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The benefits of energy-efficient homes



Consumer efforts to be more eco-conscious are more and more noticeable. For proof of that, one need look no further than the increase in vehicle charging stations. Such stations are more accessible than ever and illustrate that consumer preference is increasingly leaning toward products that leave as small a carbon footprint as possible.

Another indicator of a growing interest in eco-friendly products is the popularity in energy-efficient homes. In fact,

a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders found that energy-efficient features are among the most sought-after “must-haves” among homebuyers. Among those surveyed, 83 percent desired Energy Star-rated windows, 81 percent wanted Energy Star-rated appliances and 80 percent preferred energy-efficient lighting.

Though eco-conscious sensibilities compel millions of homeowners to make their homes more energy-efficient,

that’s not the only reason to upgrade your home. The following are a handful of the many benefits of energy-efficient homes.

- **Save money:** Inflation was one of the biggest stories of 2022, as the cost of living rose dramatically in the wake of world events. According
- **Improve resale value:** As the NAHB survey indicates, modern homebuyers want energy-efficient homes. They’re also willing to pay more for such homes. Research from the mortgage lender Freddie Mac found that homes with energy-efficient ratings sold for nearly 3 percent more on average than homes without such ratings.
- **Live healthier:** The benefits of energy-efficient homes aren’t just economic, though health-related benefits cer-

tainly produce an economic incentive as well. According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, insulation and air sealing protect individuals from heat waves and other ripple effects of climate change. The ACEEE notes that weatherization can improve indoor air quality and comfort, a notable benefit for asthma sufferers and seniors. In fact, the ACEEE estimates that integrating energy efficiency programs in homes could reduce seniors’ risk for falls in their homes, potentially saving \$2 billion in fall-related health care costs over the next decade, and improve asthma outcomes, which could reduce health care costs by as much as half a billion dollars.

Energy-efficient products and practices pay numerous dividends, making them a worthy expenditure for any homeowners looking to upgrade their homes.

Energy-efficient products and practices pay numerous dividends, making them a worthy expenditure for any homeowners looking to upgrade their homes.

Did you know?

Gardening enthusiasts recognize that fall is not a time to rest on their laurels. In fact, fall is a great season to spend time in the yard. The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst indicates fall is the ideal time to improve the soil for next season. Amending the soil in the fall allows it to react accordingly over time and reap the benefits in spring. UMass suggests getting an accurate soil test to see what is needed in the garden. Samples should be taken from various areas. Avoid doing so when the soil is very wet. At-home kits can test for nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous and determine the soil’s pH. Gardeners should till the soil and add compost or manure, which will counteract many nutritional deficiencies. Worm castings also are good to add, particularly for summer vegetable gardens. The gardening company Park Seed says that worm castings are high in minerals and effective at holding water — so much so that they even can be used alone in place of potting soil. Crushed egg shells, coffee grounds and banana peels also can be added in the fall, even if they are not part of a compost pile. The nutrients will break down throughout the fall and winter, and be available just in time for summer plantings.

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Signs your gutters are in need of repair

Fall is a great time to tackle projects around the house. The weather each fall allows homeowners to make improvements to their homes' exteriors without worrying about extreme heat or cold, while interior projects like painting are made easier because homeowners can open the windows to allow for proper ventilation.

Fall also marks a great time to prepare for upcoming projects that can make winter work that much easier. For example, fall is a great time to take stock of your gutters so you can address any issues before leaves begin to fall or the first snowstorm touches down. Compromised gutters can contribute to water issues in basements and adversely affect a home's foundation if not addressed immediately, so it behooves homeowners to learn the signs that gutters are in need of repair or replacement.

- **Gutters hanging off the home:** Gutters were once installed predominantly with spikes. However, many industry pro-

fessionals now install gutters with hanger brackets. Why the change? Spikes loosen over time, leading to the gutters hanging off the home. That can contribute to serious issues if left untreated. Gutters hanging off the home need not necessarily be replaced, but rather secured to the home, ideally with hanger brackets instead of spikes. Brackets hook into the front of the gutter and are then screwed into the fascia of a home. A professional who specializes in gutter repair can perform this task relatively quickly, and it's an inexpensive yet highly effective solution.

