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family handyman



EASY WAYS TO

BOOST CURB APPEAL

PAINT YOUR
DOOR ON
ITS HINGES

MAKE
CUSTOM
HOUSE
NUMBERS

ADD A PORCH
LIGHT FIXTURE

PLANT A
LOW-MAINTENANCE
GARDEN

EDGE A NEW
FLOWER BED

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Before: Begging for a Boost

Whether you're ready to sell or planning to stay put for years, curb appeal is key. It sets the overall tone of your home. In this issue, we're sharing several quick and impactful ways to make over your front facade. Our test case was a beautiful newer build in suburban Wisconsin that was in need of some finishing touches. For starters, it lacked color and landscaping. We changed that by updating the front door color and adding easy-care flower beds. In addition, we installed a statement light fixture and hung custom house numbers. Find step-by-step instructions for all these projects in the pages ahead. We'd love to see your own curb appeal upgrades. Share them at FamilyHandyman.com/submissions. —Kirsten Schrader, Content Director

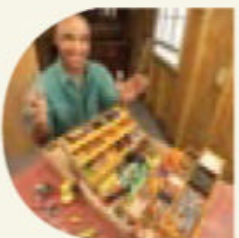
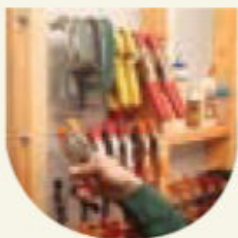
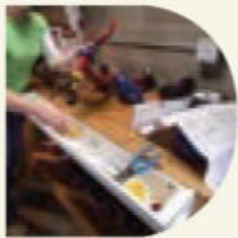


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insure your investment

Do you really need RV insurance on your travel trailer?

As RVers, we know the allure of the open road and the freedom it offers. However, with freedom comes responsibility, including the important decision of securing insurance.

What is RV insurance?

RV insurance is designed to cover various types of RVs, including travel trailers, toy haulers, motor homes, fifth wheels, and camper vans. While liability insurance is not required for most travel trailers, having RV coverage could benefit you and your adventures.

How can RV insurance protect you?

- **Protection against accidents:** May provide financial protection for repair costs, medical expenses, and liability in case of an accident.
- **Coverage for theft and vandalism:** Could help with repairs or replace your trailer with less out-of-pocket expenses if it's lost or stolen.
- **Natural disasters and weather events:** May cover the cost of damage from storms, floods, or other natural disasters.

Is your travel trailer covered under your home or auto insurance?

While your home or auto policy can protect your trailer in certain instances, it can also leave you with gaps in your coverage.

For example, your auto policy may only cover your trailer while you're on the road, not if you're parked or at a campsite. The same goes for home insurance—if you're on your home's property it might be covered, but damage from a storm at a campground wouldn't be.

What specialized coverages does Progressive offer?

Progressive offers a variety of specialized coverages that aren't included on a standard auto insurance policy like:

- **Roof Protection Plus[®]:** Covers repairs or replacements for RV roofs, including if the cause is wear and tear.*
- **Pest Damage ProtectionSM:** Covers the cost of repairs from pest infestations.*

Confidence on the road

Having RV insurance gives you confidence you're protected no matter where you roam. From remote national parks to bustling campgrounds, RV insurance ensures you have the support and financial protection you need if something goes wrong.

While insurance for your travel trailer may not be legally required, it's a crucial investment in protecting your RV, finances, and peace of mind.

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*Available for RVs less than 6 years old, and a \$250 deductible applies to any claim.

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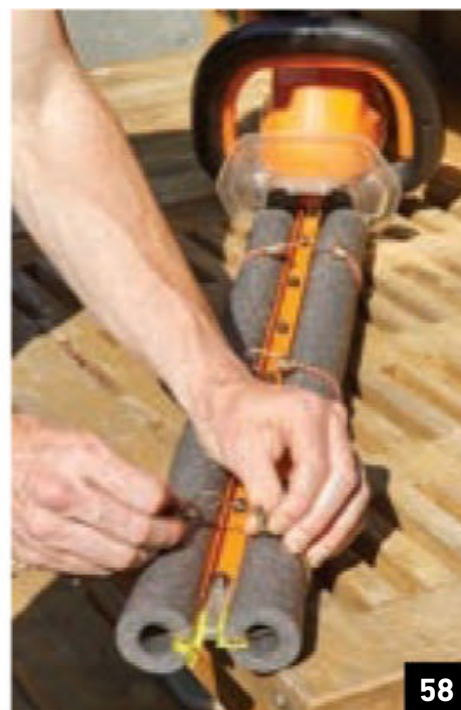


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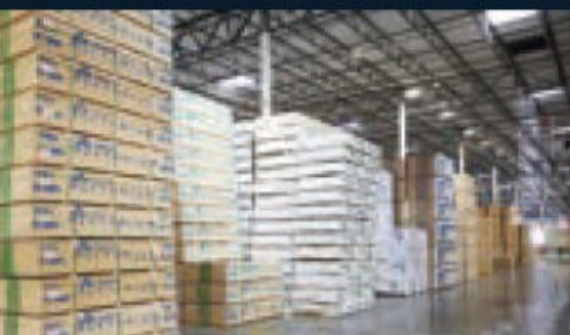
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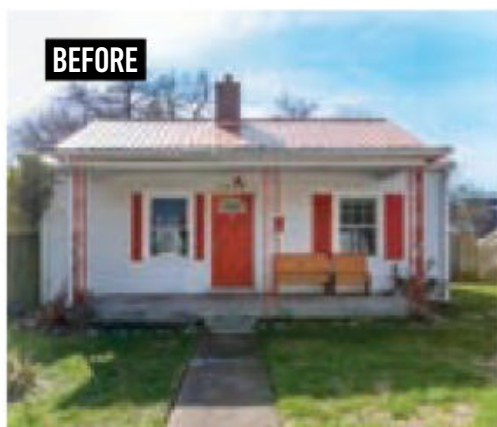
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Eye-Catching Cottage Updates

Masters of Flip hosts went all in on a cheerful color palette with this Nashville home reno



BEFORE

To appeal to potential buyers, the exterior and front yard of this home received a massive refresh. Host Kortney Wilson says, “When I was renovating this home, I was really drawn to bright colors. The exterior is one area where you can take a bit of a risk.” Spoiler alert: The risk paid off. “We received multiple offers because it stood out from the more neutral homes nearby,” Wilson says. She shares tips below on upping a home’s curb appeal. —Kirsten Schrader



AFTER

Change Colors

“I wanted to make a statement that would grab attention from the street.”

Add Pavers

“They added a historical, timeless feel. I wanted to keep some texture and character in the front yard.”

Go Bold

“Keep curb appeal simple. Do a few things really well. People notice details, like a bold door color.”

Grow a Great Garden

“If planting perennials, as we did, pay attention to their mature size. It’s important to place shorter plants in the front and taller ones in the back to create layers.”



See this renovation come to life in an episode of *Masters of Flip* on *At Home with Family Handyman*. Get inspired and learn where to stream free at [FamilyHandyman.com/tv](https://www.familyhandyman.com/tv).

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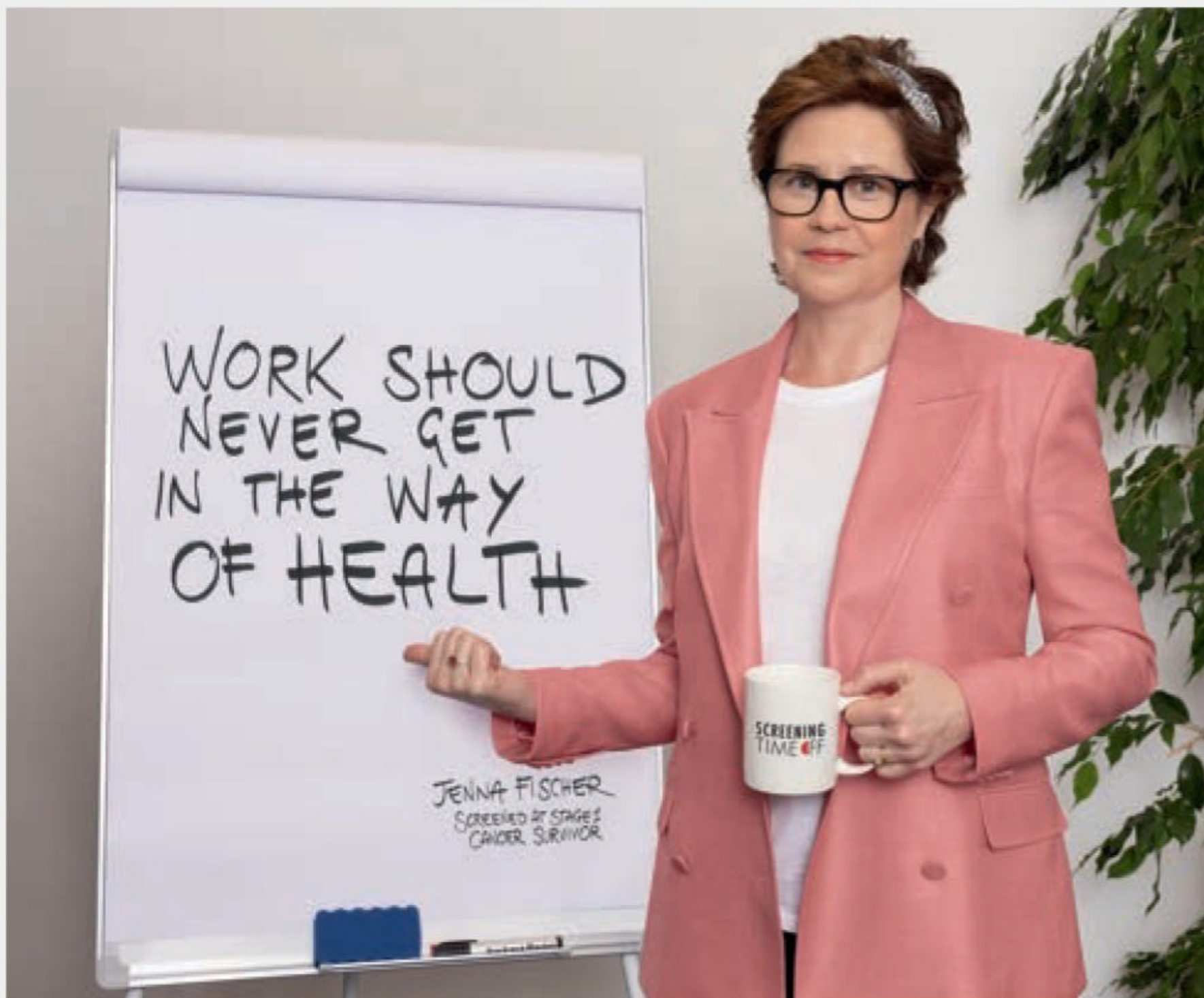
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What's New

Now Trending • Gear Up • Mini Makeovers

The latest
we've heard,
seen, tested
and tried

NOW TRENDING

Color Everywhere

Give yourself permission to go bold in the bathroom—and we're not just talking about wall paint. Drench everything in color (even the sink!) for an unexpected and playful look. To keep it balanced, "Stick to a cohesive color palette," says interior designer Janelle Patton. "The sink should either coordinate with or complement other colors in the room." —Erica Young





Outdoor Luxury

Make roughing it a little more comfortable with these portable, practical campsite upgrades

Electric Cooler's Cool Features

I used to tease my friends about their electric coolers. Why spend so much when ice is so cheap? Once I tried one, however, I had to eat my words. There's no buying bags of ice, no worrying if it will melt, no draining out the water, no sloshing noise from the backseat and—most importantly—no ruined, soggy cheese or veggies. I'm never going back!

After testing 10 models, I awarded BougeRV's Rocky 55-qt. electric cooler best in show for its versatility, light weight (for its capacity), convenient features and price. The Rocky is dual-zone, meaning you can assign each of its two compartments to be a fridge or a freezer, and it comes with a removable divider, handy for anglers or

hunters who may need a wider space for their catch.

As with most electric coolers, you can run the Rocky off of your car's 12V socket, an AC wall plug or a portable power station. As an upsell, you can buy a 173Wh battery, which takes 100W solar from a panel (also sold separately). Most manufacturers make unrealistic claims about how long their batteries last, but BougeRV is refreshingly honest and spot-on with theirs: Expect it to last around four hours on eco mode in hot weather. —*Karuna Eberl*, outdoor writer and film producer
BougeRV Rocky 55QT Dual Zone 12V Portable Fridge, \$650 (41QT version pictured, \$550); bougerv.com, walmart.com, wellbots.com

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A Gear Box Ready for Adventure

The North Face Base Camp Gear Box is exactly what it sounds like: A box that holds gear. But this isn't your average plastic, snap-lid storage box. It's built with 300-denier polyester with a durable, water-resistant thermoplastic polyurethane coating that resists abrasion and tearing and is ultra easy to clean. The box stacks easily and is collapsible too: When not in use, it folds down to be no thicker than a good book.

I jumped on the opportunity to try the box myself, using it to pack my gear for free diving, snorkeling and swimming excursions, as well as a 10.5-mile river kayaking trip. I ended up liking the box so much that I now take it out even for simple days at the beach. On one such outing I got caught in a sudden downpour, truly putting the box's water resistance to the test. Luckily, there was no need to worry: My beach towels, phone, wallet—and snacks!—were all safe and sound. —Amanda Capritto, certified nutrition coach and outdoor writer *The North Face Base Camp Gear Box (Medium)*, \$150; *Backcountry*, *Public Lands*, thenorthface.com



Upgrade Your Camp Kitchen

Campfire cooking can be tricky, especially for novice campers. The BioLite EcoZoom Versa camping stove is perfect for the occasional outdoor chef, delivering spectacular results while requiring only minimal effort and a pocket lighter.

