Spring 2020
A Special Supplement to

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What to expect during a
bathroom remodel

There are many reasons to renovate a home. Some homeowners purchase fixer-uppers and commit to making major renovations before they even move in, while others may renovate their homes with an eye on resale value. But many homeowners also take on renovation projects to make the homes more livable for themselves.

Bathroom renovations are popular projects. In fact, a 2018 survey from the National Association of Home Builders found that bathroom remodels are the most popular remodeling projects. But just because bathroom remodeling projects are popular doesn’t mean they’re easy to endure. Knowing what to expect during a bathroom remodel can help homeowners get through the renovation process.

Cost

Bathroom remodeling projects can be expensive. According to Remodeling magazine’s “Cost vs. Value 2019” report, a mid-range bathroom remodeling project costs an average of $20,420 in 2019, while an upscale remodel costs just under $64,000. Homeowners should develop budgets for their bathroom renovation projects to determine which type of project they can afford. In addition, setting aside a little extra money for overruns is a wise move that can help homeowners handle any unforeseen expenses that arise during the project.

Mess

The debris generated by bathroom renovation projects is another thing homeowners must prepare for. In addition to preparing for the waste generated by the project, first-time renovators must realize that dust might be a big issue once the project begins. Dust can pose a threat to residents’ overall health, particularly the health of youngsters whose bodies haven’t yet fully developed. As a result, parents of young children may want to schedule renovations during family vacations so their children are exposed to as little dust as possible.

Noise

Few home renovation projects can be undertaken quietly, and bathroom renovations tend to generate a lot of noise. The noise can be difficult to overcome for professionals who work from home full-time, and it also can be hard on parents of young children who still nap and don’t yet go to school. Parents of young children may find it best to delay bathroom renovation projects until their children are school-aged and out of the house for most of the day on weekdays.

Changes

Few renovations go off without a hitch. Once a project begins, contractors often uncover issues that weren’t noticeable to the naked eye. These issues may increase the cost of completing a project or force homeowners to change their plans to make the project stay as close to their budgets as possible. Recognizing that these decisions may have to be made on the fly can help homeowners feel more prepared when unexpected issues arise.

Bathroom renovation projects are worthwhile investments. Knowing what to expect during a bathroom renovation project can help homeowners handle all the twists and turns that may arise.

Essentials for a
bathroom remodel

What began as a utilitarian space for personal sanitation has, in modern times, transformed into one of the most coveted rooms in the house. Bathrooms have become a place to relax and unwind, and new bathrooms are on the tops of many homeowners’ wishlists.

Bathrooms can be as lavish as budgets allow. Wish lists can include everything from luxurious soaking tubs to rainfall showerheads to chaise lounges to televisions or home entertainment systems contained in the space. Those contemplating their own bathroom renovations may draw inspiration from the following features.

• Hot water recirculation system: Few things can be as disappointing as desiring a hot bath or shower only to find that the hot water tank has been drained. The home remodeling company Normandy Remodeling says that water recirculation systems provide on-demand hot water. In such systems, hot water may continuously run through the pipes or there may be a pump underneath a sink. Either way, one needn’t wait for the water to warm up any longer.

• Double undermount sinks: Bathroom time is at a premium, especially when people must prepare and leave the house together. Rather than jockeying for position around a single sink, dual sinks enable more breathing room and time efficiency. Undermount sinks are easy to clean because there is no lip around where the sink meets the vanity, preventing the accumulation of grime and gunk.

• Glass-free shower: Soap scum and water deposits can form on shower doors, even for homeowners who are diligent with cleaning. A sizable shower prevents water spray and affords the ability to forgo glass doors or curtains, thereby cutting down on cleaning and making the room feel more modern.

• Multihead shower: When redoing the shower, account for various shower heads so that the water can cascade across the body more completely. This provides a spa experience at home.

