

home for quite a while, think about new flooring, and don't forget to consider new flooring options that are "green."

Your kitchen is one of the biggest ways to add value to your home, but remember, it's not worth the remodel if you're not staying much longer.

"You want to enjoy while you're there," Simpler says. If you leave shortly after it's re-done, you won't get a return that's nearly as much as you invest.

But if you are planning on staying in your home for several more years, the kitchen is one area that really will up your home's value. Upgrading countertops, cabinets and appliances (especially to those that are energy-efficient) can make a huge difference, especially if your kitchen has never been updated.

Want more food for thought? If you only have one bathroom, it could be wise to invest in at least a half-bath.

As for security systems, Simpler says you shouldn't invest in one if you're going to leave soon. And



Renovating a kitchen is one area that really will raise your home's value. Upgrading countertops, cabinets and appliances can make a huge difference, especially if that room has never been updated before.

your heating and air systems? Don't change it if it works.

One final thought — don't do unnecessary repairs (such as new carpet) because what looks "good" is in the eye of the beholder.

"You want to leave some room

for buyers to come in and do their own thing and invest their own equity," Simpler says.

•Back to basics•

Looking to increase the value of your home without breaking the bank? It is possible to improve your home, on smaller projects that cost little money and won't take months to complete.

The first impression you get of any home is its outside appearance. Therefore, says Judy Hopkins of Chabbott Petrosky in Dover, Del., it is important to focus some your efforts on your "curb appeal."

That means keeping your lawn in its best condition by keeping leaves raked in the fall, grooming trees, putting out fresh mulch, cleaning gutters and in general, maintaining good habits in your yard and the exterior of your home.

It's surprising how commonly overlooked those basic chores are, Hopkins says, and it's especially



something that is overlooked in the winter.

Simpler adds that spending a bit of money in landscaping can go a long way. That's not to say you should drop a ton of money hiring someone to come in and completely re-do your yard, but you can get some good advice from a professional about what kind of plants work best (planting drought-tolerant plants is a great way to enhance the value of your home by using less water, thereby saving you money). And remember that low-maintenance landscaping also helps you (and future owners) save both time and money.

It's also a good idea, Simpler says, to paint the trim and pressure-wash your home, giving it a "fresh" and clean look. Because if your home doesn't look appealing from the outside, "especially if they're driving by, they're not going to stop."

•*Get your foot in the door*•

"In this market, you don't want to go overboard," Simpler says. So what can you do get the inside of your home to look as nice as the outside?

Well, for starters, Hopkins says, make sure everything is clean. If you have rust stains in your kitchen, get rid of them. Being observant, she adds, is really important.

"If you have a drippy faucet, fix it," Hopkins says. "If your walls are in poor repair, paint them in a neutral color."

Neutral colors tend to help camouflage problems with the wall itself, and Simpler adds that "it's amazing what paint can do."

And there are ways to give your bathroom and kitchen a new look, without completely remodeling the rooms. Remember, Simpler says, the bathroom and kitchen are the two big things that help give your home



Clean up your clutter! Untidiness can cause a lot of issues in homes — it makes rooms feel smaller and diminishes the available space.

additional value.

If you're not looking to invest quite that much, try improving the hardware on your cabinets (new knobs or handles), or even paint your cabinets.

It's fairly inexpensive, and "makes it look new, even if it's not," Simpler says. The same is true of doorknobs, maintenance-free win-

dows and even window treatments. Perhaps you could slowly replace your plastic mini-blinds with bamboo.

You can even install some indoor lighting to give your home a brighter look, which will take out dark corners and open up rooms.

•*De-clutter*•

Clutter cause a lot of issues in homes — it makes rooms feel smaller

and diminishes the available space.

“Most buyers cannot overlook (clutter) and see how much space is really available,” Hopkins says.

Take away clutter throughout your home, but don't forget areas like your garage. De-cluttering helps to give people who might be interested in buying your home a chance for them to see their things in your home, so definitely make time to go through items that aren't necessary. And even if you're not selling your home, de-cluttering can give your home a whole new look, without spending a lot of money.

If you do it yourself, it doesn't cost you anything. And, there is the potential to have a yard sale for unwanted items, so you could even make a bit of money from your cleaning.

“Everyone's got clutter,” Hopkins adds. “If they say they don't, they're lying.”



One of the best ways to maximize your home's value is to keep it clean and attractive. Be ready to break out the elbow grease!



