

The Home HANDYMAN

January/February 2026 • Vol 36 No 01



**BACKYARD
ENTERTAINING:
THE PERFECT
BRAAI**

**SA'S
ORIGINAL
DIY
MAGAZINE**

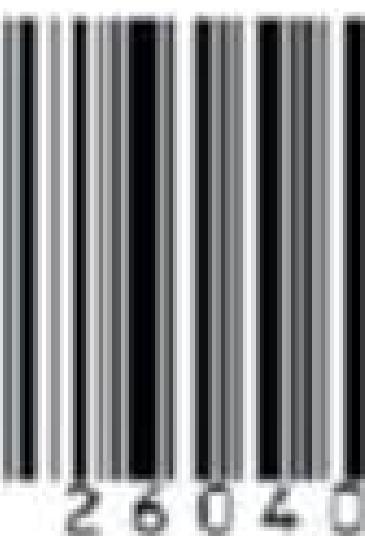


- Understanding cordless drill torque settings
- Your summer-to-autumn garden guide
- Thoughtful Handmade Gifts

**DIY PROJECT:
INSTALL A BUILT-IN
BRAAI**

**GARDEN:
INSTALLING AN
IRRIGATION SYSTEM**

**DIY PROJECT:
MAKING A BILTONG KERWER**



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FROM THE WORKBENCH

Backyard, workshop, or garden

Welcome to a fresh, practical, and inspiration-packed issue designed especially for homeowners and DIY enthusiasts who believe that a well-loved home is always a work in progress. As summer eases toward autumn, we've filled these pages with ideas, projects and expert advice to help you make the most of your indoors, outdoors, and everything in between.

Our main feature this month celebrates something close to every South African heart: *Backyard Entertaining – The Perfect Braai*. Whether you're planning your first built-in braai or refining your existing outdoor space, we guide you through design choices, smart layouts and those little touches that turn "just a braai" into the centrepiece of family life. You'll find step-by-step DIY projects ranging from choosing the right built-in unit to installing it safely and beautifully.

For tool lovers, our *Cordless Drill Torque Settings* guide breaks down one of the most misunderstood features of the modern drill, helping you use your tools with more confidence and fewer stripped screws. And if breathing easy at home is on your checklist, don't miss our practical advice on extending the lifespan of your air conditioners with simple routine care.

As the seasons shift, so should your garden. Our *Summer-to-Autumn Garden Guide* will help you choose what to plant, prune and prepare, while our irrigation installation feature shows that saving water and keeping your garden lush can go hand-in-hand. Inside the workshop, we bring you hands-on projects including building your own traditional *biltong kerwer*, reinforcing a *heavy-duty security gate*, and bringing ambience to your walkways with *solar LED pathway lights*.

This issue also continues our popular DIY learning series with a beginner-friendly guide on *Arc Welding*, plus quick and clever DIY tips for women on the go. If you're in the mood for small, thoughtful gestures, our handmade gifts ideas, including easy *Valentine's Day Projects*, offer personal, heartfelt ways to show you care.

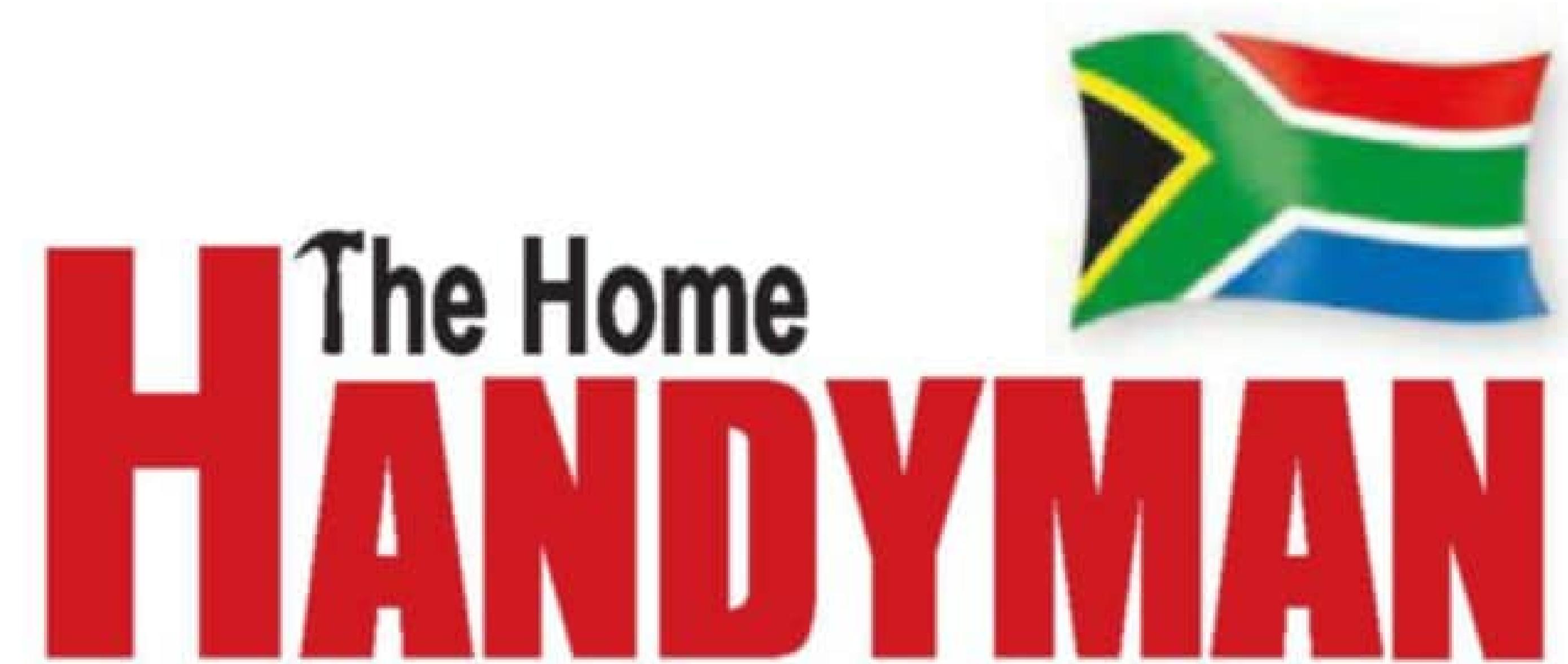
Round it all off with industry news, smart home-care advice and our always-fun collection of 5-minute DIY hacks.

Wherever your next project takes you, backyard, workshop, or garden, I hope these pages give you the spark (and the know-how) to dive in with confidence.

Happy building, braaing and creating!

Hannes Lindeque

Publisher



www.homehandyman.co.za

2026

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About The Home Handyman magazine:

The Home Handyman magazine is a specialized DIY publication and caters for a well-defined niche market since November 1993. The magazine equips its readers with relevant DIY information, knowledge and skills.

Editorial includes new products for DIY'ers, along with projects, home improvement ideas and expert advice. Expert advice from various fields (such as adhesives, abrasives, power tools, welding, plumbing, paint, lighting, waterproofing, wood and metalworking), provides readers with simple, cost effective solutions and methods in a series of practical, step-by-step features that are comprehensively illustrated. All projects feature local products and metric measurements, making the ideas easy to implement.

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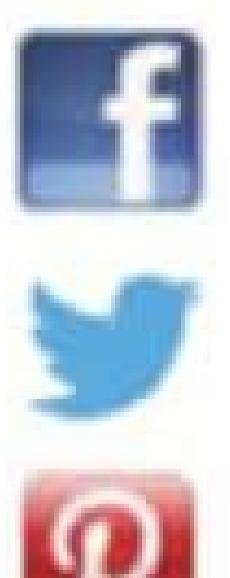
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THE PERFECT BRAAI AREA

Few things in life bring South Africans together quite like a braai. Whether it's a quick weekday chop, a Saturday rugby get-together, or a full weekend kuier, the braai area is where stories are shared, meals are made and memories live. Because of this, it makes sense to create a space that's comfortable, practical and enjoyable to use all year round.

Here's what an ideal South African braai area should include.

The heart of the space

The braai itself is the centrepiece, so choose wisely. Built-in wood-burning units remain popular for their flavour and atmosphere, while gas braais offer incredible convenience and quick heat. Many homes combine both: gas for weekday meals, wood for weekends.

If you're going the wood route, look for a unit with strong fire grates, adjustable cooking heights and a durable firebox. Stainless steel options hold up best over time.

Smart layout and comfortable flow

An ideal braai area feels natural to move through. The cook shouldn't be stuck in a corner with their back to the guests. Designing a U-shaped or L-shaped layout allows for social cooking, with prep surfaces within reach and seating close enough for conversation, but far enough to avoid smoke.

When planning, consider the position of the sun, wind direction and shelter from rain. A simple roof extension, louvre system or pergola makes the space usable throughout the year.

Worktops and prep space

If you've ever tried preparing braai-broodjies on your lap, you know the importance of proper counter space. Include

at least one solid worktop next to the braai for seasoning meat, assembling sides and placing tools. Granite, engineered stone and sealed concrete work brilliantly, but even well-finished hardwood can add warmth and character.

Storage for wood, tools and essentials

Clutter kills the vibe. Proper storage keeps the braai area neat and stress-free. Built-in wood holders, drawers for tongs and brushes, and cupboards for spices, paper towels, cleaning products and platters make a huge difference.

In coastal or humid environments, sealed cabinets and stainless hinges prevent rust and swelling.

Seating that invites a kuier

A braai is never just about the food. Comfortable seating, benches, loungers, stools around a counter or even a simple picnic table, turns your area into a social hub. Combine fixed seating with movable chairs so the space adapts to the occasion, whether it's a quiet night or a full family gathering.

Soft lighting such as warm LED strips, lanterns or wall sconces makes evenings feel cosy without attracting too many bugs.

Safety and ventilation

With open flames, safety is non-negotiable. Ensure the braai is positioned away from flammable materials, that the chimney or extractor vents smoke properly, and that the floor is finished in something non-slip and heat-resistant. You can also consider dropdown canvas curtain panels for protection from the elements, allowing you to enjoy the area in comfort throughout the year.

Having a fire extinguisher nearby (and knowing how to use it) is always wise.



Create a space to use all year round

Creature comforts that make it special

This is where your personality can shine. Think of features that will make your braai area not just functional, but exceptional:

- A bar counter or bar fridge,
- A built-in rotisserie for whole chickens,
- A pizza oven for weekend feasts,
- A sink for quick clean-ups,
- Weatherproof speakers,
- A small herb garden for fresh flavour,
- A hidden waste bin for the trash,
- A games area (dart board, pool table)

Little touches like hooks for aprons, space for potjie pots, or a dedicated spot for your braai grid give the area a personal, lived-in feel.

Easy maintenance, long-term durability

Outdoor areas work hard. Choose materials that handle sun, rain and smoke without constant upkeep. Stainless steel, stone, treated timber and quality brickwork stand the test of time. Waterproof sealants, UV-resistant coatings and regular cleaning keep everything looking sharp.

Your braai, your lifestyle

An ideal braai area doesn't need to be expensive or extravagant. What matters most is that it suits your home, your family and the way you like to entertain. Combine practicality with comfort, and create a space where guests feel welcome and the fire burns bright, exactly the way a true South African braai should be.

*Don't miss the article **How to choose the perfect built-in braai** in this issue.*



Some prefer plain and simple

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SikaWall®-165 is a new, one-component, water-resistant wall putty designed for skimming walls and ceilings to create a smooth, professional finish. This product is easy to mix and apply, suitable for both internal and external use, and ideal for contractors, renovators, and DIY homeowners.

Key features and benefits

- **Water-resistant:** The putty is water-resistant, making it suitable for both internal and external applications.
- **Easy to use:** It's a one-component product that is easy to mix, requiring no complex procedures.
- **Smooth finish:** It provides a fine, smooth, and high-quality finish on walls and ceilings.

- **Good adhesion:** The product has good adhesion to concrete and brickwork surfaces.
- **Versatile application:** Suitable for both internal and external use on walls and ceilings.
- **Broad audience:** Marketed to be user-friendly for professionals (contractors) and homeowners (DIY'ers) alike.



A practical guide for
DIY homeowners.

UNDERSTANDING CORDLESS DRILL TORQUE SETTINGS

A cordless drill is one of the most versatile tools in any DIYer's toolbox. It drills holes, drives screws, mixes paint, stirs mortar, tightens bolts and even sands with the right attachment. But many homeowners still feel confused by one particular feature: torque settings.

You've probably seen the adjustable ring behind the chuck with numbers running from around 1 to 20, or sometimes even higher. Many people turn it randomly and hope for the best, without fully understanding what it does, or why it matters.

Once you grasp torque settings, your drilling becomes smoother, your screws stop stripping and your battery lasts longer. This article breaks it all down in simple terms so you can get the most out of your cordless drill.

What torque really means

Most people think drills are all about speed, but torque is the power behind the rotation. In simple terms, torque is the amount of twisting force your drill can deliver. If speed determines how fast your bit spins, torque determines how hard it can turn under resistance.

Imagine turning a screwdriver by hand. You can turn it fast when there's no resistance, but when the screw becomes tight or hits a knot in wood, you need more force. Your drill behaves the same way, only it has a built-in system to control that force.

Why adjustable torque matters

Different tasks need different amounts of torque. Driving a small screw into soft pine needs far less force than driving

a long screw into hardwood. Too much torque and the drill will bury the screw too deep, strip the screw head or even split the wood. Too little torque and the screw will stop halfway.

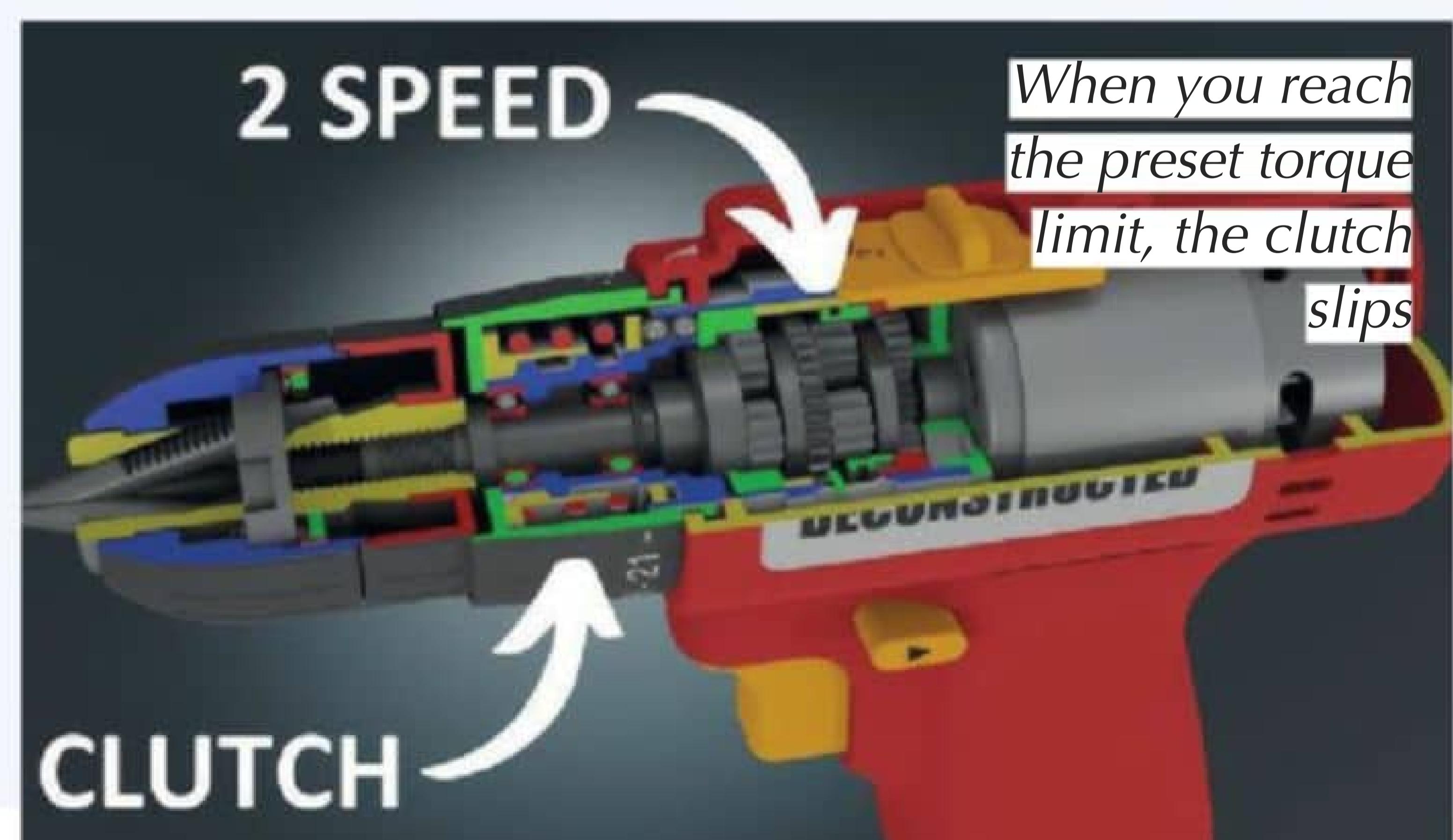
This is why drills have adjustable torque: it lets you match the drill's power to the job so you get clean, controlled results every time.

How the clutch works

The torque ring with the numbers is connected to a mechanical clutch inside the drill. When you reach the preset torque limit, the clutch slips. You'll hear a ratcheting or clicking sound - this is the drill protecting your screw, your bit and your material.

That clicking is not the drill breaking. It's the drill saying, "I've reached the torque limit you set."

Understanding this simple mechanism is the key to consistent, professional-looking results.



When to use high versus low torque

Low torque settings (1-5)

Low numbers are used when you need finesse and control, typically when working with soft materials or small screws. Light torque prevents overtightening and stops the screw from sinking too deep.

Low torque is useful for:

- DIY furniture assembly
- Softwoods like pine
- Plastic fittings
- Hinges, drawer runners and small brackets
- Screwing into drywall or chipboard

You'll feel the clutch kick in frequently on these settings - this is normal. It's protecting your workpiece.

Medium torque settings (6-12)

These mid-range settings are the everyday sweet spot. They provide enough power for most general household tasks without risking damage.

Medium torque works well for:

- Standard screws into wood
- Small pilot holes
- Driving screws into wall plugs
- General repairs and fixture installations

If you're unsure where to start, medium torque is usually a safe starting point.

High torque settings (13-20+)

High torque is used when you need maximum driving power. This is where the drill delivers strong force before the clutch slips.

High torque settings are best for:

- Long screws
- Hardwood
- Heavy-duty brackets
- Construction projects
- Bore bits and spade bits

Be cautious when using high torque - it can strip screws quickly if misused. Experienced DIY'ers often start high but reduce the setting if the screw goes in too aggressively.



Understanding "Drill Mode"

Most cordless drills have a setting beyond the numbered torque range - usually a little drill-bit icon. This is drill mode, and it bypasses the clutch completely.

In drill mode, you get full torque and full speed, which is essential when using drill bits. If the clutch were active, the drill would stop every time the bit encountered resistance, which would make drilling impossible.

Only use drill mode when drilling holes, not when driving screws.

Balancing torque, speed and control

Speed settings versus torque settings

Most cordless drills also have a low and high gear. These speed gears work together with the torque ring:

- **Low speed (Gear 1):** More control, more power, better for driving screws.
- **High speed (Gear 2):** Faster rotation, ideal for drilling holes.

Think of low gear as your "4x4 mode" and high gear as your "highway mode."

If you find the clutch slipping too often on a low torque setting, try switching to low gear instead of jumping straight to a higher torque number. This gives you more control.

Choosing the right torque through testing

Even professionals adjust torque by feel. No two pieces of wood behave exactly the same, so the best method is simple:

1. Start with a *low or medium* setting.
2. Drive the screw.
3. If the clutch clicks too early, increase the torque slightly.
4. If the screw sinks too deep or the head starts stripping, reduce the torque.

