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Give your living room a new vibe

An “out with the old, in with the new” mentality can extend to people’s visions for their homes. A home in need of repair or renovation can serve as a catalyst to take inventory of personal style and help make interior spaces reflect one’s unique vibe.

A living room can grow stale over time and often serves as a catch-call for clothing, blankets, gadgets, and other items. Upon recognizing a living room has seen better days, individuals may decide it’s time to give the space a new vibe. That transformation can start with these strategies.



Organize first

Clutter frequently is the culprit behind a living room that may not give off the vibe individuals desire. As families grow and people add belongings, space may be at a premium. Less is more has never been a more important concept. Remove extraneous items before purchasing new furniture or transitioning to a new design. You may even want to remove everything and start from scratch before reintroducing desirable elements to the space.

Seek the assistance of professionals

Some people are adept at decorating and designing spaces. But just as you wouldn’t perform your own medical procedures, you should leave jobs like interior design and renovations to the professionals. Hiring a professional interior designer and contractors can really bring a living room together in ways homeowners may have never imagined. These pros can build off of your ideas and truly create a space that may be worthy of a magazine spread.

Promote wellness

You may want to consider adding natural materials in the design to promote well-being. Eco-friendly furnishings, raw fibers and organic textures will create an environment from sustainable choices. Plenty of plants also can create a welcoming environment that helps you surround yourself with positive energy and the items you love.

Light it up

One of the easiest ways to transform a room’s vibe is to utilize lighting. Change draperies to allow more natural light to shine in. Consider additional windows or skylights if yours is a particularly dark home. If you desire to create a more vivid or cozy ambiance, use a combination of accent, task and supplemental lighting in the space so there are no dim corners.

Revamping a living room doesn’t have to be difficult. With an idea in place and some professional touches, an entirely new vibe can be achieved.

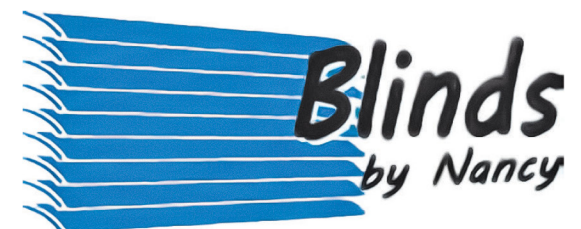
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How to create an outdoor living retreat

Al fresco entertaining has taken off in recent years. It's much more common today to find homeowners who want to extend living spaces to the outdoors in meaningful ways that go beyond a few lawn chairs and a stand-alone grill. Dream backyard living rooms mirror similar spaces indoors and contain features like cozy corners, lush furniture and televisions or movie projectors. Plus, they often abut additional outdoor luxuries like fully functional kitchens.

Homeowners have various options when designing outdoor living spaces. Above all else, spaces should be created with the goal of encouraging people to get together. Here are some ideas.

Poolside retreat

Homeowners with pools and other water features likely want this area to be the star of the entertaining space. Furniture will be more of the lounging variety, with comfortable chaises and spots to catch the sun. If a swim-up bar isn't possible, a rolling bar cart can be stocked with essentials for cocktails or mocktails for the kids. Furniture near the pool will be exposed to a lot of sun, so look for durable, sun-resistant fabrics.

Fireside nook

Gathering around an outdoor fireplace or fire pit is a treat when

the weather cools down. Mirror the look of the same setup indoors by arranging outdoor sofas so they flank the fireplace. Add some ottomans or side tables for stowing mulled cider or hot chocolate. A mantel above the fireplace can hold pots of greenery or candles that add to the ambiance.

Consider a custom banquette

Unused corners on a patio or rooftop retreat can utilize a custom-made banquette that provides the

functionality of a sofa sectional outdoors. Have a contractor design it to the exact specifications of the area, and add a rug to ground the space.

Vary the flooring

Depending on the entertaining space, a balance of soft grass, pavers or other hardscape will be necessary. Certain areas will need to be hard enough for chairs and other furniture, particularly for those who are including an outdoor dining table in the design.



