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Celebrate spring at Franklin's annual May Garden Mart

The Franklin Gardeners Association has been hard at work planning for their annual May Garden Mart, which is held each year on the first weekend of May. This year's festivities fall on Saturday, May 2nd from 9 am to 4 pm and Sunday, May 3rd from

11 am to 4 pm in downtown Franklin's historic Fountain Park. Over 40 vendors from all over the region will gather to share their wares for your garden and outdoor areas, with beautiful baskets of flowers, bedding plants, potted indoor



and outdoor plants, shrubs, trees, bouquets, birdhouses, decor, and a multitude of

items and services to help you create the garden of your dreams!

Gardening tips and suggestions from vendors will make you well informed for the upcoming season. There are also lots of fun things for people of all ages (gardeners and non-gardeners alike). Delicious foods will be offered by several favorite local vendors. A children's activity tent will help engage younger visitors through make-and-

take projects, and face painting will be available again this year by one of the vendors.

Stop by the FGA tent to take a look at the prizes and buy some raffle tickets. Several garden items provided by FGA will be raffled off, as well as dozens of additional items supplied by each of the vendors.

The Franklin Gardeners Association was founded in 2000, and its members

are pleased to celebrate the 25th year of hosting May Garden Mart. This group of local residents aspire to promote personal gardening, and provide many hours of volunteer work to plant and maintain several gardens that beautify the community of Franklin.

The FGA group has several projects they actively participate in throughout the area. In cooperation with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, FGA plants and maintains the flower beds that decorate the Franklin Fire Station. They also maintain the Outdoor Learning Center for the Central Elementary school downtown, where the children can learn the importance of growing vegetables and taking care of plants. Additional projects include the Johnny Appleseed Park on Franklin Avenue, planters at the bike trail, the West Park Garden, the butterfly waystation at the Saltbox, gardens near the 8th Street Bridge, and the flower bed under the "Welcome to Franklin" sign at the base of the 15th street Hill. The FGA Project Beautify with Blossoms, can be seen along Liberty Street during the spring and summer, decorating the businesses with pops of color. FGA also sponsors a 4-H Youth Scholarship each year. In 2024, FGA worked with the Oil City Garden Club to erect a Blue Star memorial sign at the Venango County VA Clinic; this year they are working on a project to add a Gold Star Memorial at the same site to honor all who have served our great nation!

Please join us at this year's May Garden Mart as we welcome the gardening season for 2026. Your participation helps support Franklin Gardeners during their largest fundraiser of the year! For more information, please contact FGA May Mart@gmail.com.

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Put some spring in your cleaning step

Spring is the season of nature's rebirth. Trees and flowers begin to bloom anew each spring, and young animals can be seen frolicking with their parents. During a time when it seems like the entire planet gets a refresh, many homeowners turn their thoughts to refreshing their homes as well.

As the days lengthen and the weather warms, spring cleaning takes center stage. Spring cleaning is more extensive than simply washing away grime, as cleaning a home often offers a psychological reset for the coming months. A clear strategy can make the task of spring cleaning feel less daunting, and these tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen after months spent indoors.

Declutter before cleaning

The rule of thumb when starting on spring cleaning is to combat clutter before cleaning. Trying to clean around clutter is inefficient and may result in throwing in the towel prematurely. It is important to remove as much as possible from each room before you begin cleaning. As homeowners move through each room, they can assess whether they've used items in the last year or whether they serve any functional or aesthetic purposes. If not, they can be trashed or donated.



Move top to bottom

It's important to follow the rules of science when spring cleaning. That means that dust and debris will be affected by gravity. Engaging in a top-down approach will help make cleaning more efficient. Beginning at

the ceiling and working down towards the floors will help people avoid having to clean the same surface twice.

Using a duster or a microfiber cloth, individuals can clear cobwebs from corners and dust from crown molding. Fingerprints will

accumulate near light switches and door handles, so those areas should be wiped down, too.

Homeowners can conduct a thorough cleaning of heating and cooling output and intake vents as they likely have gathered dust over the winter. A down of floor moldings can get to any area near the floor or under furniture that doesn't get frequent cleaning.

Do a kitchen reset

Focusing attention on the kitchen, which tends to be the busiest room in the house, is a wise idea for spring cleaning plans. This is the time for individuals to pull everything out of the refrigerator and pantry and check for expiration dates. Wiping down the shelves means cleaning away any accumulated food drips or spills. Additional areas to consider include behind the refrigerator, inside the dishwasher filter and inside the microwave.

Focus on air quality

It's key to replace the HVAC system filters come springtime, as well as any air purifiers in the home. This will help reduce allergens and ensure that the cooling system will run efficiently when it's time to turn it on.

