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Create spring color by planting bulbs in the fall



The do's and don'ts of chimney upkeep

Trends in replacement windows

# Time to hit the refresh button

## Design ideas for homeowners sprucing up current spaces

By Eileen Mozinski Schmidt  
Special to Conley Media

Interest rates have risen in recent months, so some homeowners may be planning on staying in their current location.

For those not planning to move in the near future, there are several ways to decorate and utilize smaller rooms or spaces already in use to give areas a renovated feel, according to one area designer.

Karen Kempf, principal designer and owner of Karen Kempf Interiors, recently offered a few suggestions for Waukesha County Home readers.

Kempf and the team at the Brookfield-based business offer a variety of services and collaborates on projects “to assure balance in both the creative and technical aspect of design,” the website said.

Here are some of Kempf’s ideas, which have been edited for publication.

**Waukesha County Home:** What are some general things a homeowners can do to update spaces? If they can’t take on an entire renovation project, is there something that is good to focus on first?

See **REFRESH/PAGE 2**



Photo submitted by Jane Thurow of Karen Kempf Interiors  
A living room before a refresh project by Karen Kempf Interiors. Karen Kempf said repainting, wall papering and moving furniture are good ways to refresh a room.



Photo submitted by Jane Thurow of Karen Kempf Interiors  
A living room following a room refresh project by Karen Kempf Interiors.

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## Refresh

From Page 1

**Kempf:** "The best way to refresh a room is to change the paint color or add wallpaper, or switch up the furniture layout," she said, adding that smaller details like switching out an area rug, artwork or adding accessories like accent pillows can make "a tremendous difference" to the overall feel of a space.

"If you're afraid to commit to four walls of wallpaper, try wallpapering just the ceiling for something unexpected. This is fun to do in a powder room or dining room," she said.

Another idea for creating a new feel to a space is to change the purpose of a room, Kempf said.

For example, a sunroom could become a dining room and a dining room a sitting room or small den.

"Especially if it's adjacent to an open kitchen," she added. "People always gather around the kitchen, why not make the seating more inviting? Plus, if you have a

formal dining room that is rarely used, it can be a fun change for that space."

Simple changes like these can "really give new life to a space," she said.

**"My best tip for small spaces is to find furniture pieces that can be multi-functional."**

— **Karen Kempf**,  
Principal designer and  
owner of Karen's Kempf  
Interiors



Photo submitted by Jane Thurow of Karen Kempf Interiors

A powder room following a renovation project by Karen Kempf Interiors. Karen Kempf, principal designer and owner of the business, said adding wallpaper is a good way to update a space.



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### Sales Director:

Jim Baumgart  
262/513-2621  
jbaumgart@conley.net

### Editor:

Dan Muckelbauer  
262/513-2626  
dmuck@conley.net

### Production:

Patricia Scheel  
262/513-2690  
pscheel@conley.net

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**Waukesha County Home:** How can homeowners make small spaces work for them? Are there designs for a room that achieve the feeling of additional space?

**Kempf:** "My best tip for small spaces is to find furniture pieces that can be multi-functional," she said.

And Kempf emphasized the importance of keeping clutter to a minimum.

"Clutter can make an already small space feel even smaller, so finding pieces that match your style and offer functional storage is key," she said.

**Waukesha County Home:** Are there any new decorating trends that homeowners can incorporate to give rooms a fresh feel?

**Kempf:** "Soft, light earthy tones are back," she said.

Sherwin-Williams Company has named the color "Upward" as the "Color of the Year 2024" on its website.

The color is "a breezy, blissful blue," the site said.

When painting a room, Kempf recommended using the same paint color, but in different finishes, on trim and walls for a "soft tone on tone look."

"Layer in textures and patterns to add interest in a space," she said.

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Photo submitted by Michael Timm

When choosing a location for spring-flowering bulbs, look for well-draining soil. Most bulbs prefer sun, but with trees just leafing out, it usually isn't hard to find a spot, Michael Timm says.

