

A man with a beard, wearing a blue cap and blue overalls over a plaid shirt, stands in a doorway. He is holding a clipboard in his left hand. The overalls have several tools in the pockets, including a pair of pliers and a screwdriver. The background shows a bright, sunny outdoor scene with greenery and a house.

At Your Service

CHOOSING THE BEST
HOME SERVICE PROS

Home Cleaning Services

With spring cleaning in full force across the country, Americans are looking to give their homes a refresh before summertime fun begins.

Check out some of these statistics, according to a 2019 survey by the American Cleaning Institute:

- Seventy-seven percent of households spring clean every year.
- On average, spring cleaning takes six days to finish.
- Thirty-three percent do not believe they clean everything in their home often enough.
- Forty-one percent can't remember the last time they cleaned the fridge.

This year's top priority for spring cleaning is windows, named by 49% of respondents. Other items at the top of the list include clothes, closets and drawers (42%), ceiling fans (36%), curtains/blinds (36%), carpets (32%), hardwood/tile floors (25%), bed linens (17%) and home offices (15%).

With so much cleaning to be done, it may be the perfect time to add a home cleaning service to your budget.

FINDING THE RIGHT SERVICE

Interviewing your potential house cleaning service professionals is one of the most



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important actions to take. According to Angie's List, it's important you interview not only a representative from a house cleaning service, but also the actual person who will be cleaning your home. You'll want to feel comfortable and secure with these professionals, especially if they'll be working while

you're away at work.

Here are some other tips to consider when looking for your next home cleaning service.

ASK FOR A BACKGROUND CHECK

House cleaners have access to your personal space and items, so a background check

is a recommended step in the process.

Ask your potential companies if they perform background checks on their employees and if the service maintains proper liability insurance. These safeguards will give you confidence that you're hiring a reputable, trustworthy service.

CONTROL YOUR COSTS

The cost for a cleaning service will depend on many factors, including the frequency of visits and the size of your home. Most house cleaning services offer free in-home estimates, so be sure to ask for one before agreeing to a rate. Know how much you want to spend and stick to it.

Mobility Services

Mobility is one of the fastest-growing segments of the home services industry.

With segments of an aging population facing disabilities and challenges getting around, mobility services are helping people stay in their homes longer and enjoy the conveniences that their disabilities and age may otherwise hamper.

EQUIPMENT SERVICES

Seniors with mobility problems may want to consider investing in a power chair or mobility scooter. There are home service organizations that can help by renting this type of equipment. Especially if the disability is short-term, renting or leasing from a business may be the best bet.

You may also consider an automatic stair lift for you or your loved ones to help with mobility. Home service professionals can come to your house to retrofit a device for your space. Adding a motorized device to your staircase can make traveling up and down the steps much easier than in the past.

Be sure to ask your mobility service professional if there are warranties available for the equipment they are installing. Mechanical failures should be covered by your warranty, but it never hurts to ask for warranty information in writing.



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PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION

People who are aging at home and having mobility difficulties can still get around town easily with a transportation service. Need to take a trip to the grocery store or post office? Private transportation services can be a great, affordable option.

These types of companies that specialize in senior transport have professionals with experience in assisting seniors with getting into the vehicle and loading mobility chairs.

MEAL DELIVERY

Another helpful home service for those struggling with

mobility is a meal delivery program. Many people hire regular meal delivery services to save them the hassle of going grocery shopping or cooking for themselves.

There are plenty of options for home delivery, ranging from pre-cooked meals to delivery of groceries. What type of service you need

depends on your specific situation, what types of foods you need and how comfortable you are with ordering food through the use of technology.

No matter which of the aforementioned mobility services you need, there are plenty of options out there to make your situation a little easier.

Dog Walkers

Looking for a home service that will be good for both you and your pooch? A dog-walking professional may be the perfect service for you.

Whether your dog is an active puppy requiring a mile of jogging each day or a lazy pooch that likes to sit around most of the day, exercise and mental stimulation are important for all dogs. And the truth is, exercise is also good for you.

