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CREATE A HOME THAT ILLUMINATES YOUR STYLE.

Moving Outdoors for the Summer...



Linda Ryan, Editor

Nothing spurs backyard creativity like the warm sun awakening the potential of entertaining in style.

While a deck and barbeque will satisfy the basic needs of entertaining, to really make a splash—and have your party the envy of the block—you need an outdoor entertainment space. Taking the kitchen and dining area into the backyard creates a world of possibilities. More than anything else, it creates a new ‘outdoor space’... a place that has all the comforts of the indoors but without the walls and roof. There’s so many ideas available; making a style decision is often the hardest part of the process.

If you’re into eco-friendly alternatives for furniture—indoors or out—using a few of the millions of shipping pallets is a great choice. We’ll get you started with a few ideas but the possibilities are endless!

Linda

▶ A Shoebox Home That Boast 24 Rooms



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“

I want a house that has got over all its troubles; I don't want to spend the rest of my life bringing up a young and inexperienced house.

- Jerome K. Jerome

”

Home Scam **RED** Flags

You don't have to be a victim of a home repair scam. Arm yourself by being aware of the following red flags of potential home repair scams:

- Contractors who appear uninvited at your doorstep or who call or email you out of the blue
- The contractor says they are doing work in your neighborhood and claims they have “extra material” left over
- You feel pressured to make a decision and sign a contract for the work immediately
- The contractor offers a “special deal” available “today only”
- The contractor points out a “problem” with your home that you never noticed yourself before. Some unscrupulous scam artists have been

known to offer “free” inspections and then break something on purpose so they can be paid to “fix” the problem

- The contractor demands full payment up front, particularly if payment is demanded in cash
- The contractor lacks identification, such as a permit from the city or locality
- Offers to give you a discount so that your home can be used as a “model” or if you find additional customers for him/her
- The contractor offers to help finance the project, either from his own funds or the funds of an associate, especially if your home equity or home deed is involved
- The contractor insists you come and examine “damage” with him (while an associate steals valuables from your home)

Some of the more common types of home repair scam involve duct cleaning, driveway sealant, leaky foundations, landscaping, furnace and roofing repair. This is by no means an exhaustive list, however. ■





Be Prepared

Disaster can happen quickly and without warning. Would you and your family be ready in the event of an earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane or blizzard?

Planning makes a big difference in coping with disaster. The better prepared you are, the better you can cope in the aftermath of an emergency.

Fire and medical are the two most common emergencies, so it's important to teach children to call 911 and to post emergency numbers by your home phone. Cellphones should contain up-to-date contact numbers so emergency personnel can get ahold of family members if you're unable to.

Here are other tips to help prepare you to deal with disaster:

Have an emergency plan

Meet with your family to discuss the various emergencies that could happen and what should be done in each case. Develop an emergency communication plan if family mem-



bers are separated during floods, storms or other disasters. If you have to evacuate your home, plan several escape routes in case roads are blocked or closed. Practice your plan and update it each year.

Hold an annual inspection

Each year, take a close look at your home to identify potential hazards that could cause injury or damage in a disaster or weather-related emergency. Anything that can fall, break, move or cause a fire is a hazard. Securing your water heater and tall or heavy furniture, moving heavy items to lower shelves, and installing locks on cabinet doors.

Be prepared year-round

Keep a disaster supplies kit containing at least a one-week supply of food and bottled water in your home at all times, replacing it every six months. This kit should stay in a designated place for easy access in

case you need to be confined to your home for an extended period. Make sure all family members know where the kit is kept. Battery-operated radios, candles and flashlights should also be on hand if there's a power outage. Keep an emergency supply kit in vehicles, as well, stocked with food, water, first aid supplies, flares and jumper cables. In addition, keep vehicles well maintained and full of gas in case a quick evacuation is needed.

Review your insurance

Review your insurance policies and make sure you're covered for replacement value, not just market value, if your house is destroyed. And if disaster strikes, know how to get in touch with your insurance agent.

Make sure you're prepared for the unexpected. Planning and practice can go a long way in protecting you and your family in a disaster. ■

Positive First Impression Key to Selling

DÉCOR IMPROVEMENTS HELP MAKE A STRONG IMPACT ON BUYERS

The old adage that you only get one chance to make a good first impression rings true for sellers showing their homes in today's competitive market. With the summer market quickly approaching, many homeowners are wondering what they can do to help get their homes ready to sell.

A poll of potential buyers released by Royal LePage, found that sellers ought to do more than just look after required renovations before showing their home. In fact, décor improvements help make a strong impact on buyers and can ultimately affect a home's market value.

