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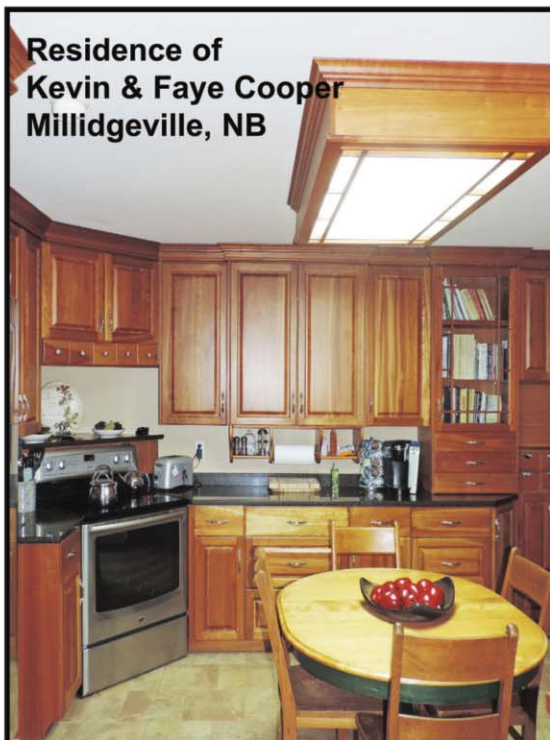
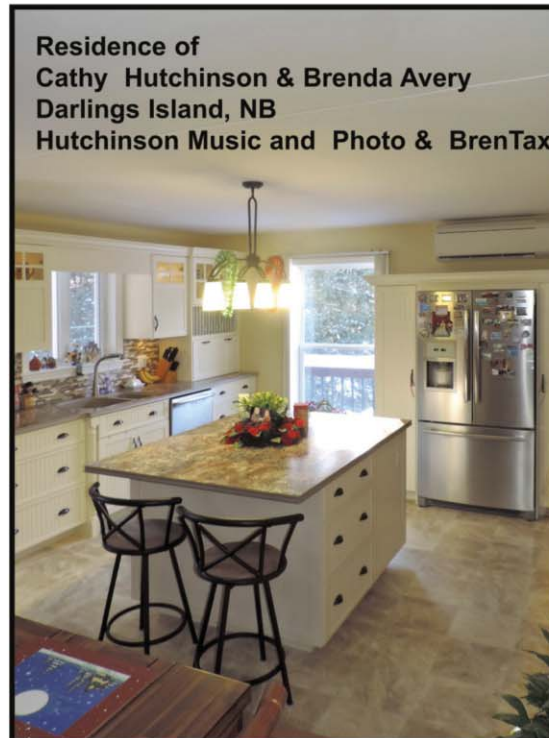
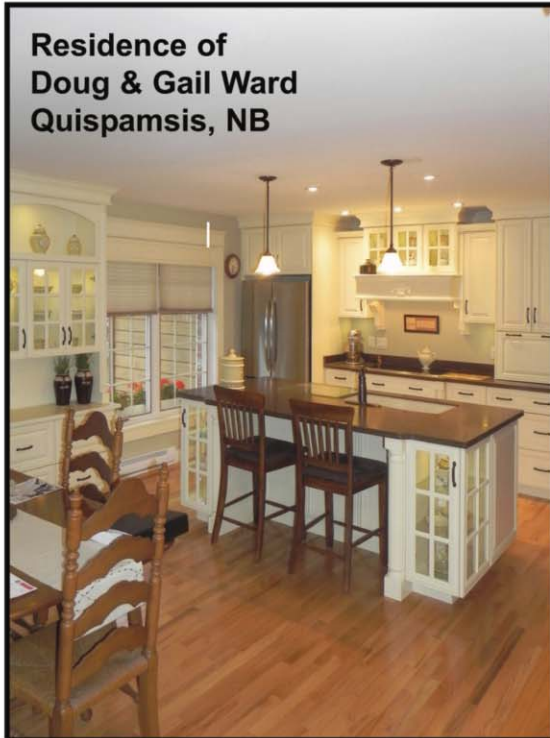
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David Reid - Editor

Tel: 642-5029 Fax: 642-5766 dreid@specialtyads.ca

John Gardner - Account Executive

Tel: 847-9323 Cell: 653-0993 2gardner@nb.sympatico.ca

John Allen - Account Executive

Tel: 672-6144 Cell: 646-0671 Email: jnallan@rogers.com

Eric Dobbelsteyn - Prepress/Production

Email: egdobbel@nb.sympatico.ca

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How to choose a swimming pool that is right for you

(NC) Building a backyard pool is an investment in the future, industry advisors say. It raises property value, turns your backyard into a vacation destination and gives family members a place to exercise, relax and entertain together. Residential inground pools can be divided into three different construction categories: vinyl, concrete and fiberglass. But would you like some guidance on choosing the right type for your yard?

First, any pool is a good pool if installed by an experienced and well-trained professional, but no matter what type you choose, regular cleaning, maintenance and care are necessary to ensure long and trouble-free enjoyment.

Vinyl-lined pools are the most popular type in Canada. They are fully customizable in shape and size to suit any backyard. The liners are available in dozens of colours and pattern combinations and are easy-to-maintain and long-lasting.

Creativity is the hallmark of the concrete pool since each one is a custom-built structure that will last a lifetime. Builders can fulfill your dreams no matter how challenging the design and many are accented with glass or ceramic tile, plaster or paint. One-piece pools are made of fiberglass resins and are fin-



ished with a nonporous surface similar to that used on boats. Popular for their simplicity of construction, these pools are fabricated in a factory and shipped ready for installation. Although limited to available sizes and shapes, these pools can also be customized with a variety of colours, finishes and other options and work well in all soil conditions. More information is available at www.poolcouncil.ca or toll-free at 1-800-879-7066. www.newscanada.com

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How to refresh your kitchen one cabinet at a time

(NC) Painting your cabinets is an affordable way to breathe life back into your space, and ideal for refreshing the look and feel of your kitchen, or add the finishing touches after a major renovation. That said, painting cabinets might also seem like a daunting, time-consuming task.

