

fall

HOME & GARDEN

September 2024

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT OF THE

TIMES NEWS
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TNONLINE.COM | 594 BLAKESLEE BLVD. DR. W., LEHIGHTON, PA 18235

610-377-2051

LEHIGH VALLEY PRESS **LVP**

LVPNEWS.COM | 1633 N. 26TH ST., ALLENTOWN, PA 18104

610-740-0944

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How to implement mixed metals throughout your next home renovation project: Tips from a designer

(BPT) - Design is a major component for any home renovation. Introducing mixed metals into the kitchen and bath is one of the latest design trends that should be considered when thinking through that next project. The eclectic aesthetic behind the mixed metal trend is popular across the design world and it only takes a few different types of materials, finishes and personality to get the job done. See below for ideas and easy ways to bring it all together, all while keeping budget in mind.

Where to look for inspiration

No matter the interior style you're trying to go for, getting inspired by the world around you or getting acquainted with what's trending in the interior decor space (via home/lifestyle magazines or vlogs) are good places to start.

Maris Park Borris, Color Material & Finish (CMF) designer at Delta Faucet Company, says inspiration can strike from a variety of ways and reminds homeowners, "Regardless of style or design intent, I think we can all find inspiration from different times or places in our lives. From your past, present or future, to online or even nature sources. People pick up on things that are meaningful to them!" Park Borris says.

By reading up and taking inspiration from others and trends happening within the design space, you'll start to notice general themes that are frequently incorporated, including the mixed metal trend. A little



dedication and creativity are all that's needed. To start, pick two or three contrasting metals with different tones to implement character and depth into the space, while selecting one of those as the cohesive thread across all. This will not only keep guests' eyes entertained, but it'll also give you the opportunity to introduce different textures and finishes for an elevated look.

Complement metals via beautiful, affordable fixtures

When renovating kitchen and bath spaces with the mixed metal look in mind, selecting beautifully designed fixtures is a simple start to get the

trend in motion. This year, Peerless® Faucet launched its all-new Ezra™ Kitchen and Bath Collections - all with an array of unique finish options to choose from. Designed with sharp lines, soft curves and functional features, these collections deliver long-lasting performance while uplifting any space.

In the kitchen, the Ezra Collection is available in Chrome, Stainless Steel and Matte Black finishes - all can be easily paired with everyday decorative pieces one may already have on-hand. For example, try accessorizing around the faucet with soap dispensers, cabinetry handles, lifestyle pieces or even other appliances - pairing the finish with a contrasting

metal.

"You don't have to spend a lot of money to achieve the mixed metal look," said Borris. "Identify where metal is already being used in your home. It's shocking to find that many decor pieces in one's home already come with a metallic finish that can be accessorized. There are endless inexpensive ways to bring some different hued metals into the home!"

Apply it to your space

Mixing metals into a home renovation project is sure to turn heads. Think through design plans, brainstorm metal selections and put it all together - it's as simple as that! With endless finishes, accessories and combinations, one's

imagination is the limit when it comes to beautifying a space. Remember, there are only a few key notes to keep top of mind when implementing this trend:

- * Remember to pick two or more metals that are distinct from one another - perhaps picking one with a cooler tone and one that is warmer.

- * Designate one metal for more prominent use and use the others as accents.

- * Leverage fixtures and products that automatically provide a specific tonal look to complement the space.

That's so metal

Mixing metals is a simple way to give spaces a unique touch. Metals like steel and copper offer a shinier, flashy aesthetic in the home while chromes and nickels give off a more polished, sophisticated look. Once the most prominent metal is identified for the space, complement it with either warmer metals like brass, gold and nickel or cooler ones like chrome and silver. Keep in mind that metal choices and combinations are all just a matter of the homeowner's taste and preference in the end.

Pro tip - avoid using metals that look too much like one another so that the result doesn't look like a mistaken matching effort. Spaces and journeys within the home are also important to consider. Keep an eye on how one finish can mix and translate to the next room. This will create new experiences and an enjoyable walkthrough for your guests.

Give your aging wood deck a composite makeover

(BPT) - Of the more than 60 million decks in the U.S., it is estimated that 50% are “past their useful life” and in need of repair or replacement, according to a report by the North American Decking and Railing Association (NADRA). If yours is among them, consider this. As long as your substructure is in good shape, resurfacing the walking surface with high-performance composite can be a simple way to breathe new life into your deck, requiring about the same amount of time and energy as resurfacing with wood. And, you'll never have to stain your deck again.

Composite decking, like Trex®, has gained popularity among today's homeowners who relish not having to sand, stain or seal the surface every year and who appreciate the eco-friendly nature of the material, which is made from mostly recycled and reclaimed



materials. Better yet, with a little know-how and a few standard tools, even a novice DIYer can install it.

