



# Spring

# HOME

EDITION



## Planning ahead is vital to a successful renovation

Remodeling projects are significant undertakings. Homeowners must consider a host of variables before any such project can begin. While planning ahead may take time, it is essential to ensuring successful completion of a renovation project. Consider these pre-renovation planning pointers to help any job go smoothly.

### Determine your motivation for renovating

Renovation projects often involve balancing needs and wants, and determining if a project is a necessity or a luxury can set the timeline and course of the project. Is the roof leaking? If so, immediate action is necessary. Could the kitchen be a bit more functional? If the kitchen is still manageable, a homeowner may be able to wait a little bit to get better prices on appliances or contracting services.

Separating needs from wants helps homeowners map out a viable timeline that maximizes productivity and affordability.

### Get professional advice

Many homeowners are under the impression that doing the work themselves can save a considerable amount of money. This may be the case for

homeowners with renovation experience. But by and large, professional contractors are an asset to any renovation. They can provide a realistic overview of the project, map out projected costs, point out areas that could be troublesome, and may have industry contacts that can keep supply costs low. Even if a homeowner will do a portion of the job, a contractor can do the bulk of the work and keep the project on budget.

### Get necessary permits

Permits are designed to ensure the work is being done to code and in a safe manner. However, they are not without additional costs and processing time, and that can cause some homeowners to skip this step. According to the home information site The Spruce, building permits cost anywhere from \$400 to about \$2,200 for new home construction. Building permits for smaller projects can cost \$100 or less, and typically are based on a percentage of the anticipated cost of the project.

A permit may be issued the day the application is submitted, while other cities and towns may issue permits up to two or more weeks later. Factor permit fees and processing times into the

renovation plan.

If it comes to light a homeowner did work without a required permit, he or she may face penalties; may have to tear out work done to have it inspected or redone; some may be unable to sell a home until permits have been obtained and work has been done to code. Homeowners insurance coverage also may be affected if homeowners do not

obtain the proper permits.

Other considerations when planning a renovation include writing out a strict budget, gathering inspiration, drawing up to-scale renovation plans, pouring over material reviews, and getting recommendations for reliable professionals to do the job. While not every obstacle can be avoided, planning is a good way to start successfully.



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Spring

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# How to pick the right trees for your property

Trees benefit a landscape by serving both aesthetic and utilitarian functions. A home surrounded by healthy green trees can be a sight to behold, and those same trees can benefit surrounding plants and wildlife at the same time.

As appealing as trees are, not all trees and landscapes make for the perfect match. The Arbor Day Foundation notes the importance of planning when designing a landscape. Planning ensures the trees homeowners ultimately choose for their properties will grow well in the soil and moisture present in their yards.

Careful consideration of a handful of variables can help homeowners determine which trees will make the best fit for their properties.

- Height: Homeowners must consider the projected height of a tree before planting it. Avoid trees that will bump into anything when fully grown, as that can adversely affect surrounding greenery and pose a safety hazard. The ADF's tree

sizing guide can be accessed at <https://www.arborday.org/trees/rightTreeAndPlace/size.cfm> and serves as an invaluable resource for homeowners who want to plant new trees around their properties.

- Canopy spread: Trees grow

out as well as up, so it's important to consider their potential width at maturity as well. The ADF sizing guide can help homeowners get an idea of how wide a tree is likely to be at maturity. Trees that spread out quite a bit don't necessarily need

to be avoided, but it's important that they're planted far enough apart so they don't adversely affect surrounding plants. In addition, wide trees that are planted too close together can make the landscape appear crowded, taking something away from its

aesthetic appeal.

- Growth rate: Growth rate is an important variable because it can affect how quickly homeowners will see changes in their landscapes. Homeowners who want to plant for privacy can consider trees with quick growth rates or purchase more mature trees that are already near full growth. Those who are not in need of instant transformation can try trees with slower growth rates, which the ADF notes typically live longer than fast-growing species.

- Requirements: Different trees require different amounts of sun and moisture and different soil components to thrive. Homeowners can have their soil tested to determine which trees will thrive in it. Local garden centers can be a great resource for homeowners who want insight as to which trees will thrive in their local climates.

Trees serve many functions on a property. Choosing the right trees for a landscape requires careful consideration of a host of variables.



