



*Spring*

# HOME

## IMPROVEMENT 2

- Why excavation is best left to the professionals

- Turn your bedroom into a relaxing retreat



- How to build a fish pond the right way



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# HOW TO BUILD A FISH POND THE RIGHT WAY

A water feature in the backyard is not only an attractive way to add dimension and visual interest to the entertaining space, it can also be a tranquil, relaxing place to which to retire. A pond filled with marine plants or fish can be a welcome respite in the yard.

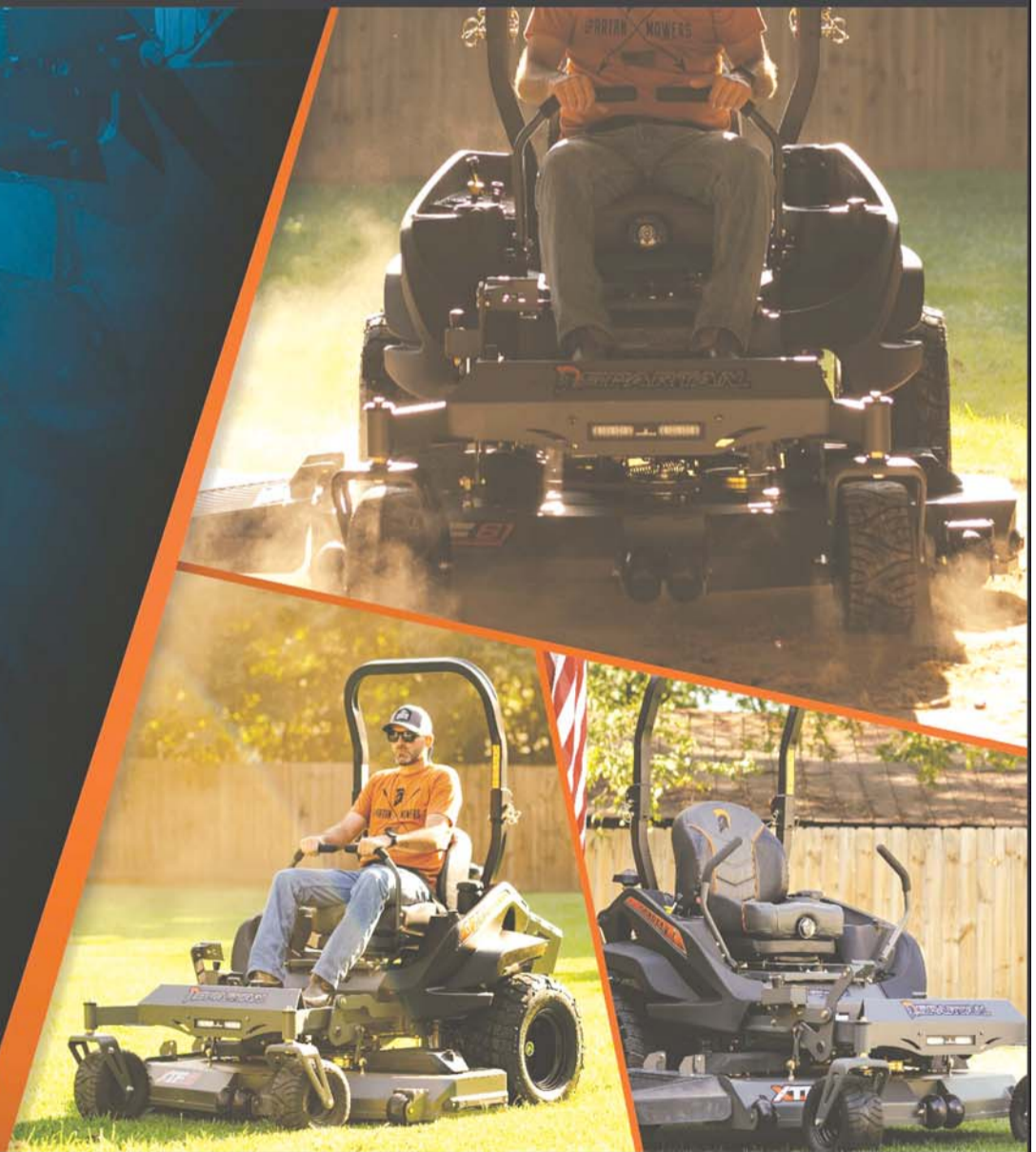
For those who haven't done major excavation or built something similar in the yard before, it pays to become educated before digging the first hole. In order to ensure the fish pond goes in correctly, there are a few things the do-it-yourselfer needs to know.

