



*Spring*  
**Home & Garden**

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# Budget-friendly ways to upgrade a landscape

An inviting, well-tended landscape can add significant curb appeal to a home. Such a landscape also can serve as a point of pride and welcome homeowners each evening as they arrive home from work.

Landscaping projects run the gamut from simple changes that can be accomplished on a weekend afternoon to more significant and costly undertakings that require the work of a professional. Budget-conscious homeowners may be looking for simpler projects, and the following are some less costly ways to upgrade a landscape.

- Add a pop of color with planters. Awe-inspiring colors can make a landscape stand out from surrounding properties. Flowers, bushes and plants may be the first thing homeowners consider when trying to add color to their lawns, but planters can provide a more immediate way to give exterior grounds some color. Bold planters won't lose their color in a matter of weeks like many flowers do, and homeowners can switch planters so the colors align with the season. For example, some pastel planters can evoke the spirit of spring, while orange planters can be filled with mums to give a landscape an autumnal feel.
- Plant perennials around the property. Well-maintained perennials grow back each year, making them ideal for homeowners who don't have the time or desire to map out new gardening arrangements each spring. Planting perennials also is a great way to add color around the property without breaking the bank.

- Upgrade walkways. Though it's more expensive than adding planters and planting perennials, upgrading old and cracked walkways is a great way to give a property a whole new look. According to the renovation experts at HomeAdvisor, homeowners typically pay between \$6 and \$12 per square foot for new concrete walkway installation. Homeowners working on a budget can target spots where walkways have already cracked and fix those areas first before continuing the project piecemeal until all the old walkways have been replaced.
- Plant to create privacy. Homeowners spent more time at home than ever before during the pandemic, and some might have grown tired of seeing what their



neighbors are up to. Fencing might be the first solution homeowners consider when looking to make their landscapes more private. But new fencing installation can be expensive, costing homeowners between \$1,667 and \$4,075 on average, according to BobVila.com. A more costly and natural solution is to plant trees around the perimeter. Speak with a

local landscaping professional, who can survey the property to see which trees might thrive and provide the privacy homeowners want.

Creating an inviting landscape doesn't have to break the bank. Various small and relatively inexpensive projects can change the look and feel of a home's exterior.

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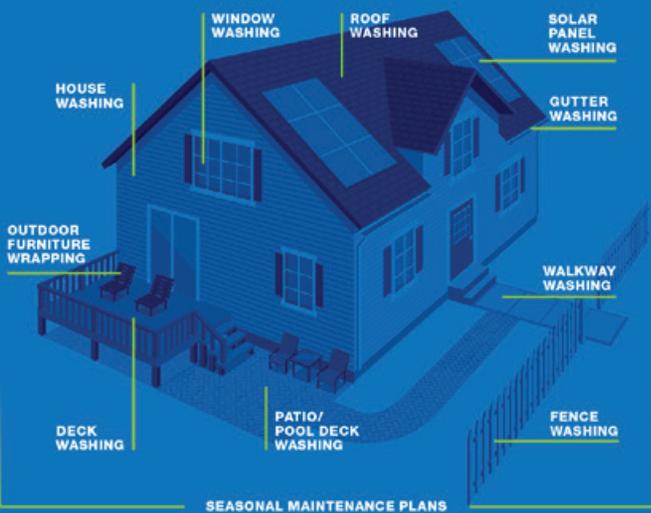
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# Quick and simple ways to make a front door pop

Visitors' impressions of a home are often dictated by the home's entryway. Must as one may judge a book by its cover, the same can be said about the impression that a front door and entryway can create, regardless of

how accurate that impression is.

Making certain changes to an entryway can go a long way toward improving curb appeal. Entryways also can set the scene for a home's interior. Whether one chooses to be classic or bold,

modern or traditional, there are various ways to quickly transform a home's entryway.