Spring cleaning takes place each year. Prioritizing decluttering and following a systematic path through the home helps people eliminate stress and mess at the same time.

Spring cleaning your kitchen? Here's how to keep bugs out

(StatePoint) With warmer weather here, spring cleaning and hosting season are in full swing. While you prep your home for guests, you may also be seeing an uptick of insect activity.

Unfortunately, insects tend to gather in the same areas of the home where household members and guests do — anywhere there is food. So, rather than let bugs disrupt your spring gatherings, act right away. Doing so is important, as insects reproduce rapidly. In fact, it only takes one week for two fruit flies to multiply to 500 fruit flies!

By using these tips to banish bugs from your kitchen

this spring, you can enjoy the feeling you get when your space is truly clean and guest-ready:

Do a deep clean: In addition to regular kitchen upkeep, be sure to do a deep clean in spring and every time you host. This is a great way to finally tackle those corners, crevices and seldom-addressed surfaces in the fridge, oven and pantry, where pest-attracting food residue and grease can build up.

Catch what you can't clean: A fly trap for indoors is a necessary addition to your kitchen spring cleaning and hosting routine. Traps catches what

you can't clean — working continuously to trap those pesky flies and gnats that linger around sinks, trash cans, and countertops even after you've scrubbed. Simply plug in a flying insect trap near high-traffic areas, such as near party spreads, fruit bowls or garbage, and doors that are opened throughout the day. It attracts and catch fruit flies, gnats, house flies and other flying insects.

Fix leaks: If you have a leak under your kitchen sink, you may unwittingly be creating an inviting habitat for bugs, which are drawn to water sources. Fix the leak so you invite only human

guests to your kitchen and home this spring. Doing so will have the added benefit of preventing water damage and mold.

Seal food tightly: Take a quick look at your pantry to assess your food storage containers. Transfer all items like flour and sugar out of paper packaging and into tightly-sealed jars. Not only will this help keep bugs at bay, but your essential ingredients will stay fresher for improved hosting.

Maintaining a tidy kitchen is just the first step in banishing bugs. Simple additional measures that require very little effort

can help you truly keep host, and enjoy your food the spaces where you prep, clean, fresh and insect-free.

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How trees and plants can change the landscape

Spring is home renovation season, and no area of a home is off limits. That includes home exteriors, particularly in regard to landscaping.

Lawn and garden centers draw crowds on spring weekends, as homeowners are anxious to get out in the yard after spending more time indoors over the winter. Plants and trees provide a simple and unique way to transform the look and feel of a property. As homeowners ponder what can be done to freshen up their landscapes, they can consider these benefits of incorporating new plants and trees into their properties.

Add some pops of color. There's no shortage of colorful plants to add some pops of color to a property. Azaleas, lilacs, pansies, and, of course, rose bushes can add a wide range of colors to a landscape, providing undeniable and awe-inspiring curb appeal when the plants bloom.

Native plants won't compromise their neighbors. When choosing plants for a landscape, it's important to pick those accustomed to the local climate. A non-native plant might be able to withstand local conditions, but it



also might compromise other trees and plants on a property. When choosing new plants and trees for a landscape, work with professionals at a local lawn and garden center to identify native plants

that can handle local weather conditions and do so without putting existing plants on the property in jeopardy.

Trees can add considerable privacy. Homeowners who don't want fencing, or

those whose towns or homeowners' associations won't allow fencing, may look to trees to add the privacy typically provided by fences. The growth rates of trees vary by species, so homeowners who

want instant privacy should look for trees that are already tall and/or fast-growing. Needlepoint holly (which reach an average height of 10 to 15 feet) and sweet viburnum (25 to 30 feet at maturity) are fast-grow-

ing species to consider when planting for privacy. Green giant arborvitae are a popular privacy tree, as they can reach significant heights and widths within a few years of being planted. And while it's always good to consult a lawn and garden center for advice on the compatibility of a given tree with the local climate, green giant arborvitae are known to thrive in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones five through eight, which cover a significant portion of the United States.

Evergreens keep a property green throughout the year. Homeowners who lament the loss of color each fall when their existing trees shed their leaves can keep a property green throughout the winter by choosing evergreen trees for landscapes. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation notes that evergreen trees excel at conserving moisture, which allows them to keep their leaves and maintain that distinct and appealing green color throughout the winter.

Various plants and trees can help homeowners change the look of their landscapes without busting homeowners' budgets.

Cost-effective curb appeal boosters

One shouldn't judge a book by its cover. However, that often is hard to do, particularly when it comes to homes. Curb appeal bears significant influence regarding how a property is perceived. A property that is neat and aesthetically appealing probably will be preferable to one that looks like the homeowners did not maintain it.

