



Spring home

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3 tips to turn your house into a smart home

Many of us want to integrate the latest tech gadgets into our homes to keep them safe, secure and efficient. From security cameras to wi-fi-enabled thermostats, smart plugs to 4K televisions, smart gadgets are here to seamlessly connect your living space.

The Electrical Safety Authority and tech expert Marc Saltzman have teamed up to share tips to optimize home automation. Here are three ways to integrate tech effortlessly into your home while keeping electrical considerations in mind.

Smarten up your home security. Outdoor security features like video doorbells and cameras can keep your home secure. When choosing these types of security features, plan ahead with your licensed electrical contractor to have the transformer and associated wiring installed.

Introduce smart temperature controls. Wi-fi-enabled thermostats are an effective and efficient way to control the temperature in your house. They monitor your schedule to help you save on energy and can be controlled from anywhere using a smartphone or

smart home device. Remember, these wi-fi enabled thermostats require a specific voltage and may need additional wiring for installation.

Get smart with lighting. The right lighting will enhance any room in your home, and using smart plugs allows you to control it from anywhere.

While many of these gadgets are available online, they may or may not be approved for use in Canada. Look for a recognized certification mark to ensure they are safe and have been properly inspected before you buy.

Find more tips online at poweryourlife.ca.
www.newscanada.com



Benefits of freestanding tubs

Few home design elements provide the instant wow factor of freestanding tubs. Freestanding tubs have an air of luxury that can help current homeowners relax, and impress buyers when homes go on the market.

Freestanding tubs are typically made of cast iron or porcelain. The home improvement website HomeAdvisor notes that cast iron is durable and solid and retains heat well, which is great for those who want to spend more than a little time relaxing in a freestanding tub. However,

because cast iron is so heavy, installing a cast iron tub may require structural reinforcement of the flooring, which will add to the overall cost of the project.

According to HomeAdvisor, the average cost to install a tub varies widely depending on the type of tub, the materials its made of and other factors, including plumbing and piping. For example, the cost to install a freestanding tub will rise considerably if new plumbing and piping are necessary.

Before purchasing a freestanding tub, homeowners should seek estimates regarding installation, making sure to get them in writing. Contractors will determine if structural reinforcement is necessary and include such costs in their estimates. In addition, make sure to ask contractors to investigate piping and plumbing so no surprises pop up after the tub has been purchased and work has begun.

If estimates from contractors aren't budget busting, homeowners can consider these benefits of freestanding tubs before making their final decisions.

· **Cleaning:** Because they're detached from other

bathroom fixtures and not flush against the wall, freestanding tubs tend to be easier to clean than built-in bathtubs. Freestanding tubs are accessible from all sides, making it easy to reach all those nooks and crannies where grime can build up.

· **Return on investment:** In its 2018 "Cost vs. Value" report, Remodeling magazine noted that upscale bathroom remodels recouped 56.2 percent of their cost at resale. That was a better return on investment than an upscale kitchen remodel (53.5 percent) and an upscale master suite addition (48.3 percent). The thought of a sizable return on investment can make relaxing in a freestanding tub that much more enjoyable.

· **Warmth:** Even freestanding tubs made of materials other than cast iron offer great heat retention. Stone resin bathtubs, for example, provide excellent insulation on cold nights. That's ideal for people who want to unwind in the tub without having to exit early because the water has become cold.

Freestanding tubs can transform regular bathrooms into luxurious oases.



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When it can be smart to hire a painting pro

Few things can revitalize a home more readily than a fresh coat of paint.

Thanks in part to the affordability of paint and its ease of application, painting is something that even novice DIYers can typically handle. According to the marketing advice guru Brandon Gaille, it is estimated that residential interior paint only lasts around three years before it needs to be updated. Exterior

paint can fade, chip and peel due to various environmental factors. As a result, many homes can likely use a fresh coat of paint in at least one room.

As DIY-friendly as painting can be, when attempting to paint the interior or exterior of their homes, homeowners may learn that some painting projects are best left to the professionals. Painting requires skill, patience and a knowledge of how various paints - includ-

ing finishes for particular applications - will hold up. Novice painters may do more harm than good by dripping paint on expensive carpeting or floors or fail to recognize the nuances that indicate a spot-on painting job.

Professional painters have spent hours upon hours learning the ropes of what works - and what does not. Painters often understand that painstaking preparatory work is crucial to getting pristine finished

results. Walls and ceilings must be properly repaired and prepared even before a base coat is applied.

