

Spring's arrived! Now that winter is gone and the weather is more comfortable, it's time to think 'home improvement' and start shaping up your home for spring. But before you begin, check out this informative section to find some of the best ideas and all the best buys!

1988

Spring Home Improvement

Special supplement to the Winchester Press
Wednesday, April 13, 1988

Do-it-yourself pitfalls to avoid

As warm afternoon sunshine and gentle breezes signal the end of winter, sweaters and blankets are returned to storage and spring cleaning and home improvement projects begin.

Whether the living area is a tiny apartment or a sprawling house — or something inbetween — the change of seasons invariably necessitates rearranging and re-allocating closet space; often it also ushers in a flurry of renovating and refurbishing.

From a general brightening of the decor or installing a new patio, to replacing old kitchen appliances or wallpapering the dining room, no options should be overlooked during this period of re-evaluation.

Perhaps this is the right time to have hardwood floors sanded down and polyurethaned to bring out their natural beauty, or maybe the bathroom needs to be re-tiled to prevent moisture from accumulating along poorly grouted edges.

Homeowners may find that a new coat (or two) of paint, restructured landscaping, or even the construction of a gazebo, are all possible for ways of improving the appearance — and their enjoyment — of their home's exterior and grounds.

Large or small, it is best to plan each home improvement project carefully before it is undertaken.

Stopping midway to make a trip to the hardware store for nails of the correct size can be a time-consuming interruption of the home handyperson's alloted time, and it is advisable that all necessary supplies and equipment be assembled prior to beginning even the simplest of tasks.

Listing each item and shopping beforehand will help ensure that unexpected problems will be all the less likely to interfere with the painless execution of the project at hand.

If supplies are needed for more than one job, coordinating a single trip to the lumber yard or home center — or both — will be a significant benefit.

One common pitfall for the do-it-yourselfer is the tendency to underestimate the amount of time that a project will take from start to finish.

Settling realistic goals and maintaining a reasonable pace will help avoid frustration and exhaustion.

Being aware of the limits of one's skills is also important. While it takes no particular expertise to remove storm windows or drive a nail into the wall to hang a picture, not everyone possesses the carpentry skills that are necessary to build a loft bed, or the masonry experience that is required for installing a fieldstone patio.

If, however, your goal is to increase basic do-it-yourself skills, this, too, can be accomplished. Compare notes with friends and neighbors working on similar projects, perhaps you could even contribute as a working observer by assisting in the execution of a task that you would like more experience in.

A myriad of homeowner's and do-it-yourself manuals is also available to offer step-by-step guidance and instruction. A vast array of builder's plans can help the aspiring carpenter to master the creation of anything from a simple shelf or table, to an outdoor deck or an impressive customized entertainment center.

When planning home improvement projects, keep in mind that other family members can also contribute to a job well done. Involving children as you work around the house will provide them with valuable experience and a sense of satisfaction and it will provide you with extra hands to help paint or hand over tools.

Even young children can be included. A nine-year-old may not be able to reach high enough to wash windows but, when storm windows are removed, he or she easily can learn to brush off excess dirt or, if balancing on a stool poses no problem, he or she can wash windows while an adolescent sibling carries storm windows to the basement for storage.

Joining in a cooperative effort and accomplishing the desired goal will give everyone a feeling of pride and satisfaction.

And, best of all, the outcome of your projects will bring tangible results in the form of home improvement.



Kitchen best

Since most home fires start in the kitchen, that's the best location for the extinguisher. But it's wise to buy additional units for such risk areas as the basement workshop or the garage.

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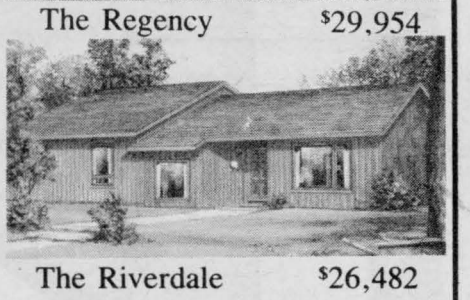

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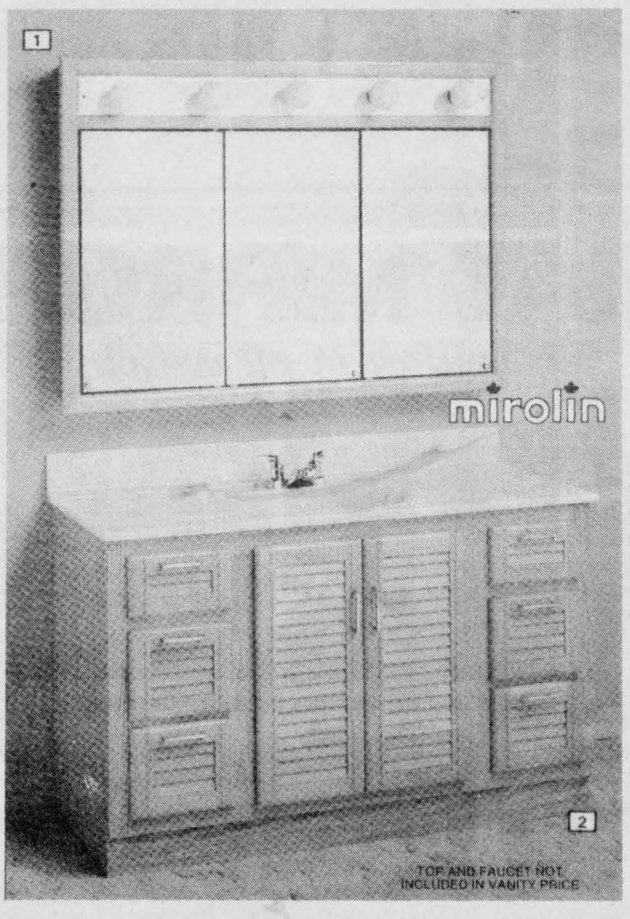

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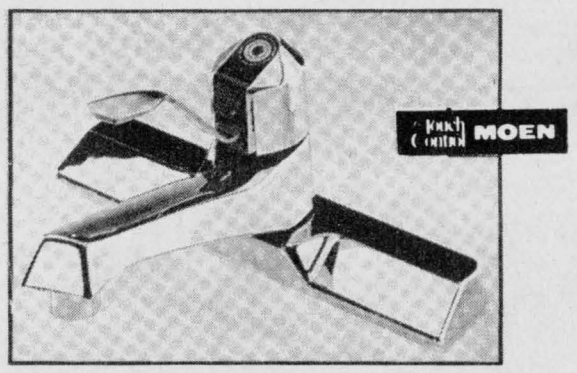

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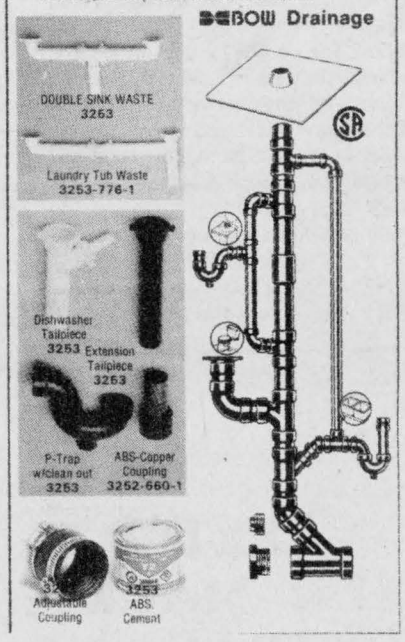

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Laminates resurfacing in fashionable kitchens

If you are looking for a glamour treatment for your kitchen, it is time to get reacquainted with laminate. Yes, you read it right! Good old laminate, always a favorite for its easy care and durability, is one of the Eighties' great fashion surprises.

Today, you will encounter laminate in so many colors it can be hard to choose; elegant faux granites and marbles; sleek metal and lacquer surfaces; woodgrains so realistic one might fear splinters; patterns ranging from spatters to stripes; and exciting dimensional textures in such designs as leather, slate and linen.

An equally big surprise is the way high pressure decorative laminate is used in today's kitchen. Visit a design-conscious kitchen showroom or leaf through some of those glossy magazines, and you will see laminate adding style to cabinets, range hoods, tables, shelves, desks, lighting canopies, window frames, doors and dinettes as well as to countertops and backsplashes.

Despite the continuous onslaught of design fads, laminate remains the most popular material for those hardworking countertops, say professional designers.

That is hardly surprising for, with laminate, you not only eliminate tile's pesky grout problems and granite's high cost, you also get fashion options particularly welcome for this conspicuous surface.

No other material, for example, gives you as many color choices, so here is an easy way to give a humdrum kitchen a shot in the arm.

Just picture a hunter green counter in a kitchen with pale oak cabinets. Or how about hot pink or bright yellow for a white kitchen.

Countertop edges, too, have become fashion objects. Sometimes they are nicely rounded or curve upward ever so gently to form what designers call "a no-drip edge." These are especially effective shapes for counters sporting a luxurious faux stone design.

Others incorporate wood trim or form colorful, striped edges, courtesy of a new king of laminate, which boasts color all the way through.

Since neutral color is the best idea for large kitchen surfaces, paying special attention to countertop edges makes a lot of sense.

In a way, highlighting these edges is similar to accessorizing a basic dress. For example, patriotic red, white and blue-striped edges could be just the zip needed in a white kitchen.

Or consider a combo of mauve, pink and black stripes if your kitchen is one of the fashionable new grays.

Of course, such edge treatments can be repeated on tables and open shelves, too.

But laminate's biggest new kitchen role is unquestionably in Eurostyled cabinetry. You see these frameless cabinets, with their sleek laminate surfaces, in today's best kitchens, but even they are now under the influence of the laminate industry's color savvy.

While the first Eurostyle cabinets were almost always white or almond, the new versions may well be pink, gray, peach or even black.

An interesting feature of Eurostyled cabinetry are tambours. Think of the flexible, slatted closure of a roll-top desk, and you have got the basic principle of the tambours.

They are great for appliance "garages," cabinet doors that must slide rather than open outward, and any curved surface. They are also used where textural interest is sought for a soffit or wall.

Local home and building centers stock only the basic laminate colors and finishes, but they should be able to show you small chips of the full lines available from major manufacturers.

Revive old kitchens inexpensively

Look around your kitchen. Is it showing signs of age?

Maybe you're satisfied with its size and layout but not its looks. Functionally, it may be fine — but aesthetically it's over the hill.

If that's the case, there are remedies that won't cost you nearly what a full-scale remodeling would. With paint and do-it-yourself products, you can create a fresh new look for your kitchen and avoid major expense.

Here's how one couple pulled off a facelift. First, they painted their old dark wood cabinets a light clay color and replaced the heavy brass hardware with white porcelain knobs. Next, they painted the walls and range hood a soft Wedgwood blue.

Then they put down inexpensive sheet flooring in a red brick pattern. The flooring is 12 feet wide, so there aren't any seams. They merely cut the flooring to room size with the aid of a paper pattern and cemented it down. An added bonus: The new flooring happens to be "no-wax."

To cap the project, they installed an acoustical suspended ceiling. The two-foot by four-foot acoustical panels are scored to give the appearance of smaller individual tiles.

They picked an acoustical suspended ceiling because, unlike plaster or drywall, it's uniquely suited to kitchen use. Besides absorbing noise, it's washable and fire retardant, and you can attach recessed fluorescent lighting fixtures to its metal supporting grid.

And it's easier to install than you might think. First you hang wires from the old ceiling. Then you attach light-weight aluminum supports to the wires to form the grid. Finally, you rest the two by four panels in the grid.

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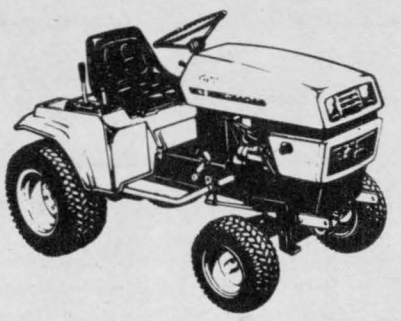

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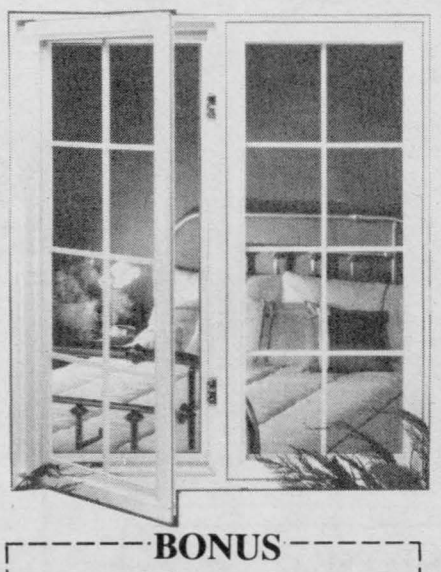

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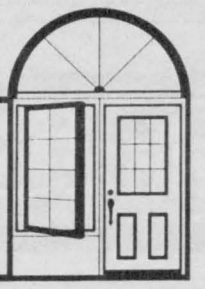

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Choosing the right interior paint is important

The winter doldrums tend to get you down, and the blahs of the long cold months spent mainly indoors have you longing for a change of surroundings.

The solution may be as simple as a new spring coat — of paint that is — to bring your living space alive once more.

Your first step is to decide what type of interior wall paint to buy.

Deciding on quality and price range for paints is like deciding what quality of clothes to wear, people often buy more expensive paint because the exact combination of color, finish and type isn't always available in more economical varieties.

The two main types are latexes (water thinned) and alkyds (solvent thinned) and both have their advantages.

CLEANING EASY

Latex paints are quick to apply, quick drying and don't leave a lingering paint smell. Being water based, they make cleaning of brushes and spills an easy matter.

Alkyds take at least four hours to dry and leave newly covered walls with a strong painty odor. But because they're resin based instead of water based, they're perfect for the bathroom and kitchen to resist the effects of prolonged exposure to steam and humidity.

Both paints are washable, but the alkyds with their tough, non-porous surface, stand up better to vigorous scrubbing.

Six sheens, ranging from flat to super-glossy, can be selected for various areas of the house. The type of finish to use is usually determined by the amount of activity the room is exposed to.

For such high-traffic areas as kitchens, bathrooms and children's rooms, a semi-gloss paint is good, allowing grease, crayon and food stains to be removed with soap and water without dulling the gloss.

The more gloss in the finish, the more durable and dirt resistant the paint will be. But high-gloss paints tend to spread unevenly, drawing attention to minor imperfections in the wall. Also a high-gloss surface in brightly lit areas can actually create glare.

FLAT ON CEILING

In most areas of the house, flat paints are usually used to ensure even distribution of light. Ceilings especially should be covered with flat paint, preferably white, for the maximum reflection possible.

Newly plastered walls should be allowed to dry for three months before painting. Also, before painting over a glossy surface, sand it or treat it with a liquid deglosser. Otherwise, the paint will peel.

A 4.5-litre can (one Imperial gallon) generally covers 37 to 46 square metres (400-500 square feet). Don't try to stretch the paint by thinning with solvent or it will show in the results.

Choice of colors is a matter of personal taste, but a few guidelines should apply: A soft hue is usually preferable for the living and dining room. Rooms with high light exposure are better off with a darker color, and a room that has low light exposure is better with brighter shades that give high light reflection.

Paint stores usually have charts listing in order which colors reflect light best.

Trends in bathroom design

All told, the average person spends more than 14 days in the bathroom in the course of a year. It is no wonder, then, that bathrooms are becoming more gradiose affairs with eye appeal as well as function.

Our bathrooms have evolved to reflect society. The average North American showers more than six times per week, up significantly from only a decade ago. Europeans only shower about four times weekly.

Women prefer to shower with warmer water than men. The two-person shower has become a popular item on the request list of designers. Fans of the two-person shower say besides its obvious merits, it keeps costs down.

Catering to the two-person shower crowd, designers have come up with extra-wide showers designed for two, and shower heads with multi-controls, so each person can decide on the the pressure or temperature preferred.

Double sink vanities have become increasingly popular recently, but designers say the double sinks are only practical if both partners brush their teeth at the same time. If not, the space can be put to better use for storage.

When placing the sink on the vanity, consider putting the sink off to one side, leaving more counter space.

Most bathroom mirrors are placed about 22 inches from the edge of the vanity. Designers recommend that mirrors for people who need glasses should be placed closer, all the easier to shave or put on makeup without having to squint or lean forward.

Sunken tubs may have eye and design appeal, but experts aren't singing the praises of step-down tubs. Sunken tubs tend to be dangerous, and clumsy to clean, requiring a headstand for each scrubbing.

