

YOUR HOME

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TIPS AND TRENDS TO HELP MAXIMIZE HOME BUYING AND SELLING

Check Yourself

Hiring a professional to conduct a home energy audit is a great way to determine how much energy your home consumes and what you can do to make it more efficient — but it also can be expensive. You can, however, easily conduct your own. Use the following guidelines from the U.S. Department of Energy and keep a checklist of areas you inspect and problems you find.

Air leaks. You might be able to save 5 percent to 30 percent a year on your energy bills by finding and fixing leaks. Start by checking for obvious leaks. Inspect windows and doors. If you can rattle them, chances are there's an air leak. Caulking or weather stripping is an easy fix. Also check to see if air flows through less-obvious places such as baseboards and electrical outlets. Then head outside the house to inspect all areas where two different building materials meet: where siding and chimneys meet and where the foundation and the bottom of exterior brick or siding meet. Plug and caulk any holes you find and seal other cracks with appropriate materials.

Insulation. Check the attic hatch to see if it is as heavily insulated as the attic, is weather-stripped and closes tightly. In the attic, determine whether openings for items such as pipes, ductwork and chimneys are sealed. Seal any gaps with an expanding foam caulk or other permanent sealant. Also check to see if you have a vapor barrier under the attic insulation. If not, paint the interior ceilings with vapor barrier paint to reduce the amount of water vapor that could pass through the ceiling.

Heating and cooling equipment. Check to see if it's more than 15 years old. If so, you might want to consider switching to a newer model. Also check your ductwork for dirt streaks; these indicate an air leak and will need to be sealed with a duct mastic.

Lighting. Check the wattage of your lightbulbs. You might be using a 100-watt bulb when you could be using a 60-watt. Consider switching to compact fluorescent lamps for lights that are on for hours at a time.

Source: www.energysavers.gov

Playing It SAFE

Do you feel as though your entire home has been invaded by toys? If so, then it's probably time to think about creating a dedicated playroom. But to create a space where your children can play without constant supervision, you need to think safety first.

Start by doing a "crawl-through" of the room you plan to use, keeping an eye out for sharp edges, electrical cords and uncovered outlets. If you find these hazards, make a note to purchase rubber edges, outlet covers and cord-keeping devices. Push on the furniture, including bookcases, shelves, tables and chairs, to check for stability. Secure items that seem unsteady with straps that you can buy at your local hardware store or by bolting the items to the wall. If the playroom is on a second floor, place kitchen sets and drawing tables away from windows to minimize the risk of a fall. Make sure that the toys are accessible to kids; keep them off high shelves and in open-top fabric or plastic storage bins with lids that snap closed.

If you're starting a room from scratch, think about the materials you use to furnish the room. Cork is great for floors because it's hypoallergenic and can withstand the moisture from the inevitable spills. Cotton fabrics are a good choice because they clean up easily and are better for children with allergies.

Source: *Consumer Reports*



Cultura RW/Masterfile



fast fact » » » » » » » » »

During Hot Dog Season, which runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Americans consume 7 billion hot dogs, or 818 hot dogs every second.

Source: National Hot Dog and Sausage Council



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SHELF LIFE

If you've got stuff, then you need storage. And when you've run out of closet space, shelves are a great way to get the storage you need and make use of the wall space you probably have plenty of. Choosing among the endless array of decorative and functional shelf options might seem like the hardest part. But hanging them can be tricky, too — it's not as easy as drilling holes. These helpful hints should keep you from running into problems.

Tool smart. For almost any shelf-hanging project you will need a pencil, a level, a tape measure, a screwdriver, a drill and a stud finder. It's also wise to have — and wear — protective safety glasses.

Weight watcher. Books weigh more than knickknacks. Be sure to keep this in mind as you purchase shelves; some kinds are sturdier than others. Also consider

buying brackets to accommodate extra weight, if needed.

Anchors aweigh. Just putting a screw in the wall usually is not enough to properly mount a shelf. In most cases, you will need to use an anchor. There are different kinds of anchors for various wall materials; the kind you use for drywall is different than the kind you use for concrete walls. Know what your walls are made of before you head to the store.

Space station. Make sure you allow enough space above each shelf so there's no height restriction on what you place on the shelves.

Ball game. After you've completed hanging your shelf, test it out by placing a tennis ball or a golf ball right in the middle. It should stay perfectly still.

Source: *This Old House*, DIY



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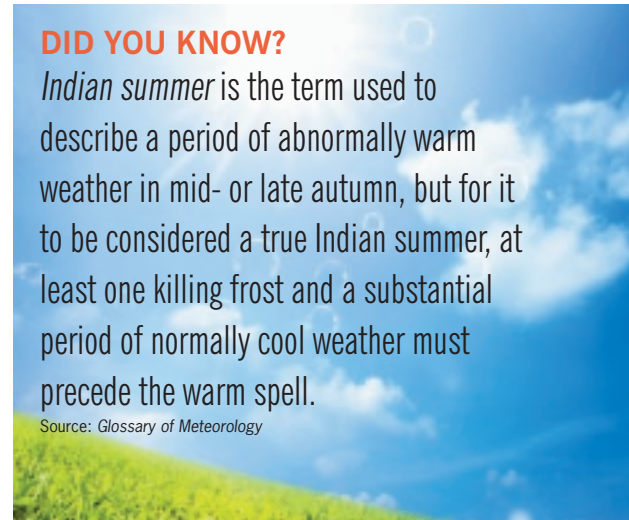


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DID YOU KNOW?

Indian summer is the term used to describe a period of abnormally warm weather in mid- or late autumn, but for it to be considered a true Indian summer, at least one killing frost and a substantial period of normally cool weather must precede the warm spell.

Source: *Glossary of Meteorology*



Do you know someone who is thinking about buying or selling a home? Please mention my name.

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