The Royal LePage House Staging Poll (conducted by Maritz Research) revealed that renovations can often boost a home's value but sometimes too much of a unique style can be detrimental when it's time to sell. Thirty-six per cent of potential buyers said that they would be willing to pay a premium for a home with updated décor. Surprisingly, more men than women viewed décor as a necessity with 41 per cent of men versus 30 per cent of women claiming they were willing to pay a premium for this feature.

"First impressions are key in real estate as buyers often make up their minds about a home within the first

few minutes of entering the front door," said Dianne Usher, senior manager, Royal LePage Real Estate Services. "As the real estate market begins to moderate in many markets across the country, the need to impress buyers becomes even more crucial. A combination of the right renovations with modern and tasteful décor is the best way to do that."

Usher added: "A contemporary and minimalist space with neutral coloured walls and a limited number of personal items appeals to most buyers and ensures the best results when selling a home."

When asked which home improvement they would pay a premium for, 79 per cent of buyers indicated that they would be willing to pay more for a home with a renovated kitchen. However, when asked if they would still pay a premium for a renovated kitchen if it was done in a style that was not to their taste, less than half of those (42%) who originally said they would pay a premium responded favourably (score of seven or higher on a scale of one to 10, with 10 meaning "very likely to pay a premium"). ■





- LIVING IN PLACE -

Upgrading the Bathroom

Whether you are a senior yourself, or have a loved one who is older, living independently in the home is a priority. With the right precautions and a few necessary safety modifications, many seniors can continue to live in their own homes where they are most comfortable.

The room that poses the most danger to seniors is the bathroom. The potential for slips and falls is greater in this part of the home—75 percent of fall injuries occur in the bathroom—making it a good place to focus your renovation energy. Have you considered updating these parts of the bathroom?

Non-slip flooring:

Hard floors are a hazard because even a small amount of moisture can make them very slick. Many people choose to install carpet because it does not lift or move like rugs can, plus it is warmer to walk on and softer if there is a fall. However carpets are also problematic because they hold moisture and mold.

Good lighting:

To help seniors see better, it's important to have well-lit rooms and walkways so that it's easy to get around all areas of the house, including the bathroom.

Higher toilet:

These custom styled toilets are designed so they sit higher off the floor. As a result, users don't have to bend their knees as much to get up and down.

Easy access bathtubs:

Walk-in baths and showers are great for seniors who want to take baths or showers but don't want to risk slipping and falling when stepping over the side of a tub or entering the shower. Look for features like a walk-in door, a powered bath lift, soothing hydrovescent therapy and easy-to-turn faucets. ■



An Improved FLUSHER

Technology has changed so much, so quickly, that it might be difficult to remember how you lived life prior to carrying around a cell phone, having a tablet computer or, for that matter, multiple remotes to turn on all the electronic devices at home.

But many homeowners, who have integrated technology into other aspects of their lives, still ignore one everyday object that is very likely completely out of date—their toilets.

Flushing technologies have made great leaps and bounds over the past two decades—improving water efficiency, flushing performance and even a user's comfort. And if you haven't considered replacing your toilet with one that is equipped with advanced flushing technology, you might be surprised at what is available, and how much it could help your water savings.

The average family of four uses about 400 gallons of potable (treated) water each day, and bathrooms represent more than 50 percent of all home indoor water use.

In the past, less water usage usually meant a less reliable flush. But technology has improved so that toilets with low water usage ratings are more efficient and hygienic than their water-guzzling predecessors.



If you don't know about high-efficiency toilets and all the options that are available, here are a few water-saving flush options to help you upgrade the technology in your bathroom:

Dual flushing

Liquid waste doesn't require nearly as much water for flushing as solid waste, which is where dual-flushing technology comes in handy. You can select which volume of water flush you want; which will help you save water and money. Because users may not be fully educated about the difference between the light flush, and the bulk flush, these toilets aren't recommended for high-traffic areas, or public places. But in your home, your family could easily save water by using the lighter flush when appropriate.

Pressure assistance

Flushing performance can't get any better than toilets with pressure assist

technology. This technology pressurizes the water, giving your home's toilet commercial-grade flushing capabilities without the commercial-grade noise.

The technology is powerful—the 1.0 gallon models save a family 18,600 gallons of water per year compared to a 3.5 gallon per flush toilet.

Gravity flushing

Gravity flushing is the most typical technology found in residential homes. The innovative Class Five flushing technology combines gravity with a powerful flush that also addresses bowl cleaning. Some of the newer models flush just 1.28 gallons, at least 20 percent less water than standard 1.6 gallon toilets saving a family of four up to 16,500 gallons of water a year. These toilets have a versatile tank design featuring an elegant flare to complement a wide range of bathroom designs.

