

fall home
& REAL ESTATE GUIDE

Spacing Solutions
Making the Most of Limited Space

Eco-Friendly Ideas
Tips to Make Your Home More Environmentally Friendly

Weathering Winter
Ready Your Home for Winter Weather







Special supplement to the Winchester Press, October 2013

Helpful winter heating tips from Guy Fuels and Propane

WINCHESTER

With winter just around the corner, it is time for homeowners to give their home's heating system a test run in order to make sure all is operating as it should.

Here is a checklist of things to consider:

Heating system checklist

• **Test run –** Turn the thermostat to heat mode, and set it to 80 degrees Fahrenheit just for testing. You should hear the furnace turn on and warm air should blow within a few minutes. If it is running okay, turn the thermostat back to its normal setting. If it is not running properly, give a qualified technician a call.

• **Seasonal maintenance –** Because a tune-up improves efficiency, you can lower your annual heating costs by as much as 10 per cent. If you spend $2,500 to heat your home, a tune-up will save you $250.

• **Replace the air filter –** Put in a new clean air filter. It is easy, and you can lower heating costs by five per cent by keeping your furnace filter clear. Replace or clean your filter about once a month during the heating season.

• **Fuel –** If you have a propane or oil furnace, make sure to have your fuel storage tank topped off and ready to go. If you take advantage of Guy Fuels' automatic delivery program, the business will carefully monitor the fuel in tanks and make sure to always have the tank at an optimum level. Automatic delivery has been made available to customers for free because those calling for each delivery run the risk of being stuck without fuel due to unpredictable weather, emergencies, or, perhaps, a broken tank gauge.

• **Heating vents –** Clear obstacles to heating vents so air can flow freely.

• **Check for carbon monoxide leaks –** This silent killer can easily be detected with either an inexpensive test badge, or battery operated alarm. Whichever tool you choose, protect you and your family with one of these units.

Guy Fuels and Propane is a family-owned and operated business located in Winchester, and according to staff, customers **are not just a number, they're a neighbour.** The firm prides itself on being there for all needs by delivering friendly and dependable service.

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Design details delivered – big or small

WINCHESTER

Sometimes all a house needs is a fresh coat of paint to give it that extra bit of something to make it feel like home. But what colour or design should the homeowner choose? Will the current window treatment, floor, furniture, and accessories work with the new colour?

Marnie Fossitt, owner of Wavey River Interiors, has the training and expertise necessary to help homeowners figure out exactly what it is they really need to make their home feel just right for them.

Fossitt began her foray into the world of interior design in 2005 when she began taking part-time courses. Realizing she was really enjoying what she was doing, and with a lot of encouragement from her sister, Raina DeJong, Fossitt eventually kicked it up a notch and switched to full-time studies, which then led to opening her own home-based business in Winchester. Fossitt credits her grandmother, Annie McKee, for her passion with colour and design.

Colour consultations may be one of Fossitt's favourite things to do, but it is not all that she does. Fossitt also offers her clients services in home staging, window treatments, lighting, accessories, furniture and placement, as well as kitchen and baths.

While the majority of her customers are rural homeowners in the local region, she also provides services to city dwellers in places like Cornwall, Ottawa, and other nearby urban areas, as well as to commercial businesses.

"I work a little differently than a lot of designers," Fossitt said. "Being in the rural area, I do as little or as much as the client wants me to do."

Whether she is hired to fully renovate a room or whether she is simply needed to visit and consult by offering tips and suggestions, Fossitt caters to the unique needs of each of her customers.

"I find it a good challenge to work within someone's budget," she said, maintaining that it is possible to make positive changes despite the amount of money available.



While Wavey River Interiors is a home-based business, owner Marnie Fossitt said she primarily works out of her car as she is constantly travelling with her supplies, swatches, and samples.
Press Photo – Casselman

When someone contacts Fossitt, she generally begins with a short phone interview to determine the customer's wants and needs. She then meets with them at their home (or business) where she spends roughly one-and-a-half to two hours discussing customer concerns, and doing a walk-through of the home. Fossitt then prepares a draft of recommendations for the client to consider.

Her goal, she said, is to help homeowners enjoy their space more.

On the flipside, Fossitt is also experienced with home staging, which, she said, is a completely different process, as the house has now become a commodity, and must be treated as such. To make a house more attractive to prospective buyers, it is necessary, she said, to declutter, scale back on the amount of personal items like photographs and keepsakes, and make the first impression the best it can be by ensuring the house has great curb appeal and an inviting entranceway.

Fossitt is a member of the Canadian Decorators' Association, and has manned the association's booth at the Ottawa Home and Design Show, where she has given free 15-minute consultations. In addition to belonging to the group of professionals, Fossitt also takes weekly trips into Ottawa "to check out new suppliers and services to stay on top of changes."

Inexpensive ways to update a home

There are many ways to make updates and changes to a home that do not require a major overhaul or a large price tag. Here are seven projects that won't break the bank.

1. Move around furniture. You may be able to change the look of a room without spending any money. Find a focal point (not the television) and angle the furniture toward it.

2. Add lighting. Properly illuminating a room means varying the lighting to create different moods at different times.

3. Add new pillows or drapes. Changing a few aspects of a room can give it an entirely new look. Think about incorporating some new throw pillows or change the curtains.

4. Change knobs or small accents. Switch out cabinet knobs for something updated and modern.

5. Use plants. Plants are inexpensive ways to add instant colour and visual appeal to a room.

6. Hang new wall art. It may be time to look at your photos and artwork, and make a few adjustments. Finding new prints to hang could instantly change a room's ambience.

7. Try a new coat of paint. After you've exhausted other avenues, choosing a new paint colour may be the answer. Painting is one of the least expensive yet most dramatic methods of changing a home's interior.



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Green ways to embrace shorter days

The arrival of autumn ushers in cooler days and less hours of sunshine. As the country turns its clocks back an hour, night descends that much earlier, prompting a greater reliance on artificial light and electricity. When the time comes to turn clocks back, eco-conscious men and women can employ various strategies to conserve energy.

• **Change light bulbs.** Traditional incandescent bulbs are not the most energy efficient option available. Incandescent bulbs use a lot of energy to produce light, but a significant amount of energy to produce heat as well. Ninety per cent of the energy used by incandescent bulbs is given off as heat, so it is more economical and efficient to use a bulb that cuts down on heat production. Compact fluorescent lamps, or CFLs, use about one-fourth the energy and last 10 times longer than a comparable incandescent bulb that puts out the same amount of light. Light-emitting diode, or LED, bulbs are a much more energy-efficient option, and LEDs last 25 times longer than incandescent bulbs.

• **Turn lights off when rooms aren't being used.** It can be tempting to turn on all of the lights on in a home when darkness arrives. But this wastes both energy and money. Turn lights off when you exit rooms. Try to gather the family in a centralized location that is full of ambient and task lighting in an attempt to concentrate lighting usage rather than spreading it out all over the house.

• **Rely on timers or automated systems.** Standard timers or more complex app-synced house management systems enable homeowners to turn their lights or even appliances on and off at key times. Those with a smartphone or tablet can log in and manage their homes from a remote location, turning lights on or off or adjusting their thermostats at their convenience.



Turn lights off in unoccupied rooms to conserve energy.

• **Turn down the temperature.** Set the thermostat low at night when residents are under warm blankets and quilts, and lower the thermostat when the house is empty. Furthermore, homeowners can turn down the thermostat on hot water heaters and even dishwashers, which can help save as much as 11 per cent on water heating costs.

• **Look to alternative heat and lighting sources.** A warm, inviting fire can light up a room and also provide supplementary heat. Pellet stoves, or those that burn a highly concentrated fuel source that is energy efficient and environmentally friendly, may prove a worthwhile investment. Many heating stoves continue to give off ambient heat long after their flames have been extinguished. And centrally located stoves can heat most of a home at a fraction of the cost of traditional forced-air systems.

• **Put south- and west-facing windows to use.** Place solar-powered devices next to an open window during daylight hours to charge when the sun is at its brightest. Use solar-powered lamps, radios, and even phone charges once the sun sets. Windows that get a lot of warm sunlight can be draped in dull, black curtains to incubate rooms that need warming. The black fabric will absorb the sun's heat, naturally heating a room.

• **Trim shrubs and trees.** Make the most of sunlight when it's available by allowing the sun's rays to reach the interior of the home. Prune dormant trees and shrubs so that the home will get plenty of sunlight.

• **Spend time outdoors.** Make the most of daylight hours by spending as much time outdoors as possible. Read books outside or do homework at the patio table, reducing reliance on indoor lighting. Sunlight can make ideal task lighting for arts and crafts projects as well.

There are many ways to conserve energy and become less reliant on artificial light as daylight hours gradually dwindle.

Small ways to make a positive impact on the environment

Living an eco-friendly lifestyle is a choice that can pay dividends for years to come. Future generations and the planet those generations inhabit can benefit significantly from the efforts of their eco-conscious ancestors. But while the benefits of living eco-friendly lifestyles are substantial and long-lasting, the effort to initiate such lifestyles need not be so significant. Here are a few examples of little things we can do to make a difference.

• **Embrace cloth bags.** Plastic grocery bags are very convenient, but they are not very eco-friendly. Such bags are often discarded after use, leading to unnecessary waste, and the effort and energy it takes to manufacture and ship such bags is wasteful. Reusable cloth bags are a much more eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags.

• **Use reusable items.** Items such as paper plates, paper napkins, and plastic cups are often taken for granted, but these items can only be used once. Over time, heavy usage of these items can add up to a significant amount of waste for landfills, and the production and transportation of such items is significant and wasteful. We can reduce this impact by only relying on reusable items.

• **Stop wasting water.** Many people, knowingly or unknowingly, are guilty of wasting water. Make an effort to reduce your water usage. Even something as simple as taking shorter showers in the morning can reduce your individual water consumption by thousands of gallons over a year.

• **Pay it forward.** Perhaps the best way to make a positive impact on the environment for years to come is to instil a sense of environmental responsibility in your children. Kids who learn to live an eco-friendly lifestyle at a young age will carry that way of life with them as they grow older, benefitting the planet for generations to come.

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Stone men working to change public's perception

WINCHESTER

Coming off a steady summer season, in which work was completed throughout the region, the brains behind Stone Creations by Derrick is still struggling to find a name for himself in his hometown.

