

fall home improvement 2012





Fire Safety SAVES LIVES

Home fires kill an average of seven people every day, and they cause billions of dollars in property damage.

Here are some easy steps you and your family can take to protect your home and each other, and to understand the basics of fire safety.

Your best defense

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), working smoke alarms are your best chance for escaping a home fire. They can alert you to a fire 24 hours a day, seven days a week, whether you're awake or asleep.

- 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. are the peak alarm times for home fire deaths - when people tend to be asleep and the house is likely to be dark.

- On average, families have less than three minutes from the time the first smoke alarm sounds to escape a fire.

The NFPA says that in the U.S., almost two-thirds of home fire deaths resulted from fires in homes with inoperable smoke alarms or no smoke alarms. In reported home fires in which the smoke alarms were present but did not operate:

- Half of the smoke alarms had missing or disconnected batteries. Nuisance alarms were the leading reason for disconnected smoke alarms.
- Almost one-quarter (23 percent) of the smoke alarm failures were due to dead batteries.
- Only seven percent of the failures were due to hard-wired power source problems, including disconnected smoke alarms, power outages and power shut-offs.

Fire safety checklist

- Install smoke alarms on every level of the home and outside each sleeping area.
- Best location - On the ceiling in the center of the room, at least 12 inches from any wall.
- Second best - On a wall 12 inches below the ceiling.
- Test alarms once a month.
- To reach it, stand on a chair or use a broom handle, and push the unit's test button. If you don't hear anything, the battery is probably dead. If the unit still doesn't sound after you've changed the battery, replace it with a new smoke alarm.
- Change batteries at least once a year.
- The clock change for daylight saving time is an easy way to remember to change your batteries, as well.
- Install a fire extinguisher in or near the kitchen.
- Use a multi-purpose fire extinguisher suitable for use on multiple flammable materials.
- Check the pressure regularly to make sure it's at the recommended level.
- Keep flashlights with fresh batteries at your bedside for

help in finding the way out and signaling for help.

- Develop and practice an emergency escape plan.
- You can download a free Escape Plan Grid at www.energizer.com to help.

Fire facts

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) believes that fire deaths can be reduced by teaching people the basic facts about fire. Here are some simple facts that explain the particular characteristics of fire.

In less than 30 seconds a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for thick black smoke to fill a house. In minutes, a house can be engulfed in flames. If you wake up to a fire, you won't have time to grab valuables because fire spreads too quickly and the smoke is too thick. There is only time to escape.

A fire's heat alone can kill. Room temperatures in a fire can be 100 degrees at floor level and rise to 600 degrees at eye level. Inhaling this super-hot air will scorch your lungs. This heat can melt clothes to your skin. In five minutes a room can get so hot that everything in it ignites at once: this is called flashover.

Fire starts bright, but quickly produces black smoke and complete darkness. If you wake up to a fire you may be blinded, disoriented and unable to find your way around the home you've lived in for years.

Fire uses up the oxygen you need and produces smoke and poisonous gases that kill. Breathing even small amounts of smoke and toxic gases can make you drowsy, disoriented and short of breath. The odorless, colorless fumes can lull you into a deep sleep before the flames reach your door. You may not wake up in time to escape.

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Could you be contaminating your own drinking water?

by TONI HOKANSON

Clean drinking water is taken for granted in the United States. Humans can live for weeks without food but only days without clean drinking water. Most homes and business' in the Mid Hudson Valley, outside of villages and cities, have individual wells to provide drinking water. While there are regulations and best practices established for the construction of wells, it is the landowner's responsibility to ensure that the well is working correctly and the water is healthy to drink. Are you unintentionally polluting your own water?

Wells are continually recharged with ground water. Most ground water comes from rain and melting snow soaking into the ground and filling the spaces between rocks and soils.

You could be contaminating your drinking water by:

- Improper disposal of household chemicals. Never dump chemicals in the ground. Detergents can be flushed into a working septic system. Return used oil to your local recycling center or service station. Contact your county for the next Household Hazardous Waste collection for disposal of antifreeze or paint and other chemicals.
- Improperly built or maintained septic systems. Have your septic system inspected and routinely maintained.
- Corrosion from old plumbing fixtures if your plumbing was installed prior to 1988.
- Pesticide use. Look for chemical free herbicides and use pesticides sparingly.
- Improper handling or disposal of animal or other waste. Never bury animal feces in a dry well and do not stock pile

near your well, stream or water bodies.

- Do not flush expired prescriptions. Contact your local health department or pharmacist for proper disposal.
- Test your water annually for coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids and PH levels. Additional testing may be needed if the water has a chemical taste or smell.
- Check your wellhead for signs of cap damage; consider installing a new locking well cap. Take care in working or mowing near your well.

