

# Winter Home & Garden



# Wintertime Indoor Projects

While the weather outside may be frightful, inside, it's just the right time to get some serious home improvement work done.

Here are four projects you can tackle this winter.

## INSTALLING A PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTAT

With rising utility costs, it may be time to invest in a smart thermostat to help keep your heating bills in check this winter. Check with your HVAC professionals to make sure a smart thermostat will work with your system, then get shopping. You can control some thermostats from your phone or tablet. Others are set to learn your routines throughout the day and set itself accordingly. Do your research and talk to the experts at your local home improvement store to make the best decision for your home.

## REPAINT YOUR DOORS

You can give your home an overhaul by just paying a little attention to your interior doors. Give each door a good cleaning and fix any scratches, nicks or even holes. Sand it down and add a new coat of paint to create a completely new look. You can also change outdated hardware for something more modern or, vice versa, change out modern sets for those with a lit-



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tle more character. Look to your local antique dealers and hardware shops for a selection of hardware that thinks outside of the big box store.

## WASH YOUR WINDOWS

Give your rooms some new life by washing the interior side

of your windows. While you're there, take down and give any blinds or other window treatments a good cleaning. Check for drafts and repair sealant and caulk as necessary.

## REGROUT YOUR TILE

If you've got old, dirty tiles

lurking in your kitchen or bath, roll up your sleeves and regrout it for a crisp, clean new look. Start by talking to your local tile store about what kind of tile you have and grab a few tools. You want to start by cleaning out the old grout, making sure to thoroughly clean every grout

line. Be careful not to scratch the old tile as you go. Next, clean and wipe the tiles before going in with your new grout, making sure to follow the instructions on the label, especially for curing. Seal with a recommended sealant at the end of the cure time.



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# Get Returns on Renovations

Home renovations shouldn't be done just because you don't like your tile or cabinetry anymore.

With the cost of renovations these days, return on investment becomes an important consideration. The National Association of Home Builders and HomeLight looked at top renovations that will offer bang for your buck.

## HOME OFFICES

More people than ever are working

from home and for those toiling away remotely, a dedicated space to work in is priceless. Some buyers may even want a room they can divide into two home offices.

Data from 2020 shows that adding a home office can add more than \$10,000 to the value of your home and may even be more in some markets. Look to see if you have walk-in closets or even space for an extension.

## CURB APPEAL

Landscaping, repainting and sprucing up the outside of your home can also pay off big. A 2021 HomeLight survey showed that buyers will pay 7%

more for a home with great curb appeal. Even though it's chilly out, there are still projects you can do to enhance the beauty of your home. Work on building a healthy yard now and put down fresh mulch and plants as soon as you can in your planting zone. You could even start as small as cleaning up your mailbox and putting in fresh new house numbers.

## REPLACE YOUR GARAGE DOOR

A noisy or damaged garage door can be an eyesore. HomeLight says that agents report a new door can return 133% of your investment in some areas. Look for features that are popu-

lar with buyers, such as code boxes that allow for remote opening and quiet lift door openers.

## PUT IN A FIRE PIT OR OUTDOOR FIREPLACE

More than half of real estate agents HomeLight surveyed said a fire pit or other cozy outdoor entertaining space was a top priority. Coming out of the pandemic, families began to value more time together, and gathering around a fire outside is a great way to do that. While you're outside, consider starting a plan for an outdoor kitchen, which can add upwards of \$10,000 to your home's value in some markets.

# Flex Your Green Thumb Inside

Winter's long, dark days can leave you longing to get your hands dirty in the garden.

Don't wait for spring; start potting an indoor paradise that will add some color and vibrancy to your living space.

## PLANT A MONEY TREE

Not literally (we wish). A money tree features a braided trunk topped by bright green, almond-shaped leaves. Give it six or so hours of indirect sunlight and water it when the soil is dry. Give it a big enough pot, and it can grow up to eight feet tall for a real showstopper of a plant.

## PURIFY THE AIR

Houseplants can also work to clean up the air in our homes. Spider plants are particularly good at this, and their striking green and white foliage adds interest to any space. Give it plenty of light and water weekly, and the plant just might start shooting off babies that you can repot and give as gifts or liven up any other room.

