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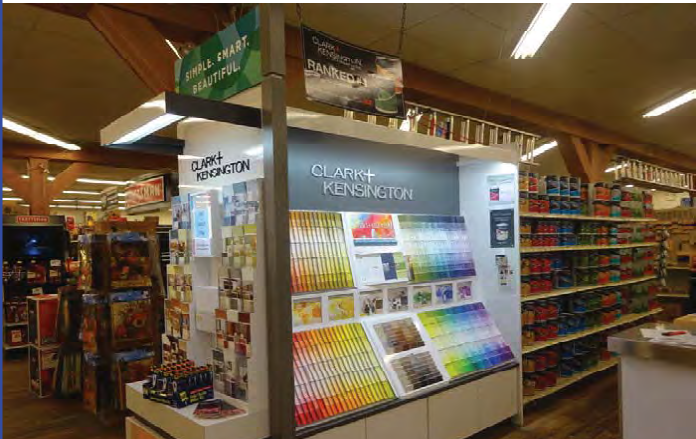


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Get Started Now On Spring Cleaning

Warmer temperatures and longer hours of sunlight can recharge energy levels. Upon the arrival of spring, homeowners dust off their to-do lists and charge ahead with renewed vigor. But before homeowners can get started on renovation projects, many must tame the existing mess that may have built up over the winter. Spring is a great time to dive into spring cleaning projects and ready a home for a season of renovation and remodeling. Getting started on spring cleaning can be a tad overwhelming. In 2012, OnePoll asked 1,000 adults living in the United Kingdom how they felt about spring cleaning, and 41 percent of those surveyed found spring cleaning a daunting process while 68 percent had negative feelings about spring cleaning. But in spite of that initial lack of enthusiasm, respondents said they felt happy and more organized once they finished their spring cleaning. Establishing a plan and setting reachable goals

can make spring cleaning a lot less daunting.

- Set aside several days for spring cleaning. A long weekend is a great time to do some spring cleaning, as having consecutive days to clean will reduce the chances you grow distracted.
- Make a list and purchase all of the supplies you will need. Again, this will help you stay on course, rather than going out to the store to pick up cleaners or organizational systems.
- Try to set reasonable goals. Even if you hope to clean the entire house, stick to the one or two rooms that are most desperate for your attention. Divide each task into a series of steps so when you complete each step you will feel proud that you're making progress.
- Create your musical playlist. A playlist full of your favorite songs can provide some inspiration and energy to push you through the spring cleaning when your enthusiasm starts to wane. The music also may take your mind off of the work ahead and help to pass the time.

- Start from the top and work downward. Follow a logical cleaning order. Begin by dusting away cobwebs and lighting fixtures. Clean light switches and walls. Empty closets and then restock them in a more organized fashion. Leave the furniture and flooring for last, as dirt and dust may accumulate on furniture and flooring as you clean other areas of the home.
- Be prepared to bid adieu to some of your stuff. Have a few trash bags at the ready. Reorganize items you won't be keeping into separate piles, with one pile for items you plan to donate and another for those items you will discard. Donate what you can and promptly put the remainder of the items at the curb for pickup.
- Stay fed and hydrated. Cleaning can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Take breaks to fuel up on food and always have a refreshing beverage close by. Following a few guidelines can make the process of spring cleaning go quickly and smoothly.

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Explaining Aeration

First-time homeowners or those just beginning to embrace their inner landscaper may notice their neighbors using a machine to punch holes in their lawns and wonder what they're doing. While aeration is slightly more complicated than simply punching holes in a lawn, that's likely what your neighbors are up to when you see them manning an unfamiliar machine in their lawns. Aeration may be a foreign concept to men and women with little lawn care experience, but it's a relatively simple way to ensure your lawn stays healthy. WHAT IS AERATION? Lawn aeration is the practice of perforating the surface of a lawn in an effort to promote stronger roots and a healthier landscape. A host of factors, from inclement weather to kids using the yard as a playground to the type of grass in a yard, can make it difficult for lawns to thrive. Aeration is a way to counter some of the things that prevent lawns from looking lush. WHY SHOULD I AERATE? Aeration is practiced so lawns can grow deeper roots, as poking holes in the surface breaks up compacted soil, thereby allowing air, nutrients and water to reach the root system. Over time, a lawn that is not aerated is likely to feature compacted soil that won't absorb water and nutrients, which are essential to maintaining a healthy lawn. Lawns that are not aerated also tend to build up thatch. Thatch is a matted layer of materials that can build up in a lawn over time. Grass clippings and other debris might not stick to your shoe when you walk through the yard, but they are combining to create thatch just below the surface of the grass. That thatch also makes it difficult for water and nutrients to reach the soil where they can promote strong, healthy root systems. Aeration helps to combat the buildup of thatch and promote a healthy lawn.

CAN I DO IT MYSELF? Homeowners with little experience caring for their lawns may want to consult professionals before tackling the project themselves. Many professional landscaping services have experience in aerating lawns, which can be labor-intensive. Aerating is not necessarily a difficult task, but some aerators do not cover much soil surface with each pass they make, so it can take a while to complete a full aeration of your lawn. In addition, some homeowners may be uncomfortable operating an aerator, and that can lead to mistakes that can harm a lawn. Homeowners pressed for time or those concerned about their ability to operate an aerator may benefit from hiring professionals and then watching how the pros do it. If you watch carefully, you might be more confident come the next time your lawn needs to be aerated. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I AERATE? Lawns that are not subject to heavy use can go longer between aerations than those with more frequent use. If kids play in the yard every day or if you routinely host parties where guests spend lots of time in the yard, your lawn will benefit from more frequent aeration. Speak to a landscaping professional about how often your property needs to be aerated, as there may be certain region-specific variables that will influence how frequently a lawn should be aerated. WHEN SHOULD I AERATE? Landscaping professionals recommend aerating lawns during the growing season, when holes created by aeration can be filled by growing grass. Homeowners should consult with a landscaping professional about when to aerate their lawns, as the type of grass may also determine the best time to aerate. Aeration is a great way for homeowners to ensure their lawns stay lush and healthy for years to come.

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Options Abound When Laying A New Driveway

A driveway is more than just a place to park your car. The right driveway material can add considerable curb appeal to your home, increasing its resale value along the way. Homeowners have many options at their disposal when choosing a driveway material, and the right material for one home may not be the best fit for another. The following is a run-down of popular driveway surfaces and what homeowners can expect of each of them.

