

Spring

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2018

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# Some ideas to renovate your laundry room

To former apartment dwellers or those who have never enjoyed the benefit of a dedicated laundry area, even the smallest washer and dryer space can seem like a luxury. The benefits of dedicated laundry rooms abound. However, disorganized laundry rooms can nullify such benefits.

Depending on the needs and preferences of each homeowner, laundry room designs can be customized for convenience.

## Employ vertical space

Floor space may be at a premium in a laundry room, especially for those who want to devote as much space as possible to bulk-size washer and dryer units. Therefore, utilizing wall space is key. Use shelving, wire racks, hooks, and other organizational tools to

store items on the wall. Shelves can be tucked into just about any space, and there are different options that can fit into corners or shallow areas. These are a great option for keeping detergent or other laundry essentials nearby.

## Incorporate a sink in the design

Some older laundry room setups have a slop sink to drain discharged water from the washing machine. However, newer homes may have plumbing installed directly through the floor or walls. It is still a worthwhile idea to have a sink in the laundry room for rinsing out stains, handwashing items and having a go-to sink for messier cleanup.

## Utilize a tension rod

A rod installed between two

cabinets or across a narrow width of space in the laundry room is a handy spot to hang shirts or pants to prevent wrinkling. Repurposing a ladder and suspending it from the ceiling also creates a spot to hang clothes.

## Consider laundry room flooring

It's important to select flooring materials that will not be damaged by contact with moisture or spills. Vinyl, tile and some composite products often make good laundry room floor materials. Resilient flooring that mimics the look of hardwood may add a classy touch, and give the appearance of wood without having to worry about damage. To alleviate fatigue while spending long moments in the laundry room, invest in a memory foam mat that can be placed underfoot.

## Keep lighting in mind

Lighting can be important in the laundry room. Rely on task lighting, under-cabinet strip lighting and overhead lights as needed for efficiency.

Laundry room design can maximize the space available and make it more convenient to launder and sort clothes.

## Clean designs reduce clutter

Simple, clean designs can be an asset in a laundry room. If budget and space permits, cabinetry built into the design will help keep items out of sight in the laundry room. Cabinets hung directly above the appliances can store detergent, bleach and fabric softener. Use cabinets elsewhere in the room as catch-alls for cleaning supplies used in various other rooms around the house.



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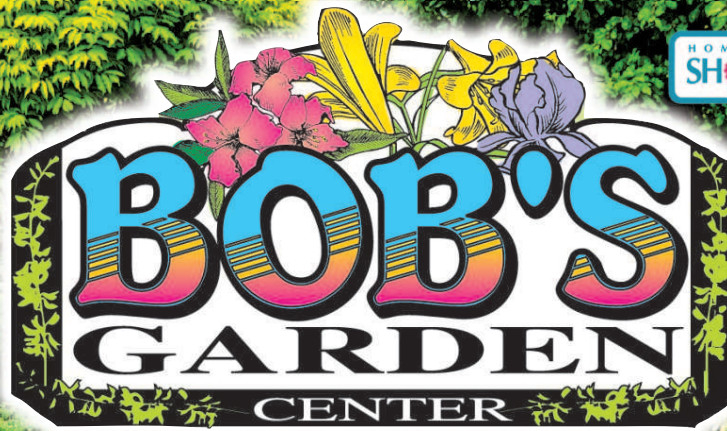


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# How to read a nursery plant tag

Shopping for new plants for a home can be an exciting undertaking. Nurseries and garden centers are often home to dozens of types of plant species that come in various colors, leaf variations and sizes. Such variety can make choosing plants more fun while also making the process of buying plants a bit complicated, especially for novices. Thankfully, plant tags can help consumers make informed decisions.

Understanding how to read plant tags is key to making good choices. Such labels contain a lot of information, but once a person knows how to decode that data, he or she is well on the way to choosing the right plants.

### Scientific (botanical) name

Scientific names are also known as the Latin names of the plant. Such names will be written in italics on the tag and are usually one or two words. The scientific name includes the genus (group) and the species of the plant.

### Common name

The common name of the

plant tends to be the most noticeable word or words on the tag.

This is the name the plant is referred to outside of scientific circles. Most plants have one or more common names in addition to their botanical name.

### Perennial or annual

The tag should designate the plant as an annual or perennial. Annuals are not expected to last through the winter and will need to be replanted the following year. Perennials can over-winter and will regenerate year after year.

Tags also may list information such as special care needs, drought tolerance, uses for the plant, and when the plant blooms. Some plant labels will inform gardeners if the plants were produced organically or without GMO practices. Trademark information also may be included.

Plant tags provide important information for selecting and growing plants. When noted, tags help gardeners make the right selections and keep plants as healthy as possible.



### Cultivar

A plant tag may further describe the type of plant by including the cultivar. A cultivar is the variation on the species. It may describe a size or color variation. The cultivar is listed in single quotations by the scientific name.

