

## Tips to prepare for your next big home project



The planning process is one of the most exciting parts of a home renovation project, and with social distancing keeping us indoors, now is the time to dream big and get ready.

Whether it's a basement makeover, a pool addition or even building a new house from scratch, here are some tips to get started:

**1** Factor in your lifestyle. Think about your priorities and lifestyle – do you work from home without a proper home office? Do you enjoy cooking and entertaining? Is your backyard living up to its potential as an extension of your home? Asking these kinds of questions can help you determine the most beneficial focus for your next project.

**2** Educate yourself. Take advantage of this extra time you have to learn about materials, processes and new innovations. You can make smarter purchasing decisions by finding out the answers to key questions, such as: Is this material mold-resistant? How long will it last? Is this a passing fad or will it stand the test of time?

**3** Consider sustainability. Products and materials that reduce your carbon footprint don't just help the planet—they're often better for your wallet, too. When doing your research, look for energy-efficient appliances, windows, walls and more to build a greener home that will last longer and save you money in the long run.

**4** Disaster-proof your design. The pandemic has taught us that sometimes the worst can happen. From natural disasters to fires and flooding, we need our homes to offer as much protection as possible. Whether you're planning an extension to your home, pools and spas for your backyard or a custom-built home, insulated concrete forms from Nudura are a smart investment.



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**5** Budget for smart splurges and savings. Budgeting is one of the most important parts of the planning process because you want to spend your hard-earned money wisely. You'll want to splurge on items that will boost your property value, like energy-efficient features, creating more living space and a solid foundation. Upcycling and repurposing furniture, DIY-ing simpler projects like painting, and spending more on nicer hardware but less on cabinets are clever ways to save.

Find more information at nudura.com.



## Creating your own backyard oasis

Our backyards are some of the best places to spend the summer months, especially if you're practicing social distancing and are tired of being cooped up indoors. Fortunately, it's possible to transform your outdoor living space into a secluded, open-air retreat.

Bring the indoors out. We often hear about bringing the outdoors inside, but the reverse is also true when designing a luxurious extension of your home. Homey, lived-in touches can take your outdoor space from sterile and unfinished to cozy and inviting. Think patterned throw pillows, fluffy blankets for chilly evenings, outdoor rugs, colourful lanterns, and decorative accessories like painted terracotta pots or metal tins.

Invest in comfy furniture. What's the best part of your living or family room? Chances are it's your comfortable couch or recliner. To recreate the same feeling, splurge on some soft furniture that will make you want to stay outside for hours reading a book or working remotely. It doesn't have to break the bank either — you can DIY a cozy lounging bench with reclaimed wood and hand-sewn cushions with outdoor stuffing and fabric.

Add a relaxing pool or spa. Water has a calming effect and is often linked to our favourite memories at the cottage or on vacation. A pool or spa can help transport you somewhere far away without leaving your home. A pool can help you and the kids get some exercise while swimming laps, while a spa can soothe tired muscles after a long day hunched over your laptop. To reduce energy costs and increase longevity, consider using Nudura insulated concrete forms, which provide superior insulation. ICF pools also can be custom-made to accommodate any design, making them a very versatile and efficient way to build pools.

Go wild with greenery. Live plants can help you feel connected with nature, and tending to them can help you feel relaxed yet productive during isolation. A vertical garden can add visual interest, while trees and shrubs can provide shade and character. Aromatic herbs like lavender or rosemary offer pleasant scents and can spice up your cooking. And don't be afraid to cut some flowers from your garden to place in vases or pots for beautiful finishing touches.

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# Keep Busy Projects



By Julien Laurion  
The Big Tuna of Real Estate

**BEING COOPED UP IN YOUR HOME** during the lockdown has probably given you time to look around and notice little things you can do to improve your home that does not cost a lot but would have an impact on enjoyment. Or, if you are like me, you cannot just sit still. Regardless of the reason, if you are looking for some simple renovation projects you can do yourself, I have a few ideas for you.

**A LAUNDRY ROOM UPGRADE.**

Typically, washer and dryers are in the basement or in a part of the home that goes unseen. It tends to be the room where we throw a lot of belongings that we have no idea what to do with. However, with minimal investment, you can spruce it up yourself and make your house more appealing when you go to sell. Buying prefabricated countertops and cabinets from the big box stores will save you money and give you a big impact. They are designed with the DIYer in mind, so with a few tools, you can install them yourself. Everyone loves an organized, clean-looking laundry room!

