



Spring Home Improvement

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The Wayne Herald
April 27, 2023

Tips to accomplish basement renovations

A fully finished and functional basement is a dream for many homeowners. Such a space, when completed, can serve as an entertainment space, a man cave, an artist's studio, or any number of additional functions.

Despite their usefulness, finished basements are something of a rarity. In an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Construction, the National Association of Home Builders® found that only around 24 percent of single-family homes built in 2018 have basements. Homeowners who do not currently have a finished basement but are considering such a project can approach the remodel with a few key factors in mind. Careful consideration of these factors can ensure the project is budget-friendly and worthy of homeowners' investments.

- Investment value: Conventional wisdom among home renovation and real estate experts suggests that a basement remodel is best if done to satisfy current inhabitants and not necessarily to appeal to prospective buyers once the home is put up for sale. Remodeling magazine reports that a midrange basement remodel costing around \$70,000 will provide a return of around \$49,000 (or 70 per-

cent) at resale. Though that's not a poor return on investment, homeowners who are remodeling a basement solely for the potential ROI at resale can find other projects that provide a greater return.

- Foundation: The foundation of the home must garner ample consideration before beginning a basement remodel. Certain foundation issues, such as soft concrete, cracked or curved outside walls and cracks in the flooring, are indicative of significant issues with the foundation. These issues can be costly to address, and they must be remedied before the basement remodel can begin.
- Existing space: Some homeowners may have bought their homes with partially finished basements or even finished areas that they simply want to remodel. In such instances, a pre-remodel inspection from a licensed home inspector can save homeowners lots of money and heartache over the long haul. Partially finished or even aging finished basements might not have been renovated in adherence to codes, which could lead to costly violations down the road. An inspection in advance of a remodel can give homeowners an idea of what they will need to do to bring the basement up to code. Local officials also



can provide a list of necessary permits and a detailed description of requirements to ensure the remodeled basement adheres to code.

- Soil: Soil surrounding the home should be tested prior to beginning the project. Radon is an odorless gas found in soil that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes can increase individuals' risk for lung cancer. Radon can seep into basements and increase

that risk even further if it is present at elevated levels in the soil surrounding a home. Radon tests are simple and inexpensive, and no basement remodel project should begin without first conducting such a test.


Finished basements are valuable spaces. Homeowners who want to finish or remodel their basements should consider a host of factors before beginning the renovation.

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Posion prevention tips for homeowners

The average home is full of potentially poisonous items. From cleaning products to medications to foods and beverages, a host of items around the house can make a person sick or prove fatal.

In 2020, 55 poison control centers in the United States provided telephone guidance for more than 2.1 million human poison exposures. That equates to one poison exposure reported to the centers every 15 seconds. In 2021, poison control centers across Canada experienced an uptick in calls regarding individuals taking veterinary grade ivermectin in order to treat and prevent COVID-19, according to CTV-News.

WebMD indicates almost all poison exposures occur in homes, and 80 percent of all poisonings affect children between ages of one and four. Accidental poisonings are scary, but largely preventable. These tips can help prevent injury or fatalities.

- Lock up:** Install locks and child-proof latches on cabinets and other places where dangerous substances are kept, including cleaning products and medications.
- Original containers:** Keep all substances in their original containers, including medicines. Individuals can accidentally ingest the wrong medication if products are moved into other containers.

- Install alarms:** Maintain carbon monoxide detectors throughout the house, including near bedrooms and close to furnaces.
- Discard old food:** Check expiration dates and examine canned or boxed foods for spoilage. Eating food that has spoiled or is not cooked to the right temperature can result in food poisoning.
- Don't mix chemicals:** Never mix chemical products, which can produce fumes or dangerous reactions.
- Recognize poisonous plants:** Research which plants may be poisonous if touched or ingested. Philodendrons, dieffenbachia, oleander, and golden pothos are some of the indoor plants that can be dangerous to children and pets.
- Avoid sprayed areas:** Stay away from lawns and gardens that have recently been sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers.
- Safely dispose of certain products:** Make sure to properly dispose of chemical products like paints, cleansers, stains, and the like. Check with municipal recycling centers about how to safely discard items.
- Poisonous animals:** Know which poisonous animals and plants reside nearby. Mushrooms, snakes and insects can be dangerous.

Accidental poisonings can be prevented with due diligence.

Crafty gift ideas for DIY experts

Home improvement projects enable homeowners to transform their homes into their ideal living spaces. According to iProperty Management, most homeowners in the United States spent between \$5,000 and \$10,000 improving their homes in 2018. And it doesn't stop there, as home improvement sales are projected to reach \$465 billion in 2022.

Various renovation projects are best left to the professionals. However, many homeowners are eager to get their own hands dirty with various projects, large and small. Having the right tools and gear on hand can make projects go all the more smoothly. Holiday shoppers can consider these ideas as they seek to ensure DIYers have all they need to get the job done.

•Painting time-savers: Painting requires some basic essentials, from paint trays to rollers to brushes. Projects can be made more efficient with innovative products that help save time and reduce mess. One such item is a paint brush cover, which snaps over wet paintbrushes between coats so they won't dry out or require rinsing. Brushes that cut in easily and others with flexible handles for getting in tight places also make painting projects that much easier.

•Cordless drill: A mechanical drill makes easy work of assembly projects and general renovations that require screws as fasteners. A cord-



less rechargeable drill will be easy to maneuver when handling projects away from outlets. Going cord-free also reduces the risk of trips and falls on errant cords.

•Lawn care subscription service: Home improvements extend to the exterior. In addition to mowers, trimmers and garden shears, DIYers may

benefit from subscription products that improve on property care. These formulations are customized to the specific needs of homeowners' lawn or

landscaping greenery and are shipped right to their door.

• Rotary tool kit: This is one of the most versatile tools homeowners can have on hand. A rotary tool can engrave, grind, sharpen, polish, cut, carve, and more depending on the accessory attachment.

•Multi-use ladder: A ladder is a

necessity for various projects inside and outside the home. One that can transform into an A-frame, scaffold system, staircase ladder and other configurations helps ensure maximum safe reach for the job at hand.

•Composter: Whether you use an indoor kitchen composter or one designed for outdoor use, being able to generate one's own compost is great for avid gardeners. Compost, often called "black gold," is made from kitchen scraps, leaves and other items that break down into a rich fertilizer.

•Tool box/tool organizer: Tool storage is a market all its own. It runs the gamut from rolling metal storage containers to plastic or metal boxes to canvas bags to plastic molded curated kits. Tool organizer kits also come at various price points, so it's easy for shoppers to choose one that fits their budgets.

