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LIVING IN STYLE

A living room is where we spend most of our time, so it's important to make your living space feel like home.



It is where we relax at the end of a busy day and spend time with our friends and family for special occasions. That's why it's important the living room is both practical and pleasing; taking on multiple forms depending on its purpose from day-to-day. The all important aspect of the living room is to provide comfort for whatever it is you predominantly use the room for.



Make Yourself Comfortable

If you've got a big enough room, stretch out with a corner sofa to make use of dead space.

Contrast plain or pastel coloured sofas with a litter of bright, elaborate and printed cushions to embellish the aesthetic appeal. Recliner chairs or sofas can be great additions to any home. They are a great place to put your feet up and relax with a chilled glass of wine whilst watching your favourite programme.

There are no real set rules for a living room, instead you just need to make sure that you make it perfect for you and your needs.

Finishing Touches

Soft and light coloured carpets work really well with wooden furniture, choose a complementary colour scheme to suit your sofas and your living room will piece itself together. If you prefer wooden flooring, buy a large living room rug that not only adds warmth and comfort, but also that final layer of colour.

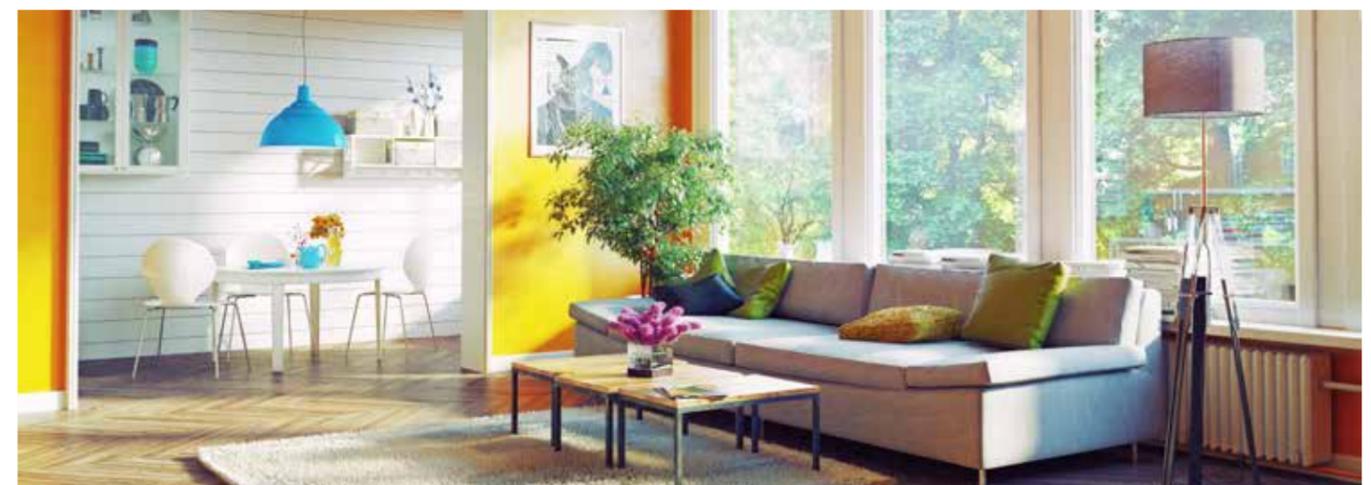
If you don't fancy a standard coffee table, a vintage trunk can be a fantastic aesthetic alternative and is an especially good option if you tend to find yourself with a bit of clutter gathering in the living room.

For Your Windows

Whether it's elegant curtains, Roman shades, or a simple strip of fabric, every window needs the perfect complement. The right curtains, shades, or shutters can turn any window into a stunning focal point. Roman shades are particularly good in summer as they can be used to shade a room without darkening it too much or, if you would prefer something more decorative, a scarf curtain provides a modern and Summery frame for the view outside.

Thankfully, there is so much choice out there now when it comes to home decor items.

There are also loads of places to get style inspiration tips (magazines, websites, blogs), so finding the perfect way to decorate your living room should not be too much of a struggle to embellish the aesthetic appeal. There are no real set rules for a living room, instead you just need to make sure that you make it perfect for you and your needs. Colours and styles that you like and really create a space that you feel happy and comfortable with.





