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# HOMES

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# How to create the perfect kids room

Creating a space your kids can call their own doesn't need to break the bank or require too much of your time. With a little creative thinking, you can transform any space into the perfect kid-friendly retreat.

■ **Color the walls**

Children are drawn to bright colors that stimulate their creativity. And, though you don't want them taking matters into their own hands when it comes to wall art, there are other great ways to create a beautifully colorful environment. With Dutch Boy's Crayola palette, a more fun and playful kids room is just a few paint strokes away. Featuring vibrant shades that match your kids' crayons, this palette offers an easy way to bring life into your child's hideaway. Whimsical colors will instantly transform your child's room into a fun-filled, lively space. You don't need to stick with one shade, either. Paint an accent wall or even do custom designs or stripes.

■ **Fun-size furniture**

Adult-sized furniture can leave your child feeling like Goldilocks, so bring in some pint-sized pieces to make them believe the room is specially meant just for them. Even if your budget is tight, there are plenty of options for fun-size furniture available. Kids' chairs and tables are great additions to help them comfortably color, read books, do crafts and exercise their creativity. And there is no need to spend a fortune. Garage sales commonly offer kids furniture, which can easily be restored. Even if a find appears worn, a fresh coat of white paint and some bright chair



cushions will instantly make it good-as-new - for a fraction of the price.

■ **Dreamland bedding**

Making sure your little one has a cozy, restful space to sleep is important, and balancing comfort with creativity is easier and less costly than you might think. There are endless bedroom options to suit every style and age, and letting children choose bedding or a quilt cover they love can make their bedtime routine go more smoothly. Matching pillows can help create a cohesive look, and fun cushions or bright body pillows can help kids sit comfortably on the floor with a book or game.

■ **Storage**

Crayons, and teddy bears, and games, oh my! Storing all of your child's precious belongings can be challenging, especially if the room is small.

To avoid the "warzone" look, invest in a few storage options that will improve the look of your child's room while teaching him to clean up after himself. Closed cabinets and clear tubs are great for storing stuffed animals, craft items and action figures, while open bookshelves work well for books, games and puzzles. Open cubby systems are also a good way to teach young children organization skills while keeping their favorite toys easily accessible. (ARA)

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# Lower energy costs and get a facelift for your home

During summer, many of us look forward to fun-filled days at the pool or beach, but we definitely don't look forward to exorbitantly high cooling bills during the heat of the season.

A typical single-family home shells out \$2,200 in annual energy costs, according a recent study by the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. And according to the Laboratory's website, if a house has central air conditioning, even though the system is only used a few months out of the year, it is most likely the single biggest consumer of electricity, driving annual air conditioning costs that can exceed a shocking \$1,000.

However, there are a number of ways you can improve the energy-efficient aspects of your home and save on electricity costs.

## ■ Seal the deal

According to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), one of the most cost-effective ways to improve energy efficiency in homes is to seal and insulate windows and doors.

Often, this means replacing old, leaky, sticky, poorly performing windows and doors. A typical home that replaces its single-paned, clear glass windows with energy-efficient windows can realize up to \$494 in annual savings, according to the EPA.

"Windows are a wonderful source of natural light, but if they are old, they can act as giant heat lamps in the summer, allowing the sun's heat into a home," says David Harrison, chief marketing office of Champion Windows, one of the nation's leading home



improvement companies. "By installing our Comfort 365 Replacement Windows, homeowners can help shrink their cooling bills. Champion's Double hung replacement windows exceed ENERGY STAR rating requirements by an average of 42 percent for Solar Heat Gain, which is the measure of the sun's heat that comes through your window. Champion windows also help keep the cool air in and still let in natural sunlight - without the heat."

For more energy saving window tips check out the U.S. Department of Energy's website or Champion Window's Energy Efficient Replacement Windows at [www.championwindow.com](http://www.championwindow.com).

