

The Home HANDYMAN

July/August 2026 • Vol 36 No 07



SA'S
ORIGINAL
DIY
MAGAZINE

HOME:
REFRESH AND
ORGANIZATION

- Electric drills
- Preparation - The Secret Behind Every Great Paint Job
- Budget Cabinet Makeovers

PROJECT:
FLOORING FIXES MADE EASY
RAISED GARDEN BED

POWERTOOLS:
ELECTRIC DRILLS

DIY PROJECT:
INDOOR WORKSHOP SETUP



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FROM THE WORKBENCH

There's something satisfying about making your home work better. Sometimes it takes a major renovation, but more often, the biggest improvements come from understanding your space, tackling the right jobs and making practical changes that deliver lasting results.

That's the thinking behind this issue of *The Home Handyman*.

Our main feature looks at home refresh and organisation - not simply adding more storage, but creating smarter systems and habits that help you reclaim space and make every room easier to live in. We also look at several projects that can make a surprisingly big difference without requiring a huge budget. From giving tired flooring a new lease on life to transforming dated kitchen cabinets with paint and new hardware, there are plenty of ways to refresh your home without replacing everything.

Outside, we turn our attention to the timber deck. Before you decide that weathered boards need replacing, discover how the right preparation and restoration can bring tired timber back to life. And in the garden, a raised garden bed offers a rewarding weekend project that can turn even limited space into a productive source of fresh vegetables and herbs.

Good maintenance is about having the right knowledge, too. We look at why preparation is the secret to a successful paint job, how sharpening your cutting tools makes every job easier, and which utility knife blade is right for the task.

For the garage and workshop, we focus on the electric drill, arguably one of the most useful tools in any DIY toolbox. We also cover practical vehicle advice, including safely dealing with a flat battery, keeping battery terminals clean and what to do when you don't have jumper cables.

And, because useful ideas don't always require a whole weekend, we've included five-minute DIY hacks you can try at home, along with advice on choosing the right electric heater as the colder months approach.

Whether you're improving, repairing, maintaining or simply looking for your next project, this issue is packed with practical ideas to help you do more yourself.

Hannes Lindeque

Publisher



The Home HANDYMAN

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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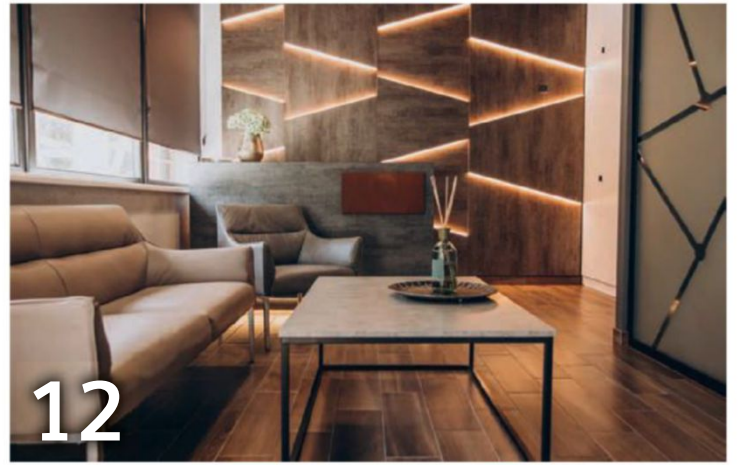
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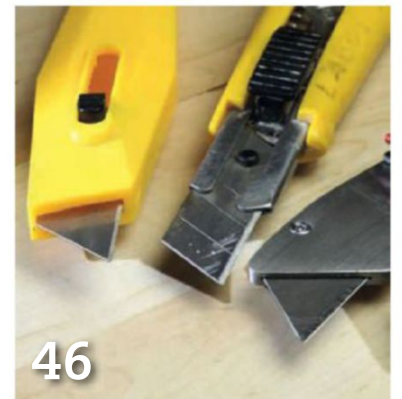
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What type of electric heater should you buy?





Transform Your Living Space Without Breaking the Budget.

HOME REFRESH & ORGANIZATION

A beautifully organised home isn't created by buying more storage baskets—it's built through smart planning, practical habits and a few well-chosen DIY improvements. Discover how homeowners can refresh every room, reclaim valuable space and create a home that's easier to live in, maintain and enjoy.

Refresh and organise a room

Rather than attempting your entire home at once, complete one room before moving to the next.

Step 1 - Empty the space

Remove loose items from shelves, cupboards and work surfaces. Starting with a blank canvas makes it easier to evaluate the room objectively.

Step 2 - Clean thoroughly

Dust every surface, vacuum corners, wash windows, wipe cupboards and inspect for maintenance issues such as leaks, cracked sealant or loose fittings.

Step 3 - Repair minor problems

Tighten loose screws, touch up paint chips, lubricate hinges and replace damaged hardware before reorganising the room.

Step 4 - Sort belongings

Group similar items together and decide what should remain, be relocated, donated or discarded.

Step 5 - Create functional zones

Arrange the room according to daily activities. Keep frequently used items close to where they're needed.

Step 6 - Install storage solutions

Add shelves, hooks, drawer organisers or storage containers only after determining what genuinely requires organised storage.

Step 7: Add finishing touches

Introduce indoor plants, updated cushions, neatly folded throws or framed photographs to make the room feel welcoming without creating unnecessary clutter.

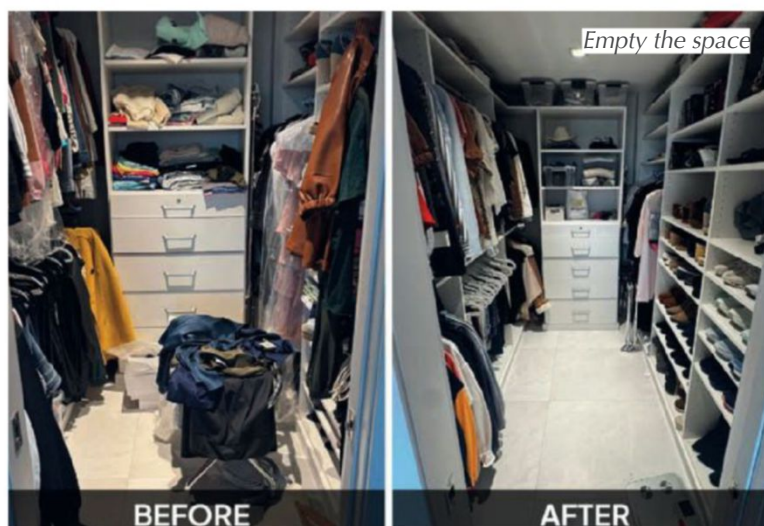
While you're refreshing, don't forget to:

- ✓ Test smoke alarms.
- ✓ Check extension cords for damage.
- ✓ Tighten loose cupboard hinges.
- ✓ Inspect silicone sealant around sinks and showers.
- ✓ Replace worn weather stripping around exterior doors.
- ✓ Clean extractor fans and air vents.
- ✓ Lubricate locks and sliding door tracks.

Small maintenance jobs completed regularly help prevent larger, more expensive repairs later.

More than a spring clean

Every home tells a story. Perhaps yours is filled with children's artwork proudly displayed on the fridge, shelves lined with treasured books, or a garage that's gradually become home to everything except the family car. Over time, even the most carefully maintained homes can begin to feel cluttered, tired or simply harder to manage.



The good news is that giving your home a fresh start doesn't always require expensive renovations or a complete makeover. Often, the biggest transformation comes from improving organisation, simplifying daily routines and making small DIY upgrades that increase both comfort and functionality.

Whether you live in a compact townhouse, a suburban family home or a country cottage, the principles remain the same: organise with purpose, repair before replacing, and create spaces that work for the way you actually live.

A successful home refresh isn't about chasing perfection. It's about creating a space that feels welcoming, functions efficiently and requires less effort to keep looking its best.

Start with a fresh perspective

Before reaching for storage containers or paintbrushes, spend some time walking through your home with fresh eyes.

Imagine you're seeing each room for the first time. Which spaces feel calm and inviting? Which ones seem crowded, untidy or difficult to use?

Instead of tackling everything at once, divide the project into manageable sections. Many homeowners underestimate how much can be accomplished over a few weekends when each room receives focused attention.

Begin by asking three simple questions about every item:

- Do I use it regularly?
- Does it still serve a purpose?
- Is it worth the space it occupies?

Being honest during this stage makes every following step easier.

Declutter before you organise

One of the biggest mistakes homeowners make is buying storage solutions before reducing unnecessary belongings.

Organising clutter simply hides the problem rather than solving it.

Work methodically through each room, creating separate areas for items to keep, donate, recycle and discard. If you haven't used something for several years and it has no sentimental or practical value, it may be time to let it go.

Many households often accumulate duplicate kitchen utensils, unused electrical appliances, outdated clothing and forgotten garage equipment. Clearing these items immediately frees valuable storage space without spending a cent.

Remember that decluttering is not about removing personality from your home. It's about making room for the possessions that genuinely improve your everyday life.

Plan smarter storage

Once unnecessary items have been removed, it's much easier to identify what storage is actually needed.

Effective storage should make everyday tasks easier, not more complicated.

Frequently used items belong within easy reach, while seasonal decorations, camping gear and seldom-used equipment can be stored higher up or in less accessible areas.

Vertical space is one of the most underused assets in South African homes. Installing sturdy wall-mounted shelving in garages, laundries and storerooms can dramatically increase storage without reducing valuable floor space.

Clear storage bins make contents easy to identify, while consistent labelling prevents future confusion. Stackable containers also help maximise cupboard height and improve accessibility.

When selecting storage furniture, consider pieces that perform multiple functions. An ottoman with hidden storage, a hallway bench with drawers or a coffee table featuring internal compartments adds practicality without increasing clutter.



Refresh without renovating

A home refresh doesn't always involve major construction.

Simple cosmetic improvements often deliver impressive results at relatively low cost.

Fresh paint remains one of the most effective ways to transform a room. Neutral colours brighten darker interiors while providing a timeless backdrop for furniture and décor.

Replacing worn cabinet handles, updating light fittings or installing modern switch plates can instantly modernise older homes without requiring specialist skills.

Deep cleaning overlooked areas, including skirting boards, ceiling fans, window tracks and light fixtures, also contributes significantly to the feeling of a refreshed home.

Even rearranging existing furniture can improve natural light, traffic flow and the overall atmosphere of a room.

The kitchen: the hardest working room

Few rooms benefit more from thoughtful organisation than the kitchen.

Arrange cupboards so that everyday items are closest to where they're used. Pots should be near the stove, food containers close to preparation areas and cleaning products safely stored away from food.

Drawer dividers prevent utensils from becoming tangled, while shelf risers make full use of cupboard height.

Pantries also become far more functional when dry goods are stored in clearly labelled containers. This reduces food waste, makes shopping easier and helps identify supplies before they run out.

Don't overlook lighting. Good task lighting above preparation areas improves both safety and comfort.

Making garages work harder

For many homeowners, the garage gradually becomes a storage area for everything that doesn't fit inside the house.

30-minute projects that deliver big results

- Empty and reorganise the kitchen cutlery drawer.
- Sort one bathroom cabinet.
- Tidy the linen cupboard.
- Organise the entryway or mudroom.
- Label storage containers in the garage.
- Clear expired pantry items.
- Donate clothing you no longer wear.

Small victories build momentum for larger projects.

With thoughtful planning, it can become one of the home's most organised spaces.

Wall-mounted tool boards keep frequently used equipment visible and accessible. Ceiling-mounted racks provide excellent storage for lightweight seasonal items such as camping equipment or holiday decorations.

Heavy equipment should always be stored on lower shelves for safety and easier lifting.

Creating designated zones, for gardening, automotive supplies, sporting equipment and power tools, helps maintain order long after the initial clean-up.

Organising bedrooms for better living

Bedrooms should encourage relaxation rather than remind us of unfinished tasks.

Begin by simplifying wardrobes.

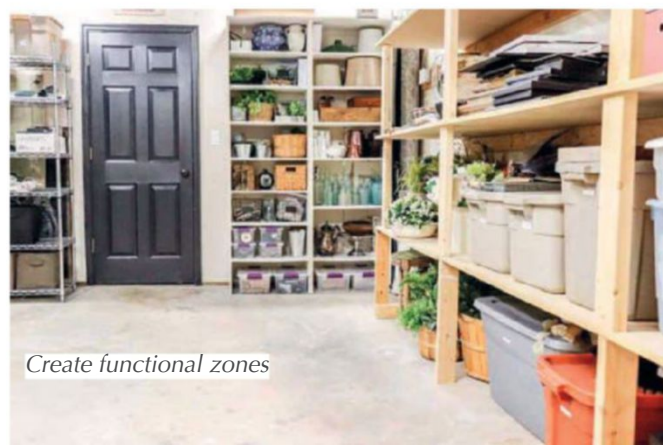
Store clothing by category, keeping everyday garments at eye level. Seasonal clothing can be packed into labelled containers beneath beds or on upper cupboard shelves.

Bedside tables should contain only essential items, while under-bed storage is best reserved for belongings that are genuinely used but not needed daily.

Simple habits such as making the bed each morning and returning clothing immediately to wardrobes or laundry baskets help maintain a consistently tidy room.

Budget-friendly improvements with big impact

- Refreshing your home doesn't require a large budget.



Create functional zones

- Many impressive improvements rely more on effort than expense.
- Repainting feature walls, refinishing timber furniture, installing floating shelves or replacing outdated curtain rails all offer excellent value.
- Repurposing existing furniture is another effective strategy. An unused bookshelf can become garage storage, while leftover timber may be transformed into custom shelving or decorative wall features.
- Shopping carefully for materials and completing projects yourself where appropriate can significantly reduce overall costs.

Safety always comes first

DIY projects should improve your home, not create unnecessary risks.

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment whenever using power tools, paints or chemical cleaning products.

Ensure ladders are positioned securely on stable ground and never overreach while working at height.

Disconnect electrical power before replacing fittings or carrying out basic electrical maintenance, and remember that work involving household wiring should comply with local regulations and may require a qualified electrician.

Good ventilation is equally important when painting, sanding or using adhesives.

Taking a few extra minutes to work safely can prevent injuries and costly mistakes.

Common mistakes to avoid

Even well-intentioned home refresh projects can lose momentum if homeowners fall into familiar traps.

One of the most common mistakes is trying to complete the entire house in a single weekend. Fatigue often leads to rushed decisions and unfinished work.

Another frequent error is purchasing storage products before understanding actual storage needs. Attractive baskets and containers cannot compensate for unnecessary clutter.

Ignoring small maintenance issues during organisation is another missed opportunity. A dripping tap, cracked tile grout or sticking cupboard hinge may seem minor today but can become expensive repairs later.

Finally, avoid creating storage spaces that are difficult to access. If retrieving everyday items requires moving several boxes, the system is unlikely to remain organised for long.