Derrick Reeve began the firm more than a decade ago, working alongside long-time friend Scott Guyea, and in that time the two men have created a number of stone features.

"But, still, people don't know a lot about us," Reeve said. "We do artsy stuff, stone masonry, landscaping… You name it."

Meanwhile, Reeve and Guyea are continuing to push their message.

"We're local, and people have a misconception of us being expensive [to hire]," Reeve said. "The fact is we're different. You're not going to find something like what we do anywhere else. But at the end of day, we are members of this community and we're a functioning business."

Of late, much of the firm's work has been done in south Ottawa, with odd jobs in Cornwall and on Ault Island, but breaking into the Winchester area's market has proved challenging.

"We wish the local area would use us more," Reeve said. "I like to be local. We offer free quotes for work, so let us come by. People need to realize we want the work, and it is not a matter that we're so busy you'll never get us or you can't afford us."



Derrick Reeve (left) and Scott Guyea, co-owners of Winchester-based Stone Creations by Derrick.

Press Photos – Uhrig

Reeve said he has been working to increase the Stone Creations by Derrick name throughout the area, but so far has not been as successful as he'd like.

"We've been trying to market, but we're not getting the word to people properly," he said. "But, we've got our fall and winter prices now, and we need the work. Just know that we can actually do the work in the winter because there is no concrete involved in our process."

In fact, Reeve and Guyea source stone from throughout Eastern Ontario, picking out of quarries or farmers' fields.

"We'll go anywhere to get the best available," Guyea said.

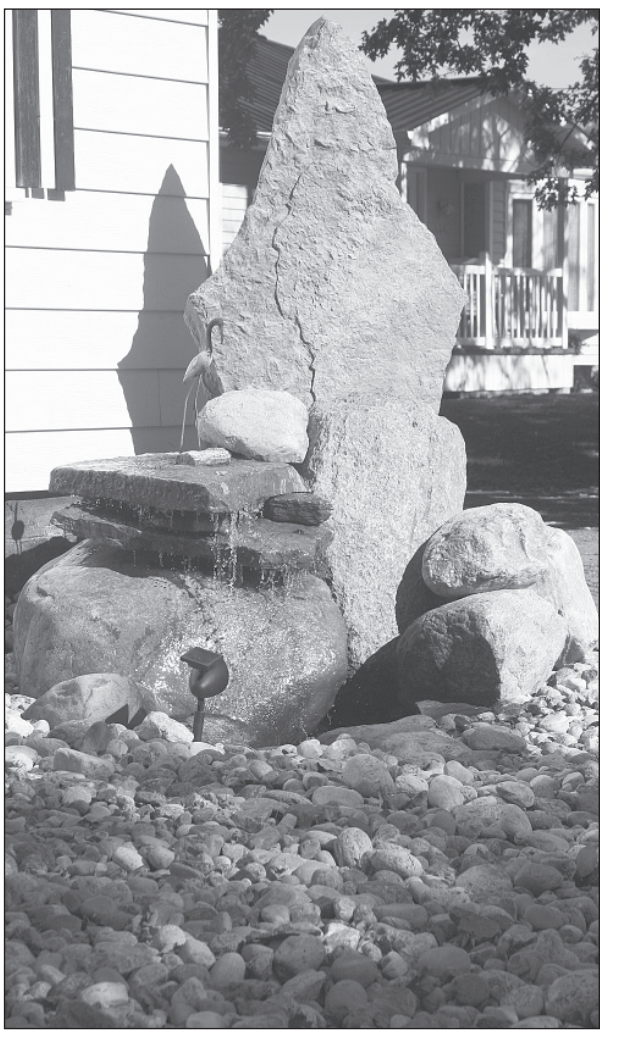
His business partner echoed those sentiments.

"For me, it is about looking at rocks differently," Reeve said. "We'll take the stone, and make whatever design and flavour people want."

For now, Reeve acknowledges that the business is up against a lack of exposure, but he and Guyea intend to keep plugging away, adding projects as they come in.

"Sure, we're just two guys with a truck and trailer, but we can take on a project of any scope," Reeve said. "We always get the job done."

For more information about Stone Creations by Derrick, visit www.stonecreationsbyderrick.com or call 613-858-7827.



The duo's most recent creation sits at home on Main Street in Winchester.

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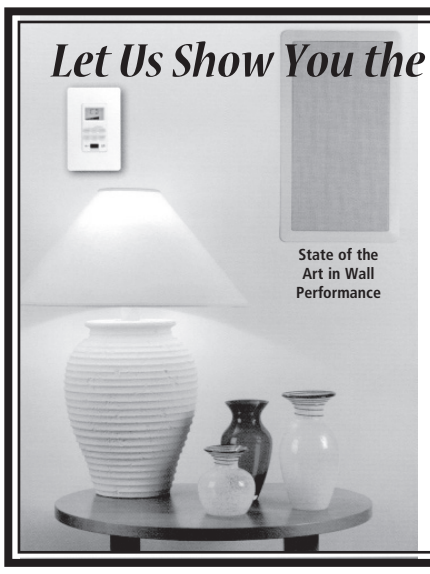

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How to rid your home of drafts

Think about what it might be like if you turned up the heat and then opened all of the windows in your home. All of that warm air would rush right out, and you would be left with a cold home and a hefty heating bill.

A home that is full of drafts is inefficient and expensive. And drafty homes are not just a problem when the weather is cold, as air that seeps in when you're trying to keep the home cool can be an inefficient nuisance as well. Higher energy bills and wasted resources do not have to be tolerated if you simply scour your home for drafts, sealing them to cut energy costs and make the home more comfortable.

Drafts are often small cracks around windows and doors, but there are many other places where drafts can form. Knowing some of the less visible spots where drafts come from may help you to seal out unwanted cold air more effectively.

Attic

Homes that feature attics with pull-down stairs tend to be drafty. In such homes, a large hole is cut out of the ceiling so residents can access the attic. So instead of thick insulation, these homes may only have a sheet of plywood blocking your interior space from the outdoors, as many attics are directly vented to the roof. To determine if there is a leak, turn on the attic light, close the attic door, and check to see if you can see the light on from below. If you can, then there is a gap letting both the light and air escape. In addition to using flexible rubber around the opening of the attic to better seal the door when it is closed, you can think about adding a thicker, more insulated door.

Dryer vents

The standard home laundry dryer vents outdoors via an exhaust duct. This duct is open to the outdoors, and it may be letting cold air into the home. That's because there is typically a flimsy flapper made of sheet metal on the outside of the vent to help protect against air infiltration. But over time dryer lint can accumulate at the vent opening, causing the metal flapper to stay open when it should close. Homeowners can invest in dryer seals that close the vent when the dryer is not in use. Not only does this prevent cold air from entering the house, but also it keeps out pests, like bugs and rodents.

Pipes

Check pipes that exit the home, such as those that feed outdoor water spigots, as such pipes can let cold air back into the house. The same can be said for waste pipes. Also, check to see if pipes that connect to garages, basements and crawl spaces are not insulated. Use sealant around these pipes to block drafts into the home. Foam insulation can be sprayed into small crevices, where it will expand and harden, blocking off air access. These damp, cool spots are also great places for insects to enter the home. Sealing drafts also may prevent bugs from entering the home.

Fireplaces

Although fireplaces often make for decorative and appealing accents to a home, many are not effective sources of ambient heat. They may draw more warm air out of the flue than they bring into the house. When a fireplace is not in use, air can rise out of the chimney and a draft can be felt in the home. Some studies indicate that an open damper on an unused fireplace, even in a well-insulated home, can increase overall heating and cooling energy consumption by 30 per cent.

If you simply must have a fireplace, remember to always keep the damper shut when the fireplace is not in use and use a glass cover you can seal tightly to further block the opening to the fireplace from your living space. Fireplace plugs, which can keep out drafts during the season when fireplaces are not in use, may also be a worthwhile investment.

Electrical outlets

Outlets and light switches can be significant sources of drafts in a home. Check to see that the switch plates are secure. If drafts still come through, then employ outlet draft blockers to prevent cool air from entering the home and warm air from exiting it.

Homeowners can address drafts in a variety of ways. And doing so can make a home more comfortable and cut energy costs considerably.

Storing your rain barrel for the winter

Rain barrels are popular methods of gathering rain water, which can then be used in various ways. Rain barrels are typically attached to a home's gutters and downspouts to collect water as it flows off of the roof. The collected water can be used for gardening, washing cars, and watering the lawn.



To prevent damage, water barrels may need to be stored in the wintertime. When storing your rain barrel for the winter, consider the following tips.

• It is best to disconnect the downspout from the rain barrel and reattach the gutter extension to funnel water away from the foundation of the house.

• Make sure the rain barrel is empty. Frozen water expands as it forms into ice, and it can crack the rain barrel.

• Flip the rain barrel over so that it will not collect any rain or snow and store it in an out-of-the-way area outside. If you have enough room, you may want to store the barrel indoors in a garage, basement, or storage shed.

• Take in any hoses so they do not freeze and crack from the cold weather.

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Harbers offers function and fashion

WILLIAMSBURG

'Tis the season… for checking the fireplace and woodstove or for having one installed.

At Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry in Williamsburg, Brian and Joy Harbers have already finished the majority of the business' annual maintenance inspections, having now moved on to a growing list of new installation jobs.

With the onset of cool nights, Joy said there has been an influx of customers visiting the shop to check out the options. Whether customers' wants tend toward those of a safe warm snow-covered home, or an inviting and romantic fireplace for two, Joy said Harbers has what clients need to provide them with a safe, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing heating source.

Brian, who is a certified, licensed mason, as well as a W.E.T.T. (wood energy technical training) technician, is hands on with every job. Joy said it is important to the couple that they deal directly with customers, giving them the one-on-one attention they deserve. While Joy leads them through the selection and purchasing process, Brian completes the installation.

"We're putting fire into your home," Joy said. "It has to be done right. Safety is always first."

For this reason, the majority of Harbers customers are within a one-hour drive of the 4385 Billy Ln. shop, making it somewhat easier for Brian to service his customers in a timely manner.

In addition to technical know-how, Brian has proven himself to be a designer of fireplace faces, hearths, and mantels.

Last spring he created a colourful steel mantel, and then designed a backdrop to go with it.

"Heat-treating the steel mantel creates a range of colours, and every mantel is different," Brian said. "It is more of a unique and functional piece of art than just your standard mantel."

