

Home Improvement GUIDE

Benefits of Home Automation

Technology has changed the way homeowners care for and protect their homes. If you're looking for an upgrade that enhances safety while boosting convenience, total home automation is an investment to consider.

Since the systems are so intricate, it's beneficial to work with an expert in the field, so you don't miss out on life-changing features.

Since many home automation innovations require a solid internet connection to work flawlessly, it may be necessary to upgrade your current setup. Call area providers for the best value while investing in quality download speeds and connectivity reliability. You should also make sure you have a capable smartphone or tablet as these devices may act as a remote control for operation.

If you're unfamiliar with home automation systems, check out some of the cutting-edge technology your home is missing.

AUTOMATED DOOR LOCKS

With a high-tech lock, you will never worry about leaving your front door unsecure.



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Typically, these advanced devices connect to a smartphone and are operated with the touch of a button. The software also allows you to analyze if a door has been unlocked without your authorization, giving you a chance to contact emergency services if necessary.

Another benefit to automated door locks is opening the door for a house sitter or

friend if you are uncomfortable leaving a spare key while you're away.

TEMPERATURE ADJUSTMENTS

Do you notice a climbing heating or air conditioning bill during the changing seasons? Consider investing in a thermostat that allows you to alter the temperature while you're away. Some units will

adjust to your work schedule without interaction to alter the comfort levels before you arrive home. Many models also can be operated remotely, allowing you to crank up your HVAC equipment to create a comfortable environment on the way home from work.

CONTROL YOUR LIGHTS

According to the group

Clearly Energy, an incandescent light bulb will cost you about 75 cents for every hour it is left on.

If you have a bad habit of forgetting to kill the lights before leaving for the day, the costs can add up on your utility bill.

Learn how to save money by purchasing smart lights that are operated by smartphone or another device.

Upgrades that Enhance Health

There are numerous ways a home in poor condition can affect its occupants. In some cases, necessary upgrades can be lifesaving or boost the healthy livability of a space.

If your home is older, it's especially crucial to analyze it for safety conditions that may be impacting your and your family's health.

The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission banned the use of lead paint in residential properties in 1977. Asbestos is another hazardous material used in insulation, drywall, floor tiles and cement.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the substance was banned to manufacture, distribute or process in 1989. If your home was built before this time, it's imperative to hire an expert to determine if dangerous wall covering or insulation is present and prepare a strategy to remove it safely.

Check out these other dangerous conditions that may be found within the place you call home as recommended by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

COOL INDOOR TEMPERATURES

It's crucial that your HVAC



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system and home's insulation is operating correctly to warm and cool your house. The National Center for Biotechnology Information suggests that low indoor temperatures can lead to these serious health conditions.

- Inflammation of lungs and circulation inhibition.
- Increased risks of respiratory illnesses like asthma.
- Cardiovascular damage like heart disease, stroke and

even death.

If you have trouble staying warm during the winter, consider talking to your electricity company about performing an energy audit. They can easily analyze your home to find out where you're losing heat and recommend steps to correct the problem.

PEST INFESTATIONS

Homes that are infested with pests and rodents have a

risk of more than just degraded structural integrity. Inhabitants are also exposed to harmful bacteria when these nuisances are present.

If your property is overrun with pests, don't be embarrassed to call a professional exterminator. Check out these statistics from the National Pest Management Association to realize you are not alone in the struggle.

- Nearly 30% of American

homeowners have had a rodent problem in their home.

- Termites cause over \$5 billion in property damage annually.

• About 63% of homes contain cockroach allergens, which can cause severe allergic reactions

- One in five households have had a bug infestation or know someone who battled an infestation.

Easy Exterior Upgrades

Since the exterior of your home is typically the first impression people get of the property, ensuring it's well-kept is essential.

Fortunately, upgrades to refresh the space don't always have to cost a fortune. There are numerous ways you can give your home a modern touch-up on a budget and many projects can be handled by the homeowner with a little knowledge of repairs.

