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OCTOBER 23, 2019 ■ PAGE 1B-24B

Prevent growth of mold/mildew in colder months

Mold and mildew are not only unsightly, but unhealthy. These fungi grow readily in damp areas and are found in the air breathed both indoors and outside. If left unaddressed, mold and mildew can threaten the health of a home's inhabitants.

Mildew is a type of mold that remains relatively flush with the surface it grows on. Other molds can grow puffy in appearance. Molds serve the purpose of destroying organic materials, but in high amounts, these microorganisms can cause respiratory problems, sinus congestion, throat irritation, headaches, and other issues, particularly when mold grows unchecked indoors, says Better Homes and Gardens. As a result, it is essential to address mold before it becomes problematic.

According to Polygon, a drying technology and temporary climate solutions company, the wet season in winter is when molds often grow and expand. Mold can break down the integrity and strength of the surfaces where it grows.

Homeowners can employ the follow-

ing strategies to prevent mold growth.

- Keep all surfaces clean, using proper cleaning products. Diluted bleach solutions are highly effective at killing microscopic fungi, viruses and bacteria.
- Reduce moisture and humidity by ensuring sufficient air circulation in rooms, particularly bathrooms and kitchens. An exhaust fan will help remove moisture quickly.
- Fabrics covered in mildew that can be laundered should be carefully removed and washed in chlorine bleach and hot water. An oxygen bleach product also can be effective.
- Invest in a dehumidifier that can reduce moisture in the home in problem areas, such as damp basements or garages.
- Fix plumbing leaks as soon as possible.
- Remove damp leaves and snow from areas around the foundation of the home. Ensure that gutters and downspouts are clear of debris and can shuttle water away from the house effectively.
- Replace cracked or defective mortar in basements.



- Make sure all seals on windows and doors are not compromised and are in good working condition.
- Be sure an HVAC in-line humidifier is adjusted to the right setting and isn't pumping too much moisture into the heated air; otherwise, the added humidity

- can contribute to mold.
 - If there is a flood or water infiltrates a home in other ways, hire a professional service to help clean and dry the home effectively.
- Mold and mildew are problematic, but with diligence they can be kept at bay.

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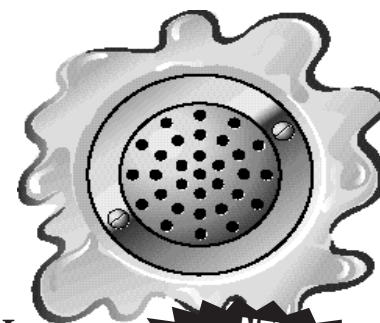
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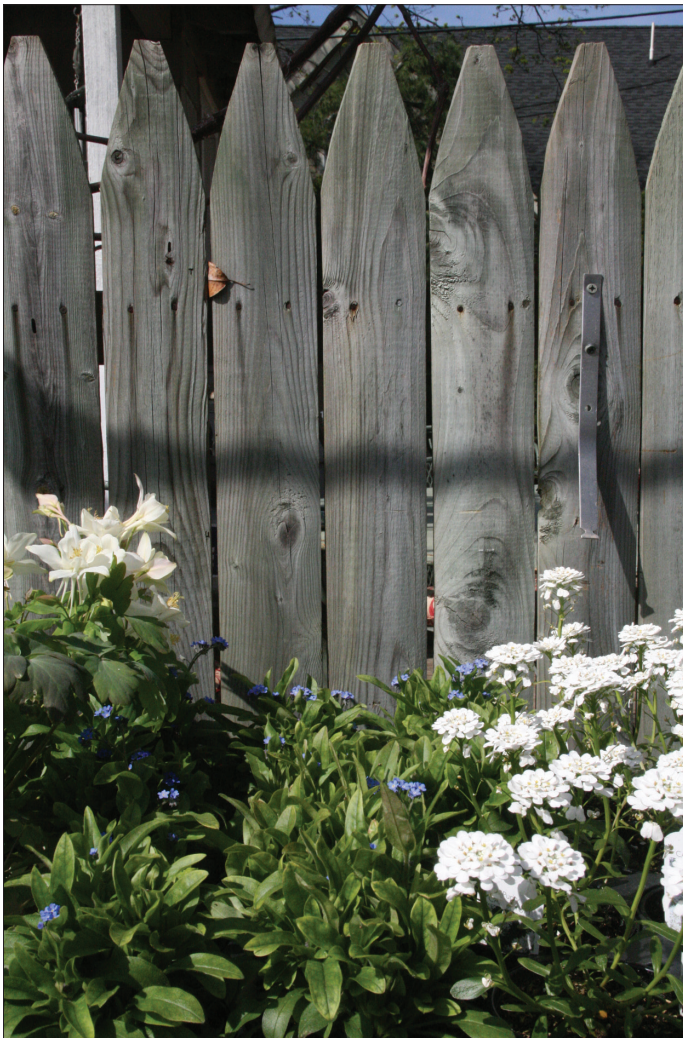
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Improve privacy and security at home

Living in close proximity to one's neighbors has its benefits. But many homeowners would no doubt admit that privacy at home is a good thing.

Whether homeowners are enjoying their yard in spring or summer or simply want their in-home activities to be less obvious to neighbors, their privacy is a year-round concern. If privacy is a concern, homeowners can take certain steps to ensure their homes stay or become the sanctuaries they were designed to be.