Here, Sharon Grech, Benjamin Moore Colour & Design Expert shares her best practices for selecting the right paint, preparation, and application to help streamline the process:

Preparation is key: For a perfect finish, take the time to ensure you are working on a clean, even surface. If possible, it's always best to remove and lay cabinet doors flat for the best results. Making sure your cabinets are clean, dry, and free of wax and oil is the first step when preparing to paint. Then, take note of any peeling, scaling or glossy surfaces and sand them down. Before priming, ensure all traces of sanding dust have been removed. It's also important to determine if your surface has been previously painted or not – if it's a new surface, it will need to be fully primed, otherwise, only prime spots where paint has chipped away.

Choosing the right paint: "For cabinets, it's important to use paint with strong adhesion and a durable finish," Grech ex-



Photo caption: Cabinets: Maid of the Mist CC-728, Advance, Semi-Gloss, Ceiling: Seahorse 2028-70, Regal Select, Flat

plains. "Kitchens are high traffic areas, so cabinets need to withstand daily wear and tear." Alkyd-based paints are a very common choice because of their resilience, but they often produce a strong odour and have a tendency to yellow when working with whites. For an optimal finish, Grech recommends Benjamin Moore Advance Waterborne Interior Alkyd paint (available in a pearl, semi-gloss or high-gloss finish). It uses proprietary technology with low VOCs that help keep odours to a minimum, while achieving a high-end finish that won't fade.

Time to paint: "I prefer using a nylon polyester angle-sash brush to achieve the best results when painting cabinets," Grech points out. "However, if you prefer using a roller, use a very low pile to achieve the smoothest texture." She also suggests ensuring there is extra ventilation in the work area for faster drying times. Give yourself four to six hours for the first coat to dry and, if necessary, reapply a second coat after 16 hours. It's ideal to save this project for the weekend or a time when you have a few days to

complete it.

More information is available at www.BenjaminMoore.ca.

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How not to repair or remodel your home

(NC) Accepting the keys to a new home is a memorable and exciting time for new homeowners. Plans, visions and ways to make the home reflect our own tastes and needs are sure to be forefront. However, there are common mistakes that can be avoided through insight and awareness.

“The most common mistakes happen when homeowners tackle repair or remodeling projects,” says Alan Stewart, broker-manager with Royal LePage Sussex in North Vancouver. “What we see in home magazines and TV makeover shows, provide ideas, but homeowners need to find out how the job is really done.”

Stewart cautions to avoid these common mistakes:

- **Completing work without a building permit.** If you are considering structural work, always check with the municipal building office to see if a building permit is required. Skipping this step can affect the resale value of your home and the time it takes to sell it. Worse, you could be asked to take down and remove the structure at your expense.
- **Doing the work of skilled tradespeople.** For all of us, there are tasks best left to the professionals. Good tradespeople can be hard to find so rely on recommendations from friends and associates. Always come to an agreement on a set price before work is begun. Make sure tradespeople have the required qualifications.
- **Not researching the proper technique and materials.** There is plenty of inspiration out there, but there is also a right way and a wrong way to approach every project. How-to resources abound at your local library or book store. It is also wise to get a few quotes from professional outfits to better understand the scope of your project.



Much satisfaction can be achieved when homeowners challenge themselves to new levels of skill and aptitude. But learning and understanding the best practices will make do-it-yourself projects all the more rewarding. And, in doing so, you preserve the value of your home.

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Downsizing is easier with a guiding hand

(NC) No matter whether you're an empty nester, a person looking to simplify your life, or someone who wants to help their aging parents move into a more functional space, downsizing can be a stressful experience. A little guidance goes a long way however.

Designer Wendy Wilkinson of Oakville, Ontario specializes in helping people transition into smaller living spaces, so here are a few of her tips to make it easier:

Before you begin to pack: Take multiple pictures (from various angles) of every room in your house. Each photo will give you a record and act as a reference for what to get rid of and what to keep. Photos also provide good insurance information for any moving issues.

Decide ahead of time which items have sentimental value and will be making the transition with you. At the same time, if there are adult children, have them reclaim their belongings before the move. If going through sentimental items, such as photographs, is overwhelming, hire a professional organizer to help.

Place different coloured sticky notes on furnishings labelling them with an action plan like 'donate', 'new home', or 'sell'. Give yourself a few days to reconsider your decisions. Consult a designer to talk over what will work in your new space and what items should be kept to stage your home for sale. Wilkinson says that on one occasion she salvaged her client's children's furniture to create a play space that became a big selling feature.

Keep calm and carry on: Start de-cluttering in advance of your move, even if it is only one drawer or closet a day. Scale down

by discarding what you don't use or wear. If you are not sure about anything, just drop it in a 'decide later' box.



Give books to your local library sale and dispose of electronic equipment. Think green and donate still-useable items to places like the ReStores of home-building organization, Habitat for Humanity. ReStores accept a wide range of household products and provide a tax receipt for the value of your donation. You can find one in your community at www.habitat.ca/restore.

Colour code rooms and corresponding boxes of the contents you'll be keeping, then colour

code the doorway in the new space for an easy transition.

Draw up a floor plan and measure furniture pieces such as tables and sofas. They are often too large to go into a new downsized home.

Looking to the Future: Homeowners need to consider their furniture from an ergonomic standpoint. Is it too low or too big? Can you get in and out of it easily? It might be time to donate old furniture and invest in updated pieces that work with your new space.

Consider moving to a home that is within walking distance of stores, local library, and other favourite places. Depending on your age, think about a home with Accessibility Design Standards. This ensures that your new place will meet any possible needs in the future, such as wider doorways and additions to the bathrooms.

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WHERE DOES YOUR WATER FLOW ?

Whether one believes that global warming is creating warmer temperatures in our region or not, one thing is true for sure: when we do have weather events they are far more severe than in the recent past. Ice storms, hurricanes, and rain storms mimicking monsoons all have had an impact on us in one manner or another recently. When it comes to your property, one of the most damaging forces is water; be it in the form of a flood, or more commonly, lack of sufficient drainage away from your house foundation and off your property. Have a look around your property to identify areas where water is not draining sufficiently and is taking an extraordinary amount of time to dry up. There are measures that can be taken with the help of a professional landscape crew to reduce or eliminate the amount of stagnant water on your property. Methods of water drainage might include a dry creek bed which is attractive in the middle of summer when it is dry, but is very functional when a large flow of water appears with rainstorms. If the flow of water is not as heavy, but direction needs to be given to the water so it does not flow in unwanted areas of the yard, a swale can be constructed. The swale is a shallow, contoured ditch-like area that directs the water on a specific course, usually as part of the lawn. French drains can also be constructed for areas that require drainage of a reasonably heavy flow of water, but which are in the param-

eters of a lawn and need to be easily be maintained. Around the foundation of a house or other structure, a "drip edge" consisting of drainage stone can be helpful in allowing water to drain easily down into the subsurface layers of subsoil and gravel and down into the water table rather than sitting close to your foundation wall. Coincidentally, a drip edge can also be an attractive way to deal with areas that are particularly dry and do not promote good plant growth or grass growth next to a foundation.