Check your oil tank regularly for signs of leakage or spill and replace any tank that is 20 years old or more. According to the American Petroleum Institute 50% of bare steel tanks will develop leaks within 15 years. When an underground tank or piping leaks, the cleanup can cost \$20,000 or more. Many insurance policies contain a "pollution exclusion" clause, leaving you with 100% of the cost. In addition, if a leaky tank contaminates a neighbor's well, the tank owner is liable for any damage done and clean up required. In New York State, all spills and contamination must be reported to the DEC.

Signs of a problem can include an unexplained increase in heating oil use, signs of a damaged tank or piping, soil that is stained or gives off strong oil odors or a sheen on the ground water.

If you suspect a leak, action should be taken immediately (within 24 hours) to minimize environmental damage and contain costs. Call the local DEC office, the Spill Hotline is 1-800-457-7362, and an experienced environmental consultant.

The absence of these signs is not a guarantee that there is no leak. If your tank is over 15 years old you can

have the tank and piping tested for tightness. For tanks 20 years old or greater it can be more cost effective to remove, replace or abandon the tank and save the testing costs. It is important to consider that no test can predict or prevent what will happen next year or even the next week. Having an old tank (and piping) replaced with a modern double-walled underground or basement tank can save money and anguish.

When a tank is found to be leaking, additional work is required to determine the extent of the problem and the amount of cleanup required. It will be important to hire a qualified and experienced contractor.

An experienced contractor should provide you with a written estimate with specific cost estimates based on site conditions. Be sure to ask for proof of insurance and references for the work to be performed. Your contractor will obtain all required permits and provide you with documentation of all work performed including: location of tank, shipping records of disposal, analytical results of samples taken, and any additional work needed.

Keep all records in a safe place. They will be needed should you want to sell or refinance your home.

Be sure the contractor you select has adequate insurance. C2G Environmental Consultants, LLC maintains the necessary insurance coverage levels to protect you, the property owner.

Toni Hokanson is Director of Marketing at C2G Environmental Consultants, LLC located at 83 South Putt Corners Rd. New Paltz, NY.

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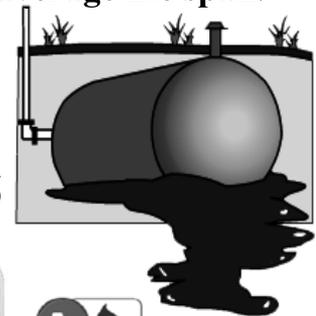
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Green options for your home

Private residences consume lots of energy. The Energy Information Administration says that Americans are increasing their electricity consumption at home, with some homes even using more energy than small businesses. The EIA says that on average a home uses between 936 and 1,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity each month. There is also a heavy reliance on natural gas, one of the primary fuels used to heat homes. On average homes use 100 million BTU for heating and cooking needs per year.

Thousands of dollars are spent every year on home heating, cooling and electricity needs, but there are many different ways to conserve energy. This includes using alternative energy sources that may be better for the planet and more cost-effective for the average homeowner.

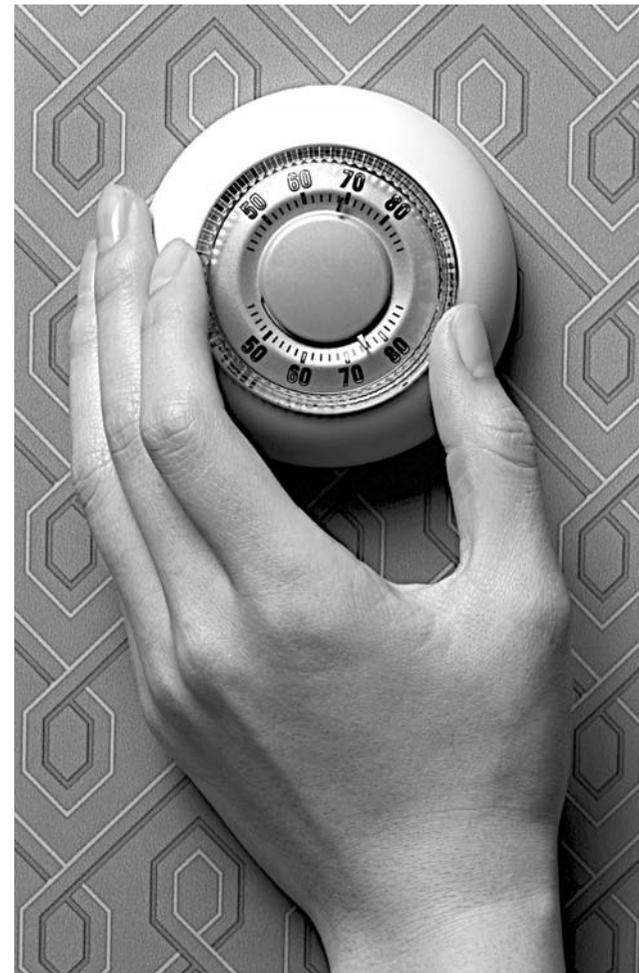
When considering green energy, many homeowners think of solar panels, which currently account for .01 percent of all electricity used in homes across the United States. However, solar power could provide as much as 10 percent of that electricity by 2025. California leads the nation with the most solar projects to date, but homeowners across the country are considering solar panel additions to their homes. While the initial cost of solar panel installation can be considerable, the panels generally pay for themselves in energy savings within a few years of installation. Also, some solar power companies now allow homeowners to rent the photovoltaic panels, which can cut down on the cost of installation.