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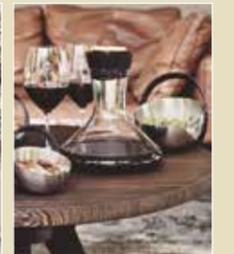
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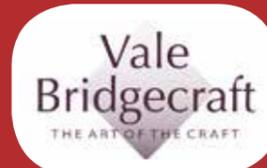


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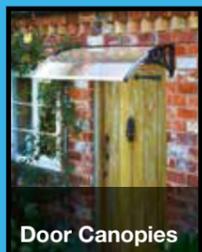
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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GARDEN

Whatever you use your garden for, it stands to reason that you are going to want to make the most of the space that is available.

Whether you simply want a garden that looks nice or you want a space to entertain friends, you'll want to ensure that your garden is perfect.

The good news is that there are plenty of options, advice and products out there that can help make this possible - you just need to decide the type of garden you would like.



Lawns

If you have enough space for some greenery then a lawn can be a great addition.

When you first plant a lawn it can be hard work to get it going, but once it is settled and growing maintenance is minimal. If you don't want to be bothered with the maintenance, then why not contemplate an artificial lawn? There are so many different "grasses" now that look very life-like. You can even get lawns that are dog-friendly.

Decoration

There are many ways that you can style and complete a garden in order to help make it perfect. Garden decking is the most popular addition followed by good garden furniture. You could look at an outdoor water feature, scented lawns or simply some garden statues to brighten up the space you have available.

Practical Touches

As much as you are going to want your garden to look good, you also want it to be functional. Think about how you see your garden being used and make sure that you use this as inspiration for what you want to add to your garden space. So, for example if you're planning on entertaining then you're going to want to give some thought to seating and tables. In fact, you might want to look at a built-in barbecue or pizza oven if you have the space for it.

A Splash of Colour

When it comes to plants that you can have in your garden, the possibilities are endless. Don't assume that because you have a small garden there is no space for flowers because this is not the case at all. Invest in flower pots, hanging baskets and trellises and get planting! There are thousands of different plants out there in a vast array of colours, so whatever your personal style and preference is, you can be sure that there is going to be something that matches your needs. Also, look at how much maintenance different plants need and buy something that is going to match your schedule.

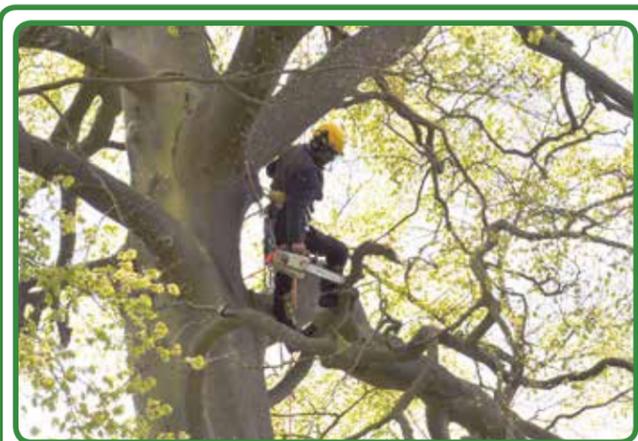
Growing

If you are interested in growing edible items in your garden then you will be glad to know that there are plenty of options open to you. Getting started with growing your own vegetables can seem a little overwhelming, but it really doesn't need to be. You don't need to do it all at once and starting with something small and working your way up is perfect. Even just growing some items to create a simple salad can be very satisfying indeed. The difference in flavour between shop bought and something you have grown yourself is phenomenal! Spinach is great for this, as it grows very easily and doesn't even need much sunlight to thrive, so you don't have to worry too much about growing conditions.

Herbs are also really easy to grow in a garden, even if you don't have much space. Items like basil, parsley, chives and coriander can be grown in small containers if you don't have space in your garden. These are fantastic ways to liven up a dish and the fact that you have grown your own will make them taste even better.

Realistically, your garden is your space to do with what you want. Simply give a little thought beforehand to what your garden is going to be used for and creating something perfect doesn't need to be much of a chore at all.





