



HOME & GARDEN

Spring 2013

Safe Electrical Wiring

According to the National Fire Protection Association, there is a one-in-four chance a fire will be reported at your house during your lifetime. In 2011, fires caused 15,635 injuries and 2,640 deaths.

Faulty or damaged electrical wiring is one of the causes of home fires. It's crucial for every homeowner to realize the importance of having safe electrical wiring in their homes in order to avoid damage to property and loss of lives.

Even if you don't own the home you currently live in, you still need to know a thing or two about safe electrical wiring to ensure your own safety and that of the people who live with you.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

The desire to save money is one of the most cited reasons people end up with faulty or low-quality electrical wiring in their homes.

Quality electrical services come at a price, and with good reason. The work that needs to be done is complex and dangerous at times. But during financially trying times, people want to save every last penny they can.

Instead of hiring the most qualified electrician to install the wiring for their home, some homeowners go with the one who charges the lowest fees. Unfortunately, this often means they won't get the quality service they need, and they may be inadvertently putting themselves and their home at great risk.

UPDATING CIRCUITS

Electricity-related house fires occur because many homeowners fail to have their home's electrical wiring updated. This is true for those who live in older



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homes that have not been checked by an electrician for a long time.

You may not have experienced any electrical problems, but if you know that your home's wiring has not been inspected in the last 10 or so years, you need to get in touch with an electrician as soon as possible and have new wires installed as a precautionary measure.

Ideally, houses should be checked for damaged or faulty electrical wiring every five years. Some homeowners have this done every two or three years.

You do have to pay for such services, but it is worth it when you can sleep more soundly at night knowing that your house and your family are protected against house fires and other electricity-related catastrophes.

WIRING SAFETY

Sometimes, electricity-related accidents still take place regardless of how responsible homeowners are in checking their home's electrical wiring. In order to avoid these accidents, here are some of the basic electrical wiring precautions you should take:

- Turn off the main power switch whenever electrical repairs are being done, no matter how minor those repairs are.

- Avoid coming into contact with electrical wiring if your hands and feet are wet.

- Avoid using extension cords with multiple sockets unless necessary. Plugging in more appliances than what your electrical wiring can support can lead to circuit breaks and overloads.

- Seal off exposed wires and replace cracked sockets as soon as you see them.

- Read the manuals of appliances to make sure you use them properly.

If you are unsure of how a particular electrical repair should be done, the safest thing to do is hire a professional electrician to do the job.

Attracting Hummingbirds

MAKE YOUR GARDEN A HAVEN FOR THESE CUTE VISITORS

Hummingbirds will be regular visitors to your garden if you provide them with food. Brightly colored, nectar filled flowers are a favorite of hummingbirds and are available in nearly all growing regions.

Adding hummingbird feeders is also an option that will attract these tiny birds to your garden.

NATURAL FOOD

Hummingbirds feed on flower nectar, as do many insects. With so much competition for food, it makes sense that hummingbirds would favor flowers most suited to meet their unique needs.

Their long bills fit into the tube shaped flowers that bees and other insects would find difficult to enter. Hummingbirds don't require a landing pad from which to perch while taking nectar, but they do need room for their fast beating wings. There are over 150 plant varieties in North America that meet the needs of hummingbirds.

Hummingbirds are attracted to brightly colored flowers, especially red ones. Bees have difficulty seeing the color red and generally choose flowers by scent. Hummingbirds don't rely on scent, having good color recognition. Choosing less fragrant, red flowers allows hummingbirds to have a better chance of finding nectar overlooked by their food competitors, the bees. Many plants meet their requirements.

Garden plants vary according to regional climate differences, but some hummingbird favorites are widely available with different species suitable to different regions. Visit a local



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nursery and look for plants with brightly colored, tube-shaped flowers. Plants attractive to hummingbirds can be found in form of annuals and perennials, from low growing plants to larger shrubs.

A few hummingbird favorites are sage (*salvia*), lobelia and foxglove (*digitalis*). If possible, choose plants that bloom at different times throughout the year. Lupine is a good early bloomer, and dahlias bloom well into the fall. Summer blooming flowers are numerous and easy to find.

FEEDERS

Adding a hummingbird feeder to the garden will ensure your hummingbirds have enough food for those times when flowers aren't blooming.

