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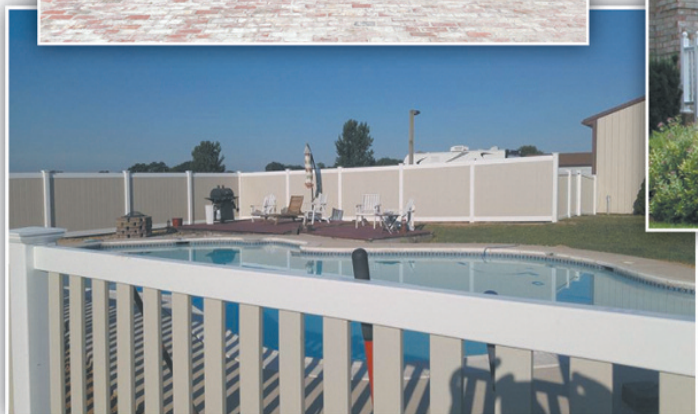
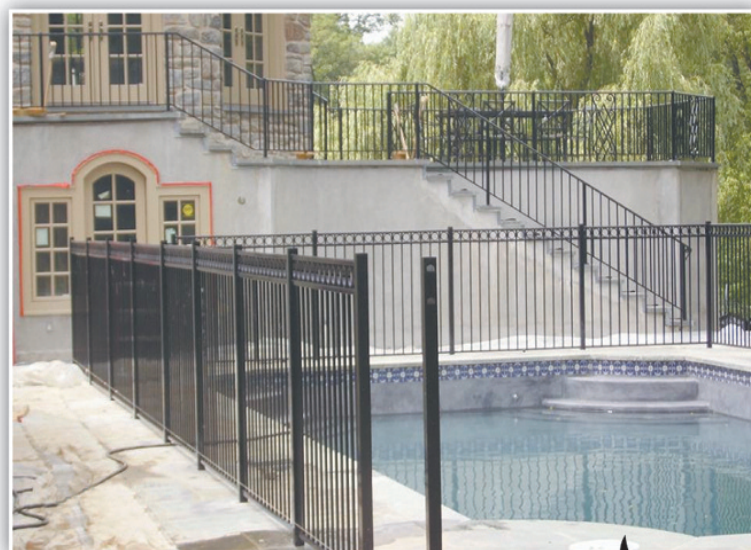
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Create A Safe And Enjoyable Backyard Play Area

Homeowners often aspire to have attractive backyards that look like they belong in a magazine. While these can be picturesque and functional for adults, they may not be entirely practical for homeowners who have young children, especially when the majority of the yard is covered with paving stones or concrete.

When young children are part of a household, homeowners may benefit by designing yards that are both functional and fun. Incorporating safe play areas for kids is one way to unlock the potential of both big and small backyards.

As children run off to enjoy a playground, safety is the last thing on their minds. Kids are most interested in scaling ladders to treehouses or coasting down slides. That's why adults must take it upon themselves to keep injury prevention in mind. SafestPlayground.com indicates that playground-related

injuries routinely result in severe fractures, internal injuries, concussions, and dislocations. In the majority of playground injuries to children younger than age 5, the head and face are affected. Children between the ages of 5 and 9 experience more leg and arm injuries than younger kids. The Consumer Product Safety Commission states 70 percent of children's injuries occur on home playgrounds. More than 28,000 children are injured each year on playgrounds across Canada, according to Parachute, a national injury prevention organization.

When considering playground equipment for the yard, parents need to make safety a priority. The Canada Safety Society advises parents to follow the "5 S's of Playground Safety": Surface, structures, site, supervision, and safety.

• **SURFACE:** Parents should assume that children will fall. To lessen the blow of falls, choose playground equipment with a perimeter of six feet of a softer surface, such as sand, pea gravel, rubber pieces or wood chips. This material should be between six and 12 inches deep.

• **STRUCTURE:** The structure of the play equipment should be built from sturdy materials. Pressure-treated lumber was once the standard, but it's not advisable for kids' playgrounds, as the chemicals used in the lumber can leach and young children may actually bite or pick at the wood. Use cedar or another wood that resists decay. Once the structure is built, inspect it frequently for damage.

• **SITE:** Look around the landscape for an ideal place to locate the playset. There should be no obstacles that children can hit while sliding or swinging. Avoid overhanging branches and do not place equipment too close to trees or



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fencing. Try to keep the set out of direct sunlight, which can make components heat up and scald young bodies.

• **SUPERVISION:** Do not leave small children alone while they are playing. Prevent children from using the playset in an incorrect manner.

• **SAFETY:** Follow the directions for installation. Make sure all posts are anchored into the ground securely. Railings should be spaced so that chil-

dren cannot get stuck between them. Check that metal components have not rusted and that there is no additional excessive wear. Be sure that no tools or other dangerous items are left around the yard.

Backyard playgrounds should be built with safety in mind. Learn the rules of play equipment and yard safety.

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How Seniors Can Simplify Everyday Tasks

The ability to perform everyday tasks is something many people take for granted. But as men and women approach or exceed retirement age, many may start to struggle with chores and tasks they have performed for decades. Physical limitations are a common side effect of aging. But such limitations do not have to prove too big a hurdle for seniors to clear. In fact, there are many ways for seniors to simplify everyday tasks while maintaining their independence.

- Embrace technology. Even the proudest Luddites cannot deny technology's potential to make seniors' lives easier. Seemingly simple tasks like shopping for groceries and vacuuming a home can be difficult for seniors with dwindling or limited mobility. But seniors with Internet access in their homes can order their groceries online and then pick them up in-store or have them delivered, saving them the trouble of walking around the store. With regard to vacuuming, autonomous vacuum cleaners have removed the need to use traditional vacuum cleaners. Certain autonomous vacuums employ sensors to detect dirty spots on the floor, and these vacuums can even be programmed to clean the home while residents are out of the house.

- Upgrade bathrooms. Tasks associated with personal

hygiene also tend to be taken for granted until they become difficult. But a few simple bathroom alterations can help seniors safely navigate the bathrooms in their homes so they can maintain their personal hygiene without fear of injury. Grab bars can be installed on shower walls so seniors can safely get in and out of their showers and bathtubs. Such bars are both effective and inexpensive, and some do not even require any drilling to install. Specialty grab bars, tub grips and tub transfer benches are just a few additional products that can make bathing easier for seniors who have lost or are starting to lose some of their physical strength.

- Get "smart" on the road. Seniors who are experiencing mild difficulty driving can make getting about town that much easier by plugging their smartphones into their vehicles or making use of the various apps that have become standard in modern vehicles. For example, the maps app on a smartphone can be connected to a car and direct seniors to their destinations, saving them the trouble of remembering all the ins and outs of how to get a particular destination. Seniors also can employ apps to help them find their vehicles should they forget exactly where they parked in crowded parking lots. Such apps can increase seniors' comfort levels



on the road while helping them maintain their independence.

- Downsize. Whether downsizing to a smaller home or simply downsizing a lifestyle, seniors may find that living smaller is akin to living simpler. Empty nesters may find they no longer need several bedrooms in their homes, and moving into smaller homes can reduce their daily workloads while also clearing out clutter that can make performing everyday chores more difficult. Men and women accustomed to hustle and bustle may also find that cutting back on professional and/or personal commitments gives them more energy for everyday activities while enriching the commitments they continue to maintain. Aging men and women can employ various strategies to simplify their lives and maintain their independence well into their golden years. Aging men and women may find that technology helps them simplify their everyday lives.



