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UPDATING WINDOW TREATMENTS

As spring brings longer days and brighter sunshine, many homeowners look for ways to manage natural light and keep indoor spaces comfortable.

Updating window treatments is an easy way to refresh a room while improving energy efficiency. With the right blinds, shades and fabrics, it is possible to enjoy the season's sunlight without overheating the home or fading furniture. A few smart installation tips can help get the best results.

Choosing the Right Blinds and Shades

Spring is a good time to choose window treatments that filter or soften intense sunlight. Light-filtering roller shades are popular because they allow gentle daylight to enter while reducing glare. They come in a variety of colors and patterns, making them a simple way to brighten rooms without sacrificing privacy.

Cellular or honeycomb shades are another strong option. Their layered design traps air and

helps insulate windows, keeping indoor spaces cooler during warm afternoons. Many models offer top-down and bottom-up functions that let homeowners control light flow throughout the day.

For homeowners who prefer blinds, faux wood and real wood blinds can provide good light control. Tilting the slats allows sunlight in while protecting furniture and flooring from direct UV exposure. Vertical blinds may work best for sliding doors or large windows since they can easily adjust to changing light angles.

Picking Fabrics That Keep Rooms Cooler

Window treatment materials play an important role in keeping homes comfortable during spring. Solar shades are designed specifically for UV protection. They block a significant amount of the sun's rays while still providing outdoor visibility. These shades are useful

in south- or west-facing rooms where afternoon sun is strongest.

Linen, cotton and other breathable fabrics are ideal for curtain panels during warmer months. Sheer curtains can soften bright light and add a fresh seasonal look, especially when paired with a secondary shade that handles UV control. Thermal-backed curtains add insulation and help reduce heat gain, making them a practical choice when temperatures rise.

Color also affects performance. Light-colored fabrics reflect more sunlight, helping rooms stay cooler throughout the day. Darker shades absorb heat and may be better suited for spaces that need additional warmth.

Tips for Smooth and Effective Installation

Proper installation ensures window treatments work as intended. Measuring windows

accurately is essential, especially for inside-mounted shades or blinds. Measure each window individually since sizes can vary even within the same room.

Mounting options matter. Inside mounts create a clean, streamlined look, while outside mounts can make windows appear larger and block more light around the edges. For rooms that get strong direct sunlight, outside mounts often provide better coverage.

Securely anchor hardware, especially for heavier blinds or layered curtains. If drilling into drywall, using the correct anchors helps avoid sagging brackets. For wider windows, adding a center support bracket can prevent bowing or cracking.

Homeowners may want to consider cordless options; these are safer for households with children or pets and offer a modern, minimal appearance.



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CREATE A KID- FRIENDLY BACKYARD



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Designing a backyard that encourages play, exploration and safety can help children spend more time outdoors as the weather warms.

A kid-friendly backyard starts with safe, clearly defined play areas. Many families use rubber mulch, artificial turf or padded play mats to create softer landings under swings, slides or climbing structures. These materials help reduce injuries and stand up well to spring rain and frequent use.

If the yard includes raised decks, patios or slopes, railings and barriers can help keep small children from wandering into unsafe spots. Fencing or gate latches around pools, ponds or fire pits are essential. For younger children, sightlines matter, so arranging play zones where

adults can easily supervise helps keep activities safe and relaxed.

Simple additions like chalkboards, outdoor easels or sandboxes provide creative outlets without requiring much space. Even a corner of the yard can become a designated play nook when equipped with age-appropriate equipment and durable storage for toys.

Planting Garden Spaces Kids Can Explore

Spring is a great time to establish a child-friendly garden where kids can dig, plant and learn. Raised beds make it

easier for children to reach and help define a dedicated space for exploration. Easy-to-grow vegetables like cherry tomatoes, snap peas or lettuce can give kids quick rewards and encourage a sense of ownership.

Herb gardens are another good option. Plants such as mint, basil and lavender are hardy and offer sensory experiences through touch and smell. Many families set aside a small “pollinator patch” with flowers that attract butterflies and bees, helping children learn about nature while supporting local ecosystems.