A bathroom ventilation fan is a must. Mould grows faster without the fan, causing health problems. Quieter fans are now on the market, for those who are willing to pay more for peace and quiet.

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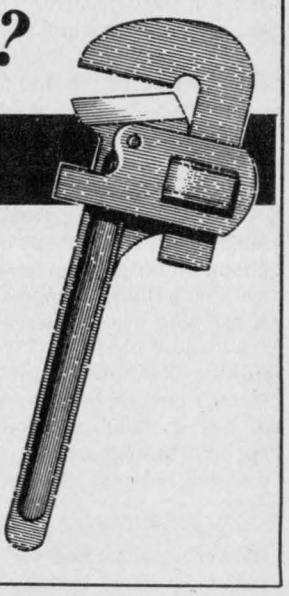

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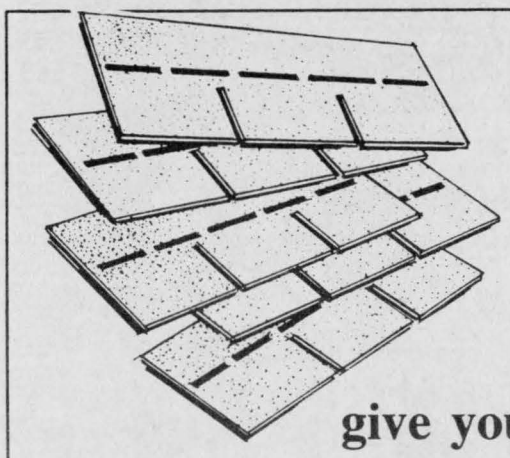

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Make your home sparkle with simple cleaning tips

Now that spring is here, it's a wonderful time to clean and spruce up your house.

Baking soda will clean soap off shower stalls, remove embedded juice stains from kitchen countertops and even get grills in shape for outdoor barbecues.

Baking soda is pure, natural sodium bicarbonate; its unique chemical and physical properties allow it to neutralize household odors, dissolve grease and dirt, and clean kitchen and bathroom surfaces without scratching.

It's also economical — one box will solve most of your cleaning needs, reducing the number of cleaning products you buy.

• *Floors* — If winter has left your kitchen floors ridden with black heel marks from shoes and boots, it's easy to remove them with a bit of baking soda. Sprinkle it on a damp sponge and rub into the affected areas. The baking soda crystals are strong enough to remove the marks, but too soft to scratch or harm your floor. Rinse and buff dry.

• *Countertops* — For food spills such as juice, coffee or tea that have stained your countertops, apply a paste of three parts baking soda, to one part water. Let it stand for half an hour and wipe with a damp sponge and rinse.

To remove onion, garlic and other food odors from countertops or wooden chopping boards, sprinkle dry baking soda on a damp sponge and rub it in. Rinse with water and dry.

• *Shower Curtains* — To remove mildew that has accumulated on your shower curtain over the winter months, as well as cleaning and deodorizing it, sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge and gently scrub. Sponge clean and wipe dry.

• *Fiberglass Shower Stalls* — If your shower stall has become cloudy and dull with soap scum, sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge and gently scour it clean without scratching. Sponge clean and wipe dry. This method also works for the chrome fixtures on sinks, tubs and showers. You will see everything sparkle again!

• *Silver Flatware/Serving Pieces* — Get your fine silver pieces ready for spring dining and entertainment! To remove built up tarnish, use the following method for all your silver — from flatware to candle-sticks.

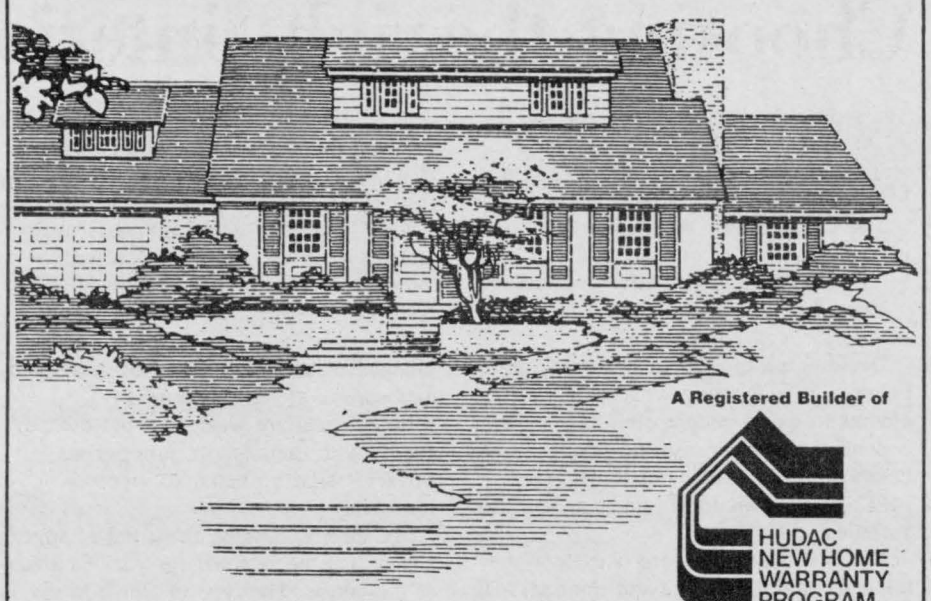
Fill a non-aluminum pan with hot water and place a small (5 inch) square of aluminum foil in the pan. Add baking soda (one teaspoon per quart of water) and bring to a boil. Drop silver in briefly. Remove silver with tongs and wash with soapy water. Rinse and buff to a shiny gloss.

Another handy tarnish-removing alternative is to apply baking soda with a damp sponge or soft cloth. Rinse and buff until shiny.

• *Grills* — After a winter of using the oven and microwave, you'll probably be more than eager to use the outdoor grill once again. To remove food and grease from your grilling rack, soak in a solution of baking soda (four tablespoons of baking soda per quart of water). For stubborn, burned-on food, sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge and scour rack lightly.

Another wise tip for outdoor cooking: Keep a can filled with baking soda near the grill. If the fire flares up, you'll be able to extinguish it. And, since baking soda is of food grade purity, it won't hurt the food being cooked.

• *Driveway/Porch/Garage* — For oil spills on your driveway or on the floor of your porch or garage, pour baking soda generously on the spill. Let it stand overnight and, the next day, sweep it up and throw it away.



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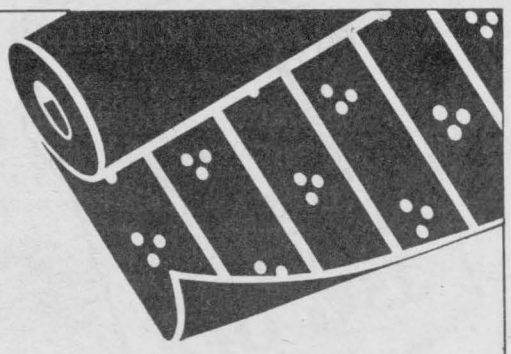

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Steps to childproof your home

According to statistics from recent years, some 2.6 million children in this country, aged 16 and under, are injured accidentally each year, and nearly 11,000 children under 15 years of age are fatally injured annually.

One child in two is injured severely enough to require medical attention, or to have his or her activities restricted for one or more days.

Many of the dangers which may pose a threat to infants or young children are present in kitchens and bathrooms.

In the kitchen, safety precautions should be observed in regard to appliances, particularly the kitchen stove.

To safeguard against burns, children should be kept away from the stove. Never allow them to lean or climb on it.

Little children can burn themselves seriously by falling against a hot oven surface, or by reaching up to touch a burner.

If a child is in the kitchen while cooking is going on, confine him or her to a playpen or away from the stove area.

Also, unless all four burners are needed, only use the back two. While cooking, keep pot handles turned toward the back of the stove, to avoid having them accidentally pulled off the top.

Don't store ''goodies'' children want — such as cookies and candies — over the stove. This tempts children to climb up to get them.

Other kitchen appliances which could be hazardous to children are electric food processors, toasters, blenders and juicers. Be sure to store sharp appliance blades where children are unable to reach them.

Sharp utensils, primarily knives, should be safely locked in drawers or placed in special wall racks, far above a child's reach.

Other dangerous objects, such as tacks, needles, pins, scissors and keys, should also be stored beyond reach.

Special safety latches are designed with children's protection in mind.

Poisoning is one of them most common pediatric emergencies experienced among children under five years of age. It is also one of the most difficult to treat.

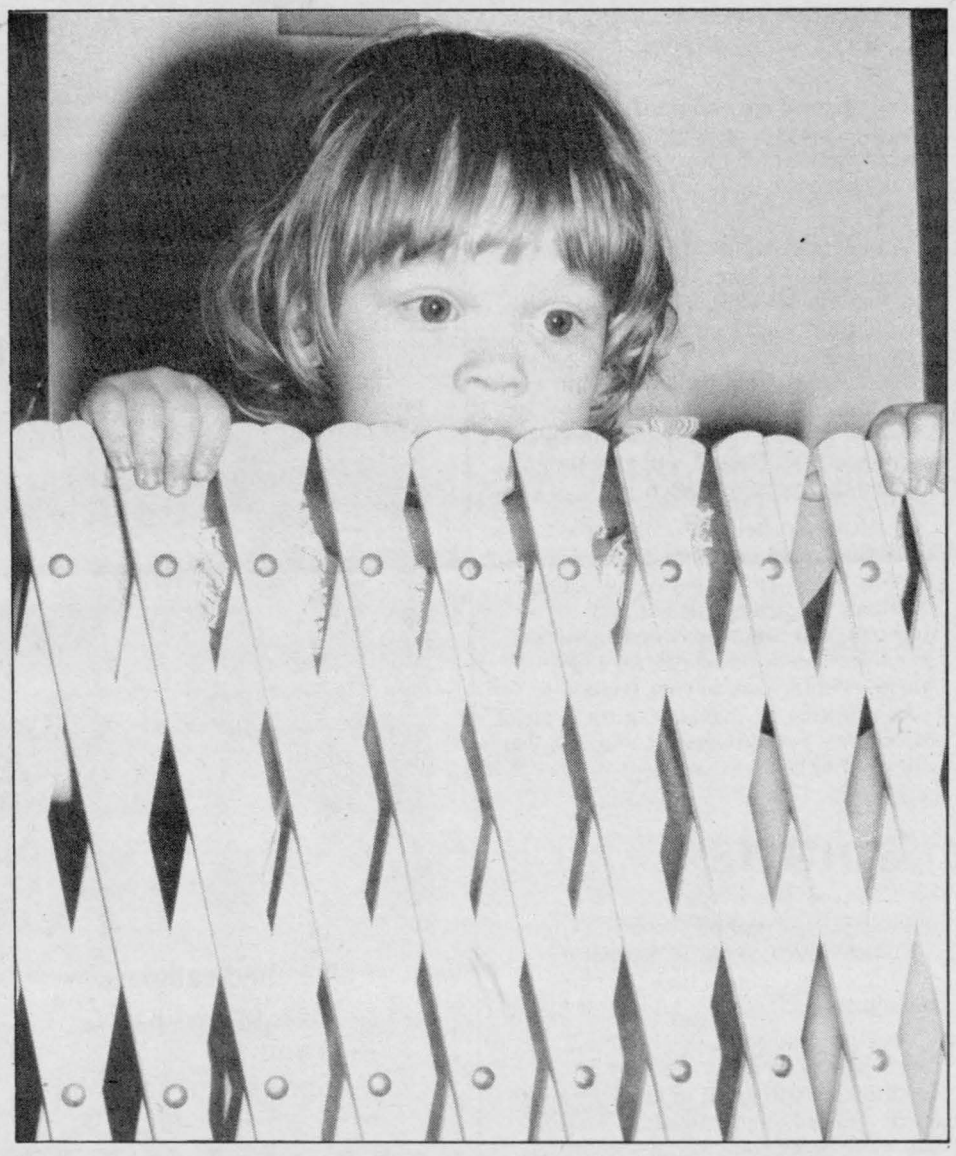
Each year, more than 50,000 children swallow household materials, often resulting in death.

Eliminate the chance of poisoning by securing floor level cabinets that contain cleaning and waxing agents, aerosols, insect sprays and other poisonous substances.

Whenever possible, keep no more household substances than are actually needed or purchase only those with child-resistant packaging.

Storing only food items in food cabinets will also help prevent poisonings. Remember, also, that food extracts, such as vanilla, are toxic in large amounts.

Most serious poisonings occur while a toxic substance is actually being used.



When looking at home improvements one of the first things a couple with young children needs to consider is playing safe. A high, folding gate is the answer to keeping small children off the steps and out of trouble.

Be careful not to leave cleaning agents on surfaces which are easily accessible to toddlers. WHen answering the telephone or doorbell, keep these items in hand.

Also, if ant and roach traps are used in the kitchen, make sure they are out of reach of a crawling child. Poisonous plants should be removed, or placed beyond reach too.

If your child has swallowed or is affected by a poison, find out what the product was. Read the label for first aid instructions. Call a physician or poison control centre immediately.

Be sure to take the container with you if you go to a hospital emergency room or poison control centre.

Other potential dangers in the kitchen include suffocation, highchairs and tables, and slippery floors.

Plastic bags should be stored behind locked cabinets or in closets to avoid possible suffocation.

Highchair safety begins with a good chair, one which meets safety standards for infants.

In positioning the highchair in the kitchen, be sure that it is not near the stove, cabinets or busy food preparation area.

Special care should also be taken when waxing or mopping kitchen floors. Protect your child against unnecessary falls on wet or soapy surfaces.

Mop up spills or grease immediately, and make sure floor mats have a non-skid backing to prevent sliding when walked upon. Gates or enclosures should be installed wherever stairs or doors are located.

Many of these same safety precautions should be adhered to in the bathroom.

In particular, all medicine cabinets should be locked, even if dangerous substancs aren't stored there. Aspirin, deodorants in all forms, nail polish remover, cosmetics, cologne and hair spary are all poisonous. Even vitamins in large quantities are dangerous.

Keep drug supplies uncluttered and dispose of them properly after an illness is over.

Don't encourage children to think that medicine tastes like candy, enticing them to get into the medicine cabinet.

Shampoos, conditioners, bowl cleaners and other bathroom substances, like kitchen cleaning goods, are hazardous. Liquid drain openers are especially hazardous and can be fatal. Store them all together in a separate, safe place or behind locked cupboard.

This same caution applies to all sharp objects. Razors, blades and glass containers should also be secured out of children's reach.

Attention should also be given to wet and soapy surfaces. To assure safe footing in bathtubs and showers, use a suction-cup mat or adhesive safety strips.

Hand bars mounted securely to the wall may also prove a safeguard against falls. At nighttime, provide a night-light for children to see their way to the bathroom.

Infants should be washed in small inflatable or plastic tubs rather than adult-sized tubs. An infant can drown in just a few inches of water. No young child should be left alone while in the bathtub, even for short periods.

Children should not be left unattended even when drawing water for a bath. Burns are caused when children fall into hot bath water, or turn on scalding hot water, by mistake.

Also, test the water temperature before bathing a baby, and tightly shut faucets when not in use.

Finally, eliminate the risk of electrocution. Electrocutions often result from misuse of electrical appliances in the bathroom.

Keep appliances such as radios, phonographs, hair dryers and sun lamps out of the bathroom.

Never allow a child to touch an appliance with wet hands, while in the bathtub or while standing on a damp floor.

Throughout the house, cover all electrical sockets with outlet covers or safety plugs.

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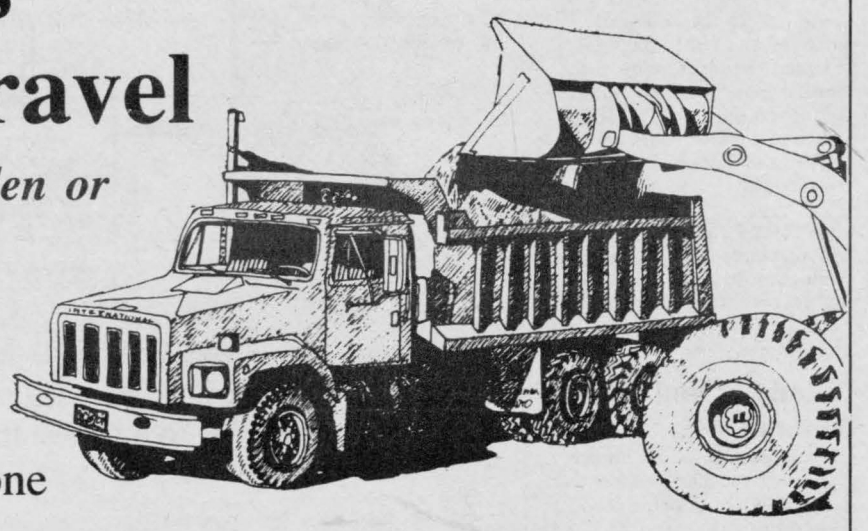

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Quick change kitchens

With today's busy schedules, the kitchen is more than ever a place for the family to gather. Here are some ideas to make your kitchen more inviting.