• Organizing units: Organizing units are available in prefabricated kits that are easily assembled when needed, as well as custom-made products that are installed by a professional. They may be an option for a handy person looking to organize tools and other items for home repairs.

Do-it-yourselfers can be even more handy with tools geared toward their interests and repair needs.



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Life Hacks for lengthy renovations

The global pandemic reignited people's passions for home renovations, as they directed dollars that would normally have been spent elsewhere into the places where they were now spending the most time - their homes. According to the 10th annual Houzz & Home survey of more than 70,000 respondents in the United States, higher-budget projects cost around \$85,000 or more in 2020, compared with \$80,000 in the two years prior. Kitchen projects were the most popular among renovating homeowners.

Even though many COVID-19-related restrictions have lifted and life has largely returned to regular programming, renovations remain a popular investment. Homeowners embarking on home renovation projects understand that a certain measure of upheaval is to be expected, but some may not fully anticipate the impact that renovations have on daily life. The following are some tips for making it through a lengthy renovation.

- Discuss the timeline with contractors. It may be easier to make a plan for how much life will be disrupted if you have an idea of how long the renovation will be (if everything goes according to plan). Sit down with contractors and have them spell out the

minutiae of the project so you'll be able to anticipate what's going on day-to-day.

- Start at the right time. Some contractors may say they can fit your project into their schedules in between other jobs. While this may seem convenient and timely, your work may be put on hold if there are delays with the other job or jobs. Instead, it may be better to hold off until the contractors can devote the bulk of their attention to your renovation.

- Recreate commonly used spaces elsewhere. A kitchen or a bathroom remodel often requires giving up spaces that are used throughout a typical day. Unless you have a spare full bathroom or kitchen, you'll need to make due. Set a microwave, tabletop electric burner and a coffee pot on a folding table in the garage or utility room. Rent or purchase a small refrigerator where you can store a few necessities. Ask your contractor to set up a makeshift outdoor shower so you have a place to get clean when the bathroom is under construction.

- Pack up and cover. Remodeling one room may cause a trickle down effect on other areas. Dust from drywall sanding can infiltrate many rooms in the home. Pack and label boxes with



items not immediately needed and store them in another area. Cover most things so a film of dust won't form on them.

- Adjust your schedule. Sleeping in will be a thing of the past for the duration of the renovation, as may be working from a home office. Try to get out of the work zone as much as possible for new scenery and respites from the noises and smells.

- Ease up on cleaning standards. It's challenging to keep a home clean during a renovation. Relax standards and expect a mess for some time. Explain to guests what they'll find if they drop by.

Renovations can disrupt life, but often are well worth the sacrifices homeowners must make to see them through to completion.



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Tips to spring clean your house

Spring is a season of renewal. When the flowers are blooming and the trees are budding and the weather is pleasantly warm, people often feel inspired to make changes around their homes. Work may begin with culling belongings and organizing essentials.

There is debate regarding where the practice of "spring cleaning" originated. Some researchers link it to



certain religious groups. It has long been an ancient Jewish custom to thoroughly clean a house in preparation for the springtime feast of Passover. The house is scoured to remove any yeast bread, or chametz, from the home. Similarly, members of the Greek Orthodox church celebrate "Clean Week," which is a week of cleaning before Lent. In Iranian culture, families spend days cleaning prior to the Persian New Year, which begins on the spring equinox.

Spring cleaning also has some secular roots. For instance, in the 1800s, Londoners routinely cleared their homes of grime and soot that accumulated over the winter.

Spring cleaning is still a ritual for many today. As people embark on their plans to tidy up, these tips can help them along.

Tackle one big task a day

Who hasn't started one project only to be distracted into moving along to another room? This often occurs when people discover something out of place in one space and then move that item where it belongs, only to find a new cleaning task at hand in that space. Inefficiency can make you give up on spring cleaning prematurely. Agree to address one room/task a day. Keep a basket or box handy to store errant items until you move on to the next room.

Stock up on supplies

Prepare all of the cleaning supplies in advance. Put together a tool kit of sorts with the equipment you need, including mops, brooms, rags, cleans-

ers, and the like. Organization can keep you on course.

Harness your strengths and weaknesses

Some people clean because they are stressed or angry, others do so to avoid other tasks. Keep personality in mind when establishing a cleaning schedule. For example, clean at night if you're a night owl, or wait until you

are feeling antsy before embarking on a "calm down cleaning."

Tackle seasonal chores first

Some tasks need to get done to prepare for the spring and summer season. These may include cleaning the grill and sorting through outdoor furniture and decor. Spring cleaning may involve readying the pool for another year of use, or cleaning out rain gutters to prepare for spring storms. Tackle time-dependent tasks first and then move on to others that are less time-sensitive.

Spread out
the work

Some people like to devote full weekends to spring cleaning, but that can be overwhelming for others. Breaking down cleaning tasks into 15- to 30-minute intervals each day can make the job more tolerable.

Spring cleaning season has arrived, and certain tips can make the job more efficient and manageable.



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Exploring many choices for front doors

A grand entryway simply wouldn't be complete without an impressive front

not all one and the same. Traditional farmhouse doors provide a rustic look



that's become popular in home decor over the last decade or so. Modern farmhouse doors are a little less rustic because they incorporate more contemporary elements into their design. Each option is ideal for homeowners who aspire to create a farmhouse vibe in their home interiors and exteriors.

• **Modern:** Modern front doors tend to boast a bold look and many are made up of large glass panels. Some homeowners prefer modern front doors because the glass in them allows lots of natural light into their

door. A front door can dazzle guests and create a homeowner's desired vibe before anyone even steps inside, which only underscores how important the choice of door style can be.

When shopping around for a new front door for their homes, homeowners can consider the many popular styles as they seek to choose one that fits an existing scheme or use a new front door as a springboard to a redesigned home interior.

• **Farmhouse:** Farmhouse doors are

home's interior. The added light in the entryway appeals to homeowners who want to brighten up these spaces, which tend to be dark in homes with more traditional doors.

• **Traditional:** Traditional front doors may be the most recognizable to today's homeowners. Often solid wood but sometimes enhanced with glass, traditional doors may feature subtle, yet ornate designs. Traditional front doors might feel out of place in modern or rustic homes, so they're generally

best suited to homes with owners that prefer more traditional decor inside their homes.

• **Custom:** It's important that homeowners recognize they need not pigeon-hole themselves into a particular design style for their front doors. Custom front doors may be costly, but many door manufacturers or contractors customize front doors. Custom doors may suit homeowners' with unique ideas about decor, and some can even mimic

other popular styles while still featuring subtle differences. For example, homeowners can request an arched double door that, while unique, features many of the same qualities that characterize traditional doors, including ornate designs.

