

Home improvement projects are as popular as ever. In its 2017 True Cost Survey, the home improvement site HomeAdvisor found that, between February 2016 and February 2017, homeowners spent an average of just over \$5,000 on home projects. That marked a nearly \$1,900 increase from the year prior, indicating that homeowners are increasingly opening their wallets to transform their homes.

In addition to spending money to improve their homes, many homeowners are spending their time on projects as well. While DIY projects can provide a sense of fulfillment and personal attachment to one's home, prospective do-it-yourselfers should ask themselves some questions before picking up their hammers and getting to work.

Do I have any physical limitations? No matter how much home improvement television shows may simplify projects, prospective DIYers should know that such undertakings are typically very difficult and oftentimes physically demanding. Homeowners with existing health conditions or other physical limitations may not be capable of performing certain tasks or may need to take fre-



quent breaks, which can delay projects.

Do I have the time? Many home improvement projects require a significant amount of time to complete. Homeowners whose time is already stretched thin with commitments to work and/or family may not be able to complete projects within a reasonable amount of time. That's fine if working on a part of the

home that won't affect daily life, but can prove stressful or problematic if the project is in a room, such as a kitchen or bathroom, that residents of the home use each day. Novice DIYers should be especially honest with themselves about do-it-yourselfers must make honest assessments of their skills, time and budgets before taking on a DIY project. FH188178

Make fall clean-up eco-friendly

Certain tasks become necessary once autumn arrives. Whereas spring and summer were spent tending gardens and maintaining a yard prime for entertaining, autumn is about preparing properties to survive the winter. Just as with other jobs around the house and yard, fall clean-up can be done in a manner that is respectful to the environment.

Leave plant stalks and leaves

It is tempting to want to cut back perennials and other greenery so a property looks neat. But as flowers and plants dry and drop to the ground, they help insulate the roots from the cold. They also provide a natural habitat and serve as a winter food source for birds and small animals.

Rake leaves sensibly

Power blowers and mulchers make fast work of leaves, but at the expense of the environment. Gas-powered devices discharge fuel exhaust into the air, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, reap the benefits of peace and quiet as

well as exercise from manual raking.

While raking, do not feel the need to remove every leaf. A certain amount of organic matter can be beneficial to the soil and even insulate the lawn somewhat. A left-over leaf here or there also may provide protection for insects and small animals. For example, many native bees spend the winter in tunnels in the ground, cracks in mortar, holes in dead wood, or within hollow stems, and they need lawn and garden litter to survive.

Compost is a friend

Spread a thin layer of compost on the lawn and in garden beds. Compost prevents weed growth, insulates and protects the soil and provides nutrients that will be needed once the spring busy season begins. By using compost, homeowners can reduce dependence on chemical fertilizers and weed killers.

Check for drafts and leaks

Fall is an ideal time to check windows and doors for cracks where water, air or insects can enter. Seal up holes

and cracks, and ensure there are no drafty areas. Drafts can cause home heating and cooling systems to work harder, expending more energy than necessary.

Collect and harvest

Be sure to gather any useable garden vegetables and fruits and prepare them for storage if they cannot be consumed in the next few days. Canning is a time-honored preservation method. Herbs and seeds can be dried and saved for use later on. Vacuum seal fresh basil and parsley.

Take inventory

Look at which items in the yard have seen better days and prepare to recycle or reuse them in different ways. Faded plastic planters can be used as impromptu bird baths in a garden. An old tire can be mulched and turned into soft material to put around a playset. Inquire as to the proper way to recycle plastic lawn chairs that may be broken.

Autumn yard work should be performed in as eco-friendly a fashion as possible. TF189316

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 maintenance," 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:** Re-

placing 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.

- **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)

Did you know? reclaimed timber

Using reclaimed timber when building or renovating a home benefits the environment in various ways. According to GreenBusinessWatch.org, building and renovating with reclaimed timber helps to preserve forests by greatly reducing the need to cut down trees. In addition, when using reclaimed timber to build or renovate a home, contractors and homeowners tend to use locally sourced reclaimed wood, reducing the need to transport wood from afar to complete the projects. That reduced reliance on transportation reduces fuel consumption and air pollution. Processing reclaimed timber is often less taxing on the environment

than processing virgin wood. However, reclaimed timber may provide more than just environmental benefits. Virgin timber typically comes from commercially grown trees that are not always afforded enough time to reach full maturity. Timber that is reclaimed from old buildings and vessels may very well have reached full maturity before it was cut down to use as building material. Reclaimed

timber that grew to full maturity is likely stronger than virgin wood taken from commercially grown trees that were not given enough time to mature. Reclaimed timber also may prove more durable than virgin wood because the former has already dried out after years of contracting and expanding, making it less likely to warp and split than virgin wood that has yet to endure such exposure.

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