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## HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

### Home improvement resolutions for 2020

While many New Year's resolutions revolve around health and personal habits, the start of a new calendar year is also a natural time to set goals regarding your home. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Make a wish list.** Walk through your home and take note of any minor repairs or major improvements you'd like to complete this year. Plan out a rough timeline of when you hope to tackle each one and start a savings plan for more expensive projects.
- **Conduct a safety check.** Purchase a radon testing kit from a hardware store, and install carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Make sure chimneys are clean and in working order. Clean or replace the duct and vent behind the dryer to prevent a possible fire hazard.
- **Minimize.** As you put up and take down holiday decorations, consider donating the items that you no longer use to a thrift store. Purge your closet of clothing and shoes you haven't worn in the past year. Throw away broken toys, clever gadgets that no longer work and unneeded financial records.
- **Create a cleaning system.** Determine daily, weekly and monthly tasks to keep your cleaning on track. Mark off chores on your phone or a physical checklist. Delegate responsibilities to family members as appropriate.

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### Which kitchen appliance is best for you?

If you don't have the storage space or budget for multiple small appliances, how do you know which one is right for your cooking needs? To help make your decision, compare the features of three of the most popular electric cookers.

#### Slow cooker

This might be the best option for you if you have more time early in the day to prep and add food to the pot so that it's ready to eat come mealtime.

#### Benefits

- **Set-and-forget:** Prepare meals hours before dinner without having to watch over food on the stove.

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- **Tenderizes inexpensive meats:** By braising all day, tougher cuts of meat soften, giving you a flavorful meal and helping you save money on your food budget.

### Multicooker

If you like a variety of features or if you need to cook something quickly, a multicooker is a practical choice.

#### Benefits

- **Fast:** The pressure-cooking feature cuts down on cook time, making even frozen foods possible in a pinch. If you make and freeze large batches of soup, you can place the frozen soup into the multicooker and have a hot meal ready in minutes.
- **Automatic:** Some multicookers offer automated settings for foods such as rice, yogurt and soups.

### Air fryer

You might want to invest in an air fryer if you like crispy or roasted foods without heating up the kitchen.

#### Benefits

- **Versatile:** It "fries" foods like french fries and chicken tenders, but you can also roast vegetables, broil meat and even bake desserts. Little to no oil is needed, so it also cuts down on calories.
- **Efficient baking:** Quickly bake one to two portions of your favorite winter comfort foods, or use it to take store-bought appetizers from frozen to crisp for your holiday parties.

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## Decor trends on their way out

As the new year approaches, interior designers hope to say goodbye to 2019 along with these trends.

**All-white kitchens:** According to *ElleDecor.com*, some designers say the monochromatic look has become sterile. Consider warming up your kitchen with darker countertops, patterned backsplashes and painted cabinets in deep blues, grays or even black.

**"Fast furniture":** This term refers to inexpensive, mass-produced pieces that are trendy but often poorly constructed. While great for dorm rooms or post-college apartments, age-up your furniture by choosing handcrafted, antique or repurposed pieces that are built to last.

**Minimalism:** Designers are moving away from simple, neutral decor and toward "maximalism." This trend encourages mixing jewel tones, vintage items and interesting textures. "In this case, more is more," says *Art.com*.

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## Staging for great first impressions

When listing your home for sale, you want it to stand out. Without a great first impression, buyers may prematurely decide to move on to the next property on the market. Follow these tips to help your home look its best.

**Freshen up the front entrance.** The first impression begins the moment buyers pull up to the curb. Be sure the exterior looks well-kept and inviting. Trim bushes and other landscaping to keep the walk to the front door clear.

**Simplify.** Too much furniture, clutter on countertops, overstuffed closets, or excessive decorations can make your house feel cramped. Enlarge your home visually by paring down your belongings. Give things away or store extra items off-site.

**Convey comfort.** You want the owner's bedroom to appear calm and relaxing. Put away family photos or other personalized items, and consider investing in neutral-colored linens and plush throw pillows to create a luxurious-feeling space.

**Deep clean.** Make it obvious that you take special care of your home. Be sure your kitchen, bathrooms, mirrors, and windows are all sparkling. Steam clean carpets, wipe down baseboards and eradicate any lingering pet odors.

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## Pasta Fagioli Soup

### Ingredients

1 lb. lean ground beef, browned and drained  
1 cup chopped onion  
1 cup chopped carrots  
½ cup chopped celery  
1 can (14.5-oz.) diced tomatoes, with juice  
1 can (15.5-oz.) kidney beans, drained and rinsed  
1 can (15.5-oz.) navy beans, drained and rinsed  
4 cups beef broth  
1 jar (24-oz.) marinara sauce  
1½ tsp. oregano  
½ tsp. Tabasco sauce  
½ tsp. salt  
½ tsp. black pepper  
1¼ cups dry ditalini pasta  
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

### Directions

Add all ingredients except pasta and parsley to a 6- or 7-quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 5-7 hours, or until vegetables are tender.

Just before serving, cook pasta according to package directions. Stir into soup. Garnish with parsley.

*Serves 8-10*

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