When you upgrade your technical devices, you probably review all the benefits and options the new device will provide you. So make sure to do your due diligence by reviewing toilets and flushing options before you choose the one that will become a vital part of your everyday life. ■

Be Sure Your Garage Is Secure

The garage is a favorite target for thieves. Garages store lots of valuable items such as cars, bikes, boats, sporting goods and tools. On top of that, a thief knows that more than likely, a garage is not occupied during the night. Keeping the garage secure is extremely vital to home security because once inside your garage, the thief has easier access to the rest of your home.

Stay secure with these three tips:

Check the garage door

Like anything, over time, garage doors go through normal wear and tear, becoming damaged or even breaking. Weak or damaged spots on the garage door are all advantages to a thief. Periodically examine your garage door for loose panels and damaged corners that could make it easy for an intruder to pry their way in.

Update the garage door opener

Electronic garage door openers make it hard for garage doors to be forced open. Most electronic garage doors come from the factory with an electronic combination. If the com-

ination is never changed from the original factory setting, the garage is actually not as secure as it could be. Refer to the owner's manual to change the settings and make the combination more complicated to break.

Do not advertise your stuff

It only takes a minute for a thief to come in and take anything they want. Leaving the garage door open gives anyone walking or driving by a clear view of what is inside. Leave the garage door closed when you're not using it to avoid unwanted attention. ■

► The Cockroach: A Perfect Creature



- **Making a doorway larger**
- **Removing a wax buildup**
- **What is ‘thread count’?**
- **Installing new gutters**
- **How to stain a concrete floor**

Q My Mom has to use a wheelchair now, and our old door into the bathroom is too narrow for the wheelchair (it’s 30” wide). A 34” door would work, but how do I make the frame wider to fit the door?

A The best solution would be to remove the existing door along with the door frame around it, and replace it with a new pre-hung 34” interior door.

Depending on the size of the gap between the wall studs and the old door casing, you may have to enlarge the opening by removing one of the studs and reframing the opening. If you do, be sure to provide temporary support for the stud if it’s a load bearing wall.

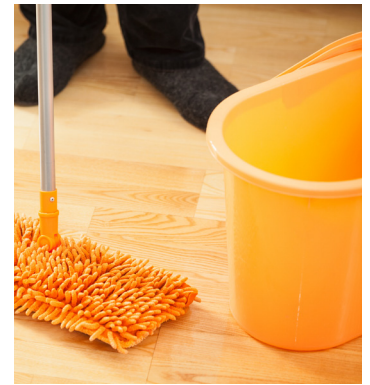


Also, if the walls of your bathroom are tiled, be careful when removing the old door frame so you don’t break or dislodge the tile. The door casing will need to be trimmed back an inch on each side to fit around the tile. ■

Q What is the best way to remove wax buildup from a vinyl or linoleum floor?

A Diluted household ammonia works great for removing wax buildup, as well as dirt and grime, on vinyl or linoleum floors. Mix from 1/2 to 2 cups of ammonia to one gallon of warm water. Have plenty of ventilation, and test it first on a small, out of the way spot to be sure the ammonia won’t damage the floor.

Apply the ammonia to the floor with a sponge mop and allow it to work for a couple of minutes. Scrub the floor to remove the softened layers of wax, then rinse with water.



Never under any circumstances mix ammonia with bleach or any cleaning product that contains bleach, as the combination of bleach and ammonia can produce poisonous chlorine gas. ■

Q I was recently looking for new linens for our king sized bed and the sales clerk told me I should buy sheets with a thread count of 200 or more. What was she referring to?

A Thread-count is the measure of the coarseness or fineness of fabric. Thread-count = the number of threads per square centimetre (or per square inch) of fabric. You count both lengthwise (warp) and widthwise (weft) threads. So 100 lengthwise threads woven with 100 widthwise threads produce a thread count of 200.

Having a high thread-count doesn't necessarily mean it is a high quality product if the threads themselves are not high quality. The quality of fabric can also depend on fibre quality, yarn size, finishing and construction. So when you look at sheets think about the weight, the fibre, the finish and the feel.



To help you get an idea of the different fabric thread counts, take into account that muslin has a thread-count of 150 (75 threads one way, 75 the other) which feels a little rough, certainly not silken. Good-quality sheets come in at 180, and anything above 200 is considered better quality.

So how are counts such as 800 or 1,200 possible? Is it possible to fit that many threads into a square centimeter (or a square inch)? The short answer is no it isn't possible. Some manufacturers count not just each thread, but each fiber (called plies) that make up each thread. So a single thread might be three plies twisted together; one manufacturer will call that one thread, while another manufacturer will call that three threads.