- Determine size. Many first-time pond builders simply make their ponds too small. If fish or a lot of aquatic plants are planned, be sure to size it large enough to accommodate growth. Err on the larger size -- some dirt can always be added back if it seems too large. A koi pond should be at least four feet deep at its deepest point. One can vary the depths of the pond by creating shelves of dirt or rock.
- Determine location. The best place to put a pond is close to the house so that it can be enjoyed when someone is outdoors or inside. Also take into consideration rain run-off. This may contain chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides that can contaminate pond life. Avoid locating it too close to trees, otherwise a lot of time will be spent cleaning out leaves and other debris. If the pond will be growing only plants, be sure it gets a few hours of steady sun a day. For a pond containing only fish, shade will be adequate.
- Plan on water circulation. Although circulation is not a must, it can help aerate the water and clean out debris, if a filter is used. Plus, moving water is less susceptible to insect larvae growth like that of mosquitoes. Figure a waterfall or water jet into the design and a skimmer that will suck out the water. Be sure the skimmer is positioned so that the level of the pond water meets halfway up the skimmer box. If a waterfall will be used, gradually slope the pond away from the waterfall to direct water toward the skimmer. Check municipal building codes to see if a permit will be needed for the pond

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and the requisite plumbing/electrical work. There may be regulations as to how deeply the power line must be buried and other requirements.

- Purchase the correct liner size. Be sure to purchase the right size liner for the pond. Measure the maximum length and width of the pond. Double the depth of the pond and add it to these measurements. Add a foot or two for overlap and this will give you the pond liner size.

- Pay attention to rocks and gravel. Too much gravel at the bottom of the pond may cause noxious gases to build up that can gradually kill off marine life. Only put about 2 inches of gravel. Also, keep in mind that some rocks are better left out of the pond design. Limestone can affect the pH of the pond water making it very acidic. Try to make the pond look as natural as possible, hiding pipes and electrical switches with plants and other landscaping items.

- Fill and get started. Be sure to include some aquatic plants because those will help create the right mix of nutrients into the water that can feed fish and other plant life. There is also pre-packaged pond bacteria to prime the pond filter. Let the filter run a day or two before adding any fish to ensure that the water condition is right.

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# Why excavation is best left to the professionals

When shopping for a home, buyers often try to envision themselves living in a given property. Images of family gatherings and holidays may instantly come to mind, but prospective homeowners also may begin to envision changes they would make to a property if they were eventually to call it home.

Changing an existing structure or building an entirely new home on an empty plot of land can be exciting. Such changes typically require excavation, which is a complicated process that may be necessary for projects big or small.

#### What is excavation?

Excavation is the process of extracting material from the ground by digging. Earth, rock and other materials may be moved during the excavation process.

#### Can do-it-yourselfers excavate?

Skilled DIYers who have participated in excavation projects in the past may be able to handle a project on their own. However, it's important that homeowners recognize that excavation is about more than just digging in the ground. It's a complicated process that requires the use of specialized tools and equipment. In addition, a strong understanding of the land that will be excavated is required for the project to be safe and go smoothly.

#### Why hire an excavation professional?

Even the most skilled DIYer might be better off hiring an excavation professional than going it alone. That's true for a number of reasons.

- **Liability:** Homeowners who hire a fully licensed and insured professional excavation firm can rest easy knowing that they will not be responsible for



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any damages or injuries that may occur during the project.

