



# HOME IMPROVEMENT

# Repairing Leaky Faucets

**D**rip, drip, drip. That sound means water leaving your faucet and money leaving your wallet. A leaky faucet can increase your water bill in no time, so it's important to act quickly.

In most cases, repairing a leaky faucet is simple work. It generally requires removing a worn washer. Even homeowners with little experience in plumbing can take care of this issue themselves.

This article focuses on the standard compression faucet — the most common style. Others include ceramic disk, cartridge and ball type.

Fixing a compression faucet usually involves replacing a washer. Fixing others can require the replacement of O-rings or neoprene seals.

Always keep your owner's manual for fixtures, as some may have more elaborate repair specifications than others.

For repairing a compression faucet, there are some simple steps to take before you get started.

## FIRST STEPS

- Always remember to shut off the water under the sink. You will be removing parts that essentially block the water from gushing out of your faucet, so it's important to follow this first step.

- Cover your sink drain with a cloth or paper towel in case you drop a small part or screw.

- Prepare your wrench for action by duct-taping its jaws. This will prevent any scratching of your fixture.

## FIXING THE ISSUE

Now that you're ready for repair, it's time to disassemble the faucet. Depending on what yours looks like, you should start by prying off the decorative cap on the handle.

After that:

- Remove the handle screw;
- Use a wrench to unscrew the packing nut;
- Unscrew the stem;
- Remove the worn seat washer (which may be held in place by a brass screw); and
- Coat the new washer with plumber's grease and reinstall the fixture.

As good as your newly installed parts look, the true test will come in turning on the water. After you've reinstalled all screws and parts, turn back on your water and check for leaks.



# Metal Backsplashes

**R**eplacing a kitchen or bathroom backsplash is one of the best ways to modernize your home's interior design. Doing so is a simple process perfect for the crafty DIY homeowner.

Glass mosaic tiles make for a beautiful backsplash, but one material is really catching fire in the home improvement industry: metal. From stainless steel to copper, metal materials can help transform your kitchen into a contemporary, elegant focal point of your home.

Installing and caring for metal backsplashes is easy — easier than regular tile in many cases.

## INSTALLATION

Installing a metal backsplash in your home is a relatively straightforward process that won't take long, depending on

the size of the project.

Most come in peel-and-stick options, while others require a strong glue to be fastened to your wall. Talk with the specialists at your home repair retailer to make sure you understand the installation specifications.

## MAINTAINING YOUR METAL BACKSPLASH

Taking care of your metal backsplash is an ongoing activity, especially in high-use areas such as your kitchen stove or bathroom sink.

If you choose copper, it's

important to note that the material can change appearance over time. The natural oxidation process means that copper will darken and form a patina, which can make it appear unique and rustic. You also can choose to seal the copper to help it retain its shine and color.

Other metal tiles, such as stainless steel or iron, can actually start to rust if not properly cared for.

The good news is that with a few simple cleaning products and a regular routine, you can make your copper and metal

backsplash last a lifetime.

## CLEANING YOUR METAL BACKSPLASH

Always check your manufacturer's guide to see which products are recommended, but the list below is a great starting point for gathering materials.

- Water
- Dishwashing detergent
- Microfiber cloth
- Copper cleaner
- Solvent-based sealer
- Stainless steel cleaner
- Vinegar and water solution
- Baking soda
- Rubber gloves

# Building a Deck

**A**dding a deck to your backyard can turn it into an outdoor oasis. With the proper measurements and tools, the project can be wrapped up over the course of a couple of weekends.

You'll need a general understanding of how a deck is structured, so do your research. Will it be a simple, single-level deck? Or do you want to incorporate various raised areas for patio furniture or a grill?

Once you build your deck, don't forget the finishing touches, such as solar post lights or light-blocking canopies that attach to your home. The final appearance of your deck is limited only to your imagination.