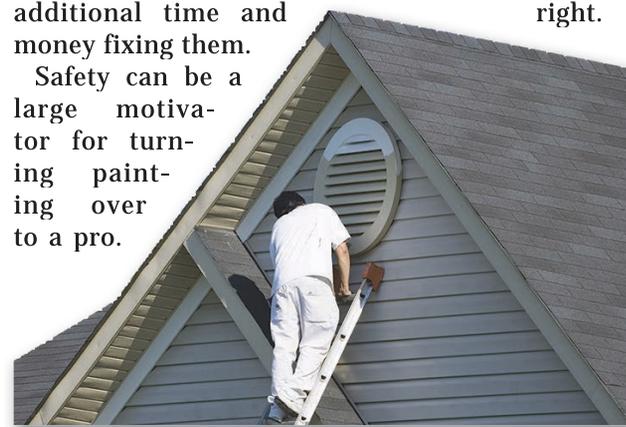
Professional painters also have an eye for details. And because professional painters make a business out of doing interior and exterior surfaces, they understand which techniques can improve efficiency. That means a professional job can typically be completed much more quickly than a DIY project.

Even though some people think they'll save money by painting their own homes, that's not necessarily true. Professionals already have all the equipment necessary, unlike novices who may need to make repeated and potentially costly trips to the hardware store for supplies. Plus, if mistakes happen, DIYers have to spend additional time and money fixing them.

Safety can be a large motivator for turning painting over to a pro.

Navigating exterior areas or tall interior ceilings can be challenging and may require scaffolding or tall ladders DIYers do not have. Risk of falls or other injuries increase with lack of experience.

Painting can give a home a facelift, and oftentimes it is smart to turn the work over to professionals to ensure the job is done just right.



Benefits to open concept floor plans

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

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

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

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

Safety
The safety of open concept floor plans may be most applicable to parents of young children. Open concept floor plans allow parents to keep an eye on their children while cooking dinner, working from home or tending to other chores around the house. Since there are no walls to divide rooms in open

concept homes, parents don't have to wonder what their curious kids are up to because they can see them at all times.

Flexibility
Open concept floor plans give homeowners more flexibility. For example, homes with more traditional floor plans may have designated spaces for dining areas. These spaces don't leave much room to work with and may not be valued by homeowners who don't often host dinners at home. As a result,

such rooms may just be wasted square footage. With an open concept floor plan, homeowners have the flexibility to make dining areas as big or small as they see fit and can even adjust the rooms on the fly on those occasions when people are coming over.

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



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Outdoor improvements that boost home value

Whether home improvement projects are design to improve the interior or exterior of a house, focusing on renovations that make the most financial sense can benefit homeowners in the long run. The right renovations can be assets if and when homeowners decide to sell their homes.

So how does one get started? First and foremost, speak to a local real estate agent who is knowledgeable about trends in the community. While a swimming pool may be something coveted in one area, it may impede sales in another. It also helps to study generalized trends and data from various home improvement industry analysts to guide upcoming projects.

The following outdoor projects are just a few renovations that tend to add value.

- **Fire pit:** A fire pit is a great place to gather most months of the year. Bob Vila and CBS news report that a fire pit realizes a 78 percent return on investment, or ROI.

- **Outdoor kitchen:** Many buyers are looking to utilize their yards as an extension of interior living areas. Cooking, dining and even watching TV outdoors is increasingly popular.



Outdoor living areas can be custom designed and built. In addition, prefabricated modular units that require a much smaller commitment of time and money are available.

- **Patio:** Homeowners who do not already have a patio will find that adding one can increase a home's value. Patios help a home look neat, add useable space and may help a home to sell quickly. The experts at Space Wise, a division of Extra Space

Storage, say that refinishing, repairing and building a new patio offers strong ROI.

- **Deck:** Decks can be as valuable

as patios. A deck is another outdoor space that can be used for entertaining, dining and more. Remodeling magazine's 2018 "Cost vs. Value" report indicates that an \$11,000 deck can add about \$9,000 in resale value to the home, recouping around 82 percent of the project's costs.

- **Door update:** Improve curb appeal with a new, high-end front door and garage doors. If that's too expensive, a good cleaning and new coat of paint can make an old door look brand new. These easy fixes can improve a home's look instantly.

