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SPRING Home IMPROVEMENT









2016 Home Trends

Simple Ways to Go Green

Selecting a Sump Pump

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APRIL 2016

Top five home projects to help you save money

It's remodeling season, and with so many projects on the to-do list, which should you tackle first? While some projects provide great long-term return on investment, a few simple ones can provide instant savings.

Here are the top home spring projects to help you save money:

Caulk around windows and doors: Stop air leaks around your home by sealing existing gaps and cracks. Installing a door sweep is also a good idea.

Insulate your home: Use insulation with a high R-value which can be used to top up insulation in your attic. Aim for an R-value of 50 or a depth of 16 inches. For whole home efficiency, ensure other areas of your home, such as crawl spaces, basement headers, walls, and ceilings, are well insulated.

Clean your AC unit: Come spring, it's not uncommon to find an air conditioner's condenser and compressor blocked up with dirt and debris. This can result in greater stress on the unit, causing it to work harder.

Plant trees: Direct sunlight can heat up surfaces and building materials, as well as the interior temperature of your home. Consider planting trees in strategic locations to provide shade and reduce cooling costs.

Install a rain barrel: Installing a rain barrel is an easy measure to reduce your water consumption, while keeping your lawn and garden looking great.



Don't be surprised to notice a resurgence of metallic shades and metals incorporated into home designs in the year ahead.

Home trends to expect in 2016

Trends in home remodeling and decor tend to come and go. Something that is popular for a little while can fall out of favour when the next new idea comes along. New trends are always on the horizon, and 2016 may encourage homeowners to try something new.

• **Metallics and metals are back:** Although stainless steel accents in the kitchen have long been popular, the glistening look of metal and metallic shades are back in a big way. Inspired by the 1950s and 1970s, brass, gold, and metallic finishes are popular right now.

• **Texture:** Texture is a big component of interior design. Furniture and accessories featuring faux fur and natural fibres are becoming popular. Pieces adorned with cozy materials can seem more inviting. Organic shapes, such as tables looking like the tree trunk they were cut from, also are expected to become more popular.

• **Artisanal touches in accessories:** It's all about getting back to basics, with homeowners desiring pieces that are one-of-a-kind and handmade rather than mass-produced. Expect to see more accessories that are made by hand or in small batches, like pottery or handwoven textiles, as homeowners are increasingly turning to independent artists and artisans when decorating their homes. Homeowners can even support local artists when choosing art for their homes.

• **Fabric on the walls:** Walls also will be covered in texture and pattern. Textiles will increasingly turn up on walls and in places they haven't traditionally been seen. Patterns may lean toward floral, tropical, and indigenous artisan weaving designs.

• **Pinks and blues:** Expect to see pale pink and blue in various design applications. The Pantone Colour Institute® released a blending of two colours, Rose Quartz and Serenity, as their 2016 Colour of the Year. This has impacted colour trends through all areas of design – including home touches. These colours pair well with mid-tones, like browns and greens, as well as the increasingly popular metallics.

• **Smart homes:** Technology is changing the way people look at their homes. Water-resistant music systems for the bathroom, wirelessly operated Bluetooth devices that turn on lights or appliances from a smartphone, and even fixtures that use technology to self-clean are turning up more and more.

Home decor trends are always changing, adding new life to homes and keeping armchair interior decorators on their toes.

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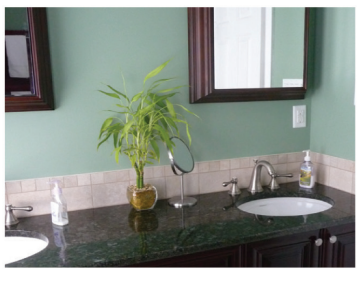





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How to clean and maintain stainless steel appliances, sinks

No matter the style of a homeowner's kitchen, be it modern, traditional, or farmhouse, stainless steel appliances can add a pop of shine and a touch of class. Proponents of stainless steel appliances note their easy maintenance, stylish look and durability. Plus, the neutral tone of stainless steel helps it blend in with just about any colour palette.

Stainless steel is lauded for its strength and resistance to corrosion and rust. These attributes make it a popular choice in kitchens, where moisture is an issue. Although they are certainly durable choices, stainless steel appliances require maintenance to keep them looking and performing at their best. Considering that stainless steel also costs more than other finish options, taking the time to learn proper care can help protect homeowners' investments.



• Avoid chlorine bleach or other products containing chloride. Although stainless steel is highly resistant to corrosion, it is not completely impervious. Chlorine products can damage the surface of stainless steel appliances and stain them if the chlorine is left to sit.

• Abrasives can scratch. Do not use metal scouring pads or coarse abrasives on the stainless steel. Such products may scratch the steel. Steel wool pads can leave behind a residue of small metal particles that may eventually rust.

• Use baking soda. Baking soda mixed with a little dish soap can be used to remove some tough dirt and stains. Rinse well and towel dry to avoid streaking.

• Clean and wipe the steel in the direction of the "grain." Usually this means working from the top of the appliance and moving down toward the floor.

• Read the manual. Consult with the owner's manual before undertaking any maintenance or cleaning. The appliance may have a special coating over the stainless steel to help protect it, and it's best to know what you're dealing with before getting your hands dirty.

• Do a spot test. If you will be trying a cleaning product or scouring method, always test it first in an inconspicuous spot to see if it is effective or harmful.

• Go soft. Applying cleansers with a soft cloth or sponge. Then wipe dry with a soft, clean cloth or allow to air dry.

Stainless steel remains a popular material in kitchens for sinks and appliances. With care, stainless steel can look like new for years to come.

Five simple ways to go green at home and save money

Thinking green throughout the year can offer some significant benefits. Here are some easy ways you can go green in your own home and lower your energy bills:



Invest in a programmable thermostat. It will automatically adjust the temperature in your house, saving you energy while you're out for the day, away on vacation, or sleeping.

Switch all of your lightbulbs to CFLs (compact fluorescent light) or LED bulbs. They last longer and use up to 75 per cent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, saving you money on your electric bills.

Use insulation with a high R-value, to top up insulation in your attic. Aim for an R-value of 50 or a depth of 16 inches. For whole home efficiency, ensure other areas of your home are well insulated, such as crawl spaces, basement headers, walls, and ceilings. It will keep your house cool in the warm weather and take the stress off your air conditioning unit.

Stop air leaks around your home by sealing existing gaps and cracks. Use caulking or weather stripping around doors and windows. Installing a door sweep is also a good idea.

Replace old appliances with energy-efficient models. Only do laundry or run the dishwasher when you have full loads.

Remember that many little improvements can add up – and provide valuable monthly savings.



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It's sump pump season!

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As temperatures rise and snow melts, homeowners can finally welcome the thought of spring.

But with the thaw can come flooding headaches for homeowners as well.

At Lannin's Home Building Centre, several sump pumps are offered to save you thousands of dollars in damage when flooding occurs, and provide everyday protection from groundwater and accumulated moisture.

There are two types of pumps available – pedestal and submersible.

Pedestal sump pumps usually last longer, up to 30 years, if they are installed properly, and kept free of debris. They are also less expensive and easier to remove.

Submersible pumps will last five to 15 years. They are more expensive to purchase, but can take up debris without clogging.

A pedestal pump has its motor mounted on a shaft, and is outside the sump basin. The vertical float design is adjustable, and is ideally used for smaller sump pits of 10 inches or less. Choosing a pedestal pump is economical, and the exposed motor can make repairs easier.

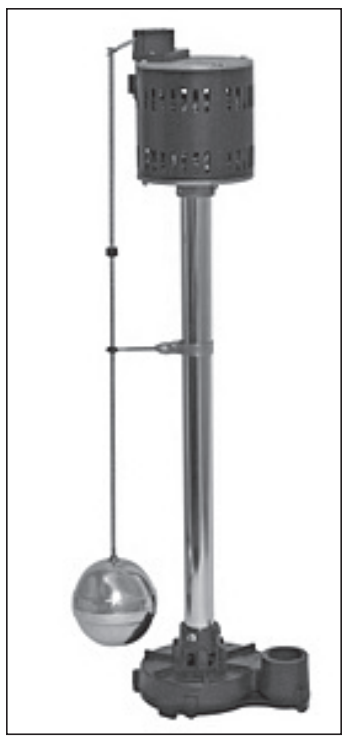
A submersible pump has its motor sealed within the sump basin, and its unit is installed below water level. These pumps are quiet, safe if children are in the house (as motor is not above basin), and provide a cleaner and less obtrusive look.

Lannin's Home Building Centre provides five different models to choose from, and can order any model not in store, according to owner J.D. Van Noy.

Some tips to keep in mind when installing a sump pump is to choose corrosion-free housing materials such as bronze, stainless steel, and cast iron. Also consider the capacity when selecting your pump, which is often measured in gallons per minute, or gallons per hour.



A submersible pump has its motor sealed inside the sump basin so is safer when children are in the home.



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Spring cleaning time: Organize room by room

Many people decide that spring is a great time of year to get organized.

Homeowners can consult with a professional organizer or tackle the job on their own, potentially enlisting the help of others in the household. Here are some suggestions to get started.

Step 1: Assess the damage

It can be difficult to get organized without first taking inventory of your home. Go through all of the rooms in the house and decide what your goals for each room are, jotting those goals down as you go.

See if the rooms have more storage potential than you're utilizing, particularly those rooms that are overrun with items. Storage can include shelves on walls, new furniture, or modified closet spaces. Again, jot down your ideas so you can refer back to them later on.

Step 2: Set up a sorting plan

Organizing may involve sorting through belongings and getting rid of things you no longer use. One of the easier ways to handle sorting is to purchase three different containers or make three different piles. The first one will hold items you will keep, the second includes items that can be sold or donated, and the last will house items that you will discard or recycle. Separating belongings in this manner can help you stay on task and remove some of the stress from getting organized. Simply move the containers that are no longer needed from the room when you're ready to organize the remaining belongings.



A closet organizational system can be a handy part of a person's plans to get organized.

Step 3: Schedule your cleaning days

It may take a couple of sessions to get certain rooms clean, so plan ahead for that. For example, you may need a day to sort and toss items, another day to prep the room with organizational enhancements, and yet another to put everything back. Separating tasks into manageable sessions will help you reach smaller goals that eventually add up to your larger goal of getting more organized.

Plan project days when you can devote time with few, if any, distractions. You may want to ask a friend or family member to take care of your children or pets for a few hours while you are tackling your tasks. Organizing around the trash pickup schedule can help, too. This way discarded items are quickly out of sight and out of mind.

