

SPRING

Home Improvement and Real Estate



NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER • FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026 • PAGE C1

Expert advice for first-time homebuyers

By John Koziol
Union Leader Correspondent

First-time homebuyers should follow their heads, not their hearts, and be cautious about online advice, too, experts say.

At Affordable Housing, Education and Development (AHEAD) in Littleton, Director of Operations Samantha Marshall oversees its Homeownership Center, one of only three such centers in New Hampshire approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a housing counseling agency.

"I think the first thing (for first-time homebuyers) is educating yourself about the buying process and where you want to buy," said Marshall.

Homebuyers need to be mindful if their would-be home community is facing an imminent revaluation and/or has committed to a potentially expensive capital project.

Taxes are going up statewide, Marshall observed, and homebuyers must factor in that uptick.

Marshall next recommends that first-time homebuyers get some counseling.

Whether it comes from AHEAD or elsewhere, "We recommend counseling and advice prior to buying a home, period," said Marshall.

She cautions that while potentially useful, artificial intelligence could provide information that is not unbiased.

First-time homebuyers should be leery of being approved for more in financing than they can afford.

"You might qualify for an amount that you can afford, technically," said Marshall. "But your lifestyle might have to change."

First-time homebuyers would do well to go to a HUD counseling center specifically because it is "much different" than a broker, said Marshall.

A HUD counselor would be privy to information about grants and other programs for which a first-time buyer may be eligible.

For example, NH Housing has down-payment assistance that can be combined with similar aid from AHEAD in Coos and Grafton counties, said Marshall.

Homebuyers should know, she said, starting April 1, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston will offer "multiple grants for homebuyers" in each New England state.

"We're just starting to hit the spring market which is when things pick up," said Marshall, although she conceded that while "spring and summer is usually good because there's more inventory," the truth is that "There really isn't a best time" to buy a house.

Sandy Jean, a real-estate adviser with Four Seasons Sotheby International Realty in Bedford, says there is no bad time to buy a house.

"The best investment you'll ever make is to buy a home. I truly feel that," said Jean, a former educator in Bedford with a dozen years'

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JULIE HUSS/UNION LEADER CORRESPONDENT

Lisa Whiteneck of Springlook Farm in Derry shows off various seedlings at her business on Island Pond Road.

Ready, Set, GROW

Derry garden center shares expert tips for a thriving season

By Julie Huss
Union Leader Correspondent

As spring is officially under way and the final frosty remnants of remaining snow melts away, it's time to think about gardening, growing and what's best for this early season.

Whether it's vegetables or florals, experts offer guidance as to what to plant and when.

Lisa Whiteneck of Springlook Farm in Derry is taking on the season at the garden/nursery property at 112 Island Pond Road, preparing for deliveries of perennials, shrubs and trees that will someday grace a front lawn or other landscape in the area.

And as the temperatures get warmer and those snow mounds are almost gone, many people



PROVIDED/SPRINGLOOK FARM

Seedlings are getting their start in a greenhouse at Springlook Farm in Derry.

are getting that "spring fever," Whiteneck said, and she and her business

are ready to help. Whiteneck and her husband, Jim, took over

the former Chakarian Farms' 21-acre garden business in 2018, making

the longstanding nursery their own and naming it Springlook Farm Garden Center Nursery and Florist.

Now every year, it's the onset of spring and warmer days ahead that drive the Springlook contributions to all in the area who love to garden, till the ground and plant their favorites.

On one cool March afternoon, Whiteneck was tending the tiny, delicate sprouts showing themselves amid the dirt in the greenhouse. The minuscule greens including annual varieties like pansies, petunias, marigold, daisies and dahlias, will continue to grow until it's warm enough to place them outdoors.

Starting seedlings indoors is perfect for those tender flowers and

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Spring pests on the prowl: NH expert shows how to keep them out

By Lara Bricker
Special to the Union Leader

Tyler Willis is like a detective as he holds a tiny mirror to peek underneath siding on a house to look for places where pests can sneak inside.

"There's always a mystery to solve," said Willis, 37, the technical director, for MD Weaver Corporation, a pest control company headquartered in Epping. "It's never unsolvable, it's never a cold case."

