

Your Island Guide to Home and Garden



# Springtime



# HOME IMPROVEMENT

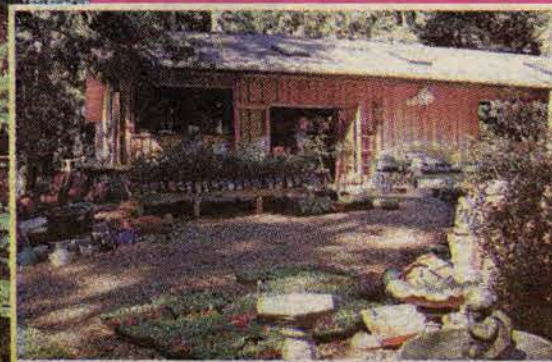
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# Things to watch for when buying an older house

In recent years older homes have become very popular — and with good reason. Older houses have advantages that new houses often can't match. They were built to last and tend to be more spacious than newer homes.

The ideal older house is well maintained and in excellent condition. Unfortunately many older houses don't fit this description. Some look sturdy but contain serious flaws that are difficult to detect.

Many older homes are obviously run-down, but look as if they may have potential once they're fixed up. However, some rundown houses are in such bad shape that it's better to forget about renovating them, and invest money in a better house.

While many older houses were built quite solidly, it's possible that by buying an older house you could be inheriting old problems, just as you would by buying an old appliance or used car. Anyone planning to buy an older home should do so with his or her eyes wide open.

## Common problems

Many older houses have common problems, which require immediate repairs. Some of the more common problems you're likely to find in older homes are:

- Plumbing. Many older houses have old galvanized pipes, which

get clogged with rust and don't allow water to get through properly. These pipes must be changed. Newer houses have copper pipes, which resist corrosion.

- If the owner doesn't know what kind of pipes the house has, you can do a simple test to find out. Place a magnet near the pipes and see if it's drawn to them. If it is, the pipes are lead or galvanized. To test whether the pipes are clogged, turn on all the faucets in the bathroom and flush the toilet at the same time.

- Water damage. Water can cause serious damage to a house and to personal property as well. Cracks in the foundation, inadequate drainage and poor grading are just some of the possible causes.

- Inadequate wiring and overloaded electrical systems. With all the appliances in use in homes, an older house should have a minimum capacity of 100 amps. Some signs of an overloaded electrical system or inadequate wiring are many extension cords and multiple plugs around the house, blown fuses, exposed wiring, frayed wires, a large supply of fuses over 15 amps and lights dimming when an appliance is turned on.

- Out-dated designs. Kitchens and bathrooms in older homes may be old-fashioned and require extensive renovations to bring them up to the higher standards of

today.

- Easily hidden defects. Defects may go unnoticed in a quick inspection of an older house. For example, a thick carpet can disguise an uneven floor; wallpaper can hide cracks in the walls.

- Roof. It's important to check its condition in an older house.

## Insulation

After mortgage payments and taxes, heating can be a homeowner's biggest expense, so it's important to avoid wasting money on it. Unfortunately, many older houses are poorly insulated. Heating costs were very low when they were built.

By doing a simple touch test on a cold day, you can check if walls are insulated. If they feel cold, they're not well insulated. Ideally, there should be thick insulation in any ceiling under the roof and in exterior walls.

However, the cost of insulating an older house to save on heating bills many not be cost-efficient. For example, if you calculate that it will cost \$10,000 to properly insulate exterior walls, but that annual energy savings after doing so will only be \$200, the job's just not worth doing.

Less costly measures such as installing energy-efficient windows, and putting in good weather-stripping and caulking may do the trick.

# Dirty, unsightly shower doors are not impossible to clean

Shower doors can be difficult to clean, but the task is not impossible.

When hard water evaporates, it leaves minerals behind, giving a cloudy appearance to tubs, tiles and shower doors.

Eventually, those mineral deposits build up into an unsightly, scaly, rock-hard layer, and can even clog the showerhead.

To dissolve and remove hard water deposits, you need an acidic cleaner. For new spots, a very mild acid such as plain white vinegar may do the trick.

For tougher jobs, you'll need a commercial bathroom cleaner that contains an acid strong enough to dissolve the deposits, but not so harsh that it will damage the surface. Look for a cleaner specifically made for this purpose. You may find one with a higher concentration of acid at a hardware or janitorial supply store.

Spray the area with the cleaner, and wait several minutes to let the acids go to work. Spray again, and scrub the area with a soft scrub pad or brush. Repeat if necessary, and make sure you rinse

away the cleaner when you're finished.

A showerhead that's clogged should be removed and soaked in a solution of one part white vinegar to two parts water.

Mineral deposits become more tenacious over time, so it's best to prevent them from accumulating.

Keep a squeegee in the bathroom, and use it to wipe away the water on

the shower doors and tiles, working from top to the bottom. If this is done after every shower, your shower door will sparkle — and you'll save yourself a lot of hard work later on.

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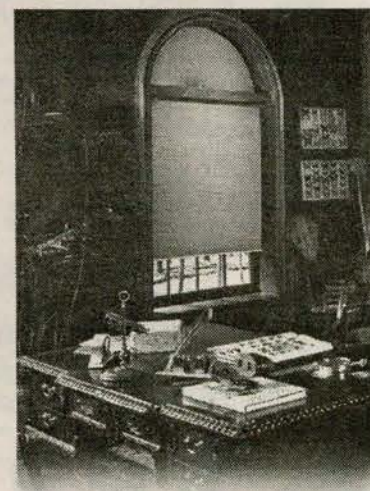
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# Tips for painting with roller

A new coat of paint can totally transform any room, but it is sometimes difficult to know where to start. Choosing a new colour for your walls may seem like the most important decision, but it is just one step in the process. You need to prepare the surface, buy the right tools and finally, apply the paint.