1) **Change Lighting** — New fixtures can change your kitchen from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Track lighting will produce dramatic effects and highlight special areas, while lighted ceiling fans add nostalgic charm. Try placing small table lamps in strategic places to light up dark corners.

2) **Add Plants and Flowers** — There's nothing like plants to help make a room feel more lived-in. Easy-to-care-for ferns or hanging plants are perfect for the kitchen and take up little space.

Straw wreaths can be changed with the season, giving your kitchen a festive look. Create a garden atmosphere by lining the tops of cabinets with flower boxes.

Inexpensive window greenhouses are visually appealing, but also can be used for growing fresh herbs year-round — a touch the family gourmet will appreciate.

3) **Provide Electronic Entertainment** — A TV, radio or cassette tape deck in the kitchen will provide a welcome source of entertainment while you cook, iron, study or participate in other activities. It also will attract family members to the kitchen.

In fact, now you can find TV's, radios and tape players designed especially for the kitchen, which mount under cabinets so as not to use up precious counter space.

4) **Create a Family Wall** — A new twist to the "family album" can be created by hanging, on one wall, a collage of family photos from vacations, birthdays or special occasions.

The collage can grow and change with your family. Individual pieces of artwork, chosen by family members and prominently displayed, will give the kitchen that personal touch.

5) **Display Collectibles** — Start a collection of old canisters or colored bottles. Aside from enjoying searching out items at garage sales or flea markets, you can display your collection on cabinets or windowsills, adding a warm, country look to your kitchen.

As you will see, even one of these ideas can change your kitchen into a room you will want to be in.

Get the summer 'smarts'

Switch to a "smart" programmable thermostat to ensure a cool home for your family this summer.

You'll wake up comfortable on hot summer mornings and step into a cool home after sizzling, sultry days. While you're away from home or asleep, you'll save energy because the temperature can be set up to an energy-saving mode.

Although the concept of set-back on heating is widely used, set-up on cooling is used very infrequently. Setting the thermostat up (e.g., moving the indoor temperature closer to the outdoor temperature), will result in smaller heat gain and lower cooling costs.

In most cities, about 10 percent of cooling energy can be saved by daytime cooling set-up.

Once programmed, these "smart" thermostats calculate when the air conditioning will go on to have the house at the desired temperature by the time you wake up or come home.

Typically, a unit pays for itself in one year. Models are available for conventional and electric heating and cooling systems, heat pumps and multi-stage systems.

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Energy Efficient Insulation Standards

Minimum Insulation Levels*

Ceilings (flat)	RSI 7.0	(R 40)
Ceilings (cathedral and sloped)	RSI 6.3	(R 36)
Walls	RSI 3.3	(R 18.7)
Exposed floors	RSI 4.9	(R 28)
Basement walls exterior (down to footing) or Interior (down to floor)	RSI 1.8	(R 10)
	RSI 2.1	(R 12)

*Canadian Electrical Association Double 'E' Insulation Standards

Thermal resistance values given refer only to the insulating material and not to the total thermal resistance value of the wall, ceiling, floor, etc. All insulation must meet CMHC, ASHRAE Guide, CSA Standard C2731 and Ontario Building Code requirements.

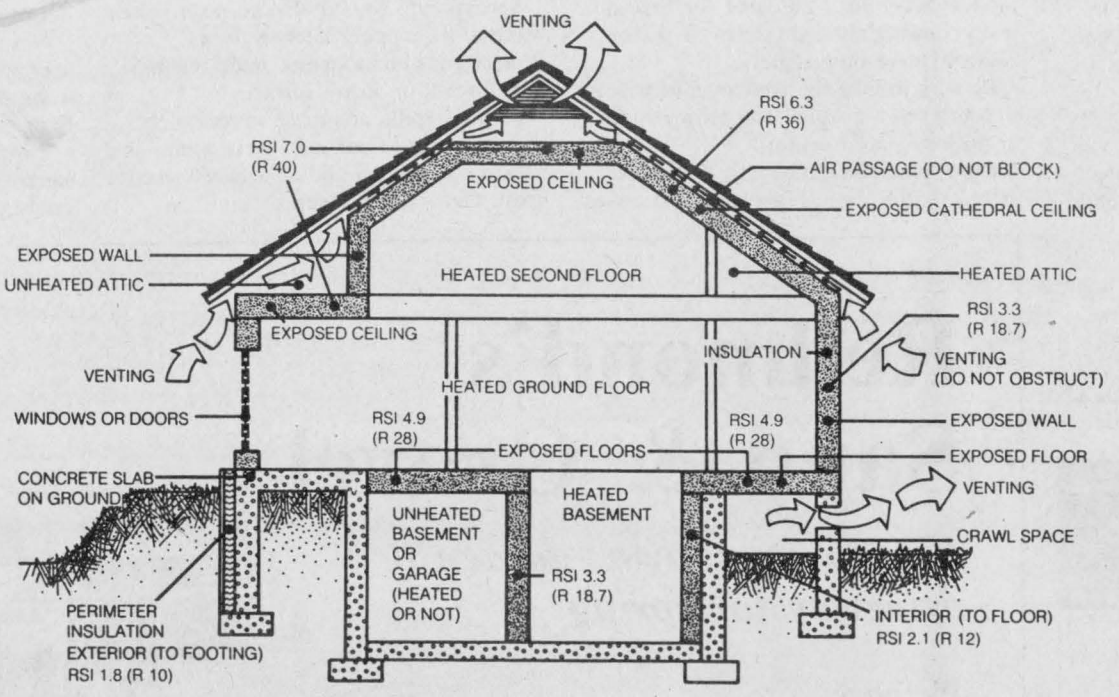
Fireplaces

All fireplaces shall be equipped with glass or metal doors and have tight fitting dampers. A separate fresh air intake is mandatory.

Windows and Glass Doors

Double glazing for all climate areas below 5,800 C degree days (10,500 FDD). (Double glass window or single glass with storm sash RSI 0.36 (R 2.04), 12 mm (1/2") air space and thermal break in metal frames.)

Triple glazing for climate areas exceeding 5800 C degree days (10,500 FDD). (Double glass with storm sash or triple glass prime construction RSI 0.45 (R 2.63) with two air spaces totalling a minimum of 12 mm (1/2") and thermal break in metal frames.)



All surfaces exposed to the outside air, to unheated areas or to a garage (heated or unheated) shall be insulated.

Doors (Non Glass)

Insulated door with thermal resistance of RSI 0.7 (R4) or uninsulated door plus storm door.

Heating

Electric hydronic, electric forced air, electric baseboard, electric hot water heat.

Air Quality

Air quality in homes can be assured with a positive, reliable mechanical ventilation system. The system should provide a continuous supply of ventilation air to each habitable room.

1. A continuous supply of ventilation air at a rate of 5 L/s (10 cfm) for each habitable room, bathroom, and kitchen, and 10 L/s (20 cfm) to basements and utility rooms. The total continuous ventilation rate need not exceed 0.45 air changes per hour (based on the total house volume including any basement volume).

2. The ventilation system shall be capable of providing an additional 25 L/s (50 cfm) on an intermittent basis activated by a humidistat and manual override or timer switch.

3. Exhaust air capability of 25 L/s (50 cfm) for each bathroom and 50 L/s (100 cfm) for kitchen on an intermittent basis.

Ventilation system design and installation should be in accordance with the Canadian Home Builders' Association's R-2000 Home Program Design and Installation Guidelines for Ventilation Systems.

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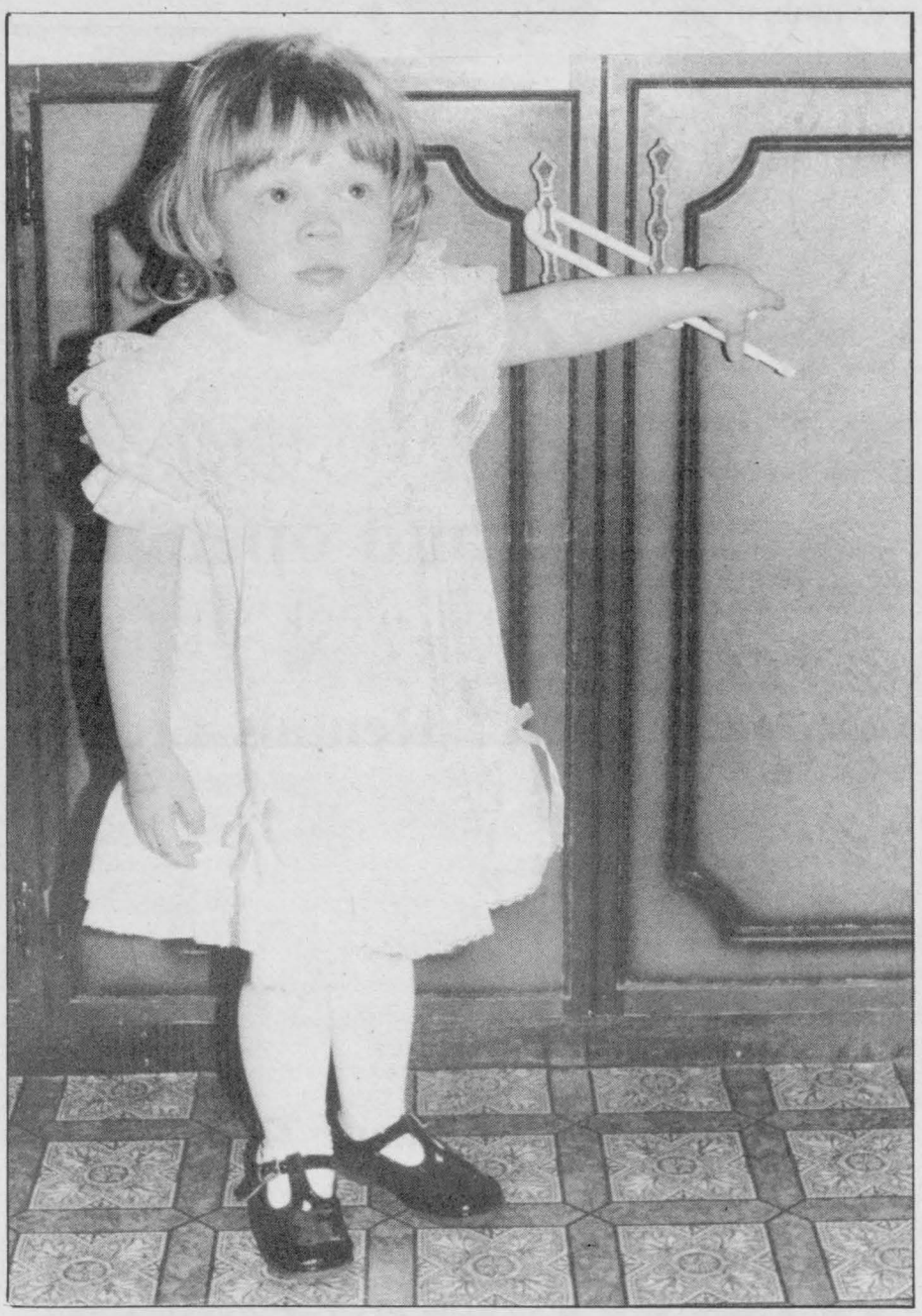

Play it safe

Special safety latches are the answer to keeping a small child out of those easy to reach cupboards. When considering home improvements this is one of the many safety precautions parents of young children should consider.

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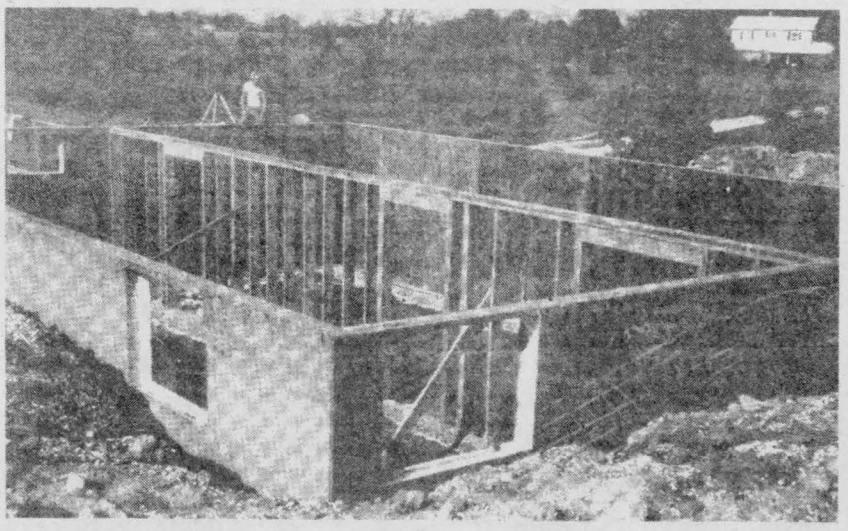

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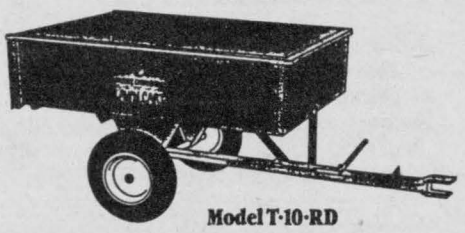
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Tree pruning combines both art and science

Proper pruning can be the best thing for your trees and shrubs; improper pruning can be the worst thing for them.

"Pruning is both an art and a science," says Horticulturist Ruth Friendship-Keller of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's rural organizations and services branch.

The "artist" in you will prune to retain or restore the natural form of the plant.

The "scientist" in you will prune to remove dead and/or diseased branches, stimulate flower and fruit development, control the plant's overall size, and to improve the plant's structural strength, health and vigor.

There is no ideal time to prune all plants.

"The correct time to prune depends on the flowering season of the species, its growth habit and your specific reason for pruning," she says.

Generally, late winter or early spring is the best time to prune deciduous trees, some vines, roses and certain shrubs; at these times of the year the plants have no leaves and that makes it easier to decide where to prune.

At these times, there is also less danger of damaging the bark. Fruit-bearing trees should be pruned just after they have leafed out.

On the other hand, spring flowering trees and shrubs such as forsythia should be pruned after flowering. (This is because these plants produce their flower buds on the growth of the previous season).

By pruning at this time, you won't destroy prospective blooms and you allow the plant sufficient time and space to grow and produce flower buds for next year.

Shrubs that flower on the current year's wood, such as hydrangea, should be pruned before they flower.

Late fall to early winter is the poorest time to prune because the wounds may not close during the winter months.

Winter pruning is also uncomfortable for you, so you are less likely to take the time to prune with care.

Trees that "bleed" profusely such as maple, birch, walnut, and yellow-woods should only be pruned when they are in full leaf because the leaves will be using the sap — thereby reducing the "bleeding" and promoting rapid healing.

Pruning while the trees are in leaf also makes it easier to see which branches are dead or lacking vigor.

But avoid pruning in late summer because this could stimulate growth which won't be able to "harden off" before the cold winter temperatures strike.

Suitable Tools

As with any gardening task, it is important to use suitable tools and equipment.

Special equipment and expertise are needed to prune large trees so you might be wise to hire a professional for these large jobs. But small trees can be pruned easily.

A sharp, properly set saw is required for the larger cuts and will do a better job for any size of cut than even the best pruning shears. A pruning saw should be used wherever possible. Hand pruners should be light, sharp, properly set and of good quality.

Long-handled pruners can speed a pruning job but they tend to leave stubs so use these selectively.

"The choice of tool is a matter of personal preference, but remember to keep your tools sharp and properly adjusted to make clean, flush cuts," she said.

Pruning paint, which was once a common recommendation, has been found to be of no benefit to the process of wound closure. Therefore it is not necessary to use pruning paint, except for cosmetic reasons. If you do decide to paint the wound, use a thin coat of some commercial material prepared for this purpose. Do not use house paints. Apply the wound paint only to the wound; painting the bark all around the trunk can kill the tree. All pruning cuts must be made so natural processes will heal the cut surfaces completely and not contribute to the death of the bud immediately below the cut.