After a few screws, you'll instinctively know what setting works for each material.



How torque affects battery life

Using high torque forces the motor to draw more power. That means low torque = longer battery life, while high torque drains batteries quicker.

You'll notice the difference especially with older batteries or when driving many screws—using a correct torque setting makes your work smoother but also helps your batteries last longer.



Three actions; screwdriver, driller, hammer action

How to choose

To choose a cordless drill consider your needs by selecting a voltage (12V for light jobs, 18V+ for heavy-duty), a brushless motor for efficiency, and a suitable chuck size (13mm is common). For DIY'ers, brands like Ryobi are affordable, while professionals should look at brands like Makita or DeWalt for higher performance features like hammer functions. Consider buying a combo kit if you need multiple tools and check for compatibility with other tools you own by matching the battery platform.

How to choose a cordless drill based on frequency of use and other factors:

For beginners and DIY'ers

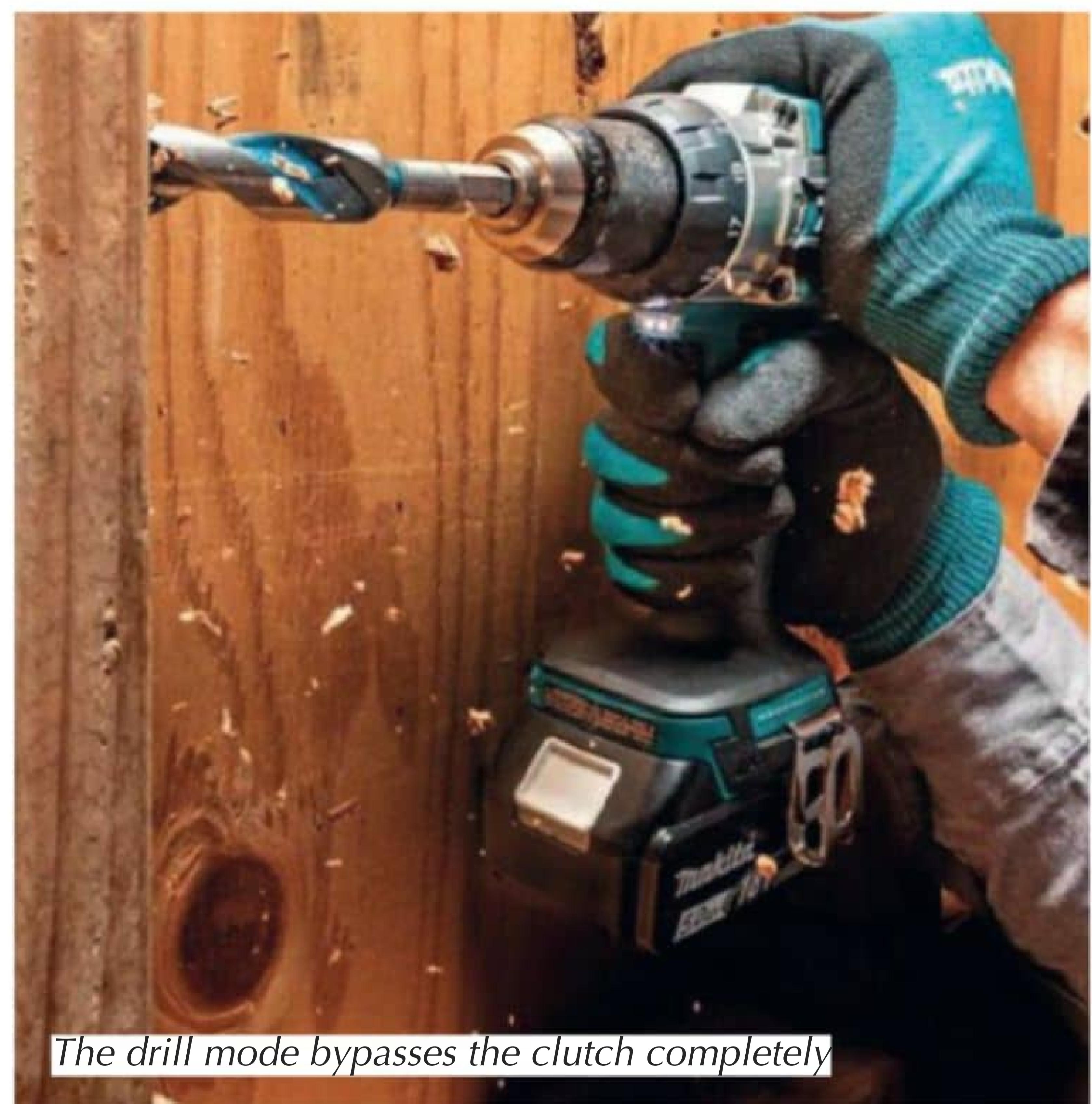
- **Voltage:** 12V is good for light tasks, while 18V is suitable for most home and DIY projects.
- **Features:** Look for variable speed control and LED lighting.

For professionals and heavy-duty use

- **Voltage:** Choose 18V or 20V+ for more power.
- **Features:** A brushless motor, dual-function (drill and hammer) capabilities, and a quick-release chuck are ideal.

Other important factors

- **Battery platform:** If you already own tools, stick with that brand's battery platform to share batteries and save money.
- **Chuck size:** A 13mm chuck is versatile and fits a wide range of bits.
- **Combo kits:** These are great for getting a complete set including an impact driver, batteries, and a charger, especially if you plan to do a variety of tasks.



The drill mode bypasses the clutch completely

Common mistakes DIT'ers make

- **Using drill mode for screws** - This usually leads to overtightening and stripped screws. Always use torque settings for screwdriving.
- **Ignoring material softness** - Soft pine, MDF and chipboard damage easily. A high torque setting will bury a screw too deep.
- **Not adjusting torque for screw size** - A small hinge screw and a long decking screw do not need the same force.
- **Staying on one setting permanently** - Many first-time drill owners never touch the torque ring. Proper adjustment improves accuracy and protects your project.

Mastering your cordless drill

Understanding torque settings turns your cordless drill from a simple tool into a precision instrument. Once you adjust torque confidently, you get cleaner results, fewer stripped screws and a far more enjoyable DIY experience.

The next time you pick up your drill, take a moment to set your torque before starting. With just a little attention to this often-ignored feature, your projects will look more professional and your tool will last longer.

Most cordless drills also have a low and high gear



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 What to plant, prune and prepare.

YOUR SUMMER-TO-AUTUMN GARDEN GUIDE

The first three months of the year bring long days, warm evenings and a rhythm of rain, humidity and occasional heatwaves. It is a rewarding time for gardeners: vegetables grow fast, flowers burst with colour and there is still plenty of time to enjoy the outdoors before the crispness of autumn arrives.

Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned gardener, planning your planting month by month will help you make the most of the season. Here is your easy guide to what vegetables and flowering tasks you can focus on from January through March.

JANUARY

Peak summer growth

January is hot, energetic and full of life. Plants grow quickly, but so do weeds, pests and fungi. This month is all about maintaining momentum while making the most of the warm soil.

Vegetables

January is still a productive time for planting warm-season crops. The soil is warm enough to encourage fast germination and quick growth.

You can sow quick growers like lettuce, radishes and baby marrows throughout the month, and you can continue planting sweetcorn and runner beans in most regions. Leafy greens such as Swiss chard and spinach do well with regular watering, while herbs such as basil absolutely thrive in the heat.

If you planted tomatoes, peppers or brinjals earlier in the season, keep feeding them with a balanced fertiliser and remove diseased leaves to keep airflow healthy. Most gardeners find that staking and regular watering makes a noticeable difference to fruit quality.

Flowering plants

Your flowerbeds should still be in full colour. January is a great month to sow quick-flowering summer annuals such as cosmos, portulaca, zinnias and sunflowers.

Deadhead spent blooms on roses, dahlias and salvias to encourage continuous flowering. Keep an eye out for mildew in humid areas and give your plants a light feeding to sustain their summer energy.

Hanging baskets and containers may dry out fast; water deeply and consider adding a layer of mulch to help retain moisture.



FEBRUARY

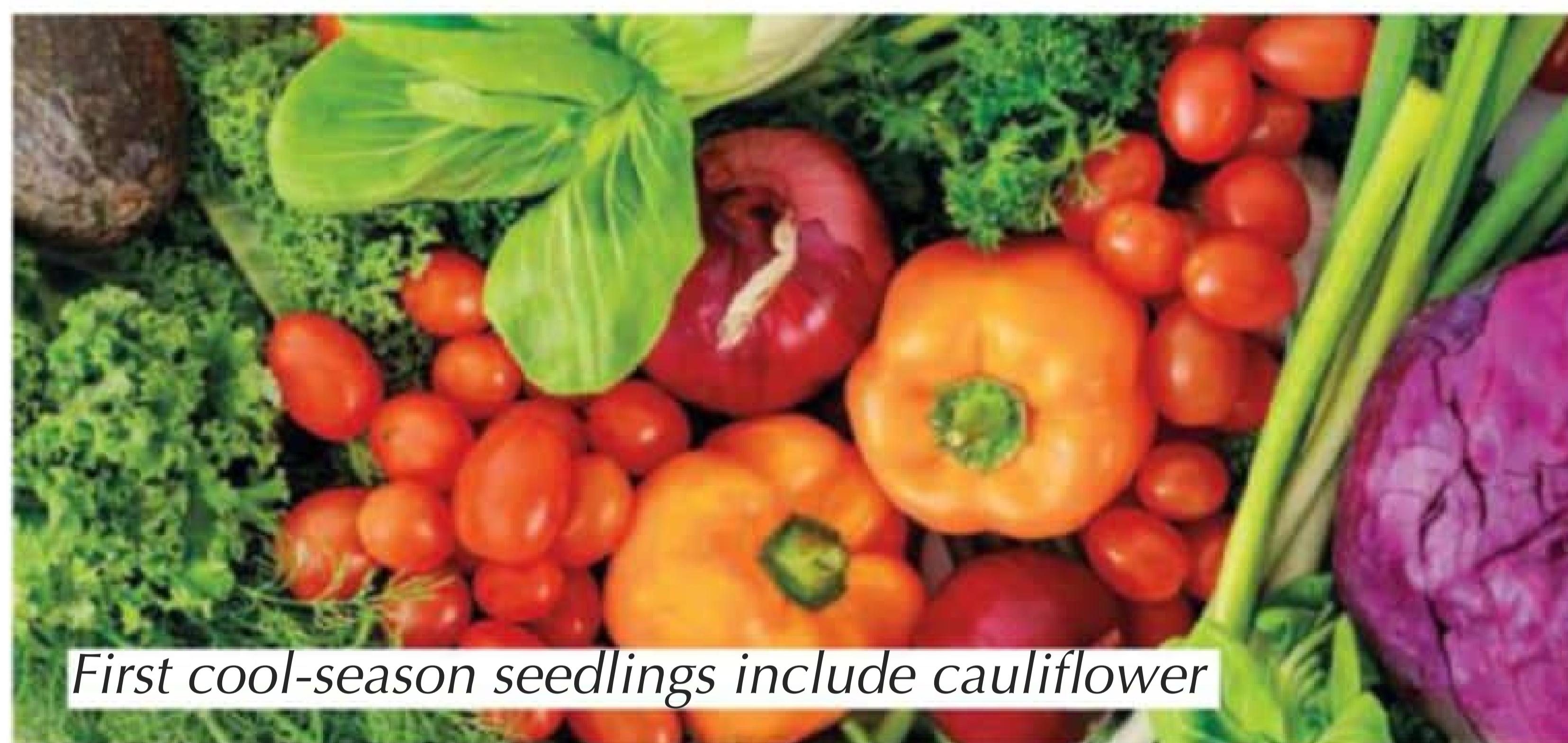
Preparing for seasonal shift

February is often the hottest month of the year, but it also signals the slow turn towards autumn. Daylight hours shorten ever so slightly, and gardens begin to settle. It is a good moment to take stock, refresh tired beds and begin late-summer planting.

Vegetables

This is the perfect time to sow your last batches of summer vegetables. Beans, beetroot, carrots, turnips, lettuce, spring onions and baby cabbage all do very well when planted now. Many gardeners also use February to start their first cool-season seedlings - broccoli, cauliflower, kale and early peas, especially in cooler inland regions where temperatures begin dipping earlier at night.

Continue harvesting crops like peppers, cucumbers and marrows regularly to keep them productive. Checking for pests such as aphids, whitefly or fruit fly is essential now; warm humid evenings can cause problems almost overnight.



Flowering Plants

Flowering annuals will still be vibrant, but some may look a bit tired after the intense heat. Light pruning and a slow-release fertiliser perk them up quickly. Continue deadheading to extend blooming.

February is also a good time to prepare your garden for early autumn colour. Sow seeds of pansies, violas, snapdragons and primulas in cooler trays or lightly shaded spots. They will be ready for transplanting once the weather cools.

In areas with heavy summer rain, consider improving drainage and refreshing mulches to prevent root rot.

MARCH

Early autumn abundance

March brings a noticeable shift in the garden. The worst heat has passed, nights cool down gently, and the soil is still warm enough for excellent germination. It's a productive transition month that allows for the planting of both late-summer and early-winter crops.

Vegetables

This is one of the busiest planting months of the year. You can sow carrots, beetroot, spinach, lettuce, peas, radishes, onions (in suitable regions) and cabbage family crops.

Peas love the cooler nights of early autumn and will reward you with excellent yields if given trellis support and rich, well-drained soil.

It is wise to clear out any spent summer crops to make room for fresh plantings. Old tomato and cucumber vines can be removed and the soil enriched with compost before planting winter staples.



Flowering plants

March is the month to establish your cool-season flower garden. Sow or transplant pansies, violas, primulas, poppies, Iceland poppies, sweet peas and snapdragons.

Sweet peas especially benefit from early planting; they enjoy the warm soil but love the cooler evenings, which help them establish strong roots.

If you have summer perennials such as lavender, agapanthus or gaura, give them a light trim to encourage neat growth through winter.

Autumn-flowering bulbs like freesias and watsonias can also be planted now in well-drained soil.



A season of transition

Gardening from January to March in South Africa is a rewarding mix of bright summer colour and the promise of cooler-season abundance. By planning your vegetable beds and flower borders month by month, you create a garden that stays productive, colourful and full of life long after the midsummer heat fades.

Whether you're growing food for your table or planting flowers for pure joy, these early-year months offer endless opportunities. With a little preparation, regular watering and a touch of creativity, your garden will shine from summer straight into autumn.

Show off with your project! Send us pictures of your finished DIY project, together with a short write up, and you could be featured in our **Reader's Projects** section! Email your pictures to editorial@homehandyman.co.za and share your project with fellow DIY'ers!

Don't miss the article **Installing An Irrigation System** in this issue.



Kwagga Smith's
Winning Tips for
the Season.

YOUR SUMMER GARDEN GAME PLAN

Rapid growth. Soaring temperatures. Rain-soaked soil. For most, summer brings a surge of garden activity - and with it, the need for consistent upkeep. From compact gardens to large outdoor areas, staying on top of seasonal growth keeps green spaces thriving and manageable. And, with the right equipment, like Husqvarna's range of power tools, maintenance routines become easier, more efficient, and even enjoyable.

Springbok powerhouse, farmer, and keen gardener, Kwagga Smith, shares his go-to tips for summer garden care - from practical routines and water-wise habits to smart tools that make maintenance easier and more efficient.

1. Cleaning

Outdoor surfaces like patios, driveways, paving, flowerpots, and garden furniture tend to collect dirt, algae, and debris during the rainy season. A pressure washer efficiently removes this buildup - just be sure to use a fan nozzle for delicate surfaces and keep a safe distance to ensure a thorough clean without damaging their finish.

2. Watering

Watering early in the morning or later in the afternoon gives plants the best chance to soak up moisture before the heat sets in. The key is consistency: if you water at regular times, roots grow deeper, and plants handle dry spells better. In summer, two to three deep waterings a week usually do the trick, unless it rains. Just keep a closer eye on potted or delicate plants as they dry out faster.

3. Spraying

A sprayer takes the effort out of routine garden care. Whether applying pest treatments or feeding plants with nutrients, it reaches tight spots around pots, raised beds, and edges that are tricky by hand. Targeted spraying saves time, reduces chemical runoff, and prevents overwatering. For best results, work during cooler parts of the day and always test on a small area first to ensure plants respond well, keeping your garden healthy and thriving.

4. Cutting

Got overgrown edges or thick, uneven grass? Depending on the size of your property, a combi brushcutter will make quick work of tough patches, weeds, and rough terrain without hours of effort. It's ideal for larger or neglected areas that a standard trimmer can't handle. With optional attachments for edging, hedge trimming, and more, this one tool can tackle multiple jobs, saving you time and energy during seasonal upkeep. And as always, don't forget your protective gear.

5. Trimming

Thinning dense shrubs improves airflow and allows light to reach all parts of the plant, reducing the risk of fungal growth and keeping plants healthy. A hedge trimmer is ideal for shaping and maintaining neat lines, enabling you to trim plants precisely with less strain. Always remember to first inspect hedges and shrubs for nesting birds or small animals before trimming to protect local wildlife.

6. Planting

If you're replacing plants or adding new ones, why not go for hardy indigenous varieties like aloes, gazanias, Cape honeysuckle, or plumbago? They're adapted to local conditions, so generally need less water and care - and they attract bees, butterflies, and sunbirds that help pollinate your garden. Planting a mix that flowers at different times keeps these pollinators around for longer, while also encouraging natural pest control. If you're not sure where to start, your local nursery can suggest combinations that suit your area.

7. Mulching

Kick off summer by spreading a thin layer of compost to feed the soil, then top it with mulch like bark, leaves, or grass clippings. It keeps soil cool, locks in moisture, and keeps weeds at bay while slowly nourishing your plants. Check your beds now and then and top up the mulch if it's looking thin. Just remember to keep it a little away from stems and trunks to prevent rot.



