



**SEPTEMBER
2023**

Fall **HOME IMPROVEMENT** *Guide*

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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 factors. 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 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.



Tips for waterproofing a basement or crawl space

Water can be a homeowner's worst nightmare. Few things have the potential to damage a home as much as water. From leaks to flooding to moisture problems like mold, water can wreak havoc on a home. Basements or crawl spaces are areas of a home where water can do the most damage. Basements and crawl spaces tend to be the lowest-lying spots in a home, and therefore prime spots for water to enter. Water problems in these areas can contribute to the demise of the structural integrity of the foundation.

According to Olshan, a foundation solutions company, water can enter homes in numerous ways. Many building materials, including concrete, that seem solid at first glance actually are quite porous. As ground water collects around these materials, the weight of the accumulated water, called hydrostatic pressure, can weaken the materials, causing cracks where water can seep through. Water also can enter subterranean spaces through basement windows and gaps between footings and concrete slabs, or push up through foundation floors when homes are in areas with high water tables.

Remediating water issues in a home generally breaks down into two methodologies: exterior waterproofing and interior waterproofing.

Depending on the cause and severity of the water issue, one or the other, or even both, may be recommended.

Exterior waterproofing

Exterior waterproofing aims to keep water away from and

out of the home. The home improvement information resource DoItYourself.com says that exterior waterproofing generally includes the application of a waterproofing agent to the concrete foundation. In addition, exterior waterproofing also could include excavation so a drainage system can be installed around the entire footing of the home. Regrading a property and properly relocating gutters and downspouts can help with many water issues.

Interior waterproofing

When water in a basement or crawl space needs to be remediated indoors, a system to collect, drain and remove water may be necessary. This can include sump pumps, drains, gravity discharge systems, and more. Moisture barriers, which can include special paints or products applied to the foundation walls and floor, also can help keep water from entering the space.

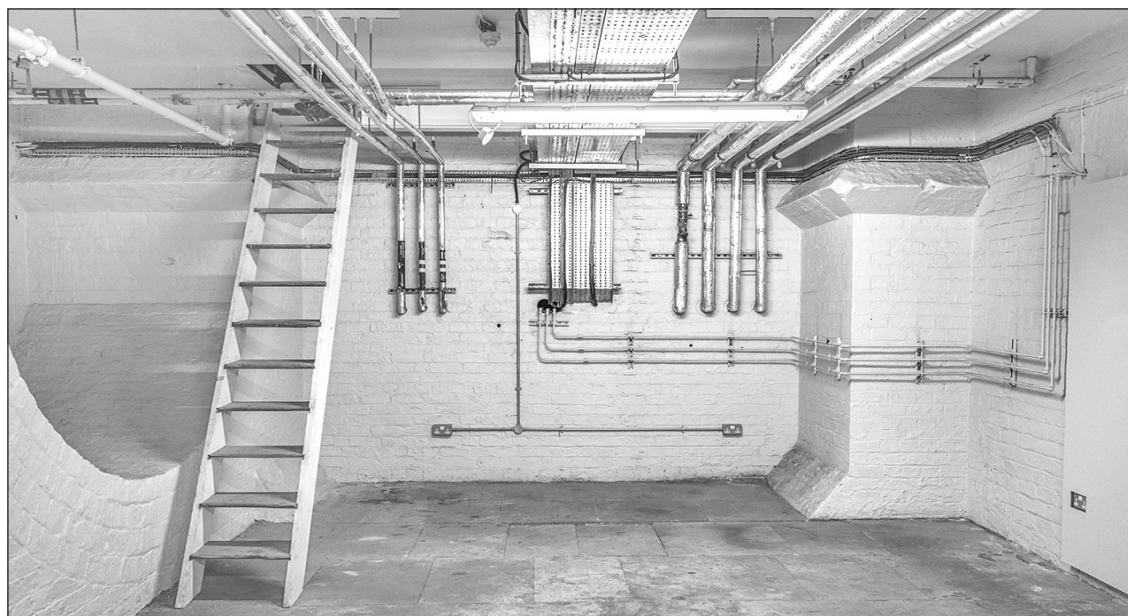
Moisture solutions

Keeping water out is only one part of the equation. Homeowners also need to manage moisture, like excessive humidity. A marriage of HVAC and waterproofing techniques may be necessary to improve air flow and remove humidity in the air.

