Fall Home Improvement

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Farmhouse style homes are having a moment. A 2020 survey from Homes.com asked more than 5,000 adults across the United States about their favorite house style from a list that included bohemian craftsman, mid-century modern ranch, French chateau, and Tudor, among others. Modern farmhouse was the runaway winner, as participants in 42 of the 50 states indicated this simple, cozy style was their favorite.

Home renovation projects can help homeowners put their own unique stamp on their homes, and such projects can be both aesthetic and functional in nature. The following are some farmhouse design elements homeowners can consider as they look to transform their home interiors with this popular style in mind.

- **Exposed beams**: Exposed beams instantly evoke images of a farmhouse. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that this rustic renovation project can utilize real wood or faux beams that look like the real thing. Decorative beams that have nothing to do with a home’s structural integrity can be installed by skilled do-it-yourselfers. However, even faux beams are heavy, and BobVila.com recommends homeowners have an engineer assess their existing structure prior to installation.

- **Distressed wood finishes**: Distressing is designed to make something look less than perfect. Distressed wood finishes can be found throughout many farmhouse style homes. Furniture and picture frames can provide the distressed look farmhouse fans are looking for. This is a relatively inexpensive project that many homeowners can tackle on their own after watching some online tutorials that recommend the right tools and techniques to get the job done right.

- **Kitchen sink**: Many components combine to create a truly classic farmhouse kitchen. But perhaps no component is more essential than the classic farmhouse sink. The renovation experts at HGTV note that a classic farmhouse sink features a deep, wide basin. Farmhouse sinks are large enough to handle all the dishes that come after a big family meal. Old-fashioned porcelain sinks are worth consideration by homeowners who want their kitchen sinks to evoke a traditional farmhouse feel.

- **Countertops**: HGTV recommends butcher block countertops for homeowners who favor European farmhouse style. Homeowners overhauling their kitchens to create a farmhouse feel should consider installing a large island with a walnut butcher block countertop for an authentic farmhouse feel.

Farmhouse style homes are wildly popular. Some simple renovations can help homeowners with a fondness for farmhouse style bring this classic look into their homes.
How to pick paint for home interiors

Many components combine to define a home’s interior. Some homeowners may be partial to certain styles, such as ultra modern or farmhouse, while others may opt for a more traditional look that cannot necessarily be categorized as one style or another. Though many homeowners may spend considerable time and devote a lot of energy to making their home embody a certain style, those who aren’t willing to commit to a particular look can lean on one component to make a stylish statement all their own: paint.

Color can be a part of every homeowner’s design arsenal. Bold colors can be used to create a stunning accent wall, while homes with open concepts often utilize color to define rooms. Homeowners who want to revitalize their home interiors can do so with paint, and this approach doesn’t require homeowners to commit to a whole new design style.

Though paint may seem simple to novices, homeowners who have painted home interiors in the past recognize how complicated the process of picking paint can be. Paint retailers have a seemingly endless swatch of paint colors to choose from, and before long homeowners’ heads may be spinning as they try to narrow down their options. The following tips can help homeowners pick the perfect paint for their home interiors.

• Take stock, and photographs, of your current furnishings. Many interior designers rely on a simple technique when recommending color schemes to their clients. Choose a standout color from existing furnishings, such as the dominant color from a patterned decorative pillow or piece of furniture, and then look for the same shade to paint the walls. A photograph of the item can be handy when visiting the paint store.

• Lighten colors as you go up. The home renovation and design experts at HGTV recommend picking darker color values for the floor, medium color values for the walls and light values for the ceiling. This approach mimics the look of the great outdoors, where the ground tends to be darker than the trees, and the trees are darker than the blue sky.

• Utilize paint to create the vibe you want. The home renovation experts at This Old House note that colors evoke an emotional response. Cool colors like blue and green give off a relaxing vibe, which makes them ideal for bedrooms and bathrooms. Red is an intense color that can up the energy ante in any room, which can make it an option for homeowners who want to spark debate around their dinner tables.

