

SPRING 2025

Coming HOME

Inspired Community Living

SPRING *Clean*

MAKE
YOUR HOME
SPARKLE FROM
A TO Z

OUTDOOR
LIGHTING
IDEAS THAT
SHINE

BRUNCH
RECIPES TO
START
YOUR DAY
OFF RIGHT



Coming HOME

Inspired Community Living

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Caitlin Saia

ART DIRECTOR

Emily Bombere

ART

Jorry Zhang, Staff Designer

COPY

Karina Burnett, Sr. Staff Writer & Editor

Caleb Akpan, Staff Writer & Editor

Amera Ratliff, Staff Writer & Editor

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Angela Frieling, Chief Marketing Officer

Christi Schmidt, Sr. Vice President of Marketing

Jennifer Gamiz, Sr. Director

Deanna Donnley, Director

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Editor's Letter

There's something about moving into a new home that makes even the most dreaded chores feel a little less chore-like. Take, for instance, organizing the garage. I tackled this after moving into my home recently. Sifting through all my belongings—deciding what to keep, donate, or trash—took up my Saturday, but I found myself surprisingly...having fun.

Tending to, maintaining, and beautifying a place that I can finally call my own makes me happy. That's probably why I'm looking forward to doing a good spring cleaning. While this new homeowner honeymoon period only lasts so long, we all know that the number-one task for the season is a whole-house scrub-down. The theme of the season is the theme of this issue: clean.

We rolled up our sleeves and put in some elbow grease to bring you fresh takes on all things cleaning. Inside, you'll discover tips on how to make your home sparkle from A to Z (P. 16), a guide to the ultimate digital detox (P. 30), and tricks for conserving water (P. 29). Plus, we have delicious brunch recipes (P. 10), a complete move-in checklist (P. 34), and creative outdoor lighting ideas to illuminate your evenings (P. 15).

I'm so glad you chose to spend time with us this season, and I hope these stories inspire you to refresh your space, body, and mind. Welcome home!

CMS

Caitlin Saia
Editor in Chief

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7 QUESTIONS WITH *A Florist*

LEARN THE ART OF BUDS AND BOUQUETS
STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE.

Spring is a season celebrated for its breathtaking blossoms—the first signs of life breaking through winter's frost. But May's flowers are more than just decorative accents—they're a language, one fluently spoken by Jorge Teran, florist and owner of Flowers by Terranova.

We sat down with him to get the dirt on the art of floral design and what makes his garden grow. With roots stretching back generations of soil and seeds, Teran has made a blooming business out of his passion for stems and the stories they tell. Read on to learn about his connection to flowers, how they shape his work, and the poetry of petals.

1. What inspired you to begin working with flowers?

My parents grew and harvested produce on our land, so I've always enjoyed gardening, even as a child. After we moved to the U.S., I began making and selling silk florals. It allowed me to create long-lasting arrangements and was a perfect way to infuse beauty into homes.

People often complimented my creative eye, encouraging me to turn it into a trade. As my business grew, I saw a shift in demand for fresh, sustainable flowers, prompting me to transition to real blooms. My background in gardening made the move natural, and I began sourcing from local growers to make seasonal arrangements. This let me combine my enthusiasm for design with a business that celebrates nature's style.

2. What do you love most about being a florist?

My work brings smiles to people's faces. Even during the most difficult times, like when people say their final goodbyes, I find fulfillment in constructing floral pieces that offer comfort and help honor those moments. Flowers have a quiet way of expressing emotion, and it's rewarding to know that my work can provide a sense of peace and connection when needed most.

3. Where do you source your flowers, and what's their journey from farm to shop?

I source my flowers from around the world. My lilies, gerberas, eucalyptus, and carnations come from Mexico, where the climate and soil are great for producing bold, lasting florals. Peonies and tulips are shipped from Holland, known for its world-class flower production. I also order branches from Oregon and ranunculus from Chile, where the growing conditions enable delicate petals to flourish.

Each flower follows a meticulously managed journey, whether by air, land, or sea, to guarantee vitality and quality before it reaches my shop. To maintain freshness, they're carefully packed in temperature-controlled environments, typically with moisture-retaining packaging, so they arrive in peak condition.

4. How do you approach designing floral arrangements for different occasions?

I begin by understanding the specific factors influencing the overall design. For corporate events, I assess the venue, considering elements such as color palette, furniture, and existing décor. This helps me fashion arrangements that complement the environment. Sometimes a corporate client will already have a set theme or color scheme, and I work within those parameters so the florals align with the vision for the event.

For intimate occasions, like romantic dinners, proposals, or anniversaries, I build arrangements that evoke personal meaning. I often incorporate unique flowers or colors significant to the clients, themes that'll take them back to that special moment. The design is usually more understated for a dinner—nothing too large or overpowering—but sophisticated enough to elevate the scene and make an impression.

5. What are your tips for keeping flower arrangements fresh?

Nourish your flowers with clean water; it ensures longevity. Change the water once every three days to keep petals vibrant for as long as possible. Cut the stems at a sharp angle with a floral knife for better water absorption, and remove dying flowers and fallen leaves. The ethylene gas emitted by wilting flowers can shorten the lifespan of your bouquet. Lastly, avoid placing your arrangement in direct heat from windows or fans during warmer months.

6. Which flowers bloom best during each of the four seasons?

Spring brings vivid blooms like tulips, peonies, and blossoming branches, which add colorful energy to any arrangement. As we transition into summer, sunflowers and roses steal the show with bright hues and timelessness. Marigolds and seasonal branches in the fall boast warm, earthy tones that capture autumn's essence. Amaryllis, red Ilex berries, and pine greenery showcase winter's beauty and cultivate a festive, cozy atmosphere, ideal for the colder months. Each season has its own distinct floral palette, allowing for a variety of textures and colors all year.

7. How can beginners create their own stunning bouquets?

Start by choosing in-season florals with healthy, sturdy petals. Aim for a mix of three to four types of blooms with varying sizes, colors, and textures, using greenery or filler flowers for depth.

Next, select a vase that suits the arrangement's size and shape—narrow vases for tall flowers and wider containers for full-bodied blossoms. Prep the stems by removing damaged petals, thorns, and leaves below the waterline, then trim them at an angle. Fill the vase three-quarters with water and add flower food.

Begin arranging by placing the largest flowers first, then layer in smaller blooms. Rotate the vase as you go to create balance and even spacing. Finish by filling in gaps with greenery or branches. My most essential tip: enjoy the process, and let the flowers' natural elegance inspire your creativity!



ABOUT JORGE TERAN

Jorge Teran is the proud owner of Flowers by Terranova, a Dallas-based company that's brought happiness to customers for over a decade. Skilled in creating memorable experiences, Jorge believes flowers can brighten any occasion, whether a birthday, anniversary, or simple gesture of love. Making the arrangement-buying process as beautiful as the blooms themselves, Jorge can be reached in his shop or at www.flowersbyterranova.com.





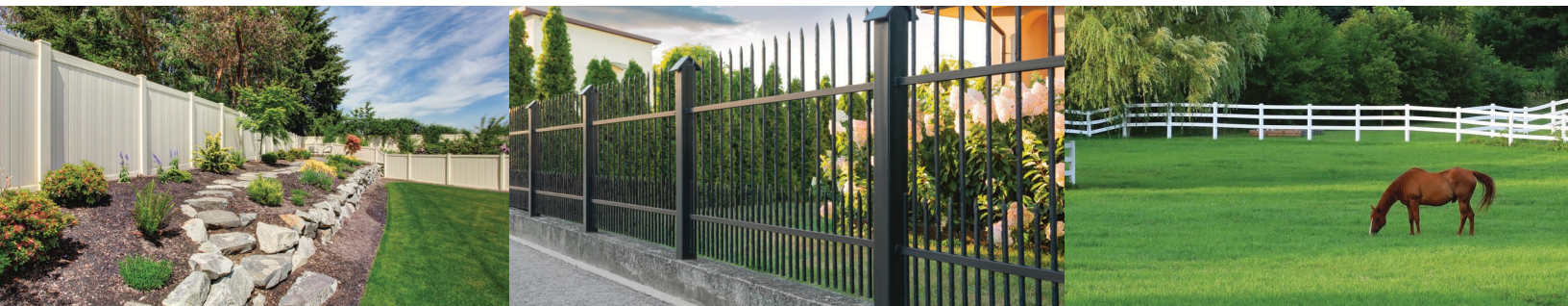
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REALITY CHECK

FOUR ENTERTAINING REALITY SHOWS.