• Touchless faucets and soap dispensers: These aren’t just for public bathrooms anymore. Touchless faucets and dispensers are more sanitary and convenient.

• Separate toilet room: A shared bath almost necessitates this type of set-up. The toilet is housed inside its own small space and closed away from the rest of the bathroom. It’s more private and convenient this way.

• Heated flooring: You need not worry about stepping out of a warm shower onto a cold floor when heated flooring is part of the equation. This option is available in various flooring materials as well. Remodeling a bathroom boils down to certain coveted features that can really set a space apart.
Affordable features to consider when revamping your kitchen

Kitchens are popular gathering spots in many homes. That popularity is reflected in various ways, including how many homeowners choose to remodel their kitchens. A 2019 report from the home renovation and design resource Houzz found that kitchens were the most popular room to renovate in 2018. Homeowners considering kitchen remodels should know that the Houzz report also indicated that spending on kitchen remodels increased by 27 percent in 2018. Homeowners concerned by the cost of remodeling a kitchen should know that there are ways to give kitchens a whole new feel without breaking the bank.

Appliances
Consumer Reports notes that luxury home buyers expect high-end features, including professional ranges and built-in refrigerators that match the surrounding cabinetry. However, many mainstream brands offer “faux pro” features that can equal more expensive alternatives. Consumer Reports even notes that many budget-friendly faux pro appliances outperformed their high-end counterparts in terms of reliability.

Countertops
Counter tops tend to capture the eye’s attention when walking into a kitchen. Outdated and/or damaged countertops grab that attention for all the wrong reasons, while updated countertops made from today’s most popular materials provide that wow factor homeowners seek. If granite is a must-have, Consumer Reports notes that homeowners can save substantial amounts of money by choosing granite from remnants at the stone yard. If marble is your ideal countertop, save money by choosing a domestic product as opposed to one imported from overseas.

Cabinets
Custom-built cabinets may be a dream, but they tend to be a very expensive one. Such cabinets are designed to adhere to the dimensions of the kitchen, and Consumer Reports notes that they can cost tens of thousands of dollars. If that estimate would bust your budget, examine the current layout of the existing cabinets. If the layout is fine but the cabinets need work, you can give them a whole new look by refinishing them. If the cabinets must go, stock units or semi-custom cabinets can provide a new look without busting the budget.

Kitchen remodels can be expensive. But there are many affordable ways to revamp a kitchen.

What is sweating a pipe?

Copper plumbing long has been a standard in home construction. Anyone who has a home with copper pipes should have an understanding of how to make repairs in the case of a leak or if modifications need to be made. “Sweating pipes” is one term homeowners may hear when maintaining their pipes. Sweating a pipe refers to soldering a pipe or the joint. Sweating seals a new joint or mends a fault. When sweating a pipe, it is important to do the job correctly so that a soldered pipe can last for years and years.

PlantItDIY, a source for how-to advice, says that sweating pipes involves some key steps.
• Cut the pipes to the right length using a copper tube cutter or hacksaw.
• Use a file or wire brush to remove burs and smooth down the ends.
• Clean the end of the copper pipe with a cleaning brush until the surface is bright all around. In addition, clean the inside of all fittings.
• Brush plumbing flux on the brushed surfaces and assemble the joint. The how-to resource Hunker says flux is an acidic paste applied to all of the pieces of copper that you want to connect together. The flux paste will draw in the solder after the pipe is heated using a blow torch. The acid in the flux attracts the solder into the seam between the two copper pieces and fills the gap while creating a semi-permanent bond between the pieces.
• To create the seal, move the flame around the joint to heat it evenly. The copper will get shiny, and the flux will melt. When the pipe begins to dull and the flux sizzles and smokes, it is time to apply solder. Touch lead-free plumbing solder to the joint and apply more heat.
• The sweating process is finished when the solder bubbles out of the end of the seam. Let cool and the joint should now be watertight.

