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HOME

SPRING

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Rusty and Sarah Clark constructed a new tiny house and cattle shed on West 125th Avenue in New Hampton.

Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some tell-tale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- **Wobbly underfoot and in hand:** Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter. Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be

a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

- **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who no-



tice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

- **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding

the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

How to recognize when it's time to replace your windows

Windows are a major component of a home. Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average life span of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years. Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill, and this is not a do-it-yourself project. There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with

homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines.

- **Difficulty opening and closing windows.** A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it's probably time for something new.

- **There's apparent win-**

dow damage. Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

- **Drafts in the window are common.** If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

- **Dated windows are present in the home.** Older windows may pose safety

hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

- **Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily.** Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

- **Fading indoors is noted.** Windows that do



not feature low-emissivity (Low-E) glass coatings will not block UV rays. Those rays can cause fading to wood floors and furniture or pretty much anything the sunlight touches. Replacing existing windows

with Low-E coating alternatives can safeguard belongings and improve window efficiency.

Window replacement may be necessary when existing windows are showing signs of aging or damage.

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8 steps to a more functional kitchen

A kitchen is often the most utilized room in a house. Meals may be prepared, cooked and often eaten in kitchens, and the room is often utilized as a home-work spot or a makeshift place to pay bills and stay on top of household needs. By enhancing the organization and functionality of the kitchen, homeowners can enjoy these popular spaces even more.

Homeowners have increased their spending on home improvements in recent years. According to the Joint Center for Housing Centers for Harvard University, project spending rose to \$472 billion in 2022 from \$328 billion in 2019. It's estimated consumers will have spent \$485 billion by the end of 2023. Kitchen renovations were the most popular upgrade and accounted for the highest budgets in 2021, according to Houzz. When the time comes to renovate a kitchen, homeowners can

take steps to make these spaces more organized and therefore functional. Here are eight tips to creating a more functional kitchen.

1. Increase storage, and then invest in more. Make the most of corner cabinets and other potential dead spots in a kitchen. Various products can be used to organize awkwardly angled or shaped areas. Kitchen designers also can work with you to reconfigure cabinets and kitchen layouts.

2. Organize utensils and dishes around the sink/dishwasher. Rather than traversing the kitchen to put clean dishes away, make loading and unloading the dishwasher that much easier by locating commonly used items next to and above it. Similarly, place frequently used saucepans, baking dishes and other items near the oven or food preparation area.

3. Utilize drawer and cabinet organizers. Make a place



for everything in the kitchen. Take out all items and see what you need and use all the time. Then coordinate storage around those items so everything fits perfectly. Pull-out shelves and Lazy Susans also can facilitate access.

4. Add shelves to cabinets. If you can afford to have a custom-built kitchen, by all means design cabinets according to preference. If you're using standard cabinets, you may have to reconfigure shelves and spacing to fit the items you have. This also will help you maximize cabinet space.

5. Organize the garbage. Have a pull-out drawer or cabinet to store trash bins. Separate compost, trash and recycling needs.

6. Create continuity in the room. Many open concept

homes will have kitchens open up to another room in the home. Mirror the design scheme from elsewhere in the house, and make sure that the flow between spaces is not obstructed.

7. Create a beverage station. A beverage station can minimize the time needed to make a cup of tea or coffee or for the kids to grab juice or chocolate milk.

8. Have a workspace in the kitchen. Whether paying bills, making a grocery list or leaving notes for the family, a dedicated workspace can add more function to the room. Be sure there is task lighting nearby and ample overhead lighting to ensure that all kitchen needs are illuminated properly.

A more functional kitchen can make this already popular space even more so.

Some hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail

Hallway and closet

Closet organization systems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space, and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging racks. An out-of-the-way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only con-



tinues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.



Wayne and Pamela Fry, built some new additions and remodeled their shed at West State Highway ZZ in McFall.

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Financial mistakes anyone can avoid

Earnings go a long way toward determining an individual's financial security. However, high wages do not guarantee long-term financial security any more than lower wages ensure a future marked by a lack of financial flexibility. Individuals are a unique variable in any financial equation, and those who can exercise and maintain some fiscal discipline are more likely to secure long-term security than those who cannot.

