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Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT

MASTER GARDENER SHARES TIPS FOR A FLOURISHING SPRING!

JACK SILBERBERG
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

For many Lacledeans, fall is a time of harvest, flannels and gourds. For the green thumb of us, autumn can too be a time of reflection, preparation and action in their gardens.

Master Gardener Teresa Sugden advised the Record on how best to utilize the incoming fall and winter to prepare readers' gardens for the spring. Laclede's Master Gardeners are volunteers trained by the MU Extension for the purposes of volunteering and spreading the knowledge learned in their program.

"This is my sixth year," Sugden said of her time with MU's program.

To plan and keep track of the various aspects of one's garden, Sugden encourages a regularly used garden map. She further organized fall gardening into a distinct checklist to take care of as the season progresses.

Weeding one's garden is an important part of one's fall

gardening schedule. Important also is removing diseased tissue from one's plants to increase its survival chances for the spring. While weeding and removing, gardeners should collect any seeds they find and distribute them how they see fit.

Gardeners can dig up bulb plants, which don't do well in colder weather, and store them for spring in boxes located in slightly humid areas. Too humid a space, Sugden reminded, will increase their chances of rotting.

To prevent one's perennials from outgrowing their space, Sugden suggests fall is the time to divide these plants and replant them elsewhere or otherwise redistribute them.

Fall is also the time to remove annuals from

the garden, and Sugden says that many can be transferred for a slightly less vibrant stint indoors. After the winter, they can be brought back outside.

Autumn is also the season to amend one's soil if it is not conducive to plants that have a hard time growing in Missouri's earth. Native plants like the state's wildflowers have an extensive root system and have an easier time of growing in the heavy soil.

To lighten soil, Sugden suggests adding aged manure, compost, and perhaps a little, not too much, sand to the mix. Too much sand, she says, can turn the soil concrete-like when water is added in.

"Fall is the best



The results of the Gardeners' June community project at the Lebanon Laclede County Library. The area's Master Gardeners are volunteers trained by the MU Extension.

time to amend soil," said Sugden. Gardeners can also take the step of getting their soil tested, which will tell them the characteristics of their soil so that they can adjust as needed.

Before the ground freezes, Sugden advises well watering one's garden to ensure that they maintain a stable amount of water throughout the freezing period.

An aspect of Ozark soil Sugden learned the hard way was that its abundance of clay leads to a decreased ability to

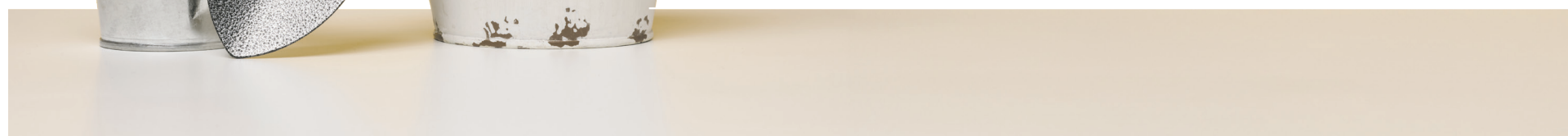
drain its accumulated water. When planting less compatible plants like peach trees, Sugden now digs bowl-like holes and surrounds the plants with more porous soil to increase their chances.

As for fun tricks to try in the fall, Sugden suggests planting tulips pointed side up in a pot of soil, burying it for six to eight weeks, digging the pot back up and transferring it inside to watching them bloom shortly thereafter.

For more resources, Sugden suggests reach-

ing out to the Master Gardeners through their MU Extension page. The groups volunteering, such as a June project to renovate a garden at the Lebanon-Laclede County Library, helps the MU Extension to research further gardening developments.

"The mission's just, 'help others learn how to grow,'" said Sugden.



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PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR POPULAR RENOVATION PROJECTS

Renovations help homeowners customize their homes to align with their needs and wants. Remodeling may be necessary to replace outdated fixtures and features, address mistakes previous homeowners may have made, or to make a home more functional.

Homeowners often find it beneficial to hire professional contractors when they have work to be done around the house to ensure the job gets done to code and to their satisfaction. Timelines for home remodeling projects vary depending on a number of variables, including the size of a crew as well as the scope of the project.

Once a project commences, the timeline can feel endless. The following are estimates of timelines for top remodeling projects to give homeowners an idea of how long their renovation projects may last,

- Kitchen: There are a lot of moving parts to a kitchen renovation, involving the services of electricians, plumbers, structural experts, and even interior design professionals. Not to mention the needs of craftspeople who can make custom cabinetry and countertops. Kitchen remodels can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks.

- Bathroom: The process of a bathroom renovation typically involves demolishing the old bathroom, removing old fixtures and starting from the ground up. As with a kitchen remodel, bathroom jobs require the services of different professionals. That is why homeowners can expect three to 10 weeks for a bathroom, depending on the scope of the project.

- Finishing a basement: Finishing a basement can add valuable living space to a home. Establishing a home the-



ater space or man cave may require installing framing, insulation, utilities, drywall, flooring, and any additional needs if the finished basement will have a bathroom or necessitate additional plumbing. A finished

basement project can last one to two months. But the good news is that typically the rest of the house is livable while the work is being done, so residents will not be disrupted.

- Whole home re-

model: Hogan Design & Construction says that a whole house remodeling project can take anywhere from 16 weeks to 24 weeks. More involved projects can take longer.

Remodeling a home often involves a consid-

erable investment of time and money. Knowing how long a homeowner will be inconvenienced by the work can help the household plan accordingly.

THE MOST POPULAR ROOMS TO REMODEL

Home improvement trends come and go. In a testament to that reality, the wildly popular open floor plan concepts that have dominated homeowners' desires over the last decade-plus could be falling out of favor, a shift that Rachel Stults of Realtor.com linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in a 2023 interview with Business Insider. Stults noted open floor plans will like-

ly exhibit some measure of staying power, but linked the shift toward more traditional layouts to COVID lockdowns and the desire for more privacy among residents.