A front door can greatly influence the first impression people get of a home. That makes it worth homeowners' time and effort to explore the many different front door styles now available.

Why you should hire contractors for your home improvements

A sense of pride comes from a successful do-it-yourself home improvement project. However, quite often inexperience and time constraints lead homeowners to turn to professional contractors to make sure jobs get done correctly and on time.

Allied Market Research reported in 2021 that the home improvement

they have insurance protection behind them. Therefore, if an injury occurs or the job goes awry, the homeowner will be protected from liability. A license means the contractor will have to uphold licensing standards, which could mean staying current on trade practices and skills.

• **Expertise:** Experienced con-



services market is predicted to reach \$585.3 billion by 2030. The following are some reasons why renovation-minded homeowners benefit from the services of professionals.

• **Tasks can be overwhelming:** A home remodel is a large undertaking with many different steps. Contractors who have been around the block a time or two understand how to organize and manage time to get the job done. Plus, they're devoting all of their attention and time toward the remodel when on the job. This differs from when a do-it-yourselfer tries to work on a remodel in between other responsibilities.

• **Network of suppliers:** A good general contractor will have a list of material suppliers he or she routinely uses. Often contractors become preferred sellers, which means they get a lower wholesale rate, and will often pass those savings on to the customer.

• **Licensed and bonded protection:** Licensed and bonded contractors not only have the skills for the job,

tractors have done the work they have been hired to do many times, which means their skills are fine-tuned. Knowing the correct way to do a job results in fewer errors (and thus fewer repairs), shorter time periods to get the work done, and potentially lower costs overall.

• **Frees up time:** Homeowners who hire out for remodels can utilize their time in other ways, such as on the job or spending time with family.

• **Reduces stress:** Putting the work in capable hands means homeowners do not have to educate themselves about how to do the task, purchase tools, prevent injuries, and/or deal with potentially negative outcomes. Certainly having extra people in the house can be challenging, but it may not equal the stress caused by tackling a job on one's own.

There are many advantages to hiring contractors to renovate a home instead of taking the DIY route.

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Home exterior trends for home owners

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.



Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

•Wood
Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found new-found devotion among home interior

decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

•Painted brick
Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

•Hardscaping
Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living

rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

•Outdoor lighting
It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their

properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.

Three low-maintenance trees to consider for your yard

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance tress can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

1. **Jacaranda:** Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds it leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

2. **American arborvitae:** The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

3. **Japanese red maple:** The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions. During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommodate the Japanese red maple, so this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When consider new trees for a property, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree. Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse conditions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.

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Benscoter Construction serving the area for 25 years

Benscoter Construction has a 25-year history in Wayne and the surrounding area.

Louis Benscoter, Sr. started the business in Laurel as a plumbing service. As they progressed, Louis' sons joined in working in the business. It also included remodeling houses, and after a visit with a fore-sighted banker, the family began building houses from the ground up.

The business has remained a family business, with Louis, Sr. and Louis, Jr. working together full-time. As more assistance is needed at times, other family members can be seen working on a project.

Over the past 25 years, Benscoter Construction has built over 50 family homes, six apartment buildings in the Wayne area and developed over 40 acres of land.

The three main developments in Wayne that have been undertaken by the company are Benscoter Addition, along Fourth Street and Jaxon Street; Angel Acres near Providence Medical Center and Angel Estates, just north of Wayne on Centennial Road.

"Great care goes into each home built by Benscoter Construction. Energy efficiency is important in construction so that the home-owners have lower utility bills," said Louis, Sr. (Lou)



Homes are inspected and tested by an independent energy company and given an Energy Star Efficiency rate and certificate.

Lou gets great pleasure in building homes for families, especially the homes that are in the price range to allow young families the ability to pur-

chase a starter home.

"There is nothing better than seeing a family get the keys to their first house," Lou said.

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Wayne State College to renovate Berry Hall

Wayne State College plans to renovate Berry Hall, which is a resident hall located near the Willow Bowl, on the south side of the Wayne State campus and construct a new facility just east of the college.

The project involves the construction of suite-style housing that will include approximately 171 beds. In addition, renovations will be made to the rest of Berry Hall.

The main goal of the renovation is to increase the overall occupancy of campus by 10 beds.

Angela Fredrickson, Vice President of Administration and Finance said, "We are hoping to begin construction of the new facility during the fall of 2023 and complete construction prior to the fall of 2024," so that the new facility can be occupied for the fall of 2024. However that timeline might shift as we get further into the planning process."

This new facility will be located on property that is currently owned by the Wayne State Foundation, at the corner of Walnut Street and Hillcrest Road.

Fredrickson said, "We would then look forward to renovating the east wing of Berry during the 2024-2025 academic year and demo the west wing of Berry." Some of the planned renovations include HVAC and electrical upgrades, window replacement, restroom upgrades, as well as charming improvement and the renovation of Berry Hall's Center lobby.

Currently the college is in the process of selecting the construction firm that will assist in the renovations as well as a construction manager to oversee the improvements to this residential hall.



The official child-proof checklist for every homeowner

It's not long before newborns who need their parents to cater to their every need become toddlers who can't wait to go exploring on their own. The curiosity can come quickly, which underscores how important it is for parents to childproof their homes.

Childproofing is essential in the nursery where children tend to spend much of their time, but it's necessary elsewhere in the house as well. The Children's Hospital of Los Angeles says fractures are the most common injuries among infants and toddlers as they develop a sense of curiosity and gain mobility. Head and mouth/tooth injuries are some additional injuries curious kids may suffer during this period in their lives. This childproofing checklist can help reduce the risk of injury.¹

- Follow United States Consumer Product Safety Commission crib safety regulations, which include fixed sides, a firm mattress and slats that are no more than 23/8 inches apart.

- Install UL-listed carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors on every story of the house and check batteries in detectors frequently.

- Install a temperature guard on the water heater and never set it above 120 F.

- Cover all sharp furniture edges and corners with safety padding or specialty bumpers.

- Block all open outlets with outlet covers or safety plugs.

- Place lockable covers on the garbage.

- Install stove knob covers.

- Use latches on any drawers, toilets, doors, or cabinets within the child's reach.

- Anchor heavy furniture, such as televisions, bookshelves and dressers, to the walls.

- Install safety guards on windows.

- Pull the crib away from other furniture.

- Use cordless window blinds.

- Place gates at the top and bottom of stairs and use them to prevent access to rooms that are off limits.

- Store cleaning supplies, tools and breakable items out of reach or in a locked cabinet.

- When the child reaches 35 inches in height or can climb out of the crib, it's time to transition to a toddler bed.

- Choose toy chests or other furniture with spring-loaded hinges.

- Do not hang heavy wall art or shelving over cribs.