One way anyone can improve their chances at a secure and flexible financial future is to identify and avoid some common mistakes. Avoiding the following mistakes can increase the chances individuals at various income levels enjoy a secure financial future.

- Delay saving for retirement: Conventional wisdom says it's never too early to begin saving for retirement. Despite that, surveys indicate many adults are



behind on saving. A 2022 survey from Bankrate found that 55 percent of respondents indicated they were behind on their retirement savings, while 35 percent reported being "significantly behind." Though laws governing retirement contributions have made it easier for people to catch up, it's still better to begin saving once you enter the professional arena, which for most

people is some time in their early to mid-twenties. The longer you delay saving for retirement, the more precarious your financial future becomes.

- Spending beyond your means: The post-pandemic increase in cost-of-living has garnered considerable attention in recent years, when inflation has driven up the cost of just about everything. There's little consumers can do about the rising cost of living, but making a concerted effort to curtail spending is one way to combat the spike. However, surveys indicate many people earning significant salaries are living paycheck-to-paycheck. For example, a 2021 report from LendingClub Corporation found that nearly 40 percent of individuals with annual incomes greater than \$100,000 live paycheck to paycheck, with 12 percent reporting they are struggling to pay their bills. An assortment of variables undoubtedly contribute to that stark reality, and one might be a tendency for consumers to spend beyond their means. Individuals who are struggling to curtail their spending are urged to seek the help of a certified financial planner who can help them devise a budget and alleviate some of the stress and pressure associated with overspending or living paycheck to paycheck.



Andrew Lane and Cassie Daleske erected this manufactured shed off Highway T in New Andover.



Jacob and Paula Denum erected the 4-door shed on Lewis Street in Bethany.

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- Poor use of credit: Credit cards can be a financial safety blanket, but that blanket can soon smother consumers who don't know how and when to utilize credit. Reserve credit cards for emergency situations and resist the temptation to use them for daily expenses, such as groceries and gas. Credit card interest rates tend to be in the double digits, so unless card holders can pay their balances in full each month, they're only exacerbating the already high cost of living by using credit for daily expenses.
- Buying too much house: Overspending on housing is another financial mistake, and arguably the one that's the most difficult to avoid. It can be hard to walk away from a dream home, but such a decision could secure your financial future. Unfortunately, data indicates far too many individuals are spending more on housing than conventional financial wisdom recommends. The most recent Consumer Expenditure Survey from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that spending on housing accounted for 33 percent of the average household's monthly expenses and that the average household spent 88 percent of its after-tax income each month. That latter figure is especially troubling, as conventional financial wisdom recommends a saving rate of 20 percent. Overspending on housing greatly affects a person's ability to save and invest, so resisting the temptation to buy that expensive dream home could be the difference between a secure or scary financial future.

Avoiding some common mistakes can help individuals be more financially flexible and secure over the long haul.

How sellers can get top dollar for their homes

The process of buying and selling a home includes many movable parts. North America has experienced historic trends in the housing market in recent years. Most notably, record-high prices have dominated the real estate market over the last several years.

High prices are good news for sellers, who can probably anticipate receiving offers above listing price. In New Jersey, inventory is so low that 12.5 percent of homes in the Garden State sold above list price. This is good news for sellers currently looking to make an excel-

lent profit on their properties. Sellers who don't want to rely on the market alone to earn more for their homes can take various steps to get top dollar.

Stage your home

Focus your attention on the living room, owner's suite and kitchen. Hiring a staging professional can be an investment that turns a sizable profit.

Know your local market

A good way to price your home and gauge if it will sell quickly is to look at the average "days on the market" for similar homes nearby.

Make added-value im-

provements

Focus renovation dollars on the types of projects that will reap the highest return on investment.

Sell at the right time

Fewer people are shopping for homes in the dead of winter or during the middle of the school year, so putting your home on the market in spring typically brings out the largest number of interested parties. But this isn't the only time-related factor to consider. To sell for the most money, you want to list your home when you have enough equity to pay off your current mortgage, the

costs of selling, and the costs of moving.

