

PROJECTS STORAGE OTTOMAN • FIX CONCRETE CRACKS • MOUNT A TV

family handyman



HOME SECURITY

Simple and effective strategies
to create a safer space

BUILD A
HIDDEN
LOCKBOX
p. 30



10+ Swiss Army
Knife Secrets

How to Make
Your Garage Floor
Look New Again

Signs Your
Home's Wiring
Is Outdated

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2026

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Why ATV/UTV insurance?

Protect your investment

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Accidents can happen, even to the most experienced riders. ATV/UTV insurance offers liability coverage, protecting you financially in case you're held responsible for injuries or damages to others while riding. Don't let unforeseen incidents tarnish your ATV/UTV adventures—let insurance be your safety net.

Protection beyond accidents

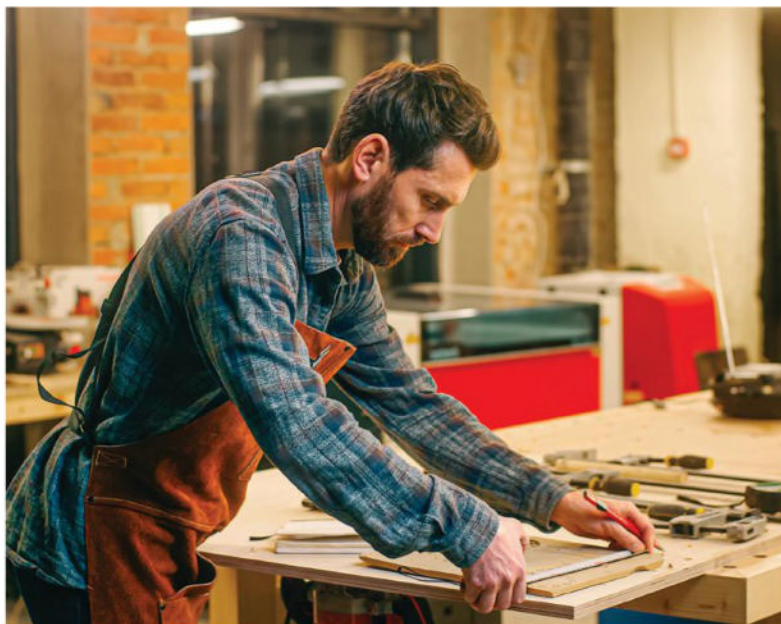
ATV/UTV insurance can cover events outside of your control, including theft, vandalism, hitting an animal, fire, and some weather-related damage, minus your deductible. Whether you're on the trail or your ATV/UTV is parked at home, enjoy peace of mind knowing that your insurance extends beyond just the basics.

Medical payments

ATV/UTV insurance can offer medical payments coverage, ensuring that the medical expenses for you and your passengers are taken care of in the event of an accident. Prioritize your safety and well-being with the right insurance coverage.

Don't let uncertainty hold you back from embracing the thrill of off-roading. Insure your ATV/UTV today with Progressive ATV/UTV insurance and unlock a world of worry-free adventures. Your passion deserves protection—ride on, confidently!





GREAT GOOFS

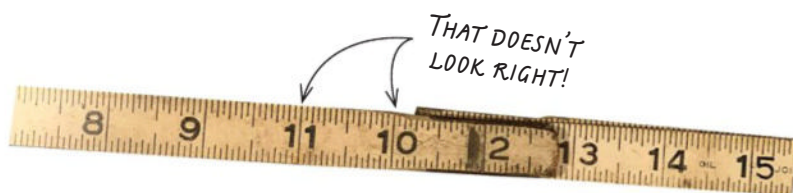
Out of Line

A DIYer learned that even the best tools can throw you off by an inch

Many years ago, I purchased a wooden folding ruler made by a very reputable company. While working on a project, I had to cut a 2×4 to 11½ in. long. When I brought the 2×4 inside, it was too short. I went outside, measured and cut again and got the same result. I was baffled. After heading outside for a third time, it finally hit me: The numbers on the ruler read 8, 9, 11, 10, 12! I've kept this photo for years as proof that it wasn't my error—at least not that time. —Paul Smith, Marlton, NJ



Share your best DIY blunders with us! Scan the code to submit.



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Coming Up in Our Next Issue...

The April/May issue will be delivered to your email inbox. Don't miss it! Here's what to look forward to:

- **Ultimate guide to outdoor living.** Easy projects and ideas to help you have your best summer ever.
- **How to build a coffee table with a tile top.** Plus, learn how tiles are made and get inspiration for crafting (or buying) your own unique artisan tiles.
- **Pressure-washing tips.** Discover common mistakes and what surfaces to skip with a pressure washer.
- **WIN a Solo Stove!** Look for contest details and find out how to enter this exciting giveaway.

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Actual Size
38.1 mm

JUST RELEASED!

Cache of 789 1922 Peace Silver Dollars Still Pristine As The Day They Were Struck

No coin embodies the spirit of the 1920s and 30s more than the Peace Silver Dollar. First struck in 1921, the Peace Dollar was a celebration of the end of WWI and was the silver dollar of choice for prohibition bootleggers and bank robbers like John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde. The hefty Peace Silver Dollar holds a special place in American history, as the silver dollar helped America through the Great Depression.

It's no wonder collectors and history buffs alike clamor to get their hands on them. That is, if they can get their hands on them.

Last Circulating Silver Dollar

Collectors love "lasts" and the Peace Dollar was the last 90% silver dollar struck for circulation. Little did designer Anthony de Francisci know the legacy he was creating when he designed what has become known as "The King of Prohibition Dollars" but it came to an end 90 years ago when the last circulating Peace Dollar was officially struck and released to the public.

Public Release - Only 789 Coins Available

Rarcoa®, America's Oldest Coin Company, is announcing the public release of 789 of the 1922 Peace Silver Dollar, struck at the iconic "Mother Mint" in Philadelphia, the birthplace of American coinage. Each coin comes in Brilliant Uncirculated condition, pristine as the day they were struck!

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Struck in 1922, each coin carries one hundred and three years of American history. Could Al Capone have paid for a load of illegal whiskey with your coin? Or maybe your great-grandfather carried it while storming the beaches of Normandy during World War II before ending up in a small coin shop in Little Rock, Arkansas. Each coin has its own unique history and you can hold 103 years of American history when you buy yours today!



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Coin experts estimate that only 15%-20% of Peace dollars still survive today due to multiple mass-meltings over the years, particularly in 1980 when the Hunt brothers tried to corner the silver market, shooting silver up to almost \$50 per ounce.

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This same 1922 Peace Silver Dollar sells elsewhere for as much as \$159. But thanks to Rarcoa's buying power and numismatic expertise, you can own one for as little as \$69, in quantity while supplies last. **That's \$90 LESS!**

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All information is correct as of the date of publication and is subject to change. Coins and other items are sold as collectibles and not as investments. © 2025 RARCOA DIRECT

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Kenny Brain Talks Carpentry

The *Making It Home* star shares go-to tools, memorable projects and advice for beginners

AT HOME with
family handyman

The latest from
our TV channel

On *Making It Home* with *Kortney & Kenny*, real estate expert Kortney Wilson and carpenter Kenny Brain partner with homeowners to renovate lackluster fixer-uppers into wow-worthy dream homes. We asked Kenny to share a few pro tips for new woodworkers and to reflect on standout moments from the show. —Christine Campbell

What would you recommend as a DIYer's first carpentry project?

The most beneficial projects for beginners include as many fundamental steps as possible. Making a cutting board or a planter box will introduce you to accurate measuring, basic tool use, cutting and gluing techniques and simple joinery. Plus, you'll end up with a great, functional end product you can use and be proud of!

Any other advice you'd give someone just starting out with woodworking?

Be curious and don't be afraid to ask questions. Reach out to people online. Watch the YouTube video. Ask the tradesperson you know. Everyone started at zero at some point, and I promise there is no such thing as a stupid question.

What's one tool you think is worth the splurge?

A track saw is an absolute must-have for me! It's incredible for accuracy and doesn't take up as much space as a table saw.



Family Handyman highlights Great Goofs from real DIYers—do you have any memorable mishaps to share?

Once, while installing baseboards, I brad-nailed pocket doors in place inside the wall because I used the wrong length brad and forgot the door was even there. It's in a pocket! I've also cut \$500 beams a foot short because I didn't "measure twice, cut once." Honestly, the list goes on ... but that's all part of the learning process.

Looking back on *Making It Home* with *Kortney & Kenny*, which project stands out the most?

I always wanted to build a secret bookshelf door. Not only is it a beautiful and functional project, it also satisfies the kid in me who always wished he had a secret hideout. The first season finale of *Making It Home* featured a log cabin that had stairs to an old dingy basement directly in front of the entrance and foyer. I built a bookcase door that slotted into the door frame. Closed, it was curated beautifully, creating a warm, intentional entrance. Hinged open, it revealed the staircase to the basement. How cool is that!?



See Kenny at work in episodes of *Making It Home* with *Kortney & Kenny* on *At Home with Family Handyman*. Find out where to stream the series for free at FamilyHandyman.com/tv.

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- Shipping weight: ≈ 174 lbs.



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1/2 HP Benchtop Hollow-Chisel Mortiser

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- Footprint: 19" x 13 1/2"
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What's New

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we've heard,
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and tried

NOW TRENDING

Divide and Conquer

Are you constantly rummaging through chaotic kitchen drawers for your favorite spatula? Take back control with customizable drawer dividers. "Dividers help create sections for designated categories. They train your mind to put items back properly and stay organized," says professional organizer Rebecca Sembrano. "The variety of sizes helps maximize every inch of space—it's like a game of Tetris!" —Erica Young





Hobby Helpers

From budget-friendly to splurge-worthy, these upgrades make your favorite pastimes easier and more rewarding

Finish Painting Projects Fast

For anyone who has struggled with streaky brush marks or roller lines, the difference a paint sprayer can make is nothing short of transformative.

The Wagner Flexio 3500 is a high-volume low-pressure paint sprayer designed for DIYers. This model is especially well suited for small projects and detail work, but it can also tackle medium-size projects such as full walls or a deck. It requires only electricity (not an air compressor) and comes with two nozzles that spray most types of paints, stains and finishes, allowing you to cover an 8-by-10 wall in just five minutes.

I tested it by repainting the exterior of a wooden shed. After a little experimentation and fine-tuning,

I got great distance and coverage, coating about 60 sq. ft. with less than $\frac{1}{3}$ gallon of paint. Plus, one of the standout features of the Flexio 3500 is the variable-speed X-Boost turbine, which provides the power needed to spray unthinned paints and stains. It's great to be able to skip the hassle of pre-thinning the paint.

Cleanup was a breeze thanks to the sprayer's quick disassembly and bonus cup liner. With maintenance that simple, I no longer dread pulling out a sprayer for smaller jobs. The Flexio will be taking a front-and-center space in my painting tool collection.

—**Pamela Bondurant**, product reviewer and DIYer *Wagner Flexio 3500 Sprayer*, \$195; Home Depot, Lowe's

VIA WAGNER



Tough-as-Nails Binoculars

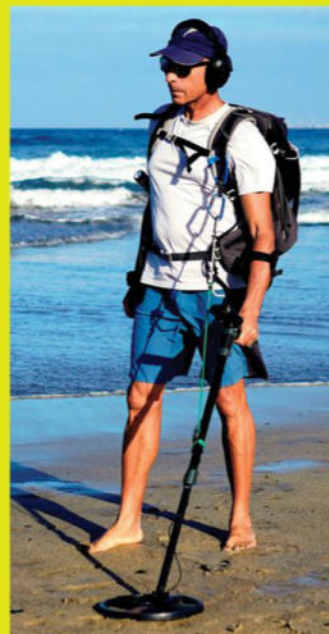
The Nocs Provisions Standard Issue 8x25 Waterproof

Binoculars are a must-have companion for birders, hikers and other outdoor adventurers. They're lightweight, compact, affordable and—most importantly—water- and fog-proof for reliable performance no matter the forecast.

The 8x25 lenses offer 8x magnification and a 357-ft. field of view, comparable to a 400mm camera lens. A 10x25 model is also available for a closer look, but I prefer the 8x25 for its wider view, which makes it easier to track birds as they flit about my yard.

The rugged rubber housing features grip-friendly ridges and an IPX7 waterproof rating, meaning the binoculars can withstand being submerged in 3 ft. of water for 30 minutes. If you drop them while fly-fishing or duck hunting, they'll be just fine.

Because of their compact, lightweight design, the Standard Issue binoculars can be held with just two fingers and are easy to tote along to outdoor concerts, on kayaking trips and more. While they don't match the perfect clarity and brightness of some premium models, they earn high points in my book for portability, rugged versatility and value. —*Sheri Kaz*, product tester and bird-watcher *Nocs Provisions Standard Issue 8x25 Waterproof Binoculars*, \$100; *Dick's Sporting Goods*, *REI*



Find Hidden Treasure

Choosing a metal detector is the first step toward an exciting new hobby. These gadgets detect iron-based metals and others such as gold, silver, copper and aluminum, making it fun and easy to unearth hidden treasure (or find that lost ring).