## Preparing the surface

When painting a room, the first step (and probably the most important) is preparing the surface. Poor surface preparation is the number one cause of paint failure and can ruin your desired effect if not done properly.

Before you start, don't forget to put a drop sheet on the floor and cover any furnishings you don't want splattered with paint. Thoroughly clean and dry the surface before painting. As a general rule of thumb, anything with a shiny surface needs to be dulled before painting.

High-gloss surfaces must be cleaned and sanded in order for the paint to bond. An oil-based primer or coat of flat paint can take the shine off a surface and prepare it for the new paint. You will need a flat, smooth surface for this to work effectively.

Scrape off flaking paint and wallpaper. Patch holes and cracks, allowing the area to dry before proceeding. Sand raised imperfections, bubbles and blisters. Apply a primer if necessary. Repaired, patched, stained and new surfaces require a coat of primer before painting. If the surface has been painted before, you only need to paint the



best with flat plastic paints (flat enamel). Most solvent paints are used on smooth surfaces so a 5-6 mm nap is recommended. Water based paints on smoother surfaces are best applied with a 5-10 mm nap.

Lambskin covers work best on smooth surfaces and with solvent-based paints.

Mohair

patched or repaired areas.

## Rollers

Painting should start at the top and work towards the bottom, painting the ceilings, then the walls, and finally the trim and woodwork. But before you can start, you need to choose the right tools for the job! Rollers make painting large surfaces quick and easy. But buying a roller is not as simple as walking into the store and grabbing the first one you see. You need to consider the size of the surface you are painting, the texture, and the type of paint you want to apply.

• Choosing the right roller: A good roller is worth buying so look for one in the mid to upper price range. Choose a roller that will cover a large area as quickly as possible. Tradespeople recommend a 270 mm roller.

When buying a roller it is important to consider the nap — this is the length of the pile. Generally, the smoother the surface, the shorter the nap. A long nap is best used for semi-smooth to rough surfaces and painting large areas. A long nap works

sleeves are best for undercoats and gloss and enamels on smooth surfaces. Foam rubber covers are best for gloss and semigloss enamels and clear finishes.

• Rolling tips: Pre-wet the roller with appropriate solvent or water, spinning out the excess.

Load the cover by dipping the roller in the paint tray and rolling back and forth on the ridged surface. This will coat the entire roller and squeeze out excess paint.

Start with diagonal or zigzag strokes to transfer the paint onto the wall or surface.

When the roller is almost dry and the paint is distributed, go back over the area with long, vertical strokes for an even finish. This is called "laying off." For solvent-based paints, lay off from floor to ceiling. For water-based paints lay off from ceiling to floor. If painting the ceiling, lay off towards the light source. To avoid lap lines, paint the surface in overlapping blocks (approximately one metre square). If you work quickly, this will blend the edges together. For glossy paints,

paint in smaller blocks as lap lines are more noticeable. If right-handed, paint left to right. Of course, the opposite applies if you're left-handed.

An extension pole makes the job much easier, especially when painting ceilings. Never roll in parallel strokes or you will get an uneven finish. Thoroughly clean the roller after use. Stand the roller on its end to dry, then store in its plastic bag so the fibres don't distort or flatten.

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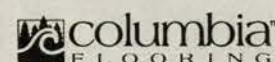
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# How to estimate your paint needs

Painting is one of the easiest ways to give a room a new look. Yet before you embark on the project, it's a good idea to learn approximately how much paint you will need. There's nothing more frustrating than running out of paint in the middle of a project and leftover paint can take up a lot of room in the basement or garage.

Here is an easy guide to estimating the amount of paint you'll need to purchase for a ceiling or room project.

To estimate the amount of paint you need in order to cover the walls of a room, add together the length of all the walls and then multiply the number by the height of the room, from floor to ceiling. The number you get is the room's square footage. Is that math class coming back to you now? Now you have to determine how much of that square footage is paintable surface area.

Because you use a different paint on the doors and windows, subtract those areas from the room total. No sweat, just subtract 20 square feet for each door and 15 square feet for each average-sized window in the room. You end up with a number that is close to the actual wall area you have to cover with paint.

In general, you can expect one gallon of paint to cover about 350 square feet. You need slightly more than a gallon if the walls are unpainted drywall, which absorbs more of the paint. You also need to consider whether to paint more than one coat. If you're painting walls that are unfinished, heavily patched,



or dark in colour, plan on applying two coats of paint.

When painting a dark colour, pros often add a colour tint to the white primer. Tints for both latex or alkyd paints are available at most paint stores. For best results, choose a tint shade that's closest to the top coat colour.

Now for the clincher of the math problem. Divide the paintable wall area by 350 (the square-foot coverage in each gallon can) to find the number of gallons of

paint you need for the walls. You can round uneven numbers; if the remainder is less than .5, order a couple of quarts of wall paint to go with the gallons; if the remainder is more than .5, order an extra gallon.

Of course, buying in bulk is usually more economical, so you may discover that three quarts of paint cost as much as a gallon.

#### Examples

The following examples walk you through the calculations for

determining how much paint you need for a 14-by-20-foot room that's eight feet tall and has two doors and two average size windows.

#### Ceiling paint estimator

Use the following formula to estimate the amount of ceiling paint you need. Double the result if the ceiling requires two coats.

1. Multiply the length of the ceiling by its width to find its area.  $14 \times 20 = 280$  square feet

2. Divide that number by 350 (the estimated square feet covered per gallon) to figure out how many gallons of paint you need.  $280 \div 350 = .8$

For this example, you want to buy one gallon of ceiling paint for a single coat.

#### Wall paint estimator

Use the following formula to estimate the amount of wall paint you need. Double the result if the walls require two coats.