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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

Spring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn. In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their lawns.

particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this important detail.

Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

- **Scarify the lawn.** Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts, including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarifying before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarifying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

- **Work with a landscaping professional.** Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity,

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Features to consider for a *relaxation-themed* bathroom remodel

Homeowners often view their homes as a respite from what goes on outside their doors. Turning a home into a residents-only retreat can ensure everyone looks forward to walking through the front door at the end of the day.

One of the more popular ways to turn a home into one's own personal retreat is to upgrade the bathroom. A renovated bathroom can completely transform how individuals feel about their homes. The following are some features to consider when remodeling a bathroom with relaxation in mind.

- **Open shower:** An open shower is a visually stunning addition to any bathroom. Such showers give

a bathroom a more open look, thanks in part to the fact that these modern features do not feature a door or require the use of a shower curtain. The result is a clean look that many people associate with a luxury hotel. When speaking with a contractor about an open shower install, homeowners can ask about a half-wall to safeguard against water splashing out of the shower. In addition, a heat lamp can help ensure residents stay warm until they're ready to leave the bathroom.

- **Heated features:** Additional features to keep everyone calm and warm can be considered when upgrading the bathroom. Radiant flooring can ensure everyone's toes



remain toasty, and the installation of such a feature can eliminate the need for floor mats and bath mats that some homeowners may not like. Commit further to the heat theme with a heated towel rack, which is another feature associated with luxury hotels that can be just as enjoyable at home.

- **Soaking tub:** An open shower creates an instant feeling of luxury,

but few things are more suggestive of relaxation than a soaking tub. A long day at school or the office or a day when winter winds are howling outside is made much better with a good a soak. The National Kitchen & Bath Association notes that luxury bathrooms featuring soaking tubs are wildly popular, and that vaunted status is undoubtedly due to the relaxing benefits of a good soak.

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Turn your bedroom into a *relaxing retreat*

Bedrooms are more than places to lay our heads at the end of the day. Bedrooms serve different functions, and not all are conducive to relaxation.

People who use their bedrooms as a work space may find they're compromising their well-being by introducing activities into the bedroom. The Sleep Foundation says having an office in the bedroom blurs the lines between work and personal life, which can have serious effects on sleep. Rather, people should be looking to turn their bedrooms into relaxing retreats that offer a respite from the outside world.

- **Remove blue-light emitting devices.** Computers, tablets, smartphones, and other electronic devices emit blue light, which can compromise natural melatonin production in the body that contributes to sleep. Such devices should not be used at night in the bedroom.

- **Use a neutral color palette.** Neutral color palettes evoke a spa feeling. Walls can be painted white,

beige or a light shade of gray. This can help the room feel calming and welcoming.

- **Declutter the room.** A sense of calm can be achieved simply by removing excess clutter. There is some evidence that the brain is more calm near an empty dresser, desk or clothes hamper. Therefore, removing excessive items from the room is a first step to making a nice retreat.

- **Add soft lighting.** Adjust the intensity and the color of the lighting in the bedroom. It should be subtle and warming. Dimmers enable homeowners to adjust lighting as needed.

- **Install an electric fireplace.** There is something to be said for the relaxing effects of gazing into the flames of a fire. A crackling (faux-wood) fire is an added layer of indulgence in a bedroom.

- **Add an area rug.** Even in rooms with carpeting, an area rug under the bed can further define the perimeter of the bed and add extra plushness.

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How to recognize when it's time to replace your windows



Windows are a major component of a home. Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average life span of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years. Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill, and this is not a do-it-yourself project. There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines.

- **Difficulty opening and closing windows.** A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it's probably time for something new.