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How Everyday People Can Cut Energy Consumption

Curtailling energy consumption is a great way for people to protect the planet's natural resources and save money at the same time. Part of the difficulty with regard to reducing energy consumption is that energy plays such a big role in our lives. Smartphones and tablets have

these items, though not necessarily big consumers of energy, must be plugged in and charged. But individuals won't have to unplug from their lives to reduce their energy consumption. In fact, there are several easy, non-invasive ways for everyday people to reduce their energy consumption.



windows in a home can help homeowners and apartment dwellers reduce their heating and cooling costs. On cold days, pull back curtains so the natural sunlight can come in and warm the house, reducing the need to turn up the temperature on the thermostat. When the weather outside is especially warm, hang blackout curtains to prevent the hot sun from warming rooms and increasing the need for air conditioning. In addition, address any leaks around windows to ensure hot and cold air is not escaping and contributing to excessive energy consumption.

- Maintain appliances and replace older ones. While reducing reliance on energy-thirsty appliances is a great way to reduce energy consumption, no one needs to throw away their refrigerators. Instead, maintain appliances so they are not forced to work harder, and thereby consume more energy, to function. Routinely clean the filters on window air conditioners, replacing them if they're worn down. In addition, have HVAC units serviced annually to ensure they're operating at peak capacity. Replace older appliances, including refrigerators, that are no longer effective.
- Install a low-flow shower head. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends that eco-conscious consumers looking to

reduce their energy consumption install low-flow shower

heads with flow rates less than 2.5 gallons per minute. This is especially important for people living in homes with dated fixtures. Water fixtures installed before 1992 might have flow rates as high as 5.5 gallons per minute, which is both wasteful and costly. Test the flow of a shower head by placing a one-gallon bucket beneath a shower head running at the pressure you normally use. If the bucket fills up in less than 20 seconds, install a low-flow shower head.

- Install ceiling fans. Ceiling fans can be installed to reduce energy consumption in both summer and winter. In summer, ceiling fans can make home

interiors more comfortable by circulating air around a room. That circulation can make rooms feel cooler, providing the same benefit of an air conditioner while consuming considerably less energy. In winter, reverse the rotation of ceiling fans so they circulate warm air and reduce reliance on heating systems.

Reducing energy consumption does not require substantial sacrifice, but it can produce substantial savings and benefit the planet in myriad ways. Ceiling fans can help homeowners and apartment dwellers reduce energy consumption and save money.

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How To Find The Right Replacement Windows

Replacing old windows is often a worthwhile investment for homeowners. Energy-efficient windows can prevent heating and cooling loss and keep homes more comfortable throughout the year. Such windows also can improve a home's resale value, proving a good return on investment for homeowners who want to upgrade their homes before putting them on the market.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, homeowners might find it more cost-effective to replace very old and/or inefficient windows to improve their energy efficiency. Such an upgrade can save

homeowners substantial amounts of money on heating and cooling costs.

Window replacement projects can be costly, so it pays to get the job right the first time. Before beginning a window replacement project, homeowners should research which windows will meet their specific needs, learning the subtleties between finishes and features, as well as comparing prices for the windows and installation.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME OF YEAR:
The best time of year to plan window replacement is when the weather will be warm, ideally in the spring or early summer. However, homeowners do not want conditions to be too warm, as each room where new windows will be installed will temporarily be exposed to the elements. Furthermore, caulk adheres better in warmer weather and will dispense easily.

CONSIDER AVAILABLE FEATURES:

When replacing windows, homeowners may want to install the same style windows they currently have. But the problems that led to the need to replace windows may still exist even when new windows are installed. When replacing windows, consider energy performance ratings based on the locations of the windows in the house. To make sure they make the most educated decision, homeowners can investigate the solar heat gain coefficient, U-factor, visible transmittance and light-to-solar gain. Explanations of these ratings are available at Energy.gov.

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DON'T IGNORE MAINTENANCE NEEDS:

Maintenance costs involved with cleaning, repairs and painting can add up. When shopping for windows, consider the amount of maintenance they will need. Wood-framed windows may require more upkeep than aluminum, fiberglass or vinyl. Also, consider if certain window types, such as double-hung windows, casement windows, awning windows, or slider windows, would be practical. **KEEP HOME STYLE IN MIND:** A poor match between windows and the style of the home can produce unwanted changes in the appearance of the home. Replacement windows should match the style and appearance desired.

EXPECT MINIMAL DISRUPTION:

When homeowners hire professionals who are good at their craft, window replacement projects should not be a terrible inconvenience. According to American Window Products, Inc., seasoned professionals will be able to complete a replacement window upgrade in a short amount of time depending on the size of the home and the number of windows being replaced. Replacing windows can be a costly task, but one that will provide a more energy efficient home that can help homeowners save money in the long run. Replacement windows can be a smart investment in comfort and design appeal of a home.

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Create Drama With Bold Paint Colors

is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to transform the look of a space. Paint colors can dramatically change the mood and the design of a home. And depending on a homeowner's goals, paint can make a statement or blend into the background. Many people are now looking to bold colors to make spaces stand out. But choosing a paint color can be challenging. Homeowners looking to update walls and complement decor may want to look at some of the more impactful colors that Pantone indicates will be popular for the 2017 season.



Primrose Yellow, Lapis Blue, Flame, Pink Yarrow, and Greenery are some of the more eye-catching selections. Once colors are selected, consider these guidelines for using bolder colors in room designs.

- Decide how big an impact you want to make. Are you looking for color overload or just a small focal point of vivid color? Remember, using bold color doesn't mean every wall must be lathered in that hue. Instead, select one wall to serve as an accent point and use that spot as your bold color display. Otherwise, rely on bold colors to dress up otherwise mundane areas, such as the back wall of a cupboard or moldings and trim.
- Try bold in a small space. Many people are surprised at how well bold colors work in small spaces. Powder rooms can be an ideal spot to experiment with paint colors. Try deep colors that can make the area seem intimate and even exotic. Dark, bold hues can be toned down by different accents, such as neutral colored fixtures and towels.
- Go bold in the kitchen. Incorporate a splash of color in the kitchen without going overboard. Try an appliance or design fixture in a bright shade. Or paint the inside of the cabinets in your favorite color and install glass inserts in the cabinet doors so that everyone gets a peek of the color beyond. A neutral kitchen also can be brightened up with the use of silverware, dishes, pots and pans, and other kitchen items featured in bold hues.
- Stick to boldness on interchangeable items. Those who like to experiment with color may find that they like to switch out the colors now and again. Instead of having to repaint every few months, use decorative items in bright shades to make swapping out color that much easier. For example, replace area rugs, throw pillows and draperies. Paint over terra cotta flower pots when the mood strikes.