1. Add together the length of each wall.  $14 + 20 + 14 + 20 = 68$  feet

2. Multiply the sum by the wall height to find the total wall area.  $68 \times 8 = 544$  square feet

3. Subtract 20 square feet for each door ( $20 \times 2 = 40$ ) and 15 square feet for each window ( $15 \times 2 = 30$ ) to find the actual amount of wall area you're painting.  $544 - 70 = 474$  square

feet

4. Divide this figure by the paint coverage (350 square feet per gallon), and the result is the number of gallons to purchase.  $474 \div 350 = 1.4$

For this example, you want to buy one gallon and two quarts of paint for a single coat.

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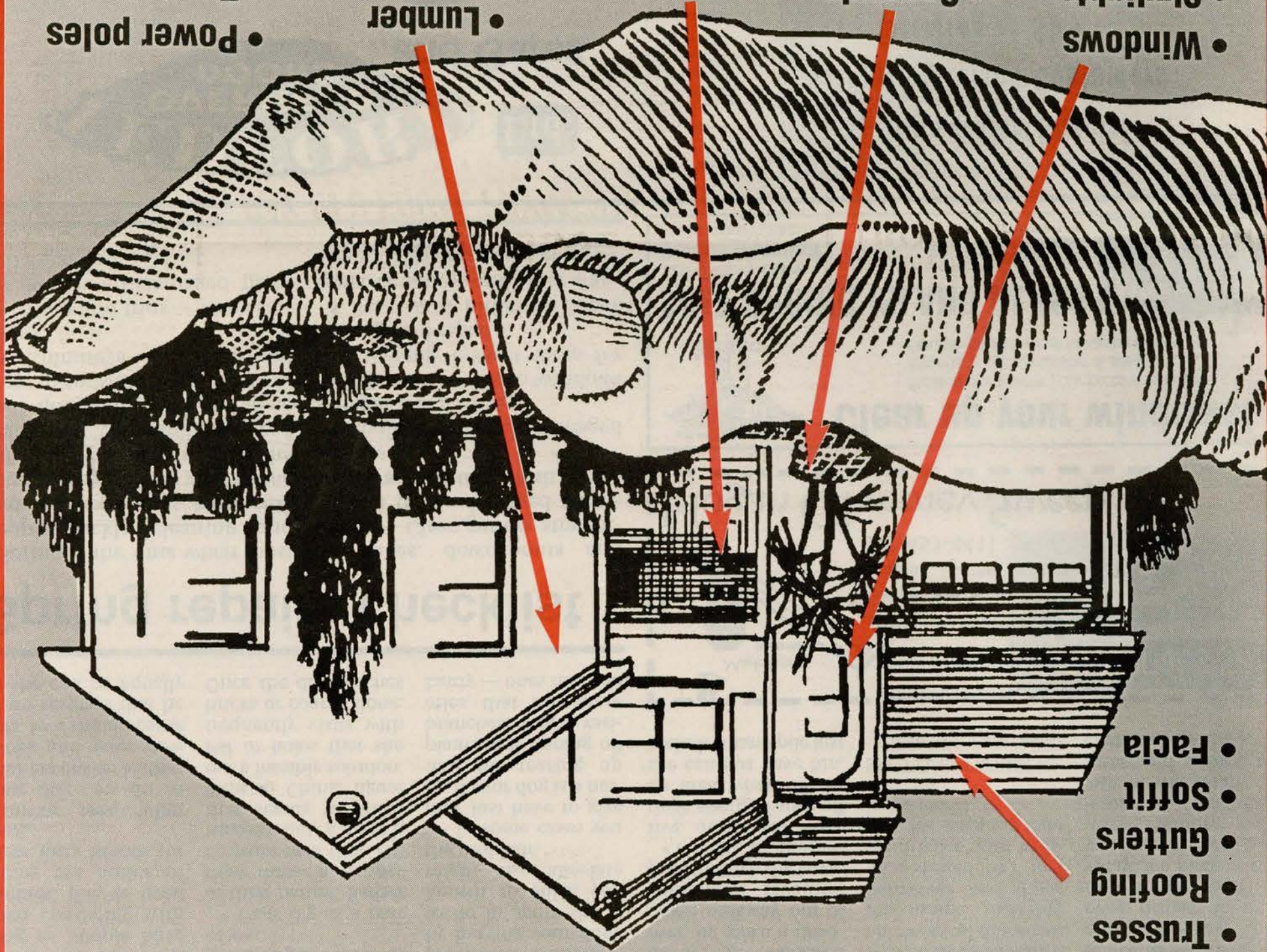
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# Don't let your garden go to the dogs

Has your pooch been digging up daisies? Does your prize rose bush look more like tossed salad once Rover returns from his walk? Are bare spots on the lawn rattling your nerves? Well, you're not alone. As long as people have been coexisting with canines, they've been facing the antics of these furry friends (or foes).

You've seen what your dog can do to your expensive leather shoes and your new sofa, so it should come as no surprise that he or she can be equally

"creative" in the yard. And because dogs don't discriminate and they don't understand improper behaviour until they are corrected properly, patience and training is required to make the garden a place for both of you.

• Dogs dig as a part of their nature. Rather than throw a temper tantrum next time Fido tunnels out a trench that seems to reach clear to China, figure out a feasible solution. Fill in holes that she frequently visits with bricks or coarse stone. Once the dog reaches

this layer, she will quickly feel the uncomfortable scrape and move on. Or, cover up troublesome spots with planters or patio stones. Dogs also do not like to sniff where their scents are most prevalent. Therefore, by burying your dog's waste in spots she is known to sniff, you might also alleviate the problem.

• In some cases you may just have to give in. If your dog is a natural for tearing up plants and ripping off branches, select varieties that are more hardy — ones that can

take some roughhousing. Or, choose prickly plants that also are attractive to you so that once pinch will drive poochie away. You may also have to remove temptations like flower pots that always get knocked over, or make a decorative walkway out of your dog's favourite path through the lawn.