While many people turn to spring cleaning inside their home, Willis says this is the perfect time to take proactive steps to eliminate damaging pests by taking measures outside of your home.

He begins with the perimeter of the house. The number one thing homeowners can do is keep vegetation away from the house by trimming it back and raking debris away from the foundation.

"The eternal battle that insects fight is a race against the clock not to dry out," he said.

Anything homeowners can do to accelerate an insect drying out, by removing cover by the side of the house, may help control pests

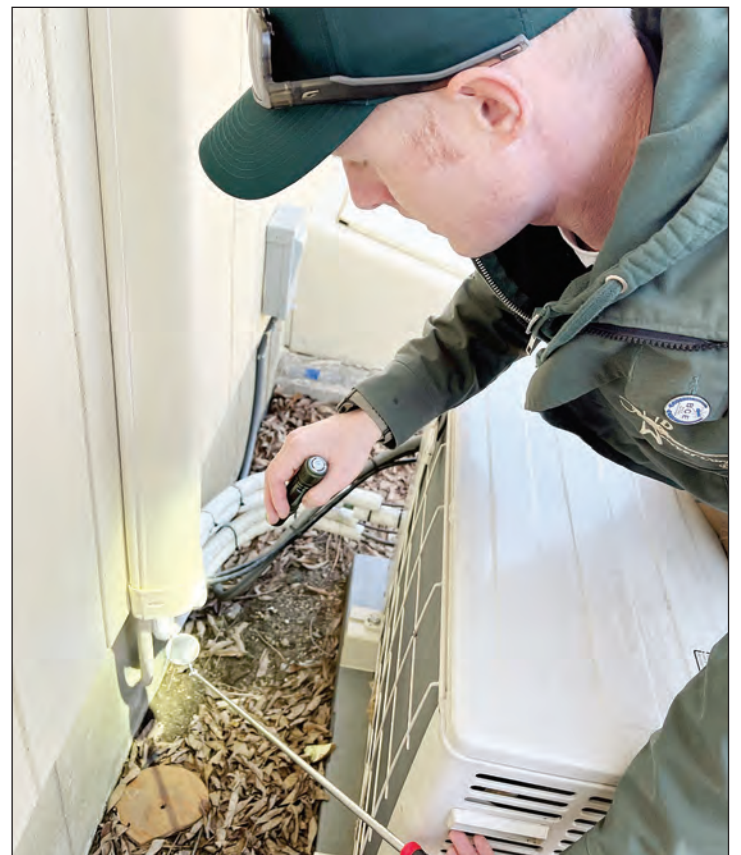
without the additional use of pesticides.

Pavement ants are also common in spring.

"Those are the little, tiny ants that you see in your kitchen," he said. "Luckily, they pretty much come in peace. They mean no harm."

As a pest control professional, Willis prefers ant bait over spraying. "Bait's going to provide you that systemic control over the colony versus just controlling whoever's crossing that threshold," he said. "Also, with an ant bait, you're really reducing your collateral damage on local ecology because you're only targeting that organism."

As far as preventing the ants from getting in the first place, it comes down to "super detailed exclusion work," which means sealing up stress cracks. "Pavement ants are going to look for man-made structures, patio pavers, driveways, slab foundations," he said. "Even a slab foundation will get a stress crack after a while, and they'll exploit that crack and come



LARA BRICKER/SPECIAL TO THE UNION LEADER

Tyler Willis of MD Weaver uses a mirror to look for points of entry that can be sealed to prevent pests from entering a home.

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Garden

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vegetable plants, Whiteneck said.

It also saves money and gets a jump on planting.

Seeds can be started in a seed tray, window box or egg carton with loose, bagged soil filling the small sections and then planted seeds can be placed in a sunny, south facing window.

Fertilizer is also key to giving the seedlings a good start and strong root strength.

Some seeds can get their start outdoors.

“Yes, you can plant outside right now,” Whiteneck said. “Early spring planting is great for cold-weather vegetables and most can handle freezing temperatures at night.”

That includes leafy vegetables like kale, spinach, lettuce and Swiss chard. Also legumes like peas, beans and root vegetables like beets, radish and carrots.

These types like the cooler temperatures.

