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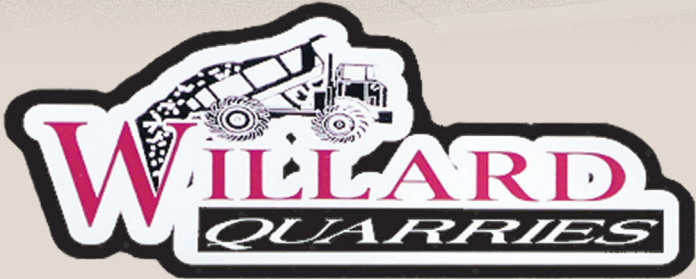
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## Small renovations that make a big impact

Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that’s something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There’s no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment.

- Front door replacement: A new front door

instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

- Lighting addition: Whether a homeowner enlarges a window or adds skylights, natural light can produce incredible results. Investing in new lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.
- Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades: Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for some-

thing a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

- Wood floor restoration: Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.
- Exterior lighting: Lighting isn’t just important inside. A welcoming glow in the yard

is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside the home.

- Staircase renovation: Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs. Tighten shaky railings or replace them while upgrading the stair treads.
- Interior paint: Change the color of walls, doors, cabinets, or even furniture with paint. All

homeowners need is a paint color that inspires them and a little bit of time.

- Replace outlet covers: Upgrade outlet covers with screwless options. Screwless plates for outlets and light switches can make walls look more sleek.
- Entry organizer installation: Banish clutter from the home by catching it at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and functional.
- Carpets cleaning:

Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep cleaning.

Small changes around a home can create a big impact without breaking the bank.

## How to find the right contractor for your next home renovation

Home renovations are significant undertakings. Though some projects require more sizable investments of time and money than others, all merit homeowners’ attention and inspire some excitement when pondering the finished product.

A finished product tends to offer more appeal when the project is overseen and undertaken by a professional contractor. Small projects may be in the wheelhouse of skilled do-it-yourselfers, but most homeowners are best served leaving home renovations to the professionals. Finding the right contractor for a given job is of the utmost importance, and the following are some tips to help homeowners do

just that.

- Secure multiple written estimates. It can be time-consuming to speak to multiple contractors and secure written estimates from each one, but such legwork is well worth the effort if the end result is finding the right contractor. Secure multiple estimates even if the first one provided to you is below budget. Multiple estimates allow homeowners to compare what’s included, and not included, in each one. Some contractors offering low estimates may not include materials costs or additional factors that will increase the price. Others may seem more expensive initially but may prove more affordable than competitors if

their estimates include all of the costs associated with the project. Only a direct comparison of multiple estimates, which should include details specific to the project and an itemized list of what

will be provided and performed by the contractor, can give homeowners an idea of what they’re paying for.

- Stay local when possible. Hiring local contractors is beneficial

for a number of reasons. Hiring locals keeps money in the community and thus supports the local economy. And working with local contractors can make it easier for homeowners to keep lines of communication open. Many projects also require a little post-completion upkeep or even some tweaks, which is more easily accomplished when working with contractors based nearby. And finally, local contractors will be familiar with building codes and other details specific to a given town. That familiarity can ensure a project is done in adherence to codes and not stalled by permit- or inspection-related delays.

- Confirm their insurance. Travelers Insurance

urges homeowners to confirm a contractor is properly insured and bonded prior to signing a contract. Contractors should be willing to provide a certificate of insurance (COI) that indicates their provider, policy number and coverage limits. Travelers also notes homeowners can contact insurers directly to verify coverage and ensure the policy is current. Never hire a contractor who is uninsured or unwilling to provide proof of insurance.

Hiring a contractor to perform a home renovation may be a leap of faith, but homeowners can take steps to ensure they find the right professional for the job.







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# Lebanon residents looking to do some spring cleaning may be able to get some assistance from the city

## LCR STAFF

The city offers Yard Debris Collection programs free to residents of Laclede County.

The city's yard debris drop-off is located at the Public Works Facility, 1401 West Commercial Street.

Weekly Hours: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

People needing to dispose of hazardous materials, contact the Lake Area Solid Waste Management District at (573) 723-0079 to find the nearest HHW collection center.