This compact rocket stove efficiently generates tons of heat on its 9.5-in. cast-iron cooktop, which one reviewer says can boil 2 qt. of water in a Dutch oven in 10 minutes. I like how pots and pans sit flat, too, so the process feels just like working in an indoor kitchen. Another major perk: You won't have to lug any heavy fuel canisters to your campsite, since the stove runs off charcoal or flammable materials that can be easily gathered outdoors, such as wood, twigs and dried leaves.

The stainless steel handles feature convenient silicone grips, allowing you to effortlessly move the stove around even while it's fired up, and the heavy insulation stays cool to the touch, keeping your hands and campsite safe. —Allison T.S. Robicelli, writer and kitchen equipment tester *BioLite EcoZoom Versa Wood & Charcoal Rocket Stove*, \$160; bioliteenergy.com, amazon.com



Need to Go While On the Go?

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Better Alfresco Dining

Like a good pair of hiking boots, a hearty, nutritious meal is a necessary piece of adventure gear. After trying dozens of freeze-dried trail meals from more than 10 different brands, I can confidently declare that Backpacker's Pantry produces the best value. The meals weigh from 4 to 5 ounces, contain more than 500 calories to keep you energized, and cost around \$11, making them a great bang for your buck.

I sampled three meals from Backpacker's Pantry: the fettuccine chicken Alfredo, the lasagna, and the fiesta beef and vegetable bowl. All three were up to par in terms of taste and texture. There was no unusual crunching, which is common with chicken and beef, or other unsavory textures. The packets have a longer soaking time—15 minutes compared with other brands' 10 minutes or less—but it's a measly price to pay for a warm, satisfying meal.

The available recipes suit many diets, with vegan and allergen-free choices, and a high-calorie collection offers good options for intense, multi-day excursions. Best of all, Backpacker's Pantry emphasizes sustainability: They produce all meals in their 100% solar-powered Colorado-based headquarters. —Amanda Capritto, certified nutrition coach and outdoor writer *Backpacker's Pantry Entrees*, \$8-\$13; backpackerspantry.com, Scheels, REI

Sleep in a Cot Fit for a King

Looking to upgrade my outdoor sleep setup, I tested REI Co-op's Kingdom Cot 3, a favorite among adventure enthusiasts. While it's too bulky to take backpacking, I hoped it could be a great fit for drive-in campsites. I found the 20-lb. frame a little awkward to carry during my backyard test, though it's certainly manageable for one person over short distances. Unfortunately, once

I got to my two-person tent, I ran into another snag: The large cot wouldn't fit inside!

While it won't be a go-to for me, if you have a tent with ample space and don't mind the heavier weight, I can promise you'll sleep well. The Kingdom Cot 3 is easily the most comfortable camping cot I've used. It's truly fit for royalty, offering a plush, curved design with plenty of room to

twist and turn. The folding aluminum and steel frame is topped with a foam mattress upholstered with durable water-resistant polyester, and the three pairs of independently adjustable legs allow you to set up a stable sleeping platform in almost any situation. —Amanda Capritto, certified nutrition coach and outdoor writer *REI Co-op Kingdom Cot 3*, \$200; REI.com



FROM TOP: VIA BACKPACKER'S PANTRY; VIA REI

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Upgrade Your Entryway

Smart ideas and easy DIYs for making your front porch an inviting outdoor oasis

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS

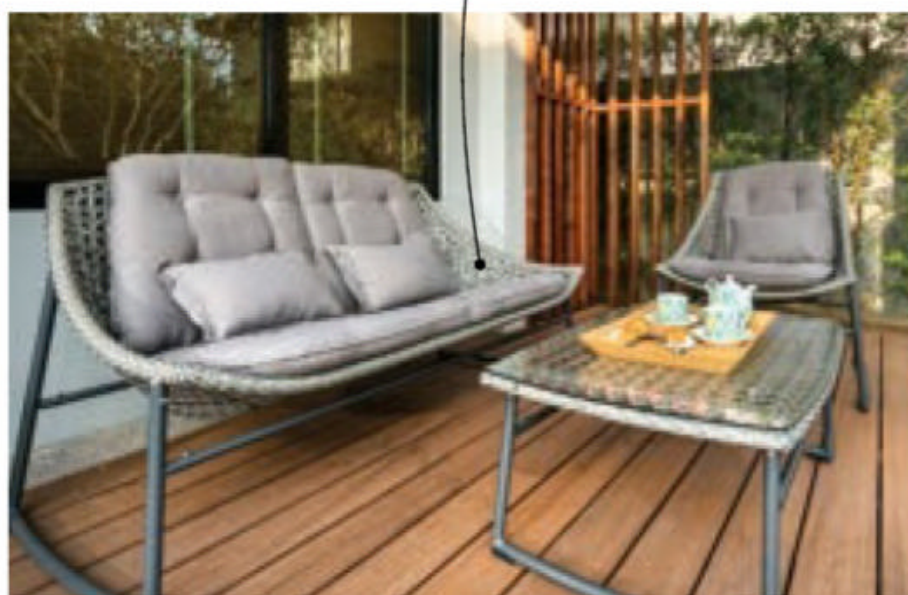


COZY UP ON A CUSHIONED SWING BED

ADD A SPLASH OF COLOR WITH A BOLD BISTRO SET



CREATE AN OUTDOOR LIVING ROOM WITH MODERN WICKER



STYLE IT

Take a Seat

A well-designed porch isn't just a place to sit—it's a space to unwind and connect. The right seating setup can transform it into a go-to spot for morning coffee, game nights, reading, or long conversations with family and friends. Get inspired and create a welcoming, comfortable space you'll love to use and share.

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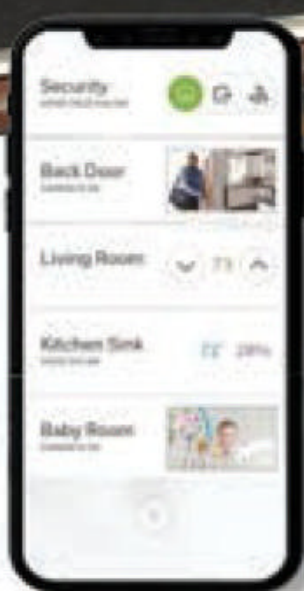
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1



2



SECURE IT

Thwart Porch Pirates

A welcoming entryway shouldn't be an open invitation for package thieves. Use these tips to keep your home and deliveries safe.



3



4

1. Use a Parcel Drop Box

A parcel drop box protects deliveries from both thieves and the elements. Couriers place packages through an opening at the top, and you retrieve them from a secure compartment below. Some smart models send delivery alerts and allow for remote locking and unlocking. We especially like the sleek Elephantrunk Drop Box from Architectural Mailboxes (\$250), which has a rotating drum design to keep packages safe.

2. Amp Up Outdoor Security

Visible security features, such as motion-activated lights or a video doorbell, can go a long way when it comes to theft prevention. For more comprehensive protection, consider a whole-home security system. Ring, Honeywell and ADT are among the top-rated brands, according to *Consumer Reports*.

3. Get Smart About Amazon Deliveries

Amazon Prime members in eligible areas can have packages delivered safely inside their smart garage with Amazon Key. Another option is Amazon Locker—type your ZIP code into the online locator tool to find one nearby. Lockers are free to use, and Prime members still receive free two-day shipping. Need to make a return? You can drop off packages at a locker too!

4. Require a Signature

To keep your deliveries from being left unattended, check off “signature required” when entering shipping details online. This is an option with all the major services, such as UPS, FedEx, DHL and USPS. If you won't be home to sign, some services—such as UPS MyChoice—allow you to redirect deliveries to a trusted neighbor.

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BUILD IT

Modern House Numbers

Add functional flair to your entryway
with this customizable weekend build

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ



Every house has numbers visible from the street so visitors and postal workers can find their way, yet few homeowners give this detail much creative thought. For this project, I set out to show how a set of numbers on the front of your home can do more than just mark your address—they can set the stage for what lies beyond the door. The result is a weekend build that is easy to make for a beginner DIYer, yet still elevated and modern enough to make anyone walking up to your door say “wow.”

When choosing a location for your panel, aim for a spot eye level or higher that’s easily visible from the road and free of

Tools

- ½" drill bit
- 2 paint brushes (1 for stain, 1 for sealer)
- 18-gauge brad nailer
- Countersink drill bit
- Drill
- Level
- Mallet
- Miter saw
- Scissors
- Speed square

Materials

- ½" screws
- 1x8x10' red oak
- 1½" 18-gauge brad nails
- 1½" screws
- 6" house numbers
- Clean shop rags
- Exterior wood glue
- Landscape fabric
- Plant of choice
- Plastic sheeting
- Potting soil
- Spar varnish
- Stain
- Z-clips



obstructions (such as shrubs or tree branches). Use contrasting colors or place the panel near a well-lit area for better visibility, even in low light conditions. And if your house sits far back from the road, consider using larger numbers so they're easy to read.

1 STAIN THE TRIM

Stain the trim pieces (D, E, F and G) using a dark color that contrasts with the natural wood. An oil-based stain will give the wood more longevity when exposed to the elements. Set aside the stained pieces and let them dry (you can touch up any exposed ends after the main panel is framed).

2 DETERMINE THE PANEL SIZE

Our address has four numbers, but yours may be different. Adjust the panel size accordingly.

Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	1	¾" x 6" x 40"	Main panel
B	3	¾" x 5½" x 6"	Flower box sides
C	1	¾" x 4½" x 6"	Flower box bottom
D	2	¾" x 1½" x 40"	Panel side trim
E	2	¾" x 1½" x 7½"	Panel top/bottom trim
F	4	¾" x 1½" x 6"	Flower box side trim
G	2	¾" x 1½" x 7½"	Flower box face trim

by laying out the numbers on a scrap piece of wood or cardboard. Decide how much space you want above, below and on the sides of the numbers, taking into consideration the 5½-in. flower box and plants that will need room to grow. The numbers may have different widths, but they are usually all the same height. Once you have determined your preferred dimensions, cut the main panel (A) to size.

Use the manufacturer's template to align and drill holes for the house number standoffs in the main panel (A). For a vertical arrangement like ours, find the centerline of the board, determine where you want the numbers to start and work your way down, laying out the numbers and drilling the screw holes.

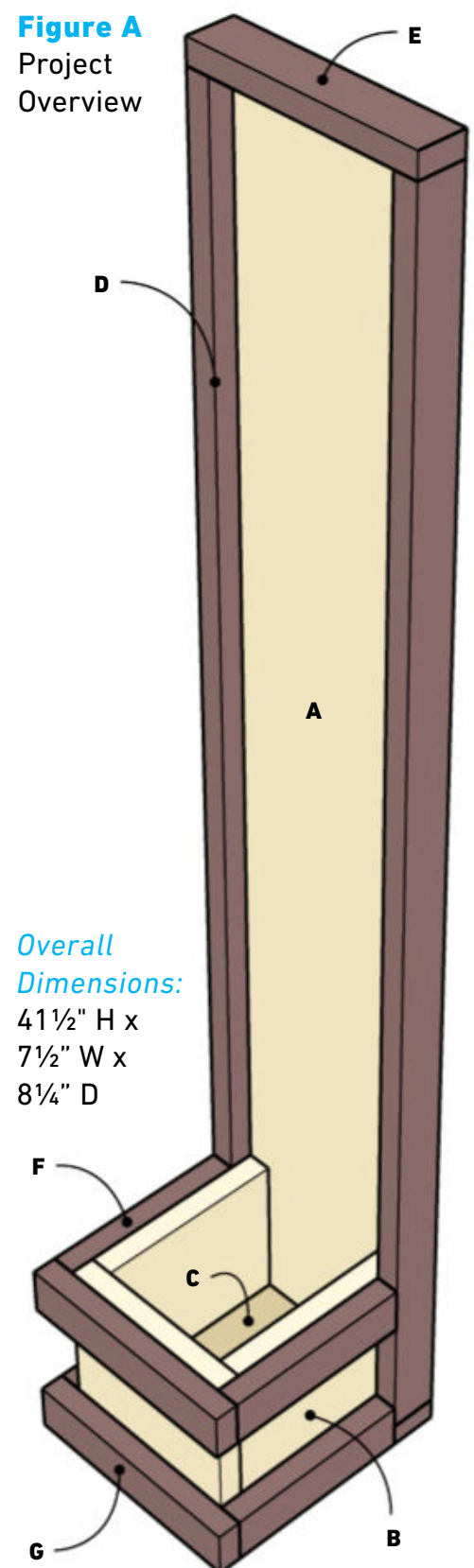
NOTE: Always test-fit your numbers before drilling holes. It is much easier to adjust the placement before drilling than to hide and repair a misplaced screw hole.

After drilling the holes, set aside the numbers—they will be installed later.

3 BUILD THE FLOWER BOX

Use wood glue and brad nails to assemble the three-sided flower box out of the flower box sides (B) and flower box bottom (C) (see Figure A).

