

Brought to you by

Jill C. Kline & Brenda K. Odenbaugh



Owners
Jill: 970-388-2926
jill@kandorealty.com
Brenda: 970-381-1169
brenda@kandorealty.com
www.kandorealty.com

K & O
REALTY, LLC

P.O. Box 1103
607 Main St
Platteville, CO 80651

HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Working With a Contractor

Home renovations often require the expertise of skilled workers. If you need professional help with your project, start with a qualified contractor. Here, we offer tips to help you navigate a client-contractor relationship.

Define your project. Create a comprehensive project plan that outlines your goals, budget, timeline, and specific requirements. A well-defined plan helps ensure you and your contractor are on the same page.

Sign a detailed contract. Your contract should include a detailed scope of work, payment terms, project timeline, and any other relevant details. Be sure to maintain a signed copy of the contract and put additional changes you want to make in writing.

Communicate clearly. State your expectations, preferences and concerns throughout the process. As the project progresses, meet regularly for updates.

Track change orders and costs. Alterations to your original plan are inevitable as your vision changes or unexpected issues arise. Keep a written record of all modifications and associated costs. Insist that your contractor provide change orders that both parties sign before initiating any work outside the original scope of the renovations.

Get the proper approvals. Many home improvement projects, even small ones, require building permits. While it's generally the contractor's responsibility to pull the permits, it's in the homeowner's best interest to follow up with the contractor to ensure approvals are obtained. Before work begins, double-check that you have the required documentation. This extra vigilance can save you many headaches down the road.

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Refresh or Remodel?

Would you like to refresh the look of your home quickly and affordably without the chaos of remodeling? You might be amazed at the dramatic impact small changes can make. So before committing to a costly remodel, consider these projects you can finish in a weekend or two.

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Kitchen

Paint or stain cabinets and replace hardware. Install pendant lighting above the island or breakfast bar.

Bathroom

Update plumbing fixtures and add attractive shelving. Replace large mirrors with smaller, framed mirrors for an instant upgrade.

Living Room

Modernize your living space with fresh paint in a trending color. Add a stylish area rug to complement the new wall color.

Windows

Replace dated window treatments with contemporary blinds or modern draperies. Make your ceiling appear taller by hanging curtain rods higher than your window frame.

Outside

Paint your front door and replace old hardware. Clean patio furniture and replace cushions if needed. Add some large potted plants to your deck or patio.

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Successful Vegetable Gardening

It's easy to plant the seeds of success in your vegetable garden with these helpful tips.

Pollination

Include some pollinator-friendly flowers in your garden, like sunflowers, zinnias or lavender to attract hummingbirds, butterflies, ladybugs, and other pollinators.

Fertilizer

Your garden can thrive with compost materials like tree leaves, vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, and eggshells. Once decomposed, mix these organic materials with soil to promote plant growth.

Timing

To get the most out of your garden, consider succession planting. By planting a fast-growing vegetable and harvesting it, you can fertilize the soil again and plant a new crop in the same space.

As long as you keep enriching the soil, you may even have enough growing time to replant the same area with a third late-season vegetable.

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Know When To Repair or Replace Appliances

You know that sinking feeling you get when your washing machine starts shuddering and knocking? Dollar signs whiz by as you brace yourself for the worst.

Before you panic, try to find out what's wrong. Sometimes you'll get lucky and discover you just need to reset a circuit breaker. If the problem isn't quite that simple, find out if it's at least fixable. A newer appliance may be under warranty, so any repairs or replacement might be covered.

If you're out of warranty and the repair is complicated, have a certified professional diagnose the issue and provide a cost estimate. According to *HouseLogic.com*, "If an appliance is more than 50% through its lifespan and if the cost of one repair is more than 50% of the cost of buying new, you should replace rather than repair."

When selecting a new appliance, remember to factor in the future cost savings you'll accrue by replacing an old appliance with a more energy-efficient model.

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Strawberry-Rhubarb Crisp Bars

1 cup rolled oats
¾ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup light brown sugar
¼ tsp. salt
6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
1 cup diced rhubarb (about 1–2 medium stalks)
1 cup diced strawberries
1 tsp. cornstarch
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 Tbsp. granulated sugar, *divided*

Preheat oven to 375° F. In medium bowl, mix oats, flour, brown sugar, and salt. Stir in melted butter. Set aside ½ cup crust mixture and press remaining crust into bottom of a 9x13-inch pan. Spread half of rhubarb and strawberries over pressed crust. Sprinkle cornstarch, lemon juice and ½ Tbsp. sugar over fruit. Add remaining fruit and sugar. Top with reserved crust mixture and bake for 30-40 minutes. Let cool in pan before slicing.



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The Personal Marketing Company
11511 W. 83rd Terrace
Lenexa, KS 66214