

2026

spring home and

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# Spring

## planting tips



BY RAY BAIRD | Special to The News

### TRY HOME-MADE POTTING SOIL MIX THIS YEAR

You can prepare your own potting medium for pots, containers and hanging baskets of spring and summer annuals and flowers. Mix one bucket of peat moss, one bucket of Black-Kow composted cow manure, one bucket of topsoil, two quarts of powdered lime, one bag of bone meal, one bag of Miracle-Gro or Vigaro or Sta-green flower potting medium. Mix all ingredients in a wheelbarrow and use in all pots, hanging baskets and containers. Leave the potting mixture in the wheelbarrow for several days for some April showers to give the mixture some liquid refresher.

### PREPARING FOR THE SEASON OF THE FOUR O'CLOCKS

Packets of four o'clock flower seed can be found in the seed racks at Walmart, Home Depot, Ace Hardware, Lowe's Home Improvements and most hardware stores, garden centers and supermarkets. They come in colors of red, yellow, white pink and wine. Burpee also has them in speckled and marbled colors. The dark green foliage of the four o'clock bush complements the contrasting colors of the four o'clock blooms themselves. Four o'clocks thrive in all types of soil and my Northampton County grandma raised them in the red clay soil in front of her home. They thrive and bloom from late spring and all the way until frost, they will produce colorful blooms.

### PLANTING ROYAL PURPLE BEETS

Beets are one of early spring's most unusual cold weather vegetables and a root vegetable that requires a long growing season. One feature that makes beets unusual is their royal burgundy color and their distinct earthy flavor. They should be sown soon so they can be harvested before hot weather. In our area, the best beet variety is Detroit dark red. The seeds of beets are hard as a brick and for best results, it is a good practice to soak beet seeds overnight before planting them the next day. Sow them in a furrow about three inches deep. Line the bottom of the furrow with peat moss, thinly sow the seed and add another layer of peat moss, soak the peat moss with water from a sprinkling can. Apply a layer of Plant-Tone organic vegetable food and hill up soil on both sides of the furrow to form a row. Tamp down the soil and give the seed solid contact with the soil. As the beets sprout and grow, keep soil hilled up on each side of the row after side-dressing the beets every 15 days.

Water often when there is no rain in the forecast. If the beets are too thick in the row, thin them out for better production of larger beets.

### LEO THE LION

The regal early spring constellation of Leo the Lion is now in the center of the night sky, and you can find the constellation of Leo easily. Just locate the Big Dipper and follow the two stars at the front of the dipper five times the distance between these two stars and you will discover the majestic Leo the Lion constellation. Leo will move a little bit toward the west each evening and be near the western horizon as we move toward the end of springtime. Follow the two stars in the front of the dipper's handle five and you will discover the most unusual star in the night sky which is the North Star at the end of the handle Little Dipper. The North Star is also named "Polaris." This star is unusual not for its brightness but for its uniqueness. It is the only star in the night sky that is stationary and all the other stars seem to revolve around it. On star maps of the night sky, the North Star is the center star on the map, and all the other stars and constellations revolve around the North Star.

### WILD ONIONS AND DANDELIONS INVADE LAWN

Both weed pests have deep roots and are a part of the lawn that is difficult to control without damaging the existing grass. These lawn weeds will be a part of the landscape until the warm temperatures arrive next month. The best way to solve the problem of the dandelion and the wild onion without disturbing the grass is to use the weed trimmer and cut these weeds down to ground level. Just remember, their days are numbered and the warmer temperature of late May will seal their doom. At least both lawn pests are green.

### PREPARING HANGING BASKETS FOR SUMMER

As we move farther along into April round up all the hanging baskets and containers. Replace worn wires on hanging baskets and replace containers that are worn and cracked. Buy several bags of fine, textured potting medium and recycle it in with medium in the pots that the pansies are now in. Mix in some peat moss and bone or blood meal with the recycled medium.

## spring home and garden

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# A rundown on roofing projects

No two home renovation projects are the same. Some projects are highly detailed undertakings that take months if not years from start to finish, while others can be tackled by skilled do-it-yourselfers over the course of a single weekend. Though each project is different, categorizing renovations as needs or wants can help homeowners determine when the time is right to go forward.

