



Spring Home & Garden

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Welcome Spring with a Fresh, Clean Home!

Business spotlight

As the remnants of winter recede and the warmth of the sun welcomes the onset of spring, the annual tradition of spring cleaning beckons homeowners and businesses alike. At the forefront of transforming residential and commercial properties to their peak beauty stands Under Pressure, a name synonymous with excellence in soft washing and exterior cleaning services for over 25 years.

Through decades of experience, Under Pressure has not only perfected the art of gentle, effective exterior cleaning, but has also cultivated a deep-rooted passion for revitalizing homes and properties. Our work goes beyond enhancing appearances—we aim to restore the pride and joy homeowners feel when they see their property at its best. Every nook






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outdoor living can be. After a long winter, mold, grime, and dirt can dull the beauty of your home, making your exterior look less than lucky this time of year! That's where Under Pressure comes in:

- House Washing – Say goodbye to dirt, algae, and buildup
- Deck & Patio Cleaning – Make your outdoor spaces fresh and inviting
- Window Cleaning – Let the sunshine (and rainbows) in this spring

As you prepare for longer days and warmer nights, you are encouraged to rejuvenate your outdoor spaces—embellish your patio with potted plants, enjoy your morning coffee in a clean, fresh setting, and reconnect with nature in a beautifully maintained environment.

Their Legacy: 25 Years of Excellence & Trust

At Under Pressure, they believe in more than just cleaning—they believe in building

lasting relationships with their clients. Their team of dedicated exterior cleaning specialists takes great pride in restoring homes, witnessing the satisfaction of homeowners as they see the transformation from weathered to wonderful.

Each year, as spring approaches, their schedule fills up fast with customers eager to wash away winter and welcome a fresh start. To ensure your home is season-ready, they recommend booking early—before the spring rush!

This season, let Under Pressure unveil the hidden beauty of your home. With over 25 years of expertise, they are here to help you embrace the joy of a clean, revitalized property.

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Spring has sprung, now it's time for cleaning and home maintenance

BY THERESA KNAPP

The days are getting longer, rain has replaced snow, and soon we'll be spending more time outside, so now is the time to assess possible winter damage and make a plan for repairs.

Homeowners should pay particular attention to their roofs, says Dermott Larkin of West-

wood Insurance.

"Roof claims are the number one insurance problem for insurance companies these days," said Larkin. "Generally speaking, for any new policy written now, the company is going to inspect your house and one of the first things they're going to look at is the roof."

In addition to missing shin-

gles and moss growth on the roof, Larkin says when insurance companies are inspecting homes, also issues that could affect your insurability are peeling and chipping paint, rot around windowsills, excessive debris in the yard and against the house as problematic.

Larkin says another consideration for homeowners is a home

security system, specifically a central station alarm, which is monitored 24/7/365, and the company alerts you (or the police) when the alarm is triggered. "A central station alarm can save you 15% to 20% on a policy."

Here is a list of items to consider:

Outdoor Maintenance

- Inspect roof & gutters – Check for winter damage, missing shingles, clean out gutters and downspouts
- Check for winter damage – Look for cracks in driveway, sidewalks, foundation
- Lawn & garden prep – Rake leaves; aerate, fertilize, seed lawn; trim trees, shrubs near house
- Drainage – Improve drainage around house
- Service yard equipment – Tune-up lawnmower and other gardening tools; winterize snowblower
- Inspect & clean outdoor furniture – Pressure wash and freshen up patio furniture
- Grill – Deep clean grill, inspect for damage, clear area of debris, fuel up
- Pool – Schedule pool opening, maintenance contract
- Air condenser – Remove debris around AC condenser

Home improvement advice from an insurance agent

- Maintain roof
- Install central station alarm
- Install/stabilize railings on decks, porches, etc. (anything with 3 or more steps)
- Never waive a home inspection when buying a new home

-Dermott Larkin, Westwood Insurance

Home Exterior

- Pressure wash the exterior – Clean siding, walkways, decks, pool areas
- Paint – Touch up house, out-buildings as necessary
- Accessways – Ensure railings, stairs, ramps are sturdy
- Check windows & screens – Clean windows, inspect for drafts, replace/repair screens; replace storm doors/windows with screens
- Inspect & seal wood decks – Stain or reseal wood to prevent rot
- Fencing – Repair damage, stabilize, seal as needed
- Sprinkler system & hoses – Look for leaks and adjust sprinkler heads, reattach hoses, turn on outdoor water
- Septic system – Schedule maintenance if you're due

MAINTENANCE

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Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds

tact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.



Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.

Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.

Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in con-



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Inflation has garnered countless headlines in recent years, and much of that news has focused on the notably higher cost of food. Though the cost of some items at the grocery store has gone down in 2024, many items remain significantly more expensive than they were as recently as three or four years ago. In an effort to overcome rising food costs, some consumers have thought about gardening. According to Washington State University, the average household with a food garden spends around \$70 per year on seeds and garden supplies. The reward for that small investment is roughly \$600 worth of food. Though the financial investment associated with a food garden might be minimal, it's important for prospective gardeners to recognize that the commitment of time required to establish and sustain a food garden can be significant.



MAINTENANCE

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Indoor Maintenance

- HVAC system check-up – Change air filters, schedule AC tune-up
- Check for leaks & water damage – Inspect under sinks, around appliances, and in the basement; address water damage and mold, install sump pump if needed
- Check weatherstripping & seals – Make sure doors and windows are energy-efficient
- Clean dryer vents – Remove lint build-up inside the dryer, exhaust hose, and outdoor vent
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Sustainable gardens are good for your health, environment

By THERESA KNAPP

A sustainable garden is one that is environmentally responsible and focuses on conserving resources.

“The first guideline is ‘right plant, right place.’ In other words, conduct a site evaluation and determine what plants would do well in that location.”

-UMass Extension Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry Program

According to the UMass Extension Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry Program, a sus-

tainable garden is one in which “each plant does not have a known significant insect or disease problem, is drought tolerant (once established), is not invasive, and is long-lived.”

The UMass Extension website says the first guideline to a successful sustainable garden is “right plant, right place.”

In a blog post entitled, “5 reasons why sustainable gardening can be a key to health,” www.usanafoundation.org lists the advantages of sustainable gardens as nutrient-rich food at your fingertips; environmental wellness; stress reduction and improved mental health; physical activity; and food security and self-sufficiency.”

Tips for getting started with sustainable gardening, according to gardenforwildlife.com, include:

- Use native plants (www.massaudubon.org/nature-wildlife/plants/native-beneficial-plants)
- Choose sustainable plants (https://ag.umass.edu/land-

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- scape/fact-sheets/choosing-sustainable-plants)
- Think organically
 - Reduce your lawn
 - Use less water
 - Reduce, reuse, recycle
 - Start gardening sustainably

Tips for planting your garden,

according to www.keepmass-beautiful.org, include:

- Evaluate sunlight
- Test soil quality
- Choose seasonal plants
- Flowers that beginners: Zinnias, sunflowers, cosmos
- Use organic fertilizers

- Apply mulch

How to get the most from a small garden, according to www.treehugger.com:

- Think vertically
- Layer plants in space

COMPOST

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- And the list goes on...

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Massachusetts has adopted the **Advanced Clean Trucks (ACT)** regulation. Under this mandate, truck dealers must sell **one electric truck** for every **10 internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles** they wish to sell.

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THANK YOU for reading this far!

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just

how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command

3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- Refresh the landscape. Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees



and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible. Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- Add a water feature. Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.
- Don't forget shade. Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long.

BACKYARD

continued on page 11

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COMPOST

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- Layer plants in time
- Make sure every element has multiple functions

- Choose the right gardening method for the particular space

The best plants for a sustainable garden, according to zerowastekitchen.com, include:

- Leafy greens - Lettuce, spinach, kale, and Swiss chard are quick-growing, nutrient-dense plants that thrive in most cli-

mates

- Herbs – Basil, rosemary, thyme, mint (which can be invasive)

- Tomatoes – Any variety

- Root vegetables – Carrots, radishes, beets

Additional gardening resources can be found at:

- Plant Hardiness Zone Map https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/system/files/MA150_HS.png
- Tips for growing a sustainable garden in Massachusetts: Native plants, permaculture, and pollinator habitats bit.ly/SustainableGardenTips
- Ways to make your lawn more sustainable:
 - “Lawn to lettuce: transform your lawn into a mixed-use vegetable garden” ediblesema.com/feature/lawn-to-lettuce/
 - “More than just a yard” at www.mass.gov/doc/more-than-just-a-yard-ecological-landscaping-tools-1/download
 - “Right plant, right place,” a plant selection guide for managed landscapes bit.ly/UMassManagedLandscapes
 - “Transforming Massachusetts lawns: your guide to sustainable, water-wise landscaping for a thriving ecosystem” bit.ly/SustainableLawns