BRICK
Many homeowners believe brick driveways provide the most aesthetic appeal, and it's hard to argue with the beauty of brick driveways and walkways. Brick driveways come in various colors and hues, and many homeowners opt to have the color of their brick driveways match their landscaping, which further adds to curb appeal. But

that curb appeal is only appealing if the driveway is designed and installed correctly, and homeowners can expect to pay a premium for that, as brick driveway installation is very labor intensive.

GRAVEL
Gravel driveways may not be as commonplace as they once were, but this cost effective driveway material is still an option. Homeowners who live in regions with mild winters without snow might benefit most from gravel driveways, which can be difficult to negotiate when shoveling snow. Gravel tends to be the least expensive driveway material to install, but professionals may recommend that a new top layer of gravel be laid once or twice a year to replace material lost to wind and everyday usage.

ASPHALT
Asphalt remains a popular driveway material, thanks in large

part to its practicality and ease of installation. Unlike other driveway surface materials, asphalt is available in just one color, black, and that lack of versatility has led many homeowners to consider other options. But asphalt remains an affordable driveway surface material that's relatively easy to repair. Cracks and holes in asphalt are somewhat common, but resealing such blemishes once every three to five years is typically enough to maintain the appearance of an asphalt driveway.

CONCRETE
Concrete driveways are popular thanks in large part to their affordability and aesthetic appeal. Concrete can be susceptible to extremely cold weather, but many homeowners prefer concrete because of its versatility. Concrete can be stamped or dyed to provide a unique look, which can

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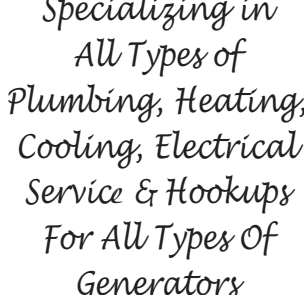
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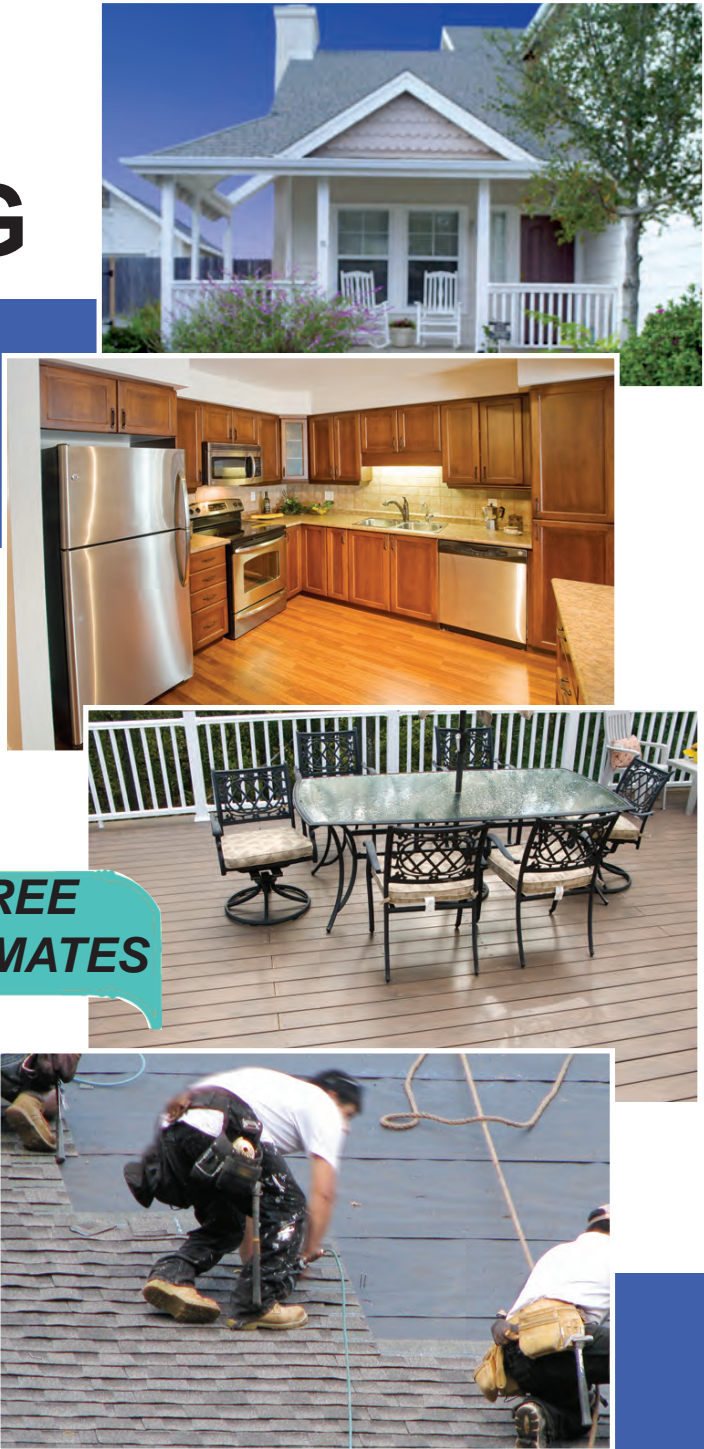
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When buying carpet for the first time, homeowners can be overwhelmed with unfamiliar terminology. Navigating such terminology, not to mention the vast array of options inside typical carpeting stores, can be difficult and make carpet buyers nervous about making the right decision. Homeowners looking for carpeting for their homes are bound to hear about particular fibers and types of carpets. But such talk is lost when buyers don't understand carpet fibers and what makes each type of carpet unique. The following rundown of the various carpet fibers and types of carpet should help homeowners make more informed decisions.

CARPET FIBERS

When a carpet salesman or store employee references "carpet fiber," he or she is referring to the type of material used to make a particular carpet. No two fibers are the same, as each feels different to the touch and reacts to routine wear and tear differently. Here are the five most popular carpet fibers:

- **Nylon:** Nylon is the most durable carpet fiber, and that has contributed to its popularity. Nylon is available in a wide range of styles and is a flexible material. Many nylon carpets come with a stain-resistant treatment to protect the material from common stains and spills.
- **Polyester:** Highly resistant to stains and fading, polyester is soft, and today's polyester carpets are more resilient and durable than those of yesteryear.
- **Triexta:** Triexta is a type of polyester fiber that is especially soft. A relatively recent addition to the market, triexta carpet fibers are especially susceptible to stains and spills.
- **Olefin:** Olefin carpet fibers are among the least expensive, thanks in part to its lack of durability compared to other fibers. Olefin carpet fibers repel UV rays and therefore don't fade when exposed to sunlight.
- **Wool:** Wool tends to be the most expensive carpet fiber, but that cost is offset by its considerable durability and soft

Explaining Carpet Fibers And Types

feel. Wool carpets can last several decades, but they also are high maintenance and not especially resistant to stains.