Following are a few tips for taking your existing deck from wood to “wow” by resurfacing it with high-performance, low-maintenance composite decking:

Resurfacing is different than rebuilding - Unlike building a deck from the ground up, deck resurfacing involves removing and replacing the deck boards with new materials to give it a fresh, updated look. Think of it as a facelift for your deck! Installing composite decking will

also extend the life of a deck with boards that are warrantied to last anywhere from 25-50 years or more.

A firm foundation is key - Before pulling up any boards, assess your deck's foundation to ensure it is

structurally sound. Start from the ground up by examining the footings, posts and joists. Pay close attention to the condition of the wood. Discolored or spongy wood indicates rot and should be replaced before proceeding. As

long as the framing and substructure are intact, you're good to go.

Use your resources - You don't need to be a building expert to tackle a resurfacing project. Utilizing online design tools and cost calculators can help you with product selection and budgeting. There are also step-by-step videos, installation guides and how-to articles available to walk you through the process.

Resurfacing an aging or decaying wood deck with new composite decking is a doable DIY project that can be completed over the course of just a weekend or two. You get a brand-new deck for a lot less money than starting from scratch, and a lot less hassle through the years.

For more expert advice and DIY resources, visit Trex.com.

Turn Your Back Yard into Your Own Personal Oasis

The change of season brings new opportunities for outdoor enjoyment and there is no better time than fall to install a new fire pit. Soak in the warmth by the fire while you relax with family and friends. AB Natural Stone has all you need to get started. We have different designs and models to complement any décor. We also have everything else you will need including patio pavers, stone and mulch to turn your back yard into an extension of your living space.

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Projected timelines for popular renovation projects

Renovations help homeowners customize their homes to align with their needs and wants. Remodeling may be necessary to replace outdated fixtures and features, address mistakes previous homeowners may have made, or to make a home more functional.

Homeowners often find it beneficial to hire professional contractors when they have work to be done around the house to ensure the job gets done to code and to their satisfaction. Timelines for home remodeling projects vary depending on a number of variables, including the size of a crew as well as the scope of the project.

Once a project commences, the timeline can feel endless. The following are estimates of timelines for top remodeling projects to give homeowners an idea of how long their renovation projects may last, courtesy of Renofi, a company that provides a lending platform leveraged by credit unions nationwide to offer loans to consumers.

• Kitchen:

There are a lot of moving parts to a kitchen renovation, involving the services of electricians, plumbers, structural experts, and even interior design professionals. Not to mention the needs of craftspeople who can make custom cabinetry and countertops. Kitchen remodels can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks.

• Bathroom:

The process of a bathroom renovation typically in-



volves demolishing the old bathroom, removing old fixtures and starting from the ground up. As with a kitchen remodel, bathroom jobs require the services of different professionals. That is why homeowners can expect three to 10 weeks for a bathroom, depending on the scope of the project.

• Finishing a basement:

Finishing a basement can add valuable living space to a home. Establishing a home theater space or man cave may require installing framing, insulation, utilities, drywall, flooring, and any additional needs if the finished basement will have a bathroom or necessitate additional plumbing. A finished basement proj-

ect can last one to two months. But the good news is that typically the rest of the house is livable while the work is being done, so residents will not be disrupted.

• Whole home remodel:

Hogan Design & Construction says that a whole house remodeling project can take anywhere from 16 weeks to 24 weeks. More involved projects can take longer.

Remodeling a home often involves a considerable investment of time and money. Knowing how long a homeowner will be inconvenienced by the work can help the household plan accordingly.

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Prepare your garden for winter's onslaught

Individuals who don't live near the equator or in another warm climate know that winter will rear its chilly head this year. Cold temperatures and snowy conditions may be excellent for skiing and sledding, but gardeners recognize these conditions are not ideal for their plants.

The inevitable slowing of activity in the garden during fall marks a time to shift attention from constant plant care to preparing the landscape for next season. It may be tempting to simply let Mother Nature take over, but a little pre-winter TLC can ensure gardens make it through winter unscathed.

Remove spent plants

Decomposing organic material is the basis for compost and other fertilizers. However, vegetable plants that are left to sit can lead to decay in the garden. Decaying plants can serve as hosts for pest populations and diseases. Rotting vegetables also can drop unwanted seeds into the soil, which eventually can strip nutrients that normally would go to next year's crops.

Ornamental plants and perennials can be cut back in fall. Cut down stalks and remove leaves.

Plant a cover crop

The gardening resource This Is My Garden recommends planting a cover crop to set the stage for a successful spring. A cover crop protects the soil and can return nutrients to it. When the soil is bare during winter, weed seeds can easily blow in and lie in wait, ultimately becoming a problem during the ensuing year. Cover crops can include clover or field peas, which will increase the levels of available nitrogen.

Amend the soil

Fall is a perfect time to add soil amendments, such as manure and compost. These fertilizers will add nutrients and break down gradually, enriching the soil over the winter.

Replenish mulch

Gardeners may have added mulch around shrubs and other areas of the landscape early in the season because it is attractive. But mulch also does much to reduce water loss and protect the soil from erosion. It may inhibit weed growth as well. Replacing mulch when the mercury drops can insulate the soil, which helps to regulate soil



temperature. A thick layer of mulch around root vegetables left in the garden can offer protection against hard frosts.

