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Get inspired with colorful decorating

The change of seasons always provides fresh inspiration and motivation for home updates. Colors and textures are discovered anew in blooming gardens, strolls to local farmers' markets and leisurely bicycle rides. A refreshed decor doesn't mean having to invest in a big-ticket item like new furniture. Try these easy and affordable design tips to transform the look of your home:

■ **All about color**

From ever-popular traditional styles to streamlined modern looks, there is a place for a splash of color in any room. Don't be afraid to add color in unexpected places - from window treatments that pop to a vivid paint shade in an entryway.

For example, Accordia Cellular Shades from Levolor are available in more than 200 fabric choices, including exclusive woven fabrics (Linen, Designer Textures and Translucence) that give rich color and texture to any room. Create an energetic kids' playroom with vivid red Sangria light-filtering shades or a serene master suite with cozy beige Candlelight room-darkening shades. "Window treatments don't have to fade into the background," says Stephen Smith, vice president of marketing for Levolor. "Embrace color and texture, and let your shades stand out and be the fashionable focal point of the room."

■ **Sweat the small stuff**

The latest trend in home decorating is the un-trend. Do-it-yourself truly classifies as such. Customize with touches such as vintage flea-market finds and repurposed accessories to reflect your personal style.

Make the details count. Change out pillow covers for the season and hang a colorful fabric valance to add visual interest. Celebrate spring and summertime with fresh flowers and greenery in decorative vases, fruit or seashells in glass bowls.

Small updates can make a big difference to the exterior of your home, too. Plant colorful annuals to enhance curb appeal. Try painting the front door and trim with a glossy finish to



coordinate with interior window treatments.

■ **Colorful app-ortunity**

Ensure color harmony throughout your entire home by taking advantage of mobile technology to custom match paint hues to your favorite pieces. It's as simple as downloading a smartphone application and unleashing your creativity.



For example, ColorSnap is a free app that allows users to quickly and easily match colors in images with more than 1,500 Sherwin-Williams hues and complementary palettes. Simply snap a photo of your favorite vase or new window treatment and you'll be presented with the closest color match.

If you're looking for color suggestions, you can't go wrong with green. "One of the most fashionable colors in decorating today is green," says Jackie Jordan, director of color marketing for Sherwin-Williams. "Green is everywhere, including urban environments where rooftop gardens continue to sprout. Today's green trend is heavily influenced by nature, such as leaves and moss." And don't forget that green is more than just a color when it comes to home updates. Energy loss through windows can account for 10 to 20 percent of a home's heating and cooling costs. Accordia features exclusive Energy Shield technology, which provides additional insulation to help block air and reduces your heating and cooling cost year round.

No matter your personal decor style, the change of seasons is a perfect time to refresh your scenery. (ARA)

Three fast ways to spruce up your home for spring

If you're short on time, it's possible to make your home look, feel and smell fresh for spring - even if you have to postpone in-depth cleaning. Here are a few tips on how to make simple, speedy decor updates to give your house a spring-like atmosphere:

■ Step 1 - Brighten the look

Replace heavy comforters and quilts with lighter bedspreads and throws in colors that evoke the look of spring. Creamsicle orange, classic rose pink, cotton white, nature-inspired greens, and watery blues are all great accent colors for spring decor.

For quick cleaning tasks that will instantly spruce up your home's interior, vacuum car-



pets, wipe down baseboards and woodwork (especially if they're painted white), and dust/vacuum cloth lampshades. If you have some extra time to spare, consider washing windows. It's one task that's a great time investment because it makes a big impact on how your home looks both inside and out.

■ Step 2 - Create fresh scents

Fragrance experts at The Yankee Candle Company Inc. suggest that while deep spring cleaning is sure to make your home smell clean,

there are faster, easier ways to freshen indoor aromas. Scent is closely associated with mood, and you can create a spring-like oasis in your home by simply burning a premium scented candle. To renew stored linens or clothes, slip a fresh dryer sheet between layers of garments. You can also use dryer sheets to keep winter clothes from developing a musty aroma while they're stored throughout the spring and summer months. Then continue to light a Quick-Scent candle in the Clean Cotton fragrance to carry this fresh laundry smell throughout your home all spring.

