

Spring Home Improvement



 MediaNews Group

Your guide to fixing up indoor spaces

Around the house

Spring is the perfect season for home renovations **PAGE 4**

Money matters

10 ways to get a nicer home with just \$20 **PAGE 12**

Decorating

8 steps to painting a room like a pro **PAGE 22**

SPRING HOME IMPROVEMENT » STORY INDEX

- **Spring is the perfect season** for home renovations **Page 4**
- **How to arrange** flowers like a pro **Page 6**
- **Brighten every room** in your home with plants **Page 8**
- **The case for talking** to your houseplants **Page 9**
- **We tested five TikTok** cleaning hacks. Here's what worked **Page 10**
- **10 ways to get a nicer** home with just \$20 **Page 12**
- **Why it's hard to hire** a handyman or contractor: what to do about it **Page 14**
- **4 ways to personalize** a cookie-cutter home **Page 16**
- **There's an order to decorating** a space. Designers share their 9 steps **Page 18**
- **Choosing the right** interior paint color **Page 20**
- **8 steps to painting** a room like a pro **Page 22**
- **How to paint your floors** so they'll look great for years **Page 24**
- **Your ceiling deserves** some love. Here are 5 ideas **Page 26**
- **Go all in on your favorite color** with a monochrome room **Page 28**
- **How to refresh a beat-up** refrigerator with paint **Page 30**
- **How to spray paint** just about anything **Page 31**
- **How to paint the brick** and tile around a gas fireplace insert **Page 32**
- **Peel-and-stick tile** is all over social media. But is it that easy? **Page 34**
- **Need new appliances?** Here's how to save without sacrificing quality **Page 36**
- **Pay attention to these details** when shopping for a garbage disposal **Page 38**
- **Why does mold** on my walls come back, even after cleaning with bleach? **Page 39**
- **Bathtubs range from basic** to spa-worthy. Here's how to choose **Page 40**
- **6 things to know** about shopping for wall-to-wall carpeting **Page 42**
- **You can paint vinyl windows**, but should you? **Page 44**



SPRING HOME IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

6250 Metropolitan Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, MI 48312

CONTACT US
Customer service/circulation:
586-731-1809

ADVERTISING
Advertising: 586-716-8100

STAFF
Publisher, Michigan Region:
Greg Mazanec,
mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com
Vice president of news:
Don Wyatt, 248-285-9652,
dwyatt@medianewsgroup.com
Custom Content Editor:
Jason Alley, 734-246-0143
jalley@medianewsgroup.com

A 21st Century Media
publication managed by
MediaNews Group

Over 50 Dining Room Tables! Over 30 Bedroom Sets On Display Elran Upholstered Furniture!

Over 24,000 Square Feet Of Amish Furniture



Largest Selection of
Amish Furniture in the State

Layaway Available

Benchley's Amish Furniture
Clare

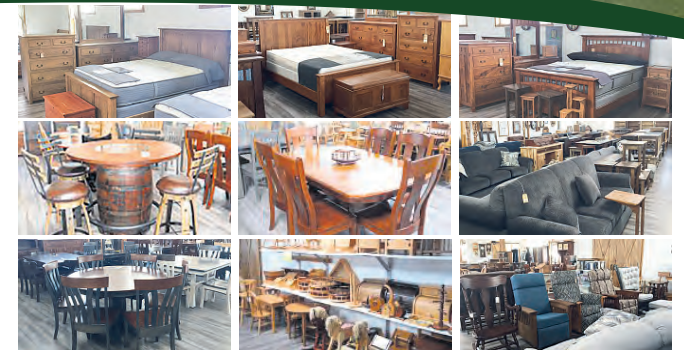
(989) 386-7951 • Open Tues. - Sat. 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
benchleysfurniture.com



DOVER ROAD FURNITURE

Solid Oak and Cherry Furniture. Tables, Chairs, Hutches, Bedroom Sets, Sofas, Recliners, Mattresses and more

William & Mattie Byler • 2985 E. Dover Rd. Farwell
(3 miles North of Clare on Old 27, 1 Mile west on Dover Road.)



(989) 386-4164 Let it Ring • M-F 10-4:30 • Sat. 10-4

AROUND THE HOUSE

Spring is the perfect season for home renovations

By Rob Kobylasz

For MediaNews Group

As the weather starts to warm up and the days slowly become longer, you may start to wonder if spring is a good time to take on any of the home improvement projects you've added to your to-do list over the winter. The answer is — it depends on what type of project you're considering doing.



Rob Kobylasz

For many of us, winter is a time when we spend a lot of time in our homes.

So naturally, home renovations pick up in the spring when the sun comes out and we are feeling motivated to begin tackling some of the projects you've been in such close proximity to all winter.

Aside from the obvious spring home projects, such as landscaping, here are some of the best projects to take on before the summer heat.

Replacing your windows

During the cold winter months, you may have noticed some of your windows are beginning to get drafty. If that's the case, then springtime is the perfect time to replace your windows to help keep the heat out of your home when summer arrives.

If you're unsure if you need new windows, check them for the following signs:

- Gaps around the window frame or a rotting frame
- Air leaks when the window is closed
- Damaged weather stripping
- Condensation building up inside double- or triple-paned windows



A basement remodel done by Cambridge Construction & Remodeling, LLC.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB KOBYLASZ

sation building up inside double- or triple-paned windows

If your windows are relatively new, some companies offer warranties to fix some of the issues above. If you don't know who installed your windows, a call to your city or township's building department may help find the name of the contractor on the permit.

Upgrading your insulation

A poorly insulated home can cost you hundreds of dollars in heating and cooling costs over a year. According to the Department of Energy, adding insulation to your attic, floors, crawl spaces and accessible basement rim joists can save you up to 20% on your home's heating and cooling

costs.

You may need to update your home's insulation if you notice:

- Ice dams on your roof
- Fluctuating temperatures in rooms throughout your home
- High energy bills
- Cold walls, floors or ceilings

Undergoing interior remodeling

Spring can be a great

time to start an interior remodeling project, such as a bathroom, kitchen or basement. The thought of being stuck in your home during a remodeling project in the winter can cause some to delay deciding to start work until the weather turns for the better.

No matter the steps taken to reduce the mess, when you're remodeling, there's bound to be a little

dust. By choosing to start an interior remodeling project in the springtime when the weather is warm and you can get out of the house, it's less likely to affect your daily routine as much as it could in other seasons.

Repairing or installing new gutters

Spring showers can wreak havoc on your home's



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB KOBYLASZ

A bathroom remodel done by Cambridge Construction & Remodeling, LLC.

foundation if your gutters are not functioning how they should. The main job of your gutter system is to move water away from your home's foundation. If they are damaged or clogged, rainwater will continue to pool around your foundation, eventually leading to some problems.

If you're not sure if you

need new gutters, check for cracks or breaks at the seams, peeling paint or water damage around areas where the gutters should be directing water away from.

Applying a new coat of paint

If you're a DIYer, painting one or more rooms in your

house can be a quick, relatively inexpensive way to rejuvenate your home. And spring is one of the most popular times people decide to paint. With warming weather, you're able to open up your windows while you work, removing any fumes.

If you're not up for painting yourself, hiring a professional can help ensure your

home's new paint job is one you're satisfied with.

Time and money

When it comes to home renovations, choosing the right time for you and your lifestyle is extremely important. Many choose spring because of the numerous benefits of the season. Not only does it offer you the

freedom to get outside during the project, but it's also the time when contractors take advantage of the longer days and are less likely to experience delays due to winter weather, leading to a more seamless and efficient project. Contractors' schedules typically fill up quickly for the summer, so spring allows you to get in front of

the summer rush, ensuring you get your project done in a timely manner.

Rob Kobylasz is a licensed residential builder in Michigan and owner of Cambridge Construction & Remodeling, LLC, a home renovation company in metropolitan Detroit. Contact him at 734-931-0017.

DECORATING

How to arrange flowers like a professional

By Michelle Brunner

Special to *The Washington Post*

Most of the time, DIY floral arranging involves bringing home a bouquet or two of cut flowers, depositing them in a generic glass vase scrounged from under the sink and then wondering why they look a bit ... off. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Part of the skill of flower arranging is matching the blooms to the vessel, so we presented floral designers with three types of containers to get their fool-proof tips on how to create artful, professional-looking arrangements at home — no experience necessary.

Here's what they recommend:

Container: Short and squat

Recommended flowers: Hydrangeas, roses, dahlias, carnations, ranunculus, pincushion flowers, sea oats

Pro tip: Buy twice as many flowers as you think you need.

When it comes to designing an arrangement for a compact vase, more is definitely more. "If you're doing a low, tight arrangement, better to have it be full and lush than have it look sparse," says Ami Wilber, floral event decor designer at the Hillwood Museum. Plan to buy enough flowers to fill twice the size of the vase opening. "Once you cut them down to size, they often don't take up as much space as you thought they would," she says.

To begin any arrangement, use floral shears or sharp scissors to cut the end of each flower at a 45-degree angle, and strip the foliage from the part of the stems that will be sub-

merged in water.

Short stems are less stable, so you may want to add some support to a low arrangement.

One easy trick is to tape a grid across the top of the container with clear floral tape or Scotch tape. "It allows you to have an armature for the flowers to slip into, so it holds the shape and style of the design better," says Rachel Gang of Helen Olivia Floral Design in Alexandria, Virginia.

Fill the container with water first, then begin the arrangement with one or two "mass flowers." A mass flower is a single-stem bloom with one large, full head. Gang likes to start with a hydrangea, or two, because it provides a forgiving base and takes up a lot of real estate in the vase, then she adds roses or dahlias, and smaller flowers such as ranunculus or scabiosa, also known as pincushion flowers.

For a budget-conscious option, Wilber suggests old-school carnations. "I know that some people might have a strong aversion to them, but they lend a nice textural quality to this type of arrangement," she says.

Grasses, such as sea oats and seeded eucalyptus, can help fill out the arrangement. "Even if the container is really squat, I still like to have some sort of wispy gesture that comes up from the body of the arrangement to lend it a bit of movement. Just make sure it doesn't block the view of the people sitting across the table from you," says Wilber.

Container: Tall and cylindrical

Recommended flowers: Delphiniums, larkspurs, gladioli, sunflowers, lilies,

pompon dahlias, cosmos

Pro tip: To give short stems a boost, fill the bottom of your vase with pebbles or lemons and limes.

Tall arrangements are meant to be showy, and their verticality is a part of their drama. "My rule of thumb is that the arrangement should be no more than 1 ½ times the height of the container, and that's to create stability for the arrangement," says Wilber. "Anything taller than that and you run the risk of having it not be balanced."

For a 12-inch vase, the flowers should add no more than 18 inches in height, so the arrangement would be 30 inches tall, measuring from the base of the vessel. If your stems are too short to touch the bottom, Wilber recommends filling the first few inches of your container with pebbles or lemons and limes.

Jeanne Ha, founder and president of Washington Flower School in Takoma Park, Maryland, likes to start with tall "line flowers" to establish the arrangement's highest point. "A line flower will have a long, sturdy stem and florets that grow along the stem, such as delphinium, larkspur or gladioli," she says. Other examples of line flowers include snapdragons, Veronicas and bells of Ireland.

Next, Ha creates "the face" of the arrangement with the main, or focal point, flowers. These could include any long-stemmed blooms such as sunflowers, lilies, calla lilies and some roses.

For the placement of the main flowers, Wilber likes to think in odd-number increments. "For instance, you could create a triangle with three large focal-point flowers, then fill in that tri-



WASHINGTON POST PHOTO BY MARVIN JOSEPH

Ami Wilber, floral event decor designer at the Hillwood Museum, sourced most of the flowers for the arrangements in this story from the grounds of the Hillwood Museum in Washington, D.C.



WASHINGTON POST PHOTO BY MARVIN JOSEPH

Ami Wilber, floral event decor designer at the Hillwood Museum, created this short arrangement using dahlias, hydrangeas, ranunculus, celosia, basil and sea oats.

angle with other blooms, such as pompon dahlias or smaller zinnias,” she says.

Stagger the largest blooms for a more natural look. And don’t forget greenery. Wilber recommends incorporating foliage and grasses for texture and movement. “You want something with a draping quality so the arrangement doesn’t feel too static in the container,” she says.

Or, keep it very simple. If you don’t want to mess with a lot of different blooms, Ha suggests sticking to just one type of line flower, such as a bunch of delphinium, for a classic look.

Container: Pedestal bowl

Recommended flowers: Dahlias, peonies, roses, tulips, ranunculus, eucalyptus

Pro tip: Adding structural reinforcement, such as floral frog, is usually necessary with this type of container.

No other vessel lends itself to romantic floral arrangements quite like a pedestal bowl, a container that often made appearances in Dutch and Flemish botanical paintings of the 17th century. But the wide-mouthed shape pres-

ents a challenge for the home arranger. “It’s shallow with a very large opening, so mechanics become even more important,” says Gang.

For structural reinforcement, use a floral frog or line the inside of the vase with a cushion of chicken wire. For the latter, cut a square of chicken wire and fold it into a pillow or ball shape, twisting any sharp ends inward so they don’t scratch your container. Nestle it into the vase. This should create a framework for stems to slide into easily. Taping a grid over the opening can help, too.

Wilber begins by filling in greenery and branches — which make up the tallest part of the arrangement — to create an architectural skeleton. “I like to green 75% of the arrangement before bringing in flowers,” she says. For foliage, she recommends eucalyptus, ruscus, ferns, oak leaf branches or magnolia leaves. Place larger blooms such as dahlias, peonies or roses near the base of the arrangement — this will create a bit of support for the other flowers. Next, bring in blooms with some movement or curve to the stem, such as

tulips or ranunculus. Wilber is especially fond of the larger Cloony ranunculus. “If you think of the Dutch Masters, they painted lilies, tulips, roses, that sort of thing, so you can let that theme guide you,” she says. Finally, artful imperfection is the key to this look, so incorporate an element that seems loose or off-kilter, such as a wayward tendril or a cascading vine.

For the palette, Wilber likes working with contrasting colors, such as blues and oranges, because it makes for a more dynamic arrangement. Gang prefers to stick to hues that

neighbor each other on the color wheel — for example, a citrusy palette of coral, orange and peach. If you opt to go monochrome, incorporate different tones and textures to keep the arrangement interesting. And make sure your blooms are properly hydrated. Says Ha, “On the first night after an arrangement is finished, the flowers drink the most, so refill the water to the top the next morning.”

Michelle Brunner is a writer in D.C. who covers interior design and culture.

GREENERY

Brighten every room in your home with plants

By Melinda Myers

Anytime is a great time to add a few houseplants to your home.

Adding greenery indoors expands your gardening opportunities and provides the many benefits of living with and tending plants. It can boost your mood and reduce stress while adding beauty or nutritious food to your home.

Increase productivity and creativity by including plants in your home or work office. Greenery helps reduce stress even when working at your desk or tackling homework at the end of a long day.

Set a few plants on or near your desk or other workspace.

Expand your growing opportunities with the help of stylish, energy-efficient full spectrum plant lights to fit any décor while directing light where it is needed to promote healthy plant growth.

Boost the flavor and nutrition of meals year-round by growing leafy greens and herbs in a sunny window or under artificial lights. Start plants from seeds or purchase transplants to grow indoors.

Place your indoor kitchen garden in a brightly lit location, free of cold drafts and with easy access to harvest and use.

Turn family meals and friend gatherings into unique and memorable experiences by enlisting them to harvest some greens for their salad and herbs to season their meals.

Grow ferns, orchids, bromeliads and other humidity-loving plants in your bathroom.

Consider these and other low-light plants

like cast iron, pothos and philodendron if natural light is limited. You'll enjoy stepping out of the shower into a mini tropical zone allowing you to ease into your day.

Get a good night's sleep with a bit of homegrown aromatherapy in the bedroom.

Grow lavender, rosemary, chamomile and other soothing herbs in your bedroom near a sunny window, on a shelf, or in another naturally or artificially lit, bright location. Just give the plants a pet to release their fragrance into the air before crawling into bed for a long restful sleep.

Create a miniature tropical, moss or desert garden in a terrarium to serve as a focal point in any room or as a centerpiece on the dining room table.

Use an open terrarium for succulents and other plants that need airflow, lower humidity, and space to grow.

Enlist closed terrariums for moss and tropical plants that benefit from the high humidity and condensation that provides continual watering.

Indoor greenery always makes a nice addition when rethinking or refreshing your home décor in any space. You and your family will enjoy the beauty and many other benefits plants provide.

Melinda Myers is the author of more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening" and "Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition." Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and her website is MelindaMyers.com.



Terrarium

PHOTO COURTESY OF MELINDAMYERS.COM

GREENERY

The case for talking to your houseplants

By Stacey Colino

Special To The Washington Post

Plants don't interrupt when you're speaking. They don't argue or ask difficult questions. And regardless of whether they're actually listening, research has shown them to be a calming presence. It's no wonder, then, that so many of us talk to ours.

In a 2022 survey by Trees.com, 50% of the 1,250 respondents reported talking to their plants and/or trees. When asked why, 65% said they believe it helps them grow. The research, however, isn't definitive about this point. While studies have found that vibrations caused by sound do affect plants, the jury's still out on whether the human voice offers any specific benefit.

For many plant owners, though, the science is beside the point. Marquis Matson, co-founder of the blog the Indoor Nursery, says she talks to her plants every day because "it feels nice. ... I think plants get a sense of community from my talking to them and that keeps them going."

"One thing humans are really good at is anthropomorphizing — we talk to all kinds of things that aren't human, like our dogs and cats," says Cindy McPherson Frantz, a professor of psychology and environmental studies at Oberlin College in Ohio. "We're hardwired to project a sentient mind, intentionality, or feelings onto other beings or objects — and to want to connect to things outside ourselves. Plants can fulfill that need."

On the plant side of the equation, a study in a 2003 issue of the journal *Ultrasonics* investigated the effects of classical music and the sounds of birds, insects and water on the growth of

Chinese cabbage and cucumber. The conclusion? Both forms of sound exposure increased the vegetables' growth.

In a 2015 study published in the *International Journal of Integrative Sciences, Innovation and Technology*, researchers exposed marigold and chickpea plants to light Indian music as well as to traffic noise: They found that both types of plants grew and developed better — gaining increased height, a greater number of leaves, and a healthier look — after being exposed to the music for four hours per day, but not to the traffic sounds.

"Plants definitely respond to vibrations in their environment, which can cause plants to grow differently and become more resistant to falling over," says Heidi Appel, a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Toledo in Ohio. "Those vibrations can come from airborne sounds or insects moving on the plants themselves. And plants will respond differently to tones and music than to silence." Still, she points out: "While sound absolutely matters to plants, we don't know if talking to them makes them grow differently."