Recycling materials are no longer accepted by the city, but are accepted in Lebanon by Laclede Industries, at 941 Utah Street. Materials are accepted from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 AM to noon the third Saturday of each month. Materials accepted include:

- Cardboard, Aluminum, Tin Cans, Plastic #1 & #2

Laclede Industries is closed most major holidays. Materials must be

clean and sorted prior to arrival. They do not accept hazardous chemical containers, glass or aerosol containers.

Below are local businesses that will take other waste materials:

- For automotive recycling, see:
  - O'Reilly Auto Parts (701 S. Jefferson) – Batteries and used oil
  - Sawyer Tires (1410 S. Jefferson) – Tire disposal
  - AutoZone (815 S. Jefferson) – Used oil, filters, batteries, and tires
- For electronics recycling, see:
  - Hillcrest Education Center (301 Hoover) – Computers, TVs, and electronic devices
  - Lowe's (190 Hwy. 32) – Light bulb disposal
- Heavy metals collection is available for free to residents of Laclede County. Accepted items include appliances, lawnmowers, tire rims, motors, swing set and trampoline frames, and other metal items.
- Brush & Yard Debris Drop-off and Collection
- Yard debris collection is free to residents of La-

clade County. A valid ID or utility bill may be required as proof of residency. Please drop off materials at the designated areas and remove any bags. Accepted materials include:

- Leaves, tree limbs, grass clippings, shrub trimmings
- No treated lumber or stumps

Laclede County residents only: Pickup trucks and small trailers from residential properties can use this service free of charge.

Anyone with questions about city services, may call (417) 532-2156 or contact "Ask Truman," Lebanon's virtual assistant. Text "Hello" to 844-771-4636: Start a conversation with Truman by sending a text message. Just text the word "Hello" to 844-771-INFO (844-771-4636) or visit the city website: Go to [lebanonmissouri.org](http://lebanonmissouri.org) and click on the Truman icon. Truman will pop up to help you navigate the site and answer your questions.



Lebanon public works building sign.

Submitted Photos

## Home interior trends on the rise

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. That's especially true in the digital age, when overnight celebrities and viral videos can be on the tips of everyone's tongue before being forgotten entirely when the next online sensation emerges in an increasingly rapid news cycle.

Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends, which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

- Rounded furnishings: Houzz noted that gentle curves and round-

ed edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to embrace popular trends.

- Arches: Houzz cites arches among the more popular modern trends, and the experts at Better Homes & Gardens note this unique, eye-catching style has been gaining popularity for several years. Better Homes & Gardens suggests that part of the appeal of arched doorways could be their deviation from a more traditional door shape. That uniqueness draws the attention of residents and visitors alike, and Houzz notes that arched windows, cabinets and even millwork details are part of the pivot toward arches.
- Stove alcoves: If it's a touch of history homeowners want, kitchen

range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which undoubtedly adds to their appeal.

- Wood for warmth: Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.

Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.



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## A spring lawn revitalization strategy

New growth is a hallmark of spring, whether it plays out in the birth of birds and bunnies or with the returned buds on trees and plant stalks. While most greenery rebounds naturally, lawns may need a little extra TLC in order to return to their once lush, green glory.

Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process but can be well worth the reward when green grass adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard. Here is how to get started when the weather warms, cour-

tesy of The Farmer's Almanac and The Home Depot.

- Clean up debris. Spend a few hours raking up leaves from the lawn and removing any other winter debris like twigs so that air can reach the grass below. Also remove any thatch that has developed.
- Test the soil. Take a sample of the soil to determine its pH level and nutrient needs. Then you can make adjustments to set a strong foundation for the lawn to grow.
- Do some weeding. Pull out any weeds that

have poked through early on and apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent additional weeds from taking over.

- Start the aeration process. A core aerator punches holes into the soil. This enables air and water to penetrate through to the roots.
- Overseed the lawn. Apply grass seeds over the lawn, paying special attention to any bare or thin areas so that the seed will fill in the lawn.
- Water consistently. It is important to water the lawn deeply and consistently, especially when

the weather is dry, to help promote strong root development.