Building habits that last

An organised home is maintained through consistent routines rather than occasional marathon cleaning sessions.



Sort belongings

Spend ten minutes each evening returning items to their proper places.

Review cupboards every few months to remove unnecessary items before clutter accumulates again.

Seasonal maintenance days, particularly before summer and winter, provide an excellent opportunity to inspect the home, complete small repairs and refresh storage areas.

The goal isn't perfection. It's creating habits that make organisation feel effortless.

Bringing it all together

Refreshing your home is one of the most rewarding DIY projects because the benefits extend far beyond appearance.

A well-organised home saves time, reduces stress, improves safety and often reveals opportunities for simple maintenance before small problems become major repairs.

By starting with decluttering, planning practical storage, completing minor repairs and adopting sustainable organisational habits, any homeowner can create a space that feels more comfortable, efficient and enjoyable.

The best part is that you don't need to finish everything at once. Choose one room, one cupboard or even one drawer. Every completed project builds confidence and moves your home one step closer to becoming a place that truly supports the way you live.

Sometimes, the biggest transformation begins not with a major renovation, but with the simple decision to start today.

Don't miss the article **Refreshing Paint Schemes** in this issue.

Did you know?

When tools, clothing and appliances are stored correctly, they experience less unnecessary wear, are easier to maintain and are far less likely to become damaged through neglect or improper storage.

The one tool every
DIY'er needs.



Rotary hammers are
designed for demanding
construction work

ELECTRIC DRILLS

If there is one power tool that deserves a place in every South African home, it is the electric drill. Whether you're assembling furniture, installing shelving, repairing a gate or tackling a weekend renovation, a quality drill quickly becomes the tool you reach for first. Yet many homeowners never unlock its full potential because they don't understand the different types of drills, the importance of selecting the right drill bit or the simple techniques that separate professional-looking results from frustrating mistakes.

Walk into almost any workshop, garage or DIY enthusiast's tool cupboard and one power tool is almost guaranteed to be sitting within easy reach.

It won't necessarily be the biggest, the most powerful or the most expensive tool in the collection. In fact, compared with mitre saws, routers and angle grinders, it can appear almost ordinary.

Yet ask any experienced DIY enthusiast which tool they would keep if they could own only one, and the answer is remarkably consistent.

The electric drill.

Its popularity isn't based on prestige; it's based on usefulness. Few tools are called upon as often or for such a wide variety of jobs. One weekend it is assembling flat-pack furniture, the next it is drilling mounting holes for curtain rails, fixing loose cabinet hinges or mixing a bucket of paint. Move outdoors and the same tool



The standard
drill driver
is the most
versatile

helps build planter boxes, install fencing, repair decking or construct a pergola.

Its versatility explains why it has become the foundation of countless DIY projects.

More importantly, learning to use a drill properly also teaches many of the basic skills that make every other power tool easier to master.

The one big idea

If there is one lesson worth remembering long after you've bought your first drill, it is this: A drill is only as good as the bit, the technique and the person using it.

Many beginners believe that buying a more expensive drill automatically produces better results. In reality, professional-quality work usually comes from understanding the material being drilled, selecting the correct accessory and allowing the tool to do the work rather than forcing it.

That knowledge remains valuable regardless of the brand or model you own.



Impact drivers
specialise in
driving long
screws

Why every home needs one

There are very few DIY projects that don't involve drilling in some form.

Even jobs that appear unrelated often require pilot holes, screws or fixings before they can be completed successfully. Attempting to drive screws directly into timber without first drilling pilot holes, for example, frequently causes the wood to split. Hanging

shelving without correctly drilling into masonry risks insecure fixings, while assembling furniture becomes significantly easier when screw holes are clean and accurately aligned.

The electric drill quietly solves all of these problems.

It is not simply a tool for making holes. It is a precision instrument that prepares materials, improves accuracy and allows fasteners to perform as they were designed.

Corded or cordless?

One of the first decisions facing any buyer is whether to choose a corded or cordless drill.

Not so long ago, corded drills dominated workshops because they offered uninterrupted power. Plug them into a wall socket and they would happily run all day without concern for battery life.

Today, however, cordless technology has transformed the market.

Modern lithium-ion batteries provide impressive runtime while eliminating the frustration of dragging extension leads around the house or garden. For most homeowners, a cordless drill offers greater convenience and sufficient power for everyday tasks.

Corded drills still have an important place, particularly for heavy-duty drilling into concrete or for prolonged workshop use, but for general home maintenance and DIY, cordless models have become the preferred choice.

When choosing a cordless drill, consider the battery platform rather than the drill alone. Many manufacturers design batteries that fit multiple tools within the same range, allowing future purchases to share batteries and chargers. It is an investment that often saves money over time.

Understanding the different types of drills

Although many people refer to every handheld drill simply as a "drill", several specialised versions exist, each designed for particular applications.

The standard drill driver is the most versatile option for homeowners. It drills holes in timber, plastics and light metals while also driving screws into a wide variety of materials.

A hammer drill adds a rapid forward-and-back hammering action, allowing masonry drill bits to chip away at brick and concrete while rotating. If your projects regularly involve installing shelves, television brackets or outdoor fixtures into masonry walls, a hammer drill quickly proves its worth.

Rotary hammers occupy another category entirely. Designed for demanding construction work, they combine greater impact energy with specialised SDS drill bits for drilling larger holes in concrete. For occasional DIY tasks, however,

they are generally more tool than most homeowners require.

Then there is the impact driver—a close relative rather than a true drill. Although often confused with drill drivers, impact drivers specialise in driving long screws and heavy-duty fasteners, making them invaluable for decking, timber framing and structural woodworking.

Understanding these distinctions helps homeowners invest wisely instead of paying for capabilities they may never use.

More than just another power tool

The electric drill is often the first power tool homeowners buy, yet it is rarely outgrown.

As DIY skills develop, the same drill continues tackling new challenges, from simple repairs to ambitious renovation projects. It becomes a familiar companion that quietly earns its place through reliability rather than excitement.

Perhaps that is its greatest strength.

It is not a specialist tool used only occasionally. It is the dependable workhorse that makes almost every other project possible.

Looking after your drill

Power tools appreciate routine care.

Fortunately, maintaining an electric drill requires little more than common sense.

Dust should be brushed or blown away after each project, particularly around ventilation slots that keep the motor cool. The chuck benefits from occasional cleaning to prevent dirt affecting its grip, while batteries should be stored in a cool, dry place rather than left permanently on charge.

Sharp drill bits also deserve attention.

A dull bit forces the drill to work harder, produces rougher holes and drains batteries more quickly. Replacing worn bits is often far more effective than replacing the drill itself.

With sensible care, a quality drill can provide reliable service for many years.



The unsung heroes: drill bits

Even the finest drill becomes ineffective without the correct bit.

Think of drill bits as tyres on a vehicle. No matter how capable the engine may be, the wrong tyres compromise performance.

Different materials demand different cutting geometries.

Twist drill bits are ideal for timber, plastics and many metals. Masonry bits feature hardened carbide tips that withstand the impact of hammer drilling through brick and concrete. Spade bits rapidly bore larger holes through timber, while hole saws create neat openings for plumbing, electrical fittings and door hardware.

For woodworking, brad-point bits produce exceptionally clean, accurate holes with minimal tear-out, making them favourites among furniture makers and cabinet installers.

One of the most common DIY mistakes is attempting to drill every material using the same bit.

The result is usually frustration, poor accuracy and unnecessary wear on both the bit and the drill itself.



Build your first drill bit collection

A practical starter kit should include:

- Twist drill bits for timber, plastic and metal.
- Masonry drill bits for brick and concrete.
- Brad-point bits for clean woodworking.
- A selection of screwdriver bits.
- One or two spade bits for larger timber holes.
- A countersink bit for neatly recessed screw heads.

A modest collection of quality bits will outperform a large collection of poor-quality ones.

Technique matters more than strength

Using an electric drill well has surprisingly little to do with physical strength.

Experienced users rarely force the tool.

Instead, they allow sharp drill bits and appropriate speed settings to perform the work naturally.

Before drilling, marking the hole position with a pencil and centre punch helps prevent the bit wandering across smooth surfaces. Holding the drill square to the workpiece creates cleaner, straighter holes, while starting slowly before increasing speed improves control.

When drilling deep holes, withdrawing the bit occasionally clears accumulated debris and reduces heat build-up, extending the life of both the bit and the drill.

These small habits soon become second nature and dramatically improve results.

From hole to finished project

Most drilling jobs follow a simple rhythm.

The workpiece is measured carefully and the drilling position marked accurately. The correct drill bit is selected and secured tightly in the chuck before checking that the drill is set to the appropriate speed and operating mode.

Once drilling begins, steady pressure keeps the bit cutting cleanly without forcing it. If screws are to be installed afterwards, switching to a suitable driver bit allows the same tool to complete the fastening process efficiently.

By slowing down slightly during the final stages of drilling, exit holes remain cleaner and splintering is reduced, particularly in timber.

Like many DIY skills, success comes from consistency rather than speed.

Safety first

Electric drills are among the safest power tools when used correctly, but sensible precautions remain essential.

Always wear eye protection when drilling, particularly into masonry where chips can fly unexpectedly. Secure the workpiece with clamps whenever possible rather than holding it by hand, and remove the chuck key immediately after tightening older keyed chucks. Loose clothing, jewellery and long hair should be kept well away from rotating parts.

Most importantly, allow the drill to stop completely before putting it down.

QUALITY TOOLS FOR EVERY HOBBY YOU TAKE ON

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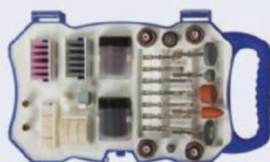
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30 STORES
9 PROVINCES

DIY Flooring Fixes
Made Easy.

FLOORING FIXES



DIY Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Estimated project time:

- Small room (10 to 15m²): 1 day
- Medium room (15 to 25m²): Weekend project

Estimated DIY cost:

- Click-lock vinyl plank: R300 to R700/m²
- Peel-and-stick vinyl: R180 to R400/m²
- Carpet tiles: R250 to R600/m²



Tools for luxury vinyl plank flooring

Best for:

- First-time DIY'ers
- Homeowners on a budget
- Rental property upgrades
- Weekend renovation projects

Essential DIY flooring kit:

- Tape measure
- Utility knife with spare blades
- Straight edge
- Chalk line
- Rubber mallet
- Pull bar
- Pacers
- Vacuum cleaner
- Knee pads

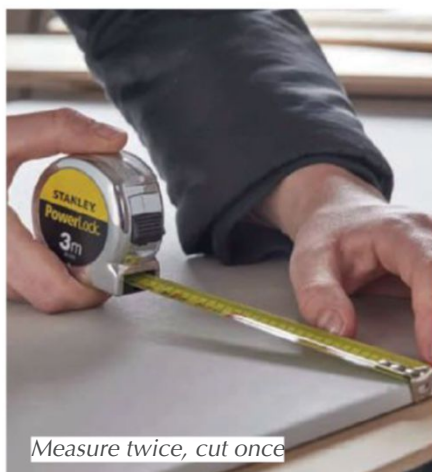


Comfortable knee pads are essential

Editor's tips:

Invest in high-quality replacement blades for your utility knife. Sharp blades produce cleaner cuts, require less force and are considerably safer to use.

- Buy an extra box
Keep one unopened carton of flooring stored in the garage. Years later, matching discontinued flooring can be almost impossible to source.
- Mix the planks
Open flooring from several boxes during installation. This distributes natural colour variation evenly throughout the room for a far more authentic appearance.
- Let it acclimatise
Allow flooring to rest in the room for at least 24 to 48 hours before installation. This helps the material adjust to the room's temperature and humidity, reducing expansion or contraction after installation.
- Work towards the door
Plan your installation so you don't accidentally floor yourself into a corner with no easy exit. It sounds obvious, but it happens more often than you'd think.



Measure twice, cut once



Click-lock vinyl plank

Walk into a beautifully finished room and there's a good chance the flooring is doing far more than you realise. Long before your eyes settle on the furniture or wall colour, the floor quietly sets the tone. A fresh, modern floor instantly makes a room feel cleaner, brighter and more inviting, while worn carpeting or scratched vinyl can make even a freshly painted space seem tired and dated.

For many homeowners, replacing a floor once meant hiring professional installers, moving furniture out for days and preparing for plenty of noise, dust and disruption. Fortunately, that's no longer the case.

Thanks to a new generation of DIY-friendly flooring products, updating your home has become one of the most rewarding weekend projects you can tackle. Whether you choose click-lock luxury vinyl planks, peel-and-stick vinyl



Corners are tricky, but not impossible

or modular carpet tiles, today's flooring systems require little more than careful planning, patience and a handful of basic tools. Better still, they can deliver professional-looking results while saving thousands of rand on installation costs.

Why DIY flooring has never been easier

Modern flooring manufacturers understand that homeowners want products that combine style, durability and simplicity. As a result, many of today's flooring systems have been designed with DIY enthusiasts firmly in mind.

Instead of wrestling with messy adhesives or specialised equipment, many products simply click together or feature self-adhesive backings. That means less mess, fewer tools and considerably less stress.

Of course, easy installation doesn't mean cutting corners. The difference between a floor that looks good for decades and one that begins showing problems after only a few months usually has very little to do with technical ability. More often than not, it comes down to careful preparation and attention to detail.

As experienced DIY'ers like to say, "The floor you don't see is every bit as important as the one you do."

Step-by-step guide

Installing click-lock vinyl flooring

Step 1

Empty the room completely and remove all existing flooring.

Step 2

Vacuum thoroughly and inspect the subfloor. Repair loose boards or uneven areas before continuing.

Step 3

Plan your layout carefully. Dry-lay a few rows to avoid finishing with a narrow strip against one wall.

Step 4

Place spacers around the perimeter to create the required expansion gap.

Step 5

Lay the first row perfectly straight. Every remaining row depends on it.

Step 6

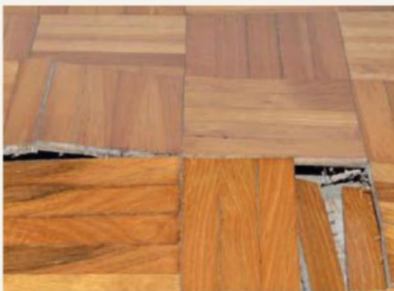
Click each plank into place, tapping gently with a rubber mallet where necessary.

Step 7

Measure and cut the final row using a sharp utility knife.

Step 8

Remove spacers and install skirting or quarter-round trim to conceal the expansion gap. Stand back and admire your work.



Installing new flooring over a damp subfloor can cause problems

Choosing the right flooring

Every room in your home has its own unique demands. Bathrooms have to cope with constant moisture, hallways endure heavy foot traffic, while bedrooms call for warmth and comfort underfoot. Choosing the right flooring for each space will ensure it not only looks good but performs well for years to come.