Divide bulbs

Divide plant bulbs and plant them where you want flowers like daffodils and tulips to grow in the spring.

Prune dormant plants

Wait until plants are dormant to prune them and adjust their shape.

Most shrubs and trees should be pruned in late winter, right before new growth.

Move potted plants

Bring delicate plants into a sheltered area, such as a greenhouse or indoor garage, so they can continue to thrive during the winter.

Fall and winter still provide opportunities to spend time in the garden. At this point in the year, gardeners can prepare landscapes for the next season.

Tips from WHITEHALL TURF EQUIPMENT

Serious health problems may result from snow shoveling and snowblowing, including heart failure from overexertion. Many people are simply not physically fit enough to move heavy quantities of snow. Those who are may not treat snow removal as they would a strenuous exercise, which would need a warm-up period so as not to strain muscles. Furthermore, improper body mechanics can put undue stress on the lower back and cause herniated discs or degeneration in the spine.

To reduce the risk of injury when shoveling snow, consider the following tips.

- Consult first with a doctor to get a health assessment. If you are restricted from certain strenuous exercises, it stands to reason that you will be restricted from shoveling snow as well. Many people underestimate just how strenuous snow removal can be.
- Choose the right snow shovel or snowblower. Tools with a curved handle or an adjustable length handle will help you feel more comfortable and minimize slouching and arching of the back. Select a shovel or snowblower that is lightweight to reduce the amount of weight you have to move in addition to the weight of the snow.
- Dress appropriately for the weather by layering clothing. Layering enables you to remain warm, but then shed layers should you become overheated. Sweating and having damp clothing could put you at risk for hypothermia. Be sure to cover extremities to

guard against frostbite.

- Warm up muscles by treating snow removal for what it is -- a physical activity. Cold, tight muscles are more prone to injury, say experts. It is advisable to spend 10 to 15 minutes with moderate exercise to get the body ready for the workout ahead. Take a brisk walk and stretch your arms, legs and back. It is best to limber up to avoid injury.
- Begin shoveling slowly, lifting only small amounts of snow. Remember that it is not a race, and there are no prizes offered for getting the job done in record time.
- Keep your back straight while bending your knees to lift snow. Position your feet wide apart for the best distribution of weight.
- Carry the shovelfuls of snow to where you want them, rather than tossing snow to the side or over your shoulders, which can only injure your body. Try to keep your arms close to your body to reduce stress on the spine.
- If using a snowblower, always wear eye protection.
- Never reach into the blades of a snowblower to dislodge snow or another obstruction. Turn off the snowblower first and wait for a few seconds to let the blades recoil before attempting to clear the blades.
- Turn off the engine any time you are walking away from the snowblower.
- Keep tabs on the electrical cord so that you don't trip or accidentally run over it.
- Do not allow children to operate the snowblower.



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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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How often do you get that nowadays?" - Liam I.

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What to do to prepare your garden for winter

Gardens provide an idyllic escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. In fact, many gardening enthusiasts typically cannot wait for the spring thaw so they can spend the next several months tending to their plants under the warm sun. But a gardener's work is never truly done, and the work to make gardens stun in the spring actually begins during the preceding fall.

Preparing gardens for winter is an important step that can help homeowners ensure their gardens return to full strength in the spring. The tasks necessary to prepare gardens for winter may depend on what homeowners are planting, but the following are some general maintenance suggestions that can keep gardens safe this winter.

- Remove weeds and debris. Weeds and debris are unsightly and detrimental to plant life in spring, but they also can be harmful in the winter. Weeds and debris left to linger in gardens through the winter provide overwintering spots for insects and can contribute to disease. So it's imperative that weeds and debris are removed before the ground hardens in winter. Don't wait until the ground hardens, as that can make it hard to remove the roots of weeds, adversely affecting the garden as a result.

- Prepare the soil. The Farmer's Almanac advises homeowners to gently till the soil in their gardens so they can expose any insects before they settle in

for the winter. Once garden soil is exposed, add a layer of compost, leaves, aged manure, and, if necessary, lime, gently tilling it into the soil. According to the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, the only accurate way to determine if lawn or garden soil needs lime is to test it. Lime makes soil less acidic and reduces soil pH. Low soil pH makes it hard for certain plants to grow, but acidic soil is ideal when growing blueberries. Test the soil for lime and amend it depending on what you hope to grow in the spring so it's ready to thrive when winter ends.

- Remove dead or diseased plants. Dead or diseased plants should not be left in the garden through the winter. These plants can attract insects and are vulnerable to disease, which can make it hard for the garden to thrive in the spring.

- Protect fruit trees. If you have fruit trees, install mouse guards around the base to prevent mice and voles from killing the trees over the winter. If left to their own devices over the winter, mice and voles may eat the bark of fruit trees, killing the trees as a result. The Farmer's Almanac notes that mouse guards made of fine mesh hardware cloth can effectively protect fruit trees from hungry mice and voles over the winter.