Hummingbird feeders should be at least partly red and should be kept clean and filled at all times. Fill them with a solution of one part granulated sugar — not honey — to four parts water. Hummingbirds must feed frequently, generally three to five times per hour.

Hummingbirds, with their rapidly beating wings and their ability to hover and dart around quickly, enhance the beauty of any garden. Gardeners that provide food for hummingbirds in their gardens will be rewarded with the presence of these tiny, beautiful birds.

Keep Your Home Secure

Most homeowners worry about what goes on at home when they're away.

Whether you are leaving your children with a nanny, leaving the house unprotected on a weekend away or leaving your teenagers home alone, there are many reasons why you might want to investigate security methods to protect your home.

In the past, home security was limited to obtrusive options like a loud alarm system. Today, much more sophisticated surveillance equipment is available.

MONITORED SECURITY

One of the most tried and true methods for securing a home is choosing a monitored security service.

These systems will involve installing or using an existing security system in your home. Since security systems may not do much good while you're out of town — it seems everyone is used to ignoring alarm sounds these days — getting a monitoring service can provide peace of mind.

If the alarm sounds while you're out of town, the security service can notify police and get in touch with you to

keep you informed.

COMPUTER PROGRAMS

Increasingly, home security is becoming a high-tech field, and many computer programs exist to help you keep an eye on your home while you're away.

The simplest ones use a webcam on your computer to let you see your home from afar. You can point the computer's camera toward your living room, for example, to see that no one has stolen your television. They may also be able to sense motion, record intruders and save the video for you — and police — to review later if necessary.

More sophisticated systems can digitally record video from multiple cameras to keep your entire home safe while you're out of town. You may even be able to log in remotely using the Internet to review what's happening at your home.

SPY TOOLS

For the everyday homeowner, there are many small and easily concealed surveillance tools which can also be useful in protecting your



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home.

Spy cameras are small video cameras that can be concealed in everyday objects around your home and either save their images for you to look at later or send their images to a computer somewhere else.

By using a spy camera, you can review what happened at your home while you were

away or keep an eye on the house from afar while you are gone. The camera can be hidden so other people in the house will not notice it.

If you would like to hear what is going on in your home while you are not around, remote audio may be right for you. A microphone can also be hidden in any room of your house and

record noise for you to listen simultaneously or later.

Either option will allow you to observe what is going on in your home while you can't be there. Both cameras and audio recording devices can be found in electronics stores and online.

For a small price, home surveillance can buy you peace of mind.

Gardening With Limited Space

What do you think of when someone asks if you're going to plant a garden? Do you imagine a thriving backyard space full of dozens of different types of plants? Do you think of a huge front yard display full of brilliant colors?

Unfortunately, not all of us have the space for a large garden. The good news is that even those who think they have no room at all usually have space for something — whether it's a smaller plot or even a container.

PLANNING FOR YOUR GARDEN

Be creative when you think of your garden and the space you have in which to plant it. Gardens have been successfully grown in very small patches of land or in pots placed outside of an entranceway. The size of your garden is not nearly as important as the way you treat their plants so that they can grow and thrive.

Start by doing a little bit of research. Not all plants grow well in every geographic location, and the time of year you can start planting without danger of frost varies depending on where you are located as well.

If you want to plant multiple types of plants, you'll need to determine which can be grown together or near each other and which need to be separated. Do the plants you want to grow need specific amounts of



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sunlight? Take everything into consideration.

Once you know what plants are most appropriate, determine where you'll place your garden. Will you be using a small patch of land outside a rented house or apartment? Will you be using window boxes or planters? Different types of plants need to be started at different times of the year, so make sure you have a timeline mapped out as well.

BUYING SEEDS AND MATERIALS

Now that you've done some research you can purchase the seeds or seedlings you need to start your garden. If you are using planters, make sure they are large enough for your plants to grow without overcrowding each other. They'll need space to grow, both above and below the soil.

Don't skimp on potting soil. A high-quality potting soil will

plants, but you can control them by mixing in some plants that have naturally repellant scents — like marigolds. Other plants are inviting to spiders and ladybugs, “good” bugs that can help to keep the “bad” bugs away.

