

# The benefits of child-safe home improvements

All family members should be considered when home improvements are being planned, especially the youngest household residents who may not be responsible enough to avoid accidents and injuries.

According to a recent Vital Signs report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accidental injuries are a leading cause of death among the country's youth — with one fatality occurring every hour from something entirely preventable. The CDC notes that the leading causes of child injury include suffocation, drowning, poisoning, fires, and falls. More can be done to keep children safe, and many strategies start at home.

## Install security systems

A security system can be just as effective at keeping little ones inside as it is at keeping unwanted guests outside. Alarms can be set to sound anytime a window or door is breached, which can deter

curious children from trying to leave the house without permission. Pair the alarm system with secure locks and high latches that can also stop children in their tracks.

## Remove fall hazards

Safety devices installed on windows that are above ground level can keep children safe. Stair rails should be secure and in good working order. Temporary gates can block kids from getting on stairways. Improve lighting around staircases to help children and adults avoid falls, and remove any obstacles.

## Anchor heavy furniture

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that unanchored televisions and top-heavy furniture can tip over onto children and cause severe injuries and even death. Everyday furniture can be tempting to climb; therefore, using anchors to secure furniture to walls for security is a must.

## Install locking cabinets

Locking cabinets can



keep medications, household chemicals, home improvement paints and solvents, and other potential poisons out of reach.

## Erect fencing around pools and yards

Install fencing around pools to keep children from wandering close to the water's

edge. Towns and cities may require certain fence heights or self-latching gates to keep little ones safe. Young children should never be left to their own devices around any source of water, whether it's a pool, tub or toilet.

## Test and replace smoke alarms

Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are only useful if they are functional. Homeowners should inspect such devices regularly to ensure proper operation and promptly replace old or faulty detectors to improve safety. SH182686

## Valuable renovations

Each year, Remodeling magazine publishes its "Cost vs. Value" report to give homeowners a greater understanding of how much popular home projects will cost across the nation, as well as which renovations will offer the greatest return on investment. According to their research, these projects improved in value between 2017 and 2018 and can be smart choices for homeowners looking to add popular features to their properties. Below are the popular projects and the average cost of the renovations.

- Midrange bathroom addition: \$44,717
- Midrange bathroom remodel: \$19,134
- Midrange deck addition (wood): \$10,950
- Midrange entry door replacement (steel): \$1,471
- Upscale garage door replacement: \$3,470
- Midrange manufactured stone veneer: \$8,221
- Midrange minor kitchen remodel: \$21,198
- Midrange siding replacement: \$15,072
- Midrange universal design bathroom: \$16,393
- Upscale window replacement (vinyl): \$15,955

# Preparing garden beds for spring and beyond

Gardening enthusiasts may have been thinking about their landscape plans throughout the winter, eager to once again get their hands dirty with soil. Whether a home gardener is making preparations for edible crops or beautiful flowers, he or she must take time to make the soil amenable to planting. To establish hearty, durable plants, gardeners can focus on three main areas: addressing soil composition, cultivating and adding nutrients.

## Soil composition

Many gardeners prefer growing a variety of plants in their gardens. Such an approach requires taking inventory of the type of soil in one's garden and making the necessary modifications so that the types of vegetables, herbs, shrubs, or flowers that will be planted can grow in strongly. In fact, according to the plant company Proven Winners, the most important step to developing good roots is preparing the soil.

Take a sample of the soil and examine it to see what is

present. If the soil is too full of clay, too sandy, too dense, or too loose, that can lead to problems where plants cannot grow in strong. Work with a garden center to add the right soil amendments to make a rich soil. This may include organic compost or manure, which will also add nutrients to the soil.

## Cultivation

Cultivating the soil can involve different steps. Removal of weeds, errant rocks, roots, and other items will help prepare the soil. Mother Earth News suggests working on garden soil when the soil is damp but never wet; otherwise, garden soil can become messy and clumpy. Use a digging fork or shovel to lightly turn the soil when it's mostly dry. Gentle tillings also can open up the soil to incorporate the nutritional amendments and relieve compaction that likely occurred from freezing temps and snow pressure. Tilling also helps with drainage and oxygen delivery to roots. The DIY Network suggests turn-

ing over soil at a depth of 12 inches to work the soil — about the length of a shovel spade. However, the resource Earth Easy says that existing garden beds have a complex soil ecosystem and simply top-dressing with compost or manure can be enough preparation for planting. Gardeners can experiment with the methods that work best for their gardens.

## Nutrition

Testing the pH and the levels of certain nutrients in the soil, namely nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, will give gardeners an idea of other soil additions that may be needed. Soils with a pH below 6.2 often can benefit from the addition of lime several weeks before planting. Soil tests will determine just how much fertilizer to add to the soil. Complete fertilizers will have equal amounts of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Individual fertilizers can amend the soil with only these nutritional elements that are needed.



## Begin preparing garden bed soil early for new plants.

Top-dressing empty beds with a layer of mulch or compost can prevent weed growth and preserve moisture until it is time to plant. If existing shrubs or plants are in garden beds, use more care

so as not to disturb roots or dig too deeply.

Preparing garden beds takes some effort initially, but can be well worth the work when plants flourish throughout the growing season.



## Identify and treat a garden mole problem

Lawn and garden enthusiasts often must address unforeseen issues when tending to their lawns. Weeds can be a blight, and drought can compromise the look and integrity of a lawn.

Another, more deceptive potential adversary is moles. After a spring and summer spent tending to their gardens, no homeowner wants to have their hard work compromised by moles.

"The Old Farmer's Almanac" says that moles are ground-dwelling insectivores that feast on insects in the soil. Moles grow to be roughly six to eight inches long and have gray or black, velvety fur. Their snouts are slender and hairless, and they have very small eyes and ears. Their large front feet have long claws that scoop dirt out of the way like a garden hoe.

Even though moles are more likely to snack on grubs, worms and beetles than plants, they damage gardens and lawns because of their underground tunneling behavior. Moles make subterranean channels throughout the yard in search of food. Some of the telltale signs include sprouted mounds of displaced soil, holes and raised burrows and hills. Tunneling can separate roots from soil, eventually killing vegetation in the process, according to the home and garden experts at BobVila.com.

There are various ways to address mole problems in a lawn or garden. Some professionals may recommend fumigants, home remedies and repellents. But these methods are not always effective, according to Better Homes & Gardens. Using insecticides

can rid the lawn of some of the foods that moles dine upon, ultimately discouraging them from coming onto a property. However, many experts agree that trapping is the only reliable means of stopping these creatures.

Homeowners can trap moles humanely by catching the mole in the act. This involves waiting for a mole to start channeling, then using two shovels to block egress on either side of its path. The mole can be removed to a box and relocated. There also are various mole and gopher traps available for sale that operate with spring-loaded snares. Individuals should check if trapping moles is legal where they live. For more information regarding moles, visit [www.almanac.com](http://www.almanac.com) or [www.bobvila.com](http://www.bobvila.com). GT194815



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