



Habitat for Humanity®

ReStore®

make yourself at home

HOME MAINTENANCE AND DIY TIPS FOR HOMEOWNERS

About this guide

We asked Habitat supporters for their favorite home maintenance and improvement tips – and they responded by the thousands! Our builder and maintenance experts reviewed and selected the best and most useful suggestions. The result is this collection of more than 150 DIY tips to care for your home inside and out—and on a budget.

Habitat partner families know the importance of improving and maintaining a home on a tight budget. That's why we provide valuable training—including maintenance, finance and budgeting—before they earn the keys to their new Habitat homes.

Thanks to our supporters, this guide can help you learn a few new helpful hacks to keep your home in top shape.





inside your house

Appliances
Electrical
HVAC
Plumbing
Water heaters

APPLIANCES

1 “Clean the coils under your refrigerator with a long brush—a vacuum cleaner is helpful—at least once a year (more if you have pets or a dusty/dirty household). If you don’t, the refrigerator will struggle to cool and vital parts will wear out sooner.”

– **KIM G.
RIVERDALE, GA**

APPLIANCES

3 “Every spring we suggest homeowners check the hoses on their washing machine to make sure they are still tight. Washing machines tend to shake and loosen up hose connections. It’s also a good time to clean behind there and find that one missing sock.”

– **MR. AND MRS. LAURENCE A.
EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ**

APPLIANCES

2 “Do not plug your freezer into a GFCI protected outlet. If the GFCI is tripped for any reason and it goes unnoticed, the food in your freezer will be spoiled.”

– **LINDA B.
SACRAMENTO, CA**

ELECTRICAL

4 “Make an ‘electric map’ of your home so you will know which circuit breaker is connected to each electrical outlet or light or appliance in your home. This will help you when you are troubleshooting an electrical problem.”

– **HENRY AND DELPHINE F.
LELAND, NC**

ELECTRICAL

5 “Electric plugs with one prong larger than the other can be hard to plug in correctly. Use a dab of ‘white-out’ or other bright mark on the case near the larger prong. So whether the plug goes parallel or horizontal, it is easier to see it.”

– **ELIZABETH L.
BOWLING GREEN, OH**

HVAC

6 “Be sure to check your furnace filter monthly and change it as necessary. Write the date on the new filter to keep track of how long it lasts. Keep a spare.”

– **CHARLES R.**

HVAC

7 “HVAC systems need unrestricted air flow. Inexpensive filters can be enhanced to provide sufficient filtering by spraying Endust on the intake side. This creates a static dust magnet and catches more dust.”

– **JOHN B.
KINGSPORT, TN**

HVAC

8 “Pour bleach and water (50/50) solution down the HVAC condensation line before the start of the air conditioning season.”

– **DAVE B.
MADISON, SD**

PLUMBING

9 “If you do any plumbing repairs on faucets or toilets that include disconnecting the water supply lines, turn off the main water valve before you start!”

– HEATHER M.
COLLEYVILLE, TX

PLUMBING

10 “When installing a toilet tank to a bowl, sometimes it leaks around the tank bolts even with a rubber washer installed. To fix that, apply a thin film of silicone caulk to the underside of the rubber washers before tightening the bolts.”

– CYNTHIA D.
BOSTON, MA

PLUMBING

11 “Before disassembling any plumbing for repair, take pictures of the existing piping and bring photos and/or old parts to the plumbing supply store.”

– JUDITH M.
TORRANCE, CA

PLUMBING

12 “Invest in a toilet snake and skip the drain cleaner. Too much can cause long-term damage to pipes. Place a hair strainer in your tub drain. It keeps your underground pipes clear and free from hair clogs.”

– MARA F.
NAPLES, FL

PLUMBING

13 “To safely unclog a sink drain, mix ½ cup salt with ½ cup baking soda and pour down the drain. Follow with ½ cup of vinegar and let sit 10 minutes. Pour boiling water down the drain and it should unclog right away. If not, repeat steps.”

– SARI T.

PLUMBING

14 “Check your sump pump annually. Make sure it is working properly before the rainy season or spring thaw (depending on your part of the country).”

– LUCY G.
MIAMI, FL

WATER HEATER

15 “Flush out the water heater tank, collecting the discarded water for use with other chores. Water heater tanks will last longer when the sediments are cleared at least once a year.”

– DAVID K.
FREMONT, CA

WATER HEATER

16 “Toss a water heater blanket around your water heater for energy savings all year long. The Department of Energy recommends being careful not to cover the water heater’s top, bottom, thermostat or burner compartment.”

– GARY S.

WATER HEATER

17 “Check (and replace if needed) the anode rod in your water heater every few years. A small investment can postpone replacing the water heater for years.”

– **DAVID AND BARBARA O.
PORTLAND, OR**

WATER HEATER

18 “Install a drain-water heat exchanger to save money by recovering heat from water drained from showers, bathtubs, sinks, dishwashers and clothes washers.”