Click-lock luxury vinyl plank (LVP)

If one product has transformed DIY flooring over the past decade, it's luxury vinyl plank flooring. Designed to replicate the warmth and character of natural timber, it delivers the look of hardwood while offering practical benefits that real wood simply can't match.

Being completely waterproof, LVP is perfectly suited to kitchens, entrances and busy family living areas where muddy shoes, spills and everyday wear are all part of life. Installation is equally straightforward. Each plank features precision-engineered tongue-and-groove edges that lock securely together to form what's known as a floating floor. Rather than being glued to the subfloor, the planks rest above it, allowing the floor to expand and contract naturally with changes in temperature.



Oscillating multi-tools are very handy

LVP is an excellent choice for living rooms, kitchens, hallways, dining rooms and open-plan living spaces. Installation requires only a utility knife, tape measure, rubber mallet, pull bar, spacers and a straight edge.

Peel-and-stick vinyl

If affordability and speed are top priorities, peel-and-stick vinyl flooring is hard to beat. As its name suggests, installation couldn't be simpler. Once the backing paper is removed, each tile or plank is carefully positioned before being pressed firmly into place.

That simplicity, however, depends entirely on what lies beneath. Because the flooring adheres directly to the subfloor, any bumps, cracks or debris left behind are likely to show through over time. A clean, dry and perfectly level surface is therefore essential for achieving the best results.

Peel-and-stick flooring is particularly well suited to bathrooms, laundry rooms, utility areas and closets where a quick, affordable update can make a noticeable difference.

Carpet tiles

Carpet tiles continue to grow in popularity because they solve one of traditional carpeting's biggest drawbacks: damage.

Instead of replacing an entire room because of one stubborn stain, you simply lift out the affected tile and replace it with a new one. They're also easier to transport, simpler to install and ideal for bedrooms, children's playrooms and home offices where comfort underfoot is just as important as practicality.

The secret nobody sees: preparing the subfloor

Ask any professional installer where DIY'ers most often go wrong and they'll almost certainly give the same answer: preparation.

No flooring product, regardless of price or quality, can compensate for a poorly prepared subfloor.

Start by removing every trace of the old flooring, including carpets, underlay, old vinyl, adhesive residue and staple strips. Once the room has been cleared, give the floor a thorough clean. Sweep away loose debris, vacuum carefully and then inspect the surface again. Dust, grit and even tiny fragments left behind can affect the final finish.

Before laying the new floor, take a few moments to inspect the subfloor itself. Loose boards should be firmly secured, uneven areas levelled and any signs of moisture dealt with before installation begins. Spending an extra hour on preparation may not be the most exciting part of the project, but it can add years to the life of your new floor.

Workshop wisdom

One simple trick used by professional installers can dramatically improve the finished appearance of a room. Rather than cutting flooring around door frames, use an oscillating multi-tool to trim a small section from the bottom of each timber door jamb. The flooring can then slide neatly underneath, creating the seamless finish that's often associated with professionally installed floors.

Common DIY mistakes

Even the most straightforward flooring project can be spoiled by rushing the job. Many DIY'ers are tempted to install flooring over a subfloor that isn't perfectly clean or level, while others forget to leave the necessary expansion gap around floating floors. Measuring only once instead of twice, starting with a crooked first row or using a blunt utility knife can all lead to disappointing results.

Moisture is another common culprit. Installing new flooring over a damp subfloor can cause problems that may only become apparent months later. Likewise, moving heavy furniture back into the room before the flooring has properly settled can undo hours of careful work.

The reality is that most flooring problems aren't caused by poor-quality products. They're caused by skipping the basics.

Maintenance matters

A newly installed floor is an investment worth protecting, and the good news is that keeping it looking its best doesn't require hours of hard work. A quick sweep or vacuum every few days removes the grit and dust that can gradually dull the surface, while wiping up spills as soon as they happen helps prevent stains from becoming permanent. Small habits also make a noticeable difference over time. Fitting felt pads to the legs of chairs and tables helps prevent scratches when furniture is moved, and taking care not to drag heavy appliances across the floor will preserve its finish for years to come. If you've opted for carpet tiles, one of their greatest advantages is the ability to replace a single stained or damaged tile without disturbing the rest of the room. With a little routine care, your new floor will continue to look smart, perform beautifully and reward your DIY efforts for many years.

Safety first

One of the greatest pleasures of a DIY flooring project is standing back and admiring a room you've transformed with your own hands, but it's worth remembering that a little care goes a long way towards ensuring the experience is both enjoyable and safe. Working with sharp cutting tools and heavy flooring packs demands your full attention, so protect your eyes with safety glasses whenever you're trimming planks or tiles. If the project keeps you on your knees for several hours, a comfortable pair of knee pads can make a remarkable difference to both your comfort and stamina.

It's equally important to work with sharp utility knife blades, as they require less force and produce cleaner, safer cuts than blunt ones. Keep the room well ventilated, particularly when removing old flooring or dealing with adhesive residue, and don't hesitate to take regular breaks when lifting heavy flooring cartons or moving furniture. Asking someone to lend a hand isn't a sign of weakness—it's simply good DIY

practice. After all, the most successful home improvement projects are the ones that end with a beautiful new floor and a homeowner who's ready to enjoy it.

The finishing touch

Few home improvement projects deliver such an immediate sense of satisfaction as laying a new floor. A once-tired lounge suddenly feels brighter and more welcoming, a dated kitchen takes on a fresh contemporary character, and a bedroom becomes warmer and more inviting without changing a single piece of furniture. It's proof that some of the biggest improvements don't require knocking down walls or embarking on expensive renovations—they simply begin beneath your feet.

The beauty of today's DIY-friendly flooring options is that they place those results within reach of almost any homeowner. Whether you're drawn to the realistic timber look and durability of click-lock luxury vinyl planks, the affordability and convenience of peel-and-stick flooring, or the warmth and versatility of carpet tiles, the principles for success remain the same. Prepare thoroughly, measure carefully and resist the temptation to rush.

Like so many worthwhile DIY projects, it's the small details that make the

biggest difference. Every accurately cut plank, every perfectly aligned joint and every neatly finished doorway contributes to a floor that not only looks professionally installed but will continue to perform beautifully for years to come. With the right preparation, a few basic tools and a free weekend, creating a stunning new floor is no longer a project reserved for professionals. It's an achievable, rewarding home improvement that adds lasting value, comfort and style to your home—one plank, tile or carpet square at a time.

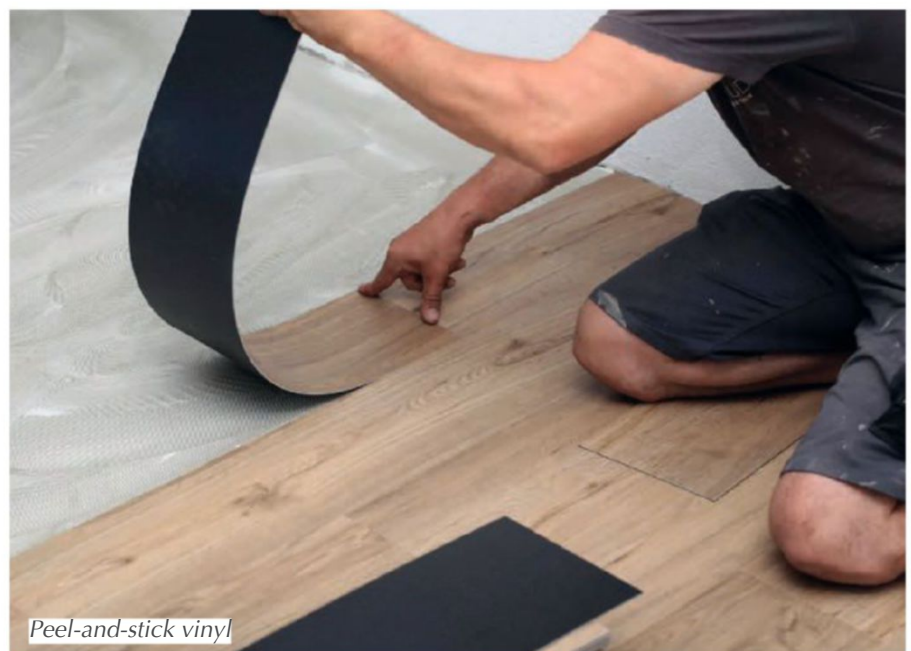
Show off with your project! Send us pictures of your finished DIY project, together with a short write up, and you could be featured in our **Reader's Projects** section! Email your pictures to editorial@homehandyman.co.za and share your project with fellow DIY'ers!

Did you know?

Luxury vinyl flooring is 100% waterproof... but that doesn't mean water problems underneath disappear.

Always repair leaking pipes, rising damp or moisture issues before installing any new flooring.

Waterproof flooring protects the surface, not the structure beneath it.



Peel-and-stick vinyl



The finish itself
is only the final
chapter in the
restoration story.

Preparation is where every successful restoration begins

BRINGING YOUR DECK BACK TO LIFE

Why careful preparation, not just a fresh coat of stain, is the secret to restoring and protecting one of your home's hardest-working outdoor spaces.

There is something special about a timber deck that no tiled patio or paved entertainment area can quite match. Timber has warmth, texture and character. It softens the transition between home and garden, and whether it surrounds a swimming pool, overlooks a bushveld view or simply extends the living area into the back garden, it quickly becomes the place where life happens. It is where friends gather around the braai, children play barefoot on summer afternoons and families linger long after dinner because nobody wants to be the first to move indoors.

Unfortunately, the same qualities that make timber so appealing also make it vulnerable.

South Africa's weather is particularly demanding. Intense ultraviolet radiation bakes exposed timber for months at a time, while sudden summer thunderstorms soak it with moisture. Along the coast, salty air accelerates weathering, and inland, wind-driven dust settles deep into the grain. Add muddy footprints, shifting outdoor furniture and years of everyday use, and even the best-built deck eventually begins to lose its rich colour and smooth finish.

The first signs are often subtle. The timber looks a little duller than it did a year ago. Water no longer beads on the surface after rain. Small patches begin to fade more quickly than others,

especially in areas exposed to direct sunlight. Left unattended, those cosmetic changes gradually become structural ones as the timber dries out, develops fine cracks and becomes increasingly vulnerable to moisture.

It is at this point that many homeowners start wondering whether the deck has reached the end of its life.

In most cases, it hasn't.

More often than not, a weathered deck doesn't need replacing - it needs restoring. The difference between a deck that lasts for decades and one that requires costly repairs usually comes down to maintenance, and the single most important part of that maintenance happens long before the first coat of stain or sealer is applied.

The water drop test

Not sure whether your deck still has enough protection against the elements? A simple water drop test can give you the answer in seconds.

Sprinkle a few drops of clean water onto several areas of the deck, including sections that receive heavy foot traffic as well as those that are used less often.

If the water forms small beads on the surface, your stain or



The water drop test

sealer is still doing its job by repelling moisture. Your deck is adequately protected for now, although regular inspections are still worthwhile.

If the water is absorbed almost immediately, the timber is no longer protected. The wood is beginning to absorb moisture, making it more vulnerable to weathering, cracking and rot. That's a clear sign it's time to clean the deck and apply a fresh coat of stain or sealer before more serious damage occurs.

Preparation is where every successful restoration begins

There is an old saying among experienced woodworkers that finishes don't hide mistakes - they highlight them. The same principle applies to deck restoration.

When a deck begins to look tired, the natural temptation is to buy a quality exterior stain and apply a fresh coat as quickly as possible. It seems logical enough: if the old finish has faded, surely a new one will solve the problem.

Unfortunately, timber doesn't work that way.

Years of weather leave behind more than faded colour. Old coatings begin to break down unevenly, dirt becomes embedded in the grain, airborne pollutants settle into tiny surface imperfections and microscopic mould spores take hold in damp, shaded areas. Applying a new finish over all of that is rather like painting over peeling wall paint. It may look acceptable for a short while, but the problems underneath remain, and they inevitably find their way back to the surface.

The most successful deck restorations begin with patience rather than paintbrushes.

Before any work starts, it is worth taking a slow walk across the deck and looking at it with fresh eyes. Notice where water tends to collect after rain, where the timber receives the harshest afternoon sun and where outdoor furniture has protected sections from weathering. These differences tell the story of how the deck has aged and often explain why some boards have weathered more quickly than others.

This is also the ideal time to check for loose screws, cracked boards or signs of rot. Timber that feels soft underfoot or remains damp long after surrounding boards have dried deserves closer inspection before any cosmetic work begins. A beautiful finish cannot compensate for damaged structural timber, and dealing with small repairs now is considerably easier than discovering them halfway through the project.

Revealing the timber beneath the years

One of the most satisfying moments in any restoration project comes when the weathered surface finally begins to disappear.

Whether the existing coating is removed with a specialised stripping product, careful sanding or a combination of both depends largely on the type and condition of the old finish. Whatever method is chosen, the objective is not simply to remove colour but to uncover clean, healthy timber capable of accepting a new protective coating.

This stage often surprises homeowners.

Boards that appeared beyond saving begin revealing warm natural tones hidden beneath years of faded finishes and accumulated grime. Grain patterns that had almost disappeared suddenly become visible again, reminding you why timber remains such a popular outdoor material despite the maintenance it requires.

Cleaning follows naturally once the old finish has been removed. Rather than being a separate chore, it becomes part of the restoration itself. A good deck cleaner or timber brightener removes stubborn dirt, helps restore the wood's natural appearance and prepares the surface for whatever comes next.

Then comes perhaps the hardest part of the entire project - waiting.

Freshly cleaned timber may look ready for its new finish, but appearances can be deceptive. Moisture trapped within the wood needs time to evaporate fully before stain or sealer is applied. Rushing this stage can shorten the life of even the highest-quality coating because the finish cannot bond properly with damp timber.

It is a reminder that successful restoration is rarely about working faster. More often, it is about allowing each stage to prepare the way for the next.

Bringing out the beauty of the grain

Once the timber has dried thoroughly, a light sanding often reveals just how much life remains in the boards.

The aim is not to remove large amounts of material or create an unnaturally smooth surface. Outdoor timber should still feel like timber. Instead, sanding removes raised fibres, blends minor imperfections and opens the grain just enough to accept the new finish evenly.

As the dust is cleared away, the transformation becomes increasingly obvious. Boards that looked tired and neglected only days earlier begin to regain the warmth and texture that first made the deck such an attractive feature of the home.

Only now is the timber truly ready for protection.

Choosing between a stain and a sealer often causes confusion because many modern products perform both functions. In simple terms, stains enrich or change the colour of the timber

while helping protect it against ultraviolet damage. Sealers focus primarily on reducing moisture absorption. Many premium exterior products combine these benefits, allowing the timber to retain its natural character while resisting the harsh combination of sun and rain that defines so much of our climate.

Whichever finish you choose, applying it should feel less like painting and more like feeding the timber. Thin, even coats brushed along the direction of the grain allow the product to penetrate rather than simply forming a film on the surface. The result is a finish that looks more natural and generally lasts longer than one applied too heavily.