## PLANT SOME PEACE

Peace lilies are great for plant parents who love a little too hard. And by that, we mean overwatering. Give it plenty of light and you'll see flowers in no time. Be warned if you have pets; this plant can be toxic to cats and dogs.

## GIVE SOME LOVE

If you have a corner that needs an interesting trailing plant, look no farther than the string of hearts. This African succulent has vines festooned with heart-shaped leaves.

They can grow up to 12 feet long and, like most succulents, are forgiving and easy to propagate.

## NO LIGHT? NO PROBLEM

The rubber plant, a native of

Asia, thrives in low-light environments. Water it about once a week or whenever the soil is dry for best results, and keep it well pruned. Another warning for pet owners: Rubber plants are toxic to cats and dogs.

## AIR PLANTS

If soil gives you the ick, welcome to air plants. Tillandsia grows without dirt and comes in funky shapes and sizes. Dunk them in water for a few hours every couple of weeks.



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# When to Start Seeds Indoors

It's common for gardeners' green thumbs to get itchy just after the new year, when seed catalogs start coming in and you can see spring just around the corner.

The good news is that, even in the dead of winter, this is the perfect time to begin planning and starting seeds for your spring and summer gardens.

## SUPPLIES

You will need some hardware for this project. Hardware will include some seed trays, shelving and possibly a light if you don't have an appropriately placed window to devote to your seedlings. A great way to get started is with a trip to your local garden center, where you can pick the experts' brains about what plants do best in your area, growing mediums and more.

For software, you'll need a growing medium, plenty of water and a way to gently apply it (spray bottles are great for this) and your seeds, of course.

## LIGHTING

Since lighting will be a factor for most people in the U.S., consider using LED grow lights for maximum efficiency. Fluorescent lights can lose brightness as they age and



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may take a bite out of your electric bill. Set up your seedlings so the lights can be a few inches from the tops of the plants and can be adjusted to keep them there as the plants grow. Seedlings generally like 12-16 hours of light per day; a timer can make giving them the right amount of light a snap.

## WHAT TO PLANT WHEN

Talk to the experts at your local garden center and know

your growing zone to determine exactly what you should plant when. You should also be aware that some plants like to go outside as seedlings, while others should be planted directly into your outside garden as seeds because they dislike being transplanted.

## CARING FOR YOUR SEEDLINGS

Once you decide what to plant and get your seeds in your soil, check on them a

couple of times a day, making sure the surface of the soil remains slightly damp. Too dry and the seeds won't germinate; too wet, and they'll rot. When at least half of the seeds are sprouted, you can remove the cover from your seed tray. Keep the seedlings moist, but not soggy, and, as they grow, start to thin them out when the first sets of true leaves emerge. Once you have two sets of leaves, you can start fertilizing with a water-soluble fertilizer.

Depending on your area, you may need to harden your seedlings by getting them used to the great outdoors. Place your seedlings outside in a protected area in the shade for an hour on the first day, extending the outdoor time by an hour each day for three days, when you can allow them a little morning sun as well. Gradually let them stay out longer and get more sun for about a week, when they're ready to go in the ground.

# Insulation 101

Insulation in your home keeps it warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Properly insulating your home can reduce heating and cooling costs and improve the comfort inside. Here's what you need to know about the insulation inside your house.

## HOW DOES INSULATION WORK

The most common types of insulation work by keeping the heat where it's supposed to be – either inside or out. Insulation is categorized by an R-value, or its thermal resistance. The R-value depends on what the insulation is made of, the thickness of the insulation and its density. It can also depend on temperatures, how old the insulation is and moisture accumulation.

## INSULATION MATERIALS

Insulation can be made from a variety of materials. The most bulky insulations are usually made from fiberglass, rockwool, cellulose or natural fibers. For tighter spaces, you can get rigid foam boards or sleek foils. These kinds of insulation reflect radiant heat away from living spaces, making them effective in climates where it's important that houses stay cool.

## RADIANT BARRIERS

Radiant barriers are highly reflective materials that radi-



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ate heat back out into the atmosphere rather than absorbing it, reducing the load on the climate control system in a structure.

It has no inherent R-value, but, depending on where you live, can still be a valuable part of your home insulation plan.

