

Four fast, easy kitchen projects you can complete this weekend

(BPT) - Minor kitchen updates can result in enhanced appearance, enjoyment and increased home value. With a free weekend and a modest budget, you can accomplish some do-it-yourself projects that will give your kitchen a whole new look.

Focus on projects that will have maximum impact with minimal time invested. These would be projects such as restoring existing tile work or installing a tile backsplash, switching out cabinet hardware, or painting an accent wall or the ceiling rather than the whole room. Here are four simple kitchen improvements that you can do in a day or two:

1. Rejuvenate existing tile and grout - Old, stained tile and grout can make an entire surface appear dated and dingy, even if the tile itself is in good condition. Cleaning or recoloring grout can breathe new life into existing tile work, whether its coun-

tertops, flooring or a backsplash. Products like the Aqua Mix brand of tile cleaners and sealants can help remove stains and brighten surfaces without damaging grout. If your grout is in good shape, but you're just tired of the off-white or gray color, try updating it with a grout colorant. Aqua Mix makes an easy-to-use water-based epoxy available in 24 different colors that recolors, seals and renews existing grout.

2. Create a trendy tile backsplash - Tile without hiring a professional. If you're a do-it-yourselfer with the right tools and a little bit of know-how, you can easily add a tile backsplash featuring colorful glass or metallic tiles for that designer look in the kitchen.

"Adding a backsplash with decorative tiles creates a new focal point and at the same time brings in a fresh accent color to the kitchen. Follow through with additional touches and inexpensive ac-

cessories such as towels, a new curtain or decorative glass jars to complete the transformation," says independent interior designer Ann Borsheim.

Products like the SimpleMat brand tile setting mat make it easy to install tile - on a backsplash, countertop or shower wall. Because the mat's double stick adhesive sheets eliminate the need to apply mortar, so you can work at your own pace. Start with a smooth surface - you can even tile over existing tile surfaces - place the mat in position, cut as needed with scissors or a utility knife, press the tiles of your choice in place and grout immediately using a pre-mixed or single-component grout product. SimpleMat is available exclusively at Home Depot in sheets or as a value-size role for larger projects. Never installed tile before? No problem - check out the manufacturer's instruction

videos at www.thesimplemat.com.

3. Replace dated hardware - Cabinet replacement can be costly and time-consuming - and best left to professionals. But you can easily and quickly give your cabinets a whole new look by replacing outdated hardware. If your cabinets are still builder-bare of knobs, handles or pulls, adding them can not only make them look fresh, it can make them much easier to use. It's easy to find hardware to suit virtually any design theme or taste, with many home improvement stores carrying a wide range of designer styles from sleek, modern metallics to Victorian-inspired glass.

4. Get creative with paint - Painting is one of the most powerful, cost-effective ways to recreate the look of a room, but painting the entire space can be time-consuming. If you're not up for a full day of painting four walls and all



that trim, consider painting one wall in an eye-catching accent color. Or, for something really different - albeit a bit more work - paint the ceiling in a hue that complements the current wall color. No design rule says your kitchen ceiling must be plain white, so spice it up with a color that speaks to you.

Updating your kitchen is a

rewarding home-improvement job, and can enhance the kitchen's appearance and your enjoyment of it, as well as boost your home's value. In fact, according to Remodeling Magazine's Cost vs. Value Report, even a minor kitchen renovation will return more than 75 percent of its cost when you sell your home.

How to know when it's time to rebuild

(NAPS)—Having a new home at an old address can be a better idea than many people realize. You just have to decide how many and what kind of changes may be best for your home and family.

A first decision is whether to remodel your home or to rebuild on the old site. There are a few things to consider that can help you decide:

- First, is the old house worth saving or will you be investing tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars you'll never be able to recoup? According to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, Americans spend \$125 million a year on home renovation projects.

- How much do you have to invest? If it's a major remodel, it's important to look at the housing market. Is it strong? Are there few houses on the market? If so, your home may sell quickly and make up the initial investment easily. If the housing market is weak, however, your home may linger on the market

for months, even years, and ultimately sell at a loss.

- Next, consider the condition of your home. If it has good wiring and heating and a sound foundation and tight building envelope, these factors strongly favor a remodel. If there is extensive mold, dry rot, asbestos, pest, water or other damage, tearing down and rebuilding may be a better investment.

- Also, how green is your residence or home? Older homes tend to be inefficient. They may have little to no insulation, single-pane leaking windows, old inefficient appliances and poor ventilation. Modern materials allow for much more energy-efficient heating and cooling. In fact, owners of older homes spend \$750 million more than owners of new homes on repairs and upkeep. If it's time to rebuild, you may consider building a green home. A new home can have modern multiple-pane windows that cut down on heating bills thanks to their high level of efficiency. In addition,

radiant floor heating is a much more efficient and green option than forced-air heat, which is standard in older homes.

Rebuilding allows for easy integration of green features. That can lead to the house being certified as a green home through such national programs as Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED).

This program looks at water efficiency, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, energy and atmosphere and sustainable sites. Since

green homes use building materials that strive to be toxin-free, there will be fewer issues with internal environmental air quality, including mold and mildew, which can be a problem in older homes with ventilation issues.

"Not only is a green-built home healthier and more efficient," explains Blu Homes CEO Bill Haney, "it usually means monthly bills will be significantly smaller." On average, the annual utility costs for a home built 50 years ago at 2,500 square feet is \$5,176. Compare

that with a new green home, whose operation costs average \$3,383—and that's before additions like solar. On average, new homes save 3,449 KWH per year as compared to old homes.

- Finally, there's also the cost of maintenance to consider when it comes to an older home. On average, a 50-year-old home—and 29 percent of U.S. homes are 40 to 70 years old—of 2,500 square feet costs \$19,000 in maintenance per year, whereas newly built homes require no maintenance

and even offer extended warranties.

Once the decision to rebuild is made, the next question is often where to find a builder. For many, the answer is Blu Homes, because of its quality design, fixed price, green features and quick build time. All the company's homes come out of the factory LEED Silver certifiable and with additions such as solar, can be upgraded to LEED Gold, Platinum or Net Zero status.

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