It's time to refresh your TV roster! While winter programming has its cozy charm, the spring lineup is fresh and full of drama. From high-stakes competitions to warm-and-fuzzy moments, we've handpicked a selection of reality TV that'll keep you hooked all season long. So grab your remote, settle in with a snack, and prepare to indulge in the best of reality TV this spring.



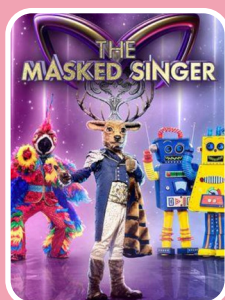
SPRING BAKING CHAMPIONSHIP

Whisk up some excitement as the *Spring Baking Championship* returns to whip your tastebuds into a frenzy. It's a sugar-coated spectacle where top bakers face off to make showstopping desserts that scream, "Spring has sprung!" From floral confections to pastel perfection, the stakes are high, and the frosting is even higher. Get ready for a sweet blend of creativity and competition as the tension bakes in the kitchen. Stream all 10 seasons on Food Network GO, Discovery+, Prime Video, Max, or Apple TV for a delicious escape that's sure to inspire your cookbook this year.



DOWN HOME FAB

Chelsea and Cole DeBoer bring their A-game to the home renovation space. In *Down Home Fab*, the couple flexes their design skills as they transform client homes and build their budding business in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Vibrant visionary Chelsea takes each project to the next level, and Cole tackles everything from carpentry to construction. But it's not all work and no play; viewers get a peek into their busy family life as they raise four kids on a charming Midwestern farm, complete with picturesque views and a bustling barnyard. Stream on HGTV GO, Discovery+, Prime Video, Hulu, Apple TV, or Max to motivate your next DIY project.



THE MASKED SINGER

This is a show where the costumes are as outrageous as the talent. *The Masked Singer* is a star-studded production that keeps you questioning as celebrities—disguised in elaborate costumes—belt hit songs while judges and viewers attempt to unmask the mystery artist. With jaw-dropping performances, quirky clues, and shocking reveals, it's a wild ride of music, mystery, and fun. The latest season packs an extra surprise, with Maya Jama joining the panel as a new judge. Gather the family for an hour of *The Masked Singer* on FOX or stream on Hulu, and let the guessing games begin!



FORGED IN FIRE

Forged in Fire turns up the heat as master bladesmiths go head-to-head, forming the sharpest, most durable weapons through sheer skill and precision. Featuring fiery forges and molten metal, each episode showcases incredible craftsmanship as the contestants push their limits to create weaponry that can withstand the ultimate tests of strength. Whether it's historical blades or modern designs, the show delivers action, artistry, and drama. No more battles over the remote—this pick is an all-around fave. Catch new episodes on the History Channel or stream on HISTORY Vault, Hulu, Tubi, Netflix, Disney+, Prime Video, or Apple TV.





Rise & Dine

Must-try
branch
recipes.





Glazed Blueberry-Lemon Scones

MAKES 8

Scones

- 2 cups** all-purpose flour
- 6 Tbsp** granulated sugar
- 2½ tsp** baking powder
- ½ tsp** salt
- 1** large lemon, zested
- ½ cup** unsalted butter, frozen & grated
- ½ cup** heavy cream
- 1** large egg
- 1 tsp** vanilla extract
- 1 cup** blueberries

Glaze

- 1 cup** powdered sugar, sifted
- 2-3 Tbsp** fresh lemon juice

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Make the scones by whisking flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and lemon zest in a large bowl.
3. Add grated butter to the dry ingredients and combine using a pastry cutter until the mixture resembles a coarse meal. Set aside.
4. Whisk the heavy cream, egg, and vanilla extract in a small bowl. Drizzle over the flour mixture and toss with a rubber spatula until moistened.
5. Gently fold in blueberries.
6. With floured hands, carefully shape the dough into a ball. Transfer to a floured surface, press into an 8-inch disc, and cut into 8 wedges.
7. Arrange scones 2 inches apart on a large parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until lightly golden and cooked through.
8. For the glaze, whisk powdered sugar and lemon juice together until smooth. Drizzle over scones before serving.

Bacon Waffles

MAKES 10

- 10 slices** bacon
- 2 cups** flour
- 1 Tbsp** sugar
- 1 tsp** baking powder
- 1 tsp** salt
- ½ tsp** baking soda
- 1 cup** sour cream
- 1 cup** milk
- 6 Tbsp** butter, melted (plus more for waffle iron)
- 1** large egg
- maple syrup (for serving)

1. Fry bacon until crisp. Drain on paper towels and set aside.
2. Whisk all dry ingredients in a large bowl.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk sour cream, milk, melted butter, and egg.
4. Fold the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients.
5. Preheat the waffle iron and lightly coat it with butter.
6. Break bacon strips in half. Pour approximately ¼ cup of batter onto the waffle iron and place 2 half-strips of bacon on top.
7. Pour another ¼ cup of batter on top of the bacon. Close the lid and cook waffles until golden and crisp. Repeat until all batter and bacon strips are used.
8. Serve with warm maple syrup.



Spinach and Gruyère Breakfast Strata

SERVES 6

- 12 slices** French bread
- 2 Tbsp** butter, softened
- 4** shallots, chopped
- 10 oz pkg** frozen chopped spinach, thawed & squeezed dry
- ¾ tsp** salt, divided
- black pepper** (to taste)
- ½ cup** dry white wine
- 1½ cups** Gruyère cheese, grated, divided
- 6** eggs
- 1¾ cups** whole milk

1. Preheat oven to 225°F.
2. Arrange bread in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake until crisp, about 40 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Sauté shallots until fragrant, about 4-5 minutes.
4. Add spinach, ¼ teaspoon of salt, and pepper. Cook for 2 minutes, until spinach is heated through. Transfer mixture to a large bowl and set aside.
5. Add wine to the skillet and increase heat to medium-high. Simmer for 2-3 minutes, remove from heat, and set aside.
6. Arrange half of the cooked bread slices in a greased 8x8 dish. Add half of the spinach mixture, and sprinkle ½ cup of cheese over top.
7. Place the remaining bread slices in a single layer over top; add the remaining spinach mixture and another ½ cup of cheese.
8. Whisk eggs in a medium bowl. Stir in reduced wine, milk, pepper, and remaining salt. Pour mixture evenly over bread layers.
9. Cover dish with plastic wrap, place something heavy on top, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
10. Remove plastic wrap, sprinkle remaining cheese over the surface, and bake for 50-55 minutes at 325°F.



WRITTEN IN THE



Everything your zodiac sign says about you.

Whether you're a staunch skeptic or a die-hard believer, it's undeniable that astrology has a fascinating way of offering insights into who we are—often with an air of mystique. But how did this captivating system of celestial signs and planetary influences come to shape our understanding of ourselves? Let's uncover the rich history of the stars, what your zodiac sign says about you, and more.

A Brief Cosmic History

Although difficult to definitively date, many historians agree that astrology originated in Mesopotamia sometime in the second millennium B.C.

The Babylonians divided the sky into 12 astrological signs, but the Greeks are credited with linking the stars and planets to human behavior and naming these signs. Astrology was a routine part of life in the Roman Empire, influencing everything from emperors' decisions to the lives of average citizens. Today, astrology continues to be ingrained in our modern culture.