While many homeowners have attempted to address water issues on their own, many times it is a job best left to the professionals. Because water penetration can have multifaceted causes, a professional can best assess the situation and create solutions that fit with homeowners' budgets and needs. The review

and advice site Angie's List suggests finding at least three waterproofing companies that offer

both interior and exterior waterproofing services that can provide the best ideas for fixing the issue.



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Home repairs that can sink budgets fast

A home is the most substantial investment many people will ever make. Once down payments have been made and closing costs have been paid, homeowners may still be staring down sizable expenses as they begin to tackle any repairs that need to be made.

Home maintenance and renovations involve a certain measure of trepidation. Even after vetting contractors and establishing budgets, homeowners may worry that repairs will unearth problems that snowball into expensive fixes.

Planning ahead for such projects and learning to recognize issues that tend to be costly can help homeowners weather any storms that may arise.

- **Foundation issues:** A strong foundation is key to any home. If there is a problem with the foundation, it can be unsafe to live in the house.

The foundation repair company Foundation Experts ad-

vises that foundation fixes can range from \$4,000 to upward of \$100,000 depending on the scale of the job. Clogged gutters and water pooling around the foundation can contribute to damage, so water issues must be remedied first.

- **Roof damage:** A roof is a key barrier between the indoors and outdoors. Roofs must remain in tip-top shape. The home improvement resource HomeAdvisor says that a roof repair or replacement can cost between \$3,000 and \$12,000.

But homeowners also must budget for the cost of removing the old roofing materials and fixing any damage to the interior of the home. Inspecting the roof and making repairs as you go is key to avoiding a big headache.

- **Siding replacement:** Another costly project can be replacing the siding. Siding may need to be replaced if there is water/wind damage or penetration from insects. Spot repairs may be relatively inex-

pensive.

However, the home improvement resource Modernize says the average siding installation project can cost between \$5,500 and \$15,000 depending on the materials homeowners choose.

- **HVAC update:** Keeping a home at a comfortable temperature is also a matter of safety. If a system gives out, homeowners may be scrambling for a solution.

Yearly inspections and upkeep, which includes changing system filters regularly, can help identify potential problems. Neglect is one of the main contributors to the failure of heating and cooling equipment.

Based on national averages, a whole-house HVAC system can cost between \$4,000 and \$12,000.

These are some of the more costly repairs homeowners can expect. Keeping on top of the home will help mitigate damage and could extend the life of major home components



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How homeowners can turn attics into livable spaces



Houses typically feature various areas that are traditionally designed for storage, such as garages, basements and attics. However, with some renovation, these spaces can be transformed into livable areas.

Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project.

While the attic may seem like it has plenty of room and is structurally sound enough to walk in, that's not necessarily so.

To be converted into usable living space, an attic must be brought up to the standards of modern building codes, according to the design experts at Board & Vellum. Retrofitting beams and insulation can eat up available space in an attic. Thus, it is best to consult an expert to see if an attic can be converted.

Furthermore, an attic that was not initially designed as a room when the house was built can add extra "load" upstairs if it is converted. That could present certain structural problems.

That means a structural engineer also must be consulted to see if adding beams, flooring and drywall will necessitate other changes elsewhere in the home to accommodate the extra load.

In order to have a functional attic room, building codes will dictate that

it needs to be accessible by a full-size staircase. Also, it will need to have another exit in case of an emergency so that will likely be an accessible window according to the home information site The Fill. Homeowners' budgets and renovation plans will need to factor into these considerations.

Homeowners also are advised to check local permits to determine what else may be required to go forward. It is best to follow the rules. Lack of a permit for work can affect the ability to sell a home down the line.