# Creating color with spring-flowering bulbs



MICHAEL  
TIMM

After a long winter, there is nothing quite like the explosion of color provided by spring flowering bulbs such as tulips, daffodils and so on. To me, the emergence of these beauties signifies the true arrival of spring.

Spring bulbs are important in adding color to the landscape in early spring. There is a lot of green at this time of year. Besides a few flowering shrubs there isn't much other color to be found. So, where do we start?

**We need to locate some areas to plant.** Most bulbs prefer to grow in full to part sun. This normally isn't a problem because most trees and shrubs are just starting to leaf out, meaning more sunlight is reaching the ground. So, locations are endless. They also prefer to grow in a moist, but well-drained soil. Soils that have poor drainage are not good places to plant bulbs.

See **BULBS**/PAGE 4

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## Bulbs

From Page 3

### Now let's look at proper planting.

To start, a good rule of thumb is to plant the bulbs a minimum of three times their height. So if your bulb is 2 inches from top to bottom, plant it at least 6 inches deep. I actually like to plant mine deeper by another inch or two. This does two things. First, it slows the growth of the bulb down, allowing for more years of flowering, especially with tulips. Second, it helps discourage the squirrels; they normally won't dig this deep in search of food. An organic bulb fertilizer should also be added at this time and again every year in the fall to ensure proper flowering for years to come.

### Flowering bulbs can be used in natural plantings, formal beds and mixed borders.

Natural plantings are plantings that mimic nature. Look for those bulbs that say "good for naturalizing." How do you mimic nature? When planting, follow the contours of the land,

never plant against the grain. Use solid, muted colors and stay away from bright flashy ones. Take a drive in the country and let nature be your guide.

Formal beds are just that; formal. Use large blocks of bright colors and in wide open spaces. These beds are normally treated like annuals because they become unsightly after bloom. Most people dig the bulbs out after bloom and replace with warm season annuals.

Mixed border plantings are the most popular way to use bulbs. What you're doing is simply planting pockets of five to seven bulbs to add spring color to your existing beds. It's a great way to brighten up a bed in spring when nothing else is blooming. Mix different bloom times to extend the season, along with different varieties for interest.

So if you are lacking early spring color, plant some bulbs this fall. Then sit back, relax and wait for the explosion of color next spring.

Happy gardening!

*(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist at Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)*



Photo submitted by Michael Timm

Bi-color tulips such as these are often the first colors of plants — besides green — in the spring. Have fun choosing those colors when planting bulbs in the fall.

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Adding a layer of mulch around plants can insulate roots and the soil against hard frosts.

# Prepare your garden for winter’s onslaught

Individuals who don’t live near the equator or in another warm climate know that winter will rear its chilly head this year. Cold temperatures and snowy conditions may be excellent for skiing and sledding, but gardeners recognize these conditions are not ideal for their plants.

The inevitable slowing of activity in the garden during fall marks a time to shift attention from constant plant care to preparing the landscape for next season. It may be tempting to simply let Mother Nature take over, but a little pre-winter TLC can ensure gardens make it through winter unscathed.

## Remove spent plants

Decomposing organic material is the basis for compost and other fertilizers. However, vegetable plants that are left to sit can lead to decay in the garden. Decaying plants can serve as hosts for pest populations and diseases. Rotting vegetables also can drop unwanted seeds into the soil, which eventually can strip nutrients that normally would go to next year’s crops.

Ornamental plants and perennials can be cut back in fall. Cut down stalks and remove leaves.

## Plant a cover crop

The gardening resource This Is My Garden recommends planting a cover crop to set the stage for a successful spring. A cover crop protects the soil and can return nutrients to it. When the soil is bare during winter, weed seeds can easily blow in and lie in wait, ultimately becoming a problem during the ensuing year. Cover crops can include clover or field peas, which will increase the levels of available nitrogen.