So, what's astrology all about? According to astrologers, the position of celestial bodies at the time of your birth impacts your personality and future. Each of the 12 zodiac signs corresponds to specific characteristics, and each planet rules different aspects of life. While it's more about intuition than hard data, millions turn to their birth charts for guidance, entertainment, or a touch of magic.

The Signs & What They Mean



Aries: The Trailblazer March 21 – April 19

Ready to take charge, Aries is the first zodiac sign and the quintessential go-getter. Ruled by Mars, the planet of action, Aries individuals are praised for their passion, energy, and fearless leadership. This sign may dive headfirst into projects, often without a plan. While enthusiasm can reap rewards, be cautious of your impatience—slow and steady is key.



Taurus: The Sensual Stabilizer April 20 – May 20

Taurus is ruled by Venus, the planet of love and beauty, and it shows. Taureans relish comfort, luxury, and the finer things in life. They're loyal and persistent, working toward their goals with unwavering determination. A Taurus favors elegance in a good meal, a lavish home, and pampering. However, that stability can make them resistant to change, so they need flexibility to thrive.



Gemini: The Social Butterfly May 21 – June 20

Gemini is ruled by Mercury, the planet of communication. They're notorious for their quick wit, adaptability, and charm. Geminis are full of ideas and excited to reveal their thoughts, keeping conversations dynamic and fun. Still, they may struggle to focus. Geminis: your need for variety can lead to endless opportunities; make sure to finish what you start.



Cancer: The Nurturer

June 21 – July 22

Deep, sensitive, and protective, Cancer is ruled by the moon, which governs emotions. Those born under this sign are empathetic and able to sense how others feel without a word being said. As a Cancer, you enjoy caring for your loved ones, but don't let that kind disposition drain you. Set boundaries to keep your heart in check.



Leo: The Showstopper

July 23 – August 22

With the sun as their ruling planet, Leos are born to shine. Charismatic, confident, and larger-than-life, Leos love being the center of attention and have a magnetic personality that attracts others. If you're a Leo, you likely have big dreams and an even bigger heart and are eager to share your creativity. Just watch out for that ego—a little humility goes a long way!



Virgo: The Perfectionist

August 23 – September 22

Virgo is ruled by Mercury (like Gemini). But where the latter is the social butterfly, Virgo is the detail-oriented problem solver. Recognized for their analytical mind, Virgos strive for perfection, excelling at organization and noticing details. However, as a Virgo, you may be too hard on yourself. Perfection doesn't necessarily mean happiness—embrace your flaws and savor the journey.



Libra: The Diplomat

September 23 – October 22

Like Taureans, Libras are ruled by Venus, making them the ultimate romantics and peacekeepers. Libras are celebrated for their fairness and ability to see all sides of an issue. Shying from conflict, they flourish in harmonious environments. They might also have a flair for aesthetics and an affinity for beauty. Be careful not to get too caught up in pleasing others, though. Your needs are just as important.



Scorpio: The Investigator

October 23 – November 21

Mysterious, passionate, and independent, Scorpios are ruled by Pluto, the planet of transformation. Known for their deep emotions and knack for uncovering hidden truths, Scorpios aren't afraid to confront life's darker parts. Reserved at first, once they trust someone, they give them their all. Be mindful of jealousy—your intensity may cause emotional turbulence.



Sagittarius: The Adventurer

November 22 – December 21

Sagittarius is ruled by Jupiter, the planet of expansion. Constantly on the hunt for knowledge, adventure, and freedom, Sagittarians are explorers. If you're a Sagittarius, you generally appreciate travel, philosophy, and anything that broadens your horizons. You're optimistic and honest, but your bluntness can ruffle feathers. Welcome exploration, and remember that home is where the heart is.



Capricorn: The Achiever

December 22 – January 19

Capricorns are ruled by Saturn, the planet of structure and discipline, and they exude these hardworking, responsible traits. Capricorns set high goals and are relentless in their pursuit of success. They value stability and practicality, making them excellent at managing responsibilities. If you're a Capricorn, don't forget to take breaks. Your ambition is admirable, but remaining balanced is vital.



Aquarius: The Visionary

January 20 – February 18

With an innovative, eccentric spirit, Aquarians are ruled by Uranus, the planet of change and originality. Aquarius prides itself on thinking outside the box and challenging the status quo. Humanitarians by nature, Aquarians are always looking for ways to improve the world. Your forward-thinking solutions are groundbreaking, yet they may come across as detached. Harmony between your ideals and reality can bring your vision to life.



Pisces: The Dreamer

February 19 – March 20

Pisces is ruled by Neptune, the planet of dreams, intuition, and creativity. Compassionate, imaginative, and artistic, Pisceans are profoundly connected to their emotions. As a Pisces, you might feel a strong tie to the spiritual and emotional realms. You're a dreamer and intuitive, but beware of escapism. Stay grounded to navigate the real world.

Gutter Guide

SPRING GUTTER MAINTENANCE TO-DOS.

Gutters may be unassuming, but they play a big part in keeping your home in top shape. Used to channel rainwater away from the home and toward storm drains, gutters prevent structural damage and erosion from water buildup. To confirm your gutters are functioning appropriately, you must keep them clean and clear. Here's how to weather this essential spring project.

Do a routine cleaning.

Give your gutters a good cleaning before heavy spring showers and, ideally, every three months after. Using a ladder, scoop up any leaves and debris and dispose of them. *Pro tip: shredded leaves and sticks make great mulch!* Next, flush the system with a water hose, starting at the far end and working toward the downspout (the part of the gutter that runs down the side of your home).

Give your downspouts attention.

You should also check your downspouts during your cleaning. If water pools at the top of your gutters or barely trickles from the downspout, there's likely a clog. Try using pressure from a hose to dislodge and flush out what's stuck in the spout. If that doesn't work, clearing out the gunk with a drain snake may do the trick.

Conduct a thorough once-over.

Remember to scan your gutters for signs of damage, too. Fixing the small stuff now will save you a headache later and help you avoid costly repairs. Specifically, watch for:

- **Fractures and splits.** Seal any cracks you find, no matter how tiny. These minor flaws can expand and result in major issues if left unchecked.
- **Water damage, stains, and mold.** Standing water indicates a clog, while water damage on the backside of your gutter suggests leaks or overflow. Both can cause mold, which may require sections to be removed and replaced.
- **Paint damage.** Gutter paint should be weather-resistant, but pooled water can lead to peeling. Touch up damaged areas and replace sections affected by rust.
- **Sagging.** Your drainage system should never sag or move away from your home. If you see this, it may be time for a replacement.

Consider gutter guards.

Gutter guards take your drainage system to the next level. Available in a variety of styles, these protective devices sit on top of your gutters to keep out leaves, twigs, dirt, and debris. By allowing rainwater to flow freely, these handy barriers simplify cleaning and prevent pest infestations, rust, clogs, and water damage. If you don't have gutter guards, think about installing them now.

Check the pitch.

Although gutters may appear straight, their slight tilt, or pitch, is crucial for proper operation. The right pitch guarantees water flows away from your home, inhibiting it from draining too slowly, too quickly, or not at all. Gutters should be installed with a ¼ to ½ inch of slope per 10 feet of material. Use a level to verify the pitch is correct and consistent from top to bottom. Be sure to test it often, as slopes can shift over time.





THE GLOW UP

Outdoor lighting ideas that shine.

Outdoor lighting can do more than illuminate your home. It can transform the way it looks and feels from the outside, creating a delightful welcome before stepping through the front door. Spotlighting what hides under the darkness of night, exterior lighting is also practical, improving the safety, security, and functionality of your property. To learn where and how to use these fixtures, read on. We've compiled a list of ideas that can add aesthetic appeal and elevate your great outdoors.

ILLUMINATE WALKWAYS.

From the path leading to your home to the steps ascending to your front door, walkways can be tricky to navigate in dark conditions. Guide visitors safely to and from the house by lighting the way. Solar-powered bulbs or low-voltage LEDs provide visibility with a touch of charm. Choose solar lights for a sustainable, energy-efficient solution, and low-voltage LED lights for a soft, subtle glow.