“They can handle it,” Whiteneck said. “They like this cold weather. Nature takes care of it.”

But many wait until mid-May, or Memorial Day weekend to get their ground start.

After the annual spring raking and cleanup, loosening soil that was compacted over long cold winter months can be done with a rototiller or pitch fork.

Soil should break apart and not be muddy. If too wet, it needs to dry out to prevent any rotting of seeds.

With people getting spring fever, Whiteneck said to watch for how the ground is reacting.

“As long as the ground is pliable,” she said. “It should break apart when it’s pulled up.”

Then it’s adding com-

post to give more nutrition and support to the soil.

“Everyone can grow,” she said, adding anyone can find the perfect garden plan to suit their spaces and favorite plants.

Whiteneck said Springgloom expected its first delivery of perennials and other plants soon, with many perennial favorites of those who love to grow.

Plants like hostas and others are hearty plants and can be divided, Whiteneck said. The plants also appear every year.

And mounds of ground and landscaping accents like mulch, river rock, crushed gravel, stone dust, peastone, compost and loam are already piled up at the Derry nursery and ready for those spring projects.

There are mistakes gardeners make, Whiteneck said.

That includes planting too soon outdoors when temperatures may still bring frost, or not putting the proper plants out at the right times.

And one of the best gardening secrets as the warmer season gets underway?

Just water.

Whether regular sprinkling of seedlings indoors or the gardens are ready outside, keeping the plants and gardens well hydrated is key to a successful growing season.

“Just water, water, water,” Whiteneck said.

And anyone can enjoy what the great outdoors can produce when months are warm.

“Everyone should be planting,” Whiteneck said. “There’s something good about it.”

For more information about the garden center, visit springlookfarm.com.

Your first vegetable garden: Low-effort crops that actually deliver

By Lauren Jarvis-Gibson

The Charlotte Observer

Starting a home garden doesn’t have to be complicated. In fact, some vegetables are incredibly easy to grow, making them perfect for beginners or anyone looking to enjoy outdoor gardening without the stress.

Whether you have a backyard or just a few containers on a patio, choosing the right vegetables can make all the difference between a frustrating experiment and a genuinely rewarding pursuit.

The high-yield, low-maintenance picks

Some of the easiest vegetables to grow include lettuce, spinach, radishes, green beans and zucchini. Each of these crops offers what an analytically minded grower would appreciate: a favorable effort-to-output ratio.

Lettuce is especially beginner-friendly because it grows quickly, doesn’t require much space and can be harvested continuously. That continuous harvest element is worth underscoring — it means ongoing returns from a single planting, not just a one-time payoff.

According to Preen.com, “Unlike head lettuces that take longer to grow, leaf lettuces grow to a harvestable size in a few weeks. That means less time for anything to go wrong. And you can keep cutting new leaves until the heat starts turning them bitter.”

The speed factor here is key: Fewer weeks in the ground means fewer variables that can derail your results.

Spinach is another strong option, thriving in cooler weather and growing fast. For those who want to see near-immediate evidence



ZBYNEK POSPISIL/GETTY

Tomato seedlings offer a low-maintenance, high-reward option for new gardeners.

that their effort is paying off, radishes are one of the quickest crops, often ready in just three to four weeks. That rapid turnaround makes radishes an ideal starter crop — a quick proof of concept before scaling up to more involved vegetables.

Kim Toscano for Southern Living says, “Radishes are grown in the spring and fall, along with lettuces. They grow very quickly, producing a crop in as little as three weeks. Sow seeds every seven to 10 days for a continuous supply. The flavor of radishes is associated with temperature, with cooler weather producing milder radishes.”

Reliable producers that keep delivering

Green beans and zucchini are also top choices for easy gardening. Green

beans are low maintenance and highly productive — the kind of straightforward, dependable performer any methodical planner appreciates.

Zucchini plants are known for producing an abundance of vegetables once they get going — often more than you expect.

If you’re looking for low-effort, high-reward vegetables, cherry tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers are excellent picks. Cherry tomatoes are more forgiving than larger varieties and tend to produce reliably.

Peppers do especially well in warm weather and can thrive in containers, making them a versatile option regardless of your available space.