– **PHYLLIS C.
BETHESDA, MD**

WATER HEATER

19 “Make sure you know where all water heater shut-off valves are located, and how to turn off in case of emergency.”

– **THOMAS K.
MELROSE, MA**

WATER HEATER

20 “Turn your water heater down to the lowest possible setting when you go on vacation.”

– **COLIN H.
BROOKFIELD, CT**

BASIC MAINTENANCE

21 “YouTube videos can help you almost fix almost everything! From a washing machine to a car repair, you can save a lot of money by buying parts and watching videos to guide you how to fix.”

– PEGGY M.
SPARTANBURG, SC

BASIC MAINTENANCE

22 “With a phone that stores pictures, take close-up photos of household items that need periodic replacement along with their SKU numbers—furnace filter dimensions, odd-shaped bulbs—for handy access. Pictures also help store other important appliance information.”

– LAURIE M.
HIGHLAND PARK, IL

BASIC MAINTENANCE

23 “Homeowners in a hurricane zone should take extensive photos of their home before a storm hits, which can make documenting damage easier.”

– TIM B.
SANTA ROSA, CA

BASIC MAINTENANCE

24 “Before using your fireplace, have the chimney checked for damage and cleaned, especially if you used the fireplace a lot the during previous year or if you had not used it in a few years.”

– LYNN M.

BASIC MAINTENANCE

25 “Don’t forget the attic space. Check it at least twice a year and look for water staining, properly connected exhaust hoses and ensure your soffits and air chutes are not blocked.”

– BHUTI N.

BASIC MAINTENANCE

26 “To check the effectiveness of a bathroom fan vent, turn it on and hold a square of toilet tissue over the vent. If it sticks, your vent is functioning appropriately. If it does not stick, it’s time to repair or replace the vent.”

– ERNESTINE V.

BASIC MAINTENANCE

27 “When replacing exterior fixture light bulbs, spread a thin film of petroleum jelly on the screw threads to protect from the weather, and also allows easier removal when the time comes to replace it.”

– MRS. A.

BUDGET

28 “Budget money every month for home improvement projects. For each person and home this will be different, but if you can budget and do home improvement projects on a regular basis then you can maintain a nice home.”

– KAREN S.
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL

BUDGET

29 “Homes are constantly in need of improvements and, of course, this requires money. Set funds aside in advance specifically for the home. This will help offset the cost of your home improvement expenses.”

– **WILLIAM P.
JACKSONVILLE, FL**

BUDGET

30 “Share tools and lawn equipment with neighbors. Wheelbarrows, ladders and tillers are tools that aren’t needed on a daily or even weekly basis. Sharing will give you more space and cost less than purchasing all the tools yourself.”

– **CATHERINE L.
MONUMENT, CO**

BUDGET

31 “Get at least three estimates for replacing windows and roofs. Purchase vinyl siding and trim so you don’t have to paint or replace siding.”

– **JULIE Y.
GOLDEN, CO**

BUDGET

32 “Contractors are expensive. Take some classes to learn some basics to keep your costs down. Things like unclogging a drain, replacing a faucet, changing a fuse or resetting a circuit breaker, painting, exterior upkeep, etc., that can save money.”

– **MARTHA P.
TACOMA, WA**

BUDGET

33 “Search secondhand stores—like Habitat for Humanity ReStore!—before going to a regular retailer. Many of these types of stores sell new items that people just never opened. You often find more interesting and unique items, and you’re helping the earth!”

– **MARTHA E.
POULSBO, WA**

BUDGET

34 “Find a reliable handyman you can trust to do minor repairs quickly and correctly at a reasonable price so you can call on him or her as soon as a small problem arises.”

– **OTIS G.**

HOME SECURITY

35 “To keep your home safe from being burglarized, always use timers on lamps in different parts of the house. Alternate the timers every once in a while to keep thieves guessing.”

– **NANCY J.
SOMERVILLE, NJ**

HOME SECURITY

36 “Set up a timer to your television to turn on and off at random times while you’re out of town.”

– **ANA C.**

HOME SECURITY

37 “To keep sliding glass doors extra safe and sound, place a wooden dowel in the track of the door. Most hardware stores have wooden dowels and might cut them to size for you for no extra charge.”

– GREG A.

HOME SECURITY

38 “Use longer screws than the ones provided on the door lock plates to screw into the door jamb for better security.”

– BRIAN U.

HOME SECURITY

39 “Store a spare house key in a combination-controlled lockbox.”

– JOHN P.
MCMINNVILLE, OR

PEST CONTROL

40 “When you are sealing openings around pipes and other areas, wedge in steel wool before you spray the foam sealant to keep mice and other crawlies from chewing through the foam.”