Here's what you'll need:

- Circular saw
- Drill
- Posthole digger
- Decking screws
- Concrete mix
- Level

Pressure-Treated Lumber:

- 2X8X10 (joists)
- 2X10X10 (beams)
- 2X8X8 (decking)
- 4X4X8 (posts)

## BUILDING YOUR DECK

1. First carefully measure your deck area to determine the amount of lumber and materials you will need. Diligent measurements will mean less waste in the end and a more efficient process.

2. Mark your deck's foundation and footing post locations with spray paint. This prep

work will help you quickly dig holes for the deck's ground support.

3. Dig footer holes 36 inches into the ground. Then mix and pour concrete into the holes with posts. Let the concrete set for at least one day. Some man-

ufacturers recommend a week.

4. Cut 2X10s to the length of the deck and secure it to your posts. These will serve as the main beams.

5. Mark, cut and secure joists to run between the beams. Deck boards will connect to the

joists.

6. Lay the deck boards. Remember to leave a gap between boards for expansion and contraction. Insert two screws at every joist, counter-sinking the screws to prevent unsightly or potentially danger-

ous screw heads from popping up.

7. For the railing, measure and install posts every six feet along the side of the deck. Bolt the posts to the outer joists. Cut the rails to size and install between the railing posts.



# Kitchen Renovations

**R**eturn on investment (ROI) is one of the most important aspects of home improvement, especially if you plan to sell your home within the next five to 10 years.

Many homeowners may choose to nix the ROI factor because they plan to stay in their home for life. They make every home improvement decision based on their needs and preferences.

For those with more moves in their future, ROI is more important and should be strongly considered before anything is removed, replaced or restructured.

The trick is understanding which parts of your remodel will offer you the greatest return on your financial investment. You probably won't make back the \$5,000 put into a home theater room in your basement, but you may still be OK with spending the money because you'll get many great years of use out of it.

If there is remodeling in your future, consider what is selling in your local real estate market. Talk to Realtors and stay up to date on current buyer trends. Doing so will keep your home improvement decisions on track.

## SMART KITCHEN RENOVATIONS

The annual cost vs. value report from Remodeling magazine routinely finds that kitchens are the first room homebuyers consider when



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looking at homes. They also return about 66 percent of initial investments, according to the most recent report.

Improvements such as ceramic tile floors or new countertops in the kitchen are at the top of the list of smart remodeling upgrades. Refinish your cabinets if they are struc-

turally sound, and consider upgrading your appliances.

Steps like this can help improve the value of your kitchen and home.

## QUARTZ COUNTERTOPS

Quartz is all the rage in the kitchen remodeling space as more homeowners look to

incorporate natural items into their homes.

Here are the main benefits of a quartz countertop:

- Nonporous surface that doesn't allow bacteria from food or drink spills to grow;
- Resistance to heat, providing you a functional prep and serving space; and

• Resistance to scratches to accommodate the activities of a busy family kitchen.

Quartz is also great for enhancing your home's overall design. Its natural color gradation and patterns lend it to be paired with bold, modern decorative accents in your design strategy.

# Installing a New Toilet

**W**ater leakage, cracks or rust are all great reasons to install a new toilet in your bathroom. Today's models are highly efficient, which means you can save money on your water bill while updating your space.

Replacing your toilet is easy, requiring only a few tools and a couple of hours of work. Let's get started.

## REMOVING YOUR OLD TOILET

Before adding your new throne, you have to ditch your old one. This involves a few basic steps, none more important than turning off the water at the shutoff valve.

Next:

- Flush the toilet to drain all the water from both the tank and toilet bowl, which should not refill now that the water is turned off.
- Disconnect your supply line with a wrench, making sure not to damage your water pipe in the process.
- Unbolt the toilet bowl from the floor.
- Carefully lift your toilet and remove it from the room. You should consider separating the tank from the bowl to make for an easier carry.
- Remove the old wax ring from the floor with a putty or utility knife.

## REPLACING YOUR TOILET

Now that your old commode is in the dumpster, it's time to add your new one. Again, a few simple steps and careful lifting will finish the job.

