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Spring

HOME & GARDEN



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KITCHEN CABINETS

Reface or replace?

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spend on major kitchen remodels grew by 14 percent from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25 percent. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94 percent of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered.

Homeowners have different options when it comes to cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to replace or reface their cabinets.

Replacement

Cabinet replacement involves

removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

Refacing

Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same. The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30 to 50 percent cheaper than a replacement.

Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately.

Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.

How sellers can get top dollar for their homes

The process of buying and selling a home includes many movable parts. North America has experienced historic trends in the housing market in recent years. Most notably, record-high prices have dominated the real estate market over the last several years.

High prices are good news for sellers, who can probably anticipate receiving offers above listing price. In New Jersey, inventory is so low that 12.5 percent of homes in the Garden State sold above list price, according to data from RedFin. This is good news for sellers currently looking to make an excellent profit on their properties. Sellers who don't want to rely on the market alone to earn more for their homes can take various steps to get top dollar.

Stage your home

According to the 2023 Profile of Home Staging



A few simple strategies can help sellers get more money for their homes.

conducted by the National Association of Realtors®, 81 percent of buyers' agents said staging a home made it easier for the buyer to

visualize the property as a future home. Focus your attention on the living room, owner's suite and kitchen. Hiring a staging

professional can be an investment that turns a sizable profit.

Know your local market

A good way to price your

home and gauge if it will sell quickly is to look at the average "days on the market" for similar homes nearby. If homes are selling faster than the average DOM, that suggests high demand, which can work in your favor.

Make added-value improvements

Focus renovation dollars on the types of projects that will reap the highest return on investment. Remodeling magazine annually reports the projects that offer the best ROI. In 2023, the project that reaped the highest ROI was an HVAC Conversion/Electrification, which involved converting a fossil-fuel-burning furnace into an electric heat pump. The cost recouped was 103.5 percent.

Sell at the right time

Fewer people are shopping for homes in the dead of winter or during the middle of the school year, so putting your home on

the market in spring typically brings out the largest number of interested parties, according to OpenDoor. But this isn't the only time-related factor to consider. To sell for the most money, you want to list your home when you have enough equity to pay off your current mortgage, the costs of selling, and the costs of moving, says Bankrate.

Give curb appeal a boost

Make sure that buyers see your home in a positive light from the first moment they pull up for a walk-through showing. According to "Home & Garden", improving the landscaping can result in a value increase of up to 12%. Additional projects can include investing in a new front door and garage doors. Be sure that hedges are trimmed, there are fresh flowers growing, and that walkways and the driveway are clean and tidy.

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Give your living room a new vibe

An “out with the old, in with the new” mentality can extend to people’s visions for their homes. A home in need of repair or renovation can serve as a catalyst to take inventory of personal style and help make interior spaces reflect one’s unique vibe.

A living room can grow stale over time and often serves as a catch-call for clothing, blankets, gadgets, and other items. Upon recognizing a living room has seen better days, individuals may decide it’s time to give the space a new vibe. That transformation can start with these strategies.

Organize first

Clutter frequently is the culprit behind a living room that may not give off the vibe individuals desire. As families grow and people add belongings, space may be at a premium. Less is more has never been a more important concept. Remove

extraneous items before purchasing new furniture or transitioning to a new design. You may even want to remove everything and start from scratch before reintroducing desirable elements to the space.

Seek the assistance of professionals

Some people are adept at decorating and designing spaces. But just as you wouldn’t perform your own medical procedures, you should leave jobs like interior design and renovations to the professionals. Hiring a professional interior designer and contractors can really bring a living room together in ways homeowners may have never imagined. These pros can build off of your ideas and truly create a space that may be worthy of a magazine spread.

Promote wellness

You may want to consider



Revamping a living room doesn’t have to be difficult. With an idea in place and some professional touches, an entirely new vibe can be achieved.

adding natural materials in the design to promote well-being. Eco-friendly furnishings, raw fibers and organic textures will create an environment from sustainable choices. Plenty of plants also can create a welcoming environment that helps you surround yourself with positive energy and the items you love.

Light it up

One of the easiest ways to transform a room’s vibe is to utilize lighting. Change draperies to allow more natural light to shine in. Consider additional windows or skylights if yours is a particularly dark home. If you desire to create a more vivid or cozy ambiance, use a

combination of accent, task and supplemental lighting in the space so there are no dim corners.

Create an industrial or urban vibe

Industrial-chic design celebrates the bones of a building. It’s what makes city lofts so appealing,

with their exposed beams and brick. Even those who live in suburbia or out in the country can give a living room this look with subtle nods to the style. Unadorned windows, clean lines on furniture, oversized, gallery-style art, and metal accents can add touches of this popular look to your home.

How to create an outdoor living retreat

Al fresco entertaining has taken off in recent years. It’s much more common today to find homeowners who want to extend living spaces to the outdoors in meaningful ways that go beyond a few lawn chairs and a stand-alone grill. Dream backyard living rooms mirror similar spaces indoors and contain features like cozy corners, lush furniture and televisions or movie projectors. Plus, they often abut additional outdoor luxuries like fully functional kitchens.

Homeowners have various options when designing outdoor living spaces. Above all else, spaces should be created with the goal of encouraging people to get together. Here

are some ideas.

Poolside retreat

Homeowners with pools and other water features likely want this area to be the star of the entertaining space. Furniture will be more of the lounging variety, with comfortable chaises and spots to catch the sun. If a swim-up bar isn’t possible, a rolling bar cart can be stocked with essentials for cocktails or mocktails for the kids. Furniture near the pool will be exposed to a lot of sun, so look for durable, sun-resistant fabrics.