To keep gardens safe, avoid toxic plants and choose varieties that are sturdy enough for regular handling. Check for thorn-free shrubs and nonpoisonous flowering plants when designing kid-accessible spaces.

DIY Outdoor Games the Whole Family Can Enjoy

Simple outdoor games can transform a backyard into a lively spring hangout. Many can be made with items already on hand. Painted stones or wooden discs can become pieces for

tic-tac-toe or matching games. PVC pipe, cones or string can build obstacle courses that encourage balance and creativity.

For older kids, homemade lawn bowling sets, beanbag toss boards or backyard scavenger hunts offer variety and help keep them active. These games can be rearranged or stored easily, making them ideal for families who want flexible play options as children grow.

Choosing Plants That Keep Kids Safe

Selecting the right plants is one of the most important steps when designing a child-friendly backyard. Avoid plants with toxic berries, sharp thorns or irritating sap. Instead, choose soft-leaved shrubs, durable grasses and colorful annuals that can handle a little rough play.

Popular child-safe options include sunflowers, marigolds, nasturtiums and zinnias. For shady areas, ferns, hostas and hardy groundcovers work well. Mulch pathways can help define borders and cushion falls, while natural stepping stones allow kids to explore without harming delicate plants.

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SMART HOME TECH

As spring approaches, many homeowners begin tackling outdoor projects, maintenance tasks and seasonal cleanup. Smart home technology can make those jobs easier.

New tools help streamline routines, save energy and improve home safety. With the right mix of apps, sensors and automated devices, homeowners can stay ahead of spring chores while reducing time spent on upkeep.

Smarter Watering and Irrigation

Irrigation often becomes one of the first concerns of the season, and smart controllers can take much of the guesswork out of watering. These devices connect to home Wi-Fi and adjust watering schedules based on weather patterns, soil moisture and sunlight exposure. Some systems also use local forecasts to skip watering before or after rainfall, helping conserve water and avoid overwatering.

Smart soil sensors can complement irrigation controllers by monitoring moisture levels in real time. They can alert homeowners when the soil is too dry or too saturated, allowing for more precise care. For those growing vegetables, flowers

or new lawns, sensors provide valuable information that helps plants get what they need without wasting resources.

Many of these apps let homeowners control watering from a smartphone. This can be especially useful for people who travel during the spring or have large yards that require attention at different times.

Lighting Solutions That Boost Safety and Efficiency

Outdoor lighting plays an important role in security, usability and curb appeal. Smart lighting systems allow homeowners to set schedules, automate adjustments or turn lights on and off remotely. Motion sensors can illuminate walkways or entry points when someone approaches, improving visibility and deterring unwanted activity.

Smart bulbs and solar-powered fixtures are now more affordable and easier to install. They can be integrated into existing home systems or controlled independently

through mobile apps. Many options offer adjustable brightness and color temperature, giving homeowners the ability to create different moods for gatherings, outdoor dining or quiet evenings outside.

Apps and Sensors That Keep Maintenance on Track

Spring home maintenance involves everything from gutter cleaning to lawn care, and smart devices can simplify many of these tasks. Temperature and humidity sensors can alert homeowners to conditions that may lead to mold or moisture problems. Leak detectors can be placed near air conditioning units, outdoor faucets or irrigation systems to catch small leaks before they turn into larger repairs.

Smart outlets and plugs let homeowners control outdoor appliances such as fountains, pumps or power tools. They can be scheduled to run only when needed, cutting down on energy use.



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HARDSCAPING

Basics

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Hardscaping can transform a yard by adding structure, function and lasting visual appeal.

Patios, pathways and edging stones help define outdoor spaces and make them easier to maintain through the spring and summer.

Popular Hardscape Features

Patios often serve as the centerpiece of a backyard. They provide space for dining, entertaining or enjoying the outdoors without tracking dirt into the house. Beginners commonly choose concrete pavers because they are affordable, durable and available in many styles. Other patio materials include wood, poured concrete, natural stone and brick, each offering a different look and level of maintenance.