**LED LIGHTING.**

Switching all your lightbulbs to LED's is an excellent improvement for your home. This is a perfect time to tackle this task, as it does not take a lot of effort and it can help you save some money. I suggest making a list of all the blubs you would need. You can either take a picture of each blub or write down the wattages and style of the lightblub and then head to a big box store and buy the comparable LED replacement. Typically, LEDs are brighter than their incandescent counter-

part, so be sure to consider that when buying. LED lights come in various hues, the most common are bright white, sunlight, and warm. The warm hue best resembles the light of an incandescent bulb.

**NEW BATHROOM ACCESSORIES.**

Replacing some of the fixtures, such as faucets, vanity lighting and even the towel bars, can give a dated bathroom a bit of a lift. Don't let installing a new toilet, faucet or towel rack overwhelm you. You don't need a lot of tools and there are lots of videos online to guide you through it. I remember when I installed a toilet for the first time. I actually was surprised at how simple it was and how fast it can be done! Take your time and find items that you find appealing and not too expensive. There are lots of high-priced fixtures that aren't necessarily better quality but are brand names that have made a name for themselves.

Don't be surprised that you want to keep renovating! A frequent side effect of a small renovation is a bigger one! Be ready to keep on renovating as you will love the new looks you are creating!

This global pandemic has been difficult for a lot of us, however, sometimes just staying busy in our homes can help us feel productive and in turn, may help reduce stress and anxiety levels.

It seems our new normal for a while will be staying in our homes so why not spruce it up a bit and keep busy.

Julien Laurion AKA Big Tuna, is a local Real Estate Sale Representative with Royal LePage Your Community Realty in Aurora. I am a real estate agent who has expertise in both Real Estate and Renovations and have been involved in this community for over 20 years. If you have a question for my monthly article or if you are considering buying, selling or leasing a home please feel free to call or email me directly at (416) 402-5530 or julien@bigtuna.ca or by alternatively visiting my website www.bigtuna.ca or Facebook page @bigtunarealty



## How to design a fitness room at home

People exercise for many different reasons. Exercise can improve one's appearance, reduce the risk for illness, alleviate stress or anxiety, and even help pass some time. Exercise is often a social activity, but in the wake of social distancing guidelines issued in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, many people have found themselves looking for ways to exercise at home.

Building a home fitness room has never been a more timely project, and such a project can continue to provide rewards even when life returns to some semblance of normalcy. Here's how to successfully stock a home gym.

**FIND A DEDICATED SPACE.** A home gym will be limited by the amount of space that can be devoted to workouts. Possible fitness room locations include a spare bedroom, a garage, a basement, or an enclosed patio. Measure the space so you can pick and choose equipment that will fit. Leave some floor space empty for movement exercises or mat activities.

**KEEP THE SPACE BRIGHT.** Darkness can sap energy levels, so invest in mirrors and adequate overhead lighting to make the space inviting. Natural light can make the exercise area more enjoyable.

**CONSIDER THE FLOORING.** New flooring can protect against damage and make an area more conducive to working out. Rubber mats can offset echoes and reduce the noise of running on a treadmill or setting down heavy weights.

**USE SPACE-SAVING EQUIPMENT.** A home gym space will likely not be as expansive as the space inside a traditional fitness centre. Thankfully, many activities do not require a lot of space or equipment. Classic exercises like squats, lunges, push ups, and sit ups require little gear but still produce results. Figure out which equipment you like the most and invest in two or three key pieces. Dumbbells of various weights, a medicine ball and a yoga mat can be all you need to create a versatile, effective workout. A TRX system and a door-mounted pull-up bar also are great space-saving options.

**HAVE A TV HOOKUP.** A home gym may benefit from a smart TV that you can use to stream workout videos or catch up on the latest news while running the treadmill or using the stationary bike.

A home gym is beneficial year-round, and can be especially valuable when social distancing guidelines are put in place.



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**We came across a rural home for sale. It's being sold 'as is' and we have concerns about making the many improvements needed for it. What should we do?**



Many perfectly imperfect homes sell every year however due diligence on the buyer side is always recommended. Gaining a scope of what may pose an immediate threat, concern or cost would be advisable. Speaking to a REALTOR® who has experience with rural properties is a great start because the conditions and clauses and requirements that would be added to an offer to purchase would be more in depth and detailed for this type of home or recreational use purchase.