Give curb appeal a boost

Make sure that buyers see your home in a positive light from the first moment they pull up for a walk-through showing.

A few simple strategies can help sellers get more money for their homes.



Kitchen cabinets: reface or replace?

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spend on major kitchen remodels grew by 14 percent from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25 percent. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94 percent of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered.

Homeowners have different options when it comes to



cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to replace or reface their cabinets.

Replacement

Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

Refacing

Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good

shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same. The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30 to 50 percent cheaper than a replacement.

Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately. Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.

A guide to long-distance moving

Prospective home buyers are widening their home search areas to find new places to live. The National Association of Realtors says the median distance that buyers traveled to their new homes was 50 miles in 2022, which was triple the median distance that most people clocked in the 30 years prior. Still, the NAR 2022 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers also indicated one-quarter of buyers studied traveled more than 470 miles to find new homes.

Home prices have been historically high in recent years and those prices are not expected to drop anytime soon, so a greater number of people may be looking for homes well outside of their current metro areas. Buying a house far from home base requires some extra know-how, and these tips can help the process.

- Hook up with a local real estate agent early on. Working with a qualified agent can facilitate the process of a long-distance move. As a long-distance buyer, you likely won't be available to drop into a new listing on a moment's notice if you live hundreds of miles away. A local real estate agent can visit homes and present his or her findings, or even provide video walk-throughs so you can see properties in real time. This person also will offer guidance through every step



of a real estate transaction.

- Start calling for estimates. Once you've zeroed in on where you would like to move, start pricing out moving companies that can safely transport all of your belongings from point A to point B. Some homeowners prefer using a storage/moving service, particularly if there is a lag between when the current residence is sold and the new one is available. Also, storing items prior means having access to an entirely empty home to make improvements before furniture and other belongings are moved in.

- Make a plan and stick to the schedule. There are a lot of moving pieces to a long-distance move. It is important to make a task list early on and cross off each job as it is completed to help stay on track. Strongly consider purchasing moving insurance to protect belongings in the move, as many moving companies offer limited

insurance, and check to see if your automotive and home insurance plans cover moving.

- Create an inventory and packing system. Itemize all of your belongings and establish a system for packing so that you'll know where each item is. This can help you recognize if any boxes go missing. Also, pack boxes with distance in mind, as things will likely get jostled more so than if they were only traveling down the street.

- Consider moving during the offseason. Lots of people prioritize moving in the spring and summer, particularly if they have children attending school. This is the busiest and most expensive time to move. Moving during less busy times of year to move can cut down on stress and may be more frugal.

These are just some tips to think about when making a long-distance move.

Air conditioning maintenance tips

There is no denying the relief cool air provides when the temperatures outdoors are particularly steamy. In fact, having a place to cool off is a necessity for those who have succumbed to heat exhaustion or have difficulty regulating their body temperatures.

Even though air conditioning can provide relief, some people are reluctant to turn it on because of the drain on electricity and the subsequent high energy bills that come with it. Certainly running the air conditioning can be costly, but regular maintenance helps a system to work more efficiently. It also enables homeowners to recognize issues that can lead to expensive repairs if left unchecked.

Here are some air conditioning maintenance tips to keep a system in top condition.

- Change the filters. Dirty, clogged filters can cause

a system to work harder to cool down rooms, compromising efficiency. Check the HVAC system's manufacturer recommendation for how frequently to change the filters. Some may benefit from monthly replacement if the air is running constantly.

- Consider the MERV rating. The filter will have a minimum efficiency reporting value, or MERV, according to This Old House. The higher the number, the better the filtration. But a higher MERV rating requires more energy to pull air through the filter. Therefore, choose a balance of filtration and energy cost requirements.

- Maintain the outdoor unit. Clean the AC unit with a soft-bristle brush and vacuum the fins at the start of the season and if the unit becomes dirty from weather, pollen and other elements. Bent condenser or evaporator fins can restrict air flow that would normally pass

through the air conditioning system. Gently straighten them to improve air flow.

- Check and repair leaks. Airflow leaks through ductwork and with window AC units can reduce efficiency. Hold an incense stick or another smoldering item to check for leaks. If the smoke blows around, there is leakage. Use foil tape to seal small gaps and duct mastic for large ones. Stuff foam around a window unit and use taping as necessary.

