A do-it-yourself mentality has taken hold in millions of households across the globe. Popular television channels like HGTV and DIY Network as well as accessible home improvement content on apps like YouTube has inspired many homeowners to tackle renovation projects around their homes. Taking such initiative is admirable, though it also can prove costly if homeowners end up biting off more than they can chew.

Home improvement videos and television shows have a tendency to oversimplify renovation projects, potentially giving homeowners a false sense of confidence in their DIY abilities. A concerted effort on the part of homeowners to determine if it’s best to renovate on their own or hire a professional should always be the first step of any renovation project. No two homeowners are the same, but the following three questions can help homeowners determine if DIY is their best option.

1. **Can I afford to DIY?**

   Professional home improvement projects are costly for a variety of reasons. Materials can be costly, but so are the tools and labor necessary to do the job right. Homeowners may not have the tools necessary to complete complicated projects. Specialty tools can be expensive to purchase or even rent, and the cost of acquiring such tools should be included in any DIY project cost estimates. Labor also factors heavily into professional projects, and for good reason. Talented contractors have unique skills that have been developed and perfected over many years. Those skills can ensure projects are completed quickly and correctly. Labor may seem costly, but such costs may ultimately prove to be a bargain compared to the cost of fixing DIY mistakes. Projects that are minor in scope and don’t require the use of potentially costly specialty tools may be better suited for weekend warriors than more complicated renovations.

2. **Do I have the time?**

   Homeowners must determine how much time they have to complete a project before deciding to do it themselves. No one wants to spend months staring at an unfinished renovation project. Homeowners who are already pressed for time may not be able to complete projects in a timely fashion, which can make homes less comfortable and even less safe.

3. **Can I pull this off?**

   DIY projects can instill homeowners with a sense of pride in their homes, but it’s imperative that homeowners considering the DIY option conduct an honest assessment of their skills. A lack of renovation experience does not necessarily mean a homeowner cannot successfully complete a DIY project. But in such instances, it may be best to start with small, straightforward projects and then gradually move up to bigger, more complicated projects as skills are fine tuned. And homeowners who have never been at their best with a hammer in hand should not be ashamed to leave the work to the professionals.

Television shows and online tutorials can make renovations appear easier than they actually are. Homeowners considering DIY renovations can ask themselves a handful of questions to determine if they’re ready for the challenge of renovating their homes on their own.
Inexpensive Ways To Boost A Home’s Curb Appeal

Curb appeal can go a long way toward making a home more attractive to its inhabitants as well as prospective buyers once the house is put on the market. Improving curb appeal is a goal for many homeowners, and while many projects aimed at making homes more aesthetically appealing can be costly, there are ways for cost-conscious homeowners to improve their properties without breaking the bank.

• Put your green thumb to use. A well-maintained landscape can dramatically improve a home’s curb appeal. Pay attention to the plants, shrubs and trees throughout your property, watering them during periods of little rainfall and trimming them when necessary so your lawn does not look like an overgrown, neglected suburban jungle. Professional landscaping services can help you maintain your property, but even if your budget does not allow for such an expense, you can still make sure your landscape adds to your home’s appeal by keeping a watchful eye on the property and addressing any issues that arise. Maintain your lawn through the colder months of the year as well, making sure no one walks on the grass when frost has settled, as doing so can produce dead spots throughout the lawn.

• Redo your front door. While their eyes may initially be drawn to a well-manicured lawn, prospective buyers will eventually find their way to the front door. If your door is especially old, consider replacing it. If your budget does not allow for such an expense, you can still give your home’s front entrance an entirely new look by installing some inexpensive molding around the door before giving the door a fresh coat of paint. Molding around the front door can make an entrance more impressive, while a new coat of paint can make a home feel warmer and more vibrant.

• Plant flowers. Another inexpensive way to make a home more appealing is to plant some colorful flowers around the property. Line walkways with flowers native to your region, as such plants will last longer than exotic alternatives that may not be capable of adapting to the local climate. In addition to lining walkways, hang window boxes filled with colorful flowers or plants outside naked windows. Doing so can make windows seem larger and add some color to your home’s exterior.

Another creative way to make use of colorful flowers is to place a few planters at the foot of your driveway and painting the numbers of your address on the planters. This can be both effortless and inexpensive, but it can instantly make a home more inviting to prospective buyers.