Hiring a qualified licensed home inspector to assess the home and provide a comprehensive report would be an important step and worthwhile expense. If there is a septic system the Buyer agent would ask for records but some homes don't have these records for reference. The Seller can obtain septic records if they exist by calling the township and can pass them along to the Buyer. It would be prudent to include a septic inspection and request a representation that the septic has been in working order. Additionally, if the rural property is on a well, water potability or safety will need investigation and testing through the health unit and the home inspector can also test the flow rate of water output. For added assurance UV filter systems are also available to purchase so that water safety is always in check. It would be beneficial to add a note to the offer that the Seller represents the condition of the well listing multiple concerns to ensure it's been in good working order.

If there are improvements required contacting the town in question planning department would also be prudent to understand the ease or process and challenges that come with improvements such as accessibility, expanding the footprint of the home and decks and outbuildings for instance. If the land this rural home is situated on has conservation authorities also noted having a say in improvements, a call to their specific planning department would be advisable for further guidance as it relates to the address in question. There would be specifics also that could be shared with respect to landscaping and what can

and cannot be done around waterways. Typically, some improvement proposals are approved by the conservation authority first, then brought forth to the town for a further seal of approval.

Speaking to a lender is important depending on how much financing is required; lending guidelines vary between types of properties and should be understood before placing an offer to purchase. A real estate lawyer will appreciate and prescribe extra steps taken for due diligence so the Buyer(s) are fully aware of the challenges if any that may come with the address in question. Title insurance through a lawyer will not cover all concerns that may come with the 'as is' home described and some lawyers offer home warranty programs which additionally may provide added coverage for heating, electrical and plumbing but may not cover for all concerns. If seeking additional insurance coverage for the home all fine details should be reviewed to eliminate misinterpretation, each insurance coverage provider and policy is different.

Once due diligence has been completed create the action plan for the home and assign the proposed costs and time it would take for upgrades and improvements. How much of the work can be done with sweat equity and how much will need to be purchased and or contracted out? Is the challenge going to increase the equity in the home, will the changes an improvements be affordable? Will this be a fix and flip home or the best start towards a forever home? Proceeding with caution is the best path, discuss the final decision with your REALTOR® if wanting to negotiate for purchase or move on to finding a different opportunity.

– Written by Connie Power

Connie POWER Assistant Manager / Sales Representative  
CNE® Certified Negotiation Expert, SRS® Seller's Representative Specialist, ABR® Accredited Buyers Representative, SRES® Seniors Real Estate Specialist with RE/MAX Hallmark YORK Group Ltd., Brokerage. Buying or Selling in YORK region or beyond call Connie directly at (905) 726-0856 to book a face to face consultation.

\*not intended to solicit anyone under contract.



**A buyer's guide to home air conditioning systems**

Few experiences provide as much relief as walking into a cool room on a hot summer day. Air conditioning systems make such experiences possible, and homeowners' decision regarding which one to install in their homes is significant.

Homeowners may not know where to begin when finding the right air conditioning system for their home. According to the Air-Conditioning, Heating, & Refrigeration Institute, the best systems provide steady, dependable performance for many years when sized correctly for the home. Correct installation and routine maintenance also can ensure homeowners' air conditioning systems withstand the test of time.

**HOW DO I KNOW WHICH SIZE IS BEST?**

When shopping for new air conditioning systems, homeowners must consider a host of factors to ensure they get the best match. The AHRI notes that the home's age, the number and quality of its windows, how well it's insulated, the number of stories it has, and its square footage are among the factors to consider. Homeowners can benefit from working with trained technicians who can investigate each of these factors and recommend the correct system. The AHRI recommends homeowners ask their technicians to perform a Manual J analysis, which is a standardized formula that can help homeowners get the perfect system for their homes.

**WHAT ABOUT ENERGY EFFICIENCY?**

Energy efficiency is an important consideration when purchasing a new air conditioner for a home. Energy rates vary depending on where a person lives, but rates remain pretty high across the board. The Energy Information Association notes that residential electricity rates increased throughout the United States by about 15 percent between 2009 and 2019. An energy-efficient unit can help homeowners save considerable amounts of money, so homeowners can ask their technicians to recommend energy-efficient units that suit their homes. A unit that adequately cools a home without consuming a lot of costly electricity should be every homeowner's goal. The U.S. Department of Energy employs the Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating, or SEER, to inform consumers about the efficiency of each air conditioner. This rating is noted on the Energy Guide® label on each unit, and the higher the number, the more efficient the unit.