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How To Create An Effective Workflow In The Kitchen

Bathroom and kitchen makeovers are some of the most coveted and profitable improvements that can be made to a home. Installing new cabinetry, countertops and appliances can transform the look of a kitchen, but homeowners also must consider the functionality of design when renovating. The National Kitchen and Bath Association suggests applying the kitchen "work triangle," which is a concept used to create efficient kitchen layouts. The triangle comprises imaginary straight lines drawn from the cooking appliance, sink and refrigerator. These are where much of the work in the kitchen takes place. The general idea is that when the work triangle is positioned accordingly — with the three components in close proximity to one another — the kitchen is easier and more efficient to use. Homeowners will be able to move freely among these elements when they are placed at appropriate distances, reducing

wasted steps. The NKBA suggests following these guidelines to create efficient kitchens.

- No major traffic patterns should cross through the triangle.
- The sum of the work triangle's three sides should not exceed 26 feet. Each portion of the triangle should be between four and nine feet.
- Avoid cutting through an island or a peninsula.
- If the kitchen has only one sink, it should be placed between or across from the cooking surface, preparation area or refrigerator. The work triangle is a suggestion, not a law of design. As kitchens evolve and more people use them simultaneously, designers may take certain liberties — even having multiple triangles at play. Homeowners should also design their kitchens so they function best for their own individual lifestyles. Kitchen layout can be just as important as the decor and appliances within the kitchen.

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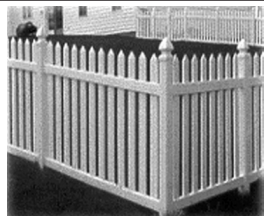
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Roofing Materials Transform The Look And Functionality Of A Home

When renovating a home, homeowners may not give ample thought to the roof unless there is a leak or another sign of damage. It's easy to forget about the roof when materials are working properly. Some people put off replacing or repairing a roof simply because of the costs of such undertakings. However, the right roof can improve the appearance of a home and provide protection against the elements, potentially preventing damage to a home's interior as well.

Roofing materials have evolved over the years, but the most common type of roofing material is the asphalt shingle. These shingles are a relatively modern invention, with the first "asphalt prepared roofing" serving as a forerunner to asphalt shingles, appearing in the late 1800s.

Roofing materials will need to meet a particular area's fire codes and must be able to withstand any extreme weather conditions common to the geographic region where the home is located. Certain roofing materials may be heavier than others and may require special framing. Work with an experienced roofing contractor to learn more about your available options and to shed light on any special installation or maintenance issues to consider before construction begins.

The following are just some of the roofing materials homeowners may want to consider. • Asphalt shingles: The most popular roofing material, asphalt shingles are guaranteed for 20 to 30 years, which helps solidify this choice as a smart-value product. For some homeowners,

a downside to shingles is that, because they are so popular, they're seen everywhere. So those homeowners looking to make a unique statement with their roofing materials may want to choose a different option.

• Wood shingles and shakes: A wood roof is another possibility, but some homeowners find wood roofs require more money to install and more effort to maintain than roofs made with other materials. Wood shingles are sawn from logs and are thin, while shakes are thick, rough and formed by being split from logs.

• Clay or concrete tiles: These tiles add texture and elegance to a roof, says HGTV. Clay or concrete tiles are very durable and quite heavy, so they must be installed by a professional. These tiles can make Mediterranean-, Spanish- or mission-style houses stand out even more. Their long-lasting nature can help offset the price tag. • Metal: Metal roofs are usually made from fully recyclable steel, aluminum or alloy, making them an eco-friendly choice. Metal roofs also reflect the sun's rays and can be an energy-efficient option in hot climates.

• Slate: One of the longest-lasting materials available in roofing products, slate is fireproof and comes in various natural colors and shapes. Once installed, slate requires very little maintenance. However, slate can be cost-prohibitive because its delicacy and weight requires extra roofing support and professional installation.

Changing a roof means years of improved performance and an instant uplift to the look of a home. Replacing or renovating a roof can be an impactful home improvement project.

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Addressing Spring Ant Problems

The return of warm weather in the spring often marks the return of animals and insects as well. The spring season is a popular time for insects to mate and build nests. This also may be a time when homeowners see ant "swarms" in or around their homes.

Ants and termites are social creatures, and when their colonies become too large, flying ants will spread out in search of new territories and to establish new queens. This mobility may also be coupled with an increasing number of ants marching on the ground and scaling walls. Although many species of ants are harmless, homeowners do not want to see ants inside their homes, especially in large numbers. The following strategies can help homeowners address ant infestations this spring.

• Identify the type of ant around your property. Consult with online guides or books to identify the species of ant on your property. Knowing which species of ant is in or around your home can help you address

the problem more effectively.

• Create a food trap. Ants are attracted to various food sources, such as fats, sweets and proteins. Mixing a very small amount of a food with boric acid can help control ant populations. Ants will bring tainted food back to their colonies and perish.

• Keep a clean house. Use vinegar, soap and water to clean areas where ants are seen.

Many leave a scent trail of pheromones to tell others where to go for a food source.

• Treat carpenter ants at the source. Carpenter ants will not bring back food to the nest. Instead, sprinkle diatomaceous earth, or DE, around outdoor nests to eradicate colonies.

• Work with an exterminator. If home remedies do not work, consult with a trained exterminator.

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Ways To Tackle Spring Cleaning Projects In A Single Weekend

Spring cleaning is an annual rite of passage in many households. Because winter weather tends to encourage people to stay indoors more than they would during other times of the year, clutter can slowly but surely accumulate in a home over the course of a typical winter. That makes spring cleaning a necessity. Few homeowners likely enjoy spring cleaning. The warm weather associated with the arrival of spring makes many people who have spent the previous months indoors less than enthusiastic about spending a

spring weekend indoors cleaning and clearing away a season's worth of clutter. But homeowners who organize their spring cleaning projects can ensure such efforts take just a weekend or less.

ENLIST THE WHOLE FAMILY. Chances are everyone who lives in the home can lay claim to some of the dirt, grime and clutter that built up over the winter. So it only makes sense that everyone then pitches in to clean the home come springtime. Parents and heads of household can delegate tasks to

everyone, incentivizing cooperation with the promise of rewards if the cleaning is completed in a single weekend.

CLEAR YOUR SCHEDULE. Another way for homeowners to ensure their spring cleaning projects are started and finished in a single weekend is to clear their schedules for the entire weekend. Homeowners who expect to spend part of their day away from home and still finish their spring cleaning projects will likely find the job unfinished come Sunday night. When planning a spring cleaning weekend,

How To Tame Indoor Home Odors

A clean home interior can make a strong first impression on prospective buyers, but only if that home is accompanied by pleasant scents. Odors can make a strong impact on buyers' perceptions of a home, including its level of cleanliness and upkeep.

Although dirt and other grime can contribute to the odor of a home, additional culprits can contribute to foul smells as well. Everything from pets to the foods cooked in the kitchen to the hidden presence of mold can impact air quality and odor inside a home. Fortunately, there are ways to remedy stinky problems and come away with sweet-smelling solutions.

It's important for homeowners to realize that foul air inside a home can be the result of poor indoor air quality — which can be a health hazard. The United States Environmental Protection Agency ranks indoor air quality as a top five environmental risk to public health. EPA studies found indoor air pollutants were generally two to five times greater than outdoor pollution levels. In some cases, indoor air pollution was 100 times greater. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission says the following can contribute to poor indoor air quality and also to some interior odors: combustion sources; tobacco products; building materials and furnishings; wet or damp carpet; cabinetry or furniture made of certain pressed wood products; products for household cleaning and maintenance and even outdoor sources such as radon, pesticides and outdoor air pollution.