A project that rewards patience

Unlike many DIY jobs, restoring a deck rarely delivers instant gratification. The first day often involves hard work with very little visual reward. Old finishes have to be stripped away, stubborn dirt removed and repairs completed before the transformation becomes obvious.

Then, almost unexpectedly, everything changes.

As the new finish begins to deepen the colour of the timber, the grain becomes more pronounced and the deck starts looking less like a repair project and more like a carefully crafted outdoor living space. Furniture that previously looked tired suddenly complements the refreshed timber. Pot plants appear more vibrant, outdoor lighting becomes more inviting and the entire entertainment area feels renewed.

It is remarkable how often homeowners describe the finished result as though they have gained an entirely new outdoor room, even though nothing has changed except the condition of the timber beneath their feet.

Looking after the investment

Restoring a deck is satisfying, but keeping it looking its best requires surprisingly little effort once the hard work has been done.

Regular sweeping prevents abrasive dirt from wearing away the finish, while clearing away wet leaves reduces the chance of trapped moisture encouraging mould or staining. Washing the deck occasionally with a mild cleaner removes dust before it becomes embedded in the surface, and taking a few minutes each year to inspect the finish allows small worn areas to be treated before they develop into larger maintenance projects.

This is where many experienced homeowners save both time and money. Instead of waiting for the deck to become badly weathered again, they refresh the protective finish whenever it begins to show signs of wear. Maintaining a well-protected surface is considerably easier than restoring one that has been neglected for years.

Avoid these common pitfalls

Even the best products cannot compensate for poor

preparation. Most disappointing deck restorations can be traced back to a handful of avoidable mistakes:

- Applying stain or sealer before the timber has dried completely.
- Skipping the cleaning stage because the deck “looks clean enough.”
- Applying thick coats in the hope of increasing protection.
- Using interior timber finishes outdoors.
- Ignoring loose fasteners or damaged boards until after the finishing work has been completed.

A little extra patience at the beginning almost always produces a finish that lasts significantly longer.

Safety first

Working with timber restoration products calls for a few sensible precautions. Wear suitable gloves and eye protection when using stripping chemicals, use a dust mask while sanding and ensure the work area is well ventilated. Keep children and pets away until finishes have cured fully, and dispose of used cloths and applicators according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

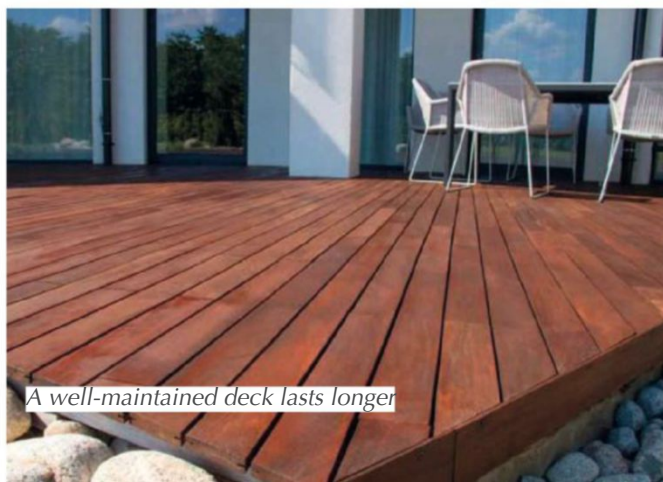
The lasting reward

Perhaps the greatest satisfaction in restoring a timber deck is that the results are about more than appearance.

A well-maintained deck lasts longer, remains safer underfoot and continues adding value to the home year after year. More importantly, it remains a place where people naturally gather, whether for a relaxed Sunday lunch, an evening around the fire or simply a quiet cup of coffee before the day begins.

If there is one lesson worth remembering long after the brushes have been cleaned and the furniture has been moved back into place, it is this: the finish itself is only the final chapter in the restoration story. The real success lies in the care taken beforehand.

Prepare the timber properly, allow each stage the time it deserves and choose products designed for local conditions. Do that, and your deck won’t simply look better for a season - it will continue rewarding your efforts for many years, making every braai, every family gathering and every sunset enjoyed from its boards feel like time well spent.



A well-maintained deck lasts longer

The *next step* in maintenance

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The Secret Behind Every Great Paint Job.

PREPARATION

Ask any professional painter where DIY enthusiasts most often go wrong and the answer is almost always the same: preparation.

It's tempting to head straight for the exciting part, opening the paint tin and choosing which wall to tackle first, but skipping the groundwork is one of the quickest ways to spoil the finished result. Dust, grease, loose paint and tiny cracks may seem insignificant, but they'll become even more noticeable once a fresh coat of paint goes on.

Before reaching for the roller, give the walls a thorough clean using a mild sugar soap solution or a suitable wall cleaner to remove grease, fingerprints and everyday grime. This is especially important in kitchens, where cooking oils can prevent paint from adhering properly, and in children's bedrooms or passageways where walls tend to collect scuff marks.

Once the walls are clean and dry, inspect them carefully in good natural light. Fill small cracks and nail holes with a quality filler, then sand the repaired areas smooth once they've dried. Finally, remove every trace of sanding dust before applying primer where necessary.

It may not be the most glamorous part of the project, but careful preparation creates the smooth, even surface that allows your chosen colours to really shine.

Creating crisp, designer-quality lines

One of the hallmarks of a professionally painted room is the sharp, clean line where two colours meet. Achieving that finish is easier than many homeowners think, provided you use painter's tape correctly.

Rather than simply sticking down the tape and painting immediately, professionals use a simple trick to prevent colour from bleeding underneath the edge. Once the tape has been firmly pressed into place, they apply a very thin coat of the existing wall colour along the tape's edge. This seals any tiny gaps before the new colour is applied. When the feature colour is painted over the top, it can't seep beneath the tape, leaving behind a beautifully crisp line.

Timing also matters. Remove the tape while the final coat is still slightly damp. Waiting until the paint has fully hardened can cause it to lift or tear, spoiling an otherwise perfect finish.

It's one of those small techniques that makes an enormous difference and instantly gives your project a polished, designer feel.

Did you know?

Colour can dramatically influence how a room feels. Soft blues and greens are often associated with calm, making them popular choices for bedrooms and bathrooms. Warm neutrals create a welcoming atmosphere in living spaces, while deep charcoal, forest green and navy blue can add sophistication when used as feature colours without overwhelming a room.



Never paint over dirty walls

Editor's tips for a flawless finish

Professional painters know that patience delivers better results than speed. Allow each coat to dry fully before applying the next, even if the paint feels dry to the touch. Good lighting also makes a surprising difference; natural daylight quickly reveals missed spots, roller marks and uneven coverage that might otherwise go unnoticed.

If you're painting more than one tin of the same colour, mix them together in a larger bucket before you begin. This simple practice, known as "boxing the paint", ensures colour consistency across the entire room.

Common mistakes that can spoil the finish

The most successful DIY painting projects usually have one thing in common: they weren't rushed.

One of the biggest mistakes homeowners make is painting over dirty walls. Dust, grease and loose paint reduce adhesion, often leading to peeling or uneven coverage later on. Another common error is applying thick coats in the hope of finishing sooner. Unfortunately, heavy coats take longer to dry, are more likely to drip and rarely produce the smooth finish achieved with two lighter applications.

Choosing colours without considering natural light can also lead to disappointment. A shade that looks warm and inviting in the shop may appear much darker in a north-facing room or cooler in a room that receives little direct sunlight. Whenever possible, paint a sample section and observe it at different times of day before committing to the entire room.

Finally, resist the temptation to remove drop sheets too early. Even experienced DIYers occasionally flick paint from a roller or brush, and protecting floors and furniture until the job is completely finished is far easier than trying to remove dried paint later.



Soft blues are often associated with calm

Step-by-step guide

Creating a colour-blocked feature wall

Colour blocking might look bold and artistic, but it's surprisingly straightforward when approached methodically.

Step 1: Choose your design

Decide where the painted shape will sit within the room. Popular choices include geometric panels, arches behind a bed or desk, or bold diagonal divisions that create movement across a wall.

Step 2: Measure carefully

Using a tape measure, spirit level and pencil, lightly mark out your design before applying painter's tape. Taking time at this stage helps ensure everything looks balanced once the room is furnished.

Step 3: Prepare the surface

Wash the wall, repair any imperfections and apply primer if required. Allow the surface to dry completely before painting.

Step 4: Apply the base colour

If you're repainting the room, begin with the lighter colour. Allow it to dry thoroughly before masking off the feature section.

Step 5: Tape and seal

Apply painter's tape carefully along the marked lines, pressing down every edge firmly. Seal the edge using a thin coat of the original colour before allowing it to dry.

Step 6: Apply the feature colour

Use a quality roller for larger sections and a brush around the edges. Apply two thin coats rather than one heavy one for the smoothest finish and the richest colour.

Step 7: Remove the tape

Carefully peel away the tape while the final coat remains slightly tacky. The result should be crisp, clean lines worthy of a professionally decorated home.

Looking after your newly painted walls

Once the paint has dried and the furniture has been moved back into place, a little routine care will help keep your newly refreshed room looking its best for years to come. Fortunately, modern interior paints are designed to withstand the demands of everyday family life, requiring very little maintenance beyond occasional cleaning.

Rather than scrubbing marks aggressively, use a soft cloth or sponge with warm water and a mild detergent to remove fingerprints and scuffs. Tackling marks while they're fresh usually prevents permanent staining and helps preserve the paint's finish. It's also worth keeping a small, clearly labelled container of leftover paint for future touch-ups. Even the best-kept homes collect the occasional ding or scratch, and having the original colour on hand makes small repairs quick and almost invisible.

Sunlight can also affect paint over time, particularly in rooms with large north-facing windows. Curtains, blinds or UV-filtering window film can help minimise fading and keep colours looking vibrant for longer.

With just a little attention, your freshly painted room will continue to feel bright, welcoming and beautifully finished long after the brushes have been cleaned and packed away.

The finishing touch

Refreshing a room with paint is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways to transform a home, yet the results can be remarkably dramatic. Whether you've embraced the elegance of two-tone walls, introduced a bold colour-blocked feature or simply breathed new life into tired doors and built-in shelving, thoughtful use of colour has the power to redefine a space without the need for expensive renovations.

The beauty of painting is that it rewards creativity just as much as careful preparation. By taking the time to clean surfaces thoroughly, repair imperfections and apply paint patiently in thin, even coats, you'll achieve a finish that looks polished, lasts longer and reflects the care you've invested in the project.

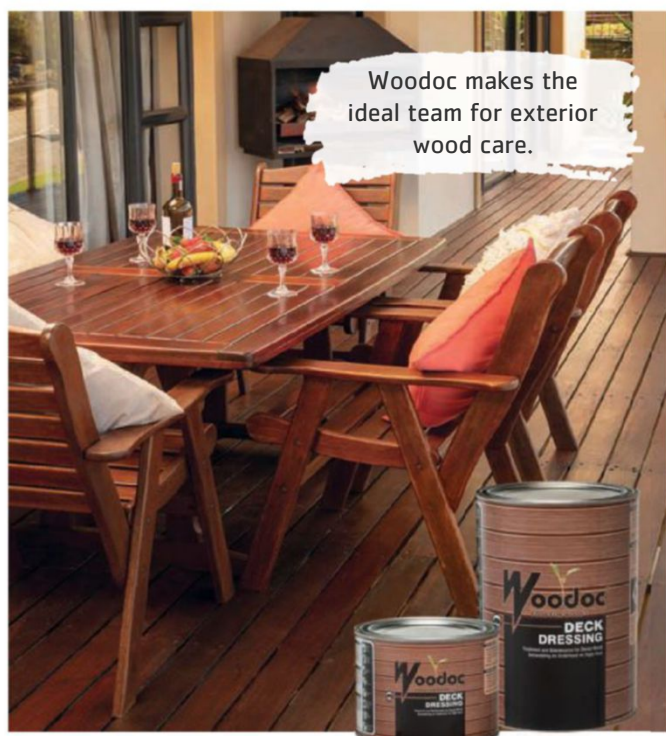
Perhaps that's why painting remains one of South Africa's favourite DIY weekend projects. It doesn't demand specialist skills or a large budget; just a willingness to experiment, a little patience and the confidence to pick up a brush. The next time a room begins to feel tired or uninspiring, don't underestimate the impact a fresh paint scheme can have. Sometimes, the biggest transformation starts with nothing more than a tin of paint and a new perspective.

Safety first

Painting may be one of the most accessible DIY projects around the home, but it still pays to work safely. Good ventilation is essential, particularly when using primers or solvent-based products, while a sturdy step ladder provides a far safer working platform than balancing on chairs or furniture. Keep the workspace tidy by storing brushes, rollers and paint tins where they won't become trip hazards, and take regular breaks during larger projects to avoid fatigue.

If children or pets are nearby, restrict access to freshly painted areas until surfaces are completely dry. A little planning not only protects the finish but also ensures everyone stays safe throughout the project.





Protecting outdoor timber the smart way

South Africans love outdoor living. From timber decks and pergolas to patio furniture, balustrades, garage doors and exterior cladding, wood remains one of the most attractive materials for creating warm, inviting outdoor spaces. Yet our harsh climate - intense UV-exposure, heavy summer rains, coastal humidity and seasonal temperature swings - can quickly take its toll on unprotected timber.

Choosing the correct protective finish is therefore not merely cosmetic; it is essential for preserving the beauty, durability and lifespan of exterior wood. Two products in the Woodoc range have become particularly popular for exterior applications: Woodoc Water-Borne MARINE for general exterior timber protection, and Woodoc DECK Dressing for dense hardwood surfaces such as decking.

Although both products are designed for exterior use, they serve different purposes and perform best on different timber types.

Woodoc Water-Borne MARINE is an excellent choice for general exterior timber applications where long-term weather resistance, flexibility and ease of maintenance are important. Suitable for exterior doors, window frames, patio furniture, pergolas, fascias and cladding, the product forms a durable protective barrier against moisture and UV-degradation while enhancing the natural appearance of the wood.

One of its biggest advantages is its water-borne formulation. This means low odour, easier clean-up and a more environmentally friendly approach compared to traditional solvent-based finishes. The finish dries relatively quickly, allowing multiple coats to be applied within a shorter period, which is particularly useful for contractors and DIY-enthusiasts working within tight weather windows.

Another important benefit is flexibility. Exterior wood expands and contracts as temperatures and moisture levels change. A rigid coating can crack or peel under these conditions, but a quality flexible sealer accommodates natural timber movement more effectively, reducing long-term maintenance issues.

Preparation, however, remains critical to success. Timber surfaces should be properly sanded, clean and dry before application.

Any contamination - including old, flaking coatings, dirt, oils, or mildew - can compromise adhesion and durability. As with all premium wood finishes, carefully following the instructions on the container is essential.



For hardwood decking, however, the requirements are different.

