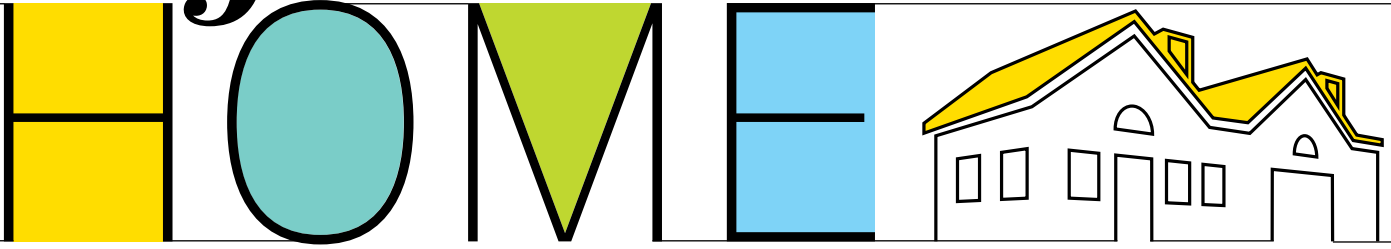


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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

Front Porch Design Ideas That Work

Depending on the space available, a porch can serve as a small haven to escape bad weather or an outdoor room for relaxing with family and friends. Whether you have a tiny platform just wider than your front door or an expansive wraparound veranda, you can make your porch an attractive and welcoming space. Here are a few design tips for most outdoor entry spaces, big or small.



1 Give your door a color boost. Painting the door with an unusual color will draw the visitor's eye and set you apart from other homes. Think about updating the hardware if it has seen better days.

2 Spruce up the floor. Natural wood decking can be refreshed with a good cleaning, sanding and new stain or specially formulated porch-and-patio paint. If your budget allows, you could opt for ceramic,

porcelain or stone tiles for an interesting, low-upkeep solution.

3 Add an outdoor rug. Select a throw rug that will resist moisture and sun. Or avoid the hassle by painting a "rug" right onto the floor.

4 Style with planters. Containers of green or flowering plants can add a friendly and homey touch, especially where space is tight. Just remember to water frequently—or use artificial plants if you're not a gardener.

5 Furniture that fits. Measure your space before selecting furniture, then pick pieces that suit your porch's style and purpose. Wooden rockers impart a nostalgic feel, while metal loungers offer a modern vibe.

EASY HOME BACKYARD IMPROVEMENTS

More prospective homebuyers are adding "outdoor entertaining space" to their search criteria. While you may be tempted to go full-tilt on an outdoor kitchen, pool and "she-shed," you can make more price-conscious choices that are eye-catching and useful. If you already have a patio or deck, make sure the furniture is arranged in welcoming seating areas or dining zones. Then perk up the rest of the area with these easy enhancements:

Go green

Adding plants is a quick way to add color and freshness to an outdoor space. Planters filled with flowers and greenery look more inviting than bare hardscape. Be sure any existing lawn, trees or shrubbery are trimmed, too.



Fire feature

If local codes allow for an open fire pit, it can be a great addition to an outdoor space, especially in climates with cooler nighttime temperatures. A permanent installation can be done at relatively low cost, or a portable pit can provide the same ambience and be stored away in winter months.



Screening and shade

Strategic placement of key items can protect guests from too much sun or prying eyes. A pergola offers shade and defines an outdoor room. A freestanding patio umbrella can also lend shade. Taller plants or vines can provide some privacy, as can fabric drapes artfully tied back to posts.



Light it up

It's easy to add ground-level lighting without installing a hard-wired system. Solar-powered, dusk-activated stake lights can be driven into garden beds or along walkways. Outdoor-rated string lights add charm when wound along fences, around tree branches or awning supports.





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DIY Interior Painting Tips

A fresh coat of paint is one of the least expensive ways to freshen up a home's look. And homeowners can save even more by doing the job themselves. Following some simple steps will make the process more efficient and lead to a finer result.



Clear a space. If you can't clear out the furniture, push the biggest pieces into the center of the room and cover them with plastic. Once you have access to each of the walls, lay down canvas drop cloths. Pros prefer these since drips will dry more quickly and canvas isn't as slippery as plastic.



Patch it up. Fix any nail holes or cracks in the wall surfaces with spackle or wood filler. Remove all outlet and light switch covers and use a bit of painter's tape to hold the screws to each plate.



Select good brushes and rollers. If you are doing more than one room, spend a bit more on your brushes—they will perform better. Use a slant-cut brush for cutting in around moldings and ceiling. A wider, 18-inch roller will allow you to make fewer passes and will cut down painting time. Pre-condition your roller covers before painting to remove any loose bits of fleece that could end up on your wall by washing them with a bit of dish soap and lightly scrubbing your hands over the surface. Rinse them out and you can start painting without waiting for them to dry.



Pick the right tape. Use painter's tape, not masking tape. When it gets wet, masking tape can buckle, allowing paint underneath, and it might also leave sticky residue on the surface. Painter's tape, properly applied, will keep a good seal yet still allow easy removal.



Use a tinted primer. Adding a bit of color to the primer will block the old color and help ensure even coverage of the new one—and you might get by with fewer coats of your main color. The pros will add a dash of gray or some of the final color to the primer to make the finish color pop.

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