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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Elevate Your Guest Room

Whether you're hosting family and friends over the holidays or just want to be ready for company year-round, hospitality begins in the guestroom. You don't have to spend a fortune to make this space welcoming. Thoughtful touches, updated style and an eye toward comfort will make your visitors feel right at home.

While you want to keep a guest space tidy and organized, it presents an ideal canvas for whimsical touches and splashes of color. Instead of coordinating bedding and walls, take some risks with mismatched patterns and colors. Experiment with bold artwork on the wall, hang an unusual light fixture from the ceiling or introduce drama with striking wallpaper behind the headboard.

Splurge on good pillows and a firm but comfortable mattress. When selecting bed linens, aim for the luxurious feel of a top-tier hotel.

Place a small nightstand with a lamp on at least one side of the bed — both sides if there's room. Layering lighting in the room increases its coziness.

Provide a small dresser with empty drawer space for guests to use. Make room in the closet for visitors to hang clothes and store luggage. Bonus items: Terry cloth robe, sleep mask and slippers.

If space allows, a cozy chair and reading lamp are a nice touch. Personalize by setting out some current magazines or a coffee-table book.

Plug in a power strip so guests can charge their devices, along with a printed card with Wi-Fi instructions.

Extras like soft throw blankets and pillows, scented candles, fluffy towels, and fresh flowers are thoughtful touches that will make guests feel extra welcome in your home.

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Kitchen Tools for Holiday Meals

Preparing big holiday meals requires a lot of time and effort. Give yourself a break this year and work smarter — not harder — with these handy kitchen gadgets.

Cut labor-intensive prep work with a **vegetable chopper**. Some brands even include a variety of blades to shred, slice and dice.

Use a **potato ricer** to get fluffy potatoes without the elbow grease usually required to make mashed potatoes.

Avoid the extra cleanup needed when using blenders by mixing soups and sauces with an **immersion blender**.

Keep perishables from going to waste with **produce saver containers**. Equipped with filters for proper ventilation, they can keep items fresh for up to two weeks.

Consider a **pie shield** to keep crusts from burning while the filling keeps cooking.

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Preventing Pipe Damage

Plumbing damage is a common problem that can lead to serious headaches for homeowners. According to *Forbes*, the average cost of a water damage or freezing claim is just over \$11,000. Here are some of the biggest threats to your pipes and what to do about them.

Corrosion

Pipes can burst or become blocked due to corrosion, especially in older houses or areas with hard water. Monitor your pipes for signs of wear.

Cold Weather

Even in the South, frigid temperatures can cause water in pipes to freeze. When water freezes, it expands, which may lead to burst pipes. Try to avoid this by running a steady trickle of water during extreme cold and insulating any exposed pipes.

Water Hammer

If you hear your pipes moving and banging, it could be water hammer. This occurs when a high-pressure water line's shut-off valve is suddenly closed, leaving the water with nowhere to go. If you notice water hammer, call a plumber to secure your pipes.

Pressure

Sudden increases in water pressure can damage pipes. By attaching a pressure gauge to your tap, you can run water to check the situation. If you get a reading of 60 psi or higher, contact a professional.

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Indoor Herb Gardening

Infuse your kitchen with fresh flavors and a burst of greenery by growing herbs right in your own home. Give your green thumb a go with these easy steps.

1. Start with seedlings of basil, chives, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, or thyme from a local nursery.
2. Plant seedlings in any container with good drainage. Add whimsy by growing herbs in a planter mounted to the wall or one hanging over the sink.
3. Set herbs close to your brightest window — preferably one that receives at least six hours of sunlight daily. Use a grow light if necessary.

4. Water just enough to keep the soil moist, harvest in small batches and transplant when herbs outgrow their containers.

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Slow Cooker Vegetable Soup

Ingredients

4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
1 cup broccoli florets
2 (15.5-oz.) cans white beans
2 celery stalks, chopped
1 yellow onion, diced
1 cup sliced carrots
½ cup sliced mushrooms
½ cup diced red bell pepper
2 medium potatoes, cubed
1 Tbsp. steak sauce or Worcestershire sauce
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
½ tsp. thyme
½ tsp. basil
2 bay leaves

Directions

Combine all ingredients in a large slow cooker. Cook on low for 6–7 hours or on high for 3–4 hours, until all vegetables are tender. Remove bay leaves before serving.

Serves 8

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