Window treatments and frosting

Windows allow natural light to enter a home, but windows also enable neighbors and others to see into a home. If thieves are the ones looking inside, wide open windows present a security issue. Window treatments are an effective way to add privacy to a home. Closing curtains or blinds limits others' ability to see inside the house. Switch to more opaque window treatments when using interior lighting more often, as gossamer draperies may still make it possible for outsiders to understand what's going on inside the home if people and items are backlit.

For those who do not want to compromise natural

light, frosted windows can satisfy a desire for privacy. Windows can be purchased with frosting in place, and home improvement retailers sell various products that can create a frosted look.

Fencing and perimeter plantings

Privet hedge, arborvitae or Italian cypress are fast-growing evergreens that provide privacy around a home for homeowners who do not want to install traditional fencing. These trees also provide a natural habitat for various yard animals. Layering various plants of different heights and textures also can create a more natural and less imposing look.

Fencing remains a viable option to create privacy and stop noise pollution. Privacy fences come in various materials, colors and sizes, enabling homeowners to choose styles that fit their landscapes.

Pergolas and enclosed patios

Homeowners who like to entertain outdoors may want to make their outdoor living spaces more private. Pergolas allow light to filter through but obstruct direct view of patio activity, especially when

Fence - continued on page 5B

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Defining hardscape and how to use it

Curb appeal is beneficial in various ways. Curb appeal can make a home more attractive to prospective buyers and give existing homeowners a place they want to come home to. In its study of the worth of outdoor remodeling projects, the National Association of Realtors found standard lawn care and overall landscape upgrades were most appealing to buyers, as well as the most likely to add value to a home.

Although plants, grass and other items can improve curb appeal, homeowners should not overlook hardscaping.

Hardscaping is an industry term that refers to the non-living features of a landscape. These features can include

Hardscape - continued on page 5B

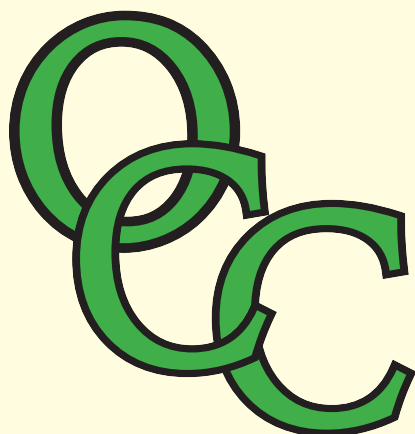
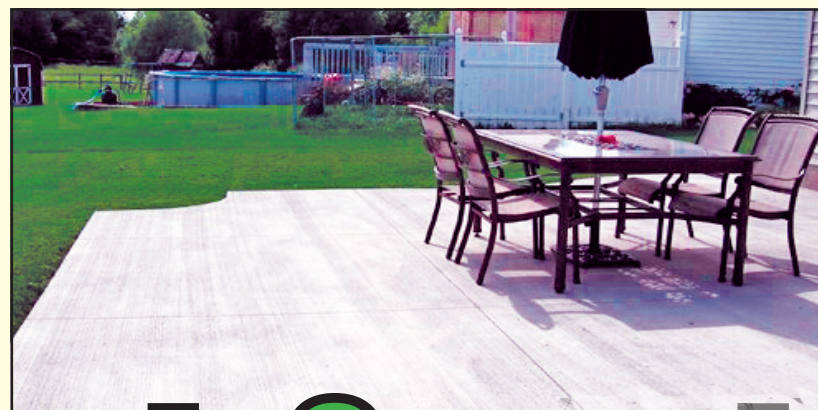


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Hardscape — continued from page 4B

everything from decks to walkways to ornamental boulders. Introducing paths or paver walls to a property helps develop that home's hardscape. Hardscape and soft elements often work in concert to create inspiring landscape designs.

DIY landscape designers can heed certain tips to make the most of hardscape features on their properties.

Choose materials.

As with many landscaping projects, homeowners must first determine what types of additions they would like on their properties. Common hardscape features include patios, decks, walkways of pavers or bricks, and retaining walls. Hardscape elements can be functional or simply decorative features that add whimsy to the yard.

Choose a theme.

The right style allows hardscaping and softscaping materials to work together. For example, homeowners may want to give their yards an eastern feel, complete with a koi pond and decorative bridge or trellis. A formal English garden, however, may include manicured paths with stepping stones and ornate topiaries. Mixing too many styles together can take away from the overall appeal.

The pros suggest looking at the overall plan of the design, even if all of the work can't be completed at once. This way the eventual finished project will be cohesive.

Think about the purpose.

Hardscaping can look good but also serve key purposes. Pebbles or gravel can mitigate trouble areas that don't grow grass or plant life well. Retaining walls hold back soil in yards with sharply inclined hills. Mulch can set perimeters around trees and shrubs, as well as planting beds. Fencing, another form of hardscaping, is essential for establishing property boundaries and adding privacy.

Consult a professional.

While many hardscaping additions can be handled by novices, large-scale projects, such as patios and decking, can change the grading of the yard. Professionals can map out how to handle drainage issues and meet building codes. In addition, professional installation can ensure hardscaping features last for years to come.

