

Giving your home a quick fix-up without spending a fortune

If you've recently purchased a home and think it needs some fixing up here and there, but don't want to spend a king's ransom, there are plenty of relatively simple, cost-effective things you can do to give your new digs a boost and create more pleasant surroundings.

You may find, for instance, the asphalt or concrete driveway you've acquired with your home is in a sad state of repair or that your aluminum siding looks a little dull and dingy. And what are you going to do about that ancient door which hides the view of that striking, hand-carved front door?

With just a little ingenuity and perseverance, you'll discover that you can probably work

wonders even on a relatively tight budget — depending of course — how much actually needs to be done.

However, before you decide to tackle any projects, be realistic. If you need major work done (like replacing a foundation footing), obviously a little patching here or there isn't going to be terribly effective. Unless it's an emergency — it may be better to wait until you have the funds to have the job done properly by professionals.

On the other hand, there are many things you can do yourself, or hire someone to do for a reasonable cost. For instance, if your chimney looks like it's in rough shape, you can have it

re-pointed instead of replacing it altogether.

If you have aluminum siding that looks like it's seen better days, don't automatically assume you have to replace it; you can have it power washed by professional cleaners. You may want to try cleaning it yourself with the proper cleansers. (Check with your local hardware or building supply store to see what products they recommend for this task.)

Minor cracks in your driveway, sidewalk or outer foundation walls can be remedied with the appropriate patching compound. (However, consult an expert for anything that appears to be the least bit serious.) You can also buy special sealants for your driveway to give it a new, glossy sheen. Again, it's important to check with your local building supply or hardware store to see what's recommended.

If your storm doors are in bad shape, you should definitely consider replacing them. While this may seem expensive, there are many energy-efficient choices to choose from and these will help enhance the overall look of your home, while helping to save money on your heating bills at the same time.

The same logic applies to windows — but you may want to do one or two windows at a time — depending on your budget. It's a good idea to choose vinyl-clad or aluminum replacements so you don't have to worry about painting them. If your budget doesn't permit this, consider the magnetic storm windows that you attach from the inside of your home.

And keep in mind that lawns can be coaxed back into shape with a little grooming, fertilizer

and grass seed. You may even want to put in some replacement strips of sod. Landscaping can be greatly enhanced with the addition of just a few properly positioned bushes and plants — or the pruning or removal of some ungainly ones. When planting new trees, keep future growth potential in mind; you don't want large roots to close to your foundation.

A new mailbox and new outdoor light fixtures can also do wonders to spruce up your home, along with a handsome doorknocker.

A great deal can also be done to the inside of your home to give it a quick fix-up. A fresh coat of paint or wallpaper can work wonders. If, for example, your kitchen has dingy, outdated cupboards, you can give them a quick coat of melamine paint to provide a durable, yet attractive finish until you're in a financial position to replace them altogether.

Outdated linoleum flooring can be replaced with new resilient floor tiles. You can buy these in a box and affix them to your existing floor. (However, when doing this, make sure you carefully read and follow the manufacturer's directions.)

If your bathtub is a mess, consider having it reglazed instead of replacing it altogether. This process, when applied by professionals, can add years of life to your tub at a fraction of the cost of installing a brand new one.

New sinks and toilets can usually be replaced at a reasonable cost.

You may also want to consider replacing your faucets if they are particularly old, stained, encrusted with mildew or scratched. You may want to tackle this job yourself, but if you have any qualms, it's best to hire a professional.

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