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**M**any people view spring as a season of rejuvenation. That renewal may be somewhat metaphorical for human beings, but it's literal for lawns and gardens that begin to grow anew as temperatures rise and hours of daylight increase in spring.

Each spring presents an opportunity for homeowners to get back outside and tend to their

gardens. As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.

- **Start with the soil.** Soil can serve as the starting point each spring. Winter can take its toll on a garden and even overwhelm the area with debris over the colder months. Clear rocks and other debris

from the area before loosening the soil. The Farmer's Almanac recommends loosening soil to a depth of at least eight inches if planting a new garden. An existing garden may only need to be loosened to a depth of around six inches, after which homeowners can mix compost into the soil in early spring. Compost is organic matter that provides nutrients and helps to build strong plant roots.

- **Consider a raised garden in colder climates.** The Farmer's Almanac notes raised gardens can help homeowners in colder climates dry out and warm up wet, cold soils more quickly. Homeowners in such regions also can cover their beds with black plastic or cardboard prior to planting. Doing so can protect the beds from late-season snow and spring rains and also helps to overcome erosion.

- **Take soil temperatures.** Unpredictable weather is among the noticeable effects of climate change in recent years. That lack of predictability can make spring planting a little more tricky than it once was. Experts note that soil temperatures around 50 F are best for cool-season crops, while soil should be 60 F or warmer when planting warm-weather plants such as tomatoes.

- **Work with a garden center to identify what to plant.** The right plants for one region may not be ideal for another, so homeowners are urged to work with a local landscaper or garden center before planting. Such a consultation can be especially useful for homeowners planting a new garden. Landscapers and garden center professionals will know which plants work in the local climate.

- **Consider planting vegetables in the spring.** Various garden experts note that spring is an ideal time to plant a vegetable garden. If planted at the right time, a vegetable garden can save homeowners money on their grocery bills and provide a season's worth of fresh veggies. Lettuce and spinach are sun- and shade-friendly vegetables, which can make them good options for a spring garden. Cool-season root vegetables, which include beets, carrots and swiss chard, are some other notable veggies that can thrive in early spring.

Spring is a season of rejuvenation for gardens. That's even more true when homeowners consider some conventional planting wisdom. With a little preparation, spring can set the stage for a thriving garden all season long.

## Drought-resistant plants & trees

**A** beautiful landscape adds considerable aesthetic appeal to a property and an awe-inspiring lawn and garden can greatly improve resale value. In fact, the American Society of Landscape Architects claims landscaping can increase a home's resale value by as much as 20 percent, a contention that supports the notion that a lush landscape is something buyers want and are willing to pay for.

Maintaining a lush landscape is no small task, but that job is notably easier when homeowners pick the right plants. The right plant for a property depends on where a home is located, but it's worth noting that drought-resistant plants and trees may be espe-

cially worthy investments. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 54 percent of the contiguous United States experienced moderate or exceptional drought over the first 10 months of 2024.

When planning a landscape renovation, homeowners must take variables such as climate into consideration, particularly if their end goal is a lush, awe-inspiring lawn and garden. With that in mind, the following are some drought-resistant plants and trees homeowners may want to consider adding to their landscapes.

Homeowners are urged to work with local lawn and garden professionals when picking trees and plants for their properties.

### Trees

Drought-tolerant trees are ideal as summer temperatures rise in many parts of the world. Drought-tolerant trees can survive in dry conditions, and they also provide great shade that allows people to enjoy their yards even when temperatures rise. The ADF notes that the following are some drought-resistant trees homeowners can consider:

- Eastern redcedar
- Bur oak
- Northern red oak
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Hackberry
- Scots pine
- Northern catalpa
- London planetree
- Shumard oak
- Live oak

### Plants

Trees add ample aesthetic appeal to a property, but colorful plants also help to create a stunning setting. Homeowners concerned about drought can consider these plants.

- Aster
- Beardtongue
- Black-eyed Susan
- Bugleweed
- Catmint
- Lantana
- Lavender
- Purple coneflower
- Russian sage
- Stonecrop

*Lawn and garden professionals can provide insight about species that are accustomed to local conditions and capable of thriving in them even when precipitation is low.*





# Tips to renovate on a budget



expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations depends on the scope of the project.

Rest assured, it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and out without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate on budget.

