



Fall HOME & Garden

September 2016
A Special Supplement to

The Delaware
Gazette
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Goodbye Summer

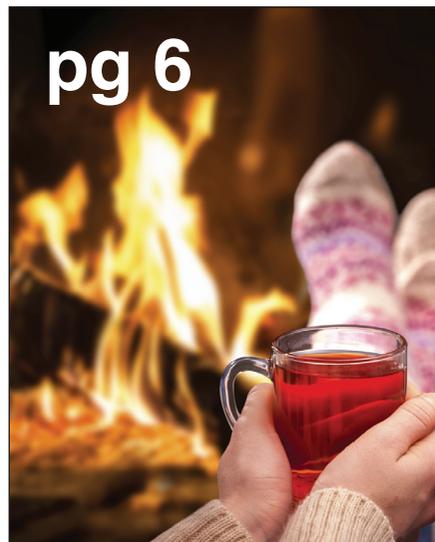
Closing the pool
for another season

Fireplace Prep

How to prepare your
fireplace for winter

How-to: Tree Pruning

Your guide to proper
tree maintenance



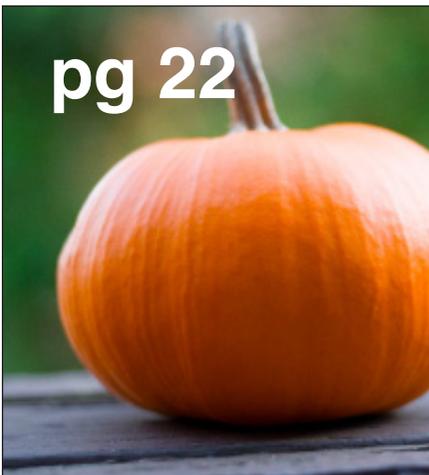
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How to recognize water damage in a home



Plumbing problems may ultimately result in costly water damage.

Homes are potentially susceptible to a host of problems. While unforeseen problems can prove costly, homeowners who keep attentive eyes on their homes can oftentimes discover small problems before they escalate. Water damage is a potentially costly problem that can afflict any home. Old homes tend to be most susceptible to water damage, and that damage can manifest itself in various ways. The following are some telltale signs of water damage that should give prospective home buyers pause and compel current homeowners to seek professional assistance as soon as possible.

Stains

Many prospective home buyers have been disappointed by the sight of water stains during an open house or home inspection. Water stains tend to be on ceilings and/or walls. Stains on ceilings tend to be round, while wall stains are straight lines down the wall that may or may not have forced paint to peel. Water stains are not necessarily indicative of a major problem, but homeowners should have the stains examined by a professional while potential buyers should direct their home inspector's attention to the stains.

Deteriorating wood

Wood around windows or doors that is deteriorating may indicate water problems. The wood might be deteriorating because water is infiltrating the wood during storms. Baseboards and molding that is dilapidated or beginning to deteriorate may also indicate water damage.



Buckled drywall or wood

Drywall or wood that is buckled or beginning to buckle is another potential indicator of water damage. Drywall buckles when it gets wet, and that is often a sign that there is a leak behind the drywall. Severely buckled drywall will feel as if it has ridges. Wood also buckles when it is exposed to excess moisture, and this can usually be felt when walking on the wood barefoot or in socks.

Odor

Sometimes water damage is best detected by the smell test. Homeowners who notice the smell of mold or mildew in rooms that previously never emanated such odors might have homes that are in the early stages of water problems. The water damage might be behind the walls, where mold is beginning to form thanks to water damage. Older homes tend to be musty, but call in a professional if you notice that mustiness is more pungent than usual.

Water damage is a potentially costly problem, especially if it goes unnoticed for months or even years. Homeowners and prospective home buyers should be on the lookout for signs of water damage before problems escalate and require expensive repairs.

Your guide to proper tree pruning



Pruning is a job that may be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, but sometimes larger tasks are best left to a professional tree trimming service.

Trimming and pruning can be handled by do-it-yourselfers if the branches are smaller and more manageable. Practice on thinner branches before moving on to thicker ones, which may require extra help. Branches may be heavy, and it takes a guided hand to ensure the branches fall in a safe manner so they do not cause damage or injury.

Branches also need to be trimmed properly to facilitate good healing. Trees will form a callus bark covering over cuts to keep out disease and decay, much as a scab forms over a person's wound. Damaging the bark on a tree while pruning may interfere with that process, so do-it-yourselfers need to take the time to prune correctly.

According to Danny Lipford, home improvement expert and host of the radio program "Today's Homeowner," larger limbs may require three cuts instead of one. The first cut is a small notch in the bottom of the limb, around two to three feet from the trunk and about one-quarter of the way through. This helps prevent the bark from splitting. A relief cut is then made a few inches away from the notch cut, and goes all the way through.

This removes the weight of the branch so that the final cut can be made without the branch splitting and falling. The final cut is made right where the limb extrudes from the branch collar, or the swollen bump that then forms into the tree limb. Follow the slant of the branch collar when making the cut. Smaller or thinner branches may not require the same three steps, but every effort should be made to reduce injury to the tree.

When deciding how much to prune, less is usually more. All pruning can put some level of stress on the tree and increase its vulnerability to disease and insect infestation. A good rule of thumb is to never prune more than 25 percent of the crown. According to experts at TreeHelp.com, living branches should comprise at least two-thirds the height of the tree. In some instances, the rules may need to be bent if trees are interfering with utility lines or to meet community laws. However, always prune minimally to avoid damaging the tree.

The right tools also make the job safer and easier. Use a pole pruner and lopper, rope saws, folding pruner, and a bucksaw. A chainsaw can be used in some instances, especially when pruning larger limbs. Always disinfect pruning tools after you're done to prevent the spread of disease to other trees.

Consider hiring a professional tree service if pruning proves beyond your capabilities. Doing so is safe and often well worth the investment.

Trees may require pruning for a variety reasons. Storms may have damaged branches, necessitating a pruning. In other instances, trees may have outgrown their yards, overpowering the landscape. Autumn and winter, when trees largely go dormant and fallen leaves make it easier to see the branches beneath, may be prime times to prune. Pruning during the dormant period also minimizes sap loss and stress to the tree, and can help cut down on the growth of fungi. In addition, insects are less likely to be problematic during the colder months of the year.

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pre-winter lawn care pointers

Winter weather can be harsh, especially on lawns. Homeowners who spend much of spring and summer tending to their lawns may fear the impact that winter will have on their once-lush landscapes, making the fall a great time to fortify lawns against any harsh conditions to come.

Homeowners must take grass type into consideration before taking steps to prepare their lawns for the winter. Some grasses are best fertilized in late-summer, while others should be fertilized in autumn. Cool-season grasses, including fescue and bluegrass, are best fertilized sometime between the months of September and November. Warm-season grasses, such as Bermuda or zoysia, should be fertilized between July and September. Once homeowners have gained a greater understanding of their lawns, they can begin exploring the various ways to prepare their lawns for whatever winter has in store.