- **Gutter separation:** Gutters that are no longer fastened together can leak and contribute to issues that affect the home's foundation, siding and appearance. Clogs and the accumulation of debris can cause gutters to separate because they are not designed to hold too much



weight. Replacement of separated gutters may or may not be necessary depending on how big the problem is and

the condition of the existing gutters. If replacement is not necessary, separated gutters may be remedied by securing

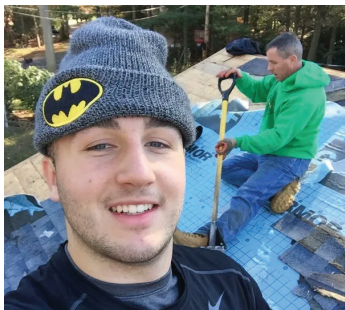
the joints, another relatively simple and inexpensive fix.

- **Peeling exterior paint:** Paint that appears to be peeling off of your home may indicate that water is seeping over the edge of the gutter closest to your home. When that happens, water is coming down the side of the house, causing the paint to peel. In such instances, replacing the gutters is often necessary.

- **Basement flooding:** Not all signs of deteriorating gutters are outside a home. Many a homeowner has been flummoxed by flooding in their basements, and such flooding can be caused by aging, ineffective gutters. That's because deteriorating gutters sometimes allow water to leak near the foundation of a home, contributing to basement flooding.

Fall is an ideal time to inspect gutters and have any issues fixed before leaves begin to fall or harsh winter weather arrives.

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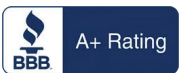
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Under Pressure spruces up homes for the holidays

By CHRISTIE VOGT
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In anticipation of fall bonfires, winter holiday gatherings and cold weather challenges, exterior cleaning company Under Pressure is busy preparing and sprucing up homes for the season. “The work we do is like a tune-up of the house from top to bottom, from roofs to gutters to

changing weather ahead,” Mercer says.

Under Pressure also offers shrink-wrapping to protect outdoor furniture, water features, garden monuments and other items that need to be shielded from the elements. “Shrink-wrapping is a great alternative to covering things with weatherproof fabric, which often gets chewed through by critters,”



Business spotlight

and install holiday lights that cater to customers’ imaginations. “The designs are only limited by homeowners’ creativity,” Mercer says. Homeowners don’t have to worry about maintenance or storage either; Under Pressure takes the lights down at the end of the season and stores the equipment until homeowners

want to reinstall a display in the coming year.

“We decorate homes for Halloween, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year’s — any fall or winter holiday that people want to celebrate,” Mercer says. “Holiday lighting creates a special feeling; there’s just something about the warmth that it brings to a place.”

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windows to patios,” says owner Mark Mercer. “We’re helping people to love their home again, especially around the holidays, and to refocus attention on the importance of the health of a house.”

Mercer says that cleaning exteriors in late summer and early fall is an optimal time because houses stay cleaner for longer due to less pollen, landscaping debris and humidity-induced mildew. Under Pressure is also able to wash surfaces later in the year — even as temperatures drop to the 30s — thanks to water heating mechanisms in its trucks. “Winter is long, and homeowners should be asking themselves at this time whether their house is prepared for the

Mercer says. “Shrink-wrapping also saves space because we can push everything into one tight bundle in your yard rather than having your patio furniture take up square footage in your garage or basement.”

In addition to routine maintenance and cleaning services, Under Pressure is excited about bringing a bit of magic to homeowners this season through custom-designed holiday lighting. “It’s amazing what you can do with modern light technologies,” Mercer says, “and customers have really loved seeing how we transform their homes.”

Under Pressure’s team completed weeks of training and safety courses in order to design



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Tips for budget-friendly home decor

Home interiors can be spruced up in a number of ways. Ideas run the gamut from relatively inexpensive changes in paint color to more extensive (and expensive) remodels that may include demolition and reconstruction. Investing in new home decor is another way to breathe new life into spaces, and this approach that falls somewhere in the middle in regard to cost.

Material and product costs remain high across the board, so individuals interested in changing the furniture and other design elements in their homes might be seeking ways to do so in the most affordable way possible. In such instances, homeowners can try these budget-friendly ways to overhaul their home decor.