So how does one remedy poor indoor air quality and odors inside a home? These tips can improve conditions.

- Ensure adequate ventilation. Open windows and doors when weather permits to eliminate the concentration of pollutants and help air out odors. Use exhaust fans in kitchens and baths to pull indoor air to the outside.
- Invest in an air filter. A high-efficiency particulate air filter will force air through a fine mesh and trap harmful particles, such as pet dander, smoke, pollen, and dust mites, that can build up in a home. Remember to change the filter regularly.
- Increase the number of plants. Plants can brighten interior spaces, and they're also remarkable at cleaning indoor air. The Clean Air Study conducted by NASA set out to find out the best way to clean the air in space stations. The association found that the Boston fern, spider plant, Chinese evergreen, weeping fig, variegated snake plant, and English ivy, among many other plants, were ideal for filtering air and removing harmful contaminants.
- Ditch disposal odors. Food can become trapped and decompose in garbage disposals. Cut citrus fruit into chunks and drop them into a running disposal to remove many odors.
- Air out the washer. New washing machines have tight seals and gaskets that do not allow air to penetrate (or water to leak out). Mildew can grow as a result. Leave the washer door open after a round of laundry to let things dry and air out.
- Tame pet odors. Pets contribute heavily to odor in a home. Wet dog smells are prevalent on rainy days, while cat litter boxes can pack a pungent punch. Cleanliness can cut down on smells. Use activated charcoal in litter products to tame smells and empty the litter box frequently. Make sure dogs are dried off thoroughly when coming in from the rain, and use a deodorizing spray on pet fur. Regular grooming can help as well. Odors in a home can be embarrassing and set a poor tone when inviting company over or showcasing a home for prospective buyers. Keep odors at bay by identifying the sources of smells and taking action.



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schedule projects for a weekend when you have no prior commitments or plan far enough in advance that you can avoid making plans on a given weekend. While it might not make for the most eventful weekend, it will greatly increase your chances of getting everything cleaned and cleared out in two days.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. Homeowners who want to complete their spring cleaning in a single weekend should do their homework with regard to finding local recycling centers or charitable organizations to whom they intend to donate items. Many charitable organizations will come to private homes to

pick up donations, but such pickups often must be arranged in advance rather than on the morning of the day homeowners want items to be taken away. In addition, if recycling will be a part of your spring cleaning efforts, familiarize yourself with the weekend hours of nearby recycling plants so you can drop items off on your cleaning weekend instead of leaving them lying around to be donated later. Spring cleaning might not make for the most enjoyable way for homeowners to spend a weekend. But planning ahead and making efficient use of the time available to them can help homeowners tackle their spring cleaning projects in a single weekend.

DID YOU KNOW? If you think that the only way to exercise and burn calories involves gym equipment, think again. Yard work can be just as challenging as a thorough aerobics workout at a nearby fitness club. Manual tools will get you moving and can burn a substantial amount of calories. Try to vary positions and alternate which hands you use to reduce strain and get an even workout. Fitness experts say that gardening can improve strength, increase endurance and assist with flexibility. Clearing a pond or weeding can burn some 300 calories in an hour. Forty-five minutes worth of gardening can burn as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics.

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Is It Time To Update Your Home's Electrical System?

The invisible systems in a home often are taken for granted. When such systems are working as expected, daily life moves along smoothly. However, when a system goes awry, it can negatively impact routines and may create a dangerous home environment. This is especially true when something goes wrong with a home's electrical system. Faulty wiring is a leading cause of residential fires. Many homeowners, particularly those who live in older homes, might be living in properties that have outdated electrical systems. The experts at Lowes ProServices state that having old wiring and/or insufficient amperage in a house can endanger residents. It also may damage appliances and make it difficult to sell

a property in the future. It can be difficult to gauge exactly when to overhaul an electrical system. Unless circuits routinely trip or lights often dim, homeowners may put off the work. But degrading wires or overextended circuitry can pose a fire risk, so it is best to address electrical systems promptly. Home inspections may uncover electrical problems. Some homeowners may discover potential trouble while making renovations that require opening up walls or tearing them down, exposing the wires. Still other homeowners learn about electrical systems when they're adding new, large appliances or other gadgets that consume more power than existing items. These devices may continually

cause power outages in the house, such as tripping the circuit breaker or popping a fuse. When it comes time to update the electrical system, it is always best to work with licensed and bonded electricians who have the expertise to work with electrical wiring without getting injured. This is not a do-it-yourself type of job since it requires specialized training. Electricians likely will recommend upgrading the electrical panel to bring more power from the utility poles into the home. This can include replacing the existing meter and circuit breaker box to allow it to handle more power or replacing items that are obsolete or dangerous. Many older homes are only capable of handling a minimum number of amps, utilizing just a few circuits. But nowadays, when homeowners have far more electronics in their homes than they once did, increased demand on electricity can overload a circuit (all of the outlets linked on one wire). Tripping a circuit breaker is a safety measure to prevent the wire from becoming overheated and causing a fire. However, in some old systems, the circuit breaker will not trip, and this can be problematic. Rewiring a home is another step. Wire insulation can deteriorate over time, and new wires may be needed. This can be messy and time-consuming, but it's a small price to pay for safety. When rewiring an electrician also may suggest new outlets. Many home building codes now require outlets with ground fault



interruptors, or GFIs, in kitchens, bathrooms and other rooms exposed to moisture. Some older homes may not even have three-pronged outlets, so this will necessitate an update as well. Electrical systems are the heart of a home, delivering power where it is needed. It is essential to keep such systems up-to-date so they can handle the power demands of everyday life.

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Bring More Natural Light Into A Home

Maximizing natural light in a home is a smart and sometimes low-cost renovation. Homes that are dark and drab can drain energy levels and reduce productivity. In addition, dark rooms may not be inviting places to gather as a family or when entertaining. Certain factors contribute to a dark home. Houses that face north or east may not get the same level of sunlight as those that primarily face south and west. Geographic location also plays a role in the amount of natural sunlight. Mountains, buildings and even latitude can affect the amount of natural light that enters a home. The style of a home and its attributes also may create dark conditions. Deep house eaves as well as small windows or too few windows also can contribute to a deficit of

light indoors. A major remodel certainly can remedy the situation. However, there also are other less-extensive strategies to improve natural light.

- Assess the situation before renovating. Walk around the house and determine which rooms get the most light and which conditions may be contributing to the problem in other areas. Dark floors and walls may be absorbing natural light and compounding the situation. You may find that only one or two rooms need attention, saving you the cost and effort associated with a major home overhaul.
- Lighten up window treatments. Heavy drapes or thick blinds can be replaced with translucent alternatives. Translucent shades will allow light into the room without compro-

ming privacy, say the experts at HGTV.