Step 4: Prepare your day

Have all of your necessary equipment on hand in advance of Day 1. This eliminates having to go on the search for supplies, which can prove distracting. Make sure you are well rested and have eaten a hearty meal. Set an alarm for how long you want the organizational session to go. If you work until you reach the point of fatigue, you may not be inclined to finish on another day.

Step 5: Reward yourself

Every time you finish an organizational session or goal, treat yourself to something nice, such as a dinner out or a massage. Choose something relaxing that makes you happy.

Step 6: Repeat the process

When one room is organized, establish your plan for the next room. Once you see the success that comes from the first room, you can use that as motivation to do the others at your own pace.

Getting organized may take some time, but it can be well worth the reward when a home is clean and everything has a place.

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Tips for safer renovation projects

Home renovation projects vary in scope. Something as simple as repainting a bedroom counts as a renovation project, as does a full kitchen remodel. But no matter how big or small a project, homeowners' top priority should always be safety.

Before beginning a project, make a list of possible hazards and how to avoid them. Here are some potential dangers that can spring up.

• **Asbestos:** Many homes built when asbestos was legal still contain asbestos materials. Asbestos has been used in many applications, such as in ceiling materials, insulation, siding, and more. That's because asbestos is flame retardant and serves as an effective and inexpensive insulator. However, asbestos fibres released into the air during renovations can cause respiratory problems and even lead to lung cancer. Asbestos needs to be removed under specific guidelines and disposed of properly. Disposal typically requires hiring a professional service.

• **Dust and dirt:** Sanding, sawing, welding, and other home renovation tasks can cast debris into the air. Ventilation may be needed to maintain clean, breathable air. Ventilation can also shuttle any harmful fumes generated from construction materials outside of the home. Do-it-yourselfers should wear masks and eye protection to guard themselves against debris.

• **Electrical lines:** All homes may not have been built in adherence to modern-day codes. Electric lines can be discovered where they are least expected. When doing demolition or drilling/nailing into walls, it's not uncommon to come across electrical wires. Extra caution needs to be taken, and an electrician should be consulted if the wires need to be relocated.

• **Chemicals:** Chemicals, such as sealants and cleaners may be used during renovations. Such substances can be dangerous to pets and children if they are touched or accidentally ingested. Exercise extreme caution when using chemical products, making sure all product containers are sealed and kept out of reach when not in use.

• **Tools:** Cuts, abrasions, burns, and more can result when power tools and even manual tools are used incorrectly. Learn how to use tools before beginning a project, and always put tools away when work is done for the day.



• **Falls:** Falls are a leading cause of household injury, and the chance of a fall may increase when climbing ladders during home improvement projects. Don't climb beyond where indicated on ladders and always have a spotter on hand when climbing is necessary. Wear harnesses, sturdy footwear and gloves as well.

How to prevent simple plumbing problems

No homeowner wants to be confronted with plumbing problems, which many associate with costly repairs and water damage. But many plumbing problems are preventable if homeowners take the time to learn about them and make the effort to nip them in the bud before they become something major.

• **Clogged kitchen sink:** Kitchen sinks get used quite a bit in the average home, and what makes its way down the sinks can contribute to plumbing problems. Avoid pouring gravy, grease, cooking oil, or fat down the kitchen sink, as these substances can cling to the pipes and lead to a backed up sink and a potentially messy situation. Discard thick liquids and sauces in the trash can instead of the sink. Periodically turn the faucet on as hot as it can go and run it for a few minutes to dislodge anything that might have stuck to the pipes.

• **Clogged shower drain:** The pipes in the shower/bathtub can easily become clogged as well. Hair is the main culprit when shower drains get clogged, so install hair traps. Instruct each person to remove their hair from the drain upon getting out of the shower. If you suspect the drain might already be on its way to clogging, use a wet/dry vac to remove any hair that might have started piling up in the pipes.

• **Washing machines:** Few homeowners may think to periodically inspect their washing machines, but normal wear and tear on washing machine hoses can gradually build up, potentially leading to flooding if left unchecked. Periodically inspect hoses for cracks and other damage, replacing them if they look especially vulnerable.

• **Water heater:** Water heaters also can produce plumbing problems if homeowners don't keep an eye on them. Rusty tank fittings on water heaters are a warning sign that the heater might need some repairs. When left unchecked, water heaters can cause flooding that produces significant water damage, and water heaters may even need to be replaced, which can be very expensive. If you detect any problems with your heater, call in a plumber.

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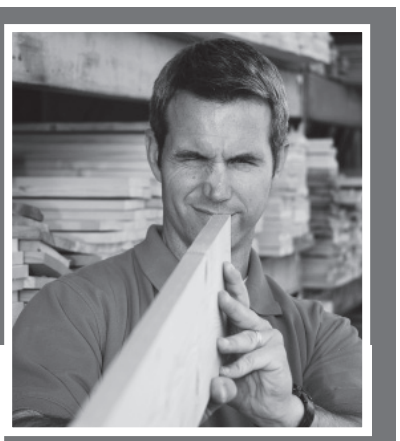

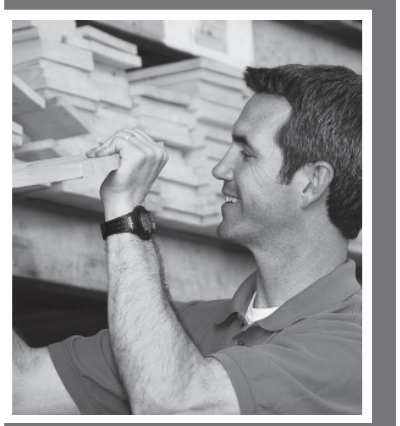

What to do if you find radon at home

Radon can be a very real threat to public health in homes all across the country.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies radon as a known cause of cancer.

Exposure to radon gas increases your risk of lung cancer. This risk depends on the level and length of exposure, as well as if you are a smoker. Lung cancer can develop after years of radon exposure. Health Canada estimates that about 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are related to being exposed to radon in the home.

Radon exposure is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and it's estimated that in Canada there are about 3,000 lung cancer deaths related to radon each year. If you smoke, you are at an even higher risk of developing lung cancer if you are exposed to radon.

Radon cannot be seen, smelled or tasted, making it very difficult to detect in homes and other buildings. In most cases the source of radon in structures is formed from the normal decay of the elements uranium, thorium, and radium in rocks and soil upon which homes are built. Homes act as chimneys, helping gases, including radon, rise from the ground level through foundations.

Only a radon test can determine if radon levels inside a home are unsafe. Tests can be purchased for around $20 at many home supply retailers. Radon testing often is required when individuals purchase a home as well.



Radon is drawn out of the ground from under the foundation of a home. It can compromise air quality and cause cancer if left untreated.

If high levels of radon are detected, it's important not to panic, as there are ways to mitigate the problem effectively. First of all, you may want to retest, which can confirm if your initial test was a fluke or caused by unusual weather. Short-term tests can measure radon over the period of a week, but longer assessments lasting about a month or more may paint a more accurate picture of your home's average radon concentration.

If high levels of radon are discovered, one of the first things to do is to ventilate the home to bring more fresh air in and dilute radon concentrations. You may then want to consult with a radon removal contractor. You may need to use a heat recovery ventilator to introduce more fresh air or ventilate the home using a fan.

Contractors may use suction to vent air from below the foundation of the house, through a pipe and above the roof. This way the radon does not leach into the home. This method ventilates radon well out of the way of human breathing spaces.

You also may want to have your water tested for radon, as homes that rely on well water may have radon in the water source, too.

The Canadian Cancer Society believes all Ontarians have the right to know if they are being exposed to cancer-causing substances so they can make informed decisions affecting about their health.

The Canadian Cancer Society is recommending that the Government of Ontario adopt the National Building Code guidelines regarding radon mitigation into Ontario's Building Code and conduct a public education program on radon.

To learn more about this recommendation and how to take action visit takeaction.cancer.ca.

Save money and stay cool as temperatures rise

Excessive energy bills can be a concern in spring and summer, just as much as they are in the winter. So how can you save money while keeping your home cool? The solution is simple: Top up your attic insulation.

A poorly insulated attic is a primary source of energy loss, forcing your AC unit to work harder than necessary over the warmer months. Most attics are insulated, but oftentimes the amount of insulation present is inadequate – especially in older homes. Over time, insulation can settle and compact, allowing heat to escape through gaps.

Topping it up is easy. Ideally, you want to aim for a depth of 16 inches of insulation for an overall R-value of 50. When existing insulation is present, simply level existing insulation to the top of the joist. Lay a fire- and moisture-resistant batt insulation on top of joists running perpendicular to the first layer. Ensure batts are butted against each other tightly. Fit batts closely to cross joists; cut batt if necessary (this can be done easily with a serrated blade or bread knife) and leave no space between layers. Don't forget to insulate the attic hatch to the same level as the rest of the attic. Apply weather-stripping to the edge of the hatch to reduce air leakage. Keep in mind that only IC-rated electrical fixtures can have insulation placed with zero clearance. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and local building code to insulate around the chimney.

When a house is insulated properly, energy savings can add up over time. Remember, insulation starts working the moment it is installed and can last for the life of the building.

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Find and maintain the right carpet for you

Carpets provide both practical and aesthetic appeal inside a home. Many homeowners choose to have carpeting in some rooms and different flooring choices in others.

When purchasing carpet, it is important that homeowners follow some guidelines to prolong a carpet's longevity and maintain its style. The following are some common carpeting dos and don'ts.

DO consider the room's purpose and foot traffic before shopping for carpeting. Make a list of the attributes desired (e.g., soundproofing, easy care, high pile) and present these to the salesperson so he or she can help you make the best choice.

DON'T rush into flooring choices. Unlike paint colours, flooring materials are more permanent choices that are only updated every several years or more. Weigh all of your options before diving in.

DO consider conservative colours and styles. Neutral hues and patterns will blend better with furniture options. This means you can change furniture out and still keep the existing carpeting, which complements any new pieces. Also, if there's a chance you might sell your home in the near future, buyers tend to look for a neutral colour scheme they can make their own.



Homeowners should consider as many variables as possible, including foot traffic in a given room, before installing carpeting in their homes.

DON'T skimp on padding to save a few dollars on the carpet installation. The carpeting needs a solid foundation to last and look its best. Inadequate padding can lead to extra and noticeable wear and tear. Invest in a good foundation for the carpeting, like firm, dense padding in high-traffic areas. Quality padding will also help your carpet feel softer and reduce noise.

DO become knowledgeable about different carpet styles, such as frieze, Berber, Saxony, textured, and more. This will help ensure you make the most educated decision.

DON'T purchase at the first store you visit. Shop around to investigate different pricing and specials. Also, consider the professionalism and expertise of the staff responsible for carpet installation. High-cost carpet may not look very good if it isn't installed correctly.