■ Step 3 - Bring in the sound of spring

What does spring sound like? It probably does not sound like a crackling fire or holiday music - sounds you may closely associate with winter months. Before guests arrive, pop in a CD of your favorite upbeat music. If the climate allows, open windows to welcome in the natural sounds of spring, from the chirping of birds to the sounds of children playing outdoors.

Save the heavier spring cleaning chores for when you have time to do them, but don't wait to make your home feel fresh for spring with these quick, simple steps. Visit www.yankee-candle.com to learn more. (ARA)

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Tips to trim the time you spend mowing

Getting out on a nice day and giving your lawn a fresh cut can be a peaceful and rewarding experience. But when mowing your lawn begins to cut into your free time, it becomes less of a joy and more of a chore. By purchasing the right mower for your yard and using certain landscaping techniques to make mowing faster and easier, you'll spend less time mowing and more time enjoying your freshly cut lawn.

■ Choosing the right mower

If it takes you much more than an hour to mow your lawn, purchasing a riding lawn mower is probably the best way to cut down that time. However, not all riding lawn mowers are created equal when it comes to the speed of mowing. Zero-turn mowers, long the preferred mowers for professionals, are now becoming more widely available, affordable and more user-friendly, making them a sensible purchase for homeowners looking for a quick and precise mow. Here are a few reasons why zero-turn mowers can get the job done faster than a traditional lawn tractor:

- More responsive steering that uses levers as opposed to a steering wheel allows you to maneuver more easily around trees, flower



beds and other obstacles.

- Zero-turn mowers can cut at nearly twice the speed of traditional lawn tractors.

- Zero-turn mowers allow you the ability to spin around 180 degrees when you get to the end of your yard, eliminating the need to back up and cut strips of lawn you might miss using a tractor with a steering wheel.

- By design, zero-turn mowers offer an unobstructed view of the cutting deck, making it easier to see when trimming edges - eliminat-

ing the need to touch up the areas you might have otherwise missed.

For more, visit www.whyzeroeturn.com.

■ Mowing and landscape techniques

How you mow and the way you design your yard can also play a role in reducing the time you spend mowing. Here are a few techniques you can use to save time:

- Plant a garden or landscape using woodchips or other materials around trees and near buildings and curbs. This will eliminate the need to mow many hard-to-trim areas.

- Leave clippings on the lawn rather than raking them up. As long as you mow regularly, leaving the clippings on your lawn will actually encourage healthier growth, providing your lawn with much-needed nutrients.

- Keep your mower blades sharp so that they cut cleanly. This will keep your grass healthier and will help you mow more effectively.

By choosing the right mower for your yard and employing a few tried-and-true, time-saving techniques, you'll be well on your way to maintaining your lush green lawn without spending any extra time doing so. (ARA)

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Reduce spring cleaning stress with these chore-sharing tips

When spring finally rolls around this year, families everywhere will be ready to embrace the season and all it has to offer: sunny days, higher temperatures and finally getting back outside.

But a long winter means your home has some serious spring cleaning needs, which can cause serious stress when one person - Mom - has to handle it by herself.

Sixty-two percent of mothers handle all household chores, according to a recent Roper study. And on average, moms spend more than 14 hours per week cleaning and maintaining the home.

"Family cooperation is key," says Alison Gutterman, mother of two and president of Jelmar, maker of CLR cleaning products. "If you share the responsibility for chores, they'll not only get done faster, but there will be less stress for the whole family."

Spring cleaning is the perfect opportunity to create a chore-sharing plan before your

flock flies the coop. Create a rotating schedule of chore assignments so no one gets stuck cleaning the toilet each time. But most of all, keep these simple spring cleaning tips in mind so doing "the chores" doesn't have to be a chore.

