

Winter
Home &
Garden



Visit a Home Expo

A fun and educational way to spend a weekend is to visit a home-and-garden expo. Here, you will learn valuable information about the latest products and services to enhance your home.

Aside from gaining advice from other DIYers, you will also meet with reputable contractors who can execute the more difficult jobs if you lack experience.

Go into the expo with an open mind and you may be surprised with the information you learn and connections you make.

LOOK FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

Keeping an eye on social media. Subscribe to local service sites where vendors, exhibitors and the venue will advertise upcoming events. If you have enough notice, start a savings fund specifical-

ly for the expo and dedicate the entire day or weekend to attending.

MAKE A LIST OF QUESTIONS

Most expos will feature keynote speakers who offer a Q&A and one-on-one contact with vendors who are pitching their products. Prepare a list of questions about your home improvement ideas. Here are a few questions for you to consider.

- What is the average price for a roof replacement and how long does it take?
- How much money can you save by upgrading to an energy-smart appliance?
- When is the best time to switch out your heating or air units?

Take advantage of experts who are willing to give their advice during an expo.

BECOME AN EXHIBITOR

If you have a product or service for homeowners, don't be afraid to showcase it at an expo. Check with the venue or event organizer for their requirements regarding how to become an exhibitor.

Collect Your Own Firewood

If you live on a property with trees, you can clean up while supplying your home with firewood for the winter. Analyze your property for shrubbery that is no longer thriving or causing problems because of its location.

This may not be a job you can do on your own. According to the Tree Care Industry Association, about 580 people died in tree-trimming accidents from 2009 to 2015. If you don't feel completely comfortable with removing the timber, be sure to call in an expert.

WHEN TO CALL AN EXPERT

Sometimes, your best option is to hire a tree-removal service to take out the tree for you. They have the experience and tools to do it quick and safely. Here are a few situations in which you should always call in a professional.

- When branches are near active-power lines.
- If a fallen tree will land close to your home or other structure.
- When removal will require you to scale the tree to access limbs out of reach.

In most cases, calling an expert for a complete tree removal is your best bet. They can make sure the tree falls in the safest direction, away from buildings, people or animals. You may also need assistance when it's time to remove the stubborn stump.

CHAINSAW SAFETY

The quickest way to turn your downed trees into firewood is with a chainsaw. As helpful as they are, keep in



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mind these safety tips from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration before operating these machines.

- Wear protective equipment including hand, foot, leg, eye, face and hearing protection.
- Never wear loose-fitting

clothing.

- Learn your machine's tendency and strength of kick-backs by practicing on smaller logs.

By taking proper precautions, a chainsaw will help you quickly collect firewood to last you all winter.

STORAGE TIPS

When considering where you will store your firewood, be sure to think with safety and convenience in mind. If you will rely on wood-burning fires to heat your home, you will benefit by keeping your stock nearby for easy access.

However, be cautious of keeping it too close to your structure. Large quantities of wood attract insects and pests like termites. The ideal location for storage would be an open-ended shed but, if you don't have access to one, an affordable option is covering it with a tarp.

Holiday Decoration Safety

For many families, a big part of the holidays is decorating their home. Bringing the festivities to life with attractive lights, decorative trees and inflatable characters is a fun way to get the entire neighborhood excited. Keep in mind these safety tips from the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission when setting the scene for the holidays.

TREE SAFETY

A holiday tree is the focal point of many displays. Regardless if you choose to use an artificial model or one fresh from the ground – there are serious safety concerns to consider.

Artificial: These trees are convenient for busy families. You may even find models with pre-hung lights, but make sure the packaging clearly states the tree is fire resistant.

Natural: Buying a fresh tree requires more attention. Make sure to find one with green needles which are hard to pull from the branch. The trunk should also be sticky with resin. This ensures the tree is healthy and not in danger of drying out. Before placing a natural tree in its stand, cut off about two inches of its trunk to help encourage absorption of water. Keep an eye on the level of fluid in the base as it is crucial to keeping the tree moist and healthy.

Trees should always be placed away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources.

LIGHTS

New technology makes it easier than ever to create a dazzling light show. Whether you use software to make illuminations dance to the beat of



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your favorite song or go with a more traditional display, lights can be a beautiful addition to every decoration scheme.

The commission urges us to never use more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord. Before making an electrical connection, ensure each strand is free

from frayed or bare wires. If you do notice signs of damage, discard the section in question. When faulty wires are placed on a decorative tree, it introduces the risk for branches to become charged, possibly electrocuting anyone who touches it. Also, make sure to turn off lights or active decora-

tions before leaving the house or going to sleep.

With proper care and safety maintenance, your display can impress the neighborhood throughout the entire holiday season.

HIRING A PROFESSIONAL

Companies now offer profes-

sional installation of holiday decorations; something to consider if you've got especially steep or tall rooflines or have difficulty climbing. Make sure the company has adequate insurance and that the decorations they will install will be appropriate for your home and neighborhood.

Focus on Windows

Cold weather is notorious for exposing cracks or drafts near windows and their frames. This winter, keep your home comfortable by replacing or repairing any defects. The investment can save you money on your heating bill.

Frame rot, a common cause of winter drafts, occurs when moisture and cold weather harm a window's housing through condensation. This can cause warping and expansion and invite pest infestations.