Figure A
Project Overview



Overall Dimensions:
41½" H x
7½" W x
8¼" D



4 DRILL THE DRAIN HOLE
Drill a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. hole in the center of the flower box bottom (C) to allow for water drainage. This will prevent the wood and plant roots from rotting.

5 ATTACH THE FLOWER BOX TO THE MAIN PANEL
From the back of the main panel (A), attach the flower box with wood glue, brad nails and $1\frac{1}{2}$ -in. screws. Pre-drill and countersink the holes so the back of the main panel (A) will sit flush when installed. Use screws, not nails, to give the box ample strength to support the plant and dirt.

6 TRIM OUT THE PANEL
Trim out the main panel (A) by nailing on the panel side trim (D) and panel top/bottom trim (E). Nail the panel trim

pieces so that the back edge is flush to the back edge of the main panel (A). This will leave a $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. overhang around the numbers, making it look like a shadow box, and will allow you to hang the whole unit flush on the wall.

When the panel trim is attached, glue and nail on the flower box side trim (F) and face trim (G).

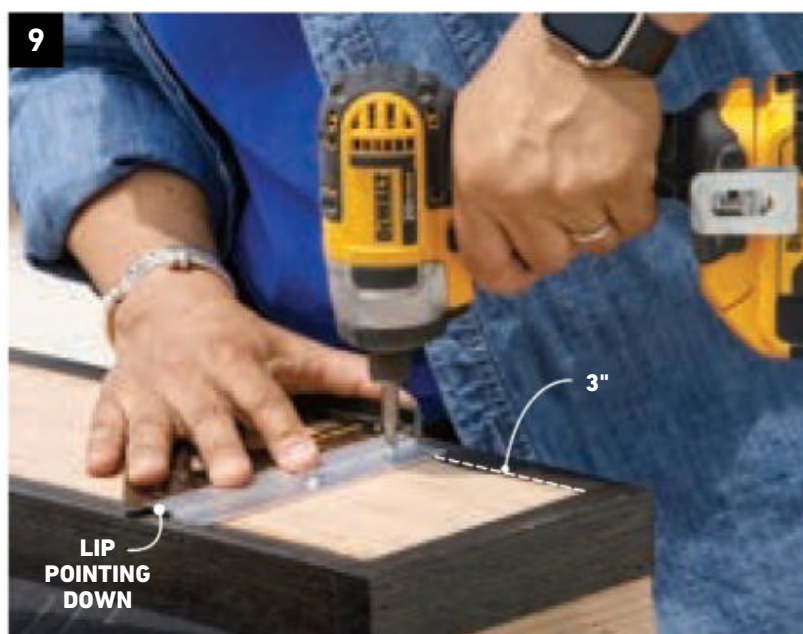
NOTE: To avoid staining the natural-colored wood pieces (A, B and C) with your fingerprints, make sure the dark stain is completely dry before you handle and install the trim pieces.

7 SEAL THE PROJECT
Apply at least two coats of spar varnish to the entire unit, including the back of the main panel and inside the flower box.

8 ATTACH THE HOUSE NUMBERS
Attach the house numbers by screwing them onto the main panel (A) from the backside. Use a mallet to make sure the numbers are fully seated on the panel. Countersink all the screw heads so the back of the panel remains flat.

9 ATTACH THE ALUMINUM CLEAT ON THE PANEL
To hang this project, we used aluminum French cleat picture hangers, also known as z-clips, which are designed to marry into each other. One clip is attached on the back of the main panel (A) with the lip down, and one is attached where you'd like the panel to hang with the lip up.

To balance the weight of the panel and flower box, we attached the panel side of the cleat 3 in. down from the top of the main



panel (A) using $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. screws. Use a Speed square to make sure it is attached square on the panel.

10 ATTACH THE ALUMINUM CLEAT ON THE HOUSE

Slide the loose house-side z-clip so that it marries with the attached z-clip on the back of the main panel (A) and measure from the top of the top trim piece (E) to the bottom of the loose z-clip. For our build, that measurement came out to $6\frac{7}{8}$ in.: $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. (the gap above the panel-side z-clip, including the top trim) + $3\frac{1}{8}$ in. (the combined height of the married z-clips).

After determining the desired installation location and height on your house, install the z-clip on your house centered behind the location of your panel, with the lip facing up and the bottom

of the z-clip $6\frac{7}{8}$ in. (use the measurement you calculated) lower than the desired height. Use a level to ensure that the panel will hang level.

If you are installing the z-clip directly into wood, secure it with screws. If you are installing into a hollow wall, brick or stone, use an appropriate anchor to secure the cleat with screws.

Once the cleat system has been secured, do a test hanging of the panel before you fill the flower box with dirt and plants. The assembled unit is lighter and easier to maneuver when it is empty.

11 PREP THE FLOWER BOX

To protect the flower box wood from too much exposure to moisture, line it with plastic sheeting (a sandwich bag will

work too). Be sure to poke a hole through the plastic to expose the drainage hole. Then, line the flower box with a small piece of landscape fabric over the plastic. Leave the landscape fabric intact over the drain hole. Water will drain, and dirt will stay in the flower box.

12 PLANT THE FLOWER BOX

Add potting soil and plants to the flower box. You can do this while the assembled panel is hanging or on the ground, whichever feels easiest for you. The panel will gain considerable weight once dirt and plants are in place. You can also simply drop in the plant in its plastic pot. If you do so, you'll still need to line the flower box with plastic and landscape fabric to protect the wood and the plant. ●

Front Door Refresh

Achieve a professional paint finish without taking it off the hinges

BY SAMUEL ROSENMAYER

Giving your front door a fresh coat of paint is a surefire way to boost your home's curb appeal. But it's more than a simple brush-and-bucket job. For the best results, the door ideally should be taken off its hinges, laid flat and carefully painted to ensure even coverage and neat edges. That said, this isn't always practical, especially for homeowners with heavy wood doors that are tricky to handle alone.

If you're uncertain about getting your door on and off its hinges or simply looking to save time, I'll show you how to paint it in place and achieve a finish you can be proud of. Trust me—your neighbors will never know the difference.

What It Takes

Time
1 day or less

Cost
\$50-\$100

Skill Level
Beginner

Tools

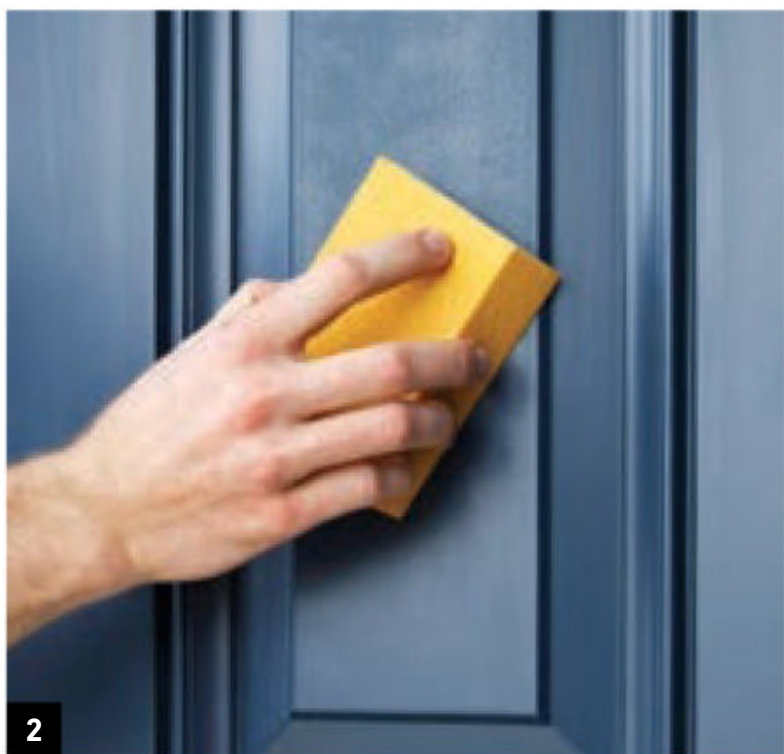
- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| • Angled paintbrush | • Heat gun or hair dryer | • Old toothbrush |
| • Dropcloths | • Ladder or stepstool | • Paint roller |
| | | • Paint tray |
| | | • Screwdriver |



CORAL CLAY
BY SHERWIN-
WILLIAMS



1



2



5

Before you begin, note the material of your door. Most exterior doors are wood, fiberglass, steel or wood clad in aluminum. Certain paints and primers will adhere better to different materials, so ask the experts at your local paint store for specific product recommendations. I used a satin exterior enamel paint/primer and was very pleased with the results. It dried smoothly and quickly, so I didn't have to wait around for hours to apply the next coat.

If you're using a high-gloss paint, keep in mind that it will reveal imperfections more readily than other finishes, such as semigloss or satin. Filling in any cracks or holes and repairing any other flaws on your door before painting will help ensure the best result.

Finally, since you'll be working against gravity on a vertical door, you will need to take a little extra care as you paint. To prevent drips, use a foam roller to apply the paint uniformly, apply multiple thin coats, and don't forget to spread a drop cloth beneath the door for extra insurance.

1 REMOVE THE DOOR HANDLE

Use a screwdriver to remove the door handle and lock.

2 LIGHTLY SAND THE DOOR

Lightly scuff the door with a 220-grit sanding sponge. Be careful not to apply too much pressure, as it may scratch the door deeply enough to show through the paint.

NOTE: If your door is in rough condition, make repairs before scuffing it: Scrape off flaking paint, fill holes with wood filler and sand flush, etc.

3 CLEAN THE DOOR

After sanding, clean the door with a

damp microfiber cloth. If it's still dirty, use a cleaning degreaser. You can use an old toothbrush to clean the tight spaces in the recessed panel edges. Finish removing small dust and debris with a cheesecloth.

4 TAPE THE EDGES

Use painter's tape to cover the edges of the door and frame. Take your time and don't skimp on tape—mistakes will show, especially on door frames.

5 PREP THE SPACE

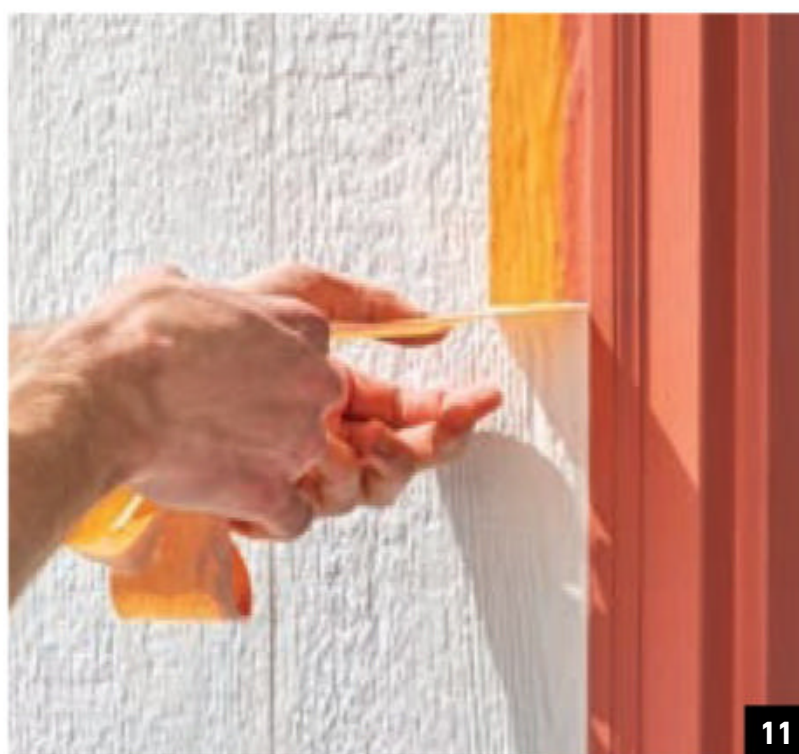
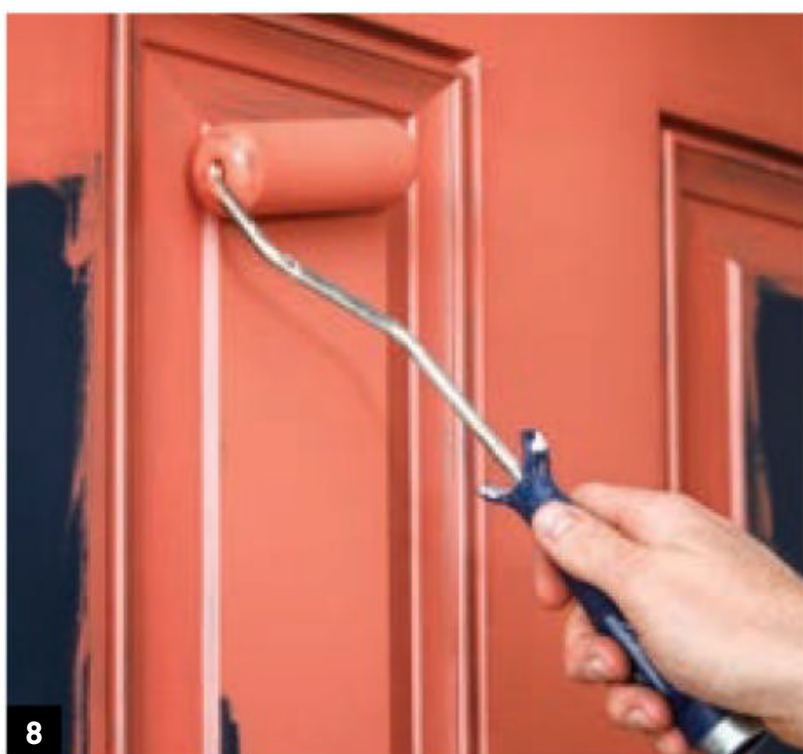
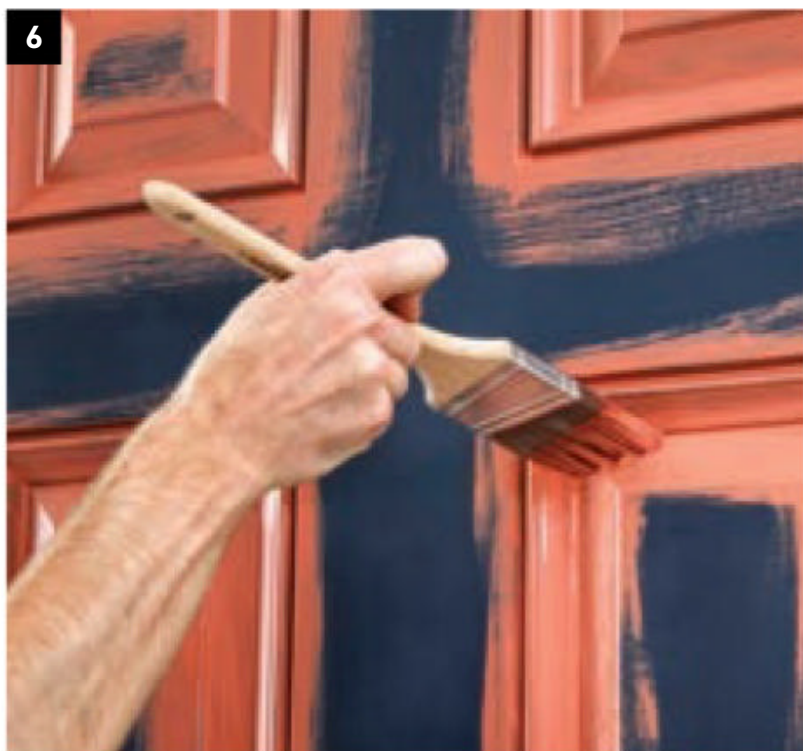
Lay down a drop cloth to prevent paint from dripping onto the floor.