The shift away from open floor plans is a testament to the fleeting nature of home renovation trends. But trends still deserve a place at the table among real estate investors and homeown-

ers who want to renovate their homes with an eye on projects that could be most appealing to prospective buyers. As homeowners balance their own preferences with those that might help them sell their homes down the road, they can consider this list of the most popular rooms to renovate, courtesy of the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research.

1. Kitchen
2. Guest bathroom
3. Primary bathroom
4. Living room
5. Guest bedroom
6. Primary bedroom
7. Laundry room
8. Closet

9. Dining room
10. Home office

When considering renovating these or other rooms, homeowners should know that Houzz researchers found that the median spend increased

for most interior room upgrades compared to the previous year. However, the median cost to upgrade living rooms and home offices remained unchanged.

DID-YOU-KNOW?

Homeowners with an eye on home improvement projects should know that kitchens and bathrooms tend to be the most costly rooms to renovate. An affiliate of the National Kitchen and Bath Association told Architectural Digest in 2023 that kitchens and bathrooms require the most labor-intensive renovations, which contributes significantly to the high costs of such projects. Labor is indeed a significant cost when renovating a home, as the Construction Labor Market Analyzer indicates labor cost percentages in construction are between 20 and 40 percent of the total budget of a given project. The final cost of any renovation project will depend on a host of variables unique to each home, including the square footage of the room being remodeled and the materials homeowners choose. However, homeowners looking for less costly renovations may want to consider revamping their dining rooms and closets, each of which are projects that can make a difference and tend to require a less significant financial commitment than projects like kitchen and bath remodels.



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TRANSFORM A PLAYROOM INTO A SPACE THAT GROWS WITH THE FAMILY

Parents typically make certain changes around a home to ensure it's accommodating to children. Childproofing is a necessity, but entire rooms also may be transformed with children's enjoyment and well-being in mind.

It's common for homeowners to set aside rooms for children to play and explore. These playrooms may initially feature infant swings and bouncers, and eventually start to accumulate the toys that kids receive on holidays and birthdays. Easels, building block sets, puzzles, video games, books, and so much more fill these playrooms where young children spend the majority of their time engrossed in imaginative play. But as children grow, playrooms may no longer be necessary. Homeowners can ensure these rooms evolve with the family, and here are a few ways to do just that.

Make it a home theater/gaming room

The National Institutes of Health says children

between the ages of eight and 17 spend an average of 1.5 to 2 hours playing video games each day. It's important for parents to monitor their children's gaming, particularly when kids participate in social platform games that involve people with an internet connection chatting and working together. One way to do so is to locate the gaming setup in a central location, like a home theater room.

Establish a hobby space

Trade in kids' toys for "toys" that everyone in the family will enjoy. Turn the room into one where family members can explore their passions. This may include scrapbooking, painting, yarn crafts, collecting, photography, and more.

Create a quiet learning spot

As children grow up, they may need to spend more time studying. Transforming a playroom into a library or a study space can provide



that out-of-the-way spot to get homework and studying done. Adults in the home also can use it for reading, paying the bills or any other task that requires concentration and quiet.

Build a home gym

If the space is large enough, bring in some workout equipment and

make the play space one that encourages exercise and fitness. You may not even need large equipment and can utilize interlocking foam tiles that already may be in the playroom. With some free weights, resistance bands and even your own body weight, you can perform a number of beneficial exercises.

Expand your living space

If the playroom currently abuts another room that can use some more real estate but is separated by a wall, take down the wall to increase the square footage.

Set it aside for guests

Clean out the toys and bring in a bed and night-

stand. Now you'll have a dedicated spot for overnight guests to stay, or a room that visiting older children (and eventually grandchildren) can call their own.

Playrooms are much-used areas when children are young. These rooms can evolve as kids get older and families' needs change.



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PROTECT PETS BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOME

Newly adopted pets waste little time becoming beloved members of a household. But much like young children, pets are a significant responsibility, and they rely on their human caretakers to ensure their safety.

Pets are susceptible to illness and injury just like their human companions. The Pet Poison Hotline reported a 51 percent increase in the volume of calls between 2020 and 2021. Banfield Pet Hospitals also saw about half a million more pet visits in 2020 than in 2019. Furthermore, Dogster reports that 47 percent of pet owners had to deal with a serious medical issue or took their pets to emergency care in 2021.

Keeping cherished pets safe in and around a home is no small task. But with some diligence, it is possible to ensure health and happiness for companion animals. Follow these tips, courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Old Farm Veterinary Hospital and Security.org.

- Consider an indoor and outdoor security camera system. Having eyes on pets while you're



away from home enables a quick response should something happen.

- Avoid leaving pet food outdoors overnight. Dog and cat foods can attract other animals, such as bears, raccoons, foxes, and opossums, depending on where you live. Wild animals grow

accustomed to receiving easy meals and this could decrease their trepidation about being around a home or yard. Run-ins between your pets and wild animals should be avoided at all costs.

- Skip the retractable leash. Walking a pet on a non-retractable leash

allows better control of the pet in the event of an encounter with a person or another animal.

- Be cautious with chemicals. Carefully consider any chemicals you use in your yard, including pesticides and weed killers, as well as any cleaning products used

indoors. Pets can ingest or inhale these products and get sick.

- Pick up potential choking hazards. String, small pieces of toys, raw-hide bone fragments, and other items can be choking hazards to pets. Be diligent about removing these items from the floor

so that pets will not swallow them.

- Tap on your car hood. Families who allow their cats outdoor access should thump on the car hood when it is cold outside, as sometimes cats take shelter near a warm engine block. Cats can become injured if you start the car while they are under the hood.

- Stay up-to-date on vaccinations. Whether pets never step outdoors or have free rein, always vaccinate companion animals against common parasites and other pests.

- Microchip your pets. Microchips not only protect pets should they get lost, but they also can help track down animals that may have been stolen. Remember to keep microchip data current to ensure a swift recovery.