- Supplement with a whole-house fan. The Family Handyman says an attic-mounted fan pushes hot air out through the attic vents and draws cooler, outside air through open windows and doors. The whole-house fan can be used to draw out most of the hot air before turning on the AC, or as a substitute on cooler days when having the AC on may not be crucial.

- Schedule annual maintenance.



Homeowners may be able to handle various maintenance tasks, or they may want to have an HVAC technician come out and do the following: clean and inspect coils; adjust and replace fan belts; lubricate motors and bearings; inspect controls and safeties, check refrigerant; and determine if the unit is large enough for the home.

Air conditioning systems need routine maintenance to operate efficiently and at the lowest cost possible.



James and Lorie Eisenhardt constructed this new home on South 15th Street in Bethany.



James and Kristen Slatten erected this building of new storage units on the Corner of Bethany Avenue and South 25th Street in Bethany.



Max Daniel and Megan Wise built a new Laundromat with a 37 x 24 parking lot off Highway N in Blythedale.



Bruce Hudalla added on a large addition to his home at the corner of 5th Street & Walnut Street in Blythedale

What to know about replacing gutters

Certain home renovation projects are more glamorous than others. A remodeled kitchen is sure to garner its share of "oohs and aahs," while a newly paved driveway is much less likely to dazzle guests.

A gutter replacement is another job that might not have the wow factor. But fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced.

Signs gutters should be replaced

Various signs indicate it's time to replace existing gutters. Homeowners should act promptly if any of the following signs arise, as poorly

functioning gutters can make it hard for water to get into the downspouts, ultimately pushing it backward and likely underneath roof shingles, where the result can be costly water damage.

- Peeling paint
- Cracks
- Pooling water in the gutter
- Mildew in the gutter, which can sometimes be seen even from the ground

- Water damage: Water damage on the gutter can be limited to certain spots and will be noticeable on the underside of the gutter

- Soffit damage
- Sagging gutters
- Detached gutters, which can be detached from other pieces or the house
- Rust

Who should replace gutters?

Many home improvements can be completed

successfully by skilled do-it-yourselfers, but a gutter replacement is best left to the professionals. Homeowners who live in single-story homes may be able to replace gutters on their own, but the issues that can arise when gutters are not functioning at optimal capacity make this a job best suited to professionals, even in residences without high roofs.

Some gutters may be under a manufacturer's warranty, so homeowners can check to see if their gutters qualify for a free upgrade. Experience is one of the best reasons to work with a professional gutter installation team. Experienced professionals can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size

of the house. In addition, gutter installation requires the use of various tools that many DIYers may not have on hand, which can cut into the cost savings of doing the project yourself.

Homeowners also should not underestimate the challenges of working on ladders that are high up off the ground. Professionals are accustomed to such challenges, while DIYers may not be comfortable or used to climbing ladders with materials and tools in hand.

A gutter replacement is a worthwhile investment that can ensure rain water efficiently and effectively runs through gutters and away from the roof. Leaving this task to the professionals can ensure the job is done right.

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How to create an outdoor living retreat

Al fresco entertaining has taken off in recent years. It's much more common today to find homeowners who want to extend living spaces to the outdoors in meaningful ways that go beyond a few lawn chairs and a stand-alone grill. Dream backyard living rooms mirror similar spaces indoors and contain features like cozy corners, lush furniture and televisions or movie projectors. Plus, they often add additional outdoor luxuries like fully functional kitchens.

Homeowners have various options when designing outdoor living spaces. Above all else, spaces should be created with the goal of encouraging people to get together. Here are some ideas.

Poolside retreat

Homeowners with pools and other water features likely want this area to be the star of the entertaining space. Furniture will be more of the lounging variety, with comfortable chaises and spots to catch the sun. If a swim-up bar isn't possible, a rolling bar cart can be stocked with essentials for cocktails or mocktails for the kids. Furniture near the pool will be exposed to a lot of sun, so look for durable, sun-resistant fabrics.