Sweating pipes gets easier with practice. DIYers who are nervous about plumbing projects that involve sweating can be reassured there are connection products available that are used in lieu of flux and solder. These push-to-connect fittings seal joints as well.

Individuals can speak with experts at hardware and home improvement stores to find the best products for their needs and skill levels.
Backyard sheds can be useful assets. Sheds can create storage space in the garage, basement or other areas of the house that have become gathering spots for gear typically used outdoors. Sheds are ideal for housing mowers, tools and even pool-care equipment. But they can be put to other uses as well, such as being key spots to engage in hobbies or even as a child’s clubhouse.

Various factors should be considered before building or buying a shed. A storage shed can be a significant investment. Once placed, sheds may remain in their dedicated spots for years to come. That means careful thought should go into the planning process.

1. **Check your local building codes first.** Before you accumulate building materials or order a shed, be sure to know the ins and outs of shed codes. The codes may impact the shed’s placement, construction, the materials used, size, and numerous other factors. It’s much easier to amend plans beforehand than to face the hassle and expense after learning you did things incorrectly.

2. **Choose placement wisely.** Spend several days assessing the yard and thinking about the uses for the shed. If you plan to store pool floats and chemicals inside of the shed, it should be located close enough to the pool to be convenient. Look at the lay of the land. If there is a soggy patch of land that can turn swampy under the shed’s foundation, that is a poor location choice.

3. **Consider the design.** Just because a shed is for storage doesn’t mean aesthetics should be overlooked. Choose a shed style that complements your home. You may also want to match certain architectural features, like arched doorways or dormers. Design also may relate to practicality. For instance, storing a riding mower inside may necessitate dual doors that open widely.

4. **Invest in quality materials.** Spending a little more and using quality materials can ensure it lasts long enough to be cost-effective. The right materials will be resistant to splitting, cracking, decay, and insect damage.

5. **Prepare the site well.** A proper foundation for the shed is almost as important as the shed itself. You cannot just drop the shed on the lawn and leave it, as the shed can sink or structural issues may arise if it is placed on a weak base.

6. **Blend into the environment.** Surround the shed with shrubs or plants so that it blends into the yard and complements the space.

7. **Deck out the interior.** Use every storage tool at your disposal to maximize floor, wall and even rafter space for storage. Plan where items will be kept and customize the storage options around those locations. Sheds can be an asset and improve storage capability in the backyard.
Improve storage at home

Homes are getting bigger, but it seems like people are still lamenting a lack of storage space.

National Public Radio says the average American home has nearly tripled in size during the last 50 years. Despite that, 10 percent of Americans still need to rent off-site storage, according to a report in The New York Times Magazine. Self-storage facilities are one of the fastest-growing commercial real estate segments, and the Self Storage Association says there are more than 50,000 storage facilities in the U.S. alone. The commercial real estate company CBRE, Ltd., says there are roughly 3,000 self-storage facilities across Canada, and 65 to 85 percent of self-storage tenants are residential users.

Improving storage at home can be a cost-effective alternative to renting storage space. With these easy tips, homeowners can maximize space immediately.

Utilize track storage systems
Closets may be plentiful, but if not efficiently utilized, space may still seem lacking. Track closet storage systems often make greater use of closet space than traditional shelf and hanging rod systems. Customizing closets using track systems or other modifications can improve utility of all closets in the house.

Invest in storage beds
Storage beds typically feature cubbies or drawers within a platform-style bed frame. It’s a practical home storage solution, and does not require any building.

Think vertically
Maximize spaces by looking up and down for storage possibilities. Items that are not used frequently, such as seasonal decorations or travel suitcases, can be stored in high spaces. Shelving on walls can go as high as necessary and be put to use in awkward wall areas, such as in corners or under eaves.

Invest in storage benches/ottomans
A stopping area inside the front door replete with a storage bench can house shoes, umbrellas, hats, backpacks, and other items, keeping them tidy and out of sight. In living rooms, look for chests or ottomans that are decorative and functional. Store throw blankets or board games inside.