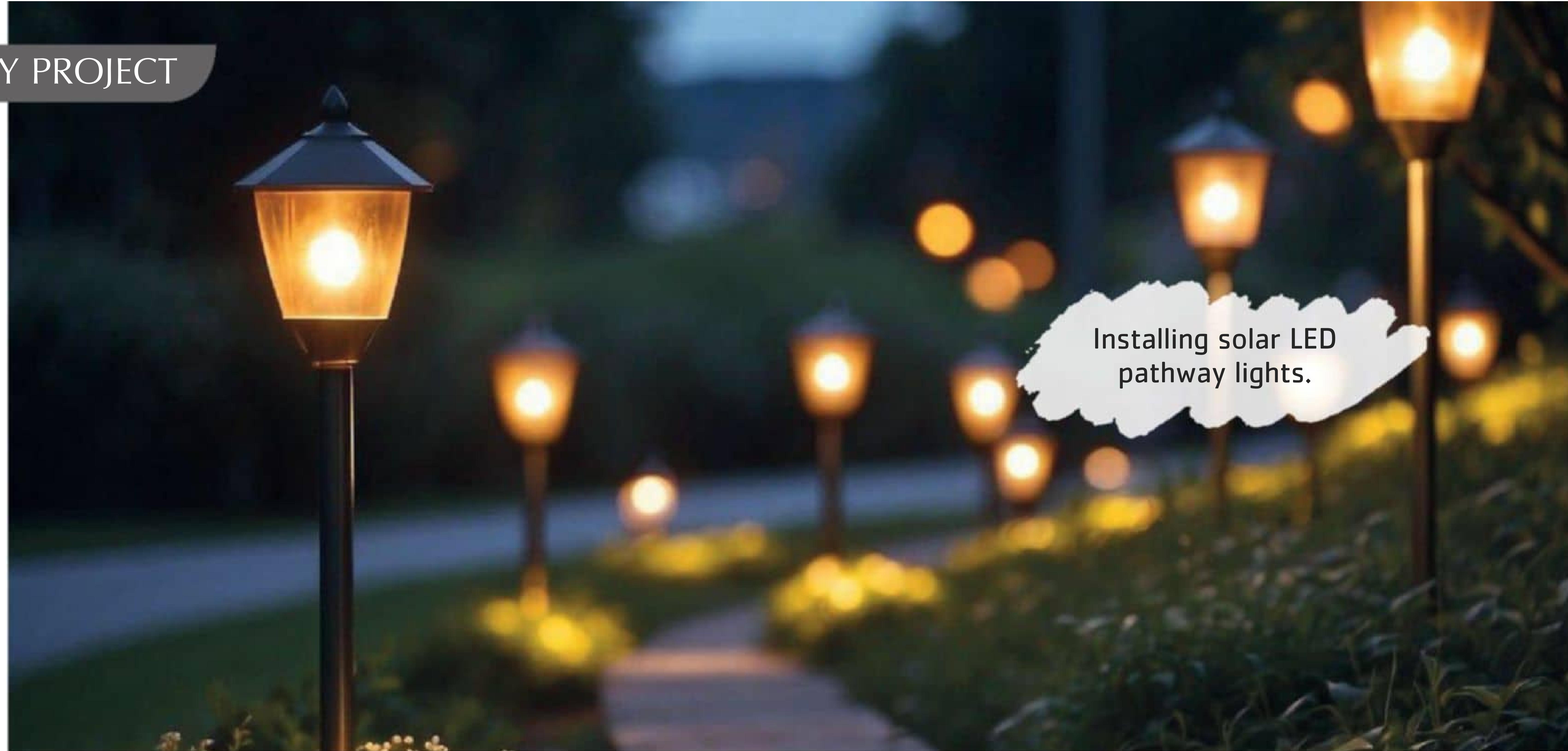
"Summer gardening isn't about doing everything at once; it's about doing the right things consistently," says Kwagga. "It's a bit like rugby: if you focus on the basics, stay in position, and play smart, the results come. Gardening is similar: follow a solid routine, use the right tools, and your garden will thrive," he concludes. "Work smart, not hard, and enjoy the season."

About Husqvarna

Husqvarna, a brand within Husqvarna Group which also includes Gardena and Husqvarna Construction, is a market leader in innovative and high-quality products and services for shaping green spaces in parks, forests and gardens. Since 1689, Swedish-born Husqvarna has a strong focus on research and development and is a pioneer in robotic lawn mowers and chainsaws. Today, the product portfolio consists of the next generation of robotic mowers, riders, chainsaws and trimmers for professional as well as private use. Sustainable value creation, product innovation and digitalisation remain important for the journey ahead. Husqvarna products are sold in more than 100 countries.

For more information on Husqvarna's outdoor equipment range, visit www.husqvarna.co.za





LIGHT UP YOUR PATH

A well-lit pathway isn't just about aesthetics, it's about safety, security, and welcoming guests to your home. Solar-powered or low-voltage LED lights offer an energy-efficient, easy-to-install solution for lighting walkways, garden paths, driveways, and patios. Best of all, you don't need to be an electrician to upgrade your outdoor spaces.

Choosing the right lights

Solar lights are perfect for homeowners looking for quick installation and minimal maintenance. They charge during the day and automatically light your paths at night, without any wiring. Look for models with efficient solar panels and LED bulbs; they last longer and provide brighter illumination than traditional mini-bulbs.

Low-voltage LED lights, on the other hand, are connected to a transformer and wired to a dedicated outdoor circuit. While installation takes more effort, they offer consistent brightness, can cover longer distances, and allow you to control brightness levels or timers.

Placement and design tips

Planning is key. Walk along the path during both day and night to imagine where lighting is needed. Place lights evenly, typically one every two to three meters, or closer in high-traffic or darker areas. Consider combining lights of varying heights to add dimension: short lights for edges and taller fixtures for focal points like trees or steps.

Solar lights need full sun exposure to recharge, so avoid shaded spots. Low-voltage lights should avoid placing cables under heavy foot traffic to prevent accidental damage.

Installation basics

For solar lights, installation is as simple as pushing stakes into the soil. Make sure the solar panel faces north to maximize sun exposure. For low-voltage systems, first lay out the cable along the path, then attach each fixture. Connect the system to the

transformer and test it before burying the wires under mulch or soil.

Always follow manufacturer instructions. Check connections for water resistance, and avoid running cables near sprinklers or areas prone to heavy rain runoff.

Common mistakes to avoid

• Ignoring sunlight needs

Solar lights in shade won't charge properly, resulting in dim or inconsistent lighting.

• Overcrowding fixtures

Too many lights create harsh, uneven glare; fewer, strategically placed lights look more elegant.

• Placing low-voltage lights too far from the transformer

LEDs lose brightness if voltage drops over long distances.

• Neglecting maintenance

Even solar lights need occasional cleaning of panels, and low-voltage systems require inspection of connections and bulbs.

• Burying wires too deep or under hard surfaces

This can make future repairs difficult and may risk damage.

Enjoy your glowing pathway

Adding solar or low-voltage LED lights is a simple DIY upgrade that enhances your home's beauty, safety, and functionality. With careful planning, proper placement, and regular maintenance, your pathway will shine night after night - welcoming visitors, protecting guests, and making your garden or driveway truly stand out.

Show off with your project! Send us pictures of your finished DIY project, together with a short write up, and you could be featured in our **Reader's Projects** section! Email your pictures to editorial@homehandyman.co.za and share your project with fellow DIY'ers!

The STIHL logo, featuring the brand name in a bold, white, sans-serif font inside an orange rectangular box.A white rectangular box containing the text "100" in a large, orange, stylized font, with "YEARS" in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font below it.

SPRING CLEAN YOUR SOLAR SYSTEM

Reclaim your solar panel efficiency with the STIHL telescopic lance and brush set attachments that connect to your STIHL high-pressure cleaner, allowing you to reach every panel effortlessly regardless of its height to banish dust, leaves, and debris.

- Adjustable from 1.57m to 4m, featuring an easy-to-alter angle.
- Lightweight and comfortable, with a soft-grip handle.
- Compatible with various attachments, including a rolling brush, suited for use on high windows, roofs, and overhangs.

Maximise the sun with minimum fuss with these practical and highly effective tools that makes tough jobs feel easy.



Keeping your cooling system running smoothly all year round.

ROUTINE CARE FOR AIR CONDITIONERS

Quick Check List

- Filter
- Drain line
- Thermostat
- Coils
- Seal and insulate ducts
- Vents

Ideal room temperature during summer

During the summer, the ideal room temperature is between 22 and 26°C. This temperature range is considered comfortable for most people during the summer months, as it helps keep the room cool while providing a comfortable living environment. An ideal temperature range may vary depending on factors such as the room's location, the amount of sunlight it receives, and the insulation of the walls and windows.

Consider additional measures to keep your home cool, such as closing curtains or blinds during the day to block out sunlight and keeping windows open at night to let in cool air.

Air conditioners work hard behind the scenes to keep our homes comfortable, especially during the hot summer months. Because they operate quietly in the background, it's easy to forget they need regular attention. But just like a vehicle needs oil changes, an air conditioner performs better, and lasts much longer, when given proper routine care. With a bit of simple upkeep, you can reduce breakdowns, improve efficiency, and save on electricity bills.

Why routine care matters

An air conditioner draws in warm indoor air, removes the heat, and sends cool air back through your home. Over time, dust, dirt, and moisture build up inside the system. Filters clog, coils get dirty, and moving parts start to wear. Without regular care, the unit has to work harder to cool the same space. This not only increases energy consumption but also shortens the life of the system.

Routine maintenance keeps your unit efficient, helps avoid expensive repairs, and ensures consistent comfort. In many cases, simple monthly and seasonal actions are all that's needed.

Start with clean filters

If there's one task homeowners should focus on, it's the air filter. Dirty filters restrict airflow, reduce efficiency, and make the AC work overtime. A clogged filter can even cause freezing on the evaporator coil, leading to poor cooling or system shutdown.

Most filters should be checked every month during cooling season. If they look dirty or discoloured, replace them. In homes with pets or dusty environments, monthly replacement is often necessary. Cleaner filters mean better airflow, healthier air quality, and reduced power usage.

Keep the outdoor unit clear

Your outdoor condenser unit is exposed to everything; dust, leaves, grass clippings, and even the occasional weed growing too close. When debris builds up around the unit, it prevents heat from escaping properly. This causes the system to overheat and run inefficiently.

Walk around the outdoor unit at least once a month. Remove leaves and debris from the surrounding area and trim back plants or shrubs so there's at least a meter of open space around the unit. Gently rinsing the exterior fins with a hose can help remove dust, but never use high-pressure water as it may bend the delicate fins.

Check the condensate drain

Air conditioners remove humidity from the air, and this moisture needs an escape route. The condensate drain line carries water from the indoor unit to the outside. Over time, algae and dirt can clog the drain, causing leaks or water damage.

A simple maintenance trick is to pour a small amount of vinegar or a drain-safe cleaning solution into the drain line every few months. This prevents algae growth and keeps the line flowing freely. If you notice water pooling around the indoor unit, it's a sign the drain may be blocked.

Inspect your thermostat

Your thermostat is the brain of your cooling system. If it isn't functioning correctly, your AC may run too often, not enough, or at the wrong times. It's worth checking that your thermostat responds accurately when you adjust the temperature.

If you're using an older manual thermostat, consider upgrading to a programmable or smart model. These modern thermostats can automatically adjust temperatures when you're asleep or away, improving comfort and reducing energy waste.

Listen for changes

Air conditioners usually run with a steady, familiar hum. If you suddenly hear rattling, clicking, grinding, or buzzing noises, it's a sign that something needs attention. Strange smells, like a musty odour or burning scent, also signal potential issues.

Catching unusual changes early can prevent bigger problems later. Often the issue may be minor, such as a loose screw or debris caught in the fan, but sometimes it can indicate a failing part that needs professional care.

Check the coils

The evaporator and condenser coils play a major role in cooling. When they get dirty, heat transfer slows down and the system becomes less effective. While a light layer of dust is normal, heavy build-up should be cleaned by a professional technician during an annual service.

A yearly inspection ensures the coils stay in good shape, improves efficiency, and reduces the risk of system failure during peak summer heat.

Seal and insulate ducts

Even a perfectly maintained air conditioner won't perform well if cool air is leaking from your ducts. Leaks force the system to run longer to reach the desired temperature. Poor insulation in the roof or crawl spaces also causes cooled air to warm before it reaches your rooms.

Checking for leaks around duct joints and ensuring attic ducts are properly insulated can make your AC work more efficiently. Sometimes the fix is as simple as sealing gaps with foil tape or replacing old duct sections.

Schedule professional maintenance

While many routine tasks can be done by homeowners, a

full annual inspection by a qualified technician is essential. A professional can measure refrigerant levels, test electrical components, clean internal parts, and identify early signs of wear. The technician will also ensure the system is operating safely and efficiently.

Many breakdowns during summer happen because small issues were ignored throughout the year. A yearly tune-up is far cheaper than emergency repairs or replacing a damaged compressor.

Keep airflow clear indoors

Furniture, curtains, and carpets can block vents without you noticing. When vents are obstructed, airflow is limited and rooms cool unevenly. Take a quick walk through your home and make sure all supply and return vents have open space around them.

Good airflow improves cooling performance and helps your home reach the desired temperature faster.

Energy-saving habits help too

Routine care goes hand-in-hand with smart cooling habits. Setting your thermostat a bit higher when you're away, closing blinds during hot afternoons, and using ceiling fans to circulate cool air can reduce strain on your AC. When the system isn't overworked, it lasts longer and runs more efficiently.

A comfortable home starts with care

Routine air conditioner maintenance doesn't require special tools or complicated skills. A few minutes each month can make a big difference in comfort, cost, and system reliability. By keeping your filters clean, inspecting key parts, clearing debris, and scheduling annual professional service, you keep your cooling system in top shape.

In return, your air conditioner will reward you with quieter operation, dependable cooling, and lower energy bills all year long.



A yearly inspection ensures the coils stay in good shape



Knowledge Is the Best Protection Against Costly Disputes.

HOMEOWNERS URGED TO BUILD SMART

Home renovations, solar installations, and water-saving projects are on the rise. However, the MBAWC warns that homeowners who enter building agreements without fully understanding both their and the appointed contractor's rights, responsibilities, or the importance of clear contracts and insurance, risk costly disputes. Highlighting the scale of the problem, Sihle Zikalala, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, noted at the 2025 International Construction Law Association Conference that South Africa is spending considerable amounts of money due to disputes within the construction sector.

"Disputes have noticeably increased, especially in the renovation and retrofit space," says Chandré Abrahams, MBAWC Marketing Committee Chairperson. "Homeowners are eager to upgrade their properties but often rush into projects without understanding the contracts, warranties, or insurance requirements. Rising material and labour costs add further pressure, which can heighten conflict when expectations and agreements are unclear."

According to the MBAWC, the most common mistakes homeowners make are simple, but costly. These include signing contracts without reading, or understanding, the fine print, not confirming that a contractor is registered or accredited, assuming verbal promises are binding, overlooking warranties and insurance, and failing to agree on clear timelines and payment milestones.

"Poor communication is one of the biggest culprits," adds David Gelb, MBAWC's Membership Services Officer. "Many homeowners don't communicate their ideas clearly or have a fully developed project plan before work begins. Often, they choose the cheapest quote rather than the most suitable contractor and that decision can have long-term consequences."

Gelb stresses that homeowners and contractors must start every project with a 'meeting of the minds'. "A fair contract should clearly state, amongst other items, start and finish dates, penalties for delays, agreed payment terms, insurance obligations, and dispute resolution processes."



A fair contract protects both homeowner and contractor. Abrahams notes that it is essential that all parties fully understand clauses like 'retention' (holding back payment until defects are fixed) or 'provisional sums' (estimates vs. fixed costs). "These details matter when things go wrong," he says. Homeowners should ensure the contract clearly covers scope, timelines, quality, warranties, and dispute resolution."

Ron Petersen of Risk Benefit Solutions agrees, "The contract should also match the project's scale and complexity," he says. "A simple one-page document might suffice for minor works like fitting a window frame, but a full renovation or new build requires a more detailed contract, such as the JBCC (Joint Building Contracts Committee) agreement available through the MBAWC."

He also warns that one of the most overlooked issues is insurance responsibility. "In new builds, the contractor typically takes responsibility for contract works and public liability insurance risks as well as the Sasria cover or political riot cover. The policy is to be issued in the joint names of employer, contractor and subcontractors.

However, for alterations and renovations, the homeowner has responsibility for the contract works insurance and Sasria in the joint names of employer, contractor and subcontractors," Petersen explains. "Not clarifying this upfront can leave costly gaps in cover." The construction period must also be specified in the policy, and insurers notified to extend coverage if the project runs longer than expected to avoid the insurance lapsing.

"Homeowners often forget that renovations can change the value and risk profile of their property," Abrahams advises. "It's essential to inform your insurer before starting work, as adding solar panels or making structural changes can affect your coverage. Failing to disclose these upgrades could invalidate your policy." Gelb adds that most insurers require an endorsement on the standard homeowner policy during alterations, including the contractor's details and project duration. "The insurer needs to know about any material changes to ensure you're properly covered." Says Petersen, "For example, a standard homeowner's policy may suffice for small projects like installing a kitchen, but major renovations usually require a separate contractor's all-risk policy."

Equally vital are warranties for materials and workmanship. "These protect homeowners against early failures or defects," Abrahams says. "Always request written warranties from both the supplier and contractor and keep them safe. They're your safety net if something goes wrong after completion."

Even with the best preparation, disagreements can still arise. "Early resolution is always the most cost-effective path," says Abrahams. "Start with direct communication, then mediation if necessary. The MBAWC can provide guidance or facilitate discussions before things escalate to arbitration or court." Gelb adds that most standard building contracts include dispute resolution clauses, but homeowners often don't know they

exist until it's too late. "Know your contract. It's there to protect you."

Knowledge is the best protection. Homeowners who understand their rights and responsibilities can ask the right questions, insist on fair terms, and reduce the risk of disputes. Careful planning, choosing a reputable contractor, ideally an MBAWC member, and documenting everything are essential. As Petersen says, "The best foundation for a home project isn't concrete, it's a solid contract and a clear understanding of your cover."

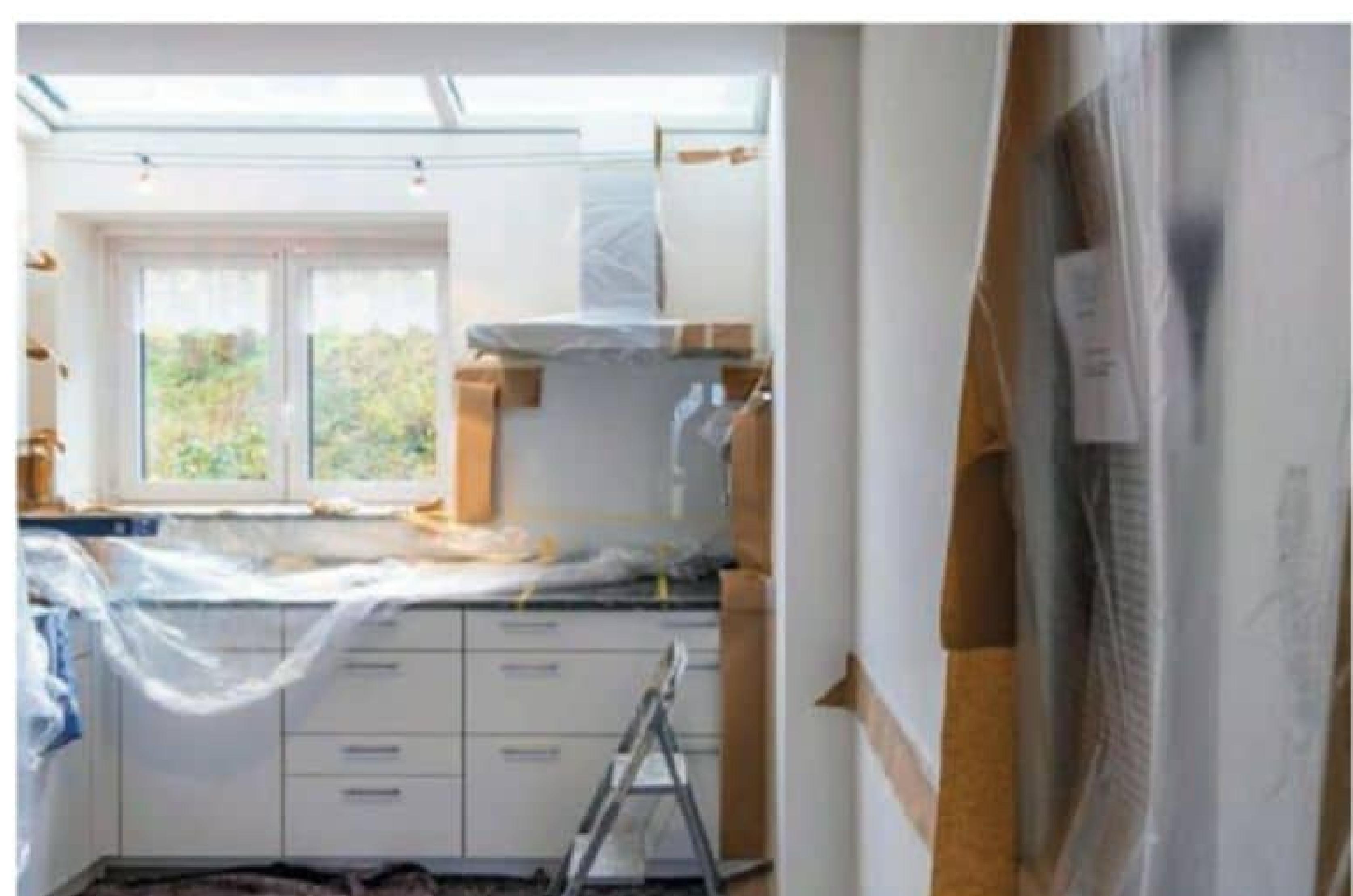
Through its resources, guidelines, and contract templates, the Master Builders Association Western Cape (MBAWC) supports homeowners in making informed decisions and accessing professional guidance when disputes arise. It also emphasises the importance of using recognised industry-standard contracts wherever possible. In addition, MBAWC collaborates with experts such as Risk Benefit Solutions to offer advice on insurance and guarantees.