### Sun requirements

The tag should list how much sun exposure the plant requires to thrive. It may be anywhere from full sun to full shade.

### Height and spread

The label frequently includes the maximum growing height and width the plant should reach when mature. This gives gardeners an understanding of just how much room the plant will take up in the garden and how to space plants in a landscape.

### Water needs

How much water the plant requires may be featured on the tag as well. This helps gardeners know if they need soil to be damp or relatively dry.

### Hardiness or zone

Tags that list zones will describe the coldest zone in which the plant can exist. Otherwise, it will give a range.

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# Stock up on gardening essentials

Gardening attracts new devotees year after year. While Baby Boomers may spend more on gardening than any other demographic, even millennials are getting on the gardening bandwagon.

A 2016 National Gardening Survey from the National Gardening Market Research Company found the average amount spent on backyard or balcony gardening projects exceeded \$400 per household.

More than \$36 billion was spent in 2015, and the vast majority of the six million new gardening households belonged to millennials.


When it comes to outfitting a gardening shed, gardeners will not want to be without certain tools and gear.

• **Digging shovel:** A rounded-blade digging shovel is needed to plant shrubs and trees as well as to excavate areas in a landscape.




- **Rake:** A rake can be used to clear the ground, remove thatch and leaves from a lawn and level soil in a garden bed.
- **Hand tools:** Hand tools, such as a hand fork and trowel, are essential for small digging jobs, especially when working with flower pots or containers.
- **Edging spade:** This flat-blade shovel is handy to have

- around because of its versatility. Edging spades can slice turf, edge gardens and cut through roots.
- **Pruners:** Sharpened pruners can cut through stems and branches effortlessly.
- **Hose:** Choose a high-quality hose that is lightweight and durable, as hoses will always be necessary.



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# Creating a teen-friendly space at home

Teenagers are busier than ever before. But even the busiest teens need places to unwind and relax with friends. Many parents aspire to create that type of environment in their homes but don't know where to begin. Having teens close by and interacting with them on a regular basis can benefit families. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics notes that parental involvement correlates to higher grade point averages.

Research from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says certain parenting styles, including those that set rules and monitor teens in supportive ways, develop kids who are more likely to wear seat belts while driving, while such support also lowers crash risk. Involved parents also may reduce the chances of teen drug use and promis-

cuous behavior.

Parents who want to keep teens nearby can create hangout spaces at home that make it easy for teens to feel comfortable with their friends. These "teen caves" can be private but permit supervision when necessary. With a few modifications, it's possible to transform a room in a home into a teen-friendly hangout space.

- **Talk to your children.** Involve teens in the process of renovating a home to create a spot in which they would like to congregate. Talk about elements they would like to see in the space, whether it be a particular design style, technology or activity.

- **Establish a shared budget.** Paint is inexpensive and can transform just about any room in a single afternoon. If the room being renovated is the teen's own

bedroom, allow him or her to choose the color palette and other accents. Even if it isn't to your taste, he or she will be proud of the results and may want to share it with friends.

- **Have a snack station.** Some teenagers always seem to be hungry, and hanging out with friends while enjoying food is a popular pastime.

When renovating a room into a teen cave, find a way to make food a focus. Install a mini-refrigerator and non-alcoholic bar where kids can serve snacks to friends. Think about a space you would like as an adult and modify it to be more accommodating to teenagers.

- **Add more seating.** Having friends over means having enough seating to handle a small crowd. Beanbags, cushioned benches, a daybed, modular seating, and more can ensure



everyone has a place to sit.

- **Make a private outdoor spot.** Teen spaces do not need to be restricted to the indoors. Design advice site Houzz says an outdoor escape zone that includes comfortable seating in a private area — particularly a spot that can also be enjoyed

into the evening — will be a coveted spot.

- **Invest in "indestructible" materials.** Teenagers are bound to make messes, and having other people over means contending with a certain measure of damage. Design the space with indoor-outdoor carpeting,

water-resistant fabrics, distressed wood, and other durable materials.

Adolescents are always looking for spaces to gather without overbearing adult interference. Homeowners can create such spaces for their children in their own homes.

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# How to build a hydroponic garden

Hydroponic gardening can change people's perceptions of what's needed to grow vibrant plants. Rather than soil, all you may need for a hydroponic garden is water to grow a variety of healthy, strong plants.

Although it seems like a futuristic concept, hydroponics — or growing plants without soil — actually dates back many centuries.

The hanging Gardens of Babylon and The Floating Gardens of China are two of the earliest examples of hydroponics.

According to Fullbloom Hydroponics, hydroponic gardening is a method of growing plants in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution. Instead of soil, roots are supported by an inert material, such as pellets, perlite, or vermiculite.

Some people use coconut fiber, sand or gravel as well. The key is that the substance not supply any additional nutrition to the plant. In some instances, the roots grow in water alone.

Hydroponics works so well because the person doing the gardening can directly control the nutrients, oxygen and light according to what the plant needs.