"There is a slightly-raised ridge of bark on a branch called the branch collar which is the tissue separating the branch from the main stem. This can be used as your guide to proper pruning," she said. Place your saw or shears in front of the ridge and cut downward and slightly outward. This results in removal of the branch without injury to the main stem. By leaving the "collar", there is less chance of infection.

"Flush cutting" or cutting through the branch collar makes a larger wound than necessary and slows down wound closure. This type of cut often results when chain saws are used for pruning. Prune deciduous trees to have a more or less "open" centre.

Branches that grow inwards and those that are in contact — rubbing and wearing each other — should be removed. This allows the tree to grow to the outside and upwards, where it will be exposed to the maximum amount of light. Remove watersprouts and suckers to encourage the growth outward and upwards.

Always consider the manner of growth and climatic conditions for best pruning results. Because few evergreens produce new buds on wood more than two years old, prune evergreens mainly on new wood or on the previous year's wood, early in the growing season up to mid-summer. Allow enough time for the new growth to "harden off" before winter sets in.

Spruce, pine and fir should be pruned shortly after the new growth has begun in the spring. And restrict your pruning to the new growth only. Prune junipers by cutting back the branch to a healthy lateral branch.

Pyramidal or central trunk evergreen trees should be pruned only to remove dead or overlapping branches. Trees with double leader branches should be pruned to one terminal leader, while the tree is young.

Cabinets move from kitchen

Can kitchen cabinetry masquerade in the family room or living room as a great looking wall system or entertainment centre?

"Of course," say the experts.

Most people don't think of the tremendous design versatility of kitchen cabinets because, historically, these cabinets were not designed for use as fine furniture.

"Begin by planning around a definite space," they suggest. "Having dimensions well in hand before you begin makes the task much easier. Then, determine what function the cabinetry will serve.

"For example, entertainment centers will need defined spaces for television sets, VCRs and stereo equipment."

Wetbars and wall systems are two other popular design configurations which have been successfully created using quality stock cabinets.

There are a host of interesting accessories, such as wine racks, glass holders, tambour cabinets, desks and decorative trim, all in the same wood, to complete the look effectively. If you want to store collections, books, bric-a-brac or whatever, there are also cabinets with beveled glass doors, interior lighting and beautifully finished interiors.

How to begin? Visit local kitchen design centers to get a feel for the range and type of cabinetry available.

They'll be happy to demonstrate the many options available and will provide design and installation assistance, as well as how-to instructions, if you're a confirmed handyman.

One of the often overlooked advantages of using quality stock cabinetry is that you can do it yourself, if you're reasonably handy.

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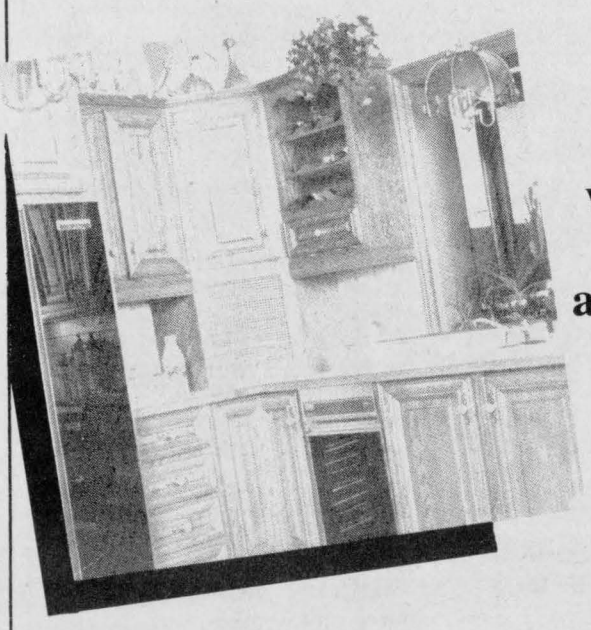

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Size up mattress needs

Making the right investment in a mattress will pay restful dividends in years of comfortable and healthful sleep.

A mattress wears out from constant use. If you have been sleeping on the same mattress for more than 10 years, better begin thinking about making another investment.

Your thinking will be influenced by the results of a simple examination. Remove all bed clothes and look for any irregularities in the surface.

Lumps, bumps, peaks and valleys mean your mattress is wearing out and is ready to give you more than headaches.

How about edges? Are they firm or do they sag? Are the springs eternally detectable to the feel? How confined are you in your sleeping space?

Start preparing for a new bedding set if you have answered "yes" to most of these questions. Begin with a visit to a retailer whose selection is wide in variety and price.

Price and quality are usually connected. As a general rule, the lower the price, the fewer years of comfort you can expect from the mattress. But remember, mattresses are one of the most heavily advertised and promoted items.

Buy from experience. Lie down on several mattresses before making the decision. Before you fall head over heels for a mattress, make sure you are investing in the right size and type.

Size yourself up and you will know what is needed. If you sleep alone, stretch and move around a lot, or need extra elbow room, it helps to determine the amount of space for these and other activities.

Standard widths range from 38 inches (twin) to 76 inches (king) wide, with lengths from 75 to 80 inches.

A couple buying a mattress should know a double size measuring 53 inches wide offers about as much room for each person as a baby's crib.

Queen (60) inches wide) or king (up to 80 inches wide) is the logical choice for a couple. The California king is 84 inches wide.

In any case, sleep authorities recommend mattresses that are six inches longer than the height of the person sleeping on it.

Two types of mattresses are innerspring and foam, available in most stores.

Innerspring, the most common mattress type, is filled with a series of steel coils fitted between layers of varying thickness of insulation, padding material and a fabric cover known as ticking.

Quality in innerspring mattresses is based on the thickness of the coil and the number of rings or turns, plus how they are linked together and how they work together to support your body weight. The number of coils is only one indication of mattress quality.

Thicker coils with more turns provide greater firmness and support. Coils with fewer than six turns are usually found in lower-quality mattresses.

The insulation covering the springs prevents them from poking through the network of wire, fiber padding and netting.

The thicker the cushioning, the better the mattress. Polyurethane, cotton felt or batting, and other materials make up the cushioning tied to the rows of springs to keep them from moving horizontally.

A mattress needs a box spring, in order to support the mattress and keep it from prematurely wearing out. Foundations of springs vary from actual coils shaped like a figure-eight to metal and wood bars and planks.

If the foundation is wood and foam, the foam should be at least two inches thick for the proper support and wear.

High density polyurethane is the dominant material in foam bedding. To ensure sustained support and longevity, the foam contains plastic pellets for proper resiliency.

Better foam mattresses have a higher latex content, which is more expensive to produce, but its density is greater than conventional foam bedding.

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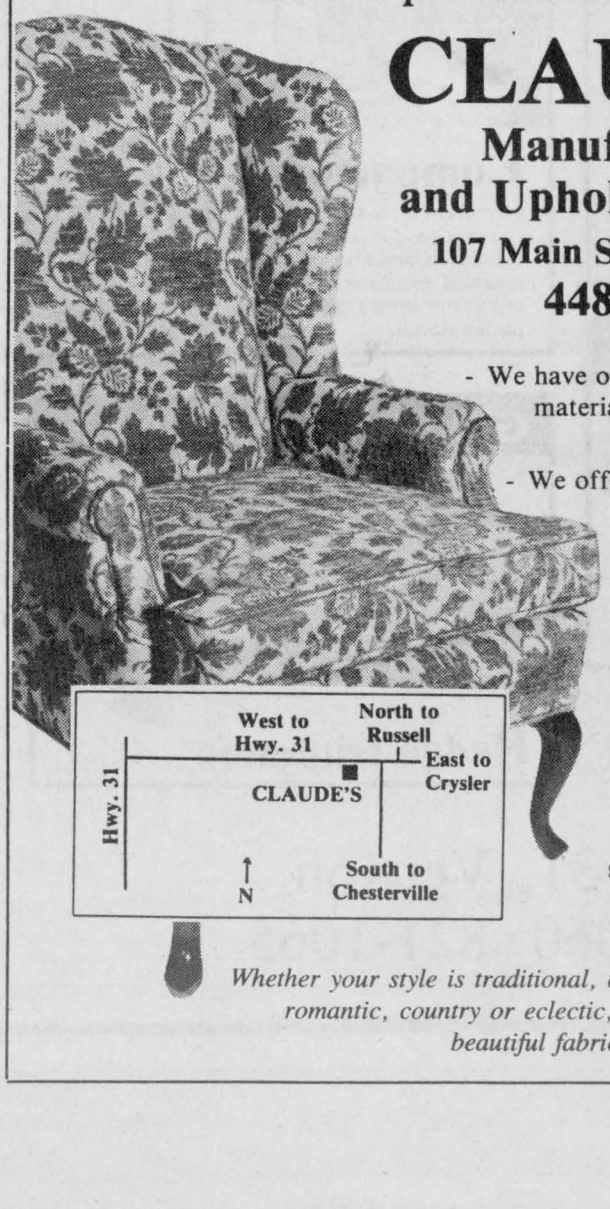

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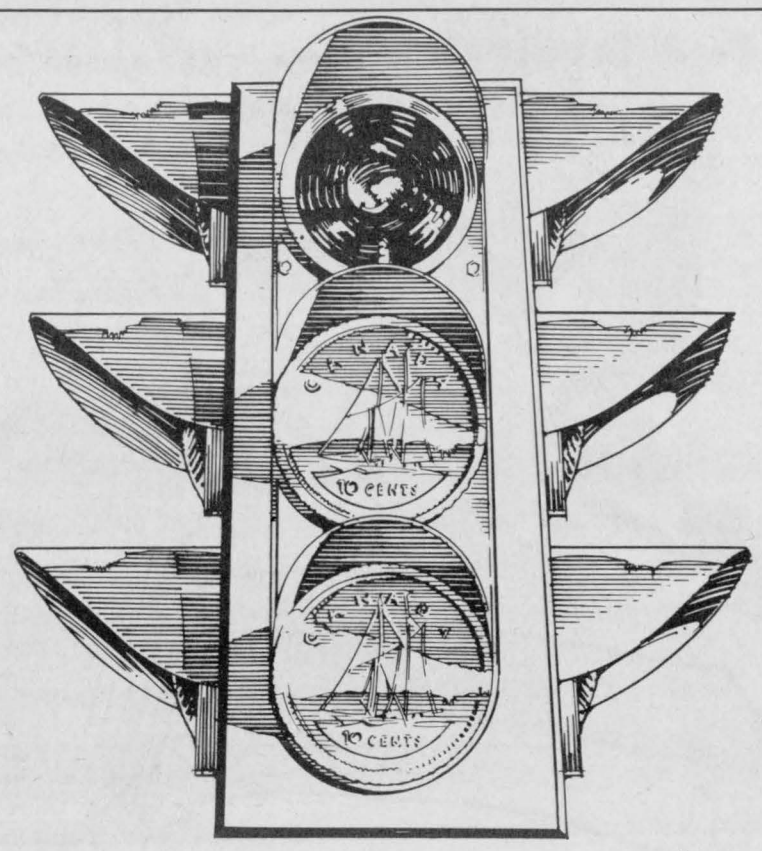

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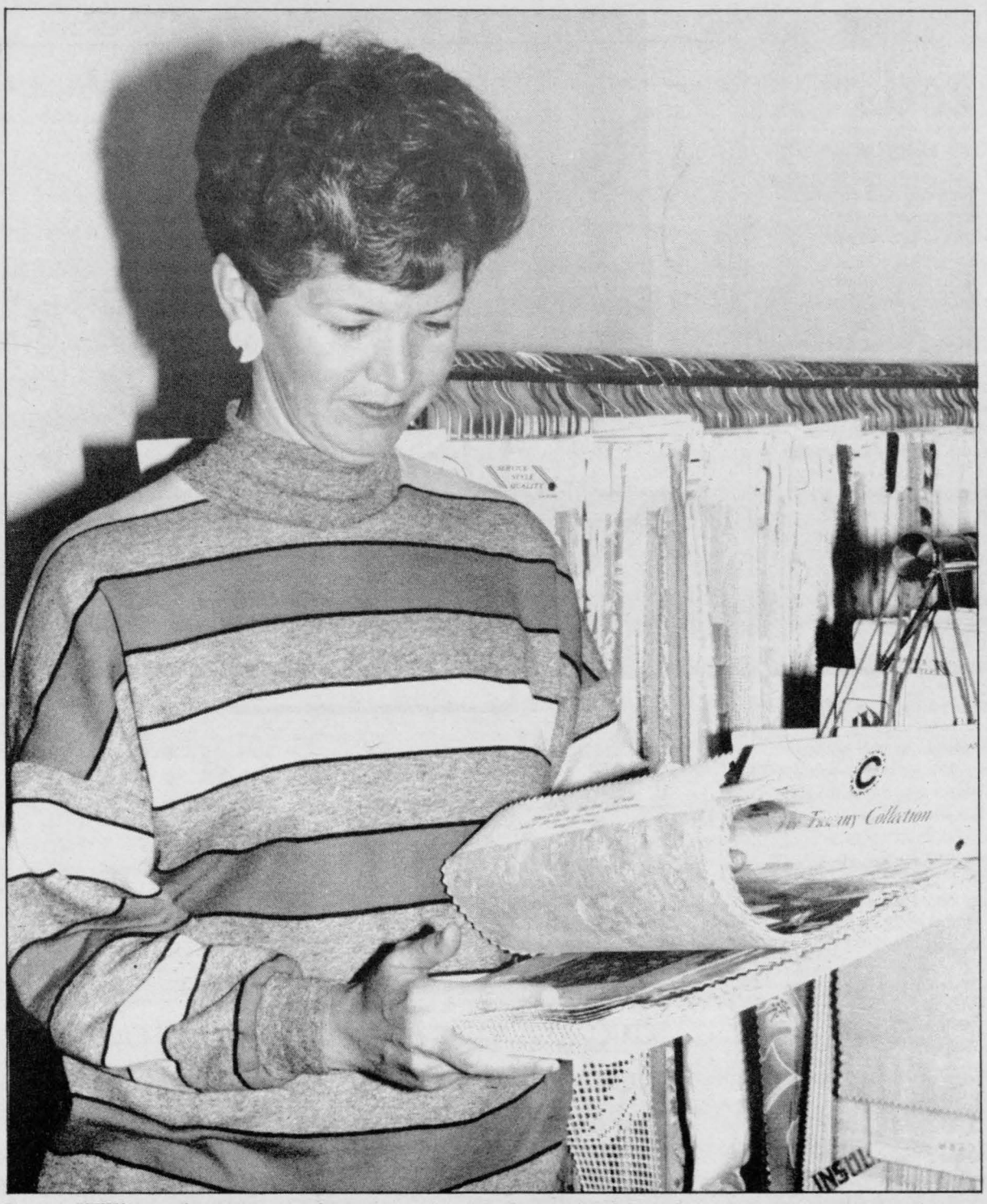

Donna Williams shows some of the many fabric samples she carries in her South Mountain showroom. She orders fabric selected by clients from mills in Southern Ontario and Montreal, sews curtains in her workroom, then adjusts them in the client's home. Press Photo—Laucius

SOUTH MOUNTAIN — Window dressings, like fashions, come and go, says consultant Donna Williams. By keeping a classic look in mind, a home decorator can usually get the most mileage for their money.

Williams is a self-confessed night-time soap opera addict, but her viewing habits have a business twist. "A lot of women watch for the clothing. I watch for the decorating. If that's your line, that's what you notice."

Williams, who has had a lifelong love affair with handiwork, began her career in home decoration as the owner of a fabric shop. She joined a team of decorating experts commissioned to design home interiors, and her consulting business just took off from there.

Four years ago, she opened an office in the former fabric store on South Mountain's Main Street and called her business Donna's.

Hiring a consultant has its advantages, she says. With the benefit of experience, a consultant is able to outline the possibilities for a window, taking its size, shape and exposure into consideration, and advise on the best-looking, and wearing, fabrics.

Williams says she spends 90 per cent of her working time in the homes of clients, checking widths and lengths and making adjustments on the curtains as they hang on the window. Allowing for the time it takes to order fabric and make adjustments, it takes about a month to do a window treatment from start to finish.

The first step is finding out what the customer wants. Often, Williams admits, the customer isn't sure of what they want. The first item on the agenda is checking the color of the carpet. Carpet and window coverings are often the most costly investments made in decorating, and usually remain constant for many years.

Fashion trends are often reflected in window covers. Popular for the last few years are muted shades of gr green, blue and rose, says W maintains racks of samples fr manufacturers in Montreal ar Ontario.

Natural fabric is always be usually the most expensive al ranging in price from $15 to metre. Good weight cotton u in the $25-30 range.