Pathways are another useful hardscape feature. They help guide foot traffic, protect grass and connect different areas of the yard. Gravel, stepping-stone paths or paver walkways are popular choices for beginner projects. Gravel paths are easiest to install, while pavers offer a more polished appearance.

Edging stones help create clean borders around garden beds, lawns or walkways. They keep mulch in place, prevent grass from spreading into garden areas and give yards a more finished look. Edging comes in stone, brick, metal or composite materials, allowing homeowners to match their landscaping style.

Understanding Hardscape Materials

Choosing the right materials is an important early step. Concrete pavers are widely used because they hold up well in most climates and are relatively

simple to install. Natural stone offers a high-end appearance but often costs more and may require more skill to fit and level. Brick provides a classic look and works well for patios or edging, though it can shift over time without proper base preparation.

Gravel is one of the most cost-effective materials and suits informal pathways or seating areas. It requires edging to stay in place and may need periodic replenishing. Composite edging and molded plastic borders provide a budget-friendly option for defining garden beds, though stone and brick tend to last longer.

For any hardscape project, the base material matters as much as the visible surface. A properly compacted base of gravel or crushed stone helps prevent sinking, shifting or cracking. Skipping this step often leads to uneven surfaces and early repairs.

DIY or Hire a Contractor?

Many homeowners tackle small hardscape projects on their own. Installing edging stones or creating a simple gravel path can be done with basic tools and a free afternoon. DIY patios are also possible, but they require more time, patience and precision, especially when leveling the base.

Larger or more complex projects may be better suited for a contractor. Curved patios, retaining walls or multi-level designs often need professional equipment and expertise. Hiring a contractor can save time and ensure long-lasting results.

Before choosing DIY or professional help, consider the project size, available tools, budget and how comfortable you are with physical labor and detailed measurements.

PREPARING FOR SPRING STORMS

Spring weather can be unpredictable, bringing heavy rain, strong winds and sudden temperature shifts.

Preparing ahead of time can help protect your home from damage and keep your family safe when storms roll through. A few practical steps such as inspecting the roof, clearing gutters, trimming trees and checking emergency equipment can make a big difference.

Inspecting the Roof and Gutters

A secure roof is one of the most important defenses against spring storms. Look for loose shingles, cracked flashing or signs of wear that could lead to leaks. Binoculars can help with a ground-level inspection, but if you are unsure about what to look for, hiring a professional roofer is often the safest option. Early repairs prevent small issues from turning into major water damage during heavy rain.

Gutters and downspouts need attention. Leaves, twigs and debris can block the flow of water and cause overflow that damages siding or foundations. Clearing gutters

before the rainy season allows stormwater to drain properly away from the home.

Preparing Trees and Outdoor Areas

Tree limbs that hang close to a roof, deck or power line can become dangerous during spring storms. Strong winds may break or weaken branches, putting structures at risk. Trimming limbs now helps reduce the chance of falling debris. A certified arborist can evaluate unhealthy or leaning trees and recommend whether pruning or removal is needed.

Secure outdoor equipment. Patio furniture, planters and lightweight decorations can become hazardous if winds pick up.

Checking Sump Pumps and Drainage

Heavy spring rains can quickly overwhelm basements or low-lying areas of a property. Test sump pumps before storms arrive to ensure they are working properly. Pouring a small amount

of water into the pit can help confirm the pump activates and removes water as expected.

Check exterior drainage. Ensuring soil slopes slightly away from the house helps direct water away from the foundation. French drains, swales or downspout extensions may help improve runoff in areas prone to moisture problems.

Building or Updating an Emergency Kit

Every household needs a basic emergency kit for storm season. This typically includes flashlights, extra batteries, bottled water, nonperishable food, a first-aid kit and necessary medications. Portable chargers and a battery-powered weather radio can also help families stay informed if power goes out.

It is wise to gather important documents in a waterproof folder and keep them in an easily accessible spot. Families with pets should include food, carriers or leashes in their emergency supplies.

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HARVESTING RAINWATER

Collecting rainwater is an effective way to conserve resources, reduce utility costs and support a healthier landscape.