Despite the lack of studies and evidence about the benefits of talking to your plants, there is at least one theoretical perk: "If we identify with a living organism that we're tasked with taking care of, we're going to take better care of it," Appel says.

For example, if talking to your plants helps you feel more connected to them, you might water, dust and prune them more regularly and take other measures to care for them and help them thrive.

Regardless of whether



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

While studies have found that vibrations caused by sound do affect plants, the jury's still out on whether the human voice offers any specific benefit.

talking to the plants helps them, does it help us, as human beings? In that same 2022 Trees.com survey, 62% of the participants who reported chatting up their greenery said they did so because it helped their own mental health.

They may have been onto something: Plenty of research shows that taking care of plants is beneficial to our well-being.

One study in a 2018 issue of the journal *HortScience* found that transplanting plants reduced mental stress and anxiety in young adults. And regularly spending an hour gardening has been found to improve mood and reduce stress among healthy women, according to a study in a 2022 issue of *PLoS One*.

Stefan Bucur of Lewisville, Texas, says he and his wife, Maegan, regularly talk to their plants. "Taking care of plants and interacting with them can be a mindful and calming practice, and talking to them enhances this experience," says Bucur, founder and owner of *Rhythm of the Home*, a home improvement website. "In addition, talking to plants can help us practice gratitude and appreciation."

While there isn't published research on whether talking to plants is therapeutic for people, there are plausible reasons it might be, experts say. For one thing, it may come to us naturally. "As humans, we often speak to what we're caring for — it's built-in," says Patricia Hasbach, a psy-

chotherapist with Northwest EcoTherapy in Eugene, Oregon, and author of "Grounded: A Guided Journal to Help You Reconnect with the Power of Nature — and Yourself." "It helps us be very present or mindful."

For another thing, it can be a way of expressing thoughts and feelings out loud, in an effort to make sense of them. "I think of talking to plants as a way of talking to ourselves," says Kenneth R. Yeager, a social worker and director of the Stress Trauma and Resilience Program at Ohio State University. "As we're talking to our plants, we're talking to ourselves — and formalizing our thought process." In other words, talking to the flora in your home can be a way of tuning in to the

ways you talk to yourself (aka your self-talk) and exploring how you're thinking about something. "Putting our thoughts and feelings into words is somewhat therapeutic," Frantz says.

Talking to your plants is also a relatively low-risk proposition. "You might not want to do it in front of someone else," says Elizabeth Diehl, director of therapeutic horticulture at the Wilmot Botanical Gardens College of Medicine at the University of Florida. However, when you talk to your plants, they are, quite literally, a captive audience. "Plants don't judge," Diehl says. "You can be who you want to be and say what you want to say — and they're happy just for you to be taking care of them."

AROUND THE HOUSE

We tested five TikTok cleaning hacks. Here's what worked

By Kalina Newman

Special to *The Washington Post*

On TikTok, a subgenre exists for cleaning hacks that promise to easily turn grimy bathrooms, serious spills and piles of dishes into sparkling, organized neatness.

Of course, we know the internet isn't always the most truthful. As someone who is addicted to watching #CleanTok videos and who could definitely use a few home improvement pointers, I set out to test some of the most viral cleaning advice. Could the tips actually help me tidy my apartment better while also saving me time?

Read on for the results, ordered from best to worst and ranked on cleanliness, efficiency and "hackability" — i.e., the likelihood I would try it again or suggest it to a friend.

Dust baseboards and trim with dryer sheets

In a video that was viewed more than 500,000 times, user @ken.c.long asks: "Have you ever used dryer sheets to clean your baseboards? Well, maybe you should." Not only will this trick clean the baseboards, he claims, but the film left behind by the sheets will also prevent more dust from accumulating.

I'll admit: I was biased going into this hack because I've done it before and can attest that it absolutely works. One sweep with a dryer sheet along the trim of my walls picks up all



PHOTO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST BY JENNIFER CHASE

One hack involves using vinegar to clean a garbage disposal.

visible dust and dirt. This time, I ran the sheets along my doors and door frames because I haven't been as mindful about dusting there and I was very satisfied by how much they were able to clean. Two weeks later, I checked the same spots, and, sure enough, they were still dust-free. So, if you already have a package of dryer sheets, you've also got an effective duster — and preventive measure.

Cleanliness: 5/5

Efficiency: 5/5

Hackability: 5/5

Fight pet hair with one rubber glove

Animal rescuer Felicia Wilson shared her secret to keeping her home free of pet hair last April, and it has since gained more than a half-million views. The key? A rubber dish glove. That's it. Put one on and run it over a surface with a lot of pet hair, and the hair will allegedly cling to the glove and come right off.

My cat Honey loves to hang out on my velvet couch, leaving behind

plenty of hair. Quick backstory: I was once influenced by TikTok to buy an approximately \$30 reusable contraption called the Chom-Chom pet hair remover. It's definitely better than your average lint roller, but the clingy part wore out after about a year. All in all, not worth the money, in my opinion. Would TikTok again steer me to a subpar pet hair solution?

Not this time! Using a glove I already owned, I followed Wilson's instructions. It took six or seven firm

sweeps to collect all the cat hair, but the glove picked it up and left my couch and my cat's favorite blanket totally fur-free.

Cleanliness: 4/5

Efficiency: 4/5

Hackability: 4/5

Deodorize your garbage disposal with pantry items

Nearly 100,000 people have liked a video in which user @partyideas4you (previously @homehacksfor-you) describes a favorite

"kitchen cleaning hack": Pour about two cups of baking soda into the garbage disposal, let it sit for 30 minutes, add white distilled vinegar until it stops fizzing, then finish with a pot of boiling water to deep-clean your disposal and keep it smelling fresh. Repeat about once a week.

If you're worried about potentially messing up your disposal like I was, plumbing expert Paul Abrams from Roto-Rooter Plumbing & Water Cleanup assured me via email that baking soda and vinegar make an excellent cleaning combination though he did offer a few revisions to the TikTok instructions.

Abrams says two cups of baking soda may be a little heavy for a single application and that you can opt for one cup of baking soda and one cup of vinegar instead. And he does not recommend using the boiling water unless your sink is made of stainless steel or porcelain over steel because superhot water can cause cracks "in some of the newer composite sink materials," such as quartz or granite, and "very hot water from the tap is more than adequate." Luckily, my sink is stainless steel.

In preparation, I made sure to run plenty of onions and garlic down the disposal. Cleaning it was a simple, if lengthy, process. I gave a few solid shakes of Arm & Hammer to coat the drain, then let it sit for a half-hour. It took a few glugs of vinegar — no more than a cup — until the fizzing stopped. Fi-

nally, I tipped in the pot of boiling water.

Once everything had drained, I immediately noticed the sink looked sparkling clean and that any lingering food smells were gone. I plan on incorporating this into my cleaning routine once a month. For a two-person apartment, once a week feels like overkill.

Cleanliness: 5/5

Efficiency: 3/5

Hackability: 3/5

Use a Swiffer for sparkling windows

Jacqueline Stein's video, viewed more than 65,000 times, assures viewers that cleaning windows with a microfiber towel attached to a Swiffer sweeper "takes less than 5 minutes and your windows will be GORGEOUS!"

I have tall windows that I ordinarily need a step stool to clean, so I thought, "Alright, let's give it a go." After dousing a microfiber towel with cleaner, I secured it onto the corners of the Swiffer pad. (I used Safeway brand glass cleaner; in the video, Stein uses a mixture of vinegar, water and dish soap.)

The Swiffer immediately felt very clumsy and awkward to use; there was little control or glide, and it kept flopping around.

Looking back, Stein had suggested dunking the Swiffer into a bucket of cleaning solution. I figured my own materials would be fine, but it took a lot of sprays to soak the towel, and even then, not much was transferred onto the windows.

In the end, I had to ask my 6-foot-3 fiance to directly spray the windows for me.

The consensus?

A step stool, rag and spray (or actual window-cleaning kit) would have done a better job.

Cleanliness: 3/5

Efficiency: 1/5

Hackability: 1/5



PHOTO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST BY JENNIFER CHASE

Using a Swiffer for sparkling windows is one hack looked into.

Clean your disposal with ice

Maybe I did something wrong, but this hack simply did not work for me.

Professional organizer Jamie Hayes went viral over the summer for running lots of ice and water through her garbage disposal until it essentially vomited up a disgusting, brown liquid.

Not only did nothing happen when I tried, but ice also got stuck and came

close to breaking my disposal. I consulted Abrams, who said readers shouldn't feel dissuaded by my failure.

Next time, he suggested adding a bit of ice with the aforementioned baking soda and vinegar, or with a degreasing dishwashing liquid, such as Dawn.

"We think adding ice cubes helps with the cleaning process, and it helps to knock off stuck-on food particles," Abrams says.

Nonetheless, for me, it

was a zero in all categories. Would not recommend.

Cleanliness: 0/5

Efficiency: 0/5

Hackability: 0/5

Where I drew the line: Stick a container of Fabuloso in your toilet tank

Wary from my garbage-disposal mishap, I decided not to pursue this hack from TikTok user @lexi_gray_, who cut a hole in a bottle of the cleaning so-

lution Fabuloso and kept it in her toilet tank. Essentially, every time she flushed, a bit of Fabuloso was released into the tank and bowl, allegedly freshening up the toilet automatically.

I envisioned my cat drinking toilet water laced with chemicals, plus the comments for the video screamed: DO NOT DO THIS. Abrams confirmed that commenters were correct.

He warns that the bot-

tle could fall out of position and block moving parts inside your toilet tank, either keeping the toilet from working altogether or causing it to run continuously. And because the shape and size of toilet tanks vary, the likelihood that this would work for everyone is slim. Some things just can't be hacked.

Kalina Newman is a freelance writer in D.C. who covers food and culture.

MONEY MATTERS

10 ways to get a nicer home with just \$20

By Annie Midori
Atherton

Special To *The Washington Post*

I've always hated flipping on a bright light first thing in the morning. Until recently, I assumed there was nothing to be done about this — at least not without buying a new bedside lamp or paying an electrician. Then I read that I could simply get a cheap dimmer that attaches to any old lamp. Now, when I wake up, I slide it to the lowest possible brightness and sip coffee in groggy peace. For \$20, I significantly improved how I start each day.

My dimmer-DIY was a lightbulb moment (bad pun intended). It got me thinking of all the other easy fixes that could probably make our apartment more comfortable or attractive.

Home decor and DIY experts confirmed I was right. Here are 10 ways to upgrade your space for \$20 or less:

1. Upgrade your lighting

As I learned with the table lamp dimmer, lighting can seriously affect your mood. Adding it to my lamp was simple: I just plugged it into the wall outlet, then plugged my lamp into it, as you would with an extension cord.

Or, try trading a regular bulb for a smart lightbulb, whose brightness and temperature you control through your phone (no special smart home system required). Monica Benavidez, the interior stylist behind DIY blog *Monica Wants It*, recommends the kind by Bulbrite which cost about \$18 each (or less if you buy a pack of several). "If I'm crafting, I want the brightest and coolest set-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Wallpaper can be used to give items a new look.

ting, but when I'm working on my blog in the evenings I prefer warm, dim light," she says.

2. Make over light switches

You might not realize it, but switch plates (the covers over light switches and outlets) can visually clutter up a wall. To streamline them, Lauren Comer, of home decor blog *Pinch Plate Party*, suggests swapping in the kind that conceals the screws, which you can find for under \$5 each. With a bigger budget, you could also choose a color

that better matches the room — for instance, replacing white with brass.

3. Feature museum art

Many large museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian, include downloadable public domain art on their websites that's free to anyone. Just be sure to download a high-resolution version so it won't be blurry when printed.

"Once I find art I like, I print posters using a one-hour photo service to create my own art for super

cheap," says Benavidez, who has printed 16-by-20-inch images for as little as \$8. "Then, I use thrifted frames to create a gallery wall. It's a great way to get high-end looking art."

4. Make our own giant art

Extra-large art can get expensive, but you can make your own using little more than wood furring strips (long, flat pieces that cost a couple of dollars apiece at hardware stores), and — of all things — a shower curtain.

To start, use four 1-by-3-

inch furring strips to build a frame, says Cara Newhart, an interior designer and host of the *Make Space* podcast. She suggests using a miter box to make it easier to cut the strips in a straight line (or try asking an employee at a hardware store to cut them for you). From there, you can attach them together using staples and a \$5 bottle of wood glue. Next, stretch the shower curtain over the frame and staple the edges.

5. Add decorative trays or boxes

To wrangle keys, mail and

other household ephemera, interior designer Cassandra LaValle suggests buying decorative boxes or trays. Visual clutter can contribute to stress, but having nice places for everyday items helps keep the chaos at bay. While small storage solutions, sometimes called "trinket dishes," are cheap at large retailers, you can also find unique pieces at thrift stores. Vintage candy bowls, for instance, make elegant holding places for jewelry and toiletries such as cotton balls or Q-tips.

6. Adopt a plant

Research shows that houseplants can make us feel happier and more peaceful in our homes. Though large or rare plants tend to get pricey, more common types — such as pothos and snake plants — can easily be found for under \$20. Research care instructions in advance to choose a variety that will thrive in your space.

Or maybe you have a plant that just needs a snazzier home. Retailers have a host of stylish planter options for under \$20.

7. Get creative with discounted paint

Home improvement stores often sell "mistint" paint at a steep discount. In many cases, these paints have been returned by customers who realized they'd chosen the wrong color.

"It's kind of a crap shoot in terms of what will be available, but they're definitely worth checking out," says Benavidez, who has used this strategy to buy a gallon of paint for \$15.

Depending on the cost, you might be able to coat a small accent wall for under \$20 (use a paint calculator



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Home improvement stores often sell “mistinted” paint at a steep discount. Depending on the cost, you might be able to coat a small accent wall for under \$20.

lator to estimate how much you’ll need).

You could also paint a door or trim work, or an old piece of furniture.

8. Refresh cabinet hardware

While cabinet knobs and handles range widely in price, Benavidez says you can update your existing hardware using only spray paint.

She transformed the chrome drawer pulls in her bathroom with gold paint for \$6 to \$8. Before painting, she sprayed all the

chrome parts with heavy-duty primer, letting them dry by a fan for 20 minutes. Then she applied a light coat of gold, let it dry, and repeated the process a few more times.

“That’s a quick afternoon project that can make a big impact,” she says. “It still looks great five years later.”

9. Add pattern with fabric

To add a jolt of pattern to a relatively small surface area, such as an accent wall or the inside of a bookshelf, try fabric as a less expensive alternative to wallpaper.

Lifestyle blogger Amber Oliver used a floral print she found for a wall in her former home office.

To attach the material, she sprayed Elmer’s Craftbond Spray Adhesive directly onto the wall, then had a friend help her carefully spread the fabric over it. In a few spots, Oliver added staples to keep edges in place, but she says one benefit of such a busy print is that it hides imperfections.

Another perk of choosing fabric over wallpaper: It’s easier to remove.

Oliver says her accent wall held up for several years before

she moved, at which point she peeled the fabric off without leaving a mark. Though this specific project cost about \$40, she has used the method on the interior of a bookshelf for less than \$20. And, of course, the cost of fabric varies widely, so you can decide how much or how little you want to spend.

10. Make wallpaper furniture

DIY blogger Carrie Waller loved the vintage end table she’d found secondhand, but not its sponge-painted top, so she cov-

ered it with about \$5 worth of peel-and-stick wallpaper.

She sanded down the painted surface, then cleaned it with tack cloth and a dry towel. (If your tabletop is smooth already, you could possibly skip these steps.) She applied the wallpaper, using a wallpaper smoothing tool to get rid of air bubbles and a handled razor blade to trim edges. She says it took only about 30 minutes to transform the table.

Annie Midori Atherton is a writer in Seattle who covers culture, lifestyle, business and parenting.

MONEY MATTERS

Why it's hard to hire a handyman or contractor; what to do about it

By Laura Daily

Special To The Washington Post

For two years, Jennifer Flynn has been reaching out to dozens of highly recommended home improvement companies, handymen, painters and others for some projects at her home. Many have not shown up for appointments, even after confirming them. Others haven't returned her calls. Still others come out and promise an estimate, only to ghost. "I'll contact them and they'll either respond they're too busy or don't respond at all," she says.

It's a frustration shared by many. "It's harder than ever to get tradesmen to commit to a job because there is so much work out there and they can afford to pick and choose," says Kimberly Greenwell, a home education expert and host of My Southern Home TV.

The situation is unlikely to improve in the near future.

There aren't enough tradespeople to go around. Inflation has driven up the cost of doing business. And professionals are weary of spending their time and money to give a free estimate to people who are unlikely to hire them.

The shortage of skilled tradespeople has been at least a decade in the making, says Chris Egner, the chairman of the board of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

"For the last 10 years, few people have chosen to learn a trade because it wasn't seen as a viable career option. On top of that, during



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A license doesn't guarantee quality work, but it does increase the chances that your contractor will have the skills to do the job.

the pandemic, those tradespeople near retirement age left the field. It's starting to get better as younger people understand skilled tradesmen can earn good money and eventually open their own business, but a 10-year gap takes a long time to rebuild," he says.

On top of that, costs for materials, labor, insurance

and fuel have as much as tripled since 2020. According to Egner, who owns a design, build and remodel firm in Milwaukee, that means businesses determine which jobs maximize profit.

A roofer is going to choose a full-blown roof replacement, for example, over a one-hour roof repair.

A remodeling company would rather deploy a crew to a home converting an unfinished basement into a bedroom with an en suite bathroom than a job replacing a bathtub with a shower stall. Others set a minimum price before considering a job.

Then there are comparison-shopping consum-

ers just testing the waters, who — to the tradespeople — feel like a waste of time. "I have 50 people calling with zero interest in hiring me. They simply want a free estimate so they can find the cheapest price," says Alan Archuleta, chairman of the National Association of Home Builders Remodelers Council. "Why

would I drive to your home and give anything to you for free?" To combat this, Archuleta charges for detailed estimates.

These bank-ready proposals range from \$300 for a master bath remodel to \$5,000 for a home addition. If you hire his company, the proposal fee is credited toward the job.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Inflation has driven up the cost of doing business, causing some contractors to be weary of spending time and money to give a free estimate to people who are unlikely to actually hire them.

In the meantime, Flynn's to-do list keeps growing: Replace a bathroom exhaust fan, cement cap three pipes, remove a broken awning, fix a leaking sink, repair a fireplace flue, redo kitchen cabinets, caulk a portion of roof flashing, unstick three painted windows, repaint the kitchen and more.

She isn't afraid to DIY, but she knows her limitations; tile, cabinets and an acceptable paint job with no drips are not in her skill set. "What do I have to say to get tradesmen to take me seriously?" she wonders. "Is there something I should be saying or not saying? Am I too anxious or not anxious enough?"