A nutrition-based water delivery system delivers food



to the roots in a highly soluble form, rather than the roots having to search through the soil and extract the same nutrients. Absorbing food with very little effort means the plant can divert its energy to growing and flower production.

This method of no-soil growth can be used just about anywhere. Although it has not yet edged out traditional farming methods, hydroponics is gaining popularity among entrepreneurs and hobbyists. An added attraction to hydroponics is its efficiency.

The gardening resource Maximum Yield says hydroponics is ideal where traditional farming is not an option, such as in large cities where there is little to no access to agriculturally amenable land.

Hydroponics can even be merged with vertical farming methods, helping to save space and increase output. Hydroponic gardens can be placed anywhere there is access to water and natural or simulated sunlight.

Empty warehouses, rooftops, old shipping containers, and much more can be turned into hydroponic garden locations with minimal effort.

Scientists say that there can be drastic differences in growth rates and yield from hydroponic and soil plants. The group Greentrees Hydroponics says the growth rate for a hydroponic plant can be 30 to 50 percent faster than a soil plant grown under the same conditions.

Environmentalists tout that hydroponic gardening is also beneficial to the environment because the plants require considerably less water than those produced with soil gardening and require fewer pesticides or other amendments to thrive.

Hobbyists looking to dabble in hydroponics can find many different hydroponic systems on the market today, in an array of prices and sizes.

Wicking, ebb and flow, aerponics, nutrient film, and deepwater culture are different hydroponic systems, each with their own advantages. Once gardeners get the knack of hydroponics, they may not want to turn back to traditional soil gardening again.

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# Suggestions for how empty-nesters can transform their homes

After bringing home a bubbly baby boy or girl, it can be hard for parents to imagine that a day will come when their kids are off to college and then onto their own apartment or house. After spending decades nurturing and caring for children, parents are then left with a suddenly quiet house and probably much more time to spare. If saying goodbye to the kids also means extra house, there's the option to downsize or make that extra space more useful.

Homeowners who choose to stay put can renovate vacant rooms into spaces that meet their newfound needs.

• **Hobby haven:** If you've always meant to set up a crafting room, homebrewing station or an artist's studio, now is an ideal time to do just that. Figure out which supplies you will need and begin reworking that

former bedroom into a new sanctuary for leisure interests.

• **Guest suite:** If you've never had a spare bedroom to entertain guests, a child's former bedroom can fit the bill. It may not be that difficult to transform such spaces into relaxing and inviting rooms for overnight guests. Be sure there is at least a queen-sized bed and a dresser or chest of drawers to stash belongings. Select paint colors and linens in neutral tones so the room will be inviting to guests.

• **Living room redo:** When there's an entire soccer team coming over to hang out, that large sectional sofa or modular seating may be ideal. Now that the kids are out of the house and their friends are no longer coming over for movie night, living rooms can be made more intimate with small-scale seating. A small sofa and two comfortable chairs may be a more fitting option.

• **At-home gym:** Save on

gym membership fees by building a mini studio right at home. Choose one of the larger bedrooms and then fill it with some fitness equipment, such as an elliptical trainer, a bench press bench and some free weights. Store rolled-up mats in the closet for yoga or Pilates sessions.

• **Expanded bathroom:** If space has always been at a premium in the bathroom, borrow area from an empty bedroom and turn it into a spa. Install a soaking tub separate from the shower, and fill the room with other amenities, such as a warming lamp or even a small sauna.

• **Home office:** Working from home a few days a week may be more plausible when nearing retirement, as it will be a smoother transition from heading to the office each day to spending more time at home. Turn a bedroom into an office space with a new desk.



## Some weekend home improvement ideas

Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up. Large-scale renovations can greatly affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

If time is of the essence, these weekend or one-day projects may satisfy homeowners' desires to fix up their homes.

• **Create an accent wall.** Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

• **Install stair runners.** Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting

or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

• **Install a new faucet.** Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets can provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets can help conserve water.

• **Dress up the entryway.** An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb. Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers.

A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor. Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different patterns and can mimic the look of wood, travertine or

marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

• **Create a gallery on the staircase.** Gather and arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This creates a designer touch and can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

• **Install a fresh light fixture.** Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Better Homes & Gardens suggests replacing an existing fixture with something new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not within one's skill set, free-standing table or floor lamps also can cast a new glow on a space.

• **Add molding.** Molding can add instant aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of walls where they meet the ceiling, or even mid-wall as a chair rail.

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# Some must-have kitchen remodel features

Homeowners looking to renovate often see room for improvement in their kitchens and bathrooms.

The National Association of Home Builder's Remodeling Market Index Survey, which measures conditions in the remodeling market, indicates that, in 2015, the two most common remodeling jobs were bathroom remodels (81 percent) and kitchen remodels (79 percent).

According to HGTV and Statistics Brain, a new kitchen remodel for a kitchen measuring 12-by-12 feet may cost homeowners anywhere from \$17,000 to \$37,000.