Roof replacement projects typically fall into the “need” category. A decaying roof can jeopardize the safety and security of a home and lead to additional issues, like water damage. It’s unwise to delay roof replacement projects when signs of a decaying roof start to appear. Homeowners who are starting to see such indicators can look to this rundown of roof replacement projects as they begin the process of replacing their roof.

## COST

Roof replacement costs vary considerably depending on a host of variables. Materials, location and the cost of labor, dimensions of the roof, and even choice of contractor all affect the cost of the project. The home renovation experts at Angi indicate the average roof replacement project costs \$9,500. Asphalt is among the more affordable roofing materials, costing an average of \$1 to \$1.20 per square foot, according to Nerdwallet. Slate roofs will be more expensive, costing anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per square foot.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY

Homeowners may blanch at the cost of a roof replacement project, particularly if they choose a more expensive material. However, it’s important to keep life expectancy in mind when receiving roof estimates. Many homeowners never replace a roof twice, making this a potentially costly but ultimately one-time expense. Though slate roofs are expensive, homeowners may find it reassuring that estimates from various roofing resources indicate slate roofs come with a life expectancy ranging from 50 to 200 years. By contrast, Nerdwallet estimates an asphalt roof lasts around 10 to 20 years,



while others suggest such roofs can last as long as 30 years.

## MATERIALS

Choice of materials is arguably the most significant decision homeowners will make when replacing a roof. The experts at This Old House report that materials typically account for 55 to 65 percent of the overall cost of a roof replacement project. Decisions regarding roof materials will be affected by budget, local climate (certain materials are better suited to particular climates than others), aesthetic appeal, and required maintenance. It’s also important that homeowners consider the material warranty of each roofing product. Some materials offer longer warranties than others, which can provide a measure of security to homeowners investing so much in the project.

A roof replacement project is not a renovation that can be delayed when signs the roof is fading start to appear. Homeowners are urged to consider a wide range of variables before committing to a project.

## Did You Know?

A well-manicured lawn appeals to homeowners when they look out their windows. But such a view also can look nice when homeowners peruse their bank statements after selling a property.

A well-manicured lawn appeals to homeowners when they look out their windows. But such a view also can look nice when homeowners peruse their bank statements after selling a property. According to the “2023 Remodeling Impact Report: Outdoor Features” from the National Association of Realtors®,

standard lawn care service yields an estimated cost recovery of 217 percent. Landscape maintenance, with an estimated cost recovery of 104 percent, and an overall landscape upgrade (100 percent) also yield great returns for homeowners. The NAR® report also noted the effects of such projects related to homeowners’ desire to spend time on their property. Among homeowners who participated in the NAR® report and committed to standard lawn care service, 58 percent indicated they had a greater desire to be at home since completing the project, while 46 percent indicated they have an increased sense of enjoyment when spending time at home.





# A guide to survive lengthly home renovations

*Renovations can transform homes into spaces that mirror homeowners' dreams. Regardless of the scope of a project, a home renovation will involve some level of disruption to residents' daily lives. Lengthy, more involved projects may impact daily life considerably.*

Renovation timelines vary depending on the scale of the project. Painting may take a week or two, while a kitchen or bathroom remodel may last anywhere from four to 16 weeks. Larger projects like adding a room can take between three and six months, say the experts at John Merrill Homes. Projects also often take longer than expected, as surprises may be in store once homeowners begin peeling back the layers in homes. Homeowners about to embark on lengthy renovation projects can embrace these tips to come through on the other side relatively unscathed.

## **CHOOSE YOUR TIMING**

The timing of a renovation may have to coincide with contractor availability or having the budget to fund the project. But homeowners should consider life circumstances and season before starting a project. You might not have the energy to take on a project right before the holidays. If kids play on sports teams that require a lot of travel, it might be better to wait until the season winds down. Figure out what

you can realistically take on to reduce the likelihood that you'll feel overwhelmed.

## **PLAN ACCORDINGLY**

Creating and sticking to a daily schedule, and knowing what is happening each day, can keep a project on track. It also allows you to determine which days will be the most chaotic. Demolition days can be noisy and messy, and maybe those are days when you plan to be away from the house for a few hours.

