

Fall Home Improvement

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Exterior renovations that improve curb appeal

Neglecting a home's exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home's appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers' perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added

value, as determined by the 2019 "Cost vs. Value Report" from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

- **Garage door replacement:** Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of \$3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

- **Manufactured stone veneer:** Replacing a portion of vinyl siding with stone

veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

- **Wood deck addition:** A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners' ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners' initial investment.

- **Siding replacement:** Not only does old or weathered siding look unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly — at roughly \$16,000 — it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

- **New entry door:** Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an



aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn't all about good looks,

either. A door that isn't well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on

some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.



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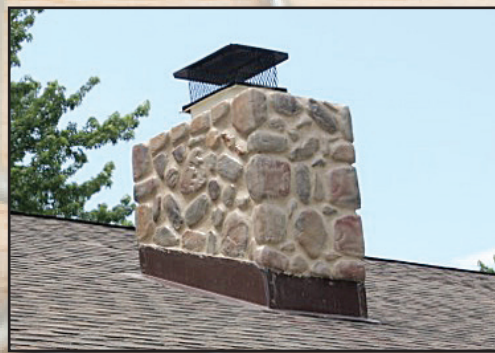
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Design a more functional pantry

Many homeowners wish they had more storage space, and kitchens are one area where people seemingly can always use more storage.

Despite a desire for more kitchen space, until recently, kitchen pantries fell out of favor. Builders and architects may have thought that close proximity to supermarkets as well as multi-use cabinets in kitchens would offset the need for pantries. But according to a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders, a kitchen pantry is the most desirable kitchen feature for buyers in the market for a new home.

According to a 2016 survey from ReportLinker, 98 percent of Americans say cooking at home is their preferred way to prepare a meal. And despite the wide array of restaurants, prepared meals and fast food options nearby, more than one-third of people cook at home daily, with nearly 50 percent cooking between three and six days a week.

In order to accommodate for spending more time in the kitchen, homeowners are directing additional attention to kitchen preparation and storage features. In fact, one recent trend in kitchen renovations is creating custom-designed pantries.

Locate the appropriate space

Ideally, pantries should be in or adjacent to the kitchen. But not every home layout allows for this setup. Some homeowners need to move storage pantries into the garage, the basement or a mud/laundry room.

Various factors should be considered before placing a pantry outside a kitchen. What is the climate? Will food spoil? Is there a possibility that vermin or insects can infiltrate the room and access food? These factors will dictate whether to have closed cabinets, air-tight bins or open shelves or if other modifications must be made to the room prior to building.

Choose the type of pantry

Accessibility is essential in a pantry. Everything should be easily reached and grabbed as needed without having to move too many things. Ideally, foods should be arranged in a single layer so that all items can be viewed at a glance. Shelves of various depths and heights can accommodate items of different sizes. Adjustable shelves are ideal because they can be modified as foods change. Sliding drawers can improve reach in cabinets.

In smaller spaces, French door-style reach-in cabinets are convenient and flexible. In complete kitchen remodels or new constructions, walk-in pantries offer the most space and flexibility.

Must-have features

Pantries serve different functions in different homes. For the bulk shopper, a pantry with plenty of room for large items will be needed.

Lighting can be beneficial in all pantries. Lights can improve visibility when trying to locate items. Others prefer an outlet for charging hand-held vacuums or other small appliances. Counter space in the pantry enables homeowners to unload groceries directly onto pantry shelves.

For pantries located outside of the kitchen, built-in freezers can maximize storage possibilities, especially for those who freeze-and-eat after bulk shopping ventures.

Pantries are popular features that homeowners can customize depending on their storage needs and the amount of time they spend in their kitchens.

7 uses for fallen leaves

By the time autumn hits full swing, many trees will have shed their leaves for the season, and the last vestiges of red, yellow and orange magic will have faded to brown. Raking, blowing and collecting leaves becomes the primary chores of lawn and yard maintenance, and presents most homeowners with large piles of gathered leaves to tend to.

It is impossible to count just how many leaves fall to the ground each year, or just how many pounds of leaves get collected curbside, but the numbers are substantial. Cleaning up leaves is considerable work, but not all of those leaves need to be carted away. In fact, there are several different uses of leaves that can be beneficial.

1. Spread leaves as a protective mulch to cover tender perennials or root crops/bulbs in the ground. The leaves will form a natural insulating cover that keeps the soil and the plants within a bit warmer over winter.

2. Create a pile of leaves that will break down and form a crumbly, compost-like material called leaf mold. Even though leaf mold may sound like a blight, it's actually a good amendment to garden soil, improving its structure and ability to hold water. Leaf mold also attracts beneficial organisms that are vital in healthy soil.