1. Explore winterizing fertilizers.

Homeowners who want to make their grasses more winter hardy can consult landscaping professionals to determine if winterizing fertilizers will work for their lawns. These specially formulated fertilizers, many of which are made exclusively for cool-season grasses, contain higher levels of potassium and lower levels of nitrogen than early-season fertilizers. Potassium helps strengthen and harden plants, and cool-season grasses may need extra potassium as winter settles in. Homeowners who are not sure if they should apply winterizing fertilizer can conduct soil tests to determine the potassium levels in their soil. If the test indicates the soil has sufficient potassium, then applying a winterizing fertilizer is likely unnecessary. In addition, homeowners who have fed their lawn a balance of nutrients throughout spring and summer likely will not need to apply winterizing fertilizer.

2. Get rid of fallen leaves.

While fallen leaves may be integral components of idyllic autumn landscapes, leaves left on the lawn throughout the winter may lead to disease in the grass. Leaves trap moisture and block sunlight and air from reaching grass, and that can encourage the development of disease. In addition, leaves can harbor insects that also may contribute to disease. While it might seem like common sense to delay leaf removal until the end of autumn when all the leaves have fallen, that, too, can prove harmful to lawns. Leaves left laying on lawns for long periods of time can contribute to the same types of damage as leaves left on the lawn throughout winter, so do your best to remove leaves as they fall.

3. Take steps to fight snow mold.

Homeowners who live in regions where snow falls into spring or where spring tends to be cold and damp may want to take steps to prevent snow mold. Gray snow mold typically looks fuzzy and gray, and lawns infested with snow mold may develop unsightly gray or brown spots indicative of dead grass. Pink snow mold may be even worse than gray snow mold because pink mold attacks the roots as well as the leaves. To prevent snow mold, continue mowing into the fall, even as lawns grow dormant, clearing the lawn of grass clippings and leaves after each mow. Thick lawns may provide a breeding ground for snow mold, so homeowners whose lawns have a history of developing snow mold may benefit from mowing their lawns into the fall. Winter is rarely easy on lawns, but homeowners can take several steps to prepare their lawns for potentially harsh winter weather.

Protect pipes from freezing this cold-weather season



Freezing pipes are a concern for homeowners who live in cold climates. When temperatures dip below freezing, the risk that pipes will freeze rises. Should a pipe burst, the damage that results can be extensive and costly.

Any pipe can freeze, but those that are directly exposed to the cold are the most vulnerable. These include pipes that feed outdoor hoses, swimming pool supply lines, pipes in unheated indoor rooms (i.e., basements or garages), and any pipes that run close to the outdoors through uninsulated walls. Water expands as it freezes, and that expansion can place pressure on whatever is trying to contain it — including pipes. To avoid serious damage, homeowners need to prepare for the arrival of colder weather and be smart about how they protect pipes.

Drain water from swimming pools and water sprinkler supply lines prior to the onset of cold weather. Drain water before freezing temperatures arrive, and don't forget to drain outdoor garden hoses and store them inside after watering season has come and gone.

Close indoor water valves that feed outdoor spigots/bibs. Open the spigot outside to allow water to drain out. Keep the outside valve open so that any water that has accumulated will continue to drain and expand outward without damaging the pipe. An insulated bib dome also can help prevent frozen pipes.

Open cabinet doors to allow heat to reach pipes inside of cabinets. Keep the doors open

to spaces that may not be heated or insulated as well as other areas of the home so that heat can find its way inside. Consider wrapping these pipes with an insulating material as well, such as heat tape or pipe sleeves.

Maintain a consistent thermostat temperature. Ensure the temperature inside your home does not drop below 55 F; otherwise, problems can arise. Use a programmable thermostat to keep the house comfortable even when you are not home. Individuals who are traveling should set the thermostat so that it will keep the home at the recommended temperature to avoid frozen pipes.

Open one faucet. When it is very cold outside, particularly at night, let water slowly drip from one faucet to prevent freezing. Choose the sink that is furthest from where water enters the house so water is flowing through all of the pipes to reach that faucet.

Increase insulation around where pipes enter the house. Use insulating foam to seal any drafts where pipes enter the house from the outdoors. Frozen pipes cannot always be avoided. Therefore, it is important that everyone in the household knows how to shut off the main water valve in the event a pipe bursts. This can prevent expensive damage to a home.

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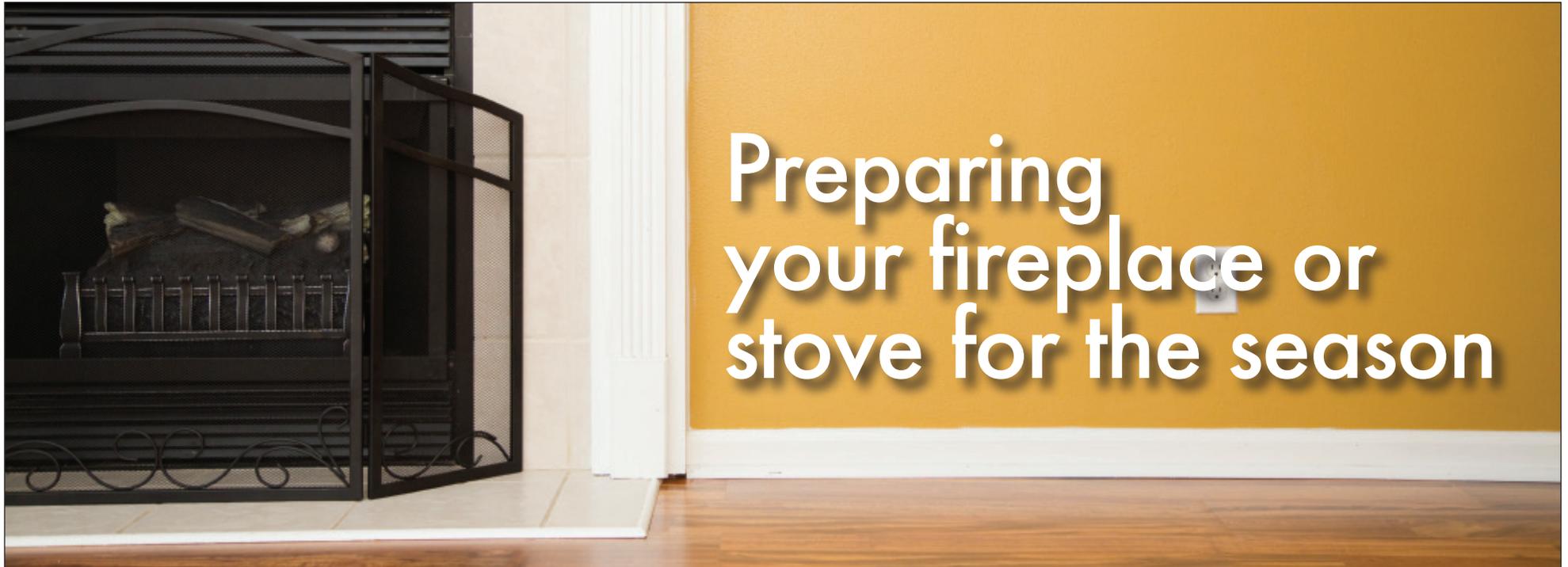


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Preparing your fireplace or stove for the season



Prepare fireplaces, chimneys and heating stoves for another season of regular use.