Dense exotic hardwoods often contain natural oils and extremely tight grain structures that can prevent conventional sealers from penetrating effectively. This is where Woodoc DECK Dressing excels. Specifically developed for hard, dense woods commonly used in exterior decking, the product penetrates the timber while nourishing and protecting it against the elements.

Unlike thick film-forming coatings that may eventually peel under heavy foot traffic, Woodoc DECK Dressing is designed to maintain the natural look and feel of timber while simplifying ongoing maintenance. This makes it especially suitable for decks exposed to full sun and high-traffic entertainment spaces.

An additional advantage is easy maintenance. Instead of extensive stripping and sanding, routine maintenance involves simply cleaning the deck and reapplying maintenance coats as needed. For homeowners, this translates into less downtime and reduced long-term maintenance costs.

Ultimately, successful exterior timber protection depends on matching the correct product to the correct application. Woodoc Water-Borne MARINE offers excellent all-round protection for general exterior timber, while Woodoc DECK Dressing provides specialised care for dense hardwood decking where penetration, flexibility and maintenance simplicity are key.

With proper preparation and regular maintenance, exterior wood can remain beautiful and protected for many years - even under demanding South African conditions.



Transform your kitchen without replacing it.

BUDGET CABINET MAKEOVERS

Replacing a kitchen can cost tens of thousands of rand, but refreshing tired cabinets doesn't have to. With careful planning, thoughtful design choices and a little DIY enthusiasm, you can dramatically transform the heart of your home for a fraction of the cost. The secret isn't spending more - it's making smarter improvements that maximise what you already have.

Walk into almost any older kitchen and you'll probably notice the cabinets before anything else.

Perhaps the timber has darkened over the years, the doors feel dated, or the brass handles that were fashionable twenty years ago now make the entire room look older than it really is. Yet despite their appearance, the cabinets themselves are often perfectly sound. The doors still close properly, the shelves remain sturdy and the layout continues to work well for everyday living.

Quick budget wins

If a full repaint isn't possible right now, these smaller improvements can still make a noticeable difference:

- Replace dated knobs and handles with contemporary hardware.
- Install soft-close hinges.
- Add under-cabinet LED lighting.
- Paint only the island or lower cabinets for a modern two-tone effect.
- Refresh the splashback with peel-and-stick tiles or a fresh coat of tile paint where suitable.

Even modest changes can breathe new life into an older kitchen.

That's why replacing an entire kitchen is frequently unnecessary.

Many homeowners assume a fresh-looking kitchen demands new cabinetry, but experienced renovators know otherwise. Some of the most impressive kitchen transformations begin with cabinets that never leave the room. Instead of ripping everything out, they focus on restoring, refining and modernising what is already there.

The result is not only kinder to the budget, but also less disruptive, more sustainable and surprisingly satisfying.

The one big idea

If there is one lesson worth remembering long after the paint has dried, it is this:

Good cabinets rarely need replacing - they simply need reimagining.

A successful cabinet makeover isn't about hiding old cupboards beneath fresh paint. It's about recognising that the cabinet boxes are usually the most expensive part of the kitchen. If they're still structurally sound, everything else can be changed around them.

That simple shift in thinking opens up countless possibilities.



Soft-close hinges provide a more refined feel

Looking beyond the surface

Kitchen cabinets work harder than almost any other feature in the home. Every day they endure fingerprints, cooking grease, steam, knocks from pots and pans, and constant opening and closing. Over time they naturally begin to look worn, even though the cabinets themselves may still have decades of life left.

Before deciding what needs changing, spend a little time looking carefully at the cabinetry.

Is it genuinely damaged, or simply dated?

There's an important difference.

Peeling laminate, loose hinges or water-damaged panels may require repairs, but faded finishes, tired colours and outdated hardware are largely cosmetic problems. Those are precisely the kinds of issues a budget makeover can solve remarkably well.

Often, homeowners are surprised to discover that changing the appearance of cabinet doors has a greater visual impact than replacing expensive appliances.

Preparation makes the difference

Anyone can buy paint, but... the challenge is making it last.

One of the biggest reasons DIY cabinet makeovers disappoint is poor preparation. Kitchens are exposed to cooking oils and airborne grease every day, creating an invisible layer that prevents paint from bonding properly.

Cleaning therefore becomes far more than a housekeeping exercise - it becomes the foundation of the entire project.

Using a quality degreasing cleaner removes years of accumulated residue that ordinary household cleaners often leave behind. Once the surfaces are clean, lightly deglossing or sanding the existing finish creates a surface the primer can grip.

It's the least glamorous part of the makeover, yet arguably the most important.

Professionals often say that painting starts long before the paint tin is opened, and cabinet restoration proves that point perfectly.



Shaker-style cabinet doors

Did you know?

The cabinet boxes account for a significant portion of the cost of a new kitchen. If they remain structurally sound, keeping them and updating the doors, finish and hardware can reduce renovation costs dramatically while also minimising waste sent to landfill.



Replacing knobs is one of the fastest ways to modernise a kitchen

A fresh look begins with fresh colour

Colour has an extraordinary ability to reshape a room.

Dark timber cabinets can make a compact kitchen feel enclosed, while lighter finishes immediately reflect more natural light and create a greater sense of space.

That doesn't necessarily mean every kitchen should be painted white.

Current design trends favour softer neutrals, warm greys, muted greens and deep blues, particularly when combined with natural timber accents or stone-look countertops. Two-tone kitchens remain especially popular because they introduce contrast without overwhelming the room.

Painting lower cabinets in a richer colour such as charcoal, olive or navy while keeping upper cabinets light creates visual balance and helps the room feel larger.

Safety first

Work in a well-ventilated area when using primers, paints and cleaning products. Wear gloves when handling strong degreasers, eye protection while sanding, and a suitable dust mask if sanding generates fine dust. Keep paint and solvents away from open flames, and allow all finishes to cure fully before returning food and kitchenware to the cupboards.

The smallest details often create the biggest change

Imagine renovating a bathroom but leaving thirty-year-old taps in place.

The room would never quite feel finished.

Cabinet hardware works in much the same way.

Replacing dated knobs and handles is one of the fastest and most affordable ways to modernise a kitchen. Contemporary matte black hardware creates a bold statement, brushed nickel offers timeless appeal, while warm brass has enjoyed a strong resurgence in modern interiors.

Changing hardware is also an opportunity to improve functionality.

Longer handles can make larger drawers easier to open, while soft-close hinges provide a more refined feel every time the cupboards are used.

These may seem like small improvements individually, but together they dramatically influence how the kitchen feels.

Creating custom-looking doors on a budget

One of the biggest trends in kitchen design over recent years has been the popularity of shaker-style cabinet doors.

Fortunately, homeowners don't always need to buy new doors to achieve that look.

If existing slab or plain-panel doors are still in good condition, carefully attached MDF mouldings can completely transform their appearance. Once the joins are filled, sanded smooth and painted, the finished doors often look as though they were manufactured that way from the beginning.

It's one of those DIY projects where patience matters more than expensive tools.

Accurate measuring, neat alignment and careful finishing produce results that far exceed the modest cost of the materials.

When painting isn't the best solution

Not every cabinet makeover requires a paintbrush.

Sometimes the cabinet boxes remain perfectly serviceable, but the doors themselves feel impossible to modernise.

This is where cabinet refacing becomes an attractive middle ground.

Instead of replacing the entire kitchen, new doors and drawer fronts are fitted to the existing cabinet framework. Once the frames have been painted to match, the result closely resembles a brand-new kitchen at a fraction of the replacement cost.

For homeowners who like the existing kitchen layout but want a completely different style, refacing often delivers the best balance between affordability and transformation.

A weekend project with lasting rewards

Although cabinet makeovers vary from one kitchen to another, the overall process follows a logical rhythm rather than a race against the clock.

It begins by removing the doors, drawers and hardware, carefully labelling each piece so that everything returns to its original position later. Once dismantled, every surface is thoroughly cleaned to remove grease before the existing finish is lightly deglossed or sanded.

If the cabinet doors have an open timber grain, particularly oak, applying a grain filler creates a smoother, more contemporary appearance before priming. A quality bonding primer is then applied, followed by several thin coats of durable cabinet paint.

Only once the paint has cured are the doors rehung and the new handles fitted.

It is a process that rewards patience at every stage. Rushing drying times or skipping preparation rarely saves time in the long run.

Common mistakes to avoid

Most disappointing cabinet makeovers have surprisingly little to do with the paint itself.

Painting over grease is perhaps the biggest culprit, preventing proper adhesion from the outset. Equally common is skipping primer, especially when covering glossy laminate or previously varnished timber.

Heavy paint coats can leave visible brush marks and are more likely to chip over time, while failing to label doors and drawers during removal often turns reassembly into an unnecessarily frustrating puzzle.

Finally, resist the temptation to reinstall doors before the paint has fully cured. Allowing adequate curing time produces a harder, more durable finish that withstands everyday use far better.



Cabinet boxes are usually the most expensive part of the kitchen

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BUILDING OR RENOVATING?

Residential construction and renovation activity remains significant. According to Statistics South Africa, residential building plans worth R46.9 billion and additions and alterations worth a further R30.2 billion were approved in 2025.

While homeowners often focus on price, timelines and references, compliance, worker protections and certification often determine whether a project runs smoothly or ends in dispute.

“Building and renovation projects involve multiple parties and significant risk,” says Danie Hattingh, spokesperson for business at the Building Industry Bargaining Council (BIBC). “Homeowners should first ensure that everyone working on the project is properly registered, compliant and qualified.”

Hattingh advises homeowners to look beyond online reviews and contractor-supplied references.

“Ask to see a portfolio of completed projects and speak directly to previous clients about the quality of work and whether the project was delivered as agreed.”

Before appointing a contractor, Hattingh advises homeowners to ask five key questions:

#1. Is the contractor registered and compliant?

A reputable contractor should be able to provide evidence of relevant and statutory registration.

Within the BIBC’s jurisdiction, all contractors, including principal contractors, subcontractors and labour-only contractors and their employees must be registered with the Council.

Homeowners should also verify compliance with the National Home Builders Registration Council (NHBR), South African Revenue Service (tax compliance), statutory obligations relating to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and Skills Development Levy (SDL), and compensation cover through the Compensation Fund or Federated Employers Mutual Assurance Company (FEM).

“Verifying a contractor’s registration and compliance is one of the simplest ways homeowners can protect themselves before work begins,” says Hattingh.

#2. Are workers' wages and benefits up to date?

Compliance goes beyond paperwork. It ensures workers receive the wages, pension contributions and benefits they are entitled to. Contractors who evade these obligations gain an unfair advantage while increasing risks for workers and clients.

"The risk of poor workmanship, delays and project abandonment rises when contractors fail to meet their obligations to workers," says Hattingh. "Exploitation often targets vulnerable workers willing to accept below-minimum wages, including undocumented foreign nationals employed under similarly precarious conditions."

Labour exploitation is often a warning sign of broader non-compliance. Choosing compliant contractors protects workers and promotes fair competition.

#3. Are the tradespeople on site properly skilled and certified?

Building work requires specialised skills. Hattingh advises homeowners to verify the skills and experience of the team doing the work, rather than relying solely on the qualifications of the person who secured the contract.

"Homeowners should ask who will be on site, whether they are suitably skilled, who will supervise the work, and request a list of authorised workers," he says. "A contractor's qualifications mean little if that person is not involved in the project."

Using unskilled or uncertified labour increases the risk of poor workmanship, delays, safety incidents and costly repairs. Knowing who is on site also improves security, supports emergency response and reduces the risks associated with unregistered workers.

#4. Who carries liability if something goes wrong?

Before work begins, homeowners should understand who is responsible for worker safety, insurance and any incidents on site.

"Non-compliant contractors can expose homeowners to significant financial, legal and insurance risks, particularly where workers are not properly registered, insured or supervised," says Hattingh.

"The key question homeowners should ask is whether their contractor demonstrates a culture of compliance," he adds. "That is often the clearest indication of how they manage quality, safety and accountability."

#5. Is there recourse if the contractor disappears or fails to complete the project?

A written contract, clear payment milestones and proper documentation are essential protections.

If a contractor abandons a project, breaches the contract or delivers defective work, homeowners should review their contract, document the site, formally notify the contractor and seek professional advice.

Keeping records of agreements, payments, communications and inspections can also be critical when seeking remedies or recovering losses.

Ultimately, choosing a compliant contractor protects more than the homeowner. It supports fair employment practices, rewards responsible contractors and helps build a more sustainable industry.

"Homeowners play an important role in shaping the industry," Hattingh concludes. "Choosing compliant contractors supports professional, responsible businesses and help keep quality, safety and accountability at the centre of the building industry."

About the Building Industry Bargaining Council (BIBC)

Established by employer organisations and trade unions in the Western Cape's building industry, the Building Industry Bargaining Council (BIBC) serves as a collaborative platform where both parties negotiate terms and conditions of employment through collective bargaining. Current members include the Master Builders Association Western Cape (MBA WC); MBA Boland; Consolidated Employers Organisation (CEO); Building, Wood and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (BWAWUSA); Building Workers' Union (BWU); and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

The Council promotes stable labour relations and contributes to a fair, just, and prosperous building industry by ensuring that workers receive agreed wages and benefits such as pensions and leave and that industry standards are maintained.





BRING IT BACK TO LIFE

It always seems to happen at the worst possible moment.

Perhaps you're running late for work, loading the family for a weekend away, or preparing to leave after a day at the shops. You slide behind the steering wheel, turn the key and instead of the familiar rumble of the engine, you're greeted by a sluggish cranking sound or worse... complete silence.

For many motorists, a flat battery feels like the beginning of an expensive repair. In reality, it is one of the most common vehicle problems and, in many cases, one of the easiest to solve.

Learning how to safely jump-start a battery and maintain clean battery terminals is a valuable DIY skill. It can get you back on the road quickly, extend the life of your battery and even help prevent breakdowns before they happen.

Like many maintenance tasks, success lies not in complicated tools but in understanding the basics and following safe working practices.

Why batteries go flat

A vehicle battery has one primary job: supplying the electrical power needed to start the engine and support electrical systems when required.

Every time you start the vehicle, the battery delivers a large burst of current. Once the engine is running, the alternator recharges the battery as you drive.

Problems arise when the battery cannot recover its charge. Leaving headlights on overnight, making frequent short trips, an ageing battery or a faulty charging system can all result in insufficient power to start the engine.

Our climate also plays a role. While cold winter mornings reduce battery performance in many inland areas, prolonged summer heat can shorten battery life by accelerating internal wear.

Understanding these factors helps explain why even a battery that seemed healthy a few weeks ago may suddenly refuse to cooperate.

Those white deposits matter

Lift the bonnet of an older vehicle and you may notice a chalky white, bluish or greenish substance around the battery terminals.