- **Bold front door color:** Color can dramatically enhance an entryway. Painting an existing door or replacing it with a more vivid option can do the trick. The DIY Network says certain colors stand out as favorites. These include turquoise, yellow, red, indigo, orange, and black. The door color should complement the other shades of the home, such as those on siding and trim.
- **Custom walkway:** Guide guests right to the front door with an attractive (and safe) walkway. Stamped concrete or decorative paver blocks may fit the bill. This walkway can extend to the street or to the driveway.
- **Contain plants.** Landscaping around the entryway should be neat and well-tended. Overgrown plants or shrubbery may give off an air of



neglect. Container plants and carefully curated shrubs can create a neat and inviting aura.

- **Highlight the address.** Make sure the home can be found easily with bold and decorative house numbers. Consider two different address signs: one illuminated and easily viewed from the curb, and another closer to the front door.
- **Utilize high-end materials.** The relatively small area of real estate by the front door enables homeowners to splurge on more opulent materials that can really add a

feeling of luxury. These can include colorful tiles, ornate planters, decorative wooden doors, or elaborate knobs and lighting fixtures.

- **Add architectural details.** Find out which architectural elements will meld with the style of the home and then incorporate them. Moldings, columns, shutters, and trim are areas to consider.

The entryway to a home garners a lot of attention. Homeowners can enhance their spaces with entryways that really make a statement.

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# When it can be smart to hire a painting pro

Few things can revitalize a home more readily than a fresh coat of paint.

Thanks in part to the affordability of paint and its ease of application, painting is something that even novice DIYers can typically handle. According to the marketing advice guru Brandon Gaille, it is estimated that residential interior paint only lasts around three years before it needs to be updated. Exterior paint can fade, chip and peel due to various environmental factors. As a result, many homes can likely use a fresh coat of paint in at least one room.

As DIY-friendly as painting can be, when attempting to paint the interior or exterior of their homes, homeowners may learn that some painting projects are best left to the professionals. Painting requires skill, patience and a knowledge of how various paints — including finishes for particular applications — will hold up. Novice painters may do more harm than good by dripping paint on

expensive carpeting or floors or fail to recognize the nuances that indicate a spot-on painting job.

Professional painters have spent hours upon hours learning the ropes of what works — and



what does not. Painters often understand that painstaking preparatory work is crucial to getting pristine finished results. Walls and ceilings must be properly repaired and prepared even before a base coat is applied.

Professional painters also have an eye for details. And because professional painters make a business out of doing interior and exterior surfaces, they understand which techniques can improve

efficiency. That means a professional job can typically be completed much more quickly than a DIY project.

Even though some people think they'll save money by painting their own homes, that's not necessarily true. Professionals already have all the equipment necessary, unlike novices who may need to make repeated and potentially costly trips to the hardware store for supplies. Plus, if mistakes happen, DIYers have to spend additional time and money fixing them.

Safety can be a large motivator for turning painting over to a pro. Navigating exterior areas or tall interior ceilings can be challenging and may require scaffolding or tall ladders DIYers do not have. Risk of falls or other injuries increase with lack of experience.

Painting can give a home a facelift, and oftentimes it is smart to turn the work over to professionals to ensure the job is done just right.

## Why do painters wear white?

The sight of professional painters decked out in white overalls is a familiar one to many people. Perhaps you've pondered just why painters wear white? The reasons behind painters' sartorial choices is not easily verifiable, but it's fun to explore nonetheless.

The actual name for a painting professionals wardrobe is "painter's whites." White canvas or denim pants, white t-shirt, overalls, and a white cap are often worn by painters. The idea of wearing white may date back to the 1700s, when there were not a variety of house colors available. As a result, white was the primary choice of paint at this time. If white paint were to be dripped on a white uniform, it wouldn't be readily noticed before laundering.

Painters also used to mix 50 pounds of "white lead powder" with a can of paint paste to make about two gallons of paint. The mixing process produced large amounts of white dust. To hide the dust, the painters wore white.

It is also believed that some painters crafted clothing from the white sails from ships.