Make a note in the coming months of what areas in your yard appear to hold water for longer than one day. Have a look at the grade of your property as it relates to your house. Does the land flow toward your house, or away? Don't assume there is nothing you can do to prevent water damaging your biggest investment. Talk to a certified, professional landscaper about what options you have to protect your home and keep your property looking beautiful and free of water damage.

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Explore the alternatives to granite countertops

Granite has long been a popular countertop material for homeowners looking to combine functionality with aesthetic appeal in their kitchens. But granite is no small investment, and homeowners looking to refurbish their kitchens should know there are a multitude of countertop materials available to those working on a budget or those who simply want to give their kitchens a different look.

- **Solid wood:** Wood countertops create a warm, homey interior. Butcher block counters are less expensive than granite and do not necessarily need to be ordered from a speciality retailer. But wood can stain and dent and can even burn when hot kitchenware is placed atop it. Regular application of oil can help homeowners maintain the appearance of their wood counters for years to come.
- **Marble:** Marble tends to be less expensive than granite without sacrificing aesthetic appeal. However, marble is softer and more porous than granite, so it can stain and be etched. Diligence in wiping away spills, routine sealing and a gentle touch is necessary for those who choose marble countertops.
- **Soapstone:** This is a natural stone composed mainly of mineral talc that gives the stone its smooth feel. Soapstone ranges from black to gray but can sometimes have a green shade to it. Other materials in the stone can produce veining. Although softer than granite, soapstone is still high-density and will hold up well. It's impervious to stains and bacteria, and exposure to chemicals will not damage it.



- **Quartz:** Quartz is a manufactured product made of stone aggregate and polymers compressed under high pressure. It has the look of natural stone but requires less work to maintain. Quartz has consistent colors and patterns and is a nonporous material, so it will not need routine sealing and resealing.
- **Glass:** Glass countertops are back-painted, so homeowners can order just about any color they want. Glass will be tempered, so it is safe and heat-resistant. Glass can scratch, though, so it is not as impervious as other materials.
- **Concrete:** Concrete is another material that can be colored to match homeowners' whims. Concrete is relatively inexpensive compared to other countertop materials, but it can crack or chip. While granite is a popular countertop material, homeowners who want something new have many additional options at their disposal. SH152891



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ing buffs who come back year after year for the joy of working with plants. After so many years in business, many of the customers were first brought there as kids with their parents to visit all the farm animals at the Corral. This popular petting farm, with a nature trail right behind it, as well as kid-friendly events such as egg hunts and barbecues make Brunswick Nurseries a popular family destination. Duncan's great joy is planting and maintaining residential gardens, and he has proudly dubbed his landscaping crews The Bed Makers. You can find out more about this successful Landscaping & Garden Center business on line at www.brunswicknurseries.com

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Keep the spring thaw outside where it belongs

(NC) After winter's long deep freeze, most of us look forward to warmer spring weather and longer hours of sunshine. But not all aspects of spring are as pleasant. Melting snow can spell trouble, leading to leaky roofs and ice build-up.

"The spring thaw can be destructive to personal property," says Ryan Michel, senior vice president and chief risk officer at Allstate Canada. "We recommend that homeowners take extra care this season to prevent damaging ice formations and leaks. Melting snow can create ice dams that can tear off gutters, lift shingles, and lead leaks directly into your home."

Ice dams can form on your eavestroughs or on the lower edge of a home's roof, Michel points out. When the temperature in your attic is above freezing, it melts the snow on your shingles. The water trickles down to a cooler part of the roof where it freezes, usually on the eavestroughs and the roof overhang. Eventually, a build-up of ice forms – an ice dam – and begins to leak beneath the shingles and then into your home. One of the biggest warning signs of ice damming is the formation of large icicles that hang from the roof.

If left unchecked, leaks caused by ice dams can harm your roof and shingles, damage insulation and interior walls and can even compromise your home's structural integrity.

Here are a few tips to prevent ice dams from forming and damaging your home:

1. Clear leaves and other debris from eavestroughs and downspouts.



2. Properly insulate areas in your attic that lose heat. This includes wrapping and insulating heating ducts.

3. Make sure your attic is properly ventilated under the roof deck.

4. If safe, clear new snowfall from gutters using a snow rake or broom.

Never attempt to go onto the roof as slippery conditions can be dangerous. Always hire a professional to inspect and repair your roof.

Safeguarding our homes from the damage of spring thaw also includes comprehensive insurance, Michel points out and suggests a visit to allstate.ca/learningcentre for more tips and advice.

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Introduce eco-friendly designs into your home

(NC) With the vernal equinox marking the beginning of spring, plus Earth Day on the horizon for April 22, it's never been a better time to think about decorating your interiors with eco-friendly products. Today it's easier to do than ever before without sacrificing style.

"Some people have the idea that recycled materials or eco-friendly products aren't as attractive," says home décor expert Sally Morse, director of creative services for Hunter Douglas, the window fashions company. "I'm happy to say that's not the case at all. You can have the best of both worlds when style meets eco-conscious manufacturing."

Below, Morse offers her own product tips for going green in style:

1. Paper-Based Countertops

Paper composite countertops are usually made of 50 to 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper and other fibres. A formaldehyde-free thermoset plastic resin is the glue that holds these fibres together to create a nice smooth finish. "In addition to looking like finely sanded wood and coming in an array of colours, the materials in these countertops (minus the resin) come from non-petroleum recycled sources," says Morse. "They're also durable and handle heat well."

2. Bamboo Plywood

Bamboo grows plentifully and matures fully in just four years, making it one of the most sustainable materials for your home. "Bamboo is particularly perfect for bathrooms because it can stand up in a moist climate without deteriorating or peeling," Morse advises. Low VOC's are also used in the laminate that holds the plywood together.