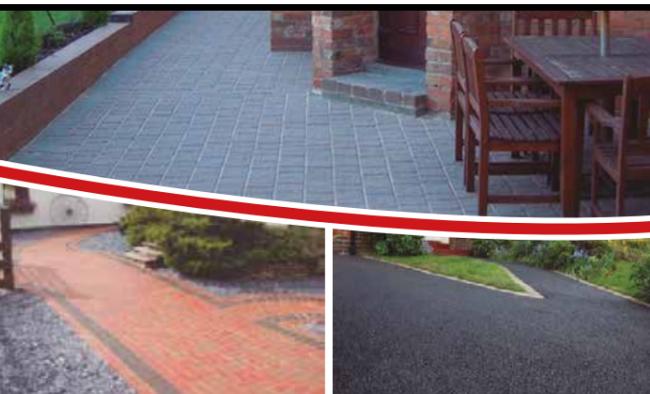
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first impression of the front of your house is important. This creates an image of you and your property.

An untidy, uncared for and unkept front garden could mean, to some people, that the inside of your property will be the same.



Top Tip

Giving yourself a new front garden and driveway is one of the best investments you can make to your home.

A front garden has to be functional, usually with parking as a priority, as more and more people now use their garages for storage. It also has to be welcoming to any visitors. Ideally, it should have impact all year round in both the hard and soft landscaping. A well-designed and tended front garden can significantly increase the value of your home, contribute to the character of the neighbourhood and make a positive impression on both you and your visitors. Your new look garden may even encourage your neighbours to improve theirs too.

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Tarmac - This is the most popular paving option due to its great appearance and lasting installation. It is generally considered to be one of the cheapest methods of laying a hard surface for your driveway. There are many different types and available colours and is excellent at hiding dirty marks and stains. Tarmac can also be used alongside block paving for added effect.

Gravel - provides a loose stone surface that is installed over a good solid base which come in many different sizes and colours. A gravel surface allows water to reach the roots of surrounding plants. You will have to be prepared to sweep up frequently as the gravel can be spread around when being walked or driven on and believe me when I say they are a nightmare if you are wearing heels!

Block Paving - When installed properly, block paving provides an attractive, adaptable hard wearing surface for driveways and front gardens. There is a wide range of designs and colours available and will be a long lasting feature of your home. In accordance with your tastes and budget, you can create a design that's deemed tasteful for your home. Block paving is easy to maintain, repair and if you need to access underground services, it's easy to reform by just replacing the existing blocks.

Resin Bond - The beauty of resin bonded aggregate is that it can be applied over an existing tarmac drive, so is much cheaper as the original driveway does not have to be uplifted. It is a good-looking and inexpensive way of replacing your old and tired looking drive with a lovely new one. It is an extremely tough surface as it is made up of four different layers, where the top one is a sealed 'aggregate' material which is slightly flexible. This flexibility means that the surface is crack-resistant – even under extremes of heat and cold (and heavy feet). The material composite differs from other gravel-based surfaces which can be kicked about which usually fade over time. It is also fully porous meaning you don't have to worry about puddles building up on your driveway.



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When it comes to buying or renting a home, we can't always afford to live in one that has as much space as we would like.

Whether it's expanding families, the chance to work from home or simply everyone growing up, many of us would love a home that has much more space.

It is easy to assume that if moving home is not an option we have to live in a home that is cramped - but that is not the case at all. Instead, there are many different ways to create more space.



Building More Room

For starters, if you have the budget and space then you could look at extending your home.

This could be in the shape of a conservatory, orangery, loft conversion or cellar conversion. The important thing is to do a little research and choose the option that best suits you.

A conservatory is great for creating more living space that the whole family can benefit from. These are perfect for the summer as they tend to be light and airy. You'll need some garden space in order to allow for this, but it can be a great and very welcome addition to a family home. There are many different types of conservatory that you can install for your home and among the most popular in style are the Victorian conservatory and the Edwardian conservatory. The Victorian conservatory has segmented glass windows and elegantly sloped roof facets to provide a stunning style. It goes without saying that the Victorian conservatories complement Victorian properties perfectly, but it can work in any modern house to provide a bold addition of individuality.