Antique satin is a perennial costing about $15 per metre. about $50 per metre, and she between $20 - 40 per metre.

Next on the agenda is cons exposure of the room. Windo south or west need to be insu from the sun, and its potenti damage to furniture, and nor windows need to be insulated winter cold blasts.

Visibility is the second con Some individuals are more s than others at the thought of public view, and window co be tailored to the wishes of i clients.

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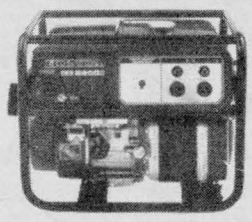

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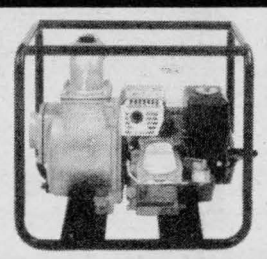

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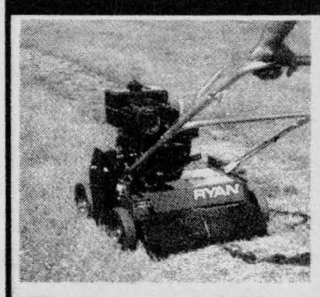

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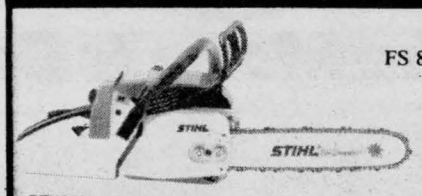

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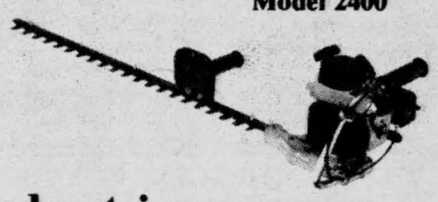

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While heavy drapes were the vogue a decade ago, Williams says new textured sheers with a liner can provide a light look while blocking out heat or cold.

Balloon or Roman shades have been steadily picking up in popularity, but the customer has to pay for the extra labor and effort that goes into making them.

Wide-width fabrics have recently made their mark on the marketplace. Without extra seams, the finished product looks nicer and stays fresher, says Williams.

Blinds are another alternative picking up in popularity, and what a selection today's homeowner has available. Clients can choose from horizontal, vertical, pleated or roller blinds, all that can let the sun shine in, or cut off the elements with a pull of the cord. It costs about $400 for the fabric and installation of blinds for a patio door.

Blinds are cutting into the popularity of curtains in the home decorating market, says Williams, who estimates that 50 per cent of her business is blinds. She orders shades from the manufacturer and adjusts them in the home as they are installed.



Donna Williams uses one of three special machines used to sew curtains. Williams says it takes about a month from start to finish from the time fabric is ordered to when curtains are hanging.

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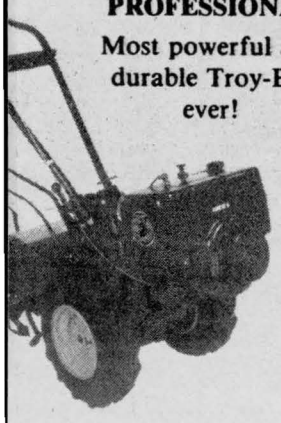

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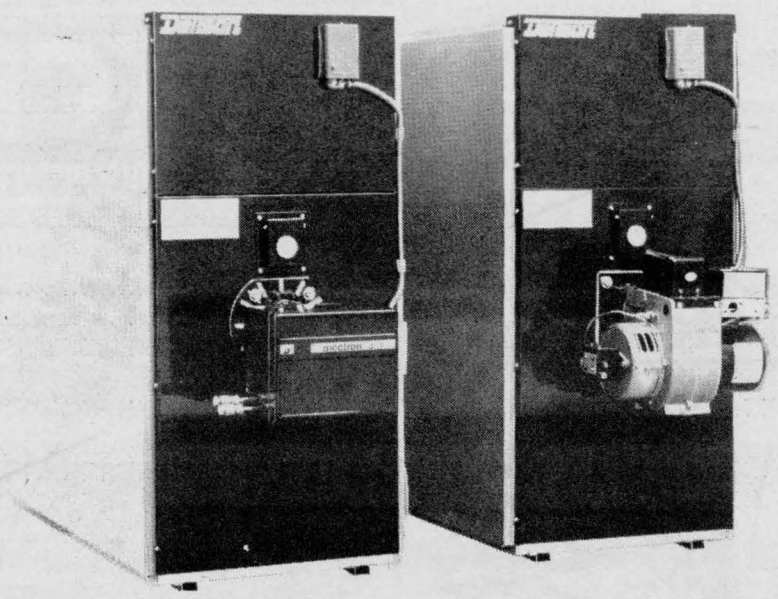

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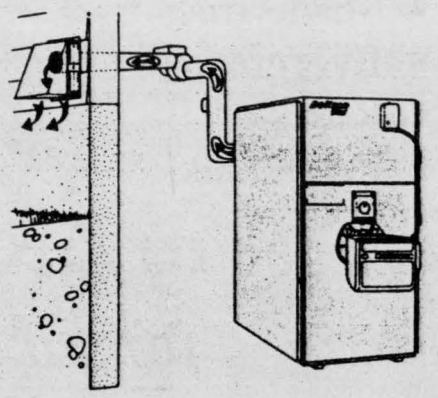

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Bring a room to life with fresh arrangements

There's no better way to bring the feeling of springtime indoors than with a beautiful arrangement of fresh cut flowers. Flowers can change the mood and look of a room, and are appropriate with any style decor.

And now, thanks to recent improvements in the transportation and storage of blooms, more and more varieties of flowers are available to mix and match for the exact look you want.

How you select a floral arrangement for a room depends a lot on your own personality and individual style.

The first step is to consider carefully the room setting you wish to enhance. And there's no reason to restrict floral arrangements to dining rooms or living rooms.

After all, just as much time is spent in kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms; these settings can be just as appropriate for the "added touch" flowers provide.

Begin by asking yourself, does the room have one dominant color? How large is the room and how much space is available to work with?

What type of vase or container will be used to arrange the flowers? Will the arrangements be viewed from one side or more angles?

Flowers should complement a room's color scheme but they don't have to match it exactly.

It's more important to make sure your flowers and container work to-gether — a vase should suit the flowers and the environment.

With regard to containers, a narrow neck vase allows a few long stems to support one another. Wide neck containers on the other hand, cause stems to fall freely away from one another and a greater number of flowers or additional foliage becomes necessary for a full look.

A good starting point, if you're interested in purchasing or sending an arrangement, is a visit to your local florist.

Remember, though, that the beauty of decorating with flowers is that there is no one "right" look — there are many.

Whatever arrangement you choose, you'll want your flowers to last. If flowers are arranged in floral foam, they will draw moisture naturally, as they would from the earth or a branch. Just check the moisture level daily and add water as needed.

If some flowers wilt before others, remove them so they don't spoil the appearance of the bouquet or adversely affect the other blooms.

You can also try reviving a drooping flower by cutting the stem at an angle which opens the passage for water; then, reinsert it in the foam.

An arrangement in a vase of water, however, is presented with an unnatural environment. In order to keep these flowers looking their best:

- always recut the stems under warm water and on an angle so as not to restrict water uptake. When cut in the air, stems may suck up a small amount of air, causing the base of the stem to be blocked, and restricting water flow.
- Remove all foliage that rests below the water line. Foliage left under water tends to rot, releasing harmful bacteria and ethylene gas, which can cause flowers to die prematurely.
- Ideally, vase water should be changed every two or three days, at which time the flower stems should be recut.

Although principles are important there are really no hard and fast rules when it comes to arranging flowers. Just experiment, using your eye as a guide — and have fun.

Keep cool, save energy

Don't let utility bills get the best of you this summer. These few simple steps will help you keep cool and save energy at the same time!

Your air conditioner is a big energy user. Set the thermostat on your air conditioner to 78 degrees, instead of 72, and you may cut your electricity use almost in half.

Installing an old fashioned ceiling fan will help circulate the cold air from your air conditioner. Even when used alone, ceiling fans use no more energy than a 15 watt light bulb, and can reduce room temperature by 10 to 12 degrees.

Sunlight streaming into a room can create a lot of heat. On summer days lower the shades, close the blinds, and draw the drapes to protect windows from the sun. Installing shutters or awnings also helps.

Avoid, if you can, installing a room air conditioner in a window that gets lots of sun; it makes the air conditioner work harder and wastes electricity. If you have a choice, put the unit on the north or east side of the house, or in a shady location.

The single most important factor in keeping cool and saving energy, is to make sure you have an efficient unit that is the correct size for the area you're cooling.

Room air conditioners are labeled with an Energy Efficiency Rating (EER). This tells you how efficient the unit is, and how much it will cost to run it for one year, as well as comparing it with other units of the same size.

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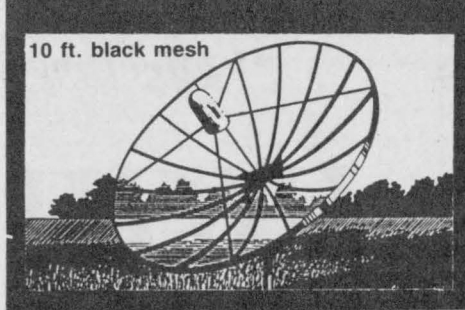



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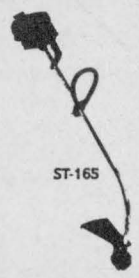

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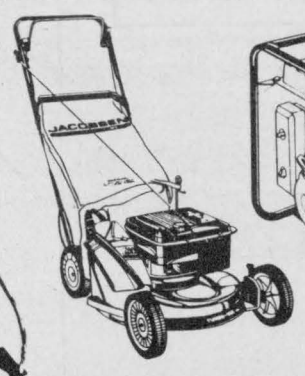

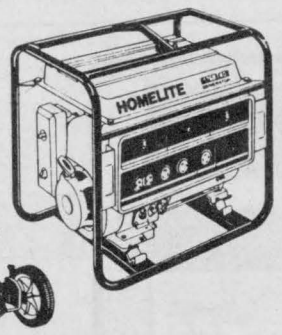

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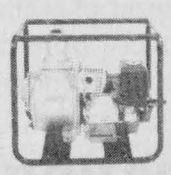

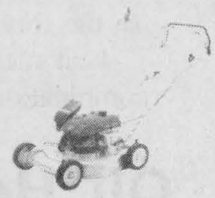





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Revitalizing home's appearance can pay off

Spring is a time of renewal. Since ancient days, when the reality of the seasons was explained by the myth of Demeter, the goddess of the crops, mourning for the absence of her daughter Persephone who was constrained to spend three months of every year in the Underworld (corresponding in calendar terms, to the winter), people have rejoiced when spring returns.

The first pointed crocus buds are an indication that it's time, once again, to make the house sparkle.

Closets are cleaned out, spring clothes pulled out of mothballs and, from attic to cellar, the work of refurbishing proceeds.

Outdoors, siding is washed down or installed, painting proceeds, roofs are cleaned and repaired, decks are built, while within, a lively wallcovering is hung to reflect the joyous mood of spring, and a fresh coat of paint revives a tired corner.

Large or small, each project adds to the sense of anticipation, and the feeling of a job well done.

If you can't afford, this year, to have a new kitchen installed, you may want to consider new countertops or cabinets — those with ingenious storage systems are particularly appealing.

New curtains can work wonders for virtually every room in the house; in your cleaning forays you may discover, tucked away, ones which didn't look quite right several years ago, but which suddenly seemed attractive again.

Failing that, it's a cinch to run cafe curtains up on a sewing machine, using bright new fabric which capture the spirit of the season.

New sheets and towels, too, can do wonders, and a bunch of fresh flowers in a favorite vase are a small touch which has big impact, wherever it's placed. And it's a great reward for tackling all the dirt and grime which have built up over the course of the winter.

Some of the refurbishing is purely practical. In spring, as well as fall, for example, smart homeowners check to make sure their insulation is adequate; after all, keeping cool air in during the summer months is as important as keeping it out during the winter.

New windows can give a house a whole new look; they can also add energy-efficiency and, depending on the material of which they're made, serve to reduce maintenance time in future years.

Then, there's cleaning out the garage, sorting through the eccentric accumulation of months or — in some cases — years. Do you really need the first rake you ever owned — sentimental value aside (and who can really get attached to a rake?), is it functional with half its teeth broken off?

What about the old, muscle-powered lawn mower? If it's been replaced by an easy-to-use electric model (or if such a replacement is on your list of priorities for spring '88), now may be the time to do the honorable thing by the old standby.

If you can't bear to throw it out, consider donating it to a charitable organization (you may be able to take a tax deduction), or putting it up for sale — along with a myriad of other useless-to-you items — at a yard sale, which can yield extra revenue for some things you really can use.

If you're really assiduous during your spring cleaning marathon — and strict with yourself, in addition — you may be able to collect quite a number of objects which you can turn into capital in this fashion.

And, undoubtedly, in the process, you'll find things you've forgotten about, and which have been put away for so long they seem new again!

Whether the projects you tackle are large or small, done on weekends, or a little every day, you'll derive a certain satisfaction from the whole process of readying your home for the summer to come.

In the process of beautifying it, you will be part of a continum that stretches all the way back to the dawn of recorded history, participating in the spirit of renewal which has been a springtime ritual ever since man has been able to define the difference between winter and spring.

Remove spots on carpet promptly

Homeowners purchasing new stain-resistant carpets can expect their floor covering to keep its original beauty for years, providing they give it frequent vacuuming, remove spills promptly and "chemically" clean the carpet regularly.

Controlling the amount of moisture when cleaning is the key to keeping carpet looking good throughout its entire life.

Here are some cleaning tips to carpet owners:

• **Avoid excess water** — Flushing spills with water dilutes and spreads them, and much of the moisture is irretrievable; the spill — now wider — can wick back up to the tips of the fibers, creating a larger spot.

If spills "magically disappear," they've probably been trapped in the backing, where they may create odors.

• **Blot and blot again** — With a dry, white towel, blot wet spills immediately. Cover the spill with an absorbent dry cleaner, working the cleaner through the carpet with a brush or your fingers.

Vacuum away the cleaner after it is dry (spills are absorbed into the cleaner's sponge-like particles), or place a layer of paper towels on the spill and weight them down overnight.

• **Clean soiled areas only** — Concentrate "chemical" cleaning exclusively on areas where carpet is soiled, and keep the balance of carpet looking good by vacuuming regularly.

Dry cleaning is the most practical method for minimizing cleaning efforts, since cleaned areas can be blended into surrounding clean carpet.



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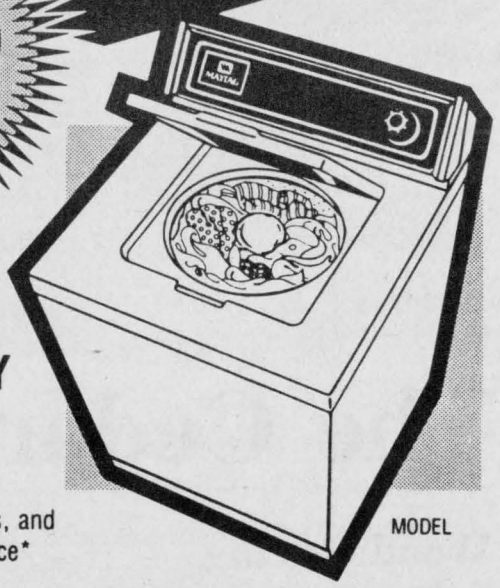

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Naturalistic gardening source books available

Naturalistic gardening is becoming a very distinct alternative to what we traditionally think of as "landscape design", says Landscape Architect Fiona Rintoul.

This distinction is apparent in the type of plant material used and in the way it is used. Naturalistic gardening means that you use native plants — plants that naturally grow in fields and forests — in a style reminiscent of Mother Nature herself. Wildflowers, native trees and shrubs — purchased at garden centres or from wild flower societies — are planted using nature's patterns as a guide.

Although naturalistic gardening, in the pure sense, means "natives only", plants that are not native to your area will thrive alongside natives in your garden. Plants, not native to your area are called "ornamentals" or "exotics".

The Saucer Magnolia (Magnolia soulangeana) for example, is native to Asia; when you grow it here in North America, this plant is referred to as an ornamental.

On the other hand, the native Sugar Maple (**Acer saccharum**) is considered an ornamental in Great Britain. "It is all a matter of location; understanding this distinction is the first key to naturalistic gardening," she said.