- Place the new wax ring, either under the toilet on the flange or directly on the floor.
- Place the toilet in position and press it down to set the

seal.

- Secure the toilet to the floor with a washer and nut on each bolt, and then tighten.
- Secure the tank to the bowl

with the required hardware and reattach the water supply line.

- Slowly turn on the water valve and check for leaks.

If you're leak free, you've successfully completed your toilet installation. Install a toilet seat according to the manufacturer's instructions.



# Installing Drywall

**D**o you have a room with damaged drywall? Maybe you're looking to replace older paneling with the smooth, more modern appeal of drywall.

Installing and finishing your own drywall is a tedious, yet doable project for the average homeowner. Drywall comes in large sheets that are easy to screw into your wall's studs. Once you have removed your damaged drywall or paneling, it's time to get to work.

## HANGING YOUR DRYWALL

Before you hang your drywall, it's important to hold a piece up to your wall to make sure both ends of it are on a stud. With a cordless drill and the proper drywall screws, drive a screw every 8 inches along the perimeter of each sheet.

Drive your screws until they are imprinted into the drywall, not flush with the surface. You will apply joint compound to these dimpled areas later for a smooth finish.

Don't forget to measure, mark and cut your drywall where any electrical outlets or light switches will need to go.

## MUDDING YOUR DRYWALL

Once your drywall is hung, it's time to apply joint compound to all taped areas and any screw holes or dents. Also known as mud, this compound will take care of any imperfections and make your various pieces of drywall appear as one.



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- Smooth on the compound with a taping knife;
- Wait for the first coat to dry and then apply a second; and
- Remember you will be

sanding this later so only use what you need.

## SANDING DRYWALL

Use a medium-grit sandpaper in your first round of sand-

ing to bring down any rough areas left over from mudding. Too coarse a paper could damage the drywall paper surface. Too light a paper could be ineffective in breaking through lay-

ers of mud.

For ceilings you can use a pole-mounted drywall sanding tool. For small areas, you can sand with a wet sponge to reduce drywall dust.

# Take Precautions

**W**hen taking on any home improvement project, it is important to protect yourself from preventable injuries.

Doing so involves understanding the risks associated with your specific project, as well as equipping yourself with the proper tools.

Research shows that many Americans are seriously injured by home improvement accidents every year.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2013:

- More than 511,000 people were treated in hospitals, doctors' offices and emergency rooms for injuries related to ladder use;
- Approximately 301,425 people were injured from lawn mower-related injuries;
- Nearly 7,500 were treated for injuries related to power tools; and
- More than 569,000 injuries were related to sofas and couches, particularly in climbing them to clean hard-to-reach areas of the home.

Don't become a statistic. Follow the tips below for a safe home improvement project.

## LADDER SAFETY

One of the most dangerous places around the home is on top of a ladder. Especially if you don't scale them very often, ladders can pose balance issues. And given the height you're dealing with, a fall can be very dangerous.

Always place ladders on a firm, level surface and always avoid wet

ground.

Once you're on the ladder, avoid leaning too far to one side or reaching for items. This can throw off your balance and quickly shift the weight of the ladder.

Other tips:

- Never climb a ladder without someone nearby;
- Keep your ladder away from electrical wires, tree limbs or other obstructions; and
- Use a sturdy step ladder instead of furniture or a countertop to reach high areas.

## GENERAL SAFETY

Many injuries occur in far less dramatic ways than falling from a ladder.

Improper stretching and lifting techniques can do damage to your back, keeping you out of any home improvement projects until you recover from your injury.

When lifting heavy objects, it is important to separate your feet shoulder-width apart, bend your knees and lift with your legs.

Other tips:

- If taking on a large project, alert your friends and family ahead of time so they will be able to check on you periodically;
- Always keep a phone within reach in case of an injury; and
- If working in the heat, take frequent breaks and hydrate properly.

