PAINTING MUST-HAVES • NEW HOMEOWNER TIPS • FURNITURE REFRESHES

family handyman

MAKE A MINI GREENHOUSE

PLUS: How to Plant the Perfect Raised Bed Garden

GIVE OLD WINDOWS NEW LIFE! P. 22

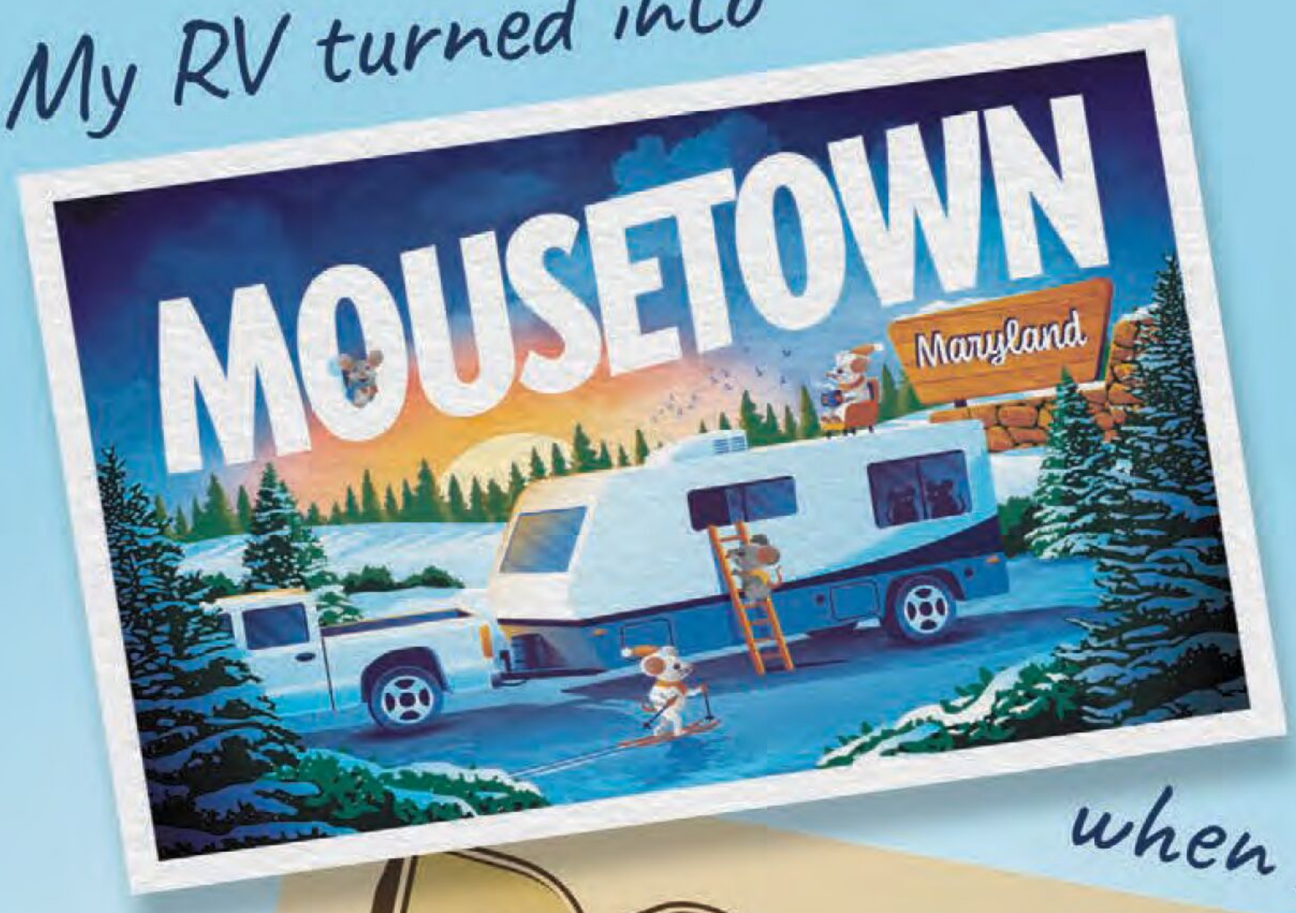
LANDSCAPE RESCUE!

9 Simple Solutions for a Better Backyard

Beat the Heat with Top-Rated Summer Gear

JUNE/JULY 2026

My RV turned into



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Do you really need RV insurance on your travel trailer?
As RVers, we know the allure of the open road and the freedom it offers. However, with freedom comes responsibility, including the important decision of securing insurance.

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

How can RV insurance protect you?

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

Is your travel trailer covered under your home or auto insurance?
While your home or auto policy can protect your trailer in certain instances, it can also leave you with gaps in your coverage.

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

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

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

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

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

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Carmen De La Paz and team install the greenhouse in Kelly's backyard.

Dream Greenhouse

I've grown herbs and vegetables in pots, but I still feel like a beginning gardener. This mini greenhouse was the perfect project to expand my range and growing season and keep critters out. As Carmen and the *Family Handyman* team installed it in my yard, I couldn't help popping outside (and peeking through the windows) to watch it come together!

The greenhouse sits at the edge of my patio and has completely transformed how I use the space. I can step outside barefoot, tend to my plants, then sit back with a cup of coffee and listen to the birds. It's paradise! I've harvested herbs, veggies and cut flowers, and this year I'm growing leafy greens and carrots. To build your own greenhouse, see the step-by-step process on page 22. —**Kelly Madison-Liebe**, Director of Editorial Services

Your Guide to Better DIY

In *The Best of Family Handyman 2026*, find hundreds of home improvement ideas and expert advice for every room of your house. Buy a copy for only $10 and free shipping at **FamilyHandyman.com /FH2605EP**.

Sudsy Situation

Laugh out loud at this hilarious reader blunder, then send us your own!

One day, suds started flowing out from our dishwasher, spilling all over the floor. It kept happening intermittently, and we had no idea why. Since the racks were rusting, a few tongs had broken off and the dishwasher was already about 9 years old, we decided to buy a new one. After the new dishwasher also spilled suds all over the floor, we finally realized what had happened! While on vacation at an Airbnb that had both a dishwasher and a washer, we somehow mixed the washer pods in with the dishwasher pods when we packed up.

—**Cary Mark,** Aurora, IL

Share your funny Great Goofs with us at FamilyHandyman.com /submissions.

COVER: TMB STUDIO; GRAPHIC BURST USED ON COVER AND THROUGHOUT: ARTVEA/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TMB STUDIO, ANMBPH/GETTY IMAGES

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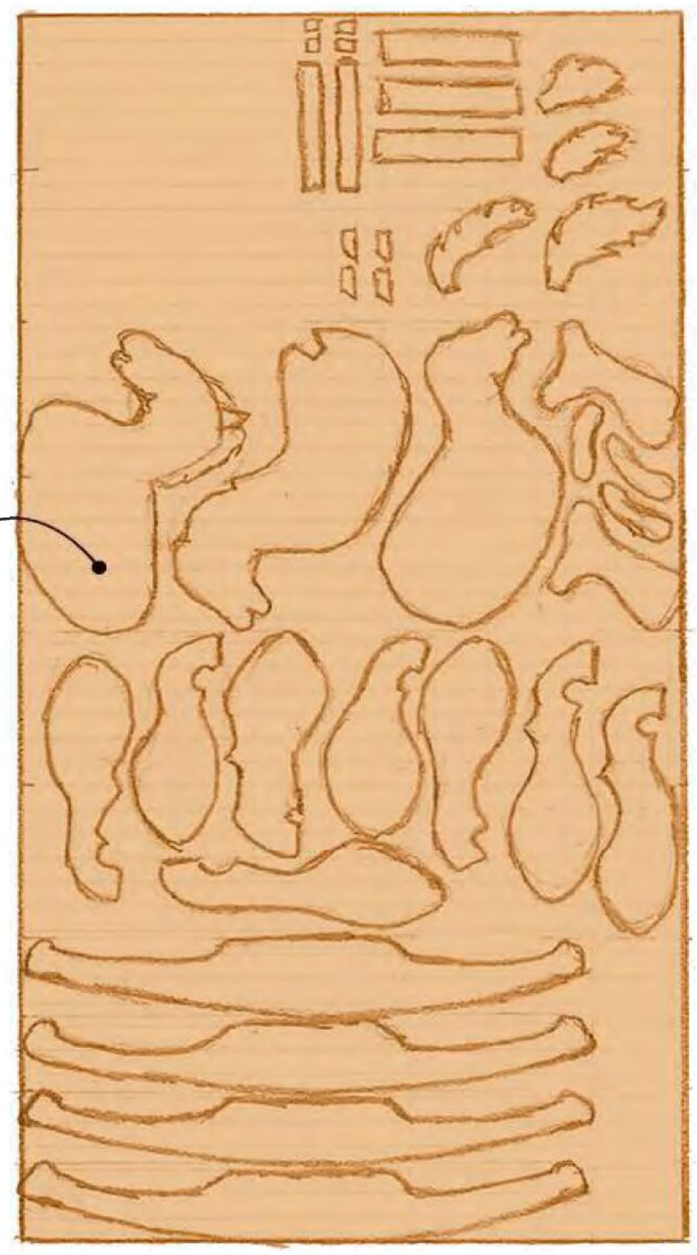
This charming children's rocking horse was built from just one sheet of plywood! Take it as inspiration for your own plywood project.

Create with Plywood

Enter the One-Sheet Plywood Challenge for your shot at $2,500 and a visit to the *Family Handyman* workshop

Put your skills to the test! The challenge is simple: Grab a single sheet of plywood and build something amazing from it. Make a piece of furniture, a toy, home decor, art ... whatever creative idea inspires you. Then submit your cut list, a sketch or diagram showing how all the parts fit on a standard 4 x 8-ft. sheet of plywood, and a few photos of your finished product (videos are welcome too).

Frank Tritschler, *Family Handyman*'s senior builder, took on the challenge and made this adorable rocking horse for his granddaughter. His drawing is a great example of the type of sketch we're looking for. Nothing fancy—hand-drawn is perfect! Good luck! We can't wait to see what you create. ●



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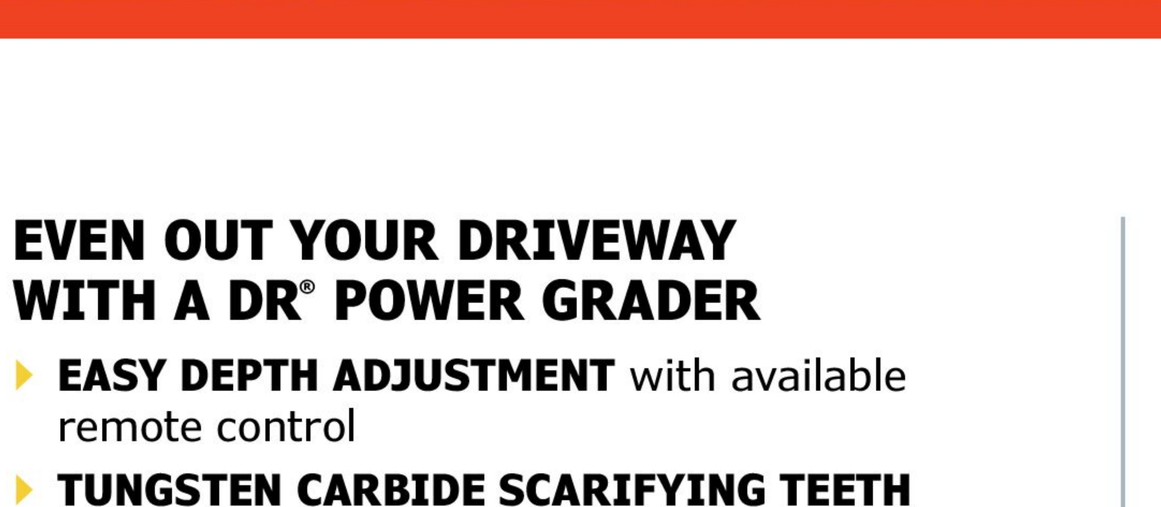

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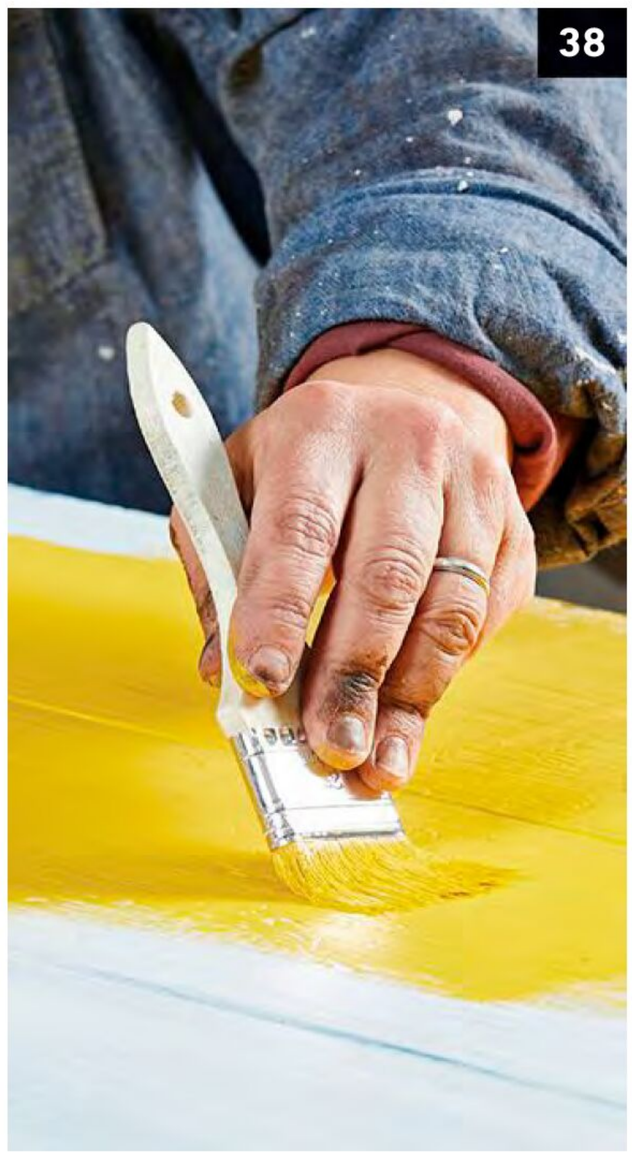

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TMB STUDIO

1920s Style for a 1920s Price

It was a warm summer afternoon and my wife and I were mingling with the best of them. The occasion was a 1920s-themed party, and everyone was dressed to the nines. Parked on the manse's circular driveway was a beautiful classic convertible. It was here that I got the idea for our new 1920s Retrograde Watch.

Never ones to miss an opportunity, we carefully steadied our glasses of bubbly and climbed into the car's long front seat. Among the many opulent features on display was a series of dashboard dials that accentuated the car's lavish aura. One of those dials inspired our 1920s Retrograde Watch, a genuinely unique timepiece that marries timeless style with modern technology.

With its remarkable retrograde hour and minute indicators, sunburst guilloche face and precision movement, this design is truly one of a kind. What does retrograde mean? Instead of displaying the hands rotating on an axis like most watches, the hands sweep in a semicircle, then return to their starting point and begin all over again.

Retrograde watches by the big brands can set you back thousands; one recent offering from a big French fashion house is selling for more than $150,000! But because we've designed the 1920s Retrograde Watch in-house, we can offer it to you for just $99!

This watch is so wildly popular with our customers that we're actually concerned about running out; we only have ~~937~~ 729 left for this ad!

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AT HOME with family handyman

The latest from our TV channel

Hot Tips for Summer Grilling

DIY enthusiast and pitmaster Tyler Smith shares secrets for firing up better backyard feasts

Our newest show, *Build & Grill with Tyler Smith,* is a unique DIY and cooking series that combines two of Tyler's biggest passions: outdoor upgrades and flavor-packed meals. Each episode serves up plenty of inspiration for family-focused backyard gatherings, pairing an attainable hands-on project with a themed meal. Here's some of Tyler's best grilling advice.

Have you experienced any grilling disasters that taught you a lesson the hard way?
In my early years of grilling, I tried the "burn it off" style of cleaning a grill. Basically, you run the grill on high for 10 to 15 minutes after you're done cooking. Don't do that and forget about it. My propane grill caught on fire! Luckily, it didn't explode.

What's one grilling mistake you see people make over and over?
Overcooking their food. The true flavor of any protein depends on cooking it to the right temperature—and not over. Invest in an instant-read meat thermometer and learn how your grill cooks your food.

Gas or charcoal? What's your preference and why?
Charcoal all the way! I love the taste of natural char (not too much) from the coals, and it also provides another layer of flavor. That said, there's nothing wrong with gas. It's definitely more convenient and easy to get hot—and fast, when you're in a time crunch.

What's in your dream outdoor kitchen?
A covered area that has all the essentials for outdoor cooking: a pizza oven, smoker, charcoal grill, gas grill and flat-top griddle. In the center would be an island with a built-in sink, refrigerator and plenty of space for food prep. Lastly, a TV and an audio system for music!

What are three grilling tools or accessories you absolutely can't live without?
Good metal tongs (avoid plastic and rubber—they can melt while cooking), an instant-read meat thermometer, and heat-resistant gloves or mitts.

What's your family's favorite meal you grill for them?
My wife and daughters absolutely love when I grill steak or smoke a pork butt for barbecue. I cook steak at least a couple of times a week! ●

Build & Grill with Tyler Smith premieres June 20 on **At Home with Family Handyman**. Find out where to stream the series for free at *FamilyHandyman.com/tv*.

FROM TOP: TASTE OF HOME/TMB STUDIO, TMB STUDIO

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What's New

Now Trending • Gear Up • Mini Makeovers

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

NOW TRENDING

Sleek Railing System

When it comes to deck railing, less is more. Rust-resistant stainless steel cables are durable and let you see the surrounding scenery. "Homeowners are seeking open views and clean sight lines, especially if they overlook water, woods or landscapes," says Jodi Lee of Trex, a leading deck brand. "Cable railing systems help maximize visibility while maintaining safety." —**Erica Young**

PETER_VISUAL/GETTY IMAGES

Summer Comfort

Top-rated apparel to keep you cool and protected on every outdoor adventure

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Darn Tough is a family-owned sock business that is so certain of the quality of its products that each pair is unconditionally guaranteed for life.

I tried one of Darn Tough's most popular styles: the Women's Hiker Micro Crew Midweight Hiking Socks. Made with Merino wool, these socks offer excellent thermoregulation, keeping your feet cool in hot weather and comfortably warm in colder conditions. Merino wool also absorbs moisture to keep feet dry and control odor. I tested the socks over several weeks on rough-terrain hikes, trips to the dog park on a wet day, and even while writing this review at a coffee shop. The Merino wool and underfoot cushioning kept my feet happy even after hours of walking.

These socks are an investment, but given their quality, comfort and lifetime guarantee, I'll be buying more pairs for myself and as gifts. —**Mary Henn,** shopping editor *Darn Tough Women's Hiker Micro Crew Midweight Hiking Socks, $26; darntough.com, REI, Cabela's*

VIA DARN TOUGH

Sun-Ready Work Shirt

Sun protection isn't just for roofers and landscapers. It's vital for anyone who spends time in the yard, on the boat, riding a motorcycle or firing up a smoker. I ordered the Dickies sun shirt just before a 10-day heat wave. While I didn't have any major jobs planned, I needed to tackle several smaller tasks such as mowing the lawn, painting the garage and even removing a wasp's nest.

Initially the long-sleeved, hooded shirt felt warm, but once I got to work, I found it comfortable and breathable. The moisture-wicking performance is top-notch too. After a sudden rain shower, I was dry and cool within minutes. The fabric feels thicker and less flexible than other UV-protective shirts I've worn for fishing, but it's just as comfortable and resisted snags while I broke down branches.

I was surprised to learn that the UPF 40+ protection is rated for only 10 washes, though that appears standard. Still, it's far better than working in an old T-shirt—no more farmer's tan for your partner or kids to tease you about. —**Ethan O'Donnell,** deputy editor *Dickies Cooling Performance Sun Shirt, $40; dickies.com, Kohl's, Target*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: VIA DICKIES, VIA TIFOSI, VIA COLUMBIA, VIA REI FOR STIO

Trail-Tough Sunnies

I'm often hesitant to wear my pricey Ray-Ban sunglasses while hiking, so I bought a pair of Tifosi Svagos as an affordable alternative—and now I reach for them almost every time I head outdoors. The Svago style comes in multiple frame and lens colors, with sleek round lenses that cut glare and provide 100% UVA/UVB protection. A nose pad prevents slipping (even when I'm sweating), the hinges don't snag my hair, and they're impressively durable. I've dropped mine on rough terrain and tossed them into tote bags, and they're still scratch-free. —**Mary Henn,** shopping editor *Tifosi Svago, $30; tifosioptics.com*

Bring Shade Anywhere

When you're exposed to the sun for an extended period, a wide-brimmed hat is key to protecting your eyes, face and neck. That's why my Columbia Bora Bora II Booney goes with me on almost every hike. It's lightweight and adjustable, with breathable mesh, sweat-wicking nylon and two adjustment points: the chinstrap and a toggle at the back of the head. With its UPF 50 rating and 3-in. brim, it's my go-to choice for staying shaded. —**Amanda Capritto,** outdoor and travel writer *Columbia Bora Bora II Booney, $32; columbia.com, REI, Dick's Sporting Goods*

Stay Protected in Style

Many sun-protective shirts look similar, which is why I like Stio's Eddy shirt, a stylish button-down with UPF 50+ protection. Unlike options with high, snug necklines, this one is easy to get on and off, and chest pockets and sleeve buttons add utility. It's a versatile staple for outdoor activities from gardening to cycling. Women's and men's styles come in both long- and short-sleeve versions. —**Nancy Snyder,** senior shopping editor *Stio Women's Eddy Shirt LS, $129; stio.com* ●

Make Room for Big Ideas

Create a versatile playroom that sparks imagination, builds independence and encourages hands-on making

TMB STUDIO

BUILD IT

Playroom Storage Table

Keep toys, building blocks and craft supplies corralled with this beginner-friendly project. The sturdy workspace offers plenty of room for creative projects and play.

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

1 PREPAINT AND CUT
Paint all the components in your preferred colors before cutting. This way, only minor touch-ups will be needed after assembly. Let the paint dry before using a table saw and miter saw to cut the pieces according to the cutting list.

NOTE: To prevent warping, wait to paint the edge banding (J and K) until after it is installed.

2 ASSEMBLE THE CASEWORK
To assemble the cabinets, first pin the butt joints together with wood glue and 1¼-in. brad nails, then countersink 1¼-in. screws to tighten down all the seams.

For each cabinet, attach the two sides (A) to the underside of the top (B), then install the bottom (C) flush with the bottom edges of the sides (A). Space the shelves (D) evenly inside each cabinet opening and flush with the back edges of the sides (A), making sure they're square and level.

3 INSTALL THE BIN RAILS
For each cabinet, use wood glue and brad nails to install rails (E) that will hold plastic storage bins. Position them 1½ in. below the cabinet top (B) and shelves (D) and 1½ in. back from the front edges of the sides (A) (adjust as needed to ensure a snug fit for the bins you're using; our bins were 18⅛ in. x 12¼ in. x 7 in.). To make installation easier, flip the cabinets upside down and use scrap 1×2s as spacers.

4 INSTALL BIN STOPS
To keep the bins from sliding in too far, install a bin stop (F) on each cabinet shelf (D) and bottom (C), 5 in. from the back edge (adjust as needed for your bins). Use a scrap 1×2 cut to 5 in. as a spacer.