Another theory behind painters' preference for white work gear traces its origins to 19th century union painters. Those in the union adopted the all-white uniform to differentiate themselves from non-union painters. Sometimes a black bow tie was added to complete the professional presentation.

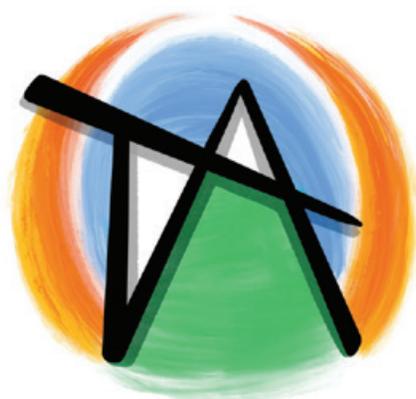
There are some practical reasons for painters to wear white. White clothing tends to be cooler when working outdoors or in sunny locations. Should painter's whites become dirty, they're easily bleachable without the color fading. Also, white is a pristine color that will present the appearance of cleanliness. Homeowners may readily invite and trust a clean worker into their homes to get the job done.

Painters often find that their business logo stands out sharply against the white of a uniform, which can be another practical reason to don some white overalls. White clothing also can be less expensive to replace.

Today, because there are many other paint hues available, painter's whites may not be so pristine. But those variously shaded specks and splatters may be indicative of a seasoned professional who has put in many hours on the job.

Painters have long worn white as their unofficial uniform. The theories as to why vary, but the tradition is likely here to stay.

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“The beautiful thing about what we do is we get to revive properties,” says Mark Mercer, owner of Under Pressure Power Washing, Inc., which has been providing residential and commercial cleaning services in the Eastern and Central Massachusetts areas for 23 years.

“One of the things we’re proudest of is helping homeowners fall in love with their house again -- especially in the last couple of years [during the pandemic] when people have been homebound, they’ve realized how important the home is -- that’s the core of what we do, bring them that joy.”

Mercer uses the example of a newly-detailed car. “When the car is fully detailed, it’s clean and spotless, you see it and think ‘Wow, this is my car, I’m proud to drive this.’ It’s the same with cleaning a home for a customer. They think ‘Wow, this is my house, I’m proud of it again!’”

Under Pressure offers many services for both residential or commercial properties including house soft washing, gentle roof

cleaning and revitalization, deck cleaning, driveway cleaning, gutter cleaning, window cleaning, hardscape washing patios, pool decks, sport courts cleaning, solar panel cleaning, and fence (wood and vinyl) cleaning.

Planning ahead for the fall, Under Pressure also offers end-of-season furniture shrink wrapping for patio furniture, outdoor kitchens, sensitive masonry (such as planters and fountains), etc.

“It’s similar to wrapping a boat for the winter. You wrap it tightly to protect it from UV rays and harsh weather, give it vents so it can breathe, add rodent repellent to protect it from damage, and then the furniture can remain outside for the winter and not take up valuable space in the garage or basement,” says Mercer.

The company’s logo is “Keep it Clean, Keep it Green” which speaks to one of its other primary goals: being environmentally friendly and continuously seeking ways to reduce its carbon footprint.

“When we first started this

business, there was very little information about which chemicals and techniques were best for the environment and our company has made great strides in that area,” says Mercer. “The biggest thing for me is water use. Fifteen years ago, we might have used triple what we use today, and we take pride in that. We’re so fast at what we do so, by being quick and using biodegradable chemicals, we’re doing our part.”

At the Under Pressure facility in Hopkinton, to which the company recently relocated from Framingham, they have a water harvesting system that captures 12,000 gallons of rain water which is then pumped into the trucks for use in the field. They also use electric power when

possible “so we don’t have gas burning all day long.”

The Under Pressure staff includes 20 to 25 employees during the busy season, and some of those employees have been with the company for more than 10 years.

in 2011. “We just love the town, it’s been really good to my family and the business. It’s a great place to raise kids and has been really supportive of us.”