With spring rains on the way, homeowners can take advantage of natural precipitation by installing a simple rainwater harvesting system.

Rain barrels and collection tanks are easier than ever to set up, and many local governments encourage their use.

Choosing and Installing a Rain Barrel

Rain barrels come in a wide range of sizes and materials, from basic plastic models to decorative barrels designed to blend in with garden landscaping. The most popular ones are between 50 and 100 gallons, though smaller or larger options are available depending on yard needs.

Installation typically begins with choosing a downspout that receives steady runoff from the roof. The barrel is placed on a flat, stable surface near the downspout, often on cinder blocks or a platform to elevate it. This height improves water pressure and makes it easier

to fill watering cans. A downspout diverter or flexible hose guides rainwater into the barrel. Overflow valves redirect excess water away from the home's foundation.

A mesh screen at the top can help keep out debris and insects.

Using Harvested Water Wisely

Rainwater collected in barrels is ideal for outdoor tasks such as watering gardens, filling watering cans, rinsing tools or cleaning patios. It can be especially helpful during dry spells when plants need consistent moisture. Harvested water is typically softer than tap water, which many gardeners find beneficial for flowers, shrubs and vegetables.

To maximize efficiency, consider pairing a rain barrel with drip irrigation or soaker hoses. These systems deliver water slowly and directly to plant roots, reducing evaporation and waste. Homeowners can use mulch around garden beds to help retain moisture and make

harvested water last longer.

Understanding Local Rules and Best Practices

Before installing a rainwater harvesting system, check local regulations. Some cities have rules about placement, mosquito prevention or connection to irrigation systems. A few communities require backflow prevention devices to ensure harvested water does not mix with potable water lines.

Some regions offer rebates or incentives to encourage homeowners to install rain barrels, so checking with local utilities or environmental agencies can be worthwhile. These programs sometimes include workshops that teach the basics of maintenance and installation.

Inspect barrels regularly for leaks, clogged screens or algae buildup. Emptying and cleaning the barrel at the end of the growing season can help extend its life.

Choosing a LAWN CARE SERVICE

A healthy lawn can boost curb appeal and make outdoor spaces more enjoyable, but maintaining it through the spring and summer can take time homeowners don't always have.

Hiring a lawn care service can help your grass stay strong, green and well cared for. With many companies offering a wide range of services, choosing the right one starts with understanding what you need, what they offer and how to compare packages.

Most lawn care services begin with basic maintenance. This usually includes mowing, edging and trimming. Many companies also offer fertilization and weed control, pest treatment, aeration and overseeding. Some handle additional tasks such as irrigation checks, small landscaping jobs or shrub trimming. Before comparing companies, make a list of the tasks you want help with and note any specific issues such as persistent weeds or patchy growth.

Qualifications

Experience and reputation matter when choosing a lawn care provider. A good first step is to look for companies with trained staff, proper licensing and clear safety practices. Many states require certification for anyone applying chemical treatments. If your lawn needs fertilizing, weed control or pest management, it is worth confirming the technician handling those materials is licensed.

Online reviews and local recommendations can also help identify which companies are reliable and consistent.

Exploring Packages

Comparing packages is often where the decision becomes more clear. Most lawn care services offer tiered plans ranging from basic mowing to full-season maintenance. A basic package may include weekly or biweekly mowing and edging. Mid-level packages might add weed treatments or fertilizing. Premium packages typically include a full schedule of seasonal services such as early spring fertilizing, late

spring weed control, summer insect treatments and fall aeration.

When reviewing packages, pay attention to how often services are performed and what products are used. Fertilizers and weed control materials vary widely in quality and environmental impact. Some companies use slow-release fertilizers while others apply quick-release varieties that may require more frequent treatments.

Understanding treatments is another key part of the process. Fertilization typically involves two or more applications throughout the growing season. Weed control may focus on pre-emergent treatments that prevent weeds from sprouting or post-emergent treatments that target weeds already growing. Some packages include both. Pest control services can help manage grubs, chinch bugs and other insects that damage grass. If your lawn struggles with bare spots, overseeding or aeration may be included to help improve soil health and encourage new growth.