Greenwell says a home-

owner may need to cast the net as far as possible to find a qualified and reputable company, independent tradesperson or handy person. Ask friends, neighbors, co-workers, your social media network and members of your faith community.

The main question you should ask is not "Are you happy with the work?" but "Would you use them again?" Should you find someone who has a good relationship with a handy person or tradesperson, have them make an introductory call on your behalf.

If you strike out there, try a local real estate agent. "They are a great resource and typically keep a list of roofers, plumbers, electricians and handymen to rec-

ommend to their clients," Greenwell says. Reach out to apartment managers or your homeowners association, if you belong to one. Ask department managers at local home improvement or hardware stores for recommendations.

The NARI website has a list of members you can search by Zip code and specialty. Those who live in rural areas may need to use the Zip code of the nearest major city and may pay a fee for someone to come a longer distance.

Archuleta also suggests finding a local or state home builders association. Call their office, tell them you are looking for a qualified remodeler and ask if they can give you a name. If the

recommended remodeler says the job is too small, ask if they know someone more suited to the task. Another option is the local franchise of a national brand such as those under the Neighborly banner, which owns Mr. Handyman and Mr. Electric, among others.

Once you find prospective tradespeople, share as much information as you can upfront. Email images of the project.

Use Zoom or FaceTime and walk around your home with your tablet or phone to show them that hole in the wall or broken window. Being willing to have a virtual meeting instead of expecting them to drive to your home for a 5-minute meetup shows that you

value their time. If, like Flynn, you have a long list of projects, combine them into one larger job. Time is money for busy tradespeople. A full day or multiple days of work can be more appealing than an hour-long task.

Be open and honest about your project and your budget. If you aren't sure what the project will cost, ask about similar projects in the area. "Typically, a professional should be able to give you a price range," says Egner. Once you've reviewed your financial situation or secured a line of credit, then you can ask for a more detailed estimate.

Another tip from Archuleta: When you do make contact, say, "I'm looking for a

qualified remodeler willing to get my home up-to-date, willing to pay for an estimate and want to work with a qualified person. How can we work together?"

"Remember, I'm interviewing you as much as you are interviewing me," he says.

And don't be afraid to be a squeaky wheel, says Greenwell. "That tradesman may not have staff to call you back, so you have to take ownership of your project," she says. "Don't be obnoxious, but do follow up, so they know you are serious."

Finally, in today's tight market, expect that some tradespeople will be no-shows or ghost you. If that's the case, be glad you aren't working with them.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

“Board ‘n batten” is a centuries-old siding design that encapsulates the appeal of farmhouse-style homes.

DECORATING

4 ways to personalize a cookie-cutter home

By Kathryn O'Shea Evans

Special To The Washington Post

When it comes to designing a home interior that reflects you and your lifestyle, nothing beats customizing everything from the bathroom tile to the drawer pulls. But when so much of the housing built since World War II falls under the broad umbrella of cookie-cutter, it can be challenging to create a personalized space.

Modern farmhouse — an architectural style known for its white exteriors with black windows, blonde wood floors and an unobtrusive neutral color palette — is just the latest mass-produced style to dominate neighborhoods, including those nowhere near a farm.

It instantly appeals to the Instagram generation in part because it seems to harness both yesteryear and today's clean lines in equal measure.

“The look gives ‘Little House on the Prairie,’ but without the diphtheria,” says Mark Eckstrom of Studio Eckström in Omaha. “The Waltons’ with Wi-Fi.”

But not everyone wants to buy the farm — or a mass-produced Colonial, split-foyer or boxy ranch, for that matter. “Many people are coming to us saying, ‘I do not want that,’” says Jim Rill, of the Bethesda, Maryland-firm Rill Archi-

fects, of the modern farmhouse style.

Or if they love it, they may want to tweak it to be more individualized. We consulted the pros to figure out how to make any cookie-cutter space feel more current and custom, from the inside out.

Here are their suggestions:

1. Focus on yourself

When you're creating your forever home, keep “you” front and center. “Some of our clients are interested in pulling ideas from the modern farmhouse aesthetic, but many are seeking guidance on how to create a home that doesn't look like all of the other homes in their neighborhood,” says Lauren Magee of Winn Design + Build.

Noz Nozawa, a designer in the San Francisco Bay Area, says this approach works with all types of homes. “Every project starts with honoring a client's own story, no matter what style of home they have,” she says. “I try to see past what might be considered ‘generic’ in a home and identify high-potential nooks or details or moments that we can celebrate through our design process.”

“We will tailor and custom-size our design ideas, whether they are built-ins or furniture or window coverings or art pieces, and if I've done a good job, our



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

To embrace everything that a home should be — an inviting place to gather with friends and family — add farmhouse-style touches to your home, indoors and out.

designs allow our clients to see themselves and their point of view reflected in the spaces they get to live in,” she adds.

For example, you might transform a small closet off the kitchen into a Downton Abbey-worthy pantry by installing beadboard, shelving with brass rails and soapstone counters, then painting it a high-gloss (and truly cinematic) grass green. Or convert an empty basement closet into a dazzling wet bar complete with Amazonite countertops and pixelated mosaic tile backsplash (both recent Nozawa projects).

2. Remember how you actually live

Robert J. Bell, of Bell Design Inc. in D.C., says functionality is key. You want to ask yourself what

your goals are, he says, whether you’re hankering for a quiet writer’s retreat or a showstopping entertaining space. “As long as the basic structure of the home is well built and the property is laid out well, we can work to add functionality and details that create special spaces from an unalluring white box,” Bell says.

He would replace a flat white subway tile backsplash, for example, with something more unexpected yet functional, such as a dimensional tile from Heath Ceramics in an ultramarine matte glaze. Or evict bland, mass-produced drawer pulls in favor of uncoated brass handles “meant to age beautifully.”

3. Go for color and texture

Vibrant color can give a generic or relatively simple struc-

ture a more tailored look, says Rill, who is a fan of the inky colors of British cult paint brand Farrow & Ball.

Dallas designer Bonnie Achariyakosol agrees, saying that paint and wallpaper are the easiest way to warm up a space. It doesn’t need to take over the entire room; you can paint the lower cabinets in your otherwise white kitchen an unexpected color, or hang wallpaper with a subtle graphic motif in the powder room.

Nozawa achieved a bespoke feel for two Bay Area clients with modern farmhouse-esque homes by bringing in riots of color in the rugs and furnishings and installing dramatic light fixtures.

The same goes for interesting textures. “I think a lot of modern farmhouses are lacking warmth and texture,” Achariya-

kosol says. Some of her textural go-to’s: handmade zellige tiles that are intentionally imperfect, lime-washed or grass cloth walls and plasterwork vessels with patina. “Texture is the gateway drug to a warm home, and I love it!” she says.

4. Pay attention to details

When Houston-based designer Paloma Contreras, author of the new book “The New Classic Home,” was working on a farmhouse presiding over significant acreage in rural Texas, she employed authentic finishes: reclaimed Texas white oak here, French limestone there. The result feels genuine and timeless, not trendy.

Outside, sometimes it’s the littlest touches that add up to a lot. Even painting your window trim

and shutters a fairy-tale hue can be transformative, Eckstrom says, noting that he loves the verdigris color of Farrow & Ball’s Arsenic.

“We love the whimsy of a decorative Pennsylvania Dutch-style Hex sign adhered below the gable end of a roofline,” says Eckstrom. He is installing them on the upper floor of a project client’s classic American four-square with a green metal roof, which was inspired by Russian dachas. “Choose a star or sun motif in bright or complementary bold colors — it will become something to wish and smile upon daily.”

And we can practically guarantee that it won’t look anything like your neighbors.

Kathryn O’Shea-Evans is a design and travel writer in Colorado.

AROUND THE HOUSE

There's an order to decorating a space. Designers share their 9 steps

By Michelle Brunner

Special to *The Washington Post*

“What’s your favorite color?” is a question we’ve all been asked countless times, so it’s not surprising that when we decide to refresh a room we might start in the paint aisle. “People run to the hardware store and they look at all the paint chips like it’s a candy display,” says Atlanta interior designer and television personality Vern Yip. “Everybody is so used to talking about design from a color standpoint that they want to start with paint, but paint is the easiest thing to decide later.”

According to design pros, there’s a logical order to decorating a room, and the paint-color-first approach may not be the wisest method (more on that in a bit). Read on to find out what steps you should take early in the process — and what decisions you can save for the home stretch.

1. Identify your decorating hero

Every room should begin with something you love, whether it’s a thrift store painting, a collection of vintage badminton rackets you want to display on the wall, or a textile you picked up on vacation years ago. During a trip to Thailand, Yip fell in love with a silk fabric, which he brought back and used to upholster his sofas. That choice inspired the direction for the rest of his living room. “I try to get people to work with the idea that they’re not just decorating a space, they’re creat-



PHOTO COURTESY OF GORDON GREGORY

The apricot-colored Chinoiserie secretary on the left wall kick-started the bold pink and saffron scheme in this cheerful Florida living space by Janie Molster Designs.

ing a home that’s uniquely designed to represent them aesthetically and support them functionally,” he says. “When you walk in a room, you should feel an immediate connection, and it’s hard to do that when you just buy a bunch of stuff randomly at the store.”

2. Pick a general color — not a specific one

“Going into a room design with a general idea of the color that you want to use is better than not thinking about it at all, but you don’t need to nail down the exact hue,” says San-

dra Meyer of Ella Scott Design in Bethesda, Maryland. For example, it’s fine to approach a room knowing you want to use the color blue in some impactful way, but if you’re debating the merits of Benjamin Moore’s Water’s Edge vs. Farrow & Ball’s De Nimes, you might

be getting too granular too early.

3. Make a space plan

Thinking about how you want the room laid out will give you valuable insight for all the other decisions that follow. “Having a space plan that provides enough

seating, appropriate tables, and accounts for traffic flow will help dictate things like your rug size,” says Richmond designer Janie Molster. There are a number of user-friendly apps, such as RoomSketcher, Floor Plan Creator and Planner 5D, that can help you devise

a layout by entering the dimensions of your room and furnishings. Retailers such as Ikea and the Williams-Sonoma family of brands (including Pottery Barn and West Elm) offer their own space-planning tools that come preloaded with the dimensions of their merchandise. Not so tech-inclined? Do like the pros and map out furniture dimensions on the floor with blue painter's tape to get a sense of how pieces spatially relate to each other.

4. Bring in major impact items

"Focus on getting your big pieces in early — that way you have more flexibility in buying the smaller items like a side table or a bar cart," says Meyer. The same holds true for hard-to-find or highly specific design elements. If you have your eye on a bold floral wallpaper, Yip recommends choosing it early because it can inspire the overall palette. Trying to shoehorn it into your room later, hoping it goes with everything you've already bought, could end in disappointment.

5. Focus on the rug

It's much easier to match a paint color to the rug than vice versa, so don't wait until all your furniture is in place and the paint is dry to consider what should go underfoot. "The floor is one of the biggest expanses in a room, so the rug should definitely not be an afterthought; it should be chosen early in the mix, right along with the big anchoring pieces of furniture," says Molster. For small enclosed rooms, she suggests a single large rug, while open-concept spaces can benefit from multiple area rugs delineating different zones.

6. Be intentional with art

Resist thinking of art as a finishing touch or a space filler. What you hang in your home is an act of self-expression, so it should never be a throwaway choice made in a fit of impatience to fill an empty wall. "A lot of people will end up buying artwork at the end of the project, picking something that coordinates with the drapes or the wall color, but that is the worst way to buy art because then it's just a place filler and there's no emotional connec-

tion to it," says Yip.

Instead, the pros recommend thinking about what kinds of pieces you'd want to display early in the process. If you already have a burgeoning collection, think about how you'd like to integrate it into a space. Yip stresses that art doesn't have to cost a small fortune or come from a gallery. "It can be something you bought at a yard sale from your college days. The most important thing is that it helps tell your story," he says.

7. Paint your walls

Once you've acquired some of your room's bigger pieces such as the sofa and the rug, you're in a better position to choose the exact wall color. "There are thousands of choices and you can always customize a color if you can't find the right one," says Yip. "It's the easiest component to decide later, so instead of putting it upfront, the exact color should be finalized towards the end."

8. Add accessories

Molster says most of her clients spend so much energy fixated on throw pillows and lamps that she often has to issue a moratorium on "pillow talk" until practical things like sofa frames are ordered. "Accessories are fun, small choices that seem a little less overwhelming for people, so they're naturally drawn to them, but they shouldn't distract from making the bigger decisions," she says. Think of accessories as the reward; you've made all the hard decisions, stayed on track and on budget. Now it's time to shop for those fun, whimsical elements that make a room interesting.

9. Leave room for growth

The final piece of advice from our experts: Don't ever finish the project — at least not completely. The best rooms aren't frozen in time; they're constantly evolving with their inhabitants. "Whether you're a trained professional or a homeowner who just likes design, no one's taste stays the same," says Molster. "Always leave some space to find that perfect piece of art while traveling or a wonderful tchotchke to occupy an empty spot on your bookshelf."

Michelle Brunner is a writer in D.C. who covers interior design and culture.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIP DAWKINS

In this dining room by Janie Molster Designs, a selection of antique portraits inspired the furnishings and overall vibe of the space.

WALLS



PHOTO COURTESY OF WEALTH OF GEEKS

Painting the interior of a house is one of the most accessible home improvement projects for homeowners.

Ivory, eggshell, ecru or cream? Choosing the right interior paint color

By Michael Pollick
Wealth of Geeks

According to Better Homes and Gardens, the right interior paint scheme can add up to \$5,000 to the overall value of a home. It's also one of the most accessible home improvement projects for homeowners, with professional advice read-

ily available and affordable supplies and equipment.

Besides raising home values, interior and exterior painting also allows homeowners to personalize their surroundings and express their household's unique personality.

The process begins with some basic prep work but usually ends with a look

that sets the clock back to the home's earliest days.

The science of paint color

The interior paint selection process often begins with a dizzying array of paint swatches: samples printed on cardstock that reflect the paint supplier's

range of products.

The gradations between shades can be very subtle, so it helps to understand the basic science behind color.

Primary and secondary colors

Three primary colors — red, blue and yellow — form

the basis of all other colors in the spectrum.

Mixing at least two of these essential colors results in secondary colors, such as green, orange and purple.

The creation of interior paint relies on the percentage of primary and secondary color pigments added to the neutral white base.

Hue and tone

Hue refers to the variety or intensity of a color and is often used interchangeably with tone, tint or shade. For example, blue is a primary color, and its hues, such as aqua or marine, have different values of blue based on their relative lightness or darkness.

Tone is a hue created by adding gray pigment to an existing primary or secondary color blend. Two interior paints can have the same hue, but different tones based on the ratio of gray pigment. Tones are often described as bright, soft, muted or dull.

Tint and shade

While the addition of gray pigment determines tone, tint is determined by adding white pigment. A lighter tint results from a higher percentage of white pigment, while a darker tint results from little to no white pigment.

While tint and shade are often used interchangeably, shade is actually the hue achieved by adding black pigment. Shade has more to do with the lightness or darkness of interior paint as it appears in normal lighting conditions.

Color temperature and mood

Interior designers often refer to a color's temperature, usually categorizing it as warm or cool. Warm colors, typically reds, oranges and yellows, suggest heat or fire. This has a comforting or exciting effect on the room's occupants.

Cool colors, generally blues, purples and greens, create visual references to water and nature. These hues have a calming effect on visitors to the space.

The psychological effect of a color on occupants is considered its mood. Some cooler colors are also considered passive in mood, ideal for bedrooms and small, intimate spaces.

Active colors such as reds, oranges and yellows are stimulating, which makes them better suited for kitchens, offices, and accent walls.

Earth tones, such as brown, gray or white, fall into the neutral mood category. Neutral interior paints are popular choices for large living spaces since



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Standing in front of an array of hundreds — perhaps thousands — of colors at the hardware store can be intimidating, but it needn't be, officials say.

they are less likely to distract visitors. Painting a house in a neutral color is a common practice before putting it on the market.

Forming a color scheme

Even if the interior painting plan involves neutral whites in every room, there should still be an overall decision on a color palette. This is where the concept of complementary or accent colors comes into play. On the color spectrum wheel, certain colors mesh better with other colors to create a pleasing visual contrast. An accent wall provides a splash of a complementary color to break up a monochromatic space. Contrasting colors on window trims or moldings also help add visual excitement to an otherwise neutral room.

Karen Kelly, a freelance food and travel writer at

Seasonal Cravings, says: "We never thought picking a white paint color for our new house would be such an effort, but it was. My husband painted so many shades of Benjamin Moore whites on walls and trim it was overwhelming. We finally went with the popular warm shade of 'Cloud White' and couldn't be happier. When picking colors, we always use the samples to paint big swatches on our walls, paying attention to how the light hits the room at different times of the day. We live with it for a few days, and then it's much easier to decide."

Choosing the right finish

The same interior paint color can have a completely different impact depending on its finish and the level of reflection created by resins added to the paint.

Here are the most common finishes available for interior paints:

- **Matte:** A matte finish has a minimal sheen when dry, creating a chalk-like appearance. While a matte finish can be applied to any surface, it is typically used for ceilings. The color value of a matte finish looks lighter than the original swatch hue.

- **Eggshell:** An eggshell finish has a very low sheen, much like an actual egg's shell. The finish is smooth and light, however. The color of a dry eggshell-finish paint is truer to the original swatch color.

- **Satin:** A satin finish is popular because of its soft, pearl-like sheen when dry. It also remains true to the original paint color's hue.

- **Semi-gloss:** A semi-gloss finish creates a shiny, sleek appearance that reflects more light and brightens the room by naturally

reflecting light. Semi-gloss paints often appear darker on the wall than expected.

- **High-gloss:** A high-gloss finish reflects the most amount of light of any paint finish. It is very shiny in appearance and more likely to be used on accent spaces (doors, moldings, cabinets) than entire walls.

Field testing paint colors

One key to choosing the right interior paint color is to take the paint shade from the swatch card to the wall itself. A small sample of paint is not going to provide enough real-time information for an entire interior makeover.

Paint a large square of a sampler paint color directly on a wall or poster board. This is a good way to judge how the paint will actually look in a room. Paint at least two coats after ap-

plying a primer to hide the original color. Paint test strips at eye level to view them from a distance. Paint test strips on two walls for larger rooms. The paint may look different depending on lighting conditions. Sample different finishes if possible.

Chhavi Agarwal at Mrs. Daaku Studio says: "A year back, we decided to repaint our house in a more fun way instead of painting it white. We looked at many photos and videos to eventually like a color that is quite dark, close to teal, but darker. To balance out the colors, we decided to paint all the doors white. Our family, the interior consultant, and friends were all against it, but we decided to give it a go. It turned out beautiful, and we loved it."

Find color inspiration

Sometimes, the contents of the room, especially the furniture or flooring, help with the decision-making process.