- **New landscaping:** The National Association of Realtors says an outdoor makeover that includes well-thought out landscaping can net 105 percent ROI. Installing a walkway, adding stone planters, mulching, and planting shrubs are ideas to consider.

Many different outdoor projects can add value to a home.

Gray is here to stay in home designs

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

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

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

Gray is not a clear-cut color that's simply a 50-50 blend of white and black. Gray has subtle nuances that can lean toward blues, greens, taupes, and more depending on the lighting and surrounding furnishings. That means that homeowners who are ready to replace their fur-

niture or accessories need not necessarily repaint if they've previously decorated in shades of gray.

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

Gray also is a predominant color in natural stones

used throughout homes in entryways, bathrooms and kitchens. It can make design sense to maintain continuity throughout by dabbling in gray elsewhere.

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





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12 ways to maximize vertical space

Who hasn't, at one point in their lives, lamented a lack of space and organization at home? A lifetime's worth of items have to be kept somewhere, and without the right organizational strategy, clutter can quickly take over.

The home improvement site Home Therapy says that, when square footage is limited, tapping vertical walls is the fastest way to maximize and multiply the space available. Hooks, rods, shelving, built-ins . the sky is the limit when it comes to finding additional storage and adding a bit of personality to tight quarters. Even homes that may have adequate space can benefit from vertical solutions.

Here are some ideas to put vertical and other less-utilized areas to work for you.

1. Hang wire or plastic file organizers on the inside of kitchen cabinets to easily store cookie sheets, trays and cutting boards.

2. Save on counter or cabinet space with hanging spice racks. These can be hung directly on walls or on the inside of cabinet doors.

3. Stack all the stuff you can,



Shelving can corral items and keep rooms more organized.

including washers and dryers, beds (with storage drawers underneath) and even stacking nesting tables.

4. Choose furniture that is tall rather than wide. This can mean swapping out a dresser in a bed-

room for an armoire or vertical chest of drawers.

5. Canvas bags hung on a towel bar on a wall can keep dirty clothes wrangled until it's time to wash them. This also eliminates clothes

hampers on the floor.

6. Add a second rod or shelving to the inside of closets to create more space for clothing and other items.

7. Take kitchen cabinets all the

way to the ceiling. Store lesser used items on the uppermost shelves and the items you use each on the most accessible shelves.

8. Install a shelf over the entry-way to a room to utilize this seldom-used space. Shelves also can be custom cut and placed in oddly shaped areas, such as in attic rooms under the eaves or on slanted walls.

9. Dowels or curtain rods and some fabric can be used to fabricate slings to hold books or magazines.

10. Invest in some magnetic boards that can hold keys or notes by the front door or store knives on a kitchen wall.

11. Install two towel bars parallel to one another on the wall of a bathroom. These can hold extra toilet tissue or rolled hand towels.

12. Use rope plant hangers to store potatoes or onions near prep areas. The same plant hangers can wrangle stuffed animals and small toys in kids' rooms.

Utilizing vertical areas in a home is a great way to increase storage capacity and keep rooms more organized.

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Big bloomers – 5 beauties for your garden

If you're heading to the nursery this spring, look for large-blooming plants that provide a big splash of colour. Here are five recommendations from the garden experts at Harrowsmith magazine.

Peonies. Although they have a short blossom time, each plant produces masses of large, often fragrant blooms, suitable for cutting and bringing indoors. Peonies are relatively free of pests and diseases. They are extremely winter hardy and when they are not in bloom, they produce clean, strong, dark green foliage that stands up to the summer heat.

Hydrangeas. The Endless Summer series of hydrangea, which flowers from late July through early October, provides great value. All hydran-

geas hold their flowers over the winter so you can leave them intact as fodder for foraging songbirds during the winter months. The spent

flowers gather snow when it falls softly, adding some winter interest to your garden. Prune plants in spring.



Lilacs. Common lilac (*syringa vulgaris*) is the workhorse of lilacs and is winter hardy even on the coldest part of the prairies. Blooming from mid-to late-May each year, it is the first of many lilacs to produce colour each spring and is fragrant and suitable for cutting. Give it lots of space, as it can grow up to three metres (10 feet) high and almost as wide.

If you plant it with French hybrid lilacs, Preston lilacs and the Japanese tree lilac 'Ivory Silk,' you can enjoy up to six weeks of blooms.

