

Spring

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A Special Supplement to

Sioux Valley NEWS

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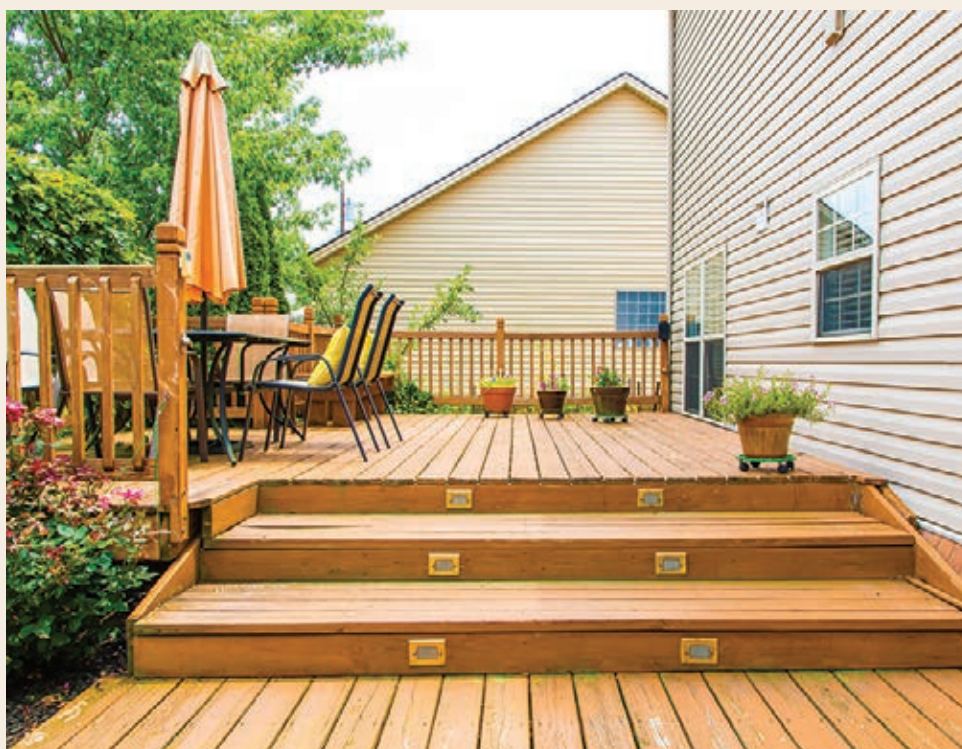
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What To Know About Reseeding Or Replanting Your Lawn

Spring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation season.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn. In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their lawns.

- Scarify the lawn. Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts, including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarifying before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarifying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

- Work with a landscaping professional. Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires

knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this important detail.

- Prepare to water the lawn. Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges

homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once

that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

Spring is a great time for homeowners in various regions to reseed or replant their lawns. With the right approach, homeowners can enjoy a full and lush lawn throughout summer.

The Basics Of Fertilizing A Lawn

Spring marks the return of lawn and garden season. Lawns often bear the brunt of winter's wrath, so spring is a great time to nurse them back to health, and fertilizing can be an essential component of that process.

Fertilizing a lawn can be intimidating. An array of fertilizers, with each seemingly designed to address a different issue, can make homeowners' heads spin when visiting their local lawn and garden center. However, fertilizing is a very simple task that any homeowner can tackle. In fact, fears about fertilizing are often unfounded and can be overcome with some basic knowledge of the process.

- Identify which type of grass is in the yard. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that turfgrass is divided into two categories: cool-season grass and warm-season grass. A local lawn and garden center can help homeowners identify which type of grass is in the yard, and this often depends on location. Fescue, bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are some examples of cool-season grasses, while Bermuda, bahia, St. Augustine, and zoysia are considered warm-season grasses. Identifying which type of grass is in the lawn is important because that will indicate when to fertilize.

Cool season grasses are typically best fertilized in early spring, while warm-season lawns can benefit from an application just before especially warm temperatures arrive.

