

Stretching Decorating Dollars

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Consumer Series | Housing

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High housing and furnishing costs can place budget constraints on renters or first-time home buyers, as well as on established families. In many cases, most of the housing portion of the budget goes toward rent or mortgage payments and very little remains for furnishings.

Through new materials and designs, decorators and manufacturers have made furnishings more affordable. Plastic, fiberboard and laminates are inexpensive materials used in place of solid woods. Multi-use pieces cut down on the number of pieces needed and make attractive and functional furnishings available at a reasonable cost. Consumers can further reduce home-furnishing costs by finding creative uses for old items and by developing the skills necessary to refurbish their present furnishings.

A Home-Decorating Plan

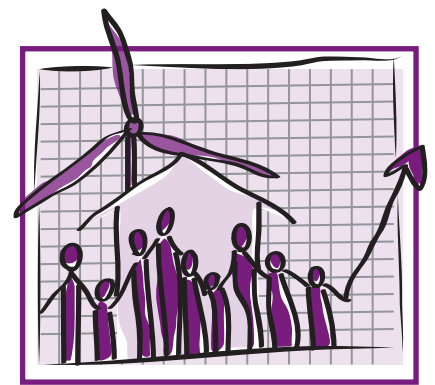
When you set up housekeeping for the first time, it is important to make a home-decorating plan. Spending an entire budget on one nice piece of furniture makes it impossible to afford anything else. It leaves the decorating plan incomplete and the living space sparsely furnished. If you are on a limited budget, select inexpensive, low-quality furnishings for starter pieces. These temporary pieces probably will be replaced eventually with better, more lasting choices. Low-quality pieces are easier to discard when the time comes. Also, tastes change. The design and color you choose at first may not be what you want in five years. Purchase better pieces later and you'll get the type of furnishings that you'll enjoy for many years. One exception is your mattress. A good mattress will last for many years and is essential for a good night's sleep.

The decorating plan for a new household does not need to include all the furnishings contained in a well-established household. Many pieces are not essential and can be purchased later as more money becomes available.

Basic Guidelines

Decorating within a budget involves planning, creativity, do-it-yourself skills, and a spirit of adventure. Follow these guidelines to create an attractively furnished home at minimum cost:

- Develop your sense of creativity and imagination by becoming more aware of your surroundings. Train your eye to see creative uses for ordinary objects.
- Collect ideas. Jot down things you see. Clip ideas from magazines and other sources. Watch design shows on television. The ideas you find may spark inspiration. You may decide that a foyer treatment is a good idea for a den. An idea copied exactly is rarely successful. Instead, adapt it to your own situation.
- Express your own taste. Make your home reflect your personality and the way you like to live.
- Try to visualize how the design or treatment will look in your home. Working with large samples of colors and fabrics can help.
- Be courageous. Break away from tradition and try something new. Many imaginative decorating ideas begin with the need to save money.
- Develop do-it-yourself skills. The more decorating tasks you can do yourself, the less expensive your projects will be. Many projects do not require special talents, but it may be helpful to have an experienced person available for major construction tasks.
- Learn to recognize bargains. Be on the lookout for sale items, and follow your decorating plan so you don't buy things you don't need.



Quick Facts

- High housing and furnishing costs leaves little for home decorating.
- Decorating on a budget involves planning, creativity, do-it-yourself skills and a spirit of adventure.
- Before beginning a decorating plan, review basic design principles to ensure an attractive end result.
- Many low-cost decorating ideas can be produced with only a few materials and a little time. Always look for new ideas, and put your imagination to work.

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- Make the useful decorative and the decorative useful. By combining function and aesthetics, fewer items are necessary.

Where to Start

- Decide what overall feeling or atmosphere you want for a room. Traditional or modern? Cozy or light and airy? Bright and flashy or calm and subdued? The atmosphere you create affects how people feel and function.
- When redecorating a home, look over your present situation. Go through your home, room by room, and take notes. Does the living room look too dark and dreary? Are the walls in the bedroom too bare? Do those dining room draperies need replacing? Many problems may be remedied with a simple facelift, such as a new coat of paint, new handles, cleaning or refinishing. Sometimes the smallest changes do wonders.
- Before you dive into projects, review a few basic design principles. Rules for decorating are not as strict today as they once were. People combine old and new, mix styles together, and don't follow strict color schemes. But no matter how imaginative your idea is or how much money you spend on it, the end result will be disappointing if you don't follow basic principles.
- Backgrounds (walls, ceilings, floors). Background colors become dull and lifeless from dirt and age. Brighten walls with a good cleaning or coat of paint. Dark colors hinder light reflection. Too much pattern in the background makes special accessories go unnoticed.