Cucumbers grow quickly, especially when given a trellis or something to

climb. Vertical growing with a trellis is worth noting because it essentially lets you get more production from less square footage — an efficient use of limited garden real estate.

Bonnie Plants writes, “Cucumbers grow fast and don’t demand a lot of care. Just keep the soil consistently moist with an inch of water per week (more if temperatures sizzle and rain is scarce). If possible, water your cucumbers with a soaker hose or drip irrigation to keep the foliage dry. This helps prevent leaf diseases that can ruin the plant.”

Maximizing limited space with container gardening

For those with limited space, container gardening is a great solution — and

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Vegetables

From Page C2

it's one that opens the door to home-grown produce even if you're working with nothing more than a balcony or small porch.

Herbs like basil, mint and parsley are incredibly easy to grow and add fresh flavor to your meals. These are crops that deliver disproportionate value relative to their size and care requirements.

A small pot of basil, for instance, provides weeks of culinary use from a modest initial investment.

Green onions are another simple option — you can even regrow them from kitchen scraps, which represents about as close to zero-cost gardening as you can get.

Preen also notes, "This is one of the few crops that animal pests generally let alone. In fact, anything in the onion family is good in that regard — leeks, shallots, garlic and chives as well as the more familiar yellow, white or red onion bulbs. Plant onions from little baby bulbs called 'sets' in early spring (or fall in southern climates), and they mature in about three months with very little care."

That pest-resistance factor matters because it removes one of the most unpredictable variables from the equation. When you're evaluating which crops to prioritize, a vegetable that rarely faces pest pressure is simply a more reliable bet.

Carrots also work well in containers, as long as the pot is deep enough to support their growth. This is one detail worth measuring carefully before planting — inadequate depth can undermine the entire effort.

Sunlight, water, soil and spacing

• Start with the right spot.

Most vegetables need at least six to eight hours of sunlight each day. If your space is shadier, stick with crops like lettuce or spinach that can tolerate less light.

• Be careful not to over-water.

This is one of the most common mistakes new gardeners make. Water deeply but less often, keeping the soil damp but not soggy. Overwatering can be just as damaging as underwatering, so restraint is warranted.

• Use good soil.

Healthy soil leads to healthy plants, so opt for a quality potting mix for containers and consider adding compost for extra nutrients. The soil is essentially the foundation everything else depends on — cutting corners here undermines every other effort you make.

• Start small.

Focus on just a few vegetables at first, such as zucchini, green beans, lettuce or cherry tomatoes, so you don't become overwhelmed. Expanding too quickly before you've established a reliable process is a common pitfall.

• Give your plants enough space.

Crowding can lead to poor growth and increase the risk of disease, so always follow spacing guidelines — even if it feels like you're leaving too much room. The temptation to squeeze in more plants is understandable, but the math works against you: Overcrowded plants produce less per plant, not more overall.

43rd New Hampshire Farm, Forest & Garden Expo is May 1-2

The 43rd New Hampshire Farm, Forest & Garden Expo is a hands-on, family-friendly celebration of agriculture, forestry and land stewardship in the Granite State.

The 2026 theme, "From Soil to Sawdust: How New Hampshire Makes Ag Happen," brings the full story to life — showing how New Hampshire's natural resources are transformed into the food we eat, the tools we use and the products that support everyday life.

Head to the expo on Friday, May 1, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday, May 2, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Deerfield Fairgrounds for two full days of live demonstrations, expert-led workshops, running machinery, barnyard animals, lumberjack shows and free horse-drawn wagon rides.

With interactive exhibits and activities designed for all ages, the expo offers something for families, gardeners, landowners, makers and anyone curious about how things are



THOMAS ROY/UNION LEADER

Waylan Witt, 4, of Auburn, checks out the post-and-beam frame and wood mallet from the Timber Framers Guild booth at the New Hampshire Farm, Forest & Garden Expo in Deerfield in 2023.

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Hampshire thriving.

Tickets will be for sale at Gate E: \$10 per person, kids 12 and under get in free.

For more information, visit nhfarmandforestexpo.org.

Homebuyers

experience in real estate.

"I find it exciting to work with first-time buyers" and the opportunity to educate them about the home-buying process.