- Survey the lawn to identify which spreader to use. A small yard or a thriving lawn with only a few bald or unsightly patches may

not need a full application of fertilizer. In such instances, a hand spreader can suffice. For larger lawns and areas, a broadcast spreader is the ideal option. Spreaders have multiple settings, and the fertilizer package will indicate which setting to utilize when using the product.

- Test the soil prior to purchasing fertilizer. The lawn experts at Pennington® note that a simple soil test can reveal soil pH and phosphorous and potassium levels. Soil tests can be purchased at most home improvement stores and lawn and garden centers, and they can help homeowners determine which fertilizer will most benefit their lawns.



- Water the lawn prior to fertilizing. The experts at Scotts® recommend a good watering a few days prior to fertilizing a lawn. Such an approach ensures the soil is ready to accept the fertilizer once it's applied.

- Follow the instructions carefully. Detailed instructions are typically provided on fertilizer product packaging. Once homeowners have identified and purchased the product they need, they can simply follow the instructions on the packaging, including how and when to water after application, which can make fertilizing less intimidating.

Fertilizing in spring can help a lawn recover from the previous summer and winter, ensuring it's lush and green when summer entertaining season arrives.

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Tips To Revitalize A Garden This Spring

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that pays a host of significant dividends. Many people love gardening because it allows them to spend time outdoors, and that simple pleasure is indeed a notable benefit of working in a garden. But the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture notes that gardening provides a host of additional benefits, including helping people get sufficient levels of exercise, reduce stress and improve mood.



With so much to gain from gardening, it's no wonder people look forward to getting their hands dirty in the garden each spring. As the weather warms up, consider these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

- **Discard the dead weight.** Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter storms also should be removed at this point if they have not previously been discarded.

- **Test the soil.** Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive in the months to come.

- **Mulch garden beds.** Mulching benefits a garden by helping soil retain moisture and preventing the growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over the course of spring and summer. That

means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

- **Inspect your irrigation system.** Homeowners with in-ground irrigation systems or above-ground systems that utilize a drip or soaker function can inspect the systems before plants begin to bloom. Damaged sprinkler heads or torn lines can deprive plants of water they will need to bloom and ultimately thrive once the weather warms up.

- **Tune up your tools.** Gardening tools have likely been sitting around gathering dust since fall. Serious gardeners know that tools can be expensive, so it pays to protect that investment by maintaining the tools. Sharpened pruners help make plants less vulnerable to infestation and infection. Well-maintained tools like shovels and hoes also make more demanding gardening jobs a little bit easier, so don't forget to tune up your tools before the weather warms up.

It's almost gardening season, which means gardeners can start on the necessary prep work to ensure their gardens grow in strong and beautiful this spring.

Tips To Successfully Grow Tomatoes

Slicing into the first tomato of the season is a much anticipated moment for gardeners. Tomatoes are among the most popular fruit or vegetable plants grown in home gardens. Much of that popularity may be credited to the fact that red, ripe tomatoes have a delicious, juicy flavor that serves as the basis for all sorts of recipes. And since tomatoes can just as easily be grown in a full backyard garden or in a container on a patio or balcony, tomatoes appeal to gardeners regardless of their living situations.

While tomatoes are relatively easy to grow, they are prone to certain problems and pests. Knowledge of what to expect when planting tomatoes and how to start off on the right footing can help produce a season's worth of delicious bounty.

- **Wait until after the last average frost date.** Tomatoes can be grown from seeds outdoors in warm areas, but tomato gardeners often find success starting seeds indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost date. Gradually introduce seedlings to the elements for a few hours each day, increasing the duration of time outside. Then they can be transplanted outdoors when temperatures are consistently over 60 F.

- **Choose a sunny spot.** Tomatoes love to soak up sunlight, according to The Home Depot. Place the plants in a sunny spot so they can thrive.

- **Space out plants.** The experts at Better Homes and Gardens say to leave anywhere from 24 to 48 inches between plants to accommodate for growth and ensure the plants will not get stunted.

