

Home Improvement



Choose the Right Flooring

Flooring is the foundation of interior design and lays the groundwork for a home's aesthetic.

It also takes a beating, so floors need to be as functional as they are pretty. Here are some trends in flooring design if you're planning on changing your flooring this year.

HARDWOOD: A CLASSIC

Hardwood flooring is a classic and is still popular with homeowners and home buyers. In recent years, hardwoods with a gray tinge have been all the rage, but now more homeowners are choosing natural hardwoods and lighter tones, such as white oak, maple and birch. These hardwoods complement a variety of looks and the lighter colors can make a room feel brighter and more spacious.

Wider planked hardwoods are gaining in popularity. These planks, ranging from 5-12 inches wide, can show off more of the natural character of the wood. Using wider planks helps reduce the number of seams between the boards, making the room look larger.

LUXURY VINYL

What hardwood isn't, is waterproof. A wood look that's waterproof or water resistant is possible with surfaces such as engineered wood, luxury vinyl plank and laminates. You can find flooring in these materials in many of the same tones and



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with many of the same characteristics as hardwood.

CARPET'S STILL AROUND

Despite a backlash against carpeting, there's still room for it in many homes. It's a great choice for bedrooms, creating a warm, cozy space. It's an

ideal choice for basements, home theaters and upper floors that need flooring that can absorb sound.

Look for carpeting with vibrant colors and interesting textures. For so long, carpet has been in a gray phase, but now more tonal, retro looks

are back in style.

TILE AND MORE

There's still plenty of use for tiles and other hard surface flooring. Terrazzo is having a moment, and chevron and herringbone tiles are starring in this year's bathroom

renovations. Look for colors in warm, earthy tones like taupe and terracotta.

Choose colors and patterns that evoke the beauty of the natural world. Palettes inspired by nature tend to stay in style more and can add a soothing, tranquil quality to your home.

Tackling Sustainable Projects

Reducing your carbon footprint is a reason to renovate that you can feel good about.

These projects from EcoWatch can help you save money and the Earth.

PUT IN ENERGY EFFICIENT LIGHTING

LED lights use up to 90% less energy than regular bulbs, and putting them in as your regular bulbs burn out is one of the easiest Earth-friendly upgrades you can do. LED bulbs can save customers up to \$225 per year on energy bills. Those less-expensive lights mean you can leave curtains and blinds pulled on hot days, saving you more money on your cooling bill than you're using on lighting your home.

REUSE, RECYCLE

Repurposed and reclaimed materials still have a purpose, even in home improvement projects. Look for materials that are still structurally sound and available in the quantity you need to complete the project. EcoWatch recommends checking online sites such as Freecycle, Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace, and also brick-and-mortar stores such as Habitat for Humanity's ReStore.

SWITCH TO SOLAR

The cost of solar panels has dropped by more than 70% in the past 10 years, EcoWatch says. Consider installing solar panels to power your home or even just parts of it that tend to use lots of energy, such as water heaters and landscape lighting. Solar attic fans can help suck the heat trapped in attics out, saving your home from damage to insulation, roofs and more.

USE LOW-VOC PAINTS

If you're literally going green, as in painting some accent walls or touching up some trim, consider using low-VOC paints. VOCs, or volatile organic compounds, are chemicals used in paints and other items that are emitted into the air as gasses. These gasses can cause both short- and long-term health issues.

GROW SOME GREEN

Save on your food bill and add to the natural beauty of your home by planting a garden. Indoors, consider a salad garden or an herb garden. Outside, a garden can reduce erosion and improve soil health. Look for indoor plants that are natural air purifiers, which will give your home cleaner oxygen and fresher air. Outdoor plants should be pollinator-friendly and work well with the natural environment.





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Energy Tax Credits

Making smart energy choices can have a positive effect on your wallet, especially around tax time.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2024 provided energy efficiency tax credits to Americans making improvements to their home. Here's what you need to know.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU SAVE?

Energy Star, the federal government's program on energy efficiency in the home, says taxpayers can save up to \$3,200 per year on federal income taxes for making energy efficiency improve-

ments in the home.