CARPET TYPES

The type, or style, of carpet refers to how the carpet is designed. The type of carpet homeowners choose may depend on where in their homes the carpet will be installed.

- **Frieze:** Frieze carpet, sometimes referred to as twist carpet, is made of twisted strands of carpet, and many homeowners

prefer frieze carpet because of its modern and stylish look. Frieze carpet can be somewhat expensive, which is why some homeowners install it in bedrooms and sitting rooms where it won't be susceptible to high traffic.

- **Saxony/Cut pile:** Saxony or cut pile carpet is ideal for high traffic areas, such as the living room or hallways. That's because it tends to be resistant to matting and crushing and still feels soft underfoot.

- **Berber:** Berber carpets, often referred to as loop carpets, are especially durable, making them strong options for high-traffic areas of a home. Though there are variations in loop carpets, a traditional loop carpet is created when yarn is sewn or tufted into the backing and left uncut. Choosing a carpet for a home is no small task, but homeowners who educate themselves about the various carpet fibers and styles can find the right fit for their homes.

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- Solid wood: Wood countertops create a warm, homey interior. Butcher block counters are less expensive than granite and do not necessarily need to be ordered from a speciality retailer. But wood can stain and dent and can even burn when hot kitchenware is placed atop it. Regular application of oil can help homeowners maintain the appearance of their wood counters for years to come.
- Marble: Marble tends to be less expensive than granite without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. However, marble is softer and more porous than granite, so it can stain and be etched. Diligence in wiping away spills, routine sealing and a gentle touch is necessary for those who choose marble countertops.
- Soapstone: This is a natural stone composed mainly of mineral talc that gives the stone its smooth feel. Soapstone ranges from black to gray but can sometimes have a green shade to it. Other materials in the stone can produce veining. Although softer than granite, soapstone is still high-density and will hold up well. It's impervious to stains and bacteria, and exposure to chemicals will not damage it.
- Quartz: Quartz is a manufactured product made of stone aggregate and polymers compressed under high pressure. It has the look of natural stone but requires less work to maintain. Quartz has consistent colors and patterns and is a nonporous material, so it will not need routine sealing and resealing.
- Glass: Glass countertops are back-painted, so homeowners can order just about any color they want. Glass will be tempered, so it is safe and heat-resistant. Glass can scratch, though, so it is not as impervious as other materials.
- Concrete: Concrete is another material that can be colored to match homeowners' whims. Concrete is relatively inexpensive compared to other countertop materials, but it can crack or chip. While granite is a popular countertop material, homeowners who want something new have many additional options at their disposal.

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Power Tool Safety Tips

Power tools can dramatically reduce the time it takes to complete home improvement projects. Professional contractors regularly rely on power tools for cutting and sanding, and many do-it-yourself renovators follow suit and invest in power tools to help get the job done. But power tools, in spite of their usefulness, are not without risk. According to the Work Safe Center, power tool injuries account for as many as 400,000 emergency room visits in the United States each year. Power nailers, chain saws and table saws account for the greatest number of injuries. Keeping safe is of the utmost priority when using power tools. Here's how:

- Read all manufacturers' instructions and guidelines before use.

- Keep your tools clean and in proper operating condition.
- Use the right tool for the job.
- Always wear eye protection, such as safety glasses or goggles.
- Wear standard cotton or leather work gloves to protect hands.
- Consider the use of earplugs or earmuffs with loud power tools.
- Don't use power tools in proximity to flammable vapors, dust or construction materials.
- Always check that wires are kept away from blades.
- Maintain a tight grip on a tool.
- Do not overreach when using tools, and maintain balance.
- Pay attention when working with any power tool.
- Only use attachments specifically recommended for the power tools and ensure proper installation.

installation.

- Unplug all power tools during breaks and anytime when tools are not in use.
- Routinely inspect tools for damage.
- Keep tools stored in secure locations when not in use.

Did You Know...

A flat roof is more prone to leakage than other roofs, so homeowners may need to routinely inspect their flat roofs for any areas of water penetration. Another way to prevent leaks is to install gutter systems correctly. Gutters should not be hung completely level, but angled toward the roof's downspouts and drains. This angle will better facilitate water flow.

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Tips For Homeowners On Their First Renovation Projects

Home renovations are typically exciting, as homeowners get to see the visions of their dream homes come to light right before their very eyes. Turning an outdated bathroom into a modern oasis or an empty basement into the ultimate man cave strengthens the sense of attachment homeowners have with their homes. But few home renovation projects go from start to finish without experiencing a few bumps in the road along the way. Such bumps can be difficult to handle for homeowners working on their first renovation projects, but there are many ways for novices to navigate the sometimes murky waters of home improvement projects and come out relatively unscathed on the other end, where a newly renovated home awaits.

- Plan well and know what to expect. When working with contractors, get all agreements in writing and spell out exactly what you desire in a home renovation. Photo references can help guide contractors and architects. Ask for the full picture of what can be expected with the work, from demolition to the punch list. Knowing what lies ahead can keep you grounded throughout the project.
- Discuss work each day and set payment schedules. Make payments contingent on work completed. This can help keep contractors on schedule. Paying for all work upfront leaves homeowners at a disadvantage, as it does not provide incentive for workers to be timely and efficient. Check in with workers to get daily progress reports.
- Have reasonable expectations. A renovation project may exceed its budget and take longer than initially expected. Understanding that these potential setbacks might be part

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of the process will make it easier to handle them when the foreman speaks to you about any issues that arise.

- Accept the mess. Construction work is messy. There's no way to maintain a pristine house when contractors are entering and exiting all day. Dust is bound to be generated, and tools can fill up rooms. A home in disarray can be stressful, but continue to visualize the end result and the mess won't bother you so much.
- Establish a contingency plan. Bathrooms and kitchen renovations are typically the most disruptive home improvement projects. Going without a kitchen can make it difficult to enjoy meals at home, while a bathroom remodel may require you to navigate water shutoffs. If your project is scheduled to

take several months, establish a contingency plan to deal with the consequences of your renovation project. Speak with family members about using some of their home amenities, and prepare and freeze meals in advance so you can reheat them later on when you don't have access to your stove.

- Plan your escape. Sometimes the constant work and mess of construction is too much to bear. Afford yourself time away by visiting relatives or staying at a hotel. Even a single night away can provide the relief you need. A home that is undergoing a remodel can be a less than comfortable environment. But homeowners who have never before lived through a renovation project can take several steps to make the process go as smoothly as possible.