Our testers spent 80 hours with 11 popular models, performing 13 tests on each and taking them to a local beach for real-world trials. We also consulted an experienced detectorist for their best tips and insights. The result? A lineup of six standout detectors for amateurs, pros and everyone in between.

Weld in Style

A large viewing area, sturdy construction and easy-to-reach controls are just a few features that make the Lincoln Electric Viking helmet one of the best on the market. The headband is the beefiest of all the helmets I've tested and probably the most comfortable with the most padding. The Viking is also one of the best-looking helmets overall, with shiny plastic and design accents that really pop.

A word of warning: Some of the controls take a little getting used to. For example, the grind button is on the outside of the helmet with an electrical connection to the auto-darkening filters. The shade setting is also unique, using a slider for range 9-13 or 5-9. To use it, you pick your range, and then the range within the range. That said, once you're familiar with the setup, you'll be humming along—and well protected. For hobbyists looking to splurge, the Lincoln Electric Viking helmet is a smart choice. —*Pamela Bondurant*, product reviewer and metalworker *Lincoln Electric Viking 2450 ADV Series Black Helmet*, \$649; *Amazon*, *globalindustrial.com*, *Walmart*



Dig In

Scan the QR code for the complete results.



Level Up with a Folding Bike Stand

As soon I became more serious about road and gravel cycling, I realized I needed to up my game when it came to fixing and maintaining my bikes. If you're ready to take on more serious bicycle maintenance, you'll need a proper work stand to securely hold your bike. A good stand raises the frame to eye level so you're not bending and twisting to remove and install parts in tough spots.

The Park Tool PCS-10.3 Deluxe Home Mechanic Bike Repair Stand has served me well the last couple of years. I don't have the space in my garage to keep a stand up permanently, so I appreciate how easily it folds and unfolds for compact storage. It also has a reliable clamp to hold the bike securely and is simple to wash, which is especially handy after cleaning a grimy bike chain. —Geoff Nudelman, writer and cyclist
Park Tool PCS-10.3 Deluxe Home Mechanic Bike Repair Stand, \$280; Amazon, backcountry.com, REI

Small Yet Sturdy Jig Set

The worst part about starting a new hobby is finding room for all your new supplies. Woodworking is no different. Thankfully, the Powertec 71844 Aluminum Pocket Hole Jig Set is a great option for those working with little space. When I worked out of a shed, I looked for tools with easy cleanup, a small storage footprint, durability and versatility. The Powertec checks all those boxes.

While other jig sets have dust ports, many separate from the unit and are easy to misplace. The Powertec has an integrated dust port that connects to my wet/dry vacuum as well as my regular vacuum cleaner. I appreciate how heavy the jig is for its size and the solid clamps for drilling clean and accurate holes. The Powertec also has a removable base stand for projects with a larger material thickness—so you don't need a second jig. It can do it all in a small footprint. —Morgan Chaney, home writer and DIYer
Powertec 71844 Aluminum Pocket Hole Jig Set, \$85; Amazon, Home Depot



A Trusty Saw for All Occasions

Years before I learned my way around power tools, I used handsaws to build art projects, bicycle jumps and toy boxes. I'm still fond of handsaws because they're lightweight, affordable, safe and easy to operate. And there's something satisfying about the sound of a saw cutting through a board.

If I could keep only one handsaw in my shop, it would be the Stanley FatMax. I've owned one for more than a decade and I love it. Most often I use the 15-in. blade to rough-cut hardwoods before joining and planing cabinet parts. I always have it with me for adding blocking on framing or drywall jobs. I drag it to the bonfire, too, for cutting up branches and logs, and I've even cut piles of plastic and PVC with it.

To this day, its induction-hardened teeth (which I have never sharpened) are still strong enough to get through boards quickly without much effort. The Stanley FatMax is all the best in one place: inexpensive, sharp, comfortable to use and well constructed. —Ethan O'Donnell, deputy editor and custom cabinet and furniture designer
Stanley FatMax 15-In. Carbon Steel Handsaw, \$19; Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Walmart



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Stay Sharp

If you don't have a grinder, files or the time and skill to sharpen your gardening tools, Sharpal's all-in-one sharpener offers an easy solution. This handy tool can sharpen a range of dull blades in a flash.

It features three multifunctional sharpening slots, suitable for indoor and outdoor tools. I tested it on a kitchen knife, but it can restore the edges of single-beveled blades such as pruners, loppers and mower blades; wide-bevel blades such as spades, axes and machetes; and straight-edge knives, hedge sheers and scissors.

Understanding which of the three slots to use on the Sharpal multi-sharpener for your blade type is essential. The rest is like butter. Simply stabilize larger tools and slide the sharpener against the edge. Conversely, when sharpening knives or small tools, set the Sharpal on a flat, dry surface and pull your tool through the slot a few times for a sharper edge.

With the versatility of this gadget, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. —**Sheri Kaz**, product tester and gardener *Sharpal All-in-One Knife, Pruner, Axe & Tool Sharpener*, \$24; Ace Hardware, Target

A Parking Spot for Garage Gear

As an enthusiastic gardener, I have a host of tools and small items that needed a home in my disorganized one-car garage. I opted for the Yizosh Metal Garage Storage Cabinet, and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it for home, office or garage use. It's sleek, well made and impressively sturdy.

Given the reasonable price, I didn't have high expectations when the cabinet arrived. The package was so heavy that I needed a dolly to move it, but assembly was simple and the well-protected parts were clearly labeled. With a partner, it took about an hour to put together.

I was amazed at how sturdy and solid this unit is. The adjustable shelves hold up to 150 lbs.—plenty for my garden and lawn gear. And the locking, magnetic-close doors seal to keep items dust free and safe from pests.

I've owned other metal cabinets that warped when filled and had problems with the doors lining up after just a short time. The Yizosh cabinet is still as stable as the day it was built. —**Sheri Kaz**, product tester and gardener *Yizosh Metal Garage Storage Cabinet*, \$145; Amazon, Walmart



Weed Without Back Pain

Gardening is hard work, and it can be especially tough on your knees and back. The Garden Works Gardener's Tool Seat is a clever solution that works as a stool and tool bag in one, keeping your gear (and garden) comfortably within reach.

At just under 17 in. tall, the sturdy nylon and steel seat is the perfect height for pruning plants and getting rid of weeds. It supports up to 250 lbs., folds quickly and can be transported with one hand to save time and frustration when moving from one spot to another.

What sets the seat apart is the detachable tool bag, which features 21 pockets and a roomy center compartment to stash trowels, clippers, seed packets and even your phone. The bag includes two carrying handles and attaches to the stool with hook-and-loop fasteners for quick, easy removal and reattachment. —**Sheri Kaz**, product tester and gardener *Garden Works Gardener's Tool Seat*, \$49; Uncommon Goods ●



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Garage Floor Upgrades

Even the best garages look a little run down with age. These easy improvements bring back the shine.

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



A Showroom Finish

High-gloss coatings give garage floors a clean, bright look that's easy to maintain. Here we applied Rust-Oleum's RockSolid Polycuramine Metallic Floor Coating Kit (\$224, Lowe's) for an iridescent sheen.

REPAIR IT

Fix Concrete Cracks for Good

Keep moisture, mold and further damage at bay with a step-by-step solution

Cracks in concrete floors are common. Freeze-thaw cycles, tree roots, settling soil, poor drainage and improper installation can all play a role. Whatever the cause, it's best to tackle cracks promptly—they can widen or deepen over time and leave your floor vulnerable to moisture and mold.

The good news: Repairing a crack is often a great DIY project if you're comfortable with the tools and materials. For hairline or small cracks, an epoxy or polyurethane injection kit is usually enough. Larger cracks will need a few extra steps, which we outline here.

NOTE: If both sides of the crack are level, you can fix it yourself. If one side is lower, call an expert to diagnose and address the underlying soil or drainage issue. Then either replace the sunken portion or call a mud-jacking company to raise it.

1 CUT A GROOVE ON BOTH SIDES
Using a diamond blade on a circular saw, cut a ½-in.-deep

groove along each side of the crack. Wear an N95 respirator and turn on a fan to blow the concrete dust out of the garage.

2 REMOVE THE CRACKED CONCRETE

Chip out the cracked portion with a maul and cold chisel. This creates a fresh surface for the new concrete to bond to. Remove the chipped pieces and vacuum out the crack, then pressure-wash the area and squeegee off the excess water.

3 FILL GROOVE WITH CONCRETE

Add a latex modifier to regular concrete mix and pack it into the channel. Fill to within ½ in. of the original height. Let it sit for a few days.

4 SPREAD THE RESURFACER

Add water to the concrete resurfacer to achieve a pancake batter consistency. Pour it into the crack and smooth it out with a rubber floor squeegee. Feather the edges for the best appearance.

Start by Removing Stains for a Better Bond

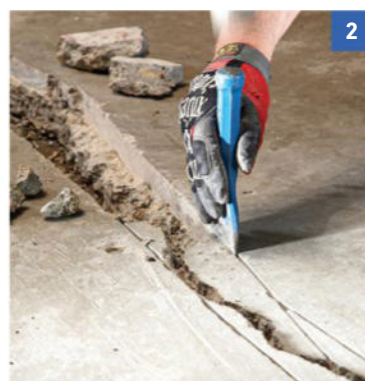
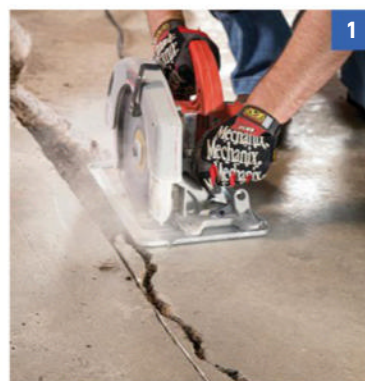
Oil-stained concrete isn't just unsightly—it's a slip hazard and can keep floor finishes and repairs from bonding well. To make sure your upgrade lasts, remove standing oil or dirt with a scraper and sweep clean. On a day above 60 degrees, spread Pour-N-Restore Oil Stain Remover (\$20, Ace Hardware) over the stain with a ¼-in. notched trowel. Let it dry for at least eight hours. Once it turns to powder, sweep or vacuum it up. Let the moisture evaporate fully (over a few days, or even weeks for sealed concrete), and the stain should be gone.

Tools

- Bucket
- Circular saw with diamond blade
- Cold chisel
- Fan
- Floor squeegee
- Maul
- N95 respirator
- Pressure washer
- Trowel
- Wet/dry vac

Materials

- Concrete mix
- Concrete resurfacer
- Latex modifier
- Water





RESURFACE IT

Coatings and Coverings

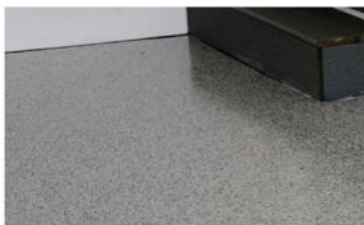
Explore the differences—and decide what's best for your garage

You have two general options when refinishing a garage floor: a coating or a covering.

Coatings include floor paints, epoxies, stains and sealers. They generally cost less than coverings if you apply them yourself, and they protect against stains, road salts and moisture. But coatings can fail with incomplete prep (proper floor prep can take hours) and moisture. Don't use coatings where groundwater comes through the

concrete, and always test a patch before committing to the entire floor.

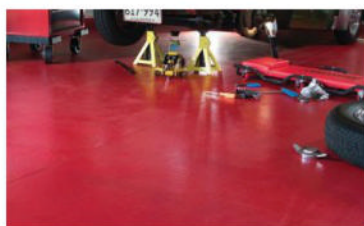
Coverings are available as interlocking tiles and rollout mats. These are quicker to install—you can easily cover a three-car garage in a morning after a thorough sweep. Best of all, coverings hide cracks and craters and can go over damp concrete, making even a nasty floor look spotless. The tradeoff is a higher cost upfront.



Epoxy

DURABLE AND DEPENDABLE

This is one of the toughest floors you can get—and a beautiful one at that. But epoxy can be tricky to apply, requiring thorough prep, quick work, and up to a week of curing time. Seek out UV-stable formulas for a long-lasting finish.



Latex Paint

CHEAP AND EASY

Garage floor paint is essentially a tougher version of paint for interior walls. Just roll it on! It's by far the least expensive coating, but you'll likely have to touch up worn areas annually. For a high-gloss finish with added durability, consider an oil-based formula.



Polyaspartic

QUICK CURE

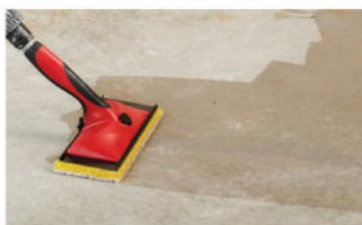
Tough polyaspartic coatings cure faster than epoxy but slowly enough that they're still manageable to apply. You have to wait 12 hours or more to walk on newly applied epoxy, but you can walk on polyaspartic after just a few hours and drive on it after a day. It also resists tire marks and holds its color better than other coatings. The catch? Polyaspartic costs about 20% more than most epoxies.