Hardscaping should blend with the nature around it and take its cues from the surrounding environment. This can help softscaping and hardscaping work as one.

Fence — continued from page 3B

combined with some gauzy draperies hanging on the sides. An enclosed patio or three-season room can be a worthwhile addition for homeowners who like to enjoy the great outdoors without being in the elements or on display for neighbors. Structures vary from screened-in porches to greenhouses to removable gazebos. Potted plants or trailing vines can soften the structural edges and help the privacy devices blend in with the natural surroundings.

Personal tactics

Homeowners who do not want their neighbors or others knowing what they're up to in their free time can limit what they share through photos and descriptions on social media. Doing so also cuts down on neighbors' curiosity.

Did you know?

Outdoor remodels and landscaping projects can add valuable curb appeal to homes. The National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Landscape Professionals agree that certain projects offer significant returns when selling a home. The NAR says these are the 10 most appealing outdoor features to buyers.

- Standard lawn care

- Overall landscape upgrade
- New patio
- New wood deck
- Softscaping
- Sod lawn
- Seed lawn
- Outdoor firepit
- Outdoor fireplace
- New pool



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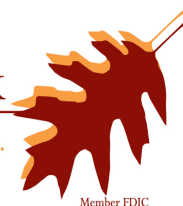
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Exterior renovations that improve curb appeal

Neglecting a home's exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home's appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers' perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added value, as determined by the 2019 "Cost vs. Value Report" from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

- **Garage door replacement:** Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of \$3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

- **Manufactured stone veneer:** Replacing a portion of vinyl siding with stone veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

Exterior - continued on page 3B



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Adding more exterior light

Homeowners are increasingly realizing the benefits of improving the exteriors of their home, which can be just as valuable as improving the interior spaces. As individuals design picturesque garden beds and cultivate lavish lawns or revamp exteriors with architectural features, they probably want to spotlight these improvements. This is where exterior lighting can be put to great use.

Exterior illumination can cast a glow on various features, but there are many other reasons

to increase lighting around the exterior of a home.

- **Safety:** Trips and falls can occur at night when trying to traverse walkways and landscapes in the dark, as it can be difficult to see rocks, stairs and uneven pavement. Outdoor lighting can illuminate pathways, entryways and other areas for safer access for homeowners and their guests.

- **Extend outdoor entertaining:** Ample lighting can increase the amount of time one can use outdoor spaces and make them the perfect gathering spot. As autumn arrives, days become shorter. However, patios, porches and more can get extended use with lighting.

- **Safeguard security:** A well-lit home may be less likely to be targeted by

burglars than one swathed in darkness and shadows. Lights can remain on all evening or be motion-triggered. Setting lights on timers also ensures that the home is illuminated whether residents are home or not.

- **Create drama:** Landscape lighting de-



signers can establish focal points around the landscape and highlight the best features of a property. Uplighting in trees, silhouetting techniques to showcase plants and spotlights to show off architectural features are all options for homeowners to consider.

- **Add value:** The experts at Parker Homescape, a landscape design service, say that exterior lighting can add roughly 30 percent to the value of a home. They also indicate that 50 percent of all home buyers say that outdoor lighting is important when buying a home. If current residents are thinking about selling, now may be the time to invest in exterior lighting.

Improving a home's exterior may be as simple as adding more lighting to improve functionality and beauty.

Exterior — continued from page 2B

- **Wood deck addition:** A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners' ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners' initial investment.

- **Siding replacement:** Not only does old or weathered siding look unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly — at roughly \$16,000 — it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

- **New entry door:** Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn't all about good looks, either. A door that isn't well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.



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Signs it is time for new windows



Windows help regulate the temperature in a home, let in natural light and keep insects, weather and outdoor elements outside where they belong. The right windows also can add value to a property by providing aesthetic appeal and increasing curb appeal.

Although homeowners can typically get many years out of their homes' windows, ultimately windows will need to be replaced. Homes that are more than 20 years old and still have their original windows could be due for an upgrade. Aluminum- or wood-framed windows also may be ripe for changing. Here are some signs that it's time to replace windows, courtesy of Good Housekeeping, Centra® and the real estate website Redfin.

- **Drafty feel in the home:** Window frames can begin to shrink as they age, allowing air to flow from the outdoors in and vice versa. Homeowners may notice drafts when standing near windows or hear whistling on

notably windy days.

- **Rising energy bills:** If energy bills are inexplicably on the rise, then old windows could be to blame. Aging, drafty windows can make it necessary to run HVAC systems more often and at higher or lower temperatures in order to keep homes comfortable.

- **Windows are difficult to open or close:** Homeowners may get used to the quirks of their windows, but those that are difficult to open or close may require replacement. In addition, if windows need to be propped open, it's time to replace them.

- **Water infiltration:** Warping or decaying window frames can make it easy for rain or snow to get into the home. Wood frames are particularly prone to moisture decay. If frames are warping or allowing water into the home, it's time for an upgrade.

- **Condensation on windows:** Fog or condensation buildup on windows can occur if the seal between panes is broken. In this instance, replacement windows are necessary.



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Basement remodeling tips

A basement remodeling project can add valuable and usable space to a home. For many years, homeowners overlooked the potential of a basement remodel, perhaps thinking it would not be a smart return on investment. But that's no longer the case.