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# Three factors to consider before converting an attic

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many homeowners suddenly found themselves in need of more usable square footage in their homes. Required to work from home due to social distancing recommendations, millions of working professionals suddenly found themselves setting up shop at kitchen tables or islands, in alcoves,

garages, or even walk-in closets. Those makeshift offices were never supposed to be permanent, but as companies loosen workplace policies and embrace full remote or hybrid working arrangements, professionals are seeking more permanent home office solutions.

Home additions are a possibility for homeowners who need more us-

able square footage, but add-ons may not be the right option for everyone. If adding on won't work, homeowners may want to look up ... at their attics.

Attics with ample space can make for ideal home offices, as they're away from the hustle and bustle of a home's main floor. That can make it easier to concentrate when ev-

eryone is in the house and reduce the likelihood that video calls with colleagues and clients will be interrupted by kids and pets.

Attic conversions are not always possible, and the following are three important factors homeowners may need to consider before they can go forward with such projects.

**1. Dimensions:** Both the renovation experts at This Old House and the real estate experts at UpNest indicate that at least half of a finished attic must be a minimum of seven feet high and seven feet wide and 70 square feet. Requirements may differ depending on where homeowners live, but that 7-7-70 guideline is generally the minimum requirement. An attic that fails to meet such requirements won't necessarily be a lost cause, but it might be costly to make adjustments that ultimately align with lo-

cal codes.

**2. Access:** Access is another aspect that must adhere to local safety guidelines. Many attics are accessible only through pulldown ladders, but that will have to change if homeowners repurpose their attic spaces. A staircase that complies with local laws will need to be installed, and contractors can work with homeowners to build that and estimate the cost. Homeowners who simply want to put desks in their attics without going with full-fledged conversions are urged to adhere to local access requirements anyway, as they're intended to ensure residents can safely escape attics in the case of a fire or another emergency.

**3. Climate control:** Attics are converted to provide residents with more livable space. Converted space is only livable if the climate within the attic can be controlled so

it's cool in the summer and warm in the winter. An existing HVAC unit needs to efficiently heat and cool an extra room. If it can't, bills might spike because the rest of the home likely won't be as comfortable, forcing homeowners to adjust thermostats to offset that discomfort. That also could affect the unit's life expectancy. Before going forward with an attic renovation, homeowners should contact HVAC professionals to determine if attic spaces can be serviced with the existing units and ductwork, or if an alternative arrangement must be worked out to make the spaces livable.

Attic conversions can be great ways to make existing spaces more livable. Homeowners considering such projects should pay attention to three important variables as they try to determine if attic conversions will work for them.



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# Pros and cons to open-concept homes

Open-concept homes have become increasingly popular in recent years. An open-concept home is one in which the rooms flow into one another with limited obstruction from walls or other barriers. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 84 percent of new single-family homes have fully or partially open layouts.

While they may seem like a new trend, open floor plans are anything but. Early North American homes featured open, often one- or two-room

units built around the central kitchen/hearth. This maximized warmth and functionality. Homes evolved as incomes grew, and soon homes had several smaller rooms with specialized functions.

What's old has become new again. However, before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup to determine if it's really right for you.

### Advantages of open floor plans

Open floor plans facilitate the flow of natural light throughout a space and can promote air flow, helping to reduce warm or cool pockets of air in otherwise closed-off rooms.

Open homes make socializing easier, even when people are doing different things. While someone is cooking dinner in the kitchen, he or she can still interact with someone else playing video games in the family room or paying bills in the home office. Entertaining also is easier, as mingling with guests is much more convenient when walls are not getting in the way.

A smaller home can feel much larger if it employs an open concept. The square footage is not divided into smaller quarters, which sometimes are rooms (such as formal dining rooms) that are only used a few times per year. This eliminates underused spaces and opens up sight lines in the layout.

The value of real estate has risen dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prospective buyers may prefer an open-concept plan because it can help them minimize building costs.

### Disadvantages of open floor plans

Open layouts are not for everyone. The same sense of space that occurs when walls are taken down may make rooms feel cavernous and less cozy, particularly in homes with ample square footage. In addition, privacy can be hard to come by when all rooms feed into one another.

