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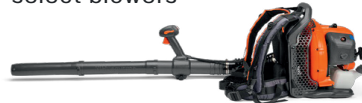
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Program helps low-income residents make needed home repairs

BY ALEX MALM

The cold Minnesota winter is all but over, and now homeowners are beginning projects, including needed repairs.

For some, especially those with low incomes, those repairs may be all but impossible.

But a program through Minnesota Housing may be able to help.

“The Rehabilitation Loan Emergency & Accessibility Loan Programs (RLP/ELP) help low-income homeowners finance important home, repair projects that directly affect the safety, habitability, energy efficiency or accessibility of their homes, and also provide financing towards the replacement of manufactured homes,” according to a description of the programs..

For the Rehabilitation Loan Program, some of the eligible improvements or repairs include electrical wiring, furnace or boiler replacement, windows, doors, siding and roofing, plumbing/ septic system upgrades, water heater repair and replacement, mold and radon mitigation, among others.

The maximum loan amount is \$37,500.

Also available is the Emergency & Accessibility Loan Program.

Some of the eligible im-

provements include heating, electrical, plumbing, or septic system failures, foundation walls, roof that could cause collapse.

Accessibility improvements, such as a ramp, to enable a household member with a disability to continue to live in the home, are also an example of what the funds could be used for.

The maximum loan amount is \$15,000 with a potential for an increase up to \$27,000.

In order to be eligible, you must live in Minnesota and own and occupy the property, be 18 years or older, be current with your mortgage payments and property tax payments, and not have assets exceeding \$25,000 except for your primary home.

The income eligibility begins with those who make \$25,000 or less for individuals and goes up to \$49,200 for households of eight or more.

Those interested in applying who live in Dodge, Steele, Fillmore, Freeborn, Houston, Olmsted, Mower, or Winona County can contact Cindy Vitse, SEMCAC Housing Coordinator at 507 864-8207.

From there, applicants are pre-screened and then are sent an application packet “if it sounds like they would meet the program guidelines,” Vitse said.



Tis the season for spring cleaning

BY RENEE BERG

Tis the season for spring cleaning.

To stock up on spring cleaning supplies, go to Kasson Hardware Hank and find your way to the cleaning supply aisle, said owner Greg Kuball. There you'll find everything from buckets to sponges and reusable spray bottles to all-purpose cleaner.

At Kasson Hardware Hank you'll also be able to purchase a vacuum and a mop for deep cleaning.

Kuball said it's the ideal time to wash your windows inside and outside. Grab your garden hose and Windex made for outdoor window cleaning. Kasson Hardware Hank also carries an outdoor squeegee with a handle. "It's like you're washing your vehicle."

Tending to your floors is also important when it comes to spring cleaning.

"It's a great time to clean your indoor carpeting by renting a carpet cleaner," he said. "We rent those. We have four units available for under \$50 a day."

If you're looking for more of a spring makeover, Kuball recommends painting an accent wall in a room.

"It will give the room a whole new look. Springtime is a great time to do that. You can change the look of a room for under \$100."



Spring is also an ideal time to update your yard. Kuball recommends refreshing garden beds	with garden soil and fresh mulch. "It'll make your yard look sharper," Kuball said.	If it's due, you can also dethatch and aerate your lawn. You can rent a dethatcher and lawn aer-	ator at Kasson Hardware Hank. This way you'll get ready for spring grass growth, "which allows	root development and is very important for a good strong bed of grass," he said.
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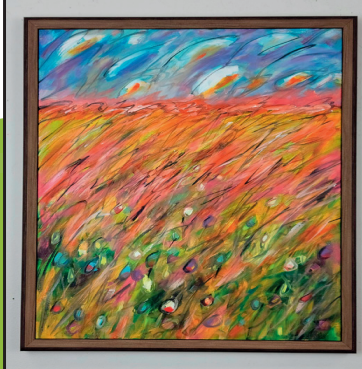


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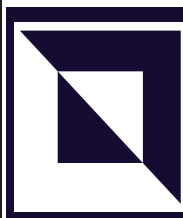
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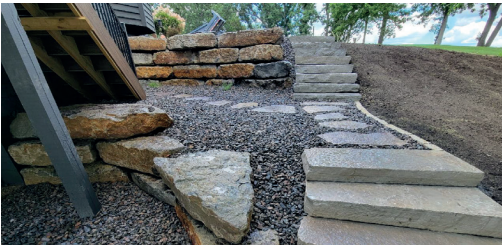
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Byron 'Plantopia' class can help with your garden



PHOTO BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN

Ella Gnagey and Alexa Van Straaten, students in the Plantopia class, deadhead flowers several weeks before the sale. By removing the old growth and seed heads from the plant new growth and re-flowering will take place ensuring they will be blooming at the time of the sale.

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN

If a flower or vegetable garden is included in your summer landscaping plans, you may want to check out the plant sale coming up in May at Byron High School.

Byron's agriculture department offers two "Plan-

topia" classes each year, said agriculture teacher Alison Newman. During the first session, which meets during the third quarter, students learn basic information about plants and how they grow. They also learn about purchasing plants and

how much rock or mulch or other items one might need for landscaping. The second class meets in the fourth quarter, and that is where the students get firsthand experience planting, growing, and selling plants.

