

# HOME PROJECTS

## Worth Every Penny

13 DIY refreshes and renovations that smarten up your house.

BY CHERYL LOCK



**TARGET ZONE**  
**SIDING**

A newly vibrant exterior is like a facelift for your home.

**Affordable Refresh**  
**A POWER WASH**

Any type of facade can use an annual scrub-down to remove grime and mildew—you may just rediscover that great color you fell in love with when you bought the place! Rent a power washing machine at the hardware store for as little as \$75 a day to do it yourself, or bring in a professional for \$150 to \$250 a day for the job.

**Smart Reno**  
**REPLACE IT**

If your siding is severely broken or rotting, consider investing in versatile vinyl. It's super-durable, generally cheaper than brick or stone and quick to install, which means lower labor costs. You'll pay \$200 to \$700 for 100 square feet, plus \$1,000 or more to remove and dispose of existing siding.

**Affordable Refresh**

**UPDATE PAINT & HARDWARE**

Just need a spruce-up? After sanding, apply a fresh coat or two of exterior paint, then finish it with weather-resistant spar urethane, like Minwax (\$20 per quart; at hardware stores). Or swap in a new handleset (starting at \$100; at hardware stores) to instantly change the overall look.

**Smart Reno**

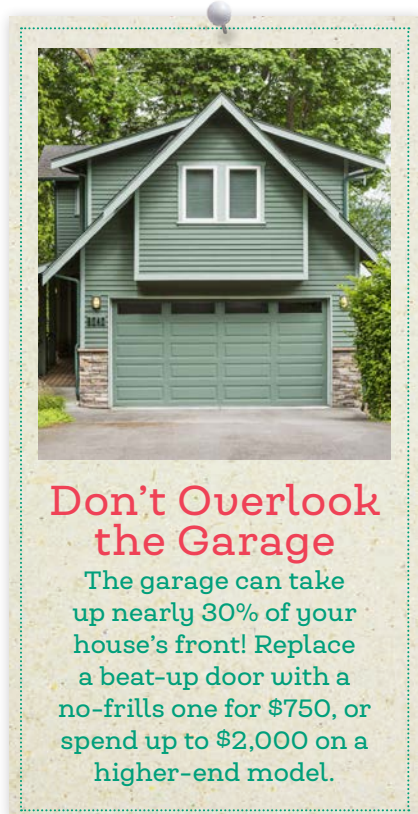
**INSTALL A NEW DOOR**

If the door is damaged beyond repair, it's time for a new one. Fiberglass is an affordable and durable alternative to wood and metal. For added savings, buy an unfinished style from stores like The Home Depot and Lowe's for around \$200, then stain or paint it yourself. Remember to budget another \$200-plus for the frame, if necessary, and an additional \$40 or so for hinges, if they're not included. Installation, which can be tricky for the average DIYer, can also run you between \$250 and \$500.



**TARGET ZONE**  
**FRONT DOOR**

Fix up an aging front door to make a great first impression.



**Don't Overlook the Garage**

The garage can take up nearly 30% of your house's front! Replace a beat-up door with a no-frills one for \$750, or spend up to \$2,000 on a higher-end model.



**TARGET ZONE**  
**WINDOWS**

Enjoy the sunshine—and lower your energy bills at the same time.

**Affordable Refresh**

**FIX UP FRAMES**

If your windows are in decent shape and still water- and air-tight, rehabbing the surface will keep them working longer. Use liquid epoxy (about \$33 at hardware stores) to fix wood that's beginning to rot, or fill small cracks in vinyl with caulk for about \$6. Then sand and repaint the frames to make them look like new.

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**REPLACE THE WINDOWS**

Buy new frames if you have heavy rotting, cracked glass or damaged sashes. Replacing a few first-story windows could be a DIY job, but if you plan to work on more than four windows, ones on higher floors or bigger bay windows, hire a pro. Expect to pay \$150 to \$250 for each installation, plus the cost of replacement windows. Basic single-pane vinyl styles start at \$90 at big-box stores. Energy Star-qualified ones can cost more (from \$130 depending on size) but will save you an estimated \$126 to \$465 per year on energy costs, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.



American Craftsman 70 Series Pro Double Hung White Vinyl Window with Buck Frame and Grilles, \$166; homedepot.com.



**TARGET ZONE**  
**COUNTERS**

Revamp scratched surfaces to get your kitchen gleaming.

**Affordable Refresh**  
**FILL IN NICKS**

Cover up dings in laminate counters with laminate repair paste for around \$5. Layers of epoxy resin (around \$30) can fill in tiny cracks and scratches in granite, and you may be able

to lift oil, ink and wine stains with a homemade paste of flour and hydrogen peroxide. For trickier stains, try the Weiman Granite & Stone Complete Care Kit (\$29.99; [bedbathandbeyond.com](http://bedbathandbeyond.com)).

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**SWAP IN NEW SURFACES**

The price of countertop can vary—from \$40 to \$100 per square foot for engineered stone, \$55 to \$80 per square foot for quartz and \$35 to \$100 or more per square foot for marble—so shop in person to find the right balance of looks and budget. If your heart is set on pricier material, look for gently used countertops on community sites, find closeout deals or mix and match. Install the more expensive slab on the island to create a focal point, then use a less expensive material everywhere else.

**TARGET ZONE**  
**EXTERIOR LIGHTS**

Highlight your architecture—and scare away burglars—with targeted lighting.

**Affordable Refresh**

**POP IN NEW FIXTURES**

If you already have a working ceiling mount, just swap in a new front light for as little as \$30. Next, line the walk to your front door and the driveway with standard solar LED path lights. They're affordable and don't require an electrician for installation. You'll only need to replace the batteries from time to time.

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**UPLIGHT YOUR HOME**

Once you have spotlights illuminating your entryways, walkways and driveway, try adding uplighting to your property. At about \$30 to \$40 each, these lights are positioned on the ground and point toward the exterior of your home to draw attention to key landscaping or architectural features, like a flowering tree or picture window. To save on costs, buy all the fixtures and bulbs yourself and supply them for your electrician, who'll charge at least \$500 to \$600 for the job.



Winsome House Classical Solar 1 Light Pathway Light, \$37.99 for set of 2; [wayfair.com](http://wayfair.com).

**TARGET ZONE**  
**FLOORING**

Rejuvenating this hardworking surface will improve the look of the entire room.

**Affordable Refresh**

**REFINISH FLOORS**

Revive hardwood floors by getting a professional buffing (about

\$2 to \$3 per square foot) to clean and polish the surface. If your stain has changed color or is outdated, you may want to sand and restain the floors—about \$3 to \$8 per square foot when done by a professional.

**Smart Reno**

**INSTALL NEW FLOORS**

If your carpeted or laminate floors are in poor shape, it may be time to replace them, a project that can cost \$2 to \$25 per square foot, depending on the material you use. To cut costs, consider tackling only the most visible areas first, like the entryway and living room, and moving on to other rooms later. You can also remove carpeting yourself (it'll save you \$1 to \$5 per square foot on the project) and look at overstock stores to find deals on your materials.

SOURCES: Kermit Baker, program director at Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies. Josh Downing, general contractor, expert for [thumbtack.com](http://thumbtack.com). Natalie Cary, hard surfaces category manager, Shaw Floors. Dennis Fox, Renaissance Painting & Contracting. Chris Polychron, National Association of Realtors past president. Joni Rocco, National Wood Flooring Association member, owner Artistic Floors by Design, Inc. Sabine H. Schoenberg, home improvement expert, real estate developer of Sabine's New House.