## ■ On the side

Another great way to cut costs is to increase insulation by installing energy-efficient siding. Vinyl siding and energy-ef-

ficient underlayment can increase a home's R-value, a measure of insulation's ability to resist heat traveling through it. The higher the R-value, the better the thermal performance of the insulation. By increasing the R-value, homeowners can save more than 20 percent on their electricity bills, according to [energysavers.gov](http://energysavers.gov).

"Installing an energy-efficient siding system, including ENERGY STAR rated insulation board, can help insulate your home against the heat, reduce the amount of air flow into your house, making it easier to keep cool air in during the summer," says Harrison. "At Champion, our customers have told us they were pleasantly surprised to see a decrease in their energy bills after their siding installation."

Other ways to improve energy efficiency and lower summer electric bills include:

- Increasing insulation in attics
- Making sure you have proper roof ventilation
- Sealing air conditioner ducts
- Keeping your blinds closed when the sun is shining in
- Using a programmable thermostat

By making a few of these changes, you won't cringe when you open those utility bills, and you might even be able to reap benefits beyond the summer.

"If homes are not properly insulated or sealed, cool air is leaking out and homeowners are throwing money out of the window," says Harrison. "By making a few energy-efficient changes to your home, you can help keep electric bills in check and even increase the value of your home." (ARA)

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# Tips and tricks for using every inch of a tiny kitchen

## ■ Size up your space

Before starting any project, big or small, evaluate the space and determine how you want it to work for you. Sometimes solutions for one issue can provide an answer for other challenges. For example, by adding a moveable island to create additional prep space, you've now also got an area for friends and family to gather when you entertain.

## ■ Make a plan

When you've decided on the scope of your project, it's time to determine what resources you'll need to make it happen. On-line tools like Merillat's Step-By-Step Kitchen Planner can help you get an idea of what elements you're looking for and how they'll work in your space. Talking with a design professional can help you decide if you need additional support.

## ■ Get organized

If you're remodeling, look for cabinets to



help contain clutter and keep countertops clear. Storage solutions such as pull-out spice racks, in-drawer cutting boards, drawer organizers and dividers keep all your cooking utensils out of the way but close at hand, and can make life in the kitchen easier for everyday use and entertaining. Look for creative ways to make the most of your cabinets

and drawers by placing items close to where they'll be used. Have pots and pans, spices and utensils close to the stove. Put storage containers and dishes near the fridge or serving area. Make sure you put your most frequently used items in the most accessible places. For more design tips for kitchens of any size, visit merillat.com. (ARA)

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# The design element that can add drama and save cash

Interior designers, architects, decorators and homeowners have been relying on skylights to add beauty, warmth, natural light and passive ventilation to interior designs for decades. Fortunately, advances in skylight design make them a cost-effective, green design element as well.

Less dependence on artificial light sources or powered ventilation can mean lower electric bills in summer. Plus, warm sun entering the home through a skylight in winter can reduce your heating bills, as well. In fact, EnergyStar.gov says that installing Energy Star-qualified skylights, windows and doors can shrink your home's energy bill - and carbon footprint - by 7 to 15 percent over non-qualified products.

"Skylights convey drama, yet they're a surprisingly cost-effective home improvement," says Ross Vandermark, national



product manager of Velux, manufacturers of the "No-Leak Skylight." "Installing skylights can be less costly than buying new designer furniture or putting in new carpet. Plus, if your interior design cries out for natural



light, it's more practical and cost-effective to place skylights overhead than to add windows to a wall."

Log on to [www.veluxusa.com](http://www.veluxusa.com) to learn more about skylights. (ARA)



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# Revive your bathroom quickly and affordably

Remodeling projects have increased in popularity over the past few years as homeowners have decided to improve on what they have, rather than take a risk in the real estate market. Whether you're hoping to sell your home or create a more enjoyable living space, tackle home improvement projects that make a big impact and add value.