- Time fertilizer correctly. Apply a spring fertilizer around three weeks after the lawn starts to turn green or after the first two or three mowings. If fertilizer is applied too early it can feed weeds instead of the grass and result in fertilizer runoff.
- Mow to an appropriate height. Begin to mow when the ground is dry enough and the grass is long enough to need cutting. Leave some length to the lawn; otherwise,



sunlight will reach the soil and encourage weed seeds to germinate.

With a little elbow grease at the start of spring, homeowners can establish strong and healthy lawns.

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## Common questions and answers about carpeting

No two homeowners are the same, and that's perhaps most evident in the design decisions individuals make when decorating their homes. Flooring is among the first things a person notices when entering a home, and the array of options consumers have when choosing flooring materials underscores how unique each homeowner is.

Carpeting is a popular flooring option. Many homeowners prefer carpeting because they feel it helps to create a cozy, welcoming vibe in a home. Consumers considering carpet for their homes may have some common questions, and answers to those inquiries can help homeowners determine if carpeting is for them.

**Is carpeting expensive?**

Home renovations are expensive, and the cost of a project is often the first question homeowners have. The cost of carpeting varies widely and is contingent on an array of variables unique to each home and homeowner, including square footage, materials chosen by the homeowner and

the cost of labor associated with installation, which can vary significantly between locations. According to the online renovation resource HomeAdvisor, the average cost to install or replace carpet is between \$782 and \$2,812. That wide range illustrates how much the cost of the project will be affected by variables unique to each project. However, even homeowners who come in around or above the high end of that estimate may find carpet installation is among the more affordable ways to give the interior of a home an entirely new look and feel.

**How different are carpeting materials?**

Carpeting materials differ in their look, feel and function. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that some carpet fibers are better suited to areas in a home that attract a lot of foot traffic, while others make for better options in areas with less use, such as a bedroom or home office. For example, Angi.com notes that polyester has a luxurious, soft feel, making it a strong option for

bedroom floors. Nylon carpet fiber is resistant to stains and damage and maintains its height under heavy weight, making this a good option in heavily trafficked rooms. Homeowners can discuss each carpeting material with their flooring retailer to determine which suits their budget and which is best in each room of their homes.

**Is carpet padding a must?**

Carpet padding is one of the costs associated with carpeting. When shopping for carpeting for the first time, homeowners may notice carpet padding costs on their estimate and wonder what it is and if it's truly necessary. Carpet padding is necessary, as Flooring101.com notes that it keeps the underside of the carpet from wearing against the subfloor while absorbing the impact of foot traffic and furniture. That absorption helps to reduce stress on the carpet and thus extend its life expectancy. Carpet padding also can have an insulating effect and help to reduce sound in a room. So while carpet padding might be a costly expense on an itemized estimate, it's well worth the investment.

Carpeting can help make a home feel more cozy and welcoming. Homeowners can work with a local carpeting retailer to find a carpet that meets their needs and fits their budget.



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## How to start a home garden, tips from the locals



Tomatoes are just one type of crop that can be found in a home garden.

**JACK SILBERBERG**  
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

When it comes to beginning a home garden, Laclede County has plenty of local experts and resources for those eager to hone their green thumb.

The Record has spoken with Victor Hudson, commercial tomato seller and high tunnel gardener, Clyde Majerus, homesteader and Master Gardener, and Anna Maria Desipris, permaculture farmer, for advice on some of the basics beginners should know about gardening.

One of Majerus's first tips to beginners was that gardening was worth pursuing, especially considering the subsistence and commercial opportunities it afforded. Hudson brought up the use of

the garden's crops as a consideration, such as whether the crops would be canned.

Majerus also suggested finding a mentor in the field to reach out to for advice, joining Desipris and Hudson in suggesting one's local extension offices.

The scope of one's garden is one key consideration when planning for the season, both in size and types of crops. Majerus and Desipris both encouraged would-be gardeners to plan what they and their family would eat.

Hudson discussed various considerations just on a single type of crop, the tomato, such as the differences in vine and bush types. Necessary sunlight and appropriate weather conditions were

also the concerns of the other two experts, with all three advising to keep track of the area's frost dates.