• Spotlight certain parts of your property. Many homeowners focus on improving the curb appeal of their property during the daytime hours, but you can take steps to make a home more appealing at night as well. Solar spotlights placed around trees and other attractive features in your yard can shed light on those areas of your property you’re most proud of, even after the sun has gone down. Solar spotlights won’t add to your energy bill, as they are powered by the sun, and they can make certain accents on your property stand out at night.

Improving curb appeal may sound like a significant undertaking, but there are many ways budget-conscious homeowners can make their home’s exterior more appealing without going broke.  TFI157346
Pros and Cons Of Open Floor Plans

Open floor plans have evolved to be the floor plan of choice in new homes and current home renovations. Turn on a home renovation show, and you’re likely to see eager homeowners knocking down walls to open the kitchen to the family room. Walls have become anathema to homeowners. There are many supporters of the open floor plan, particularly those who entertain frequently or like to keep an eye on children throughout the house. Although open floor plans are touted, there are plenty of people who have never been enamored with having all of their rooms flowing into one. There also are some people who prefer a different style. For those who are not fans of the open floor plan, blame the excess of the 1980s for their inception. In homes built in the 1960s and 1970s, rooms were compartmentalized and isolated for specific activities. During the 1980s, an era of “bigger is better,” when entertaining was widely popular among homeowners, designers noticed that many homeowners preferred an open floor plan in which rooms merged into one another, creating the illusion of more space. These floor plans also enable people to be in separate rooms and still interact with one another across the space. A home’s floor plan largely depends on the preference of the homeowner. There are many advantages to having an open floor plan versus one that is more compartmentalized. Here is a look at some of the pros and cons.

Pro: Open floor plans can be safer for parents of young children. If the home opens up with the living spaces branching off from the kitchen, parents can keep an eye on children while the parents prepare dinner. It also eliminates the number of places that kids can hide and get into mischief.

Con:Privacy is reduced in a home with few walls. Much in the way that an open floor plan enables children to be seen from every angle, it also enables neighbors to be seen -- and all of your belongings as well. There’s also no place to retreat to if you need a minute to collect yourself when entertaining. You’re on display unless you retreat to the bathroom.

Pro: Entertaining can be easier in a home with an open floor plan because hosts and hostesses are not separated from their guests or holed up in the kitchen the entire time. An open space enables everyone to mingle and conversations to flow.

Con: Those who like to host events without showing guests all of their dirty dishes or secrets of the kitchen may dislike an open floor plan.

Pro: Light can flow effectively through an open space, minimizing dark rooms and reducing the need to install more windows. Light in and of itself can help a home feel more spacious.

Con: While light can flow easily, so can sound. Noises through the house may be amplified. A student doing homework in the dining room may be disturbed by the television blaring in the family room. Talking on the phone or even finding a quiet nook to read a book may be challenging.

Pro: Open floor plans allow for more family time together in one space than a home with a more compartmentalized layout.

Con: People who are collectors or who have a lot of furniture or accent items may find that open floor plans do not work well with this type of design mantra. Pro: Because several rooms run into one another, color choices for walls and furnishings in a home with an open floor plan can be limited and cohesive, making choices easier.

Con: On the flip side, those who want to incorporate different color schemes and eclectic styles may have difficulty deciding on where to “end” rooms or how to co-mingle furniture.
Improve Water Pressure

For those who have turned on a faucet to find a trickle or bathed under something more like a drip sprinkler than a shower, water pressure might be the culprit. Inadequate water pressure can be a nuisance. Remedying it could take a quick fix or a major overhaul. There are many reasons for low water pressure. Diagnosing the problem is the key to fixing it. Here are some causes to consider.

- Rural areas that rely on well water may have less pounds of water pressure than in suburban or city areas.
- Water softeners or filters in homes can reduce water pressure.
- Multi-level homes could experience a drop in water pressure in upstairs bathrooms. That’s because, for every 2.31 feet of vertical climb in a water line, a homeowner will lose a pound of water pressure. Water that originates in the basement and must travel upstairs could decrease by 12 pounds of pressure by the time it arrives at a third-floor bathroom.
- Clogged pipes or fixtures can reduce water pressure. Pipes that are also too small in diameter to meet the house water needs could also be to blame.
- Water restrictors in showerheads and other fixtures can reduce water flow in an effort to conserve the natural resource. Homeowners can insert a gauge at the main water supply of the house to determine the pressure of the water at the source. This will help determine if the problem lies outside of the home or inside.

