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How To Choose The Right Lighting Inside Your Home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help

homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in. When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk

a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

KITCHEN: Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

FORMAL DINING ROOM: Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

LIVING ROOM: Adaptability also is important in the living

room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly

option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

BEDROOM: The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve

these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

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Shade Trees That Can Make Yards More Comfortable

Various factors motivate the decisions homeowners make when designing their landscapes. Some may be motivated by the ways additions will affect the resale value of their homes, while others may be guided by a love for a particular type of plant. Comfort is yet another motivator, and shade trees can make yards more comfortable as the mercury rises. According to the Arbor Day Foundation, the following are some popular shade trees that can add beauty to a landscape and make it more comfortable come the dog days of summer.

• **Quaking aspen:** The quaking aspen has the widest natural range of any tree in North America, spanning 47 degrees of latitude, 110 degrees of longitude (nine time zones) and elevations from sea level to timberline. That impressive range is no doubt why the United States Forest Service notes that the quaking aspen can grow in greatly diverse regions, environments and communities.

• **Northern catalpa:** The Arbor Day Foundation notes that the northern catalpa is easily identifiable thanks to its heart-shaped leaves and twisting trunks and branches. Nature enthusiasts, and particularly those who enjoy birdwatching, may be happy to learn that the flowers of the catalpa are frequently visited by hummingbirds.

• **Red sunset maple:** Its name alone makes many people think of lazy summer days spent lounging in the yard. The red sunset maple provides ample shade and comes with the added benefit of producing an awe-inspiring blend of red and orange leaves come the fall. Red sunset maples can survive

in a range of habitats and their adaptable roots means they can thrive in various soil types.

• **Northern red oak:** The state tree of New Jersey, the northern red oak is, according to the Arbor Day Foundation, both beloved for its aesthetic appeal and valued for its adaptability and usefulness. Northern red oaks can tolerate urban conditions, but they do not do well in hot climates.

• **Sawtooth oak:** Another tree that produces some awe-inspiring color, the sawtooth oak is a durable, adaptable shade tree. Golden yellow leaves in the spring will give way to dark green in summer, only to turn yellow and golden brown in the fall. The Tree Center Plant Supply Co. notes that the sawtooth oak can thrive in warmer climates where shade trees that can coexist with high temperatures can be hard to find.

Shade trees can add beauty to a property and make a yard more comfortable. Homeowners are urged to discuss shade trees with a local lawn and garden professional prior to planting.

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Prepare Cooling Systems For Warm Weather

One springtime task on homeowners' to-do lists is checking cooling systems to ensure they are ready for summer. Proper maintenance of cooling systems is essential to saving energy and keeping utility costs down. Fortunately, homeowners need not be certified HVAC technicians to maintain their cooling units.

• **Clean filters.** Whether a home is kept cool by a whole-house central air conditioning system or window units, clean filters are necessary to keep the units working efficiently. Routinely replacing or cleaning filters is one of the most important maintenance tasks to improve airflow and increase efficiency. The U.S. Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy says replacing a dirty, clogged filter with a clean one can lower an air conditioner's energy consumption by anywhere from 5 to 15 percent.

• **Know the square footage.** When replacing a cooling system, have an understanding of the size of your home (or room if installing a window unit). Determine the area of the home so you buy a unit that suits your needs. Air conditioners use BTUs (British Thermal Units) to define cooling power. The more BTUs, the larger the space that can be cooled. However, homeowners

do not want to exceed the necessary cooling power. This leads to energy waste. EnergyStar.gov can help homeowners find the right cooling system for their needs.

• **Inspect system coils.** The evaporator and condenser coils on air conditioners can collect dirt, even when filters are maintained. Dirty coils are less efficient at absorbing heat, so periodically remove the dirt. Outdoor coils can be kept cleaner by cutting back foliage from the unit to allow better air flow.



• **Inspect condensate drains.** Energy.gov also suggests making sure condensate drains, which take moisture pulled from the air away, are functioning properly. If they're clogged, they may not be effective at reducing humidity in a home, and they may even leak.