3. Brown leaves can be added to green materials in compost piles to improve the health of the compost being formed. According to the healthy living resource Care2, the ideal ratio is 75 percent brown to 25 percent green materials in compost. Turn compost piles regularly to aerate them.

4. Store dried, mulched leaves in a dry spot so they can be used in the spring as a weed barrier for spring plantings. They will keep weeds at bay and help re-



tain soil moisture to ensure small sprouts have the resources to grow.

5. Use shredded leaves as a lawn supplement. Pass a lawn mower over leaves left on the lawn to break them down into pieces too small to rake. This will help keep the lawn healthy throughout the winter without blocking out needed sunlight.

6. Bag dried leaves and pack them tightly together in cold areas of the home, such as basements or garages. They can act as added in-

sulation. Bags of leaves also can be placed around planting containers to protect them from frost.

7. Gather a few of the best-looking leaves and preserve them. Use an iron on a low setting and press leaves between two pieces of waxed paper until the waxed paper seals together. Or use clear contact paper to achieve the same effect.

Fallen leaves can be used in many different ways throughout the year.

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How to level an uneven yard

Many things can cause a yard to be uneven. Drainage problems, leaky pipes beneath the grass and pests can wreak havoc on a yard, resulting in uneven turf that can be both unsightly and unsafe.

Addressing an uneven yard might be homeowners' ultimate goal, but the home experts at BobVila.com note that homeowners should first figure out what's causing the problem and make fixing that their first task. Fixing uneven ground above leaky pipes will only be a temporary fix if the leaks themselves are not addressed. Professional contractors might be necessary depending on what's causing the problem. However, once the underlying issue has been addressed, many homeowners can handle the task of leveling an uneven yard on their own.

• Get the right tools and materials. Leveling an uneven yard may require various tools. Thatch will likely need to be removed from the lawn before it can be leveled out, so homeowners will need a thatch rake or dethatching machine to get

this task started. Dethatching machines are generally necessary for especially large lawns, and these can typically be rented from home improvement retailers. A shovel, bow rake and push broom are other tools homeowners will likely need. Materials such as topsoil, compost and sand will be necessary as well, and these are typically sold at local garden centers.

• Fill in areas beneath the grass. Areas beneath the grass can be filled in with a mixture of sand, topsoil and compost. The experts at BobVila.com advise using two parts sand, two parts topsoil and one part compost. Each of these components plays its own role in restoring the yard to full health. Sand helps the ground stay level, while the topsoil and compost provide the grass with valuable nutrients. If the low spots are not especially deep, this mixture can be applied without removing the grass. However, before filling in holes when addressing spots that are deeper than two or three inches, remove the grass then place it back in place once the hole has been

filled. To dig up the grass, put the blade of the shovel at the outside of the low spot before sliding it under about two or three inches so you do not upset the grass roots.

• Spread the top dressing. Once the holes have been filled and the grass has been placed back on the ground (if it was removed), spread the top dressing mix with a shovel. The mix should be spread evenly with the back of the bow rake at a depth of no more than half an inch. Make sure the mix is worked into the low spots and that it's not completely covering the grass, as that will suffocate the lawn. If necessary, use the push broom to work the mix into the soil.

• Water the lawn. Finally, water the lawn to help the top dressing settle into the grass. If necessary, repeat the process of applying top dressing and watering until the lawn is even and has returned to full strength.

An uneven lawn is an eyesore and potentially harmful. But fixing an uneven lawn is simple once homeowners discover and address what's behind the issue.

Did you know?

According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, adding square footage to a home can cost homeowners anywhere from \$7,000 to \$100,000. When adding square footage to a home, homeowners may need to knock down an interior wall or walls, the cost of which can vary widely depending on the walls being knocked down. Load-bearing walls are needed to support the home, and while such walls can be removed, homeowners may need to hire structural engineers at additional cost to orchestrate such removals. In addition, homeowners can expect to pay more when knocking down walls that contain ducts or electrical wiring. It also can be costly for homeowners whose homes are old to knock down walls. HomeAdvisor notes that the wall-removal process in old homes that contain lead paint or lath-and-plaster walls is more intricate and may cost homeowners more money.

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How to protect wood floors from inclement weather

Wood floors are a worthwhile investment that can improve the beauty and function of just about any room in a home. Even though wood floors are durable, and new protective treatments help seal out many of the things that may have damaged floors in the past, homeowners still need to prioritize protecting their hardwood floors.