– SUZANNE D.
LONG BEACH, CA

PEST CONTROL

41 “A dried bay leaf in containers with flour, spaghetti and other grain products will help keep weevils away. Also lay one on the shelf where these products are stored.”

– JUDY S.
MOUNT PLEASANT, SC

PEST CONTROL

42 “A peppermint oil/cedar oil combo in a spritzer bottle—1 ounce each to 2 ounces distilled water—is an excellent, inexpensive and organic way to protect the home from insects, spiders and rodents all year round.”

– JESSICA M.
TEXAS

SAFETY

43 “Every so often, use a vacuum cleaner to remove lint buildup on the exhaust fan in the bathroom. That lint around the electric motor can be a fire hazard.”

– WALTER P.
MONEE, IL

SAFETY

44 “Clean lint from your dryer after every use to keep the dryer working at maximum efficiency and to prevent fire potential. Clean the dryer vent at least four times a year.”

– JACQUELINE L.
GREENSBORO, NC

SAFETY

45 “Wearing gloves while working around the house—work gloves for outdoors and latex for the bathroom and kitchen—makes it much safer and more precise.”

— **BRIAN S.**
SPRING BRANCH, TX

SAFETY

46 “Before you start the heater, furnace or fireplace in the fall, complete this checklist: Replace batteries in all smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors, and make sure your fire extinguisher has not expired.”

— **TODD V.**

SAFETY

47 “If you have natural gas or propane-fired heating units in your home you might be smart to buy a carbon monoxide detector.”

— **SHARON S.**

SAFETY

48 “Put the replacement date on the outside of a new smoke detector (with a marker or label) where visible without removing the alarm. The replacement date is 10 years after the date found on the back of the alarm. It may save a life some day!”

— **NORA S.**

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

49 “When away from your home for extended periods of time, consider shutting off your home’s water supply. That could prevent a major surprise when you return.”

– **KIM H.
CARLTON, MN**

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

50 “Have a way to turn your home’s water on and off that is easy to get to. It might not be at the water meter. ”

– **WILLIAM S.
WINCHESTER, KY**

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

51 “Test your water shut-offs annually— under sinks, at the toilet, etc., as well as the main coming into the house and lines going out. Better to replace those during planned maintenance than to find out one doesn’t work during an emergency!”

– **TINA F.**

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

52 “Make sure your insurance covers flood damage from water backups and standing water from drain backups.”

– **JOHN L.
MCDERMOTT, OH**

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

53 “Make sure that soil and concrete surfaces around your house aren’t above the foundation, but slope away so rainwater flows away and does not collect against it, reducing the possibility of flooding.”

– RONALD M.
BEAUMONT, TX

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

54 “Add fill dirt as needed to keep a positive drainage of water away from your foundation or basement. If needed, use a plastic sheet around the exterior along with appropriate landscaping to keep water from the basement wall.”

– DONALD AND CATHY M.
PALMYRA, PA

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

55 “Be sure your valleys, eaves, downspouts, gutters and drainage are clear to take water away from your house so water does not back up under your shingles and siding to damage your insulation and sheathing.”

– CONSTANCE T.
MARTINSVILLE, IN

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

56 “Instead of the rubber hoses that come with your clothes washer, use slightly more expensive (but little chance of bursting) stainless steel mesh. Well worth preventing what could be a thousands-of-dollars water leak when the rubber ones burst.”

– NICOLE F.
EDGEWOOD, MD

WATER DAMAGE PREVENTION

57 “When it rained and I would get seepage in my basement, I bought hydraulic waterproof cement and filled in areas where the seepage entered. End of seepage!”

– **STEVE G.
WAUPUN, WI**

CLEANING TIP

58 “Dust the blades of a ceiling fan with an old pillowcase. Open the case; slip it over a blade. Close the pillowcase, and slide it off the blade, dusting it as you go. Dust bunnies will stay inside the pillowcase! Then launder the pillowcase.”

– ELI K.

CLEANING TIP

59 “To remove dust from ceiling fans I use baby wipes, which also clean dust off of heater vents.”

– JEFF R.

CLEANING TIP

60 “Using baking soda and white vinegar to clean tire marks on garage floor, to clean burned food on sauce pans, to freshen drains, etc.”

– EDRIS B.
NEWARK VALLEY, NY

CLEANING TIP

61 “Use your blower to clean out the garage.”

– KIMBERLY M.
MARTINEZ, CA

CLEANING TIP

62 “Use something alcohol-based, like rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer, to get out ink stains from most surfaces. Test for color change in a hidden area first.”

– **BRETT L.
HERMON, NY**

CLEANING TIP

63 “To remove the toughest of permanent ink stains on hands or walls, drench a cotton ball in nail polish remover with acetone and then blot the stain away.”