5 CUT THE ACCESS PANELS
Clamp the tabletop (L) onto the cabinets so its ends are flush with the outside edges of the cabinet tops (B) and there is a ½-in. overhang at the front and back.

Mark two access holes (8⅛ x 10⅛ in.) centered over the bins in each cabinet—ours were 3 in. from the side and 4 in. from the front edge of the tabletop (L).

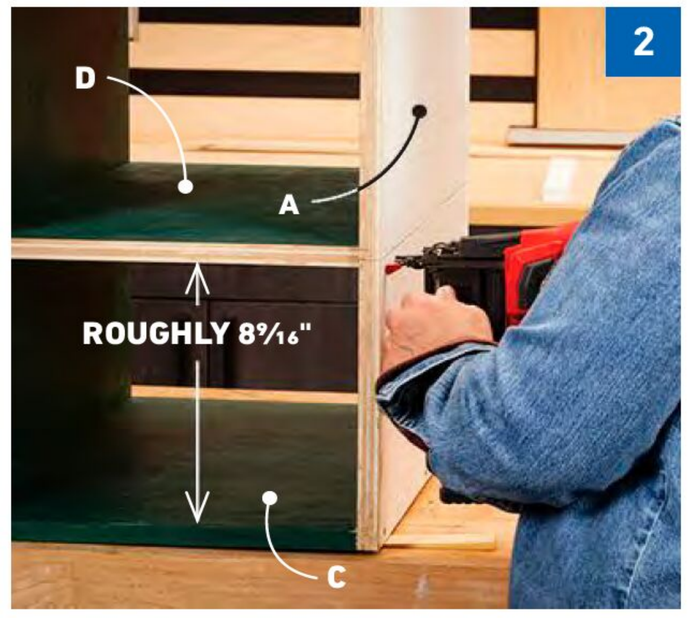
Set your circular saw to cut through both the tabletop (L) and cabinet top (B), then cut an inset rectangle that is ½ in. smaller than the outline in each direction (7⅛ x 9⅛ in.). Clamp or tape a guide board to keep the cuts straight, and clean up the corners as needed with an oscillating tool.

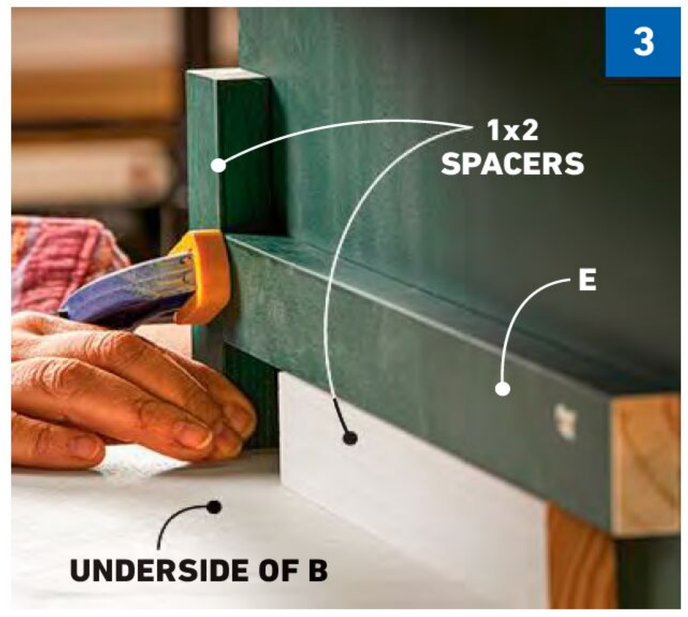
Separate the tabletop (L) from the cabinets and cut the access holes to their final dimensions through the tabletop (L) only. The smaller openings in the cabinet tops (B) create lips for the lids (P) to rest on.

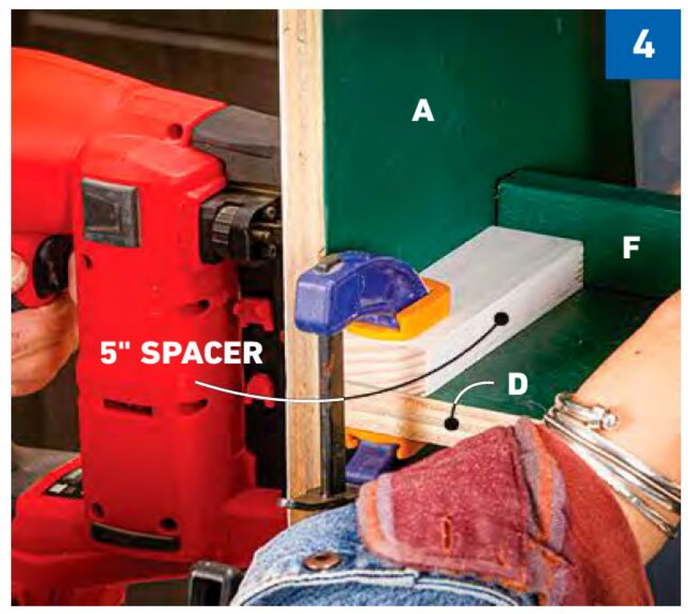
6 MAKE THE LIDS
Cut the lids (P) from ¾-in. plywood so they are 1/16 in. smaller than the access holes in each direction (8 x 10 in.).

At the drill press, use a ¾-in. Forstner bit to drill a hole in the center of each lid (P) to serve as a finger pull.

7 SECURE THE TABLETOP
Set the tabletop (L) on top of







Video Online
Scan the QR code to watch Carmen complete her storage table build.

the cabinets. As before, the ends should be flush with the outside edges of the cabinet tops (B), with a ½-in. overhang at the front and back. Make sure the holes in the cabinet tops align under the holes in the tabletop, leaving a ½-in. reveal. Secure the tabletop (L) with glue and brad nails, followed by at least two screws connecting each cabinet top to the tabletop.

8 TRIM THE TABLETOP EDGES
Secure trim pieces (M and N) to the edges of the tabletop (L) with wood glue and brad nails. These pieces require a 45° miter on each end; for tight miters, cut them long and sneak up on the final fit.

9 INSTALL THE BACK PANEL
Slide the back panel (Q) under the trim (M) along the back until it is flush with the outside edges of the cabinet sides (A). Secure it with wood glue and brad nails to the back edges of the cabinet sides (A), bottoms (C) and shelves (D).

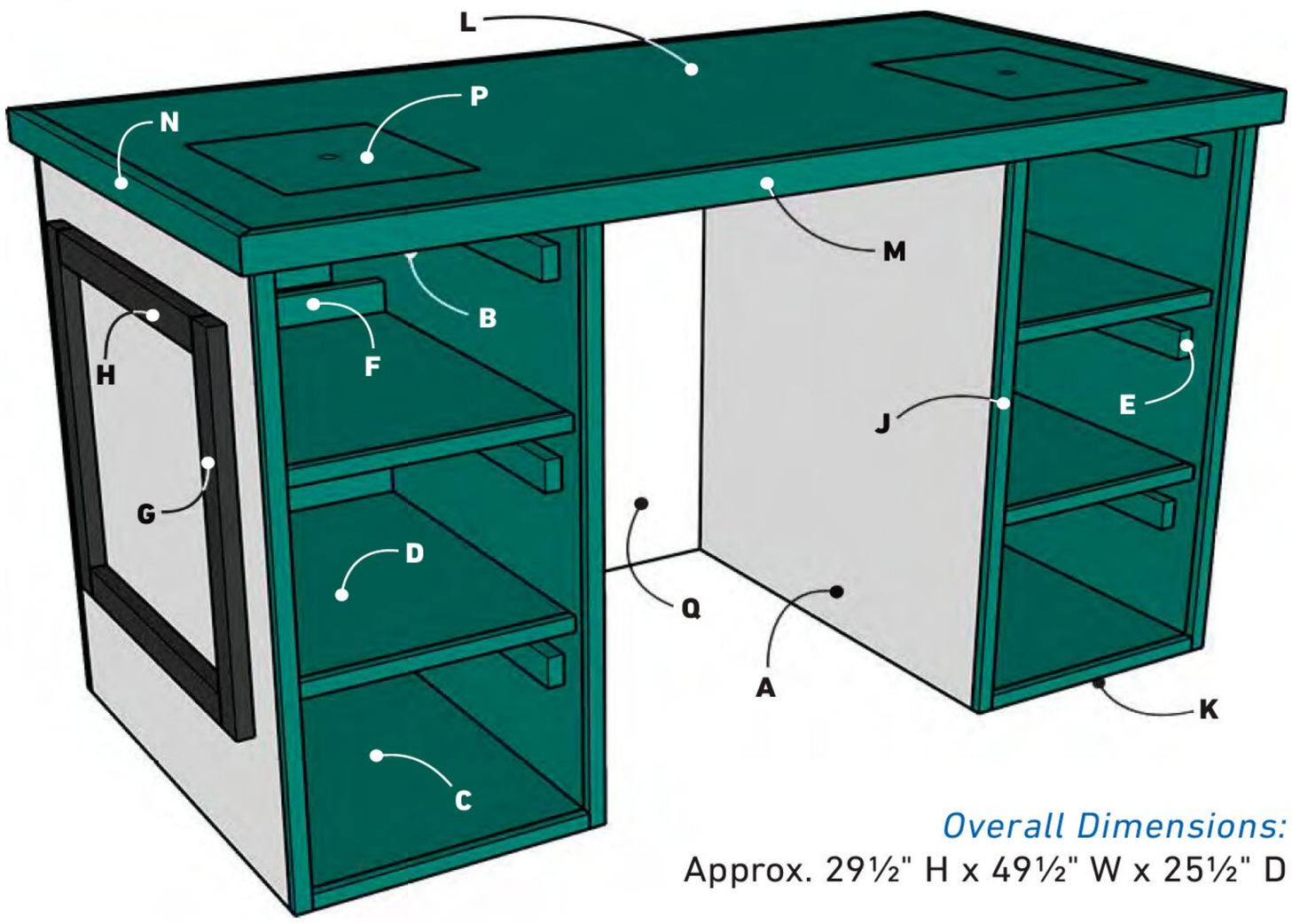
10 INSTALL THE EDGE BANDING
Attach ¼-in.-thick solid edge banding to the exposed edges on the front of the cabinet sides, bottoms and shelves with wood glue and pin nails. Install the vertical pieces (J) flush to the outside of the sides (A), then cut the horizontal pieces (K) to fit between them on the bottoms (C) and shelves (D).

11 ADD BASEPLATES
Attach a 15 x 15-in. building block baseplate to the outside face of each cabinet side (A), 3¾ in. from the top and centered side to side. Apply spray adhesive to both surfaces and press firmly.

Use wood glue and pin nails to attach the horizontal rails (H) at the top and bottom of each baseplate, flush with the outside edges. Then install the vertical stiles (G) along the two outside edges of the baseplate, covering the end grain of the rails (H).

12 FINISHING TOUCHES
Break all sharp edges with 150-grit sandpaper. Sink all nail heads below the surface with a nail set, then fill any holes with wood filler. Once it's dry, sand it smooth. Caulk any open seams with paintable caulk, then touch up the paint on the entire unit.

Figure A
Project Overview



Overall Dimensions:
Approx. 29½" H x 49½" W x 25½" D

Tools

- ¾" Forstner bit
- 18-gauge brad nailer
- 23-gauge pin nailer
- 90° clamping squares
- Caulk gun
- Circular saw
- Clamps
- Countersink drill bit
- Drill
- Drill press
- Miter saw
- Nail set
- Oscillating tool
- Painting supplies
- Sander
- Table saw

Materials

Item	Qty.
½" x 4' x 4' paint-grade plywood	1
¾" x 4' x 8' paint-grade plywood	2
1x2 x 8' primed	7
1" 23-gauge pin nails	
1¼" 18-gauge brad nails	
1¼" screws	
15" x 15" building block baseplate	
Assorted sandpaper	
Paint	
Paintable caulk	
Painter's tape	
Spray adhesive	
Wood filler	
Wood glue	

Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part
A	4	¾" x 23" x 28"	Cabinet side
B	2	¾" x 14" x 23"	Cabinet top
C	2	¾" x 12½" x 23"	Cabinet bottom
D	4	¾" x 12½" x 12½"	Cabinet shelf
E	12	¾" x 1½" x 15"	Bin rail
F	6	¾" x 1½" x 12½"	Bin stop
G	4	¾" x 1½" x 18"	Frame stile
H	4	¾" x 1½" x 15"	Frame rail
J	4	¼" x ¾" x 28¾"*	Vertical edge banding
K	6	¼" x ¾" x 12½"*	Horizontal edge banding
L	1	¾" x 24" x 48"	Tabletop
M	2	¾" x 1½" x 49½"*	Long tabletop trim
N	2	¾" x 1½" x 25½"*	Short tabletop trim
P	2	¾" x 8" x 10"*	Lid
Q	1	½" x 28¾" x 48"	Back panel

*Cut to fit

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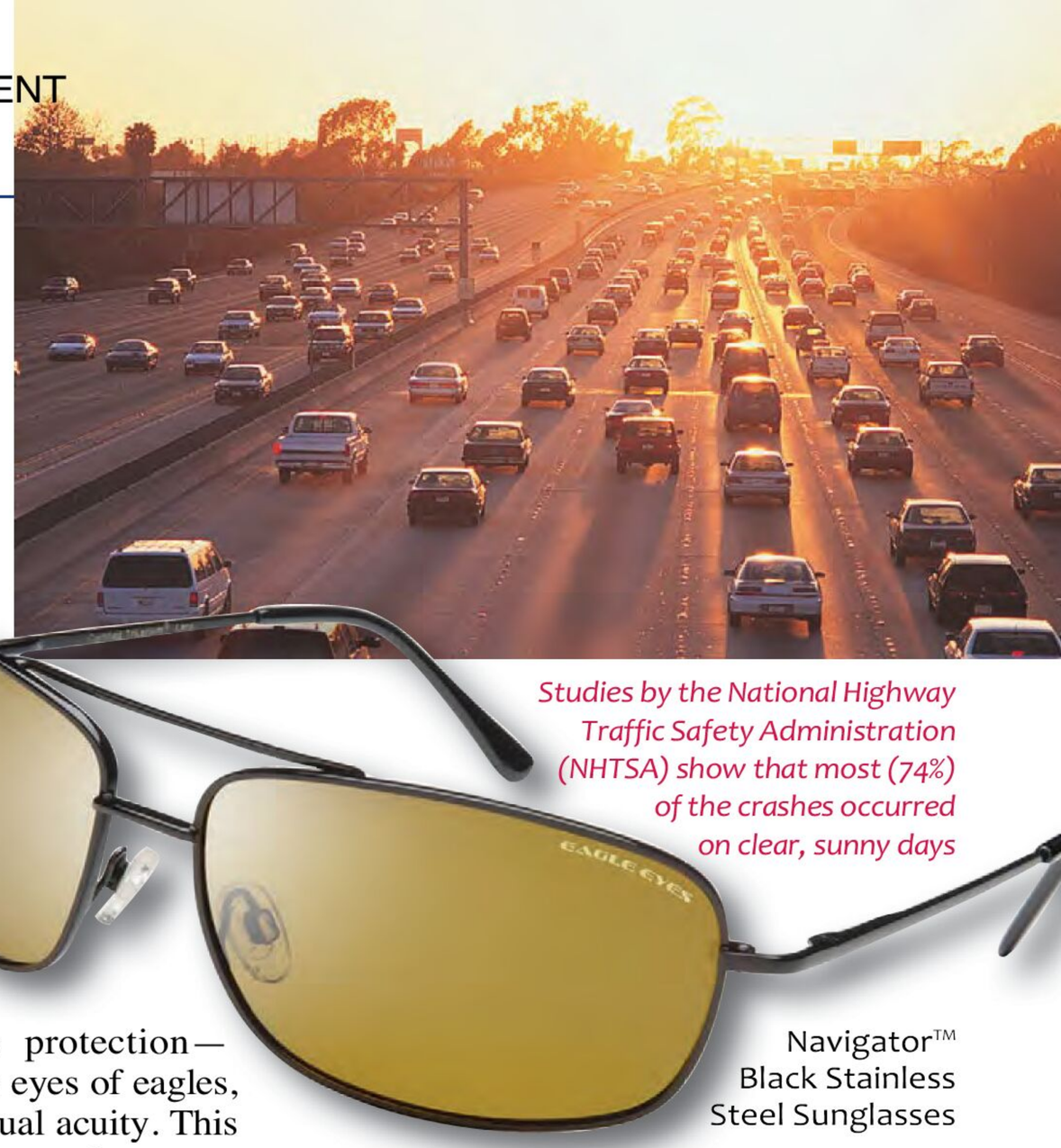
ADVERTISEMENT

Urgent: Special Summer Driving Notice

To some, sunglasses are a fashion accessory…

But When Driving, These Sunglasses May Save Your Life!



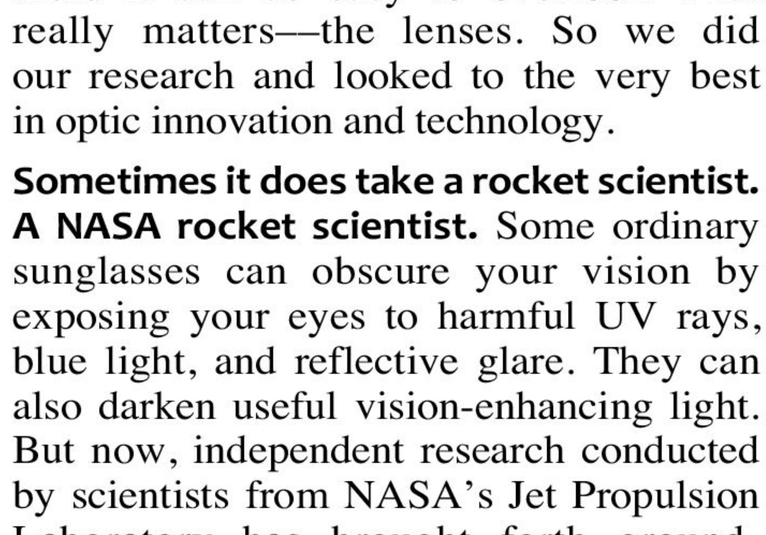
Studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) show that most (74%) of the crashes occurred on clear, sunny days

Drivers' Alert: Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than any sunny day at the beach can… do you know how to protect yourself?

The sun rises and sets at peak travel periods, during the early morning and afternoon rush hours and many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded while driving directly into the glare of the sun. Deadly accidents are regularly caused by such blinding glare with danger arising from reflected light off another vehicle, the pavement, or even from waxed and oily windshields that can make matters worse. Early morning dew can exacerbate this situation. Yet, motorists struggle on despite being blinded by the sun's glare that can cause countless accidents every year.

Not all sunglasses are created equal. Protecting your eyes is serious business. With all the fancy fashion frames out there it can be easy to overlook what really matters—the lenses. So we did our research and looked to the very best in optic innovation and technology.

Sometimes it does take a rocket scientist. A NASA rocket scientist. Some ordinary sunglasses can obscure your vision by exposing your eyes to harmful UV rays, blue light, and reflective glare. They can also darken useful vision-enhancing light. But now, independent research conducted by scientists from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory has brought forth ground-breaking technology to help protect human eyesight from the harmful effects of solar radiation light. This superior lens technology was first discovered when NASA scientists looked to nature for a means to superior eye protection—specifically, by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. This discovery resulted in what is now known as Eagle Eyes®.



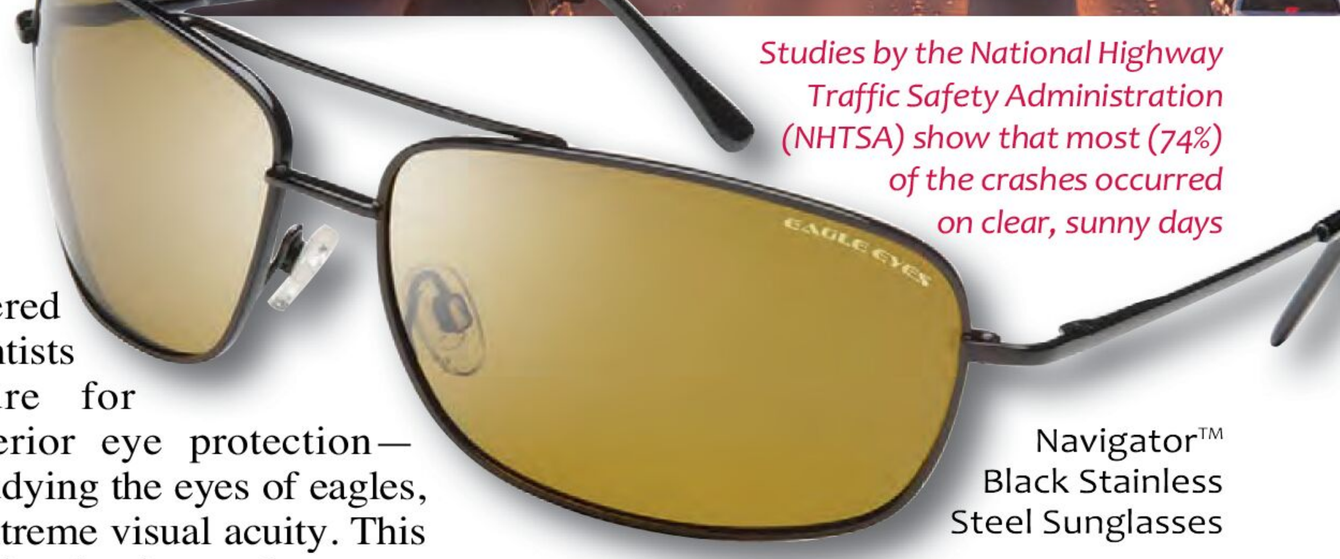
Slip on a pair of Eagle Eyes® and everything instantly appears more vivid and sharp. You'll immediately notice that your eyes are more comfortable and relaxed and you'll feel no need to squint. The scientifically designed sunglasses are not just fashion accessories—they are necessary to protect your eyes from those harmful rays produced by the sun during peak driving times.

The Only Sunglass Technology Certified by the Space Foundation for UV and Blue-Light Eye Protection. Eagle Eyes® features the most advanced eye protection technology ever created. The TriLenium® Lens Technology offers triple-filter polarization to block 99.9% UVA and UVB—plus the added benefit of blue-light eye protection. Eagle Eyes® is the only optic technology that has earned official recognition from the Space Certification Program for this remarkable technology. Now, that's proven science-based protection.

The finest optics: And buy one, get one FREE! Eagle Eyes® has the highest customer satisfaction of any item in our 20 year history. We are so excited for you to try the Eagle Eyes® breakthrough technology that we will give you a **second pair of Eagle Eyes® Navigator™ Sunglasses FREE––a $59.95 value!**

That's two pairs to protect your eyes with the best technology available for less than the price of one pair of traditional sunglasses. You get a pair of Navigators with stainless steel black frames and the other with stainless steel gold, plus one hard zipper case and one micro-fiber drawstring cleaning pouch are included. Keep one pair in your pocket and one in your car.

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. If you are not astounded with the Eagle Eyes® technology, enjoying clearer, sharper and more glare-free vision, simply return one pair within 30 days for a full refund of the purchase price. The other pair is yours to keep. No one else has such confidence in their optic technology. Don't leave your eyes in the hands of fashion designers, entrust them to the best scientific minds on earth. Wear your Eagle Eyes® **Navigators** with absolute confidence, knowing your eyes are protected with technology that was born in space for the human race.



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Curious kids can climb, jump and cozy up on Figgy's modular foam play couches.

