

This Old House

OOPS!
12 Classic
DIY
Disasters
P. 82

**Cut energy costs,
keep the
comfort**

pellet stoves, denim insulation,
and 8 more ways to save

Get a warm glow
from CFLs
P. 33

5 great stories:

Draft-proof your windows (P. 47)

Add a ceiling medallion (P. 61)

Vintage-look kitchen (P. 23)

Get cash for your trash (P. 43)

Handsaw know-how (P. 53)

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PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT) SUSAN SEUBERT; MIKE JENSEN; ANTHONY FIELD



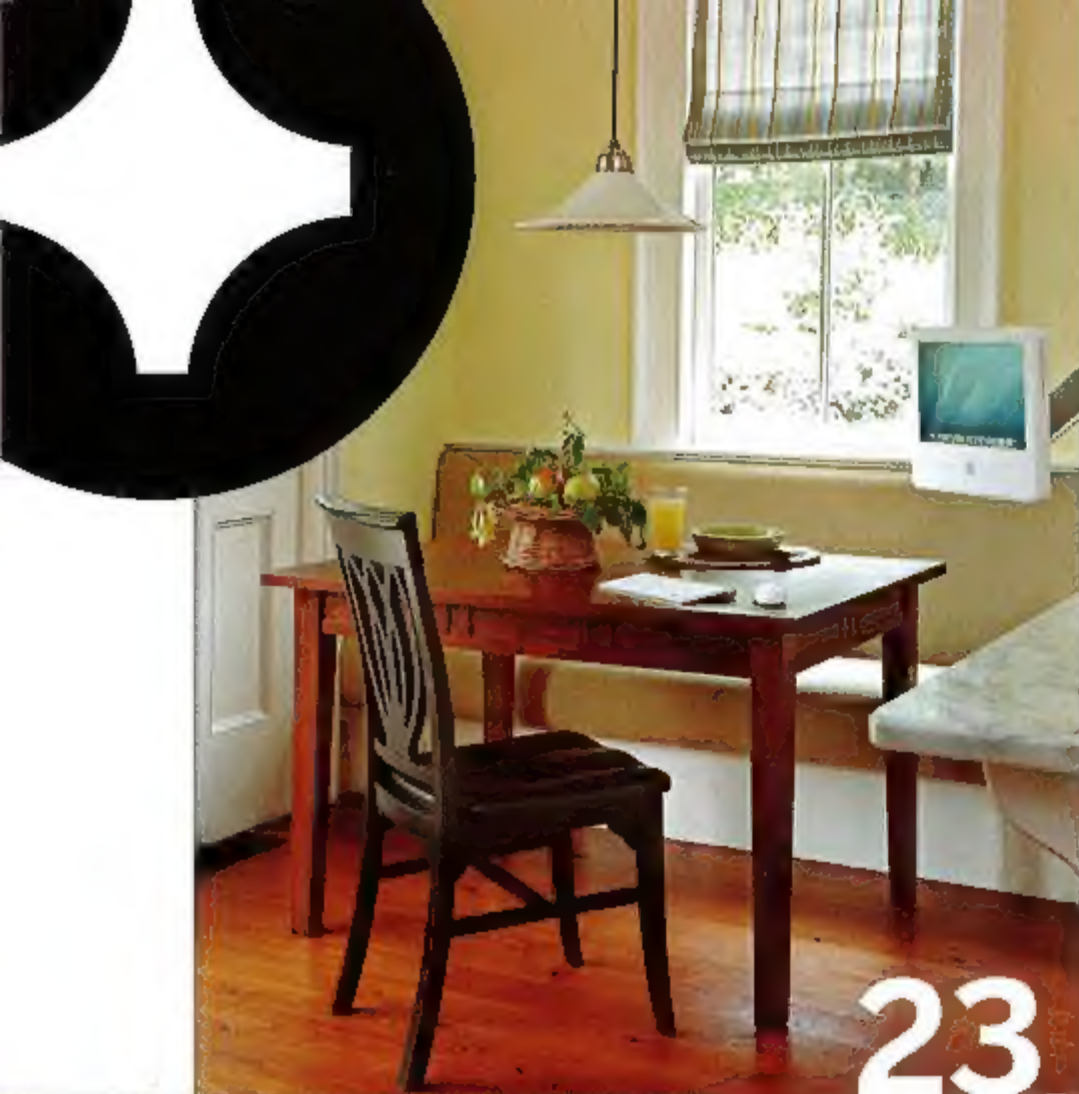
Once a run-of-the-mill backyard, this garden now supports the local ecosystem and is nearly self-sustaining.



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PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) TRIA GIOVANNI; KRISTINE LARSEN; ANTONIO ACHILLO; EDG. ANTHONY TIEULI; MENDELL T. WEBBER

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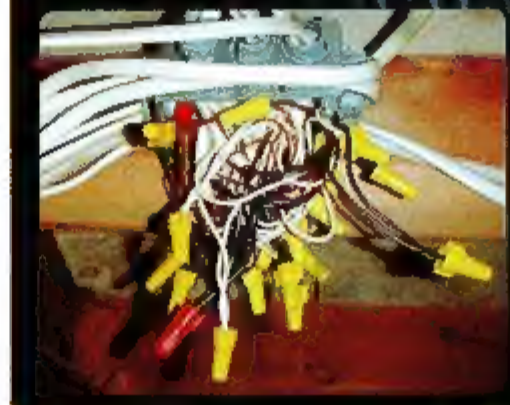
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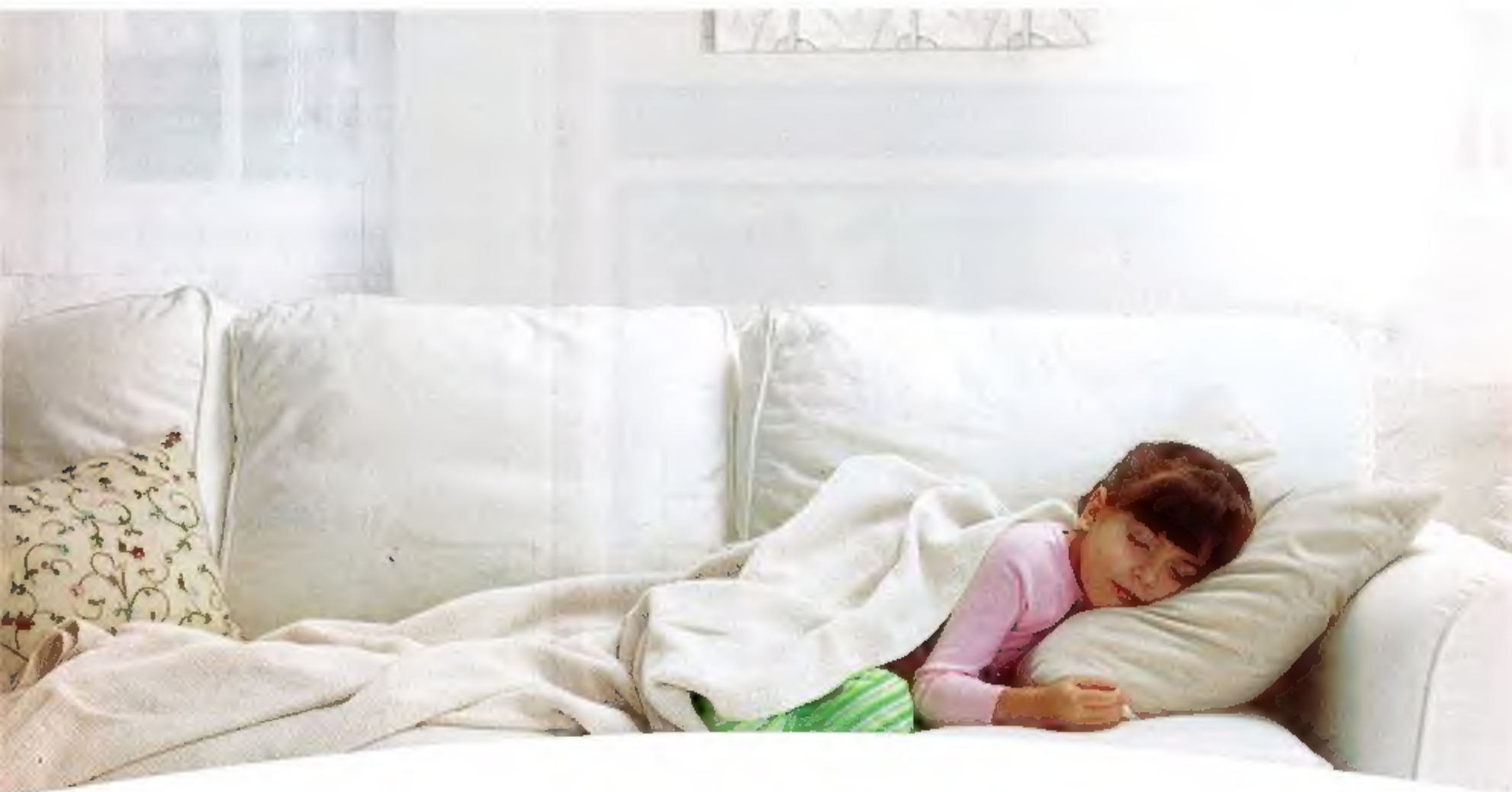


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letter FROM THIS OLD HOUSE

Useful Stuff, Free for the Taking

"I WISH YOU HADN'T," my wife said.

But it was too late. I already had. Again.

I was standing in the rain, holding my cell phone in the same hand as my umbrella, which I was struggling to keep over my head. With my other hand I was clutching a 30-pound paint-caked plaster ceiling medallion I'd just found atop someone's garbage can. "How often do you find something from when Grover Cleveland was president that's free for the taking?" I said, before the rain-slicked phone shot out of my hand like a bar of soap. I couldn't hear my wife's response, let alone see her, but I knew she was wearing that all-too-familiar expression of exasperation—the one I'm always causing when I garbage-pick stuff we don't need. Stuff like an old cake display case from a bakery, a rum cask, a railroad lantern, and the odds and ends that fill a wall of boxes in the guest room. You know, what the exasperated might call junk.

But this medallion was special. And I knew the perfect place for it. When I got home, I climbed the ladder to hold it up to the ceiling in the foyer so that my wife could judge its proportions. That's when the medallion slipped. I grabbed at it, and by blind luck my hand went through its center hole. Safe, I thought, a millisecond before the sheer weight of the giant plaster doughnut on my outstretched arm yanked me off the ladder. Miraculously, in some Mr. Magoo fashion, I landed on my feet, the medallion wholly intact.

Later, I began removing the 120 years of paint that coated the ornament. As the layers came off, details revealed themselves: an inner ring of plump peaches and strawberries spilling out of a cornucopia, an outer one of a vine laden with grapes. It was beautiful. And—once I took Aleve for my arm pain—worth my efforts. Of course, my wife will tell you that's only because I am what she refers to as a kook. I cannot argue with that, but I will say there is another way to install a medallion, and it doesn't require dislocating an arm. You'll find the instructions on page 61. Check it out. If you don't, your significant other might just say, "I wish you had."

Scott Omelianuk

SCOTT OMELIANUK
EDITOR



The editor in his guest room-turned-storage space for all his trashing-picking, Dumpster-diving finds.

Three useful things I learned from this month's TOH

How to use **CFLs** without looking like a Martian. P. 33

How wood pellets and **blue jeans** can cut your energy bills. P. 86

How **chickens** can save your backyard, the environment, and a few bucks a week on eggs. P. 76

Bargain Savvy

I read your article on cheap kitchen remodeling ["We Redid Our Kitchen for \$6,000," June], and I have my own story to share. I went on Craigslist and found used but high-quality cabinets, granite countertops, and a stainless-steel stove, and I got a microwave and undermount sink on eBay. My husband and I are going to do all the work ourselves. After all's said and done, we'll have a high-end kitchen remodel of our 1980s melamine kitchen—along with a new bay window!—for under \$7,000. How's that for frugal?

ANNETTE MOORE, BERKLEY, MASS.

Pool School

Your article on pool maintenance ["Swamp Thing," July/August] failed to mention that mixing certain chemicals is dangerous. Some are made of calcium hypochlorite, sodium dichloroisocyanuric acid, or trichloroisocyanuric acid. Certain tablets can even contain bromine and methyl alcohol. These chemicals are not always compatible! At best they can off-gas hydrochloric acid and cyanide; at worst they can kill you.

If you're a new homeowner and don't know which chemicals the last owner used to maintain the pool, call in a pro to have the water tested or to drain it and start over. But don't just guess and assume it will be okay.

MERL GRAMLICH, BYE-MAIL

The Wrong Stuff

I read with special interest about the reader who found old newspapers in the walls of his house [Around the House, June]. I found I had old newspapers stuffed in the walls of my attic the hard way. I was sweating a joint in my water-heating system when the wall burst into flames. The torch had found a crack in the molding and ignited the paper. The wallboard was low-density fiberboard, and the fire spread as if I had gunpowder in the walls. Fortunately, I'd installed an AC duct across the attic ceiling in the space between the rafters and insulated

it with fiberglass. This acted as a firebreak, and the prompt arrival of the fire department helped save my house.

I'd urge those who are remodeling or buying an old house to check for newspapers in the walls. They're not just a curiosity; they can be a serious fire hazard.

PHILIP BRANDT, BRONX, N.Y.

In Defense of Contractors

As a contractor, I just wanted to respond to "I Want to Be in the Cheapskate Hall of Fame" [June]. I like the idea of homeowners being knowledgeable about building materials and prices, but sometimes the materials they want me to use are of such poor quality that I have to refuse the job. Would you take parts you bought at an auto-supply discount store to a car dealer and say, "Your prices are too high. Can you use my parts instead?" I'm not suggesting that homeowners shouldn't be allowed to provide any materials. But you must understand the contractor's side of the story. We want to do the job right and use quality materials.

JAKE DALY, UPPER DARBY, PA.

H₂ Whoa

Thanks for "Let Us Spray" [July/August]. Great information! Worth mentioning, though, is that most hoses have warnings on the packaging that effectively say, "This product contains chemicals known to the state of California to cause cancer. Do not use for drinking water. Wash hands after handling." What?! We can't drink from the hose? How many consumers read the fine print? And where can I find a hose worthy of a long drink on a hot summer's day?

CATHERINE E., FLAGSTAFF, ARIZ.



The editors reply: No one—least of all thirsty DIYers—should go without safe drinking water. Teknor Apex and Gilmour are two companies that sell marine and recreation hoses that are manufactured with FDA-approved material and safe to drink from.

No-Hassle Hose

Thanks for Norm Abram's tips on coiling garden hoses [Norm's Notebook, July/August]. Another variation that I use is to lay my hose on the ground in a figure-8 pattern (as shown below). With each twist generated on one side, you create a twist in the opposite direction on the other side for a "net-zero twist."

The hose takes up a little more space this way, but you'll find that it's blissfully twist- and kink-free when you go back to pull it off the pile.

BRAD MEYERS, MILILANI, HAWAII



correction

"Let Us Spray," Toolbox, July/August, p. 80: The 100-foot Osmile soaker hose sells for \$51, not \$30. It is for sale through amleo.com.

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EDITED BY DEBORAH SNOONIAN

▶ Little Devils

Dress up your gutters and gardens with these medieval monsters

"All attempts at explanation are foredoomed to failure," wrote the late art historian Émile Mâle of those "monstrous fauna of the cathedrals," otherwise known as gargoyles. The spooky creatures, which seem especially relevant this time of year, were first used to decorate the drain spouts of 13th-century churches (gargoyle comes from the French word *gargouille*, meaning throat or pipe), and history's best guess is that their sinister stances were meant to scare away evil spirits. Today you can find gargoyles in all shapes and sizes to shunt water away from your house's foundation or, if you prefer, to keep a watchful eye over your yard (where they're more accurately known as grotesques). Call them whatever you like—we can't think of a better way to give trick-or-treaters a freak show.

- 1 Resin Apex, Winged Dragon Sculptural Roof Cresting, 16 1/2 inches high, \$99; design toscano.com
- 2 Copper Conductor Head, 11 inches high, \$910; acgentry.com
- 3 Resin Solar Night Guardian Garden Statue, 16 1/2 inches high, \$120; exterior-accents.com
- 4 Copper Lion ornamental downspout, 2 1/2 inches high, \$96; guttersupply.com
- 5 Fiberglass resin Cornerstone Sconce, 15 inches high, \$124; elementsofhome.com
- 6 Resin Roland Sculptural Downspout, 6 inches high, \$20; design toscano.com

PHOTO: ANTONIO SCHILLER



Decoding Green Labels

Most of us recognize the Energy Star logo used on high-efficiency appliances and electronics, but these days many labels on home products claim efficiency and eco-saintliness. They tell you a lot about what you're getting—if you can get past the fine print, that is. Here's our summary of a few popular ones. —EMILY GERTZ

LABEL	WHO'S BEHIND IT	WHAT IT MEANS
 usgbc.org/LEED	The U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit group whose members are architects, contractors, and building professionals.	Homes or buildings that are LEED-certified are built or renovated according to benchmarks for energy efficiency, waste reduction, and other criteria. They're given a rating of certified, silver, gold, or platinum based on how many benchmarks are achieved. Note that building products and materials do not qualify for LEED certification, a common misconception.
 fsc.org	The Forest Stewardship Council, a nonprofit group whose members include foresters, activists, and native peoples in countries where wood is harvested.	Auditors assess how a forest or mill is managed against quality standards set by the FSC; if certified, wood can be sold with the FSC label. Using lumber that bears the label means forests weren't harmed to make your ceiling joists or subflooring.
 greenseal.org	Green Seal, a nonprofit group that brings together research institutions and experts from around the world to evaluate green products.	Green Seal-certified products, which include paints, floor strippers, windows, and doors, are audited against scientific standards to determine that they have less environmental impact than noncertified products. The group evaluates products across their entire life cycle, from raw material to manufacture, use, and disposal or recycling.
 buildinggreen.com/menus	BuildingGreen, a company that publishes information about efficient building practices. Their publications carry no advertising and are not sponsored by industries or manufacturers.	The GreenSpec Guide for homes is a directory of products that have been evaluated against 26 environmental standards. Products fit into one of five broad categories, including those made with recycled content or that avoid toxic emissions. BuildingGreen aims for the directory to list "the top 5 to 10 percent of environmentally preferable products."
 epa.gov/watersense	The Environmental Protection Agency, in partnership with retailers, manufacturers, utilities, and government agencies.	Fixtures and irrigation systems that carry the WaterSense label are about 20 percent more water-efficient than nonlabeled products, while functioning as well as or better than them.



READER TIP



Snakes Clear Gutter Clogs

"One of my gutters stops up sometimes, and when it does, I send a plumber's snake up into the downspout to break up the debris. When I pull out the snake, the debris flushes away easily with the water that has built up behind the clog. Works every time!"

—ANGELO SABATINO, MONROE, CONN.

Send Us Your Tips

Submit your favorite tips to Around the House at thisoldhouse.com/tips

DID YOU KNOW?



Stylish Fixtures That Save Energy

Sure, you can save a few bucks by putting CFLs into your lamp sockets. But did you know you can get hardwired fixtures that come with an Energy Star qualification? Designed to use pin-mounted CFLs, which cost about the same as the screw-in kind, these fixtures use a whopping 75 percent less energy than those made for incandescents. And they come with two-year warranties—double the industry standard. Bonus: The qualification is based on more than just efficiency. The lights must also be free of those annoying flickers, buzzes, and hums that have plagued fluorescent-based fixtures in the past. Similarly, the lights are required to give off a warm and yellowish glow, just like your chandelier of yore. —NATALIE RODRIGUEZ

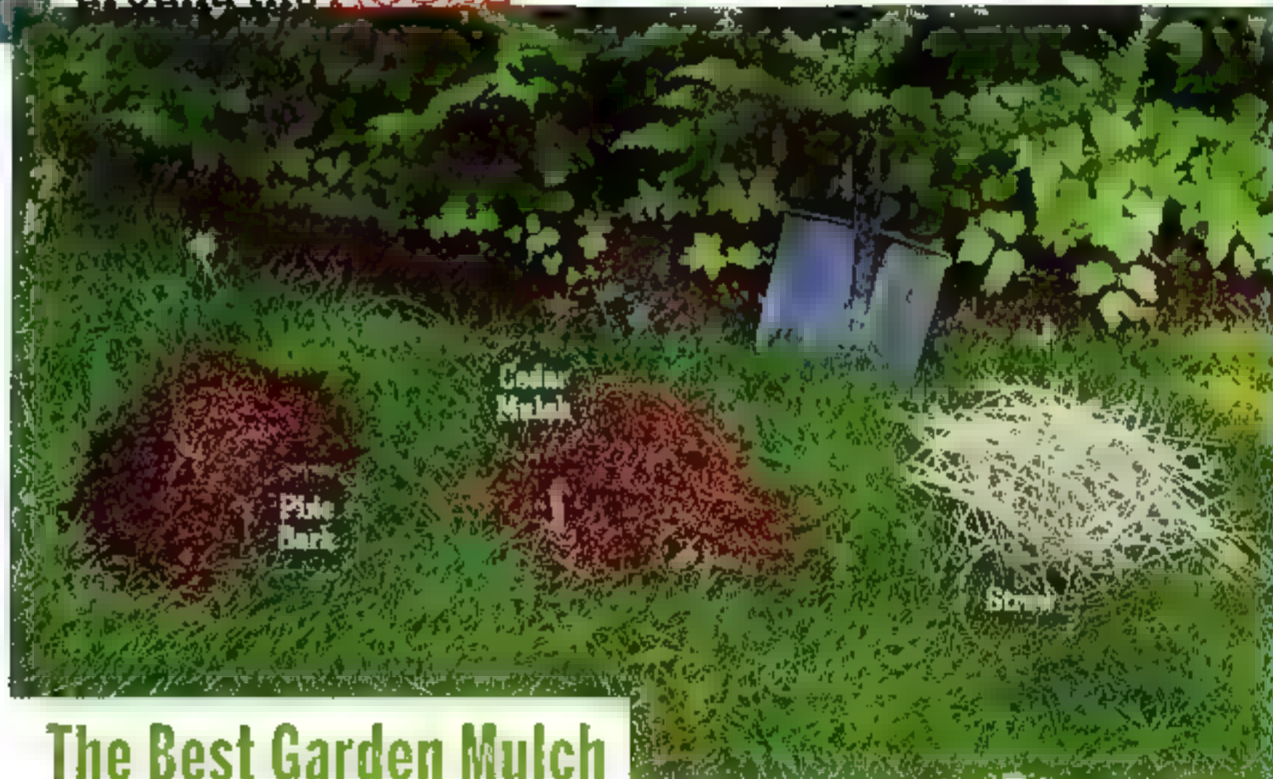


You popped in for a gallon of paint.
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Floor Shown: BR-111™ Maduro Chestnut #238548, model #TRENGMC3, Paint color shown: Valspar® 5005-3C Jekyll Grand Dining Sea Mist and 4007-4A Magnet Dapple, Rug: Allen+Roth Perth Bay Natural #279223, model: 64378, Pendant: Portfolio Lighting 19" Brushed Nickel, SOS #93188, model #B178, Lamp: Crystal Lamp #277245, Mirror: Jamestown 33 1/2" x 45 1/2" Black Mirror #239694, Drapery: Simsbury Tan Panel #293593, Drapery Rod: Allen+Roth Brushed Nickel Triumphant #275133, Blinds: Allen+Roth Premium Wood Blinds in Cameo with Black Tape #179754, model #404. For the store nearest you, call 1-800-993-4416. © 2008 by Lowe's. All rights reserved. Lowe's and the gable design are registered trademarks of LF, LLC.



The Best Garden Mulch

Three Substitutes for Disappearing Cypress

Mulch made from cypress is a favorite of gardeners for its long life and sweet smell—but you may have trouble finding it this fall. Wal-Mart has stopped selling it because of concerns that companies are clear-cutting forests to make mulch instead of using scraps from furniture production. And Lowe's won't stock the stuff that's harvested from moist forests south of Interstate 10, where the hurricane-prone Gulf Coast relies on cypress trees to absorb runoff and prevent flooding. So how to protect beds and newly planted shrubs from the coming cold? Roger Swain, former TV host of *The Victory Garden*, says many other mulches work just as well, and some break down faster to nourish your soil. Stock up now and apply them when it gets chilly, but before the ground freezes. —KEITH PANDOLF

PINE BARK: Acid-loving plants like azaleas and holly will get a boost from low-pH pine bark. It's available in many forms, including nuggets, pellets, and shreds or chips.

CEDAR MULCH: Cypress and cedar have many similar properties, and cedar mulch is one of the cheapest on the market. Bonus: It keeps bugs away naturally.

STRAW: Save your scarecrow! Straw breaks down fast and doesn't have weed seeds, making it ideal for covering vegetable gardens. It consumes nitrogen as it decomposes, so apply fertilizer next spring if you use it.



TGH WRITERS

AS GREEN AS IT GETS

In his new book *Almost Green: How I Saved 1/6th of a Billionth of the Planet*, writer and *This Old House* contributor James Glave asks this fundamental question: Can an SUV-driving suburbanite with a modest salary achieve—and afford—the green lifestyle? As you might expect, the answers are neither clear nor simple. Glave's efforts begin with the construction of an "eco-shed" office for himself, with a more-than-adequate (you'd think) \$50,000 budget. In building it, the author must navigate conflicting advice from a slew of green contractors whose belief systems run the gamut from practical sustainability to eco-evangelism. For anyone concerned about the health of our planet, *Almost Green* is an amusing and instructive tale of Glave's sometimes futile attempts to curb his impact.

—KEITH PANDOLF



HOME SAFETY

A Reliable Lead Test You Can Do at Home

Testing your house for lead just got as easy as a trip to the hardware store. An over-the-counter kit called LeadCheck recently passed muster with the EPA, which says the results are more reliable than at-home tests of the past. Instead of sending a paint chip to a lab (once the only way to get an accurate reading), you simply squeeze the tube that holds the LeadCheck testing swab, swipe it along the painted surface, and wait about 30 seconds: if it turns red, you've got a problem. With five in every seven homes built before 1978 containing lead paint, it's a small price to pay for knowing whether your house is safe. \$30, leadcheck.com

NATALIE RODRIGUEZ

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KITCHEN DESIGN



A pot rack keeps cookware out of the way, within easy reach. Made of brass, it looks at home in the Victorian-era house.

Baking supplies are stored under the island. The cool marble top is perfect for rolling out dough.

LEFT The kitchen went from slapped together and outdated (inset BELOW) to light, bright, and in keeping with the home's Victorian style. Traditional soapstone and marble cover the counters. Cabinets are painted wood with flat-panel and glass doors. Touches of stainless steel update the look.