- Use mirrors strategically. A mirror placed opposite a window will reflect light all around the room. This can make a small room seem larger and a dark space instantly brighter.
 - Install new windows and doors. If the budget allows, installing larger windows in a home will allow more natural light in. French doors or sliding doors also may make a home's interior more bright. Think about adding windows to a side of the house that has none, or increase the size of the windows on the side of the house that gets the most light.
 - Maximize sunlight from above. Skylights will bring light into a home as the sun passes overhead. Tubular skylights can bring natural sunlight into spaces where you may not expect skylights to be practical. According to Houzz, a design and architectural resource, tubular daylighting devices, or TDDs, can make a big difference. TDDs are reflective pipes installed between the roof and ceiling, with a clear plastic dome.
 - Use reflective decor. Reflective surfaces, including glass and metal, can brighten up a room and diffuse light around a room. Glossy backsplashes, pendant lighting and shiny metal that reflect light can increase the natural light, balancing out dark spaces.
 - Prune trees regularly. Cut back branches and keep trees tidy to maximize sunlight. Avoid planting tall shrubbery in front of windows.
 - Routinely clean windows and glass doors. Dirt and other grime can prevent light from getting through. Regularly give windows a thorough washing.
- Natural light is an important commodity in a home. Sunlight can improve mood and go a long way toward keeping home occupants healthy and happy.



Employ Simple Fire Prevention Measures To Maximize Safety

(MS)- Did you know that, according to the National Fire Protection Association, most people have a false sense of security regarding house fires, believing that they would have approximately six minutes to evacuate their home in the event of a fire? In reality, smoke and fire spread rapidly and can overcome occupants in less than three minutes.

When a fire occurs, there's no question that time is critical. The good news is there are several important steps you can take to maximize your escape time. With the following measures in place, you'll create critical protection for what matters most — your home and family.

1. Install smoke alarms. You should have one in every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level of the home, including the basement. For the best protection, make sure all smoke alarms are interconnected. When one sounds, they all sound.
2. Inspect and clean smoke alarms monthly. Replace batteries in spring and fall. To clean the alarm, open the cover and gently vacuum the interior.

3. Prepare and practice a fire escape plan. Draw a floor plan of your home, marking two ways out of every room — especially sleeping areas. Discuss the escape routes with every member of your household, and agree on a meeting place outside your home in case of emergency. Practice your escape plan at least twice a year.
4. Select building materials that provide passive fire protection. Passive fire protection is part of the core of the building and helps control fire by limiting its spread. One very effective form of passive fire protection is the installation of insulation. When adding or upgrading insulation, look for products made from naturally fire-resistant, inorganic materials. A favorite among builders, contractors and homeowners is a stone wool insulation called Roxul Safe 'n' Sound, which offers fire resistance up to 2,150°F. Its melting point is higher than the temperature of a typical house fire, which means it will stay in place longer to provide passive fire protection when every second counts, allowing more time for safe evacuation and for first responders to arrive.



Composite Decking Can Be A Smart Choice

Decks add character and functionality to a home, increasing outdoor entertaining space and oftentimes improving the resale value of a home. Homeowners have various options when choosing decking materials, but one such option, composite decking, is growing in popularity. Decks used to primarily be made from pressure-treated lumber. While lumber remains a popular material, more and more homeowners are opting for composite decking products. As anyone who has pressure-washed, stained and sealed wood decks can attest, such spaces require lots of upkeep to look new year after year. Composite decks require much

less maintenance, making them highly attractive to homeowners who would rather spend time using their decks instead of maintaining them. Composite decking is any type of decking material that is formulated from different recycled materials. The majority of these materials include hard plastic and wood shavings of pulp. Unlike wood, which can fade, crack and rot, composite decking, which has been available for roughly a decade, does not degrade quickly and requires very little upkeep. Available in a variety of wood colors to match outdoor decor, composite decks also can feature artificial wood grains to

make them look similar to wood planks. Although composite decks are not completely impervious to the elements, with some occasional washing to impede mold growth and new technology that has improved stain-resistance, many of the pitfalls of other materials can be avoided with composite decks. Composite decking fits in with eco-friendly lifestyles. The planks are made from recycled materials that would normally end up in landfills. Products from Trex, a popular composite decking manufacturer, are made from 1.5 million shopping bags and wood mill waste. As composite decks do not rot away and are long-lasting, they will not need to be replaced frequently, which is another eco-friendly benefit.

When comparing composite decking brands, look mainly at the colors, materials used in the composition and the fastening systems. Many are fastened with regular deck screws, offers This Old House. The newer systems have channels for hidden fastening, and the composite deck tiles snap into place. Composite decks do have a few drawbacks. They can be expensive — nearly double the initial cost of wood decks. And although they don't rot, composite planks can scratch. Without refinishing, damaged boards will

need to be replaced. Harsh chemicals may fade color and damage the composite materials, so caution is needed. Composite decking remains an in-demand choice for outdoor spaces. Low-maintenance and long-lasting, these decks have quickly become favorites among homeowners. Composite decking can mimic the look of wood, but requires much less maintenance.

Did you know?

Paving stones are used around the house in many different applications, including on walkways and patios. Sometimes, however, paving stones are beyond homeowners' budgets. Fortunately, there's another alternative that may look just as attractive and save homeowners money. Stamped concrete, also called textured or imprinted concrete, is a design element that replicates the look of stone, brick, wood, slate, or other materials in concrete. Stamped concrete can be used for patios, sidewalks, driveways, and pool decks. Stamped concrete also may be incorporated into interior flooring designs. Homeowners can explore their options with regard to stamped concrete by speaking with a masonry expert or landscape architect.



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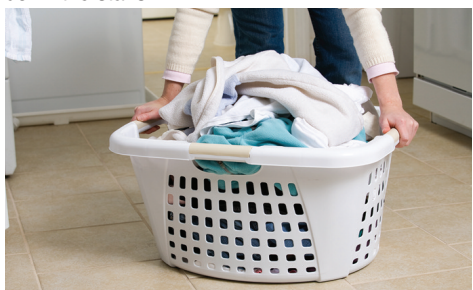
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Dos and Don'ts for Second-Floor Laundry Rooms

Laundry can be a cumbersome chore. In homes with more than one story, clothes are put in a hamper, carried down to the washer and dryer, where they are then cleaned, dried, folded, and taken back upstairs to be put away. The entire process can be inefficient, which may contribute to why so many people delay doing laundry for as long as possible.

As unenjoyable as it can be, doing laundry is a necessity. Fresh clothing not only looks and smells good, it is essential to personal hygiene. One way to make the process of doing laundry go more smoothly is to consider moving the location of the laundry area. According to the National Association of Home Builders, more homeowners are moving their laundry rooms upstairs so they don't have to transport laundry baskets up and down the stairs.



Before moving their laundry rooms, homeowners should take steps to safeguard their homes, and that may involve finding the ideal location for the new room. Find space for an upstairs laundry room and then consult with an engineer to be sure that the plan is feasible. An engineer and an architect can assess if a home is structurally sound enough to handle the weight and vibration of an upstairs laundry.

One of the biggest concerns with regard to moving a laundry room upstairs is the fear of flooding or leaks. There are certain steps to take to minimize these risks. Experts advise installing an easily accessible water shut-off valve. Turn off the valve when the washer is not in use. Also, steel-braided washer hoses are more sturdy than standard hoses and are less likely to burst. Homeowners also can place the washer in a drain pan, which will catch overflowing water and drain it through a pipe. Some areas may require a floor drain as an alternative.