About Master Builders Association Western Cape

The Master Builders and Allied Trades' Association Western Cape (MBAWC) is a leading trade association representing employers in the building industry and the public throughout the Western Cape. Established in 1891, it is the oldest organisation of its kind in South Africa and operates autonomously while being affiliated with Master Builders South Africa (MBSA).

MBAWC is committed to promoting quality, safety, and professionalism to ensure sustained growth and investment in the building sector. It does this by encouraging its members to work to the highest possible standards, aesthetically, technically and ethically - in short, to conduct their business thoroughly and professionally.

MBAWC is also committed to public benefit initiatives focused on promoting best construction practices, providing information to the public, enhancing safety standards, and supporting community development projects. By fostering collaboration among its members and the broader community, MBAWC aims to create a sustainable and prosperous environment for all stakeholders in the building sector.





Focusing your team's cleaning efforts where it matters most.

SECRETS TO A CLEANER, SAFER KITCHEN

It starts before the first dish is served. Before the final checks – straightening a chair or adjusting a table setting – before the doors open, and the first guest walks in. It starts with clean counters, gleaming floors, and the quiet confidence that every surface has been properly sanitised. Food safety and kitchen cleanliness aren't just afterthoughts or tasks to be hurried through at closing time. They're the foundation of everything that happens in a successful restaurant.

But maintaining hygiene in a high-pressure environment requires more than good intentions. "Behind the polished façade of fine dining or the bustling energy of a casual eatery, must lie a well-defined plan of invisible protocols and practices, ensuring consistent health and safety standards, and brand reputation," says Jeffery Madkins, Marketing Manager for Unilever Professional. "Because just cleaning where there's dirt doesn't hold up in 2025. It's expected that cleaners and kitchen staff are trained to follow a stringent cleaning and sanitisation system."

With that in mind, Madkins shares ten key areas that restaurants,



>> Jeffery Madkins*

guesthouses, hotels, and catering teams should prioritise in their cleaning routines. These are grounded in best practices, ensuring hygiene standards customers can trust – even beyond what they can see."

TEN PRIORITY CLEANING AREAS

1. High-touch surfaces

Door handles, fridge doors, counters, and dining tables should be cleaned and disinfected multiple times a day using a professional-grade surface cleaner, like Handy Andy Professional Multi Surface Disinfectant Cleaner.

2. Floor transition zones

In addition to mopping twice daily, prioritise high-traffic transition areas between food prep and service zones. These doorways and passages are critical control points for preventing cross-contamination. Use proper drainage mats and clean spills immediately to avoid accidents.

3. Hand-washed kitchen utensils and cookware

Wash thoroughly in hot, soapy water and sanitise by submerging in boiling water for one minute, especially after use with raw food. Use a powerful dishwashing liquid like Sunlight Professional Dishwashing Liquid that leaves no residue and lifts stubborn grease.

4. Walk-in refrigerators

Clean shelving in walk-in fridges weekly, with high-use areas cleaned more often. Wipe spills immediately. Sanitise handles and high-touch surfaces multiple times a day. Store raw and cooked foods separately, using clearly labelled containers to prevent cross-contamination. Conduct a deep clean monthly, including walls and floors.

5. Exhaust hood systems and ducts

Clean monthly in high-volume, busy kitchens to remove grease, reduce fire risk, and improve airflow.

6. Kitchen walls and ceilings

Grease and steam settle quickly, especially in busy kitchens. Regular weekly wipe-downs prevent build-up and keep surfaces safe and hygienic.

7. Restrooms and toilets

Customers often judge hygiene by the state of the bathroom. Disinfect high-touch areas like taps, door handles, and flush buttons multiple times throughout the day, especially during peak service periods when hourly checks may be appropriate. Re-stock soap, toilet paper, and sanitizer regularly, to ensure guests always have what they need. Perform a full clean at least once daily using an appropriate product such as Domestos multipurpose bleach, effective against 99.9% of germs, to maintain hygiene and eliminate odours.

8. Entrance mats and rugs

Often overlooked, mats trap bacteria and grime. Vacuum daily and wash regularly to maintain a well-kept and inviting entrance.

9. Staff uniforms and aprons

Fresh, spotless uniforms are a hygiene standard requiring daily laundering to remove stains and smells. Use Omo Auto or Skip Auto Washing Powder and Comfort Fabric Softener (Professional Range) for stain-free uniforms that reflect a clean and professional kitchen.

10. Waste disposal areas

Empty bins regularly, clean the surrounding areas, and replace liners often to deter pests and prevent foul odours.

"For those in the food service business, cleaning has to be a commitment, because cleanliness builds credibility," notes Madkins. "Patrons may not inspect your kitchen to ensure it is spotless – but they'll notice sticky tables, dirty restrooms and neglected surfaces. And that kind of oversight shows up where it hurts most: the bottom line. In contrast, structured cleaning systems maintain high standards and send a clear message of respect for customer well-being," he concludes.

Lasting impression

Guests don't need to see a kitchen to know how it's run. They experience it in how the food looks, tastes, and makes them feel. A spotless kitchen won't earn you a Michelin star – but without it, you won't keep one for long either...

"You can't fake clean," says Madkins. "You either build trust through hygiene, or you give guests a reason not to come back."

About Unilever Professional

Unilever Professional is a trusted partner for businesses in South Africa, offering innovative and effective cleaning and hygiene solutions. As part of the global Unilever family, Unilever Professional leverages well-known brands like OMO, Sunlight, Domestos, and Handy Andy to meet the needs of South African businesses across diverse industries. From hotels and restaurants to healthcare facilities and office spaces, our products are designed to deliver superior cleaning power, ensuring a better clean, better business.

Maintaining a safe and clean environment is crucial for a business's success, Unilever Professional provides tailored solutions that are not only effective but also sustainable. With a strong commitment to environmentally friendly practices, our products help businesses reduce their ecological footprint while upholding top-tier hygiene standards.

Unilever Professional goes beyond just providing products; we offer expert support to ensure your business can maximise efficiency, reduce operational costs, and maintain an exceptional level of cleanliness. Whether it's ensuring spotless surfaces or a monthly deep clean, Unilever Professional is dedicated to supporting South African businesses with reliable, sustainable solutions that meet the highest standards.

**Jeffery Madkins is the Marketing Manager for Unilever Professional Marketing Manager.*

For more insights, tools, or to explore Unilever Professional's solutions for the foodservice industry, visit www.unileverprofessional.co.za





BAKE, DECORATE AND CELEBRATE

Few things capture the spirit of the holidays quite like the aroma of freshly baked biscuits wafting through the house. Baking cookies with your children isn't just a fun festive tradition - it's a way to make memories, create personalised gifts, and even craft beautiful decorations for any party. With Miele's precision ovens, achieving perfect golden biscuits has never been easier.

Biscuit recipe

Makes: 30 - 40 biscuits

Prep time: 20 minutes

Chill time: 30 minutes

Bake time: 10 - 12 minutes

Ingredients:

- 250g unsalted butter, softened
- 150g caster sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract (or almond extract for variation)
- 400g cake flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Pinch of salt

Method:

1. Preheat your Miele oven

- Set your Miele oven to 170°C on Fan Plus or Conventional Heat 175°C.
- If you're using the Moisture Plus feature, add a short burst of steam at the start to help the dough bake evenly and retain a soft centre.

2. Cream the butter and sugar

- Beat butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the egg and vanilla extract, mixing until combined.

3. Add dry ingredients

- In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt.
- Gradually add to the butter mixture until a smooth dough forms.

4. Chill the dough

- Shape the dough into a disc, wrap it in cling film, and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

5. Cut and bake

- Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface (about 5mm thick).
- Use festive cookie cutters – stars, trees, reindeer or snowflakes.
- Place on a PerfectClean non-stick baking tray lined with parchment.
- Bake in your Miele oven for 10-12 minutes, or until lightly golden.
- For perfectly even results, use the Multi-level cooking setting to bake several trays at once without flavour transfer.

6. Cool completely

- Let the biscuits rest on the tray for a few minutes before transferring them to a cooling rack.

Decorating with your kids

Once cooled, the fun begins!

Simple icing glaze:

- 250g icing sugar
- 2-3 tbsp milk or lemon juice
- Food colouring and edible glitter (optional)

Mix the icing sugar and milk to form a thick, spreadable glaze. Divide into small bowls, add colourings, and let your kids unleash their creativity with piping bags, sprinkles, or edible pearls.

Tip: Miele ovens' TasteControl feature prevents overbaking, so your cookies have the perfect base for decorating: crisp at the edges, soft in the centre.

Finishing touches

- **For gifts:** Stack biscuits in clear jars or paper bags, tie with ribbon and add a personalised tag.
- **For the decorations:** Before baking, poke a small hole near the top of each biscuit using a straw. Once cooled and decorated, thread with ribbon and hang them up.

A Miele moment

From the precise baking power of Miele ovens to their effortless PerfectClean surfaces that make post-baking cleanup a breeze, every step of your baking experience becomes joyful and stress-free. These homemade biscuits don't just fill your home with the scent of the season - they fill it with love, laughter, and a touch of Miele magic.

QUALITY TOOLS FOR THE
HANDS THAT PURSUE
GREATNESS

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CHECK YOUR VEHICLE'S BRAKE PADS AND PARKING BRAKE



Y our vehicle's brakes are some of the most hardworking safety components on the road. They operate every time you stop at a traffic light, slow down at an intersection or descend a steep hill. Yet many drivers only think about their brakes when something goes wrong. Regularly checking your brake pads and parking brake doesn't just keep you safe, it can save you money by catching wear before it becomes a major repair.

This guide breaks down the basics in clear, practical steps so any driver can confidently inspect their brakes at home.



Understanding brake pad wear

Brake pads are designed to wear down gradually. Each time you press the brake pedal, the pads clamp against the metal rotor, creating friction that slows the wheels. Over time, this friction thins the pads. Catching this early helps avoid damage to the rotors, which are far more expensive to replace.

Listen for the warning signs

Your car often gives audible clues when the pads are nearing the end of their life. A high-pitched squeal is typically the sound of a small metal tab, called a wear indicator, rubbing against the rotor. It's built in to warn you that replacement is due soon.

Grinding, scraping or screeching sounds are more serious. These indicate that the pads have worn right down to the metal backing plate, causing metal-on-metal contact. If you hear this, stop driving and have the brakes replaced immediately. Continued driving can damage the rotors and compromise your stopping power.

Feel for vibrations and pedal changes

Another early warning sign is a vibration or pulsation when braking. If the steering wheel or brake pedal shakes as you slow down, it may be due to unevenly worn pads or warped rotors.

A soft or spongy brake pedal is also a red flag. If you need to press the pedal further than usual to get the car to stop, worn pads may be the cause, although low brake fluid or an issue in the hydraulic system can also produce similar symptoms.

Do a visual inspection

You can get a quick idea of pad thickness by looking through the wheel spokes. Locate the brake calliper, the pad is the dark, friction material pressed against the shiny rotor. A healthy brake pad typically has around a centimetre (or at least a noticeable layer) of material. If it looks very thin, uneven or cracked, it's time for replacement.

For a more accurate inspection, remove the wheel and look at the pads from above. Check both the inner and outer pads; sometimes one can wear faster than the other due to sticking calipers or uneven braking.

Check for uneven wear

Uneven pad wear is just as important as overall thickness. If one pad looks brand-new while the other is nearly finished, there may be an issue with the caliper slides or the braking balance. Catching this early prevents further damage and ensures the brake system works evenly on both sides of the car.

Testing your parking brake

Your parking brake, whether mechanical or electronic, is your final line of defence when parking on an incline, working under the car or holding the vehicle still during a breakdown. Because many drivers rarely use it, issues can develop unnoticed.

The simple incline test

Find a gentle slope and stop the car. Firmly engage the parking brake.

- In a manual vehicle, place the car in first gear.
- In an automatic, leave it in “Park” only after engaging the brake.

Now release the foot brake. The car should remain firmly in place. If the vehicle creeps forward or backwards, the parking brake needs adjustment or repair.

Manual parking brakes: What to look for

Get someone to pull the brake lever while you inspect underneath (with the car safely raised on jack stands). You should see the cables pulling the brake levers on both rear calipers. When the lever is released, the mechanisms should spring back freely. If the cables stick, feel overly loose or fail to move both sides evenly, the system needs servicing.

You may also notice that the brake lever pulls up unusually high, this often means the cable has stretched or the rear pads or shoes are worn.

Electronic parking brakes: How they warn you

Electronic parking brakes use small motors to clamp the rear brakes. Instead of cable stretch, the system monitors itself and warns you via dashboard lights. A flashing or solid parking-brake symbol, or a message such as *Parking Brake Fault*, may indicate:

- A worn parking brake mechanism
- Low brake fluid
- Loose electrical connections
- Failed actuators

Ignore these messages, and you risk being unable to secure the vehicle when you need it most.

Common mistakes drivers should avoid

Even well-meaning DIY checks can go wrong if you don't know what to avoid. Here are the mistakes most people make when checking brakes:

Ignoring small squeaks and delaying checks

A mild squeal often becomes a grinding noise far sooner than expected. Early attention prevents expensive rotor damage.

Relying only on dashboard warnings

Not all cars have electronic wear sensors. Many older vehicles rely solely on your ears and eyes.

Checking only one wheel

Brake pad wear can differ between wheels. Always check both sides of the axle.

Using the parking brake only occasionally

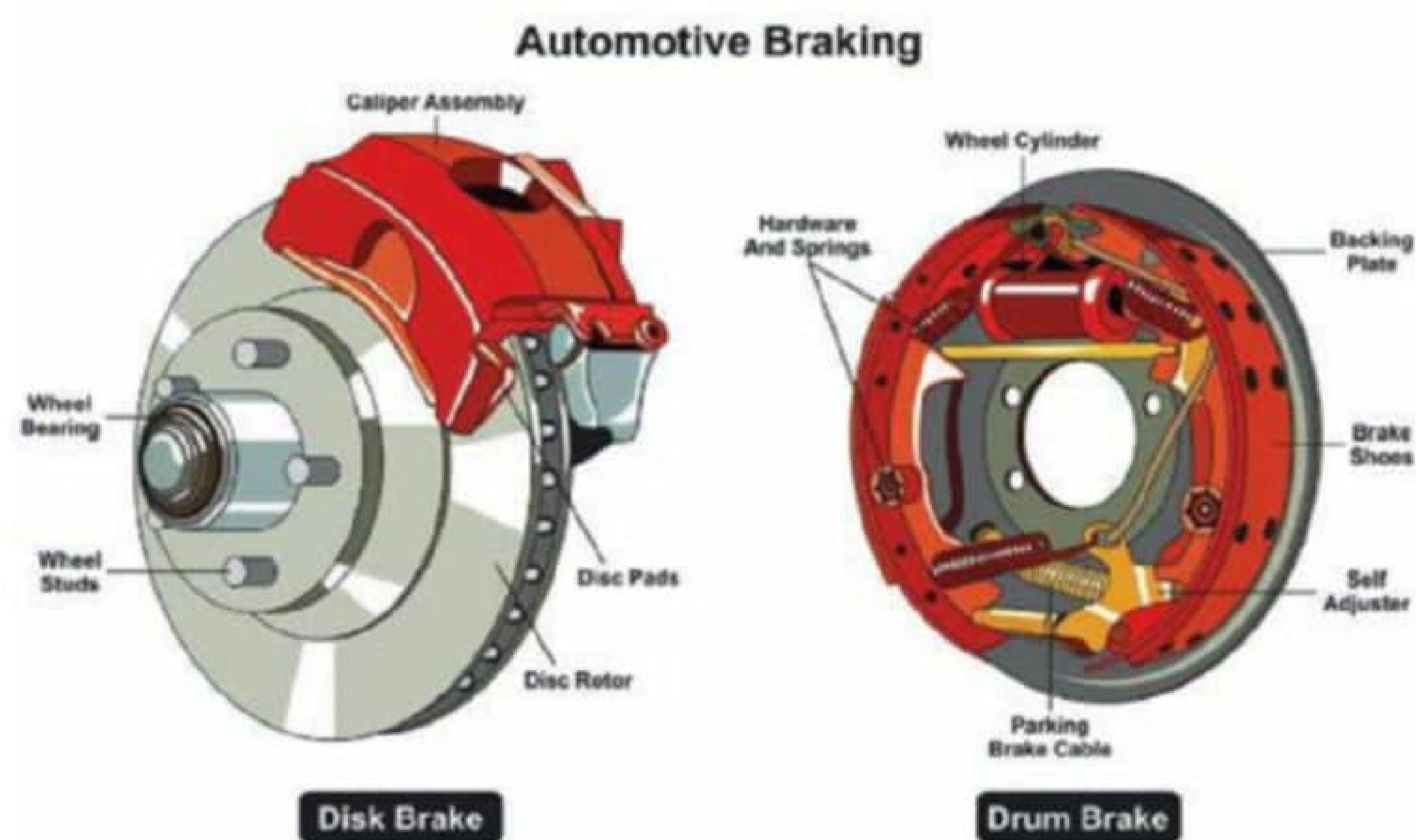
Mechanical parking brakes can seize if neglected. Use yours regularly to keep the cables and levers moving freely.

Testing the parking brake on a steep hill

An incline test should be done on a gentle slope first to avoid roll-away accidents.

Assuming electronic parking brakes never need service

They still rely on friction material and must be inspected just like manual systems.



Stay safe with regular checks

Checking your brake pads and parking brake isn't difficult and takes only a few minutes, but the benefits are huge. You'll catch early signs of wear, prevent unexpected failures and keep your car stopping smoothly and safely.

Whether you're an everyday commuter or a weekend DIY enthusiast, making brake inspections part of your routine maintenance is one of the simplest and smartest habits you can adopt. If anything feels uncertain or unusual, don't hesitate to consult a qualified mechanic; brakes are one place where guesswork simply isn't worth the risk.



DIY hacks

Quiet a squeaky door

If a door hinge won't stop squeaking, grab a can of cooking spray from the kitchen. Spray a little on the hinge pins, swing the door back and forth a few times, and enjoy a silent close, no oil or special lubricant needed.



Fix loose screws

When screws in wood won't tighten anymore, dip a couple of wooden toothpicks in wood glue, insert them into the stripped hole, and snap off the excess. Reinsert the screw - it'll grip tightly again as if new.



Shine chrome fixtures

Mix a spoonful of baking soda with a few drops of lemon juice to make a paste. Rub it on dull taps or showerheads using a soft cloth, rinse, and buff dry. It cuts grime and leaves metal sparkling in minutes.



Remove sticker residue

Got sticky residue left from labels or price tags? Rub a little cooking oil or peanut butter over the area, wait a few minutes, then wipe clean with a paper towel. It breaks down the adhesive safely without scratching surfaces.



Stop slipping rugs

Flip the rug over and apply lines of hot glue along the corners and edges. Once it cools, the rubbery texture grips the floor and prevents sliding - no expensive non-slip mats required.



Refresh stale air

In a spray bottle, mix one cup of water, two tablespoons of baking soda, and ten drops of your favourite essential oil. Shake and spray around the room to neutralize odours and leave a light, natural fragrance behind.





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Part 2/3 - Reinforcing and Assembling for Strength.



