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APRIL 2022

Design ideas to give your home a farmhouse feel

Farmhouse style homes are having a moment. A 2020 survey from Homes.com asked more than 5,000 adults across the United States about their favorite house style from a list that included bohemian craftsman, mid-century modern ranch, French chateau, and Tudor, among others. Modern farmhouse was the runaway winner, as participants in 42 of the 50 states indicated this simple, cozy style was their favorite.

Home renovation projects can help homeowners put their own unique stamp on their homes, and such projects can be both aesthetic and functional in nature. The following are some farmhouse design elements homeowners can consider as they look to transform their home interiors with this popular style in mind.

- Exposed beams: Exposed beams instantly evoke images of a farmhouse. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that this rustic renovation project can utilize real wood or faux beams that look like the real thing. Decorative beams that have

nothing to do with a home's structural integrity can be installed by skilled do-it-yourselfers. However, even faux beams are heavy, and BobVila.com recommends homeowners have an engineer assess their existing structure prior to installation.

- Distressed wood finishes: Distressing is designed to make something look less than perfect. Distressed wood finishes can be found throughout many farmhouse style homes. Furniture and picture frames can provide the distressed look farmhouse fans are looking for. This is a relatively inexpensive project that many homeowners can tackle on their own after watching some online tutorials that recommend the right tools and techniques to get the job done right.

- Kitchen sink: Many components combine to create a truly classic farmhouse kitchen. But perhaps no component is more essential than the classic farmhouse sink. The renovation experts at HGTV note that a classic farmhouse sink features a deep, wide basin. Farmhouse sinks are large enough to

handle all the dishes that come after a big family meal. Old-fashioned porcelain sinks are worth consideration by homeowners who want their kitchen sinks to evoke a traditional farmhouse feel.

- Countertops: HGTV recommends butcher block countertops for homeowners who favor European farmhouse style. Home-

owners overhauling their kitchens to create a farmhouse feel should consider installing a large island with a walnut butcher block countertop for an authentic farmhouse feel.

Farmhouse style homes are wildly popular. Some simple renovations can help homeowners with a fondness for farmhouse style bring this classic look into their homes.



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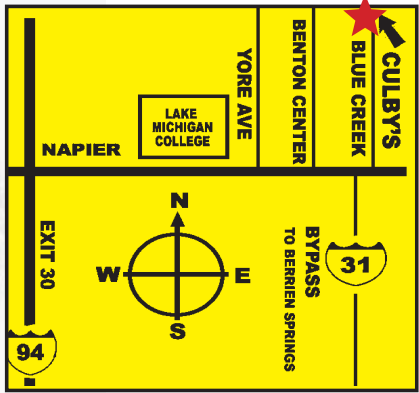
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Lawn watering and fertilizing techniques

A lush, green lawn is a sight to behold. Many variables are involved in growing and maintaining grass, and water and fertilizer are among the most important components.

Knowing how much water and fertilizer to apply and when to apply it can make a big difference in the appearance and health of a lawn. That's because a well-fed and watered lawn will develop a better root system, which makes the lawn less vulnerable to stressors like drought, mowing, foot traffic, and heat, according to the Scotts® company.

Fertilize

There is no magic formula governing when to fertilize a lawn. The type of grass and how well-established a lawn is must be considered. Experts suggest having the soil tested to determine its pH levels and if any nutrients are lacking. A fertilizing schedule can then be developed after testing.

Keep in mind that overfeeding a lawn will not make it grow any better and actu-

ally can damage the turf. Several small applications of fertilizer during the lawn's most active growing period may be helpful, advises the home improvement resource Tools Around the House. An annual application (late spring for warm-season grass or fall for cool-season grass) may be all that's needed.

Certain fertilizers need to be applied and watered in. Others may be combined with weed-control products and must be set on top of damp grass. Read packaging to determine the right application.

Water

The right watering schedule and techniques can help a lawn thrive. Scotts® says adjusting for climate and nature can help grass to grow strongly. A lawn that has a grayish cast or appears dull green is telling an owner that it needs water. Another test is to step on the lawn. If footprints disappear quickly, the grass blades have enough moisture to spring back.

Water the lawn in the morning before 10 a.m. when it's cooler and the winds tend to be calm so that the water can soak in. For those who must water at night, do so in early evening so that the water can dry before nightfall and will not contribute to disease.