- Cover radiators, hot pipes, etc., with protective materials.

- Remove flaking paint and be sure to have paint tested for lead.

- Inspect the home for protruding nails, bolts or other hardware that can cause injury.

These are some childproofing measures parents can implement to keep kids safe. Parents can customize childproofing plans based on their needs and the designs of their homes. Consult with a pediatrician for other tips on making a home safe for young children.



What to know about landscape lighting

Home improvement trends come and go, and one trend that has become wildly popular in recent years is recognizable in yards every night. Landscape lighting has transformed how people see and enjoy their properties at night, making it one of the more sought-after upgrades among modern homeowners. Curb appeal is often seen through the lens of how homes appear during daylight hours, but landscape lighting can make homes look better and more modern, and potentially safer,

after the sun goes down. With such potential, landscape lighting is worth exploring for homeowners looking to upgrade their properties. **Are there different types of landscape lighting?** When considering landscape lighting, homeowners should know that there are various options to consider. According to the lighting experts at Lumens, spotlights project a concentrated and narrow beam of light that's usually around 45 degrees. Spotlights



are often chosen to highlight specific features on a property, like a component of the landscaping. Individuals who want to cast light over wider, more general areas may consider floodlights, which Lumens notes spread light up to 120 degrees. Inground lighting is among the more sophisticated landscape lighting options. Lumens notes that inground lighting illuminates the whole of a tree or structure, often creating a dramatic look. These circle-shaped lights also are great at illuminating walkways and driveways. Post lights are another outdoor lighting option, and these are often used to light up long walkways and pathways so it's easier and safer to navigate dark areas at night. **Is landscape lighting a job a DIYer can handle?** Many homeowners consider a do-it-yourself approach when pondering a potential home renovation, and a landscape lighting project is likely to inspire such curiosity as well. The home experts at HGTV note that the feasibility of DIY in regard to a landscape lighting project depends on the type of lighting homeowners want to install and where they want to install it. Replacing an existing electrical fixture may be well within the skill of a

seasoned DIYer, but installing a new fixture is a job best left to the professionals. Homeowners whose homes currently have no or very little landscape lighting are almost certainly better off working with a professional. Solar lighting that does not require any electrical work can be installed quickly and easily by anyone, but such options may not provide the look homeowners are aiming for. **How much lighting is necessary?** The amount of lighting homeowners want to install is up to them. If the home currently has little or no landscape lighting, a consultation with a professional can help to determine how much lighting to install and where to install it. When discussing landscape lighting, homeowners may want to inquire about dimmers. Dimmers can increase or decrease lighting depending on the situation. For example, homeowners may want a little extra light during a party, but less when relaxing alone outside at night. Dimmers allow homeowners to adjust as necessary. Landscape lighting is a popular home renovation trend. Homeowners considering adding landscape lighting to their property are urged to work with a skilled professional to devise and install a set-up that makes their homes more appealing at night.



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What to know before planting around your property

When planning a landscape, it is tempting to pick the most colorful, vibrant plants. An eye-popping property filled with yellows, purples, pinks and other bold colors is sure to catch anyone's eye.

However, the right plant for a prop-



erty is not always the most colorful.

Gardening novices can easily be overwhelmed on a trip to their local garden center, where employees may ask a host of questions that have little to do with homeowners' preferences and everything to do with the growing conditions around their properties.

Those questions may seem a little intense, but they are well-intentioned. Successful gardening is more about soil conditions and access to sunlight than it is about the plants themselves.

An awe-inspiring hydrangea bush will only impress if it is planted in a location where it can thrive.

The Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry program at UMass Amherst Extension advises homeowners to learn about the following site conditions, and ultimately share that knowledge with

local garden center representatives, before they pick and plant anything around their properties.

- Hardiness zone: The Plant Hardiness Zone Map from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is designed to help gardeners determine which plants are most likely to thrive where they live. The map can be found on the USDA website at www.usda.gov.
- Light availability, intensity and duration, from full sun to deep shade: Prior to planting, homeowners can document this information in a notebook or on their smartphones. Do so for a long enough period of time that you can get an accurate of idea of the conditions in which plants will have to grow, and then take that information with you to the garden center where you will buy your plants. Employees can then use this info to help you find the right fit given the light conditions.
- Water availability, both quantity and quality, as well as ease of access
- Exposure to wind and temperature extremes
- Exposure to weather events, snow

loads, erosion, and flooding: Garden center employees can likely recommend plants based on traditional weather patterns in a given area.

- Soil type, drainage and compaction: Homeowners can take note of any areas of their property where water pools or the ground feels especially soggy after rainfall. Share this information with garden center employees prior to picking plants for such areas. If soil appears compacted, aeration prior to planting may be necessary.

- Competition from existing vegetation, keeping in mind the roots underground that you cannot see.
- Above ground wires or obstructions: Trees will grow up, and the presence of power lines or other obstructions may threaten the trees or prove dangerous if trees eventually grow into or hang over power lines.

Knowledge of various conditions prior to planting can save homeowners the cost of replacing plants and the hassle of dealing with plants that don't take.



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How to keep your backyard safe for your furry friends

Dogs, particularly puppies, can be full of boundless energy. Channeling that energy into exercise with long walks or play sessions can help stem dogs' propensity to get into trouble around the house as they burn off extra adrenaline. Pets who don't have an energy outlet may chew off-limits objects or get into other mischief.

According to the American Kennel Club, the amount of exercise a dog needs depends on the animal's age and breed. For example, border collies or Siberian huskies may require much more exercise than English bulldogs, simply because the former are working breeds. Pet owners with large backyards often find those outdoor spots are ideal for when their dogs get the "zoomies," something that tends to be a daily occurrence. Letting their dogs run around yards, whether on their own or chasing tossed tennis balls, is an ideal way to provide exercise and tire out pups. In such scenarios, it's vital that pups have a dog-friendly yard in which to play.

•Use safe lawn care products

An expanse of grass is the perfect place to frolic or enjoy some sunbathing - for people or pets. But contact with chemically treated lawns can cause a number of health issues for dogs, such as allergies or intestinal

upset.

Switching to native grasses can reduce the need to use chemicals to get lush lawns. When supplementation is needed, homeowners can switch to organic products or natural compost



as safer alternatives than chemical-based products.

•Fence off the yard

Off-leash running and bounding through the yard will make any dog smile. However, a fence is a must-have to ensure a dog doesn't become an escape artist. Be sure the fence is

high enough so that the pup cannot jump over it. Burying chicken wire in the dirt beneath the lower edge of the fence also can help prevent dogs who like to dig from exiting by crawling underneath the fence.

Consider installing a lock on the fence gate so that no one can wander in and surprise the dog, which may startle the animal and prompt it to defend the property. A lock also helps prevent dog theft.