6 PAINT THE PANEL EDGES

Stir the paint, then begin painting any recessed panel edges with an angled paintbrush. Start with the highest recessed panels and work your way down.

Materials

- 220-grit sanding sponge
- 320-grit sanding sponge
- Cheesecloths
- Clean microfiber cloths
- Cleaning degreaser (optional)
- Exterior enamel paint/primer
- Painter's tape



7 PAINT THE EDGES AND TRIM
Using the paintbrush, paint the edges of the door and the door frame.

8 ROLL THE REST
Switch to a paint roller and paint the large, flat surfaces of the door. Again, start at the top of the door and work your way down.

9 LIGHTLY SAND BETWEEN COATS
Let the paint dry

completely, then lightly sand the door with a 320-grit sanding sponge. Don't apply too much pressure. After sanding, wipe down the door with a damp microfiber cloth, then with a cheesecloth.

10 PAINT THE SECOND COAT
Apply a second coat of paint, repeating the process detailed in Steps 6–8, then let the second coat dry completely.

TIP: Whenever I paint in high-traffic areas such as a front entryway, I use a heat gun or hair dryer to speed up the drying process and minimize the risk of someone touching or brushing against the wet paint.

11 REATTACH THE DOOR HANDLE AND CLEAN UP
Remove the painter's tape and reinstall the door handle and lock.

Clean off the paint brushes and rollers. Store the paint in a safe location and label it so you'll know what project the paint was used on. ●



Video Online
Scan the QR code to see a video of this project.



HOW TO INSTALL A Porch Light Fixture

Upgrade your outdoor space with
bold and bright statement lighting

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

Before I gained experience with electrical projects, I often found them intimidating and overwhelming. The idea of working with wiring was especially daunting! But after plenty of hands-on work, I've learned that installing or changing a simple light fixture—while requiring respect for safety and attention to detail—really isn't as complicated as it seems, and usually doesn't require expensive tools. Just as important: I've learned that sometimes calling in a pro is the best choice.

For this project, we wanted to install an outdoor light fixture in a spot without existing wiring or a junction box, and connect it to a new switch inside the entryway. So to handle some of the heavy lifting, I called in Milwaukee's Burkhardt Heating, Cooling, Plumbing & Electric. Their licensed electrician installed the junction box, ran the wiring through the walls and expanded the entryway box for a new switch—all in just a few hours. Doing it myself would have turned the job into a full weekend project (with a few extra drywall repairs along the way). With a pro on site, I could focus on installing the fixture itself.

Whether you tackle the full process shown here or jump in for the finishing touches, the appeal of a new porch fixture is undeniable: You'll be left with a bright, inviting space that's ready to welcome company.

1 CUT THE HOLE
After determining a location for the fixture, use a hole saw to cut a hole through the soffit panels and OSB underlayment into the cavity above the porch.

2 RUN THE WIRES
Making sure you have plenty of excess wire, begin feeding it toward the location of the new switch. Be patient with this—depending on how far you need to run

it, fishing wire through a wall can be frustrating. If you decide to have the new fixture on an existing circuit with capacity, run the wire to the nearest light fixture or outlet on that circuit. When the wire is run to its final destination, install a junction box in the porch rafter with the wires running through it, then strip about ½ in. off the ends on each side of the wires.

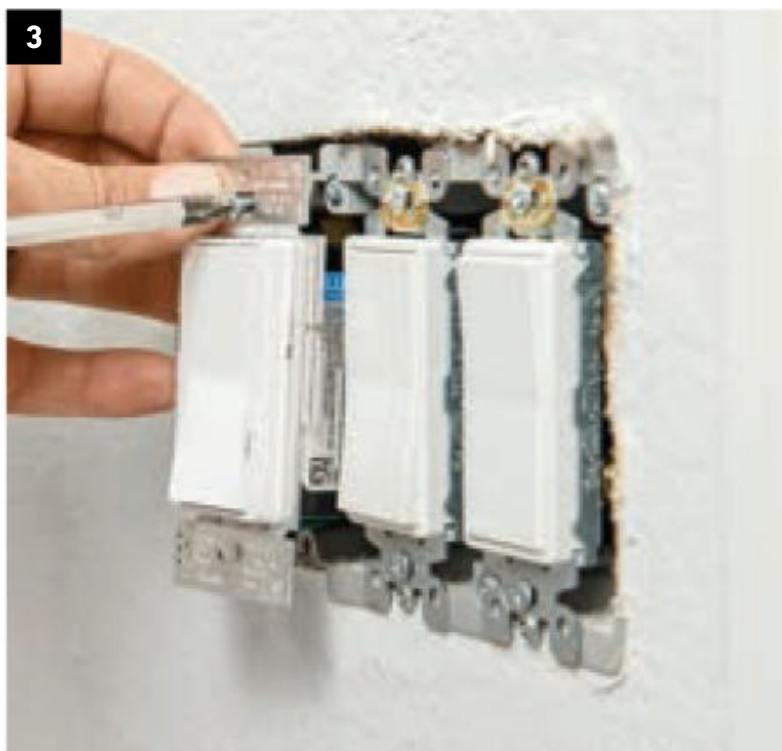
What It Takes

Time Varies	Cost Varies	Skill Level Intermediate
----------------	----------------	-----------------------------

Tools

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Caulk gun | • Ladder or stepstool |
| • Cordless drill | • Noncontact voltage tester |
| • Fish tape | • Wire stripper |
| • Hole saw | |
| • Insulated screwdriver | |





3 MAKE THE SWITCH CONNECTIONS

If you are running the light to a new switch, make those connections now.



4 ATTACH A MOUNTING PLATE

The junction box will have various holes to accommodate different light mounting plates sold with your light fixture. Some mounting plates are round, some are square and some are just a flat bar. These mounting plates or bars (regardless of manufacturer) are designed to correspond with at least one set of holes in your junction box.

Manufacturers often provide more than one mounting option in their instructions. Choose the one that makes the most secure connection between the junction box and the mounting plate. If you can't find holes in the junction box that



5 CONNECT THE WIRES

Position the wires for easy access when making your connections. Follow the manufacturer's instructions or diagram to connect the corresponding colors: white wire to white wire, black wire to black wire, and copper wire to green grounding wire or screw.

The light fixture we installed is "damp rated," which means the electric wire connection is protected from the elements by connecting the wires inside a capsule-shaped housing (see Photo 5). This housing is also known as a waterproof three-pole wire connector external electrical junction box.

The three-pole wire connector is stamped with a letter key for a corresponding placement of the wires in your fixture. Follow the specific placement for the white, black and grounding wire,

Materials

- Electrical wire
- Junction box
- Light fixture with mounting hardware
- Light switch
- Siliconized caulk
- Wire nuts

Safety Considerations

As with all electrical projects, ensure that the power to the area you are working in is turned off at the breaker before beginning work. Use a noncontact voltage tester, insulated tools and a nonmetal ladder during the installation. If at all possible, work on a dry day. The last thing you want to do is install a light fixture when it's raining.



and secure tightly with the small screw found in the housing. Be sure to use the right size screwdriver to avoid stripping the small screws inside the housing. Seal the wires into the capsule and continue with your process as you would with any light fixture by neatly tucking the excess wires into the junction box.

NOTE: If your light fixture doesn't come with a protected housing, make sure to cover the wire connections with the appropriate wire nuts.

6 MOUNT THE FIXTURE

Tuck the wires away so they don't impede your ability to secure the fixture to the mounting plate. Install the fixture using the screws provided in their designated locations. Do this by hand rather than with a drill, in case you need to adjust a wire so it doesn't get pinched in the process.

7 TEST THE FIXTURE

Once your fixture is securely installed and before you install the lampshade or cover, turn the power back on at the circuit breaker and test the light by turning it on at the light switch. If your light doesn't turn on, turn off the power and go back to ensure that all the wire connections have been properly made. Also, be sure you have a working light bulb in the fixture. You'd be surprised how many



people think their light fixture doesn't work and find out the issue is merely a blown bulb.

Once the light is functioning properly, turn off the switch and attach the shade according to the manufacturer's instructions.

8 CAULK AROUND THE BASE

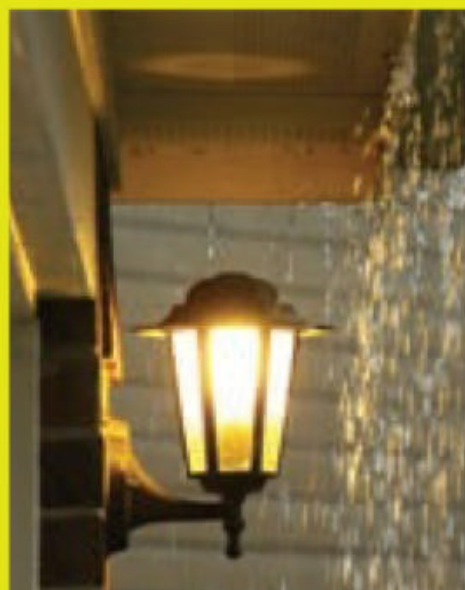
For added safety and a cleaned-up look around the hole in your porch ceiling, apply a bead of siliconized caulk around the seam where the light fixture meets

the ceiling. This will help keep moisture and bugs out, and serve as an added support layer should the light fixture come loose from prolonged exposure to heavy winds.



Video Online

Scan the QR code to see a video of this project.



Choosing a Light Fixture

When shopping for exterior light fixtures, you'll encounter "exterior-grade" and "damp-rated" options. If your fixture will be exposed to all weather conditions, go with exterior grade. For covered porches that won't receive sheets of rain, such as the one we worked on, damp rated will suffice. If you're unsure, err on the side of caution and opt for higher protection. And look for a fixture with a universal mounting bar plate that will be compatible with your junction box. ●



ULTIMATE GUIDE TO **Easy-Care Landscaping**

Transforming your front yard can be done with minimal effort and tools. Take these tips, dig in and see your home's curb appeal bloom.

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ
AND KELLY AIGLON

Carmen De La Paz and garden pro Melinda Myers arrange plants in the front yard of the home where we installed a low-maintenance garden.



One week last June, most members of the *Family Handyman* project team were on location. The goal: Add low-maintenance beds full of plants to enhance the look and feel of a bare bones front yard landscape in the Milwaukee suburbs. With careful planning, a little bit of elbow grease and guidance from an expert, we gave the homeowners a couple of easy-care beds that will wow them year after year.

Use these tips and learnings from our project to add interest and appeal to your front yard.

Pro Tips for Planning

The first thing to do when planning any front yard feature is to think about what you want out of it. Are you trying to attract

birds? Add color or fragrance to the area? Cover up some unsightly porch or deck footings? Universally, one main goal applies: to give things a new look and boost the curb appeal of your home.

Once you know your mission, select the plants that will get you there. Milwaukee-based gardening expert Melinda Myers designed our garden. “I selected plants suited to the growing conditions and those that require minimal attention to look good throughout the growing season,” Myers says. To get started, she recommends first visiting your local garden center and reading the plant tags.

“Plant tags give you the growing conditions and the size of the plant,” she says. “Some nurseries are now sharing more

information on their website—you can learn so much more than just the hardiness zone.”