- **There's apparent window damage.** Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

- **Drafts in the window are common.** If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

- **Dated windows are present in the home.** Older windows may pose safety hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

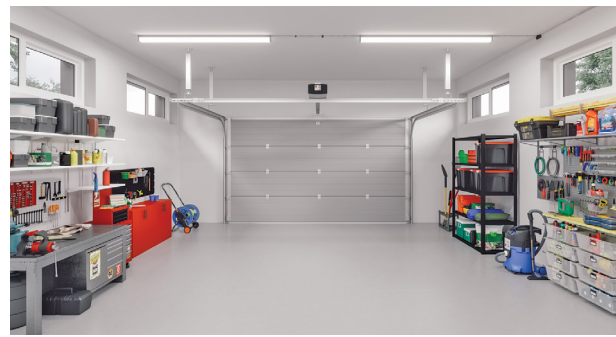
- **Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily.** Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

Factors to consider when mulling a garage renovation

Garages may rank below kitchens and bathrooms in the home renovation pecking order, but these unsung heroes of suburban dwellings deserve their day in the sun. It's easy for garages to become convenient, if crowded and disorganized, storage spaces, but scores of homeowners are embracing the idea that renovated garages can serve a more functional purpose.

Prior to beginning a garage renovation, homeowners can consider a host of factors that will guide the direction of the project and ultimately produce a more functional space.

- **Appeal:** Though many homeowners want to ensure their homes are amenable to their own lifestyles without worrying about the effects a given project might have on resale value, it's best that they do not completely ignore the



latter variable. A 2019 analysis from the National Association of Home Builders found that 65 percent of newly constructed homes included two-car garages. That suggests a traditional two-car garage remains widely appealing. However, it's worth noting that the NAHB analysis was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when fewer people were working from home. Now that more people work from home, some may see a garage converted into a home office space as more functional. Homeowners can speak with a real estate agent to learn more about local buyers' preferences before beginning a renovation project.

- **Function of the space:** It's important to consider why you want to renovate the garage. Is it to build a designated home office space? A fully outfitted



home gym? A home theater? An extra bedroom? An in-laws suite? Each of these options are popular reasons to renovate a garage, and each may require a different approach during the project. The desired function also may affect the cost, so it's best to identify precisely what the room will be used for post-renovation.

- **The existing space:** When mulling a garage renovation, contact a local garage conversion expert to audit the space. Such a professional can assess the existing space and determine what will need to be done beyond the design of the room. Will additional electrical outlets need to be installed? Will the room require additional ventilation? Will a new doorway need to be created to allow for easier access? These are questions a qualified expert can answer.



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Warning signs of electrical problems



Homeowners know that owning a home provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Home ownership also can increase the chances individuals view their homes as a sanctuary where they can relax and enjoy creature comforts they've personally chosen.

The comfort people feel inside their homes can be compromised when they begin to suspect certain safety issues, including electrical problems. The Electrical Safety Foundation estimates that home electrical fires account for roughly 51,000 fires and 500 deaths each year. Electrical problems will not always cause home fires, but it's still wise for homeowners to learn the potential warning signs that something is amiss with their home electrical systems.

• **Flickering lights:** Flickering lights are more than a mere nuisance. Bulbs sometimes flicker because they become loose, which can be remedied by turning the fixture off, waiting for the bulb to cool down to the touch and then tightening it. However, if the bulb was already

tight when it was flickering, then the ESFI warns this could be a sign of an overloaded circuit. The tech experts at CNET advise homeowners to contact a certified electrician if they suspect their home electrical circuit is overloaded.

• **Frequently tripped circuits:** In a day and age when people rely so heavily on electronic devices like routers, desktop computers, tablets, smartphones, and more, a tripped circuit that cuts power to a home can be a major nuisance. But frequently tripped circuits indicate the presence of an electrical problem that's greater than a suddenly shut down computer or disconnected router. Tripping is actually a safety net that shuts down the electrical current of a home in order to let homeowners know something is wrong with their electrical system. Frequently tripped circuits should be brought to the attention of a licensed electrician, who can identify what's causing the system to alert homeowners something is amiss.

• **Warm or discolored wall plates:** It may not be common practice to touch wall plates, but the ESFI notes this can be a good way to determine if a home is having electrical issues. Discoloration on the wall plates should be enough to draw homeowners' attention. Some wall plates may even appear to be melting. Each of these issues could be a byproduct of various problems, including damaged wiring. A certified electrician can determine what's behind warm and/or discolored wall plates.