Old Fashion, New Function

>> Replacing a poorly built 1960s kitchen gave this Queen Anne home the cooking space it deserved—one with Victorian style and 21st-century convenience

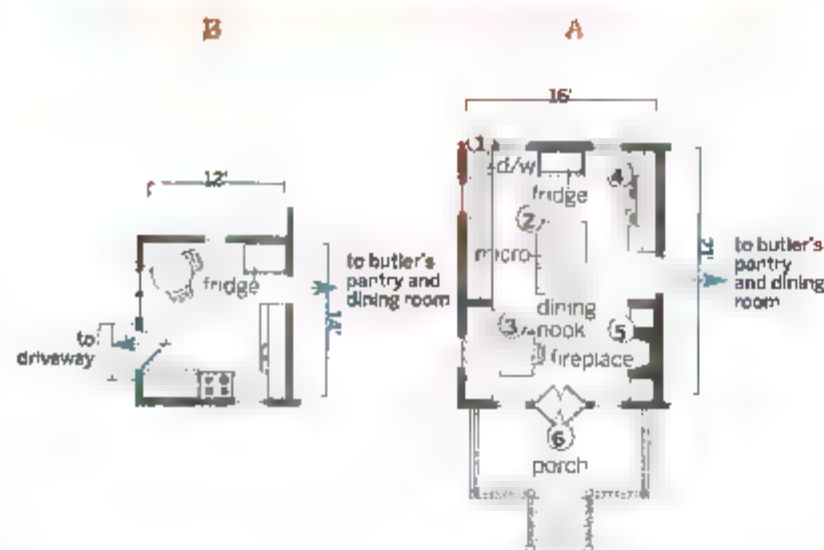
PERIOD HOME GENERIC KITCHEN: It's a familiar finding for buyers looking to score an old house full of original detail. And it was just what David Schloss and his wife, Abigail, ended up with when they moved into their 1875 home in Nyack, New York. The Queen Anne's architecture was largely intact, with one exception: The kitchen was a shoddy, circa-1964 number thoughtlessly tacked on the back. Just as bad for the pair of avid cooks, the space was dinky. Minimal counter space was always cluttered, three tiny windows provided little light, and opening the fridge door blocked the only passage to other rooms. Local architect Jeffine Lane worked up a plan to give the couple a larger space that would run the length of the house's back wall, improving the overall proportions. Inside, he gained room for a center island and a cozy dining nook across from a fireplace. Traditional materials like soapstone and marble, white-painted cabinets, and deep crown and base moldings make the new space feel more like a wing of the old house. As a final touch, the back door was closed up in favor of French doors that lead to a colorfully painted side porch—a replica of one on the opposite side of the house. Says Lane, "We reclaimed the character and scale of the original home inside and out."

BY KELLY BEAMON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
TRIA GIOVAN



B BEFORE The existing kitchen was an awkward 12-by-14-foot box off the back of the house. The entry to the butler's pantry was impassable with the fridge open.

A AFTER The new addition is 7 feet longer to square off the house's back wall and 4 feet deeper to accommodate a large central island. French doors now lead to a new side porch.



"For the best flow in a small space, keep the floor plan open when carving out different areas for cooking, eating, and relaxing."

—JEFFRIE LANE, ARCHITECT

The Plan

➤➤ Rebuild and enlarge the kitchen to echo the style of the Victorian-era home

What They Did

- 1 STARTED FROM SCRATCH.** The homeowners demolished the old 12-by-14-foot circa-1964 kitchen in favor of a more workable 16-by-21-foot space that spans the back of the house. All the windows and doors are new.
- 2 PUT IN AN ISLAND.** Adding a central workstation/storage island, complete with a second sink, allowed the couple his-and-hers food-prep areas.
- 3 CREATED AN EATING NOOK.** The corner where the back door had been is now an inviting windowed space that holds built-in bench seating, a small table, and a chair.
- 4 RELOCATED APPLIANCES.** The range, fridge, and primary sink now form a triangle at one end of the kitchen, away from the seating area. The formerly 2-foot-wide doorway to the butler's pantry (which leads into the dining room) is now a foot wider for better traffic flow.
- 5 ADDED A CHIMNEY.** Installing a fireplace meant running a new chimney up through the eaves. Building out the wall made room for bookshelves around it and a recess above it for a flat-panel TV.
- 6 BUILT A PORCH.** To help further tie the kitchen into the rest of the exterior, a side porch was added to echo one on the other side of the house.

FLOOR PLAN: JEFFREY LANE

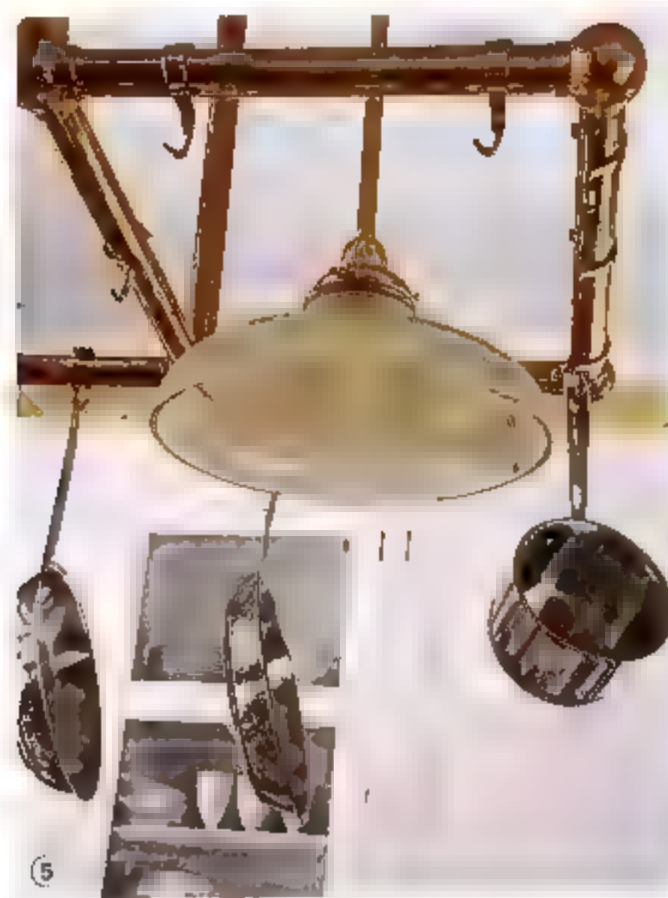
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The Details

>> Soapstone, brass, and open-work spindles marry the new kitchen to the old house

1 THE NEW SIDE PORCH off the kitchen steps down to a patio. Its balustrade and paint colors mirror those on an existing porch elsewhere on the house. Ceiling fans add Southern style charm. Porch rails: Victoriana East; ceiling fans: Casablanca.

2 THE COZY FIREPLACE opposite the dining area has a soapstone surround to echo the kitchen counters. Shelves alongside hold the homeowners' cookbook collection. The recess above the mantel was built to (eventually) accept a flat-panel TV. New moldings reflect those elsewhere in the house.

3 A 48-INCH PRO-STYLE RANGE with six burners, a grill, a full convection oven, and a smaller baking oven is at the heart of the new cooking space. The integral backsplash has an upper shelf to help keep foods warm. The high-powered hood vents heat and odors outdoors. Range, backsplash, hood: Viking.

4 MAGNETIC CHALKBOARD PANELS hide the refrigerator's stainless-steel front and provide message-center and bulletin-board space. Made to fit a wide array of appliance models, they are a fingerprint- and smudge-resistant alternative to stainless surfaces. Refrigerator: Sub-Zero; fridge panels: Frigo Design.

5 THE HANGING POT RACK is made from brass bar rails bought from a commercial equipment supply company, including the antique meat hooks the homeowner found on eBay; the rack's total materials cost was less than \$100. The pendant lights hang from 5-foot brass rods to help give them an integrated look. Pot rack rails: Outwater Hardware; pendant lights: Rejuvenation.



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SALVAGE

Most salvaged shutters, like these at Demolition Depot in New York City, have a distressed paint finish. To safely preserve the paint, which may contain lead, use a HEPA vac to remove chips, clean with soapy water, and then seal with an acrylic varnish.

Reusing Interior Shutters

» Search your local salvage yard for vintage shutters. They can tidy up more than the view

BY AMY R. HUGHES
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN



This *Old House* multimedia editor Alex Bandon (at left) and I did just that with a matched set of paneled shutters that she bought for just \$75. It's a great way to hide a honking tube TV. Turn the page to see how we did it.

I HAD INTERIOR SHUTTERS. Nice chestnut ones, actually. I'd been renting the parlor floor of a Victorian-era townhouse for three months before I even knew they were there. Then, while cleaning the front windows one afternoon, I spotted tiny knobs screwed into what I had always thought was just paneled wood casing. I gave the knobs a tug, and out of these cleverly recessed pockets popped bifold shutters.

Such elegant light blockers and privacy providers are a real rarity in homes built today. Even great—and incredibly useful—architectural details can become passe as styles and tastes change.

Lucky for us, though, vintage interior shutters, both solid-panel and vented-louver varieties, are easy to find at salvage yards. I'm considering a pair to replace the wimpy cafe curtain I've got hanging in my kitchen.

More than mere window dressing, old shutters can be put to work elsewhere in the house, too. Use a pair to form the sides of a corner cupboard fitted with beadboard shelves. To hide clutter, make a hinged folding screen. Or use them as doors to enclose an open media cabinet full of unsightly electronics. My coworker Alex Bandon and I did just that with a matched set of paneled shutters that she bought for just \$75. It's a great way to hide a honking tube TV. Turn the page to see how we did it.

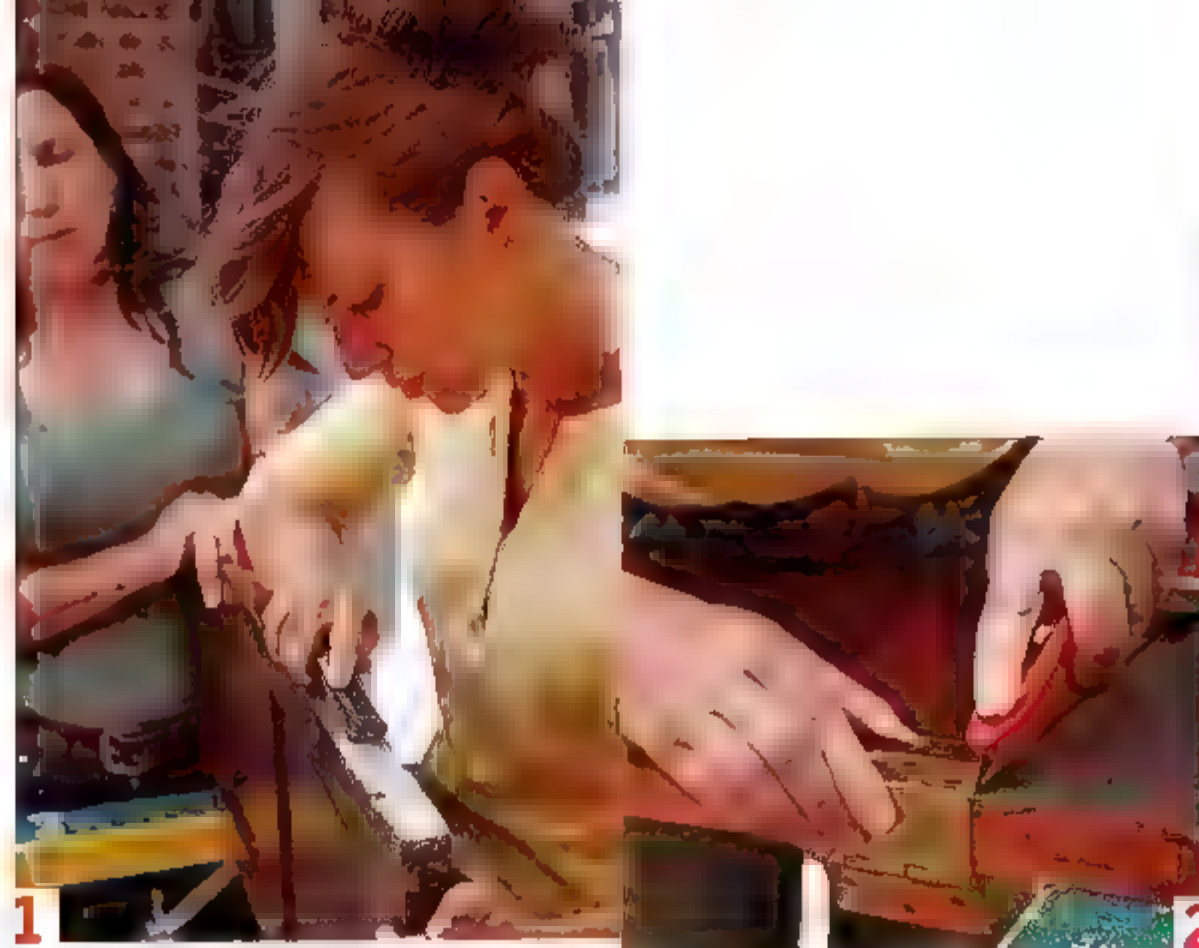


Step-by-Step: Make a New Door Out of Vintage Shutters

Some of us can't afford a display-worthy flat-screen TV. And even if we could, there'd still be the wires, the DVD player, and audio equipment to contend with. Better to keep it all under wraps. After building her media-storage shelves, Alex simply got tired of looking at all that equipment when it wasn't in use. Rather than make a custom door, she bought two mahogany shutters at a salvage yard for \$75. Hinged together as a bifold, they were a perfect fit. She also knew that if she integrated vintage finds into her upgrade project, I would pitch in with the labor. *Clever girl.* >>



Cost: \$110 for shutters, hinges, and paint
Time: 3 hours, plus dry time
Difficulty: Fairly easy
All it takes is a sharp chisel and a steady hand for painting.

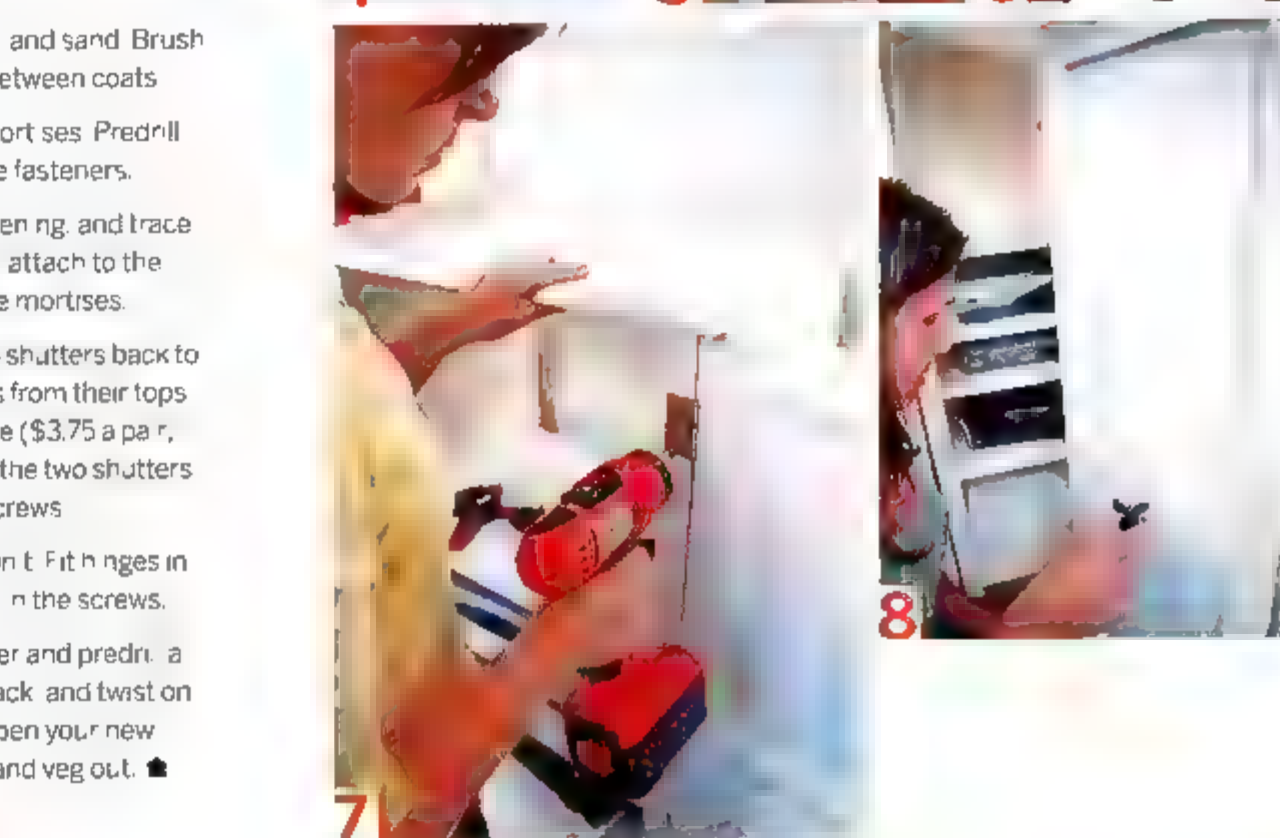


1_FILL OLD HINGE MORTISES in both shutters with an epoxy filler. Let dry and use a rasp to smooth the buildup. To turn two single shutters into a bifold, you must also remove the rabbets (light-blocking strips where opposing pairs of shutters come together). Cut these off with a jigsaw to create smooth edges.



"When sizing shutters to a cabinet or window, consider ones with extra meat around the center panels or louvers. If you keep your cuts in proportion, it's a lot easier to shave a little off for a snug fit than to try to add to ones that fall short."

EVAN BLUM, SALVAGE DEALER,
NEW YORK CITY



2_CUT NEW MORTISES in the shutter that will attach to the shelving unit, spacing them about 3 inches from the top and bottom. Score around the hinge with a utility knife, chisel out the wood to the depth of the metal. To open the door a full 180 degrees, use wraparound hinges (\$5 a pair, rockler.com). These have a fixed center and two leaves—one that screws into the shutter and one that secures it to the unit.

3_PRIME BOTH SHUTTERS, let dry and sand. Brush on two coats of latex paint, sanding between coats.

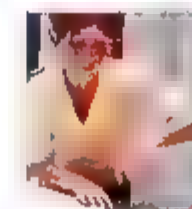
4_FIT THE HINGES in the shutter mortises. Predrill holes for their screws, and drive in the fasteners.

5_STEADY THE SHUTTER in the opening, and trace the outline of the hinges where they'll attach to the shelving unit. Score and chisel out the mortises.

6_CREATE THE BIFOLD. Stand both shutters back to back, the r sides facing up. At 6 inches from their tops and bottoms, place a no-mortise hinge (\$3.75 a pair, rockler.com) so the barrels sit between the two shutters. Predrill holes, and drive in the hinge screws.

7_ATTACH THE SHUTTERS to the unit. Fit hinges in the mortises, predrill holes, and drive in the screws.

8_CENTER THE KNOB on the shutter and predrill a hole. Insert the knob post from the back and twist on the pull. Now you're ready to swing open your new media cabinet door. Flip on the tube, and veg out. ♣



ONLINE VIDEO
Watch the complete
step-by-step for making
this bifold cabinet door
at [thisoldhouse.com](http://thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts)
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Your CFL Problems Solved

>> Compact fluorescent lightbulbs help fight rising energy costs, but the unflattering color they cast and their funky spiral shapes can be turnoffs. Here, ways to start saving more money without suffering

BY JOSH GASKOF ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZOHAR LAZAR



OF ALL THE WAYS TO CUT your electric bills, twisting in a CFL might just be the easiest. You don't have to build a backyard wind farm or set the thermostat so low you've got to sleep in down pajamas. Just replace incandescent bulbs with CFLs, which sap 75 percent less energy, and you could slash hundreds off your annual electricity expenses. And over the long haul, you'll save on bulbs, too, because they last up to 10 times longer than incandescents.

It's that simple. And yet many of you aren't using CFLs. We know this because you told us so in a recent poll on thisoldhouse.com. Among your gripes were slow start-up times, the greenish light CFLs cast, and their mercury content. But they don't deserve such a bad rap anymore, says sustainable lighting designer Mark Loeffler of New Haven, Connecticut. "The bulbs you buy today are far better than what was on the market just a few years ago," says Loeffler. No, they're still not ideal for every light fixture and application, but most of the big problems have been solved. Take, for example, the following concerns from your fellow readers.

Q Looking at my greenish reflection in the bathroom mirror each morning is just too much.

Kate Larson, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Bulbs that burn a filament, such as incandescents, provide the full spectrum of light, approximating sunshine and giving everything a natural glow. A CFL's spiral tube is filled with gas, which produces ultraviolet light that is, in turn, reflected into a room as white light by a phosphorous coating on the glass. That coating can distort colors and give skin a ghastly hue. By altering the phosphor manufacturers have recently improved the quality of CFL light, as measured by the color rendering index. This gauges how accurately a bulb renders colors, from 0 to 100, with incandescents scoring a 100. Today's CFLs are in the 80s, which is good for ambient light. But they're still not great for task lighting. So keep incandescents in the bath, in the laundry where you need to do spot treating, and where you prep food in the kitchen. Replacing bulbs elsewhere in the house will still save you money.



"To soften the harsh glow of a CFL, cover it with a linen-colored fabric or an opaque glass shade."

MARK LOEFFLER, SUSTAINABLE LIGHTING DESIGNER, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Q I have no problems using CFLs, but my wife hates the way they look! The 27-watt bulbs I bought stick too far out of the lamps.
—John White, Sugar Land, Tex.

A All that's inside an incandescent bulb is a glowing wire filament. The gas-filled tube of a CFL isn't as easy to squeeze into a petite package. The higher the wattage, the more gas and the bigger the spiral. That 27-watt bulb of yours compares with a 100-watt incandescent. But thanks to new, smaller plastic ballasts, the section above the screw base that houses the bulb's circuitry, manufacturers are now making CFLs in standard incandescent sizes. Before you shop for a new CFL, measure the length of the bulb you're replacing, and bring a ruler to the store. Many online sellers also list dimensions on their websites.

Q A lower electric bill is a huge plus, but the amount of light CFLs put out is poor. I have to turn on every lamp in the room to compensate.
—Mary Lou Clark, Indian Trail, N.C.

A The short answer is, you may need to buy a brighter bulb. Here's why: Those suggested CFL equivalences, which say that a 27-watt CFL equals a 100-watt incandescent, for example, are based on the overall light output of the bulbs. But because CFL light appears more diffuse, the same output isn't always enough. You may need to up the ante by replacing a 100-watt incandescent with a 150-

watt equivalent CFL, for instance. That brighter light is only 42 watts in incandescent-speak and therefore safe for a fixture with one of those 60-watt-maximum warning labels. And it's still cheaper to use.

Q I put spiral CFLs in all my lamps only to find that my house looked like a drunk lady had decorated it. All the clip-on shades were at a slant.
—Tiffany H. Campbell, Framingham, Mass.

A A new style of CFL addresses the clip-on shade dilemma, as well as fixtures where the bulb is visible, by putting the spiral inside a round glass globe. Most companies, including Philips, Sylvania, and General Electric, sell these under the names "bulb-shaped," "covered," or "capsule." But the term that matters, and what should be on the packaging, is A19, the shape for standard incandescents. An A21 label signifies the same shape but a slightly larger bulb.

Q I understand that you can't put CFLs in the trash. But if not there, where do you dispose of them?
—Rebecca Morice, Dayton, Ohio

A Like rechargeable batteries, CFLs contain mercury, which can harm the environment if dumped or incinerated. Some CFLs now come with postage-paid recycling envelopes, and The Home Depot recently announced that it'd accept any CFL for recycling, no matter where it was

How to Speak CFL

Trying to decipher the labels on a CFL package can make you think twice about using the eco-friendly bulbs, no matter the energy savings. Here's how to translate the tech talk so that you can shop smart and get the right bulb for every light in your house.

CONVERT THE WATTAGE
It takes fewer watts, a measure of power consumption, to get the same amount of light from a CFL as it does from an incandescent.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BULB
Using a CFL designed for a table lamp, for instance, in a recessed light fixture can cause the bulb to overheat and fail. Always check to see which type of fixture the CFL is rated for before you buy.

READ THE WARRANTY
Even if a CFL is advertised to last 10,000 hours, you typically have two years from the date of purchase to return a spent bulb to get your money back. So save your receipts.



CONSIDER THE COLOR

The lower the number of kelvins the more rosy-hued the light. For instance, a rating of 2,700K will yield a "warm" reddish light, and 6,000K will put out a "cold" bluish light.

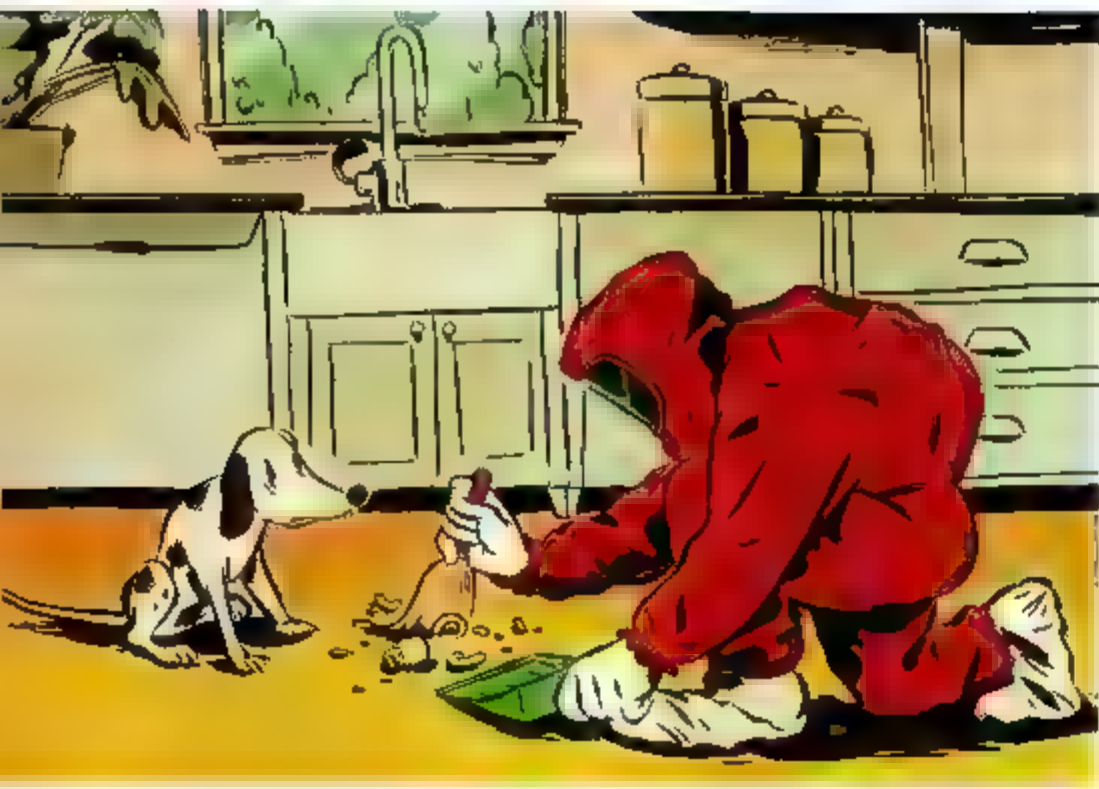
SELECT THE BRIGHTNESS

The higher the number of lumens the brighter the light. Typical lumen output of a bulb used in a table lamp is 900, which is equivalent to a 15-watt CFL or a 60-watt incandescent.

