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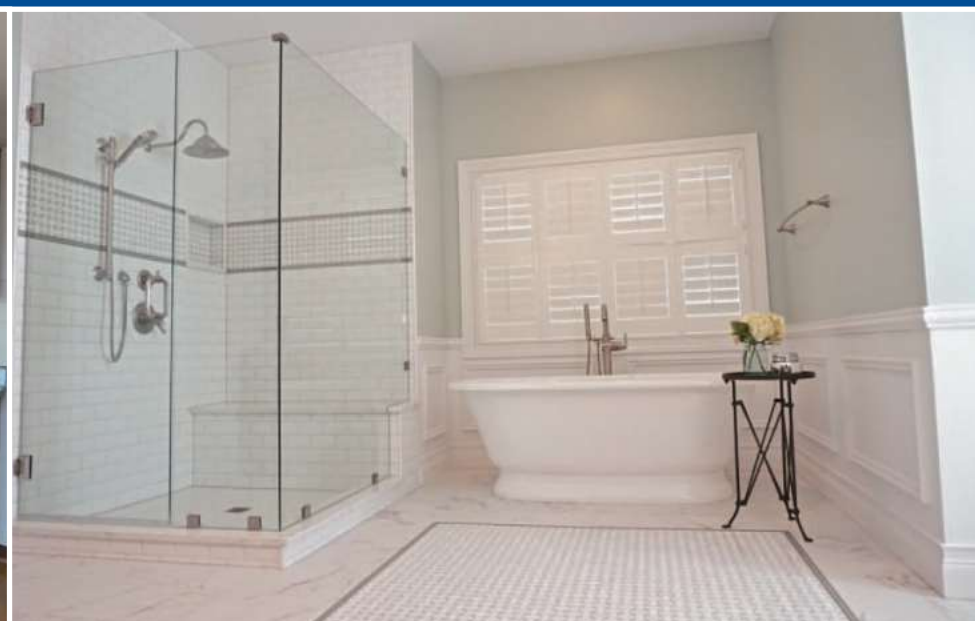
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6 easy spring cleaning projects

Warmer days are here, and although enjoying the great outdoors is probably high on many a to-do list come spring, by the end of winter, homes can probably do with a much-needed overhaul.

Owners and renters can rely on temperate days to throw open the windows and engage in some easy spring-cleaning projects. The earlier one begins spring cleaning, the more quickly he or she will be able to head outside and bask in the warm spring sun.

Spring cleaning tasks can be stretched out across several days to make the jobs more manageable.

While certain spring cleaning tasks can be time-consuming, many projects can be started and completed in 30 minutes or less.

1. Look up

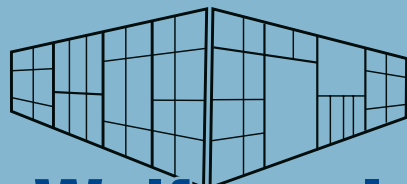
Start by looking up at ceilings, molding and ceiling fans. Chances are strong that some cobwebs and dust have formed in these areas. Always begin cleaning by working from the top downward so you don't have to clean any tables, countertops or floors twice. Static-charged dusting cloths work well to catch and contain dust. Use a pillowcase on ceiling fan blades to clear the dust and keep it from

cascading to the floor.

2. Blinds and curtains

Heavy window treatments can be removed and replaced with more gauzy fabrics. This lets in more light and warmth from the sun. Many curtains can be freshened up right in the laundry, but blinds may require a bit more effort. If the blinds can be snapped out of the brackets, place them in a tub full of vinegar, dish soap and water. Allow them to soak, and then rinse with the shower nozzle. Stationary blinds can be cleaned using an old sock over your hand

See **CLEANING** on Page 6



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Cleaning

continued from Page 5
dipped in a vinegar-and-water solution.

3. Change linens

Remove and launder bed linens. While the linens are in the wash, thoroughly dust all furniture and vacuum the carpets. Move furniture so you can reach areas where dust gathers, such as under the bed or dresser.

4. Grout cleaner

Grade school science lessons can be put to use as you look to remove stubborn dirt. Combining baking soda and vinegar produces a reaction that causes the formation of gassy bubbles. These bubbles can help to break up dirt that clings to crevices, such as grout between tiles. Some light scrubbing and subsequent rinsing can rid surfaces of hard-to-remove dirt.

5. Vacuum vent intakes

Many houses are heated by forced-air systems. The air intake vents can become clogged with dust and other debris. Vacuum these vents so air flow is not impeded. Let the heat run for a few minutes to catch any small particles that become dislodged, and then

change the furnace filter.

