October 18, 2017

A Special Supplement to the **Winchester Press**

FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT & Real Estate Guide

YOUR GUIDE to getting your home ready for winter

Our special supplement is loaded with ideas, advice, inspiration, and offers from our advertisers.

R.B. Heating still 'on fire' after 25 years

Alicia K. Gosselin

KEMPTVILLE

The team at Kemptville's R.B. Heating ClimateCare recently celebrated the company's 25th anniversary with a blowout bash, promoting special deals on new furnaces, fireplaces, stoves, and air conditioning units.

Since 1992, president Rick Buffham has been servicing the community with not only heating products, but also routine maintenance and installation services.

He started out the business in his home, before settling into the 8,500-square-foot space in Kemptville in 2006. Today, the company houses a showroom, office space, and warehouse, and has 15 employees.

"We have excellent certified professional technicians who train on an ongoing basis to be able to provide the latest technological expertise and to maintain today's state-of-the-art heating and air conditioning systems," said Buffham.

As the company has grown, it has expanded the products and services offered as well. Nearly five years ago, R.B. Heating joined forces with the co-operative of independent contractors known as ClimateCare, which has locations all across North America.

"This has allowed us to benefit from economies of scale to offer customers even lower prices and better product selection," added Buffham.

Today, the local store offers ductless air-conditioning, fireplaces, gas and propane furnaces, geothermal systems, water heaters, boilers, and more.



There are hundreds of heating options to choose from in R.B. Heating's showroom.
Courtesy photo

Check the below contributed article from the ClimateCare team on how to prepare for winter by simply changing the filter in your furnace.

Simple furnace fix: Change your filter this winter

Your family shouldn't spend the winter wearing heavy sweaters under blankets at home, and your furnace filter plays a larger role in the overall temperature of your home than most homeowners realize.

Changing your furnace filter on a regular basis is an easy way to keep your furnace functioning the way it should, and your home as comfortable as it should be when you get home from work every day.

Your furnace works with three main pieces – the return air duct, supply air vent, and the furnace filter.

The return air duct serves as the starting point. Air enters and is warmed through the heat exchanger with the assistance of a blower fan. The supply air vent sends the air on a trip around your house. The furnace filter sits in a space between these two points, mediating and regulating the circulation of air. When you set your thermostat to your desired temperature, the furnace will continue to treat air until it has reached that temperature.

Indoor air contains more pollutants than outdoor air. Common pollutants and particles in the air include dust, pet dander, mold, pollen, and dirt.

The furnace filter's primary purpose is to clean the air moving through the furnace. It helps to minimize your exposure to these pollutants and as it catches air pollutants, it protects the blower fan from the pollutants and allows greater temperature regulation and air circulation.

What happens with a blocked furnace filter?

Over time, the accumulation of pollutants in furnace a furnace filter affects its ability to capture pollutants. Irregular inspection and maintenance of a furnace filter compromises its functionality and overall purpose.

The blower fan has to work harder to reach the temperature set on your thermostat and eventually the furnace motor will overheat and burn out. You'll end up spending more money on your energy bills and repairing your furnace with a dirty furnace filter.

Why would anybody let a furnace filter stay filthy?

We don't know.

Changing your furnace filter on a regular basis keeps your family warm and helps maintain clean air, helps your furnace last longer, and keeps your energy bill low. Take good care of the furnace air filter and your furnace will take good care of your family.

For more information, visit www.climatecare.com/blog/simple-furnace-fix-change-filter-winter/.

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Five things to keep in mind before renovating

by Leslie Ault

WINCHESTER

Fall is a popular time to do renovations, and it's important to be aware of costly mistakes to avoid when preparing for the renovation process.

You should take care to avoid legal problems that could lead to additional expenses and possibly court. Many claims in small claims court (claims of $25,000 or less) arise from renovations.

The court has dealt with all the problems listed below, and an understanding of

these issues will be useful when planning your renovations.

Please note that none of what follows is legal advice – only general information. Each situation has its own unique circumstances, and proper legal advice should be sought.

1. Building permits

No matter the size or type of renovation or demolition, you should first call the municipality's planning or building department to determine whether a building permit is required. The homeowner, not the contractor, has the ultimate responsibility to ensure the work is done legally. If work is done without a permit when a permit was in fact needed, the work is illegal.

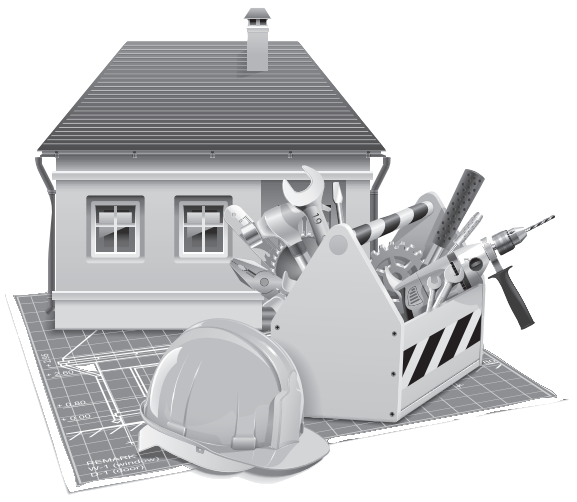
A permit's cost depends on the value and type of improvements. If a permit is needed and issued, ensure that the municipality conducts all the necessary inspections as the work progresses, not after the work is finished, otherwise completed walls and ceilings may need to be torn apart to perform the inspection.

Homeowners: beware the contractor who does not discuss and provide proof of permits. In one case, the contractor told the owner that he had taken care of the permit, but he had not. When the municipality discovered there was no permit, the homeowner was forced to completely teardown the improperly done work, while the contractor disappeared with the money.

The risks of proceeding without a permit are numerous, including being fined by the municipality, having to demolish the work to legally rebuild, problems obtaining full fire insurance, satisfying safety concerns, and difficulties selling the house.

Once a permit is opened, it is essential to ensure the work has all the required staged inspections, so that the municipality can eventually complete its "final inspection" and close the permit.

Note that the municipality does not inspect electrical work. All such work is the domain of the Electrical Safety Authority. Similarly, in this geographic area, the local conservation authority enforces any on-site sewage system renovation or construction.



2. Zoning and property

If the renovation involves extending any structure (addition, garage, deck, steps, etc.) be sure to check the zoning of your property, and the boundaries of your land. Guessing where your land boundaries are can lead to house, driveway, and permanent sheds encroaching on neighbouring properties. Ask a surveyor to delineate the relevant boundary lines.

One homeowner built a house on what he thought was his vacant lot, only to find out that he had mistakenly built half the house on his lot and the other half on his neighbour's vacant lot.

Municipal bylaws require structures to be setback a certain distance from the boundaries of the property. There are also laws controlling the maximum land that can be covered by a structure. The rules can be complicated, and vary by municipality and type of zoning. For instance, if you are already at maximum land coverage, you may not be able to pave a walkway, but could potentially install interlocking blocks.

When in doubt, always make the call to the municipality. There might also be local governmental grants available for certain types of construction or improvement. Relevant provincial and federal grants can be found with an internet search.

3. Choosing a contractor

Any homeowner can check the online "Ontario Consumer Beware List" to ensure that a contractor is not named. The contractor must be licenced.

Beware of door-to-door renovation contractors. The Consumer Protection Act gives some protection to the consumer if the renovation contract is signed in the consumer's home. If the contract is worth more than $50, the consumer has the right to a "cooling-off period" of 10 days, during which the consumer may cancel the contract for any reason without having to pay any cancellation fees.

If the contractor did work within the 10-day cooling-off period, however, the consumer may be required to compensate the contractor a "reasonable amount" for the work done.

Any deposit should be, at most, 10 to 15 per cent of the quoted total price.

Ensure the contractor is registered with the WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board), which administers compensation and no-fault insurance should an injury occur. Otherwise, it is entirely possible that you, as the homeowner, will be named as a defendant in a personal injury claim.

4. Contract (it's always better to have one)

The basic question for the court, should it get that far, is "What did the parties agree to?"

Very often, court could have been avoided if a written contract containing the essential elements of the deal had been signed. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has removed its long-standing renovation contract precedent from its website, but a search for the CMHC precedent should yield useful results. The precedent is to be used only as a starting point – it is merely an aid, not a substitute for proper legal advice. Each renovation contract has its own peculiarities, and requires specific legal assistance to have any guarantee of its enforceability and correctness.

Even if the contract was not in writing, a court could find there is a contract if it can be proved that the parties agreed on the essential terms. If the parties did not agree on the essential terms, then the aggrieved party would likely need to bring a claim based on "tort" with that party trying to prove negligence instead of a breach of contract.

Whether contract or tort, the court will expect the contractor to complete the renovations "in a good and workmanlike manner."

5. Owner dissatisfaction

Regardless of whether the homeowner likes the completed work product, if the work was done by the contractor with the homeowner's consent the contractor is entitled to some (if not all) of the value of the work performed.

Refusal to pay for the work is a fast way to end up in court, which is likely to be unpleasant for all parties involved.

Leslie Ault is a lawyer with Winchester's Ault and Ault Law Office focusing on real estate transactions and land development matters, among other things.

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Specialist Terri-Lee Tilley of Lannin's Home Building Centre said there are more than 200 types of caulking and sealants to choose from at the Winchester store. Press Photo – Gosselin

Choose the right caulking for the job

Alicia K. Gosselin

WINCHESTER

As the leaves fall off the trees and the cooler weather becomes more consistent, homeowners are faced with the task of winterizing their homes to withstand the below-freezing temperatures that are just around the corner.

One of the easiest ways to improve insulation around the house is to use caulking or sealant in all the little cracks and leaks around windows, doors, siding, and even roof shingles, to seal in the heat all season long.

At Lannin's Home Building Centre in Winchester, there are more than 200 different brands and types of caulking and sealant to choose from to satisfy any project around the home.

The selection in the caulk and sealant aisle can be overwhelming, but actually choosing the right one for the job doesn't need to be complicated.