Heidi Bender at Tons of Thanks shares: "We chose forest green for two of our bedroom walls. The other two are wood paneling. Anyway, the painters we hired thought that forest green was way too dark for a bedroom. However, our bedroom is small and we only sleep in our bedroom. The room isn't big enough for chairs or whatever else people put in huge master bedrooms. It made sense to us to have a dark color to help the room feel darker for sleeping, as at that time, the neighbor's porch light was on during the night and would shine in our window."

Taking inspiration from artwork or a bold fabric color is also a possibility. The key is to find a color that creates a definite mood and reflects the energy of that specific space.

This article was produced by Media Decision and syndicated by Wealth of Geeks.

DECORATING

8 steps to painting a room like a pro

By Jennifer Barger

Special to *The Washington Post*

It's a decorating truth nearly universally acknowledged: Putting new paint on your walls is the best way to change the look of a space quickly and cheaply. "Paint has superpowers: It can make a plain room look more expensive or even brighten up features you hate, like dingy floors," says Julia Marcum, a product designer and DIY home blogger.

And in most cases (barring, perhaps, treacherous staircases or areas with exceptionally high ceilings), painting a room in your home is almost always a project you can tackle yourself.

Before you get rolling, you'll want to brush up on the best practices for prepping your space, choosing the right tools and pulling off an expert-level application.

Here's our step-by-step guide — created with the help of painting pros — to ensure things go smoothly.

1. Choose a paint color

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the rainbow of paint colors available at paint or hardware stores. "There are literally 2 million choices," Marcum says. To zero in on the right one for your space, you'll need to view it in your room's lighting (natural and artificial) at different times of the day.

Obtain a few swatches and tape them to the wall of your room. Better yet, buy sample-size paint pots and apply the shades to a white poster board that you hang up, or order peel-and-stick swatches. (Unless your wall is a basic white, painting the samples directly onto it



PHOTO BY JACOB JEFFERSON, COURTESY OF CITY OF PONTIAC

Delia Corke, City of Pontiac Grants Coordinator, is one of the volunteers who painted the kitchen walls at Ruth Peterson Senior Center in Pontiac.

might distort the shades.) Traditionally, a room's trim and ceilings have been painted white.

But that's no longer a hard-and-fast rule. "I like a monochrome look, with the same color on the trim and walls in different paint finishes," says Tom Preston, an interior designer. "It's more cohesive and can make the ceilings look higher." Preston and other pros also say it's perfectly acceptable to use the wall color — or even an entirely different hue —

on the ceiling. Basically, you can have fun!

2. Choose a finish

Once you've decided on a color, you'll also have to choose a finish, which affects how glossy and durable the paint will be once it's dry.

Most paints come in increasingly reflective options, ranging from flat (no shine) to high gloss. The shinier the paint, the smoother your walls will need to be, since glossier

finishes accentuate imperfections.

Eggshell — one step up from flat — is a popular choice for walls in non-damp locations, such as living rooms and bedrooms, because it's glossy enough to be scrubbable yet flat enough that it doesn't show too many flaws.

If you're painting trim in those areas, go with a satin or semi-gloss for durability and contrast.

In bathrooms and kitchens, you'll probably want to

use at least a satin finish on the walls, so you can easily clean them and the paint holds up better against moisture.

You can stick to satin or use something glossier on the trim.

For ceilings, which aren't as susceptible to grubby fingerprints and other wear and tear, you can use flat paint, which is typically the toughest to scrub clean. It's also a good bet for ceilings because it won't reflect too much light and detract

from the rest of the room.

3. Determine how much paint and primer you need

Use a paint calculator to figure out how many gallons you'll need for the room you're painting, keeping in mind that you'll generally want enough for two coats.

Depending on what shade is already on the walls, you may also need a primer. "We generally have our paint suppliers tint the primer gray if we're doing a dramatic color change," says Chuck Khiel of Fred Home Improvement in Bethesda, Maryland. "It really helps block the previous color."

Primer is a base coat that helps your topcoat adhere and blocks stains, imperfections and mold. It's not always necessary, especially if you're painting from a light color to a dark one, or you choose a paint with a built-in primer. But it does help ensure a smooth application.

If you're changing a room from dark to light — for instance, from royal blue to baby pink — you will definitely need a separate coat of primer.

And if your walls are plaster, modern latex paint may not adhere to them, so you'll probably want to start with an oil-based primer such as Kilz.

4. Protect yourself

When you're prepping your walls for new paint — a process that includes sanding — wearing safety goggles and a face mask or respirator can protect you from potentially harmful particles. You should be especially careful if your house was built before 1978

and might have residual lead paint.

Although many newer paint formulas are low in VOCs (volatile organic compounds), it's better for your lungs and your eyes to wear protective face and eye gear while painting.

Open a window if possible, and keep it cracked until the paint is thoroughly dry, which usually takes a day.

5. Prep your walls

Just as you would wash your face before applying makeup, you must patch, clean and prepare your walls before putting paint on them. "You need to sand and wash down your walls to get rid of grease, oil and dust," says Patrick O'Donnell, Farrow & Ball's international brand ambassador and a color consultant. "It's eye-wateringly dull."

First, clean your walls (and your ceiling if you're painting it, too) using a solution of dish detergent and warm water. Then, with a cellulose sponge, wipe off the solution using a gentle circular motion. When the walls are dry, patch any holes or cracks by applying joint compound with a putty knife. Then sand the surfaces with 220-grit sandpaper, by hand or with a sanding pole. (Electric hand sanders are usually too harsh for this purpose.) If your trim or molding needs smoothing, try a sanding sponge that can get into tight spaces.

Finally, remove light switch and outlet covers, roll up rugs and move any furniture to the center of the room.

Cover "anything you don't want sprinkled or spattered with a dropcloth or plastic sheeting," says Shannon Duvall, co-owner of house painting company HD Paint and Stain in Belleville, Illinois.

6. Tape

Use blue painter's tape for crisp, professional-look-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Painting your home doesn't have to be intimidating if you do the right prep work.

ing lines and to keep paint from bleeding into places it shouldn't. Duvall prefers a tape with "edge lock" that helps prevent leakage. Tape off the section directly abutting the section you're painting. For example, tape along the trim and ceiling before painting the walls, and tape along the edges of the walls before painting the trim or ceiling.

Apply the tape in 6-inch increments, which makes it easier to keep in a straight line. Press down firmly as you go, then seal it by running a putty knife or damp cloth along the length. Most manufacturers recommend letting the tape "set" for 30 to 90 minutes before painting, to allow it to fully adhere.

Some experts say the cor-

rect paint brush and painting technique makes this whole process unnecessary. "I think a really good, 2-inch, short-handled paint brush eliminates the need to tape off," Marcum says. But if you're a painting novice, taping is the surest way to keep your job neat.

7. Get painting with the correct tools

Most painters recommend a combination of rolling and brushing on the paint. Start with the ceiling, then move onto the walls, and finish with the trim. You'll need a paint key (free at most paint stores) or a putty knife to open your can of paint.

Stir it with a chopstick or stirring stick (another paint

store freebie) to blend all the pigments. Start by "cutting in" — the process of carefully applying a straight line of paint with a 2- to 4-inch angled brush — along the edge of the wall where it touches the molding, trim or floor.

You'll also need to cut in around light switches, door and window frames, and other narrow spots. Dip the brush about halfway into the paint and tap off any excess before applying it gently but firmly to the wall. Then cover the bulk of the walls and ceiling using a roller. Most experts recommend a 9-inch roller with a ½- to 1-inch nap.

Pour paint into a roller tray (a plastic disposable one or a more eco-friendly reusable one), then cover

the roller with paint via short, rapid dips. Roll on the paint while the edges you've brushed on are still wet. Experts recommend rolling in a tight "W" pattern to ensure full coverage, going vertically first, then horizontally to ensure complete coverage.

Let the paint dry between coats — generally two to four hours, but check the recommendations on your can. For trim, use a 2-inch angled brush and "long, single strokes," Duvall says. "The fewer brush marks, the better, since shinier trim paint will show more imperfections."

8. Remove tape and clean up

Once you've applied the

last coat, allow it to partially dry (generally two to four hours), then remove the blue painter's tape by pulling gently and slowly at a 45-degree angle.

If you wait to peel it off until the paint has totally dried, you'll probably take some of the paint along with it.

If you've used latex paint, clean the brushes and rollers using soap and warm water to ensure they will be in good condition for your next project.

Brush combs and a rag to wipe off the initial globs of paint also can help.

If you've used oil-based paints and primer, you'll need to clean brushes and rollers with a solvent; look on your paint can for recommendations.

FLOORING

How to paint your floors so they'll look great for years

By Annie Midori Atherton

Special To The Washington Post

Shawn Bo-Abrams, who is renovating his house in Washington state with his husband, Leon Bo-Abrams, was eager to get rid of the carpet covering their top floor. "I have four animals, and they all like to shed, so it's just easier to have a cleaner environment without carpet," he says.

Since the hardwood underneath was in rough shape, the couple thought painting it dark brown would give it a fresh look.

The hardest part was deciding to actually do it. "We were quite nervous," Shawn says. "We would go to Home Depot and ask a ton of questions. Then we'd be like, oh no, we're not going to do that. ... I swear, we went back and forth like four times."

Their ambivalence is understandable. Painting your floors is not an easily reversible decision, and the job will have to stand up to a lot of wear and tear. But if you're willing to put in the work, it can be a cost-effective way to transform a space.

The key is to thoroughly research the best process and paint for your type of floor and to not skip any steps.

Ultimately, the Bo-Abramses took the plunge and love the result. "It really changed how the entire upstairs felt," Shawn says.

Why paint floors?

The most obvious reason: It's significantly cheaper than ripping out and replacing the floor.

The Bo-Abramses used Behr paint made for both interior and exterior surfaces that cost roughly \$200 for five gallons. (Shawn

shares videos about their process on Instagram.)

Kristen Coutts, a DIY hobbyist turned contractor, says she landed on the idea while looking for budget-friendly ways to upgrade a client's tiled entryway. "We were trying to come up with something that we felt would be durable and easy to maintain," she says.

Putting in new tile would've cost more than \$2,000, she says.

By comparison, painting the existing tile required about \$50 worth of paint. (The total for all the products she used, including primer and sealant, was higher. But she used only a portion of each can and plans to use the rest for other projects).

Choose colors wisely

Whatever color you choose will have a big impact on the room.

And because we're talking about the floor — which gets dirtier and more beat up than just about anywhere else — you'll want to consider your lifestyle.

A white floor could be beautiful, but if you wear shoes inside, or have a dog that sheds dark fur, it's probably not the best choice, says Kenna Stout, design director at Brio Interior Design in Seattle. At the same time, dark paint colors will show dust more easily.

In her own home, Stout had the staircase painted leafy green. "A medium tone is probably the easiest to maintain in that you won't see every speck of dust," she says.

Painting tile is riskier than painting wood

Arielle Decker, a DIY content creator in New Jersey, says that when she shared

her decision to paint her tile hallway with a tan and white checkerboard pattern, she was met with indignation. "So many people said, 'Don't do this! It will never last!'" But a year later, Decker says the paint job has held up, even with two dogs and two kids running around. "It doesn't have any knicks or scratches," she says. "It really worked out well."

Still, many experts caution against painting tile. Brad Hoffman, a professional painter for 35 years who shares tips at BradThePainter.com, is one of them. "Painted tile is just never going to hold up in the long run," he says. He feels the same way about painting laminate.

Jeff Dupont, owner of Sound Painting Solutions in Seattle, agrees that painted tile often doesn't last. But if you want to try, he emphasizes the importance of choosing paint specifically meant for tile.

Decker used Sherwin-Williams Porch & Floor Enamel, an interior/exterior paint made for high-traffic areas. For her client's entryway, Coutts used Rust-Oleum Interior Chalked Paint, which is designed for a variety of surfaces, including ceramic.

Prepare the floor well

Proper prep work will make or break a paint job.

Begin by removing all furniture from the room. It's generally best to sand wood floors before priming and painting, Hoffman says.

You can use a palm sander or regular sandpaper (he advises starting with coarse grit and finishing with medium).

Or rent a floor sander from a hardware store. To get tile ready for new



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN BO-ABRAMS

Shawn Bo-Abrams, right, and his husband, Leon Bo-Abrams, painted their old wood floors dark brown.

paint, Dupont suggests using stripper to remove the existing glaze or sealer.

Whether you're working with wood or tile, clean the floors thoroughly before painting.

Start by vacuuming, then mop with warm, soapy water. (For tile, Dupont says you can also use Krud Kutter.) Rinse well and allow the surface to dry completely.

Don't skip primer

Primer will make your paint job more durable. For wood, Hoffman suggests an all-purpose, interior primer to seal the surface and help the paint stick.

For tile, consider a heavy-duty primer like Insl-X Stix waterborne bonding primer, which can be used on many types of surfaces. For her check-board hallway,

Decker used Rust-Oleum's floor-coating kit, which comes with a base coat and top coat and can be used on many materials, including tile, wood and laminate.

To paint on the primer, use an angled-sash brush to "cut in" the edges (the term for using a brush to paint a border and getting to the places a roller can't).

Then, use a roller to cover the rest.

An adjustable extension pole can make the job easier on your back.

It's also wise to start on the opposite wall of the door so that you can work your way out.

Paint with care

Choose a paint that is clearly intended for floors, or floors and patios, such as Tough Shield by INSL-X.

And make sure it's fit for interiors.

An interior/exterior paint is fine, but a product meant only for an outside space may contain toxic chemicals unsuitable for indoors, Hoffman says.

For a solid color, use the same brushing and rolling techniques as you did with the primer.

You'll likely need multiple coats — the Bo-Abramses applied four to attain the look they wanted.

Though the painting itself can go quickly, you'll need to abide by the dry time specified in your paint's instructions.

To apply a pattern over your base color, consider using a stencil. Coutts used a foam paint roller and a geometric design that she found online to create a repeating motif in her client's entryway.

The corners were the trickiest part, she says, and required her to hand-paint the design where the stencil wouldn't fit.

She advises using as little paint as possible and a light touch to avoid sloppy lines.

Hoffman offers another tip to improve your floor's chances of holding up. "As you're painting, keep a vacuum handy because there's always dust settling," he says. "I'll paint a section and then, if needed, give a quick vacuum before I paint more because there are particles of dust that get in your paint."

Later, when someone walks on it and scrapes that, that's going to start the paint peeling."

To seal or not to seal

You can choose to finish a paint job with a coat of sealant. Coutts, for instance, used a polycrylic top coat by Minwax.

But according to Hoffman, you don't need it: "These days, big companies have formulated floor paint to be very tough." Sealant could also make it harder to repaint the surface in the future, he says.

Annie Midori Atherton is a writer in Seattle who covers culture, lifestyle, business and parenting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARIELLE DECKER

Arielle Decker used Sherwin-Williams Porch & Floor Enamel, an interior/exterior paint made for high-traffic areas, to make over her tile floor.

WALLS

Your ceiling deserves some love. Here are 5 ideas

By Rachel Kurzius

The Washington Post

Ceilings are usually the forgotten, fifth wall — kept white and bare, even if the rest of a room has been meticulously decorated.

But to professional designers, neglecting the ceiling amounts to leaving a space incomplete.

“I cannot finish a room without addressing what we will be doing to the ceiling,” says Ashley Whiteside, an interior designer in Raleigh, North Carolina. “There is no, ‘Yes, obviously we will leave it white.’ Because this is an opportunity. It completely changes the entire juju of a room.”

Interior print and fashion designer Dani Dazey says that “doing something with your ceiling actually makes the room feel bigger and more grand, and draws your eyes upward. It really can be such a statement.”

Herewith, pros share some of their favorite ways to give the long-ignored fifth wall the love it deserves.

Paint the ceiling the same color as the walls

Despite what the paint jobs in most rooms would lead you to believe, there is no law that says you have to stop painting when you reach the ceiling.

“When the walls and the ceiling are the same color, you’re just surrounded by this luscious color,” says Liz Johnson, owner of Liz Johnson Design Studio and president of Design Collective DC. “It makes a space more cozy, like a warm hug — you feel enveloped.” She says this is particularly true in small rooms.

But this project isn’t quite as simple as coating



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHLEY WHITESIDE

Your statement wall can be the one above you when you put wallpaper on your ceiling.

your ceiling in the exact same hue as your walls.

If you want the entire space to appear the same, the trick is to have your ceiling paint mixed so that it’s 10% to 20% lighter than the wall paint.

Otherwise, your ceiling will always appear darker, since light doesn’t hit it the same way.

“It’s not a vertical plane,” explains Charles Almonte, an architect and interior designer in Silver Spring, Maryland. “The horizontal plane gives a different intensity to the color. It’s always going to be in shade, so to speak, because it’s not going to get the same amount of daylight as a vertical surface.”

Paint your ceiling a contrasting color or texture

It’s a much “bolder statement,” as Almonte puts it, to paint your ceiling an entirely different color than your walls.

Going dark, even black, says Johnson, “adds visual depth and actually makes

the room appear larger and taller.” But softer hues also have benefits. Kelley Proxmire, an interior decorator in Bethesda, Maryland, suggests sky blue or light peach. “I paint a lot of ceilings, particularly in bedrooms,” she says. “When you’re in bed, you’re looking up.”

Soft pink is particularly

flattering: “It just makes everyone glow, similar to sitting in candlelight,” Whiteside says.

For wallpapered rooms, a painted ceiling can bring the whole look together. “Pick a color that mimics the mood of the wallpaper,” says Johnson, who suggests going with the dominant color in a multicolored

pattern.

You can also use paint to add texture. In one recent project, Almonte applied a coat of paint to the ceiling, then pressed it with a broom before it dried. “It just gives a little bit of dimension to the space rather than just a flat feeling,” he says. Plus, texture can help hide imperfections.

Nina Farmer, owner of Nina Farmer Interiors in Boston, says she often uses Moroccan plaster on ceilings. “There is a reflective quality, but not in the same way that you would get out of, like, a lacquer or high gloss,” she says. “It creates a nice, tranquil, subdued feeling.”

Wallpaper your ceiling

Adding a pattern to the ceiling gives “an unexpected wow factor when you walk into the room,” says Johnson, who favors a wallpaper with a shimmer or texture that contrasts with the walls.

Proxmire has used the same wallpaper on all four walls and the ceiling — but if you go this route, you’ll have to be careful about selecting a pattern. Some designs — such as abstract or geometric prints, or cloud motifs — are more forgiving than others.

That way, if it’s not possible to exactly match up the pattern where the walls and ceiling meet, no one will ever notice.

Joanne Rodríguez, principal at Joanne Rodríguez Interior Design in Washington, dodges that hurdle by using two different, complementary wallpapers. For example, she might use a large-scale floral print on the walls, and find a diamond or square pattern in the same color palette “that coordinates with it.”