Before investing so much into their remodeling projects, homeowners should think carefully about the features that will improve their time spent at home. When planning a kitchen renovation, homeowners may want to consider the

following upgrades to make the room more enjoyable while improving its functionality.

## Appliance garages

Architectural and design resource Houzz says that appliance garages are popular kitchen additions, too. Set at countertop level, these cabinets allow people to keep small appliances plugged in but tucked neatly behind closed doors.

Kitchen remodels are a sizable investment, and renovations can be customized to make the kitchen more hospitable for all in residence.

## Oversized sink

Although high-efficiency dishwashers are popular, deep sinks to soak soup pots or woks are still useful.

Deep sinks may be preferable to double sinks,

especially for homeowners who use lots of kitchen tools when preparing meals.

## Soft-closing hinges

When replacing cabinets (or just the hardware), consider installing soft-closing hinges and slides on doors and drawers. These devices eliminate slamming and caught fingers, reducing noise and injuries in the kitchen.

## Foot-pedal water operation

When outfitting a sink, think about foot controls, which are popular in doctors' offices and hospitals. Turning on the water with the tap of a foot can reduce the transfer of pathogens to faucets from hands during food preparation.

These pedals also free up hands for other tasks.

## Bottom's up

People likely spend more time raiding the refrigerator than the freezer on any given day.

Rather than having to bend down to seek out that favorite flavor of Greek yogurt, choose a model with the fridge on top and freezer on the bottom, especially if anyone in the household has mobility issues. When shopping for refrigerators, French-door style units may offer even more access, making it easy for homeowners to slide fruit trays, sheet cakes and other large items into the fridge.

## Extra lighting

A kitchen should be a balance of form and function. A combination of overhead lighting, decorative lighting and task lighting can illuminate all areas of the space effectively.



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## Experiment with growing edible vegetables indoors



Foodies find it hard to beat vine-ripened tomatoes plucked right out of a garden. Other edibles, such as fresh lettuce for a small luncheon salad or a handful of fresh parsley right out of a pot to add to a marinade, also add a lot to meals.

The convenience and flavor of freshly grown edibles propels many home gardeners to grow produce and herb gardens in their yards. But those short on outdoor space may be happy to learn that many edibles grow equally as well indoors as outdoors.

Many people maintain comfortable temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees in their homes all year long, which can be the ideal condition for growing an array of edibles no matter the season.

For those with homes that receive ample sunlight (or if homeowners are willing to supplement with artificial light), growing conditions can be even stronger. An indoor garden can comprise as much space as a homeowner is willing to devote.

Shelving can maximize vertical areas and enable gardeners to include even more planting room.

Keep these tips in mind when cultivating indoor edible gardens.

• **Tomatoes:** Tomatoes should be reserved for the



sunniest spot in a home or one where additional UV light can be used.

Tomatoes will need pots or containers that are roughly six inches deep with ample drainage. Keep in mind that tomatoes grown indoors will be smaller than outside fruits, and you may want to consider plum or cherry tomato varieties.

• **Cucumbers:** For those fresh salad mixes, cucumbers can be grown indoors in large pots so they can have space to develop. Be sure to put a climbing structure in the pot so that vines can grow vertically, and place cucumbers in a sunny, warm location.

• **Carrots:** Natural Living Ideas says that if you have between four and five hours of bright sunlight per day and deep pots with loose, well-draining soil, you can cultivate carrots indoors. Carrots prefer cooler spots for sweet yields. Plus, carrot greens can make for attractive

indoor decorations.

• **Microgreens:** Swiss chard, basil, dill, kale, and other greens can provide nutrient-dense additions to any meals. These plants do not require a lot of depth to a container and can thrive on a sunny windowsill in a room that's between 60 and 70 degrees.

• **Scallions:** These plants of the onion family add flavor to many recipes. When scallions are grown at home, gardeners can snip off the greens as needed. Choose deep pots so the scallions can establish strong root systems.

• **Turnips:** Large, deep pots are needed to grow turnips, says Loyal Gardener. You can grow them from seeds and be harvesting turnips in about two months.

Homeowners or apartment dwellers can experiment with different types of edibles indoors. The result can be fresh foods no matter the season.



# Transform your bathrooms with technology

Technology is infiltrating every room of the house. Many new home buyers are millennials, and this tech-savvy demographic covets technological innovations.

A recent survey by Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate indicates 77 percent of Generation X and Y home buyers want their homes equipped with the tech capabilities they have grown accustomed to.

Many of these involve smart innovations, including those that can transform one of the most private rooms in the house — the bathroom.

Automated home theater rooms and Wi-Fi-enabled home security systems have become the norm, but what tech improvements are available to make the powder room more in touch with today's digital lifestyle? According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, bathrooms have the

most potential of any rooms to be improved with technology. The following are just some of the bathroom gadgets and gizmos no one should resist before giving a try.