So when choosing your sheets, ask for a fabric sample or go by how they feel, don't rely solely on the thread-count for quality. ■

Q We plan to install gutters on our home, and since we're not do-it-yourselfers in this area, we will contract the job out. What type of guttering and downspouts would you recommend?

A Since you're not planning on tackling the job yourself, I would go with seamless aluminum gutters that are made on site to whatever length is needed. Request the

heaviest gauge guttering available (0.32"), and have the gutters attached with screwed on hidden fasteners, rather than spikes and ferrules. Use the larger size (3" x 4") downspouts to reduce the chance of clogging. ■

Q I want to acid stain an existing, older concrete slab. What's the best way to clean the concrete so the stain will take??

A Cleaning an old concrete slab so it will take an acid stain can be very difficult, but it is possible. The main thing is to NOT use any kind of acid wash or etching solution (including muriatic acid) to clean the slab. The stain will not take at all if you use acid as a cleaner.

A solution of TSP (trisodium phosphate) and a lot of elbow grease with a scrub brush would be your best bet. Using a scrub brush with a long handle makes cleaning much easier. Another option would be to use a pressure washer to clean the concrete slab. For grease stains on concrete, try scrubbing the stain with lacquer thinner or mineral spirits.

Even with your best efforts, you may wind up with patches on a concrete slab that simply won't take an acid stain due to low lime content in the concrete (lime is what causes a chemical reaction with the acid stain). In those cases, you may have to resort to applying a faux finish to the spots to try and match the acid stain in the surrounding areas. ■



10 Environmental Hazards you can live without

There's no better way to improve the quality of your immediate environment than to banish these top indoor hazards from your home.

The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) released its list of the Top 10 Indoor Environmental Hazards. The list provides a practical starting point for homeowners who are interested in making their indoor environment safer and healthier.

"People are inextricably linked with their environment," said Robert K. McLellan, M.D. and chief author of the checklist. "The environment does not stop at the walls of our homes and buildings. And just because we can't see all of these hazards directly, doesn't mean that we're not impacted by them."

The list of **Ten Environmental Hazards You Can Live Without** includes:

1 TOBACCO SMOKE

Long-term exposure to other people's tobacco smoke increases risks for lung cancer, respiratory diseases and infections, heart attack, and many childhood diseases. Don't allow anyone to smoke in your home.

2 ASBESTOS

Asbestos was commonly used as an insulating material in homes built from 1920 to 1978. Exposure to small amounts of asbestos is unlikely to cause problems, but breathing high levels increases risks of cancer and lung disease. Identify but avoid disturbing asbestos in your home or place of work; only specially trained contractors should remove it.

3 LEAD

Children are especially susceptible to lead poisoning. If you live in a home built prior to 1978, test for lead paint and only allow licensed and trained professionals to remediate lead in your home.

4 COMBUSTION GASES

Combustion gases include carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxide. These gases can cause flu-like symptoms, respiratory illnesses, or death. Do not use unvented combustion appliances indoors; use an exhaust hood over a gas stove; and clean and maintain your chimneys and furnace annually.

5 TAP WATER

North Americans may benefit from one of the safest water supplies in the world, but problems may occur. You can take a few extra measures to make sure your tap water is clean. If you use a well, test your water annually. To minimize possible lead exposure in older plumbing systems, let the water run until it's cold before drinking or cooking with it.

6 HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

Keep household chemicals out of reach of children and pets; follow label instructions carefully; dispose of chemicals properly; and call the Poison Control Center if a suspected poisoning occurs.

7 PESTICIDES

While not an "indoor" hazard, pesticide use around your home can impact health. Maintain your yard and garden to naturally deter pests instead of using pesticides when possible; store firewood away from the home to avoid wood-destroying insects. Always follow instructions on use and disposal when using any pesticides.

8 ALLERGENS

Porous, water-damaged materials frequently grow molds and other organisms that can exacerbate allergies or other illnesses. Fix leaks or moisture issues; brush pets outside; and wrap mattresses and pillows in allergy-proof covers.

9 FOOD POISONING

Keep your refrigerator temperature below 40 degrees F; wash cutting boards with soap and hot water after each use; do not allow raw meat, poultry or fish to come into contact with other food; and be aware that some fish contain chemicals or infectious agents.

10 RADON

Radon is a gas produced naturally by the breakdown of uranium in soils and rocks that occurs naturally in the environment. It is considered a health hazard due to its radioactivity. Test your home for this odorless, invisible gas that increases the risk of lung cancer.

