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Home Office Must-Haves

Remote work has been around for many years, though it certainly picked up steam in 2020. In an effort to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, in March 2020 government officials implemented stay-at-home measures that mandated many working professionals to begin working from home. That transition occurred seemingly overnight, forcing men and women to find somewhere in their homes to

As the dust settled and working professionals grew accustomed to working from home, many recognized the need to have an office in their homes. Various factors can make home offices more conducive to getting work done, and the following are some home office must-haves that can help people be more productive while working from

LIGHTING - Lighting is important in a home office. It's easy to overlook natural light, especially for workers who previously worked in offices that did not have windows. But natural light can help save on energy costs and boost mood. In fact, natural light is a valued commodity for people used to working in office settings. A 2018 survey of more by the human resources advisory firm Future Workplace found that access to natural light and views of the outdoors were the most sought after attribute of a workplace environment. In addition, 47 percent of workers surveyed admitted they felt tired or very tired from the absence of natural light or a window at their office. When designing their home offices,

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homeowners should keep this in mind and choose areas of their homes that get ample natural light during a typical work-day. Additional lighting also will be necessary. Recessed lighting can give an office a sleek look, and lights that can dim can allow workers to adjust their lighting based on how much they need at any given point in the workday.

QUIET - Professionals forced to work at home when social distancing measures were implemented may not have had much quiet, especially for those with young children whose schools were closed. But when designing a home office, homeowners have the chance to make their offices more conto concentration. ducive Soundproofing walls may not hut areas of the home that don't get much foot traffic. Kitchens are very popular rooms in many homes, so try to locate your home office away from the kitchen. A spare bedroom upstairs may make for the most ideal home office setting if the home does not have a traditional den. Spare bedrooms come with doors, which can instantly create a sense of quiet when

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closed. A converted garage also can make for a useful home office, but make sure the room already has cooling and heating and, ideally, windows.

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS -Recently built homes tend to be equipped with enough outlets to accommodate our increasingly connected lifestyles. But older homes may need some electri-



cal updates before they can capably accommodate home offices. When updating your electrical, replace existing outlets and fixtures with energyefficient LED fixtures, which save money and benefit the environment. Before updating the electrical, decide on how you want the office to be laid out so you can have outlets installed where your computer, devices and other items, like a printer and television, will be. This makes it easy to hide cords and give the office a clean, professional look.

office capabilities became a big priority in 2020. Designing such spaces can be fun and easy.



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Add A Pop Of Color To Your Garden This Winter

heels of a vibrant, colorful autumn season. Shortly after fall foliage falls to the ground, nature tends to greet us with a considerably less colorful palette. What's more, much of the wildlife and plants that make spring, summer and fall so awe-inspiring tend to hibernate in winter, making it more difficult to find bright spots on

If you think that winter means the end of beautiful garden colors, think again. There are plenty of cool-season flowers and other plants that can add a pop of color to brighten your day. These flowers provide color right when most people need it most. In areas where winter is not marked by a deep freeze, homeowners can plant pansies, snapdragons, English daisies, calendula, and other blooms from early fall through late winter. These plants will survive the cold, keeping containers, borders and gardens full of color. Camellias are a type of flower that bloom in fall and winter in hues of red, pink, coral, white, and more. The coral, white, and more. plants are evergreen and will grow from shrubs or small trees when fully established.

Homeowners who live in cli-mates marked by cold winters can opt for plants that offer color but without flowers such as cabbages and kales, which can survive most cold winters and lend an interesting texture to a winter landscape bed. Of course, no list of winter's colorful plants would be complete eye-catching display of ever-green leaves and bright red berries, though sometimes the berries are golden. Either way, they can be a sight for sore eyes on gray winter days.

For more ideas, visit a local garden center to learn about plants that can add vibrant color to a landscape, even as autumn transitions to winter.



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The Value Of **Mulched Leaves!**

Homeowners who don't look forward to dusting off their rakes each fall might be happy to learn that mulching fallen leaves with a mower may be a healthier and less labor intensive way to confront a yard covered in leaves. For 20 years, turfgrass specialists Michigan State University studied how lawns reacted to having ground up leaves left on the lawn and the results were overwhelmingly positive. Researchers found that tiny pieces of mulched leaves eventually sifted down through the turf and provided the lawn with essential nutrients. Mulched leaves also served to control future weed growth by covering up bare spots between turf plants. Such spots typically provided openings for weed seeds to germinate and ultimately infect lawns. In researchers found that mulching leaves for just three years could produce a nearly 100 percent decrease in dandelion and crabgrass growth. Homeowners with mulching mowers that also have bags can even help their gardens by alternating using the mower with and without the bag on once leaves begin to fall. When



leaves can then be used as mulch in landscape beds and vegetable gardens.

