

HOME IMPROVEMENT

GUIDE



Finding Space

From adding a few new shelves to your bedroom to making better use of space in a closet, there are several low-cost options for finding more room in your existing space.

ADD RECESSED SHELVES

Need shelf space? Go in instead of out. This is one of the easiest options, especially in older homes.

You can cut out space from within your walls to add recessed shelving. Cut a square in the drywall or plaster, but be sure you're not hitting any pipes or wiring. From there, determine how much space you have within the wall, and you should be able to burrow out a couple of inches of shelf space.

It might not sound like much, but in a small bathroom, it can be valuable for storing everything from hair-spray to extra toilet paper.

CLOSET TOO SMALL? GUT IT AND START OVER

It's no secret that your mileage may vary when it comes to the little details of home design, and you might need to make a few changes once you figure out how you'd like to utilize the space. Figure out how much space you have in the closet and pull out everything else. From there, figure

out how you'd like to lay out the closet. Need more shelf space? Add a few more rows of shelves. Need it for hanging clothes? Double up on the amount of clothing rods by putting one high and one low. It's your house, and if it can make your life easier, that small scale renovation can be more than worth the few hundred bucks and days of labor required to make the change.

'SECRET' ROOMS

This is where things get a bit more expensive and messy, but if you really want to add some additional space, it could be worth it depending on how your home is laid out. The Chicago Tribune notes that some homes can have "hidden" cavities of unused space behind non-load-bearing walls. From a new closet to possibly even room for a new bathroom, these unused spaces can turn out to be very useful. Of course, you'll have to closely check your home's plans to see what's there before you start knocking down walls.



Stay on Top of Things



Catching small problems early can prevent big problems later. It just takes a bit of vigilance.

CHECK YOUR CAULK EVERY YEAR

HGTV recommends checking for separated and deteriorated caulk around the exterior of your home, such as between the siding and foundation, and around vents, outlets, pipes and faucets. If you don't ensure your caulk is consistently applied, moisture can get in and cause rotting and mildew. Once that happens, it becomes a much bigger and more expensive problem. All it takes

is a few hours and a canister of caulk.

CHECK THE GUTTERS

Making sure your gutters are cleaned out at least twice per year also is a relatively easy task that can be done in a few hours on the weekend. Get a ladder that can safely reach your gutters and downspouts, and a thick pair of work gloves you don't mind ruining. Then start pulling. Soggy leaves and dirt can clog your gutters, ren-

dering them pretty much useless. When that happens, they don't work, and all that water that should be going down the gutter dumps around the foundation of your home. It can cause damage to siding and even cause trouble for your foundation and basement, if the water has nowhere to drain.

KEEP THE CARPET CLEAN

Vacuuming can go a long way, but about once per year, your carpet needs a deep clean.

HGTV recommends you take the plunge and hire a professional to clean your carpet to pull out those deep-down stains and dirt.

GARBAGE DISPOSAL

We tend to toss things into the garbage disposal, run it and forget about it. There are some steps you can take to keep your disposal functioning properly. Cutting up a lemon or lime into wedges and running them through the disposal will help

and eliminate odors. Remove the rubber baffle and clean it with dish soap or kitchen antibacterial spray to prevent the buildup of germs.

FLUSH THE A/C DRAIN LINE

HGTV recommends hiring a professional to flush the air conditioning unit primary drain line. Algae or debris can block the line, causing water to back up into the drain pan, causing malfunction or water damage.

Make Your Fireplace New

Whether wood-burning or gas, a fireplace can make an excellent centerpiece for any room. If your fireplace is looking drab, freshen it up with a quick fix or give it a major overhaul.

IF NOTHING ELSE, PAINT IT

It's the cheapest change you can make and can be the most obvious. Depending on the type of room, you can paint (or strip the paint from) the brick and paint the trim and wall around the fireplace. HGTV recommends going with something bright and loud, to really make the wall stand out.