• Provide an alternative outlet for your dog's energy. Fence off an area where he or she can just have fun. Include a sand pile just

for digging and some safe toys.

• Don't be afraid to reprimand. Dogs respond well to things they find annoying or unpleasant. A well aimed water gun, the clanking of pennies in a jar, or as a last resort, an electrical fence can discourage naughty behaviour. And above all, a simple "NO" in a stern voice does wonders for stopping Fido in his tracks.

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dered why dog urine discolours grass in such a stark way? Surprisingly, it is not due to the pH in the urine but rather the concentration of nitrogen present. Female dogs also have a tendency to create larger messes because they often urinate in puddles, rather than the spray of a male dog. If you flush the area with water within eight hours of your dog's visit, it will dilute the urine and reduce the chance of spotting.

## Spring repairs checklist

Spring is the time when most people tackle cleaning and maintenance chores. Make sure you are prepared for your spring cleaning by making a list of the items that will probably need your attention. Here are some areas to consider first.

- Chimneys — clean and inspect flues.
- Siding and trim — Wash siding, touch up damaged paint and repair loose siding.

- Eaves, downspouts and drains — Clean gutters, straighten and repair damaged downspouts and gutters. Flush downspouts.

- Roofing — Repair damaged shingles and flashing.

- Windows — Clean windows and screens. Inspect them for damage and repair.

- Pests and birds — Check vents, chimneys and other cranies for bird and insect nests.

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# Some ideas for improving home security

Much can be done to make your home a harder target for criminals to crack.

- Close and lock all doors when leaving, even for short periods of time. This includes garage or connecting doors. Burglars want easy jobs. That's why they scan homes for the weakest point of entry.

- Trimming shrubs and hedges will prevent them from being used as cover for burglars or anyone intent on assault.

- Lock up ladders, tools or lawn furniture. These items could be used by burglars to gain entry into the home.

- Use electronic timers to switch outside lights on, particularly if you plan on being away until nightfall.

- Timers should also be added to indoor lights. Select rooms that you use most often, and set timers so lights are switched on and off at different times - take a few moments noting your own regular routines for greater authenticity.

- Motion or sound detectors can activate alarms and exterior lights, and are an inexpensive deterrent to would-be burglars.

- Most burglaries involve a door - replace any flimsy outside doors with sturdier metal models, and add deadbolts. Sliding patio doors can be secured by placing a metal or wooden rod along the runner.

- An automatic garage door opener will allow easier access (for you, not the crooks), allowing you to tuck yourself away inside your car before heading out... and preventing anyone from pouncing upon you when you return.

- All windows should have strong interior locks added.

- Add a peep hole to all exterior doors - this will allow you to identify callers without having to open the door.

- An answering machine or voice mail service is a good (and relatively cheap) investment. Messages should be straight

forward and not too detailed - leave just your phone number, nothing more. Indicate you're busy elsewhere in the house, and "can't come to the phone right now."

If you're a woman living alone, ask a male friend or relative to record a message for you (it also doesn't hurt to have a dog barking somewhere in the back-ground).

- Look into having a security system added to your arsenal of anti-thievery gadgets (surveys show that homes without alarms make up 75 per cent of break-in targets).

These vary in cost and features - weigh your needs against your budget, and get as many quotes as possible before making a commitment. Top-of-the-line systems will trigger a call to a central monitoring service, which in turn will alert police and neighbours that a break-in is in progress.

- Neighbours are an

invaluable resource. Get to know them, and inform them if you plan on being away from home for extended periods of time. Neighbors can also help by collecting newspapers, mowing the grass, and generally keeping an eye on things.

- Take a complete inventory of valuables and place valuable jewellery and documents in a safety-deposit box. Videotape or take photos of all valuable possessions. These also should be marked with an engraving pen to help police trace and recover them if stolen.

- Don't allow strangers into the home to use the phone and never leave service technicians or repairmen

alone in the house. These individuals might be casing homes in the neighbourhood for possible burglary targets.

- Never place keys under the doormat,

flowerpot or window ledge. Burglars study the daily habits and routines of people. Experience has taught them to check these places first when casing a house.



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## Tips for removing wallpaper

Wallpaper comes in two types, and the method for removal is different for each. Vinyl wallpaper - a modern invention - is designed so it can easily be pulled off a wall, just find a loose corner and start peeling.

Older wallpaper, however, is more difficult and messier to remove. For this type, you'll need a wallpaper remover product that penetrates the paper and softens the adhesive underneath.

Here's how it works:

1. Pierce the wallpaper with a perforation tool so the remover solution can soak the adhesive

behind the paper.

2. Use a sprayer, a paint roller or a sponge to apply the remover solution, and let it soak into the wallpaper according to the manufacturer's directions.

3. After loosening the wallpaper at the edges, peel it away with a six-inch wallboard knife, being careful not to damage the wall underneath. Completely remove all of the backing paper.

4. Rinse the wall with remover solution to remove all adhesive residue. Then rinse the wall with clear water and let it dry completely.

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# Renovate with long-lasting convenience in mind

Renovating your kitchen, laundry room and storage areas requires special planning, especially when you want value for your money together with long-lasting convenience that will make life easier now and in the future.

Easy-to-work-on countertops, kitchen and laundry areas well-suited to your needs, cupboards and closets that are easy to get things out of: these are the types of things that can make your daily life easier and help you should you suffer mobility impairment at some later time. And when renovating, think about air quality, another key to good health and quality of life.

Depending on your needs, you could make provision for the following:

#### Clearances:

- 750 mm (30 in.) x 1,200 mm (48 in.) clearance in front of appliances, counters, cupboards, closets, etc.
- 1,500 mm (60 in.) unobstructed space in a U-shaped kitchen arrangement;
- 900 mm (35 in.) x 1,200 mm (48 in.) clear-

ance in front of storage areas with a sliding door;

- 1,200 mm (48 in.) x 1,200 mm (48 in.) clearance in front of other rooms with swinging or folding doors.