FREE download ACOEM's PDF containing more information about these 10 indoor environmental hazards. [Click here.](#)

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THE MODERN SHOWER

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In every home there are several places that are used on a daily basis. The kitchen, the bedroom and the bathroom are probably the top three for most people, and for that reason these are the areas that, naturally, we would like to be the most comfortable and functional.

In the bathroom, one amenity which is absolutely indispensable is the shower. For those who are considering a bathroom remodel, this is an excellent place to start. The shower can very easily be transformed from a nondescript utility where the routine of your day begins, into a comfortable, relaxing sensory experience that you'll look forward to every evening. All it takes is a little planning and preparation.

First, you'll need to establish a budget. There is a wide price range for new showers depending on the type of materials and fixtures you'll be using. Also, you'll need to decide if this is a "do it yourself" project or if you'll be hiring a licensed, professional contractor for the job. Depending on the complexity of the



From an invigorating spray to an enveloping waterfall that washes away a long day, today's showers offer a luxurious experience to meet every desire.

project, many shower installations can be done in just a day or two, but the average cost for a contractor can run from \$500 to \$1000 per day. As for materials, you can choose between inexpensive pre-fabricated units to more elaborate custom tile designs. Obviously, the price ranges can vary widely because of this, which is why establishing a budget is so important.

Even pre-fabricated shower enclosures can run from several hundred to a few thousand dollars, but most people who really desire a luxury shower design will opt for either custom tile or quality solid surfaces like cultured marble.

Ceramic tiles are one of the most popular choices for shower surfaces and can cost from \$1.50 to over \$7.00 per square foot. For other types of high quality stone tiles the cost can go even higher. Most budgets for tile installations should start at a minimum of \$1000, and that would be for smaller shower unit sizes. After you add in the cost of materials you could easily be pushing \$2000, however, this is for a modest project. You'd therefore need to take into consideration the size of the enclosure and whether or not you'd be including a tub. A more reasonable expectation then would be closer to \$3000 and up.

There is such a wide selection of shower materials available that it's recommended that you spend some time at a local bathroom specialty store that offers a choice of different tiles and surface materials, in addition to bathroom fixtures. This will



give you the best idea as to what your options are, along with some specifics on pricing.

Although tile is extremely popular for showers, other surface materials may appeal to you as well. It's hard to beat marble slab—which is very appealing—however, it can require some maintenance and can be subject to wear and tear. An excellent alternative, for those who wish for marble is manufactured, or “cultured” marble,



which is both affordable and luxurious. One of the primary benefits of cultured marble is that it is low maintenance and long lasting. It is excellent for resisting stains and water penetration which cuts down on any mold or mildew issues that sometimes arise with more porous ceramic tiles and grout.

Another popular surface choice is Swanstone, which is considered one of the top “green”, environmentally friendly, bathroom surfaces by homeowners. It is a manufactured composite that has the look and feel of real stone and comes in a wide variety of textures and colors. It is much longer lasting than other types of organic surfaces, therefore it rarely requires replacing. One of the primary benefits of Swanstone is that it is much more resistant to heat, cracks and stains than materials such as marble or granite. It is also about 20% less expensive than similar surface types, like Corian.

The finishing touch to your new shower will be the shower fixtures. There are a myriad of choices when it comes to shower fixtures. The shower head is probably the best place to start as it really is the central piece of equipment to any shower. You can even design your new shower with multiple shower heads in mind for an even more indulgent experience. Most new showers can be nicely equipped in the low to medium hundreds of dollars.

The last component to your new shower will be the door. Here again, there are many different choices: clear glass, textured or frosted glass, tinted, mirrored or even sandblasted glass. There are different thicknesses and weights to consider as well. You can have a standard door height or you can choose from a steam shower door which is fully enclosed all the way to the ceiling.

Your best resource for making this choice will be your local bathroom retailer who can explain the differences, but more importantly show you the look and feel of various shower products and materials.

As always, a consultation with an experienced contractor is always the best place to start for ideas and estimates. ■

Getting Started with Bath Design

Homeowners looking for new and interesting bathroom designs, say that the most difficult part is usually just getting started. The good news is that there are plenty of resources to get you on your way to a new, exciting bathroom design.