BACKYARD

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Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time

in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot. A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

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Tips for the gardening beginner

Gardening is a popular hobby all over the world. Ruby Home Luxury Real Estate estimates there are 71.5 million gardening households in the United States alone. That translates to around 185.9 million people engaged in some form of gardening, which places the U.S. among other countries where gardening is wildly popular, including Australia and China.

to add nutrients to the dirt; peat moss or coconut coir to help with water retention and to make the soil lighter; and vermiculite that helps to retain water. A compost bin set up at the same time as the garden allows gardeners to continually produce nutrient-rich food to add to the garden.

A greater number of people are showing interest in gardening, which is a rewarding hobby that's good for the mind and the body. Those who are new to gardening may need a crash course to get started. These pointers can help anyone foster a newfound passion for gardening.



Plant starter guide

It's best to keep a few things in mind when planning the garden. Think about what will grow well in your climate. Consider how big the garden will be and the size of mature plants. A small garden will not be able to accommodate corn, for example. Also, how would you like the space to look and what will be its function? Is this a purely aesthetic garden or one that will be food-bearing?

Start seeds inside

If you'll be starting a garden from seeds, it's best to start indoors before your region's frost-free date. This way the delicate plants will get the needed care and can establish before they go outdoors in the ground. Keep them humid by covering the seedlings in plastic wrap. You can start the seeds in different containers, even empty egg cartons. Transplant to larger containers after the seedlings grow a second set of leaves. Once you're free from overnight frost, you can place the established, strong seedlings in the ground.

An automatic watering system, such as a timer hooked up to the sprinkler, can keep the garden well watered, which increases the chances of success. Then it will only be a matter of weeks before the garden can be enjoyed throughout the season.

Choose the best location

Spend time in the yard and decide where to house a garden. A far-off corner may get the most sun, but will you forget about the garden if it is too far away? Ideally, the garden should be located where it will get at least six to eight hours of sun each day. There also should be a water source nearby. The spot also should be convenient so that it is easy to go and pick vegetables or prune flowers.

Start small

If you're new to gardening, begin with a small garden footprint so that you can get your feet wet. A raised garden bed can be a good starting point because it is contained and easy to maintain. As your experience (and garden) grows, you can add to the garden size the next time around.

Amend the soil

It's possible but unlikely that the soil in the backyard is the perfect mix to grow healthy plants. It's more likely that the garden will need some soil modification. You can test the soil makeup with do-it-yourself kits or work with a garden center. A garden typically requires a mix of compost



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How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

Memorial Day weekend is a popular time to entertain. For many, the weekend marks the first outdoor entertaining opportunity of the year, which is certainly something to look forward to.

As outdoor entertaining season begins, homeowners can take these steps to prepare their outdoor living spaces for the first big backyard get-together of the year.

- Break out the power washer. Pressure washing is an important component of spring home cleanup. The warmer temperatures of spring allow water from power washing to dry more quickly, which can decrease the chances that mold and mildew will grow on surfaces like siding. A freshly power washed home also makes for a welcoming entertaining space. A power washer also can be used on outdoor entertaining spaces to remove dirt and debris that

built up over the winter. Just make sure to read manufacturer instructions before using a power washer to clean paving stones, decks and outdoor furniture.

- Inspect outdoor furniture. Now is a good time to inspect outdoor furniture if the task was not performed in late fall or early winter before items were moved into the garage or placed in storage. Check to make sure furnishings are still safe to use, addressing any issues before guests come over for a Memorial Day weekend gathering. Wash cushions for outdoor furniture and replace any that might be showing their age.
- Clean the grill. A thorough cleaning of the grill also is in order prior to summer entertaining season. Many homeowners do little or no grilling during winter, so now is the time to give grilling sur-

faces and the interior of the grill a deep cleaning. Check for leaks if using a gas grill, and scrub the interior of any grease that accumulated last season. Many grilling experts advise lighting a grill and letting it burn for roughly 20 minutes prior to putting any foods on the grates for the first time. Such a strategy allows residual fluids like soap, vinegar and de-greasing products used when cleaning the grill to burn off before food is placed on the grates.