Fireside nook

Gathering around an outdoor fireplace or fire pit

is a treat when the weather cools down. Mirror the look of the same setup indoors by arranging outdoor sofas so they flank the fireplace. Add some ottomans or side tables for stowing mulled cider or hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

Consider a custom banquette

Unused corners on a patio or rooftop retreat can utilize a custom-made banquette that provides the functionality of a sofa sectional outdoors. Have a contractor design it to the exact specifications of

the area, and add a rug to ground the space.

Vary the flooring

Depending on the entertaining space, a balance of soft grass, pavers or other hardscape will be necessary. Certain areas will need to be hard enough for chairs and other furniture, particularly for those who are including an outdoor dining table in the design.

Create some privacy

Some homeowners are lucky enough to have natural barriers that offer privacy in their entertaining spaces. When there isn’t enough, tall shrubs, inexpensive bamboo fencing or trellis can provide a blind



Outdoor living spaces are all the rage, and they can add value and functionality to most any home.

that makes an outdoor living area more cozy and private. Consider placing

tall, potted plants on rolling casters to improve privacy as the need arises.

Features for a relaxation-themed bathroom remodel

Homeowners want to view their homes as a respite from all that goes on outside their doors. Indeed, turning a home into a residents-only retreat can ensure everyone looks forward to walking through the front door at the end of the day.

One of the more popular ways to turn a home into one's own personal retreat is to upgrade the bathroom. A renovated bathroom can completely transform how individuals feel about their homes. The following are some features to consider when remodeling a bathroom with relaxation in mind.

• **Open shower:** An open shower is a visually stunning addition to any bathroom. Such showers give a bathroom a more open look, thanks in part to the fact that these modern features do not feature a door or require the use of a shower

curtain. The result is a clean look that many people associate with a luxury hotel. When speaking with a contractor about an open shower install, homeowners can ask about a half-wall to safeguard against water splashing out of the shower. In addition, a heat lamp can help ensure residents stay warm until they're ready to leave the bathroom.

• **Heated features:** Additional features to keep everyone calm and warm can be considered when upgrading the bathroom. Radiant flooring can ensure everyone's toes remain toasty, and the installation of such a feature can eliminate the need for floor mats and bath mats that some homeowners may not like. Commit further to the heat theme with a heated towel rack, which is another feature associated with luxury hotels that can be just as enjoyable at home.



• **Soaking tub:** An open shower creates an instant feeling of luxury, but few things are more suggestive

of relaxation than a soaking tub. A long day at school or the office or a day when winter winds are howling

outside is made much better with a good a soak. The National Kitchen & Bath Association notes that

luxury bathrooms featuring soaking tubs are wildly popular, and that vaunted status is undoubtedly due to the relaxing benefits of a good soak.

• **Skylight:** Even if the goal of a luxury bathroom is to leave the outside world outside, allowing some natural light inside is a great way to add a little extra calm to the room. Floor-to-ceiling windows may seem appealing in brochures or advertisements, but such features do not create the sense of privacy many people prefer in their bathrooms. One or two skylights can create that sense of privacy and still allow for natural light to enter the room, making this an option that provides the best of both worlds.

These features and more can help homeowners transform their bathrooms into luxurious, relaxing respites from the outside world.

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Expert tips for choosing and installing plants

The perfect landscape may start with a healthy, lush lawn, but for interest and depth, you'll also need to consider the plants that surround it.

Thankfully, it's easy to make considerable improvements to your backyard life using tips from professionals. Landscape designer Doug Scott has partnered with lawn care equipment manufacturer Exmark, to offer these tips for selecting and installing plants that will beautify your outdoor living areas.

Choosing Plants

- Choose plants well-suited for your specific growing conditions.

Knowing your growing zone is important, however you should also be mindful how conditions like sun exposure can change as you move around your yard.

- Choose the right size plants for the space. Bear in mind that what you're planting today is much smaller than what it will be once



it's matured. Always read a plant's care label to understand its optimal growing conditions and size at maturity.

- From a design perspective, think in terms of texture, layers and drifts. When addressing the overall texture of your planting beds, choose plants

that vary in form, size, color and leaf structure. This will create greater interest, and a space that's more visually appealing and enjoyable to spend time in.

For a lush look, think in terms of layers when considering composition.

Much like in a painting, you should have background,

middle ground, and foreground layers. Your background layer should consist of taller evergreen shrubs to provide something alive and green to look at all year long, no matter what's happening in front of them.

Your middle ground layer should be lower than the background layer to create

interest, and is where you can add a contrasting evergreen shrub or pop of color with a perennial plant. Finally, your foreground layer should help transition the planting beds to your lawn space. You can accomplish this with smaller perennials, evergreens, annuals or creeping ground covers.

When addressing drifts, read the plant labels to know how large they'll grow. This can help ensure plants grow in together as they mature, but are not overcrowded.

Installing Them

1. Dig a hole that's about two times the diameter of the pot your plant's being transplanted from, and about the depth of the pot.

2. Mend in compost or soil conditioner to give your plant the organic material it needs to thrive. If you'd like, add slow-release fertilizer, and mix well.

3. Place your plant in the hole, making sure that it sits

at, or just above, the level it did in the pot.

4. Backfill with soil, stopping to add water when the hole is about halfway full.

5. Fill the rest of the hole with soil, then firmly press down.

6. Soak your plant with more water.

7. Finish by adding mulch, making sure it's pulled away from the base of your plant.

Scott offers more insights in "How to Choose Plants for Landscaping," a recent episode of "Done-in-a-Weekend Projects," an original series from Exmark. To watch the video, visit Backyard Life, which is part of a unique multimedia destination with a focus on helping homeowners make the most of outdoor spaces.

"Now that you have the inspiration and know-how needed to choose and install plant material, you can create landscaping that reflects who you are and how you'd like to live outside," says Scott.

4 trends to take muted interiors from drab to dreamy

While neutral tones continue to be popular this year among home DIYers, bold and colorful surroundings also are trending right now.