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Get Ahead Of Chimney Repair This Season

Woodburning fireplaces or fuel stoves can add warmth and ambiance to a home. These appliances are particularly coveted in the cooler months when people spend more time indoors. Maintenance is necessary in order for fireplaces and stoves to function safely, and that upkeep must include paying close attention to the functionality of the chimney.

Chimneys are designed to last for decades. Cracks and spalling in brick chimneys are common concerns that can cause significant damage if left unchecked.

Chimney maintenance involves more than cleaning the flue. Rather than running the risk of costly repairs, which can cost



several thousand dollars, homeowners can take some simple steps to keep their chimneys in tip-top shape. Certain components of chimney main tenance are do-it-vourself tasks, while others may be better left to the professionals.

• Start from the inside and

ensure that dampers are working properly. When using fire-places and other appliances, dampers need to be open to allow smoke to vent outside; otherwise, smoke will be trapped in the home and could lead to carbon monoxide buildup. Dampers need to be fixed or replaced if they are not operational. Replacement fireplace dampers should be snug and not have any gaps, states Vertical Chimney Care.

 Conduct a visual inspection of the chimney to check for any cracks or spalling. Spalling is the wearing away of masonry due to water, weather and time. If enough of the material erodes, that erosion can adversely affect the structural integrity of the chimney. Some repairs can be made by patching up cracks or replacing missing bricks. Chimney tuckpointing is the process of repairing

• Think about waterproofing the water sealant applied to the outside of the chimney can prevent moisture from breaking down the masonry.

 Inspect and replace the chim-ney cap if it is worn out. A chimney cap is a contraption that sits atop the chimney to allow the smoke to vent while also preventing critters and water from going inside the flue, helping to extend the flue life. The chimney cap attaches to the flue liner, so outside dimensions should be taken to ensure the cap is the right size for the

chimney. Have the chimney swept. Sweeping helps remove the soot and debris that clings to the inside of the flue, known as creosote. The amount of time the fireplace is used will determine how often the chimney must be cleaned. Generally speaking, the chimney liner needs to be cleaned if it has 1/8-inch or more of soot.

Regular inspection and maintenance can help keep a chimney working safely for decades. For those who do not like working at such an elevation, leave exterior chimney repair to a certified professional.

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Add More Exterior Light To Their Property

realizing the benefits of improving the exteriors of their home, which can be just as valuable as want to spotlight these improvements. Exterior illumination can cast a glow on various features, but there are many other rea-sons to increase lighting around the exterior of a home.

SAFETY: Trips and falls can

Why Homeowners Should

improving the interior spaces. As individuals design picturesque garden beds and lawns, or revamp exteriors, they probably

occur at night when trying to traverse walkways and landscapes in the dark, as it can be difficult to see rocks, stairs and uneven pavement. Outdoor lighting can illuminate pathways, entryways and other areas for safer access for homeowners and their

Homeowners are increasingly

EXTEND OUTDOOR ENTER-TAINING: Ample lighting can increase the amount of time one can use outdoor spaces and make them the perfect gathering spot. As autumn arrives, days become shorter. However, patios, porches and more can get extended use with lighting.

SAFEGUARD SECURITY A well-lit home may be less likely to be targeted by burglars than one swathed in darkness and shadows. Lights can remain on all evening or be motion-trig-gered. Setting lights on timers can also be beneficial.
• CREATE DRAMA: Landscape

lighting designers can establish focal points around the land-scape and highlight the best features of a property. Uplighting in trees, silhouetting techniques to showcase plants and spotlights to show off architectural features are all options for homeowners to consider.

• ADD VALUE: Exterior lighting can add roughly 30 percent to the value of a home. They also indicate that 50 percent of all home buyers say that outdoor lighting is important when buying a home. If current residents are thinking about selling, now may be the time to invest in exterior lighting. Improving a home's exterior may be as simple as adding more lighting to improve functionality and beauty.

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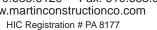
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