- **Plant deeply.** Tomatoes tend to root along their stems. If transplants are long and lean, dig a trench and lay the stem sideways in the dirt, and then bend the top of the plant upward. Snip off the lower branches and cover with soil up to the first set of leaves. This will produce extra root growth and stronger, more vital plants.



- **Give the plants support.** Tomato cages or stakes can help keep the leaves and fruit from touching the ground, which can cause rot and, eventually, death to the tomato plant.

- **Lay down a layer of mulch.** Tomatoes grow best when the soil is consistently moist. Mulch can help retain moisture from watering and rain. Mulch also will help prevent soil and soilborne diseases from splashing on the leaves and plants when it rains. While you amend the soil, make sure that it drains well and is slightly acidic.

- **Prune away suckers.** Tomatoes produce "suckers," which are leaves that shoot out from the main stem. Removing these leaves promotes air circulation and keeps the plant's energy focused on growing fruit.

Tomatoes are a rich addition to any garden. A few simple tricks can help even novice gardeners grow delicious tomatoes.

GARDENING OFFERS MORE THAN A DAY IN THE SUN

Millions of people embrace opportunities to get back in their gardens each spring, and they might be reaping more rewards from that activity than they realize. According to the American Institute of Stress, gardening sparks a level of creativity among enthusiasts, and that can help to alleviate stress by lowering levels of the hormone cortisol. In addition, authors of a 2022 study published in the journal *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* concluded that gardening during the COVID-19 pandemic helped people cope with coronavirus-related stress through outdoor activity.

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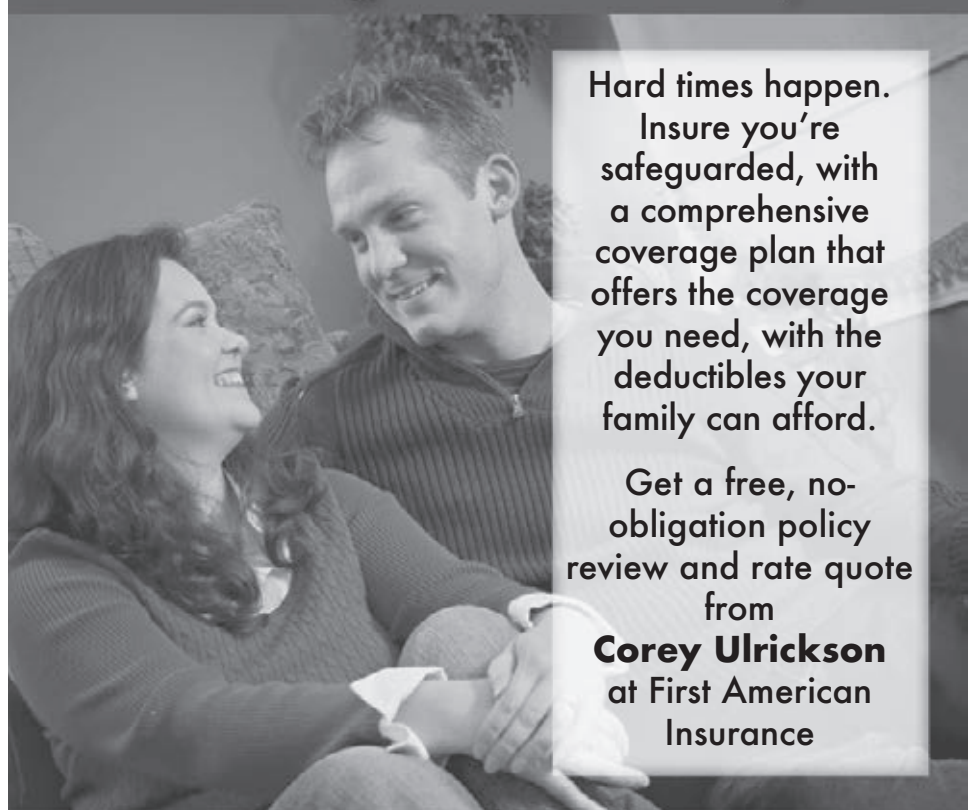
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How To Create An Outdoor Living Retreat