Choosing green energy may not involve any effort on

the part of the homeowner. In fact, there are many different companies that work in conjunction with traditional energy suppliers so that a portion of the energy supplied to homes comes via an alternative energy source. Call your local energy company to see if they have any programs that enable homeowners to switch a certain percentage of their energy usage to renewable energy. Potentially these programs can reduce total carbon emissions saving roughly 5 million trees and 24 million gallons of gasoline as a result. Homeowners who choose this option will still receive the same bill and must still open an account with their local utility company.

Homeowners interested in making any other changes for energy savings can sign up to have an energy audit. Conducted through a utility provider or a third-party organization, energy audits assess many things in the home. Appliances are examined, as are insulation and the types of windows and doors used in the home and an inspector will check the home for drafts. A report is generated, and homeowners are provided recommendations as to how they can improve their home's energy efficiency. Making such changes may make homeowners eligible for tax breaks or even rebate incentives while reducing the cost of their monthly utility bills.

Homeowners hoping to embrace green energy have many options at their disposal. It's just a matter of researching those options and taking the initiative to make changes.



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Fall is a cool time for a roof repairs

There comes a time in many homeowners' lives when they're faced with the reality that a roof replacement is necessary. A roof can last between 15 and 30 years, and a person who owns an older home may find the lease has expired on the current roof. Is there a particular time of year that is better for having a roof installed? It depends on different factors, including the availability of a roofing contractor.

According to the site, The Average Cost of Things, courtesy of the Home Buying Institute, across the country one can expect to spend \$18,000 on average to replace a roof with asphalt shingles. Use of other materials, like tile or metal will cost more than this. In general, those living in big cities tend to pay more than those in rural areas. Because a roof replacement is expensive, it is something that some homeowners prefer to put off until it is absolutely necessary. Others are interested in finding the best rate around and hiring reliable roofers for the job.

It's important to note that there really is no season where roof replacements are off-limits. Most roofers can do the job effectively unless the temperature is below freezing or if there is significant rain in the forecast. In fact, planning a roofing job for the middle of the winter actually may work to a homeowner's advantage. This is typically a slow time of year for some roofers, and they may be anxious to get work this time of year and be willing to negotiate on price. There's also a good chance that the roofer will not be bogged down with other jobs, enabling the company to start on a home right away. Some



roofers prefer working in the colder weather to sizzling up on a roof under the hot sun at another time of year.

Naturally the spring is a prime time of year for roofing projects. After the rainy season, the weather is generally comfortable and homeowners are thinking about the projects they will commence. A busy time of year for home improvement all around, homeowners may find that they have to compete with others for a good date to have a roof

installed. They also may be paying top dollar for the work and materials that are in high demand. Another thing to consider during the busy season is that a project may be rushed along in order to move on to the next job or one being worked on concurrently. This may lead to corners being cut or less attention to detail.

A person may be limited in their choices of roof installation during the summer. Extreme temperatures can make working on the roof hazardous and uncomfortable for workers. For those who live in a climate where the temperatures generally cause the mercury to soar, choose a cooler time of year.

Many homeowners opt to have a roof replacement in the autumn. The crisp weather and the decline in home-renovation projects overall can make this a prime time to contract with a quality roofer. If the roof is very much damaged, replacing it before the harsh, winter weather sets in can be advantageous.

Some homeowners find they can get a discount on a roof installation if they bundle different renovations together. A contractor may offer a special on siding and roofing together. For those who have the funds, this may be the opportunity to get two jobs done at once.

A roofing project is no small undertaking, and homeowners are wise to get several referrals and investigate a variety of companies before settling on one. Review sites, such as Angie's List, or simply word-of-mouth appraisals from friends and family members can help make choosing a roofer an easier decision.