Under Pressure also has a focus on community service and often donates time and talent to help local efforts such as cleaning gravestones in advance of Memorial Day, cleaning the Michael Lisnow Respite Center, and helping town officials remove graffiti when necessary.

Mercer says, “For me, it’s about the little things like that – donating where we can because it feels good to do that.”

For more information about Under Pressure Power Washing, Inc., or to receive an instant quote, visit

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Mercer and his family live in Hopkinton where his company has been giving back to the community since they moved there

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# Tips to prepare for your next big home project

The planning process is one of the most exciting parts of a home renovation project, and with social distancing keeping us indoors, now is the time to dream big and get ready.

Whether it's a basement makeover, a pool addition or even building a new house from scratch, here are some tips to get started:

1. Factor in your lifestyle. Think about your priorities and lifestyle – do you work from home without a proper home office? Do you enjoy cooking and entertaining? Is your backyard living up to its potential as an extension of your home? Asking these kinds of questions can help you determine the most beneficial focus for your next project.

2. Educate yourself. Take advantage of this extra time you have to learn about materials, processes and new innovations. You can make smarter purchasing decisions by finding out the answers to key questions, such as: Is this material mold-resistant? How long will it last? Is this a passing fad or will it stand the test of time?

3. Consider sustainability. Products and materials that reduce your carbon footprint don't just help the planet—they're often better for your wallet, too. When doing your research, look for energy-efficient appliances, windows, walls and more to build a greener home that will last longer and save you money in the long run.

4. Disaster-proof your design. The pandemic has taught us that sometimes the worst can happen. From natural disasters to fires and flooding, we need our homes to offer as much protection as possible. Whether you're planning an extension to your home, pools and spas for your backyard or a custom-built home, insulated concrete forms from Nudura are a smart investment. An eco-friendly alternative to traditional materials like wood, ICFs are disaster resilient, designed to withstand wind, fire, tornados, and more.



5. Budget for smart splurges and savings. Budgeting is one of the most important parts of the planning process because you want to spend your hard-earned money wisely. You'll want to splurge on items that will boost your property value, like energy-efficient features, creating more living

space and a solid foundation. Upcycling and repurposing furniture, DIY-ing simpler projects like painting, and spending more on nicer hardware but less on cabinets are clever ways to save.

Find more information at [nudura.com](http://nudura.com).

## American Backyard Company scales company to keep up with the demand

Brandon Currul and Mark Narducci, owners of American Backyard Co., have made some big moves in the last year

Currul says Google searches for home improvement work are up over 50%, year over year, since 2020.

American Backyard is a skilled team with the ability to do just about any outdoor project a customer can dream up, but because of the overwhelming demand over the last few years, they have shifted their focus almost exclusively to fence, decks, hardscape, and outdoor lighting.

In just the last 12 months, Currul and Narducci have acquired a 4000 square foot warehouse with acres of outdoor storage to stockpile fence and other building materials. They have invested heavily in warehouse support equipment and logistic vehicles.

Currul says the mission from the beginning was to offer a high level of service to customers that they won't normally see in most building trades. "Mark and I understood right away that the only way to do that was to not only

invest in equipment and buildings, but to invest heaviest in our team, not just on the front end, but the back end also."

"Over the fall and winter of this past year, we brought on three additional fence crews and had them trained to the American Backyard standard."

"We also acquired an entire construction company that specializes in custom decks and pool houses."

Narducci has built homes personally for over 30 years and agreed that this company and crew puts out some of the best work that he has ever seen. "We are truly blessed to have them on our team."

Currul states, "Our plan is to always continue adding to and building out their team." From the beginning, Currul's wife Jenna, who brings her background working with the New England Patriots and two other Boston startups, has been working tirelessly and in lockstep with co-Founder Narducci. She's worked not only on streamlining American Backyard's back-end support, but also on the recruit-



ing of several previous business owners that are now working on the American Backyard team."