Fireplaces and wood-burning stoves not only can be beautiful focal points within a home, but they also provide an additional source of heat and can be used to keep rooms or entire homes comfortable without the need for additional and potentially costly heating sources. Just like more modern home heating systems, stoves and fireplaces need to be maintained, and that maintenance includes readying them before winter when they are used more heavily. Ensuring a fireplace or stove is in good working order helps to guarantee efficiency of use and safety during the winter months.

Open-flame heating sources carry with them certain risks. The National Fire Protection Association states that, between 2009-2013, American fire departments responded to 56,000 home structure fires that involved heating equipment. The NFPA notes that the leading factor contributing to home-heating fires is a failure to keep things clean, principally from solid-fueled heating equipment. The following are a handful of ways to stay safe as you get ready for another cozy season around the fire.

Start with the chimney. Begin by having your chimney thoroughly cleaned and inspected. Creosote can build up inside of the chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and becomes more difficult and expensive to clean the longer it builds up inside your flue lining. In addition, animals may have created nest inside of the chimney since the last time the fireplace was used. A professional chimney sweep should be hired in this situation. He or she will be able to effectively clean the chimney in a manner that is the least messy and disruptive to residents.

Install or check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Operational alarms are essential to preventing injury or death resulting from smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation. Such detectors are inexpensive safeguards that should be installed on every floor of the house. Batteries should be replaced every six months, and the alarms themselves should be changed every five to 10 years.

Inspect the chimney from outdoors as well. Inspect the mortar around any bricks in the chimney and surrounding areas for cracks. If left unaddressed, these can cause

dangerous fires. If there are serious cracks, a professional may need to make repairs or the chimney may need to be replaced. You also can have the chimney capped with a screen to keep animals and debris from entering.

Inspect the damper. A damper is a valve or plate that stops or regulates the flow of air inside a chimney. It should be checked prior to the first use of a stove or fireplace so homeowners can be certain it opens and closes smoothly.

Clear out flammable items. Move flammable items away from the front of a fireplace or stove. Be sure curtains or other home furnishings are far enough away that they will not catch fire from any errant sparks or flames.

Order wood now. Be sure there is plenty of wood for the season. Ask a wood supplier to estimate just how much will be needed, and double-check that the wood will arrive in time for the start of the season.

By preparing for fireplace and wood stove use now, homeowners can ensure their winters are comfortable and safe.





Simplify fall leaf cleanup

Apple pie, pumpkins and blooming chrysanthemums are symbols of autumn. But nothing signals the arrival of fall more than the millions of leaves that begin to cascade from the trees as the temperatures dip.

Many people feel nothing is more beautiful than the yellow, red, purple, and orange leaves that coat neighborhoods and countrysides each fall. But in spite of their beauty, leaves might be a nuisance to homeowners tasked with removing the growing piles of them from their lawns. Those with large oak and maple trees in front of their homes understand the seemingly endless work of leaf removal.

As the days begin to grow shorter and colder, these changes trigger a hormone release in trees, prompting them to drop their leaves. This chemical message causes the formation of abscission cells where the leaf stem meets the branch, say botanists at the Missouri Botanical Garden. So rather than merely dropping off of trees when the wind blows, the leaves actually fall off deliberately.

Left untouched, fallen leaves can contribute to lawn problems such as poor aeration, mold growth and moisture issues. Leaves also can cause staining on driveways and walkways. Prompt removal can help prevent any problems. To make faster and easier work of leaf removal, keep these tips in mind.

Mow over thin leaf coverage. If only a few leaves have fallen, use a mulching mower to shred the leaves until they are small enough that they won't suffocate the lawn. The small pieces will decompose in the lawn, reintroducing nutrients as a result.

Use a tarp. Rake or blow leaves onto a tarp and then drag the tarp to the curbside or to the back of a truck for proper disposal. Special leaf scoopers enable you to grab more leaves if they need to be picked up and transported. Otherwise, you can use the covers from two garbage pails to achieve a similar effect.

Work with the wind. Rake in the direction the wind is blowing and downhill if your property slopes. This way it will be easier on you, and you won't be working against Mother Nature.

Spread out the job. Do not attempt to remove all fallen leaves in a single day. Schedule a few cleaning days during the season to make lighter work of the job than if you tried to do it all at once. Keep in mind that leaves will continue to fall throughout the season and you may need to spend a few days removing leaves from your yard.

Removing leaves is a large part of fall home maintenance. Employ these tips to make this task less strenuous.

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Home improvement projects for your fall to-do list

Homeowners know that maintaining a home can be a year-round job. No home is immune to wear and tear, and homeowners who want to protect their real estate investments should try to stay two steps ahead to ensure their homes do not succumb to the elements or become outdated and unappealing to prospective buyers.

Fall has become a season that's synonymous with home improvement, but homeowners need not wait until the leaves begin changing colors to start planning their next projects. The following are a few items homeowners can add to their fall home improvement to-do lists.

Patio cleanup

Patios are popular hangouts during spring and summer, and that can result in a lot of wear and tear. Once you store patio furniture for the winter, inspect your entire patio to determine if it needs any refurbishing. While certain patio projects may be best left for spring, you can still clean any stained areas around the grill and look for cracks in the sidewalk that need to be addressed.

Preparing for fall home improvement projects ahead of time can help homeowners complete projects in a timely manner and ensures they won't be forced to brave the winter elements when refurbishing their homes.

Roof inspection

Less precipitation tends to fall during the warmer months than during the late fall and winter. As a result, homeowners may not be aware of leaky roofs until autumn has come and gone. But waiting until winter to inspect the roof can prove disastrous, as weather conditions will not be conducive to inspection and increased precipitation may result in potentially costly damage. Leaky roofs can be easily identified by looking for water stains on interior ceilings. Once you see a stain, you can climb onto the roof to identify the location of the leak and fix it before winter rains and snowfall turn the problem into something much larger. Inspect your ceilings for signs of leaking after a strong rainfall, and then address any leaks immediately.

Gutter cleaning

While some homeowners prefer to delay their gutter cleaning projects until late fall, those whose homes are surrounded by trees may need to schedule two such projects. Gutters clogged with leaves and other debris can cause serious roof damage, and that damage can extend all the way inside a home. In addition, clogged gutters make great nesting areas for insects or critters. Always stand on a ladder when cleaning gutters, wearing gloves to remove items by hand and dropping leaves and debris into a trash can below. Standing on the roof and leaning over gutters greatly increases your risk of injury. If the gutters are clear when you first examine them in early fall, you can wait until later in the season to give them a complete and thorough cleaning. Once you have finished clearing the gutters, you can use a hose to run water through them and the downspouts to confirm everything is functioning properly.

Autumn is a great time to inspect patios that might have endured some wear and tear during the heavy usage seasons of spring and summer.

Window and doorway inspection

Before temperatures start dropping once again, homeowners will want to inspect their windows and doorways for leaks. Over time, cracks can develop around windows and doorways, and while such cracks are rarely noticeable when the weather outside is warm, they can be quite obvious and very costly if they remain unsealed come the start of winter. Cold air can enter a home through cracks around windows and doorways, and many homeowners who don't suspect leaks may respond by turning up the thermostats in their homes. That can prove quite expensive over a full winter. Choose a windy autumn day to place a hand by windows and external doorways in your home to see if you can feel drafts. If you can, seal these cracks as soon as possible.