- Create the illusion of more space. Light, bright and white are key attributes to remember when selecting design elements for rooms where you want to create the illusion of more square footage. Painting the walls in very light colors,

increasing natural and artificial light, including using well-placed mirrors to reflect light, and decorating with light-colored fabrics can help a space seem more roomy.

- Replace the accessories. Replacing curtains, area rugs, throw pillows, and chair cushions is an easy way to change a room without a big investment. Consider updating some wall art and tying color schemes together with all of the newly introduced elements.
- Splurge on statement pieces that will be used frequently. These may include chandeliers, unique rugs or an eye-catching piece of furniture.
- Shop 'discount' stores for furniture and accents. Traditional design centers can be great places to find plenty of high-quality merchandise. However, don't overlook local discount or close-out centers that may have items

at very reasonable costs. Stores like Home Goods, At Home and Big Lots routinely get new merchandise that changes with the season, helping homeowners to refresh their spaces without having to dig deep into their pockets. Shop the high-end stores for inspiration, then try to find "dupes" in the discount stores that will mimic the looks for less.

- Cut out the clutter. Modern homes are lean and clean. A home's interior instantly looks more high-end and appealing when the clutter is removed. Consider keeping main living areas free from too many knickknacks and other accents. If you want to display a special collection, set aside a room specifically for such items.

There are many budget-friendly ways to make interior spaces more inviting.

Things you should know before deciding to do a DIY demolition

Home improvement projects can range from relatively inexpensive undertakings to complex endeavors that cost homeowners thousands of dollars. In an effort to make expensive projects more affordable, homeowners may look for ways to pitch in, and do-it-yourself demolition is a common way to cut costs.

Due to geographical fluctuations in price as well as the scale of a project, it's hard to pinpoint just how much homeowners can save by doing demolition work themselves. HomeAdvisor estimates that the average small interior demolition project costs just over \$3,000, though more significant demolition projects can cost considerably more than that. Given the cost, it's no surprise that so many homeowners volunteer to do demolition on their own. Though it's possible to do so safely, homeowners can take steps to determine if it's in their best interest to take on a DIY demolition or leave it to the professionals.

- Conduct a cost analysis. Demolition projects seem simple, but they often require the use of equipment most homeowners don't have on hand. Rentals can be considered in such instances, but the cost of renting equipment can reduce the amount of money homeowners are saving by going it alone. For example, homeowners may be able to pull up vinyl or tile flooring on their own, but not all floors are installed the same. Some floors may have been glued more effectively than others, making it hard and/or time-consuming to pull them up by hand. A walk-behind floor scraper can make it easier to remove such floors, but that equipment must be rented. A cost analysis comparing the contractors' demolition cost estimate and the cost of DIY, complete with equipment rental projections, can give a more accurate picture

of how much money homeowners will save by going it alone. If the savings of DIY are negligible, homeowners should probably let the contractor handle the demo.

- Speak with your contractor. Prior to saying they'll do the demo work on their own, homeowners should speak with their contractors to get



an accurate idea of what the project will entail. Demolition projects may seem simple enough, but contractors can illustrate the correct way to do things so as to minimize potentially costly damage. Some contractors may offer to help homeowners start the demo project and then leave them to their own devices once they get a knack for what to do. Once homeowners see what it will take, they can then decide if DIY is best for them.

- Enlist help. No DIY demo should ever be done alone. The risk for accident and injury is simply too great for homeowners to go it alone. Homeowners who can't enlist some volunteers to pitch in should leave the job to the professionals.

DIY demolition can save homeowners a lot of money. But such projects are not necessarily as simple as they seem. Homeowners should take steps to see exactly what they're getting into before they volunteer to take on demo duty.

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Robert Roofing & Gutters

Fall in New England comes with (at least) two guarantees: a beautiful fall landscape and a countdown to snowfall.

With the seasons changing, Norfolk-based Robert Roofing & Gutters Inc. has been helping local homeowners prepare and maintain their homes for the elements since 1980. The full-service second-generation

“They’ve completed two jobs at our house. Easy to deal with. Good communication, Robert is a straight shooter. We recommend them.”

-Adam Burch

roofing and home improvement company has been in business for more than 30 years, and provides “speedy and reliable service when you need it most.” They pride



themselves on being honest and reliable, and they are focused on providing their customers with the most cost-effective solution.