Sunflowers. When it comes to big flowers and lots of them, you really can't beat sunflowers. In addition to being attractive, sun-loving and fast-growing annual plants, they attract myriad pollinators, from honeybees to a wide variety of native bees. When the flower heads have matured, the seeds attract songbirds by the dozen.

Dahlias. If you have a sunny position in your garden, try some dinner-plate dahlias for a real wow-factor. Bloom season occurs around the middle of summer through late

fall. While dahlias are technically an annual and will die with a killing frost, they are easy to overwinter indoors. Dig the tubers up after the tops have been hit with early frost and lie them in the sun for a day or two. Knock the dirt off each root and place them in a kraft paper leaf bag with dry peat moss or vermiculite to insulate them. Store in a cool, dry place like the basement. Inspect monthly, discarding any rotting tubers.

Find more gardening tips and ideas at harrowsmithmag.com.

www.newscanada.com

How to create a pet-friendly garden

Yes, you can have a beautiful garden to relax in and a place where your pet can run and chase squirrels. Here are seven ideas for designing a pet-friendly yard, from the garden and home improvement experts at Harrowsmith magazine.

1. Remember that dirt equals mud. Chances are you know where your pet likes to travel in the yard. A beaten-down path through the lawn and garden is your cue to put down a hard surface like patio slabs or interlocking brick. Dirt, after all, becomes mud — especially in the fall and spring.

2. Cool it. Plant trees or large-growing shrubs on the south and west sides of your yard to provide shade for your pet during the hottest parts of the day.

3. Deal with the "unmentionable." Dogs are famous for burning the grass where they squat to urinate. The solution is to dilute the urea, which is what causes the lawn to die in patches, by hosing down your lawn when you see the culprit do its business. When brown patches occur, have a bucket of pre-moistened sand-and-grass-seed mix standing by.

4. Keep in mind that cats are attracted to dry soil. Discourage them from using your garden as a latrine by keeping the soil under your soffit and fascia moist. Orange peel and scented plants, like lemon geraniums, lavender, basil and verbena, can also discourage cats. Never use moth balls, which are poisonous to humans

and could be picked up by young children.

5. Choose plants wisely. Avoid plants that are poisonous or harmful to animals, including common ones such as boxwood, clematis, daffodil, foxglove, hosta, hydrangea, lily of the valley, periwinkle, tomato (leaves) and many more. Research before you plant to be safe.

6. Don't forget that dogs like to dig. You can discourage them by placing chicken wire over areas in the garden that your dog likes to frequent. Or create a space for your dog to dig and fence it in.

7. Give your pets water. A visit to your pet supply store will introduce you to all kinds of innovative gizmos that can provide your pet with access to fresh water. To make it easy on yourself, locate your pet's water station near a faucet.

Find more gardening, pet and home improvement ideas at harrowsmithmag.com.

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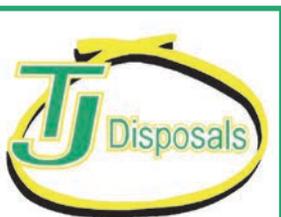
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Minor renovations that make a major difference

Renovations can be a daunting task. If your goal is to increase your property value, smaller upgrades can provide a higher return on your investment.

Here are some budget-friendly projects for key areas of your home that can boost your property value:

Kitchen. You don't need a complete remodel to increase the value of this space – it can be as simple as focusing on one thing, such as cabinets

or countertops. Refacing old cabinets by adding a fresh coat of paint, a new finish or updated knobs can bring new life to your kitchen. Adding new granite countertops is an easy way to modernize an older kitchen. Make sure to choose a countertop that fits with the price point and aesthetic of your home.

Bathroom. The bathroom is where most of us begin and end our day; modernizing it is a great way to increase your

property value. New floors or shower tiles will give the illusion of a complete makeover. Updating the vanity, sink or mirror are also inexpensive options. Smaller bathroom projects like these can have high appeal to future buyers.

Windows. These are often

overlooked in renovations. However, upgrading windows is a great idea for both aesthetic and energy-saving purposes. In cooler climates you can purchase windows with insulating properties, and in warmer climates you can purchase those that reflect sunlight.

Deciding on the right budget to suit your needs can be hard, but worrying about the financing shouldn't hold you back. For an easy way to finance these renos, check out The Home Depot Project Loan, available across Canada.

www.newscanada.com



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

The groundwater table plays a role in home construction, foundation stability and home comfort. Because the groundwater table is so significant, it behooves homeowners to understand how it works.