When preparing one's ground for a garden – all three recommended the ground itself as a beginner place to garden – the three differed on their approaches to preparing the ground, but they recommended sending a soil sample to the local extension offices the purposes of later amending the soil to be more friendly towards the planted crops.

In terms of management, Hudson stressed the importance of paying attention to the garden, with Desipris advising gardeners to plant where they can be viewed regularly. Majerus spoke of management as giving the gardens small atten-

tions. All three spoke to the importance of water schedules.

In terms of pest control, Desipris and Hudson both suggested planting marigold, which aphids dislike, and Desipris recommended other aromatic herbs for similar pest control.

For interior gardening, readers can find further information on the USDA's website page on gardening advice. Majerus and Desipris both have commercial and educational resources online, and Hudson expressed enthusiasm for cultivating more "bare-foot" gardeners.

## Tips to make a living room a more comfortable, welcoming space

A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home. Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations. That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible. With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more comfortable.

- Prioritize comfort over aesthetics. In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing

a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the living room whether you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

- Ensure there's ample seating. It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and family into your home or simply lounging around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spend-

ing time in the room.

- Consider neutral paint colors. Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a

living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel

in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan, or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable vibe in a living room.

- Incorporate the outdoors into the room. The great outdoors can have a calming effect on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnishings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

A comfortable living room is a space where people will want to spend their time. A few simple strategies can help create an inviting and comfortable vibe in any living room.





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## 4 signs of potential electrical hazards in a home

Homeowners know that the work of maintaining a home is never done. Cleaning is a daily task associated with homeownership, and such sessions can reveal more than dust buildup or dirty walls and surfaces.

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous situations. For example, vacuuming and dusting sessions can present a great opportunity to spot electrical hazards that might otherwise go unseen. With that in mind, homeowners can keep an eye out for these four signs of potential electrical hazards when working around the house.

1. Tingling when touching an electrical appliance: The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) advises homeowners to call a qualified electrician immediately if they experience a tingling feeling when touching an electrical appliance. The Electrical Safety Of-

fice notes experiencing a tingle or the feeling of being shocked is not normal. Homeowners who experience such a feeling should avoid the location and warn others in the home to do the same.

2. Wall outlets that look or feel unusual: Wall outlets do not garner much attention, as many are low enough to be out of sight or even behind furniture. So a cleaning session might be the only time homeowners will notice issues with wall outlets. The NFPA notes discolored outlets or outlets that feel warm to the touch is a sign of an electrical problem. Various issues can cause outlets to look or feel unusual. An outlet could be short-circuiting or wires could be damaged, and each issue merits the attention of a qualified electrician.

3. Foul odors: An odor that calls to mind burning rubber is another indicator of an electrical problem. Various electrical experts indicate such odors can be indic-

ative of damaged wiring, an overloaded circuit or loose connections, each of which poses a significant safety hazard. The NFPA urges homeowners to contact a qualified electrician immediately if they sense a smell of burning rubber in their homes.

4. Flickering lights: Homeowners won't need to wait until cleaning sessions to notice flickering

lights. Such flickering is hard to miss regardless of what residents are doing inside a home. Sometimes lights flicker because of a loose bulb, so homeowners who notice flickering should first turn off the light, let the bulb cool down if need be and then check to make sure it isn't loose. If the bulb isn't loose, then lights could be flickering for a multitude

of reasons. A loose connection can cause flickering, as can an overloaded circuit. Homeowners also may not realize that not all bulbs and dimmer switches are designed to work together. For example, modern LED light bulbs often require the installation of specific dimmer switches or the lights won't operate properly. Flickering can

result if these products are not compatible. If a home is old, then flickering lights could be due to old wiring that needs to be replaced.

Daily and weekly cleaning sessions can be a good time for homeowners to perform a quick audit of electrical outlets and lights to ensure everything is safe and working properly.

## Signs of pest infestation in a home

As any seasoned party host knows, guests can sometimes overstay their welcome. But what about guests that were never welcome in the first place? Pests can wreak havoc on a home, contributing to significant and costly damage and potentially exposing residents, particularly pets, to harmful illnesses.