Most of the caulk and sealant on the store's shelves is basically one of four types – elastomeric, polyurethane, acrylic, latex, and silicone.

Here's how to make the right choice:

> More than 200 products at Lannin's Home Building Centre

Siding, windows and doors

Polyurethane is the best material for the job. Not only can you paint over it, but it doesn't shrink and stays flexible. It also adheres better than silicone, so it doesn't attract dust and dirt the way silicone does. A popular choice at the Winchester store is the Quikrete self-leveling sealant, which provides superior adhesion, flexibility, and durability.

Roofing

The best material to use would be an elastomeric or rubberized product. This stuff won't dry out in extreme conditions, and it sticks to everything. According to employee Terri-Lee Tilley, a lot of roofs will have small leaks at this time of year, so using a caulking or sealant that can stick to the shingles can make all the difference. Look for Black Gold Roof Repair on the shelves, which is water and weather-resistant, and easy to apply. On top of being great for the roof, it weatherproofs seams, joints, cracks, flashings, vents, drainpipes, eaves, and skylights.

Interior trim

Latex products are great if you're sealing gaps and nail holes in trim that's going to be painted. It cleans up easily and dries fast. It's also easy to use, and cheaper than other options.

Baseboards and doors

Acrylic caulking is popular because of its ease of use and because it cleans up well. It also provides a clean, neat seal. This caulking works very well for painting applications as it fills any gaps between walls, ceilings, and woodwork trim. Although acrylic caulking can be used to guard against water penetration, due to its ability to shrink and distort over time, it is not the best choice. An acrylic caulking on the shelves at Lannin's is the Home Builder Acrylic, which is a 35-year durability product formulated for the Canadian climate, and can be used indoors or outdoors.

Kitchen and bath

This is where silicone products shine, as it is great for jobs exposed to water. Silicone caulk is more expensive than others, but worth the cost due to its flexibility and long life. It also is mildew resistant, watertight, and won't yellow or discolour. Silicone can be easily removed and replaced when it gets grungy as well. Look for the GE Multi-purpose Clear Silicone II Sealant, which has low odour during curing, will never crack, peel or shrink, is UV resistant, and remains flexible from 65 degrees F to 400 degrees F.



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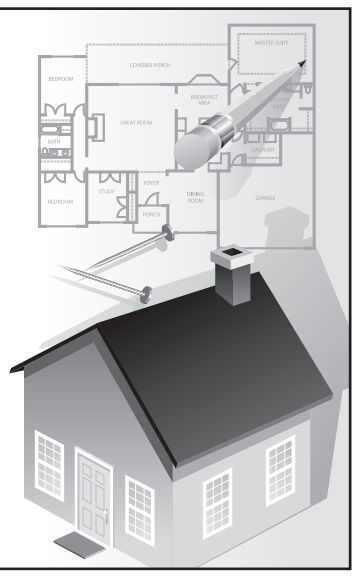

What to do when a home renovation project stalls



Upon embarking on a home improvement project, homeowners who have never before lived through such undertakings are often told to expect their projects to take more time than initial estimates suggested. Unforeseen complications can compromise project timelines, and some homeowners may find their projects stuck in neutral.

Stalled projects can make life at home difficult, and homeowners may feel helpless with regard to getting a project back on course. But there are ways for homeowners to get stalled projects back on course.

• Start off on solid financial footing. It's important that homeowners who want to upgrade their homes enter the home improvement process with a realistic grasp of their finances. Many home improvement projects stall when homeowners run out of money. Homeowners can avoid such unfortunate situations by only beginning a project they know they can afford. Whether funding a project with a loan or savings or a combination of both, homeowners should make an honest assessment of what they can afford to commit to a given project. If the amount of money available does not add up to the estimated cost of the project, delay the project now or you might be facing a stalled project down the road.

• Honestly assess whether or not you can finish the job. Do-it-yourselfers may have the abilities to complete a project, but they should not let their pride get in the way of their ultimate goal, which is the completion of the project. In addition to money, time or lack thereof, is often the culprit behind stalled projects. Homeowners with full-time jobs, families or both may not be able to find the time to complete a job in a timely fashion. If the project has been stuck in neutral and no sudden windfall of free time is on the horizon, start contacting contractors to finish the job for you.

• Ask for help. There's no shame in asking for help to complete a project. Some homeowners may underestimate the scope of a project until it's too late. Asking family, friends or neighbours for help might be the only way to get a stalled project back on track. Certain home improvement projects may not require advanced skills, and even friends or family with little or no home improvement experience can pitch in to complete such projects. When more advanced projects stall, homeowners may want to hire contractors to complete the work. If budgets have not left much room for hiring a contractor, homeowners can perform some of the labour on their own.

• Be mindful of permits. Some home improvement projects require permits, and these permits often have expiration dates. Homeowners must keep permits in mind when projects start to stall, recognizing that they may need to reapply for permits if projects go unfinished for especially long periods of time.

Stalled home improvement projects can be a nightmare. But homeowners can address such delays in various ways to get projects back on track.

Growing trends in today's homes

Although the heydays of the real estate boom of the early 2000s have not quite returned, things look positive. By mid-2017, the market was a seller's market, with more people in the market for homes than properties available. But sales during that time were still outpacing sales figures from a year prior. In fact, in May 2017, home sales in Canada increased to their highest level in more than five years, according to the Canadian MLS® Systems.



Low interest rates on mortgages and more confidence in the economy has driven many people to make improvements to their existing homes. As is typical, the things homeowners are looking for in 2017 have evolved from years past. The following are some trends that are helping to steer the real estate market further.

• Smaller homes: There seems to be a slight trend toward more modest homes as people consider affordability and maintenance on larger properties. The National Association of Home Builders states buyers are now looking for smaller, more livable homes with flexible floor plans, energy-efficient appliances and plenty of storage space.

• Matte finishes: Stainless steel and luster have been popular for years. However, the next big thing is matte finishes on faucets, appliances and even in countertops. These less flashy finishes are prized for their warmth and elegance. While some high-end models with matte finishes have been available for several years, even less expensive models are now available.

• Smarter technology: Many homeowners are embracing smart technology throughout their homes, but it's not just lights that turn on with voice command or more efficient thermostats. Innovative technology includes toilets that can autonomously stay clean and sanitized, refrigerators equipped with cameras so homeowners can see the contents inside and indoor food recyclers that can turn food waste into fertilizer.

Staying abreast of the ever-changing trends in home improvement and real estate can help consumers make the best choices with regard to buying and building their homes.

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Financial advice

To renovate or not? Here's how you can pay for it

Article submitted by
O'Farrell Financial Services

WINCHESTER – A lot of planning and consideration goes into a home renovation. What are the reasons for renovating? What needs to be done? What is your budget? How will you pay for it?

Consider your reasons for renovating. Have you outgrown your home? Does a renovation make more sense than buying a larger home? Perhaps you are preparing your home for sale. If it's the latter, make sure you're spending your money in the right places. A renovation can fast track the growth of your home's market value. Bathrooms, kitchens, floors, and basement apartments are the key areas to increase property value. Make sure you're not overspending for the type of buyers in your neighbourhood.

Once you've determined a renovation is necessary, you'll begin the process of planning what needs to be done and who will do the work. Doing the work yourself will save you some money, but be realistic about your abilities. Work done incorrectly could cost you more in the long run. Hire someone to do the more complex jobs like electrical, plumbing, or tiling. It's important to find a contractor you trust. Always follow up on references and seek out at least three quotes from different contractors.

When you have your quotes, you can finalize your budget and determine how you'll pay for the renovation. There are a number of ways to go about this. If you can hold off for a while, you can save the funds that are needed. Another option is to hold off on other large expenses such as vacations and costly hobbies. For some people, a secured line of credit or home equity line of credit (HELOC) makes the most sense.

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It is recommended that you borrow no more than 20 per cent of the value of your home**. You should always consult your financial advisor, as borrowing money is not for everyone.

When considering a large expense, an advisor can offer guidance for the best way to structure the necessary funds required to achieve the lowest possible borrowing costs. Your advisor will review your loan in conjunction with your existing debt and your overall retirement and investment plan to help ensure you're still on track to reach your financial goals. This will help you come out on top with your home renovation project.

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Fall for farmhouse charm

Chunky sweaters, pumpkin spice lattes and multi-coloured leaves – some things are simply quintessentially fall. Others like giving your home an outdoor face-lift may not necessarily be top of mind, but rich fall colours open up a realm of possibilities for creative yard decorations. Not just for the summer and holiday seasons, outdoor décor help create a warm and welcoming exterior.



Drawing inspiration from the season is the best place to start. A simple harvest wreath made from leaves, berries, and twigs uses the gorgeous reds, oranges, and browns of autumn. Accent it with a burlap bow for a rustic touch.

If you want to add some farmhouse charm, repurpose household items to breathe new life into them. The opportunities are endless – an old door that used to have windows on it is the perfect way to display fall blooms in hanging flower pots. A chair missing its seat can act as a rustic flower pot stand. An old set of shelves is ideal for showing off vintage watering cans. And if you don't have these hanging around, you can always pop by a local used furniture outlet, like Habitat for Humanity ReStore, which has been raising funds to invest in local communities for 25 years.

For added pops of colour, place pots of burgundy chrysanthemums, purple asters, or ornamental cabbage along your walkway. Flowers always freshen things up, especially when the temperature starts to drop. Create a country aesthetic by placing decorative gourds and pumpkins in between the flowers. These will transition well into late autumn, and you can even repurpose the pumpkin for carving a jack-o-lantern on Halloween. *www.newscanada.com*

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Burning wood this fall or winter? Do a moisture test first

by Joy Harbers

WILLIAMSBURG

We have had a wet rainy summer, and drying our firewood for this heating season has been a challenge.

We rely on the sun and warm breezy weather throughout the spring and summer months to dry our firewood.

When a tree is cut, the moisture content can be as high as 50 per cent by weight. Moisture content should be between 15 and 20 per cent for it to burn properly, so a lot of water must evaporate from your wood before it is ready for the heating season.