When the kitchen is not separate from the family room space, that makes it easy for noise to compromise the area's comfort levels. There is no hiding from noise in an open floor plan, as sounds from voices, television shows and appliances tend to echo and blend together. And if the home is a single-story layout, those noises from the main living areas also may carry to adjacent bedrooms.

Smoke and smells are another thing to consider. When something on the stove spills over, a small range hood will not be practical for clearing smoke from a large space. Though the aroma of freshly cooked food is enticing, it can make it hard for cooks to keep guests out of the kitchen.

Open-concept homes are popular, but homeowners should weigh the pluses and minuses to see if this trend is truly right for them.




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# Spring HOME EDITION

## A guide to outdoor lighting

Lighting is an essential component of interior and exterior home design. Not only does lighting add style and make spaces more appealing, when done correctly, it also makes a home safer and more functional.

Homeowners who plan to utilize outdoor spaces like backyards, front porches and walkways to the fullest should think carefully about lighting. These guidelines can assist with selecting outdoor lighting fixtures.

### Security lighting

Flood lights and security lights are a good investment for those who want to beef up visibility and security around the home. These lights are high-intensity and designed to illuminate large areas. The brightness and reach can serve as a preventive measure to keep animals and even criminals away. Motion-sensor lights will immediately engage if something

crosses the path of the sensor. Some lights will remain on from dusk until dawn. Lowes Home Improvement suggests using the correct wattage on outdoor security lights so they flood an area thoroughly without affecting neighboring properties.

### Wall, post and ceiling lights

Outdoor lighting fixtures beyond security options come in a variety of styles, according to Lamps USA. Wall lights are mounted to the outdoor wall of the home. These typically flank doorways or the garage. Post lights are often installed on the posts of decks and porches, or are free-standing on properties, providing visibility but also style. Ceiling-mounted lights may be above doorways or installed in any structure that has an overhead area. Warm-coloured temperature bulbs in these fixtures can create

an inviting atmosphere that is not too bright and jarring, especially when multiple lighting fixtures are working together. When selecting lighting for wall-mounted fixtures, experts suggest sizing up if you are not sure of the size to pick, as lights will look much smaller in scale from a distance.

### Accent and landscape lighting

A bevy of accent lighting choices are available. Accent lighting is designed to enhance the mood and appearance of certain elements of a landscape. Accent lighting is not intended to add bright light. For example, upward-directed lights can be cast on trees or shrubs to accentuate their shapes. Accent lighting also may call out a structure, such as a garden or a fountain. While accent lighting may be hard-wired, homeowners who want the luxury of

changing lighting can opt for solar fixtures, which are more mobile but not as bright.

### Additional pointers

When shopping for bulbs, consider the number of lumens. A standard 100-watt bulb produces around 1,600 lumens. Security lights should range from 700 to 1,300 lumens

for optimal brightness. Other lights needn't be so bright.

Furthermore, ensure that any fixtures that are being used are safety-rated for outdoors. Wet-rated fixtures are designed to withstand direct exposure to outdoor elements, advises the design experts at Schoolhouse, a lighting

and lifestyle goods company. Damp-rated fixtures are built for outdoor locations protected from harsh weather. Look for the product details or work with an electrician to choose the right lighting choices.

Lighting can transform outdoors spaces for the better.



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## The different ways to repair a driveway

## How to cut costs on home renovations

Asphalt driveways do not last forever. Over time, weather and general usage can degrade the driveway surface, resulting in cracks, pitting and more. Ultraviolet rays, salt and automotive fluids also can affect the appearance and functionality of a driveway. An unsightly driveway can adversely affect curb appeal and resale potential.

Homeowners have to consider various factors when it comes to repairing driveways. They may have the option of getting the driveway resurfaced, resealed or repaved, and each project is unique.

### Resurfacing

According to the home improvement price comparison site Kompare It, resurfacing is simpler and faster than installing a new asphalt drive-

way. With resurfacing, any cracks are filled in to create an even base. Then a new layer of asphalt is applied over the existing one. That new layer can range in thickness from 1.5 to 3 inches. A heavy rolling machine will then smooth and flatten the layers together. If the driveway has minor pitting or cracking, then resurfacing can be a cost-effective strategy, as it may be a \$3,000 to \$6,000 job as opposed to \$5,000 to \$10,000 with repaving.

