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# Signs A Home Exterior Needs Updating

**R**enovations are a great way for homeowners to reshape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities. Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors.

Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

- **CURLING SHINGLES:**

The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the

affected shingles.

- **DATED ENTRY DOOR:** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

- **UNSIGHTLY LANDSCAPING:** It's not only the physical components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green

thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscaping. These alternatives to more needy plants can create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.

- **CRACKED DRIVEWAYS/WALKWAYS:**

If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season, chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition, cracked walkways indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.



# 7 Things To Know Before Replacing Windows

The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15 percent of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

**1. VINYL OR ALUMINUM MAY BE BEST.** Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice. Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

**2. MOISTURE PROBLEMS INDICATE WINDOWS NEED TO BE REPLACED.** Condensation that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

**3. WINDOWS ADD CURB APPEAL.** Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

**4. CONSIDER OTHER ENERGY-EFFICIENT UPGRADES.** Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement — which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

**5. THE WRONG WINDOWS CAN ADVERSELY AFFECT HOME VALUE.** The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73 percent of their replacement window investment back when they resell a home. But choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original

windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

**6. THINK ABOUT SOUNDPROOFING, TOO.** When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more soundproof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

**7. PROPER INSTALLATION IS KEY TO LONGEVITY.** Replacement windows are only as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals. Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.



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# Turn Your Yard Into A Vacation-Worthy Oasis

Warm weather means more time to relax outdoors. For those homeowners lucky enough to have entertaining spaces outside, spring and summer provides plenty of opportunities to enjoy fresh air under the sun or stars.

Over the last few years, families have become especially familiar with what works about their yards and where there is room for improvement. Pandemic-related travel restrictions and early stay-at-home mandates resulted in plenty of time spent in backyards on staycations. Even though many such restrictions have been lifted, homeowners may have seen the benefits of having functional respites right outside their doors.

A backyard renovation can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000. The American Society of Landscape Architects suggests homeowners budget the cost of a major landscaping project at between 5 and 10 percent of their home's value. Large or small, here are ways to make an outdoor oasis at home.

## CREATE LIVING PRIVACY

Living in close proximity to neighbors may make privacy harder to come by. Wood or vinyl fences, however effective, may not provide the all-natural look many people desire. Vertical gardening, which trains easy-care vines like English ivy, Clematis or various climbing roses to grow on trellis or fencing adds greenery and privacy. Hedges and fast-growing shrubs also can be used for natural barriers.

## INSTALL A POOL

Pools are the ultimate spots to cool off on hot days. An elaborately shaped inground pool can blend in with the landscape and offer the ultimate hang-out zone. However, above-ground pools also serve the purpose and are more budget-friendly. Stock tank pools are popular among those who want minimal pool expenditure or have small spaces to work with. Stock tanks are metal vessels traditionally used as watering

holes for livestock. They also can be "adult kiddie pools" when combined with some plumbing. Galvanized steel frames make them sturdy. With floats and other accessories, they can become the perfect oasis.

## PROVIDE OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE

Create a bespoke bistro vibe by using freestanding planters and posts along with hanging lights to make an intimate outdoor hangout spot at night. For those with permanent structures, like a deck or a gazebo,



lights can be strung across the area or on railings or edging.

## EXTEND THE LIVING SPACE

Decks and patios can help make outdoor entertaining areas more comfortable by eliminating the need to sit on the grass or gravel. Plus, they add another "room" to the home. When paired with weatherproof patio furniture, such as sofas, loungers and tables, a private seating area can be crafted and utilized for any number of entertaining desires.

## HANG A HAMMOCK

Few things evoke feelings of relaxation better than a hammock. Fitted between two trees (or two posts if trees are sparse), a hammock is an ideal place to grab a nap or read a book.

Additional oasis-inspired ideas include outdoor kitchens, letting up lanterns, cascading water features, and bird feeders to attract the sounds of nature.



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# How To Cut Costs On Home Renovations

**D**o you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes — some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

- **ASSESS THE MERIT OF THE PROJECT.**

Remodeling magazine annually publishes a “Cost vs. Value Report” that lists the average cost and return on investment homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you’re planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

- **HIRE A CONTRACTOR.** Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor’s expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don’t waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

- **REFURBISH EXISTING FEATURES.** Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie’s List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

- **CHOOSE MIDGRADE MATERIALS.** Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher

price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

- **AVOID PEAK SEASONS.** You’ll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

- **DO SOME PREP WORK.** You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

- **BUY A DISPLAY ITEM.** Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.



