Fall Home Improvement

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basement remodeling

kitchen design

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MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER
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Kitchen remodels are among the most popular home renovation projects, whether they consist of swapping out cabinet hardware or doing major demolition.

Due to the sheer amount of time families spend in the kitchen, not to mention the number of tasks performed in this space, it is easy to see why Remodeling magazine consistently ranks kitchen renovations as projects that will enable homeowners to recoup a high percentage of their investments. In the magazine’s 2018 Cost vs. Value report, midrange major kitchen remodels costing an average of $63,829 recouped 59 percent of that investment.

When investing in a kitchen project, it is important to incorporate items that are coveted.

• Deep, double sinks: Having a double sink enables you to soak dishes in one side and then wash on the other. It also makes it easy to wash and prep produce for meals.

• Kitchen island and bar stools: Even though many meals are enjoyed around the table, there’s something to be said for the convenience of a kitchen island and some well-placed bar stools for quick breakfasts or snacks.

• Smart kitchen storage: Work with a contractor to include storage solutions built into cabinetry and the pantry. Slide-out shelving, nooks for a paper towel roll and custom-designed areas to store stand mixers and other necessities can make kitchens more functional.

• Outdoor access: If possible, design a kitchen so it is easy to access the backyard via sliding doors. This can make outdoor entertaining or even coffee on the deck much easier.

• Under-cabinet lighting: Fixtures installed under cabinets provide both ambient lighting and task lighting. Such lighting makes it easier to see what you’re working on as well, as even well-placed overhead lighting can fail to illuminate dark corners and spots on the counters.

• Convenient warming drawer: This appliance provides backup to the oven. It’s a slide-out drawer that can keep prepared foods out of the way and warm until they are ready to be served. This is particularly handy for holidays and other entertaining.

• Beverage station: Designate one area of the kitchen to beverages, such as coffee and tea. Or make the area an informal bar. This can limit traffic in the kitchen to a single area.

Kitchen remodels are exciting to envision, and several choices can make these high-traffic spaces even more coveted.
A basement remodeling project can add valuable and usable space to a home. For many years, homeowners overlooked the potential of a basement remodel, perhaps thinking it would not be a smart return on investment. But that’s no longer the case.

The latest ‘Cost vs. Value’ report from Remodeling magazine says the average basement remodel can cost around $61,000 with a 70.3 percent recoup rate. In addition, HGTV says architects and contractors indicate the cost of redoing a basement is roughly one-third to one-half less than the price of putting an addition on a home.

Before remodeling a basement, homeowners should think about how they want to use the space. Homeowners also must focus on some potential obstacles in a basement that will need to be addressed so that the area can be as functional as possible.

Basements can be chilly and damp. That means moisture issues and heating and cooling needs must be addressed prior to any construction. Homeowners may have to consider the installation of a dehumidifier and run venting through the basement to allow for proper climate control. If a basement takes on water, either through the walls or a concrete slab, a professional waterproofing company can come in and fix these issues so they will not damage drywall and flooring afterwards.

The presence of insects and pests also must be addressed. Exterminators can help homeowners figure out which insects are in their basements and how to make the space less hospitable to these unwelcome guests so that the room will become comfortable for human occupants.

Space is often at a premium in basements, which may contain HVAC units, water heaters, filtration devices, ductwork, pipes, and the other appliances. Qualified contractors can suggest solutions for cordoning off appliances and camouflaging pipes and wires so they won’t detract from the finished product. However, building access panels into the design will make it easier to service or repair features as necessary. Homeowners also may want to wrap pipes before drywall is installed to quiet noisy drainage pipes.

Uneven basement flooring will need to be smoothed out and flattened before carpeting or tile can be laid down. A self-leveling underlayment can be applied to fill in gullies, while larger crack and holes will need to be patched.

Once the structure of the basement is addressed, then the design work can begin. Many professionals advise against drop ceilings, which can take away from ceiling height and look cheap. Basements can be dark, so the addition of plenty of lighting can help brighten the room. Small basement windows can be replaced with larger ones to add more light as well.

Homeowners can mimic built-ins and architectural details from elsewhere in the home so the basement is aesthetically cohesive and doesn’t seem like an addition. Bookcases and shelving can add valuable storage space as well. Decorate the basement with bright, neutral colors so they make the space feel more inviting.

With some effort and financial investment, basements can be as beautiful and functional as other rooms in a home.
SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING?

By Jo Underwood, Owner - Mighty Ducts, LLC.

Should you be concerned about carbon monoxide poisoning? When winter temperatures plummet and home heating systems run for hours at a time, the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning increases. According to the CDC, at least 430 people die in the U.S. every year from accidental CO poisoning. Approximately 50,000 people in the U.S. visit the emergency department each year due to accidental CO poisoning. This number is believed to be an underestimate because many people with CO symptoms mistake the symptoms for the flu or are misdiagnosed.

