

SERIOUSLY CUTE EASTER  
EGGS AND DESSERTS

GREEN HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS  
THAT SPARKLE

NO-PRESSURE WAYS  
TO HANDLE PICKY EATING

# Parents®

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**FRESH  
START**

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CAN'T WAIT TO MEET  
HER BABY GIRL

**PLAY IN NATURE  
EVERY DAY**

**ORGANIZE  
YOUR  
DIGITAL LIFE**

**TAKE A  
STAND FOR THE  
PLANET**  
(AND BRING THE KIDS!)

# LIFE.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY TOGETHER

EASE OFF THE PAPER TOWELS, YES, BUT THERE ARE BIGGER WAYS TO MAKE AN ECO IMPACT IN THE KITCHEN.



## **Renovate Your House the Green Way**

A few eco-savvy home improvements—from smart tech to new flooring and kitchen upgrades—are wise investments in the long run for your family and the planet. →

by SARAH KARNASIEWCZ

**COULD** staying in be what inspires more folks to go green? If the renovation boom is any indicator (have you tried to get a contractor on the phone lately?), one upside of hanging out at home may be a new commitment to make our houses more comfortable, efficient, and healthy—not just for ourselves but for the earth.

It doesn't hurt that many eco-friendly home upgrades offer a different kind of "green" benefit too. Whether it's splurging on energy-efficient appliances or adding better air filters, lots of improvements can pay for themselves in utility savings over time or by increasing the value of your home, should you sell.

If your wish list is long and your budget is finite, it's tricky to know where to begin. We asked a few of our favorite certified green home designers and architects—all of whom are parents—to walk us through some oft-requested items and identify strategic, sustainable changes to suit every kind of family and price point. Here's what they say makes the biggest difference.



Homeowner  
Amanda Jane Jones  
chose wood  
floors from the Hudson  
Company throughout  
her home because of their  
commitment to using  
reclaimed wood.

#### **UPGRADE**

### **Install Hardwood Flooring**

The reasons to switch from carpet to hardwood, bamboo, or tile floors go beyond aesthetics: Carpeting often contains synthetic chemicals and is notorious for trapping allergens. Plus, according to Realm, an online data platform that analyzes the value of home improvements, putting in new floors is one of the most high-value upgrades you can make, yielding a 342 percent average return on your investment. But when it comes to making eco- (and family-) friendly flooring choices, sustainable sourcing is the key.

On the affordable end of the spectrum, bamboo, cork, and Marmoleum—an all-natural linoleum that comes in stylish colors and designs (and looks nothing like your grade-school cafeteria)—are all excellent options. But if you're set on hardwood floors, the simplest way to know you're making a green choice is to look for products certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), says Kristin Bartone, a LEED-certified designer based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The international nonprofit promotes socially and

environmentally responsible forestry practices, including minimal use of pesticides and other chemicals, protection of wildlife, and fair wages and safe conditions for workers. "When you see the FSC stamp, you can feel good that the flooring has been sustainably produced and supports a local economy," Bartone says. And you don't have to settle: These days, FSC-certified solid wood is available from companies like Vermont Plank Flooring and Tesoro Woods in many species and styles. (Pricing runs from \$6 to \$20

per square foot, depending on grade, species, and cut.)

Because it's a recycled product, reclaimed wood flooring—which has been salvaged from old barns and other buildings headed for the wrecking ball—is another option to consider, says Laura Hodges, principal designer at the Baltimore-based, LEED-certified firm Laura Hodges Studio. Going with reclaimed doesn't necessarily mean embracing the distressed look. (Although with rowdy kids running underfoot, getting used to a few dings here and there might not be a bad thing.) "Reclaimed floors look great and come in all kinds of styles now," Hodges says. "Plus, they can always be sanded down and refinished like new." Some companies, such as the Pennsylvania-based mill Sylvan Brandt, offer nationwide shipping. But the reclaimed flooring industry does tend to be more regional than its industrial counterpart, so it's worth googling options in your area to try to shop locally. (Pricing starts at \$8 per square foot.)