This corrosion forms as battery gases react with moisture and the metal terminals. Although it may appear harmless, corrosion acts as an electrical insulator, reducing the flow of current

between the battery and the vehicle.

The result can be slow starting, dim lights or intermittent electrical problems that mimic a failing battery.

Fortunately, cleaning battery terminals is one of the simplest maintenance tasks a vehicle owner can perform.

When a jump-start isn't the answer

A jump-start is designed to restore enough power to start an otherwise healthy battery.

If the battery repeatedly goes flat, the underlying cause needs investigation.

The battery itself may have reached the end of its service life, the alternator may not be charging correctly or an electrical component may be draining power while the vehicle is parked.

Repeatedly relying on jump-starts without addressing the root cause simply delays the inevitable.

Choosing the right jumper cables

Not all jumper cables are created equal, and selecting the right set is an important safety consideration. One of the



Always choose the right jumper cables

most important factors is the thickness, or gauge, of the cables. During a jump-start, a large amount of electrical current flows through the leads. If the cables are too thin, they can overheat as they carry the load. Excessive heat may soften or even melt the insulation, exposing the conductors and increasing the risk of sparks, short circuits or, in extreme cases, an electrical fire.

For most passenger vehicles, choose heavy-duty jumper cables with thick copper conductors and well-insulated clamps. Longer cables offer greater flexibility when positioning vehicles, but they should still be of an adequate gauge to minimise voltage drop and overheating. Avoid inexpensive, lightweight jumper cables that feel noticeably thin, as they may not safely handle the high current required to start larger engines or vehicles with heavily discharged batteries.

Before every use, inspect the cables for damaged insulation, loose or corroded clamps, or exposed wires. If the cables show signs of wear or overheating, replace them immediately rather than risking damage to the vehicle's electrical system, or compromising your safety.



Use a battery terminal cleaning brush or a soft wire brush



This corrosion acts as an electrical insulator

Small habits that prevent big problems

Good battery care involves more than responding when the vehicle refuses to start.

Regularly inspecting the battery for corrosion, ensuring the mounting bracket remains secure and checking that cables are firmly attached can prevent many common problems.

If your vehicle is not driven regularly, consider taking it for a longer drive every week or two to allow the alternator sufficient time to recharge the battery.

Keeping the battery clean also makes it easier to spot leaks, loose connections or other developing issues before they become major concerns.

Common mistakes to avoid

Even experienced motorists occasionally make errors when dealing with batteries.

One of the most serious mistakes is connecting jumper leads incorrectly. Reversing positive and negative connections can damage sensitive electronic systems and may even cause the battery to fail catastrophically.

Another common mistake is attempting to jump-start a visibly damaged or leaking battery. Such batteries should always be replaced rather than reused.

Many people also ignore corrosion until starting problems develop. Cleaning terminals periodically is quicker, easier and safer than waiting for poor electrical contact to leave you stranded.

Finally, avoid assuming every starting problem is caused by the battery. Faulty starter motors, charging system problems or damaged wiring can produce similar symptoms.

A few minutes that could save your day

Knowing how to deal with a flat battery provides more than practical convenience, it offers peace of mind.

Whether you're heading to work, setting off on holiday or simply collecting groceries, the confidence to recognise corrosion, clean battery terminals and safely perform a jump-start can prevent unnecessary stress and expensive roadside assistance.

Better still, these are maintenance tasks that require very little time yet deliver significant long-term benefits.

Safety first

Before working on any vehicle battery:

- Wear safety glasses and protective gloves.
- Remove rings, watches and metal jewellery.
- Keep sparks, cigarettes and open flames away from the battery.
- Work in a well-ventilated area.
- Never lean directly over the battery while connecting jumper cables.

Did you know?

Most vehicle batteries last between three and five years, depending on driving habits, climate and maintenance. Frequent short trips, extended periods without driving and prolonged exposure to high temperatures can all shorten battery life.



Step-by-step guide

Cleaning battery terminals

Before beginning, park the vehicle on level ground, switch off the ignition and remove the keys. Wear safety glasses and gloves, as battery corrosion can irritate skin and eyes.

Step 1 - Inspect the battery

Check for cracked battery cases, leaks or severe damage.

If the battery casing is swollen, cracked or leaking, do not attempt to clean or jump-start it. The battery should be professionally replaced.

Step 2 - Disconnect the battery

Always disconnect the negative (-) terminal first (black cable). Removing the negative connection first reduces the risk of accidental short circuits while working. Once disconnected, remove the positive (+) terminal (red cable).

Step 3 - Remove the corrosion

Using a battery terminal cleaning brush or a soft wire brush, gently remove corrosion from both the battery posts and cable clamps.

For stubborn deposits, a solution of bicarbonate of soda mixed with a small amount of water can help neutralise acidic residue. Apply carefully with a brush, avoiding excessive liquid around the battery.

Wipe everything dry with a clean cloth once the corrosion has been removed.

Step 4 - Reconnect the battery

Reconnect the positive (+) terminal first, followed by the negative (-). Tighten the clamps securely so they cannot be rotated by hand, but avoid over tightening, which can damage the battery terminals.

Step 5 - Protect the connections

A light coating of battery terminal protector or dielectric grease helps reduce future corrosion by limiting

exposure to moisture.

The entire process typically takes less than 20 minutes but can significantly improve electrical reliability.

Safely jump-starting a vehicle

Even with good maintenance, every driver may eventually face a flat battery. Fortunately, jump-starting is straightforward when performed correctly.

Step 1 - Position the vehicles

Position the assisting vehicle close enough for the jumper leads to reach comfortably, ensuring the vehicles do not touch one another.

Switch off both engines before making any connections.

Step 2 - Connect the positive leads

Attach one red jumper lead to the positive (+) terminal of the flat battery.

Connect the other end of the same lead to the positive (+) terminal of the charged battery.

Step 3 - Connect the negative lead

Attach one black lead to the negative (-) terminal of the charged battery.

Instead of connecting the remaining clamp directly to the flat battery's negative terminal, attach it to an unpainted metal part of the disabled vehicle's engine or chassis, well away

from the battery. This provides a safe earth connection and reduces the risk of sparks near battery gases.

Step 4 - Start the donor vehicle

Allow the assisting vehicle to idle for several minutes.

This provides time for some charge to flow into the flat battery before attempting to start the disabled vehicle.

Step 5 - Start the disabled vehicle

Attempt to start the vehicle.

If it starts, allow it to idle for several minutes before disconnecting the jumper leads.

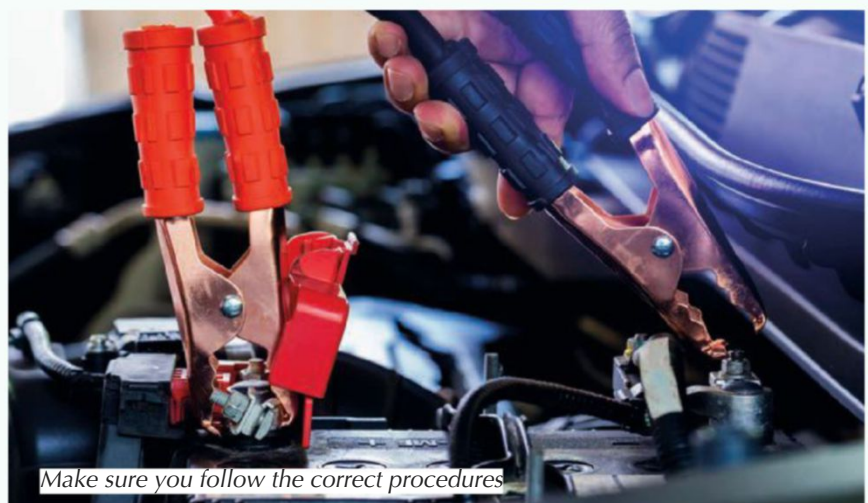
If the engine does not start after a few attempts, further jump-starting is unlikely to solve the problem and the vehicle should be inspected professionally.

Step 6 - Remove the leads

Disconnect the leads in the **reverse order** of installation.

Take care that the clamps do not touch one another or any moving engine components during removal.

Once disconnected, drive the vehicle for at least 20 to 30 minutes, where practical, to allow the charging system an opportunity to replenish the battery.



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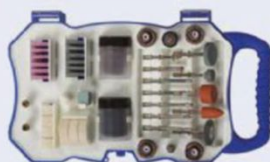
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Why there's never been
a better time to grow
your own.

FROM GARDEN TO TABLE

There is something immensely satisfying about walking into your garden moments before dinner and returning with a basket of fresh produce. A handful of spinach for a hearty stew, fragrant basil for homemade pasta sauce, crisp lettuce for a weekend braai or sun-warmed tomatoes bursting with flavour all remind us that some of the best ingredients don't come from supermarket shelves.

A vegetable garden is far more than another DIY project. It changes the way you think about your outdoor space, encouraging you to see every sunny

corner as an opportunity to produce something useful. It also changes the rhythm of everyday life. Instead of adding vegetables to your shopping list every week, you begin checking what's ready to harvest before deciding what's for supper.

With food prices continuing to rise, more South African homeowners are discovering that growing even a small selection of vegetables can make a noticeable difference to the household budget. The savings are welcome, but they're only part of the appeal. Home-grown vegetables taste fresher, travel only

a few metres from garden to kitchen and allow you complete control over how they are grown.

The encouraging news is that productive vegetable gardens aren't reserved for large country properties. A sunny strip alongside the garage, a few raised beds next to the patio or even a collection of containers on a balcony can produce a surprisingly generous harvest. Success has very little to do with the amount of space available and far more to do with understanding what vegetables need to thrive.

A garden that fits your life

It's easy to be inspired by photographs of perfectly organised vegetable gardens with long rows of flourishing crops stretching into the distance. While they certainly look impressive, they can also create unrealistic expectations for first-time gardeners.

The most productive home vegetable gardens are rarely the largest. Instead, they are the ones that become part of everyday life.

A modest planting bed measuring around 1.2 metres by 2.4 metres is often enough to keep a family supplied with seasonal vegetables while remaining manageable throughout the year. Because it doesn't demand hours of

maintenance every week, it's far more likely to receive the regular attention that healthy vegetables appreciate.

Location plays an equally important role. Most vegetables thrive in at least six hours of direct sunlight each day, and a position that enjoys morning sunshine offers an added advantage. As the early sun dries dew from the leaves, it creates conditions that are less favourable for fungal diseases while giving plants a strong start to the day.

Practicality also deserves some thought. A vegetable patch tucked away at the far end of the garden can easily be forgotten during a busy week, while one positioned close to the kitchen or entertainment area naturally becomes part of your daily routine. Passing it

every day means you'll notice when lettuce is ready to harvest, tomatoes need tying up or the soil is becoming dry long before these small jobs become larger problems.



Healthy soil grows healthy vegetables

Every successful vegetable garden begins below ground.

Just as a house depends on strong foundations, vegetables rely on healthy soil to support vigorous growth. Rich soil holds moisture without becoming waterlogged, provides a steady supply of nutrients and creates an environment where beneficial microorganisms quietly improve the health of the plants above.

Preparing the soil is one of those jobs that rewards patience. Digging to a depth of about 250 to 300 millimetres loosens compacted ground and allows roots to develop freely, while removing stones, old roots and stubborn weeds gives young seedlings the best possible start.

This is also the stage where compost earns its reputation as a gardener's best friend. Mixed generously into the soil, compost improves almost every type of garden. Heavy clay becomes easier to work and drains more effectively, while sandy soil gains the ability to hold moisture for longer. Instead of relying on large amounts of fertiliser from the outset, healthy soil provides a stable foundation that continues improving season after season.

Where the ground is particularly hard or poorly drained, raised beds offer an elegant solution. Besides improving drainage, they warm up more quickly in spring and make planting, weeding and harvesting considerably more comfortable.

The rhythm of a healthy vegetable garden

One of the biggest surprises for many beginners is discovering that vegetables don't necessarily need daily watering. In fact, constantly wetting only the surface of the soil encourages shallow roots that struggle during hot weather.

Vegetables respond far better to deep watering that allows moisture to penetrate well below the surface. Watering early in the morning gives plants time to absorb what they need before the day's heat arrives, while allowing leaves to dry naturally and reducing the likelihood of disease.

Mulch quietly becomes one of the hardest-working features in the garden. A layer of organic material spread around plants slows evaporation, suppresses weeds and keeps soil temperatures more consistent during South Africa's hot summers. Combined with drip irrigation or soaker hoses,

it creates a growing environment that is both water-wise and highly productive.

As plants begin producing leaves, flowers and fruit, their nutritional needs naturally increase. Rather than thinking of fertilising as a once-off task, experienced gardeners view feeding as an ongoing partnership with the soil. Regular additions of compost gradually build fertility, while balanced fertilisers provide extra nutrients during periods of active growth.

The plants themselves often reveal exactly what they need. Pale foliage, slow growth or poor flowering may signal nutrient shortages, while abundant leafy growth accompanied by very little fruit often suggests that too much nitrogen has been applied. Learning to observe these subtle changes soon becomes second nature.

Safety reminder

Wear gloves when handling compost, fertilisers or garden chemicals, and wash your hands thoroughly after gardening. Use sharp tools carefully, keep cutting edges clean and store all garden products securely away from children and pets.

Grow what you love to eat

One of the easiest mistakes to make is choosing vegetables because they look appealing in seed catalogues or nursery displays. A far better approach is to think about what regularly appears on the family dinner table.

Leafy vegetables such as spinach, lettuce and Swiss chard reward beginners with quick results and can often be harvested repeatedly over several weeks. Bush beans are dependable producers that ask for very little in return, while beetroot, carrots and spring onions fit comfortably into even modest-sized gardens.

No home vegetable patch feels complete without tomatoes. They demand a little more attention than some crops, needing sturdy support and regular feeding as they grow, but few gardening experiences match the satisfaction of picking perfectly ripe fruit straight from the vine.

Herbs deserve equal consideration. A handful of parsley, coriander or basil harvested fresh from the garden transforms everyday cooking, while hardy favourites such as rosemary and thyme continue producing throughout much of the year with very little effort.

Combining quick-growing vegetables with slower crops helps maintain enthusiasm. Long before carrots are ready to lift from the soil, leafy greens are already providing regular harvests, giving new gardeners confidence that their efforts are paying off.



Herbs deserve equal consideration

Working with nature instead of against it

A thriving vegetable garden quickly becomes home to countless insects, but not all visitors arrive with bad intentions.

Ladybirds, lacewings and tiny parasitic wasps are among the gardener's greatest allies, feeding on aphids and other troublesome pests before they can establish large populations. By planting flowers nearby and encouraging biodiversity, these natural predators become regular residents

rather than occasional visitors.

This balanced approach means pesticides are often unnecessary. A few minutes spent inspecting plants while watering usually reveals problems long before they become serious. Small colonies of aphids can often be removed by hand or washed away with water, while healthy, well-watered plants are naturally more resilient when faced with occasional insect damage.