Tools:

- Measuring tape
- Welder
- Angle grinder
- Metal saw or chop saw
- Framing square
- Drill
- Clamps
- Proper safety gear

Materials:

- Bullet hinges
- 25mm x 25mm steel tubing
- 12mm round bar or steel mesh
- Zinc-rich primer or galvanising spray
- Paint

Welded joints

Good welded joints have a strong, uniform appearance with full penetration, meaning the weld metal fuses completely with the base materials, and are free of defects like cracks or holes. The strength depends on the joint type, with butt joints typically being the strongest and most suitable for load-bearing situations.

HEAVY-DUTY SECURITY GATE

By now, your gate posts are solidly set in concrete, and your rectangular frame is cut, tacked, and checked for alignment. It's time to give your gate its real muscle - welding it securely, adding diagonal braces to prevent sagging, and installing

the infill panels that stop intruders from reaching through.

This stage requires patience and precision, but once complete, you'll have a structure built to outlast most store-bought security gates.

Step-by-step guide

Step 1

Welding the frame properly

A strong weld is the backbone of a reliable gate. Poorly welded joints can lead to warping, twisting, or structural weakness - especially under South Africa's temperature extremes or the strain of frequent use.

a. Prepare the joints: Before welding, clean each joint with an angle grinder to remove mill scale, rust, or oil. This ensures better penetration and stronger welds.

b. Tack first, weld second: Tack-weld all four corners again to keep the

frame square. Measure diagonally one last time - both diagonals must match within a few millimetres.

c. Full weld: Once you're sure the frame is true, run full, continuous weld beads along every joint. Alternate between opposite sides to balance the heat and prevent warping.

d. Cool naturally: Avoid quenching hot metal in water - it can cause brittleness. Let the frame cool slowly in open air.

TIP: If you have access to a welding table, clamp the frame flat during welding to keep everything aligned. On

a concrete surface, use spacers beneath the frame to lift it slightly so the weld beads don't stick to the ground.

Step 2

Adding diagonal bracing

A common problem with heavy swing gates is sagging — the free end gradually drops over time, making it difficult to close or latch. The cure is diagonal bracing.

a. Measure the brace: For a single swing gate, measure from the bottom hinge corner to the top opposite corner. Cut a piece of 25mm x 25mm steel tubing to fit.

b. Position correctly: Always run the brace from the bottom hinge side to the top latch side. This direction transfers the gate's weight back toward the hinge, preventing droop. (Scan the QR-Code on page 22 to see the correct way to brace a gate. – Ed.)

c. Tack and weld: Tack both ends of the brace first. Check that the gate is still square, then fully weld it in place.

d. Add cross bracing (optional): For very wide gates, especially double-leaf designs, add an "X" brace by repeating the process in the opposite direction. This provides immense rigidity.

Diagonal bracing doesn't just stop sagging - it also strengthens the gate against impacts and forced entry attempts.

Step 3

Adding the infill panels

Now it's time to close off the open frame with security infill - the part that keeps intruders out. Depending on your design and preference, you can use steel bars, expanded mesh, or decorative security panels.

a. Choose your infill wisely:

- Vertical steel bars (12mm or thicker) are a classic choice, providing excellent visibility while maintaining security. (I personally

prefer steel reinforcing bar, commonly known as rebar – Ed.)

• Steel mesh (4mm or thicker) offers full coverage and is harder to climb. Make sure the openings are small enough that a hand or crowbar can't fit through.

b. Cut to size: Measure and cut your infill pieces slightly smaller than the inner dimensions of your frame to allow for welding space.

c. Position evenly: Space vertical bars 80 to 100mm apart, ensuring consistent gaps for both aesthetics and strength.

d. Tack into place: Use clamps or magnets to hold each bar or mesh panel steady while you tack them in position.

e. Fully weld all joints: Go back and complete every weld. A single weak spot can be exploited by someone trying to pry open the gate.

TIP: When welding mesh, avoid overheating - too much heat can warp the material. Short, staggered welds work best.



12mm rebar



Carefully smooth down all welds



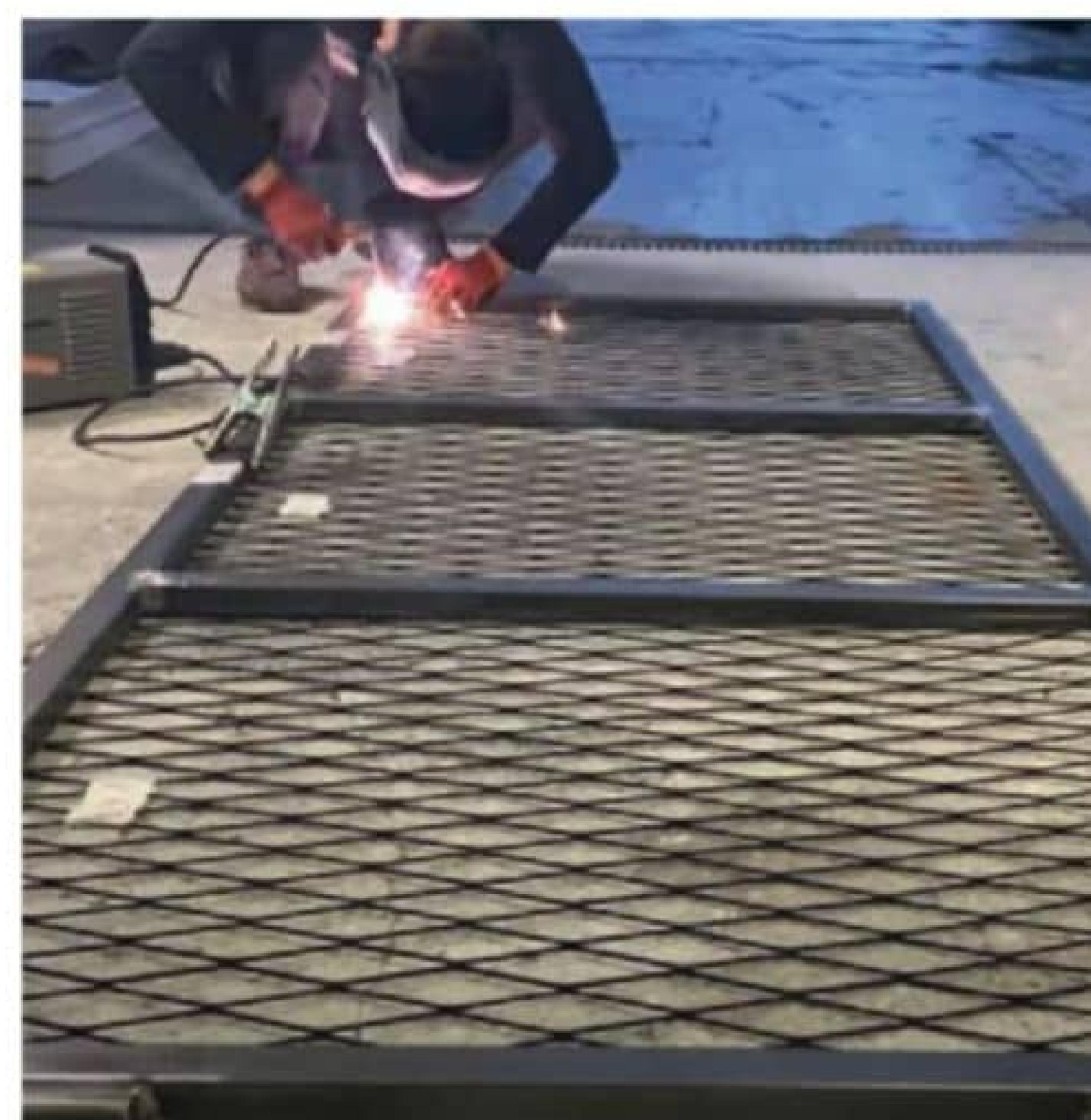
Before painting, clean the entire gate thoroughly



Space vertical bars 80 to 100mm apart



Weld the frame properly



You can use mesh metal for the infill panels



Mark the exact hinge and latch positions

Step 5

Test-fitting the frame

Before you move on to hinge installation, check how the gate fits between your posts. Lift the frame into place and rest it on blocks or shims to simulate its final height.

You should have a 5mm gap on each side - just enough for clearance but not wide enough to allow easy prying. Ensure the latch side meets the post evenly from top to bottom. If it doesn't, recheck the post alignment or trim minor irregularities with the grinder.

It's far easier to correct these issues now than after the gate has been painted and mounted.

Step 6

Preparing for hardware

Before installing hinges or locks, mark the exact hinge and latch positions on both the frame and posts. For large or heavy gates, a third hinge midway between the top and bottom provides extra support and prevents long-term sagging.

Mark where the hinges will attach, and clean those areas thoroughly with the grinder - welding over paint or rust weakens the joint. If using barrel hinges or weld-on gate hinges, make sure their axes align perfectly, or the gate will bind when opening. (See our article "How to install bullet hinges like a pro" on page 28, September/October 2025 issue - Ed.)

Reinforcement tips for high-security applications

Homeowners often face not just petty theft but aggressive break-in attempts. To add further strength:

- **Double up the latch area:** Weld a small 5mm thick steel plate behind the latch region to prevent crowbars or spanners from forcing it open.
- **Add anti-lift tabs:** Weld small steel tabs above and below the hinge barrels so the gate can't be lifted off its hinges.
- **Reinforce hinge welds:** Use full-length welds and consider gusset plates - small triangular reinforcements between the hinge and frame - for extra rigidity.

• **Use tamper-proof welds:** After installing hinges, weld over the hinge pins or bolts to make them non-removable.

These reinforcements turn your gate from a simple barrier into a serious line of defence.

Step 7

Cleaning and prepping for paint

Before painting, clean the entire gate thoroughly. Use acetone or another solvent to remove oil, dust, and metal shavings. A clean surface ensures that your primer and paint adhere properly.

TIP: If you live in a coastal area like Durban, Port Elizabeth or Cape Town, consider a zinc-rich primer or galvanising spray before painting. Salt air accelerates corrosion, so extra protection is well worth the effort.



The only way to brace a gate

Practical Insight: Weather vs. Crime

Security gates face two relentless enemies - weather and criminals. Heat expansion, humidity, and heavy rainfall can weaken welds or cause rust that eventually leads to failure. Likewise, opportunistic criminals look for easy entry points like weak locks, rusted hinges, or poorly braced frames.

By focusing on precision welding, strong bracing, and full infill coverage, you're already several steps ahead. This kind of gate

can withstand both natural and human abuse for decades with only minimal maintenance.

Coming next in this three part DIY series, we'll install and secure everything with anti-tamper fittings; and complete the project with a durable, weather-resistant finish. You'll also learn how to maintain your gate so it stays strong, rust-free, and smooth to operate year after year.

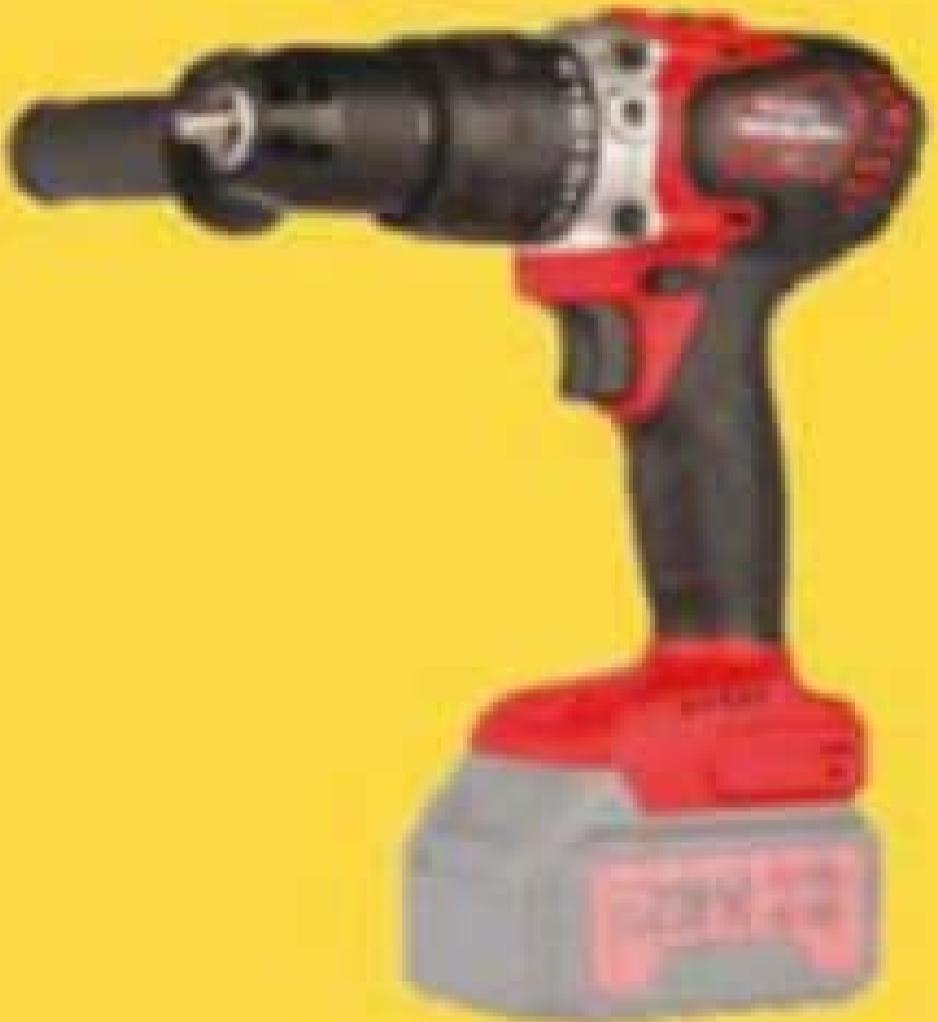
Don't miss the article **How to Arc Weld** in this issue.

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MAINTENANCE NEGLECT

South Africans take home security seriously. Investing in retractable gates, burglar bars, security shutters, and alarm systems, all to safeguard the people and possessions we care about most. Yet, one of the most overlooked risks to that safety isn't external. It's the slow decline of the very barriers we trust to keep danger out.

Over time, weather, pollution, and simple wear and tear can quietly erode the effectiveness of our home security. And while many homeowners pride themselves on having solid gates and locks, few realise that maintenance is what keeps those defences working when it matters most.

"Security isn't just about the day your gate is installed," says Damian Judge, Sales and Marketing Executive at Trellidor. "It's about how that gate performs five, ten, or even fifteen years later, and that depends entirely on how well it's been looked after."

When 'set and forget' becomes a safety risk

Security fixtures are seen as permanent. Once a retractable gate or louver shutter is installed, it's assumed to be indestructible. But Judge cautions that this mindset can be dangerous.

"Every moving part in a security barrier, from the locks to the rollers, experiences wear. Dirt, moisture, and corrosion can all reduce its effectiveness. You might not notice these changes immediately, but they can make a huge difference in an emergency."

A sticking lock, a jammed track, or a rusted surface might seem minor, but these are early warning signs of reduced protection. "Criminals look for weaknesses," adds Judge. "If

your barrier doesn't close properly or the lock mechanism is compromised, that's the point of entry they'll exploit."

Our climate is a tough opponent

South Africa's diverse climate presents unique challenges for home security materials. Coastal homeowners face salty air that corrodes metal, while inland areas battle dust, heat, and pollution that can damage coatings and moving parts.

Judge explains that even the strongest materials have limits. "We treat our aluminium and steel products with anti-corrosion coatings and UV-resistant finishes to help them withstand harsh conditions. But no surface treatment can completely protect against years of build-up if it's not cleaned and maintained."

"Consistent cleaning schedules are not just about keeping products looking good," says Judge. "They're about preventing long-term damage and ensuring that your barriers still operate as securely as the day they were installed."

WHERE MAINTENANCE MATTERS MOST

Through decades of experience, Trellidor technicians have identified a few key areas where maintenance can make or break a home's security.

1. Tracks and rollers

Dirt and debris often accumulate in sliding or retractable gate tracks, causing the system to stick or scrape. "Clean tracks are essential for smooth operation," says Judge. "A gate that drags or jams is a security risk waiting to happen."

2. Locks and keys

Locks are one of the most common failure points in home break-ins. Judge advises homeowners to test their locks regularly and never spray lubricant directly into keyholes. "If a lock feels stiff, don't force it, have it checked. And keep track of every key. Lost or duplicated keys are an often-ignored threat."

Should there be a faulty lock or cylinder, it is advised to contact authorised franchises, rather than your nearest locksmith. This will ensure only genuine components are used and product warranties and security standards remain intact.

3. Surface Corrosion

Even powder-coated metal can degrade when exposed to salty or polluted air. "Wiping surfaces with a soft cloth and mild, salt-free cleaner can prevent rust from taking hold," he notes. "Avoid harsh detergents - they strip away protective coatings."

4. Alignment Issues

A gate or shutter that suddenly feels skewed or difficult to open isn't just inconvenient, it's vulnerable. "If your barrier doesn't close perfectly, it's not performing at 100 percent," says Judge. "Small misalignments can compromise the structure over time."

Maintenance is peace of mind

Regular care doesn't require professional tools or complex knowledge. A monthly visual check is often enough to spot small problems before they grow. Judge recommends that homeowners get into the habit of a quick security walk-around:

- Wipe down all metal surfaces and remove dust or debris
- Lubricate moving parts, avoiding locks
- Check for corrosion, cracks, or paint damage
- Test each lock and handle for smooth operation
- Trim vegetation that blocks lighting or sightlines

"These are small, five-minute tasks," adds Judge, "but they add up to years of extended lifespan and continued safety."

The Education Gap

Despite South Africa's strong security culture, there's still a lack of public awareness around maintenance. "Most people don't realise that poor upkeep can actually void parts of their home insurance," Judge explains. "If a gate fails because it's corroded or jammed, and that leads to a break-in, the insurer can question whether the barrier was properly maintained."

He believes the solution lies in education. "We need to shift the mindset from reactionary to proactive. Maintenance shouldn't happen after something breaks; it should be part of a homeowner's routine, just like servicing a car."



Professional inspections make a difference

While most upkeep can be handled by homeowners, Judge advises scheduling a professional inspection once a year, especially for coastal or high-use properties. "Technicians can spot what homeowners might miss, a worn hinge, a bent roller, a weakening weld. These are the issues that can compromise your protection down the line."

The real value of maintenance

In South Africa, investing in reliable security is one of the smartest decisions a homeowner can make. It secures not just your property, but your peace of mind. But like any major investment, its value depends on how well it's cared for over time.

"Security barriers are built to last, but maintenance is what ensures they keep doing their job for years to come," says Damian Judge, Sales and Marketing Executive at Trellidor. "Regular cleaning and maintenance help preserve both the appearance and performance of your installation."

In short, maintenance is not just a chore; it is how you make your security investment go the distance. A well-looked-after gate or shutter not only lasts longer, but it also continues to deliver the safety, convenience, and confidence you paid for.

About Trellidor

Trellidor is a proudly South African company specialising in the manufacturing and distribution of security gates and window burglar proofing. Since the development of the original steel trellis-style sliding gate in the 1970s, Trellidor has expanded its product range to include internationally certified industrial-grade gates for high-security public spaces, including one of the strongest models in the world. The product line also features contemporary solutions such as see-through security screens, sliding gates in both aluminium and steel, aluminium louver shutters, aluminium roller shutters, polycarbonate bars, and various window burglar-proofing styles.

Trellidor's extensive franchise network ensures that products are shipped and installed professionally, providing personal service from experts familiar with local safety and security challenges. With over 70 skilled franchise teams throughout South Africa, Trellidor addresses crime concerns both locally and internationally, operating 54 franchises in 27 countries, including locations in Africa, the United Kingdom, Israel, several European countries, and Australia.



A practical guide for homeowners.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE PERFECT BUILT-IN BRAAI

A built-in braai is more than just a cooking appliance, it's a lifestyle statement. Whether you're hosting a Saturday rugby braai, a relaxed Sunday potjie, or a festive family gathering, the right built-in braai becomes the heart of your entertainment area. With so many options available in South Africa, choosing the right one can feel overwhelming, but with a little guidance you can confidently select a braai that suits your home, your cooking style, and the local climate.