DO stain-protect rugs and carpeting, which can help repel stains that would otherwise become permanent and can prolong the longevity of the flooring.

DON'T forget to vacuum carpets frequently to prevent ground-in dirt and debris.

DO pick textured carpets to conceal footprints and vacuum track marks.

Create extra storage space

Apartment dwellers commonly lament the lack of storage space in their homes. Fortunately, there are many ways to create storage space. Here are just a few ideas.

• **Buy furniture that includes storage space.** Storage beds make great places to store bulky bedding, including extra bedsheets, blankets, and pillows. Living room furniture can also serve dual roles. Dress up a storage chest and use it as your coffee table, and replace old footrests with storage ottomans.

• **Hang pots and pans.** Kitchen cabinet space can be especially scarce in apartments, but that does not mean apartment dwellers must cook with a single pot and pan. Suspend pots and pans from the ceiling, using the cabinet space you have to store food and other items that might look out of place if left sitting out.

• **Buy a corner coat rack.** Coats take up ample closet space, which apartment dwellers know can be a precious commodity. Rather than reserving half of your closet space for coats, purchase a corner coat rack with multiple hooks at varying heights. This means that all those bulky coats will be stored in one small, vertical space, leaving more room in the closets for the rest of your wardrobe.

• **Purchase removable shelving units for closets.** Closets may have plenty of shelf space up top, but what about all that floor space that's not being put to use? Small, removable shelving units can be placed inside closets so you can make use of the space beneath all those shirts, dresses and sweaters hanging on hangers.

• **Purchase an e-reader.** Avid readers living in storage-starved apartments can create more space simply by going digital with regard to their favourite hobby. Purchase an e-reader and store all of your books digitally on your new device and its accompanying cloud storage. This saves you from having to find space to store new books, and you can donate all or some of your existing collection to create more space.

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Say 'so long' to high electricity bills



Utility bills are among the largest expenses homeowners have each month. Trimming utility bills can not only benefit homeowners' bottom lines, but also be prove beneficial for the environment.

Unnecessary energy consumption can drive up utility bills, costing homeowners substantial amounts of money every year. Fortunately, homeowners can take several steps to reduce unnecessary energy consumption, saving themselves money and helping the planet along the way.

• Conduct nightly energy audits. Before going to bed at night, homeowners can spend a few minutes walking around their homes making sure all devices, appliances and lights are tuned off. Devices left on when not in use may not consume significant amounts of energy on their own, but when many are left on, the resulting energy consumption can be considerable. Unplugging appliances each night when not in use can add to these savings while reducing excessive energy consumption.

• Lower the temperature on your water heater. Water heaters make it possible to take hot showers each morning, but when used improperly, such heaters can be very wasteful. Water heaters set at 50 degrees Celsius will not affect the quality of your daily showers and can help prevent scalding. But water heaters may be set at 60 degrees Celsius by manufacturers, and that can waste energy and pose a scalding hazard. Setting water heaters to 50 degrees Celsius and lowering that temperature when going on vacation can save homeowners money and reduce the standby heat losses.

• Clean filters more frequently. It's easy to forget about filters on heating and air conditioning systems. But forgotten filters could be costing homeowners significant amounts of money. When neglected, HVAC filters accumulate dirt and dust, making systems work much less efficiently than they do when filters are clean. Clean filters once per month to make sure you aren't wasting money and energy when heating and cooling your home.

• Monitor your meter. If you are taking steps to reduce energy consumption but your utility bills are staying the same or even increasing, start monitoring your energy meter. Meter readers are not immune to mistakes, and the readings may be incorrect. Jot down the energy consumption figures reflected on your meter, and compare those figures to those on your utility bill, reporting any discrepancies to your utility company.

Attention new parents!

How to childproof your home

New parents face a host of challenges upon bringing their newborn sons and daughters home, not the least of which is childproofing their homes so the newest additions to their families are safe and sound. The strategies moms and dads employ when childproofing their homes will change as youngsters grow older and more curious, but the following are a few tips to get parents started.

• Install safety latches and locks on cabinets and drawers. Curiosity might start to take over at the moment infants learn to crawl, so new parents should install safety latches and locks on all cabinets and drawers in their homes. Such latches and locks can prevent access to a host of potentially harmful items, such as medications, cleaning products, knives, and other sharp objects.

• Use anti-scald devices. Burns from hot water can quickly cause significant burns to young children's skin, so install anti-scald devices that regulate water temperature and reduce the risk of kids being burned. It is recommended to lower water heaters to 120 F to further reduce the risk of burns.

• Use safety gates at stairways and in rooms that are off limits. Safety gates around stairways and in doorways of prohibited rooms can reduce the likelihood of potentially harmful falls and keep kids out of rooms where they might be harmed. Place gates in the doorways of rooms that contain sharp objects, work tools, substances that can prove harmful if ingested, and any other items you don't want inquisitive tots to come into contact with. Make sure all safety gates at the top of stairways are the kind that can be nailed into the wall.

• Attach bumpers to the edges of sharp furniture. Corner and edge bumpers can reduce the risk of injury when kids bang their heads on sharp furniture such as coffee tables or other items with hard edges. Make sure the bumpers are firmly secured before allowing youngsters into the room.

Infants, toddlers, and young children are vulnerable to injury around the house. Parents can reduce that injury risk by taking several steps to childproof their homes.

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How to ensure a successful basement remodel

Basement renovations are expected to be a hot trend in 2016, as buyers look to maximize available living space rather than move, and as young buyers look to offset the cost of homeownership with potential income suites.

While finishing a basement can be a great alternative to moving – especially if you love your neighbourhood – there are some challenges homeowners must be aware of when tackling below-grade living spaces. Choosing the right products is vital to the comfort, safety, and function of your new living area. Look for products that help to maximize energy efficiency and protect against moisture, fire and noise.

Here are the top points to consider to ensure a successful basement renovation.



• **Waterproof it.** Check the interior foundation and floors to make sure there are no existing moisture issues, water damage or mold problems. Address any primary moisture issues before finishing the space. Examine grading to ensure water runs away from your foundation.

• **Insulation is key.** Insulation plays a critical role in making your basement feel comfortable, while keeping it safe and dry. For the best results, install a rigid board insulation against the concrete foundation before you stud the wall. The board is mechanically fastened or adhered to the concrete foundation wall, which prevents thermal bridging through the studs, providing better thermal performance. Finish with a moisture-resistant and dimensionally stable insulation between the studs to protect against common basement issues such as mold, mildew and rot.

• **Choose a functional design.** Draw out plans, carefully taking into consideration any low ceilings or small windows. Try to incorporate structural features, such as attractive wood beams, into your design. Keep the space as open as possible. Select lighting that provides a bright, airy feel.

• **Don't forget to soundproof it.** Soundproofing is the ultimate solution to maximize your basement's quiet and privacy. Whether your newfound space will function as a home theatre, music room, home office or playroom, it will benefit from quality acoustic insulation.

• **Consider fire safety.** Since many basements are now being renovated as income suites, fire protection is also a vital consideration. Whenever possible, select building materials with a high fire-resistance rating and look for products that will not off-gas or contribute to toxic smoke in the event of a fire. Include additional exits in your renovation plan and educate yourself on your local fire code.

• **Check bylaws, get building permits:** Before you start your renovation, be sure to check with your municipality to secure the right permits and to ensure that you're complying with local bylaws and building codes.

Finishing a basement can be a smart renovation, if done properly, adding to a home's value, increasing its function and providing greater enjoyment or income potential.

Cost-cutting measures for your reno project

The cost of home renovation projects and the potential return on investing in such projects is a big consideration for homeowners. But even those working on tight budgets can find ways to save without resorting to lower quality materials or poor workmanship.

• **Work with salvaged materials.** The cost of materials can be considerable, but homeowners can cut those costs by choosing salvaged materials for their projects. This may only be an option for DIYers, as some contractors refuse to work with salvaged materials for fear of liability down the road if the materials do not hold up. Salvaged materials benefit the environment because they are reused rather than discarded, and homeowners can even support Habitat for Humanity by buying their salvaged materials from one of the nonprofit organization's ReStores.

• **Do some of your own dirty work.** Even if you are not a seasoned DIYer, you can save some money on labour costs by performing some of your own demolition work. Such DIY demo work is best left to exterior projects, such as breaking up an old sidewalk or discarding an old deck. When you take your DIY skills to your home's interior, you run the risk of making serious and costly mistakes, such as damaging plumbing or demolishing a load-bearing wall.

• **Consider labour-friendly projects.** Labour accounts for a substantial amount of renovation costs, so if your budget is especially tight consider projects that are less labour-intensive. Such projects might not be as glamorous, but they can make great investments. For example, the "2015 Cost vs. Value Report" found that replacing existing entryway doors with 20-gauge steel units cost slightly more than $1,200 but provided a better than 100 per cent return on investment.

• **Comparison shop and exercise patience.** Ask for estimates in writing, but be careful not to choose a contractor based strictly on the estimate. You want a contractor you're comfortable with and who understands your vision, not just one who's coming in at the lowest price.

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Are formal living spaces disappearing?



Formal dining rooms may fall victim to more useful spaces popularized by modern home plans.

Formal dining and living spaces could once be found in every home. But such rooms are becoming more and more rare, thanks in large part to the rising popularity of multipurpose open spaces.

So what is taking the place of living rooms and dining rooms? Great rooms and open-concept kitchens have steadily caught the eyes of designers and homeowners alike. Such rooms enable a free flow between lounging and entertaining spaces and the heart of the home – the kitchen. On-the-go families may not be sitting down to the same formal dinners they once were, or they don't need the pomp and circumstance of formal meals. Large eat-in-kitchens function well for family meals and even for entertaining friends in a relaxing way.

Thanks to the advent of wireless technology and mobile devices, home residents no longer need to be relegated to one room in the house for their media watching or computer use. This may have helped to accelerate the disappearance of living rooms. In addition, the concept of devoting one space as a media-free zone (traditional formal living or sitting rooms tend to be tech-free) may seem antiquated to this plugged-in generation. Rooms that are comfortable and serve various purposes better suit today's homeowners.

The rules that once governed the traditional home floor plan are more fluid than ever. Homeowners' preferences are having a greater impact over which rooms are now being included in new homes and which ones are soon to be history.

Tips for first-time DIYers

Many homeowners prefer to tackle their home improvement projects on their own, which can be both rewarding and cost-effective. But going the DIY route also carries some risk, especially for homeowners with no previous experience swinging a hammer. Before embarking on their first DIY project, homeowners should consider a few tips to ensure their project stays on course and finds its way to completion.

