

FALL

HOME IMPROVEMENT

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Issue Two

- How homeowners can turn attics into livable spaces
- How to prepare a fireplace for the winter
- What to know about kitchen countertop materials



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How to prepare a fireplace for the winter

As hours of daylight shorten and fall gives way to winter, thoughts shift from fall foliage to spending time cuddling under warm blankets and being cozy indoors. A fireplace can improve the ambiance of any room and help to create a warm and welcoming gathering spot.

Home fireplaces typically are wood-burning or gas. Though maintenance for these fireplaces differs, certain preparatory steps must be taken to prepare a fireplace for winter.

Clear the clutter

Items can accumulate in areas that are not in use, and a fireplace is no exception. Take a few hours to remove any belongings from in front of the fireplace and clean the mantle thoroughly.

Have the chimney cleaned

Hire a professional chimney cleaning company to inspect the chimney and clean it thoroughly before winter. According to BobVila.com, a chimney should be cleaned once a year, or after about every 80 fires. The National Fire Protection Association says failure to properly clean chimneys is one of the leading contributors to home fires. That's due to creosote, a highly flammable residue that builds up in the flue that lines the chimney.

Inspect the interior

The interior of a wood-burning fireplace is likely lined with fire bricks. Check for cracks and loose joints. Hire a professional mason to make any repairs, as special materials are needed to withstand the heat of fires.



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Install a chimney cap and screen
 According to Family Handyman, a chimney cap is a protective covering that goes over the top of the chimney. It is made of steel or copper mesh with a cap on top. This protects the chimney from rain and downdrafts and keeps animals and debris from getting into the chimney.



Prune overhanging branches

If there are trees close to the home and the chimney, cut them back, as they can be a fire hazard. Branches and leaves also can restrict the proper draft of the chimney.

Assess the outdoor vent

Gas fireplaces typically emit exhaust through a vent in the home. Remove any blockages from the vent, including leaves, cobwebs and debris.

Check glass or other coverings

The glass or face of the fireplace helps regulate carbon monoxide exposure and protects people from the flames. Be sure the glass covering is intact.

Clean ceramic logs

Gas fireplaces use ceramic logs, rocks or beads that can become dusty. Clean them prior to use. Dirty ceramic logs can be a fire hazard and produce an unpleasant burning smell.

Check the blower and pilot

If the fireplace has an electric blower, clean and dust it so it doesn't become clogged. Inspect the pilot light for any wear and tear that includes wiring or structural issues.

It takes several steps to prepare fireplaces for cold weather seasons when they're most likely to be used with frequency. FH238154



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What to know about replacing gutters

Certain home renovation projects are more glamorous than others. A remodeled kitchen is sure to garner its share of "oohs and aahs," while a newly paved driveway is much less likely to dazzle guests.

A gutter replacement is another job that might not have the wow factor. But fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced.

Signs gutters should be replaced

Various signs indicate it's time to replace existing gutters. Homeowners should act promptly if any of the following signs arise, as poorly functioning gutters can make it hard for water to get into the downspouts, ultimately pushing it backward and likely underneath roof shingles, where the result can be costly water damage.

- Peeling paint
- Cracks
- Pooling water in the gutter
- Mildew in the gutter, which can sometimes be seen even from the ground
- Water damage: Water damage on the gutter can be limited to certain spots and will be noticeable on the underside of the gutter
- Soffit damage
- Sagging gutters
- Detached gutters, which can be detached from other pieces or the house
- Rust

Who should replace gutters?

Many home improvements can be completed successfully by skilled do-it-

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yourselfers, but a gutter replacement is best left to the professionals. Homeowners who live in single-story homes may be able to replace gutters on their own, but the issues that can arise when gutters are not functioning at optimal capacity make this a job best suited to professionals, even in residences without high roofs.

Some gutters may be under a manufacturer's warranty, so homeowners can check to see if their gutters qualify for a free upgrade. Experience is one of the best reasons to work with a professional gutter installation team.

Experienced professionals can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size of the house. In addition, gutter installation requires the use of various tools that many DIYers may not have on hand, which can cut into the cost savings of doing the project yourself.

Homeowners also should not underestimate the challenges of working on ladders that are high up off the ground. Professionals are accustomed to such challenges, while DIYers may not be comfortable or used to climbing ladders with materials and tools in hand.

A gutter replacement is a worthwhile investment that can ensure rain water efficiently and effectively runs through gutters and away from the roof. Leaving this task to the professionals can ensure the job is done right.