This guide walks you through the most important considerations, from fuel type and size to materials, features, and installation planning.

Budgeting and long-term value

A built-in braai is an investment in both lifestyle and property value. Costs vary widely based on size, materials, brand reputation, and included accessories. While it may be tempting to save money upfront, choosing a durable unit with high-quality materials often pays off over time. Cheaper metals can warp, rust, or deteriorate quickly, leading to costly replacements.

Also factor in installation costs, flue components, and any masonry work required. A well-installed braai will perform better, last longer, and give you countless trouble-free braai days.

Choosing your fuel type

One of the biggest decisions you'll make is whether you want a wood-burning braai or a gas unit. Each offers unique advantages and lends itself to different lifestyles.

Wood-burning braais

Wood-burning braais remain the most popular option in South Africa. They deliver the unmistakable smoky aroma and flavour that many consider essential to a true braai. Wood allows for high, consistent heat and is ideal for everything from chops and wors to potjies and slow-cooked meals. However, they require more effort: you'll need paper and kindling to get the fire going, and ash removal is part of the routine. Smoke is another factor; wood braais must have excellent ventilation, especially if installed near enclosed patios.



Gas braais

Gas braais, on the other hand, offer clean, controlled cooking with the push of a button. They heat up quickly, allow precise temperature management, and minimise smoke, making them perfect for modern homes, small patios, and enclosed braai rooms. Gas is also safer indoors thanks to fewer sparks and no drifting embers. While they lack the authentic wood-smoke flavour, they make up for it in convenience and ease of use, ideal for busy households or those who prefer fuss-free entertaining.

Many homeowners opt for hybrid braais, which combine both gas and wood options in a single unit. This gives you the best of both worlds: the flavour of wood when you have time, and the convenience of gas when you don't.



Selecting the right size

The size of your braai should match how often you entertain and how many people you typically cook for. Choosing a unit that is too large wastes fuel and increases heat-up times, while going too small may leave you juggling grid space when the family grows or unexpected guests arrive.

A compact 700 to 800mm braai is usually perfect for small families and casual weeknight grilling. Medium-sized units (900 to 1100mm) easily handle gatherings of 6 to 10 people, which suits most South African households. Larger braais, often 1200mm and up, are ideal for entertainers who regularly host big groups and want the flexibility to prepare several dishes at the same time.

Also consider additional cooking surfaces, warming areas, and whether you'll use potjies or rotisserie attachments, all of which influence how much space you'll realistically need.

Understanding materials: Durability matters

Material choice plays a major role in how long your built-in braai will last, especially in South Africa's varied climate.

Stainless steel

Stainless steel is by far the most popular material for modern braai units. It is durable, corrosion-resistant, and visually appealing. For inland areas, 304 stainless steel usually offers more than enough protection, but if you live near the coast where salt and humidity are high, 316 stainless steel is strongly recommended. It provides superior rust resistance and ensures your investment lasts for many years.



A multi functional unit

Cast iron

Cast iron is another robust option. It retains heat exceptionally well and is almost indestructible when properly cared for. It does, however, require seasoning and occasional oiling to prevent rust. Cast-iron components are especially good for heavy-duty grids and potjie holders.

Whichever material you choose, look for manufacturers with strong warranties and reputable build quality. A well-constructed braai not only lasts longer but also offers safer, more efficient cooking.

Features and accessories to enhance your cooking

Modern built-in braais come with a wide range of features to suit different cooking styles. A rotisserie spit is perfect for succulent roast chicken or slow-turned lamb.

Warming trays help keep food ready while you braai in batches, and ash drawers make cleaning up a breeze in wood-burning units.

Potjie lovers may want a built-in potjie holder, while avid night braaiers will appreciate interior lights for better visibility. Even braai grids differ significantly: stainless-steel grids last longer and are easier to clean, while cast-iron grids offer unbeatable searing power.

Before purchasing, think realistically about how you prefer to cook. Extra features add convenience and versatility, but they also influence price, so choose what you'll actually use.

Final thoughts

Choosing a built-in braai in South Africa is an exciting project, and with the right planning you can create an entertainment area that suits your lifestyle perfectly. From selecting the ideal fuel type and size to choosing durable materials and essential accessories, each decision helps shape your ultimate braai experience.

Whether you prefer the crackle of sekelbos, the convenience of gas, or a combination of both, investing in the right built-in braai ensures warm gatherings, delicious meals, and unforgettable moments with family and friends, the true spirit of South African living.

*Don't miss the article **How to install a built-in braai** in this issue.*



QUICK, CLEVER AND BUDGET-FRIENDLY DIY

Between work deadlines, school runs, and trying to balance life as a go-getting woman, finding a moment during the day for self-care sounds like a luxury. Add DIY on top of that, and it's no surprise that taps may be left leaky or cupboards may be left overflowing. Even finding a lid for your plastic containers can become completely overwhelming!

But what if a few clever DIY hacks could help you reclaim your space, your time, and let's get real here, your sanity?

For time-pressed women doing the daily juggling act, DIY doesn't have to mean power tools and Pinterest perfection. It can be quick and simple, very satisfying, and believe us when we tell you, surprisingly affordable.

Working moms, multitasking professionals, or those ladies who love a good life hack, these quick wins are designed to make any woman's day a little easier, and maybe even give you a sense of empowerment!

You want to know the best thing? You don't even need a full toolbox to get started! That's right, a variety of affordable, everyday essentials, like the goodies found at MR.DIY can make all the difference.

Here's some speedy home organisation hacks for you:

1. Baskets in the bathroom

Small storage baskets aren't just for clutter control; they can

be transformed into stylish bathroom organisers. You could try stacking them vertically to save space, or what about mounting them on the wall for a stunning floating shelf effect? Whatever you decide to do, these repurposed racks will become the perfect accessory for storing rolled-up towels, skincare products, or even kids' bath toys, and they'll also look super cute!

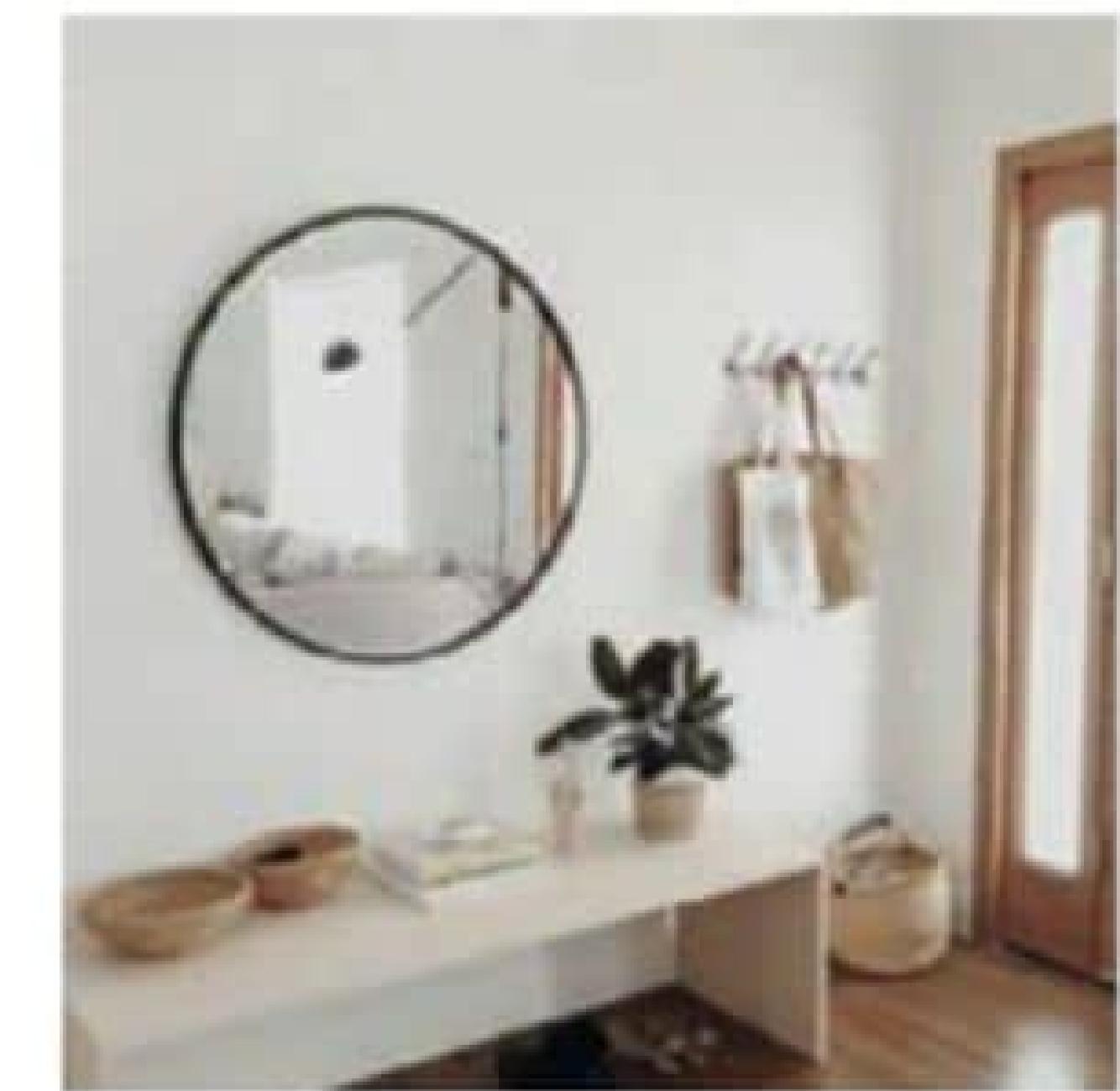
2. Hidden help in the kitchen

Command hooks are a game-changer when it comes to kitchen hacks. You can quickly stick them inside cabinet doors to hang measuring spoons, pot lids, or cleaning cloths, no mess, no fuss. These little wonders are a simple way to create hidden storage without drilling holes or breaking the bank.



3. The drop zone

Tired of the morning hunt to find the car and house keys? You can easily create a dedicated "drop zone" near your front door by using wall hooks and a small tray. You'll see how easy it is to set up a designated spot for keys, mail, sunglasses, all the little

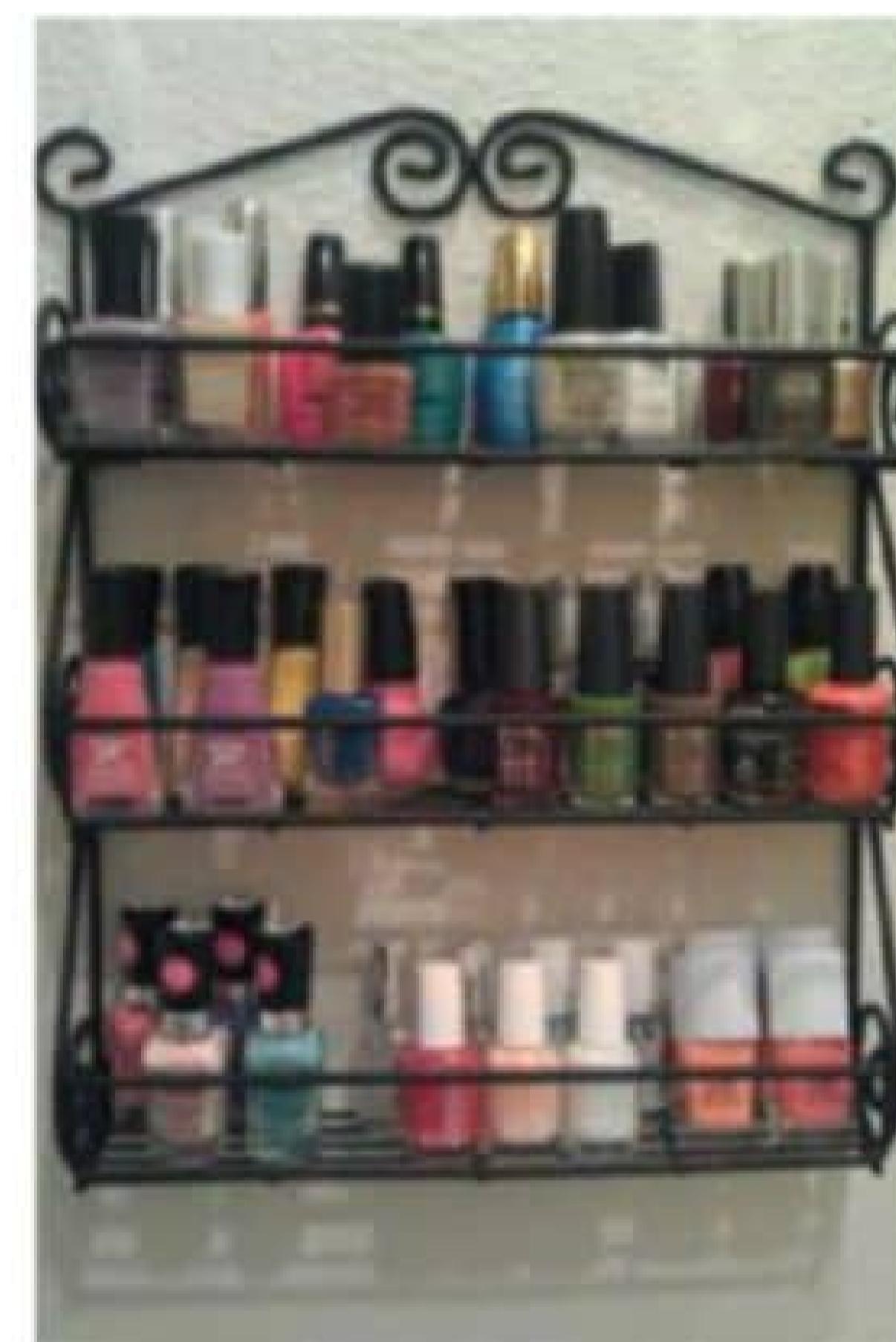


titbits that tend to go missing, and tend to drive you crazy! MR.DIY's range of wall hooks and mini organisers make this hack a breeze.

Looking for beauty and self-care DIY hacks? We've got you!

1. Upcycled glass jars

Empty glass jars can be repurposed into chic organisers on your bathroom vanity. You can use them to store cotton pads, makeup brushes, hair bands, and even toothbrushes. Glam them up with some colour-coded ribbon or washi tape for flair, you'll be amazed at the colour and variety you can find.



2. Remix your nail polish rack

Shhh, don't tell anyone, but spice racks aren't just for the kitchen. If you cleverly mount a spice rack on a wall or put it on a shelf, voilà! Suddenly, they become perfect holders for nail polish, essential oils, or mini perfumes. It's a clever way to keep your beauty stash visible and tidy, and you can even decorate and paint them to make them your own.

3. Home spa relaxation

Create your very own home spa experience with DIY goodies and treats stored in different-sized containers. How about a mix of sugar, coconut oil, and a few drops of essential oil? Easy! Whip it up and store it in one of MR.DIY's travel-sized jars, there is a whole range of shapes and sizes to choose from. Add a colourful label and you've got a self-care treat ready to go in minutes.

If you're more of a family and kid-friendly hacks type of woman, check these out:

1. Homework station in minutes

Turn a corner of your home into a homework haven by using a variety of stationery holders and file organisers. You can label each section for subjects or tasks to help kids stay focused and organised.



2. Snack prep like a pro

How about repurposing muffin tins for snack-time variety? All you have to do is fill each cup with different treats, fruit, crackers, and cheese cubes for a fun, portion-controlled snack tray. Snacks are always a hit with toddlers and teens (and even for moms too), but when they're laid out beautifully and portion-controlled, you can relax and make sure your kiddies are getting the best.

3. Time for some quiet?

If you need a moment of peace (and we're sure you do), create a "quiet time box" filled with colouring books, puzzles, and craft supplies with MR.DIY's affordable art kits and stationery items. There is so much to choose from for so many ages; they're a lifesaver during long afternoons, rainy weekends, or just some downtime.

Quick fixes and hacks for the home DIY

1. The wonders of washi tape

Colourful and decorative washi tape is the perfect way to instantly upgrade furniture that may be scratched, keep cables tidy, or even add some flair to light switches. It's a great choice because it's renter-friendly, very easily removable, and available in endless patterns and colours.



2. Five-minute fixes

Loose handles, squeaky hinges, or wobbly chairs that you've been meaning to fix for the last 6 months? Now's the time to get stuck in! Setting up a basic toolkit can solve most minor issues in minutes, and you'll always have tools handy for future household niggles. MR.DIY stocks compact tool sets that are perfect for quick repairs, no handyman required!

3. Stylish peel-and-stick

If it's time to refresh a shelf or drawer, does the idea of sanding and repainting make you tired? Forget the paint! Peel-and-stick wallpaper is your DIY best friend. It's seriously easy to apply, super budget-friendly, and available in trendy designs that add personality to any space. Just apply and you're good to go!

With a little imagination, DIY doesn't have to be complicated or costly

Being busy definitely doesn't mean your home should be ignored. With a few smart hacks and the right tools at your fingertips, you can create a home that is stylish, functional, and most importantly, works for you.

Whether you're organising your bathroom, setting up a homework station, or just trying to keep your cables from tangling, MR.DIY offers practical solutions that fit your lifestyle and your budget.

Explore more clever finds online at MR.DIY or visit your nearest store to start your DIY journey.



INSTALLING AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM

A well-designed irrigation system can transform your garden from a thirsty, unpredictable space into a lush, thriving landscape that practically looks after itself.

Whether you're nurturing a vegetable patch, keeping a lawn emerald green or maintaining flower beds, installing irrigation saves water, time and effort. But like any DIY project, success depends on planning, understanding your garden's needs and avoiding common pitfalls.

This guide walks you through the essentials of installing irrigation systems, what to consider before you start, how to choose the right components, and how to put everything together safely and efficiently.

Understanding your garden's water needs

Before laying a single pipe or buying a single sprinkler, take time to understand what your garden needs. Every space is different. Some areas are shaded all day and need very little water; others are exposed to full sun and dry quickly. Lawns, vegetables, succulents and shrubs all have unique requirements, so your irrigation system should be designed with these differences in mind.

Assess your garden layout

Walk through your garden and map out the zones. Lawns typically need even, wide coverage, while flower beds require targeted watering to avoid over-soaking stems and leaves. Vegetable gardens prefer low, slow watering at the root zone. If you have a mix of these, you will need separate irrigation lines that can be controlled independently.

Pay attention to the slope of your yard. Water flows downhill, which means plants at the bottom of a slope may receive more water naturally, while those at the top may need extra help. Soil type also matters: sandy soils drain quickly, while clay holds moisture but can become waterlogged.

Choose your irrigation system type

Homeowners usually work with three main types of irrigation, and many gardens benefit from a combination.

• Sprinkler systems

These spray water over a broad area and work well for lawns. Modern sprinkler heads come in fixed, rotating or multi-pattern styles that can be adjusted to suit rectangular lawns, narrow side strips or broad garden areas. They distribute water in wide arcs or rotating patterns, covering a lot of ground quickly.

• Drip irrigation systems

Drip irrigation delivers water slowly and directly to the plant roots. This is ideal for shrubs, trees, flower beds and vegetable gardens because it reduces evaporation, minimises water waste and keeps the foliage dry, reducing risk of fungal disease.

• Micro-sprayers or misters

These produce a fine spray and are great for delicate flower beds or densely planted areas. They offer wider coverage than drippers but use less water than traditional sprinklers.

Most gardens benefit from a combination, for example, sprinklers for the lawn and drip lines for beds.

Installing your irrigation system

Once you have a clear plan, you can begin laying out your irrigation system. Good preparation makes installation smoother and ensures the system performs efficiently for years.

Start with a water source and pressure check

Your irrigation will likely connect to a garden tap or water tank pump. Before installing anything, test the water pressure. Low pressure support systems like drip irrigation perfectly, while high pressure may require regulators to prevent pipes from popping or fittings blowing off.