From adding dramatic style to the kitchen to giving an unexpected space a splash of color, these ideas—inspired by the 2024 FrogTape Design Trends, as identified by celebrity interior designer Taniya Nayak—will make areas around your home pop in 2024.

Colorful Kitchens. Make the kitchen a focal point by painting the cabinets or panels on the island a vivid color. Calming blue will ensure a relaxed and laid-back feeling, while fuchsia will energize the design. Nayak recommends using FrogTape Delicate Surface Painter's Tape to prevent paint bleed and achieve

crisp paint lines. The low-adhesion tape is designed to prevent damage on surfaces like cabinets, freshly painted walls, wallpaper and more.

Dynamic Décor. If painting projects aren't in the plan for this year, revive a living room or bedroom by adding a collection of brightly colored pillows and throws, bohemian-style macramé, wall art and a rug with geometric patterns. As long as the colors are complementary to each other, the blend of styles and textures will catch the eye and make the room feel refreshed with little effort.

Nourishing Green. A simple, but effective, way to boost the mood of a space is to fill it with large blooms. Place a modern plant stand in an empty corner or



between rooms as a divider, and layer in green houseplants or ones with colorful leaves on the shelves.

Accentuate the greenery with pops of the same color throughout the room to create a sense of

cohesion.

Elevated Exteriors. It's not just the interiors of the home that should speak to personal style, the outside should, too! Give the front door a facelift by painting it a daring color. Don't be afraid to choose one hue for the outside of the door and another for the inside. For this project, apply FrogTape Multi-Surface Painter's Tape before painting, so that trim around the door and doorknob is protected from paint bleed.

For more fresh decor ideas and design tips, visit FrogTape.com.

Whether you choose one or all of these trends, they can be tackled by DIYers with a range of skillsets to transform dull living spaces into the home of your dreams.



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Don't toss that 'junk,' it may be valuable!

(StatePoint) From baseball cards and sports equipment to postcards and photographs, is that "junk" in your attic or basement dusty treasure or just dusty? We've all heard of families getting rich from the sale of rare memorabilia they found when spring cleaning.

A little time spent determining if items are valuable and where to sell them can pay off in the long run.

"The sale of older sports cards, postcards and photographs can yield thousands of dollars, even tens of thousands or more for the right ones," says Al Crisafulli, Auction Director at Love of the Game Auctions, an internet sports auction house that helps families identify and sell valuable sports cards and memorabilia.

Crisafulli has assisted people in selling tens of millions of dollars of baseball card collections,



autographs, sports equipment and more. Such sales can be life changing. In one instance, he researched a family's old baseball bat and proved it was game used by Hall of Famer Lou Gehrig. His Love of the Game Auctions sold it for almost half a million dollars, a figure which would top a million dollars today.

Here are some of his tips

to determine if your sports collectibles are valuable:

The Older, the Better with Cards

Vintage sports cards from the early periods of sports are collectible, especially Hall of Famers. Do you have stars from the 1960s, 1950s or earlier? Look for names like Mickey Mantle, Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner or Ty Cobb.

Even non-star cards can be valuable, especially in nice condition with sharp corners and no creases.

Really early cards from the 1880s through the 1930s are particularly desirable, such as those by tobacco, gum and candy brands, such as Old Judge, Piedmont, Sweet Caporal, American Caramel, Goudey or Diamond Stars.

When determining where to sell cards and memorabilia, focus on a specialty auction house, such as Love of the Game, which employs trained experts in researching sports ephemera, and maintains bidder lists of sports collectors. More information is available at loveofthegameauctions.com.

Don't Overlook Memorabilia and Equipment

Cards aren't the only potentially valuable things. Look for older promotional and advertising ephemera spotlighting sports stars,

especially items that promote sporting goods, food or tobacco brands. Ads from magazines aren't valuable, but store displays, signs and premiums can be pricey.

Old sporting goods and equipment, such as balls, bats, gloves and uniforms, can also be valuable, especially if you had a family member who played minor or major league sports. Note that items from before the 1960s are highly collected. Also look for equipment endorsed by star players. Condition matters, but game-used equipment from professionals can be valuable in almost any condition.

Save Postcards and Photographs

If you have old photographs, cabinet cards or postcards of sports stars or ballparks, they should be evaluated. Those from pre-1960 can be expensive. Look for early "real photo" postcards from the 1900s

through the 1940s, which are photographs printed on postcard backs.

Popular stars are key, meaning original images like Babe Ruth or early ballparks can be valuable, as opposed to images of your family members playing sports or of popular vacation destinations. When examining photographs, look for markings on the back, such as photographer, publication and date stamps. Also set aside cabinet cards, which are photographs from the 1880s through the 1930s adhered to cardboard stock.

"A good rule of thumb is that the older a sports item is, the more valuable it might be, especially from before the 1950s going back to the 1880s," says Crisafulli.

This spring cleaning season, don't rush to haul "junk" to the curb. Examine it first.

Tips when hiring a contractor

Contractors perform important work for millions of homeowners every day. Home improvement projects are complicated undertakings, and the experience of skilled contractors can ensure jobs are completed on time and within homeowners' budgets.

Homeowners have undoubtedly heard horror stories from neighbors about projects that have gone awry. Projects can go sideways for a number of reasons, but a skilled contractor can help homeowners navigate such situations successfully. That underscores how important it can be to find the right professional for the job. The following are some tips homeowners can consider

as they look to hire a contractor.

• **Identify which professional you need.** Some contractors are of the jack-of-all-trades variety, but many specialize in a particular line of work. It's important that homeowners identify which type of contractor they should work with prior to starting a project. This requires homeowners to define the goal of the project (i.e., new wood floor installation), which can serve as a springboard into finding the right type of contractor.