SECURE IT

Safety First

An expert shares her top tips for creating a worry-free play space

BY RACHEL MAIDL

Lex Snyder, co-founder of The Figgy modular play couch and parent of two, knows a thing or two about encouraging creative, independent play. She says it's all about cultivating a place where kids can experiment. "If you make a space safe, their imagination just soars," says Snyder. "You're not in there trying to guide them to make sure they're staying safe."

Here are Snyder's favorite DIY projects for setting up a room where kids can play freely:

Anchor Furniture

"Think about anything that your kid could pull at—it shouldn't be able to fall over," Snyder says. Most large furniture pieces such as dressers and bookcases include an anchor kit, but additional kits are also available at hardware stores.

Hide Wires

Wires pose a variety of hazards, including electrical shocks and tripping. To tuck them away, use cable raceways or baseboard molding with a built-in channel for wires.

Swap Window Treatments

"Always make sure to pull those cords away," says Snyder about traditional blinds with long cords. Screw hooks into the wall and hang cords out of the way, or install cordless blinds.

Add Soft Furniture

Whether your kid is the type to enjoy a reading nook or jump off the high ropes, a soft, safe place to land is important. Figgy play couches or other soft play mats are an excellent addition and a toy in their own right.

Replace Outlet Covers

Outlet safety can be as simple as buying a pack of outlet caps—but that's not your only option. Many child-resistant outlet covers have a sleek look, and some even have a box design that protects cords from being ripped out of the outlet.

Make Shelving More Useful

Remove the doors on bookcases and storage furniture to keep little fingers from getting slammed or pinched. Snyder says it's also a Montessori-friendly way of letting your child organize and access their toys.

Lock Cabinets

Snyder keeps cleaning supplies in a locked cabinet under her kitchen sink. Similarly, consider installing cabinet locks in the playroom to keep any cleaning or art supplies out of reach.

VIA FIGGY

BUY IT

Tools for All Ages

Kid-friendly toys and gear that teach practical skills through play

BY RACHEL MAIDL

1. 3Doodler Start+ Essentials 3D Printing Pen Set, $60

With this nifty 3D printing pen, kids can engineer houses, cars and more. Just charge it, insert a colorful plastic rod and start layering lifelike 3D figures. The pen stays cool to the touch and comes with an app full of inspiration and design plans.

2. Stanley Jr. 10-Piece Tool Set, $60

This isn't your average plastic play set—these rubber and steel tools look and feel like the real thing, just scaled down for little builders. The set includes a handsaw, file, hammer, screwdrivers, ruler, tape measure, bar clamp, safety goggles and a tool belt to keep everything organized.

3. ChompSaw, $249

Designed with safety in mind, this gadget works like a router table to cut cardboard and is suitable for kids as young as 3. It's great for cutting freehand shapes, or kids can use the guidelines on the lid for straight cuts.

4. Montessori Bolt Board, $55

Give little hands experience with real wrenches, Allen keys and screwdrivers with these Montessori-approved sets. Each of the three styles comes with different tools and hardware, letting kids experiment while learning important safety skills, fine motor control and hand-eye coordination. They're compact and great on the go too.

5. VTech Drill & Learn Toolbox Pro, $24

Just right for the youngest DIYers, VTech's toolbox set comes with a plastic hammer and nails, an activity board with threaded holes for large screws (perfect for learning righty-tighty, lefty-loosey) and a working toy drill. Flashing buttons and music also help keep little ones' attention. ●

1. VIA 3DOODLER, 2. VIA HIGHLAND SIDE FOR STANLEY JR., 3. VIA CHOMPSAW, 4. VIA PANDA BROTHERS FOR MONTESSORI, 5. VIA TARGET FOR VTECH

Build a Mini Greenhouse

Made from salvaged windows, this compact structure protects your plants and extends the growing season

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

There's nothing like stepping outside and harvesting fresh produce or cutting flowers from your garden. But here in Wisconsin, the growing season can feel frustratingly short. A mini greenhouse helps by protecting young plants from early-season cold, extending the harvest into fall and keeping out pests such as rabbits and squirrels.

Operable windows make it easy to control ventilation: Open them on warm days to prevent overheating, or close them to shield plants from wind gusts, hail or sudden temperature swings.

What It Takes

Time	Cost	Skill Level
Multiple days	$1,500–$2,000	Intermediate

Tools

- 18-gauge brad nailer
- 6" Speed square
- Caulk gun
- Circular saw with plastics blade
- Countersink bit
- Drill
- Jigsaw
- Level
- Miter saw
- Painting supplies
- Pliers
- Putty knife
- Sander
- Screwdriver
- Shop vacuum with HEPA filter
- Utility knife

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Figure A
Raised Bed Overview

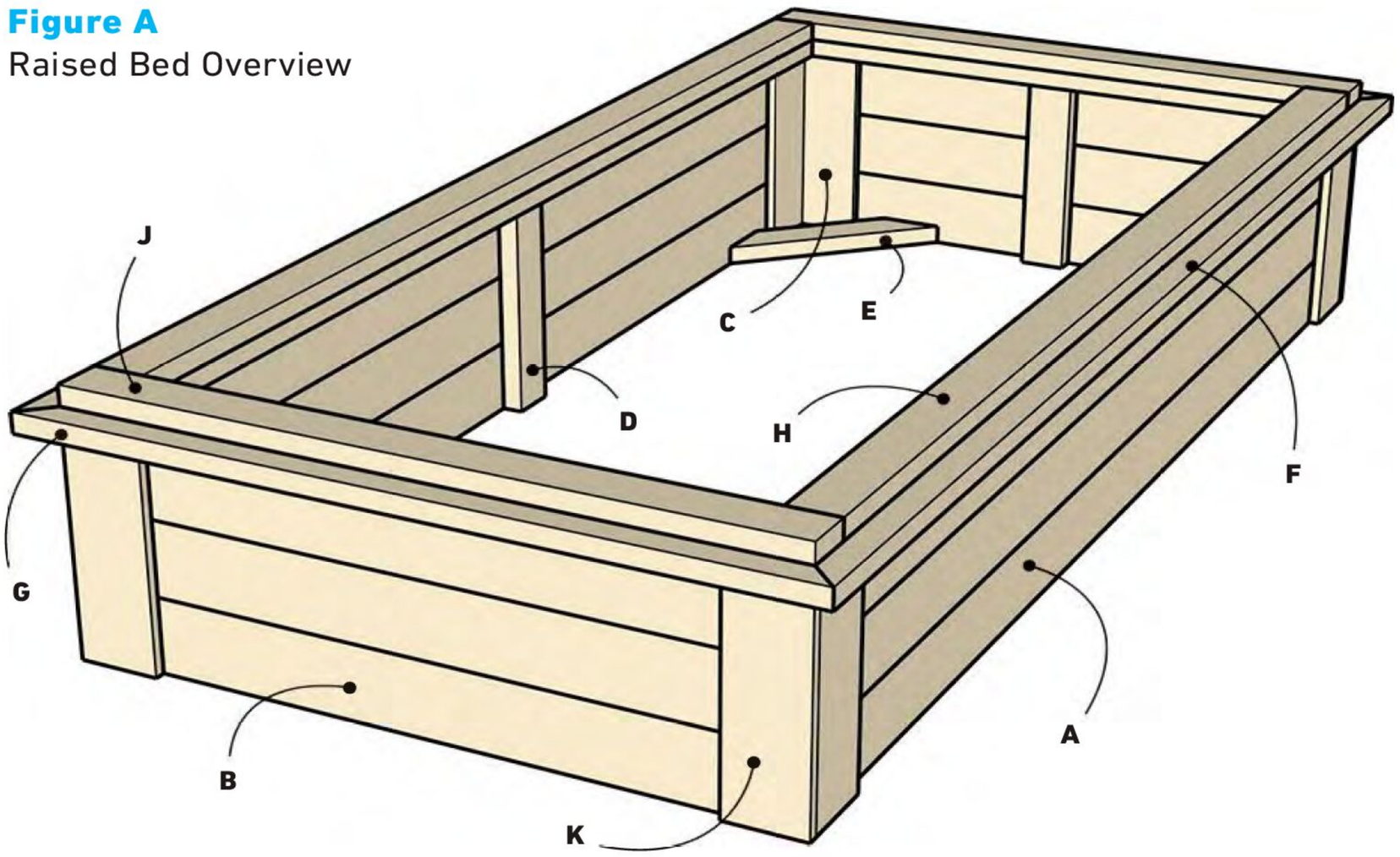


Figure B
Greenhouse Top Overview

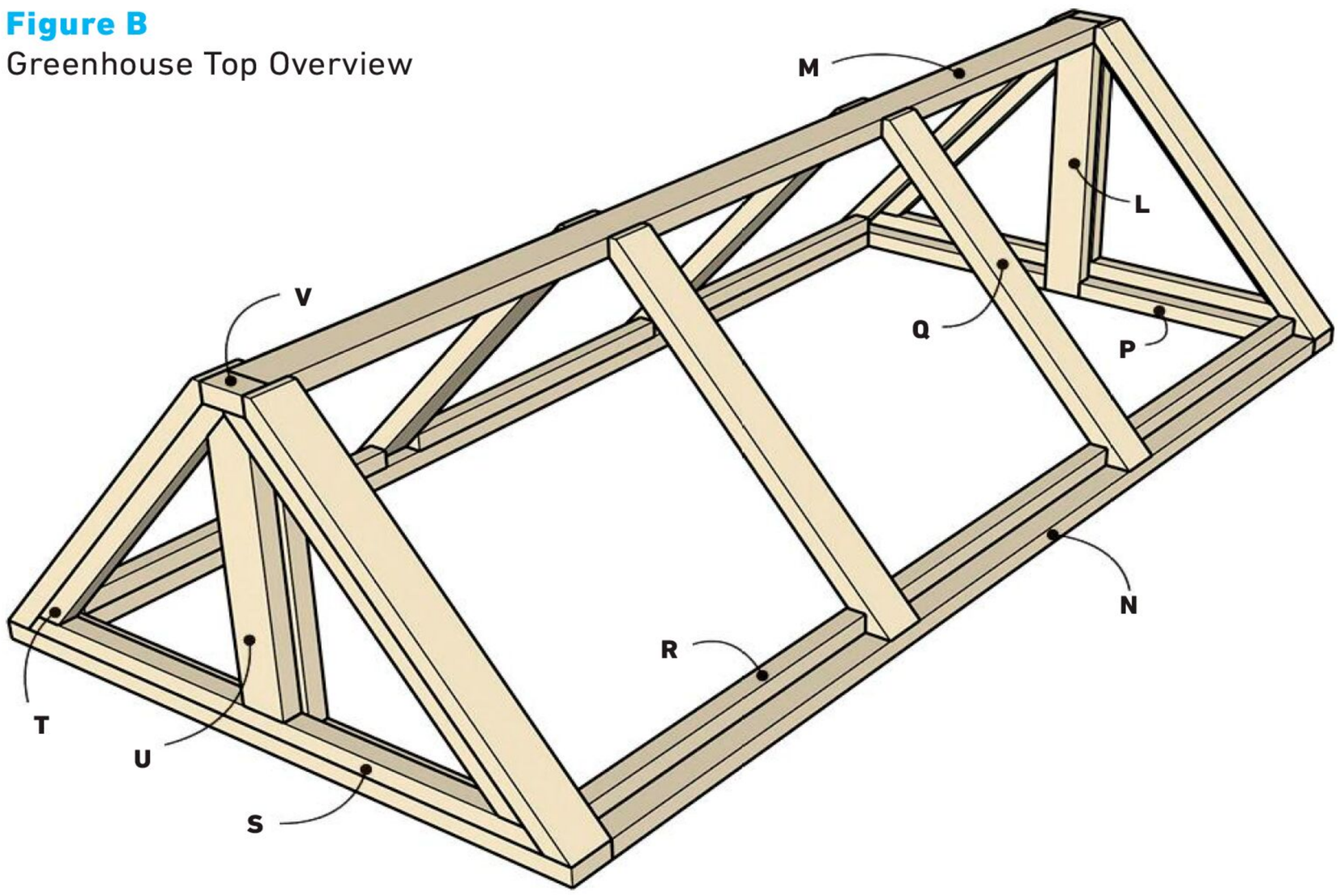
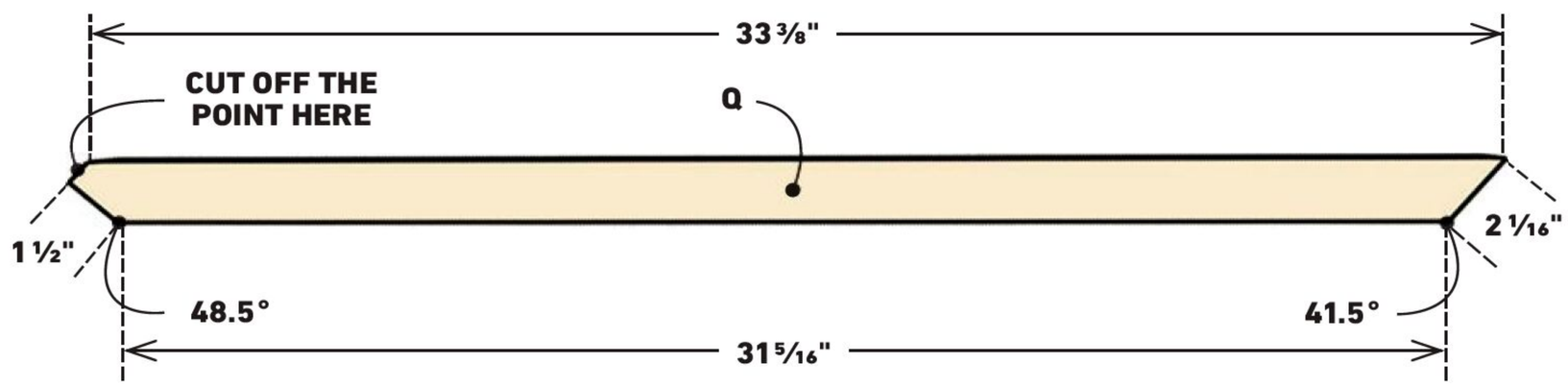


Figure C
Mullion Overview



To keep costs down, I used salvaged windows as the basis for my greenhouse design. The windows' size (34 in. tall by 27⅞ in. wide) determined many of the project's dimensions, so be prepared to adjust measurements to fit your materials.

Before assembly, paint the pine components and coat the cedar with spar varnish. Finishing the pieces ahead of time makes the build much easier, since you'll only need to fill fastener holes and touch up once the greenhouse is assembled.

1 TEST FOR LEAD

Test older windows for lead paint before starting your build. Test kits are available at most hardware stores and typically require mailing a paint sample in a vial. If the result is positive, work only in a well-ventilated outdoor area. In addition, when you're restoring the windows, avoid sanding or creating dust to keep particles from becoming airborne.

NOTE: Wear safety glasses, gloves and a respirator throughout the testing process.

2 PREP THE WINDOWS

Lay down a plastic liner to catch debris. Remove all the window hardware (rope, handles and hinges), using pliers to pull stubborn staples or nails. If the hardware is brass, work carefully to avoid stripping screws.

Use a putty knife to gently remove only loose, flaking paint—don't force off any

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stubborn chips.

Fill cracks and any split end grain with Bondo wood filler, mixing small batches for easier handling. Work the filler flush to the surface to minimize sanding. Once it dries, carefully sand it flush without disturbing the surrounding paint. Use a shop vacuum with a HEPA filter to capture the dust, then seal the vacuum bag and filter together and dispose of them.

3 REGLAZE

If the window glazing has dried, cracked or fallen out, reglaze the windows. Start by cleaning out and removing loose pieces. Knead the glazing compound until it's soft

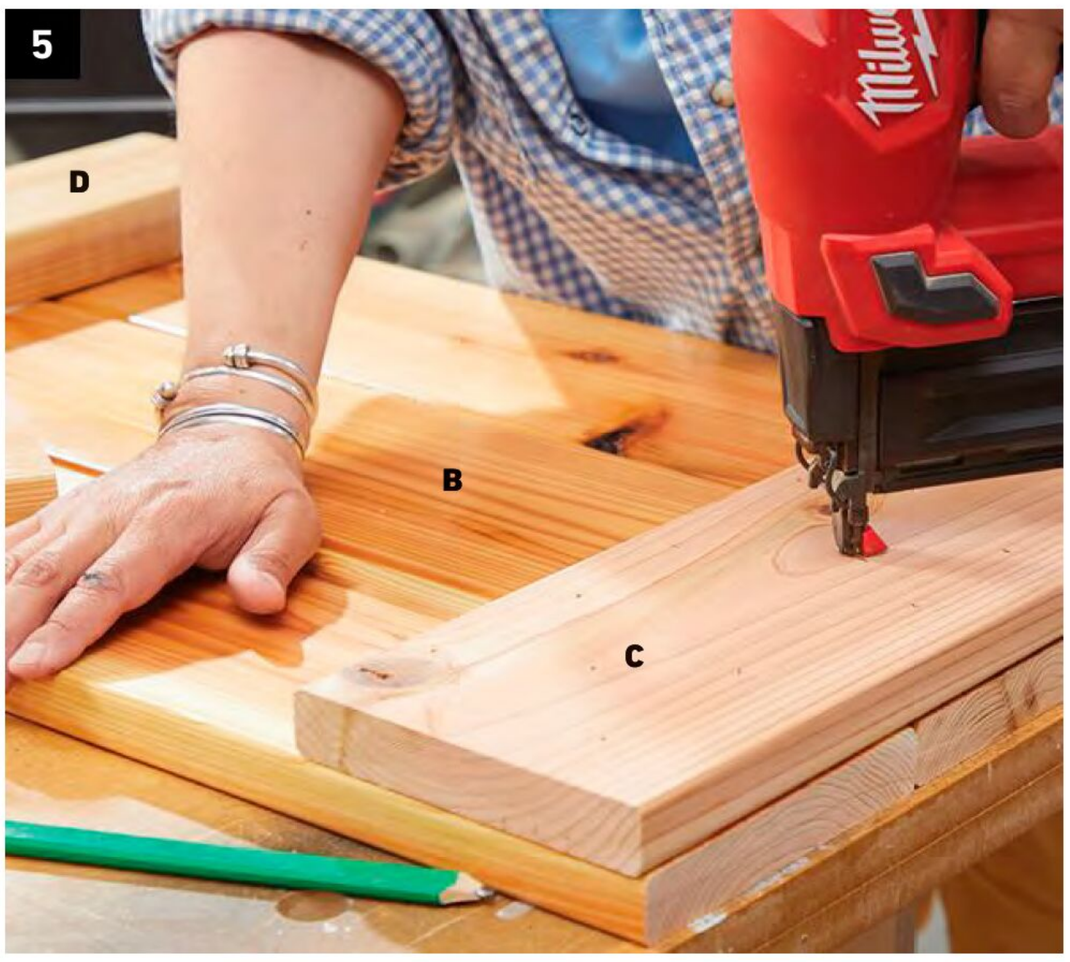
Materials

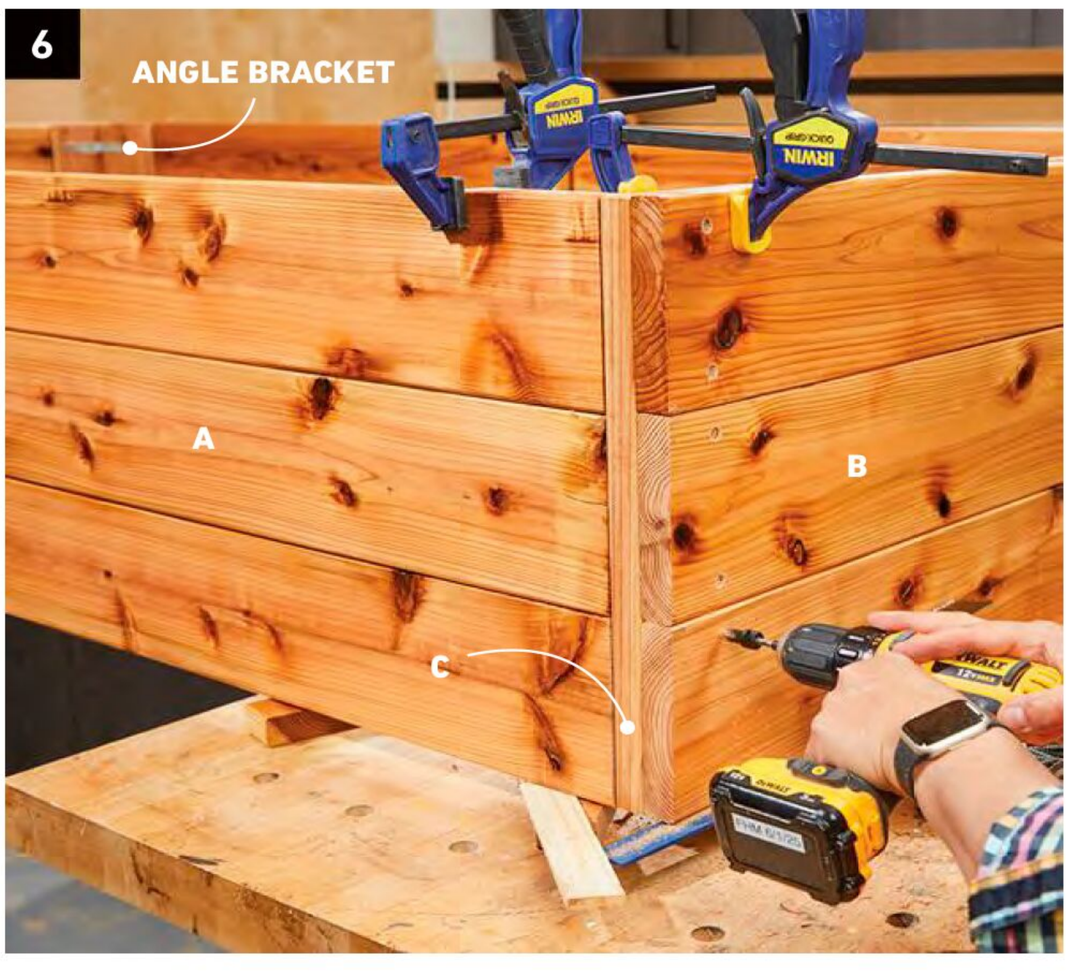
Item	Qty.
¼" polycarbonate sheet	
⅝x6 x 8' cedar	11
1x6 x 8' pine	2
1½" 18-gauge nails	
2x2 x 8' pine	5
2x4 x 8' pine	5
2x4 x 8' cedar	9
2x6 x 10' pine	3
2½" deck screws	
3" deck screws	
3" hinges	
3" x 3" angle brackets	
Assorted sandpaper	
Bondo wood filler	
Cabinet handles	
Cardboard	
Caulk	
Construction adhesive	
Exterior-grade paint	
Gas strut lift supports	
Lead paint test kit	
Plastic liner	
Rubber or felt bumpers	
Spar varnish	
Triple-thick primer	
Window glazing compound	
Windows	6

Cuts

Key	Qty.	Dimensions	Part	Finish
A	6	⅝" x 5½" x 96"	Long side	Clear
B	6	⅝" x 5½" x 47½"	Short side	Clear
C	8	⅝" x 5½" x 16½"	End batten	Clear
D	4	1½" x 3½" x 16½"	Center batten	Clear
E	2	1½" x 3½" x 18⅜"*	Gusset	Clear
F	2	1½" x 5½" x 103"*	Long top cap	Paint
G	2	1½" x 5½" x 53"*	Short top cap	Paint
H	2	1½" x 3½" x 92"	Long stepback	Clear
J	2	1½" x 3½" x 49"	Short stepback	Clear
K	8	¾" x 5½" x 16½"	Corner trim	Paint
L	2	1½" x 3½" x 25"	Upright	Clear
M	1	1½" x 3½" x 95"	Center beam	Clear
N	2	1½" x 3½" x 92"	Long sill	Paint
P	2	1½" x 3½" x 49"**	Short sill	Paint
Q	8	1½" x 3½" x 33 13/16"***	Mullion	Clear and paint
R	6	1½" x 1½" x 28⅜"	Stop	Paint
S	2	1½" x 1½" x 44⅞"*	Bottom polycarbonate support	Paint
T	4	1½" x 1½" x 29 5/16"*	Side polycarbonate support	Paint
U	2	1½" x 3½" x 21¾"*	Center polycarbonate support	Clear
V	2	1½" x 3½" x 2"	End cap	Clear

*To long side. Angled cut(s) required.
**Needs to be notched for uprights (L).
***See Figure C.





and pliable, then roll it into ½-in.-thick ropes, 3 to 6 in. long. Press the compound along the edge of the glass at an angle with a putty knife. Smooth it with your finger, then finish with the putty knife for a clean seal.