6. Clean out the refrigerator

Now is a great time to remove any of those mystery containers growing fuzzy experiments in the back of the refrigerator. Take the food out of the refrigerator and use a food-safe cleaner to scour the shelves and inside of crisper drawers.

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Explore the alternatives to granite countertops

Granite has long been a popular countertop material for homeowners looking to combine functionality with aesthetic appeal in their kitchens.

But granite is no small investment, and homeowners looking to refurbish their kitchens should know there are a multitude of countertop materials available to those working on a budget or those who simply want to give their kitchens a different look.

• **Solid wood:** Wood countertops create a warm, homey interior. Butcher-block counters are less expensive than granite and do not necessarily need to be ordered from a specialty retailer. But wood can stain and dent and even burn when hot kitchenware is placed atop it. Regular application of oil can help homeowners maintain the appearance of their wood counters for years to come.

• **Marble:** Marble tends to be less expensive than granite without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. However, marble is softer and more porous than granite, so it can stain and be etched. Diligence in wiping away spills, routine sealing and a gentle touch are necessary for those who choose marble countertops.

• **Soapstone:** This is a natural stone composed mainly of mineral talc that gives the stone its smooth feel. Soapstone ranges from black to gray but can sometimes have a green



shade to it. Other materials in the stone can produce veining. Although softer than granite, soapstone is still high-density and will hold up well. It's impervious to stains and bacteria, and exposure to chemicals will not damage it.

• **Quartz:** Quartz is a manufactured product made of stone aggregate and polymers

compressed under high pressure. It has the look of natural stone but requires less work to maintain. Quartz has consistent colors and patterns and is a nonporous material, so it will not need routine sealing and resealing.

• **Glass:** Glass countertops are back-painted, so homeowners can order just about any color

they want. Glass will be tempered, so it is safe and heat-resistant. Glass can scratch, though, so it is not as impervious as other materials.

• **Concrete:** Concrete is another material that can be colored to match homeowners' whims. Concrete is relatively inexpensive compared to other countertop materials, but it can crack or chip.

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Reclaimed wood adds instant appeal to home projects

Repurposing salvaged wood is a popular trend in the home-improvement industry. Not only can salvaged wood give a home a one-of-a-kind look, it's a handy way to incorporate the three Rs of green living into your lifestyle: reduce, reuse and recycle.

Reclaimed wood is often used in flooring, beams, wall treatments and doors, but it also can be turned into furniture or home accent items. Reclaimed wood adds warmth and historical interest to a home's decor that newer materials may lack. Although finding wood that can be salvaged takes time and some legwork, such efforts can quickly pay off. Many businesses are now devoted to reclaimed timber, which can help make the process of finding and using salvaged wood even easier.

Homeowners considering reclaimed wood may be interested to learn that such wood can serve functions aside from benefiting the planet.

Match old-growth wood

New regulations may prevent certain species of trees from being cut down. That means it can be challenging to match old wood in a home, particularly if you're looking to maintain historical value and authenticity. Relying on salvaged wood items can alleviate

this concern, ensuring you can find rare woods that are no longer available brand new.

Salvaged wood has character

It's difficult to mimic the natural age marks and character that older wood may have. Instead of being raised on farms, wood harvested decades ago probably grew in natural environments, making the wood both durable and strong. The color and grain of salvaged wood may also be unique.

Look at objects in a new way

Doors are versatile pieces of reclaimed lumber because they're already flat and rather large. Doors can be turned into headboards, tables or benches. Staircase or porch posts can be turned into candlestick holders, and wood shutters can dress up walls and provide a place to hang artwork and other wall items.

Reclaimed wood can be found everywhere

Most people do not have to look too far to find wood they can salvage. Check salvage yards, landfills, dumpsters in front of older homes being renovated, or older, unused barns in rural settings. You also can collect



driftwood or discarded shipping crates.

While some reclaimed wood can be used as-is, some pieces may require millwork, including sanding, cutting, shaping and finishing. If you do not have these skills,

you probably will have to hire someone who does.

The internet is awash in ideas for putting salvaged wood to use. Get inspired, and then find the pieces that will fit your project.



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Improvements that increase home value

When granite countertops or shiny, stainless steel appliances beckon homeowners from the display areas of home improvement stores, it's tempting to gear remodeling thoughts toward the items that will add flair and decorative appeal to a home.

Even though most improvements add some measure of value, deciding which are the best investments can be difficult.

Return on investment, often referred to as "ROI," varies depending on the project. Frequently, the projects that seem like the best investments don't bring the greatest rate of return, while those that seem like smaller projects bring substantial returns. Real estate professionals routinely weigh in with their expert advice, and homeowners can couple that advice with Remodeling magazine's annual "Cost vs. Value Index" to reap the greatest financial impact from their renovations.