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Build your own storage shed this fall

Many people find that space around a home is a precious commodity after years spent accumulating different things. The basement, attic and garage are commonly used to store items that won't fit anywhere else. Though spring cleaning is a great way to cut down on clutter, a storage shed makes a great place to put those items you can't bear to discard. Sheds come in many shapes and sizes. Ready-made sheds can be erected on your property immediately, and some retailers will do so for an additional fee. The cost of a shed can vary greatly, from simple plastic sheds that cost roughly \$100 to more customized sheds that cost \$1,000 or more.

After looking at many storage sheds from builders or prefabricated models, you may want to build one yourself. This way you can be sure it is customized to fit your yard and is the right color and style and made of secure and durable materials. While an adventurous project, shed building is typically within the skill set of the average homeowner. Also, a shed can be built in a weekend or two, depending on how much time you can devote to the project. Here's how to get started.

• Consult with your town, city, province, or municipality to find out the zoning laws regarding sheds. You may need a building permit if the shed will feature a permanent foundation or is larger than a certain size. Storage



sheds greater than 120 square feet generally require a permit. There also may be rules regarding how far away the shed must be from the property line or even the height of the structure. It pays to know this information in advance so you don't run into legal trouble after the project has begun.

• Find a style of shed that you would like to emulate. Drive around to different shed retailers or big box home

improvement stores and peruse the stock. Choose the features you like and mark them down. Take photos of the ones you really like.

• Research available plans. You can purchase shed plans or have an architect draw them up, but that may be costly. There are also free shed plans online, some of which provide a list of necessary supplies.

• Order your supplies and organize everything. A building materials center or a home improvement store may deliver all of your materials right to your home, saving you the hassle of going back and forth to get things piece by piece. Once they are delivered, sort through everything and mark whether the material is for the floor, walls or roof. If the shed will not be rooted to the ground but kept on skids or blocks, you will likely want to have some sort of base material, like rocks or gravel underneath to deter animals from making a home under the shed.

• Enlist the help of a friend and get building. Once you get into a groove, you may find that the shed building comes easy to you. But the work will go more quickly if you have a friend available to help you hold materials in place while you secure them.

Building a shed can be a rewarding do-it-yourself project that saves you money and frees up space in your home.

Fall Clean-up

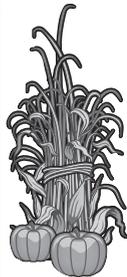
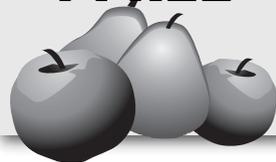
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Improving curb appeal is easier than you think

Men and women who have tried to sell a home are likely familiar with the phrase "curb appeal." Curb appeal is similar to getting ready for a big date, only you're not dressing yourself up to make a strong first impression. Instead, improving curb appeal involves dressing your home up in the hopes it makes a strong first impression on prospective buyers, many of whom will have a strong opinion about the property before they even get out of their cars to have a look around.

A home with strong curb appeal can entice buyers who are likely to believe that a home with a well-maintained exterior is likely to have an equally impressive interior. Homeowners who want the process of selling their home to go smoothly can improve the property's curb appeal in a number of ways, many of which don't necessitate a substantial home improvement budget.

The most effective way to improve curb appeal is to clean up the property. Many homeowners are savvy enough to remove toys and other items from the yard before showing a home, but cleaning up goes beyond removing clutter from the property. Make sure all hedges are trimmed



and remove weeds, sticks and other debris from any flower beds. Lay mulch in the

flower beds and garden, as mulch prevents weed growth while helping the soil retain moisture, resulting in more attractive gardens to catch a buyer's eye.

Edging is another easy and effective way to improve curb appeal. Edge driveways, sidewalks and other walkways around the property, removing or trimming anything that is hanging over the driveway or walkways. If the boundary between your driveway and lawn is not distinct, consider installing edging materials such as stone or bricks. The edging can be level with the driveway or elevated, but keep in mind that elevated driveway edging can protect the lawn, preventing kids from riding their bicycles onto the lawn or cars from driving onto it. Adding edging is

not a very difficult do-it-yourself project.

Many homeowners grow accustomed to overgrown trees around their property and may not notice that low-hanging, unsightly branches are hiding the home from view. Buyers want to see the house, so take to the trees and trim any branches that hang too low or obscure your home.

Leaves and sticks hanging from the gutters are a red flag to buyers, who tend to associate clogged gutters with roof damage. Clean the gutters thoroughly before putting your home up for sale and keep them clean throughout the selling process. If your property includes lots of trees, install guards to keep twigs and leaves out of the gutters.