4 PRIME AND PAINT

Apply two to three coats of triple-thick primer to both sides of the window frames. This primer seals cracked, weathered and peeling surfaces while allowing for the natural expansion and contraction of the wood. Prime the new window glazing as well.

Once the primer dries, apply two to three coats of exterior-grade paint to all sides of the frames.

NOTE: Consider tinting the primer toward your topcoat color (for our black topcoat, we tinted our primer gray).

5 ASSEMBLE THE SIDE PANELS

Build two long panels and two short panels for the sides of the raised-bed portion of the greenhouse. Each panel consists of three side pieces (A or B) stacked one on top of another and secured with two end battens (C) and a center batten (D).

Use wood glue and brad nails to pin the battens (C and D) to the back of the side pieces (A or B), then add a few deck screws after double-checking that everything is square.

6 CONNECT THE SIDE PANELS

Use 3-in. deck screws to attach the short side panels to the long side panels. Drill through the side pieces (B) and end battens (C) on the short panels into the edge of the end battens (C) on the long panels. Don't worry about the screw holes on the outside of the raised bed—they won't be visible once the corner trim (K) is applied.

Reinforce the connection by adding three 3 x 3-in. angle brackets to the inside of each joint: one 2 in. from the top, one 2 in. from the bottom and one in the center. To hold the sides square, install mitered gussets (E) at the bottom of each corner of the raised bed. Attach these with wood glue and brad nails, toenailing them from inside the bed.

7 BUILD THE TOP CAP

Secure the painted, mitered top cap pieces (F and G) to the topmost side pieces (A and B) using countersunk 3-in. deck screws. Leave a 2⅝-in. overhang around the outside perimeter of the raised bed. If any miters are opening up or not aligning top to bottom, drive a screw into the end to hold them in place—there will be plenty of wood filling and touching up to do later.

Once you've secured the top cap pieces, attach varnished cedar stepback pieces (H and J) to the top cap (F and G), flush with the inside edge. This decorative layer separates the black top cap (F and G) from the window framing.

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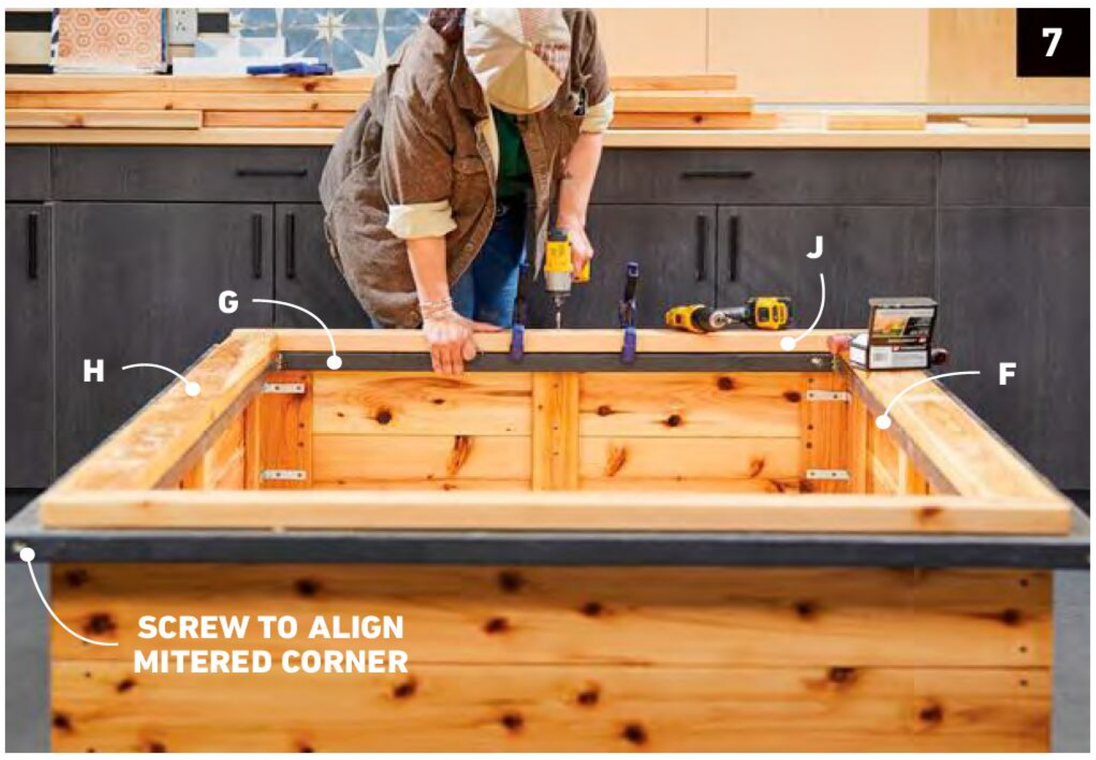
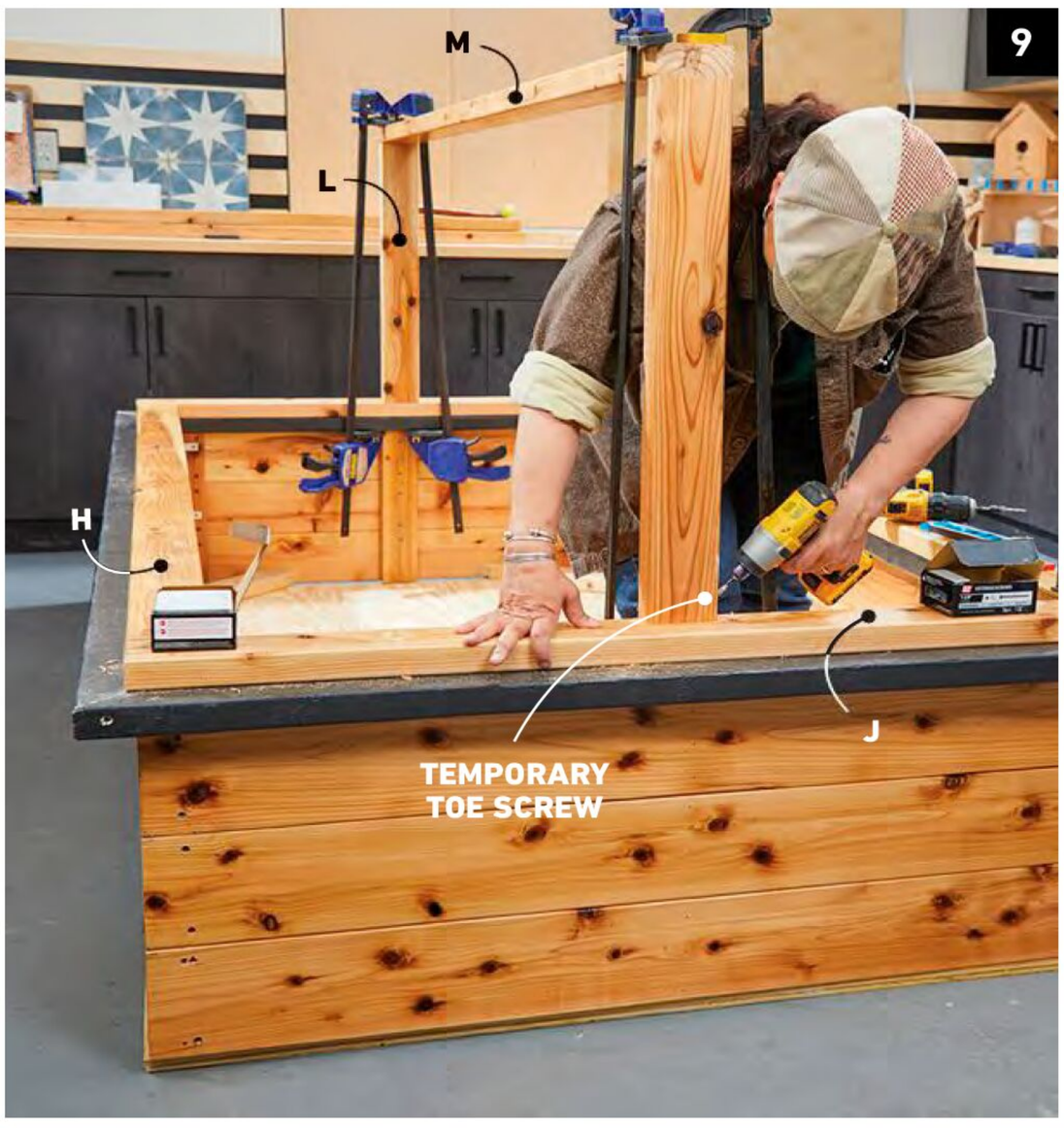
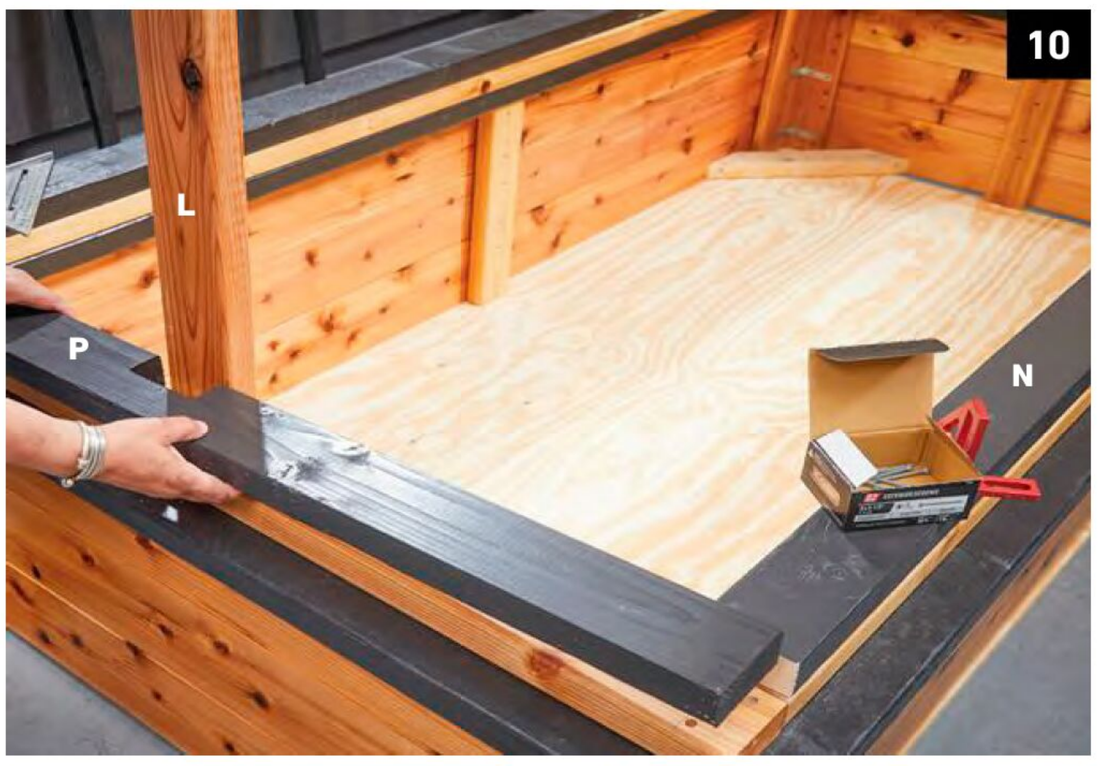






8 MAKE THE CORNER TRIM

Using construction adhesive and brad nails, nail together the eight corner trim pieces (K) to create four "L" brackets.

Attach the "L" brackets to the raised bed side pieces (A and B) at all four corners, again using construction adhesive and brad nails.

These decorative brackets cover any visible screw holes on the side pieces (A and B).

9 BUILD THE GREENHOUSE PEAK

The size of the windows you're using will determine many of the greenhouse measurements, including the height of the uprights (L) and the width of the center beam (M).

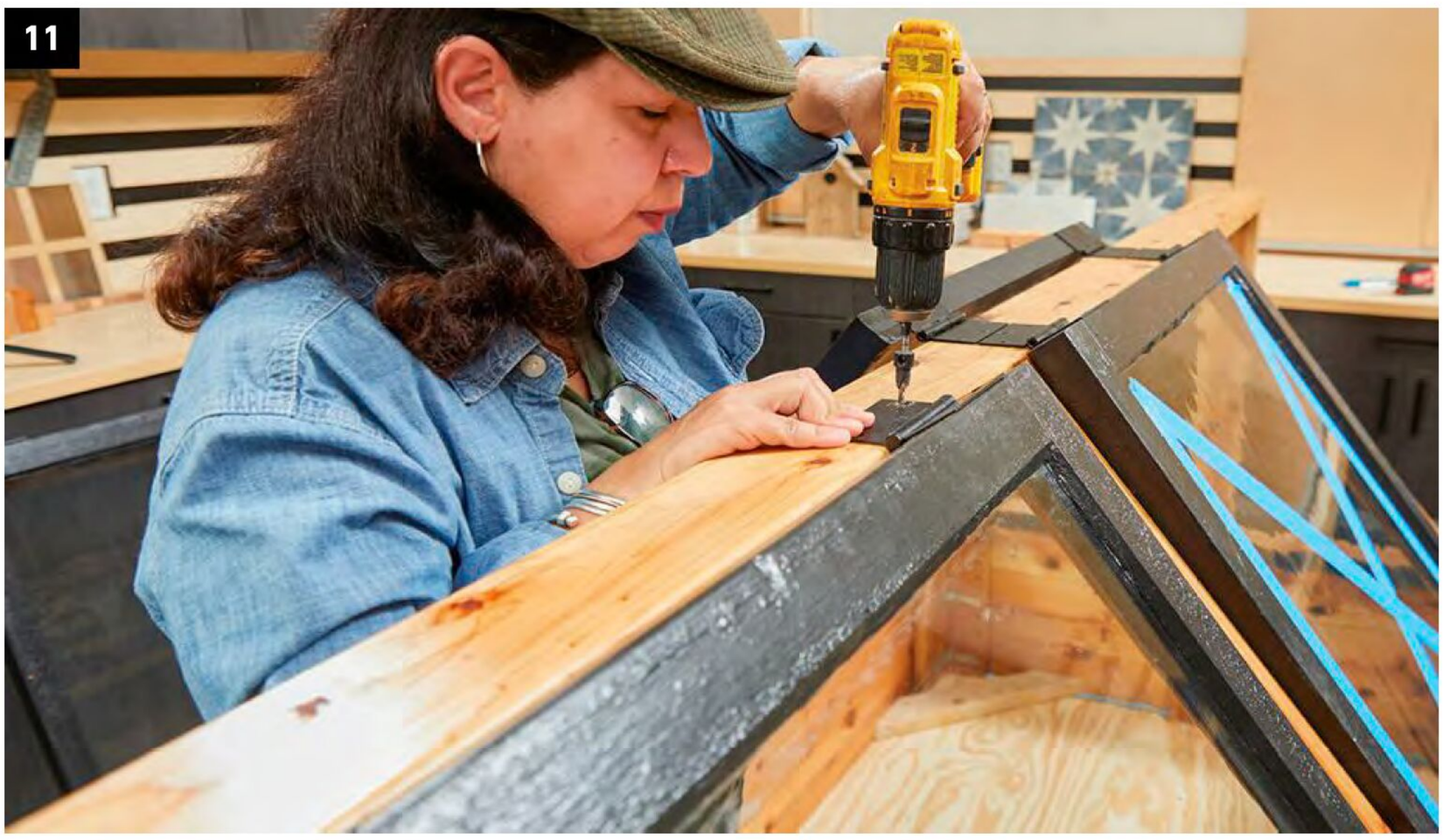
Install hinges on the top edge of each window, then test different upright (L) heights until the pivot point of the window hinge makes the bottom edge of the window frame land centered on a 2×4 placed on top of the long stepback (H).

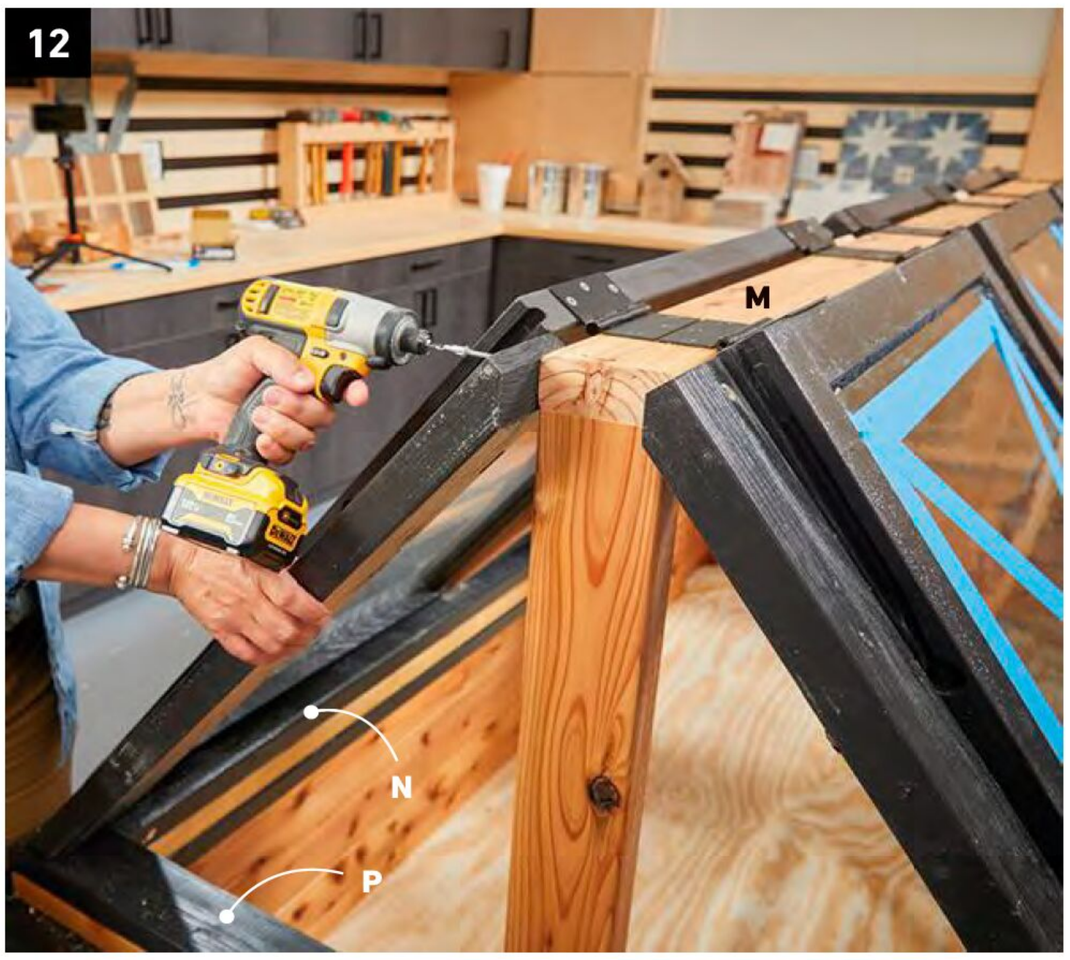
Once you've cut the uprights (L) to the right height, toe-screw them so they're flush to the inside edge and centered on top of the short stepback pieces (J). Then attach the center beam (M) to the top of the installed uprights (L).

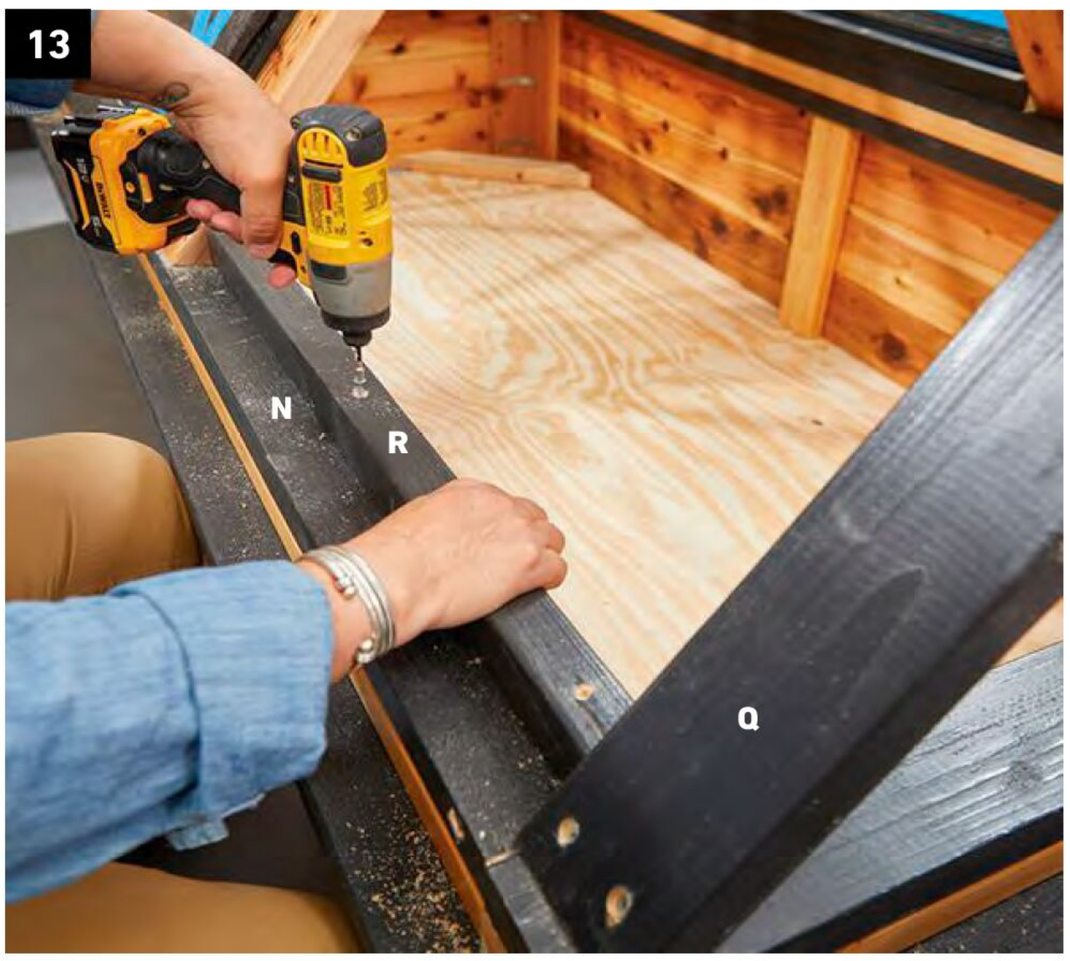
NOTE: The toe screws between the uprights (L) and stepbacks (J) are temporary. They allow you to build the greenhouse indoors and move it outside in two sections.