■ **Organize:** Group rooms that need sprucing up into "sectors" that use similar products and methods to help break up your to-do list and tackle projects quickly.

■ **Prioritize:** If cleaning the garage has been neglected for years, chances are it's not a priority. Save those tough jobs until you get through the rooms you know have to get done.

■ **Quick refresh:** Have guests coming today? If you don't have time for a deep clean, quickly freshen up each room by spraying fabric softener on drapes and curtains, and toss the pillows and couch covers in the dryer with a dryer sheet.

■ **Use cleaning multi-taskers:**



Maintaining that huge supply of specialized cleaners under the sink is a waste of time and space - look for products that can tackle three or four jobs instead of just one.

■ **Create a finish line:** Cleaning can go on forever if you let it. By establishing some cleaning goals before you start, you can manage your time and know when to say "enough's enough." Once you're done, get back to enjoying the season and your family.

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Seeing green through energy efficient windows



Now that spring is here, many homeowners are thinking about remodeling projects that will improve the home this season and year-round. Whether you're planning a few do-it-yourself improvements or a major renovation, it's important to think "green." One way to enhance the beauty and comfort of your home while saving on energy is by installing highly energy-efficient windows.

Energy efficient windows with high insulating values, such as R-5, can result in significant savings on energy needed to heat and cool a home. Up until now, such windows have been cost prohibitive to most consumers. But thanks to programs like the Department of Energy (DOE)'s High Performance Windows Volume Program, homeowners can now purchase energy efficient R-5 windows at a more affordable price.

So, what exactly does R-5 mean and why is it beneficial? An "R" value of a window means greater resistance to weather. Most ENERGY STAR windows have an R-value of 3, but increasing the R-value from 3 to 5 reduces average heat loss by more than 30 percent, according to the DOE. (ARA)

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Tips to spruce up your home's exterior

There's no better time to spruce up your home. But while most families are reorganizing closets and making trips to Goodwill, they are neglecting the part of their home guests see first - its exterior. After this year's harsh, long winter, the outside of your home probably needs more than a little TLC.

"This was one of the worst winters America has seen in decades and unfortunately, snow, sleet and freezing rain can be damaging to the exterior of any home," says Rust-Oleum Brand Manager Dirk Sappok. "Moisture can create the perfect conditions for the growth of mold and mildew. Dirt, grime and salt residue can also be damaging, if left unchecked. But fortunately, there are products available that can make the outside of your home look brand new."

Here are some tips and tricks for sprucing up your home's exterior:

Make your home's siding shine:

After getting hit with record-breaking snow falls this winter, the exterior of most homes took a beating. Now that it's getting warmer, it's the perfect time to freshen up your home's siding - and you don't need to hire a professional



or rent a power washer to make your home look like new. Try a cleaner like JOMAX House Cleaner and Mildew Killer. It is guaranteed to kill mold and mildew and remove tough stains and stubborn dirt without scrubbing or power washing. Plus it's safe for use around plants and shrubs. Or for quick and easy routine cleaning, try JOMAX House Wash. Just hook it up to a garden hose, spray, wait five to 10 minutes for dirt and stains to loosen and rinse off.

Put life back into your driveway:

A cracked, weathered driveway doesn't do

much for a home's curb appeal and it's often the first thing guests see when they visit your home. Unfortunately, driveway resealing is a project that many homeowners neglect due to the mess and time it requires. But, resealing a driveway doesn't have to be a time-consuming and messy project. Thanks to breakthrough technology, homeowners can rejuvenate their driveways in one easy step with EPOXYSHIELD Blacktop Coating. Unlike other blacktop sealers that must be applied with a squeegee, EPOXYSHIELD Blacktop Coating can be rolled onto the surface, just like paint. It's drive-ready in just four hours, leaving a jet black finish, plus it lasts longer than traditional driveway sealers.