One of the top return-on-investment remodeling projects is updating a bathroom. Bathroom updates even outweigh kitchen projects in terms of getting back what you spend, according to CNN Money. And, if you take a cost-conscious approach and do the project yourself, your investment return will be even better. Renting tools is a key way you can cut costs and bring new life into your bathroom. There are plenty of remodeling tasks that are easily accomplished by renting tools, versus the cost of buying expensive tools or hiring someone else to do the work. Visit [www.rentalhq.com](http://www.rentalhq.com) to find an American Rental Association member rental store in your area.

Bring new life to your bath with these tips:

■ **Replace old tile.** Outdated tile is a common problem that makes bathrooms look old.



Replacing it with fresh new tile that is in style will instantly give the room a modern look. Tiling is a DIY project that anyone can tackle, with the right tools. Rent the necessary items like a tile stripper, a tile saw and a mortar mixer to keep your project costs down.

■ **Refresh the ceiling.** Ceilings can become dingy over time, and you might not suspect them as the culprit that's making your room feel dull. You'll notice a dramatic change if



you live it up with fresh new texture and paint. Texture sprayers are an unusual tool for most DIY warriors to own, but you can easily rent one to make the job quick and inexpensive.

■ **Add personality with paint.** Another simple fix that can be done is adding a new paint color. It's an easy, quick and cheap project and can totally change the look and feel of the room. Opt for one of your favorite colors or scour interior design websites and magazines to find a trendy color that gets your attention.

■ **Change hardware.** Some faucets and cabinet hardware clearly show their decade of origin. Switching out old hardware is relatively simple and a great way to make a dramatic change in the look of your room.

These projects set the stage for creating a new feel for your bathroom. Make the revived space a reality by choosing a decorating theme and accessories that complement it. Items like window treatments, throw rugs and wall art make the room feel more complete and stylish. To get your project started, visit [www.rentalhq.com](http://www.rentalhq.com).

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# Grow lush landscapes with less water

With some easy steps, you can reduce your water bill, foster attractive spaces for you and others to enjoy and help protect water supplies for future generations. Do something good for your bank account, your yard and your planet by following these smart tips.

## PLANT SMART

■ Landscape to suit your lot and your climate. Choose grass or plants with low water requirements that will thrive in your local climate.

Consider sun and shade areas, slopes and plant sizes for optimum growth. Group plants with similar water needs close together and separate lawn areas from planting beds.

■ Keep soil healthy. Aeration helps improve water penetration and adding compost or fertilizer maintains plant health so they use water more efficiently. Mulch well around plants, bushes and trees. Two to 4 inches of mulch reduces evaporation, moderates soil temperatures and helps control weeds that compete for water.

## WATER WISELY

■ Set sprinklers to only water plants, not your driveway, sidewalk, patio or other hardscapes.

■ Water at the best time. Watering during the heat of the day causes high evaporation loss. Watering early in the morning when winds

are calm and temperatures are cooler minimizes evaporation by as much as 30 percent.

■ Adapt watering to the season. Adjust how much you water based on seasonal weather and changing conditions. Weather-based timers are available and can make such adjustments automatically.

## MAINTAIN AND UPGRADE

### AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

■ Inspect the system regularly. Check for leaks that can waste water and cause other problems. Also look for broken or clogged sprinklers that no longer operate efficiently.

■ Check the pressure. Proper water pressure encourages more uniform water distribution and better sprinkler operation. Fixed spray-type sprinklers work well around 25 to 30 psi while sprinklers with moving streams of water work well at 40 to 45 psi.

■ Install a rain shutoff device. Rain sensors prevent irrigation systems from running when irrigation is unnecessary. These devices can reduce irrigation water usage by up to 35 percent.

■ Utilize "smart" technology. Climate or soil moisture sensors and controllers evaluate weather or soil moisture conditions and automatically adjust the irrigation schedule so your landscape always receives the appropriate amount of water. The water savings can be



significant and the convenience of these self-adjusting controllers is another great benefit.