• **Automatic faucets:** Infrared sensors have been helping keep public restrooms more hygienic for years.

The same technology can be used in home bathrooms to curtail water waste and keep faucets and sinks from becoming infested with germs. In addition, faucets with built-in timers can be programmed to set tasks for brushing teeth or washing your face.

• **Musical shower:** Instead of having to blast the volume on the portable speaker you use in the bathroom, a wireless speaker is built into some showerheads.

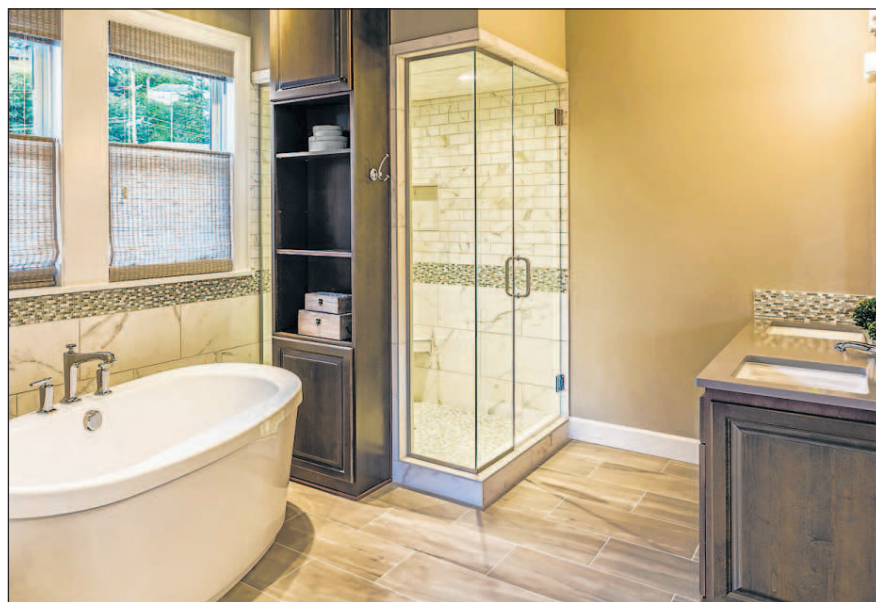
This enables those who like to sing in the shower or

listen to podcasts while washing up to enjoy this luxury effortlessly.

• **Smarter weight management:** Bathroom scales have gone high-tech as well, with various options enabling users to measure weight, BMI and body fat percentage before sending the data wirelessly to a phone, tablet or computer. This can put you in greater control of fitness goals.

• **High-tech toilets:** Borrowing ideas from bidets and trends around the world, modern toilets do not require hands or paper.

These toilets have temperature-controlled water, spritzing wands and air dryers to clean and sanitize. Self-cleaning toilets help busy professionals save time and are ideal for those who always want their bowls as clean as possible. And if you desire extra comfort, toilet seat warmers are available,



while LED lights can make nighttime restroom visits easier.

• **Soaking tubs:** As fast as stand-alone showers were introduced to the modern bathroom, tubless designs have been replaced with

streamlined soaking tubs. Tubs come with different features, including chroma-therapy, which employs colored lights to enhance mood. Air baths are controlled electronically and provide different levels of

sensation for those who are skipping the hot tub.

Round out these innovations with automated lights, chilled medicine cabinets and aromatherapy, and your bathroom will indeed become a technological spa.



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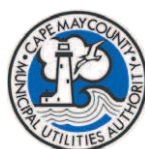
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**Antifreeze, Motor Oil and Motor Oil Filters** are accepted at the CMCMUA Transfer Station and Sanitary Landfill during normal operating hours. Antifreeze is accepted free of charge. Motor Oil and Oil Filters are **\$1.00/gallon and \$1.00/filter**. Limit of 5 gallons/5 filters per day.

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# Choosing the best materials for decking

Warm weather often gives rise to thoughts about spending time in the great outdoors. Decks can expand outdoor living spaces, making them popular home additions.

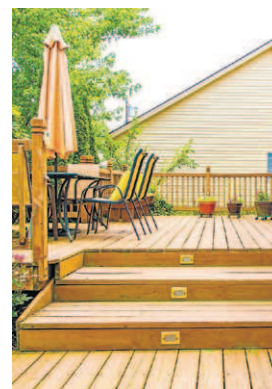
However, when it comes time to map out a deck building plan, individuals may be unsure as to which deck material will meet their needs. Wood and composite decks are among the most popular choices today, and the popularity of aluminum is growing steadily.

## Wood

Wood is a versatile and attractive decking material. According to the wood resource Real Cedar, some people think that wood is too expensive and requires too much maintenance. In fact, domestic softwoods can be very cost-effective decking options. According to Remodeling Magazine's "Cost vs. Value" report, wood decks retain considerable resale value.

In terms of maintenance, choosing a rot-resistant wood can result in less maintenance.