Don't forget your walkways:

It's easy to revive worn sidewalks, porches and entryways without spending a small fortune on replacing them. Select a product like EPOXYSHIELD Concrete Resurfacer. It comes in a kit complete with all of the tools you need to renew and restore aged, patched and cracked concrete surfaces. The best part is it can be rolled on, eliminating the mess of replacement or traditional application. (ARA)

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Even small projects have a big impact

Cutting things out of the budget, like home improvement projects, might seem reasonable in the short term, but it's a bad decision in the long run.

Your home is your largest investment and no matter how the housing market fluctuates, you don't want to neglect maintenance and upkeep around the house. Fixing little problems will prevent larger problems down the road.

Simple projects to refresh the look of your home, like a fresh coat of paint or a little landscaping work, will not only make your home feel more warm and inviting, but it will also yield a large return on investment when it comes to resale value.

Although many home improvement projects can be simple, they often require tools that most people don't commonly have. This is when it makes sense to visit your local rental store.

Since you will most likely only need the tools or equipment once, renting is a more cost-effective solution than buying new or hiring a handyman.

To make finding the location nearest



you even easier, the American Rental Association (ARA) offers RentalHQ.com, the



world's largest and most comprehensive rental store. (ARA)

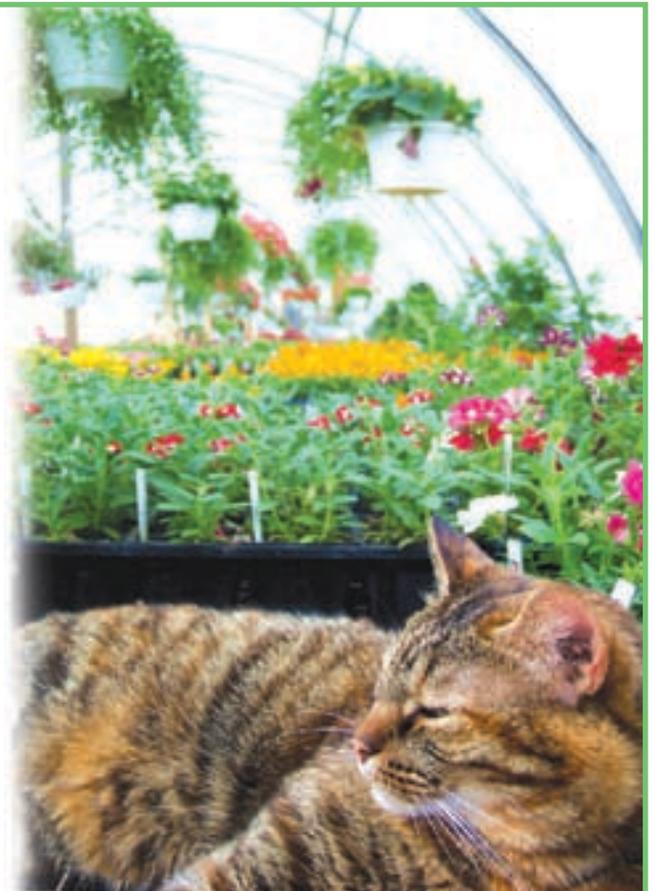
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Fresh ideas for summer entertaining



Design insiders say you can make summer sizzle by throwing a great dinner party without breaking the bank. Simply start with two sources - your china cabinet and Mother Nature. "With the higher gas prices and tough economy, many people are looking for ways to dazzle their guests without spending a lot of money," says Keith Winkler, product marketing manager with Replacements, Ltd., billed as the world's largest retailer of old and new china, crystal, silver and collectibles.

■ **Think fresh**

If you need a little inspiration to get you going, look no further than outside your door.

Fill a clear vase with lemons and add water and fresh flowers. You can even use double old fashioned glasses to create floral arrangements for individual place settings.

Place smooth stones in the bottom of a clear glass pitcher, and use those to anchor a large fresh flower, such as a Gerber daisy. Fill with water for a fantastic accent.

Plant fresh flowers or herbs in cups and saucers to go around the table or kitchen. This not only adds a splash of fresh green color, herbs are handy for healthy cooking.