• Give personal preference its place at the table. Though interior designers may have years of experience picking paint colors for a home and researchers may have determined how certain colors can be utilized to create a desired ambiance in a given room, ultimately homeowners are the ones who will be living in the home. So it’s important that homeowners pick colors they like for their home interiors.

Paint is an inexpensive way to transform a room. Homeowners can rely on a combination of color strategies and their personal preferences as they try to decide which colors they want on their interior walls.

Tips before deciding to do a DIY demolition

Home improvement projects can range from relatively inexpensive undertakings to complex endeavors that cost homeowners thousands of dollars. In an effort to make expensive projects more affordable, homeowners may look for ways to pitch in, and do-it-yourself demolition is a common way to cut costs.

Due to geographical fluctuations in price as well as the scale of a project, it’s hard to pinpoint just how much homeowners can save by doing demolition work themselves. HomeAdvisor estimates that the average small interior demolition project costs just over $3,000, though more significant demolition projects can cost considerably more than that. Given the cost, it’s no surprise that so many homeowners volunteer to do demolition on their own. Though it’s possible to do so safely, homeowners can take steps to determine if it’s in their best interest to take on a DIY demolition or leave it to the professionals.

• Conduct a cost analysis. Demolition projects seem simple, but they often require the use of equipment most homeowners don’t have on hand. Rentals can be considered in such instances, but the cost of renting equipment can reduce the amount of money homeowners are saving by going it alone. For example, homeowners may be able to pull up vinyl or tile flooring on their own, but not all floors are installed the same. Some floors may have been glued more effectively than others, making it hard and/or time-consuming to pull them up by hand. A walk-behind floor scraper can make it easier to remove such floors, but that equipment must be rented. A cost analysis comparing the contractors’ demolition cost estimate and the cost of DIY, complete with equipment rental projections, can give a more accurate picture of how much money homeowners will save by going it alone. If the savings of DIY are negligible, homeowners should probably let the contractor handle the demo.

• Speak with your contractor. Prior to saying they’ll do the demo work on their own, homeowners should speak with their contractors to get an accurate idea of what the project will entail. Demolition projects may seem simple enough, but contractors can illustrate the correct way to do things so as to minimize potentially costly damage. Some contractors may offer to help homeowners start the demo project and then leave them to their own devices once they get a knack for what to do. Once homeowners see what it will take, they can then decide if DIY is best for them.

• Enlist help. No DIY demo should ever be done alone. The risk for accident and injury is simply too great for homeowners to go it alone. Homeowners who can’t enlist some volunteers to pitch in should leave the job to the professionals.

DIY demolition can save homeowners a lot of money. But such projects are not necessarily as simple as they seem. Homeowners should take steps to see exactly what they’re getting into before they volunteer to take on demo duty.
Popular renovation projects during the pandemic

1. Interior painting:
Just under 35 percent of participants reported taking on an interior painting project in 2020. Interior painting projects can be perfect for DIYers, but homeowners also can trust this task to skilled professionals.

2. Bathroom renovations:
Real estate professionals routinely report how much prospective buyers love updated bathrooms, so it’s no surprise that roughly 31 percent of homeowners who took part in the HomeAdvisor report indicated they renovated their bathrooms in 2020.

3. Flooring:
Floors took on a lot of extra traffic during the pandemic, so it shouldn’t be too surprising that flooring projects were popular in 2020. More than one-fourth of participants told HomeAdvisor their homes were updated with a new floor during the pandemic.

4. Landscaping:
With nowhere else to go to escape the daily grind in 2020, many homeowners took to their yards. Twenty-four percent of those homeowners reported making their backyard retreats more appealing by repairing or upgrading the landscaping outside their homes. In fact, the average homeowner reported completing 3.4 landscaping projects in 2020.

5. Kitchen:
Another project that makes sense given the circumstances, kitchen renovations were the fifth most popular home improvement project in 2020. Restaurant closures and social distancing guidelines led many people to dine in more often than they otherwise would, and just under 23 percent of homeowners reported renovating their kitchens in 2020.

As the world gradually emerges from the pandemic, many homeowners who caught the renovation bug while in quarantine also will be emerging with what feels like an entirely new home.
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Homes come in many sizes and styles. But whether your home is a palatial postmodern masterpiece or a cozy farmhouse, reclaimed wood can be utilized to create an awe-inspiring interior.

