



Maintaining the Home:

***Update Your Home
for a Lifetime of
Living***

Maintaining the Home: Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living

Where do you want to live when you retire? Many older Americans decide to stay in their current home for as long as possible and many are beginning to make changes to achieve this goal. Any home is ready for a lifetime of living if it is easy to visit, easy to live in and easy on the budget. If your house is not all of these things, develop a long-range plan to make necessary improvements as time and resources permit.

Easy to visit

The easy visiting home is a welcoming place for family members, friends and relatives. It will be easy to entertain overnight guests – even those who use wheelchairs – if your home has a no-step entrance, a bedroom or sleeping area and a full-sized bathroom on the main level.

No-step entrance

A home with a no-step entrance makes it easy to carry groceries, move furniture or push a baby stroller through the doorway. There are many attractive ways to create a no-step entrance without building a ramp.

Bedroom or sleeping area on main level

A bedroom or sleeping area on the main level is convenient for guests who are not able to climb stairs. It also is a good place for family members to recuperate following an injury or illness. If you do not have a bedroom on the main level, consider how an office or family room may double as a guest bedroom with the use of a sofa

bed.

Full-sized bathroom on main level

A full-sized bathroom on the main level will work for guests who use walkers or wheelchairs. At a minimum, guests will need a five-foot circle of open floor space for maneuvering a wheelchair between bathroom fixtures (see Figure 1). A shower stall will be more convenient than a tub for many guests. Make sure the bathroom door is at least 32 inches wide (preferably 36 inches).

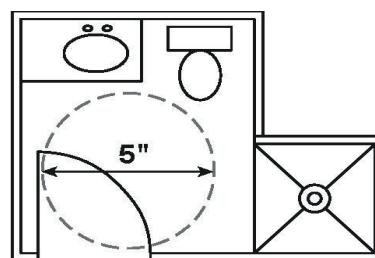


Figure 1. Bath with five-foot circle of open floor space between fixtures.

Easy to live in

Because many people spend more time at home after retirement, the convenience and comfort of their home environment becomes more important. To ensure easy living, keep these points in mind: plan space for activities, update for safety and security and add features for convenience and comfort.

Space for activities

Plan activity areas that make it easy to enjoy

hobbies in pleasant surroundings. It is not much fun to spend long hours working in a dark basement. Add extra windows to provide more sunlight and better views if someone spends lots of time indoors.

Consider if a family room and a separate living room is needed. Perhaps one could be put to better use as a light-filled space for sewing or painting. Try converting an extra bedroom into a high-tech work room with space for the latest in computer technology, plus room to store all the family photos or other collections.

Be sure to include shelving or storage units designed to hold supplies and equipment. Invest in file cabinets to make it easier to find important papers, rather than stacking them in boxes or drawers.

Safety and security

Have heating system and other fuel-burning appliances serviced yearly by a qualified service technician. If these appliances are not operating properly, carbon monoxide (CO), a deadly, odorless and colorless gas, may be produced. Install at least one carbon monoxide detector near sleeping areas. Also install smoke detectors on each floor of the home, especially near bedrooms. Do not forget to place a fire extinguisher in an easy-to-reach location in the kitchen.

If you live in an older home, have a qualified electrician check the electrical system. You may need to add circuits or upgrade the entire system to handle growing demands for electricity. Do this sooner, rather than later, if lights frequently dim when your refrigerator kicks into action or if a circuit breaker trips when you turn on several appliances at the same time. This also would be a good time to think about adding communication systems or central controls for lighting and appliances throughout the house.

Think about ways to change your home to

prevent falls in the future. Falls continue to be the major reason for injury related death, or hospital admission for older adults. Add lighting, especially near steps. Add handrails on both sides of each stairway. Install anti-scald faucet controls in the bathroom. Replace towel bars with colorful grab bars to match the decor of your home.

For security, install motion-detector lighting on the outside of the home. A security system may be needed if you live in a remote location or if you will be away from your home for long periods of time.

Convenience and comfort

Upgrade your home with universal design features to make it more convenient for everyone. Some possibilities include widening all doors to at least 32 inches, replacing round door knobs with lever handles, creating a seated work area in the kitchen, converting to single lever faucets at sinks, replacing shower heads with hand-held shower units on a slide bar and adding adjustable shelves for easy-to-reach storage.

If your washer and dryer are in the basement, relocate them to the main level when it is time to replace them. A stacked washer-dryer unit does not take up much space and could be placed in the corner of the bathroom, kitchen or hall closet.

A garage that has a sheltered connection to the house is good if you live where there are cold winters. Figure 2 shows an attractive way to add a new garage to an existing home.



Maintaining the Home: Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living

Figure 2. Before (above top) – Many older homes were built without a garage. After (directly above) – An attached garage was added to update this home for retirement. Note that doors, windows and rooflines of the new addition echo the original character of the home.

