5 New Year's Resolutions for Your Home

Every year when January rolls around you vow to lose weight, save money or spend more time with family and friends. But what goals do you set for your home?

By Melinda Fulmer

In the spirit of new beginnings, HGTV has consulted the experts and come up with some resolutions that will make your home a more beautiful, efficient, clean and green place in the coming year.

Here are our five picks for the best home improvement resolutions for 2011 and how to achieve them:

1. Streamline the stuff

One of the best and least expensive ways to feel better about your home is to clear it of clutter.

Each year most of us acquire a mountain of stuff. Without some regular purging, cabinets and drawers get jam-packed and it becomes hard to find the things you use and enjoy the most. (All that clutter also makes your house look dated and dirty, designers say.)

This year resolve to go room-by-room periodically clearing anything that you don't use, wear or love and donate it to charity. After that, think twice about what you bring in, says Antoinette Nue, an Atlanta consultant who specializes in helping people simplify and go green.

"Fill your home with the things that raise your energy level and make you feel good, and get rid of the things that drain your energy or are broken," she says.

Stash useful (but not beautiful) items such as DVDs, remotes and those kicked-off shoes in simple woven baskets. Group similar items together on sleek trays, says Stuart McCormick, a designer with Liz Levin Interiors in Washington D.C.

Clear your counters of everything you don't use on a daily basis. And get ready to breathe a little easier in your own home.

2. Make it safe and sound

Your home may be beautiful, but is it safe? There are a few things that every homeowner should do to ensure that they're not living with a potential health hazard or fire risk.

First, check your house for radon. This colorless, odorless gas causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year from the radioactive particles it traps in your lungs as you breathe, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. One in every fifteen homes has elevated levels. And with test kits costing as little as $20 at your local hardware store, there's no reason not to get right on that.

While we're on the subject of deadly gas, make sure you install a carbon monoxide detector on every bedroom floor in addition to fire detectors. If a chimney flue or furnace vent gets blocked or leaks, carbon monoxide...
could back up in your house and kill you. Like a radon test, this is a small investment — $40 or more — for such an important safeguard.

Watch out for dryer lint. We know you clean the little trap inside the door, but most people neglect to clean the vents and ducts behind the dryer. Lint may seem innocent, but it's highly combustible, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, accounting for more than 15,000 building fires a year.

Make sure your house can breathe. Hickory Hills, Ill. home inspector Jack McGraw is always surprised at how many people's bathrooms and attics aren't vented to the outside (or the vents are covered over with shingles.) This makes you a prime candidate for mold.

And if you're considering a remodel — and your home was last built or remodeled before 1978 — consider testing for lead paint and asbestos flooring. It will have to handled properly during removal, or particles can be released into the air for you to ingest.

3. Shrink your bills (and your carbon footprint in the process)

When people think of going green, they often think it takes solar panels or a hybrid car to make a difference.

Not so, says Bob Schildgen, who writes the "Hey Mr. Green" column for Sierra magazine. It just takes a little old-fashioned common sense.

The best place to start is by cutting your energy usage in your home:

- Remember your mom's advice and switch off the lights when you leave a room.
- Turn off your air conditioner when you leave the house and dial your heater down to 55 degrees at night.
- Install compact fluorescent bulbs and low-flow showerheads.
- Try drying some of your clothes on the line and wait for the dishwasher or washing machine to be full before you run them.
- Turn off your power strips and/or set your home computer to revert to sleep mode when not in use.
- Water your yard less. Put in drought-tolerant landscaping if necessary.
- Give composting a try. Your garden will thank you.

4. Work out a weekly system for keeping your house clean

Here are a few tips for keeping the mess under control from Jeff Campbell, author of the book Speed Cleaning and owner of the Clean Team housekeeping service in San Francisco.

**Daily:** Dishes go in the dishwasher every night - no excuses! Dirty clothes go in the hamper and jackets or clean clothes are hung in the closet. Bring everything back to its assigned place.

**Weekly:** Clean your entire house, using these tips:

- Keep all of your cleaners, as well as rubber gloves and spare cleaning cloths - in a portable carryall that moves with you from room to room.
- Stash cleaning implements such as a toothbrush, scraper, sponge, a few cleaning cloths and plastic bags in a builder's apron that you wear when you clean. Hook your glass cleaner and all-purpose cleaning spray on the loops to keep your hands free as you work around the room clockwise, cleaning from high (cabinets) to low (floors.)
- Focus on one type of cleaning at a time. It's faster, Campbell says. Wipe down fingerprints on all of the cabinets, for instance, before moving on to spraying and wiping counters. Then move on to windows and mirrors and appliances. Once that's done move on to sweeping and then mopping floors.
For optimum efficiency, enlist the help of your family. If you can, divide the jobs among at least three parties: One of you can do the dusting/vacuuming and changing beds, the other can do the bathroom cleanup, leaving only the kitchen and trash emptying for you to handle. The upside? You can get the whole house done in 45 minutes, Campbell says, leaving more time on the weekends for the park or the movies.

5. Get your place ready for entertaining

Each year most of us vow to spend more time with family and friends. To make you feel like inviting people in, why not give the areas you entertain in a little update?

You don’t have to go for broke here and invest in a new kitchen remodel. All it takes to get a fresh new look is a little bit of rearranging and a few updates says designer McCormick.

One easy update that makes your home seem more “finished” is the addition of plants, she says. “They bring in new energy and help clean the air,” she says. “And it’s a great way to decorate if you’re on a budget.”

A couple of dramatic presentations like a large flowering agapanthus or potted palm in a bright ceramic planter that complements your existing color scheme will do the trick.

Pulling out a new accent color from your existing decor can make the whole room seem fresh. Pick an underused color in the room and add more of it in the form of a new pillow or throw to update your look, McCormick advises. A colorful rug or runner can also help anchor your space.

Lastly, take some time to rearrange your furniture so it is oriented in conversation groups and not just facing the television. That just might up for chances for real conversation and connection in the New Year.