10 BUILD THE BOTTOM FRAME

To ensure the greenhouse can be moved outside in two sections, build a bottom frame for the greenhouse top using the painted sill pieces (N and P). Use a jigsaw to notch the two short sill pieces (P) around the uprights (L). Secure the sill pieces (N







center beam (M) using the included hardware. Begin in the middle, centering the first window on the beam (M), then install the adjacent windows. Make sure the hinges are aligned so the windows are square and open and close smoothly.

12 INSTALL THE MULLIONS

The mullions (Q) that frame the greenhouse windows require the most machining (and finishing) of any parts of this build (see Figure C). The function of the mullions is to follow the same slope as the windows so they can support the structure, and to provide a base for attaching the cam lifts later.

Determine the top and bottom angles for your mullions—ours were 41.5 degrees at the bottom and 48.5 degrees at the top—then cut off the point at the top so the mullion doesn't protrude past the top of the center beam (M).

Secure the mullions to the center beam (M) and sills (N and P) with construction adhesive and 3-in. screws. Leave about a ¼-in. gap between the edges of the mullions and the sides of the window frames.

13 ADD WINDOW STOPS

Add 2×2 stops (R) between the mullions (Q) along the bottom of the window openings. Place them so they hold the bottom edge of the window frame ¼ in. off the top of the long sill (N).

and P) to one another and the uprights (L) with screws and construction adhesive. Remove the toe screws between the uprights (L) and the short stepback pieces (J) before joining these pieces.

Drive a few screws between the stepback (H and J) and sill (N and P) layers to hold the greenhouse frame in place, but don't attach them permanently until the outdoor installation.

11 INSTALL THE WINDOWS

Based on the size of my windows, I designed the greenhouse with 2×4 mullions between window frames and ¼-in. gaps to allow the windows room to open and close easily. The window size determines many of the project's dimensions, so adjust your plans accordingly.

Start installing the windows by surface-mounting the second leaf of the window hinges to the top of the

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Secure the stops (R) to the long sills (N) with construction adhesive and 2½-in. screws.

14 INSTALL THE POLYCARBONATE

You could use a single piece of polycarbonate at each end, but I suggest using two triangles with a seam in the middle to allow for expansion and contraction. Whichever design you choose, use cardboard to create a template for the polycarbonate ends. Trace the template onto a ¼-in. polycarbonate sheet and cut out the triangles using a circular saw outfitted with a plastics blade.

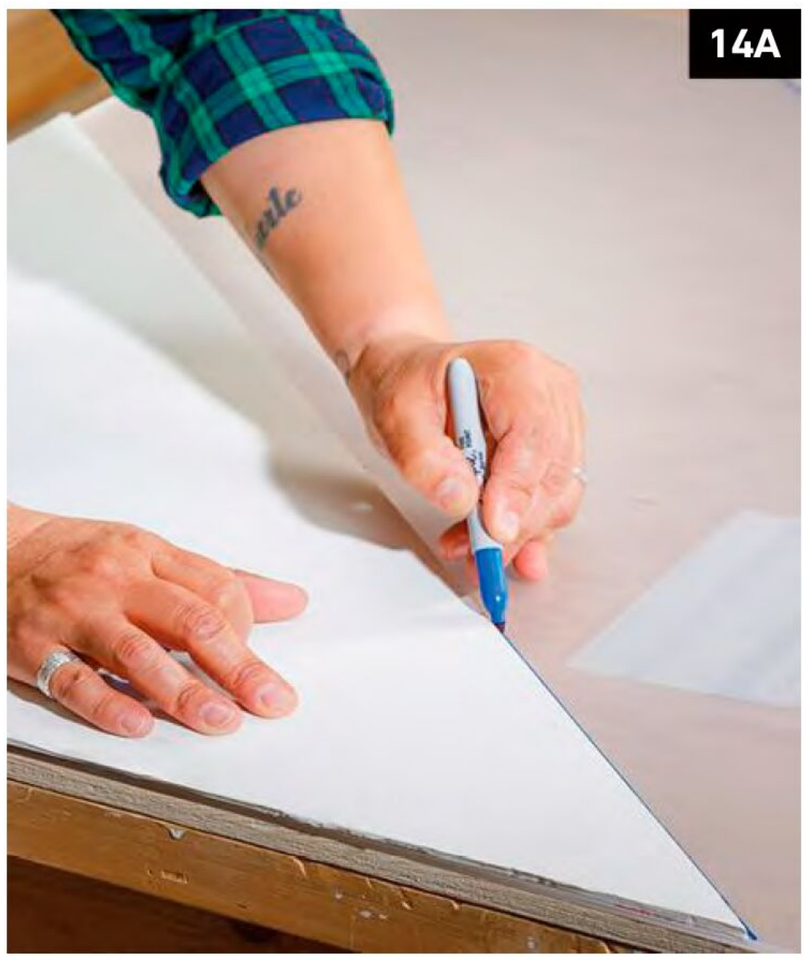
On the inside of each end triangle, use wood glue and 2½-in. screws to attach the bottom and side polycarbonate supports (S and T) to the inside of the outermost mullions (Q) and sill (P).

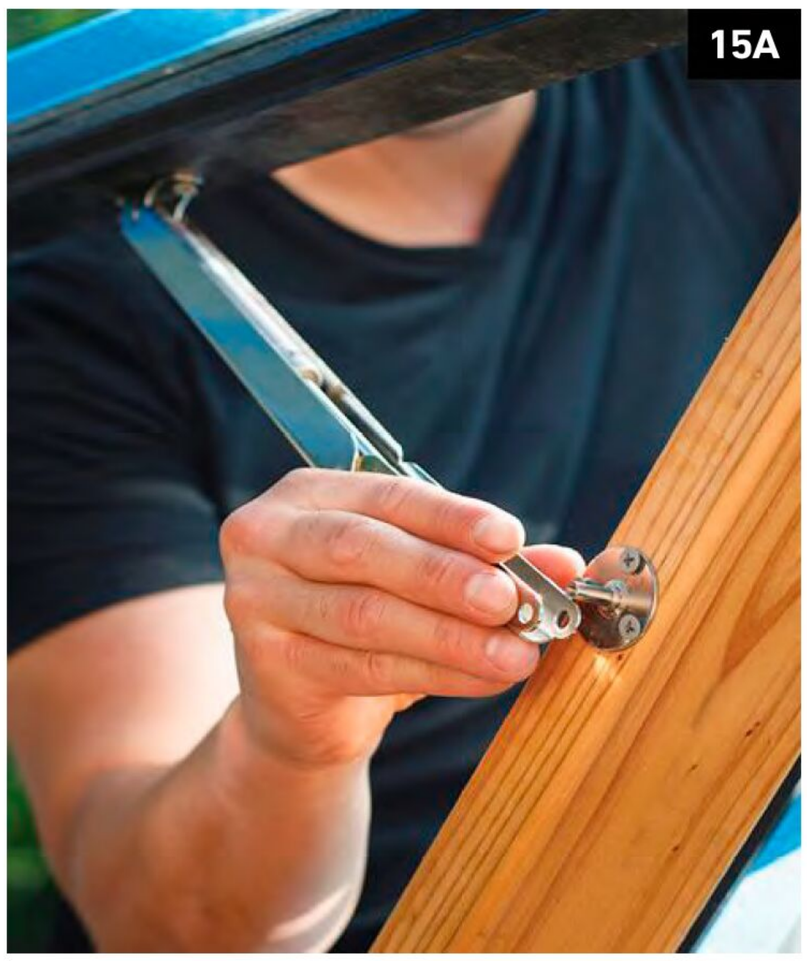
Install the polycarbonate ends by predrilling oversized holes along the bottom and sloped edges of the polycarbonate, then screwing them loosely to the supports to allow for expansion and contraction.

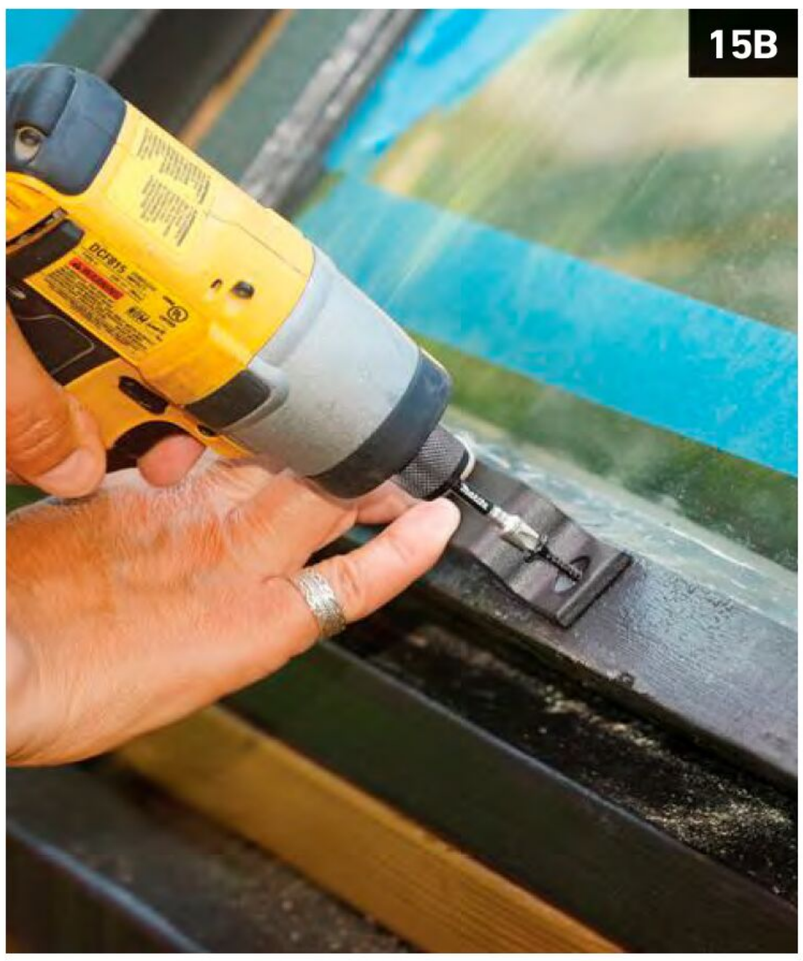
Then cut and install the center polycarbonate supports (U), toenailing them to the side and bottom polycarbonate supports (S and T) and sandwiching the unsupported polycarbonate seams between the center polycarbonate supports (U) and the uprights behind them.

15 FINISHING TOUCHES

To wrap up:







Use wood filler to fill any holes from nails or screw heads in the painted pieces. Sand or wipe back the filler to leave a smooth surface, then touch up the paint at these locations.

Apply rubber or felt bumpers to the edges of the window frames where they contact the stops (R). This keeps the painted surfaces from sticking together in hot weather.

Attach lift supports that stretch between the window frames and mullions (Q) to keep the windows from dropping while you're working within the greenhouse.

Add cabinet handles centered at the bottom of the window frame for easy access.

Add small end caps (V) to flush the center beam (M) with the outside of the mullions (Q) and polycarbonate support pieces (S, T, U). You can avoid this step by using a longer (99-in.) 2×4 as the center beam (M).

16 OUTDOOR INSTALLATION

Install your mini greenhouse in a level area where water drains freely.

After placing the raised-bed portion at the installation location, attach a plastic liner to the inside of the bed as a barrier, then fill the bed with soil. Next, line up and secure the bottom sills (N and P) on the greenhouse top to the stepbacks (J and H) on the raised bed using construction adhesive and 2½-in. screws. ●

Video Online

Scan the QR code to watch Carmen build this mini greenhouse.

16A

16B

TMB STUDIO

Set Up Your Garden Bed

A productive raised-bed garden starts with smart planning. Not all plants play well together—I once planted cucumbers next to butternut squash and ended up with orange cucumbers! Take some time to research plant compatibility and choose varieties with similar water, sun and soil needs.

Next, think about how each plant will grow. Give them plenty of room to mature, and place smaller varieties along the outer edges so you won't have to reach past larger plants as you maintain the garden. Once you have a plan, follow these steps to lay out, plant and care for your garden. Then get ready for an abundant harvest!

1. **Create a String Grid:** Use string and a measuring tape to divide the bed into 1-sq.-ft. sections, taping the string to the edges of the bed or wrapping it around stakes. If some squares are larger or smaller, save the biggest for larger plants and use tighter squares for smaller plants such as herbs.
2. **Lay Out the Plants:** Keep plants in their pots and arrange them within the grid to fine-tune spacing and balance before planting.
3. **Plant:** Dig holes deep enough to cover each root ball with about 1 in. of soil. Loosen the surrounding soil so the roots can spread easily. Form a slight mound around each plant, with a circular channel to direct water toward the base.
4. **Water:** Soak the bed thoroughly after planting, then water regularly throughout the season. In hot weather, plants may need water twice daily; watch for wilting or other signs of distress and adjust your schedule as needed.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

The Amish "Secret" to Prostate Woes?

Prostate Relief Pill Combats All-Night Bathroom Urges and Embarrassment: Thousands have snapped up this safe & affordable way to get relief from prostate woes

The Amish pride themselves on finding more "natural" solutions to a number of health challenges that affect the rest of us...

And prostate woes rank near the top! Like the rest of us, Amish men struggle with prostate issues like:

-Too many bathroom trips, which disrupt a good nights sleep

-When it can seemingly take forever for our flow to start

-And when our flow does start, it's a weak stream, which causes us to have to stand seemingly forever to go

-When it feels our bladders are not emptying, which makes us very uncomfortable

Saw Palmetto has been kicked around for years as being helpful for prostate issues..

But the Amish have found that while taking some Saw Palmetto can be helpful–There are several other herbs that are just as helpful if not more so, and the Amish take a combination of all of them!

And over the past several years there is one product on the market many Amish men now swear by as being a key to improved prostate health–And that product is Prost-Fix.

30 INGREDIENTS IN ONE SMALL CAPSULE!

Scott Adams, the Product Manager behind Prost-Fix had this to say, "It took a great deal of research and time in order create Prost-Fix. We wanted to create the perfect solution for those struggling with their prostate–I'm one of those myself and I take the Prost-Fix every day."

And that ingredient list starts with Saw Palmetto, which is considered the "granddaddy" of prostate ingredients. It's been used to help treat prostate issues since the 1800's. And it has been extensively researched over the past four decades...

Many of those studies have showed that Saw Palmetto can help shrink the inner linings of the Prostate which when enlarged can put pressure on the tubes that control urine flow.

But Saw Palmetto is just a small part of what's in Prost-Fix. Here are several of the other ingredients included in each capsule of Prost-Fix:

Zinc: There's more zinc in one's prostate than in any other part of the body. One study supported the premise that zinc is needed for a healthy prostate.

Copper: Copper helps the body maintain healthy blood circulation, which is helpful for the prostate.

Selenium: In several studies Selenium has been shown to help protect the prostate.

Cernitin flower pollen extract: In one study helped improve prostate symptoms in a majority of men participating.

Quercetin: Helps fight prostate problems within cells.

Pumpkin Seed Extract: Helps maintain a healthy flow.

Nettle Root Extract: Very popular in Europe for prostate issues.

Vitamin B6: Helps boost your immune system.

And that's just a few of the ingredients found within each bottle of Prost-Fix. These ingredients have helped thousands get their prostate issues under control.

"I ordered this product for my father who is healthy and just turned 64. He had issues with frequent bathroom trips. Since taking this product for four weeks, he has noticed a fewer number of bathroom trips. We very much appreciated this product!" -James Wilson

If you're looking for help for prostate issues then you need Prost-Fix!

- REDUCE NIGHTLY BATHROOM TRIPS! Get more sleep & stop waking up every night
- INCREASE FLOW RATE – Effective blend of 30 herbs, vitamins & minerals support urinary function
- QUALITY YOU CAN COUNT ON - MADE IN THE USA in a FDA and GMP Certified Facility and tested for purity by a third party
- NO ALLERGENS-NO GMOs, binders, fillers, preservatives, soy, gluten, dairy, shellfish, peanut and eggs
- 60 Veggie caps within each bottle. Each bottle is a 30 day supply

GET A FREE BOTTLE!

One bottle of Prost-Fix is $29.95 and if you order two bottles you'll get a third bottle absolutely FREE! You'll also receive free shipping & handling no matter how many bottles you order. For credit/debit card orders, you can call: **1-855-287-1800** Or go to: **TopValueSupplements.com**

Or you can send payment to: MWSB Inc., 834 South Union Street, Olean, NY 14760-3917

Prost-Fix comes with a 30-day money back guarantee.

These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration.
This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Results may vary

How to Dispose of (Almost) Anything

Safe, responsible solutions for getting rid of all your household junk

BY KARUNA EBERL

Never pour motor oil down the drain or on the ground.

It feels great to get rid of extra stuff around the house and workshop. But not everything can simply be chucked into the garbage bin. Some items, such as varnishes and old cellphones, create dangers for sanitation workers. Medications, electronics and chemicals contaminate drinking water. And landfills get clogged with all sorts of items that could have been recycled.

"Decluttering isn't just about a clean home; it's about responsibility," says Nick Friedman, co-founder of College HUNKS Hauling Junk & Moving (HUNKS stands for Honest, Uniformed, Nice, Knowledgeable, Service). "With the right approach, you can dispose of anything safely."

The first step is to determine whether what you're getting rid of is curbside trash, curbside recycling, a candidate for donation/resale, or an item that requires special disposal, says Marisol Rivera, a professional cleaning expert and organizer at Sparkly Maid Austin in Texas.

"What causes the most problems is people incorrectly believing everything is either going into the trash or recycling, when many things belong in the third or fourth category," says Rivera.

If you're ready to cast off excess belongings and DIY materials, here's how to decide where they belong—plus best practices for disposing of items that require special handling.

Flammable and Hazardous Items

Anything that can poison, corrode, explode or accidentally catch fire is classified as hazardous waste. This includes motor oil, pesticides, varnish, propane and aerosol canisters, electronic devices and certain chemicals such as toilet bowl cleaner and bleach.

Even "empty" propane canisters can ignite. Drop them off or exchange for a full tank.

It's critical to dispose of hazardous items properly. Never pour them down the drain, dump them onto the ground or put them in the trash. Instead, take them to your local household hazardous waste drop-off center. To find one in your area, check the location database on *earth911.com* or consult your local government or waste management website.

If you're unsure whether an item is hazardous, look for keywords on the label such as *warning*, *harmful*, *danger*, *toxic*, *corrosive* or *flammable*. For more information on what's in your household products, visit the Consumer Product Information Database (CPID) at *whatsinproducts.com*.

Bulky Items

For large items, such as furniture, carpeting, lawn mowers and grills, first determine whether they're in good enough condition to donate or sell. If they're truly unusable, your city or waste management company might provide bulk pickup. If not, your best bet is to hire a junk hauling service. Note that

OPPOSITE PAGE: MINT IMAGES RF/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: NIWAT KHONGPRAPHAT/GETTY IMAGES, LUCATO/GETTY IMAGES

some appliances require special handling—especially refrigerators, which must have their coolant professionally drained.

PRO TIP: If you're buying a replacement appliance, ask the retailer if they'll haul away the old one for you.

For mattresses and box springs, check for recycling programs in your area, says Rivera. The metal, foam, wood and other materials can be separated and recycled into new products.

Workshop and DIY Materials

Solvents, epoxy, and oil-based varnishes, stains and paints can pose a fire risk if stored or disposed of improperly, so it's important take them to a hazardous waste drop-off center. Rags with these liquids on them can spontaneously combust, so before dropping them off, keep them submerged in water in a metal container, says Friedman.

The exception is latex paint, says Rivera. "It can be allowed to dry completely, with products such as cat litter or a latex paint hardener, and then placed in the trash once it is solid."

As for other shop materials, be sure to wrap anything sharp, such as loose saw blades, in rags or cardboard to prevent injury to sanitation workers.

Construction Materials

Construction and demolition (C&D) recycling centers often accept concrete, drywall scraps and other heavy materials. If recycling isn't available in your area, a junk removal service or a trip to the landfill is in order.

For metals, also try scrapyards and haul-away recyclers. Bricks and pavers can usually be given away or sold for reuse, and in some areas, asphalt shingles can also be recycled into road materials.

Car and Home Maintenance

Car fluids, fluorescent light bulbs, batteries and household cleaners should go straight to the hazardous waste drop-off.

Exceptions are motor oil and car batteries, which are accepted by many auto shops and auto parts retailers. Also, "regular LED and incandescent light bulbs are usually acceptable in the trash unless local authorities advise otherwise," says Rivera.

PRO TIP: Never combine household cleaners for disposal. Some combinations can become toxic or explosive, such as ammonia and bleach.

Take-back programs keep medications from contaminating soil and waterways.

FROM TOP: ALIAKSANDR LITVINIUK/GETTY IMAGES, INNA LUZAN/GETTY IMAGES

Decluttering

During a declutter, or when moving to a new home, all sorts of odds and ends hit the chopping block. To streamline the process, Rivera recommends sorting items into three categories: donate, sell and true trash.

For donations, think charities and nonprofits such as thrift stores and shelters. For books, try libraries and schools. Request a receipt upon drop-off, as some donations may be tax deductible.

If you have clothing and blankets that are too worn to donate, look for a textile recycling center. "If fabrics are not useful any longer, don't put them in the donation bin, as charities do not want to be burdened with the expense of disposing of them," says Rivera.

For items you'd like to sell, try platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Nextdoor. Write a clear description, price items slightly lower than comparable listings to encourage a quick sale, and cross-post in multiple online groups, says Rivera. "Also, be realistic about the likelihood of success," she says. "Some items are best offered as 'free if you pick up.'"

As for all those personal knick-knacks, sentimental items and old photographs, first ask friends and family if they'd like them. That can make the items easier to part with, since they won't feel permanently gone.

For boxes of old photos, consider having them scanned to a hard drive or the cloud. While the prints aren't recyclable, scrapbookers and art students might want them. Check with schools or list them on sites such as eBay and Etsy. If you believe any items may have historic value, consult local museums or history centers too.

Personal Care Products

For hygienic reasons, cosmetics and other personal care products almost always belong in the trash category (unless they're unopened, in which case they can usually be donated). Remember that aerosol cans that aren't empty need to be treated as hazardous waste.

For medications, ask your local pharmacy, hospital or law enforcement agency about prescription take-back programs and community collection events. Never flush medications down the toilet or put them in the garbage, as they can contaminate water and soil, hurting wildlife and damaging ecosystems.

Wrap saw blades in cloth or cardboard to keep sanitation workers safe.

Personal Documents and Data

To prevent identity theft, cut up expired credit and ID cards, and shred any documents containing private information before putting them in recycling or trash bins. This includes bills, bank statements, credit card offers and medical records. Some office supply stores offer shredding services, and community shredding events are another option to watch for.

Town Dump Etiquette

If you plan to take items directly to a landfill or waste transfer station, first call ahead to make sure they'll accept what you are bringing. "Some items are outright banned, such as tires, electronics and chemicals," says Nick Friedman of College HUNKS Hauling Junk & Moving.

Also, cover your load if anything could blow out in transit. Many dumps turn away uncovered loads.

Once on site, an attendant will likely ask for a photo ID and a description of the items you've brought. They'll then point you in the right direction to drop off your various streams of waste.