The following were some of the projects that garnered the greatest ROI in 2015.

- Open the door to improvement.



Region by region across the United States, installation of a new steel door on the front of a home can have a large impact on the resale value of a property. The ROI ranges from 123 percent at the highest to

86 percent at the lowest, which is still a considerable investment return for such a simple project. Match the door's style with the style of the house for the best value.

- Turn up the kitchen heat. An

attractive kitchen can encourage buyers to overlook some of a home's less attractive components. In the kitchen, replacement countertops, wall color changes, new cabinetry and flooring offer the biggest ROI.

- Dreaming of a new bedroom. Remodeling magazine also points to creating an attic bedroom to increase home value. An attic remodel that adheres to code can garner an 83 percent ROI.

- Home maintenance projects. There's little good to improving the aesthetic appeal and functionality of a home if there are existing structural or maintenance issues, warn experts. Siding replacement, HVAC system repair or replacement, a new roof and basement dampness prevention solutions can be smarter investments before other flashy remodels. Many buyers have a strict budget for a house, and those buyers may be more likely to buy a house with little or no maintenance issues. Such buyers will then upgrade the kitchen or baths themselves, according to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

- Worthy window replacement. Angie's List, a home services review and referral resource, has found the average ROI of new windows is 77 percent. The cost of installation and energy savings tends to offset at around the 10-year point.



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Create drama with bold paint colors

Painting is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to transform the look of a space. Paint colors can dramatically change the mood and design of a home. And depending on a homeowner's goals, paint can make a statement or blend into the background.

Many people are now looking to bold colors to make spaces stand out. But choosing a paint color can be challenging. Homeowners looking to update walls and complement decor may want to look at some of the more impactful colors Pantone indicates will be popular in 2017. Primrose Yellow, Lapis Blue, Flame, Pink Yarrow and Greenery are some of the more eye-catching selections. Once colors are selected, consider these guidelines for using bolder colors in room designs.

Decide how big an impact you want to make

Are you looking for color overload or just a small focal point of vivid color? Remember, using bold color doesn't mean every wall must be lathered in that hue. Instead, select one wall to serve as an accent point and use that spot as your bold color display. Otherwise, rely on bold colors to dress up otherwise mundane areas, such as the back wall of a cupboard or moldings and trim.

Try bold in a small space

Many people are surprised at how well bold colors work in small spaces. Powder

rooms can be an ideal spot to experiment with paint colors. Try deep colors that can make the area seem intimate and even exotic. Dark, bold hues can be toned down by different accents, such as neutral colored fixtures and towels.

Go bold in the kitchen

Incorporate a splash of color in the kitchen without going overboard. Try an appliance or design fixture in a bright shade. Or paint the inside of the cabinets your favorite color and install glass inserts in the cabinet doors so everyone gets a peek at the color beyond. A neutral kitchen also can be brightened up with silverware, dishes, pots and pans, and other kitchen items in bold hues.

Stick to boldness on interchangeable items

Those who like to experiment with color may find they like to switch out the colors now and again. Instead of having to repaint every few months, use decorative items in bright shades to make swapping out color that much easier. For example, replace area rugs, throw pillows and draperies. Paint over terra cotta flower pots when the mood strikes.

Establish balance

Rely on neutral furniture, rugs, moldings and baseboards if you decide to take bold colors up a notch. This will help create a sense of balance in the room.

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Easy and budget-friendly ways to add curb appeal

Curb appeal can help a home get noticed in a bustling real estate market. It also can contribute to the aesthetics of a neighborhood for residents who plan to stay put, and many homeowners feel an attractive exterior is just as important as a comfortable interior.

Homeowners do not have to spend a fortune to improve the curb appeal of their homes. With these strategies, anyone's home can take on a more appealing look.

Clean up

A messy, untamed front yard can detract from a perfectly acceptable home. Cleaning up your yard and home's exterior is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to give the place a makeover. Cut back overgrown shrubs, plants and trees. Make sure the front door is clearly visible and that any walkways are edged and accessible. Store garbage pails behind a barrier and keep trash out of sight. Store children's toys in the backyard rather than strewn across the front lawn. These simple steps can improve curb appeal instantly.



Spruce up the lawn

A well-manicured lawn can go a long way to making a home more appealing. If your thumb is anything but green, hire a professional lawn

and garden service to help you establish a lush, green lawn.