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Add Value To Your Home With These Renovations

Homeowners choose renovation projects for a variety of reasons. Although many improvements are made to increase functionality and comfort of a home, several others are seen as worthwhile investments. These investments can add up to a higher resale value when the time comes to sell a home. Certain projects have a history of providing a greater return on homeowners' investments than others. The following renovation tips can add beauty to your home and generate great returns when you put the home up for sale.

- Invest in your kitchen. Kitchen remodels are a safe bet when it comes to putting money into improving a home. Residents tend to spend a great deal of time in the kitchen, but a dated, poorly functioning kitchen can detract from the value of a home, even if the rest of the home is in good shape. It's possible to recoup between 60 and 120 percent of your kitchen remodel investment, especially if the kitchen matches up well with the rest of your home. Homeowners should know that a deluxe renovation may not be necessary, as relatively moderate improvements can create a whole new look for a kitchen.
- Look to paint. One of the least expensive improvement materials, but one that has a significant impact, is paint. Neutral, modern colors can easily liven up any space. If you paint with low-VOC paint, you also can advertise an eco-friendly home, which is very desirable these days.



- Put in another bathroom. Multiple bathrooms are an attractive selling point, particularly in older homes that may not have been equipped with more than one bathroom. Finding extra space for a bathroom can be tricky, but consider closets, areas under stairs or even taking some space away from another room. Popular home-improvement television channel HGTV advises that half-bathrooms require at least 18 square feet of space, while full baths need 30 to 35 square feet for a stand-up shower or bathtub.
- Renovate the HVAC system. Aesthetic improvements aren't the only ones that add value to a home. Many home buyers are eager to purchase a home that has a new heating and cooling system, as buyers understand that furnaces and air conditioning units are substantial investments that can last for years. Other improvements, such as adding attic insulation or replacing older windows and doors

with more energy efficient options, also are smart bets.

- Add illumination to rooms. A dark home is a dreary home. Adding light can mean including more overhead and accent lighting. Under-cabinet task lighting is a nice touch. Inclusion of skylights and sun tubes can bring natural light into rooms that may not have south- or west-facing windows.
- Put a deck addition outdoors. Outdoor living spaces have become more desirable, especially as the "staycation" has grown in popularity. Decks and patios can make backyards more appealing. The scope of your investment will depend on the size of the deck and design. Doing the work yourself can cut the cost of decks in half, but only if you have the specific tools or experience to tackle such a project.
- Improve curb appeal. Adding attractive landscaping and freshening up the entryway to a home can add considerable value to your home, as buyers judge homes by their exteriors. Completely renovated interiors may never be seen if buyers pass up your home because of a less attractive exterior. Classy, subtle changes, like well-placed shrubbery and a green lawn, can work wonders. An inviting front door and well-lit entryway also add curb appeal to a home. Before making improvements, homeowners should determine if a given project will provide a solid return on their investment. Finding space to install an extra bathroom in a home can be a worthwhile investment.

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How To Close Up A Fireplace For The Season

A roaring fireplace on a chilly day provides a welcome, aesthetically appealing respite from the cold. Fireplaces are typically used throughout winter, but when spring rolls around, many homeowners no longer feel the need to light a fire. As fireplace season winds down, homeowners can take the following steps to close their fireplaces for the warm weather seasons ahead.

BEGIN THE CLEANUP

Repeatedly lighting fires results in an accumulation of ash and residual wood debris. Clean out what you can by hand and discard the soot. To conduct a more thorough cleaning, use a high-powered garage vacuum to clear out any remaining ashes from crevices and other parts of the firebox.

HIRE A CHIMNEY SWEEP

A fully functioning fireplace chimney should be swept annually by a certified chimney sweep. He or she will remove soot and any creosote from the inside of the chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and can cause considerable damage if it catches fire.

A professional chimney sweeping also reduces the amount of dirt and odor that will continue to enter a home after the fireplace has been retired for the season. Damp spring weather can moisten soot trapped in a chimney, causing it to smell. Cleaning and deodorizing can help keep rooms fresh.

ASK FOR AN INSPECTION

Ask a chimney sweep to inspect your chimney in addition to cleaning it. A sweep can look for leaks and cracks, and he or she should also look at the flashing system and rain cap, which can prevent water infiltration. You don't want to learn your chimney is in poor shape during a heavy spring rainfall. Ask that the pipes, brickwork and damper also be checked for functionality and good repair.

CLOSE THE DAMPER

Homeowners should close the dampers on wood-burning fireplaces when closing their fire-

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Kick Start Spring With A Finished Basement

(MS) — After a winter of hibernation, spring is the perfect time to consider remodeling projects that will help keep your house cool in the coming summer months and reduce energy consumption. An unfinished basement is a source of energy loss in many homes. By simply finishing the space with wall and floor coverings, you will notice a difference on your energy bills. A remodeled basement offers more than additional storage and living space. It can provide room for a growing family or a space where you can retreat for some privacy. Insulation is a key component in making your basement look and feel comfortable, inviting and dry. For the best results, install a rigid board insulation like ROXUL ComfortBoard IS against the concrete foundation before you stud the wall. The board is mechanically fastened or adhered to the concrete foundation wall, preventing thermal bridging through the studs, offering a higher R-value and better thermal performance. It will ensure your basement is not a source of energy loss, but rather an inviting retreat all year round. Installation tips are available online at www.diywithroxul.com.

How You Can Finance Your Home Improvement Projects

Many homeowners recognize that improving and maintaining a property makes a home more livable for its inhabitants and more attractive to prospective buyers when the time comes to erect a "For Sale" sign in the front yard. But a well-maintained home also provides additional benefits. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, home improvements not only raise the values of individual homes, but they tend to raise neighborhood standards as well. Home improvements can create jobs and help local communities flourish economically. Maintaining a home can be a costly undertaking. Home improvement projects can be expensive whether homeowners hire professionals or tackle renovation projects on their own. The following are a handful of options homeowners can consider as they look for ways to finance renovation projects.

- Paying outright: Paying for the renovations upfront and in full is perhaps the simplest way to finance a project. Homeowners who have the cash to pay for renovations outright won't have to worry about interest rates or balloon payments.
- Mortgage refinancing: Some homeowners tap into their home equity to cover home remodeling projects. Refinancing a mortgage means paying off the debt owed and starting over with a completely new loan. Refinancing comes with various fees and can cost between 3 and 6 percent of the loan's principal.
- Home equity loans and lines of credit: Both of these options are commonly referred to as second mortgages. When homeowners apply for home equity loans or lines of credit, they are borrowing against the equity value in their homes. A home equity loan is a term, or closed-end, loan. It is a one-time sum that will be paid off over a set amount of time with a fixed interest rate and the same payment each month. This is a one-time loan from which a person cannot borrow further. A home equity line of credit, or HELOC, is like having a credit card.