Their services include all types of roofing, anything related to gutters and soffits, expert siding installation, chimney repointing and flashing, and custom window trim. They also provide energy saving services such as a high quality underlayment (an ice and water shield) that protects the

roof from possible water damage due to ice dams, which is then topped with a premium underlayment which is breathable and waterproof.

The team at Robert Roofing & Gutters includes founder Robert “Rob” Greene, and his son Foreman Robert Jr., as well as Foreman Stiles, plus an amazing crew, all of whom have been with the company for 9+ years.

We are experts at roof re-

placement,” Rob says. “If we can restore your roof, we will not sell you a new one. If you are looking to replace your roof, our expert installers will make sure the job is done right the first time...Our focus on structural integrity, energy efficiency, and visual appeal makes us your best choice for all of your roofing needs.”

Their motto is “ONE CALL SENDS A ROOFER, NOT A SALESMAN” so when customers call for a free estimate, it is founder Rob who shows up at the door.

Rob says, “Our typical customer is anyone who has a 15-20+ year old roof, to first-time buyers whose first thing on their to-do list is to replace the roof; so, we have a wide range of customers.”

Rob says, “This fall, homeowners need to be aware of any damage and/or wear and tear on their roof, and they should have it fixed or replaced before any damage occurs. Once the snow comes, the damage could become devastating - like a roof leak that penetrates into the ceiling which could then cause wall, window, and/or floor damage.



Business spotlight

A homeowner’s best bet is to call me to come out and evaluate their roof before the harsh weather arrives.”

Robert Roofing & Gutters’ service area is south of Boston, including Westwood, Medfield, Dover/Sherborn, Walpole, Norfolk, Norton, Stoughton, Easton,

“Robert Roofing & Gutters is everything you want a contractor to be: honest, reasonably priced, expert in what he is doing. Nothing flashy, just good work.”

-David Williams

and most other towns from Hopkinton to Seekonk.

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Small renovations that make a big difference

Home renovation projects were high on homeowners' priority lists during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout much of 2020, people across the globe were forced to spend much of their time at home as leaders and

in mind, the following are some small renovations that can have a big impact.

- **Storage addition:** Regardless of where storage is added, be it the kitchen or a home office or a laundry room, extra space to keep

bedroom walls and kitchen cabinets can be painted over with a fresh coat of the same color or even something more vibrant. Outside, apply a fresh coat to a wooden deck or paint over brick siding to create a whole new look.

- **Molding:** Crown molding can add a touch of elegance to any room. Rooms can be transformed in a single weekend with the installation of new or replacement crown molding. A simple molding installation is a task many do-it-yourselfers can handle on their own, while homeowners with less DIY experience may benefit from hiring a contractor to create a layered molding look.

Homeowners are pivoting away from costly renovations to more budget-conscious projects. Various less expensive undertakings can transform spaces at a fraction of the cost of more extensive renovations.



governments across the globe sought to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More time at home compelled millions of homeowners to invest more in their properties, thus sparking a renovation boom.

By early 2023, the renovation boom that marked the initial days of the pandemic appeared to have burst. In May 2023, the popular home improvement retailer Home Depot reported its sales had fallen by 4.5 percent in the first quarter of the year and that its income had fallen by more than 6 percent from the same period a year earlier. That marked the end of what Home Depot CEO Ted Decker characterized as "a three-year period of unprecedented growth" in the home improvement sector.

Home Depot's decline in sales was attributed to a number of factors, including a pivot among homeowners from large projects to smaller renovations. Inflation and the looming threat of a recession have led many homeowners to emphasize smaller projects. With that

items out of view can dramatically alter the look of a home. Unused kitchen walls can be transformed with some inexpensive, easily hanged shelves, while some laundry pedestals with storage drawers can help keep washrooms clear of clutter.

- **Polish floors:** Elbow grease might be the biggest expenditure when cleaning hardwood floors. The wood flooring experts at Bona® advise homeowners to polish their floors once every two to four months depending on how much foot traffic the floors get. A fresh polishing can make floors look brand new and ensures dirt and dust are not hanging around as uninvited houseguests.

- **Paint:** Painting is another inexpensive option for budget-conscious homeowners who want to update their homes. There's no shortage of places in a home, both inside and out, where a fresh coat of paint can make a statement without breaking the bank. Fading paint on

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How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

Kitchen

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal

preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

Formal dining room

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.