Dress to impress

The entryway to a home is the

first thing visitors will see. Be sure the front door and entryway are in good repair. A pop of color can't hurt, either. If you do not like the idea of painting the door a vivid hue,

dress it up with a colorful wreath or another decorative accent. Carry your interior design style to the outdoors as well. Welcoming accents, such as cushioned chairs or potted plants, also add curb appeal. Consider painting house numbers on a terra-cotta pot and filling it with plants. The pot will be decorative and functional.

Rely on symmetry

Symmetry is pleasing to the eye and easy to arrange. Use it to frame your entryway and throughout your property. Symmetrical use of lighting fixtures, plants, trees and decorative items really can have an impact.

Don't forget lighting

Outdoor lighting adds appeal and safety to a property. Use lighting to accent a special landscaping feature or to illuminate a walkway. Few people enjoy approaching a dark home, and outdoor lighting can ensure your property always is well-lit. Remember, curb appeal is applicable both day and night.



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How to make an older home more energy efficient

Older properties tend to have a sense of charm that some new homes lack. Perhaps it's their lived-in feel or design elements that remind people of yesteryear that make older homes so popular among home buyers.

However, while older homes may have character, they may be sorely lacking in modern amenities. For example, many homes are now built with energy efficiency in mind, while older homes may not be so eco-friendly. Fortunately, there are many ways for people who love their older home to make their home more energy efficient.

Check for and plug leaks

Homes can develop air leaks over time, allowing unheated and uncooled air to infiltrate the home, depending on the season. As a result, the occupants must adjust the thermostat to get the home to a comfortable temperature, causing the heater or air conditioner to run longer, and resulting in higher energy bills. Check for air leaks by running your hand along doorways and windows, and seal any areas where you detect a draft. Older homes can also develop cracks in bricks around the foundation and in siding or stucco; check these areas as well. Sealing any areas where air is infiltrating can save money, reduce energy consumption and make an older home more energy efficient.

Add insulation

Many older homes are poorly insulated. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, adding insulation can reduce energy costs by as much as 50 percent.

Installing insulation can be tricky, especially if it was not originally used, as is sometimes the case with older houses. Insulation can also become damp if installed improperly. Damp insulation can be ineffective and contribute to mold growth and rot in the wood framing. Older homes may also lack adequate insulation around attics, crawlspaces, basements, heating and cooling ducts, and water pipes. Cover the water heater with an insulated water heater blanket so the heater retains more heat and consumes less energy to heat the water.

Stay on top of maintenance

Much like older vehicles, older homes require a little extra TLC on the owner's part. Don't allow a home to fall into disrepair. Even if energy bills are not on the rise, inspect windows and doors to make sure they are closing tightly, as over time seemingly minor problems can add up to substantial energy loss. Don't forget to clean gutters and downspouts, removing debris that can pile and lead to water damage that may compromise the effectiveness of the insulation.

Book an energy audit

Energy audits, which may be offered free by your utility company, can help detect additional areas where a home may be using energy inefficiently. Even if you have to pay for an audit, the cost savings if any inefficiencies are discovered will likely add up to more than the cost of the audit.



What to look for in an investment property

Historically, the appreciation rate for real estate is very strong. Even when the housing market declines, long-term investors in real estate can rest easy knowing property values tend to rebound rather quickly, rewarding patient investors in the process.

Looking at real estate as a long-term investment is just one way to approach a potential investment property. The following are a few additional considerations prospective investors should contemplate before buying an investment property.

Location

Many people are familiar with the real estate industry axiom "location, location, location." When buying an investment property, location is everything. A great location should outweigh your own personal feelings about the home, especially if you do not intend to live at the property. You will likely define a great location for an investment property differently than you would a property you intend to live in, so don't let your own desires in a home cloud your judgement when choosing an investment property. Properties in safe neighborhoods that boast good schools and offer easy access to public transportation tend to make great investment properties.

Decor

Decor is another thing to consider when looking for an investment property. If you don't plan to live in the property, your opinion of the decor should not carry much weight. When viewing a property, try to imagine how

much it might appeal to prospective tenants. Quirky properties typically do not appeal to as many prospective tenants as properties whose decor are similar to other homes in the area. Though you might find a tenant who prefers properties with unique interiors, a property that appeals to as many prospective tenants as possible often makes for a better investment and a lot less stress when the time comes to find tenants.

Condition

The condition of the property also must be considered before buying an investment property. Some investors want a fixer-upper, while others prefer turnkey properties that won't require any elbow grease. The former type of property likely won't cost as much as a fully renovated property, but those cost savings might be lost when it's time to renovate. Find a property that's in the type of condition you're comfortable with. If you decide to go with a fixer-upper, learn the cost of your potential projects before submitting an offer.