• **Assess your skills.** Even projects that seem simple can prove complex when unforeseen circumstances arise, so DIYers should assess their skills to determine if they are capable of completing a project should the worst-case scenario present itself. When researching a project, examine all the things that could go wrong and determine if your skills are such that you can handle those problems. If you determine that you can't, you can still attempt the project on your own, but you should enlist a friend or relative with extensive DIY experience to assist you so the project can be successfully completed even if problems arise.

• **Ease your way into DIY.** You may dream of starting with a big project that will impress guests and establish you as a certified handyman (or handywoman). But it's better to take it slow and start with a small project. Doing so allows you to make some mistakes that likely won't prove too costly, and it also gives you an idea of how to plan a project and see it through to completion. Take note of any mistakes you make as well as any areas where you excel, using this information when you decide which DIY project to tackle next.

• **Do a lot of homework.** Effective online tutorials can be valuable resources and instill confidence in prospective DIYers. But not all tutorials are the same, and some may make jobs appear easier to complete than they actually are. If you will rely on an online tutorial to guide you through a project, view several such tutorials before beginning the project. Some will highlight potential pitfalls, while others may gloss over these hurdles. The more tutorials you watch, the better grasp you will get of the full scope of a project.

• **Buy quality tools.** Sometimes it's not the person swinging the hammer but the hammer itself that derails a project. Purchase quality tools and materials before beginning a DIY project, as cheap and/or poorly rated tools and materials can put a project in jeopardy or produce poor results. In addition to buying the right tools and materials, invest some time in learning how to properly use the tools, even practicing before beginning a project. This increases the chance that the project stays on schedule, and learning to use your new tools can be fun.

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Go green when choosing light bulbs for your home

To live more eco-friendly lifestyles, many people need only make some relatively minor changes. But even the simplest efforts, when multiplied across millions of households, can add up to profound results.

Reducing energy consumption is an effective way to conserve water and other resources. One way to do this is to switch to energy-efficient light sources, which may entail replacing your existing light bulbs with more modern and efficient alternatives.

Incandescent bulbs were once the standard for home use. Available for roughly 135 years, incandescent bulbs are now being phased out because they consume too much energy.

Eartheasy.com, a solutions-based website for sustainable living, has found that electric lighting burns up to 25 per cent of the average home-energy budget. The electricity used over the lifetime of a single incandescent bulb costs five to 10 times the original purchase price of the bulb itself. Traditional incandescent bulbs consume significant amounts of energy during heat production, while only a small portion of the energy used is involved in lighting the bulb. Experts have found incandescent bulbs convert less than five per cent of the energy they use into visible light, with standard light bulbs averaging about 2.2 per cent.

Unlike incandescent bulbs that have to heat up a filament to high temperatures to produce light, energy-efficient light bulbs, such as LEDs, CFLs and halogen bulbs, work differently. Each has its share of positive and negative attributes.



Here are some of the facts about the other bulbs available.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs

• CFLs use 75 per cent less energy than incandescents.

• CFLs last up to 10 times longer than older bulbs.

• CFLs will brighten slowly after being turned on, so it can take a few minutes to reach full illumination.

• Turning CFLs on and off frequently can shorten their life span.

• CFLs contain mercury, so they need to be handled delicately and recycled to keep mercury out of the environment.

Halogen light bulbs

• Halogen lights are not the most energy-efficient choice, but they still consume roughly 25 per cent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs.

• Halogen bulbs produce instant brightness and can be dimmed.

• Halogen bulbs more accurately show the colours of objects, which can be advantageous in certain settings.

• Halogen bulbs last about a year or two.

Light-emitting diode light bulbs

• LED bulbs are very energy-efficient, with an energy savings of 85 per cent compared to incandescent bulbs.

• When used for three hours per day, LEDs can last from 18 to 46 years.

• LEDs brighten instantly, and many are dimmable.

• Some LEDs cannot cast light in all directions and may not accurately show colours of objects.

• LEDs are some of the most expensive bulbs, although newer LEDs are being produced for less.

Eco-incandescent light bulbs

• Eco-incandescent bulbs employ halogen technology and are 28 per cent more efficient than standard incandescent bulbs, according to Philips.

• Eco-incandescent bulbs are typically less expensive than other incandescent bulb replacements.

While there are many ways for homeowners to reduce their home energy consumption, few are as easy and simple as replacing standard incandescent bulbs with more eco-friendly alternatives.



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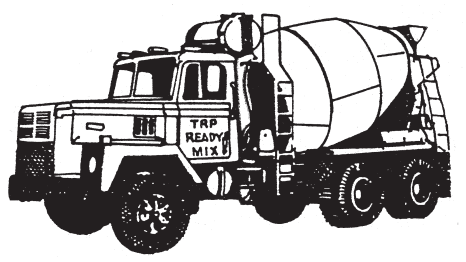

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Fresh flowers, new throw pillows and lightweight draperies are some easy ways to transform a home in time for spring's arrival.

Freshen up your home for the spring season

After months of chilly temperatures, come spring, many homeowners are eager to throw open their windows and doors and breathe new life into their homes. Simple changes made now can improve interior spaces and brighten the atmosphere of a home.

• **Go plant shopping.** Research from NASA suggests adding at least one plant in your home per 100 square feet is efficient enough to clean air. Fresh foliage also makes a home feel warm and inviting. Watering and misting plants introduces moisture into indoor air, which can make rooms overcome with dry air from heating systems feel comfortable. Just be sure to avoid overwatering plants, which can lead to mold growth.

• **Swap out throw pillows.** Accent pillows on beds and sofas are quick and inexpensive ways to add new bursts of colour to rooms. You may be able to make over a room's entire colour scheme with new pillows. Invest in pillows that you can switch with each season so your decor will never look tired or dull.

• **Clean existing light fixtures.** Another way to brighten the mood in a home is to periodically clean light fixtures to make sure they are working effectively. Spend time dusting them and cleaning off any accumulated debris. If need be, switch out old lamp shades for newer ones that let more light shine through. If inadequate lighting is a problem no matter how many lamps you have, consult with an electrician about installing more overhead and accent lighting.

• **Give rugs and floors a deep cleaning.** Recirculated air may be full of dust and other microscopic particles that end up blowing throughout your home. Also, it's easy to track in dirt and other materials on your shoes that become imbedded in carpeting. At least once a year, rent or enlist the surfaces of carpet and upholstery cleaners to give floors a thorough cleaning. You may be surprised at how clean and fresh a home looks and smells once rugs and carpets are deep-cleaned. You also can make a dry carpet cleaner using baking soda, corn starch, and desired fresh herbs for fragrance. Sprinkle and then vacuum up after a few hours.

• **Colour-coordinate bookshelves.** Group all books with similarly coloured covers together for an instant and eye-appealing look.

• **Simmer some homemade home deodorizer.** In a large pot, boil water and some scented herbs, such as rosemary, citrus rinds, vanilla, or lavender. The aroma will waft through the home, creating a pleasing scent.

• **Invest in new window treatments.** Lightweight draperies or new blinds or shades can transform the look of a room. Be sure to keep curtains and blinds open during the day to maximize the hours of sunlight.

Reclaimed wood adds instant appeal to home projects

Repurposing salvaged wood is a popular trend in the home improvement industry. Not only can using salvaged wood give a home a one-of-a-kind look, but it's a handy way to incorporate the three Rs of green living into your lifestyle: reduce, reuse, and recycle.



Reclaimed wood is often used in flooring, beams, wall treatments, and doors, but it also can be turned into furniture or home accent items. Reclaimed wood adds warmth and historical interest to a home's decor. Although finding wood that can be salvaged takes time and some legwork, such efforts can quickly pay off. Many businesses are now devoted to reclaimed timber, which can help make the process of finding and using salvaged wood even easier.

Homeowners considering reclaimed wood may be interested to learn that such wood can serve various functions aside from benefitting the planet.

• **Match old-growth wood.** New regulations may prevent certain species of trees from being cut down. That means it can be challenging to match old wood in a home, particularly if you're looking to maintain historical value and authenticity. Relying on salvaged wood items can alleviate this concern, ensuring that you can find rare woods that are no longer available brand new.

• **Salvaged wood has character.** It's difficult to mimic the natural age marks and character that older wood may have. The colour and grain of salvaged wood may also be unique.

• **Look at objects in a new way.** Doors are versatile pieces of reclaimed lumber because they're already flat and rather large. Doors can be turned into headboards, tables, or benches. Staircase posts can be turned into candlestick holders, and wood shutters can dress up walls and provide a place to hang artwork and other items.

• **Reclaimed wood can be found everywhere.** Most people do not have to look too far to find wood they can salvage. Check salvage yards and dumpsters in front of older homes being renovated.

While some reclaimed wood can be used as-is, some pieces may require millwork, including sanding, cutting, shaping, and finishing. If you do not have these skills, you probably will have to hire someone who does.

The internet is awash with ideas for putting salvaged wood to use. Get inspired and then find the pieces that will fit your project.







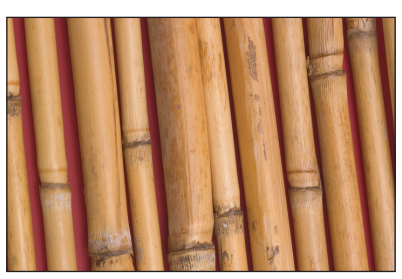
Environmentally friendly flooring options abound

Kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects tend to make great investments, earning homeowners significant returns when they sell their homes down the road. But flooring upgrades are another home renovation project that can attract attention and help sellers when they put their homes on the market.

Home flooring options abound, and it is easy to get excited and overwhelmed about flooring renovation projects. When choosing new flooring materials, homeowners should keep in mind the latest consumer trends, as those trends might help them recoup more of their flooring investment down the road.

One popular flooring trend is the use of sustainable materials. In addition to the more widely known benefits of choosing sustainable flooring, such as protecting natural resources and reducing a home's carbon footprint, sustainable flooring can help reduce indoor air pollution.

A major contributor to indoor air pollution are the volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, being off-gassed by carpeting and other flooring in a home.



Flooring manufacturers and designers are embracing the green design and remodeling movement. Today there are many beautiful and sustainable eco-flooring options. Here are some of the more popular materials.

• **Bamboo:** Contrary to popular belief, bamboo is not a wood, but a grass. It is a fast-growing grass, and that makes it a smart choice in many design applications. Also, unlike wood, which will absorb moisture and can warp, bamboo repels water and can be used for flooring in areas where one wouldn't think to put wood, such as in bathrooms, entryways or mudrooms. Bamboo is naturally very light in colour, but can be stained in many different hues to give homeowners more options.

