

FRESH LOOKS FOR



Fall



Top tips for a more organized kitchen

(StatePoint) Better organization in the kitchen means spending less time searching for the right ingredient or tool so you can have more time for savoring meals with family and friends, and more time for personal pursuits.

Whether you're throwing together weekday lunches for the kids or hosting an elegant dinner party, here are some tips to keep your kitchen -- and meal prep -- organized.

Declutter

Do you feel like you're constantly battling clutter? Not only can clutter make you feel less comfortable, it can impact your efficiency. Take some time to sort through those areas of your kitchen that tend to collect unused food products, such as the pantry, the refrigerator door and the back of the fridge. You'll be surprised how long certain items have been sitting there. Toss anything that has expired, and donate anything unopened



and in good condition that you can't or won't use to a food pantry. Transferring items such as grains, sugar and flour to labeled containers of the same size makes for more uniform storage that can help you maximize shelving. You might also consider alphabetizing spices so they are easier to find and grab when you need them.

Upgrade Your Fridge

Trading in your refrigerator for a newer model

can be a game changer, and not just because modern appliances tend to be more energy efficient. Today's refrigerators can also be a world apart in functionality and organization, offering you more storage space, greater control and even the ability to multitask.

Improve Go-To Tools

Coordinated, efficient meal prep relies on your go-to tools being in good working order. To that end,

a knife sharpener can make a useful addition to your kitchen, whether you opt for a simple sharpening stone or an electric model with different settings. If you're low on counter space or would prefer having this task handled professionally, check your local hardware store. Many provide this service at an affordable cost. Other small items, such as can openers, zesters and peelers, are all prone to rust, which can make them difficult to wield over time. Likewise, plastic spatulas can become cracked and damaged with use and wooden spoons can become splintered. Assess these items and replace them as needed with new tools that offer a better grip and smoother operation.

With a few small tweaks and updates, your kitchen and all the items within it big and small, can make your life easier, more organized and more convenient.



Facts about insulation and home efficiency

Insulation can go a long way toward making a home more comfortable. Insulation reduces the transfer of heat from indoors and outdoors so homes stay more comfortable in both the winter and summer. Insulation also can block exterior noise. A properly insulated home is a must, particularly in the wake of rising energy costs. Insulation will help a home be more energy efficient.

Insulation is easily taken for granted. The following are some facts about insulation and home efficiency that illustrate how much homeowners can benefit from upgrading their insulation.

- Insulation is made from a variety of materials, including fiberglass, wool, cellulose, and spray foam.
- Unless damaged, insulation lasts for the life of the building. Some settling of insulation may occur, particularly with loose-fill type insulation, and gaps can be filled in.
- During the Middle Ages, walls of homes were stuffed with straw and mud to help keep out the cold. It is one of the first documented types of insulation.
- According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, insulation saves more than 600 times more energy each year than compact fluorescent lights, Energy Star Appliances, and Energy Star windows combined.
- For every Btu consumed in the production of insulation each year, 12 Btus are saved by the use of insulation.
- An insulating material's resistance to heat flow is measured in terms of its thermal resistance, or R-value. The higher the R-value, the greater the insulating effectiveness. An insulation contractor can let a homeowner know how much insulation and what R-value is recommended for his or her climate.
- Manufacturers continue to experiment with insulation materials. Environmentally friendly options include recycled cotton denim, paper or plant cellulose, and sheep's wool.
- Large pieces of insulation are called batts. Traditionally they are made from pink fiberglass, which is extremely fine woven glass. It's important to realize fiberglass insulation can release small particles or fibers in the air when disturbed, so respiratory protection and gloves should be used when handling to reduce risk of irritation.

Insulation is a key investment in home comfort and efficiency.



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Why having a home backup generator is a game-changer in power outages

(BPT) - What would you do if your power went out? An hour or two may be fine for most people, but a day, week or more can have a significant effect on your livelihood. And not only are power outages inconvenient, but they can be dangerous, especially for people with medical devices that require a power source.