See **PLANTOPIA** on 13 ►

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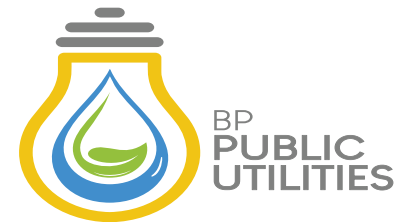
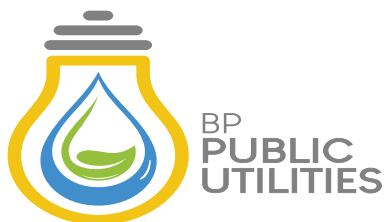
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Small renovations that make a big impact

Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that's something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There's no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment.

• **Front door replacement:** A new front door instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

• **Lighting addition:** Whether a homeowner enlarges a window or adds skylights, natural light can produce incredible results. Investing in new lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.

• **Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

• **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely



affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

• **Exterior lighting:** Lighting isn't just important inside. A welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside the home.

• **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs. Tighten shaky railings or replace them while upgrading the stair treads.

• **Interior paint:** Change the color of walls,

doors, cabinets, or even furniture with paint. All homeowners need is a paint color that inspires them and a little bit of time.

• **Replace outlet covers:** Upgrade outlet covers with screwless options. Screwless plates for outlets and light switches can make walls look more sleek.

• **Entry organizer installation:** Banish clutter from the home by catching it at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and functional.

• **Carpets cleaning:** Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep cleaning.

Small changes around a home can create a big impact without breaking the bank.

How to recognize when it's time to replace your windows

Windows are a major component of a home. Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average life span of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years. Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

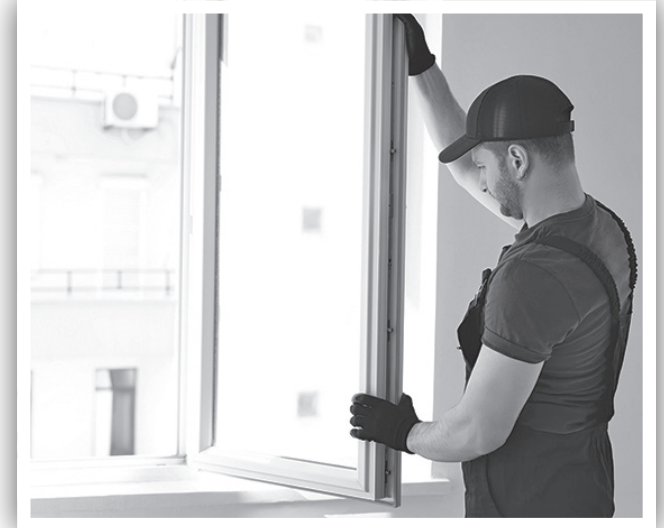
Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill, and this is not a do-it-yourself project. There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines.

• **Difficulty opening and closing windows.**

A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it's probably time for something new.

• **There's apparent window damage.** Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a



lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

• **Drafts in the window are common.** If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

• **Dated windows are present in the home.** Older windows may pose safety hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

• **Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily.** Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

• **Fading indoors is noted.** Windows that do not feature low-emissivity (Low-E) glass coatings will not block UV rays. Those rays can cause fading to wood floors and furniture or pretty much anything the sunlight touches. Replacing existing windows with Low-E coating alternatives can safeguard belongings and improve window efficiency.

Window replacement may be necessary when existing windows are showing signs of aging or damage.

How to keep indoor air clean during allergy season

Seasonal allergies can turn a warm and welcoming spring or summer day into something else entirely. Congestion, runny nose, sneezing, and itchy eyes are just some of the unpleasant symptoms of seasonal allergies, which are most often triggered by high pollen counts during spring and summer.

The Mayo Clinic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors when pollen counts are high. But what about indoor air quality? The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America reports that eight out of 10 people are exposed to dust mites and six out of 10 are exposed to cat or dog dander. Dust

mites and pet dander can each trigger allergic reactions. Pair those two triggers with higher pollen counts common in spring and summer and it's no wonder that many seasonal allergy sufferers are ambivalent about the warm weather seasons. Fortunately, steps can be taken to keep indoor air clean during allergy season.

• **Close windows and doors.** Many people embrace opportunities to open their windows and doors on warm days, but doing so allows outdoor allergens like pollen to get inside. Pollen can attach to furniture and clothing, and that can make time

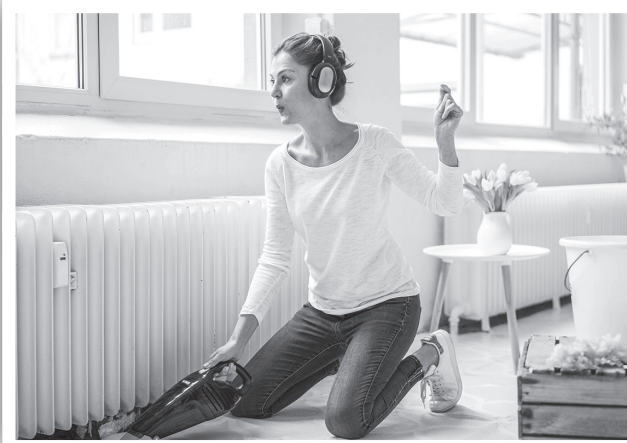
indoors unpleasant for allergy sufferers. Maintain indoor air quality by closing windows and doors on windy days and/or days when pollen counts are high.