Living room

Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recog-

nize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

Bedroom

The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting

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A beginner's guide to fall planting and maintenance

Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to gardens.

The tree and bare root retailer Bower & Branch advises that soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year's bounty.

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

- Think about fall annuals and bulb planting. Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer flowers fade. Also, it's a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.
- Sow salad seeds. Lettuce,



spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads

well into the fall season.

- Take inventory of the sun. Positioning a garden carefully

means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.

- Fill in landscaping gaps. Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.
- Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow

them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

- Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.
- Continue to water plants. Water is essential in the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant. Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.

Budget-friendly ways to freshen up your home's exterior

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.

Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

- Power washing: Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Hardware chains like Home Depot and Lowes typically rent power washers, but homeowners who don't want to do it themselves can hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.

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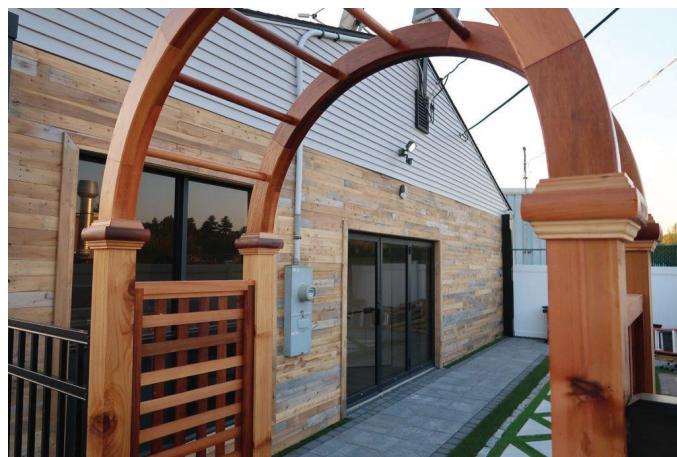
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Business spotlight

At American Backyard, we understand that transforming your outdoor space is not just another project—it's a lifetime investment. Located at 1465 Main St, Millis, MA, we specialize in offering fencing solutions that stand the test of time, be it Vinyl, Chain-link, White Cedar custom wood imported from Canada, or Ornamental Aluminum. But that's not all. Our expertise also includes Hardscaping—walkways, patios—and crafting custom composite and wood decks.

Born Out of Necessity

The genesis of American Backyard came amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The co-founders—Brandon Currul, Mark Narducci, and Dan Essary—shared a common frustration: the agonizing wait and poor customer service that had become the norm in the fence and outdoor trade industry. Instead of settling for less, they teamed up to disrupt the status quo.

A Team with a Proven Track Record

Brandon, a serial entrepreneur, has a history of establishing and running successful businesses, including one recently acquired by Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. Mark brings over two decades of home-building experience through Narducci Corp, a local legend that's built hundreds of homes and developments. Dan adds another layer of expertise with his 20-year tenure in roofing, owning Essary Roofing, one of the largest roofing

companies in MA. All three are Medway High alumni and friends since their school days. This power trio possesses the credentials and commitment that guarantees you're in good hands.

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Our philosophy is simple—put the customer first. This means answering your calls promptly and providing estimates at an unparalleled speed. Our warranties on materials and workmanship are among the best in the industry. If something happens down the line, you can rest assured we'll be there to make it right.

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EXTERIOR

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• **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

• **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens urge homeowners to take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy,

so look for a sturdy box as well as one that has drainage holes.

- **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs, knockers, house numbers, and even



the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home appears to residents and visitors.

Exterior renovations need not break the bank. Various simple and inexpensive tweaks can quickly revitalize the exterior of a home.



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How to maintain hardwood floors

Hardwood floors have long been sought after by home buyers. In its 2019 “Remodeling Impact Report,” the National Association of Realtors® revealed that new wood flooring was the fourth most popular project to attract buyers.

Of course, hardwood floors aren’t just for buyers. Homeowners who already have hardwood floors know just how impressive these floors can be, especially when they’re well maintained. Maintaining wood floors is not necessarily as straightforward as it may seem, and homeowners may benefit from a tutorial on how to keep the floors under their feet looking good.

To polish or not to polish?