3. Energy-Efficient Window Treatments

Energy lost through windows can account for up to 25 percent of utility bills. "Highly insulating Duette Architella honeycomb shades from Hunter Douglas have a cell-within-a-cell honeycomb structure that can reduce solar heat gain in summer by up to 80 percent and can reduce heat loss in winter by up to 45 percent," she notes. "And, the way the light filters into the room is beautiful." By conserving energy at the window, you can rest assured that your cooling and heating systems won't have to work as hard.

"Eco-friendly design is in, and it's here to stay," concludes Morse. "There are so many reasons to make your home green, so why wouldn't you?" More information is available online at www.hunterdouglas.ca. www.newscanada.com



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5 popular sustainable flooring options

(NC) What goes under foot is seldom an easy decision. Colour, surface texture, room usage and price all come into play. Today, greener options abound, adding to the myriad of choices already available.

“Heightened interest in incorporating renewable resources into the home has resulted in many beautiful eco-friendly flooring options,” says Alan Stewart, broker-manager with Royal LePage Sussex in North Vancouver.

For homeowners looking on the greener side, Stewart suggests a look at the many sustainable products available today:

- Give a tree another lease on life with salvaged wood flooring. A rustic look can be created with reclaimed wood. Buying reclaimed lumber continues to get easier, and in some instances, less expensive relative to the cost of new hardwoods. An Internet search under reclaimed wood, reclaimed timber or reclaimed lumber should yield results.
- Bamboo is a good option for rooms with low humidity. High abundance and a natural look make sustainable bamboo an attractive flooring option. Bamboo grows to maturity in three to five years, about a quarter of the time it takes to grow trees used for hardwood.
- Linoleum flooring has retained its popularity over decades. Unlike vinyl flooring, which is a synthetic product made of chlorinated petrochemicals, linoleum is manufactured from natural compounds including linseed oil, cork dust, tree resins and ground limestone. With natural, renewable elements used in its manufacturing, the popularity of this eco-friendly flooring option continues to rise.
- Cork flooring has many eco-friendly attributes. Like bamboo, cork is quickly renewable. It is harvested from the bark of the cork oak tree and grows back every three years. Cork has anti-microbial properties to reduce allergens, is fire retardant and provides a comfortable feel under foot. Cork flooring can be finished in a variety of paints and stains to complement any room setting.
- Polyester (P.E.T.) Berber carpet is a sustainable option made of recycled plastic bottles. Anytime we can reuse these materials, we reduce the amount of new materials being manufactured and we reduce non-biodegradable materials in our landfills. Polyester Berber is spill resistant and comes in a variety of aesthetically – pleasing colours and patterns.

Whatever your home style or design, an eco-friendly flooring option does exist to complement the desired look and existing patterns. More information is available at www.royallepage.ca. www.newscanada.com

A fire in your dryer is more common than you think

(NC) Did you know that laundry room clothes dryers are the cause of around 15,000 house fires across North America every year? It is essential, therefore, to put this hard-working appliance on your springtime to-do list. "The reality is that dryer fires are fairly preventable with proper maintenance and safety precautions," says Ryan Michel, senior vice president and chief risk officer at Allstate Canada.

Most people know you should clean the lint trap after every dryer use and shouldn't overload your machine. However, here are six other tips you can follow to ensure it is operating safely:

1. Don't leave your dryer running if you're not a home.
2. Make sure there's proper ventilation for dryers located in closets or enclosed rooms.
3. Never operate your dryer with a damaged or missing lint filter.
4. Keep the area around the dryer free of combustible items.
5. Never dry fabrics that have been saturated by oils, gasoline or chemicals. And don't put rubber coated or foam items in your dryer either.
6. Always refer to the owner's manual for proper operating instructions.

And once a year be sure to:

- Hire a professional to service your dryer.
- Check that the dryer duct is clear of lint and connected to a vent outdoors. This can also help to reduce energy costs.
- Replace plastic venting pipes with flexible aluminum or steel material to sustain proper airflow and avoid crimping.

"Every family should have a fire prevention plan in place," Michel adds, "and dryer maintenance and proper use of it should be a key component."

Spring is also the perfect time of year to check the batteries in your smoke alarms and CO detectors, and to ensure that you have one on each floor of your home. Also be sure to have an exit plan in place for emergency evacuation during a fire and make sure every member of your family is aware of the plan. Additional information on fire prevention is available at www.allstate.ca/learningcentre.

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Think through the right way to do renovations

(NC) For some Canadians, the cold weather means bundling up and hunkering down. As you spend more time indoors, the state of your home may become increasingly apparent, prompting you to consider a renovation. Some projects must wait until spring returns, but others don't require the warm weather.

In the colder months in particular, energy consumption becomes a concern. A number of easy indoor renovations can make your home more efficient, can aid the environment and keep a few extra dollars in your pocket over the long term.

There are a huge variety of these simple projects, and by updating your flooring, installing new trim or moulding, insulating the attic or replacing faucets and fixtures, you can make a very big impact.

Obviously, no matter how seasoned you are as a handy person, you will want to take precautions, such as relying on appropriate safety equipment and taking care in your work. Remember to avoid rickety ladders and wear goggles and/or gloves when protection is required. "It also means thinking about how your project will affect your insurance policy," says James Hall, an insurance expert with Western Financial Group. "Anything you do can change the value of your property, which may have implications for your coverage.



While home renovations can make a positive difference, they also carry risks. A study from Western Financial Group found that one quarter of Canadian homeowners (24 per cent) have undertaken recent renovations that were valued at between \$10,000 and \$25,000.

"These projects include adding an extension or a wood-burning stove, or finishing your basement," notes Hall. "When spending that much, you should speak to an insurance broker to see if your plan reflects the new value of your house."

It's unlikely that every homeowner has complete and thorough knowledge of the latest codes that govern and inform renovation work. However, it's very important to make sure that your work ad-

heres to these, as codes are designed to guard you and your home against danger, faulty workmanship and negative insurance implications.

Now you're ready to emerge from your blanket, strap on your trusty tool belt, and get to work. More information is available at www.westernfinancialgroup.ca.

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Common mistakes made on home renovation projects

Home improvement projects can turn a house into a home. Homeowners plan scores of renovations to transform living spaces into rooms that reflect their personal tastes and comforts.