National Geographic defines a water table as the boundary between water-saturated ground and unsaturated

ground. Well beneath the ground, at various depths depending on geography, topography and weather conditions, pockets of water, called aquifers, exist. The water table marks the boundary between that available water and the dry surface.

Ground water is impacted by precipitation, irrigation and ground cover. It

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

The water table as well as local soil conditions and drainage can impact homes and their foundations. If soil drains efficiently and there is a relatively low water table, it may not be problematic. However, if soil is dense and absorbent and the water table is high, the ground around a home may swell and become saturated. This can exert significant pressure against the foundation walls, states Rytech, a water damage and mold rehabilitation company.

In areas where a local water table rises near the surface, water can push against the underside of the foundation in a condition known as "hydrostatic pressure." This may cause water to infiltrate through the bottom of the

foundation - even permeating solid concrete over time. If hydrostatic pressure is severe, it could lift certain portions of the foundation out of the ground, but this is very unlikely. But it could cause shifting of foundation walls and structures like fencing and decks.

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

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

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



If not properly addressed, ground water can affect an existing foundation and the ability to build successfully.

Tools any DIYer must own

Life is expensive, so why not save where you can? By learning to do-it-yourself, you can save major money by not calling in an expert to sweat the small stuff, like building a shelf. But it's also important to know what tasks are better left to the professionals.

To get started, the GTA Home and Reno Show has rounded up five tools anyone must own to give their home the TLC it deserves.

Tape measure. Perhaps the most important tool in any kit, you'll need a tape measure for most projects you take on. When choosing a tape measure, consider its potential roles in your household. If you're expecting it to measure longer distances, consider a wider tape measure, which will "stand" over further distances. For smaller distances you can save a few bucks and get a thinner one.

Hammer. Many peo-

ple overlook this basic necessity in their toolkit. But hammers are not too expensive and can come in handy for many small projects around the house. If you're using your hammer to hang pictures, pair it with a laser level. This will help you hang more than one picture at the same height with ease.

Screwdriver. If you're building nearly anything, a screwdriver will be crucial to the process. To make things eas-

ier and faster, invest in a cordless drill. If you're going to be doing a lot of work in one day, a brushless motor will help the battery last a little longer. For simple everyday jobs, a brushed motor will work just fine.

Pliers. Meet your go-to tool for gripping, twisting and cutting wire. Having a pair of pliers

on hand will help with a variety of tasks around your home that you never even knew existed. Expert tip: never use your pliers for tightening bolts and the like; this is a job best left to appropriately sized wrenches.

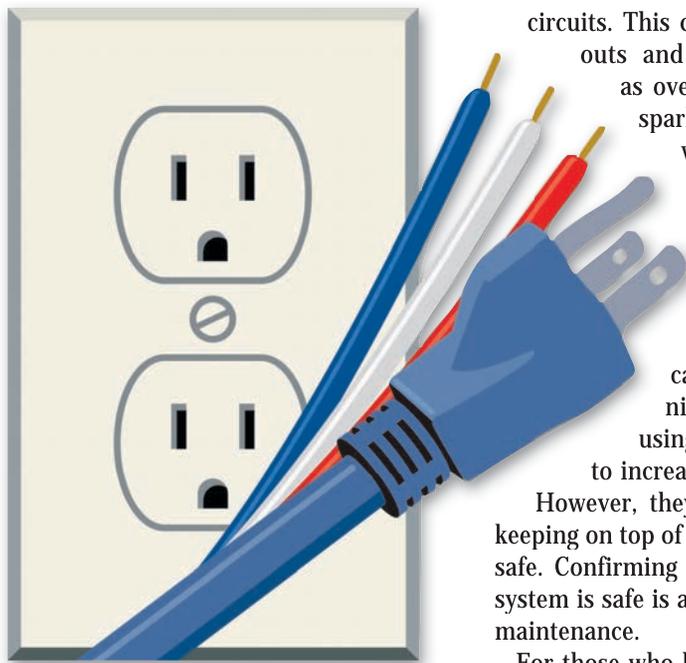
Utility knives. Everything on this list may be essential, but none are quite like the

utility knife. Think about when you receive that massive box before the building process even begins. It all starts with the utility knife that easily cuts through the toughest packaging and more. To ensure things are always safe, one with a folding or retractable blade is recommended.

