



## Kids' Krafts

Children can hone their racing skills with a stick horse they can make at home.

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Take Note: Vet to open low-cost clinic for pets in North Canton. Conservation group seeks America's biggest trees. E2

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Terry Murray, a carpenter with American Wood Reface of Copley, works on refacing kitchen cabinetry in Granger Township.



# HOME FIX-UPS FOR THRIFTY FOLK

Resurfacing cabinets is a cheaper alternative that can save money and modernize kitchen

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We've been pinching our pennies so much that Abe is complaining of bruises.

In this sluggish economy, it's tough to come up with the cash for home fix-ups. Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies predicted in July that spending on home improvements would continue its downward trend into early 2010, with each of the next several quarters showing a decline of around 11 percent over the course of the year ending with that quarter.

Yet maintaining the value of our homes is a money-smart move in the long run.



Carpenter Terry Murray uses a sander as he works on refacing kitchen cabinets.

So we've searched out a few cheaper alternatives for big-ticket home improvements. They're projects that will give your home an aesthetic boost for less money than traditional methods.

That way, you'll still have pennies left to pinch.

### Reface cabinets

New cabinets can gobble up a big part of the budget for a kitchen remodeling. But if your existing cabinets are in decent shape and you're happy with the room's layout, refacing the cabinets can give you an updated look at a lower cost.

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# Home

## Paint cabinets, replace hinges to save money

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Refacing cabinets typically involves replacing the doors and sheathing the cabinet boxes with a material such as plastic laminate, wood veneer or solid wood. While you can't change the basic layout of the cabinets, a contractor can make some modifications such as adding or removing cupboards or shortening the cabinet above a stove to accommodate a microwave oven, said Jason Hicks, president of American Wood Reface in Copley Township.

The quality of materials used in refacing varies, but Hicks' company refaces with quarter-inch-thick solid wood applied with adhesive and nails.

Hicks said the cost of his refacing is about half that of installing new cabinets. A typical kitchen with 30 drawers and door fronts costs around \$7,500, he said.

Bathroom vanities and other cabinets can be refaced, too.

The work takes about a week, Hicks said. The homeowner needs to empty the cabinets first, because the work generates some dust.

Most cabinets are good candidates for refacing, he said, especially cabinets in older homes that were built on site. Some poorly made cabinets may not be worth refacing, but "that's pretty rare," he said.

An even cheaper alternative is painting the cabinets and replacing cabinet pulls and hinges, noted Tom Winemiller, president of Hoffman's Ace Hardware, which has stores in Norton, Coventry Township and the Ellet area of Akron. Or just rejuvenate natural wood cabinets with a product that revives the finish without stripping and varnishing, he suggested. Winemiller recommended Howard Products' Restor-A-Finish; another brand is Formby's Furniture Face Lift.

### Make over a deck

Decks don't always age well. Over time, wood can warp, split or otherwise deteriorate.

However, the supporting structure of the deck may still be sound. In that case, it's possible to replace just the flooring and railings and give the deck new

## Cut project cost by being helper

Here's a clever way to cut costs on a professional home-improvement project: Ask whether the contractor will hire you as a helper or laborer.

David Beam of Midwest Building Contractors in Broadview Heights has used that tactic on a few projects. Beam said the arrangement benefits the homeowner by reducing the cost of the work, and it benefits the contractor because he or she doesn't have to hire a laborer, especially for a smaller job that might not be worth a full day's pay.

He assigns the homeowners unskilled tasks such as demolition, painting, cleanup and moving

materials. Projects that required special skills, such as electrical work or plumbing, wouldn't be appropriate for that kind of arrangement, although Beam said he once allowed a homeowner to help with the framing work in a basement remodeling because the man wanted to learn.

The homeowner generally needs to be available during the day, he noted.

Construction companies that are open to hiring homeowners typically are smaller operations, he said. When you're looking to hire a contractor, just ask whether such an arrangement is possible, he suggested.

life at less cost than rebuilding.

Having a contractor spruce up an existing deck will save as much as 30 percent over the cost of having an entire new deck built, according to estimates from Trex Co., which makes decking materials made from recycled plastic and waste wood. Do the work yourself, and the savings could be twice that, the company says.

Trex recommends inspecting the deck to make sure it's structurally sound and meets local building codes. Then remove the old decking and railing, leaving the framework intact, and replace with new boards.

If you wish, you can upgrade from pressure-treated wood to a composite product or a higher quality, rot-resistant lumber such as cedar, redwood or an exotic wood like ipe, but expect to pay more. On Home Depot's Web site, for example, a 16-foot, pressure-treated board costs \$12.47; the same length of Trex Accents decking is \$39.97.

### Glamorize your entry

Now may not be the time for adding a front porch or portico, but you can still spiff up your front entry to add to your home's curb appeal and welcome guests in style.

Architectural accents made of lightweight molded materials make it surprisingly easy for a do-it-yourselfer to enhance a home's exterior, said Kathy Ziprik, a spokesperson for Fypon, an Arbold company that makes decorative millwork

elements of urethane. Those accents aren't necessarily cheaper than traditional millwork, she said, but you'll save on labor costs.

You'll also save both money and time on long-term maintenance, she noted. The products are weather- and bug-resistant, and they won't rot or warp.

The products are typically installed with an adhesive and fasteners such as nails, screws or masonry fasteners. Flanking your front door with pilasters and topping it with a pediment might cost you in the neighborhood of \$900 to \$1,000, depending on the styles you choose.

You can also find column wraps to cover plain porch posts, although at prices ranging from about \$23 to \$87, they're not an inexpensive purchase. Products are available for indoor use as well, including moldings and ceiling medallions.

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