Some soils have fertilizers and insect repellants mixed in. Do your best to avoid chemical pesticides as they can be harmful to children and small animals — not to mention your plants. If you must use them, do so sparingly.

Bugs aren't the only problem your garden will face. Weeds can also choke out your plants, causing them difficulty in terms of growth. Take some time to aerate your garden's soil and pull the weeds as often as you can. Even potted plants can end up with weeds.

Don't let the fact that you don't have a lot of space prevent you from having a garden. It doesn't matter if you live in a mansion or in a third-floor apartment. If you have space for a pot and time to give your plants some attention and care, you can definitely grow thriving plants. Make a plan and make the most of the space you've been given. You'll be glad you gave small space gardening a shot.

give your plants the nutrients they need to survive and thrive. There are dozens of different soil alternatives to choose from, so you may want to ask an expert at your local garden center which type will be best for the types of plants you're working with.

DEALING WITH PESTS, WEEDS

Even the smallest gardens can end up with pest problems. Bugs love to feed on

Spring Clean Your Kitchen

As spring arrives, you might be thinking about de-cluttering different areas of the home.

One of the most used rooms in the house is the kitchen, which means it can also be the most cluttered.

But de-cluttering isn't only a benefit to the eyes. It can also do a lot for your health. Here are three ways you can de-clutter your kitchen.

1. REMOVE ALL NON-KITCHEN ITEMS

Maybe someone has made the kitchen table their home office or study space. Maybe your toddlers have dragged all of their toys onto the kitchen floor.

Whatever the items are, if they don't belong in the kitchen, remove them. This also goes for items in drawers and cupboards. Most people barely have enough space in the kitchen as it is, so it's important that none of it goes to waste with other items.

2. ORGANIZE DRAWERS AND CUPBOARDS

Now is the perfect time to rearrange items in these spaces if you wish to. Otherwise you can just straighten them up and get rid of any items you no longer use.



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If you have a junk drawer, go through it and toss anything that is truly garbage and will never be used. You can have an organized junk drawer by using dividers and little containers to hold things such as rubber bands and pieces of string.

If you have many take-out menus stuck to the fridge and tossed into drawers, place them all in one area such as a basket on top of the fridge. This way you know where they are, but they aren't always in sight and

tempting you and your family.

3. CLEAN OUT THE FRIDGE AND FREEZER

This probably seems like a scary task, which is all the more reason to do it now. Check all expiration dates and toss anything that is too old to be eaten. Also toss anything that you don't recognize. Chances are you won't eat it anyway, so why take up space and containers by leaving it in the freezer?

Now is a good time to create a new labeling system for items that you put in the fridge and freezer. Labels should include what the item is and when it was stored.

If you are making a plan to eat healthier, now may also be a good time to get rid of the junk food in your kitchen and replace them with healthy snacks.

Spring cleaning the kitchen can be a great way to start the season off right.

Decorating Essentials

You've taken the flannel sheets off the bed, removed the snuggly blankets from the couch, and tucked mittens and scarves away for next year. In addition to giving your home a fresh blast of spring cleaning, welcome the warming weather with these decorating essentials.

A WREATH

Wreaths aren't just for Christmas. Display spring beauty in your home by hanging up a fresh wreath.

Wreaths can be purchased from florist shops or you can make one yourself. There are many varieties to choose from. How about putting up a lavender wreath, a grass wreath, a rose wreath, or even a wreath made of feathers?

Light colors like pink, pale green, light blue, white and lilac brighten up your space. You can hang your wreath above the television, on a kitchen wall, in your bedroom, on your front door or in a home office.

SPRING BOUQUET

To think spring is to celebrate the lovely flowers that reappear after months of cold and snow. Bring this natural bounty indoors with a lively, colorful and fragranced spring bouquet.

Crocuses, narcissus, daffodils, hyacinths, tulips and lilacs bloom this time of year and look beautiful in delicate china, polished silver, pure white or clear glass containers.

Visit a craft store to purchase faux flowers for longer-lasting beauty. Fresh blooms are cheerful as a table centerpiece, on a living room side table or by your bed.

SCENTED CANDLES

Light a scented candle to feature both beauty and fragrance in your spring home. There are so many different scents it's fun to spend time picking out a few favorites.