#### Cupboards and shelves:

- Easy-to-use knobs;
- Sliding shelves under the kitchen counter and built-in oven;
- Upper cupboards 350 mm (14 in.) above the counter, rather than the standard 450 mm (18 in.);
- If your cupboards are already 450 mm (18 in.) above the kitchen counter, you could consider adding a shelf between the counter and the cupboards 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level;
- Wheelchair users should have a 150 mm (6 in.) deep x 180 mm (7 in.) high recess under the lower cupboards rather than the standard 80 mm (3 1/4 in.) x 100 mm (4 in.);
- Consider building a pantry with adjustable shelves that is separate from the kitchen cupboards.

**Kitchen counter** (that part of the counter used for food preparation):

- Can be lowered to a height of 865 mm (34 in.) rather than the standard 920 mm (36 in.) if necessary;
- Provide for a 760 mm (30 in.) wide x 685 mm (27 in.) deep space under this part of the counter when required.

#### Miscellaneous household items:

- Switches, thermostats and intercoms 1,050 mm (42 in.) to 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level;
- Electrical outlets at least 400 mm (16 in.) above floor level;
- Kitchen counter electrical outlets 1,050 mm (42 in.) above floor level.
- Easy-access fusebox 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level;
- Ensure that all household switches, thermostats, etc. are easy to activate with one hand.

#### Storage shelves and hang bars:

- Adjustable clothes rods 1,200 mm (48 in.) long and 1,500 mm (60 in.) above floor level.
- Install shelves 400 mm (16 in.) to 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level for easy access by people with reduced mobility.

#### Air quality:

- Water-based paints on walls and ceilings;
- Floor coverings such as linoleum, ceramic tile, hardwood with water-based, low tox-

#### Stove and cooktop:

- Controls on the side or in front;
- Consider building the cooktop into a counter 865 mm (34 in.) high rather than the standard 920 mm (36 in.), and positioning it near that part of the kitchen counter used for food preparation;
- 760 mm (30 in.) wide x 685 mm (27 in.) high space under the built-

in cooktop, as required;

#### Storage shelves and hang bars:

- Adjustable clothes rods 1,200 mm (48 in.) long and 1,500 mm (60 in.) above floor level.
- Install shelves 400 mm (16 in.) to 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level for easy access by people with reduced mobility.

#### Air quality:

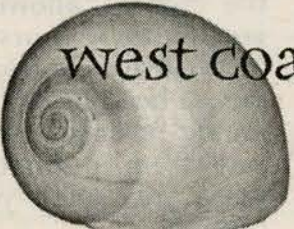
- Water-based paints on walls and ceilings;
- Floor coverings such as linoleum, ceramic tile, hardwood with water-based, low tox-

icity varnish, or flexible sheets or squares that are self-adhesive or affixed using water-based glue;

- Cabinets made of solid wood, formaldehyde-free fibreboard, or particleboard that has been laminated or coated with a low toxicity sealant;
- Exhaust fan to vent air and humidity outside;
- Hypersensitive individuals should consider building a separate, outdoor-vented

cupboard for storing household and other polluting products;

- An outdoor-vented central vacuum system to maintain good air quality;
- Before beginning work, make sure surfaces are free of mold and dampness. If they are not, identify the cause and correct the situation, with the help of a specialist if necessary;
- During renovations, avoid breathing in dust from lead-based paints.



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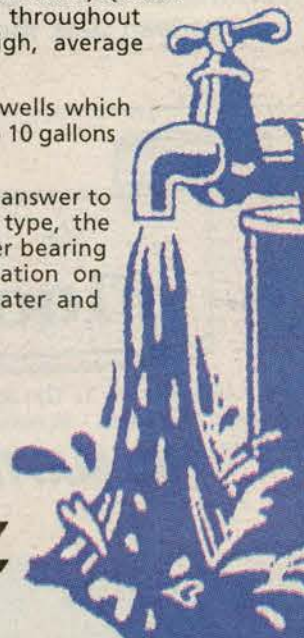
Will hydro-fracturing work for your well? The short answer to that question is...maybe. It depends on the rock type, the depth of the well, and the occurrence of good water bearing formations in a given area. To get more information on hydrofracturing, or any other aspect of ground water and wells please call drillwell. Available 7 days a week.

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# What to do about old windows

Modern windows not only beautify the appearance of a home, they bring in the sunlight during the winter, while preventing the warmth created from escaping outdoors. Windows also insulate a home from heat during the summer and keep cooled air from escaping.

When deciding whether to repair or replace your existing windows, begin by considering their age

and condition. Poorly designed, constructed and placed windows can cost money through heat loss.

If your home is more than 30 years old and still has the original windows, chances are your windows are not keeping you as warm or as cool as well-placed and installed newer models. But, there are measures you can take to increase their efficiency:

- Tighten the seal

around the windows with weatherstripping

• Every window not made of insulated glass should have a storm window. If your home has storm windows, ensure they are in good condition and properly installed before the cold season begins.

• If your home doesn't have storm windows, or they are in poor condition, you can get as good or better protection

using heavy-gauge clear plastic sheeting.

Replacing windows with more energy-efficient ones doesn't have to be done all at once. Begin by replacing the ones causing the most heat loss, such as the large picture windows in your living or dining rooms. Replacing windows in stages over a period of years costs less up front and still increases energy efficiency.

## Try these alternative, natural garden pest prevention tips

Sometimes the joy of a home garden can quickly turn to aggravation when insects and other pests damage all of your hard work.

But pesticides and chemicals used to rid your garden of bugs might damage your plants and your health in the process.