• **Prioritize building safety.** Safety should be the utmost priority for homeowners and contractors alike. Prior to hiring a contractor, homeowners should

identify any safety restrictions that might be enforced by local governments and take note of all the permits necessary to get a job done. Homeowners can then discuss those restrictions and permits as they interview contractors. Projects that do not adhere to code are illegal and can compromise homeowners' ability to sell their homes in the future. So it's vital to work with contractors who are familiar with local codes and aware of which permits are necessary to ensure a project can go forward.

• **Insist on written estimates.** Handshake agreements offer no protection to homeowners or contractors, so estimates indicating what will be done and how much

the project will cost should be provided. Homeowners should insist on receiving written estimates and interpret an unwillingness to provide one as a significant red flag.

• **Know your rights.** Laws vary by region, but in general homeowners have a right to a written contract and contractors are obligated to provide a copy of that contract signed by both parties. That contract must be provided prior to the start of the project. The contract should provide a detailed account of the work that will be done, as well as a timeline indicating important dates that components of the project will begin and be completed. The contract also should detail



Contractors help homeowners turn dream projects into reality. Homeowners can employ various strategies to ensure they find the right professional for their home improvement project.

materials and who is providing them. Details regarding payments, guarantees and warranties also should be cited.

• **Do not pay in cash.** Some contractors may suggest that the project

will cost less if they're paid in cash. However, home improvements should never be cash transactions. Cash does not indicate proof of payment, which can be problematic if a dispute arises.



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Tips to revitalize a garden this spring

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that pays a host of significant dividends. Many people love gardening because it allows them to spend time outdoors, and that simple pleasure is indeed a notable benefit of working in a garden. But the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture notes that gardening provides a host of additional benefits, including helping people get sufficient levels of exercise, reduce stress and improve mood.

With so much to gain from gardening, it's no wonder people look forward to getting their hands dirty in the garden each spring. As the weather warms up, consider these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

• **Discard the dead weight.**

Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter



It's almost gardening season, which means gardeners can start on the necessary prep work to ensure their gardens grow in strong and beautiful this spring.

CONTRIBUTOR

storms also should be removed at this point if they have not previously been discarded.

• **Test the soil.** Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are

inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive in the months to come.

• **Mulch garden beds.** Mulching benefits a garden by helping soil retain moisture and preventing

the growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over the course of spring and summer. That means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when

the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

• **Inspect your irrigation system.** Homeowners with in-ground irrigation systems or above-ground systems that utilize a drip or soaker function can inspect the systems before plants begin to bloom. Damaged sprinkler heads or torn lines can deprive plants of water they will need to bloom and ultimately thrive once the weather warms up.

• **Tune up your tools.** Gardening tools have likely been sitting around gathering dust since fall. Serious gardeners know that tools can be expensive, so it pays to protect that investment by maintaining the tools. Sharpened pruners help make plants less vulnerable to infestation and infection. Well-maintained tools like shovels and hoes also make more demanding gardening jobs a little bit easier, so don't forget to tune up your tools before the weather warms up.

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Tips to make a yard less attractive to ticks

Backyards are ideal places to spend warm afternoons soaking up some sun. Lazy days in the yard are a big part of what makes warm weather seasons like spring and summer so appealing. But those afternoons can quickly go off the rails when an unwelcome visitor makes its presence known.

Ticks can be found throughout the world, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that only a select few types of ticks transmit bacteria, viruses and parasites, or pathogens, that cause diseases in people. But even if the number of tick species that transmit diseases to humans is relatively low, ticks that can infect humans are a notable threat. Such ticks carry pathogens that the CDC notes can cause a

number of diseases, including Bourbon virus, Ehrlichiosis and, of course, Lyme disease, among others.

Human beings can come into contact with ticks in their own backyards. But humans can take various steps to make their lawns less welcoming to ticks.

- **Cut your grass short and keep it that way.**

Black-legged ticks are transmitters of Lyme disease, which the CDC notes is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States. Lyme disease also poses a growing threat in Canada, where data from the Public Health Agency indicates human-reported Lyme disease cases increased from 144 in 2009 to more than 2,100 in 2022. Black-legged ticks do not like environments that are dry and

hot, so short grass makes lawns less attractive to this type of tick. Consumer Reports advises homeowners who have let their grass grow a little too high (around five or six inches) to bag their clippings when cutting the grass. Lots of clippings on the grass can provide a respite from the heat for black-legged ticks.

- **Create a tick barrier if your property abuts woods.** Woods provide a cover from summer heat that black-legged ticks crave. So properties that abut the woods may be more vulnerable to these unwanted guests than yards that do not border woodlands. A barrier of dry mulch made of wood chips between a property and a bordering wooded area can help repel ticks, who won't want to



settle in often dry, hot mulch beds.

- **Plant with infestation prevention in mind.** Some plants can help to repel ticks because they boast certain characteristics that ticks cannot tolerate. The fragrances, textures and oils of plants like garlic, mint, lavender, marigolds, and others create less welcoming

conditions for ticks. Homeowners can speak with local garden centers for advice on tick-repellant plants that can thrive in their particular climate and on their properties.

- **Remove yard debris.** Piles of wood, leaves and brush can make for good conditions for ticks that transmit disease. After

raking leaves and gathering brush, discard the resulting piles immediately.

These measures will not necessarily prevent all ticks from establishing themselves on a property, so individuals are urged to inspect their bodies and the bodies of their pets after a day in the yard.



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9 signs of pest infestation

Individuals want a home that is welcoming and comfortable. Unfortunately many conditions that people find appealing also appeal to pests. Pests may be more problematic at certain times of year, such as when weather is extreme and pests like rodents or even raccoons seek refuge in a home. During times of year when temperatures are mild, certain insects may begin to hatch or swarm, becoming problematic around the home.

Some signs of pests taking up residence may be readily apparent, while others may be less obvious. The following are nine signs of pest infestation in or around a home.