Many homeowners enter their home through a side door or through their garage. If you fall into this category, keep in mind that prospective buyers will be entering through the front door, so make this area accessible. Clear any clutter, such as overgrown hedges, away from the front door, and consider upgrading the door handle to a more modern feature. In addition, make sure the lock on the front door doesn't stick, forcing the realtor and buyers to immediately struggle before entering the home. You want buyers and their real estate agents to get in and out of the home as smoothly as possible.

Make sure all plants, including flowers, are living. Dehydrated or dead plants and flowers are eyesores, and they will give buyers the impression that you didn't pay much attention to your property. Make sure all plants are alive and thriving and replace those that aren't. You can replant new flowers or plants or just use potted plants instead. When purchasing new plants, choose low-maintenance varieties that appeal to buyers who want good vibrant plants but might not want to put in much work into the garden.

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Easy carpet cleaning tips and tricks from the experts

As the weather cools and daylight hours shorten, families tend to spend more time inside. After a long summer of open windows, sticky treats and constant activity in and out the door, you might notice that your carpets are looking a bit drab. Keeping carpets clean might seem like a daunting task, but with some tips from the experts it's quicker and easier than you think.

Carpet provides good traction, absorbs noises, and saves homeowners money because it naturally insulates a room. And, contrary to popular misconceptions, carpet that is cleaned regularly is fine for people with allergies, and even asthma. The best practice for keeping carpets consistently clean is having a regular maintenance routine.

Refreshing carpets after a special event, season of tough use, or simply any time of year is easy with these tips from the experts at the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), a national carpet trade association that focuses on science-based research, customer advocacy and environmental initiatives.

Create a vacuum schedule

Have you ever wondered if vacuuming really makes a difference? Removing soil when it's on the surface, before it gets tramped down, is the first and most important step in carpet maintenance. Use slow, repetitive motions that overlap (about four swipes), ensuring you get right up to the edges where dust, pollen and pet dander like to accu-

mulate.

How often do you need to vacuum? That answer may surprise you. Generally once a week with a CRI-certified vacuum is a good place to start, but depending on how frequently the area is used, you'll likely want to do it more often. For example, high-traffic or pet areas should be vacuumed daily, medium-traffic areas require about twice a week and light-traffic areas can be done once a week. Just as you wouldn't wear a shirt over and over again without washing it, you don't want to go too long between vacuuming your carpets.

Treat stains the correct way

Up to 98 percent of carpet is manufactured in the United States, and most is made to be stain-resistant. However, junior's ice cream cone drips and Fido's dirty paws can leave marks that may seem almost too difficult to remove. No matter how hard you try to prevent them, stains do happen, so it's important to act quickly. Scoop up solids and blot liquids with a dry, white cloth or paper towel, starting at the edge of the spot moving toward the center. Do not scrub - it can damage carpet and spread the mess.

Next, treat the spot with a CRI-tested and approved carpet cleaning solution. If you don't have one on hand, plain water often works better than untested carpet cleaners. For wine or chocolate stains, try mixing 1/4 teaspoon clear dishwashing liquid with one cup warm water. Avoid

laundry detergent which can cause permanent damage, such as a change in color. For coffee or tea stains, try mixing 1 cup white vinegar with 1 cup water. For ink stains, apply rubbing alcohol to a cloth and blot. Have a wax spill? Cover the spot with a clean brown paper bag or heavy brown paper and apply low heat from an iron. The paper will absorb the wax as it melts.

Call in the pros

Just like you visit the dentist to get your teeth cleaned regularly, your carpets also need attention from a trained professional. To keep your carpets looking great and lasting for years to come, you should get them professionally deep cleaned every 12 to 18 months with a CRI Seal of Approval Service Provider. Find one near you by visiting www.carpet-rug.org.

If you've never had your carpets professionally cleaned, now is a great time to start before the holidays arrive. Start by getting bids and don't be afraid to ask questions. A good carpet cleaning should include vacuuming, a pre-spray and routine spot removal. Many won't charge for furniture removal either.

Whether you want to get in a better habit with routine carpet maintenance or you simply want to refresh your carpet for the change of seasons or a special event, these tips will keep your carpet and home looking wonderful today and long into the future.

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Keep hardwood floors looking beautiful

No matter what the setting, the good looks and durability of hardwood floors can be maintained with minimal effort. It's simply a matter of proper care and maintenance.

The American Hardwood Information Center in conjunction with the National Wood Flooring Association suggest the following care and maintenance guidelines to keep hardwood floors looking beautiful today, and for years to come. Here's how to begin.