• **Clear debris.** Remove fallen leaves or other plant material from condenser units and fan blades. Obstructed components can cause the system to retain heat, compromising its ability to work effectively. Some homeowners prefer to cover their condensers at the end of the cooling season to keep leaves and dirt out of the unit.

• **Check window unit seals.** When installing window units, make sure all seals around the

air conditioner are in place to prevent cool-air loss.

• **Hire a technician.** Air conditioner technicians can be very helpful and will know how to prepare a system for hot weather. Technicians typically conduct multipoint inspections and measure such things as refrigerant levels and duct leakage. Airflow through the evaporator coil also may be checked. If a homeowner suspects the thermostat is not working properly, a technician can verify if that is true and even install a new one if necessary.

As summer approaches, homeowners should prepare their air conditioning units for the busy months ahead.

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Techniques To Revitalize A Lawn After A Lawn Winter

Pristine, snow-covered landscapes can be wonders to behold. While that blanket of white is idyllic, a lawn's delicate blades may be paying a hefty price beneath the cold, heavy piles of snow.

Snow plows push salt and sand up on the grass while subterranean animals like mice and moles dig burrows beneath piles of snow as they try to find food and stay warm. Such conditions are not favorable for thriving landscapes. When the spring thaw arrives, lawns may be in dire need of some TLC. The following techniques can



mitigate winter-related lawn damage.

- Clear out debris. Remove any scattered leaves, branches and other debris that has been strewn across the property due

to storms or snow-laden trees. This will give you a clean canvas to work on.

- Dry out snow mold. The Family Handyman says snow mold is a cold-season fungus that causes gray-colored circles or patches on the lawn where there has been snow. To alleviate snow mold, rake the lawn to loosen matted grass and facilitate the drying-out process.
- De-thatch the lawn. Heavy snow can compress the grass and cause some of it to die off. De-thatching helps to remove dead grass blades and separate any matting. This enables water, nutrients and air to reach the lawn's roots more effectively. Thinning out old organic matter also helps encourage new growth.
- Aerate the soil. Coupled with dethatching, aeration involves loosening the soil or poking holes to allow nutrients to move freely to the roots.
- Kill weeds before they spread. Weeds may be the first to start growing when the weather begins to warm. Address them promptly by manually pulling them or applying an herbicide.
- Overseed the lawn. Chances are there are some bare spots that have formed over the winter. Overseeding can help to fill in the lawn. Make sure that frosts are largely a thing of the past and soil temperature is around 50 F to 60 F before seeding. Water daily until grass fills in.
- Apply nutrients. Fertilizer and compost can restore nutrients to the lawn that may have been used up over winter. A soil test at a nearby horticultural center can tell you which nutrients are needed, according to the Chemistry Cachet, a guide to using chemistry secrets for healthy living, beauty, cleaning, and gardening.

Lawns can be restored to their pre-winter glory after some sweat equity and about five to six weeks of consistent sunshine and warm weather.

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Exterior Lighting Can Add Ambiance To A Property

The value of the right lighting in a home is undeniable. Lighting can instantly transform a room and create the ambiance homeowners are looking to establish. Though it might be mostly seen as a way to create mood inside a home, lighting also can do much for lawns and gardens. Backyards have come a long way over the last several decades. Once reserved as play areas for children and stomping grounds for the family dog, backyards have become oases for homeowners and their families. Outdoor living areas are wildly popular, and no such area is complete without exterior lighting. In fact, a recent report from the National Association of Home Builders found that 85 percent of home buyers want exterior lighting, making it the second most desired outdoor feature (patios topped that list). Exterior lighting can have a dramatic effect on landscaping, and estimates from the online financial resource Kiplinger.com suggest such lighting is inexpensive, with installation averaging roughly \$67 per fixture. When installing exterior lighting around their landscapes, homeowners can keep various tips in mind to create a relaxing, awe-inspiring mood on their properties at night.

