SPRING IS ON THE WAY!
TIME FOR HELPFUL HINTS ON...

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Doing-it yourself

Patio patterns

Even the most inexperienced handyperson can design and build a wooden patio or deck which will add beauty and value to a home. A multi-purpose addition to family living, the patio can serve as an at-home resort for rest and relaxation, a private sunbathing area, a play area for the children, or a setting for family cookouts or entertaining.

First, decide on the size and location of your deck. You should give special consideration to factors like accessibility, exposure to sunlight, and local weather conditions. Sketch out your home and property and then check deeds and laws to see that your patio will not extend beyond your property and that the work you are about to do comes within legal confines.

Tools

If your patio is going to be elaborate, you might need the help of a contractor. Otherwise, a hammer, saw, drill, level and square are about all you'll need, aside from galvanized nails. Other hardware will include hangers and bolts. Galvanized nails are strongly recommended.

You should purchase protected or pressure-treated wood to make a long-lasting structure that is not susceptible to the elements or to termites.

The Floor

Because your deck surface is most visible, it should look interesting. Use boards of equal width set on joists. You can experiment, however, by alternating between different widths or by making parquet patterns, or diagonal or herringbone designs. Whatever you choose to do, allow one-fourth-of-an-inch between the boards for drainage and for expansion and contraction during weather changes.

Safety

If you build an elevated deck, add railings and limit any openings to six inches to prevent children from climbing or falling through. Also take care in the construction of your stairs. The easiest to build are those in which the treads rest on cleats which are nailed directly to the stringers. Though more difficult to make, another and much safer option is to saw the supports into the stringers themselves.

Personal safety is also a priority. Safety goggles or glasses are a must for this and all other home construction projects. Reports indicate that 41 percent of the one million people with vision impairments caused by eye injuries received the injuries around the house; 90 percent of these accidents could have been avoided by eye protection devices.

A safety helmet is a top priority in this work as well. Most are constructed of molded cycolac or polyehtylene and cost from $10-20. Use some form of ear protection as well.

No safety equipment is an adequate replacement for good caution and common sense. Follow instructions carefully when using power tools and other mechanical devices.

Shade solutions

Fixing window shades is really quite simple, and will consume less energy than tearing your hair out over them. Most shades are just paper or cloth wrapped around a wooden or cardboard roller.

If your shade is reluctant to roll up and usually stops before it reaches the top, the tension in the spring needs to be increased. Pull the shade down about two feet and then remove the roller from the brackets. Then reroll the shade by hand and replace it, completely rolled up, in its brackets. You may have to repeat the process to get the desired tension.

If the shade springs up too quickly when you're trying to pull it down, there is too much tension in the spring, and you need to carry out the above process in reverse. First roll the shade up, remove it, unroll it about halfway by hand, and replace it in the brackets.

Sometimes shades are not stapled evenly to the roller. The result is a slanted shade. Take the roll off the brackets and completely unroll it by hand. Check carefully to see if it has been attached evenly to the roller. If not, you can remove the staples, adjust it, and restaple it or tape it on evenly.

If the shade wobbles, one of the pins is probably bent. Straighten it with a pair of pliers. Shades fall out of the brackets or get caught in them because the brackets are too far apart or too close together. You can put extra material between the frame and the bracket or even bend the bracket to make the connection tighter. Bending the brackets away from the frame loosens the connection.

Torn shades are probably the most difficult problem to address. As only a temporary repair, tape or a piece of cloth (or a patch (on the back) can help, but it's seldom attractive. The real answer to a torn shade is replacement.

Energy update

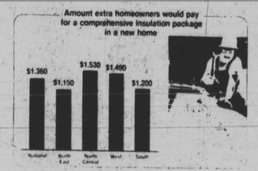
Increases resale value

Eighty-three percent of the homeowners said they believed that insulation and other energy-saving measures would increase the resale value of their homes. This was consistent with a previous study in which 66 percent of real estate brokers and 78 percent of appraisers interviewed agreed that insulated homes are worth more at resale. The brokers said a well-insulated home could be worth an average of nine percent more at resale; appraisers estimated five percent.

Increased resale value is only one incentive to upgrade your home's energy features. Tax form 5695 is a strong incentive as well. This energy credit form allows you to claim 30 percent of the first $2,000 you spend on solar, wind, and geothermal equipment, and 20 percent of the next $8,000. While the current maximum amount you can deduct is $2,200, the Senate Finance Committee has voted to raise the level to 50 percent with a maximum of $5,000.

