

Fast, Simple And Amazing DIY Projects

(ARA) - Call the family and grab the toolbox. Do-it-yourself projects can become a family affair this fall.

According to a recent survey by economists at the University of California, there is a trend of parents looking for ways to spend even more time with their children. A DIY project offers the perfect activity mix for spending happy, productive, cost-effective time together to accomplish a common family goal.

DIY projects can be as rewarding as the results: a brighter bathroom, an updated living room or a dramatic touch to any room in the house. The possibilities of easy home improvement projects are seemingly endless.

"Improving and updating your home doesn't have to be a chore," says Erinn Valencich, a Los Angeles-based interior designer and blogger for HGTV's Design Happens. "You don't have to renovate to create a big impact; just a few small changes will do the trick and you can get the whole family involved."

One of the easiest ways to update a room is by refreshing the floor, says Valencich. "Floors set the tone of the room," she says. "A floor adds so much to the look and feel of the room."

Hard surfaces, including laminate, are once again dominating home flooring options. Laminate flooring is a popular option and the fastest growing flooring material around, according to HGTV, because of its practical benefits including durability, beauty and lasting wear.

While the thought of installing your own floors can be

daunting, Valencich assures homeowners that the installation of laminate floors is fairly simple. In fact, according to flooring industry experts, new floors can be installed in a weekend.

"Laminate floors, like Quick-Step, can be installed directly on top of existing wood, tile or vinyl flooring and Quick-Step's Uniclic design needs no glue, nails or staples during installation," says Valencich. "Planks simply click together, for a lasting connection. Because of the ease of installation, older children can get involved with putting in new laminate floors."

Following these easy tips from Flooring Trends.com will make your room look like a million bucks.

- To help reduce moisture, mold, mildew and a hollow sound when walked on, put down a quality underlayment first.

- Order 7 to 10 percent more product than you think you'll need to allow for cuts and custom fits.

- Order matching or coordinating molding and trim. "This finishing touch will set you apart," says Valencich.

- Acclimate your laminate floor products before installation. Put unopened cartons in the room they will be installed in for 72 to 96 hours. This is important if you live in a very dry or humid climate.

- Make sure the concrete or wood subfloor is level before you start your installation.

Additional simple DIY projects

In addition to installing a new floor, there are other simple DIY projects that will add to the

beauty and comfort of your home.

- Add attic insulation. If the insulation in your attic is not up to par, the house can lose almost 30 percent of its warm air. Properly insulating an attic can save anywhere from 10 to 30 percent off your monthly heating bill, U.S. News & World Report's My Money blog says. Batt insulation - rolled fiberglass insulation - can often be added for 70 cents to \$1 per square foot.

- Lighten up your bathroom. The bathroom is a great place for a do-it-yourself project. Try adding can or recessed lighting. "Recessed lighting becomes part of the architecture," says Valencich.

- Replace that kitchen faucet. Update your kitchen faucet to refresh your sink area, and younger children can help with the removal and replacement of the old faucet. Installing a new faucet can be an economical decision, too. "A new faucet can help lower your water and energy costs," says Valencich.

- Go green. You don't need to install solar panels or a wind farm to go green and save money. There are several small things you can do to help save the planet and your wallet, from sealing drafts and air ducts to installing a programmable thermostat. Caulk and spray foam are inexpensive and can be used to seal drafts, saving up to 20 percent on a monthly heating bill. Use a programmable thermostat to turn down the heat while you're at work and to turn it back up right before you come home.

Is DIY A Recipe For Saving Money?

Many homeowners or renters wrestle with the question of whether to tackle a project as a do-it-yourself venture to save some money or simply leave it to a professional. Each situation is unique, but there are certain factors that must be considered regardless of a homeowner's particular situation.

On the surface, a DIY task can seem a very good way to save some money. After all, a large percentage, sometimes as much as 50 percent, of the cost of hiring a contractor goes toward labor. For a DIY job with no such costs, the final financial tally can be substantially less.

Although labor can be expensive, that cost is often justified. People who hire carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and the like are paying for the workers' experience. They're also paying with the expectation that the job will be done correctly. With jobs that require a building permit or must be done to specific code, the contractor often puts his reputation on the line and will be held accountable if the work doesn't meet requirements.

That isn't to say an untrained individual can't tackle a specific job around the house. There are some guidelines that may make such projects go more smoothly and, as a result, more affordable.

- * Read up and learn as much as you can about the particular work to be done. It's easier to make mistakes if you do not know where to start.

- * Talk to others who have also done the work. They may have some tips or advice that can save you time and money. You may also want to ask if they can help and show you the ropes.

- * Be sure to obtain all necessary permits before starting any work. Don't risk a fine for doing work without permits or having work inspected.

- * When applying for permits, find out if there is a list of code-specific requirements that you can

follow -- a cheat-sheet of sorts. It may list rated materials required and any techniques. See if you can speak to an inspector who will be visiting your property later on to find out what he or she looks for specifically.

- * You must feel confident with the endeavor. If you are unsure about anything, you may risk injury or make a significant mistake and be forced to hire someone to clean up your mess.

- * Consider reputable sources for information. While it's easy to go online and scour message boards for pointers on certain tasks, not all of the information is accurate. Trust only content from sources that are licensed or backed by certification in a certain area.

These things being said, there are a number of DIY projects that regular people can try. Starting off small and building up as skills are developed are good ways to begin. For example:

- * Tile a small kitchen backsplash before tackling an entire bathroom shower enclosure or floor.

- * Build an outdoor potting stand before attempting furniture or cabinetry work in a main room of the house.

- * Change out a ceiling fan or lighting fixture before re-running electrical lines through the home.

- * Succeed in repairing a leaky drain pipe before taking on a more advanced plumbing issue.

- * Use regular painting techniques first before experimenting with a trendy faux finish or plaster application.

There are many different things individuals can do themselves that stretch beyond routine home maintenance. From manicures to pool upkeep, the potential to save money when budgets are tight can be a powerful motivator.

Did you know?

Though ceiling fans are most associated with warm-weather seasons, most can be effective throughout the winter months as well, helping circulate warm air throughout a room in much the same way they circulate cool air during the warmer weather.

Most of today's fans have a switch near the motor housing that alters the direction in which the fan's blades turn. When a ceiling fan is used in the summer, its blades push the air downward, moving cool air around the room.

When the blades' direction is altered, the blades then push the air upward toward the ceiling. This drives the hot air, which typically rises to the top, down toward the edges of the room. This helps circulate warm air throughout a room, making for more even heating. What's more, this improved heat circulation helps combat window sweating.

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