Reclaimed wood serves both aesthetic and practical purposes. Visually stunning, reclaimed wood also is a great way to make use of old-growth forest wood. Why is that significant? According to the United States Forest Service, just 3 percent of old-growth forest has survived into the second decade of the 21st century. Old-growth forest wood like that from longleaf pine trees has long been touted as excellent building material, but the pine utilized today comes from trees that are cut down when they’re young. Reclaimed wood taken from old or demolished homes built with old-growth forest wood offers access to this highly valued building material while also providing the environmental benefits that come with reusing existing materials.

Reclaimed wood can be incorporated into a home’s interior rather easily, and the results are often stunning.

• **Accent wall:** Transforming a wall into an accent wall with reclaimed wood is a simple project that won’t affect the existing design of a home’s interior. A living room or home office can be given a whole new look with the addition of an accent wall made from reclaimed wood. Homeowners who want their bedrooms to give off the vibe of a rustic retreat can consider adding an accent wall made of reclaimed wood.

• **Furniture:** Reclaimed wood also can be put to use, or reuse, as furniture. A home office desk made from reclaimed wood can be both stunning and sturdy, while end tables and coffee tables made from reclaimed wood can add some unique character to a living room.

• **Kitchen islands:** Homeowners who aspire to have a farmhouse kitchen can consider reclaimed wood when creating their kitchen islands. Reclaimed wood can be used to make the body of the island, complete with cabinets and drawers, that sits beneath the countertop where cooks will prepare their meals.

• **Storage beds:** Guest rooms tend to be smaller than other rooms in the house, and that means little room for furniture like dressers. Rather than cramming lots of furniture into a small room, homeowners can utilize reclaimed wood to create storage bed frames. The frames won’t take up extra space in the room, reassuring guests that they won’t be spending a weekend in cramped quarters. And the rustic look of reclaimed wood storage beds can be an instant stunner when guests arrive.

Reclaimed wood can be incorporated into a home in myriad ways. This stunning, eco-friendly design choice can add instant appeal to any home.
Smart Homes

Smart homes feature appliances and devices that can talk to each other and create a unique ecosystem that can make our lives easier.

Devices that can work together include appliances, lighting, climate control, shades, security features, televisions and more.

INTEGRATION
For a smart home to function, it needs a system to run all the devices through. This can be a digital personal assistant such as Google Home, Amazon’s Alexa and others. Or you can run them through your home security or cable systems if they allow it. Once you decide on a platform, you’ll need to look for devices that work with that platform. If you use a digital assistant, you’ll need appliances that you can control with your voice, such as asking Google or Alexa to turn the temperature down or turn the bedroom lights off.

APPLIANCES
One of the hottest trends in smart homes are smart appliances. Fridges, ranges and more now have features that allow for control via Wi-Fi. Some of these appliances feature things like checking the ice level in the freezer or cameras and touch screens that allow you to see if there’s enough milk in the fridge. Other appliances serve as a communications center for the home, like a GE range hood that features an integrated touchscreen where you can store favorite family recipes and allow you to manage other smart devices through your range hood. Yes, really.

LIGHTS
Automating your lights is one of the easiest ways to turn your home into a smart home. You start with smart LED bulbs and, depending on the system you choose, a hub. Once you connect those, you can set lights to turn on and off with your voice, or even change color depending on the kind of bulbs you get. Many lighting systems also include more than bulbs for your lamps — you can get strip lighting, fixtures and more to customize your smart home lighting to your liking.

THERMOSTATS
Thermostats are another smart home feature that’s popular for people just getting started. Smart thermostats work with your digital assistants to raise and lower temperatures at your beck and call, but they can also work with other devices, such as your smartphone, to allow it to learn your habits and adjust your climate control systems accordingly.

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FEATURES VARY PER MODEL

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Window Treatments that Wow

The windows are the eyes of your home — and often times your eyes on the world.

They’re key to a well-dressed room, to your family’s privacy and even to keeping your utility bills under control. Choosing the right window treatments is way more about fashion these days.