So, before designing your own naturalistic garden, you must find out which plants are common to your area — both woody plants (trees and shrubs) and herbaceous plants (commonly called wildflowers).

Start with books such as Diekelmann and Schuster's "Natural Landscaping — Designing with Native Plant Communities"; M. Sperka's "Growing Wildflowers"; James H. Soper and Margaret L. Heimburger's "Shrubs of Ontario"; Alfred A Knopf's "The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers"; or editor James A. French's "Wildflower Magazine".

These reference books outline the botanical (Latin) and common names of native plants and the type of environment they usually inhabit. For example, some plants grow on the edge of forests; some under the canopies of large trees; others only in open fields.

"Knowing this will help you decide which plant species are best suited to your garden," Mrs. Rintoul said.

Finding sources of native plants is not as easy as finding Junipers or geraniums, but native plants are becoming more common at garden centres. Major nursery catalogues often contain sections dealing with "native trees and shrubs" or "wildflowers". And once a year in the spring, the Royal Botanical Garden in Hamilton sells native plants as a fund raising campaign.

"An increasing number of groups are also organizing plant sales or plant swaps, trading plants that its members have propagated," Mrs. Rintoul says.

Through this unique approach to gardening, you help preserve dwindling native plant species while at the same time, provide a home for wildlife.

"But digging up plants from forests and fields is strictly discouraged; while you may be "saving" one trillium, you are likely destroying others in the process," she said.

Once plants are established in your garden, transplant seedlings, take cuttings and divide clumps, as you would with other garden plants.

And remember that a naturalistic garden earns its distinct beauty from its random patterns; it should look as though it was planted by Mother Nature herself.

Install outdoor speakers

One of winter's gifts is the time to enjoy music. As you're snuggled up by a fire, the stereo seems as natural a part of the season as Christmas carols.

But, when spring comes and we move outside to garden, play tennis, swim or just lounge around and soak up the sunshine, we often leave the music and the pleasure it gives inside, along with the fireplace tools.

While some homeowners have temporarily brought their music outside with them by cranking up the volume on the stereo or moving the living room speakers, a new generation of outdoor speakers makes permanent installation of a high quality outdoor sound system a home improvement idea worth listening to.

Tom Milan, marketing manager for Design Acoustics loudspeaker systems, says that new case materials make today's outdoor speakers weather resistant, and a speaker such as his company's omnidirectional DA-360 is designed to tolerate snow, rain and high humidity.

Milan suggests a pair of speakers for those who want to maintain a stereo effect. But, says Milan, with a good omnidirectional speaker, even a single loudspeaker can be centrally positioned to provide music to a wide area.

Installation of speakers can be as simple as connecting speaker cable from the amplifier to the speaker and carrying the speakers outside, or as complex as burying the speaker wire about four or five inches underground and coming up into the speaker itself via a ½" threaded pipe.

An intermediate approach is to mount the speakers on the eaves or to string the cable from tree to tree.

Installing outdoor speakers can enlarge your house effectively by increasing your area of enjoyment. As home improvement projects go, it is fast, easy and inexpensive.



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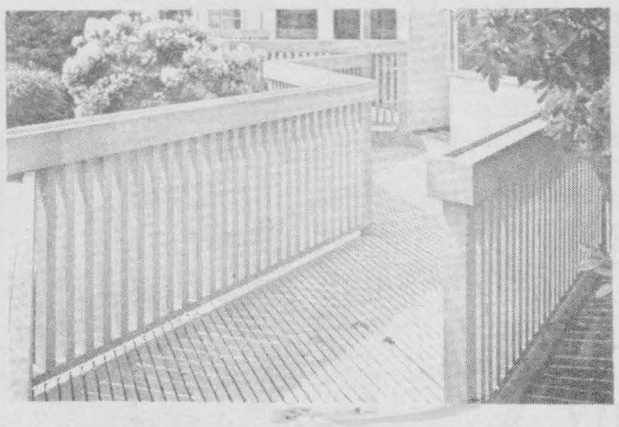

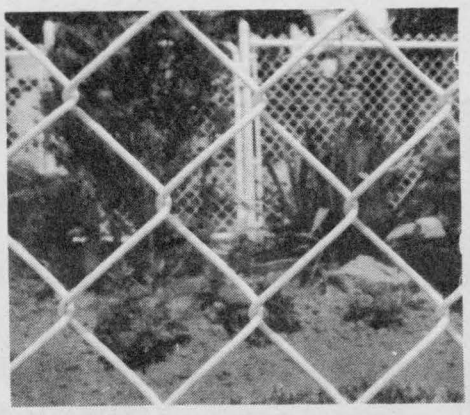

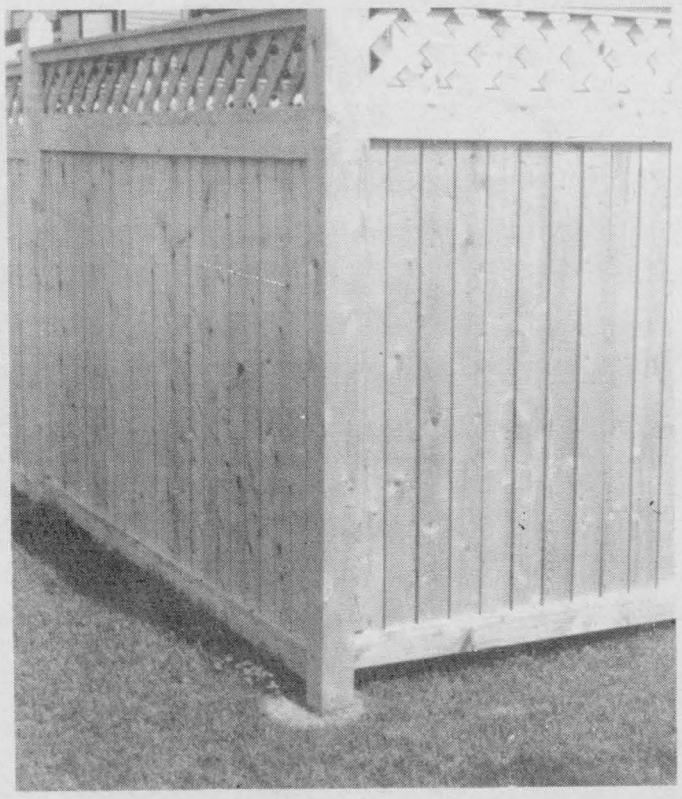

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Lighten cleaning load

Did dirt and grime have a busy winter at your home? If so, there's no need to panic. Spring cleaning can be made easier — and your load will be lightened — by these cleaning tips.

• A well-stocked, centralized cleaning centre is a housecleaner's best friend. Everything you need should be on hand: Clean rags for dusting, all-purpose cleaners and detergents, brushes of all sizes, a basket to carry everything in, and a vacuum cleaner with a set of attachments.

• You can make short work of accumulated dust and grit on floors, furniture, walls and ceiling with the aid of a vacuum cleaner correctly equipped for your home and lifestyle.

In general, an upright vac with an agitator brush-beater bar is best for wall-to-wall carpeting, while a canister vac is recommended for cleaning bare floors and hard-to-reach above the floor places.

• Clean a room from top to bottom. First, gather all the cleaning supplies you'll need. This will help you save extra steps between cleaning closet and excavation site. Then, clear the room of messy clutter — redistributing bric-a-brac after you've cleaned.

Pull furniture away from walls, turn back carpet edges, choose a starting point, and simply work your way around the room. Dust settles downward, so door frames come first and floors last.

• Quick-clean the bathroom and kitchen every day. Their tile and porcelain surfaces are fairly stain-resistant if the dirt and scum is not allowed to build up. Hint: Rinse out the tub and/or shower stall immediately after using, while you are still inside.

• It's best to leave the big jobs — like window washing, floor waxing and rug shampooing — for a time when you can do it all at once, with vim and vigor. If you're rushed or tired, you might have to abandon these jobs in the middle, which makes the remaining dirt more noticeable.

Practise safety in the bathroom

Avoiding dangerous accidents in the home is not a difficult task. It requires taking a few precautions and using common sense. One area that contains the most hazards per square foot is the bathroom.

The tub should have a rubber mat and durable hand rail to facilitate getting in and out without slipping or falling.

Old razor blades should be thrown away and not left lying about within a child's reach.

Hot radiators should be covered or mounted in an area where they cannot cause accidental burns.

Electrical switches should be properly insulated and placed where they cannot be reached from the shower or tub.

Bathroom doors should lock with mechanisms permitting them to be opened from the outside.

Medicine cabinets containing dangerous drugs or toxic chemicals should be locked or kept out of reach of children. Dispose of medicines that are no longer needed or have outlived the expiration date.

Radios and TV sets should never be used near the tub or shower.

Electrocutions can occur when reaching over to turn it up, off, tune it better or change the station. The danger of doing this is not to be ignored as the results can be deadly!

In addition, the appliance may fall into the water, which is almost always fatal.

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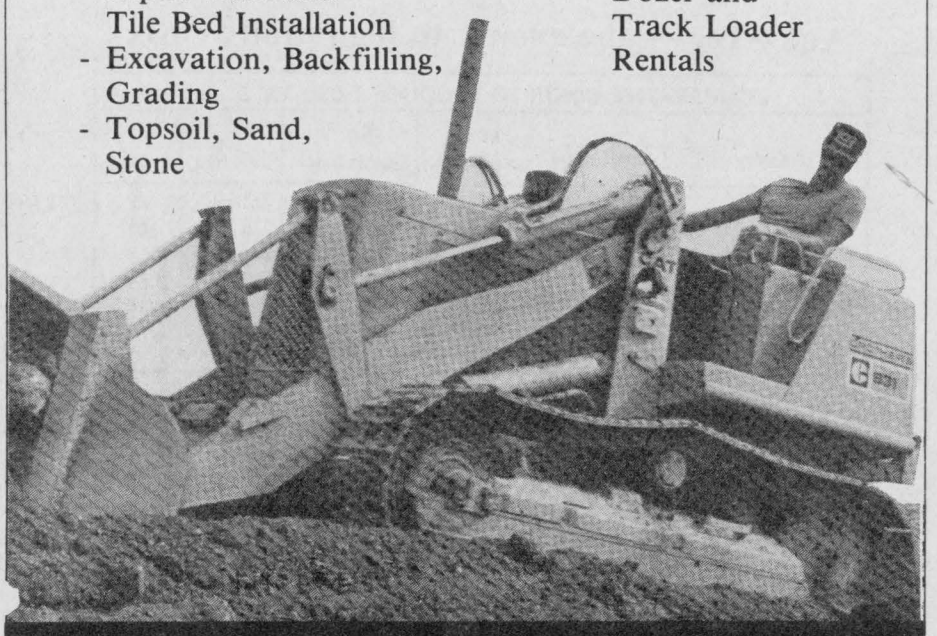

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Upgrade attic insulation

The start of warmer weather signals the beginning of many outdoor home improvement projects including the planting of flowers, the seeding of a lawn, and the building of a deck. But what's there to do on a rainy Saturday afternoon?

How about upgrading your insulation levels? Adding fibreglass insulation to your attic can bring it up to today's energy standards and is easy to do. It also offers many benefits. It helps reduce energy costs, and adds to the resale value and comfort of your home — to name a few.

Before you begin insulating, keep in mind the following important tips about insulation, and the two "Bs" — vapor barriers and ventilations.

INSULATION

The most important thing to be aware of with insulation is R-value. R-value is simply the resistance to heat flow of the material. When evaluating the energy efficiency of insulation, it's important to look at R-values, not just thickness. The higher the R-value. the greater the insulation power and the greater your potential energy savings.

VAPOR BARRIERS

Vapor barriers are important when insulating because they help guard against the transmission (in summer) of water vapor from cool areas inside your home to the warm surfaces inside attics and walls where it can cause damage.

A variety of materials can be used as vapor barriers. The most common are Kraft asphalt paper, foil and polyethylene plastic sheeting.

The first two can be purchased already attached to the insulation. Polyethylene sheeting is purchased separately.

They should always be installed towards the cool-in-summer part of your home. When adding a second layer of insulation, do not use a vapor barrier. Use unfaced insulation.

VENTILATION

While vapor barriers retard the flow of water vapor from inside air to attics and wall cavities, ventilation allows excess water to escape to the outside.

In the attic, there are four different types of vents that your home may have, including eave, roof, gable or ridge vents.

It's important when insulating your attic that you not cover eave vent openings and maintain at least a one-inch space between insulation and roof sheathing so that air from the eave vents can enter the attic space.

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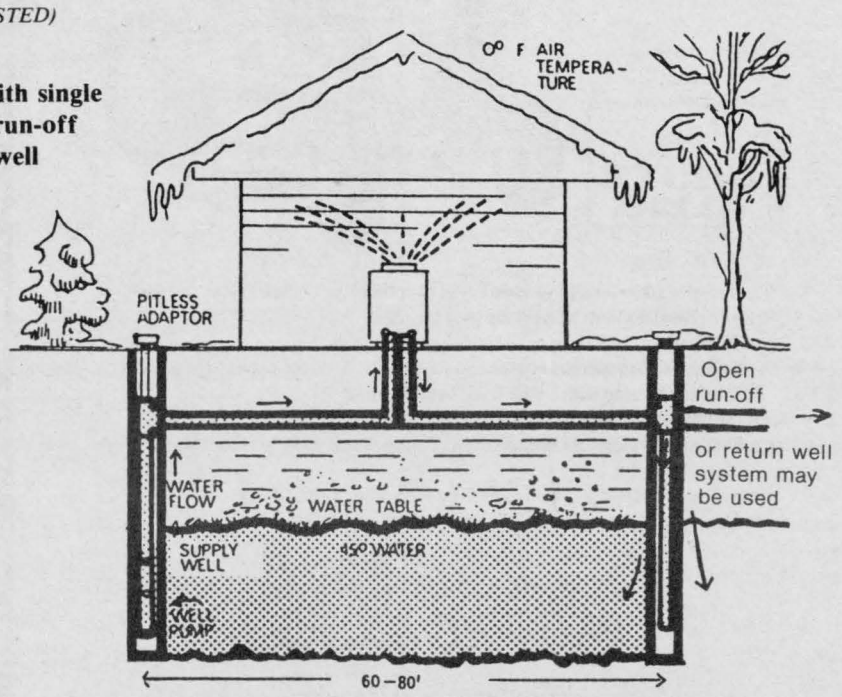

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Spa or hot tub? Options to suit every taste

The first hot tub in North America appeared in the 1950s in Santa Barbara where some imaginative ex-GIs converted some old wooden wine vats into hot tubs — similar to the hot tubs they had used in Japan. It was the start of the modern hot tub/spa industry which has recently become popular across Canada and the United States.

Today the industry has grown far beyond converted wine tubs, and consumers can find a large number of hot tubs and spas on the market.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

What's the difference between a spa and a hot tub? A hot tub is a water-tight wooden container designed to hold 300 to 1,000 gallons of water and one to 12 people. It may be round, oval or rectangular, with straight or slanted sides. Most hot tubs have a heater, pump and filter — called support equipment — to keep the water hot and clean. Many also use hydrotherapy jets, called hydrojets, or air bubblers to create a bubbly water effect.

A spa is operated and used like a hot tub. It also uses similar heating and filtering systems.

Spa shells are usually manufactured of either a vacuum formed acrylic material or constructed of concrete on site.

In the acrylic spa models, which are the most popular in Canada, there are a variety of designs, colors and sizes. Design shapes range from squares and rectangles through rounds, pears, kidneys and octagons. Multi-level seating, recliners and loungers are available features.

Standard colors include blue, brown and black marble, solid blue, bone and sequoia. Spa sizes start with the intimate two- person model and go to sizes that will hold 10-12 persons comfortably.

For the hot tubs, you can buy expertly crafted round wooden rubs in a variety of woods — redwood, cedar, mahogany and teak.

WHERE CAN YOU PUT THEM?

Most spas and hot tubs can be installed, inspected and ready to use within a couple of weeks. You can put them indoors or out — below ground, partially below ground or completely above ground. You'll find spas and hot tubs on patios, decks and roofs, in family rooms, basements and greenhouses — almost any location conducive to a relaxing soak.

Increasingly popular are the portable or self-contained spas which can be set in the backyard, on a patio or set up indoors. When the time comes to move or change houses, the portable spa can be taken with you. Portable spas utilize compact equipment packages with pump, filter and heater hidden beneath the spa "skirt".

All the owner has to do is have an electrician safely wire the equipment to a power source, fill the unit with water and then turn it on.