If using a municipal supply, consider installing a Y-connector so you still have access to the tap while running your irrigation. If using tank water, ensure your pump has enough pressure and flow rate to drive the system.

Plan and lay out the main supply line

The main supply line is the “backbone” of your system. Lay it out along pathways, fence lines or garden edges where it won’t be disturbed by digging or foot traffic. Use durable HDPE (high-density polyethylene) or poly piping that withstands sun exposure and pressure. Secure the pipe with clips or stakes so it does not shift over time.

From the main line, branch off secondary lines into beds or lawn areas. Keep the layout neat, future maintenance becomes far easier when your pipes are logically arranged.

Installing sprinklers for lawns

Sprinklers should be spaced so their spray patterns overlap slightly, this ensures even coverage without dry spots or overwatered patches. Use risers or pop-ups to lift the sprinklers above grass height. When burying pipe for pop-ups, dig a shallow trench and ensure each sprinkler sits level with the soil surface.

Always flush the pipes before connecting sprinkler heads to remove debris that may clog or damage the nozzles.

Installing drip irrigation for flower beds

Drip lines are generally laid directly on the soil or lightly covered with mulch to protect them from sun damage. Position emitters near the root zones of plants, not at the stems. For dense beds, use dripline with built-in emitters, making installation quick and uniform.

A good rule of thumb is one dripper per small plant and two or more for shrubs and trees. In vegetable gardens, run lines down each row so each plant receives adequate water.

Add valves and controllers

Manual valves allow you to turn zones on and off, but automated controllers take convenience to the next level.

Modern controllers can be set on timers or even adjusted from your smartphone. Separating zones is essential because lawns, beds and veggies rarely need the same amount of water.

Testing

With everything connected, it’s time to test the system. Open the water slowly and check for leaks at every joint. Adjust sprinkler heads so they water only the lawn and not your walls, driveway or windows. For drip systems, ensure every emitter is releasing water at a steady pace.

Maintain your system regularly

Even the best irrigation system needs routine care. Check all lines seasonally for leaks or cracked fittings. Clear clogged nozzles, rinse filters and replace worn drippers. As plants grow larger, adjust irrigation spacing so the roots continue receiving water.

Mulching around beds helps retain moisture and reduces the workload on your irrigation. In winter, drainage pipes and sprinklers in frost-prone areas may need protection to avoid cracking.

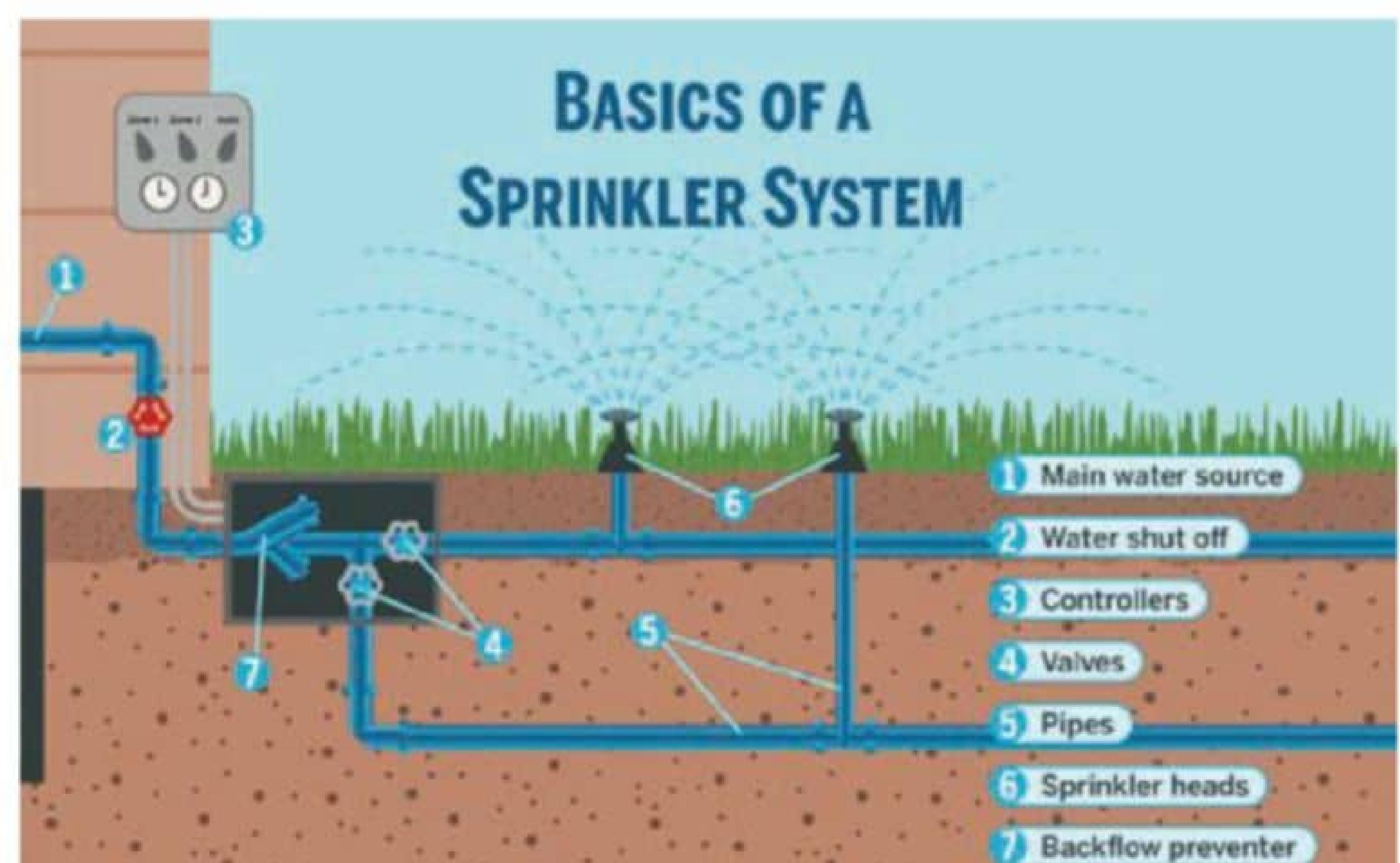
Water wisely, garden better

Installing an irrigation system may seem complex at first, but with careful planning and a step-by-step approach, it becomes a rewarding DIY project. A good system ensures your garden receives consistent, efficient watering - saving you time, reducing water waste and helping your plants thrive.

Whether you’re upgrading an existing garden or starting fresh, the right irrigation setup will keep your landscape healthy and vibrant year-round. And once it’s installed, you’ll wonder how you ever managed without it.

*Don’t miss the article **Your Summer-To-Autumn Garden Guide** in this issue.*

Manual valves allow you to turn zones on and off





A step-by-step guide
(for beginners).



Core equipment:

- Arc welder
- Electrode holder
- Ground clamp
- Welding electrodes

Essential safety gear:

- Welding helmet
- Welding gloves
- Flame-resistant clothing
- Safety glasses
- Ear protection

Holding and positioning:

- Welding clamps, and/or
- Welding magnets

Cleaning and preparation:

- Chipping hammer
- Wire brush
- Angle grinder



HOW TO ARC WELD

Arc welding is one of the most widely used welding methods in the world, especially for DIY users and farm, workshop, and home repair projects. It's affordable to get started, doesn't require overly

complicated equipment, and, once you understand the basics, can be a reliable skill that solves a lot of everyday problems. This simple guide will walk you through the key steps to begin welding with confidence.

Understanding the basics

Arc welding, also known as stick welding, uses an electric current to create a spark (the "arc") between the metal and a coated welding rod. This arc melts the rod and the metal, fusing the two pieces together. The flux coating around the rod protects the weld from contamination and leaves a layer of slag that you chip off once the weld cools.

What you need before starting

You'll need a welding machine, a handful of electrodes suitable for your project, protective gloves, a welding helmet with a proper shade lens, a steel brush or chipping hammer, and clean pieces of metal

to practice on. Make sure you work in a well-ventilated area with no flammable materials nearby. Safety is always your first priority, arc welding produces intense heat, sparks, and UV light.

Preparing your workspace and materials

Start by cleaning the metal surfaces. Rust, grease, old paint, or dirt can weaken your weld and make it difficult to strike an arc. Use a grinder or a wire brush to clean both edges thoroughly. Secure your pieces in place with clamps if necessary, and attach your ground clamp firmly to the metal. A good electrical connection makes welding much easier.

Striking the arc

This is usually the part beginners struggle with, but it becomes natural after a few tries. Hold the rod at a slight angle and tap it lightly on the metal as if you're striking a match. The moment you see the spark, lift the rod slightly to maintain a small gap. If the rod sticks, simply twist it free and try again. Don't worry, every beginner sticks rods at first.

Be careful!

The sparks from welding are called spatter. They are small droplets of molten metal that are blown out from the welding puddle during the process and are caused by factors like high current, a dirty base metal, or an unstable arc.

• What spatter is:

Spatter consists of tiny bits of metal that are ejected and glow from the intense heat. Therefore, always wear proper protective clothing (face shield, welding gloves, leather apron, and heavy-duty footwear).

• What causes it:

- High current or high arc voltage can cause spatter.
- Contaminants on the base metal, such as dirt, oil, or moisture, can cause a reaction that creates sparks.
- Moisture in the electrode can turn into steam, which causes the spatter.
- An unstable or erratic arc, often caused by a trainee or by an issue with the equipment, can also create spatter.

• Problems with spatter:

- Spatter can stick to surfaces and lead to a messy work area.
- It can create a need for additional cleanup after welding, potentially affecting the quality and integrity of the weld itself.



Maintaining the weld bead

Once the arc is stable, move forward slowly and steadily. Your goal is to create a smooth, even bead. Too fast, and the weld becomes thin and weak. Too slow, and you'll build up a thick, uneven bead. Watch the puddle closely, the tiny pool of molten metal. This is the real guide to your weld quality. Keep the arc length short and steady, and try to keep your travel speed consistent.

Finishing the weld

When you reach the end of your joint, pause briefly to fill the crater, then lift the rod away. Let the weld cool for a moment, and you'll notice a layer of hard flux (slag) covering the bead. Use a chipping hammer to remove the slag, then brush the weld clean. This reveals your actual weld, and it's always satisfying to see how it turned out.

NB: Don't touch the welded area with bare hands – it is HOT!

Practicing good technique

The best way to improve is to practice straight lines on flat pieces of scrap metal. Experiment with different electrodes, amperage settings, and angles until you feel the weld flowing smoothly. With time you'll learn to read the arc, adjust your movements, and weld confidently in different positions.

Final thoughts

Arc welding is a hands-on skill that improves quickly with repetition. Once you master the basics, you can repair gates, brackets, tools, trailers, frames, and countless metal projects around your home or workshop. Start slow, focus on safety, and give yourself time to learn. Every great welder began exactly where you are; holding a rod, striking that first arc, and discovering the satisfaction of a strong, clean weld.

*Don't miss our **DIY Series: Build your own heavy-duty security gate** in this issue.*





BILTONG KERWER

>> Difficulty: Easy



What you will need

Tools:

- Drill
- Jig saw
- Screw driver
- Sand paper (120 & 220 grit)
- Router (optional)
- Food safe oil
- Wood glue

Few tools in a South African kitchen are as iconic as the wooden biltong kerwer. This simple guillotine-style slicer delivers perfectly even biltong slices and has long been a favourite in homes, butcheries and weekend braai spots across the country. The good news is that you don't need a workshop full of specialised equipment to build one. With a single plank of hardwood, a planer blade and a few bolts, you can

create a kerwer that will last for years. It also makes a thoughtful, practical gift, and the ways you can personalise it are limited only by your imagination.

MATERIALS & MEASUREMENTS

Hardwood components

Base: 25x130x300mm

Sides: 25x80x145mm (2x)

Handle: 25x60x260mm

Chopping block: 25x50x100mm

Thumb block: 25x40x100mm

1x planer blade ($\pm 50 \times 185$ mm)

1x 8x100mm bolt + butterfly nut

2x 10x40mm bolts + dome nuts

4x 8x25mm flat washers

4x 10mm flat washers

6x 76mm wood screws (for the sides)

4x 32mm screws (for the chopping block)

2x 32mm screws (for the thumb block)

4x 20mm wood screws (for the rubber feet)

4x rubber feet

This project is perfect for beginners and deeply satisfying for seasoned DIY enthusiasts: beautiful, functional and proudly South African.

Step-by-step guide

Step 1:

Prepare the base

Start by sketching out a rough idea of how you want your finished kerwer to look. Cut your hardwood base plank to size, this forms the stable slicing platform. Sand the board smooth, beginning with 120-grit paper and finishing with 220-grit. Lightly round the edges for a comfortable, professional-looking finish.

Tip: Favourite hardwood to be used include Rhodesian Teak, kiaat,

Step 2:

Make the handle

Draw the shape of your handle onto a scrap piece of hardwood and use a jigsaw to cut it out. This handle carries the planer blade and acts like a mini guillotine, so ensure it feels good in the hand. Sand it thoroughly and mark the blade's mounting position.

Note: Ensure the blade's chip breaker faces away from the handle (see sketch).

Step 3:

Prepare and attach the sides

Mark and drill an 8 mm hole through both side pieces, this will hold the handle bolt. Apply wood glue to the bottom of each side piece and position them on the base. From underneath, secure each side with at least three screws.

Tip: Drill pilot holes first to prevent the wood from splitting when driving in the screws. A pilot hole should be slightly smaller than the screw's core (the part without threads). For hardwoods, aim for a hole around 60-70% of the screw's diameter.

Step 4:

Cut and mount the CHOPPING block

The chopping block is traditionally bevelled to create a clean cutting edge. Cut your block to size, bevel the front if you prefer, and glue it in place. Secure it further with four screws driven from beneath the base.

Step 5:

Cut and mount the THUMB block

The purpose of the thumb block is to act as both a safety feature to protect the user's fingers and thumb from the blade and a guide for achieving uniform slices.

Cut your block to size, bevel it and glue it in place. Secure it further with two screws driven from beneath the base.

Step 6:

Attach the handle

Place the handle between the two side pieces and insert an 8x100mm bolt through the holes. Add washers and a butterfly nut. Tighten it enough for smooth movement - firm but not stiff.

Step 7:

Secure the blade

With the handle lowered so it sits parallel to the base, position the planer blade and mark where the two 10mm bolt holes should be drilled through the handle. Double-check that the blade lies flat on the chopping block before drilling.

Install the blade using bolts and washers on both sides, tightening firmly to keep the blade stable

Step 8:

Finish and protect the wood

Wipe the kerwer clean and apply a generous layer of food-safe oil, allowing it to soak in. Repeat once or twice for a durable finish.



Avoid varnish - it chips over time and is not ideal for food-contact surfaces.

Step 9:

Add stability

To keep your kerwer steady on the counter, attach four rubber feet or a strip of non-slip matting under the base. This improves control and prevents accidents during slicing.

How to use your kerwer

Place your biltong on the board, lift the arm and slice down in one smooth, controlled motion, similar to using a paper cutter. Start with thin slices to get a feel for the motion. With a sharp blade and the guided action of the hinged handle, you'll get consistent, beautiful slices every time.

Safety first: Never allow anyone to grab a slice from the chopping block while you are cutting. Always wait until the handle is fully raised and the area is clear.

Final thoughts

Building your own biltong kerwer is one of the most rewarding small DIY projects you can tackle. The materials are affordable, the tools required are minimal and the end result is both beautiful and useful. Whether you're slicing biltong for the family or preparing snacks for the next rugby test, this traditional South African kerwer

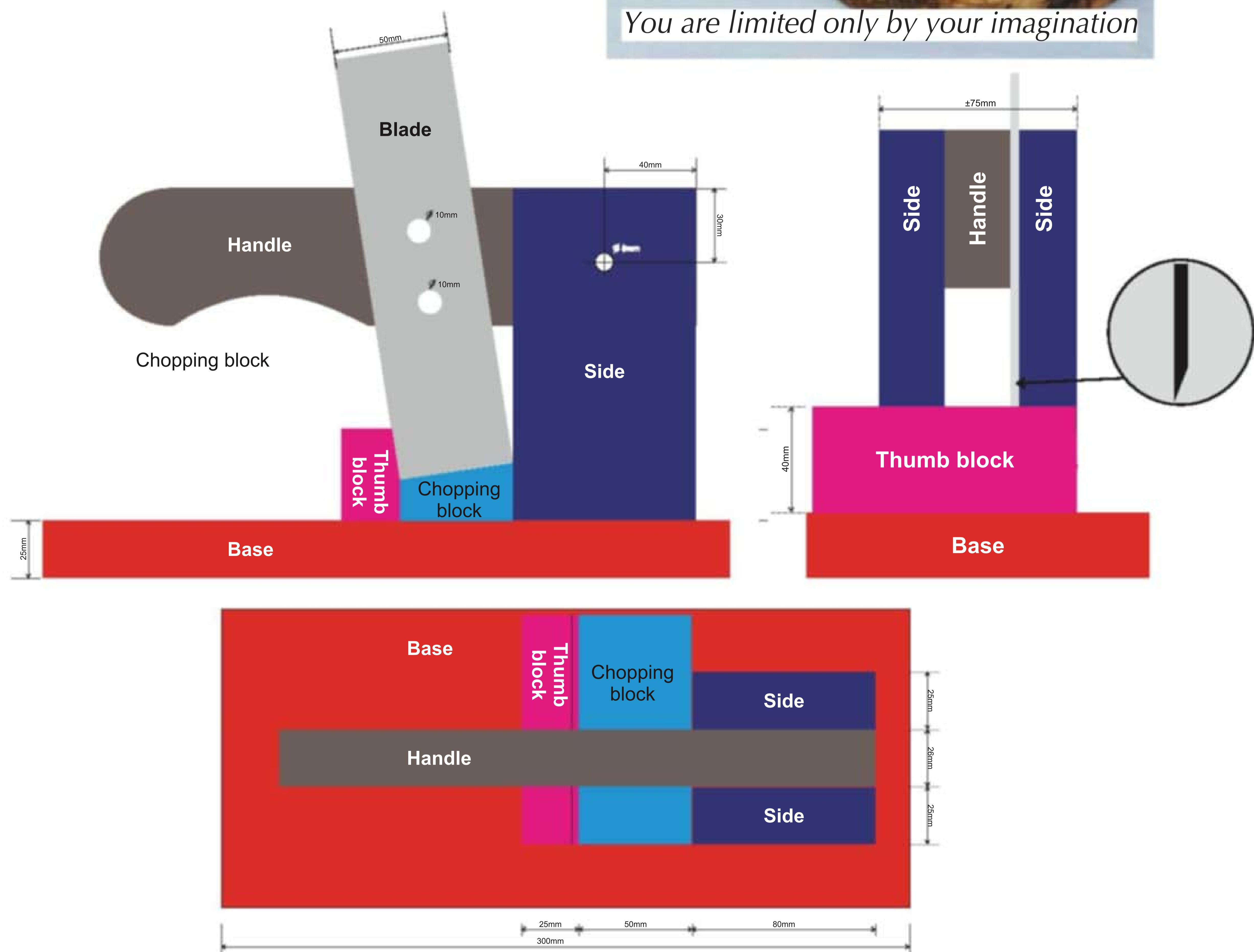
will quickly become a favourite in your kitchen.