Scented candles can be jar candles, votives, tea lights or tapers. Some lovely fragrances that

are fresh and spring-like include lilac, tea rose, clean cotton, freshly mowed grass, lavender and lemon.

Scented candles are also colorful and can be displayed in a dining room, living room, bathroom or bedroom. Keep safety in mind as well, and don't leave burning candles unattended.

BREEZY CURTAINS

Take down heavy drapes in thick and cozy fabrics, and replace them with light and breezy curtains for an instant spring feel to your home.

Cotton, voile, sheer and floral fabrics let the sunshine in and provide a pretty frame for your freshly cleaned windows.

Curtains are one of the easiest and quickest ways to change a room's mood. Have fun creating different looks. Hang valances in a kitchen, a valance and tier combination in the living room and longer curtain panels in bedrooms.

WELCOME MAT

Wipe off your spring shoes, sandals, and gardening boots with a cheerful new welcome mat placed at your door. It is also mud season after all, and welcome mats help prevent dirt and dust from being tracked into your freshly cleaned home.

You can try a rubber or coir mat outdoors and a smaller rug just inside the front door. Pick a colorful floral pattern for added enjoyment.



Weed-Killer Burn

WHEN GOOD LAWN CHEMICALS GO BAD

Herbicides are chemicals used to eliminate weeds from your lawn turf.

Lawn herbicides are available in pre-emergent types that prevent weeds from sprouting, and post-emergent types, which kill them after they have sprouted.

Homeowners should research carefully before using weed killers. Some products can cause severe damage to grass and landscape plants when used improperly.

SIGNS OF INJURY

You may see signs of herbicide damage shortly after applying the product to your lawn areas. The grass may become yellowed, a condition called chlorosis, or it may appear striped with colorless areas.

Grass plants may brown and die. Wilting and curling of leaves can also occur. Herbicides should not be used on newly planted grass, which can brown and die in large patches.

THE RIGHT HERBICIDE

Weed killers come in a variety of types. Some of these are “selective” in that they only kill some types of weed plants. Others

are “non-selective,” which means they will kill any type of growing plant, so they must be used with care.

Glysophate, marketed under the brand name Roundup, is one of these non-selective weed-killers used to kill weeds on driveways and sidewalks. It can kill your lawn grass if used incorrectly.

Homeowners should identify the type of turfgrass used in their lawns so they can choose the right herbicide product. St. Augustine, a grass used in warm climates, cannot tolerate many herbicide compounds.

Always read labels carefully to determine if the herbicide is safe for your type of grass. When in doubt, contact your local agricultural extension service for advice.

REPAIRING DAMAGE

If you see damage on your lawn soon after applying an herbicide, you may be able to save the grass by employing a few techniques.

First, water the lawn liberally to wash the herbicide off the grass plants. This method will not help herbicides that are soil active. It will merely wash the compound further into the soil. You can, however, dig a slight trench around damaged areas to cut the roots of the grass plants to prevent the weed killer from being taken up into plant cells.

If damage is severe, you may have to re-seed or re-sod areas of your lawn with the most injury. After repairing your lawn, do not use herbicides for at least six weeks after re-seeding or re-sodding to allow the new grass to develop a strong root system.

PREVENTING INJURY

The best way to avoid expensive grass and plant injury from herbicides is to prevent it from happening. Follow label directions whenever you apply weed-killing products. Use only the amount recommended by the manufacturer.

Don't mix chemicals together. Avoid drift problems by refraining from applying herbicide when it is windy. Use only the amine or low-volatile forms of 2, 4-D herbicide. Do not use soil active herbicides where run-off can carry it to non-target areas.

Be careful when applying soil, manure or other amendments to your property. They may contain herbicides to kill weeds. Know the source of the materials. Herbicide injury often occurs when you apply herbicides in hot weather. Only apply herbicide when the temperature is below 80 degrees Fahrenheit, or as directed on the bottle.

WEED AND FEED

Weed-and-feed combination products that combine an herbicide with fertilizer can be damaging to turf grass and landscape plants.

The main problem with these products is that fertilizer generally needs to be watered into the soil, but herbicides need to be left on the leaves in order to work properly.

Also, if you need to re-apply weed-killer, you will also be re-applying fertilizer, which is unnecessary and can find its way into local waterways. It's generally best to weed and feed in separate operations.