However, sometimes life gets in the way of us trying to stay in shape. As a responsible pet owner with a busy schedule, you might consider a dog walker. These professionals come to your home — most likely when you are away at work — to ensure a healthy dose of exercise for your favorite four-legged friend.

Read on for more information on dog-walkers and how to find the perfect local service for you.

THE SEARCH

Your dog walker should be someone you can trust. After all, you're giving them access to your home and trusting them to take care of your beloved dog. That's why, when searching for the right professional service, trust and safety should be your two top concerns.

When interviewing different dog walker candidates, be sure



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to ask about their experience, cost and availability. If their schedule doesn't work out with your dog's exercise needs, then they probably aren't the right fit.

On the other hand, if a local dog-walking service has great availability but comes with a higher cost, it may be worth it to pay the extra money for the

logistical benefits.

Always be prepared with some specific questions when interviewing potential dog walkers. They should include the following:

- How many clients do you currently serve?
- How long have you been in the business?
- How long will you spend

with my dog on each walk?

- Are you licensed, bonded and insured?
- Can you provide a list of client references?

THE PARTNERSHIP

Once you've found a great match, be sure to give your dog-walker some important information, including:

- Your contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses.
- Veterinary information.
- Information and instructions about medication.
- Feeding instructions.
- Alarm code and instructions for your home.
- Location of supplies, food and treats.

Air Conditioning Technicians

Nothing makes things more uncomfortable in your home than a faulty heating and air system.

Summer days feel much hotter and longer. Winter days turn even more frigid and frosty. A local HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) contractor may be just what the doctor ordered.

When searching for a great local service, you'll likely uncover dozens of results. How do you know which one is best for you? How can you be sure you're getting the best vendor for your money?

Fortunately, there are a few key indicators to follow when searching for a quality HVAC contractor. Two of the most important ones are research and references.

RESEARCH

The research you put into finding the right HVAC company is crucial to your end results. Certifications should be at the top of your list of demands. All HVAC companies should hire technicians who are North American Technician Excellence (NATE) certified.

According to NATE, all certified technicians are required to maintain the highest level of professionalism and knowledge. Beginning technicians must acquire early-level certification, while more experienced technicians can get certified as



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an early career professional after about six months.

Also check into insurance. Make sure the company you're hiring for the job carries proper business and liability insurance. This protects you in the case of any issue that pops up with your home or equipment.

REFERENCES

Reputable companies should be able to provide numerous solid references — and they should be proud of it. Ask to speak with other satisfied clients about their experiences with the company. Be wary of any HVAC contractor that

refuses to provide references. This may be a sign that they are trying to hide something.

A great place to start with references is social media. Do some research online to read reviews and get a lay of the land when it comes to how other customers have rated the

company. Also ask your friends and family members which HVAC companies they have worked with in the past.

The advice and guidance of your closest connections should give you peace of mind when moving ahead with a specific HVAC company.

Certified Mold Specialists

Mold in your home is a serious issue that can lead to major health problems if not taken care of by a certified professional. It can cause respiratory problems in anyone who lives in or visits the home, especially if the problem is widespread.

Whether it's in your crawl-space, kitchen or bathroom, mold can spread into different areas of your house if not treated properly and in a timely manner.

There are local companies focused on improving your indoor air quality by remediating mold issues in a thorough manner. Not sure where to start? Find the right company by understanding how serious your home's issue is.



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WHAT CAUSES MOLD?

Mold is usually a symptom of a bigger problem related to inadequate ventilation and a buildup of moisture — and it usually causes a smell that is easy for professionals to identify.

Homes with high moisture or stagnant water are more susceptible to mold growth. There could be structural issues causing mold in your home, including ice dams,

moisture and heating and cooling deficiencies.

HOW TO PREVENT MOLD

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, here are some tips for preventing mold from entering your home:

- Routine inspections for evidence of water damage.
- Control humidity levels.
- Promptly fixing leaky roofs,

windows, and pipes.

- Thoroughly cleaning and drying after flooding.
- Ventilating shower, laundry and cooking areas.