Al fresco entertaining has taken off in recent years. It's much more common today to find homeowners who want to extend living spaces to the outdoors in meaningful ways that go beyond a few lawn chairs and a stand-alone grill. Dream backyard living rooms mirror similar spaces indoors and contain features like cozy corners, lush furniture and televisions or movie projectors. Plus, they often abut additional outdoor luxuries like fully functional kitchens.

Homeowners have various options when designing outdoor living spaces. Above all else, spaces should be created with the goal of encouraging people to get together. Here are some ideas.

Poolside retreat

Homeowners with pools and other water features likely want this area to be the star of the entertaining space. Furniture will be more of the lounging variety, with comfortable chaises and spots to catch the sun. If a swim-up bar isn't possible, a rolling bar cart can be stocked with essentials for cocktails or mocktails for the kids. Furniture near the pool will be exposed to a lot of sun, so look for durable, sun-resistant fabrics.

Fireside nook

Gathering around an outdoor fireplace or fire pit is a treat when the weather cools down. Mirror the look of the same setup indoors by arranging outdoor sofas so they flank the fireplace. Add some ottomans or side tables for stowing mulled cider or hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

Consider a custom banquette

Unused corners on a patio or rooftop retreat can utilize a custom-made banquette that provides the functionality of a sofa sectional outdoors. Have a contractor design it to the exact specifications of the area, and add a rug to ground the space.

Vary the flooring

Depending on the entertaining space, a balance of soft grass, pavers or other hardscape will be necessary. Certain areas will need to be hard enough for chairs and other furniture, particularly for those who are including an outdoor dining table in the design.

Create some privacy

Some homeowners are lucky enough to have natural barriers that offer privacy in their entertaining spaces. When there isn't enough, tall shrubs, inexpensive bamboo fencing or trellis can provide a blind that makes an outdoor living area more cozy and private. Consider placing tall, potted plants on rolling casters to improve privacy as the need arises.

Outdoor living spaces are all the rage, and they can add value and functionality to most any home.



Signs It's Time To Repair Or Replace Your Deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- **Wobbly underfoot and in hand:** Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter. Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi,

wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

- **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through

wood. Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

- **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

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Factors To Consider When Mulling A Garage Renovation

Garages may rank below kitchens and bathrooms in the home renovation pecking order, but these unsung heroes of suburban dwellings deserve their day in the sun. It's easy for garages to become convenient, if crowded and disorganized, storage spaces, but scores of homeowners are embracing the idea that renovated garages can serve a more functional purpose.

Prior to beginning a garage renovation, homeowners can consider a host of factors that will guide the direction of the project and ultimately produce a more functional space.

- **Appeal:** Though many homeowners understandably want to ensure their homes are amenable to their own lifestyles without worrying about the effects a given project might have on resale value, it's best that they do not completely ignore the latter variable. A 2019 analysis from the National Association of Home Builders found that 65 percent of newly constructed homes included two-car garages. That suggests a traditional two-car garage remains widely appealing. However, it's worth noting that the NAHB analysis was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when fewer people were working from home. Now that more people work from home, some may see a garage converted into a home office space as more functional. Homeowners can speak with a local real estate agent to learn more about local buyers' preferences before beginning a garage renovation project.

- **Function of the space:** It's important to consider why you want to renovate the garage. Is it to build a designated home office space? A fully outfitted home gym? A home theater? An extra bedroom? An in-laws suite? Each of these options are popular reasons to renovate a garage, and each may require a different approach during the project. The desired function also may affect the cost, so it's best to identify precisely what the room will be used for post-renovation.

