

Spring Home Improvement



The Wayne Herald
Spring, 2024

Nature starts at your back door

The outdoor areas around us makes everyday activities like working, dining and working out more enjoyable, and they are also good for the planet.

“When properly planted and cared for, our yards and community parks can affect climate change on a micro-level and provide support for backyard wildlife and pollinators,” said Kris Kiser, President & CEO of the TurfMutt Foundation. “Remember, nature starts at your back door, and

when done right, your yard is good for people, pets and the planet.”

The essential elements that make up your yard and our community parks and public green spaces – including plants, shrubs, trees and grass – are “environmental superheroes.” Just to name a few benefits, they capture and filter rainwater, produce oxygen and absorb carbon.

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life, shows off your personality, and is designed according to your taste and purpose, adds Kiser. For those with an eco-conscious mindset, here are some tips from TurfMutt to “yard your way” for the planet this spring:

Remember “right plant, right place.” The key to successful eco-friendly backyards is selecting plants that support your family’s lifestyle and ones that will thrive in your climate zone (with minimal input from you). Refer to the USDA’s Plant Hardiness Zone Map to find the plants, shrubs and trees that are best suited for your home.

- Choose real grass. Research has shown that yards must be full of live plants to be beneficial to the local environment. Real turfgrass is a major carbon sink. According to this report, an average-sized home lawn in the U.S. has the potential to sequester 20.3 to 163.4 kg C/lawn/year. Artificial grass, on the other hand, cannot typically be recycled, has to be cleaned and cooled off with water, and is hot.

- Plant for pollinators. Bees, butterflies and birds are not only pretty, they are also critical to our food system

and to maintaining biodiversity in our human-made environments. Selecting a variety of native plants that have evolved for your region that will bloom throughout the year is just one way you can support pollinators with your plantings.

- Water wisely. Watering too much is actually bad for turfgrass because over-watered grass gets lazy, growing roots in a horizontal pattern. With less water, grass sends its roots deeper and vertically to seek water. By working harder, grass does a better job of sequestering carbon and releasing oxygen.

- Mowing know-how. You should only cut off about a third of the height of the grass blades per mow to produce a stronger, healthier lawn. That’s because longer grass blades collect more sunlight, resulting in a thicker turf that has a deeper root system. This helps the grass retain moisture and fight off weeds. Scientists have also found that recycling grass clippings on lawns (called grasscycling) will help your grass sequester even more carbon.

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Learn the basics of home inspections

The process of buying a home involves a number of variables that present at various times throughout buyers' search for a home. For instance, real estate professionals typically advise buyers to receive a mortgage preapproval prior to beginning their search for a new home. Once such preliminary measures have been taken care of, buyers can then search for a home and ultimately make an offer.

One of the more critical steps buyers can take when making an offer is insisting that the offer is contingent upon a home inspection. Home inspections offer a measure of protection that can save buyers from investing in properties that may look nice to the naked eye, but feature a host of costly problems beneath the surface. Individuals new to home buying may not know what to expect of the inspection process. In such instances, the following rundown can shed light on home inspections.

Recognize inspection may be mandatory. Though it is not always the case, home inspections may be required by mortgage lenders. Lenders want to ensure borrowers can repay their loans, which might prove difficult if a home is in need of considerable repairs. That is why home inspec-

tions tend to be mandated by lenders, even if they're paid for by buyers. Estimates from HomeAdvisor indicate home inspections cost between \$279



and \$400 on average, but that cost is well worth the peace of mind of knowing you will not unknowingly be buying a money pit.

You choose your own inspector. Buyers will choose their own home inspector, so it can pay dividends to start asking people you trust for recommendations even before you begin

searching for a new home. Realtors also may recommend inspectors they have worked with in the past. The International Association of Certified

Home Inspectors® (nachi.org) also can help buyers find a home inspector. You can, and should, attend a home inspection. It is wise for buyers to attend a home inspection. Doing so allows them to see potential issues firsthand. Some seasoned home inspectors even prefer clients to attend an inspection so they can point out issues

as they go through the house and answer questions directly rather than later on over the phone or via text or email. Though inspectors typically will answer questions off-site, it is easier for both buyer and inspector to discuss issues in person on the day of the inspection. And for buyers, this can be a great way to become more informed about the home inspection process. Expect to spend a good deal of time at the inspection, and not necessarily with the sellers present. The National Association of Realtors indicates inspections can take as long as three hours, so this won't be an in-and-out excursion. Buyers don't want to rush the process, so block out ample time on your schedule to attend the inspection. In addition, sellers typically are not home during an inspection, though it can happen. Buyers who do not want sellers present can request that they are not on the premises while the inspection takes place. There may not be anything to compel sellers to be off-site, but it cannot hurt to ask.

Home inspections are a vital component of the home buying process. It is imperative that buyers take inspections seriously so they can feel confident they are not investing in a flawed property.

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How to keep gardens safe in summer heat waves

Summer is a season to relax and enjoy the warm weather. Basking in the summer sun is a great way to relax, but only when the temperatures are safe. Summer heat waves can compromise the health of human beings as well as their pets. Gardening enthusiasts also may need to go the extra mile to keep their plants and gardens from wilting under harsh summer sun.

Extreme heat stress can be very harmful to plants. The online garden-

ing resource Gardening Know How notes that some plants can withstand summer heat waves better than others. For example, succulents conserve water in their leaves, helping them to withstand heat waves when the dog days of summer arrive. But succulents are unique, and many plants will require a little extra help to withstand a heat wave.

Take a proactive approach with mulch. Gardeners need not wait until

the heat arrives to protect their plants from searing summer heat. The sustainable living experts at Eartheasy recommend utilizing light-colored mulch during heat waves. Such mulch will reflect the sunlight and help to maintain cooler surface soil conditions. Eartheasy even notes that grass clippings, once they've turned from green to light brown, can make for the perfect mulch to protect plants from the heat. Clippings also are free, making them a cost-effective solution.