Strong storms and wildfires threats that are top of mind for homeowners. Pair both storms and fires with

an aging power grid in many portions of the country, and it makes sense why so many people are exploring their options for backup power.

Protection from power outages

Power outages can happen at any time. How can you protect your home and keep your appliances and devices functioning? One of the most reliable options is a home backup generator.

A home backup generator is permanently installed

outside your house (like an AC unit) and comes on automatically when the power is out - whether you're home or away. This makes them ideal for your primary residence as well as vacation properties.

When the power goes out, the automatic transfer switch - the ATS - transfers power from the utility to your generator. And when utility power is restored, the ATS turns off your generator and returns your home's power to the grid.

A home backup generator connects to your home's natural gas or liquid propane system, so there are no extension cords and no refueling with gasoline. They are simple, safe, effective and provide peace of mind.

What size is right for your home?

Not all generators are created equal, and not all sizes are appropriate for a home's energy needs. Your best option is to work with an expert to find the right fit for your home's size.

Power up to keep costs down

Severe weather is the single leading cause of power outages in the United States. The amount and severity of these outages has spiked dramatically over the past decade, a shift associated with climate change. By being proactive and installing a reliable standby generator in your home, you'll help protect your property and the people that matter most.



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Sights and sounds that indicate floors should be replaced soon

Nice flooring draws immediate attention when entering a home. Natural wood floors tend to instantly impress, while the right kitchen flooring materials

can create the welcoming feeling many homeowners strive to establish in the most popular room in the home.

Stunning floors are hard to miss, and floors that are

well past their prime are equally noticeable. Aging floors may fall somewhere between fading and failing to live up to homeowners' standards. Fading floors may not need to be replaced immediately, but the following are some signs that indicate existing floors are nearing their expiration date.

- **Soft spots:** A floor should not give when stepped on. Soft spots could be indicative of water damage caused by any number of factors. Some water damage is caused by mopping the floor with a soaking wet mop, while burst pipes also contribute to water damage that can cause soft spots. A single soft spot on the floor may necessitate a relatively simple repair, but various soft spots indicate extensive damage that might be affecting the floor, subflooring or both. In the latter instance, homeowners should consider a full floor replacement.



- **Creaking floors:** Creaking floors are among the more annoying issues that can arise in a home. In such homes, residents feel as though every step they or their housemates take is being announced. In addition, creaking floors can awake

light sleepers, including young children. It should be noted that uneven subflooring could be the culprit behind creaking floors. Though that does not necessarily require a floor replacement, it can be hard to lift existing floors and then refit them after

the subflooring has been addressed. That's especially so if low-quality laminate flooring was installed. So while creaking floors may not require a full floor replacement, it's an outcome homeowners who can no longer live with the noise can prepare themselves for.

- **Dated look:** Of course, some floors simply look like the product of a bygone era. Various factors, including location, affect the resale value of a home, but Realtor.com reports that hardwood floors are preferred by both home buyers and renters. In addition, Realtor.com estimates that wood floors could provide a return as high as 80 percent of the initial investment when homeowners sell their homes. If existing flooring looks dated, it might be time to bring it up to speed with something more modern.

A home's flooring is bound to draw the attention of residents and visitors alike. Homeowners who replace their flooring can ensure that attention is drawn for all the right reasons.



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How homeowners can turn attics into livable spaces

Houses typically feature various areas that are traditionally designed for storage, such as garages, basements and attics. However, with some renovation, these spaces can be transformed into livable areas.

Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project. While the attic may seem like it has plenty of room and is structurally sound enough to walk in, that's not necessarily so. To be converted into usable living space, an attic must be brought up to the standards of modern building codes, according to the design experts at Board & Vellum. Retrofitting beams and insulation can eat up available space in an attic. Thus, it is best to consult an expert to see if an attic can be converted.

Furthermore, an attic that was not initially designed as a room when the house was built can add extra "load" upstairs if it is converted. That could present certain structural problems. That means a structural engineer also must be consulted to see if adding beams, flooring and drywall will necessitate other changes elsewhere in the home to accommodate the extra load.