- **The existing space:** When mulling a garage renovation, contact a local garage conversion expert to audit the space. Such a professional

can assess the existing space and determine what will need to be done beyond the design of the room. Will additional electrical outlets need to be installed? Will the room require additional ventilation? Will a new doorway need to be created to allow for easier access? These are questions a qualified expert can answer. Some may estimate the cost as well, but it's likely the garage expert will defer estimates regarding electric and ventilation to contractors who specialize in those areas.

- **Storage:** The home renovation experts at Angi estimate that the average garage remodel costs around \$18,000. That's considerably less than a home addition project, which can easily exceed six figures. So a garage remodel might be more budget-friendly than a room addition. However, homeowners should consider what's currently in their garages and where those items will end up if the room is repurposed. If it's primarily lawn care items and kids' toys, a new shed with ample storage space might work. But if the garage currently holds more items than can reasonably fit in a shed, homeowners should determine where those items can be stored once the garage is repurposed.



Garage Storage Solutions

Who doesn't have a space at home that serves as a catch-all for items that seemingly have no other home? For many, this storage wasteland where items go to be forgotten tends to be the garage. Before long, clutter can overwhelm the space and create an eyesore. Garage clutter also makes the space less functional by making it harder to park a vehicle or store equipment.

Organizing a garage takes work, but the end result can improve the appearance, free up space, make work more efficient, and make it easier to find and use tools more readily. Here are some ways to get started on organizing your garage.

Start with cleaning and culling

One of the first steps when organizing a garage is to thoroughly analyze what is needed and what can be removed from the garage. If items belong elsewhere, such as in a shed or the basement, move these items first. Discard damaged or broken items. Next, move on to tools or gear that hasn't been used in some time. Will you use it again? If the item has been collecting dust for years, you likely already know the answer to that question.

Pile all items in the driveway so you have a clean slate with which to start. Measure the room to figure out the dimensions so you'll know how much wall space is available for storage.

Free up floor space

The ultimate goal of a garage storage renovation is to make floor space available, according to Stacey Schweiger of Sunshine Organizing. Lifting items off the floor makes access easier, and protects items should there be a flood or leaks.

A combination of wall shelves, overhead shelves, cabinets, and wall hooks can help homeowners create more floor area. Organization becomes easier when everything has a designated space where it can be easily returned to.

Consider weight

When investing in shelving and racks, remember that many of the items stored in garages tend to be heavy. It's important to ensure that shelves and hooks are heavy-duty and able to withstand the weight of pressure put on them. Verify the maximum weight so that racks will not buckle or tip over and cause issues.

Utilize overhead space

Overhead storage can be reserved for items that aren't used frequently, such as seasonal decorations or luggage.

Out of sight

Some items should be stored out of sight and beyond the reach of children and pets. Cabinets and containers can be used and locked to secure materials, such as fertilizers, paints, solvents, and other chemicals.

Additional ideas

Magnets, pegboards, organization bins and systems, and similar products can be used to corral small or errant items like hand tools, fasteners and more.

Garage organization will take some planning and time, but the end result can be well worth the effort.

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8 Steps To A More Functional Kitchen



A kitchen is often the most utilized room in a house. Meals may be prepared, cooked and often eaten in kitchens, and the room is often utilized as a homework spot or a makeshift place to pay bills and stay on top of household needs. By enhancing the organization and functionality of the kitchen, homeowners can enjoy these popular spaces even more.

Homeowners have increased their spending on home improvements in recent years. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies for Harvard University, project spending rose to \$472 billion in 2022 from \$328 billion in 2019. It's estimated consumers will have spent \$485 billion by the end of 2023. Kitchen renovations were the most popular upgrade and accounted for the highest budgets in 2021, according to Houzz. When the time comes to renovate a kitchen, homeowners can take steps to make these spaces more organized and therefore functional. Here are eight tips to creating a more functional kitchen.

1. Increase storage, and then invest in more. Make the most of corner cabinets and other potential dead spots in a kitchen. Various products can be used to organize awkwardly angled or shaped areas. Kitchen designers also can work with you to reconfigure cabinets and kitchen layouts.