Water wisely. The horticultural experts at Yates Gardening note that water only helps plants withstand heat waves if it is applied effectively. If water is only applied in short bursts and not long enough so it can penetrate all the way to the root zone, roots will then stay near the surface. In such instances, roots will dry out during a heat wave and plants won't make it through the season. Timing also is essential when watering. Eartheasy recommends watering in the morning

to avoid heat scald and also ensure as little water is lost to evaporation as possible. When watering during a heat wave, do so by hand rather than through a sprinkler. Hand watering allows gardeners to direct all of the water onto the plants that need it most during a heat wave.

Let your plants pitch in. When planting new plants, it is important that gardeners recognize it takes time for these plants to establish their roots so they are strong enough to withstand heat waves. In the meantime, strategic planting can help them make it through their first heat waves unscathed. Eartheasy notes that planting by taller, more established plants can provide new plants with shade that can help them survive heat waves. Just make sure new plants can still get the sun they need to thrive.

Heat waves are inevitable and potentially harmful to gardens. Gardeners can help their plants beat the heat in various ways.



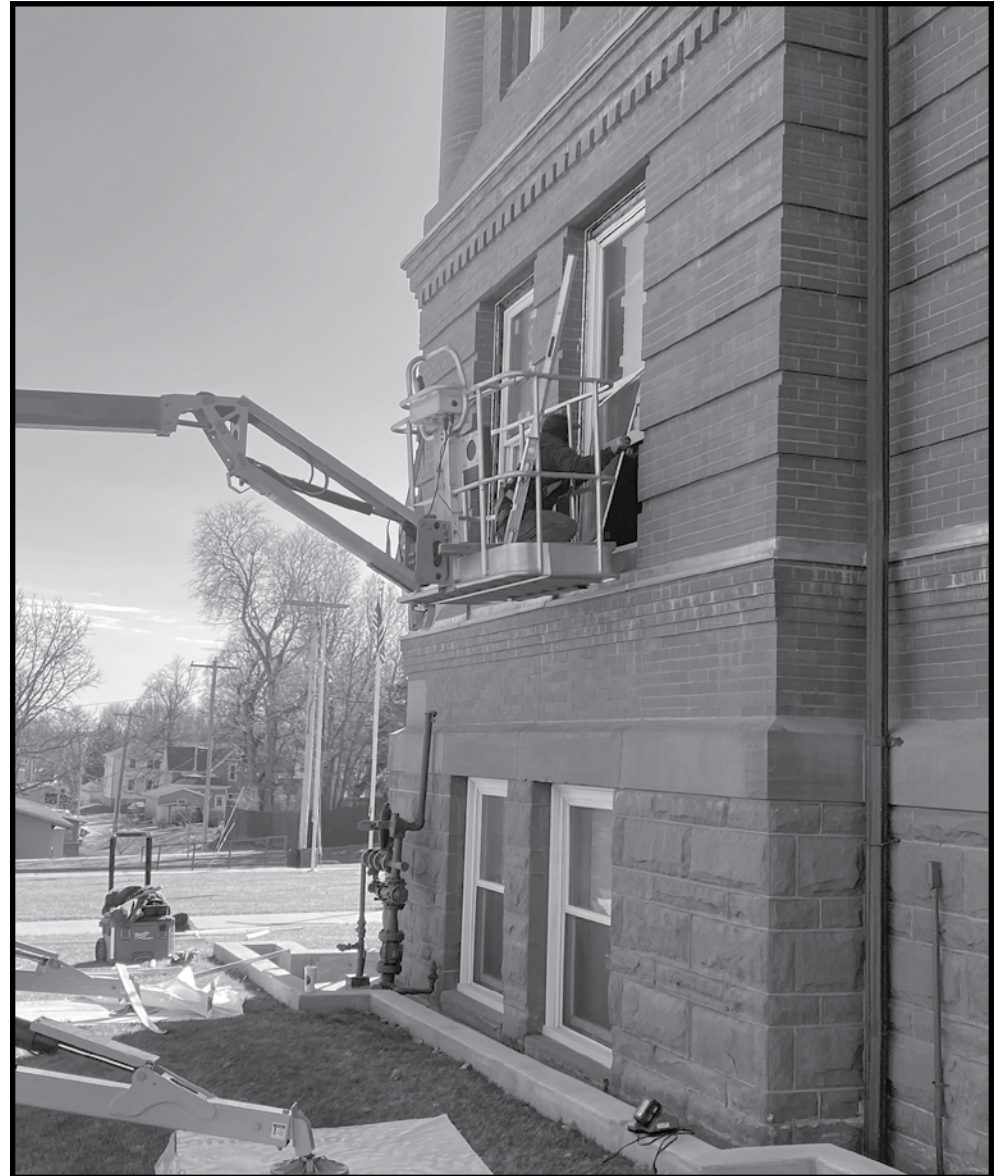
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Window of opportunity...

The Wayne County Courthouse is having a facelift this spring. Every window in the building is being replaced. Architect Jill Brodersen headed the project, choosing stain colors, working with the manufacturer and keeping the Wayne County Commissioners updated. The installation crew has consulted with every office to install the windows without disrupting courthouse business.

How to help pets acclimate to new homes

Welcoming a new pet into a family can be an exciting time. Pets are wonderful companions and can even be beneficial to their owners' overall health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that pets may create increased opportunities for exercise. In addition, studies have shown that relationships with pets may help lower blood pressure and cholesterol and reduce triglyceride levels, feelings of loneliness, anxiety,

will be something positive. Establish a quiet spot that is away from high-traffic areas so the new pet can grow accustomed to the sounds, smells and routine of its new environment. Then he or she can retreat there when necessary.