"First and foremost," she said, "You need to know what you qualify for" in terms of financing.

"You need to speak to a mortgage professional and get preapproved."

If you get pre-approved for \$500,000, don't look at properties that cost \$700,000 because you'll never be happy with the lesser-priced one, said

Jean.

"Understand what your budget is," she said, and speak with a reputable counselor about your options.

Ask people you trust to point you to a counselor, said Jean.

Overall, she said the housing market has "started to get better" but pointed out that the market never stops and is year-round.

"There's always reasons to get into the market and always reasons to sell," said Jean.

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JOHN KOZIOL/UNION LEADER CORRESPONDENT

It's recommended that first-time homebuyers seek advice and counseling before making their important purchase.

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Pests

From Page C1

into your home."

Several types of mice can become unwanted spring guests. "The best way to keep mice out of your house is exactly that. Keep them out of your house. Exclusion is your first line of defense, and it's probably the most important," he said.

Willis uses an expandable mirror to look under the sill on a house's siding by the foundation to find (and later seal) spaces large enough for a mouse to get inside.

"Once they're in wall voids, they're going to travel using electrical lines, plumbing lines, and they have free run of your house," Willis said. "So, finding these spots and excluding them early in the season is critical."

They only need a dime-sized area to get in.

"If you look at a mouse's

skull, it's almost wedge-shaped. If their head will fit, everything else will follow," he said.

Mice incrementally map out their routes around your house, gradually going further as they learn the space. "That mouse is trying to memorize its path so if it has to run in a hurry, it doesn't have to think," he said. "This is a critical time for intervention."

Other common pests that awaken in the spring include wasps, hornets and bees. The queen bee may enter through a tiny crack to wait out winter. "They can cozy up right inside," he said, adding, "Exclusion is hard with them."

While he cannot recommend that customers self-treat, for liability reasons, he says there are proactive measures they can take

such sealing up spaces around the exterior of the house. "Upkeep becomes critical," he said.

Gutter lines are a major pest entry point on homes, including squirrels. Areas with moisture next to your foundation, such as wet leaves or debris, can provide a place for insects to hide out. That combined with electrical lines can create the "perfect storm" for pests.

Keeping trees and branches 18 inches away from your home as well as ensuring no branches touch the roof is another step homeowners can take.

Spring is also the season for stink bugs, which are considered a nuisance pest. They get inside much like bees, or even through an open door. Stink bugs can be cleaned up with a vacuum cleaner or captured under a

cup and released outside.

If you spot pill bugs, which are harmless, under debris next to your house, it's a clue that you could have a moisture issue. Raking debris away from the foundation and side of your home early on can go a long way toward prevention.

Another area to keep an eye on is wood that is wet, such as siding, or around windows, which provides an ideal spot for carpenter ants and termites to get inside. While ants clear out the wood to make a place to live, termites clear out the wood to consume it as food. "Getting damaged wood replaced is the first step in prevention," he said. "As a homeowner, one of the biggest struggles is this lifelong struggle with water and how it can destroy your home."



LARA BRICKER/SPECIAL THE UNION LEADER

Tyler Willis looks for areas where common pests could get inside via exterior piping on a home.

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Planning a home renovation? Start with a realistic budget to avoid surprises

Metro Creative Connection

Homeowners know that the next home renovation project is always right around the corner. And that means finding ways to finance such undertakings.

When planning for renovations, the average homeowner underestimates their project cost by approximately 22%, according to the 2026 Remodeling Impact Report. Establishing a pre-project budget can help avoid such surprises.

Don't over-improve

A common mistake homeowners make is over-improving a home beyond the neighborhood value. A good rule of thumb is to employ the average percentage-of-home-value approach in an effort to

stay within range of what's acceptable. Budget a kitchen renovation or finished basement at 10% to 15% of the home value. A master bedroom will come in at 5% to 10% of home value, while a small bedroom or office falls between 1% and 3% of home value.

These benchmarks are supported by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry and the National Association of Realtors. Historically, a functional, modern kitchen is the top driver of home value, says Remodeling Magazine.