The backdrop for the mantel, which can be seen in the business' showroom, was created with different types of stone, and the design features a depiction of the sun shining down on the mantel.

"Blending the rough and smooth stone together, we can create different designs [that are] only limited to your imagination," Brian said.

Recently, Brian completed a new fireplace design with a slate base, and a steel cutout of a tree, which can also be found in the store's showroom.

"With the flagstone fireplace, we wanted to create a wall of stone, like a smooth stone wall towering over the edge of a lake," Brian said. "The sculpted steel tree is a local elm tree that we photographed and created a pattern from. This pattern was then cut out of a seven-foot-by-five-foot sheet of steel. The process of cleaning and treating the tree with different acids creates a range of colours with no two pieces being the same."

While Brian is busy creating new designer backdrops for the heating source, he and Joy are also staying on top of the latest technology in fireplace and woodstove designs. This winter, in fact, the Harbers will be testing a new woodstove in their own home. The product boasts a longer burn time, Joy said.

"The best test is to put it in our own house," she said. "We are hoping to have it in the showroom at the end of this season."

The couple is constantly trying new products, Joy added, pointing out that she is not comfortable offering something to her customers that she has not already tried herself. In order to speak to an item's qualities, Joy said that she feels she must have first-hand knowledge.

The Jotul TL50 woodstove is another example of the Harbers policy of testing before selling. The product, which the couple began using last fall, offers a grill top. In addition to grilling steaks on it during last year's open house, Joy and Brian have also used it in their own home all year, grilling anything from salmon, to pork, to chicken and steak on it almost nightly.

There's a hint of wood flavour in everything, Joy said, which everyone in their family has enjoyed.

The Jotul TL50 will now be a feature in the showroom, and, depending on the way the wind blows, customers might drop in to find Joy grilling a treat to share with customers throughout the coming winter months.







Above: *Brian Harbers is pictured grilling steaks during the store's 2012 fall open house. The pictured woodstove is to become a feature in the Williamsburg showroom this winter. Joy expects to grill an assortment of foods throughout the year to share with customers.*

Left: *Brian, whose wife, Joy, is pictured here loading wood into the fireplace, designed the backdrop for the heat source, which includes a rather hard-to-find stone and a uniquely designed steel tree.*

Far left: *The mantel and backdrop for this fireplace were both designed by Brian.*

Press Photos – Casselman

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Above: *Merrilyn Haarsma, one of Lannin Home Building Centre's paint specialists, is pictured here using the Beauti-Tone Colour Designer scanner and software.*

Left: *Beauti-Tone products are sold exclusively in Home Hardware and Home Building Centres.*

Press Photos – Casselman

Painting process simplified at Lannin's

WINCHESTER

While being a responsible homeowner means staying on top of leaks, cracks, and general repairs, it can also be an opportunity to express a personalized sense of style.

The customer service team at Lannin Home Building Centre in Winchester is ready to help homeowners find just what they need to enhance the stability and functionality of their home or to spruce it up.

Collectively, owner J.D. Van Noy's paint team has years of experience and training in the science of paint application and colour creation. Merrilyn Haarsma, Terri Tilley, and Sam Hummel attend yearly seminars to keep up-to-date on new information, practices, and products in the world of painting and staining, Haarsma said.

Recently, the store acquired a line of cabinet and furniture paint in the Beauti-Tone Designer series, the brand's premier line of paint. Previously, it was only offered in the Signature line. The new option comes in a pearl finish, and offers the same benefits as other Beauti-Tone products, including its cross-linking technology, mildew resistance, and its ability to be both paint and primer in one.



The Bissell Big Green, a carpet and upholstery cleaner, is now available for rent at Lannin's.

Another relatively new paint product is the reformulated Natura, which is environmentally friendly, has no volatile organic compounds (VOC), and has virtually no odour. This paint-and-primer-in-one comes in eggshell or pearl. (Beauti-Tone products are exclusive to Home Hardware and Home Building Centres.)

To create just the right colour for customers, Lannin's paint team uses a set of VOC-free colourants, the Beauti-Tone Colour Finder, and the store's new and improved paint-shaking machine.

"We can match any colour," Tilley said.

The colour scanner takes a reading of the preferred colour, finds the Beauti-Tone equivalent in the computer's database, and gives the paint technician the right formula to create the desired match.

In addition to the in-store scanner, Tilley said there is also a portable scanner for clients to take home, and while the take-home tool is not as precise as its in-store counterpart, she said it does provide the closest match possible.

Lannin's keeps a record of customer's paint choices, including colour formulas, for reference in future purchases. As well, there is an all-year-round in-store promotion whereby customers can "buy six, and get one free" in the Beauti-Tone paint and stain department.

Next spring, the store will see the addition of a new paint chip rack made up of two four-foot structures, offering customers a better preview of the more than 2,700 colour options available.

The paint section is not the only one to see new products added to its inventory; Van Noy is constantly ordering more Home Hardware products to enhance the store's catalogue of in-store items, creating a larger and more varied selection.

"It is exciting to see the new products that come in every week," Haarsma said. "We have more to offer our customers."

While clients can order any Home Hardware product available in the company's warehouse through the County Road 31 store, Van Noy is looking to make many of these products, like housewares and seasonal items, an in-store option. He already has several new products ordered for the spring, he said. As well, Lannin Home Building Centre continues to provide the same lumber and building supply services.

Notably new to the store is the ability to rent a Bissell Big Green, a deep cleaning machine for carpets and upholstery, as well as the accompanying cleaning liquids. With more than one machine for rent, staff members are ready to show customers how to use the new product to get the best results.

"We are proud of our customer service," Haarsma said.

Those who drop by Lannin's now have the opportunity to purchase a fresh hot beverage ($1.25 each) from the in-store Keurig machine, choosing from an assortment of teas, coffees, and hot chocolate. All proceeds are to be directed to the Winchester Downtown Revitalization Committee.

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Sheet metal latest addition to W.C. Robinson's offerings

SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Sheet metal manufacturing is now known as just one of many offerings made available at W.C. Robinson and Son.

The South Mountain firm, which has been serving the region for more than 15 years, unveiled the new division in August and interest has been increasing gradually since then.

With the sheet metal manufacturing division, W.C. Robinson employees can make duct work (four, six, and eight inch lengths) at the business' Wallace Road location, or hoods for barn exhaust fans, and much more.

As well, employees are available for the installation of complete duct work in homes, with delivery included, or W.C. Robinson can visit a site and build to measure out the job prior to installation.

Largely, however, the business specializes in plumbing, heating (natural gas, propane, and fireplaces), and air conditioning.

W.C. Robinson is a licenced electrical contractor with the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) of Ontario, and a member of the ESA's Authorized Contractor Program, while also being certified by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority.



Business owners Wayne and Stacey Robinson have been steadily increasing W.C. Robinson's service offerings throughout more than 15 years of operation. Press Photos – Uhrig

According to business owners Wayne and Stacey Robinson, pride in the work completed and top of the line service presence has helped to sustain W.C. Robinson since the beginning.

"Sometimes it is about keeping our heads above water, but we have had some very happy responses from customers," Wayne said. "We don't want to put all our eggs in one basket, but we keep [our employees] busy with everything."

For more about W.C. Robinson, visit www.wcrobinson.com or call 613-989-2894.



The business recently added a sheet metal manufacturing division at its Wallace Road location. Pictured is employee Merv Patterson working on a product order.

How to safely clear gutters of grime before winter strikes

Cleaning gutters is a household chore that many homeowners associate with both spring and autumn. Cleaning gutters prevents water damage on the roof while protecting your home's siding and foundation. In addition, cleaning gutters in the fall gives homeowners a chance to ensure they are firmly secured to the house, an important precaution when potentially harsh winter weather is just around the corner.

Unlike many household chores, cleaning gutters can be quite dangerous, as it often requires homeowners to climb up and down on ladders or spend ample time on the roof. As a result, safety should reign supreme when cleaning gutters, and homeowners should take the following precautions before gutting their gutters of grime.

• **Don't try to be a hero.** If you are afraid of heights, then it's perfectly alright to hire a professional to clean your gutters. People with a fear of heights cannot predict how they will react when climbing a ladder, so play it safe and hire a professional if the thought of climbing up and down a ladder frightens you.

• **Inspect the stability of your ladder.** Ladders play a key role when cleaning gutters of leaves, dirt and grime, so homeowners should inspect their ladders before they get to work. An unbalanced ladder may not be reliable and should be replaced. You will be moving and swaying somewhat while cleaning the gutters, so you will need a secure ladder that does not teeter back and forth.

• **Keep the ladder on stable ground, and ask a friend or family member to hold it.** The ladder should always be planted on a flat and secure surface before you climb up to clean the gutter. And much like you might have a spotter when lifting weights, have a friend or family member hold the ladder as you climb up to ensure the ladder remains stable.

• **Move the ladder frequently.** It can be tempting to reach as far as possible when you're on the ladder, as you can save time by covering more ground on each trip up the ladder. But overextending yourself is a considerable safety risk, so move the ladder frequently, even if the job is taking more time than you had expected.

• **Wear tight clothing.** Loose clothing when cleaning gutters can easily get stuck on shutters, tree branches, or other items when climbing up or down the ladder. If you aren't paying attention, clothing that gets snagged can throw off your balance when you start to move, increasing your risk of falling.

• **Wear protective gloves.** Anyone who has cleaned gutters in the past can attest that you never know what might have settled in gutters since the last time they were cleaned. Wear a thick pair of gloves that won't puncture when caught on a gutter, or sharp twig or branch. You won't want any holes in the gloves, as holes may leave you susceptible to any bacteria in organic items that might have settled in the materials in your gutter. Gutters also may have sharp edges that can leave you susceptible to cuts if you aren't wearing gloves. In addition, gloves keep your hands warm, which will come in handy as you clear the gutters of materials that are often wet. When choosing gloves, be sure to choose ones that give you some grip so you can firmly grasp the ladder as you climb up and down.

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How to make a home handicap accessible

Many homeowners have found themselves scrambling to make their homes handicap accessible after a sudden injury or illness. In addition, some homeowners have found themselves looking to make adjustments to their homes in anticipation of welcoming elderly, less mobile relatives into their homes.



Converting a home into a handicap-accessible space can seem like a daunting task that requires adjustments to nearly every part of the house. While the extent of those adjustments depends on the individual who needs to be accommodated, some of the areas homeowners must address when making their homes handicap accessible are universal regardless of the individual's condition.

