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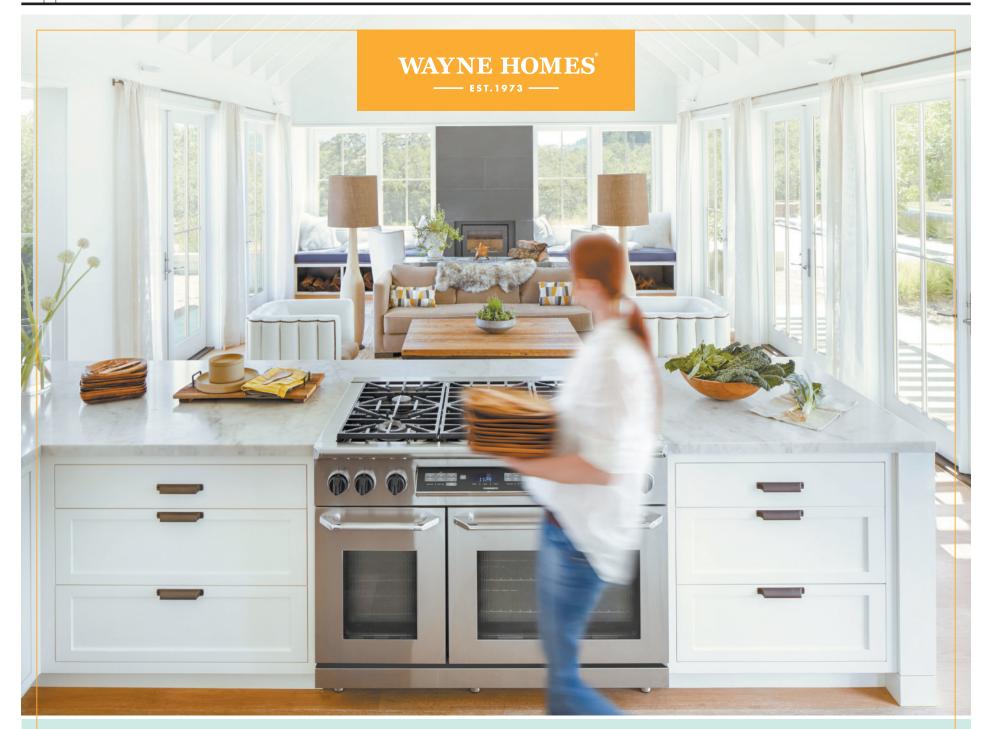
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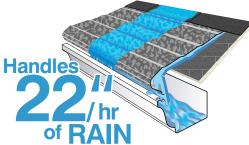
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7 Ideas to Improve Curb Appeal

(Family Features) Whether you're hoping to sell in the near future or simply looking to touch up outdated areas, there's one aspect of home maintenance most homeowners agree is important: curb appeal. It's a broad term that may reference any number of visible features, meaning there are plenty of ways to enhance the appearance of your house.

Consider these ideas - some big, some small - for bringing new life to your home's look from the experts at the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

Swap Out Your Front Door

As one of the first things a guest, passerby or potential homebuyer may notice, the front door is the gateway to your home and a likely opening impression. Upgrading to a heavier, bolder door or simply repainting the existing threshold can capture positive attention. Alternately, swapping out hardware for a more eye-catching look is an easy way to achieve a fresh facelift.

Create Seating Areas

A welcoming home is typically an attractive one, and there are few better ways to create a cozy vibe than a seating or gathering area on the porch. Whether it's the classic porch swing or chairs and a coffee table suitable for the outdoors, a small zone ideal for conversation and camaraderie can help create an at-home appearance. **Plant Shrubbery**

Billowing trees and blooming flowers are certainly eye-catching accessories outside a home, but many varieties require intense care to grow the way you envision and may adhere to seasonal weather patterns for optimal appearance. For a quicker result, shop around for fully mature shrubs and plants that can withstand elements throughout the year.

Rethink the Mailbox

It may not be as exciting of a project to undertake, however, giving your mailbox a fresh look helps it stand out and - especially if it's directly in front of your home - may turn an ordinary object into a worthy attractant. Your work may be as simple as updating to a newer model or as thought-out as constructing a small rock wall around the base.

Add Stonework

For a project that can give your house a new look altogether, consider incorporating stonework or a stone veneer for a natural appearance. If changing your facade isn't in the plans, less complicated ideas like pavers, brick sidewalks and landscape rings are ways to introduce a classic touch.

Paint (or Repaint) the Exterior

Changing the exterior paint color of a home is one of the most popular renovation projects, and one of the first that comes to mind for many homeowners. Simply altering the colors of trim, gutters and other accent pieces may be enough for some homes, and repainting the exterior doesn't have to mean a new color altogether - consider a brighter shade or simply a fresh coat to help your home pop.

Update Lighting

Light fixtures come in all shapes and sizes, and many times the beauty is in the eye of the beholder. While updated porch illumination may not drive home a potential sale, it's a subtle touch right as guests arrive. Adding smaller lights in previously unlit areas like around landscaping (consider solar-powered for easier maintenance) can help your hard work shine.

To find more ideas to increase curb appeal, or to find a certified remodeler near you, visit RemodelingDoneRight.com.

5 factors to consider when buying a home

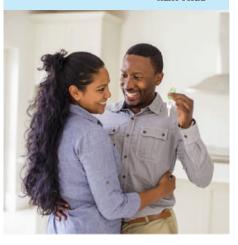
Home ownership is a dream for many people. In fact, buying a home is considered by many people to be a major life accomplishment.

Various factors determine what makes a home an attractive place to live. While some considerations may overlap, others may be unique to individual buyers. Those new to the real estate arena may want to consider the following factors as they search for a new place to call home.