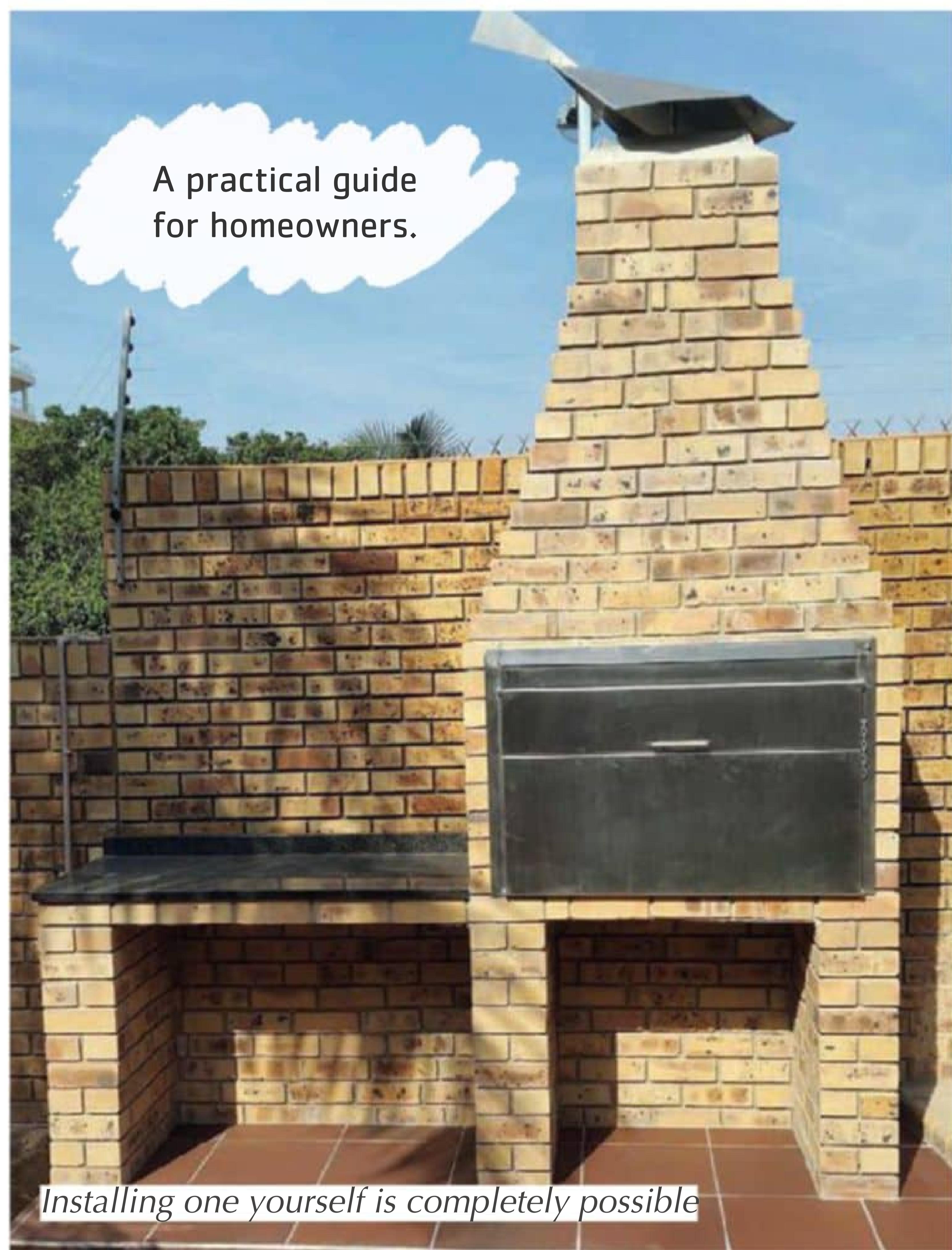
Show off your handiwork!

Send us photos of your finished kerwer, along with a short write-up, and you could be featured in our **Reader's Projects** section! Email your project to editorial@homehandyman.co.za and inspire fellow DIY'ers.



You are limited only by your imagination





HOW TO INSTALL A BUILT-IN BRAAI

A built-in braai is more than just a place to cook, it becomes the heart of the patio, the centre of weekend gatherings, and a long-lasting home feature that adds both beauty and value. It must be installed correctly to perform well. Even before purchasing your unit, visualise where it will be positioned and how it will integrate into your outdoor or indoor entertainment area.

Installing one yourself is completely possible with patience, and the right materials. This guide walks you through the process from choosing the spot to finishing the final brickwork, giving you the confidence to build a safe, durable braai you'll enjoy for many years.

Choosing the right location

Every successful braai project starts with selecting the perfect spot. Choose an area that is sheltered from strong winds yet not enclosed to the point of collecting smoke. Avoid placing the braai too close to doors, windows, overhanging roofs, or any flammable materials. Good airflow is important, but so is user

comfort - ideally, the braai should sit where smoke will not blow into entertainment areas.

Once you've found the ideal location, clear away vegetation, debris, or paving that might interfere with construction. This is also the time to consider access to outdoor lighting, power points for accessories, and whether you want to integrate the braai into existing walls or appoint its own freestanding structure.

Preparing the foundation

A sturdy, level base is essential. The foundation will carry the entire weight of the brickwork, the braai unit, and the chimney, so take your time here. Start by marking out the footprint of your braai and dry-lay a layer of bricks or pavers to get a sense of the final shape and size. When you're happy, lift the bricks again and prepare the foundation using a sand-and-cement mixture or a concrete slab. Use a spirit level throughout the process to ensure a perfectly flat surface, any unevenness now will only worsen as the walls rise.

Mark the centre line of your braai to guide the brickwork, and double-check that your planned dimensions match the manufacturer's specifications for your braai unit. Once the foundation sets, you're ready to begin building.

Constructing the braai enclosure

Built-in braais require two sets of walls: a strong inner support structure and a neat outer brick "shell." Begin by laying two courses of brickwork, forming a double wall. The inner row is responsible for carrying the braai unit, while the outer row gives the braai its finished appearance. Work slowly and make sure each course is plumb and level.

As the walls rise, prepare to install your support system. Most braai units sit on either a pre-cast concrete slab or several non-combustible lintels laid across the inner brickwork. This platform needs to be fully supported and absolutely level before you place the unit. Leave around 100 - 200mm of headroom beneath the lintels so the heat can disperse properly and so that future maintenance remains easy.

It's also important to leave a small expansion gap, usually between 20 and 50 mm, between the metal braai unit and the surrounding bricks. This gap prevents the heat from cracking the masonry as the metal expands during cooking. Fill the gap with a heat-resistant insulation material such as fibreglass or a ceramic blanket. This not only protects the brickwork but improves heat retention inside the braai.

Placing the braai unit

Once the lintels or slab are secure, the braai unit can be carefully positioned. This step often requires an extra pair of hands because the units are heavy and must be lowered gently into place. Ensure it sits evenly on its supports and that the expansion gap remains consistent on all sides.

With the unit installed, continue building the outer brickwork

around it. Always work slowly and methodically, checking for straight lines. Well-built brickwork does more than look good, it keeps the structure stable and supports the chimney.

Building the chimney

A well-designed chimney is essential for good draught and smoke control. Build the chimney to at least 2.5 metres above ground level, or higher if your roofline or prevailing wind conditions require it. Many builders choose to insert flue liners inside the chimney. These improve airflow, protect the brickwork from extreme heat, and help prevent soot buildup.

Finish the chimney with a rotating cowl.

Finish the chimney with a rotating cowl

This simple but important addition prevents smoke from being forced back down the chimney during windy weather and keeps rainwater out of the braai.



Adding practical features

Once the main structure is stable and the chimney complete, you can add the touches that make the braai a pleasure to use. Many homeowners like to include a countertop or prep surface next to the braai. This can be formed using a concrete slab, natural stone, or a purchased countertop material. A working height of 850 to 900mm is generally comfortable for most people.

This is also a good time to consider built-in storage spaces, wood boxes, or even cupboards for utensils and spices. Outdoor-rated materials will ensure your additions last as long as your braai.

Making the counter tops

To make the counter tops and braai support slab, first build shutterboard boxes, open on one side and held together with screws. (Ensure that the boxes are at least 75 mm deep.) Make allowance behind the braai unit support slab for the pipes that will be connected to the gas bottle, which must be sited in a safe and legal place.

Place the shutterboard boxes in position on top of the support walls, supporting them with sturdy scrap planks. Then take three parts of stone, two parts of river sand and one part of



Build shutterboard boxes



Reinforce the counter tops

cement, and mix concrete, slowly adding water until it attains the consistency of thick yoghurt. Pour the concrete into the shutterboard boxes to the halfway mark. Then place the reinforcing rod, cut into lengths, in a grid pattern on top of the concrete. Bind the rods with wire. Then pour the rest of the concrete into the boxes, agitating it with a builder's trowel to remove any air bubbles. Allow it to settle before running a float across the surface to give it a smooth finish (a plaster trowel will also be useful for this). Let the concrete cure for at least a week before you remove the shutterboards.

Finishing the brickwork

Pointing the brick joints gives the braai a professional finish and improves its resistance to rain. Use a pointing trowel to shape the joints neatly once the mortar begins to firm up. Afterward, brush the brickwork lightly with a soft bristle brush to remove excess mortar and dust. Avoid using water too soon, as it may cause streaking.

Some homeowners choose to leave the bricks natural, while others prefer to plaster and paint the exterior. If you opt for plaster, use a heat-resistant mixture around the warmer sections. For a more rustic look, you can leave the face bricks exposed and simply seal them.

Final checks and enjoying your braai

Once everything has dried and cured properly, give the braai a final inspection. Make sure the chimney draws well, that the unit sits firmly, and that all brickwork is sound. After that, you're ready to fire it up for the first time. A small curing fire is recommended to gently heat the structure and help the materials settle.

With a bit of care and craftsmanship, your built-in braai will be a backyard centrepiece for years to come, perfect for lazy summer days, winter potjies, and everything in between.

Enjoy your new outdoor cooking space... and happy braaing!

Show off with your project! Send us pictures of your finished DIY project, together with a short write up, and you could be featured in our **Reader's Projects** section! Email your pictures to editorial@homehandyman.co.za and share your project with fellow DIY'ers!



Pointing the brick joints gives the braai a professional finish



PROTECTING YOUR HOME FROM SEVERE WEATHER

When it comes to climate risk, the stakes could not be higher. Climate risk affects almost every aspect of our professional and personal lives and is affecting decisions such as where to buy your home and how to adapt to future climate trends.

- Aon's latest climate and catastrophe insight found that global natural disasters in 2024 resulted in economic losses reaching at least US\$368 billion and were primarily driven by tropical cyclones, severe convective storms and floods. Of the US\$368 billion in damage, only US\$145 billion were insured.

- Flooding is ranked as the second-highest cause of natural catastrophes with the eastern and south-eastern areas of South Africa expected to receive above-normal rainfall during early- and mid-spring while most other areas are expected to be below normal.

"It is more vital than ever to not only physically prepare your home for a possible natural catastrophe, but to ensure that your homeowner's insurance is ready too," says Ann Cloete.

Can your insurance weather the storm?

Understanding your risk profile is the first step in customising your insurance coverage. "It is important to engage with your insurance broker to get a better understanding of weather-related coverage limits and deductibles that may be prevalent on your homeowner's insurance. Some insurance solutions may exclude perils such as floods, earthquakes, hail damage, subsidence and landslip cover, and it is important to be aware of these. If these perils are excluded on your insurance solutions the next step would be to find out if the cover can be added and the cost involved," Ann explains.

"It remains critical to review your home and its structural aspects from an adaptive point of view, to see where things can be altered and changed to address any underlying weather

risk, even more so if severe weather cover cannot be secured," Ann adds.

"Don't overlook your contents cover as your belongings matter too. In a catastrophe scenario, you could run the risk of having the contents of your home damaged, such as furniture or major appliances, or everything could be lost in a flood or fire. Making a comprehensive inventory of the contents of your home is a good place to start and will help you to make an informed decision on the contents cover you should aim for," Ann suggests.



Ann Cloete

Strengthen your home to be more resilient

While there is little that can be done to prevent a severe weather event such as a flood, there are some important tips that can help protect your safety, your home and your assets:

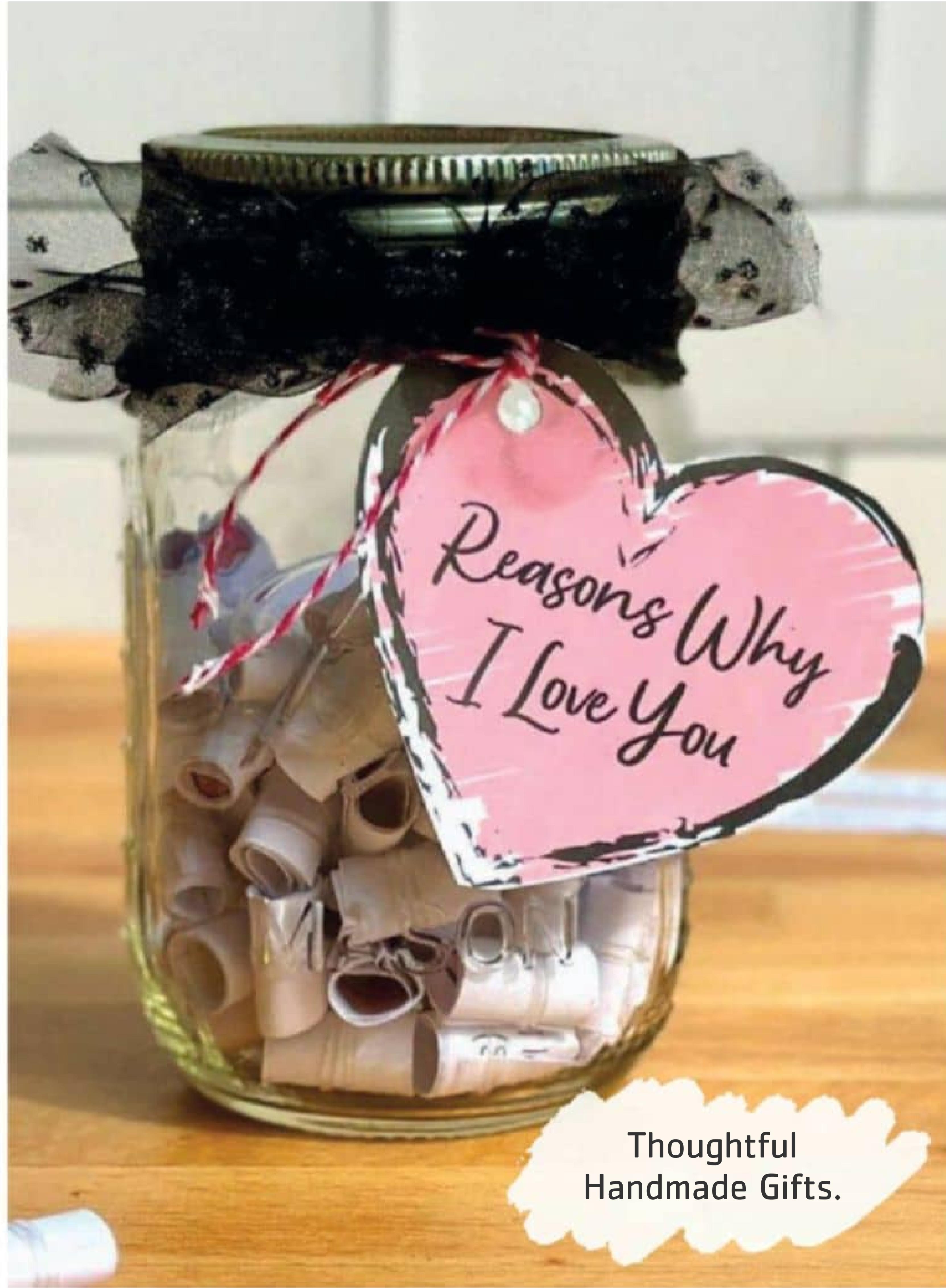
- Your homeowner's insurance policy will not cover maintenance-related damage. This means that while your insurance may respond by repairing the damage caused by a leaking roof, it will not cover the repair of the roof's waterproofing if it deteriorates due to lack of maintenance.
- If you're faced with flooding of your property, try to move as many of your belongings as you can out of the water – the longer the water is left sitting, the more damage it causes. Try and clear away as much of the water as you possibly can to prevent further and permanent damage.
- Paving solutions along the perimeter of a building can help with damp problems and will greatly aid in directing water away from the building to drain away.
- Keep gutters clear of debris to facilitate proper drainage around the house. Protect inlet/outlet pipes of any drains and storm water drainage against blockage from debris.
- Check waterproofing and flashings on the roof regularly to prevent any leaks.
- Install lightning rods along the outside of the house if your area is prone to lightning strikes and fit plugs with surge protection.
- Make sure that any building projects in and around your home adhere to building regulations to ensure safety and mitigate damage from severe weather events as far as possible. Remember to speak to your broker to confirm terms and conditions relating to building alterations or renovations.
- In your garden or surrounding areas, consider any pumps such as your swimming pool pump, landscaping and irrigation systems and take measures to prevent water intrusion. In fire-prone areas, also consider fire-resistant materials and defensible space in a wildfire scenario.
- Subscribe to weather warning systems and weather forecasts so that you are informed of any impending risks.
- Put an evacuation plan in place if you need to vacate your home. Visualise what the process will look like and make sure that everyone at home is aware of it, as most disasters do not keep business hours and often happen at the drop of a hat.

Following a disaster event, safety always comes first. "Once you and your loved ones are secure it is a good idea to keep receipts for emergency repairs or temporary accommodation. When lodging a claim, it is important to notify your broker of the event and to start the claims process. Claims advocacy is the one aspect that underpins your journey with an insurance broker, as your broker will be able to assist you in the claims process to make sure that the settlement is expedited and fair so that all you need to worry about, is getting back on your feet," says Ann.

The best defence in preparing for severe weather or a catastrophic event is to take both proactive physical steps and insurance policy-related steps to ensure your home can weather any storm.

Disclaimer

The contents of this article should not be construed as legal advice on any matter. You should not act, or refrain from acting, on the basis of any content included in this article without seeking professional legal counsel.



Thoughtful
Handmade Gifts.

DIY VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day has a way of sneaking up on us; one moment you're packing away the festive season décor, and the next you're wondering what meaningful gift you can create without resorting to last-minute shopping. For homeowners and DIY enthusiasts, this is the perfect opportunity to put your creativity to work and craft something heartfelt, personal and refreshingly unique. After all, the best gifts aren't the priciest, they're the ones infused with intention.

What makes DIY Valentine's gifts so special is the personal touch. A simple "Reasons I Love You" jar, filled with handwritten notes, can be more powerful than anything store-bought. It's a small project that only needs a glass jar, scraps of paper, and a few genuine thoughts, yet it carries emotional weight that lasts far beyond the holiday. Personalized photo ideas are equally timeless, think custom mugs, puzzles or a handmade frame showcasing a favourite memory. These treasures blend sentiment with creativity, and they're perfect for anyone who enjoys working with their hands.

Edible gifts are another charming option, especially for those who love spending time in the kitchen. Baking a batch of brownies or layering ingredients for a ready-to-mix hot cocoa or jar shows care in a delicious way. For something even more indulgent, a homemade spa kit (with bath bombs, bath teas, and a hand-poured candle), can turn an ordinary

evening into a sensory retreat. It's thoughtful, practical and wonderfully personal.

If you enjoy crafting, consider cosy handmade items. A knitted scarf with heart-shaped pockets or small crocheted coasters can be both fun to make and delightful to receive. Candle-making, string art and embroidery projects offer relaxing weekend activities that result in beautiful, heartfelt décor pieces your partner will treasure. These crafts are perfect for anyone who enjoys slowing down and working with textures, colour and simple tools.

Valentine's Day can also be celebrated through shared experiences. A DIY fondue set or sushi-making kit invites couples to connect over food and fun. Designing your own date-night scratch-off cards is another playful idea, each reveal becomes a little surprise, encouraging spontaneity long after Valentine's Day has passed.

The beauty of DIY gifting is that it encourages us to pause, think about the person we love and craft something that reflects that connection. Whether you choose a handcrafted keepsake, a cosy creation, a homemade treat or an experience to enjoy together, remember that effort is the real gift. As you gather your supplies and spark your creativity, let this Valentine's Day be less about perfection and more about meaning, because there's nothing more romantic than something made by hand and given from the heart.



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