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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Convert Your Formal Dining Room

In today's fast-paced world, many families opt to enjoy meals around a kitchen table or breakfast bar, often leaving the formal dining room empty and unused. Here are a few ways you can revamp your formal dining room into a fun or functional space.

Make a Work Area

Boost your productivity by designating a separate space that prevents work and homework from overtaking the rest of your home. Furnish the room with a desk, a supportive chair and a small worktable for projects. Be sure to include baskets or other storage bins to organize supplies.

Set Up a Game Room

Score big on family bonding with a game room that brings everyone together in a fun, modern way — much like the dining room table once did. Consider a ping-pong or pool table with an add-on tabletop feature and surround it with comfortable chairs. Include cabinetry to store board games.

Start an Indoor Garden

Show off your green thumb with a variety of plants in their very own garden room. Use colorful planters and vases to bring character to the space, but make sure you place planters on waterproof surfaces.

Build a Library

Line the walls with shelves and fill them with your favorite books. For something unusual, consider creating a music library with your favorite vinyl albums or a small movie room to house your favorite films. Don't forget to include some plush seating to enjoy your media collection.

Create a Sitting Room

Ditch the TV and create an inviting conversation space with comfortable furnishings arranged to encourage family connection. Add soft lighting and an electric fireplace for added warmth.

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Organize a Decor Swap

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Transform your space without spending a dime by trading trinkets for newfound treasures at a decor swap.

Plan the Perfect Swap

Send invitations to friends and family. Include instructions detailing how many pieces to bring, what items are acceptable and what to leave at home. You might even try a themed swap, like "seasonal splendor" or "vintage vibes."

Host With Style

Create an inviting atmosphere with light background music and refreshments. Arrange tables to display the featured pieces and allow everyone to browse, then have your guests make selections. Keep the process simple by drawing two or three names at a time and setting a time limit for choosing items. Allow extra time for any additional swapping between guests.

Any unclaimed items remaining after the decor swap is over can be donated to a local nonprofit or posted online in a Buy Nothing group.

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Lighting Hacks

Proper lighting can make or break a room's look and feel. Every room is different, so it's important to tailor lighting to the function of the space.

Soft lighting works well in rooms where you want to relax, such as bedrooms and living rooms. Skip the overhead lights and opt for table lamps or wall sconces to create a sense of coziness.

Practical lighting is essential in areas where you want to be productive, such as an office or workout room. In these spaces, the right overhead lighting and functional fixtures can add brightness and boost productivity.

Versatile lighting is key in the areas of your home where you can be both productive and relaxed, such as the kitchen or primary bedroom suite. Install dimmer switches for overhead lighting to adjust the mood as needed. Add lamps or battery-operated LED candles to create a warm, inviting atmosphere during relaxation time, and consider under-cabinet lighting for practical tasks. Layering your lighting options allows you to easily transition the space from bright and functional to soft and soothing.

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The Dirty Truth About Kitchen Towels

Keeping your kitchen sparkling clean isn't just about scrubbing surfaces and washing fruits and veggies. One often overlooked culprit for bacteria buildup is the kitchen towel.

While cloth towels are an economical and environmentally friendly alternative to paper, they're breeding grounds for bacteria. Even after rinsing towels in the sink, salmonella can still grow quickly overnight. Towels used to wipe down counters and clean up spills should be laundered in a washing machine with hot water after one day's use. If towels are used only to dry hands, they should be laundered after three or four days. Experts also recommend replacing kitchen towels every year or two.

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Penne With Smoked Sausage

Ingredients

1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 lb. smoked sausage
½ cup diced onion
1 Tbsp. minced garlic
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
2 cups chicken broth
1 (10 oz.) can diced tomatoes
½ cup milk
2 cups dry penne pasta
Crushed red pepper
Shredded Parmesan cheese
Basil leaves
Arugula leaves



Directions

Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Slice sausage into bite

pepper. Continue cooking for about 30 seconds.



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