- Inspect the landscaping, too. It's not just seating areas like patios and decks that need some investigation prior to outdoor entertaining season. Take a walk around the landscape and make sure there's no potentially dangerous spots where people could be injured when playing backyard games. Fill in any holes with soil and fresh grass seed, and inspect trees to see if any

branches need to be pruned. Summer entertaining season begins each Memorial Day weekend. Homeowners can take vari-

ous steps to ensure their outdoor entertaining spaces are comfortable and safe.



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Robert Roofing and Gutters: Just Honest Roofing, No Gimmicks

By JANE LEBAK

Robert Greene of Robert Roofing and Gutters begins his work with a promise: "ONE CALL SENDS A ROOFER, NOT A SALESMAN."

Replacing a roof seems like a nerve-racking process. After all, "a roof over your head" is shorthand for your home itself. It's important to find a roofer you can trust, and Robert Greene strives to be that man.

"When homeowners make that first appointment, I'm the one who goes out there to look at the roof," Rob says. "I take that first appointment myself because I want that assessment done right."

"The human touch is important, and it's a dying art," adds Kelli Greene, Operations Manager and also Rob's wife. "We could make it seem flashy and high-tech by flying a drone over the roof, but drones and photos can't replace a man on a ladder. Even from the ground, Rob can tell you all sorts of things about a roof. He can figure out how

many layers of shingles it's had. He can tell from the way it feels whether the plywood needs to be replaced or if the underlay is rotting."

A proper roof breathes, so Rob always inspects the ventilation. Afterward, he'll take a walk around the property, determining where to place the ladders and how to protect the landscaping.

"Any salesman can sell you a roof, but an experienced roofer can figure out what your house actually needs," Rob says. "Many times, it turns out the roof doesn't need replacing at all. That's a huge savings for the homeowner."

Kelli says, "Rob is down to earth and straightforward. No gimmicks. No upselling. If our team finds an issue while doing the work, they don't just do extra work. Instead, we'll take pictures so the homeowners can see the problem themselves. We'll explain their options before we go ahead with any work. That way, there are no costly surprises."

Rob can usually get a team on the roof within two weeks. Most



Meet the roofers, not the salesmen! Foreman Stiles Bezema, owner Robert Greene, and foreman Robert Greene Jr. are ready to work on your roof.

jobs can be started and completed the same day so the house isn't exposed to the elements.

Robert Roofing and Gutters is a third-generation company based in Norfolk. Rob started at age thirteen, working cleanup for his father's construction business and learning from the experienced roofers, men he calls "the great old-timers." Now his son, Robert Junior, works alongside him, and Rob has become the

teacher.

The majority of Robert Roofing clients are referrals from other customers. "We've been a part of this community for so long," says Rob. "At any event in Norfolk, I always end up meeting a customer or two. Part of my work is to give back to the community."

Robert Roofing and Gutters supports several local organizations, such as the North Cottage Program in Norton, and Gilly's House in Wrentham. "It's important to us to help one another," says Kelli Greene. "We sponsor children's sports teams in Norfolk, Walpole, and Stoughton, and we make donations for equipment to the local schools. It's vital for children to have role models and structure. What roofing does for your house, positive activity does for a child. Then

Business spotlight



those children grow up to make the whole community stronger."

Robert Roofing and Gutters offers asphalt roofing, rubber, low-slope, and specialty shingles. In addition, Rob can install gutters or downspouts, install new fascia, replace vinyl and wood siding, and perform chimney re-pointing and flashing. Kelli says, "Just about everything for the outside of your home."

"A good roof makes for a good house," says Rob. "It's easy to brush off minor damage to your shingles, or try to get one more year out of that failing roof, but you don't want to wait until it's an emergency."

Is it time to take a closer look at your own roof? Visit <https://www.robertroofingandgutters.com> or call 857-247-8709 to schedule your first appointment with a roofer...not a salesman.

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Did you know?