Homeowners going it alone may find things do not always go as planned. In fact, a Harris Interactive study found that 85 percent of homeowners say remodeling is a more stressful undertaking than buying a home. But homeowners about to embark on home improvement projects can make the process go more smoothly by avoiding these common pitfalls.



Failing to understand the scope of the project
Some homeowners don't realize just how big a commitment they have made until they get their hands dirty. But understanding the scope of the project, including how much demolition and reconstruction is involved and how much time a project will take can help homeowners avoid some of the stress that comes with renovation projects. For example, a bathroom renovation may require the removal of drywall, reinforcement of flooring to accommodate a new bathtub or shower enclosure and the installation of new plumbing and wiring behind walls. So such a renovation is far more detailed than simply replacing faucets.

So such a renovation is far more detailed than simply replacing faucets.

Not establishing a budget

Homeowners must develop a project budget to ensure their projects do not drain their finances. If your budget is so inflexible that you can't afford the materials you prefer, you may want to postpone the project and save more money so you can eventually afford to do it right.

Without a budget in place, it is easy to overspend, and that can put you in financial peril down the line. Worrying about coming up with money to pay for materials and labor also can induce stress. Avoid the anxiety by setting a firm budget.

Making trendy or over-personal improvements

Homeowners who plan to stay in their homes for the long run have more free reign when it comes to renovating their homes. Such homeowners can create a billiards room or paint a room hot pink if they so prefer. However, if the goal is to make improvements in order to sell a property, overly personal touches may make a property less appealing to prospective buyers. Trends come and go, and improvements can be expensive. If your ultimate goal is to sell your home, opt for renovations that will look beautiful through the ages and avoid bold choices that may only appeal to a select few buyers.

Forgetting to properly vet all workers

It is important to vet your contractor, but don't forget to vet potential subcontractors as well. Failing to do so can prove a costly mistake. Contractors often look to subcontractors to perform certain parts of a job, and it is the responsibility of homeowners to vet these workers.

Expecting everything to go as planned

Optimism is great, but you also should be a realist. Knowing what potentially could go wrong puts you in a better position to handle any problems should they arise. The project might go off without a hitch, but plan for a few hiccups along the way.

Overestimating DIY abilities

Overzealous homeowners may see a renovation project in a magazine or on television and immediately think they can do the work themselves. Unless you have the tools and the skills necessary to do the work, tackling too much can be problematic. In the long run, leaving the work to a professional may save you money.

Home improvements can be stressful, but homeowners can lessen that stress by avoiding common renovation mistakes. SH152893

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Options abound when laying a new driveway

A driveway is more than just a place to park your car. The right driveway material can add considerable curb appeal to your home, increasing its resale value along the way.

Homeowners have many options at their disposal when choosing a driveway material, and the right material for one home may not be the best fit for another. The following is a rundown of popular driveway surfaces and what homeowners can expect of each of them.

Brick

Many homeowners believe brick driveways provide the most aesthetic appeal, and it's hard to argue with the beauty of brick driveways and walkways. Brick driveways come in various colors and hues, and many homeowners opt to have the color of their brick driveways match their landscaping, which further adds to curb appeal. But that curb appeal is only appealing if the driveway is designed and installed correctly, and homeowners can expect to pay a premium for that, as brick driveway installation is very labor intensive.

Gravel

Gravel driveways may not be as commonplace as they once were, but this cost effective driveway material is still an option. Homeowners who live in regions with mild winters without snow might benefit most from gravel driveways, which can be difficult to negotiate when shoveling snow. Gravel tends to be the least expensive driveway material to install, but professionals may recommend that a new top layer of gravel be laid once or twice a year to replace material lost to wind and everyday usage.

Asphalt

Asphalt remains a popular driveway material, thanks in large part to its practicality and ease of installation. Unlike other driveway surface materials, asphalt is available in just one color, black, and that lack of versatility has led many homeowners to consider other options. But asphalt remains an affordable driveway surface material that's relatively easy to repair. Cracks and holes in asphalt are somewhat common, but resealing such blemishes once every three to five years is typically enough to maintain the appearance of an asphalt driveway.

Concrete

Concrete driveways are popular thanks in large part to their affordability and aesthetic appeal. Concrete can be susceptible to extremely cold weather, but many homeowners prefer concrete because of its versatility. Concrete can be stamped or dyed to provide a unique look, which can increase curb appeal. Concrete can be expensive to maintain, particularly when the material cracks. In addition, gas and oil spills are more noticeable on a concrete surface than other driveway surface materials.

When replacing an existing driveway, homeowners have an array of new surface materials to choose from, and each material has its pros and cons. SH152918

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5 ways to eco-drive

(NC) Attention all drivers. The way you drive affects your fuel consumption, which in turn affects the amount of greenhouse gas emissions your vehicle emits into the atmosphere.

By changing your driving habits, even a little, you could save hundreds of dollars a year in fuel and help reduce your CO2 emissions. The way to start is to eco-drive, a safer and greener way that produces the lowest fuel consumption from every vehicle, regardless of its size and age.

Here are five tips to get you started from the experts at Natural Resources Canada:

1. Accelerate gently - Every time you put your foot on the gas pedal, you feed fuel to your engine - the harder you apply the gas, the more fuel your engine uses and the more greenhouse gas emissions your car produces;
2. Maintain a steady speed and stick to the speed limit - It's tempting to speed on the highway but by reducing your speed from 120 km/hour to 100 km/hour you can lower your fuel consumption by about 20 per cent;
3. Anticipate traffic flow - Try to gauge the flow of traffic, keep a buffer zone between you and the vehicles in front of you, and drive at a consistent speed. Speed fluctuations use more fuel;
4. Coast to decelerate - Coasting to a stop is like getting a free ride. When you notice that traffic ahead is slowing or stopped, remove your foot from



the accelerator as soon as possible and coast instead of staying on the gas until the last second and slamming on the brakes. Your car uses little or no fuel when coasting.

5. Eco-Driving can result in as much as a 25 per cent reduction in fuel costs or roughly \$500 a year and \$2,500 over five years for the average vehicle. Not only does eco-driving save fuel, but it also reduces maintenance costs.