A garden that keeps giving

Unlike many DIY projects that reach completion and require only occasional maintenance, a vegetable garden is always evolving. One crop finishes as another begins, each season offering opportunities to improve the soil and refine what you've learned.

Removing spent plants, adding fresh compost and rotating crops all contribute to healthier gardens over time, while regular inspections of irrigation systems help avoid wasted water and unnecessary stress on plants. Even spending just a few quiet minutes in the garden each day often reveals small issues before they become larger ones.

Before long, those daily visits become less about maintenance and more about enjoyment. The garden changes constantly, rewarding your attention with new flowers, ripening vegetables and the quiet satisfaction that comes from producing food with your own hands.

The harvest is only the beginning

Growing vegetables is not about creating a picture-perfect garden that belongs on the pages of a glossy magazine. It's about creating a space that works for your home, your family and your lifestyle.

The first harvest may be nothing more than a bowl of crisp lettuce, a handful of herbs or a few perfectly ripe tomatoes, but it represents something much more meaningful than fresh produce alone. It reflects an investment in healthier eating, lower grocery bills and a more productive outdoor space.

Like any worthwhile DIY project, a vegetable garden improves with experience. Every season brings new lessons, greater confidence and better harvests. The key is simply to begin.

This weekend, rather than trying to transform the entire garden, choose one sunny spot and prepare a single planting bed with plenty of compost. Plant a few vegetables your family genuinely enjoys eating, then allow the garden to grow naturally alongside your experience. It won't be long before dinner begins with a short walk into the garden, and the freshest ingredients you'll ever taste.



Common mistakes

Every experienced gardener has stories about crops that failed, seedlings that disappeared overnight or tomatoes that never quite lived up to expectations. The encouraging part is that most disappointments have surprisingly simple causes.

Enthusiasm often encourages beginners to plant more than they can realistically maintain. What begins as an ambitious vegetable garden can quickly become difficult to weed, water and harvest consistently. Starting small almost always produces better results than trying to manage too much space.

Crowded planting creates another avoidable problem. Vegetables need room to breathe, and when airflow is restricted, fungal diseases spread more easily while plants compete for sunlight and nutrients.

Timing also matters. South Africa's varied climate allows vegetables to be grown throughout much of the year, but matching crops to the appropriate season makes the difference between struggling plants and abundant harvests.

Even harvesting has its own rhythm. Many vegetables respond positively to regular picking, rewarding the gardener with fresh growth and a longer productive season.

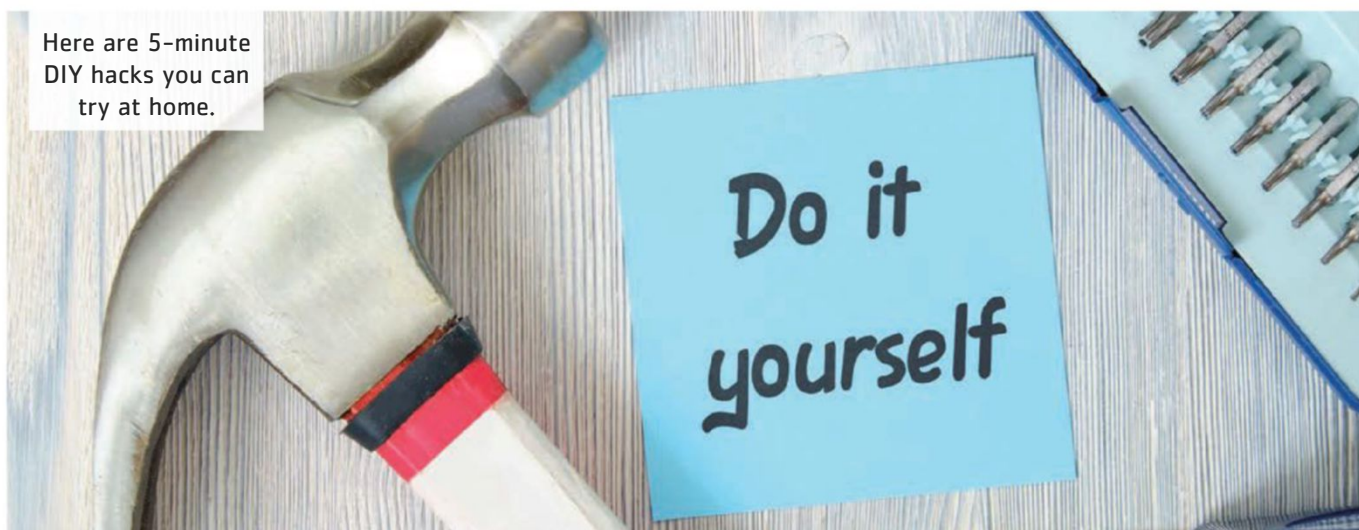
Did you know?

Healthy soil contains billions of beneficial microorganisms in every handful. These tiny organisms help break down organic matter, improve nutrient availability and strengthen plant roots naturally - one reason compost is often more valuable than simply adding more fertiliser.

Don't miss our companion feature, "Build Your Own Raised Garden Bed" elsewhere in this issue.

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!

Here are 5-minute
DIY hacks you can
try at home.



DIY hacks

Boost shower pressure

Unscrew the shower head from the wall pipe. Locate the rubber washer and mesh filter screen inside the base, rinse away trapped sand or sediment, scrub it clean with an old toothbrush.



Freshen a mattress

Sprinkle a layer of baking soda over the surface, let it sit for at least 5 minutes to absorb odors, and then vacuum it up thoroughly with a brush attachment.



Fix loose cabinet knobs

Dab a drop of clear nail polish onto the screw threads, then screw the knob back into place tightly. The dry polish acts as a mild glue to stop the screw from shaking loose again.



Clean a burnt pot

Add enough water to cover the charred spots, mix in 1 to 2 tablespoons of baking soda, and bring it to a boil for 10 minutes. Let it cool completely, then gently scrub away the loosened debris with a sponge.



Remove rust quickly

Mix white vinegar with a couple of tablespoons of salt, submerge the rusty metal, and let it soak for 4 to 24 hours. Scrub away the loosened rust with a brush or steel wool, rinse with water, and dry the metal completely.



Improve paint grip on metal

Clean the surface, lightly sand with 120- to 220-grit sandpaper to create a texture, wipe away all dust, and apply a specialized metal primer before painting.



Keep screws from slipping

Placing a piece of masking tape or a wide rubber band over a screw head provides extra friction, keeps the screwdriver bit from slipping or stripping the metal grooves, and helps hold the screw steady on the tool.





BLADE SHARPENING

From kitchen knives and pruning shears to axes and lawn mower blades, every cutting tool performs better when it's properly sharpened. The good news is that you don't need expensive equipment or years of experience to keep your blades in top condition. A little know-how, regular maintenance and the right technique can make your tools safer, easier to use and much longer lasting.

Most homeowners have at least one tool that has slowly become harder to use. It may be the kitchen knife that crushes tomatoes instead of slicing them, the secateurs that chew through branches rather than cutting them cleanly, or the lawn mower that leaves the grass looking ragged after every pass.

It's easy to ignore these small frustrations. After all, the tools still work - just not as well as they once did. But dull blades don't simply make jobs take longer. They require more effort, deliver poorer results and, surprisingly, can be more dangerous than properly sharpened ones.

Learning to sharpen your own blades is one of those DIY skills that pays dividends almost immediately. Not only will your tools perform like new again, but you'll also save money by extending their lifespan and avoiding unnecessary replacements.

Why sharp blades are actually safer

It sounds backwards, but a sharp blade is far safer than a blunt one.

A keen edge cuts with very little force. A dull blade, however, requires extra pressure, increasing the chance that it will suddenly slip or glance off the material you're cutting.

Whether you're slicing vegetables, pruning shrubs or trimming timber for your next weekend project, sharp tools allow you to work with greater control and much less effort.

The benefits don't stop there. Garden plants recover more quickly from clean cuts, timber produces smoother finishes, and lawn mower blades slice grass neatly instead of tearing it, helping your lawn stay healthier throughout the growing season.

Understanding the cutting edge

Many people imagine sharpening as aggressively grinding away metal until the blade becomes sharp again. In reality, very little steel is removed.

Every blade has two angled surfaces that meet to form an extremely fine cutting edge. As the tool is used, that edge slowly rolls over, develops tiny chips or simply wears away.

Sharpening removes just enough material to recreate that fine point.

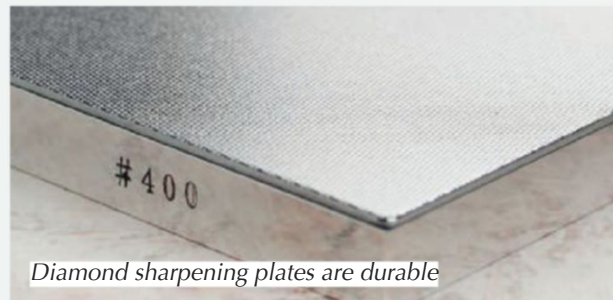
Once you understand that simple principle, sharpening becomes much less intimidating.

Choosing the right sharpening tool

There are several ways to sharpen blades, and each has its strengths.

A whetstone remains the favourite for many DIY enthusiasts because it offers excellent control and works well on kitchen knives, woodworking tools and many other blades. Although it takes a little practice, it produces outstanding results.

Diamond sharpening plates are durable, stay flat and cut quickly, making them ideal for harder steels and regular maintenance.





For garden tools a quality flat mill file is often all that's required

Manual pull-through sharpeners are useful for quick kitchen touch-ups, but they shouldn't replace proper sharpening as they can remove more metal than necessary if used too often.

For garden tools such as spades, hoes, axes and pruning equipment, a quality flat mill file is often all that's required.

The tool itself is less important than using it correctly.

Consistency beats speed

One of the biggest mistakes beginners make is trying to sharpen too quickly.

The secret is maintaining a consistent angle throughout each stroke. The exact angle isn't nearly as important as keeping it steady.

Use smooth, controlled movements and allow the sharpening surface to do the work. Pressing harder won't produce a sharper blade, it simply removes more metal and makes it harder to achieve an even edge.

As you sharpen, you'll eventually feel a tiny wire edge, known as a burr, develop on the opposite side. This tells you that you've sharpened all the way to the cutting edge. Once the burr runs along the entire length, repeat the process on the opposite side before finishing with several lighter strokes.



For garden tools a quality flat mill file is often all that's required

Different blades need different care

Not every blade is meant to be razor sharp.

- Kitchen knives benefit from frequent light sharpening that keeps the edge keen without removing unnecessary material.
- Pruning shears should normally be sharpened only on the bevelled side, following the original factory angle.
- Axes and splitting mauls require a tougher edge that can withstand repeated impacts without chipping.
- Lawn mower blades deserve particular attention. Before removing the blade, disconnect the spark plug on petrol mowers or disconnect the battery on cordless models. After sharpening, check that the blade remains balanced. Even a slight imbalance can cause vibration and place extra strain on the mower.

Avoid these common mistakes

Many sharpening problems come down to just a handful of avoidable errors.

- **Waiting too long**
Trying to restore a severely blunt blade takes far longer than maintaining a reasonably sharp one.
- **Changing the sharpening angle**
An inconsistent angle creates an uneven edge that never becomes truly sharp.
- **Using too much pressure**
Let the sharpening stone or file do the work. Heavy pressure usually creates poor results.
- **Skipping the final honing**
Removing the burr and refining the edge is what gives a blade its clean cutting performance.
- **Ignoring cleaning and storage**
Dirt, moisture and rust quickly undo all your hard work.

The bottom line

Blade sharpening isn't a skill reserved for professionals. It's a practical part of home maintenance that anyone can learn.

Like painting a wall or servicing a lawn mower, it becomes easier each time you do it. With regular touch-ups and proper care, your knives, garden tools and workshop equipment will perform better, last longer and make every DIY project more enjoyable.

The next time a cutting job feels like **hard work**, don't assume the tool has reached the end of its life. **More often** than not, all it needs is a freshly sharpened edge.

Don't miss the article on understanding utility knife blades and their uses.

A whetstone remains the favourite for many





Here are your options.



Always use a high-quality battery charger to avoid damaging the battery

A handy DIY jump starter

NO JUMPER CABLES?

A flat battery doesn't always happen in the ideal place. You may be parked in an empty car park, away on holiday, or simply have no other vehicle nearby to provide a jump-start. Fortunately, jumper cables are no longer your only option.

One of the most useful additions to any vehicle emergency kit is a portable lithium jump starter. Compact enough to fit in the boot or glove compartment, these rechargeable units are designed to deliver the high burst of current needed to start a vehicle without relying on another battery. Most modern jump starters include built-in safety features such as reverse-polarity protection, short-circuit protection and overload protection, making them easier and safer for occasional users. Many models also double as power banks for charging mobile phones or include integrated

LED emergency lights, adding to their usefulness during roadside emergencies.

If a portable jump starter is

A compact, heavy duty Li-Ion jump starter



unavailable and there is no second vehicle nearby, roadside assistance remains the safest option. Many insurance policies, vehicle warranties and motoring organisations include emergency battery assistance as part of their cover, allowing a technician to either jump-start the vehicle or test the battery to determine whether it needs replacement.

For vehicles with manual transmissions, some motorists may be familiar with "push-starting" or "bump-starting".

While this method can sometimes start older manual vehicles by engaging the clutch while the vehicle is moving, it is not suitable for automatic transmissions and is generally not recommended for modern vehicles. Advances in engine management systems, catalytic converters and electronic controls mean that bump-starting can potentially cause damage and may not work at all. Always consult your vehicle's owner's manual before considering this method.

If the battery repeatedly goes flat after being jump-started, resist the temptation to simply recharge it again and again. Frequent battery failures often indicate a deeper problem, such as an ageing battery, a faulty alternator

or an electrical drain that continues to discharge the battery when the vehicle is parked. Having the charging system professionally tested can prevent repeated breakdowns and help identify the underlying cause before it leaves you stranded again.

Emergency kit essentials

Keep these items in your vehicle for added peace of mind::

- Heavy-duty jumper cables with adequately thick, well-insulated leads.
- A fully charged portable lithium jump starter.
- Protective gloves and safety glasses.
- A torch or rechargeable work light.
- A reflective warning triangle or high-visibility vest.
- Basic hand tools and a clean cloth for wiping battery terminals.

A well-stocked emergency kit takes up very little space in the boot but can make the difference between a minor inconvenience and a lengthy roadside wait.



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The weekend project that keeps rewarding you long after the tools are packed away.

BUILD YOUR OWN RAISED GARDEN BED



DIY Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Build Time: One weekend

Estimated Cost: Moderate

Best Timber: Pressure-treated structural pine

Tools:

- Circular saw or mitre saw
- Cordless drill/driver
- Tape measure
- Combination square
- Spirit level
- Clamps
- Spade and rake
- Safety glasses and hearing protection

Cut list:

- 2 Side boards 2400 × 152 × 38mm
- 2 End boards 1124 × 152 × 38mm
- 4 Corner posts 450 × 75 × 75mm

Finished size:

- Length: 2400 mm
- Width: 1200 mm
- Height: 450 mm

Walk through almost any suburb and you'll notice a familiar pattern. Beautiful lawns surround the house, flower beds brighten the entrance, and somewhere near the back fence sits an unused corner that receives plenty of sunshine but serves little purpose.