Some research beyond the plant tag may be required to ensure they are easy to care for. “Many plants are aggressive or reseed readily, which is fine if you have the space or desire to dig or divide,” Myers says. “Look for plants that have few pest problems, combine nicely with other plants and require minimal or no deadheading.”

And remember: Once plants are in the ground, you still may not have a true garden. After all, many plants take years to grow into their fullest potential. Myers has a fix for this: “Use smaller complementary plants and annuals for quick fill until your main plants have grown into the space,



so it looks like your garden has been there for a while.”

Myers maintains that the key to a healthy and successful garden is being responsive to your plants’ needs and adapting your approach as necessary to help them thrive.

Sketch a Map to Establish the Space

Once you’ve selected plants, it’s a good idea to make a quick drawing of your planting plan (see our loose sketch on the next page). The sketch should primarily include the anchor plants you want to grow. From there, it’s easier to get an idea of how the garden will come together. As

you plot them, consider the size of the plants now and how big they will be at maturity.

Take Note of Your Soil

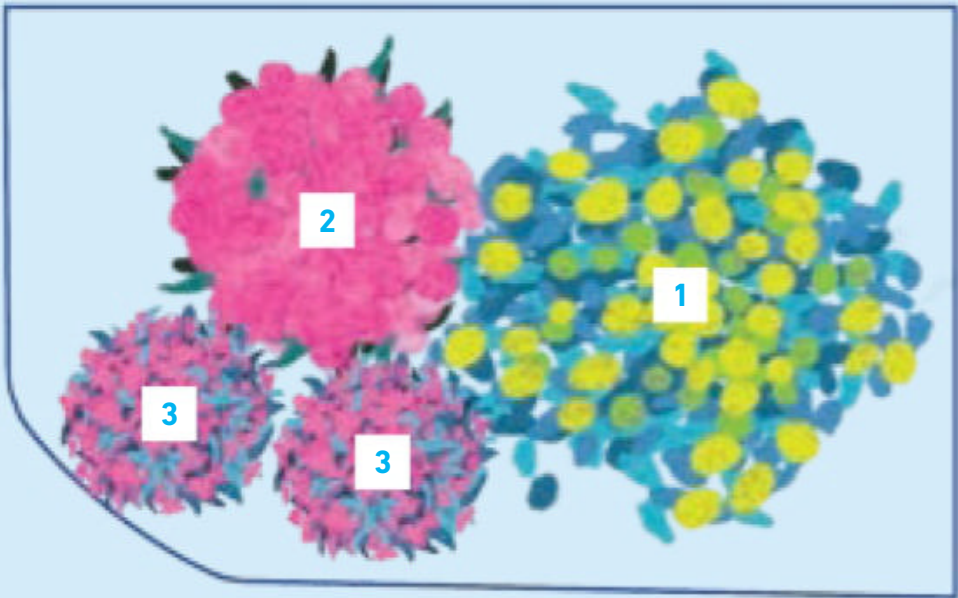
If you have low quality soil, your soon-to-be-planted flora may need some extra nourishment. Enhance your current soil with equal parts compost and topsoil. Use a tiller to help combine the compost and topsoil with the existing soil. For good drainage, the soil should be fluffy and light, not compact and tight.

Lay Out the Plants

Before committing to plant placement, take time to set the plants in their plastic pots

“I selected plants that are suited to the growing conditions and require minimal care to look good for the entire growing season.”

—Melinda Myers

Easy Planting Plan

For our front yard garden, we chose three types of anchor plants in various sizes that are all ideal for use in perennial beds.

1. Korean Spice Viburnum
As the largest plant of the three, reaching 4 to 6 ft. tall, the Korean Spice viburnum was planted along the wall, leaving space around it for future growth.

2. Fire Light Tidbit Hydrangea
At 2 to 3 ft. tall, the Fire Light Tidbit hydrangea is smaller than other hydrangeas and offers easy-care color.

3. My Monet Purple Effect Weigela
The weigelas were planted in the front because they are the smallest at about 2 ft. tall and they provide color contrast within the bed.

Use Annuals to Fill Gaps
We used colorful petunias and other annuals to fill in the gaps. These annuals won't come back next year, as the perennials fill in the space.

where you envision them. This will allow you to move things, step back and really think about where you want the plants to live and thrive. Always consider the trajectory of sunlight and color flow in flowers and leaves.

When playing with placement, keep in mind the potential growth size of each plant and allow them room to grow. For visual interest, avoid putting the same color or plant right next to each other unless you want to make a specific statement, such as a straight line of lavender. The more thought and purpose you dedicate to this step, the more successful your garden will be.

Dig and Plant

Make digging holes easier by using a garden auger attachment with a drill. Read the plant tag for the suggested depth and separation from other plants. Plants always do better if the hole is dug deep enough to fully cover the root ball with soil. Use the pot the plant came in as a gauge and go a few inches deeper to allow the roots to expand.

Lay In Landscape Mulch

Give your flower bed a finished and clean look with a 2-to-3-in. layer of organic mulch under and around the plants. Use a composting material such as cardboard or newspaper under

the mulch to keep it intact for a longer period of time. Mulch also helps maintain moisture, making the need for watering less frequent.

Water Regularly

Follow the water recommendations for each plant, but be prepared to adjust your schedule as needed to account for changes in the weather.

The general rule is to keep the soil from becoming too dry or overly saturated. Pay attention to the leaves. If they start to change color or droop, that's a sign that they aren't happy with their current watering situation.



Edge a Garden Bed

Your landscape will be tidy, polished and easy to maintain when you contain it with metal edging

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

As part of our curb appeal makeover, we added a garden bed along the home's concrete walkway. To contain the bed and keep it looking nice and tidy, we used metal edging to create a crisp, clear outline. If you have an existing bed and want to add edging, start on Step 5. Otherwise, start here to create and edge a brand-new bed.

1 OUTLINE THE AREA Before you start digging, take some time to define the garden bed. Use landscape marking paint to spray a line where you plan to install the metal edging. This particular paint is designed for use in an inverted position for marking construction and landscape projects. It works well on exterior surfaces such as

concrete, blacktop, gravel, soil and grass.

2 CUT THE SOD Using a lawn edger or square shovel, cut into the grass along the painted guideline. It helps to swivel or rock the edger or shovel back and forth to create enough space for the metal edging to fit.



3 REMOVE SOD, WEEDS AND ROOTS

Clear any grass or sod, pebbles or rocks from the planned garden section or walkway. A small garden tiller might help with hard-to-remove roots.

4 PREP THE SOIL

Mix in compost or topsoil. Lay the bags out and use a utility knife to cut them open in place. Then go back through with a rake or shovel and turn over the dirt.

5 STAKE EDGING INTO PLACE

With metal shears, clip off the stakes on the metal edging. You will use the stakes to secure the edging in place, in tandem with the next piece.

Using a 2x4 as a protective buffer between a dead-blow hammer and the metal edging, hammer the edging down until there is about 2 in. of metal above grade. Once the edging is positioned where you want it, secure it in place by inserting the metal stakes through the openings on the ends of each piece of edging. Overlap the edging slightly to secure two pieces with one stake.

Tools

- Garden tiller (optional)
- Lawn edger or square shovel
- Metal shears
- Rake or shovel
- Rubber mallet or dead-blow hammer
- Utility knife

To install the edging along a curved line, use wooden stakes to position the curve where you want it. Then drive the edging into the ground with the dead-blow hammer and 2x4, and secure it with the metal stakes. Remove the wooden stakes when you're done and push soil up against the metal edging from both sides for additional support and stability. ●

Materials

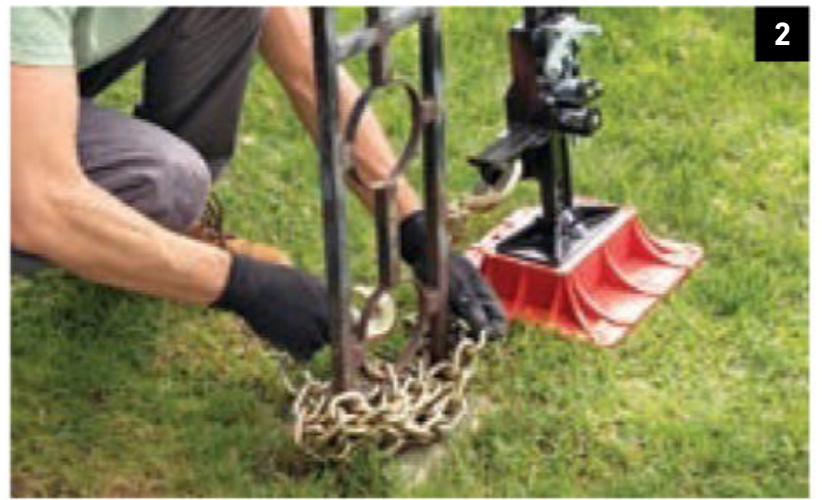
- 2x4 scrap wood
- Black metal edging in 8' x 4" sections
- Compost or topsoil
- Landscape marking paint
- Wooden stakes (optional)

You've Got Mail



Curb appeal isn't only about big-ticket renovations. Swap out or fix up your mailbox and enjoy the difference every day!

BY SAMUEL ROSENMAYER



Replace a Mailbox Post

Say goodbye to wobbles, rust and rot—and hello to a sturdy, lasting upgrade

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Your existing mailbox post is likely set in concrete, so removing it will take some elbow grease. That said, it's entirely possible to do it on your own, even if you run into snags. While I was removing the rusted steel mailbox post shown above, it broke from the cement block as the Hi-Lift jack raised it from the ground. I had to manually dig around the mailbox concrete, wrap the chain around it and securely raise it out. Although this cost me extra time (and gave me quite the arm workout), I was able to get the base out just fine.

Since you're already replacing your mailbox post, this might also be a good time to consider installing a new mailbox. Confirm that the new mailbox will fit the new post if you decide

to do this. Online photos can sometimes be misleading, so it's important to take accurate measurements.

1 REMOVE THE MAILBOX

Use a drill to remove the screws securing the mailbox to the post, then remove the mailbox.

2 REMOVE THE OLD MAILBOX POST

Attach one end of the tow chain to the bottom of the mailbox post. Connect the other end to a Hi-Lift farm jack. Place the jack about a foot away from the post, start cranking the handle, and use your other hand to stabilize the jack. Once the post is primarily out of the ground, you can finish pulling it out manually. If

Materials

- Concrete form tube
- Fast-setting concrete mix
- Gravel
- Mailbox post
- Rope
- Stakes

Tools

- Auger drill bit
- Bucket
- Drill
- Hammer drill
- Hi-Lift jack
- Jigsaw
- Level
- Mallet
- Post and pipe level
- Posthole digger
- Shovel
- Tape measure
- Tarp
- Tow chain
- Work gloves



the post breaks from the concrete, wrap the tow chain around the concrete and repeat the process.

3 REVIEW USPS GUIDELINES

The U.S. Postal Service's guidelines for installing a mailbox post are to bury the post no more than 24 in. deep and ensure that the bottom of the mailbox sits 41 to 45 in. off the road's surface. The mailbox needs to be 6 to 8 in. from the curb. Use a tape measure to ensure that you are in the correct location before digging, and check the USPS website for additional details if you are unsure.

4 DIG THE HOLE FOR THE MAILBOX POST

To dig a hole for the post, you will need an auger drill bit connected to a hammer drill or mud mixer, and a posthole digger. While you can get away without using an auger, it speeds up the process and saves your arms.

Ensure that the auger is fully rotating before penetrating the ground. Keep the hammer drill close to your body to maintain control while breaking up the ground. Remove the dirt using a posthole digger or shovel. Remember to take breaks while digging to check the hole depth with a tape measure to ensure that the concrete form tube will fit properly and that you are not digging too deep. Consider that the gravel layer you will place at the bottom of the hole will be 4 to 6 in. deep. Then, place the concrete form tube into the hole to verify that it fits.

TIP: Use a tarp at the dig site as a place to discard the dirt you dig out of the hole. It makes cleanup much easier.

5 LAY DOWN GRAVEL

When you have reached your desired depth, lay a 4-to-6-in. layer of pea gravel into the hole and level it by hand.

Adjust the mailbox's height as necessary, using a tape measure for accuracy. When attached to

the post, the bottom of the mailbox needs to be 41 to 45 in. off the road's surface. Add or remove gravel as needed to adjust the height. Once secured to the post, double-check that the mailbox will be positioned 6 to 8 in. from the curb.

6 MEASURE AND CUT THE CONCRETE FORM TUBE

Place the concrete form tube in the hole and mark 2 in. from the surface height with a tape measure. With a jigsaw, cut the concrete form tube where you've marked. Once cut, position the form tube into the hole and fill dirt around the outside of the tube so it fits snugly.

7 SECURE THE POST

Place the mailbox post exactly where you'd like it. Attach a post and pipe level and secure it with stakes and rope to keep it plumb and prevent movement while you pour the concrete mix.

8 POUR THE CONCRETE

Fill the concrete form tube halfway with fast-setting concrete mix, add the required water and mix it. After thoroughly mixing, fill the rest of the form tube with concrete mix until it reaches the top, then repeat the mixing process. Check that the post is plumb and adjust it as needed by wiggling and changing its position. Once the concrete sets, you won't be able to adjust the post again, so take the time to ensure it's level. Give the concrete 12 to 24 hours to cure before removing the supporting stakes.

9 REMOVE THE POST SUPPORTS

Once the concrete has cured, remove the post supports and install the mailbox onto the post.