Durable woods include cedar and redwood. Popular Mechanics says both species contain tannins and oils that make them naturally resistant to decay, rot and voracious



insects. Periodic cleaning and inspection/repairs will be needed, but wood can be much more durable than people may think.

## Composite

Composite decking and its close cousin, plastic lumber, are some of the fastest-growing decking materials on the market. Many products are made from polyethylene or polyvinyl chloride.

Some composites will be comprised of recycled plastic and wood fibers to create a weather- and stain-resistant material that doesn't warp, rot or splinter.

Composite manufacturers continually experiment with manufacturing processes to duplicate the look of natural wood grain.

Homeowners are often drawn to composite decking because such decks require

little maintenance. These decks do not need to be sanded, stained or refinished. However, mold and mildew can grow in shady, damp areas, so homeowners must realize that these products are not completely maintenance-free.

## Aluminum

Although aluminum decks are not seen that often, there are reasons why this decking material is becoming more popular.

According to LockDry, a manufacturer of aluminum decking materials, power-coated aluminum does not need to be replaced due to rotting, cracking or warped boards.

Most planks have interlocking edges that create gap-free, watertight decks. Aluminum also has the advantage of being a very strong but lightweight material.

Some people may think that aluminum decks would be hot underfoot, but the material actually stays cooler in the sun because of its heat-dissipation properties. For those who have green goals in mind, aluminum is totally recyclable.

Various decking materials can meet the look, price point and maintenance level homeowners desire.

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# How to avoid electrical mishaps around the house

Accidents around the home happen. Some are minor and easily brushed off, while others can lead to serious injury or financial peril.

Many accidents, even those that are relatively minor, can be prevented.

Such is often the case with electrical accidents, which may be more common than many people think.

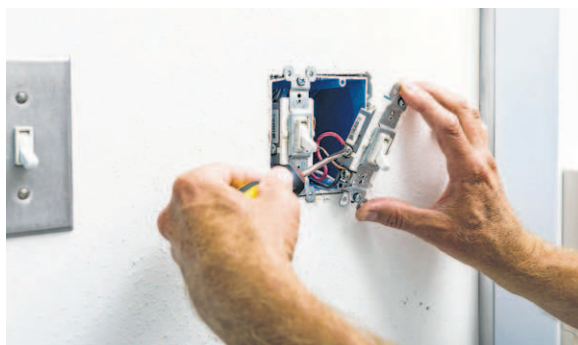
According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, home electrical fires account for an estimated 51,000 fires each year, resulting in roughly 500 deaths and more than \$1 billion in property damage.

Homeowners who want to do all they can to reduce the likelihood of electrical mishaps at home can employ various strategies.

- Be mindful of cords and plugs. Cords and plugs can be found throughout the typical home. While few people may perceive cords and plugs as threats, they can serve as catalysts for accident and/or injury.

Cords and plugs should always be kept clear of heat and water sources, and cords should not be placed in areas where they can pose any tripping hazards.

Even if residents grow accustomed to cord locations and know to maneuver around them, guests won't be as familiar. When pulling plugs from outlets, always pull the



plug, and not the cord, to reduce injury risk.

- Periodically take inventory of electrical appliances and components. Some electrical appliances age well, while others may not. Periodic inspections of appliances and their components, such as their cords, can reveal wear and tear that can lead to fires or injuries. Replace any items that pose a threat and stop using these items immediately.

- Avoid DIY electrical work. Many homeowners are handy with hammers and other tools, but professionals are better trusted to perform electrical work on a home. The risk of accident or injury when working with wiring and other electrical components is simply too great for untrained homeowners to do on their own.

- Unplug appliances before flipping a fuse. Fuses blow from time to time. Some may be knocked out by especially powerful storms, while others may blow because they're

overloaded. Regardless of why fuses blow, homeowners should turn off appliances on blown fuses before flipping those fuses back on. Leaving appliances running when flipping a fuse can increase the risk of fire or accident. Turn off appliances, unplug them and then turn them back on one by one after the fuse has been flipped.

- Be especially cautious if anyone smells gas. Gas leaks are often detected by the aroma of the gas in the air. When such leaks are detected, homeowners should not touch or turn any electrical switches. Doing so may create a spark that can react with the gas in the air, leading to fire. If a gas leak is detected, go outside and contact a local emergency service.

Many home electrical mishaps can be prevented if homeowners exercise caution and hire certified electrical contractors to handle wiring and other electrical tasks around their homes.

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# Selecting the right fertilizer for your needs

For plants to truly flourish, the right growing conditions and soil that offers the right nutrients is of paramount importance. Fertilizer enhances soil so that plants and flowers can thrive. However, fertilizer is not a one-size-fits-all mix.

Choosing fertilizer can be a little overwhelming thanks to the variety of formulations available at neighborhood lawn and garden centers. Shelves contain all-purpose products, such as those billed as vegetable fertilizer, and even formulations geared toward specific flower varieties.