Be prepared to separate and handle your own materials. "Sort items by category before unloading to make the process easier and faster," says Marisol Rivera of Sparkly Maid Austin. "And wear closed-toe shoes and gloves."

FROM TOP: BREAKERMAXIMUS/GETTY IMAGES, GLEB POPOV/GETTY IMAGES

Recycling Reality Check

Just because a container has a recycling number on the bottom doesn't necessarily mean it's approved for curbside pickup. Getting it right matters: The wrong items can contaminate a whole recycling load or even damage a facility's sorting machinery.

What can be recycled varies by community, so request a list of approved items from your collection service. Don't "wish-cycle," or place something in the recycling bin and simply hope it will be accepted. "If you cannot verify that your hauler accepts a certain item, it's better to err on the side of caution and dispose of it in the trash," says Rivera. Frequently wish-cycled items include plastic bags, string lights, greasy pizza boxes, foam coffee cups, takeout containers and many types of plastics.

PRO TIP: Some items that can't go in your curbside recycling bin may still be recyclable. Many plastics and other hard-to-recycle items can be dropped off at specialized collection bins. *Earth911.com* is a helpful resource for locating these sites.

E-waste often contains valuable (and recyclable) materials such as gold and neodymium.

When disposing of phones, tablets, computers and hard drives, consult the manufacturer for instructions on permanently deleting your data, or hire a qualified technician to wipe the devices for you.

Technology

Never throw away broken electronics, including TVs, DVD players, stereo equipment, cellphones, printers and computers. These "e-waste" items contain heavy metals and other hazardous materials, and they often contain desirable components that can be recycled.

Many big-box stores collect e-waste, and some manufacturers offer take-back programs. Most cities or counties also maintain certified e-waste collection sites. Again, be sure to delete personal info from tablets, computers and phones before recycling.

Never trash devices powered by lithium batteries, such as cellphones, power tools and Bluetooth speakers, as they can catch fire in garbage trucks and landfills. Also, spent alkaline batteries (regular batteries, like those in most TV remotes and traditional flashlights) should go to the hazardous waste facility.

Yard Waste

Instead of filling up the trash bin, take advantage of composting branches, grass clippings, leaves and other organic materials. Grass clippings left on a lawn add nutrients to the soil, and leaf piles and branches provide valuable habitats for caterpillars and other invertebrates, which in turn attract birds.

If you're unable or uninterested in composting at home, look for local drop-off sites, which are usually run by municipalities or garden centers. Many towns also offer curbside yard waste pickup, both on a regular basis as well as after special occasions, such as storms and neighborhood yard cleanups.

FROM LEFT: PHOTOGRAPHER, BASAK GURBUZ DERMAN/GETTY IMAGES, NANTONOV/GETTY IMAGES

Truth or Trash?

Household waste comes with plenty of myths. We've sorted fact from fiction to help you make better choices on trash day.

Plastic bags are NOT recyclable.

FALSE (with caveats). Most single-use plastic bags, such as grocery, bread and zip-top bags, are made of No. 2 or No. 4 plastic, so they're technically recyclable. However, they don't belong in curbside bins because thin plastic can snag in sorting equipment and cause delays and damage.

Instead, take plastic bags to drop-off collection boxes, which are common at supermarkets and big-box stores, or use a mail-in program. While this is better than tossing bags in the trash, reports on the efficacy of these programs are mixed, so always aim to limit plastic use and reuse bags whenever possible.

Food waste is the largest category of material in U.S. landfills.

TRUE. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, food waste makes up about one-quarter of all landfill material. The average family of four spends roughly $3,000 a year on food that goes uneaten.

To cut waste at home and save money, be sure to store fruits and vegetables properly, freeze foods before they spoil, and plan meals and grocery trips. Donate any unexpired items, and compost food scraps or use a curbside composting program if available.

Bottles and containers should be rinsed before going in a curbside recycling bin.

TRUE. Containers don't need to be spotless, but they should be rinsed before recycling. Even small amounts of sticky, sugary, oily or saucy residue can contaminate other items in your bin, particularly paper and cardboard. When that happens, the entire batch can be sent to the landfill. Food residue can also create odors and attract pests. A quick rinse—no soap or intense scrubbing needed—helps ensure your recyclables are properly processed.

The best way to get rid of sticks, leaves and other yard debris is to burn them.

FALSE. Burning yard trimmings produces smoke and fine particles that pollute the air and irritate eyes and lungs—especially for people with asthma or other respiratory issues. Many areas also restrict or ban burning at certain times of year because of the risk of wildfires.

Better options for disposing of yard waste include composting leaves, chipping logs and branches for mulch, leaving grass clippings on the lawn or using municipal yard-waste pickup. ●

FROM TOP: NIKOLAY ZAIARNYI/GETTY IMAGES, LJUPCO/GETTY IMAGES

Flip Your Furniture

Give tired pieces a fresh start with DIY techniques that add character and hold up for the long haul

BY CARMEN DE LA PAZ

No-Stress Distressing

With chalk paint, glaze and some artful sanding, achieve a finish that looks antique but feels brand new

Paint was my entry into the DIY world before I got into woodworking, and I still love to use this simple chalk-paint distressing technique to give furniture an aged look. For best results, work on solid wood—laminates, plastic and human-made veneers tend to reject finishes and can cause paint to peel or chip. If your piece has an oil-based varnish or sealer, give it a light scratch coat with sandpaper and apply two coats of primer, as outlined in the steps, to help the new paint bond for the life of the furniture. Unsure about the original finish? Prime your piece anyway to be safe.

I revamped a small end table, painting the legs and apron with blue chalk paint and brown decorative glaze and the tabletop with yellow flat paint layered with a terra-cotta chalk paint and the same glaze. Follow this two-tone approach or go for an all-over treatment with whichever colors fit your style.

1 CLEAN THE PAINTING SURFACES Clean all surfaces to be painted with a mixture of water and phosphate-free TSP (trisodium phosphate substitute). Use cotton rags or a sponge to remove dust and grime. If needed, lightly sand with 150-grit sandpaper to remove any flaking or chipped paint.

NOTE: Paint bonds best to a clean, dust-free surface. Any leftover grease or dirt can cause cracking, chipping or peeling.

2 SCUFF THE PAINTING SURFACES Lightly scuff all surfaces to be painted with 180-grit sandpaper.

Tools

- Detail sander
- Painting supplies

Materials

- Assorted sandpaper/sanding blocks
- Chalk paint
- Chip brushes
- Cotton painter's rags
- Decorative glaze
- Furniture wax
- Paint
- Paraffin wax or candle
- Phosphate-free TSP (liquid or powder)
- Water-based polyurethane
- Water-based primer

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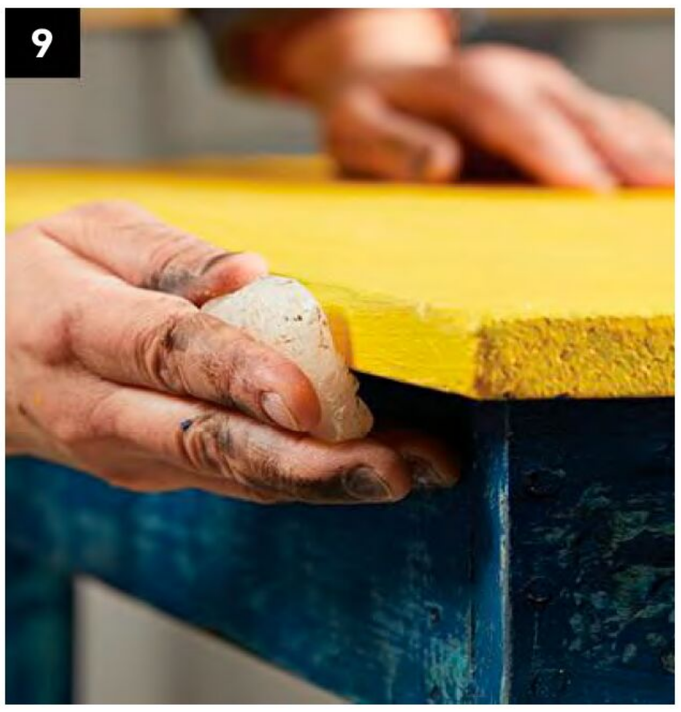

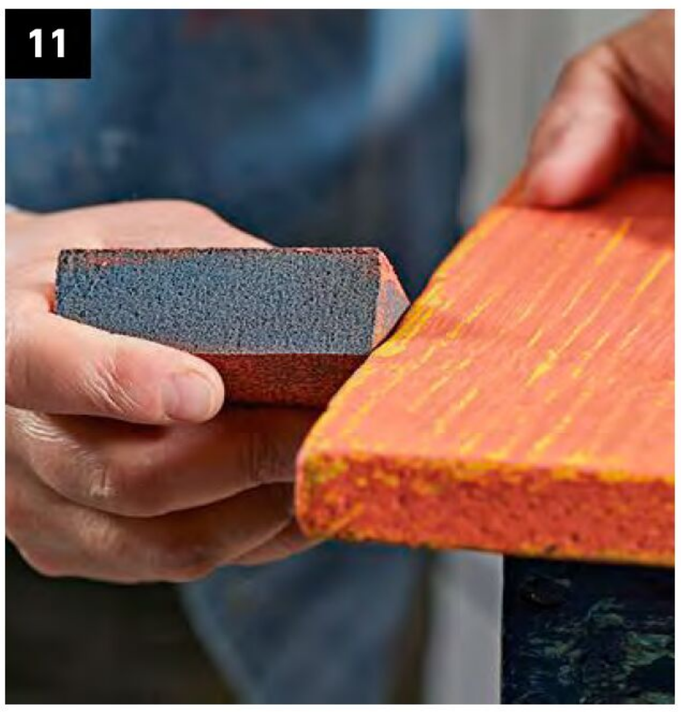

This gives the surfaces "teeth," helping the primer adhere. The goal is not to remove the old finish, just to scuff it up. This step is especially important when transitioning from an oil-based finish to a water-based one.

3 PRIME THE LEGS AND APRON
With the table upside down, brush a coat of primer onto the legs, apron and underside of the tabletop. It's easier to work on these areas first, then flip the table to work on the top. If you are switching from an oil-based finish to a water-based one, apply two coats of primer. Let the primer dry completely.

4 PAINT THE LEGS AND APRON
Apply a solid coat of chalk paint (we used FolkArt Home Decor Chalk Paint in Nautical) and let it dry completely.

5 SAND THE EDGES AND CORNERS
Using 100-grit sandpaper and a detail sander, sand the edges, corners, and any other areas where natural wear would occur to reveal underlayers of paint and raw wood. Switch to 180-grit sandpaper to smooth and blend.

6 APPLY A DECORATIVE GLAZE
For an antique look, brush on a premixed brown decorative glaze (we used Rust-Oleum Transformations Decorative Glaze in Java Brown) with a chip brush, then wipe off the excess with a rag, working with the grain. The glaze will settle into low points and be wiped off high points. Let the glaze dry completely.

NOTE: To make your own decorative glaze, mix 1 part satin or flat paint in your chosen color with 3 parts transparent decorative paint glaze.

7 PRIME THE TABLETOP
Flip the table upright and prime the tabletop. Again, if you are switching from an oil-based finish to a water-based one, apply two coats of primer and let them dry completely.

8 PAINT THE TABLETOP
Apply a solid coat of flat paint (we used DecoArt Americana acrylic paint in Primary Yellow) and let it dry completely.

9 APPLY "RESIST" WAX
Once the paint has dried, rub a candle or paraffin wax along the edges of the table and then lightly across the top. The wax serves as a "resist," preventing the next coat of paint from adhering or bonding wherever the wax is applied. This makes it easier to remove the paint as you sand it back and achieve a naturally aged, distressed look.

10 APPLY THE SECOND PAINT COLOR
Apply a generous coat of a second paint color (we used FolkArt Home Decor Chalk Paint in Fired Clay) to the tabletop, painting over the wax resist. Let the paint dry completely.

11 SAND THE TABLETOP EDGES AND CORNERS
With a 150-grit sanding block and a detail sander, sand the edges and corners of the tabletop. Focus on edges and high spots, revealing the paint layer below. In areas where you applied the wax resist, the paint will come off easily. If needed, sand with 180-grit sandpaper to even out the paint for a smooth finish.

12 GLAZE THE TABLETOP
Brush a coat of premixed brown decorative glaze onto the tabletop, then wipe off the excess with a rag, working with the grain.

13 SEAL THE TABLE (OPTIONAL)
If desired, seal the table with a water-based polyurethane or furniture wax.

NOTE: Sealing your piece with furniture wax will prevent you from adding more paint in the future. The wax will also need to be reapplied periodically.

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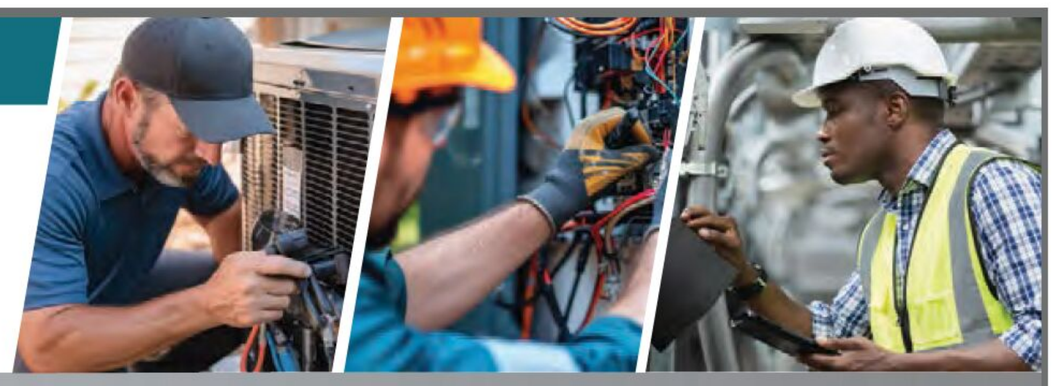

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Refinish with Confidence

Start with solid prep for a durable, beautiful result

Refinishing wood furniture is one of the most satisfying DIY skills out there. I can't tell you how many pieces once destined for the garbage have landed in my hands and been given new life as functional, beautiful items. But this isn't a project to rush.

Start by considering the material. Solid wood is the best, most forgiving option for refinishing. Veneered plywood requires caution—you could sand right through the veneer. And plastic laminate is a poor candidate, as it rarely takes sanding, stain or paint well.

Examine the piece from all angles and mark problem areas, such as putty buildup or deep dings, with painter's tape. It's easy to overlook these spots once the dust starts flying.

Check all joints and reinforce them if needed. Tighten loose nails or screws—you don't want a leg falling off while sanding. If gluing is required, use clamps for a tight fit and a paintbrush or screwdriver to push glue into deep voids.

If stained wood lies under the topcoat or sealer, color matching can be tricky—stains and sealers often yellow or deepen in tone with age. If matching is a concern, consider priming and painting the piece instead of applying a clear sealer.

Finally, determine whether the existing finish is water- or oil-based (if a piece has a yellowed finish or was made before the 1980s, the finish is probably oil-based). While oil-based finishes can cover just about anything, water-based finishes stick best to other water-based finishes.

1 CLEAN THE SURFACE

Remove all hardware, then clean the piece with a solution of 3 parts water and 1 part vinegar. Use a damp (not wet) rag and let the surface dry fully.

2 SAND PROBLEM AREAS

Even out any dings, chips and scuffs with 180-grit sandpaper.

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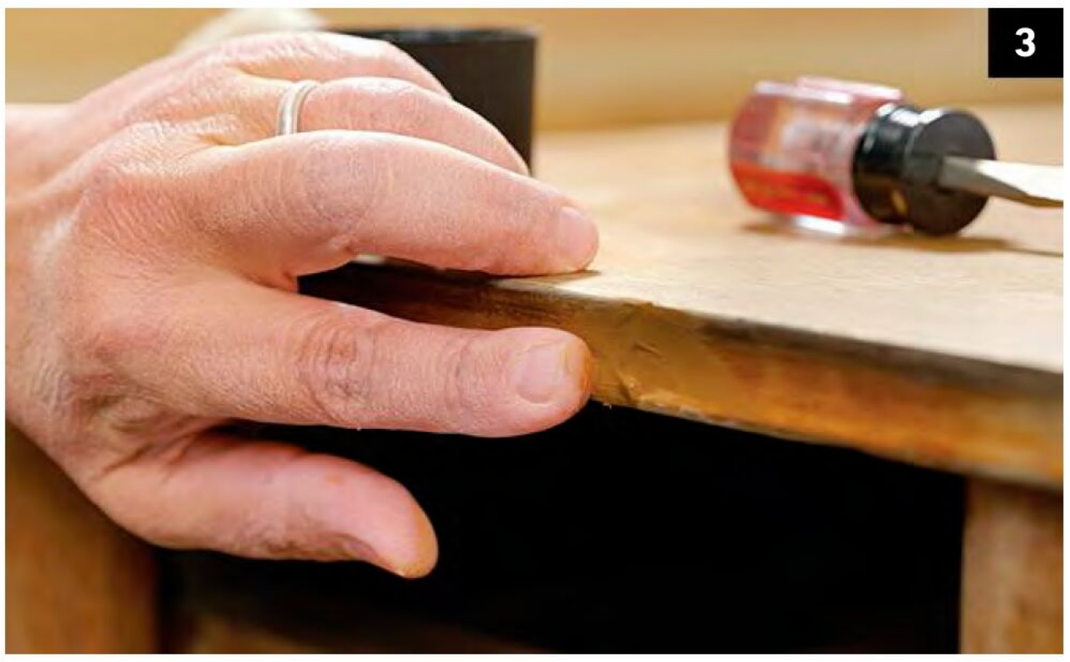

Tools

- Air compressor with blower
- Flathead screwdriver
- Paintbrush
- Rubber profile sanding blocks or sanding sponges
- Scrap block of wood for sanding

Materials

- 000 steel wool
- Assorted sandpaper
- Furniture hardware
- Oil-based finish
- Paint rags
- Tack cloth
- Wood glue
- Wood putty

Smart Hardware Rehab

Removing paint from metal hardware can be tedious, but don't rush to sand it off or scrape it with a knife or metal spatula. These methods almost guarantee scratches and can damage the hardware's finish.

Some popular approaches use chemicals such as paint strippers, while others are more natural, using heat and common household supplies. I tried out three options that safely remove paint without harming what's underneath so you can choose the best one for your time frame and project.

Scratch-Free Solutions

Scan the QR code for three easy hardware paint-stripping methods.

3 FILL LARGE DINGS AND HOLES
With wood putty, fill deep dents, dings or holes that can't easily be sanded back (or that go through veneer). Build up the putty so there is excess in the damaged areas—putty often shrinks as it dries. Let the putty dry fully, then sand it back to create an even surface.

NOTE: Color-match the putty to the wood species you are refinishing—pine, walnut and oak colors are widely available at home centers. You won't know the exact color until the putty dries, so give yourself time to do a test first. Experienced refinishers often mix putties to get the right tone.

4 GIVE THE SURFACE "TEETH"
To ensure the new finish bonds well, lightly scuff the entire surface of the furniture with 220-grit sandpaper. Use the flat side of a scrap block of wood wrapped in sandpaper for the flat parts of the furniture, and go over any profiles with a rubber profile sanding block or sanding sponge. The goal is not to remove the entire finish, so use a light touch when sanding.

5 REMOVE DUST
Use an air nozzle attached to an air compressor to remove the bulk of the dust from the furniture surface, then wipe with a tack cloth to catch fine particles.

6 APPLY THE NEW FINISH
Use a quality brush to apply at least two to three coats of finish, letting each dry fully and ensuring the surface is dust-free before the next coat. Sand with 320-grit sandpaper after the first coat, concentrating on any raised grain, and use 000 steel wool between additional coats. Don't be surprised if you need a fourth or fifth coat of finish. A buildup of oil-based finish will also help camouflage more deeply sanded areas.

7 INSTALL NEW HARDWARE
Complete the transformation by installing new knobs, handles, pulls or hinges. ●

Painting Power Players

Whether you're painting walls and ceilings, decks and fences, or trim and cabinets, choosing the right tools is key to achieving good-looking, long-lasting results. These staples will help you get any painting job done right.

BY LAURIE NICHOLS

Roll It On

Match your roller cover to the job for a flawless finish every time

Reach for a roller when it's time to paint large, flat surfaces such as walls and ceilings. But don't just grab the cheapest cover and hope for the best. Weigh these factors when you're picking the best roller for your project:

Nap length

Longer naps hold more paint and provide better coverage on imperfect surfaces such as concrete and brick. Shorter nap lengths create less stipple, or pebbled finish, making them ideal for smooth surfaces. "The surface you're painting dictates everything," says Shayne Pancione, owner of Pancione Painting Plus in Chicopee, Massachusetts. "Always match the nap length and material to the surface."

Choose roller covers with 3/16-to-1/4-in. naps for smooth surfaces, 3/8-to-1/2-in. naps for smooth to semi-smooth surfaces and 5/8-to-1 1/2-in. naps for rough surfaces.

Material

Synthetic paint roller covers, made from polyester, microfiber or foam, work best with latex paint. Use natural materials such as mohair or lambswool with oil-based or alkyd products. Short-nap microfiber and dense foam covers offer the smoothest finish for cabinets, doors and trim.

Width

Small, 2-to-4-in. rollers handle tight spaces and small surfaces such as cabinets and trim with precision. The most common roller cover width—9 in.—is best suited for walls and ceilings and fits standard-size trays and cages. For especially large jobs, choose a 14- or 18-in. roller cover, which can make short work of cathedral ceilings and extra-tall walls. Just remember to purchase larger cages and trays as well.

Quality

You'll find a variety of price points when you shop for roller covers. And, as with most tools, higher prices tend to signify higher quality and better results. Invest in premium, name-brand roller covers to paint smooth surfaces and visible interior spaces. "Quality matters," Pancione says. "Cheap rollers shed, leave lint and waste time." That said, cheap covers work fine to paint rough exterior surfaces such as fences and concrete.

HIGH PAINT CAPACITY

Wooster Golden Flo 9-In. Roller Cover, 1¼-In. Nap

$9 • Wooster's long-nap roller cover quickly achieves solid coverage on highly textured, extra-rough surfaces including stucco and brick. The medium-density fibers resist matting and shedding for a reliably smooth application.

BEST FOR GENERAL USE

Purdy White Dove Roller Cover, 3/8-In. Nap

$6 • This classic roller cover is compatible with all paints, providing full coverage on smooth and semi-smooth surfaces. Its high-density woven fabric doesn't shed and leaves little to no stipple.

ULTRA-SMOOTH FINISH

Wooster Jumbo-Koter Pro Foam Mini Roller Covers

$8 (pack of 2) • Reach for one of these small foam roller covers when only the smoothest finish will do. The high-density foam is compatible with all paints, and the closed end makes easy work of corners.

OPPOSITE PAGE: MIKHAIL SPASKOV/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: VIA HOME DEPOT FOR WOOSTER, VIA PURDY, VIA AMAZON FOR WOOSTER

The Best Brush for Every Job

Home centers carry a dizzying array of paintbrushes in various sizes, materials and price points. Here's how to buy the right one.

Paintbrushes offer superior control and accuracy for precision work such as cutting in and edging, as well as for coating cabinets, trim and molding. They're also the preferred tool for touch-ups and applying stain. When choosing a brush, focus on these key factors:

Size

Small brushes (1 to 2 in.) carry less paint, giving you better control for detailed work and tight spaces.

Larger brushes (2 to 3 in.) hold more paint and cover more area faster, making them ideal for open, flat surfaces such as doors, trim and cabinets. This size also works well for cutting in. Use 4-to-6-in. brushes for exterior projects such as fences, decks or siding, where speed and coverage are top priorities.