Rollout Mats

FLEXIBLE PLACEMENT

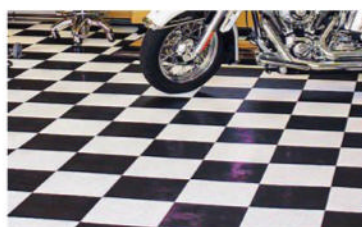
Vinyl or rubber mats are easy to move and customize to your space. They're durable and clean up well, but they may stain from tire marks and can be gouged by motorcycle kickstands and heavy equipment.



Concrete Sealer

GLOSSY AND PROTECTIVE

Acrylic and latex sealers harden in the pores of concrete, preventing oil stains. Sealers with a satin or semigloss finish will typically need to be reapplied every few years.



Rigid Tiles

NO SLIP, NO MOLD

Interlocking floor tiles come in a wide range of sizes and colors. Look for stiff plastic tiles that can handle carjacks and other heavy loads, with drainage holes to clear spills and snowmelt to prevent mold.

Safe Refinishing

Most coatings release fumes that can cause headaches or more serious health problems with long-term exposure. Follow these tips to protect yourself.

Ventilate the area.

Before cracking open the can of paint, epoxy or whatever your finish may be, open the garage door and windows or exterior doors. Set up fans to circulate fresh air.

Dress for success.

Don a respirator or face mask with an N95 rating or higher. Epoxy fumes can irritate skin and eyes, so wear gloves, full-coverage clothes and eye protection.

Read the warnings.

Some manufacturers may recommend additional gear or safety practices. Review labels and make an informed decision before choosing a coating.



MAINTAIN IT

Extend That New-Finish Feel

Take up these eight simple habits to help your garage floor last longer—and get more bang for your buck

1. Clean Often

Although it depends on how much and what kind of traffic your garage sees, experts recommend sweeping regularly and deep-cleaning monthly. Stick with a push broom to clear debris, use a degreaser to lift dirt and grime, and wash away what's left with a hose.

2. Skip Harsh Abrasives

Metal-bristled brushes and abrasive cleaners may damage less-durable finishes or scratch and dull tough ones such as epoxies.

Before you throw out the packaging, read what the manufacturer recommends to clean and maintain your floor.

3. Store Chemicals Securely

Paints, oils and other materials that tend to leak should be kept in sealed containers or cabinets to reduce the risk of long-standing spills.

4. Keep Salt Away

Salt corrodes concrete and damages some finishes. Don't spread deicing salts next to

your garage door, and regularly clear salt residue in winter.

Consider using a boot tray to minimize the amount of salt coming in from foot traffic.

5. Use Drip Pans

Prevention is the best medicine. Always work with a drip pan and protective coverings while changing the oil or transmission fluid or doing other messy jobs. Wipe away any spills before they have a chance to stain.

6. Drain Away Water

Ground moisture is the enemy of concrete, whether it's sealed or not. Keep an eye on the gutters and drainage around your garage to stop water from causing cracks during freeze-thaw cycles. Proper weatherstripping on a garage door also goes a long way to keep

your things dry (and protected from pests).

7. Don't Drag Equipment

Even the toughest coatings and coverings will scratch and dent if you pull heavy tool chests or cabinets across the garage. Use a hand dolly or look for storage with wheels if you reconfigure your setup often.

8. Repair Scratches Before They Peel

No matter how careful you are, you will eventually have a ding or scratch in your new floor. If you patch the blemish quickly, it will stop a larger area from peeling and becoming more noticeable. Just clean the area well, sand the patch, rinse and dry the floor completely, and repair the spot with your coating as the manufacturer recommends. ●

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Upholstered Storage Ottoman

This versatile piece serves as a coffee table, footrest and storage solution in one

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ



TMB STUDIO

Making something curved or circular is one of the more challenging things you can do with wood. Fortunately, with a circle-cutting jig for your router and some bending plywood (often called “wobble board”), those challenges become much more manageable.

This round storage ottoman is a perfect introduction to working with curves, helping you build confidence with techniques you’ll be able to use for future projects. It’s also a great chance to try your hand at basic upholstery. When you’re done, you’ll have a functional home accent that adds comfort, coziness and DIY character to your living space while showing off your craftsmanship. Here are the step-by-step instructions to guide you through the process.

1 CUT THE CIRCLES, HOOPS AND FRAMING

Use a router equipped with a circle-cutting jig to cut the circles (A and B) and hoops (C and D) specified in the cuts list on page 25. Cut each piece in three to four passes to avoid overheating the router and bit and to keep the cuts accurate and clean.

Using a miter saw, cut the 1×2 framing members for the storage section (E), lid (F) and toe (G).

2 NAIL TOGETHER THE SECTIONS

Use wood glue and a brad nailer with 1½-in. brad nails to assemble the storage section, lid and toe, as shown in Figure A. Make sure the framing members (E, F and G) are evenly spaced and flush to the outside edge of each circle (A and B) or hoop (C and D). Clean up any glue squeeze-out with a damp shop rag.

NOTE: Your hoops may be narrower than the 1×2 framing members. Just make sure the outside edges are flush.

As an optional step, I used scrap 1×2 to

make blocking for the toe in the form of an “X”. The blocking pieces, which are the height of the small hoop (D) when the toe is assembled, help keep glue squeeze-out from getting on the toe veneer when you attach the toe to the storage section.

3 RIP THE BENDING PLYWOOD

On the table saw, rip four strips of bending plywood to the finished widths of the stapled storage section (interior and exterior), toe and lid. Don’t cut the strips to length just yet.

4 STAPLE THE BENDING PLYWOOD

Use clamps to dry-fit the bending plywood around the outside of the toe and lid, as well as the outside and inside of the storage section. As you clamp the plywood around each form, mark and cut it to length with the miter saw. If the piece is still a bit long when you go to secure it, trim it with a pull saw. Use glue and 1½-in. narrow-crown staples



What It Takes

Time	Cost	Skill Level
2 days	\$150-\$300	Intermediate

Tools

- 18-gauge brad nailer
- Caliper or tape measure
- Circle-cutting jig or trammel arm
- Clamps
- Drill
- Electric carving knife
- File
- Laminate roller
- Miter saw
- Narrow-crown staple gun
- Permanent marker
- Pull saw
- Router
- Straight-cut router bit
- Table saw
- Utility knife



to secure the plywood to the framing.

5 APPLY THE WALNUT VENEER TO THE TOE

Sand the bending plywood so it is smooth and flush with the top and bottom of the toe, and clean it thoroughly to remove dust. Use spray contact cement to attach the walnut veneer to the base. Spray both the back of the veneer and the bending plywood surface generously, allowing the contact cement to set up for a few minutes before joining the pieces.

Using a laminate roller or smooth wood block, apply even pressure to the veneer to ensure it adheres well. Trim any excess with a sharp utility knife or file so it is flush with the edge of the small circle (B) and hoop (D). Lightly sand the face of the veneer to

remove any traces of contact cement.

6 JOIN THE TOE AND STORAGE SECTION

Use a caliper or tape measure to center the toe on the bottom of the storage section. Join them using wood glue and 1 1/2-in. brad nails through the bottom circle (A) of the storage section into the small hoop (D) and blocking of the toe.

7 ATTACH FOAM TO THE LID

Trace the lid's top circle (A) onto upholstery foam with a permanent marker; then cut the foam with an electric carving knife. Attach it to the lid with spray adhesive, spraying both the bottom of the foam and the top of the lid and giving the adhesive time to set up a bit before joining the pieces.

8 ATTACH BATTING TO THE LID AND STORAGE SECTION

The batting should be folded over 2 to 3 in. on the underside of the lid; dry-fit and cut it accordingly. Lightly spray the attached foam with spray adhesive, center the batting on it, and staple the batting into place with 1/2-in. narrow-crown staples. Trim any excess batting.

Next, dry-fit batting around the storage section and cut it. Staple it around the large circle (A) at the bottom of the storage section, then fold it over the top and staple it into the storage cavity about 2 in. down the interior wall. Trim any excess batting. To

Materials

Item	Qty.
3/4" x 4' x 8' bending plywood	1
1/2" narrow-crown staples	
3/4" x 4' x 8' sanded plywood	1
1x2 x 8'	4
1x6 x 8' walnut	1
1" upholstery foam	
1 1/4" screws	
1 1/2" 18-gauge brad nails	
1 1/2" narrow-crown staples	
2" 18-gauge brad nails	
Assorted sandpaper	
CA glue	
Clean shop rags	
Contact cement	
Spray adhesive	
Upholstery batting	
Upholstery fabric	
Walnut veneer	
Wipe-on finish	
Wood filler	
Wood glue	



close the seam, create a neat fold and secure it into place with CA glue.

9 COVER THE LID AND STORAGE SECTION WITH FABRIC

Cut the upholstery fabric for the lid and the storage section slightly larger than the batting. Use ½-in. narrow-crown staples to secure it, fully covering the batting on the underside of the lid and along the bottom of the storage section. For the fabric inside the storage compartment, either staple it and treat it with Fray Check or fold the edge over to prevent fraying.

To create a neat seam on the outside of the storage section, cut the fabric so that it overlaps itself by 2 to 3 in., fold it over tightly and use CA glue to hold it in place.

NOTE: When stapling around a circular item, be careful not to pull the fabric, as this can distort the pattern.

10 MAKE AN INDEXING CIRCLE FOR THE LID
To ensure the lid closes properly and indexes with the storage section,

route a solid-wood circle (I used walnut) for the underside of the lid. When the lid is flipped, this circle can also serve as a tabletop.

The circle must fit snugly within the top opening of the assembled storage section. My circle had a diameter of 16½ in., but adjust as needed for the thickness of your materials.

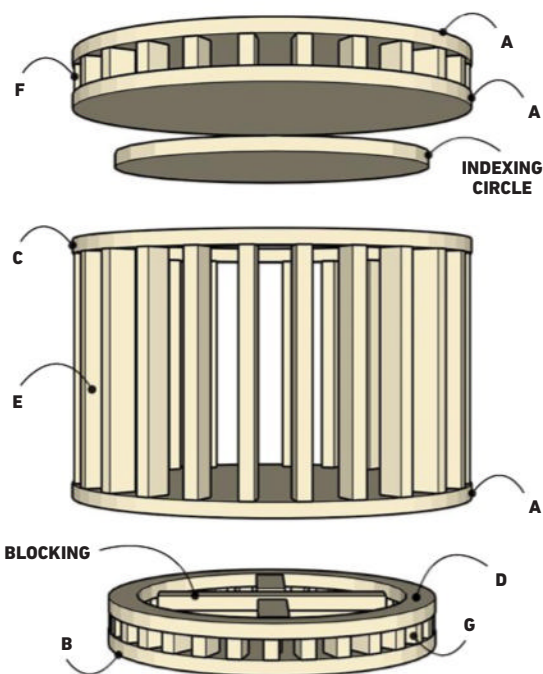
To form the circle, glue and clamp a panel of ¾-in. boards that is slightly wider than the desired diameter. Then route it using a router and circle-cutting jig. Sand the face and edges so they are smooth and free of glue residue.

Use 2-in. brad nails to secure the circle to the underside of the lid. If the lid does not feel secure, add a 1 ¼-in. screw in the center divot made by the fastener from the circle-cutting jig.

11 FINISHING TOUCHES
Fill any holes in the storage compartment and indexing circle with wood filler. Apply a wipe-on finish to the toe veneer and indexing circle and let it dry. •



Figure A
Ottoman Framing



Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	3	¾" x 21" OD	Large circle
B	1	¾" x 17¼" OD	Small circle
C	1	¾" x 21" OD x 18" ID	Large hoop
D	1	¾" x 17¼" OD x 14¼" ID	Small hoop
E	24	¾" x 1½" x 12"	Storage framing
F	24	¾" x 1½" x 1½"	Lid framing
G	28	¾" x 1½" x 1"	Toe framing



Video Online

Scan the QR code to follow along with Carmen as she builds this ottoman.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO Home Security

Combining smart systems with old-school safety
tactics saves money and simplifies home protection

BY KARUNA EBERL





Smart and Streamlined

Tech has modernized home safety, and luckily most options aren't all that complicated

Smart home security products are flourishing as technologies become more refined and affordable. Many studies suggest that just the presence of security cameras and alarm systems deters a majority of would-be thieves. But “smart” doesn’t mean fool-proof—proper installation and maintenance, plus traditional security measures, are key for keeping your home safe.

Doorbell Cameras

Doorbell cameras alert you when someone approaches your home. Even when you’re away, you can see who’s there, talk to them in real time and keep track of deliveries. Keep in mind that if you want footage recorded to the cloud, you’ll likely need to pay for a subscription. And because the doorbells rely on

Wi-Fi, they won’t work when the power is out.

To minimize the risk of hacking, choose strong, unique passwords for your Wi-Fi network and doorbell app, and keep the app and device updated.

Security Cameras

Security cameras also monitor your home remotely, record suspicious events and help deter intruders. “However, they often have low video quality and can be easily disabled or disconnected from the power source, even by those who aren’t particularly tech-savvy,” says Rick Sheets, VP of Monitoring and Compliance at Brinks Home.