Video Online

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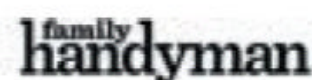
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Install a Mailbox

Dress up your doorstep with a wall-mounted model that complements your home's style

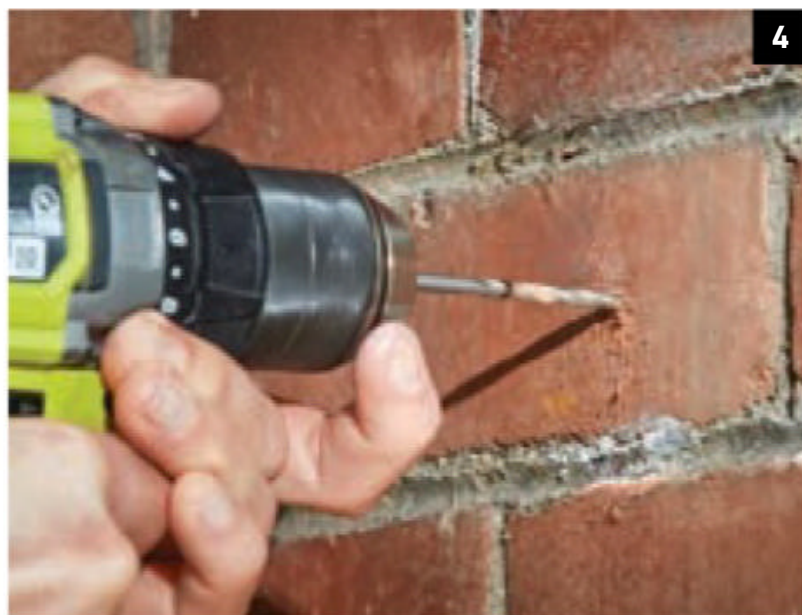
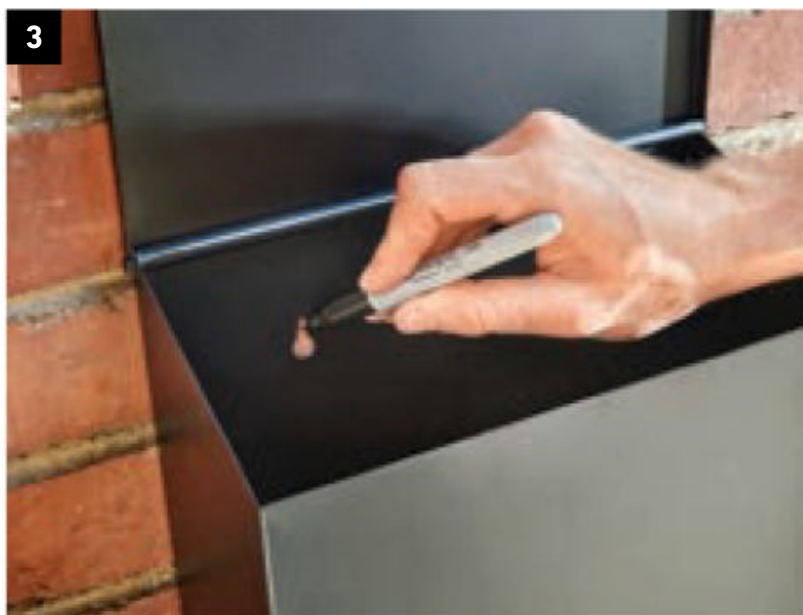
BEFORE YOU BEGIN: The exterior material of your house will impact the materials and installation method required for this project:

- **Brick:** Use a masonry drill bit and masonry screws to secure the mailbox.
- **Stucco:** As with brick, pre-drill a hole with a masonry drill bit. You'll also need to add silicone into the predrilled hole, insert an anchor and then fasten a concrete screw.
- **Wood:** Pre-drill and fasten a cedar surface mounting block with exterior screws. Then secure the mailbox to the mounting block with screws. You should always use exterior screws to prevent corrosion and rust, which can cause the screw to break.
- **Vinyl:** Use hooks specifically made to be used with vinyl without causing damage—drilling through vinyl is not recommended.

1 CHOOSE THE LOCATION

Depending on where you live, the U.S. Postal Service and some homeowners associations have mandatory guidelines for mailbox placement. Once you are familiar with these guidelines, choose a location near your main entrance that will be easy for the mail carrier to find and access.

NOTE: If you have a curbside mailbox and want to replace it with a mounted one, you'll need to get permission from your local postmaster first.



2 LEVEL THE MAILBOX
Hold the mailbox at the desired location and use a level to confirm it is level on the wall.

3 MARK THE HOLES
Once the mailbox is level, mark the locations of the keyhole mounts with a marker or pencil that will make visible marks on the exterior material of your home.

4 DRILL THE HOLES
Drill the holes for your fasteners. The depth and diameter of the hole is dependent on the screws or anchors you're using. Be sure to drill with the exact size masonry drill bit specified for your anchors or screws, and drill slightly deeper than the length of the screw (approximately ½ in.) to allow space for brick chips and dust to go when the screw is inserted.

Use a hammer drill or a drill with a “hammer” setting to drill these. Wear safety glasses to shield yourself from flying debris and use a shop vacuum to clear out the holes before inserting the screws or anchors.

5 FASTEN THE SCREWS
Use a drill to fasten the masonry screws in place, allowing the screw heads to stick out slightly for the keyhole mount on the mailbox.

6 ATTACH THE MAILBOX
Attach the mailbox to the wall by aligning the keyhole mounts with the masonry screws, then slightly tighten the screws if necessary. Adding address numbers to the mailbox is optional. Before applying the numbers, clean the mailbox to ensure the numbers adhere well.

Tools

Drill
Hammer drill
Level
Masonry drill bit
Marker
Shop vac

Materials

House numbers (optional)
Mailbox
Masonry screws



Video Online
Scan the QR code to see a video of this project.



Paint a Mailbox

Make a faded paint job look new again with a protective spray-on finish



1

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Using a protective enamel spray paint for this project is fast and effective and will give your mailbox extra defense against the elements. When working with spray paint, be sure to work outside or in a well-ventilated area—never in an enclosed space. And check the forecast before you start: Dry conditions and temperatures from 50 to 90 degrees are ideal.

1 DETACH THE MAILBOX

Remove the mailbox from the mailbox post using a drill to unscrew it from the bottom. Save the screws—you will use them to reattach the mailbox later. If you cannot remove the mailbox, Cover the post with a plastic painting sheet.

2 PREPARE A WORK AREA

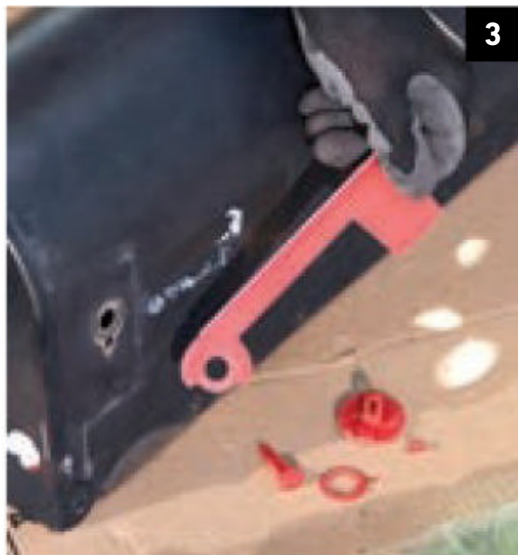
Lay a plastic sheet and cardboard under the mailbox. If needed, the cardboard will make it easy to move the mailbox as it dries.

3 REMOVE THE FLAG

Remove the flag from the mailbox.

4 PREP THE MAILBOX

Remove any rust from the mailbox surface using a wire brush or steel wool. Smooth out any dents, and use a putty knife to scrape off any stickers still stuck on the mailbox. Remove any stubborn adhesive with an adhesive remover such as Goo Gone.



5 CLEAN THE MAILBOX

Use a clean sponge and soapy water to clean the mailbox. Rinse and dry with a clean microfiber towel.

6 PRIME THE MAILBOX AND FLAG

Spray a thin coat of primer onto the flag, then spray the mailbox. You may need to apply two coats depending on how well the first coat goes on. If there are patchy areas that need additional primer, spray on another coat.

7 PAINT THE MAILBOX AND FLAG

Once the primer is dry, spray two thin coats of black paint onto the entire mailbox. Then, spray two thin coats of red paint onto the flag. Two coats are necessary for full and even coverage.

Let the paint dry completely, then use a drill to install the

mailbox back onto the post with the original screws.

NOTE: Be patient with this step! I had to fix some smudged spots and repaint them, so as tempting as it is, wait until the final coat of spray paint has dried and hardened completely before handling the mailbox.

8 REATTACH THE FLAG

Once the flag has dried completely, reattach it to the mailbox.

9 ATTACH THE ADDRESS NUMBERS

After painting your mailbox, add your house number.

For those who live in a city or town, the U.S. Postal Service guidelines state that every curbside mailbox must display the house number “in contrasting color using neat letters and numerals at least 1 in. high.” If you live in a rural area, you may also be required to put the road or highway name on the mailbox. This text should be visible on the side of the box facing the carrier’s regular approach or on the mailbox door if it is grouped together with others. •



Tools

Drill
Putty knife
Wire brush

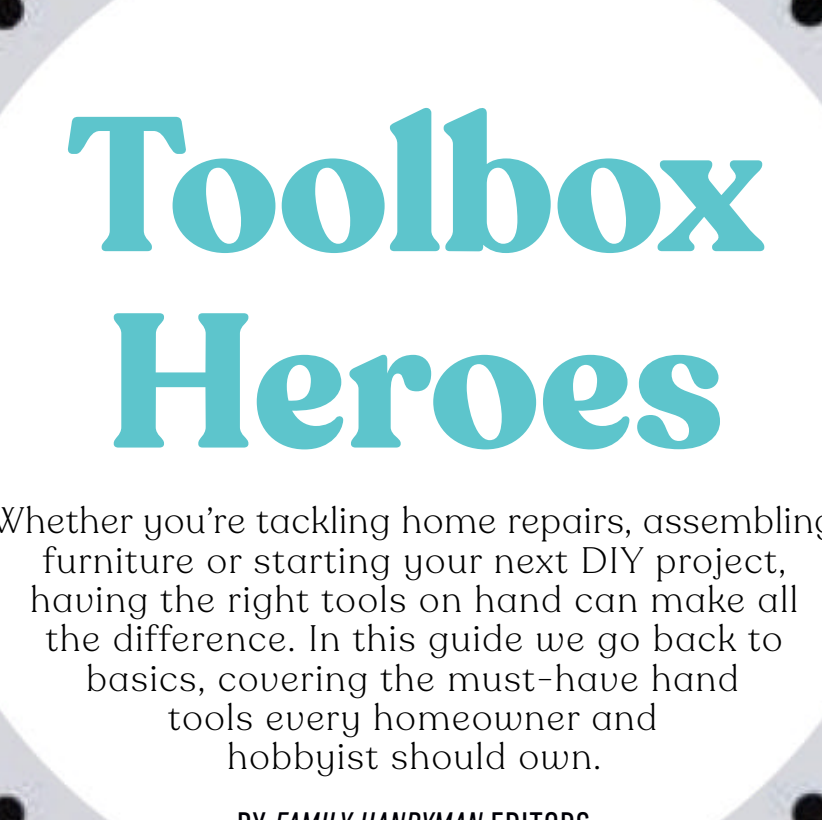
Materials

Cardboard
Dish soap
Goo Gone
House numbers
Microfiber towel
Plastic painting sheets
Sponge
Spray paint
Spray primer
Steel wool



Video Online

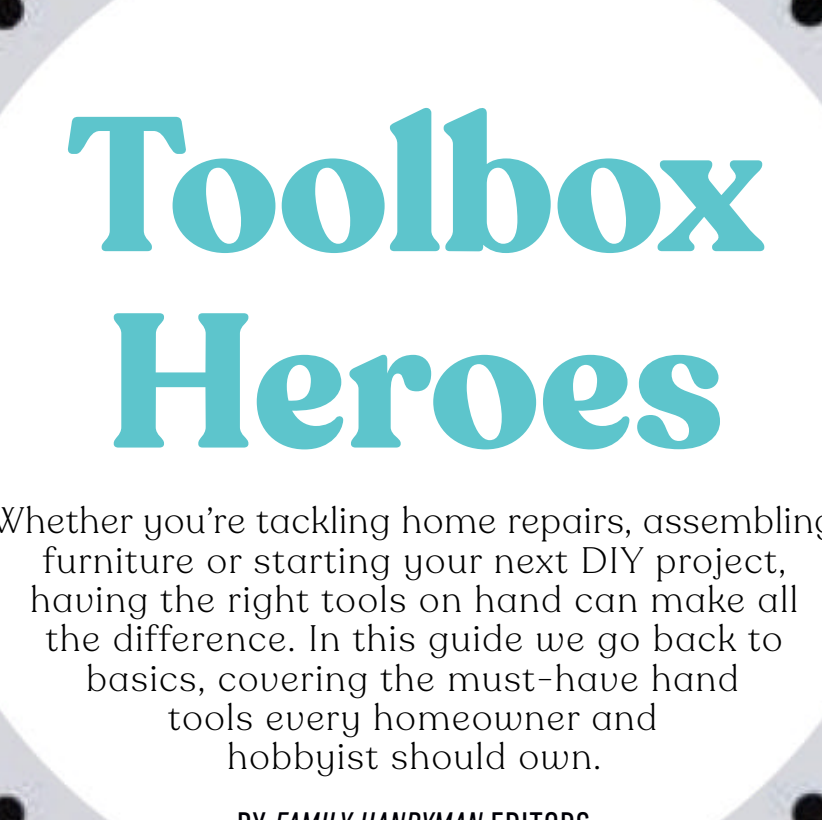
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Toolbox Heroes

Whether you're tackling home repairs, assembling furniture or starting your next DIY project, having the right tools on hand can make all the difference. In this guide we go back to basics, covering the must-have hand tools every homeowner and hobbyist should own.