Home air conditioning systems are costly. But the right choice of unit can keep homes cool without costing homeowners a fortune in energy costs.

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# Simple ways to prevent dog-related lawn damage



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Dogs love spending time outdoors. Dog owners with yards know that dogs benefit greatly from some exercise in the backyard. While that time might be great for dogs, it can take its toll on lawns.

Dog urine and feces can adversely affect the look and health of a lush green lawn. Nitrogen is essential to healthy soil, but only at certain levels. When those levels are exceeded, the result can be lawn damage. According to The Spruce Pets, an advisory site that offers practical tips and training advice to pet owners, this is what happens when pets frequently urinate on grass. Urine is naturally high in nitrogen, so when pets urinate on lawns, the grass might turn yellow or brown due to the excess nitrogen content. Nitrogen also is present in lawn fertilizers, further exacerbating the problem for pet owners who fertilize their lawns.

In addition to urine damage, dogs can trample frosted grass, contributing to problems that may not become evident until spring, and get into areas like gardens where they wreak additional havoc.

Pet owners who want to let their dogs run free in the yard but don't want damaged grass may be tempted to put their pooches in diapers or confine them to crates when letting them outside. But such an approach isn't necessary. In fact, some simple

strategies can be highly effective at preventing dog-related lawn damage.

**SPEAK WITH A LANDSCAPER  
ABOUT PLANTING NEW GRASS**

Certain types of grass, such as Bermuda grass, can withstand dog damage better than others. Local climate will dictate which types of grass are likely to thrive in a given area, so speak with a professional landscaper about the viability of planting new grass.

**INSTALL FENCING**

Pet owners with expansive yards can install fencing that allows dogs to spend time exercising outdoors without granting them access to the entire property. Large dogs will need more room than small ones, but try to build fenced-in areas that allow dogs to run freely and get the exercise they need to stay healthy.

**WORK WITH A DOG TRAINER**

Dog trainers might be able to work with dogs so they only urinate in certain areas of the yard, greatly reducing the damage they can cause to a lawn. Trainers also might help curb digging and clawing behaviours that can damage lawns as well as gardens.

**CONSIDER HARDSCAPING**

Hardscaping might be most effective for pet owners with small properties. Hardscaping does not include grass and can add visual appeal to a property while saving pet owners the headaches of dealing with dog-related lawn damage.

Dogs need time outdoors, and homeowners can take various steps to protect their lawns from dog-related damage.



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# Tips to successfully grow tomatoes

**SLICING INTO THE FIRST TOMATO OF THE SEASON** is a much anticipated moment for gardeners. Tomatoes are among the most popular fruit or vegetable plants grown in home gardens. Much of that popularity may be credited to the fact that red, ripe tomatoes have a delicious, juicy flavour that serves as the basis for all sorts of recipes. And since tomatoes can just as easily be grown in a full backyard garden or in a container on a patio or balcony, tomatoes appeal to gardeners regardless of their living situations.

While tomatoes are relatively easy to grow, they are prone to certain problems and pests. Knowledge of what to expect when planting tomatoes and how to start off on the right footing can help produce a season's worth of delicious bounty.

**WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE LAST AVERAGE FROST DATE.** Tomatoes can be grown from seeds outdoors in warm areas, but tomato gardeners often find success starting seeds indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost date. Gradually introduce seedlings to the elements for a few hours

each day, increasing the duration of time outside. Then they can be transplanted outdoors when temperatures are consistently over 60 F.

**CHOOSE A SUNNY SPOT.** Tomatoes love to soak up sunlight, according to The Home Depot. Place the plants in a sunny spot so they can thrive.

**SPACE OUT PLANTS.** The experts at Better Homes and Gardens say to leave anywhere from 24 to 48 inches between plants to accommodate for growth and ensure the plants will not get stunted.

**PLANT DEEPLY.** Tomatoes tend to root along their stems. If transplants are long and lean, dig a trench and lay the stem sideways in the dirt, and then bend the top of the plant upward. Snip off the lower branches and cover with soil up to the first set of leaves. This will produce extra root growth and stronger, more vital plants.

**GIVE THE PLANTS SUPPORT.** Tomato cages or stakes can help keep the leaves and fruit from touching the ground, which can cause rot and, eventually, death to the tomato plant.

**LAY DOWN A LAYER OF MULCH.** Tomatoes grow best when the soil is consistently moist. Mulch can help retain moisture from watering and rain. Mulch also will help prevent soil and soilborne diseases from splashing on the leaves and plants when it rains. While you amend the soil, make sure that it drains well and is slightly acidic.