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Time to replace old wiring?



circuits. This can cause breaker blow-outs and other problems, such as overheated wires that may spark and cause fires from within the wall.

Wiring often falls into the "out of sight, out of mind" category. Homeowners may make allowances for inadequate electrical systems, such as running extension cords or using multipug connectors to increase their wiring capacity.

However, they may not be diligently keeping on top of upgrades needed to stay safe. Confirming that a home's electrical system is safe is a necessary part of home maintenance.

For those who haven't already done so, schedule an inspection with a licensed electrician to go over the home's wiring. He or she can determine if any areas pose a safety risk and/or do not conform to local code requirements and the National Electrical Code. Failure to meet code can lead to difficulty obtaining permits to make other home renovations, or difficulty selling a home later on.

The electrician can also go over improvements that can improve safety and function. Additional outlets, including GFCI outlets in kitchens and bathrooms, may be part of the plan, as well as rewiring a fuse box or circuit panel to allow for better flow of power around the house. Frayed wiring or underinsulated wiring also may need to be replaced.

Owners of old homes should recognize possible electrical system dangers that require attention. Plus, considering electrical codes change quite frequently, it is always in a homeowner's best interest to work with a qualified electrician to keep wiring inspected and up to date.

Old homes can be charming and contain architectural elements not often seen in many modern housing developments. But what older homes may have in design appeal, they may lack in updated features.

While cosmetic changes are not necessarily difficult, one area of concern in historic homes - and sometimes even in houses built 40 or 50 years ago - is archaic wiring. Wiring provides power to every room of the home. In today's electronics-driven society, electricity that works is an essential component of daily life. Over time, wiring can be compromised through simple aging, pest infiltration, weather, or other conditions. Deteriorated wiring can present a shock hazard and also a serious fire hazard, warn the home renovation experts at The Spruce. Furthermore, the home improvement site This Old House advises that the amperage of old wiring may not be able to meet the needs of the devices used in homes - overpowering the

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Quick and simple ways to make a front door pop

Visitors' impressions of a home are often dictated by the home's entryway. Must as one may judge a book by its cover, the same can be said about the impression that a front door and entryway can create, regardless of how accurate that impression is.

Making certain changes to an entryway can go a long way toward improving curb appeal. Entryways also can set the scene for a home's interior. Whether one chooses to be classic or bold, modern or traditional, there are various ways to quickly transform a home's entryway.

· **Bold front door color:** Color can dramatically

enhance an entryway. Painting an existing door or replacing it with a more vivid option can do the trick. The DIY Network says certain colors stand out as favorites. These include turquoise, yellow, red, indigo, orange, and

black. The door color should complement the other shades of the home, such as those on siding and trim.

· **Custom walkway:** Guide guests right to the front door with an attractive (and safe) walkway. Stamped

concrete or decorative paver blocks may fit the bill. This walkway can extend to the street or to the driveway.

· **Contain plants:** Landscaping around the entryway should be neat and well-tended. Overgrown plants or shrubbery may give off an air of neglect. Container plants and carefully curated shrubs can create a neat and inviting aura.

· **Highlight the address:** Make sure the home can be found eas-

ily with bold and decorative house numbers. Consider two different address signs: one illuminated and easily viewed from the curb, and another closer to the front door.

· **Utilize high-end materials:** The relatively small area of real estate by the front door enables homeowners to splurge on more opulent materials that can really add a feeling of luxury. These can include colorful tiles, ornate planters, deco-

rative wooden doors, or elaborate knobs and lighting fixtures.

· **Add architectural details:** Find out which architectural elements will meld with the style of the home and then incorporate them. Moldings, columns, shutters, and trim are areas to consider.

The entryway to a home garners a lot of attention. Homeowners can enhance their spaces with entryways that really make a statement.



Signs your soil might be compacted

Compacted soil can result from any number of activities, including walking on a lawn. When soil on a lawn is compacted, grass roots might not receive the water, oxygen and nutrients they need to grow in strong. The can lead to weak lawns that are vulnerable to various issues. However, homeowners need not avoid their lawns to prevent soil compaction. Rather, learning to recognize signs of soil compaction and paying special attention to heavily trafficked areas of the yard can help homeowners identify the problem early and address it before grass begins to suffer. Cooperative Extension, which is supported by the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, notes that the following are some sign potential indicators of compacted soil.