Some water pressure issues have easy fixes. Simply cleaning the screen on faucets or showerheads can remove debris and improve water flow. Purchasing fixtures that do not additionally restrict water flow can also alleviate the problem. Individuals who live in rural areas or at the end of city water systems may want to consider the addition of a water pressure tank that will provide extra water supply in high-demand situations. While it won’t improve water pressure, it will alleviate water volume problems when in need. A booster pump installed on a system will actually increase water pressure by several pounds. Homeowners may have to contend with fluctuating water pressure, but it may be a small price to pay for extra water pressure.

Some homes have various valves installed in the plumbing system so that a leak or problem can be isolated and turned off. However, the wrong types of valves can impede water pressure. It can be well worth the expense to have a professional plumber to investigate home water pressure issues and recommend solutions. It may be simpler than one thinks.

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Factors To Consider When Planning A Home Office

As technology has made working remotely easier, more and more professionals are working from home. Working from home can help working parents save money on childcare costs and help all workers avoid rush hour traffic jams and the costs of commuting to and from the office. The right working environment is essential for men and women who work from home. An environment that’s conducive to work can help people increase their productivity and make their employers more likely to allow more employees to work from home. Professionals who are new to working from home may find it takes some time before they can create the perfect working environment, but the following are a few factors to consider when planning a home office.

Space
One of the disadvantages to working from home is that remote workers don’t have access to the same level of equipment as in the main office, such as color copiers or scanners. If you want to include even scaled-down versions of such equipment in your office, you will need ample space. In addition, less spacious home offices can feel too tight and enclosed, making workers uncomfortable and less enthusiastic about working every day. Pick a spot in your home that affords room for your equipment and the ability to move around so you don’t feel cramped throughout the workday.

Lighting
Lighting is another factor remote workers must consider when they’re planning their home offices. Natural light can provide an energetic boost and improve your mood, so choose a room in your home that gets lots of sunlight during the day. Many professionals who work remotely do so from the basements of their homes, which can make it difficult to rely on natural light. If the basement is the only location in your home that can fit a home office, look for lighting sources that replicate daylight so you are not working in dark quarters. Speak with your physician about how to arrange lighting to reduce eyestrain caused by staring at a computer.

Connectivity
Connectivity also must be considered when planning a home office. While wireless Internet has made Internet dead zones less problematic, certain areas or rooms in your home may still be touch-and-go with regard to Internet connectivity. Such areas should be avoided when choosing a room for your home office, as it can be difficult to remain productive if your connection to your office’s external server is routinely compromised. Find an area where the wireless connection is always strong.

Distractions
While your home might be empty for much of the day, you don’t want to be distracted when the kids come home from school or when your spouse or roommate arrives home from work. Avoid putting your home office too close to popular hangout areas in your home, such as the kitchen and the living room. Instead, choose a room where you have lots of privacy so you can focus on your work and won’t be routinely interrupted.

Working from home can pay numerous dividends, but professionals who telework must put careful thought into the rooms or areas of their homes where they plan to work. FH158411

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INVEST IN YOUR ROOF

(1S) — If your asphalt shingles are curling or your wooden cedar shake shingles have rotted out, it’s time to look for a new roof. This major home improvement investment requires research and an understanding of roofing material options to make the best selection for your home.

“There’s only one type of roof I know of that is backed by a 50-year warranty and helps you save on homeowner’s insurance, and that’s synthetic slate and shake roofing tiles,” says Mark Clement, host of MyFixItUpLife.com radio show and website. “My own home is 100+ years old, so when it was time to replace our shingles, I researched every option available.

“The DaVinci slate roofing tiles I installed look better than natural slate...”
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- Excessive snow in your area has caused substantial damage to your roof.
- Too often, homeowners wait until their roofs are old and worn out before considering an upgrade.

- You don’t want to worry about wood rot caused by wood shakes and termites.
- Your geographic area has seen an increase in severe weather conditions, (including hail or tornados) that require a stronger roofing material to handle the dramatic weather changes.
- Your existing roof is functional, but has staining that detracts from the look of your home.
- You don’t want to worry about wood rot caused by wood shakes and termites.
- Excessive snow in your area has caused substantial damage to your roof.
- Too often, homeowners wait until their roots are old and worn out before considering an upgrade.

