

# Expand living spaces with clever ideas

Homeowners looking to add more space to their homes do not necessarily need to make major renovations. They simply have to see the possibilities in outdoor living spaces.

Outdoor living spaces are coveted niches in a home. The American Home Furnishings Alliance says more than 70 percent of American households have outdoor living spaces, and nearly 70 percent of people use these spaces at least once per week in-season. Furthermore, homeowners are increasingly interested in enhancing these spaces to make them more usable and comfortable.

A recent survey from the online home design and remodeling resource Houzz found that more than 4,500 users were planning a landscape update. In addition, 56 percent of homeowners surveyed were making updates to improve their yards for entertaining.

While the creation of outdoor living spaces can cost thousands of dollars depending on the renovation, homeowners have more budget-friendly options at their disposal as well. The following are some ways to create inviting spaces no matter how much square-footage is present.

**Revamp a garage or shed:** Rather than turning a storage area into a catch-all for items time forgot, clean out the space and put it to better use.



For instance, kids may appreciate their own clubhouse away from the main living area. These spaces also can be handy bonus rooms for when Mother Nature doesn't cooperate and backyard guests need to seek shelter. Wall art, curtains, a pendant light, and some comfortable outdoor-compatible furniture can quickly transform a space.

**Create a relaxing nook:** Whether there's a ledge, overhang, small terrace, or porch off the house, turn it into a relaxing area for reading a book or sipping a beverage. Use a few outdoor pillows, pull up a small folding table and dress the area with

hanging lights and potted plants for a quiet retreat.

**Add privacy to a porch:** If it's privacy you covet, install curtain rods and hang lightweight mesh or another translucent material that obscures neighbors' views without blocking out natural light. Invest in outdoor sofas and chaises to create an outdoor living room right on the porch. If your budget allows, consider closing in the porch as a true three-season room so it can be used throughout fall, spring and summer.

Outdoor living spaces are booming and highly achievable, and many such spaces need not be expensive. FH188245

# Quiet home noise with soundproofing

Many people want their homes to be comfortable, relaxing retreats. While much thought will be given to layout and decor, the noises in and around a house also can affect how enjoyable a space is or isn't.

Certain offenders are driving up the noise levels in homes. New building materials that are lighter than those used in the past can make it easier for noise to travel between rooms. In addition, open floor plans make it easy for noise to travel from room to room, while handheld personal devices can make rooms noisy. Homeowners who want more peace and quiet in their home can take the following steps.

**Add more drywall:** Homeowners may not be able to add walls of sturdy brick to block sounds, but they can add more drywall in noisy rooms. Consider adding more drywall to a library or reading nook. The home improvement resource HomeLogic notes that drywall can be used to isolate noisy rooms,



such as those where kids practice playing musical instruments.

**Beef up dense materials:** Heavy curtains, fluffy furniture and thick carpets can make rooms quieter because they help absorb sound waves. Such items and materials also can help prevent echoes. Bare walls and floors will only make sounds bounce around.

**Seal holes and cracks:** Noises from outside can sneak around gaps in windows, doors and siding. Making sure gaps are sealed will not only make a home more energy efficient, but also help block out some exterior noises.

**Fix squeaky floors:** Wood floors can shrink and expand, leading to movement and the development of squeaky areas. By fixing squeaky floors, homeowners can reduce noise created when people walk through their homes.

Soundproofing a home can be a relatively easy and effective DIY project. FH188248

# Did you know?

Homeowners about to embark on home improvement projects should prioritize dust removal to avoid the potentially negative side effects of exposure to lead dust. When undergoing a renovation, homes built before 1978, the year the use of lead paint was banned, are likely to produce lead dust, which occurs when lead paint is sanded or chipped. That dust can be especially harmful to children, pregnant women and pets. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, lead dust that is as small as a grain of sand is enough to poison children, who may suffer brain damage, hearing loss, nervous system and kidney damage, and decreased muscle and bone growth after exposure to lead dust. When pregnant women are exposed to lead dust, that exposure may affect the baby's cognitive development while increasing the mother's blood pressure. Household pets exposed to lead dust may suffer from a series of side effects, including vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and possibly death. When making renovations to their homes, homeowners can open windows and wear protective gear such as masks and safety goggles to avoid direct exposure to lead dust.

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