Pest infestation can occur any time of year,

but homeowners may be most likely to see signs of infestation during spring cleaning sessions in areas of the home where they didn't spend much time in the previous months, such as attics and garages. As spring cleaning season kicks off, individuals can keep an eye open for the following signs of pest infestation.

- **Nesting materials:** Pests may drag certain nesting materials from outdoor areas into a home. Leaves and grass clippings as well as twigs may be used to construct a warm nest in interior spaces. Pests also transport nesting materials that are inside a home to other areas of a home that are more secluded. Fabric, paper products, including chewed cardboard, and insulation seen in unusual spaces may be left behind by pests nesting in other

areas. If there's a trail of such materials, follow it to see if you can find a nest.

- **Pets behaving strangely:** Pets can't tell their owners if there's pests in a home, but they may exhibit signs suggesting an infestation. Pets may start scratching at walls and doors with their paws or sniffing around areas where they can smell pests.

- **Unexplained odors:** Foul odors are not necessarily indicative of a pest infestation, as such aromas could indicate a range of issues. But pest feces can produce a foul odor, and some pest infestations can lead to mold growth that also produces unpleasant smells.

- **Destroyed items:** Certain pests may gnaw or chew on items, including electrical wires, home furnishings and food packaging. Homeown-

ers who keep a stocked pantry of dry goods and notice packages have been damaged or chewed through likely have a pest infestation.

- **Droppings:** Of course, droppings are a telltale indicator of a pest infestation. Rodent droppings are small, black and shaped like a grain of rice. Pests such as termites might leave pellet-shaped droppings in their wake.

Signs of pest infestation may be discovered during spring cleaning sessions. If homeowners suspect pest infestations in their home, they can examine out-of-the-way spaces with a flashlight and contact a pest control specialist to identify and address any issues they uncover.



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## The benefits of neutral colors

Homeowners make many notable decisions when designing their home interiors, with some choices proving more bold than others. The decision to decorate with neutral colors might not be the boldest move homeowners can make, but there are numerous reasons to stay neutral with a color scheme.

- **Versatility:** Neutral colors afford homeowners endless opportunities to play around with textures, patterns, furnishings, and more. For example, a neutral color on a living room wall can ensure a boldly colored



couch or chair won't contrast with its surroundings. In fact, there's no end to the options homeowners have to customize the look of a room with bold features or furnishings when neutral colors

feature prominently in the space.

- **Flexibility:** Neutral colors are more flexible than bolder alternatives because they likely won't require a complete overhaul of a room when homeowners want to spice things up with new features and furnishings. That flexibility will be appreciated by homeowners who every so often like to experiment with a new vibe or look in their homes.
- **Trendy:** Neutral colors are not as vulnerable to trends as other design choices. In fact, neutral colors are effectively their

own trend and won't get in the way of homeowners who want to change things up. But unlike other trends that must be replaced when homeowners grow tired of them, neutral colors can remain thanks to their compatibility with so many styles.

- **Tranquility:** Homes are often characterized as their owners' private sanctuaries from the hustle and bustle that goes on outside those walls, and neutral colors are often lauded for the tranquil vibe they help to create in a space. Neutral colors are soft, and that can lend

a serene and calming atmosphere to the interior spaces of a home.

- **Brightness:** Neutral colors are lighter in tone and thus pair well with natural light. That mixture can amplify brightness within a home and give it an uplifting vibe that residents and guests alike will appreciate.

Neutral colors are not bold, but the benefits they provide open doors to an array of design styles and decor choices that enable homeowners to go in various directions with the interior spaces in their homes.

## Tips to renovate on a budget

Renovations around the house require an investment of time and often considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations depends on the scope of the project.

Homeowners who are conserving funds can rest assured that it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate a home on a budget.

- **Create a budget and don't waver.** Figure out exactly what you can afford for a renovation and then make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must

adapt ideas to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise once a renovation is underway.

- **Maximize an existing floor plan.** This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before you invest in major renovations like an expansion. Bring in a designer with an eye for utilizing space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.
- **Balance DIY with hiring contractors.** You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.
- **Check clearance and resale stores.** Shop discount stores for building materials to save money.