Individuals also should plan for heating and cooling upgrades as the home will need to have ductwork installed in the attic, or at the least, a stand-alone heating and cooling unit.

As heat rises, it can get quite warm in an attic, so ventilation and comfort should be considered.

The attic will need to be wired for electricity for lighting and other needs. Air sealing and additional insulation can the attic space more comfortable as well.

Consult with a qualified electrician and an HVAC technician and have an energy audit done to discuss needs.

Attic renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners. This is no small undertaking and all of the right steps need to be followed to ensure a legal, safe and successful renovation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Homeowners should give due consideration to whether or not plants are considered invasive species before introducing new plants on their properties. According to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, invasive species of plants can lead to the extinction of native plants and animals. Invasive plant species also can reduce biodiversity and cause significant

fundamental disruptions to local ecosystems. Though non-native plants are often cherished for their unique looks, homeowners planting new gardens or supplementing existing gardens with new plants are urged to plant only native species. Such an approach benefits plants and also local wildlife that depends on native plant species for food and cover.



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Fireplace trends help create attractive, comfortable rooms

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

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

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

- **Minimalist style:** Many fireplaces are designed in neutral colors with minimal trim that directs focus on the fire and not the appliance. When the fireplace is not in use, it blends in with surroundings and will

not compete for attention with other design elements.

- **Convertible fireplaces:** Homeowners can choose between open or sealed fireplaces. A convertible fireplace enables homeowners to have the best features of these options. A convertible fireplace can be converted to wood from gas, or the opposite, in as little as 30 minutes.

- **Nature-inspired materials:** Natural stone continues to be a material of choice in fireplace surrounds. Light colors work well for a fireplace, and also fit with today's lighter color interior design preferences. Natural stone also works perfectly with both contemporary and rustic decor.

- **Vintage fireplaces:** Vintage continues to be a buzzword in 2022, and the choice to go vintage also applies to fireplace styles. A room decorated in vintage elements can be complemented with a vintage fireplace or one designed to look vintage.

- **Integrate into wall decor:** Fireplaces that are built right into a wall save space. One can have a television and a fireplace on the same wall. These types of fireplaces work well in modern home designs. Other fireplaces may be built into bookshelves or other wall features. Fireplaces can improve the appeal of a home. Various trends are popular this year, making fireplaces highly coveted features.



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Kitchen cabinets: reface or replace

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spend on major kitchen remodels grew by 14 percent from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25 percent. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94 percent of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered. Homeowners have different options when it comes to cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to replace or reface their cabinets.

Replacement Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before

new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or create a new layout in the room.

Refacing

Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same. The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30 to 50 percent cheaper than a replacement. Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately. Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.



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What to know about kitchen countertop materials

Kitchens are the busiest rooms in most homes. Kitchens have become more than just places to prepare meals, with many functioning as gathering spaces and even go-to dining spots in homes that do not feature formal dining rooms.

So much time spent in the kitchen makes it worthwhile to invest in these popular spaces. Kitchen renovations are high on many homeowners' to-do lists, and there's many decisions to make once they commit to redoing the room. When renovating a kitchen, homeowners will have to choose which countertop material they want to install, and the following rundown of popular options can help simplify that decision.

Quartz

Quartz is considered a low-maintenance and durable countertop material. The home improvement experts at This Old House note that quartz countertops are typically 94 percent ground quartz and now come with an honed, sandblasted or embossed treatment, which makes