Carbon monoxide is created when combustion appliances are used improperly, not maintained or have failed for reasons such as age. Combustion appliances are things that burn fuels for heating and/or cooking. Examples include space heaters, ranges, ovens, stoves, furnaces, fireplaces, water heaters, boilers and clothes dryers. Carbon monoxide is a by-product you get whenever fuel is burned.

When appliances are maintained, they produce little CO. Lack of maintenance or improperly vented appliances, however, can produce elevated — even fatal levels of carbon monoxide concentrations in your home. Likewise, using kerosene heaters or charcoal grills indoors, or running a car in a garage, can cause levels high enough to result in CO poisoning.

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever having symptoms.

Having carbon monoxide detectors in your home or business is a must. Recommendations for CO detectors are similar to those for smoke alarms. As a minimum, each home or office should have one CO detector on each floor, one in or just outside each sleeping area, and one in the basement. In homes where multiple bedrooms adjoin a common hallway, a single detector in the hallway can provide protection for all of the rooms. However, if the home has forced-air heat (with a conventional gas or propane furnace), carbon monoxide leaking in the furnace system can reach each room individually. Therefore, it’s safest to include a separate CO detector in each bedroom or other sleeping areas.

With winter just around the corner be sure your combustion appliances are well maintained, have them inspected and cleaned on a regular schedule.

“...The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion."
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, but as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

**INSPECT THE DECK FOR PROBLEMS.**

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. 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. Moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, contributing to mildew, discoloration or decay.

**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.

**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 can likely move the majority into a garage or shed for the winter. Doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.
Photo spreads in home design magazines can be awe-inspiring. Quite often homeowners wish they could lift the looks right off the pages of magazines and transform their own homes into picture-perfect retreats.

It takes an eye for design to pull a room together - even with inspiration - and make it both functional and attractive. While hiring an interior designer is one way to go, homeowners can use some of the tricks and techniques the designers employ to do a remarkably good job of improving the interiors of their homes without such help.

**EMBRACE TEXTURE**

The colors used in a home can add impact, but designers often utilize various textures to create aesthetic appeal. A single color scheme can be enhanced by various fabrics. Consider a leather sofa made more cozy with chenille pillows next to a rustic side table. Figure out ways to incorporate a few different textures to add depth to the room.

**BE CAREFUL WITH COLOR**

Many high-end homes showcase neutral shades that are enhanced by pops of color. If you like a rich, royal purple, leave room for other colors as well. Add touches of purple in vases, throw pillows and other accessories.

Also, many designers work in shades of three for room colors. There may be one main color for walls, another color for larger accents, such as couches and chairs, and then a third color that pops in accessories such as flowers, pillows and collectibles. These can be any colors, but the most muted tends to be the more abundant shade.

**ADD A BIT OF BLING**

Glittery items and metallics can add a touch of luxury feel to any space. A shiny table lamp, mirrors, a sparkling chandelier, and the like are easy ways to produce a high-end feel. Reflective surfaces also will cast light around the room, giving the illusion of a larger space.

**CHOOSE A BIG STATEMENT PIECE**

Many homeowners make the mistake of filling a room with several small pieces of furniture that only contribute to clutter. Instead, look for a statement piece, which can be a cabinet, armoire or chaise. Mix and match large and small elements for a sense of balance.
Neglecting a home’s exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home’s appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers’ perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added value, as determined by the 2019 “Cost vs. Value Report” from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

Garage door replacement: Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of $3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

Manufactured stone veneer: Replacing a portion of vinyl siding with stone veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

Wood deck addition: A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners’ ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners’ initial investment.

Siding replacement: Not only does old or weathered siding look unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly $16,000 it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

New entry door: Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn’t all about good looks, either. A door that isn’t well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.
Accidents around the home happen. Some are minor and easily brushed off, while others can lead to serious injury or financial peril.

Many accidents, even those that are relatively minor, can be prevented. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, home electrical fires account for an estimated 51,000 fires each year, resulting in roughly 500 deaths and more than $1 billion in property damage.

Homeowners who want to do all they can to reduce the likelihood of electrical mishaps at home can employ various strategies.

**BE MINDFUL OF CORDS AND PLUGS.**
Cords and plugs can be found throughout the typical home. While few people may perceive cords and plugs as threats, they can serve as catalysts for accident and/or injury. Cords and plugs should always be kept clear of heat and water sources, and areas where they can pose any tripping hazards. Even if residents grow accustomed to cord locations and know to maneuver around them, guests won’t be as familiar. When pulling plugs from outlets, always pull the plug, and not the cord, to reduce injury risk.

**INSPECT ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS.**
Some electrical appliances age well, while others may not. Periodic inspections of appliances and their components, such as their cords, can reveal wear and tear that can lead to fires or injuries. Replace any items that pose a threat and stop using these items immediately.