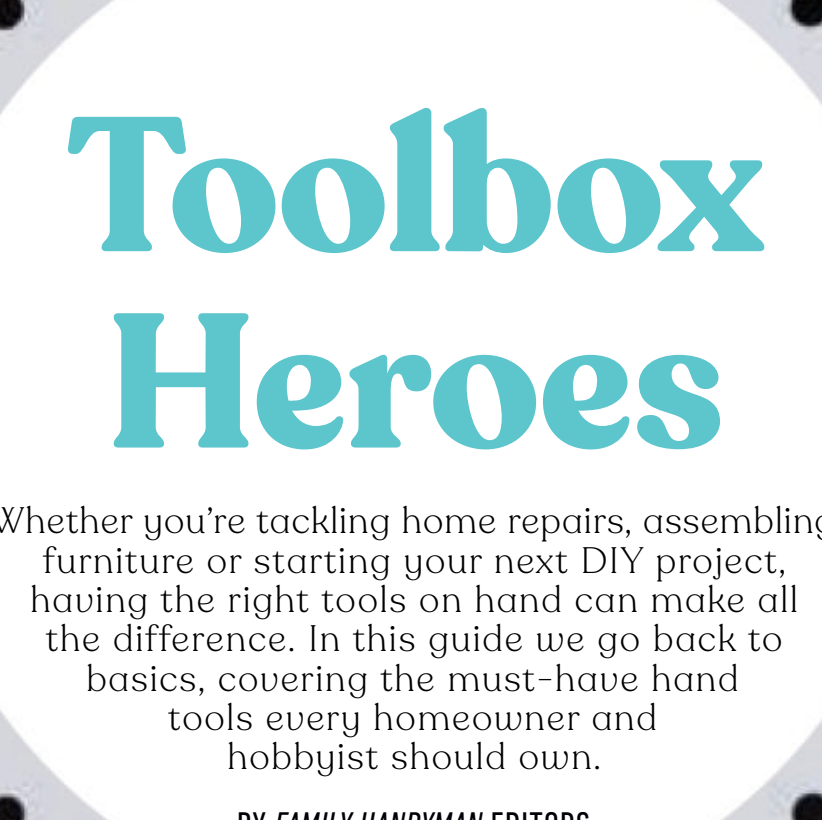
BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



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BY *FAMILY HANDYMAN* EDITORS



Get a Handle on Hammers

Choosing the right claw hammer comes down to how it feels in your hand and how you plan to use it. We'll help you find the best style for your needs.

One of the biggest factors in a hammer's comfort and durability is the material of the handle. Three options dominate the market: steel, fiberglass and wood. Each has its strengths and trade-offs, so choosing the right one will depend on how you work:

- **Steel:** The strongest of the bunch, steel handles are a top choice among masons and demo crews. It's tough to beat a solid or welded piece of steel when it comes to overall strength and durability—steel hammerheads are even harder than titanium. However, steel handles are also the heaviest option, and they tend to be the worst offenders for causing vibrations that lead to repetitive strain injuries and other ailments over time.
- **Fiberglass:** Fiberglass handles transmit less vibration than steel, but still more than wood. They are a top choice for electricians because they are non-conductive; they're popular among plumbers and mechanics for their affordability.
- **Wood:** The lightest and the best at reducing vibration, wood handles keep most of a hammer's weight up in the head (where it counts). They can be replaced if damaged and can even be customized for uber-particular hammer connoisseurs. While not ideal for demo work, they are preferred by those who swing a hammer all day, such as framers, trim carpenters and siding installers. If a hammer is going to hang from your pouch all day long, you probably don't want it to be super heavy. And if you drive a lot of nails, a low-vibration wood handle reduces fatigue.

GREAT FOR EVERYDAY USE

Estwing Curved Claw Solid Steel Hammer

\$26 • This well-balanced model has a one-piece solid-steel construction, a smooth face and a shock-reducing rubber grip for comfort and control.



OVERSTRIKE PROTECTION

Stanley 7-oz. Curve Claw Fiberglass Hammer

\$8 • Stanley's nonconductive, high-visibility handle, slip-resistant grip and overstrike protection plate come in at a surprisingly affordable price.



STRAIGHT CLAW

Vaughan & Bushnell 99 16-oz. Professional Rip Hammer

\$38 • A high-quality hickory handle supports an alloy steel head, featuring a large striking face and a straight claw for effortless wood ripping.



At the end of the day, personal preference plays a big role in choosing the right hammer. Some folks love to swing a hammer with a heavy head and a feather-light handle, while others prefer the lower center of gravity of a steel-handled hammer. Special features—such as strike guards, adjustable claws, side nail pullers and magnetized nail holders—are also worth considering, depending on your day-to-day needs.

Whenever possible, swing a hammer before you buy. Test the weight, grip and balance to see what suits you best. Check out the reliable options above, and ask friends, neighbors or others on a jobsite to try out their favorites too. You might just hit the nail on the head!



Slot In the Right Screwdriver

Screwdrivers come in a dizzying array of slot configurations and sizes. Here are the five types you should start with.

Flat-Head

The original screwdriver, the flat-head, has a paddle-shaped tip that fits into a single-slot screw head. In older houses, you're almost guaranteed to find flat-head screws.

Flat-head screwdrivers come in a range of sizes—too small, and the tool will slip; too large, and it won't fit. Not sure which size you need? Invest in a set.

Phillips

Invented in 1933, the Phillips-head screw has a cross-shaped slot. It's the most common screw type

in the U.S., found in everything from cabinetry to electronics.

Phillips screwdrivers come to a dull point and have ribs that fit in the cross grooves. Sizes range from tiny to enormous. The most common sizes are #1, #2 and #3. If you only buy one, opt for a #2—it covers the most ground.

Robertson

The Robertson head, aka square head, dates back to 1907. Long common in Canada, it's gaining ground in the U.S. because it resists slipping better than the Phillips head.

Robertson screwdrivers primarily come in four sizes: #0, #1, #2 and #3. You're most likely to need a #2, followed by #1 and #3.

Hex-Head

Screwdrivers for hex-head screws, aka Allen wrenches, have a distinctive L-shape for minimum clearance and maximum torque in tight spaces. You'll find hex-head screws on faucet handles, towel rack brackets, your garbage disposal and, of course, Ikea furniture. You can buy individual Allen wrenches, but a set is almost always the better choice (see an affordable option from Amazon Basics on the next page).

Torx

Torx is a trademark name for screws with a six-pointed star-shaped head. They provide a better grip than other screw heads and prevent stripping.

Sizes range from T1 to T40, so even more than other screwdrivers, it's better to buy a set. You'll find Torx screws on household appliances and in HVAC components. Builders are also increasingly using mid-size Torx screws for decking, fencing, framing and more.

CUSHIONED HANDLE

Klein Tools #2 Phillips Screwdriver

\$11 • An easy-grip rubber handle, a precision-machined head that resists slippage and an anticorrosive chrome-plated blade make this screwdriver from Klein a practical addition to any toolbox.



SET OF 5

Craftsman Slotted Acetate Screwdriver Set

\$18 • Durable, heat-treated alloy steel blades and acetate handles ensure these five tools are ready to tackle quick repairs.



MAGNETIC TIPS

Ronmar 13-Piece Magnetic Torx Screwdriver Set

\$20 • This versatile set is easy to store and keep organized, thanks to a convenient case. And the crack-resistant handles stand up to regular use.



Complete Your Collection

Stock your toolbox with these everyday MVPs, and you'll be ready for any job around the house



1. FastCap ProCarpenter Tape Measure, 16 ft. Standard Reverse (\$8)

Measure lumber, room dimensions and more

2. Amazon Basics Hex Key Set, 26 Piece (\$17)

Assemble furniture; adjust appliances, bicycles and automotive components

3. Workpro 9-in. Magnetic Torpedo Level (\$9)

Hang wall art, mount shelves

4. Swanson Speedlite Square (\$5)

Check corners, mark angles, scribe lines, guide saw cuts

5. Milwaukee Fastback Folding Utility Knife with Blade Storage (\$15)

Open packages, break down boxes or remove old caulk

6. Husky 8-in. Adjustable Wrench (\$14)

Tighten or loosen bolts, nuts and plumbing fasteners

7. Irwin Vise-Grip 6-in. Long-Nose Pliers (\$12)

Grip, bend and pull wire; extract items from hard-to-reach places; remove staples and small nails •

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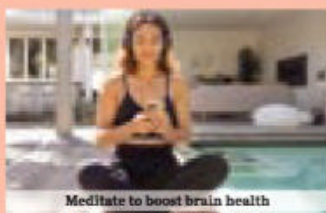
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BEST PRO TIPS

Indoor Pest Control

Bugs bugging you? Keep
unwelcome guests out of your
home for good with guidance
from an expert.

BY ALLY CHILDRESS



Whether you're a homeowner or a renter, you've probably dealt with pests from time to time. And you're not alone: About 80% of Americans have seen at least one pest species in their home, according to a 2024 YouGov poll. Some are relatively harmless, such as that trail of ants feasting on a stray piece of your dog's kibble. Others, such as roaches and rodents, are a significant health concern.

Shannon Harlow-Ellis, an associate certified entomologist and a technical services manager with Mosquito Joe, part of the Neighborly company, is fascinated by insects of all stripes. "Their biology and behavior showcase an amazing adaptability to environmental changes, and they seize every opportunity to ensure their survival," Harlow-Ellis says. "It's this resilience and ingenuity that keeps me intrigued."

Use these tips to learn how to prevent pests from becoming permanent, unwelcome guests.

Signs of a Pest Problem

It depends on the room, but any time you see rodent droppings, frass (insect excrement) or actual bugs and animals, you should investigate.

In your kitchen, look for "droppings, gnaw marks on

Sprinkle Mosquito Bits in houseplant soil to control stubborn fungus gnats.



food packaging, grease trails or live insects," Harlow-Ellis says. Roaches and rodents also tend to give off strange odors.

Moths and carpet beetles leave holes in clothing and upholstery, while blood specks and bites could mean bedbugs. Chewed wiring and nesting materials point to rodents, especially in attics, basements and garages.

Seeing an occasional spider or centipede is usually no cause for alarm, but if you see one cockroach, you likely have more: "Roaches are rarely solitary," Harlow-Ellis says.

How Pests Get In

Most pests enter your home the same way you do: They walk right in. To an ant, roach or mouse, any opening they can fit through might as well be a welcome mat. Exterior cracks, gaps around plumbing vents and pipes, even shipping boxes and grocery bags are like open windows and doors (and they enter through those too).

Where Pests Hide

If you've ever seen a bug skitter under the stove, you already know that pests prefer to congregate in dark spots away from people. Temperature plays a role too. "Often, pests like the heat that is produced by appliances," Harlow-Ellis says. "Cockroaches, for example, like warm, tight areas where they can have at least

three sides of their body touching a secure surface."

Harlow-Ellis says to skip the kitchen steel wool pads and go for sturdier copper or steel mesh. Follow it up with caulk to secure.

Check your cupboards for little-used or forgotten bins, and get rid of their contents periodically. "Keeping dry goods such as flour, cornmeal, nuts and herbs tightly sealed in airtight containers will help, and they should

"To an ant, roach or mouse, any opening they can fit through might as well be a welcome mat."

be rotated out at least annually," Harlow-Ellis says. For extra security with pest-attracting pantry items, "look at freezing them, as this would kill any potential larvae that may be in the products."

When to Call a Pro
DIY pest control can keep costs down and is a great option for the occasional bug sighting. But for serious infestations or health risks, ask for help.

Harlow-Ellis also notes some surprise locations, such as behind wallpaper (roaches eat almost anything, including paper and glue), and even inside electronic devices. Fungus gnats breed in refrigerator drip pans, which provide water, food and safe harbor.

Harlow-Ellis recalls a situation involving a homeowner who was seeing visions of purple flying pests. "What we found was both shocking and concerning," she says. The homeowner had tried to eradicate Indian meal moths by filling her home with hundreds of mothballs. "This excessive exposure led to hallucinations, creating her imagined pests."

Protect Your Home

A welfare check followed, and she received help for both the moths and her health. "Sometimes pest issues get beyond our tolerance or experience level, and then it is time to call a professional," says Harlow-Ellis.

Longtime homeowners likely know the basics, such as maintaining a clean home, keeping leaf litter picked up, and sealing small cracks with silicone caulk. But for larger openings,

check your houseplants for gnats too. Moist soil offers the gnats many of the same resources. If reduced watering and emptying excess water from plant saucers doesn't help, you can treat the soil with an organic *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (BTI) product, such as Summit Mosquito Bits, labeled for controlling fungus gnat larvae on houseplants.