BLINDS

Blinds typically fit inside a window’s frame and come in a variety of materials that lend themselves to a minimalist, clean decor. They’re also one of the most versatile window treatments, with levels of light blockage and even some smart features. Blinds not only block light, but they can also muffle outside noise and keep down dust. They typically last longer than curtains and drapes and are also easier to clean. Look for blinds in sustainable materials, such as bamboo or fabrics. In areas where there may be young children or pets, look for cordless blinds to keep everyone safe.

CURTAINS

Curtains are also extremely versatile and can add texture and a rich feel to the room. Curtains also can block out light and warm or cold air from outside. Look for layered curtains with light, airy curtains to let in natural light with darker, heavier curtains over them. On trend this year are textured fabrics, like knobby natural cotton or linen. Look for curtains this year in earthy, organic tones and bold, nature-inspired prints that bring the outdoors in.

DRAPES

You may be forgiven for thinking curtains and drapes are the same thing. But there are differences. Drapes are usually heavier and longer than curtains, and they’re meant to be hung or swagged in different ways around the window, whereas curtain panels usually just hang straight. Consider pairing drapes with airy curtains or with textured blinds for privacy. Look for drapery with corresponding tiebacks so you can adjust how much of the outside world you let in.

In both curtains and drapes (and in the customizable world of Roman shades), big, bold prints are in. They can be inspired by nature, by retro patterns and palettes, or both. Using curtains and drapes, which are easy to change out, is one way to bring a bold look into your room without spending too much money.
How to maintain hardwood floors

Hardwood floors have long been sought after by home buyers. In its 2019 “Remodeling Impact Report,” the National Association of Realtors® revealed that new wood flooring was the fourth most popular project to attract buyers.

Of course, hardwood floors aren’t just for buyers. Homeowners who already have hardwood floors know just how impressive these floors can be, especially when they’re well maintained. Maintaining wood floors is not necessarily as straightforward as it may seem, and homeowners may benefit from a tutorial on how to keep the floors under their feet looking good.

To polish or not to polish?
Polishing floors is an inexpensive way to keep them looking good. But the home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that not all floors can be polished, and determining which ones can depend on the finish. Floors with waterproof barriers such as urethane will benefit from routine polishing. However, floors with penetrating finishes like tung oil will need to be waxed rather than polished.

What finish is on the floor?
The Hardwood Distributor’s Association recommends a simple way for homeowners to determine which type of finish is on their hardwood floors. Homeowners are advised to rub a finger across the floor. If no smudge appears, then the floor is surface sealed. If a smudge is created, then the floor has been treated with a penetrating seal. The HDA also notes that recently installed wood floors are likely surface sealed.

How often should floors be polished or waxed?
Wood flooring professionals recommend polishing floors that can be polished once every few months. Waxing wood floors does not need to be done as frequently, and most can benefit from a fresh coat of wax every 12 to 18 months.

What can I do on a daily basis?
Some simple tricks and daily maintenance can help wood floors maintain their impressive look.

- **Utilize floor mats.** The HDA notes that floor mats near entryways can reduce the time it takes to clean hardwood floors and reduce the wear and tear they endure. For example, tiny particles like dirt can scratch the floor and contribute to the kind of minor damage that adds up to significant scarring over time. Floor mats near entryways ensures that most of that dirt never makes it to the wood floors.

- **Vacuum without a beater bar.** Some vacuums contain beater bars, which are designed to pick up human hair, dog hair and other things that conventional vacuums may not be able to pick up. The HDA advises vacuuming without the beater bar, as it can contribute to small scratches in the floor. Sweeping with a high-quality broom or microfiber cloth is another way to pick up dirt without damaging floors.

- **Use manufacturer-recommended cleaning products.** Local home improvement stores sell a host of hardwood floor cleaning products, but the HDA notes that many flooring manufacturers now sell their own hardwood floor cleaners designed specifically for their floors. These products are likely homeowners’ best bets. Homeowners who can’t find them can seek recommendations from a local flooring retailer.