•Keep the yard tidy

Maintaining a clean yard also is key

to safety. Inspect the yard regularly to make sure nothing is around that can prove harmful, whether it's poison ivy, felled branches or broken fence panels. Also, keep shrubs and grass trimmed to reduce flea and tick populations on the property.

•Avoid poisonous plants

Certain plants can be dangerous if they're consumed by curious pups. Chrysanthemums, peonies, irises, and hydrangeas are some plants that can be poisonous. For a full list of poisonous plants, visit the ASPCA website (aspc.org).

•Keep an eye on animals

Dogs can spend some unattended time in the yard, but check in from time to time. Should wildlife get into the yard, dogs may get hurt by tussles or bites. Birds of prey, such as owls, hawks and even vultures, may attack small dogs in a yard. According to Pat Silvosky, director of the Milford Nature Center in Kansas, some birds can be territorial. While they might not view a dog as an easy meal, they could swoop down and attack to defend territory. The same may occur with other wild animals.

A dog-friendly yard may require a little effort to create, but it's worth a little sweat equity to keep pups safe.

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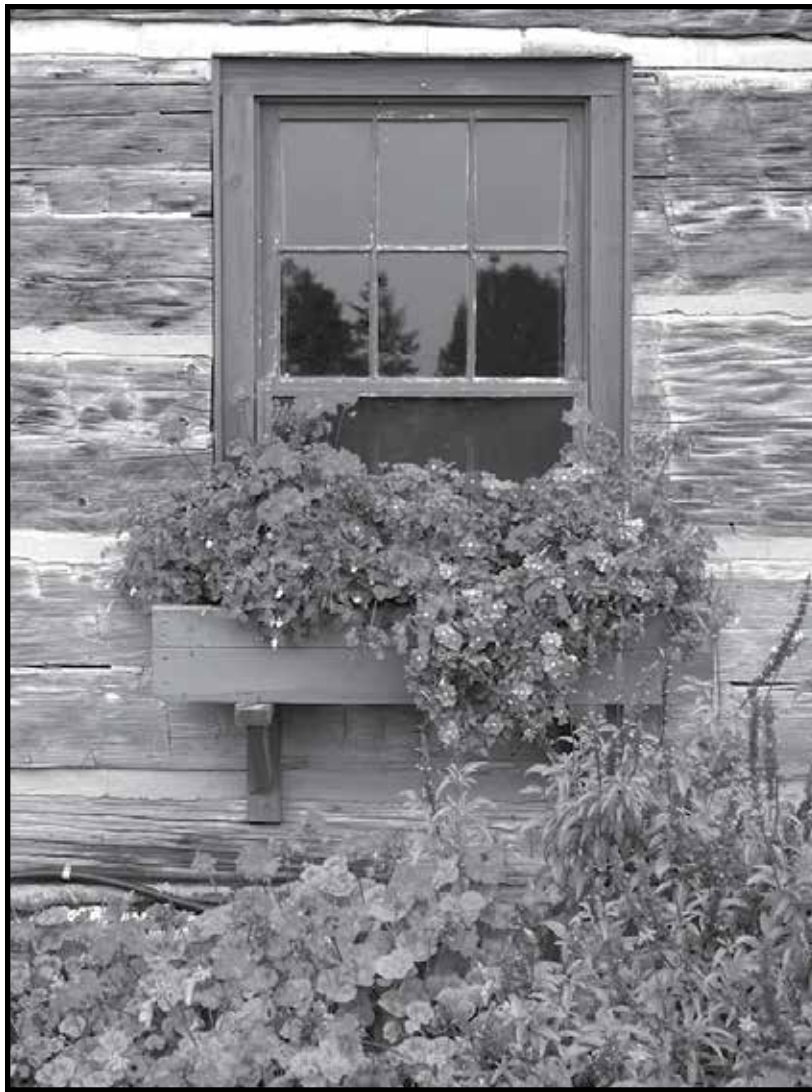
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Freshen up your home with these budget-friendly ways

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.

Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

• **Power washing:** Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Hardware chains like Home Depot and Lowes typically rent power washers, but homeowners who don't want to do it themselves can hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.



• **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

• **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens urge homeowners to take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy, so look for a sturdy box as well as one that has drainage holes.

- **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs, knockers, house numbers, and even the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home appears to residents and visitors.

Exterior renovations need not break the bank. Various simple and inexpensive tweaks can quickly revitalize the exterior of a home.

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Let the outside in with all-season rooms

Many homeowners express interest in creating fewer barriers between the interior and exterior of their homes. Some may have backyards built for entertaining and want to facilitate the transition between the inside of the residence and the outside when guests arrive. In other instances, homes may back to a nature preserve that homeowners want to enjoy more readily. Whatever the reason for bringing the outside in, all-season rooms can serve

as a welcoming bridge between indoor and outdoor spaces.

- What is an all-season room?
Also known as a four-season room, all-season rooms are specially engineered spaces that provide a connection to the outdoors no matter the season. They are like sunrooms, but climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer, and fall.
- What is the difference between

a three-season room and an all-season room?

The biggest difference between these two spaces is the level of usage and the capacity of the room to be heated and cooled. Individuals who reside in climates with moderate year-round

•Maintaining a comfortable temperature

All-season rooms can be built with adequate thermal insulation and energy-saving features. Insulation will be installed in the walls and roof, and homeowners may have a choice of win-

dow ratings for efficiency. Some all-season rooms are specially equipped with HVAC systems that may or may not be tied in to the home's general heating and cooling system. Some people use portable heaters or air conditioners to control the temperature in all-season rooms. It's best to speak with an all-season room contractor to identify heating and cooling needs.

•How much does an all-season room cost?

Prices vary by region and are contingent on the features homeowners

temperatures may get by with a three-season room. However, those who experience all four seasons may need a more insulated space to make the room usable throughout the year.

- Features of all-season rooms
One of the more notable features of an all-season room is an abundance of windows, which allow plenty of natural light to shine in. All-season rooms also can feature creature comforts like a reading nook, outdoor kitchen spaces and televisions. Retractable screens can be installed when privacy or shade is desired.

owners desire. According to the outdoor resource Garden Center Care, a three-season room can cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$50,000 to build. A four-season room can cost \$20,000 to \$80,000 to add. If there is an existing three-season room, it may be more affordable to upgrade the space into an all-season room, but an architect and contractor should inspect the space to determine the scope of the project.

All-season rooms can be an ideal addition to a property, providing extra space for entertaining or lounging and a connection to the outdoors.





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Hay speaks on energy conservation and savings with a solar array

How much people save on their electric bill after installing a solar array depends largely on local policies, John Hay, a Nebraska extension educator, told NRT students recently.