**R**enovations around the house require an investment of time and considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more

- **Don't waver.** Figure out exactly what you can afford and make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must adapt ideas

to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise.

- **Maximize an existing floor plan.** This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before investing in major renovations. Bring in a designer with an eye for space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.

- **Balance DIY with contractors.** You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.

- **Check clearance and resale stores.** Shop discount stores for building materials to save money. For example, if a

builder ordered too many cabinets they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also can be great places to find materials and furnishings.

- **Take advantage of free services.** Some stores offer things like free consultations with designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products.

- **Resurface instead of redo.** Certain items can be made to look new with minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well.

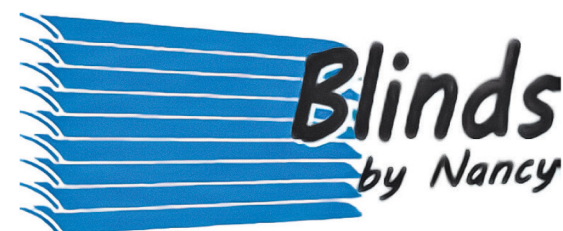
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# How to boost home value before selling



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People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.

### Kitchen & bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate upgrades like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware.

Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as “money rooms” that add the most value to a home.

### Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves living there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

### Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.



## Home Value Checklist

- ☐ **Freshen up kitchen & bath**  
The high ROI “money rooms.”
- ☐ **Declutter and depersonalize**  
So buyer can see themselves in the space.
- ☐ **Add curb appeal**  
Tidy lawns and flowers make a great first impression.
- ☐ **Paint in neutral tones**  
Help to clean and modernize..
- ☐ **Maximize usable space**  
Make every square foot count.

### And always remember . . .

Small Changes = Bigger Offers

### Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

### Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



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# What to know about kitchen cabinet projects



**K**itchens have long been characterized as the busiest room in a home. Kitchens are where meals are prepared and cooked, but they also tend to be gathering spaces where families connect at the end of a day and where guests congregate during celebrations.

All that time in the kitchen makes these popular rooms to renovate. To give kitchens a new look and feel without doing a full renovation consider kitchen cabinet projects.

- **Cabinet renovations may not require replacement.** Some cabinets may not need removal. The renovation experts at HGTV note that cabinet refacing can be a budget-friendly way to give a new look to cabinets that don't

need replacement. Refacing can be as extensive as homeowners prefer, but such projects can create a whole new aesthetic in the kitchen depending on the extent of the project.

- **There are many different types of kitchen cabinets.** Homeowners new to cabinet projects should know they will have many different options to choose from. Face-frame cabinets are a traditional choice made with a frame around the door and any drawers that might be included. Some additional options include full overlay cabinets, frameless cabinets, recessed panel cabinets, and Shaker cabinets. Not sure which cabinets to choose? A contractor or designer can help.

- **Cabinet materials and finishes vary as well.** Cabinets can be made from an array of materials, including wood, laminate, metal, and plastic. Cabinets also can be finished with paint, stain, glaze, and lacquer. Each finish has its own unique characteris-

tics. For example, painted cabinets may require more upkeep because paint can fade. However, painted cabinets remain popular because homeowners can paint them any color at any time.

- **Consider the countertops when adjusting cabinets.** Kitchens tend to have color schemes, and that scheme is often reflected in cabinets and countertops. When tweaking just the cabinets, homeowners should give ample consideration to the overall color scheme of their kitchens. Interior designers can help homeowners who aren't quite sure how new or refaced cabinets will fit into an overall color scheme.

- **Replacement if necessary.** A replacement project will be more expensive than refacing. But there are instances when cabinets require replacement. Excessive wear and tear, insufficient storage, a dated appearance, and cabinets that appear to be sagging off the wall are some indicators that replacement is necessary.



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**Home renovations are wildly popular, and that popularity can be traced to a number of factors.**

Some homeowners renovate their homes with their own comfort in mind, while others do so to improve the resale value of the property. For those in the latter group, a recognition of renovations that yield the highest return on investment may help them decide which projects to pursue. According to the housing market research and analytics firm Zonda Media, a garage door replacement offered the highest return on investment in the American real estate market in 2024, earning a whopping 194 percent return on homeowners' initial investment. An entry door replacement with steel door offered the second best ROI at 188 percent of homeowners' initial investment, while replacing siding with stone veneer was third on the list with an average ROI of 153 percent.