Before investing in upgrades to your property, analyze the lawn for unattractive features like cracked sidewalks or overgrown weeds. A little TLC to your yard can make a significant difference when improving the looks of the exterior. A good way to find problem spots is to drive by the home and look for problems that are visible from the road. Make a plan to resolve landscaping issues to instantly add curb appeal over a week-end.

ADD LIGHT FIXTURES

Adding or upgrading exterior lighting is an easy project that can enhance the visual ambiance of a home and provide more security. When searching for new fixtures, look for options that include motion sensors, capabilities to utilize brighter bulbs and



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housings that blend well with a home's design scheme.

Homeowners should consider upgrading to LED lighting to provide long-lasting illumination that can lead to savings on utility bills. According to the United States Department of Energy, approved bulbs use at least 75% less energy while lasting 25 times longer than incandescent lighting

NEW SHUTTERS

The simple addition of shutters to existing windows will make the outside of your home stand out and provide an updated look. Before buying new accents, make sure to measure your window and purchase the appropriate size.

In some cases, the correct dimensions may have to be special ordered and custom built. Simply bring your

required dimensions to the local home improvement store and ask an expert for their recommendations on style and installation tips. They may be able to recommend a local pro to do the install.

Consider hiring a professional to pressure wash the exterior of your property prior to updating the shutters, so they are installed on a clean backdrop.

STAIN YOUR DECK

As a wooden deck becomes weathered and dated, the visual appeal quickly degrades. Save your deck by applying a layer of stain and weatherproof clear coat.

Before beginning the project, make sure to thoroughly clean the patio, protect exterior walls with painter's tape and acquire the right tools for the job.

When to Call an Expert

Many home upgrades can be completed on your own. When the improvements seem too difficult for your level of experience, however, don't hesitate to hire a local expert.

Attempting a repair with which you are unfamiliar can lead to more severe damage and the resolution can be costly.

Before tackling a project, do your research to discover if it's something you can complete yourself. A few ideas include watching DIY videos of others doing the same repair or reading home improvement books focusing on the renovation.

There is no shame in hiring a professional when you want the job done right the first time. Consider calling an expert before attempting these difficult home repairs if you lack the experience.

WINDOW INSTALLATION

Installing new windows is not a task for every DIY homeowner. A faulty job can lead to leaks, energy inefficiency or lackluster results. When looking for an expert to complete the project, Consumer Reports recommends looking for the following specific traits.

- Speak with several contractors for the best price and their



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experience in construction.

- Determine how long the project will take during the quote process.

- Research the construction company via online reviews and word-of-mouth referrals.

- Make sure the install is properly insured and licensed in your state.

When choosing windows, consider pricing glass that is ENERGY STAR certified as they are efficient in keeping the outside air from leaking in.

PLUMBING CHANGES

While most homeowners can handle the repairs of simple leaky faucets and pipes under the sink, a major renovation should be accomplished by an expert. Especially if you are performing projects like moving the washing machine or hot water heater, setting up an area for plumbing can be overwhelming.

A plumber can efficiently tap into the existing system

and reroute pipes to ensure they are free of leaks and insulate exposed pipes. According to the Insurance Information Institute, water damage and freezing ranked fourth in claims severity between 2014 and 2018; the average claim expense was \$10,849.

ELECTRICAL UPGRADES

Whether you're installing new outlets throughout the home or making major elec-

trical changes, hiring an electrician is a valuable resource. Working with a licensed professional ensures that the project is performed correctly and safely to protect your home and livelihood.

It is also possible that your homeowner's insurance will not cover damage caused by DIY electrical repairs. Make sure to check with your provider before you consider tackling a project on your own.

Paint a Staircase

The home's entry point to a second story can quickly become a focal point in any room. Whether the staircase features dated carpet or wood with cosmetic damage, touching up the covering can totally change the feel of the entire interior.

While the desired outcome may be simple to imagine, the actual process of restoring stairs can be difficult.

Before you make your mind up regarding which color to repaint the banisters, flooring and surrounding wall, it's beneficial to analyze the existing covering to see if it can be refurbished. In many older homes, you may discover quality hardwood that can be easily restored.

Try to start in a small, inconspicuous area and apply paint stripper to find out how the rest of the project will look.