One solution is to consider mixing plants into your garden that naturally repel pests. These plants have their own chemical defense systems against pests in the wild. The following is a list of some of Mother Nature's best.

- Ants: mint, tansy, pennyroyal
- Aphids: mint, garlic, chives, coriander
- Bean Leaf Beetles: potato, onion, turnip
- Codling Moths: common oleander
- Colorado Potato Bugs: green beans, coriander
- Cucumber Beetles: radish, tansy
- Flea Beetles: garlic, onion, mint
- Imported Cabbage Worms: mint, sage, rosemary, hyssop
- Japanese Beetles: garlic, larkspur, rue, geranium

- Leaf Hoppers: geranium, petunia
- Mexican Bean Beetles: potato, onion, garlic, radish
- Mice: onion
- Root Knot Nematodes: French marigolds
- Slugs: rosemary, wormwood
- Spider Mites: onion, garlic, cloves, chives
- Squash Bugs: marigolds, nasturtium
- Stink Bugs: radish
- Thrips: marigolds
- Tomato Hornworms: marigolds, sage, borage
- Whiteflies: marigolds, nasturtium

## Plan your great fire escape

Your Great Escape! Brings to mind a getaway, a break from life's pace that seems to get faster every day. Sometimes, it seems we couldn't plan our getaway if our lives depended on it. Well, in a fire, it could.

Every day, lives are lost in house fires. Old house, new house, fire doesn't care. That safe haven we call home can quickly turn into a death-trap, if we don't plan to get out alive

by practising fire drills.

Associations against fire are urging everyone to take a few minutes to plan and practise their family's great escape.

Find the safest and quickest way to get outside when the smoke alarm sounds.

• Smoke alarms: Change the batteries in your smoke alarms at least once a year, and test them regularly to be sure they are in working order.

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# Freshen a room with flowers

Nothing brightens a mood (or a room) like fresh flowers, making them a timeless gift to give — and receive. Whether you order phlox by phone or irises on the Net, here are some tips to help you make an impression.

Which flowers last longest? All blooms fade, but generally bulb flowers (tulips, irises, daffodils) wilt first. Roses typically last a little longer. Carnations, daisies, gladiolus, chrysanthemums and certain types of lilies stay fresh for a number of days. Check with your florist when ordering. And, of course, dried flowers and potted plants last for as long as you properly care for them.

How to care for your bouquet. Most bouquets last four to seven days, but you can do a few things to extend their freshness and scent:

When you get the flowers, trim their stems as soon as possible. (If you're gathering

the bouquet from your garden, it's best to cut flowers early in the morning.) Fill your sink with clean, tepid water, place the stems beneath the water and cut a few centimetres or so off the ends with a sharp knife or scissors. Doing the surgery underwater prevents the stems from developing air bubbles that may block the flow of water. If the stems are thick, scrape a little bark from the base to help them absorb water.

Strip all leaves from the stems that will be underwater in the vase. Otherwise they decompose and create



bacteria that shorten the life of your blooms.

Change the water in the vase every one to two days — more often if it becomes cloudy. (Clean the vase, too.) This is also a good time to trim another few centimetres from the stems and to remove any blossoms that have seen better days.

Which flowers are the most fragrant? Some flowers smell as good as they look and

are thought to be the ultimate in natural aromatherapy. The scents of lavender and roses, for example, are said to create a feeling of tranquility and calm, while romance and passion may be ignited by the sensual smell of lilies, lilacs and sweet peas. Other fragrantly fragrant flowers include freesias, hyacinths, dianthus, lilies of the valley, ylang-ylangs and carnations.

Get the most bloom for your buck. Flowers that are in season generally cost less than hothouse exotics. Ask your florist if there are any seasonal specials. Many florists feature specials around certain holidays, like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. And keep in mind that more modest and common flowers like daisies and carnations will always be a lot less expensive than long-stemmed roses or exotic blooms like orchids.

## Think safety when doing maintenance

Spring home-improvement projects can be exciting, especially when they involve changing the décor of the home. Whether you plan to make a minor change, like hanging new drapes, or you have something extensive in mind, it is important to consider your health and safety in the process.

- Always read manufacturers' operating instructions before using any equipment.
- Make sure that you use any materials or chemicals safely,

complying with statutory legislation regulating the use of hazardous substances. Follow advice on labels carefully before making solutions or mixtures.

- Make sure that ladders and stepladders are in good working order, and platforms have been constructed safely to prevent injury from falling.
- Disconnect any electrical equipment when it is not in use, even for a short time.
- Switch off the power supply when decorating around switches or wall outlets and

when cleaning them.

- Consider using a ground-fault interrupter to protect against electrocution.
- Increase the ventilation in a room to reduce the effects of dust and fumes.
- Wear a mask to minimize the amount of dust and fine particles that you inhale.
- Wear safety glasses to protect eyes from flying debris.
- Wear gloves to protect skin from injury and irritation.
- Keep all chemicals and tools away from children and out of the way of corridors

in your work area.

- Keep pets secure in another room so they don't wander in.