1. Droppings: Small droppings may indicate that pests are nearby. Droppings will vary depending on the insect or rodent. It's good to familiarize yourself with the appearance of various droppings, from mice to termites to bed bugs.

2. Footprints: Footprints are another sign of pest infestation. Footprints left in dirt around a home, or in dusty areas in the attic or basement, may show that pests are tracking in and out of the house.

3. Sawdust piles or trails: Sawdust could be indicative of termites or ants. Insects like carpenter bees also may burrow into areas of wood and leave sawdust behind.

4. Shed wings, skins and casings: Many insects molt and, during this process, will shed certain parts of their anatomy to grow larger. Roaches, bed bugs and beetles are some pests that might be scattering sheds or egg casings in a home. Termite wings are discarded once the swarmers choose a new location for the colony.

5. Foul odors: Musty or foul smells,



particularly in hidden areas, may indicate pests are nesting nearby.

6. Unexplained noises: Scratching or scurrying in walls or floors often indicates pests are present.

7. Bites: Waking up in the morning with welts or red areas on the skin might indicate the presence of bed bugs or other biting insects.

8. Presence of nests: Those who can see nests in corners or undisturbed areas of the home likely have pests present. Rodents often use chewed cardboard, insulation, paper, and other scavenged items to create nests, according to exterminators.

9. Increased number of beneficial insects: An influx of spiders and other predatory insects may indicate there are plenty of food sources in the home for them to feast on.

Pests can be problematic, but homeowners who recognize signs of infestation can take prompt action.

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Symptoms of plumbing problems

The drip of a faucet, the bang of pipes and the visible signs of a leak under the sink are some notable indicators of plumbing problems. Other, potentially serious issues may not be so evident. How can homeowners tell if they have potential plumbing problems? The following are some sights and sounds that indicate it is time to call in a plumber.

- **Banging or clanking:** Plumbers refer to these noises as water hammer. This is when a rush of water forces through the pipe and bumps into a closed valve, producing a metallic noise. Something is in the pipe that is restricting water flow. Over time, the flow of water meeting an obstacle could loosen pipe joints as the water tries to find an easier workaround.

- **Pipe discoloration:** If there is any sign of discoloration on pipes, particularly rust, it could be a symptom of a dripping sink or drain line that is slowly leaking. A slow leak can eventually turn into a big mess if left unattended.

- **Sewer smells:** Pipes need traps and vents. Traps are designed to prevent sewer gas from entering the home, while vents channel sewer odor up to the roof. If there are sewer smells, it could mean a trap has dried out or a vent line is cracked, says Family Handyman.

- **Low water pressure:** If you turn on the faucet and the water pressure is poor, it could be the result of a clog or a leak somewhere in the system. Pipes that are



improperly sized for a home also can affect pressure.

- **Sluggish drains:** Clearing drains is perhaps the only plumbing problem that homeowners should address themselves. More often than not, drains that fail to drain quickly have a blockage such as hair or other debris. If attempts to clear the drain do not work, it is best to bring in a professional plumber.

- **Shaking sounds:** Water can cause occasional noises, but if the sounds are frequent, the pipes are not secured firmly enough. A plumber will need to tighten the mounting straps or even completely replace them.

Plumbing issues are nothing to take lightly, as small problems can quickly escalate and cause thousands of dollars in damage.

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When to bring in a PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER



Skilled professional organizers have a unique talent and the expertise to create solutions for cluttered spaces and other overcrowded areas in a home. Although some may view hiring a professional to help them sort through their stuff as a luxury, in many instances relying on an organizer can be money well spent. That's because a pro is specially equipped to set up areas that function smoothly and efficiently, which increases the chances spaces will remain organized after the initial job is done. The following are some reasons why a professional organizer might be warranted.

▶ **Difficulty finding time:** Procrastination is a major component behind why people do not get ahead of clutter. It's easy to shrug off the job in favor of other tasks. Hiring an organizer is handing the job off to someone whose job it is to find the time to tidy up.

▶ **Feeling overwhelmed:** Many people admit that the idea of tackling organizational jobs puts them in a tailspin. Individuals who feel that organization has gotten away from them to the point that the job seems impossible can benefit from hiring an organizer. In addition, those who have

been diagnosed with a hoarding disorder and are ill at ease at the idea of getting rid of items likely will find a professional organizer can be a saving grace.

▶ **Moving into a new space:** New homeowners, renters or office workers moving into new spaces may want to start out on more organized footing. A professional organizer can help to lay a more tidy foundation.

▶ **Never achieved organizing goals:** Many people try to get their spaces in order, but fall flat time and again. For those whose spaces have never quite been organized the way they have wanted, a professional organizer can provide the tips and tricks that work. He or she will not do the work without you, but will guide you through the process.

▶ **One space is problematic:** Some people master organizing but still have one room or area they cannot conquer. This could be a garage or another space that tends to be the catch-all for other rooms. The right pro can help tame even the most out-of-control area.

Professional organizers can assist with various tasks and provide the extra motivation needed to tame clutter.



How to clear out home office clutter

Home offices have garnered more attention in recent years. Restrictions implemented as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic forced many professionals to start working from home, which created a greater need for home office space.

Though millions of professionals have now returned to the office full-time, millions more have continued to work from home five days a week or are now working on a hybrid schedule. As a result, home office spaces have maintained their utility even as restrictions related to the

pandemic move further into the rearview mirror.

Since home office spaces remain vital for so many, it's important that these spaces are conducive to productivity. Conquering home office clutter is a step in that direction.

▶ **Cut through the piles of paper.** Home offices have a tendency to transform into paper depositories over time. Work files, notes, monthly bills, receipts, and junk mail can quickly overwhelm a home office. Professionals who spend ample time working from home can resolve to



cut through the piles of paper. Use a paper shredder to discard documents with sensitive information, such as bank statements and utility bills. Signing up for e-statements can prevent the piling up of paper in the future. Invest in a small file cabinet to store important personal and professional documents.