Wood could be having a moment among modern home buyers. According to the real estate experts at Zillow, the term “cozy” appeared in 35 percent more real estate listings in 2024 than in 2023. Though various components can help to create a cozy vibe inside a home, wood has long been a go-to material when interior designers attempt to add warmth to a property. The home renovation experts at



Houzz also cite wood-infused architectural warmth among its 10 most popular home trends in the coming year. Homeowners who want to capitalize on this trend before putting their homes on the market or those who simply love the idea of adding more wood-based warmth in their homes can consider installing ceiling beams, wood wall paneling or even wood trim throughout their homes.

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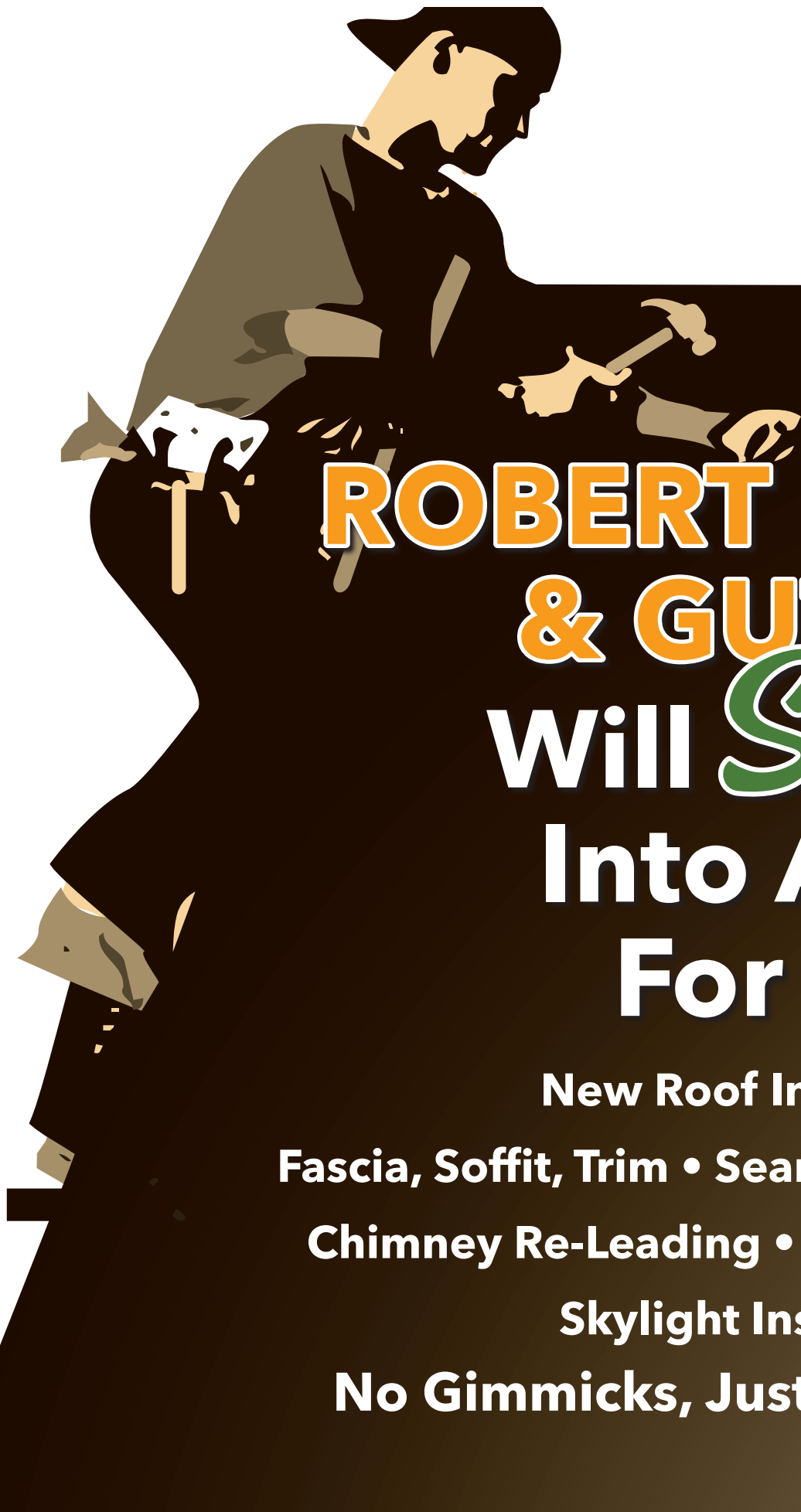
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