Others may feature buzz words like “all-natural” or “organic,” and consumers may not be sure just what they need to keep plants healthy. The following guidelines can help any would-be gardener or landscaper grow more vibrant plants.

## Start with soil test

It's difficult to determine what plants need without an accurate picture of what's

going on in the ground. A soil test can paint a picture of what's going on and indicate if any nutrients are lacking. A common misconception is that gardeners fertilize plants. But fertilizer amends the soil that feeds plants, according to the soil-testing lab professionals at Virginia Tech.

Soil types vary by region, and conditions may even vary between spots on a landscape. Testing where the plants will be placed can yield the most accurate results. Soil tests are available at gardening centers and online. Otherwise, landscaping professionals can conduct tests.

## Grow plant knowledge

A cursory knowledge of the plants being planted in the garden also can be helpful. Gardeners must recognize that some plants will not tolerate excess amounts of a particular fertilizer component, while

some may need more. Checking books out of the library, seeking information online and consulting with landscaping experts will help expand homeowners' knowledge about plant types and the needs of each particular plant they hope to grow.

## Know the N-P-K ratio

Most fertilizers will come with information concerning the nutrients within. Most notably it will have a breakdown of how much nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) is in the mix. Judging by the soil test, gardeners can choose a product that will give them the right ratio to amend the soil for the type of plant they are hoping to grow.

Complete fertilizers often have NPK in the formulation. Incomplete fertilizers may have only one or two nutrients. This allows a person to customize fertilizer even more without overdoing



it with a particular nutrient.

## Solid and liquid fertilizer

Fertilizers are generally sold in pellets, spikes and liquid forms. Pellets or granules are dispersed over

large areas and will gradually offer nutrients when the soil is watered. Liquid fertilizer is concentrated and fast-acting. These may be used for container plants or smaller areas. Spikes usually are placed in houseplants or to feed individual trees or

shrubs. Depending on the formulation, fertilizer may need to be reapplied once a month or more. Consult the product packaging for the correct application advice.

Fertilizer amends soil to grow stronger, more resilient plants.

# Here's how to control common spring pests

Just when winter thaws out and people are anxious to enjoy the blooming flowers and luscious lawns of spring, pesky pests can appear and impact comfort levels and safety.

Many pests resume their levels of activity as spring draws closer and temperatures warm up. The presence of these insects and rodents may cause problems in and around a home, which makes it essential to recognize them and avoid issues. The following are some of the more common spring pests and how to remedy infestations.

## Fleas

Fleas are tiny, jumping, biting pests that must find a

host upon which to live. As ectoparasites, they feed on blood while living on the body of living hosts. Pets can bring fleas inside the yard and home in warm weather. According to the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, flea larvae develop more quickly at higher temperatures. At normal room temperatures, the entire life cycle of a flea is about 18 days.

Several flea control products are available to control fleas on cats and dogs. There also may be powders and sprays to alleviate flea infestations in the home. Vacuuming is also very effective in killing larvae in the carpet and at picking up adults.

## Pavement ants

Pavement ants are some of the most common pests residents encounter inside and outside of their homes. These ants are light brown to black with appendages that are lighter than the rest of their bodies. Small in stature, pavement ants have parallel lines on their heads and thorax, according to pest extermination company Orkin.

Although pavement ants nest outdoors, they can enter homes through small crevices in search of food scraps. Their large colonies may not disappear until treatment is introduced. Keep foods in tightly sealed containers, clear counters and floors of crumbs, and address water sources, such as leaks. Pesticides may

be needed in extreme conditions.

## Wasps

An errant wasp, hornet or yellow jacket may have survived winter and ridden out the colder temperatures within a home. Once the weather warms, queens will begin to look for places to lay eggs and establish colonies. Treating areas where wasps are seen entering and leaving the home is key. Seal holes as soon as possible.

Although wasps help control other insect populations, their painful stings and potentially aggressive nature can make them challenging to have around a home. If a nest is found, hire a professional to remove it.



## Spiders

Many spiders are not harmful enough to humans and pets to be much of a problem. In fact, spiders can be helpful to have around to control the populations of other insects. Still, many homeowners would prefer these web-slinging friends remain outdoors. Therefore, sealing cracks in a home's

foundation and repairing small openings around windows and doors can help keep spiders out. Also, alleviating moisture issues in basements, garages or attics may keep out other bugs that would be prey to spiders.

Homeowners can take the steps necessary to cut down on pests in and around their homes.



# Use your renovations to create healthier homes



Home renovation projects are done for several different reasons, whether to update styles, repair damaged or broken items or to achieve more living space. More than ever before, homeowners are choosing improvement projects geared toward making their homes healthier.

Establishing a healthy home means different things to different people. For example, to an environmentalist, a healthy home may incorporate eco-friendly or green products. To those with young children or mobility-impaired seniors, a healthy home may be one free from potential hazards. Others may view a healthy home as one that alleviates allergies.