Keep in mind that how you orient a pattern matters. If you’ve got a striped wallpaper on a ceiling in a long room, for instance, you’d want the stripes to be perpendicular to the long wall “to balance out that elongated-ness of the room,” Almonte says.

Install ceiling tiles or slatted wood

In an older house, ceiling tiles can enhance a vintage look.

They’re often made of tin, mica or copper, and come in a variety of colors. “It can be a budget buster, but it’s gorgeous,” says Rodríguez. Just make sure you use tiles specifically designed for the ceiling because they’re lightweight.

Installing wooden slats on the ceiling, Whiteside says, makes “such a statement and it lends well to a ton of styles,” depending on the wood you select. Beadboard, for instance, gives a French country or shabby chic look. Lighter wood might skew organic-modern, while a darker stain creates an industrial vibe.

An experienced DIYer could pull off either of these projects with the right tools. But if you’re unsure of your abilities, it’s probably best to hire a professional.

Install molding or ceiling medallions

When applied correctly, molding and ceiling medallions can look like they’ve been part of a home since it was built.

“I love to have fun with the molding,” Dazey says. “It’s just such a fun way to add what seems like architectural significance when it’s really just a piece of wood attached to the wall.”

She describes the installation process as “very easy” as long as you have some basic woodworking skills. And the supplies can be procured from any big-box hardware store.

Simpler moldings with fewer layers will work better in a room with low ceilings, while you can go for something larger or more extravagant in a space with higher ceilings.

Dazey is also a big fan of the ceiling medallion — an architectural flourish that gets installed around light fixtures: “It can make a blank-box room look like it’s charming and like it was built that way.”

Putting one up “is an afternoon project,” Whiteside says.

Wood versions require nails, but foam or plastic-composite medallions are lightweight enough that you can stick them to the ceiling with adhesive. Whatever material you use, you’ll want to caulk around the edges “because it’ll never look finished until you do,” Whiteside says.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NINA FARMER INTERIORS

Painting the ceiling a dark hue adds visual depth to a room, while a lighter color can bring a relaxed feel.

DECORATING

Go all in on your favorite color with a monochrome room

By Annie Midori Atherton

Special To *The Washington Post*

Chanel Boeve-Roth was browsing an estate sale near her home in North Bend, Wash., when she spotted some emerald, hanging lights and a celery-hued chair in the shape of a hand. The combination sparked the entire vision for her front room.

“I just knew, after seeing them, that I wanted that whole space to be cohesive and green,” she says. The result “is a place where I’ll make a cocktail, sit down and just relax after work.”

Color trends come and go. Each year, Pantone releases its color of the year (2023’s is magenta), and design experts hail one shade or another as “the new neutral.” But going all in on a monochrome palette, for no reason other than you love it, can simplify the design process while creating drama and a specific mood.

In a world of all-white kitchens and endless shades of gray, here’s how to embrace your favorite color with abandon.

Let statement pieces lead the way

Boeve-Roth, a self-proclaimed “maximalist” who often shares photos of her home on Instagram, loves decorating rooms in only one color.

Her living room features an orange couch and retro orange decor, and she’s in the process of redoing her bedroom in all red. In each case, the color scheme was determined somewhat by happenstance: After finding a vintage statement piece that caught her eye, she decided to let it dictate the rest of the room.

The same estate sale with the green treasures yielded



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANN LOWENGART

When painting a room a dark shade, designer Ann Lowengart recommends using a high-gloss finish.

the orange lamp that served as the starting point for Boeve-Roth’s living room. It’s a nostalgic color for her, reminding her of her grandparent’s home. “I love collecting things and the idea of filling a space with things that make you happy,” she says.

She took her time hunting for other thrifted items to fill out each room, often

for bargain prices. A painting of a field in her front room was a \$10 score at Goodwill.

Consider the colors you like to wear

Annie Lowengart, an interior designer and founder of the firm Ann Lowengart Interiors in Marin County, California, begins her proj-

ects by giving clients detailed questionnaires to learn about their preferences, including clothing styles.

Often, the results steer them toward a color that she digs into for a particular room.

For one client, Lowengart did an all-pink library. They came to the idea after discussing the client’s fashion

choices. “She has a beautiful wardrobe,” Lowengart says. “I’ve seen her in a lot of formal events. She’s worn Carolina Herrera and Oscar de la Renta and she really loves pink.”

To use your wardrobe to guide your decor, Lowengart advises thinking beyond the colors you wear most often, since, for many people, those may be black

and neutrals. Instead, consider which pieces “light you up,” she says. Maybe you gravitate toward turquoise accessories or a purple scarf. Then consider that color in the context of the room. If a bright purple living room seems too loud, perhaps a more muted version — such as lavender or mauve — could work instead.

Vary textures and tones

Varying textures and different tones of the same color helps break up a monochrome aesthetic, says Jonathan Lo, a designer and editor-in-chief of the design blog the Octopian. “Otherwise, you run the risk of it becoming super matchy-matchy.”

A good approach, he says, is to start with a neutral base and slowly add in color. “I started with a blank slate of warm white walls, then added the big furniture pieces, keeping them in wood tones and upholstery in whites and creams,” he says, describing what eventually turned into an orange guest room in his home. “Finally, I added the color as accents.” He also mixed in analogous colors (those that are next to each other on the color wheel), which, in the case of orange, meant reds and yellows.

Layering textures keeps your eye moving in the space and adds depth to a room, he says. “Different surfaces reflect light differently, so having both matte and glossy textures will help prevent the room from feeling flat.”

Lowengart says that with monochromatic rooms, she adapts the principles of classic color theory. “60% of a given room will be one color, 30% is a secondary color, and that last 10% is a third color,” she says. “We could use very different colors in that mix, but we also could use different shades of the same color. That’s a great way to balance the space because it feels grounded in something.”

Maria Killam, founder of the Killam Colour System, says a monochromatic room is easier to pull off with blues and greens, possibly because they both appear so often in nature.

With other colors — say, purple — she says it’s more important to choose shades with the same undertone.

Another consideration: Ensuring that “clean” colors (which Killam defines as “bright and fresh”), aren’t clashing with “dirty” colors (which, despite the negative-sounding connotation, is just how she describes colors that are “muted and earthy”).

In a monochromatic red room, for instance, candy apple red (a clean color), would not look great with burgundy (a dirty one), she says.

Go glossy with dark paint

The key to coating a room in a bold color, says Lowengart, is to use high-gloss enamel paint, such as Hollandlac Brilliant 98.

She bedecked a library in Los Altos, California, in rich blues, which appear in the paint color, the ZAK+FOX drapery and the sofas by Jonathan Adler that she had reupholstered in an indigo fabric from Cowtan & Tout. Against the monochrome palette, dozens of books, organized by color, stand out. For the library’s walls, the painter on the project mixed a small amount of the Hollandlac Brilliant with Gentleman’s Gray by Benjamin Moore (a bit of a misnomer, as the hue is described as a “blackened teal blue”). “With saturated colors, what I’ve found over and over again is that you can go as dark and intense as you like if you add high gloss,” Lowengart says. “It gives it a vibrancy, so it feels very upbeat, even if it’s a really dark color.”

Let the color palette evolve

Sometimes, a more focused palette emerges over time. When Lo began decorating his guest room, he felt inspired by Hawaii, where he often visits.

“The original idea was to create a sort of retreat vibe, and bring a bit of that tropical flair to lovely, suburban Irvine,” he says.

One of the first pieces he bought for the room was a white couch. “I had a hard time finding a color palette in the beginning,” he says. He’d seen an image of a mid-century space filled with pillows of all colors and wanted to emulate the look. “I thought, if I kept the couch neutral, I could get away with using all the colors that I wanted. But then over the years, I started swapping stuff, and it started to take on more orange, warm tones.”

He painted an accent wall bright orange, then later toned it down to a softer coral. Above the couch, he added a woven vintage art piece from an antique store in Palm Springs, California. The many throw pillows were picked up one by one from different sources, including Target, West Elm, H&M and Jonathan Adler.

Annie Midori Atherton is a writer in Seattle who covers culture, lifestyle, business and parenting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHANEL BOEVE-ROTH

The funky, hand-shaped chair was one of the first pieces that Chanel Boeve-Roth picked up for her green sitting room.

KITCHEN



BILL PUGLIANO — GETTY IMAGES

If even a new coat of paint won't fix an old refrigerator, DTE Energy's recycling program will pick it up and give you a \$50 gift card.

How to refresh a beat-up refrigerator with paint

By **Jeanne Huber**

Special to The Washington Post

To paint a side of a white refrigerator, you have a few options, including one that doesn't need a primer.

That option is Rust-Oleum appliance epoxy, a brush-on, oil-based paint that comes only in white. Although epoxy is in the name, this is a ready-to-use enamel, without the need to mix in a catalyst like most epoxies.

It is designed and marketed for refinishing the exteriors of refrigerators, dishwashers, laundry machines and other indoor metal surfaces.

Not only does it not require a primer, but the manufacturer recommends against using one. Instead, instructions call for remov-

ing any loose paint or rust with a wire brush or sandpaper and lightly sanding the whole surface to help the paint stick better. Sandpaper with 150 grit should work well.

Then wash with soap and water. You've already removed the grease, but if you hadn't, you'd want to use a degreasing detergent. Rinse by repeatedly wiping the surface with a clean cloth and clean water.

Let it dry and you're ready to paint. Because this product is an oil paint, make sure to have good ventilation, and don't have any open flames or lighted cigarettes nearby. Use a brush to paint the edges, then fill in the main area with a foam roller. Use mineral spirits or paint thinner to clean your tools after the

job.

If the front is still in good shape, you're better off just painting the damaged side. Besides reducing your work, this would retain the manufacturer's finish on the front, which is almost certainly more durable than any new paint you could apply.

If you don't paint the undamaged side of the refrigerator and the two sides wind up with a slightly different sheen or color, it's likely that no one would notice. Painting only one side would also ensure that you have enough paint to add a second coat where it matters.

Of course, you need to move the refrigerator away from the wall to paint it. Refrigerators can be heavy enough to dent some floor-

ing.

Prevent that by moving the refrigerator onto thin plywood. Tip the appliance back just enough to get the wheels over the edge of the plywood, then "walk" the refrigerator out from the wall by moving it at an angle from side to side.

There are other options for painting an appliance, which would work if you wanted a color other than white, or if you wanted to use only water-based paint. Painting pros would probably use DTM (direct-to-metal) paint and apply it with an airless spray gun, but these paints can also be applied with a brush or roller.

Benjamin Moore ultra spec DTM acrylic can be tinted to almost any color and is available in quarts.

Or you could use a water-based enamel labeled as good for use on cabinets. Cabinets and refrigerators both collect fingerprints and need to stand up to repeated cleaning, so paint needs are similar. Check the label to determine whether you need a primer and then check the primer label to make sure you get one that will work on steel.

Many water-based primers formulated to stick to slick surfaces list aluminum, but not steel, as a suitable surface, presumably because they wouldn't stop rust from forming. On previously painted metal, it doesn't require a primer, just scuff-sanding to degloss the surface.

If spots of bare metal show, you could use a little of the paint to spot-prime,

saving you from buying a separate primer.

And, of course, you could go the spray paint route. Before you decide on spray paint, though, think through the details. You would need to unplug a refrigerator or freezer, empty it of food and remove any ice buildup.

Then you would need to move the appliance to a place where overspray wouldn't be a problem, probably a temporary spray booth that you rig up. You'd need to remove or mask off handles.

And for a refrigerator or a freezer, where you'd want the paint to continue around the door to the edge of the seal, you would need to use thin plastic and tape to protect the flange and interior.

DECORATING

How to spray paint just about anything

By **Hannah Holland**

Special To The Washington Post

Want to make over secondhand furniture, give cabinet hardware a new finish or revive an old lamp? The answer is probably two words: spray paint.

This DIYer's secret weapon is affordable, versatile and easy to use — if you know how.

Here's how to get a flawless finish every time:

1. Get your supplies

One of the best parts of spray painting is how little equipment you need to do a good job.

Experts say you'll need three different coats: spray primer, spray paint in whatever color and finish you've chosen, and spray-on sealer. You will also need sanding blocks, sanding sheets, or a wire brush depending on the material you're spray painting, and tack cloth.

When it comes to choosing a paint, the finish options can seem overwhelming. But there are some general pointers to help you decide. "High-gloss spray paints provide a slick surface that is easily cleaned and provides the best color protection, especially when the item painted is left outside," says Dennis Fiorilli, director of product excellence at Sherwin Williams. The drawback: High-gloss or metallic will more easily show imperfections. A matte or textured finish, on the other hand, will camouflage flaws but isn't as easy to clean, or as resistant to stains and sun damage.

In many cases, a satin finish — which falls between matte and glossy — is a safe bet, says MinChan Koo, associate brand manager for spray paint company Krylon.



MIKE WINDLE — GETTY IMAGES

Cans of spray paint come in all shades of color.

2. Protect your space

Spray painting outside or in a garage with the doors open is ideal. If that's not possible, there are ways to make an indoor space work.

"The most important thing is creating a well-ventilated area," says Amanda Conley, the blogger behind Determined DIY. "Air flow helps with dry time and so you don't breathe in (fumes)." Before you do anything else, open windows and doors, and turn on a fan. And, as Fiorilli stresses, spray paint is flammable, so this is not the time to light a cigarette or candle.

Whether outside or in, you'll want to protect the surface beneath your project. Gena Jaffe, a popular DIYer on Instagram, saves flattened delivery boxes to reuse as floor-covering, though a regular drop cloth would work, too. If you're spraying indoors, Sherwin Farooq, the DIYer behind Instagram account @pretty.and.functional, suggests investing in a spray tent — a collapsible, lightweight structure that will protect your walls and fur-

niture.

3. Protect yourself

Just like your floors, you need to protect yourself. Bob Glass, merchant and paint specialist at Home Depot, recommends "using latex gloves, eye protection, protective clothing, and face protection, such as a disposable respirator when spray painting."

Heavy-duty respirator masks are a good reusable option if you're planning multiple projects, but Jaffe says sturdy disposable masks, such as N95s, can work, too. She recommends wearing clear goggles for eye protection, especially while sanding.

4. Clean your surface

Paint will adhere best to surfaces that Fiorilli describes as, "clean, dull and dry." Whether you're painting a plastic planter, a metal picture frame, or a piece of wood furniture, you'll want to give it a thorough scrub first. Says Glass: "Remove all dirt, grease, oil, salt or chemical contaminants by washing the surface with

a commercial detergent" or another suitable cleaner like good old dish soap. Then thoroughly rinse with water and let the piece completely dry.

5. Sand it

Next, grab your sanding tools. Whether spray painting something wood, metal or plastic, if you don't sand first, experts say you risk your new paint color quickly chipping off.

On a piece of wood furniture, any old lacquer, stain or paint has to come off. For that kind of heavy sanding and stripping, says Glass, "you need coarse sandpaper measuring 40 to 60 grit." Farooq says sanding blocks are easier to use for a project that requires extensive sanding, or for getting into smaller spaces (such as between the gaps on a ladder-back chair).

To sand metal items, Conley recommends using a wire brush. She takes one to her outdoor fire pit every year, scraping off any old flakes of paint and rust, before applying its annual coat of new paint. She

advises getting rid of as much of the rust as possible, otherwise it could show through. A good primer application will help prevent this, too, Conley notes.

Sanding is also important when painting plastic or glass, but for a different reason. Instead of sanding to create a smooth surface, you'll want to sand to scuff up these items so the paint has something to grab on to. "Start with a 120-grit for light removal, and finish with a 220-grit for increased smoothness," Koo says.

Finally, go over your piece — no matter what it's made of — with a tack cloth, a special type of cloth treated with a tacky material (hence the name) that will help remove any remaining particles left behind from sanding.

6. Prime it

Priming is nonnegotiable, especially if your sanding job was lackluster, to ensure the longevity of the paint. For rusty metal items, Conley and Glass both advise priming with Rust-Oleum brand primer so the old rust doesn't peek through. Stain-blocking primers, such as one made by Zinsser, says Fiorilli, are great for covering up other imperfections, such as dark knots in a wood surface.

You'll want to apply a thin, even coat. Glass suggests starting by vigorously shaking the can of primer for "one minute after the mixing ball begins to rattle." Then, "Hold the can upright 10 to 16 inches from the surface and spray in a steady back-and-forth motion, slightly overlapping each stroke."

The primer must be totally dry before moving on to painting. "The primer is

going to appear like it dried right away, but give it an hour," Farooq says.

Once you're sure it's dry, lightly sand the primed surface. Glass recommends using "a super fine sandpaper with 360 to 600 grit." In a pinch, Farooq says you can also gently sand with a brown paper bag.

7. Spray paint it

Before spray painting your piece, Fiorilli suggests "spraying onto a scrap piece of cardboard or paper to get a feel for how the can sprays." Once you have the hang of it, apply a thin, even coat of your paint, employing the same back-and-forth motion that you used with the primer. Koo reiterates that "thin coats" are the key.

One last bit of advice from Glass: "Keep the can the same distance from the surface during the duration of paint application." (Applying too much paint to one spot can cause it to build up and more easily chip off later.)

You'll likely need at least two coats of spray paint for an even finish. Remember to let each coat fully dry before applying the next one.

8. Seal it

Sealing with a spray-on clear coat is particularly important for protecting glass and metal pieces, or anything that is going to be handled a lot.

Simply apply your sealer with the same technique you used for your primer and paint. Sealing, Koo notes, can also be a fix for paint-choice remorse: "If you don't love the sheen you selected at first, you can always consider applying another clear coat with your desired sheen." Satin to matte in a snap.

DECORATING



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

High-temperature paint is rated to perform well up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit, but some are skeptical if it would work on a tile hearth or a brick surround.

How to paint the brick and tile around a gas fireplace insert

By Jeanne Huber

Special to The Washington Post

You face a few different issues: how to prep brick and tile so paint sticks, which paint to use and how to apply the paint evenly to such textured surfaces.

There's considerable disagreement about whether you need high-temperature paint for the bricks and

hearth or whether regular paint will work.

Benjamin Moore and Behr, two major paint manufacturers, both offer advice online suggesting regular paint is sufficient.

But many other online sources say to use high-temperature paint, such as the Stove Bright brand stocked by many fireplace shops.

High-temperature paint

is rated to perform well up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit, so it might seem like the obvious, always-safe choice given the conflicting advice.

But Leslie Arbgast, a receptionist for Forrest Technical Coatings who often answers customers' questions, cringed when asked if it would work on a tile hearth, as well as a brick

surround.

High-temperature paint dries at room temperature, and once dry it sticks well to bricks, tile and many other surfaces without a need to prime first.