- Retain some of the pet's items. Owners may want to buy their pets new toys and supplies, but they should utilize some of the pet's original and familiar items to make it easier for the

have moved to new places may temporarily forget their training. This means engaging in undesirable behavior, such as having indoor accidents (or those outside a litter box), jumping up on people, howling, barking or meowing and more. It will take some time for pets to feel safe, so reinforce training with patience.

- Stick to a routine. Animals prefer knowing what is coming next and are

creatures of habit, says the American Kennel Club. Individuals should establish and stick to daily routines where feedings, play time, walks, and other activities occur at roughly the same time. This will help pets feel more relaxed.

It can take some time for new pets to settle in, but with patient and reassuring owners, pets will eventually acclimate to their new homes.



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and other ailments.

A new pet requires owners to make various changes to help both humans and companion animals. It can take a period of transition for everyone involved to determine their new roles. Here are some strategies to help pets and people acclimate to new living situations.

- Create a safe place. Any person who has moved understands that relocating can be stressful. Pets may be on edge when moving into a new home because they don't have the capacity to process why a move is taking place - even if the eventual result

animal to adjust. This familiarity can be comforting for the animals.

- Consider the 3-3-3 rule. Animal rescue and training organizations, such as Alpha and Omega Dog Training, say the general rule is that pet owners can expect three days of a new dog feeling overwhelmed and nervous; three weeks of settling in; and three months of building trust and bonding with new owners. New pet owners should not feel disappointed if it takes some time for a pet to settle in. Cats and other animals may acclimate differently.

- Be patient with behavior. Pets who

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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

Spring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation season.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn.

In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their lawns.

Scarify the lawn. Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts, including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarify-



ing before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarifying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

Work with a landscaping professional. Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in

spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this important detail.

Prepare to water the lawn. Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

Spring is a great time for homeowners in various regions to reseed or replant their lawns. With the right approach, homeowners can enjoy a full and lush lawn throughout summer.

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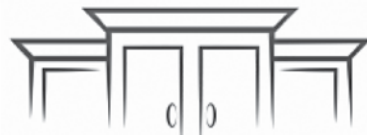
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How to pick paint for home interiors

Many components combine to define a home's interior. Some homeowners may be partial to certain styles, such as ultra modern or farmhouse, while others may opt for a more traditional look that cannot necessarily be categorized as one style or another. Though

homeowners heads may be spinning as they try to narrow down their options. The following tips can help homeowners pick the perfect paint for their home interiors.

- Take stock, and photographs, of your current furnishings. Many interi-

an emotional response. Cool colors like blue and green give off a relaxing vibe, which makes them ideal for bedrooms and bathrooms. Red is an intense color that can up the energy ante in any room, which can make it an option for homeowners who want to spark debate around their dinner tables.

- Give personal preference its place at the table. Though interior designers may have years of experience picking paint colors for a home and researchers may have determined how cer-

tain colors can be utilized to create a desired ambiance in a given room, ultimately homeowners are the ones who will be living in the home. So it's important that homeowners pick colors they like for their home interiors.

Paint is an inexpensive way to transform a room. Homeowners can rely on a combination of color strategies and their personal preferences as they try to decide which colors they want on their interior walls.



many homeowners may spend considerable time and devote a lot of energy to making their home embody a certain style, those who are not willing to commit to a particular look can lean on one component to make a stylish statement all their own: paint.

Color can be a part of every homeowner's design arsenal. Bold colors can be used to create a stunning accent wall, while homes with open concepts often utilize color to define rooms. Homeowners who want to revitalize their home interiors can do so with paint, and this approach doesn't require homeowners to commit to a whole new design style.

Though paint may seem simple to novices, homeowners who have painted home interiors in the past recognize how complicated the process of picking paint can be. Paint retailers have a seemingly endless swatch of paint colors to choose from, and before long

or designers rely on a simple technique when recommending color schemes to their clients. Choose a standout color from existing furnishings, such as the dominant color from a patterned decorative pillow or piece of furniture, and then look for the same shade to paint the walls. A photograph of the item can be handy when visiting the paint store.

- Lighten colors as you go up. The home renovation and design experts at HGTV recommend picking darker color values for the floor, medium color values for the walls and light values for the ceiling. This approach mimics the look of the great outdoors, where the ground tends to be darker than the trees, and the trees are darker than the blue sky.

- Utilize paint to create the vibe you want. The home renovation experts at This Old House note that colors evoke



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Renovations that help sell homes

The adage "there's a lid for every pot" suggests that, even in relation to the real estate market, there's bound to be a buyer for every home on the market. Price is a significant variable in the minds of potential buyers, but there are additional factors that can affect the impression people get of a given home.

Certain home features can tip the scales in favor of sellers. In fact, various renovations can help sell homes more readily. And these renovations need not cost a fortune. Putting a home on the market can be stressful, but these renovations may help it sell fast.

· **A fresh coat of paint:** Although painting is relatively inexpensive and a job that some do-it-yourselfers can tackle, it is not a task relished by many. Painting is messy, it takes time, and requires moving furniture. In fact, prepping a room for painting often is the toughest component of any painting job. But fresh coats of paint can create a strong first impression. Choose a neutral color and get painting. Jennie Norris, chairwoman for the International Association of Home Staging Professionals, says gray is a "safe" color that has been trending in recent years.



· **Minor bathroom remodel:** Remove dated wall coverings, replace fixtures, consider re-glazing or replacing an old tub, and swap old shower doors for fast fixes in a bathroom. If there's more room in the budget, replacing a tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity and fixtures can cost roughly \$10,500, says HGTV. You will recoup an average of \$10,700 at resale, making a minor bathroom remodel a potentially

worthy investment.

· **Redone kitchen:** The kitchen tends to be the hub of a home. This room gets the most usage and attention of any space, and it's a great place to focus your remodeling attention. The National Association of the Remodeling Industry estimates that homeowners can recover up to 52% of the cost of a kitchen upgrade upon selling a home. Buyers want a func-

tional and updated kitchen. Trending features include drawer-style microwaves and dishwashers, commercial ranges, hidden outlets and even wine refrigerators.