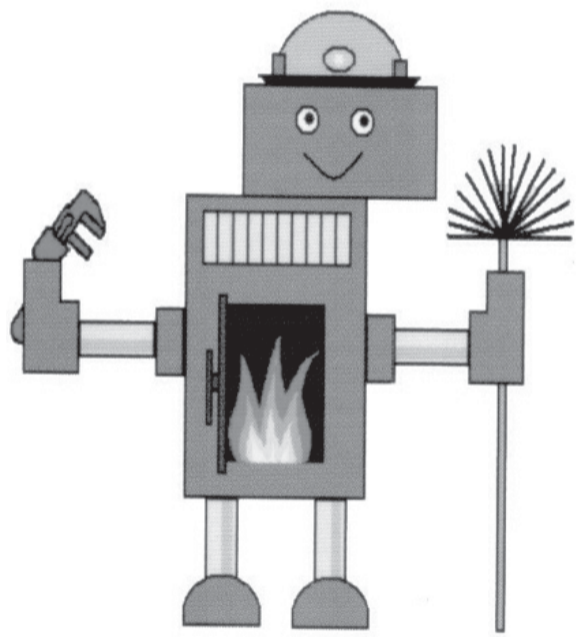
- **Permits/requirements:** A professional excavation firm typically files all the necessary paperwork for work permits or can advise which permits homeowners will need to go forward with the project. In addition, professionals will know the local laws regarding building and excavation. For example, homeowners may be unfamiliar with the concept of lateral support, which refers to landowners' right to have their land physically supported in its natural state by adjoining land and underground structures. This is an important concept to understand during an excavation project, and professionals can advise homeowners if a project they want to undertake will violate lateral support laws.
- **Experience:** Perhaps the best reason to work with excavation professionals is their experience. A lack of excavation experience can result in damage to a homeowner's property and surrounding properties, which can prove costly. DIYers may not know the type of soil they have on their property nor recognize the different types of challenges each type of soil can present during an excavation project. Such knowledge comes with experience and is often invaluable. Skilled DIYers can tackle many home improvement projects on their own. However, the complex nature of excavation makes these types of projects the kind that are best left to skilled professionals. FH218165

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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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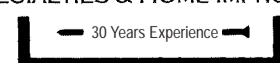


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tiles. The look is so realistic that people pass by and can't tell the difference between them and real slate. They always bet me that these are real slate shingles. I come up a winner every time with these eco-friendly roofing tiles."

As Clement discovered, synthetic roofing tiles have many advantages over asphalt shingles, cement tiles and even real slate. "I appreciate the thickness and realistic look of the synthetic classic slate for our home's style, but I could just have easily chosen the Bellaforte snap-fit synthetic slate," says Clement. "Both are made from 100 percent pure resins and have colors and pigments infused throughout each tile. The idea that I could get a custom color to match my exterior really got my attention."

While the professional contractor chose to install synthetic slate tiles, the cedar shake style also caught his attention. "Testing shows that DaVinci shake roofing tiles last two to four times longer than real cedar shakes," says Clement. "They offer superior impact performance and maintain fire resistance over the entire product life cycle as opposed to their wood counterparts. Given that type of protection for the home, I can't see why anyone would select a real wood product that is subject to damaging weather conditions, insects and rot."

The recyclable synthetic roofing tiles are environmentally-friendly and can be requested in EcoBlend colors that actually help make the home more energy efficient. The award-winning

EcoBlend products have been rated by the Cool Roof Rating Council (CRRC) to reflect sunlight and heat away from the home.

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- Your neighbors have not added a new roof and you want to increase the resale 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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# 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

## Homeowners should not skimp on comforters, sheets, duvet covers, and pillows for their beds.

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.

• 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.

• 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.

• Invest in aromatherapy diffusers. Certain smells can create a relaxing mood. These may be sandalwood, lavender or jasmine. Utilizing their preferred scents, homeowners can employ reed diffusers in their bedrooms to enjoy the aromas of natural oils.

