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your home

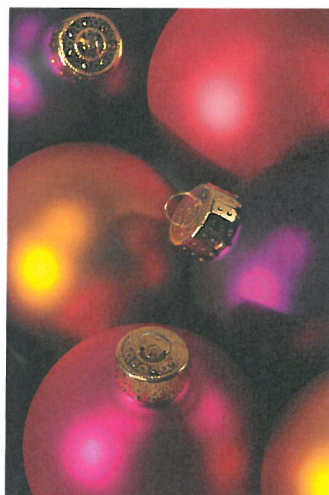
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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

HOLIDAY staging tips

➤ You may be trying to sell your home during the festive holiday season, but that doesn't mean you have to forgo the holiday decorations completely. Just don't overdo it, say the staging experts at Frontdoor.com. Instead, stick to a few simple decorative touches, such as a pinecone centerpiece or an evergreen wreath. Avoid religious themed decorations, which may turn off potential buyers.

Avoid using decorations that might clash with your current color scheme. For example, if the décor in the living room is blue, silver and white, choose accessories that complement



that color scheme, such as blue glass ornaments and silver or white candles.

Use accessories to draw attention to the home's best features. Hang a few tasteful ornaments from the mantel to showcase an elegant fireplace or hang an evergreen garland around the bay window.

Keep inflatable characters in storage while your home is on the market. Instead, use simple string lighting to showcase a fir tree in your front yard.

Make your home extra inviting by lighting a fire in the fireplace or turning up the heat a couple of degrees on chilly days. Offer tasty treats like hot apple cider and fresh-baked cookies to create a welcoming environment.

With a little creativity and common sense, you can enjoy the holidays while trying to sell your home.

THE HEAT IS ON

As the weather gets cooler, it's a good time to check your HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) system to make sure it's operating properly. While it's wise to have your HVAC inspected by a heating professional every fall and spring, you can increase the efficiency of your system by following these simple maintenance tips from American Home Shield.

Now: Use a high-efficiency pleated filter with an electrostatic charge that works like a magnet to grab the tiniest particles. Replace the filter every 90 days and check it monthly. If it looks dark and clogged, change it, and if you have pets, you may need to change it more often.

Keep the air-conditioning unit free of leaves, pollen, grass or branches that can interfere with its future efficiency. Make sure there is at least two feet of space cleared around outdoor units.

Monthly or Seasonally: Inspect the insulation and refrigerant lines monthly. Before winter sets in, replace the humidifier filter and turn on the water.

Always: Keep at least 20 percent of a home's registers open to avoid putting unnecessary strain on the HVAC system.

Following these simple tips can prolong the life of your HVAC system and help you be prepared for whatever the winter season may bring.

Annually: Replace the battery in the carbon monoxide detector.

Walk around the exterior of the house and check that outdoor AC units and heat pumps are on firm and level ground. Pour one cup of bleach mixed with water down the AC condensate drain to prevent a buildup of mold and algae, which can clog the drain.

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heart-healthy NEIGHBORHOODS

Living in a friendly neighborhood may be good for your heart, according to a recent study by psychologists at the University of Michigan. In fact, the more social connections you have among your neighbors, the less likely you are to die from a heart attack.

The study analyzed the social connections of more than 5,000 adults in urban, suburban and rural areas over a four-year period. Researchers controlled for factors like age, race, income, marital status, education, mental health, optimism and other known health-risk factors associated with heart attacks, such as diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure. By the end of the four years, 148 of the individuals studied had suffered a heart attack.

Maintaining friendly relationships with your neighbors may be good for your health because neighbors are more likely to check on each other and notice any potential health problems, share resources and health information, and lend money. They can also offer emotional support, which can be a buffer during times of stress.

Conversely, other studies have shown that negative aspects of a neighborhood can have a detrimental effect on a person's health. For example, living in areas with violence, noise, poor air quality and access to too many fast food restaurants can have a negative impact on a person's health. Further, a study at the University of Pennsylvania finds



that living in areas with abandoned buildings can lead to isolation and hamper social relationships, which can lead to poor physical health of residents who live nearby.

Being helpful and neighborly is not only good for your health, it's good for the health of the neighborhood.

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