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# Bring the outdoors in – all year long

Many homeowners express interest in creating fewer barriers between the interior and exterior of their homes. Some may have backyards built for entertaining and want to facilitate the transition between the inside of the residence and the outside when guests arrive.

In other instances, homes may back to a nature preserve that homeowners want to enjoy more readily. Whatever the reason for bringing the outside in, all-season rooms can serve as a welcoming bridge between indoor and outdoor spaces.

## What is an all-season room?

Also known as a four-season room, all-season rooms are specially engineered spaces that provide a connection to the outdoors no matter the season. They are like sunrooms, but climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer, and fall.

## What is the difference between a three-season room and an all-season room?

The biggest difference between these two spaces is the level of usage and the capacity of the room to be heated and cooled. Individuals who reside in climates with moderate year-round temperatures may get by with a three-season room. However, those who experience all four seasons may need a more insulated space to make the room usable throughout the year.

**“All-season rooms are like sunrooms, but climate-controlled so that they will be comfortable throughout winter, spring, summer, and fall.”**

## Features of all-season rooms

One of the more notable features of an all-season room is an abundance of windows, which allow plenty of natural light to shine in. All-season rooms also can feature creature comforts like a reading nook, outdoor kitchen spaces and televisions. Retractable screens can be installed when privacy or shade is desired.

## Maintaining a comfortable temperature

All-season rooms can be built with adequate thermal insulation and energy-saving features. Insulation will be installed in the walls and roof, and homeowners may have a choice of window ratings for efficiency. Some all-season rooms are specially equipped with HVAC systems that may or may not be tied



in to the home's general heating and cooling system. Some people use portable heaters or air conditioners to control the temperature in all-season rooms. It's best to speak with an all-season room contractor to identify heating and cooling needs.

## How much does an all-season room cost?

Prices vary by region and are contingent on the features homeowners desire. According to the outdoor resource Garden Center Care, a three-season room can cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$50,000 to build. A four-season room can cost \$20,000 to \$80,000 to add. If there is an existing three-season room, it may be more affordable to upgrade the space into an all-season room, but an architect and contractor should inspect the space to determine the scope of the project.

All-season rooms can be an ideal addition to a property, providing extra space for entertaining or lounging and a connection to the outdoors.

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# Simple

## landscaping strategies that can transform a home's exterior

The interior of a home may be where homeowners and their families spend the majority of their time, and there's no denying that a well-planned interior goes a long way toward making a house a home. However, the exterior of a home, including its landscaping, can serve as a source of pride and catch the eye of prospective buyers when the home hits the market.

It's easy to walk past a home with an eye-catching exterior and assume the homeowner has a green thumb or has spent lots of time and money working on the landscaping. Though that may be true, oftentimes it's the simplest strategies that make all the difference. Homeowners can keep these strategies in mind as they look to transform the exterior of their homes.

- **Dress up the walkway.** A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank. Create new planting beds and plant bright plants and flowers along each side of the walkway. If it's necessary and within budget, lengthen the walkway to create the feel of a more grandiose entryway.

- **Make things more symmetrical.** A messy landscape can give a poor first impression, even if the area features some beautiful plants. In such instances, a little effort to make things more symmetrical, with equal parts grass and vegetation, can create a cleaner, more inviting look.

- **Mulch your flower and tree beds.** Mulch is a relatively inexpensive but effective way to add aesthetic appeal to a landscape. Freshly mulched beds beneath trees and flowers creates a clean and organized look, and the mulch also serves a practical purpose, as it reduces weed growth and helps

### A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank.

the soil retain moisture so plants stay healthy and look better throughout the warmer months when rainfall may not be steady or significant.

- **Plant shade trees.** Shade trees can be especially useful when selling a home. The shade provided by trees can shield grass from blistering summer sun, potentially helping it stay green. A lush green lawn appeals to buyers and gives the impression the home has been well maintained. In addition, shade trees can be used to create the look of a backyard oasis. A well-placed bench beneath a large shade tree can entice buyers who want a relaxing spot to enjoy warm summer days outdoors without getting a sunburn.