Make the new garage spacious enough to accommodate today's larger vehicles. Allow generous walkways around vehicles, plus room to store lawn and garden equipment. If steps are required to go from the garage to the main level of the home, plan for enough space inside the garage for a ramp addition in the future.

Plan space for a future master bedroom on the main floor, if there is not already one. Convert an existing room for this purpose or build an addition. A master bedroom needs to be larger than a typical guest bedroom. Provide pathways at least three feet wide on each side of the bed, plus room to accommodate other furniture. You may be surprised how much space this takes when you upgrade to a queen or king-sized bed, along with a recliner, a larger dresser and other furniture.

Be sure the new bedroom would be adjacent to a full-sized bathroom and have a walk-in closet or convenient storage for hanging clothes. There should be plenty of large windows – low enough to see out – if anyone would ever need to spend a long time in bed because of a serious illness. Casement windows are easier to open than traditional double-hung windows.

Easy on the budget

Energy prices continue to rise. Put a high priority on making energy conservation improvements that will save money now and into the future.

Schedule a home energy audit to find out where you have energy leaks. Many utility companies and some local businesses provide free audits. An energy audit starts with the basics: Is there enough insulation in the attic, walls and basement

areas of your home? Are there cracks and leaks that need to be caulked and weather-stripped? Many homeowners can make these improvements themselves.

Look for the Energy Star® label when it is time to update your heating and cooling systems and other major appliances. Programmable thermostats are a part of the Energy Star® program, as are water heaters, refrigerators, freezers, dish-washers and clothes washers. The Energy Star® label indicates high-performance products that exceed federal efficiency standards.

Replace old, leaky windows with new high-efficiency models. If there is a large amount of window area on the north side of your home, consider adding triple-pane windows to increase comfort, as well as reduce energy costs.

You also may want to add more windows or enlarge the windows you already have on the south side of your home to provide free solar energy. If you are considering a new addition on your home, try to orient it to the south. South-facing windows not only save energy, but are comfortable and inviting on a sunny winter day.

This material was adapted from publications produced by Iowa State University. Iowa Cooperative Extension publications can be found on the Web at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/>.

Maintaining the Home: Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

Interior Maintenance

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup
Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

Heating

Furnace Care
Fireplace and Chimney Care

Cooling

Evaporative Cooler
Air Conditioner
Ceiling Fans

Plumbing

Fixing Plugged Sink Drains
How to Unclog a Toilet
Repairing Dripping Faucets

Electrical

How to Set or Reset a Circuit Breaker
How to Replace a Fuse

Appliances

How to Buy an Energy Efficient Home Appliance
Choosing a Water Heater

Maintenance:

Dishwasher Care and Dishwasher Cleaning
Dryer Care and Dryer Cleaning
Freezer Care and Freezer Cleaning
Garbage Disposal Care and Cleaning
Range and Oven Care and Range Cleaning
Refrigerator Care and Refrigerator Cleaning
Small Electrical Appliance Care and Cleaning
Washer Care and Cleaning

Flooring

Buying new carpet
Carpet Care and Cleaning
Wood Floors Care and Cleaning
Ceramic Tile Floors Care and Cleaning
Vinyl Floor Coverings Care and Cleaning

Walls

Selecting and Applying Paint
Wallpaper Selection and Cleaning
Repairing Walls

Furniture

Furnishing Your New Home: Color and Design
Selecting Fabric For Home Furnishings

Exterior Maintenance

Home Exterior

Foundations, Basements and Yards
Exterior Walls, Windows, and Doors

Roof

A Guide To Roofs
Roof Maintenance

Landscaping and Lawn Care

Principles of Xeriscape
Watering Your Lawn

Home Safety

Child-Proofing Your Home
Is Your Home Safe From Fire Hazards?
Smoke Alarms Save Lives
Carbon Monoxide Alarms
Are Your Children Safe From Poisons?
Protecting Yourself Against Burglary

Conservation

Weatherize Your Home
Easy Tips to Save Money and the Planet
How to Stop Air Leaks Around Windows
Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling
Indoor Water Conservation Tips
Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

Environment Issues

Green Building
Reduce-Reuse-Recycle: Alternatives for Waste Management
Create a home recycling center
Healthy Indoor Air for New Mexico Homes
Dealing with Mold
Household Hazardous Waste
Hazardous Household Substances: Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects
Radon

Pest Control

Cockroaches and Their Control
Southwest Insects

Accessible Living

Update your home for a lifetime of living
Vision Loss & Hearing Loss
Hand Dexterity, Strength and Range of Motion
Cognitive Difficulties
Mobility Impairments, Balance and Coordination

Sponsored by New Mexico State University and the City of Las Cruces. Supported by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator. NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. © 2005 NMSU Board of Regents. All rights reserved.



Maintaining the Home: Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living