Recess drawers or shelves
Gain more storage by recessing a chest of drawers into what is called the “knee wall” of homes that have sloped ceilings in attics and upstairs bedrooms. Utilize these short walls in an efficient manner by sinking drawers or shelves into them, without taking up floor space.

Rafter shelving
While in the attic (or a garage), add hanging shelves to rafters or exposed beams to create off-the-floor storage as well. These are just a few of the handy ways to improve the interior storage space in a home.

Did you know?

When planning spring landscapes, homeowners should always group plants with similar water needs together. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, grouping plants with similar water needs together helps to conserve water, which can be an especially useful strategy if or when drought restrictions go into effect in summer. Homeowners also can embrace additional strategies to landscape with water conservation in mind. For example, aerating soil helps to improve water flow to plants’ roots and reduces water runoff, helping to ensure that plants get all of the water they need while reducing the likelihood that homeowners will have to use excessive amounts of water to keep plants healthy. In addition, using low-water-using types of grass can help homeowners who live in areas prone to drought conserve water while still maintaining lush, green lawns.

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Renovating a home to improve its value can be a smart investment. Interior improvements, such as updating kitchens and baths, offer good return on investment, but there are plenty of exterior renovations that can add value to a home and give it that coveted “wow” factor.

**Landscaping**
Abundant and well-planned landscaping can instantly boost curb appeal. According to the landscaping company Lawn Starter, 71 percent of prospective home buyers say a home’s curb appeal is an important factor in their buying decisions. As buyers use the internet to look for their dream homes, there’s no denying a beautifully landscaped, nicely photographed property can entice buyers to click and read more about a house.

**Address insects and minor repairs**
Improving home value may come down to fixing areas of the home that can negatively affect its appeal to buyers. Hire an inspector to look at key components of the house and recommend what needs to be fixed. This way it is discovered before home buyers come in and do their own inspections. Termite infestations, deteriorating roofs and hidden water leaks are some things that might need fixing.

**Improve the entryway**
The front door is the focal point of a home’s exterior. Invest in a new door or paint it a striking color to add appeal. *Remodeling* magazine’s “Cost vs. Value Report 2019” indicates changing an entry door to a steel replacement can offer 74.9 percent ROI. Such a door provides visual appeal and added security — things buyers look for. In addition to the front door, make sure that the entryway has a level walkway, steps that are in good repair, accents that are free from rust or tarnish, and decorative plants.

**Outdoor lighting**
Outdoor lighting can add to the ambiance of a property and serve as a security feature. Utilize different lights, such as a bright light by the entry, uplighting in trees and shrubs for drama, a light-lined path to the door to improve visibility, and motion-detection lights to improve the security of the property.

**Repaint (or reside) the exterior**
A fresh coat of paint or new (or cleaned) siding can instantly give homes a facelift. Neutral, warm and inviting colors tend to have the widest appeal. Adding manufactured stone veneer to the home can offer a 94.9 percent ROI, says *Remodeling*. And after doing the front door and siding, investing in a garage door replacement offers the highest ROI of all exterior projects listed on the “Cost vs. Value Report 2019.” This improvement returns 97.5 percent when selling.

Knowing which improvements add value to a home can help homeowners tailor their efforts to those that are most financially beneficial.
DIY Projects that can conserve energy around the house

Home renovation projects can pay numerous dividends. Renovations can have a positive effect on resale value, make homes more livable for residents and, in some ways, make homes more affordable. Renovation projects that aim to conserve energy can save homeowners substantial amounts of money. Such projects don’t often require considerable effort or even sizable financial investments, which can make homeowners skeptical as to just how much they can save after completing the project. But the scale of a project may have little to do with how much homeowners will save. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy notes that a relatively effortless task like turning back a thermostat between 7° and 10° F for eight hours per day can save homeowners as much as $83 per year. A more labor-intensive task like planting shade trees saves homeowners an average of between $35 and $119 per year.