A gardener's work is never done, and the work to create beautiful spring gardens begins in the fall.

Native Pollinators

As the 2024 planting season winds down, it's never too early to start thinking about ideas for next year. Pollinators and native plants have always been popular, but over the past decade-plus, there has been a noticeable uptick in the demand for these types of perennials.

Hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies all play a vital role in keeping a healthy ecosystem, not to mention help tremendously with the production of the food we consume on a regular basis.

By planting native varieties of pollinators in your garden or landscape, you will be helping with all of the above.

Some popular varieties of such plants can be seen in the picture below. *Coreopsis verticillata* (Whorled Coreopsis) has threadleaf foliage that grows in a vertical mounding style. Their bright yellow flowers add a spark of color throughout the summer.

Liatris ligulistylis (Meadow Blazing Star) is a taller option (stands between two and three feet tall). Butterflies love their upright flower spikes

that are lavender in color.

Solidago odora (Sweet Goldenrod) is a clump-forming perennial flower that is a vibrant yellow that even has a slight, but sweet smell to it when in full bloom.

Monarda fistulosa (Wild Bergamot) is a great variation of what is commonly referred to as "Bee Balm." This perennial has a light green foliage that is covered with frilly flowers in various pink and purple shades. There are many other types of *Monarda* in existence, but this is the one that you want if you're leaning towards a more "native" theme.

These are just a handful of ideas for next year and beyond. Within the native pollinator world, there are dozens of other options that I encourage you to do some research on. *Heliopsis helianthoides*, *Asclepias sullivantii*, and *Pycnanthemum flexuosum* are all great options as well.

All of the above items will be available at Herbein's Garden Center in 2025, plus many, many more.

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How to help houseplants survive a long winter

As fall gradually gives way to winter, gardeners expend ample energy preparing their flowers and plants for the months ahead. Plants may be pruned to increase the likelihood that they will return in full bloom come the spring, while lawns may be aerated so cool-season grasses can get the nutrients, water and oxygen they need when the temperatures dip. But what about houseplants? Do indoor houseplants need the same type of pre-winter TLC that outdoor plants need before winter arrives?

As the seasons change, so, too, do the conditions outside. And those conditions affect indoor houseplants much like they do lawns, gardens and trees. So it's vital that people with houseplants do not overlook the need to keep houseplants going strong as fall gives way to winter.

Location

Hours of daylight shorten in winter, which means some houseplants won't get as much sun as

they were accustomed to over the last several months. That means plants may need to be relocated closer to windows where they can make the most of each day's sunlight. However, it's important that there's ample distance between the plant and the window, especially when winter temperatures get especially cold. If the plants are too close to a window on cold days, they could freeze. Keep them close enough to the windows to get ample sunlight but far enough away so they don't get too cold. In addition, keep plants away from drafty windows as well as heating vents, as extreme temperatures are not conducive to healthy houseplants.

Watering

Watering needs also may change when the temperatures drop. The indoor plant experts at Pistil's Nursery in Oregon note that all houseplants need less water in winter. In fact, overwatering in winter can be especially harmful to indoor plants. Plant owners can try

decreasing the frequency of their watering by half each winter and see how the plants respond.

Cleaning

Cleaning plants is another way to help them survive a long winter. Dust settles in many homes in winter, when windows tend to remain closed for months on end and fresh air isn't circulating around the house as much as it is in spring and summer. Pistil's Nursery notes that dust inhibits a plant's ability to photosynthesize, thus compromising its ability to make it through a winter unscathed. Better Homes & Gardens recommends using a soft-bristle paintbrush, a toothbrush or pipe cleaner to remove dust from African violets and other fuzzy-leaved plants. Gently washing plants with a paper towel or cloth that's been moistened with water can remove the dust. Oils and polishes should not be used to make leaves shine, as these substances can block pores on the plant.



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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 propa-

gate 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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Did you know?

Homeowners between 20 and 40 percent of the total home improvement budget of a given project. The final cost that kitchens and bathrooms tend to be the most costly rooms to renovate. An affiliate of the National Kitchen and Bath Association told Architectural Digest in 2023 that kitchens and bathrooms require the most labor-intensive renovations, which contributes significantly to the high costs of such projects. Labor is indeed a significant cost when renovating a home, as the Construction Labor Market Analyzer indicates labor cost percentages in construction are

between 20 and 40 percent of the total home improvement budget of a given project. The final cost of any renovation project will depend on a host of variables unique to each home, including the square footage of the room being remodeled and the materials homeowners choose. However, homeowners looking for less costly renovations may want to consider revamping their dining rooms and closets, each of which are projects that can make a difference and tend to require a less significant financial commitment than projects like kitchen and bath remodels.