American Backyard recently recruited Operations Manager Dan Essary, who previously owned Essary Roofing Company, then later went on to run things over at Olyn Roofing for several years. "Now he smooths out the customer experience at American Backyard, making sure the jobs run on time, keeping materials in stock, and stay-

ing in contact with the customer from the start to finish of every job." Similarly, Michelle Masters came from Master's Touch Design Build.

Currul says, "Their background is oriented toward enhancing the customer experience. We've got a different spin, and we're building a team that understands full service. Most people think of a construction company as the people doing the physical work, but the back-end

support is just as important. It's in the operational management, the planning, the folks who pull permits, and the team who keeps in contact with the customer."

Currul and Narducci are excited to announce they recently leased a 2000 square foot building on Route 109 in Millis. This will be built out over the next few months to not only house some of their corporate offices, but will also serve as an outdoor space and custom design center, sample showroom, and include a separate room to display all the latest outdoor lighting fixtures.

Currul and Narducci believe this will be a game-changer for their customers and will help continue American Backyard's mission to offer a unique start-to-finish service. "We feel grateful to be able to work in the communities that we grew up in."

American Backyard has a website at [www.abackyard.com](http://www.abackyard.com), as well as a page on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/American-BackyardCompany/](http://www.facebook.com/American-BackyardCompany/)

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# Fun ways to celebrate the arrival of spring

Spring is a season of rebirth in more ways than one. Spring is when certain animals emerge from hibernation, while many species lay eggs or give birth this time of year. Flowers and trees also bloom in spring, providing spectacular foliage and awe-inspiring color.

People also may feel like they have a new lease on life as they shake away the doldrums of winter and embrace longer hours of sunlight and warmer temperatures. The arrival of spring is worthy of celebration, and these activities and ideas can be enjoyable ways to spend the first day of spring.

- Spend time outdoors. One is never too old for a picnic in a park or a bike ride along the trails. Spending time outdoors is beneficial because it exposes people to sunlight, which is a precursor to the development of vitamin D. Vitamin D affects muscles, joints and tissues. It also can affect mood.
- Plant a tree. Honor the first day of spring, and Earth Day shortly thereafter, by planting trees. Trees provide habitats for wildlife, create shade, reduce air pollution by filtering the air, and produce oxygen. A sapling is a manageable tree to plant and something children can do as well.

- Enjoy spring crafts. Grab an inexpensive canvas and paint a landscape that is in full bloom. Use quick-set plaster to create stepping stones embedded with mosaic glass pieces for color that can be added to the backyard.
- Host a spring potluck. Put fresh spring vegetables and fruits on display. Options include artichokes, apricots, asparagus, carrots, dandelion greens, and radishes. Put together a pasta primavera, which essentially is a spring pasta dish laden with fresh vegetables.
- Decorate with flowers. Bring fresh flowers indoors and put them on display in vases or table centerpieces. Cut stems on a 45-degree angle underwater to help flowers last longer. In addition, choose floral themed curtains and throw pillows to add some spring decor.
- Create a water feature. The sound and sights of cascading water can be both relaxing and picturesque. A water feature can be something as simple as a small fountain or more elaborate like a koi pond.

Spring is a time of year when people can enjoy seasonal activities that make the most of the warmer weather and blooming landscape.

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# 7 things to consider when buying a shed

Backyard sheds can be useful assets. Sheds can create storage space in the garage, basement or other areas of the house that have become gathering spots for gear typically used outdoors. Sheds are ideal for housing mowers, tools and even pool-care equipment. But they can be put to other uses as well, such as being key spots to engage in hobbies or even as a child's clubhouse.

Various factors should be considered before building or buying a shed. A storage shed can be a significant investment. Once placed, sheds may remain in their dedicated spots for years to come. That means careful thought should go into the planning process.

1. Check your local building codes first. Before you accumulate building materials or order a shed, be sure to know the ins and outs of shed codes. The codes may impact the shed's placement, construction, the materials used, size, and numerous other fac-

tors. It's much easier to amend plans beforehand than to face the hassle and expense after learning you did things incorrectly.