Boosting curb appeal is a common focus of sellers before listing a property. But what can those who don't have big budgets for major overhauls do to improve their curb appeal? Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

- Refresh the front door**
Painting the front door can add brightness and improve the look of a home's entryway. Most exterior paint costs between \$30 and \$40 per gallon, so this is undeniably a budget-friendly improvement. If money allows, replacing the door altogether will generate bang for your buck.
- Improve or add landscaping elements**
Landscaping should be de-



signed to highlight the home's best features. It should look symmetrical and feel manicured. If it's not possible to plant new flowers or bushes, simply cleaning up debris and weeds, and trimming existing greenery can make it feel neater and more polished.

Clean up
Power-washing the siding, cement walkways and garage door can create instant impact. It's amazing how much dirt and mildew can reduce the luster of a home.

Cleaning off years of grime can be a fast and inexpensive refresh.

Reseal the driveway
Make sure the driveway is clean and tidy. If it has cracks or discoloration, filling in cracks and applying a new coat of sealer will make a big difference. Homeowners can hire someone to reseal the driveway or do the work on their own.

Add more lighting
Updating front porch lights

and accent lights around the property will cast a more positive glow on a home, both literally and figuratively.

Add a seating area
If space by the front door allows, add a bench or some chairs to create a welcoming seating area. A potted plant or two nearby will help the area seem intentional. Improving curb appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A few easy touches can boost the look of any property.



Debunking common myths about metal roofs

(StatePoint) Shopping for a new roof but unsure if metal is the right material for your home? Metal roofing is tougher, safer and longer-lasting than asphalt, with an expected lifespan of more than 50 years. Additionally, metal roof systems offer energy cost savings, withstand extreme weather, and boost resale value.

Despite these benefits, lingering myths sometimes prevent homeowners from opting for metal roofs. Below are answers to frequently asked questions about metal roofs to help you sort fact from fiction:

- Can you walk on a metal roof?**
Tin roofs that bend, buckle or crumple are a thing of the past. Whether cleaning gutters, picking up storm debris or fetching a lost kite, you can do so on a high-quality metal roof.
- Is metal roofing heavy?**
Metal panel roofing systems are heavy duty, not heavy-weight, giving you the added strength of steel without added weight. The average per-square weight for an asphalt shingle roof is 240-270 pounds, and for slate is 800-1500 pounds. By contrast, a metal roof system is much lighter, coming in at a per-square-weight of only 108 pounds.
- Do metal roofs attract lightning?**
Metal is actually one of the best materials to have if your home were struck by

lightning, working to disperse energy safely through the home's structure rather than allowing it to penetrate or spontaneously ignite or shock. And metal is noncombustible, so if lightning does hit, a metal roof will not catch fire.

Are metal roofs noisy when it rains?
In residential structures, roofing is part of a complete system that includes attic space, the roof deck, underlayment materials that prevent moisture, and interior insulation, all of which absorb sound. When installed properly, a metal roofing system should be as quiet as any other roofing material.

Are metal roofs easily dented by hail?
Metal roofs are well-known for being much more durable than other roofing materials, especially asphalt. In fact, in many areas where extreme weather can occur, metal roofs are the better choice for homes, so much so that many insurance companies offer price breaks for metal roof systems.

Do metal roofs attract heat?
Metal roofs release solar heat much more quickly than asphalt roofs, which absorb heat with their petroleum and granular composition. Metal roofing reduces the heat load of your house, providing up to 30% energy savings.

Do metal roofs impact cell reception?
Metal roofing allows radio signals to pass through with little disruption and is no different in this regard to other common building materials like brick or concrete.

Do metal roofs rust?
Rust occurs when iron reacts with oxygen and water, causing oxidation that deteriorates the metal. That's why metal roofing panels are treated with 11 total layers of anti-corrosive coating that prevent moisture from reaching the metal, ensuring each panel is protected.

Is it time to give your mower a tune-up?

(StatePoint) As the weather starts to turn in early spring, giving your mower a tune-up is a must for performance, safety and efficiency. "Before the spring season truly kicks off, take stock of your mower's maintenance needs. Paying a bit of attention to your machine now will set you up for a smooth and easy cutting season, and extend the life of your mower," says Exmark marketing manager, Lenny Mangnall.