Fireside nook

Gathering around an outdoor fireplace or fire pit is a treat when the weather cools down. Mirror the look of the same setup indoors by arranging outdoor sofas so they flank the fireplace. Add some ottomans or side tables for stowing mulled cider or hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

Consider a custom

banquette

Unused corners on a patio or rooftop retreat can utilize a custom-made banquette that provides the functionality of a sofa sectional outdoors. Have a contractor design it to the exact specifications of the area, and add a rug to ground the space.

Vary the flooring

Depending on the entertaining space, a balance of soft grass, pavers or other hardscape will be necessary. Certain areas will need to be hard enough for chairs and other furniture, particularly for those who are including an outdoor dining table in the design.

Create some privacy

Some homeowners are lucky enough to have natural barriers that offer privacy in their entertaining spaces. When there isn't enough, tall shrubs, inexpensive bamboo fencing or trellis can provide a blind that makes an outdoor living area more cozy and private. Consider placing tall, potted plants on rolling casters to improve privacy as the need arises.

Outdoor living spaces are all the rage, and they can add value and functionality to most any home. hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

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Outdoor living spaces are all the rage, and they can add value and functionality to most any home.



Rob and Lisa Cracraft constructed this new home off Highway M on West 215th Street, Eagleville.

Small renovations that make a big difference

Home renovation projects were high on homeowners' priority lists during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout much of 2020, people across the globe were forced to spend much of their time at home as leaders and governments across the globe sought to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More time at home compelled millions of homeowners to invest more in their properties, thus sparking a renovation boom.

By early 2023, the renovation boom that marked the initial days of the pandemic appeared to have burst. In May 2023, the popular home improvement retailer Home Depot reported its sales had fallen by 4.5 percent in the first quarter of the year and that

its income had fallen by more than 6 percent from the same period a year earlier. That marked the end of what Home Depot CEO Ted Decker characterized as "a three-year period of unprecedented growth" in the home improvement sector.

Home Depot's decline in sales was attributed to a number of factors, including a pivot among homeowners from large projects to smaller renovations. Inflation and the looming threat of a recession have led many homeowners to emphasize smaller projects. With that in mind, the following are some small renovations that can have a big impact.

- Storage addition: Regardless of where storage is added, be it the kitchen or a home office or a laundry room, extra space to keep

items out of view can dramatically alter the look of a home. Unused kitchen walls can be transformed with some inexpensive, easily hung shelves, while some laundry pedestals with storage drawers can help keep washrooms clear of clutter.

- Polish floors: Elbow grease might be the biggest expenditure when cleaning hardwood floors. The wood flooring experts at Bona® advise homeowners to polish their floors once every two to four months depending on how much foot traffic the floors get. A fresh polishing can make floors look brand new and ensures dirt and dust are not hanging around as uninvited houseguests.

- Paint: Painting is another inexpensive option for budget-conscious

homeowners who want to update their homes. There's no shortage of places in a home, both inside and out, where a fresh coat of paint can make a statement without breaking the bank. Fading paint on bedroom walls and kitchen cabinets can be painted over with a fresh coat of the same color or even something more vibrant. Outside, apply a fresh coat to a wooden deck or paint over brick siding to create a whole new look.

- Molding: Crown molding can add a touch of elegance to any room. Rooms can be transformed in a single weekend with the installation of new or replacement crown molding. A simple molding installation is a task many do-it-yourselfers can handle on their own, while homeowners with less



DIY experience may benefit from hiring a contractor to create a layered molding look.

Homeowners are pivoting away from costly renovations to more budget-

conscious projects. Various less expensive undertakings can transform spaces at a fraction of the cost of more extensive renovations.



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Design ideas that can create a peaceful feel

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. A calm place to come home to after a busy day at work or school is often just what people need to unwind.

Certain design components can help individuals turn their homes into relaxing respites from the daily grind. With that goal in mind, individuals can consider these ideas to create a peaceful feel inside their homes.

- Paint with neutral col-

ors. Wall colors can define the mood in a given room, and neutral colors have long been linked to a calming effect. Subtle shades like beige, taupe and light gray are known to create a relaxed vibe in a room, so these colors can be a go-to choice. Some people consider neutral colors a tad boring, so individuals concerned by that impression can limit neutral colors to rooms designated as sanctuaries, like a reading room, a spa bathroom or a



bedroom.