Homeowners also must recognize that noise can be a problem with upstairs laundry rooms. Front-loading appliances may cause more vibration and movement than top-loaders. However, some front-loaders are designed to be quiet. Antivibration pads may help with vibration issues. Before moving their laundry rooms, homeowners should consult with contractors to ensure things go smoothly.

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Steps To Take Before An Appraiser's Visit

Homeowners unfamiliar with the appraisal process might not know if there is anything they can do to make the process go more smoothly. While certain variables involved in the appraisal process, such as location of the home and the value of surrounding homes, are beyond homeowners' control, the Appraisal Institute recommends homeowners take the following steps before an appraiser visits their home.

- Clean the house. A dirty home that is full of clutter will not make the best impression on appraisers. Dirty homes may be vulnerable to insect infestations that can lead to structural problems

with the home. While a dirty home is not necessarily an indicator of infestations or a reflection of a home's value, a clean home will create a stronger first impression with the appraiser.

- Make any necessary repairs ahead of the appointment. Homeowners who have been putting off repairs should make them before the appraiser arrives. Homes with repairs that still need to be made will likely be valued less than similar homes with no such repair issues. Though repairs can be costly, investing in home repairs will likely increase both the appraisal and resale value of the home.

- Obtain all necessary documents before the appraiser arrives. Homeowners who have certain documentation at the ready can speed up the appraisal process. Such documentation may include a survey of the house and property; a deed or title report; a recent tax bill; if applicable, a list of items to be sold with the house; purchase history of the home; and the original plans and specifications of the home.
- Inform the appraiser about recent improvements. Homeowners can inform appraisers about any recent improvements to the home and the cost of those improvements. The value of home improvements with regard to a home's appraisal value vary depending on a host of variables, but having such information at the ready can help appraisers make the most informed appraisal possible.

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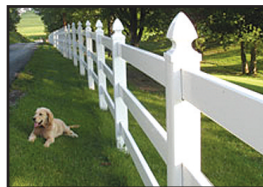
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The Benefits Of Hiring Professional Contractors

The DIY movement has inspired many homeowners to tackle home repair and remodeling projects on their own. DIY projects can be rewarding, and many homeowners who have embraced the DIY movement have discovered talents they never before knew they had. But no matter how simple popular home renovation television shows make remodeling projects appear, homeowners should know that such undertakings are far more difficult than they appear on television. Homeowners who overestimate their abilities and the time they have to complete projects can cost themselves substantial amounts of money. In fact, there are a variety of reasons homeowners might want to work with professional contractors when tackling home improvement projects.

EXPERIENCE

A trial and error approach can work with various projects and problems. But applying such an approach to home improvement projects is risky and potentially dangerous, not to mention costly. Experienced professional





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contractors with strong track records (seek recommendations from friends or neighbors) won't have to go through trial and error and are therefore more likely than DIYers to complete a project on time and on budget.

INSPIRATION

One oft-overlooked benefit of working with professional contractors is the likelihood that they can draw up ideas for projects that homeowners might otherwise never have thought up on their own. Homeowners without specific ideas in mind can ask contractors to come up with various scenarios before committing to a particular one. Veteran contractors can draw on years of experience to create designs that DIYers might be incapable of coming up with and/or incapable of seeing

through to completion.

COST

Conventional wisdom suggests it's less expensive to do something yourself than to hire someone else to do it for you, but that's not necessarily true of home improvement projects. Labor costs typically account for a substantial amount of professionally contracted projects, but homeowners can cut those costs by volunteering to do some of the simpler tasks themselves. In addition, contractors often purchase materials at a much lower cost than individual homeowners because contractors buy in bulk. So while labor costs might be lower on DIY projects, the cost of materials can offset those savings.

RESALE VALUE

Many homeowners renovate their homes with eyes on improving the resale value of those homes. But if homeowners want to showcase a newly remodeled kitchen when selling their homes, they should be prepared for prospective buyers to ask who worked on the project. Fearing potential problems down the road, some buyers might be put off by homes that were remodeled by DIYers and not professional contractors. Renovating a home on your own can be a rewarding project for homeowners. But it's important that homeowners recognize the many benefits of working with professional contractors before making any final decisions with regard to who will tackle their next project.

Learn How To Prevent DIY Injuries

Thousands of people try their hands at do-it-yourself home improvement projects every year. Whether working indoors or outdoors, wearing safety gear and exercising caution is a necessity when undertaking any home remodeling project.

According to the Home Safety Council, one in five consumers will need medical attention this year as a result of home improvement projects. A 2013 survey by 3M TEKK Protection and the National Safety Council found that more than one-quarter of DIY home improvement projects ended with injuries to homeowners or someone else in the household. Falls from ladders, cuts from power tools and injuries from thrown debris account for many emergency room visits. Accidents involving chemicals and cleaning agents also can occur. Safety should be the utmost priority when renovating, and that means utilizing appropriate safety equipment.

FOOTWEAR

Wear solid shoes that provide considerable traction during home improvements. A firm, reinforced toe is helpful as well. Should any items fall, they'll be less likely to cause injury if your foot is encased in a protective boot or sturdy shoe. Soles that grip surfaces will help safeguard against slips and falls.

EYE PROTECTION

Safety goggles and glasses are a must-have for any do-it-yourselfer. They will provide a barrier between the eye and flying debris. According to VisionWeb, an eye education resource, most of the 110,000 eye injuries that occur each year in homes within the United States result from splashes with household cleaners, flying debris such as wood chips, or getting hit by branches. Many of these injuries can be prevented by wearing eye protection.



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EAR PROTECTION

Power tools can be quite loud. When operating loud, powered machinery, use earplugs or safety earmuffs to reduce the risk of damage to hearing and potential hearing loss.

VENTILATION AND RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

When working with chemicals and other products that have strong odors and/or emit particulates into the air, make sure you do so in well-ventilated areas. This will help dissipate the smell and prevent inhalation of concentrated chemical substances. Masks guard against dust, pollen and some other microscopic particles and may not provide enough protection, depending on the job. The Home Depot suggests using particulate or filtration respirators when performing tasks, such as sanding, where you might be exposed to particles. Gas and vapor respirators offer

protection against additional substances.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

When working at home, make sure to use tools in the manner in which they were designed. Keep power cords tidy so they do not pose a tripping hazard. Falls from ladders often occur when climbing above the recommended rung or engaging in risky behavior while on the ladder, such as reaching or hanging over too far.

When outdoors, exercise caution in inclement weather, which can make it harder to work safely. Be sure there are no bystanders too close when using power tools or tools that can kick up debris.

The right safety gear and some smart do-it-yourself techniques can help DIYers avoid injury. Respiratory protection is essential when dealing with particulates in the air and vapors.