■ Consider drip or micro-irrigation for shrubs and ground covers. Water drips slowly from emitters either onto the soil surface or below ground. Less water is lost due to wind and evaporation as a result, and weeds can also be reduced.

■ Look for rebates. Many water utilities offer rebates for certain water-efficient products. Before upgrading your system, check with your local water provider for opportunities for free and discounted products. (ARA)



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# Cook up a whole new look for your kitchen

As the center of the home's activities, the kitchen should be as fun as it is functional. With just a few supplies and a free weekend, you can cook up a whole new look for your kitchen.

## ■ Warm up the walls

Changing the color and texture of walls is an easy way to add some spice to any kitchen. Paint the walls a deep red or blue for a dramatic look, or make your space feel light and airy with a coat of sunny yellow or subtle taupe. Feel free to experiment with decorative painting techniques, such as stripes, geometric patterns or textured finishes.

## ■ Change up the cabinets

Liven up basic cupboards by switching the hardware - it's a simple way to give your existing cabinets a whole new look. Use crystal knobs for a vintage touch, or add stainless steel handles for an ultra-modern, sleek appearance. And, don't forget about the functional aspect of your cupboards - install shelf liner to ensure cabinets stay clean and well-maintained. Shelf liner protects cabinet shelves and drawers from wear and tear, prevents scratches and keeps spills or drips from damp dishes from causing

damage to surfaces.

## ■ Transform your table

Create a delightful dining space with a few changes to your kitchen table. Use a staple gun and a bright fabric to recover your chairs, making items you already own look like new additions to your home. You can even create a new tablecloth using the leftover fabric.

## ■ Brighten the basics

Adding color from floor to ceiling is a great way to improve the overall feel of your kitchen. To start, try adding accessories to areas of your kitchen that feel blase. Bring in color at the highest points of the kitchen by adding faux plants or interesting knickknacks to the space above cabinets. Then, look low and consider the floor. Placing a colorful area rug beneath the table can bring additional interest and color to the kitchen, while also protecting the floor against scratches.

Window treatments are another effective, eye-catching way to make any kitchen pop, whether you're adding new valances, cornices or even long panels. When choosing fabrics, make a statement with bright colors, or choose an unexpected, bold pattern for



a contemporary approach. Sophisticated stripes, pretty plaids or fun florals are also a nice choice for kitchens. Follow these tips to make your kitchen as chic as your dinner is delicious - you'll create a flavorful design that will look good enough to eat. (ARA)



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# Simple home updates to make

Whether or not we want to admit it, we all want our home to look its best and be the envy of the neighborhood. But do you think that keeping up with the Joneses comes with a big price tag? Think again. With a little elbow grease and creativity, your property can be the talk of the town.

## ■ Making a good first impression

Your home can't look great if you can't see it, so updating outdoor lighting is a great first step to achieving the best-looking house on the block. Chances are your exterior porch lights or street lamp may be rusty or faded. Luckily, you can bring new life to your lighting with a single can of spray paint.

New Krylon Dual Paint and Primer is a one-step solution to easily transform any light fixture. The unique formula primes the surface for adhesion, durability and coverage, while delivering a high-quality finish. Best of all, Dual is now available in specialty finishes, such as hammered and metallic, that are perfect for adding an extra dose of style.

Still looking for more illumination? Adding decorative lanterns to walkways or porches is an easy and inexpensive way to add charm and light. You can often find these

pieces at yard sales, thrift stores or dollar stores and then simply paint them in a matching hammered or metallic finish for a bright and stylish look.

## ■ Quick color

The front door is a focal point of your home - especially with the added lighting you've updated - so be sure that your doors and shutters are a vivid shade. If yours have been dulled by years of sun and weather, it's time to update with paint.

For metal doors and shutters, you can use a variety of spray or bucket paints in your favorite hue. However, for plastic shutters, Krylon Fusion for Plastic is the ideal choice since it bonds to plastic without the need for priming or sanding.

