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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Home Maintenance Checklist

The first day of fall is September 22. Use this checklist to ensure your home is safe and ready for the change of seasons.

- Schedule all exterior home projects such as painting, deck staining or foundation repairs to be completed before cooler and potentially wetter weather arrives.
- Clean gutters of leaves and other debris to prevent blockage that could damage your roof and siding.
- Apply weatherstripping around window and door frames to help reduce energy costs.
- Prune trees and shrubs.
- If needed, fertilize, verticut or core aerate, and overseed your lawn.
- Hire a professional to inspect your HVAC systems and to replace air filters.
- Have your chimney cleaned and inspected for any damage by a certified chimney sweep.
- Consider upgrading the insulation in your home.
- Replace batteries in all of your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Enjoy autumn by relaxing near your fireplace, chiminea or fire pit, knowing your home is attractively well-maintained.

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Choosing the Right Window Coverings

Both beautiful and functional, blinds and shades can be integral to a home's interior lighting and ambiance. Keep these points in mind when searching for the perfect window coverings for each of your rooms.

Cellular or insulated blinds are great options for homes with older, drafty or south-facing windows that need an extra line of defense against the sun's heat.

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Consider **cordless blinds and shades** if young children frequent your home because the cords can be a safety hazard.

Roman shades feature soft draping fabric or crisp fabric folds when raised. They're functional, lavish window coverings often selected for rooms with highly formal decor.

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Eco-Friendly Fireplace Options

There's nothing better than the comforting warmth of a fireplace on a fall evening. However, wood-burning fires can be messy and release pollutants. Fortunately, there are several environmentally friendly, cleaner-burning alternatives.

Although **electric** fireplaces don't produce as much heat as other options, they're relatively inexpensive, clean burning and 100% energy efficient. If you're looking for a warm glow but don't want the heat, an electric fireplace may be a good choice.

Natural gas fireplaces produce more heat than electric and burn cleaner than wood. As an added bonus, they often have the convenience of being controlled by a simple switch. Keep in mind that gas fireplaces must be vented and will lose heat through the flue.

Ethanol fireplaces burn biofuel, so they're clean burning and eco-friendly. They're easy to install, but care must be exercised because ethanol is extremely flammable.

Pellet stoves generate heat by burning sawdust pellets, which are nontoxic and immune to bacteria, fungus and pests. Pellet stoves are 75% to 90% efficient and have low emissions. However, they require electricity to operate, and the pellets are subject to drastic price increases when housing production slows.

Simple Ways to Refurbish Your Fireplace

- Add peel-and-stick tiles
- Install a mantel
- Update your artwork
- Add interesting accessories

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Living in Your House During a Remodel

Ownership provides many opportunities to transform a house into your home. When you finally prioritize that extensive remodel you've been dreaming of, you may find yourself living in the middle of a construction zone. Staying in your house during renovations isn't easy, but with these tips, you can turn a potentially inconvenient experience into one that's manageable and even memorable.

Designate your new living quarters. You'll want to make sure there are places to continue each aspect of everyday life. Where will the cooking, eating and sleeping areas be located during the remodeling project? Designate spots where you can escape construction so that you're still comfortable in your home.

The calendar is your friend. People may joke that construction timelines always run long, but some cooperative planning can help get your new project done on time. Work with your contractor to schedule significant deadlines like the start, midpoint and completion dates. Bring your planner with you when discussing the work schedule with the contractor. Note any days (and nights) when you'll need to be out of the house.

Flexibility becomes a necessity. Before work begins, keep in mind that you may need to relocate food, appliances, clothing, and beds depending on which area of your home is currently under construction. If you're renovating one or more bathrooms, create a schedule for the times when each member of the household can use the space to get ready for work and school.

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Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients

1 Tbsp. avocado oil
¼ cup diced shallots
3 garlic cloves, minced
2¼ cups pumpkin puree
2 cups vegetable broth
1 cup canned light coconut milk
2 Tbsp. honey or maple syrup
¼ tsp. sea salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
¼ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. nutmeg

Directions

Add oil, shallots and garlic to a large saucepan over medium heat. Cook for 2-3 minutes, or until slightly browned and translucent. Reduce heat if cooking too quickly. Add remaining ingredients and bring to a simmer.

Transfer mixture to a blender or use an immersion blender to puree the soup. Pour mixture back into pan, and continue cooking over medium-low heat for 5-10 minutes. Season to taste.

Garnish with toasted pumpkin seeds.

Serves 2-4

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