▶ **Discard old devices.**

Old devices are another space eater in many home offices. In fact, a recent survey from Material Focus found that more than 20 million unused electrical items are currently hoarded in homes throughout the United Kingdom. Old smartphones and laptops that users are afraid to throw out can be wiped clean and

discarded in adherence with local laws. Contact your local government to determine how to safely discard old devices rather than simply tossing them in the trash once they've been wiped clean.

▶ **Buy a bigger bookshelf.** Home offices often double as reading rooms, which makes them vulnerable to clutter associated with leisure time as well. Books stacked in a corner or taking up space on your desk can create a cluttered look, but also compromise your ability to concentrate. A 2011 study from researchers at Princeton University published in *The Journal of Neuroscience* found that clutter can make it difficult to focus on a particular

task. If books are strewn about your office, purchase a bookshelf that can hold them. Once books are shelved, the less cluttered space can make it easier to concentrate.

▶ **Go digital.** If space is limited, forgo traditional file cabinets in favor of digitizing important records and documents. Scan important receipts and statements and store them on a desktop or backup hard drive so they're never out of each. This creates space and makes it easier and quicker to find important files.

Home offices can quickly become overwhelmed with clutter. Some simple strategies can help any professional transform their home offices into more organized spaces.

Color tips to make your home exterior pop



(StatePoint) Home exteriors make a first impression, setting the tone for neighbors, guests, and if a property is on the market --prospective home buyers. So how do you boost your curb appeal and make your exterior pop? According to those in the know, a lot of it has to do with color.

“Choosing deep, bold colors for your door or siding can provide eye-catching focal points and dramatically increase curb appeal,” says Jon Lapp, vinyl siding product manager at ProVia.

To help you make selections that work best for your home and vision, ProVia is offering the following insights:

Siding

Color and texture play significant roles in the overall look and style of a home, so consider pairing your vinyl siding with other materials, such as manufactured stone, decorative shake, or board and batten. Whether you go for soft earth tones or deep hues of primary colors, color retention technologies will maintain the look through the years. To that end, here are a few qualities to look for in your siding:

- **UV protection:** Think of it as sunscreen for your house. This layer of protection helps shield your siding from the destructive

effects of the sun's UV rays.

- **Weather barrier shield:** Anti-weathering materials on the siding's surface can help ensure long-lasting color fidelity and low-maintenance freedom for your home's exterior.

- **Heat resistance:** Heat-resistant inorganic pigments ensure exacting deep colors, reflect heat from exterior walls, and deflect solar rays to reduce solar heat build-up and unsightly weathering.

- **Anti-fade protection:** A strong molecular chain, found in super polymer vinyl siding, is engineered for superior color retention.

“At first, it might be difficult to tell the difference between a good vinyl siding panel and an outstanding one. But over time, the true strength and quality of each panel will be revealed,” says Lapp.

It's for this reason that ProVia's entire lineup of super polymer vinyl siding is formulated with Tri-Pigment Reflective Technology, Color Keeper Anti-Fade Protection, Weather Barrier Shield and SPX-2000 UV Blocker. These components work together to combat fade and increase weather resistance.

The Entry Door

The entry door is an

amazing place to make a color statement. However, if you buy an exterior replacement door and try to finish it yourself, achieving the flawless finish you're hoping for is easier said than done. Then there's the trim, and possibly sidelights and a transom that also need to be painted to match or coordinate with the door color.

From classic hues, such as rustic bronze or forest green, to trending colors like avocado or burnt orange, you can ensure a consistent, beautiful and lasting finish by having your manufacturer paint the door before it leaves the factory floor. Bonus: the color will also be under warranty. Look for a manufacturer that crafts custom doors, allowing you to choose different interior and exterior colors and other specifications tailored to your taste.

To get inspired for your home exterior project, visit provia.com. In addition to photo galleries of finished projects, the site's home designer tools allow you to visualize how various elements will look on your home.

By selecting professional-quality exterior products, you can ensure long-lasting durability and a big boost in curb appeal.

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YOUR LAWN

What to know about reseeding or replanting

Spring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation season.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn. In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their lawns.

• **Scarify the lawn.** Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts, including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarifying before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarifying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

• **Work with a landscaping professional.** Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer.



Spring is a great time for homeowners in various regions to reseed or replant their lawns. With the right approach, homeowners can enjoy a full and lush lawn throughout summer.

A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this important detail.

• **Prepare to water the lawn.** Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

What to know about buying a home in a low inventory market

People who have shopped for homes at any point over the last few years are undoubtedly aware that inventory is low. While low inventory has affected home prices and priced some buyers out of certain markets, the good news is the tide may have started to change as 2023 drew to a close. In fact, a December 2023 report from the National Association of Realtors® indicated home sales rose by nearly 1 percent in November, a month during which single-family home construction also rose by 18 percent compared to October.

Each of those figures could prove a harbinger of good things to come for buyers in 2024. But it can still pay dividends for such buyers to prepare themselves to buy in a low inventory real estate market.

• **Prepare to offer more than asking price.** Data from the NAR indicates nearly one-third of all homes (28 percent) purchased in October 2023 sold for above asking price. When buyers have fewer homes to choose from, the competition for homes on the market increases, and that

typically means buyers will offer more than asking price for homes they truly want. It might not be necessary to offer more than asking price on a given home, but it's something buyers in a low inventory market must be ready to do.

• **Prepare to find additional money, if necessary.** Offering more than asking price can be tricky, particularly if a buyer's offer exceeds the appraised value of the home. The real estate listing service Trulia notes that most lenders will not approve a mortgage for more than the appraised value of a home. Conventional wisdom may indicate it's never a good idea to offer more for a home than it's appraised value, but that scenario has played out with greater frequency in the current low inventory market. Buyers who feel they need to offer more than the appraised value to get a home will have to come up with the extra funds to make up the difference that their mortgage won't cover.

