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To DIY Or Not To DIY? 5 Common Summer Home-Improvement To-Dos

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For many, summer’s arrival signals the end of school, summer Fridays at the office, and, of course, a chance to kick back at the beach.

But for ambitious homeowners, it means just one thing: It’s time to tackle those outdoor home-improvement projects that have been waiting in the wings all winter.

Just one question remains: When should you save some green and tackle a project yourself—and when is it smarter (and safer) to call in the big guns?

To find out, we tapped contractor Danny Lipford, a nationally syndicated TV and radio host based in Mobile, Ala., and Rory McCreesh, a master builder and founder of Duce Construction in New York City, to offer their sage advice for getting the job done right.

Summer Project #1: Pool Cleaning

Your husband’s 8th annual water polo tournament. The kids’ birthday parties. Your pool is poised to get plenty of use this summer—which means it will need to be properly cleaned and treated for safe swimming.

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[and brushes](#) galore to remove leaves and algae, when it comes to shocking the water with chemicals, that's where you could use some help.

DIY or Hire a Pro? This surprisingly simple chore is all yours.

Getting the Job Done “[Maintaining your pool] is a great DIY project,” Lipford says. “Retail pool supply stores, like [Leslie's](#), are very helpful in analyzing your pool's condition and recommending the needed chemicals to have a summer-ready pool.”

All you have to do is take a sample of pool water to the supply store in a sanitized container. Once you tell the clerk your pool's dimensions, they can calculate the proper ratio for agents like chlorine and cyanuric acid, and provide detailed instructions on how—and when—to add them to your pool.

All in all, Lipford says regular chemical maintenance can run you between \$25 and \$75 a month, depending on the size and type of pool you have—compared to about [\\$165](#) for once-a-week pro cleaners.

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Summer Project #2: Landscaping

From planting petunias to [installing a flagstone path](#) to your front door, a little landscaping can go a long way when it comes to beautifying your property.

But with so many types of flora to choose from and the perplexing science of soil to contend with, you might be wondering whether you need a landscape architect to make your yard really sing.

DIY or Hire a Pro? For the most part, small-scale tasks—mulching beds, shrub pruning, and weeding—can easily be successful DIY projects. “The beauty of minor landscaping is that it requires few yard tools, very little skill, and, in most cases, little time to achieve fantastic results,” Lipford says.

The only exception: breaking out the chainsaw and going to work on that overgrown oak in the front yard.

“Pruning large trees should be done by a reputable, experienced tree-care company or arborist,” McCreesh says. “Not only is it a skill that requires talent and expertise, but it also poses safety hazards, as the work entails ladders and sharp tools.”



Getting the Job Done If gardening is one of the top landscaping projects on your list this summer, Lipford recommends first researching your location on the [USDA’s Plant Hardiness Zone Map](#) to ensure you’re working with the right plants for your region of the country, climate and sun exposure.

For example, flowers like geraniums and oleander perform best in full sun, while plants like hydrangea and dogwood thrive in shadier areas. The same goes for your sod or grass selection, Lipford says. St. Augustine grows best in the shade, while centipedegrass performs better in full sun.

Regardless of the type of plant you pick, Lipford says they all have one thing in common when it comes to successful care. “All plants need proper irrigation. [Installing a soaker hose](#) is an easy DIY way of providing a constant stream of water,” he says. “A soaker hose will run about \$15–\$20, can be partially buried, and can even be attached to a simple timer for another \$15.”

Ready to hire someone to help you with that tree-trimming project? Lipford issues one word of caution: “Never let anyone work in or around your home without having proper insurance, like general liability and workman’s comp. This is important because it protects you in the event of an accident.”

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Summer Project #3: Pest Control

From mosquito bites to chewed-through vegetable plants, creepy-crawlies are an unwanted reality of the warm-weather months.

Sure, you can load up on citronella candles and DEET for the season, but how much sweeter would it be to enjoy a bug-free summer—for your family and your prized tomato plants?