Color. Choose a color scheme. Use different colors in different proportions and vary from dark to light. Repeat colors. Tie colors together with a pattern, and repeat the pattern around the room. Use subdued colors in large areas and bright colors in small areas. Accent neutral background colors with small areas of bright color.

Focal point. A focal point is whatever draws your eye when you first enter a room. Emphasize only one area rather than making many areas compete for attention.

Lines. Lines should provide variety without confusion. Lines can provide direction or movement of the eye throughout a room.

Shape and size. Use a variety of shapes for interest. Make sure your furnishings are in pleasing proportion to one another and to the room.

Texture. Different textures lend different feelings to a room.

Pattern. Use patterns to add interest. Start with a pattern and use its colors throughout the room, or choose a pattern that coordinates with the room's existing colors. Repeat patterns in the room and don't be afraid to mix patterns.

Lighting. Keep light bulbs clean for maximum light. Replace lampshades when they become dark and yellowed. Provide adequate light, especially for reading, sewing, etc. Consider compact fluorescent lighting for energy efficiency.

Putting Ideas to Work

Low-cost decorating is possible with inexpensive materials and a little time. Get to know the best places to find materials, tools and helpful advice. Keep up with innovative methods that simplify and speed up the process of transforming old pieces into treasures.

Many project ideas spring from items already on hand – leftover fabrics, extra wallpaper, carpet samples, etc. Look carefully at items you are about to discard and search your home for unused items. The pitcher with a broken handle can become a vase; an old footlocker can make a great bench; an old end table might serve as a nightstand.

Salvage parts from old items to use on new pieces. Take the base from an old pedestal table and fit it with a new top. Line up old stair spindles to make a simple headboard.

Watch for bargain prices on materials you'll need. Check sales and compare prices. Browse flea markets, second-hand stores and garage sales for low-cost items.

If you need to purchase new materials for your project, ask the local lumber dealer and other supply sources such as hardware and home improvement stores for advice. Create a list of resource people who can help with the special skills you need.

Surface Treatments

Often a new surface treatment is all an old piece may need. When deciding on a surface treatment, consider how the item will be used. If it will be replaced soon, you

can be more extreme with your choice and less concerned with wear. A heavily used item, though, needs a surface that is durable and easy to maintain.

Paint is one of the easiest surface finishes to apply and can be attractive and durable. Spray or brush it on large surfaces. Antiquing, like most paint finishes, does a good job of covering surface colors and marks on old furniture. Use stencils to paint designs on floors, walls, furniture, lampshades, etc. Cover the design with a clear coating for protection.

Fabric as a surface treatment can be applied in many ways. When using both fabric and paint to decorate a room, always buy the fabric first and then find or mix a paint to match. Bed sheets work well in home projects that require large pieces of fabric.

Wallpaper and adhesive-backed papers are popular covers for home-furnishing items as well as for walls. To make a poorly designed or awkward piece of furniture blend into the background, cover it and the wall behind it with the same pattern. Cover small items like waste baskets, coffee cans and notebooks to make them coordinate with the rest of the room.

Make a collage with fabric pieces or torn bits of colored tissue paper. Cover objects with rope, cord, yarn, seeds or other items to change the surface texture. Glue crushed egg shells or bits of colored glass to a surface.

Inexpensive Decorating Ideas

The list of ideas for decorating on a budget is unending. Every day you may come across new ways to use throw-away items or to recycle old pieces. Below is only a partial list of some things you can do at minimal cost to brighten your home.

Windows

- Do you have a window or other area of woodwork you wish would disappear? Disguise the area by painting the woodwork the same color as the wall and choosing a window fabric of the same color.
- Fill a window with plants. The view is partially blocked, but light can still enter the room. Make simple shelves by placing brackets along the window edges and attaching supports and shelves.

- Use inexpensive fabrics for window coverings. Gingham and other dressmaker fabrics work well. Try using unbleached muslin or burlap for a country look. Sheets provide a lot of fabric at a reasonable cost.
- Paint that old venetian blind a bright, cheery color. You'll be amazed at the results. To add an extra touch, paint a design on the blind so when it closes the design takes shape.
- Make windows appear larger by extending the window treatment beyond the window area.
- Are ordinary shades too plain for you? Stencil on a design or cover them with fabric. You can even make your own shades using fabrics that coordinate with the room.

Floors

- Use area rugs instead of wall-to-wall carpet. Many carpet stores sell room-sized remnants at a reasonable price. Such pieces are easy to rotate for more even wear and can be taken with you if you move.
- If you are tired of your carpet color but it is still in good shape, play down the color and emphasize other furnishings.
- Stencil a design on a concrete floor.

