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## HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

### Seasonal Home Maintenance

Before decorating for the holidays, take time to prepare your home for the winter months. Use this list to help you get started.

- **Weatherproof doors and windows.** Using clear caulk or weatherstripping to seal any gaps around windows and doors helps prevent warm air from escaping when it's chilly outside and keeps the cool air in when it's hot.
- **Protect your floors.** Prepare your home for messy weather by placing floor mats at every entrance and purchasing a waterproof tray for storing wet shoes.
- **Reverse ceiling fans.** Make sure your fans are set to turn clockwise during the winter. This pushes warm air down into the room and could help you save money on heating costs.
- **Treat the lawn.** Mowing and fertilizing your lawn prior to the cooler months can help ensure a lush, green yard come spring.
- **Check for overhanging branches.** To prevent damage during high winds and severe weather, hire a professional to trim any branches that are too close to your roof.
- **Tune up the HVAC.** Replace the air filter in your HVAC system, and have a professional check your unit to ensure that it's running efficiently before cooler temperatures set in.

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### Maximize Your Kitchen for Holiday Cooking

The kitchen becomes one of the most-used rooms during the holidays, so take some time to ensure that you have all the space you need for food preparation this year. Consider these simple steps for maximizing your kitchen.

**Plan ahead and space out food preparation.** Whenever possible, try to prepare dishes a day or two prior to large meals to prevent crowded countertops and ovens. Consider including margin in your meal prep schedule to make sure you aren't left working on multiple dishes at the last minute.

**Temporarily expand counter space.** Place a large cutting board over the sink to create additional space for chopping produce. This frees up your countertops for assembling dishes and holding hot items from the oven.

**Use a rolling cart.** This functional addition to your kitchen can double as a storage solution and extra counter space. Search for a cart with multiple levels, pull-out drawers and locking wheels. The cart can then be rolled out of the way when prep work is complete.

**Remove unnecessary items.** Rarely used dishes, appliances and utensils can be stored outside of the kitchen during holiday hosting to make more room for meal prep.

Consider these larger projects for long-term space improvements.

**Add shelves inside cabinets.** Some types of cabinets are much taller than the items you need to store. Consider installing additional racks or shelves inside your cabinets to add more flat surfaces for storing small items.

**Make the most of empty spaces.** Attach utensil holders, shelves, magnetic strips, or hooks to empty vertical surfaces throughout your kitchen. Consider the sides of cabinets, the backsplash, the inside of cabinet and pantry doors, and even the refrigerator.

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## 5 Home Decor Mistakes To Avoid

With all the time you're spending at home these days, it's important to make sure your space is relaxing and comfortable. Evaluate your home's decor with these suggestions in mind.

1. If you're **relying solely on overhead lighting**, your kitchen and living spaces may feel uninviting. Soften the atmosphere with floor lamps and under-the-cabinet lighting.
2. An **absence of potted plants** means you're missing out on natural accents that can breathe life into any room. Plants are scientifically proven to clean indoor air and reduce stress.
3. If your **dining room is painted blue**, your meals could be accompanied by an unidentified discomfort. Despite its popularity, blue is an appetite suppressant, as it rarely appears in nature as an edible substance.
4. **Hanging curtains too low** can evoke a trapped feeling and make a room feel stuffy. Instead, hang them near the ceiling to create a lofty space and let in as much light as possible.
5. In the living room, a **small area rug** could make the space feel choppy. Choose a rug that extends beyond your couch by at least a foot on each end to make the room feel complete.

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## Top Herbs To Grow Indoors

Fresh herbs add a pop of flavor and brightness to just about any dish, and an indoor herb garden makes an attractive addition to your kitchen. Not all herbs are fit for indoor potting, but these four varieties thrive inside.

- **Thyme:** With an earthy flavor and hints of lemon, thyme is a versatile addition to meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, or homemade broth.
- **Oregano:** A common addition to sauces and Italian foods, oregano can also add bold flavor to many Mediterranean dishes.
- **Rosemary:** An aromatic, pine-scented herb, rosemary has a strong flavor that best complements red meat, lamb and side dishes with potatoes.
- **Chives:** With a distinct onion taste, chives are delicious in dips and egg dishes. They also make an effortless garnish.

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## Herbed Potato Gratin

**Ingredients**

5 Tbsp. unsalted butter  
1 garlic clove, minced  
4 Tbsp. cornstarch  
1 tsp. kosher salt  
½ tsp. pepper  
2 cups whole milk  
2 cups shredded white Cheddar, divided  
1 Tbsp. fresh rosemary, finely chopped  
½ Tbsp. fresh thyme, finely chopped  
5 cups thinly sliced Yukon Gold potatoes

**Directions**

Preheat oven to 350° F. Coat a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. In a large pot, melt butter over low heat. Stir in garlic and cook for 1 minute. Whisk in cornstarch, salt and pepper until smooth. Gradually add milk and cook until thickened, about 3-5 minutes, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat and stir in 1½ cups of cheese, rosemary and thyme. Add potatoes and stir to combine.

Transfer to baking dish and sprinkle with remaining cheese. Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake an additional 30-45 minutes, or until potatoes are tender and top is golden brown.



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