By following these few simple eco-driving tips, you can save fuel, reduce maintenance costs and reduce your environmental footprint. Watch a video for more eco-driving tips on the NRCAN website at www.nrcan.gc.ca/energy/efficiency/transportation/cars-light-trucks/driver-educators/7537. Or you can search for "Auto Smart Module Two Video". www.newscanada.com



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Top spring maintenance tips for every home

(NC) No home comes maintenance free. Even a brand new house requires regular upkeep to ensure its internal environment stays healthy. If you live in a house that is less than seven years old, home maintenance is also essential for preserving your warranty rights.

Almost all new homes in Ontario come with a warranty that lasts seven years from the date of the first possession, and it is guaranteed by Tarion Warranty Corporation. The warranty protects homeowners from certain defects, violations of the Ontario Building Code, and major structural damage, among other problems. But to make sure your home stays covered, you are advised to perform regular seasonal maintenance. Here are some tips to ensure it remains in good shape:

- Clear eavestroughs of debris regularly and extend downspouts so that water is directed away from your home. Water that flows around the foundation could eventually find its way into the basement.
- Have your roof inspected regularly to ensure shingles, flashing and chimney caps are in place and sealed properly.
- Fix the caulking around windows and doors and on the roof if it becomes cracked or separated.
- Clean or replace your furnace filter.

- Check air ducts, remove covers and vacuum dust from vents.
- Investigate and identify any musty smells and odours. They are often an indicator that there is a hidden moisture problem.
- In the winter, shut off the exterior water supply and drain water lines.
- Install a winter cover for the air conditioning unit.
- Check roofing and flashing for signs of wear or damage.
- Check/clean the heat recovery ventilator (HRV); wash or replace the filter.
- Clean the mechanisms of the humidifiers.
- Check for condensation and proper humidity levels.

By following an annual maintenance routine, you can keep your new home in top shape. Information about warranty coverage, including videos on year-round maintenance and moisture control, is available online at tarion.com. Ongoing maintenance helps to ensure that your home stays healthy and that your statutory warranty is protected.

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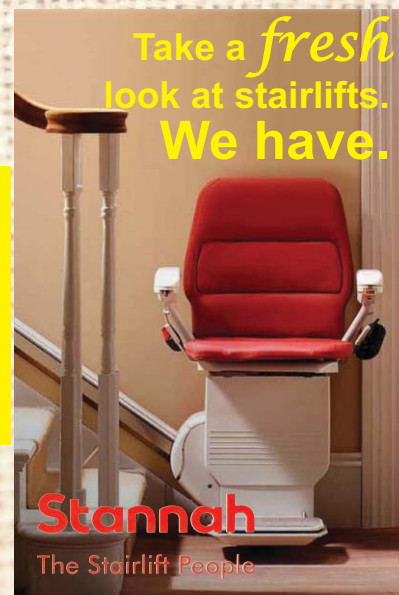
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Clever little tips to quickly make your house a home

(NC) Is 'homey' the ambiance you would like to create for family and friends?

Merriam-Webster's dictionary definition: Hom-ey (adjective) comfortable, or familiar like home. It is short and sweet but how exactly do we make our homes more comfortable and familiar for us so that they are truly a retreat?

Décor expert Sally Morse, the director of creative services at the window treatment company Hunter Douglas, offers tips on how to make a space truly your own, as follows:

Light the Way

"A great place to start on any design project is with lighting," Morse advises. "The correct lighting sets the perfect ambiance." From rustic re-purposed mason jars to luxurious crystal chandeliers, there are so many options from which to choose. Shop around for a look that works for you, or seek out custom-crafted items if you can't find the "wow" factor you are seeking in a store.

Dress Up Your Hobbies

Family photographs and sentimental items are sure to make you feel at home. You can take it a step further, however, by artfully turning your hobbies into stylish décor accents. "It's important that this doesn't look like a childhood art project, but rather that it pays homage to a favourite sport or vacation spot," Morse advises. If tennis is your game, for example, give a nod to the vintage side and decorate a wall with antique wooden racquets. If you've got an impressive jewelry collection, mirrored trays and glass stands are a pretty way to display your charms and trinkets.

Natural, Timeless Materials

Another way to add comfort and your own special style to a space is by using organic materials like grass and bamboo. They add a timeless appeal and help restore balance with the techno-centric, hectic outside world. Hunter Douglas Provenance woven wood shades provide a wealth of grass, bamboo and wood designs and the newest collection includes pearlized and metallic finishes, gold tones, light neutrals, pops of colour and lightweight weaves. Easy, affordable battery-powered motorization is available for most of the company's products.

New Life to Old Memories

Even if history wasn't your favourite subject, it's easy to appreciate the beauty of a one-of-a-kind antique. An 18th-century armoire has seen more history and special moments than many people do in a lifetime, and it's exciting to imagine all of the scenes that took place before the piece found its way into your home. "People can feel a distinct connection to their antiques," Morse notes. "Walking in your front door and seeing a special antique can really lift your mood."



"With a few small changes," Morse adds, "your home can help you put a little pep in your step and give you something to be proud about."

More information is available at www.hunterdouglas.ca.
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Redefine a space with an interior decorator's help

Though it may seem like interior decorators are a luxury reserved exclusively for the rich and famous, interior decorators work with people of all budgets. Homeowners sometimes wrestle with the practicality of hiring a decorator, wondering why they should spend the money when they can do the work themselves. But just like homeowners may hire professional electricians or landscapers, hiring a professional interior decorator can ensure the job is done right, within budget and completed within a reasonable amount of time.

Those who have already invested quite a bit of money into their homes but want to add some finishing touches would be wise to hire interior decorators or designers. Homeowners often have no idea where to begin when attempting to establish flow from room to room in their homes. Decorators can help homeowners tailor the interiors of their homes to the homes produce the desired vibe.

Hiring a designer can help a person avoid making potentially costly design errors. An aesthetically appealing house also can increase the home's value, setting a property above others in terms of appeal. Even though the designer will charge a fee, the investment may be well worth the expense when the room is done right the first time.

Interior decorators have numerous resources at their disposal. Fine tuned to the world of design, they understand which trends will come and go and also which design ideas have staying power. In addition, decorators will be in touch with vendors in the industry, connecting homeowners with the best of the best in terms of providing furniture, housewares, photography, and



additional special touches that help make a house a home.

In addition to expertise and resources, interior decorators have eyes that will be trained on things homeowners may not have noticed or even realized can be done. A designer may envision removing a room to create more space or knocking a wall down to let more natural light into a room.