• **Green carpeting:** Consumers can now find a wide range of sustainable carpets and rugs that are available at competitive prices. Wool carpets made with undyed or vegetable-dyed yarns and minimal glues are some options. Some carpets are even made from recycled content, such as rubber and plastics. Water-based, low-VOC adhesives paired with recycled cotton padding can reduce the toxicity and impact of carpeting even further.

• **Cork:** Growing in popularity, cork is a material harvested from the bark of cork trees found in the forests of the Mediterranean. The bark grows back every three years, so it is a handy renewable resource. Cork boasts fire-retardant properties and may naturally repel insects. It can usually be stained to suit various colour schemes.

• **Rubber:** Rubber flooring may call to mind fitness gyms and playground safety substrate, but it's also slowly finding its way into homes. Made from recycled tires, rubber flooring is flexible underfoot and can be long-lasting and colourful.

• **Reclaimed wood:** Rather than purchasing brand new hardwood planks for flooring, homeowners can opt for reclaimed wood reused from other building applications. After some sanding, staining and finishing, reclaimed wood provides homeowners with the opportunity to choose traditional hardwood flooring without any concerns about deforestation.

Eco-friendly flooring materials continue to evolve and can be smart choices in today's homes.

Things to consider before expanding your home

Homeowners who feel their homes are a little confined may be interested in expanding their homes to make them more comfortable. Several questions may come to mind when homeowners are considering adding on to an existing home.



Expanding a home requires careful consideration. While the end results can be spectacular, expansion is typically a long and costly process that will impede on the lifestyles of a home's inhabitants during the renovation process. Expect loud noises, work crews and sawdust throughout the project. Depending on which areas are being renovated, residents may feel their lives are in upheaval until the expansion project has been completed.

Familiarizing yourself with the expansion process and recognizing potential snags along the way can make planning and coping that much easier.

1. Many homeowners first consult with a contractor when mulling over expansions. However, you may want to speak with an architect first. He or she may be able to suggest renovations that fit with your neighbourhood and appeal to prospective buyers when you decide to sell your home in the future.

2. Visit your building inspection or municipal office to learn the local regulations. You want to ensure that any renovations you make are done in keeping with safety codes and laws.

3. While you're thinking of your neighbours, give them the heads up on your potential plans. This way they will not be surprised by the extra noise and activity when the renovation begins.

4. Remodeling can cost anywhere from $200 to $600 per square foot added. You'll need to figure out a way to pay for the renovations, and you may consider refinancing your home. Make sure it is a smart time financially to do so based on current real estate market conditions. Also know that additions will likely increase your home insurance coverage needs. Consult with the insurance company about estimated charges and any restrictions they have.

5. Consider a stand-alone structure when mulling over your options. Sometimes the cost of putting up a free-standing office or another structure on your property may end up being less expansive than expanding on what you already have. Think creatively and research all of your options before committing to a project.





Thinking spring reno projects? Think Winchester BMR

WINCHESTER

Spring weather's slow reveal in the region is underway, and with it comes the relinquishing of winter and the advent of new home renovation projects.

At Winchester BMR, the full-line hardware store is slowly getting products displayed for all project needs this spring and summer.

"It's not always that people are looking outdoors [for work], but a matter of getting a fresh look… They've been cooped up all winter, and they want a change," Dave Turner, a team member at the store's contractor's desk, said.

Countless shipments of items arrived at the store in recent weeks, ahead of spring load restrictions on area roads.

In BMR's near four-acre yard, lumber of all lengths, both treated and untreated, and some cedar, can be found alongside a myriad of other building materials.

As the weather gets nice, all that stock is moved around and positioned for waiting customers.

Great effort is put into aligning complementary products, from sheet goods (plywood, OSB, MDF) to shingles (BP, Iko, and CertainTeed), drywall to landscape stones, and windows and doors, the store has been equipped to meet a variety of needs.

There is also vinyl siding, stocking both Kaycan and Duchesne, blown-in insulation with two blowers to rent out, and a full line of concrete and mortar mixes, thin sets, sheetrock for wall compounds, and floor levelers.

Winchester BMR also benefits from a vast selection of flooring options (both laminate and hardwood), as well as tile (ceramic or other). In total, the shop inventories close to 100 lifts of laminate flooring at any time, which gives customers countless options for their jobs.

"There will be a bunch more flooring coming in, too, than we have now," Turner said.

One of the commodities Turner expects to sell a lot of this spring is shingles.

"We'll probably be really busy with that this spring, especially after the Christmas Eve windstorm, there was a lot of roof damage," he said. "Roofers are anxious to get going on those jobs."

Expanded product lines are also obvious, including plumbing and accessories, paint (the Winchester store is one of the only shops to carry Boomerang Recycled Paint), composite decking (with the addition of six new colour choices this year, and two-tone options that better represent a natural product), exterior and interior stone house treatments, and much more.





At Winchester BMR, Dave Turner is helping to ease the stress of home and building construction, offering a variety of services, and helping customers locate items among the store's expansive selection of building materials for projects both big and small.
Press Photos – Uhrig







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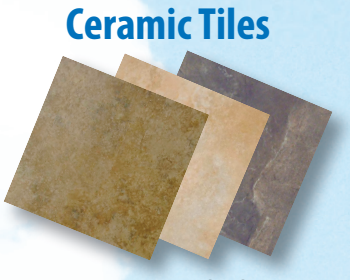

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How to approach buying a pool or spa

Many homeowners feel pools or spas are must-have features as they attempt to turn their homes in their own personal oases. The decision to get a pool or a hot tub is not one to take lightly. Significant purchases, pools and/or spas can affect the value of a home and also require various safety modifications. Taking a thoughtful approach when considering adding pools and/or spas to their homes can help homeowners rest easy knowing they made the right decision.

• **Do your research first.** When making any decision, it's best to be well-informed. Read reviews on products and find out the base prices of certain pool models so you'll have a system of comparison. Choose the type and size of pool you want. Other factors, such as the material used in the pool (i.e., concrete, metal, fibreglass, or vinyl) and filtration methods, also can affect the price, so consider each of these factors carefully before making your decision.

• **Determine why you want a pool or spa.** The type of pool or spa you ultimately choose should depend on how you plan to use the pool. If you want a pool mainly for family entertainment, then you may want to add mood lighting or special landscaping features. If you simply want something in which you can cool off, a basic model may be most practical.



If your spa is intended for therapeutic purposes, look for ones with multi-positional water jets or other specialized features. Don't fall into the trap that a large pool with a deep diving area is best. Young children and many adults do not frequently use the deep end, and you may end up with wasted pool space.

• **Find a good time to buy.** Fall and winter are some of the best times to get deals on pool and spa equipment because it's no longer prime swimming season. However, there are deals to be had come early spring as well. Retailers may deeply discount last year's models to make room for new inventory. You always can negotiate if the price is just a bit beyond your reach. Retailers may be motivated to make sales in the offseason, so try to use that motivation to your advantage.

• **Recognize there will be extra costs.** Some retailers sell pools and spas but do not arrange for installation. Realize that an inground pool will require excavation, and your yard may need to be regraded to allow for rain run-off. Electricians and landscapers are some additional costs to factor in. Make sure you understand the bigger picture and account for the total cost of modifying the yard.

• **Inquire about insurance.** Speak with the pool installer about any liability and compensation insurance they may carry to protect you in the event of an accident during the installation of the pool. Reputable builders should be fully insured.

• **Learn about zoning laws and other ordinances.** Rules regarding pool placement and size will vary depending on local laws. Always consult with the town's municipal office and get the proper permits. Otherwise, you may face fines and be forced to spend more to fix problems that need to be addressed.

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Going solar is on the rise

Rising energy costs and a growing desire to live more eco-friendly lifestyles has spurred interest in solar panels to power our homes. Although solar panels have been around for quite some time, only recently have homes cloaked in panels aimed at capturing the rays of the sunsolar panels begun to be so visible.

The World Meteorological Organization reported that the solar industry saw a robust expansion of 41 per cent in 2013, and that popularity continues to grow. According to the Solar Energy Industries Association®, in 2015 the solar industry grew 34 per cent more than 2013 figures. Through the first half of the year, the solar industry supplied 40 per cent of all new 2015 electric generating capacity – more than any other energy technology. Solar energy now has the cumulative electric capacity to power more than 4.6 million average American homes.

According to Green Tech Media, American solar companies are now installing one solar system every four minutes. If the market continues to grow at this pace, through 2016 there will be a system installed every 20 seconds. These gains in the solar industry may have been spurred on by the Solar Investment Tax Credit, which the SEIA says has helped to lower the cost of solar energy by more than 73 per cent.



How does solar energy work?

Solar energy is turned into electric power through the photovoltaic (PV) cells located in the solar panels. The PV cells transform sunlight into direct electric current.

An inverter built into the system converts the DC electricity into the alternating current (AC) that powers homes. The AC is sent to the home's electrical panel and used to power lights and other devices.

What happens at night?

Unless a home is self-contained and off the grid, the average homeowner will not have to worry about night usage or batteries to store energy. He or she will continue to use energy off of the traditional electrical system at night. Many electrical costs will be offset by the amount of extra solar energy put back into the grid. There are a variety of programs, and some homeowners may even reverse bills further based on how much electricity is generated.

Solar panel needs

Although it is ideal to have a south-facing location for panels, this is not an absolute necessity. According to SolarEnergy.net, positioning solar panels to face west or south will work, and even southeast-, east- and north-northwest-facing panels can produce adequate energy savings.

The type of roof may affect costs. Solar panels will not harm the roof when installed correctly. Many homeowners find that the solar panels protect the roof from extreme weather, heat and cold, providing an extra bonus to solar energy.

Solar panel costs

The "soft costs" associated with solar energy can be substantial. Such costs include permits, installation, and labour. Energy Informative indicates that the solar panels themselves are relatively affordable, at an average cost of $6,500. However, the entire process of installing residential solar systems can end up costing anywhere between $15,000 and $40,000.

Homeowners may be able to lease solar panel systems to make solar energy a more affordable option.

Solar energy continues to be a hot topic and a growing trend in home energy solutions.

Spring cleaning projects you don't want to forget

Spring cleaning is an annual tradition in many households. After a winter spent cooped up indoors, spring cleaning can rejuvenate a household and provide a great chance to rid a home of a season's worth of clutter.

Donating old clothes and cleaning out the garage are popular spring cleaning projects, but there are a host of additional tasks homeowners can tackle to freshen up their homes this spring.

Floors

Simply vacuuming or sweeping the floors might not be enough to banish some of winter's most uninvited guests. Dust has a way of settling into a home over the course of a typical winter, and it's easy for a home's inhabitants to track dirt and debris inside as well. After vacuuming or sweeping floors, go over them with a mop. Doing so can remove any lingering dust, dirt, debris, and allergens the vacuum or broom failed to pick up. Apply wood cleaner and polish to wood floors to make them look even cleaner.

