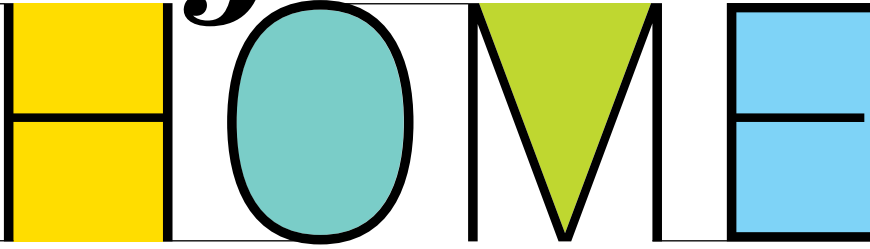


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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

Pool Maintenance 101

Owning a pool is the dream of many homeowners—but the maintenance that comes along with pool ownership can bring numerous headaches. Here are the things you need to be aware of if you plan on installing a pool or are moving into a home that has a pool included.

Pool components

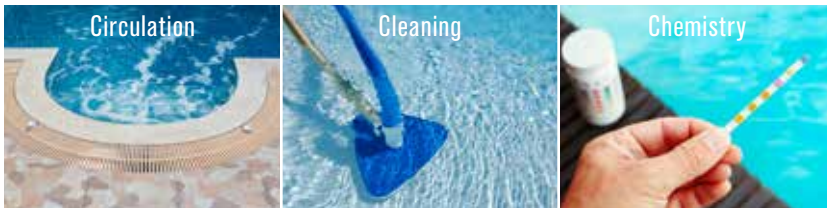
Educate yourself on the four standard components of any swimming pool:



Your water needs to be kept clear of pollutants to prevent future maintenance projects. Keep your pool liner or walls free of algae, mold and debris. Ensure your filter is functioning properly to keep the grit and grime away. And confirm that the skimmer/return system is in good shape to draw water into the filter and push it back into the pool.

Pool health

Diving in deeper, there are three more aspects of pool health to be aware of:



Your pool pump should be running 24/7 to ensure that water is constantly circulating and being filtered at all times. Set up a regular cleaning schedule and use a net skimmer, pool brush and vacuum to rid your pool of debris the filter doesn't catch. And test your pool water, so you better understand the chemistry at work, finding the perfect pH, alkalinity and sanitizer levels for your pool.

With this knowledge in hand, you'll be able to relax and enjoy your own private swimming pool in no time.

Landscaping a New Home

Landscaping is a great way to make the property you just purchased feel truly like home. But not everyone has experience with designing outdoor spaces. Use these tips to help you properly plan your landscaping project and make your yard the best it can be.

Look ahead — Before beginning any sort of landscaping project, you'll have to answer a few important questions. What is the purpose of the outdoor space? Are you using your yard to entertain, or do you want it to serve as your own private sanctuary? Are there any permanent features you'll need to consider when drawing up your plans? What colors do you prefer? All of these should be determined before breaking ground or doing any work on your outdoor space.

Mind your finances — This can be tricky, as you can quickly go way overboard on the types of furniture, walkways, entertainment areas and greenery for a landscaping project. Set a firm budget from the beginning to ensure you aren't tempted to spend beyond your means. Remember: While the outdoor space of your home is important, you don't want to break the bank on a section of your property where you won't be spending the majority of your time.

Learn to prioritize — Identify which aspects of your landscaping project are most important, and finalize those first. Usually, people will prioritize the front of the house because it is visible from the street. After these elements are taken care of, you can think about the backyard and any additional features you'd like to add to your outdoor area.





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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

Some people view a front door as simply a utility—a way in and out. However, the entrance to your home can speak to both guests who come to visit and to your own creativity. Here are a few ways to make your door stand out.

Style The first thing you need to address is what style of door you want. Depending on what your home looks like and your own personal tastes, there are a range of options to choose. From a traditional door that you see on most houses as you drive around your neighborhood, to a modern look that makes the door really pop from the sidewalk or street, to a niche-style, like country cottage or beach bungalow, you must decide how the door will fit in with the rest of the home design.

Color While you can choose from a wide variety of colors, some fit in better with certain styles. For instance, a traditional door usually is a dark shade, like black, gray or navy, while a modern door can be as bold as lime green, orange or magenta.

Bells and whistles Consider some less-thought-about features of your doorway. Are you going to have a door knocker? A mail slot? Do you want knobs or handles? You even need to think about what font you want your street number to be written in, if you have it posted on the front of your home. For all of these features, you then need to think about what materials they'll be constructed from. Brass, gold or silver can really accentuate your door and make these extra elements shine.

Finishing touches Complete your entryway with a few extra personal touches, like a tasteful doormat or bench/seating area on your porch or stoop. They may not be the most important features while you're planning your front door design, but these accessories can certainly tie all design elements together and create the perfect entryway experience.

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