Cost

Real estate makes a great investment, but don't go overboard when buying an investment property. Before making an offer on a property, research rents in the area and the cost of insurance in that particular neighborhood. You want a property that essentially pays for itself, so make sure the rent you're likely to collect is enough to cover your monthly costs, including the mortgage on the property, insurance and the costs associated with managing and maintaining the property.

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Factors to consider when choosing carpeting

When the time comes to choose flooring for their homes, homeowners may be overwhelmed by the vast array of options at their disposal. The choice between carpet and hardwood flooring, laminate or tile is a matter of personal preference. People have long extolled the virtues of hardwood flooring, but carpeting can be just as stylish and provides a host of other benefits.

Carpeting insulates rooms in the summer and winter, adding that extra level of protection against the elements. Carpeting also absorbs sound in a home. Many appreciate the warmth and cozy feeling of carpet, especially when stepping out of bed. Carpeting also can increase the level of safety at home. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute, carpeting makes areas of play safer and may reduce the severity of an injury in the event of a fall.

Today, there are many different types of carpeting available. Selecting the right carpeting for a room comes down to identifying the level of traffic in a particular room, the attributes homeowners would like the carpet to have and any other needs that fit with their lifestyles. The following guidelines can make carpet shopping a bit easier.



Type of carpeting

There are many different types of carpeting, some of which are best suited to certain situations. For example, plush and saxony carpets are better in low-traffic areas. These carpets

may show footprints, vacuum tracks and dirt, but they're higher on the comfort spectrum than other types of carpet. Berber, which is more flat and dense, helps mask stains and tracks. It is durable in high-traffic areas.

Textured carpets like frieze are cut from fibers of different heights, so they mask stains and are softer on the feet than berber.

Padding

Padding can impact the way carpeting feels and how long it lasts. It isn't always necessary to purchase the most expensive or thickest padding. However, it is wise to pick a pad that matches the type of carpeting you're selecting and one that aligns with how you plan to use the room. You may be able to go with a thinner pad in low-traffic rooms and beneath dense carpeting like berber. In high-traffic rooms, choose a thicker, more durable padding. Padding prevents carpet backing and fibers from coming apart over time. It pays to invest in a padding that will last as well.

Installation

Select a reliable carpet retailer and installer for your business. Competent installers will lay the carpeting in the correct manner so it will look beautiful and maintain its durability for the life of the product. Shop around to find the right installer or even do the work yourself if you feel capable.

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Dos and don'ts of kitchen remodeling

According to Remodeling magazine's "2014 Cost vs. Value Report," homeowners can expect to recoup about 74 percent of their initial investment for a major kitchen remodeling project.

Kitchen renovations have long been a way to improve the function and value of a home. But not every kitchen project is a guaranteed winner. People may inadvertently make changes that end up sticking out like a sore thumb rather than improving the space. Here are some kitchen remodeling dos and don'ts to guide your next undertaking.

DO consider the way your kitchen will look with the rest of the home. Keep architectural integrity in mind when designing the space. A farmhouse sink and country cabinets can look out of place in an ultramodern home.

DON'T overlook the importance of using a seasoned designer or architect. The pros know the tricks to maximizing space and achieving the ideal layout of appliances, and may be able to recommend local contractors and vendors.

DO look beyond surface details to the structural integrity of the design. The kitchen should be functional, long-lasting and beautiful.

DON'T design just for today; look to the

future. Unless you are willing to spend \$50,000 every five years, look for styles and materials that will last for the long haul. Older homeowners may want to make adjustments now that address potential mobility issues down the road.

DO work with what you have. A complete demolition and renovation may not be necessary to achieve the desired results. Only invest in major changes if something is not working — such as having to walk across the entire kitchen to access the stove — or is unsafe. Otherwise, minor upgrades may do the trick.

DON'T over-improve the space. A fully equipped commercial kitchen may be ideal for a professional chef, but the average person may not need an industrial hood and indoor pizza oven. When you make excessive improvements, you may not be able to recoup as much of the money spent because your home will not be on par with the values of homes in the neighborhood.

DO make sure you can afford the project. Plan out the renovation according to your budget, leaving some money for unexpected expenses. Skimping on materials or design because of lack of money could leave you feeling dissatisfied afterward.



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Organize room by room

While resolving to lose weight or quit smoking are popular New Year's resolutions, many people decide the dawn of a new year is a great time to get organized.

The holiday season can interfere with one's ability to stay organized. The arrival of new gifts, decorations decking the halls and overnight guests can make it seem like rooms have been turned upside down. But the end of the holiday season provides a great chance to sort through belongings and start organizing in earnest.