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Tips to transform a living room into a go-to viewing space

Watch parties are wildly popular. Whether it's a gathering for the big game or a group of friends anxious to see the latest episode of a favorite television show, watch parties have become a fun way to enjoy special events with family and friends.

Many bars and restaurants have recognized the popularity of watch parties and looked to capitalize on the trend, particularly for sporting events. Watch parties can make for a fun night out, but homeowners can do much to make their own living room a go-to spot for the next big game or series finale.

Expand seating space, if necessary. Of course, guests for the big game or movie night will need a place to sit. Homeowners who love to host can determine their ideal gathering size and then work to ensure

their entertaining space has enough seats to accommodate everyone. Multifunctional furniture can help if space is limited. For example, some stools that are typically used as footrests can be repurposed as seats when guests arrive and an upholstered coffee table can provide an additional space for guests to sit. Another option is to work with a contractor to add a built-in window seat or bench beneath a picture window.

Convert an existing space into an open floor plan. A 2023 survey from Rocket HomesSM found that more than half of individuals surveyed preferred open layouts to traditional layouts. Open layouts can make living spaces feel more airy and less claustrophobic, and such designs also make it easy to accommodate more guests. Homeowners

can speak with a local contractor to determine ways to convert living spaces into open floor plans.

Invest in your internet. Whereas cable television used to be the go-to option when watching sports, movies and television at home, streaming platforms have now taken over, as many, including Peacock, Amazon Prime and Netflix, are now even broadcasting National Football League games. Homeowners who want to host watch parties must invest in high-speed internet and perhaps even a new router to ensure games and shows are not interrupted by the dreaded spinning wheel or issues that can arise if internet speeds are slow. If necessary, relocate the router to the living room to reduce the risk of streaming interruptions.

Reconsider your lighting scheme. If movie nights or television shows dominate your watch party schedule, some recessed lighting in the living room can reduce glare and reflections on the screen once a movie or show begins. Recessed lighting above a mounted television can illuminate the screen so everyone can see it but won't appear in the screen and adversely affect what



viewers can see.

Consider upgrading your television and sound. It goes without saying that a television is wildly important when hosting a watch party. The experts at Best Buy note that 8K resolution is the highest resolution available in the television

market. Such devices provide an extraordinary viewing experience, but they also can stretch homeowners' budgets. A 4K television won't cost nearly as much, and these devices also provide superior image quality. When a new television is paired with a premium

soundbar, viewers can settle in for a memorable game day or movie night experience.

Homeowners can embrace various strategies to make watch parties an extraordinary experience for themselves and their guests.



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FAQ about garage remodels

Homeowners tend to want to maximize all of the space they have in their homes. For some this may involve turning a garage from a utilitarian space into one that serves multiple purposes.

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage remodels can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office. Prior to beginning a garage remodel, homeowners may have some common questions about the process.

How much does the renovation cost?

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel, but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

Will I recoup the investment?

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average garage conversion provides an 80 percent return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

How can I upgrade the flooring?

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors. Although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring



options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.

Can I have the best of both worlds?

Sometimes a garage needs to serve many purposes. Lofting the garage means a homeowner can still park cars or utilize the lower space as a living area, all the while items are stored overhead. Some flip this design scenario and have the loft area as a bedroom or finished living space, while the lower portion remains a traditional garage area. Another thought is to finish only a portion of the garage. This works

well for two- or three-car garages where there will be room to park a car and the remainder will serve another purpose.

What are other ways to improve the garage?

Installing more windows or improving on the lighting in the garage can be important. The garage improvement experts at Danley's say window installation enables people to circulate air in the garage without having to open the garage door. Improving the lighting means the garage can still be enjoyed or utilized after dark. Spread out lighting in the garage, and use a combination

of overhead and task lighting just as one would in the home itself.

How do I deter bugs or other pests from entering?

Insects often want to hunker down in garages, and they may find it easy to get inside a garage. Keeping the garage clean and organized is the best

way to deter pests and to spot infestations before they become problematic, indicates Mosquito Joe pest control company. Reducing water and humidity in the space, weatherproofing at the base of the garage door and other entry spots and utilizing insect repellents to make the garage less hospitable also can

decrease the risk of insect infestation.

Remodeling a garage can add value and plenty of usable space to a home. Whether a garage houses cars or hosts neighborhood game night, a garage renovation can be well worth the investment.

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Dining room conversion ideas

Many homeowners can undoubtedly take a stroll through their homes and find at least one space that could be repurposed to provide more functionality. Real estate professionals know that such sentiments are not uncommon, and many point to formal dining rooms as spaces that have fallen out of favor in recent years.

Formal dining rooms were once common in newly built homes, but the pivot toward open concept floor plans left it up to homeowners to decide if such spaces were for them. In a 2017 book published by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, authors used cameras to monitor life in many people's homes, including how they used each room. The authors concluded that formal dining rooms were rarely used for eating. If that sounds a lot like home to many current homeowners, then it might be time to consider some ideas to convert formal dining rooms to make these spaces more functional.