The latest "Cost vs. Value" report from Remodeling magazine says the average basement remodel can cost around \$61,000 with a 70.3 percent recoup rate. In addition, HGTV says architects and contractors indicate the cost of redoing a basement is roughly one-third to one-half less than the price of putting an addition on a home.

Before remodeling a basement, homeowners should think about how they want to use the space. Homeowners also must focus on some potential obstacles in a basement that will need to be addressed so that the area can be as functional as possible.

Basements can be chilly and damp. That means moisture issues and heating and cooling needs must be addressed prior to any construction. Homeowners may have to consider the installation of a dehumidifier and run venting through the basement to allow for proper climate control. If a basement takes on water, either through the walls or a concrete slab, a professional waterproofing company can come in and fix these issues so they will not damage drywall and flooring afterwards.

The presence of insects and pests also must be addressed. Exterminators can help homeowners figure out which insects are in their basements and how to make the space less hospitable to these unwelcome guests so that the room will become comfortable for human occupants.

Space is often at a premium in basements, which may contain HVAC units, water heaters, filtration devices, ductwork, pipes, and the other appliances. Qualified contractors can suggest solutions for cordoning off appliances and camouflaging pipes and wires so they won't detract from the finished product. However, building access panels into the design will make it easier to service or repair features as necessary. Homeowners also may want to wrap pipes before drywall is installed to quiet noisy drainage pipes.

Uneven basement flooring will need to be smoothed out and flattened before carpeting or tile can be laid down. A self-leveling underlayment can be applied to

fill in gullies, while larger crack and holes will need to be patched.

Once the structure of the basement is addressed, then the design work can begin. Many professionals advise against drop ceilings, which can take away from ceiling height and look cheap. Basements can be dark, so the addition of plenty of lighting can help brighten the room. Small basement windows can be replaced with larger ones to add more light as well.

Homeowners can mimic built-ins and architectural details from elsewhere in the home so the basement is aesthetically cohesive and doesn't seem like an addition. Bookcases and shelving can add valuable storage space as well. Decorate the basement with bright, neutral colors so they make the space feel more inviting.

With some effort and financial investment, basements can be as beautiful and functional as other rooms in a home.

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Small kitchen improvements that maximize functionality

Many homeowners wish for expansive kitchens. Modernized kitchens that include sought after features and showcase the latest trends go a long way to improving the overall value of a home.

As desirable as such kitchens may be, some homes simply don't have enough space for a centerfold-worthy kitchen featuring an island, wine refrigerator and walk-in pantry. However, homeowners with small kitchens can still improve the form and function of their existing spaces.

Reconfigure and revamp cabinetry

Homeowners whose kitchens are small often lament their lack of storage. Redesigning the layout of cabinets, and possibly adding some more cabinetry, may take care of certain storage issues. The experts at Merit Kitchens suggest utilizing corner space with LeMans units, lazy susans and other gadgets to make access to these areas easier. Going vertical with wall cabinets that extend to the ceiling also can add more storage, as can roll-in work carts.

Work with the walls

Small kitchens require clever usage of vertical space. Vertical storage units, hooks, shelving, and more can move items out of drawers and off of counters. Consider an under-the-cabinet toaster oven and microwave to

Kitchen - continued on page 11B

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What is the water table, and how does it affect homes

The groundwater table plays a role in home construction, foundation stability and home comfort.

Because the groundwater table is so significant, it behooves homeowners to understand how it works.

National Geographic defines a water table as the boundary between water-saturated ground and unsaturated ground. Well beneath the ground, at various depths depending on geography, topography and weather conditions, pockets of water, called aquifers, exist. The water table marks the boundary between that available water and the dry surface.

Ground water is impacted by precipitation, irrigation and ground cover. It also may be affected by land use and tides. The water table can fluctuate with the seasons and from year to year because it is affected by climatic variations, as well as how much water may be drawn from underground, advises Encyclopedia Britannica. The water table where one person lives may be several inches or feet below the surface of the ground and follow the topography of the land. For others, it may be much higher, even coming above the surface of the soil.

The water table as well as local soil conditions and drainage can impact homes and their foundations. If soil drains efficiently and there is a relatively low water table, it may not be problematic. However, if soil is dense and absorbent and the water table is high, the ground around a home may swell and become

saturated. This can exert significant pressure against the foundation walls, states Rytech, a water damage and mold rehabilitation company.

In areas where a local water table rises near the surface, water can push against the underside of the foundation in a condition known as “hydrostatic pressure.” This may cause water to infiltrate through the bottom of the foundation — even permeating solid concrete over time. If hydrostatic pressure is severe, it could lift certain portions of the foundation out of the ground, but this is very unlikely. But it could cause shifting of foundation walls and structures like fencing and decks.

Even if ground water does not cause foundation cracking or shifting, it could lead to humidity issues, resulting in rust, bacteria and mold. Wood structures in a home may be compromised by a high level of humidity.

The home improvement resource Angie’s List says certain steps may need to be taken to protect against damage from a water table and abundant ground water. Basement and foundation waterproofing professionals can help homeowners develop a plan to mitigate water damage. This can include grading changes and the installation of drains and pumps to move water away from the house. Special paints and sealants also can protect the foundation.