In addition to consulting your owner's manual to determine tasks specific to your model, you can also follow this checklist to make sure

- your mower is in top shape:
1. Change the oil. A healthy engine is a happy engine.
 2. Sharpen or replace blades. Fresh blades cut faster, smoother and cleaner.
 3. Give the mower a deep clean. Use a putty knife to remove caked grass from under the deck.
 4. Replace old fuel. Never use fuel left in the tank from the last season.
 5. Check on the tires. Low tire pressure is a performance issue and a safety hazard.
 6. Inspect engine belts. Check belt tension and wear to help your engine perform at its best.
 7. Replace spark plugs. Fresh spark plugs help your mower start and run smoothly.
- Work smarter, not harder in your yard. Give your mower a little love at the start of the season to help ensure you get reliable performance all spring and summer.

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Top painting trends for 2026 show DIY isn't slowing down

(StatePoint) What are homeowners focusing on right now? Impactful, affordable upgrades. New research highlights that painting remains one of the most popular home improvement projects expected in 2026, driven by tighter budgets and a desire for lasting design.

The survey, from FrogTape brand painter's tape, found that nearly 60% of homeowners are planning interior paint projects in the year ahead, while over one-third expect to refresh exterior surfaces.

"Painting remains a top priority for homeowners because it offers an affordable, high-impact way to transform interior spaces," says Melanie Canning, director of insights for FrogTape. "DIYers are embracing projects that are creative, yet practical, with timeless color palettes and AI-assisted design choices."

Based on the FrogTape research, here's what's ahead:

Affordable upgrades

Despite a tight financial environment, over 45% of people at the time of the survey had undertaken a project in the past month, and the data indicates that this momentum is expected to continue. Nearly half of respondents agreed that tough economic conditions have influenced their 2026 DIY plans — but they still intend to complete projects, just on a tighter budget.

"When budgets tighten, homeowners become more intentional with their time and money," says Canning. "Painting gives DIYers flexibility to work at their own pace, manage costs and see noticeable results."

Timeless over trendy

Homeowners are gravitating toward spaces that feel calm and timeless — 71%



"Painting gives DIYers flexibility to work at their own pace, manage costs and see noticeable results."

Melanie Canning

Director of insights for FrogTape

agreed that they prefer painting projects that are long-lasting and classic.

Despite being fun for the moment, trendy colors, patterns and styles can quickly lose appeal — 44% say they're motivated to repaint because their current space feels outdated. For a classic look, homeowners can opt for neutral walls and add accent colors through accessories like pillows, artwork and candles, which can easily be swapped for different seasons, moods or trends.

"Painting is a simple project in terms of skills, but it requires time and patience. DIYers want to feel like their work is going to pay off for years to come," Canning adds.

Comfort-first colors

DIYers are saying good-

bye to plain, colorless rooms and hello to warm, inviting spaces. According to nearly half (49%) of survey respondents, stark white rooms are their biggest design "ick." For many (45%), their 2026 design outlook is warm and natural, and they plan to lean into earthy tones like beige, taupe, clay, greens and blues. The ultimate goal for 47% of DIYers is to create calm, relaxing spaces through color. Additionally, "comfortcore" is the most popular design style in 2026. Anyone can achieve "comfortcore" with soft textures and calm colors for a cozy ambiance.

Personal preferences aren't the only factor impacting the trend — 65% of respondents are planning their upcoming paint projects for entertaining guests, and 62% agree that

their main goal is to make the space feel more inviting, making comfort a key priority.

Tech & tape

Making home update decisions can be difficult, but modern technologies can help. More than half of people reported using AI to assist with home improvement projects in some capacity, from previewing paint colors to assisting with design decisions and identifying paint trends.

However, even in the age of AI, traditional tools, like painter's tape, remain irreplaceable. Ninety percent of people have used or plan to use painter's tape on recent painting projects. The most common surfaces they tape include trim and baseboards (74%), doors and windows (65%), edges (58%) and walls (49%).

From cozy, comfort-first color palettes to practical room refreshes and AI-powered planning tools, this year, DIYers are making meaningful updates that feel both intentional and attainable.



Repurpose rooms and breathe new life into a home

Homeowners do not need to get hung up on room labels as they explore ways to reinvent their spaces. Just because a formal dining room doesn't mean the area has to remain that way.

Repurposing rooms in a home comes down to aligning the space a person has with their lifestyle needs. Here are a few ways to rethink interior spaces and make a switch to improve utility.

Identify unused or under-used rooms. Take note of spaces that are cleaned but rarely used. For many people, this is a dining room or a guest suite. Either of these rooms can be transformed into something new.

Invest in multipurpose furniture. Even people short on space can transform their homes. Replacing a traditional bed with a Murphy bed or a daybed can make a room more suitable for a home office or yoga studio, but still provide a space for the occasional houseguest to sleep. A pull-down shelf desk in a bedroom or even a walk-in closet can turn an area into a compact home workstation.