Baseboards

Though baseboards might not seem all that dirty, upon closer inspection homeowners might notice substantial accumulations of dirt and dust. Such dirt and dust many not be removed so easily, so homeowners might need to use hot water and a sponge to remove any debris that is clinging.

Curtains

Curtains also may have absorbed substantial amounts of dust over the winter. This might be more visible near the end of winter when more sunlight begins to shine through. Clean the curtains in adherence to the manufacturer instructions before you open windows for the season so any wind that blows in does not spread dust onto nearby furniture. Once the curtains have been washed, opening windows may help them dry more quickly.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms also tend to bear the brunt of winter weather, as mold and grime can accumulate throughout a season in which it's too cold to open bathroom windows to let fresh air in after bathing. Inspect ceilings, tubs, shower stalls, and floors for any signs of mold growth or grime. Mold growth in a home can lead to respiratory problems and exacerbate existing conditions such as asthma, so it's best to inspect bathrooms for any signs of mold throughout winter. If you have let that slip, prioritize such inspections come spring.

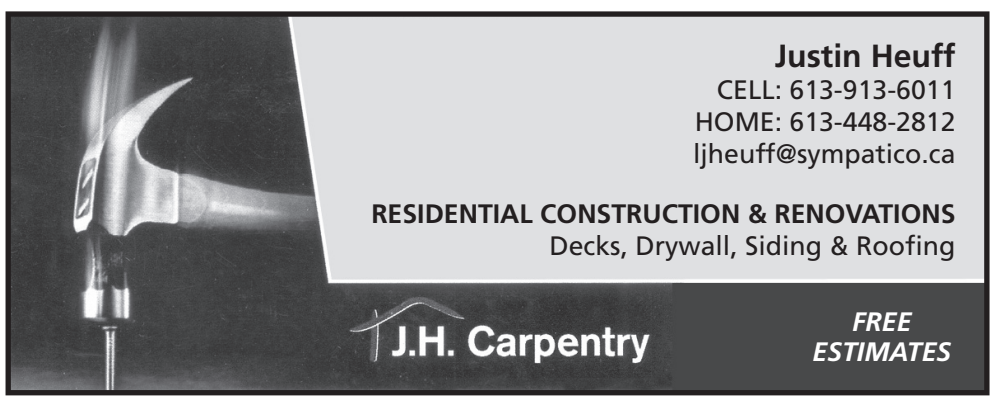
Furniture

It's easy to overlook furniture when tackling spring cleaning, but dust and dirt can quickly accumulate on couches and chairs over the course of winter. When possible, vacuum furniture to remove any debris that might have accumulated while windows and doors were kept shut, and shampoo any cushions or seat covers that don't pass the smell test.

Spring cleaning encompasses a host of tasks, and homeowners who want a truly clean house should not overlook smaller tasks that can produce big results.







Make garage organization go smoothly



Garages tend to fall victim to disorganization during the winter, when homeowners want to hurry inside and get some respite from the cold. As a result, many homeowners resolve to clean their garages come springtime.

Cleaning a disorganized garage overcome with clutter can be an all-day job, so homeowners would be wise to reserve a springtime Saturday or Sunday to get their garages back in order. Upon designating ample time to clean their garages, homeowners can then utilize a few additional tips to make the project go as smoothly as possible.

• **Empty the garage.** The first step when organizing a garage is to empty it completely. Old machinery and rusted lawn and garden tools have a way of disappearing in garages, and those items may remain there for years if the garage is never emptied. Once you have emptied the garage, you might be surprised to learn just how much or even how little space you have to work with.

• **Clean the garage top to bottom.** After you have emptied the garage, give it a thorough cleaning. Cleaning the garage serves multiple purposes. A clean garage is less likely to be overcome with dirt and/or critters, both of which can contribute to the deterioration of tools and machinery stored in the garage. In addition, you may be less likely to let a clean garage fall back into disorganization, saving you the trouble of reorganizing the garage next spring.

• **Look up.** Many homeowners fail to make adequate use of the vertical space in their garages. But keeping items off the floor can make it easier to clean the garage and will provide more room for your car or other machinery you don't want to leave in the driveway or a backyard shed. Install shelves so you can more safely store automotive fluids and cleaners, and hang some hooks or hammer a few nails into the garage walls so you can hang tools like rakes and garden shears.

• **Group tools by season.** Grouping tools by season can make for a more organized garage and one less likely to be overcome with clutter. Designate one corner of the garage for lawn and gardening tools and another for winter tools like snow shovels or snowblowers. This makes it easier to find tools when you need them. When grouping tools, you can also group items by who uses them. For example, parents can designate one area of the garage for their tools, while kids can get their own area for their toys and bicycles.

• **Resolve to park in the garage.** One of the best ways to keep a garage organized is to park your vehicle or vehicles inside the garage each night. Parking in a garage protects your vehicle(s) from the elements, and you also won't be tempted to leave items lying around on the garage floor if you know you will eventually be pulling your vehicle in.

A few simple strategies can make springtime garage organization more effective and efficient.

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Prepare cooling systems now for summer weather



One springtime task on homeowners' to-do lists is checking cooling systems to ensure they are ready for summer. Proper maintenance of cooling systems is essential to saving energy and keeping utility costs down. Fortunately, homeowners need not be certified HVAC technicians to maintain their cooling units.

• **Clean filters.** Whether a home is kept cool by a whole-house central air conditioning system or window units, clean filters are necessary to keep the units working efficiently. Routinely replacing or cleaning filters is one of the most important maintenance tasks to improve airflow and increase efficiency. Replacing a dirty, clogged filter with a clean one can lower an air conditioner's energy consumption by anywhere from five to 15 per cent.

• **Know the square footage.** When replacing a cooling system, have an understanding of the size of your home (or room if installing an window unit). Determine the area of the home so you buy a unit that suits your needs. Air conditioners use BTUs (British Thermal Units) to define cooling power. The more BTUs, the larger the space that can be cooled. However, homeowners do not want to exceed the necessary cooling power. This leads to energy waste.

• **Inspect system coils.** The evaporator and condenser coils on air conditioners can collect dirt, even when filters are maintained. Dirty coils are less efficient at absorbing heat, so periodically remove the dirt. Outdoor coils can be kept cleaner by cutting back foliage from the unit to allow better air flow.

• **Inspect condensate drains.** Energy.gov also suggests making sure condensate drains, which take moisture pulled from the air away, are functioning properly. If they're clogged, they may not be effective at reducing humidity in a home, and they may even leak.

• **Clear debris.** Remove fallen leaves or other plant material from condenser units and fan blades. Obstructed components can cause the system to retain heat, compromising its ability to work effectively. Some homeowners prefer to cover their condensers at the end of the cooling season to keep leaves and dirt out of the unit.

• **Check window unit seals.** When installing window units, make sure all seals around the air conditioner are in place to prevent cool-air loss.

• **Hire a technician.** Air conditioner technicians can be very helpful and will know how to prepare a system for hot weather. Technicians typically conduct multipoint inspections and measure such things as refrigerant levels and duct leakage. Airflow through the evaporator coil also may be checked. If a homeowner suspects the thermostat is not working properly, a technician can verify if that is true and even install a new one if necessary.

As summer approaches, homeowners should prepare their air conditioning units for the busy months ahead.

Improve indoor air quality all year long

Though open windows in spring and summer can vastly improve indoor air quality, there are ways to ensure that air stays fresh and healthy regardless of which season it happens to be.

Clean the floors

Dirty floors are one of the chief contributors to poor indoor air quality. Dust, dirt, pollen, and pet dander can accumulate on floors, leading to poor air quality and potentially aggravating respiratory conditions such as asthma. When vacuuming, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter, which is a uniquely designed mechanical air filter that traps harmful particles such as pollen, pet dander and dust mites. When you finish vacuuming, mop floors to gather any dust or allergens that escaped the vacuum.

Control indoor air moisture

Moist air is great for dust mites and mold, both of which are very bad for humans, so do everything you can to maintain healthy levels of indoor air moisture. Dehumidifiers can reduce indoor air moisture and control allergens, but it's important to take additional steps as well.

When bathing, try to keep a bathroom window open on a slight crack to prevent mold growth.

When preparing meals in the kitchen, make use of your exhaust fan. In addition, don't overwater houseplants, as they can become breeding grounds for mold.

Resist synthetic fragrances

A home that smells good tends to feel more pleasant, especially during winter months when windows are closed.

But synthetic fragrances, such as those found in detergents and air fresheners, may be providing that welcoming scent at a heavy cost to a home's inhabitants.

Such fragrances may be emitting various chemicals, including volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, into the air, affecting indoor air quality and possibly even human health.

When buying laundry products, look for those that are fragrance-free, also choosing home cleaning products that do not include any artificial fragrances.

Indoor air quality tends to suffer in colder months, when windows are closed and doors are open only briefly. But homeowners can take a handful of simple yet effective steps to ensure the air in their homes is healthy all year long.







Renovations for senior safety

As adults approach their golden years, the homes they once thought of as sanctuaries can become unsafe. Families wrestle with the decision to keep parents and grandparents in their homes or move them into assisted living facilities or other senior residences.

Modifying seniors' homes to make them safer is another option. The National Institute on Aging says that families may be able to have a senior stay at home by helping older relatives remain independent but safe. The following are a few ways to do just that.

• **Remove fall hazards.** The NIA reports that six out of 10 falls happen at home, where people spend the most time and fail to think about their safety. Seniors who want to be independent may overestimate their physical abilities. Because falls can be so dangerous, leading to cuts, abrasions, broken bones, and more, seniors and their families must take steps to prevent falls in homes. Improve lighting, especially at night when sight may become diminished. Install hand rails and grab bars where possible. Pick up clutter and remove tripping hazards, such as slippery rugs or electric cords. Install an electric stair climbing seat to make traversing stairs less risky.

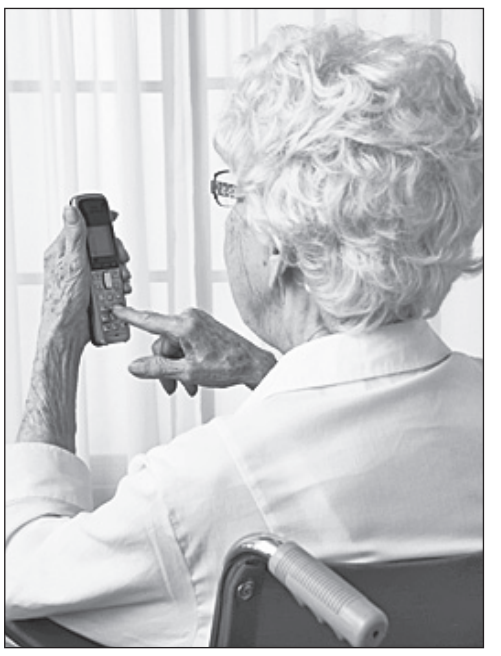
• **Improve visibility and ability to communicate.** Vision loss may accompany aging, but technology can help mitigate such losses. Use big-button phones, remote controls and even keyboards so seniors can keep in touch. Voice-activated thermostats or smart home technology also can make it easier for seniors to voice their needs.