The Edwardian conservatory is a timeless design feature a symmetrical square front that provides a bright, stylish and spacious living area, ideal if you're looking to increase the space in your home. The appearance blends well with properties both old and new, it is stylish, bright and open, ideal for dining or relaxing in its spacious feel.

An Orangery is basically a cross between a conservatory and an extension. In contrast to a conservatory, orangeries are more like a typical house extension, featuring more brickwork that subtly blends in with the house itself, creating an elegant and stylish addition to the home and also has large windows and a glass roof.

A modern day orangery combines the light and airy feel of a conservatory and can be used all year round. If you are looking for natural sun light, energy efficiency double glazing as well as a versatile and stylish space, then an orangery could be the extension for you.



Going Upwards

Many people opt for a loft conversion if they need to create an extra bedroom. As this makes the most of loft space that you already have it means that not too much of your home has to change. Loft conversions add appeal and charm to your property too, many people choose to opt for a loft conversion rather than go through the stress of moving home for these reasons. Most loft conversions do not require planning permission unless you opt for something that substantially alters the facade of your property.

Going Below

A cellar conversion is less popular than loft conversions but are still beneficial as available space is often equal to the existing ground floor space. A cellar is the ideal location for additional family living space, such as a playroom or home entertainment room. Converting an existing cellar beneath a dwelling from a storage area to habitable space involves only a 'change of use' and so does not require planning permission but reducing the floor level of a cellar to improve the ceiling height will enlarge the volume of the property and is therefore treated as an extension and so may need planning permission, so you need to check this out. Choose a basement contractor who specialises in cellar conversions.



KITCHEN TRENDS

The kitchen is one of our most used rooms and so it follows that we want it to be one of the most comfortable and enjoyable rooms to be in. You should always think about what you want and what is going to best suit your needs.

Over time our tastes change, new styles develop and it's understandable that we want to give our kitchen a little makeover in order to keep in trend and enjoy spending time cooking and eating in a stylish environment.



Open Shelving

Whilst new doors are always going to be a great way to re-design your kitchen and extra cabinets will always be useful in any kitchen, open shelving has its merits and is becoming ever more popular, particularly for bigger kitchens.

With a bit of open shelving in your kitchen you don't have to hide away all of those eye-catching kitchen accessories and beautiful bits of crockery behind closed doors. Allowing you to show off the very best of your kitchen accessories and is great for easy access to everything you need.

Replace Your Doors

Because kitchens are built to last, the structure of it tends to remain in good condition over many years. Therefore, it is very easy to change the style of your kitchen without a complete upheaval and just replace the doors. A bonus of doing it this way is that it can save you a lot of money, compared to a brand new kitchen install; new doors and a fresh lick of paint on the walls will give your kitchen that brand new look that you want at a fraction of the cost. A full blown kitchen renovation can take weeks, so if you're looking for a way to change the way your kitchen looks without a delay then just replacing doors and worktops could be the answer.



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TIME TO RELAX

It's said that people can't unwind in a cluttered or messy space, so making sure your home is tidy and well-kept is key to being able to relax.

Our lives can certainly be hectic from time to time, so it's important to create spaces in our homes which are perfect for us to relax in. In the summer it might be that ideal spot in the shade or sitting in the conservatory enjoying the morning sun, whereas wintertime may call for a cosy corner in front of the fire.



Relax

Even if it's just finding the time for five minutes peace, a place to retreat to in our home is one of the most important aspects of the house.

It's said that people can't unwind in a cluttered or messy space so making sure your home is tidy and well-kept is key to being able to relax. Add fragrance to a room with plugins, candles or incense sticks to ensure that your space doesn't become stale and plays on all of your senses. Treat yourself to a bouquet of flowers as these are soothing both visually and aromatically.

Soak Away the Stress

Nothing says relaxation like a long, hot soak in the bath. If you can, treat yourself to a modern whirlpool or jacuzzi bath, add thick towels, warm colours, soft lighting, and soothing music to make those precious moments a relaxing experience. If you are looking for something with an extra touch of extravagance, installing a hot tub outside for the summer months with a glass of champagne might just be relaxation perfected.