· **Updated heating and cooling system:** Better Homes and Gardens reports that homeowners may be able to recoup 85% of the cost of new HVAC systems when they sell their homes. Heating, cooling and ventilation components are vital to maintain. You don't want buyers to be taken aback by an older system, and many millennial buyers are not willing to overlook old mechanical systems.

· **Fresh landscaping:** A home's exterior is the first thing buyers will see. If they pull up to a home with eye-catching landscaping and outdoor areas that are attractive yet functional, they're more likely to be intrigued. Often buyers will equate a home that features an impressive exterior with upkeep inside as well. The American Nursery Landscape Association says the average homeowner may spend \$3,500 for landscaping.

Improving a home's chances to sell quickly and at a higher price often comes down to making smart improvements that catch the eyes of buyers.

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Spring Home Improvement

How to recognize when it is time to replace your windows

Windows are a major component of a home. Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average life span of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years. Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill, and this is not a do-it-yourself project. There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines.

- Difficulty opening and closing windows. A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it is probably time for something new.

- There is apparent window damage. Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

- Drafts in the window are common. If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

- Dated windows are present in the home. Older windows may pose safety hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

- Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily. Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

- Fading indoors is noted. Windows that do not feature low-emissivity (Low-E) glass coatings will not block UV rays. Those rays can cause fading to wood floors and furniture or pretty much anything the sunlight touches. Replacing existing windows with Low-E coating alternatives can safeguard belongings and improve window efficiency.

Window replacement may be necessary when existing windows are showing signs of aging or damage.

Features to consider for a relaxation-themed bathroom remodel

Homeowners want to view their homes as a respite from all that goes on outside their doors. Indeed, turning a home into a residents-only retreat can ensure everyone looks forward to walking through the front the door at the end of the day.

One of the more popular ways to turn a home into one's own personal retreat is to upgrade the bathroom. A renovated bathroom can completely transform how individuals feel about

their homes. The following are some features to consider when remodeling a bathroom with relaxation in mind.

- Open shower: An open shower is a visually stunning addition to any bathroom. Such showers give a bathroom a more open look, thanks in part to the fact that these modern features do not feature a door or require the use of a shower curtain. The result is a clean look that many people associate with a luxury hotel. When speaking with

a contractor about an open shower install, homeowners can ask about a half-wall to safeguard against water splashing out of the shower. In addition, a heat lamp can help ensure residents stay warm until they're ready to leave the bathroom.

- Heated features: Additional features to keep everyone calm and warm can be considered when upgrading the bathroom. Radiant flooring can ensure everyone's toes remain toasty, and the

installation of such a feature can eliminate the need for floor mats and bath mats that some homeowners may not like. Commit further to the heat theme with a heated towel rack.

- Soaking tub: An open shower creates an instant feeling of luxury, but few things are more suggestive of relaxation than a soaking tub. A long day at school or the office or a day when win-

See BATHROOM, page 2B

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How to determine how much house you need

Potential home buyers typically like to find in a new home. Although have lists of requirements they would there are many features that are uni-

versally appreciated, certain elements may appeal to particular buyers more than others. For example, a swimming pool may be coveted by active families, but may not be as desirable to retirees looking for less upkeep.

It is important to consider life changes on the horizon, and buyers should decide if they want to move as a result of those changes or if they want to set down strong roots and stay in one home. For example, a starter home may be perfect for newlyweds, but the space may be too tight when kids come along. Also, those who anticipate caring for a parent in the future may want a home that will accommodate an extra resident in the years ahead.

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Size is consideration that merits significant attention. The mantra "bigger is better" is well known, but homes with significant square footage may not be ideal for all buyers. "How much home do I really need?" is an important question for buyers to ask themselves before they embark on their home-buying journeys. Here is how buyers can identify how much house they need.

How many occupants will be living in the home?

The first consideration in home size is the number of residents. Rocket Mortgage says a good rule of thumb is to give each person 600 square feet of space. So that means a family of four would ideally live in a home that is 2,400 square feet, while a couple may be fine in a 1,200 square foot home.

Number of rooms:

Generally speaking, the more rooms in a home, the larger the house. Potential buyers should identify rooms they feel are essential. While formal dining rooms once were de rigueur, they largely fell out of favor in recent years in lieu of open floor plans. The more rooms you need, the larger a home should be.

Potential life changes:

Tiny house movement:

The trend to live in very small houses has gained popularity in recent years. Many people have chosen to live with less and downsize to diminutive homes. Most "tiny" homes are less than 400 square feet and are not much bigger than some owner's suites in larger homes. There are merits to small homes, and that includes a small environmental impact, less clutter, financial advantages and other perks like spending more time outdoors.

Housing budget:

Sometimes how much house a person needs comes down to how much he or she can afford. Small homes tend to be less expensive than large ones. However, even small homes in urban areas or those close to the water or other attractive amenities could still cost quite a bit.

Housing size is a personal preference that potential buyers must consider when they are shopping around.

Bathroom

(continued from page 1B)

ter winds are howling outside is made much better with a good a soak. The National Kitchen & Bath Association notes that luxury bathrooms featuring soaking tubs are wildly popular, and that vaunted status is undoubtedly due to the relaxing benefits of a good soak.

Skylight: Even if the goal of a luxury bathroom is to leave the outside world outside, allowing some natural light inside is a great way to add a little extra calm to the room. Floor-to-ceiling windows may seem appealing in brochures or advertisements, but such features do not create the sense of privacy many people prefer in their bathrooms. One or two skylights can create that sense of privacy and still allow for natural light to enter the room, making this an option that provides the best of both worlds.

These features and more can help homeowners transform their bathrooms into luxurious, relaxing respites from the outside world.