• **Burning odor emanating from outlets:** The unpleasantness of this warning sign of electrical problems is enough to compel an immediate investigation. Homeowners who detect a burning odor in their homes but aren't sure where it's coming from are urged to inspect their wall outlets.



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Symptoms of plumbing problems

The drip of a faucet, the bang of pipes and the visible signs of a leak under the sink are some notable indicators of plumbing problems. Other, potentially serious issues may not be so evident. How can homeowners tell if they have potential plumbing problems? The following are some sights and sounds that indicate it is time to call in a plumber.

- **Banging or clanking:** Plumbers refer to these noises as water hammer. This is when a rush of water forces through the pipe and bumps into a closed valve, producing a metallic noise. Something is in the pipe that is restricting water flow. Over time, the flow of water meeting an obstacle could loosen pipe joints as the water tries to find an easier workaround.

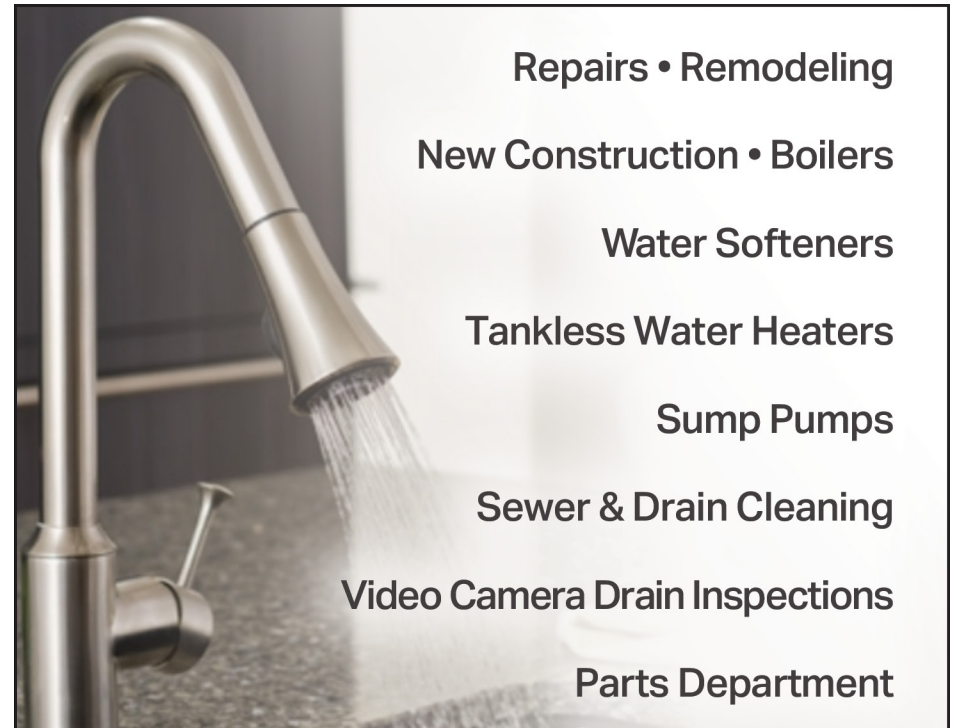
- **Pipe discoloration:** If there is any sign of discoloration on pipes, particularly rust, it could be a symptom of a dripping sink or drain

line that is slowly leaking. A slow leak can eventually turn into a big mess if left unattended.

- **Sewer smells:** Pipes need traps and vents. Traps are designed to prevent sewer gas from entering the home, while vents channel sewer odor up to the roof. If there are sewer smells, it could mean a trap has dried out or a vent line is cracked, says Family Handyman.

- **Low water pressure:** If you turn on the faucet and the water pressure is poor, it could be the result of a clog or a leak somewhere in the system. Pipes that are improperly sized for a home also can affect pressure.