Another quick summer decorating trick

is to place fresh leaves or blossoms flat on a dinner plate, then place a clear glass luncheon or salad plate over the floral design. You can use various colored plates, leaves or flowers to create unique designs for each guest.

Arrange candles and flowers or even sand and sea shells on cake stands to use as table centerpieces or accents for any room of your home. (ARA)

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Tell your own story through home decor

With more and more people staying put in their homes, homeowners have realized the importance of creating a space that is meaningful to them and their families. Here are a few ideas for infusing your identity into your home's decor:

■ Color your world.

Color is a great way to add personality to a room. Neutral hues can actually make a room appear quite dramatic when carried throughout in various textures, such as accent pillows, rugs and upholstery. You can go bold with vibrant, saturated hues as well, in anything from artwork to furniture to wall color. For color inspiration and paint tips, visit Sherwin-Williams.com or your neighborhood Sherwin-Williams store.

■ Customize your space.

Companies have taken the demand for personalization to heart and are increasingly



offering homeowners unique ways to tailor their spaces. For example, Decorá Cabinets recently introduced a color-matching system that allows you to customize an opaque finish of your cabinetry. (ARA)





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Is your home renovation project really worth doing?

Maybe you've watched one too many home improvement shows. Perhaps you're still stinging from that holiday guest's comment about how your kitchen countertop has seen better days. Or maybe you're just really tired of the same old, same old every day.

Whatever the reason the remodeling itch has settled into your brain, before you bring in a contractor - or pick up a hammer - you should consider two important questions: How will you fund your project? And will it be worth it in the end?

A little research and credit self-assessment can answer both questions. In addition to pull-



ing your credit report to see how likely you are to qualify for good loan terms, you should consider the potential resale value of the improvement, how it will improve your life and if it will enhance your enjoyment of your home.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to evaluate the potential resale value. Kitchen and bathroom remodels, adding a deck, or finishing a basement or attic are all popular renovations because they upgrade the most-used rooms in the house or add living space.

In terms of resale value, here are some popular projects with high paybacks, according to Remodeling Magazine's 2009-2010 Cost versus Value Report:

- Adding an attic bedroom - 83.1 percent
- Adding a wooden deck - 80.6 percent
- Minor kitchen remodel - 78.3 percent
- Major kitchen remodel - 72.1 percent

- Basement remodel - 75.4 percent
- Bathroom remodel - 71 percent

Keep in mind that smaller remodels, while costing less than major jobs, can still have a major impact on how your home looks and feels. For example, simply replacing that old front door with a steel version can cost around \$1,000 but offers a return on investment of nearly 129 percent, according to the report.

Another factor to consider when weighing the value of any remodeling project is how it will affect your quality of life in terms of financial security. It's important to be sure the cost of the project won't be a financial burden that detracts from your enjoyment of the results.

To help understand your current credit status and how it might affect your remodeling loan terms, obtain a copy of your credit report. Websites like CreditReport.com can provide you with a credit report with your paid monitoring membership. Obtaining your credit report and monitoring your credit can help you identify any inaccuracies or errors that might lead to higher interest rates, and also catch and resolve potential fraud quickly. You'll also find tips on the website for understanding your credit, and tools such as a credit score tracker to help you anticipate how certain financial decisions - like financing a remodel - might affect your credit. (ARA)



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How to get a total kitchen makeover for less than \$500

The kitchen has always been the heart of the home - a place where the family socializes and entertains friends. It's no wonder a kitchen remodel occupies first place on many homeowners' wish lists, especially at a time when families are spending less time dining out and more time at home. Unfortunately, it's also one of the most expensive and time-consuming home improvement projects a family will undertake, ranging from \$17,000 to \$20,000 for a basic kitchen remodel.

Here's how can get your own kitchen transformation on a budget:

■ Select a color scheme:

Dark accent walls with neutral colors are all the trend right now, but you'll want to make sure you choose a color palette that expresses your personal style and that you think will be around for years to come. Home decorating magazines and websites are great sources of inspiration when selecting a color scheme for your new kitchen.