Designers and decorators are trained to think differently and spatially to achieve concepts homeowners may never have envisioned for themselves. They can help tell stories through design and improve spaces immeasurably. TF154108

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Warning signs a tire is about to go flat

Few drivers will be fortunate enough to go their entire driving lives without encountering at least one flat tire. Flat tires range from the inconvenient flats, which may interrupt a road trip or make drivers late for work or an appointment, to more dangerous blowouts, which can compromise the safety of drivers, their passengers and anyone else on the road when the tire gives out.

But as inconvenient or dangerous as flats or blowouts can be, they also can be prevented more often than not. Tires often produce warning signs that a flat or blowout is about to emerge, so drivers who want to avoid such unfortunate developments can inspect their tires for the following signs.

- **Varying wear:** Tires should exhibit the same type of wear. The wear on front tires and back tires may differ, but one front tire should have the same amount of wear as the other and the same goes for the back tires. Uneven tread on tires indicates that the tire with more wear could be about to go out.

- **Worn tread:** Even drivers who know little about cars can typically recognize when tire tread has worn down to the point where the tire is a safety risk. But drivers who are unsure can employ the quarter test. Insert a quarter into the tread of the tire, with George Washington's head upright. If you can see the hairline of the United States' first president,

then you need to replace the tire. Perform this test on each of your vehicle's four tires.

- **Low pressure:** Drivers who do not routinely check their tire pressure are more likely to endure a flat or blowout than those who regularly make sure their tires are at the manufacturer-recommended pressure, which can be found in a vehicle owner's manual or by calling the tire manufacturer or visiting their website. An underinflated tire is under stress that can cause the tire to blowout. In addition, poorly inflated tires force engines to work harder, which negatively affects a car's fuel efficiency.

- **Vibration:** A car that vibrates excessively may do so because tires are damaged. Poor suspension is another cause of excessive vibration. Whatever is behind a car that is vibrating, drivers should immediately take the car to their mechanic for an inspection.

- **Physical damage to the tire:** Sometimes tires exhibit physical damage like bulges or cuts, and such signs could mean a flat tire or blowout is just around the corner. Tires that exhibit such physical damage need to be replaced immediately.

Flat tires and blowouts can prove both scary and inconvenient. Drivers who want to avoid such problems should routinely inspect their tires for indicators that a flat or blowout is likely to occur. SC153005



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Atlantic National Home Show is this weekend at Harbour Station!

With all the snow and fun winter weather we have been having it is hard to imagine that spring really is just around the corner! But with the time change this weekend and the sun's rays getting stronger the snow and ice will melt quickly, so we need to be ready for all of our spring projects.

So the Home Show is this weekend, March 20-22nd. Friday opening at noon and going til 9:00pm, Saturday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm and Sunday from 10:00 am til 4:00 pm. If you haven't been out to a Home Show for a while, why not come out of the snow and rain and melting snow and in to a nice warm dry place to see new ideas and vendors that are just waiting for you to stop by their booths. And if you usually attend, don't stop now cause there is always something new to discover!

The line up for seminars this year is varied as well. Decorating and various other seminars and of course the highlight is "Kitchens with the Wow Factor,". These seminars are scheduled with you in mind and for some of them, if you miss the first time, there will be repeat times, but not for all of them. Don't miss out on an opportunity to learn about some interesting topics and the great news is, the seminars are all free for everyone to enjoy!

So if you haven't been here in a while (or maybe never) you need to know a few things. Once you have packed your family up and arrived inside Harbour Station you really should take a minute or two to look over the map and see where and who you would like to see for sure. Also, check the seminar schedule and mark down your times for the ones you wish to attend, maybe all of them? Many of the seminars will fill up so be there a little ahead of the start time to get a good seat. Next, make sure you allow lots of time to visit with other attendees, because you are going to see people you haven't seen since who knows when and you will enjoy the time to catch up on each others lives. Most importantly, allow time at the booths you are interested in to interact with the vendors, who, by the way, are there just for you.

During peak times, patience can be a virtue. There are traditionally busier times throughout the afternoon and evening so if the vendor you would like to speak with seems swamped with customers, just wait patiently or come back a little later. We all really want to show you what we have and answer your questions and we feel bad if we can't connect with everyone who shows an interest in us. Maybe go have a snack and keep hydrated, this is like a marathon that you run at your own pace.

Now, go out there and have fun, see what you need for your spring building or renovation project, from kitchen cabinets to landscaping, there will be something for everyone. Technology and information increases so fast that this is a great way to ask questions, pick up information and see first hand how things work, all under one roof. See you all there!

For more info on the upcoming home shows check out www.AvondaleKitchens.com or www.MasterPromotions.ca <http://www.AvondaleKitchens.com/>

This article was written by Jim Lawrence of www.AvondaleKitchens.com Jim and the Avondale staff will be at the Home show all this weekend at Harbour Station, so drop in and say Hi.



Make the switch to the bright new world of LED lights

(NC) As the Canadian government continues to transition out incandescent light bulbs, it's time to embrace the next step in the electricity evolution: light-emitting diodes, better known as LEDs.

This advanced technology already being used across the country is light years ahead of incandescent bulbs when it comes to power usage, energy costs and overall sustainability. So if you are ready now, The Home Depot Canada tells us it's easy to switch to LED bulbs with reasonably priced options. If, however, you still need convincing, here are just a few of the reasons why you should be using energy efficient lighting:

Cost and energy savings: LED bulbs use approximately 85 per cent less energy than incandescent bulbs, significantly reducing energy bills for homeowners. In fact, by replacing the five most frequently-used light fixtures with LEDs in a home, consumers can save an average of \$60 per year on electric bills. That means the bulbs, which cost an average of \$10, will pay for themselves in a very short time.

Long life: One LED light bulb will last an average of 25,000 hours (or about 22 years based on the average usage of three hours a day). This is a radical improvement, simplifying the upkeep of the home by saving time and reducing maintenance.

Eco-friendly: As we take steps for a greener future, consider that LED lights are free of hazardous materials and are 100 per cent recyclable. Additionally, their longer life span means less material usage and waste over the long-term.



Variety: LED lights are made for every space in your home – from an elegant chandelier in the dining room, to the safety lights in the driveway. Companies like Cree and Philips have created lighting levels and tones to suit all lighting preferences.