Hardwoods like maple and oak take longer to dry, while softer woods like poplar will dry faster.

Wood will dry faster if it is split into smaller pieces, allowing more sun and warmth to get to the centre of the wood.

And, of course, the weather plays a big factor in drying the wood. A hot dry climate will speed up the drying process.

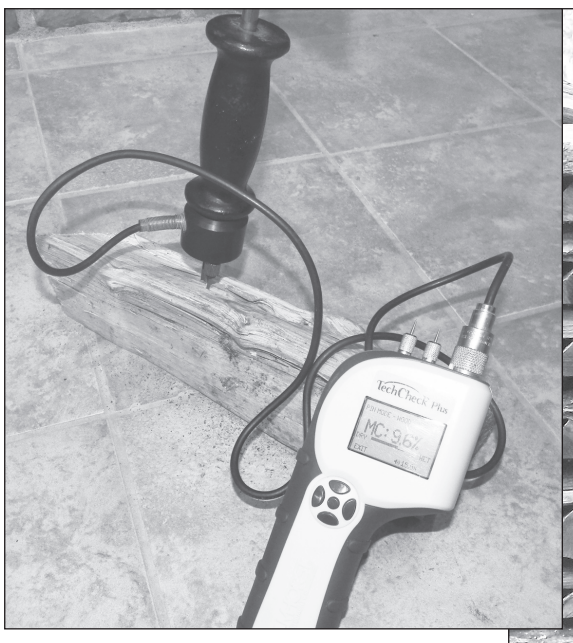
Having your wood split and placed in windrows out in the open for the summer is an effective way of drying for most years. Although, it's certainly been a challenge this year.

Is your wood dry for this winter?

Cracks in the end grain of the wood can be an indication that the wood is dry; however, this is not always a reliable way to determine if the wood is dry. Wet wood can also have these signs.

Wet wood is usually darker in colour and will turn to grey or yellow as it dries.

The sound of banging two pieces of wood together can also help – dry wood will sound hollow, and wet will sound more solid and dull.





Williamsburg's Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry has a moisture meter on hand to help its customers test the quality of their wood before burning this fall and winter. Courtesy photos

Dry wood is much lighter in weight than wet wood of the same species.

If you split a piece of wood, the freshly exposed surface will feel warm to the touch if it is dry. Cool and damp to the touch is a sign of wet wood not ready to burn.

When lighting a fire, dry wood will ignite quickly and burn down easily. Wet wood will be a struggle to light, and you can hear hisses in the fire. If burning in a stove or fireplace that has a glass door, wet wood will darken the glass leaving black spots. Wet wood will not give off the same heat as dry wood either.

At Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry, we have a moisture meter and while cleaning chimneys and doing inspections this year we have been checking the moisture content of our customers' wood. This helps them know how their wood will burn this winter.

Wet wood will cause creosote in the chimney, as it is not burning hot enough. Keep an eye on your draft, and check your chimney throughout the winter for any build up.

We plan to have the moisture meter here in our showroom for most Saturday mornings throughout the season. If you have concerns about your wood, give us a call and bring a few pieces of wood to our store and we can check the moisture for you.

For those of us heating with wood, we find it gratifying and appreciate the solid warmth in our homes, as well as the ambiance it offers.

Let's burn responsibly and enjoy another heating season!

Joy Harbers is co-owner of Williamsburg's Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry, located at 4385 Billy Lane.

Reduce cold-weather fire risk

Plenty of things heat up when the temperature drops, including the risk for fire hazards. Fireplaces, stoves, heating systems, candles, and even electric lights are used more often during the winter than any other time of year, so it makes sense that the risk of home fires increases when the mercury drops.

In 2015, there were 94 fire deaths in Ontario. Cooking is the leading cause of all home fires and contributes to billions of dollars in property loss each year. Understanding potential risks and exercising caution can help homeowners protect themselves, their families and their homes from fire.

Cooking

Home heating fires peak between the hours of 6 and 8 pm, when many people are home preparing dinner. The following steps, courtesy of the Red Cross, can improve safety in the kitchen and reduce the likelihood of a home fire.

• Never leave cooking food unattended, as it can take just seconds for fires to ignite.

• Keep anything that can catch fire away from the stove or other appliances that generate heat.

• Clean regularly to prevent grease buildup.

• Make sure appliances are turned off before leaving the room or going to bed.

Heating

Heating is the second leading cause of home fires, deaths and injuries. Here are some safety guidelines.

• Install heating appliances according to manufacturers' instructions or have a professional do the installation.

• Fuel-burning equipment needs to vent to the outside.

• Never use an oven to heat a home.

• Keep anything that can burn away from heating equipment, including portable space heaters.

• Clean and inspect heating appliances regularly.

• Turn off portable heaters when leaving the room or going to bed.

Electric

The National Safety Council estimates that between 600 and 1,000 people die each year from electrocution. Electricity also can contribute to home fires. The Energy Education Council offers these safety suggestions.

• Never force plugs into outlets.

• Check that cords are not frayed or cracked. Do not run cords under carpets or place them in high-traffic areas.

• Use extension cords only on a temporary basis.

• Make sure light bulbs are the proper wattage for fixtures.

• Install ground fault circuit interrupters in kitchens, baths, laundry rooms, and elsewhere, making sure to test them regularly.

• Check periodically for loose wall receptacles and loose wires. Listen for popping or sizzling sounds behind walls.



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Millwork details add appeal and a classic feel

Homeowners are discovering that architectural accents can go a long way toward improving both the look and value of their homes. When renovating a space, the term "millwork" may be mentioned by designers and contractors. While it might be a mystery to some, millwork can give rooms unique looks.

Millwork refers to items traditionally made from raw lumber in a sawmill. Examples of millwork include crown moulding, base trims, door frames, window casings, chair rails, and paneling. Cabinets may also classify as millwork.

Used for both decoration and to increase the functionality of buildings, millwork comes in various types. Generally, millwork is fabricated in two ways. Stock millwork tends to be mass-produced commercial items. These low-cost items are interchangeable and may be widely available at retailers, including home improvement centres. Custom millwork is a product that is custom designed and produced for individuals and special building projects. Sometimes referred to as "architectural millwork," these pieces may be more ornate and made-to-order. Homeowners who want to match a focal point of a home or an existing style often turn to custom millwork.

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, ornate millwork was largely reserved for royalty or the very wealthy. Skilled carpenters would hand carve each piece, taking weeks to finish most projects. Eventually, millwork became more commonplace. Distinguishing one property from another today could mean turning back to the more distinctive designs of the past.

Homeowners looking for ways to enhance their properties can embrace millwork to achieve a luxury feel without a sizable investment. The first step is to choose millwork that will coordinate with the era and style of a home's existing decor. Ornate millwork in an overly modern house may seem out of place. The millwork should match the architectural theme of the home.

Although some do-it-yourselfers can successfully install prefabricated millwork, for custom designs and a truly seamless look, it is important to have millwork professionally installed. Individuals should research carpenters who specialize in millwork and verify their license and reputation through a consumer protection agency.

Popular types of millwork include crown moulding, corbels, wainscotting, and custom bookcases. Homeowners may not realize that millwork can be added to spaces of all sizes to give them an air of sophistication.

Although millwork was traditionally formed from hardwoods, eco-friendly homeowners can now find millwork crafted from synthetic materials and even reclaimed woods.

Millwork can add that special touch to the interior or exterior of a home. Learn more by visiting worldmillworkalliance.com.



Architectural millwork can be seen in many areas of a home, including kitchens.

Inside and out

Five ways to make homes safer

As homeowners prepare for home-improvement projects, improving safety inside and outside the home should be a priority.

1. Improve lighting

One of the easiest ways to reduce the risk of falls is to improve lighting around the home. Adequate lighting is important at entrances to the home, stairways, hallways, and other frequently traversed areas. Make sure lighting fixtures are using the highest wattage light bulb allowed. Artificial lighting sources become even more vital in fall and autumn, when natural light is less abundant in a home. In addition, install lighting outdoors by the front door, over the garage and where garbage pails are stored to facilitate safe passage.

2. Eliminate slick surfaces

Improving traction around the house also can minimize falls. Throw rugs and runners can be made more secure with nonslip rubber backings. Bath rugs can reduce slipping on wet surfaces in the bathroom. Also, nonslip mats can be used inside of showers and bathtubs.

Use shoe trays to reduce puddling from melting snow or rain runoff in entryways. Mop up spills quickly, and consider the use of matte- or textured-finished flooring to improve stability underfoot.

Promptly remove snow and ice from driveways and walkways. For those who live in cold climates, heated concrete can help melt precipitation before it accumulates.

3. Make needed repairs

Repair loose floorboards and pull carpet taut if it has started to stretch out. Address cracks outdoors and ensure that patio stones, bricks and pavers are secure and level to reduce tripping hazards. Fix areas of the landscape where water may pool and freeze, creating potential hazards.

4. Declutter all spaces

Remove unnecessary items and furniture from rooms to free up more space to get around. Be sure there are no obstructions in walkways, entryways and near doors. Keep staircases clear at all times.

5. Invest in assistive devices

Handrails, grab bars, nonslip stair treads, and many other devices can make homes safer for people of all ages and abilities. Outfit cabinets and closets with organizers that put frequently used items within easy reach. A sturdy step stool can reduce the risk of injury while reaching for items stored on high shelves.

Taking measures to reduce the risk of falling around the home is a worthwhile home improvement project.



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Antimicrobial tiles help create sanitary spaces

Tile can be a worthy addition to rooms with potential moisture issues or areas in a home that may routinely necessitate quick cleanup. Because they are not damaged by constant contact with water, tiled floors and walls are often found in bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, and entryways.

Although tile is resilient, it is not impervious to the microorganisms that tend to proliferate in areas where moisture and humidity are commonplace. Microbes can grow rapidly in warm areas, especially if food is present. Mould or mildew issues also can become problematic seemingly overnight. But certain modifications can help homeowners alleviate the proliferation of microorganisms.