- Opt for warm light. Warm white light creates an inviting feel around the property. The exterior lighting experts at Utah Lights acknowledge that choice of lighting is up to homeowners but also note that, in situations with lower levels of ambient light, such as in exterior lights around a property, people typically prefer warmer light. That's because warm light tends to be easier on the eyes and directs attention to the features of the landscape, which is many homeowners' goal when installing exterior lighting in their yards.
- Utilize a timer. Modern exterior lighting timers make it easier than ever to control the lights outside a home. Many such timers even adjust for the changing seasons and the shifting hours of daylight. That means homeowners shouldn't have to tinker with the timer once it's set. Exterior lighting can add significant appeal to a property without breaking the bank.
- Consider uplights. Uplights are installed in the ground and direct light up at a tree, focusing on its trunk or canopy. This creates a dramatic effect that makes it possible to enjoy majestic trees at night just like you might when spending time in the yard during the day.
- Focus on trees. Many homeowners already have exterior lighting lining their walkways and patios, but focusing on trees can create an entirely different look. Though it's possible to install exterior tree lighting on your own, landscaping professionals with lighting experience know which fixtures will pair most effectively with the trees around your property and how to arrange them for maximum effect.

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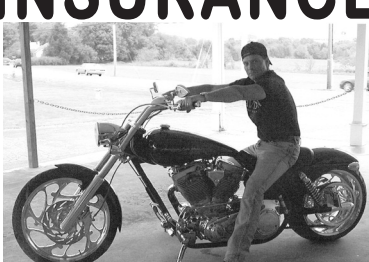


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Backyard pools provide a way to cool off and enjoy a taste of luxury without having to travel. Backyard pools provided even more convenience and a welcome respite in 2020, as many public pools were closed in response to social distancing restrictions put in place during the pandemic. After installing pools, many homeowners realize that touching up the landscaping around the pool can provide the finishing touch to their backyard retreats. Not all landscaping is the same, and homeowners should choose plants that look beautiful, are tolerant to pool splash-out and won't outgrow the area. The home and garden resource The Spruce notes that a plant that is attractive at two feet tall can grow rapidly and drop leaves or other debris into the pool. When selecting options for pool landscaping, there are some considerations to keep in mind:

- Choose plants that will provide privacy.

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- Know which kind of climate a plant needs prior to purchasing it. Tropical plants may be fitting poolside, but will they endure when the season is over?
- Design according to the theme of the home, as plants should complement the existing style. Modern foliage may not blend well with a home styled after a traditional English cottage.
- Decide whether you can accept spreading or trailing plants that can cascade over retaining walls and other infrastructure.
- Look at trees that won't drop too many leaves, flowers or fruit into the water.
- Think about having layers of plants to soften the landscape, which can make a small pool seem bigger and more luxurious, indicates the landscaping company Earth Development, Inc.
- Don't overlook the possibility of a lawn abutting pavers or concrete surrounding a pool, as it can soften the edges and keep spaces open and inviting.
- Incorporate herbs or fragrant plants, which can transform a pool day into a spa experience. Consider low-maintenance lavender as an option.

Pool landscaping must marry a variety of different features and plant requirements. As a result, a professional consultation may be the route to take. Landscape architects will have the know-how to select plant varieties that will be tolerant, beautiful and fulfill homeowners' wishes. Backyard pools can make a backyard retreat that much more enjoyable. Landscaping offers the softness and beauty that adds a finishing touch to poolside retreats.

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Carbon Monoxide Remediation



Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can be deadly. Because carbon monoxide is found in the fumes produced when fuel is burned, it is present in and around homes. As a result, homeowners should be aware of carbon monoxide and make every effort to detect its presence.

CO forms most readily when there is insufficient oxygen to complete combustion and produce carbon dioxide. Hot water closets, furnaces in crawl-spaces, heating appliances in attics, and other contained areas are common areas where CO can form.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that thousands of people visit emergency rooms and are hospitalized because of CO poisoning every year. While CO is a risk for just about anyone, infants, the elderly, those with breathing problems or chronic heart disease, and people with anemia are most likely to get sick from CO.

CO has earned the moniker "the silent killer" because it cannot be identified without the presence of a carbon monoxide detector. If a person believes he or she is smelling carbon monoxide, that person is probably mistaking the odor for other combustion byproducts that the human nose can sense.