5 weekend projects to try this fall



Home improvement projects range from major construction overhauls like bathroom remodeling jobs to smaller renovations that may entail something as minor as painting the walls. Smaller projects can

often be conquered in a typical weekend but still provide a strong sense of accomplishment. The following are five projects tailor-made for weekend warriors.

1. Improve storage in the entryway

Home entryways are the first places many people drop mail, shed their shoes and toss their keys upon arriving home. As a result, entryways can quickly be overrun with clutter. Storage solutions can include putting in a desk or hutch with baskets underneath to store umbrellas and backpacks. Or hang a coat rack and create a shoe rack to store shoes until the time comes to leave the house once again.

2. Shed new light

Add some design appeal to your home by replacing an old lighting fixture with something more modern. Such a task is relatively easy, and you need not possess the skills of a trained electrician.

3. Add molding for a finishing touch

Dress up spaces with crown molding or a decorative chair rail that goes around a room. You can even use molding to frame new or existing artwork. Find a molding style that complements the architectural style.

4. Update hardware in the bath and kitchen.

Switch the handles, draw pulls and knobs on cabinetry with new hardware. The time commitment is practically nil, but you might just give rooms a whole new feel.

5. Patch and paint walls

Spend a weekend filling in holes left behind by since-removed wall hangings. If the patches dry quickly, paint over them. If not, resolve to do your patchwork one weekend and paint the ensuing weekend.

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The popularity of the color white



White is a versatile color to use around the home. It's consistently a favorite among designers for its crisp appeal.

White is a versatile color in home decorating and renovation. White helps any space look effortlessly chic, blends well with just about any color and can be incorporated into various design styles — from modern to traditional.

While the color white is always trendy, the paint manufacturers Benjamin Moore chose white (Simply White OC-117) as their "it" color for 2016. White can be used nearly anywhere inside and outside the home. Improving interior and exterior spaces with white elements is easier than you might think, and it instantly can make anything look as good as new.



Kitchen

While rich cherrywood cabinets and deeply hued granite countertops have long been popular in kitchens, creamy white cabinets paired with blonde wood countertops can work together to make kitchens seem open and airy. If all white is not your thing, brighten up kitchen spaces with white canisters, cookie jars and a fresh bouquet of white flowers to add instant appeal.

Living Room

Use white as a base color for living room spaces so you can build on it with other hues on pillows and draperies, mixing and matching however you see fit.

Homeowners who have children and/or pets should look for furniture with removable slipcovers. This way they're easily removed and laundered.

Bathroom

White bathrooms look fresh and are easy to clean and maintain. White tiles provide a classic look. Include colored bath mats, towels and shower curtains to break up the white as you see fit. A neutral white base makes it easy to switch out color schemes whenever you feel like it.

Bedroom

Feminine and fresh, white bedrooms may not be the first choice for novice designers. If the prospect of white on white seems too sterile, offset deeper hues on bed linens and walls with white furniture. This provides some pop against the darker contrast.

Keep in mind that doing a bed up in all white means it will always be easy to find matching sheets and pillowcases, making it possible to ensure everything looks cohesive and crisp.

Outdoors

Use white paint on trims, shutters, mailboxes, and more to provide that pop of contrast against the rest of the home. White complements just about every color, making it a versatile choice on a home's accents regardless of the main exterior color of that home.

White and other light shades will reflect the sun as well, contributing to cooler temperatures on walkways, decks and other structures, which can be advantageous to homeowners who live in warm climates.

Is it any wonder that white continues to be a classic and popular color to use around the home? Whether you do so with monochromatic rooms or accent pieces, you can incorporate white into design plans throughout your home.

Paint your home's exterior like a pro



Painting is an inexpensive way to transform just about any space. Many people paint the interiors of their homes, but home exteriors also can undergo dramatic makeovers with fresh coats of paint. Timing the job right and heeding some tips from professionals and do-it-yourselfers who have tread the painting path before you can make the job go smoothly.

Consider the time of year

Consider local weather patterns and forecasts when planning an exterior painting project. Choose a time of year when there is little rain and low humidity, such as autumn. Keep in mind that the paint will require a couple of days to dry completely and cure, and that can be difficult in damp weather. Don't hamper the final outcome with poor timing.

Prepare the painting surfaces

Resist the temptation to start painting straight away. Paint may not adhere to unprepared surfaces, and dirt and other debris may show through and mar the finished product. Repainting a home's exterior will likely involve removing peeling or chipping paint prior to making your first strokes. Wear protective gear when scraping, sanding or brushing old paint, as such tasks can generate dust that can be dangerous to inhale, particularly if the old paint contains lead.

Employ a chlorine bleach solution to kill any mildew and to scrub any dirt from the house. In addition, repair any cracks or imperfections. For example, if you're painting stucco, you may have to fill in any pitting or holes. Use this opportunity to inspect caulking around windows and doors. Recaulk as needed to seal up drafty areas or those that may cause water infiltration prior to painting.

Try these painting techniques

Rent a paint sprayer for large surface areas. The sprayer will produce a more uniform application and is less time-consuming than painting everything with a brush or roller. Make sure you've chosen a high-quality paint, as the added expense is worth it if the paint lasts longer and coats more evenly. Also, if you have purchased multiple cans of paint, mix them all in one large bucket to ensure the same color; otherwise, the colors may not match perfectly.

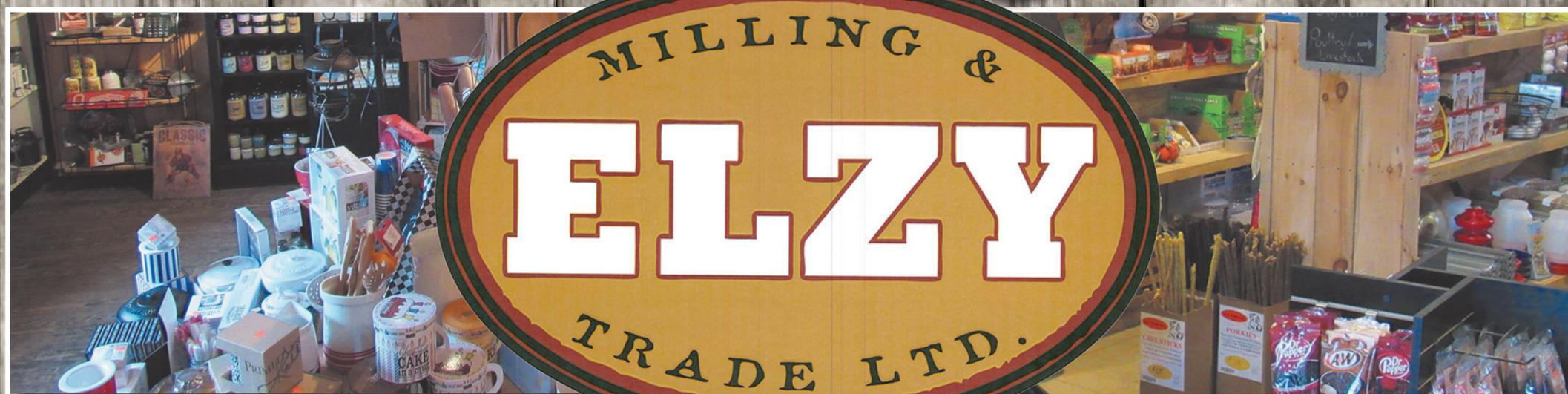
The experts at HGTV recommend working your way from top to bottom in a smooth, controlled manner, overlapping each stroke by eight inches. Trim and hard-to-reach areas should be left for brush work so you can maintain control over your tools. If you are painting areas like steps or staircases, consider adding a little fine-grain sand to the paint to improve traction, as paint can be slippery when wet. If painting your home's exterior is beyond your capabilities, hire a professional. He or she will get the work done in a timely manner, and you can rest assured that the job will be done correctly.