Scotts® says to water an established lawn until the top six to eight inches of soil is wet. Most lawns need one to 1.5 inches of water per week from rain or a hose to soak the soil that deeply.

Newly established lawns may require more water to keep the soil moist but not soggy.

Visit a lawn care center for more information on watering the type of lawn for your area or visit www.scotts.com for additional tips.



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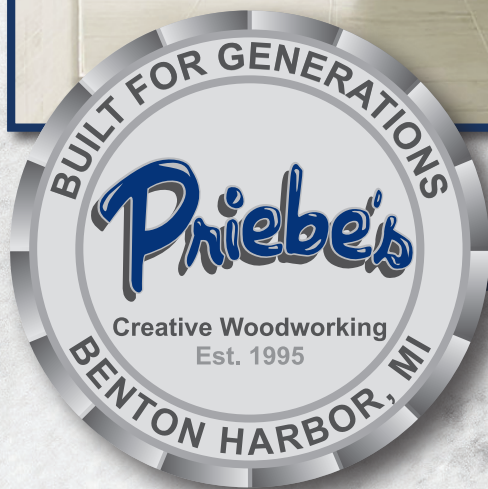
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Nick Chrste,
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The court of public opinion can be brutal. Especially to those who sell their homes, for cash fast, without tending to the needs of the home before selling. I hear it from the peanut gallery all too often, "Who could live like that!?"... "Why is all that junk in the photos?"... "That's a teardown, disgusting!" Do you know who can live like that? Your neighbor. Your church member. Your friend. Your grandmother. If you're reading this... maybe it's you who lives like that.

In one example, I was called by a friend of a homeowner. I was told in confidence that this person was a great man, worked and retired from the local school system, and attended the church where they knew him. He didn't have a car and was picked up by the church bus for years. The church ended bus transportation and the man could no longer attend service. One of the members and a dear friend of the man decided to help by driving him. The man was frail and the friend insisted on helping him up the front stairs and into his home. To the utter surprise of the friend, there was debris, trash and filth piled high and everywhere. There was no running water or electricity. The man was barricaded in one back room of the 6 bedroom 3 bath house. He lived under blankets and was brought food and water by the neighbors. They had to act and didn't know who to call. They called me. I was able to sell this distressed house which was on the verge of condemnation. The man is now living comfortably in assisted living and still attends church regularly.

He wasn't expecting to make any money on the sale, and I couldn't guarantee he would either. In the end, he walked away cash positive.

In another example, I purchased a rental personally from a landlord with decades in the business. I bought a 2 bed 1 bath house which rented for \$525/month for 10 grand. At first, I was ecstatic. Who buys rentals for 10k that are occupied and cash flowing!? I bought it sight unseen. I later found out the tenant hadn't paid the landlord for nearly 10 years! The older lady was also living in one room of the house because the furnace was out for over 3 years. She lived in the living room with space heaters surrounded by her cats. Her electric bill was more than the rent. The former owner couldn't bear to evict her so they agreed, that he wouldn't collect rent if she took on the repairs. Well, needless to say, no repairs were ever made. Most would have evicted the old lady. She was on disability so there was only so much she could afford. I put a new furnace in and managed to reduce her rent by \$50/month. Her electric bill was finally manageable and she was thankful I was able to work with her. I'll be in the red for several years but I was able to make it work.

One thing I've learned when buying houses for cash, fast, is never to judge and never assume that I'm any better than those who have fallen on hard times. I've been there. You've probably been there. Someone out there now is in need and there's no one to help. There are many reasons sellers sell to investors like me and for some, those reasons are painful and embarrassing. If you or someone you know is struggling in the house they live in or maybe you're a landlord that doesn't want to face the problem. Call me.

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Tips for waterproofing a basement or crawl space

Water can be a homeowner's worst nightmare. Few things have the potential to damage a home as much as water. From leaks to flooding to moisture problems like mold, water can wreak havoc on a home.

Basements or crawl spaces are areas of a home where water can do the most damage. Basements and crawl spaces tend to be the lowest-lying spots in a home, and therefore prime spots for water to enter. Water problems in these areas can contribute to the demise of the structural integrity of the foundation.