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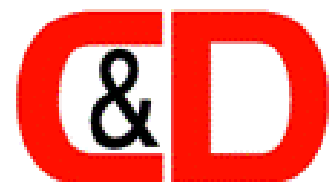
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A Great Egret travels magistically above the reeds and marshland during a trip to the shore in this recent sighting at Hooper's Island.

(Photo courtesy Donna Tolbert-Anderson/www.capturingnaturesimages.com)

Birdwatching 101

A wing and a prayer ... and a whole lot of patience



Story by Kevin George

Bird watching is arguably the most adaptable of hobbies.

People of all ages watch birds. In fact, it can be a lifetime activity that can be done in any part of the world.

Casual participants can enjoy catching

a glimpse of our feathered friends with just a comfortable pair of walking shoes, field glasses and some insect repellent. There are also more accelerated tactics for the more committed fans with varying levels of costs and participation.

“Really, you need a good set of binoculars to see some of these birds — especially the smaller song birds,” said Donna Tolbert-Anderson, an Easton-based veteran bird watcher and photographer. “And as far as footwear, prepare to be outside — it’s an outdoors activity.”

She added that participants should dress to blend in with the environment — not to make their presence obvious.

“There’s a saying, ‘Birders don’t wear white,’” Tolbert-Anderson laughed.

Bird watching does not have to be an expensive hobby compared to many sports activities — and it doesn’t really ask a great physical toll to participate. It tends to draw a distinct kind of crowd where the level of knowledge is not necessarily an issue. And with the recent “go-green” movement, it’s an activity that helps participants appreciate the natural environment.

The more successful sightings of species some bird watchers collect on a “lifer’s list,” the wider the world may appear for them.

Bird watching is the fastest-growing outdoor activity in the United States. Based on a recent survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 51.3 million Americans report that they watch birds.

“For beginning birders, it can sometimes be frustrating,” said Tolbert-Anderson, who added that it’s a good idea to try to tag along with someone who has a little more experience — if nothing else, the



It’s not uncommon for predator birds like the bald eagle, top, and the osprey to be spotted on the Mid-Shore.

(Photos by Donna Tolbert-Anderson) more eyes, the better. “They should go to places where birds are more used to seeing people and they’re

Photographing birds all about timing, but good equipment helps

Donna Tolbert-Anderson has traveled all over the world to add to her chronicled list of sighted birds and has the pictures to prove it.


Like any professional photographer, she has molded her craft through her own personal trials and errors — but she’s still quick to offer some elementary pointers to those who are considering just starting out.

“With nature photography, generally the standard (lens) is 500 to 600 millimeters,” Tolbert-Anderson said. “That (size lens) is a very large investment of money — the average person may not be able to go that route — but you could probably get some of the zoom lenses that are less expensive.”

She also suggested using a tripod when using the more powerful lens to keep the camera stable.

“With nature photography, there is ‘the need for speed,’” Tolbert-Anderson said. “The faster the camera writes the image to the card (or film), that’s helpful — because birds don’t hang around for too long.”

She points out that the amount of gear is a necessary evil for the nature photographer, but coming home with the perfect shot can be more than rewarding enough.

Tolbert-Anderson has hundreds of images available for sale — or just to browse through — on her Web site at www.capturingnatureimages.com. 



The male American Goldfinch is a vibrant yellow in the summer, while the female — as seen on the cover this month — is a dull yellow-brown shade which brightens only slightly during the summer.

(Photos courtesy Donna Tolbert-Anderson)

not so easily frightened off — that’s always a big help — like our national wildlife refuges, or even a place like Adkins Arboretum.”

Adkins Arboretum, located in Ridgely, will host one of their regularly-scheduled bird walks, “Bluebirds to Warblers,” on Sept. 27. The walk, which begins at 8 a.m., focuses on resident and migrating birds.

The refuge’s staff — which monitored 21 Eastern bluebird houses with nests a few months ago, also keeps a tally of which birds have been spotted on the grounds. In May, for instance, 69 different species were documented there.

Tolbert-Anderson also pointed out there are a handful of local bird-

ing clubs, like the Caroline County Bird Club and the Talbot Bird Club. She said they can help beginning



The Northern Cardinal is the state bird for a record seven states.

birders hone their craft and make it more enjoyable.

“Sometimes you can go out and not see a whole lot, and the next day you could be bombarded,” she said.

Bird watchers observe wild birds in their natural habitat — which sometimes may be right in the person’s back yard in view from the back porch — and learn to identify them.

There are more than 800 species of birds in North America and it is relatively easy to find at least 100 species in any part of the country.

The Mid-Shore offers an incredibly wide variety of locations to spot birds. Woodlands, crop fields, meadows — even shorelines and