What expenses are eligible for the credit? Insulatign, not only for the house, but around your hot-water heater and pipes. Storm windows and storm doors, electronic ignition systems to replace pilot lights on furnaces are all eligible. Greenhouses, once the playthings of the wealthy, are also eligible if they contribute heat or hot water directly to your home.

A Senate committee recently voted to allow credits on energy expenditures on second homes or summer cottages. It is expected that Congress will soon make this deduction law.



Extra incentive to insulate

American homeowners say they'd spend over $1,000 extra for a comprehensive insulation package in a new home. While most homeowners have already taken steps to reduce energy costs in their own homes, many still believe their homes could be more energy efficient and would consequently bring a prettier price on resale.

In a nationally conducted survey involving nearly 3,000 telephone interviews and over 30 cities, homeowners said they would be willing to spend an average of $1,360 for an insulation package that would save them about 25 percent on heating and cooling expenses.

"Today's homeowners have been hard hit by rising fuel costs," said Thomas D. McGivern, sales manager for insulation products at Dow Chemical, which commissioned the study. McGivern noted that some 90 percent of the responding homeowners said they had been affected somewhat by rising energy bills, almost half claimed to have been affected considerably. "They report their energy bills have increased more than the overall increase in the cost of living," he added.

A typical homeowner anticipated that he would be spending $1,225 annually to heat and cool his home by fall 1980—a 50 percent increase over two years ago. McGivern said that American homeowners consequently have come to view energy-saving features as a major factor in the value of their present homes as well as in the purchasing of a new home. In some cases energy-saving features were ranked higher than options like landscaping and wall-to-wall carpeting.

Among energy-saving features considered most important were attic insulation, wall insulation, weather stripping/caulking, storm windows and doors, and basement insulation. Ninety-four percent of the homeowners said they had already taken steps to save energy.

Among the more popular efforts were inexpensive do-it-yourself measures, like adjusting the thermostat in winter, adding weather stripping and caulking, insulating, and lowering the temperature on the water heater.

Despite these efforts, McGivern said that 63 percent of the homeowners felt that their homes could use additional energy-saving features. He noted, however, that additional insulation would be more expensive. All in all, homeowners planning to add insulation to their homes in the next year or two expect to spend an average of $547 on that improvement alone.

Homeowners guide

Homeowners. Is your heat going out the window? Are your taxes more then you can afford? Are the fuel bills doing you in? Are your mortgage paymenta getting behind?

The Absalom Jones Housing Center 3811 Egerton Rd, is located in the Forest Park area. The Center is working to:

inform people of energy programs available and help them to apply for the appropriate program,

counsel individuals who are behind in their mortgage payments and work with lenders to arrange a repayment program, and

assist people in the community to use the financing programs when they are available, to buy a home.

The city has loan and grant programs available to help lower income homeowners to make repairs and improvements to their homes which will conserve heat and energy.

Such repairs and improvements can help a lot with lowering your heating bills.

If you are a lower income homeowner, there is a Maryland TAX CREDIT program which will reduce your property taxes. However, you must apply each year to receive the tax credit for that year. Even if you pay your mortgage with your mortgage payment, you still could qualify and should apply.

If you fall behind in your payment, you absolutely should contact the lender as soon as there is a problem. Come in and talk to our counselor. Do not wait until the foreclosure notice comes; by then it is usually too late to do anything useful.

Periodically, there are City or State programs available which offer mortgages to people at lower interest rates. This makes homeownership affordable to more people. If you are interested in buying a house, get in touch with us and we will notify you when such funds are going to be available.

For more information call 664-3563.

About the house

Driveaway sealing deals

Now is the time for homeowners to be on the watch for doorbell ringing alleged contractors who want to pave or seal the driveway.

The fast talking contractors will pull up to the door and give the resident a bargain that cannot be resisted to seal or pave the drive. That bargain, at the cost of a hundred or more, may be no more than a plain old oiling which, of course, might wash away with the first rain. Or, the drive could be sealed but with a compound that might not last out the month.

All home improvement contractors and driveway pavers who are home improvement contractors should be registered with the Department of Consumer Protection and licensed to do business.

If a pleasant appearing person, with shiny new vehicles and equipment knocks on your door and offers you a made-in-heaven bargain, first ask if he is registered with the State Consumer Protection Agency and ask to see the registration card.

Itinerant contractors skim all the money they can from any consumer, particularly the elderly who seem to be a particular target.

If the contractor cannot show a legitimate registration certificate with number, call your local police department and alert them and the Department of Consumer Protection.

Top quality paving contractors who have long been and are doing legitimate business will not hesitate to show a registration card or to provide a written specification, contract and guarantee.