• **Modify fixtures and other features.** Dexterity may wane with age, and arthritis can make grasping or turning doorknobs and faucets more challenging. Take inventory of areas of the home that present the biggest obstacles to seniors. Replace knobs in the shower or on faucets with lever handles, which are easier to manoeuvre. Install new cabinets and doors that freely glide open and self-close. Replace toggle light switches with easier paddle-type switches that can be pushed with a hand or even arm. Motion-sensor lights also can be handy. Push-button oven controls may make cooking easier.

• **Prepare for medical emergencies.** Invest in medical alert systems, such as necklaces or bracelets, that can be used to contact police or emergency medical personnel directly. Make phones available in commonly used rooms in the home, such as bedrooms, the living room, bathrooms, and the kitchen.

• **Install ramps and nonslip flooring.** Ramps can make it easier to reach the front door or cross over elevated doorway thresholds. Nonslip flooring also can prevent falls around the house, offering more traction for feet, walkers or canes.

• **Repair cracks in walkways and driveways.** Safety should also extend to the outdoors. Be sure to repair cracks or uneven pavement. Replace loose patio blocks or bricks with a more stable design or with concrete or asphalt. While outdoors, trim back bushes and make sure there are no tripping hazards outside as well.



A few modifications can make it possible for seniors to live comfortably in their homes for many years.

Make your bathroom safer

Although bathroom injuries are mostly associated with the elderly, anyone is susceptible to such injuries. Some minor modifications can make bathrooms safer for everyone.

Grab bars

Unsteady individuals may rely on towel bars or shower knobs to provide some balance when manoeuvring around bathrooms. But such items were not designed to support a person's weight and can be slippery, making grab bars the safer choice. Look for bars with slip-resistant surfaces instead of chrome plating. Bolted-in bars that are fixed to the studs in a wall provide good support.

Chairs

A bath/shower chair can make bathing safer. Pharmacies and medical supply retailers carry these sturdy, plastic chairs and stools which can fit inside of a shower or tub. They enable a person to rest his or her legs and sit while bathing. When remodeling a bathroom, have a seating area built into the design of the shower enclosure.

Transfer bench

Many injuries occur when people are attempting to get in and out of the tub or shower, but a transfer bench can greatly reduce the risk of such injuries. The bench is placed outside of the tub, and users just sit on the bench and then swing their legs over the ledge of the tub rather than stepping over while standing.

Walk-in showers

Some homeowners are eliminating tubs from their homes altogether. A walk-in shower provides a barrier-free entry into the shower, making it safer for those who have difficulty stepping into and out of bathtubs.

Lever-style fixtures

Knob temperature controls on faucets can be challenging to grasp for people with arthritis or poor grips. Lever-style fixtures are easier to manoeuvre and can help prevent scalding. These levers also are easier for children to manage.

Forgiving flooring

Tile may be preferred around the bathroom, but it can be cold and slippery. Investigate other water-resistant flooring materials that may be softer underfoot and offer greater traction. Rubber flooring made from recycled tires is one option that is gaining ground for its practicality.

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How to make older homes more energy efficient

Older properties tend to have a sense of charm that newly built homes may lack. Perhaps it's their lived-in feel or design elements that remind homeowners of yesteryear that make older homes so popular among home buyers.

What older homes have in character they may lack in modern amenities. For example, whereas many homes are now built with energy efficiency in mind, older homes may not be so eco-friendly. Fortunately, there are many ways for homeowners who love their older homes to keep that love going strong while making their homes more energy efficient at the same time.

• Check for leaks and plug any you find. Homes may develop air leaks over time, and such leaks allow air to infiltrate the home. When that occurs, homeowners instinctively turn up the thermostat in winter to combat the cold air getting in. Come summertime, those same homeowners will run their air conditioners on a higher setting in an effort to stay comfortable when hot air is creeping through the cracks. Rather than adjusting the temperature inside, fix any sources of air infiltration you find. Run your hand along doorways and windows to determine if any drafts are coming through. Older homes may also develop cracks in bricks, around the foundation and in siding or stucco. Seal any areas where you feel air infiltrating your home, which will save money, reduce your energy consumption and make your older home more efficient.

• Add insulation. Many older homes are poorly insulated. Adding insulation can reduce energy costs by as much as 50 per cent. Installing insulation can be tricky, especially if insulation was not originally included in your home, as is sometimes the case with older homes. Insulation can become damp and prove ineffective if installed improperly. Damp insulation also may contribute to mold growth and rot in the home's framing. Older homes may be lacking adequate insulation around attics, crawl spaces, basements, heating and cooling ducts, and water pipes. Cover your water heater with an insulated water heater blanket so the heater retains more heat and consumes less energy to heat the water.

• Stay on top of your home. Much like older vehicles, older homes require a little extra TLC on the part of homeowners. Don't allow your home to fall into disrepair. Even if your energy bills are not on the rise, inspect windows and doors to make sure they are closing tightly, as over time such seemingly minor problems can add up to substantial energy loss. Don't forget to clean gutters and downspouts, removing debris that can add up and lead to water damage that may ultimately compromise the effectiveness of your home's insulation.

• Book an energy audit. Energy audits, which may be offered free of charge by your utility company, can help detect any additional areas where a home may be using energy inefficiently. Even if you have to pay for an audit, the cost savings if any additional inefficiencies are discovered will likely add up to more than the cost of the audit.



Replacing old or inadequate insulation is one way that homeowners can make older homes more energy efficient.

Older homes are attractive to many homeowners, who can take several steps to make sure their homes are operating as efficiently as possible.

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Safeguard your home from insect infestation

The dawn of spring marks the return of many things, including long hours of sunlight and warm temperatures in which to enjoy that sunshine. But homeowners know spring also marks the return of insects, unwelcome guests that can be difficult or expensive to control once they have entered a home.

As problematic as insect infestations can be, preventing such problems can be simple, especially when homeowners are proactive. The following are a handful of ways to keep insects out this spring and summer.

• **Consider potential food supplies** and cut those supplies off. Insects often enter a home in search of food, so cutting off potential food supplies is a great way to prevent insects from coming inside. Give dining areas a thorough cleaning after meals, vacuuming or sweeping the floors beneath dining tables each night before going to bed. (Parents of young children may want to sweep floors after each meal.) In addition, clean pets' bowls each night to be sure there are no food scraps left that may entice insects, and make sure pet food containers are tightly sealed after each serving. Sinks are another potential food source, so empty food traps after using the sink and run the garbage disposal as well to remove any food that might be lingering.



• **Address potential shelters.** Insects also seek shelter inside homes, and there are many areas in a home that can provide adequate shelter. Cracks around windows and doors and in the foundation provide both entry points and potential shelters for insects. Seal such cracks with caulk, testing the areas by feeling for any incoming air. If you still feel air coming in, there is still some sealing to do. Cracks in cabinets or counters also may provide shelter to insects, so address these areas as well.

• **Reconsider exterior lighting.** Exterior lighting may be inviting insects into your home. Insects tend to congregate around lights at nighttime, so avoid placing lights right outside entryways. Once doors are opened, insects can then fly right into your home. Keep exterior lights as far away from entryways as possible. If you need lights right outside your doors, install motion-sensing lights that only turn on when you come within a few feet of the door. This reduces the volume of insects that congregate outside your entryways, and lowers the risk that insects will follow you in when you arrive home at night.

• **React quickly upon seeing insects.** Insect infestations happen gradually, so homeowners should react quickly when seeing a single insect or a handful of insects inside their homes. The slower your response, the more likely one or two intruders is likely to turn into a large infestation. Immediately clean any areas where you see insects, and take more substantial measures if your initial efforts were not enough to prevent more insects from coming in.

The presence of insects inside a home can be a nuisance, but there are many ways to prevent such infestations and keep unwelcome guests at bay.

Plants clean indoor air

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that can pay a host of dividends, both for the planet and the people doing the gardening. Healthy plant life can help clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and various air pollutants, while the act of gardening can help gardeners combat stress.

Published in 2011 in the Journal of Health Psychology, a study from researchers in the Netherlands found that gardening promotes relief from acute stress. In the study, two groups of participants were asked to complete a stressful task and then instructed to either read indoors or garden outdoors for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, the latter group had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and even reported being in a better mood than the group instructed to read indoors.

But gardening does more than just provide gardeners with a reason to relax indoors. Gardeners who raise certain plants may be able to bring those benefits with them when going inside as well. According to an article published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives in October 2011, houseplants can work wonders when it comes to improving overall health, removing toxins from air, soil and water by metabolizing some toxic chemicals and releasing harmless byproducts while sequestering such toxins by incorporating them into plant tissues.

Clean indoor air is especially important for those people who suffer from respiratory ailments like asthma. In fact, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology considers indoor air filtration an essential part of any strategy to improve respiratory health. But filtration systems and air purifiers are often not enough, and those who want the air in their homes to be as clean as possible may benefit from introducing certain houseplants into their homes. The following plants can help to improve indoor air quality.

• **Aloe vera:** Aloe vera might be most often associated with hand creams and hand soaps, but the aloe vera plant, a succulent that even novice gardeners should have no problem growing, can clear indoor air of formaldehyde and benzene, two common byproducts of

• **continued on next page**

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Make a home offer they can't refuse

Prospective home buyers may find themselves in some stiff competition upon finding their dream homes. But a few simple strategies can make their offers stand out and increase their chances of buying their ideal homes.

• **Get preapproved for a mortgage.** Sellers' patience may wear thin with buyers who are not preapproved for a mortgage when making their offers. Preapproval can speed up the selling process, as buyers won't need to secure financing afterward. When sellers receive multiple offers on their homes, they are more likely to sell their homes to buyers whose financing is already lined up as opposed to buyers who have to scramble to secure loans.

• **Establish a strong rapport with the sellers.** It's not uncommon for homeowners to develop emotional attachments to their homes, and buyers should keep that in mind when viewing a home and negotiating their purchase. Sellers won't want to hear about how ugly a home is or how much money buyers will have to spend to bring the home up to their standards. While buyers must weigh such variables when making their offers, keep it as cordial as possible and avoid any inflammatory remarks during the negotiation process. Sellers may be more likely to accept a lower offer from a buyer they like than a higher offer from someone they don't like.