2. Choose placement wisely. Spend several days assessing the yard and thinking about the uses for the shed. If you plan to store pool floats and chemicals inside of the shed, it should be located close enough to the pool to be convenient. Look at the lay of the land. If there is a soggy patch of land that can turn swampy under the shed's foundation, that is a poor location choice. If you need access to electricity, placing it far away from the house could necessitate running expensive wiring.
3. Consider the design. Just because a shed is for storage doesn't mean aesthetics should be overlooked. Choose a shed style that



complements your home. You may also want to match certain architectural features, like arched doorways or dormers. Design also may relate to practicality. For instance, storing a riding mower inside may necessitate dual doors that open widely.

4. Invest in quality materials. Spending a little more and using quality materials can ensure it lasts long enough to be cost-effective. The right materials will be resistant to splitting, cracking, decay, and insect damage.

5. Prepare the site well. A proper foundation for the shed is almost as important as the shed itself. You cannot just drop the shed on the lawn and leave it, as the shed can sink or structural issues may arise if it is placed on a weak base.
  6. Blend into the environment. Surround the shed with shrubs or plants so that it blends into the yard and complements the space.
  7. Deck out the interior. Use every storage tool at your disposal to maximize floor, wall and even rafter space for storage. Plan where items will be kept and customize the storage options around those locations.
- Sheds can be an asset and improve storage capability in the backyard.



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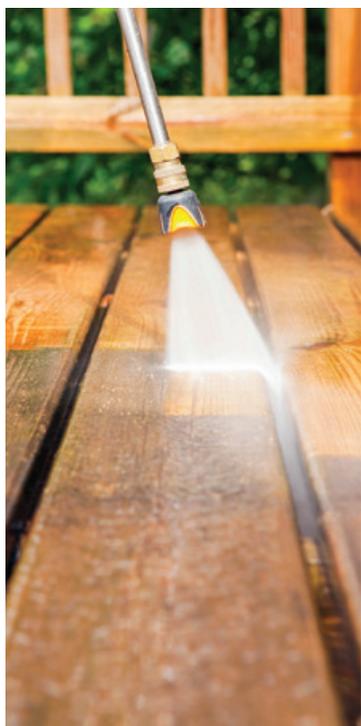
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# House powerwashing tips

frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as

a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface

that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home's exterior.

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is

# How to prepare a garden for spring planting

The final weeks of winter, and even the first few weeks of spring, are still chilly in many parts of the world. Despite those last vestiges of winter chills, late winter is a great time to begin preparing gardens for the coming planting season.

Gardens may have to withstand months of harsh weather each winter, and such conditions can take a toll. Gardeners can consider the following tips as they try to restore their gardens and get them ready for spring planting.



- Disinfect your tools. It's common to clean tools in late fall or whenever they're typically placed in storage for the winter. But cleaning and disinfecting are not necessarily the same thing. If tools were not disinfected at the end of the previous gardening season, disinfect them before doing any work on the garden. Doing so can ensure any lingering bacteria or fungi on tool surfaces are killed prior to the beginning of gardening season. According to the University of Minnesota Extension, plant pathogens, including bacteria and viruses,

can be transferred to and infect plants through bits of soil and plant debris left on shovels and pruner blades. Thoroughly disinfecting such tools prior to using them in the spring is a great way to reduce the risk of disease in your garden.

- Clear debris from garden beds. Leaves, twigs, sticks, and other debris may have gathered in the garden over the winter. Such debris can inhibit the growth of plants and vegetables, so make sure all of it is removed prior to planting. Weeds might even begin to sprout up in late winter and early spring, so remove them before they go to seed.

- Test the soil. Testing the soil prior to planting can help gardeners determine what their gardens will need to thrive in the coming months. Garden centers and home improvement stores sell home testing kits that are effective and easy to use. Once the results are in, speak with a professional at your local garden center about the best time to amend the soil.

- Loosen compacted soil. Soil can become compacted over winter. If compacted soil is not loosened prior to planting, plants will have a hard time getting the water and nutrients they need to thrive. Loosening the soil also provides another opportunity to inspect the garden for any underlying issues, such as fungi or weed growth, that you may have missed when clearing debris or testing the soil.