## ■ A tidy and neat yard

No matter what the size of your front yard, a well manicured lawn is important to boosting your curb appeal. Simple one-weekend tasks like edging, trimming bushes and removing unsightly weeds can make a huge difference without a lot of work or cost. To keep your efforts looking great, spray weed killer to maintain a polished look for the rest of the season.



After the initial grooming, add new mulch and flowers in beds or in brightly painted pots for an extra pop of color and style.

## ■ Fill in the blanks

The final task to a great looking home that will have your neighbors lusting, is to repair or replace any elements that have deteriorated over time. Walk around the perimeter of your home to check for cracks in bricks or concrete, stains on the driveway or sidewalks, and loose shutters or downspouts. Sprucing up these basics will not only make a big difference to the exterior appearance, but protect your home from damages in the future. (ARA)

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# Improve your curb appeal with a few painting projects

Summer is finally here, and with warmer temperatures and longer days, it's the perfect time to brighten up your home with a few outdoor painting projects. You can add the right amount of color and increase your curb appeal in just one weekend, leaving you the rest of the season to enjoy the finished product.

**■ Your home, your style**

Before rushing to pick out a new paint color or even accessories, first determine what will complement your home's existing exterior features. By keeping in mind your house's style factors - like its design, size and age - you'll be able to make updates that add value to your home. Next, look for inspiration by browsing through home catalogs, online or even by driving through a few nearby neighborhoods. Make note of the color combinations you like on homes that are similar to yours.

Once you have your new palette in mind, you're ready to get to work. The fastest way to make an impact? Apply a fresh coat of paint or stain to outdoor areas like doors, shutters, trim and fencing.

Doors, shutters and trim do more than just accessorize your home; they also make a big impact on its overall impression. Unfortunately, they take a beating from exposure to the elements, causing them to become faded and dingy. By repainting them, you can quickly make your house look more polished and refined. As with any painting project, surface preparation is the first important step. Make sure the surface is clean, dull and dry before starting to paint or stain. It is also important to remove loose or peeling paint so that you are starting with a smooth and uniform surface.

Now that the house looks refreshed, don't neglect wood fencing and latticework. Update these surfaces with a new coat of paint or stain. Not only will it keep your entire property looking impeccable, it will help protect and extend the life of your fence or latticework. Surface preparation is also key for these projects. After cleaning the surface remember to replace any broken wood and replace any nails or screws. Be sure to add a few finishing touches to your lawn to really make it look pulled together. (ARA)

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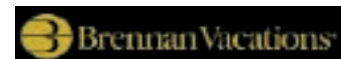
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# Need a style lift? Begin with neutral flooring

According to a recent survey by Better Homes & Gardens magazine, consumers rank "style upgrades" as the most important component of their upcoming home improvement plans. If you want some great style ideas for your home, consider starting with the flooring.

What is a fresh, new, and widely-popular neutral color within interior design circles? That would be grey. Quick-Step offers a variety of styles and options with grey undertones. Grey-toned floors provide the ideal backdrop to let your style and favorite colors shine through, and they also transition well as interior design styles and trends change.

## ■ Grey is the new brown

Grey is no longer viewed as a "trend" color in design circles, but is now viewed by professional designers as the "new neutral".

"Grey is the new brown," says Erinn Valencich, L.A.-based interior designer and blogger for HGTV's Design Happens. "I used a grey-based floor in my new design studio because it goes well under a myriad of other wood tones. You don't have to use grey-based furniture on top of it - grey looks great with all wood tones." Another benefit to grey-based flooring, Valencich adds, is that it's very forgiving. (ARA)



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# Start enjoying your deck after one day's work

Most deck owners know that one of the keys to keeping their decks looking good is staining it every few years. However, while deck staining is a process that most homeowners are capable of doing themselves, finding the time to do it can be difficult. With the right approach and the right products, you can get everything done in just one day and spend the rest of the year enjoying your newly stained deck.