Various manufacturers have developed their own innovative tile that contributes to cleaner, and sometimes more eco-friendly, home environments. The application of certain treatments can make ceramic tiles even more impervious to water and moisture. Some tile may help reduce the spread of certain strains of bacteria, such as E. coli and staph, without requiring the application of potentially harsh chemical detergents. Others treatments may protect against yeast, moulds and fungi that can cause stains and odours and result in the degradation of tile.

Antimicrobial products inhibit the growth of microorganisms and suppress their reproduction. For example, tiles with Microban® protection employ an antimicrobial agent built into the product during the manufacturing process. When microbes touch the product surface, the agent penetrates the cell wall of the microorganism. Other tiles are treated with micrometric particles of titanium dioxide (TiO2), which is activated by sunlight or artificial light. This causes a photocatalysis process, which is responsible for the product's antipollution and bactericidal properties. Examples of TiO2-treated tiles include Active Clean Air & Antibacterial Ceramic™.



Antimicrobial ceramic tile can be advantageous in rooms where sanitation and hygiene are an utmost priority. This includes not only public places, but private residences. Worktops and floors where microbes can be transfered are particularly beneficial areas to install antimicrobial tile.

A potential side effect of antimicrobial tile is a reduction in reliance on harsh cleaning products. Although regular washing is recommended, residents may not need to use odouriferous or strong chemical cleaners to sanitize their homes. This helps improve indoor air quality and reduce the potential contamination of the environment from chemical runoff.

Make floors shine like new

Since replacing flooring can cost hundreds of dollars, it is worth the effort it takes to keep floors in like-new condition.



Sweep and clean

Restoring shine to flooring involves making sure the floor is clean. Dirt and grime can diminish the colour and look of flooring. Homeowners are urged to use products designed for their particular flooring material, such as wood, laminate, stone, or vinyl. Products oftentimes are not interchangeable.

Begin by thoroughly sweeping or vacuuming the floor. Clean along all surfaces of the floor, including under furniture where dust and dirt tends to accumulate. Use the hard-floor setting on a vacuum to avoid having the brush rolls scratch or damage the flooring. Laminate can scratch easily and hardwood flooring is not impervious to dings and scratches. Quite often a dry mop or a static-charged mopping cloth effectively picks up debris left behind on many flooring surfaces.

Although many commercial cleaners can clean flooring, homemade mopping solutions are sometimes just as effective. Keep in mind that wood, laminate, and vinyl should not be soaked in water. A little liquid can go a long way on these surfaces. Water and other liquids can seep between laminate and wood boards, potentially contributing to swelling and damage over time. Also, resist the urge to use too much soap. Soap can leave behind a residue that dulls the finish of the floor.

Vinegar-based solutions can work well on a wide variety of flooring types and help cut through any sticky residue left behind from cooking, cleaning, and the activities of daily life. Many wood-flooring cleaners and polishes are oil-based to condition the wood in the process. Whenever making one's own solution, test a small amount in an inconspicuous spot to make sure it will not damage the flooring.

Protection

Another way to prolong the life of flooring is to protect it from wear and tear. Removing shoes before walking indoors can help. Avoid high heels and athletic cleats, which can create divots in hardwood and other types of flooring.

Place indoor and outdoor mats at the entrances of the home to catch any dirt that would be ground into the flooring. Furniture protectors will help prevent scratches from furniture feet while moving pieces around a room.

Remember to wipe up spills when they occur to prevent the formation of stains.

These steps can keep floors in top form and prevent premature aging or damage. Floors that are in especially bad shape may need professional restoration or replacement.

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Three decades of success at Clear Cut Installations

SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Hitting the 30-year mark is an important milestone for any business.

For Steve Caza of Clear Cut Installations, the three decades of renovating and improving local homes and businesses has allowed him to witness significant changes in the industry.

Even after all this time, Caza's South Mountain-based company continues to perform all sorts of renovations, from windows and doors to bathrooms, kitchens, roofing, sunroofs, and more – even garages and full-scale additions to houses.

For the longtime owner, however, it's an interesting premise to have reached this point in Clear Cut's journey.

"I didn't set out thinking I'd be in business for myself," Caza said. "It was never a consideration… But, things happened and it worked out well; It's been enjoyable – I still enjoy it."

With that though, the years have come and gone just as many products have shifted into the market before quickly falling out of favour with customers. That's allowed Clear Cut to continue giving consumers more options, and in some cases a longer lifespan for their renovation projects.

Simple technological advancements have also opened up more opportunities for not only the business, but also the customer.

Clear Cut, with about 25 mostly full-time employees, also prided itself on quality craftsmanship and satisfaction on the part of the person(s) paying the bill.

"We do work for the customer, but I'm the one to please because I know what the result should be," Caza said. "I want to see what we promised the customer, although I know there are a lot of different ways to get the same result."

The business owner admits that he has always prided himself on surrounding his company with experience, which opens up the scope of what can be offered.

"We do a lot of different things, and we've been at it a long time," Caza said. "It's important to have an eye for what is desired, and to figure out what people want… I'm not afraid to ask people what they are looking for."

Another noticeable trait of the 30-year operation? More and more work closer to home.

"It seems that after so long the reputation is out there, and people are recognizing the quality of the work," Caza said. "It's a great area to live and work in, and I'm happy for that."



Steve Caza, owner of South Mountain-based- Clear Cut Installations is reflecting on three decades of operation in the renovation industry.



Work often takes employees out into the broader community, but more of it is coming closer to the business' headquarters, which also features an extensive showroom.
Press Photos – Uhrig



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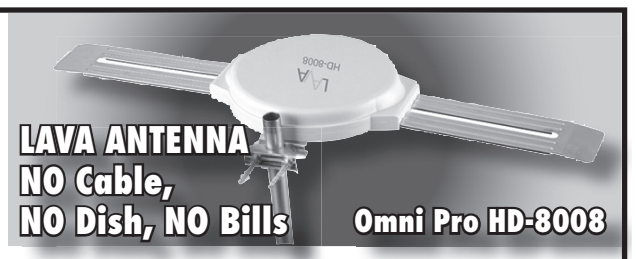

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How to winter-proof your home

You may not want to admit it, but the days are getting shorter, the temperature is dropping, and winter is officially on its way. No matter what the season means to you – whether that's embracing the snow, avoiding the outdoors altogether, or taking off for a sunny destination – winter-proofing your home should be at the top of your list. And fall is the perfect time to do this, as it's still warm enough to be outside for longer periods of time. Here's some advice on the key spots you should focus on.



Roof: When was your roof last looked at? Before it's covered in snow be sure to have it checked for any damaged shingles, replacing them if necessary. Also have your gutters cleared to ensure drainage will flow smoothly when the snow melts.

Furnace: It's no secret your furnace will be of paramount importance as temperatures continue to drop, so prevent a breakdown by making sure its service and maintenance is up to date.

Windows: One of the main ways cold air can seep inside is through windows, especially if they aren't properly sealed. Double check that all windows are tightly sealed and water isn't collecting in the sills. Ensuring windows with multiple sliding panels are in the closed position is important to avoid drafts, as they can freeze in the open position and impact heat insulation.

Doors: Similar to windows, it's important to ensure door frames are securely sealed without any cracks.

Floors: Check for gaps between exposed floorboards, especially in any unfinished rooms in the house. If you have central heating, it's important to ensure ducts connected to floor vents are well insulated so you're not losing a significant amount of heat input.

Everything else: When setting your home up for seasonal success, it makes sense to take a look at your current insurance policy as well. Ask yourself if you feel confident with your coverage, as winter often means extreme weather that can result in damage to your property.

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Must-have kitchen remodel features

Homeowners looking to renovate often see room for improvement in their kitchens and bathrooms. The National Association of Home Builder's Remodeling Market Index Survey, which measures conditions in the remodeling market, indicates that, in 2015, the two most common remodeling jobs were bathroom remodels (81 percent) and kitchen remodels (79 percent). According to HGTV and Statistics Brain, a new kitchen remodel for a kitchen measuring 12 by 12 feet may cost homeowners anywhere from $17,000 to $37,000.

Before investing so much into their remodeling projects, homeowners should think carefully about the features that will improve their time spent at home. When planning a kitchen renovation, homeowners may want to consider the following upgrades to make the room more enjoyable while improving its functionality.

Oversized sink

Although high-efficiency dishwashers are popular, deep sinks to soak soup pots or woks are still useful. Deep sinks may be preferable to double sinks, especially for homeowners who use lots of kitchen tools when preparing meals.

Soft-closing hinges

When replacing cabinets (or just the hardware), consider installing soft-closing hinges and slides on doors and drawers. These devices eliminate slamming and caught fingers, reducing noise and injuries in the kitchen.

Foot-pedal water operation

When outfitting a sink, think about foot controls, which are popular in doctors' offices and hospitals. Turning on the water with the tap of a foot can reduce the transfer of pathogens to faucets from hands during food preparation. These pedals also free up hands for other tasks.

Bottom's up

People likely spend more time raiding the refrigerator than the freezer on any given day. Rather than having to bend down to seek out that favourite flavour of Greek yogourt, choose a model with the fridge on top and freezer on the bottom, especially if anyone in the household has mobility issues. When shopping for refrigerators, French-door style units may offer even more access, making it easy for homeowners to slide fruit trays, sheet cakes, and other large items into the fridge.

Extra lighting

A kitchen should be a balance of form and function. A combination of overhead lighting, decorative lighting and task lighting can illuminate all areas of the space effectively.

Appliance garages

Architectural and design resource Houzz says that appliance garages are popular kitchen additions, too. Set at countertop level, these cabinets allow people to keep small appliances plugged in but tucked neatly behind closed doors.

Kitchen remodels are a sizable investment, and renovations can be customized to make the kitchen more hospitable for all in residence.

Make the most of limited space

Homeowners who decided to downsize or those who purchased a small property to begin with may need a few pointers to make the most of their limited space.