Of course, if the thought of potentially ruining expensive wood isn't what you have in mind, hire a professional contractor to carefully begin the process.

Once the flooring has been stripped, consider these tips from Better Homes and Gardens to flawlessly redecorate your staircase.



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PAINTING THE HANDRAIL AND BALUSTERS

Prior to painting the components on your staircase, apply coats to the wall that holds the steps and rails to ensure the chosen colors will blend together. Be careful to use quality ladders if the area is out of reach.

Once the backdrop is dry, you should mask the stairs with heavy butcher paper and painter's tape to avoid dripping as you paint around it.

As you coat the handrail, make sure to paint with the grain rather than against, to ensure an even coat. Next, cover the decorative balusters

with your chosen color. Even if these components will be the same color as the stairs, it's a good idea to wipe up any drops, as uneven drying may lead to unattractive lumps.

BEGINNING AND FINISHING THE STEPS

Once the stairs are ready for

their upgrade, it's a good idea to begin painting the underside of the first nosing before moving on the initial riser.

Try to start at the top and work your way down. If you will need to use the staircase before the paint can dry, only cover every other step. This will give you a path to use.

Join the Pallet Craze

If you follow arts and crafts or custom furniture communities on social media, you have likely been exposed to pallet projects' growing popularity.

DIYers are finding unique ways to repurpose the high-quality wood in pallets, typically found in warehouses to store and organize inventory. These unique structures are easily obtainable and can be used in a plethora of ways to update both the interior and exterior of your home.

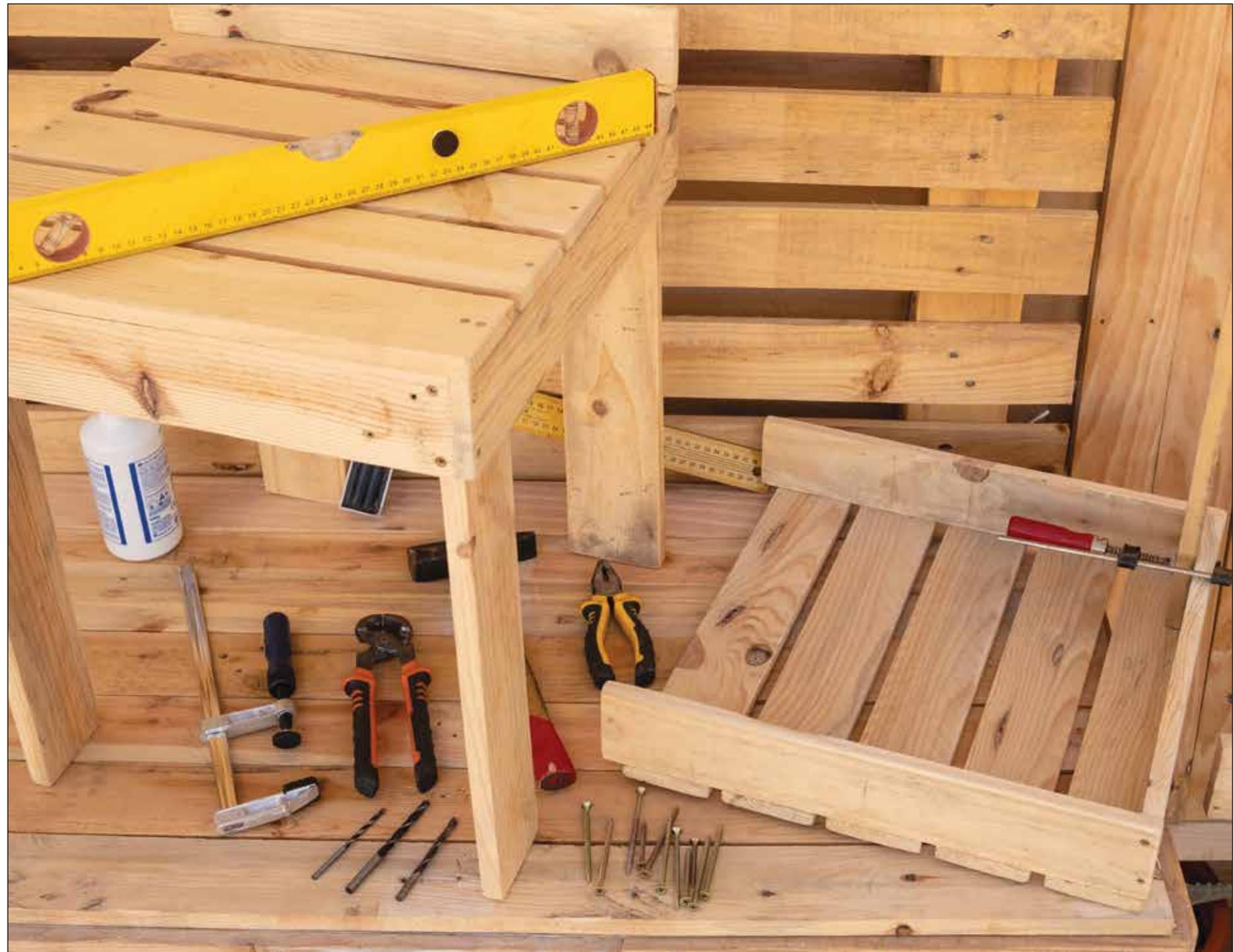
When committing to trying your hand at creating a one-of-a-kind display for a home improvement project, finding pallets isn't always difficult. Simply ask business owners in your area if they have any extra units to spare or ask others where they found theirs.

