

HOME HELP



PEXELS

TIP OF THE WEEK
Remove these things for more counter space

It’s frustrating to run out of kitchen countertop space while cooking a meal. Here are a few things BobVila.com recommends removing to declutter your kitchen and free up counter space:

- **Décor.** First, get rid of decoration that serve no purpose in the kitchen. Vases, candles, picture frames and small sculptures can all take up a lot of room and make cooking more difficult than it needs to be.
- **Spices.** If it helps to see spices, consider purchasing some acrylic shelves (available on Amazon) for spices and mounting them on a wall or inside a kitchen cabinet for quick access.
- **Knife blocks.** Most of the knives on display in a knife block are basic steak knives that can be stored in a utensil drawer instead. For knives needed for cooking, invest in a magnetic knife holder that mounts onto the wall.

CLEANING
Steps to get rid of hard water stains on glass

When hard water droplets dry, they can leave behind stains varying from chalky white to brown or rust-colored. According to Good Housekeeping, vinegar is the best way to remove hard water stains from glass.

- “To remove hard water marks from glasses by hand-washing your dishes, you’ll need a basin that’s large enough to submerge your glass in vinegar.”
1. Heat some white vinegar in the microwave until it’s warm, and pour it in a basin.
 2. Immerse the glasses in the vinegar for 10 minutes, turning them to cover all sides.
 3. Add baking soda: After 10 minutes, remove the glasses and sprinkle on a generous amount of baking soda.
 4. Rub the baking soda gently with your fingers to remove the stains, rinse and buff dry.

GARDENING
Quick tips to prep for spring

- Soon, winter will be over and we’ll be back in our gardens. Here are two quick tips from Better Home and Gardens:
- **Weed control.** Do not cultivate or hoe deep, as this might bring weed seeds to the soil’s surface so they germinate. You should weed early and often so weeds don’t go to seed. To prevent annual weeds, smother them with mulch.
 - **Fertilizer not the answer.** “Fertilizer is not the answer to growing the best plants; soil quality is. Add organic amendments such as compost and well-aged manure to your soil. The best soil structure is crumbly, easy to dig, accepts water easily, and is loose enough to provide oxygen for plant roots. If you choose to use fertilizer, use an organic one to add nitrogen, phosphate, and potash (the form of potassium plants can use).”

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Mirror, mirror

5 decorative ideas to add dimension to your home’s decor

Felicity Warner
Reviewed
USA TODAY NETWORK

Decorative wall mirrors: There’s a reason that interior designers, homeowners, and renters all gravitate toward this one piece of décor when creating the ideal interior space. This timeless accent promises much more than its functional purpose. Wall mirrors can give a dull room a new dimension, add extra light, and even trick the eye into seeing a much more spacious, well, space. Plus, a mirror can match with any home décor style, whether traditional, mid-century modern, bohemian, or industrial. Wall mirror decorating ideas are endless, but we’ve narrowed down five design possibilities for a simple yet effective upgrade.

1. Windowpane mirrors brighten

Windowpane mirrors are exactly what they sound like — a mirror that looks like a window. Small pieces of wood create sections over the mirror, creating what looks like a windowpane, while the mirror reflects light. This wall mirror idea is a bright addition to a room that lacks natural light. A windowpane mirror is versatile and pairs well with any design style. For a more rustic look, go for natural, distressed wood or faded metal material. For a more minimalist and modern look, an

iron-framed gold mirror adds an elegant touch fit for any simple space.

2. A gallery mirror wall offers an artistic vibe

If you have a big, blank stretch of wall, arranging decorative mirrors in an art gallery style can be a beautiful way to create dimension and add personality and texture to your room. This look can work in a variety of spots around your home, from the dining room, to the living room, and along a staircase. Similarly to a gallery photo wall, this look comes together with a collection of different mirrors from furniture stores and vintage shops. If you don’t have the time or desire to spend browsing, you can purchase a curated set of mirrors that’s a ready-made mix and match design.

3. Entryway wall mirrors offer guests a fancy welcome

The entryway or foyer is your home’s version of a first impression. So make a good one with a mirrored accent rather than framed art. Foyers can be small, especially in older homes, and a mirror immediately opens up the area. We recommend keeping this decorative mirror on the small side, and place it above an entryway console table or a shoe rack. Try adding a shorter mirror that has more length, or a portrait-style mirror that’s perfect for quick touch-ups before heading out the door.