Certain seasons of the year can be more harsh on wood floors than others. For example, seasons characterized by moisture and precipitation, particularly the early spring, winter and fall, can be hard on wood floors. The experts at ServiceMaster Clean say that cold, snowy days can damage wood floors, and Lumber Liquidators agrees that winter weather can be harsh on flooring.

Homeowners need not give up on hardwood if they live in an area that sees all four seasons. They just need to take a few steps to keep floors looking beautiful.

- Clean up the salt. Salt that keeps sidewalks and streets clear of snow and ice inadvertently gets tracked inside

a home. Hard chunks of salt can scratch wood floors, and, if left to sit, that salt can eventually cause white marks and other stains. Routinely vacuuming and sweeping up salt is necessary to protect wood floors.

- Invest in shoe storage. Wet or snowy boots can create puddles around the house. Have a special mat or tray by the front door where wet shoes can be kept. A nice bench in the entryway makes it easy for residents and guests to remove their shoes until it's time to go back outside.

- Use water-wicking mats. Homeowners will probably need a few extra mats around to tame errant drips and wipe shoes. Any entrance that might be used by people or pets should be protected. Try to avoid petroleum-based, rubber-backed mats, as they could discolor the wood floor.

- Control humidity indoors. Cold, dry air in a home can be problematic because the moisture in the wood can eventually evaporate into the air. The heat will suck that moisture from the flooring, causing it to shrink, creak



and splinter and become more brittle. Think about investing in an in-line humidifier for the home's HVAC system that can keep a moderate amount of humidity in the home. Hardwood floorboards are installed to accommodate minor temperature and humidity fluctuations. This is typically a range of between 60 and 80 degrees F with a relative humidity range of 35 to 55 percent, advises Ser-

viceMaster.

- Use the right cleaning products. Avoid excessive water to clean wood floors, and select soaps that are specially designed for wood flooring. Consult with the flooring manufacturer for a list of detergents that are safe to use.

With proper care, hardwood flooring can survive rain, snow and cold weather.

Considering an energy audit? Get informed

Overconsumption of energy is a problem that plagues many homeowners. Wasting energy can hurt homeowners' bottom lines and the planet. But many homeowners aren't aware just how much energy their homes are consuming and even wasting. That's why a home energy audit can be so important.

A home energy audit or assessment investigates just how much energy a home consumes so homeowners can make their homes more energy efficient. Audits identify where energy is being wasted and can offer suggestions to fix the problem.

The U.S. Department of Energy advises that the average U.S. household consumes around 90 million btus in a year. Of the energy used in homes, nearly 50 percent goes to heating and cooling. Water heating, appliances, electronics, and lighting account for the remaining consumption. Consumers can save between 5 and 30 percent on home energy bills by getting a home energy audit and making the adjustments advised by auditors.

There are two types of energy audits: professional and do-it-yourself. Professional auditors will go room-to-room to assess a home's energy use. Typical testing includes thermographic scans and infrared cameras to determine air leakage and insulation; a blower door test, which depressurizes the home and simulates the effect of a 20 mph wind to find air leaks; and watt meter

measurements to test energy usage by various devices throughout the house.

Before an auditor comes to the house, homeowners can make a list of any problems or concerns they want to discuss with the auditor. The auditor also may interview the homeowner to learn about how the home normally runs and can analyze energy bills to determine typical energy consumption. Windows, doors, HVAC systems, insulation, fireplaces, and lighting fixtures all may be assessed during a professional audit.

Even though a professional audit is usually the best way to determine where a home is losing energy, homeowners can conduct their own audits to detect and fix problems. Locating and sealing air leaks, addressing inadequate ventilation, checking that insulation levels and vapor barriers are at recommended levels, and inspecting HVAC systems should be part of any DIY audit. If a heating/cooling unit is more than 15 years old, the DOE suggests having it replaced with a newer, energy-efficient unit.

An energy audit can identify areas around a home where improvements can be made to reduce energy consumption and waste. Upgrading to new appliances, replacing light bulbs, sealing drafts, improving insulation, and addressing moisture and water leaks can be good for the environment and help homeowners save money.

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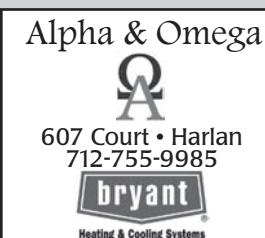
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- Keep exterior doors closed.
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LONG TERM SAVINGS

- Install and use a programmable thermostat.
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- Inspect and upgrade attic and wall insulation if necessary.
- Install energy efficient windows and doors.
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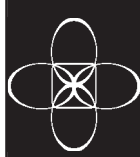
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