CREATE A WELL-LIT ENTRY.

At night, a well-lit entryway not only signals your home is lived in but also reflects your personal style. Build an inviting atmosphere by greeting guests with wall-mounted sconces or lanterns at the front of your house. Whether your pieces have a classic, modern, or contemporary look, using warm, white bulbs enhances both the light's design and approachability.

DECORATE DECKS & PATIOS.

Decks and patios serve as an extension of your interior, offering settings to entertain, relax, and enjoy day or night. Install string lights or LED deck lights to set an enchanting scene. Have a unique place with distinct characteristics? Go for stringed Edison bulbs—these vintage-inspired, decorative lights come in different shapes and colors and have a glowing filament that gives an old-world vibe.

HIGHLIGHT GARDENS & LANDSCAPING.

A gorgeous garden and thoughtfully designed landscape are works of art. Carefully constructed showpieces, these natural beauties deserve attention, even after the sun sets. Highlight your beds with adjustable spotlights showcasing your most vibrant florals. For added depth and drama, install well lights in the ground surrounding trees, plants, or sculptures. These fixtures cast light upward, generating striking contrasts and boosting your landscape's visual interest.

TOP CONSIDERATIONS FOR OUTDOOR LIGHTS

Consider these four things before executing our electrifying ideas.

WEATHER RESISTANCE

Outdoor lights are exposed to everything from snowstorms to heavy winds. Think about the weather and select lights that can withstand the elements.

YOUR BUDGET

By establishing a firm budget, you can design your dream space without overspending. Include costs for the price of fixtures, wiring, and professional installation.

BRIGHTNESS LEVELS

Check a light's lumens to determine its brightness.

More lumens equal brighter light. Fewer lumens mean dimmer illumination. A standard 60-watt incandescent light bulb emits about 800 lumens.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

All lights have watts.

Watts indicate the amount of energy used by the light bulb. The fewer watts a light bulb uses, the less power it consumes. LED bulbs are widely recognized as the most eco-friendly option.

Spring

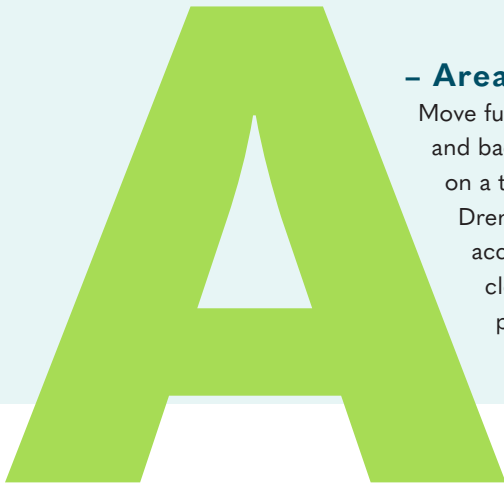
CLEAN

**Make your home
sparkle from**

A to Z



Spring cleaning doesn't have to be a chore. Put the F.U.N. in your seasonal deep clean by making your house sparkle from top to bottom using every letter of the alphabet. From freshening up your freezer to organizing your favorite junk drawer, we've got every corner and crevice covered. Turn your home into a spotless sanctuary with a little elbow grease and a lot of alphabetized satisfaction. Ready, set, scrub! >



– Area Rugs

Move furniture and vacuum both sides of your area rug—front and back. Hang the carpet outside and shake out the dust. Lay it on a tarp and spot-treat stains with a carpet-cleaning solution. Drench it with your garden hose and apply rug shampoo according to instructions. Rinse the rug until the water runs clear and hang again to dry. Return the rug to its rightful place before giving it one more vacuum pass.



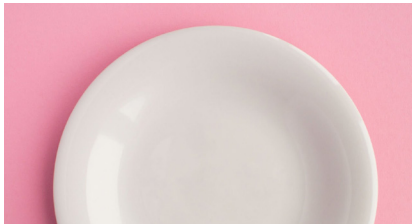
– Baseboards

Dust baseboards with a vacuum brush attachment or dry microfiber cloth. Use another microfiber cloth dipped in a water, vinegar, and dish soap solution to pick up dust, dirt, and grime. Then, dry the baseboards with a clean cloth and buff with a dryer sheet to reduce future dust buildup.



– Ceiling Fans

Switch off fans and wipe blades with a soft cloth. For a mess-free experience, slip a pillowcase over each blade and slowly pull it along, trapping dust and debris inside. Wash glass globes with warm, soapy water.



– Dishwasher

Scrub all removable parts—including the filter, utensil holder, and racks—with dish soap and an old toothbrush. Clear clogs from the spray arms with a toothpick. Pour one cup of vinegar into a dishwasher-safe container, place it on the top rack, close the door, and run a normal hot water cycle. Afterward, sprinkle a cup of baking soda over the bottom shelf and run another hot water cycle. Leave the door open to air dry and finish with an exterior polish.



– Electronics

Power off and unplug electronics like computers, TVs, speakers, and game consoles. Gently wipe surfaces with a microfiber cloth to eliminate smudges, and use compressed air to blast dust from gaps. Sanitize remotes, game controllers, tablets, and smartphones with disinfectant wipes.

F – Floors

Sweep or vacuum floors to clear crumbs and debris. Mop with the appropriate solution, being careful not to oversaturate. Work in small sections, moving backward in a figure-eight pattern or straight lines, and rinse the mop frequently. After each section, do a final once-over with hot water. Let your floors air-dry or dry them with a towel or squeegee.

G – Grout

Make a paste by mixing two parts baking soda with one part water or hydrogen peroxide. Spread the mixture on grout lines and let sit for five to 10 minutes. Using a stiff-bristled brush, scrub the grout lines until clean. Rinse with cool water, and consider using a sealant for extra protection.



– Interior Windows & Treatments

Remove curtains and blinds and follow care instructions. Sweep cobwebs and dust from the windows, frames, corners, and sills with a duster. Wipe the window with a sponge dipped in soapy water and dry with a microfiber cloth. For a streak-free shine, spray the window with glass cleaner and go in an “S” motion with a lint-free towel or black-and-white newspaper pages.



H – Hardware

Unscrew the hardware from doors, drawers, and cabinets, then soak them in a bucket of water, vinegar, and dish soap for about an hour. Rinse with warm water, tackling stubborn grime with a soft cloth. Dry completely, clean the surfaces around the hardware, and reinstall.



J – Junk Drawers

Dump the contents of your junk drawer (or drawers) and trash unnecessary odds and ends. Use an all-purpose cleaner on the inside of the drawer. Add a liner or dividers before putting things back where they belong.



K – Kids' Toys

Sanitize solid plastic toys on the top rack of your dishwasher or with disinfectant wipes. Pop sturdy, plush toys (without battery packs) in a pillowcase, knot it, run them on a gentle, low-spin cycle, and dry them on low heat with no tumble. Hand-wash or spot-treat delicate toys with a rag dipped in warm, soapy water.



L – Light Fixtures

Turn off your lights and unscrew the bulbs. For standard fixtures, dust surfaces and wipe metal and glass parts with warm, soapy water, then let them dry. Note that antique, brass, and crystal fixtures may require specialized products.

M – Mattresses

Strip and launder bedding. Vacuum the mattress with an upholstery attachment, then sprinkle with baking soda and vacuum again. Blot stains with an enzyme cleaner or a mixture of dish soap, baking soda, and hydrogen peroxide. Let dry, rotate or flip the mattress, and add a protector.