**PRUNE AWAY SUCKERS.** Tomatoes produce "suckers," which are leaves that shoot out from the main stem. Removing these leaves promotes air circulation and keeps the plant's energy focused on growing fruit.

Tomatoes are a rich addition to any garden. A few simple tricks can help even novice gardeners grow delicious tomatoes.



## Container gardening tips

**GARDENING IS BENEFICIAL IN VARIOUS WAYS.** The AARP states that some of the health perks associated with gardening include improved mood, increased vitamin D levels (which benefits bones and immune system) and reduced risk of dementia. In addition, if gardening efforts include growing herbs, fruits and vegetables, it can be a cost-effective way to eat healthy.

For gardeners without sufficient space or for those with mobility issues, container gardening can be an ideal way to grow everything from flowers to vegetables. Better Homes & Gardens says most plants are not fussy about the containers in which they grow so long as some of their basic needs are met. This means watering correctly for the type of plant, and ensuring sufficient drainage.

The following are some other ways container gardening efforts can prove successful.

**WATCH WATER.** Planet Natural Research Center says plants with thin leaves typically need ample water, and plants with thick leaves need less. Use this as a guideline to gauge water needs.

**SIZE CORRECTLY.** Plants should be sized to the container. Consider dwarf varieties of certain plants if your containers are small.

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT SOIL.** Fill containers with a commercial potting soil rather than soil from the garden. Garden soil can dry into a solid mass, while commercial mixtures have amendments like peat moss, vermiculite, compost, and other ingredients to help with soil texture and moisture retention.



**MIX IT UP.** When planting containers of flowers and other greenery, Good Housekeeping says to include "a thriller, a spiller and a filler" as a good rule of thumb. The thriller is the focal point, the spiller a trailing plant, and a filler has smaller leaves or flowers to add bulk and colour.

**POKE HOLES.** Drainage holes are essential so that soil will not become waterlogged. Holes don't need to be large, but there should be enough of them so that excess water can drain out readily.

**SELECT THE RIGHT CONTAINER MATERIAL.** Container materials may be affected by gardeners' budgets, personal taste and other factors. For those who live in hot climates, selecting a light-coloured container can help prevent further soil heat absorption.

Container gardening is a healthy and enjoyable activity that can pay dividends in various ways.

### Real Estate Market Update – Aurora

## Home Values Strengthen

There continues to be a very low supply of homes for sale in Aurora with only 2.9 months of supply of homes to meet the current demand. The pandemic continues to be a major factor of consideration for sellers wanting their homes to come out on the market as safely as possible and more home owners are considering placing their homes for sale as summer approaches and COVID-19 Restrictions ease.

There were 41 home sales in the month of May throughout Aurora and the average price of a home was \$950,573 and 110 homes were placed on the market for sale. On average it took 29 days for homes to sell taking into account that some of the homes may have been placed on the market more than once. Sellers yielded on average 97 per cent of their asking price.

The bulk of sales in May were for the purchase of detached homes at a median price of \$1,177,500 when you exclude the highest and lowest sale for the month. At the start of June there were 183 homes of all types for sale and of that number 138 were detached homes. The average price for a townhome was \$797,286, semi detached homes average pricing was \$740,967, condo townhouses average price was \$487,000

and one condo apartment sold in May for \$487,000.

When compared to 2019 there was actually an increase in home sale pricing by nearly 8 per cent. Further proof that while this is an unprecedented time in real estate home values held steady in May of 2020. High end home sales continue to be the slowest moving and no sales occurred above \$2 million in May.

Discuss your real estate needs with a REALTOR® today including a review of COVID-19 safety protocols including the use of Personal Protection Equipment in advance of meeting in person.

– Written by Connie Power

Connie Power is a Real Estate Sales Representative CNE® SRS® ABR® SRES®, Assistant Manager, Sales Representative for RE/MAX Hallmark York Group Realty Ltd., Brokerage serving York region and beyond in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Empowering you in Real Estate, Call Connie today to make an appointment to discuss your next move at (905) 726-0856.

\*The statistics provided herein were obtained from the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board; Regional Housing Market Tables; York Region, Aurora for May of 2019, 2020 and the Summary of Existing Home Transactions of all home types, February 2019, 2020 for all TRREB Areas.

\*\*\*Not intended to solicit those currently under a real estate contract.

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