• Used closed storage. Open shelves and visible closet interiors may not hide a mess. Exposure to clutter can contribute to feelings of anxiety. Store items that shouldn't be on display behind closed doors or drawers.

• Bring in luxury linens. Homeowners should not skimp on comforters, sheets, duvet covers, and pillows for their beds. A cozy bed to dive right into can serve as the centerpiece of a bedroom retreat.



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 underfoot.

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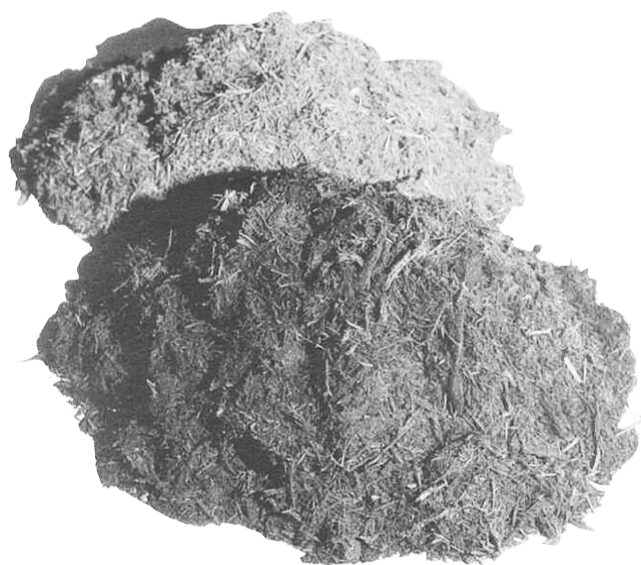
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Turning a bedroom into a relaxing space can help individuals sleep better and reduce anxiety. SH242658

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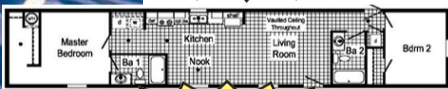
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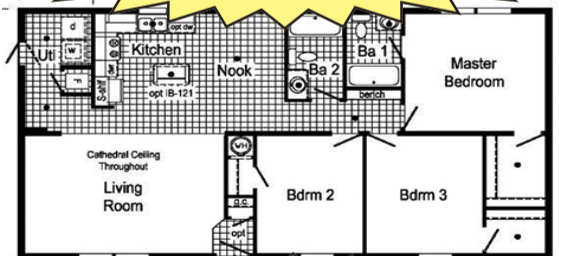
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  - Samuel Mueller Solid Surface
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  - Florida Tile - Wall, Floor, Backsplash
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  - Tarkett Fiberfloor
  - Floamation LVT Glue Down
  - Congoleum Triversa LVT Click
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# Did you know?

Certain home improvement projects are more complex than others. Projects that involve working with gas lines are among the most complicated and risky undertakings, and even seasoned do-it-yourselfers are urged to leave such tasks to certified professionals. According to Angi, the average cost to move a gas line is between \$15 and \$25 per linear foot, and homeowners can expect to pay an additional \$1 to \$10 per linear foot for pipe materials. A natural gas plumber can install, extend and repair natural gas lines and ensure that the project is completed safely, on time and within homeowners' budgets. Angi notes that the average cost to move a gas line is between \$250 and \$750 for the whole project. However, if a buried line must be excavated, that cost could run into the thousands of dollars. SH222678

# Did you know?

It's no secret that a good-looking lawn can entice buyers when selling a home, but homeowners may not realize just how much they can benefit from even the smallest investments of time and money in their home exteriors. According to the Top Agent Insights Q2 2019 Report from HomeLight, low-cost outdoor home improvements to a landscape provide sizable returns on investment. For example, the report found that a \$268 investment in a lawn care service can lead to a \$1,211 increase in home value at resale. Similarly, \$340 worth of fresh mulch can increase home value at resale by \$769. More than 85 percent of real estate professionals recommended other small and simple projects, including removing dirt, grime and cobwebs from a home entrance and trimming trees and shrubs prior to putting a home on the market. GT224830



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# Prevent home electrical fires

A person's home should be a safe haven. Too often, however, there may be dangers lurking in a home that can compromise the safety of residents.