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Cleaning the **UNDERCARRIAGE**

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The undercarriage is one of the most overlooked parts of a vehicle, yet it faces some of the harshest conditions — especially during winter.

Road salt, sand, slush and grime accumulate underneath the car throughout the colder months, and if they aren't removed in spring, they can lead to rust, corrosion and damage to essential components.

Why Winter Buildup Causes Damage

Winter road treatments improve safety, but they expose vehicles to corrosive materials. Salt is particularly harmful because it speeds up the chemical reaction that causes metal to rust. When salt mixes with moisture, it creates an environment where corrosion spreads more quickly. Sand and dirt trap moisture against the metal for longer periods, accelerating rust even further.

The undercarriage houses important parts such as brake lines, exhaust components, suspension parts, fuel lines and the vehicle frame. Corrosion in any

of these areas can lead to costly repairs. Spring's warmer, wetter weather can worsen the problem as leftover salt reactivates when exposed to rain or humidity.

How to Inspect the Undercarriage

A spring inspection can help identify early signs of corrosion before damage spreads. You can start with a visual check by safely raising the vehicle with ramps or a jack and stands. Use a flashlight to look for:

- Orange or brown discoloration.
- Flaking or peeling metal.
- Damp spots that might trap moisture.
- Accumulated dirt, salt or gravel.

Pay special attention to brake lines and fuel lines, which are especially vulnerable. The wheel wells, frame rails and exhaust system are common rust spots. If you notice deep rust,

holes or structural concerns, a mechanic should examine the vehicle right away.

Cleaning the Undercarriage Properly

Once winter debris is identified, the next step is a thorough cleaning. Many car washes offer undercarriage spray options, which can be effective for routine maintenance. However, a more complete cleaning at home or by a professional can help reach areas those washes may miss.

Using a garden hose with high pressure or a pressure washer, spray the underside of the car in slow, sweeping motions. Focus on crevices, joints and the backs of wheel wells where salt tends to collect. Avoid using extremely high pressure directly on sensitive components such as rubber bushings, electrical connectors or seals.

For stubborn buildup, using a long-handled brush with

mild detergent can break up packed dirt and grime. Rinse thoroughly to ensure no suds or residue remain. Allow the vehicle to dry fully before driving or parking in an enclosed space to reduce the chance of moisture settling on metal surfaces.

Protecting Against Future Corrosion

After cleaning, some drivers apply rust-inhibiting sprays or protective coatings. These products help create a barrier between metal surfaces and moisture. Professional rustproofing or undercoating services can provide long-lasting protection, especially for vehicles driven frequently on winter roads.

Regular undercarriage rinses throughout the winter season can help minimize future corrosion. Even a quick spray every few weeks can reduce the amount of salt that builds up underneath the vehicle.



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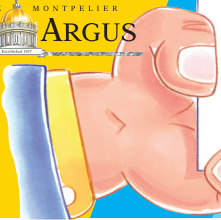
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BATTERY HEALTH After Winter

© ADOBE STOCK

Cold weather can be tough on vehicle batteries, and many drivers don't notice the strain until warm weather arrives.

Winter temperatures slow the chemical reactions inside a battery and make it harder for the engine to turn over.

By spring, a weakened battery may still work but could be close to failing, especially once summer heat begins placing new demands on the system. Checking battery health now can help prevent breakdowns and keep your car running smoothly through the warmer months.

Why Winter Is Hard on Batteries

Vehicle batteries rely on chemical energy to power the starter motor and electrical systems. Cold temperatures reduce a battery's overall capacity and slow its ability to deliver power. During winter, engines require more energy to start, meaning the battery must work harder at a time when it is already under stress.

Short trips in winter add even more strain. When the engine doesn't run long enough, the alternator has less time to recharge the battery. Accessories like the heater, defroster and headlights draw extra power, leaving the battery with fewer opportunities to recover between drives.

Even if a battery survives the winter, its internal components may have weakened. Corrosion on terminals, minor voltage drops and reduced reserve capacity can affect performance as temperatures rise.