CHECK THE DIMENSIONS

Bulbs that are taller than 4 inches, the standard size for incandescents, may poke out of your shade or exceed the height of the shade's harp. —TARYN LONERGAN





purchased. Manufacturers then take those spent bulbs and recapture the mercury inside to make new ones.



Q When CFLs break they shatter in a million pieces. We have a 6-year-old beagle-corgi mix, and she's always sniffing around for trouble. We're worried about her being exposed to toxins.

—John J. Amadi, St. Louis, Mo

CFL bulbs contain about 4 milligrams of mercury, although in some new ones it's as little as 1.4 milligrams. That compares with 500 milligrams in old-fashioned thermometers. The mercury is harmless if it's inside the bulb, but it will get released as a gas if the bulb shatters. Should one break on your hard kitchen floor, for instance, you don't have to call the local hazmat unit. Just open the windows, and leave the area for a minimum of 15 minutes—typically enough time for the mercury vapor to either exit the house or disperse to a harmless level. Then use a piece of cardboard to scoop the debris into a Ziploc bag and bring it to a recycling facility that accepts “universal waste.” Be sure to get every bit of broken glass because it can be coated with trace amounts of mercury. Log onto epa.gov/mercury/spills/index.htm for more cleanup tips.

Q I have a hard time finding three-way and dimmable bulbs. And the ones I do see are much more expensive.

Richard Whalen, Framingham, Mass.

Although three-way and dimmable CFLs were fairly exotic just a year ago, they're now widely available from home centers, megamarts, and online retailers. The



Find which CFLs work best with your fixtures at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts

problem is their complex internal wiring makes these bulbs pricey at \$10 to \$15 a pop. And you don't want a cheap knockoff. It'll be oversized, offer harsh light, and may not move smoothly between brightness settings. Earthtronics (earthbulb.com) offers good three-way CFLs, as well as dimmables for all types of fixtures.

Q Many CFLs have a warranty for so many hours of service. But I've had two bulbs go bad rather quickly.

Ken Fath, Upland, Calif.

No matter what the packaging says about how many hours the bulb will shine, most CFL makers only warranty their bulbs for a certain time after date of purchase, typically two years. Defective bulbs generally fail within the first few months. Beyond that, premature burnout is likely caused by the way you're using the bulb. Putting it in a recessed can or an enclosed glass shade, for instance, will overheat a CFL not specifically designed for those fixtures. Using one in a lamp that gets switched on and off a dozen times a day also causes early death. To get a replacement, bring the bum bulb and your receipt back to the retailer, or get return-by-mail instructions on the manufacturer's website. One of your fellow readers, Nora Galambos of Stony Brook, New York, goes a step further by writing the date she installs the bulb in permanent marker on the ballast. She's already gotten her money back from The Home Depot for two duds.



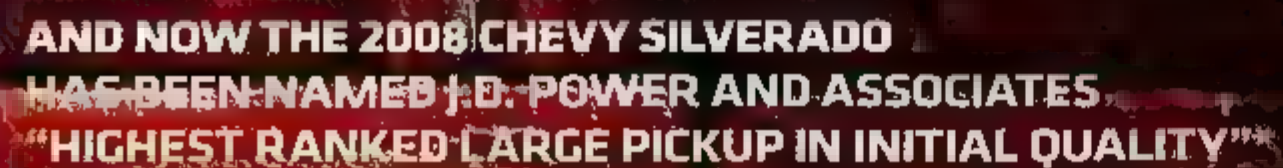
Q The CFL in our motion-detecting exterior floodlight takes so long to warm up that by the time it comes on the offending party has done what they came to do and left. We're stocking up on incandescents before they're banished.

Jamie Scott, Edmond, Okla.

An exterior security light is a bad spot for a CFL. Inside the house, the start-up time for today's CFL is just a fraction of a second. But if the gas inside the bulb is cold, as it can be outdoors or in an unfinished basement or attic, it can take a few minutes for it to warm up and the bulb to brighten. Also, CFLs provide big energy savings only if used in lights that are left on for extended periods. The frequent on-and-off switching of a motion detector shortens the bulb's life.

And despite some erroneous reports, you've got plenty of time to buy incandescents. The 2007 energy bill requires a 30 percent efficiency improvement by 2012. Today's incandescents can't do that, but GE says it's developing ones that will. It's also possible that something entirely different will become the next standard. One contender is light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs, the technology behind flat-screen TVs. In any case, the efficiency deadline is years away, so there's no need to go buying up all those old incandescent floods at the home center. Besides, something even better's bound to come along in the next few years. ■

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SPECIAL



Debris Disposal 101

» How to get cash for your trash—and other money-saving ways to reduce renovation waste

BY SARAH SCHMIDT ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARK MATCHO



WHETHER YOU'RE UPDATING A ROOM or gutting an entire house, chances are you have piles of junk taking up valuable real estate. No problem finding takers for that saw-foot tub, but what about the stuff you can't sell on Craigslist or unload on eBay? You've got garbage, and you're not alone. Reader Jeff Kirk recently posted his own tally of accumulated trash on thisoldhouse.com. "After three days of demo, my 6x8 shed was full, the 10x14 deck was covered with contractor garbage bags, and a section of the yard was filling up with carpet." Small wonder. *This Old House* general contractor Tom Silva says it can cost up to \$10,000 to make the guts of a whole-house remodel go away. So before you load up a Dumpster with shards of drywall and strips of wall-to-wall, lighten your load—and your disposal costs—by repurposing and recycling what you can. Then make sure the rest gets a proper burial. From dented washers and wheezing air conditioners to surplus boards and gypsum, here's how to do the right thing with your rubbish.

CARPETING

In the words of the National Association of Home Builders, "The bulkiness of carpet and padding waste can make disposal very costly." Manufacturers are making a concerted push to help you recycle it instead.

- ▶ IF YOUR CARPET is in good shape with no stains or worn patches, donate it (see "Don't Dump, Donate" page 44).
- ▶ IF YOU HAVE DAMAGED or worn carpet and area rugs, click on a map at the Carpet America Recovery Effort website (carpetrecovery.org/waste.php) to find a location where you can drop it off for recycling.
- ▶ IF YOU MUST TOSS IT, ask your sanitation department when and how to put rugs on the curb.

WHITE GOODS

These big, bulky items—your dishwasher, washing machine, clothes dryer, stove, fridge, and freezer—can push a job-site container to overflowing without even trying.

- ▶ IF YOU'VE GOT AN OUTAGE stove or refrigerator, sell it to a dealer or restorer such as AntiqueAppliances.com.

► **IF YOUR APPLIANCES STILL WORK** and are on the new side, ask a resale store if it will pick them up (see "Don't Dump, Donate" below). Just remember to request a receipt so you can take a tax deduction.

► **IF YOU OWN** an energy-guzzling refrigerator, freezer or air conditioner, ask your electric utility if it offers a rebate for getting rid of it and, if it does, how to proceed. In 11 states, a private company, JACO Environmental, will pick up a working guzzler and give you a check. It then tries for the rebate, captures and disposes of any Freon, and recycles 95 percent of the rest. 800-299-7573.

► **IF YOU HAVE NO OTHER TAKERS**, consider selling your old appliances for scrap. Dealers pay about 10 cents a pound or about \$30 to \$80 for appliances (except those containing a coolant). Some dealers will come by to pick appliances up. Find salvaged metal dealers at yellowpages.com.

► **IF YOU MUST TOSS THEM**, ask your sanitation department if and when it picks up such items and what's required. (Your town's website may be helpful.) For safety reasons, doors on freezers and fridges should be removed, for example, and there may be rules governing disposal of Freon.

LUMBER AND SCRAP WOOD

It may grow on trees—but all the more reason to recycle wood if you can.

► **IF YOU HAVE UNUSED TONGUE-AND-GROOVE FLOORING**, take it to a dealer or give it to a resale store (see "Don't Dump, Donate" above). These places may also want large pieces of undamaged lumber and wooden doors. Find salvaged wood dealers at yellowpages.com.

► **IF YOU HAVE LUMBER SCRAPS** and leftover pieces

of raw lumber, contact a wood-waste dealer for recycling or repurposing. You may have to pay a fee, but it should be less than the cost of disposal. Look for wood-waste dealers at yellowpages.com.

► **IF YOU MUST TOSS IT**, make sure you are not handling baseboards and other woodwork that could contain lead paint. For tips on safe handling of materials painted before 1978, consult epa.gov/lead. Ask your sanitation department for rules on disposal.

DRYWALL AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION DEBRIS

Here's how to get rid of gypsum scraps and other rubble.

► **IF YOU HAVE ASPHALT SHINGLES**, you may be able to find a nearby recycling center at ShingleRecycling.org, or check for State Experience.

► **IF YOU HAVE MIXED DEBRIS**, look for a center where gleaners sort and sell recyclable wood, metal, concrete, gypsum and other materials. Often they charge a nominal fee. Contact the Construction Materials Recycling Association at cormrecycling.org or call 630-585-7530 for location.

► **IF YOU MUST TOSS IT**, ask your sanitation department if there are special pickup days for construction materials, or call a hauler such as 1-800-GotJunk (1800gotjunk.com).

LEFTOVER PAINT

Consumers toss millions of dollars worth of paint every year, often because they picked the wrong color. But your bad red can be another man's crimson. If no one will take it (and you can't use it to add another coat or cover the walls of the workshop or garage), find a place for it—never pour paint down a drain, because it can contaminate water supplies.

► **IF IT'S IN GOLD SHAPE**, donate it to a school or church for alternative use, go to redo.org.

► **IF NO ONE TAKES THE COOL**, OR donate it to a paint-recycling center. For addresses, enter your ZIP code at 800-253-2658 or earth911.org.

► **IF YOU HAVE OIL-BASED** or mixed paint, treat it as a hazardous material (see below).

► **IF YOU MUST TOSS IT**, turn latex into a solid by pouring it into a box of cat litter or shredded news paper and allowing it to dry. Leave empty cans outside to dry too. Ask your sanitation department if the latex-litter mix can be tossed in other garbage and whether empty cans can be recycled.

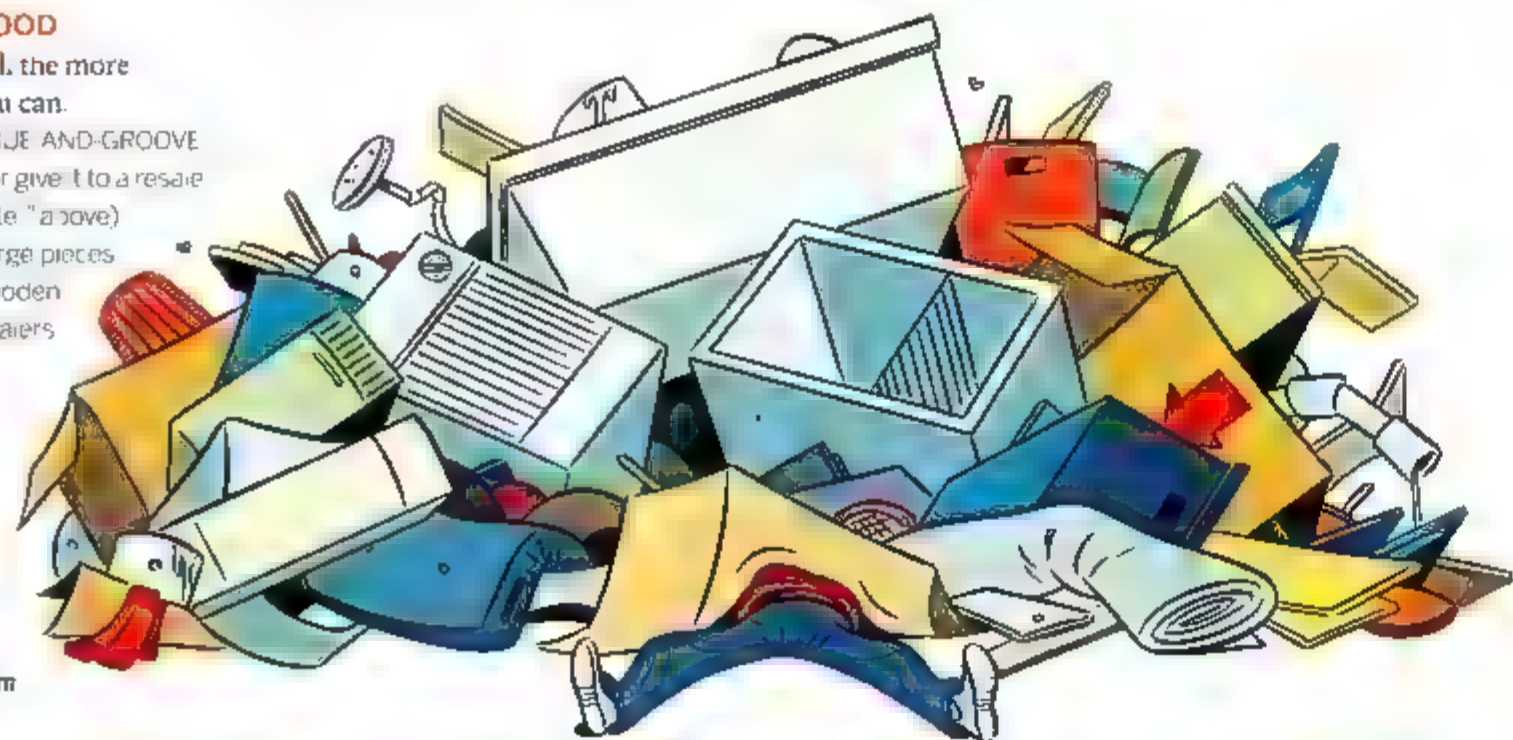
HAZMATS

Solvents, strippers, paint thinners, WD-40: These products must be handled with care.

► **IF YOUR SANITATION DEPARTMENT** does special pickups of hazardous waste, ask when and how to get yours out.

► **IF YOU DON'T WANT TO WAIT**, ask the sanitation department for the address and hours of a household hazardous waste drop-off center.

► **DON'T TOSS THEM** in the trash. It's against the law. ■



The most impressionable art is behind the wall

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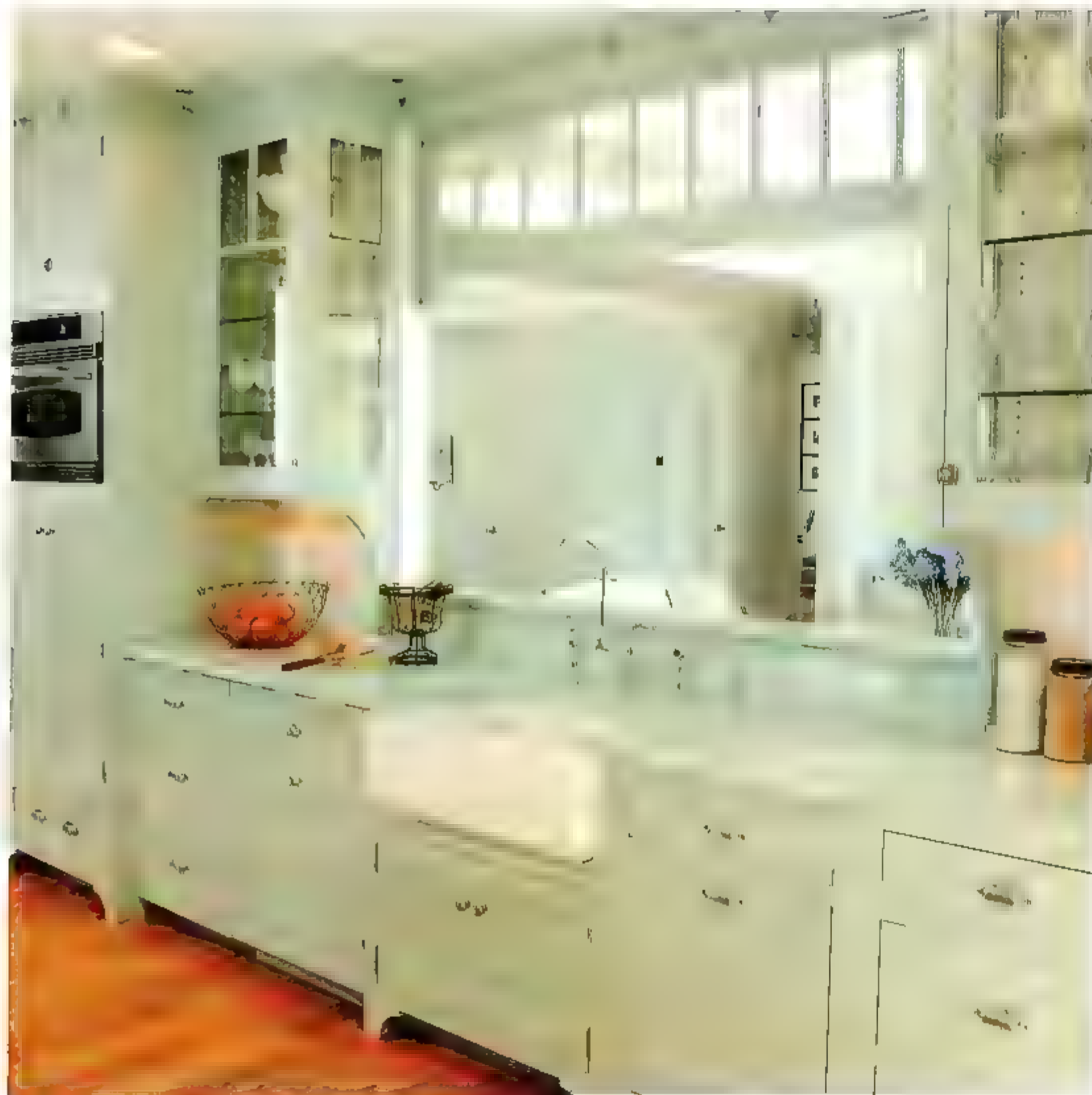
Saving today's energy-conscious homeowners up to 50% on their energy bills makes Icynene a highly attractive investment. Unlike conventional insulation, Icynene works as an air barrier to deliver significant energy savings that can outweigh the cost of the installation. And that's just one of the many benefits you'll come to admire about it.



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UPKEEP



Save That Sash

How to preserve old windows with putty, epoxy, and patience

BY THOMAS BAKER PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID CARMACK

SINGLE-PANE DOUBLE-HUNG WINDOWS from the 19th century don't have the best of reputations. They can be notoriously drafty, full of rattles, loose in the joints, or can simply refuse to budge. But as a number of studies have shown, when these windows are properly weatherstripped and paired with good storm windows, they can match the performance of new double-pane units for much less than the new ones cost.

Painting contractor John Dee, whose refinishing skills are regularly seen in the pages of *This Old House*, recently turned the windows in an 1882 house back into smooth operators—and increased their energy efficiency, to boot. As he shows on the following pages, it was simply a matter of methodically removing each sash from its opening, stripping off the old paint and putty, and reglazing the joints with epoxy. With new putty, paint, and weatherstripping, the sashes are ready to face the cold and last through the 21st century as good as new.

Painting contractor John Dee reattaches the stops, the last step in his window restoration. "Before this, opening a window was a wrestling match," he says, "now, they just glide up and down."

\$70 per window
2 days

Moderately easy.

Requires patience and a steady hand to remove and replace the glass.





First Things First: Get the Sash Out

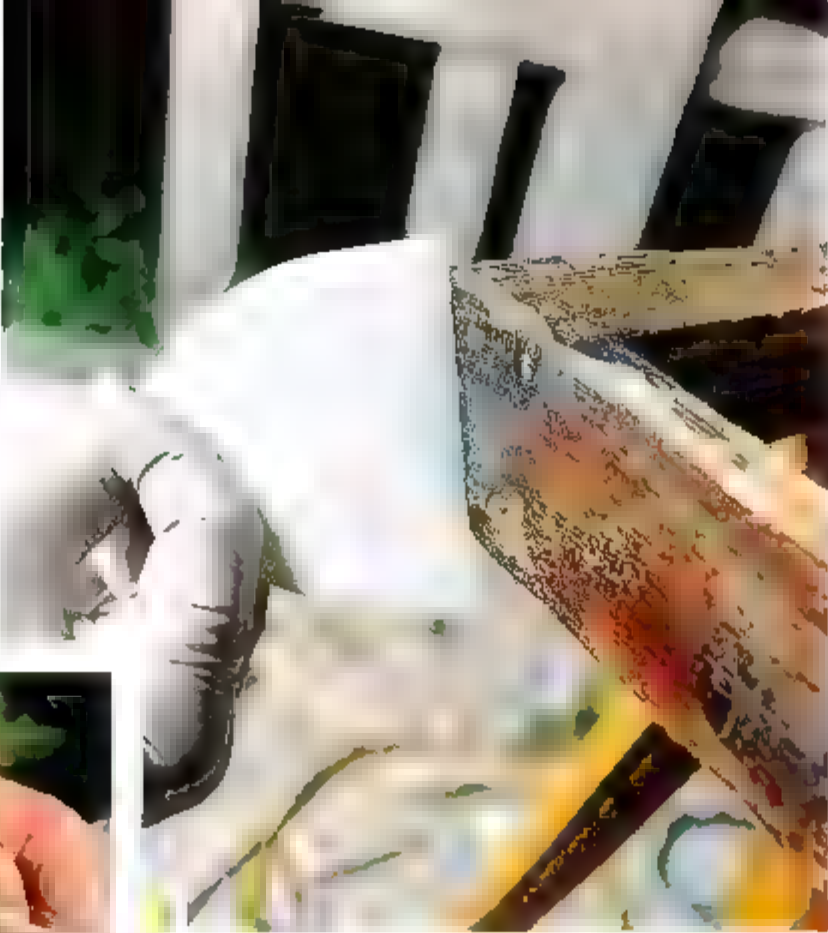
- > Pry off or unscrew the stops (the moldings in front of the lower sash).
- > Pull out the lower sash, and take off the cords or chains on both sides.
- > Knot the cords to keep them from being pulled into the weight pockets.
- > Remove the parting beads (the vertical strips holding the upper sash).
- > Pull out the upper sash, and take off its cords or chains.
- > Remove the sash hardware and store in a labeled bag.



FREE THE GLASS. Soften old, hardened putty (glazing compound) with a heat gun set to medium and fitted with a nozzle shield. Scrape the putty away with a putty knife. This exposes the metal glazier's points; pry them out of the wood. Remove the glass, and label it so you know which opening to put it back into.



CLEAN OUT THE JOINTS. Using a rotary tool such as a Dremel, grind away any soft or rotten wood wherever sash joints are loose or open.



APPLY THE EPOXY. To rebuild the cleaned-out joints, first brush on the epoxy primer and let it set for about 20 minutes. Then, using a plastic scraper, mix the two parts of the epoxy filler into a goop the consistency of Vaseline. Force it into the joint, and spread the mix over the sides to restore the joint's original shape. Wait overnight, then trim the excess with a utility knife.

TIP • Clamp pieces of Plexiglas over the wet epoxy. When it hardens, take the plastic off. You'll have a smooth surface that doesn't need much sanding.



PRIME THE SASH. Wait another day until the epoxy is fully cured, then hand sand the sash with 100-grit paper and wipe up all the dust with a tack cloth. Seal the wood with a coat of oil-based primer.



"Without a coat of primer, the wood will suck the oils out of the putty and turn it brittle prematurely."

JOHN DEE
PAINTING CONTRACTOR



You know where DUDE
meets DAD? I'M THERE

Whoa, that happened fast, didn't it?
The next 18 years will zip right by, too.
So don't wait until Junior

is a senior to figure out how
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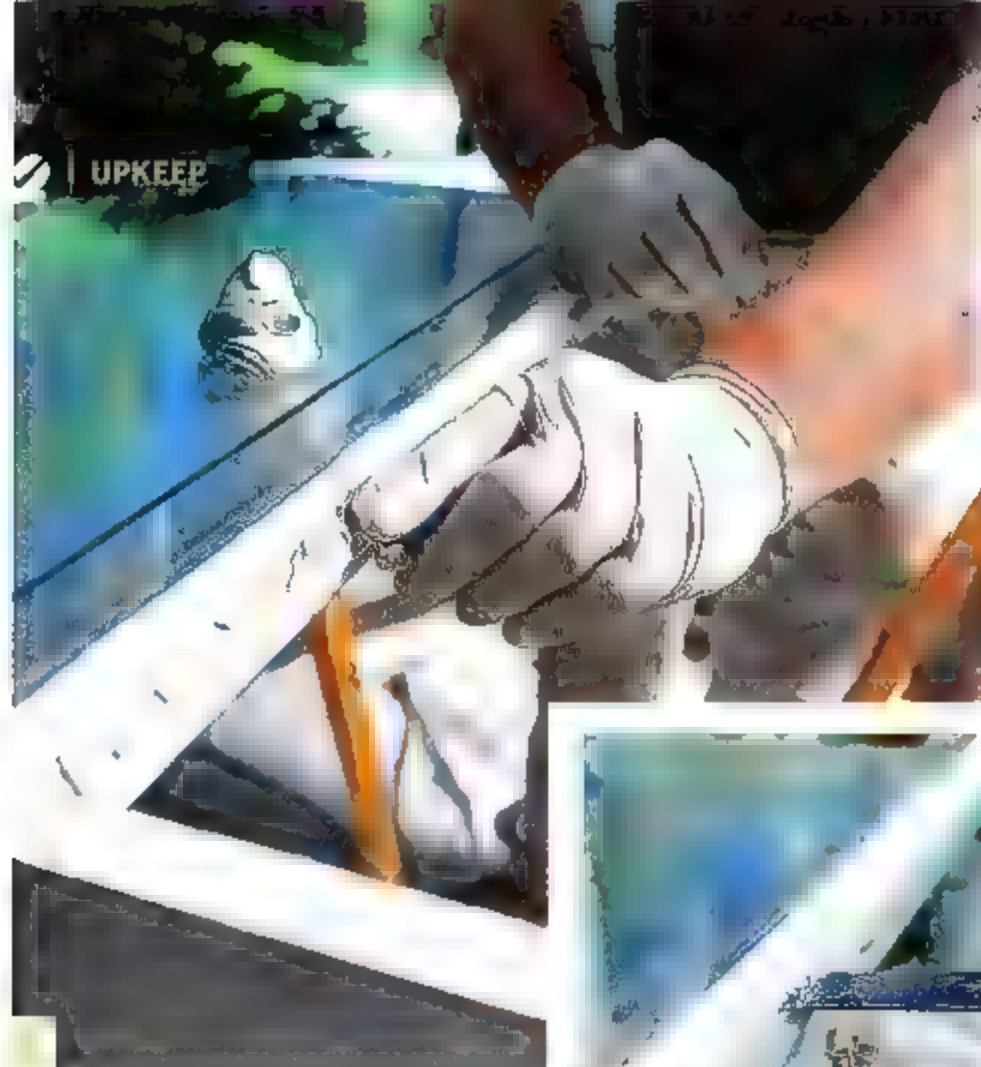
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"On warm days, lubricate the tip of the putty knife with linseed oil so that it doesn't pull out the glazing compound."