In order to have a functional attic room, building codes will dictate that it needs to be accessible by

a full-size staircase. Also, it will need to have another exit in case of an emergency so that will likely be an accessible window, according to the home information site The Fill. Homeowners' budgets and renovation plans will need to factor into these considerations. Homeowners also are advised to check local permits to determine what else may be required to go forward. It is best to follow the rules. Lack of a permit for work can affect the ability to sell a home down the line.

Individuals also should plan for heating and cooling upgrades as the home will need to have ductwork installed in the attic, or at the least, a stand-alone heating and cooling unit. As heat rises, it can get quite warm in an attic, so ventilation and comfort should be considered. The attic will need to be wired for electricity for lighting and other needs. Air sealing and additional insulation can the attic space more comfortable as well. Consult with a qualified electrician and an HVAC technician and have an energy audit done to discuss needs.

Attic renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners. This is no small undertaking and all of the right steps need to be followed to ensure a legal, safe and successful renovation.



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The benefits of energy-efficient homes

Consumer efforts to be more eco-conscious are more and more noticeable. For proof of that, one need look no further than the increase in vehicle charging stations. Such stations are more accessible than ever and illustrate that consumer preference is increasingly leaning toward products that leave as small a carbon footprint as possible.

Another indicator of a growing interest in eco-friendly products is the popularity in energy-efficient homes. In fact, a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders found that energy-efficient features are among the most sought-after “must-haves” among homebuyers. Among those surveyed, 83 percent desired Energy Star-rated windows, 81 percent wanted Energy Star-rated appliances and 80 percent preferred energy-efficient lighting.

Though eco-conscious sensibilities compel mil-

lions of homeowners to make their homes more energy-efficient, that's not the only reason to upgrade your home. The following are a handful of the many benefits of energy-efficient homes.

- **Save money:** Inflation was one of the biggest stories of 2022, as the cost of living rose dramatically in the wake of world events. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation led to an overall 6.5 percent increase in prices. But that increase was dwarfed by the cost of electricity, which increased by 14.3 percent in 2022. Energy-efficient appliances can help homeowners overcome that spike, as the U.S. Department of Energy indicates upgrading to such products can help homeowners reduce their energy costs by as much as 30 percent.

- **Improve resale value:** As the NAHB survey indicates, modern homebuy-



ers want energy-efficient homes. They're also willing to pay more for such homes. Research from the mortgage lender Freddie Mac found that homes with energy-efficient ratings sold for nearly 3 percent more on average than homes without such ratings.

- **Live healthier:** The benefits of energy-efficient homes aren't just economic, though health-related benefits certainly produce an economic incentive as well. According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, insulation and air sealing protect individuals from heat waves and other ripple effects of climate change. The

ACEEE notes that weatherization can improve indoor air quality and comfort, a notable benefit for asthma sufferers and seniors. In fact, the ACEEE estimates that integrating energy efficiency programs in homes could reduce seniors' risk for falls in their homes, potentially saving \$2 billion in fall-related health care costs over the next decade, and improve asthma outcomes, which could reduce health care costs by as much as half a billion dollars.

Energy-efficient products and practices pay numerous dividends, making them a worthy expenditure for any homeowners looking to upgrade their homes.

How to prepare a fireplace for winter

As hours of daylight shorten and fall gives way to winter, thoughts shift from fall foliage to spending time cuddling under warm blankets and being cozy indoors. A fireplace can improve the ambiance of any room and help to create a warm and welcoming gathering spot.

Home fireplaces typically are wood-burning or gas. Though maintenance for these fireplaces differs, certain preparatory steps must be taken to prepare a fireplace for winter.

Clear the clutter

Items can accumulate in areas that are not in use, and a fireplace is no exception. Take a few hours to remove any belongings from in front of the fireplace and clean the mantle thoroughly.