- Keep foods and medicines out of reach. Many human foods can be toxic to pets, as can medications that are kept in a home. Pets can be curious and easy access to these items may make them quite ill.

Pets need their owners to take key steps to safeguard their well-being.

BE MINDFUL OF PETS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The magic and wonder of the holiday season can be enthralling for people of all ages. There is so much to see and do during the holiday

season, making it easy to forge lasting memories.

With so much to do in December, life at home can sometimes feel a little hectic, especially for the

family pet. Although the holidays can be exciting, the season can induce anxiety in pets. Pets like cats and dogs often thrive on routine and familiari-

ty. Switch up that routine and various behavioral issues can arise, including having accidents in the home. Pets also may become more destructive, chewing or clawing at items to release pent-up tension and anxiety. Pet owners who want the season to be festive for their pets can consider the following strategies.

- Gradually introduce new items. Gradually decorate living spaces so pets can grow acclimated to their newly decorated environs. Add a few pieces to rooms each day until you finally have all of your decorations out for display. This way pets can sniff around the decorations and realize they do not pose a threat.

- Keep familiar pet belongings. Try not to upset the apple cart too much in regard to pets' cherished possessions. For example,

do not move the dog bed from the living room and place the Christmas tree in its place. Pets need that familiarity and having some of their items with familiar smells can make for a smooth adjustment to holiday decorations.

- Designate a pet-safe zone. If you will be inviting people over during the holidays, set aside a room for pets so they can be in relative quiet away from boisterous crowds. Locking pets away also helps prevent their escape from the home as guests come and go.

- Secure the tree and other decorations. Pets are often curious about new things, and they may climb or paw at items to try to understand them better. Decorative items may end up being knocked over by curious pets. Secure the tree using a string and an anchor to

the ceiling or wall like you might secure a large screen TV to prevent it from tipping over. Keep breakable ornaments and other trinkets behind display cases or beyond the reach of pets.

- Discourage pets from using decorations as toys. Reprimand pets or move them away from holiday decor so they don't get the idea that these items are now their toys.

- Be careful with holiday foods. Holiday foods and desserts are rich and full of ingredients that may not be healthy for pets. Keep a secure lid on trash pails and remind holiday guests that pets should not be fed table scraps.

Pets may need some time to adjust to the changes that come with holiday decorating and celebrating to keep them happy and safe.



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4 MUST-KNOWS FOR KITCHEN RENOVATIONS



Kitchens are often described as the most popular room in a home, and that's not mere conjecture. A 2022 survey from House Digest asked participants to identify the room they consider most important in their homes, and roughly 41 percent chose the kitchen.

Residents tend to congregate in kitchens in the morning and then again in the evening when meals are prepared and, in homes without formal dining rooms, eaten. With so much time spent in the kitchen, it's no wonder that the 2022 U.S. Houzz & Home Study: Renovation Trends found kitchens to be the most popular interior room to upgrade. With so many people interested in kitchen renovations, the following are four things homeowners should know about these popular improvement projects.

1. Expect to spend some money. Most home improvement projects require a significant financial investment, but kitchen renovations are among the more expensive undertakings. The overall cost of a project will depend on a host of variables unique to each home, including homeowners' preferenc-

es, but HomeAdvisor estimated the average kitchen remodel in 2023 cost between \$14,611 and \$41,432. Homeowners considering an upscale kitchen remodel may receive six figure estimates for such projects.

2. Expect a good return on investment. If sticker shock settles in when receiving an initial kitchen remodel estimate, perhaps it can help homeowners to know that such a project may provide a strong return on investment (ROI). According to Remodeling magazine's "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," a minor kitchen remodel provides a 96 percent ROI. A major kitchen remodel mid-range (49 percent) and a major kitchen remodel upscale (38 percent) did not provide as notable a ROI.

3. Expect the project to take some time. Kitchens are large rooms with a lot of components, so renovating these spaces can take some time. Estimates vary depending on the size of the room, the scale of the remodel and the materials chosen, but Angi reports a kitchen remodel for most homes takes six weeks to four months. That's a sizable window, and it reflects

the likelihood that unforeseen issues like supply chain interruptions or the discovery of mold will arise at some point during the renovation. Though it's impossible to determine precisely how long a project will take before it begins, homeowners renovating their kitchens may want to plan for the project to take two months if not longer.

4. Expect to use your kitchen during the renovation. If the timeline of a renovation is scary, homeowners should know they will likely be able to use their kitchen even after the project begins. Though the room might not remain a popular gathering space once the work starts, Angi notes kitchens are typically out of commission for around six weeks during a renovation. That still requires some pre-planning in relation to meals, but it also suggests homeowners won't be without a kitchen for months on end.

Kitchen renovations are popular projects. Homeowners who know what to expect before such projects commence can make it through a renovation more smoothly.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT GARAGE REMODELS

Homeowners tend to want to maximize all of the space they have in their homes. For some this may involve turning a garage from a utilitarian space into one that serves multiple purposes.

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage remodels can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office. Prior to beginning a garage remodel, homeowners may have some common questions about the process.

How much does the renovation cost?

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel, but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

Will I recoup the investment?

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average

garage conversion provides an 80 percent return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

How can I upgrade the flooring?

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors. Although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.

Can I have the best of both worlds?

Sometimes a garage needs to serve many purposes. Lofting the garage means a homeowner can still park cars or utilize the lower space as a living area, all the while items are stored overhead. Some flip this design scenario and have the loft area as a bedroom or finished living space, while the lower portion remains a traditional garage area. Another thought is to finish only a portion of the garage. This works well for two- or three-car garages where there will be room to park a car and the remainder will serve another purpose.

What are other ways to improve the garage?