- Take a look online or in magazines at other bathroom designs for inspiration. You may not even realize the various options or creative possibilities that exist until you’ve had a chance to see what other bathroom remodels look like.
- Go to your local bathroom retailer and explore the various fixtures, woods, tiles, tubs and showers available and get some ideas on pricing as well. Ask lots of questions and always find out which products are most durable and come with manufacturers warranties.
- Decide if you want your new bathroom remodel to be eco-friendly. There are entire product lines dedicated to using green, sustainable materials, like bamboo, and environmentally friendly fixtures like low flush toilets.
- Make a wish list of all the conveniences you’ve ever wanted in your bathroom and then discuss those ideas with your bathroom remodeling contractor. Wanted a TV in the bathroom? A telephone? Maybe his and her vanities or for some, real European style comfort, maybe a bidet?

Bathroom remodels are a big investment and you may only do this once during the entire time you own your home, so if you’re in the market, this can be your chance to have the dream bathroom design that you’ve always wanted. ■



YOU WON'T FIND IT THERE.

If you're looking for a stylish, economical kitchen upgrade, Habitat for Humanity NCR ReStores are the place to go. At two locations, we resell donated, new and used building, renovation and decorating materials to keep them out of landfills—and to fund Habitat's good work right here in the National Capital Region.

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Dream Bedrooms for Children

Just about every child wishes for a dream bedroom, but it takes inspiration to transform four white walls into a fairytale princess room or tree house hideaway. Fortunately, you don't have to be an interior designer or skilled

craftsman to become a hero. A little family compromising, combined with some simple painting techniques, can go a long way in creating a fun, personalized design that kids love—and parents can live with over time.

Choose kid-friendly colors

Paint is one of the easiest and most dramatic ways to transform a room. Start by choosing a color scheme that appeals to your child's interests. There's a wide array of colors and creative design ideas that appeal to kids.

Many home building and decorating stores offer color coordinated palettes, paired with easy instruction guides, for creating delightful, age-appropriate designs. Selected colors fall into various age groups, from infants to teenagers, with color schemes that can be adapted as the child grows. Oftentimes, you'll find free instructions and techniques on how to create child friendly designs.

These techniques are as endless as your imagination. Try adding whimsical polka dots to a girl's room, create a checkerboard effect for an avid chess player, or paint a faux racecar track that zooms around the bedroom wall, across the floor and back up the wall again, for a young sports enthusiast. Using instructions and a few simple tools such as painters' tape, mini-rollers and a tape measure, you can confidently add visual interest and make even a simple room look incredibly special.

If you need some help with ideas, visit websites that cater to kids and pay attention to the background décor used to showcase their products. Wallpaper books are another great resource for decorating ideas.

Create storage to complement the design

Keep your child's bedroom beautiful by incorporating storage elements that will blend with your design and help keep the space clutter-free. For example, try adding a bed skirt to hide a couple of slide-out storage containers for organizing anything from small toys to multiple pairs of tennis shoes. Place woven baskets around the room to create attractive storage in plain sight. These organizational elements can work well in rooms for kids of any age.



Coordinate colors with patterns

The nursery is another room that lends itself to the dreams of both little ones and their parents. One way to create a cohesive design is to match paint colors with the patterns in baby bedding fashions.

For example, a collection of paint colors are available from many outlets that coordinate with popular patterns of bassinets, baby seats, play yards and other nursery items, including hues that have been hand-selected by color experts to help tie a nursery design together.

To round out the baby's room, try adding rugs, accessories or draperies that pick up the colors used on the walls and in the bedding patterns.

Choose bedroom furniture that will endure

Select furniture that can transition to a new bedroom design as your child grows older. For example, with just a change of pillows, a nursery rocker can become part of a cozy reading nook later for a grade-schooler who loves to curl up and read alone. Bunk beds that serve as a pretend fort now can become traditional twin beds later. Even a frilly canopy bed can become a grown-up four-poster bed later by simply removing the canopy framework and fabric cover.

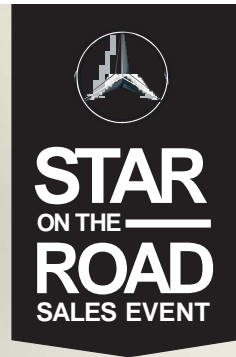
Use wall murals for drama

Murals are most commonly thought to be an image painted on a wall surface. But rather than hiring an artist to paint a mural, which can be timely and very expensive, you can buy digital print images on wall covering material which you simply adhere to the wall. Wall

murals are becoming a popular trend in décor and can be seen on today's top home design shows such as Extreme Makeover and HGTV. ■