- **Consider maintenance.** The more exotic an exterior landscape is, the more maintenance it's likely to require. Lawn and garden enthusiasts may not be turned off by landscape features that require steady maintenance, but homeowners who don't have much time for such work should keep things simple. A poorly maintained landscape, even if it includes exotic plants and elaborate designs, will adversely affect curb appeal. Another feather in the cap of low-maintenance landscape features is they could prove more appealing to prospective buyers, who may view elaborate, exotic landscaping as a lot of extra work they won't want to do.

Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money.



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# Fun and innovative modern kitchen *features*



Kitchens are the hub of many homes. Perhaps due to their popularity as gathering spaces, kitchens are popular rooms to renovate to ensure they remain functional and attractive through the years.

Online resources such as Houzz and Fixr indicate kitchens are consistently ranked among the most popular rooms to renovate. **In 2022, 42 percent of homeowners were motivated to remodel their kitchens**, according to data from Statista. Homeowners looking to enhance the functionality and look of their kitchens can consider these fun and innovative features as they plan their renovations.

## Concealed countertop appliances

The latest small appliances and gadgets can make easy work of preparing food, but these devices can add to kitchen clutter. A roll-down door “appliance garage” will conceal appliances kept on counters.

## Cleverly placed storage

Additional storage also can give kitchens a cleaner look. Narrow, pull-out drawers can be nestled in between cabinets or appliances to make the most of tight spaces. These spots are perfect for utensils or spice containers.

## Mixer lift

Baking enthusiasts will cheer if they don’t have to lift a heavy stand mixer when preparing foods. A mixer lift is an innovative feature that enables homeowners to raise and lower the mixer from a dedicated cabinet any time it’s needed.

## Microwave drawer

A microwave drawer maximizes space and boasts a sleek design. Instead of installing a microwave above a stove, homeowners can enjoy a beautiful range hood.

## Wine refrigerator

Available in a variety of sizes, wine refrigerators offer stylish storage for any wine lover’s collection. A refrigerator can be installed into an island or

## Kitchen Reno Checklist

- ☐ Hidden appliance storage
- ☐ Pull-out spice rack
- ☐ Mixer lift cabinet
- ☐ Pot filler installation
- ☐ Upgrade to double ovens

lower cabinet and integrated into the rest of the kitchen.

## Double ovens

Double ovens are built directly into cabinetry and offer convenience and a sleek, modern look. Two ovens can make entertaining crowds easier, and separating the ovens from the burners lets homeowners install a cooktop elsewhere in the kitchen, which can expand floor plan options.

## Pot filler

A special faucet near the cooktop makes it much easier to fill heavy pasta pots. A pot filler can be quite handy for those who cook a lot and do not want to lug heavy pots from the sink to the stove.

Outfitting a modern kitchen during a renovation can involve some innovative features to enhance the space.

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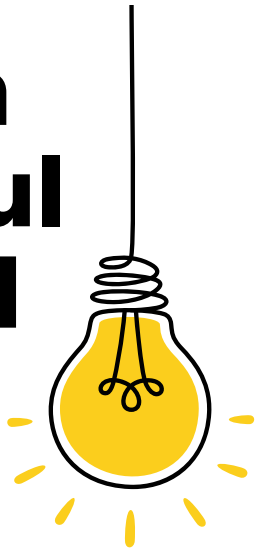
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# How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat



Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- **Refresh the landscape.** Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or

landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- **Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- **Add a water feature.** Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

- **Don't forget shade.** Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos,

pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

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## FANNING THE FLAMES: Fireplaces that light up the room

Providing the cozy comfort and aesthetic appeal that many desire, fireplaces are features individuals may want to add to their homes or upgrade if existing fixtures are showing their age. Before getting started, it's important to realize that fireplaces are not all one and the same.

The Spruce says there are four main types of fireplaces: wood-burning, gas, electric, and ethanol. The type of fireplace homeowners choose will affect the initial installation cost, the long-term cost of operation and even the utility of the feature. Direct-vent gas fireplaces are easy to install and can vent through an exterior wall. Another advantage of this type of gas fireplace is that it can start with the flip of a switch rather than a match. There also are B-vent gas appliances and ventless units that combust the interior air.

Fireplaces have been featured in homes for centuries. Although their function may have shifted through the years from a necessity that provides light and heat to a device that is more a design focal point, fireplaces are still popular among homeowners.