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Home Improvement Glossary

Understanding the terminology used in the home improvement and construction industries can help homeowners be better informed and involved in projects around their homes. The following are some common industry terms.

Aggregate: Crushed rock used in many asphalt applications.

Ampacity: The amount of current a wire can safely carry.

Asbestos: A fibrous material that was once used widely in building materials but is linked to cancers of the lung and lung cavity.

Backfill: Soil or gravel used to fill in against a foundation.

Beam: Horizontal framing member designed to carry a load from joists or a roof.

Butt joint: Lumber pieces joined at the ends.

Casement window: A window with hinges on one of the vertical sides making it swing open like a door.

Caulking: Flexible material used to seal a gap between two surfaces.

Code: Rules set forth by a government institution to determine fair and safe trade practices.

Curing: A process that brings paint or masonry materials to their final, durable form.

Drywall: A wall finish made from gypsum plaster encased in a thin cardboard.

Estimate: The anticipated cost of materials and labor for a project.

Fixed price contract: A contract with a set price for the work.

Flashing: Sheet metal or roll roofing pieces fit to the joint of any roof intersection or projection.

Footing: Widened ground base of a foundation to support foundations or piers.

Framing: The structural wooden elements of most homes.

GFI: A ground fault current interrupter, which is an electrical device used to prevent injury from contact with electrical appliances.

Jamb: The exposed upright part on each side of a window frame or door frame.

Level: A tool to check for level or plumb surfaces.

Permit: A legal authorization to begin a work project.

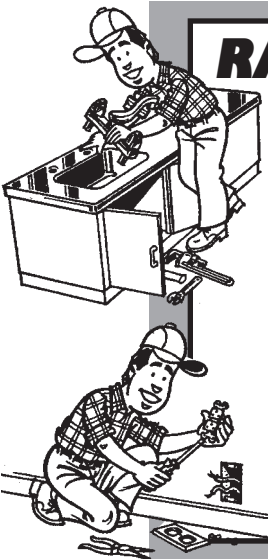
Pitch: The slope of incline on a roof.

Rebar: Steel rods that are imbedded in concrete for stability.

Shim: A tapered piece of wood used to level and secure a structure.

Stud: Vertical parts of framing placed 16 or 24 inches apart.

Watt: A measure of the electrical requirement of an appliance.



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Many homeowners take up gardening to transform their homes with beautiful flowers and foliage, while others do so to yield fresh fruits and vegetables. But gardening can be more than just a weekend hobby. In fact, it may be especially beneficial for homeowners to surround themselves with more plants and natural decor, whether in the yard or in the home. Studies have indicated that gardening can be good for the mind and body. In addition to improving mood and reducing stress, plant life and gardening also may help people have a more hopeful outlook on life. If reaping the benefit of a beautiful landscape is not reason enough to get into gardening, elevating your mood and coping with depression or illness may be even further motivation to start developing your green thumb. Home-design trends seem to be following suit, offering individuals more opportunities to surround themselves with potentially therapeutic plants. Explore these emerging and established garden décor trends to try in and around your home.

- **Living wall planters:** A living wall planter can add greenery to any décor without taking up floor or table space. Ideal for outdoor structures, these planters also can be used indoors if you safeguard against leaks and dripping. A living wall planter is a framed device that houses plants in a manner that enables them to be vertically mounted to a wall surface. While there are commercially available models, you can create your own design and paint or stain it to match the existing décor. Use a soil-free potting substrate to avoid the mess that regular soil may create.
- **Combining fish with gardening:** Enjoy the best of two relaxing worlds by installing a water feature in your yard. Garden retailers offer ready-made kits that can make fast work of establishing a pond or other water feature in the backyard. Otherwise, there are plenty of water garden companies and installers who can suggest a design and put in your desired water features. Add fish suitable for outdoor life to your pond. These include koi and certain goldfish varieties. Game fish are discouraged because they can destroy pond plants. If an outdoor pond is more maintenance than you desire, consider an indoor aquarium with a combination of fish and live aquarium plants.
- **Creative furniture designs:** Maybe you're a person who appreciates the unique and whimsical? Tables, benches and chairs can be built with planting channels that enable you to have greenery and garden décor in one piece. Envision a picnic table with a cutout down the center for a thin row of plants or decorative grasses. This is a project the entire family can get behind, as the more creative ideas the better.
- **Improved outdoor lighting:** People who like to spend time in their gardens and yards may not want to be limited by sunrise and sunset. By incorporating different lighting sources, you can create a retreat that is welcoming at any hour. Although flood lights and overhead lights can illuminate a space, consider ambient and decorative lighting to create the desired ambiance.
- **Functional fire pits and places:** A blazing fire creates a cozy spot to gather on chilly evenings, but fire pits and fireplaces also can be used as impromptu cooking spots for s'mores or frankfurters on a stick. You can purchase a stand-alone fire pit from any number of retailers or build your own with patio pavers and fire bricks to line the interior of the fire pit. Outdoor fireplaces require more work, and you want to hire a mason to ensure proper installation.
- **Enjoyable yard additions:** While plants and seating may take center stage, some people still want to have fun in their yards. There's an increased demand for yard designs and décor that can put the fun in backyard living. Bocce courts, ring- or horseshoe-toss setups, as well as bean bag-toss boards, can be incorporated into landscape designs, giving you yet another reason to spend a few hours in the great

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Secrets To Keeping An Organized Shed