• **Employ air cleaning devices.** The AAFA notes that air cleaners with Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly® filters can filter nearly 98 percent of allergen particles in the air. The AAFA maintains a list of certified air cleaners at asthmaandallergyfriendly.com.

• **Keep a clean home.** The Mayo Clinic notes that, in most homes, items such as bedding, upholstered furniture and carpeting provide an

ideal environment for dust mites, which are microscopic bugs that trigger allergic reactions in many people. The AAFA recommends keeping surfaces in a home clean and uncluttered to control dust mites. Washing bedding and uncovered pillows in hot water each week also can help to corral dust mites and improve indoor air quality.

• **Vacuum frequently.** Frequent vacuuming is another way to improve indoor air quality. The AAFA maintains a list of Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly® vacuums that have been tested and found to prevent allergens from reentering the air.



A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is kneeling on a light-colored wooden floor. She is using a black stick vacuum cleaner. In the background, there is a white radiator, a small white table with a vase of white flowers, and a white bucket.

• **Prevent mold and treat areas where infestations have occurred.** Mold also contributes to poor indoor air quality. Dehumidifiers can be used to reduce mold and dust mites, making these beneficial additions to allergy sufferers' homes. Minimizing house plants around the house and

addressing leaky fixtures immediately are some additional measures to prevent mold infestations.

It may not be enough to simply stay indoors to avoid allergic reactions on spring and summer days. Embracing measures to improve indoor air quality can be vital for allergy sufferers as well.

Byron ‘Plantopia’ class can help with your garden

◀ **PLANTOPIA** from 10

“It’s really cool,” said Ella Gnagey, a 10th grade student in the class.

The first class deals with the structure of plants and how a greenhouse operates. As the quarter progresses, they

move on to the prep work for the actual greenhouse including preparing over 4,000 individual flower-pots, 125 hanging baskets, four-packs of veggies and pots for herbs, she said.

During the second class, Gnagey said, they

are in the greenhouse every day. The class, she said, meets at 8 a.m. and runs for an hour and 20 minutes.

The classes, Newman said, are not for those interested in horticulture as a career. Rather, she said, the students learn some skills that will come in handy when they have moved on from high school and have homes of their own. Also, some of the students in her classes have found summer jobs at greenhouses, and others who already were working at other retail establishments volunteered to work in their garden centers in the spring.

Alexa Van Straaten, a junior at Byron High School, said she had already talked to her mom about having a small garden.

After the plants have been raised and sold, Newman said, the students review their progress and track how much has been sold. Every year, she said, the plant sale makes enough to cover expenses and make a few upgrades to the project.

Newman said that she orders the flowers in September based on how much was sold the previous year.

This year’s plant sale is scheduled for Friday and



A large greenhouse filled with rows of small potted plants. The plants are in various stages of growth, and there are several signs placed among them. The greenhouse has a high ceiling and large windows.



A greenhouse filled with rows of small potted plants. The plants are in various stages of growth, and there are several signs placed among them. The greenhouse has a high ceiling and large windows.

PHOTO BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN

Vegetable seeds planted by the Plantopia students begin to grow in the Byron High School greenhouse.

Saturday, May 9 and 10, at the Byron High School Commons.

When the sale began about 12 years ago, Newman said, it was held inside the school’s greenhouse. It was then moved to outside on the school grounds and three years ago made the move to the Commons.

Again, this year, she

said, there will be dozens of annuals in individual pots, hanging baskets, and veggies and herbs.

Veggies include tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, eggplant, kohlrabi, kale, spinach, and spaghetti squash among others. Among the herbs are dill, chives, rosemary, parsley, thyme and cilantro.

Flowers blooming in the school greenhouse prior to the plant sale in May.



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*Offer available March 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025. Rebates and/or financing based on the purchase of eligible equipment defined in promotional program. Pricing and rebates in US dollars. Additional fees including, but not limited to, taxes, freight, setup and delivery charges may apply. Financing must be through DLL or Sheffield using one of the available financing options. Financing is subject to credit approval. Customers must take delivery prior to the end of the program period. Some customers will not qualify. Some restrictions apply. Offer available on new equipment only. Prior purchases are not eligible. Offer valid only at participating Dealers. Offer subject to change without notice. See your dealer for details. 6 Year Warranty for Non-Commercial, residential use only. 6 Year Warranty applies to CS, CX, CK10, CK20, DK10, DK20, NS and NX model Kioti tractors and must be purchased and registered between September 1, 2016 – June 30, 2025. Offer valid only at participating Dealers. Offer subject to change without notice. See your dealer for details. © 2025 Kioti Tractor Company a Division of Daedong-USA, Inc.