

Stay safe when completing home improvement projects



Finally fixing that loose step? Planning to use power tools? Doing your own home repairs and projects can feel empowering, but if done improperly, it can be dangerous too.

Last year, one-third of DIYers reported injuries while

working on a home improvement project, yet 77 percent admit they've skipped wearing the proper protective gear.

"Whatever your experience level, you need to use caution when making repairs or doing general home main-

tenance," says Lou Manfredini, host of HouseSmarts TV and home improvement contributor on NBC's 'The Today Show.'

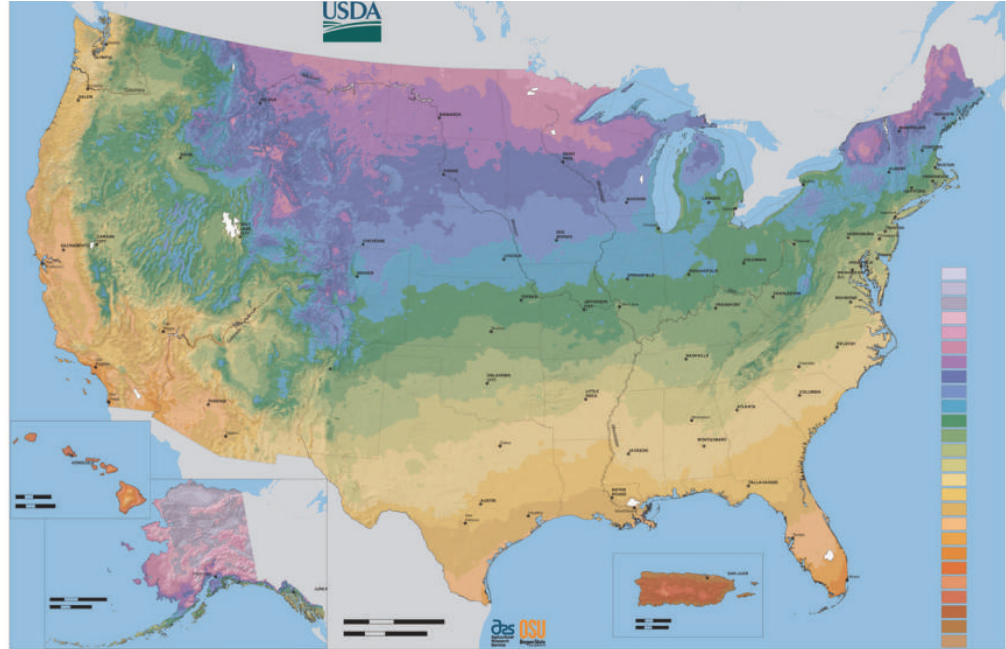
Here are some tips from Manfredini to ensure you are safe when completing common DIY tasks.

- Updating the front door: Want to add some pizzazz to your home? Consider repainting the front door. With a little sanding, priming and a new coat of paint in a bold color, you can change the entire look of your home. Just make sure you wear a proper respirator while sanding, and use appropriate protective eyewear.
- Mowing the lawn: Before mowing, take time to inspect for items lying on the ground. Sticks and stones can break your bones – particularly if the blade of the mower picks it up and throws it at high speed from under the mower's deck. When doing yard work outside, help protect your eyes with safety eyewear.
- Easy bathroom fix: Replacing a broken ceramic tile is easy if you follow these steps. Remove all the grout

- around the tile. Then use a chisel to remove the tile. Consider wearing proper safety eyewear. Clean up the surface and then install the new tile with tile adhesive. When that dries, re-grout the new tile. When tackling this project, make sure you wear a good pair of gloves, as broken tile pieces can be sharp.
- Fixing up furniture: Refinishing furniture is a great way to revive old items. But remember, some finishing products may be harmful to lungs and skin. Always read the safety information for the products used. Wear a good pair of quality painter's gloves, protective eyewear, and an appropriate respirator.
- Using power tools: Anytime you use power tools like a circular saw, sander or a compressor, you should protect your ears. Disposable

- foam ear plugs are easy to use and can help reduce the noise level, which is important, as noises over 85 decibels can lead to permanent hearing loss over time. Also consider safety protective eyewear when using circular saws, sanders and other power tools.
 - Adding Insulation: Adding insulation to your home is one of the best ways to increase its energy efficiency. Whether its fiberglass batt insulation or blown-in cellulose, the added comfort will be apparent. For safety, wear pants, a long sleeve shirt and eye, hand, and lung protection.
- More DIY safety tips and project information can be found at www.3MDIY.com.
- When it comes to your health and safety, don't take chances. Doing it right means doing it safely. (StatePoint)

Understand hardiness zones before planting



USDA Hardiness Zone map courtesy of the USDA. View an interactive version at the USDA website.

Gardening benefits the environment in myriad ways. Maintaining natural landscapes and preserving green spaces can reduce the collective carbon footprint of the human race. Trees, flowers and other greenery filter the air and create welcoming habitats for all species of animals and insects.

Many home gardeners set out each spring to create landscapes that cater to all of the senses. But choosing plants that are unlikely to thrive in certain climates can lead to dissatisfaction and premature plant demise and may require gardeners to use more fertilizers, pesticides and other not-so-Earth-friendly techniques to help plants thrive.

One of the more important steps gardeners can take before spring arrives is to educate themselves about plant hardiness zones. Hardiness zones are defined by the average climatic conditions of the region and are broken down into various zones. The USDA Hardiness Zone map divides North America into 13 separate zones. Each zone is marked by 10 F incremental differences from the last zone. In some versions of the map, each zone is further divided into "a" and "b" regions.

The National Gardening Association says the USDA Hardiness Zone Map was re-

vised in 2012. The latest version was jointly developed by the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group. To help develop the new map, the USDA and Oregon State University requested that horticultural and climatic experts review the zones in their geographic areas. As a result, the zone boundaries in the 2012 edition of the map have shifted in many areas. Canada's Hardiness Zone map, updated in 2010, uses nine different zones.

Zone maps are tools that show where permanent landscape plants can adapt. Home gardeners who are looking for shrubs or perennials to last year after year should recognize that such plants must tolerate year-round conditions, including the lowest and highest temperatures and the amount of precipitation. Snow cover and humidity also can impact a plant's propensity to thrive.

While zone maps are not perfect, they can be useful in planning and ensuring the survival of future gardens. Plant and seed manufacturer Burpee says that other factors to consider that also affect the viability of plants include wind, moisture and soil conditions. The company offers an interactive zone finder on their

website that will indicate the hardiness zone as well as average first and last frost dates. Visit www.burpee.com/find-growzone to enter a zip code. Learn more about plant hardiness at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb. In Canada, visit the site www.planthardiness.gc.ca/?m=1.

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Did you know? chemicals

Many environmental problems can be traced to a number of factors. Chemicals can contaminate soil and water, and farmers' use of pesticides and chemical herbicides to produce more crops is a source of considerable chemical pollution. But according to www.greenbuzz.com, homeowners use 10 times more chemicals per acre than the average farmer. These include the detergents, cleaning products, automotive substances, and other chemicals that are often stored in

garages and beneath sinks. Individuals willing to make small changes in regard to the use of such products could make a profound impact on the environment. Concerned consumers should be conscious of which products they purchase and use around the home, selecting ones that have minimal environmental impact. Additionally, many natural substances, such as vinegar, baking soda and borax, are much safer to use than many chemically-based household products.

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