Bristle Material

The best bristle material depends on the type of paint you're using. "Synthetic bristles are for latex paint, and natural bristles are for oil-based paint," Pancione says. Natural bristles absorb water, so they can swell and soften in latex paints and other water-based finishes. "The right bristle holds paint better, releases it evenly and leaves fewer brush marks," Pancione says. Look for bristle details on the brush packaging so you can match the material to your project.

Angled vs. Flat

Angled brushes create crisp lines when you're edging and cutting in along ceilings or trim. "Typically, we use angled brushes for any detailed projects requiring precision," Pancione says. Painting large, open surfaces on doors or fences? Opt for a flat brush, which holds more paint and provides smooth, even coverage.

Quality

You can spend a lot on a quality paintbrush, but it isn't always necessary. Invest in a better brush when the project calls for close attention to detail and a flawless finish—think cabinets, trim and any cutting-in work. "Cheap brushes are for rough work such as sheds or priming," Pancione says, so save your money and splurge on a nice brush only when it counts.

ERGONOMIC

Wooster Gold Edge 2-In. Firm Angle Brush

$9 • A short handle makes this brush easy to work with in tight spaces and minimizes cramping and fatigue. The gold-tipped polyester filaments are soft at the ends for an ultra-smooth finish yet firm enough to deliver crisp, clean lines.

GREAT VALUE

KingOrigin Block Brush 3-Pack

$22 • These large exterior brushes hold a lot of paint and offer excellent durability. They're great for staining or painting decks, fences and siding, and their double thickness makes them especially good for masonry work.

VERSATILE

Wooster Chinex FTP 3-In. Extra-Firm Flat Brush

$24 • This flat brush works well with all paints and stains, including fast-drying and low-VOC coatings. The extra-firm Chinex filaments are easy to clean, and maintain stiffness and control even after repeated use.

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: VIA WOOSTER, VIA AMAZON FOR KINGORIGIN, VIA ACE HARDWARE FOR WOOSTER; OPPOSITE PAGE: TMB STUDIO

Tools of the Trade

Add these accessories to your painting toolkit for faster work times and more professional results

1. Telescoping Pole

Skip the ladder and reach high spots with an extension pole. Figure out the length you need, then consider the material. Aluminum is light, but fiberglass is more durable. "I want a pole that's lightweight, rigid and with a solid locking mechanism that doesn't twist," Pancione says.

2. 5-in-1

This multipurpose tool is "the Swiss Army knife of painting," Pancione says. "If I only have one hand tool, this is it." 5-in-1s feature a straight edge to scrape paint and spread compound, a pointed end that opens paint cans, a nail puller and a concave edge for cleaning roller covers.

3. Drop Cloths

Canvas drop cloths are durable, absorbent and reusable, while plastic is lightweight, affordable and disposable. Choose canvas for floors: "It stays put, absorbs drips and won't turn the job site into a slip-and-slide," Pancione says. "Plastic is fine for covering furniture." Measure the space first and buy accordingly.

4. Painter's Tape

Apply painter's tape to protect adjacent surfaces when cutting in ceilings or painting trim or an accent wall. Always check the label, but color can offer a helpful clue about a tape's intended use. For FrogTape, green is a multi-surface option, yellow is best for delicate jobs, and beige is suited for rough or outdoor applications.

5. Bucket

Work from a bucket instead of the can to keep paint clean, speed up the job and reduce arm fatigue. "Gallons are for storage, not working," Pancione says. "A good bucket is sturdy, has a magnet for the brush and works with a liner for easy cleanup." Pancione recommends the Purdy Pail. ●

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BEST PRO TIPS

Smart Moves for New Homeowners

A seasoned Realtor shares advice to help you protect your investment—and your sanity

BY KELLY AIGLON

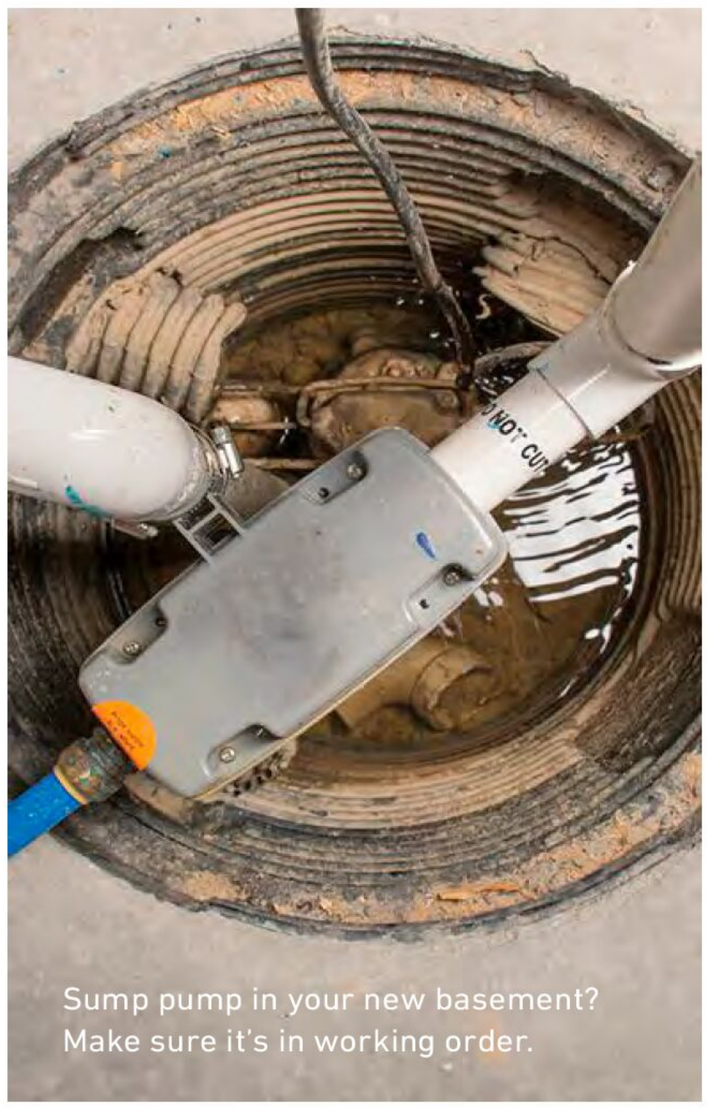
MASKOT/GETTY IMAGES

The keys are finally in your hand. The boxes are stacked in the living room. And then, somewhere between the first rain shower and the first cold snap, reality sets in: The house is yours—along with every drip, draft and detail.

"That's the biggest shift," says Marie Grandelis, a Realtor with Shorewest in the Milwaukee area. "When you're renting, you call one person and it's handled. When you own, you're the one making the calls."

The good news? Confident homeownership isn't about fixing everything at once. It's about knowing what matters most.

Locate your home's key shutoff valves and know how to use them.



Sump pump in your new basement? Make sure it's in working order.

Turn the Inspection Report into a Plan

Few documents intimidate new homeowners like the inspection report. For older housing stock, it can run 60 or 70 pages long. "I always tell buyers to focus on what's labeled a defect," Grandelis says. "That's structural integrity, safety and mechanical issues. Don't get distracted by every little note."

She encourages homeowners to mentally sort findings into three categories:

> "Live with your house for a few months. See how the flow works before you rip everything out."

Safety issues, such as electrical problems, gas concerns or active water intrusion, should be handled immediately. "Electrical is a big trigger for me," Grandelis says. "If you already know about a problem, don't wait and risk something bigger."

Systems issues might include an aging roof, HVAC equipment nearing the end of its life or signs of foundation movement. These findings may not need urgent action, but they do require planning and budgeting to address.

Cosmetic issues, while often tempting to tackle first, can usually wait.

Some findings sound worse than they are. With an older home, for example, that might be learning that the attic has microbial growth (aka mold). "It feels scary when you read it," Grandelis says, "but it's very treatable and often not as expensive as people assume." The same goes for minor foundation concerns in regions with clay-heavy soil; they can often be remedied by grading corrections or added support.

Instead of treating the report like a weekend to-do list, Grandelis advises mapping repairs across the first 12 months.

Expect the Unexpected

Beyond a mortgage, taxes and insurance, maintenance is the expense new homeowners underestimate most.

"There's always something," Grandelis says. A roof's age can affect insurance premiums. Trees need trimming. Sewer lines may need cleaning. Appliances fail. A common rule of thumb is setting aside 1% to 3% of your home's value annually for upkeep. Creating a dedicated "home fund"—separate from everyday savings—helps soften surprises.

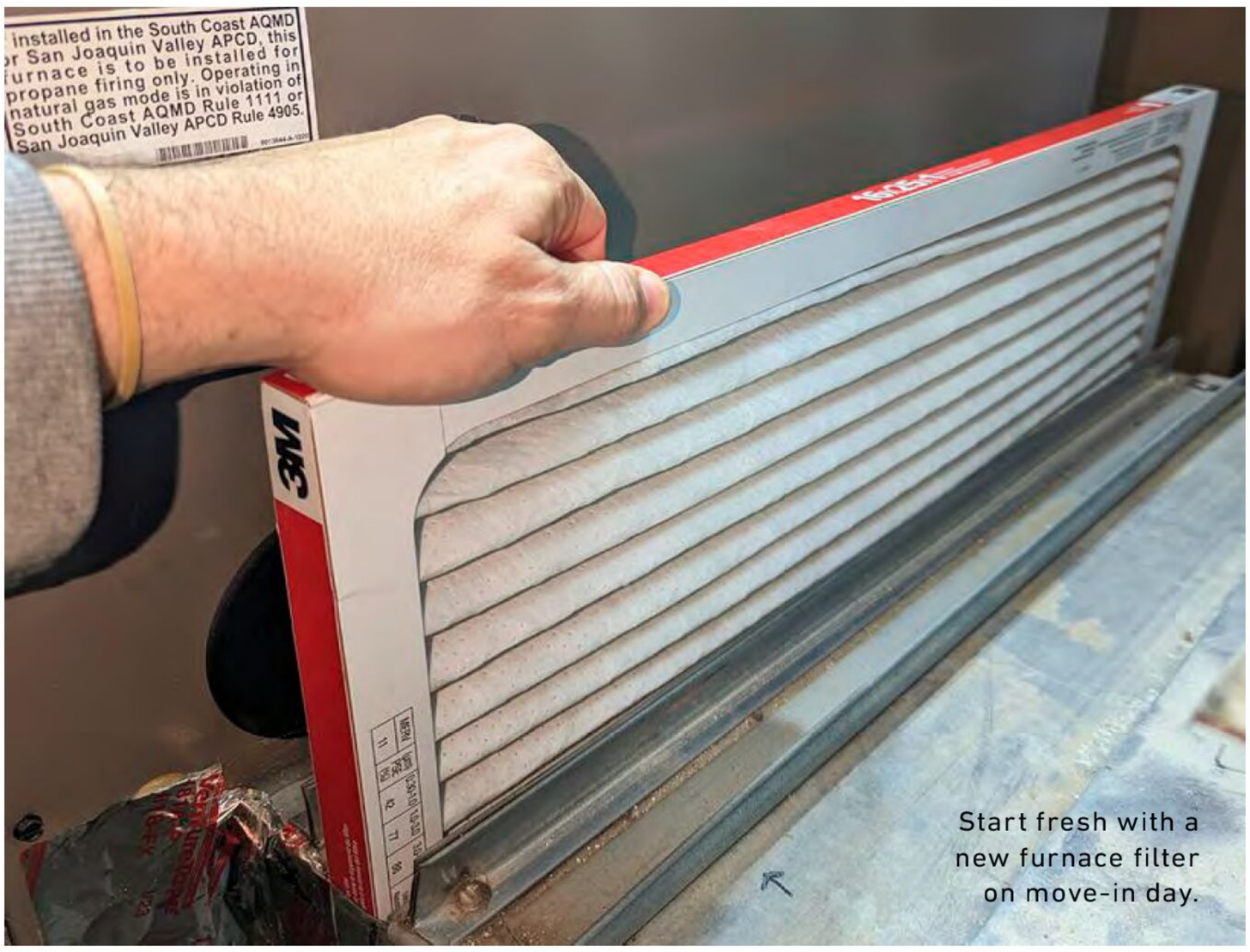
"It's a mindset shift," Grandelis says. "You're not just paying a mortgage. You're maintaining an asset."

Get to Know Your Home

In the first week, before you unpack every box, walk through the house with purpose. Locate the main water shutoff, electrical panel, furnace filter, sump pump and sewer cleanout. Replace smoke and carbon monoxide detectors if needed, and change the locks. "Those simple things give you peace of mind," Grandelis says. "You know where things are if something happens."

In cold-weather climates, seasonal basics matter. Turn off exterior spigots before winter. Keep cabinet doors open during deep freezes so pipes don't

TMB STUDIO



Start fresh with a new furnace filter on move-in day.

burst. Replace furnace filters regularly.

New homeowners often overlook city ordinances, trash pickup schedules, snow removal responsibilities and permit requirements, and may not know who their utility providers are. Don't wait to get familiar with the details. And from day one, organize important paperwork, including warranties, appliance model numbers and contractor receipts. You'll be glad you did.

Start with Quick Wins

If you're tempted to gut the kitchen on day one, pause. "I always say, live with it for a few months," Grandelis says. "See how the flow works before you rip everything out."

For a low-cost transformation with instant impact, paint. "A coat of paint can completely change how a space feels," Grandelis says. Updated lighting, new hardware and a deep clean go a long way too.

Doing some jobs yourself is a smart way to keep costs down and build pride of ownership, but in general, plan to leave major safety and structural work to the pros.

Build Your Team Early

As a homeowner, you can't call one number for everything anymore. Building a bench of trusted contractors matters.

"Ask your Realtor," says Grandelis. "We usually have a tried-and-true list. Then check reviews on Angi or Yelp and get multiple quotes for larger projects."

Keep your eyes open for red flags, such as cash-only demands and the absence of written contracts and proof of insurance. It's a good idea to build good relationships with service providers. It pays dividends over time, especially when emergencies hit.

Strive for Confidence, Not Perfection

Settling into a new home isn't about having the dream kitchen a year after moving in. It's about staying on top of maintenance and protecting the structure.

"I've seen homes where small issues were ignored and became big ones," Grandelis says. If you don't address small leaks, improper venting and poor grading around the foundation, they can escalate into expensive problems.

"Smart homeownership is staying ahead of things," she says. "When you see something, don't put it off." After all, confidence doesn't come from perfection. It comes from knowing where the shutoff is and having a plan. ●

Your First 48 Hours: A Checklist for New Homeowners

Indoors

- ☐ Locate and label the main water shutoff, gas shutoff and electrical panel.
- ☐ Test your sump pump.
- ☐ Replace HVAC filters.
- ☐ Install new smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- ☐ Rekey or change exterior locks.
- ☐ Photograph appliance serial numbers and create a simple home binder (physical or digital) for warranties, contractor contacts and utility details.

Outdoors

- ☐ Check grading around the foundation; the soil should slope away from the house.
- ☐ Make sure gutters direct water away from the foundation.
- ☐ In cold climates, confirm exterior hose bibs can be shut off before winter.

MEET THE PRO Marie Grandelis is an associate vice president with Shorewest Realtors. Her career includes $154 million in sales and 394 families moved.

Landscape Rescue

Use these simple strategies to transform a lackluster yard into a lush outdoor retreat

BY *FAMILY HANDYMAN* EDITORS

Q: What are some common tree-planting mistakes?

Getting a new tree off to a healthy start isn't complicated, but a few mistakes can slow the growth of a tree or even kill it. Avoid these common pitfalls:

Planting in poorly drained soil: Poorly drained soil is a death knell for most trees. To test a site, dig a hole and fill it with water. If it takes 15 minutes or more to drain, choose another location.

Planting too close: Give trees 5 to 10 ft. of space to prevent crowding and spindly growth.

Crowding with grass: Some grasses release chemicals that slow tree growth. Keep the base clear to the drip line (the outer extent of the canopy), and mulch with wood chips or compost.

Planting too shallow or too deep: The area where the trunk base starts to taper should sit just above the soil. Planting too shallow will slow growth and risk root damage from erosion; planting too deep will cause most species to struggle or die.

MORSA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Cut Down on Weeding

Keep weeding chores to a minimum by mulching beds heavily with compost and shredded bark. Plant densely to shade out weeds, and avoid turning the soil, which can expose dormant weed seeds to sunlight and allow them to germinate. Instead, let the earthworms from your compost do the cultivating for you.

Q: Any tips for keeping a lawn green and healthy during a heat wave?

Every region has its seasonal temperature swings, so it's important to seed your lawn with a grass species suited to your climate. If your lawn seems to struggle every summer, consider overseeding with a more heat-resistant variety. Good mowing habits also help: Mow frequently, removing no more than a third of the height of the grass blades at a time; avoid mowing during peak heat; and keep mower blades sharp for clean cuts.

Be sure to treat and reseed dead spots promptly—it's easier to fix these issues on a small scale, and new grass growth helps shade the soil and prevent weeds from taking hold.

Q: When is the best time to treat crabgrass?

Fill your spreader with preemergence granules between the second and third mowings of the year. The ideal window is short, only about a week and a half, when soil temperatures reach about 52 degrees. An inexpensive soil thermometer from a garden center can help you monitor the ground, but if you're unsure, it's better to apply a little early than too late.

If you'd rather not use herbicides, hand-pulling young crabgrass plants in late spring works well, especially in soft soil after a rain. Another option is corn gluten meal (CGM), a corn byproduct that controls crabgrass and broadleaf weeds such as dandelions and clover. Keep in mind it requires a heavy application rate (20 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft.), making it cumbersome to use and costly.

Q: If a bird feeder isn't doing the trick, how else can you draw birds to the backyard?

It's often bugs, not birdseed, that attract birds to your yard. Many species rely on insects year-round, so a yard rich in insect life becomes an active feeding ground.

To boost insect activity, plant spring-flowering trees such as crabapples and other fruit trees. They bloom at migration time, attracting insects and creating inviting pit stops for warblers, vireos, gnatcatchers, tanagers and orioles.

Caterpillars are especially valuable bird food. Boost their population by planting native plants, which serve as hosts for egg-laying butterflies and moths while supporting a wide variety of other insects.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DMYTRO/GETTY IMAGES, TMB STUDIO, RYAN SCHOENFELD, LUTAVIA/GETTY IMAGES

Q: What could cause a hydrangea not to bloom?

One common culprit is improper pruning. Some hydrangea varieties, including oakleaf and bigleaf, produce flower buds the year before they bloom. To maximize the floral display, remove only damaged and wayward branches and avoid cutting more than a third of the canopy each year. By being selective in your cuts, you'll preserve more stems with intact buds for a better bloom the following year.

PRO TIP: Study the overall shape of the plant before making any cuts, and always use clean, sharp tools for precise pruning.

Q: Is there an easier alternative to grass?

If maintaining a traditional lawn feels like too much work, you have plenty of low-maintenance options. Mulch, gravel, pavers or even artificial turf can cut upkeep, but for a more organic look that keeps your yard's natural beauty, consider replacing some or all of your grass with an appropriate ground cover plant. Focus on problem spots such as shady, hot or rocky areas, and choose a species that thrives there.

Easy-Care Picks

Scan the QR code for 10 great ground cover ideas.

Q: How does lawn aeration work, and when is it needed?

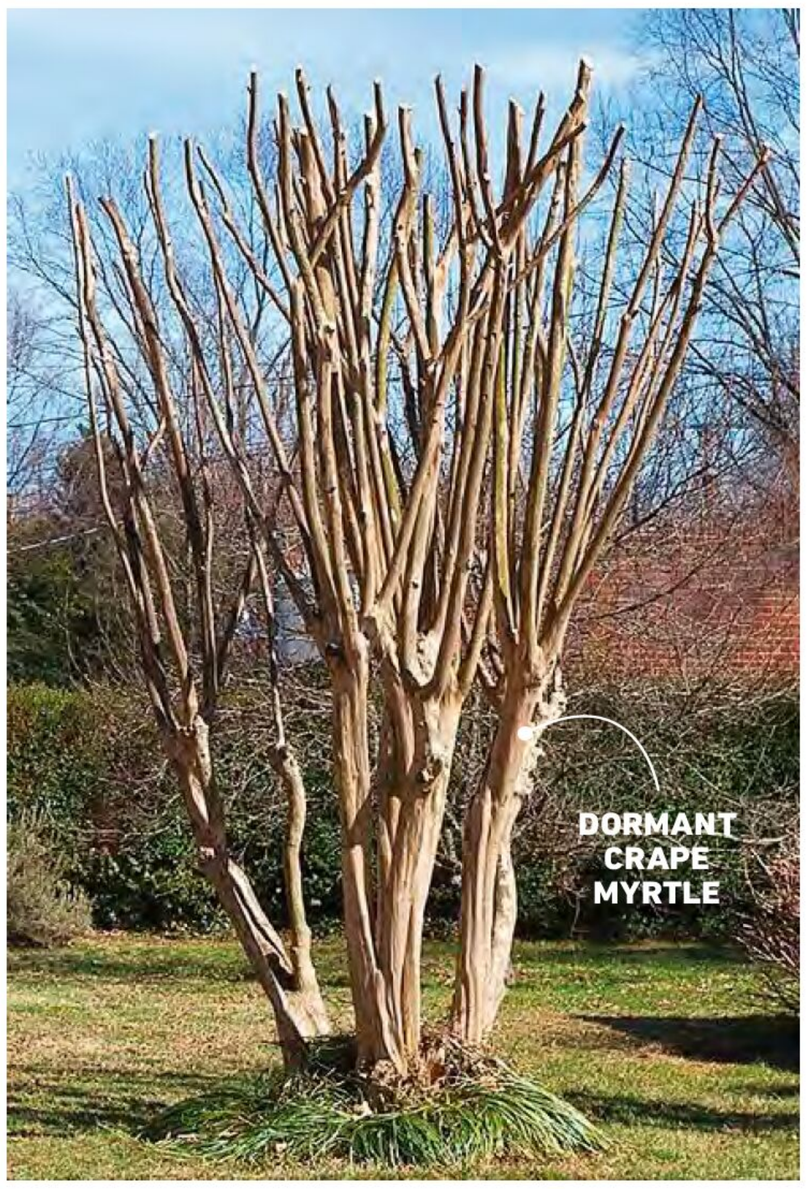
Over time, soil becomes compacted from foot traffic, mowing and even rainfall, which can prevent your lawn from getting the air, water and nutrients it needs. Aeration perforates the soil with small holes so these resources can reach the grass roots.

Timing is important: Early fall is ideal for aerating cool-season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass or fescue because the soil is still warm and moist and the grass is actively growing—good conditions for recovery before winter. Spring aeration is possible, but it may unearth weed seeds and encourage unwanted weed growth.

Q: How can you tell if a plant is dead or just dormant?

Many plants, especially those native to warmer climates, wait for consistently warm weather before springing back to life. In areas with subfreezing winters, it's not unusual for crape myrtles, hardy hibiscus, butterfly bushes, figs and other late-to-leaf-out plants to look dead while everything else is already green.