As you make the switch to energy efficient lighting for your whole home, The Home Depot Canada has a variety of LEDs, CFLs, and halogen options available either in your local store or at www.homedepot.ca.

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How shopping locally can help you and your community

Today's consumers have more shopping options at their disposal than they did in years past. Though the Internet may put the world at one's fingertips, more and more shoppers are discovering that buying locally makes for a superior shopping experience.

The benefits associated with shopping locally are many, and the following are just a few reasons why shoppers may want to look no further than their own communities when planning their next shopping excursions.

Keeps money in the local economy

Locally-owned businesses often put a larger share of their revenue back into their communities. Small business owners may be more inclined to employ local residents, giving more people in the community solid employment. Business owners may reach out and support other neighborhood efforts, such as fundraising initiatives for charities and schools. By shopping at local stores, you have a hand in supporting these efforts as well.

Save money

When factoring in travel time and the cost of fuel, shopping locally makes more sense than driving to a faraway mall. In addition, repeat customers who establish a rapport with a local business owner may find that such owners are more inclined to price match or work with loyal customers to find lower prices through suppliers.

Diversify your home and lifestyle

Shoppers who prefer more unique styles may find local businesses cater to their needs better than large chain stores. Larger retailers offer the same products to customers regardless of where those customers live, so a per-

son in California may be decorating his or her home with the same furnishings as a person in North Carolina. But local shops tend to produce more unique items that are not available nationwide.

Promote entrepreneurship

Small businesses are an essential element to the country's economic growth. By shopping locally, consumers are showing their support for this important segment of the national economy.

Help establish local pride

Independent shops contribute to the fabric of a community and what makes it special and unique. Tourists and other visitors will be much more inclined to remember a local shop rather than a big chain in a particular neighborhood. When travelers want to get a feel for a community, they seek out small, local stores that are much more likely to stock a high percentage of locally-sourced goods.

Attract other businesses

Private and public sector businesses tend to gravitate around anchor stores. Should a local store be successful, banks, restaurants, salons, and other businesses may move in as well.

Shopping locally benefits consumers in various ways, many of which contribute to a healthy local economy. TF153016

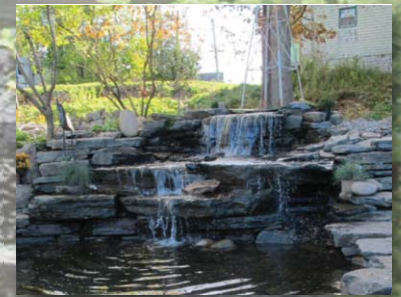
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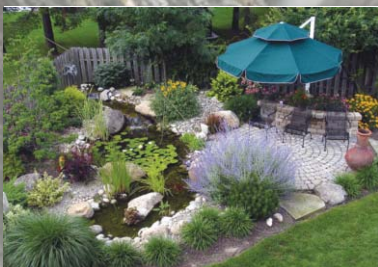
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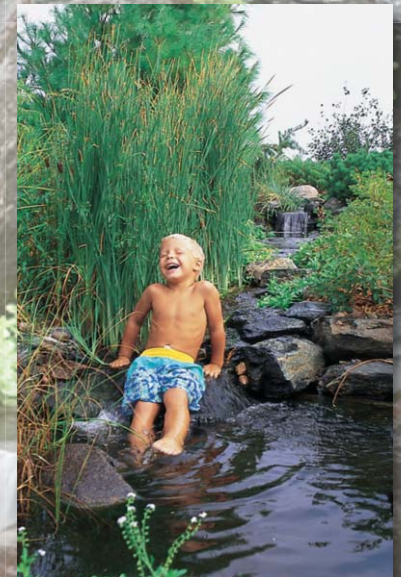
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The potentially harmful effects of mold in your home

The presence of mold in a home is a sight few homeowners want to see. In addition to being unsightly, mold found in a home can be unhealthy. While certain cleaners may prove effective at removing mold, homeowners who want to remove existing mold growths and prevent future growths may benefit from gaining a greater understanding of mold and why it grows inside homes.

What is mold?

Mold is a blanket term used to describe fungi that can be found both indoors and outdoors. Many species of mold exist, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that some estimates suggest there may be more than three hundred thousand different species of mold. Common indoor molds include cladosporium, penicillium, alternaria, and aspergillus.

Which conditions promote mold growth?

Homeowners may notice that mold tends to grow in specific areas of their homes but not in others, and that's because molds grow best in certain conditions. Warm, damp and humid conditions, such as those found in poorly ventilated bathrooms and basements, make ideal breeding grounds for mold.

What are the effects of mold exposure?

Molds are a natural and resilient part of the environment, but mold growth indoors should be addressed and avoided. Mold spores are tiny and invisible to the naked eye, and when these spores attach to wet surfaces, they begin to grow. Once these spores begin to grow, they can then affect people in various ways. Roughly a decade ago, the Institute of Medicine found sufficient evidence to support a link between exposure to indoor mold and respiratory tract issues, such as coughing and wheezing in peo-

ple who were otherwise healthy. The same report found that mold may trigger asthma symptoms among people with asthma and hypersensitivity pneumonitis, a disease in which the lungs are inflamed when a person breathes in certain dusts he or she is allergic to, in people susceptible to that condition.

Some people who do not have a preexisting condition can still be sensitive to molds. When exposed to mold, such people may experience symptoms like nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing, or skin irritation.

How can exposure to mold be decreased at home?

Adequate ventilation is arguably homeowners' best friend with regard to reducing mold exposure at home. Control humidity levels in areas of the home that tend to be warm and humid, such as the kitchen and bathroom. Install an exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathroom and a window in the bathroom if yours does not already have one.

The CDC recommends that humidity levels be no higher than 50 percent throughout the day, and an air conditioner and dehumidifier can help you keep indoor humidity levels in check, especially during the summer when humidity levels tend to be their highest of any time during the year.

When renovating your home, remove any existing carpeting from bathrooms and basements and toss out soaked carpets or upholstery as well. If painting will be part of your home renovation projects, add mold inhibitors to paints prior to application.

Mold that grows inside a home is unsightly and potentially unhealthy. But concerned homeowners can take several reactive and proactive steps to reduce existing mold growths and prevent them from returning in the future. SH152903

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