According to Olshan, a foundation solutions company, water can enter homes in numerous ways. Many building materials, including concrete, that seem solid at first glance actually are quite porous. As ground water collects around these materials, the weight of the accumulated water, called hydrostatic pressure, can weaken the materials, causing cracks where water can seep through. Water also can enter subterranean spaces through basement windows and gaps between footings and concrete slabs, or push up through foundation floors when homes are in areas with high water tables.

Remediating water issues in a home generally breaks down into two methodologies: exterior waterproofing and interior waterproofing. Depending on the cause and severity of the water issue, one or the other, or even both, may be recommended.

Exterior waterproofing

Exterior waterproofing aims to keep water away from and out of the home. The home improvement information resource DoItYourself.com says that exterior waterproofing generally includes the application of a waterproofing agent to the concrete foundation. In addition, exterior waterproofing also could include excavation so a drainage system can be installed around the

entire footing of the home. Regrading a property and properly relocating gutters and downspouts can help with many water issues.

Interior waterproofing

When water in a basement or crawl space needs to be remediated indoors, a system to collect, drain and remove water may be necessary. This can include sump pumps, drains, gravity discharge systems, and more. Moisture barriers, which can include special paints or products applied to the foundation walls and floor, also can help keep water from entering the space.

Moisture solutions

Keeping water out is only one part of the equation. Homeowners also need to manage moisture, like excessive humidity. A marriage of HVAC and waterproofing techniques may be necessary to improve air flow and remove humidity in the air.

While many homeowners have attempted to address water issues on their own, many times it is a job best left to the professionals. Because water penetration can have multifaceted causes, a professional can best assess the situation and create solutions that fit with homeowners' budgets and needs. The review and advice site Angie's List suggests finding at least three waterproofing companies that offer both interior and exterior waterproofing services that can provide the best ideas for fixing the issue.



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7 things to know before replacing windows

The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15 percent of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

1. Vinyl or aluminum may be best. Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice. Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

2. Moisture problems indicate windows need to be replaced. Condensation that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If

installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

3. Windows add curb appeal. Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

4. Consider other energy-efficient upgrades. Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement — which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

5. The wrong windows can adversely affect home value. The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73 percent of their replacement window investment back when they resell a home. But

choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too. When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more soundproof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

7. Proper installation is key to longevity. Replacement windows are only as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals. Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.



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Guide to outdoor lighting

Lighting is an essential component of interior and exterior home design. Not only does lighting add style and make spaces more appealing, when done correctly, it also makes a home safer and more functional.

Homeowners who plan to utilize outdoor spaces like backyards, front porches and walkways to the fullest should think carefully about lighting. These guidelines can assist with selecting outdoor lighting fixtures.

Security lighting

Flood lights and security lights are a good investment for those who want to beef up visibility and security around the home. These lights are high-intensity and designed to illuminate large areas. The brightness and reach can serve as a preventive measure to keep animals and even criminals away. Motion-sensor lights will immediately engage if something crosses the path of the sensor. Some lights will re-

main on from dusk until dawn. Lowe's Home Improvement suggests using the correct wattage on outdoor security lights so they flood an area thoroughly without affecting neighboring properties.

Wall, post and ceiling lights

Outdoor lighting fixtures beyond security options come in a variety of styles, according to Lamps USA. Wall lights are mounted to the outdoor wall of the home. These typically flank doorways or the garage. Post lights are often installed on the posts of decks and porches, or are free-standing on properties, providing visibility but also style. Ceiling-mounted lights may be above doorways or installed in any structure that has an overhead area. Warm-colored temperature bulbs in these fixtures can create an inviting atmosphere that is not too bright and jarring, especially when multiple lighting fixtures are working together. When selecting lighting for wall-mounted fixtures, experts suggest siz-

ing up if you are not sure of the size to pick, as lights will look much smaller in scale from a distance.

Accent and landscape lighting

A bevy of accent lighting choices are available. Accent lighting is designed to enhance the mood and appearance of certain elements of a landscape. Accent lighting is not intended to add bright light. For example, upward-directed lights can be cast on trees or shrubs to accentuate their shapes. Accent lighting also may call out a structure, such as a garden or a fountain. While accent lighting may be hard-wired, homeowners who want the luxury of changing lighting can opt for solar fixtures, which are more mobile but not as bright.

Additional pointers

When shopping for bulbs, consider the number of lumens. A standard 100-watt bulb produces around 1,600 lumens. Security lights should range from 700 to 1,300 lumens for optimal brightness. Oth-

er lights needn't be so bright.