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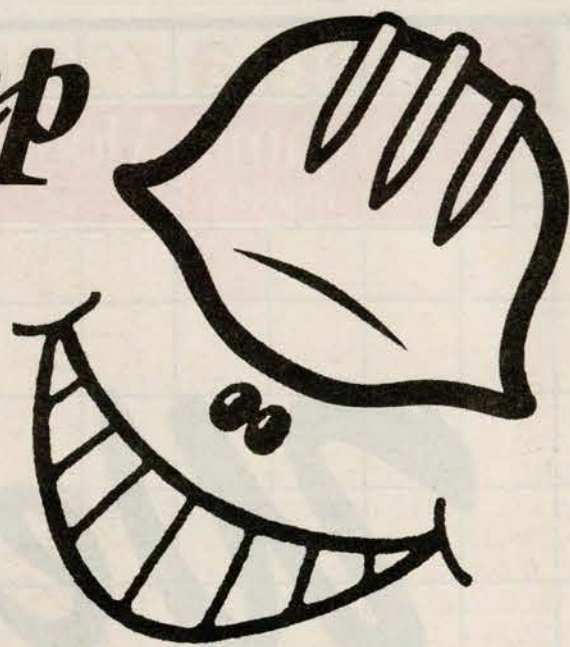
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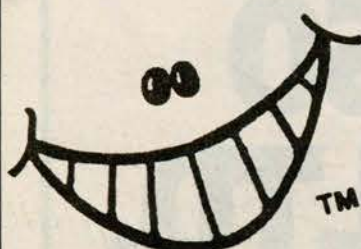
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# Start new season with spring cleaning

Whether you call it spring cleaning, major cleaning or cleaning from top to bottom, a truly thorough washing of your home or apartment will someday become a necessity.

True, the original reasons for spring cleaning — a winter's worth of oil lighting and coal heating that left grease and dirt on every surface — have long since disappeared. But psychologically, many people still find spring cleaning a satisfying, if tiring, way to mark the start of a new season.

If a move or a desire for deep cleaning means you're facing a major housecleaning, here are some ideas for what should be done and how best to accomplish the task.

A spring or major cleaning should include:

- Cleaning walls, ceilings and floors;
- Cleaning windows, as well as washing drapes and blinds;
- Shampooing rugs and cleaning upholstery;

- Vacuuming under major appliances like stoves and refrigerators;

- Emptying closets and drawers, then cleaning and reorganizing them;

- Washing china, silver, brass, gems, etc.;

- Cleaning out basements, garages and attics.

If you do it yourself, count on a major cleaning taking two or three days of intensive effort, or a week of shorter cleaning spurts. If you decide to seek help from a cleaning service, be aware that not all companies will take on a major cleaning, particularly if it involves washing windows and walls where the cleaner will need to be going up and down a ladder. Nor will every company have the expertise to clean upholstery or delicate items in the house. Ask as many questions as possible and make sure everyone is clear about what will and will not be done. Most companies will insist on examining the area(s)

to be cleaned and will provide a free estimate.

To save time, and thus money, you remove all drapes and blinds and move heavy furniture that is in front the windows to be washed. Before any cleaning — major or otherwise — spend time tidying the room.

One area that is too often neglected is the baseboards in rooms. Just getting the grime off those can make a room seem brighter. Also, few people take the time to clean inside the kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Other areas that need attention are basements and garages. When people move, they often leave behind firewood and old gallons of paint. Getting rid of these items frees up space and improves the look of a garage or workshop.

One area of spring cleaning often ignored by traditional cleaning books is organization. And this is a place where no cleaning service

can help you.

So if you've relegated the scrubbing and dusting to someone else, you might want to put some time into organizing your own goods. Experts suggest that each year people consider sorting out and disposing of unwanted old clothing, toys, books, etc.

The arrival of spring, or a pending move, is also an ideal time to take inventory and organize photos, CDs and videos. (This might be a good time to review your homeowner's insurance to make sure you are adequately covered).

Devoted computer users, particularly those with a backlog of e-mail messages,

might take an evening to sort, read, respond and delete messages and files. Home-office workers

might want to look through file cabinets and remove old files to make room for new projects.

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## Flowers can speak louder than words

How do you express your emotions to a friend, a lover, a special family member? Some spend hours searching for the right sentiments in a greeting card while others type up a quick message and zap it through cyberspace. Yet flowers can speak louder than any voice when it comes to sharing a message.

Victorians knew how to express their emotions through the delicate messages of flowers. Each small bouquet, known as a tussie-mussie, symbolized something different. Why not borrow from this classic tradition and share some blooms with someone close to you.

Here are some examples of flower meanings and how they change with colour, according to Tussie-Mussies (Workman Publishing), by Geraldine Adamich Laufer.

### CARNATION

- Pink: Maternal love, lively and pure affection, beauty, pride
- Red: Admiration, betrothal, deep pure love, passion, fascination

- White: Democracy, living for love
- Yellow: Admiration, fascination, disdain, disbelief, rejection

### CHRYSANTHEMUM

- Red: "I love you."
- White: Truth
- Yellow: Cheerfulness, slighted love

### POPPY

- Orange: Vanity
- Red: Forgetfulness
- Scarlet: Fantastic extravagance
- White: "My antidote," sleep

### ROSE

- Cherry red: Merriment, sweetness of character derived from good works
- Coral: Good fortune, longevity, beauty, admiration of accomplishments
- Cream: Richness, perfection
- Lavender: Rarity, dignity
- Pink: Grace, beauty
- Red: "I love you," passion, desire, beauty, victory, harmony, joy, charm, luck, pride, martyrdom
- White: Unity, silence, respect
- Yellow: Friendship, highest mark of distinction, jealousy, unfaithful.

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# Renovating a bathroom? Consider these practical suggestions

If you are planning to renovate your bathroom, you are undoubtedly interested in certain practical suggestions on the best way to arrange your toilet, bath, shower, counter and other bathroom accessories.

Even if you cannot use all these suggestions because of space or other restrictions, remember that simple arrangements can sometimes make the difference between a functional and non-functional bathroom. Your renovation costs won't be any higher, but you'll enjoy an improved quality of life, both now and in the future.

Depending on your needs, you could make provision for the following:

Room dimensions:

- Area of 1,500 mm (60 in.) diameter, sufficient for a wheelchair to turn around in, if required.

Door:

- Minimum, unobstructed opening of 760 mm (30 in.).
- Easy-to-operate, lever-type handle.
- A door that can be unlocked from the

outside and that opens outwards is recommended.

- Also consider the possibility of using a sliding door.

Floors:

- Non-slip floor covering.

- Wedge-shaped sill no higher than 13 mm (1/2 in.).