### Resealing

Resealing a driveway, also called sealcoating, is another repair strategy. HGTV says resealing can be a do-it-yourself project. Resealing helps the driveway last longer.

The driveway needs to be clean and dry, with holes and cracks filled

prior to sealcoating. Start at the far edge of the driveway and seal that area by "cutting-in" by hand for a neat edge. Afterward the rest of the driveway can be sealed using a squeegee or broom. This project can be completed within two or three days if no precipitation is forecast.

### Repaving

A project best left to professionals, repaving typically involves the removal of an existing driveway and the installation of a new one. The sub-grade layer is essential in the process for a smooth look. Contractors also will assess soil and grading when doing work. The construction blog Main Infrastructure says the new asphalt driveway can vary in thickness between two and six inches, depending on budget and need. The contractor also can advise if full-depth asphalt application or an aggregate base is practical.

Assessing the condition of driveway can give homeowners a better idea about which type of repair project best suits their property.

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes - some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

- Assess the merit of the project. Remodeling magazine annually publishes a "Cost vs. Value Report" that lists the average cost and return on investment homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you're planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

- Hire a contractor. Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

- Refurbish existing features. Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save

you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

- Choose midgrade materials. Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

- Avoid peak seasons. You'll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

- Do some prep work. You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

- Buy a display item. Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.

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## Seven things to know before replacing windows

The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15 percent of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

1. Vinyl or aluminum may be best. Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice.

Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

2. Moisture problems indicate windows need to be replaced. Condensation that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

3. Windows add curb appeal. Beyond functionality, replace-

ment windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

4. Consider other energy-efficient upgrades. Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement - which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

5. The wrong windows can adversely affect home value. The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73 percent of their replacement

window investment back when they resell a home. But choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too. When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more soundproof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

7. Proper installation is key to longevity. Replacement windows are only as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals. Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.



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# Spring HOME EDITION



## Upgrade bathroom safety features

Bathrooms can benefit from updates that improve their form and function. While styles and color patterns may inspire bathroom renovations, improvements to safety also should be considered.

Bathrooms can be one of the most dangerous rooms in a house. Bath and shower areas account for about two-thirds of accidental injuries in these spaces. Many other injuries involve the toilet.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable in the bathroom due to reduced mobility and flexibility, visual impairment and other factors. However, some key modifications can make bathrooms much safer for aging populations.

- **Raised toilet seat:** Install an ADA-compliant raised toilet seat. Standard toilet seats are roughly 15 inches high, but elevated seats can raise the bowl an additional two to four inches. Another option is to invest in risers that can be attached to an existing toilet.

- **Grab bars:** Seniors may use towel holders as grab bars, which don't have stability and can dislodge from the wall.



Install secured side grip bars by the toilet and inside the shower to make maneuvering easier.

- **Water temperature:** Seniors may be vulnerable to hot water temperatures. Lower the water temperature setting on the hot water heater. StaySafe.org recommends 120 F.

- **Faucets:** Change faucet handles to paddle-style handles rather than knobs. Knobs can be challenging to grip for those with arthritis in their hands. Also, handles that are easier for seniors to use can reduce the risk of the elderly losing their balance as they attempt to gain leverage to turn

the water on and off.

- **Nonslip mats:** Nonslip mats or tape strips can be used in showers and tub bottoms, as well as outside of the shower to reduce the risk of slips and falls. Rugs should have rubberized, slip-resistant backing.

- **Rounded corners:** Choose

counters and fixtures with rounded corners. Should a senior fall against something, the rounded corner may prevent serious injury.

- **Shower benches and transfer seats:** Benches and transfer seats make it easier getting in and out of the shower. Also, sitting while showering reduces the risk of becoming light-headed or losing balance.

- **Walk-in tubs/showers:** Minimizing the threshold to the shower or bathtub is an important safety feature. Some manufacturers make walk-in tubs with doors that secure and make watertight seals. Showers that don't have a lip or tub to scale also are better for seniors.

- **Lighting:** Eyesight weakens over time, so improve lighting with combinations of overhead lighting and softer side lighting. Night lights or soft-glowing toilet lights can make it easier to get around the bathroom in the middle of the night.

These are just some improvements that can create safer bathroom environments for seniors.

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