

How to cut costs on your home improvement project

By Metro Creative Connection

Over the last several decades, more and more homeowners have embraced the notion that homes need not all be alike, and that an individual's home can cater to his or her personal tastes and needs. The trend of modeling a home after one's own tastes has extended beyond choosing furniture or other replaceable elements to structural changes and full-scale renovations, thus upping the financial ante for homeowners who want to turn their homes into places more in tune with their own personalities.

When it comes to improving their homes, many homeowners associate cutting costs with cutting corners, which can put residents' safety at risk. But there are ways for homeowners to save money on home improvement projects while still ensuring their homes are safe and sound.

Work with recycled materials. Homeowners about to undertake small-scale do-it-yourself projects can often save money by using recycled materials. Many homeowners do not go the DIY route when making larger renovations, but those that do also can save money by using recycled materials. However, homeowners should know that many contractors do not work with recycled materials in an effort to avoid liability should something go awry during the project or after it is completed. But DIYers can benefit from using recycled materials, which can be purchased at various locations. For example, Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization devoted to building homes for the less fortunate, operates its own ReStores, which are nonprofit home improvement stores that sell recycled building materials at a steep discount. ReStore locations can be found by visiting www.habitat.org.

Get your hands dirty. Labor costs on home improvement projects are considerable, but homeowners can cut these costs by doing some of the labor themselves. Even those men and women with little or no DIY experience can still chip in and save



Homeowners willing and able to chip in on home improvement projects can bring the costs of labor down considerably.

some money. Homeowners about to embark on a rebuilding project can chip in and do some of the demolition on their own. For example, when replacing sidewalks, homeowners can simply break up and remove the existing sidewalk on their own rather than paying their contractors to do such work for them. It's best for homeowners to leave interior labor to the professionals, as they are more knowledgeable about how to find load-bearing walls and plumbing fixtures than the average weekend warrior homeowner. Homeowners who mistakenly take out fixtures inside their homes in an attempt to cut down on labor costs might find such miscues are far more costly than simply paying for the labor from the get-go.

Remember how flattering imitation can be. As the old adage goes, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Homeowners working on

tight budgets can opt for imitation materials that appear and feel just like more costly authentic materials. When opting for imitation materials, homeowners should know that they or their representatives cannot falsely represent the materials as authentic when selling the home, no matter how much materials look and feel like the real thing.

Schedule projects during the offseason. Like many professionals, contractors have busy seasons and seasons that tend to be slow. These seasons can change depending on geography, but homeowners can save money by postponing projects until the slow season, when contractors are more likely to offer discounts in an attempt to stay busy and continue to generate income. Savings will vary depending on a variety of factors, but it's not unlikely that patient homeowners willing to wait until the

offseason to renovate their homes can save as much as 5 percent on the overall cost of the project.

Try not to customize. Though the driving force behind many home improvement projects is to create a dream home that caters to homeowners' individual needs, going overboard with customizing is expensive. Larger-than-normal dimensions may seem like a great idea, but unless they're absolutely necessary, they're best avoided by budget-conscious homeowners.

Building supplies are sold at certain dimensions because those dimensions are the most common. Altering these dimensions unnecessarily is only driving up the cost of the project, so it's best to stick with stock sizes when money is tight.

Home improvement projects are often expensive undertakings. But such endeavors need not break the bank.