Getting Back to Nature

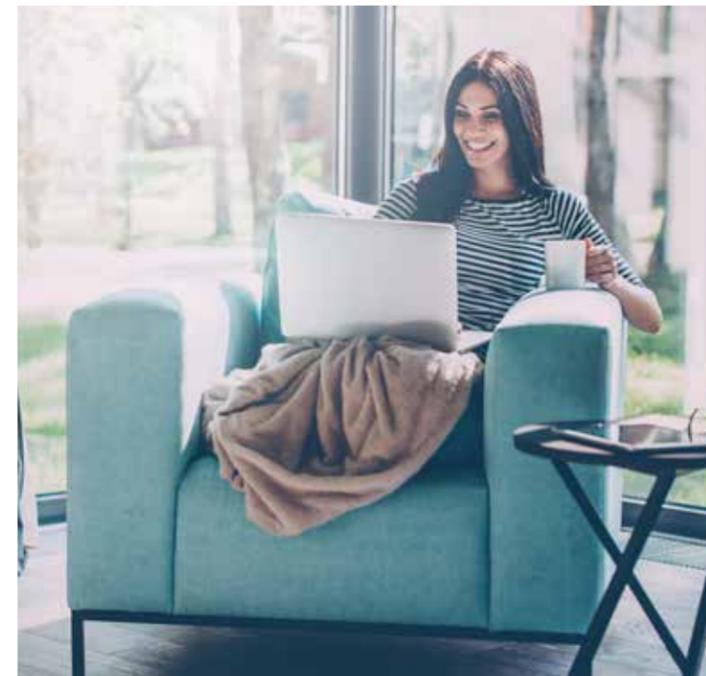
Nothing provides a connected feel to nature like swinging from the branches of the garden tree on a wicker woven hanging chair or lazily lying in a shaded hammock. Hanging chairs or even just standing swing chairs aren't too difficult to get hold of from garden centres and they truly provide a luxurious way to relax in the summer evenings.

Full furniture sets are always popular, but add a touch of luxury by installing a pergola or a gazebo to provide a shaded and comfortable area to relax in.

Put Your Feet Up

Buy in a piece of furniture that will be perfect for you to relax in, something that you will love to curl up on and put your feet up. It's always great to have a couple of blankets or throws that provide a homely and cosy touch in those winter months.

In the summer, open the curtains to the sunshine in order to lighten and warm your home. Why not look into a conservatory extension if you haven't already got one? They are perfect sunny rooms for enjoying the warm weather and relaxing in as the sun shines through the windows. A few potted plants and indoor flowers create a beautiful and idyllic spot.



YOUR PAMPER ZONE

Bathrooms are often the only place where people regularly have time to themselves and relax. For that reason bathroom design should create a refuge of serenity and personal luxury. When it comes to updating your bathroom, you want to choose a look that's on-trend.



If you're not looking for a complete re-design, there are a few simple things you can do to create a fresh feel to your bathroom. First of all, invest in new bath mats, towels and soap dispensers; a couple of attractive matching sets can inject a brilliant burst of colour to a timeless black and white bathroom. Throw in a new shower curtain that won't clash and remember to keep it clean to give you a whole new edge of colour.



Flooring

When it comes to flooring in your bathroom, there is a vast choice to choose from.

If you want to go for a feature floor using Geometric tiles, think about the size of your bathroom. For smaller bathrooms a feature floor can add a strong character and definition without over powering the space, alternatively in large bathrooms the overall effect of a feature floor can actually come across quite elegant, helping to collate widely spaced fixtures.

Walls

By including texture on your walls you can enhance the crisp lines of your stylish bathroom; even the most subtle of wall textures can aid the creation of an inviting bathroom. There are a variety of textured surfaces now available for bathrooms, from seductive wave designs through to embossed patterns, each taste is catered for and holds endless possibilities even when built into the smallest of bathrooms. Even monochromatic bathrooms can include a great deal of character and definition by using textured tiles from floor to ceiling allowing both natural and artificial light to shimmer across the surface not only reflecting glittering rays of light but creating shadows and intensifying the shape and form built into the wall.

Treat yourself to a piece of art to hang on the wall. This will make the room feel inviting to spend time there rather than just somewhere to shower and brush your teeth.