Learn the breakdown

Homeowners should understand that materials, fixtures, appliances and flooring, otherwise known as "hard costs," will eat up 50% to 60% of their

renovation budgets. Labor, permits and design fees will comprise the next largest chunk, typically coming in between 25% and 35%. Homeowners also should factor about 15% to 20% of a budget to a safety net to cover unforeseen expenses, like mold remediation or structural issues.

Get three quotes

It's important for homeowners to get several estimates before establishing a budget. Experts advise working with contractors that offer fixed-price contracts rather than those that list time and materials; otherwise, there may be a mid-project price hike that comes out of the blue.

A person also can ask contractors for a line-item bid so it's possible to see where money can be



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Establishing a pre-project budget can help avoid surprises.

trimmed through different material choices. With a list of desired items in hand, and acceptable substitutions if the cost comes in too high, homeowners can create a budget that works.

Saving versus splurging

It's important for home-

owners to be realistic about their renovations. They can splurge on items that are seen or touched every day, like door handles, cabinet pulls and faucets.

Other items, like lighting fixtures or backsplashes, can be replaced down the road. It may be better to

direct funds to structural elements or those "invisible renovations" like upgrading insulation or smart systems that save on energy costs and improve efficiency.

Keep a 20% cushion

Homeowners can determine the affordability if a proposed project ends up costing 20% more or takes a few months longer. If the answer is no, homeowners should scale back the project budget until they have that financial safety net. Alliant Credit Union says experts strongly recommend adding a 20% contingency cushion to a remodeling budget.

A home remodeling project is a big commitment of time and money. Budgeting correctly ensures that there are few, if any, surprises along the way.

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Joni McNeal tends the memorial aster garden she created behind her home in Portsmouth's Atlantic Heights neighborhood at Portsmouth Pocket Gardens Tour in 2025.

Don't miss these home and garden events

Lakes Region Home Show

The Lakes Region Home Show will return to Belknap Marketplace on April 17-18.

This annual event highlights local businesses, home services and community resources, bringing together exhibitors and visitors from across the region.

The expo runs 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday.

Info: lakesregion.org.

Keene Home Expo

The Keene Home Expo is April 11-12 at Keene Ice Arena.

The event features experts with all the products and services for your home improvements.

The expo, presented by the Home Builders Association of Southwestern NH, is 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday.

Info: homebuildersassocswnh.com.

Pocket Gardens of Portsmouth

The 37th annual Pocket Gardens of Portsmouth Tour is Friday, June 19, from 5 to 8 p.m., and Saturday, June 20, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This year's tour returns to the South End Neighborhood of historic Portsmouth.

More details and ticket sales will be available in the spring.

Info: Find on Facebook.

Affordable design tips to open up a small space

By Cathy Hobbs
Tribune News Service

Designing a small space can be challenging, but with the right approach, even the most compact room can be made to feel open, airy and larger than its size.

The key is to avoid common design pitfalls such as overwhelming a room with too much color, pattern or oversized furniture, and instead focus on timeless design techniques that help maximize flow, light and proportion.

By embracing neutral palettes, thoughtful furniture placement, layered textures and smart lighting, you can transform a small space into one that feels larger and more functional.

Common mistakes

One of the biggest mistakes that one can make especially as it relates to small spaces is to overwhelm it with color and pattern. Neutral color palettes, layered textures and natural materials have stood the test of time because they work in any environment and can evolve with small updates and blend well with nearly any décor. Classic design foundations, solid lighting, balance and proportion will never go out of style.

Tips for making a small room feel bigger

Furniture placement is key. Furniture should enhance not overwhelm a space. Often in small interiors, less is more. It is critical to allow for furniture placement that encourages conversation and flow as well. Be sure not to block pathways or entrances and allow a room to breathe.

Colors that enhance

Neutrals and muted



Neutral colors such as black, white and cream help to make a windowless room feel larger.



A small office is enhanced by small-scale furnishings.

tones such as pastels, off-white and light gray can be by themselves or layered in a space to add depth and interest without closing in a space or making it feel small.

Opt for more subtle

design techniques such as an accent wall over the popular "color drenching" trend.

Accent walls are powerful as far as making a design statement but tend to just add a "pop of color" as

opposed to an overall color experience.