Claim dead space. The area under the stairs or another small spot often is used to collect junk. Instead, it can be turned into a built-in wine rack, a reading nook for kids or even a pet sanctuary with just a few modifications. Analyze areas around the home that seem like they don't serve a purpose, and then figure out

a way to make them more functional.

Establish room zones. Some people simply cannot transform an entire room into something else. Visual partitioning makes it possible to create rooms within rooms. An area rug can be used to define a border of a space. Open bookshelves can serve as a wall to separate a sleeping area from a lounging spot. Lighting can add dimension to areas in a space. A pendant light over a crafting or work table can be used to define the space.

Look at utility areas. Unless you are a do-it-yourselfer or have a hobby that takes up much of the garage or basement, utility areas are major spots in a home to consider repurposing. A garage can be turned into a home gym, kids' play area or even a hobby shop. Modular flooring and insulated walls can make the room comfortable. Attic lofts are the ultimate quiet zones, and can be serene spots for reading, meditating or doing homework. An unfinished basement can be converted into a finished space to serve many different purposes. From media rooms to a teen lounge to a hobby cave, the opportunities are endless.

A good rule of thumb before converting any room is to give it a test run. Move in a piece of furniture and test how it works with its intended function. Assess lighting, noise and foot traffic for a week, and then move ahead with changes if the result is positive.

Surviving lengthy home renovations



Renovations can transform homes into spaces that mirror homeowners' dreams. Regardless of the scope of a project, a home renovation will involve some level of disruption to residents' daily lives. Lengthy, more involved projects may impact daily life considerably.

Renovation timelines vary depending on the scale of the project. Painting may take a week or two, while a kitchen or bathroom remodel may last anywhere from four to 16 weeks. Larger projects like adding a room can take between three and six months, say the experts at John Merrill Homes. Projects also often take longer than expected, as surprises may be in store once homeowners begin peeling back the layers in homes. Homeowners about to embark on lengthy renovation projects can embrace these tips to come through on the other side relatively unscathed.

Choose your timing

The timing of a renovation may have to coincide with contractor availability or having the budget to fund the project. But homeowners should consider life circumstances and season before starting a project. You might not have the energy to take on a project right before the holidays. If kids play on sports teams that require a lot of travel, it might be better to wait until the season winds down. Figure out what you can realistically take on to re-

duce the likelihood that you'll feel overwhelmed.

Plan accordingly

Creating and sticking to a daily schedule, and knowing what is happening each day, can keep a project on track. It also allows you to determine which days will be the most chaotic. Demolition days can be noisy and messy, and maybe those are days when you plan to be away from the house for a few hours.

Store items out of harm's way

Invest in a storage solution for the duration of the renovation. Decluttering and removing items before the project is in full force will make it easier to work and maneuver, and it also means fewer items will need to be cleaned afterwards. Renovations tend to kick up a lot of construction dust, after all.

Designate a safe zone

Establish a room or rooms as work-free areas to which residents can retreat. If multiple rooms are being renovated, you might consider spending time with a family member or friend, or getting a hotel for a short duration until the bulk of the disruption dies down.

Lower your standards

Homecooked meals may be your standard most days of the week, but it's alright to be a bit lax when remodeling

projects begin. Relying on frozen foods or takeout might be necessary for a little while. Remodeling projects can

be disruptive and stressful, but certain strategies can make it easier to get through projects without too much disruption.

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How to stay safe on DIY projects

Home improvement projects can be costly. Depending on the scope of the project, the choice of materials and the skill level involved to see the project through to successful completion, homeowners could be on the hook for thousands of dollars or even more when renovating their homes.

One popular way homeowners look to cut such costs is to do some, if not all, of the work themselves. Indeed, do-it-yourselfers can save a considerable amount of money. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Housing Survey indicate that homeowners can save anywhere from 50 to 80 percent on DIY projects compared to what they might pay for com-

parable work to be performed by a contractor. However, the key there is "comparable." Cost overruns could derail DIY savings rather quickly if homeowners have little renovating skill or experience. But homeowners' wallets aren't the only thing in jeopardy if a DIY project goes awry.

Renovation projects require attention to detail, and that includes an emphasis on safety. Homeowners who are injured on DIY projects may face costly medical bills, while projects that are completed without incident could later pose safety hazards that require work to be redone, which is both expensive and a threat to personal safety in the interim. DIYers need not

be discouraged from taking projects on themselves, but they should heed these tips to stay safe when working on their homes.

Make sure you choose the right ladder. DIYers may spend ample time shopping for drills and other electronic tools and gadgets that are fun to use. But ample time also must be afforded to the type of ladder you intend to use on a project. Estimates from the West Bend Insurance Company indicate that roughly 90,000 people visit the emergency room due to ladder accidents each year. Never use a broken ladder or an aging ladder that's uneven. In addition, do not use a ladder that forces you to reach far away.