- Employ natural light. Natural light also can help to establish a serene setting at home. Large windows that let daylight in can improve anyone's mood. A 2022 study from researchers at the University of Chile in Santiago found that the more natural light that entered a home, the happier people said they felt. Study authors even noted that the largest uptick in well-being was found among participants who lived in homes in which windows covered at least 40 percent of the dwelling's wall space. Opening blinds or curtains and, if possible, installing larger windows in a home can help to establish the relaxing, happy vibe individuals are aiming for.

- Utilize plants to set a

peaceful tone. The United Kingdom-based Royal Horticultural Society notes that research has found that indoor plants can benefit psychological well-being. The RHS notes that improved mood and reduced stress levels are two benefits that indoor plants can provide. A good mood and less stress can help individuals establish the peaceful feel they're aiming for at home.

- Keep devices out of bedrooms. Watching television while lying in bed, scanning a smartphone before turning off a nightstand light and retiring for the night, or reading an e-reader instead of a print book at night can transform a bedroom from a serene setting into one that's overrun with stimuli. According to the Sleep Foundation, technology stimulates the mind, which can make it harder to fall asleep. In addition, blue light emitted by devices disrupts the natural production of melatonin, a hormone that makes it easier to fall asleep. That can negate any efforts individuals have undertaken to make their bedrooms as peaceful as possible. Designate bedrooms in the house as technology-free zones to ensure the peaceful vibe continues uninterrupted until everyone goes to bed.

A peaceful home makes for the perfect respite at the end of a busy day. Various design choices can help individuals establish a serene vibe throughout their homes.



Darren and Julie Morse constructed this new house on West State Highway P in New Hampton.



Jodie Graham put up a new camper storage shed at West 110th Street, Eagleville.



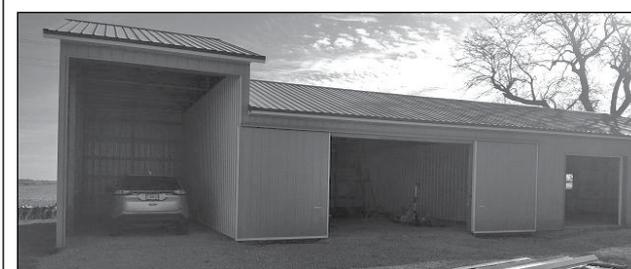
Koltyn and Mychelle Smith constructed this new home with a large deck on Monson Street in Bethany.



Lance and Janette Johns erected this new building on Taylor Street in Bethany.



O'Reilly Automotive Stores Inc. closed down their store on Main Street after building a new store on Miller Street, Bethany.



Pamela and Kelly Nichols built this new shed on West US Highway 69 in Eagleville.

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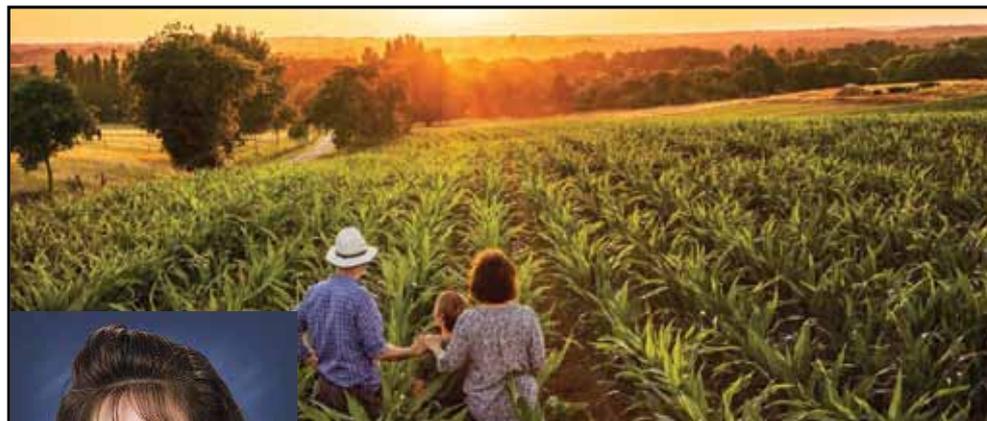
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How to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

Private backyards are now go-to spaces for recreation and entertainment and great places to recharge the body and mind.

One ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was more time spent outdoors, even if it was predominantly on one's own property. In addition, respondents admitted that time spent outdoors was therapeutic.

People now spend more

time relaxing, gardening, exercising, dining, and entertaining outside than in years past.

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can do all they can to make these spaces comfortable and welcoming.

Get all lit up

Outdoor spaces can be enjoyed no matter the hour when there is ample lighting. Outdoor lighting not only sheds

light on entertaining spaces, but also makes spaces safer and more secure.

Increase privacy

Fencing, whether it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even star gaze in private.

Address the elements

Homeowners should note

the direction their backyard faces and the typical daily conditions of the space. For example, a yard that faces southwest may get plenty of strong sun during the day, requiring the addition of shade trees, covered patios or arbors to cut down on the glare and heat. If the yard is often hit by winds, trees or bushes planted strategically as windbreaks can help.

Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A deep seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor sofa or love seat and chaise lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day,

while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather.

Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mosquitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

As people spend more time enjoying their properties, they can consider the many ways to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable.

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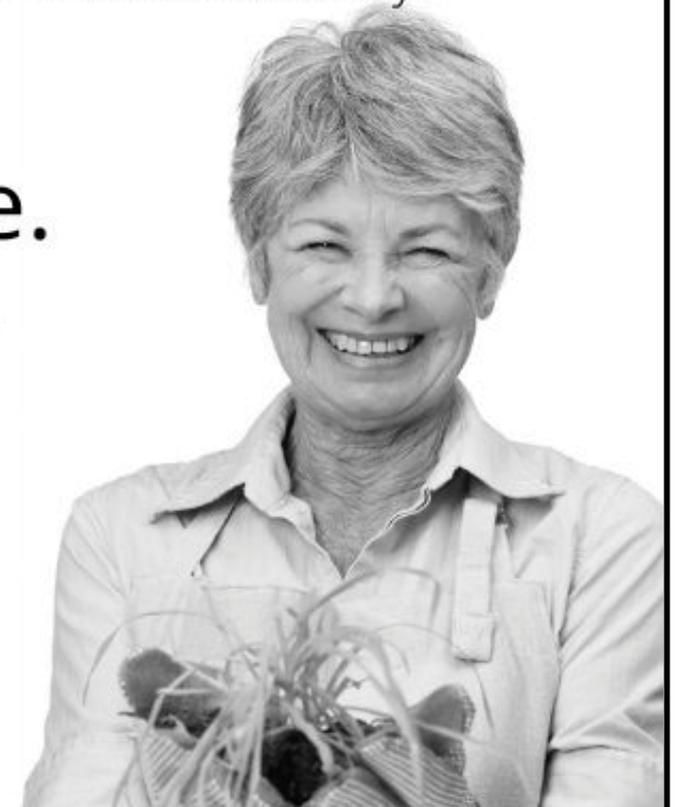
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A guide to various types of home awnings

Homeowners recognize that upgrades can improve the functionality and comfort of their homes. Improving outdoor spaces has proven particularly popular of late. The National Association of Home Builders reports that outdoor living has been propelled to the top of homeowner wish lists. Plus, a recent survey conducted by the New

Home Trends Institute found connection to the outdoors/nature and outdoor entertaining ranked high among desired home designs.

One way to make outdoor spaces more accommodating is through the installation of awnings. Many homeowners would like to enhance their homes with awnings but do not know where to begin.



Learning about the various types of awnings can help homeowners determine which option best suits their needs.

Fixed awnings

Fixed awnings are stationary on a building's exterior. While the awnings are generally stable, they can be damaged by snow or wind. It's key to find an installation expert to make sure the awning is installed correctly so that it can withstand weather and other issues. It's also important to know that fixed awnings re-

main in the same position and orientation, so its best to know exactly where to place it beforehand.