Signs Your Battery May Need Attention

Subtle changes often indicate a battery is starting to fail. Slow engine cranking, dim headlights or interior lights that flicker when the car starts are common warning signs. Electronics such as the radio, touchscreen or power windows may behave inconsistently.

If you experience clicking noises when turning the key or see dashboard battery warnings, the battery may be struggling to hold a charge. Some issues can be related

to the charging system or alternator, so it's important to check the entire electrical system if symptoms persist.

How to Check Battery Capacity in Spring

Testing your battery after winter is one of the simplest ways to prevent unexpected failures. Many auto parts stores offer free battery tests that measure cold cranking amps and voltage to determine whether the battery is still performing within a healthy range.

If you prefer to check at home, a multimeter can provide basic information. A fully charged battery should read around 12.6 volts when the car is off. Anything significantly lower may indicate reduced capacity or a battery that is failing to hold a charge.

Inspect the battery visually. Look for corrosion on the terminals, loose cables, bulging sides or cracks in the casing. Cleaning corrosion with a battery-safe brush and tightening connections can help improve performance.

Preparing for Summer Heat

Summer heat can be just as hard on a battery as winter cold. High temperatures accelerate internal corrosion and can evaporate electrolyte fluid in non-sealed batteries. A weak or aging battery that survived winter may fail quickly once heat sets in.

To prepare for warmer weather, ensure the battery is securely mounted and that terminals are clean and coated lightly with dielectric grease to slow corrosion. Some vehicles have protective covers that help shield the battery from engine heat; make sure they are properly in place.

If your battery is more than three to five years old, consider replacing it as a preventive measure. Heat, vibration and seasonal stress all shorten battery life, and proactive replacement can help avoid being stranded later in the summer.

UNDERSTANDING CABIN AIR QUALITY

As spring arrives, many drivers notice seasonal allergies returning along with warmer weather.

While most people think about pollen in the air outside, the air inside the car can become just as troublesome.

Vehicle cabins trap dust, pollen and other particles, especially during daily commutes or long drives.

Why Cabin Air Quality Matters

Air inside a vehicle circulates through a closed environment. When windows are up and the ventilation system is running, the air you breathe moves repeatedly through the cabin. If the air is filled with pollen, dust or pollution, these particles can build up quickly. This can irritate eyes, noses and lungs, especially for those who suffer from seasonal allergies or asthma.

Spring often brings heavy pollen counts, which can settle into seats, floor mats and dashboard surfaces. Your car's ventilation system can draw pollen directly from the outside into the cabin.

Without an effective filtration system, these allergens linger in the air and continue circulating.

Poor cabin air quality can also affect comfort and concentration while driving. Sneezing, watery eyes and congestion are distracting and can make it harder to stay focused on the road.



Over time, pollen can clog vents and reduce airflow. This forces the system to work harder and can contribute to unpleasant odors or uneven heating and cooling.

The Role of Cabin Air Filters

Most modern vehicles come equipped with a cabin air filter located behind the glove box or under the dashboard. This filter traps airborne particles before they enter the cabin, improving the quality of the air you breathe. Standard cabin filters catch dust, debris and some pollen. Higher-grade filters, such as those made with activated carbon or HEPA-style materials, capture finer particles and help reduce odors.

Manufacturers typically recommend replacing the cabin air filter once or twice a year, but spring is an ideal time to check it.

After months of winter driving, filters may already be holding dirt, moisture and debris. A clogged filter restricts airflow, reduces HVAC efficiency and lets more allergens pass through.

Installing a higher-quality cabin air filter can make a noticeable difference during peak allergy season.

Premium filters capture smaller particles and help improve overall air freshness. They are especially beneficial for drivers with allergies or respiratory issues and for those who frequently drive children or older passengers.

Simple Ways to Improve Air Quality

Beyond changing the filter, a few simple habits can help keep the air inside your car cleaner:

- Keep windows closed during high-pollen days.
- Vacuum seats and floor mats regularly to remove settled dust.
- Wipe down hard surfaces to reduce buildup.
- Use the recirculate setting on days with heavy pollen or pollution.
- Avoid idling behind other vehicles.

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