



Guide to replacing home siding



Few home improvements can transform a home more than the installation of new siding. Replacing siding can be a costly venture, but the right siding will maintain its appeal for years to come.

Updated siding can improve home's energy value by enabling owners to save on heating and cooling costs. A new design and color also can improve a home's property value and set it apart from neighboring properties. According to the Professional Builder's Home Exteriors Survey, exterior design and materials used are a top priority for new home buyers.

Project costs depend on the size of the home as well as which siding material homeowners choose. Considering new siding is a major renovation, it pays to get the job done right.

Choose a qualified contractor
It is important for consumers to do their research when it comes to siding materials and contractors. A contractor who takes shortcuts or improperly installs the siding may void a manufacturer's warranty. Always ask family members and friends for recommendations before choosing a contractor, and check out each prospective contractor's work for yourself. Interview more than one contractor and compare both their costs and what they offer. Ask plenty of questions of the contractors, and avoid those who try hard-sell methods. Questionable contractors may try strategies like a promise of a considerable discount if you 'act now' or scare tactics that your home is unsafe in its present condition.

Be sure the contractor carries general liability insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance for their subcontractors. Ask for a license number as well and verify its accuracy.

Select a durable material
Siding comes in all types of materials from wood to plastic to fiber cement, but vinyl is among the most popular due to cost and availability. Research how well particular brands of siding stand up to conditions and

which are the least likely to crack, warp or discolor. Find this information from online reviews or through consumer advocacy groups. Also remember, vinyl and other synthetic materials have improved and can now mimic the look of many other materials for a fraction of the cost.

Calculate how much you need
Before you price out siding with contractors, estimate how much you will need for your house. Consumer Reports suggests multiplying the height times the width of each rectangular section of your house in feet, going by what you can measure from the ground, to determine their areas. Multiply the approximate height and width of gables and other triangular surfaces and divide each total by two. Then add all the totals. To allow for waste, don't subtract for doors, windows or other areas that won't be covered. Finally, divide the total square footage by 100 to estimate how many squares of siding you will need. A square represents 100 square feet. Knowing how much you need can save you money.

Vinyl siding can completely transform the look of a home and make it more energy efficient. Consumers who do their homework will get the best value for their investments.

Budget-friendly outdoor renovation ideas

Homeowners are increasingly extending their living spaces outside the walls of their homes. Expansive and intricate stonework patios and decked-out outdoor kitchens are the kind of additions many homeowners dream of. Those with unlimited budgets can enjoy just about any look they desire, but many homeowners may not have the money to go all the way with their outdoor living spaces. But that doesn't mean it's impossible to create budget-friendly spaces that are functional, fun and eye catching.

Decks and patios are popular gathering spots outside a home, and homeowners have numerous inexpensive options at their disposal when choosing patio materials. And those who can do their own labor when installing a patio can save a substantial amount of money. Instead of higher-priced composite or resin decks, homeowners can go with standard wood, which will need to be stained periodically. Scaling back the size of the deck means less materials to buy and less labor involved.

The cost of patio blocks depends on the material and style. Poured concrete patios will cost less than placed blocks or stones because concrete is less labor-intensive. For those who desire the look of patio blocks without the cost, stamped concrete can mimic the look for less.

Homeowners may not need to replace patio furniture, even if chairs and tables have seen better days. A can of spray paint can cover up any rusted areas or spots where paint has peeled off due to exposure to the elements. Updating cushions and purchasing a coordinating umbrella can revitalize the patio's entire look. Also, very often stores run sales to clear out merchandise for new displays.

Defining edges of planting borders and refreshing the landscape may be all that is needed to improve the yard. This is easily achieved with inexpensive mulch and some vinyl edging. While cleaning up the yard, use a pressure washer to clean stains off of siding and patios and create a like-new appearance.

End-of-season sales can also be the ideal opportunity to purchase big-ticket items like a pool, a hot tub or an outdoor fireplace/fire pit. Shoppers can learn when stores discount their merchandise to make room for new inventory and then use these sales as opportunities to save.

Sometimes saving means repurposing antiques or items found at garage sales. Thanks to the Internet, people can easily advertise items they no longer need or desire. A person can search for backyard items they need at a deep discount if they are fine with previously used materials. From patio furniture to masonry blocks to above-ground pools, patient homeowners can find just about any item they may need to upgrade their backyards.

Though not all homeowners can afford to create the backyard of their dreams, with a little ingenuity and some sweat hard work, homeowners can still create an outdoor oasis.

Switching to LED Bulbs is Becoming More Affordable and Appealing



(StatePoint) The use of LED bulbs in homes is on the rise nationwide, and with good reason. Not only are they more energy efficient than their traditional counterparts, LEDs are becoming more affordable upfront.

Indeed, of the United States' four billion residential light bulb sockets, less than 10 percent are filled with LED lighting; but by 2020, more than 50 percent will be LED, according to industry estimates. This year alone, the consumer lighting market is anticipated

to more than double with LED, while traditional CFL bulb usage is expected to decrease.

LED is not a new technology and has been on the market for years. So what is driving this sudden consumer shift? New light bulb designs are making these cost-efficient bulbs more convenient, attractive and affordable. In fact, certain designs retail as low as under \$10 for a three-pack

of bulbs.

For example, GE Lighting's new Bright Stik bulb's slender, sleek design is offered both in soft white

and daylight, and fits in more sockets and fixtures compared to its general purpose CFL bulb counterpart. It has a rated life of 15,000 hours and should last nearly 14 years, at a cost of 10 cents per month based on three hours of operation daily and 11 cents per kilowatt hour.

Designed to be a good alternative to general purpose replacement CFL bulbs, the Bright Stik can be used anywhere, from sockets found in basements, sheds, and garages to table and floor lamps, adding up to substantial energy savings over time. These bulbs are available in-store at The Home Depot or by visiting www.HomeDepot.com.

To learn more about in-

novations in LED lighting, get lighting tips for any room of the house, or to find out how much you stand to save making the simple swap, visit gelighting.com/LightingWeb/na/consumer/.

You don't need to be a skilled handyman to make an important, planet-friendly home upgrade that will save your family time and money for years to come. This weekend, consider trading in your traditional bulbs for a more modern variety.



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