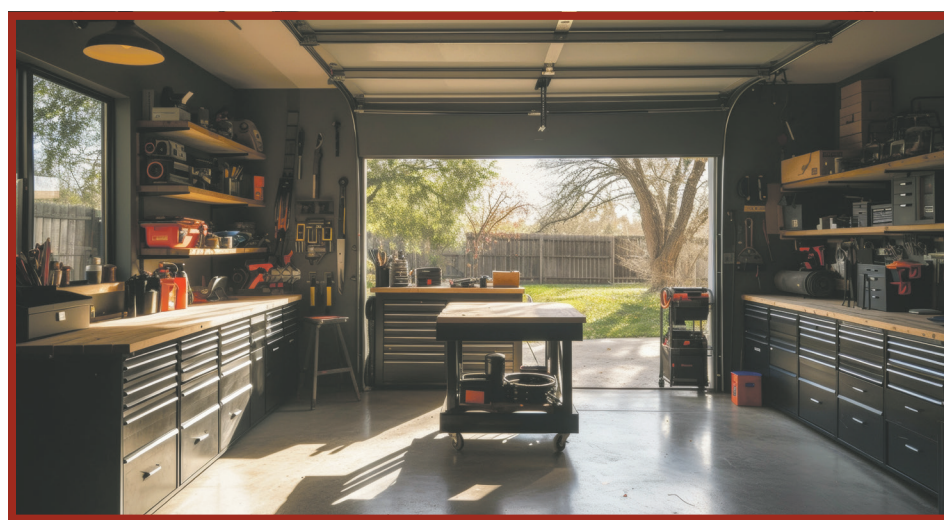
Installing more windows or improving on the lighting in the garage can be important. The garage

improvement experts at Danley's say window installation enables people to circulate air in the garage without having to open the garage door. Improving the lighting means the garage can still be enjoyed or utilized after dark. Spread out lighting in the garage, and use a combination of overhead and task lighting just as one would in the home itself.

How do I deter bugs or other pests from entering?

Insects often want to hunker down in garages, and they may find it easy to get inside a garage. Keeping the garage clean and organized is the best way to deter pests and to spot infestations before they become problematic, indicates Mosquito Joe pest control company. Reducing water and humidity in the space, weatherproofing at the base of the garage door and other entry spots and utilizing insect repellents to make the garage less hospitable also can decrease the risk of insect infestation.

Remodeling a garage can add value and plenty of usable space to a home. Whether a garage houses cars or hosts neighborhood game night, a garage renovation can be well worth the investment.



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DINING ROOM CONVERSION IDEAS FOR A FRESH NEW LOOK



DID-YOU-KNOW?

Planning plays an integral role in the home improvement process, and it's perhaps a more time-consuming component of renovations than homeowners realize. According to the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research, homeowners spent almost twice as much time planning their kitchen renovations in 2023 as it took for the projects to be completed. The researchers behind the report found that the average time spent planning a kitchen renovation in 2023 was 9.6 months, while the building took 5.1 months. Additional projects featured a similar disparity between the time to plan and the time to build. For example, homeowners spent 8.1 months planning living room renovations, which then took an additional 4.1 months to complete. Even smaller projects like closet renovations required ample planning (6.5 months) that more than doubled the time required to complete the project (3.1 months).

Many homeowners can undoubtedly take a stroll through their homes and find at least one space that could be repurposed to provide more functionality. Real estate professionals know that such sentiments are not uncommon, and many point to formal dining rooms as spaces that have fallen out of favor in recent years.

Formal dining rooms were once common in newly built homes, but the pivot toward open concept floor plans left it up to homeowners to decide if such spaces were for them. In a 2017 book published by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, authors used cameras to monitor life in many people's homes, including how they used each room. The authors concluded that formal dining rooms were rarely used for eating. If that sounds a lot like home to many current homeowners, then it might be time to consider some ideas to convert formal dining rooms to make these spaces more functional.

• Home office: Though the percentage of professionals working remotely has dipped considerably since the end of the pandemic, hybrid working is perhaps among the more lasting work-related by-products of COVID-19. In its Global State of Remote and Hybrid study published in early 2024, the career networking

resource LinkedIn noted that 13 percent of jobs posted to the platform were for hybrid positions. That means millions of workers can still utilize an accommodating home office space. A formal dining room can be converted to provide such a space, and the good news is that such a conversion need not require extensive renovations. A fresh coat of paint, an additional outlet or two and perhaps a new overhead lighting fixture can instantly transform the space at minimal cost.

• Reading room/library: Homeowners who dream of having a designated space for quiet reading can convert a little-used formal dining room into a space to curl up with a good book. Some comfortable armchairs, built-in bookshelves and perhaps an expanded floor-to-ceiling window overlooking a side or backyard can help homeowners create a home library that will be the envy of any avid reader.

• Studio space: If there's a resident yogi and/or artist living under the roof, then converting a dining room into a yoga or art studio, or perhaps even a hybrid space for those who enjoy both activities, is a no-brainer. A yoga studio conversion may not require as much investment as a kitchen overhaul or bathroom renovation, but an ideal

home yoga space requires more than a mat and room to stretch. The Yogapreneur Collective notes that flooring in a yoga studio should be non-slip, easily cleaned, durable, sound-absorbing, and low maintenance. The Yogapreneur Collective asserts that different flooring materials may be ideal for certain types of yoga, noting that cork flooring is a go-to choice for professional studios that offer hot yoga. Similarly, the right flooring for an art studio may depend on the artist's preferred medium, whether it's oil painting, arts and crafts or another artistic pursuit. But any artist knows that a floor that's easy to clean is perhaps best for a home art studio.

• Additional ideas: Some additional ideas to repurpose a dining room include a gaming room for avid gamers, a memorabilia showcase for collectors or a pantry for foodies who love to cook but need some extra space to store ingredients and tools of the trade.

If a formal dining room is only utilized on occasion, homeowners may want to consider the many ways to convert such spaces into areas that are more usable every day.