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What to know about installing a pool at home

Summer is a season of relaxation when school is not in session, vacation season is in full swing and people everywhere are getting outside and soaking up the summer sun. It's hard to imagine how that can get any better. But it can for people thinking of

price, and homeowners should know that the average cost of each project is higher in certain regions and under certain circumstances. Potential ancillary costs, such as excavation and plumbing relocation, will add to the final cost of the project. The erection of fencing around the pool if no fencing currently surrounds the area where the pool will be located also will add to the final cost.

Pool type:

As noted, above ground pools, on average, require a considerably smaller financial investment than inground pools. This is an important consideration, but which option may ultimately prove the better investment is worth researching. Homeowners can speak with a local real estate professional to determine if an inground pool or above ground might yield a significantly higher return at resale. If an inground pool is likely to increase property value by a substantial amount, it could be well worth the extra upfront costs.

installing a pool in their backyard.

Pools definitely have a wow factor that's hard to replicate. Homeowners considering pool installation can take note of these factors as they try to decide if a pool is right for them.

Cost:

The cost to install a pool depends on a host of factors, including which type of pool homeowners are considering and where they live. According to the online home improvement resource Angi (formerly Angie's list), the average cost to install an above ground pool in the United States in 2022 was \$3,322, while the average inground pool installation in the same year was \$55,000. That is quite a disparity in

Maintenance: Pools are undeniably fun, but they still require maintenance. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that vinyl liners in pools last approximately six to 10 years, while painted concrete may require a fresh coat of paint every five years. Plaster finishes may last as long as 15 years, while cement-coated products can last a lifetime. Pools also need periodic cleaning, and chemicals to keep the pool operating safely and cleanly will require an additional, if somewhat minimal, financial investment. Homeowners investing in a new pool should be aware of the mainte-

nance required to keep the pool clean and be willing to do that maintenance. And though homeowners typically can open and close pools on their own, it's also possible to hire someone to do it for a relatively small fee each season.

Location:

A survey of the land in a yard can reveal how smoothly a pool installation may or may not go. Though it's possible to install a pool in just about any yard, some spaces might require greater preparation and pre-installation

effort than others. Sloped backyards, for example, may require the services of a landscape architect to prepare the space, which can extend the time it takes to complete the project and add the overall cost.

These are just some of the factors that merit consideration when mulling a pool installation. A homeowners' best resource might be a local pool company who can visit a home, provide an estimate and point out any challenges that may arise during the install.





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Choosing the best decking material to use

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and that notion is as true when renovating a home as it is when studying a piece of art. Therefore, when homeowners are looking for the best building materials for their home remodels - including backyard decks - their own personal preferences may ultimately dictate the direction they go.

Deck boards and railings can be made from a diverse array of materials, including traditional hardwood, plastic and composite materials. Here's a deep look into some of the

more popular decking materials so homeowners can make informed decisions when contracting with a decking professional for the build.

- Hardwood, softwood or pressure-treated wood

In the not-so-distant past, decks were primarily built using some type of wood. Wood is widely available and fairly cost-effective. However, as anyone with a wood deck knows, wood requires frequent upkeep and it can be susceptible to rotting or insect damage. Wood decks also may splinter and



deteriorate when exposed to the elements or pool water. Pressure-treated boards are infused with chemicals to help them endure, but that does not make them impervious to wear. Still, the traditional look of a wood deck remains appealing to many homeowners.

- Composite

Composite decking materials are made from a blend of recycled plastic and wood fibers. Since there is so much recycled content, composite decks attract those who are concerned about the environment and sustainability. Composite decking comes in uncapped and capped varieties. The capped version has an extra layer of protective capping made from high-performance polymers, says TimberTech, a decking and outdoor furniture provider. While composite decks may have similar up-front costs to wood, they will require less maintenance over the years, but they must be scrubbed to avoid mildew growth.

- Plastic

Decks made of polyvinyl chloride, polypropylene or high density polyethylene (HDPE) are collectively referred to as PVC decks. They are made entirely from environmentally safe plastic with no wood in the mix at all. PVC decks are more durable than composite and can last a lifetime. All PVC decks need is occasional cleaning. A potential disadvantage to PVC

is it doesn't always look, sound or feel like wood. Also, complex fastening systems can make the boards move as the temperature changes, resulting in squeaking as people walk on the deck. Generally, PVC is more expensive than wood or composite, but that investment may be worth it for those who never want to worry about deck repair or replacement.

This Old House says there is another plastic decking material made from polystyrene. It is stiff, strong and light, and with the brand Eon, the nonslip surface becomes less slippery when wet so it may be great around pools.

- Aluminum

Aluminum may not be as popular as other decking materials, but it is lighter and stronger than wood, composite, and plastic. Aluminum also is resistant to mold, weather and insects, and it can be recycled. An aluminum deck will last for years, which is why it is one of the more costly decking materials.

Homeowners have many choices when picking materials for their decks. If they want a traditional look and moderate cost, wood may be the way to go. Those concerned about looks and durability may like composite. People who want very durable and long-lasting may want to give strong consideration to plastic or aluminum materials.