For example, if a builder ordered too many cabinets they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores, which are non-profit home improvement stores and donation centers. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings on items needed for a renovation. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also can be great places to find certain home improvement materials and furnishings.

- **Take advantage of free services.** Certain stores may offer things like free consultations with designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products, even if it's not mandatory.
- **Resurface instead of redo.** Certain items can be made to look new with minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor

and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well.

Finding ways to perform home renovations on a budget may require some creative thinking, but it's possible to get results at the right price point.



## Did you know?

Open concept floor plans may be losing appeal. According to the design experts with Martha Stewart, open floor plans are giving way to a rise in separate spaces. Older homes with many rooms featured considerably less square footage than modern properties. According to Madeline Merin, a New York-based designer, the average size of a home in the United States has doubled from 1,000 square feet in 1950 to 2,300 square feet now. Instead of taking down walls, which is often done to make small homes seem more spacious, owners of larger homes are looking to delineate between rooms to help homes feel more cozy. The global pandemic led some homeowners to rethink the rooms in their homes when many were forced to cohabitate around-the-clock. Many would now rather see a return to defined gathering spaces and areas where residents can retreat for some privacy and personal time. Furthermore, Taylor Hill of Taylor Hill Interior Design says that some homeowners are increasingly appreciative of walls for their architectural appeal and not just for their utility in separating spaces.

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## Did you know?

Wood could be having a moment among modern home buyers. According to the real estate experts at Zillow, the term “cozy” appeared in 35 percent more real estate listings in 2024 than in 2023. Though various components can help to create a cozy vibe inside a home, wood has long been a go-to material when interior designers attempt to add warmth to a property. The home renovation experts at Houzz also cite wood-infused architectural warmth among its 10 most popular home trends in the coming year. Homeowners who want to capitalize on this trend before putting their homes on the market or those who simply love the idea of adding more wood-based warmth in their homes can consider installing ceiling beams, wood wall paneling or even wood trim throughout their homes.



## Aeration breathes new life into lawns

Regular maintenance is necessary when caring for a lawn, and various strategies translate into thicker, greener and healthier grass. Much like car owners routinely get an oil change or tire rotation on their vehicles, homeowners should recognize that certain lawn care strategies are periodically necessary to keep a property looking its best. Aeration is one task that can complement other lawn care strategies throughout the growing season.

What is lawn aeration? The Home Depot says that aeration involves making holes in the lawn to loosen the soil underneath. Over time, the lawn and soil can become com-

pacted, creating a layer of thatch that forms between the soil and the grass in the lawn. Thatch can prevent air, water and fertilizer from reaching the roots of the grass, eventually stifling growth. The holes made during aeration allow oxygen, water and nutrients to reach the lawn’s roots.

When to aerate Aeration can be good for a lawn, but it can cause stress to the grass if timed improperly, advise the lawn care experts at Pennington. Cool-season grasses common in northern lawns should be aerated in the early fall or early spring. Warm-season grasses should be aerated in the late spring or

very early summer. Aeration should be done right before the grass reaches peak time for natural growth.

How to aerate a lawn Homeowners can use different aeration equipment, including manual and automated machinery. Some homeowners wear spiked aerator “sandals” strapped to shoes to walk across the lawn. These may be useful on a small scale, but not on larger properties.

Slicing aerators have rotating blades that slice through grass and thatch into the soil. Core or plug aerators often are preferred for lawn professionals. Hollow tines remove plugs of soil from the

lawn and deposit them on top where they break down.

What’s next? According to The Spruce, it is necessary to water the grass every two to three days after a lawn has been aerated. This also is the time to perform overseeding. Apply a quality, slow-release fertilizer to revitalize the lawn. Wait at least a month before mowing, and avoid heavy traffic on the lawn after aerating to prevent grass damage. Aeration is an important step to maintain lawn health. While aerating can be labor-intensive, the end result of a lush lawn can be worth the extra effort.

## How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn’t sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home.

But there’s more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- Refresh the landscape. Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it’s still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep.

Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible. Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the

space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there’s always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- Add a water feature. Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that’s good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water

features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it’s installed in their backyard oasis.

- Don’t forget shade. Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that’s worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won’t want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable

all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.



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