

TIPS AND TRENDS FOR HOMEOWNERS, BUYERS AND SELLERS



Root Cause

Trees and shrubs add visual appeal to any homeowner's lawn or backyard — but only when they're in tip-top shape. *Better Homes & Gardens* and HGTV offer some key maintenance tips.

Pruning

To keep plants lush and healthy, prune dead branches or leaves regularly. If a plant is already infected with a disease or pests, pruning can help prevent spreading and extend the plant's life. Experts suggest dipping your pruning shears in bleach or rubbing alcohol in between cuts to further kill disease or pests.

When you prune depends on what kind of tree or shrub you have. The basic rule of thumb is to prune plants when they are not in bloom or are on the verge of blooming. For example, shade trees are best pruned in late fall, winter or early spring, when they're typically leafless.

And keep in mind that while light pruning is OK to do on your own, it's best to hire a professional if larger branches need to be cut.

Watering

Just planted a tree? If the tree is in its first two years, water it more frequently, since the tree is expending energy to grow. Experts suggest 30 seconds with a steady stream of water from an ordinary garden hose. You can also add mulching to your regular routine to try and retain moisture.

One note of caution: Be careful not to water trees as frequently as the grass. Too much watering can cause the tree roots to grow too close to the surface, which means that the water is actually suffocating the roots.

Pest Control

The most important thing you can do to maintain a pest-free environment is to check your plants thoroughly for insects and oddities — such as black spots on the leaves or holes in the wood — on a regular basis. Anything amiss could mean the plant has been infested with pests. Experts suggest periodically blasting leaves with a hose to shake off any clinging pests.

GARAGE MAKEOVER

It might seem like your garage is only good for cars and out-of-season junk, but consider your garage an extra room. With just a little bit of creativity and effort, it can become a fully functional part of your home.

Just as many basements or attics are finished, complete with heating, air conditioning and wiring, garages can be as well. Whether you've got an extra houseguest or a surprise live-in relative, the garage can be the perfect spot to host visitors and give everyone a little extra privacy. Invest in decorations, furniture and even carpet to keep the garage looking habitable, even when not in use.

The garage is also the perfect place for entertainment. Incorporate fun add-ons such as a pool table, ping-pong table or even foosball. Having people over to watch the big game? Convert your garage into the ultimate football haven with big-screen TVs and a built-in bar in the corner.

Last, consider using your garage as a workroom or a photography or woodworking studio. The garage also can serve as a home gym, if there's not enough room in the main home to store treadmills or a weight bench..



fast fact >> >> >> >> >> >> >>

You can burn nearly 200 calories by raking leaves for an hour.





No Leaks

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, water from household leaks can add up to 10,000 gallons of water every year — enough to fill a backyard swimming pool. If your faucet has sprung a leak, H2ouse.org encourages you to keep these tips in mind.

Most faucet leaks are caused by worn washers within the faucet. Replacing the washer is fairly simple: Cut off the water supply to the problem faucet, disassemble it and replace the washer with a new one. If you're unsure of what type of washer to buy, bring it into the hardware store so you can compare it to similar models or ask a sales associate for assistance. Still leaking? The problem may be in the underground pipes, in which case it's best to call a plumber.

If you're replacing tubing under a sink, be sure to replace the shutoff valve as well. Most likely, these valves haven't been touched in years, so it's best to get a new one when it's being used.

If you wind up going the do-it-yourself route, take photos or sketch and record the order of disassembly. Many homeowners skip this vital step, which leads to even more problems down the road with faulty equipment.

The most important rule? If you feel you can't handle it, call in an expert. Going in blind to fix leaks can wind up costing you if something goes awry.

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Kathryn Ann McKenzie

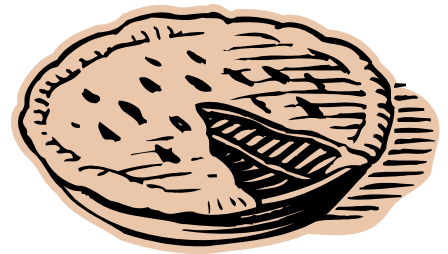
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DID YOU KNOW?

One out of five Americans prefer apple pie, followed by pumpkin and pecan.

★★★★★
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Thank you, Kathryn*