Exterior renovations that improve curb appeal

Neglecting a home’s exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home’s appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers’ perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added value, as determined by the 2019 “Cost vs. Value Report” from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

Garage door replacement
Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of $3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

Manufactured stone veneer
Replacing a portion of vinyl siding with stone veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

Wood deck addition
A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners’ ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners’ initial investment.

Siding replacement
Not only does old or weathered siding look unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly — at roughly $16,000 — it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

New entry door
Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn’t all about good looks, either. A door that isn’t well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.

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How to level an uneven yard

Many things can cause a yard to be uneven. Drainage problems, leaky pipes beneath the grass and pests can wreak havoc on a yard, resulting in uneven turf that can be both unsightly and unsafe.

Addressing an uneven yard might be homeowners’ ultimate goal, but the home experts at BobVila.com note that homeowners should first figure out what’s causing the problem and make fixing that their first task. Fixing uneven ground above leaky pipes will only be a temporary fix if the leaks themselves are not addressed. Professional contractors might be necessary depending on what’s causing the problem. However, once the underlying issue has been addressed, many homeowners can handle the task of leveling an uneven yard on their own.

Get the right tools and materials. Leveling an uneven yard may require various tools. Thatch will likely need to be removed from the lawn before it can be leveled out, so homeowners will need a thatch rake or dethatching machine to get this task started. Dethatching machines are generally necessary for especially large lawns, and these can typically be rented from home improvement retailers. A shovel, bow rake and push broom are other tools homeowners will likely need. Materials such as topsoil, compost and sand will be necessary as well, and these are typically sold at local garden centers.

Fill in areas beneath the grass. Areas beneath the grass can be filled in with a mixture of sand, topsoil and compost. The experts at BobVila.com advise using two parts sand, two parts topsoil and one part compost. Each of these components plays its own role in restoring the yard to full health. Sand helps the ground stay level, while the topsoil and compost provide the grass with valuable nutrients. If the low spots are not especially deep, this mixture can be applied without removing the grass. However, before filling in holes when addressing spots that are deeper than two or three inches, remove the grass then place it back in place once the hole has been filled. To dig up the grass, put the blade of the shovel at the outside of the low spot before sliding it under about two or three inches so you do not upset the grass roots.

Spread the top dressing. Once the holes have been filled and the grass has been placed back on the ground (if it was removed), spread the top dressing mix with a shovel. The mix should be spread evenly with the back of the bow rake at a depth of no more than half an inch. Make sure the mix is worked into the low spots and that it’s not completely covering the grass, as that will suffocate the lawn. If necessary, use the push broom to work the mix into the soil.

Water the lawn. Finally, water the lawn to help the top dressing settle into the grass. If necessary, repeat the process of applying top dressing and watering until the lawn is even and has returned to full strength.

An uneven lawn is an eyesore and potentially harmful. But fixing an uneven lawn is simple once homeowners discover and address what’s behind the issue.

Fix wet spots in the landscape

Grass that is greener than green coupled with perfectly manicured shrubs set the tone for impressive curb appeal. Creating such landscapes requires hard work, and while doing such work, homeowners may find they have to contend with certain issues that are adversely affecting their lawns and gardens.

Wetness in a landscape is one problem many homeowners encounter. Wet areas in a lawn not only become muddy and messy, but they also can cause permanent damage to the grass. Puddles can kill the roots, while wet spots can freeze and damage the lawn. Particularly problematic spots can remain soggy for days, while some people find their yards are seemingly always wet.

Wet spots can be caused by various factors. Compacted soil may prohibit adequate drainage, as can heavy clay or less porous soil materials. Landscape grading issues may be another concern. Neighbors who have home downspouts that extend into their yards may be pushing roof water into other areas, contributing to puddles and problems.

Understanding what is causing the issue makes it easier to treat. Heavy, compacted soil can be aerated and amended with sand and compost. Tilling the soil and mixing in these soil additions may help prevent further drainage issues.

Homeowners may need to have their property professionally regraded to alleviate wet issues. Otherwise, the installation of a drainage system may be necessary. An underground trench or pipe can redirect water from wet areas to sewers. (Check with local municipalities about the legality of draining water properly.) Another potential solution is to build up low-lying areas that collect water with soil.

