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HOMEOWNER'S UPDATE

Create a Comfy & Cozy Reading Nook

With a little planning, you can create a space in your home that cultivates more reading, rest and imaginative thought. Try these three suggestions for designing the ideal reading nook.

Pick a strategic location. Take stock of areas in your home that can comfortably house a chair, end table and lamp. If you have the space, include some bookshelves and a small ottoman as well. Consider how much foot traffic each area tends to receive (and just how many interruptions you're willing to tolerate), and place your reading nook accordingly.

Plan its uses. This space doesn't have to only be for getting lost in a novel. If you think you'll use it as a place to rest and recharge, consider adding soft blankets and pillows. If you're hoping the nook will boost your creative juices, add inspiring elements such as potted plants or a gallery wall with signs, prints and photos.

Consider kids. Creating a cozy corner especially for your kids or grandkids can encourage reading and give them a place to calm down before naps or bedtime. Include stuffed animals, cheerful decor and a small desk. Add a whimsical touch by hanging string lights on a bookshelf or across the ceiling.

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How to Keep Your Home Clean Longer

Cleaning is one of the constants in life – you may not like it, but you're going to have to deal with it eventually. According to a study conducted by Duck Brand, 55% of Americans say their homes could be more organized. If you want to keep your house tidy without sacrificing your family's free time, try these tips for making chores more efficient.

Spot cleaning is your greatest weapon. As soon as you notice dust bunnies in the corner or a sticky stain on the counter, clean it up. To motivate yourself to clean or declutter a little each day, **set a timer for 10 minutes**. Work quickly until it goes off, and then move on with your day. These small actions will help you stretch the time between deep cleans while still maintaining a well-kept home.

For quick touch-ups, **try storing cleaning supplies in multiple locations**. You're more likely to clean up small messes on a regular basis if you don't have to track down supplies first. For example, stash an extra hand broom and dustpan in your bathroom, or conceal a stick vacuum behind your couch. In the kitchen, **stay on top of dishes** by washing them right after each meal, and make it a habit to unload the dishwasher first thing in the morning.

Finding ways to **make cleaning fun** will encourage you and your household to keep up with chores. Turn on some music and sing along, or transform tasks into a game. **Creating a weekly cleaning schedule** can help as well. Try assigning the cleaning of each room to a different day of the week, and make sure each family member knows his or her responsibilities. Don't forget to **include monthly projects** such as deep cleaning the refrigerator or stove, and save those tasks for the weekends.

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Tips for Rearranging Furniture

It's easy to feel overwhelmed when trying to rearrange your furniture. Avoid moving heavy items several times by creating a floor plan using an app like MagicPlan, RoomScan Pro or Amikasa. These apps allow you to record room dimensions and easily move digital furnishings around to find the ideal placement.

Be sure to keep functionality in mind when designing a space. For example, if you have an area intended for working or studying, make sure there's adequate lighting nearby. In an open floor plan, using area rugs or grouping furniture together can help you create distinct living and dining spaces. If you still don't know where your furnishings would look best, find the focal point of a room – such as the fireplace, TV or a piece of art – and work around that feature.

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Do Buyers Value Smart Home Tech?

When it comes to making an offer on a house, smart home technology isn't at the top of the priority list for most buyers. However, certain devices are steadily gaining popularity as nice-to-have features, and they can be an affordable way to make your home more attractive.

Realtor.com® evaluated 1 million listings of single-family homes to determine the top upgrades for a fast, profitable sale. Of the 70 amenities analyzed, security systems ranked No. 12 and smart home features were No. 14. According to the report, consumers value smart home technology for lots of different reasons, but the peace of mind that comes from being able to monitor your home on a mobile device is a positive selling point.

If you decide to install smart home features before listing your property, choose devices that are intuitive and compatible with a variety of smart home hubs. A complex system could be a major turn-off. Focus on technology that enhances security and promotes more sustainable energy practices, which are the top two motivators for owning smart home devices, according to the National Association of Realtors®. Installing a smart thermostat, a video doorbell and a security system that's integrated with mobile devices is a great place to start.

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Chicken Fried Rice

Ingredients

2 Tbsp. sesame oil
2 Tbsp. avocado oil
1 lb. chicken breasts, cut into cubes
3 green onions, thinly sliced and divided
1½ cups diced carrots
2-3 garlic cloves, minced
3 large eggs, beaten
4 cups cooked rice
3-4 Tbsp. soy sauce
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Heat oils in a large skillet or wok on medium-high. Add chicken and cook for 2-3 minutes per side until cooked through. Transfer chicken to a plate and set aside.

Reserve 2 Tbsp. of onions for garnish. Add remaining onions plus carrots to pan. Cook for 3-4 minutes until carrots are softened. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Push vegetables to one side of pan. Add eggs to the other side and scramble.

Add rice, cooked chicken and soy sauce to pan. Stir well and cook for 4-5 minutes until warmed through. Season with salt and pepper. Garnish with reserved onions.

Serves 6-8



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