Entryways

A home's entryways often must be addressed when making the home more handicap accessible. Portable ramps can be an affordable option and are often ideal for those who only need to make temporary adjustments, such as when a resident suffers an injury that requires he or she spend some time in a wheelchair. When the adjustments will just be temporary, a folding wheelchair might be necessary, as the doorways might not be able to fit a standard wheelchair that doesn't fold.

When adjustments figure to be permanent, homeowners might need to expand the doorways in their homes. Contractors typically recommend expanding doorways to at least 32 inches, which provides some manoeuvrability when wheelchairs, which are typically between 24 and 27 inches wide, are entering the home. Doorways at the most commonly used entryways, including front doors and doors to the bathrooms, as well as the individual's bedroom, will likely need to be widened.

Bathroom

The bathroom might be the area of the home that needs the most attention. Slippery conditions common to bathrooms can make things especially difficult for people in wheelchairs or with disabilities. Grab bars should be installed in bath tubs and shower stalls, and next to toilets.

But grab bars aren't the only adjustment homeowners should make in the bathroom as they attempt to make a home more handicap accessible. Safety treads, which can provide a secure, slip-free surface on the floors of showers and tubs, can be installed. Add a hand-held shower head to the shower stall to make it easier for those with a disability to shower. Portable transfer seats, which enable wheelchair-bound men and women to transition from their chairs to showers and bathtubs, can be purchased and kept in or near the bathroom.

Water fixtures

An often overlooked adjustment homeowners must make when transforming their homes into handicap-accessible spaces concerns the sinks throughout the home. Disabled persons may find it difficult to access faucets on sinks throughout the home, especially when there are vanity cabinets beneath the sinks. Replacing vanities with pedestal sinks can improve manoeuvrability, but make sure these sinks are lower to the ground than standard pedestal sinks. A sink that's just a few inches lower than a standard sink is considerably more accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Closets

Closets are rarely handicap accessible. Homeowners can address this issue by creating multi-level closet spaces so individuals can place their clothes at accessible heights. Closet shelves can be lowered and doors can be widened so disabled persons can easily manage their wardrobes. In addition, consider installing a light inside the closet and make sure the light switch can be easily reached from a wheelchair.

Making a home more handicap accessible can be a significant undertaking, but many of the adjustments homeowners must make are small in scale and won't take long to complete.

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The Wellington model home opens into the dining, living, and kitchen area, with bedrooms and bathrooms to the left, including a deluxe master en suite and walk-in closet, and laundry, mudroom, and garage to the right. The attached two-car garage includes a 12-foot-by-14-foot workshop. This model also features an optional sunroom.



The Dundas II is a three-bedroom ranch style home, which opens into an open concept dining, great room, and kitchen. In this design, the master bedroom with en suite is located at one end of the home while the other bedrooms, bathroom, laundry room, and garage are positioned at the other. The vaulted ceiling and window wall in the great room is an option in this unit.



The Essex is a split-level unit with three bedrooms. The open-concept living, dining, and kitchen area are located in the front of the home with the washroom and bedrooms to the back. Pictured is the living area with a bevelled ceiling.

Press Photos – Casselman

Guildcrest Homes makes home buying easy

MOREWOOD

What is the best way to build a house – one that is structurally sound, environmentally friendly, and aesthetically pleasing?

According to Guildcrest Homes, the key is to make it modular. The firm has been building, promoting, and selling modularly constructed houses since 1991.

With sales representatives throughout Ontario, the company's 120,000-square-foot factory is stationed in Morewood, where, at peak times, roughly 140 workers can be found assembling the housing units.

Last month, the organization held a three-day celebratory event to introduce its new design centre, as well as its three new model homes – The Essex, The Wellington, and The Dundas II.

One stop shop

Upon visiting Guildcrest Homes, customers are first greeted in the new design centre, which is attached to The Essex.

It is here that potential homebuyers can take a virtual tour of the available layouts and options using the company's new computer software application, as well as browse the broad selection of options for floors, cupboards, counters, lighting, bathroom and kitchen fixtures, and more.

The new software, coupled with the on-site samples, allows customers to create a "fully customized" home, George Tierney, director of marketing services and sales manager, said. This way, no two houses are ever exactly the same, he added.

Touring Guildcrest

Each of the new models, ranging from roughly 1,350 to 1,880 square-feet, is of the bungalow design; however, modular units can be used to create two-storey homes as well. There is currently a trend toward one-storey builds, Tierney said.

While there are several ways to sell modular units, the majority of customers (roughly 85 per cent) prefer the "turn key" option, which takes approximately 14 to 16 weeks from start to finish, he added. In choosing this option, prospective homeowners remain in control of layout and design choices, but Guildcrest employees do all the work from building the units in the factory to delivering and finishing the home on site.

While the unit is being built, buyers are welcome to visit the factory at any time to watch as their new home moves along the assembly line from start to finish, which takes roughly one week. The factory produces approximately 10,500 square-feet of new homes each week.



George Tierney (left), director of marketing services and sales manager, demonstrated the company's new sales application, which has the ability to take the customer through the home-buying process in a "hands on digital presentation."



Roy Mills (above), regional sales manager, took visitors on a tour of Guildcrest Homes' Morewood factory. Building the units inside the warehouse facility means that workers can seal electrical boxes from the outside, leaving zero room for air leakage. As well, insulation can be cut to exact size and fitted properly before the outside panels are attached to the home. Another advantage of the pre-fabricated method is the ability to apply continuous vapour barrier sheeting, which leads to a more air-tight home, making it more energy efficient. Factory-built units also have the benefit of continuous flooring, and more. "You cannot have a house built on site as well as we can build it here," Mills said.

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Pieces falling into place

BMR major expansion nears completion

WINCHESTER

The various stations are slowly being put into place as Winchester BMR's expansive addition nears the home stretch toward completion.

From north to south, east to west, each area of the facility has been renewed with emphasis paid to user-friendly aisles and a more aesthetically pleasing layout.

Increased signage has been installed in order to better assist shoppers in finding what they are looking for, while racks throughout the middle of the store have pictures attached to identify products.

"It is a matter of customer service," Ken Boje, who co-owns the local BMR with his wife, Trish, said. "We're prided in that, and it is critical to do so."

While much of the construction that had been ongoing at the County Road 38 facility has been completed, the push now is to get items into their proper place and make the most of the store's newfound space.

All told, the business now encompasses more than 50,000 square-feet, with a fully serviced, 7,000 square-foot drive-through system for lumber pickup and 40,000 square-feet of area for wood and other products.

As well, the retail portion has increased to approximately 23,000 square-feet, with a 7,000 square-foot garden centre now an offshoot of the main building, and an adjacent 5,000 square-foot outbuilding.

"We're now a full line hardware and home improvement centre," Boje said. "But we also carry housewares, appliances, various gadgets, home décor items, giftware in our Country Treasures area, and more."

With much of the on-floor products in place, Boje said focus has now shifted to "behind the scenes" in order to better maximize storage and ensure each new area operates as a functional entity of BMR.

"What remains critical, however, is to get the product to the customer as quick as possible," he said. "Through the store, I'm seeing more and more [customers] coming in now just to look around [at the changes]… We didn't have that six months ago."

The most compelling features of the new store set up, according to Boje, will be the assorted displays. From plumbing to lighting, kitchen and bathroom, each stage of the renovation is to be acknowledged with its own personal space at BMR. Other intact product lines that have been expanded include flooring, paint (BMR is the only hardware dealer in the region to stock the Benjamin Moore line), siding, shingles, and much more. The store carries a full line up of lumber including spruce, pressure-treated, plywoods, and the like.

In the store's back room shop, meanwhile, both a cut room, where lumber can be cut to specific needs of customers, and a metal bender have been added. For the bender, customers and contractors are able to purchase the necessary material at the store and then use the device to reduce it to specific sizes or shapes – ideal for those roofing or siding projects.

It should also be noted that Winchester BMR is a stocking dealer for Kaycan siding and Ideal steel roof products, including Wakefield steel shingles.

Boje has also added a boom truck to the store's fleet, joining the flatbed vehicle and some forklifts. The boom truck will assist those requiring product lifted to upper levels of the constructed building.

As for when completion of Winchester BMR's overhaul can be expected, Boje said year's end should be met will the finalizing of displays and the positioning of in-store items.

"We'll certainly have most of the products on the floor by Christmas," he said. "From there, it is a matter of working through the seasons and fine-tuning the stock to maximize our assortment and fill our customers' needs on a day to day basis."





Winchester BMR's massive overhaul is expected to be completed by year's end, with the final positioning of displays and in-store items. Pictured near the store's increased flooring centre is BMR employee Rick Sullivan. Of the many new features available at the increased BMR is a metal bender. Customers and contractors can use the device to shape the material purchased at the store.

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Create a lighting scheme that works for a kitchen

When designing a kitchen, homeowners typically give substantial consideration to many elements of their dream design, including cabinet and countertop materials and which brand of appliances they most prefer. But few may consider the lighting for the room as thoroughly.

Lighting is an important consideration in any room, but most especially in the kitchen, where people tend to gravitate and spend a good portion of their time. The right lighting can have a dramatic effect on the functionality of the kitchen, including how the space feels when you enter it. The right blend of lights can create a vibrant mood in the kitchen, while light can be adjusted according to what needs to get done in the space.

Establishing a lighting plan in a kitchen requires a combination of different lights. The main focus should be on three distinct lighting types: task lighting, ambient lighting and accent lighting.

Task lighting

Task light is beneficial anywhere a person will need to perform tasks that require close concentration, such as chopping vegetables. Task lighting shines direct light onto a surface, illuminating it thoroughly, and it can be turned off when it is not needed.

Task lighting is generally placed above counters and islands where one will be slicing vegetables and preparing food. There may be lighting over the sink to illuminate dirty dishes. If a kitchen has a desk area, lighting above the desk will make that area more functional. Many task lighting designs include lights under cabinetry to shine down onto counters and eliminate shadowed recesses. Under-cabinet lighting is a relatively inexpensive add-on for existing kitchens. Homeowners can add lighting afterward to focus more light onto countertops.