• **Home office:** Though the percentage of professionals working remotely has dipped considerably since the end of the pandemic, hybrid working is perhaps among the more lasting work-related byproducts of COVID-19. In its Global State of Remote and Hybrid

study published in early 2024, the career networking resource LinkedIn noted that 13 percent of jobs posted to the platform were for hybrid positions. That means millions of workers can still utilize an accommodating home office space. A formal dining room can be converted to provide such a space, and the good news is that such a conversion need not require extensive renovations. A fresh coat of paint, an additional outlet or two and perhaps a new overhead lighting fixture can instantly transform the space at minimal cost.

• **Reading room/library:** Homeowners who dream of having a designated space for quiet reading can convert a little-used formal dining room into a space to curl up with a good book. Some comfortable armchairs, built-in bookshelves and perhaps an expanded floor-to-ceiling window overlooking a side or backyard can help homeowners create a home library that will be the envy of any avid reader.

• **Studio space:** If there's a resident yogi and/or artist living under the roof, then converting a dining room into a yoga or art studio, or perhaps even a hybrid space for those who enjoy both activities, is a no-brainer. A yoga studio conversion may not require as much



investment as a kitchen overhaul or bathroom renovation, but an ideal home yoga space requires more than a mat and room to stretch. The Yogapreneur Collective notes that flooring in a yoga studio should be non-slip, easily cleaned, durable, sound-absorbing, and low maintenance. The Yogapreneur Collective asserts that different flooring materials may be ideal for certain types of yoga, noting that cork flooring is a go-to choice for professional studios that offer hot yoga. Similarly, the right flooring for an art studio may depend on the artist's preferred medium, whether it's oil painting, arts and crafts or another artistic pursuit. But any artist

knows that a floor that's easy to clean is perhaps best for a home art studio.

• **Additional ideas:** Some additional ways to repurpose a dining room include a gaming room for avid gamers, a memorabilia showcase for collectors or a pantry for foodies who love to cook but need some extra space to store ingredients and tools of the trade.

If a formal dining room is only utilized on occasion, homeowners may want to consider the many ways to convert such spaces into areas that are more usable every day.

The inevitable slowing of activity in the garden during fall marks a time to shift attention from constant plant care to preparing the landscape for next season. It may be tempting to simply let Mother Nature take over, but a little pre-winter TLC can ensure gardens make it through winter unscathed.

Remove spent plants

Decomposing organic material is the basis for compost and other fertilizers. However, vegetable plants that are left to sit can lead to decay in the garden. Decaying plants can serve as hosts for pest populations and diseases. Rotting vegetables also can drop unwanted seeds into the soil, which eventually can strip nutrients that normally would go to next year's crops.

Ornamental plants and perennials can be cut back in fall. Cut down stalks and remove leaves.

Replenish mulch

Gardeners may have added mulch around shrubs and other areas of the landscape

early in the season because it is attractive. But mulch also does much to reduce water loss and protect the soil from erosion. It may inhibit weed growth as well. Replacing mulch when the mercury drops can insulate the soil, which helps to regulate soil temperature. A thick layer of mulch around root vegetables left in the garden can offer protection against hard frosts.

Prune dormant plants

Wait until plants are dormant to prune them and adjust their shape. Most shrubs and trees should be pruned in late winter, right before new growth.

Move potted plants

Bring delicate plants into a sheltered area, such as a greenhouse or indoor garage, so they can continue to thrive during the winter.

Fall and winter still provide opportunities to spend time in the garden. At this point in the year, gardeners can prepare landscapes for the next season.

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Warning signs a bathroom needs work

Homeowners know that the work involved to maintain a home is never done. The end of one project has a tendency to roll into the planning of another, and so it goes for years on end.

Fortunate are the homeowners who get to choose when to begin a renovation project, but it's far more common that homeowners spot an issue and then realize it's time to renovate. When it comes to bathrooms, which can be among the more expensive spaces to renovate in a home, homeowners can keep an eye out for various signs suggesting the room needs a remodel.

• **Mold and mildew:**

Mold and mildew is perhaps the most glaring sign a bathroom needs to be renovated or remodeled. Mold and mildew pose a notable threat to human health, as the United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that molds can cause allergic reactions. Individuals sensitive to mold may develop symptoms that mimic reactions to outdoor allergens like pollen, including sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and dermatitis (skin rash). Mold also can trigger asthma attacks in people allergic to mold who have the condition.



Mold can grow in poorly ventilated bathrooms, such as those without a fan or ones in which fans are not working properly. Mold and mildew will return if it's merely scrubbed away, so the underlying cause of mold must be addressed to prevent its return.

• **Small signs of fading:** Stains, peeling paint, cracked paint, and

gaps in grout are small signs of fading that indicate a bathroom is in need of renovation if not a complete remodel. These issues also can serve as warning signs of larger issues, such as water issues and structural problems, so they should not be merely written off as minor problems or eyesores.