JOHN DEE



INSERT THE POINTS. Using a putty knife, slide each new glazier's point on the glass and push it point first into the wood sash. Plant at least two points, evenly spaced, on each side of the pane. For large panes, the spacing between the points should not exceed 12 inches.



TOOL THE PUTTY. Press another rope of compound around the edge of the pane. Make a smooth bevel between the glass and sash by pulling a putty knife over the compound. Repeat on the other panes. Wait at least a week, then coat the putty with oil-based primer. Apply a top coat of acrylic latex paint to the putty and sash.

REHANG THE SASH. If the windows have old weatherstripping, replace it, if there isn't any add it. (See thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts for instructions.) Clean and reattach the hardware, lubricate the pulley axes with a silicone or Teflon spray. Reattach the cords or chains to the upper sash, and reinstall the parting beads or replace them with new ones. Hook the cords or chains to the lower sash, then put both stops back on the jamb to hold the restored sash in place.

TIP > Strip paint-encrusted hardware by giving it an overnight dip in a warm Crock-Pot filled with sudsy water. ■



ONLINE VIDEO

Watch TOH general contractor Tom Silva free a window that was painted shut, at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts



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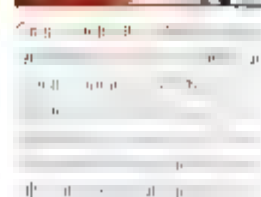
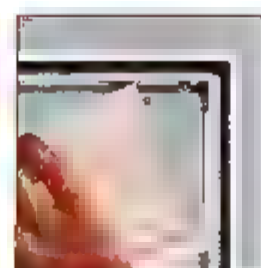
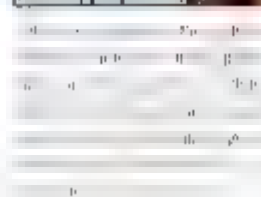
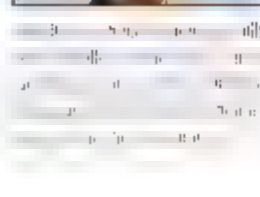
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When Push Comes to Cut

Before you turn on that power saw, consider the virtues of sawing by hand.

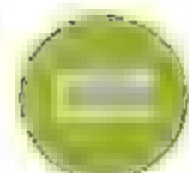
BY SAL VASILICA
WITH LAMEN PETKOV

SURE, IT'S EASY to pull the trigger on a circular saw to cut wood in two. But it's safer, quieter, and cheaper to pick up a handsaw and slide it back and forth through the work. Traditional handsaws, with thick blades and sturdy teeth that cut on the push stroke, still come in handy for cutting posts too far for a circ saw, notching stair stringers, or making any cut where a power tool would be unwieldy or unsafe. *This Old House* master carpenter Norm Abram still uses his for small jobs. "If you only have a few cuts to make, a push saw can get them done before you set up a power saw and plug it in," he says. "Besides, it's a pleasure to use."

These days, handsaws are either heirlooms or disposable. Heirlooms have carved-wood handles, long blades of tough spring steel, and teeth that can be resharpened. Less expensive disposables use the latest technology: composite handles, low-friction blade coatings, and heat-hardened teeth to chew through wood faster and longer. But once they're dull, the saw is toast. On the next few pages, we'll show you both types, to help make your next cuts quick, clean, and easy.

TOOLBOX





Specialized Saws

HANDSAWS COME IN A VARIETY OF SHAPES and sizes to perform special tasks, whether it's to saw logs, slip into a toolbox, or just give you the feel of what it's like to hold an heirloom. Here are some of our favorites.

LOG SAW
The extra-rigid 18-gauge steel blade on this 24-inch saw from Fanno Saw Works can handle rough carpentry, limb pruning, and log cutting. There's a big opening on the laminated hardwood handle to fit a gloved hand—making the saw a favorite with public utility crews. 5 tpi, \$42; fannosaw.com

KID'S SAW
Start junior carpenters off with this small yet capable 14-inch crosscut saw from E.C. Emmerich. It fits little hands and short arms but still has the feel of a good tool. It also fits nicely inside an adult's toolbox. 9 tpi, \$20; ecmmerich.com

TOOL SCHOOL
TOH master carpenter Norm Abram shares his hand-sawing secrets *Workshop*, p. 115

VERSATILE HEIRLOOM
Spear & Jackson's skew-back 26-inch saw can handle both rip cuts and rough crosscuts. Since 1760, the English company has made saws from Sheffield steel—world-renowned for toughness. 6 tpi, \$139; traditionalwoodworker.com

QUICK-CUTTING HYBRID
Bahco's 24-inch Superior has the length of a traditional saw and the knife-edged, hardened teeth of a modern hybrid, so it eats through wood with impressive speed on every push and pull stroke. The blade's textured polymer coating helps it slide more smoothly in the kerf. 7 tpi, \$40; jhwilliamstoolgroup.com

"To prevent a saw blade from rusting, spray it with a silicone-free lubricant such as Slipit before putting it away. Don't use oily lubricants, which leave a residue on wood that will interfere with glues and finishes."

NORM ABRAM, THIS OLD HOUSE MASTER CARPENTER



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❖ "Two" Many Cooks

Make room for the second chef in your home with a full-sized sink and ample counter space, as shown here in the Gettysburg Collection in Cherry Chocolate.

❖ Social Hub

A built-in countertop makes this island a stylish piece of furniture that serves as the perfect smorgasbord and natural social hub of any party, as featured here in the Mission-inspired Townsend Collection in Oak Honey.

❖ Family Connection

Carving a study area into an island can help bring families together during dinner preparations, as demonstrated by the Del Ray Collection in Cherry Chocolate.

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Wherever You Find Your Inspiration...



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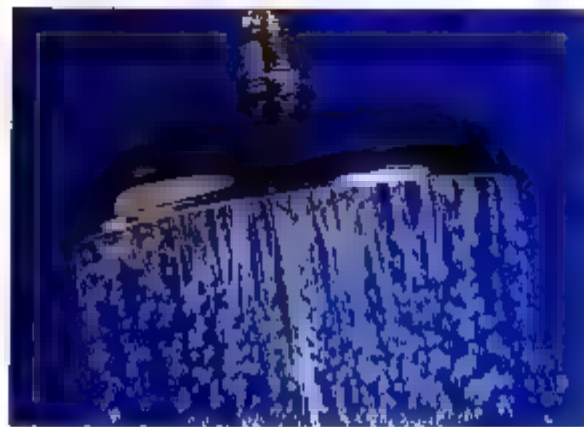
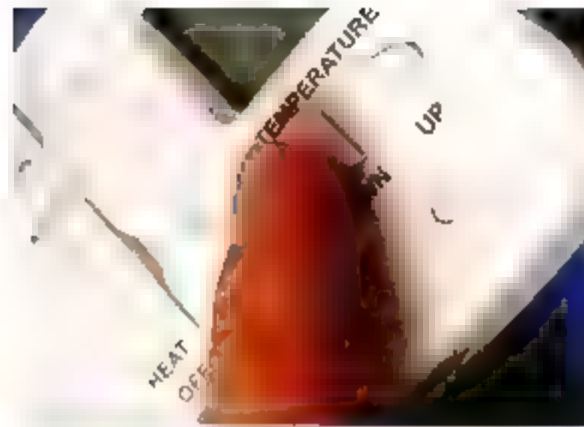


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STEP-BY-STEP
WEEKEND
PROJECT SERIES



Installing a Ceiling Medallion



Cost: \$500
Time: 1 hour
Difficulty: Easy
Tools Needed: Screwdriver, Wire Nuts, Wire Cutters

Medallion: Pembroke, from Pypco, \$50;
Pypco.com; Chandelier: George II, from
Coral Lighting, \$840, coralighting.com.

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Propane tankless water heaters are the ideal choice for those who are concerned about the planet, but who also want plenty of hot water. They're better for the environment, giving off less than one-half the carbon emissions compared to electric water heaters and reducing standby energy loss up to 20 percent. And since propane tankless water heaters only heat water on demand, they can provide a nearly endless supply while lowering water heating bills up to 60%. Making them the perfect choice for your home and the planet we all call home. For more on tankless water heaters, visit usepropane.com.



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STEP-BY-STEP WEEKEND PROJECT SERIES



overview

THE RIGHT CEILING MEDALLION is as much about size as it is about style. After you've picked out a piece that won't look too ornate or too simple next to your room's other moldings—or the light fixture that will hang from it—buy it in a size that's in proportion to the

room. A good rule of thumb is to divide the square footage of your room by 7 to get a rough diameter for your medallion. (See "Sizing a Medallion," far right, for some helpful dimensions.)

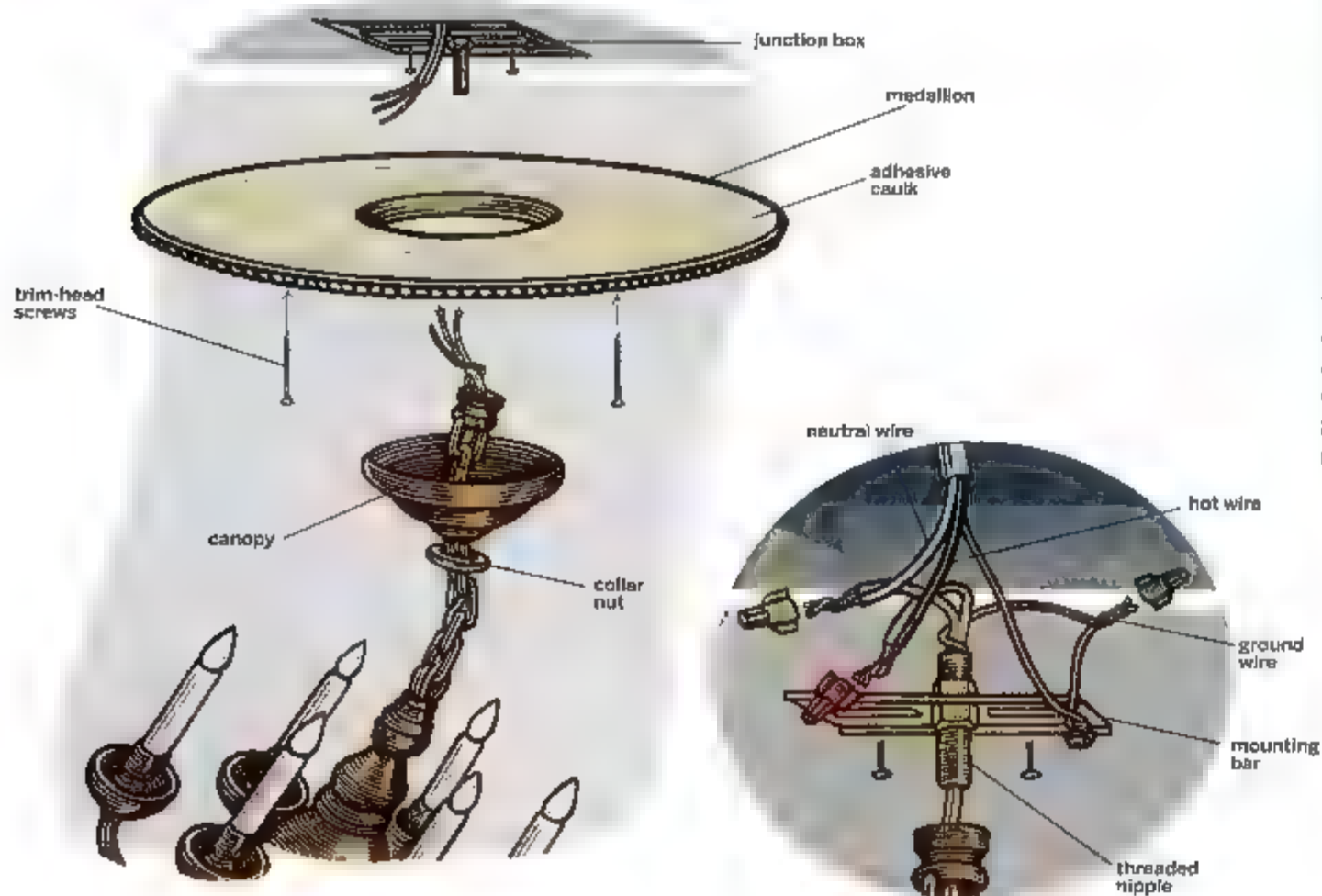
But there are other factors to take into account. A medallion should be about the same diameter as the light fixture that will hang under it, but it can be smaller than a fan. A room with high ceilings can support a larger medallion because it will look well proportioned from farther away. Test different sizes by taping cardboard cutouts to your ceiling and standing back to see how each looks.

Most medallions on the market are polystyrene foam, even those labeled "plaster." (You have to read the fine print to discover that they are not, in fact, real plaster.) Foam medallions go up quickly and simply, with adhesive caulk and some finish screws. But beware. If you do have a real plaster medallion, this installation will not work because the plaster is too heavy for the adhesive caulk.

Traditionally, medallions pair with a chandelier. Their original purpose was to protect the ceiling from candle burns. To install one with a light fixture, the medallion must have a hole in the middle to allow access to the electrical wiring in the ceiling. The hole should be large enough to let you get at the entire junction box but small enough that the decorative plate or canopy, of the light fixture will hide it. Some medallions come with the hole, but if yours doesn't already have one you can cut one with a drywall saw. You may also have to get a longer threaded nipple, the bolt from which the fixture hangs, to clear the thickness of the medallion. Then, once the medallion itself is prepped and the electrical hookup is ready to go, installing it is a simple matter of sticking it to the ceiling and connecting the light.



Learn how to install a new chandelier at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
GREGORY NEMEC

shopping list

1 CEILING MEDALLION

Available online or in home centers, in diameters ranging from less than 10 inches to more than 70 inches. You can order a medallion with a center hole precut or get one without a hole and cut it yourself.

2 MILD DISHWASHING SOAP

To clean the ceiling in preparation for the installation.

3 MEDIUM-GRIT SANDPAPER

To smooth the medallion's center cutout to attach the light fixture to the ceiling's junction box. Most fixtures come with the appropriate nipple, but you may need to get a longer one to account for the thickness of the medallion.

5 ADHESIVE CAULK

To stick the medallion to the ceiling, fill the screw holes and cover voids between the medallion and the ceiling, if necessary. Choose a paintable caulk such as Phenosan Does It All or Liquid Nails All-Purpose Adhesive Caulk.

6 TRIM-HEAD SCREWS

To fasten the medallion to the ceiling while the adhesive caulk adheres. 3 1/2-inch screws should be long enough, though thicker medallions may require longer screws.

7 PAINT

To match the ceiling or the trim in the room. A flat finish will show off the carved details best.

8 WIRE NUTS

To connect the light fixture.

step by step

Clean the ceiling »

Turn off power to the light fixture at the breaker box and remove the old fixture.

Using dishwashing soap and a sponge, clean the ceiling around the fixture location to remove dust, dirt, and debris (RIGHT). If necessary, scrape away chipped paint or caulk from the old fixture with a putty knife.

Always treat electrical wires as if they are live, and keep them protected with wire caps as you work. **TIP**

« Mark the medallion for cutting

If your medallion does not already have a center hole or if the hole is not big enough to allow access to the junction box in the ceiling, cut a new one. Center the fixture's decorative cover plate or canopy on the face of the medallion. Lightly draw four reference marks around the edge of the canopy (LEFT).

Set the canopy aside. Using a compass, draw a circle about 1/2 inch inside the reference marks (INSET).

TIP > Keep a pure rubber "dry sponge" or an artist's eraser handy to clean up scuff marks on the medallion or the ceiling.



2

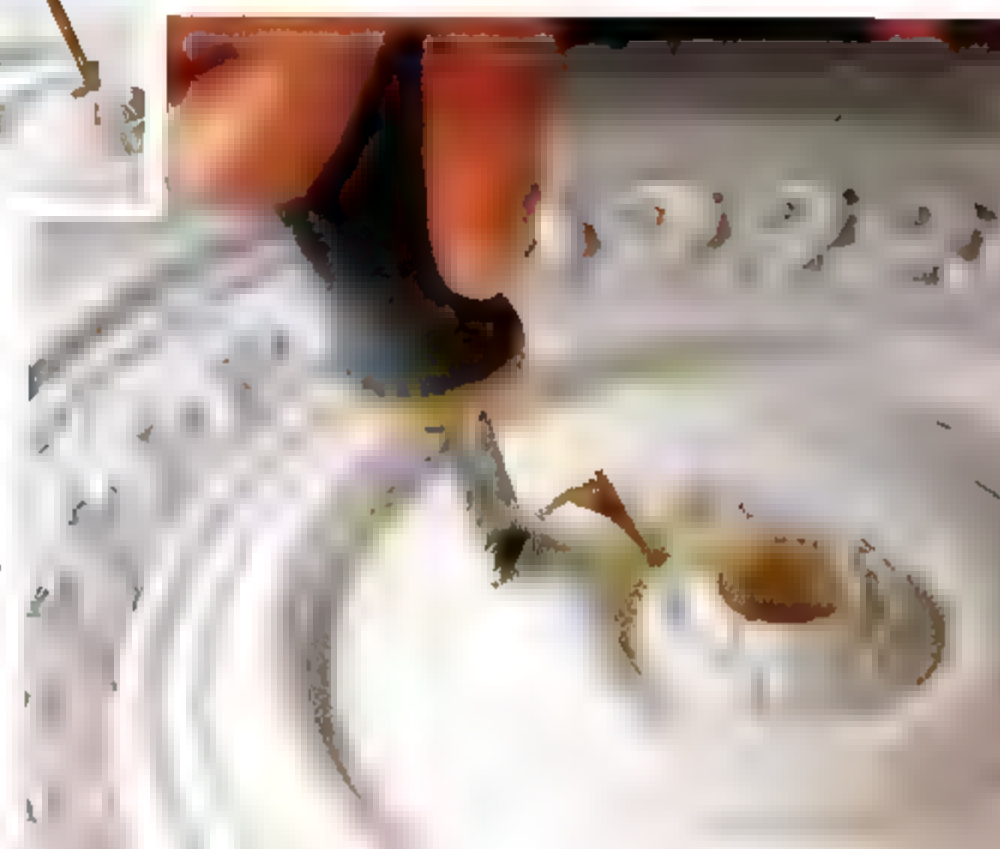


3

Cut the center hole »

Using a drill driver with a 3/8-inch paddle bit, drill a hole inside the circle. Insert the blade of a drywall saw into the hole and carefully cut along the marked circle (RIGHT).

Using a piece of medium-grit sandpaper, smooth the inside edge of the circular cutout.





4

« Dry fit the assembly

Hold the medallion in place so that it's centered over the electrical box (LEFT). Be sure that you can access the wires and the screw holes for the box's hanging hardware through the hole. Enlarge the hole with sandpaper if necessary.

Check that the threaded bolt (the nipple) which connects the fixture to the hanging plate attached to the junction box (the mounting bar) is long enough to reach from the junction box to the fixture with the medallion in place. Temporarily screw the nipple into the mounting bar. Then hold the medallion against the ceiling while screwing the fixture's canopy to the nipple, making sure you can tighten it on securely (INSET).

Remove the medallion and paint it to match the ceiling or the trim in the room. Let it dry.



Install the medallion »

Turn the medallion facedown and, using a caulk gun, apply a bead of adhesive caulk over the entire back. Stick the medallion in place on the ceiling, centering it over the junction box (RIGHT).

While the adhesive is wet, screw the canopy to the nipple and tighten it enough to act as a clamp to hold the medallion to the ceiling. Adjust the medallion as necessary to be sure the canopy is perfectly centered. Using a drill/driver, drive two trim-head screws through the medallion and into the ceiling to hold it in place while the adhesive sets. For medallions larger than 30 inches, use more screws. Drive the screws in a discreet location in the medallion's pattern, and let them sink a little below the surface to hide them. Remove the canopy.

Fill the screw holes with a dab of caulk, and caulk around the edge of the medallion if there are any obvious voids between it and the ceiling. When the caulk is dry, touch up the screw holes with paint. Also touch up the ceiling if necessary.



« Install the light fixture

Unscrew the mounting bar and nipple from the junction box. Tighten nuts onto the nipple on either side of the mounting bar to secure it. Feed the fixture's wires through the nipple and out the mounting bar. Screw the nipple/mounting bar assembly to the light fixture.

Using wire strippers, remove 1/2 inch of insulation from the fixture's wires. Lift the fixture in place and have a helper hold it. Screw the mounting bar to the junction box. Thread the wires over the top of the mounting bar and back down out of the ceiling.

Wrap the bare copper from the junction box around the mounting bar's grounding screw and tighten it. Then twist its end together with the fixture's ground wire (green or bare) and secure it with a wire nut. Determine which of the fixture's wires connects to the neutral wire: look for a wire with silver strands or one whose insulation is white, redged, or has wiring on it. Then twist it onto the ceiling's white wire and secure it with a wire nut. Connect the other (colored or smooth) wire to the black wire coming from the ceiling (LEFT).

Push the canopy into place, and tighten the collar nut underneath it to secure it against the medallion. Restore power to the fixture.

{ buying guide }

Ceiling medallions come in all sizes and designs, befitting everything from simple Colonial style sitting rooms to ornate Victorian parlors. Not all are white to mimic plaster; some have metallic or woodlike finishes, and others use mirrors as embellishment. Here are some of the classic and interesting medallion looks available.



^ RENAISSANCE, 24 inches, \$161
focalpointproducts.com



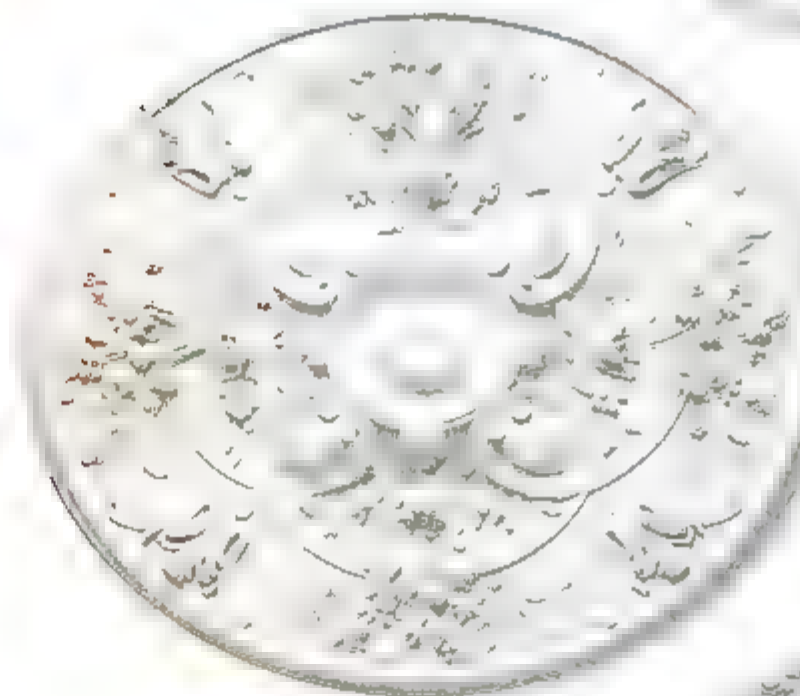
^ EGG AND DART, 12 1/2 inches, \$45
focalpointproducts.com

< FAUX METAL, in burnt copper, 17 inches, \$111
emersonfans.com

sizing a medallion

To ensure your medallion doesn't overpower or underwhelm, follow these handy guidelines:

ROOM SIZE	MEDALLION DIAMETER
140 square feet or less	Up to 20 inches
140 to 210 square feet	20 to 30 inches
210 to 280 square feet	30 to 40 inches
More than 280 square feet	40 inches or larger

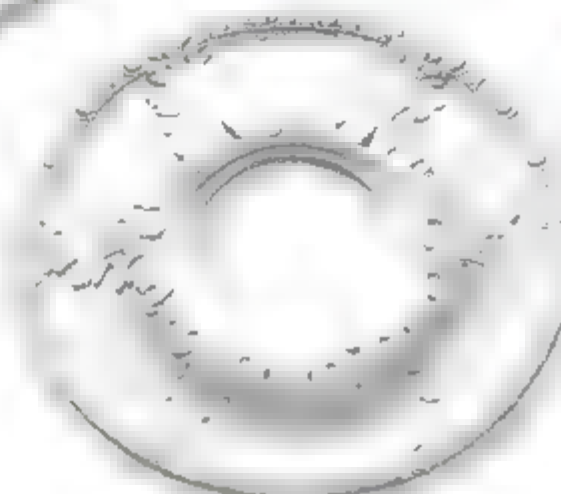


^ JEFFERSON, 15 inches, \$23, typon.com



^ CHELSEA, 19 inches, \$50, typon.com

^ ROCHELLE, 32 inches, \$107, typon.com



^ WOOD FINISH, in fiery cocoa, 36 1/3 inches, \$260, arctel.com

By JOSEPH DAGNESE
Photographs by SUSAN SEIBERT
Produced by COLLETTE SCANLON
Styling by SHELLEY STOUT

SMALL FIXES

Some key changes made a vintage cottage ultra-livable
without sacrificing an ounce of its charm

BIG PAYOFF

added space, kept the scale

The addition to the left of the Salem, Oregon house repeats the roofline, arch motif, and scale of the front portion of the 1927 cottage, making it fit right in. Inside, a new bedroom and bath will serve as a guest suite now, a first-floor master suite later.