Ground water can be a hindrance when it affects the home, but homeowners who learn about it can be in a position to confront any ground water issues.

Kitchen — continued from page 10B

create more counter space.

Use scaled-down appliances

Shop with size in mind when looking at new appliances if you have a small kitchen. Compact versions won’t take up as much space as larger alternatives. Homeowners should consider the ultimate function of the kitchen and then think about which appliances will serve them well. Homeowners with small kitchens may not need a large stand mixer or an oversized commercial stove.

Add some glass

The DIY Network recommends incorporating glass to improve the perception of space in small kitchens. Glass lets you see through the objects, thereby enhancing the feeling of spaciousness or what designers call “negative space.” Glass also can be reflective, visually expanding the space.

Embrace high-end materials

It costs less to renovate small spaces than bigger areas, so homeowners may be able to afford high-end materials that really add personality to a kitchen. Flooring, counter materials and quality fixtures can really set small kitchens apart.

Small kitchens can be culinary havens with the right improvements to maximize the space.

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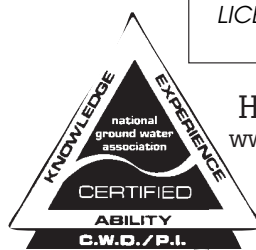
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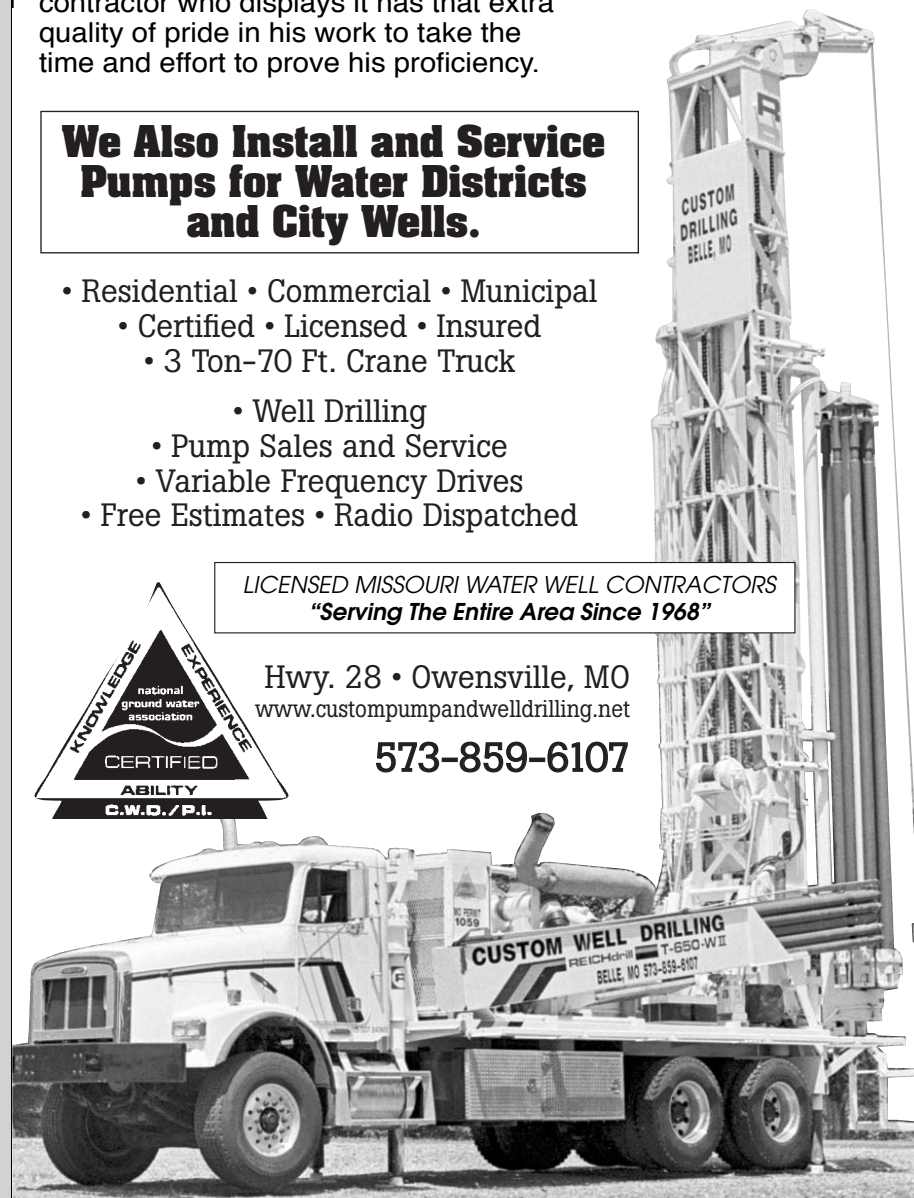
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Benefits to open concept floor plans



The way a home is designed can say a lot of things about it. In fact, many real estate professionals and contractors can determine when a home was built based on the design of its interior. For example, homes with sunken living rooms were likely built sometime in the 1960s and 1970s.

Open concept living rooms are one trend that might one day make people nostalgic for the early 21st century. Many of today's home buyers want homes with open concept floor plans, which can give homes a more spacious feel, perhaps even creating the illusion that a home is bigger than it really is.