Toilet:

- 305 mm (12 in.) clearance between the toilet and side-wall.

- A seat 400 mm (16 in.) above floor level rather than the standard 350 mm (14 in.) is recommended for people with reduced mobility.

- Easy-to-use, manually activated flushing system.

Washbasin and counter top:

- The centre of the washbasin should be no more than 460 mm (18 in.) from a sidewall.

- The countertop and washbasin should be 865 mm (34 in.) above floor level, rather than the standard 813 mm (32 in.).

- Clearance of 760 mm (30 in.) below and 685 mm (27 in.) above the washbasin, if required.

- Insulate or build an enclosure around the

pipes under the sink to avoid risk of burns while allowing for proper clearances.

Shower and bathtub:

- Showerhead with an 1,800 mm (72 in.) long flexible hose.

- Sliding showerhead on a vertical rod allowing for easy adjustment by seated individuals.

- Consider installing a 450 mm (18 in.) high shower seat.

- Use a shower curtain rather than solid bathtub and shower panels that make access difficult.

- Front taps no higher than 450 mm (18 in.) from the rim of the bathtub or 850 mm (± 33 in.) from the floor.

- Seated individuals will find it easier to use a balanced pressure or thermostatic shower valve (a single-handled lever for adjusting water flow and temperature).

- Easily accessible, built-in soap dish, preferably with no handle.

Bathroom plumbing fixtures:

- Lever-type handles for the washbasin, shower and bathtub.

Storage and medicine cabinets:

- Consider installing

an easy-access storage cabinet, as well as a medicine cabinet no more than 1,000 mm (39 in.) above floor level.

Accessories:

- Toilet paper dispenser 600 mm (24 in.) above floor level.

- Towel rack and shelves 1,200 mm (48 in.) above floor level.

- Mirror 1,000 mm (39 in.) above floor level.

- Hooks 1,400 mm (55 in.) above floor level and protruding no more than (50 mm) 2 in.

- Normally all accessories should be 400 mm (16 in.) to 1 200 mm (48 in.) above floor level.

Grab bars:

- Nailing bases (reinforcement) in side-walls near the toilet, in the wall behind the toilet and in the walls surrounding the bathtub and shower with a view to installing grab bars at some future date.

- If you install grab bars, ensure they are 30 mm to 40 mm (1 1/4 in. to 1 5/8 in.) in diameter for easy grasping, and approximately 35 mm to 45 mm (1 1/2 in. to 1 3/4 in.) from the wall.



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## Did you know?

• Once considered "the poor man's timber," bamboo is the most common craft material in Thailand, traditionally used for everything from buckets to baskets, kitchen utensils to fish-traps. In the past few years, designers have started to develop their own take on bamboo for items as diverse as upmarket dining and living room furniture and accessories like vases, trays and paper products. From mat to coffee table, chair to sofa, the modern applications of bam-

boo seem endless.

• For those who have the added bonus of a pantry in their kitchen, they understand the convenience this storage centre provides for foods, condiments and paper goods.

A good tip to keep in mind if you'd like to update your existing pantry or build one if your house does not yet have a pantry, is to use a screen door instead of a solid panel on your pantry. This allows air to circulate and prevents the pantry from getting musty.



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# Time to prepare the pool

Warmer weather is coming and it's time for swimming pool owners to get ready for summer. By following a few simple steps, you can start up and maintain your pool with a minimum amount of effort.

1. Fill the pool. If the pool was closed and the water level low, fill it to the middle of the skimmer opening. This will make it easier to remove the pool cover.

2. Remove the pool cover. If the pool is covered with a solid cover, drain off the water. Try to avoid letting the standing water get into the pool. Sweep the cover and clean it with a product designed to prevent mildew and odours.

3. Check your pump, skimmer basket and filter. Make sure all equipment is clean and in working order. Start the circulation system and remove debris from the pool. Your filter is an important part of your pool's maintenance program. If it isn't working properly, neither will the chemical products you add. If the filter element is dirty, or was not cleaned before your pool was closed, remove grease, oil and scale build-up with a cleaner especially formulated for that purpose.

4. Have your water analyzed. Using a clean plastic container, take a pool water sample (about a litre) by dipping the container to about elbow depth and bring it to your local pool dealer for testing and analysis. This will ensure you get only those chemicals you need. The pool will be properly adjusted and balanced making regular maintenance easy.

5. Test your chlorine and pH. Once you have followed the instruction for your water analysis, use your home test kit to check the free chlorine and pH levels. If testing reveals a pH below 7.4, the water is corrosive and can damage surfaces and equipment. If the pH is above 7.6, the water is scale forming and encourages bacteria and algae growth. When your test kit indicates a free chlorine reading of 1.0 to 3.0 ppm (parts per million) and pH of 7.4 to 7.6, you're ready to swim.

Now that you're swimming, your routine maintenance can be as easy as 1-2-3.

Sanitize with chlo-

rine or bromine stabilized sticks or pucks to ensure a safe and effective level of sanitizer. If you are using chlorine, make sure that you maintain the proper level of stabilizer in the pool so that the chlorine is not dissipated by the ultraviolet light of the sun.

Shock weekly to oxidize and remove the accumulation of swimmer wastes like perspiration, urine, suntan oil and hairsprays. These can make the eyes sting, irritate the skin, dull the water

and give algae plenty of food to grow on. By regularly oxidizing swimmer wastes you will get more protection and efficiency from your regular sanitizer.

Top up your algae inhibitor. Prevent algae from getting a foothold in your pool by using an algae inhibitor. Algae can ruin your pool's health and looks, cost plenty to cure and take a large bite out of your summer fun. It makes sense to stop it before it starts.

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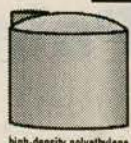
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- slow drains, sewage odours
- lush, green growth over the disposal field



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