When looking for ways to conserve energy around the house and save money, homeowners need not necessarily commit to expensive projects. The DOE notes that the following are some energy-saving projects and details what homeowners can expect to save after completing them. While each individual project may not result in jaw-dropping savings, homeowners who follow many of these recommendations may end up saving more than $1,000 per year.

**Project: Install exterior low-e storm windows.**
Low-e windows reflect infrared heat back into a home. Such windows are coated with an ultra-thin layer of metal that improves the window’s insulation ability.

Homeowners who install low-e windows can save between 12 and 33 percent on their annual heating and cooling costs.

**Project: Seal uncontrolled air leaks.**
Air leaks let cool air in during winter and warm air in during summer. Caulking, sealing and weather stripping all cracks and large openings can cut back on air leaks that are costing you money. The DOE recommends hiring a contractor to seal any leaks on heating and cooling ducts.

Homeowners who seal uncontrolled air leaks can save between 10 and 20 percent on their annual heating and cooling bills.

**Project: Plant shade trees.**
If you plant a deciduous tree between six and eight feet tall near your home, it will begin to shade your windows within a year of being planted. Depending on the species of the tree and the home, the shade tree will begin shading the roof within five to 10 years. The DOE notes that shading is the most cost-effective way to reduce air conditioning costs. Properly planted shade trees can reduce air conditioning costs by anywhere from 15 to 50 percent.

**Project: Insulate the water heater tank.**
New water tanks are likely already insulated. But homeowners with older hot water tanks can insulate their tanks with a water heater insulating blanket kit.

Insulating a water heater tank can save homeowners as much as 16 percent on their annual water heating bills. Even the smallest DIY projects can produce big savings. More information about energy-saving home improvement projects can be found at [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov).

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Pride tends to swell when homeowners successfully complete do-it-yourself projects on their homes. In addition to saving homeowners money, DIY projects provide a unique way for men and women to personally connect with their homes. The ability to look at a finished project and say it’s a result of your own handiwork can make a home feel more your own.

As fun and fulfilling as DIY projects can be, they also can be nerve-wracking and induce anxiety. When DIY projects falter, fixing them can prove costly, as homeowners typically must call in contractors to correct their mistakes and get a project back on track. That results in additional labor and material costs that might have been avoidable, especially for homeowners who make an effort to avoid some common DIY mistakes.

1. Failure to secure permits
Even though homeowners own their homes, that does not mean they have carte blanche to do what they want with them. Many renovation projects require homeowners to secure permits before projects can commence. Some may even require additional permits as the projects advance. If proper permits are not secured, homeowners may be fined and projects may be nixed, regardless of how much money homeowners have spent up to that point. Before beginning a home renovation project, homeowners should always contact their local permit office to determine if any permits are required. Bankrate.com notes that permits are often required for any project larger than painting or wallpapering.

2. Overestimating your abilities
DIY television shows make home renovation projects look easy, but reality suggests otherwise. Homeowners with little or no experience renovating a home may want to take classes before they think about starting a project on their own. Even online tutorials tend to make jobs appear easier than they are. Roofing and plumbing projects tend to be best left to the professionals, as these projects can be either dangerous or vulnerable to disaster if not addressed by trained professionals.

3. Incorrect materials
Whether it’s to save money or a byproduct of inexperience, DIYers do not always choose the correct materials for a job. Experienced contractors have ample experience working with all sorts of materials and are therefore in a unique position to recommend the best materials for any given job. That resource is not available for DIYers, who must perform ample research before beginning a job so the project involves the most appropriate materials. Incorrect materials can be a sunken cost that derails a project, but even jobs completed using incorrect materials may need to be redone a lot more quickly than those that employed the right materials the first time.