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Improve entertaining spaces

Some homes are seemingly built for entertaining, while others may need a little help to make them more fit for hosting dinner, holiday gatherings or an evening with friends.

Overall, one-quarter of people entertain guests in their home either daily or weekly across the globe. One-third entertain monthly, according to findings from GFK Insights.

People who open their homes to loved ones may want to make some modifications to their spaces to improve the experience for all involved.

- Tame the clutter. Look for ways to reduce clutter in rooms where entertaining takes place. Built-ins with bookshelves and cabinets can hide electronics and wayward toys or collectibles. Focus attention on the entryway, hanging hooks for collecting coats, keys and shoes, so they do not overrun the foyer. Remove any knickknacks or other breakable items from shelves or on coffee tables to free up more space.
- Improve conversation seating. Arrange tables and chairs to create conversation nooks for guests who want to talk and get to know one another better. Consider moving out big and bulky sofas in favor of love seats or comfortable chairs that will take up less room and improve flow in entertaining areas.
- Find the pieces you like. Think about how you tend to entertain and then cater your space to those preferences. For example, a large dining table with fold-out extensions or leaves is ideal for someone who regularly hosts formal dinner parties. Renovate a room to include a



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small bar and club chairs for a lounge feel if cocktail parties are typical.

- Improve lighting. Work with an electrician and/or designer who can offer ideas for lighting that can set the mood for entertaining. Rooms that are dull and dim can benefit from overhead lighting fixtures if there are none already available. Task lighting in the kitchen under cabinets can make it easy to prepare food for guests. Wall sconces or focused lighting on artwork can establish a dramatic effect.
- Do major construction. Consider working with a builder to make some changes if you simply don't have the space to entertain. Taking down a wall can open kitchens to living spaces, while adding a deck or three-season room off the kitchen or dining room can provide more space for guests to congregate.
- Install a guest bath. Update or add a bathroom near the main entertaining areas. This allows guests to discretely use the bathroom and keeps them from roaming in areas of the house you would prefer they avoid. DE18B418

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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 renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners.

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. FH238148



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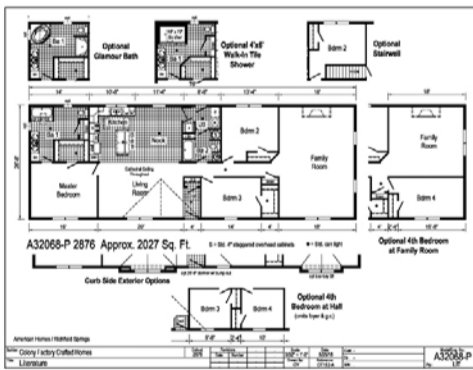
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What to know about kitchen countertop materials

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. FH238147



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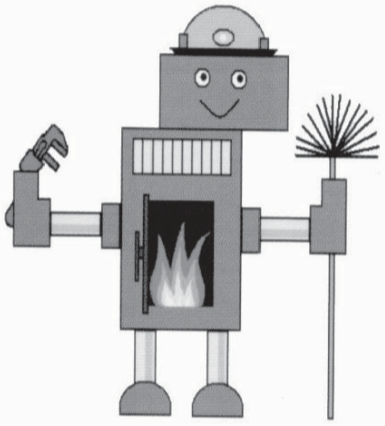
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Why excavation is best left to the professionals

When shopping for a home, buyers often try to envision themselves living in a given property. Images of family gatherings and holidays may instantly come to mind, but prospective homeowners also may begin to envision changes they would make to a property if they were eventually to call it home.

Changing an existing structure or building an entirely new home on an empty plot of land can be exciting. Such changes typically require excavation, which is a complicated process that may be necessary for projects big or small.

What is excavation?

Excavation is the process of extracting material from the ground by digging. Earth, rock and other materials may be moved during the excavation process.

Can do-it-yourselfers excavate?

Skilled DIYers who have participated in excavation projects in the past may be able to handle a project on their own. However, it's important that homeowners recognize that excavation is about more than just digging in the ground. It's a complicated process that requires the use of specialized tools and equipment. In addition, a strong understanding of the land that will be excavated is required for the project to be safe and go smoothly.

Why hire an excavation professional?

Even the most skilled DIYer might be better off hiring an excavation professional than going it alone. That's true for a number of reasons.

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any damages or injuries that may occur during the project.