Polishing floors is an inexpensive way to keep them looking good. But the home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that not all floors can be polished, and determining which ones can depends on the finish. Floors with waterproof

barriers such as urethane will benefit from routine polishing. However, floors with penetrating finishes like tung oil will need to be waxed rather than polished.

What finish is on the floor?

The Hardwood Distributor’s Association recommends a simple way for homeowners to determine which type of fin-



ish is on their hardwood floors. Homeowners are advised to rub a finger across the floor. If no

smudge appears, then the floor is surface sealed. If a smudge is created, then the floor has been treated with a penetrating seal. The HDA also notes that recently installed wood floors are likely surface sealed.

How often should floors be polished or waxed?

Wood flooring profession-

als recommend polishing floors that can be polished once every few months. Waxing wood floors

does not need to be done as frequently, and most can benefit from a fresh coat of wax every 12 to 18 months.

What can I do on a daily basis?

Some simple tricks and daily maintenance can help wood floors maintain their impressive look.

- Utilize floor mats. The HDA notes that floor mats near entryways can reduce the time it takes to clean hardwood floors and reduce the wear and tear they endure. For example, tiny particles like dirt can scratch the floor and contribute to the kind of minor damage that adds up to significant scarring over time. Floor mats near entryways ensures that most of that dirt never makes it to the wood floors.
- Vacuum without a beater bar. Some vacuums contain beater bars, which are designed to pick up human hair, dog hair and other things that conven-

tional vacuums may not be able to pick up. The HDA advises vacuuming without the beater bar, as it can contribute to small scratches in the floor. Sweeping with a high-quality broom or microfiber cloth is another way to pick up dirt without damaging floors.

- Use manufacturer-recommended cleaning products. Local home improvement stores sell a host of hardwood floor cleaning products, but the HDA notes that many flooring manufacturers now sell their own hardwood floor cleaners designed specifically for their floors. These products are likely homeowners’ best bets. Homeowners who can’t find them can seek recommendations from a local flooring retailer.

Hardwood floors are attractive for many reasons. And they look even more stunning, and last much longer, when homeowners make an effort to maintain them.

Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter’s arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well.

Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and

eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening. But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

- Inspect the deck for prob-

lems. Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer. Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed be-

fore winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.

- Clear the deck of potted plants. Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.
- Store unnecessary furniture. Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a



garage or shed for the winter. HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

- Remove snow, but do so carefully. Prolonged contact with snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant. HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring.



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Fireplace trends help create attractive, comfortable rooms

Fireplaces are useful features in a home. Fireplaces are sources of ambient heat and also add style to indoor spaces.

Fireplaces can complement just about any interior style. Fireplaces can be traditional and burn wood or connect to a home's natural gas supply for on-demand ambiance. What's more, fireplaces may come in vented or ventless varieties, depending on homeowners' preferences and what is allowed by community building codes. That means a chimney or flue may not be needed — expanding the list of rooms where a fireplace can be installed.

Certain trends have emerged among fireplace fans in recent years. Here's a look at what's getting consumers fired up about these home decor elements.

- **Minimalist style:** Many fireplaces are designed in neutral colors with minimal trim that directs focus on the fire and

not the appliance. When the fireplace is not in use, it blends in with surroundings and will not compete for attention with other design elements.

- **Convertible fireplaces:** Homeowners can choose between open or sealed fireplaces. A convertible fireplace enables homeowners to have the best features of these options. A convertible fireplace can be converted to wood from gas, or the opposite, in as little as 30 minutes.
- **Nature-inspired materials:** Natural stone continues to be a material of choice in fireplace surrounds. Light colors work well for a fireplace, and also fit with today's lighter color interior design preferences. Natural stone also works perfectly with both contemporary and rustic decor.
- **Vintage fireplaces:** Vintage continues to be a buzzword



in 2022, and the choice to go vintage also applies to fireplace styles. A room decorated in vintage elements can be complemented with a vintage fireplace or one designed to look vintage.

- **Integrate into wall decor:** Fireplaces that are built right into a wall save space. One can have a television and a fireplace on the same wall. These types of fireplaces work well in modern home designs. Other fireplaces may be built

into bookshelves or other wall features.

Fireplaces can improve the appeal of a home. Various trends are popular this year, making fireplaces highly coveted features.



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