Ambient lighting

Ambient lighting is another name for all-over lighting that fills a room. During the day, ambient light may stream in from windows and skylights. However, at night, ambient lighting is created by different light fixtures in a room. In the kitchen, overhead fixtures are a popular choice for ambient lighting. A blend of hanging pendant lamps, chandeliers and recessed lighting can create the amount of light needed. Homeowners should pay special attention to the bulbs and fixtures they choose, as not all produce the same amount of light. Those concerned about energy efficiency also must give mind to whether the bulbs will use a lot of energy or last a long time. Compact fluorescent bulbs as well as LED lighting are long-lasting and do not use as much energy as incandescent bulbs.

Indirect ambient lighting softens shadows in a room, creating a warm, inviting glow. It is an important layer of light that is often overlooked in the kitchen. Setting ambient lighting on a dimmer enables homeowners to cast a mood that is desired when the kitchen isn't being used for prep work.

Accent lighting

If there are key elements around the kitchen that a person would like to highlight, such as a china set, accent lighting can do the trick. Spotlights can be used to show off collectibles, while a subtle strip of lighting can illuminate a wall of artwork. Many people like to install accent lighting inside of cabinetry to create dramatic focal points.

Some homeowners may want to incorporate decorative lighting in their kitchens. This is the use of ornate chandeliers, hanging pendants and other eye-catching fixtures. Decorative lighting should be considered in proportion to the size of the kitchen. Therefore, smaller kitchens will have smaller fixtures and vice versa. Decorative lighting may be the most expensive type of kitchen lighting, so some homeowners prefer to plan ahead for the inclusion of decorative accents by having the wiring ready and then adding the fixtures over time.



Under-cabinet task lighting sheds light on areas where cooks do their prep work.

Lighting in a kitchen can be just as important as which appliances and other accessories homeowners choose for their kitchens. Without the right mix of lighting, the kitchen may not be functional or inviting.

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My basement is wet; now what?

Few things can cause more damage to a home than water. Leaks and flooding can cause various structural insufficiencies, and may lead to unsafe conditions in a home.

Some homeowners live in areas where a high water table inevitably forces groundwater up and into subterranean living spaces. Others may live close to rivers or streams that can overflow and cause home flooding. Still others who may not have had a water problem before learn that a heavy rainfall, and perhaps inadequate drainage outdoors, can cause water damage to a home.



Compounding these issues is the fact that very often a home's utility systems are located out of the way in basements, or these spaces may be finished to create additional living space. Water in a basement can be much more than a nuisance. Water can lead to thousands of dollars in damage.

Moisture or several inches of water in a basement is nothing to take lightly. Furnaces and water heaters damaged by water can be costly to replace. Wires that come in contact with water can become hazards and cause an electrical fire, and water in a basement may be a harbinger for bacteria and viruses, creating unsanitary living conditions in the home. Mold spores that have developed in a damp basement can spread to other areas of the home thanks to a heating and cooling forced air system. And a cool, damp spot can be the perfect habitat for insects.

When a basement develops a water problem, it is best to call in a professional. Although it might not be cheap, calling a professional can help you to remedy the situation faster than if you try several methods to fix the water problem yourself. When looking for a waterproofing company, seek recommendations from people you trust. Only do business with licensed professional contractors who are willing to give you a free estimate. You also can check out businesses by contacting consumer advocacy groups. You may be able to read up on their business practices and learn if there have been any complaints lodged against a company in the past.

Hydrostatic pressure, poor foundations and cracks can each cause water to enter the house. Each situation is different, and a combination of exterior and interior changes may need to be made. In order to alleviate some water problems, certain modifications must be made. While the following solutions may not be applicable in each situation, they are some of the more common modifications plumbers suggest when fixing flooded basements.

• **Sump pump:** In some cases, the installation of a well and a submersible pump may be all that's needed to keep basements dry. When water rises high enough to start the pump, the sump pump will then expel the water out through a pipe to a drain or the street. Sometimes a sump pump works in concert with a French drainage system, which is a channel around the perimeter of the basement that funnels water to the sump pump well.

• **Vapour barriers:** Vinyl, plastic and paint encapsulation systems may be applied to the interior of foundation walls to serve as a barrier system. This prevents water or condensation from reaching the interior of the house. A vapour barrier may extend below the foundation to direct water runoff into a drainage system.

• **Exterior fixes:** There are many ways to address flooding from outside the home. These include using outdoor vapour barriers and paints, having grading issues corrected so water will flow away from the home, digging of a swale to catch water away from the basement, exterior drainage systems, and utilizing specialized rain gutters and downspouts to direct water further away from the home during rainstorms.

• **Plumbing repairs:** Sometimes water issues may be the result of a pipe backup or a faulty appliance and not necessarily an outdoor water issue. In these cases, repairing the source of the leak may be all that's needed.

How to prevent tip-over accidents

Modern conveniences in a home are meant to be enjoyed. However, items such as televisions, appliances and furniture can prove quite dangerous when they are involved in tip-over accidents.

Each year there are hundreds of accidents involving furniture tipping over onto children – some resulting in serious or fatal injuries.

Fortunately, tip-over injuries are preventable. Individuals making improvements around their homes may want to give special attention to renovations that can improve safety in and around the house. One of the first steps to take is securing furniture and televisions to prevent tip-over accidents.

One of the single easiest methods to preventing tip-over injuries is to anchor furniture, televisions and appliances to the wall. All furniture with shelves, drawers and doors – anything that can be climbed or pulled over by curious children – should be anchored into a stud with an appropriate device. Even if an item seems stable or heavy, some simple precautionary measures can help prevent an injury and possibly save a life.

Many different safety devices that can prevent tip-over accidents are now available. Products from Safety First to Kidco to Hangman all offer furniture straps to secure items. However, do-it-yourselfers can use "L" brackets as well as other bolts and hardware that are sturdy enough to hold the weight of a fully loaded piece of furniture. Remember, walls can always be repaired should damage occur from bolts and straps. But lives cannot be replaced.

Flat screen televisions are safer when mounted on a wall than they are when placed atop a piece of furniture. If televisions are on a TV stand, they should be secured to the surface.

Homeowners hoping to prevent tip-over accidents can follow these tips.

• When loading dresser drawers, put the heaviest items at the bottom and the lightest items in the top drawers.

• Do not put things on top of dressers that may entice children to climb up the dresser.

• Keep items you do not want children to have out of sight.

• Do not assume children will remember the dangers associated with climbing or always follow the rules.

• Don't forget to also secure computer monitors.

• Check safety straps frequently to be sure they are still secure.

• Think about other items around the house that can present a danger were they to fall. Secure everything and anything that is large and could cause injury if it fell down onto a person.

Homeowners should not put off securing items around the house. Spending five minutes now can prevent a tragedy later on.

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How to increase storage in tight spaces

Cozy, quaint homes attract many home buyers and renters. Be it a cottage-style house or a studio apartment, smaller living spaces often involve getting creative with storage.

People live in a smaller homes for a variety of reasons. Some choose to live in a smaller home so they can be right in the thick of things in a town or urban centre. Others scale back on living space in an effort to save money. But storage space in small quarters is often at a premium, and thinking creatively is a necessity to keep the home tidy and items out of view.

Rainy or chilly days are the perfect times to tackle indoor organization projects. When the outdoors isn't beckoning, you can devote all of your attention to addressing storage issues in your home. To begin, take inventory of what you have, going through your possessions and determining what can stay and what can go. Part with anything you haven't used in quite some time.

The next step is to sort items and get organized. Then you can find a place for everything. For example, if you have a dozen bath towels but only one sauce pot, you will need to find more room for linens than kitchen cookware. You may need to borrow space from one area of the home to give to another area.

The following are some additional tips to increase space in an otherwise cramped home.

Add shelves

Increase cabinet and closet space by adding shelves into them. This may double or even triple the amount of usable space, especially if you customize the shelving to fit storage containers you use to store everything from shoes to craft items.

Opt for dual-purpose furniture

Benches with lids that lift up and sofas that convert into guest beds are just a few of the many ways you can keep a small home neat and increase storage space. An ottoman is a great place to store extra blankets and linens, while a trunk or crate with a sturdy top can be used in lieu of a traditional coffee table to keep books or board games.

Think vertically

When floor space is at a premium, you may need to look up for storage. Frequently used pots and pans can be hung from a decorative rack in your kitchen. Use magnets on jars to store a spice rack on the wall near the stove. Racks above cabinets or on doors can be used to store everything from shoes to jewelry to toiletries. Shelving in children's rooms can store lesser used toys away from the floor. Empty walls are valuable real estate in a small home, and tall bookshelves can house a number of different things.

Take advantage of odd spaces

If you have space under a staircase or a spot by a dormer or in an attic eave, use the space to store items. You may need to get creative, such as adding a door and small closet into the staircase, but such spaces make practical storage areas and add character to a home.

Use see-through containers

Many people find that plastic storage bins are neater and more stackable than boxes. See-through bins enable you to quickly find items so that you are not searching around the house for lost items and creating a bigger mess along the way. Clear storage containers work in the refrigerator, too. You can more easily spot leftovers, and uniform stacking containers free up more room for bulkier items.

Use space beneath bed

There likely is ample room to store more things than just dust bunnies beneath your bed. A bed frame with built-in drawers is the perfect place to keep bed linens and out-of-season clothes. Beds can be raised on blocks to create more space underneath for storing rolling plastic containers and even seldom-used suitcases.

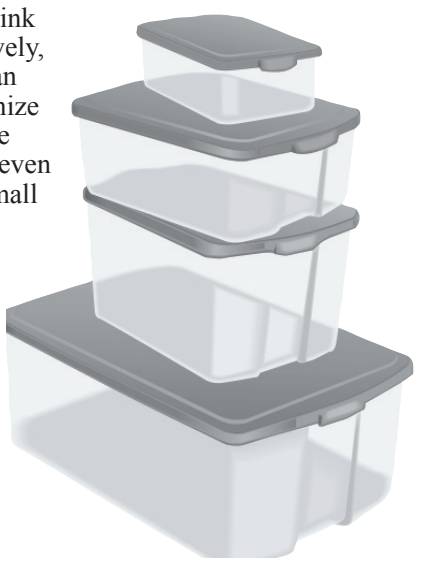
Opt for an armoire

Armoires are not exclusive to bedrooms. Armoires can be used in dining spaces or in dens to store items out of sight. An armoire can be used when retrofitted with a pull-out shelf as a laptop desk, storing all office items behind closed doors when not needed.