Homeowners who want the path of least resistance may consider embracing the wet spot of their landscape by turning it into a man-made pond. Lining a pond and installing an air pump will help circulate the water and keep it from becoming a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Water issues in a landscape can be a tough nut to crack. But identifying the problem can help homeowners resolve soggy lawns and landscapes.
This design trend is coming back

Wood paneling can add a rustic feel to a bathroom.

Design trends come and go, but some have a funny way of resurfacing years after they first became popular. Homeowners who may have been considering renovating their home to remove a design element they believe to be passé might want to see if that feature has experienced a resurgence in popularity. In fact, one of the more derided home decor trends of yesteryear has slowly crept back into style, albeit in moderation.

Wood paneling is back and better than ever, advise many design professionals. It’s the formerly ugly duckling that filled homes starting in the 1950s, creating drab dens and faux-wood family rooms. Paneling had long been an element of choice because it is relatively easy to install and can camouflage problem walls in a home, like those covered in boisterous wallpaper prints.

Wood paneling reach the peak of its popularity in the 1970s, and since then homeowners have been tearing down these faux offenders for years or masking them in paint to brighten up spaces. However, the experts at Apartment Therapy report that wood paneling in shades of brown are making a comeback in cozy spots such as dens or studies. The warm tones of wood paneling elicit a retro vibe. But unlike their fake predecessors, today’s paneled walls are being outfitted in real wood, making them more eco-friendly and stylish than ever before.

Designers have flocked to reclaimed wood and veneer panelings to incorporate them into design elements. And while wood paneling used to be hung vertically, designers now experiment with hanging paneling. Many people no longer use paneling to cover an entire space. Paneling is used sparingly as an accent wall or another feature for character. Wood walls can be stained in a rich mahogany to look upscale or be weathered and rustic.

Homeowners ready to re-embrace wood paneling can choose to enhance one wall in a room. Think about the space above a fireplace or a strip of wall behind a sitting chair and side table. Paneling also can serve as a headboard behind a bed in a master suite. Painted horizontally, paneling can add dimension and texture to walls, even in a bathroom. Wood paneling is slowly making a comeback, proving that no design trend every truly goes away.

Need Help With That Down Payment?

If your income is less than the amount listed on the chart below and you have not owned a home in the last three years and you want to purchase in Allen County, you may qualify to earn up to $6,000 for a down payment on a home in the City of Lima and you may be eligible for limited funds in areas outside of the City.

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House POWERWASHING TIPS

Powerwashing the exterior of the home can be an effective way to clean it in the spring and fall.

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home’s exterior.

### Did you know?

Carpet can add warmth and texture to a room and also provide a little bit of soundproofing. Underfoot, carpeting can be more comfortable than other types of flooring, even though it may require more upkeep. Carpet comes in various forms, but here are the main material components.

- **Nylon**: This is one of the most durable and stain-resistant carpet fibers available and a popular choice among many homeowners.
- **Polyester**: Carpeting can be made from polyester, which is fashioned to feel and look luxurious.
- **Olefin**: Olefin is made from polypropylene or polyethylene. It is prized for its strength, resistance to staining and colorfastness. It is often suited well to loop pile or high, dense cut piles.
- **Wool**: Wool is durable, albeit less resistant to soiling than some other materials. However, because it is an all-natural material, it is prized by people who want natural beauty.

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New Price!

**4145 Bussert Rd, Elida**  
No reason to build now! This could just be the place you’ve been dreaming to own. Single story home sitting on nearly 3 acres of land. This home welcomes you with an open floor plan, and cathedral ceiling. The 3 bedrooms and 2 and 1/2 bath house has 1944 sq ft space, and also includes geothermal heating/cooling system and a full basement with 9 foot ceilings. Open patio out back to enjoy the country setting, with plenty of room to expand to suit your needs.