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Factors To Consider When Choosing Carpeting

When the time comes to choose flooring for their homes, homeowners may be overwhelmed by the vast array of options at their disposal. The choice between carpet and hardwood flooring, laminate or tile is a matter of personal preference. People have long extolled the virtues of hardwood flooring, but carpeting can be just as stylish and provides a host of other benefits as well. Carpeting insulates rooms in the summer and winter, adding that extra level of protection against the elements. Carpeting also

absorbs sound in a home. Many appreciate the warmth and cozy feeling of carpet, especially when stepping out of bed. Carpeting also can increase the level of safety at home. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute, carpeting makes areas of play safer and may also reduce the severity of an injury in the event of a fall. Today, there are many different types of carpeting available. Selecting the right carpeting for a room comes down to identifying the level of traffic in a particular room, the attributes homeowners would like the carpet to have and any other needs that fit with their lifestyles. The following guidelines can make carpet shopping a bit easier.

owners would like the carpet to have and any other needs that fit with their lifestyles. The following guidelines can make carpet shopping a bit easier.

TYPE OF CARPETING
There are many different types of carpeting, some of which are best suited to certain situations. For example, plush and saxony carpets are better in low-traffic areas. These carpets may show footprints and also vacuum tracks and dirt, but they're higher on the comfort spectrum than other types of carpet. Berber, which is more flat and dense, helps mask stains and tracks. It is durable in high-traffic areas. Textured carpets like frieze are cut from fibers of different heights, so they mask stains and are also softer on the feet than berber.

PADDING
Padding can impact the way carpeting feels and how long it lasts. It isn't always necessary to purchase the most expensive or thickest padding. However, it is wise to pick a pad that matches the type of carpeting you're

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selecting and one that aligns with how you plan to use the room. You may be able to go with a thinner pad in low-traffic rooms and beneath dense carpeting like berber. In high-traffic rooms, choose a thicker, more durable padding. Padding prevents carpet backing and fibers from coming apart over time. It pays to invest in a padding that will last as well.

INSTALLATION
Select a reliable carpet retailer and installer for your business. Competent installers will lay the carpeting in the correct manner so that it will look beautiful and maintain its durability for the life of the product. Shop around to find the right installer or even do

the work yourself if you feel capable. Take time when shopping for carpeting, which is a substantial

investment that can last for many years if the right material is chosen and installed correctly.



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Recognize Potentially Dangerous Household Chemicals

Homes are safe havens that people retreat to in an effort to relax and unwind. However, homes may be harboring some hazards that put their inhabitants at risk.

Cleaning products and chemicals can be found in every home, but some may be putting people in jeopardy. Even seemingly safe items can prove dangerous when they are used and/or stored incorrectly.

Individuals who make a concerted effort to educate themselves about common household chemicals can reduce the likelihood that such cleaners will hurt them in the long run. The following are some commonly used products that may prove dangerous or irritating with prolonged use.

AIR FRESHENERS

These seemingly innocuous products may be doing more harm than good. Information published in a 2015 issue of The Journal of Toxicological Sciences linked air fresheners to volatile organic compounds, or

VOCs. They also may contain ultra-fine particles of formaldehyde and phenol. In addition, National Geographic's The Green Guide states that many air fresheners contain nerve-deadening chemicals that coat nasal passages and temporarily block one's sense of smell. Many widely available air fresheners use phthalates, which are linked to hormonal and reproductive issues, birth defects and developmental disorders. In lieu of chemical air fresheners, spray diluted essential oils around the house.

ALL-PURPOSE CLEANERS

Many cleaners list bleach and ammonia among their ingredients. Bleach may be listed as sodium hypochlorite. When used as directed in a well-ventilated space, bleach and ammonia can be relatively safe. However, fumes from bleach or ammonia can cause rashes and skin irritation and irritate the eyes and respiratory tract. Bleach and ammonia should never be mixed because mixing

the two can produce a deadly chloramine gas.

Vinegar and baking soda can be used as a replacement for many household cleaning products, and these alternatives have virtually no dangerous side effects.

DRAIN AND OVEN CLEANERS

Many drain and oven cleaners contain lye (sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide), a chemical derived from salt or wood ash that is used to break down other substances, particularly those that are sticky. Lye is quite caustic in high amounts and extremely alkaline, which can cause burns and skin irritation. Lye is also found in soaps and detergents. When handled correctly in safe amounts, lye can be used safely. However, it can be dangerous if it gets into the hands of children or is touched by pets.

ANTIBACTERIAL PRODUCTS

Antibacterial soaps, lotions and wipes may contain triclosan, triclocarban and at least 17 additional ingredients that are linked to various negative health effects. In September 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the use of these antibacterial agents. These chemicals can disrupt hormone cycles and cause muscle weakness.

"There's no data demonstrating that over-the-counter antibacterial soaps are better at preventing illness than washing with plain soap and water," the FDA said in a press release issued shortly after the rule was announced.

In addition to the aforementioned products, some carpet cleaners, toilet cleaners and other detergents may prove harmful. Always read ingredient lists, use products in the proper fashion and keep any and all chemicals away from children and pets.

How Everyday People Can Cut Energy Consumption

Curtailing energy consumption is a great way for people to protect the planet's natural resources and save money at the same time.

Part of the difficulty with regard to reducing energy consumption is that energy plays such a big role in our lives. Smartphones and tablets have become must-have items, and these items, though not necessarily big consumers of energy, must be plugged in and charged. But individuals won't have to unplug from their lives to reduce their energy consumption. In fact, there are several easy, non-invasive ways for everyday people to reduce their energy consumption.

- Start with your windows. The windows in a home can help homeowners and apartment dwellers reduce their heating and cooling costs. On cold days, pull back curtains so the natural sunlight can come in and warm the house, reducing the need to turn up the temperature on the thermostat. When the weather outside is especially warm, hang blackout curtains to prevent the hot sun from warming rooms and increasing the need for air conditioning. In addition, address any leaks around windows to ensure hot and cold air is not escaping and contributing to excessive energy consumption.

- Maintain appliances and replace older ones. While reducing reliance on energy-thirsty appliances is a great way to reduce energy consumption, no one needs to throw away their

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refrigerators. Instead, maintain appliances so they are not forced to work harder, and thereby consume more energy, to function. Routinely clean the filters on window air conditioners, replacing them if they're worn down. In addition, have HVAC units serviced annually to ensure they're operating at peak capacity. Replace older appliances, including refrigerators, that are no longer effective.

- Install a low-flow shower head. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends that eco-conscious consumers looking to reduce their energy consumption install low-flow shower heads with flow rates less than 2.5 gallons per minute. This is especially important for people living in homes with dated fixtures. Water fixtures installed before 1992 might have flow rates as high as 5.5 gallons per minute, which is both wasteful and costly. Test the flow of a shower head by placing a one-

gallon bucket beneath a shower head running at the pressure you normally use. If the bucket fills up in less than 20 seconds, install a low-flow shower head.

- Install ceiling fans. Ceiling fans can be installed to reduce energy consumption in both summer and winter. In summer, ceiling fans can make home interiors more comfortable by circulating air around a room. That circulation can make rooms feel cooler, providing the same benefit of an air conditioner while consuming considerably less energy. In winter, reverse the rotation of ceiling fans so they circulate warm air and reduce reliance on heating systems.

Reducing energy consumption does not require substantial sacrifice, but it can produce substantial savings and benefit the planet in myriad ways.

Ceiling fans can help homeowners and apartment dwellers reduce energy consumption and save money.