– **SUSAN M.
CAMPBELL, NY**

CLEANING TIP

64 “Carbonated water works on many stains. Pour on a generous amount to soak the stain, then blot up with towels. Repeat as necessary.”

– **BRAD L.**

CLEANING TIP

65 “Make an all-in-one magic cleaner: 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of baking soda, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of Dawn, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water, and 2 tablespoons vinegar. Mix together and pour into a spray bottle. Use to clean countertops, shower walls and more. Rinse and wipe clean.”

– **DENNIS B.
HOMEWOOD, IL**

CLEANING TIP

66 “Save old toothbrushes to clean off dirt or scum in places that are hard to access. Throw them in the dishwasher between scrubbing jobs.”

– BRUCE K.

CLEANING TIP

67 “Use holey socks for dirty jobs like applying wax, polishing silver, cleaning baseboards and blinds or around toilet bases. They fit easily over your hand. Dispose of them when they're full of wax, polish or dirt.”

– PATRICIA P.
OCONOMOWOC, WI

CLEANING TIP

68 “How to clean a slider door track: Vacuum the track with door closed and open. Scrape remaining dirt with a screwdriver. Vacuum the debris. Apply a lubricant to the tracks. Work the door back and forth several times until it slides smoothly.”

– ERNEST L.

CLEANING TIP

69 “Spring clean: Muck out everything you no longer use – discard, give away, sell cheap and rejoice in all the space that emerges free of clutter, revealing areas that might need a touch up, minor fixing, etc.!”

– TRACEY C.
JENKS, OK

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

70 “Instead of chemicals to clean the kitchen and bathroom, I use equal parts white vinegar and blue Dawn dishwashing liquid. Pour this miracle solution first, then sprinkle baking soda. Let it sit, then wipe off with a clean rag.”

– JOHN R.
ENGLEWOOD, FL

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

71 “Applying Rain-X—usually used on car windshields—on bathroom glass can reduce hard water and soap scum buildup. Just be sure to apply it on clean glass.”

– HABITAT SUPPORTER

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

72 “Squeegee walls after showering and make a habit of leaving the door open for a bit to prevent mold from growing in the bathroom.”

– LORI Z.
ABINGDON, MD

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

73 “To eliminate soap residue and mineral scale on glass shower doors, use cleaning vinegar with 6% acidity. Shower doors will sparkle. Also use it to clean glass shower doors: leave on for 15 minutes, rinse, wipe dry with microfiber cloth.”

– BILL C.
MAUMEE, OH

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

74 “Put some vinegar in an ice tray and let it freeze, then run the ice cubes through the garbage disposal. It freshens it, and as a bonus, the ice sharpens the blades.”

– SHARON R.
NAZARETH, PA

CLEANING TIP – KITCHEN & BATHROOM

75 “Move your stove and refrigerator out and clean under at least once a year.”

– THERESA L.
FORT MYERS, FL

CLEANING – CARPET & FLOORS

76 “To clean carpets with a large carpet-cleaning machine, use $\frac{1}{3}$ white vinegar, $\frac{1}{3}$ hydrogen peroxide and $\frac{1}{3}$ water. Amazing results.”

– CHRISTINE C.
NORTH CAROLINA

CLEANING – CARPET & FLOORS

77 “How to clean shag area rugs: Turn the rug over onto hard flooring and vacuum the back with the beater bar. Vacuum debris off the floor beneath. Place freshly cleaned rug right side up. This beats hauling the heavy thing outside and shaking it over your deck railing!”

– LORIE M.

CLEANING – CARPET & FLOORS

78 “How to remove gum from carpet: Dampen a rag and place it over the gum. Use a hot iron to press on the gum spot for 5–10 seconds. If needed, move to a new area of the rag and repeat. The heat will melt the gum onto the rag.”

– JEFF P.
ASHEVILLE, NC

CLEANING – CARPET & FLOORS

79 “Instead of purchasing expensive cleaning products for your wood floors, make a mixture of ½ cup of white vinegar to a gallon of warm water. Cleans beautifully with no residue and doesn’t clean out your pocketbook.”

– CLYDE B.
SATELLITE BEACH, FL

CLEANING – CARPET & FLOORS

80 “Use Windex to clean your wood floors—never water. This tip was given to us by the professionals who refinished our floors. It has worked for 29 years.”

– INGRID M.
SPRINGFIELD, TN

CLEANING – LAUNDRY

81 “To remove stubborn blood or other stains from clothing, mix a tablespoon of hydrogen peroxide with several drops of dish detergent, pour a bit on the stain and rub it in well. Wait several minutes then rinse with cold water. Repeat if necessary.”

– PAMELA C.
SAN DIEGO, CA

CLEANING – LAUNDRY

82 “Keep your front-loader washing machine fresh and clean by pouring white vinegar in the bleach dispenser. This reduces residual detergent buildup. Also, wipe off the rubber seal completely after each use to avoid mold from excess moisture.”