• **Rising water bills:** Some signs a bathroom

could use a little TLC are not necessarily confined to the room itself. If water bills are rising significantly and do not align with price increases or an uptick in water consumption, homeowners may have leaking pipes. Such pipes might be beneath a bathroom sink or behind tiled walls. Discoloration on the walls, peeling paint or wallpaper and/or a musty

odor may indicate leaks inside a bathroom wall. If coupled with rising water bills, these signs could be indicative of a significant issue that requires immediate attention.

• **Issues with tiles:**

Cracked or damaged tiles in the shower and bathtub or even on the floor are unsightly and also pose a safety hazard. Cracked floor tiles can lead to slips and falls, which can be especially harmful to older residents. And cracked tiles within the shower and tub area can indicate water problems behind the walls or general disrepair. Such issues should be addressed before they escalate into something larger.

• **A dated vibe:**

Of course, some issues affecting a bathroom are not necessarily health or safety hazards but more an affront to homeowners' grasp of current styles and trends. If walking into a bathroom unintentionally feels like stepping backward into a bygone era, then it's probably time to consider a renovation or remodeling job.

Various signs can indicate to homeowners it's time to consider a bathroom renovation.



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Pre-winter perennial pruning pointers

Foliage and football might be two things people instantly associate with fall, but there's more to this beloved season than brightly colored leaves and action on the gridiron.

Gardeners know that spring is an ideal time to plan and plant their favorite flowers and most flavorful fruits and vegetables. However, seasoned gardeners know that gardening is a year-round

commitment. Pruning is one of the keys to keeping perennials coming back for years to come, and fall is an ideal time to take on this important task.

Pruning perennials in the fall is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, some perennials can be cut down after the first killing frost, while others can be left to benefit wildlife, including birds and insects.

Understanding pruning and when to do it this fall can help gardeners lay a strong foundation for their gardens that will benefit them next spring.

Why should some perennials be pruned?

The College of Agricultural Sciences at Pennsylvania State University notes that perennials that

have become diseased or infested with insects are pruned to prevent those problems from resurfacing in the spring. In addition, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac, many herbaceous perennials have old foliage and dying stems after several hard frosts. If dead foliage or dying stems aren't

pruned, disease, slugs and other pests can overwinter in the plants. Cutting these plants down to the ground after several hard frosts allows the base of the plant to remain dormant over the winter but makes the plant less hospitable to disease and insects.

Which perennials

should I prune?

The first step to pruning perennials is to recognize which need to be pruned and which can be left intact for the winter. The Old Farmer's Almanac notes that bee balm and phlox are prone to powdery mildew and

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Transform a playroom into a space that grows with the family

Parents typically make certain changes around a home to ensure it's accommodating to children. Childproofing is a necessity, but entire rooms also may be transformed with children's enjoyment and well-being in mind.

It's common for homeowners to set aside rooms for children to play and explore. These playrooms may initially feature infant swings and bouncers, and eventually start to accumulate the toys that kids receive on holidays and birthdays. Easels, building block sets, puzzles, video games, books, and so much more fill these playrooms where young children spend the majority of their time engrossed in imaginative play. But as children grow, playrooms may no longer be necessary. Homeowners can ensure these rooms evolve with the family, and here are a few ways to do just that.

Make it a home theater/gaming room

The National Institutes of Health says children

between the ages of eight and 17 spend an average of 1.5 to 2 hours playing video games each day. It's important for parents to monitor their children's gaming, particularly when kids participate in social platform games that involve people with an internet connection chatting and working together. One way to do so is to locate the gaming setup in a central location, like a home theater room.

Establish a hobby space

Trade in kids' toys for "toys" that everyone in the family will enjoy. Turn the room into one where family members can explore their passions. This may include scrapbooking, painting, yarn crafts, collecting, photography, and more.

Create a quiet learning spot

As children grow up, they may need to spend more time studying. Transforming a playroom into a library or a study



space can provide that out-of-the-way spot to get homework and studying done. Adults in the home also can use it for reading, paying the bills or any other task that requires concentration and quiet.

Build a home gym

If the space is large enough, bring in some workout equipment and make the play space one that encourages exercise and fitness. You may not even need large equipment and can utilize interlocking foam tiles that already may be in the playroom. With some free weights, resistance bands and even your own body weight, you can perform

a number of beneficial exercises.

Expand your living space

If the playroom currently abuts another room that can use some more real estate but is separated by a wall, take down the wall to increase the square footage.

Set it aside for guests

Clean out the toys and

bring in a bed and nightstand. Now you'll have a dedicated spot for overnight guests to stay, or a room that visiting older children (and eventually grandchildren) can call their own.

Playrooms are much-used areas when children are young. These rooms can evolve as kids get older and families' needs change.