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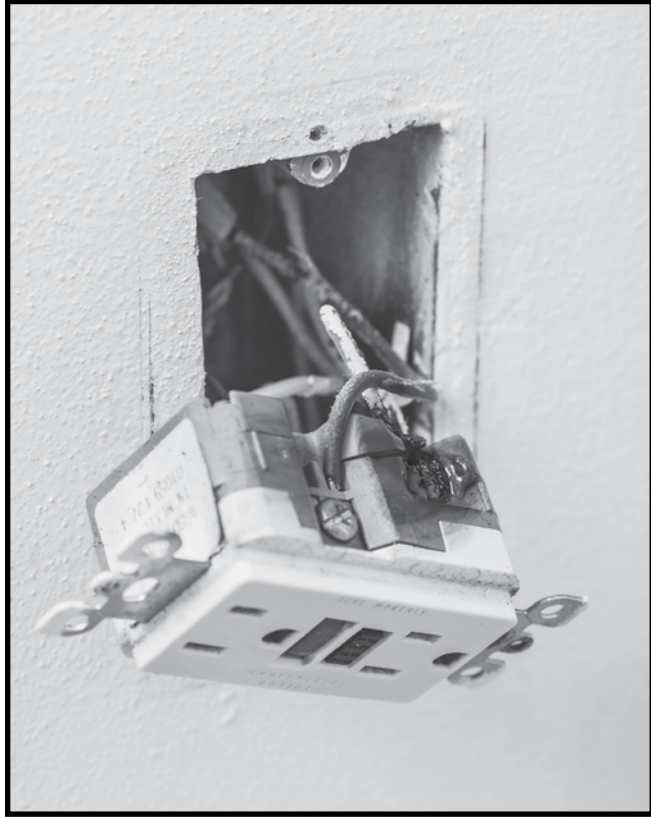
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Prevent home electrical fires

A person's home should be a safe haven. Too often, however, there may be dangers lurking in a home that can compromise the safety of residents.



Electrical fires are no joke. The Hartford insurance company says electrical failure or malfunctions account for almost 34,000 home fires per year. The National Fire Protection Association says they can contribute to 440 deaths and \$1.3 billion in direct property damage annually.

Older homes may be most vulnerable to electrical fires, as such structures were not designed to handle the demands of modern living. The insurance experts at Nationwide say half of all homes in the United States have electrical systems that were installed before garage door openers, high-tech coffee makers, and many computers became must-have items. And the Electrical Safety Foundation International says homes built before 1973 with overloaded electrical sys-

tems pose a number of safety threats.

Overloaded circuits are not the only contributor to electrical fires. Damaged wiring characterized by worn, frayed or loose wires can cause fires. Malfunctioning appliances or those improperly maintained also can create home fires. Another contributor is poorly installed extension cords and power strips, as well as faulty outlets and switches around homes.

Homeowners can take various steps to reduce the risk of electrical fires at home.

- Install arc fault circuit interrupters. AFCIs are special types of circuit breakers that help prevent fires caused by nicked or frayed wiring. An AFCI gets tripped and cuts off power when an electrical problem is detected before a fire can start. In 2022, the National Electric Code

started requiring AFCIs in bedrooms, and by 2017 they have been mandated throughout homes.

- Conduct a home electrical inspection. All homes more than 40 years old should be inspected to ensure their electrical systems can handle modern demands, says Nationwide. A qualified electrician can make recommendations regarding replacing breakers and suggest other modifications to improve safety.

- Utilize a monitor. Ting from Whisker Labs monitors a home's electrical network using a smart plug-in sensor that is designed to detect hazards. The company indicates micro-arcs and sparks that develop are precursors to electrical fires.

- Turn to automatic shut-offs. Homeowners can utilize appliances

and additional devices that automatically shut off after a set period of time. This can reduce the risk of overheating.

- Rely on timers or smart devices. Timers and smart home devices can give homeowners control of electrical components like appliances or lights from a remote area. This enables users to turn an appliance on or off to reduce overheating or avoid additional risk factors for electrical fires.

- Do not go DIY. Choosing to work with a professional electrician rather than doing electrical work oneself can help reduce electrical fire risk considerably. Electricians know how to work on electrical systems safely to prevent damage to wires and components, and also safeguard themselves against shock.

Risk for electrical fires at home can be reduced with technology and other strategies.

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The basics of flipping of homes

In recent years, home sellers have experienced record profits as the value of real estate has risen dramatically. Bankrate indicates the median home price across the United States is around \$486,000. According to WOWA, a personal finance resource in Canada, the national average price of a home in Canada was \$657,145 CAD in December 2023.

Flipping homes gained popularity prior to the spike in real estate prices, but that increase has led some novices to consider flipping more closely. Though it's true the chances at turning a large profit are substantial in a market where high prices are the norm, potential flippers may benefit from a rundown of the practice before they decide if it's something they want to do.

What is flipping?

Flipping works when an investor purchases a property with the intention of selling the home (or business) for profit without actually using it. The basic premise of flipping is to find a property at a low price and sell it at a much higher price, typically after renovating the home. Investopedia says it is important to complete this transaction as quickly as possible to reap the greatest return on investment.

Do not underestimate the necessary

investment of time and money:

Many new flippers overestimate their skills and knowledge and lose money in the process. Common mis-

tax when the sale goes through. All of these can eat into profits.

Limited inventory makes things tougher:



According to Tresa Todd, founder of the Women's Real Estate Investors Network, flipping may be less tax-efficient in the United States than getting into investment properties. Flippers will be paying short-term capital gains instead of long-term capital gains. According to NerdWallet, capital gains taxes are paid when one sells an asset for profit. The rate at which capital gains is taxed is based on whether you hold an asset for less than a year or longer than a year. Long-term capital gains tax rates are generally lower than short-term capital gains tax rates.

Abide by the "golden rule":

Most home flippers follow the 70% rule. This says one should pay no more than 70% of what the house's estimated ARV (after-repair value) will be, minus the cost of the repairs necessary to renovate the home, says Rocket Mortgage. The ARV is calculated by adding the current property value plus the added value of any renovations. The formula boils down to: $ARV \times .70 - \text{Estimated repair costs} = \text{Maximum buying price}$.

Flipping may seem like a good idea, but prospective flippers should fully understand the process, including the financial commitments it requires, prior to purchasing a home.

takes include thinking that a project will cost less or the home will be turned around quickly. It can take months to find the right property, and then there will be time needed to renovate. Costs involved include the initial sale, renovations, holding costs and capital gains

It can be challenging to find a good deal as everyone seemingly wants to be in real estate these days. With fierce competition in a low-inventory market, flipping can be like finding a needle in a haystack.