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PLANTS DO WELL IN A

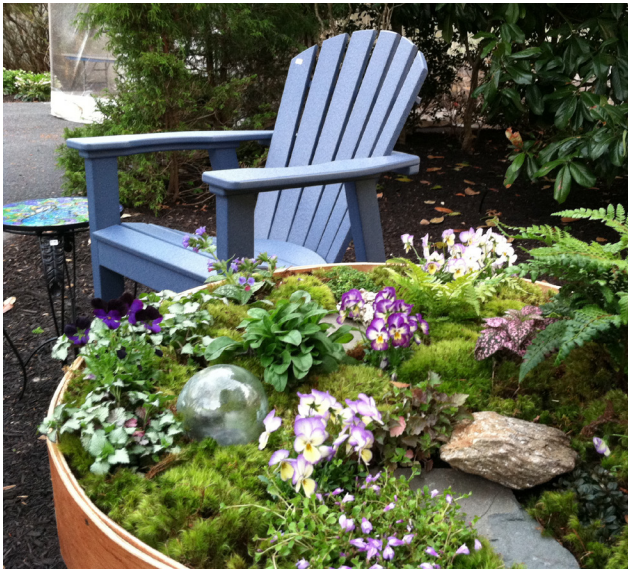
POT

Containers allow you to garden where there's no ground to till, brightening up the patios, porches, decks, and stoops where we linger on long summer days. They also let you skip the major digging and weed-pulling of backyard gardening and fast-forward to the fun: designing, planting, and enjoying. You

get just enough dirt under your fingernails to feel like you've accomplished something. Pairing up pots and plants in pleasing compositions, you can even



work in perennials, grasses, and dwarf evergreen shrubs to provide year-round interest. Best of all, container gardens are close-up delights. They invite you to slow down, notice the details, and savor the scents. ■





CREATING AN AWESOME **BACKYARD PATIO**

Design your patio to be a fully furnished kitchen or outdoor room.

Building a backyard patio is probably one of the most useful ways to extend the living space of your house. Patios are perfect for entertaining, dining, relaxing, child or pet play and many other uses. Although most homes are equipped with the usual rectangular cement patio, there are many other ways to handle back-

yard patio designing. In fact, if you are willing to put a little effort into designing, you can make your backyard patio a beautiful asset to your landscape.

If you want to design the best possible backyard patio, always sketch out drawings on paper or on the computer. You can create a rough drawing, work on a more refined

plan, call in a coach for a consultation or have a professional designer draw out a full, to-scale drawing for you. The important part is just to make sure you try out your ideas on paper first where changes are easy and cheap rather than doing the trial and error designing process where things will get difficult and expensive during installation.

When you sketch out your patio area, you can see how the shape will interact with other forms in your landscape. Create a shape that conforms or contrasts and is either connected to the back door area or adjacent. An example might be to use a rounded shape for your patio to contrast, but soften the hard edges of your house. Designing a wide apron of a patio can offer a transition to an open lawn area. Or a patio may flow into walkways that meander between garden planters.

Design your backyard patio keeping the style of your house in mind. You might want to use a formal or traditional styled brick patio with an historic or classic looking home. Or try an unusual freeform or geometric patio to complement a contemporary styled house. A cottage-styled house would be a perfect home for a cozy English garden with a small patio that is fenced in with a white picket fence. Or maybe a succession of small linked patios would be just the solution for an Asian styled landscape and house.

Property built on a hill might offer a succession of patios as landings between staircases. Or a large piece of land might benefit by one or more detached patio spaces set into parts of the garden where you can construct shade covers for a cool summer hide-away, an entertainment

room, a lounge to watch swimmers in the swimming pool or a private retreat.

There are many sizes and shapes you can use for a patio. Just because they are used so often doesn't mean you need to be confined to rectangles. Your patio can curve and flow with built-in seating or planters to soften the boundaries. And if you like using a geometric pattern, think about creative ways to make shapes into an asset to your overall landscape. You can go strong by carving out an unusual geometric shape or put shapes together to create separate spaces. Areas can be cut



out for house gardens or fountains. Or link geometric shapes to lead into pathways or other patios in other parts of the garden.

Accent your patio with bright paint, fabric or imbedded textures. Sculpt out the space and decorate it with colored tiles, stylish furniture or practical features like fire pits, barbecues or shade covers. Design your patio to be a fully furnished kitchen

or outdoor room. Add an interesting roof. Hang walls with roll-up shades, suspended windows or tapestries. And rugs for color and comfort.

In short, a backyard patio can be so much more than just a rectangle of concrete. You can extend your home outdoors and turn a backyard into a resort or retreat with a beautiful patio. The possibilities for design are endless. Materials are limited by your imagination only. Research what other designers have created on the internet, in magazines or call in a designer to help you come up with the right ideas to fit into your taste and lifestyle. You can design your backyard patio into something that is useful and exciting; something that will make sure you want to use your backyard—a lot!