Wood fireplaces offer the crackling sounds of a fire and the smell of burning wood. Wood fireplaces can be expensive and require more extensive installation, particularly because a homeowner needs a space above the fireplace to install a chimney through the roof. In a two-story home, that reality may limit where a fireplace can be installed. A wood fireplace requires a brick or stone firebox to be installed as well. Wood-burning fireplaces also can be dangerous if they are not installed correctly or properly maintained.

Electric fireplaces are easy to install and operate. The Spruce says most electric fireplaces are mounted on the wall and plugged into a standard outlet. Some also are portable and thus can be moved from room to room depending on need.

A notable drawback of an electric fireplace for some is that such fixtures do not have a real flame, which some believe adversely affects their aesthetic appeal. Also, electric fireplaces will not be helpful during a power outage and do not produce the same amount of heat as other fireplaces.

Ethanol fireplaces are a relatively new invention that are lightweight and can be moved as needed. Smaller versions can be placed on a tabletop, while others can be built into a wall as permanent fixtures. Again, these produce less heat than other fireplace options, but the fuel required to use them can be more expensive than gas, wood or electricity.

Complex installs involving gas lines or venting should be left to professionals for safety and efficiency.

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# SOAK UP these LUXURIOUS BATHROOM FEATURES



A luxury bathroom renovation has an ROI of about **57%**

**K**itchens and bathrooms are two popular areas to address when renovating a home. Modernize Home Services says 26 percent of sellers make bathroom improvements to their homes before listing. Midscale bath remodels will net a return on investment of about 64 percent, while a luxury bathroom overhaul has an ROI of about 57 percent.

When considering bathroom renovations, homeowners may want to include some unique features that can add style and function, not to mention some much-deserved luxury. With that in mind, the following are some luxurious features to consider.

• **Heated floors:** There is something to be said for stepping out of the shower and being met with warmth underfoot. Heated floors are not just for people who live in cold climates, either. When the air conditioning is pumping on hot days, tile floors can feel chilly. Heated floors also are aesthetically appealing because homeowners don't have to factor in baseboard heaters or forced-air vents.

• **Steam showers:** There are many different steam showers on the market, and each can turn regular showers into steamy spa-like enclaves. A steam shower is similar to a sauna and utilizes a steam generator to produce steam in a single area, advises Badeloft® Luxury Bathrooms.

• **Soaking tub:** Although the majority of people shower as part of their daily hygiene routine, a deep soaking tub separate from the shower is ideal for those who enjoy a good bath.

• **Luxury mirror:** Upgrading the bathroom mirror to one that offers features like defoggers, integrated lighting and a dimmer setting can elevate the bathroom.

• **Floating vanity:** A floating vanity is mounted directly to the wall to leave space underneath. Better Homes & Gardens says a floating vanity can lend an airy feel to a bathroom.

• **Frameless shower:** A frameless (glass) shower door is not only luxurious but also functional for people who want to age in place. With no edge or lip to step over to enter the shower, anyone with mobility challenges can walk into a frameless shower safely.

• **Water closet:** If space allows, separating the toilet in a water closet from the rest of the bathroom space affords even more privacy. Plus, in couple's bathrooms, a water closet enables two to use the bathroom at the same time for different functions.


• **Walk-in-closet:** Relocating the bedroom closet to right off the owner's bathroom affords an immediate



opportunity to dress comfortably, thus streamlining a morning routine.

Choosing some unique upgrades can enhance the design and function of these spaces. Whether it's added convenience, comfort, or a touch of indulgence, incorporating these upgrades can transform the bathroom into a personalized retreat.





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## TIPS to MAKE A LIVING ROOM A more comfortable, welcoming space



A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home. Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations. That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible. With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more comfortable.

- **Prioritize comfort over aesthetics.** In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the living room whether you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

- **Ensure there's ample seating.** It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and family into your home or simply loung-

ing around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spending time in the room.

- **Consider neutral paint colors.** Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan, or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable vibe in a living room.

- **Incorporate the outdoors into the room.** The great outdoors can have a calming effect on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnishings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

A comfortable living room is a space where people will want to spend their time. A few simple strategies can help create an inviting and comfortable vibe in any living room.

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## Small renovations that make a big impact

Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that's something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There's no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment.