- **Sluggish drains:** Clearing drains is perhaps the only plumbing problem that homeowners should address themselves. More often than not, drains that fail to drain quickly have a blockage such as hair or other debris. If attempts to clear the drain do not work, it is best to bring in a professional plumber.



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A rundown of 3 popular flooring materials

Even though it's underfoot, flooring can set the tone for how a room or even an entire home is viewed. Perhaps that's one reason why flooring generates such strong opinions when homeowners look to refurbish or replace their floors.

Homeowners now have more choices than ever when considering new flooring for their homes. The following rundown of three popular flooring options can help homeowners as they try to decide which material best suits their homes.

1. Hardwood floors

Hardwood floors might once have been a relatively straightforward option, but homeowners may now choose between solid wood flooring and engineered wood flooring. According to The Home Depot, engineered wood flooring provides the look of solid wood flooring without the high maintenance of such floors. Engineered wood is manmade and created with the use of wood strands, particles, fibers or veneers of wood that are forged together with adhesives. Each engineered wood flooring plank is composed of several layers of plywood or fiberboard with a solid wood veneer on top, which is how it can provide the look of solid wood

flooring. Solid wood flooring planks are made from a single piece of hardwood. Each type of flooring has its pros and cons, and homeowners who prefer hardwood floors are urged to speak with a flooring professional about the features that make these options unique from one another.

2. Laminate floors

Laminate flooring is another engineered flooring product. But unlike engineered wood flooring, laminate flooring does not utilize real wood and many people can recognize that the moment they step on a laminate floor. Flooring is such a vital and heavily trafficked component of a home that it's typically best to leave installation to a qualified professional. However, homeowners who prefer the DIY route should know that laminate flooring is viewed as among the easiest types of flooring for DIYers to install.

3. Vinyl flooring

The experts at Good Housekeeping report that vinyl flooring is the fastest-growing category of flooring. The Home Depot notes that vinyl flooring is made from plastic and usually consists of acrylic, PVC and similar polymers. Luxury vinyl tile is thick and durable, and it's often noted for its likeness to solid wood.



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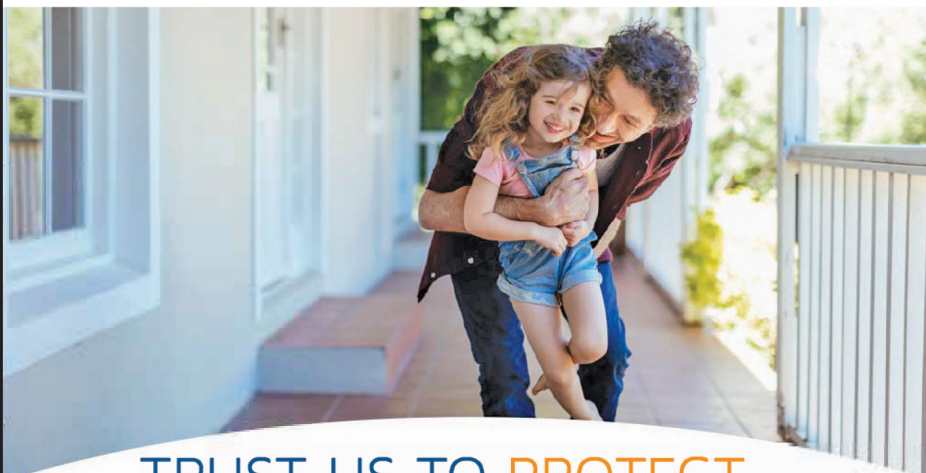
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Choosing the best decking material



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and that notion is as true when renovating a home as it is when studying a piece of art. Therefore, when homeowners are looking for the best building materials for their home remodels — including backyard decks — their own personal preferences may ultimately dictate the direction they go.

Deck boards and railings can be made from a diverse array of materials, including traditional hardwood, plastic and composite materials. Here's a deep look into some of the more popular decking materials so homeowners can make informed decisions when contracting with a decking professional for the build.