When driving by a small house, most people think, *Oh, how cute. But I could never live there.* That's just what Randy Fishfader thought the first time she saw this little cottage some 30 years ago—and again, twice more, when FOR SALE signs went up in front of it.

Known among its Salem, Oregon, neighbors as the Tulip Cottage because of the floral motif on the stained-glass front window, the 1927 house looked perfect, Randy thought—if only it were just a little bigger.

Finally, when she heard from a friend that the cottage was going on the market once again, giving its longtime admirer another chance, she decided she had to go for it. Having recently overseen an expansion project at the college where she teaches, she felt less intimidated by the idea of remodeling this time around. But before putting in her offer, she called contractor Robert Kraft to do the walk-through—and a reality check—with her.

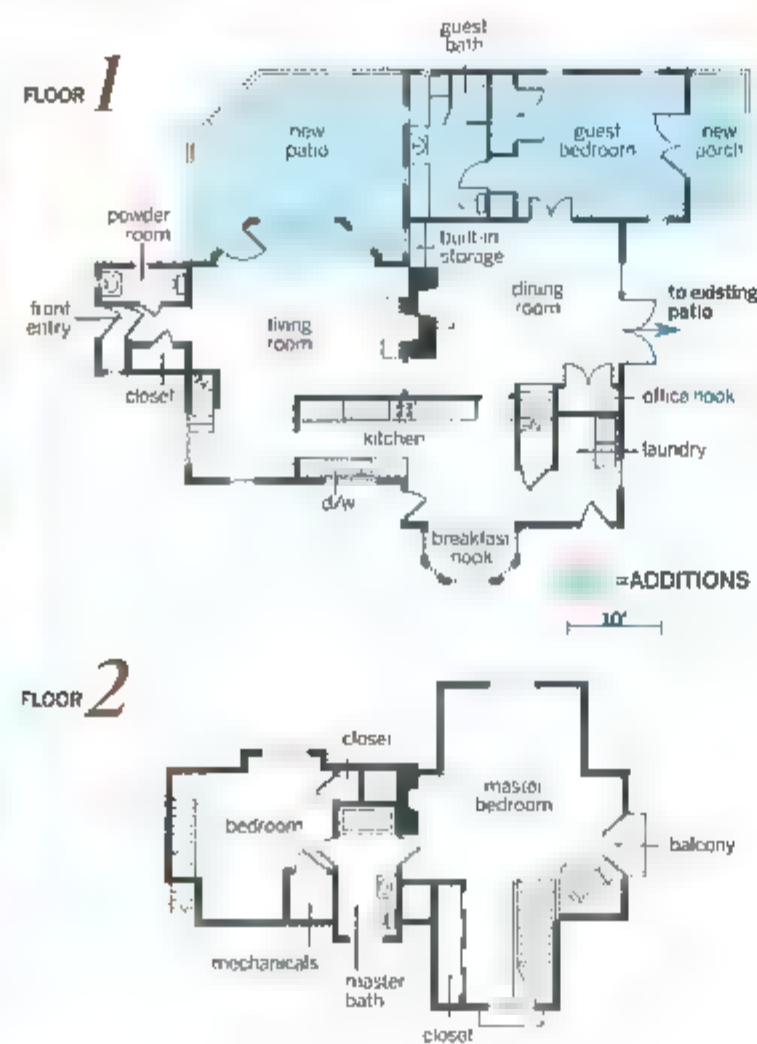
Together, they roamed the house, cataloging its charms: arched windows and doorways, and two cozy upstairs bedrooms and a bath tucked under the eaves. They also took note of faded, cramped downstairs rooms, an aging furnace, and the absence of an attic or basement for storage. On the plus side, the kitchen had recently been renovated.

At 1,650 square feet, the house wasn't tiny, but the two main rooms were so poorly laid out that Randy didn't think she could fit her sofa in there, much less a party. "And I do love to have people over," she says. More glaring, the biggest rooms were shortest on the home's signature charm. The living room's hardwood flooring was patched in places and sloping, and its brick fireplace was awkwardly off center. The dining room, which appeared to be a 1960s addition, was an afterthought, with metal-frame windows, painted-pine wall paneling, and a concrete-slab floor covered with salmon-colored carpet. Its raw-looking brick firebox was colonized by a wood-burning stove.

Part of Randy's vision was a house that, having been held at arm's length for so long, would now be hers forever. Specifically, she wanted a ground-floor bedroom and bath that could serve as a guest suite for the present and as a master suite later, when she no longer wanted to climb the stairs each night. But getting that would be tricky.

expanded the plan

The 1927 house was added onto once before, where the dining room now stands. The new addition opens that room up to a guest bedroom and bath. A bay window improves the flow of the living room, and a new patio and porch add outdoor living space.



bumped out for a bay window

To fit in comfortable seating and make room to entertain, the architect bumped out the living room's exterior wall with a full-height windowed bay, which also made the awkwardly placed hearth feel more centered.

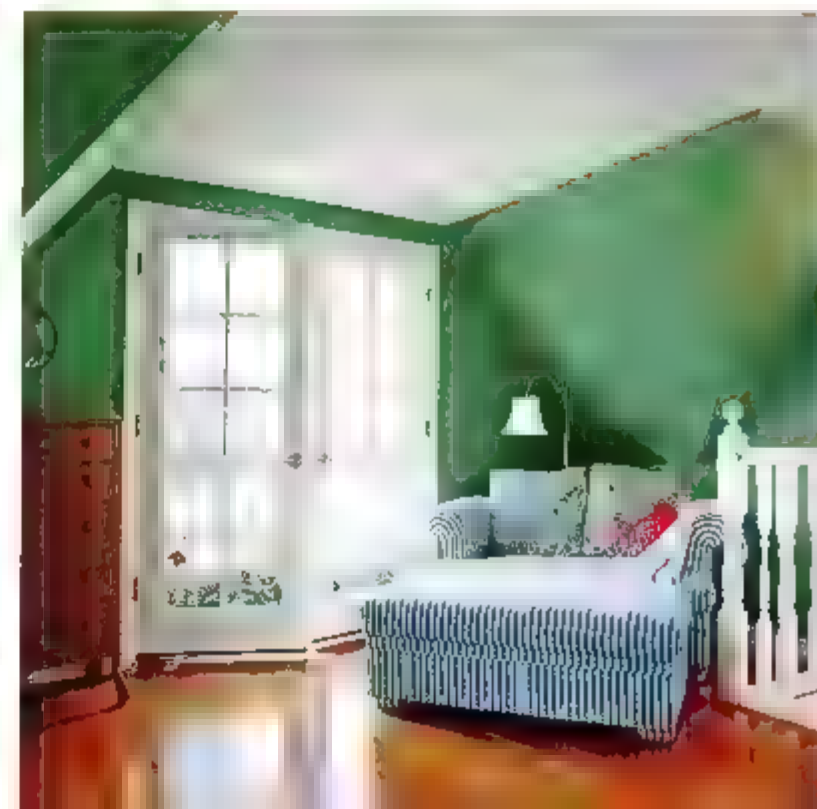


dressed up the fireplace

The dining room was previously used as a bare-bones den, complete with wood-burning stove (inset, TOP). The room got a makeover with an elegant mantel and surround and a coat of salmon paint. Because of the newly adjacent bathroom, it also lost a window—hardly noticeable, since French doors now channel light into the space.

planted a balcony garden

The existing master bedroom has a cozy feel, thanks to its slanted under-the-eaves ceilings. Keeping the French doors drapery-less and filling the sliver of balcony with flowers was one more way of letting in light and opening up rooms to views of the outdoors.



PRO ADVICE



"When installing crown molding on a raised ceiling, adding trim blocks at the corners will give you a clean transition."

ROBERT KRAFT, CONTRACTOR

improved outdoor living space
To maximize the house's potential for outdoor living, a small patio outside the living room was enlarged and finished to match an existing patio that is accessible from the dining room.



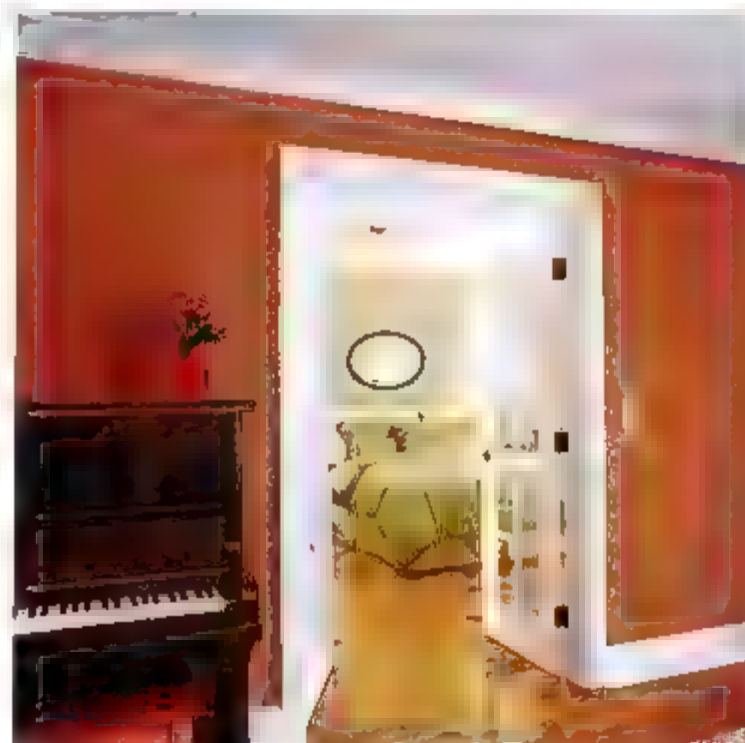
"There were more ways to butcher the house than do it right," says Kraft, a veteran carpenter. "I promised her we would do everything we could to preserve the charm of the original home."

So he called in local architect Karl Anderson to devise a plan to straighten out the awkward spaces and add a gentle enlargement that would be in keeping with the scale and style of the cute-as-a-button cottage. Anderson won Randy over by telling her, "I will fire myself before I make this house into something it shouldn't be."

Anderson let the home's original details and proportions guide him, repeating the rooflines and arch motif in his plan. In the living room, which felt barely big enough to seat Randy and three close friends, he bumped out the exterior wall with an almost floor-to-ceiling bay window. This alcove now holds an overstuffed sofa and gave the room a more pleasing shape as well as size. "It was just enough to turn it into a totally different space, allowing furniture to fall in place," says Anderson. "Widening the room, even by a bit, also makes the fireplace feel more centered." To give the red-brick mantle a more finished look, he added a wooden shelf with brackets and a space-enhancing coat of white paint.

The dining room, which had been used as a family room, needed surgery of its own. After removing the wood-burning stove, the fireplace brickwork was clad with light-reflecting travertine marble and framed with a white mantle. A low glass-front cabinet to the right of it would provide needed storage.

To give Randy her guest suite and make the entire ground floor feel roomier, Anderson sited the addition off the dining room, establishing a sight line from the kitchen through that room's interior French



opened up interior views

To make the whole first floor feel more spacious, the architect created a continuous sight line from the kitchen through the dining room's French doors and into the new guest suite.

raised ceilings, added windows
To make the new 13-by-15-foot bedroom feel bigger, the ceiling was vaulted and finished with white-painted beadboard. Three windows, two skylights, and a pair of French doors that open onto a small east-facing porch fill it with light.



built-in storage

The new bath features a single pedestal sink flanked by generous built-in drawer units, helping to make up for the 1927 cottage's pronounced lack of storage space. The room's ceramic tile is a period-appropriate touch that echoes the look of the previously renovated kitchen.

created a gradual transition

The passageway between the new bedroom and bath has two openings, creating an alcove for a built-in dresser. This gradual transition space helps make the whole suite feel more spacious.



repeated the arch theme

Windows and interior passageways in the addition repeat the arches found in the original portion of the house, making new spaces blend seamlessly with the old ones.



Get the scoop on tankless water heaters like the one installed in this cottage at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts

doors and into the new bedroom. From the outside, the 13-by-26-foot addition looks like a scaled-down version of the main house grafted onto the house's side with two arched windows facing the street, giving it a wide-eyed look similar to that of the front entry.

Inside, the bedroom and bath are separated by an elongated passageway that holds a built-in dresser—a gradual transition space that makes the whole suite feel more spacious. Along with three windows and French doors, the bedroom has a vaulted ceiling with two skylights. “Anytime you raise the ceiling of a small room, and especially if you add skylights, it makes the whole room feel bigger and brighter,” says Anderson. The roomy bath has a period-appropriate pedestal sink flanked by two built-in bureaus—helpful storage for when Randy moves down stairs and a nice bonus for guests in the meantime.

To unify the ground floor, Kraft installed crown molding and engineered-wood flooring throughout, and stuck to a paint palette of Randy's favorite peaches and greens. The special trim around the vaulted beadboard ceiling in the new bedroom actually serves a purpose. “When you

install crown molding on a raised ceiling, the corners can be a problem,” says Kraft. “Adding trim blocks where the pieces meet will give you a clean transition.”

Patios and porches make the whole interior feel more expansive by leading the eye outside and offer nearly year-round outdoor living in Oregon's mild climate. The dining room opens onto an original patio, and the living room's bay window now overlooks another patio that was remodeled to resemble the existing one. Both areas are enclosed by brick-capped stucco walls, making them feel like extensions of the rooms inside. The new bedroom has its own small porch, which faces the morning sun.

The guest suite has become—no surprise—a kind of destination. “Local friends with three young children have reserved it for their anniversary,” Randy says with a laugh.

Despite the tweaks, it is still the house she fell in love with 30 years ago. She has even given it her own tulip stamp, in the form of a metal grille she found in a salvage yard and had Kraft turn into a peephole in the front door. Like the addition, it not only adds a welcoming touch but also looks as if it has been there forever. ■

MORE SMART MOVES THIS HOMEOWNER MADE

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

> Swapped out a space-hogging 50-gallon electric water heater for a tankless gas model. Added a tankless gas water heater to the new bedroom.

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

> Upgraded the outmoded heating system. An old furnace was replaced with a new one.

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

> Replaced old leaky ducts with insulated ducts and took apart and cleaned others. Fixed the old ducts.

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

> Installed a programmable thermostat. This will help to save money on heating bills.

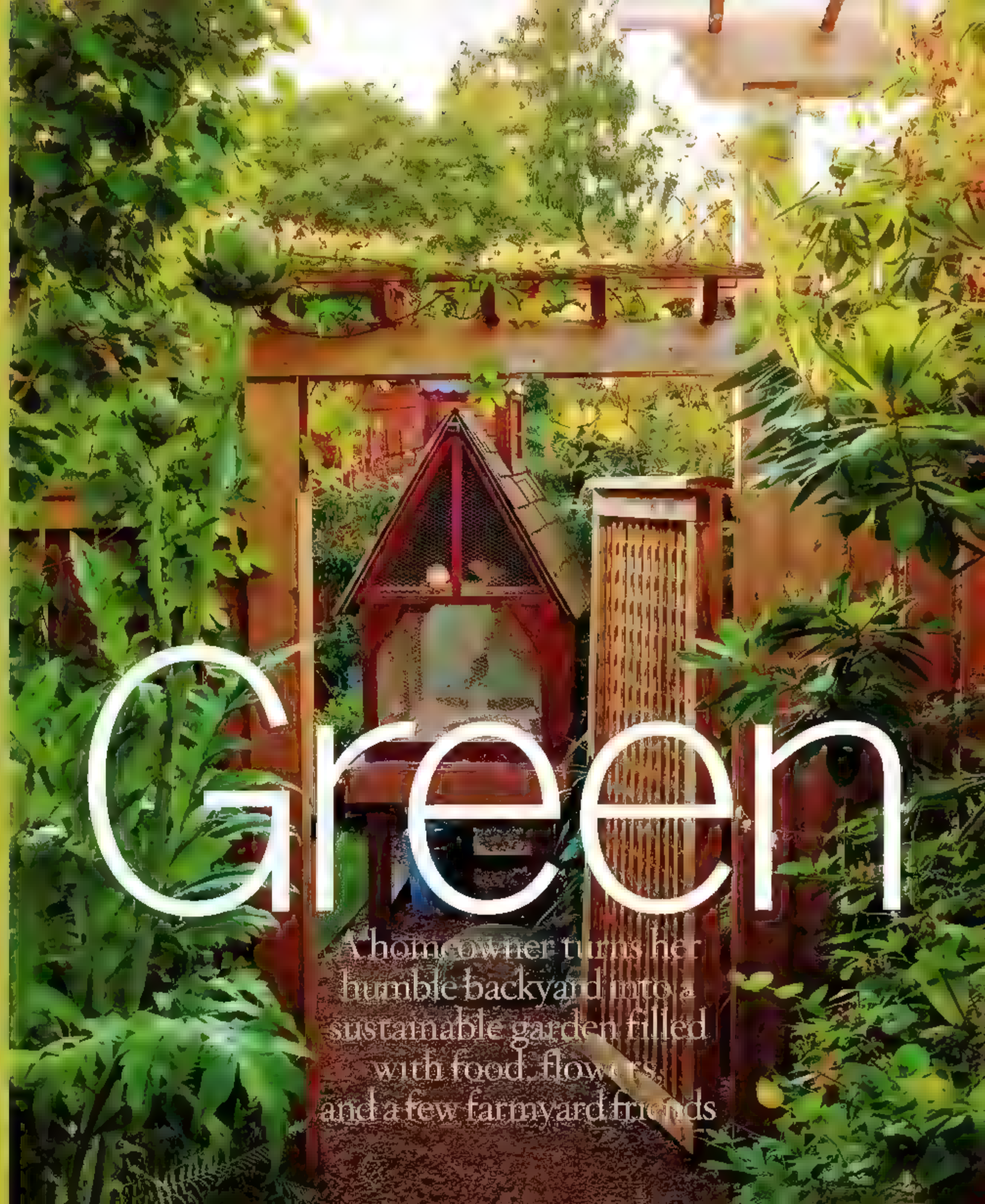
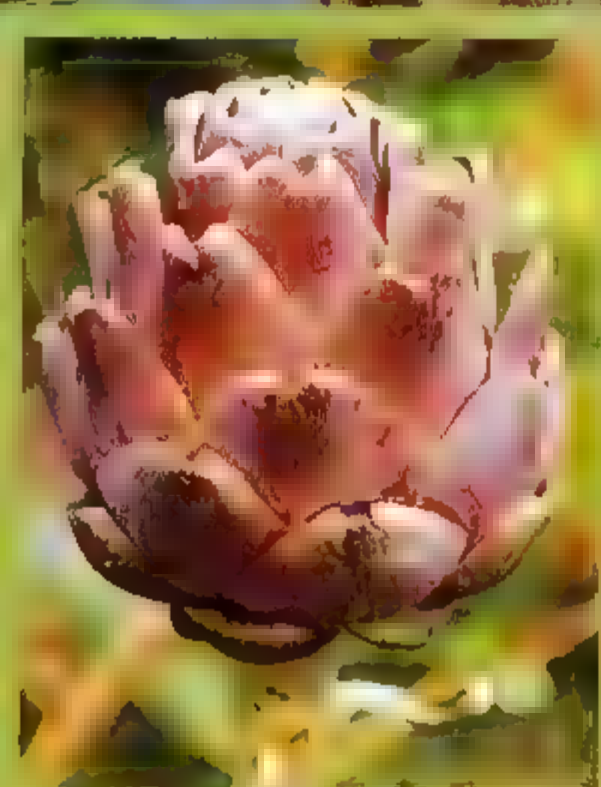
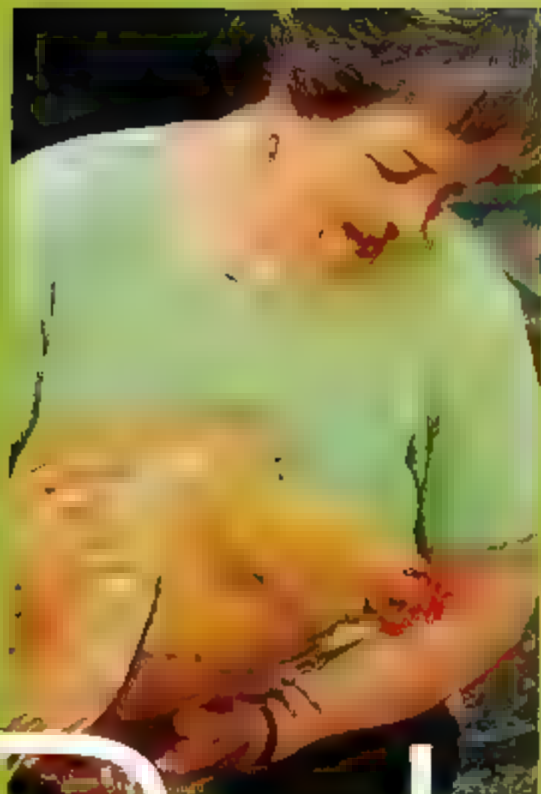
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“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

> Weatherstripped existing doors and windows. Together with the new windows, this will help to save money on heating bills.

“I wanted to make the most of the space I had, and I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there. I wanted to make sure the new addition looked like it had always been there.”

Her Patch of Green



A homeowner turns her humble backyard into a sustainable garden filled with food, flowers, and a few farmyard friends

A SUSTAINABLE GARDEN One that supports a local ecosystem and spurs chemical intervention can be as beautiful as a city street. In Jennifer Carlson's pretty little Seattle backyard, the fence, arbor, and whimsical home for low-maintenance plantings so lush that the property fits seamlessly into its green neighborhood of older homes. You'd never guess this eco-friendly haven, with its animals and rabbits, is more akin to a working farm than a typical city garden.

A landscape designer and teacher, Carlson moved here six years ago with her husband and two children and began studying the big picture: what the sun felt like, what the soil was like, how rainwater flowed, where it collected. Then, as soon as she had dripped ivy and overgrown shrubs, taken down a dead cherry tree, and removed lawn to widen the planting beds, she started enriching the sandy soil with coffee grounds collected from local coffee shops. "They add organic matter, which breaks down slowly and worms love the paper filters," she says of the cast-off grounds, which normally head for the landfill in plastic bags. "Plus, they smell great."

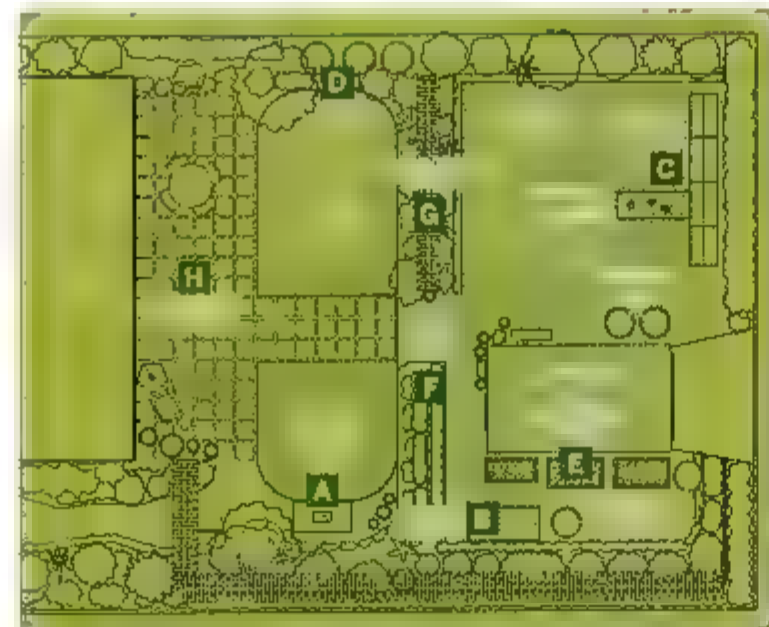
She designed the garden to nearly take care of itself. "I'm out here just five times a year to deadhead, weed, or clip back," she says of her maintenance regimen. "The rest of the time, the plants need to shine on their own." She repeats tough, durable varieties that have interesting color, leaf shape, and texture, adding in plenty of edibles and herbs, as well as native plants to feed and shelter birds and other wildlife. The rabbits, hens, and other fowl she keeps feed on garden scraps and contribute fertilizer.

Carlson thought about how each part of the garden could be engineered so that it would add up to one self-supporting loop. From rain barrels that harvest water for irrigation, to permeable paving that allows runoff to percolate into the soil, to a fence that composts garden clippings, every backyard element contributes to the landscape's system in its utility as well as its beauty and productivity. Read on to see how it all works together.

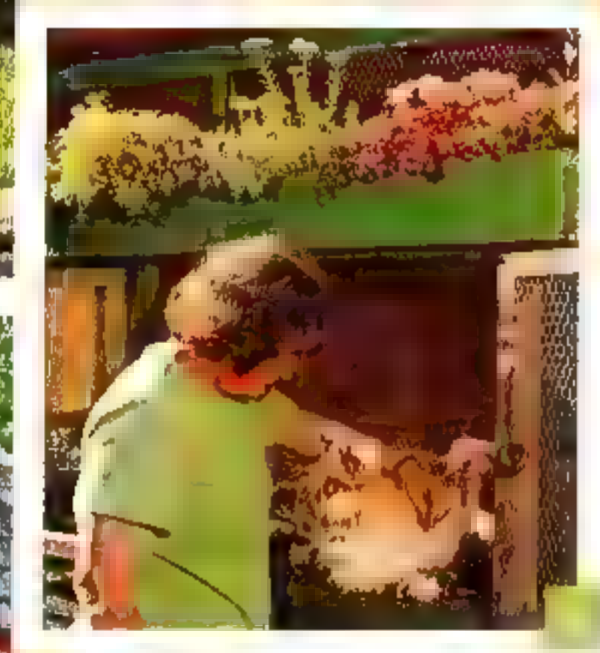
Animal Helpers

The cupola-topped home Carlson built for four cooing doves and a quail (A), the green roof on the rabbit hutch (B) and the bright red-orange and gold trim on the chicken coop (C) enliven the landscape and draw attention to their occupants, all of whom contribute nourishment to the garden and, in many cases, to the homeowners, too. The alfalfa hay bedding and droppings of the fluffy Angora rabbit brothers, Peaches and Mocha, are collected for fertilizer, and Carlson gathers and spins their fur into yarn. The hutch's sedum-covered roof absorbs rainwater. Three Buff Orpington hens (the maximum number of chickens allowed on a Seattle residential lot) are moved around in a bottomless portable pen built from salvaged cedar and hardware cloth. This way the chickens' tasks of fertilizing and turning over the soil is distributed throughout the garden. At night, the hens return to the safety of their brightly painted coop home. All the fowl provide eggs the family eats.