– RIZWAN A.
SAN ANTONIO, TX

CLEANING – LAUNDRY

83 “How to get rid of diesel gas smell on clothes: Add some mouthwash to the wash cycle.”

– CHARLES S.
SAINT PAUL, MN

DECOR

84 “Revarnish damaged wood cabinets instead of replacing them. Repair any damage and let all coats dry for 24 hours. Apply at least two coats of colored varnish. Choose a darker color than the color you have now. You may need to sand the cabinets lightly.”

– CAROL N.
ALACHUA, FL

DECOR

85 “Recycle old kitchen cabinets by using them in the laundry room, garage or even a shed. Even if you don’t use all of them they’re usually better-looking and more efficient than what is sold for those locations.”

– PATRICIA D.
EAGLE, ID

DECOR

86 “Change a light fixture in a room that needs a facelift. Often that is all you need to give an instant update to an otherwise boring or outdated room. Then donate the old fixture to the Habitat ReStore!”

– PAMELA P.
MOUNT PLEASANT, SC

DECOR

87 “If you have wood paneling, consider painting it rather than removing it. It’s less costly and looks a bit like beadboard. The room will look larger and brighter.”

– IRVIN M.
ARLINGTON, VA

DECOR

88 “Use Stitch Witchery to hem curtains.”

– AMY H.
CLEARWATER, FL

DIY TIPS

89 “Ugly screw or nail holes in wood? Sharpen a quarter-inch dowel with a pencil sharpener, tap in place with a spot of glue, and cut with a razor knife. Stain and finish.”

– TANDI C.

DIY TIPS

90 “When caulking, be sure to wet your finger or tool to get a smoother finish.”

– **JEFF B.**
ASHEVILLE, NC

DIY TIPS

91 “When using only a portion of a caulk tube, to keep the remaining portion from drying out, place a 3- or 4-inch nail in the tube with the nail head touching the end of the caulk tube. Simply remove the nail for next use and the caulk is like new.”

– **TRACYANN R.**
FREEMONT, IL

DIY TIPS

92 “To get the best results when caulking, cut a small hole in the tip of the caulking tube (the smaller the hole, the better). After caulking, use a wet tile sponge (that has been wrung out well) to wipe back the caulk and leave a clean, smooth line.”

– **STEPHEN P.**
NARRAGANSETT, RI

DIY TIPS

93 “Tape the ‘wrenchette’ or Allen wrench that came with your garbage disposal to the side of it, under the sink. If the disposal jams, the wrench is literally at your fingertips.”

– **HABITAT SUPPORTER**

DIY TIPS

94 “When cutting baseboard on an inside 45-degree angle, instead of copying the entire 45-degree base, back cut the straight part of the base 5 degrees until you get near the profile. Then copy the little ogee part. Fast and a much better fit.”

– NIC M.

DIY TIPS

95 “When toe-nailing studs, hold the nail perpendicularly to the stud and give it a few taps. After the nail has some leverage in the stud, turn the nail to the desired angle (about a 30-degree angle from the face) and finish driving it in.”

– MARY W.
CHESAPEAKE, VA

DIY TIPS

96 “To line up screws at a proper distance, such as for a new front door handle, trace the shape onto a piece of file folder card and punch the screw holes in it. That way the holes can be aligned and drilled properly.”

– ED R.
BREWSTER, NY

DIY TIPS

97 “To prevent a nail from splitting the wood, turn it upside down and blunt the sharp end on a firm surface like concrete, metal, etc.”

– FRANCINA M.

DIY TIPS

98 “Keep a box of shims on hand. They’re useful for levelling bookcases or other furniture, keeping windows in old houses from rattling, and holding things in place while you wait for glue or paint to dry.”

– **LOWELL H.**

DIY TIPS

99 “Putting squares of grippy drawer liner under your couch legs can help keep the couch from sliding and protect the floor. You can also use the liner under cushions to help keep them in place.”

– **JULIA C.
ORLANDO, FL**

DIY TIPS

100 “Put a small piece of tape on plaster walls if you are going to drive in a nail or a screw. The tape keeps the plaster around the hole from cracking.”

– **GLEN P.
PORT TOWNSEND, WA**

DIY TIPS

101 “If your house or mailbox key is sticking in a lock or becoming hard to turn, try applying a bit of household oil into the keyhole before calling a locksmith, which can be very expensive and possibly unnecessary.”

– **MICHELLE S.**

DIY TIPS

102 “If your cupboards or drawers stick and are difficult to slide then this helps as long as they are wooden: Take a regular candle and rub it on the surfaces that glide—both sides. It's a simple but very effective solution.”

– **CHRIS C.**
SILVER SPRING, MD

DIY TIPS

103 “Keep black and brown Sharpie pens handy for touching up minor dings in wood.”