1: Property taxes

Property taxes can greatly affect the overall cost of living in a particular home. The real estate company RedFin says property taxes are generally levied by each county and often include taxes paid to schools, utility companies and municipal governments. Property taxes will usually be factored into a monthly mortgage payment, and how high (or low) taxes are can turn an affordable mortgage payment into something that can break a budget. When calculating payments, be sure to include property taxes in your estimates. 2: Job security/availability

The financial resource Fortune Builder says to consider your job security before taking the home ownership plunge. Before committing to an investment as substantial as a home, ensure that you are NEXT PAGE >>



5 FACTORS CONTINUED

secure in your job. Similarly, if you are relocating for job prospects, verify that the new location has a thriving job market. **3: Local schools**

For potential homeowners with children or those planning on becoming parents, area schools should merit significant consideration. Research school rankings and reviews, but know that rankings can change. American Family Insurance Company says to also look at the school budget history of towns you're considering to see if residents prioritize funding for education. This can be a measure of how important education is in a given community.

4: Commute times

Home ownership involves both lifestyle and financial decisions. Calculate the time it will take to travel to and from work when considering a certain town or neighborhood. Find out if there is mass transit and what options are available for off-hour travel needs. **5: Lifestyle options**

Quality nightlife, arts and history, community events, proximity to cultural centers or cities, and other factors are at play in choosing a home. Make sure your new community allows you to still enjoy the things you're passionate about.

Buying a home involves considering various factors that can affect your budget and quality of life.





Tips for Maintaining an Organized Home

(Family Features) This time of year, family life can get a little messy. School schedules and sports activities mix with work commitments, and before long the house is as cluttered as the calendar.

Fall is the perfect time of year to recommit to an organized household so you can keep the chaos contained. With these tips, you can make small changes to help you get organized and stay that way.

Embrace routines. The idea of dedicating large chunks of time to organizing and tidying the house can be overwhelming. However, making time to clean as you progress through the day can help control clutter and keep the time commitment more manageable. Commit to cleaning up the kitchen after dinner each night. Set expectations for kids to pick up their rooms before bed. Before long, routines become productive habits that make a visible difference.

Purge the excess. Over time, nearly

everyone collects too much stuff, and clutter is often more an indication of too much volume than poor organization. Items are purchased to replace outdated things, but the old pieces sometimes don't actually get discarded. Getting control of your clutter starts with eliminating the things you no longer want or need. A good strategy is to create piles of items: keep, sell, donate and discard.

Create a drop zone. In most homes, the entryway is a catchall for family belongings that get shed with each pass through the door. It's convenient to have shoes, coats, backpacks and other essentials ready to grab as you head out, so instead of fighting the inevitable jumble, find a way to organize it. A stylish drop zone using ClosetMaid's Space Creations organizers is a solution that attractively contains all those essentials. The line includes a range shelving kits, complementing drawers, baskets, rods and more so you can customize the storage unit to your exact space and needs.

Avoid junk piles. Nearly every home has at least one junk pile, drawer or even room. In most cases, the reason is that the contents are a mish-mash of items that don't really have any place else to go. Make a point to identify ways to create order, whether it's adding drawer inserts to contain all the odds and ends or buying a standing file to capture bills and mail.

Be mindful about use. When you're on a mission to eliminate excess clutter, it can be tempting to go overboard putting things away. It's important to be realistic about where you store the things you need and err on the side of keeping the things you use regularly within reach. This may mean getting creative about how you organize or even adding new storage containers or furniture, but remember being organized is only helpful if it's also practical.

Find more ideas for better home organization this busy season at ClosetMaid.com.



Must-haves for an amazing kitchen remodel

Kitchen remodels are among the most popular home renovation projects, whether they consist of swapping out cabinet hardware or doing major demolition.

Due to the sheer amount of time families spend in the kitchen, not to mention the number of tasks performed in this space, it is easy to see why Remodeling magazine consistently ranks kitchen renovations as projects that will enable homeowners to recoup a high percentage of their investments. In the magazine's 2018 "Cost vs. Value" report, midrange major kitchen remodels costing an average of \$63,829 recouped 59 percent of that investment.

When investing in a kitchen project, it is important to incorporate items that are coveted.

• **Deep, double sinks:** Having a double sink enables you to soak dishes in one side and then wash on the other. It also makes it easy to wash and prep produce for meals.

• **Kitchen island and bar stools:** Even though many meals are enjoyed around the table, there's something to be said for the convenience of a kitchen island and some well-placed bar stools for quick breakfasts or snacks.

• Smart kitchen storage: Work with a contractor to include storage solutions built into cabinetry and the

pantry. Slide-out shelving, nooks for a paper towel roll and custom-designed areas to store stand mixers and other necessities can make kitchens more functional.

• Outdoor access: If possible, design a kitchen so it is easy to access the backyard via sliding doors. This can make outdoor entertaining or even coffee on the deck much easier.

• Under-cabinet lighting: Fixtures installed under cabinets provide both ambient lighting and task lighting. Such lighting makes it easier to see what you're working on as well, as even well-placed overhead lighting can fail to illuminate dark corners and spots on the counters.

• **Convenient warming drawer:** This appliance provides backup to the oven. It's a slide-out drawer that can keep prepared foods out of the way and warm until they are ready to be served. This is particularly handy for holidays and other entertaining.

• Beverage station: Designate one area of the kitchen to beverages, such as coffee and tea. Or make the area an informal bar. This can limit traffic in the kitchen to a single area.

Kitchen remodels are exciting to envision, and several choices can make these high-traffic spaces even more coveted.



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