Improve storage in bathroom

Try to choose a vanity that has under-the-sink storage so you will have a place to store some toiletries. Home improvement centres sell cabinets and étagère that can be placed above the toilet tank as a storage space for bathroom items. In the shower, hang a second tension-loaded shower curtain rod on the inside of the shower enclosure that can be used to hold bags of kids bath toys and other toiletries, keeping them off the tub ledges.

When you think creatively, you can maximize storage space even in a small home.



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Autumn a great time to clear away clutter

Clutter is a concern for many homeowners. Clutter can gradually accumulate, and over time a home can turn from a welcoming respite to a claustrophobic place overwhelmed by items of little or no value.

Homeowners who have battled clutter in the past often find that it is most likely to accumulate over the winter, when frigid temperatures outside drive more people indoors. Spending more time indoors means more trash indoors. Newspapers and magazines might be easy to discard when the weather is warm, but a trip outside to discard such items takes less precedence when it must be made in below freezing temperatures.

The likelihood that even the cleanliest of homeowners might accumulate some clutter over the winter only highlights the importance of clearing a house of clutter in the fall. While clearing clutter can seem like an arduous task, the following tips can make the project much easier.

Clean one room or area at a time

A disorganized approach to getting organized is likely to waste time and may even prove fruitless. Work your way through your home or apartment one room at a time rather than jumping from room to room. Have boxes or crates designated for items you find that belong in other rooms, and place items in the appropriate boxes as you clean rather than returning items to the right room as you find them. Once you have finished a room, move on to the next one and try to finish a room on the same day you started.

Invest in a paper shredder

Old bills, bank statements, receipts, and other once-important papers have a way of accumulating on desks, in drawers and on counters. Such documents often do not need to be held onto, but some people are hesitant to discard them because they contain personal information. A paper shredder is a great investment for homeowners and apartment dwellers alike and can be the safest way to discard documents with potentially sensitive information. It's also a friend to anyone attempting to clear clutter. Many shredders can shred multiple pages at a time, making them a quick and safe way to discard documents that have been littering a home long after they were useful.

Decide to donate some items

Many unused items lying around your house can likely be donated to a worthy cause, which can help motivate you to clean out your closet of all those extra sweaters and other items you no longer wear. Encourage fellow members of the household to donate as well, and set aside a few boxes for clothes that will be donated and those that will be discarded. Donated items need not be clothes, as many goodwill organizations accept appliances and other products as well.

Put seasonal items away

Storing seasonal items like patio furniture and swimsuits can help reduce the likelihood that clutter will build up in the months ahead. Pack items from your summer wardrobe together and store them in a suitcase in the back of your closet. This frees up room for your fall and winter clothing and helps you avoid overstuffed drawers. In addition to clothing, store seasonal furniture neatly in the back of your garage or storage shed, pulling out items like snow shovels or snow blowers you may need come the winter.



Organizing closets, including packing seasonal wardrobe items in a suitcase, is one way to reduce clutter as winter approaches.

Tackle the hall closet

Hall closets are convenient dropoff spots for items of all shapes, uses, and sizes. The hall closet is not necessarily opened each day and therefore it can be simply ignored it as it gradually accumulates more and more random items. But hall closets can be valuable storage spaces when used appropriately. Designate a significant amount of time to tackle hallway closets in your home so you can thoroughly reduce the clutter within them and get back to using the closets as the valuable, organized storage units they're intended to be. Discuss having different purposes for each closet, such as one devoted to cleaning items, another to coats, and so on. Resolve to keep the floors in each closet clear of items, as clutter tends to be on the floor and then work its way upward, eventually encompassing the entire closet. Once the hallway closets have been cleared, work hard to keep them clean as autumn turns into winter.

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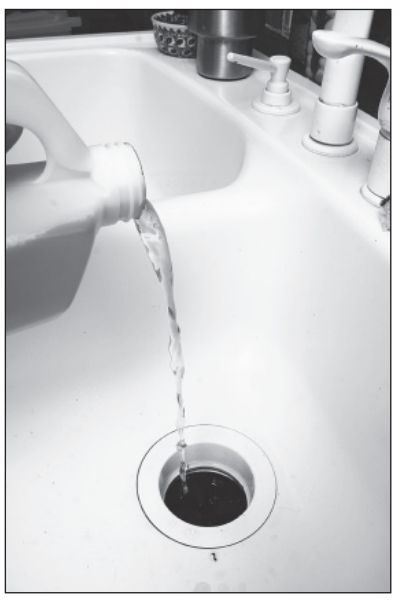
Tips for unclogging drains

Clogged drains can be a nuisance. And if left untreated, that minor nuisance can turn into an expensive repair.

A number of different things can cause drains to clog. Food particles, hair, grease, soap residue, oil, and even a foreign object lodged in the drain can each cause a drain to clog. Before you have to call a plumber, there are steps to take that may get water flowing once more.

Bubbles Galore

Baking soda has many uses in the home. This versatile product can be used dislodge items in drains. It is better to try baking soda when clogs are minor and water drainage is sluggish rather than waiting for the clog to get so bad that water is impenetrable.



When baking soda and common household vinegar are mixed together, they form a new chemical called carbonic acid. This acid immediately begins to degrade into carbon dioxide gas, which produces foam and bubbles in the process. This bubbling action can upset the source of a clog in a pipe and dislodge particles that may be causing the water backup. Keep your face away from the drain as the smell of vinegar mixing with the baking soda may be unpleasant.

Baking soda also can be mixed with salt and boiling water to break down grease that may be clogging drains. Repeatedly washing this mixture down drains can gently scour pipes and keep water moving steadily.

Plunge ahead

If a clog is especially stubborn, you may need to use a plunger. A plunger works by forcing the energy you push on the plunger into the surrounding water, which then applies pressure against the clog. Repeatedly forcing water against a clog can move it along until it frees up the drain.

Plunging can be messy, so wear old clothes when plunging. Make sure the head of the plunger is filled with water; otherwise, your work will be for naught. You may want to keep a separate plunger handy for sink work so you are not transferring bacteria and waste from a toilet plunger into the sink, especially in the kitchen.

Pop and fizz

Colas are loaded with phosphoric acid, which is more acidic than lemon juice and is also corrosive. This acid will fizz in the drain and break through any greasy, stubborn residue. It's even effective at dissolving calcium deposits, which may be a by-product of hard water.

Snake it

Some clogs are more stubborn and require some extra elbow grease to fix. A pipe snake can push hair and other debris through the pipes until water can run free. They also can be used to pull the obstacle back up out of the drain. While there are snakes of various lengths, sometimes a small one that makes it just to the bend of the elbow trap can be sufficient. A snake is essentially a flexible piece of wire that is inserted in the pipe. It may have a coarse or wound end to ensnare a clog.

Call a plumber

Unless you feel confident taking pipes apart to check for and clear out clogs and then reassembling everything, you may need to call a plumber if the clog will not relent. It may be lower in the system than at house level, especially if there are clogs in multiple sinks or appliances in the home. Multiple clogged drains may be indicative of a more serious problem.

Many clogs can be alleviated with simple household items. Serious clogs may require the expertise of a plumber.

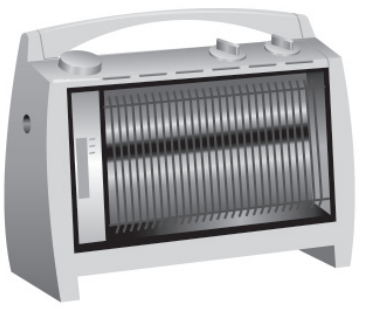
Space heater safety

When operating a space heater, it is important to follow some safety guidelines.

• Keep the heater at least three feet away from any drapery, bedding and flammable material.

• Plug power cords directly into outlets and never into an extension cord. Inspect for cracked or damaged, broken plugs or loose connections. Replace before using.

• Turn off the heater when you leave the room.



• Keep the heater on a level surface that is hard and non-flammable.

• Don't leave the space heater on all night while you are sleeping.

• Never use a portable propane space heater designed for camping outdoors inside a home.

• Make sure smoke alarms in a home have been tested and batteries have been replaced to protect yourself in the event of a space heater-related fire.

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How to prepare your yard for winter

Changing seasons can be tough on a lawn. Always exposed to the elements, lawns can fare especially poorly upon the arrival of winter, a season known for its harsh and unforgiving weather. Even the most perfectly manicured lawn can suffer at the hands of winter weather, causing homeowners to sit idly by and hope spring arrives that much sooner.

But as punishing as winter weather can be on a lawn, homeowners are not without recourse. Much like homeowners can take steps to help their lawns survive sizzling summer heat waves during the warmer months of the year, they also can take steps to help their lawns make it through the often stormy weather synonymous with winter.

Don't procrastinate

Putting off the process of winterizing a lawn can put that lawn in jeopardy. Lawns will turn dormant the closer you get to winter, and they may reject the nutrients found in fertilizer as a result. Those nutrients will prove valuable once spring weather returns, so start the winterization process in early fall so the lawn has sufficient time to absorb nutrients and strengthen itself for the seasons to come.

Treat trouble spots

Summer can be even harder on a lawn than winter, especially for those lawns located in regions where heat waves and drought are common. In such instances, certain spots on the lawn seem to be hit harder than others, and those spots should get special attention when winterizing the lawn. Check the soil's pH levels before fertilizing or applying any treatments. Such a test will reveal which spots need the most attention, and treating trouble spots now will make spring lawn care that much easier.

Aerate the property

Aerating can help a lawn recover after a long summer and help it survive the potentially harsh months that lie ahead. Aerating, which involves puncturing the soil or removing cores of soil from the ground, can restore a lawn to health by improving its drainage and allowing more water and air to reach the roots of the grass. Aerating also makes it easier for nutrients to penetrate the soil, which encourages a healthier lawn over the long haul. Aerators can be purchased or rented, but homeowners uncomfortable with the process may want to enlist a professional to tackle the job. Parents of small children who spend lots of time in the yard may need to aerate their lawn more than most, as heavy lawn traffic compresses the soil, a potentially harmful process that can be reversed via aeration.