AUTOMATED CONTROLS

Today you can buy your spa or hot tub equipped with electronic control panels. These can be set for continuous 24- hour low-speed heating and filtering and for the automatic startup and shutdown. Control switches for heater, whirlpool or air blower jets are now mounted on the side of the spa and can be operated while soaking.

A new innovation is a remote control, which can be operated from inside the house or even from a car or plane. Such controls turn on the heater, jets and blower. A simpler control is a time clock which can be set to heat up the system and automatically shut it down at preset times and at preset temperatures.

Advances have also been made in the various chemicals to sanitize spa water and keep it clean and fresh.

The most popular are chlorine or bromine-based chemicals developed especially for use in hot water and free from chlorine odors associated with earlier chemicals available.

Today you can also buy automated chemical controllers that monitor and automatically feed the required amount of chlorine, bromine or other pH-controlling chemicals into the spa. Alternative water purifiers include those using ions or ozone to kill bacteria and algae.

Lights set into the walls of the spa are also becoming popular. The latest development is a fibre-optic light that illuminates without any electrical connection to the spa.

BENEFITS OF SOAKING

According to some medical authorities, a good soak in a spa or hot tub is a form of preventive medicine — a means of avoiding illness. Spas and hot tubs offer a drug-free way of reducing stress. They are said to relax muscles, encourage socialization and reduce anxiety.

Of course, you should consult your doctor before using a spa or hot tub if you have any type of health problems.

For more information contact: The Canadian Spa and Pool Association, 6303 Airport Road, Mississauga, Ontario, L4V 1R8, or toll free 1-800-263-6103.

Vinyl siding accessories add interest

Blossoming flowers, a rebirth of nature — the joys of spring are almost upon us. So who wants to be saddled with the tough chore of repainting the house when the year's most liberating season is just ahead?

Smart homeowners can take this tiresome task off their list of springtime jobs — permanently — with the decision to re-side their homes with solid vinyl siding.

And instead of repainting the same old color again, they can dramatically change the exterior of their homes with the wide selection of solid vinyl siding designs and colors now available. No longer are homeowners limited to one style or color.

Major manufacturers have expanded their product lines in recent years to appeal to the wide range of tastes of today's style-conscious consumers.

Working with a qualified professional home remodeler, homeowners can add interesting architectural detailing to their houses with creative applications of solid vinyl siding.

Siding applied vertically, horizontally, in combination, or in a chevron "V" pattern can create a striking effect on a home's exterior. Gables, dormers and porches are areas particularly suited to architectural detailing.

And while white and off-white continue to be two of the favorite siding colors among homeowners, manufacturers have added fresh designer colors to their siding lines.

Because of the increasing interest in architectural styling, new siding designs have become available recently.

New accessories to further customize the look of a home are wide-faced fluted corner caps, soffit crown molding and a wide-faced window and door casing trim.

Homeowners choosing solid vinyl siding reap other advantages in addition to versatility in exterior home design.

Solid vinyl maintains its freshly painted look because the color is molded clear through the panel. A simple soap and water cleanup is all that is needed to keep it looking fresh.

The panels will not chip, peel or rot, nor can they corrode or dent like aluminum.

With all of its many benefits, the fact remains that vinyl siding must be applied properly if it is to yield its lifetime of beauty. That is why it is important to choose a contractor whose work has beem certified by a major manufacturer.

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1x10	69¢ ft.	2x8	98¢ ft.
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5/8x4 kiln dried clear T&G 58¢ ft.	8" channel STK...57¢ ft.
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Plan renovations carefully

Like any other campaign, a plan to renovate must have carefully laid plans before advancing.

Gathering the family together is the first step. Every member of the family should have input in the size and nature of the renovations. How much space will be added? What will the decorating scheme be? How much can we afford? How much of the work will be done by the architect or contractor?

After the family has outlined its specifications, practical logistics come into play. What are the electrical and water requirements for the project? The local municipal office may be of help with maps of the area or in explaining by-laws.

Budgeting comes next. Make a list of the most important elements of the renovations, then run down the list to the least important work. Set a top price for the job, and make sure you have some leeway, about ten per cent, to pay for unpredictable expenses.

Hiring an architect or contracter should be like shopping for any other goods or service. Interview several candidates, talk to former clients and ask to see a portfolio before you make your final selection. If you choose an architect, he may take on the responsibility of helping with budgets and finding out how municipal by-laws affect your plans as well as choosing or tendering a contractor.

At this stage, you may also want to pre-order materials so they will be ready on the date set for starting the project. An architect will draw up any documents needed to be signed by the owner and the contractor. The owner must agree, in writing, to any timing changes made to the contract.

The architect will bring you the plans for your approval, and give you advice on which of the tenders to accept.

After the work begins, plan to have several meetings on the site with the architect to check the progress of the renovations. You may elect to provide the finishing touches, like the wallpapering, yourself.

The last step is the most satisfying. Sit back and enjoy your creation.

Generate your own electricity

CAMBRIDGE — For $4,700 per kW, a homeowner can generate his own electricity and sell what's left over to Ontario Hydro.

The source of all the excitement is a new turbine, nicknamed a "microhydro system", designed by Galt Energy Systems of Cambridge, Ontario. At 90 per cent efficiency, the system is 12 per cent more efficient than a conventional hydraulic generator.

The secret to its efficiency is an L-shaped intake which allows water to spiral and hit the turbine blades at a better angle.

The turbine has already been picked up by residents of isolated areas not served by Ontario Hydro. Excess power can be sold for as much as 3.3 cents per kW hour.

While the public electricity companies in other provinces hadn't elected to follow suit yet, Galt hopes that selling electricity could soon become more common in other areas.

Ontario Hydro charges $4,000 per kW hour, which the microhydro system costs $1,200 to $4,700 kW to install. Galt executives say the systems pay for themselves within ten years, and can operate for up to 50 years without major repairs.

So far, Galt has installed 11 of the clean, money-saving systems, which seven of their turbines in southern Ontario.

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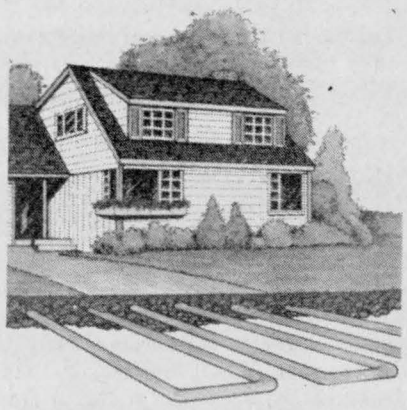

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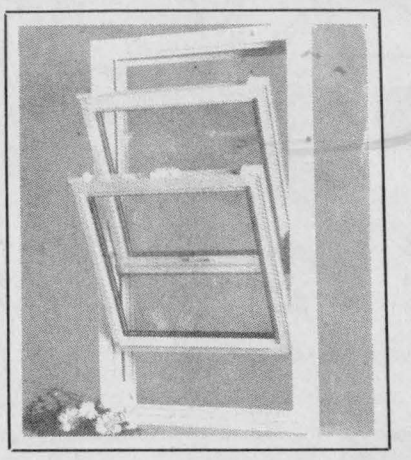

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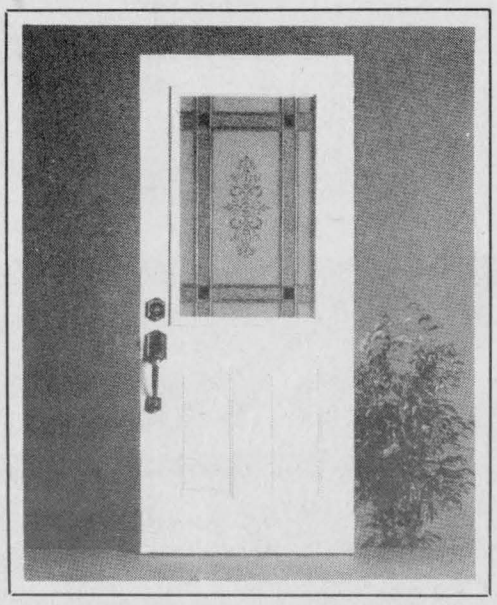

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Calculate savings with siding

Paint, repair, paint, repair. The "exterior decorating" of your home can become an expensive and tiresome cycle.

According to many paint manufacturers and contractors, homes should be repainted approximately every three years to maintain their appearance.

In addition, touch-ups may be needed for blistered or peeled paint, and damaged or rotted wood should be replaced.

Homeowners who have had it with the time and cost of maintaining homes with wood or hardboard siding are turning to re-siding materials such as aluminum siding, which provides low maintenance and aesthetic appeal.

The one-time cost of aluminum siding is amortized over just a few years when comparable painting costs are considered.

To calculate savings, multiply what it costs to paint your house by six. Assuming you paint your house every three years, the resulting figure would cover 18 years of painting.

Factor in the costs of repairs and inflation, and the savings of re-siding rather than painting become immediately apparent.

Added savings can be realized by upgrading the wall insulation when new siding is installed. Besides applying insulated sheathing first, homeowners also should consider one of the insulated aluminum siding brands on the market.

In addition to the financial benefits of aluminum siding, time savings also may be considerable. Finding, interviewing and supervising painting contractors every three years is a task most homeowners dread. With siding, it's applied once and you don't have to worry about it again.

Although manufacturers of many types of siding claim that theirs is "low maintenance and worry free," only aluminum siding has a published performance standard that assures homeowners that it will stand up to weathering and many types of abuse.

Redecorate with accessories

Picture a room that's totally beige — carpet, wall and sofas. Then imagine a tall black urn standing in the corner and striking ebony accents scattered about.

Quick change! That same room is now abloom with accessories in romantic pastels. A peach tone vase sits on one table. Dramatically grouped on another is a bevy of bowls boasting silk pastel bouquets.

With just a little bit of imagination, you can visualize the very different sense of each room, created by the presence of accessories and the effect of their colors.

The first and most lasting impression of a room most often is its color. One tends to recall an oasis of calm after leaving a roomscape of neutral tones. A cheerful yellow room will be remembered as bathed in sunlight.

A few striking accessories or dramatic groupings will transform the color scheme or mood of a room more easily and inexpensively than any other category of furnishing, and you can feel up-to-date without having had to make a major investment.

Start with the basics. Then, build and change with accessory accents. Actually, that is the secret of the best dressed women, as well as professional designers.

The formula for accessory decorating is easy.

1. Determine your color choice or choices.
2. Decide whether you want striking contrasts or a monochromatic feeling.
3. Let your personal taste guide your choice. In addition to bringing a fresh look into your rooms, let your accessories reflect your interests or personaility.

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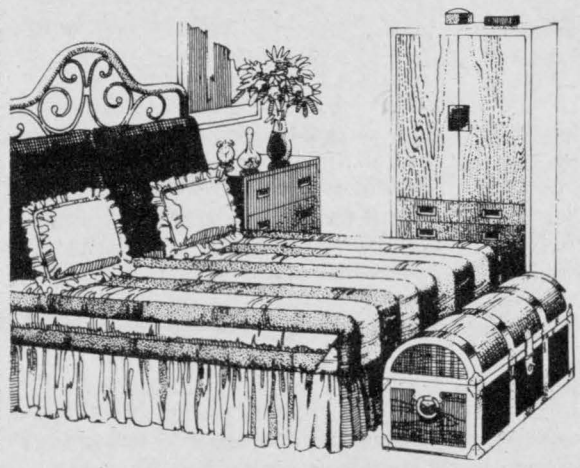

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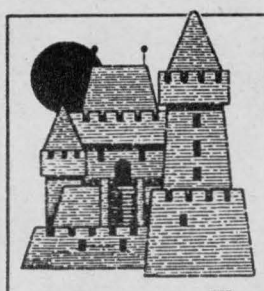

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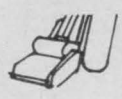
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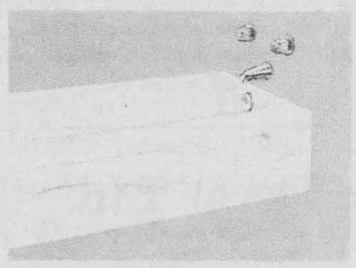

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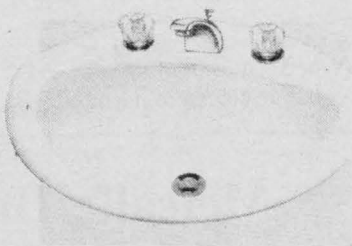

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Some renovations pay back more than others

Remodelling a home can add to its use and value, but consider the the value of the work as well as whether costs can be recouped before you go ahead with a project.

Adding an extra room, remodelling a kitchen or putting in another bathroom can be the ideal solution for a growing family that can't afford a new house. Home improvements can also be the ideal answer for a family bored of a home's decor.

Many families go about home improvement under the impression that any and all improvements add to the value of the home. But building experts warn that this is not always the case.

It is possible to ''over-improve'' a house to the point where it is unlikely that remodelling costs will ever be recovered. If improvement costs catapault the price of your house over the values of neighboring homes, chances are it will be difficult to find a buyer. A family looking for a $200,000 home will not look in a $100,000 neighborhood.

Home prices are especially limited in subdivisions, or in areas where most houses are the same size and condition. Remodellers have greater latitude in neighborhoods where home values vary.

Bringing you house up to same level as others in the neighborhood is always a good investment. A seller can get maximum recovery by added a second bathroom to a house in a neighborhood where all houses have second bathrooms.

Pleasing yourself also has to be on the agenda. A homeowner who plans never to move can overhaul a house to his own satisfaction without having to worry about resale values. Some improvements are dated, so a homeowner who wants to renovate his kitchen into an ultra-modern affair to the tune of $15,000 should be reminded that the kitchen may lose its contemporary appeal in less than a decade.

Some improvements are designed with only the owner in mind. A gourmet cook might not mind shelling out $20,000 to design a dream kitchen, but prospective buyers may not be willing to pay the extra money for a feature they don't need or want.

Among the improvements that may bring returns in the long run —

- The kitchen is undergoing a renaissance. Once the centre of social activity, home buyers are again demanding spacious kitchens, this time with all the modern touches. A major remodelling, with new cabinets, counter tops, redecorating and appliances can run to $15,000. If the house is sold within five years, the seller can expect to recoup about 80 per cent. A small project, limited to a $5,000 investment, will give a 90 per cent return.
- Adding a second bathroom to a one-bathroom house is an investment that can't miss. The project can cost up to $10,000, but prospective buyers are usually willing to pay for the extra convenience. Going halfway will cost less, about $4,500 to install new fixtures, wall and floor coverings, but this investment will only recoup about 50 per cent of the investment. Whirlpool tubs are gaining in popularity, but some buyers may not be willing to pay for the luxury.
- A fireplace can be one of the best selling points of a house, adding the coziness of a warm blaze and the attraction of saving energy. While a fireplace can cost about $3,000 to install, a homeowners can expect it to add $4,000 to the value of the house. Energy-efficient fireplaces that lower fuel bills while complementing the good looks of a room are especially attractive to home buyers.
- Energy-conservation improvements are big winners before and after selling a house. The owner gets immediate benefits by saving money on heating bills, and home buyers find houses with improvements a better buy. Investments range from spending a few dollars on weatherstripping and caulking to installing attic or ceiling installation. Wall installation is more expensive, and costs can only be recouped over a long period of time.
- A wood deck is a better investment in some areas than in others. In locations where outdoor entertaining is popular and lasts longer. Costs can range from $2,500 to $6,000, but may bring only a 50 to 60 per cent return.

Adding an extra room might be the answer to an expanding family, but don't expect to make back all the money spent. Starting from scratch, the new room could cost up to $25,000 with only a 60 per cent return. Converting an attic or garage is less expensive, but the returns aren't as high.

- Refinished wood flooring, especially in older houses, adds to the rustic appeal. Refinishing costs may be as little as $200 per room, and returns are high. Other quick changes that will pay off when trying to sell a home are a fresh coat of paint indoors and out, and landscaping.

For those with do-it-yourself savvy, the home handyman approach can save up to 50 per cent of costs. Finishing off the job with paint and wallpaper can save a lot on contractor's fees. Or, do some of the work and consider sub-contracting out for the jobs you don't feel comfortable with.

Mirrors expand spaces

One of the most dramatic ways to enhance a home's decor is through the use of mirrors.

Mirrors are particularly helpful in small homes, condominiums or apartments, where they seem to expand the size of areas.

Throughout the home, there are many stategic places for touches of mirrored surfaces. In the entry hall, for instance, a handsomely-framed mirror can help set off that table or rack in an inviting manner.

In the living room, mirrored walls can open up the smallest seating area; the same holds true for a dining room.