Hay, who specializes in renewable energy and biofuels and installed a solar array at his home in 2017, explained three ways of financially compensating consumers who produce some of their own electricity with solar panels.

Net metering is the best deal for consumers, he said, with the electricity produced by the consumers' panels subtracted from the electricity they need to pay the utility company for.

Consumers with solar panels then pay the leftover amount at the standard retail rate. In this way, they get credit at retail price for whatever electricity they produced.

However, if they produce more electricity than they use from the utility, that surplus gets paid at a rate lower than retail, perhaps between a third and half of retail.

Hay said an average sized solar system may cost \$15,000 to install and, with net metering, a Nebraska consumer might expect to pay that back in about 14.5 years.

A solar array with a standard 25- to 30-year life expectancy should last long enough to pay back the initial investment and then benefit the consumer financially several more years.

"There is a lot of utilities in the state of Nebraska, seven now, that have reached the threshold where they've got enough systems installed, that they don't have to net meter anymore," Hay said. "Then they get to choose the policy put in place for the next set of customers, and that's pretty important."

Meters are now sophisticated enough to measure the electricity that goes from the grid into a house, solar energy produced at a house and sent to the grid, and solar energy produced and used at a house without going to the grid.

Utilities may reason that consumers

need to pay not just for the electricity they used from the grid but for the sys-



tem maintained to generate, transmit and distribute that electricity.

This includes the power plants and wind turbines that generate it; the substations that transmit it and maintain the electric grid and lines of transmission; and the utilities that distribute the electricity, issue bills and collect payments.

Instead of net metering, a utility may use net billing to compensate consumers using solar energy.

In this method, consumers pay for all of the electricity from the utility at full retail and then get credited at a lower rate, perhaps between a third and half of retail, for the electricity their solar panels produce and send to the grid.

The solar energy they use at home, which never goes to the grid, offsets full retail value to the solar consumers, as it does in net metering, since it lowers the amount of electricity the house uses from the grid.

"With net billing, you can see that I'm not getting as much value from what's sent to the grid," Hay said. "So, that's really important from an economic analysis standpoint to understand 'Is this going to be a good economic investment to put this solar on my house if what I send to the grid has less value?'"

The third way of compensating solar

consumers, buy all/sell all, involves use of a solar meter that measures

both the solar energy sent to the grid and the solar energy used in the home.

The consumer is credited at the lower rate (between a third and half of retail) for the energy sent to the grid. The utility buys the

solar energy used in the home at that lower rate also, but then turns around and sells it to the consumer at the full retail price, along with charging full retail for the electricity coming from the utility into the house.

Net billing can have an 18.5 year pay back, but when it comes to buy all/sell all, "the economics fall apart pretty rapidly," Hay said.

Utilities in Nebraska are nonprofits, not seeking profit, but they need to make enough money to maintain their business, he said.

"They're trying to make themselves

whole, but the question is, is net billing making them whole or do they think that they need to buy all/sell all to make them whole?"

In the future, as meters grow increasingly sophisticated and can show utility companies what times of day electricity was used and in what amount, thus allowing utilities to charge different rates for the time of day, Hay told the NRT students they can expect to see more promotion and advertisements of behind-the-meter solar.

"You need to look at those very skeptically, not because they may not be correct in that they could be a decent investment or something like that, but the reality is that the policy is different in different places," he said.

Consumers who want to lower their electric bill without installing a solar array should lower their thermostat in the winter, reduce the temperature on their water heater and raise the temperature on their air conditioner.

"Beyond those three, everything else is small," Hay said. "Let's say I have my lights off more or reduce how much time I'm cooking. Don't worry about those things. What you need to worry about is, what setting do you have your thermostat on and can you change that and still be comfortable? Those are the big savings."

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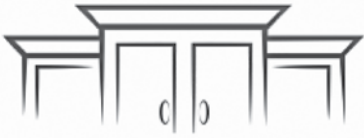
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Stay safe when working in the yard this spring and summer

A day spent working in the yard is an ideal way to pass the time on spring and summer afternoons. A pristine landscape can add value to a property and instill pride in homeowners who put a lot of thought and effort into their lawns and gardens.

A sun-soaked day can make it easy to overlook potential threats when working in a lawn or garden.

But safety precautions are of the utmost necessity when working in the yard, where the risk for serious injury

is considerable.

For example, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons reported in 2016, more than 90,000 patients, including nearly 5,000 children, were treated in hospital emergency rooms for lawn mower-related injuries.

Lawn and garden-related injuries can be prevented without going to great lengths.

· Know your terrain before mowing. Knowing the terrain in your own yard can reduce the risk for accident or inju-

ry. This can be especially important when mowing the lawn with a riding mower. Adhere to manufacturers' rec-



often if you are sweating excessively. The SCF recommends broad spectrum sunscreens, which protect the skin from both UVA and UVB rays. Though a product with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 is acceptable when walking the dog or driving to work, the SCF advises using a product with an SPF of 30 or higher when engaging in extended outdoor activities like gardening or mowing.

· Employ the buddy system. Use the buddy system when pruning tall trees or performing any tasks that require a ladder. The Orthopedic Institute of Pennsylvania reports that more than 164,000 people are injured each year falling off a ladder. Ask a significant other or neighbor to hold the ladder in place while you climb up to reduce your risk of falling. If cutting large branches, cut them piecemeal to reduce the risk of being injured by heavy falling branches.

· Inspect the property for insect hives. The OIP notes that the most common insect stings in spring come from bees, wasps and hornets. Homeowners who are not careful can inadvertently come across hives when doing spring clean-up, making them vulnerable to bites and stings. That can be very dangerous for anyone, and especially so for people with a history of allergic reactions to insect bites or stings.

Inspect areas where you will be working to make sure insects haven't put down roots in your property. If you discover any hives and are hesitant to remove them on your own, contact a local landscaping firm.

Lawn and garden accidents and injuries can be serious. Thankfully, accidents and injuries are easily prevented when homeowners take a few simple safety precautions while tending to their lawns and gardens.

ommendations regarding inclines to reduce tip-over accidents that can pin riders beneath the mower. Study hilly areas of the yard prior to mowing so you know which areas are safe to mow with a riding mower and which areas are best mowed with a walk-behind mower. For greater control when using a walk-behind mower on an incline, mow parallel to the slope.

· Apply and reapply sunscreen. Sunburns may not require trips to the emergency room, but they can still be serious.

In fact, the Skin Cancer Foundation notes sunburn is a leading cause in the majority of cases of basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The SCF recommends applying sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside to allow the sunscreen to bond to your skin. Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours, and more

Signs of drought stress and what to do about it

A pristine lawn is a source of pride for homeowners. Even the most well-maintained lawns must confront a host of challenges in a given year, and perhaps no challenge is more daunting than drought.