UNSPLASH/PEXELS



4. Floor-length and floor mirrors make your room look taller

A trick many interior designers use to make a room feel much larger than it actually is by introducing a full-length mirror into the space. Large leaning wall mirrors has been one such trend popping up across the internet and in homes. This style is perfect for getting ready in the morning, creating the illusion of a super spacious room, or for snapping a shameless selfie.

5. An over-the-bed centerpiece mirror opens up the bedroom

Create a focal point in any bedroom with a mirror over the bed. Doing so may surprise your senses—the mirror will open up your space and pull sunlight towards it. We recommend going for a wider mirror that will stretch to complement the width of your bed. **Pro tip:** Pair an over-the-bed mirror with a floor-length mirror on another wall for maximum effect.

DEAR MONTY

Do open houses help find a buyer?



Richard Montgomery

Reader question: We recently put our home up for sale. The presentation was very professional, and we both liked the agent. The emphasis was on how much the real estate business has changed. She mentioned the difficulty of keeping up with technology. She explained how their company was ahead of their competition with staging experts (for an extra \$150), smart lockboxes, virtual photography and search

engine optimization (whatever that means). I asked about an open house, and they haven’t held open houses for over two years. “Video has replaced open houses,” was the response. Has the real estate business changed this much? **Monty’s answer:** The description is mostly accurate, because consumer behavior has changed over the years, and the industry has adopted additional features that can be helpful. Like companies in every industry, real estate companies have always sought new methods and promotions to either stay ahead of the pack or usurp the leader. Years ago, the differentiators were products like a fax machine, a color

copier or a home warranty program. Some of those changes have survived. **My theory** Agents work in an ultra-competitive market and strive to find ways to gain an advantage. Investigating, testing and the learning curve to put these tools into practice is distracting them from the nuts and bolts of the business. This pressure to invest in such tools has created whole new industries. While some of the innovations will survive, many of them will fall by the wayside. **The basics still work** We part company on your agent’s open house

stance. An “open house” remains an excellent tool to gain exposure for the home. It provides prospects a genuinely casual, nonobligatory chance to view the home in person. The video is helpful to qualify showings, but positioning it to replace the open house is counterproductive, in my opinion. Many people come to an open house because they are interested in buying it. Good agents can be very creative and skilled in ensuring the open house is promoted and take steps to encourage prospects to attend. *Richard Montgomery is the author of “House Money – An Insider’s Secrets to Saving Thousands When You Buy or Sell a Home.”*

PLAYROOM REFRESH

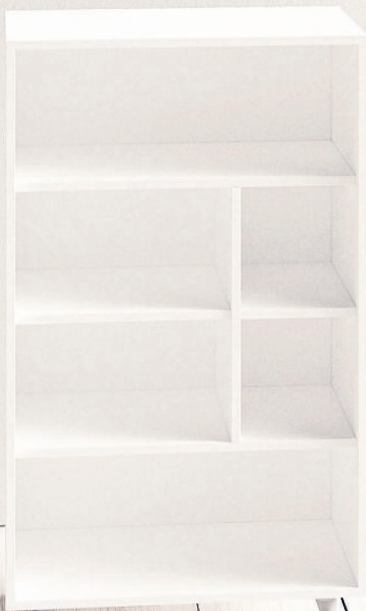
Inspire imagination with a room makeover

USA TODAY NETWORK

Revamp the playroom with new storage options, furniture, playhouses and more. Brighten your children's playtime with a special space of their own.

The six cubbies in the Bryson standard bookcase offer plenty of storage. \$121 at [allmodern.com](#).

[PHOTOS BY USA TODAY NETWORK]



The celestial Tamsin kids chair will delight budding astronomers. \$78 at [anthropologie.com](#).



Let children get messy with the easy-wipe Lemonade playset. \$299 at [babyletto.com](#).



Even clean-up time gets a makeover with the nine-bin deluxe toy organizer. \$49.99 at [target.com](#).



Kids can pile into the firetruck play tent. \$49.99 at [melissaanddoug.com](#).



Bookworms will love lounging on the KidKraft bookcase with a reading nook. \$124.99 at [kohls.com](#).



Easily declutter with the 3 Sprouts whale toy storage box with handles. \$29.99 at [containerstore.com](#).