If you're leaning while using a ladder, the ladder is either too short for your project or positioned too far away from the wall. The National Home Security Alliance advises DIYers to place their ladder one foot from the wall for every four feet it rises above the ground. Test your ladders for their sturdiness prior to beginning work so you aren't tempted to use a subpar ladder.

Be especially careful with power tools. Power tools can do a lot and they're fun to use. But it's important that DIYers do not let fun distract them from safety. The Power Tool Institute urges power tool users to wear personal protective equipment, including

eye and hearing protection and a dust mask, whenever using power tools. The PTI also advises users to make sure tools are powered down before plugging them in and to inspect the tool before using it. Inspections can confirm that all guards are in place and that tools are up to the task at hand. Much like it's unsafe to overreach on a ladder, overreaching when using power tools increase the risk for mistakes, accidents and injuries.

Avoid electrical work. Complicated electrical work is best left to the professionals. Estimates from the Electrical Safety Foundation International indicate that electrical malfunctions cause more than 50,000 house fires each year.

Such malfunctions can occur for myriad reasons, and a lack of experience working with electrical circuits and breakers could make homes vulnerable to malfunctions and fires. It's also worth noting that homeowners' insurance policies may not cover damage caused by DIY electrical work. So at the very least homeowners should contact their insurance providers to determine if any accidents or injuries caused by DIY electrical work would be covered by their policies.

DIY renovation projects can save homeowners a lot of money, but those savings aren't worth compromising your safety and the safety of your loved ones.

A guide to buying your first home

Buying a home is one of the most significant financial commitments a person can make. Individuals may wonder when is the right time to jump in to the real estate market. The answer may boil down to affordability.

The housing market is continually evolving. Buying a home now is a little bit different than it was even a few years ago, as inventory is starting to recover from a lengthy period with limited

offerings, according to Realtor.com. But even though inventory may have increased, home prices have not come down. The median home price now sits at around \$410,000 in the United States and approximately \$676,335 in Canada, and interests rates hover around 6 percent for a 30-year fixed rate.

Before it's time to sign a contract and get the keys, potential buyers can follow this guide as they navigate buying



a home for the first time. **Know your buying power.**

Before browsing home listings, buyers should conduct a financial audit to see how they stack up. It's worthwhile to sit down with a mortgage broker who can run your numbers. Credit score is a significant variable that will be checked during such consultations. If necessary, identify ways to boost that score in the months before applying for a mortgage.

Follow the 30 percent rule. Rocket Mortgage says the 30 percent rule dictates

that total monthly housing costs, including principal, interest, taxes, and insurance (PITI) should not exceed 30 percent of a borrower's gross monthly income to maintain financial stability.

Budget for the extra costs. Buyers should concern themselves with all of the costs that go into buying a home. In addition to the down payment, closing costs can come in at around 2 to 5 percent of the home's price. An

inspection and appraisal can run around \$1,000. Additional costs may include termite inspection, and other out-of-pocket costs to get the home up to code.

Lower your costs. A rising trend in home buying is a surge in down payment assistance (DPA). Bankrate says DPAs provide eligible individuals, typically first-time or low-to-moderate-income buyers, with assistance that covers costs like down payments and closing fees. These programs may be offered by the government, non-profits or private lenders.

Utilize a reputable inspector. A home may seem like a dream until a person pulls back the curtain on some hidden red flags. It's always worth the expense to have a housing inspector or a trusted contractor walk through the property prior to making an offer to ensure that the home is in good condition.

First-time home buyers must consider a range of variables as they inch closer to making their home ownership dreams a reality.

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What to know before replacing your roof

No two home renovation projects are the same. Some projects are highly detailed undertakings that take months if not years from start to finish, while others can be tackled by skilled do-it-yourselfers over the course of a single weekend. Though each project is different, categorizing renovations as needs or wants can help homeowners determine when the time is right to go forward.

Roof replacement projects typically fall into the “need” category. A decaying roof can jeopardize the safety and security of a home and lead to additional issues, like water damage. It’s unwise to delay roof replacement projects when signs of a decaying roof start to appear. Homeowners who are starting to see such indicators can look to this rundown of roof replacement projects as they begin the

process of replacing their roof.

Cost

Roof replacement costs vary considerably depending on a host of variables. Materials, location and the cost of labor, dimensions of the roof, and even choice of contractor all affect the cost of the project. The home renovation experts at Angi indicate the average roof replacement project costs \$9,500. Asphalt is among the more affordable roofing materials, costing an average of \$1 to \$1.20 per square foot, according to Nerdwallet. Slate roofs will be more expensive, costing anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per square foot.