Affordable Ideas

Let there be light. Lighting can be a key to making a small space feel larger. This is not where you will want to skimp. Look for opportunities to infuse purposeful lighting such as table lamps, floor lamps and pendants. An affordable and readily available option is a local big box or hardware store, you will find lots of options — and be sure you leave with the right bulbs!

Furniture selections

Consider including smaller scale items such as stools, benches, ottomans and side tables. These items are often "cash and carry" at retail stores for national brands and often allow you to furnish a space at an approachable cost.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company in New York City (cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (highlandpassivehouse.com). Her practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

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Retro design is making a modern comeback

By Cathy Hobbs
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Retro design is experiencing a major comeback, infusing bold color and pattern with a modern twist.

Instead of monochromatic designs or interiors without patterns, these days, graphics and playful prints and patterns steal the show.

What is retro design style?

Retro design is by definition a “throw back” to a previous period in time. Typically this era is defined by bright, playful prints and bold colors that often blend fashion with home décor.

A popular period for what is often considered to be “retro” design style is typically the 1960s and 1970s and even the 1980s. Textures range from high close to high texture such as

shag, velvet and corduroy.

Mid-Century modern vs. retro design style

Often these two designs are confused. Mid-Century modern design is defined by wood, clean lines, soft color palettes and organic elements. While retro design style is dominated by funky patterns, bold colors and graphic prints.

What colors are retro?

Colors can range from the bright bubble gum pinks, teals and lemon yellow of the 1960s to the warm rich colors of the 1970s such as mustard, orange, olive and brown. The 1980s were dominated by black and white color combinations that often included muted tones such as blush and mauve. When it comes to patterns, retro patterns tend



Oversized, thick-legged coffee tables are a nod to retro interiors when paired with retro side pillows and lighting.

to involve large, oversized florals, psychedelic patterns as well as stripes and geometric shapes.

Top tips: Do and don't

DO introduce a small retro “moment” in a space. **DO** begin with a neutral

foundation.

DO incorporate both color and texture.

DON'T mix too many retro “periods” in one space.

DON'T overwhelm with too much color or texture.

DON'T use too many patterns in a single room.



Various retro styles merge in this living space vignette.

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Budget-friendly upgrades that instantly elevate your home's exterior

Metro Creative Connection

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 designed 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 sid-



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

ing, 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, fill-

ing 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.

Signs it's time to repair or replace your roof

Metro Creative Connection

The exterior components of a home, such as the siding and the roof, help to protect its occupants from the elements. While many roofing materials can last for decades, at some point homeowners will likely have to repair or replace the roof on their home.

Roof wear and tear may not always be so evident, particularly because most homeowners do not make it a point to get on their roofs very often. The first sign of roof damage typically is a leak that is noticeable from the indoors. It may include a browned spot on the ceiling or even pooling water in the attic. Leaks from storm damage or something minor like a water intrusion through a nail hole or from a lost shingle typically can be repaired easily enough. However, additional indicators may necessitate a complete roof overhaul.

Here are some signs a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

- **Sagging roof:** If the roof is sagging, it could be due to excess loads, such as water-damaged shingles



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Your roof protects your home against the elements, so you need to be aware of signs that it needs to be replaced.

or even weakened roof structure. A professional will need to restore the integrity of the roof.

- **Cracking and buckling:** It is likely that shingles will have to be replaced

if there is cracking or if shingles are buckling and warping.

- **Exposed nails:** Exposed nails may rust and contribute to a leaky roof, says Family Handyman. How long the nails were exposed could indicate if the roof can be repaired or if everything should be redone.

- **Lost granules:** Asphalt roofing shingles have small granules on the surface. Over time these granules will slowly degrade and fall off. If there are many granules in gutters or if one can see that portions of the shingles are bare, it is likely time for a new roof.

- **Visible light:** Homeowners who can see light streams coming into the home need roof repair. This is indicative of holes, cracks or spaces in the roof.

- **Growth on the roof:** Mold and mildew on the roof is a sign that the roof needs to be repaired or replaced. Such growths contribute to rot that jeopardizes the integrity of the roof.

A durable roof protects a home from the elements. Various symptoms signal that it is time to repair or replace a roof.

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