It's exactly the kind of space where a raised garden bed can make all the difference.

Unlike many DIY projects that look impressive for a while before fading into the background, a raised garden bed becomes part of everyday life. One day you're measuring timber and driving screws; a few weeks later you're stepping outside before supper to pick crisp lettuce, fragrant herbs or sun-ripened tomatoes that have travelled only a few metres from garden to kitchen.

Perhaps that's why raised beds have become so popular in recent years. They solve several gardening challenges at once. Poor soil becomes far less of a concern because you're creating an entirely new growing environment. Drainage improves immediately, weeds are easier to manage, and the raised height makes planting, watering

and harvesting considerably more comfortable.

For homeowners who are new to vegetable gardening, it's also an ideal first woodworking project. The construction is straightforward, the materials are readily available from most timber merchants, and the finished result is something the whole family can enjoy.

A good garden starts long before the first seed

Experienced gardeners often say they spend more time preparing the soil than planting the vegetables, and with good reason.

The healthiest vegetables rarely come from the richest fertiliser programme. They grow in healthy, living soil.

Before cutting a single board, spend a little time walking around the garden. The ideal location isn't necessarily the largest open space - it's the one you'll naturally visit every day. Position the raised bed close enough to the house that watering and harvesting become

part of your daily routine rather than another weekend chore.

Morning sunshine is especially valuable. Besides providing the six or more hours of light that most vegetables need, it dries dew from the leaves, helping to reduce fungal diseases while giving plants a strong start to the day.

Once you've chosen the right location, the project begins to take shape remarkably quickly.

Standing the timber on sawhorses before making the first cut is one of those simple workshop habits that pays dividends. Every board is easier to measure accurately, safer to cut and far easier to assemble later.

Our project uses pressure-treated pine because it offers an excellent balance between affordability and durability. Once the boards have been cut to length, every freshly exposed end should be sealed with a suitable timber preservative. It's a simple task that takes only a few minutes but can significantly extend the life of the finished bed.

With the components prepared, assembly is surprisingly satisfying.

Rather than simply screwing the boards together at the corners, each corner is reinforced with a solid timber post fixed inside the frame. These posts act as structural anchors, resisting the outward pressure created once the bed is filled with several hundred kilograms of soil.

As each corner comes together, resist the temptation to rush ahead. Measuring diagonally across the frame is a quick way to confirm that it's perfectly square. It's one of those professional habits that separates a neat, well-built project from one that never quite looks right.

Once assembled, the frame reveals the true scale of the project. Although it measures only 2.4 metres in length, it provides ample growing space for a

family while remaining narrow enough to reach the centre comfortably from either side without stepping onto the soil.

Positioning the completed frame is much easier with a helper. Besides making the lifting safer, an extra pair of hands makes it easier to check the level while making small adjustments beneath the frame.

Taking the time to get this stage right is more important than many people realise. A raised bed that's slightly out of level doesn't just look untidy - it also affects watering, causing moisture to collect at one end while leaving the opposite side noticeably drier.

With the structure complete, the project naturally shifts from carpentry to gardening.

Rather than filling the bed with heavy garden soil, create a growing medium by blending quality topsoil with generous quantities of mature compost. This lighter, nutrient-rich mixture retains moisture while allowing excess water to drain freely, creating the ideal environment for healthy root development.

As the soil settles over the following weeks, finish the bed with a generous layer of organic mulch. Besides helping to conserve moisture, mulch suppresses weeds and keeps the soil cooler during South Africa's long, hot summers.



Budget builder

If you're planning to build several raised beds, buying longer timber lengths and cutting them yourself is usually far more economical than purchasing pre-cut components.

The same applies to soil and compost. Ordering in bulk rather than buying numerous small bags can save a considerable amount of money, especially when filling multiple beds.

One of the greatest pleasures of building a raised garden bed is that the project doesn't end when the last screw is driven home.

Over the coming months, the timber weathers naturally into the landscape, seedlings mature into productive plants and the bed gradually becomes one of the busiest - and most rewarding - parts of the garden.

Like any worthwhile DIY project, it also benefits from occasional maintenance. Checking for loose screws, topping up the mulch each season and adding fresh compost before every new planting cycle will **keep the bed performing at its best for many years.**



Pro tip:

Don't drive screws directly into untreated cut ends.

Always drill pilot holes first and brush preservative onto every freshly cut surface before assembly. This simple habit can add years to the life of outdoor timber projects.

Common mistakes to avoid

Most raised beds that disappoint their owners do so because of a few easily avoided mistakes.

Building the bed too wide makes planting and harvesting awkward because the centre becomes difficult to reach. Filling it with poor-quality soil instead of a compost-rich growing mix limits plant growth before the first seedling has even emerged. Failing to treat freshly cut timber ends can significantly shorten the life of the structure, while assembling the frame without checking that it's square often leaves a project that never quite looks professionally built.

The biggest mistake, however, usually happens after construction is complete.

Enthusiastic gardeners often try to plant too much too soon. A raised bed is far more productive when planted thoughtfully, giving each crop enough space, sunlight and airflow to develop properly.

From builder to gardener

There's something uniquely satisfying about a project that continues to improve long after construction is finished, and a raised garden bed is exactly that kind of investment.

Months from now, you'll probably forget how many screws you used or how long

it took to build. Instead, you'll remember picking your first tomatoes, harvesting herbs just minutes before a braai, or watching children discover that carrots don't arrive in plastic bags.

For a project that takes only a weekend to complete, few DIY builds offer such lasting rewards. The timber frame is simply the beginning. What grows inside it - and the enjoyment it brings - is where the real satisfaction begins.

Don't miss our companion feature, "From Garden to Table" elsewhere in this issue, where we show you how to turn your new raised garden bed into a productive kitchen garden.



Choose vegetables your family enjoys eating, and plant taller crops behind shorter ones to ensure every plant gets the sunlight it needs



Plant the first vegetables, water thoroughly and apply mulch

Weekend project

Saturday Morning

Cut all timber components, treat cut ends and assemble the frame.

Saturday Afternoon

Position the bed, level it carefully and secure it in place.

Sunday Morning

Fill with compost-enriched soil and install irrigation if required.

Sunday Afternoon

Plant the first vegetables, water thoroughly and apply mulch.

By the following weekend, the project will already feel less like a woodworking exercise and more like the beginning of a productive kitchen garden.



Did you know?

A raised bed measuring 2400 × 1200mm holds almost 1.3 cubic metres of growing medium. Filling it with quality compost and topsoil rather than ordinary garden soil gives vegetables an immediate advantage.

THE HOME HANDYMAN EXISTS FOR ONE REASON: TO HELP YOU BECOME THE BEST DIY'ER YOU CAN BE.

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Understanding utility knife blades and their uses.

THE RIGHT CUT

Few tools earn their place in a home toolbox quite like the utility knife. Compact, affordable and endlessly practical, it is often the first tool reached for when there is a package to open, a piece of vinyl flooring to trim or a stubborn strip of sealant backing to remove.

But not all utility knives, or blades, are created equal. The difference between a clean, controlled cut and a frustrating, unsafe job often comes down to selecting the right blade for the material in front of you.

Modern utility knives are available in many forms, from traditional retractable models found in most DIY kits to specialised knives designed for flooring, insulation, carpet and precision work.

Understanding how these blades work and where they perform best allows homeowners to get better results while protecting both themselves and their tools.

More than just a sharp edge

At first glance, a utility knife blade appears simple: a thin piece of steel with a cutting edge. However, small differences in design have a big impact on performance.

Most household utility knives use replaceable blades made from hardened steel. Some blades are coated for improved durability, while others are designed with specific edge profiles to handle tougher materials. A fresh blade reduces the need for excessive force, which is one of the main causes of slips and accidents.

Did you know?

A dull blade is often more dangerous than a sharp one because it encourages the user to push harder, increasing the chance of losing control.

The most common blade types found in homes include:

Standard trapezoid blades: the everyday favourite

The classic trapezoid blade is the all-rounder of the utility knife world. It is ideal for general household tasks such as opening cartons, cutting plastic packaging, trimming paperboard and slicing through light materials.

For most homeowners, a quality retractable utility knife fitted with standard blades will handle the majority of weekend DIY jobs. Keeping a small supply of replacement blades in the workshop means there is always a sharp edge ready when needed.

Hook blades: designed for controlled cutting

Hook blades have a curved end that allows the blade to grip and cut materials while reducing the risk of damaging the surface underneath. They are particularly useful for cutting carpet, vinyl flooring and roofing felt.

When replacing flooring in a room, for example, a hook blade can make it easier to cut through the material while helping prevent accidental scratches on the floor below.

Snap-off blades: precision when you need it

Snap-off blades are popular among decorators, crafters and hobbyists because a fresh cutting edge can be exposed quickly. These knives contain a segmented blade, allowing the worn section to be snapped away to reveal a new sharp section.

They are excellent for cutting wallpaper, cardboard, thin plastic sheets and other lighter materials. However, they are not the best choice for heavy-duty cutting because the segmented design is less suited to high pressure.



A retractable utility knife with snap-off blades



Serrated blades: for tougher materials

Some utility knives use serrated edges that work more like a miniature saw. These blades are useful for materials that resist a straight cutting motion, such as thick insulation boards, foam products and certain textiles.

The teeth help the blade grip the material, making the cut smoother and reducing the effort required.

Choosing the right blade for your DIY project

Before reaching for your knife, consider what you are cutting and the finish you want to achieve.

A sharp standard blade is usually the best choice for cardboard, packaging and general repairs. A hook blade is better when working with floor coverings, while a precision snap-off blade suits detailed cutting tasks.

The thickness and density of the material also matter. Cutting through thick carpet with a worn standard blade may require too much pressure, increasing the chance of the knife slipping. Replacing the blade or switching to a more suitable design often makes the job quicker and safer.



Keeping your utility knife in good condition

A utility knife is a small investment, but a little care will extend its working life.

Dirt, adhesive residue and moisture can affect how smoothly the blade mechanism operates. After working with materials such as carpet adhesive, insulation or treated timber, wipe the knife clean and remove any build-up around the blade channel.

Store replacement blades in a dry container, away from moisture and children. Rusty blades not only perform poorly but can damage materials and require more force to use.

A useful habit is to replace blades as soon as cutting becomes difficult rather than waiting until the knife struggles. A sharp blade requires less pressure, produces cleaner results and gives you better control.

Step-by-step guide

Changing a utility knife blade safely

Replacing a blade is a simple task, but it should always be done carefully.

A heavy duty, folding pocket utility knife

Step 1 - Work in a clear area

Place the knife on a stable surface with good lighting. Avoid changing blades while holding the knife in mid-air.

Step 2 - Retract the blade fully

Make sure the cutting edge is safely inside the knife body before opening the mechanism.

Step 3 - Follow the knife design

Some models have a quick-release button, while others require loosening a screw or sliding the blade holder open. Check the manufacturer's instructions if you are unsure.

Step 4 - Remove the old blade carefully

Grip the blade by the blunt section, not the sharp edge. Dispose of used blades safely by wrapping them or placing them in a suitable container.

Step 5 - Fit the new blade securely

Ensure the blade sits correctly in its holder before closing the knife. A loose blade can move unexpectedly during use.

Step 6 - Test the mechanism

Extend and retract the blade a few times to confirm it moves smoothly and locks securely.

Common mistakes to avoid

One of the most common mistakes DIY'ers make is continuing to use a blade long after it has become blunt. A struggling knife can tear materials instead of cutting cleanly and may cause unnecessary strain on your hands and wrists.

Another mistake is using the wrong blade for the material. A standard blade forced through a thick floor covering may not only produce a poor finish but also create a safety risk.

Many homeowners also overlook blade security. If the blade is not properly fitted or the locking mechanism is damaged, the knife can become unpredictable. Before starting a project, take a moment to check that everything is working correctly.

Finally, avoid using a utility knife as a substitute for other tools. It may be tempting to use it for scraping, prying or cutting materials it was not designed for, but this can damage the knife and increase the chance of injury.

Don't miss the article on blade sharpening in this issue.



WHAT TYPE OF ELECTRIC HEATER SHOULD YOU BUY?

When winter settles in, there is something satisfying about walking into a warm home after a cold day. But before you buy the first electric heater you see, it is worth considering how, where and for how long you plan to use it. The cheapest heater to buy is not necessarily the best heater for your needs, and choosing the right type can make a noticeable difference to comfort and electricity consumption.

Portable electric heaters are particularly useful because they let you heat the room you are actually using instead of warming the entire house. Two common choices are oil-filled radiators and convector heaters, and although both produce heat from electricity, they deliver that warmth in quite different ways.

An oil-filled radiator is designed for steady, comfortable heat. An electrical element heats the oil sealed inside the radiator, and the warm oil transfers heat to the metal casing. The casing then gradually releases that heat into the room. Because the oil retains heat, the radiator can remain warm for some time after the element switches off.

This makes an oil-filled radiator a good choice when you want to keep a room warm for several hours. Think of a bedroom overnight, a home office during the working day or a living room where the family spends an evening. They are not the fastest heaters to warm a cold room, but their gradual, consistent heat can make them comfortable for longer periods.

A convector heater, on the other hand, is more about getting heat into the room quickly. It heats the air around the heating element, causing warm air to rise and circulate around the room. Some models use a fan to speed up this circulation.

The result is faster heat, which is useful when you come home to a chilly room and want to warm it up quickly.

The trade-off is that convector heaters generally don't retain heat once they are switched off. They are therefore particularly useful for shorter periods of heating, such as warming a bathroom before use or taking the chill off a room in the morning.

Whichever type you choose, don't overlook the controls and safety features. A good thermostat allows the heater to maintain a comfortable temperature without running continuously, while a timer can prevent the heater from operating when nobody is in the room. Multiple heat settings can also help you match the heater's output to the conditions rather than simply running it at maximum power.

It is also worth remembering that an electric heater doesn't magically create "cheap" heat. How much electricity it uses depends largely on its power rating and how long it operates. The smartest approach is to heat the space you need, keep doors and windows closed, improve draught-proofing where possible, and use the thermostat and timer sensibly.

So, which should you buy? Choose a convector heater when speed is your priority; choose an oil-filled radiator when you want steady, longer-lasting warmth. There is no single winner - the best heater is the one that matches the way you use the room.

And, as with any electrical appliance, buy from a reputable manufacturer, follow the installation and operating instructions, and keep heaters well clear of curtains, furniture and other combustible materials. A little thought before you buy can leave you warmer, safer and less likely to regret your winter heating choice.

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