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# Low-Cost Ways To Revamp Living Areas

**H**ome 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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# Building Better Flower Beds

**By Joe W. White, Ph.D.**  
*Extension Horticulturist, (ret.)*  
 LSU AgCenter

Most landscapes can benefit from a little extra color. Probably one of the easiest ways to accomplish this (and perhaps the least expensive) is to develop beds of flowers in strategic locations throughout the entire landscape. For maximum enjoyment the flowers need to be placed where both residents and guests can see them and if near a street, where those passing by can also get a glimpse. Such beds can provide year round color if careful choices of flowers are made. This means that seasonal changes of species will be necessary. Cool season flowers in the spring then would be followed by warm season annuals in the late spring and summer

and these followed by more cool season flowers in the late fall. And don't forget, there are several perennial flowers that can add to the show when their time to flower arrives.

But let's get to the subject of building better flower beds. The first consideration might be location which I've already discussed. Near a back patio or porch are always good choices. Close to front entrances is another good place for flowers and a nice way to greet visitors. However, there are other factors that may be even more important than location. One such item is the amount of sunlight available at each bed's location. Most flowers need at least about six hours per day while others perform best with more than that. Generally, morning sun is ideal for the majority of flowers, but some can withstand the scorching rays of the summer afternoon

sun without getting "cooked". Thus, it's important to know how tough each flower species is before it's planted.

Another factor to be considered is drainage. Usually, planting on raised beds is a simple and effective solution if poor drainage is the problem.

Size and shape of bed are important as the bigger the bed, the more flowers it takes to fill it which may affect your landscaping budget. While some homeowners prefer the more formal square or rectangular shaped bed, here in the South the preference is most often a curved, more informal bed regardless of size. Although beds don't have to have defining edges, probably a majority of beds are constructed with edgings of brick or stone and some people use metal edging strips or old railroad cross-ties. Whatever the choice, an edging with an 8 to 12 inch height gives an

attractive appearance. All edgings need a weeping hole near the bottom to allow excess water to escape and prevent drowning and death of the plants.

Once a flower bed is constructed, spread three inches of coarse gravel over the bottom and top that with an inch or so of coarse sand (but never use river sand) and then fill the rest of the bed with a good quality soil. Add the soil by putting it through a screen to remove any trash or problem objects and then round the soil at the top of the bed. Before planting flowers pull a pint soil sample for testing mineral content and level of acidity. Make adjustments as needed. Finally, top dress bed with an organic mulch.



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# Don't Toss That 'Junk,' It May Be Valuable!

It's time to hit the garage, basement, attic and closets for that age-old task of spring cleaning! Before hauling unwanted possessions to the curb, you may be surprised to learn they might be valuable -- especially if you have sports cards and memorabilia gathering dust.

With prices of sports cards rising in recent years, take time to determine if yours are valuable and how to best sell them.

"Older sports cards and memorabilia aren't just highly collectible; they can be worth lots of money. Recent sales of scarce vintage cards have topped anywhere from thousands of dollars to tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands. And really rare cards can go higher," says Al Crisafulli, Auction Director at Love of the Game Auctions, an internet sports auction house that helps families identify and sell valuable items.

Crisafulli has assisted people in selling such keepsakes as a grandparent's autograph collection and an uncle's childhood baseball cards, for tens of thousands of dollars. In one life-changing event, he helped a family determine that a baseball bat that spent decades protecting their home was used by Hall of Famer Lou Gehrig -- and Love of the Game Auctions sold it for almost half a million dollars. Today, that bat could bring more than a million dollars.

The key is understanding what makes old sports collectibles valuable. To help, Crisafulli is sharing some tips:

## Older is Usually Pricier

Cards from the 1960s and earlier are collectible, and those from before the 1940s can be worth a lot of money, especially those depicting stars. Do you

have cards of Hall of Famers, such as Mickey Mantle, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner or Ty Cobb? Even non-stars from the early days of a sport can be worth big bucks, especially if the cards have no creases and re-

## Postcards and Photographs

We all have keepsakes of vacation destinations, but most aren't valuable. However, photographs and postcards depicting sports stars and ballparks can be significant. Look for early "real photo" postcards from the 1900s through the 1940s, which are photographs printed on postcard backs.

As with sports cards, star power matters, so preserve those Babe Ruths as opposed to images of your great grandma's baby cousin once-removed. And when it comes to photos, look for old markings on the back, such as photographer, publication and date stamps.