People who want to get organized can consult with a professional organizer or tackle the job on their own, potentially enlisting the help of others in the household.

Step 1: Assess the damage

It can be difficult to get organized

without first taking inventory of your home. Go through all of the rooms in the house and decide what your goals for each room are, jotting those goals down as you go.

See if the rooms have more storage potential than you're utilizing, particularly those rooms that are overrun with items. Storage can include shelves on walls, new furniture or modified closet spaces. Again, jot down your ideas so you can refer back to them later on.

Step 2: Set up a sorting plan

Organizing may involve sorting through belongings and getting rid of things you no longer use. One of the easier ways to handle sorting is to purchase three different containers or make three different piles. The first one will hold items you will keep, the

second includes items that can be sold or donated and the last will house items you will discard or recycle. Separating belongings in this manner can help you stay on task and remove some of the stress from getting organized. Simply move the containers that are no longer needed from the room when you're ready to organize the remaining belongings.

Step 3: Schedule your cleaning days

It may take a couple of sessions to get certain rooms clean, so plan ahead for that. For example, you may need a day to sort and toss items, another day to prep the room with organizational enhancements and yet another to put everything back. Separating tasks into manageable sessions

will help you reach smaller goals that eventually add up to your larger goal of getting more organized.

Plan project days when you can devote time with few, if any, distractions. You may want to ask a friend or family member to take care of your children or pets for a few hours while you are tackling your tasks. Organizing around the trash pickup schedule can help, too. This way discarded items are quickly out of sight and out of mind.

Step 4: Prepare your day

Have all of your necessary equipment on hand in advance of Day 1. This eliminates having to go on the search for supplies, which can prove distracting. Make sure you are well rested and have eaten

a hearty meal. Set an alarm for how long you want the organizational session to go. If you work until you reach the point of fatigue, you may not be inclined to finish on another day.

Step 5: Reward yourself

Every time you finish an organizational session or goal, treat yourself to something nice, such as a dinner out or a massage. Choose something relaxing that makes you happy.

Step 6: Repeat the process

When one room is organized, establish your plan for the next room. Once you see the success that comes from the first room, you can use that as motivation to do the others at your own pace.

Steps to a more organized, functional garage

Organization can help homeowners transform their homes into less cramped, more spacious oases without forcing them to finance potentially expensive expansion projects.

Homeowners who park in their driveways may find their garages have become crowded, cluttered spaces in which searching for tools can feel like scouring a haystack in search of a needle. Organizing a garage can create extra room in a home while affording homeowners the chance to protect their vehicles from the elements. Homeowners who want to turn their garages into something more than cluttered storage units can employ the following strategies to transform these largely overlooked areas into more valuable spaces.

- Choose the right day. Garages tend to be separate from the rest of the homes

they're a part of, meaning the only way to organize a garage is to first remove all items from the garage and into the driveway. Because items removed from the garage will be exposed to the elements, homeowners should choose a day that's temperate and sunny to clean their garages. If possible, homeowners should opt to organize their garages in late spring, summer or early fall when there are additional hours of daylight. This protects homeowners from having to work in the dark should the job take longer than they initially anticipated.

- Discard or donate duplicate items. Duplicate items are some of the main culprits behind cluttered garages. As garages gradually become more cluttered, homeowners may buy tools they already have simply because they cannot find their original tools. When



organizing the garage, create separate piles for duplicate tools, placing still-useful items in a pile that can be donated to neighbors, local charities or organizations and another pile for old tools that

are no longer useful.

- Host a garage sale. Homeowners who want to organize their garages and make a buck at the same time can host garage sales. Make only those items that are still

functional available for purchase, and let neighbors and bargain hunters do the bulk of your organization work for you.

- Designate areas of the garage for certain items.

Once the items that won't be going back into the garage have been sold, donated or discarded, organize the garage by designating areas for certain items, making sure to separate items that can pose safety risks. For example, store kids' bicycles and outdoor toys in a corner of the garage that is opposite the corner where potentially dangerous items such as power tools and gas cans will be stored. Keep the center of the garage open for vehicles.

- Periodically park cars in the garage. Homeowners who are comfortable parking their vehicles in their driveways can improve their chances of maintaining organized garages over the long haul by periodically parking in the garage. Doing so not only prevents the gradual buildup of clutter that can slowly take over a garage but protects homeowners' automotive investments.

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HOME AND GARDEN / SPRING 2017 21



How to approach buying a pool or spa

Many homeowners feel pools or spas are must-have features as they attempt to turn their homes in their own personal oases. But the decision to get a pool or a hot tub is not one to take lightly.