Natural

Bathrooms are seen as a place of relaxation and rejuvenation, a sanctuary to hide from the stresses of our daily lives. Natural materials often bring an organic feel to a room as they inspire a sense of well-being, whether it's the delicate colour palette or soft flowing textures that make this theme appeal to you, be sure to follow through with accessories that bring added charm, enhancing a completed room for you to unwind in.

Natural tumbled limestones with elegant marbled hues, through to detailed wood effect tiles available with anti-slip finishes stop you slipping out of the bath once you're forced to come back into the real world. Add a touch of nature to your bathroom with a bit of greenery. Ferns take really well to humidity so won't wilt from the steam or a stylish Bonsai tree will liven up the room.

Bathroom Essentials

An extendable wall mirror is a great addition to the bathroom to help you get ready and clean thoroughly behind the ears. Or equally a fog-free mirror will make things much easier after jumping out of a hot-shower. Pick up a non-slip mat to avoid any accidents and stay safe in the bathroom. Make sure you check it's anti-bacterial and resistant to mildew making it easy to clean.

Finally, scented candles or incense sticks will provide a lush touch or luxury for those long hot baths to wash away any stress or tension at the end of a busy week.





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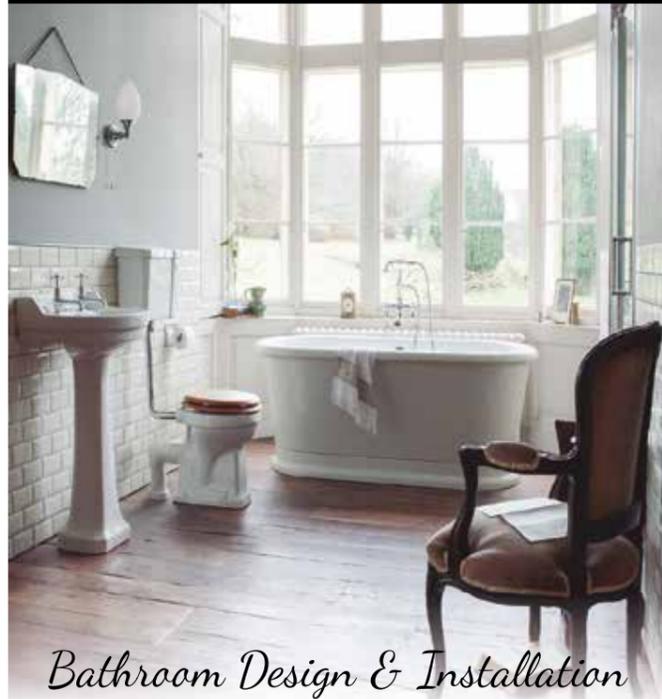
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KEEPING YOUR HOME WARM

When it comes to running a home, it is often the cost of heating bills and other utilities that worry people the most. With household bills and outgoings, a large chunk of this goes on heating our homes.

It makes sense to look at ways to reduce this cost and make your home much more affordable to run. The good news is that there are ways to do this and they could be easier to implement than you think. From insulating the house through to the type of fuel to use, there is a variety of ways to lower our bills whilst being friendly to the environment.



Insulation

In many homes insulation is the most practical and cost effective way to make a house more energy efficient, keeping it cooler in summer and warmer in winter and saving up to 40 per cent in heating bills, recovering your expenditure in the reduction of your bills within just a few years.

In addition, insulation may reduce condensation in the home. The four crucial areas to insulate are the roof, the walls, the floor and your doors and windows. Mineral and glass wools are ideal for the loft and floors as they come on rolls in blanket form.

Draught-Proofing

Windows, letterboxes, doors, fittings, pipe work and loft hatches can all create draughts where there are unwanted gaps between the structure of your home and these openings. Blocking these is a great way of retaining heat in your home. To find them, just hold your hand near the openings and sense any cold air leaking into the house. Draught excluders are the simplest way to block gaps around windows as well as your letterbox.