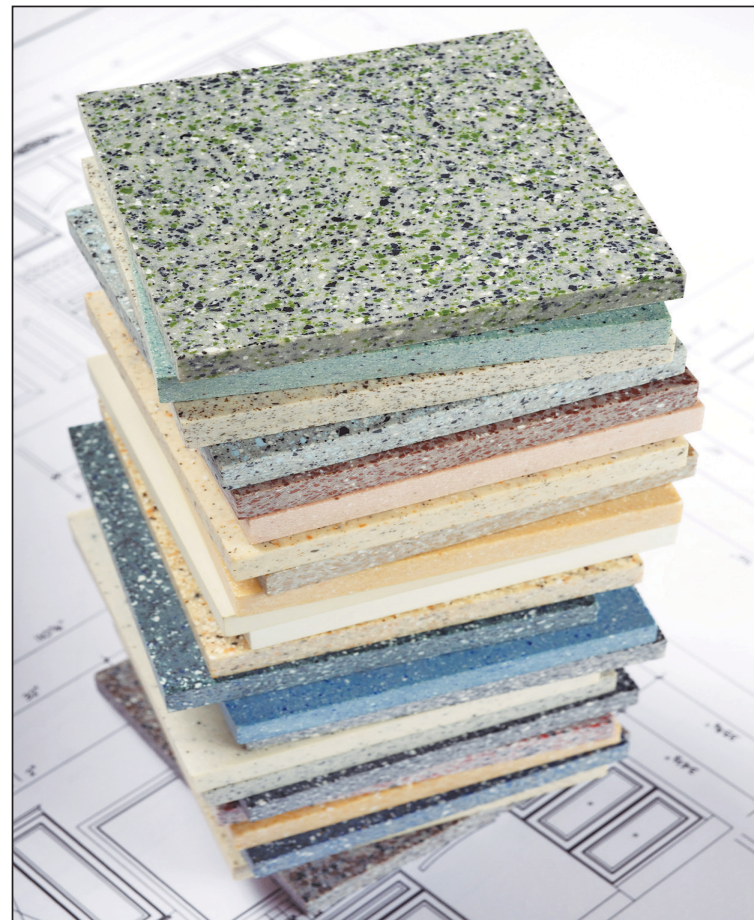
them appealing to homeowners with varying ideas on the ideal look of a kitchen countertop. Quartz can crack if it's not handled properly, and edges and corners can chip over time. Rounded edges can minimize the risk of chipping. Costs vary by location and product availability, but quartz typically costs about the same as natural stone.

Granite

Consumer Reports notes that no two slabs of granite are the same, and that uniqueness has long appealed to homeowners. Tests run by Consumer Reports found that heat, cuts and scratches did not harm granite, though this material, like quartz, can crack around edges and corners. Granite is a durable material that, if properly maintained, can last several decades. Granite also is nonporous, which makes it resistant to bacteria.

Laminate

Laminate countertops appeal to budget-friendly homeowners and Consumer Reports



notes that they're easy to install. Home Depot also notes that laminate countertops come in a wide range of colors, textures and designs. Laminate countertops also are durable, which helps budget-conscious homeowners stretch their dollars even further. Laminate countertops are easily maintained, though it's also easy to permanently damage them with knives, so Consumer Reports recommends always using a cutting board when preparing meals on laminate.

Butcher Block

Butcher block countertops are among the more unique options homeowners may consider. Sometimes referred to as "wood countertops," butcher block countertops are made from wooden strips that are fused together. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that butcher block is among the more affordable materials, but the final cost will be dictated by location and availability. BobVila.com notes that butcher block countertops are highly sensitive to liquid, so exposure to moisture should be limited. Sealing butcher block countertops immediately after installation can help protect against bacteria and warping. Though butcher blocks can be high maintenance, many homeowners find the unique look is well worth the extra elbow grease. Kitchen countertops can define how the room looks, and homeowners have many options to choose from when designing a new kitchen.

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A beginner's guide to fall planting and maintenance

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

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

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

- Sow salad seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.

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

- Fill in landscaping gaps.

Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.

- Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

- Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.

- Continue to water plants. Water is essential in the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.

Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.



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Wood floor installation dos and don'ts

Jaw-dropping features can sell a home in a heartbeat. A penthouse apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows and a panoramic view of a city skyline likely won't prove a hard sell, nor will a home with an infinity pool overlooking a landscape of rolling hills. As awe-inspiring as such features can be, some more subtle components, such as authentic hardwood floors, also can do much to make a home more appealing to prospective buyers.