· **Hard soil:** Soil that is difficult, if not impossible, to penetrate with a shovel

is likely compacted. Even healthy soil is sometimes resistant to penetration, but if homeowners put some muscle into their efforts to penetrate the soil and still can't do so, then the soil is compacted.

· **Standing water:** Water standing on top of soil for a long time is doing so because the soil is likely so compacted that the water, which roots need to thrive, cannot get through.

· **Excessive water runoff:** Runoff occurs when watering lawns. But if nearly all of the water intended for the lawn and the soil beneath it is seemingly being diverted away from the grass, then that means the water cannot get through to the soil or that so little is getting through that the lawn's health is in jeopardy.

· **Loss of vegetation or poor plant growth:** Compacted soil prevents water, nutrients and oxygen from accessing the root zone. As a result, plants, including trees, are vulnerable to disease and even death.

· **Surface crust:** Surface crust, which blocks oxygen and water from penetrating the soil and tends to inflict areas like footpaths and playgrounds due to heavy foot traffic, contributes to runoff and soil erosion.

Compacted soil is relatively simple to fix. But when untreated, compacted soil can threaten lawns, plants and other vegetation.



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How to afford a home renovation that fits your life

Changing seasons always bring about the desire to update our living spaces. But your life stage and budget can influence what kind of upgrades you can make.



Here are some tips to get you started. Assess the investment. The first step is to gauge how much value your investment will bring, whether you're looking to sell or grow into a family home. A common misconception among home owners is that all renovations will increase a home's value; unfortunately, this is not always the case. It's always a good idea to strategically renovate the space to fit your life plan and goals.

Plan for both long- and short-term value. As a homeowner, it is important to assess what kind of value items can contribute to your life plan. Searching for products that are energy efficient, like an eco-friendly washing machine or water filtration system, can help you save on your monthly bills. A long-term investment, such as hardwood floors or bathroom tiles, can spruce up a living space for years to come. While sometimes this require a larger budget, the project can be both appealing to future buyers and stand the test of



time in a family home.

Create a renovation budget. Once you have a clear plan, you'll need to create a budget to align with your financial goals. Always ensure your budget includes any interest you'll be paying. Ask multiple sources for competitive quotes.

Use a payment plan. For those high-ticket investment items, consider using a payment plan. Payment solutions such as The Home Depot Project Loan can help with bigger renovations. This allows you to stick

to your budgeting goals while using a flexible payment plan to make larger purchases more accessible.

Use DIY to offset costs. In addition to using a payment plan, taking on a few safe and simple renovation projects yourself is an easy way to offset renovation costs. Your local hardware store can help source materials and provide helpful tips to make those do-it-yourself projects, such as refinishing cabinets or sanding old hardwood floors, a breeze.

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Most popular handyman jobs for spring

As the weather warms, it's an ideal time to tackle home renovation projects. Here are the top jobs worth hiring a handyman for this spring:

Deck and patio repairs. If you have one of these outdoor spaces, it's a safe bet that you're planning on spending a lot of time out there over the summer. Since decks see so much action, they require proper maintenance and upkeep. Fixes can include warped or rotten wood, popped up nails or loose handrails.

Power washing. A small task that is often

overlooked is maintaining the overall cleanliness of the outside of your home. Have the exterior, back deck and driveway power washed to easily freshen it up.

Window washing. From snow and rainstorms to heat waves, there's a lot of muck that can build up on your windows. A professional will get those hard-to-reach places clean and make your windows and your sills sparkle.

Caulking and weather-stripping. Weather-stripping and caulking can have a significant impact on keeping cool air in and hot air out—

and vice versa come winter. If there's a significant leak it will also help save money on your energy bills.

Updating doorbells and locks. Keeping your home secure is always a priority. With so many new smart locks and doorbells available, consider an update that allows you to keep an eye on your home from afar. From video doorbells to smart security cameras [KM1], it's one less thing to think about when away from home.

Updating the backsplash. This small job makes a big impact. It's a great way to inject some personality and make it look like you've done a lot more to the space than you have. If you want to go all out, have your handyman also paint your kitchen cabinets for a quick and easy kitchen makeover.

Find the perfect handyman for your spring jobs at homestars.com.

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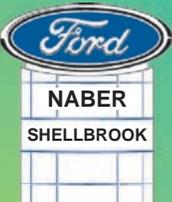
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