Despite other intentions, homeowners often turn their garages into storage centers for random, little-used items, leaving little to no room for the tools and even vehicles that actually belong in a garage. Such homeowners may turn to sheds to store their garage overflow and keep yard equipment at the ready, but storage sheds are not immune to clutter, and homeowners may find the very structure erected to keep them organized requires a bit of organization itself. A well-organized shed can save homeowners time and energy, as it's easy to abandon or delay a project if you can't find that pair of work gloves you stashed. The first step to any organizing project is to take everything out of the shed and determine just what needs to go back in. Items that do not belong in the shed should be moved to their rightful locations or tossed in the trash if they're no longer needed. Make a pile of anything that will be kept, a separate one for donations and a third for garbage. Take inventory of what you have so you know whether you're missing any items or you have something and do not need to purchase another. Now that the entire shed is empty, you can assess just how much room you have. Utilizing vertical and overhead space effectively can free up areas on the floor for larger equipment. Shelving, racks, pegboards and any other materials that enable you to hang or store items off the floor are good investments. Visit your nearby home improvement retailer to find items that can simplify your storage. You also may be able to put scrap wood to use to make your own storage shelves or a work bench. Extra kitchen cabinets can be installed in the shed to organize additional items. In order to remember where items go, label or sort them accordingly. Some people like to take organization a step further by tracing the outline of tools hung on the wall so they can be placed back in the same spot after use. This also serves as a visual reminder of which tools are missing and which ones need to be purchased. Don't forget to utilize shed doors as additional storage space. Hang frequently used tools, such as rakes and shovels, on the inside of the doors so they will always be easily accessible. You also can repurpose storage solutions designed for other areas of the home. For example, magnetic knife holders can be mounted to a shed wall to keep paintbrushes organized. These holders also can be used to keep many small metal tools tidy. Metal funnels can hold twine and string. Thread through the narrow end of the funnel for a handy dispenser. Keep dangerous substances off the floor and out of reach. Gasoline, chemical fertilizers and other potentially dangerous substances should be stored high up to keep pets and children safe. Make sure the shed floor is sturdy and level. This makes it easier to neatly store larger items. Roll in the lawnmower, wheelbarrow and any other cumbersome items. Now that more things are mounted vertically, you should find that you have more area to move around. Taking the time to clean and organize a shed can help make anyone more productive. Hanging items vertically frees up more space in a shed or garage.

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The Many Benefits Of Hiring A Professional Landscaper

The flowers are blooming, and the grass has begun to grow anew, making spring a great time for homeowners to once again turn their attention to landscaping. Those who aren't looking forward to dusting off their lawnmowers and rethreading their string trimmers may want to hire professional landscapers to tend to their lawns and gardens.

A recent joint study by the National Gardening Association, Residential Lawn and Landscape Services and the Value of Landscaping found that homeowners spend roughly \$45 billion per year on professional lawn and landscape services, as nearly 30 percent of all households across the United States use at least one type of lawn or landscape service. The rising use of lawn care services is indicative of homeowners' appreciation of the convenience and craftsmanship professional services can provide. While the impact professional landscapers can have on a property's aesthetic appeal is considerable, homeowners also benefit from working with professional landscapers in various other ways.

- Time savings: One of the biggest benefits of leaving lawn care to the professionals is the amount of time it will save for the average homeowner. Lawns generally need to be mowed once per week during the spring and summer seasons and, depending on the size of the property, that can take an hour or more. Add the time it takes to clean up clippings,

mulch landscaping beds and edge the property, and homeowners can expect to devote a significant chunk of their weekends to caring for their lawns. Lawn services employ a few workers who make fast work of the job, leaving homeowners time to enjoy their weekends however they see fit.

- Reduced risk for injury: Maintaining a landscape is hard work, and those unaccustomed to this type of activity may find themselves winded or at risk of injury. Improper use of lawn equipment also is a safety hazard. Leaving the work to professionals can help homeowners avoid strained backs, lacerations, pulled muscles, sunburns, and any other dangers that can result when tackling landscaping projects.
- Financial savings: On the surface, hiring a landscaping service may seem like a costly venture. However, after crunching some numbers, many homeowners realize that doing the work themselves may cost more in the long run than hiring a professional landscaping service. Homeowners who decide to go it alone must purchase expensive equipment, and those lawn tools will require routine maintenance, which costs additional money. Inexperienced homeowners may incur extra fees to "fix" mistakes that occur during the learning process. Each year, new seed, fertilizer, mulch, pesticides, and other supplies also must be purchased. But professional lawn care services typically charge a

set fee per month, and that fee covers the maintenance of both your property and the equipment needed to keep that property looking great.

- Know-how: Many professional landscapers know how to address lawn care issues that may arise throughout the year. They will know how to deal with dry patches of lawn or poorly draining areas, and they also can make recommendations on plants that will thrive under certain conditions.
- One-stop shopping: Certain landscaping services provide many different options for prospective customers. Basic lawn cuts may be one package, but there also may be services for seasonal seeding, weeding, leaf clean-up, and winterizing.
- Consistent maintenance: Homeowners who frequently travel or spend much of their summers away from home often find that lawn care companies are a wise investment. Established weekly schedules ensure the landscape always will look its best whether homeowners are home or out of town.

Spring is a great time for homeowners to decide if hiring professional landscaping services is in their best interests. The time and money saved, as well as impact professional landscapers can have on a property, makes landscaping services a great investment for many homeowners. Time saved and a professional job are just two of the reasons homeowners hire lawn care companies.

The Relationship Between Paint And Mood

Painting is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to transform the look of a space. The colors homeowners choose for their walls can give rooms their own unique feel and even affect the moods of the people within them. Finding the right shade for a bedroom or kitchen involves more than just selecting the first color that catches your eye. Design experts and psychologists alike say it may be worthwhile to choose a color that helps you feel good rather than just following design trends. The paint color you pick may add energy to a space or create a tranquil retreat where you can unwind at the end of the day.

BLUE: To create a spa-like environment and a more serene space, look to shades of blue in soft variations. Cool blues are soothing colors that can help lower stress levels and promote sleep. That's why blue is a frequent fixture in bedrooms and bathrooms. Just be

advised that too much blue can make a room appear cold and stark, so balance out blue with some warmer accents.

ORANGE: Many people do not immediately consider bright orange for their homes, but when used as an accent shade, orange can really brighten up a home. Orange is considered a shade that expands creativity and imparts a youthful appeal to a space. Consider an orange accent wall or a burst of color with orange throw pillows. If pumpkin orange is a little too bold for you, tone it down by choosing a more pastel, peachy hue, which is equally warm and energizing.

RED: Red stimulates energy and appetite, which is why the shade is so popular in restaurants and home dining spaces. Red is a good choice for social gathering rooms but may not be the wisest choice for a bedroom, as the color may prove overstimulating.

GREEN: Green can evoke

composure and tranquility and works in any room of the house. Since green is the primary color of nature, it also works well for those people who want to bring some of the outdoors inside and work with the fresh starts and new growth that green can inspire. To make green feel less subdued and sleepy, work with its complementary opposite, red, by using a few bold red accents here and there to balance out the tranquility of green.

PURPLE: People have long related purple to royalty, and this dramatic color can add a formal, regal aspect to a home depending on the hue. Purple also may help stimulate the creative side of the brain. In paler shades of lavender, purple can seem almost ethereal and spiritual. Some designers suggest avoiding purple in a bedroom because that is a place you want your brain to rest rather than be stimulated.