All hardwood floors should be cleaned regularly to remove dirt and grit from between the floor boards. Avoid using a wet mop which can dull the finish. Instead, sweep with either a dust mop or broom that features exploded tips, or vacuum the floors using a vacuum with special hardwood floor attachments or one with the beater bar turned off.

Wipe up any spills immediately, using a soft, dry or slightly damp cloth, starting at

the edges of the spill and working toward the center. Allowing spills to remain on hardwood floors could damage the finish, as well as the wood.

Avoid walking on hardwood floors with sports cleats or high heel shoes in disrepair. These can scratch the finish, or even dent the floor. Placing felt pads on the bottom of furniture legs will also minimize scratches.

Further minimize scratches by placing scatter rugs at all entrances to help keep small stones and debris out. But choose wisely. Scatter rugs with rubber backs can discolor wood floors. Special rug mats can be purchased from a wood flooring retailer to protect the floors from discoloration.

Knowing which type of finish applied to protect the hardwood floor is important. Different flooring finishes require different kinds of care, so if or when in doubt, contact the flooring manufacturer or a wood flooring professional in your area.

There are three major types of wood flooring finishes available - surface finishes, wax and acrylic impregnated - and the experts at the National Wood Flooring Association, www.woodfloors.org, stress that using the right maintenance products will protect and prolong the life of the floor.

Surface finishes, also referred to as urethanes or polyurethanes, are practical and very popular. They remain on the surface of the wood and form a protective coating that is water-resistant, durable and requires minimal maintenance.

For cleaning purposes, use products recommended by the flooring manufacturer. If the floors were finished or refinished on site, contact the installer. If neither is known, use a generic hardwood floor cleaner which can be purchased at a retail flooring store. Never use wax-based or petroleum-based products on a surface finish floor, as they will damage the finish.

Wax finishes soak into the wood, harden to form a protective penetrating seal, and when needed, are maintained with additional thin applications of wax. Only solvent-based waxes, buffing pastes or cleaning liquids made specifically for wax-finished wood floors should be used.

Use cleaning products, available at retail flooring stores, made specifically for wax finishes. Follow the directions carefully to determine how long the cleaner should remain on the floor. Once the floor is clean, apply a new coat of wax to restore luster.

Acrylic impregnated finishes are injected into the wood to create a super-hard, extremely durable floor. These finishes most often are used in high traffic areas of malls, restaurants and other commercial settings.

Cleaning an acrylic impregnated floor depends on the finish. If the floor has a urethane-based finish, follow the same procedures suggested for surface finished floors. If the floor has a nonurethane-based finish, use a spray and buff system, as recommended by the manufacturer.

It pays to be knowledgeable. Proper care and maintenance will protect and prolong the performance of hardwood flooring for a lifetime, and even longer. To learn more about how to sustain the natural beauty and durability of your hardwood flooring, visit the American Hardwood Information Center at www.HardwoodInfo.com.

Tackle household chores quickly

As fall approaches, the daylight hours are dwindling, kids are headed back to school, and the lazy days of summer will soon be long forgotten. As you establish new routines, it seems like there are 10 additional tasks to handle each day, and cleaning, while one of the most important things on your to-do list, often falls to the bottom due to lack of time.

In fact, a recent CLR Brands survey revealed that on average, women spend 15.5 hours per week cleaning in and around the home while men spend 10 hours per week - a significant amount of time. Ever wondered how to clean more effectively and quickly, to actually find some extra time to spend on your favorite things this fall?

One idea is to get the whole family involved and not let cleaning become an insurmountable chore. With some planning and teamwork, you can make cleaning a fun event in your household and teach your kids (and significant other) to take pride in their home by taking responsibility to each keep up with a few simple tasks so your home never becomes a disaster zone.

CLR (www.clrbrands.com) cleaning experts share top tips to help you make the most of your time and clean more efficiently. For more inspiration on how to transform your home, see the list below.

- Figure out who likes doing what

best. If someone prefers to handle the yard work and the kids love polishing silver or unloading the dishwasher, divide it up so the act of doing chores doesn't seem as tedious. Or, designate a family cleaning day and clarify who will be doing what and when.

- Pre-game. Before the big day, assign each person a room to prep so that once you attack with your gloves on and product in hand, you're not wasting precious time and energy figuring out what goes in the junk drawer, what should be thrown out and what should be kept.

- Multitask. Several products can do double (if not triple) duty. For example, CLR works on showerheads, porcelain, chrome, glassware, fiberglass, stainless steel and grout, and can even remove sprinkler spots on outdoor windows and remove stains and mold smells from your washing machine. Grease Magnet cleans grills, smokers and tenacious garage floor stains and Stone Cleaner brings the sparkle back to delicate, hard-to-clean surfaces like granite, marble, Corian and tile.