• **Reconsider your furniture.** Furniture that also can be used as storage can save space without sacrificing comfort. For the bedroom, choose a storage bed if it's difficult to find space for two dressers. For the living room, storage ottomans and/or end tables with storage beneath are a good choice.

• **Discard some items.** Homeowners who are downsizing from large homes may need to part with some of their furniture to make their transition. For example, homeowners may need to get by with just one bedroom nightstand and may even need to replace their existing nightstands with something more compact. Discarding living room end tables and downsizing to a smaller coffee table also can help homeowners make smaller common areas more welcoming and less cluttered.

• **Put paint to work.** Paint is another way to make the most of a limited space. Painting certain pieces of furniture the same colour as the wall can make the furniture blend in and feel less imposing. The result is a room that feels calm and open, even if there is less space to move around than homeowners might have grown accustomed to in their larger homes.

• **Keep surfaces free of clutter.** Surfaces such as dining tables, coffee tables and kitchen counters tend to accumulate clutter. While such clutter might not feel overwhelming in a large home, in small spaces crowded surfaces can make it feel as though the walls are closing in. Make an effort to keep surfaces free of clutter, resolving to discard or put items away each night before going to bed.



Thinking barn board? Think Winchester BMR

WINCHESTER

It's a big initial expenditure for the store, but Winchester BMR is betting on the popularity of barn board.

"Thanks to [online platforms] like Pinterest, it's exciting to people, and not a lot of places sell [barn board]," Craig Richer-Lafleche, a member of the store's managerial team, said.

The material, as well as tin and barn beams, is becoming a popular feature for countless homeowners, and it's obvious at BMR.

Earlier this year, the village store partnered with an area reclamation expert for the teardown of a pair of local barns in the area. BMR purchased the material, removing the derelict structure from a field and at the same time taking an insurance liability off the hands of the farmer, and adding an increasingly popular product to the store's stock.

"We're really aiming to build this business," Richer-Lafleche said. "It's one of those things that not everybody knows we carry… But we have it, and that's exclusive to this area."

BMR benefits from a constant display of the material thanks to an overhaul of its Country Treasures gift and decor area.

"This is a good place to shop for it… It's one of those niche items, and unless people want it they don't come in for it," he said. "We have gotten quite a bit of positive feedback about it, though, and I'm happy with that. The sales will increase in time."

Sticking with indoor renovations, the BMR store is looking to sell-off the bulk of its discontinued flooring options, much of it listed from 25 per cent off. Check in store for more details.

It's all part of the fresh look for that section of the store, which is undergoing an overhaul, trading in old displays for new ones to offer more selections.

Patio doors are also on sale throughout the remainder of October, with more than 20 doors in stock.

The approaching winter weather also has homeowners looking at various indoor renovations, and with that in mind, Richer-Lafleche and other store staff are adjusting various shopping areas, including a wide selection of wood and pellet stoves for both heating and cooking.

Kitchens, he said, is an area BMR will start "developing" more and more with updated displays, including cabinets, countertops, lighting and more.

"Just recently I changed a display, and sold a full kitchen set the next day," Richer-Lafleche said. "It's an area that has been lacking in sales the last few years, so it'll be good to really get that going again." As a bonus, Richer-Lafleche can assist with your kitchen design and provides free estimates, including taking measurements and helping to choose the right products for your dream kitchen.

More than that, there is a full selection of bathroom items, such as vanities, bathtubs and shower kits, and any materials needed for possible basement renovations.

"Indoor overhauls, that's a big focus right now, and that's something we can definitely help shoppers with," Richer-Lafleche said.



Beyond barn board, the store is set-up for fall and winter indoor renovations, with patio doors, kitchen sets, flooring, and more.
Press Photos – Uhrig





Barn board and tin are becoming popular among homeowners looking to spice up their interior home decoration, and Winchester BMR has caught on to the trend. Here, examples are shown of the in-store display in the Country Treasures area.





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Bold colours add vitality to homes

By embracing bold painting and decorating styles, homeowners can use fresh colour palettes to make rooms more inviting and colourful.

Green and pink

Colours on opposite ends of the colour wheel will always complement each other. Green paired with pink (a lighter shade of green's opposite, red) calls to mind the great outdoors. These hues can add a touch of floral spring sunshine even when that season has long since passed. Opt for a deep green and a carnation pink for maximum impact. And don't forget a vase full of fresh blooms as the finishing factor.

Lavender and deep blue

Analogous colours are three colours that sit side-by-side on the colour wheel and share a common denominator in terms of shade. Lavender, blue and an orchid pink are examples of such hues. This cool, regal combination can add femininity to a bedroom or even drama to another space in the house. If painting the walls dark blue or lavender seems scary, opt for a neutral shade on walls and then dress up the space with inky and violet accents.

Turquoise and brick red

Enhance the "wow" factor with these bold colours. Although they are striking, when they work together, they also can impart a soothing feel, particularly since they are often inspired by Asian influences. Feature a light turquoise sofa with red throw pillows. Or dress up meals with a red tablecloth on the dining table and turquoise, white and red, patterned place mats.

Gray and yellow

Yellow is a pick-me-up colour any time of the year, but, when combined with a gray, it's toned down to be soothing instead of startling. This colour combination is popular in kitchens, nurseries and entryways. Have fun in the kitchen with mottled gray stone countertops, pale yellow walls and canary café curtains.

Colour can affect mood and transform spaces with just a small investment of time and money. Homeowners can experiment with colour palettes so rooms remain vibrant all year long.



Bright accessories bring new life to your decor.

Did you know?

Using reclaimed timber when building or renovating a home benefits the environment in various ways.

Building and renovating with reclaimed timber helps to preserve forests by greatly reducing the need to cut down trees. In addition, when using reclaimed timber to build or renovate a home, contractors and homeowners tend to use locally sourced reclaimed wood, reducing the need to transport wood from afar to complete the projects. That reduced reliance on transportation reduces fuel consumption and air pollution. Processing reclaimed timber is often less taxing on the environment than processing virgin wood.

However, reclaimed timber may provide more than just environmental benefits. Virgin timber typically comes from commercially grown trees that are not always afforded enough time to reach full maturity. Timber that is reclaimed may very well have reached full maturity before it was cut down to use as building material. Reclaimed timber that grew to full maturity is likely stronger than virgin wood taken from commercially grown trees that were not given enough time to mature.

Reclaimed timber also may prove more durable than virgin wood because the former has already dried out after years of contracting and expanding, making it less likely to warp and split than virgin wood that has yet to endure such exposure.

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Proper chimney maintenance essential for home safety

As temperatures drop and thoughts once again turn to lighting fires and sitting down with a good book, it's important to revisit chimney maintenance. Even though chimneys do not require daily upkeep, regular maintenance efforts help chimneys operate safely and prevent deaths and injuries while protecting homes from fire.



Various problems can arise when chimneys are not well maintained. Such problems include chimney fires, carbon monoxide poisoning and early failure of the chimney and heating sources that the chimney vents.

Carbon monoxide can be scary, as it is virtually invisible without a proper detector. An estimated 414 Canadians died of carbon monoxide poisoning between 2000 and 2007, including 87 in Ontario.When carbon monoxide is breathed in, it builds up quickly and combines with the blood, reducing the blood's ability to carry oxygen. Body tissue and cells can't function without oxygen.

Chimney fires are another potential byproduct of poor chimney maintenance. Chimneys expel the byproducts of combustion, including smoke, water vapour, gases, unburned wood particles, hydrocarbon, tar fog, and assorted minerals, which can condense on the inside of the chimney flue. The residue, called creosote, is highly combustible. With the right conditions, a chimney fire can occur.

To avoid chimney fires and other risks, take these precautions.

• Have chimneys inspected annually and properly cleaned by a professional chimney technician.

• Make sure tree branches and other obstacles are cleared away from the top of the chimney.

• Use seasoned hardwoods that have been split for several months to a year. "Green" wood creates more creosote.

• The top-down method of building a fire produces less smoke. This means using larger pieces of wood on the bottom and the smallest twigs and kindling at the top. The fire will burn from the top and down, igniting the wood beneath as it goes.

• Put a cap on the chimney to keep out rain, snow and small animals.

• Keep fires small; otherwise, the intense heat may damage bricks and mortar in the chimney. Repair any damage promptly before lighting another fire.

• Open the damper and fireplace doors so that air supply flows freely and can vent the smoke promptly, reducing residence time in the flue; otherwise, creosote can form.

• Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms throughout the home and routinely check the batteries.

Learn more about chimney maintenance and find a certified chimney sweep at www.csia.org.

Corral entryway clutter

The entryway to a home is the first thing guests experience when coming inside. It also can be the first place residents drop their belongings after long days at school or work. As a result, entryways can quickly be consumed by clutter. Taming such messes takes a mixture of ingenuity and planning.



Homeowners hoping to clear their entryways of clutter must first decide what they want to get out of the space. Will it simply be a decorative spot with photos and other home decor on display? Or is functionality the primary goal?

Once that decision has been made, take inventory of which items, such as shoes, keys, umbrellas or coats, need to be in the area, which don't (i.e., old mail). To make things more organized, rearrange the former while removing the latter.

Next it is time to assess storage needs and what's already available. User-friendly storage items may need to be purchased to make the room as functional as possible. The following ideas also can help bring order to the space.

• **Create a command centre.** Create a central location where items are neat, orderly and within reach. Use a bulletin board, dry-erase calendar, or something that can house schedules and important notices. Hooks can hold keys, chargers, and more.

• **Keep it covered.** Covered bins can serve as a seating area and also a place to store shoes, hats, and scarves.

• **Create cabinet space.** Store items in cabinets so they are organized but out of sight. This way belongings are not just left on an entryway table.

• **Create another drop zone.** If the entryway is too small to serve its purpose, outfit another room or area that also can do the job. This can be a laundry room or mudroom area. Install shelves, a bench, cabinets, and hooks. Just be sure this space is close enough to the entryway to make it useful.

• **Go vertical.** An easy way to keep things neater is to remove items from the floor and embrace vertical storage. Shoe racks, hooks for purses, and a cabinet for coats may do the trick.