In the bedrooms mirrored closet doors can make an ordinary-size room seem luxuriously spacious and will also come in handy for checking hemlines, etc.

Mirrored shower doors are also available to expand that very small bathroom.

Besides creating a feeling of spaciousness, mirrors can add a real note of elegance to their surroundings. Small alcoves, such as those used for dressing areas and wet bars will especially benefit from the use of mirrors. Decorating with mirrors reflects an attractive solution of today's small-scaled housing.

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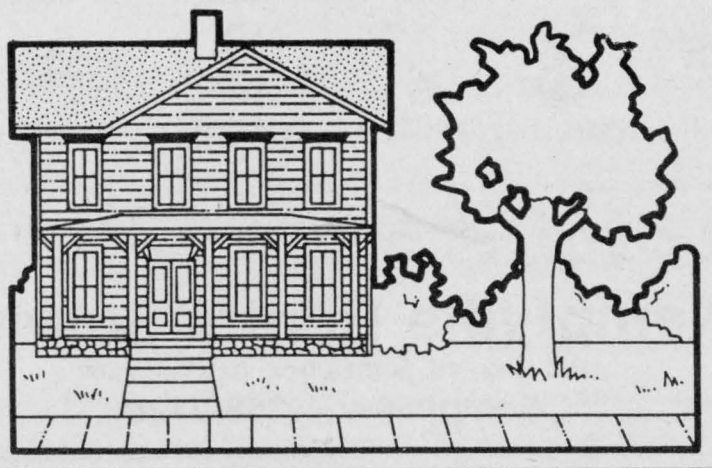

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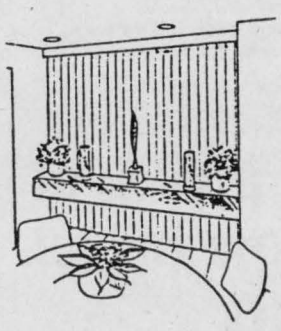

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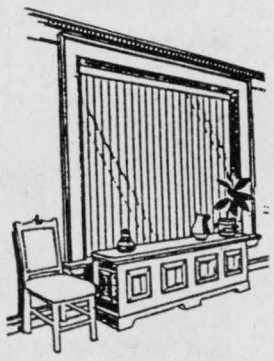

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Use handy checklist for energy conservation

A. Is the filter clean? — Yes or No.

B. Is the temperature control set at no lower than 78 degrees? — Yes or No.

C. Do you use an automatic clock thermostat with your air conditioner? (If you answer "Yes", then answer question D.) — Yes or No.

D. Is the thermostat programmed to lower the temperature in the house no more than half an hour before you come home? — Yes or No.

E. Are the curtains, draperies, shades or blinds closed during the day in the summer? — Yes or No.

F. Do you shut off the air conditioner and open the windows on cooler nights in spring and fall? — Yes or No.

G. Was your air conditioner inspected by a professional service person before the start of the cooling season? — Yes or No.

H. Do you turn off your air conditioner when you're away for extended periods of time such as vacations? — Yes or No.

SCORING

If you answered "yes" to all of these questions, your home will be cool and comfortable this summer while your energy usage will remain low.

One additional measure for you to consider is a home energy audit. A home energy audit is an excellent way to determine in-depth measures you can take to maximize your home's energy efficiency, such as revealing where insulation is needed. Home energy audits are available from many authorized dealers and you can consult your Yellow Pages telephone directory for the one nearest you.

Your local dealer can also analyze your present air conditioning system to see if it is working efficiently. If your system was manufactured before the energy crisis, it's probably worth the investment to upgrade the system now, even before it fails. Your investment will quickly pay for itself in lower energy usage.

If you answered "no" to three or fewer questions, you're on the road to energy efficiency, although there are still several things you can do around your home to save more energy dollars. If you answered "no" to four or more questions, your house will surely lose its cool this summer unless you take action now.

The energy saving suggestions provided below as checklist answers are a good starting point. A home energy audit will point out additional measures.

TIPS TO STAY COOL

Air Conditioner Filters — At the beginning of every summer, the filter in your central air conditioner should be removed and cleaned, or if necessary, replaced. A dirty filter blocks the flow of air and lowers the efficiency of the air conditioner. You can clean or replace the filter yourself (be sure to read the manufacturer's instructions) or arrange for a service call. Check the filter once a month for the duration of the cooling season.

Temperature Settings — Another simple step is to select an efficient temperature setting for the air conditioner. This is important because lowering the thermostat even a few degrees can sharply increase your utility bills. A 78 degree Fahrenheit setting is recommended for a comfortable environment at a minimum cost.

To help regulate your home's cooling (and heating) system efficiently and easily, consider an automatic clock thermostat if you don't already have one. Automatic clock thermostats are programmed to raise and lower a home's temperature up to several times daily, in accordance with a family's needs. Such precision temperature control can reduce both cooling and heating bills. If you have an automatic clock thermostat, make sure its program is set to lower the temperature just before you arrive home — no longer than 30 minutes before you enter the door.

Avoid Continuous Operation — There are times when it is best to simply turn off your air conditioner, such as extended periods away from home, or if the outside temperature cools down substantially. In many regions the summer nighttime temperatures are low enough to enable homeowners to shut off their air conditioners and open the windows to let in the cool breezes. If you avoid operating your air conditioner unnecessarily, you can save money on your utility bills.

Annual Inspection — Perhaps one of the best ways to save money is to practice preventive maintenance on your air conditioning system. Have your air conditioner inspected before each cooling season begins, to make sure everything is in working order. This will help avoid potentially costly problems later.

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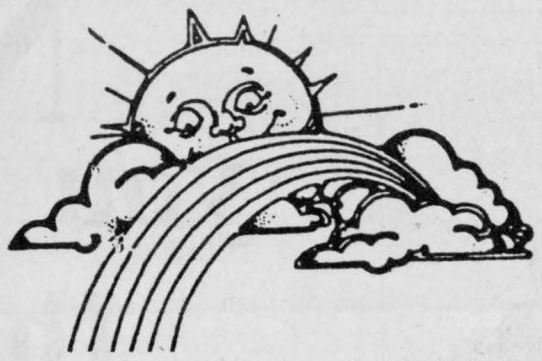
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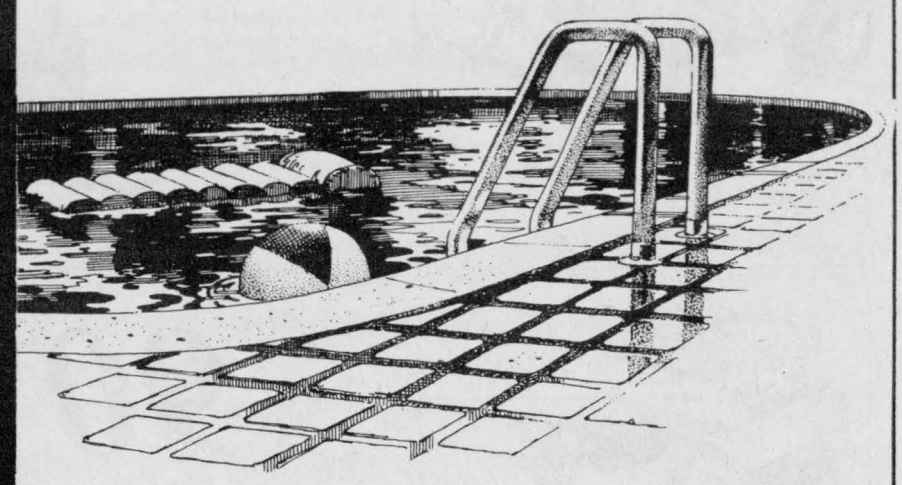
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Multi-purpose wall systems add dimension to living spaces

A variation on the bookcase theme, a wall system offers a multitude of functions. Available in the widest variety of finishes and woods, wall systems are the solution for people wanting ample storage and display space in one or more pieces of furniture.

As with any furniture, the purpose and potential location of the wall system you're looking at must be a major consideration when planning a purchase. A unit chosen for a family room might be more casual than one for a study or hallway.

Your options include a variety of modular concepts that are stackable and bunchable. If your budget is restricted consider making an investment in wall systems. Select one of three pieces, with the goal of eventually buying them all over a reasonable period of time.

Many of the newest systems are finished on the back. This extra dimension permits you to create a room divider with a free-standing unit that can help reshape space and direct traffic flow.

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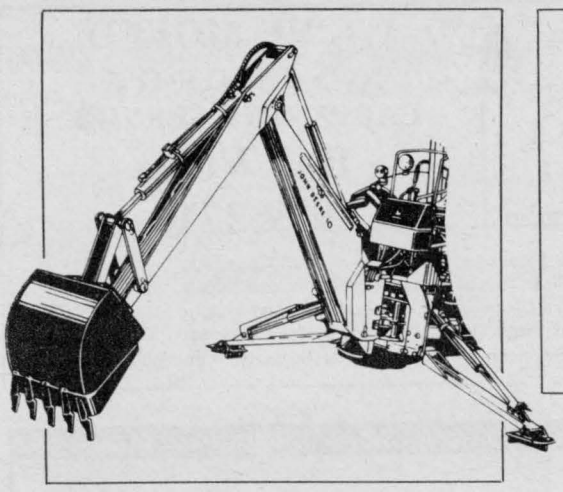

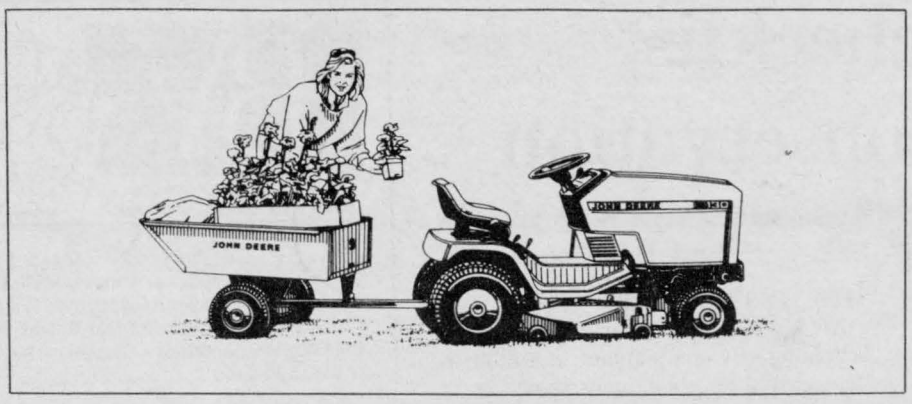

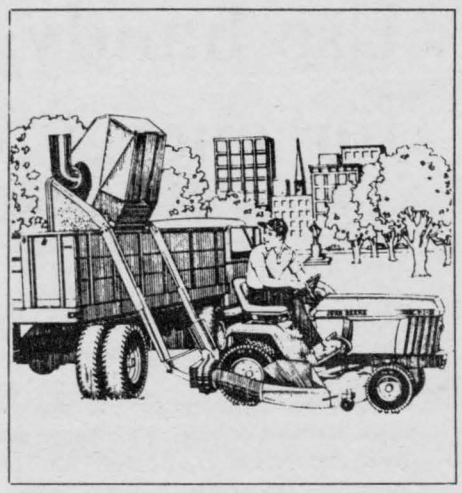

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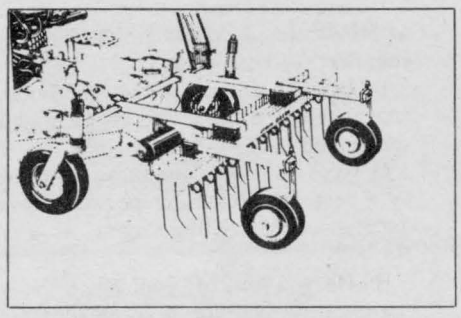

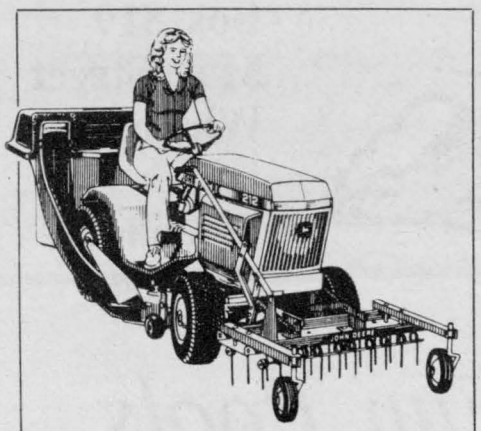

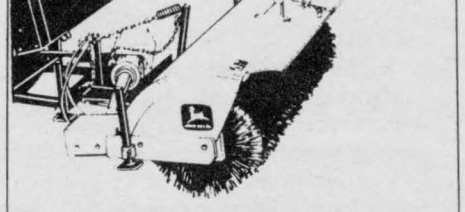

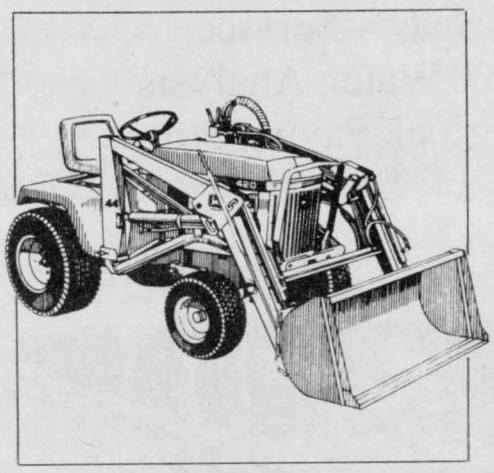

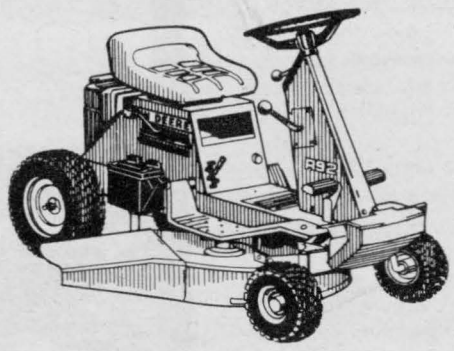

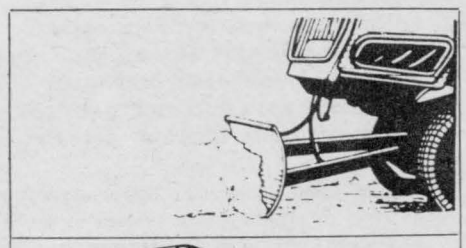

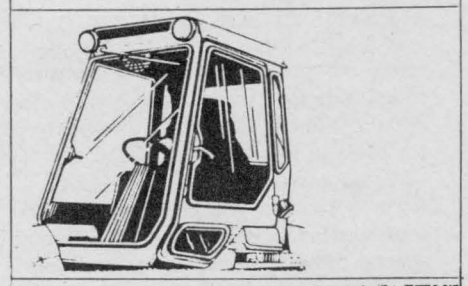

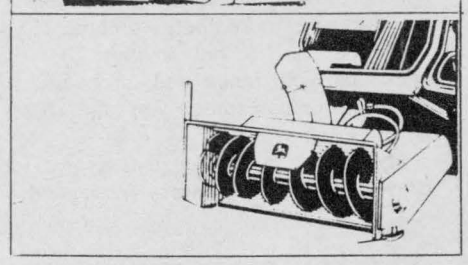

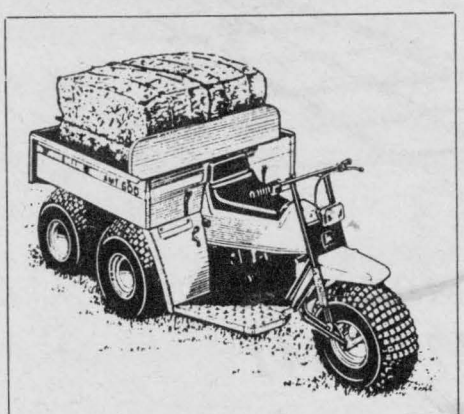



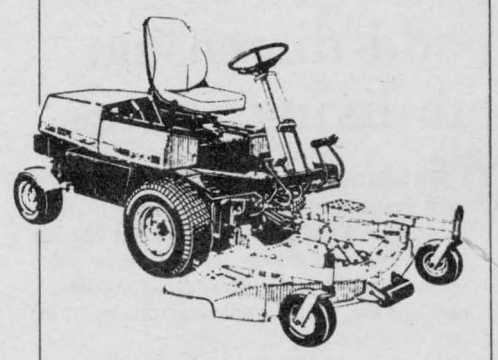

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