Prime and cover stains

It may be a little extra work, but apply a quality primer as the first coat to hide any imperfections, such as wood knots or discoloration from weathering. Primer provides a smooth, even surface upon which to put your paint color. Once you have applied the primer, test your paint color in a small, inconspicuous spot to see how the color looks in the daylight. You do not want to paint the entire home only to find out you dislike the color.

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Finding the right fencing fit



Autumn marks the time to transition from the hot days of summer to the chilly weather of winter. As people remove sweaters and long pants from storage, cleaning up their yards also may be on their minds.

Fall is a season of beautiful foliage, but once that magical color show is over, thousands of leaves have fallen to the ground, necessitating a few weekends' worth of yard work. Some homeowners may be on the lookout for environmentally friendly ways to handle autumn yard work, and thankfully there are plenty of eco-friendly ways to tackle such tasks.

Leaves

The tallest task with regard to fall yard work is collecting the leaves that fall to the ground. Some homeowners prefer to wait until all of the leaves have fallen before starting the collection process, while others handle the task in stages to make it more manageable. Regardless of your timing, skip the noisy gas- or electric-powered leaf blower in favor of a reliable rake. Raking not only collects the leaves but also helps men and women burn calories while ensuring they are not creating any noise or air pollution.

Invest in a durable, ergonomic rake to get the job done quickly and without injury. Innovators are constantly reinventing the rake, and now there are designs that do not trap leaves, saving homeowners from the time-consuming tasks of cleaning the rake's teeth. Rake on a calm day so the wind isn't thwarting your efforts.

When it comes time to bag the leaves, use biodegradable paper bags or look for mesh-

like bags that are made from cornstarch. These are more eco-friendly than plastic bags, which can take much longer to decompose. You won't need to dispose of all the leaves you collect. Shred some to use as mulch, which can prevent soil erosion during the winter. Some leaves can be added to compost piles or used as a soil amendment in planting beds.

Compost

Autumn is an ideal time of year to get started on building a compost bin. Take advantage of the cooler temperatures to make outdoor work more comfortable.

According to the Audubon Society, American yards generate two tons of clippings each year. A lot of that waste ends up being bagged and thrown away. Instead of producing waste, compost leaves and grass trimmings to use as valuable fertilizer come the spring planting season.

When choosing a location for your compost bins, be sure to place them a good distance away from the house but near enough to garden beds. Most yard waste and food debris can be added to the compost pile. Just avoid animal products, which can produce harmful bacteria.

Keep the compost damp and turn it periodically to facilitate the decomposition process. Soak finished compost in water to create "compost tea." This liquid mixture can be sprayed on lawns in the fall to give the yard a nutrient boost that promotes healthy regrowth when the warmer weather returns. Eco-friendly lawn care can save energy, money and natural resources.

different and eco-friendly. Bamboo grows naturally, which should appeal to homeowners who want their homes to have as little negative impact on the environment as possible. Bamboo provides ample privacy and comes in various styles. Homeowners should consult with a fencing specialist before choosing a style so they can be certain they choose the most climate-appropriate option.

Chain-link

Chain-link fences may not add the aesthetic appeal homeowners are looking for, but they are relatively inexpensive, durable and functional. Chain-link fences are low maintenance, though homeowners looking for fences to provide some privacy may need to get creative if they install chain-link fencing. Planting flowers, shrubbery or trees near chain-link fences can add some aesthetic appeal and a little privacy.

Vinyl

Among the more expensive fencing options, vinyl can make up for that initial sticker shock thanks to its durability. In addition, vinyl fences require little maintenance, saving homeowners the expense of paying for upkeep such as repainting. Vinyl fencing comes in various styles, and homeowners can choose the style that best suits their priorities with regard to aesthetic appeal and privacy.

Wood

Of course, no discussion of fencing would be complete without mentioning wood fencing. Many homeowners love wood fencing because of its versatility with regard to design and color. The options are endless when it comes to crafting wood fencing, which also can be stained in any color homeowners prefer. Wood fencing can be designed not only for homeowners who prioritize privacy, but it also can be crafted for homeowners for whom privacy is not a significant concern. Wood is a relatively inexpensive fencing material, but the maintenance required to keep wood fencing looking great can sometimes be costly and time-consuming.

Options abound for homeowners looking to add fencing to their properties. Homeowners hesitant to choose a

Homeowners choose to erect fences on their properties for various reasons. Parents may find fences provide peace of mind during those times when their youngsters are playing in the yard, while other homeowners prefer fences for the privacy they can provide. Whatever compels homeowners to consider fencing for their properties, those that have decided to install fencing will soon realize they have numerous options. Finding the right fencing material for your property requires considering a host of factors, including budget and personal style.

Aluminum

Aluminum fencing is ideal for those looking for something that's both ornamental and functional. Aluminum fencing may not appeal to those homeowners whose biggest priority is privacy, as aluminum fences are not solid walls. But aluminum fences are typically low maintenance, and they can be effective at keeping both kids and pets in the yard. Aluminum fences painted with a rust-inhibiting primer may require even less maintenance than aluminum fences painted without primer.

Bamboo

Bamboo is a less traditional fencing option that may appeal to homeowners who want to do something that's both

Address air leaks to save energy and money

Rising energy costs coupled with the continued adoption of eco-friendly lifestyles are two factors driving homeowners to seek ways to reduce energy consumption in their homes. Reducing energy consumption is reason enough for many homeowners to make changes around the house, but saving energy sometimes means saving substantial amounts of money as well.

Energy-efficient appliances and eco-friendly building materials can help homeowners reduce energy consumption. But homeowners looking for additional ways to cut cooling and heating costs can address air leaks around the house to make their homes more energy efficient.