Clutter can accumulate in entryways. But some simple adjustments can quickly revamp the space to make it neater and much more functional.

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Repurpose a dresser

One of the benefits to becoming a skilled do-it-yourselfer is the chance to embrace projects that can breathe new life into objects that others might designate for the trash or donation pile. Renovating such items can save money and provide an entirely different purpose for the object.



After upgrading design styles or moving, there's a good chance the average homeowner has a spare dresser or chest of drawers he or she may no longer use. Repurposing such furniture can make for an enjoyable weekend DIY project.

With a change of colour, removal of drawers or a few minor modifications, dressers can be transformed in many different ways. Here are a few ideas to get started.

• **Television stand:** Sand and paint or stain the dresser to match the colour scheme of your living room or family room. Remove the top row of drawers from the dresser to have cubby space to house electronics, such as cable boxes or DVD players. The remaining drawers can hold movie collections, spare remote controls, gaming systems, and much more.

• **Serving bar:** Paint the dresser in an eye-catching shade and make sure to seal-coat it with a finish that is impervious to moisture. If time or budget allows, attach a piece of glass or tiles on top of the dresser to create a water-resistant, strong surface area. Store various serving glasses and cocktail accoutrements within the drawers. Place a few bottles of your favourite spirits and a decanter on a decorative tray.

• **Storage shelving:** Remove the drawers from the dresser and turn it into a storage mecca by using stackable plastic containers in spaces once occupied by the drawers. Keep craft supplies, collectibles or anything else you can think of inside.

• **Kitchen island:** Small dressers can be repurposed into kitchen islands with a few modifications. Install casters on the feet so it can be moved around when necessary. Place butcher block wood or stone on top so you'll have a sturdy cutting or preparation surface area. Hooks hung on the side can hold frequently used kitchen utensils.

• **Changing table:** Turn an older dresser into a changing table for a new baby. In addition, add a cushioned pad and some decorative trim to serve as a frame that keeps the pad in place. The drawers will keep wipes, diapers, onesies, and other supplies at the ready.

• **Bench:** Remove the top drawers from the dresser. Add a piece of plywood to make a seat. Use the removed drawer faces on the inside back of the dresser since this area will now be visible. Paint the entire piece or stain it as desired. Fashion a cushion for the seat, and the bench is ready for an entryway or wherever you have space.

Stain wood surfaces for an easy upgrade

For a simple and affordable update in any space in your home, design experts recommend staining your woods. Great for creating everything from a modern aesthetic to an antique look, staining can align the colour of a wood's surface with the room's décor as well as emphasize the gorgeous natural grain pattern found in any wood. You can add a stain and finish to furniture, picture frames, and other wood items for an easy DIY that can be done on a weekend afternoon. Here's how to get the look:



Equipment:

- Fine grit sandpaper
- Disposable rubber gloves
- Minwax Wood Finishing Cloths
- Clean rag

Directions:

1. Sanding: Always prepare the wood with a light sanding so the coat goes on smoothly and evenly. Sand in the direction of the grain to avoid unsightly scratches. Make sure to remove any dust before you begin staining.

2. Protection: To keep hands clean, wear the gloves provided in the finishing cloths package. Remember to close the front label after you remove a stain cloth to keep the remaining cloths from drying out.

3. Application: Using the stain cloth, wipe in the direction of the wood, working the colour into the surface. For a lighter tone, wipe the stain off immediately after it has been applied. When wiping off any excess stain use a clean rag and wipe in the direction of the wood grain. Never allow excess stain to dry on the wood surface as it will cause excess adhesion and other problems.

4. Evaluation: After letting the finish sit for an hour, evaluate your work. If you want an even deeper colour, wait one hour and apply a second coat using a fresh cloth. Once the stain has dried apply a clear finish product such as Minwax Polycyclic protective finish, available in four sheens, to protect the stain and the wood.

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Make it a green winter with these energy-saving tips

Conserving energy is a great way to protect the planet and save money. While energy bills might be highest in summer thanks to air conditioning units, certain factors around a house can make winter more wasteful and costly than it needs to be.

Energy bills are influenced by a variety of factors, including geography and how energy-efficient a home is. For example, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the average monthly utility bill in Connecticut in 2015 was $153.13, while New Mexico residents paid slightly more than half that amount ($79.23) on average. Homeowners cannot control winter weather, which can greatly affect how much energy homeowners consume between December and March. However, there are other ways for homeowners to curtail their energy consumption and save money throughout winter.

• Address any leaks or drafts. Drafty windows and doorways can make the air inside homes feel warmer in the summer and colder in the winter. As autumn weather grows colder, homeowners can perform simple inspections around windows and doorways to determine if they have any leaks. On a cold and/or windy day, place a hand near all windows and doors to feel if there are any leaks. Use caulk or another type of sealant to address leaks so you can keep cold air out and set your thermostat to a reasonable, eco-friendly temperature.



• Inspect air vents, faucets and plumbing fixtures. Air vents, faucets and plumbing fixtures attached to exterior walls should be inspected for leaks. Such inspections might need to be conducted from outside the home, which can make it more difficult to detect if cold air is entering the home. Look for gaps in the insulation around these areas, filling in those gaps as necessary.

• Inspect heating systems at the start of each new season. According to EnergyStar.gov, heating systems account for 29 percent of the average homeowner's energy expenditures. Inspect your heating or HVAC system before the start of winter, making sure all gas or oil connections are operating properly. EnergyStar.gov notes that dirty burners and cracked heat exchangers can cause heating units to operate less efficiently and may even pose a safety risk. Inspect the air filter of the heating system at least once per month, as filters can quickly become dirty during a heavy-use season like winter. Dirty filters cause the system to work harder to keep a home warm, unnecessarily wasting energy as a result.

• Install a Wi-fi enabled programmable thermostat. Some programmable thermostats can be very difficult to use effectively, making it far too difficult if not impossible for homeowners to set their thermostats for various temperatures in a single day. Wi-fi enabled programmable thermostats that allow homeowners to control their heating and cooling systems via their smartphones can be more user-friendly than many other programmable thermostats, ensuring homeowners are saving money and not wasting energy heating empty homes.

Easy snow removal starts now

It's common for homeowners to neglect getting their snow thrower prepped for the winter. But once that Canadian snow decides to fall you'll find yourself asking why you didn't get yours ready sooner.

"Taking your snow thrower into a local dealer for maintenance is always a good idea," says Michelle Sordie, director of marketing at Husqvarna Canada, the world's largest producer of outdoor power products. "But if you wait for the first snowfall, the shops will be extremely busy with those who left tune-ups to the last minute."

Use these five maintenance tips from the pros to get your snow thrower up and running, ready to tackle any snow that comes your way:



1. Freshen up the juice: Gasoline gets stale over time leaving harmful deposits in the fuel system that could damage the engine, making it important to change at the beginning of the season. Add a fuel stabilizer to keep the ethanol in the gas from damaging your thrower's engine.

2. Change the spark plug: If the spark plug is in good condition it will make starting your machine that much easier. A new spark plug will help ignite the fuel air mixture within the engine and ensure you're not left in the cold.

3. Wash up: Keep your thrower in top shape by diligently cleaning away any dirt. A buildup of grime from storing your machine during the off season can impede its performance. Using a degreaser spray and letting it sit for 15 minutes before removing will allow you to wipe away dirt easily.

4. Check tire pressure: Tires that are properly inflated will increase the machine's manoeuvreability, making it easy for you to tackle any type of snow you have to clear.

5. Lubricate those bearings: Make sure to lubricate the wheel, auger and impeller bearings periodically to ensure that all parts are moving efficiently and safely.

Find more information at your local dealer or online at husqvarna.ca.

www.newscanada.com

How to prevent CO poisoning

Many people are aware of the threat posed by carbon monoxide, or CO. According to the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 430 people die from accidental CO poisoning in the United States each year, while the Canada Safety Council notes that carbon monoxide is the leading cause of fatal poisonings throughout North America.

The CDC points out that instances of CO poisoning are entirely preventable, which might surprise many of the estimated tens of thousands of people in the United States who visit emergency rooms to be treated for CO poisoning each year. Learning to recognize signs of CO poisoning and how to prevent it can help people avoid its harmful effects and potentially save lives.

Recognizing CO poisoning

The National Centre for Environmental Health says that breathing CO can cause a variety of symptoms, including headache, dizziness, vomiting, or nausea. Infants, the elderly and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or breathing problems are more likely to get sick from CO exposure than children, adults and people without the aforementioned conditions.

How can I prevent CO poisoning?

Even those people who do not lose their lives to moderate or severe CO poisoning can suffer long-term health consequences, including an increased risk of heart disease, as a result of their exposure. So it behooves everyone to take steps to prevent CO poisoning from occurring.

• Do not run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer or any gasoline-powered engine within 20 feet of an open window, door or vent. The exhaust from such items can vent into enclosed areas, increasing the risk of CO exposure.

• Do not leave motor vehicles running in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces, such as a garage.

• Do not run generators, pressure washers or gasoline-powered inside basements, garages or other enclosed structures, even if windows are open.

• Do not operate charcoal grills, hibachis, lanterns, or portable camping stoves indoors or inside of tents or campers.

CO poisoning can cause very serious consequences, including death. Fortunately, all instances of CO poisoning can be prevented.

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Create more closet space without major renovations

Closet space is at a premium in many homes and apartments. Many older homes were not built to accommodate large wardrobes, while rental properties are often designed to maximize living space at the expense of storage.

Closets vary depending on the size of the home, but many tend to be a minimum of 24 inches deep so they can store garments without the clothes brushing against the walls. Bedroom and hallway closets can be four feet in length or more. Walk-in closets are the largest options, but such spaces tend to only be available in modern homes or custom-built properties.

It is not always practical or possible to undergo renovations to create more closet space. Apart from moving to a new residence, homeowners or renters must evaluate the space they have and make some more efficient choices in how they utilize available areas.

