

Creating your own patio oasis

Indoor style is still moving outdoors this season, with the trend to couch-comfortable patio furniture, outdoor carpets and tables that double as firepits. The trend seems here to stay and with it homeowners are paying closer attention to the basic design of their outdoor space. A solidly-constructed patio or deck is the place where form meets function resulting in a beautiful oasis from city living.

Decorating trends come and go, but a well-designed patio will be in style for years to come. With that in mind, many homeowners opt for the versatility of interlocking brick to create an outdoor space that is low in maintenance and high in pay-back. Interlocking brick projects offer a payback of up to 50 per cent according to the Appraisal Institute of Canada.

Interlock offers a dizzying array of design options for patios, driveways and retaining walls.

Add a simple edging of interlock around the base of a tree to create an instant garden. Use the charm of interlock to create a pocket patio in a favourite area of your garden. Create raised planters from interlocking brick to add interest to your yard.

Interlocking brick is the ideal material to create unique:

- Outdoor fireplaces, kitchens and barbecues
- Garden borders and accents
- Driveways and entrances



- Planters and seat walls
- Pillars and columns for gazebos and pergolas
- Steps
- Swimming pool and spa decks

Interlocking brick has a lot more going for it as a building material than simply aesthetic appeal. It is one of the strongest, most durable construction materials available. Up to three times stronger than concrete, interlocking brick surfaces flex without cracking or breaking like rigid paved surfaces. In Canada's tough freeze/thaw climate, the joints between the bricks allow for contracting and expanding without surface damage.

Interlocking brick is a smart option for patio and walkway projects, with unlimited design options, timeless beauty and maintenance-free appeal.

3 EASY WAYS to accessorize your outdoor space

ADD COLOUR - EVERYWHERE!

Garden planters are an easy way to add pops of colour. Paint inexpensive terra cotta planters in a variety of colours. Add colorful throw cushions. Define an eating or conversation area with colourful outdoor carpets.

LIGHT THE NIGHT—Place solar-powered landscape lanterns to light walkways and define focal points in the garden. Add some patio lanterns for festive flair.

MAKE IT A PARTY—A firepit makes a great conversation area on cool nights. Add some outdoor speakers to pipe in the tunes, and enjoy!

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COOL SUMMER RENOVATIONS

Now that spring cleanup is done, you may feel ready to tackle some renovation projects this summer. With temperatures heating up this summer, take on renovations that not only make your home more beautiful, but make it cool and comfortable as well.

Replacement windows

You're probably aware that quality new windows can help your home retain heat in the winter, but did you know they can also keep your home cooler in the summer? By tightening your home's envelope and reflecting heat, energy-efficient windows can help maintain more even temperatures inside your home.

Air conditioning

If you live in an older home, you may not have the space you need to install a traditional central HVAC unit with ductwork. Duct-free split systems like

LG's Art Cool Line provide plenty of cooling power from wall-mounted units that can be subtle or splashy, including a customizable picture frame, a flat panel with a modern charcoal mirror finish and a traditional unit in sleek white. An outdoor unit works in tandem with up to eight interior units for room-by-room temperature control.

Cooler lighting and appliances

Electrical appliances and incandescent light bulbs all contribute to the amount of ambient heat in your home. Replace incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient options that give off far less heat, such as LEDs or CFLs. Replacing them can also help reduce your electricity bill since they use about 80 percent less energy, according to the Energy Star program. Reduce heat output from appliances like refrigerators, dishwashers and dryers by upgrading to more energy-efficient models.

Outdoor improvements

Strategically plant shade trees to shield windows from the hot sun in summer time. Consider adding awnings that will shade windows and doors. For patios and decks, choose materials that reflect heat away from your home and outdoor spaces. Finally, paint siding in a lighter colour to help minimize heat absorption.

Summer home renovation projects can be exciting, beautiful and energy efficient when you keep a cool head about your design choices. (BPT)



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KITCHEN MAKEOVERS

Tips for painless kitchen renos

Renovating your kitchen tops the list of value-added renovations, but it can be disruptive for the household. Here are a few tips that will make your kitchen renovation a little easier:

- Pack up your kitchen well ahead of the contracted start date for your renovation, making sure boxes are properly labelled and more essential items are easily accessible. This is the time to get rid of items you don't use.
- Set up a temporary kitchen in a convenient location, preferably near a washroom or laundry room where you can wash up dishes. Otherwise,

use disposable plates and glasses.

- Your temporary kitchen could include a microwave, kettle, toaster oven, coffee maker, and any canned goods and non-perishables from the pantry. If you have a wine cooler, put it into use to keep drinks cool.
- Make some meals ahead of time and pop them in the freezer for reheating in the microwave.
- Ask the contractor to tape heavy plastic over kitchen entrances to help cut down on dust through the house.

By planning ahead, the path to your dream kitchen will be painless.

QUICK STAGING FIXES to sell your home

Paint! - A fresh coat of paint, inside and out, gives more bang for your buck than anything else. Make sure to stick with crowd-pleasing neutral hues.

Improve the lighting - Replace any dated light fixtures. They don't have to be expensive, just clean and modern.

De-clutter - Pack away the knick knacks, clear out unnecessary or worn furniture and clean out closets.

Give dated bathrooms a facelift - Bring an out-of-date bath up to speed with new fixtures, a fresh coat of white paint or new ceramic tile and lighting. Add neutral accessories and fresh flowers during open houses.

Take down curtains - If privacy isn't an issue, leave the windows bare to make the room appear larger.

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