- **Permits/requirements:** A professional excavation firm typically files all the necessary paperwork for work permits or can advise which permits homeowners will need to go forward with the project. In addition, professionals will know the local laws regarding building and excavation. For example, homeowners may be unfamiliar with the concept of lateral support, which refers to landowners' right to have their land physically supported in its natural state by adjoining land and underground structures. This is an important concept to understand during an excavation project, and professionals can advise homeowners if a project they want to undertake will violate lateral support laws.

- **Experience:** Perhaps the best reason to work with excavation professionals is their experience. A lack of excavation experience can result in damage to a homeowner's property and surrounding properties, which can prove costly. DIYers may not know the type of soil they have on their property nor recognize the different types of challenges each type of soil can present during an excavation project. Such knowledge comes with experience and is often invaluable.

Skilled DIYers can tackle many home improvement projects on their own. However, the complex nature of excavation makes these types of projects the kind that are best left to skilled professionals. FH218165

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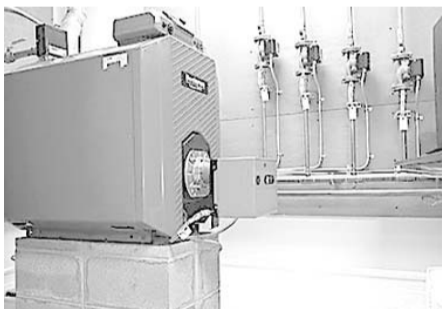
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Must-have features in your bathroom remodel

Veteran homeowners recognize the value of remodeling their kitchens and bathrooms. Kitchens and baths tend to appear dated more quickly than other spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, which can always be revamped with some fresh paint and new furnishings.

The home improvement pricing resource Home Guide indicates an average bathroom remodel costs anywhere from \$5,500 to \$15,000 depending on the size and scope of the renovation. However, a bath redo can increase a home's resale value and can return as much as 68 percent of homeowners' investments. As homeowners plan their bathroom renovations, it's a good time to consider improvements that will improve function and add design appeal for years to come.

- **Floating vanity:** Add an airy feeling to the room by creating space between the vanity and the floor. A floating vanity can be a counter with a vessel sink or even have cabinets, as long as the vanity doesn't extend to the floor.
- **Freestanding traditional sink or tub:** There's something elegant about a freestanding tub or pedestal sink. Such features can lend a classic vibe to a space. However, freestanding fixtures also come in modern or eclectic forms, so there are options for any design style.
- **Frameless showers:** Switch to a walk-in shower option, which improves aesthetics and makes it easier to "age in place" in a home. Pair that frameless shower with clear glass shower doors so sightline in the space remains unencumbered.
- **Natural textures:** Create a calm and serene sanctuary in the bathroom with light, natural hues and materials. Nature-inspired colors on tiles, walls and vanities can add to the spa vibe.
- **Dual sinks and vanities:** With a double vanity, two people can share the space and easily use the bathroom without getting in each other's way. One vanity with two sinks works, but homeowners can create even more personal space by dividing vanities and mirrors.
- **Small textured tile on shower floors:** Small textures are appealing and add



safety. The added texture and grouting will keep feet from slipping on wet floors. Also, opt for mold-resistant grout to make cleanup even easier.

- **Special shower heads:** Invest in shower heads that can run the gamut from creating steam showers to rainfall effects. Some showers will have multiple shower jets to offer an invigorating experience.
- **Improve drainage:** Increase the diameter of the drain pipe in the bathroom from the standard to a two-inch drain pipe. This will reduce the risk of clogs and overflow leaks.
- **Install a window:** Natural light and air flow can reduce the risk for mold and mildew growth, and windows add some aesthetic appeal to a space. Just be sure to choose frosted privacy glass.

Additional considerations for a bath remodel include heated floors, well-placed and attractive storage options and a toilet enclosure (water closet) for added privacy. These and other bathroom renovation ideas can add value and improve the appeal of the room. TF21A423

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Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter's arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well.

Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening. But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

- Inspect the deck for problems. Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer. Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed before winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.
- Clear the deck of potted plants. Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.
- Store unnecessary furniture. Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a garage or shed for the



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winter. HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

- Remove snow, but do so carefully. Prolonged contact with snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant. HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring. FH198133



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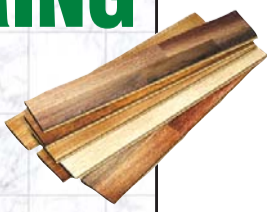
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