Many home renovation projects can be completed without the help of professional contractors, especially when homeowners take steps to avoid some of the more common mistakes made by DIYers.

Tips for waterproofing a basement or crawl space
Water can be a homeowner’s worst nightmare. Few things have the potential to damage a home as much as water. From leaks to flooding to moisture problems like mold, water can wreak havoc on a home.

Basements or crawl spaces are areas of a home where water can do the most damage. Basements and crawl spaces tend to be the lowest-lying spots in a home, and therefore prime spots for water to enter. Water problems in these areas can contribute to the demise of the structural integrity of the foundation.

According to Olshan, a foundation solutions company, water can enter homes in numerous ways. Many building materials, including concrete, that seem solid at first glance actually are quite porous. As ground water collects around these materials, the weight of the accumulated water, called hydrostatic pressure, can weaken the materials, causing cracks where water can seep through. Water also can enter subterranean spaces through basement windows and gaps between footings and concrete slabs, or push up through foundation floors when homes are in areas with high water tables.

Remedying water issues in a home generally breaks down into two methodologies: exterior waterproofing and interior waterproofing. Depending on the cause and severity of the water issue, one or the other, or even both, may be recommended.

Exterior waterproofing
Exterior waterproofing aims to keep water away from and out of the home. The home improvement information resource DoItYourself.com says that exterior waterproofing generally includes the application of a waterproofing agent to the concrete foundation. In addition, exterior waterproofing also could include excavation so a drainage system can be installed around the entire footing of the home. Regrading a property and properly relocating gutters and downspouts can help with many water issues.

Interior waterproofing
When water in a basement or crawl space needs to be remediated indoors, a system to collect, drain and remove water may be necessary. This can include sump pumps, drains, gravity discharge systems, and more. Moisture barriers, which can include special paints or products applied to the foundation walls and floor, also can help keep water from entering the space.

Moisture solutions
Keeping water out is only one part of the equation. Homeowners also need to manage moisture, like excessive humidity. A marriage of HVAC and waterproofing techniques may be necessary to improve air flow and remove humidity in the air.

While many homeowners have attempted to address water issues on their own, many times it is a job best left to the professionals. Because water penetration can have multifaceted causes, a professional can best assess the situation and create solutions that fit with homeowners’ budgets and needs. The review and advice site Angie’s List suggests finding at least three waterproofing companies that offer both interior and exterior waterproofing services that can provide the best ideas for fixing the issue.
Address insects before entertaining season

Bbques in the backyard or cocktails on the patio provide some fun ways to enjoy the great outdoors from the comforts of home. While friends and family flock to such entertaining opportunities, some unwanted guests may want to crash the festivities. It’s impossible to ensure a completely bug-free outdoor environment, but there are steps homeowners can take to reduce the amount of pests who want to join the party.

Western Exterminator Supply suggests first identifying which kind of insect infiltrations are most common where you live. Ants, termites and other bugs also can be prevalent. These insects, however pesky they may seem, often can be kept away without the use of pesticides and other chemicals.

• **Lure away pests.** Many insects will be happy to snack on a treat and leave you alone. Put out a dish of sugar water or slices of fruit for insects that feed on sweets and nectar, or a slice of sandwich meat for wasps and yellow jackets. Place these items a fair distance from your gathering.

• **Install fans.** A patio ceiling fan can blow away mosquitoes and flies relatively easily. And you and your guests will likely enjoy a nice breeze on sultry days.

• **Use mulch wisely.** Mulch will add to curb appeal, but having it too close to the house, according to the National Pest Management Association, can present an ideal environment for roaches and ants to nest and find their way into a home. As mulch decomposes, it generates heat and a cozy spot for pests, including mice. Keep mulch 12 inches away from the home’s foundation and entertaining spaces, or use inorganic mulch.

• **Keep patios clean.** Sweep up and clean away any spilled foods and beverages promptly. Even a tiny nugget of food can attract ants and other insects.