## **STORE ITEMS OUT OF HARM'S WAY**

Invest in a storage solution for the duration of the renovation. Decluttering and removing items before the project is in full force will make it easier to work and maneuver, and it also means fewer items will need to be cleaned afterwards. Renovations tend to kick up a lot of construction dust, after all.

## **DESIGNATE A SAFE ZONE**

Establish a room or rooms as work-free areas to which residents can retreat. If multiple rooms are being renovated, you might consider spending time with a family member or friend, or getting a hotel for a short duration until the bulk of disruption dies down.

## **LOWER YOUR STANDARDS**

Homecooked meals may be your standard most days of the week, but it's alright to be a bit lax when remodeling projects begin. Relying on frozen foods or takeout might be necessary for a little while.

Remodeling projects can be disruptive and stressful, but certain strategies can make it easier to get through projects without too much disruption.

# The basics of 3

popular siding materials ●

Few home renovation projects can change the look of a home as significantly as new siding. New siding can make a home look brand new, and a new color can dramatically change the perception of a home.

As homeowners begin to consider siding replacement projects, they might be surprised to learn their options in relation to materials are so numerous. Though it's great to have options, it also can be difficult to pick a material when there are so many products to choose from. Vinyl, fiber cement and wood are three popular siding materials, and understanding the characteristics of each can help homeowners make more informed decisions.

## VINYL

Vinyl siding has long been among the most popular siding materials. The

National Association of Home Builders notes that popularity has declined in recent years, with the market share of vinyl siding dropping 5 percent over the last decade and nearly 13 percent over the last 20 years. Despite that declining popularity, vinyl remains a strong option for many homeowners due to its affordability and minimal maintenance requirements. Consumer Reports also notes that vinyl siding is impervious to insects and water, an attribute that's highly appealing to many homeowners.

## FIBER CEMENT

Consumer Reports notes that fiber cement siding blends cement, sand and cellulose. Many homeowners like fiber cement siding because of its aesthetic appeal, as it looks like real wood without the vulnerabilities associated with wood (see below). The home renovation experts

at This Old House report that fiber cement siding has exceptional durability and offers great resistance to environmental factors like harsh weather, UV rays and moisture. Fiber cement siding also is a low-maintenance, insect-resistant option that won't warp or rot. Fiber cement siding is not easily installed, which contributes to a higher overall cost.

## WOOD

Siding materials don't get much more traditional than wood. It shouldn't surprise homeowners to learn that wood siding can warp or rot, and anything made from wood can be vulnerable to insects. However, well-maintained wood siding can be very durable and

certain types are less vulnerable to rot than others. Local climate will affect which wood siding options are best for a given area. Many see wood siding as characteristic of a high-end home, making the somewhat higher price tag compared to vinyl siding easier to justify.

There's no right or wrong decision when choosing siding materials for a home. Homeowners are urged to do their homework, including studying cost and the local climate, before choosing a material for their home.



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# Cost-effective curb appeal boosters

One shouldn't judge a book by its cover. However, that often is hard to do,

particularly when it comes to homes. Curb appeal bears significant influence regarding how a property is perceived. A property that is neat and aesthetically appealing probably will be preferable to one that looks like the homeowners did not maintain it.

Boosting curb appeal is a common focus of sellers before listing a property. But what can those who don't have big budgets for major overhauls do to improve their curb appeal? Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

## REFRESH THE FRONT DOOR

Painting the front door can add brightness and improve the look of a home's entryway. Most exterior



paint costs between \$30 and \$40 per gallon, so this is undeniably a budget-friendly improvement. If money allows, replacing the door altogether will generate bang for your buck.

## IMPROVE OR ADD LANDSCAPING ELEMENTS

Landscaping should be designed to highlight the home's best features. It should look symmetrical and feel manicured. If it's not possible to plant new flowers or bushes, simply cleaning up debris and weeds, and trimming existing greenery can make it feel neater and more polished.

## CLEAN UP

Power-washing the siding, cement walkways and garage door can create instant impact. It's amazing how much dirt and mildew can reduce the luster of a home. Cleaning off years of grime can be a fast and inexpensive refresh.

## RESEAL THE DRIVEWAY

Make sure the driveway is clean and tidy. If it has cracks or discoloration, filling in cracks and applying a new coat of sealer will make a big difference. Homeowners can hire someone to reseal the driveway or do the work on their own.