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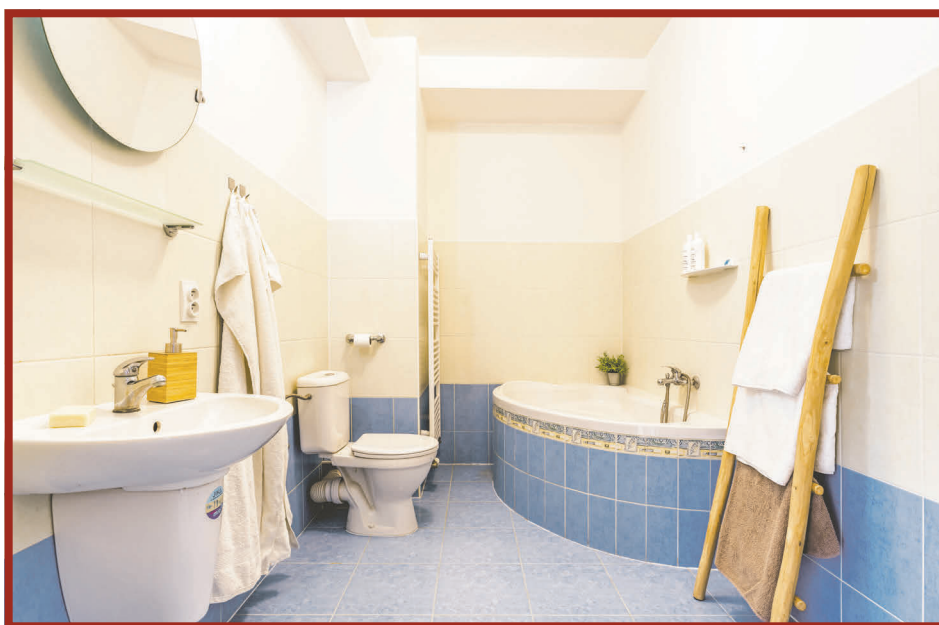
Homeowners know that the work involved to maintain a home is never done. The end of one project has a tendency to roll into the planning of another, and so it goes for years on end.

Fortunate are the homeowners who get to choose when to begin a renovation project, but it's far more common that homeowners spot an issue and then realize it's time to renovate. When it comes to bathrooms, which can be among the more expensive spaces to renovate in a home, homeowners can keep an eye out for various signs suggesting the room needs a remodel.

- **Mold and mildew:** Mold and mildew is perhaps the most glaring sign a bathroom needs to be renovated or remodeled. Mold and mildew pose a notable threat to human health, as the United States Environ-

mental Protection Agency reports that molds can cause allergic reactions. Individuals sensitive to mold may develop symptoms that mimic reactions to outdoor allergens like pollen, including sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and dermatitis (skin rash). Mold also can trigger asthma attacks in people allergic to mold who have the condition. Mold can grow in poorly ventilated bathrooms, such as those without a fan or ones in which fans are not working properly. Mold and mildew will return if it's merely scrubbed away, so the underlying cause of mold must be addressed to prevent its return.

- **Small signs of fading:** Stains, peeling paint, cracked paint, and gaps in grout are small signs of fading that indicate a bathroom is in need of renovation if not a complete remodel. These



issues also can serve as warning signs of larger issues, such as water issues and structural problems, so they should not be merely written off as minor problems or eyesores.

- **Rising water bills:** Some signs a bathroom could use a little TLC are not necessarily confined to the room itself.

If water bills are rising significantly and do not align with price increases or an uptick in water consumption, homeowners may have leaking pipes. Such pipes might be beneath a bathroom sink or behind tiled walls. Discoloration on the walls, peeling paint or wallpaper and/or a musty

odor may indicate leaks inside a bathroom wall. If coupled with rising water bills, these signs could be indicative of a significant issue that requires immediate attention.

- **Issues with tiles:** Cracked or damaged tiles in the shower and bathtub or even on the floor are unsightly and also pose

a safety hazard. Cracked floor tiles can lead to slips and falls, which can be especially harmful to older residents. And cracked tiles within the shower and tub area can indicate water problems behind the walls or general disrepair. Such issues should be addressed before they escalate into something larger.

- **A dated vibe:** Of course, some issues affecting a bathroom are not necessarily health or safety hazards but more an affront to homeowners' grasp of current styles and trends. If walking into a bathroom unintentionally feels like stepping backward into a bygone era, then it's probably time to consider a renovation or remodeling job.

Various signs can indicate to homeowners it's time to consider a bathroom renovation.

WHAT THINGS OFTEN DELAY PROJECT TIMELINES?

Even with the best intentions and services of qualified contractors and crews, timelines for home renovation projects can be prolonged due to various circumstances. Each project is unique and contractors cannot predict the circumstances they will encounter once work is started. Various factors can affect the overall timeline of a project.

- **Weather can impact** the ability to pour foundations, do housing framing, install Belgium block pavers, or tend to roofing projects.

- **The temperature outdoors and inside** can affect paint drying times or how long it takes asphalt to cure.

- **Getting a permit** for work isn't always cut and dry. There may be delays

at the permit office that can affect the remodeling process. Also, inspectors have to check that work is being done correctly, and contractors can be at the mercy of inspectors' schedules.

- **Mold, water damage, insect infestation, and other issues** may only become apparent once demolition begins. These issues often cannot

be ignored and must be addressed before work on the actual remodel can continue.

- **Changes in design** after an initial plan has been established can throw off the timeline, as it may require ordering new supplies or getting new architectural drawings.

- **Supply chain issues** became commonplace

during the global pandemic, and building materials still may be affected. A project can be delayed by certain materials being backordered or no longer available.

- **Some homeowners** have to interview and hire new contractors if theirs fails to deliver on promises or is a no-show altogether.

- **Homeowners whose**

loans or other funding fall through may have to delay further work until they are able to pay for the work at hand.

These are a few situations that can waylay a home renovation project. Individuals need to remain patient whenever they begin a remodeling project.

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TIPS TO MAKE A HOME LESS VULNERABLE TO CRIMINALS

Property crimes are perhaps more common than people may realize. Data from the Council on Criminal Justice indicates residential burglaries declined by 26 percent in 2023 compared to 2019. However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicates there were nearly seven million property-related crimes committed in 2019, which means there were still more than five million such crimes committed in 2023.