The Garden Plan



FROM COOPS TO CROPS Follow the key to match the photos on these pages to their location on this plan of the 60-by-62-foot backyard.



The bottomless pen, or "chicken tractor," can be placed directly on the lawn or soil, allowing the hens to graze on grass, dust bathe, and scratch for needed minerals.



Harvesting Water

Though Seattle receives 36 to 38 inches of rainfall each year, summers tend to be dry. So between September and May, Carlson collects over 4,000 gallons of rainwater off her roof, storing it in three cisterns (D) lined up against the back fence. In this way, the 950-square-foot roof provides sufficient water to keep the garden going all summer, including the lawn and vegetable beds. When it's time to water, Carlson simply attaches a garden hose or hooks up a sprinkler to a small utility pump submerged in each of the 625-gallon polypropylene storage tanks. "I've never used it all up over the summer," she says proudly of her free irrigation supply. Siting the cisterns was key, since they inevitably overflow in winter. Here, excess water runs onto a gravel area where it gradually filters down to recharge an underground creek bed.

An Edible Ornamental Mix

Every inch of ground is either productive or pretty, and often both. Most of the vegetables grow in three raised beds (E) nestled between the garage and fence, maximizing sunlight reflected off the outbuilding's wall to ripen tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. In a tour de force of space saving, a 15-foot-long espaliered fruit tree fence (F) yields Asian pears, apples, and Italian prune plums. Blueberry bushes are layered underneath, with a groundcover of strawberries shading their roots. Every shrub, tree, and perennial that doesn't provide food is vetted for drought tolerance, low maintenance, and resiliency. A short list of Carlson's favorites include Northwest natives, such as vine maple (*Acer circinatum*), red-towering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), and Pacific wax myrtle (*Myrica californica*). She favors small shrubs, such as evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) and salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), mingling with Western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*).



Composting

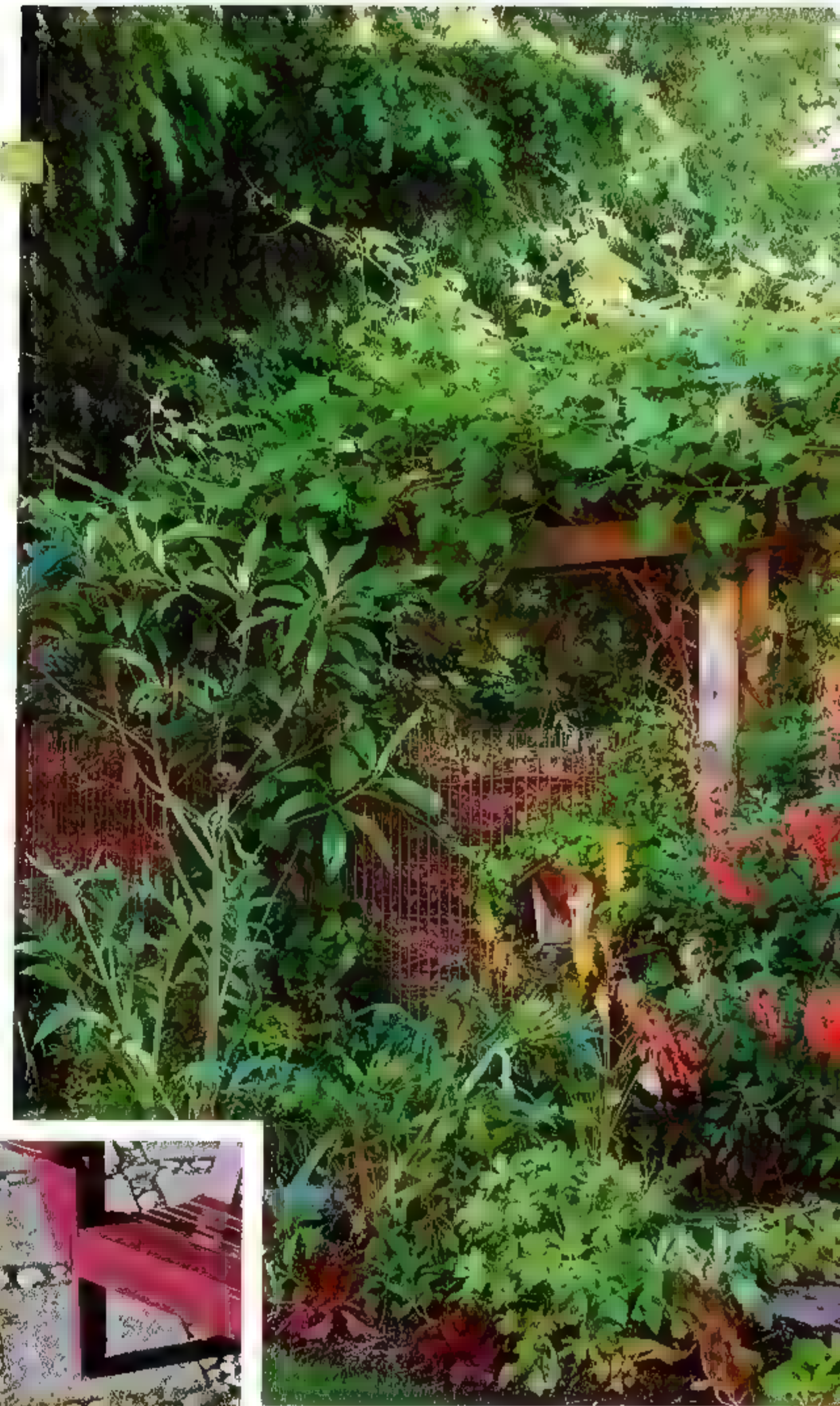
When layer after layer of yard waste is sandwiched between the parallel sections of wire that make up the composting fence (G), it almost looks like a stratified geological find. But this clever fence is thoroughly modern. Carlson designed and built it out of cedar posts and welded wire fencing, and topped it with an arbor draped in kiwi and grape vines. It also works as a privacy screen to shield the garden from the parking area. Most fallen leaves and clippings fit neatly inside, cutting way down on the amount of woody waste that needs to be hauled off the property. Wrens and chickadees are attracted to the dense wall of vegetation, and, best of all, over time the green waste breaks down to feed the plants around it. In addition, four bins are used year-round to turn manure, animal bedding, yard waste, and kitchen scraps into more compost to enrich the garden beds.

Permeable Patio

A foot of crushed rock, a layer of landscape fabric, and an inch of sand form the base of the backyard patio (H). Carlson built to replace an old impermeable concrete slab. She laid ribbons of stones she had collected for years—bounty sifted out of the soil in her clients' gardens—between aggregate pavers. Then she swept a commercial compost made from garden clippings and vegetable trimmings into the spaces between the pavers to promote feathery moss growing in the gaps.



Get tips from This Old House landscape contractor Roger Cook on installing a rain barrel at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts



the second annual bl@ck and b!ue thumb awards

Home-repair blunders got you down?
Here are 12 reasons you're not alone

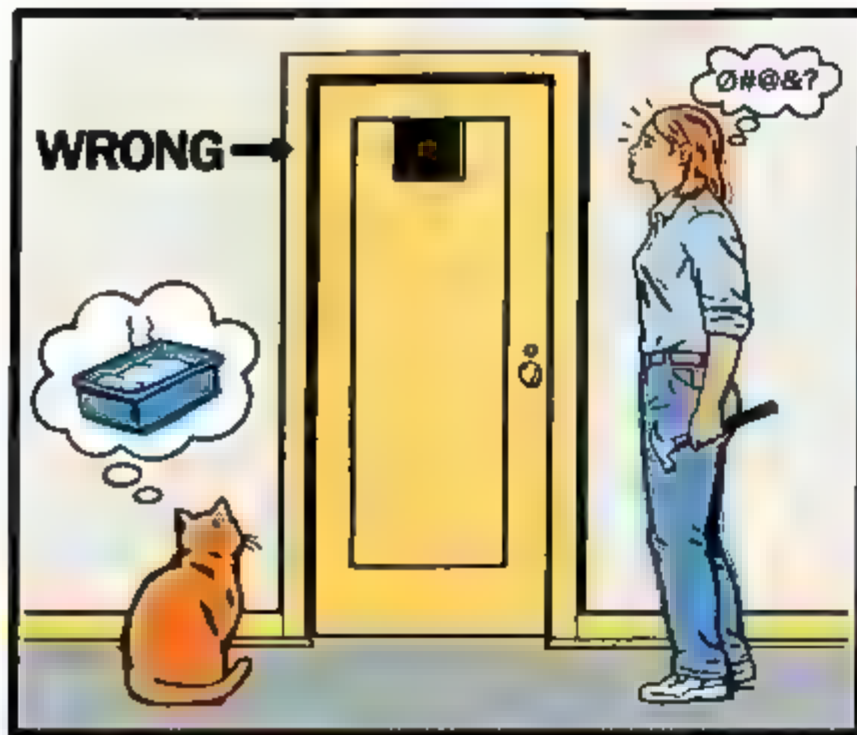
Stuff happens. You screw up the measurements for your new custom cabinets, and they don't quite...fit. You drop the marble countertop you're installing, and, well, look on the bright side: You now have two marble countertops. Or this: You swing the hammer and hit the nail on the head—your thumb-nail, that is. Welcome to the second annual Black & Blue Thumb Awards, our roundup of DIY mishaps so monumental that your mistakes will seem minuscule by comparison. We hope.

The Will to Survive Award

Sherley Larcom, 36, of Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania, is handy around the house. Put in an efficient new lockset on her front door. Very efficient. On a cold, rainy morning, she got up to let the dog out. "But soon as I closed the door behind me," says Sherley, who was still in her pjs, "I got that sinking feeling." It was locked. So was the back door and all the windows—except one on the second floor. So she grabbed a ladder and started her ascent to the unlocked window. That's when she slipped and plummeted onto the garage roof, spraining her left ankle and breaking her right leg. Despite the agonizing pain, she climbed down and dragged herself into the yard, where she grabbed a firewood ax. She busted down a

by keith
pandolfi
illustrations
by eric larsen





wooden basement door crawled up stairs and called an ambulance. "I'm happy to say that I have been back up on that ladder," says Shirley. "Only now I make sure someone is there to hold it."

2 The Pollywog Hater's Award

Debra Taylor, 37, of Sand Springs, Oklahoma, was power washing her pool. Unhappy with the puddle of algae and debris in the deep end. She was barefoot in the shallows, blasting away when she started sliding toward the muck. "I didn't want to end up in that water—there was a tadpole in there! don't swim in lakes for the same reason. To avoid the dirty water, I fell on my right arm, wrenching my shoulder," says Debra. She managed to avoid the dreaded pollywog but not tearing her rotator cuff—or surgery. "I learned my lesson," she says. "The pool will never get that dirty again."

3 The Next Time, Let Someone Else Do It Award

Anthony Lipardis, 37, of New York City decided to forgo the installation cost and put in a new dishwasher himself. His wife, Tiffany jokingly reminded him to turn off the breaker before he got started.

"I already did," he assured her. But a few minutes later Tiffany heard

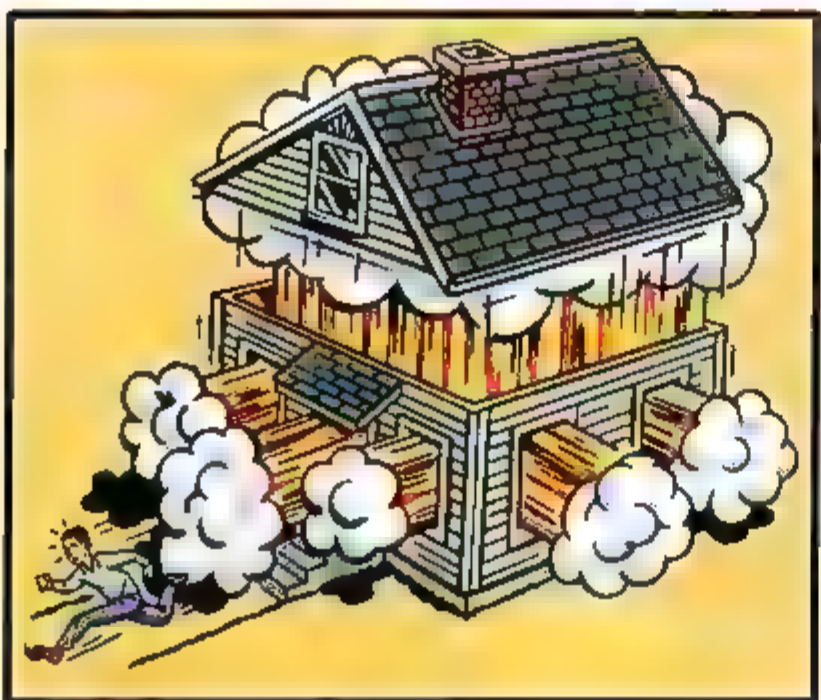
Anthony moaning. She ran to the kitchen, where she found him lying on the floor—10 feet from the dishwasher—with streaky burns on his arm and leg. Turns out the machine was on a circuit for large appliances which only the building super had access to. Anthony spent the night in the burn unit. Though only his pride was truly injured, he managed a get well gift out of the ordeal. "While I was in the hospital, the super was nice enough to finish the job for me at no charge," says Anthony.

4 The Sometimes We Learn From Our Mistakes; Other Times, Not So Much Award

While installing new plasterboard on his pantry ceiling, Chuck Andrae, 51, of Darien, Connecticut, practiced poor marksmanship when he aimed his screw gun directly into a length of pipe. The errant shot flooded the laundry room and, of course, ruined the plasterboard. Chuck was working alongside his general contractor, who simply rolled his eyes, turned off the water, and dutifully patched up the hole. Then it was back to work. A little embarrassed, Chuck repositioned the plasterboard on the ceiling, pulled the trigger of his dry wall gun, and screwed right into those darn pipes all over again. "My GC was just laughing at me," says Chuck. "Wondering why the heck I was even trying to do this."

5 The Flying Feline Award

Jeanne Leveque, 44, of New Hope, Minnesota, and her father were taking part in the progress while installing a polystyrene insulation board to provide her two cats with better box access. "We took a box of flash tapes and carefully placed it on top of the board," she says. "We didn't realize we were holding the cats' lives in our hands. When we realized we had cut the opening in the top of the board instead of the bottom, the flashing, one of the cats, had just walked up the stairs."



6 The Award for Excellence in Home Pyrotechnics

Ronald Cox had good intentions when he blew up his house. Really, he did. The 75-year-old retiree from Scunthorpe, England, was just trying to remove glue from some kitchen floor tiles. The cleaner didn't work that well, so he poured on a cup of gasoline or petrol, in local parlance. When the volatile vapors spread to Ronald's boiler, the explosion blew out a bay window and brought down part of the kitchen ceiling. Fortunately, Ronald escaped unharmed. After responding to the scene, a local fire official offered some helpful advice, albeit a bit late: "The place for petrol is outside, in motor vehicles."

7 The Award for Excellence in Home Pyrotechnics (Silver)

Lois Garnett, 57, of Augusta, Georgia, made a small but critical mistake when she set off an aerosol bug bomb in her home. She forgot to first snuff the pilot light on her stove. Like Cox, Lois was at home when the inevitable explosion took place—and lucky to escape harm. According to Battalion Chief Tommy Willis of Augusta Fire/Rescue, "It blew the ceiling up into the attic."

8 The Award for Excellence in Home Pyrotechnics (Bronze)

Joshua Mullen, 26, of Mobile, Alabama, had a very nice utility shed. The only problem was that it was filled with bees, which were swarming around a pile of rags inside of it. One day Joshua decided to get rid of them. He poured some gasoline on the rags, then left to do some yard work. That's when he heard a mighty whoosh! The gas fumes were ignited by a water-heater pilot light. And the bees presumably died after lighting up like urban fireflies.

9 The Nail in the Noggin Award

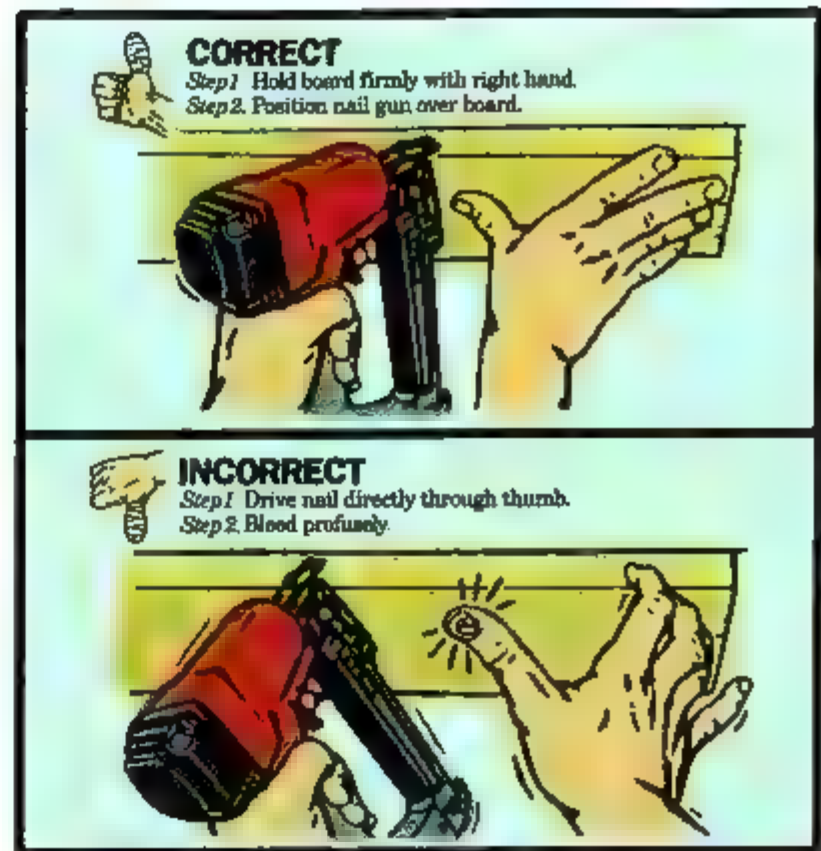
Last June, George Chandler, 60, of Shawnee, Kansas, was installing attic for a climbing wisteria with his buddy Phil Kern, 60. Phil was on a ladder handling the nail gun, and George was on the ground below. The compressor hose snagged on a child's toy, and when Phil yanked on the hose to untangle it, the gun went off.

"Where did the nail go?" Phil asked.

"I don't know, but I felt something on my head," George said.

"I looked down," Phil later told a reporter, "and saw the nail."

Turns out George's hat had been spiked to his head. A doctor later removed it in a delicate and sophisticated procedure—using the ever-ready maintenance department claw hammer.



10 The Biblical Pain & Suffering Award

Squeamish readers beware. While restoring a turn of the century farmhouse in St. Augusta, Minnesota, Scott Christman, 34, nail-gunned his thumb to a 2x4 while reframing a bedroom ceiling. He was standing high on a ladder working alone, cell phone out of reach. Scott reluctantly grabbed his hammer out of his tool belt, pounded on the board to loosen it, and climbed down. After sawing the board to a length that would fit inside his car, he drove to the hospital. There, using a saw normally employed to cut away casts, doctors tried unsuccessfully to remove the nail from the board. Frustrated and angry but ever resourceful, Scott demanded the doctors call the maintenance department. Workers arrived and split the 2x4 lengthwise to free the nail, which then slid out of Scott's thumb, proving once again that one should always use the right tool for the job.

11 The Stephen King Home-Improvement Award

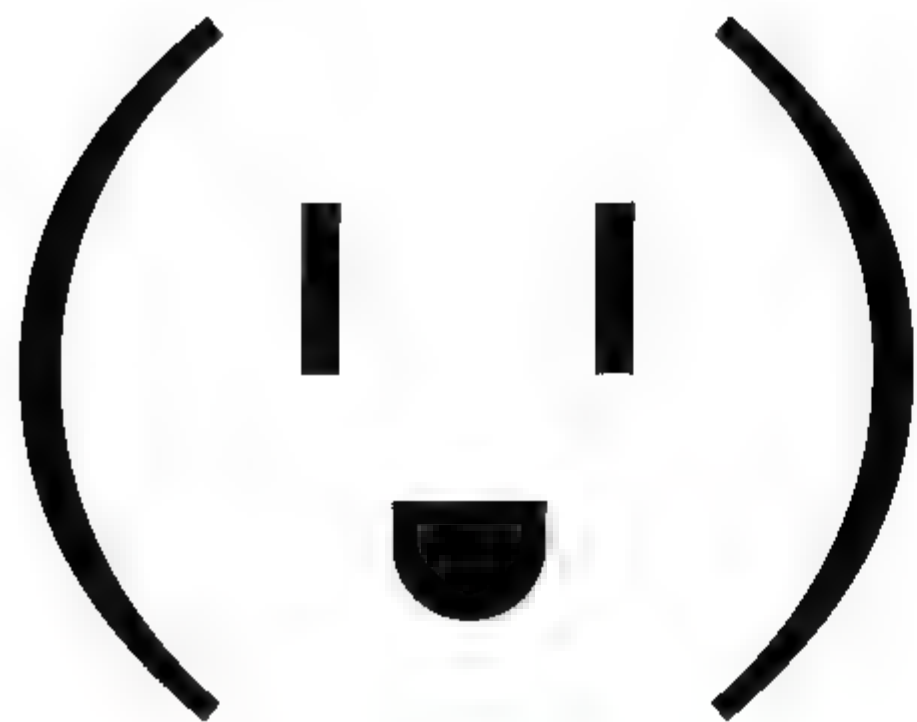
After buying his first home, Jay Cotten, 49, of Saratoga Springs, New York, was pretty excited about becoming a real handyman. But that excitement quickly turned to blood-splattered humiliation when he tried to pry open the packaging on a screwdriver set with his pocketknife. Jay

accidentally stabbed himself in the hand, hitting what must have been an artery. "Blood just went everywhere," he says. "It splattered over three walls—even the ceiling." Eight stitches later he had a chance to put his handyman skills to work, adding a coat of primer and three coats of paint to his bloodied living room.

"Apparently," warns Jay, "blood doesn't cover over easily."

12 The Charlton Heston Award for Home Exter

The Charlton Heston Award for Home Exterior is given to the homeowner who has made the most significant improvement to the exterior of their home. The award is named after the actor Charlton Heston, who was known for his role as Moses in the 1956 film "The Ten Commandments". The award is presented annually to the winner of a contest held by the National Home Improvement Association. The contest is open to all homeowners who have made a significant improvement to the exterior of their home. The winner of the contest will receive a trophy and a certificate of appreciation. The award is given to the homeowner who has made the most significant improvement to the exterior of their home. The award is named after the actor Charlton Heston, who was known for his role as Moses in the 1956 film "The Ten Commandments". The award is presented annually to the winner of a contest held by the National Home Improvement Association. 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The savvy homeowners on
these eight pages will
save over \$12,275
on their energy bills this year.

How? By putting power-saving technologies to work inside
their homes. Read on to see if you can do the same.

BY JOSEPH D'AGNESE



**“We put in a
pellet stove”**

—Brent Bussey and Jessica Gervais,
Putnam, Connecticut

How It Works. Clean-burning pellets made from compressed recycled sawdust and resembling rabbit feed are poured into the stove's hopper, where they're fed automatically into the burn chamber. One internal fan stokes the flame, another sends out convection heat. Electricity powers the fans, feeder, and temperature controls. The stove can save 50 percent or more on home heating costs. **What These Homeowners Did** Although Brent and Jessica insulated their 900-square-foot, two-story house in 2004, they still spent \$3,000 on home heating oil, thanks to an old, inefficient furnace. So the next year they brought in

find more online

Learn more about the technologies in this story and get other energy-saving tips at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts

a backup: a freestanding, glass-front pellet stove made by Breckwell (breckwell.com), a company based in Arlington, Texas. The 185-pound stove sits on a tiled platform in a corner of the living room, with the stovepipe discreetly vented outdoors through the back wall.

Brent and Jessica keep their stove fired up from October to May, adjusting the controls to keep the heat output between 60 and 70 degrees F. Its hopper holds 45 pounds of pellets, or enough to keep the stove going for up to two days without replenishing. Other models have bigger hoppers, so you can leave town without fear of frozen pipes. As for maintenance, "Once a week during the winter, we vacuum it out with a wet/dry vac and clean off the glass," says Brent.

The stove did such a good job they disconnected their furnace two years ago. "The oil company called because they could see that we hadn't bought oil in a while and were worried about us," Jessica recalls. "I said, 'We don't need any more, thanks. We're just fine!'"

What They Learned: A freestanding fan, combined with hot air's natural inclination to rise, easily warms all seven rooms in the house. "If your house doesn't have an open plan, you do have to get used to keeping doors open so that the heat can travel to each room," says Jessica.

Keep in Mind: Storing all those pellets somewhere dry can be a challenge. Brent and Jessica went through three tons (150 bags) last winter, stashing the 40-pound sacks on a back porch and a pallet in the basement. Still, it's a good idea to stock up early—the stuff gets harder to find as winter approaches, and three years ago a shortage caused something of a pellet panic.

PAYBACK PERIOD: Less than 2 years

THEIR COST: \$2,000 for the stove, installed; \$800 a year for premium hardwood pellets

YEARLY SAVINGS on **\$2,200**
of heat

"We installed heat pumps"

—Ed Schwartz and Julie Tung,
Ridgewood, New Jersey



How They Work: An air-source heat pump looks something like a central AC compressor, and in summer it works the same way, pumping heat to the outside through lines

filled with refrigerant.

During the winter, the same pump extracts heat from

the outdoor air—surprisingly, even cold air still contains a large amount of heat—and sends it inside. Air handlers blow the heated or cooled air through a home's ductwork. Some systems may be equipped with humidifiers for winter comfort and filters to trap allergens.

Historically, heat pumps didn't work well in areas where temperatures dropped below 35 degrees F, but Hallowell International (gotohallowell.com) recently introduced an "all-climate" heat pump called the Acadia, which works when the mercury dips as low as -30 degrees F. The Bangor, Maine, company says this system can reduce heating and cooling costs by at least 60 percent.

What These Homeowners Did: While completing a renovation of their 5,000-square-foot house, much of it dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, Ed and Julie replaced an ancient furnace with two Hallowell all-climate heat pumps.