Choosing the right patio stone

The stone you choose for the flooring can set the whole style and feel of your patio. Here are some tips on the different effects

you can get and how to choose patio stone.

Flagstone comes in many colors and textures. The prices are variable, too. The flagstone used for patio flooring is quarried from all over the world and offers different effects. A patio with one of the red tones like Arizona Red flagstone can evoke a Southwest or brick-like Old World feel. There are softer versions of the Arizona flagstone colors that have more orange or tan in them. These sandstone flagstones tend to be one of the less expensive choices. A textured white stone like Travertine is likely to offer a clean, contemporary look and will cost appreciably more than the Arizona flagstones. The Three Rivers flagstone has a gray tone with colored veining and is neutral enough to work in almost any design. Certain stones like marble are too soft for outdoor patio paving use.

Cut stone can be rough cut, formally cut, or tumbled and comes in all the natural colors, textures and forms as flagstone. It can be stacked or cemented into matching walls to carry the theme from the patio floor into vertical structures. You can choose small or large pieces. Most cut stone is pretty much rectangular so it will give a more formal and organized look that the fitted free-form shapes of flagstone.

Stone is usually sold by the ton. You can go to your favorite building products yard and choose your stone piece by piece, or you can order large quantities by the palette. Even if you use a designer or contractor, I always suggest going to the supplier to see the stone directly. The impact of seeing your selected stone in large quantities is much more telling than trying to imagine it from a single little sample piece.

Stone shapes can be cast in cement as well. Much like bricks or flagstone, pavers can be set in place to form your patio.

Colors, textures and shapes

You can choose stone for your patio



as one smooth texture or you can combine different stones and/or shapes to create various effects. There are interesting edgings you can purchase that will add a textural or color contrast to outline or create inner lines within your patio floor. Or you can design your own patterns. You can also mix and match stone materials to create designs or pictures like a mosaic for your patio. There are even special designs pre-cut that you can buy to install as finished pictures to decorate special areas inset into your patio.

You will need to decide how wide a space you want between your pieces of stonework.

Stone can be laid closely fitted on cement to form a smooth patio surface or it can be laid on sand so water will drain between pavers. The latter has advantages of being better draining and can be removed or changed easier than stone cemented permanently into place. The downside is that you will need to keep the space between stones well weeded and the surface will be less smooth.

If you build your patio on sand, the wider the space between stone, the more fill you will need. It will cost more in labor to fit stones closely, but if you don't mind the cost, a good mason should be able to fit stones as close as 1/8th to 1/4" apart. Larger gaps can become part of the design depending on how you choose to fill them.

You can use colored or natural, raw or polished pebbles, decomposed granite, gravel, tumbled glass or many other decorative materials. Or you can plant groundcovers for a living garden effect.

Keep in mind your micro-climate and conditions when you choose stone for your patio. If your patio will be exposed to hot sun, remember that dark colors will absorb heat and can become painful to bare skin. Some stone can be slippery around pools and other water features. And with hard water, darker colors are likely to stain with white mineral build up, just like light colors can become marred with rust from iron fencing or other staining materials.

The best way to choose stone for a patio is to go to a



building products yard and look over the different materials. It helps to look at photographs and check out samples to narrow down what you want, but the real effect of a massed stone impact is best seen where materials are spread out. See what friends and neighbors have built and talk with a good designer who understands hardscaping. Surf the internet for even more ideas. Choosing stone for a patio floor can be an artistic adventure and make your patio something really special. ■

Jane Schwartz Gates is a landscape designer, garden coach, horticulturist and licensed landscape contractor.



RECLAIMED WOOD SHIPPING PALLETS ARE AN ECO-FRIENDLY MATERIAL TO BUILD DESKS, TABLES, SHELVES AND EVEN A DOG BED.

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With over two billion pallets in circulation worldwide, it's no wonder that they keep turning up in eco-furniture, whether it's the do-it-yourself or commercial kind.

Shipping pallets are a plentiful resource to reclaim and build with. Since pallets are rough hewn, they lend themselves to rustic pieces of furniture, which happen to be in style right now. With imagination and some basic carpentry skills, you can turn shipping pallets into all kinds of practical and whimsical furniture, indoors and in the backyard. But, where can you get free pallets?

Basically, any business that receives shipments on pallets probably discards the unused pallets. However, if a company has a high volume of pallets to discard, they may use a pallet recycling company which are becoming used more and more. You may have better luck with a company that occasionally receives shipments on pallets,

but not enough to bother using a recycling company to discard them. Check with local furniture stores, pet supply shops, newspaper and printing operations and hardware stores and nurseries.

Start looking and their availability becomes obvious! ■



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