N

– Nooks & Crannies

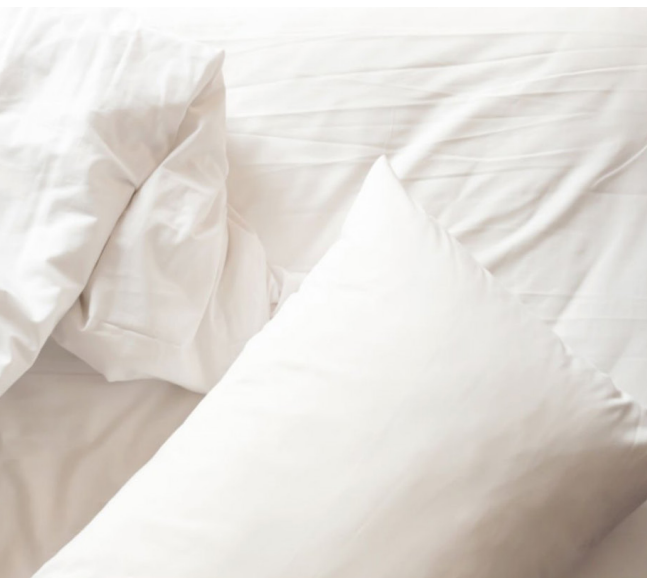
Scan each room, focusing on often-overlooked spots—under the couch, behind appliances, on top of cabinets, or between floorboards. Clear dirt, debris, and dust with microfiber cloths, an old toothbrush, or a vacuum with a crevice attachment.



P

– Pantry

Remove the items from your pantry and clean shelves and drawers with an all-purpose cleaner and a towel. Sweep and mop the floors. Check your inventory, discard expired items, and donate what you don't need. Neatly return everything in an organized fashion.



O

– Oven

Take everything out of your oven and lay newspaper or paper towels on the floor underneath. Combine ½ cup of baking soda with two or three tablespoons of water to form a paste. Wearing rubber gloves, spread the paste over the oven interior, avoiding the heating elements. Let it sit for at least 12 hours or overnight. While it sits, wash the racks with dishwashing liquid and scrub with a scouring pad, or use the same paste to tackle stuck-on grease. After 12 hours, wipe away the paste with a damp cloth. For any remaining sticky or clumped spots, spray with white vinegar, scrape with a plastic spatula, and wipe again.



Q

– Quilts & Bedspreads

Pre-treat stains on quilts and blankets, and mend any holes or tears. If it fits, wash on a delicate cycle with cold water and a color-catching sheet. If it's too big, hand wash in cold water in a bathtub or sink. Always use a mild, fragrance- and dye-free detergent, then air-dry flat on clean towels, turning every few hours.



R – Refrigerator & Freezer

Unplug your fridge, toss expired items, and store remaining food in an iced cooler.

Remove drawers and shelves, let them reach room temperature, then wash with hot water, dish soap, and a splash of vinegar. Wipe the interior from top to bottom (including the rubber door seal and shelf seams) with a sponge soaked in warm water and dish soap, then dry with a towel. Restock the fridge and freezer, place an open box of baking soda in the back, and polish the exterior with a stainless-steel cleaner, following the grain.



S – Showers & Tubs

Empty your showers and tubs. Clear drain gunk with a snake or baking soda and vinegar. Spray surfaces with a bathroom cleaner or a mix of equal parts distilled white vinegar and dish soap, then rub off residue after 10-15 minutes. Thoroughly rinse with clean water and dry with a towel.

T – Toilets

With rubber gloves, squirt commercial toilet cleaner around the bowl and under the rim. Let it sit before scrubbing with a brush, using a wet pumice stone for hard water deposits. Swipe the exterior with a disinfectant and flush to rinse away debris. Sanitize the brush and basin with disinfectant.

U – Upholstered Furniture

Use a vacuum with an upholstery attachment to sweep up crumbs and dirt. Spot-test the fabric with the proper cleaning solution or a mix of laundry detergent and water. If there's no discoloration, apply the solution with a soft cloth, dabbing stains. Blot with a clean, dry cloth and ensure the fabric is dry before use.



V – Vents & Filters

Turn off your HVAC system and detach your vent covers. Vacuum dust and debris with a hose attachment and wash them with warm, soapy water and a soft brush. Let the covers dry and reattach. Don't forget to replace all filters!



W

– Workstation

Sift through the documents that you've accumulated. Recycle or shred what you no longer need and organize and file important papers for safekeeping. Dust and wipe down computer monitors, keyboards, desks, and filing cabinets.



X

– eXpired Items

Sort through your medicine cabinet, makeup drawer, pantry, garage chemicals, and cleaning supplies and pitch expired products.



Y

– Yard

Rake fallen leaves and sticks, prune trees and bushes, pull weeds, trim edges, and refresh mulch. Power wash patios, decks, and walkways, then clean outdoor furniture with a brush and soapy water.

Z

– Zoned Alarms & Detectors

Check where you've placed fire alarms and smoke detectors and confirm they're in appropriate areas, such as near the kitchen, bedrooms, and HVAC systems. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to test and clean them and replace batteries as needed.



St. Patrick's Day fun facts.



On March 17, we're all a little Irish. Whether you're eating corned beef and cabbage, rocking shamrocks, or enjoying a green beer, celebrating St. Patrick and the Republic of Ireland is a classic springtime tradition. If you're a wee bit foggy about what the green-clad revelers are commemorating, we've got you covered with seven fun facts about St. Patrick's Day.

1. St. Patrick wasn't Irish.

Well, not technically. Saint Patrick was born around 390 A.D. in either England, Scotland, or Wales—a matter still open to speculation. At 16, he was kidnapped into slavery and brought to Ireland. He escaped to a monastery in Gaul, likely near present-day France, where he converted to Christianity, became a priest, and later a bishop. He returned to Ireland about 40 years later as a missionary and is widely credited with introducing Christianity to the Irish people. He was named the patron saint of Ireland after his death in 461.

2. The first parades were in the United States.

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place on March 17, 1601. To honor the Catholic feast day of St. Patrick, Irish vicar Ricardo Artur led the first parade in what's now St. Augustine, Florida. The second was in 1737 in Boston, followed by the third in New York City in 1762. Surprisingly, the parade didn't reach Ireland until 1931.

3. The shamrock's origin is pretty foggy.

There's quite a debate on the origin of the iconic St. Patrick's Day emblem. Ireland's unofficial national flower, some say that St. Patrick used the shamrock to represent the Holy Trinity while teaching about Christianity. Others say the number three was sacred in Irish mythology well before his time. Regardless, the festive motif remains synonymous with the holiday and is even a registered trademark by the Irish government.

4. Leprechauns had nothing to do with the holiday.

The infamous mascots of St. Patrick's Day, leprechauns have been ingrained in Irish culture and folklore for centuries. Part of the fairy family of mythical creatures, these mischievous men allegedly hid gold coins in pots at the end of rainbows. Because leprechauns were so tiny, they were hard to catch, but if you caught one, you'd be granted three wishes in exchange for setting him free. In short, leprechauns and St. Patrick's Day aren't directly related—they're just both Irish symbols.

5. You should be pinched for not wearing blue.

From the color of the decorations to the dyed Chicago River, you probably associate St. Patrick's Day with Kelly green. However, Ireland and St. Patrick were actually associated with a shade of sky blue known as "St. Patrick's blue." Green was considered unlucky until after the Irish independence movement in the 18th century. As the divide between Ireland and the British crown grew, green became a symbol of Irish rebellion. It has been linked to the holiday and country ever since.

6. They almost called it "St. Maewyn's Day."

St. Patrick's real name was likely Maewyn Succat (pronounced "may-win"). Legend has it he adopted the name Patricius, derived from the Latin term for "father figure," after becoming a priest in the 5th century. One thing's for sure—St. Maewyn's Day doesn't have the same ring to it!

7. It used to be a dry observance.

St. Patrick's Day was once classified as a religious holiday in Ireland, so all bars had to close for the day. When it transitioned to a national holiday in 1970, everything changed. Now, pubs are a top spot for the holiday's antics, and over 13 million pints of Guinness are consumed worldwide every March 17.



What's Your Favorite Thing About Being a Mom?

Readers share why they love motherhood.

"I'm a new mom, and my son has made life fuller. Every day is an exciting adventure, and I have a built-in best friend!"