What They Learned: Last winter, when temperatures fell to the single digits, the two pumps kept the house a toasty 70 degrees F, even though some rooms were still uninsulated. And at the height of a heat wave last summer, they got the temperature down to 76 degrees. The key is to leave the thermostat at a set temperature for about eight hours at a time so that each pump can perform at peak efficiency.

It also pays to insulate and seal air leaks. By doing this, the owners were able to buy a smaller, less costly system.

Keep in Mind: New ductwork and thick, old plaster walls aren't a natural fit. To minimize the number of openings in the walls, Ed and Julie located one air handler in the attic and one in the basement.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 7 years

THEIR COST: \$15,000 for each heat pump; installed new ductwork not included

YEARLY SAVINGS on **\$2,100**
of heat

"We got solar panels"

—Tom Hammer and Sue Ling Cho,
Los Gatos, California

How They Work: Solar panels are made up of photovoltaic cells that contain semiconductors, which absorb the sun's energy and turn it into electricity. The cells are encased in a protective film, and the panels are typically framed in aluminum and topped with glass. If the system is designed and installed correctly, the panels will produce most, if not all, of the electricity your house needs—at no further cost.

What These Homeowners Did: Three years ago, Tom and Sue Ling hired a professional installer to put 24 solar panels on the roof of their 2,900-square-foot ranch house. Made by SunPower (sunpowercorp.com, of San Jose, California), their 4.5 kilowatt system took about a week to get up and running. It generates enough electricity to supply nearly all their needs. When it's too cloudy or dark to generate enough of its own electricity, the system draws from the grid; when it generates a surplus, the meter spins in reverse.

In the end, the couple pay their utility company about \$500 a year, a 75 percent reduction. After installing the panels, they switched to a plan that offers cheaper power during off-peak hours, contributing even more to their overall savings.

What They Learned: "In summer, where we live, the panels need to be washed on a regular basis to get the dust and grime off or they lose power," says Sue Ling, who takes turns with her husband climbing up on the roof with a hose every six to eight weeks.

Keep in Mind: Installation is expensive, and the economics depend partly on where you live; some areas are sunnier than others, and some utilities charge more than others. Government subsidies can help reduce initial costs.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 13 years

THEIR COST: \$26,000 installed after about \$15,000 in state and federal tax credits and rebate

YEARLY SAVINGS on **\$2,000**
household electricity



“We switched to solar hot water”

—Bob Alcock and Tim Wheeler,
Lost River, West Virginia



How It Works: A flat-plate collector—basically an insulated weatherproof box containing a dark plate covered with glass or plastic—absorbs the sun’s heat and transfers it to water or an antifreeze solution. The solution flows through a long loop of piping that heats water in an insulated tank. On a 90-degree day, the sun can heat this water to nearly 160 degrees F. On cloudy days, when the temperature of the water drops, a backup water heater can boost the temperature; it doesn’t have to work as hard, though, because the water is preheated. The bottom line: You can cut your water-heating bills by more than 50 percent.

What These Homeowners Did: Two years ago Bob and Tim increased the size of their rustic home to 2,660 square feet. As part of a whole-house energy retrofit, they added five solar flat-plate collectors made by Alternate Energy Technologies (aetsolar.com), which is based in

fleeing commodity than the electricity produced by photovoltaic cells, which can be stored in batteries.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 10 years

THEIR COST: \$14,770 installed together with radiant floor heating (which they put in largely themselves) after about \$2,000 in federal tax credits

YEARLY SAVINGS on propane for heat and hot water

\$1,500

“We put up window awnings”

—David and Nellie Aranowski,
South Bend, Indiana



How They Work: These protruding exterior window shades prevent glare and solar heat gain, lightening an air conditioner’s load. Made from weather-resistant fabric, they usually retract manually, via a cord system, or mechanically, with a remote, to protect them from wind damage and, in frost-prone areas, to allow sunlight to warm a home’s interior in winter. They can reduce cooling costs by up to 24 percent, depending on the climate.

What These Homeowners Did: David and Nellie moved into their 1920s Dutch Colonial Revival three years ago, just in time to experience summer as a nonstop sauna. That’s also when they noticed tree stumps near the house—and realized it would need some shade. They called on Custom Awning (custom-awning.com), a local shop in Osceola, Indiana, to install four large awnings made of durable acrylic fabric across nine windows on the house’s sun-drenched south- and west-facing sides.

What They Learned: The awnings allowed the couple to raise the thermostat on their central AC by 5 degrees F while making a dramatic difference in their comfort level. The black and white striped awnings also added major curb appeal. “The house is so darn cute now,” says Nellie.

Keep in Mind: Even top-of-the-line awnings only last about 10 years.

PAYBACK PERIOD: Here’s one case where you may not recoup all your cost in energy savings, but you’ll vastly improve your quality of life.

THEIR COST: \$1,920 for four large awnings, installed

YEARLY SAVINGS on electricity for AC

\$90

“Cloudy days can really get in the way of a nice hot shower, so be sure to couple your solar hot-water system with a conventional water heater as a backup.”

BOB ALCOCK, LOST RIVER, WEST VIRGINIA

Jacksonville, Florida. Installed on the roof, the collectors heat two 80-gallon water tanks in the basement, so there’s plenty of hot water on sunny days for household needs as well as for the new radiant heat system they added in more than two-thirds of the house. When their water drops below 110 degrees, a 75-gallon propane-heated backup tank kicks on.

What They Learned: The temperature of the hot water varies, depending on the weather and time of day. So they now time their showers—and encourage guests to do the same—to take full advantage of “tree” hot water, which is most plentiful late in the day.

Keep in Mind: Panels should face south and catch the sun for most of the day. And solar-heated water is a more



“We put in tube skylights”

—Justin and Kristin Gonzalez,
Vista, California

How They Work: About 10 to 20 inches in diameter, tubular skylights channel natural light where windows or skylights can’t. A tube lined with reflective material is inserted through a hole cut in the roof and lined up with a second hole cut in a room’s ceiling. A clear plastic dome tops the rooftop end, and a ceiling fixture caps it below. Sunlight bounces off the mirrorlike lining and spills from the fixture, so you don’t waste money turning on lights.

What These Homeowners Did: Last fall, while renovating the 1,400-square-foot ranch Justin and Kristin share with their 2-year-old daughter, they learned about tubular skylights just as recessed light fixtures were being installed. Since the house faces a busy street, they keep the blinds drawn in several rooms, so they need a lot of light. The couple invested in 10 tubular skylights made by Solatube (solarube.com), a local company, for their kitchen, family room, a hallway, two bathrooms, and the master closet.

What They Learned: “All that natural light just makes you feel better,” says Justin. “It makes the whole house feel more relaxing.” It also changed the way they live. From about 6 A.M. to 7 P.M., they don’t turn on a single light—or pay to power one.

Keep in Mind: An array of plastic bubbles may not improve the look of your roofline. To preserve your facade, you can place the tubes in back and angle them across the attic—with a small sacrifice of light—to their desired location.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 10 years

THEIR COST: \$5,000 for 10 tubes installed

YEARLY SAVINGS on electricity for lighting

\$500

“We added denim batts”

—Bryant and Stephanie Pearson,
Portland, Oregon



How They Work: Like all insulation, recycled denim batts help to block drafts and curb heat loss. They offer about the same R-value protection as fiberglass but take less energy to produce, since they’re made with scrap fibers from textile mills and garment factories. The material is treated with nontoxic borates to make it insect- and fire-resistant. As with any insulation, denim batts can cut energy costs by up to 30 percent.

What These Homeowners Did: When it came time to insulate the family’s 900-square-foot basement, Bryant reached for a soft, familiar material: denim. “I come from

a construction family,” says Bryant, “and the worst job on any work site is having to put up fiberglass insulation. It gets everywhere.” He chose instead UltraTouch denim batts, made by Bonded Logic (bonded.logic.com) of Chandler, Arizona, and installed them in a day. (Finishing the drywall was another story.)

What They Learned: “Denim insulation throws off a lot of dust,” says Bryant, who wore goggles and a mask, and vacuumed frequently.

Keep in Mind: Recycled denim batts cost 15 to 20 percent more than comparable fiberglass—worth it, says Bryant, to work with no-itch, formaldehyde-free cotton.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 2 to 3 years

THEIR COST: \$800, with DIY installation

YEARLY SAVINGS on gas heat

\$300

PHOTO: © JEFFREY M. HARRIS

"We got hot water heat pumps"

—Jim and Rachel King,
Rosharon, Texas

How They Work: Like other heat pumps, this scaled-down version extracts heat from the surrounding air and transfers it to another medium—in this case, to water stored in a conventional standby tank. The Air Tap, as it's called, measures less than two cubic feet, weighs 48 pounds, and sits on top of your existing hot water tank. AirGenerate (airgenerate.com), the Houston company that makes the device, says it uses only one-quarter of the electricity drawn by a conventional electric hot-water tank.

What These Homeowners Did: Jim and Rachel, who live with their two kids in a 3,750-square-foot house, had been heating water with propane—at a monthly cost of \$130. "You'd hear the flame go *whoosh* all day long," says Jim. "It was like hearing money go down the drain." When they learned about the Air Tap earlier this year, they decided to buy one for each of their two 50-gallon hot water tanks. A contractor installed them in about three hours.

What They Learned: "You still hear a bit of noise sometimes, like a bathroom fan running," says Jim, who is relieved to know his kids are no longer sleeping near a propane flame—one water tank is upstairs. And how's the water? "We haven't had a cold shower since we turned off the propane."

Keep in Mind: The manufacturer says an Air Tap should last 10 years but won't perform as well or last as long if the existing tank is in poor condition.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 7 months

THEIR COST: \$450 each or \$900 total, including

YEARLY SAVINGS on
propane for hot water

\$1,560



THE WATER'S FINE
With the Air Tap, Jim and Rachel King retrofitted their water tanks with heat-pump devices that stopped using propane.

"We went with a geothermal heat pump"

—David and Jen Schlegel,
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania



How It Works: A geothermal system, or ground-source heat pump, taps into the earth's constant temperature of 55 degrees F to heat and cool a home efficiently. In a vertical installation, piping is buried up to 300 feet deep. In a horizontal system, the piping snakes under a wide swath of land, 3 to 6 feet below the surface. The pipes contain an antifreeze

solution that flows beneath the ground and then through the heat pump indoors, which transfers the heat from the liquid to air handlers. In summer the unit cools the house by pumping heat back into the ground. The systems can cut heating and cooling bills by up to 40 percent.

What These Homeowners Did: David and Jen were burning through \$1,150 worth of home heating oil and spending about \$375 on electricity for central AC each year in their 1949 Colonial Revival. Just as important, their furnace, water heater, and AC compressor were close to shot. So last fall they brought in a local geothermal specialist to take a look at their 1,262-square-foot home. The company sank two pipes 190 feet deep into their yard. It took the crew about a week to do the work, which included drilling,

removing the old furnace, wiring an electrical service panel, and installing a new heat pump made by ClimateMaster (climatemaster.com), which is based in Oklahoma City. The heat pump fits into the basement and, fortunately, could be used with the existing ductwork.

What They Learned: "You get nice, even heat throughout the house," says David. And a geothermal system provides an endless supply of heating, cooling, and hot water.

Keep in Mind: Drilling is costly, and nerve-racking, because you don't know what you may hit. David and Jen paid \$11 per foot. But if the drill had hit water, sand, or stone, the price would have risen to \$13 to \$17 per foot. The larger the house, the more pipe you need underground.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 8 years

THEIR COST: \$26,000, installed after a \$300

down payment

YEARLY SAVINGS on 1,000-kilowatt-hour electricity
to heat and cool central AC

\$1,525

"We hooked up a whole-house fan"

—Dwight and Shannon Okahara,
Santa Clarita, California



How It Works: A large fan at the center of the house pulls in cool air through open windows on lower floors, drawing warm air up and out through windows or roof vents.

Whole-house fans use about one-fifth of the electricity consumed by central AC.

What These Homeowners Did: First, Dwight and Shannon did their homework. They learned that their climate—cool early in the morning and at night—is ideal for this old-fashioned fix. So last spring, Dwight installed a Master Flow fan made by GAF Materials (www.gaf.com) of Wayne, New Jersey, in the attic floor of their 2,500-square-foot house. He cut a hole in the second-story hall ceiling and, working from the attic, mounted the fan on top of the exposed joists. Then he hard-wired the fan to a switch in a nearby bedroom and finished the hall ceiling with a louvered panel that closes automatically when the fan is off. "It was a 'measure nine times, cut once' type of job," he deadpans.

What They Learned: They can lower the indoor air temperature by 5 degrees F in an hour by running the fan full tilt. "The funny part is, it can get too cold at night," says

Dwight. "I end up turning it off and getting under the comforter." It takes a little experimenting, opening some doors and windows and closing others, to direct the cool air where you want it most. Last summer they used their central AC only when the outside temperature hit 85 degrees F.

"I had to spray foam insulation where the fan's frame meets the rafters. You need a tight seal to get the optimal air draw."

DWIGHT OKAHARA, SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA

Keep in Mind: A whole-house fan doesn't dehumidify the way AC does. It works best when located in the center of the house. Some models are loud—decibel levels range from 60 to 71. The Okaharas' generates 65 decibels, about as loud as a window air conditioner. Also, since it has no filter, a whole-house fan will draw in outdoor allergens.

PAYBACK PERIOD: 6 to 8 months

THEIR COST: \$2,000, including labor

YEARLY SAVINGS on

electricity for AC

\$500

To Save Energy, Go Online



KRISTEN DEDE

FOR ALL-AROUND KNOW-HOW

energystar.gov

Among many useful features on this EPA and Department of Energy site is a tool called ENERGYSTAR@home, an interactive graphic that guides you on changes room by room.

FOR AUDITING YOURSELF

hes.a.gov

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory's energy calculator prompts you to fill out a questionnaire about your house, then churns out a detailed profile of your energy use and tips on reducing it.

FOR REMODELING ADVICE

rehabadvisor.pathnet.org

Enter info about your renovation plans into the rehab advisor and get back suggestions on making your project more energy-efficient with estimated costs and payback period.

FOR DECODING YOUR POWER BILL

consumerspower.org

A calculator on this website helps you break down your energy bill appliance by appliance so that you can pinpoint and correct problem areas—maybe it's time to get rid of that second fridge, after all.

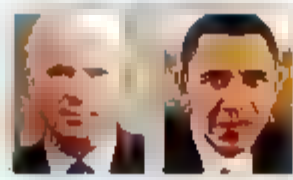


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Event Spotlight

Greenbuild International Conference & Expo

GREEN BUILD

November 19-21 • Boston Convention & Exhibition Center



Green homebuilding takes center stage at the U.S. Green Building Council's annual Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, with *This Old House*'s Kevin O'Connor joining a slate of speakers at the first-ever Green Homebuilders' Day on Nov. 20, 2008, in Boston. O'Connor, host of PBS's Emmy award-winning *This Old House*, will moderate a panel as part of the daylong program dedicated to green homebuilding topics.

Buildings play a critical role in protecting and improving our environment and the health of the people who occupy them. USGBC's Greenbuild Conference and Expo is an unparalleled opportunity to connect with other green building peers, industry experts, and influential leaders as they share insights on the green building movement and its diverse specialties.



For more information, visit greenbuildexpo.org



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PHOTOS: ANTHONY TEUL

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PROJECT > Building a Bird Feeder

How to make a feeding station for feathered friends, with instructions for parents and kids

By Chrystle Fiedler Photographs by Wendell T. Webber

AGE RANGE > 5 and up

COST > \$35

TIME > 5 hours

DIFFICULTY > Fairly easy.

The parts are a cinch to make and assemble.

COMPLETE INSTRUCTIONS INSIDE →



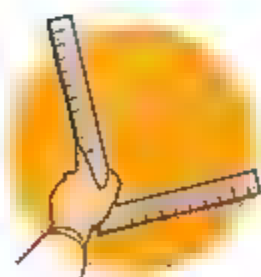
IF YOU WANT hours of quiet entertainment, build yourself a bird feeder, overflow it with seeds, then watch the feathery fliers swarm. As the cold months approach, your backyard friends will be happy to have the free buffet.

The bird feeder shown here looks store-bought but is actually assembled out of materials from the home center and grocery store. The copper top is a cap for

a 4x4 deck post, and the clear body is a soda bottle. The rest of the feeder is cut from a single cedar board, and it all comes together with tools you likely have hanging around your garage. After it's complete, hang your bird feeder outside your kitchen or living room window, and watch your chirping friends feed all year long.

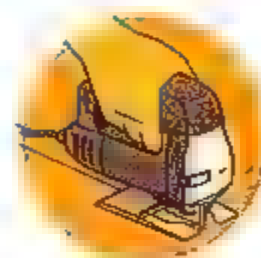
SAFETY FIRST

Teach kids good workshop habits from the start. Here are a few guidelines for the tools used in this project:



HAND TOOLS

Start your junior carpenter off right! Measuring, gluing, and hammering are great ways for kids of all ages to get involved.



POWER TOOLS

Older kids can use the drill/driver or the random-orbit sander with a parent's guidance, but jigsaws are better off in adult hands.



GEAR

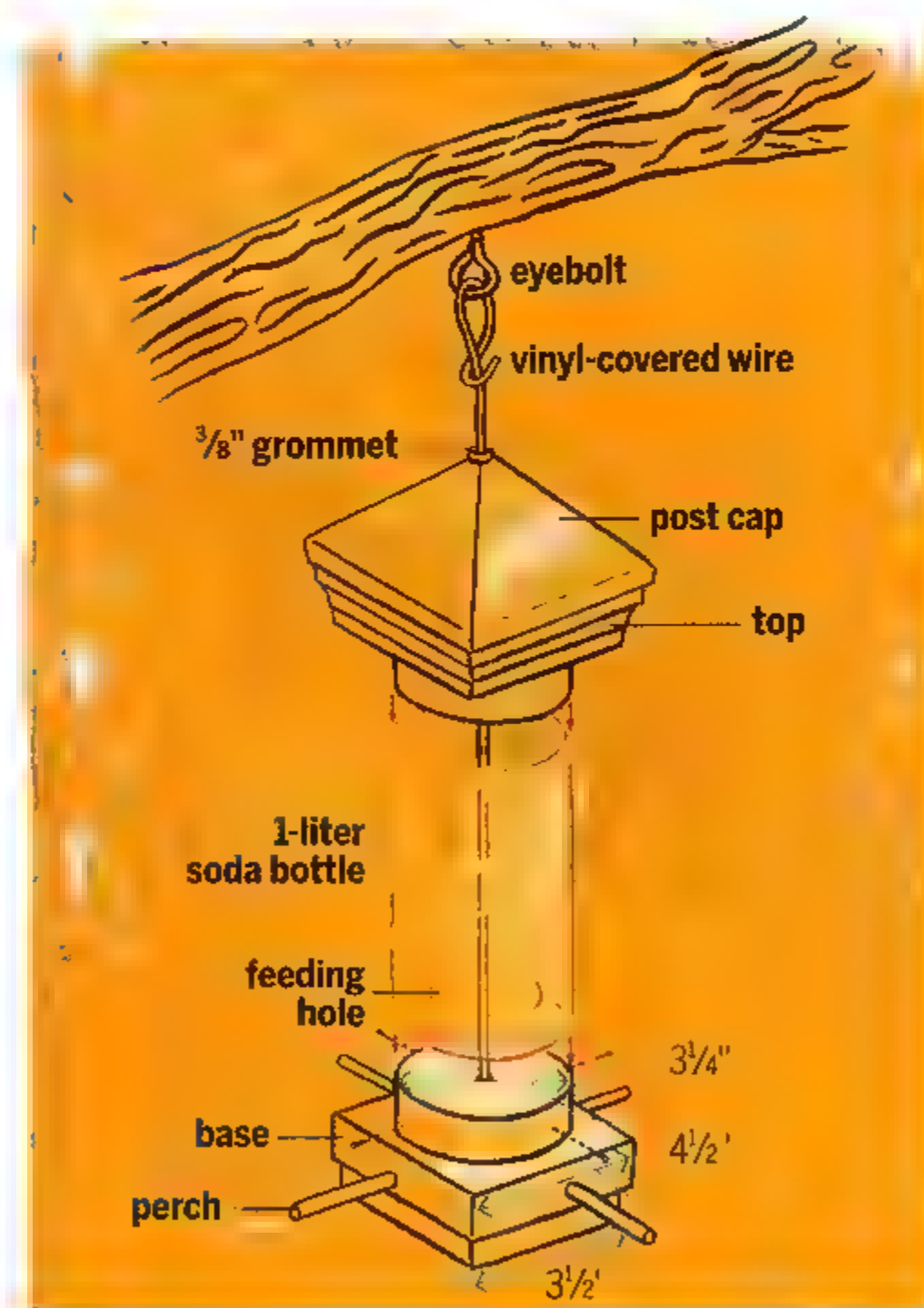
Keep sleeves away from spinning parts and cutting blades. Whenever the jigsaw is on, safety glasses are a must.

Project design by **Edward Potokar**



Lay out the parts

> Using a square and a compass, lay out the six individual pieces of the bird feeder on a 2-foot-long cedar 1x6: three 3½-inch squares, one 4½-inch square, and two 3¼-inch-diameter circles.



TOOLS YOU'LL NEED>

- Tape measure
- Combination square or framing square
- Compass
- Spring clamps
- Bar clamps
- Jigsaw
- Random orbit sander or sanding block with 120-grit sandpaper
- Hammer and nailset
- Drill/driver fitted with 1/4-inch bit
- Scissors
- Wire cutters
- Screwdriver

MATERIALS TO BUY>

- 1x6 cedar (2 feet)
- 1/4-inch dowel (2 feet)
- Wood glue
- 4d nails
- 3/8-inch rubber grommet
- Epoxy
- Copper-topped post cap for a 4x4
- 1-liter soda bottle
- Vinyl-covered wire
- 5/8-inch blued tacks
- Eyebolt



MAKE IT EASY Download full-size templates for this and other family projects at thisoldhouse.com/family



Cut and sand the parts

- > Clamp the cedar to a worktable. Using a jigsaw, cut out the circles and the squares.
- > Using a random-orbit sander or sanding block with 120-grit sandpaper, sand the pieces of the bird feeder so they are smooth and free of splinters. Make sure the dust bag is on the back of the sander.

TO PARENTS:
A jigsaw can send dust and splinters flying. Be sure everyone has on safety glasses before you cut.



Make the top and base

- > To make the top, glue two 3½-inch blocks together and secure them with 4d nails. Then glue and nail one of the circles on top of the blocks.
- > Mix up the epoxy and spread it on the square. Set the square into the copper post cap. Let it set for 20 minutes.
- > For the base, turn the 4½-inch square on edge, then drill a ¼-inch hole about ½ inch deep into the center of each edge. Glue 4-inch-long dowels into the holes to make perches.
- > Glue and nail the other circle onto the square with the perches. Drill a ¼-inch hole through the center of both. Enlarge the hole slightly on the square side.
- > Feed the wire through the hole. Fold over the wire's tip to make a little knot. Pull the folded end back into the enlarged hole until it stops. Glue and nail the last 3½-inch square over the hole to cover it.



HEY, KIDS!
Here's a trick to find the center of the square: Just draw lines from corner to opposite corner to make an X on the face of the square. The place where the lines intersect is the center

Think About It

IF THE CABIN WERE ANY QUIETER, YOU MIGHT BEGIN TO WONDER WHERE WE HID ALL THE BOOKS.

As quiet as the BMW 750i and Mercedes S550.¹

It's true: it may just remind you of a library. Thanks to things like intelligent whisper valves, the silence inside the Genesis rivals even such touchstones of tranquility as the BMW 7 Series.¹

And the Lexicon® 7.1 Discrete surround sound system,² shared only with the Rolls-Royce Phantom, means your cabin may not stay quiet all that long. Which is good because you can't read a book while you're driving.

> CONTINUED at HyundaiGenesis.com



Introducing the 375-horsepower Genesis





4

Assemble the bird feeder

- > Drill a hole through the copper peak of the top and out the center of the attached circle.
- > Cut the ends off a 1-liter soda bottle to make a cylinder. Brace it on a scrap of wood clamped to a worktable, then drill four evenly spaced holes, 1½ inches from the cylinder's edge.
- > Feed the wire through the cylinder, and fit the cylinder over the base, holes above the perches. Secure the cylinder to the base with blue dacks. Lead the wire through the hole in the top, and top into the cylinder.

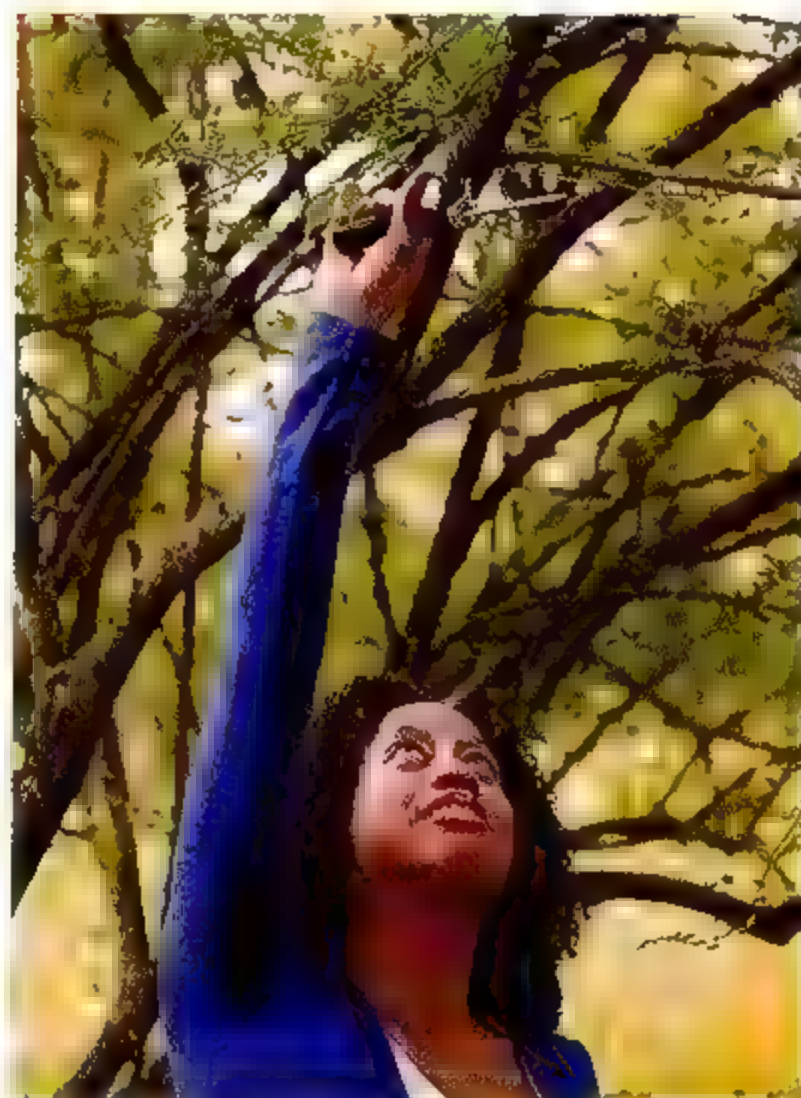
5

Hang the bird feeder

- > Open the top and fill the feeder with seed. Fit the top back on, pull the wire taut, and slide a rubber grommet onto the wire—pushing it tight against the peak—to hold the top on.
- > Screw an eyebolt into a thick tree limb you can reach easily (so you can refill or take down the feeder). Feed the end of the wire through the eyebolt. Twist the wire on itself. Then sit back, and wait for your visitors!