Furthermore, ensure that any fixtures that are being used are safety-rated for outdoors. Wet-rated fixtures are designed to withstand direct exposure to outdoor elements, advises the design experts at Schoolhouse, a lighting and lifestyle goods company. Damp-rated fixtures are built for outdoor locations protected from harsh weather. Look for the product details or work with an electrician to choose the right lighting choices.

Lighting can transform outdoors spaces for the better.



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Must-have features in your bathroom remodel

Veteran homeowners recognize the value of remodeling their kitchens and bathrooms. Kitchens and baths tend to appear dated more quickly than other spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, which can always be revamped with some fresh paint and new furnishings.

The home improvement pricing resource Home Guide indicates an average bathroom remodel costs anywhere from \$5,500 to \$15,000 depending on the size and scope of the renovation. However, a bath redo can increase a home's resale value and can return as much as 68 percent of homeowners' investments. As homeowners plan their bathroom renovations, it's a good time to consider improvements that will improve function and add design appeal for years to come.

- **Floating vanity:** Add an airy feeling to the room by creating space between the vanity and the floor. A floating vanity can be a counter with a vessel sink or even have cabinets, as long as the vanity doesn't extend to the floor.

- **Freestanding traditional sink or tub:** There's something elegant about a freestanding tub or pedestal sink. Such features can lend a classic vibe to a space. However, freestand-

ing fixtures also come in modern or eclectic forms, so there are options for any design style.

- **Frameless showers:** Switch to a walk-in shower option, which improves aesthetics and makes it easier to "age in place" in a home. Pair that frameless shower with clear glass shower doors so sightline in the space remains unencumbered.

- **Natural textures:** Create a calm and serene sanctuary in the bathroom with light, natural hues and materials. Nature-inspired colors on tiles, walls and vanities can add to the spa vibe.

- **Dual sinks and vanities:** With a double vanity, two people can share the space and easily use the bathroom without getting in each other's way. One vanity with two sinks works, but homeowners can create even more personal space by dividing vanities and mirrors.

- **Small textured tile on shower floors:** Small textures are appealing and add safety. The added texture and grouting will keep feet from slipping on wet floors. Also, opt for mold-resistant grout to make cleanup even easier.

- **Special shower heads:** Invest in shower heads that can run the gamut from creating

steam showers to rainfall effects. Some showers will have multiple shower jets to offer an invigorating experience.

- **Improve drainage:** Increase the diameter of the drain pipe in the bathroom from the standard to a two-inch drain pipe. This will reduce the risk of clogs and overflow leaks.

- **Install a window:** Natural light and air flow can reduce the risk for mold and mildew

growth, and windows add some aesthetic appeal to a space. Just be sure to choose frosted privacy glass.

Additional considerations for a bath remodel include heated floors, well-placed and attractive storage options and a toilet enclosure (water closet) for added privacy. These and other bathroom renovation ideas can add value and improve the appeal of the room.



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How to stay safe on DIY projects

Home improvement projects can be costly. Depending on the scope of the project, the choice of materials and the skill level involved to see the project through to successful completion, homeowners could be on the hook for thousands of dollars or even more when renovating their homes.

One popular way homeowners look to cut such costs is to do some, if not all, of the work themselves. Indeed, do-it-yourselfers can save a considerable amount of money. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Housing Survey indicate that homeowners can save anywhere from 50 to 80 percent on DIY projects compared to what they might pay for comparable work to be performed by a contractor. However, the key there is "comparable." Cost overruns could derail DIY savings rather quickly if homeowners have little renovating skill or experience. But homeowners' wallets aren't the only thing in jeopardy if a DIY project goes awry.

Renovation projects require attention to detail, and that includes an emphasis on safety. Homeowners who are injured on DIY projects may face costly medical bills, while projects that are completed without incident could later pose safety hazards that require work to be redone, which is both expensive and a threat to personal safety in the interim. DIYers need not be discouraged from taking

projects on themselves, but they should heed these tips to stay safe when working on their homes.