Late winter is a good time to assess a garden and address any issues that developed over the winter so plants and vegetables can thrive come the spring planting season.



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# Low-cost ways to revamp living areas

Home improvement projects require substantial financial investment. But just because a homeowner wants to bring a fresh look indoors doesn't mean he or she has to break the bank along the way.

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend or to make the area more functional for a changing family dynamic. Here are some budget-

friendly ideas for breathing new life into living room designs.

- **Establish the budget.** Homeowners should figure out how many dollars they can designate to a living room makeover before purchasing supplies or hiring out the work. Figure out the scope of the remodel, visit stores or suppliers to price out materials, get estimates from contractors, and then plan for some unforeseen circumstances along the way to determine if this type of renovation is affordable. If not, scale things back until the project more closely aligns with your budget.
- **Change the paint color.** Lighter and brighter colors are on trend. A can or two of paint can do wonders for updating a space without a large financial commitment. Pair that new paint color with new window coverings and complementary throw pillows to pull the theme together with minimal expense.

- **Update the flooring.** Tired, outdated carpeting or other flooring can use an overhaul. While solid hardwood flooring may be preferable, there are many types of laminate flooring that mimic the looks of popular wood colors and styles for a fraction of the cost. Plus, many are sold at home improvement retailers and even at warehouse clubs or online for reasonable prices. Laminate flooring also may be a potential DIY job for a skilled homeowner, saving even more money.
- **Introduce a fireplace.** Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that popularity waned in the 1970s and 1980s. Homeowners with chimneys may discover a fireplace was boarded over and the bare bones still exist that can be renovated to bring back character. There also are ventless freestanding units that are quite affordable that can mimic the look of a built-in fireplace.

- **Reupholster instead of replace furniture.** There's no need to throw away quality furniture if the fabric is the only thing impeding design. New upholstery or even a slipcover can update designs.
- **Conquer clutter.** Rather than adding something to the living room, remove clutter to give the room a more airy feel. This can instantly change the look of the room. Use cord covers to tame plugs for electronics and remove unnecessary furniture from the room.
- **Improve lighting.** Another easy and often inexpensive fix is to change lighting fixtures, including using brighter, more energy efficient LED bulbs, and to assess lighting needs to eliminate dark corners of rooms that can make the space seem drab.

Living room spaces in need of an update often can benefit from improvements that go easy on the wallet.

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# Popular insect repellent plants



Homeowners choose plants for their properties based on a number of variables. Some may be into growing their own foods, while others desire their gardens to be an awe-inspiring mélange of bright colors and alluring scents. There's no wrong reason to plant a fresh garden, but some plants offer extra benefits, such as repelling insects.

Insects can be a nuisance and a threat to individuals' overall health. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, insect-borne diseases are viral and bacterial illnesses that develop from insect bites. Mosquitoes, sand flies and fleas are some examples of insects that can pass on disease. Fever, chills, headache, and muscle soreness are just a few of the more common symptoms linked to insect-borne diseases.

The good news for avid gardeners is that certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.

- **Basil:** The aroma of fresh basil is enough to compel any gardener to make a place for it in their garden. But there's more to fresh basil than its scent, as the Farmers Almanac notes it can be used to repel mosquitoes and moths.

- **Lavender:** Fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and moths are not fans of this aromatic and colorful member of the mint family. Bees tend to be drawn to lavender, a durable plant that many garden centers recommend in areas prone to drought or hot summers without much precipitation.

- **Mint:** Mint is another plant that is instantly recognizable for its aroma. But mint lovers may not realize that it's also great for keeping ants at bay. Mint also can be used to repel mosquitoes, but gardeners with no experience planting mint should plant it in pots. That's because the Farmers Almanac notes mint is an especially aggressive spreader that can quickly take over a garden. Separating mint in pots can prevent it from bullying its way into other plants' domains.