## ADD MORE LIGHTING

Updating front porch lights and accent lights around the property will cast a more positive glow on a home, both literally and figuratively.

## ADD A SEATING AREA

If space by the front door allows, add a bench or some chairs to create a welcoming seating area. A potted plant or two nearby will help the area seem intentional.

Improving curb appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A few easy touches can boost the look of any property.

# How trees and plants

can change the look of a landscape ●

Spring is home renovation season, and no area of a home is off limits. That includes home exteriors, particularly in regard to landscaping.

Lawn and garden centers draw crowds on spring weekends, as homeowners are anxious to get out in the yard after spending more time indoors over the winter. Plants and trees provide a simple and unique way to transform the look and feel of a property. As homeowners ponder what can be done to freshen up their landscapes, they can consider these benefits of incorporating new plants and trees into their properties.

- **Add some pops of color.** There's no shortage of colorful plants to add some pops of color to a property. Azaleas, lilacs, pansies, and, of course, rose bushes can add a wide range of colors to a landscape, providing undeniable and awe-inspiring curb appeal when the plants bloom.

- **Native plants won't compromise their neighbors.** When choosing plants for a landscape, it's important to pick those accustomed to the local climate. A non-native plant might be able to withstand local conditions, but it also might compromise other trees and plants on a property. When choosing new plants and trees for a landscape, work with professionals at a local lawn and garden center to identify native plants that can handle local weather conditions and do so without putting existing plants on the property in jeopardy.

- **Trees can add considerable privacy.** Homeowners who don't want fencing, or those whose towns or homeowners' associations won't allow fencing, may look to trees to add the privacy typically provided by fences. The growth rates of trees vary by species, so homeowners who want instant privacy should look for trees that are already tall and/or fast-growing. Needlepoint holly (which reach an average height of 10 to 15 feet



and sweet viburnum (25 to 30 feet at maturity) are fast-growing species to consider when planting for privacy. Green giant arborvitae are a popular privacy tree, as they can reach significant heights and widths within a few years of being planted. And while it's always good to consult a lawn and garden center for advice on the compatibility of a given tree with the local climate, green giant arborvitae are known to thrive in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones five through eight, which cover a significant portion of the United States.

- **Evergreens keep a property green throughout the year.** Homeowners who lament the loss of color each fall when their existing trees shed their leaves can keep a property green throughout the winter by choosing evergreen trees for landscapes. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation notes that evergreen trees excel at conserving moisture, which allows them to keep their leaves and maintain that distinct and appealing green color throughout the winter.

Various plants and trees can help homeowners change the look of their landscapes without busting homeowners' budgets.

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# How to spot

## foundation issues at home

Home ownership can be a rewarding endeavor and a good investment over time. But homes require consistent upkeep to ensure a property remains safe, a condition of ownership that renters typically do not need to concern themselves with.

Foundation issues are a component of home ownership that can be easy to forget, as such concerns are not necessarily evident in frequently visited areas of a home. A foundation provides structural integrity for the entire home, so addressing damage is essential. The experts at This Old House indicate that some foundation issues can be relatively easy and inexpensive to address. Other issues may not be so simple, especially if they challenge the structural integrity of a home.

Learning to recognize foundation issues can help homeowners sort through small problems and big ones. But what are signs of foundation problems? Consider these potential issues, as noted by This Old House, Robbie Breaux & Team Real Broker, LLC and Bay Crawl Space Foundation Repair.

- **Cracks in walls:** Cracks appearing in foundation walls, drywall or plaster, especially diagonal or stair-step cracks forming near doorways, windows or corners, might be indicative of foundation movement. If a crack has formed in a living space, something is likely moving below since floors are supported from the foundation upward. Cracks thicker than one-quarter of an inch in foundation walls or home walls can be a problem.

- **Sagging porches and stoops:** Notable sagging of porches or stoops can indicate that a house is sinking or changing faster than other areas.

- **Separation between door and window frames and walls:** Gaps can form around windows and doors if the foundation is shifting. The gaps that form can lead to water and pest infiltration if left untreated, causing even more issues.

- **Cabinets and countertops separating from walls:** Homeowners who notice considerable space forming between cabinets or countertops and the wall indicate that the frame of the home is out of square. That likely means a foundation is settling or sinking.



