



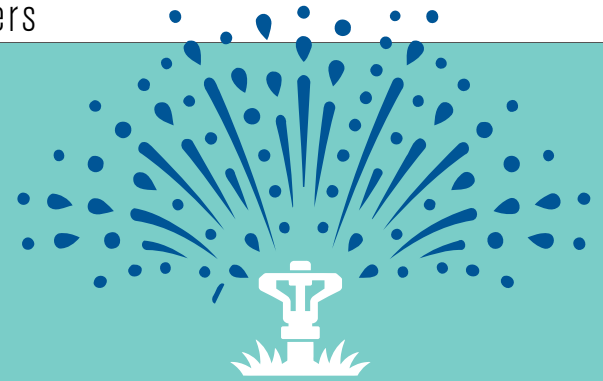
Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

## Create a Homework Zone That Makes School Days Easier

Back-to-school season can feel hectic, but a dedicated homework zone can bring order to the afternoon rush. The space does not need to be large or expensive. A quiet corner or section of the kitchen can work well when it is set up with focus and organization.

- ❶ **Choose a practical location.**  
Look for a spot with lighting, a comfortable seat and fewer distractions.
- ❷ **Keep supplies within reach.**  
Store pencils, paper, scissors and chargers in labeled cups, drawers or a rolling cart.
- ❸ **Make room for technology.**  
Provide an accessible outlet and a safe place to charge devices without work surface.
- ❹ **Add a simple paper system.**  
Use folders or wall files for assignments, permission slips and completed work.
- ❺ **Personalize the space.** Let your child choose colors, photos or desk accessories so the area feels welcoming.

Adjust the setup as school needs change. Younger children may need room for crafts, while older students may need better task lighting or more device storage. A well-planned homework zone helps reduce clutter, supports good routines and makes it easier for everyone to shift into school mode.



## Keep Your Yard Healthy Without Wasting Water

Late-summer heat can leave lawns and gardens looking tired, but watering more is not always the answer. A few smart adjustments can help plants stay healthy while reducing runoff, evaporation and unnecessary water use.

Use this late-summer watering checklist:

- ▶ Water in the early morning when temperatures are cooler and winds are usually lighter
- ▶ Check the soil before turning on sprinklers since recent rain may have provided enough moisture
- ▶ Water deeply rather than briefly so moisture reaches plant roots
- ▶ Aim sprinklers at grass and garden beds, not sidewalks or driveways
- ▶ Inspect hoses, sprinkler heads and irrigation lines for leaks
- ▶ Add mulch around plants to help the soil hold moisture longer

Most established landscapes do better with less frequent, deeper watering than with a light daily spray. Plant type, soil and local weather all affect how much water your yard needs, so watch for signs of stress instead of relying only on a fixed schedule.

August is also a good time to adjust automatic irrigation settings as daylight and weather begin to shift. Paying attention now can protect your landscaping, lower your water bill and help conserve an important resource without sacrificing a healthy-looking yard.

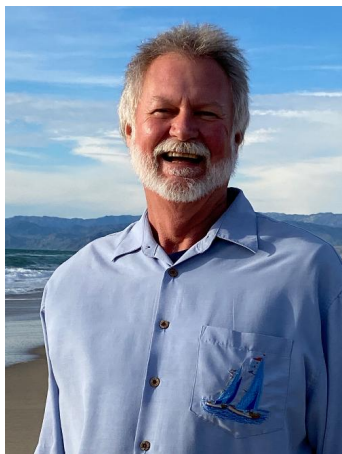


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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

## Hiring a Contractor? Watch for These Red Flags

A home project can be exciting, but choosing the wrong contractor can lead to delays, poor work or unexpected costs. Before signing an agreement, confirm the person is qualified for the job.

**Q: Is an unexpected door-to-door offer a problem?**

Be cautious when someone claims to be “in the area” or has leftover materials from another project. A reputable contractor should give you time to research the company.

**Q: What payment requests should raise concern?**

Be wary of anyone demanding full payment up front, insisting on cash or pressuring you to use a lender they recommend. A payment schedule tied to project milestones offers more protection.

**Q: What paperwork should a contractor provide?**

Ask for proof of licensing and insurance when required locally. You should also receive a detailed estimate and contract explaining the work, materials, cost and timeline.

**Q: Who should handle permits?**

The contractor usually handles permits for work that requires them. A request that you pull permits yourself may shift responsibility to you.

**TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.**  
Compare estimates, check references and never let urgency replace careful review. A trustworthy professional will welcome questions and put important details in writing.

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