HOME HELP

TIP OF THE WEEK Proper bathroom caulking technique

If you plan on staying in your home for more than five years, you will likely have to recaulk your bathroom at some point. Here are a few things BobVila.com recommends keeping in mind when using a caulking gun in your bathroom:

- **Cut the tube of caulk to the correct length.** Begin by cutting a small portion off the tube's tip and squeezing out a bead of caulk to test the size against the area you'll be caulking. If you need the bead to be wider, cut a little more off the tube and test again. Be careful: you can always cut more off the tip, but you can't reattach cut-off sections of tube.
- **Apply the right amount of pressure.** After ensuring that your painter's tape is neatly applied, gently squeeze your caulking gun until a small amount of caulk begins to come out. Maintain the pressure you have on the handle, keeping the caulk right at the tip of the tube, while you line it up with the intended crevice. Once you are satisfied with your starting point, begin to apply more pressure so that the caulk is pushed from the tube. Keep the pressure uniform and move the caulking gun along the crack to apply an even bead that is about the width of a pencil.
- **It's easier to start from the corner.** Apply a single bead of caulk in a corner that runs about half the length of the crack you are going to fill. Run a second bead from the opposite end and meet the first in the middle.
- **Remove extra.** When you

finish, wet your finger and run it along the bead of caulking to remove any extra caulk. If it looks good to you, remove the painter's tape while the caulk is still wet.

GARDENING Transplanting container-grown perennials to the garden

"When transplanting container-grown perennials, dig a hole that's twice as wide as the soil ball of the plant to aid with root establishment," recommends Better Homes & Gardens. "Make sure the plant sits at the same depth in the hole as it did in the container. Use the same soil you dug out of the hole to fill in around your new plant instead of using bagged soil."

CLEANING How to clean greasy microwave doors

Here's how Good Housekeeping recommends cleaning a greasy microwave door:

- **Wipe down the door.** Dampen a sponge with water and dip it in a little baking soda, then wipe down the entire door. Use a damp cloth or sponge to rinse.
- **Degrease the window.** Using a 50/50 vinegar and water mixture, rinse the window and wipe dry.
- **Removing heavy grease buildup.** Wipe down the microwave door using a sudsy mix of dish soap and water or an all-purpose, grease-cutting cleaner. Cleaner should be applied with a cloth or sponge to prevent it from getting into the vent holes. Do not spray electronics with cleaner.

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DEAR MONTY

Are real estate commissions fair?



Richard Montgomery

Reader question: I'm the homeowner. I just listed my home with a real estate agent. I told a friend I was selling, and they want to buy it for cash. I called my agent to negotiate the \$24,000 commission because it hasn't been on the market 24 hours. My agent said her company does not permit a reduction. Her reaction isn't very comforting and does not seem fair. Is there anything I can do to get them to reduce their commission?

Monty's answer: In my home state, the listing agreement states if the seller turns up a prospect, they must turn it over to the agent to follow up on it. Most states have a similar clause in listing contracts. Read your listing agreement carefully to see if such language exists. While it may not be practical in most cases, one approach may suggest that you are taking your home off the market.

Part of a commission rather than no commission may be a helpful negotiating

tool. Consider first asking your friends if they will wait until the broker protection clause expires in the contract and that they have proof of funds. You may also want to check with legal counsel because every state's real estate law is unique.

Situations when the commission feels unfair:

- Homes in like-new condition and sought-after neighborhoods.
- The seller knows the buyer, or the buyer knows of the seller.
- The price is at the low end of the range of value in the neighborhood.
- When, for whatever reason, it sells quickly.

Why are real estate commissions high?

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) has a powerful lobby in both state and national governments.

Commissions must consider the hidden cost of both time and money spent on expired listings, failed transactions and lead-generation, which is enormous.

The fact that the industry operates with what I consider inefficient models makes correcting these flaws challenging to accomplish.

Consumers play a role as well. Some home

sellers are emotionally attached to their homes and ignore market facts when pricing to sell it for more than the market suggests. Buyers can be complicit because they will pay more than the market suggests. Pricing property is not an exact science.

Are changes in the future?

While it is true that the industry may be inefficient, it still works. To date, none of the new ideas attempted have proven successful. New idea start-ups are continually launching as companies seek methods to capture market share from the incumbents. If some of these new ideas take root, they could impact the future. There are several new concepts with very different views. They want to improve the real estate transaction to eliminate the type of issue that you are experiencing.

Richard Montgomery is the author of "House Money - An Insider's Secrets to Saving Thousands When You Buy or Sell a Home." He advocates industry reform and offers readers unbiased real estate advice. Follow him on Twitter at @dearmonty, or at DearMonty.com.