- Some obvious signs that a roof needs to be replaced are:

- Gapung holes and messy leaks
- Washire signs are less obvious.
- Your neighbors have new roofs and you want to maintain the value of your home.
- Your geographic area has seen an increase in severe weather conditions. (Including hail or tornados) that require a stronger roofing material to handle the dramatic weather changes.
- Your existing roof is functional, but has staining that detracts from the look of your home.
- You want to switch to a low-maintenance roof that has a 50-year warranty.
- You don’t want to worry about wood rot caused by wood shakes and termites.
- Excessive snow in your area has caused substantial damage to your roof.
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How To Select The Right Carpeting For Your Home...

Although many people may tout the benefits of hardwood flooring over carpeting, there are plenty of individuals who like to have the soft and luxurious feeling of carpeting underfoot. Selecting the right carpeting for a particular room and purpose can be a bit daunting because of the abundance of available colors and materials.

Choosing the right carpeting for a room comes down to identifying the kind of foot traffic you expect in your home and which carpeting options most suit your needs. Here are some tips to get started.

- Don’t overlook padding. Padding can make the difference in the way carpeting feels and how long it lasts. The thickest or most expensive padding isn’t necessarily the best or the best-suited for your home. However, it is wise to pick a pad that matches the type of carpeting you’re selecting. You may be able to go with a thinner pad in low-traffic rooms and under dense carpeting like berber. In high-traffic rooms, choose thicker, more durable padding. Padding prevents carpet backings and fibers from coming apart over a duration of time, so if you’re spending a lot on the carpet, it pays to invest in a padding that will last the duration of the carpet as well.

- Recognize the type of carpeting that best suits your needs. There are many different types of carpeting, and they won’t all be the perfect match for your home. For example, plush and saxony carpets are better in low-traffic areas. There are other advantages to carpeting as well. It can help insulate rooms both in the summer and winter. It can be easier on feet than a hard floor, and few materials absorb sound better than carpet.

- Hire a good installer. There are many beautiful carpets available, but unless you choose a reliable installer and store, you may end up paying more or receiving subpar service. Poll friends and family members for recommendations to help you narrow down options. Then be sure to have stores price out materials separate from installation so you can make more accurate comparisons. Also, you don’t necessarily need to use an installer provided by the carpet store. You can shop around to find a separate installer or even do the work yourself.

Carpeting can make a fine addition to your home and make it feel more comfortable and inviting. Remember to take your time when selecting carpeting, as your decision will have long-lasting effects.

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Many people decide to upgrade from their apartments or condominiums out of a need for more space. But even after moving into a new home, homeowners may soon begin to outgrow the room they have. Rather than looking for a new home, some homeowners consider expansion. Expanding a living space can be expensive, and a more affordable option may be converting existing basement or garage space into something more livable. Garages already are built on a foundation, have four walls and a roof overhead, so a garage-conversion project is merely a matter of turning this utilitarian area into a living space.

Before beginning the renovation, homeowners should consider the benefits versus the cost of converting the garage. For those who are planning to grow old in a house, a garage conversion can be a worthy investment. But those who intend to sell their homes rather than retire in them may learn that a converted garage can affect home value and make it less desirable at resale. Compare your home to others in the area and see what your neighbors have done. If converted garages are the norm where you live, your own renovation may fit in with others. Always apply for the proper permits and learn the zoning laws to see if a garage conversion is acceptable in your town or city. It’s best to go by the book so that work can be done in a proper manner and be inspected for safety.

Many homeowners hope their garage-conversion projects will make their garages seem like a seamless part of the rest of the house. To do so, you will need to remove evidence the space was once a garage. Slab floor will need to be raised and insulated. Walls also will need to be insulated and finished to improve comfort and soundproofing. Many garages do not have windows, so for the garage to function as a renovated space, windows may need to be added.

One of the biggest transformations will come by way of modifying the garage door entry. Some homeowners prefer to leave the existing door so that the home still has the appearance of a garage from the curb, while others remove the garage door and rebuild the exterior wall so that it has a window or another architectural element. An architect can help suggest design elements that will camouflage the original garage look and make the space seem like it was always part of the main living area of the home. Landscaping work also can minimize the appearance of an old garage. Rather than having the driveway end at the wall of a home, shrubbery, pavers and other techniques can blend the garage renovation into the rest of the yard design.

Transforming a garage into a living space can add several hundred square feet to a home. Hire a reputable contractor and follow the municipal guidelines for modifying the space to ensure the job is done right.

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