It won't peel, she said. But to truly cure and become hard enough to resist scratches, it needs heat — around 450 degrees. Getting to that temperature

isn't an issue when it's used to paint metal stoves, metal fireplace inserts, or even barbecues.

But brick around a fireplace and the tiles on a hearth should not get that hot, meaning high-temperature paint could easily scratch, especially on the hearth, she said.

So regular paint is the better option. Benjamin

Moore has instructions and a YouTube video about how to transform a brick fireplace with paint, and the steps should work well even on just the single course of bricks on your surround and the tile hearth.

The first step, as always with any painting project, is to get the surface clean and free of debris. First, cover the floor with plastic to pro-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

You face a few different issues: how to prep brick and tile so paint sticks, which paint to use and how to apply the paint evenly to such textured surfaces.

tect it.

For bricks and the mortar joints between the bricks and the tiles, use a stiff brush to scrub away any loose grit.

Benjamin Moore recommends using a wire brush, but the Brick Industry Association, a trade group, says wire bristles can scratch bricks; they recommend stiff plastic or natural-fiber bristles instead. Because you are planning to paint the bricks, though, the type of bristles probably doesn't matter.

Vacuum up the debris, then clean the bricks and tile.

Benjamin Moore recommends an all-purpose citrus cleaner, but you could use a mixture of clear hand dishwashing detergent and water instead.

The Brick Industry Association says to wet the bricks first with plain water so the soapy water and the soot it picks up stay close to the surface, where you can wipe or vacuum them away.

Use a masonry sponge,

which holds a lot of moisture, as an applicator. Wipe off the wash water with a clean sponge or vacuum it away with a shop vac (not a household vacuum or an ash vacuum, which aren't safe to use for liquids).

Wait at least 24 hours for the bricks to dry.

Then mask off surrounding surfaces with painter's tape and make sure there is plastic covering the floor. Apply primer — the key to getting regular paint to stick to both bricks and tiles.

Use a brush, perhaps one with angled bristles 1 ½ inches wide, to paint bricks along the masking tape and the mortar joints between the bricks.

Then use a roller with a cover designed for rough surfaces — probably with a 3/8-inch or ½-inch nap — or to spread primer over the faces of the brick. Or, because you are painting such a narrow band of bricks, you might want to use only a brush for the whole job. Paint the hearth after you finish the bricks.

Because brick is rough and porous, you will probably see numerous indentations that didn't get paint. Rather than try to dab primer and then paint into all these divots, wait an hour or two for the primer to dry, then fill the crevices with paintable acrylic caulk.

After two hours, the caulk will be dry enough for you to apply the first coat of the final paint.

Choose a water-based paint with relatively little gloss, such as matte or egg-

shell, if you want to make texture differences in the brick less noticeable. If ease of cleaning and good light reflection matter more to you, go with semi-gloss.

Wait the time recommended on the paint label before applying a second coat.

Be aware that water-based paints dry quickly, often in an hour or two, but they take more time to cure. Be careful not to scratch the paint, and avoid washing it for at least two weeks.

DECORATING

Peel-and-stick tile is all over social media. But is it that easy?

By **Jamie Killin**

Special to The Washington Post

If you've found yourself on the DIY home improvement side of TikTok, you've probably seen influencers touting peel-and-stick tiles as an easy, inexpensive, renter-friendly way to spruce up floors, backsplashes, accent walls and even showers — no contractor required. But is it really that simple? I decided to find out.

The shower in my guest bathroom made the perfect target. The tile wasn't to my taste, but the bathroom is rarely used, so I didn't want to spend a lot of money upgrading it. Before embarking on my peel-and-stick mission, I spoke with experts to get their best advice.

Here's their guidance, coupled with my own experience:

Select the right tile

Choosing a peel-and-stick tile for a spot such as a backsplash or accent wall, which probably won't get too wet or hot, is relatively straightforward. But for a project like mine, I learned you have to be more discerning.

"You have to find a product that you trust," says Stephanie Bloom, who's amassed more than 23 million likes for her DIY renovations on TikTok. "There's tons of products. You can go on Amazon and it's going to pull up 300 different peel-and-stick tile options, so you have to look at the description of each tile and make sure it's truly waterproof." Look for a product whose description clearly states that it can be used in the shower, she says.

Bloom also suggested that I might instead use tile decals for my project. Made of vinyl, these lay di-

rectly over existing tiles and don't require mapping out a new tile pattern or grouting edges. I unfortunately wasn't able to find any that matched the shape and size of my existing tile, but I would try this option for a future project. (This method will not work if you're dealing with a fiberglass shower or another flat surface.)

Ultimately, I selected a traditional peel-and-stick tile with fake grouted lines by Artemuro in a bright green color with a subway shape. If I were to go back and do it again, I would opt for square tile, which I believe would have been easier to place. The intricacies of the subway pattern became one of the most challenging aspects of my install.

Prep your surface

One of the most important parts of the process is also the simplest — cleaning your surface so the tile's adhesive will stick firmly to the wall.

"Even the slightest amount of dust can lead to peel-and-stick not sticking as well," Bloom says.

To prepare my shower, I used an all-purpose cleaner with a paper towel to wipe down the entire area set to be tiled. I purposely avoided using a cleaning cloth that could leave behind fibers.

Begin tile placement

There are two schools of thought about how to place peel-and-stick tile in a shower.

Cameron Johnson, CEO of Nickson Living, an interior design company that specializes in rentals and frequently uses peel-and-stick tile, advises starting in the middle of each wall and working outward. Bloom recommends starting on the far-left-hand side and working to the right.

After handling an installation myself, I can see the benefits of both options. I decided to follow Johnson's advice and start in the middle of my wall to create a more symmetrical pattern on both sides, but this necessitated more cuts. Starting flush against a clean edge on the left side would have required only cutting the tiles one time, when I reached the end of the wall on the far right.

Johnson also recommends using a template to plan where each tile will go. "For a novice, you might want to use chalk or painter's tape to map out your layout," he says. "You can make yourself a map so that you know you can live with the layout before you actually put the peel-and-stick tiles up."

I can confirm that I wish I had done this. I didn't think it would be worth the added time, and that was a mistake. My first error was lining up my two center sheets of subway tile — not staggering them — so I ended up with a perfectly stacked pattern, instead of the usual staggered design, right in the middle of the back wall. I also had issues with uneven spacing the rest of the way.

Luckily, I'd gotten some invaluable advice from Trina Sholin, a renovation expert who specializes in RVs (which, she says, are great candidates for peel-and-stick makeovers since the material is lighter weight than real tile). She encouraged me to lightly attach the peel-and-stick sheets before fully setting them, which allowed me to make adjustments as I worked.

"You can typically take the tile off and put it back on about three times, so what I do is put it up there just lightly at first — maybe



PHOTO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST BY MICHAEL DUERINCKX

Jamie Killin starts in the center of a shower wall to build out the design.

just tap your four corners to see if you like it — stand back and see if you really like it, then really press it on there,” Sholin says.

Cut tiles to fit in corners and around fixtures

I found cutting the peel-and-stick tile to fit the edges of my shower and around the faucet and showerhead to be the most difficult part of the installation by far.

Bloom supplied one piece of advice that helped: Using a pencil, trace around hardware onto the tile’s paper backing to create a template.

From there, I would cut my template, check it against the shower, tape it to the peel-and-stick tile sheet and cut around it.

Note: Even with a decent blade from my peel-and-stick tile kit, cutting through the thick plastic was tough.

This strategy worked pretty well for the edges of my shower, but the tile I was cutting to fit around my faucet and showerhead still looked off. About halfway through the process, I bought a contour gauge for tracing circular pieces that made the process infinitely easier.

Make sure the tile sticks on securely

Once your pattern is placed, it’s important to press down the tiles firmly enough to ensure they’ll stay put and to get rid of air bubbles.

“You might want to use a rolling pin to get the air bubbles out and make the tile nice and straight on the wall,” Johnson says. “They have these things called floor rollers, too, but it’s basically just like a rolling pin that allows you to apply pressure to get the tile as flat as possible.”

I primarily used a smoother that came in a peel-and-stick kit that I

bought for this project, but a rolling pin probably would’ve worked just as well.

Finish the project with a professional touch

Each of the experts I talked to recommended using caulk or PVC quarter-round to seal the project, clean up imperfect edges and give the tile a more professional look.

“The edges may not align perfectly, so you’ll likely want to use some caulk along the corners,” Johnson says. “It will also make the tile look finished and more like regular porcelain tile.”

Rather than traditional caulk, I decided to keep with the peel-and-stick approach and use InstaTrim self-adhesive caulk tape. While it looked nice at first, within a day, it shrank in length and started peeling off. I had better luck with a flat adhesive trim, which helped to disguise my imperfect cuts and matched the color of the peel-and-stick tile’s grout lines.

Final verdict

With tile, trim, a smoothing tool and the contour gauge, this project ended up costing just under \$500, even after selecting a less expensive peel-and-stick option. And it wasn’t quick: All told, I spent about 10 days on it.

Add in the beginner mistakes and general difficulty of the project, and I can’t say this DIY was worth the trouble.

However, I do love that I was able to experiment with a fun tile color I might not have chosen for a more permanent change. I’ve taken it for a test run, and the tile has held up under the water and heat. Plus, every time I look at it, the mistakes seem more minor.

Jamie Killin is a writer in Arizona who covers business, hospitality and lifestyle.

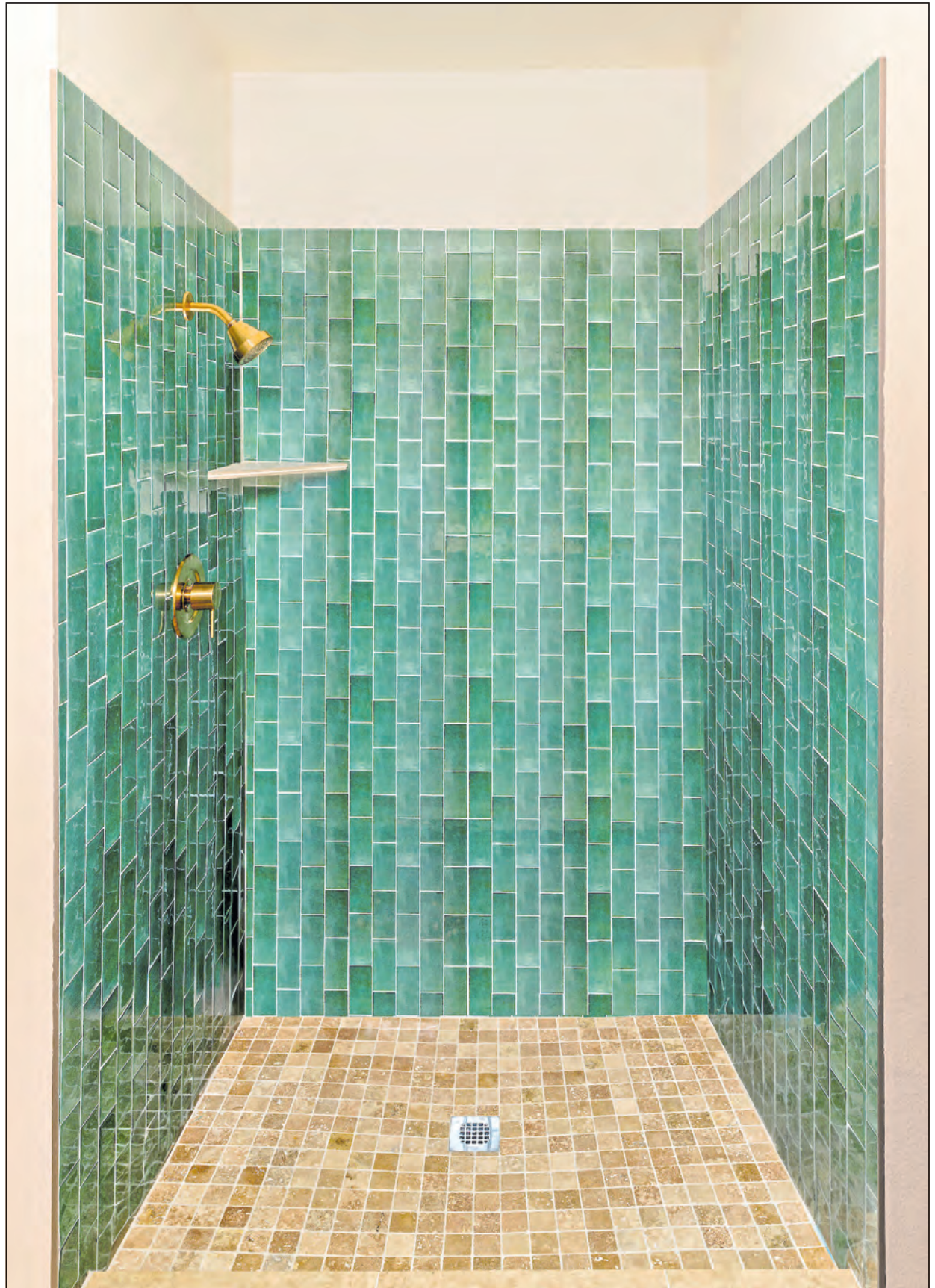


PHOTO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST BY MICHAEL DUERINCKX

The finished product cost just under \$500 and took Jamie Killin 10 days to complete.

MONEY MATTERS

Need new appliances? Here's how to save without sacrificing quality

By Laura Daily

Special to *The Washington Post*

With washers and dryers running \$700 each and refrigerators costing upward of \$2,000 in many cases, new appliances are a big investment.

But if you need or want one — or a full set — sooner than later, there are ways to save money while still getting what you want. Here are tips and tricks for finding the best deals on appliances, without sacrificing on quality.

Repair before you buy

Before you drop big bucks on a new model, see if yours can be fixed. “If you are happy with your appliance and its features, it’s worth finding out what is wrong,” says Kevin Brasler, executive editor with Consumers’ Checkbook, a non-profit consumer advocacy group. “Many repairs are straightforward and most average about \$100.” You don’t need to start shopping unless the repair is more than 50% of the replacement cost, the appliance is nearing the end of its expected life span (typically 10 to 14 years) or it is unrepairable.

Do your research

Sites such as Consumer Reports evaluate appliances for reliability and features. If you’re unable to locate the recommended model in a store, consider substituting a similar model within the same brand, says Tobie Stanger, a senior editor at Consumer Reports.

Even if you don’t buy from a big-box store, it’s



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

If your dishwasher needs to be replaced, think about the size you need compared to the dishes you have.

worth a visit to compare the look, finish, features and feel of various models. If you’re in the market for a dishwasher, for example, Stanger suggests bringing your largest dish to see if it fits.

Try adjusting refrigerator shelves, or test whether you can easily reach in to load and unload a washing

machine. Note the make and model number of your top choices, then shop around for the best price.

Don't buy more than you need

“Not everyone needs bigger or an upgrade,” says Erica Finamore, home director of Real Simple. “Bells

and whistles are fun but add to the cost.” Create a list of must-have features. You can save money by skipping that camera that will display the refrigerator’s contents on your phone and going with a functional top-freezer fridge with a basic icemaker instead. And unless you do a lot of laundry every day, you probably

don’t need an industrial-size machine.

On the other hand, if you host huge family gatherings, a three-rack, adjustable dishwasher may be worth the investment.

Compare prices

Here’s a little secret: Appliance manufacturers set the minimum advertised

price for all retailers. That means prices don’t fluctuate much from seller to seller.

Big-box stores don’t offer better discounts or prices than independent retailers, which tend to get higher marks for selling, service and delivery, says Brasler.

With the make and model number in hand, call or email several stores for



Over time, residue – especially from fabric softener – can build up and block openings on the lint screen.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

a quote.

Ask for the best price for that model, including delivery, extra hoses or hookup kits, and installation.

And don't be afraid to haggle. "Only 22% of people do, but those who try were successful a lot of the time and saved \$140 on average at big-box stores and \$123 at independent stores," Stanger says.

Shop around

Independent dealers can often match or beat the price of a home improvement store.

They may also give you a better deal if you buy multiple appliances at once. Stanger says independent retailers are often more exact in predicting when you'll get your appliance. If the one you want isn't in stock, you can usually sign up to receive a digital alert when it arrives.

Independent retailers also may be more generous in their customer service. "If you are desperate because an appliance has broken, some may even give you a loaner in the interim," she says.

Appliance outlets – which often sell floor models, overstock and open-box (returned) items – may yield a good deal. Stanger says you can save up to 75%, but you may have to pay for delivery and/or installation. Still, a "scratch-and-dent" appliance may be a great option, particularly if the flaw won't be visible. If you buy a floor model or open-box item, though, confirm the markdown is for cosmetic or size reasons and not a mechanical problem, Finamore says. Also, buy only from reputable stores that offer a warranty and ask about the store's return policy.

There is no 'best' time to buy

Conventional wisdom is that you can save money during big sales on Labor Day, the Fourth of July or Black Friday. "Nonsense!" says Brasler. "Retailers are discounting off the MSRP (manufacturer's suggested retail price), but they never really sell the appliance at that price. Stores want you to think a holiday sale is temporary, but it's not. Likely that discounted price is always available."

And unlike cars, toys or running shoes, appliances don't change dramatically from year to year, so retailers rarely offload models to make way for new ones. That means there is no best month to buy, so don't be seduced by so-called "clear-out" sales.

Cosmetics can cost (or save) you

Stores typically display appliances in the most popular finishes.

Right now, those are soft matte black and black stainless, says Finamore. But who's to say what will be popular in 10 years? If you're willing to compromise on the finish and go with, say, glossy black or white, you may be able to save, she says.

Skip the extended warranty

Most manufacturers provide a good product warranty. But experts agree that extended warranties have so many exclusions they are practically worthless. "They are highly profitable for the store but bad for the customer," Brasler says.

And check with your credit card company. Some cards extend a manufacturer's warranty by one or two years, as long as you bought the appliance with that credit card.

KITCHEN

Pay attention to these details when shopping for a garbage disposal

By **Laura Daily**

Special To The Washington Post

A garbage disposal is hardly a glamorous item, but there are reasons to pore over its details the same way you do with any other kitchen appliance, lest you wind up with a shrieking, leaky or clog-generating device.

These tips about garbage disposal features, cost, installation and maintenance will help ensure you purchase a product that fits your needs and will last for years.

Horsepower

A garbage disposal's job is to grind food waste into pieces small enough to pass through your plumbing.

The most important choice you will make is the motor's horsepower (hp). Horsepower equals grinding power and ranges from 1/3 to 1 hp. Take into account your family's size, how often you cook, how much food waste you generate and how often you will use the disposal.

Though economical, a 1/3-hp unit will probably fail quickly, says Bob Harrah, general manager at SAK Electric Plumbing in Arizona. Most households are well served by a 1/2- or 3/4-hp motor. Large families and home chefs may want to consider a 1-hp unit.