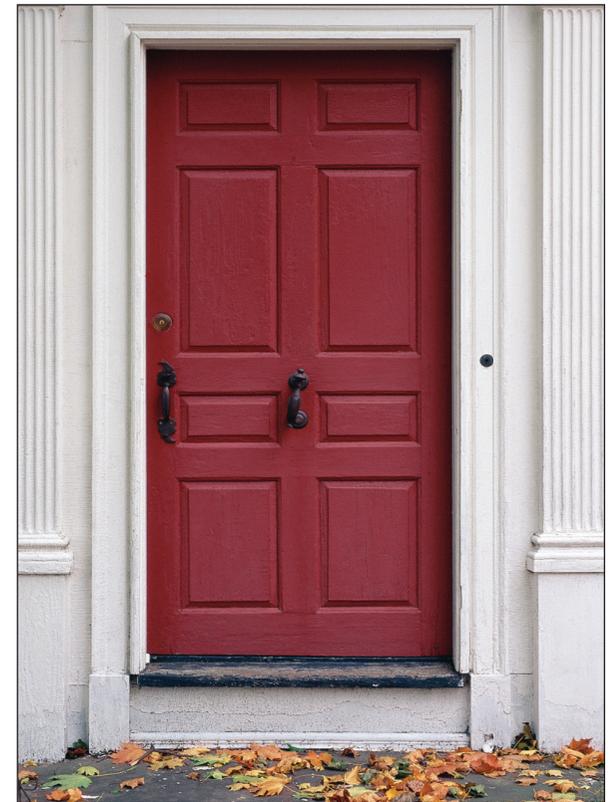
Identify air leaks around windows and doorways. Autumn is a great time of year to identify air leaks. Fall, and particularly late fall, tends to be characterized by cold air that makes it easy to detect air leaks. Feel for leaks around windows and doorways, ideally conducting such tests on cold, windy days when you can quickly detect if air is flowing in from the outside. Leaks around windows and doors waste energy because the interior of the home is either colder (in the winter) or warmer (in the summer) than it needs to be, prompting homeowners to turn up their thermostats or rely more heavily on air conditioning units.

Look for leaks elsewhere around the house. While windows and doorways are where many leaks are found, leaks also may be found around plumbing, electrical fixtures and dryer vents. Inspect such areas by feeling for drafts or looking for signs that insects and critters might be entering.

Look up and down. Evidence of air leaks may be noticeable on both the floor and the ceiling. Dirty spots on carpeting and the ceiling may be indicative of air leaks at interior wall/ceiling joints and wall/floor joists. Fixing such leaks may be as simple as applying some caulk.

Go with gaskets. The United States Department of Energy recommends installing foam gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on walls. Outlets and switch boxes on exterior walls provide another place for air to leak into a home and drive up energy costs. Properly installed gaskets can cut back on air infiltration, providing an inexpensive way to save energy and money.

Cover the kitchen exhaust fans when you are not cooking. Kitchen exhaust fans can help prevent fires and unfavorable indoor air conditions when preparing meals at home. But such fans provide opportunities for air to enter a home, so make sure they are tightly closed or covered when no one is cooking in the kitchen. Air leaks around a house can waste energy and contribute to high energy bills, particularly during the winter and summer when temperatures outside tend to be at their most extreme. Homeowners looking to reduce their energy consumption and save money can inspect various areas of their homes for air leaks and immediately address any they discover.



Air leaks around doorways can waste energy and cost homeowners substantial amounts of money.

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Transform spaces into cozy retreats

Cool weather often drives people to spend more hours indoors than they do during the warmer months. Autumn is a time to winterize gardens, put away lawn furniture and prepare for the holiday season. Autumn also provides the perfect opportunity to begin home interior projects.

Many people decide to redecorate their homes to reflect each season. When temperatures change, it's time to transition from the light colors and breezy fabrics symbolic of summer to thicker, darker materials that evoke coziness.

With some inspiration and a little know-how, any homeowner or apartment dweller can cozy up a space in time for fall and winter.

Invest in area rugs. While wood floors can look beautiful and work well with many different design styles, wood can feel chilly underfoot. Thick area rugs add warmth to a room and can help it look more lived-in. Area rugs also help a room appear more cohesive, coordinating with other colors in a space and providing a visual border.

Practice layering in rooms. An affordable and relatively easy way to make a room seem more cozy is to layer fabrics and other accents. Layers can include throws and blankets. Remove place mats from the dining room table and use them on accent tables or an ottoman in the living room. Table runners also can add a splash of color to the top of bedroom dressers.

Play with texture. Look for fabrics that boast texture and can add a tactile feel to spaces. When used on throw pillows or small accents, faux fur can create that cozy cabin feel. Draperies made from nubby fabrics or those with grooves and ridges can add dimension to a room as well. Even a lampshade made of an unusual fabric, such as a waffle-patterned material, can add a little depth and warmth to a space.

Reevaluate your lighting. Lighting a space is more than just flipping on a switch. Finding the right balance of lighting fixtures can instantly transform the feel of a room. Create more warmth and a cozy feel by switching out bulbs from cooler shades to warmer ones — those that give off yellow and pink hues rather than cool blues. Accent lighting helps establish a comfortable space for curling up and reading a good book. Spot lighting, such as fixtures that are trained on artwork or inside of a curio or china cabinet, also can set a more welcoming mood.

Install a bookshelf and start a book collection. Piles and stacked books can add warmth to any space. Books evoke the hallowed halls of schools and quiet nooks in the library. Fill shelves with books interspersed with additional design accents, and you will



instantly make a room feel more inviting.

Choose dark paint. Do not feel nervous about incorporating deeper shades in rooms. Dark colors give rooms a more enclosed feel than lighter colors, and that can create a warm and cozy feeling. This works particularly well in larger spaces that feel vast and empty. If you're scared to paint all of your walls, try a darker shade below a chair rail or just paint one accent wall.

Add architectural elements. Think about adding rich moldings to crown the ceilings or to frame doorways. If you have the space for a nook, create a window seat beneath a picture window or add a bench and cushions in a corner for a nice escape spot.

Use the colder weather as an opportunity to reinvent some of the rooms in your home. With paint, texture, fabric, lighting, and more, rooms can be quickly transformed into cozy respites from the cold.



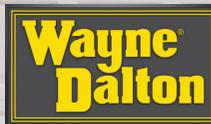
Did You Know?

The arrival of cooler weather marks a prime time to plant bulbs that will bloom come spring and summer. Bulbs should be planted as soon as the ground is cool, ideally when temperatures average between 40 and 50 F. Just be sure to plant bulbs at least six weeks before the ground freezes for optimal success. Always follow the bulb distributor's guidelines for planting, including suggestions regarding spacing and soil depth. Remove any weeds and loosen the soil to get started. In addition, think about mixing in compost or other organic matter to enrich the soil if it lacks nutrients.



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Home safety checks to complete today

A new kitchen or a bathroom remodeling job might be dream projects for many homeowners, but the right home improvement project at a given moment is not necessarily the most glamorous project. Sometimes safety upgrades around the house must take precedence over more popular projects.

Accidents or injuries can occur in any part of the home, but homeowners who take certain preventative measures can greatly reduce their injury risk. The security resource A Secure Life points out that more than 18,000 Americans die every year from injuries that take place in the home. Unintentional injuries account for millions of medical visits each year. Home injuries also are prevalent elsewhere in the world. In the United Kingdom, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents reports that there are approximately 6,000 deaths every year that result from accidents at home.

Periodic inspections for potential hazards can keep everyone safe. The following are a handful of ways for homeowners to ensure their homes are as safe as possible.