Homeowners may feel helpless when drought strikes and begins to transform their lawns from green sources of pride to off-color eyesores. However, learning to identify signs of drought stress and what to do about it can help homeowners get their lawns through dry periods.

Signs of drought stress

The lawn care experts at TruGreen note there are four common characteristics of drought stress. Perhaps the most noticeable is changes in color, but it is important homeowners recognize there is a difference between a change in hue and a change in color.

When a lawn changes its hue, typically turning from bright green to a

dull gray or blue green color, it is in what TruGreen identifies as the first stage of drought stress.

Regular watering, if allowed (local drought restrictions may dictate how much water can be applied to the lawn), can help the grass regain its moisture and the lawn may recover within a couple of days.

When lawns change from green to brown, this is indicative that the lawn is in a dormancy stage.

At this point, the lawn is entering survival mode. Watering to save the lawn will need to be more extensive. Deep and repeated watering for two to three weeks may help restore the lawn, but some parts ultimately may not recover.

And deep watering may not be allowed until drought restrictions are lifted, increasing the likelihood a significant portion of the lawn will turn

See DROUGHT, page 9B

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The DO's and DON'TS of floor installations

Jaw-dropping features can sell a home in a heartbeat. A penthouse apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows and a panoramic view of a city skyline likely won't prove a hard sell, nor will a



home with an infinity pool overlooking a landscape of rolling hills. As awe-inspiring as such features can be, some more subtle components, such as authentic hardwood floors, also can do much to make a home more appealing to prospective buyers.

Drought

(continued from page 8B)

brown. Footprints in the lawn are another sign of drought stress TruGreen indicates this is a result of lawns that are too tired to spring back up after they have been walked on.

Wilting also indicates drought stress is affecting the lawn. Wilting occurs when grass blades roll or fold because they do not have sufficient water content.

What to do about drought stress

In addition to the watering techniques noted above, homeowners can try other strategies to help their lawns make it through a drought. TruGreen advises against mowing drought-stressed grass and keeping off the lawn as much as possible.

Removing tall weeds is another strategy homeowners can try. Doing so ensures the grass, and not the weeds, gets what little water is available during a drought.

Homeowners also should resist the temptation to mow too close, especially when signs of drought stress are just beginning to appear. TruGreen notes that mowing too close creates a shallow root system that makes lawns more vulnerable to drought.

It can be hard to watch a pristine lawn suffer from drought stress. But several strategies can increase the likelihood that lawns survive such conditions. More information about combatting drought can be found at www.trugreen.com.

Hardwood flooring is a sought-after commodity. Data from the National Association of Realtors indicates that 54 percent of home buyers are willing to pay more for hardwood floors. In

fact, NAR figures indicate that 28 percent of buyers between the ages of 35 and 54 consider hardwood floors "very important" when looking for a home. Homeowners who are considering selling their homes, or those who simply want to upgrade their existing flooring, may want to consider installing hardwood flooring. Though it's a project best left to professionals, hardwood flooring can be installed by skilled DIYers. In such instances, homeowners may want to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

DO hire a professional if you have limited or no DIY flooring experience. Hardwood flooring installation is not generally a project for novice DIYers. Hardwood flooring projects may present some common challenges, but no two homes are the same. So unless they have prior experience installing floors in multiple rooms or homes, homeowners may save themselves time, trouble and a significant amount of money hiring a professional to do the job.

DON'T ignore the subfloor. New hardwoods won't erase the problem of subfloors in poor condition. According to the home renovation experts at BobVila.com, squeaky floors could be an indication that the subfloor has begun to warp or twist. Sinking floors are another indicator of deteriorating subfloors. Subfloors should be somewhat level before new hardwoods are installed, so DIYers should inspect and address subfloor issues before installing new flooring.

DO expose wood flooring to the elements in your home prior to installation. The home improvement resource BuildDirect recommends acclimating hardwoods to the space where they will be installed. Skipping this important step could result in gaps during the winter and cupping over the summer. To acclimate hardwoods, open the boxes and spread them out for about a week while running the air condi-

tioner or heater at normal levels. When storing hardwoods prior to installation, avoid keeping them in potentially moist areas like a basement.1

DON'T skimp on tools. A DIY hardwood flooring installation might be less expensive than hiring a professional, but homeowners should resist any temptation to increase those savings further by purchasing less costly tools or fewer tools than is necessary to complete the job. BuildDirect notes that DIYers will need at least a miter

saw, table saw, cleat-nailer or stapler, finish nailer, compressor, jamb saw, chalk line, nail set, and tape measurer when installing hardwood floors. Purchase all necessary tools and read product reviews to ensure each tool is up to the task.

Wood floors can be awe-inspiring. Some homeowners can install such flooring on their own, and the project can be much easier if they learn as much about installation as possible prior to beginning the project.



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The 2023 Greatplants selections offer resilience, adaptability for a changing environment

As we continue to battle with drought and warming temperatures across most of Nebraska, this year's GreatPlants selections, a joint program of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum and the Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association, offer gardeners and landscapers plant, tree and shrub choices that are tolerate of a variety of conditions as well as aesthetically pleasing and beneficial for pollinators.

From the vibrant 'Tor' birchleaf spirea to the resilient shingle oak and the prolific pollinator 'Iron Butterfly' ironweed, this year's GreatPlants selections each offer multiple benefits to gardens and landscapes. Here are the 2023 GreatPlants selections:

Perennial of the Year: 'Iron Butterfly' Ironweed (*Vernonia lettermanii*) – Also

classified as an herbaceous perennial, 'Iron Butterfly' ironweed prefers medium to dry, well-drained soil in full sun. Its bright purple, long-lasting flowers appear in mid- to late summer and attract hummingbirds, butterflies and other pollinators. With a height of 2-3 feet, this perennial would work well at the back of a border garden.

Tree of the Year: Shingle Oak (*Quercus imbricaria*) – This central United States native and member of the red oak family is a medium-size deciduous tree that typically grows in conical form. One might not guess at first glance that it's an oak tree, as its lustrous, narrow, dark green leaves are not lobed but alternant, broadest near the middle, with a slight wavy pattern. The shingle oak thrives in medium to dry, well-drained soil and full sun. Settlers discovered that it split easily and could be used for shingles or shakes, which is how it got the common name shingle oak.

Shrub of the Year: 'Tor' Birchleaf Spirea (*Spirea betulifolia*) – This small, rounded shrub blooms small, flat clusters of tiny white flowers in the late spring, while in the fall, its dark green, birch-like leaves transition to a mosaic of red, orange and purple. 'Tor' birchleaf spirea prefers moist, well-drained soil and full sun and would make a great addition to a pollinator

garden, as its flowers attract a multitude of butterflies and other pollinators.