When you don't have the budget to start from scratch, Ross Smith of the Asheville, North Carolina-based firm Assembly Architecture and Build suggests this fix: "If you have a mix-and-match situation with oak in one room and pine in another, sand everything down and finish with a combo of Bona NordicSeal, a sanding sealant, and Bona Traffic HD, a poly-like finish," he explains. "The NordicSeal has a cool Scandi whitewashed look and is a great way to unify patchy floors—and when combined with Traffic, it's basically bulletproof. Your kid will be able to ride their scooter through the house." With Greenguard certification and low-VOC, water-based formulas, both finishes offer green bona fides to boot. (Bona NordicSeal is \$58 per gallon; Bona Traffic HD is about \$139 per gallon)

## UPGRADE

### Add Smart Home Technology

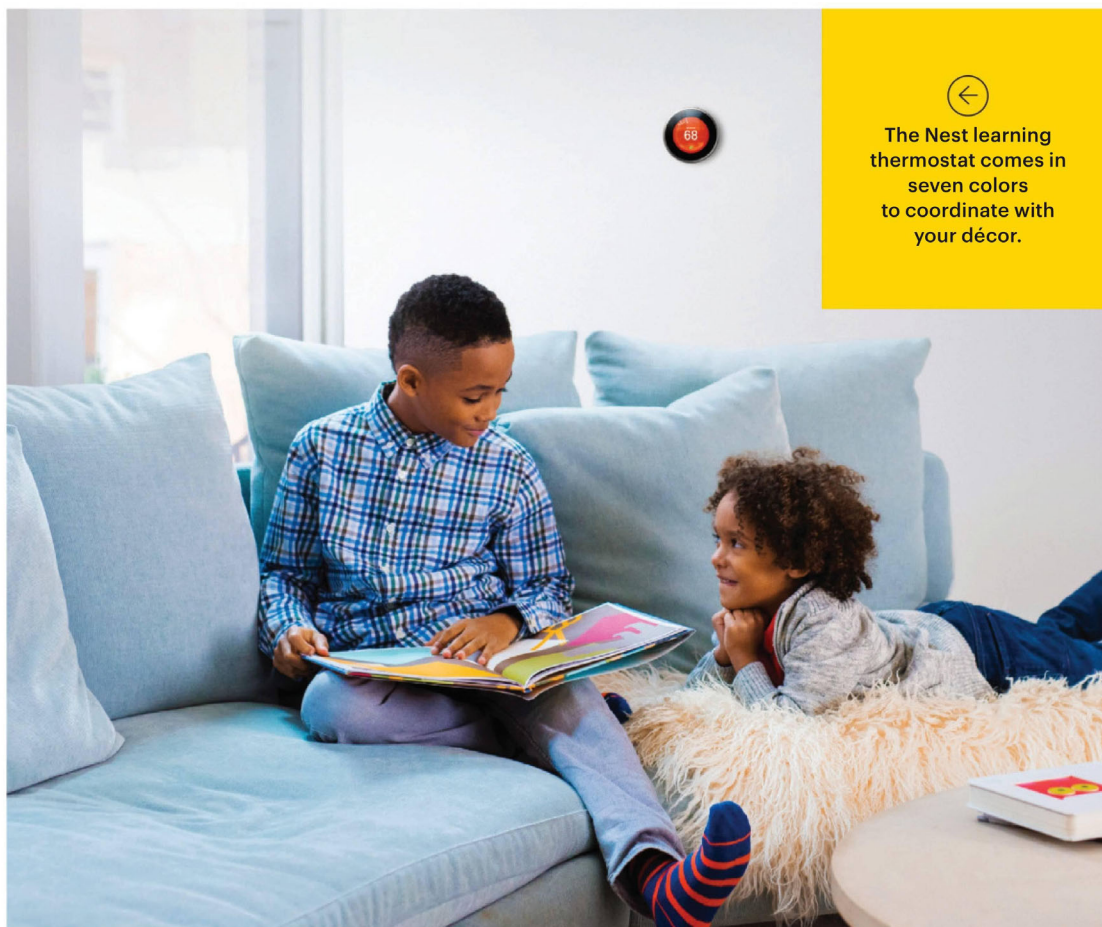
"If you're looking for simple updates that will cut down on chores, improve your house's efficiency, and increase your happiness, smart home systems are a great place to start," advises Santa Monica-based designer Sarah Barnard. "And adding them doesn't involve a gut renovation. There are plenty of entry points that aren't major budget breakers."

For instance, a Google Nest learning thermostat (\$249) will gauge how long it takes your house to heat up and cool down, figure out your family's temperature preferences and schedules, and adjust heat

and AC accordingly. The upside (besides maximum coziness exactly when you want it) is that follow-up data from Google has shown that, on average, the gadget saves homes 10 to 12 percent on heating and 15 percent on cooling annually.