Hardwood flooring is a sought-after commodity. Data from the National Association of Realtors indicates that 54 percent of home buyers are willing to pay more for hardwood floors. In fact, NAR figures indicate that 28 percent of buyers between the ages of 35 and 54 consider hardwood floors "very important" when looking for a home. Homeowners who are considering selling their homes, or those who simply want to upgrade their existing flooring, may want to consider installing hardwood flooring. Though it's a project best left to professionals, hardwood flooring can be installed by skilled DIYers. In such instances, homeowners may want to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

DO hire a professional if you have limited or no DIY flooring



experience. Hardwood flooring installation is not generally a project for novice DIYers. Hardwood flooring projects may present some common challenges, but no two homes are the same. So unless they have prior experience installing floors in multiple rooms or homes, homeowners may save themselves time, trouble and a significant amount of money hiring a professional to do the job.

DON'T ignore the subfloor. New hardwoods won't erase the problem of subfloors in poor condition. According to the home renovation experts at BobVila.com, squeaky floors could be an indication that the subfloor has begun to warp or twist. Sinking floors are another indicator of deteriorating subfloors. Subfloors should be somewhat level before new hardwoods are installed, so DIYers should inspect and address subfloor issues before installing new flooring.

DO expose wood flooring to the elements in your home prior to installation. The home improvement resource BuildDirect recommends acclimating hardwoods

to the space where they will be installed. Skipping this important step could result in gaps during the winter and cupping over the summer. To acclimate hardwoods, open the boxes and spread them out for about a week while running the air conditioner or heater at normal levels. When storing hardwoods prior to installation, avoid keeping them in potentially moist areas like a basement.

DON'T skimp on tools. A DIY hardwood flooring installation might be less expensive than hiring a professional, but homeowners should resist any temptation to increase those savings further by purchasing less costly tools or fewer tools than is necessary to complete the job. BuildDirect notes that DIYers will need at least a miter saw, table saw, cleat-nailer or stapler, finish nailer, compressor, jamb saw, chalk line, nail set, and tape measurer when installing hardwood floors. Purchase all necessary tools and read product reviews to ensure each tool is up to the task.

Wood floors can be awe-inspiring. Some homeowners can install such flooring on their own, and the project can be much easier if they learn as much about installation as possible prior to beginning the project.

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Make a dining room more elegant for entertaining

The kitchen may be the heart of a home, but when it comes to entertaining, a dining room, if one is present in a house, tends to be the prime gathering spot for meals.

Dining rooms may not be top on the list of spaces to renovate, as they tend to be used infrequently. But a dining room makeover may still be a worthy endeavor. Here are some simple ways to make the dining room more elegant and functional.

- Clear out the clutter. The first step toward improving a dining room eating area is to remove any extraneous items from the space. If the dining room table is not used very often, it likely has become a catch-all for other items, such as bills, newspapers or kids' homework. Rather than using the dining space as a makeshift office or homework station, invest in a rolling cart to store those papers and other items. Simply roll it into a closet or another room when it's time to host a party.

- Hang a statement light. Few decorative items add as much drama and ambiance to a dining space as a new overhead light. People hear chandelier and think



a bejeweled or crystal design. But various chandelier styles can fit the aesthetic of a home. The light will be a focal point and instantly make the dining area more elegant. Install the light on a dimmer to adjust the illumination as needed to set the mood.

- Invest in new linens. Purchase coordinating table linens that will be used for special occasions. A decorative table cloth or table runner coupled with cloth napkins and placemats helps to set the scene of the dinner party.

- Add a piece of artwork. Many modern homeowners have eschewed the China cabinet that once was standard in dining rooms. Rather than a bulky piece of furniture, a large piece of statement-making artwork or framed photos over a more minimalistic buffet table or small

service bar is preferable. Choose artwork that complements the colors in the space.

- Include a centerpiece. Centerpieces add sophistication to the table and tie into the event. Floral arrangements, a bowl or basket of fruit, pine cones or greens from outdoors, or collectibles like shells in a tall canister can serve as centerpieces.

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