- Make sure you choose the right ladder. DIYers may spend ample time shopping for drills and other electronic tools and gadgets that are fun to use. But ample time also must be afforded to the type of ladder you intend to use on a project. Estimates from the West Bend Insurance Company indicate that roughly 90,000 people visit the emergency room due to ladder accidents each year. Never use a broken ladder or an aging ladder that's uneven. In addition, do not use a ladder that forces you to reach far away. If you're leaning while using a ladder, the ladder is either too short for your project or positioned too far away from the wall. The National Home Security Alliance advises DIYers to place their ladder one foot from the wall for every four feet it rises above the ground. Test your ladders for their sturdiness prior to beginning work so you aren't tempted to use a subpar ladder.

- Be especially careful with power tools. Power tools can do a lot and they're fun to use. But it's important that DIYers do not let fun distract them from safety. The Power Tool Institute urges power tool users to wear personal protective equipment, including eye and hearing protection and a dust mask, whenever using power tools. The PTI also advises users to make sure tools are powered down before plugging them in and to inspect the tool before using it. Inspections can confirm that all guards are in place and that tools are up to the task at hand. Much like it's unsafe to overreach on a ladder, overreaching when using power tools increase the risk for mistakes, accidents and injuries.

- Avoid electrical work. Complicated electrical work is best left to the professionals. Estimates from the Electrical Safety Foundation International indicate that electrical malfunctions cause more than 50,000 house fires each year. Such malfunctions can occur for myriad reasons, and a lack of experience working with electrical circuits and breakers could make homes vulnerable to malfunctions and fires. It's also worth noting that homeowners' insurance policies may

not cover damage caused by DIY electrical work. So at the very least homeowners should contact their insurance providers to determine if any accidents or injuries caused by DIY electrical work would be covered by their policies.

DIY renovation projects can save homeowners a lot of money, but those savings aren't worth compromising your safety and the safety of your loved ones.



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Signs it is time to overhaul your kitchen

Remodeling a kitchen adds value to a home. Remodeling Magazine’s “Cost vs. Value Report” indicates mid-range kitchen remodels cost about \$66,000, and homeowners can expect to recover about 60 to 80 percent of that cost at resale.

Homeowners may wonder if remodeling their kitchens is worth the investment. But homeowners should not just consider cost, but also the current conditions of their kitchens when deciding if a renovation project is the right move to make. These signs indicate it may be time to renovate a kitchen.

- Breakers are triggered: If the lights go dark from a tripped circuit breaker every time you try to microwave and run the toaster oven at the same time, your wiring is likely not up to the task of handling the workload and could be out of date. A kitchen remodel will assess wiring load needs and an electric overhaul may be necessary.
- Lack of storage: One of the biggest hassles homeowners encounter in their kitchens is a lack of storage space. If making a meal involves a Jenga-like stacking and rearranging of kitchen tools, or if an avalanche occurs whenever you search for an item, you might need more storage. A carefully planned redesign can achieve this, even in a smaller kitchen.

- Outdated appliances: Even if your appliances are not avocado green or mustard yellow relics of the 1970s, they might still need to be replaced. According to CRD Design, appliances are only expected to last around 10 to 15 years. If appliances have become unsafe or energy hogs, it could be time for a remodel.
- Family is expanding (or shrinking): Kitchens often are the heart of a home. They need to meet the needs of the family that resides in that home. A remodel can add space as needed. On the flip side, when a couple becomes empty nesters, kitchens can be redesigned

- and downsized to reflect their new needs and desires, such as the addition of a wine chiller or espresso station.
- Poor lighting: Task lighting is essential in a kitchen, but older homes may not be equipped with lighting where it’s most needed. A carefully designed remodel can improve lighting with under-cabinet lights, pendants, overhead lighting, and even natural light to make the space attractive and more functional.
- Frequent run-ins: The notion that you can have too many cooks in the kitchen refers to having too many people trying to

- pitch in or offer their opinions. However, it also can apply to when too many people are gathering in a small space. Redesigning a kitchen can improve the efficiency of a space and make the room feel larger.
- Aesthetic appeal: Many kitchen remodels have been inspired by unsightly kitchens. Cosmetic changes can lead to big improvements.
- Kitchen renovations can add instant appeal and help address issues that tend to plague outdated rooms.



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Turn your yard into a vacation-worthy oasis

Warm weather means more time to relax outdoors. For those homeowners lucky enough to have entertaining spaces outside, spring and summer provides plenty of opportunities to enjoy fresh air under the sun or stars.