## Memorabilia

Set aside old advertising posters depicting sports stars and food, tobacco or sporting goods brands. Ads from magazines aren't valuable, but those used as store displays and for other marketing purposes can be pricey. Tin signs from the 1960 and earlier can be highly prized, but reproductions aren't.

Your family's sporting goods, such as balls, gloves and bats, can be valuable. Pre-1950s uni-

forms and catcher's masks, helmets and other equipment are highly collected, especially when endorsed by star players. Top condition brings the highest prices, but even used equipment can be valuable.

"The golden rule is the older the sports card or item, the more valuable it usually is. Pre-1975 pieces start to get interesting and are worth researching," says Crisafulli.

Don't just clean out your "junk" this spring, examine it closely to potentially maximize its value. (StatePoint)



tain sharp corners and original gloss.

If you have very old cards from the 1880s through the 1930s, look for tobacco, gum and candy brands, such as Old Judge, Piedmont, Sweet Caporal, Goudey or American Caramel.

If you want to sell sports items for the most money, consider a specialty auction, such as Love of the Game, which has the expertise to properly research sports ephemera and maintains bidder lists of collectors specializing in sports. More information is available at [loveofthegameauctions.com](http://loveofthegameauctions.com).



# Spring Cleaning Tips & Tricks

Spring is a time of year when change is in the air. Trees are budding, plants are flowering, and homes laden with dark or heavy fabrics and clutter could use some lightening up.

Spring cleaning projects are popular this time of year as residents take inventory of their living spaces and aim to declutter, clean and increase efficiency. Some people find the prospect of getting organized overwhelming. Here are some tips that can help anyone master spring cleaning.

- **CREATE A PLAN.** Make a checklist and establish a cleaning plan of attack. Focus on areas that are not regularly cleaned, as they probably need a little attention.

- Assemble your cleaning kit. Spring cleaning can be slowed down considerably if you don't have all of your equipment at the ready. Items to have on hand include an all-purpose cleaner, concentrated cleaner, microfiber cloths, paper towels, mop, vacuum, dusters, and a squeegee. Adjust your equipment based on

the task at hand.

- **CURATE YOUR CLEANING PLAYLIST.** Create a playlist with songs that will get you moving and motivated to clean.

- **WORK FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.** Work efficiently by cleaning shelves, ceiling fans and other elevated items first, as dust and debris will trickle down and need to be cleaned next.

- **PURCHASE OR RENT A CARPET CLEANER.** According to the experts at Clean That Up, carpets help filter indoor air by trapping debris and allergens. By deep cleaning carpets, homeowners can improve the indoor air quality of their homes. Use a carpet cleaner on a warm, dry day so that windows can be opened and cross breezes will help dry the damp rug.

- **CLEAN WINDOWS.** Wash windows inside and out and utilize their screens to help brighten indoors spaces.

- **DEEP CLEAN THE KITCHEN.** Clean out and disinfect the refrigerator by wiping it down with warm water and baking soda or a vinegar-and-water solution. While in the kitchen, set the oven to the self-clean function so it becomes cleaner as well.

Homeowners also can focus on cleaning curtains (including shower curtains), steam-cleaning upholstery, removing clutter from closets, cleaning out the dryer vent and duct tubing, wiping inside kitchen drawers, and vacuuming under beds and other furniture.

Spring cleaning can bring the revitalizing nature of this beloved time of year into your home.



## Did You Know?

A sunflower is not just one flower. The sunflower is a huge flower, but the head or fuzzy brown center actually contains 1,000–2,000 individual flowers. Each of those individual flowers will produce a sunflower seed.

There are more microorganisms in one teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth. It's aliiiiive! Okay, in all seriousness, that fact might make you uncomfortable, but microbes are important for keeping your soil full of nutrients.

Plants really do respond to sound. Talking to plants to help them grow is a well-known old gardeners tale, but studies have shown vibration (like music, or perhaps even the sweet sound of your voice) can affect plant growth. Plus, the Myth Busters (in an admittedly not-so-scientific study), compared a silent greenhouse to one where they piped in a voice soundtrack, and found that plants in the latter grew more.

Butterflies might be more attracted to your weeds than your flowers. Colorful blooms aren't the chief reason these insects love your garden – it's more about the fragrance and nectar. According to the Smithsonian Institute, new cultivars of popular flowers have been bred for enhanced color and size, but have often lost their fragrance in the process. So everyday weeds, like dandelions and clovers, might actually be the most appealing things in your yard to butterflies (they hate pesticides, too). Taking care to choose heirloom flower seeds can get them to also fly your way.





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