If you're unsure what's normal for a plant, wait until the end of May or even mid-June before digging it up. For a quicker check, scratch a little bark off leafless woody plant stems. If you see green underneath, your plant is likely still snoozing and not dead. ●



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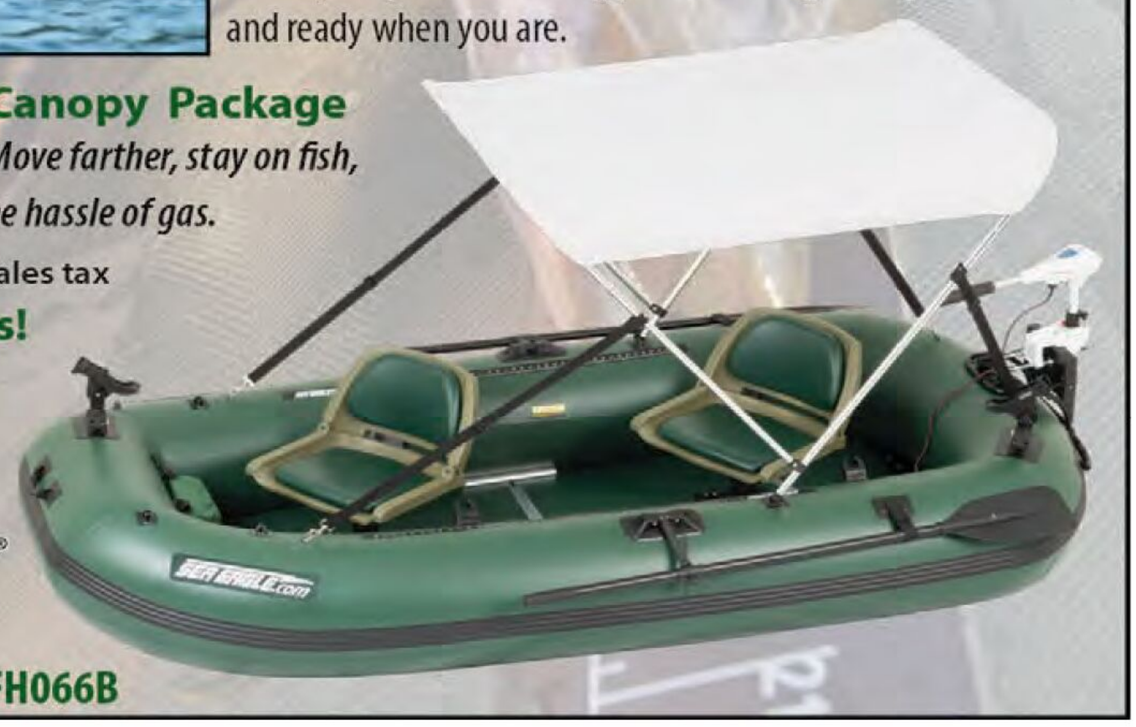

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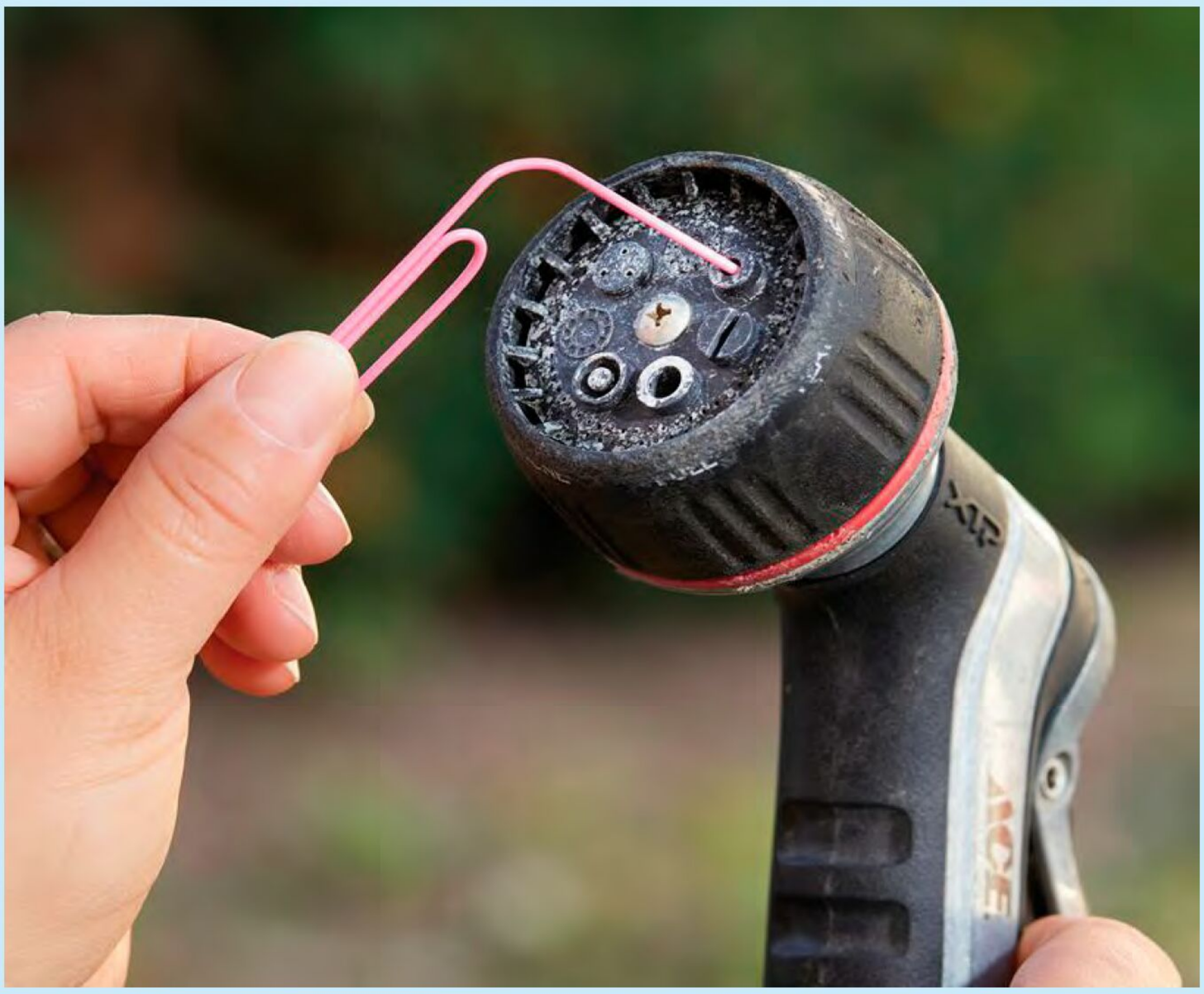
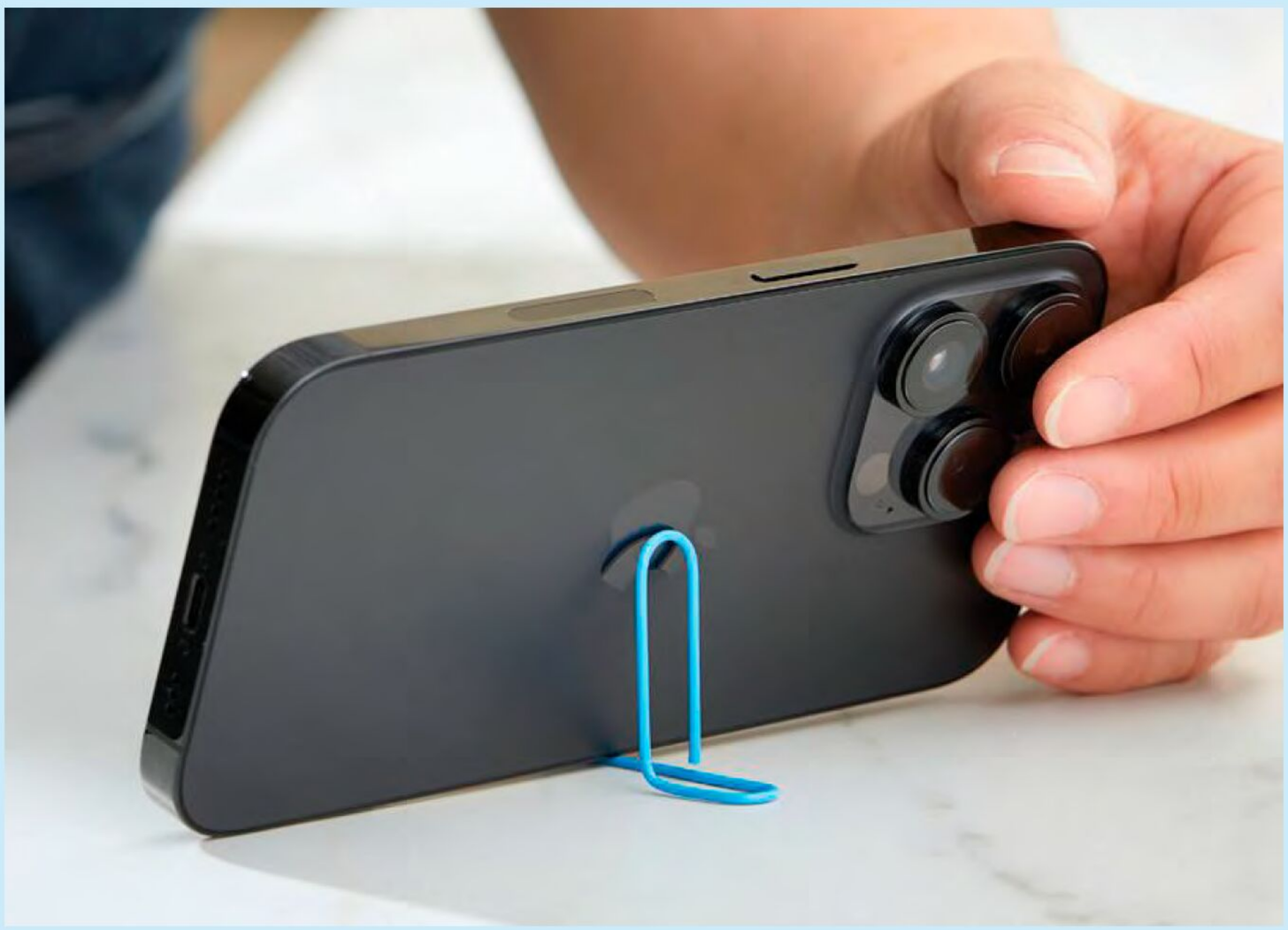
Paper Clip Tips

Use these tiny but mighty tools to handle everything from tech problems to clogged drains



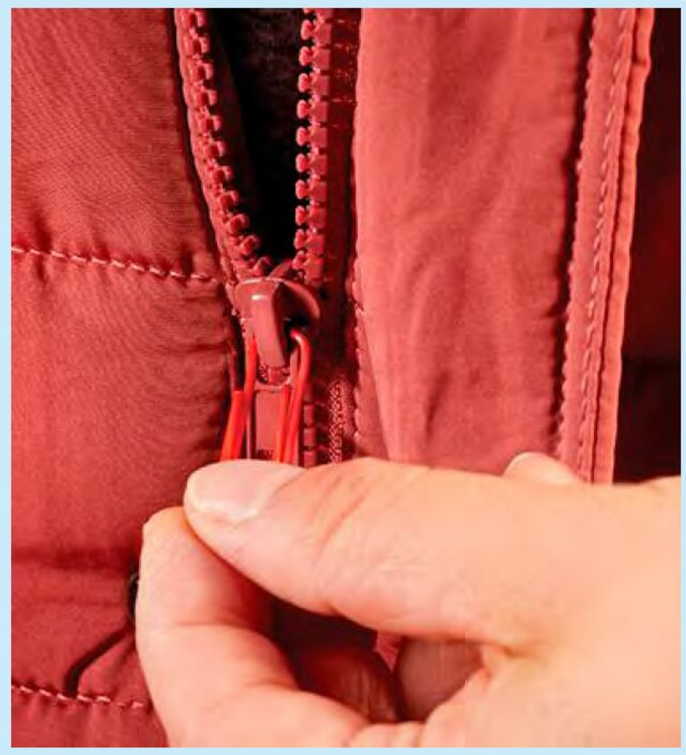
Restore Spray Nozzles

The small holes in spray nozzles—whether on bottles, misters or hoses—can easily get clogged. Straighten a paper clip and push one end into the hole to loosen debris, then rinse the nozzle with hot water to help flush it out and restore the spray pattern to normal.



Instant Phone Stand

In a pinch, bend one side of a paper clip to create a simple stand for your phone—perfect for watching videos or reading recipes in the kitchen. For better stability, position your phone at a steeper angle and use a larger, thicker paper clip.



Simple Zipper Fix

When a zipper's pull tab becomes loose or falls off, run a paper clip through the hole where the tab was attached. It creates a small handle you can grip to zip up your item quickly.

Wobble-Free Toilet Paper Holder

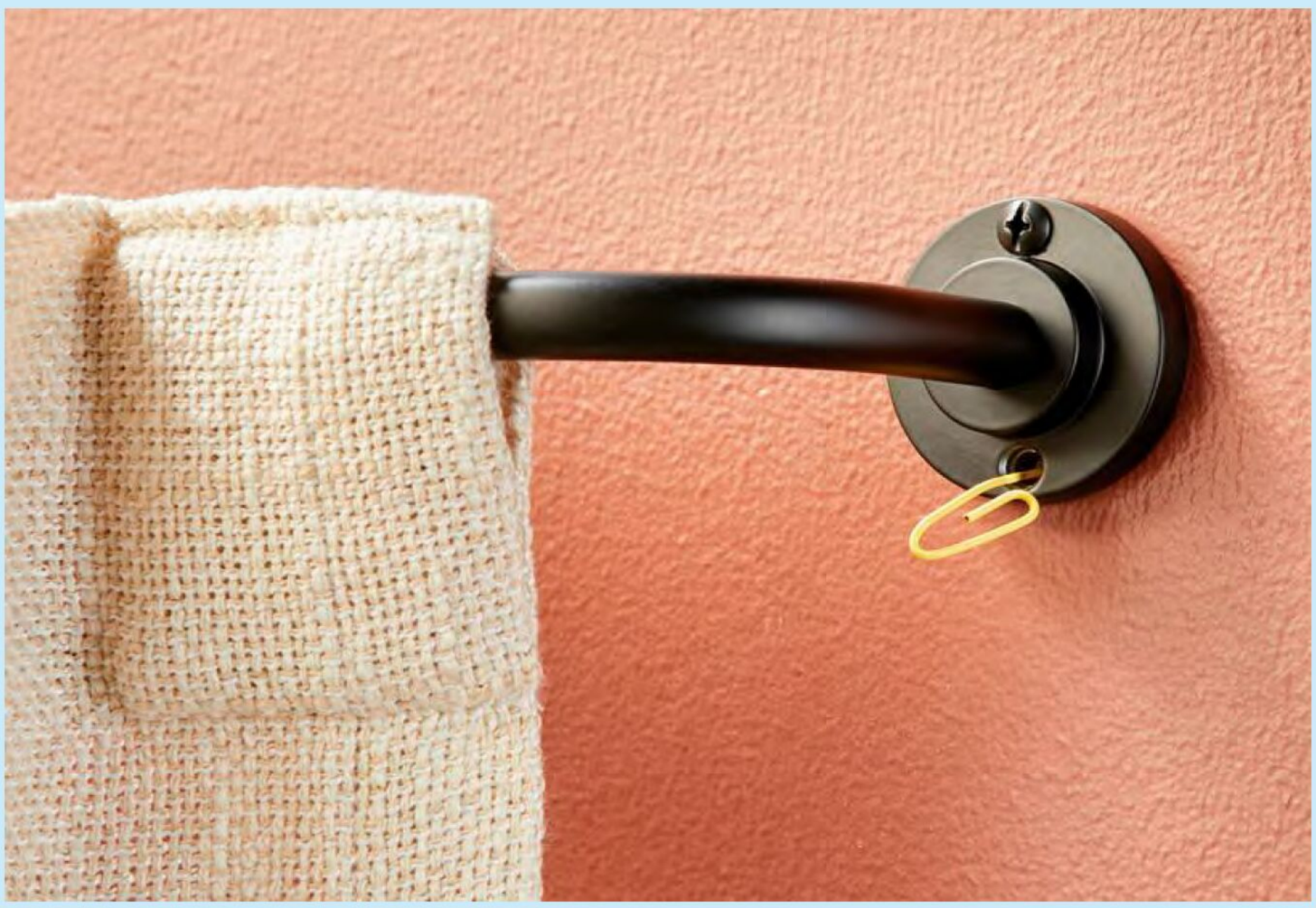
Wall-mounted spring-loaded toilet paper holders can sag or wobble due to a loose bracket. A bent paper clip wedged behind the bracket acts like a shim to push the bracket forward and firm up the tension.

Can't find that item you need? A paper clip makes a handy stand-in for a money clip, bookmark, letter opener or key chain.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ALENA ZHARAVA /GETTY IMAGES, THIS PAGE: TMB STUDIO

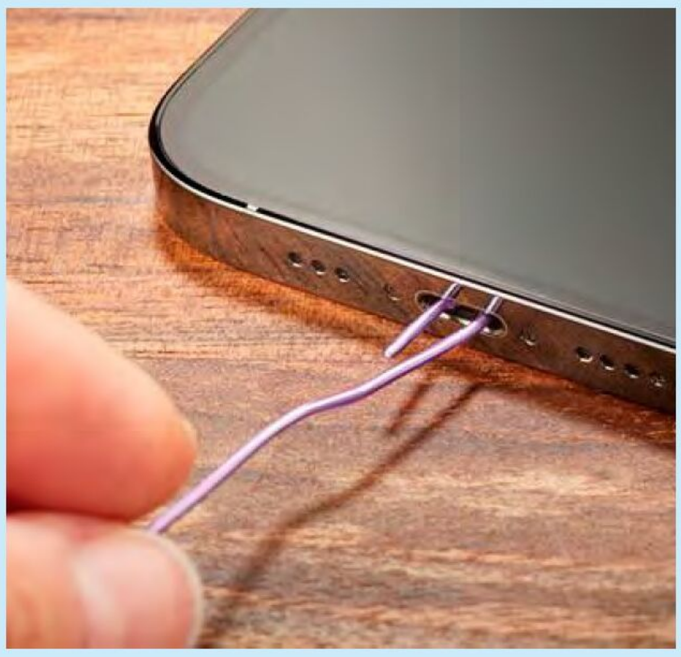
Fix a Clogged Drain

If your sink or shower drain is backing up, bend a paper clip into a small hook and gently wiggle it down the drain. Once it's past the stopper, twist and slowly pull it back up to snag hair, soap scum and debris. This won't solve a major obstruction, but it's a quick (and free!) remedy for a slow drain.



Stabilize a Curtain Rod

If the bracket supporting a curtain rod breaks, straighten a paper clip and insert it into the hole where the screw has sheared off or fallen out. Twist the paper clip onto the remaining piece of the bracket, or use it to help hold the curtain in place until you get a proper replacement.



Fish Out Pocket Lint

If the charging port on your phone or tablet is acting up, dust or lint is likely to blame. A paper clip bent into a hook can help fish it out. Power down the device first, and be careful not to scrape the walls or touch the delicate internal pins.

Save Your Spectacles

Use the end of a paper clip to create a temporary hinge for broken eyeglasses by inserting it into the hole where the arm used to be attached. This will keep your glasses functional until you can get them professionally fixed.

When threading a drawstring back into a piece of clothing, pierce one end with a paper clip and use it to guide the string easily through the casing.

TMB STUDIO

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Backyard Oasis

A *Family Handyman* reader transformed an entire yard into a private outdoor living space, perfect for family fun

We call our backyard retreat Bukiewicz Bay. This renovation was extremely labor intensive and took us more than a year to complete, but now we are proud to have our own little resort at home. We did almost all the work ourselves to save money, including building the deck and fence, running all the electric, installing French drains, and grading and preparing for the patio. The only thing we hired out was laying the turf and the patio stones. We made the space extra fun and functional by adding a bar around the edge of the aboveground pool, an outdoor TV and speakers, and even a dog wash station for our little Yorkie. We also have an inflatable projector to enjoy DIVE-in movies!

—**Amanda Bukiewicz,** Ladson, SC

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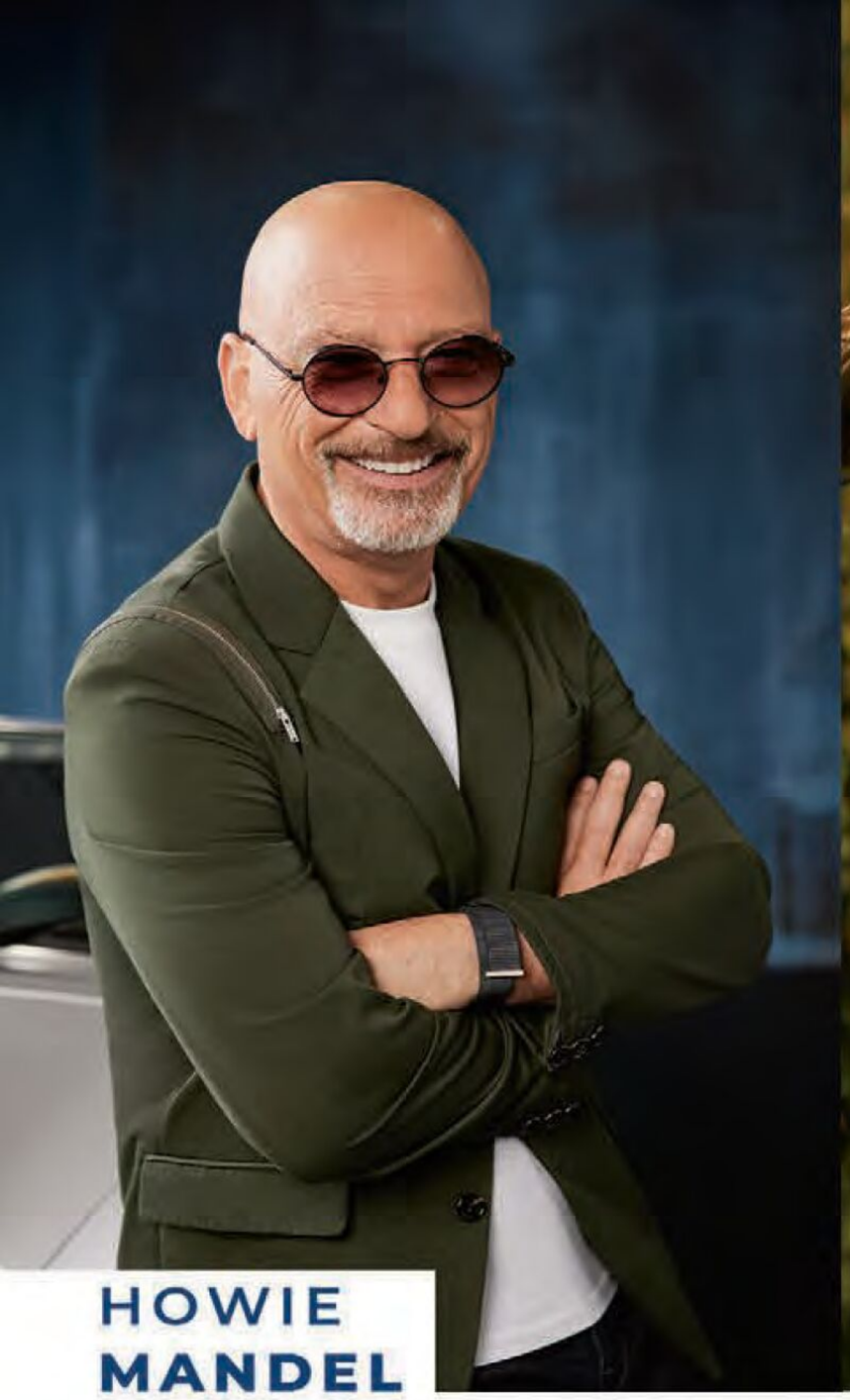

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