Significant purchases, pools and spas can affect the value of a home and require safety modifications. Taking a thoughtful approach when considering adding a pool or spa to their homes can help homeowners rest easy knowing they made the right decision.

- Do your research first. Read reviews on products

and find out the base prices of certain pool models so you'll have a system of comparison. Choose the type and size of pool you want. Other factors, such as the material used in the pool (i.e., concrete, metal, fiberglass, or vinyl) and filtration methods, also can affect the price, so consider each of these factors carefully before making your decision.

- Determine why you want a pool or spa. The type of pool or spa you ultimately choose should depend on how you plan to use the

pool. If you want a pool mainly for family entertainment, then you may want to add mood lighting or special landscaping features. If you simply want something in which you can cool off, a basic model may be most practical. If your spa is intended for therapeutic purposes, look for ones with multipositional water jets or other specialized features. Don't fall into the trap that a large pool with a deep diving area is best. Young children and many adults do not frequently use the deep end,

and you may end up with wasted pool space.

- Find a good time to buy. Fall and winter are some of the best times to get deals on pool and spa equipment because it's no longer prime swimming season. However, there are deals to be had come early spring. Retailers may deeply discount last year's models to make room for new inventory. You always can negotiate if the price is just a bit beyond your reach. Retailers may be motivated to make sales in the offseason, so try to use

that motivation to your advantage.

- Recognize there will be extra costs. Some retailers sell pools and spas but do not arrange for installation. Realize that an inground pool will require excavation, and your yard may need to be regraded to allow for rain runoff. Electricians and landscapers are additional costs. Make sure you understand the bigger picture and account for the total cost of modifying the yard.

- Inquire about insurance. Speak with the pool installer

about any liability and compensation insurance they may carry to protect you in the event of an accident during the installation of the pool. Reputable builders should be fully insured.

- Learn about zoning laws and other ordinances. Rules regarding pool placement and size will vary depending on local laws. Always consult the town's municipal office and get the proper permits. Otherwise, you may face fines and be forced to spend more to fix problems that need to be addressed.

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How and when to fertilize your lawn

Various components go into creating beautiful, lush lawns. Lawn maintenance involves ensuring lawns have all of the nutrients they need to thrive.

Fertilizer is essential when feeding lawns, but fertilizing a lawn involves more than spreading fertilizer around the yard and hoping for the best. Fertilizing is a process that should be done carefully and timed correctly for optimal results.

According to Scotts, a lawn seed and care company, no two lawns are alike and each lawn has different needs. The type of grass and whether a lawn is mostly in the sun or shade may dictate fertilizer requirements. While many lawns are composed of several different grasses, a general rule of thumb is that the lawn will need to be fertilized in the spring at the very least. After that, fertilization schedules should be customized according to grass type, climate and other factors.

Spring is a prime time to fertilize because the lawn is reviving after a long season of cold weather and dormancy. Come spring, lawns need to be fed to turn green and grow. Soil supplies some of the nutrients grass needs, but many soils lack elements lawns need to survive the



growing season. Lawn and garden experts at Lowes say a healthy and actively growing lawn uses a great deal of energy, and fertilizer will provide the boost it requires. Fertilizer helps promote new root and leaf

growth, aid in recovery from damage, reduce weeds and replace nutrients lost to water runoff.

Follow these steps to feed your lawn and help it thrive.

- Identify the type of grass in your lawn and consult with a garden center to find the right type of fertilizer for your grass. Many grasses are categorized by season and may be referred to as cool season,

transitional or warm season grasses.

- Test the soil to check for pH. You want the soil to be as close to neutral as possible so it can readily process the nutrients in the fertilizer.

- Broadcast or rotary spreaders will evenly distribute fertilizer and will not cause striping on the lawn like drop spreaders might. Resist the urge to fertilize by hand, as you may lay an uneven amount of product, producing burns and brown spots.

- Fertilizers come in slow-release, fast-release, and weed-and-feed formulations. Which fertilizer you use will depend on the type of grass you have and how much time you have to devote to lawn maintenance. Slow-release fertilizers may be preferable because they do not need to be reapplied often.

- Use caution and set the spreader to distribute less product if you are unsure how much to apply. Excessive fertilizer can damage a lawn.

- Water the lawn well after application, and always follow the fertilizer manufacturer's instructions.

- Keep people and pets off the lawn for a day or two after application.

- Scotts recommends lawns with warm-season grass be fed over the summer as they grow steadily from spring to fall.

- Another application of fertilizer in the fall will supply lawns with nutrients to continue to grow and survive winter.

