

## **New Year's resolutions for your home**

### ***It's time to tackle your to-do list for 2009***

By Jodi Helmer  
*The Times, Jan 8, 2009*

**Forget about losing weight and giving up caffeine. This year, make a New Year's resolution to tackle a few projects around the house. Not sure where to start? Here are a few projects that can improve the value of your home and the quality of your life.**

- **Get a handle on paperwork:** There are receipts covering the kitchen counter, littering the top of the coffee table and spilling out of the pockets of your favorite jacket.

"Paper is the number one issue in our homes," says Sherwood resident Vicki Norris, president of Restoring Order and author of "Restoring Order to Your Home." "We are drowning in paper; it creates a paper trail that runs through the entire house."

Norris suggests creating a set of systems to organize the paper in your home.

The minute paper – from bills and coupons to business cards and invitations – comes into the house, take a few minutes to sort it. Shred sensitive items and recycle junk mail, file important documents and create an action pile for papers that need further attention. Stick to the system and the mountains of paperwork that are currently taking over your home will become much more manageable.

- **Tackle painting projects:** Tired of plain white walls? Ready to cover the chartreuse paint in the bathroom? Looking for a neutral color that will appeal to prospective buyers? In 2009, pick up a roller and start painting.

"Painting is a great home improvement project," says Nancy Resnick, broker with Windermere Cronin and Caplan Realty Group. "It can make your home look more appealing and add value."

To get the best results, take the time to do the prep work prior to picking up a paintbrush. Resnick also recommends taking your time choosing the right color.

"Earth tone colors are really popular; just remember that the paint swatches you see in the store won't look the same on your wall," she says. "Buy the sample packets of paint and put it on the walls to see how it looks in different lights throughout the day before making your final choice."

- **Organize the kitchen:** "The kitchen is the hub of the home – which means it's prone to being a disorganized catchall.

"The kitchen is the most used room in our homes," says Norris. "It's the spot where we store mail, cookbooks, appliances and even tools."

Creating several stations in the kitchen can help keep it organized. Establishing a communication center with the phone, important phone numbers and a place to leave messages is essential. Norris also recommends creating a household reference binder – a single spot for coupons, takeout menus, gift certificates and soccer schedules – and storing it in the communication center.

“We have organized entire kitchens for clients and the one thing they’re most excited about is the household reference binder,” Norris says. “It’s a life-saver.”

- Hire a cleaning service: You’ve been talking about it forever – hiring someone to corral the dust bunnies, scour the sinks and scrub the floors. This year, make the call. A cleaning service can be a worthwhile investment, especially if you’re thinking of selling your home.

“Buyers notice details like cleanliness; a buyer can walk into a great house but if it looks dirty, it won’t appeal to them,” says Resnick. “A cleaning service can help you maintain your home which may make it more attractive to buyers.”

Coming home to a clean house will also free up extra time to tackle other household projects and spend more time with your family.

- Landscape the yard: It’s time to pull the dandelions from the flowerbeds and trim the hedges. Landscaping gives your home an instant facelift.

“The first thing that someone notices about your home is its curb appeal,” she says. “Well-maintained landscaping can entice a buyer to call their Realtor or keep driving to the next listing.”

Even if you’re not planning to sell your home in 2009, landscaping is still a worthwhile project. It demonstrates pride of ownership, creates an outdoor living space and can even help maintain your home.

It doesn’t have to take a lot of work either. A few simple projects can make a big difference, according to Resnick.

Get rid of dead plants, trim the hedges and replace broken or missing pavers. Consider planting new trees and shrubs or expanding the flowerbeds if the landscaping is sparse. Remove plants that are growing on the house because the moisture might cause dry rot and keep gutters and downspouts free of debris so water can’t accumulate and cause leaks.

“Even if you’re planning to do all of the work yourself, it can be a good idea to hire a landscape consultant to provide some ideas on improving your curb appeal,” says Resnick. “The consultation fees are reasonable and the advice is invaluable.”