Upgrade Your Boiler

Upgrading your boiler could cut the amount of energy you use, significantly reduce your home's CO2 emissions and make a huge difference to the amount of energy you use. Professionally installed boilers usually come with either a 5 or 10 year manufacturer's warranty; dependent on the boiler purchased and subject to an annual service at the customer's expense. Today's central heating boilers are much better than the old ones, heating water more efficiently which saves energy and will save you money. If your boiler is over 10 years old, then it's probably worth investing in a new one. In most cases the savings you make from a more efficient boiler over the years will pay for the outlay. You have the option of installing a combi boiler which removes the necessity of having a hot water cylinder. Combi boilers are particularly advantageous for smaller households and if you're short on space; they take up less room and you will only have to heat the one device. Modern boilers are also easy to use and modulate meaning you can easily control the temperature of the house whilst always having plenty of hot water available.



Wood Burning Stove

Wood burning stoves allow you to enjoy the traditional look and feel of an open fire but with much less wasted heat. A wood burning stove will project the heat into the room rather than losing up and out of the house via the chimney. Wood is a renewable form of energy and therefore wood burning stoves are an eco-friendly way to heat your home so long as you stick to burning the right wood, for example seasoned wood rather than varnished scrap wood, the process is carbon neutral. This means wood burning stoves do not increase the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Wood logs do emit carbon dioxide when they are burned, but this is then neutralised by growing replacement trees. As the cost of electricity, oil and gas remains sky high, heating a property can be extremely expensive. Although the initial cost of a wood burner may be more than a gas fire, it will certainly save you money in the long run. Remember that a qualified and HETAS registered installer should undertake an in-depth survey of your home before you begin installation. Only HETAS registered personnel are entitled to carry out installation and provide you with a compliance certificate upon completion. If you do not have a compliance certificate your home insurance will likely be invalid.



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B E D T I M E

This is great because it means that whatever your style and colour preferences are, there is going to be something to suit you.

You can simply spend some time shopping around for options, browsing magazines for inspiration and make sure that you choose something that you really love.



Pantone Pandemonium

Choosing the right shades for the bedroom depends on the condition that you want to induce.

Blue produces a sense of calm, loyalty, serenity, protection, stimulates thinking, delays hunger (and prevent nightmares).

Lavender is associated with fertility, happiness, creativity, but you have to use it in combination with other colours because it's a hard colour, and green - means calm, energy, balance, security and nature.

To deliver a fresh yet invigorating feeling to your room, go for warm greys with sunny yellows, or crisp neutrals and light corals. Combinations of warm shades like gold, wine, slate brown and teal help make a room feel both inviting and relaxing at the same time.

Neutral Colours

Neutral colours are a great choice for a bedroom because they create a calming and relaxing feeling. People often prefer to stay away from brighter colours as these can be too stimulating in a bedroom.

Neutral colours have become a real trend in bedroom arrangement. Bright or matt shades of cream, beige, brown are very popular. Neutral colours are a good choice for bedrooms especially because they can be combined with almost any other colour.

If you feel that neutral colours are too bland for you then you can brighten things up with a little texture and colour - a feature wall for example or a rug to brighten up some floor space. Even a few bright decorations and accessories can help make a room much more friendly but you still keep the natural feel of the room, which should help you get a decent night's sleep.

Kids Choice

If you are decorating a child's bedroom then you can go with their favourite characters and colours. Pink tones for children's rooms will create a relaxing and calm environment.

Try to create a room that they are going to be happy to spend time in and are going to feel relaxed and settled in. In fact, why not get them involved in the decorating process so that they have a room they are proud of?

The Bed Itself

Beds come in all shapes and sizes these days, with divan bases the most popular but also slatted bases, bedsteads and adjustable bases available for the utmost comfort. If you are short on storage space, how about an Ottoman bed which lifts up and has a massive area underneath for storage...invaluable for all those shoes and bags!

When it comes to the mattress, everything from the springs to the filling, the quilting or tufting or even the non-sprung mattresses are available for your choice. It's important to test a variety of all these options out in your local bed company's outlet in order to find the bed that will be right for you.

If you're feeling any sort of discomfort from your current bed, it's important to rectify it for a healthy body. Mattresses don't last forever and if you have had the same mattress for longer than seven years and your sleep is becoming interrupted, or you are waking up with stiffness or aches and pains then you may need to start looking for a new one.





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