Call the Better Business Bureau or check with the Building Inspector's department to check on a contractor whom you are contemplating hiring. Don't give anyone money at the outset and be sure to get written estimates.

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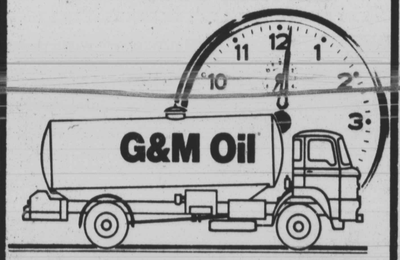

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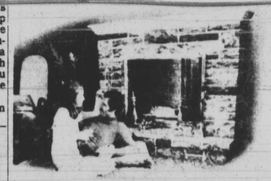

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HOME IMPROVEMENT

Make fire safety a workbench project

The danger of hitting your thumb with a hammer is real enough. The U.S. Government calculates that over 47,000 hammer injuries occurred in 1979 alone. Misuse of even so simple a workshop tool as the common screwdriver caused an estimated 13,642 injuries in the same year.

The total amount of accidents, serious enough to require emergency room treatment or hospitalization, resulting from workshop apparatus, tools and attachments in 1979 is estimated to be nearly 297,000.

These startling statistics should remind home handymen that workshop safety can't be taken for granted. Even more frightening are workshop conditions that pose serious risk of fire, threatening not only the workshop area, but your family and home if fire should start and spread.

The safety engineers at Underwriters Laboratories stress that your home workshop should be organized and maintained safely to decrease, as much as possible, the dangers of fire. Not only is a safe workshop necessary to protect you and your family from harm, but a safe, worry-free environment can spare your mind the anxieties that hinder efficient, concentrated, creative work.

Consider your surroundings. Special fire prevention care must be taken in a small area, like your workshop, where many highly combustible building materials may be present. Fires burn at varying speeds, and with finely divided substances such as wood dust and fine sandings, the possibility of rapid fire is critical.

Deposits of combustible dusts on beams, machinery, floors and other surfaces are more easily ignited than the solid material they cover. When ignited, the result is a flash fire.

Dust explosions

If the dust is stirred up into a cloud, and there is a source of ignition present, an explosion can occur. Even the simple act of turning on an electric light switch can ignite a cloud of combustible dust or flammable vapor.

Statistics are not available concerning dust explosions in home workshops; however, it is more likely that a home workshop would have a sawdust fire than a sawdust explosion. The difference lies only in degree; the greater the concentration and accumulation of combustible substances, the more possible a rapid fire becomes.

Various means can be employed to reduce the danger of sawdust fires in your work area. These include collection, elimination of ignition sources and proper venting. Good housekeeping (cleaning up sawdust, shavings and woodchips) is essential to prevent workshop fires.

Don't forget that metal dust due to grinding is also capable of catching fire. All fine dust should be cleaned up as soon as possible to reduce the chance of fire.

It is the same with all workshop litter. If you're a seasoned handyman or just starting out, you already know work space is frequently at a premium. It is important that you conserve room and not waste what space you have. Therefore, avoid needless clutter.

Make a habit of cleaning your work area frequently in between the stages of your work project. Not only will you find working more pleasant and efficient, you'll also avert the fire and safety risks caused by sawdust, woodchips, shavings, scrap wood and stray nails.

The proper storing of flammable liquids, such as solvents, thinner, gasoline and oils, in low fire probability locations, is an important factor in fire safety. Flammable liquids should be kept in tightly closed metal containers. They should be used only where there is good ventilation, and away from possible ignition sources such as matches, pilot lights, sparks or hot surfaces.

Keep in mind that the vapors of these liquids are usually heavier than air and can travel a considerable distance along the floor. Oily rags should be stored in a metal container and disposed of as soon as possible to prevent spontaneous ignition.

Ignition sources

While you're dealing with substances that fuel fires, watch for possible hazardous ignition sources. It is estimated that portable electric space heaters accounted for 228 injuries in 1979.

Home workshops are often located in poorly heated and underventilated basement, garage and attic areas. Plugging in a space heater to compensate only leads to life-threatening and property-damaging possibilities. Again, the dangers of sawdust and wood fires reach a critical level.

If your work area is too cool or drafty, think of alternative ways of warming up. If possible, relocate your workshop to another part of a your home, or consider adding more insulation. Simplest of all, put on a snug-fitting sweater or sweatshirt. Space heaters and workshops are a dangerous combination.

If you've looked at the surgeon general's warning on cigarettes lately, you know they've been found to be dangerous to your health. The hazards of smoking are even greater in the home workshop. Your concentration on the work at hand makes it more than likely you'll forget the cigarette you lit only a moment ago. The burns on the average smoker's workbench attest to this.