Another device that can deliver savings and peace of mind is a smart leak detector, such as the one made by Moen (\$50). When mounted near a water heater, washing machine, refrigerator, or other water-carrying appliance, it will monitor moisture and humidity levels and send a smartphone alert at the first sign of a leak.

With a plumber's help, you can even pair detectors with a smart water valve (like the Flo Smart Water Monitor & Shutoff, \$760) connected directly to your water main, which turns things off at the source whenever it senses trouble. If this seems like overkill, consider that dripping faucets and other minor household leaks lead to 10,000 gallons of water wasted every year in an average household, according to the EPA. Catching and repairing them early not only saves finite resources, it helps avoid pricey repairs and the growth of mold that can sicken your family.



The Nest learning thermostat comes in seven colors to coordinate with your décor.

**UPGRADE****Make Air Improvements**

According to Bartone, one unfortunate irony is that when a home is well insulated and energy-efficient, the tight seal between indoors and outdoors can affect indoor air quality for the worse by preventing fresh air from coming in and dust, dander, smoke, and other pollutants from being filtered out. “We don’t always think about air—it’s just there and you breathe it,” she cautions. “But maintaining good air quality in our home is extremely important for raising a healthy family. It’s totally foundational.” Her advice: If you’re ready to install a new HVAC system, opt for one with a health-care-grade HEPA filter and pair it with a fresh-air intake adapter (starting at around \$250, not including installation) that continually replaces the stagnant, contaminated air inside your home with fresh air from the great outdoors.

You can still reap plenty of benefits without a total overhaul by simply adding better filters to your existing system’s return vents and air handler. When shopping for furnace and air conditioner filters, look for ones—like the Nordic Pure MERV 10 (\$36 for six)—that have a MERV (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) rating in the 10 to 13 range, which should remove upwards of 90 percent of the airborne pollutants that cause common health and respiratory issues.

“Eco upgrades aren’t just grand gestures like solar panels. Baby steps are as important.”

—designer Laura Hodges

**UPGRADE****Spring for a Green “Dream Kitchen”**

Not only is the cooking space the heart of your home, it’s also one of the areas where updates can make the biggest financial impact, according to a 2021 *Cost vs. Value Report* recently published by the housing market research firm Zonda. On average, at resale, homeowners see about a 72 percent return on their investment from a minor kitchen remodel.

If you’re committed to a green reno, the key is making mindful choices every step of the way, Hodges says. “To reduce waste, I encourage people to think about if they *really* need to change. But if you are taking out cabinets, donate them to Habitat for Humanity or another place where they can be resold or reused. Hardware, appliances—anything that

can be diverted from a landfill, is worth making the effort for.”

Selecting a sustainable countertop doesn’t have to mean giving up on a dream of a sleek marble island. “If you’re in love with the look of a natural stone, two things to consider are whether it can be traced to a responsible source and how big a footprint it has in terms of transportation costs,” Hodges explains. Instead of relying on resource-intensive slabs from quarries in China, Italy, and Brazil, she advises seeking out responsibly quarried domestic stone like creamy calacatta-esque Imperial Danby marble from Vermont (about \$140 per square foot) or rich gray soapstone from Virginia (\$75 to \$110 per square foot). Soapstone is not only on



If you’re designing a new kitchen, plan a place for a dedicated compost bin, just as you do for recycling and garbage.

trend, it’s strong enough to stand up to the wear and tear of family life. (After all, it’s been the go-to surface in high school chemistry labs for years.)

Are your appliances more than ten years old? If so, trading up even a couple of them can equal significant health benefits and utilities savings. For instance, today’s dishwashers use about half the water and energy that they did two decades ago. To simplify shopping, look for models labeled with the EPA’s Energy Star certification, or go to [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) to search by specific categories. Some dishwashers from Bartone’s favorite brand, Bosch (starting at \$899), use as little as 2.9 gallons of water per wash cycle and are so quiet they’ll never interrupt naptime or disturb viewings of *The Great British Baking Show*. Replacing a gas range with an induction cooktop (starting at around \$1,000) will reduce energy usage and cut down on volatile indoor air pollutants like carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide—and because it does away with open flames and hot surfaces, it makes the kitchen safer for kids. “The up-front costs of upgrading might feel a little steep,” Bartone says. “But you should think of it as an investment in your pocketbook and the planet.”