– **JEANNINE S.**
SAN RAMON, CA

DIY TIPS

104 “Always use heavy-duty door stoppers to prevent damage to walls from door knobs.”

– **JUDITH B.**

DIY TIPS

105 “When there are raw places on beveled areas of wood doors or furniture, don't spend money on refinishing. Apply a little olive oil with your finger or a Q-tip and it'll be fine for a long time.”

– **JAMES S.**
AUSTIN, TX

DIY TIPS

106 “Use a clothespin to hold nails in odd spots. It holds them perfectly until you get the nail started. And they are very cost effective if they break!”

– ODESSA K.

DIY TIPS

107 “If a screw has become loose in wood, dip a wooden toothpick into carpenter’s glue, stick it into the hole and break it off even with the wood surface. Repeat until the hole is full. Then insert the screw again and it will hold.”

– HABITAT SUPPORTER

DIY TIPS

108 “When drilling or sanding a wall, use an envelope to catch falling dust so you don't have to clean it up afterward. Use painter’s tape to tape the open flap to the wall (with the envelope address side down) just below where you are working.”

– JOHN M.
OAKLAND, CA

DIY TIPS

109 “When troubleshooting issues under sinks, bathroom counters and other uncomfortable places, take a picture to see the area in detail instead of craning your neck and body.”

– MONIQUE G.
LOS ANGELES, CA

DIY TIPS

110 “To save car doors from damage by hitting walls (especially concrete walls), wrap a piece of 2x1 lumber or piping with $\frac{3}{4}$ ” pipe insulation, then cover with duct tape. Attach it to the wall at the point of impact when you open the door. It saves the paint on your car, especially in tight garages.”

– WILLIAM C.

DIY TIPS

111 “To keep a door from swinging fully open, take one of the door pins out and hit it with a hammer on a piece of wood to slightly bend it. Put the pin back in and the door will stay where you want it.”

– CYNTHIA J.
ASHEVILLE, NC

DIY TIPS

112 “Wear a magnetic band around your wrist when working on household projects. The band keeps all screws in one convenient place.”

– DIANA M.

DIY TIPS

113 “Snow blower chute getting clogged? Simply spray it with WD-40 thoroughly before starting.”

– PATRICIA S.
LAKEWOOD, CO

ORGANIZATION

114 “With so many things to look after, set reminders to do all those things that need to be done every month, season, etc. Spread these tasks out so they’re not overwhelming and they all get done.”

– CATHRYN B.
LINCOLN, NE

ORGANIZATION

115 “Set alarms on your cell phone to remind you to change filters, check smoke detectors, inspect crawl spaces, etc.”

– F. H.
HOUSTON, TX

ORGANIZATION

116 “Write down directions on index cards for maintenance on various items (water softener filter change, etc.)—things you do only occasionally. Put the index cards in plastic and attach them to the item.”

– ROSA H.

ORGANIZATION

117 “Start setting up a tool box. You will also need a toilet plunger, plumber’s snake and a generator. Also start an emergency kit and plan. Make a list, prioritize, take care of one thing a month. Involve household members.”

– LANE S.
DES MOINES, IA

ORGANIZATION

118 “Create a binder to track home expenses and homeowner to-do projects. Put a project a month on the calendar. Ex: Change furnace filter and smoke alarm batteries. At year end you’ll have expense receipts in one place and can easily reevaluate your budget for next year.”

– JOHN V.
CHICAGO, IL

ORGANIZATION

119 “Start a filing system to keep all receipts, tax information, proof and date of purchases for your house and other pertinent data. You will save yourself an immense amount of trouble and angst in the years to come!”

– EDWARD S.
VALPARAISO, IN

ORGANIZATION

120 “In a renovation or home build, take photos of each step, as well as where the wires are, plumbing, etc. This way if you ever decide to make changes you’ll know what’s behind the walls.”

– ROD M.
NORTH BETHESDA, MD

ORGANIZATION

121 “Keep a few basic tools (flat- and Phillips-head screwdrivers, pliers, etc.) on each floor of your house. That way you don’t have to run all over to get the tool needed for a simple task.”

– RICHARD V.
CATONSVILLE, MD

ORGANIZATION

122 “If you are remodeling a kitchen or bathroom, put an extra piece of 2x6 lumber horizontally where towel racks, toilet paper holder or gadget racks might go. This way you can screw them into solid wood and they will be able to handle years of use.”

– **DEBRA G.
E GREENWICH, RI**

PAINTING

123 “Before painting or caulking, work a liberal amount of hand cream into your hands and forearms, around your fingernails. Wipe off the excess with a towel. After you’re done, any paint comes off much more easily.”

– **ERIC R.
PHILADELPHIA, PA**

PAINTING

124 “Rather than spending a lot of time applying tape, keep a damp cloth handy when painting near molding. Get a little paint where it doesn’t belong? Quickly wipe it away! You’ll still want to cover floors or any areas that may be splattered by paint.”