Homeowners recognize the importance of protecting themselves, their loved ones and their valuables. Locking doors at night is one measure of protection anyone can employ, but there's a host of additional steps individuals can take to make their homes less vulnerable to criminals.

- Embrace some simple solutions. The Insurance Information Institute recommends utilizing simple security devices such as padlocks, door and window locks, grates, bars, and bolts. These devices may not prevent burglars from entering a home, but they can increase the amount of time it takes criminals to gain access. That can be enough to discourage criminals and also provide extra time for homeowners and neigh-

bors to see and report suspicious individuals lurking around homes.

- Periodically assess existing security devices. Locks, security cameras and additional devices are effective deterrents, but only if they're working properly. It's easy to overlook security devices, but routine inspections can ensure they continue to serve as a security blanket between residents and criminals.

- Install a burglar alarm. Burglar alarms can be effective deterrents and even help homeowners save money on their insurance policies. The Electronic Security Association estimates that home alarm systems can save homeowners as much as 20 percent on their insurance policies. Such savings can offset the cost to purchase and install burglar alarms. Homeowners who doubt the efficacy of burglar alarms as a crime deterrent should know that a study from researchers at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte examining the habits of burglars found that 60 percent decided against burglarizing properties they learned had burglar alarms.

- Trim privacy trees and shrubs around the perimeter of your home.

Privacy trees and shrubs can make it harder for passersby to see into a home from a nearby street or sidewalk. However, such features also can provide hiding space for criminals looking to gain access to a property. Routinely trim trees and shrubs near doors and windows so they are not inadvertently providing cover for criminals.

- Light up the outside. Exterior lighting is wildly popular among homeowners for its aesthetic appeal. But lights around walkways and throughout a landscape also illuminate the exterior of a home, making it harder for criminals to get around without being seen. Spotlights and motion-detection lights can alert homeowners if someone is outside, and such lighting also can make it easier to spot criminals on exterior cameras, which can deter burglars.

There's no shortage of ways for homeowners to make their properties less vulnerable to criminals.

DON'T LET FALL LEAVES CLOG YOUR GUTTERS

STEVE SMITH
EDITOR@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Fall is the time when leaves come off of trees and clog up gutters. But maintenance for preventing water damage is crucial year-round, according to Steven Miller of Miller Seamless Gut-tering.

"Water mitigation for gutters is very important," Miller said. "Your home is your most important and valuable investment. If you don't have proper gutter function, it will damage your house. Not only will leaves fill up and cause it to not work properly, but it can also leak back and rot your fascia board."

He said there are preventative measures that can be done for people who don't have time for extensive maintenance, including gutter guards.

"There are products out there that prevent leaves and stuff from going in your gutters," he said. "So if a person doesn't have time to clean their gutters every three months or so, it wouldn't be a bad investment for them to get some kind of protection over their gutters where they don't have to worry about that issue any more."

Miller said fall is probably the most important time for gutter maintenance, but summer storms can also fill them with leaves.

"It's really something a person should do three times a year," he said. "To make sure everything's clean and everything's functioning. It never hurts to have a professional installer come in and make sure that everything's

sloped right. They say that you're supposed to re-slope your gutters every 10 years because they get out of slope from leaves and other things pushing them down.

The most important thing people can do in the fall is to make sure their gutters are clean, Miller said.

"Dirty gutters will cause a lot more issues than what they think," he said.

Miller said it is better to have gutters than not have any protection from water.

"But if you're not keeping them clean, it's like you don't even have them," he said. "The purpose for gutters is water mitigation, to get the water as far from your house as possible because it can cause erosion and foundation issues."



Pictured: Steven Miller

LCR Photo / Steve Smith



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Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT

5 RENOVATIONS THAT PROVIDE A STRONG RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Renovations that make homeowners and residents of a home happy are always worth the investment. Though it's certainly true that projects that create more functional, usable space and add comfort and convenience are worth the price, such renovations are even more beneficial if they provide a good return on homeowners' financial investment. Returns are often cashed in when homeowners put their homes up for sale, and each year Remodeling magazine releases its "Cost vs. Value Report," which considers a wealth of data across the United States to determine which renovations return the highest percentage of homeowners' financial investment. According to the "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," the following are five projects that provide a strong return on investment (ROI).

1. Garage door replacement: The average job cost for this project is slightly more than \$4,500 but the project is valued

at \$8,751, providing an especially high 194 percent ROI.

2. Steel door replacement: Remodeling magazine notes that a steel entry door replacement is worth double what it was worth in 2023. This project offers a 188 percent ROI on an average investment of \$2,355.

3. Manufactured stone veneer: A manufactured stone veneer is a man-made product that appears as if it's natural stone. Many homeowners prefer manufactured stone veneer to natural stone because of the price, as the former is less expensive and easier to install, which means lower labor costs as well. The comparatively low cost of manufactured stone veneer is perhaps one reason why it averages a roughly 153 percent ROI on an average cost of just more than \$11,000.

4. Grand entrance up-scale (fiberglass): Few things are as awe-inspiring as an impressive entryway, and upgrading to a grand fiberglass en-



trance door provides a 97 percent ROI. Components of these entryways can vary, but Remodeling magazine notes the project may entail removing an existing entry door and cutting and reframing the opening for a larger with dual sidelights.

5. Minor kitchen remodel: According to

the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research, kitchens were the most popular rooms to renovate in 2023. There's no denying the appeal of a newly renovated kitchen, and homeowners considering such a project may be happy to learn that a minor kitchen remodel

that costs an average of around \$27,000 provides a 96 percent ROI. Bankrate.com notes that minor kitchen remodels typically keep the current kitchen design, size and layout intact, but these projects may involve painting walls, refreshing backsplash, replacing lighting and plumbing fixtures,

and changing cabinet hardware and facades.

Home renovations that provide a significant ROI can make homeowners happy once a project is completed and even happier when the day comes to put a home up for sale.

SAFETY MEASURES TO CONSIDER BEFORE OFFERING A PROPERTY AS A VACATION RENTAL



Vacations have changed dramatically over the last several decades. Social media has opened doors to new places, as millions of people are inspired to visit locales they first caught sight of via platforms like Instagram. But it's not just where people are going that has changed, but where they're laying their heads when they arrive at their destinations.