Have the chimney cleaned

Hire a professional chimney cleaning company to inspect the chimney and clean it thoroughly before winter. According to BobVila.com, a chimney should be cleaned once a year, or after about every 80 fires. The National Fire Protection Association says failure to properly clean chimneys is one of the leading contributors to home fires. That's due to creosote, a highly flammable residue that builds up in the flue that lines the chimney.

Inspect the interior

The interior of a wood-burning fireplace is likely lined with fire bricks. Check for cracks and loose joints. Hire a professional mason to make any repairs, as special materials are needed to

withstand the heat of fires.

Install a chimney cap and screen

According to Family Handyman, a chimney cap is a protective covering that goes over the top of the chimney. It is made of steel or copper mesh with a cap on top. This protects the chimney from rain and downdrafts and keeps animals and debris from getting into the chimney.

Prune overhanging branches

If there are trees close to the home and the chimney, cut them back, as they can be a fire hazard. Branches and leaves also can restrict the proper draft of the chimney.

Assess the outdoor vent

Gas fireplaces typically emit exhaust through a vent in the home. Remove any blockages from the vent, including leaves, cobwebs and debris.

Check glass or other coverings

The glass or face of the fireplace helps regulate carbon monoxide exposure and protects people from the flames. Be sure the glass covering is intact.

Clean ceramic logs

Gas fireplaces use ceramic logs, rocks or beads that can become dusty. Clean them prior to use. Dirty ceramic logs can be a fire hazard and produce an unpleasant burning smell.

Check the blower and pilot

If the fireplace has an electric blower, clean and dust it so it doesn't become clogged. Inspect the pilot light for any wear and tear that includes wiring or structural issues.



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A beginner's guide to fall planting and maintenance

Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to gardens.

Soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year's bounty.

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

- Think about fall annuals and bulb planting. Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer flowers fade. Also, it's a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.

- Sow salad seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.

- Take inventory of the sun. Positioning a garden carefully means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.

- Fill in landscaping gaps. Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters,



Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.

Fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year's bounty.

kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.

- Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

- Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.

- Continue to water plants. Water is essential in the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.

Fall planting and maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.

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How to set up the ultimate workstation for kids at home

(StatePoint) Want to help guarantee your child's academic success? While you can't control what goes on in the classroom, you can facilitate their study time at home by setting up an A+ workstation. Here's how:

1. Choose a location: Select a location that's well-lit, preferably with some natural light, and away from noise and distractions. Whether it's your child's bedroom or a corner of the dining area, the area should be large enough for all their supplies and tech to stay organized.

2. Use color wisely: Research has shown that certain colors have the power to boost productivity and creativity or promote a sense of calm. Decorating the space with care could potentially help your student weather crunch periods with ease. You may also opt to color code binders, dividers and other supplies by coursework so that your child can quickly identify the items they need.

3. Update tech: Equip the workstation with the latest technology and educational tools. For easy essay composition, your child's suite of devices should include a tablet or laptop and a printer. To get your student prepped for math and science classes, be sure to supply them with a graphing calculator featuring the latest capabilities.

4. Prevent clutter: Clutter can pile up all too easily, making it difficult to find notes and assignments. Keep the mess to a minimum with the addition of a few organizational tools. Hang a corkboard to post reminders and to-do lists. Add wall shelving or a sorting tray to keep papers filed by subject area or due date, and use small baskets or cups to collect erasers, paper clips and other small



supplies. Finally, be sure the workstation has its own waste bin, so that items that are no longer needed can be efficiently tossed or recycled.

5. Consider ergonomics: Eliminate distractions by making sure the workstation is ergonomic-friendly and

comfy. If your child sits at a desk, ensure their computer monitor is at eye level and that their feet touch the floor. Adjustable laptop tables can transform a makeshift work area on the couch or bed into a comfortable workstation.

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for productivity, you can help your student make the grade.

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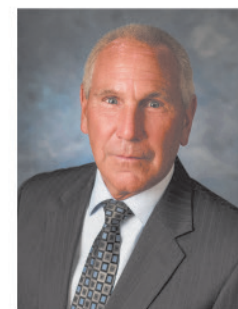
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