Strengthen the roots

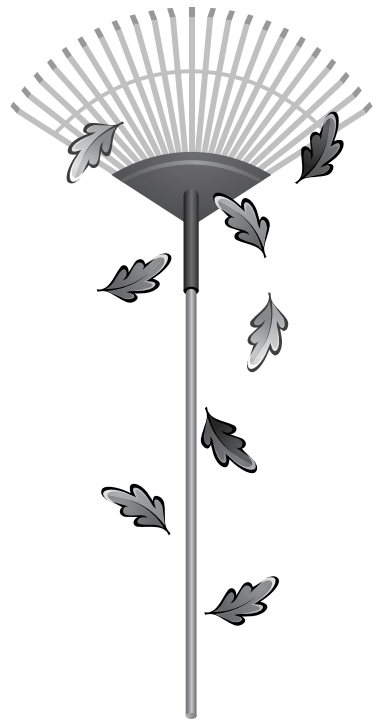
Aerating promotes stronger roots, but homeowners might also want to find a winterizing product with potassium and phosphorous, both of which can strengthen roots. Different types of lawns will respond differently to certain winterizers, so discuss your options with a lawn care professional who can help you find the right fit for your property.

Remove debris from the lawn

Debris left on a lawn over the winter can prove very harmful. Piles of debris left scattered around a lawn can suffocate the blades of grass, leading to long-term damage and a potentially unsightly lawn come the spring. In addition, piles of debris might make good homes for organisms that can damage the lawn. As fall moves into winter, periodically remove all debris, including leaves and branches fallen from trees.

Make the lawn off-limits

A lawn should be off-limits once the ground freezes. Stepping on grass that has frozen will leave noticeable footprints, and walking on frozen grass can kill the turf. When winter arrives, people should avoid using the lawn as a shortcut into and out of your home and stick to driveways and sidewalks instead.



Some trees can be pruned in winter

Many homeowners may not know that pruning trees in the winter can benefit some trees. Deciduous trees are dormant in winter, so they won't bleed sap when pruned at this time of year like they will at other times of year. In addition, many varieties of trees are less likely to attract disease or insects if pruned in the winter. Oak trees, for example, emit a strong odor when pruned, and that odor can attract a type of beetle that causes oak wilt. But this type of beetle hibernates in the winter, making this the ideal season to prune oak trees.

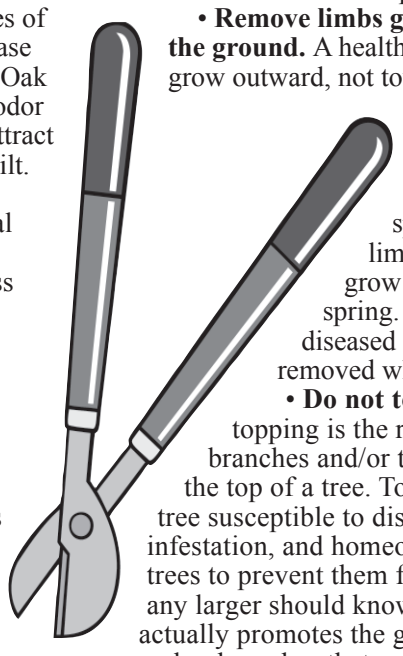
Before pruning trees, regardless of the time of year, homeowners should learn the types of trees on their property and when the ideal pruning season is for each type of tree. Pruning also may depend on climate, so speak with a local gardening or landscaping professional to determine when is the best time to prune the trees on your property.

Once the time has come to prune, keep the following tips in mind to maintain healthy and aesthetically appealing trees.

• **Remove limbs that appear to be competing for space.** Tree limbs that are crossing, rubbing or growing parallel to one another can be pruned. Such limbs may prohibit the growth of nearby limbs.

• **Remove limbs that are growing in.** Some tree limbs may appear to be growing toward the interior of the tree, and these limbs can be pruned.

• **Remove limbs growing toward the ground.** A healthy tree's limbs will grow outward, not toward the ground.



• **Remove dead limbs.** Dead limbs simply take up space, and a dead limb is not going to grow back come the spring. Dead, broken or diseased limbs should be removed when pruning.

• **Do not top trees.** Tree topping is the removal of large branches and/or trunks from the top of a tree. Topping leaves a tree susceptible to disease and insect infestation, and homeowners who top trees to prevent them from getting any larger should know that topping actually promotes the growth of smaller, weaker branches that eventually grow as tall, if not taller, than the original branches before the tree was topped. Topping also decreases a tree's life expectancy.

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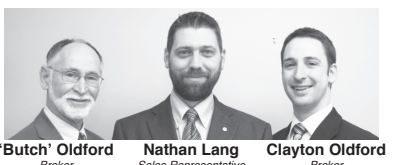

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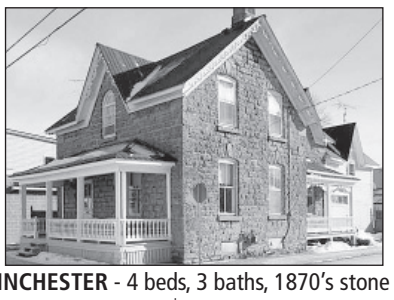

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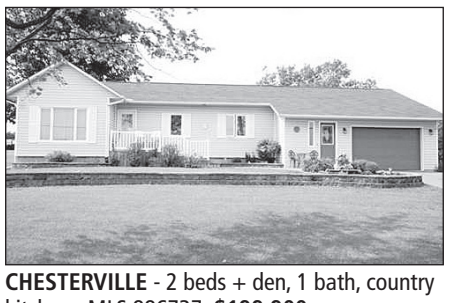

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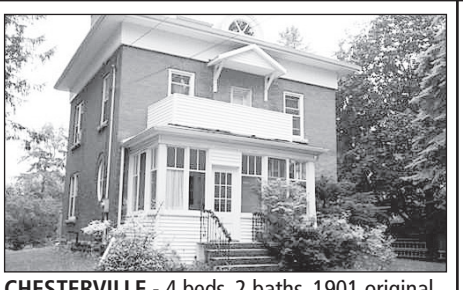

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Implications of downsizing

Real estate question? Ask an expert

Whether you are a first time buyer, renter or an existing homeowner looking to downsize or invest in an additional property, you're bound to have questions.

From figuring out how much home you can afford to choosing the right neighbourhood for you and your family, real estate expert and president of the Ontario Real Estate Association, Phil Dorner is here to help.

Today's question comes from a couple looking at downsizing from a large single family detached house into a smaller home. They have lived in their current home for almost twenty years but with their children moved out, don't need as much space. They are concerned about the lifestyle implications of downsizing.

Q. Hi Phil. My husband and I are looking at downsizing from our current home into something smaller and easier to maintain. We have lived in the same home for twenty years but since our children moved out, we just don't need all the space anymore. I can't even remember the last time we went down to the basement!

While we recognize that we don't need the extra space, we love to have family and friends over and are concerned that by downsizing, we won't be able to host holidays and family gatherings. We also value our privacy so we just aren't sure if a condominium is right for us at this point but since we plan on travelling quite a bit, low maintenance is a priority. Help!

A. It sounds like you are struggling with a downsizing dilemma. Many baby boomers will be able to relate to these concerns and the challenges surrounding the decision to downsize. However, downsizing can be a great option if you're ready for it and it sounds like you are.

Firstly, consider some of the benefits of downsizing. With a smaller home you will not have as much maintenance to take care of, your heating and cooling costs will go down and you may free up some extra money that will come in useful once you retire.

Of course there is a trade-off and the loss of space can be a challenge when you are accustomed to a certain amount of square footage. A good place to start is by considering your current and future lifestyle needs. Ask yourself:

• How many rooms do you (really) need?

• How often do you host overnight guests?

• How much travelling are you planning on doing?

• Do you have a cottage or timeshare where you plan on spending time?

Depending on how you answer these questions, the next steps will become easier to navigate. If you are in the position where extra space is an afterthought, then the upkeep necessary may not be worth the benefits.

Keep in mind that a smaller home or condominium doesn't mean that you won't be able to have family and friends over; you may just have to handoff the hosting duties for the annual 25 person Thanksgiving dinner!

Speak to your Realtor about your changing needs and have him or her show you some options – there are a lot of choices out there from bungalows to villas and town homes so you certainly aren't limited to either a single family detached home or a high rise condominium.

Do you have a real estate question for Phil? Email www.AskPHIL@OREA.com



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How to invite more natural light into your home

A dark home can be dreary and drain residents' energy levels rather quickly. Natural light has the power to make a person feel more energized, and it also can buoy spirits. As a result, many homeowners want to increase the amount of natural light in their homes.

Increasing natural sunlight in a home reduces reliance on interior lighting. This reduces energy bills and lowers the home's carbon footprint. Natural light also can help people in a home feel happier and more content.

Some people experience serious mood changes during the winter months. Dubbed seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, this condition may be effectively treated with light therapy. Exposure to more light can alleviate fatigue, loss of interest and sad or anxious feelings. Homeowners looking to increase the natural light in their homes, be it for medical or aesthetic reasons, can do so in a variety of ways.

Keep the drapes open

Opening blinds and curtains as far as they will go allows as much light to shine in without having to do major home renovations or spend any money at all. Homeowners concerned about privacy can install a window film that allows viewing from the inside only.

Clean the windows

Dirty windows obstruct sunlight from entering the home. They also can make a home appear unkempt. Spend a free day cleaning the windows so that they'll let ample light in.

Install new windows and doors

Sliding doors enable a large amount of light to enter the home. Such doors can replace an entire wall to brighten up a dark area of a home. The more windows and doors a home has, the brighter it will be.

Take inventory of dark spots

A room may be dark because it simply does not have a layout conducive to brightness. Is a wall blocking light from reaching a portion of the room? Think about changing the room's layout or even making structural changes to improve light distribution. The addition of a small window on a south- or west-facing wall can greatly improve natural light. Using mirrors can also reflect light where it is needed.

Invest in skylights or solar tubes

Both skylights or solar tubes enable light to enter a home from above. Skylights are larger and require considerably more work to install, while solar tubes are more low-profile and can be put into rooms that do not abut the roofline, such as those obstructed by attic space. The tubular cylinders are installed between the roof and the ceiling and carry light through a reflective tube to the room below. Diffusers on tubular daylighting devices scatter the rays so the light doesn't cast harsh shadows, and UV filters can help protect furniture from discolouring.

Trim shrubs and trees

If trees and bushes are blocking light from entering your home, trim them to enable dappled light to come through. Deciduous trees that will naturally lose their leaves come autumn can be planted on sunny areas of the property. This way in the summer months they will shade the house and keep it cooler, while in winter more sun will stream in when the leaves are shed.