GET IT IN WRITING

No matter which company you select, make sure they give you a written inspection report detailing your home's issues and their remediation recommendations.

Other things the report should detail include:

- Summary of all the areas inspected.
- Cause of the mold growth.
- How to take care of the problem.
- Sampling results.

FIND A TRUSTED COMPANY

One final step in your research should be checking

the credibility of the companies you are considering. Check with groups like the National Organization of Remediators and Mold Inspectors for a list of approved contractors. These certifying agencies are focused on providing high-quality training for mold and indoor environmental professionals, giving you confidence that a vendor is experienced and credible.

Landscaping Contractors

When it comes to transforming your property, a landscaper can spruce things up and take care of general maintenance that may be hard for you to keep up on.

Depending on where you live, you may be able to find different pricing deals based on the season, making landscaping an affordable local service to add to your home improvement plans this year.

Don't forget, by hiring local professionals, you are feeding money back into your region. There are certainly national landscaping companies across the country, but choosing contractors from your neck of the woods keeps your money local.

HIRING A LANDSCAPER?

When searching for landscaping contractors, you will likely find a large range of options, from large companies to small businesses.

Independent contractors can offer simple services, including spreading mulch, spring planting and installing sprinkler systems. Larger companies can design and build a comprehensive landscaping setup that transforms your entire outdoor living space and yard.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

HomeAdvisor recommends



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taking the following steps when vetting your landscaping vendor.

- Evaluate your landscaping needs to narrow your search.
- Read online reviews and ratings on independent websites.
- Check your local newspapers in print and online for special seasonal deals.
- Check credentials.
- Evaluate previous experience and references.

CONSIDER YOUR COSTS

The average price to install landscaping for residential properties is \$3,300, according to data collected by HomeAdvisor.com from across the country. However, that average differs significantly based on your project.

Here are some examples of landscaping services to consider for your property:

- Landscape curbing.
- Sod installation.

- Architecture services.
- Laying rocks and stones.
- Lawn hydroseeding or regrading.

Your local lawn landscapers should have a pricing sheet detailing their costs for each service, so be sure to assess your budget before signing any contract for work.

HOW TO NEGOTIATE

When you work with a land-

scaping firm or professional who offers multiple services, bundling tasks could make sense for your timeline and budget. For example, you might be able to combine general landscaping work with installation of new outdoor stone steps or the buildout of a pergola.

Talk with your contractor to see what kinds of pricing breaks you can receive by bundling services together.

Hiring a Local Handyman

Are you facing a leaking faucet, backed up garbage disposal or failing electrical outlets that you simply don't have time to repair yourself? It may be the perfect time to hire a local handyman.

You can find them online or through your local newspaper's classified ads, but wherever you find them, make sure to vet a few before signing any contracts.

Independent or company-run handyman services usually have an hourly rate plus material costs. Depending on your scope of work, it may be best to combine multiple jobs into one visit if it makes sense for your budget.

WHAT DOES A HANDYMAN DO?

Handymen typically have experience in construction services and home repair. You should be able to find services that specialize in specific areas, including carpentry, electric work, painting or plumbing.

Make sure you ask for their expertise and to align their skill set with your home needs. Otherwise you may end up paying someone for something they are not equipped to do.

HOW DO I KNOW THEY ARE QUALIFIED?

There is no set national stan-



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dard or regulation for handymen or similar services. Licensing and regulation vary by state, so be sure to check what your state requires of home service repair professionals.

Always ask any service professional entering your home if they are licensed and insured,

and whether they offer any kind of warranty on their work. You need confidence that if something goes wrong with their repair job, you won't be left on the hook to pay for it again.

IS IT AFFORDABLE?

If you have a few projects in

need of completion, you could hire specific contractors, plumbers and painters for each job. Or you could hire a handyman service, which might be cheaper in the long run.

On the flip side, hiring a handyman at an hourly rate to take on a large-scale, long-

term remodel may not make sense for your budget.

It's all about knowing what you need and finding the right professional for the job. Take your time to research your home service need, and then vet multiple services to get the most out of your dollar.