- **Squeaky, bouncy or sagging floors:** While these issues in floors may not always result from foundation issues, they often indicate that moisture has invaded the basement or crawl space. That moisture may have gained access through a cracked or compromised foundation.

- **Leaning or cracked chimney:** If a chimney resembles the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it could be a sign of possible foundation issues causing settling or sinking.

Bringing in a professional to assess potential foundation issues is a good idea. While certain foundation problems can be remedied by homeowners themselves, it's best to rule out more serious issues that may require professional expertise before going the DIY route.

# Things to know

## when replacing windows

Windows are durable, but they do not last forever. The experts at This Old House say the life span of home windows is between 15 and 50 years, with most reaching the upper limits of their life expectancy at around 20 years. Once they reach this age, the seals begin to weaken or fail, and windows become susceptible to drafts and water seepage.

Replacing windows can be a good investment. Such a project is one of the more effective ways to elevate a home's curb appeal and value. New windows are energy efficient and make homes more secure. They also tend to look better than old, fading windows. When pondering a window replacement project, it's important to consider these factors.

- Know the window types. Double hung windows are classic and have operable upper and lower sashes. Lowering the upper sash allows warm air near the ceiling to escape and cooler air can to flow in through the bottom. Single hung windows only have an operable lower sash. Sliding windows have one or more panels that move horizontally, and picture windows are fixed models designed to offer wide, unobstructed views and lots of light.

- Repair or replace windows. Existing windows might just need to be repaired, saving homeowners thousands of dollars. It's best to consult with a professional to see if certain components can be repaired rather than replaced. Typically, rotten framing, wet or weeping windows or significant drafts require replacement.

- Identify the differences between replacement windows and construction windows. Traditional replacement windows are sometimes called pocket windows, says Consumer Reports. They fit inside an existing window frame. Construction windows require the removal of the entire old window, including the frame, sill and trim. The latter cost more to install.

- Familiarize yourself with window frame materials. Various window frame materials are available for purchase, and variables such as heat transfer, maintenance and durability differ with each product. Vinyl is a common material that's low-maintenance and affordable. Aluminum and aluminum clad windows can be economical options, and they are corrosion-resistant and require little maintenance. Wood is also popular for the interior parts of a window, and offer a traditional look. Wood is available on new construction windows. Fiberglass windows also are available in new construction windows. They won't crack, warp, rust, corrode, or peel, and the frames will not expand and contract as much as other materials.



- Keep costs in mind. According to Fixr, an online marketplace for local remodeling services, the average national price for a professional to replace a window is around \$800. For a one-story house, a window replacement project of multiple windows may cost around \$8,000.

When selecting replacement windows, look for The National Fenestration Rating Council label to get a snapshot of the window's energy performance to compare with others. The Energy Star logo indicates that the window meets Energy Star standards.



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# Popular Annuals

## for Spring Color

CONTENT PROVIDED BY MITCHELL'S NURSERY IN KING, NC

This time of year, in the Triad, the rain, plants, and mulch make the area look lush and wonderful. If you're like me, you're struggling with this ongoing drought. We may be in a drought, but with proper watering, you can still achieve a colorful landscape. Our nursery here in King is full of all different colors. You've spent the winter looking at a yard that's mostly shades of "dormant brown," and you're ready for a change of color that doesn't take three years to grow in.

You probably want color, and you wanted it yesterday. That's where our favorite "quick-fix" annuals come in.

### Why Annuals Are Your Best Friend

Perennials, like coneflowers and peonies, can be a big investment that often takes several seasons to reach their full size. Annuals, however, come to the party ready to dance. They grow fast, bloom heavily, and bring some instant gratification to the color we were missing in the cold and dark months, and in times of drought, the colors may take some extra watering to maintain their colorful growing habits when we are not

getting any rain.

The beauty of annuals is their work ethic. Because they only have one or two seasons to make an impression and drop their seeds, they put every ounce of their energy into producing flowers. Some perennials might bloom for a week or two and then go green for the rest of the year, a well-fed annual is blooming from April until the first hard frost, a lot of times.

### A Triad Spring

If you want a yard that begs for attention when you pass by, these are the five best growing spring and summer annuals. Here's how to handle them like a pro.