Electrical fires are no joke. The Hartford insurance company says electrical failure or malfunctions account for almost 34,000 home fires per year. The National Fire Protection Association says they can contribute to 440 deaths and \$1.3 billion in direct property damage annually.

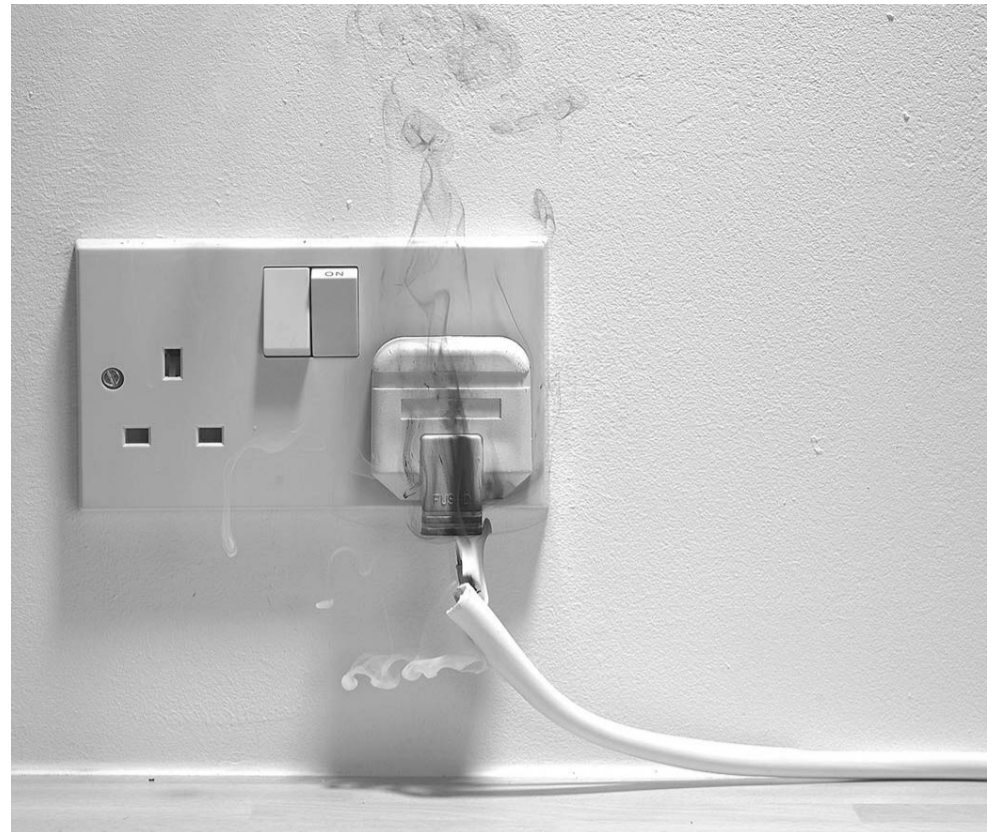
Older homes may be most vulnerable to electrical fires, as such structures were not designed to handle the demands of modern living. The insurance experts at Nationwide say half of all homes in the United States have electrical systems that were installed before garage door openers, high-tech coffee makers, and many computers became must-have items. And the Electrical Safety Foundation International says homes built before 1973 with overloaded electrical systems pose a number of safety threats.

Overloaded circuits are not the only contributor to electrical fires. Damaged wiring characterized by worn, frayed or loose wires can cause fires.

Malfunctioning appliances or those improperly maintained also can create home fires. Another contributor is poorly installed extension cords and power strips, as well as faulty outlets and switches around homes.

Homeowners can take various steps to reduce the risk of electrical fires at home.

