

Go green when

Cost-effective and healthy

by Megan Purpora

Since we spend approximately 90 percent of our time indoors, our homes should be as accessible as possible.

Doing simple up-grades to often overlooked areas can lessen your burden later. Using natural renewable materials to remodel is better for your health plus, you will be saving energy while doing your part to positively impact the environment.

What easy, environmental, and cost-effective adjustments can be made to make your home more barrier-free?

Cecil Fox, special assistant to the president/ CEO of Chimes, a provider of services to people with disabilities and seniors, says, “The purpose of a barrier-free home is to make the house accessible for every individual who lives there or visits. It is also important that the exterior of the house match the environment



A ramp was made to be an easy way leading to the door into the room.

you remodel



**extension of the patio
new sitting room.**

of the neighborhood as much as possible and the interior stay true to the style.”

Getting started

First, address the exterior of your home. Look around the house for loose gravel, uneven ground, or areas that typically gather leaves and water. This can become an obstacle caused by improper drainage. To solve this problem simply redirect your drainage system pipes to an area where people do not travel frequently. If ground problems still occur, use erosion protection made out of natural-fibers that are biodegradable, which will add





A ramp leads from the sitting room into the dining area.



additional green benefits.

Once that problem is solved, the entry is next. If the threshold is a problem, the solution might be quick and affordable. By inserting a rubber ramp under the door it becomes an accessible entrance. The best solution is a ramp made from recycled-tire rubber because this material is very durable and slip-resistant. Take measurements before buying to ensure an exact fit that will allow the ramp to become an extension of the doorway.

A commonly overlooked obstacle is the doorknob. Many people open a door without much thought. But, this

is a challenge if you have difficulty gripping a small object. A simple fix is to replace both interior and exterior doorknobs with lever door handles. These make entry a lot easier at little expense to you.

Inside

If the flooring in your foyer is tile or laminate it becomes slippery when it gets wet. Put down a non-slick material that will become an adhesive to the floor. Using a recycled plastic that has an open-weave texture helps eliminate wet areas and adds a design element to your house. This material can also



Chimes renovated this house in Stevenson, Maryland to make it more accessible.



Using pull out shelves in cabinets at any level makes items easier to reach.



be used on any floor surface in the house.

Don't use a rug or mat to solve this problem. They can be a tripping hazard if not secured down properly and are difficult to roll a wheelchair over.

Doorways can pose a challenge. Most standard doorways are 28, 30, 32, and 34 inches wide. The minimum requirement for a wheelchair is 30 inches wide. Instead of replacing the entire doorway, use offset door hinges, which allow the door to open two

inches wider than the frame. (These hinges are available from Specialiving, **\$13 each**. See page 68 or order on the website.)

Kitchen

The most multi-purpose room in the house is the kitchen, so adjustments should be made to fit multiple abilities. For many, it is a challenge to reach. Rotating and pullout shelves can help alleviate this problem.

When shopping for shelves ask if



the shelves have a low volatile organic compound (VOC). VOC is used like a solvent to finish most cabinets and shelves. It is used in paint, adhesives, and cleaners. Ultimately the solvent gives off gases that travel throughout your house. Another green alternative to standard cabinets is to place wheat board, a renewable material, on a wall to hang pots and pans for reachable convenience.

Bedroom

This room functions as storage for

Resources

www.chimes.org provides information about the organization and their efforts to provide services, support, and employment for people with disabilities.

www.independentliving.org provides a full-text library on multiple issues that people with disabilities face.

www.nari.org is the National Association of the Remodeling Industry which provides tips, guides, and professional contractors in your area.

www.usgbc.org is a non-profit organization formed in 1993. They govern the green movement and have a system to measure and define green buildings.

The Green Home Guide is an excellent resource to use while remodeling your home. www.buildinggreen.com/men-us/ provides a directory for over 2,000 products that are green to promote a healthy lifestyle.

By putting rods and shelves at different heights inside a closet, items can be arranged according to use.

Accessible shelves do not have to be just in closets. Be resourceful and use any area that is available.



clothes and often other miscellaneous items. Access to these areas should not be a barrier. Up-grade your closet with multiple layer rods and shelves so it is accessible at various heights. A bamboo-clothing rod is a durable solution that releases 35% more oxygen than other hard woods while providing antioxidant properties that prevent bacterial growth.

Bathroom

Extra attention should be given the

bathroom because this is where most accidents in the home happen.

A major concern is the shower and the temperature controls which can be turned on too hot and cause scalding. Fox said that in every barrier-free home that Chimes owns and operates, a temperature lock is installed. He recommends placing a lock to keep the water from passing 110 degrees to decrease the chance of serious injury.

Install a hand-held showerhead that uses low energy/power to help lower



energy bills. The Building Green Product Directory recommends a showerhead that has a “flow of 1.75 gallons per minute or less, well below the federal standard of 2.5 gallons per minute.”

Grab bars should be mounted throughout the bathroom at strategic

points to lower the risk of falling.

Making your home safe and accessible should be priority. Also, by using green solutions you are being a conscious consumer while improving your home. *