



FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT 2020

*Fall into your
home improvements
with helpful
tips and
local businesses*

Smarten up your home

Today's user-friendly technology makes it relatively easy for anyone to turn his or her home into a smarter one.

The Hub

The hub refers to software or hardware that connects all of your devices and gets them to work together. Think of the various devices you have and then think of their manufacturers. Chances are strong you have devices manufactured by various companies, and enabling those to work together might seem impossible but a hub does that work for you. And because they can be connected to your smartphone, hubs also make it possible to control devices while you're away from home.

Wi-Fi

Some people rent their routers from their internet/cable providers, while others buy their own. Regardless of which category you fall into, you're going to need a good Wi-Fi router to get your smart home up and running. Determine which type of Wi-Fi your home currently has and then find a router that's compatible with that Wi-Fi. Request a list of routers that are compatible with your Wi-Fi from your service provider, not all routers will work with your internet connection. Upgrade to the fastest Wi-Fi your internet provider offers, for a more enjoyable and frustration-free

Devices

If you can control any device in your home with a smartphone, you are already on your way to having a smart home. Upgrading to a programmable thermostat that's compatible with your smartphone is a good idea if your current thermostat is old and not internet-compatible. With a programmable thermostat, you can control the temperature in your home remotely. That ensures the home is a comfortable temperature when you get home and allows you to turn off costly heating and cooling units when no one is home.

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A gardener's work is never done

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

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

The Farmer's Almanac advises homeowners to gently till the soil in their gardens so they can expose any insects before they settle in for the winter. Once garden soil is exposed,

add a layer of compost, leaves, aged manure, and, if necessary, lime, gently tilling it into the soil. Lime makes soil less acidic and reduces soil pH. Low soil pH makes it hard for certain plants to grow, but acidic soil is ideal when growing blueberries. Test the soil for lime and amend it depending on what you hope to grow in the spring so it's ready to thrive when winter ends.

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

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

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Covid brings home design trend changes

COVID-19 has brought changes to everything, and home design is no exception. Experts are expecting to see lasting impacts on everything from the materials we use to the rooms we prioritize. Check out these and other noteworthy trends:

Houses over apartments: Many people who live in condos or apartments do so to be closer to the action - work, entertainment and shops - and never planned on spending much time at home. But the pandemic has changed that, and more people are going to want a home that offers plenty of room and outdoor space in case they need to self-isolate again.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY: A hard lesson we've learned is that things and services we thought we could count on aren't necessarily a sure thing, so items that increase self-reliance will become very popular. Expect to see more homes with sources of energy like solar panels, sources of heat like fireplaces and stoves, and even urban and indoor gardens that allow you to grow your own produce.

OUTDOOR LIVING: Between playgrounds closing and parks becoming overcrowded, many of us are turning to our balconies, patios and backyards for



fresh air and nature. This means we're going to be investing more in our outdoor spaces, with functional kitchens, soothing water features, cozy firepits, and high-quality outdoor furniture to create a much-needed escape.

HEALTHIER SPACES: Thanks to spending more time indoors and reprioritizing our health, we'll turn to design to help ensure our homes are safe and

healthy for our families. We'll see a rise in products like water filtration systems as well as materials that improve indoor air quality. For new homes and additions, alternatives to wood-framing like insulated concrete forms from Nudura, which offer improved ventilation for healthier indoor air quality and an environment that's less susceptible to mold, will be key.

HOME OFFICE SPACE: Business experts are suggesting many companies will see that working from home is not only possible but offers tangible benefits, like saving money on office space rent. With working from home on the rise, creating a home office space that inspires productivity will be a major project many of us tackle. Luxury home office furniture that feels chic and blends into your décor as well as ergonomic chairs and desks will see a major boost.

CUSTOM & QUALITY: With the hit to the economy, people are going to be buying less, but what they do buy will be better quality, while at the same time making an effort to support American businesses. When it comes to design, trends will shift to locally made furniture, custom-built homes and pieces and materials that stand the test of time.

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DIY projects that can conserve energy in your home

Renovation projects that aim to conserve energy can save homeowners money. Many don't require much effort or even sizable financial investments. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy notes that a relatively effortless task like turning back a thermostat between 7° and 10° F for eight hours per day can save homeowners as much as \$83 per year. A more labor-intensive task like planting shade trees saves

homeowners an average of between \$35 and \$119 per year.

While each individual project may not result in jaw-dropping savings, many of these recommendations may end up saving more than \$1,000 per year.

PROJECT: Install exterior low-e storm windows. Low-e windows reflect infrared heat back into a home. Such windows are coated with an ultra-thin layer of metal that improves

the window's insulation ability.

How much can I save? Homeowners who install low-e windows can save between 12 and 33 percent on their annual heating and cooling costs.

PROJECT: Seal uncontrolled air leaks. Air leaks let cool air in during winter and warm air in during summer. Caulking, sealing and weather stripping all cracks and large openings can cut back on air leaks that are costing you money. The DOE recommends hiring a contractor to seal any leaks on heating and cooling ducts.

How much can I save? Homeowners who seal uncontrolled air leaks can save between 10 and 20 percent on their annual heating and cooling bills.

PROJECT: Plant shade trees. If you plant a deciduous tree between six and eight feet tall near your home, it will begin to shade your windows within a year of being planted. Depending on the species of the tree and the home, the shade tree will begin shading the roof within five to 10 years. The DOE notes that shading is the most cost-effective way to reduce air conditioning costs.



How much can I save? Properly planted shade trees can reduce air conditioning costs by anywhere from 15 to 50 percent.

PROJECT: Insulate the water heater tank New water tanks are likely already insulated. But homeowners with older hot water tanks can insulate their tanks with a water heater insulating blanket kit.

How much can I save? Insulating a water heater tank can save homeowners as much as 16 percent on their annual water heating bills.

More energy-saving project information is at www.energy.gov.

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