Hardwood, softwood or pressure-treated wood

In the not-so-distant past, decks were primarily built using some type of wood. Wood is widely available and fairly cost-effective. However, as anyone with a wood deck knows, wood requires frequent upkeep and it can be susceptible to rotting or insect damage. Wood decks also may splinter and deteriorate when exposed to the elements or pool water. Pressure-treated boards are infused with chemicals to help them endure, but that does not make them impervious to wear. Still, the traditional look of a wood deck remains appealing to many homeowners.

Composite

Composite decking materials are made from a blend of recycled plastic and wood fibers. Since there is so much recycled content, composite decks attract those who are concerned about the environment and sustainability. Composite decking comes in uncapped and capped varieties. The capped version has an extra layer of protective capping made from high-performance polymers, says TimberTech, a decking and outdoor furniture provider. While composite decks may have similar up-front costs to wood, they will require less maintenance over the years, but they must be scrubbed to avoid mildew growth.

Plastic

Decks made of polyvinyl chloride, polypropylene or high density polyethylene (HDPE) are collectively referred to as PVC decks. They are made entirely from environmentally safe plastic with no wood in the mix at all. PVC decks are more durable than composite and can last a lifetime. All PVC decks need is occasional cleaning. A potential disadvantage to PVC is it doesn't always look, sound or feel like wood. Also, complex fastening systems can make the boards move as the temperature changes, resulting in squeaking as people walk on the deck. Generally, PVC is more expensive than wood or composite, but that investment may be worth it for those who never want to worry about deck repair or replacement.

Aluminum

Aluminum may not be as popular as other decking materials, but it is lighter and stronger than wood, composite, and plastic. Aluminum also is resistant to mold, weather and insects, and it can be recycled. An aluminum deck will last for years, which is why it is one of the more costly decking materials.

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Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- **Wobbly underfoot and in hand:** Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter.

Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading.



- **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be repaired, a deck littered with holes may need a full replacement.

- **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.



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How empty nesters can repurpose bedrooms in their homes



It can be bittersweet when adult children decide the time has come to move out of the family home. Parents perhaps get their first trial run of this scenario when their children go off to college or enlist in the military. Rooms are left empty, if only for a certain period of time. Eventually, those rooms will remain empty as adult children move out of the house for good.

Converting a child's bedroom into an area for adults may take some planning. It can be exciting to regain space, but at the same time, it can be disheartening to convert a child's bedroom once and for all. When the time comes and homeowners are emotionally ready to tackle bedroom conversions, these tips can help the process go smoothly.

- **Repurpose the space for them.** Give a childhood bedroom an adult spin without changing too much. If furniture is in good shape, replace the bedding, change the flooring, swap out artwork, and remove "youthful" items like toys, trophies and other collectibles. When the child comes home to visit, he or she will still feel comfortable in the space.

- **Create extra storage.** The bedroom can be transformed into a walk-in closet or dressing space. According to the design experts at Houzz, many clients request this type of dressing room situation. There's a bonus if the layout allows the space to connect to the owner's suite or bathroom. This is a major overhaul, so homeowners should enlist a professional contractor.

- **Make a fitness center.** A bedroom can be turned into a home gym to make working out more convenient. Homeowners should take inventory of equipment they may have and then figure out where existing and new equipment will go. They may need to consult a structural engineer to ensure that the flooring can bear the weight of additional equipment.

- **Create a work space.** One of the best ways to transform adult children's bedrooms is to convert the spaces into home offices. Those who have been setting up "desks" at dining room tables or elsewhere may be excited about the prospects of finally having a private, dedicated space to work from home.



Did You
KNOW?

While home buyers typically take their time to examine each room and space inside and outside a home before making an offer, the real estate experts at Trulia note that two rooms in particular seem to merit the closest inspection among prospective buyers. Kitchens and the bathroom in an owner's suite can dramatically increase the value of a home. Trulia recommends that homeowners consider their neighborhood and identify their target buyers prior to beginning a kitchen or owner's suite renovation, as such variables can provide direction and inspiration when refurbishing these widely valued areas in a home.



Paul L Kruse, Agent

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