#### 1. Impatiens: The Shade Grower

If you have a porch that rarely sees the sun or a spot under a big oak tree where nothing seems to thrive, you need Impatiens. Begonias will also tolerate the shade and are more drought-resistant.

**Pro-Tip:** Most people overwater these because they're in the shade and won't dry out as quickly. Don't. Let the top inch of soil get dry to the touch before you give it a drink.

#### 2. Vinca: The Heat Grower

When the summer heat and humidity hit in North Carolina and other flowers are looking "tired," Vinca is just getting started. They have glossy, dark green leaves that look polished, and they are resistant to pests. These can do well in spots where you may have had pansies or violas; they grow in the opposite season.

**Pro-Tip:** Patience is a virtue here. Do not plant Vinca too early. If the soil is still



chilly (below 60 degrees), they'll catch a fungal "damping off" and turn yellow. Mother's Day is the perfect time to put these in the ground. They want the heat, so you know it's ok to give it to them where other flowers may have failed.

### 3. Portulaca: The Sun Seeker

We all have spots that can bake in the sun. Portulaca (or Sea of Roses) loves it there, thriving in poor, dry soil. They have needle-like leaves that hold water, and their blooms look like miniature neon roses.

**Pro-Tip:** They actually close up when the sun goes down or on very cloudy days. Plant these in a spot where you'll see them during the daytime, because they'll be closed up for the night when it gets dark.

### 4. Marigolds: The Vegetable Protector

Marigolds are the classic garden flower, and they've earned that spot for a good reason. They come in many colors and are beyond tough. Beyond their looks, their scent and roots actually help deter certain pests (nematodes) and confused hungry bugs.

**Pro-Tip:** If you're planting a backyard tomato patch this year, tuck a border of Marigolds around the edges. They will act as security guards. Make sure to "deadhead"

(pinch off) the dried-up blooms, and this will keep the plant going until the freeze hits.

### 5. Petunias: The High-Impact Grower

Modern Petunias, like the "Wave" or "Color Rush" series, don't need you to pluck off every single dead flower to keep blooming. They'll trail down a hanging basket for three feet if you let them.

**Pro-Tip:** Around late-June, petunias in baskets often get "leggy" (long, stringy stems with just a few flowers at the end). Don't be afraid to give them a "haircut." Take a pair of scissors and snip off the top third of the plant. It feels wrong, but in ten days, you'll have a flush of bushy new growth with more flowers. Petunias in the ground shouldn't need to be pruned.

### The Secret Sauce

Before you dig in, remember that your plants are only as happy as the dirt they live in. If you're planting in pots, don't skimp. Buy a high-quality potting mix that feels light and fluffy; if it's heavy like topsoil, your roots will suffocate. You will want to fertilize your plants in the spring, summer, and fall.

And as for watering? Do it early. Giving your plants a drink at 7:00 AM allows the leaves to dry off during the day, which prevents the "funk" (mold and mildew) from moving in overnight. It is especially important to follow the weather forecast to maintain the water levels in the pots. Smaller pots are easy to feel the weight to determine when it truly needs water.

### Let's Get Growing

You don't need a degree in botany to have a beautiful yard; you just need to add a little 'sweat equity' and use the right plants for the right spots. If you get stuck or can't decide, swing by for more tips at Mitchell's Nursery here in King. Let's make this your year.



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## 3 ways to get more use of a garage

Even though no two homes are the same, rooms have a tendency to take on similar characteristics regardless of which property they're a part of. Kitchens tend to be popular gathering spaces, while basements have become go-to spots for game rooms and watch parties.

Garages also tend to share certain characteristics between homes, and one notable attribute is the tendency to become difficult-to-navigate dumping grounds for a wide range of items, including lawn and garden tools, children's toys, sporting goods, and seasonal home decor. Though there's nothing wrong with utilizing a garage as a storage space, the following are three simple ways homeowners can get more out of these spaces.

**1. Utilize the wall space.** The walls in a garage have lots of potential. Effective use of walls within a garage can ensure garden tools, small toys and other items do not accumulate on the floor. Such accumulations contribute much to the reputation of garages as dumping grounds for miscellaneous items. By clearing the floors of clutter, and utilizing wall spaces to store items, homeowners can open up the spaces to serve any number of functions, including home gyms, art studios or even parking spaces to protect vehicles from the elements. A storage organizer system with various hooks can be mounted on a garage wall to free up floor space, while shelving can be hung to store paint cans, power tool batteries and other items.