The World Health Organization says inadequate housing conditions, such as poor ventilation, radon, urban pollution, and moisture issues, can contribute to many preventable diseases and injuries — especially respiratory problems, nervous system disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Furthermore, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ranks indoor air quality as a top five environmental risk to public health. EPA studies have found that indoor air pollution levels

were roughly two to five times greater than outdoor pollution levels.

People interested in making their homes healthier can embrace these renovations and lifestyle changes.

- **Be aware of furniture materials.** Toxic PBDEs, which are chemicals used as flame retardants on furniture fabrics produced prior to 2006, can send toxins into the air. Some manufacturers may still use these flame retardants in new forms, but with similar risks. Before purchasing furniture, ask if a product is treated, and select naturally fire-resistant materials like wool and cotton.

- **Lighten up.** Lighting is often underappreciated but can have a dramatic impact on whether a home feels inviting, warm and/or uplifting. Experiment with different types of bulbs and lighting fixtures to turn drab and dreary environments into brighter places. Lighting may improve mood and productivity.

- **Let the sun shine in.** Modify window treatments to let more sunlight into the house. There is evidence that the sun, particularly UV light, is a potent bactericide. The Sunlight Institute advises that

there's no harm in letting natural sunlight do its work, as bacteria within eight feet of low-intensity UV light can be killed in 10 minutes.

- **Inspect and service wood-burning appliances.**

A study published in the American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology has found regular inhalation of wood smoke limits immune activity and function, and anyone who burns wood indoors should be aware of these potential health risks. Ensuring proper ventilation of smoke and routinely cleaning the chimney can help cut down on particulate matter.

- **Turn to nontoxic cleaning products, pesticides and insecticides.** Always opt for nontoxic, natural products when cleaning in and around the house.

- **Declutter the home.** A cluttered, hectic space can affect emotions and mental state, never mind attracting dust and making a home harder to clean. Spending time in spaces that do not elicit stressful feelings is healthier and can help residents to rest and recharge.

Making a home healthier can be on the list of this year's renovation plans.

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## Savor these beautiful (and edible) flowers

Cultivating beautiful blooms is a popular pastime for gardeners near and far. While gazing at a yard full of vibrant colors or enjoying the aroma of freshly cut blooms is enough for many gardeners, others may want to embrace a long-enduring tradition — growing edible flowers.

Cooking with edible flowers is a trend that has endured for centuries. According to *Fleurs Gourmandes*, the first recorded history of edible flowers occurred in 140 B.C.

Use of calendula in salads dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Victorian-era candied flowers and flower-encrusted sweets took edible flowers to new heights. Today, nothing may make a meal seem more gourmet than the inclusion of flower petals in the recipe.

Of course, before delving into the expanded world of cooking using edible blooms, some notes of caution should first be mentioned. Avoid flowers that may have been sprayed with fungicides, herbicides or insecticides. To verify safety, only use edible flowers grown specifically for this purpose, not flowers picked from roadsides or from landscapes. Secondly, remember that not all flowers are edible. Some can be

poisonous or cause severe gastrointestinal upset when consumed. That means all flowers should be carefully researched prior to experimenting with them in the kitchen.

To begin growing — and eating — edible flowers, refer to this list of varieties deemed safe and be careful to double-check against allergies and any interactions with medications prior to use.

- **Allium:** These are blossoms from the allium family, which include garlic, chives and leeks. These flowers can be used to add flavor to foods.

- **Basil blossoms:** It may be customary to pinch off the blossoms of basil, which come in colors from white to lavender in order to stimulate growth of the leaves of the plant. However, the blossoms, which are more mild than the leaves, can be tasty as well.

- **Calendula:** Sometimes known as “poor man’s saffron,” this yellow flower in the marigold family can taste like saffron when it’s sauteed. Uncooked, calendula can have spicy notes that add variety to salads and garnishes.

- **Chamomile:** This plant features small, daisy-type flowers that can be used in

treats and teas.

- **Cilantro:** The flowers from the cilantro plant can be eaten, just as the leaves and the seeds that form the spice coriander.

- **Fennel:** Just like the plant itself, the flowers of fennel have a subtle licorice flavor.

- **Hibiscus:** Hibiscus blooms are famously used in hibiscus tea, which is tart and cranberry-like.

- **Lavender:** The sweet, perfumed taste of lavender works in cocktails and desserts.

- **Marigolds:** These tiny flowers may be used in vegetable gardens to repel animal and insect pests. Blossoms have a fresh citrus taste that can be used in cooking.

- **Pansies:** These vibrant early bloomers can take on a wintergreen flavor and look beautiful when glazed on cakes and other desserts.

- **Roses:** Beautiful to behold, rose petals can lend a subtle, fruity flavor to many different foods as well.

- **Zucchini:** The blossoms from this squash, which have a slightly sweet taste, can be enjoyed in many different ways. Some people batter and fry the blossoms, while others may stuff them with herbs and cheeses.



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