Over the last few years, families have become especially familiar with what works about their yards and where there is room for improvement. Pandemic-related travel restrictions and early stay-at-home mandates resulted in plenty of time spent in backyards on staycations. Even though many such restrictions have been lifted, homeowners may have seen the benefits of having functional respites right outside their doors.

A backyard renovation can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000. The American Society of Landscape Architects suggests homeowners budget the cost of a major landscaping project at between 5 and 10 percent of their home's value. Large or small, here are ways to make an outdoor oasis at home.

Create living privacy

Living in close proximity to neighbors may make privacy harder to come by. Wood or vinyl fences, however effective, may not provide the all-natural look many people desire. Vertical gardening, which trains easy-care vines like English ivy,

Clematis or various climbing roses to grow on trellis or fencing adds greenery and privacy. Hedges and fast-growing shrubs also can be used for natural barriers.

Install a pool

Pools are the ultimate spots to cool off on hot days. An elaborately shaped in-ground pool can blend in with the landscape and offer the ultimate hang-out zone. However, above-ground pools also serve the purpose and are more budget-friendly. Stock tank pools are popular among those who want minimal pool expenditure or have small spaces to work with. Stock tanks are metal vessels traditionally used as watering holes for livestock. They also can be "adult kiddie pools" when combined with some plumbing. Galvanized steel frames make them sturdy. With floats and other accessories, they can become the perfect oasis.

Provide outdoor atmosphere

Create a bespoke bistro vibe by using freestanding planters and posts along with hanging lights to make an intimate outdoor hangout spot at night. For those with permanent structures, like a deck or a gazebo, lights can be strung across the area or on railings or edging.

Extend the living space

Decks and patios can help make outdoor entertaining areas more comfortable

by eliminating the need to sit on the grass or gravel. Plus, they add another "room" to the home. When paired with weatherproof patio furniture, such as sofas, loungers and tables, a private seating area can be crafted and utilized for any number of entertaining desires.

Hang a hammock

Few things evoke feelings of relaxation better than a hammock. Fitted between

two trees (or two posts if trees are sparse), a hammock is an ideal place to grab a nap or read a book.

Additional oasis-inspired ideas include outdoor kitchens, letting up lanterns, cascading water features, and bird feeders to attract the sounds of nature.



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How to care for perennials

Perennials can add color and vibrancy to any garden. One of the more desirable components of perennials is that they come back year after year, meaning homeowners do not have to invest in a gardenful of new flowers every year. That can add up to considerable savings. Perennials often form the foundation of beautiful gardens.

Annuals only grow for one season, produce seeds and then die. However, perennials die back to the ground every autumn and their roots survive the winter. So the plants reemerge in the spring, according to The Farmer's Almanac. Some perennials are short-lived, meaning they will come back a few consecutive years; others will last for decades.

Though planted perennials require less maintenance than annuals, they are not completely maintenance-free. Certain care is needed to help perennials thrive, and that starts with the soil. In fact, soil is the single most important factor for growing healthy plants. Penn State Extension says most perennials grow ideally in well drained, fertile soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. In addition, or-

ganic matter can improve soil texture and water-holding ability.

When including perennials in the garden, make sure you wait for the right time to plant them. The ideal time is during the spring or fall. Perennials come as container-grown perennials, which already have been established in the soil. Bare-root perennials are just roots that are often packed in peat moss. In order to plant bare-root perennials, soak the roots in water for several minutes before gently planting in the ground, indicates the how-to resource Tip Bulletin.

Perennials should be watered deeply, especially during the first growing season. However, the soil should never be overly dry or wet. Most perennials do not need to be fertilized heavily. A single application in the spring typically is all that's needed.

Care along the way can include dead-heading spent flowers so that plants can use their energy on seed production and re-blooming. Perennials should be divided when they grow large, every three to four years when the plants are not in bloom. Perennials produce fewer flowers or may look

sickly when the time has passed to divide them. Early spring often is a good time to divide perennials, advises The Farmer's Almanac.

A thick layer of mulch can help perennials to overwinter successfully. Perennials planted in containers will need to be transplanted into the garden before it gets cold

because most containers cannot thoroughly insulate perennial roots.

Apart from these strategies, perennials pretty much take care of themselves. As long as sunlight requirements match plant needs, the perennials should thrive.



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6 ways to make your garden more successful

Homeowners enjoy gardening for many different reasons. In addition to adding beauty to a property, gardens can offset grocery costs by yielding tasty produce. They also offer important habitats and food sources for both insects and animals.