Recording can also present legal problems. Privacy laws vary, but in general it’s illegal to film neighboring properties or put cameras in private areas such as



A doorbell camera helps you keep tabs on visitors, whether you’re home or away.

bedrooms and bathrooms. Visitors also often perceive indoor cameras as a breach of privacy.

While posting footage from doorbell/security cameras on social media is usually OK, to be safe and courteous, “focus on awareness and deterrence rather than identifying or shaming individuals,” says Gene Petrino,



Neighborhood Security for Safer Homes

A simple way to boost safety in your community and at home is to get to know your neighbors. Join local clubs or take walks to meet people. "These casual interactions build trust and create informal surveillance," says Gene Petrino of security.org.

More safety tips:

- Join or start a neighborhood watch or group text for reporting suspicious activity. Find programs through local police or apps such as Nextdoor and Facebook.
- Report anything suspicious to the nonemergency police number, community apps or school groups. For urgent situations, always call 911.
- When planning a move, research neighborhood safety using websites such as AreaVibes and NeighborhoodScout. Well-lit streets, gated entries and clear signage all help, Petrino says.
- Share your house key only with trusted neighbors or family, not with service providers.
- Don't open the door to unknown visitors or give personal details or money to solicitors. Call the company directly to verify their identity.



Install motion-activated outdoor lights to discourage bad actors before they get too close.

retired SWAT Commander and Lead Advisor for security.org.

Dummy Cameras

Dummy cameras deter thieves, if the thieves believe the devices are real. But because they won't capture evidence or alert you to suspicious activity, Petrino suggests posting a sign that identifies the presence of cameras, then installing both real and dummy cameras to create a visible deterrent.

Smart and Keyless Locks

Smart locks reduce the risk of lost or stolen keys, and allow you to lock and unlock doors remotely or create temporary codes for visitors. "These can be a very secure way to prevent entry of intruders," Sheets says, "but they do have some vulnerabilities." Those include battery failure, potential hacking and physical damage. So choose a model with encryption and a deadbolt, keep the firmware updated, make a physical backup key and change your codes periodically.

Motion-Activated Smart Lighting

Since most break-ins happen in darkness, motion-activated lights help deter intruders as well as trigger cameras and send alerts. To simulate occupancy while you're away, pair them with smart lighting and curtains that can be controlled remotely. "It's a simple upgrade with a big impact," says Sheets.

Monitored vs. Self-Monitored Systems

Professionally monitored security systems are more effective than self-monitored ones, since they trigger an immediate, trained response to potential emergencies such as break-ins and fires. Self-monitored systems are less expensive but rely on your noticing alerts as they arise.



More Online

Scan the QR code for more of our best home security tips, projects and advice.

A wooden dowel in the track of a sliding glass door is an affordable and effective barrier against forced entry.

Low-Tech, Low-Cost, Low-Hassle

These smart habits and physical deterrents have stood the test of time

There are plenty of tried-and-true ways to keep your home safe without tech-heavy gear. Many are cheap or free and don't require subscriptions or maintenance. And most come down to common sense. "Thieves look for easy, low-risk targets, visible entrances, poor lighting and signs of vacancy," says Petrino, "so make your home a less attractive target."

Install Obvious Deterrents

Signs declaring your home is monitored by a security system, even if you don't have one, can be a deterrent. So can large window and door locks installed in plain sight. "This simple strategy will convince many that your house simply isn't worth trying to break into," Sheets says.

Create Reinforcements

Putting wooden dowels in the tracks of sliding doors and windows is an oldie but goodie for keeping intruders at

bay. Petrino also recommends replacing hinge-and-lock screws with 3-in. stainless steel ones, which makes them more difficult to pry or kick in. For extra security, install deadbolts and thicker entry doors.

Landscape for Anti-Theft

Trim shrubs and trees to minimize hiding places. Spread gravel along fence lines so you'll have an audible warning if someone jumps over. And plant cactuses and thorny bushes such as roses below windows and fences. This can both discourage entry and collect DNA evidence should someone try to pass. Also, keep garden tools that may help with break-ins, such as shovels and ladders, out of sight, Sheets says.

Add Motion Lights

Motion-activated lights don't need to be "smart" to be effective. Low-cost ones still illuminate dark areas and reduce hiding spots.

Additionally, keep lights over entry points on all night, says Petrino. "Lighting is one of the top crime-prevention tools to use," he says.

Hide Valuables

Close your blinds after dark and always keep the overhead garage door shut, so tools and other expensive items are hidden from passersby. Inside, keep valuables tucked out of sight, especially if you're expecting an unfamiliar visitor or worker. Also, cut up any boxes from costly purchases before putting them on the curb, so it's not obvious you just bought something worth stealing.

Travel Off-Radar

When leaving town, don't let mail and newspapers

pile up, which signals an empty home and therefore an easy target. Instead, stop delivery for your vacation or get a trusted friend or neighbor to collect your papers for you. Also, don't widely announce your departure. "While it may be tempting to post photos of your beautiful beach vacation on your social media pages, it's best to wait until you return home to share, even if you keep your profiles private," Sheets says.

Consult the Police

For a second opinion on your home's security, try contacting your local police station. Some departments will send out an officer to identify weak spots or even check the exterior of your home periodically while you're away.



Clear, obvious signage tells would-be intruders your home isn't an easy target.



TMB STUDIO



Hidden-Storage Floating Shelf

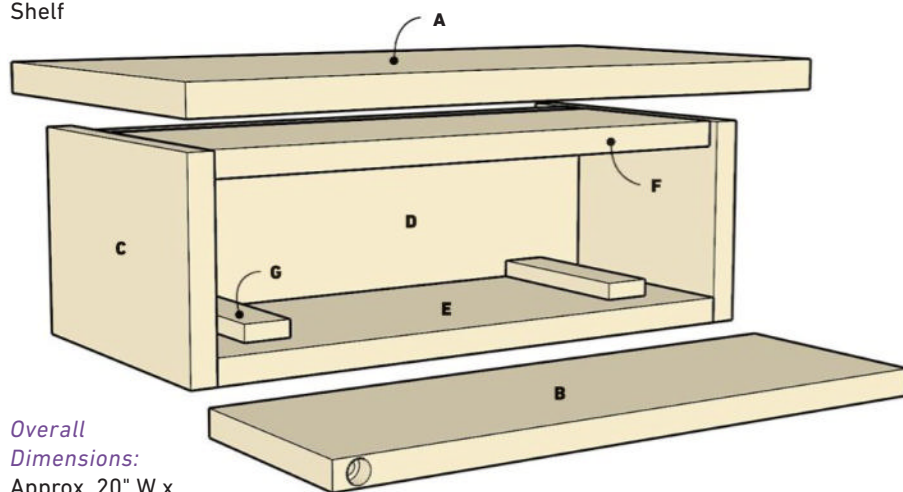
Keeping valuables out of sight is home security 101. This clever shelf keeps your things protected in a concealed lockbox.

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

As a builder with experience in the film industry, I've always been fascinated by the clever gadgets and secret contraptions showcased in movies like *James Bond*, *Indiana Jones* and *Batman*. Inspired by that tradition, I designed this wall-mounted floating shelf with a hidden compartment that keeps your belongings safely out of sight. The way it works is simple but fun: Place an unassuming object with an embedded magnet on the shelf to lock it, then pull the object away to access the drawer. Inside, there's a discreet spot for your wallet, watch, spare change or keys. And while the spy games may feel like movie magic, this functional piece also adds a layer of real-world security to your home. Mission accomplished!



Figure A
Shelf

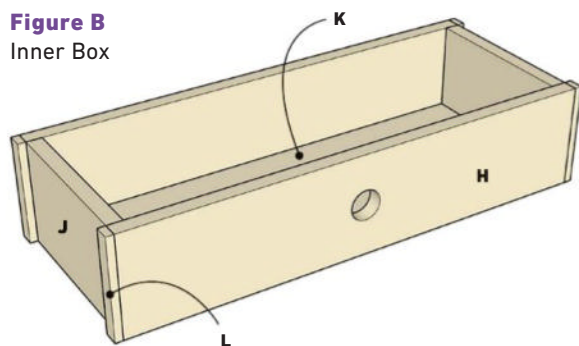


Overall Dimensions:
Approx. 20" W x
6 $\frac{7}{8}$ " H x 10" D

Materials

- $\frac{1}{4}$ " dowel pins
- $\frac{5}{16}$ " x 3" bolt with nut
- $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 2' x 2' walnut plywood scrap
- $\frac{5}{8}$ " round magnets
- $\frac{3}{4}$ " overlay hinges (2)
- 1x8 x 8' walnut
- 1" 23-gauge pin nails
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ " 18-gauge brad nails
- 2x6 x 2' scrap
- 2" screws
- Assorted sandpaper
- Beeswax wood finish
- CA glue
- Chip brush
- Contact cement
- Live-edge board
- Painter's tape
- Shop rags
- Walnut veneer
- Wood filler
- Wood glue

Figure B
Inner Box



Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 20"	Live-edge top
B	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 6" x 18"	Floating shelf face
C	2	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 6" x 9"	Floating shelf side
D	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 6" x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Floating shelf back
E	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Floating shelf bottom
F	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ " x 6" x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Floating shelf slat
G	2	$\frac{1}{2}$ " x 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	Floating shelf slide
H	2	$\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Inner box front/back
J	2	$\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ "	Inner box side
K	1	$\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Inner box bottom
L	4	$\frac{1}{4}$ " x $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ "	Inner box trim
M	1	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 16"	Ledger

1 CUT THE PARTS
Using a miter saw and table saw, cut all the parts listed in the cuts list.

2 ASSEMBLE THE OUTER FRAME
Using wood glue, clamps and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. 18-gauge brad nails, join the floating shelf

sides (C), back (D) and bottom (E) to form the shelf's outer frame. Leave a 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. gap between the back (D) and the back edge of the sides (C) to accommodate the ledger (M). Use a Speed square to ensure everything is square as you nail.

the instructions for the tab size so the face (B) aligns flush with the bottom edge of the bottom (E) and sides (C) when closed. Use a 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. Forstner bit to drill the cup holes. Install the other side of the hinges using the included screws, drilling a pilot hole first to avoid splitting the bottom (E).

3 ATTACH THE FACE
Use soft-close $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. overlay European-style hinges to attach the floating shelf face (B) to the floating shelf bottom (E). Install the cup side of the hinges along the bottom edge of the face (B). Follow

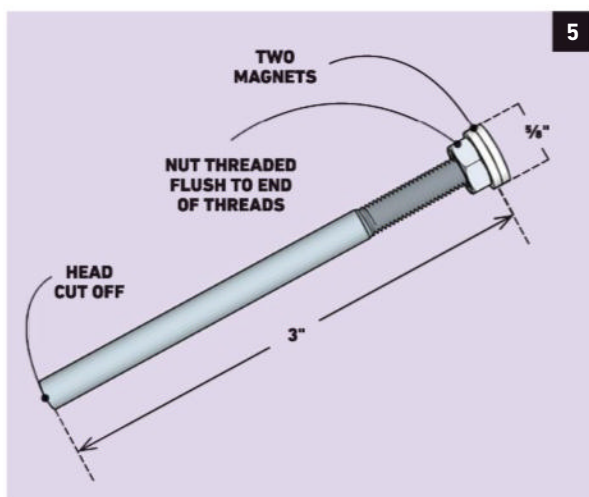
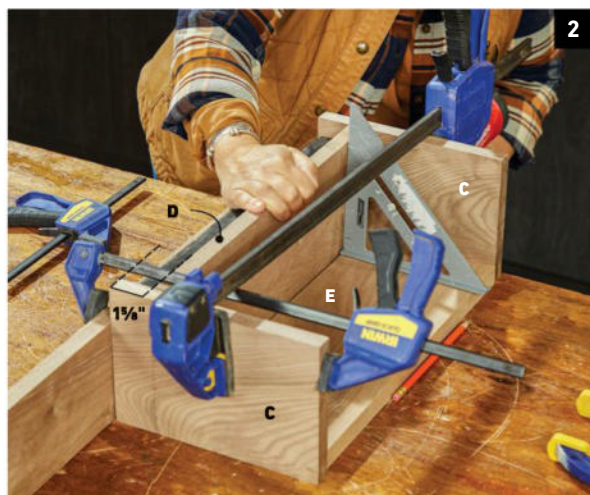
4 INSTALL THE SLIDES AND SLAT
Use CA glue to secure two $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. plywood slides (G) to the floating shelf bottom (E), aligned with the hinges. These allow the inner

What It Takes

Time	Cost	Skill Level
1-2 days	About \$200	Intermediate

Tools

- 18-gauge brad nailer
- 23-gauge pin nailer
- Clamps
- Dowel centers
- Doweling jig
- Drill/driver
- Drill press
- Forstner bit set
- Mallet
- Miter saw
- Pull saw
- Speed square
- Table saw
- Track saw



box to slide in and out without catching on the hinges.