Worse still is the likelihood that the cigarette will drop hot ashes onto nearby combustible materials. There may or may not be best places to smoke, but the home workshop is certainly one of the worst smoking areas.

Why not make your next project the designing, cutting and framing of a brightly painted "NO SMOKING" sign to hang over your workbench? It will be a constant reminder to you, your family and visiting friends that you make fire safety an important element in your workshop area, and will attest to the professional way you approach your work.

You can reduce the possibility of electrical fires by making sure power tool electrical supply cords which terminate in a 3-pin plug (one pin for grounding) are connected to a 3-terminal or grounding type receptacle. And be certain that the electrical outlet box is properly grounded. If necessary, have a qualified, licensed electrician check it out.

Since improperly maintained hot water heaters, furnaces, motors, or poorly functioning electric tools are potential sources for stray sparks, it is essential you monitor their correct operation and maintenance.

If you're not sure of your expertise, have things looked over by a professional. Doing-it-yourself is a good way to cut down on costs, but not if it risks the expense to life and property that carelessness and lack of sufficient know-how can cause.

Fire extinguisher recommended

Finally, don't overlook your home workshop's most important tool—an Underwriters Laboratories Inc. Listed fire extinguisher. Extinguishers are labeled A, B, and/or C according to the type of fire they can handle.

Class A fires involve ordinary combustibles such as paper, wood, drapes or upholstery. Class B fires occur with flammable liquids such as fuel oil, gasoline, paint, grease in a frying pan and solvents. Class C fires involve electrical equipment such as appliances, motors, TV sets, power tools and fuse boxes.

An extinguisher marked ABC that will fight all three types of fires is recommended for general home use. Having the appropriate extinguisher near at hand can provide you with a way to stop a fire in time. Equip your workshop with a smoke detector to alert you if a fire begins when you're away in another part of the house.

The startling numbers of injuries in home workshops needn't intimidate you.

To decrease your chances of becoming part of those statistics, just take time to carefully analyze and evaluate your workshop environment and your own working habits. Don't put it off, eliminate your fire and safety hazards now. Make safety your next home workshop project.

Bare facts on stripping shutters

- It's best to do the stripping over some kind of tub or dipping container so you can re-use the excess stripper that flows off the shutter.
- Use stripper generously. Allow enough time before you start scraping away paint. The stripper must soak all the way down to the bottom layer. If the paint is very thick, a second coat may be needed; don't let the first coat dry out before applying the second.

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Painting the exterior of your house

This is the best time of year for an exterior paint job because the weather conditions are just right. Temperatures should be between 50 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit and the surfaces should be relatively moisture free for best results. The job should be done towards afternoon, when morning dew has evaporated. There are two steps in exterior painting, priming and finishing.

Here are some tips to follow when *priming:*

- *Wood Surfaces* tend to expand and contract during changes in temperature and humidity, and this has a negative affect on paint. So, a good primer is needed to provide the anchorage necessary for the finish paint, and it should be applied with a brush. Wood shouldn't be primed unless the surface is completely dry. Wood surfaces that have already been painted don't need priming unless the paint has cracked, blistered or peeled. If this is the case, remove the old paint by scraping or wire brushing it off, and then apply the primer. If the wood is scratched, dented, recessed, or rough edged, smooth down the surface first before priming.
- *Masonry Surfaces*, when n should be primed with an exter. latex paint that is specially made for rough, or porous, brush on a fill coat (block filler) to penetrate and fill the pores. Already painted surfaces that have become chalky should be painted with an exterior oil primer to rebind the chalk. If there is an excessive amount of chalk, you should remove it using a stiff bristled brush, or wash it with household washing soda. TSP (trisodium phosphate) mixed with water is also good for this cleaning job.
- *Metal Surfaces* need different types of attention depending on the metal. *Copper* should be cleaned with a phosphoric acid cleaner, buffed, polished until bright, and then immediately coated with a zinc chromate type primer before it has time to discolor. This type of primer is also good for aluminum and steel surfaces. Copper gutters and downspouts need not be painted. The oxide that darkens or greens the copper is a natural protective coating. The only reason for painting these types of surfaces is to prevent any staining of nearby painted surfaces. *Galvanized steel* (the metal usually used for gutters and downspouts) should be primed with a zinc-oxide primer. Conventional primers won't stick to this type of surface. Galvanized steel doesn't have to be primed before finishing. If you prefer not to prime first, use an exterior latex paint as a finish. Oil paints will not produce good results. *Unpainted iron and steel* tend to rust when exposed to weather.

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