The online marketplace for vacation rentals has no shortage of inventory, as popular websites such as Vrbo and Airbnb continue to attract property owners and renters alike. Property owners may want to consider using a home or apartment to generate some extra money. According to Alltherooms.com, the average annual host earnings on Airbnb in North America exceeded \$41,000 in 2021. That income is notable, and it's undoubtedly one reason

why Airbnb reported adding more than one million active listings in 2023.

Property owners must ponder the pros and cons to listing homes via a vacation rental service. Those that decide to go forward can take the following steps as they prepare to offer their properties as vacation rentals.

- Hire a home inspector. A certified home inspector is typically hired when individuals enter a contract to purchase a home, but these skilled professionals can be just as useful when preparing to offer a property as a rental. Certified, experienced professionals can identify any potential problems or safety issues with a home that could cause trouble when renting a home down the road. Address any safety or structural issues with a property prior to offering it through a rental service.
- Install new safety de-

vices. New smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, locks on exterior doors, and other safety features should be upgraded prior to renting a property. In between each rental, test batteries in alarms and detectors to ensure each device is operating at peak capacity. A new security system with external cameras also can reassure prospective renters that a property is safe. Remote locks that allow for keyless entry to a home is another upgrade that can make it more convenient for hosts and renters to access a property.

- Do your insurance homework. Existing homeowners insurance coverage likely will not apply when renting a home as a vacation property. Prior to listing a property for rent, confirm with your homeowners insurance company the coverage you need to ensure you are protected

when renting a home or apartment. Liability and accidental damage coverage are two of the many variables prospective hosts must consider.

- Keep emergency supplies on site. A fully stocked first aid kit, functioning fire extinguishers (more than one) and a listing of local emergency responder contact information (i.e., police department, fire department, nearest hospital, etc.) should be made readily available to renters. Check supplies before each new group of renters gains access to the property, and restock when necessary.

Renting a property as a vacation home is a great way to generate extra revenue. But prospective hosts must take steps to protect themselves and their guests before renting a home or apartment.

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HEALTH PROBLEMS LINKED TO MOLD EXPOSURE

Mold is a natural part of the environment and can be found growing just about anywhere that moisture and oxygen are present, advises the Environmental Protection Agency. Mold is a fungus that can be helpful because it breaks down dead organic matter. But mold growth indoors can prove problematic, not only to personal living spaces but to one's health.

When mold grows outdoors in the fresh air, exposure to it can be minimal. However, mold growing indoors can cause concentrated conditions that adversely affect indoor air quality and overall health. The Rhode Island Department of Health says exposure to a large number of mold spores may cause symptoms associated with allergies, such as runny nose, watery eyes, headache, fatigue, and sneezing, among others. Exposure to certain molds, such as Stachy-

botrys and Aspergillus, can cause more serious illness because of the mycotoxins these molds produce. Aspergillosis is a fungal lung infection with emerging antimicrobial resistance, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization, the National Academy of Medicine and the National Toxicology Program report that occupants of damp, moldy buildings have an increased risk of respiratory problems. Repeated exposure to mold can lead to asthma, which is a chronic airway disease characterized by inflammation, states the National Institutes of Health. Individuals can experience shortness of breath and airway obstruction from the overproduction of mucus.

Additional conditions also can be attributed to mold. For example, valley fever is linked to the fungus Coccidioides, which



lives in soil in some areas of the southwestern United States. Mucormycosis is a severe but rare fungal infection caused by a group of molds known as mucormycetes, says the CDC. It affects the sinuses or the lungs of people with weakened immune systems.

Though some people who come in contact with

mold will not develop any adverse symptoms, it is still best to address indoor mold problems promptly. These steps can help.

- Use dehumidifiers in damp areas, such as basements.
- Ventilate bathrooms, kitchens and laundry areas.
- Fix any leaks in

pipes, walls or windows promptly.

- Use mold-resistant paint.

• Make sure that clothes dryers and exhaust fans vent to the outdoors rather than an attic or another room.

- Remove mold with mold-killing products. The CDC says mold can be cleaned from hard

surfaces with soap and water or a bleach solution of no more than one cup of household bleach to one gallon of water.

Mold is everywhere in the environment, but prevention of indoor mold growth can help people avoid respiratory issues and other health problems.

RISK FACTORS FOR MOLD INFESTATION IN A HOME

Homeowners know that there's no shortage of work required to maintain a home. Whether it's a renovation project designed to make a home more comfortable or a safety-related remodel, homes require a significant amount of TLC.

Mold remediation falls under the umbrella of safety-related renovations. Various types of mold can grow in a home, and such infestations may develop just about anywhere in a house. According to the Rhode Island Department of Health, exposure to mold can contribute to an array of adverse health consequences, including allergy symptoms such as runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, difficulty breathing, and headache. Prolonged exposure can cause allergic reactions to become more severe.

Various points in a home can be vulnerable to mold infestation. The New York State Department of Health notes that identifying and controlling moisture is the key to preventing mold infestations in a home. Certain points in a home, if left unchecked, are

more likely to promote mold growth than others. As homeowners work to maintain their homes so the environment inside their walls is as comfortable and healthy as possible, they can routinely inspect potential mold infestation points and do their best to keep these areas as free from moisture as possible.

- Roof: A sturdy, leak-free roof can help prevent a buildup of moisture that can contribute to mold growth.

• Indoor plumbing: Check the pipes beneath sinks throughout the home, including those in the kitchen and bathrooms. Homeowners whose washrooms have a slop sink or utility sink should inspect these areas for leaky plumbing as well.

• Outdoor drainage: Maintaining effective outdoor drainage is another way to prevent mold growth in a home. This typically requires maintaining gutters and drains so they do not become clogged during or after rainstorms. Gutter guards can prevent gutters and drains from clogging. Homeowners also



may want to work with a landscaper or landscape architect to ensure soil around the house slopes away from the foundation, which can prevent water from pooling near the walls. When water pools near the walls, this can contribute to foundation problems and make it easier for mold to grow.