• **Use natural pest deterrents.** Citronella oils can drive away some insects, as can garlic and rosemary. Lavender, eucalyptus, marigolds, and other pungent aromas will naturally keep mosquitoes and other flying insects at bay. Some people also have luck with mint-flavored mouthwash misted on patios and furniture.

• **Address standing water.** Mosquitoes and some other insects lay their eggs in standing water. Routinely drain areas where water collects, including gutters and downspouts.

• **Use light colors.** According to HouseLogic, studies show that bugs see dark and bright colors more easily than light colors. Choose lighter shades of paint for outdoor areas and it may make these spaces less attractive to some bugs.

• **Leave those spider webs.** Many people yell “eek” at the sight of spiders and spider webs. But those arachnids and their sticky webs can do a fine job of capturing many unwanted insects. Resist the temptation to tear down webs and shoos spiders away.

Addressing insects means employing various natural strategies to make outdoor entertaining more pleasant.

Use various natural remedies to keep insects from invading entertaining spaces.

A do-it-yourselfer is only as good as his or her tools. Without the proper tools, even the handiest men and women may struggle to complete jobs well within their abilities.

It doesn’t take a seasoned do-it-yourselfer to recognize when hammers and screwdrivers need to be replaced. And such tools are generally so affordable that replacing them, even when they still have some utility, won’t affect too many DIYers’ budgets. However, power tools are considerable investments that do not necessarily need to be discarded when the first signs of trouble pop up. In fact, sometimes power tools just need some TLC to become useful once again. The following are some common symptoms of power tool problems, and what may be behind those problems.

**Difficulty starting**

A power tool that won’t start can delay a project. But a tool that won’t start should not be immediately written off, especially not before DIYers employ a multimeter. The cost of digital multimeters varies widely, with some retailing for less than $20 while others sell for hundreds and hundreds of dollars. Serious DIYers who spend every weekend working on one project or another may find the more expensive multimeters more to their liking, but many weekend warriors can get by with less expensive alternatives. Multimeters are useful because they can measure voltage on a tool immediately and let it sit for 30 minutes before trying to diagnose the problem. When the first signs of trouble pop up. In fact, sometimes power tools just need some TLC to become useful once again. The following are some common symptoms of power tool problems, and what may be behind those problems.

**Loss of power**

Some power tools may start but still lack the extra muscle that make power tools more beneficial than manual tools. In such instances, the carbon brushes might need to be replaced. The online resource replacementparts.com notes that heat damage to brushes can reduce the overall conductivity of the brush, resulting in less power reaching the tool’s motor. In such instances, replace the carbon brushes. In addition, chipped or damaged brushes can result in inconsistent power output. Replacing the brushes in such instances may be all that’s necessary to restore a tool to its powerful self.

**Burning smell**

Many a DIYer has dealt with a power tool that emits an odor or burning. The power tool experts at Grainger notes that tools like Sanders contain drive belts, and these belts should be the first place to look when tools produce a burning smell. When the drive belt is to blame, the tool will typically stop working even when the motor is running. Capacitors may be behind the burning smell when using tools without drive belts. Sometimes tools have simply overheated. Whenever DIYers get a whiff of that burning smell, turn off the tool immediately and let it sit for 30 minutes before trying to diagnose the problem. Replacing these parts can restore them to full usefulness and get rid of that unwelcome aroma.

Replacing worn or damaged power tool parts as opposed to the tools themselves is often the most budget-friendly way to get these must-have DIY accessories back on track.
Tips when planting shade trees

Beautiful landscaping can add instant curb appeal to a property. But beauty isn’t the only thing that makes idyllic landscaping attractive to homeowners. Some landscaping features, such as shade trees, save homeowners money while adding aesthetic appeal.