– Emma B., Ohio

"When my kids were young, I liked reading stories and snuggling with them. Now that my kids are adults, it's so fun to hang out and mentor them."

– Sharon S., New Jersey

"One of my favorite things about being a mom is playing again. We play Barbies, pretend restaurant, school, and Target cashiers. It's awesome to dive into a world of make-believe, imagination, and silliness for a small portion of the day. My kid is pretty funny, so she's always saying or doing something that makes me laugh."

– Karina B., Texas

"Watching life through their eyes is wonderful. It's amazing to see all their firsts—obviously the milestones like crawling, walking, and talking—but also little moments like trying ice cream or celebrating holidays. They constantly surprise me with the new things they've learned."

– Jess T., Virginia

"The best part about being a mom is getting to experience love in its truest form. I was chosen to look after these tiny people, and I don't take it for granted. They've taught me life's toughest lessons, and they've also been my greatest source of grace. We learn as they learn; we grow as they grow, and it's magical and rewarding."

– Tiffany M., Canada

"I marvel at the gift of bringing a bundle of joy into the world, watching them grow, navigate life, and mature into responsible young adults—and let's not forget the perfect grandchildren they bring later!"

– Penny F., Massachusetts

"My children give me a sense of purpose, and I cherish teaching them and sharing in their experiences at every stage of their lives."

– Brenda K., Pennsylvania

"What I treasure most is the unconditional love and watching my kids grow into their own unique selves. It's the sweetest joy!"

– Brittany J., Louisiana

GOTCHA!

Hilarious (but harmless) April Fools' Day pranks.

April Fools' Day is a chance to let your inner prankster loose, encouraging playful stunts and fun trickery with family, friends, and colleagues. However, for maximum laughs, it's important to strike the right balance—keeping things lighthearted without going too far. Check out these April Fools' ideas that are hilarious but harmless.

PICTURE-PERFECT FOOLERY

Do you or your family members find a random celebrity, character, or pop-culture moment especially amusing? If so, print out pictures of the person or event (memes are highly effective), and tape them around the house the night before April Fools' Day. They can go on the fridge, replace framed photos, cover a car, or even adhere to the front door. When everybody wakes up, they'll be greeted by their favorite inside joke.

EYE ANTICS

Gather a pile of googly eyes and place them on the items your chosen target regularly reaches for. Stick the silly peepers on breakfast foods, mugs, photos, electronics buttons, and more. The person you're pranking will quickly realize they were fooled when everything seems to be staring back at them.

TAPED TV

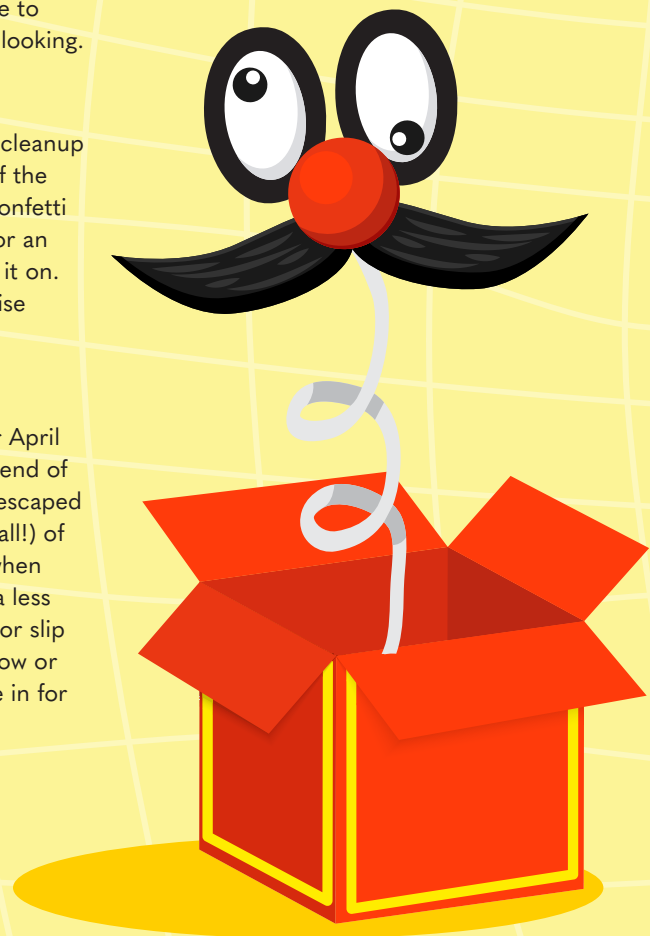
This might be one of the easiest escapades—just grab a piece of tape to pull it off. Choose a color that matches your remote or TV and cover the sensor on either device. When your target tries to start a binge-watching session, they'll be frustrated to find they can't. For an added twist, use a second remote to turn the TV on when they aren't looking.

INSTANT PARTY

Though this antic requires some cleanup afterward, it's sure to elicit one of the greatest reactions. Simply hide confetti on top of a ceiling fan and wait for an unsuspecting someone to switch it on. Once they do, they'll get a surprise shower fit for a big celebration.

POP SHOCK

If your family is familiar with your April 1 high jinks, save this gag for the end of the day when they think they've escaped your mischief. Swap out one (or all!) of their pillows with balloons, and when they settle in for bed...pop! For a less startling effect, use bubble wrap or slip a rubber chicken under their pillow or fitted sheet. Either way, they'll be in for a late-night treat!





WORK OUT YOUR WAY



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Bundle and save. Get \$5 off each additional gym you join.²



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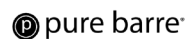


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Standard Gyms



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¹ Monthly fees are subject to applicable enrollment fees and taxes. Costs for premium exercise studios exceed \$28/mo. plus applicable enrollment fees and taxes. Fees vary based on premium fitness studios selected.

² Members may purchase multiple standard and premium gym memberships with a \$5 discount off the monthly fee for each membership purchased after their first.

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WATER-SAVING SECRETS

FIVE WAYS TO CONSERVE WATER AT HOME.



Spring is the ideal time to refresh your water habits at home. Cutting back on water usage not only helps lower your utility bills but also shows love to our planet. From turning off running faucets to repairing leaky pipes, small lifestyle changes can make a big splash. Want to make every drop count? Here are five ways to save water this spring.



LOOK FOR LEAKS.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that households waste over one trillion gallons of water annually through leaks alone. To shrink this stat, regularly inspect your home and property for faulty faucets, showerheads, and taps. Addressing replacements and repairs promptly can stop gallons from slipping through the cracks. And don't overlook your toilets—while less obvious, they're often the biggest culprits of water waste. If yours makes unusual noises, trickles water after a flush, or needs a handle jiggle, you likely have a leak.



HARVEST RAINWATER.

Put those spring showers to work and drastically decrease water use with a rain barrel. Simply place a plastic, stone, or wood container on level ground or under a downspout during downpours and watch it catch buckets of free water. You can then use your collection to water your yard and garden, clean outdoor surfaces, and more. Great for areas with heavy rainfall, harvesting reduces water and energy bills while preventing flooding and soil erosion. Just be sure to check local regulations, as some areas have rainwater collection restrictions.



BE SMART IN THE KITCHEN.

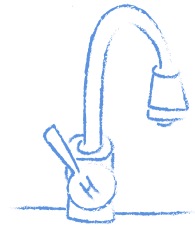
Unfortunately, all your cooking, cleaning, and dishwashing have a ripple effect when it comes to water waste. Think about using your garbage disposal sparingly and composting food scraps instead. Reuse water from boiling pasta to hydrate plants or rinse produce. Install flow-controlled aerators on faucets, defrost food in the fridge as opposed to under running water, and start the dishwasher only when it's full.



WASH CLOTHES WITH CARE.