**2. Look upward.** If garage ceilings extend several feet above the height of homeowners' vehicles, then the spaces above where cars might be parked can be converted into storage space for large recreational items, like canoes or kayaks, or seasonal decor that does not need to be accessed on a regular basis. A simple kayak hoist utilizing a pulley system clears floor space and allows kayaks to be stored



overhead. Lifting storage racks work in similar fashion and make for great additions for anyone who needs to store containers full of seasonal decor but does not want to do so by stacking items on the floor. A hand crank system for a lifting storage rack makes for easy and safe access.

**3. Install new lighting.** Without ample lighting, garages may not be conducive to recreational pursuits like painting, crafting or even exercising. A lighting upgrade is a relatively affordable renovation that can make a big difference, illuminating spaces not exactly known for brightness, especially if there's no windows. If you want to spend time in the garage during winter and stay warm, then some new lighting can make that possible.

Homeowners whose garages are currently serving as cluttered storage closets can do much to get more out of these useful spaces.

# Lighting for every room in the house

Lighting in a home is easily overlooked. But power outages serve as a stark reminder of the importance of lighting, which adds to the safety, functionality and aesthetic appeal of a space.

When homeowners go room to room, they can consider various types of lighting to add a unique feel to each space.

## KITCHEN

Kitchens are heavily trafficked rooms in many homes. A combination of overhead lighting that will illuminate the entire space and focused task lighting, like under-cabinet lights for meal prep, can help in the kitchen. Separate task lighting for a bill-paying area or homework station also can be a useful touch.

## BEDROOM

Bedrooms are cozy retreats where homeowners spend most of their time resting and relaxing. Harsh lighting may not be applicable here, so consider side lamps fitted with warm-hued bulbs placed beside a bed. Lighting can be more stark and targeted in closets to help homeowners see clothing and other belongings.

## BATHROOM

Bathroom lighting amenities can include a combination of features to fully optimize this space. Most homeowners will want some sort of overhead lighting to shed light on most of the space. Task lighting by the mirror can offer more visibility while shaving or applying makeup. Lighting in a bathing area can keep such spaces safer by improving visibility in a generally slippery area. In bathrooms with spa-like settings, mood lighting paired with features like steam capabilities can enhance the space even further.

## GARAGE AND BASEMENT

Utility areas like garages, basements and crawl spaces need high-wattage bright lighting for safety. Installation of bright LEDs in these areas can make work projects easier and safer. Well-lit areas also are generally less inviting to pests like insects and rodents, so bright lighting may deter these creatures in areas where they tend to enter a home.



## LIVING ROOM/GREAT ROOM

Living areas can benefit from a combination of ambient lighting sources. Table lamps alongside sofas and chairs will provide enough light, but will not compete with televisions or home theater setups. Lighting that highlights artwork or home accents also can add a cozy appeal to the space.

## ADDITIONAL LIGHTING

Homeowners may want to consider a few additional lighting scenarios to improve their spaces. Lighting in a foyer or above coat racks or shoe cubbies can keep the space functional but attractive. A combination of overhead lighting and accent lighting can make a laundry room less utilitarian. And dining spaces can be intimate or grandiose depending on the fixtures featured in the room.

Homeowners also can utilize smart devices and bulbs to easily control the lights while at home or away.

Lighting plays a key role in a home, affecting the safety, functionality and aesthetics of rooms.

## Did You Know?

Light-emitting diode bulbs (LEDs) are energy-efficient and durable options.

LEDs convert electricity into light instead of heat, and increasingly are used in a wide range of products, including lighting fixtures. According to Energy Star®, LEDs produce light up to 90 percent more efficiently than incandescent

light bulbs. LEDs also do not typically “burn out” or fail, like other types of bulbs. Because of their performance benefits, homeowners may be interested in switching over to LED bulbs to power their existing lighting fixtures. Generally speaking, LED bulbs can work in most non-LED fixtures, provided the base type matches the socket. The LED bulb also should be rated for the same line voltage for the fixture. Also, the fixture should not be enclosed, such as glass-encased ceiling lights or certain outdoor fixtures. The lack of ventilation can cause heat buildup, leading to damage or failure.