CO is a byproduct of vehicle exhaust, boat engines, stoves, lanterns, grills, furnaces, and fireplaces. CO is produced anytime something is burning. That is why it is essential that products designed to be used outdoors are used exclusively outside, and that indoor appliances are properly vented to the outdoors. CO can build up indoors and poison people and pets who breathe it in.

Some people may not recognize that CO is problematic in a home until multiple residents start complaining of similar symptoms. Common CO poisoning symptoms include nausea and vomiting, dizziness, chest pain, confusion, headache, and other flu-like symptoms, advises the consumer advocacy group Carbon Monoxide Kills. Those with repeated exposure to high levels of CO may eventually develop cerebral edema, which is a swelling of the brain. CO can compress brain cells and destroy them, leading to neurological issues and death. CO poisoning is actually the result of the head and heart not receiving sufficient oxygen.

CO detectors can save lives and should be installed in all homes and apartments. The National Fire Protection Association says CO detectors "shall be centrally located outside of each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms." Individuals should follow the manufacturer instructions regarding where on the wall or ceiling the CO detectors should be mounted. As an added safety precaution, CO detectors should be placed on every floor of the home.

Gas sensors in CO alarms have limited life spans, so they should be replaced generally every five to six years, because calibrating and testing for CO is more difficult than simply replacing the alarms.

Installing or replacing carbon monoxide detectors is an easy improvement that can help save lives.



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Renovations For Senior Safety

As adults approach their golden years, the homes they once thought of as sanctuaries can become unsafe. Families wrestle with the decision to keep parents and grandparents in their homes or move them into assisted living facilities or other senior residences.

Modifying seniors' homes to make them safer is another option. The National Institute on Aging says that families may be able to have a senior stay at home by helping older relatives remain independent but safe. The following are a few ways to do just that.

- Remove fall hazards. The NIA reports that six out of 10 falls happen at home, where people spend the most time and fail to think about their safety. Seniors who want to be independent

may overestimate their physical abilities. Because falls can be so dangerous, leading to cuts, abrasions, broken bones, and more, seniors and their families must take steps to prevent falls in homes. Improve lighting, especially at night when sight may become diminished. Install hand rails and grab bars where possible. Pick up clutter and remove tripping hazards, such as slippery rugs or electric cords. Install an electric stair climbing seat to make traversing stairs less risky.

- Improve visibility and ability to communicate. Vision loss may accompany aging, but technology can help mitigate such losses. Use big-button phones, remote controls and even keyboards so seniors can keep in touch. Voice-activated ther-



mostats or smart home technology also can make it easier for seniors to voice their needs.

- Modify fixtures and other features. Dexterity may wane with age, and arthritis can make grasping or turning doorknobs and faucets more challenging. Take inventory of areas of the home that present the biggest obstacles to seniors. Replace knobs in the shower or on faucets with lever handles, which are easier to maneuver. Install new cabinets and doors that freely glide open and self-close. Replace toggle light switches with easier paddle-type switches that can be pushed with a hand or even arm. Motion-sensor lights also can be handy. Push-button oven controls may make cooking easier.

- Prepare for medical emergencies. Invest in medical alert systems, such as necklaces or bracelets, that can be used to contact police or emergency

medical personnel directly. Make phones available in commonly used rooms in the home, such as bedrooms, the living room, bathrooms, and the kitchen.

- Install ramps and nonslip flooring. Ramps can make it easier to reach the front door or cross over elevated doorway thresholds. Nonslip flooring also can prevent falls around the house, offering more traction for feet, walkers or canes.
- Repair cracks in walkways and driveways. Safety should also extend to the outdoors. Be sure to repair cracks or uneven pavement. Replace loose patio blocks or bricks with a more stable design or with concrete or asphalt. While outdoors, trim back bushes and make sure there are no tripping hazards outside as well.

A few modifications can make it possible for seniors to live comfortably in their homes for many years.

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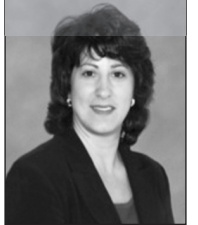
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7 Things To Consider When Buying A Shed

Backyard sheds can be useful assets. Sheds can create storage space in the garage, basement or other areas of the house that have become gathering spots for gear typically used outdoors. Sheds are ideal for housing mowers, tools and even pool-care equipment. But they can be put to other uses as well, such as being key spots to engage in hobbies or even as a child's clubhouse.