Reduce Radon In Your Home

Radon is an odorless, invisible gas that may be lurking in homes even if homeowners are unaware of its presence. Although it is a naturally occurring substance, radon has the potential to cause serious illness. Therefore, its detection and reduction are paramount.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Surgeon General's Office have estimated that as many as 20,000 lung cancer deaths are caused each year by radon, which is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. The EPA further notes that many homes are in radon danger areas. Nearly one in three homes checked in seven states and on three lands designated for Native Americans had screening levels over 4 pCi/L, the EPA's recommended action level for radon exposure. According to Air Chek, Inc., a radon testing resource, a radon level of 4 pCi/L is equal to approximately 35 times as much radiation as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission would allow if a person was standing next to the fence of a radioactive waste site.

Testing can determine if radon is present in a home. Homeowners can rely on professional companies or purchase self-testing kits at home improvement retailers. If a test comes back positive for high levels, conduct a follow-up test before taking any measures to fix the problem. Unusual weather can increase radon levels. If repeat testing yields the same results, efforts to reduce radon levels are necessary. Homeowners must keep in mind that no two situations are the same and various techniques may be necessary to reduce radon levels in a home. Simply opening the windows in a home may not be enough, and many radon remedies require the skilled services of professional contractors who are experienced in radon reduction procedures. Homes can be fixed, but some instances may be best left to the professionals.

One of the most popular methods of reducing radon concentrations involves a process called active soil depressurization, or ASD. This is a cost-effective and reliable technique to

reduce radon that involves capturing the radon from beneath a building before it can enter the dwelling. A venting system draws the radon gas from the soil beneath the foundation and exhausts it outside of the building, far away from windows and other home openings. A continuously operating fan draws and discharges the radon outdoors. Radon that has infiltrated water supplies may require other removal methods. Such methods may require spraying water into a contained air space, introducing air bubbles into the water or storing water in a tank until the radon has decayed. Another method employs granular activated carbon (GAC) to remove radon from the water. The GAC method has been more widely tested and is more commonly used in individual homes, according to the EPA. Because radon removal often requires a specific skill set, it is a job better left to professionals. Opening windows and allowing natural ventilation may help, but a more long-term approach to radon removal might be most appropriate.

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Expect The Unexpected When Renovating A Home

According to projections released in 2015 by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, a growing number of people in the United States planned to renovate their homes in 2016. While it is still early to tabulate all of the figures from 2016, a quick glance at the data indicates renovations have increased across the country. And one only need travel through communities to see a greater number of contractors and homeowners working on homes.

Tackling any renovation project is an exercise in patience. Renovations can impede on daily activities and cause a certain level of upheaval in homeowners' lives. Homeowners planning renovations also may find that they must have some wiggle room when it comes to both their budgets and their expectations. Remodeling, particularly with regard to older homes, may unveil unforeseen issues that only arise in the face of the renovation.

So what can homeowners expect during a renovation? The following are a few issues that might arise during home improvement projects.

• **Dirt and noise:** Homeowners can count on dust, debris and noise throughout the renovation

process. Dust appears when walls come down or go up, and construction teams typically erect temporary walls or tarps to contain the debris. Air filtering systems also can limit dust particles. Noise is unavoidable. If it becomes troublesome, arrange to be outside of the home when the bulk of the construction is taking place.

• **Delays or schedule changes:** Even the best contractors cannot control every aspect of the job. They rely on subcontractors and vendors to do portions of the work. Materials may not always arrive on time, or they may fall short of homeowners' expectations. This can push back the project schedule. Homeowners should hope for everything to be done on time, but it can be less stressful if homeowners anticipate delays and be a pleasant surprise if there are no delays.

• **Hidden issues:** Contractors may uncover all sorts of issues that need to be addressed before a project can progress. Examples include the presence of asbestos (common in older homes), plumbing problems, incorrectly wired electrical systems, and leaks or moisture issues. These problems also can impact the cost of the project, so set aside some money in the budget for unforeseen expenses. Chances are you are going to need some extra money to handle a few surprises during the project.

It's important to expect the unexpected when embarking on home renovations. Budgeting for hidden costs, expecting delays and coping with the upheaval to daily schedules are par for the remodeling course. However, the end result is often well worth the time and effort. Homeowners often discover hidden problems when delving into renovations. Budgeting for remediation can help remove some of the stress of unexpected delays and concerns.



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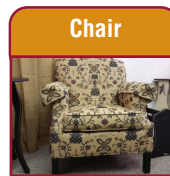
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Make Homes Safe For Pets

Pets require certain comforts to live long and healthy lives. In addition to adequate nutrition, exercise, medical care, and mental stimulation, pets need a safe place to live. The average home is filled with various items that can be harmful to pets. Just as parents baby-proof their homes when welcoming new children into their families, pet owners can take inventory of potential hazards to pets and take steps to safeguard their pets from home-related injuries. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, a few simple adjustments around the house

can prevent many pet emergencies.

- Invest in cabinet locks. Cats and dogs can be curious animals, gaining access to areas of a home pet owners never would have imagined possible. If you can't store everything beyond pets' reach, then use cabinet and drawer latches to prevent access to areas that are off limits. Lock doors to basements, garages and storage sheds as well.
- Cover all garbage cans. Animals have extraordinary senses of smell, and they may be attracted to trash cans around the house. Pets rooting

around in the garbage can be messy, but this can also make pets vulnerable to illness. Invest in garbage cans with locks or tight lids to prevent food poisoning or choking.

- Use medications wisely. Be mindful of medications, making sure none of your pills fall on the floor where they can be gobbled up by pets.
- Protect belongings. Cats can scale many objects in the house, gaining access to areas of the house that dogs cannot reach. Cats also can be attracted to small shiny objects, such as jewelry or glass items, that are choking hazards. Store

potential choking hazards out of sight of curious cats.

- Clean the furnace. Allergens and poor indoor air quality is not just a concern for humans. Pets also can be affected by allergies and health issues that result from exposure to mold or dirt in a home. Have your HVAC system routinely serviced and routinely change indoor air filters to maintain healthy air quality. When possible, open windows to let fresh air inside.
- Secure windows and doors. Cats and dogs may be distracted by something outdoors and feel compelled to chase after it. Dogs and cats can suffer serious injuries if they fall from windows. Make sure window screens are secure and install guards if your pet likes to hang out by the windows. Exercise caution when entering and leaving your home so pets don't scurry outside.

- Keep cords and electronic outlets secure. Teething puppies or curious cats may bite or pull on power cords. Use cord keepers to cover up electric lines and outlet locks to keep plugs where they should be.
- Provide a comfortable indoor climate. Many pets spend the majority of their days indoors where climate and temperature can be controlled. However, if yours is an outside pet or requires a brief stint in the garage or an uninsulated area, make sure the temperature in such areas is comfortable and safe. Take precautions around the house to keep pets safe, comfortable and secure. TF16B539 Keep companion animals safe around the house.



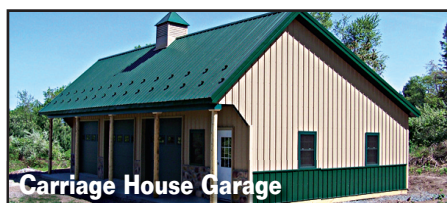
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