DIY or Hire a Pro? Call in the experts.

“Typical services include pest control for termites, ants, spiders, cockroaches, beetles, biting and stinging insects, rodents and wildlife control,” McCreesh says. “Most homeowners do not have the necessary chemicals on hand or the knowledge required to effectively and safely manage this task.”

Getting the Job Done Just [how much you'll shell out](#) varies based on the size of your yard, whether the interior of your home is included in the work, and if there are any issues to address—such as a termite infestation, McCreesh says.

But regardless of the pest control you're soliciting, he recommends seeking out a seasonal contract, as opposed to a one-time treatment. Good pest control companies providing longer-term services will monitor their work and re-treat as necessary.

Just confirm the fee structure for follow-up appointments. “It should be very clear if there is an additional charge or if it is included in the plan,” McCreesh says.

Summer Project #4: Gutter Repairs

Clean, secure gutters keep wastewater, leaves and other natural nuisances from weighing down your roof.

So unless you want stagnant, rotting debris hanging out like a ticking time bomb overhead, it's important to repair and patch any holes, seal leaky joints and secure any part of the gutter that's pulled away from the house as soon as you notice it.

DIY or Hire a Pro? Go with the pro.

“Even though [certain types of] gutter repair *can* be easy to do yourself, this type of project can frequently result in injury from falls,” Lipford says. “Gutter specialists have unique equipment to create custom gutter sections and links on-site for a home, and can do it inexpensively for about \$75 to \$180. It’ll give you a better result than using gutter repair materials from a big-box store.”

Getting the Job Done When it comes to seeking out a qualified, licensed and insured gutter repair company, Lipford suggests relying on references from friends, family or a list of recommends from your local chapter of the [National Association of Home Builders](#).

“You might get a cheaper price by taking a chance [on a random company], but you also take a risk with the possibility of further damage, or someone not performing the work that was agreed upon,” Lipford cautions. “It can cost you peace of mind and additional expenses if you need to have work re-done or get damage repaired.”

Summer Project #5: Deck Work

One of the greatest pleasures of summer is spending a warm evening on the back deck, under the starry sky.

But thanks to the wrath of winter—especially this last one—you may have some repair work cut out for you first.

DIY or Hire a Pro? It depends on the scale of the project.

“Deck repairs that involve replacing or [securing loose or damaged wood](#) and [staining](#) are all manageable DIY projects,” Lipford says. “But if a deck is in need of structural repair or needs to be completely replaced, it would be better to bring in an experienced carpenter or decking company.”

Getting the Job Done DIY deck projects can be a pretty easy and satisfying feat—with the right equipment.

“I recommend using a pressure washer for cleaning,” Lipford says, adding that renting one from a hardware store, like Home Depot, could run about \$100 per day, depending on your

location. “It does not require experience or great skill, but take care not to get the tip too close to the surface of the deck boards, which can cause damage.”

If the thought of wielding a pressure washer is too intimidating, try a [deck brightener](#), which Lipford says you can easily snag at a home center in one-gallon cans. “Apply it to the deck’s surface, and wait 15 minutes,” he says. “Then lightly scrub the deck with a nylon brush, and rinse away grime with a regular hose.”

But if you’re leaning toward a project that’s larger in scale or more labor-intensive than a simple cleaning and staining, do your homework.

“It’s important that the homeowner check local requirements for any permits needed, and that all necessary code is followed when planning and building,” McCreesh says. “If you don’t follow local foundation, steps, landings and railing codes, you could be faced with a ‘stop work order’ from the Building Department, or you may have to undo work that’s already in place.”

As for what you can expect to pay a pro, McCreesh says it varies based on square footage, complexity and wood species. So put in the effort to get the best quotes.

“Solicit bids from two to three professionals,” Lipford says. “And get everything in writing, including the scope of the work and total cost. Taking the time to make the right selection for someone working in your home is time well spent.”

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