REPAIR OR REPLACE

Sometimes, damage to windows can be repaired, while more serious defects will require a complete replacement. Do you know how to determine when which action to take? Here are some tips from Consumer Reports to consider when deciding which route to take.

- **House Built Before 1960:** If your home was built during a time when lead paint was commonly used in homes, and it still has the original windows, a replacement is necessary for the health of your family.

- **Windows are Rotted or Jammed:** When you notice decay or jammed sashes, it's best to call in an expert. They may be able to fix the problem if it hasn't gone too far. Follow their advice when determining if replacing the window is the best option.

- **They Aren't Energy Efficient:** If you notice a draft coming through the frame of your windows, you should take the steps to block all entrances. Sometimes, it can be as easy as applying a new coat of caulk to compromised seams.



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ENERGY-EFFICIENT OPTIONS

If you or a professional has deemed a total replacement the way to go, consider installing Energy Star approved

options. The Department of Energy states these certified windows can result in lower energy bills. You can stay comfortable this winter by taking advantage of these specially

designed windows which prevent heat from escaping from your home.

REDECORATE

Once you have solved your

window problem, give your room a facelift by buying new blinds or curtains. An interior designer can add a touch of elegance and class to a room with affordable accessories.

Bathroom Facelift

There are many benefits homeowners receive by performing indoor renovations during the colder weather. Not only can you find great deals on appliances and flooring, but you will also have an easier time finding a qualified contractor since their busy season is over.

CHECK FOR WATER DAMAGE

Leaks are common in bathrooms and, unless they are resolved quickly, the problems they cause can be immense. One of the easiest ways to tell you have a water leak is to look for water on the floor near the shower, sink or toilet. Sometimes, the problem is beneath the floor and may not reveal itself until you notice the surface begin to sag or become weak under your feet.

Water won't just damage your home. It can also hurt your family's health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to damp and moldy environments can cause effects including skin irritation, nasal stuffiness and coughing.



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UPGRADE A VANITY

You probably spend time in front of your bathroom vanity getting ready for the day. If you feel it doesn't offer enough space for the people in your

home, consider an upgrade. It's a good idea to enlist an expert for renovations including relocating or using additional plumbing for a new bathroom centerpiece.

UPGRADE THE SHOWER

Another area that may benefit from an update is the shower. The entire feel of a room can be changed by including an attractive back-

splash or new tiles and fixtures. Whether you want a traditional model or one of today's high-tech options, the perfect shower is available at a local home store.



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Prevent Winter Fires

According to the National Fire Protection Association, the second leading cause of United States' house fires is due to heating equipment. However, with proper care and by taking precautions, you can protect your home and family. One way to ensure these tragedies are avoided is to hire a licensed electrician to conduct a safety inspection.

WINTER FIRE STATISTICS

These startling statistics from the United States Fire Administration will reveal how serious the risk of winter fires is to Americans.

- 890 people die in home fires each year.
- Winter home fires account for only eight percent of the total number of U.S. fires; but account for 30 percent of all

deaths.

- These disasters account for two-billion dollars in property losses each year.
- Since three out of five fire deaths occur in properties without working smoke alarms, the USFA urges us to place detectors in and outside all sleeping quarters and test batteries at least once a month.

APPLIANCE MAINTENANCE

Home appliances can become serious fire hazards if they are not maintained properly. Consider hiring an expert to inspect and perform preventative maintenance on these appliances.

Even if fire risks aren't found, you'll feel better knowing they were given a clean

bill of health to keep you comfortable and safe throughout the cool temperatures.

Furnace: Whether you have a gas or electric model, it's crucial that a licensed HVAC professional inspects it before turning them on. They will make sure the ignition system is in good shape, replace filters to encourage airflow and

inspect for frayed wires.

Fireplace: If you use a fireplace to heat your home, make it a habit to get an inspection at least once a year. Over time, buildups of creosote can ignite and spread from the chimney to other parts of the property like an attic. The damage may not be noticed until it is too late.

Design a Winter Garden

Don't let the cold weather stop you from showcasing an attractive garden.

While beautiful flowers and thriving greenery may have taken a break for the season, you still have plenty of options available to create a focal point in your backyard. Here are some other great ideas to spruce up a winter garden, from the experts at Better Homes and Gardens.

STRUCTURES

Since it can be difficult to find flowers which thrive during winter, you enlist the help of structures. Often called “hardscape,” they are considered the solid, hard elements in landscaping. Consider restoring an attractive bench to be a focal point in your garden. You can find a restoration expert who can bring new life to a tired piece of furniture. Other great items to include can be a trellis, sculptures or an arbor.

IMPORTANCE OF TREES

While the trees in your garden may not be producing attractive blooms or leaves, the bark is present for the entire year. You can add interest to your winter garden by planting timber that showcases beauty every season. When you consider adding new trees to your garden, research their bark color and texture; you may



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even find some branches that produce berries during the winter months for a welcome pop of color.

MAKE USE OF SUMMER CONTAINERS

Don't put away those window boxes or hanging baskets

just because the warm weather has left for a few months. The pros at Better Homes & Garden recommend using these con-

tainers to showcase evergreen boughs of different textures and colors and intriguing twigs.