- **Front door replacement:** A new front door instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

- **Lighting addition:** Enlarging a window or adding skylights, can produce incredible results using natural light. New lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.

- **Kitchen & bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

- **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

- **Exterior lighting:** A welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside.

- **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs.

- **Replace outlet covers:** Upgrade outlet covers and light switches with screwless options. Screwless plates can make walls look more sleek.

- **Entry organizer installation:** Banish clutter from the home at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and functional.

- **Carpets cleaning:** Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep cleaning.



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# TECH UPGRADES for YOUR HOME ENTERTAINMENT SPACE

Life in the twenty-first century can feel like it's moving at breakneck speed. Perhaps nowhere is that feeling more pronounced than within the technology sector, where new products are often upstaged by more advanced models, sometimes within a few weeks of an item's initial release.

The speed with which technology advances can make it difficult to keep up. However, it's important to note that software updates can bring devices up to speed in a matter of minutes, often at no cost to users. That can quiet concerns some may have about investing in entertainment room technology. For those ready to move forward with their entertainment room remodel, these tech upgrades can take such spaces to the next level.

## • New television:

Shopping for a new TV can be overwhelming, the alphabet soup of OLED, QLED, 4K, and other television styles can be difficult to navigate. To simplify things, start by considering what you watch most. Though opinions vary and consumers should always trust their own eyes, the OLED televisions are recommended for movie and television lovers as well as gamers who require fast response times. Sports fans may look for a high refresh rate to keep fast moving action smooth and clear.

• **Speaker system:** Surround sound can take any entertainment setup to the next level. Modern televisions are slim and that sleek design does not always translate to great built-in sound. A



home theater surround sound system with subwoofer and Bluetooth connectivity can greatly improve the viewing experience. For those on a budget, a soundbar that can be upgraded with additional surround sound speakers can be a great way to start building a theater-like sound system.

• **Lighting:** Often overlooked, the right lighting can set the perfect mood. If the room is exclusively for movies or big games, then lighting that calls to mind a movie theater, complete with LED strip lights on

the walls, is worth considering. If the entertaining space is your living room and a space where you're just as likely to read a book as enjoy a family movie night, then recessed lighting in the ceiling with dimmable bulbs allows you to pivot back and forth between lighting schemes at any given moment.

It's easy to get lost when considering tech upgrades for an entertainment room. But pairing the right television with great sound and appropriate lighting can make for a consistently impressive viewing experience.

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# COMMON QUESTIONS and ANSWERS ABOUT CARPETING



No two homeowners are the same, and that's perhaps most evident in the design decisions individuals make when decorating their homes. Flooring is among the first things a person notices when entering a home, and the array of options consumers have when choosing flooring materials underscores how unique each homeowner is.

Carpeting is a popular flooring option. Many homeowners prefer carpeting because they feel it helps to create a cozy, welcoming vibe in a home. Consumers considering carpet for their homes may have some common questions, and answers to those inquiries can help homeowners determine if carpeting is for them.

## Is carpeting expensive?

Home renovations are expensive, and the cost of a project is often the first question homeowners have. The cost of carpeting varies widely and is contingent on an array of variables unique to each home and homeowner, including square footage, materials chosen by the homeowner and the cost of labor associated with installation, which can vary significantly between locations. According to the online renovation resource HomeAdvisor, the average cost to install or replace carpet is between \$782 and \$2,812. That wide range illustrates how much the cost of the project will be affected by variables unique to each project. However, even homeowners who come in around or above the high end of that estimate may find

**Many homeowners prefer carpeting because they feel it helps to create a cozy, welcoming vibe in a home.**

carpet installation is among the more affordable ways to give the interior of a home an entirely new look and feel.

## How different are carpeting materials?

Carpeting materials differ in their look, feel and function. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that some carpet fibers are better suited to areas in a home that attract a lot of foot traffic, while others make for better options in areas with less use, such as a bedroom or home office. For example, Angi.com notes that polyester has a luxurious, soft feel, making it a strong option for bedroom floors. Nylon carpet fiber is resistant to stains and damage and maintains its height under heavy weight, making this a good option in heavily trafficked rooms. Homeowners can discuss each carpeting material with their flooring retailer to determine which suits their budget and which is best in each room of their homes.