Who's Paying? The money comes from federal, state and even some local utility programs. Eligibility will depend on income, household size and location. For programs that are part of the Inflation Reduction Act, a percentage of the area median income (AMI) is used. Households may qualify for credits based on their participation in other federal programs serving low-income households, such as SNAP or Head Start.

WHAT DOES IT PAY FOR?

The credits are available for a broad range of energy efficient products, including heating and cooling systems, heat pumps, water heaters, insulation

and more.

It may pay for some of the cost of doors that meet applicable Energy Star requirements, windows that meet Energy Star Most Efficient certification requirements, and insulation and air sealing materials or systems that meet International Energy Conservation Code standards in effect at the start of the year two years before installation (or 2022 for an installation in 2024).

It could pay for home energy audits done by a professional auditor certified by certain Department of Energy certification programs. The report must be a written report and include an inspection that identifies the most significant and cost-effective energy efficiency improvements.

WHEN DOES IT RUN OUT?

The credit, the IRS says, has no lifetime dollar limit. The maximum credit can be claimed every year a taxpayer makes eligible improvements until 2033.

The credit is nonrefundable and excess credit cannot be applied to future tax years.

WHAT ABOUT A VACATION HOME?

For most of the available credits, the improvements must be made to a taxpayer's primary home where they live most of the time. A credit cannot be claimed if it's a rental property or other property where the owner doesn't live.

Keeping Seniors at Home

Many seniors want to stay in their homes as long as they can, a trend known as aging in place.

With a few home improvement projects, seniors can stay at home and live independently longer.

EXTERIOR PROJECTS

Some exterior projects that may make aging in place a possibility include changing out higher maintenance gardens and exterior surfaces into lower-maintenance choices. Pick plants and shrubs that are native to the area to make them easier to care for. Install vinyl and brick that's long-lasting, and make sure patio, deck and balcony surfaces are easily accessible.

FLOOR PLANS

The National Association of Home Builders recommends making sure you can live on the main floor, including having a full bath on the main floor. Reduce steps as much as possible, with clear turns that are at least five feet square in every room. Hallways should be well lit and a minimum of 36 inches wide, at the very least.

Entries should also be wide; NAHB says they should be at least 32 inches of clear width with non-slip flooring at doorways that lead outside. Interior doors should have 32



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inches of clear width and be equipped with levered door hardware that's easy to grasp.

BATHROOMS

Bathrooms should have wall supports and adjustable or variable height counters and removable base cabinets. There should be at least one

wheelchair accessible bath on the main level and bracing around the tub, shower, and toilet for the installation of grab bars.

Add shower seats to showers and install toilets that are higher than standard toilets to make it easier to stand up and down.

MISCELLANEOUS

Place light switches, thermostats and other controls in easily accessible locations no higher than 48 inches from the floor. Electrical outlets should be 15 inches on the center from the floor and may need to be closer than 12 feet apart.

Install audible and visual strobe light systems to help seniors see when someone's at the door or when smoke or CO2 alarms go off. A switch that's wired directly to police, fire and EMS may be handy, as can a security system that monitors climate control and lighting.

Color Trends for 2024

Interior color trends, much like building trends in general, are going green.

Green shades bring tones of the outside in, another big trend for 2024, and are tranquil, bringing peace into the home. Here are some other trends for interior colors.

TONE-ON-TONE

Color palettes that stay within the same family add a touch of sophistication, designers told House Beautiful.

“Tone-on-tone layering through texture, patterns and materiality is an approachable style for those who may not feel experienced in interior design but are looking to elevate their homes,” says Greg Voorhis, executive design director at Sunbrella.

GOING BOLD

A consistent palette can allow homeowners to use bold colors in place of expected neutrals. Jodi Berger of JLA Designs suggests deep greens, khakis, marigold and luxe purples, especially in smaller spaces. Accent these big colors with white metal, burl wood and dramatic stones.

WARM PALETTES

Earthy colors create warmth in the home and create coziness. It's a shift away from the grays of the past few years. Designers suggest using earthy tones that change with natural light. Look for creams, browns,



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rusts and muted greens (there's those greens again).

CLASSY PINKS AND SOOTHING BLUES

It's not just Barbie. Pinks are having a moment outside of the movie. Consider soft mauves and medium pinks with hints of brown to create

a quiet sophistication. HGTV's color of the year is a warm terracotta pink called Persimmon.