2. Organize utensils and dishes around the sink/dishwasher. Rather than traversing the kitchen to put clean dishes away, make loading and unloading the dishwasher that much easier by locating commonly used items next to and above it. Similarly, place frequently used saucepans, baking dishes and other items near the oven or food preparation

area.

3. Utilize drawer and cabinet organizers. Make a place for everything in the kitchen. Take out all items and see what you need and use all the time. Then coordinate storage around those items so everything fits perfectly. Pull-out shelves and Lazy Susans also can facilitate access.

4. Add shelves to cabinets. If you can afford to have a custom-built kitchen, by all means design cabinets according to preference. If you're using standard cabinets, you may have to reconfigure shelves and spacing to fit the items you have. This also will help you maximize cabinet space.

5. Organize the garbage. Have a pull-out drawer or cabinet to store trash bins. Separate compost, trash and recycling needs.

6. Create continuity in the room. Many open concept homes will have kitchens open up to another room in the home. Mirror the design scheme from elsewhere in the house, and make sure that the flow between spaces is not obstructed.

7. Create a beverage station. A beverage station can minimize the time needed to make a cup of tea or coffee or for the kids to grab juice or chocolate milk.

8. Have a workspace in the kitchen. Whether paying bills, making a grocery list or leaving notes for the family, a dedicated workspace can add more function to the room. Be sure there is task lighting nearby and ample overhead lighting to ensure that all kitchen needs are illuminated properly.

A more functional kitchen can make this already popular space even more so.

Improving Storage In Common Areas

Increasing storage capabilities at home is a popular goal among many homeowners and renters. Despite how much space a person may have at home, there's often a desire to have more or maximize the areas that are there. According to the Self-Storage Almanac, there are an estimated 51,206 storage facilities operating in the United States today, and MJ Partners Self-Storage Update says 11.1 percent of households currently rent at self-storage facilities. IBISWorld indicates the Canadian self-storage industry has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent over the last five years.

People often turn to external storage facilities to house their belongings when space is at a premium at home.

a storage ottoman adds decorative appeal but also can be filled with board games or books. Cabinet-style TV stands may not be as streamlined as mounted versions, but they're ideal places to stash games, remote controls and other accessories.

Entryway

An entryway or mudroom can quickly succumb to clutter. When organizing such a space, think about the needs of the household. A storage bench will be a place where everyone can sit to put on shoes, and then stow footwear underneath when not in use. A wall-mounted rack can hold the current season's jackets or sweaters, as well as purses or backpacks for easy access. A shelf with some hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail.



Others may focus their organization energy on closets, garages and basements to free up room. But common areas around the home also can provide additional sources of storage. Common areas are locations where people come together for activities.

Living room/family room

Living rooms and family rooms are areas of the home where people spend many hours. These tend to be multifunctional spaces where people entertain, lounge and even enjoy movies or gaming. Possibilities in these living spaces that can create extra storage include furniture that serves double-duty. For example,

Hallway and closet

Closet organization systems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space, and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging racks. An out-of-the-way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only continues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.

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How Diy Can Be Bad For Homeowners' Bottom Lines

Homeowners know it can be tempting to go the do-it-yourself (DIY) route when starting a home improvement project. Home repairs and renovations can be costly, and the notion of saving money on such projects compels many homeowners to try their hand at home improvements. However, the DIY approach can be costly as well, and if things go awry, homeowners may end up with empty pockets and unfinished projects.



Online tutorials and advertisements for home improvement retailers can make DIY seem like a snap. However, there are potential pitfalls to consider that could make the ostensibly less expensive DIY route far more detrimental to the bottom line than homeowners may recognize.