Laundry is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be wasteful. Conserve water, a vital resource, and put an eco-friendly spin on laundry day by:

- Washing clothes only when necessary.
- Pre-treating stains to avoid rewashing.
- Sticking to full loads.
- Skipping extra rinse cycles.
- Opting for cold water over hot.
- Air-drying clothes.
- Upgrading to energy-efficient appliances.



GET INTO INSULATION.

There's nothing worse than waiting for your shower water to warm up and witnessing perfectly good water go down the drain. But did you know this common problem can be easily fixed with some pipe insulation? Insulation helps retain the water's heat as it goes through your pipes, delivering hot water faster, so you waste less as you wait. DIY the insulation with your material of choice, or call in the pros to lighten your environmental footprint.



DIGITAL DETOX

How a tech timeout can transform your life.

Technology is a central part of our lives. And that's not hyperbole; it's a fact. Studies show that people worldwide average six hours and 40 minutes of screen time per day. That's almost an entire U.S. workday or a flight from New York City to Paris, France.

While technology does a lot of good, like connecting people from faraway places and providing quick communication in an emergency, it can also seep into our lives in unsavory ways and cause us to miss out on all the great things around us. Taking a tech timeout can benefit your well-being and completely transform the way you experience life. Let's dive in.

What's a Digital Detox?

A digital detox is an intentional step back from digital devices, such as computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, and TVs. By cleansing yourself from constant connectivity, email and text notifications, and online interactions for a period of time, you can enhance your wellness, minimize stress, and more.

Dangers of Too Much Tech

Digital devices offer a pathway to another world, a virtual one, where the stream of information never runs dry, and there's always something new to explore. Although captivating, too much technology and screen time can lead to some not-so-desirable consequences, like:

Impatience. With everything just a click away, technology's instant gratification can make people impatient and frustrated in the real world.

Poor health. A recent study revealed that every additional hour of TV viewing for 23-year-olds was linked to higher levels of obesity, blood pressure, and cholesterol 25 years later.

Lack of awareness. Excessive technology use can harm your ability to be conscious of your surroundings. For example, sending or reading a text diverts your attention from the road for five seconds—the equivalent of running the length of a football field with your eyes closed.

Diminished social skills. Making eye contact, introducing yourself to someone new, or starting a conversation at the dinner table all suffer when you spend more time online and less time interacting with people in person.

Depression and anxiety. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), teens who spent over four hours daily on digital devices were more likely to experience depression and anxiety than those with less screen time.

Benefits of a Digital Detox

You don't have to make a huge change to reap the benefits of going tech-free. Simply reducing time spent on your phone by 30 minutes each day can help you feel and sleep better. The advantages of powering off include:

- **Restful sleep.** All electronics with screens emit blue light. Too much

exposure to blue light (especially during the evening) can prevent your body from producing melatonin. Turning off your electronics well before bed may promote more rejuvenating sleep.

- **Mental clarity.** Video games and social media can cause people to isolate and withdraw, resulting in sadness and despair. When you remove yourself from these influences, you can engage with others, focus on tasks, and make sound judgments.
- **Improved mood.** Too often, we rely on digital devices to distract us and keep us busy during our downtime. By practicing patience without a gadget, you can train yourself to become comfortable with idleness. This translates to less irritability, less stress, and an optimistic outlook on life.
- **Increased physical activity.** With fewer hours online, you have extra time and energy to be active. To keep tech at bay while you play, consider an interactive activity, like a fitness class, boot camp, or team sport.

How to Take a Tech Timeout

There's no standard rule for digital detoxing. Figure out where and how technology fits into your life and use that information to determine which cuts work for you. Here are some tips to help you get started:

Make small changes. Don't go cold turkey. Total tech deprivation can backfire, and you may set yourself up for failure. Instead, take small steps, like deleting a social media app from your phone or watching one hour less of TV a day. These little accomplishments can add up and encourage you to do more.

Set a time limit. Whether you choose to go without TV for a week or social media for 24 hours, setting a time limit helps you gauge your boundaries and encourages mindful usage.

Physically distance yourself from tech. Try hiding your phone in a drawer or locking the tablet in a safe. This physical distance from your most-used device can break the habit of reaching for it when you're bored.

Be intentional about your time online. Before you go online, think of why you're plugging in. Researching how to clean a stain or shipping a gift

“Devices offer a pathway to another world, a virtual one, where the stream of information never runs dry.”

to an out-of-town friend? Do what you need to do online and then sign off. It's easy to get distracted, but planning ahead makes you more likely to follow through.

Identify how you'll fill your time. Schedule activities to occupy your time away from technology. For a bigger reward, plan activities that allow you to be completely present with others. Devoting time to a worthy cause, playing outside with your kids, or visiting an elderly family member are ways to fill the digital gaps and unlock the feel-good benefits of interpersonal relationships.

Recognize and celebrate your success. Take note of how a tech timeout has affected you. Maybe you'll find that you're getting quality sleep or experiencing less stress, which are all positive changes. Celebrate the win and keep the momentum going!

What Are the Best Amenities To Attract New Residents?

ROSE JURCZEWSKI TELLS US WHAT BUYERS ARE LOOKING FOR NOW.



Amenities are a prime reason many people choose to live in a managed community. In fact, it's estimated that nearly 70 percent of residents in managed associations consider their dues reasonable, given the benefits of community living. Usually maintained by the association, these features offer a way for residents to interact, relax, and stay active. Plus, amenities play a pivotal role in shaping a community's culture and boosting property values, too.

As interest in association living rises, communities are eager to attract new residents with highly coveted amenities. We sat down with Rose Jurczewski, CMCA®, AMS®, to learn what accommodations buyers seek.

“

Today's buyers are drawn to communities rich in amenities. They want to get out, meet their neighbors, enjoy their surroundings, and have fun close to home. Typically, you'll find that many homebuyers desire communities with these perks:

Swimming Pool & Hot Tub

A swimming pool with a hot tub provides cool relief during summer and a warm oasis in winter, making it an invigorating and healthy escape year-round. If it makes sense for your community, a pool is a value-add worth the investment.

Pond or Small Lake

We love the great outdoors in our area! A pond where residents can ride a paddle boat, sit and meditate, or go fishing exponentially increases excitement. An eco-friendly feature that never gets old, a small body of water on community grounds will always keep residents entertained.

Clubhouse

A clubhouse, also known as a community center or village center, serves as a gathering spot for residents. A place to host events, meetings, and social activities, a clubhouse complete with a library or game room is an even better attraction. Just make sure you're equipped with community-wide Wi-Fi so members can fully appreciate the space.

Health & Wellness Features

Now more than ever, people are calling for amenities that support wellness. Whether it's a gym, walking trail, playground, or multi-use court, these conveniences allow homeowners to get moving, continue healthy habits, and engage with their neighbors. Encourage use with opportunities for fitness classes, personal trainers, and competitions.

Communities vary to suit different lifestyles, so the amenities will differ, too. Still, leaders should keep a finger on the pulse of the needs and wants of residents and homebuyers. Tailor your community to accommodate shifting demographics, industry trends, and personal preferences to maintain a competitive edge.”



Rose Jurczewski, CMCA®, AMS®, is a portfolio community association manager for Associa Chicagoland.



MEETING MANNERS

Community association meeting etiquette tips.

In a community association, residents and board members meet regularly to share updates, plan projects, and discuss community issues. Because big things happen during these meetings, minding your manners can mean the difference between a peaceful gathering and a chaotic get-together. It's important to do your part in creating harmony. Check out these seven etiquette tips to make your next community association meeting even more productive.

1. REVIEW THE AGENDA BEFOREHAND.

Residents typically have access to the agenda before the scheduled meeting. If it's available, take a few minutes to look it over. Get familiar with the topics, jot down ideas, and be ready to share your thoughts. Doing your homework and coming prepared helps the board move through orders of business quickly, prevents tangents, and sets the stage for meaningful conversations.

2. SHOW UP ON TIME.

Being fashionably late to community meetings isn't recommended. A lack of punctuality can be awkward, disruptive, and distracting to speakers and fellow attendees. You might also miss announcements, ask questions that have already been answered, or pull attention away from the topic at hand.