Know the tax benefits vs. tax risks:

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Three tips for first-time home buyers

Real estate has garnered considerable attention since 2020, and for good reason. Though speculators and real estate professionals may point to a number of variables that have affected the market for homes in recent years, the pandemic certainly was among those factors.

Real estate prices and mortgage interest rates increased significantly during the pandemic and have remained well above pre-pandemic levels ever since.

The spike in home prices and inter-

cessfully navigate the market as they look to purchase their first home.

1. Expect to move quickly. Inventory remains very low, which means buyers are in heated competition for the few homes that are on the market. In late 2023, NAR data indicated the rate of home sales were the lowest they had been in 13 years, so buyers will likely need to move quickly and make an offer if they see a home they like, as chances are the property won't be on the market too long before it's sold. In fact, the NAR noted that homes spent

information and clear up any issues, such as credit disputes or delinquent accounts, prior to applying for preapproval.

3. Set a realistic budget and expect to offer over asking price. A financial planner and/or real estate professional can help first-time buyers determine how much they should be spending on a home. In the current market, buyers should know that they will likely need to pay more than asking price for a

home. For example, the NAR reports that 28 percent of homes sold for above list price in October 2023. With that in mind, first-time buyers may do well to look for homes that are under budget in anticipation of offering more than list price after seeing a property.

The real estate market remains competitive for buyers. First-time buyers can utilize three strategies to increase their chances of realizing their dream of home ownership.



est rates has had a significant impact on young home buyers, some of whom feel as though their dream of home ownership may never be realized. And data from the National Association of Realtors indicates the median age of home buyers is now significantly higher than it was two decades ago. In 2023, the median age of buyers was 49, which marked an increase of 10 years compared to the average buyer age 20 years ago.

First-time home buyers may face a more challenging real estate market than they would have encountered just a half decade ago. The following three tips can help such buyers suc-

cessfully navigate the market as they look to purchase their first home.

2. Apply for mortgage preapproval. The competitive nature of the market for buyers means it's in their best interests to arrange financing prior to beginning their home search. A mortgage preapproval can be a competitive advantage, as it indicates to sellers that buyers won't be denied a mortgage or lack financing after making an offer. The financial experts at NerdWallet note that buyers will be asked to provide details about their employment, income, debt, and financial accounts when applying for mortgage preapproval. Gather this

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Tips when hiring a contractor for projects

Contractors perform important work for millions of homeowners every day. Home improvement projects are complicated undertakings, and the experience of skilled contractors can ensure jobs are completed on time and within homeowners' budgets.

Homeowners have undoubtedly heard horror stories from neighbors about projects that have gone awry. Projects can go sideways for a number of reasons, but a skilled contractor can help homeowners navigate such situations successfully. That underscores how important it can be to find the right professional for the job. The following are some tips homeowners can consider as they look to hire a contractor.

- Identify which professional you need. Some contractors are of the jack-of-all-trades variety, but many specialize in a particular line of work. It is important that homeowners identify which type of contractor they should work with prior to starting a project. This requires homeowners to define the goal of the project (i.e., new wood floor installation), which can serve as a springboard into finding the right type of contractor.

- Prioritize building safety. Safety should be the utmost priority for homeowners and contractors alike.

Prior to hiring a contractor, homeowners should identify any safety restrictions that might be enforced by local governments and take note of all the permits necessary to get a job done. Homeowners can then discuss those restrictions and permits as they interview contractors. Projects that do not adhere to code are illegal and can compromise homeowners' ability to sell their homes in the future. So it's vital to work with contractors who are familiar with local codes and aware of which permits are necessary to ensure a project can go forward.

- Insist on written estimates. Handshake agreements offer no protection to homeowners or contractors, so estimates indicating what will be done and how much the project will cost should be provided. Homeowners should insist on receiving written estimates and interpret an unwillingness to provide one as a significant red flag.

- Know your rights. Laws vary by region, but in general homeowners have a right to a written contract and contractors are obligated to provide a copy of that contract signed by both parties. That contract must be provided prior to the start of the project. The contract should provide a detailed account of the work that will be done, as well as a timeline indicating impor-



tant dates that components of the project will begin and be completed. The contract also should detail materials and who is providing them. Details regarding payments, guarantees and warranties also should be cited.

- Do not pay in cash. Some contractors may suggest that the project will cost less if they are paid in cash. However, home improvements should

never be cash transactions. Cash does not indicate proof of payment, which can be problematic if a dispute arises.

Contractors help homeowners turn dream projects into reality. Homeowners can employ various strategies to ensure they find the right professional for their home improvement project.



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Spring Home Improvement

Signs it is time to repair or replace your deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- **Wobbly underfoot and in hand:** Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter. Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an

eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

- **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

- **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

Maintaining a lawn routinely roamed by pets

Vibrant, green lawns can draw attention to any landscape. Many homeowners toil for hours each week to ensure their lawns are pristine, or invest in lawn care services to help maintain a yard if they do not have the time to do so themselves.

While many treatments can be applied to lawns to help them thrive, animal waste is not among them. Pet owners who aspire to have beautiful

lawns will have to take a few extra steps to ensure lawns can persevere despite the presence of furry companions.

Reseed with a damage-resistant grass

There are many different types of grass, and some are more resilient than others. Tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and Bermuda grass are just some of the

grass varieties that can capably handle pet traffic. If replacing the entire lawn is not possible, consider reseeding or addressing the areas that pets frequent.

Strengthen the root system

It may be tempting to cut the lawn short, particularly if dogs or cats like to nibble on longer blades of grass. But that approach could be doing the lawn a disservice. According to The Home

Depot, letting the lawn grow to at least three inches will help keep moisture in the soil and prevent evaporation. That moisture will strengthen the roots, creating a healthier lawn for pets and people.