- Install arc fault circuit interrupters. AFCIs are special types of circuit breakers that help prevent fires caused by nicked or frayed wiring. An AFCI gets tripped and cuts off power when an electrical problem is detected before a fire can start. In 2022, the National Electric Code started requiring AFCIs in bedrooms, and by 2017 they have been mandated throughout homes.
- Conduct a home electrical inspection. All homes more than 40 years old should be inspected to ensure their electrical systems can handle modern demands, says Nationwide. A qualified electrician can make recommendations regarding replacing breakers and suggest other modifications to improve safety.
- Utilize a monitor. Ting from Whisker Labs monitors a home's electrical



network using a smart plug-in sensor that is designed to detect hazards. The company indicates micro-arcs and sparks that develop are precursors to electrical fires.

- Turn to automatic shut-offs. Homeowners can utilize appliances and additional devices that automatically shut off after a set period of time. This can reduce the risk of overheating.
- Rely on timers or smart devices. Timers and smart home devices can give homeowners control of electrical components like appliances or lights from a remote area. This enables users to turn an appliance on or off to reduce overheating or avoid additional risk factors for electrical fires.
- Don't go DIY. Choosing to work with a professional electrician rather than doing electrical work oneself can help reduce electrical fire risk considerably. Electricians know how to work on electrical systems safely to prevent damage to wires and components, and also safeguard themselves against shock.

Risk for electrical fires at home can be reduced with technology and other strategies. TF245950

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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

**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**

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.

• **Turn it into a craft room.** The bedroom can be converted into a space to explore hobbies and various other interests. A dedicated craft space, a reading nook, a place to store photography equipment, or another function can serve as a useful way to repurpose an empty bedroom. Empty nesters have many possibilities when it comes to converting their children’s old bedrooms into adult spaces. SH242650

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# Low-cost ways to revamp living areas

Home improvement projects require substantial financial investment. But just because a homeowner wants to bring a fresh look indoors doesn't mean he or she has to break the bank along the way.

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend or to make the area more functional for a changing family dynamic. Here are some budget-friendly ideas for breathing new life into living room designs.

- Establish the budget. Homeowners should figure out how many dollars they can designate to a living room makeover before purchasing supplies or hiring out the work. Figure out the scope of the remodel, visit stores or suppliers to price out materials, get estimates from contractors, and then plan for some unforeseen circumstances along the way to determine if this type of renovation is affordable. If not, scale things back until the project more closely aligns with your budget.
- Change the paint color. Lighter and brighter colors are on trend. A can or two of paint can do wonders for updating a space without a large financial commitment. Pair that new paint color with new window coverings and complementary throw pillows to pull the theme together with minimal expense.
- Update the flooring. Tired, outdated carpeting or other flooring can use an overhaul. While solid hardwood flooring may be preferable, there are many types of laminate flooring that mimic the looks of popular wood colors and styles for a fraction of the cost. Plus, many are sold at home improvement retailers and even at warehouse clubs or online for reasonable prices. Laminate flooring also may be a potential DIY job for a skilled homeowner, saving even more money.
- Introduce a fireplace. Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that

popularity waned in the 1970s and 1980s.

Homeowners with chimneys may discover a fireplace was boarded over and the bare bones still exist that can be renovated to bring back character. There also are ventless freestanding units that are quite affordable that can mimic the look of a built-in fireplace.

- Reupholster instead of replace furniture. There's no need to throw away quality furniture if the fabric is the only thing impeding design. New upholstery or even a slipcover can update designs.
  - Conquer clutter. Rather than adding something to the living room, remove clutter to give the room a more airy feel. This can instantly change the look of the room. Use cord covers to tame plugs for electronics and remove unnecessary furniture from the room.
  - Improve lighting. Another easy and often inexpensive fix is to change lighting fixtures, including using brighter, more energy efficient LED bulbs, and to assess lighting needs to eliminate dark corners of rooms that can make the space seem drab.
- Living room spaces in need of an update often can benefit from improvements that go easy on the wallet. SH222677



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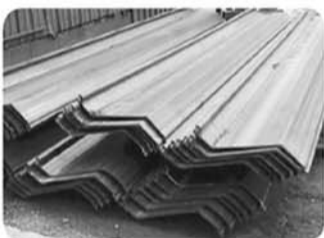
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# Signs of septic system malfunction

Homeowners recognize that their work is never done. Homes require maintenance that runs the gamut from daily tasks like cleaning kitchen countertops to more significant undertakings like replacing roofs. For many homeowners, keeping their homes running smoothly involves tending to septic systems.