Life expectancy

Homeowners may blanch at the cost of a

roof replacement project, particularly if they choose a more expensive material. However, it’s important to keep life expectancy in mind when receiving roof estimates. Many homeowners never replace a roof twice, making this a potentially costly but ultimately one-time expense. Though slate roofs are expensive, homeowners may find it reassuring that estimates from various roofing resources indicate slate roofs come with a life expectancy ranging from 50 to 200 years. By contrast, Nerdwallet estimates an asphalt roof lasts around 10 to 20 years, while others suggest such roofs can last as long as 30 years.

Materials

Choice of materials is arguably the most significant decision homeowners will make

when replacing a roof. The experts at This Old House report that materials typically account for 55 to 65 percent of the overall cost of a roof replacement project. Decisions regarding roof materials will be affected by budget, local climate (certain materials are better suited to particular climates than others), aesthetic appeal, and required maintenance. It’s also important that homeowners consider the material warranty of each roofing product. Some materials offer longer warranties than others, which can provide a measure of security to homeowners investing so much in the project.

A roof replacement project is not a renovation that can be delayed when signs the roof is fading start to appear. Homeowners are urged to consider a wide range of variables before committing to a project.

How homeowners can spot foundation issues at home



Home ownership can be a rewarding endeavor and a good investment over time. But homes require consistent upkeep to ensure a property remains safe, a condition of ownership that renters typically do not need to concern themselves with.

Foundation issues are a component of home ownership that can be easy to forget, as such concerns are not nec-

essarily evident in frequently visited areas of a home. A foundation provides structural integrity for the entire home, so addressing damage is essential. The experts at This Old House indicate that some foundation issues can be relatively easy and inexpensive to address. Other issues may not be so simple, especially if they challenge the structural integrity of a home.

Learning to recognize foundation issues can help homeowners sort through small problems and big ones. But what are signs of foundation problems? Consider these potential issues, as noted by This Old House, Robbie Breaux & Team Real Broker, LLC and Bay Crawl Space Foundation Repair.

Cracks in walls: Cracks appearing in foundation

walls, drywall or plaster, especially diagonal or stair-step cracks forming near doorways, windows or corners, might be indicative of foundation movement. If a crack has formed in a living space, something is likely moving below since floors are supported from the foundation upward. Cracks thicker than one-quarter of an inch in foundation walls or home walls can be a problem.

Sagging porches and stoops: Notable sagging of porches or stoops can indicate that a house is sinking or changing faster than other areas.

Separation between door and window frames and walls: Gaps can form around windows and doors if the foundation is shifting. The gaps that form can lead to water and pest infiltration if left untreated, causing even more issues.

Cabinets and countertops separating from walls: Homeowners who notice considerable space forming between cabinets or countertops and the wall indicate that the frame of the home is out

of square. That likely means a foundation is settling or sinking.

Squeaky, bouncy or sagging floors: While these issues in floors may not always result from foundation issues, they often indicate that moisture has invaded the basement or crawl space. That moisture may have gained access through a cracked or compromised foundation.

Leaning or cracked chim-

ney: If a chimney resembles the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it could be a sign of possible foundation issues causing settling or sinking.

Bringing in a professional to assess potential foundation issues is a good idea. While certain foundation problems can be remedied by homeowners themselves, it’s best to rule out more serious issues that may require professional expertise before going the DIY route.

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Unique features for outdoor living spaces

Outdoor living spaces are wildly popular. A 2023 study conducted by Brown Jordan Outdoor Kitchens found that 63 percent of homeowners indicated they would prioritize an outdoor living space if they were to remodel their homes.

Homeowners cite a multitude of motivations regarding their interest in upgrading their outdoor living spaces. The 2024 U.S. Outdoor Trends Study from Houzz Research found that more than half of homeowners who participated in the study (51 percent) want to renovate to improve aesthetics, while 37 percent hoped to enhance entertaining spaces. One-third view renovating outdoor spaces as a great way to extend the living space of their homes. Homeowners who share these motivations and are committed to renovating their outdoor living areas can look to these unique features to fulfill all three goals.

Water fountain: Water fountains can serve as stunning focal points in outdoor living spaces. Outdoor fountains are ideal for anyone hoping to create an outdoor oasis, as few sights and sounds promote a calming atmosphere as effectively as softly flowing water in a cast stone fountain. Fountains also attract birds, which can add to the soothing sounds of a backyard escape.