Size

The higher the horsepower, the larger the grinding chamber, both in depth and diameter.

You want to buy a disposal that fits into the cabinet space under your kitchen sink.

If you are replacing a disposal, measure the length of the existing one or measure from the cabinet bottom to the sink, says Aaron Mulder, a journeyman plumber

and co-owner of Mr. Rooter Plumbing in San Antonio. If space is an issue, consider compact models that have just as much horsepower.

Noise

Garbage disposals are not quiet appliances. The stronger the unit, the louder it will be.

Manufacturers are now producing models with sound insulation jackets, claiming to cut noise by up to 60% over standard disposers, but serenity comes at a price.

A 1-hp unit with sound-reduction technology may cost twice as much as its uninsulated counterpart. "It's personal preference. Some people don't care about noise, and others are really bothered by it," Mulder says.

Cost

A basic 1/3-hp model can cost less than \$100, while a 1-hp unit with sound-seal technology could be as much as \$750.

On average, a quality disposal will cost between \$150 and \$250. Experts advise sticking to tried-and-true brands.

A standard installation typically runs from \$125 to \$325.

Many home improvement stores offer professional installation services, and some plumbers will give you a deal on installation if you purchase the disposal from them.

Installation

Doug Greene of Signature Properties in Philadelphia specializes in flipping houses and outfits each kitchen sink with a new garbage disposal. "I'm a strong proponent of DIY, but if you do the work yourself, you are on the hook if anything goes wrong," he says. "Take inventory



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

A garbage disposal is hardly a glamorous item, but there are reasons to pore over its details the same way you do with any other kitchen appliance.

of your skill set. Have you ever done a plumbing project, worked with PVC pipe and understand how to seal pipes and other joints, so there are no leaks? If not, you may want to find a professional plumber."

Mulder agrees. Although installing a disposal is not a hard job, he says, "you do have to line things up, especially if the new unit is not the same make and model as the older one."

Note that if you are installing a disposal under a kitchen sink that doesn't have one, you may also need to invest in piping or electrical work. (A disposal needs a power source.)

And although a pro will

cost you, with a plumber, you'll get an installation warranty and the manufacturer's warranty.

Jams

Some models tout anti-jamming features such as "reverse grind." Experts say you don't need them. Standard models typically come with an Allen wrench and/or a reset button.

If your disposal stops running, make sure it's not jammed before assuming it must be replaced.

Unplug it, insert the wrench into a hole on the bottom of the disposal and manually turn the disposal blades to free the jam.

Or you can unplug the

unit, stick your hand into the disposal to clear the jam, plug it in, then push the reset button.

Maintenance

With proper care, a garbage disposal can last some 30 years or more, Mulder says. Still, there are some tricks to avoiding jams, clogged pipes and gross smells caused by bacteria and food buildup.

Greene tosses ice cubes and baking soda into his disposal every week or so to deodorize it.

Although in theory tossing an orange or lemon into your disposal makes it smell great, the solid peels are the bane of plumbers

because they can get caught in the unit.

Harrah says you should also avoid eggshells, stringy foods (potato peelings, celery or carrot shavings, for example) and grease. (It can get stuck in pipes and eventually cause clogs.) Drain products are another no-no because the caustic chemicals can damage plastic pipes. Mulder says a green-certified, all-natural enzymatic treatment can be used to dissolve organic material in drain pipes.

Denver-based writer Laura Daily specializes in consumer advocacy and travel strategies. Find her at dailywriter.net.

AROUND THE HOUSE

Why does mold on my walls come back, even after cleaning with bleach?

By Jeanne Huber

Special to *The Washington Post*

“Killing” mold is a never-ending task unless you change the conditions that allow the fungus to thrive. Plenty of fresh spores are always floating in the air, ready to set up new colonies wherever they land on surfaces that are damp for long periods.

The first step in dealing with a mold problem is always to figure out why it is occurring.

Fix that, clean away the mold, and it should stay gone.

If the mold is on indoor paneling, is it a cold outside wall?

Thin or missing insulation could be allowing condensation to form where warm, humid indoor air hits cold wood. Try moving furniture out from the wall a bit so there's better air circulation to dry the wood.

Another possible solution is improving insulation.

A home inspector or insulation contractor with a thermal imaging camera can scan the wall and pinpoint areas where insulation is thin or missing — or maybe you already know that there is no insulation, given the age of your house.

A thermal scan can also help locate plumbing leaks, which are often the cause of mold in houses. And better ventilation of steamy rooms, such as the kitchen, laundry room or bathrooms, might help.

Exhaust fans and dryer vents must send the moist air outside.

That may seem obvious, but previous owners might



LEE CELANO — GETTY IMAGES

The EPA recommends professional cleaning of any indoor mold that covers more than 10 square feet.

have taken shortcuts, so it's worth checking. An oversized air-conditioning system can also leave air too humid; have a heating and air conditioning company look at it.

If the mold is growing on wood siding on the outside of your house, try to figure out ways to keep the walls from staying damp for long periods. Mold is especially likely to grow on walls in the shade. You can't change the direction of the sun, but you can cut back trees, shrubs or vines growing close to the house; clean gutters; divert water from downspouts so it flows away from the walls; and make sure sprinklers don't spray the house.

Sometimes, especially on

north-facing walls, mold appears in vertical sections with no mold or little mold where wall framing is hidden.

This happens because the wall cavities between studs are insulated but the framing is not, and the wood transmits heat. Those strips of siding stay warmer and therefore drier, preventing mold. Solving the underlying problem or problems is key, but if the mold is indoors, it's also important to remove it.

Mold spores, which make up most of what you see on surfaces, cause allergic reactions.

Those can range from a stuffy nose and itching eyes to intense breathing problems, especially among

people who have asthma or mold allergies.

In people with chronic breathing problems, mold can cause lung infections. Because cleaning spores inevitably causes some of them to go airborne, and because there is no way to know which kind of mold will cause health problems for specific individuals, the EPA recommends professional cleaning of any indoor mold that covers more than 10 square feet. If you do the cleanup yourself, wear protective goggles and gloves.

To remove mold, many people assume bleach is the best option. Chlorine bleach does remove the dark stains that mold can leave, so it can be useful on surfaces

such as tile.

It also kills mold spores, but that's not as useful as it might seem. “In most cases, it is not possible or desirable to sterilize an area,” says the federal Environmental Protection Agency in a section of its website devoted to helping people understand mold issues. “A background level of mold spores will remain — these spores will not grow if the moisture problem has been resolved.”

Dead spores can still cause allergic reactions, though, and using bleach can trigger its own set of health problems if you inhale the fumes or get it in your eyes or on your skin. It can also damage your clothes.

The EPA recommends scrubbing mold from hard surfaces with water and detergent, such as the kind you'd use for washing dishes by hand. Wood with an intact finish — paint or clear — can be cleaned the same way.

But if the wood is bare, or has finish that has worn off in places, it's a different story. Then you're cleaning the wood fibers.

Indoors, the best solution for bare wood is to scrub off the mildew as well as you can, using water and a little dishwashing soap. Wipe with clear water a few times, then let the wood dry.

If the air is not humid and the wood stays dry, the mildew should not come back.

If the stains come back, try painting the wood, which will make it easier to wipe clean in the future. Af-

ter the primer dries, paint with water-based paint, possibly one labeled as resistant to mold.

Outside, you might want to follow advice from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Products Laboratory about the care of cedar shakes and shingles used for wood siding. It notes that mold does not damage wood and feeds mostly on contaminants that settle out from the air.

So outdoors, mold is mostly a cosmetic issue: It looks ugly.

They recommend avoiding chlorine bleach, which can turn wood fuzzy.

Cleaners that contain sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide are even worse. Instead, they suggest something that contains sodium percarbonate or another oxygen bleach, which will be gentler to wood fibers. But even then, they advise starting with a more dilute solution than the manufacturer recommends.

If it works, continue to use that. If it isn't cleaning well, increase the concentration up to the recommended amount.

If the mold doesn't come off with an oxygen bleach, the laboratory's report says that it may have grown into the finish, which could be blocking the cleaner from reaching the mold. If that's your situation, you might need to strip the finish and redo it.

If you paint, the mold-killing primer is also suitable for exterior use. Most exterior paints are formulated to resist mold growth on the surface.

BATHROOM

Bathtubs range from basic to spa-worthy. Here's how to choose

By Jerica Pender

Special To The Washington Post

The bathtub, which has taken a back seat to luxury shower setups in many homes in recent years, is experiencing a bit of a revival as people seek a place to soak away their worries along with the dirt of everyday life.

“It’s a time to reset and relax,” says Caroline Danielson, director of showrooms for Ferguson, a wholesale plumbing supply company. “A lot of bathtubs these days can come with different bells and whistles, whether you actually need to rest your muscles or you need to rest your mind.”

Bathtubs have come a long way — and gone through many iterations — since the days of a humble galvanized steel basin that had to be filled with water heated on the stove. There was John M. Kohler’s 1880s enamel-coated horse trough; the clawfoot models that graced bathrooms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the sunken tubs in mid-century green, yellow or pink; and the large soaking versions with jets that were popular in the 1980s.

Clawfoots, fun colors and spa tubs are still available, but today’s tubs are streamlined and more lightweight, thanks to material blends. They come in a variety of sizes, styles and materials, and with options that include aroma, chroma and hydrotherapy.

Strategically placed jets can massage sore muscles. LED lights can change the



PHOTO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST BY NICK COTE

Bathtubs have come a long ways over the years, offering many designs and types.

color of the water. And built-in essential oil diffusers can emit a delicate mist of soothing scents. All of this can make shopping — and caring — for a new tub a bit overwhelming.

We talked to several experts about available materials and options, and how

to care for and maintain your tub. Here is what they had to say:

Fiberglass

Starting at around \$200, this is the cheapest option, because it’s easy to manufacture, says Eric Goranson, host of Around the House

and a home improvement, design and construction expert with 30 years of experience.

It’s lightweight and shiny and lacks a steel frame, meaning it can be sprayed into a variety of forms, including compact spaces. And easy installation makes

it popular with builders and landlords.

It’s also less durable and scratches, cracks and fades more easily than other materials, Goranson says. Expect a fiberglass tub to last for about 10 to 15 years.

“If you’ve ever gotten into a bathtub and you kind of

feel like, ‘OK, the plastic is giving way a little bit — I can hear it creak when I jump,’ probably that’s fiberglass,” says Danielson.

Brandon Pleshek, a third-generation professional cleaner and self-proclaimed “clean freak,” suggests using some mild dish

soap and a nonabrasive sponge to clean fiberglass. Rinse and then polish with a soft microfiber cloth.

Acrylic

For everyday functionality and ease of use, Danielson says that acrylic tubs — which start at around \$400 for a base model and last 10 to 15 years — are a great choice.

Like fiberglass, acrylic is lightweight and shiny and sounds hollow when you knock on it.

Many are double-walled, meaning there's a sheet of acrylic on each side of the insulation, making them more durable.

Manufacturers offer them in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors, and with tons of options, such as jets or air systems, heaters, speakers and Bluetooth functionalities, essential oil diffusers, and color-changing LED lights.

Beware, though, the added features can quickly add up.

Pleshek uses a homemade spray of a cup each of water and white vinegar and a teaspoon of dish soap to clean acrylic.

He wets the surface, sprays on the solution, then scrubs with a non-scratch sponge or soft-bristled drill brush. He then rinses and wipes down.

Any added systems, such as jets, also need regular cleaning to prevent mold growth, Danielson says. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to clean them, or you can simply circulate vinegar and hot water through it.

Cast iron

In Goranson's opinion, a sturdy cast iron bathtub is "the most luxurious" option. It outlasts other materials (think a life span of around 100 years) and costs between \$600 and \$2,000. Cast iron is easily identifiable by the bell-like sound it makes when you knock on it. Another quick test: See if a magnet sticks to it.

With these (and all-natural material tubs) you should draw your bath hotter than normal because the tub's cold metal and the hot water equalize, Danielson says.

The benefit is that the bath water stays warmer longer. Think of it like cast iron cookware, Goranson says, "Once it gets warm,

it stays warm." The downside is that cast iron is heavy, not easily customizable and harder to install.

To clean and maintain a cast iron tub, Pleshek wets the surface and sprinkles a gentle abrasive or uses a nonabrasive spray with a scratchless sponge that softens in warm water. Danielson says cast iron withstands a little more "tough love" with scrubbing than other tub materials.

Steel

If you want the classic look of cast iron at a lower price point (and lighter weight), consider steel, which starts around \$200-\$300 and lasts 10 to 20 years.

Steel has a tinnier sound than cast iron when you knock on it.

Stamped from a thin sheet of steel with glass enamel powder melted over the top, these tubs, like fiberglass, can be loud. They can also chip and dent, and those intrusions will quickly rust.

"It's just like a car door," Goranson says, "a metal surface with paint on it." He says you can buy steel tubs that have sound deadeners on the back.

To clean a steel tub, Pleshek uses a DIY spray (the same formula he uses for acrylic) and a nonscratch sponge.

Specialty materials

Generally manufactured by hand, specialty tubs, often chosen for therapeutic qualities or to fit a specific design aesthetic, are statement pieces commanding higher price tags. Materials include stone (and stone composite), copper and wood.

Stone composites blend stone and resin, making them lighter than their whole stone slab counterparts. Wooden tubs are often made from teak, which is oily with water-resistant qualities. Copper tubs, depending on whether they are sealed or coated, have what Danielson calls a living finish that patinas beautifully.

Each of these materials will have very specific cleaning recommendations from the manufacturers because of the delicate nature and range of variables.

Jerica Pender is a freelance writer in Olympia, Washington.



R. BRIGDEN/EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE — GETTY IMAGES

English actress Virginia Wetherell is shown in Dec. 1973 near a bathtub.

AROUND THE HOUSE

6 things to know about shopping for wall-to-wall carpeting

By **Laura Daily**

The Washington Post

If you watch enough home improvement shows, you may become convinced that wall-to-wall carpet is as passe as skinny jeans. But experts in the industry say otherwise. Carpet continues to be a popular choice because it is affordable, versatile, generally softer underfoot and can work well in a variety of spaces.

“Hardwood may be more common, but you can’t beat the warmth and comfortable feel of a carpeted floor,” says Kate McKenna, senior editor for The Spruce. “Durability and stain resistance have come a long way, so much so that we see carpet in spaces with pets because many brands are built to withstand messes.”

Sorting through the many options for materials, patterns, textures and styles, though, can leave consumers with more questions than answers. We spoke with McKenna and other experts about how to find the best fit for you and your home.

Here are their top tips on what to consider when shopping for wall-to-wall carpet:

The space

Carpet can work in almost any space, but that doesn’t mean you should add it to every room. It isn’t recommended in bathrooms or the kitchen, McKenna says, because it’s a moisture magnet, creating the perfect environment for mold and mildew (and

cleaning product spills can bleach it).

Look at your lifestyle and the room(s) in question to determine the best carpet for that area. How do you use the space? Is this a high-traffic area or a quiet bedroom? Do you host a lot of parties where food or drinks could get spilled? Do you have children who need a soft surface for playing on the floor? Do you have pets? Be armed with the answers before heading to a showroom.

Types of carpet

Carpet comes in two broad types: synthetic and natural fiber. Synthetics are durable, stain-resistant and affordable. Styles with a low, tight loop and a short pile are less likely to show footprints or vacuum marks. Nylon is the most popular synthetic fiber, followed by olefin, polypropylene and polyester. Within synthetics, you’ll find a range of durability and softness. Olefin and polyester, for example, attract oil and dust and will “ugly out” (flatten or mat down) over time, says Christopher Ayoub, co-owner of Ayoub N&H, a full-service flooring store in Kensington, Maryland.

Wool is the most common natural fiber, and pretty much the only one used in wall-to-wall carpet. Eco-friendly fibers such as jute, sisal, coir and bamboo are popular in area rugs, but they are too weak or too coarse to be made into carpet. Wool is more expensive and prone to stain than synthetics, but it’s more luxurious and the durable, re-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Carpet continues to be a popular choice because it is affordable, versatile, generally softer underfoot and can work well in a variety of spaces.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Don't settle for having to look at dirty carpets while you're indoors this fall and winter.

silient fibers wear well.

"Think about what you really want," Ayoub says. "Some carpet is more durable, but not easy to clean, versus stainproof but doesn't last 20 years." One aesthetic factor to consider: Wool typically comes in neutral hues, whereas synthetics can be dyed almost any color.

Costs

Fiber type and quality determine carpet prices. Synthetics can range from \$1.50 to as much as \$12 per square foot.

Wool ranges from \$5 to \$50 per square foot. Ayoub points out you can get a lower-grade wool for about the same price as a higher-grade synthetic.

Another budget-friendly option is a wool-nylon blend. "You get the softness of wool, but the durability and stain-resistance of a synthetic," says McKenna.

You also need to budget for padding, which provides a barrier between carpet and floor, impacts how carpet feels underfoot and helps prolong carpet life.

Typical padding materials include rubber, memory foam or rebond (scraps of high-density foam bonded together).

Costs range from 60 cents to \$1 per square foot.

Thicker padding will be more expensive, but Ayoub says that if you invest in a durable carpet you shouldn't scrimp on the quality of the padding.

Installation

Professional installation, provided by flooring retailers, includes removing old carpet, then stretching and tacking down the new carpet. Installers charge either by the square foot or the room. There may be additional fees for moving furniture, putting in transition strips from the carpet to a wood floor or installation on steps. You can ease the installation process by removing small objects from the room. "And I tell clients to take photos before the installation just in case you have to prove that something was damaged," says Kelly Kuehn, an interior designer and Design Studio manager at Floor360 in Milwau-

kee. Be prepared to touch up any painted baseboards after installation, as they often get dinged during the process. If your current flooring is wood, you may need to shave down entry or closet doors so they open and close over the thicker carpet.

Warranties

A manufacturer's warranty runs 10 to 25 years and covers stains, texture retention and maybe premature wear, says Ayoub. Most carpet samples list the warranty terms and conditions on the label. It's also important to get a warranty at installation to cover buckles or ripples that may develop over time. That coverage can last from one year

to a lifetime, depending on the installer.

Maintenance

"If you clean and vacuum a carpet, it will hold up a long time," Kuehn says. Vacuum regularly and spot-clean spills or stains. But, Kuehn says, avoid using vacuum cleaners with aggressive suction, which is bad for the fibers. Also steer clear of models with stiff bristles; they can be abrasive and create a fuzz that can't be fixed.

Have carpets professionally cleaned every 18 to 24 months and keep the receipts as proof to maintain your manufacturer's warranty. DIY rental machines don't count, says Kuehn.

WALLS

You can paint vinyl windows, but should you?

By Jeanne Huber

Special to *The Washington Post*

You'll find a lot of contradictory advice on the web, including statements that paint will or won't stick to vinyl and warnings that dark paint will make vinyl window frames warp and fail.

