



House Notes

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How to Avoid Do-It-Yourself Headaches

By Jim Katen

A few years ago, a friend of mine (let's call him John) remodeled his house and thought he'd save a lot of money by doing his own plumbing. While John knew quite a bit about writing (let's say he's the editor of small weekly newspaper), he didn't know squat about plumbing.

Curiously, this didn't become apparent to him until he called for an inspection of his rough-in work. The Washington County inspector stared at it for awhile, scratched his head and searched for the most tactful response he could muster. He finally settled on, "Um, exactly what are we trying to achieve here?"

With that devastating phrase, John learned three important lessons about do-it-yourself projects

1. They're not as easy as they seem.
2. They always take longer than you expect.
3. Once you get them right, they can be tremendously satisfying.

Unfortunately, getting them right can be downright tricky. Over the years, as a home inspector working for prospective buyers, I've seen every home repair and remodel mistake imaginable. Most of them tend to fall into similar categories. Here are a few of the more common mistakes I see and some hints for avoiding them.

Avoid the white plague:

I hate doing my own plumbing. It always seems to involve at least three trips to the hardware store for even the simplest of repairs.

But if you're brave enough to attempt it, I salute you and offer the following advice: Don't use white PVC plastic supply pipe.

When you get to that aisle in the hardware store, just close your eyes and walk on by. It's fine for irrigation – when you bury it in the ground and the only water that runs through it is cold – but don't put it in or under your house. The stuff just isn't reliable.

Go ahead and use CPVC plastic (that's the opaque yellow-colored stuff) or PEX (that's the translucent milky plastic) or even old-fashioned copper or galvanized steel. All of those work just fine if you follow the directions and don't rush.

Curb your creativity:

In fact a lot of home projects go smoother when you read the directions and don't rush.

Roofing with asphalt shingles is a perfect example. Pretty much everything you need to know to do the job is printed on each bundle of shingles. Put the nails where they're supposed to be, put the right kinds of flashings in the right kinds of places, and put it all together in the right order.

Sometimes, as you're going along, a little voice pipes up inside your head, "Say, I've just thought of a great way to make this project go faster."

That's the devil talking. He owns stock in the company that makes blue tarps and if you follow his advice there'll be one in your future. Stick to the printed instructions and go slowly. Or, just buy the blue tarp ahead of time.

Flash on your deck:

If you're going to attach a deck to your house, be sure that the ledger gets secured properly. The ledger is the part of the deck that connects to the house.

It should be bolted on, not just nailed, and there should be metal flashing that prevents water from running behind it. Water that gets back there can follow the fasteners into the wall and cause rot.

If that happens, the fasteners won't hold very well in the rotted wood and the deck could pull away from the house.



How to Avoid Do-It-Yourself Headaches (cont.)

Keep your eyes low:

Garage door openers are pretty straightforward to install, but I see folks making the same mistakes over and over. Be sure to mount the little electric eyes down low.

Remember that they're there to protect people or critters, little or big, who might be lying across that opening. Don't put them at the height of a car bumper. They should be between 4" and 6" off the floor.

While you're at it, be sure to put the control button at least five feet above the floor to keep it out of reach of small kids. The last person on earth you want operating that thing is a 3-year-old.

Bring your paper in:

Insulating your house is a great way to save money and it's an easy enough job that most any homeowner can do. But believe it or not, there's a right and a wrong way to put up insulation.

If you buy the stuff with the paper backing, be sure to put it up with the paper facing the inside of the house.

You see, the paper is coated with a vapor barrier and if it faces the outside of the house you could get condensation going on in there – next thing you know, there's a mold farm growing in the walls and your family's being featured on "60 Minutes."

Also remember to always cover the paper with drywall or paneling. That paper burns like crazy and, if you leave it exposed, it could help to spread a fire. Now I know what you're thinking, "If I put the insulation up backwards, I'll get condensation. That'll wet the paper and prevent it from catching fire." Well, let me tell you, you're not the first to think of that one. Just take my word for it and don't go there.

One other thing. If you're planning a project that requires a permit, get the permit. It's not very expensive, it forces you to do a little advance planning, and the inspectors who come out to check your work might save you from making a big mistake (or two).



***Happy Holidays from the AMI Team, and
thank you for your business in 2009!***

***We look forward to working with you in the
coming year.***

From the
kitchens of AMI,
a holiday recipe
you might
enjoy...



Sweet Potato Gratin

(serves 4)

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| 3 tablespoons butter, divided | 1 cup heavy cream |
| 1 clove garlic minced | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 2 large sweet potatoes peeled and sliced | 1/4 teaspoon pepper |
| 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese | 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper |

Butter a 10x10 baking dish with 1 tablespoon butter mixed with garlic. Layer 1/3 of the potatoes in dish, cover with 1/3 of the cheese, repeat twice. Pour cream mixed with salt, pepper and cayenne over top. Dot with the remaining butter, cut into pieces. Cover with foil, bake at 400 for 20 min, remove foil, cook another 20-25 minutes until top is golden brown and bubbly and potatoes are tender. A tasty, sweet-savory dish!