Create pet paths

Various materials can be used in these high-traffic areas to minimize

See PETS, page 4C



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Final touches

As contractors have finished up the final touches on the Prairie Park Apartments located in the southeast part of Wayne near Hank Overin Field, the apartments are now open for leasing. Ground breaking for the project took place last October. Since then, the apartments, garages and a community center for the tenants have all been built. Those interested in living in one of the brand new builds can email prairieparkwayne@gmail.com or call the phone number.

How to determine how much house you need

Potential home buyers typically have lists of requirements they would like to find in a new home. Although there are many features that are universally appreciated, certain elements may appeal to particular buyers more than others. For example, a swimming pool may be coveted by active families, but may not be as desirable to retirees looking for less upkeep.

Size is consideration that merits significant attention. The mantra "bigger is better" is well known, but homes with significant square footage may not be ideal for all buyers. "How much home do I really need?" is an important question for buyers to ask themselves before they embark on their home-buying journeys. Here's how buyers can identify how much house

they need.

How many occupants will be living in the home?

The first consideration in home size is the number of residents. Rocket Mortgage says a good rule of thumb is to give each person 600 square feet of space. So that means a family of four would ideally live in a home that is 2,400 square feet, while a couple may be fine in a 1,200 square foot home.

Number of rooms

Generally speaking, the more rooms in a home, the larger the house. Potential buyers should identify rooms they feel are essential. While formal dining rooms once were de rigueur, they largely fell out of favor in recent years in lieu of open floor plans. The more rooms you need, the larger a home should be.

Potential life changes

It is important to consider life changes on the horizon, and buyers should decide if they want to move as a result of those changes or if they want to set down strong roots and stay in one home. For example, a starter home may be perfect for newlyweds, but the space may be too tight when kids

come along. Also, those who anticipate caring for a parent in the future may want a home that will accommodate an extra resident in the years ahead.

Tiny house movement

The trend to live in very small houses has gained popularity in recent years. Many people have chosen to live with less and downsize to diminutive homes. Most "tiny" homes are less than 400 square feet and are not much bigger than some owner's suites in larger homes. There are merits to small homes, and that includes a small environmental impact, less clutter, financial advantages and other perks like spending more time outdoors.

Housing budget

Sometimes how much house a person needs comes down to how much he or she can afford. Small homes tend to be less expensive than large ones. However, even small homes in urban areas or those close to the water or other attractive amenities could still cost quite a bit.

Housing size is a personal preference that potential buyers must consider when they are shopping around.



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Coming up with humane ways for pest control

Pest control in and around a home may be a necessity if homeowners are seeing an abundance of insects or animals where these creatures should not be. But some find it difficult to exterminate bugs or rodents - even if they give people the creeps.

It is common knowledge that many animals feel and understand pain, but it also may be the case for insects. According to Lars Chittka, Ph.D., a German zoologist, and information published in Scientific American, bees appear to experience both pleasure and pain. Chittka says it appears that at least some species of insects - and maybe all of them - are sentient.

If both bugs and animals can feel pain, individuals may be interested in more humane ways to control their infestations. These tips and tricks can help.

Eliminate entry points:

Preventing insects and animals from getting inside is one of the best ways to control them in a humane way. Keep a close eye on various areas around the home, such as where pipes extend outdoors, window seals, doorway gaps,

the space between the garage door and the driveway and where wires or other utilities enter the home. Be sure that these places are sealed so pests will not be able to sneak in.

Modify the habitat:

Habitat modification involves making changes to a home environment so it is less hospitable to pests. This can include anything from removing debris from a yard to adding a dehumidifier to damp spots to increasing lighting or noise to get pests to scam.

Use a humane bug catcher:

PETA suggests using a cup to place over larger insects and then sliding a piece of paper under the cup to release the bug outside. There are humane bug catchers available for sale to put more space between you and the bugs when removing them.

Utilize no-kill traps:

Sometimes rodents and marsupials (such as opossums) will nest in homes or sheds. They can cause damage to these areas. If noise or lighting techniques do not evict the unwanted tenant, then setting no-kill traps can catch the animals so they can be re-

located away from the home or property. However, it's best to confirm the laws regarding animal relocation prior to trapping and moving pests.

Rely on natural repellents:

Certain essential oils act as natural repellents to deter pests without harming them. Consumer Reports says lemongrass, citronella, peppermint, geraniol, soybean and rosemary are some common botanical repellents that may work. Picardin, which mimics a compound found in pepper plants, and

oil of lemon eucalyptus are additional natural bug repellents.

Be choosy about pest mitigation:

Although it may be uncomfortable to spot a large spider in a home or a lot of buzzing bees in the yard, many insects are helpful to have around. Exercise caution when taking a blanket approach to extermination, as you may make conditions inhospitable to even good bugs or animals.

There are humane ways to address pests around the home.






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Gift ideas for the family do-it-yourselfer

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 does not 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 cordless 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

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



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

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.

Pets

(continued from page 1C)

the sights and signs of pet traffic. Mulch or crushed stone can establish these pet highways and look like intended features.

Set boundaries

Pet urine contains high levels of nitrogen, which can burn grass and turn it brown. It is not possible to water down urine or pick up solid waste immediately every time a pet goes outdoors, so designate a pet-friendly spot for potty time. Use fencing or a dog run to separate this area and help mitigate "land mines" all over the lawn. Fencing also can keep pets out of vegetable gardens and away from potentially toxic plants.

Avoid chemical lawn treatments

When pets use the yard and rest on the lawn, you will need to eliminate

products that can be harmful to them. Choose all-natural fertilizers and weed and pest preventatives.

Look for alternatives

If maintaining a lawn with pets seems like an uphill battle, consider swapping out your landscape with a variety of materials. Scale back on grass, and incorporate groundcover, hardscape materials like pea gravel or extend the patio. Artificial turf also is an option, as it will not brown and wither. Some turf products can even be quickly and thoroughly cleaned with water.

It can take some trial and error for pet parents to protect their lawns from the effects of having furry friends playing in the yard.



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