Walls

- A fresh coat of paint is an inexpensive redo for a wall and can add new life to a room. Try a new color. Choose a color one to two tones lighter than the one you like in the samples – colors intensify on a large area.
- Paint a design on a wall. It will take the place of pictures or other wall decorations.
- Hide ugly or damaged woodwork by painting it the same color as the wall. Use an enamel paint (latex or oil based) for easy cleaning.
- A wall of shelves can be decorative and add storage space.
- Wallpaper serves many functions. It can add color, pattern and texture, as well as cover cracks and other undesirable features.

Kitchen

- If metal kitchen cabinets look a little shabby, repaint them.
- For inexpensive "cupboards," build shelves and cover the front with roller

match stick shades. Open kitchen shelves also are quite popular.

- Hang pots and pans of interesting shapes and colors from a ceiling bracket or pegboard. They add interest to the room and are easy to reach.

Furniture

- Filing cabinets provide an abundance of storage and may be used in a variety of ways. Use new pieces or buy used ones at office supply stores. Cover them with fabric, wallpaper or a coat of paint to make them more attractive. Use as a single unit or place a board across two cabinets to form a desk.
- Rearrange furniture. Many times a new furniture arrangement will do a lot for a room. Rather than lining up all your furniture against walls, place some pieces out toward the center of the room.
- Restore your present furniture. This can include anything from adding new hardware to refinishing, antiquing or painting.
- Use louvered doors or screens connected by hinges to divide a room.
- Use old trunks. Make a trunk into a seat by adding a cushion. Place a circular piece of glass on top to make a coffee table. Use a trunk as is for an end table, shelf or coffee table.
- Purchase unfinished furniture and add your own finish.
- Make an inexpensive bookshelf from boards separated by bricks, concrete blocks, glass blocks, large covered juice cans or mailing tubes bunched together.
- Make an inexpensive headboard for a bed. Use board pieces to form a picket-fence look. Use an old wrought-iron gate. Paint a headboard on the wall.
- Making or buying framed furniture with removable cushions makes changing colors easy.
- Use a picnic table for an informal dining or game table.
- Make a bedside table from a trash can, box or packing barrel topped with a circular piece of wood. Cover with a decorative floor-length tablecloth.
- Make utility spools into fun furniture for a child's room, recreation room or patio. Choose multipurpose furniture to cut down on the number of pieces you need to buy.

- Purchase inexpensive director's chairs for starter pieces, then move them to the patio or den when you add better pieces.
- Make an inexpensive cover for an old lawn chair.
- Paint old school lockers and use for storage.
- Make a table by joining wooden boards to form a base and adding a glass top.
- Build and attach a fold-down shelf to a dining room wall to use as a buffet service.
- Fold a mattress and hold it together with straps to form a chair.

Accessories

- A few well-chosen accessories show up better than a flood of small things.
- Don't buy every accessory you need at once and don't feel you have to keep them forever. If one becomes damaged, fix it or discard it.
- Tack wooden door or wall molding to a wall to form a display shelf.
- Make a simple wall hanging from a drapery sample, embroidered piece, tea towel or small rug and hang from a stained dowel.
- Create your own accessory with dried or silk flowers. You can dry the flowers yourself. Also try using some interesting weeds from the countryside.
- Plants are always attractive and nice for filling empty spaces. They also help keep your indoor air healthy.
- Use decorative pillows. They can be inexpensive, functional and attractive.
- Use books to add color, texture and design to an area.
- Candles can be simple but decorative.
- Frame a fabric. Frames can be purchased or made. Stretch the fabric over the frame and staple.
- Baskets can be decorative in every room of the home. Use them on the wall, under a plant, on a shelf, to store clothes or linens, etc. If you don't care for their neutral color, spray-paint them in vivid enamels.
- Make a fabric cover for your shower curtain to add a little elegance to your bathroom.

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House Beautiful
Martha Stewart Living
Metropolitan Home
Romantic Homes
Sunset
Today's Homeowner
Traditional Home

Television Shows

Television has embraced home decorating in recent years. Programs often provide useful, inexpensive ideas.

Bob Villa (Check local listing)

Clean Sweep (Discovery)

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (ABC)

Home and Garden Television (HGTV)

House Rules (Reality World)

Merge (Lifetime)

Trading Spaces (Discovery)

While You Were Out (Discovery)

Web Sites for Decorating Ideas

www.bhg.com
www.doityourself.com
www.gardenandhearth.com
www.homedepot.com
www.improvenet.com
www.livinghome.com
www.lowes.com
www.nkba.com
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