Shade structure: Gone are the days when homeowners' most accessible option to create shade on patios and decks were umbrellas extending out from the center of outdoor dining tables. Pergolas and gazebos are now available in a wide range of shapes and styles, making these a must-have for homeowners who want to entertain while ensuring guests remain comfortable on hot days. A hardtop gazebo with roof hooks to accommodate fans, lights and even plants can serve as an aesthetically appealing safe haven from summer sun.

Hammock: A hammock is a simple yet unique, functional and affordable feature to consider for an outdoor living space. If the existing landscaping allows, situate a hammock between two tall, sturdy trees. Such a sight can contribute to a welcoming and calming ambiance in an out-



door living space, and provide extra room to lounge and relax beneath the shade of trees.

Game zone: If entertaining is the primary motivation behind an outdoor living space renovation, then designate part of the space for games and activities. A designated bocce court will draw visitors who want to relax and enjoy a little friendly competition away from dining areas and other spaces. A small putting green can allow golfers to work on their short games, and such spaces can offer ample opportunities for fun if homeowners are inclined to host putting contests during backyard barbecues. Whatever game tickles homeowners' fancy, designating a space exclusively for games can up the entertainment value of an outdoor living space.

The popularity of outdoor living spaces remains high. Homeowners hoping to enhance their existing spaces can consider a number of unique features to meet their goals.

Some more ways to create a beautiful, inviting outdoor space

(Family Features) With all the beauty Mother Nature has to offer, a few pops of color or other simple embellishments can help make your yard look superb from the curb.

Whether you're looking to enhance your front yard, backyard, porch or patio space, consider these easy and affordable ways to spruce up your outdoor oasis:

Add mirrors

Just as they do indoors, mirrors can open up small patio spaces and make areas feel larger. Use mirrors made with resin or other waterproof materials so they won't be compromised when exposed to the elements.

Make bold statements

Plant your favorite flowers in a giant, bright red or yellow pot or hang a bright colored swing from a tree. Just a little dab of color can make a statement and brighten the whole space.

Hang it up

Place hanging baskets around the porch to bring punches of color to your outdoor sanctuary. With the freedom to pick and choose your favorite plants and flowers, these baskets

have the added benefit of easy maintenance.

Consider time when planting

If you wish to add color to your landscape, consider the time of day you normally spend in your outdoor space. Early risers may appreciate vibrantly colored foliage that perks with the morning sun. Those who spend time outdoors in the evening hours can incorporate white or lightly colored plants that take on a silvery sheen in the moonlight.

Add a birdbath

These garden favorites come in a variety of styles and colors to fit your unique tastes and budget. Birds of all kinds can find an oasis in their new bath and provide you with a beautiful view.

Throw some pillows

Outdoor pillows are often available in the same fun designs of their indoor counterparts. Add some throw pillows to your outdoor furniture for a chic yet comfortable update.

These subtle changes can help beautify your outdoor spaces and cause onlookers to do a double-take — for the right reasons.

Ready, set, spring: 5 smart early-season yard tips

(Feature Impact) As the days lengthen and warm air has you ready to get your patio furniture out of storage, that means it's time to give your yard a fresh start. With a little planning now, you'll be rewarded with a fuller, greener and easier-to-maintain outdoor space once spring is in full bloom.

1. Start with a clean slate
Winter leaves behind plen-

ty of debris, including fallen branches and matted leaves. Before you start planting, take a walk around your yard and tidy up:

- Rake moisture-trapping twigs and leaves that can cause fungus
 - Remove dead plants or spent annuals from flower beds
 - Sweep or power wash patios and walkways
- 2. Tune up tools**

Digging into yard work only to find rusty shears or a squeaky mower can prolong the task. Instead, ensure your tools are in good working order:

- Sharpen blades on lawn mowers, shears and pruners
- Install fresh string on trimmers and weed eaters
- Replace old fuel or clean air filters on gas-powered tools

3. Assess your lawn

Early spring is ideal for noticing how winter treated your grass. Dethatching and aeration can go a long way toward helping grass absorb nutrients. Set the stage for lush growth once warmer weather arrives by looking for:

- Bare patches that need re-seeding
- Weeds making an early debut
- Compacted soil where water pools instead of soaking in

4. Give plants the right start

Now's the time to prep beds



for new life. Before you plant:

- Loosen soil and mix in compost for nutrients
- Add mulch around perennials
- Plan your planting based on sun and shade patterns

5. Hydrate wisely

Strong roots start with proper hydration. Even before sprigs pop up, early spring can be dry as the sun gets higher. Remember to:

- Water flowerbeds if rainfall has been scarce
- Check irrigation systems

for damage

- Mulch lightly after soil warms to lock in moisture
- Getting your yard ready early in spring isn't about perfection; it's about setting yourself up for outdoor enjoyment all season long.

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