- Check for sturdy handrails and prevent tripping hazards. Falls are one of the leading causes of home injuries. Falls can be a particular threat for youngsters and the elderly. To help prevent falls, make sure that staircases feature sturdy railings and that there is ample lighting in walkways. Remove obstructions from frequently used paths inside and outside the home. In addition, insert nonslip padding beneath runners or throw rugs.

- Check for frayed wires or faulty outlets. Address any electrical problems around the house, including frayed wiring and faulty outlets. Sparks can lead to fires, and poor wiring may cause unforeseen problems behind walls. Repair or replace any loose or frayed wires on all electrical devices. Be sure that cords do not run under doorways or rugs. Replace outlets that are in disrepair and install ones with ground-fault current interruptors as an added precaution. If small children live in the home, use plastic safety covers over unused outlets.

- Practice window safety. Young children are curious and do not always recognize the inherent dangers around them. Children excited to see the great outdoors may climb up to peer out windows, and open windows are falling hazards. Screens do not offer an adequate barrier against falls. Consider locking windows

Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Replace the batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors at least twice per year..

or use safety bars to guard against falls. Test to see how easily screens can be pushed out, replacing any that do not provide adequate resistance to curious youngsters' hands.

- Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Replace the batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors at least twice per year, and test them to make sure they're in good working order at least once per month. The National Fire Protection Association recommends replacing hard-wired smoke alarms every 10 years. Battery-operated alarms may need to be replaced even sooner. Many carbon monoxide detectors work for five to seven years.

Check the back of alarms for a date stamp that indicates how old the product is and when it expires.

Safety checklists are an important part of home maintenance. A proactive approach can prevent both injuries and damage to the home.



Earth-friendly tips for fall

Autumn is upon us, and with the change of seasons comes the fall to-do list that must be completed before the arrival of winter weather. Many outdoor jobs are best completed before temperatures drop, while others can be tackled indoors to help save energy and prepare for increased time spent inside the home.

Outdoor cleanup

Autumn means leaves are falling from trees and littering landscapes. Cleaning up leaves can be a time-consuming task, but it's necessary to promote the health of lawns and other plants. Grass that is completely matted down with leaves can become starved for light and moisture, and lawns may even rot when forced to spend winter beneath fallen leaves. One eco-friendly timesaver is to shred leaves

with a mower (a manual mower is preferable) and leave them as topdressing for the lawn. As long as the grass blades can be seen within the leaves, the lawn should be fine. Shredded leaves will decompose and add necessary nutrients and organic matter to the soil naturally.

Leaves also can be used in annual flower and vegetable gardens to improve the soil. Mulch made from shredded leaves can be placed on the soil around trees and shrubs. This helps to reduce weed problems and protects root systems from harsh temperature fluctuations.

Clothing donations

It's time to pack away summer clothing and once again fill closets and drawers with sweaters and jeans. Before packing away your summer wardrobe, conduct an inventory

to determine if there are any items you no longer use. Donate these items or use them as rags when cleaning.

Keep some short-sleeved shirts accessible so you can layer them under sweatshirts and sweaters. The heat from layering will be trapped against your body and keep you cozier, reducing your reliance on HVAC systems to stay warm.

Home repairs

Check the roof for any missing shingles. In addition, look for spots where animals or insects may be able to gain entry into your home. Seal these areas and repair any leaks.

This will make your home more efficient later on when winter hits its stride.

Remove window air conditioners for the winter. If they can't be removed, seal them with caulking or tape and cover them with an airtight, insulated jacket. If you have forced-air systems, move furniture away from the vents so that air can flow better around the home and keep it comfortable.

Check weatherstripping around windows and doors and make the necessary adjustments. Installing additional insulation also can help reduce energy consumption.

A few tips can help homeowners prepare for autumn in eco-friendly ways.



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How to transform a fixer-upper

The real estate market will always have its ups and downs, but real estate is an oft-profitable investment. Real estate investors do their investing for various reasons. Some see a house as a place to hang their hats for years and years, while others look at properties as nothing more than investments.

Buying a home with the intent to fix it up and resell it is called a “fix and flip.” In such situations, investors buy homes at below-market prices before refurbishing the homes with the goal of recouping their initial investment and then some when the homes are ultimately put back on the

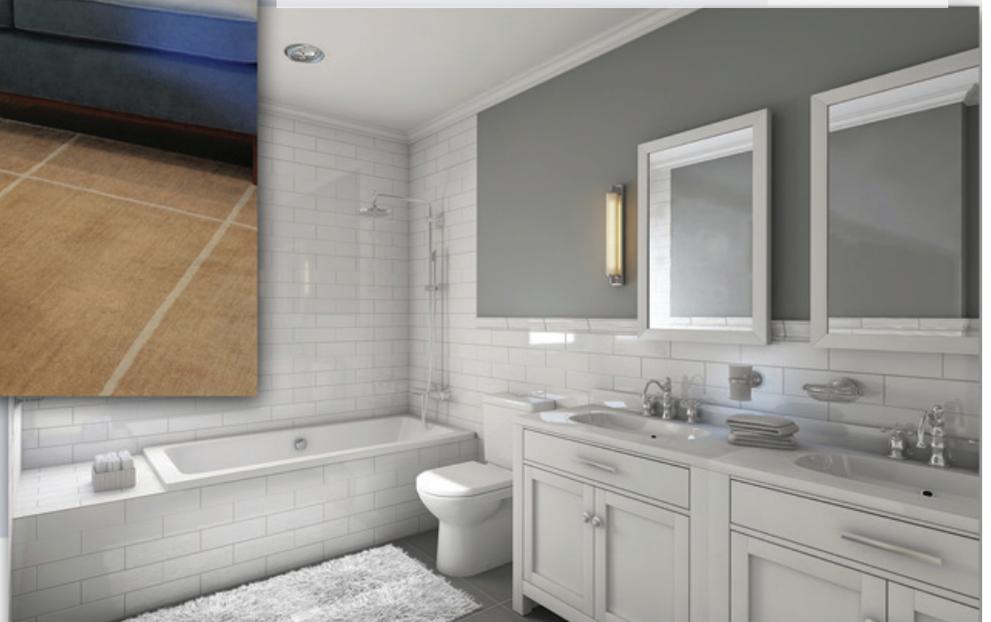
market. Flipping has become popular for both expert remodelers and novice investors. RealtyTrac®, the nation’s leading source for comprehensive housing data, noted in its “Year-End and Q4 2015 U.S. Home Flipping” report that 5.5 percent of all single family home and condo sales during the year were flipped properties. This marked an increase from the same time the previous year.

Investing in a fixer-upper requires a leap of faith and a vision of what the home can look like in the future. Turning a real estate lemon into lemonade requires certain skills and a good measure of patience. The following are some guidelines to get anyone started.

- Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Make an honest assessment of your abilities and which renovations, if any, you can handle. If you are unskilled or inexperienced working with your hands, then it can be easy for an investment property to quickly become a money pit. Before purchasing a property, hire a trained home inspector to tour the home with you and point out all of the areas that will need renovation. With this list, begin getting estimates on how much money the work will entail. Determine if this fits with your budget or not. You do not want to invest so much that it exceeds what you could feasibly recoup when it comes time to sell.