Home buyers who have never before enjoyed open concept floor plans can consider these benefits to these wildly popular layouts.

Plans - continued on page 13B

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Plans — continued from page 12B

Entertainment

Many people who live in homes with open concept floor plans cite their convenience when entertaining as one of their biggest assets. In an open concept home, guests don't have to be corralled into a single room in the home. Instead, hosts and their guests can roam freely from room to room because there are no walls dividing common areas. This can make gatherings feel less cramped than in homes with more traditional floor plans.

Safety

The safety of open concept floor plans may be most applicable to parents of young children. Open concept floor plans allow parents to keep an eye on their children while cooking dinner, working from home or tending to other chores around the house. Since there are no walls to divide rooms in open concept homes, parents don't have to wonder what their curious kids are up to because they can see them at all times.

Flexibility

Open concept floor plans give homeowners more flexibility. For example, homes with more traditional floor plans may have designated spaces for dining areas. These spaces don't leave much room to work with and may not be valued by homeowners who don't often host dinners at home. As a result, such rooms may just be wasted square footage. With an open concept floor plan, homeowners have the flexibility to make dining areas as big or small as they see fit and can even adjust the rooms on the fly on those occasions when people are coming over.

Open concept floor plans continue to be popular among home buyers and might prove to be the most lasting home design trend of the early 21st century.

The choice for staying put or moving on

Many home improvement television series showcase people deciding whether to improve upon their current homes to make them into the houses of their dreams or to put "for sale" signs in their lawns and move on to something new.

The question of whether to move or stay put depends on various factors. Such factors may include emotional attachment to a home, the current economic climate and the cost of real estate. Current data points to a greater propensity for people to invest and improve upon their current properties rather than trading up for something new.

According to information collected by John Burns Real Estate Consulting, the percentage of homeowners moving up to their next home is the lowest in 25 years. Many are opting to make starter homes permanent by expanding them and repairing homes for the long haul.

The National Association of Realtors said that, between 1987 and 2008, home buyers stayed in their homes an average

of six years before selling. Since 2010, however, NAR says the average expected length of time people will stay in their homes before selling is now 15 years.

Part of what's fueling this permanency is that many home buyers were able to acquire rock-bottom mortgage interest rates shortly after the 2008 recession. As a result, they're not inclined to walk away from those rates, even if doing so means getting more house. Also, a low inventory of available houses has stymied repeat buying for many people.

Those factors and others have led many homeowners to invest in renovations instead. The experts at Bankrate say realistic budgeting and comparing renovation project costs against mortgages and interests rates can further help individuals decide whether to remain in their current homes or move out. Very often a smarter layout and more efficient floor plan can make meaningful differences in spaces. Renovations and redesigns can make sense and often are less expensive and disruptive than moving.

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Gray is here to stay in home designs

Decorating a home in neutral tones has long been recommended as a way to sell a home quickly. But the color gray also provides a blank canvas for homeowners who have no intention of putting their homes on the market anytime soon.

Beige and white have long been go-to colors for neutral living spaces. But many interior decorators now look to gray as the neutral color of choice.

Design experts advise that gray has a broad range. Gray can include everything from silver to charcoal to a dusty cloud. According to the trendsetters at Glidden Paints, gray coordinates well with other colors. Plus, the neutral appeal of gray boasts a timeless quality.

Gray is not a clear-cut color that's simply a 50-50 blend of white and black. Gray has subtle nuances that can lean toward blues, greens, taupes, and more depending on the lighting and surrounding furnishings. That means that homeowners who are ready to replace their furniture or accessories need not necessarily repaint if they've previously decorated in shades of gray.

Individuals need only replace small items to produce a big effect in rooms where gray is dominant. Because gray is so neutral, it works with soft, calming colors in various pastels, but equally as well with bright reds, yellow and oranges, according to Scott Bodenner, a Brooklyn-based textile designer.

Gray also is a predominant color in natural stones used throughout homes in entryways, bathrooms and kitchens. It can make design sense to maintain continuity throughout by dabbling in gray elsewhere.

Designers have shown how gray does not have to be cold, industrial or gloomy. It can be sophisticated in just about any room of the house. More designers are now leaning toward warmer variations of gray, such as taupes and blends dubbed "greige," that are beautiful but not as stark as pure gray.



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House powerwashing tips

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden

hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home's exterior.

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Lighting is a key component of curb appeal

Curb appeal can affect prospective buyers' perception of a home. When addressing curb appeal, homeowners may be inclined to focus on features that are easily seen from the street during the day. But what can a homeowner do to improve on his or her home's nighttime aesthetic?

Outdoor lighting is one aspect of curb appeal that is often overlooked, advises the home improvement experts at The Spruce. Homeowners may fail to recognize the importance of how proper illumination can provide their homes with a warm glow and make it look beautiful after the sun has set. For example, think of how cozy and inviting neighborhoods appear during the holiday season when homes are strung with twinkling lights. Homeowners can replicate that look all year long with lighting elements.

Lighting for evening hours also helps maintain a safe environment for people who are visiting the property. Illuminating walkways and doorways provides a clearly visible and safe path to and from the home.

The following are a few ways to improve outdoor lighting.

- Focus on architectural features. Outdoor lighting can focus on the external features of the

home's architectural style. Use light to draw attention to interesting gables, dramatic roof lines, dormers, or curved entryways.