– **JIM M.
SARASOTA, FL**

PAINTING

125 “When rearranging framed pictures on a painted wall, mix a bit of paint with putty to cover the previous nail hole.”

– **MAHMUDUL H.
JHENIDAH, BANGLADESH**

PAINTING

126 “If you’re going to paint rooms yourself, or even if hiring someone, spend the money on paint samples. Colors look different on your walls, and you’ll also have a small jar for touching up later.”

– JOE H. AND CATHY S.
SEATTLE, WA

PAINTING

127 “When buying paint, ask for a second label of the mix. Put the label on the top of a paint stirrer, write where the paint was used, and the store. Dip the stirrer in the paint, and after it dries hang it by a hook on a peg board.”

– ELINOR N.
SAUGERTIES, NY

PAINTING

128 “When opening a gallon of paint, get a flathead screwdriver and poke three to four holes in the rim, going around it. This eliminates paint from running down the side of the can and flying everywhere while putting the lid back on.”

– BILL AND GAE B.
PENSACOLA, FL



yard and garden

Home exterior maintenance

Gardening

Snow removal

Weatherproofing

Yardwork

GARDENING

128 “Plant herbs in pots and bring them in when it gets cold outside. You can return them outdoors when it gets warm.”

– **NANCY F.
PASADENA, CA**

GARDENING

129 “When planning your spring plantings, place water-loving plants in lower areas of your yard to take advantage of runoff and conserve water used at watering times.”

– **BEATRICE M.
SYLMAR, CA**

GARDENING

130 “Recycle your garden scraps into a compost bin. Over time, the good compost will become a welcome addition to your garden soil.”

– **M. AND LINDA M.
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL**

GARDENING

131 “To build your garden on a budget, buy perennials and add something new each year. Go to garden centers in fall when they may be selling perennials very cheap.”

– **BARRY B.
GEORGIA**

GARDENING

132 “If you are setting up a garden, combine native plants, which will thrive in local conditions and not require chemicals or lots of water, along with edibles, such as herbs, lettuces and broccoli.”

– **DAVID L.**

GARDENING

133 “Sprinkle coffee grounds around rose bushes to help them grow better.”

– **MICHAEL C.
TUCSON, AZ**

GARDENING

134 “Plant native perennial flowers to reduce water consumption and avoid chemicals on lawns, reduce mowing, etc. Planting shrubs, bushes and trees helps save on utility bills and attracts wildlife in the form of birds, butterflies and beneficial insects.”

– **VJ T.**

GARDENING

135 “Roses need pruning to stay healthy. Trim dead flowers just above a three-leaf junction. ”

– **JUERGEN M.
GERNSBACH IM SCHOENEN MURGTAL**

HOME EXTERIOR

136 “Use laundry detergent in a strong bleach solution to clean mildew and ‘green’ stuff off decks and exterior surfaces. An old broom and old shoes makes the work easier.”

– SANDRA H.

HOME EXTERIOR

138 “Keep tree limbs trimmed back from the roof. They can damage shingles and allow animals easy access.”

– WILLA K. AND STEVEN B.
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

HOME EXTERIOR

137 “Cut a laundry detergent bottle in the shape of a scoop to clean gutters.”

– ROBERT A.
BANGOR, ME

HOME EXTERIOR

139 “If you live in an area with trees, check that the street storm drain is not clogged with leaves, to prevent flooding.”

– JOHN O.
DURHAM, NC

HOME EXTERIOR

140 “Use a tube of exterior caulk on the outside of your home to seal cracks between trim, siding, window and door frames. Don’t forget to seal where pipes and cable wires enter into your house. This helps prevent moisture from getting inside your home’s walls.”

– JENNIFER P.
BELLEVILLE, IL

HOME EXTERIOR

141 “Keep gutters and downspouts clear, connected and functional to keep water from eroding the ground at the base of the house and leaking into the basement or eroding the foundation.”

– CATHERINE H.

SNOW REMOVAL

142 “Always have plenty of sidewalk salt on hand to keep from slipping and falling when ice forms on sidewalks and driveways after you remove the snow from them. Use pet-friendly salt.”

– BAHOKEN LYDIA A.

SNOW REMOVAL

143 “Mark the perimeter of your driveway with snow markers to protect your lawn and shrubs. They are reflective, which helps when clearing your driveway in the dark. Put them in the ground before it freezes.”

– DANNY M.
KNOXVILLE, TN

SNOW REMOVAL

144 “Be sure to clear each snowfall all the way to the edge of the pavement starting with the first one. If you don’t, you may find the walkable and drivable surface narrowing each time.”

– **ARLENE M.**
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

WEATHERPROOFING

145 “Before winter comes and it’s still a warm fall day, put the summer garden hose on an outside deck to soften in the sun. Then the hose will curl easily for storage until you need again come spring.”