By perfecting your process, you can take staining from something that you dread to a simple one-day process. First, choose the look you want to project on your deck. Do you want a clear, semi-transparent or solid finish? If you are looking for the solution that will allow you to accomplish your project in one day, you'll need to choose a product like Flood OneCoat Waterproofing Finish, which can be applied within a few hours of cleaning the surface.

Always know your deck's square footage before heading to the store to buy stain. Flood.com offers a handy calculator you can get an idea of how much you might need. For more deck staining tips, helpful tools and videos and help finding a home improvement retailer near you, visit [www.flood.com](http://www.flood.com). (ARA)



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# Give your kitchen and bath a mend

Does your home feel tired, worn or out-dated? Do you walk into rooms and wish they looked more like the pictures in magazines? You're not alone. Many homeowners who have put off home improvement projects for some time have decided to turn their dreaming into reality - especially in the kitchen and bathroom.

## ■ Bathroom bliss

According to a National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) survey, adding a linen closet, marble or granite double vanity and a shower with multiple showerheads top the list.

To add a bit of beauty and bliss in the bath, start with the countertop. Updating the current material with a solid-surface option will make an instant visual update. Next, choose a stylish new faucet, such as the Moen Boardwalk faucet, to accentuate the area. The elegant



collection features a blend of vintage design and classic lines. The suite is available in some of today's most popular finishes, Chrome and Spot Resist Brushed Nickel which is a unique finish from Moen which does exactly what it says - resists fingerprints and water spots.

Next, think storage. While a linen closet tops the "wanted" list, bath accessories are an easier and more affordable way to add additional storage and organization. Finally, update your shower to create a relaxing and spa-like environment. Depending on your budget, you can create the ultimate retreat with a vertical spa, or simply upgrade your current showerhead.

## ■ Form and function in the kitchen

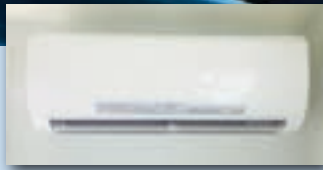
Once you've updated your bath; the kitchen, not far behind in appeal, is a rewarding home upgrade. Similar to the bath, upgrading countertops - which consume a large area of the kitchen - is an ideal place to start. While laminate is the most cost-effective choice, options such as solid-surface, marble or granite, offer an upscale look, added durability and functionality. Finish off the counter area with a high-end kitchen faucet. High-arc pulldown styles are the fastest growing kitchen faucet category - and the new Harlon faucet is one of the first at Lowe's to feature Moen's Reflex pulldown system, which offers high-quality performance with secure retraction, exceptional range of motion and generous reach. Plus, it's available in the exclusive Moen Spot Resist Stainless finish.

Finally, flooring, as one of the largest surface areas in the kitchen, is an ideal upgrade that can set the tone of the room from the bottom up. And, today's flooring manufacturers offer resilient flooring in a variety of materials, colors and patterns to meet your functionality, style and price needs. So, no matter what your vision, follow the trend like other homeowners, and soon you can turn your dreams of a new kitchen or bath into a reality. For information visit [www.moen.com](http://www.moen.com). (ARA)

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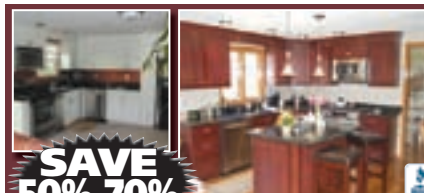
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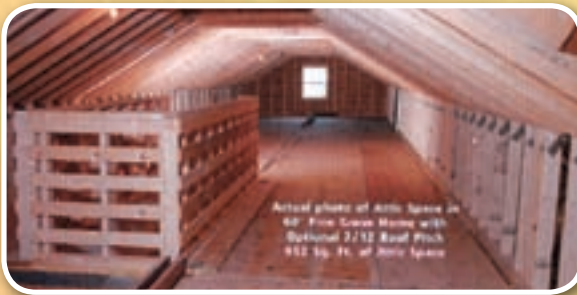
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