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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

How to be a smart open house guest

If an open house sign has caught your eye, here's how to be a confident, savvy visitor.

Arrive early so you can have the host's undivided attention. The host is typically the listing agent; however, there's no reason to fear engaging in conversation. This is an ideal time to ask questions and gain perspective about the home. Be courteous, but avoid oversharing about your personal situation. Don't forget to mention that you're working with an agent if you are.

If you're concerned about rooms not being large enough for your furniture, check the listing sheet for room dimensions. If unavailable, ask for permission to measure specific areas. Open closets and pantries to evaluate storage space, and check under sinks for any signs of mold.

Look for indications of damage or neglect. Doors that stick could reveal a settling foundation, stained baseboards may indicate water damage, and condensation on windows could mean they're drafty and need to be replaced.

Visiting open houses can be a helpful experience in determining what you do and do not want in a future home. If you'd like to talk about your next steps, call anytime.

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Create a mood board for your next home project

Home projects can escalate quickly in both time and money spent if you don't have a well-prepared plan. Whether you are refreshing the look of the living room, overhauling the kitchen or revamping the front porch, the place to begin your project is not inside the home improvement store.

Before spending a dime, consider creating a mood board to guide your project. A mood board is a collage of images that will help you visualize how the finished space will look and determine what pieces you want to buy. To easily create a digital mood board, try out Pinterest or *RoomStyler.com*.

Step 1: Gather inspiration on Pinterest.

Create a Pinterest board dedicated specifically to your home project, then pin images and websites that inspire you. After you've saved at least 10 images, step away for a day or two. Then review your Pins and watch for common themes among the images to narrow down what styles you prefer, deleting outliers as you go. You want to come out of this step with a clear color scheme and a basic style in mind.

Step 2: Create a digital mood board.

Using the Mood Board Creator on *RoomStyler.com*, add images to create a mock-up of your home project based on your design style. You can choose from stock photos or upload your own. By adding, arranging and resizing images, you can see what looks best in the design. Once your mood board is finished, save a copy to your phone for easy access.

Step 3: Make your purchases.

Your mood board can act as a guide when you go shopping for products that closely resemble your design images. Knowing that you've taken time to research and to visualize the end product, you can avoid impulsive decisions and be confident your purchases will fit with your overall plan.

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5 Ways to waste less water

Saving water in your home doesn't have to be a painful experience. There are a few simple things you can do to waste less water without sacrificing your comfort.

1. **Turn off your faucet.** It sounds simple, but according to the U.S. Geological Survey, if you leave the faucet running each time you brush your teeth, wash your face and shave, you will go through 1-2 gallons of water.
2. **Address small leaks.** According to *Realtor.com*[®], a small drip from a faucet can waste 20 gallons of water each day. Fix your leaky faucets as soon as possible.
3. **Invest in a new toilet.** Newer models are specifically designed to use less water per flush. Look for one with the WaterSense label that meets the EPA's certification.
4. **Make the most of your outdoor watering.** When you water your lawn, garden and flower beds early in the morning, you'll use less water overall because you won't lose as much to evaporation.
5. **Update your washing machine.** According to Consumer Reports, front-loaders and high-efficiency (HE) top-loaders typically use less water and energy than top-loaders with agitators.

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Moving? Here's how to take care of your pet

Whether it's across town or across the country, moving can be stressful for pets. Before you move, make sure you have your pet's vaccination records, and stock up on any necessary medications and specialty foods. Pack essentials such as a leash and food/water bowls somewhere that's easily accessible.

On moving day, keep your pet in a quiet room away from the action. Make sure your pet is safely transported in a large crate with plenty of ventilation. If you're worried about your pet's anxiety levels, ask your vet for an all-natural remedy to help him or her stay calm, especially if you have a long day of driving ahead of you.

When you arrive, make it a priority to update your pet's tags and/or microchip with your new address.

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Grilled Peaches with Mascarpone and Honey

Ingredients

4 oz. Mascarpone cheese
4 oz. plain Greek yogurt
1 tsp. vanilla extract
6 firm (but ripe) peaches, halved and pitted
2 tsp. grapeseed oil, plus more for grilling
¼ cup honey
¼ cup honey oat granola
Fresh mint leaves for garnish

Directions

Preheat grill to medium-high heat. In a medium bowl, whisk together Mascarpone, yogurt and vanilla. Set aside in fridge.



Brush tops of peach halves with oil and lightly brush grill grates with oil. Place peaches flesh side down on grill for 3 minutes or until they have grill marks. Use a grill spatula to rotate peaches to prevent sticking. Grill about 3 minutes longer, or until peaches are soft but still hold their shape.

Place peaches on a serving plate, drizzle with honey and Mascarpone mixture, and top with granola. Garnish with mint leaves. Serve immediately.

Serves 6

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