

Improve privacy & security at home

Living in close proximity to one's neighbors has its benefits. But many homeowners would no doubt admit that privacy at home is a good thing.

Whether homeowners are enjoying their yard in spring or summer or simply want their in-home activities to be less obvious to neighbors, their privacy is a year-round concern. If privacy is a concern, homeowners can take certain steps to ensure their homes stay or become the sanctuaries they were designed to be.

WINDOW TREATMENTS

Windows allow natural light to enter a home, but windows also enable neighbors and others to see into a home. If thieves are the ones looking inside, wide open windows present a security issue. Window treatments are an effective way to add privacy to a home. Closing curtains or blinds

limits others' ability to see inside the house. Switch to more opaque window treatments when using interior lighting more often, as gossamer draperies may still make it possible for outsiders to understand what's going on inside the home if people and items are backlit.

For those who do not want to compromise natural light, frosted windows can satisfy a desire for privacy. Windows can be purchased with frosting in place, and home improvement retailers sell various products that can create a frosted look.

FENCING & PERIMETER PLANTINGS

Privet hedge, arborvitae or Italian cypress are fast-growing evergreens that provide privacy around a home for homeowners who do not want to install traditional fencing. These trees also provide a natural habitat for var-

ious yard animals. Layering various plants of different heights and textures also can create a more natural and less imposing look.

Fencing remains a viable option to create privacy and stop noise pollution. Privacy fences come in various materials, colors and sizes, enabling homeowners to choose styles that fit their landscapes.

PERGOLAS & ENCLOSED PATIOS

Homeowners who like to entertain outdoors may want to make their outdoor living spaces more private. Pergolas allow light to filter through but obstruct direct view of patio activity, especially when combined with some gauzy draperies hanging on the sides. An enclosed patio or three-season room can be a worthwhile addition for homeowners who like to enjoy the great outdoors without being in



Fencing and well-placed plantings can improve privacy for homeowners.

the elements or on display for neighbors. Structures vary from screened-in porches to greenhouses to removable gazebos. Potted plants or trailing vines can soften the structural edges and help the privacy devices blend in with the natural surroundings.

PERSONAL TACTICS

Homeowners who do not want their neighbors or others knowing what they're up to in their free time can limit what they share through photos and descriptions on social media. Doing so also cuts down on neighbors' curiosity.

Safety tips for grilling season

People have been cooking meals over open flames since the discovery of fire. Even today, when there are so many ways to cook a meal, many still insist there's nothing better than the taste of food cooked on the grill.

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA), which tracks industry trends, points out that one-third of consumers plan to use their grill or smoker more often this year. Even though grilling is widely associated with summer, a growing number of people are embracing year-round grilling.

HPBA's CEO Jack Goldman has said, "Barbecuing is no longer just a pastime, but an integral part of the North American lifestyle."

Seven in 10 adults in the United States own a grill or smoker. With so many people firing up their grills, it's important to recognize the importance of grilling safety. Here's how to stay safe.

• Only grill outside. Propane and charcoal barbecue grills should only be used outdoors.

Grills should be placed well away from the home. Keep grills away from deck railings, eaves, overhangs and tree branches.

• Keep the grill clean. Thoroughly clean the grill prior to first use, and keep it tidy all year long. Grease or fat buildup can ignite and cause a fire.

• Always attend the grill. Grill distraction-free and keep an eye on the food being cooked. Simply stepping away for a few moments can lead to a fire or accident.

• Start fires safely. Charcoal and gas grills may be lit using electronic starters that do not require fire. If using starter fluid, only do so on charcoal, and do not add more fluid or other flammable liquids after the fire has ignited.

• Check for gas leaks. Whether the gas grill is hooked up to

a propane tank or the natural gas supply of a home, ensure that the hoses or tanks are not leaking. Apply a light soap-and-water solution to hoses to see if they bubble from leaking gas.

• Keep baking soda nearby. Baking soda can control grease fires, but it's also helpful to have a fire extinguisher or a bucket of sand on hand for other types of fires.

• Watch children and pets. Keep children and pets at least three feet away from grilling areas.

• Wait for the grill and coals to cool. Practice safety around the grill until all coals are cool and the grill is no longer hot to the touch. Only then should the grill be moved or relocated.

Grilling is a passion that is enjoyed throughout much of the year. Safely cook outdoors by heeding safety guidelines.



Tips to making delicious ice cream

Ice cream is a favorite dessert across the globe. The average American consumes more than 23 pounds of ice cream per year, says the International Dairy Foods Association.

Even though a trip to the local ice cream parlor can yield many different opportunities to indulge, making ice cream at home is easier than one may believe. Also, creating homemade ice cream can be a fun way to experiment with unique flavors and textures. It is easy to customize concoctions based on what everyone likes best. Making ice cream also is a fun way to bring the family together with the reward of a tasty prize for all of the effort. Here are some tips for making ice cream at home.

• Buy quality ingredients. Choose fresh, high-quality ingredients. Real vanilla beans or extract can produce better flavor than imitations. Select in-season berries and other fruits and, if possible, use organic milk. All of these ingredients will blend together for fresh flavor.

• Freeze equipment early.



Making ice cream at home allows for endless custom flavors.

Cold equipment is necessary to produce ice cream. Store the bowls of an ice cream maker in the freezer to keep them frozen and ready for when the mood strikes to make a batch of ice cream.

• Keep mix-ins small. Mix-ins, like cookie pieces or cake crumbs, can add a different dimension to ice cream. Chill the ingredients and make sure they are small, such as the size of chocolate chips. Add them after the ice cream is entirely frozen.

• Watch alcohol usage. Al-

cohol can create a tipsy ice cream experience, but adding too much can interfere with ice cream's ability to freeze. Therefore, use alcohol sparingly.

• Store ice cream smartly. A shallow container can keep ice cream softer. Also, cover the surface of the ice cream with plastic wrap to prevent ice crystals from forming.

Homemade ice cream will last for roughly a week in the freezer.

The whole process can be a challenging yet tasty endeavor.

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