Estimates from various sources indicate that roughly one in five homes in the United States has a septic system. Homeowners who live in areas with regional sewage systems may not give much thought to the operation and maintenance of their wastewater and disposal system. But that responsibility typically rests squarely on the shoulders of homeowners whose homes have septic systems. Learning to maintain septic systems so they operate safely and efficiently is essential. Homeowners should know that recognizing signs of septic system malfunction is vital to avoiding potentially costly, messy accidents that can put the health of humans and local wildlife in jeopardy.

### What happens when a septic system malfunctions?

The Washington State Department of Health notes that a malfunctioning septic system is a threat to the health of both humans and animals as well as the environment. When a septic system is malfunctioning, untreated sewage can be released and end up in places where it shouldn't be, such as groundwater, surface water and marine water. That's true even if it's not visible to the naked eye. Humans and animals are in danger when septic systems malfunction because

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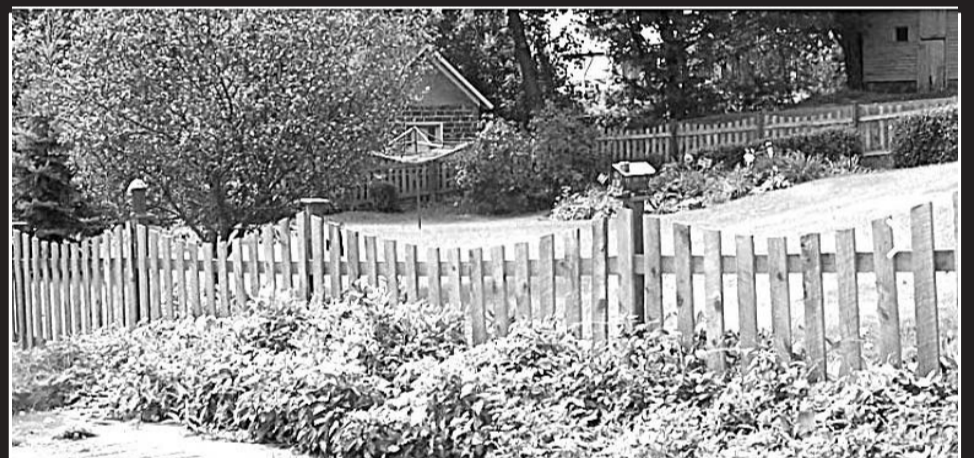
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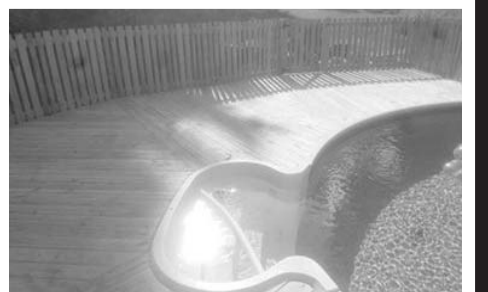
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untreated sewage contains pathogens and other contaminants that can make them sick.

**What are the signs of a malfunctioning septic system?**

The DOH of Washington State notes that properly maintained septic systems should provide reliable service for many years. Part of that maintenance is keeping an eye out for these signs that suggest a system is malfunctioning or failing:

- Water and sewage from toilets, drains and sinks is backing up into the home
- Bathtubs, showers, and sinks drain very slowly
- Gurgling sounds are coming from the plumbing system
- Standing water or damp spots near the septic tank or drain field
- Bad odors around the septic tank or drain field
- Bright green, spongy lush grass over the septic tank or drain field, even during dry weather
- Algal blooms in nearby ponds or lakes
- High levels of nitrates or coliform bacteria in water wells

Homeowners with septic systems should make tending to those systems part of their routine home maintenance. FH218209

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