

Make the most of small bathrooms

Renovating bathrooms is commonly at the top of home improvement to-do lists. Though some rooms around the house may remain timeless, bathrooms, like kitchens, show their age (and era) much more easily, which could be why homeowners are always on the lookout for new ideas.

Although many people may dream about creating a spa-type oasis in their homes, not everyone is lucky enough to have a large bathroom, much less a large budget for a full-scale renovation. Small bathrooms are common, particularly in older homes, but they needn't force homeowners to compromise on style when renovating.

Small bathrooms may be a half-bath on a main home level or even a full bath, depending on the home. By thinking creatively, homeowners can maximize their spaces and redo bathrooms in ways that bring out their best assets.

* When space is at a premium, it's best to look for fixtures and items that fit with the scale of the bathroom. Although you may want a large vanity and cabinet in which to hide all of your toiletries, this simply may not be practical — taking up most of the bathroom real estate. Instead, look for elegant pedestal sinks that have a much smaller profile. They'll also help you control the clutter in the bathroom because there won't be anywhere to hide it.

* Use optical illusions to make the bathroom appear more roomy. For example, lay tile diagonally to create the impression of space. A large mirror will reflect the room back and make it appear much larger than it really is.

* Select lighter hues in paint colors and accessories. Dark paints and fixtures could make the room feel cramped. Dark colors are generally used to make spaces feel more cozy. In a small bathroom, it may make the space feel claustrophobic. Instead, think light and

bright and the room will instantly feel more airy.

* Minimize wall hangings and keep fixtures smaller. Filling the walls with knickknacks may contribute to clutter and make the space appear closed in. Use decorative items sparingly.

* If possible, store towels in a closet outside of the bathroom. This way you won't have to devote space inside the bathroom to a closet, leaving more room for other things.

* While some people like the thought of a separate bath and shower, in smaller bathrooms this may not be possible. Instead, look for a combined shower and bath, or select a walk-in shower with a much smaller profile.

* Windows are often welcome in bathrooms because of the ventilation they provide, but they could be a hindrance in smaller bathrooms because they take up prime wall space. Cover a window in a shower stall to free up space. Just be sure to install a venting fan

to reduce moisture in the bathroom.

* Maximize wall space if you need storage. Find cabinets that will fit beneath windows or be able to fit in thin areas between sinks and toilets. Over the toilet is prime area for cabinetry.

* Consider a frameless shower. This is a partitioned area of the bathroom that's set aside for the shower and is typically only cordoned off by a thin wall or piece of glass. Or a shower with no walls at all is the ultimate in space-saving. The entire bathroom floor is decked out in tile, and a portion is sloped toward a shower drain.

* Think about installing a skylight if you prefer natural light, but there is no room for a traditional window.

Thinking creatively can help turn a cramped bathroom into a space-saving and well-designed room homeowners desire.

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A frameless shower can take up less space in a small bathroom.

Seven inexpensive ways to update a home

Oftentimes, buying a home opens up a bottomless pit of opportunities for projects and improvements. While some homeowners engage in different repairs and fix-ups out of necessity, many others like to freshen-up their spaces out of personal preference instead of need. But even the most well-intentioned projects can be waylaid if budgets are tight.

What many homeowners may not realize is that there are many ways to make updates and changes to a home that do not require a major overhaul or a large price tag. The following are seven projects that won't break the bank.

1. Move around furniture. You may be able to change the look of

a room without spending any money. Interior designers know how to arrange furniture for maximum appeal, but the average homeowner can do it, too. Find a focal point in the room and angle the furniture toward it. Don't make the focal point the television, however. Try changing the placement of chairs and sofas. Simply moving a curio cabinet from one corner to another may also make a difference.

2. Add lighting. Lighting at different levels in the room can create a vibrant impact. Many homeowners mistakenly put in a couple of table lamps and think that will be adequate. However, properly illuminating a room means varying the lighting to create different moods at different

times. Plus, more light can make a room feel more welcoming.

3. Add new pillows or drapes. Changing a few aspects of a room can give it an entirely new look. If you want to add a splash of color but don't know what to do, think about incorporating some new throw pillows or change the curtains. An accessory here and there in a bright color also can incorporate a new hue without it being overwhelming.

4. Change knobs or small accents. Give a room a new look by focusing on the small details. Switch out cabinet knobs for something updated and modern. Take inventory of wall outlets and light switches and think about selecting new ones that coordinate with your home decor.

5. Use plants. Empty corners or spots you're not certain how to fill may benefit from a plant. Plants are inexpensive ways to add instant color and visual appeal to a room. Plus, having live plants can help improve indoor air by filtering out contaminants. A home with plants also feels more cozy.

6. Hang new wall art. It may be time to look at your photos and artwork and make a few adjustments. Finding new prints to hang could instantly change a room's ambience. And you needn't spend a lot of money on professional photography, either. Grab your camera and take a few close-up shots of flowers or take in a landscape scenery. Many of today's home printers can produce pro-

fessional-quality prints in minutes.

7. Try a new coat of paint. After you've exhausted other avenues, choosing a new paint color may be the new look you desire. Painting is one of the least expensive yet most dramatic methods of changing a home's interior. With dozens of hues to choose from, and new apps that enable you to take snapshots of things in nature or in your life and match them up to a paint color, you will have scores of opportunities to explore fresh new colors for your home.

When you get inspired to make improvements to the home but fear how much it may take out of

your wallet, consider inexpensive tricks that can induce a big "wow" factor.

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