Next, use wood glue and brad nails to secure the slat (F) from side (C) to side (C) across the top of the floating shelf compartment, leaving a $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. gap at the front and back.

5 MAKE THE LOCKING MECHANISM

To make the shelf's locking mechanism, cut the head off a $\frac{5}{16} \times 3$ -in. bolt and thread a nut flush to the end of the threads. Then CA-glue two magnets on top of the nut.

NOTE: Don't glue the magnets directly to the head of the bolt—they will adhere better to the nut and threaded end because the glue can seep into the threads.

6 DRILL A HOLE FOR THE LOCKING MECHANISM

On the edge of the face (B) opposite the hinges, drill a hole at least $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep for the locking mechanism. Drill it on the drill press using a square to ensure the hole is plumb.

Start by drilling down $\frac{1}{2}$ in. with a

$\frac{5}{16}$ -in. Forstner bit, then switch to a regular $\frac{11}{32}$ -in. twist drill bit and finish drilling.

7 BUILD THE INNER BOX

Assemble the inner box as shown in Figure B using wood glue and 1-in. 23-gauge pin nails. Pin nails prevent the MDF core of the plywood from blowing out and splitting.

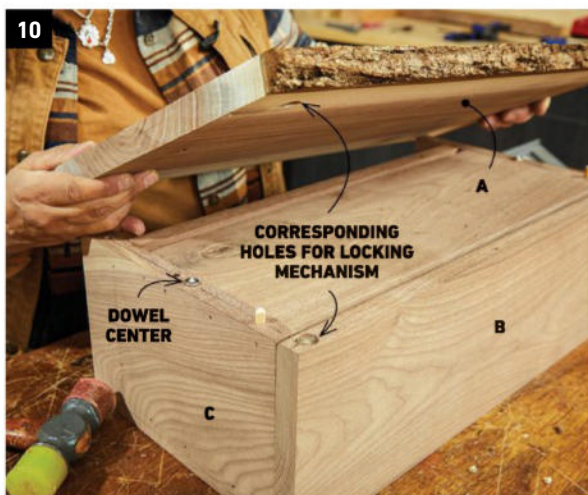
8 TRIM OUT THE INNER BOX

Use spray contact cement to secure walnut veneer along the top of the inner box's front/back (H) and

sides (J). Tape off the inner portion of the box (or spray very carefully) to keep the cement from getting all over the sides of the box. Use pin nails and glue to secure the walnut trim pieces (L) to cover the MDF core at the ends of the plywood. Let the glue cure, then cut the trim pieces (L) flush with a pull saw and sand them smooth.

9 CUT THE LIVE EDGE

Cut the live-edge top (A) from a wood slab that has been planed on two sides. First, use a track saw to cut the back edge so the slab



is roughly 1 in. deeper than the floating shelf box. Then use a miter saw to cut the slab 2 in. wider than the box.

10 DRILL DOWEL HOLES

Using dowel centers and a doweling jig or drill press with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. bit, drill corresponding holes for $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. dowels into the top edge of the floating shelf sides (C) and the bottom of the live-edge top (A). Leave a 1-in. overhang on each side of the top and keep it flush across the back.

While drilling into

the live-edge top (A), use a $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. Forstner bit to drill a corresponding hole for the locking mechanism. Make sure the hole aligns with the $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. hole on the top edge of the floating shelf face (B). Drill this hole $\frac{5}{16}$ in. deep; this allows a magnet placed on top of it to magnetize through the live-edge top (A).

11 FILL NAIL HOLES, SAND AND FINISH

Fill in any visible nail holes with wood filler, then sand all surfaces to 220-grit for a soft,

smooth feel. When sanding, break any sharp edges, particularly those along the inside of the floating shelf compartment and along the veneer at the top edge of the inner box.

Apply a couple of coats of a beeswax and oil finish such as Rowdy Rooster to all surfaces except the top of the floating shelf slat (F) and bottom of the live-edge top (A), where glue will be applied at assembly. Use a chip brush to get the finish deep into the bark crevices along

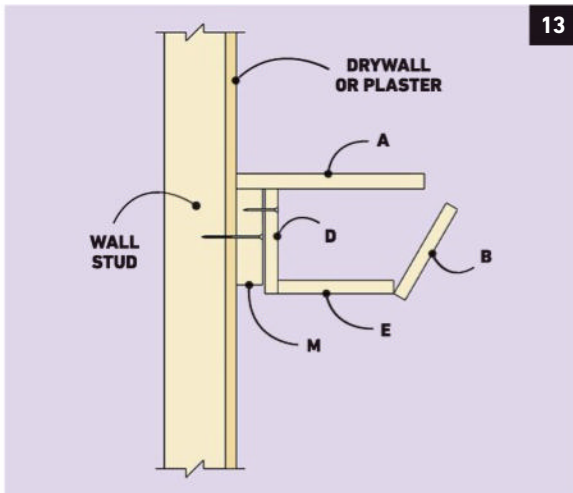
the front edge of the live-edge top (A).

12 ASSEMBLE THE SHELF

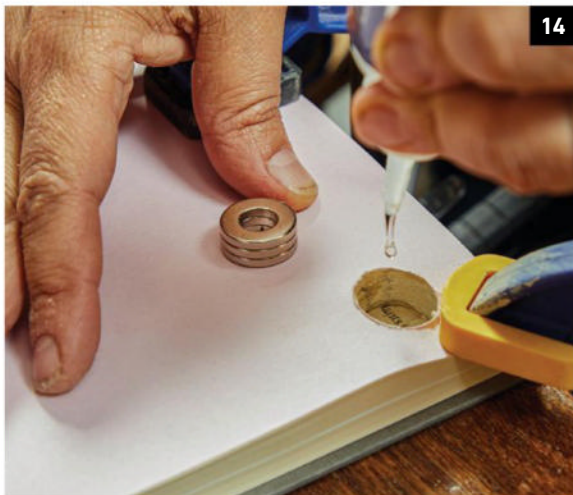
With the beeswax finish dry, use wood glue, $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. dowels, a mallet and clamps to attach the live-edge top (A) to the top of the floating shelf. Wipe up any glue squeeze-out with a damp shop rag.

Drop the locking mechanism into the hole on the top of the floating shelf face (B).

To create a pull, use a Forstner bit to drill a 1-in. hole in the center of the inner box front (H).



13



14

13 HANG THE SHELF Mount the 2×6 ledger (M) $\frac{1}{8}$ in. lower than the desired height of the floating shelf, making sure it is level and centered where the shelf will be positioned. Attach the ledger (M) to at least one wall stud. If a wall stud isn't present, use a flip toggle drywall anchor with the bolt head countersunk into the ledger on any side.

Place the floating shelf over the ledger (M) so that the bottom of the live-edge top (A) along the back edge sits on top of it. Screw

the floating shelf to the 2×6 ledger (M) through the back (D) using 2-in. screws. Slide the inner box into the shelf.

14 MAKE A LOCKING DEVICE

To make a locking device that engages the locking mechanism, embed a few $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. magnets into an inconspicuous object such as a book.

Place the object over the locking mechanism on the floating shelf top (A) to keep the compartment locked. Move it, and you'll be able to open it and access what's inside! ●



Leaving Town? Check These Things Off Before You Go

Doors and Windows

- ☐ Lock all doors and windows; place dowels or security bars in door and window slides.
- ☐ If you have smart locks, hide or bring a physical key with you as backup.

Cameras

- ☐ Position security cameras for wide coverage, over all entry points, avoiding blind spots.
- ☐ Test cameras' functionality and whether their field of view is obscured by plant growth.

Lighting

- ☐ Connect indoor and outdoor lights to smart plugs and set automated schedules.
- ☐ Schedule indoor lights to turn on at sunset and off at bedtime, or randomize them.
- ☐ Have outdoor lights turn on at sunset and off at dawn to help deter nighttime intruders.

Security Systems

- ☐ Test and activate all security systems, including entry alarms, smart/motion lights and smart curtains.
- ☐ Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms; replace batteries as necessary.
- ☐ Turn down the heat or air conditioning, and hide valuables and important documents.

Neighbors and Family

- ☐ Let trusted family and neighbors know your schedule. Ask them to keep an eye out for anything suspicious.
- ☐ Avoid posting travel plans publicly on social media or telling others you'll be out of town.

Outside Appearance

- ☐ Hold mail, newspapers and deliveries, or have a neighbor collect them daily.
- ☐ Leave a car in your driveway to give the illusion that someone is home.

TV Room Tuneups

From corralling cables to cleaning screens, here's how to quickly and easily upgrade your home viewing setup





Hide TV Wires

Cable raceways neatly tame the tangle and keep the focus on the screen

BY SAMUEL ROSENMAYER

If you still have a waterfall of tangled wires spilling from behind your TV, it's time for a change. For a neat, clutter-free look, there's no need to cut into drywall—just use a raceway. These hollow channels attach to the wall, hide your cords and can be painted to blend in seamlessly.

I picked up a raceway kit for under \$15. With about an 11-in. gap between my TV and console, I chose one a few inches longer and hid the ends behind both pieces. Look for models that can handle 90-degree turns or run along baseboards if your setup requires it.

Raceways are easy to trim, so if you can't find the exact length you need, buy a slightly longer one and cut it. My setup had

three wires, but I chose a raceway wide enough for four, leaving room for future components such as a soundbar or gaming console.

1 PREPARE THE WALL

Because dust and grime can keep double-sided tape from sticking, wipe down the entire

Tools

Jigsaw, handsaw or utility knife

Level

Paintbrush

Tape measure

Materials

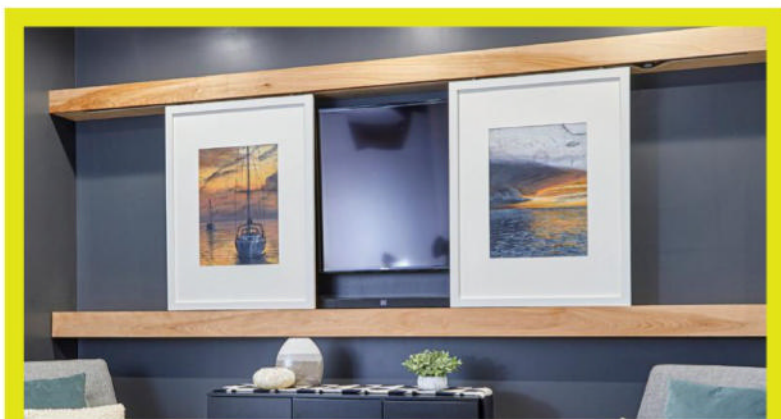
Double-sided tape

Microfiber cloth

Paint

Raceway kit





Now You See It...

A TV as the focal point in a room is great for movie nights and game days, but sometimes you want to focus on family or just enjoy a cozy, distraction-free space. Unlike a phone or tablet, a TV can't be tucked away, so we designed a system that hides it behind artwork. The sliding doors can be automated or operated by hand—and we've done all the trial-and-error so you can replicate the belt system in just an hour or two.



More Online

Scan the QR code for the full project plan.

installation area with a micro-fiber cleaning cloth.

2 DETERMINE THE LENGTH OF THE RACEWAY

With a tape measure, measure the length the raceway will need to be to cover any exposed wires. For my setup, I needed a raceway long enough to run a couple of inches behind my mounted TV and a couple of inches behind the entertainment center.

3 CUT THE RACEWAY TO LENGTH

Trim the raceway as needed with a jigsaw, handsaw or utility knife.

4 MARK A GUIDELINE

Use a level to mark a plumb line on the wall where the raceway will be installed. A crooked raceway will be noticeable in this high-visibility area.

5 APPLY TAPE TO THE RACEWAY

Line up a strip of double-sided tape to the back of the raceway, remove the film and then apply the tape. Most raceway kits come with double-sided tape, but it's also available at hardware stores and home centers.

6 MOUNT THE RACEWAY

Peel the remaining film from the tape, align the raceway to the guideline and press the raceway firmly and evenly against the wall until it is secured.

7 PLACE WIRES INSIDE

Place the wires into the track and push the lid down to securely close the raceway.

8 PAINT THE RACEWAY

If desired, paint the raceway to match your wall. I recommend two coats to ensure it blends well with the surrounding environment. I skipped painting since my walls and the raceway were both white.

NOTE: Depending on the accessibility of the space behind your TV, consider painting the raceway before installation.



Clean an LED Screen

Gently remove fingerprints, dust and debris for a crisp, streak-free view

BY SAMUEL ROSENMAAYER

Have you ever noticed fingerprints and smudges all over your TV while trying to enjoy a game or a show? Yuck! Cleaning a flat-screen TV the wrong way can damage it, so skip the Windex and paper towels. Window cleaners and soaps contain chemicals that are too harsh for LED screens, and rough towels can cause scratches.

The safest option is to use a soft microfiber cloth, which lifts dust gently yet effectively. You can buy specialized screen cleaners such as Whoosh! Spray Cleaner and Insignia Screen Cleaning Solution, but to save yourself the hassle and expense of a trip to the store, here's how to make your own and achieve flawless results fast.

1 MIX THE CLEANER

Add 4 oz. of distilled water and 4 oz. of white vinegar to a clean spray bottle and shake well.