Conifer of the Year: Korean Pine (*Pinus koraiensis*) – A member of the white pine group, the Korean pine is very versatile in that it can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions, from sandy to clay to rocky. It grows in full sun or part shade and reaches a height of between 30 and 50 feet. When young, the Korean pine typically grows in a narrow pyramidal form, and as it matures, it takes a loose pyramid shape with a rounded crown and branches spreading horizontally and often reaching the ground. Its 3-inch cones contain large, edible seeds that can be harvested and sold as pine nuts.

Grass of the Year: Blue Zinger Sedge (*Carex flacca*) – Also known as blue-green sedge, this evergreen sedge prefers medium to wet soil in part shade to full sun. It thrives well in rain gardens but can also tolerate dry shade in hot summer climates. This cool season sedge does much of its growing during chilly weather, forming attractive clumps of fine-textured, arching, blue-green foliage that blooms in late summer.

For more information about the 2023 GreatPlants and a full list of GreatPlants selections since 1999, visit plantnebraska.org/great-plants.

Signs to know for home exterior updates

Renovations are a great way for homeowners to reshape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities. Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors.

Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

• **Curling shingles:** The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles

is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the affected shingles.

• **Dated entry door:** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

• **Unsightly landscaping:** It's not only the physical components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscaping. These alternatives to more needy plants can create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.

See SIGNS, page 11B



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How to bring an adopted cat to a new home

Cats have a special place in the hearts of millions of people. These wily rascals can be flirty, funny or even aloof. The personality of cats, coupled with their compact size, makes them ideal pets for homes of all sizes.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says approximately 1.3 million cats are adopted from animal shelters each year. However, of the cats entering



Signs

(continued from page 10B)

owners.

• **Cracked driveways/walkways:** If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season, chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition, cracked walkways indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.

Updating a home's exterior can restore curb appeal and help homeowners feel better about their properties.



shelters, only around 37 percent are ultimately adopted, according to the National Kitten Coalition. Individuals who adopt cats may want to take every step they can to make the relationship with a new companion animal work. That often means finding ways to help the cat feel comfortable by acclimating it to its new home. The length of time it will take to adjust to a new environment depends on the cat's temperament. However, these tips can help.

- Pick a familiar item and bring it with you. Does the cat have a favorite toy, carrier or scratching post? Moving something into the home that has the animal's smell may help him or her adjust more quickly.
- Select a room as a home base. Introducing the cat to the entire home and all of the people in it can be overwhelming. Rather, select a small room in the home, such as an office or laundry space, that the cat can call home for the time being. With the door closed, this small space can be comforting and let the cat learn the smells and sounds of the home before it ventures into other areas. Remember to visit often and provide plenty of love and affection as tolerated.
- Avoid lots of traffic. Now is not the

time to host a house party. Remove stressors like large crowds, increased foot traffic and kids' play dates. Loud sounds and sudden movements can put cats on edge.

- Don't force the issue. The kitty will start to come around when he or she is ready. Don't be compelled to pull the pet out from hiding under a bed or couch; let the cat set the pace.
- Keep kids away. Young children

tend to be boisterous and jerky, which isn't a good mix with a skittish cat. While the cat is acclimating, keep young children away. When they are introduced, do so in small intervals and supervise carefully so the cat does not get hurt and children are not accidentally scratched or bitten by a scared cat.

- Provide a quiet area. Perhaps that first room or a cozy nook can be the cat's quiet spot. According to cat behaviorist Jackson Galaxy, cats need solitude and quiet time. A box or basket lined with soft, washable bedding in a corner can serve as a place for a cat to retire to.
- Introduce existing pets slowly. Existing pets should be introduced gradually. Keep a dog confined until the cat feels secure in the home. Two altered cats can become friends in the same home. However, older cats often are more accepting of kittens than other adults. Keep this in mind when making introductions.

Cats are happiest when they've had time to settle and get used to surroundings in their new home. Once the adoption takes place, give the cat plenty of time to become comfortable in its new environment.



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Bathroom upgrade tips given for style and safety

Bathrooms can benefit from updates that improve their form and function. While styles and color patterns may inspire bathroom renovations, improvements to safety also should be considered.

Bathrooms can be one of the most dangerous rooms in a house. Bath and shower areas account for about two-thirds of accidental injuries in these spaces. Many other injuries involve the toilet. In 2008, a thorough investi-

gation of bathroom dangers conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that mishaps near the bathtub, shower, toilet, and sink caused an estimated 234,094 nonfatal injuries in the United States among people aged 15 years and older.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable in the bathroom due to reduced mobility and flexibility, visual impairment and other factors. However, some key modifications can make bathrooms



- much safer for aging populations.
- Raised toilet seat: Install an ADA-compliant raised toilet seat. Standard toilet seats are roughly 15 inches high, but elevated seats can raise the bowl an additional two to four inches. Another option is to invest in risers that can be attached to an existing toilet.
 - Grab bars: Seniors may use towel holders as grab bars, which don't have stability and can dislodge from the wall. Install secured side grip bars by the toilet and inside the shower to make maneuvering easier.
 - Water temperature: Seniors may be vulnerable to hot water temperatures. Lower the water temperature setting on the hot water heater. StaySafe.org recommends 120 F.
 - Faucets: Change faucet handles to paddle-style handles rather than knobs. Knobs can be challenging to grip for those with arthritis in their hands. Also, handles that are easier for seniors to use can reduce the risk of the elderly losing their balance as they attempt to gain leverage to turn the water on and off.
 - Nonslip mats: Nonslip mats or tape strips can be used in showers and tub bottoms, as well as outside of the shower to reduce the risk of slips and falls. Rugs should have rubberized, slip-resistant backing.
 - Rounded corners: Choose counters and fixtures with rounded corners. Should a senior fall against something, the rounded corner may prevent serious injury.
 - Shower benches and transfer seats: Benches and transfer seats make it easier getting in and out of the shower. Also, sitting while showering reduces the risk of becoming light-headed or losing balance.
 - Walk-in tubs/showers: Minimizing the threshold to the shower or bathtub is an important safety feature. Some manufacturers make walk-in tubs with doors that secure and make watertight seals. Showers that don't have a lip or tub to scale also are better for seniors.
 - Lighting: Eyesight weakens over time, so improve lighting with combinations of overhead lighting and softer side lighting. Night lights or soft-glowing toilet lights can make it easier to get around the bathroom in the middle of the night.
- These are just some improvements that can create safer bathroom environments for seniors.



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