The U.S. Department of Energy notes that shading is the most cost-effective way to reduce solar heat gain in a home. Shading also cuts air conditioning costs, which tend to be expensive in areas with warm, humid climates. In fact, the DOE notes that well-planned landscapes can reduce unshaded homes’ air conditioning costs by anywhere from 15 to 50 percent.

When planting shade trees, one of the first decisions homeowners will need to make is which type of tree, deciduous or evergreen, they want to plant. Deciduous trees are those that seasonally shed their leaves, while evergreens are trees that keep their leaves throughout the year. Deciduous trees can help keep homes cool in the summer by blocking sun, and those same trees can be beneficial in winter after they shed their leaves by letting the sun in and keeping homes warm. But evergreens also can be beneficial in winter by blocking wind, potentially preventing cold air from making its way into a home through cracks in walls or around windows.

When planting shade trees, techniques vary depending on which type of tree homeowners ultimately choose to plant.

Planting deciduous trees

The DOE says that deciduous trees that are between six and eight feet tall when planted will begin shading the windows of a home within a year of being planted. Depending on the species of the plant and the home, those same deciduous trees may begin shading the roof within five to 10 years of being planted. When planting deciduous trees, homeowners should keep these tips in mind.

- Plant trees to the south of the home. When planted to the south of the home, deciduous trees can screen between 70 and 90 percent of the summer sun while still allowing residents to feel summer breezes.
- Consider sun angles. Homeowners who want to shade their homes from low afternoon sun angles should plant trees with crowns that are lower to the ground on the west side of their homes.
- Cool air before it reaches your home. Shrubs and groundcover plants can be planted to cool air before it reaches a home.

Evergreen trees

Planting evergreens to block wind is known as “windbreaking,” which lowers the wind chill near a home. Wind also can be used to cool a home in summer. But these benefits can only be realized when evergreens are strategically planted.

- Location, location, location: The DOE advises planting evergreen trees to the north and northwest of the home to stop wind. In addition, to get the most bang for your windbreaking buck, the distance between the home and windbreak should be two to five times the height of the mature tree.
- Plant trees on either side of the house. Planting trees on either side of the house will direct cooling winds toward the home in the summer. Shade trees can help homeowners reduce their energy bills, making them valuable and attractive additions to any landscape.

Best methods to repair damaged driveways

Asphalt and concrete driveways are common throughout suburban neighborhoods. They are as much a part of a home as lawns, decks and other exterior elements. Regardless of how they’re utilized, driveways need to be cared for and maintained to retain their appearance and function.

Even the most durable driveways can suffer from cracks and pits over time. As cracks form, they pave the way for more deterioration if they are not addressed. Water infiltration can break down the integrity of the driveway during freeze and thaw periods, and any little hole or crack can promote weed growth. Driveway repair can be a do-it-yourself project, but pay attention to the details to ensure the job is done right.

Asphalt

The home improvement resource The Family Handyman says it is key to first repair cracks and pits in an asphalt driveway before planning to topcoat it, which is generally done every year or so to maintain its appearance and durability. Experts recommend investing in a quality product that will not shrink and crack. A melt-in material that is similar to products used by highway crews can be purchased for around $100. This product will also require use of a propane torch. Cauk-style crack repair products may not require as many tools, and are much easier to apply. They may not last as long, however.

Concrete

The process is similar with concrete driveways, yet the products differ. Small driveway cracks can be repaired by scrubbing out the crack to remove debris and then filling using a mortar repair compound, suggests the repair advice site Home Guides. Larger cracks and potholes should be cleaned. Once that’s done, apply a painted-in bonder to the crack or hole, followed by a dry concrete patching product mixed with water. The material can be worked into the damaged area with a trowel, and then leveled using a wood board. Afterward, a liquid concrete sealer can be applied to help prevent future cracks and holes.

Homeowners who are hesitant to fix their driveways can contact masons or asphalt specialists to perform the job. Keeping up on driveway repair can prolong the life of the surface and help delay a complete driveway replacement for several years.
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