## ADDING INSULATION

Before you start adding insulation, have your utility company conduct an energy audit. These qualified professionals can help you find areas of your home that could use more insulation, what kind of insulation you already

have, and what kinds of insulation work well in your area.

You can use a Department of Energy online calculator or ask your auditor what the recommended R-values are in your area to determine how much insulation you should add and where.

Don't forget that moisture

and air flow also contribute to higher heating costs. Check for air leakage around windows and doors and recaulk and reseal as needed. The energy audit may test for leakage for you and help you identify where more work is needed before you invest in new insulation.

# Know Your Fireplace

Nothing's more cozy in winter than sitting in front of a crackling warm fireplace.

That sweet scene, however, can turn dangerous in a hurry. Here's what you need to know to keep your family safe.

## HAVE YOUR FIREPLACE INSPECTED

Have a professional chimney sweep come out and check your fireplace and chimney for soot buildup that could cause a fire. The chimney sweep will also clear out any debris that may have accumulated during the warmer months.

## USE THE RIGHT WOOD

Soot in the chimney comes from burning wood that's too moist. Wood with accumulated moisture can also explode in the fire, sending shards of burning hot wood throughout your room. Use kiln-dried or dry, fresh wood in your wood-burning fireplace or stove.

## MAKE SURE THE FLUE IS OPEN

Make sure your flue is open before you start your fire. A blazing fire can make it difficult to open the flue, sending smoke and even flames into the room.

Also make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector in case the flue gets closed by accident, as well as a fire extinguisher.



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## USE A FIREPLACE SCREEN

Fireplace screens aren't just decorative. They keep sparks and cinders in the fireplace where they belong and are especially important when you're not in the room.

A solid set of grates or andirons are also important

because they keep the burning hot wood from rolling out of fireplaces.

## USE THE PROPER TOOLS

A good fireplace tool set should include a stand, a natural fiber broom, a poker, a shovel and tongs. These tools will help you move burning

wood safely and keep your fireplace clean. You may also want to invest in a set of firefighter gloves so that you can reach into the fire safely if you need to.

## DON'T LEAVE A FIREPLACE UNATTENDED

Make sure fires burn out

before bedtime, especially in insert or prefabricated fireplaces made of metal and not brick or stone.

While we're on the subject, keep small children and pets away from the fireplace, too. Teach them to stay away from the flames, the wood and the tools.

# Staying Warm, Safely

Portable space heaters are a popular way to supplement your central heating system or to keep yourself warm during winter. But they can also be dangerous.

The National Fire Protection Association says that two in five deaths in home heater fires involve portable electric space heaters.

Electric space heaters can create and radiate heat through an oil- or water-filled radiator, by blowing a fan over warm metal coils, by warming a ceramic heating element and by using infrared bulbs.

No matter what fuel your space heater uses, it can be dangerous if not used properly.

Here's a checklist for using space heaters safely from the NFPA:

- Choose a heater with the seal of a qualified testing laboratory.
- Keep the heater at least three feet away from anything that can burn, including people and pets. This also includes rugs, curtains and furniture. Do not store flammable liquids near the heater.
- Choose a heater with a thermostat and overheat protection.
- Place the heater on a solid, flat surface.
- Your oven is not a space heater. Do not use your oven or any other cooking appliance to heat your home.



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- Make sure your heater has an auto shut-off to turn the heater off if it tips over.
- Keep space heaters out of the way of foot traffic. Don't block an exit.
- Keep children and pets away from the space heater.
- Make sure heating appliances are allowed in your com-

munity, especially if you live in multifamily housing.

- Plug the heater directly into a wall outlet, not an extension cord.
- Turn space heaters off and unplug them whenever you leave the room or go to bed.
- Inspect your heater regularly and perform any recom-

mended maintenance.

- Use qualified technicians to install fixed space heaters.
- If your heater burns fuel such as kerosene, always use the proper grade of fuel. Refuel your unit in a well-ventilated area when the heater is cool.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in every

room. Test them regularly and replace the batteries as needed.

- Inspect the plugs on your heaters regularly and look for cracked plugs, loose wires or loose connections.
- When you're using a fuel-burning space heater, crack a window for adequate ventilation.