- **Lemongrass:** Lemongrass is a tropical grass that's so fragrant it's often used in perfumes. Lemongrass contains citronella, which many people associate with repelling mosquitoes. A potted lemongrass plant can repel these unwanted guests, keeping them away from decks, porches and/or patios all summer long.

- **Chrysanthemums:** The Farmers' Almanac® recommends using chrysanthemums, which repel a range of insects from bedbugs to fleas to ants, as border plants around a home. That's because they contain the natural insecticide pyrethrin, which can serve as something of an insect-repelling boundary around a home.

Insects are unwanted guests around a home each spring, summer and fall. Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.

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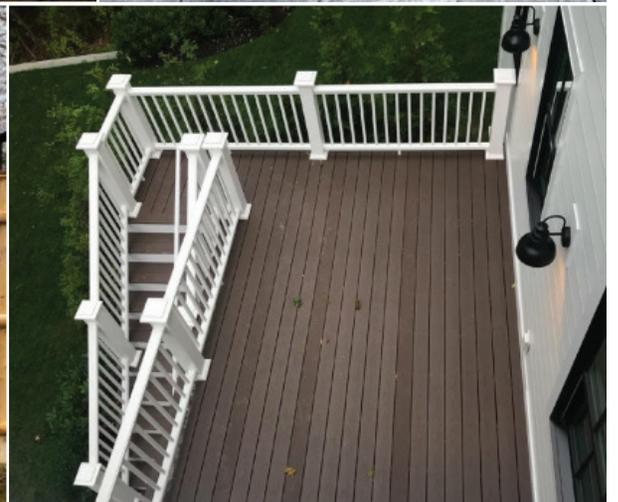
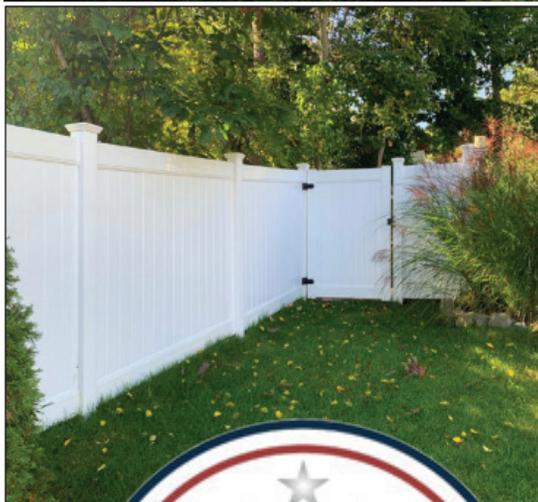
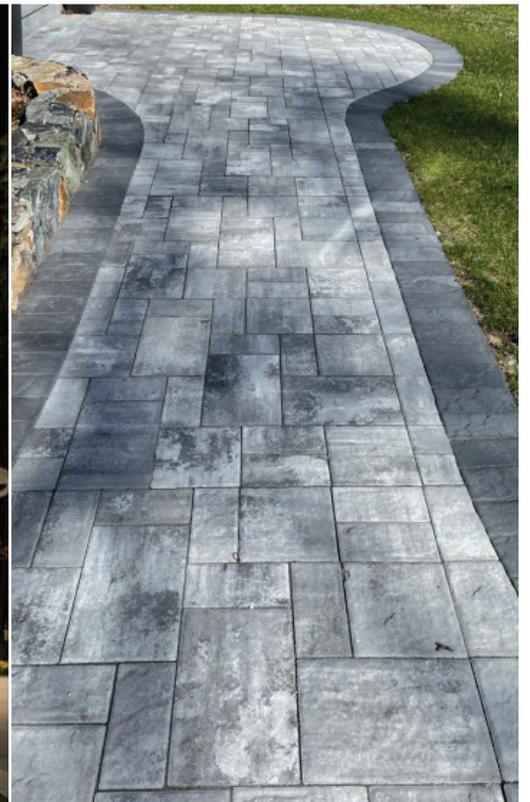
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