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Things to consider when renovating a vacation home

Vacation homes may seem like a luxury only the very wealthy can afford, but many people purchase vacation homes as investments. Vacation homes give families a place to escape to where they can spend time together each summer or winter, but such homes also help homeowners generate income, and some homeowners even find the height of vacation season generates enough rental income to pay for the second home year-round.

Personal style goes a long way toward determining how to renovate a primary residence. But men and women who own vacation homes they hope to rent out should not allow their own personal styles to dictate a vacation home renovation project. The following are some additional things homeowners should consider before renovating their vacation homes.

Connectivity

While vacation was once a respite from all aspects of our everyday lives, nowadays vacationers want to maintain at least some connection to the outside world. If your vacation home is not up-to-date with its wireless technology, upgrade to a faster network that offers high-speed internet. Such connectivity can and likely will prove attractive to prospective renters who have grown accustomed to relying on the internet, even when they are on vacation.

Appliances

A vacation rental may not need the latest and greatest appliances, but homeowners may find it easier to attract renters (and charge more in rent) if the home is not filled with outdated appliances reminiscent of a long-forgotten era. Upgrade especially outdated appliances, but make sure any upgrades fit with the theme of your rental. For example, stainless steel appliances may look great in your primary residence, but such appliances are costly and may not be what renters hoping to find a beachside bungalow are looking for.

Accessibility

Some people want a vacation home far off the beaten path, but that does not mean the home has to be inaccessible. If your vacation home is in a wooded area far off the road, consider paving the access road prospective renters will use to get to and from the property. This relatively small touch may appeal to potential renters who want some seclusion but don't want to put their vehicles through the ringer every time they leave the property.

Curb appeal

When renovating a vacation property, relatively minor updates can dramatically improve curb appeal, which may bear more weight with prospective renters than it would prospective buyers. Potential buyers are making a substantial financial commitment when they buy a home, so they will go over a home with a fine-tooth comb. But vacation renters are making a much smaller financial commitment, so curb appeal can go a long way toward encouraging vacationers to rent your property. Repaint a home in a more vibrant color or replace old siding with newer material. Hire a local landscaping service to tend to the property throughout vacation season, and be sure to include updated photos of your property with online listings.

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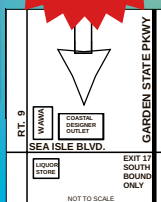


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Renovating a historic home

Living in a historic home can be a labor of love.

The history and the distinct architecture of historic homes draw buyers to such properties, but what historic homes have in history they often lack in the conveniences of modern life, forcing many historic-home owners to make renovations to bring their homes into the 21st century.

Historic-home renovations differ from other types of modifications. According to the Victorian Preservation Association, renovation is getting a home back to where it may have been when originally built, but making concessions for today's lifestyle. Preservation is the act of maintaining a structure in its current historic state, and restoration is returning a home to its original state. Unless a homeowner plans to use an outhouse or live without electricity, the majority of work done on historic properties is likely to fall into the category of a renovation.

Renovating an aging structure can be fulfilling and help to make a home more functional. But make no mistake, such a renovation is a major undertaking. Before beginning, it pays to hire a professional consultant with expertise in renovating historic properties. He or she can inspect the property to determine which areas of the home are safe and which will need to be upgraded. A professional inspection also can determine whether any deficiencies lie hidden in the structure. Potential concerns can be toxic paints and other substances, building code issues, rotting and structural settling. Professionals will know what to look for and guide homeowners accordingly.

Homeowners also may want to consult with

a preservation association, community restoration group or general owner-builder group. These people can refer homeowners to the craftspeople and materials that will be needed for a job. Homeowners can request to see other historic properties in the area and learn what those owners did to maintain the integrity of a home when using newer materials.

Before any work is started, homeowners should find out if their home is listed with the National Register of Historic Places. According to the National Parks Service, property owners can do whatever they want with their property so long as there is no federal money attached to the property. However, the property owner should also contact his or her state's historic preservation office, as there may be state or local preservation laws the owner should be aware of before renovating.

Craftspeople should have experience with historic homes and a sensitivity and appreciation of renovating older properties. Homeowners always should see examples of a craftsman's work and verify references from each contractor before hiring anyone to work on the property.

Homeowners who want to include traditional hardware and other period details in their homes may be able to find quality replicas of historic milling materials, while others may want to scour antique shops or salvage yards for era-appropriate materials.

Historic renovations can be costly and have a tendency to go over budget because of unforeseen damage and hazards that have to be repaired so the building is up to code. Going into the project with this in mind can help soften the blow of extra costs down the road.

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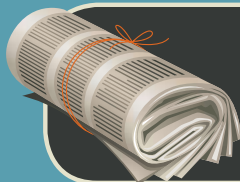
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