DON'T LIKE THE TILE? COVER IT UP

Depending on when your home was built, the fireplace could feature tile around the opening as trim. If you're looking to make a change, there are a few options. To go big, replace or cover the tile with marble. It's a bit pricey but will almost certainly add some class to the room.

Working on a tight budget? HGTV notes marble-like adhesive paper can be attached to existing tile to cover it up with a new look. Along with being a low-priced option, this can be great for renters looking to temporarily change the look of a room.

WHITEWASH THE BRICK

HGTV points to a relatively easy project that can upgrade a brick fireplace: multiple coats of white paint with an egg-shell finish to give the fireplace a much more subtle look.

COVER THE FACADE WITH SOMETHING NEW

You also can go with a relatively low-cost option by just covering up whatever facade is already on the fireplace with something new. Artificial stone can be installed with adhesive to make an old fireplace look brand new.

ADD SOME ART

If you're looking to go ultra-low budget, add some flair above the fireplace by picking up a new painting or other work of art to hang over the fireplace. Go with something that represents you, and don't be afraid to try something different. The fireplace is the centerpiece of the room, so make it count.



A New Basement Den

Basements can end up as dumping grounds for tools, boxes and just about anything else that doesn't fit upstairs, but why not turn your basement into an extremely useful space with a little bit (or a lot) of work.

START BY CLEANING IT UP

It might seem obvious, but doing some cleaning is the best way to start a basement renovation. Figure out what can be thrown out or donated, and follow through. Consolidate the rest into a designated storage area in the basement (be it a certain room or even just a corner of the basement). That space down there is useless if you have too much junk to actually utilize it.

BRIGHTEN THINGS UP

Depending on the level of finish in your basement, you could be dealing with drywall or bare concrete walls. Either way, bright colors are key. Basements are dark by design. Bland and dark colors only exacerbate that, so go with something light, and possibly even bright, to make the space feel more inviting. You can paint bare concrete or drywall. Anything is better than concrete gray.

UPGRADE THE FLOOR

It's sadly a fact of life: basements leak, and at some point, your basement probably will, too. It might take a 100-year storm to make it happen, but all basements will get some moisture at some point. When it comes to flooring, carpet or adhesive tile can be dangerous. Just a little bit of water



and moisture and it's ruined. So what do you do? Consider concrete — but not the drab, ugly color you're thinking of. Concrete stains can look fan-

tastic, adding color and texture to what would typically be an ugly floor. It's also relatively inexpensive, if not a bit time consuming. If you're feeling

really creative, use a saw to etch out lines that look like large "tiles" in the floor, to add a unique flair. Lay a few coats of clear coat on top of that,

and it'll shine like something a whole lot more expensive. Plus, if the basement ever does leak, you haven't lost a large flooring investment.

Owners Spending Again

It's a strategy as old as home ownership itself: buy a house at a low price, then kick in the time and money to make it what you want. According to spending data projected for the next year or so, homeowners are spending almost twice as much as they have in previous years on renovations and repairs. Put simply: the fixer-upper is alive and well.

BILLIONS IN UPGRADES

CNBC reports home improvement and repaid expenditures to hit 8 percent in 2017, well above the historical average of 4.9 percent. The numbers come from a new report from Harvard's Joint Center for Housing.

"By the middle of next year, the national remodeling market should be very close to a full recovery from its worst downturn on record," Abbe Will, research analyst in the remodeling futures program at the Joint Center, told CNBC. "Annual spending is set to reach \$321 billion by then, which after adjusting for inflation, is just shy of the previous peak set in 2006 before the housing crash."

EQUITY IS TRENDING UP

The report notes home equity is a major factor in the increase, buoyed by near-record low mortgage rates, which are wooing owners to pull cash out and refinance their properties. The data shows that in the first quarter of 2016, homeowners gained a collective \$260 billion in additional home equity.