## Is carpet padding a must?

Carpet padding is one of the costs associated with carpeting. When shopping for carpeting for the first time, homeowners may notice carpet padding costs on their estimate and wonder what it is and if it's truly necessary. Carpet padding is necessary, as Flooring101.com

notes that it keeps the underside of the carpet from wearing against the subfloor while absorbing the impact of foot traffic and furniture. That absorption helps to reduce stress on the carpet and thus extend its life expectancy. Carpet padding also can have an insulating effect and help to reduce sound in a room. So

while carpet padding might be a costly expense on an itemized estimate, it's well worth the investment.

Carpeting can help make a home feel more cozy and welcoming. Homeowners can work with a local carpeting retailer to find a carpet that meets their needs and fits their budget.

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The day homeowners move into a new home is a unique experience. First-time home buyers may see such a day as the culmination of years of hard work, while those who are not new to the experience may find their new home is where they'll spend the rest of their lives.

Move-in day is indeed a notable milestone, but there's much homeowners can do between closing on a home and backing the moving truck into the driveway. In fact, it may be best for homeowners to complete several home interior projects while the residence is still empty.



### Painting

Painting home interiors is among the more logical projects to consider before moving into a home. Simply put, an empty home is far easier to paint than one filled with furniture and other items. Professional painters may even discount a project if they know they won't have to cover and/or move any furniture before and after applying paint. Painting before anyone has moved in also saves residents the discomfort of living in a home overcome by the lingering aroma of drying paint. Simply open the windows and let the home air out throughout each painting session.

### Flooring

Flooring projects are another undertaking to consider before moving in. Whether you're tearing up old carpet and replacing it with new carpet, refinishing wood floors, or installing a wholly new floor, each task is considerably easier if there is nothing on the floor. Flooring projects are best left to the professionals, and labor costs may drop considerably if contractors don't have to pause to move furnishings or work around other items.

### Deep cleaning

A professional cleaning service should be among the first calls homeowners make after closing on a new home. A deep cleaning when the home is empty and all lingering dust and debris is visible to the naked eye can ensure no spots are missed before move-in day. Request that the cleaning service clean the interior of kitchen



drawers and cabinets, which have a tendency to accumulate grime over the years.

### Electrical work

Modern homes are plugged in, so addressing electrical issues prior to move-in day can ensure there are no interruptions to internet connectivity when everyone begins to settle into the home. This is also a great time to install additional electrical outlets, and homeowners are urged to take the time to draw up plans for how each room will look once all of their furniture is in the house. Doing so can identify where additional outlets should be installed. Homeowners also can visit their new home at night and turn on the lights to see if existing fixtures provide ample illumination. If not, installing new fixtures prior to moving in makes cleanup easier and ensures there are no dark nights once everyone is in the home.

### Ceilings

Replacing ceilings prior to moving in is another savvy move. If the ceilings are dated or unsightly, removing, repainting or replacing them before anything is beneath them is a great way to protect valuables from damage. And contractors may not need as much time to complete such a project in empty rooms as they would in spaces where they need to negotiate their way around furniture and other valuables.

Various renovation projects can be conducted prior to moving into a new home. Such an approach can save both money and effort.

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# Quick and easy ways to give your kitchen a new look

Kitchens are often the busiest rooms in a home serving as go-to gathering spots on holiday get-togethers and during other events when homeowners host family and friends.

With so much time spent there, it's easy for homeowners to grow a little bored by the space. The cost of a kitchen remodel won't be cheap. Angi.com notes that the typical cost of such a project in the United States is between \$13,000 and \$38,000, and estimates even indicate that a high-end remodel could cost homeowners as much as \$61,000. That's beyond many homeowners' budgets. But the good news is that there are many quick, easy, and affordable ways to give a kitchen a new look.

- **Repaint and restyle the cabinets.**

Cabinet space is a precious commodity, especially as when homeowners embrace their inner chef and cook more complicated meals at home. After all, the more expansive a home chef's culinary repertoire, the more space is needed to store all the tools of the trade. A full cabinet replacement is unnecessary if the cabinets are functional and not overcrowded, so repainting them can be a great way to give the kitchen a new look while keeping costs reasonable. During the project, install new cabinet knobs and/or drawer pulls to freshen up the style even further.