ONLINE BONUS Watch a video of building this bird feeder—along with other family projects—at thisoldhouse.com/family



What Birds Eat

Fill your bird feeder with yummy treats to attract all kinds of birds. One sure bet: black-oil sunflower seeds. The thin shells are easy to crack, and the seeds have lots of protein and fat. Here are some of the other foods that different birds like to eat.



CARDINALS

Striped sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts and chips, safflower seeds, peanuts, red and white millet

MOURNING DOVES

Safflower seeds



BLUE JAYS

Striped sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts, red millet, white millet, peanuts, cracked corn



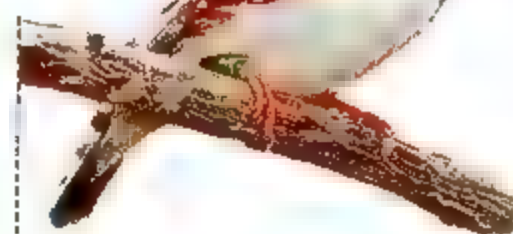
ROBINS

Sunflower hearts and chips, white millet



FINCHES

Niger seeds, striped sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, orange Siberian millet, red millet, white millet, flaxseed



CHICKADEES

Safflower seeds, striped sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts, white millet



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) LYNDIA RICHARDSON/CORBIS; GAIL SHUMWAY/GETTY IMAGES; ARTHUR MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES (2); DAN TA DELIMONT/ALAMY; GARY W. CARTER/CORBIS

Think About It

USUALLY WHEN THINGS GET THIS POWERFUL, SOMEONE ENDS UP TESTIFYING BEFORE CONGRESS.

Faster zero to 60 than the Porsche Boxster and BMW 750i.¹

Introducing the new Genesis luxury sedan. It's got a 4.6-liter V8 that—in horsepower per liter²—beats every car in this list: Lexus GS 460, Mercedes E550, BMW 550i, 650i, and 750i.²

That kind of smart engineering pays off—this thing goes zero to 60 in 5.7 seconds.¹ All the while, getting better mileage than any car in its class.³

More powerful and more fuel efficient—what more could you ask for?

> CONTINUED at HyundaiGenesis.com



Introducing the 375-horsepower Genesis



AM

¹5-speed transmission ²Horsepower with premium fuel ³Best V8 for economy

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WORKSHOP



107

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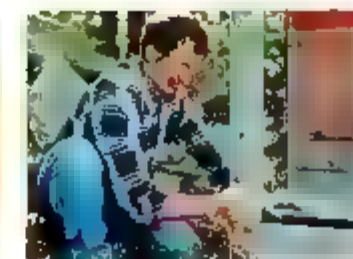
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Ask This Old House

NEED AN EXPERT? WE'VE GOT FIVE, READY TO ANSWER YOUR HOME QUESTIONS



TOM SILVA
GENERAL CONTRACTOR



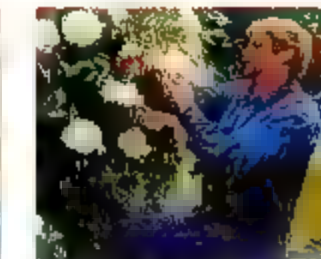
NORM ABRAM
MASTER CARPENTER



RICHARD YRETHEWEY
PLUMBING & HEATING EXPERT



KEVIN O'CONNOR
HOST



ROGER COOK
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR



PLANTING REPLACEMENT TREES
Most of our ash trees were removed because of an infestation of emerald ash borer. The tree people didn't remove the root system, but they did grind down the stumps below grade. Can I replant other trees in the same locations?

S. KNIGHT BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICH.

Roger Cook replies: You can, but only if you dig out the stumps entirely. Save yourself a backache and some money, and put the new saplings next to the stumps. They should grow just fine, as long as you cut out any old roots when you dig the new holes. In a few years, the area around the old stump will probably start to sink as the roots decompose. Just fill in the area as necessary.

Don't plant more ash trees, though—they'll likely succumb to this terrible infestation, which started in Michigan in 2002. Maple or linden trees might be better, but before you decide, ask a good nursery for recommendations.

Problem Knocker

We have a polished-brass door knocker on our front door. In cold weather, condensation forms on the exposed screw heads on the inside, rusting them. Any advice?

JOHN MAIER, SOUTH RIDING, VA.

Tom Silva replies: A storm door would prevent the knocker from getting cold, but an easier solution is to replace the screws with solid brass or bronze ones. These metals won't rust, even with the condensation. Just be sure that any washers or nuts are made of the same metal as the screws.

Toilet Goes Glug

I recently replaced the wax ring under the toilet. Now when I take a shower, the water level in the bowl drops and makes a loud glugging sound. (The shower drains just fine.) What could be causing this?

DOUG CAMP DORAVILLE, GA.



PHOTO: CLIC CHWISSE/REYNOLDS & RUSSELL; MAKE: CARL TORRE/REYNOLDS & RUSSELL; MAKE: CARL TORRE/REYNOLDS & RUSSELL; MAKE: CARL TORRE/REYNOLDS & RUSSELL



ASK THE EXPERTS

Let's celebrate Energy Awareness Month.

This October is Energy Awareness Month. And we think it's a great time to learn how to save money on your heating bills.

Use a furnace that selects the most efficient fuel source and switches back and forth as conditions change.



Add a humidifier. It allows you to keep your thermostat at a lower setting without compromising comfort.

Install a programmable thermostat. It automatically adjusts the temperature and provides comfort when you're at home.



Get an annual inspection from a certified technician to find out if your equipment is operating at peak performance.

If you need more information on how to save money on your heating bills, visit carrier.com or call 1-800-CARRIER and talk to an expert.

Carrier

Turn to the Experts.

WORKSHOP Ask This Old House

{ Q. WHAT IS IT? }



A. Stove top wok holder

B. Rebar stand

C. Lawn chair frame

D. Or.

*FOR ANSWER SEE PAGE 12

ONLINE BONUS

Tom Silva demonstrates his techniques for installing beadboard wainscot at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts

Richard Trethewey replies: When I hear "glugging sound" and "toilet" I think blocked vent. Water can't go down a drain unless there's a way to bring in air to replace it, so plumbing drains have vent pipes that go out the roof to draw in fresh air. If a vent is blocked or not connected properly, the vacuum caused by the draining will pull water out of sink traps instead—or the toilet, in your case.

I'm not sure why this is happening now and not before. It's likely not related to your repair, because it's hard to accidentally drop something in the vent from the toilet drain, where you were working. But vent problems can be a bear to diagnose; I'd have a plumber check the vent pipe. He or she might be able to snake it out from the roof. If that doesn't work, more invasive and expensive work might be needed to clear the clog.

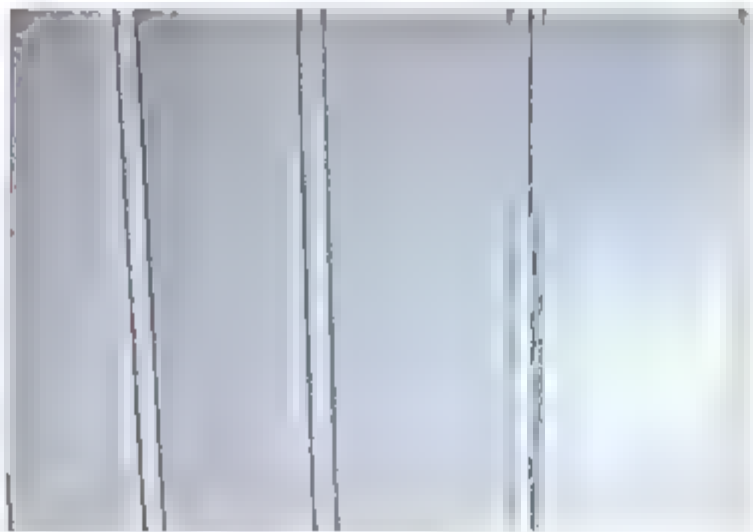
Hiding Beadboard Gaps

Sometime after our contractor installed and painted the new beadboard paneling in our bathroom, the individual boards separated from one another. He then caulked the gaps, which looked okay until last winter, when the boards separated again. Now the caulk has cracked along the joints. What should we do?

NANCY OAKES KEENE, N.H.

Tom Silva replies: This is a common problem with solid-wood beadboard, particularly where there are big swings in humidity from season to season (or shower to shower). Caulk can't keep up with all that swelling and shrinking, and eventually fails. Priming the back and ends of each board before it's installed minimizes wood movement, but at this point, it's a little late for that.

Try this: Wait for the seams to open again in the winter, then scrape out all the old caulking and paint any exposed wood. Paint only one edge at a time; any paint film that bridges a gap will crack, too. The gaps will be less noticeable the next time



Cracked caulk only highlights the gaps in painted beadboard. For a cleaner look, cut out the caulk, then paint the exposed wood edges.

SHARPENING DIGGING TOOLS

Q Am I supposed to sharpen my shovel, posthole digger, hoe, and other digging tools? How do you do that?

JERRY COMEAUX, YOUNGSVILLE, LA

Roger Cook replies: Yes, it is a good idea to keep all your digging tools sharp because you'll get more work done in less time and with less effort. The maintenance is easy. All you need is a good pair of heavy leather gloves, a 12-inch mill bastard file, and a vise. Here's how I keep my digging tools in shape:

1 For safety and stability, secure the tool in the vise by its handle—dished-side up, in the case of shovels and posthole diggers, and blade pointing straight up for hoes.

2 Hold the file with two hands, skewed slightly to the side and flat against the

original bevel on the cutting edge. If there's no bevel left, hold the file tilted 45 degrees off the tool's face. Push the file toward the handle in straight, even strokes, moving it in only one direction.

3 When the angle has been restored, lay the file flat against the back of the bevel and remove the burr, which forms as you file the metal. A couple of strokes is all you need.

4 Wipe the metal with a penetrating oil, such as WD-40, to discourage rust. If a tool is severely dented or worn, a 4-inch angle grinder fitted with a medium-grit aluminum-oxide wheel will take care of snaggy edges in short order. Be sure to wear hearing protection and goggles when you switch it on. Hold the grinder so that the sparks fly toward the shovel, not at you. When you're done, touch up the bevel with a file.

Once a tool is sharp, you should only need to file it yearly to keep it keen.



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WORKSHOP Ask This Old House

the wood shrinks. Painting beadboard a darker color also helps hide the gaps because they blend in with the shadows.

Q Extending a Closet Door
When we installed tile on our floors, we had to shorten many of our doors. However, we cut one sliding closet door too short. Do we have to buy a new one?

BETTY HAWLEY, ALBUQUERQUE, N.MEX.

Norm Abram replies: I don't think so. First, try lowering the door by adjusting the roller track hardware attached to the door's top edge. You either turn the nut beneath each roller—a thin, flat bicycle wrench will come in handy in this tight space—or loosen the screws that hold the slotted bracket to the door. You don't have to remove the door. But if it's still too high, you can always lower the track itself. Here's how to go about it:

1. Get a piece of wood the same width and length as the track and as thick as the amount you need to lower the door.
2. Remove the door and the track, then screw the wood to the top of the door jamb.
3. Paint or stain the wood to match the jamb, then reinstall the track and rehang the door.

Some door tracks are concealed with a piece of trim. If that's the case, you might have to replace it, but that would be a lot less expensive than buying a new door.

Q Batproofing a Window
Recently we were awakened about midnight by screams from our daughter's room. My wife and I hustled in just in time to see a brown bat, which we captured and released outdoors. While searching for a point of entry, I discovered a 3/8-inch gap around the window behind the inside trim. I also found that there's no insulation between the window jamb and the framing. That's probably how the bat got in. What should I do?

BOB HARRIS, ONEIDA CASTLE, N.Y.

Tom Silva replies: It doesn't take much of a hole to let a bat in—3/8 inch will do if they're searching for a warm place to spend the winter.

The easiest way for you to close up the gap between the wall and the window trim, or casing, is by slipping 3/8-inch-thick lengths of

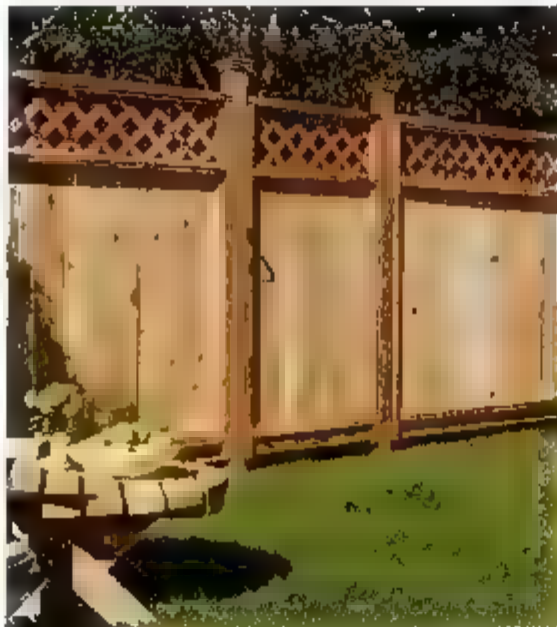
solid wood behind the casing. But you'd still have a gap between the window and the framing inside the wall, which the bats find ideal for hanging out, what with all the warm air escaping through it. So I'd advise you to remove the casing and fix it right.

Start by carefully prying off and marking each piece of casing so that you can put it back exactly where it came from. Then squirt expanding foam sealant into the gap between the jamb and the exposed framing. Use a spray foam labeled "low-pressure" and "minimal-expansion," such as the one made by Great Stuff for windows; it won't bow the jamb as it expands. While you're waiting for it to harden, attach the 3/8-inch spacers to the back of the casing using wood glue and 1/2-inch brads. After the glue dries, sand the edges flush with the casing.

When the foam hardens, trim off any excess with a drywall saw. Reinstall your casing—first the sides, then the top—by nailing it back into the studs. Caulk the edges where they meet the wall. Now you have windows that won't let in bats or cold air.

While you're at it, go outside and caulk any small gaps around the exterior casing to discourage bats from coming in from the cold.

Q Finishing a Fence
We recently installed 170 feet of red cedar fence around our yard. Now we'd like to finish it with something clear to show the



To keep a red cedar fence from turning silvery gray, it should be sprayed periodically with a semitransparent, penetrating, oil-based finish.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF TRAJER, TWICE APPROXIMATES



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WORKSHOP Ask This Old House

wood's natural beauty. Is there any finish we can spray, rather than brush or roll on?

GREG HERRELL, ST. LOUIS, MO

Kevin O'Connor replies: According to Sam Williams, a researcher at the USDA's Forest Products Lab in Madison, Wisconsin, you need a product that blocks ultraviolet radiation, contains a mildewcide and a water repellent, and penetrates deeply into the wood. Any finish that forms a surface film—such as a varnish—is going to be a headache to maintain.

Many finishes claim to penetrate wood, Williams says, but not all do it effectively. "A true penetrating finish goes into the cell walls and stabilizes the wood surface," he says. Oil-based coatings can do this, water-based acrylics generally do not, although some acrylics are modified with oil to increase their penetration.

So the best product for your fence would be an oil-based, semitransparent stain. *Semitransparent* means it contains some pigment to protect wood from UV rays but not enough to conceal its natural beauty. This kind of stain should be reapplied every three to five years, depending on the wood's texture and how much sun it gets. Williams says that rough, saw-textured wood accepts more finish, so therefore the finish lasts about twice as long as it does on smooth wood. Also, he says that the stain on the shady side of a fence will survive about twice as long as the stain on the unshaded side.

You should be able to apply an oil-based, semitransparent stain with a pump sprayer. Just go over the surface immediately with a dry brush or roller to distribute the finish evenly. Otherwise, your fence will end up looking blotchy. Williams also recommends putting finish on the end grain of all boards, which will greatly improve the wood's longevity.

Overhanging Shingles

The roof shingles on one side of my house hang over the gutters so much that birds have built nests under the overhang. I tried to cut the shingles back using tin snips but haven't had much luck. What should I do?

KEITH HILLE, MERRICK, NY

Tom Silva replies: It sounds like someone set the shingles way too far over the edge the last time your roof was done. Shingles should

{A WHAT IS IT?}



D. Tile spacer

You can orient TileJax 7-legged spacers to fit almost any tile pattern or corner intersection. And unlike traditional T-shaped spacers, you only need one per tile. \$8 for 100, tilejax.com

extend past the drip edge of the roof only by about 1/2 to 3/4 inch. Once you determine how much overhang you need to cut off, mark your cut line with chalk and a straightedge. On some roofs, you might be able to use the exposed butt edges of the roofing course as a guide to keep your cuts straight.

How you cut them depends on what kind of shingles they are. With asphalt or fiberglass shingles, a sharp utility knife will do the trick. Just support the edge of the shingle on a block of wood as you make each cut, and change blades frequently. For wood shingles, use a circular saw or reciprocating saw fitted with a short metal cutting blade—its small teeth will make a smoother cut than a wood-cutting blade. Be sure to hold the recip saw at a low angle—almost horizontal—so that the blade doesn't jab your gutters or cut the brackets. ■

Send your questions to Ask This Old House

go to: thisoldhouse.com/ashtoh

or write to: Ask This Old House
This Old House magazine
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Include a complete address and daytime phone number. Published questions will be edited for clarity and length and may be used in other media. We regret that, due to the volume of mail received, we're not able to reply to unpublished questions.

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202. AUTOMOTIVE

1. FORD F-150 The next F-150 has arrived and from a frame that's twice as strong to revolutionary interiors—it's the toughest F-150 ever.

2. GMC SIERRA Home improvers need Professional Grade support. GMC Sierras are that and more. Whether you're putting up paneling or adding a new suite of rooms, GMC Sierra will make the task easier.

3. HYUNDAI Are car companies committed to quality, or to the phrase "committed to quality"? Hyundai. Think About It.

4. KIA Introducing the All New 7 Passenger Kia Borrego. Starting under \$27,000. A New Kind of Luxury SUV.

203. BUILDING PRODUCTS

5. DIY NETWORK DIY Network is an on-air, on-line network that provides in-depth project instructions, demonstrations and product tips for home and hobby enthusiasts.

6. DOW GREAT STUFF Great Stuff™ products offer both professionals and do-it-yourselfers an easy solution to help lower energy costs and make the home more comfortable.

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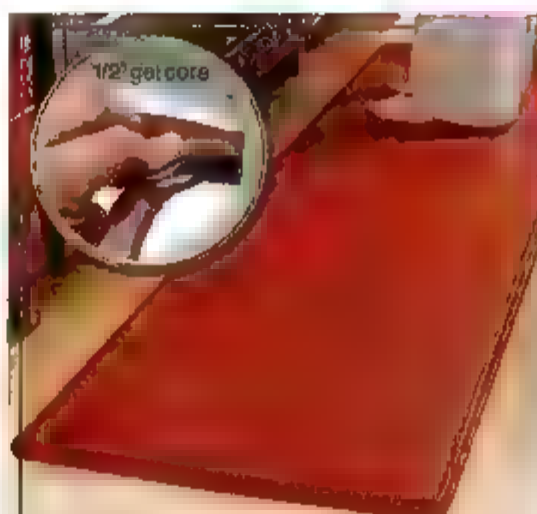


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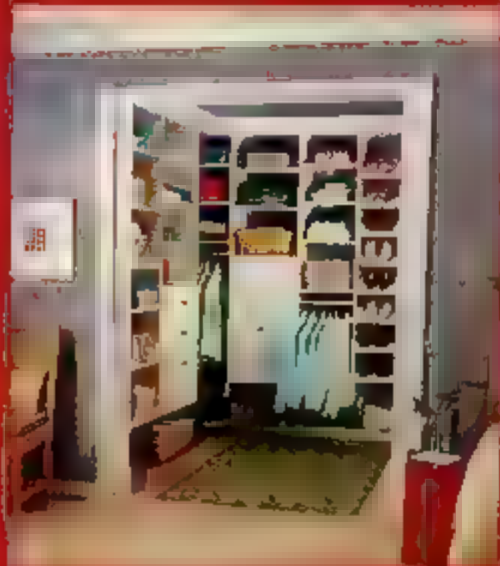


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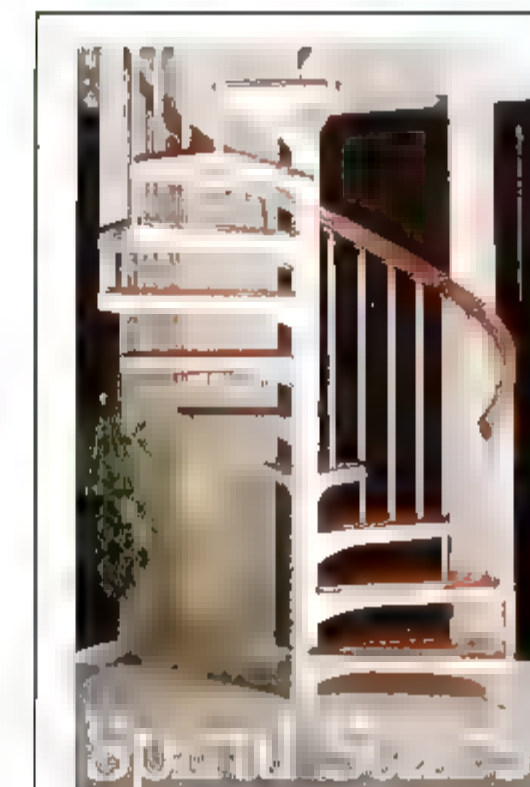


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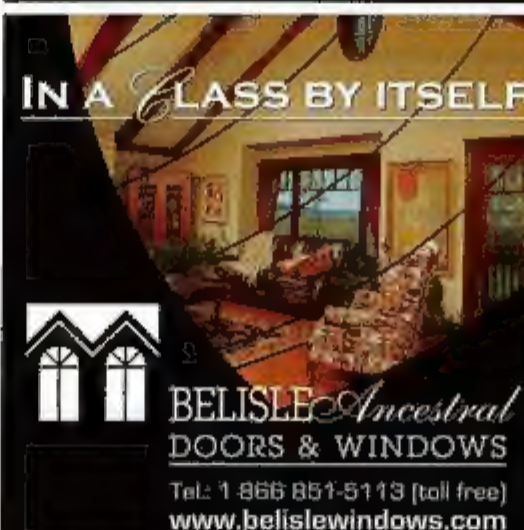
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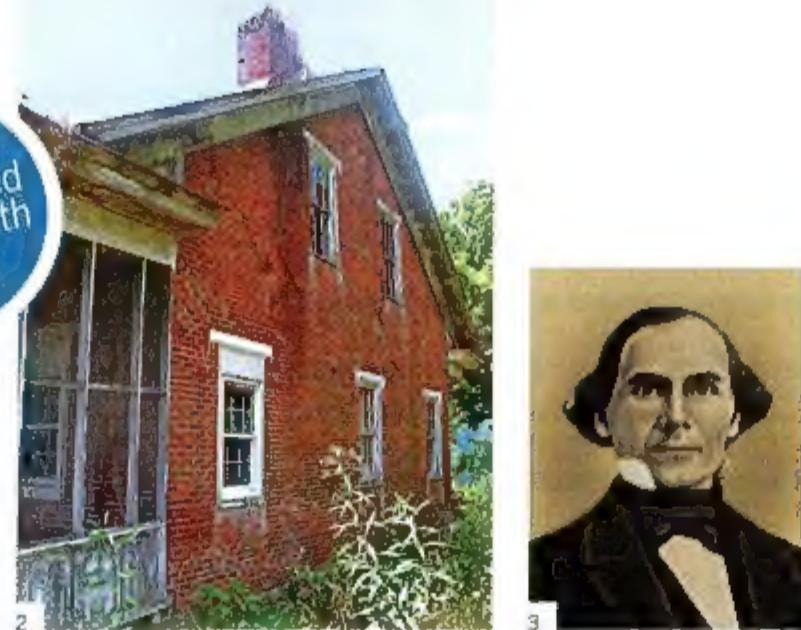
JOHN A. BOWMAN just couldn't quit Washington County, Indiana. After leaving his parents' farm there for a two-year stint in New Orleans, he came home in 1840 and built this one-and-a-half-story brick Greek Revival with a stately columned front porch, elaborate plaster ceiling medallions, elegant millwork, and some fine built-in cabinetry.

From it, Bowman oversaw almost 1,000 acres of his own farmland and launched a livestock trading company. As one of the most influential businessmen in the Hoosier State, he also got himself elected to the Indiana House of Representatives and the State Senate. He married, had two kids, but never left this house. Seriously. Upon his death in 1886, he was buried right here on the farm. A granite obelisk marks the gravesite.

The house has been empty since the early '90s, after being occupied by a series of owners who rented the land out for farming. The roof is now shot, the plaster is crumbling, and the front porch is gone. Still, the current owner is working with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana to find someone willing to breathe new life into it. Whoever does will end up with a beautiful country estate and enough land to start his or her very own farm. It comes with 10 acres, but more than 50 additional acres can be purchased at \$5,000 each. The house still has its original six-over-six windows, 12-foot ceilings, and wide poplar flooring. Covenants require the new owner to make substantial progress within two years.

Washington County is a rural area 45 minutes from Louisville, Kentucky, but a new subdivision is under construction not far from the Bowman house. So while you'll still have peace and quiet, you'll have plenty of neighbors to invite to your housewarming party. —KEITH PANDOLFI

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[1] The 2,787-square-foot, two-bedroom house once had a columned, full-length front porch sheltered by massive eaves. One of the square columns is stored inside the house and could serve as a template to create replicas. [2] The screened-in back porch. [3] A portrait of the original owner, John Bowman. [4] The house's large center hall is flanked by two double-door entries that lead to a dining room on one side, a parlor on the other. [5] A front parlor still holds the house's original poplar flooring and six-over-six windows.



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