Clear out clutter

The first step to more closet space is to eliminate unused items. Clothing that no longer fits or items that can be stored elsewhere should be removed from the closet. Donate as much as possible. Some organizations will even pick up donations at your convenience.

Upgrade hangers and rods

Replace existing hangers with slimmer, more uniform alternatives that more easily fit into your closet. In addition, remove empty hangers, which are likely just taking up space.

Consider dual closet rods if space will allow them. Hang the second rod below an area reserved for shorter clothing to achieve a two-tiered design. Grouping short items together also can free up valuable floor space.

Stack taller

Many closets are as tall as the ceilings of the rooms where they're located. However, the upper area may go unused because if it is not easy to reach. Install shelving above the closet rod with small swing-out style cabinet doors to offer access. In such areas, store seasonal items that you won't need to reach for each day. Keep a step stool close by for easy accessibility.

In small rooms, homeowners may want to find another way to utilize vertical space. A loft bed, which raises the bed up to a level where it might be on the top bunk of a bunk bed, will free up plenty of storage space beneath the bed. This can be turned into a floor closet.

Create storage for small items

Bookends, bins, boxes, and drawers can be used to contain items that don't easily conform to closets. These may be purses, scarves, ties, and more. Don't overlook the possibilities of hanging items on the wall inside the closet or on the back of closet doors.

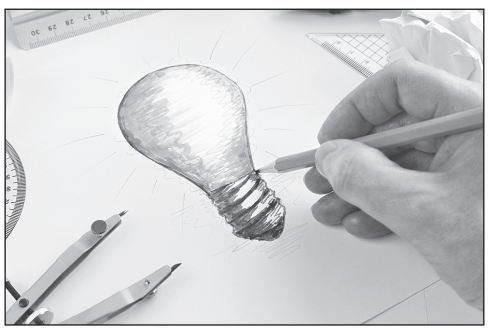
When finishing closet makeovers, be sure to install lighting inside the closet so items are more visible.



What is a smart home?

Refrigerators that inform their owners when it's time to buy more eggs and thermostats that learn homeowners' heating and cooling preferences may once have seemed like futuristic ideas straight out of a sci-fi movie. However, such products are no longer a dream but a reality.

The term "smart home" refers to a residence that has appliances, HVAC, lighting, entertainment systems, security, and many more devices that communicate with one another. Such devices can also be controlled remotely. Proponents of smart home technology say features can help people save money on utilities and conserve natural resources, all the while providing peace of mind to homeowners.



In 2016, 80 million smart home devices were delivered worldwide. That marks a 64 percent increase from 2015, according to the research data firm IHS Markit. The smart home trend is only expected to grow in coming years.

Although there's interest in smart home technology, the industry remains fragmented. Consumers are trying to figure out which devices are simply fun and which provide practical benefits. Furthermore, the range of smart devices is expanding rapidly, making potential compatability issues a concern. Companies that plan to educate consumers further about the advantages of smart home features and are open to standardization may have the best chances of survival.

Those interested in dabbling in some smart home technology and testing the waters may want to start with the following household items.

• **Smart bulbs:** Manufacturers offer various types of smart light bulbs. Some are colour-changing, others react to doorbells or alarms, and others can simulate typical lighting patterns when homeowners are away. Integrated apps enable remote access to scheduling so people can arrive home to a well-lit house.

• **Home security:** Wi-Fi enabled doorbells with video capabilities allow residents to see who is at the door without having to open it. Cameras can even be accessed remotely, simulating that someone is at home at all times. Never wonder if you've locked the door again with smart locks that can be engaged via a smartphone. Make sure that homes are secured or that pets are behaving while out with smart cameras.

• **Flood sensor:** Get peace of mind against damaging floods with Wi-Fi flood sensors.

• **Appliances:** A new breed of smart appliances can make it possible for users to turn on the washing machine while out of the house, close refrigerator doors from afar or even start their vacuum cleaners remotely.

Smart technology is taking over and is likely to continue changing the way people live and work.

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Transform interior spaces into cozy retreats

Cool weather often drives people to spend more hours indoors than they do during the warmer months. Autumn is a time to winterize gardens, put away lawn furniture and prepare for the holiday season. Autumn also provides the perfect opportunity to begin home interior projects.

Many people decide to redecorate their homes to reflect each season. When temperatures change, it's time to transition from the light colours and breezy fabrics symbolic of summer to thicker, darker materials that evoke coziness.

With some inspiration and a little know-how, any homeowner or apartment dweller can cozy up a space in time for fall and winter.

• **Invest in area rugs.** While wood floors can look beautiful and work well with many different design styles, wood can feel chilly underfoot. Thick area rugs add warmth to a room and can help it look more lived-in. Area rugs also help a room appear more cohesive, coordinating with other colours in a space and providing a visual border.

• **Practice layering in rooms.** An affordable and relatively easy way to make a room seem more cozy is to layer fabrics and other accents. Layers can include throws and blankets. Remove place mats from the dining room table and use them on accent tables or an ottoman in the living room. Table runners also can add a splash of colour to the top of bedroom dressers.

• **Play with texture.** Look for fabrics that boast texture and can add a tactile feel to spaces. When used on throw pillows or small accents, faux fur can create that cozy cabin feel. Draperies made from nubby fabrics or those with grooves and ridges can add dimension to a room as well. Even a lampshade made of an unusual fabric, such as a waffle-patterned material, can add a little depth and warmth to a space.

• **Reevaluate your lighting.** Lighting a space is more than just flipping on a switch. Finding the right balance of lighting fixtures can instantly transform the feel of a room. Create more warmth and a cozy feel by switching out bulbs from cooler shades to warmer ones — those that give off yellow and pink hues rather than cool blues. Accent lighting helps establish a comfortable space for curling up and reading a good book. Spot lighting, such as fixtures that are trained on artwork or inside of a curio or china cabinet, also can set a more welcoming mood.

• **Install a bookshelf and start a book collection.** Piles and stacked books can add warmth to any space. Books evoke the hallowed halls of schools and quiet nooks in the library. Fill shelves with books interspersed with additional design accents, and you will instantly make a room feel more inviting.

• **Choose dark paint.** Do not feel nervous about incorporating deeper shades in rooms. Dark colours give rooms a more enclosed feel than lighter colours, and that can create a warm and cozy feeling. This works particularly well in larger spaces that feel vast and empty. If you're scared to paint all of your walls, try a darker shade below a chair rail or just paint one accent wall.

• **Add architectural elements.** Think about adding rich mouldings to crown the ceilings or to frame doorways. If you have



the space for a nook, create a window seat beneath a picture window or add a bench and cushions in a corner for a nice escape spot.

Use the colder weather as an opportunity to reinvent some of the rooms in your home. With paint, texture, fabric, lighting, and more, rooms can be quickly transformed into cozy respites from the cold.

Contemplating antiques? Here's how to buy

Antique furnishings, decor, coins, and toys remain popular among consumers. Unlike the mass-produced merchandise of today, antiques have history, and their endurance through decades, if not centuries, is a testament to the quality craftsmanship and materials used to create these often timeless pieces.

Antiques also might be more affordable than many shoppers think. Savvy shoppers may find mid-range "brown furniture," which constitutes some antique wood pieces, more affordable than reproductions. Homeowners and apartment dwellers who want their rooms to stand apart often rely on antiques to provide a unique ambiance.

Antique shopping also is a "green" endeavour. Antiquing is an eco-friendly practice, putting to use items that have been recycled and reused.

Antiques also can be a good investment, as they generally retain their value while adding texture, contrast and personality to any room of the house.

Understanding antiques can take time, but even the novice can develop an eye for pieces that strike their fancy. And thanks to the wealth of information about collectibles and antiques available online, shoppers have constant access to information about antiques at their fingertips. Shoppers may even be able to comparison shop on their mobile phones.

Mid-range antiques can be particularly easy to buy thanks to the available inventory. Novices may want to begin by exploring mid-range antiques. As they gain more knowledge and expertise, shoppers who covet antiques can move on to high-end pieces that are more expensive. Some antiques are put in the



same category as fine artwork and are considered just as valuable.

Another reason to browse and shop antiques is to learn about the value of similar items homeowners may already own. For those looking to downsize a collection or simply liquidate an estate, antiquing is a great way to get hands-on experience.

Rummaging through antique stores or markets can be a relaxing experience as well. And many antique enthusiasts find shopping for antiques is like a treasure hunt to find that coveted piece and unearth a bit of history in the process.

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Fall 2017 focus on real estate

Advice home sellers should ignore

Whether you're moving across town or to the other side of the country, selling your home is no easy feat. There are many aspects of the sale to manage, and no one homeowner will be an expert on them all. Sometimes, well-meaning folk will offer you advice: take it with a grain of salt. People generally mean well but are all too often misinformed themselves. Here is some of the worst advice for selling your home that gets repeated.



Price high now, lower it later

This may be the single worst piece of advice for selling your home. Instead of listing at the amount you realistically hope to get, you price it much higher thinking you'll negotiate down to your actual asking price down the line. Nice idea in theory, but in practice, you'll scare away buyers at the time when it's most critical that you capture their interest: coming out of the starting gate. Furthermore, statistics show that the longer your home sits on the market, the lower the eventual selling price is likely to be.

You should only sell in the spring

Homes are sold throughout the year. And while there are a number of advantages to selling in the spring, there's also more competition. Other seasons have their own advantages, and ultimately the right time of year to sell your home is the one in which it's ready to be sold.

Let the buyer do the repairs

Pawning off required repair work to the buyer can be a pricy mistake. It could bring down the value of your home and cost you thousands of dollars. Repairs, especially easy, inexpensive ones, should never be left to the buyer.

You must have an open house

You can host one if you'd like, but in the digital age, open houses are no longer essential. All the preliminary information homebuyers need is at the tips of their fingers. Therefore, the majority of serious buyers will be happy to skip straight to a scheduled showing instead.