Retractable awning

Retractable awnings are the most popular type of awnings because they can be extended when necessary to keep a space cool or protected, then rolled or folded up when not in use. These awnings are advantageous because they can be retracted when bad weather hits to prevent damage.

Motorized retractable awning

Motorized retractable awnings offer the utmost convenience. Standard retractable offerings require a handle or hand crank to manually extend or fold up the awning. Motorized awnings can be operated with a sensor, remote or even motion trigger. Even though they cost more, they're a favorite among homeowners.

Areas of use

Awnings can be installed in various locations. Patio awnings are much preferred because of their large coverage area, which typically spans entire patios. Door awnings are installed above the exterior door of an entryway to protect visitors and occupants from precipitation and to improve the home's look. Window awnings can add additional shade and privacy. There also are side awnings, which are essentially wall-like structures that run across a patio, garden or balcony for wind or sun protection. They're also utilized to improve privacy.

Homeowners can choose from various types of awning materials, including fabric, metal, glass, and others. Working with a reputable awning company is the best way for homeowners to peruse possible products and find awnings that will suit their needs.



Brian Carter added two nice decks to his recently remodeled home on Vandivert Street in Bethany.



Christopher and Tricia Jerome constructed this home on West 140th Street in Hatfield.



Stephen and Brenda Coulson of Eagleville erected this new barn on East 165th Street.



Troy's Four Seasons Yard Care, Inc. constructed this nice new cabin off Highway V in Cainsville.



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Owner's suite renovation ideas for luxury spaces

An owner's suite is a sanctuary for homeowners. It's a place where adults can retreat, relax and unwind after a busy day. It's expected that a bed and some other furniture will take up residence in a standard bedroom, but certain elements can help homeowners create stunning spaces.

While the largest bedroom in the home typically is dubbed the "owner's suite," it cannot be classified as a suite unless there is an adjoining bathroom. An owner's suite also may have many more unique features that individuals may want to incorporate into a remodel. Here are some ideas to consider.

Upgraded closet

Those who will be overhauling the walls and layout of the bedroom can configure the space to make room for a serious closet overhaul. A spacious, walk-in closet that has built-in shelves, drawers and rods can improve the functionality of the bedroom. Draw dividers and other components also can optimize space.

Sitting area

In large suites, homeowners may have the potential to set up a sitting area in one portion of the room away

from the bed. This area can have a sofa, chairs, chaise, or other furniture and make for an ideal spot to read and lounge. Some people also enjoy having a television adjacent to the sitting area so they can watch a show in the privacy of the bedroom.

Fireplace

Fireplaces add a unique ambiance to bedrooms and make for cozy spaces in which to cuddle up. While a traditional, roaring wood fire is one option, there is much less mess and fuss with a gas fireplace. Some gas fireplaces may not even have to be vented, and they can be turned on with the flip of a switch.

Private patio or balcony

Owners who want to go the extra mile in owner's suite renovations can incorporate outdoor spaces into the plans. Many homes are now being built with owner's suites on the first floor, facilitating the possibility of aging in place at home. With this layout, the bedroom can be opened up to the outdoors by way of a sliding door or French doors. Decking or a patio can be outside of the room, or even a covered space similar to a Florida room. Those with second-

floor suites may want to consider a small deck or balcony where bistro seating can be placed.

Luxury bath

Owners can turn the ensuite bathroom into something out of a spa. A steam shower; heated floors; separate area for the toilet, closed off from the rest of the bathroom; and dual vani-

ties and sinks can make this a place that screams luxury and comfort. Do not forget dimmer switches for lighting, and even the inclusion of some new aromatherapy technology for increasing the potential for relaxation.

Many different features can improve the functionality and luxury of an owner's suite.



Jerad and Victoria Vandiver moved, upgraded and expanded on an old shed on West State Highway P, McFall.



Clinton and April Fenimore erected a new garage on West State Highway AA in Pattonsburg.



Greg and Rose Fenimore upgraded their home with a new front porch, patio and firepit on West 395th Street, Pattonsburg.



Randall Mulnix put up this new shed on West 375th Street in Bethany.



Bobby and Rebecca Willis constructed the new house and shed on West State Highway M in Eagleville.

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