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How to Give Ants the Boot

Unfortunately, you can't completely get rid of ants, but these measures will help:

- **Use prepackaged bait stations.** Ant colonies send out scouts to find and bring food back to the nest, so you can use that against them.
- **Make your own bait.** Shannon Harlow-Ellis suggests a DIY ant treatment made of boric acid or borax-based ant bait. If you know what food the ants like, try mixing the borax with the tasty bait. Or sprinkle diatomaceous earth around your home's entry points. It won't harm people or pets, but it causes insects to dry out.
- **Spray your foundation.** Odorous house ants, for example, may resist the effect of bait stations. If that's the case for you, spray your foundation with insecticides. Read the directions carefully and apply as instructed.
- **Eliminate the nest.** If there's a nest in your walls, you can inject an insecticide powder or aerosol into wall voids, but you should consider calling a pro. Serious infestations of carpenter ants and other hard-to-manage pests are not something to mess around with. ●



MEET THE PRO Shannon Harlow-Ellis is an associate certified entomologist and a technical services manager for Mosquito Joe. She has a lifelong love of insects.

Quick and Easy Furniture Facelifts

Bring your favorite tables, bookshelves and chairs back to life with some fundamental fixes

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



Q: How do I stabilize a wobbly wooden chair?

Adding braces is often the fastest way to fix a wobble. Chair braces are better looking and much stiffer than L-brackets, and they are available at most hardware stores in finishes such as chrome, brass or bronze. To avoid splitting the wood during install, drill $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. pilot holes before driving in the screws. Adding metal braces may not restore the chair's original sturdiness, but it's a quick fix that will reliably prevent it from coming apart.





Q: Is there an easy way to hide scratches on wood furniture?

Yes, wax! To revive a finish, rub colored paste wax over the entire surface and buff. This isn't a perfect fix; heavy scratches or dents will still be visible. But light scratches and wear will almost disappear. For the ultimate camouflage, pick a color that's slightly darker than the finish. You can find Minwax or Briwax colored paste wax at some paint stores or order it online.



Q: Is it better to sand or strip wood furniture?

The decision to sand or strip wood furniture is determined by the condition of the wood and what you wish the finish to be. If you want to restain it a different color altogether, then you must strip it. If you wish to revive a surface that doesn't have a previous stain under the sealer, you can sand it and reapply a sealer.



Q: What's a quick fix for sagging bookshelves?

Sometimes you can simply flip shelves over to fix the sag—but eventually they'll droop again. Here's a permanent solution: Add supports that fit tight between the shelves. Pine stair tread, which has a rounded front edge, is perfect for this. It's available at all home centers, and many stores will cut it to length for you. You can paint or stain the supports to match the shelves, of course. But if the shelves hold books, consider staining them a color similar to your books. You'll be surprised at how well they blend in.

Stabilize Chairs with Epoxy

Epoxy is a polymer made with liquid epoxy resin mixed with chemical hardener. It's available in convenient tear-and-squeeze packets and can be used like glue to keep joints stable. For example, when a chair has one or two loose dowel joints but you can't get the rest of them apart, inject epoxy into the loose joints using a syringe. Once mixed, most epoxy is too thick to push through a syringe, but epoxy used for fiberglass boat repair (like the one shown here) has the right consistency. To inject it, drill 1/8-in. holes in an inconspicuous place in line with the dowels. Aim for the cavity behind each dowel. Insert the syringe into the hole, then inject the epoxy until it runs out of the joint. Push the joint together, then wipe off the excess. ●



Spring into Action

Family Handyman readers
share field-tested tips for tackling
your seasonal to-do list

Micro Greenhouses

Do you have a hard time starting seeds or cuttings? Try soda bottle greenhouses. Cut the bottoms off 2-liter soda bottles and remove the labels. Each seed gets its own designated greenhouse! Remove the bottles once the seeds have germinated and the cuttings are rooted. —Katy Zimmerman



Corral Your Clippings

When I'm trimming hedges, I use a plastic kiddie pool to catch the clippings, kicking it along as I go. The clippings fall into the pool, making cleanup a snap. When I'm done trimming, I dump the clippings into my mulch pile. —Benjamin Meyer



Smarter Seed Storage

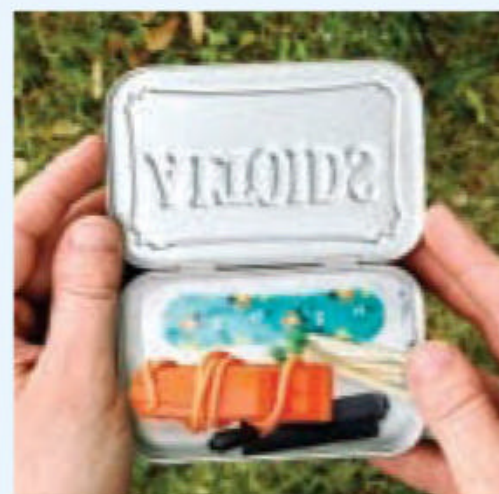
If you don't use up all your seed packets in the garden, store them in an airtight container with silica packets to keep them fresh for next year. The silica keeps the seeds from germinating or getting moldy. —Greg McManus



Keep Your Car Smelling Fresh

I make my own car air fresheners with scented candle wax. All you need to do is punch holes in the lid of a Mason jar with a hammer and a large nail, add the wax to the jar and replace the lid. As your car heats up, the wax will melt, releasing the fragrance.

—James Alvarado



Mint Tin Emergency Kit

Here's a safety tip for outdoorsy types: Use an empty Altoids tin to create a compact emergency kit. Pack it with strike-anywhere matches, Band-Aids, essential meds, a bit of gaffer tape (for taping together broken toes or other emergency needs), antibiotic ointment, a whistle, etc. You can customize the case based on your specific adventure. Keep it in your pocket while you look for kindling, on your day hike—wherever you go, it goes. —Timothy Grabowski



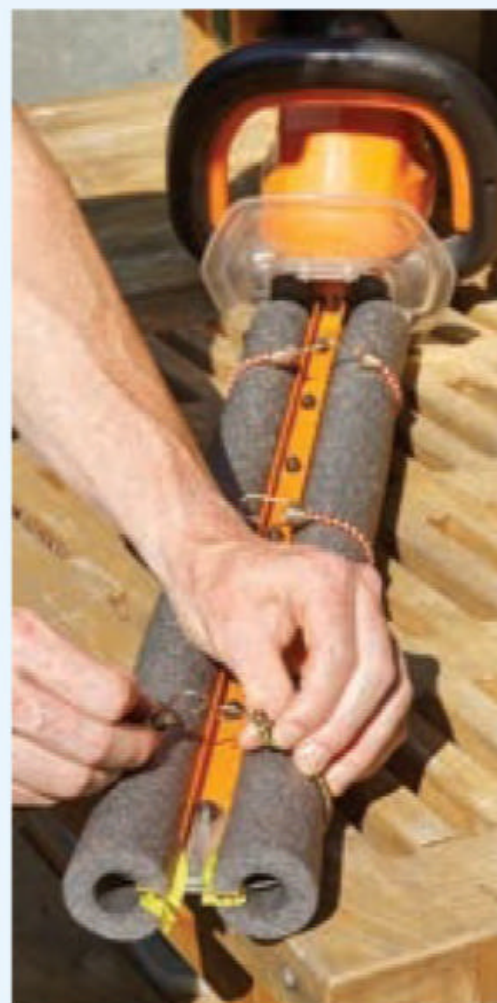
Cover It with Cardboard

Cardboard can be used to safely, cheaply and easily kill grass when you are preparing for a mulch bed. First, cover the area with cardboard, saturate it with water and add a 4-in. layer of mulch on top of the cardboard. Then walk away and forget about it! Note: Make sure to use cardboard that does not contain ink. —Gregory Krueger



Stow-and-Go Trunk Bumpers

Keep a couple of sections of pipe insulation or pool noodles in your trunk to protect both the car's paint and your oversized cargo. —Andrew Poole



Hedge Trimmer Sheath

I lost my hedge trimmer's blade sheath, so I had to get creative to safely store the tool. A piece of foam pipe insulation was just right. I cut two ½-in. foam tubes to the length of the hedge trimmer blade. The tubes are slit down their length, so they slide easily over the blades. Three 4-in. bungee cords hold them in place. —Thomas Curran



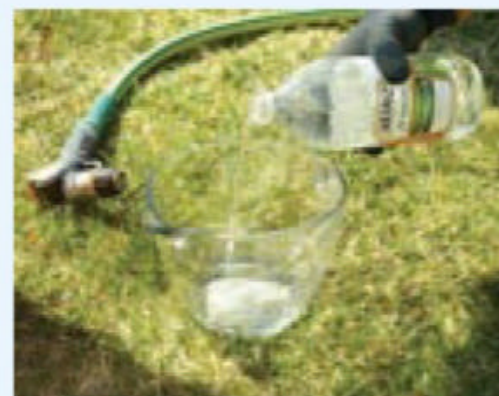
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Potted Plant Vacation Irrigation

Headed out for the weekend but worried about coming home to drooping plants? Have no fear! I love this solution shared by garden blogger Dominique Charles on the *Today* show. First, rinse out an empty wine bottle and fill it with clean water. Then quickly invert the bottle and insert the neck into the soil. Give the bottle a second to level out and make sure it will stay upright. The weight distribution of the water in the bottle means the water won't rush into the soil all at once. Instead, it will slowly trickle out over the next few days, functioning as an irrigation drip system for the plant. —Alice Knisley Matthias



Give Your Birdbath a Bath

Create a safe, appealing environment for backyard birds by keeping your birdbath clean. Use a simple vinegar-water mixture—instead of a harsher alternative like bleach—to remove algae without posing harm to your feathered friends. Start by rinsing the birdbath with a high-pressure garden hose nozzle to remove dirt and debris, then drain. Mix 1 part vinegar with 9 parts water in a bucket, pour the solution into the birdbath, and scrub with a heavy-duty bristle brush or sponge. For tough grime, repeat as needed. Rinse away any remaining dirt and vinegar solution, then refill the birdbath with clean water no more than 2 in. deep. —Samuel Rosenmayer, projects editor



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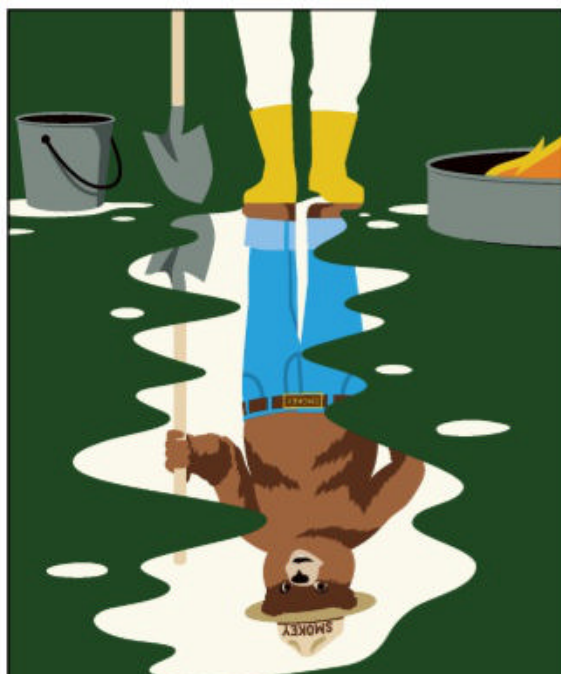
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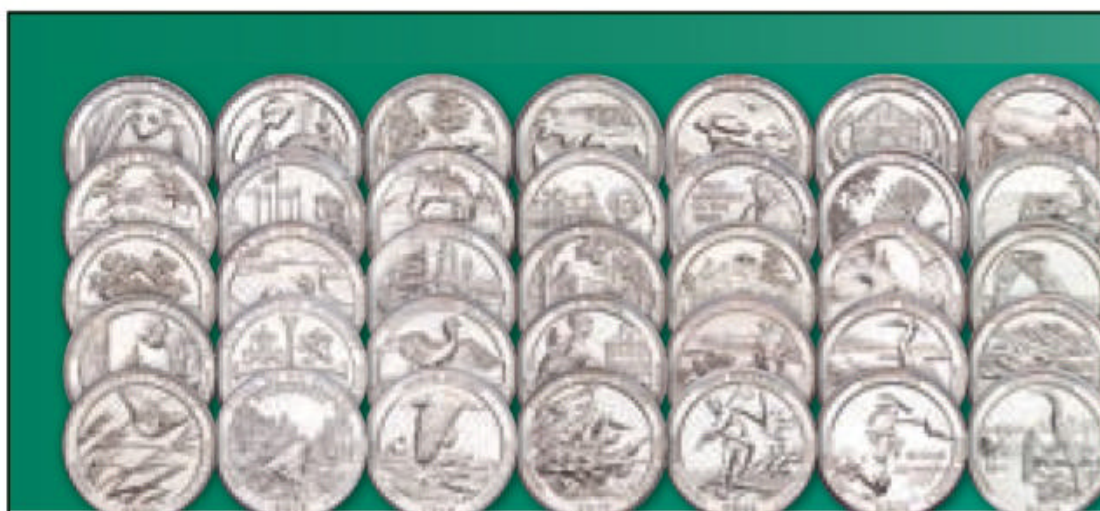
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A *Family Handyman* reader transformed the stump of a cherished oak tree into a backyard statement piece



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Powder Springs, GA ●

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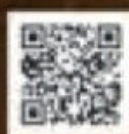
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