**AVOID DIY ELECTRICAL WORK.**
Many homeowners are handy with hammers and other tools, but professionals are better trusted to perform electrical work on a home. The risk of accident or injury when working with wiring and other electrical components is simply too great for untrained homeowners to do on their own.

**UNPLUG APPLIANCES BEFORE FLIPPING A FUSE.**
Fuses blow from time to time. Some may be knocked out by especially powerful storms, while others may blow because they’re overloaded. Regardless of why fuses blow, homeowners should turn off appliances on blown fuses before flipping those fuses back on. Leaving appliances running when flipping a fuse can increase the risk of fire or accident. Turn off appliances, unplug them and then turn them back on one by one after the fuse has been flipped.

**BE CAUTIOUS IF ANYONE SMELLS GAS.**
Gas leaks are often detected by the aroma of the gas in the air. When such leaks are detected, homeowners should not touch or turn any electrical switches. Doing so may create a spark that can react with the gas in the air, leading to fire. If a gas leak is detected, go outside and contact a local emergency service.

Many home electrical mishaps can be prevented if homeowners exercise caution and hire certified electrical contractors to handle wiring and other electrical tasks around their homes.
Cold, snowy weather can present various issues for homeowners to contend with. One such problem, ice dams, can cause damage to walls, ceilings and other areas.

The University of Minnesota Extension says that an ice dam is a ridge of ice that forms at the edge of the roof and prevents melting snow from draining properly. A complex combination of heat loss from a home, snow cover and outside temperatures can lead the formation of ice dams. An ice dam will be fed by melting snow above it and cause a backup at the edge of the roof.

Dams can cause gutters to tear off and loosen shingles and may lead to water backing up and pouring into the home, advises This Old House. Ice dams also can contribute to soggy insulation, making the insulation lose its protective R-value and becoming a magnet for mold and mildew.

Homeowners can do a number of things to temporarily prevent the formation of ice dams. Heated cables clipped to the roof’s edge in a zigzag pattern can help prevent dams that lift shingles. Pushing snow off the roof can help. Laying an ice melt product in gutters to help melt the ice that forms also can prevent ice dams.

More permanent solutions involve keeping the entire roof the same temperature as the eaves by increasing ventilation, adding insulation and properly sealing air leaks that can warm the underside of the roof. This may involve calling in a professional contractor. Such an investment is well worth it, as it can prevent much more costly damage down the line.
For the majority of gardening enthusiasts, gardening is a warm weather activity. While some people live in climates that make it possible to enjoy gardening year-round, those who don’t often lament the end of the gardening season.

Winter might not be conducive to gardening, but the arrival of cold weather does not necessarily mean a gardener’s work is done until the following spring. Taking steps to protect plants from winter weather is an important part of maintaining a healthy garden that thrives from year to year.

Timing is of the essence when winterizing a garden. The online gardening resource Get Busy Gardening!™ advises gardeners that the best time to winterize is after the first hard freeze in the fall. A hard freeze occurs when temperatures dip below freezing overnight. When that occurs, annual plants and vegetables are killed off and perennial plants, which grow back year after year, begin going dormant.

Better Homes and Gardens notes that perennials are the easiest plants to prepare for winter, as they require just a little cutting back and mulching to be safe from cold weather. But no two perennials are alike, so homeowners should consult their local gardening center for advice on how to prepare their particular perennials for the coming months.

The steps necessary to winterize annuals depends on which type of annuals, cool- or warm-climate, you have. Cool-climate annuals should be covered with polypun garden fabric when light frost is in the forecast. In addition, Better Homes and Gardens recommends pulling dead annuals and adding them to a compost pile after a killing frost. Any annuals that developed fungal disease should be discarded. Mulch annual beds with a three- to four-inch layer of chopped leaves or similar materials, spreading the mulch only two inches thick over self-sown seeds you want to germinate in the spring.

Warm-climate annuals also should be covered with polypun garden fabric when light frost is expected. Seeds of cold-hardy annuals can be planted for extended winter bloom, while gardeners also can collect seeds of warm-weather plants that will breed true to type. Even though you’re winterizing, Better Homes and Gardens recommends that gardeners continue to weed and water their plant beds and plants while also keeping an eye out for pests. If organic mulch has decomposed or thinned out, replace it with a new layer.

Get Busy Gardening!™ notes that the bulbs of tender plants like dahlias and tuberous begonias can be dug up and overwintered in their dormant state. All dead foliage should be removed after the bulbs have been dug up, and the bulbs should be allowed to dry out a little before being stored. Container gardeners can overwinter their tender bulbs in their pots inside, but be sure to remove their foliage and store them in a dark, cool place that maintains temperatures above freezing.

Winterizing may mark the end of gardening season, but it’s an important task that can ensure a healthy, beautiful garden next spring, summer and fall.
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