2 DUST THE TV

Turn off the TV. Using a clean, dry microfiber cleaning cloth, wipe down the screen, starting at the top and working your way down. Don't forget the corners.

3 DAMPEN A MICROFIBER CLOTH

Spray the vinegar mixture on a clean, dry microfiber cloth so it's damp but not overly saturated.

4 CLEAN THE TV

With the dampened cloth, clean the TV screen, starting from the top and working your way down to the bottom.

5 WIPE UP EXCESS MOISTURE

Remove any excess moisture with another dry microfiber cloth, paying particular attention to the corners and the bottom of the screen. Let the screen air-dry, and if streaks remain, buff them out with a microfiber cloth.

5 TV Mistakes to Avoid

Get the most out of your device by avoiding these common missteps:

1. **Don't mount your TV above a fireplace.** Heat can shorten your TV's lifespan, and soot can build up on and inside the unit. It's also likely too high a spot for comfortable viewing.
2. **Don't expect built-in speakers to sound great.** Today's ultra-thin TVs leave little room for quality speakers. Add an affordable soundbar or invest in a home theater system for fuller sound.
3. **Don't assume your freestanding TV is tip-proof.** Modern flat-screen TVs are lightweight, but they still pose a safety risk, especially for kids and pets. If you're not wall-mounting your TV, use a sturdy stand. For extra security, use safety straps to anchor the TV to the wall.
4. **Don't block airflow to TV accessories.** Keeping your Apple TV or PlayStation in an enclosed cabinet traps heat, limits airflow and can potentially shorten the device's lifespan.
5. **Don't lay your TV flat.** When moving a TV, always keep it upright. TVs are designed to have their weight evenly distributed when standing. If they are laid down, gravity can pull on the edges and potentially cause the screen to crack.



Wall-Mount a TV

Keep your TV secure and your viewing comfortable without shelling out for a pro

BY NINA BRICKO

Mounting a flat-screen TV on the wall is one of those jobs where a little know-how can save you a lot of money. Professional installation can cost \$300 or more, plus the price of the mount. But if you can measure precisely and drive a few screws, you can do a first-class DIY job in about an hour. I'll show you how, and help you sort through the confusing variety of mounts to find the best one for your setup.

Before You Begin

Most flat-screen TVs are made to be mounted, but double-check before shopping for a mount. Look for "VESA" (Video Electronics Standards Association) on the manual or the TV itself, followed by a number (e.g., "VESA 75"). Any mount with the same VESA number will fit.

For my project, I mounted a 42-in. TV in my bedroom above a credenza. I chose a full-motion

mount in case I wanted to pull the TV away from the wall and tilt the screen for better viewing. Depending on your mount type, the steps may vary, so always check the included instructions before diving into the project.

1 DETERMINE THE INSTALLATION HEIGHT

For large TVs, you may need two or three people—two to hold the TV and one to judge the height. If you don't have helpers, cut a piece of paper or cardboard the size of your TV and use painter's tape to temporarily attach it to the wall. This lets you see how the TV will look from your usual viewing position and adjust the cutout until it feels right. Once you've decided on a height, mark the top-center location on the wall, then set the cardboard or TV aside.

PRO TIP: Don't mount your TV too high—looking up can strain your neck and make the picture appear murky, especially if the mount doesn't tilt. Some experts recommend centering the screen at eye level when seated, while others suggest a bit lower so eye level hits the top two-thirds of the TV, where most on-screen action occurs. There's no single "correct" height; it depends on your preference, the TV size and the room. A large TV in a big room can be mounted higher because the upward viewing angle is less noticeable from farther away.

Tools

- Cordless drill
- Level
- Pencil
- Screwdriver
- Socket/ratchet set
- Stud finder
- Tape measure
- Utility knife (to cut cardboard)

Materials

- Cardboard
- Flat-screen TV and mount
- Lag bolts (if not included in mounting kit)
- Nail
- Painter's tape





The best way to choose the height? Hold the TV—or cardboard cutout—against the wall, sit at your viewing spot and decide what feels right to you.

2 FIND THE STUDS

Locate the centers of the wall studs using a stud finder. The centers of the studs provide maximum holding power. Mark the location with a pencil.

To make sure it's actually a stud, run a nail into the wall. Newer stud finders light up the entire stud, so it's easier to see the center.

If you have concrete, brick or block walls, you can drive anchors anywhere. Check the mount instructions for wall anchor recommendations.

3 POSITION THE WALL MOUNT

Most wall plates let you slide the TV left or right a few inches, so the plate doesn't have to be perfectly centered. But positioning the plate at the right height can be tricky—lots of people install it two or even three times before they get it right. Here's how to avoid wasted time and a wall full of screw holes:

Put the TV screen-side down on a blanket or something that won't scratch the surface, then screw the brackets to the TV following the instructions. The screw holes in the back of the



TV may be hidden by plastic plugs. If so, just pry them off.

Hang the wall plate on the brackets so the complete mount is attached to the TV.

Measure the distance from the top of the TV to the center of each row of mounting holes on the back plate.

On the wall, measure the same distances by using the center-top TV marking to locate where the two rows of mounting holes would land.

Use the stud marks to locate the stud within each row of mounting holes. Check the final marks with a level to make sure they're perfectly level horizontally. There should be four markings: two on top and two on the bottom.

Drill holes at the marks. The holes should be about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. smaller than the lag bolts. If the manufacturer didn't include lag bolts, check the instructions and pick up the suggested size at a hardware store or home center.

4 ATTACH THE MOUNT TO THE WALL

Screw the plate to the wall using lag bolts and a socket wrench.

5 MOUNT THE TV ON THE WALL

After installing the TV, consider using cable raceways to hide any unsightly wires (see page 37). You could also put up a shelf to house your soundbar and other decor items. ●



TV Mount Styles

Wall mounts come in four basic styles. They mainly differ in how much you can adjust the screen—a key factor for reducing glare, improving viewing comfort and getting the clearest picture.

• Fixed Mounts

Fixed mounts hold the TV close to the wall with no tilting or other adjustments. They're best placed at eye level.

• Swivel Mounts

Swivel mounts turn left or right, making it easier to view the screen from different sides of the room. They also work best when mounted at eye level.

• Tilt Mounts

Tilt mounts angle the screen up or down, ideal if the TV sits above eye level or if you tend to watch TV from the floor one day and a sofa the next.

• Full-Motion Mounts

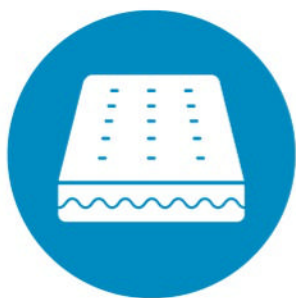
Full-motion mounts tilt, swivel, pan and extend (pull away from the wall). They can be installed on a flat wall or in a recessed box for a low-profile look and a neat exit point for in-wall wiring. These are the most flexible option for nearly any viewing setup.



Your Bed, Your Way

If you're among the one-third of American adults who don't get enough sleep, you know how transformative a good night's rest can be. Whether you crave firm support, breathable fabrics or cloud-like layers, our guide helps you tailor your bedding to bring blissful, lasting sleep.

BY GEMMA JOHNSTONE



Firm Foundations

Choosing a mattress isn't one-size-fits-all. Here's how to find the ideal blend of comfort, support and durability for your best night's sleep.

Material Matters

Megan Anderson, director of merchandising at Mattress Firm, suggests starting with how you sleep. "[This includes] your preferred position, whether you tend to sleep hot, what level of comfort meets your physical needs and if you share a bed," she says.

Andrew Colsky, behavioral sleep medicine clinician and founder of the National Sleep Center, recommends traditional innerspring mattresses for those seeking classic firmness and excellent airflow. They're ideal for back sleepers, those with spinal or muscular issues and anyone carrying extra weight.

Memory foam, Colsky notes, is a solid choice for side sleepers thanks to its body-contouring support and pressure relief, though it can retain heat. Latex, on the other hand, is naturally breathable, antimicrobial and resilient—though typically at a higher price.

Hybrid models combine coils with foam or latex toppers for a balance of bounce, breathability and motion control. That's especially helpful if you share a bed and you or your partner tends to toss and turn.

The Right Firmness

"If you're a back sleeper or have spine concerns, you'll generally want something on the firmer side," Colsky says. Firm mattresses help maintain spinal alignment and reduce sinkage—also a plus for stomach sleepers. Side sleepers, by contrast, benefit from softer surfaces that cushion shoulders and hips.

When possible, test mattresses in person. Colsky recommends seeking out brands with at least a 30-day trial period (some extend up to a year) so you can ensure it's the right fit.

ECO-CONSCIOUS

The Silk & Snow Organic Mattress

\$1,000 (queen) • Silk & Snow's hybrid mattress combines organic latex, cotton and wool with soft and firm pocketed springs for zoned support. It's breathable, durable and backed by a 365-day trial and 15-year warranty.



MEMORY FOAM

Leesa Original Mattress

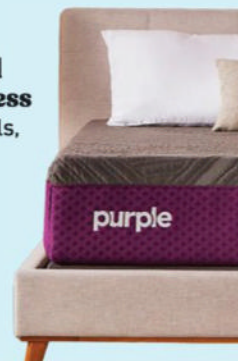
\$1,332 (queen) • This all-foam option resists sinking and overheating, two common drawbacks of the material. Its cradling comfort is ideal for back or side sleepers, and it comes with a 120-night trial and limited lifetime warranty.



KEEPS YOU COOL

Purple RestorePlus Cool Touch 13" Hybrid Mattress

\$3,299 (queen) • Layers of coils, foam and a cooling GelFlex Grid deliver medium-firm comfort. Designed for hot sleepers, the RestorePlus features cool-touch yarns and moisture-wicking, antimicrobial technology.



Sizing Up Comfort

Before settling on a mattress size, consider how much room you really need. Does your partner sprawl? Is your bedroom small and cozy? Measure your space and plan to leave at least 24 to 30 in. of clearance around the bed for easy movement.

Also pay attention to mattress height. "If your bed frame is tall, you don't want a mattress so high you need a ladder to climb in," Colsky says. Most mattresses range from 8 to 14 in. thick, but some lush pillow-top models can reach up to 16 or 18 in.



Battle of the Bedsheets

Finding your perfect sheets is all about the “four Fs”—fiber, fit, feel and finish. Each factor can make or break your sleep experience.

Material

Since we spend roughly a third of our lives in bed, it makes sense to focus on fabric before slipping between the sheets. “Generally, the more natural the material, the more breathable and comfortable it will be,” Colsky explains.

Cotton remains the gold standard—especially

crisp, cool, long-staple Egyptian. Linen’s looser weave has an airy texture and a luxurious, timeless style, but it needs serious pressing for a wrinkle-free finish.

Synthetic blends are budget friendly and wrinkle resistant but less breathable. Meanwhile, bamboo and Tencel (derived from eucalyptus) offer a luxurious balance of softness, sustainability and moisture-wicking coolness.

Thread Count and Weave

Thread count—the number of threads woven in a square inch of fabric—is often cited as a measure of quality. But a higher number isn’t always better, Colsky cautions. Some manufacturers twist shorter threads together to double the count, which can mean quicker wear. A 300-500 thread count in premium cotton is often more breathable and durable than inflated multi-ply options.

Weave also plays a key role: Percale is crisp, cool and long-lasting (though some sleepers find it a bit stiff), while sateen delivers silky smoothness and a soft sheen but may attract lint or pet hair.

Fit

Before buying, measure your mattress carefully. “The right fit ensures the sheets stay smooth and snug, which is especially helpful when using an adjustable base,” Anderson says. “Sheets made with stretch performance fabric tend to move with you and offer a more conforming feel, while traditional cotton sheets have less stretch and can make the mattress feel slightly firmer.”

BUDGET-FRIENDLY COTTON

Target Threshold Solid Performance 400 Thread Count Sheet Set

\$55 (queen) • This sheet set combines cost-effective cotton softness with a silky sateen finish—an ideal choice if you’re looking for durable, affordable everyday luxury.



LUXURIOUS LINEN

The Citizenry Stonewashed Linen Sheet Set

\$299 (queen) • Luxury linen doesn’t come cheap, but these artisan sheets are worth the indulgence. They’re soft (for linen), long-lasting and light and airy to perfectly regulate your temperature.



COOLING COMFORT

Olive + Crate Tencel Eucalyptus Cooling Sheet Set

\$160 (queen) • Crafted from eucalyptus fibers, these Tencel sheets are ultrasoft, breathable and naturally antibacterial. They’re a deluxe, durable upgrade for hot sleepers seeking cool-to-the-touch comfort. A 30-day at-home trial seals the deal.





Topping It Off

The “Scandinavian sleep method” of couples using separate bed coverings isn’t just a trend—it’s a sanity saver. Layer your toppers of choice to personalize temperature and comfort while keeping the nighttime tug-of-war to a minimum.