- **Permits:** Permits ensure work is done in accordance with local codes, which are designed to ensure the safety of residents and their neighbors. Licensed contractors know which permits are necessary for projects they're hired to work on, and many even procure permits for their clients (homeowners are urged to read estimates and contracts to determine who will be responsible for acquiring the appropriate permits). DIYers may not know about local permits, and therefore go ahead with projects without procuring any. That can be harmful in the short- and long-term. In the short-term, a failure to procure the appropriate permits can make a home less safe and potentially lead to costly fines and necessitate a complete do-over of the project. In the long-term, homeowners who did not secure the appropriate permits may not be given a certificate of occupancy (CO) when putting their homes on the market, which can make it very difficult to sell the home.

- **Ancillary costs:** The ancillary costs of DIY are not often noted in online tutorials. However, such costs can dramatically increase the amount of money DIYers shell

out in order to complete projects on their own. Ancillary costs include but are not limited to the price of tools and equipment; disposal fees for materials that will need to be discarded; and the cost of permits. These costs are often included in estimates provided by contractors, but they're easily overlooked by novice DIYers.

- **Repairs:** Even experienced contractors make mistakes, so DIYers, particularly novices, can anticipate making a few errors along the way. Minor mistakes may not prove too costly, but more significant mishaps can quickly negate any cost savings associated with DIY renovations. The cost to fix DIY mistakes varies depending on the project, but a 2019 survey from Porch.com found that the average DIY mistake cost homeowners \$310 and added five and a half hours to the overall time spent to complete a project. It's worth noting the Porch.com survey was conducted prior to the dramatic increase in materials costs related to inflation in recent years. So it's reasonable to assume that fixing DIY mistakes in 2024 could end up costing considerably more than a few hundred dollars.

Before diving in to DIY, homeowners may want to consider the real costs associated with forgoing professional experience in the potentially misplaced hopes of saving a few dollars.

How Sellers Can Get Top Dollar For Their Homes

The process of buying and selling a home includes many movable parts. North America has experienced historic trends in the housing market in recent years. Most notably, record-high prices have dominated the real estate market over the last several years.

High prices are good news for sellers, who can probably anticipate receiving offers above listing price. In New Jersey, inventory is so low that 12.5 percent of homes in the Garden State sold above list price, according to data from RedFin. This is good news for sellers currently looking to make an excellent profit on their properties. Sellers who don't want to rely on the market alone to earn more for their homes can take various steps to get top dollar.

Stage your home

According to the 2023 Profile of Home Staging conducted by the National Association of Realtors®, 81 percent of buyers' agents said staging a home made it easier for the buyer to visualize the property as a future home. Focus your attention on the living room, owner's suite and kitchen. Hiring a staging professional can be an investment that turns a sizable profit.

Know your local market

A good way to price your home and gauge if it will sell quickly is to look at the average "days on the market" for similar homes nearby. If homes are selling faster than the average DOM, that suggests high demand, which can work in your favor.

Make added-value improvements

Focus renovation dollars on the types of projects that will reap the highest return on investment. Remodeling magazine annually reports the projects that offer the best ROI. In 2023, the project that reaped the highest ROI was an HVAC Conversion/Electrification, which involved converting a fossil-fuel-burning furnace into an electric heat pump. The cost recouped was 103.5 percent.

Sell at the right time

Fewer people are shopping for homes in the dead of winter or during the middle of the school year, so putting your home on the market in spring typically brings out

the largest number of interested parties, according to Opendoor. But this isn't the only time-related factor to consider. To sell for the most money, you want to list your home when you have enough equity to pay off your current mortgage, the costs of selling, and the costs of moving, says Bankrate.

Give curb appeal a boost

Make sure that buyers see your home in a positive light from the first moment they pull up for a walk-through showing. According to Home & Garden, improving the landscaping can result in a value increase of up to 12 percent. Additional projects can include investing in a new front door and garage doors. Be sure that hedges are trimmed, there are fresh flowers growing, and that walkways and the driveway are clean and tidy.

A few simple strategies can help sellers get more money for their homes.

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Prevent Home Electrical Fires

A person's home should be a safe haven. Too often, however, there may be dangers lurking in a home that can compromise the safety of residents.