• Basements/crawl spaces: Basements and crawl spaces are vulnerable to mold infestations because they tend to be dark and cool, which can contribute to dampness that facilitates mold growth. The Rhode Island Department of Health recommends using a de-

humidifier in basements and crawl spaces.

- Bathrooms: Steam from hot showers also can contribute to mold growth if the bathrooms do not contain exhaust

fans. Such fans can remove excess moisture that makes it easy for mold to grow.

Mold can pose a notable health threat in a home. But homeowners

can keep an eye on various areas of their home and implement measures to keep such spaces dry and less mold-friendly.

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Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT

CREATE A COZY HAVEN: TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR HOME MORE INVITING

The meaning of the term “cozy” varies as it pertains to home decor. For some, cozy may mean intimate spaces with lots of quilts and throws. For others, cozy could indicate bright and airy spaces enhanced by plenty of fresh foliage.

Regardless of how they define cozy, homeowners typically want their homes to be inviting and comfortable. With that in mind, the following are some ways to impart a cozy vibe to any living space.

- Make use of a fireplace. Flames lapping wood (or faux wood in

the event of gas-powered fireplaces) can put anyone in a tranquil state of mind. Fireplaces add instant ambiance and make great places for people to congregate and engage in conversation. During warmer months when the fire isn’t blazing, decorative candles can be lit to mimic the same feel.

- Add texture in the design. Texture can be anything from a raised pattern on wallpaper to a knotty area rug to a mosaic piece of artwork. A home with texture tends to create cozier impressions than one with all sleek and smooth

surfaces.

- Enjoy a soft rug. Although many design experts say hardwood floors or laminate options are easier for allergies and keeping a home clean, a soft rug underfoot can be welcoming. Rather than wall-to-wall carpeting, place area rugs in spots that can use some cozying up, such as beneath beds and even under the dining table.

- Light candles. The warm, flickering light of candles adds cozy vibes in spades. According to The Spruce and Paula Boston, a visual merchandiser for

Festive Lights, candles can be used throughout a home to create instant atmosphere. Exercise caution with candles and fully extinguish them before retiring for the evening.

- Update bedding for the season. Crisp and light cotton and linen are cozy materials when the weather is warm. But when the temperature starts to dip, flannel or jersey bedding makes a bed that much more inviting, says Real Simple.

- Invest in lots of pillows. Pillows can instantly make a spot more cozy, whether it’s the living

room sofa or an outdoor lounging nook. Look for materials that are durable for the space in which they’re being used.

- Think about warm lighting. The transition from incandescent light bulbs to halogen and LED is beneficial from an environmental standpoint. However, LEDs illuminate with a more stark, blue light that can seem clinical in home spaces. Look for bulbs where the “temperature” can be customized. The more the color spectrum leans toward warm light, the more cozy a space will feel. This can

be enhanced by putting some lights on dimmer switches, and toning down the brightness as needed.

- Install a bookshelf. Even for those who are strict devotees of e-readers, a shelf full of actual books interspersed with some well-placed knick-knacks can make a room feel more cozy. Books add texture, the feel of hallowed halls and libraries, and visual appeal.

Making a home more cozy doesn’t have to be complicated. A few easy modifications can improve interior spaces.

TIPS TO TRANSFORM A LIVING ROOM INTO A GO-TO VIEWING SPACE

Watch parties are wildly popular. Whether it’s a gathering for the big game or a group of friends anxious to see the latest episode of a favorite television show, watch parties have become a fun way to enjoy special events with family and friends.

Many bars and restaurants have recognized the popularity of watch parties and looked to capitalize on the trend, particularly for sporting events. Watch parties can make for a fun night out, but homeowners can do much to make their own living room a go-to spot for the next big game or series finale.

- Expand seating space,

if necessary. Of course, guests for the big game or movie night will need a place to sit. Homeowners who love to host can determine their ideal gathering size and then work to ensure their entertaining space has enough seats to accommodate everyone. Multifunctional furniture can help if space is limited. For example, some stools that are typically used as footrests can be repurposed as seats when guests arrive and an upholstered coffee table can provide an additional space for guests to sit. Another option is to work with a contractor to add a built-in window seat or bench beneath a picture

window.

- Convert an existing space into an open floor plan. A 2023 survey from Rocket HomesSM found that more than half of individuals surveyed preferred open layouts to traditional layouts. Open layouts can make living spaces feel more airy and less claustrophobic, and such designs also make it easy to accommodate more guests. Homeowners can speak with a local contractor to determine ways to convert living spaces into open floor plans.

- Invest in your internet. Whereas cable television used to be the go-to option when watching

sports, movies and television at home, streaming platforms have now taken over, as many, including Peacock, Amazon Prime and Netflix, are now even broadcasting National Football League games. Homeowners who want to host watch parties must invest in high-speed internet and perhaps even a new router to ensure games and shows are not interrupted by the dreaded spinning wheel or issues that can arise if internet speeds are slow. If necessary, relocate the router to the living room to reduce the risk of streaming interruptions.

- Reconsider your lighting scheme. If movie nights

or television shows dominate your watch party schedule, some recessed lighting in the living room can reduce glare and reflections on the screen once a movie or show begins. Recessed lighting above a mounted television can illuminate the screen so everyone can see it but won’t appear in the screen and adversely affect what viewers can see.

- Consider upgrading your television and sound. It goes without saying that a television is wildly important when hosting a watch party. The experts at Best Buy note that 8K resolution is the highest resolution available in the

television market. Such devices provide an extraordinary viewing experience, but they also can stretch homeowners’ budgets. A 4K television won’t cost nearly as much, and these devices also provide superior image quality. When a new television is paired with a premium soundbar, viewers can settle in for a memorable game day or movie night experience.

Homeowners can embrace various strategies to make watch parties an extraordinary experience for themselves and their guests.

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