

Planning Spring Home Improvements? Know the Score First

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Smart Choices

Some financed home improvement projects pay off more than others in terms of enhancing your home's value and your enjoyment of your house. If you're opting for improvements to your outdoor living spaces, consider ones that will deliver the greatest return for your investment, such as patios, decks or screened porches. In fact, the National Association of Realtors' 2008 Remodeling Cost vs. Value found that outdoor improvements, such as wood decks, continue to recoup 80 percent or more in value upon resale.

Landscaping, it seems, is also popular with potential buyers - a University of Michigan study found that potential buyers scored a well-landscaped home 11.3 percent higher than the same home without good landscaping. The trend for

more Americans to stay home and invest in their surroundings, rather than spend on pricey vacations, has spurred interest in grand backyards that evoke the look and experience of a resort. From in-ground pools with water slides to lavishly tiered patios that feature built-in hot tubs, a growing number of homeowners are focusing on outdoor improvements that improve resale value and their current enjoyment of their homes. Before you make your summer remodeling plans, check your free credit report at www.FreeCreditReport.com. If you plan to sell your home within five years, it might pay to check with your realtor as well to see if he or she can give you an idea of how much your investment might affect the eventual sale price of your home.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

Pool Safety Measures Ensure Safe Summer Fun

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strong engineering polymers with stainless steel components, so it won't rust -- ever. And it carries a limited lifetime warranty. With TruClose hinges, no external closing spring is required, and the homeowner can easily adjust the gate closing tension after installation with the twist of a screwdriver."

Pool barrier codes require pool gates to be self-closing and self-latching, and to open away from the pool. D&D has two lockable MagnaLatch styles so the release can be mounted at the code-required height, typically 54 or 60 inches above the ground. Consult your building department for local regulations.

Pool safety advocacy groups like the National Drowning Prevention Alliance recommend several layers of protection to ensure that homeowners can experience the pleasures of swimming pools and feel an added degree of assurance that their children, grandchildren and visitors will be safe.

"We believe in promoting 'The Safer 3,' a program developed by the Swim for Life Foundation," Paterson says. "This means safer water -- including fencing and other safety devices such as alarms around the pool; safer kids -- including adult supervision and swim skill attainment; and safer response -- meaning adults should know

CPR and rescue breathing, and a cordless phone should be kept poolside so that adults never have to leave the area to answer the phone while children are swimming."

The National Drowning Prevention Alliance recommends that a "water watcher" be designated for safety when children are in the pool, to maintain eye-to-eye contact at all times. Toys or floating chlorine dispensers that look like toys should never be left in the pool area. Most people don't realize that toddlers are top-heavy, so are at a higher risk of falling into water while reaching.

"With isolation fencing and 'The Safer 3' in place, your family can look forward to years of safe relaxation and enjoyment of your pool," Paterson says.

Paterson notes that rust free gate hardware by D&D Technologies is now available through pool stores, fencing contractors and on-line, and many hardware and home improvement stores carry the company's products under the Stanley or National Hardware brand. For more information, visit www.ddtech-global.com or www.ndpa.org. For more information or a free "Pool Safety Kit" call (800) 716-0888, ext. 292 or e-mail mwilliams@ddtechusa.com.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

Your Yard as Your Home's Helper

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trees planted to the East and West of your home cut cooling costs 15 to 30 percent. By blocking sunshine from hitting your home, trees save you cooling expense while simultaneously allowing you to hear birdsongs. Try getting that from insulation! Additionally, in the winter, when you want sunlight to flood in and warm and brighten rooms, the trees have lost their leaves, making for very little sunlight blockage. This is called "Passive Cooling" and there is no home that would not benefit from it's application.

Additionally, one of the largest sources of heat in your home is called the "Heat Island Effect". This is where dark surfaces, such as your driveway, get warmed in the day and cool far slower than the surrounding air, making for a far warmer micro-climate. By planting trees near your driveway, you are shading it as well, meaning it does not build up latent heat. Reducing the effect of these heat islands makes for a more balmy home in summer. Also, by limiting and normalizing the amount of water flowing across and under your driveway, your lawn and trees are extending the life of your paved surfaces.

Creating a micro-environment:

A lawn with trees, healthy grass and shrubs is a lawn rich with life. You can plot the seasons with flowers blooming, birds arriving and departing south, and leaves changing color. It makes for a constantly changing picture, putting you in tune with the joys of our brilliant New England Autumn or the first blush of Spring. Whatever your tastes, it's possible to create a garden to maximize the verdant scene you find most charming.

Working with plants as part of your home makes you smart. Just ask Frank Lloyd Wright. Working with trees as a "second wall" saves you money in cooling bills. Just ask the US Department of Environment or your local energy consultant. Certainly not least of all, working with plants as part of your home design makes you great parents. Just ask your kids, that is, if you can catch them in the rare moments they're not playing outside.

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Flip Burgers with Mother Nature...Grill Green This Summer

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91 percent fewer VOCs than grilling with charcoal. Plus the by-products created when ethanol is burned include only water and a modest amount of carbon dioxide.

And unlike lighter fluid and propane gas, the FlameDisk is not derived from non-renewable petroleum. Wood is another green grill fuel option, but like charcoal it burns dirty, producing tiny soot particles that pollute the air and can cause health problems. However, unlike charcoal, the ash from wood can be disposed of in your garden, and is a greener option when obtained from a sustainable source like hickory or mesquite.

Your selection of grilling accessories also determines how much impact your grilling experience has on the environment. Not only can using real plates and silverware add some class to your next cookout, you'll be reducing your waste by steering clear of the paper and plastic. In addition, many highly biodegradable disposable options have recently become available on the market. If you're wrapping food in aluminum foil, consider using 100 percent recycled aluminum. Cleanup can be both easy and green when you use natural cleaners, many of which you can make safely and affordably in your own kitchen using common ingredients like vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice and water.

While charcoal reigned supreme in the days of Henry Ford, there's no reason the modern day barbecue can't save the earth one burger or tofu dog at a time. While no one expects you to cook your next turkey with a solar oven, it's just good sense to consider grilling green as an eco-friendly barbecue option in the 21st century.

While it might not be as green as switching over to a hybrid car, any reduction in your carbon footprint can make a difference over time. So move over charcoal, here comes something greener!

For more information on the FlameDisk and how you can grill green this summer, go to www.FlameDisk.com.

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