YELLOW: Few colors are more vibrant than yellow, which can help stimulate conversation and make thoughts more focused. A luminous shade of yellow is an ideal way to make any space more welcoming and bright. Just use it sparingly, as too much yellow may not be a good thing. Yellow accents mixed with touches of purple can offer the balance needed to prevent yellow rooms from overwhelming residents and guests. Home decorators should keep in mind that colors can be blended to create the desired environment. A color scheme based on complementary colors, or those opposite on the color wheel, may fit. Otherwise, analogous color schemes, or those colors that are next to one another on the color wheel, can create a variation that suits your design needs.



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Help Your Home's Exterior Rebound From Harsh Winter Weather

The seasons can be harsh on homes, and perhaps no season is more taxing on a home's exterior than winter. Harsh winter weather can take a toll on roofs, gutters, landscaping, and just about any other part of the home that must face the cold head-on. The following are a few areas of your home that might need some help rebounding from winter now that spring has finally arrived.

- **Gutters:** Gutters are vulnerable to winter weather, as strong winds may blow debris into the gutters or even blow the gutters off of the house. Gutters should be cleaned prior to and immediately after winter to ensure they're working properly and not backing up to the point that water can build up and damage the roof. Reattach any loose gutters and clear them of any debris left behind by winter winds.
- **Roof:** The roof is another area of your home's exterior that may have been beaten down over the winter. Examine the roof for cracked, missing or deformed shingles that can allow water to enter a home and damage its interior. Some roof damage is visible from the ground, but homeowners who just endured especially harsh winters may want to climb up on their roofs or hire a professional to get a closer look. Another way to determine if the roof was damaged is to go into your attic and check for water damage near roof trusses. Water damage indicates something went awry over the winter.
- **Walkways and driveways:** Heavy snowfall or significant accumulation of ice over the winter can result in cracked or damaged walkways, driveways and porches. Some of this damage may have resulted from aggressive shoveling or breaking up of ice. Look for any cracks in areas that needed shoveling over the winter, as such cracks can be safety hazards and may even prove to be entry points into your home for water or critters.
- **Landscaping:** Landscaping also tends to take a hit in areas that experience harsh winters. Winter storms may damage trees, which can put a home right in the line of falling limbs or worse. Walk around your property to inspect for tree damage, removing any fallen limbs or cutting down any limbs that appear dead or that might eventually prove a safety hazard. In addition, check the grass for any dead spots that might have fallen victim to winter freeze, and address those spots when the time comes to revitalize your lawn.
- **Appliances:** When surveying your property after a long winter, inspect appliances like a central air conditioning unit or even dryer vents to make sure they made it through the winter unscathed. Such appliances may have proven an attractive nesting spot for animals over the winter, but damage can be significant if vermin or other animals seek shelter from winter weather inside appliances.

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Pruning Trees A Job Best Left To The Pros

Bountiful, healthy trees can be beautiful to behold and important contributors to a thriving environment. According to American Forests, a nonprofit conservation organization, a tree can absorb as much as 40 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and can sequester one ton of carbon dioxide by the time the tree reaches age 40. The United States Forest Service adds that trees placed properly around a home can reduce air conditioning and heating demands considerably. Many homeowners are content to leave healthy trees alone. However, trees eventually must be pruned or removed if they become safety risks or pose other threats. Trees with roots that are damaging home foundations or those with limbs overhanging property limits or power lines can be troublesome. Although homeowners can handle relatively minor tree maintenance, for a variety of reasons, many tree projects are best left to the professionals.

AVOID INJURY

Professional tree contractors recognize and understand the hazards associated with tree and limb removal. Many operate in accordance with national or local guidelines to maintain proper clearance of power lines and structures.

Trimming trees close to electrical lines puts a person at risk of being electrocuted. Professionals know how to protect themselves and prevent power outages, which can result when limbs come into contact with power lines.

Professional tree services will use machinery appropriate for the task. Cherrypickers and cranes may lift workers to the correct height to work on trees, while do-it-yourselfers who rely on climbing trees or using ladders are at risk of injury.

PREVENT DAMAGE TO THE TREE

Many tree services understand the proper way to prune trees to minimize stress and damage to the tree itself. Novice pruners

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may inadvertently do more harm than good, resulting in proliferation of tree disease or shock. Improper pruning technique also can lead to an unsightly tree.

LIABILITY

A professional tree service will possess the correct liability and worker's compensation insurance. This protects homeowners against litigation should someone be injured while tree work is being done. Homeowners who damage neighboring properties when cutting down a tree may find that they are not covered by their homeowner's insurance policies. This can be a costly mistake that's easily avoided by simply hiring a fully insured tree

removal service.

THE RIGHT TOOLS

The right tools can mean the difference between a job done correctly and one that results in disaster. Professional arborists and tree services have acquired the training, tools and techniques to perform the job safely. This includes using the right tools to tackle the job. Ropes, pulleys, cranes, stump grinders, and other heavy machinery are just a few of the tools tree services have at their disposal that the average homeowner does not.

Trimming or removing trees can be an unpredictable and potentially dangerous endeavor. Such work is best left to professionals.



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The presence of mold in a home is a sight few homeowners want to see. In addition to being unsightly, mold found in a home can be unhealthy.

While certain cleaners may prove effective at removing mold, homeowners who want to remove existing mold growths and prevent future growths may benefit from gaining a greater understanding of mold and why it grows inside homes.

WHAT IS MOLD?
Mold is a blanket term used to describe fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. Many species of mold exist, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that some estimates suggest there may be more than three hundred thousand different species of mold. Common indoor molds include *cladosporium*, *penicillium*, *alternaria*, and *aspergillus*.

WHICH CONDITIONS PROMOTE MOLD GROWTH?
Homeowners may notice that mold tends to grow in specific areas of their homes but not in others, and that's because molds grow best in certain conditions. Warm, damp and humid conditions, such as those found in poorly ventilated bathrooms and basements, make ideal breeding grounds for mold.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF MOLD EXPOSURE?

Molds are a natural and resilient part of the environment, but mold growth indoors should be addressed and avoided. Mold spores are tiny and invisible to the naked eye, and when these spores attach to wet surfaces, they begin to grow. Once these spores begin to grow, they can then affect people in various ways. Roughly a decade ago, the Institute of Medicine found sufficient evidence to support a link between exposure to indoor mold and respiratory tract issues, such as coughing and wheezing in people who were

otherwise healthy. The same report found that mold may trigger asthma symptoms among people with asthma and hypersensitivity pneumonitis, a disease in which the lungs are inflamed when a person breathes in certain dusts he or she is allergic to, in people susceptible to that condition.