- Overlook cosmetic things when visiting properties. Cosmetic issues include all of the easily replaceable items in a home, such as carpeting, appliances, interior paint colors and cabinetry. Focus on the bones of the house — the architectural integrity and those little touches that you envision having a “wow” factor.

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FIXER

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- Seek the help of experts. Some flippers think they'll save the most money by doing all of the work themselves. This isn't always the case. Professional architects, designers and contractors may help you save money. Contractors have an intimate knowledge of where to buy materials and may be able to negotiate prices based on wholesale or trade costs. In addition, experts can help you avoid common pitfalls because they've already done this type of work time and again. It's smart to rely on expert advice, even if it means investing a little bit more.
- Save money by doing some work yourself. While the pros may tackle the more complex parts of a given project, such as rewiring electricity or changing the footprint of a home, you can still be involved. Ask to participate in demolition, such as taking down walls or removing old materials from the home. Such

participation may be fun, and it can save you substantial amounts of money on labor.

- Recognize that not everything must be completely redone. Realize that, in some instances, a coat of paint and some new accents may be all you need to transform a space. For example, if kitchen cabinets are in good condition, see if they can be refaced or painted instead of replaced entirely. Install new door pulls/handles to add visual interest. Look for some ready-made items, such as bookshelves, instead of installing custom carpentry.

- Think about what the buyer wants and not what you want. Renovate with an eye toward prospective buyers' needs. Keep things neutral and accommodating. Research the latest trends to understand what buyers might be seeking in a home. You want potential buyers to envision themselves moving right in.

Renovating a fixer-upper takes time, but it can be a worthwhile project, and one that can help anyone turn a profit in a booming real estate market.

Did You Know?



Home improvement projects can inadvertently expose homeowners to hidden dangers. For example, lead paint may be lurking underneath layers of existing paint in older homes. Exposure to lead dust or fumes may cause brain damage or other adverse health effects, especially in children or pregnant women. It is essential that homeowners control their

exposure to lead or other hazardous substances through the use of protective equipment, such as a properly fitted respirator. If lead is discovered, it may require professional containment and cleanup. Contact your local health authority if you discover or suspect you have discovered lead paint or other hazardous materials in your home.

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Grow pumpkins right at home



Year after year, families make the trek to farm stands and nurseries in rural areas to purchase pumpkins. There among the vines and soil, each person is on the hunt for the perfect pumpkin to turn into pie or to carve into a gap-toothed jack-o'-lantern. But what if you only had to venture as far as your backyard for the ideal autumn pumpkin? It's possible when you plan ahead and sow the seeds of your very own pumpkin patch.

Pumpkins are a long-season fruit that requires some advanced soil prep work and planning to ensure a bountiful crop. Pumpkins come in hundreds of varieties of all shapes and sizes. Pumpkins belong to the "cucurbita" family and come in three main categories. Cucurbita Moschata pumpkins belong to a group of mainly squashes that are usually used commercially for canned pumpkins. Cucurbita Pepo pumpkins are the ones typically carved on Halloween. Cucurbita Maxima are the giant pumpkins that show up at state fairs and other vegetable and fruit growing contests.

To begin a pumpkin patch, find an area of the yard that gets full sunlight. The soil should have a slightly acidic soil from 6.0 to 6.8 pH. Pumpkins prefer a light, rich soil that drains well. Till the soil and amend it with compost to ensure it is rich in nutrients.

Pumpkins can be started indoors from seeds during the early spring. However, if you plan to put seedlings into the ground, be sure to do so when the first frost is over and the soil is

60 F. The temperature during the day should average 70 F. Be sure to space pumpkins far apart from one another and dig them in deep. Leave at least a few feet of space because vines can grow quite long and pumpkins can get large.

Pumpkins are mostly water and need a lot to grow, so test the soil's moisture levels every day. Only add water when it is needed. Deep but infrequent watering results in healthier plants. Keep water off of the leaves, and water the pumpkins in the morning instead of late in the evening. This can prevent the onset of fungal diseases. It is also advisable to plant sunflowers next to pumpkins to attract the pests that may normally thrive on the pumpkins. Beetles, aphids and squash bugs are common and can damage the crop.

When the shell of the pumpkin has hardened and is no longer easily dented, it is usually ready for harvesting. The vine also may begin to thin and whither. If a pumpkin is large but not quite ready, place boards under the pumpkin to keep it from rotting on the ground. Cut stems on the long side, and never carry around the pumpkin by the stem. It can break and cause the pumpkin to rot prematurely. Reduce watering a week to 10 days before harvesting, which will help them keep longer. While visiting pumpkin farms is an enjoyable autumn activity, homeowners can plant their own pumpkins and enjoy their harvests right from the comforts of their backyards.



What to look for during roof inspections

Cold weather can be tough on a home, and perhaps no part of a home is more vulnerable to harsh winter weather than its roof.

Fallen snow can equate to several pounds of pressure placed on a residential roof. Roofs do not often collapse under heavy snowfall. But adverse winter weather conditions can compromise roofs in other ways. Water leakage and damage to the roof's interior are just two of the potentially problematic issues that can arise when roofs are battered by cold, blustery weather. That's why many home improvement specialists advise homeowners to conduct roof inspections prior to the start of winter.

Many homeowners can conduct their own cursory roof inspections, but they may not know exactly what to look for. The National Roofing Contractors Association says that there are certain key areas to inspect that may reveal some telltale signs of roof damage.

Curled, cracked or missing shingles may prove troublesome. Inclement weather can test the strength of even the most durable roofs. Even though many roofs are designed to last up to 30 years, some may need to be replaced early, particularly when they have been exposed to harsh weather over a period of years. Individual shingles can be replaced as spot treatments, but if the damage is widespread, a new roof may be necessary.

Attic leaks or water elsewhere might signal issues with the roof. Figure out if water inside the home is coming from the roof. Water stains do not always indicate problems with the

roofing, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Look for protective granules wearing off. If gutters are filled with the sandy granular material that coats roofing shingles, that may be a sign of an aging or damaged roof.

Inspect flashing. Professional roofers can recognize properly installed flashing, the material that connects the roof to other parts of the house that adjoin the roof, like skylights or a chimneys. Poorly installed flashing can cause leaks. Stains that appear below chimneys or near attic windows may indicate new flashing, and not new shingles, is needed.

Gutters and downspouts should be in good condition. A roof is the sum of its parts, and that includes downspouts and gutters. If the gutters are clogged or damaged, they cannot direct water away from the house properly. Snow, leaves and other debris needs to be cleared from gutters to help them function at optimal capacity.

Animals and insects can cause damage, too. It's not just poor weather that homeowners need to consider with regard to roof damage. Boring insects and animals may cause problems with roofs as well. A roof inspection may shed light on potential pest problems. Holes or nesting materials may indicate that an animal or animals are using the attic as a shelter from the elements. Get to the root of issues with your home's roof before they become bigger problems once winter arrives. A thorough inspection can reveal problems that may prove costly if ignored.

Inspect a roof each fall to get an idea of the potential damage and any necessary repairs that may be needed before nasty weather sets in.



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