• **Don't delay an inspection.** When a property is drawing significant interest, buyers can set their offers apart from the rest by arranging for a near-immediate inspection. Some buyers may want sellers to give them a couple of weeks to arrange for an inspection, and that may irritate sellers who want to sell their homes as quickly as possible. Have an inspector ready to perform an inspection within days of making your offer.

• **Include an escalation clause.** When making an offer on a home, prospective buyers can include an escalation clause. Such a clause acknowledges that a potential buyer is willing to increase his or her initial offer by a predetermined amount to exceed any bids that are higher than that initial offer. When sellers trigger such clauses, they are often required to show the other offers they received that triggered the escalation clause. Escalation clauses show the sellers you really want the house while keeping potential buyers' hopes of buying the home alive when the bids are competitive.

Plants

• continued from previous page

chemical-based cleaners many people use in their homes.

• **Spider plant:** Spider plants are resilient, and that makes them great houseplants for busy men and women who tend to be forgetful when caring for their plants. In addition, spider plants are pet-friendly and can be used to combat benzene, carbon dioxide, formaldehyde and xylene.

• **English ivy:** NASA researchers exploring the possibilities of long-term space habitation found that certain houseplants were more effective at cleaning air inside energy-efficient, nonventilated buildings than others. One such plant was English ivy, which can effectively combat the formaldehyde found in certain household cleaning products.

• **Bamboo palm:** Bamboo palms also found their way onto NASA's list. Bamboo palm plants thrive indoors, where they are especially effective at filtering out the chemicals benzene and trichloroethylene.

Gardening has been proven to be a soothing hobby that can help gardeners reduce stress. But the health benefits of gardening can extend indoors as well.

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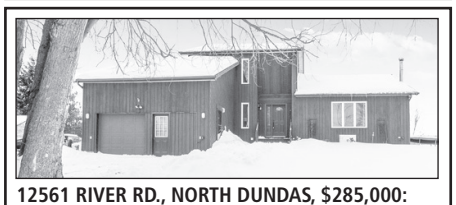

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Spectacular three-bedroom home with everything redone! This home features an open-concept main-floor along with three good-sized bedrooms upstairs. Outside you will find a two-tier deck to enjoy the quiet evenings and also an additional shed for storage and much more! Priced at $188,000. MLS# M3492

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Sales Representative



Williamsburg - $314,900

A beautiful all brick three-bedroom hi-ranch bungalow with attached two-car garage (23' x 23') and an extra insulated 20' x 35' heated workshop on a very spacious 3.89 acre property. Lovely open concept living room, dining room, and kitchen with hardwood and ceramic floors, pellet stove in living room just to be cozy on those long, cold winter nights. Three bedrooms are hardwood and laminate flooring, one full bath plus a two-piece bath in laundry room in foyer has access to the garage and back yard. Extra large family room with wood stove, paved driveway, property also has an extra 20' x 11' storage shed at rear of workshop. Just a very peaceful place on a country setting to call home. 55 minutes from downtown Ottawa, three minutes to Williamsburg. MLS#1000368



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211 OXFORD ST., KEMPTVILLE



Great 3-bedroom home in a quiet street. Large kitchen, dining room, living room and bedroom on the main floor, 2 bedrooms and bath upstairs. Natural gas forced air heating. Beautiful private back yard with shed. **$179,000**

15 VICTORIA ST., FINCH



Beautiful 3-bedroom Century home features kitchen and dining room, den and family room on main floor, 3 bedrooms and full bath upstairs. Second floor balcony to relax in the morning sun or head outside to enjoy the fantastic back yard. **$189,000**

14265 CTY. RD. 43, FINCH



Great country property! This 4-bedroom home sits on 2.867 acres of beautiful country land. Main floor boasts a large kitchen, dining room and living room. Upstairs you will find 4 generous bedrooms and full bathroom. This place is awaiting new memories. **Call today!**

9 CEDAR ST., NEWINGTON



Great 2-bedroom starter home on a nice village lot. Main level features large bathroom, kitchen, living room and laundry room. Master bedroom with walk-in closet, second bedroom and bathroom upstairs. Wrap-around veranda and screened porch. **$129,000**

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CHESTERVILLE — MLS 983395 $199,000



WINCHESTER — MLS 920355 $549,000

FARMS FOR SALE



BRINSTON — MLS 936155 • 100 acres • $1,600,000



MORRISBURG — MLS 985744 • 112 acres • $952,000

Spring 2016 focus on real estate

Things to consider before buying an investment property

Real estate can be a fruitful investment, and investors who want to benefit the most from their properties will explore various factors before purchasing a home or homes.



Price trends. Recent sale activity in a given town or neighbourhood is something prospective real estate investors should study before buying an investment property. Such data can be invaluable, showing potential investors which neighbourhoods are in demand and which may be in decline.

Taxes. Investment properties are not eligible for as many tax benefits as primary residences. However, landlords can write off repairs, management costs, and other fees associated with rental properties. But it's not just their own tax bill prospective investors should consider before buying an investment property. Many potential buyers down the road may prefer a property in an area where property taxes are relatively low, so even if you can afford the tax on the investment property, you may find buyers are unwilling to assume that burden when you put the property up for sale in the future.

Location. Prospective real estate investors no doubt know the value of location with regard to real estate, but if you can't afford to buy in a neighbourhood that's currently hot, that does not necessarily mean you can't still capitalize on that area's popularity. When an area becomes popular, its property values rise, and many buyers find themselves just barely priced out. When that happens, the surrounding towns tend to become the next hot neighbourhood, as these areas are nearly as close to the attractions that make the initial neighbourhood so desirable. Buying on the outskirts of a hot neighbourhood can set you up to benefit nicely when that area gets too pricey.

Host a successful open house

Realtors have long used open houses to introduce properties to the market, and a well-planned open house can help sellers generate numerous offers in a single day. Whether working with a realtor or listing homes on their own, homeowners can follow a few simple tips to ensure their open house is a success.

• **Generate publicity.** Publicity is extremely important when promoting an open house. A $5 "Open House" lawn sign is an effective and inexpensive way to attract buyers who are driving through desirable neighbourhoods looking for their next homes. While the internet is a valuable resource to promote your open house, the sheer volume of online listings can make it hard to reach potential buyers. A traditional lawn sign and a listing in your local newspaper are budget-friendly promotional opportunities that can generate interest in your open house.

• **Invite your neighbours.** Neighbours can be great salesmen for your home and the community where you live. Invite friendly neighbours to your open house and encourage them to chat with prospective buyers. Buyers will appreciate neighbours' firsthand knowledge about the community, and their friendliness can help to create a strong first impression that increases buyer interest in your home.

• **Consider some changes to your home decor.** When hosting an open house, you might not need to go so far as to stage your home, but you may want to make some changes to the decor to make your home more neutral and appealing to buyers from all walks of life. Remove any potentially controversial artwork or decorative items, replacing them with more neutral items that won't offend or distract.

• **Leave the hosting to the professionals.** Unless you're selling the home on your own, resist the temptation to attend your open house. Let your realtor do the work. Your absence can make it easier for potential buyers to see themselves in your home, while your presence may make them uncomfortable or hesitant to explore the property and ask any questions.

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Spring 2016 **focus on real estate**

Add curb appeal to your property

When selling a home, homeowners who emphasize curb appeal may find it far easier to sell their homes. Curb appeal refers to the impression a home's exterior makes on people seeing the home for the first time.

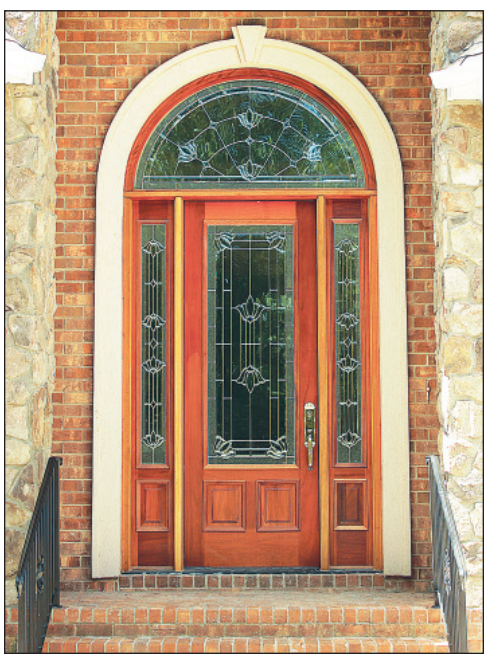
The following are a handful of projects to improve a home's curb appeal that run the gamut from simple to complex.

• **Clean up the yard.** Cleaning up the yard is among the simpler yet most effective projects to improve a home's curb appeal. When selling their homes, homeowners should clear the yard of any clutter, including kids' toys, grass clippings, or items that might be scattered throughout the yard. A cluttered yard suggests homeowners do not care much about their home's appearance, and that may lead buyers to think that indifference extended to maintaining the home's interior as well. Many buyers will ignore properties without any external aesthetic appeal, but cleaning up the yard does not require much effort or expense on the part of sellers.

• **Make the main entryway more inviting.** Creating a more inviting entryway won't be as simple as cleaning up the yard, but it can help create a strong first impression without breaking the bank. To begin, remove plants and furniture from the front porch or area surrounding the doorway, as such items can create a cluttered feel. If the front door is old, replace it. Custom doors may be expensive, but they might add the wow factor buyers are looking for. If a new door is beyond your means or just unnecessary, repaint the door, ideally in a colour that complements the colour of your home and the surrounding landscape.

• **Address pavement problems.** Paving problems are not necessarily an expensive fix, but the cost of repairing driveways and walkways can add up if it's been awhile since these areas were refurbished. Still, one of the first things buyers will notice when getting out of their cars is the ground they're walking on, so patch and repair or even replace driveways and walkways that have fallen into disrepair.

• **Add or upgrade outdoor living spaces.** Outdoor living spaces also can set a property apart from others on the market. When adding or upgrading outdoor living spaces, try to depersonalize the spaces as much as possible, as buyers want to picture themselves, and not the sellers, enjoying these areas. Include some comfortable furniture, adequate lighting, and a dining area in your outdoor living space as well.



An inviting entryway free of clutter can add substantial curb appeal to a property.

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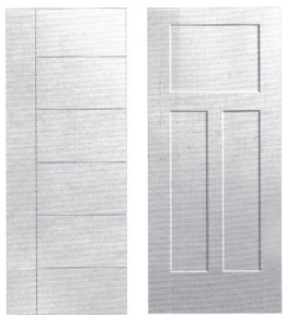

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