Create a three-season room

Make a spot in the home where sun will be at a premium. A solarium or greenhouse attached to the home can be a warm and sunny spot.

Increasing natural light in a home can improve feelings of well-being and also reduce energy consumption during daylight hours.



New windows may allow more natural light to enter a home.

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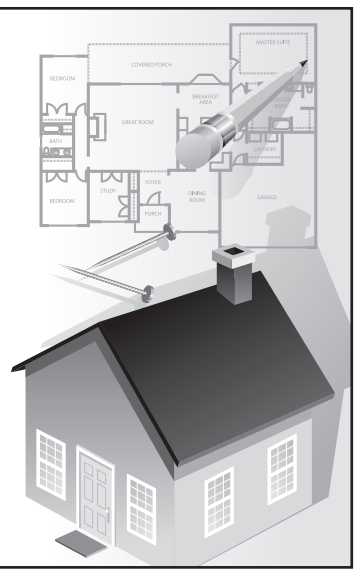

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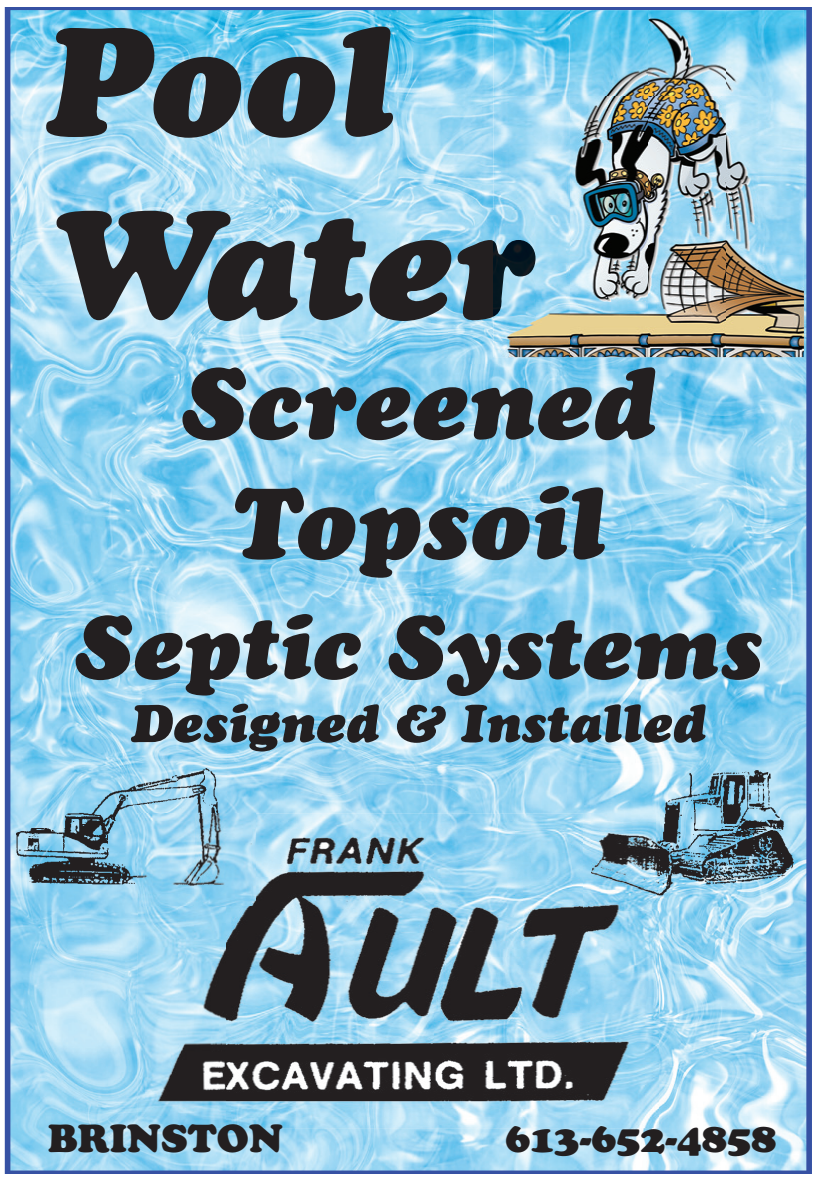

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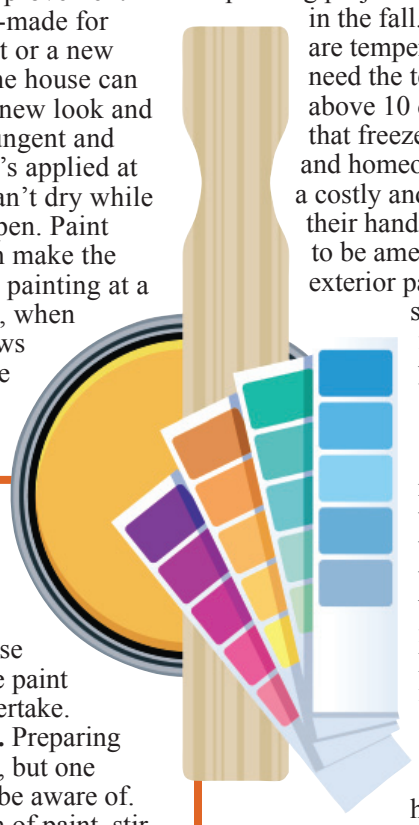
Home improvement projects perfect for fall

Home improvement projects can add value to a home and do-it-yourselfers know the sweat-equity that goes into such projects can give homeowners a greater sense of pride in their homes. But no two home improvement projects are the same, and homeowners should know that certain projects are best tackled during certain times of the year.

Fall is a great season to work on your house, as the weather is often at its most agreeable once the summer heat has gone and before winter weather arrives. The following are a handful of fall-friendly home improvement projects for homeowners looking to improve their homes.

Painting projects

Painting is a home improvement project that seems tailor-made for fall. A fresh coat of paint or a new colour scheme around the house can give a home an entirely new look and feel. But paint can be pungent and the aromas may last if it's applied at a time of year when it can't dry while the windows are wide open. Paint fumes inside a home can make the home uninhabitable, but painting at a time of year like the fall, when you can keep the windows open during and after the project, can help air the home out.



But interior painting isn't the only painting project homeowners can tackle in the fall. Many exterior paints are temperature-sensitive and need the temperature outside to be above 10 degrees Celsius. Paint that freezes won't dry properly, and homeowners might be left with a costly and unsightly mistake on their hands. Fall temperatures tend to be amenable to both interior and exterior painting projects, just be sure to check the weather forecast before making your first brush stroke.

Roof repair

Whether you're repairing or replacing the roof, fall is a great time of year to dust off the ladder and get some work done on your roof for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, fall is ideal for roof work because you won't have to be up on the roof with the summer heat bearing down on you. This can make the project move along more quickly, which is especially beneficial if you are paying labourers to work on the roof. The fewer hours workers are fixing your roof, the less you will be paying in labour costs.

In addition, fixing up the roof in the fall ensures those winter storms, be it rain or snow, won't find their way into your home via leaks. A leaky roof in winter is hard to fix, as the roof surface could be treacherous in the winter and winter winds can make it dangerous to be up on the roof at all. Addressing leaks in the fall can prevent damage to your home's interior, which can mount up if a leaky roof is not addressed until the following spring.

Window work

When the weather outside gets frightful, poorly insulated windows can allow cold air into the home. That often has a trickle-down effect on finances, forcing you to turn up the thermostat in an attempt to offset the cold air pouring into the home. Whether you need your windows replaced or simply need to patch up any leaks, a proactive approach to leaky or older windows in the fall can save you from unnecessarily high heating bills come the winter. Addressing leaky windows also makes a home more comfortable for its inhabitants.

Fall is the ideal time to address a home's windows because the temperature outside tends to be pleasant. This means you likely won't have to make much of an effort to offset the elements, and open windows in the fall won't make your home's interior very hot or cold like they might if you were to tackle the project during the summer or winter.

Fixing the floors

Wood flooring is a hot commodity for many homeowners. But not all flooring can be added to a home at any time of year. That's because certain types of flooring employ adhesives that need temperatures inside the home to be within a certain range, and that range is often within 20 to 27 degrees Celsius, which makes fall a great time to install such floors. Colder temperatures can make it difficult for the flooring to dry and bond, which will prove problematic down the road. What's more, many people entertain friends and family come late fall and into the holiday season, and it can be difficult to do so if you are busy installing new flooring.

Prep work important

Painting a home's interior can give it a completely new look and feel. A fresh coat of paint can make a room feel more vibrant and up-to-date, creating a whole new attitude within the room without breaking the bank.

Whether creating an accent wall or painting each wall within a room, painting is a relatively easy and inexpensive home improvement project. But that doesn't mean painting does not require a little prep work before the project can begin.

- **Address any holes or bumps on the wall.** Holes or cracks in the wall will need to be patched with spackle, which then must dry before the wall can be painted. In addition, sand down any bumps until the walls are smooth and free of any unsightly abnormalities.
- **Wash the walls.** Walls can get dirty, and that dirt may or may not be masked by paint. Before adding a new coat of paint, wash the walls and inspect them for dust. Dust can collect on molding, especially in rooms that get little natural air. When dust has collected on the molding and around doorways and trim, use a damp cloth to wipe it away before adding any new paint.
- **Apply primer.** Primer can serve many functions, not the least of which is its role as a bonding agent between the wall and the top coat of paint. Primer can also help conceal dark colours, prevent stains and increase the life expectancy of the paint job you are about to undertake.
- **Prepare your paint.** Preparing the paint is a simple task, but one novice painters may not be aware of. When opening a new can of paint, stir the paint before using it. In addition, even if you don't plan to use a roller when painting, do not paint straight from the can, which can be heavier to hold than a small bowl, and a light bowl is less likely to be spilled than a potentially heavy can of paint. In addition, once paint has been removed from the can, replace the lid so dust and other impurities do not settle in the can.
- **Purchase painter's tape.** Painter's tape can be especially valuable to novice painters. Painter's tape makes it easier to paint smooth and clean paint lines, giving a room a more professional looking coat of paint without the cost of hiring a professional painter.

Painting can be an inexpensive and fun way to upgrade a home's interior. But even though painting does not require the technical know-how of more large-scale home improvement projects, it still requires some prep work and attention to detail to ensure the job is done right.



