

A bounce in your step
Flooring made from recycled rubber is decorative and practical in a laundry, mudroom or playroom | 19

Home & Garden

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2006 SHOWCASE OF REMODELED HOMES

GRADUAL UPGRADE

Many people take room-by-room approach to remodeling their home

AFTER



The new kitchen features decorative lighting, oak floors and an island with an attached table.

MICHAELA PERRY/STYLING; ROBERTA PHOTOGRAPHY

BEFORE



The owners of an Upper Arlington home wanted to open up their kitchen for better access between the work and dining areas.

R.J. LANDIS DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION INC.



Maura Manning uses the extra grip to dig with the new Union Tools trowel.

Rugged tools take pain out of digging

By Julie H. Bailey
96 COLUMBUS DISPATCH

These aren't your grandma's garden tools.

With cushioned loop handles, sharp edges and one-piece construction, the new Gardener's Pride tools are designed by gardeners for gardeners — and made by a company known for providing sturdy tools to professional landscapers and farmers. "We met with gardeners, listened to them and watched them work," said Melissa Fisher, vice president of marketing for Union Tools.

The feedback was incorporated "into every aspect of this new line, from the construction to the dimensions and feel of the tools," she said.

At least one East Side resident, Maura Manning, thinks the Columbus company succeeded in designing strong, comfortable tools.

As part of a focus group last year, she told the company, "We need something that will give us some strength to dig into Ohio's clay soil, which my flower beds are full of."

Gardeners complained of weak tools that snapped at joints during heavy work.

Since the one-piece cast aluminum tools were introduced in February, Manning has tried them.

"I had an 'aha' moment as soon as I picked up one of the tools," she said. "I knew the very second I saw them, they would work. . . . I couldn't believe how great they felt and worked."

Each hand tool is made with an oversized oval handle with a knob on top to allow a user to grip with two hands.

"The design reduces the stress a gardener feels when using only one hand," Fisher said.

"We looked at what was out there and took it a few steps further," she said. "These tools are truly different. . . . To my knowledge (no one has taken such a radical approach to redesign the handle and to serrate the edges" of the blades.

The new line consists of five hand tools — a transplanter, cultivator, weeder, trowel and trowel-placer — that cost \$9.99 to \$24.99; and five long-handle tools — a border spade, digging fork, shovel, mulch fork and rake — that cost \$29.99 to \$54.99.

The tools are available in select styles at Sears stores at the Mall at Tuttle Crossing, Polaris Fashion Place and Eastland. They also are available at www.amanon.com.

Manning had been skeptical when she learned that the company was trying to make tools easier for women to use. She feared that the design would be cosmetic rather than practical.

"I remember telling them, 'If you're going to make them usable, then don't make them look like they're not used, then don't bother!'"

But she likes the trowel and the bulb planter.

"I'm not good at getting how far a trowel deep is when I'm planting bulbs, so I always carry a ruler with me," she said. "But the trowel has an inside ruler gauge so I was able to tell how far I was digging."

"It was like somebody really gave it some thought to make it easier for women to work in the garden."

"Plus, (the tools are) funky-looking enough that they're cool to give as a gift, and there's no pink to be found."

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By Lee Stratton
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

If you can't stand the kitchen, remodel it.

Thirteen new kitchens are included in the 20 remodeling projects to be featured next weekend during the Showcase of Remodeled Homes.

Some of the kitchens are part of larger projects that involved massive additions or entire house makeovers.

But other homeowners have taken the more modest course of updating their homes one area at a time.

Remodeler Ron Landis said many of his customers update their homes that way.

Last year, about half of his customers were homeowners for whom he had completed earlier projects.

"The big, grand projects are fewer and farther between," said Landis, president of R.J. Landis Design & Construction in Worthington.

American homeowners spent about \$150 billion on remodeling and repairs last year, according to a recent analysis by Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

Spending on remodeling is growing at an annual rate of about 4.5 percent, a significant slowdown from the 19 percent surge experienced in 2004. The report noted that spending on remodeling totaled \$120 billion in 2003 and \$143.4 billion in 2004.

The research center's director, Nicolas Retsinas, attributed the slower growth to rising interest rates.

BEFORE



R.J. LANDIS DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION INC.

A desk and window frame faced the sunroom, which was in the 1991 Showcase of Remodeled Homes.

"Remodeling contractors recently have reported a slight decline in hours worked by their employees and more modest growth in their paychecks," said Kermit Baker, the center's director of the remodeling studies. "This points to remodeling following home building into a period of slower growth in the months ahead."

The National Association of Home Builders reported in April that 1.5 million newly built homes were sold in 2005, a 0.6 percent increase from the previous year.

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AFTER



NEAL GARDNER/STYLING

The desk and window frame were replaced by the sink and an arched opening.