- Play up landscaping. Stylish lighting can highlight trees, shrubs, pathways, gardens, and all of the elements of softscapes and hardscapes on a property. The lighting experts at Vernon Daniel Associates say that soft lighting can make homes feel warm and cozy. Uplighting trees or other elements can add a dramatic effect.

- Light up all doors. Make sure that doors, both entry and garage, are properly lit for ease of entry and egress from the home. Safety.com, a home and personal security resource, says a home burglary occurs every 15 seconds in the United States. Installing motion-activated lights or lights on timers can deter break-ins. Consider using home automation to control porch lights and other outdoor lights remotely, if necessary.

- Create entertaining areas. Outdoor lighting can be used to extend the hours residents can spend outside. This is great for entertaining and can be an excellent selling point.

Homeowners are urged not to overlook outdoor lighting as a vital part of their plan to improve curb appeal.



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Arrange furniture, design rooms more easily

Redesigning a room can involve several steps, from choosing a paint palette to taking down walls to buying new furniture. When it comes time to put the space back together, finding an appealing furniture arrangement or layout renovation that maximizes space efficiently can be challenging if it requires moving heavy pieces of furniture around. To make such tasks easier, homeowners can rely on a bevy of room-designing apps that enable one to manipulate a room in the digital realm.

Some people have great spatial reasoning and can work out designs in their head or by plotting items on graph paper. But many homeowners may need a little extra help. By figuring out a floor plan, anyone can start laying out their furniture and other design elements.

Room planners come in various forms, from free downloads available through popular furniture companies to pay-for-use, third-party software. The following are some of the more popular room planners homeowners can utilize.

- **Amikasa:** This app enables users to create room layouts using furniture and more from real brands. It features a walk-through mode so you can take a virtual tour afterwards.

- **Autodesk Homestyler:** Brought to you by the company that produces professional design programs for architects and designers, like AutoCAD, Autodesk and Revit, this user-friendly technology allows you to create 3D renderings and move around furniture, decorative items,

appliances, and other elements right in the app.

- **Floor Plan Creator:** Start with the basics by plotting out precise and accurate floor plans. This app enables you to create multiple floor rooms in 3D and get automatic figures for perimeters, walls and more.

- **Ikea Home Planner Tools:** The free, easy-to-use home planner tool from the popular furniture giant enables you to see how items from the store can look in your space — before you bring it home. The Kitchen Planner from the company also makes it simple to enter Ikea components and see how much the proposed kitchen design may cost.

- **Magic Plan:** This is another popular feature-filled app for planning designs. The technology even allows you to take a picture of your existing room and create floor plans.

- **Planner 5D:** This is an extensive room-design tool that helps you design rooms down to the smallest architectural details. It also can be taken outdoors for landscaping and pools, utilizing 3D graphics.

- **Room Scan Pro:** This app draws floor plans simply by having you hold the phone up to a wall. The software will then scan the circumference and plot out the requisite measurements.

These are just a few of the room planners that can make it easier to see what a finished design product may one day look like.

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Pantry

Design a more functional pantry

Many homeowners wish they had more storage space, and kitchens are one area where people seemingly can always use more storage.

Despite a desire for more kitchen space, until recently, kitchen pantries fell out of favor. Builders and architects may have thought that close proximity to supermarkets as well as multi-use cabinets in kitchens would offset the need for pantries. But according to a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders, a kitchen pantry is the most desirable kitchen feature for buyers in the market for a new home.

According to a 2016 survey from ReportLinker, 98 percent of Americans say cooking at home is their preferred way to prepare a meal. And despite the wide array of restaurants, prepared meals and fast food options nearby, more than one-third of people cook at home daily, with nearly 50 percent cooking between

Pantry - continued on page 5B

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Pantry — continued from page 4B

three and six days a week.

In order to accommodate for spending more time in the kitchen, homeowners are directing additional attention to kitchen preparation and storage features. In fact, one recent trend in kitchen renovations is creating custom-designed pantries.

Locate the appropriate space

Ideally, pantries should be in or adjacent to the kitchen. But not every home layout allows for this setup. Some homeowners need to move storage pantries into the garage, the basement or a mud/laundry room.

Various factors should be considered before placing a pantry outside a kitchen. What is the climate? Will food spoil? Is there a possibility that vermin or insects can infiltrate the room and access food? These factors will dictate whether to have closed cabinets, air-tight bins or open shelves or if other modifications must be made to the room prior to building.

Choose the type of pantry

Accessibility is essential in a pantry. Everything should be easily reached and grabbed as needed without having to move too many things. Ideally, foods should be arranged in a single layer so that all items can be viewed at a glance. Shelves of various depths and heights can accommodate items

of different sizes. Adjustable shelves are ideal because they can be modified as foods change. Sliding drawers can improve reach in cabinets.

In smaller spaces, French door-style reach-in cabinets are convenient and flexible. In complete kitchen remodels or new constructions, walk-in pantries offer the most space and flexibility.

Must-have features

Pantries serve different functions in different homes. For the bulk shopper, a pantry with plenty of room for large items will be needed.

Lighting can be beneficial in all pantries. Lights can improve visibility when trying to locate items. Others prefer an outlet for charging hand-held vacuums or other small appliances. Counter space in the pantry enables homeowners to unload groceries directly onto pantry shelves.