Some people who do not have a preexisting condition can still be sensitive to molds. When exposed to mold, such people may experience symptoms like nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation.

HOW CAN EXPOSURE TO MOLD BE DECREASED AT HOME? Adequate ventilation is arguably homeowners' best friend with regard to reducing mold exposure at home. Control humidity levels in areas of the home that tend to be warm and humid, such as the kitchen and bathroom. Install an exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathroom and a window in the bathroom if yours does not already have one.

The CDC recommends that humidity levels be no higher than 50 percent throughout the day, and an air conditioner and dehumidifier can help you keep indoor humidity levels in check, especially during the summer when humidity levels tend to be their highest of any time during the year.

When renovating your home, remove any existing carpeting from bathrooms and basements and toss out soaked carpets or upholstery as well. If painting will be part of your home renovation projects, add mold inhibitors to paints prior to application. Mold that grows inside a home is unsightly and potentially unhealthy. But concerned homeowners can take several reactive and proactive steps to reduce existing mold growths and prevent them from returning in the future.

Stay Cool Without Air Conditioning

Hot, steamy weather can derail the best intentions of reducing energy consumption. As temperatures soar, few can resist the temptation to crank the air conditioning unit and relax in some frosty comfort. However, relying too heavily on air conditioning can compromise the efforts of men and women hoping to reduce their carbon footprints. It is estimated that up to 50 percent of electricity used during the warm weather season is for air conditioning. The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy says energy consumption for home air conditioning accounts for more than 8 percent of all the electricity produced in the United States, costing homeowners more than \$15 billion annually. This translates to roughly 195 million tons of carbon dioxide, an average of almost two tons per year, for homes with air conditioning. Air conditioning costs and energy usage vary widely depending on the type and age of a unit, the size of a home, how well air conditioners are maintained and many other factors. Air conditioners work similarly to refrigerators. Evaporator and condenser coils either distribute cool air into the home or release hot air outdoors. When an air conditioner is running, a great deal of heat can be expelled outdoors. Air conditioners use pumps known as compressors to transfer heat between these components.

Refrigerant fluid is pumped through the tubing and fins surrounding the evaporator and condenser coils. When the fluid reaches the indoor coil, it evaporates, taking heat with it and cooling the air that will be pumped inside. The pump then moves the gaseous refrigerant over to the outdoor coil where it condenses, transferring that heat to the air that will be expelled from the building. Compressors, fans and additional components of air conditioning systems require a lot of energy and power.

Reducing reliance on air conditioning can lower energy bills and benefit the environment. Before turning on your air conditioning unit this summer, consider these cooling tips.

* Use cool water. Run your hands, head and feet under cold water. This will cool down the blood in key pressure points of the body and keep you feeling cool for an hour or more.

* Run fans in a counter-clockwise position. Ceiling fans come equipped with a switch that enables you to change the blades' spinning direction. Counter-clockwise will draw the cooler air up from the floor and distribute it throughout the room.

* Dress sparingly. While in the comfort of home, wear minimal clothing to remain cooler. Sleep in less clothing and remove covers if you're finding it difficult to get a

good night's rest.

* Change your home's color scheme. A light-colored roof and siding will help reflect the sun's rays rather than absorb them. This can make a home considerably cooler.

* Plant shade trees. Trees can stop sunlight from baking a home or backyard. Trees also absorb and sequester carbon dioxide emissions, which makes them beneficial to the environment for a variety of reasons.

* Open windows and doors at night. Open windows to allow cool nighttime air to enter. Open interior doors (including closets) to allow trapped, hot air to be released. This may help cool the home down a few degrees.

* Avoid steam and heat-producing appliances. Dishwashers, ovens and hot showers can add extra heat to an already warm home. Wait until the evening before running appliances. Stick to cool showers and cook outdoors if possible.

- * Insulate your home. A home that has a well-insulated attic and walls will keep the heat out of the house during the hotter months of the year.

Air conditioning systems use a great deal of energy, but eco-conscious homeowners can explore other methods of keeping cool to help lessen their reliance on air conditioners this year.



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Break Ground With The Right Tools

The right tools for the job can be the difference between an interminable landscaping project and one that goes smoothly and efficiently. Aspiring landscapers probably have a few shovels and rakes hanging in their garages and sheds for basic landscaping work. But while such tools are effective for certain projects, when it comes to churning soil for garden beds or digging holes for outdoor structures, additional tools come in handy. It may be well worth a trip to a nearby home center to purchase or rent one of these tools ideal for breaking ground.

ROTOTILLER: A rototiller, sometimes called just a "tiller," is a powered garden tool designed to loosen soil prior to planting. A rototiller also can help aerate soil during the growing season. Because they reduce the need for

manual spade digging or hoeing, tillers can be useful landscaping tools, particularly for homeowners who want to work efficiently. Rototillers will break through tough soil and any plant roots. They come in a variety of sizes, and it's best to match the tool to the size of the job. Many homeowners can get by with smaller, less powerful models, especially if the tiller is only necessary at the beginning of planting season. Professional landscapers or those with large swatches of property may benefit from larger models.

AUGER: Augers, both mechanical and manual, are essentially large drill bits that help move materials from one location to another. Augers are typically used to cut holes in landscapes, and they are good for post-hole drilling, which is part of the process of installing

deck footings, fencing posts or other structures. Augers come in a variety of sizes, and homeowners can choose how much power they prefer. Augers can be heavy and cumbersome, and many do-it-yourselfers will find that one-person augers are more than adequate for their projects. Augers dig deep holes, so it is always smart to have the property surveyed prior to use. This way pipes, gas lines, buried electrical lines, and any other obstructions are clearly identified prior to drilling.

CULTIVATOR: Cultivators are similar to tillers in that they loosen soil. Cultivators are effective during the growth period of plants, when they can be used to aerate the soil and remove weeds. Cultivators come in hand-held versions and push models, and some are even motor-

ized. Cultivators get close to plants to remove weeds without disturbing the plant. They also are used to stir in compost or fertilizer. While many people think cultivators and tillers are the same, that is not the case. The former is less powerful and will mix the soil or stir up the top layer, while the latter can break up moderately hard ground and loosen firm soil. When using any tools around the garden, wear the proper protection. This includes devices to protect hearing when power tools are in use as well as gloves and safety goggles. Tillers, augers and cultivators have the potential to toss soil and rocks into the air, so make sure others keep their distance while work is in progress. Proper tools can churn up soil in a short amount of time to make landscaping projects that much easier.


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