- Get the hardest part out of the way first. Tackle the most time-consuming areas (scum-soaked shower doors, greasy grills, or dirt and dust on top of fans) first and then work toward the less time-intensive ones.

- Create rewards to foster healthy competition with kids.

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Six time-saving kitchen tools

1. Hands-free helper Imagine the convenience of having a kitchen faucet that can sense what you're trying to accomplish, and with a simple wave of the hand, immediately responds to your needs. The new Moen Arbor pull-down kitchen faucet with MotionSense utilizes advanced sensors to detect a user's movement in two sensing zones, immediately setting water flow in motion. Simply place an object - like a cup or your hand - near the base of the faucet or wave your hand above the faucet to turn the water on and off automatically. You can also adjust the faucet's temperature and flow the traditional way, using its convenient side handle. Tasks like washing dishes, filling a glass of water and preparing the evening meal can become quicker and more efficient. It's like having a second set of hands in the kitchen - perfect for when your hands are too full or too dirty to turn on the faucet.

2. Futuristic fridge Until recently, the most unique tool for the outside of the fridge was the ice maker. Although still a useful item, some manufacturers have far surpassed this technology with today's more high-tech models. The Samsung 30 cubic foot Side by Side LCD Refrigerator with apps features a WiFi-enabled 8-inch LCD touch screen, giving access to popular apps like Pandora, Epicurious, Google Calendar and the brand new Grocery Manager app, which tracks expiration dates on perishables. Whether you're looking for a recipe, updating your calendar or listening to music, you can do it all from your refrigerator door.

3. Pressure reliever It's 5 p.m., your family is hungry and you have no idea what you're going to feed them. An electric pressure cooker can help ease the pressure of a what-to-cook-for-dinner situation, and requires less moni-

toring than a stovetop pressure cooker. These miracle machines use a moist, high-temperature environment to cook food three times faster than conventional methods. Plus, many models have the added bonus of electronic features, such as a programmable timer and the ability to brown, simmer or saute.

4. Programmed for success Make meals more easily with the Frigidaire Professional 30-inch Slide-In Induction Hybrid Range. This smart stove features a delay start option, so you can set your oven to begin cooking on your schedule. For easy prep the day before, the range can be programmed from one to 24 hours in advance. Other innovative features include one-touch settings, allowing you to cook family favorites like chicken nuggets and pizza with the touch of a button.

5. Reliable robot Of all the possible kitchen floor cleaning tools, robotic floor cleaners are truly the best time savers. Mops and brooms require some time and muscle on your part to do their job, but today's robotic floor cleaners simply require a minute to program. These clever little robots do it all - from vacuuming to scrubbing - or even sanitizing.

6. Reduce refills Dishwashers have already made our lives easier, but new models take cleaning to the next level. These handy kitchen cleaning tools are becoming more efficient and quieter than ever before. Today's machines can hold enough liquid dishwasher detergent for several months of cycles and automatically dispense the right amount each time, based on water hardness and soil levels. You can also program your dishwasher to start on its own, the only thing left to worry about is whose turn it is to put them away.

DID YOU KNOW? Kitchen renovations are the most popular home improvement projects. Renovating a kitchen is a great way to increase the value and also the functionality of a home. The National Kitchen & Bath Association's latest market report says that, in the first three months of 2012, the number of homeowners who started a kitchen renovation was up more than 50 percent from the previous quarter. A kitchen is a central gathering place and is one of the most popular family gathering spots in the house. With traditional dining rooms being eliminated in favor of open, eat-in kitchens and entertaining spaces, more attention than ever is now placed on a well-designed kitchen. The average remodeling budget for a kitchen renovation exceeds \$30,000. But there are ways to keep budgets in check.

- Do some of the work yourself to reduce money spent on labor costs.
- Consider laminate flooring and counters, which will look like real stone but at a fraction of the cost.
- Skip custom cabinetry in lieu of stock units. They're more attractive than ever before and don't require the wait time of custom-ordered cabinets.
- Choose less expensive, mid-range appliances that may function better than or equal to high-end models.
- Plan layout accurately and spend time reviewing your designs. Late changes in a remodel can quickly eat up a budget.

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Three affordable options for patio material

Curb appeal can have a dramatic impact on prospective home buyers. Landscaping improvements and renovations to the outside of the home create a strong first impression on buyers, who often feel a home with an appealing exterior has an equally impressive interior.

A patio can boost a home's appeal while also providing a great place for current homeowners to relax outside. Many homeowners waver on patio material choice because each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

A backyard patio is a place where friends and family members can convene in the nice weather to enjoy dining al fresco. In the cooler months, a patio is a great place to gather around a fire pit and warm chilly toes while sipping mugs of hot cocoa.