• **Flexibility can be your friend.** A low inventory market is a seller's market. Buyers who can be flexible in regard to

seller's demands and requests might be getting the keys to a new home faster than those who are not as accommodating. Some sellers may request a quick closing, while others may need extra time in the home until they can move into their own new property. Entering the process with the intention of being flexible can be an advantage for buyers in a low inventory market.

• **Patience can prevail.** It might seem as though there will never again be ample inventory on the real estate market. However, the increase in single-family home construction and forecasts predicting mortgage rates will drop suggest the real estate market could feature more inventory in the months to come. Buyers concerned about going over-budget or making a hasty decision are urged to remain patient if they cannot find a home that works for them personally and financially.

A low inventory real estate market may not be normal. But savvy buyers can still navigate such a market and find a home they love.



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ANDOVER

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1646
- ▶ **Website:** andoverma.gov
- ▶ **Population:** 36,569 (2020 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$162,694 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$756,600 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$12.88 residential; \$25.48 commercial (FY2024)
- ▶ **Town Hall:** 36 Bartlet St., 978-623-8200
- ▶ **Police Department:** 32 North Main St., 978-623-3500
- ▶ **Fire Department:** 32 North Main St., 978-623-3700
- ▶ **Department of Public Works:** 978-623-8700
- ▶ **Youth Services:** Cormier Youth Center, 40 Whittier Court, 978-623-8360
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Robb Center, 30 Whittier Court, 978-623-8320
- ▶ **School Department:** 978-247-7000
- ▶ **Library:** Memorial Hall Library, 2 North Main St., 978-623-8400

LAWRENCE

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1853
- ▶ **Website:** cityoflawrence.com
- ▶ **Population:** 89,143 (2020 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$53,977 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$370,600 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$9.25 residential; \$19.37 commercial (FY2023)
- ▶ **City Hall:** 200 Common St., 978-620-3000
- ▶ **Police Department:** 90 Lowell St., 978-794-5900
- ▶ **Fire Department:** 65 Lowell St., 978-620-3400
- ▶ **Department of Public Works:** 200 Common St., 978-620-3090
- ▶ **Recreation:** 155 Haverhill St., Second Floor, 978-620-3252
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Senior Center, 155 Haverhill St., 978-620-3540
- ▶ **School Department:** 255 Essex St., 978-975-5905
- ▶ **Library:** Lawrence Public Library: 51 Lawrence St., 978-620-3600

METHUEN

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1725
- ▶ **Website:** cityofmethuen.net
- ▶ **Population:** 53,059 (2022 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$93,681 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$439,500 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$9.25 residential; \$19.37 commercial (FY2024)
- ▶ **City Hall:** Searles Building, 41 Pleasant St., 978-983-8505
- ▶ **Police Department:** 90 Hampshire St., 978-983-8698
- ▶ **Fire Department:** 250 Howe St., 978-983-8940
- ▶ **Department of Public Works:** 10 Ditson Place, 978-983-8545
- ▶ **Youth Services:** Recreation Department, 41 Pleasant Street, 978-983-8589
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Senior Center, 77 Lowell St., 978-983-8825
- ▶ **School Department:** 978-722-6000
- ▶ **Library:** Nevins Memorial Library, 305 Broadway, 978-686-4080

TOWN HIGHLIGHTS

NORTH ANDOVER

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1855
- ▶ **Website:** northandoverma.gov
- ▶ **Population:** 30,915 (2020 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$131,852 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$621,100 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$11.09 residential; \$15.60 commercial (FY2024)
- ▶ **Town Hall:** 120 Main St., 978-688-9500
- ▶ **Police Department:** 1475 Osgood St., 978-683-3168
- ▶ **Fire Department:** 795 Chickering Road, 978-688-9590
- ▶ **Department of Public Works:** 978-685-0950
- ▶ **Youth Services:** 33 Johnson St., 978-682-9000
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Senior Center, 481 Sutton St., 978-688-9560
- ▶ **School Department:** 978-794-1503
- ▶ **Library:** Stevens Memorial Library, 345 Main St., 978-688-9505

HAVERHILL

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1870
- ▶ **Website:** cityofhaverhill.com
- ▶ **Population:** 67,787 (2020 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$81,989 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$400,900 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$10.64 residential; \$19.35 commercial (FY2024)
- ▶ **City Hall:** 4 Summer St., 978-358-1311
- ▶ **Police Department:** 40 Bailey Blvd., 978-373-1212
- ▶ **Fire Department:** City Hall, 4 Summer St., 978-373-8460
- ▶ **Department of Public Works:** 500 Primrose St., 978-374-2360
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Council on Aging, 10 Welcome St., 978-374-2390
- ▶ **School Department:** City Hall, 4 Summer St., 978-374-3400
- ▶ **Library:** 99 Main St., 978-373-1586

WINDHAM

- ▶ **Incorporated:** 1742
- ▶ **Website:** windhamnh.gov
- ▶ **Population:** 15,817 (2020 Census)
- ▶ **Median household income:** \$171,563 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Median value owner-occupied home/condo:** \$609,900 (2018-2022)
- ▶ **Tax rate:** \$21.40 (2023)
- ▶ **Town Hall:** 4 North Lowell Road, 603-432-7732
- ▶ **Police Department:** 4 Fellows Road, 603-434-5577
- ▶ **Fire Department:** 3 Fellows Road, 603-434-4907
- ▶ **Highway Department:** 603-216-5676
- ▶ **Youth Services:** 4 North Lowell Road, 603-965-1208
- ▶ **Elder Services:** Senior Center, 2 North Lowell Road, 603-434-2411
- ▶ **School Department:** 603-845-1550
- ▶ **Library:** Nesmith Library, 8 Fellows Road, 603-432-7154