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**2172 Lyn Grove, Lima**  
Well kept brick ranch home on large lot with fenced in backyard. Many updates including newly renovated bathroom with Italian marble floor, new carpet, new on demand water heater in 2015, new sump pumps in 2018, some new windows, and a new roof in 2014 as well. Home was switched from electric heat to gas in 2014 and new AC and furnace installed. Screened in back porch for relaxing.
Prepare your deck for winter

Homeowners often take steps to winterize the interior of their homes in the weeks before winter’s arrival, but such efforts should extend to the outside of a home as well.

Decks make for great gathering places when the weather permits. Decks are where many people spend their free time and eat their meals come spring and summer, when the temperatures climb and the sun sets well into the evening. But as summer turns to fall, homeowners must take measures to protect their decks from potentially harsh winter weather.

Inspect the deck for problems. Decks tend to be used more often in summer than any other time of year. That makes fall and early winter an ideal time to inspect for wear and tear and any additional issues that may have cropped up throughout the summer. Damaged boards and loose handrails should be fixed before winter arrives, especially for homeowners who plan to use their decks in winter. Fixing such issues in winter and even into spring may be difficult thanks to harsh conditions, so make good use of the relatively calm autumn weather to fix any issues on the deck.

Clear the deck of potted plants. Even homeowners who intend to use their decks in winter should remove potted plants from the deck in the fall. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that moisture can get trapped between deck boards and plastic, wood or ceramic containers in cold weather, and that can contribute to mildew, discoloration or decay.

Store unnecessary furniture. Homeowners who like to sit on their decks in winter will no doubt want to leave some furniture out over the winter. But those with lots of furniture for entertaining guests can likely move the majority of that furniture into a garage or shed for the winter. HGTV notes that doing so will prevent the potential formation of blemishes on the deck that can result from inconsistent weathering.

Remove snow, but do so carefully. Prolonged contact with snow and ice can damage a deck. As a result, homeowners should clear snow from their decks when accumulation is significant. HGTV recommends using a snow blower on the deck to avoid scarring. If a shovel must be used, push snow with the planks to reduce the risk of damaging the deck.

Homeowners who take steps to protect their decks throughout the winter months can ensure these popular areas are ready once entertaining season returns in the spring.
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Prevent growth of mold/mildew in colder months

 Mold and mildew are not only unsightly, but unhealthy. These fungi grow readily in damp areas and are found in the air breathed both indoors and outside. If left unaddressed, mold and mildew can threaten the health of a home’s inhabitants.

Mildew is a type of mold that remains relatively flush with the surface it grows on. Other molds can grow puffy in appearance. Molds serve the purpose of destroying organic materials, but in high amounts, these microorganisms can cause respiratory problems, sinus congestion, throat irritation, headaches, and other issues, particularly when mold grows unchecked indoors, says Better Homes and Gardens. As a result, it is essential to address mold before it becomes problematic.

According to Polygon, a drying technology and temporary climate solutions company, the wet season in winter is when molds often grow and expand. Mold can break down the integrity and strength of the surfaces where it grows.

Homeowners can employ the following strategies to prevent mold growth.

• Keep all surfaces clean, using proper cleaning products. Diluted bleach solutions are highly effective at killing microscopic fungi, viruses, and bacteria.
• Reduce moisture and humidity by ensuring sufficient air circulation in rooms, particularly bathrooms and kitchens. An exhaust fan will help remove moisture quickly.
• Fabrics covered in mildew that can be laundered should be carefully removed and washed in chlorine bleach and hot water. An oxygen bleach product also can be effective.
• Invest in a dehumidifier that can reduce moisture in the home in problem areas, such as damp basements or garages.
• Fix plumbing leaks as soon as possible.
• Remove damp leaves and snow from areas around the foundation of the home. Ensure that gutters and downspouts are clear of debris and can shuttle water away from the house effectively.
• Replace cracked or defective mortar in basements.
• Make sure all seals on windows and doors are not compromised and are in good working condition.
• Be sure an HVAC in-line humidifier is adjusted to the right setting and isn’t pumping too much moisture into the heated air; otherwise, the added humidity can contribute to mold.
• If there is a flood or water infiltrates a home in other ways, hire a professional service to help clean and dry the home effectively.

Mold and mildew are problematic, but with diligence they can be kept at bay.

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