■ Start with the cabinets:

They are the focal point of any kitchen and will set the tone for the look and feel of the entire room. Instead of replacing or refacing, it's easy to transform worn, outdated cabinets



to the look of beautiful hand-crafted cabinets with Rust-Oleum Cabinet Transformations. The refinishing system provides you with all the tools you need to give your cabinets a fresh, new look for less than \$150 - without the stripping, sanding or priming associated with cabinet painting. It works on all types of cabinets - wood, melamine, laminate and more.

Plus it is available in 70 beautiful finishes and is guaranteed to last for years to come.

■ Rethink your current countertop:

You don't have to replace your countertop to get a sleek new look. With new Rust-Oleum Countertop Transformations, you can transform your worn or damaged laminate countertops at a fraction of the cost of replacement. Available in a convenient kit for \$250, the innovative coating system comes with all the tools needed to transform your outdated countertops to mirror the look of natural stone such as granite. The coating was put through extensive testing to ensure it could stand up against daily wear and tear. It's available in five different colors and is so easy to use, the entire project can be completed in less than a weekend.

Don't forget the details:

It's easy to make your old cabinet knobs and pulls look brand new with a few coats of spray paint. Try a spray paint like Rust-Oleum Universal Oil-Rubbed Bronze to mimic one of today's hottest metal finishes at a fraction of the cost. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

For more information on alternatives to the traditional kitchen remodel visit: www.rustoleumtransformations.com. (ARA)

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HILLSBORO. Adorable 2 bedroom home with large backyard and storage shed. In town location close to schools and town services, town water and sewer. New roof, flooring and appliances. #1719. **\$135,900**



#1721 LEE: Lovely 3-4 BR home in low-taxed Lee. Sets back from the road. 5 mins. to Whittemore Center and train to Boston/Portland, 20 mins. from the ocean. Over 2000 sq ft, barn with loft and shed on over 1.5 acres. **\$336,900**



ANTRIM. Large 5BR home with great master, spacious LR and DR. Large barn currently home to 2 horses. Rural setting with easy commute to Concord or Keene. #1723. **\$279,900**



#1722 SALISBURY: Not many of these left — a camp on one acre with a fireplace, front porch and a brook on two sides. Nature abounds in the private setting with hunting, fishing or swimming just outside your door. **\$57,000**



HENNIKER: One owner 2000 mobile home. Beautiful built-in cabinets, refrigerator, dishwasher, gas stove, w/d inc. Master BR has jacuzzi tub, separate shower and double sinks. Outside deck and utility shed. #1718. **\$45,000**



HILLSBORO. Cute 2 BR cottage on over 3/4 acres. Outbuilding for workshop/storage. On a dead-end, public road. Access to 3 beaches, swimming, fishing, and near to other recreation including hiking, golf in the summer. **\$69,900.** #1715



BENNINGTON. Shades of Newhart - stately 1900's New Englander with 8 acres. Three outbuildings plus a garage. Shining hardwood floors, amazing built-ins, heated wrap-around porch and separate screen porch, 2 fireplaces, 4 bedrooms, front and back stairways, over 5000 square feet...too much to mention. **\$399,000**



#1920 HILLSBORO. In-town New Englander. 3BR/1BA, Convenient to town services, town water/sewer, new roof and renovated bath. **\$134,900**



Joyce Bosse, Broker
491-0559



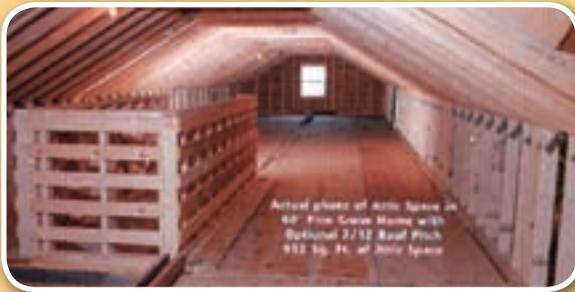
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