By factoring in that increase, 38 million borrowers now have at least 20 percent equity in their homes, accord-



ing to Black Knight Financial Services. Brad Hunter, chief economist with HomeAdvisor,

an online home services marketplace, said confidence is another factor.

BATHROOMS, KITCHENS ARE THE MOST POPULAR

Though spending is up, the

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most popular renovations remain as expected: bathrooms and kitchens. Insulation work is reportedly yielding the best returns, and more ambitious multi-room remodels are up almost 70 percent compared to last year.

CNBC points to a report from Houzz, which notes at least one-quarter of remodeling firms across all sectors report seeing more clients taking on multiple projects at the same time.

It's literally the gateway into your home, but after a while it can start to look a little shabby. Just a little bit of work on your front door can make your home look like a brand new place — and add a ton of curb appeal for minimal investment.

FEEL FREE TO GO A LITTLE CRAZY WITH THE COLORS

The obvious approach dictates you treat your front door as an extension of your home's color scheme, matching it to the shutters or other accents. But, as UnHinge notes, that doesn't have to be the case. Instead, they recommend treating the front door like a "single focal point." When choosing a color, the guide recommends you pick something that's personal to you and represents your personality, so don't be afraid to go a little crazy

ADD A LITTLE SWAG

Okay, so you've painted the door, but it might still be missing a little something. Think about adding an extra feature or two — and even a bit of additional functionality. You can always add a peephole to the door, or even a door knocker, which can either fit the historical architecture of your house or go a little quirky. Also feel free to change up the door knob. If you have an older home, consider a vintage find that matches the era of the home.

FIX WHAT'S BROKEN

All the upgrades in the world won't do much good if the door is off center or sagging, or has a broken screen. Make these repairs before starting an upgrade project to be sure you're working with a good base before starting renovations. Replace or fix a broken screen door, and fix any broken or uneven, door handles and hinges.

REFINISH THE DOOR

Flaking paint has a certain type of appeal in some situations, but on a front door, it just doesn't work. Scrape off any flaking paint and give the door a fresh coat. Then refinish it with a new coat to seal it and ensure it'll last another few decades. If you're looking to showcase the wood's natural color and grain, This Old House recommends a high-performance, oil-based varnish.



Add Kitchen Storage

Big or small, it seems most every house can use a bit more storage space. Luckily, you don't always have to build on more rooms to add more space. All you have to do is get creative and use some space you probably forgot was even there.

ADD MORE DRAWERS UNDER YOUR CABINETS

If you're running out of kitchen space, you can always take the full-on renovation route and put in new cabinets and reconfigure the whole layout. If you're looking to gain some space and just spend a few hundred bucks, however, the easiest solution could be under (or right in front of) your feet. The Family Handyman offers a project for adding new drawers underneath your cabinets in the hollow space between the bottom of the cabinets and the floor.

REMOVE THE TOE KICK AND OPEN UP THE SPACE

The first step is to figure out what you're dealing with, to make sure your kitchen configuration will allow for additional drawers. To find out if you have the space, remove the toe kick board to expose the space underneath the cabinets. Once you have the space exposed, you can determine exactly which size your cabinets need to be in order to fit in the space.

BUILD AND INSTALL

Build your cabinets to fit the space, and be sure to leave room for a cradle and slides. Be very sure of your measurements and cuts to make absolutely certain you're not building a set of cabinets too tall or wide to fit the space. Install the cradles and be sure the drawers fit the slides and move smoothly. Then, test out the drawers with some heavy objects to make sure they can handle the weight and are installed securely. Add paint and hardware to make sure the fronts of the drawers match your kitchen cabinet aesthetic.

LOAD THEM WITH LITTLE-USED OBJECTS

You should have 3 to 4 inches of clearance in the bottom drawers, which is more than enough room to hold pans, baking sheets and utensils. Your own mileage may vary, depending on how often you use specific items, but this should add several square-feet of usable storage space — all for a weekend or so of work and a few hundred dollars.

