

Fix common household eyesores

Even a spotless home complete with the latest gadgets and popular kitchen and bathroom decor cannot compete with little eyesores that go unfixed. These may include anything from loose knobs to scuffed floors. Although it may take a little work, it's generally easy to eradicate common blemishes.

BATHROOM

A home's bathroom or bathrooms get more than their fair share of use. As a result, everything from stains to grout to rings around the toilet are common in the bathroom.

Vinegar and baking soda can be handy tools in the bathroom. Pour vinegar into the toilet and add some baking soda to create a foaming action. Use a toilet brush to scrub the inside of the bowl. Then allow the solution to sit for an hour before flushing away.

The same combination can be used to scrub down soap scum that accumulates inside the bath tub.

Soak a cotton ball in vinegar and place on surfaces where hard water stains have accumulated. The vinegar will dissolve the scale and make it easy to wipe away.

KITCHEN

No matter how many times you wash down a tiled kitchen floor, grout has a funny way of never quite coming clean. Purchase a grout-cleaning product from a home store and use a stiff-bristled brush or even a toothbrush to get into the grout lines. Then consider using a grout stain and sealer to prevent future discoloration.

WINDOWS

Few things around the house are as unsightly as torn window screens. Whether on house windows or porches, torn screens tell visitors that you don't care very much about the appearance of your home. But repairing window screens is a relatively easy task. There are screen replacement kits that take you through the process step-by-step if you plan to replace the entire screen. For very small tears, you may be able to patch the damage. There are self-stick patches for screens, but often the glue draws attention to the repair. Rather, get a small piece of new screen material and use an upholstery needle and invisible finishing thread to attach the patch.

FURNITURE

Remedy nicks with furniture markers that can blend into the wood grain or other surface materials and mask the dings and dents.

DECORATING TRENDS:

Eco-Friendly Hardwood Floors Lead Healthy Home Trend

(MS) — The "healthy home" movement has become more than just a decorating fad. It marks a major shift in the priorities and ideologies of consumers who are now making concerted efforts to seek out eco-friendly and health-conscious decor choices for their homes. Innovative designers and manufacturers have caught on to this reality and are now giving consumers more options for healthy materials for their homes.

The fact is more and more information is written about the negative impact of environmental toxins on our health. Many of us aren't aware, unless we have allergies or a child with allergies, that paint odours, stains and chemicals used in manufacturing can make us sick. Making home environments healthier has become a prime concern with homeowners, as shown by the demand for low VOC paints, stains and materials, as well as natural wood cabinets, furniture and floorings.

Certain manufacturers are more than answering the call for healthier, eco-friendly home decor options by setting new trends in "green" product innovation.

Mercier Wood Flooring, one of North

America's leading hardwood flooring manufacturers, is setting the tone in the home decor category with its latest eco-flooring innovation that is so healthy and eco-friendly that it actually was awarded the "Children and School certification" by world-renowned standards organization Greenguard.

"At Mercier we have long recognized this trend and have made eco-friendliness a core value ever since our first day," explained Michel Collin, Director of Marketing for Mercier Wood Flooring. "This is why we are so proud of our Greenguard Generations 'Children and School' certified flooring, Mercier's next generation of flooring."

Made using 100 per cent pure soybean oil, this revolutionary new factory-finished flooring boasts zero volatile organic compounds (VOC's) is hypoallergenic and offers a comprehensive 35-year warranty.

Available in all species, colors and finishes, Collin added that with this new product innovation you can create a natural wood floor that offers both a distinct character to your decor, as well as a healthy, eco-friendly choice for your entire family. "We feel our Generation Greenguard flooring answers the need



parents have to create healthy living environments in their homes for their children."

The Greenguard Children and Schools Certification Program offers stricter certification criteria for products intended for use in schools, daycares or other environments where children spend significant periods of time. The reason is children are more sensitive to environmental exposures than adults because their bodies and brains are still developing. They breathe faster than adults and in return

receive a higher dose of indoor pollution per body weight, which is why products like Mercier's Generation Greenguard flooring is such a welcome option for discerning homeowners and their families.

Ideal for kids' rooms, living rooms, daycares, schools and playrooms, this new generation of flooring is a key step in the process of creating the ideal healthy home. More information on the latest trends in wood flooring is available at www.mercierwoodflooring.com.

Succulents Add Low-Maintenance Variety To Landscaping

Now is the time of year to focus on outdoor landscaping projects. One popular project involves redesigning the front yard or backyard to include an array of different flowers and foliage. While many people gravitate to the flashy and colorful annuals on display at nurseries and home centers, you may want to consider adding some succulents to your home landscape.

Succulent plants can be a boon to a homeowner without the time or resources to maintain plants. Succulents get their name from their primary function, which is drawing up and storing water. Succulents are able to thrive in arid conditions, and there are more than 300 different types, including some exotic species.

The advantages to planting succulents are many. Because they store water in their stems, roots and leaves, this reduces the number of times an owner must water them. Succulents can go several days between waterings. Succulents, like cacti, that have few if any leaves, are perhaps best at managing water because they lose little to evaporation through the foliage.

Succulents are particularly good

to have in areas prone to arid temperatures or where water restrictions are often in place. They can be environmentally friendly because of their ability to conserve water. Succulents treat water as a precious resource, and their entire makeup is designed to minimize consumption of water.

Because they thrive in sunlight, succulents can be the ideal plants to put in extremely sunny and hot locations. They will not wither and dry out due to extreme heat. For particularly dry areas of landscape or where soil is subpar, consider the placement of different varieties of succulents to create a varied and eye-catching display.

There are many other advantages to planting succulents; some of which include:

- Succulents offer contrasts in shape, texture and colors. With the many varieties, you're bound to find something interesting and different to add to the landscape.
- Whether you have ample acreage in the yard or simply some containers available for planting, succulents will thrive. They grow just as well in containers as they do in the ground.



Succulents, like jade, are ideal for arid conditions or for gardens where low-maintenance plants are desired.

- Succulents don't tend to require pruning or cutting back of the plant. With this in mind, you can expect them to grow large. Therefore, space the plants adequately to allow for growth.
- Succulents are perennials. So once you plant them, they should last for years and years without the hassle and expense you can expect from planting annuals every year.
- Indoor greenhouses or sunrooms can be another good place for succulents. They prefer not to get

chilled, which makes a controlled environment advantageous.

When considering a spot for your succulents, choose areas that get plenty of sun. Think about pruning back or removing trees that would create too much shade on the succulents. Space the succulents widely apart — more so than you would with other plants — to allow them to spread. Pebbles or gravel

make good mulching material around succulents so that drainage will be adequate. It will also set the succulents apart from other plants by contextualizing them in your garden.

Visit a gardening center or home improvement store to learn more about the myriad types of succulents that can add beauty to most gardens.



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