But, yes, it is possible to paint vinyl windows. And, yes, it would probably void the warranty.

One indication that vinyl can be painted is this: Milgard, a major window manufacturer in the western half of the country, sells vinyl windows with a painted finish — even in very dark colors — that come with a bottle of touch-up paint applied at the factory.

A manager at one of the company's manufacturing plants said they even refer customers who want to paint or repaint vinyl windows to a local paint company. Yet on the Milgard website, where one of the frequently asked questions is "Can I paint my vinyl windows?" the answer is "Painting your vinyl windows is considered an alteration to the vinyl finish and will result in the warranty being voided."

It's worth evaluating how much you should be concerned about the warranty.

Depending on how the warranty for your windows is worded, you might not be able to collect anything now, regardless of whether you paint.

Many warranties cover repairs only for the origi-

nal purchaser.

Warranties that are transferrable may set different conditions once the original owner sells.

And replacements for glass units that become cloudy may last for only a limited time, such as 20 years, regardless of who owns the house.

So you need to check the wording. If you don't have the warranty, you can look it up online or by calling the manufacturer, but you need to know the type of window and when it was made.

Some manufacturers stamp a code on the spacer bar that separates the glass panes.

Others put a sticker with a code on the frame. The Fenestration and Glazing Industry Alliance has an online guide to websites that can translate the code into a manufacturer name and product line.

If you can't decipher the code or even find one, a local store that sells windows and doors may be able to help.

Once you're over the hurdle of whether to worry about voiding the warranty, decide whether you really want to paint.

Yes, you'd get to switch to a color you like better.

The downside is that the paint might need to be redone after some number of years, meaning that you'd be converting window frames that essentially need no maintenance (other than cleaning) into ones that might need periodic repainting.

Over the years, many



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

For kitchens and breakfast nooks, bathrooms and dens, consider vinyl garden windows, which invite more light into your space and include shelves ideal for housing indoor plants, such as fragrant herbs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Painting your vinyl windows is considered an alteration to the vinyl finish and could result in the product's warranty being voided.

homeowners have had disastrous experiences caused by painting vinyl siding.

Vinyl expands and contracts significantly as it heats. Light colors reflect wavelengths from the sun, which include the infrared wavelengths that translate to heat, while dark colors absorb them.

So painting light-colored vinyl siding a darker color can cause the vinyl to expand and bubble out from the wall, and once that happens, the only way to get a good-looking wall again is to replace the siding. Vinyl window framing isn't likely

to warp as much simply because framing pieces are a lot shorter than a typical siding piece.

But window frames have corners that need to stay tightly closed, and the framing needs to hold the glass in place — a real challenge if the vinyl expands too much because glass doesn't expand as much. This adds stress on the sealant that keeps the glass in place.

To avoid problems with painting vinyl siding, painters for years have been told never to switch to a darker color and to use colors with a light reflectance value of

55 or greater. (This scale goes from 0, which absorbs all light, to 100, which reflects all light. Most paint chips list the LRV on the back.)

But major paint manufacturers, including Benjamin Moore and Sherwin-Williams, offer a palette of "vinyl safe" colors that include darker shades, even some close to the reddish brown trim color shown in the photograph of your house.

What makes these dark colors OK for vinyl siding even though they absorb so much light? "They don't use black," said Fabian Navarro,

one of the people who answers consumers' questions for Benjamin Moore.

David Underwood, associate technical project manager at Benjamin Moore, explained more in an email. "The vinyl-safe palette has unique prescriptions based on reflectance value of each pigment used to achieve the final color," he wrote. "These special prescriptions produce colors with a heat reflectance of 55 or higher, while the non-vinyl-safe prescriptions could be much lower depending on the color — which are fine for more stable substrates

such as wood or masonry."

Sherwin-Williams, in a PDF about its vinyl-safe colors, shows the dramatic difference in how sample pieces of vinyl fared when painted: The sample with a standard gray paint warped noticeably, while the one with a vinyl-safe gray stayed flat.

The current advice from these companies is to pick a vinyl-safe color or one that has an LRV above 55.

The paint manufacturers don't offer advice specifically for vinyl windows, but a color that works on vinyl siding would also be suitable for other vinyl surfaces, in-

cluding doors, garage doors, and, yes, windows, Navarro said.

Sherwin-Williams and Benjamin Moore each recommend a variety of acrylic finishes for vinyl siding. Some are self-priming; others require a separate primer. Ask your local paint store for advice and read the product data sheet for the paint you select to see what primer, if any, is recommended for vinyl.

One caveat, whether the paint is sprayed or brushed on: Don't clog the weep holes at the bottom of the frame on the exterior.

SPRING WORD SEARCH

D G S M F S Z W O O R E V O S S A P B N
 E L N U G S R O O D T U O C E Y O H I O
 B L E I M N S V T L L U M M B W Y S M S
 U C O I K B I E B S U N S H I N E R B A
 D N V P F I R R I U F T R A V E L E U E
 G S H M D D H E P G L K L L D B D W T S
 R A I N Y A D T L S R B C Z I V P O T S
 S U C O R C T M A L R E S O L O E H E L
 Z R E B I R T H I P A N L L L R S S R A
 O R G A N I Z A T I O N N L U A Z F F M
 L L A B E S A B W M R C V T A S M E L I
 T H G I L Y A D Y O I D A W G P U S I N
 S T C E S N I Y B Z R R T A A C R M E A
 F L K F F Z N L K A E M A M R L S P S R
 H L N E L L O P Y P L E S B D E O O W R
 S S O M T O D K M S A A R C E A T T E E
 I A M W M B C E S G N S N B N N U C K T
 V H H I E A T Y N V R O B R I I W P N S
 P P N C B R N F Y N E U Z I N N V L N A
 E G F H L D S G E S V M C I G G A I M E

WORDS

ALLERGIES INSECTS
 ANIMALS ORGANIZATION
 BACKYARD OUTDOORS
 BASEBALL PASSOVER
 BLOOMING POLLEN
 BREEZY RAIN
 BUD REBIRTH
 BULBS SEASON
 BUTTERFLIES SHOWERS
 CLEANING SOIL
 CROCUS SPRING
 DAYLIGHT SUNSHINE
 EASTER TADPOLE
 FIELD TEMPERATURE
 FLOWERS TRAVEL
 GARDENING UMBRELLA
 HIKING VERNAL
 WORMS

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally & diagonally throughout the puzzle.

SPRINGTIME WORD SEARCH

H M I N W S Y R B C D B H I K I N G W Z
 D U S E I G R E L L A N A T U R E A U E
 S P R I N G H O H F B E N I H S N U S U
 B M T I D N U N L G G L U D A Y T R I P
 A T A O O D O O G G P R O Z D S S W N B
 B O P K S S W N E B K M K O F W M I W E
 I Z K G A E I N E L L O P I M I B L Y S
 E D Z E R L H U M M I N G B I R D D M C
 S U S S H W C G N I H C T A H N U L I N
 E R G C A M D S D L E I F M E R D I K E
 C D T T S S T C E S N I D Y N G E F C D
 T A P F C N T L O U T D O O R S T E H B
 H R A A L L E R B M U G Z T P K N O I U
 G D T C B T S E N L A W N M O W E R R M
 H W P E W A R M I N G E A I R G C W P B
 N O I T C U D O R P E R I O D A S W I L
 H O C B E G N I N E D R A G D D W D N E
 U K N W O R A I N Y A A D Z S Z U S G B
 N C I I S D E E W T R E E S C O I B S E
 B G C B K S G G E O R S N E E Z I N G E

WORDS

ALLERGIES NATURE
 BABIES NEST
 BLOOM OUTDOORS
 BUDDING PICNIC
 BUMBLEBEE POLLEN
 CHIRPING RAINY
 CLOUDS REPRODUCTION
 DAYTRIP SCENTED
 EGGS SEASON
 FIELDS SNEEZING
 FLOWERS SPRING
 GARDENING SUNSHINE
 HATCHING SWARM
 HATCHLING TREES
 HIKING UMBRELLA
 HUMMINGBIRD WARMING
 INSECTS WEEDS
 LAWMOWER WILDLIFE

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally & diagonally throughout the puzzle.

SPRING SEASON WORD SEARCH

L M A H B L I D O F F A D S F K I K K H
 S S B T Z P O S K E I Y R K C K C B B Y
 S E T R R W B M I I T W S U H D D I L G
 E A M I S E L D D U P K P N S A C S H D
 M S P B Y M D F B K N W O H B Y G Y E C
 Y O T E L O O L K L R R A U U G T U F Y
 H N N N S O P O O N H T L U E P T U N C
 G R M A A L O W T L C B S F S F I N D D
 B R I K Y B B E R H S P E D C E U Y T N
 R R O E A K S R Z D R T Y N Z B H A B A
 T K K W E H Y S Y I U U T H H B A U E S
 M G G Y O D K C N E C T T D A G T R G D
 K I B W Z M R G H H Z H B Y R T T S E N
 N S E H R I D T Z H B E F E E M P P R K
 F R K O T C N G E Y T G E R S O A K H D
 S N B B Y I W C Z D R N F R A U W R U O
 F I P L C U N L Y A U L N N B G C F C H
 N T O A A E K K I U Y U W O H W H O U H
 G T Y M I M U N P A U C R A P B N C R C
 K H W S D I B C P S C U F N Z G G W Z C

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

BIRTH
 BLOOM
 BREEZE
 BULBS
 BUNNY
 BUTTERFLY
 CHICK
 CROCUS
 DAFFODIL
 EGGS
 FLOWERS
 GREEN
 GROW
 HATCH
 HYACINTH
 LAMB
 MARCH
 NEST
 PUDDLES
 RAIN
 ROBIN
 SEASON
 SHOWERS
 SPRING

LANDSCAPE WORD SEARCH

S M R O W R D G E Z I L I T R E F R S U
 G L A C U R N L D B P R A R I Z D A S L
 A E S O H I U G M O S C O S P Y E Z L U
 W M Z R H E N G O B U O R D S H R U B S
 P T R C S I S U S R T L W E U D S G F E
 A A L T R B H S B S I U E E W N P H E S
 B U T P R I U A W C E Y I S P R L E E T
 M Z S H D O P R G O M B L D I Z A L L N
 U A S G W P U S G N R A E S Z W N I H N
 G D N S E A L B D E N B T Z T I T Y R G
 A S I A A A Y E L D I N R L R L I Z W Z
 R W L Y W R S D S E A I L Z I D N P P G
 D N E N O I G C O L S A P L H L G R M M
 E D E E G I A A P S W H I N T I S U C T
 N T N N D P T U W F P G O G H F B N R L
 C E P H E B R W A T E R C O Z E D E U D
 O P U S N N O T H G U O R D T L E R G C
 F P E S T I C I D E C T U C W S L Z O A
 O L G L H M Z T S O P M O C O R N B O S
 D D N H G R E E N N O I T A G I R R I P

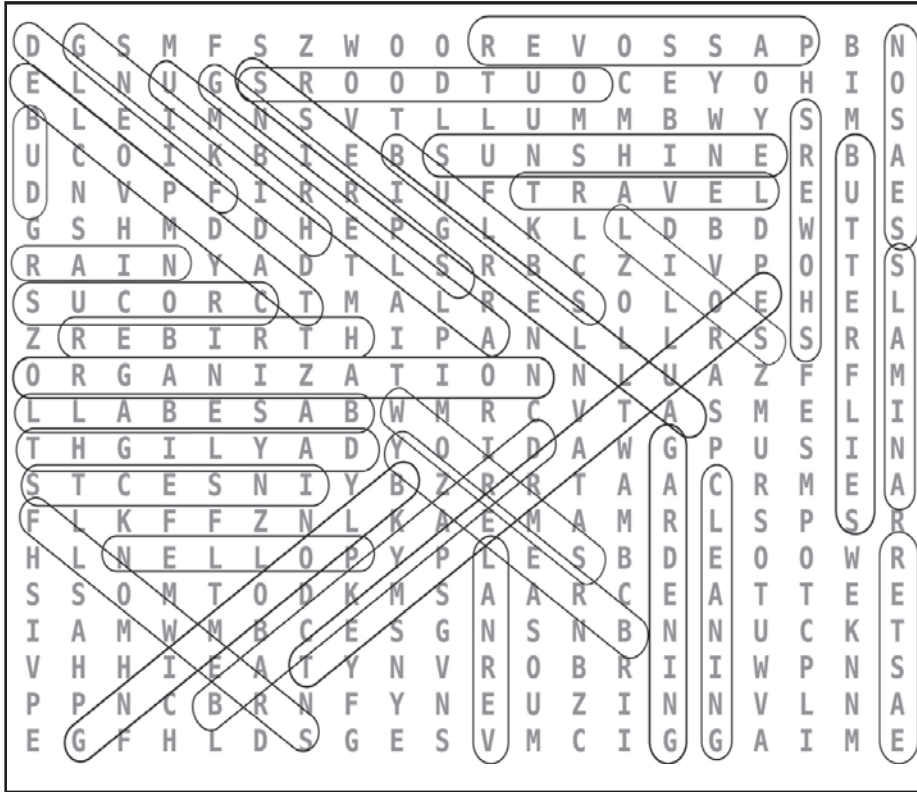
Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

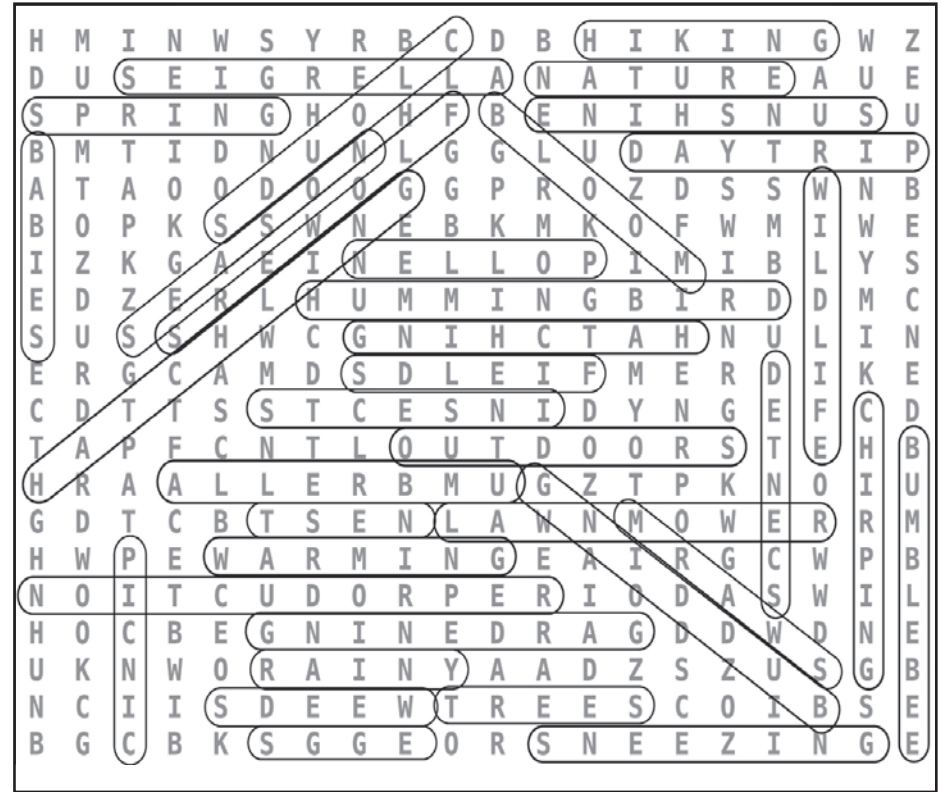
BED
 COMPOST
 CURB APPEAL
 DESIGN
 DROUGHT
 FERTILIZE
 GARDEN
 GRASS
 GREEN
 GRUBS
 HOSE
 IRRIGATION
 LANDSCAPE
 LAWN
 MULCHING
 PATHWAY
 PESTICIDE
 PLANTING
 PLANTS
 PRUNE
 ROOTS
 ROWS
 SEEDS
 SHRUBS
 SOD
 SPRING
 TREES
 TROUBLESHOOT
 WATER
 WEED
 WILDLIFE
 WORMS

Puzzles courtesy
 of Metro Editorial
 Services

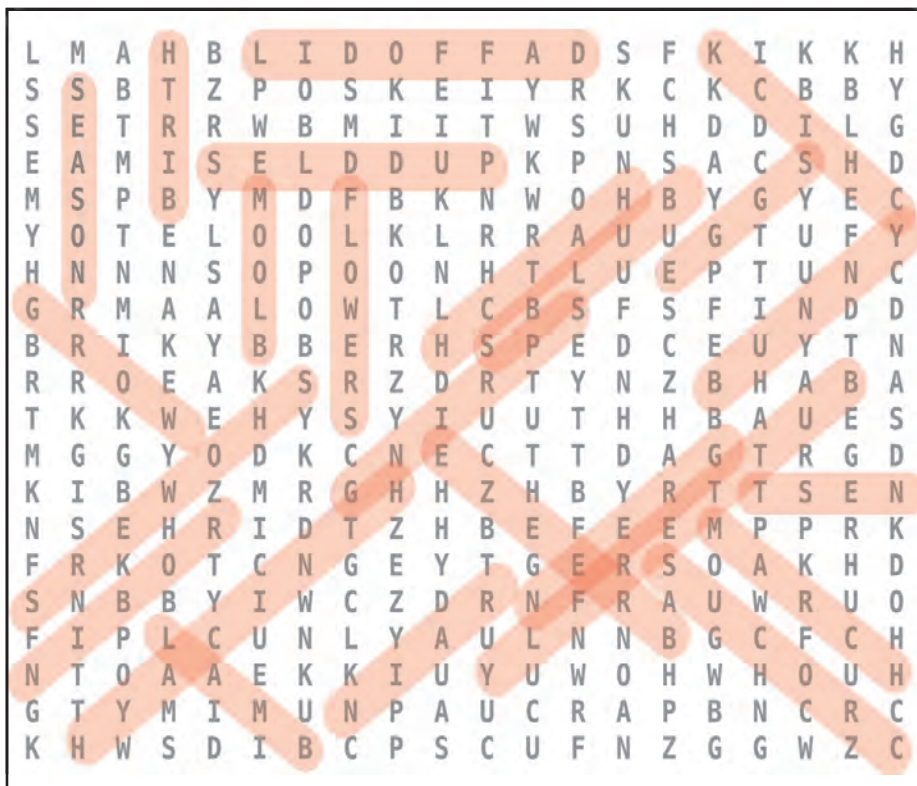
SPRING WORD SEARCH ANSWERS



SPRINGTIME WORD SEARCH ANSWERS



SPRING SEASON WORD SEARCH ANSWERS



LANDSCAPE WORD SEARCH ANSWERS