Electrical fires are no joke. The Hartford insurance company says electrical failure or malfunctions account for almost 34,000 home fires per year. The National Fire Protection Association says they can contribute to 440 deaths and \$1.3 billion in direct property damage annually.

Older homes may be most vulnerable to electrical fires, as such structures were not designed to handle the demands of modern living. The insurance experts at Nationwide say half of all homes in the United States have electrical systems that were installed before garage door openers, high-tech coffee makers, and many computers became must-have items. And the Electrical Safety Foundation International says homes built before 1973 with overloaded electrical systems pose a number of safety threats.

Overloaded circuits are not the only contributor to electrical fires. Damaged wiring characterized by worn, frayed or loose wires can cause fires. Malfunctioning appliances or those improperly maintained also can create home fires. Another contributor is poorly installed extension cords and power strips, as well as faulty outlets and switches around homes.

Homeowners can take various steps to reduce the risk of electrical fires at home.

- Install arc fault circuit interrupters. AFCIs are special types of circuit breakers that help prevent fires caused by nicked or frayed wiring. An AFCI gets tripped and cuts off power when an electrical problem is detected before a fire can start. In 2022, the National Electric Code started requiring AFCIs in bedrooms, and by 2017 they have been mandated throughout homes.

- Conduct a home electrical inspection. All homes more than 40 years old should be inspected to ensure their electrical systems can handle modern demands, says Nationwide. A qualified electrician can make recommendations regarding replacing



breakers and suggest other modifications to improve safety.

- Utilize a monitor. Ting from Whisker Labs monitors a home's electrical network using a smart plug-in sensor that is designed to detect hazards. The company indicates micro-arcs and sparks that develop are precursors to electrical fires.

- Turn to automatic shut-offs. Homeowners can utilize appliances and additional devices that automatically shut off after a set period of time. This can reduce the risk of overheating.

- Rely on timers or smart devices. Timers and smart home devices can give homeowners control of electrical components like appliances or lights from a remote area. This enables users to turn an appliance on or off to reduce overheating or avoid additional risk factors for electrical fires.

- Don't go DIY. Choosing to work with a professional electrician rather than doing electrical work oneself can help reduce electrical fire risk considerably. Electricians know how to work on electrical systems safely to prevent damage to wires and components, and also safeguard themselves against shock.

Risk for electrical fires at home can be reduced with technology and other strategies.

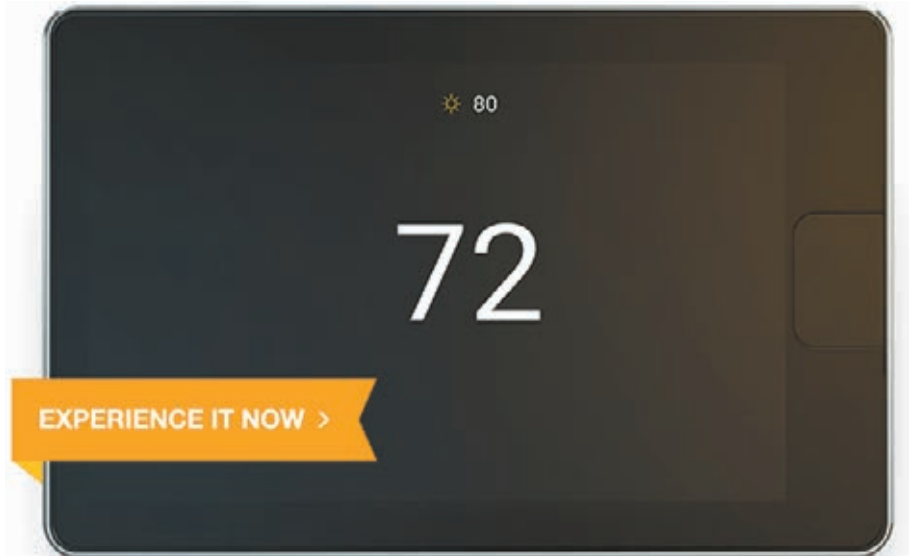
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