Don't be hesitant to acquire more than your venture requires, as not all of the boards may be usable. Getting rid of the extra wood is simple and can lead to a fun bonfire with family and friends.

Here are some ideas to get you started on the journey of pallet repurposing.

CREATE A PALLET WALL

You can give your home an attractive accent wall by covering it with durable pallet wood



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and a little craftsmanship. Before you get started, measure the area to determine how much material will be needed. You should also gather tools like construction adhesive, a nail gun, a measuring tape and a table saw.

The first step is to apply a

coat of dark-colored paint to the wall that will be covered. Since pallet wood is rarely uniform, this will help cover gaps or small holes featured on the wood.

Next, sand the boards down before applying the caulk to the back and holding them in

place with brad nails. Starting at the top, stagger the boards' lengths so they don't line up with the pieces above or underneath to give your new wall a unique twist.

SAVE SPACE

If you're looking for a way to

de-clutter certain areas in your home, pallet shelves can be a great way to save space. Consider building a wine rack to empty space in your cabinets or cooler. A shoe shelf is a beneficial storage creation to keep the entire family's items in an organized area.

Backyard Upgrades on a Budget

Is your backyard due for an update? Sometimes simple landscaping or a new entertainment area will completely change your yard's appearance.

When you feel uncomfortable making the upgrades, simply search your local area for competitive prices from numerous landscaping businesses. With their help and some creativity, you can create an outdoor paradise just outside your door.

When searching for a company to expertly renovate your outdoor living space, be sure to research their professional profile. Ask them about their experience based on a particular project and inquire about before and after photos they might have in a portfolio. Ensuring you find the right expert for the job is crucial to receiving the desired results.

ENTERTAINMENT AREA ON A BUDGET

If outdoor entertaining is your passion, you probably have numerous pieces of equipment like a barbecue grill, pellet smoker and patio set.

Consider keeping them in one area by building a perimeter of pavers for your gear and fill in the middle with mulch or a weed-killing area rug. If you have space and electrical



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capabilities, enhance the space by installing a television in the gathering area.

Use weatherproof covers to encapsulate the screen and seal other essential components from rain.

PLANT PERENNIALS

Perennials are flowers that

return each year with attractive blossoms and pleasant scents. Save money by investing in these unique plants and creating beds around your property.

Each year, as your perennials begin to sprout, your investment will continue to pay off.

For the best results, pay close attention to the planting instructions during the initial process and find out how to protect them during the winter. Many should be cut back and covered with mulch.

BACKYARD ACCENTS

You likely incorporate your

interior design with accent items to tie the room together. Your backyard should be no different as it benefits from minor aesthetics that provide significant results.

Consider laying stepping stones throughout flower beds or solar lights to highlight a desolate part of the yard.