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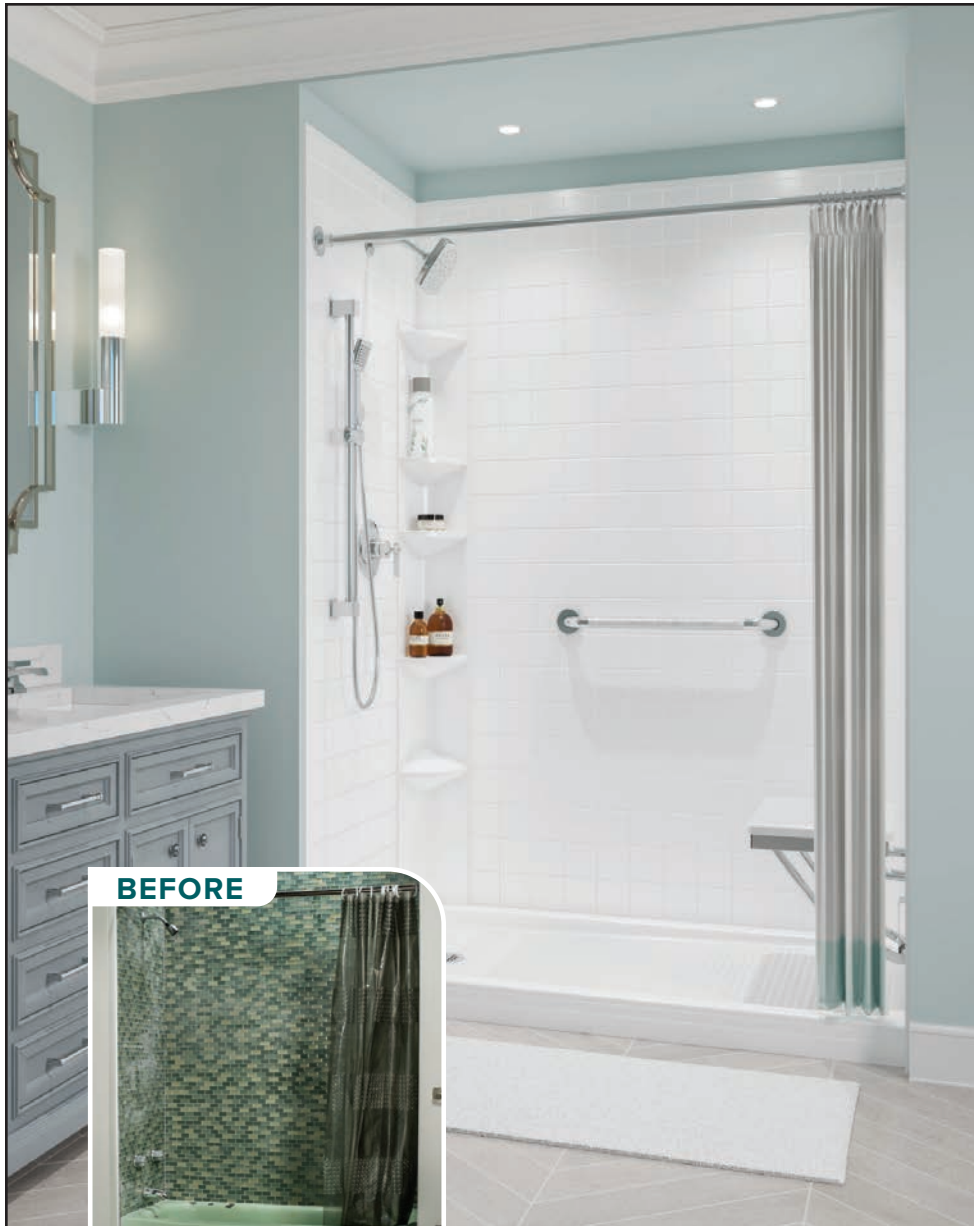
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I can't express how delighted I am with the exceptional service provided by ohDEER. Living in an area prone to mosquitoes and ticks and having three kids and a dog that love to spend time outside, I've tried various solutions over the years, but none have been as effective and reliable as this company

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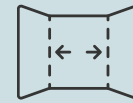
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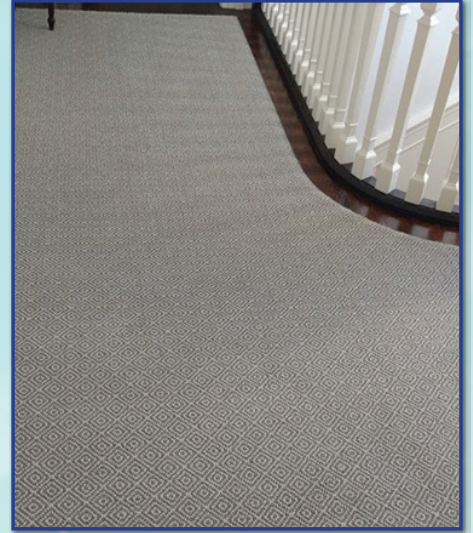
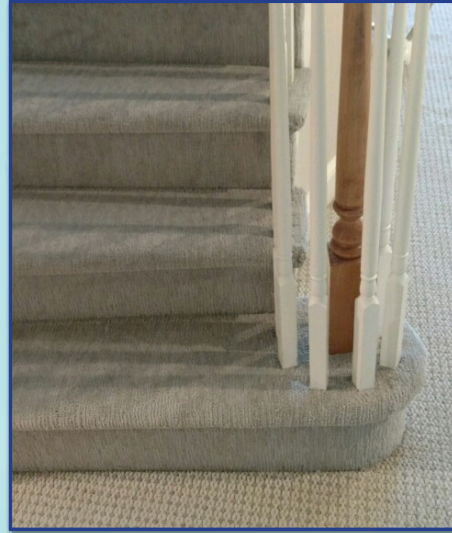
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