While growing a vegetable or flower garden can turn into a rewarding hobby, or even a passion, gardening also can be overwhelming — particularly when the results are less than stellar. Novice gardeners have scores of resources at their disposal, including the advice of gardeners who have made mistakes and learned from them. The following guidance can make home gardens that much more successful.

1. Start small.

You may have visions of an expansive garden growing rows of crops or acres of flowers. But it is smart to start small and build on what you find successful, which includes plants that thrive in your lawn and garden.

This also is beneficial if you are unsure of vegetable yields. Several blooming plants producing bushels of crops can be overwhelming, especially if you can't get to harvesting or cooking them in a timely fashion.

2. Assess the soil.

Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce

strong, hardy plants, according to the gardening resource GrowVeg. Nourish soil with organic matter, such as manure, compost, shredded leaves, and natural mulch. Add this organic matter in the off-season to give it enough time to be incorporated into the ground before spring. You can have your soil tested for pH and other characteristics that make it friendly or averse to plants at a local garden center.

3. Arm yourself with knowledge.

Do you know how deeply to plant seeds and how far apart to space plants? Are you aware of the sunlight needs of certain flowers or plants? If not, read the packaging and do your research so your plants have the best chance of not only sprouting, but also surviving. Many people prefer to start seedlings indoors in late winter and then transfer those plants outdoors when they are stronger and more established.

4. Sit in your yard and observe.

Watch the way the sunlight dances over areas of your landscape. Take note of which areas get the most sun and shade. This will help you plan what to plant and where to plant it. Vegetable gardens tend to need ample sunlight to bear pick-worthy produce. You can give plants a leg up by growing them in optimal conditions.

5. Choose hardy varieties.

Certain plants have been bred to thrive in your climate, including heat-tolerant plants for climates with sweltering summer sun. Consult with a local gardening center to figure out which plant zone you are in and which plants will do best within that zone.

6. Use rainwater.

Rainwater contains fewer contaminants and additives than tap water, which can benefit garden plants. Collect rainwater in rain

barrels and use irrigation systems to deliver it to the garden.

Home gardens can yield many gifts, from flowers to fruit. Beginners can utilize some time-tested strategies to increase their chances of planting a successful garden.



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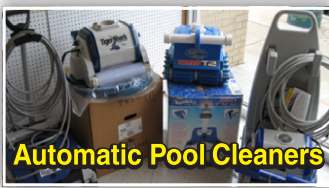
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Tips to improve WiFi around the house

Speedy, reliable internet is something people have quickly grown accustomed to. That's no doubt why dropped WiFi signals can be so frustrating.

Various things can contribute to slow or interrupted Wi-Fi. As a result, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to address underperforming Wi-Fi. But that's good news, as it means there's an assortment of strategies that consumers can try to improve the Wi-Fi in their homes.

- Upgrade your router. Many people rent their routers from their internet service providers, but it may surprise some to learn that they can buy their own. Buying your own router can be beneficial in various ways, not the least of which is it can save money. Router rental fees vary, but they typically cost between \$10 and \$15 per month. Consumers will save money in the long run by buying their own router rather than renting one from their ISP. When buying their own routers, consumers also can pick from a host of options, including routers with strong per-

formance ratings that may contribute to better WiFi performance.

- Set up automatic firmware updates. It's easy to forget a router after it's been plugged in and internet service starts working. However, manufacturers routinely issue firmware updates to improve router performance. Turning on automatic updates may improve WiFi performance, and such updates also can provide a host of additional benefits, including added security measures.

- Relocate the router. PCMag.com notes that the location of the router can affect WiFi performance. If possible, locate the router in the center of the home so it can easily reach all parts of the house. Locating wireless routers away from walls and other obstructions also may improve performance.

- Switch frequencies. Switching frequencies can help wireless consumers whose service might be adversely affected by congestion. Consumer Reports notes that wireless congestion can affect WiFi performance in apartment buildings and densely populated

neighborhoods. In such instances, consumers can check their routers to see if they're running on the 2.4 GHz frequency band. If so, switching them to the 5 GHz band, which has more channels and is likely to be less

congested, may improve WiFi performance. Slow and/or interrupted WiFi signals can be very frustrating. Thankfully, various strategies can help consumers quickly remedy such issues.



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