In such instances, one should purchase LEDs specifically rated for enclosed fixtures.





# The 4-1-1

on whole-house generators

Weather is unpredictable. Strong winds or storms can wreak havoc on power lines, resulting in outages that may last hours or even days. People have come to rely on electricity, not only for comfort and safety, but to power just about every aspect of modern life. A power outage can be a minor disruption or downright dangerous, unless a whole-house generator can take over when needed.

## WHAT IS A WHOLE-HOUSE GENERATOR?

A whole-house generator, also called a standby generator, is a permanently installed system that provides backup power to a home during a utility outage. The generator typically runs using a natural gas or propane connection.

Unlike a portable generator, a whole-house generator is installed outside on a concrete slab. It is wired to the home's electrical panel through an automatic transfer switch (ATS). This switch will continuously monitor the electrical grid's power and start automatically if an outage is detected. When the power comes back on, the ATS will shut off the generator and reconnect the home to the grid.

## GENERATOR CONSIDERATIONS

NJR Home Services says there are some considerations when determining which generator best meets the needs of a household. It's important to identify where power will be needed in the home, whether it's a few essential pieces of equipment or the entire home.

The more one wants to have power, the more costly the generator will be.



The location of the generator on the property must meet local zoning requirements, which vary from town to town. A permit likely will be required for the installation work.

Another consideration is gas meter sizing. A trained technician should schedule a pressure check to ensure that the gas supply to the home can handle the new generator.

## WHAT IF THERE HASN'T BEEN AN OUTAGE?

Most units will test themselves periodically for a few minutes each week to recharge the batteries and keep the engine lubricated, which serves as a testament to the hands-off nature of these systems.

Whole-house generators offer peace of mind in an unpredictable world. When the power goes out, these generators seamlessly kick into action.

# Unique features

## for outdoor living spaces

Outdoor living spaces are wildly popular. A 2023 study conducted by Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens found that 63 percent of homeowners indicated they would prioritize an outdoor living space if they were to remodel their homes.

Homeowners cite a multitude of motivations regarding their interest in upgrading their outdoor living spaces. The 2024 U.S. Outdoor Trends Study from Houzz Research found that more than half of homeowners who participated in the study (51 percent) want to renovate to improve aesthetics, while 37 percent hoped to enhance entertaining spaces. One-third view renovating outdoor spaces as a great way to extend the living space of their homes. Homeowners who share these motivations and are committed to renovating their outdoor living areas can look to these unique features to fulfill all three goals.

- **Water fountain:** Water fountains can serve as stunning focal points in outdoor living spaces. Outdoor fountains are ideal for anyone hoping to create an outdoor oasis, as few sights and sounds promote a calming atmosphere as effectively as softly flowing water in a cast stone fountain. Fountains also attract birds, which can add to the soothing sounds of a backyard escape.

- **Shade structure:** Gone are the days when homeowners' most accessible option to create shade on patios and decks were umbrellas extending out from the center of outdoor dining tables. Pergolas and gazebos are now available in a wide range of shapes and styles, making these a must-have for homeowners who want to entertain while ensuring guests remain comfortable on hot days.

A hardtop gazebo with roof hooks to accommodate fans, lights and even plants can serve as an aesthetically appealing safe haven from summer sun.

- **Hammock:** A hammock is a simple yet unique, functional and affordable feature to consider for an outdoor living space. If the existing landscaping allows, situate a hammock between two tall, sturdy trees. Such a sight can contribute to a welcoming and calming ambiance in an outdoor living space, and provide extra room to lounge and relax beneath the shade of trees.



- **Game zone:** If entertaining is the primary motivation behind an outdoor living space renovation, then designate part of the space for games and activities. A designated bocce court will draw visitors who want to relax and enjoy a little friendly competition away from dining areas and other spaces. A small putting green can allow golfers to work on their short games, and such spaces can offer ample opportunities for fun if homeowners are inclined to host putting contests during backyard barbecues. Whatever game tickles homeowners' fancy, designating a space exclusively for games can up the entertainment value of an outdoor living space.

The popularity of outdoor living spaces remains high. Homeowners hoping to enhance their existing spaces can consider a number of unique features to meet their goals.

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