## Amend the soil

Fall is a perfect time to add soil amendments, such as manure and compost. These fertilizers will add nutrients and break down gradually, enriching the soil over the winter.

## Replenish mulch

Gardeners may have added mulch around shrubs and other areas of the landscape early in the season because it is attractive. But mulch also does much to reduce water loss and protect the soil from erosion. It may inhibit weed growth as well. Replacing mulch when the mercury drops can insulate the soil, which helps to regulate soil temperature. A thick layer of mulch around root vegetables left in the garden can offer protection against hard frosts.

## Divide bulbs

Divide plant bulbs and plant them where you want flowers like daffodils and tulips to grow in the spring.

## Prune dormant plants

Wait until plants are dormant to prune them and adjust their shape. Most shrubs and trees should be pruned in late winter, right before new growth.

## Move potted plants

Bring delicate plants into a sheltered area, such as a greenhouse or indoor garage, so they can continue to thrive during the winter.

Fall and winter still provide opportunities to spend time in the garden. At this point in the year, gardeners can prepare landscapes for the next season.



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# The do's and don'ts of chimney maintenance



**JAMES  
DULLEY**

**Dear Jim:** I use my efficient fireplace to supplement my heat pump. The chimney has never been cleaned and the exterior is weathered. Is it really important to have it cleaned and what things can I do myself?

— Willie B.

**Dear Willie:** If you plan to use your fireplace for heating, it must be an efficient design. The typical open masonry fireplace loses much more heat than it provides. It may feel comfortable directly in front of the fireplace, but heated air is being drawn up the flue from the rest of the house.

There are some maintenance items you can do yourself, but cleaning the inside of the chimney is not one of them. Definitely



Photo by ChimneyRX

Clean off the interior of the fireplace opening to keep the mortar and brick looking new.

have it professionally inspected and cleaned. Many house fires and deaths are caused from creosote buildup and poor chimney maintenance.

The exterior weathered spots do need to be fixed for both aesthetics and integrity of

See **FIREPLACE/PAGE 7**



Photo by ChimneyRX

This synthetic mortar repair material is easy to apply, durable and dries to the same color as real cement-based mortar.



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Photo by ChimneyRX

This patch system repairs and seals the flashing around the base of the chimney. A piece of mesh is covered with a tough polymer material, which adheres well.

## Fireplace

From Page 6

the chimney, but the condition of the inside of the chimney is more important. A well-maintained chimney should be able to contain a chimney fire and avoid a house fire.

Efficient fireplaces, which control combustion air and room air loss, tend to produce more creosote because of incomplete combustion. Even though you want it to be as efficient as possible, don't choke down the combustion air inlet excessively.

Many houses have had chimney fires without the family knowing it. One obvious sign of a chimney fire is a rapid increase of the draft up the chimney. The intense heat from the fire creates a very strong upward draft.

Another sign is reduced draft and smoky conditions afterward. The heat from the chimney fire can crack the tiles lining it. If the mortar is deteriorated, the tiles can come loose or break and fall across the flue. This blocks the smoke path up the chimney causing back drafting and poor combustion.

When the chimney is cleaned, you may see chunks of puffy black creosote fall into the fireplace. This often indicates there was a chimney fire. Make sure the chimney sweep does a visual inspection of the entire chimney liner with a video camera.

If a chimney sweep does not do a thorough inspection, but suggests a new liner or a costly sealer procedure, get a second opinion. I had that happen once at my own home. The second inspection with a camera showed the chimney liner was actually fine.

Do-it-yourself repair materials are available for chimney exterior (ChimneyRX, [www.chimneyrx.com](http://www.chimneyrx.com), 800-860-6327). If water penetrates the chimney crown or through the sides, this can affect the interior mortar joints. It can also leak into the house walls causing structural damage.