1. Bedspread

A decorative bedspread layered over your duvet or comforter gives your space a polished, hotel-like finish. Lightweight and generally affordable, bedspreads don’t add much insulative winter warmth, but they do contribute design-forward style as they drape over the fluffier layers below. They’re practical, too, offering easy-to-wash protection if you share your bed with your pets.

making cleaning easier and styling more versatile. Swap cover designs as the seasons change or adjust the insert’s thickness for year-round comfort.

Colsky notes that duvets work especially well for couples with differing sleep styles. He’s not a fan of the trendy term “sleep divorce,” but if your partner is a restless, sheet-stealing sleeper, using two twin duvets instead of one queen or king can be a game-changing solution.

2. Quilt

For lighter coverage and a touch of textural style, opt for a quilt. Made from stitched fabric panels filled with insulating batting, quilts have a sleek profile that makes them easier to wash and perfect for warmer climates or layering. They’re also a great way to repurpose sentimental fabrics into a handmade patchwork showpiece.

4. Comforter

Plush and breathable, comforters feature soft outer shells filled with insulating fibers. Strategic stitching keeps the fill evenly distributed to prevent clumping. They’re easy to layer with blankets or top sheets for year-round flexibility and come in a range of patterns and textures. Plus, unlike a duvet, a comforter is all-in-one, so there’s no wrestling match to stuff a stubborn insert into a cover. ●

3. Duvet

A duvet consists of a lofty insert and a removable cover,



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Wired for Today

A veteran electrician talks old houses—and how to safely and affordably update them for modern life

BY ALLY CHILDRESS



JENA ARDELL/GETTY IMAGES

I'll never forget the day I tried to install a ceiling fan in my old house, built in 1900. The two-wire, cloth-covered knob-and-tube circuit in the ceiling hadn't seen daylight in more than a century, and my new fan had six wires. Even though I was an electrical apprentice at the time, I eventually gave up, reattached the light fixture and returned the fan to the store.

Old homes have plenty of quirks, and while some are charming, others can be downright dangerous. Aging electrical

wiring definitely veers into the latter category. I consulted John Stapleton, a master electrician and 34-year electrical industry veteran, for his take on the biggest electrical red flags in older homes—and how homeowners can safely address them:

Aluminum Wiring

Copper has been the standard for electrical wiring since the early days of electricity. But when copper was in short supply and prices were high, aluminum—which is lighter and conducts

electricity well—briefly became the norm.

“In the 1960s and '70s, we had aluminum wiring, and it's still around today,” Stapleton says. “While it's cheaper than copper, aluminum wiring is a significant fire hazard because it expands and contracts more than copper, which can cause connections at outlets and switches to loosen.”

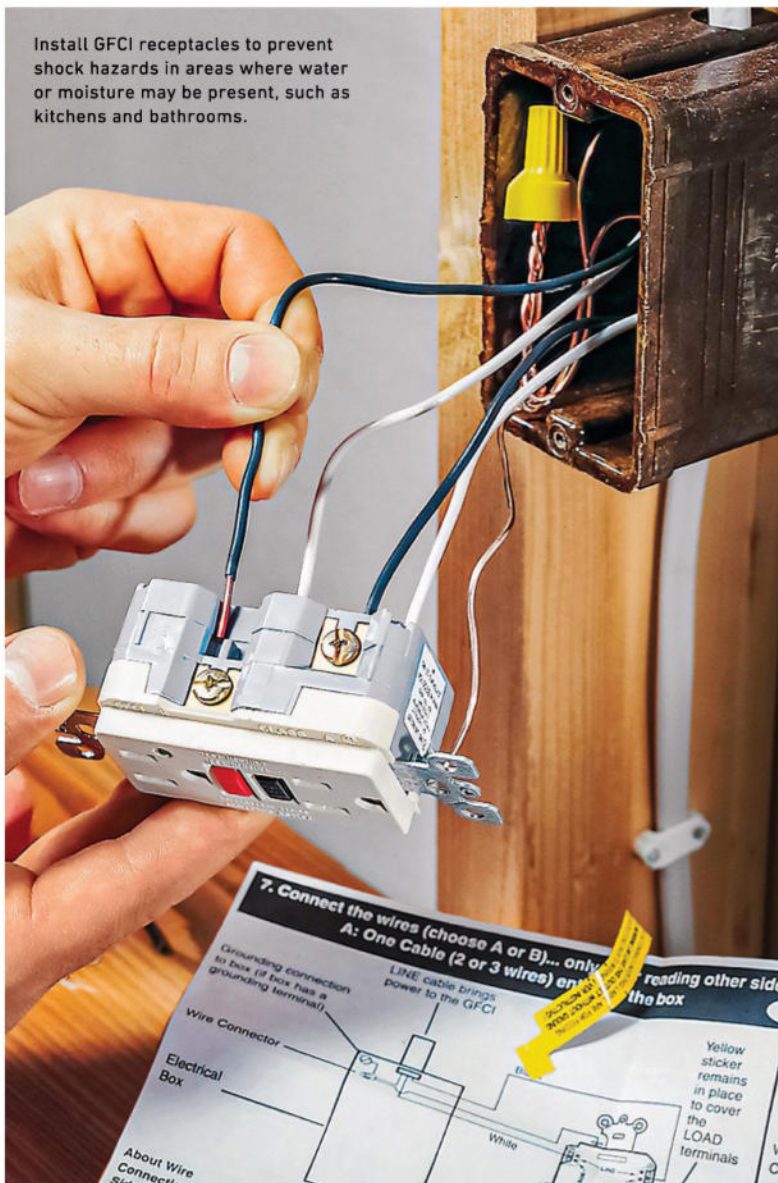
Ideally, Stapleton says, “if you have aluminum wiring, you should replace it with copper.” If that's not feasible, make sure to use approved connectors on any splices and aluminum-to-copper connections. Homeowners with aluminum wiring should have regular inspections by a licensed electrician to catch potential problems early.

Lack of Arc-Fault and Ground-Fault Protection

Arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) and ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) protect against fires and shock hazards, respectively. They're required throughout new homes, but these critical safety measures are usually lacking in older ones because the National Electrical Code (NEC) has gradually expanded where they're needed over time.

GFCI protection is required in kitchens, bathrooms, outdoors and anywhere water may be present. “It monitors the current

Both AFCI and GFCI protection can be installed as breakers or as receptacles.





From the 1880s to the 1940s, knob-and-tube wiring was standard in residential homes.

flowing through the circuit, and if it detects an imbalance indicating a potential shock, it quickly shuts the circuit off,” Stapleton says. GFCIs have been required in some circuits since 1971.

AFCIs are a newer requirement. “First required in bedrooms to detect arcing in extension cords that may have been run under carpets, they became an NEC requirement in 1999 and, like GFCIs, they have been gradually expanding to almost all the circuits in a home,” Stapleton says.

If your home lacks protection, add it. Both AFCI and GFCI protection can be installed as breakers or as receptacles. To protect the entire circuit with a receptacle, it must be installed in the first outlet after the panel.

Small Service Panels

“A 200-amp service is common these days, and some large homes could require a 400-amp service,” Stapleton says. Homes built before the 1960s likely have much less capacity unless they’ve been upgraded.

“Homes built back then may have had four circuits in total and a 30- or 60-amp service,” Stapleton says. Today’s tech-heavy lifestyles demand more, so the NEC has minimum circuit requirements for new construction. “It’s not uncommon for a

new home to have upwards of 30 circuits; we also must add for future considerations like electric vehicle charging.”

Homes built in the late 20th century often have 100-amp service. That’s better, but if your panel is full and you can’t or don’t want to fully upgrade, add a subpanel. “A subpanel can be beneficial for increased capacity and convenience, especially in larger homes,” Stapleton says.

Two-Prong Receptacles

Before the NEC required an equipment grounding conductor, which is a safety valve for excess current, many circuits had only a hot and neutral. That meant receptacles (aka outlets) had just two slots to receive a plug—not ideal for today’s three-prong world.

While rewiring your home is the best long-term solution, it isn’t always practical. For an immediate safety upgrade, swap out the old two-slot receptacles for GFCIs. “Installing a GFCI is essential for protecting circuits without a grounding conductor,” Stapleton says.



MEET THE PRO John Stapleton is a master electrician with 34 years of experience who now works for American Home Shield. He helps homeowners with a range of electrical needs.



Should You Do Your Own Electrical Work?

Household projects such as swapping out light fixtures and adding a new USB-charging receptacle are normally very doable for a DIYer. But old homes add complexity; you may stumble on ancient wiring or need to figure out new code requirements.

Use caution in older homes. If you get stuck or you have an unfamiliar project, call a licensed electrician. “One of the worst things you can do is tap into an existing knob-and-tube circuit; this could also create a fire hazard,” Stapleton says.

Remember: It takes only a few milliamps of current to severely injure or even kill you. Saving money and learning new skills is rewarding, but be sure to assess your abilities and project honestly so you don’t get in over your head.

This not only allows you to safely use three-prong plugs, it provides shock protection at each GFCI outlet. Never remove the ground pin from a plug to make it fit, and don’t install a regular (non-GFCI) three-prong receptacle without updating the wiring. ●

Smells Be Gone

From lingering fridge funk to old-house must, here's how to clear out stubborn odors for good

BY FAMILY HANDYMAN EDITORS



Q: What's the best way to freshen up a stinky dishwasher?

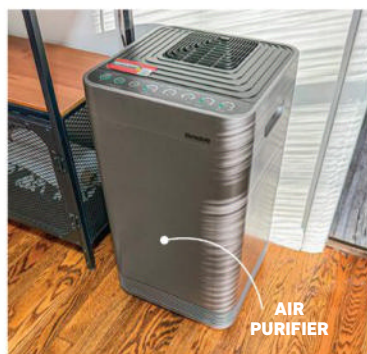
Moisture in your dishwasher, combined with food residue, can quickly create a breeding ground for smelly mold and mildew. To keep it clean, wipe down the interior regularly and try this deodorizing trick: Place a small bowl of white vinegar on the lower rack of an empty dishwasher, then run a normal cycle without detergent, using the hot rinse or extra rinse setting if available. To tackle mildew, spray on a store-bought mildew cleaner, let it sit for 5 to 10 minutes, then scrub with a brush and wipe clean with a paper towel or cloth. If you spot mold, it's best to call a professional.

FROM TOP: ERSTUDIOSTOK/GETTY IMAGES, TMB STUDIO



Q: How do you keep a microwave clean and smelling fresh?

It's easy to clean baked-on food from your microwave. Just partially fill a bowl or coffee cup with water and add a slice of lemon. Heat the water in the microwave for a minute, then leave the door closed to let the steam loosen the mess. After 10 minutes, open the door and wipe away the grime.



Q: Brand-new furniture can smell terrible! What's going on?

That smell from new furniture isn't just unpleasant; it can also be harmful. Some vinyl and flame-retardant upholstery materials release volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which pollute indoor air. According to the EPA, VOC levels can be up to 10 times higher indoors than outdoors, especially after new furniture is brought in. To reduce odors, open windows, run a fan and let the room breathe. If you are concerned about long-term exposure, a high-efficiency air purifier with a carbon filter can trap VOCs and greatly improve indoor air quality.



Q: Activated charcoal is supposed to get rid of refrigerator odors. How does it work?

Activated charcoal is a highly porous form of carbon that traps odor molecules on its surface—like a sponge for smells—making it a highly effective natural deodorizer. Fill two containers with activated charcoal (or smashed charcoal briquettes in a pinch), then place one in the fridge and one in the freezer. Newspaper works too: Crumple a few pages into loose balls, add a drop of vanilla extract to each, then place them in the fridge and freezer, replacing daily for a week for best results. Keep your fridge fresh by cleaning spills immediately, tossing spoiled food and wiping down the interior as needed.

Put the Brakes on Car Odors

If the AC in your car has a musty, moldy or chemical smell, it's trying to tell you something. A damp, earthy odor usually means water and debris are trapped in the evaporator, creating the perfect conditions for mold. If you don't see clear water dripping under your car when the AC runs, the drain may be clogged. And chemical or sweet, syrupy smells point to refrigerant or coolant leaks, which require a mechanic.



That New Car Smell

Scan the QR code for our best tips to make any car smell like new again.



Q: What's the best way to get rid of lingering cat odors around the house?

Cat urine contains uric acid, which clings to surfaces and resists most cleaners. As it breaks down, it releases ammonia, making the odor stronger over time. Add to that cats' desert ancestry—they conserve water, so their urine is ultra concentrated—and you've got a potent mix. Here's how to fight back:

- **Vacuum often:** Cat hair and dander trap odor. Vacuum weekly and empty the canister right away.
- **Baking soda:** Sprinkle baking soda over affected spots, let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes, then vacuum to neutralize acids.
- **Vinegar:** Mix a solution of equal

parts water and vinegar, then spray it on affected spots and blot to cut bacteria and odor.

- **Enzymatic cleaners:** These cleaners effectively break down ammonia, sulfur and other compounds in cat urine, vomit and feces. Follow the directions on the label.
- **Hydrogen peroxide:** Hydrogen peroxide oxidizes ammonia smells—just be sure to test fabrics first and thoroughly remove the product to prevent discoloration.