You can sell without an agent

There are many aspects to selling a home (pricing, marketing, negotiating, etc.), and if you don't have a lot of free time on your hands, you'll likely need help. There's a misconception that compared to buying a home, selling is easy. This is far from the reality. So though you may be tempted to sell without a real estate agent it's far less of a headache to leave it to the pros.

Fall for these homes



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Fall 2017 focus on real estate

How to live in your home while it's on the market

From staging to packing to showings, selling a home is hectic – especially if you have to live in it. So how do you make it work? Here are a few tried and trusted tips.

Deep clean, then keep it clean

A clean house and yard matters to buyers and they'll pay more to get it. Before listing your home, be sure to scrub it clean from top to bottom. Think five-star hotel kind of clean. Since most real estate sells in less than 120 days, you'll likely only need to tackle this task once. Afterwards, you'll need to keep things ultra tidy, which in itself can be something of a challenge. The best strategy is to adopt a clean-as-you-go policy, so if there's a last minute showing, you're just a quick touch-up away from being ready.

Pack, pitch or pass it on

Decluttering your entire home is the next big step. Room by room, decide which items you'll need over the next few months. Everything else – especially personal items like family photos and collectibles – should be removed. Categorize these objects as things to be packed, tossed or given away. If possible, store your items in a relative's basement or attic, or even better, rent a storage unit so you can access your items whenever you need them.

Store your valuables

Strangers will be breezing in and out of your home, so it's best to have a safe spot to store your valuables. Items like jewellery and cash are best kept in a safe. Personal documents should also be locked up. In addition, you may wish to store prescription medications out of sight, enable passwords on computers and ensure mail isn't left lying around.

Arrange pet care

Few things can detract potential buyers like your family pet – so much so that real estate agents advise that all traces of Fido or Mittens be erased before potential buyers arrive. If at all possible, arrange for your pets to stay with a friend or relative, or even at a pet daycare, once your home's listed. Alternatively, take them and their accessories (dish, leash, bed, toys, etc.) with you each time you show your home.

Have a get-out-quick plan

Ideally, each time there's a showing, you and your family members will vacate the premises. You may not be given a lot of warning. Therefore, it's best to have a plan in place that you can execute at a moment's notice. Make sure this routine includes taking out the trash, clearing countertops, closing toilet seats, and opening all curtains and blinds.

You have to come see to believe it!





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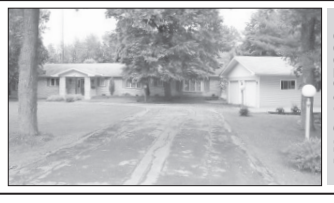

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Top three trends: Update interior wood finishes



Revitalize the look of your home with on-trend updated interior wood surfaces. Applying a fresh wood finish to furniture, wood cabinets, and wood accessories is a simple DIY project that can modernize your old furniture or a great garage sale or antique store sale find. It's also an easy way to quickly change a room's style from contemporary to vintage or vice versa. Try one of these top trends as an alternative to an expensive renovation.

1. Crisp white: This Scandinavian-inspired look is perfect for a simple and polished appearance. White-washed wood surfaces bring an understated elegance to any room, working to reflect any natural light and opening up the space. Use Minwax's White-Wash Pickling Stain for a subtle hue that'll let the wood's natural grain show through.

2. Weathered grey: Grey-washed wood creates a rustic-chic look reminiscent of the country, the beach, and natural charm — think driftwood, barn boards, and weathered beach docks. But you don't necessarily need older wood pieces to create this lived-in look. Choose a classic grey for a worn, beachy effect.

3. Bold black: Darkly-stained wood creates a crisp, modern look with timeless appeal. Try Minwax wood finish in ebony to achieve a rich hue. To darken the colour even more, apply multiple coats being sure to let them air dry between each application. Create contrast in your space with lighter, neutral shades on the walls and surrounding décor.

Tip: Remember that stains can alter the colour of your wood surfaces, but don't provide the necessary protection to preserve your projects. For best results, it's important to sand your projects first and finish them off with a protective clear coating once the stain has completely dried. *www.newscanada.com*

Paint your home's exterior like a pro

Painting is an inexpensive way to transform just about any space. Many people paint the interiors of their homes, but home exteriors also can undergo dramatic makeovers with fresh coats of paint. Timing the job right and heeding some tips from professionals and do-it-yourselfers who have tread the painting path before you can make the job go smoothly.

Consider the time of year

Consider local weather patterns and forecasts when planning an exterior painting project. Choose a time of year when there is little rain and low humidity, such as autumn. Keep in mind that the paint will require a couple of days to dry completely and cure, and that can be difficult in damp weather. Don't hamper the final outcome with poor timing.

Prepare the painting surfaces

Resist the temptation to start painting straight away. Paint may not adhere to unprepared surfaces, and dirt and other debris may show through and mar the finished product. Repainting a home's exterior will likely involve removing peeling or chipping paint prior to making your first strokes. Wear protective gear when scraping, sanding, or brushing old paint, as such tasks can generate dust that can be dangerous to inhale, particularly if the old paint contains lead.

Employ a chlorine bleach solution to kill any mildew and to scrub any dirt from the house. In addition, repair any cracks or imperfections. For example, if you're painting stucco, you may have to fill in any pitting or holes. Use this opportunity to inspect caulking around windows and doors. Recaulk as needed to seal up drafty areas or those that may cause water infiltration prior to painting.

Prime and cover stains

It may be a little extra work, but apply a quality primer as the first coat to hide any imperfections, such as wood knots or discolouration from weathering. Primer



provides a smooth, even surface upon which to put your paint colour. Once you have applied the primer, test your paint colour in a small, inconspicuous spot to see how the colour looks in the daylight. You do not want to paint the entire home only to find out you dislike the colour.

Try these painting techniques

Rent a paint sprayer for large surface areas. The sprayer will produce a more uniform application and is less time-consuming than painting everything with a brush or roller. Make sure you've chosen a high-quality paint, as the added expense is worth it if the paint lasts longer and coats more evenly. Also, if you have purchased multiple cans of paint, mix them all in one large bucket to ensure the same colour; otherwise, the colours may not match perfectly.

Experts recommend working your way from top to bottom in a smooth, controlled manner, overlapping each stroke by eight inches. Trim and hard-to-reach areas should be left for brush work so you can maintain control over your tools.

If you are painting areas like steps or staircases, consider adding a little fine-grain sand to the paint to improve traction, as paint can be slippery when wet.

If painting your home's exterior is beyond your capabilities, hire a professional. He or she will get the work done in a timely manner, and you can rest assured that the job will be done correctly.

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How to make bedrooms more conducive to sleep

Insufficient sleep causes more problems than many people may know. Fatigue after a poor night's sleep might seem like an inconvenience that can be easily rectified, but the long-term effects of insufficient sleep are significant.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, researchers have found a link between insufficient sleep and an elevated risk for type 2 diabetes. In one such study exploring that potential link, researchers asked healthy adults to sleep just four hours per night for six nights. At the conclusion of that period, participants' ability to break down glucose had decreased by an average of 40 percent and reached levels that are consistent with those of older adults at risk for diabetes.

Insufficient sleep may be linked to any of a host of factors, including one's bedroom environment. An environment that promotes restful sleep can help people suffering from insomnia or restlessness improve the quality of their sleep. Try the following tips to make bedrooms more conducive to sleep.

• **Set the right temperature.** Research indicates a bedroom temperature of roughly 18 Celsius makes for the best sleep. Human beings' body temperatures rise and fall throughout the day, reaching their lowest level around 5 am each day before slowly climbing as morning begins. A room that is too warm overnight may interfere with this natural dip, leading to restlessness. If necessary, install a programmable thermostat in the bedroom so the temperature in the room remains steady and in line with your body's natural temperature fluctuations.

• **Address allergens.** Some people may trace their sleeping difficulties to allergies. Dust and pollen in the bedroom can make for a disruptive night's sleep. Wash bedding once per week in hot water if dust mites are proving problematic. If pillows cannot be washed, dry them using high heat to kill dust mites. In addition, cover the mattress in a mattress protector that guards against allergens and dust mites. If pollen is finding its way into the bedroom, always keep bedroom windows closed during allergy season.

• **Use a white noise machine.** Noise is another potential contributor to poor sleep. The NSF notes that some people may have their sleep interrupted by noise even if they don't know it. White noise machines are often used to help infants sleep, but such machines can be just as effective at helping adults. The constant ambient sound created by white noise machines masks activity both inside and outside the house.

• **Draw blinds, shades or curtains.** Waking up to sunlight each day might be nice, but that morning sunlight may be interrupting your sleep. Early morning rays from the sun might be triggering your body to wake up before its had adequate rest, so make sure blinds, shades, and curtains are drawn before going to bed at night so you are not woken up prematurely in the morning.

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A sofa bed enables overnight guests to sleep comfortably right in the living room or den.

Rooms can serve double duty

Owners of small homes can still enjoy the benefits of larger spaces, they just need to equip rooms to perform double duty. Here are some tips:

Living room/guest room

Entertaining guests is easier when there's a dedicated space where visitors can feel at home. When furnishing a living room, keep the guest room in mind. A sofa that opens up to a bed or a convertible sectional can be a comfortable place for guests to lay their heads. Side tables provide guests with places to store their belongings, and an empty storage chest can house bed linens or guests' clothing.

Den/playroom

Children tend to accumulate toys and games. And as kids grow from children to young adults, their list of must-have items – from video gaming systems to other electronics – grows along with them. Storage can make a room functional for both adults and children. Devote an entire wall to a closet or drawer system where toys can be stored out of sight when necessary. Storage ottomans can be used for extra seating while also providing somewhere for homeowners to stash stuffed animals or games for easy access. When choosing furniture, look for fabrics that are resistant to stains and modular pieces that can be moved around as necessary to create room for playing or entertaining.

Bedroom/home office

More and more people are working from home. In tight quarters, bedrooms may be the only available area to use as a home office. An armoire-style desk will blend in with the decor and can hide paperwork and electronics behind doors. Otherwise, a makeup vanity can serve the dual purpose of providing a place to get ready for a night out and a ready space to house a laptop during the day.