- **Install under-cabinet lighting.**

Another way to give a kitchen a new look is to install under-cabinet lighting. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, under-cabinet lighting can make a kitchen feel warmer and illuminated when meals aren't being prepared. During meal prep, under-cabinet lighting can illuminate counters so it's easier to chop, peel and perform other prep tasks.



- **Replace existing backsplash.**

Replacing backsplash is another simple, inexpensive and effective way to give a kitchen a new feel. Homeowners can opt for something neutral that won't upset their existing decor or go with a more bold backsplash that immediately draws the attention of anyone who enters the room. This simple job can be done by the average do-it-yourselfer and the cost of new backsplash won't break the bank.

- **Replace existing seating.**

Whether you have an island countertop with bar stools or a breakfast nook with cushioned seats, replacing the seating is a budget-friendly job that can create a new look when entering the room. Countertop bar stools come in many styles, so giving this area of the kitchen a new feel can be as simple as shifting from classic, high-back stools to more modern swivel stools with a chrome base. For the breakfast nook, replacing a light-colored bench cushion with a bolder alternative can instantly transform the look of the space.

Kitchen remodels can break the bank. But there's a host of budget-friendly ways for cost-conscious homeowners to revitalize these popular spaces in their homes.



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# How to upgrade your home to accommodate *modern living*

**R**emodeling projects allow homeowners to put their personal stamps on a property. In addition to choosing a color and design scheme that fits a particular aesthetic, homeowners may want to outfit their homes with various features that can make them more accommodating to modern living. Homeowners can use these ideas as a springboard for remodeling projects designed to modernize their homes.

- **Open floor plans:** Open floor plans remain coveted characteristics of modern home architecture. An open layout enables occupants to feel like they are enjoying spaces together without having to be on top of one another. Since sightlines are not obstructed in open floor plans, homeowners can enjoy a cohesive design style across each level of the home.

- **Eco-friendly features:** Eco-friendly features modernize homes and may even earn homeowners rebates from the government. From positioning rooms to take advantage of natural sunlight to using environmentally responsible materials throughout a home, modern homes can function with a much smaller carbon footprint than older structures.

- **Smart home technology:** A smart home is equipped with appliances and other devices that can be controlled remotely, typically from a phone or computer connected to the internet. Investopedia notes that smart home technology offers homeowners convenience and cost savings. Smart home technology is available across a wide range of budgets, ranging from thousands of dollars for a complete home automation to roughly \$100 for a small change like a smart thermostat.

- **Accessibility features:** A home that can grow with its residents is advantageous. When choosing renovations, features like slip-resis-



DC Studio/stock.adobe.com

tant flooring, stylish grab bars and low-threshold or barrier-free showers can enable homeowners to age in place more comfortably.

- **Dual owner's suites:** Dual owner's suites can be an asset for couples who choose to sleep separately. The Sleep Foundation says individuals choose to sleep in different rooms for a variety of reasons, notably reduced sleep interruptions and improved sleep quality. Plus, an extra bedroom can come in handy when one person is ill or in the event a partner snores. Rather than one person in the relationship getting the "lesser" space, certain homebuilders now offer plans for dual owner's suites so both people get the features they desire in a bedroom.

- **Three-season room:** Many homeowners aspire to bridge the gap between the indoors and outside. Three-season rooms help transition from the yard to the interior of a home, and offer a touch of nature without the bugs or unpleasant elements.



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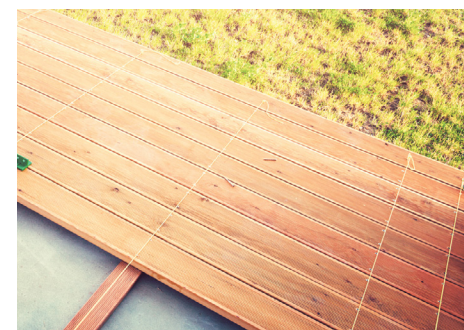
## How to decide between a deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. Green spaces remain popular, but many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time comes to plan such areas. That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

- **Determine your budget.** The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project. For example, composite

decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and typically a longer life span. Pavers may prove less expensive than composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio. It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an outdoor living space. In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.



- **Identify your vision for the space.** Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more quickly and even more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want. Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate between rooms inside the home. For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavilion and fireplace, while kitchen and

dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio. Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space.

- **Recognize both may be in your best interest.** Homeowners also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio. Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the area as a multifunctional space.



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