If the odors persist or seep into your walls or furnishings, call a professional cleaner. Sometimes cat chemistry calls for an expert.

Q: Is there any cure for "old house smell"?

That unmistakable blend of must, dust and mystery that greets you when you step into a long-closed home isn't "vintage charm." It's typically caused by hidden moisture problems, mold or mildew, plus years of trapped odors from carpets, smoke or pets.

The first fix? Air it out. Open the windows, run fans and get fresh air circulating. Next, run a dehumidifier to keep humidity levels below 50%, especially in basements. Check for sneaky plumbing leaks under sinks and in crawl spaces and repair them promptly. If mold has taken hold, scrub small spots with a vinegar solution or call in a pro for bigger jobs. Then deep-clean or replace carpets, wash walls and add a coat of odor-blocking primer and paint. Once the must is gone, you can finally layer in scents you actually want to live with.



Q: The garbage disposal stinks! What's the best way to clean it?

Over time, food particles and grease can build up under your disposal's blades, creating one of the most common household odors. Store-bought cleaners, such as Affresh tablets, work well, but for a simple DIY fix, just drop 1 cup of ice into the disposal, followed by ½ cup of table salt. Run cold water, turn on the disposal and let it scrub itself clean.

Q: What causes bathroom drains to smell?

Smelly drains are usually caused by one of three common culprits. The first is soap scum, which forms when hard water reacts with soap, leaving a filmy residue that traps bacteria and mold. To combat it, scrub the drain cover once a month with hot water and all-purpose cleaner, then pour 1 cup of baking soda followed by 1 cup of vinegar down the drain. After 10 minutes, flush with hot water. Consider using a monthly enzyme stick, such as Instant Power, to prevent buildup.

If a bathroom smells like sewage, a dry P-trap may be the cause. When a P-trap dries out, noxious sewer gases can migrate up the drainpipe and into your bathroom—particularly common in rarely used guest baths. Run water periodically to refill the trap and restore the barrier that blocks the gases.

Musty bathroom odors often point to mold. Molds love dark, moist environments, and a shower drain fits the bill. Pour ½ cup of bleach mixed with 2 cups of hot water down the drain, let it sit for an hour, then rinse well with hot water. Note: Never mix bleach with vinegar or other acids.

Q: Any tips for freshening up stinky shoes?

Shoe odors can transfer to your socks and feet and then be tracked throughout your home. To stop odors at the source, start by checking the label for the material and care instructions—some sneakers can be machine-washed. If the label specifies hand-wash only, soak the shoes in lukewarm water and gently scrub them with detergent and an old toothbrush.

Once clean, let shoes dry fully in an area with good airflow. Set up a fan or stuff them with newspaper or a towel to help absorb moisture. For extra odor control, sprinkle a little baking soda inside the shoes or store them with a dryer sheet tucked inside.



Q: How do you remove the smell of smoke from a home after a fire?

Smoke smells tend to linger, but these tips can help you clear the air safely and effectively:

Start with fresh air. Open windows and doors, and use fans to push out smoky air. Taping a furnace filter to a box fan is another quick fix. To neutralize odors, set out bowls of white vinegar for a day or two, or simmer water with lemon slices and cinnamon sticks. Skip air fresheners, which just mask the smell.

Protect yourself. Smoke and soot contain fine particles (PM2.5 and PM10) that can irritate lungs. Wear gloves and an N95 mask, and wet any ash before sweeping to prevent it from becoming airborne.

Try DIY treatments first. Sprinkle baking soda on carpets and upholstery, let it sit, then vacuum. For walls, mix 1 part white vinegar and 3 parts water and wipe with a microfiber cloth.

Call a pro if needed. For deep smoke odors that persist after DIY cleaning, hire a professional. They'll use trisodium phosphate (TSP) and oil-based primers such as KILZ for complete odor removal.



Keep Linens Fresh

Linen spray is an easy way to keep your sheets, towels and laundry smelling clean and inviting. Skip the pricey store-bought versions and make your own in just a few minutes. Combine 1½ cups of distilled water, 3 oz. of vodka or witch hazel and 30 drops of your favorite essential oil in a spray bottle with a fine mist sprayer. Shake to mix, label the bottle and spritz as needed for a fresh, invigorating scent any time. ●

Swiss Army Knife Secrets

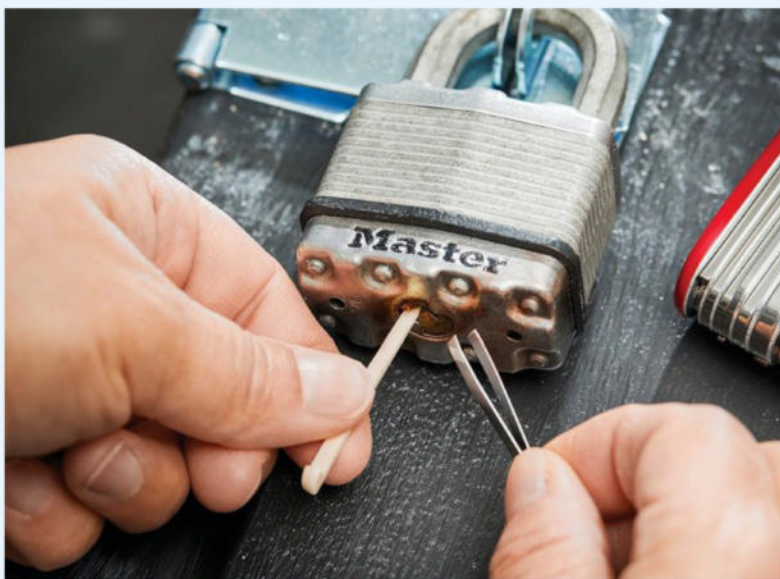
This all-in-one tool is handy for opening the mail or popping a bottle of wine, but that's just the beginning. Check out these creative uses from experts and unlock your knife's full potential.





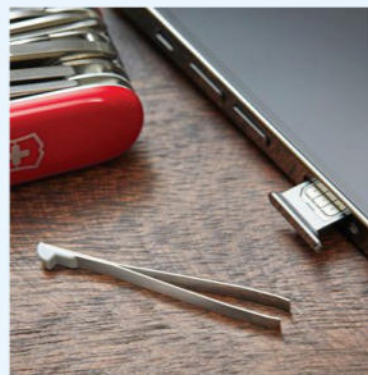
Crack Open a Coconut

Opening a coconut is notoriously tricky, but it's no problem for a Swiss Army knife. "The eyelet is strong enough to puncture the shell without breaking," says interior designer Seymen Usta. "Use that as a punch, then use the knife body to pry it open." Keep the coconut stable as you punch, and if you'd like, drain the coconut water first with the reamer through one of the three eyes.



Pick a Lock

"I witnessed someone pick a lock with a Swiss Army knife," says real estate expert Ryan Carrigan. When the key wouldn't work in the rusted lock, they used the toothpick and tweezers to turn the tumblers. "A few minutes later, the move-in continued," he says. Keep your knife handy for other moving-day tasks such as slicing open boxes, prying open crates and tightening screws.



Fix a Cellphone

Your knife's tweezers or pin tool can remove a stuck SIM card. "When your phone's SIM tray won't budge, you can use those to gently pry it out without damaging anything," says Usta. Turn off the device before you begin, and wrap the tool tip with tissue for a little extra grip if needed.



Makeshift Wind Sock

If you want to know whether a storm is rolling in, use the scissors or knife blade to check the weather. Cut a short piece of thread, tie it to your key ring and hold it up like a tiny wind sock, says Brian Raffio of adventure touring company Climbing Kilimanjaro. Bonus points for using unraveled paracord instead. "It's not going to win any awards, but it sure looks cool, and you will know in which direction the wind is blowing," he says.



Two Smart Ways to Start a Campfire

Make tinder for your campfire by using the tiny scissors to snip lint or dry grass into a fluffy pile. You'll have a fire going in no time, says Army veteran Chad Lipka. "On a freezing night in the Boundary Waters, my friends and I were fretting over damp wood when I did this with some sock lint," he says. "Bam! Instant fire, warm night." Safety tip: Point the scissors away from your body, keep them razor-sharp for clean cuts and store your knife dry to avoid rust.



Justin Trump, editor and writer for CAT Outdoors, shares another emergency fire-starting trick: Take a CR123A battery from a flashlight, brace its flat end on the knife's bottle opener, close the can opener until it almost touches the positive nub, then bridge fine steel wool between the nub and the can opener. "The wool heats and ignites tinder," he says. "Essentially, you can use the tool to create some makeshift electricity."



Zip It Up

Your knife's toothpick or screwdriver can help reset a jammed or frozen zipper. Insert the tool into the slider and gently wiggle it to realign the teeth. Take it slow and steady, being careful not to force it, says Usta. "No need to throw out gear over a stuck zip," he says. "It's great for backpacks, coats or a tent."



Angler's Best Friend

A Swiss Army knife's reamer can be used to sharpen fishing hooks. Glide the point of a dull hook along the reamer's groove with gentle pressure, turn the hook to maintain even wear, then grip-test on your thumbnail. "Maintain a secure grip on the knife to prevent slippage," says Lipka.



Resurrect Footwear

For knots in shoelaces or paracord, gently work the hook or corkscrew tool into the jumble, twisting gently to loosen it. "I find this handy during my kids' baseball season," says Trump. Jared Spaulding of the National Outdoor Leadership School says you can also use the reamer for an emergency shoe fix. "Sometimes even brand-new boots fall apart after a week in the mountains," he says. If that happens, use some cord, Barge Cement and a stitch with the reamer and sewing eye for a quick fix.



Quick Fixes for Firearms

The flat-head screwdriver on the tip of the bottle opener fits many iron sights and optic screws, so you can re-zero or snug a loose mount while out hunting or at the range, says Trump. You can also use the fine screwdriver or reamer to push takedown pins, drift slide pins, scrape carbon and tighten loose fasteners. "This gives you a pocket armorer kit when you need to make adjustments on a firearm in the field," he says.

Have you found an unexpected use for an everyday tool? Share your Handy Hints with us at FamilyHandyman.com/submissions.

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Solo Reno Success

A *Family Handyman* reader transformed a plain bathroom into a standout space—and learned a few DIY lessons along the way



I renovated our first-floor half bath 100% by myself. When my husband and I bought our house, it was basic and bland. A year later, while on maternity leave, I decided to tackle the bathroom. I removed a built-in medicine cabinet and patched the drywall, and when that came out great, I decided “what the heck!” and ripped up the old laminate flooring next. I even installed a new toilet by myself.

It took me about a year to complete with a newborn and two toddlers, but I learned a lot and now consider myself a can-do-it-all mom! I found traditional wallpaper easy to install, but vinyl plank flooring is my nemesis. I went through two boxes trying to make the right cuts for that tiny bathroom!

Now I'm on to my next million projects: built-in bookshelves, a paver path, redoing our pool deck ... the list goes on.

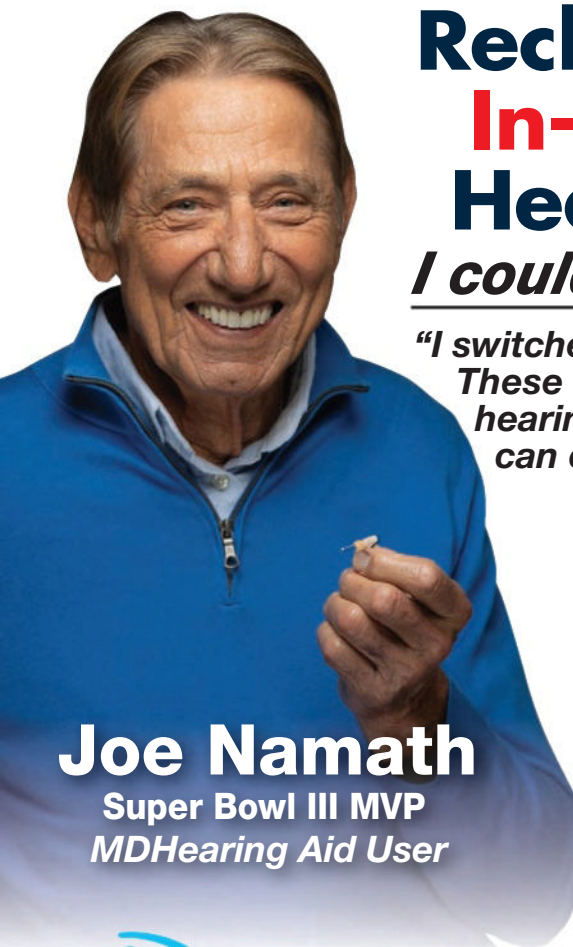
—Ita Solaimanzadeh, Clifton, NJ ●

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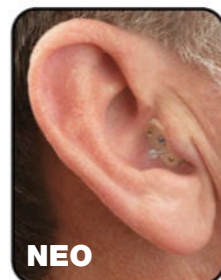


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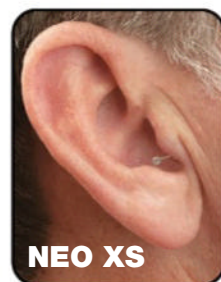
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