Blues are also big this year, with serene hues that add tranquility and a touch of coolness to warm palette trends.

Consider Benjamin Moore's

color of the year, Blue Nova 825.

MOODY HUES

Black (or nearly black) is having a moment in 2024. Cracked Pepper is Behr's color of the year and it's a nearly black charcoal color that can adapt to a variety of styles. It has an inky, earthy quality

that blends well with landscapes, designers say.

Ironside, Dutch Boy's color of the year, is a nearly black olive color that brings the outside in with a comforting deep green. Designers suggest pairing it with taupe Sanded Grout, a blue-gray Whale's Tail, or a warm Mystic Mauve.

Renovating for a Home Office

More than half of total respondents have access to some type of remote work, the American Opportunity Survey says, and this means more homes need a dedicated office space.

Get started on getting to work with these projects.

SAVE SOME SPACE

If you don't have a lot of room to work with, consider a desk with a top that folds up to conceal the mess when not in use. If you don't have a place to attach such a desk to a wall, consider turning a disused armoire into a desk that can easily fold away when it's not time to work.

ADD IT TO THE KITCHEN

The kitchen, a hub of the house, can make a fine home office. Build a desk into the cabinetry and add a bold wallpaper. Bonus: Make the desk long enough so the office features space for the kids to do homework while the parents cook dinner.

CONVERT A BEDROOM

Turn a guest bedroom into a home office space, or, if you don't have enough room for that, the closet in the guest bedroom. Remove the closet rods, drawers and more and put in a desk and shelving.



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Keep the doors, but make them stylish enough to be a focal point when closed at the end of the work day.

PICK A PALETTE

No matter where you put your home office, pick a color palette that works well with your lifestyle. If you do

creative work, consider greens with a smattering of potted plants or situating your desk near a window so you can see the outside.

To encourage focus, try metal objects and metallic colors to promote strength, clarity and focus. Stressful jobs call for natural materials

and calming colors such as soft blues and grays.

ERGONOMICS

While you may be comfortable working from home because you're wearing pajama pants with your shirt and tie, you also need to be comfortable ergonomically.

Position your monitor's screen at eye level and an arm's length away. You should be able to sit and work with your wrists straight at or below elbow level. Sit so your knees are level with your hips and invest in a good chair where you can adjust the back and seat height.

Choosing Kitchen Countertops

One of the biggest costs in a kitchen remodel — and indeed one of the biggest decisions — is a kitchen countertop.

In addition to color and texture, consider durability, stain resistance and maintenance. Like many other trends, kitchen countertops are nature inspired, be it in the materials or the color.

SUSTAINABLE SOURCING

Green isn't just on the walls, it's in the principles. There's a focus this year on sustainable countertop materials. Consider limestone, recycled glass and bamboo. One such material is sintered stone, a synthetic countertop material that's very durable. Look for hues with warm undertones and bold colors in deep blues, terracotta hues and marbling.

TILE COUNTERTOPS

What's old is new again, especially when it comes to tile countertops. Designers at The Spruce recommend choosing a flat tile that isn't too textured and pairing it with a dark-colored grout.

TERRAZZO

Terrazzo has been having a moment for a few years, but it's standing strong in 2024. Terrazzo's pops of color and depth offer an illusion of



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texture. Look for classic color combinations to make a trendy material last even longer.

QUARTZ OR QUARTZITE

Quartz countertops are a synthetic stone that's composed of 80-93% natural material mixed with pigments and resins. It's a durable and

low-maintenance option that comes in a wide variety of colors and design options. Quartzite is a stone that's not quite as low maintenance, but it is a natural material. It requires annual sealing.

GRANITE AND MARBLE

Another all-natural stone that's common in the kitchen

is granite. More popular options today have lighter or more solid colors. It's heat resistant and durable, but can be expensive. Marble is the choice for luxury kitchens and comes in a variety of prices and qualities. It's somewhat high maintenance in that it's porous and scratches easily.

BUTCHER BLOCK

Butcher block, which is made of individual wooden strips, is eco-friendly and can easily be sanded down and refinished for a fresh look. It provides a natural look that's popular in today's designs, but does require a lot of regular maintenance.