Various factors should be considered before building or buying a shed. A storage shed can be a significant investment. Once placed, sheds may remain in their dedicated spots for years to come. That means careful thought should go into the planning process.

1. Check your local building codes first. Before you order your shed, be sure to know the ins and outs of shed codes. The codes may impact the shed's placement, construction, the materials used, size, and numerous other factors. It's much easier to amend plans beforehand than to face the hassle and expense after learning you did things incorrectly.

2. Choose placement wisely. Spend several days assessing the yard and thinking about the uses for the shed. If you plan to store pool floats and chemicals inside of the shed, it should be located close enough to the pool to be convenient. Look at the lay of the land. If there is a soggy patch of land that can turn swampy under the shed's foundation, that is a poor location choice. If you need access to

electricity, placing it far away from the house could necessitate running expensive wiring.

3. Consider the design. Just because a shed is for storage doesn't mean aesthetics should be overlooked. Choose a shed style that complements your home. You may also want to match certain architectural features, like arched doorways or dormers. Design also may relate to practicality. For instance, storing a riding mower inside may necessitate dual doors that open widely.

4. Invest in quality materials from your local hardware store. Spending a little more and using quality materials can ensure it lasts long enough to be cost-effective. The right materials will be resistant to splitting, cracking, decay, and insect damage.

5. Prepare the site well. A proper foundation for the shed is almost as important as the shed itself. You cannot just drop the shed on the lawn and leave it, as the shed can sink or structural issues may arise if it is placed on a weak base.

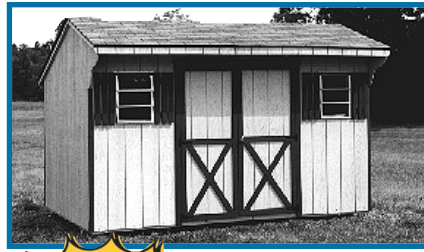
6. Blend into the environment. Surround the shed with shrubs or plants so that it blends into the yard and complements the space.

7. Deck out the interior. Use every storage tool at your disposal to maximize floor, wall and even rafter space for storage. Plan where items will be kept and customize the storage options around those locations. Sheds can be an asset and improve storage capability in the backyard.

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5 Ways To Increase Home Fire Safety

(MS)- An average of seven Americans die each week as a result of house fires. Most fires occur in residential buildings between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., when occupants are most likely to be asleep. Your first line of defense is fire preparedness.

Here's five things you can do to increase your chance of survival in a fire:

- Install smoke alarms on every story of your home and outside sleeping areas. Be sure to test them monthly, clean them every six months and replace batteries in spring and fall. Having working fire alarms can cut your

chance of dying in a fire in half!

- Have a fire escape plan for your family and practice it. A small fire can spread rapidly, you may only have minutes or seconds to escape. When going over the details of your escape plan, check windows and doors to ensure all open easily. Know your local emergency number (911). Never stop to gather belongings or reenter a home after safely outside.

- When renovating, consider using fire-rated, noncombustible products. Your choice of insulation, for example, can be vital. Stone wool insulation, like that produced by Roxul, resists tem-

peratures up to approximately 2,150 F. When directly exposed to fire, it will not off-gas, contribute to toxic smoke or promote flames. Fire-resistant building materials can give you extra time to escape when seconds count.

- Purchase a multi-use fire ladder for each bedroom in your home and practice using it. A fire ladder may be your only escape option if flames block critical exits.

- Place fire extinguishers on every level of your home, especially in high-risk areas like the kitchen, near fireplaces and in the garage. Use only for small,

contained fires that are not spreading rapidly. Know how to operate your extinguisher before an emergency occurs using the PASS method: Pull pin, Aim low, Squeeze lever and Sweep from side to side. The safest option is always to evacuate your home and call for help.

Fire prevention measures are a serious matter in every home. Find out how to keep your home and family safe at nipa.org or improve your fire safety knowledge by visiting the Roxul website. Visit your local hardware store for all your home fire safety needs.



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