For pantries located outside of the kitchen, built-in freezers can maximize storage possibilities, especially for those who freeze-and-eat after bulk shopping ventures.

Pantries are popular features that homeowners can customize depending on their storage needs and the amount of time they spend in their kitchens.

Valuable renovations

Each year, Remodeling magazine publishes its “Cost vs. Value” report to give homeowners a greater understanding of how much popular home projects will cost across the nation, as well as which renovations will offer the greatest return on investment. According to their research, these projects improved in value between 2017 and 2018 and can be smart choices for homeowners looking to add popular features to their properties. Below are the popular projects and the average cost of the renovations.

- Midrange bathroom addition: \$44,717
- Midrange bathroom remodel: \$19,134
- Midrange deck addition (wood): \$10,950
- Midrange entry door replacement (steel): \$1,471
- Upscale garage door replacement: \$3,470
- Midrange manufactured stone veneer: \$8,221
- Midrange minor kitchen remodel: \$21,198
- Midrange siding replacement: \$15,072
- Midrange universal design bathroom: \$16,393
- Upscale window replacement (vinyl): \$15,955

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How to store firewood



A fireplace is a cozy and warm spot around which a family can gather. The home and real estate resource HomeGuides.com indicates that 60 percent of new homes have a fireplace, which is up from 36 percent in the 1970s.

Naturally, fueling a fireplace for the season may require homeowners with wood-burning units to keep an ample supply of wood at the ready. How that wood is stored is important, as properly stored firewood can prevent waste and other issues around the house.

Wood that is freshly cut has a water content of 60 percent or more. Yet, for best burning ability, wood should be near 20 percent in water content. Green wood is hard to ignite and will not burn nearly as well or efficiently as seasoned wood. Another concern associated with green wood is that it can contribute more to creosote accumulation in the flue of a fireplace. Creosote is a combustible material that may lead to fires if left unchecked.

According to BioAdvanced®, a science-based lawn, garden and home improvement innovator, seasoning wood typically takes six months to a year. Homeowners may opt to purchase seasoned wood that already has sat and dried.

Homeowners who have an abundance of firewood have to store it somewhere. Log Splitters Direct suggests choosing a dry, breezy area of the property that is

about 20 feet from the nearest door to the house. This helps avoid hitchhiker pests from coming inside with the wood, such as termites, ants, spiders, and mice. Do not stack the wood flush against a structure. It should be at least a few inches away to allow airflow behind the stack.

Stick to organized rows of wood no more than four feet high. Log racks and pallets and posts will keep the wood up and off of the ground where moisture and rotting can develop. Placing the logs in an unorganized pile will impede air flow and cause the wood to rot rather than continue to dry and season even more.

Homeowners also should use a cover to protect seasoned firewood from the elements. Position a tarp or plastic sheeting so it blankets the top of the stack and extends a few inches down the sides. Keep the sides mostly exposed to air. Others prefer to stack it in a barn or shed or under an overhang.

Green wood is less expensive than seasoned wood. Those who prefer this method should do so in the early spring and let it season over the next several months.

Bankrate says that the cost of a cord of wood varies across the country, but in general one can expect to pay between \$120 and \$180 for a cord of hardwood that is split and seasoned. This price may be higher in mid-winter when demand increases.

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Security - Continued from page 22B

include professional installation and monitoring are available, some homeowners may want to investigate the highly customizable DIY kits now available. Some include personal monitoring, while others are self-install technologies with professional monitoring.

Before getting started, homeowners and renters can ask themselves a few questions to help narrow down their options.

- What is your budget? Professional installation and monitoring will likely cost more than DIY kits.

- How large is the home?

- Are you tech-savvy?

- How frequently are you out of the home on vacation or extended trips?

- Do you desire emergency response?

- Do you want an entire package or just some deterrent devices?

Once men and women have answered these questions, it's time to start shopping.

Here are some DIY security system items that may be of interest.

Smart home security systems

These home security systems connect to a home's Wi-Fi network so they can be monitored and controlled using a smartphone app. Others may be accessed through an application on the internet. It is important to look for a system that has the extra security of technology that is not easily hacked.

Security cameras

Some people may only want to watch the inside and outside of their residences. It can take mere minutes to set up wireless security cameras around the house. These devices connect to a Wi-Fi network and give customers free access to a constant stream of video. Some systems make it easy for homeowners to listen in on what's going on at home and even talk to anyone within the camera's range. Others can be paired with cloud storage for recording video.

Professionally monitored

Residents who are away from home frequently or are too busy to constantly monitor security systems may like the peace of mind of professionally monitored kits. Services like Frontpoint®, Link Interactive® and Scout® are just three that have affordable starter kits and video monitoring. Monitored alarm systems can be set to call the police or other emergency services if necessary.

Entry-level or advanced systems

Entry-level systems typically include a few door and window sensors, a motion detector and a hub that communicates with these sensors. This may be enough for someone in an apartment or small house. More extensive systems may include additional sensors, door locks, garage door openers, surveillance cameras, lights, sirens, and even water and smoke detectors.

Do-it-yourself security systems represent a new wave to safeguard one's belongings and family. Kits continue to evolve and have become more seamless than ever.



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