When designing a patio, homeowners must make a host of decisions, not the least of which is choosing a patio material. Wood, stone, concrete, paving blocks, and tile all can be used to create appealing and functional patios. Because of the widespread availability of concrete, pavers and wood, many patios are constructed of these materials.

Concrete

Concrete is one of the more affordable patio materials. With stamped concrete, homeowners can enjoy more colors and designs than ever before, and new technology in tinting and styling enables concrete to look like other expensive stone materials at a fraction of the cost of stone.

For the experienced mason, laying concrete is a relatively easy job. It may be more difficult for the novice do-it-yourselfer because laying concrete requires knowledge of grading and also installing spacers correctly to deter cracking. Because concrete is not as labor-intensive as some other materials, homeowners may save some money if they choose concrete.

Concrete is durable, but over time

cracking is inevitable. Some concrete requires the application of a sealant every few years to protect coloring and durability.



ity. Around pools, concrete can become slippery when wet if an anti-skid agent was not applied with.

Paving stones

Many homeowners gravitate toward paving stones because their varied texture and shapes can create quite an appealing look in a yard. If installed correctly, pavers will not crack and it is possible to easily add on to an original design because of the portability of these stones. And because they can be moved, pavers can be repaired from underground and stones can be replaced without any demolition. Homeowners like that pavers can quickly make a yard look high-end.

Although pavers can be installed as a do-it-yourself project, such installation can be labor-intensive. The ground needs to be accurately leveled and prepped before the stones can be placed to help ensure there is no shifting or movement. Polymeric sand should be applied and pushed into the

joints between blocks to alleviate shifting. The sand contains a polymer that hardens and locks the blocks in place. Such detailed

so maintenance is necessary. Also, paving blocks are slightly uneven and they can loosen, which can prove a safety hazard to the elderly or young children who aren't surefooted.

Wood

Wood is often thought of in a raised deck scenario, but it can also be laid at ground level to create a low-lying patio. A wood patio can be unique and stained or painted in a variety of colors. It also may be less expensive to install than concrete or pavers. If the shape is relatively simple, a do-it-yourselfer also may be able to do the job without hiring a professional.

Though wood is a good choice for many homeowners, it is one of the more maintenance-heavy materials. Wood must be routinely cleaned, stained and sealed. Even with the best care, wood can warp, splinter and chip. When surrounding a pool, wood may deteriorate after coming in contact with chemicals from the pool water. Though most wood is treated, it may be susceptible to boring insects and other pests.

Creating a patio adds value to a home. Select a patio material that fits your budget and gives your patio the look you desire.

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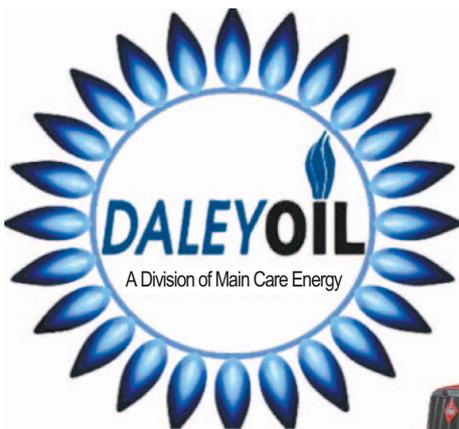
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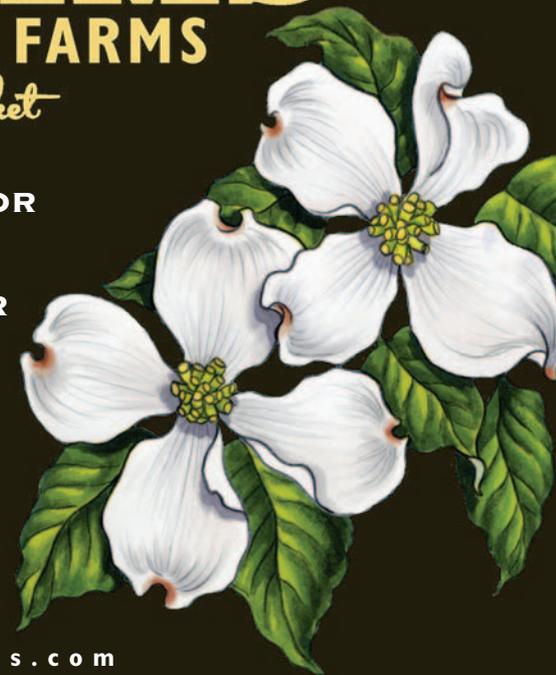
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