Hardwood floors are attractive for many reasons. And they look even more stunning, and last much longer, when homeowners make an effort to maintain them.
Pre-winter perennial pruning pointers

When planning a landscape, it’s tempting to pick the most colorful, vibrant plants. An eye-popping property filled with yellows, purples, pinks, and other bold colors is sure to catch anyone’s eye. However, the right plant for a property is not always the most colorful.

Successful gardening is more about soil conditions and access to sunlight than it is about the plants themselves. An awe-inspiring hydrangea bush will only impress if it’s planted in a location where it can thrive.

The Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry program at UMass Amherst Extension advises homeowners to learn about the following site conditions, and ultimately share that knowledge with local garden center representatives, before they pick and plant anything around their properties.

- **Hardiness zone:** The Plant Hardiness Zone Map from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is designed to help gardeners determine which plants are most likely to thrive where they live. The map can be found on the USDA website at www.usda.gov.

- **Light availability, intensity, and duration, from full sun to deep shade:** Prior to planting, homeowners can document this information in a notebook or on their smartphones. Do so for a long enough period of time that you can get an accurate idea of the conditions in which plants will have to grow, and then take that information with you to the garden center where you will buy your plants. Employees can then use this info to help you find the right fit given the light conditions.

- **Water availability, both quantity and quality, as well as ease of access**

- **Soil type, drainage and compaction:** Homeowners can take note of any areas of their property where water pools or the ground feels especially soggy after rainfall. Share this information with garden center employees prior to picking plants for such areas. If soil appears compacted, aeration prior to planting may be necessary.

- **Above ground wires or obstructions:** Trees will grow up, and the presence of power lines or other obstructions may threaten the trees or prove dangerous if trees eventually grow into or hang over power lines.

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Gardeners know that spring is an ideal time to plan and plant their favorite flowers and most flavorful fruits and vegetables. However, seasoned gardeners know that gardening is a year-round commitment. Pruning is one of the keys to keeping perennials coming back for years to come, and fall is an ideal time to take on this important task.

Pruning perennials in the fall is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. According to the Old Farmer’s Almanac, some perennials can be cut down after the first killing frost, while others can be left to benefit wildlife, including birds and insects. Understanding pruning and when to do it this fall can help gardeners lay a strong foundation for their gardens that will benefit them next spring.

**Which perennials should I prune?**

The first step to pruning perennials is to recognize which need to be pruned and which can be left intact for the winter. The Old Farmer’s Almanac notes that bee balm and phlox are prone to powdery mildew and should be cut back once they’re gone. Hostas harbor slug eggs, so they, too, should be pruned after a hard frost. Hosta leaves that have fallen on the ground should be removed as well. There’s no need to cut back certain perennials if they’re healthy. For example, hardy geraniums do not require pruning in the fall, and Penn State Extension notes that hardy perennials like garden mums are more likely to survive a cold winter if they’re left intact. That’s because the tops of such plants will collect leaves and snow for insulation and moisture over the course of winter. Gardeners who are unsure about fall pruning can speak with their local gardening center for additional advice regarding which plants to cut back before winter.

**When to prune perennials**

Gardeners need not rush to prune perennials in the fall. Diseased or infested plants can be pruned at the first sight of disease or infestation, but gardeners can wait until several hard frosts have occurred before they prune healthy perennials. In gardening parlance, a hard frost refers to when temperatures drop below 28 F. Several hard frosts kill the uppermost growth of most perennials, making this an ideal time to prune them.

Pruning perennials in fall can be the first step toward creating an awe-inspiring spring garden.
When remodeling a home with the ultimate goal of making it more attractive to prospective buyers, homeowners can benefit from taking stock of current trends, including the style of home that’s most popular. According to a 2020 Homes.com survey of more than 5,000 adults across the United States, modern farmhouse is the most favored house style. The survey asked participants to choose from a selection of styles, including mid-century modern ranch, Spanish colonial/southwest, bohemian craftsman, Italianate, French chateau, and Tudor. The modern farmhouse style was the most popular choice in 42 of the 50 states, proving that home style preference is not beholden to geography. Respondents gave a host of reasons for favoring the modern farmhouse look, including that the style is “aesthetically appealing but not boring” and that it looks “simple, cozy, and not too busy.”
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