– **LOUIE M.**

WEATHERPROOFING

146 “Remove screens and wash them with a hose and store them for winter. Your windows will let in more light, then they are ready for spring.”

– **JOYCE M.**
CHAMPAIGN, IL

WEATHERPROOFING

147 “If you have lawn sprinklers, be sure they are turned off and the lines blown out before the first hard freeze. I have seen pipes and valves split by water freezing in them.”

– **MATT C.**
HANOVER, PA

YARD

148 “When putting together or repairing a drip system for my yard, dipping the end of the tubing in hot water makes it a whole lot easier to insert it onto the connectors.”

– **MOSES D.**
DENVER, CO

YARD

150 “Get a lawn mower that mulches grass and leaves as you mow and deposits them back into the ground. That adds nutrients to the soil. No raking is an added bonus!”

– **PENNI M.**
DAYTON, OH

YARD

149 “Find out where your water, power and gas lines are in your yard, and draw a map that you can save. This makes planting trees, starting a garden or putting in a fence easier and safer in the future.”

– **CAROL L.**
HARTFORD, CT

YARD

151 “Make sure to get your yard ready for winter. Clean up all plant debris, pull any weeds and add mulch to protect your plants from water and temperature fluctuations.”

– **CARA S.**
FARMERS BRANCH, TX

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

152 “Seal around windows and doors in the fall to keep out the cold. Need help finding where air is coming in? Look for spiderwebs. Spiders love to place their webs near moving air, so if you find one, it’s a pretty good sign you’ve got an air leak there.”

– JOAN AND FRANK R.
ROCK ISLAND, IL

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

153 “Test your air conditioning unit in spring so if there are any issues to address, you can do so before you need it up and running in summer.”

– STEVEN K.
CENTRAL, SC

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

154 “Use (and properly program) a programmable thermostat for the heating system. It reduces energy usage and cost.”

– KEITH L.
FOUNTAIN VALLEY, CA

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

155 “When leaving your home for any length of time, turn your thermostat down for heat or up for air conditioning at least 5 or more degrees.”

– MARY ELLEN N.
SAVANNAH, GA

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

156 “Ask your electric provider for their rate schedule. By running your washer, dryer, dishwasher, heat and air conditioning during low hours you can make a significant difference in your bill.”

– **SUSAN K.
SANTA CRUZ, CA**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

157 “Check the insulation in your attic and install more if needed.”

– **GARY W.
FRANKTOWN, CO**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

158 “Always check or replace all weatherstripping on all outside doors as well as basement doors that lead into the house.”

– **DOREEN C.
PFLUGERVILLE, TX**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

159 “Replace window blinds with room-darkening shades made of thick vinyl. They block so much of the sun that rooms do not heat up and the air conditioner does not run as much. This can lower your electric bill.”

– **HABITAT SUPPORTER**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

160 “Use overhead room fans, which circulate air so that heat and cooling moves around evenly. They also make room air seem fresher. Heat/cooling units can run less with room fans on. Adjust fans to blow air down in summer and up in winter.”

– **ROBERT M.**
FARMINGTON, MI

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

161 “Replace all your lightbulbs with LED bulbs. They last longer and can reduce your electric bill. ”

– **SANDRA S.**
LIDO BEACH, NY

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

162 “Put foam sealers behind all of your plugs and switches to stop air drafts or leaks.”

– **MATT T.**
CRYSTAL LAKE, IL

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

163 “Take a moist paper towel and force it gently through the edges of windows that have air coming through. When the paper towel dries it becomes temporary caulk.”

– **VERENA G.**
NEWNAN, GA

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

164 “If you have a small yard, mow it with a reel mower. No motor, no gas, no noise, and they’re comparatively inexpensive. Plus you get some exercise.”

– **CURT L.**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

165 “Caulk all windows to minimize draft. Wrap insulation foam around hot water pipes to conserve heat. Replace worn weatherstripping around exterior doors to prevent draft.”

– **BRIAN G.
GLENWOOD, IL**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

166 “Replacing the door sweeps on exterior doors saves energy and keeps dust out.”

– **THERESA L.
FORT MYERS, FL**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

167 “Attend events held by energy providers. They often give away energy-saving products such as light bulbs, weatherstripping and water-saving showerheads.”

– **CATHERINE R.
CANON CITY, CO**

SAVING WATER

168 “Install a dual-flush toilet. It could cut your water use significantly. A person with moderate DIY skills can do the install.”

– **WILLIAM J.
MIAMI, FL**

SAVING WATER

169 “When running hot water, instead of letting cold water that first comes out go down the drain, collect it in plastic milk cartons to water plants, fill a bird bath, pour in pets’ water bowls and fill the toilet water tank after flushing.”

– **NICOLE P.**