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POINTERS

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should be cut back once they're gone. Hostas harbor slug eggs, so they, too, should be pruned after a hard frost. Hosta leaves that have fallen on the ground should be removed as well. There's no need to cut back certain perennials if they're healthy. For example, hardy geraniums do not require pruning in the fall, and Penn State Extension notes that hardy perennials like garden

mums are more likely to survive a cold winter if they're left intact. That's because the tops of such plants will collect leaves and snow for insulation and moisture over the course of winter. Gardeners who are unsure about fall pruning can speak with their local gardening center for additional advice regarding which plants to cut back before winter.

When to prune perennials

Gardeners need not rush to prune perennials in the fall. Diseased

or infested plants can be pruned at the first sight of disease or infestation, but gardeners can wait until several hard frosts have occurred before they prune healthy perennials. In gardening parlance, a hard frost refers to when temperatures drop below 28 F. Several hard frosts kill the uppermost growth of most perennials, making this an ideal time to prune them.

Pruning perennials in fall can be the first step toward creating an awe-inspiring spring garden.

How to choose a water heater: Finding the best fit

American homeowners may not realize that their water heater accounts for roughly 13% of annual residential energy use. Recently, the Department of Energy (DOE) passed new water heater efficiency standards that will help save approximately \$7.6 billion and reduce more than 332 million metric tons of carbon emissions.

The federal-level Inflation Reduction Act passed in 2022, along with a variety of state and municipal programs, which can be found through tools such as Rheem®'s Rebate Finder website, offers rebates and tax incentives to make it easier to upgrade to more energy-efficient models.

Whether you are looking for a heat pump water heater or a more conventional option, here are steps to help identify the ideal water heater for any home.

Assess your hot water needs

Keep in mind the number of people in the home and estimate hot water usage (in gallons) for activities like showering, dishwashing, laundry and cooking. Identify peak usage periods such as mornings and evenings when the demand for hot water likely increases and consider available energy sources.

Choose the right type of water heater

Each category of water heater has its own set of unique advantages. Selecting the right one depends on each household's specific needs, budget and space availability. Rheem® offers a full line of heat pump, tank and tankless water heaters, each designed to meet the demands of diverse homes and occupants while providing long-term savings.



Three primary types of water heaters, and what each style has to offer

Heat pump water heaters (HPWH): These units use electricity to move heat from the air to heat the water, making them significantly more energy-efficient than conventional electric water heaters. Benefits include lower environmental impact due to their high efficiency. These units also provide savings on energy bills. In fact, by upgrading to a more efficient heat pump water heater, the average homeowner savings could reach \$1,800 over the appliance's lifetime, with more advantages for renters and low-income households. All of these features make HPWH's a cost-effective option for the long-term.

Conventional storage tanks: Available in electric, propane and natural gas options, these units can store

a large volume of hot water in a tank that is ready for use at any time and maintain it at a set temperature until needed. Features include a lower initial install cost and the ability to provide hot water during power outages (for gas models). Keep in mind that tank-type options require more floor space than a tankless water heater and use energy to replace heat losses from the tank.

Tankless water heaters: Also known as "instantaneous" or "on-demand" water heaters, tankless models are available in natural gas, propane and electric - and heat water only when it is needed. Tankless technology does not store hot water, rather it heats the water as it passes through the unit, providing a continuous supply of hot water. These units are much smaller than conventional tanks, which helps to save space. Homeowners will see long-

term benefits while saving on energy bills, as energy isn't wasted on maintaining hot water. Heating water instantaneously requires high energy consumption for a short period of time, so a review of the home's existing electrical or gas systems to ensure they are compatible with the chosen model is recommended.

Consider energy efficiency and technology features

Energy efficiency and decarbonization: Energy-efficient models employ advanced technologies to minimize energy waste. This provides homeowners with substantial savings on monthly energy bills while also lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, a number of environmentally- and budget-friendly options exist, with many water heaters being ENERGY STAR® certified, including

several options from Rheem®.

Regulatory changes: The DOE's new energy efficiency standards for water heaters, effective in 2029, aim to save consumers billions in energy costs. Electric water heaters will shift to heat-pump technology, using less than half the electricity of older models, while gas-burning heaters must also meet higher standards. To maximize savings and ensure compliance with the latest standards, it's essential to select models that comply with the new regulations. Be sure to check the updated standards and guidelines to make an informed decision.

Technology and innovations in water heating: Innovations such as smart home integration and Wi-Fi connectivity provide greater control over the water heating system and contribute to increased energy efficiency and cost savings. For instance, many Rheem water heaters include features such as EcoNet, hot water availability indicator, vacation mode for energy savings, easy energy usage tracking, and proactive leak detection and prevention.

With a sharp focus on decreasing carbon emissions and reducing energy costs for homeowners, manufacturers such as Rheem are changing the global water heating industry. Homeowners focused on these regulatory and manufacturing changes, as well as the ongoing rebates and incentives being offered, can leverage these trends to increase their comfort with new energy-efficient water heaters. When selecting the ideal water heater, remember to start by fully assessing the home's hot water needs, then prioritize factors such as comfort and maximizing energy savings. And, finally, research the model's warranty details to ensure the unit will serve the home for many years to come.

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