Brick actually is a porous material even though it feels very hard and rainwater will easily migrate through it. This is the cause of the bad spots you see. In climates with repeated freeze/thaw cycles during winter, this damage happens faster.

Using a hammer and chisel, remove crumbling or loose mortar. Use matching elastomeric mortar repair material to fill the voids. After it sets up, coat (brush or spray) the entire chimney exterior with chimney water repellent.

Inspect the chimney crown for cracks. Similar types of elastomeric repair materials can be brushed on cracks or applied with a trowel for more serious repairs. If it is below freezing temperatures, use a special type of material which sets up as it freezes.

Unless the metal flashing between the chimney and roof is badly rusted, a thick coating of flexible flashing sealant should block leaks. Badly rusted flashing must first be replaced and then sealed.

**Dear Jim:** I need to bend some aluminum siding to repair a corner over insulation damaged in a storm. I do not have a professional bending brake to make a crisp sharp corner. How can I bend it myself?

— Steve K.

**Dear Steve:** For those who do not know, a brake is a heavy piece of equipment, often with a hydraulic cylinder, to bend long creases in sheet metal. It is too expensive for the average do-it-yourselfer.

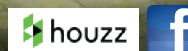
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# Components trending in replacement windows

MILWAUKEE — Choosing replacement windows is an important decision because you want the window to not only do its job in keeping your home warm or cool and free of drafts, but you also want it to be durable, maintenance free and to enhance your home's beauty and character, said Christi Pryor, marketing manager with Callen Construction, Inc.

From fashionable to practical, Pryor explains some of the trends she is seeing in replacement windows.

## Exterior frame colors

Black-framed windows have been around for a few years, but the trend continues. Black is a timeless color and looks good on any style home, from farmhouse to traditional to contemporary to mid-century modern, Pryor said. Besides black, we are also seeing homeowners getting bolder with other colors. In addition to the popular Ebony color, there's also bronze, Bahama brown, pebble gray, cashmere, Sierra and the traditional stone white. It's important to note, just because a color is on-trend, you as the homeowner need to choose what seems right for your particular style.

## Energy-efficiency is a must-have

Pryor said she has never encountered a



Photo courtesy of Callen Construction, Inc.

While traditional stone white remains popular, black frames continue to trend.

customer that was not seeking a window replacement that didn't offer improved energy-efficiency. Quite frankly, Callen does not offer products that don't enhance a home's efficiency. In fact, energy efficiency is typically a key driver in window replacement, Pryor said. Infinity from Marvin offers various levels of Low-E (low emissivity) insulating glass, which boosts energy efficiency and blocks UV rays. In our climate, we recommend using Low E3, which will retain heat in your home during the winter while letting the light in and help keep heat out during the summer. It also blocks up to 95% of the sun's damaging UV

rays to reduce fading of your furniture, window treatments and flooring, said Pryor.

In addition to the glass, the frame material is another consideration. Marvin Ultrex fiberglass window frames are engineered to have superior material properties in terms of strength, stability and durability.

## Thinner frames for a more expansive view

Windows are all about the view to the outdoors and homeowners are wanting more of it. The advantage to using Infinity from Marvin is the use of Ultrex fiberglass in its construction, Pryor said. Because Ultrex is

so strong, eight times stronger than vinyl in fact, less is used in the window frame, which allows more daylight and expanded views.

## Refresh with a change of shape

There are many styles of replacement windows, with double-hung the most popular replacement style. There is a trend toward casement, as well as bow, bay and slider windows. Bow and bay windows allow light to come in from multiple angles, and they also have a casement options, said Pryor. The slider operates like a patio door, so it does not open into an outdoor living space or landscaping.

## Sound abatement now more than ever

Sound-reducing windows limit noise from the outside world, which can disturb the tranquility desired in a home. Sound abatement can be achieved through the materials used to build the window. For the most part, it's the glass in the window that makes the biggest difference, with Infinity from Marvin offering options that reduce outside noise.

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