3. GIVE THE DISCUSSION YOUR FULL ATTENTION.

Scrolling through your phone to catch up on the latest social media trends might be tempting, but practicing active listening is the best way to get the most from the session. This means silencing your devices, taking notes, and participating when appropriate.

4. WAIT YOUR TURN TO SPEAK UP.

A meeting agenda usually includes a designated open forum for residents to provide feedback or suggestions. If you have something to say, wait for the right time to speak up or ask questions. Chiming in at the wrong time can prolong the session and derail dialogue.

5. RESPECT THE OPINIONS OF OTHER RESIDENTS.

While everyone wants the community to succeed, residents might not always agree on how to meet collective goals. Opposing opinions or disagreements are totally normal during meetings. Rather than being dismissive or confrontational, show respect, open-mindedness, and patience. By embracing diverse viewpoints and allowing others to explain their side, you can avoid tense situations or heated debates.

6. FOLLOW YOUR ASSOCIATION'S MEETING GUIDELINES.

Every managed community has a set of rules that outline how a meeting should be conducted. Most communities follow Robert's Rules of Order (standard parliamentary procedure), but you can likely find official policies in your governing documents. Meetings stay fair, organized, and focused when everyone plays by the rules and understands the flow.

7. ASK ABOUT VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOLS.

Some communities host virtual meetings to make attendance easier. There should be a clear framework for when and how to respond, who to contact for help, and how to get the speaker's attention through the platform. Ask board members about virtual meeting expectations. It's crucial to let your voice be heard, regardless of how you participate.

At community gatherings, you can influence decisions that affect you and your neighbors. However, meetings can become unproductive if residents don't follow proper etiquette. Practicing good meeting manners is a simple way to keep your community connected and get more done!

Welcome Home

A move-in
checklist for new
homeowners.

Congratulations! You've signed on the dotted line and are moving to a home in a community association. You've made a great choice, and there's so much to explore about your new lifestyle and neighborhood. Luckily, we're here to guide you every step of the way. Here's everything to do as you settle in.

BROWSE YOUR WELCOME PACKET.

As a new homeowner, you should receive all the necessary information to get situated in your community in a welcome packet. Think of it as an operating manual, only instead of providing instructions for a new gadget, it contains details about your neighborhood and association, including:

- **Contact information.** Locate ways to get in touch with board members, community managers, emergency personnel, security, and maintenance teams.
- **Homeowner responsibilities.** Get a clear understanding of your duties, from lawn care and pet management to internet, cable, and trash collection.
- **Amenities and facilities.** Figure out operating hours, usage rules, and reservation instructions.
- **Retail and entertainment.** Discover what your local area has for food, fun, and more.
- **Forms.** Check out your bylaws, emergency plans, insurance, and pet registration documents.
- **Community calendar.** Stay up to date on neighborhood activities so you never miss a beat.

Read your welcome packet and keep it handy as you get acclimated. If questions pop up, you'll likely find your answers there.

REVIEW THE RULES.

Rules and community policies are the backbone of a well-run association. These guidelines help maintain the attractive, pleasant, and harmonious environment residents have invested in. Confirm you can access your community guidelines and read them thoroughly so you know what flies and what doesn't. Misplaced the copy you received at closing? Simply check your welcome packet or the community website, or reach out to the management office for a copy.

SET UP YOUR UTILITIES.

Don't forget about all the utilities and services you need to set up in your new home: electricity, water, gas, internet, and cable, just to name a few. Be sure to activate everything on time to avoid interruptions or late fees, and add service billing dates to a calendar for an easy reminder.

BUDGET FOR ADDITIONAL EXPENSES.

In addition to a mortgage and utilities, association residents often pay fees to cover items like amenity maintenance, neighborhood security, and insurance. Learn what you must pay for and opt-in to receive updates on payment amounts, deadlines, and other information. If available, enroll in autopay for timely payments—nobody likes late charges!

CONNECT WITH KEY PEOPLE.

There are several individuals you'll want to get to know in your community. Start with the board of directors, a group of volunteer residents who oversee operations. Your community association manager, who reports directly to the board, is another valuable contact. They can answer questions, connect you with service providers, and even recommend nearby attractions. And, of course, there are your neighbors—who will hopefully welcome you with open arms.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR AMENITIES.

Amenities are one of the best parts of community living. As a resident, you pay to maintain them—so use them! Visit your neighborhood hot spots like:

- Pools
- Fitness centers
- Clubhouses
- Walking paths
- Golf courses
- Playgrounds
- Picnic areas
- Basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts

Remember to get any entry keys or codes needed to access your favorite features. Plus, double-check hours of operation before you go—nothing dampens a trip to the pool like being locked out.

EXPLORE YOUR SURROUNDINGS.

There's fun beyond your neighborhood, too. Get out and explore the area. Look for the services you use most, like:

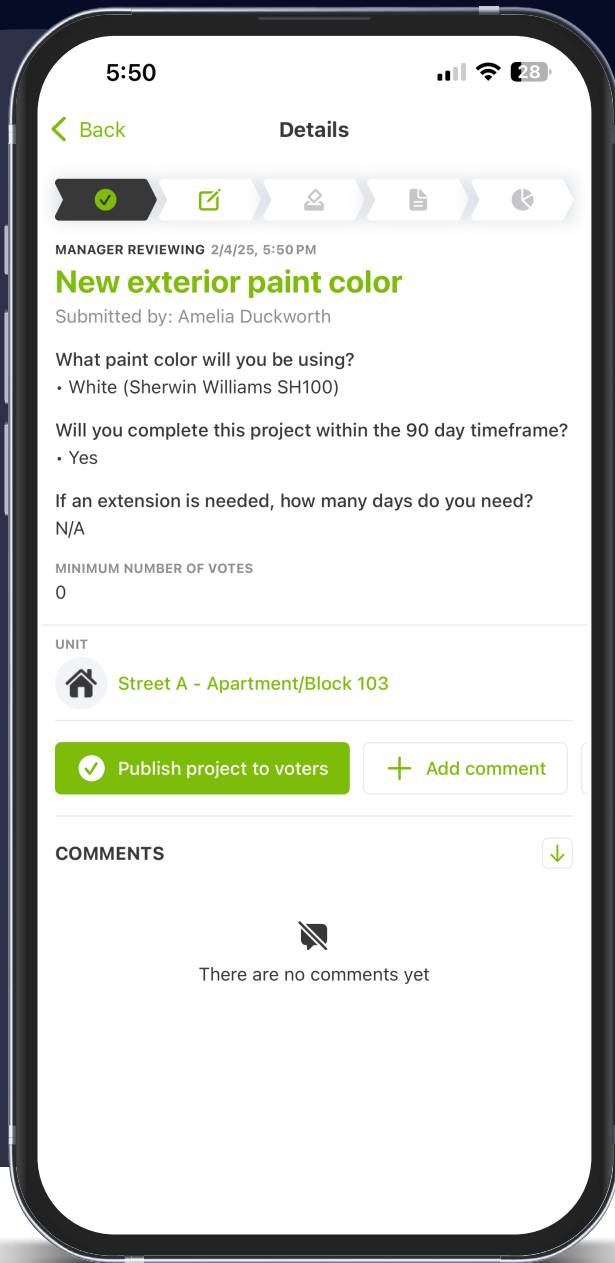
- Shopping centers
- Schools
- Doctor and dentist offices
- Gyms
- Parks
- Mechanics

ATTEND EVENTS.

When it comes to community living, you get out what you put in. Talk to neighbors, attend meetings, and participate in social events. At meetings, you'll get the lowdown on community operations and a chance to speak up and shape how the community functions. Social gatherings like cookouts and block parties are prime moments to create bonds that can last for decades.

Moving into a new community is exciting. While there's plenty to learn, embracing the community lifestyle is rewarding. Before you know it, you'll go from new-in-town to a trusted community member, welcoming those who come after you!

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