

# Modifying staircases inside and outside the house an important aspect of fall prevention

by lindakafka | Oct 20, 2020 | Home Mods



Fall is a time of pumpkin-flavored everything, but the thick-skinned fruit (yes, fruit) is also ripe for use in home decor. How to pick the best ones? First, get thee to a pumpkin patch for a fresher and more interesting selection than what you'd find at a grocery store.

Then, says Better Homes and Gardens, think beyond your basic orange pumpkin. Heirloom varieties can have eye-catching characteristics like deep ribs, bumpy skin, and various colors. To check for freshness, look at the stems — you want firm, dark green ones that have a bit of the vines leftover on either side. The pumpkins should also sound hollow when you tap them and have leathery, unyielding skin.

Once you get them home, reduce rotting by washing the outside with a diluted bleach solution (one-part bleach to nine parts water) and keep them in a cool, dry place. Melissa Hank

## Modifying staircases inside and outside the house an important aspect of fall prevention

November is Fall Prevention Month and modifying housing to prevent falls is an important step Orleans residents Lynda and Ken Zimmerman want to age in place and they're doing what they can to make that happen. The couple has lived for 30 years in the Chapel Hill neighborhood, seven years in their current home.

"We chose a bungalow, the only one in this area," said Lynda, 68.

"It was very fortuitous."

Ken, 69, has Parkinson's, which is why the bungalow was desirable.

"First thing we did was change a lot of the staircases," said Lynda, who has mobility problems as well?

"We put in a railing at the front entrance. We rebuilt our deck to make it level with the floor of the house; now you can just step outside to the deck of the house in the back without going downstairs. It's a direct walkout." They also built a railing and new stairs to the house from the garage.

"The stairs were a fall hazard because they were different heights."

Now they are planning a bathroom renovation.

"We've been talking to friends and are feeling a little overwhelmed with all the information we've been receiving," she said.

"We know there needs to be a larger shower, a larger opening to the shower, and level access into the shower so you could use a wheelchair if you needed one."

They also considered "grab bars and a whole new shower, getting rid of the bathtub — which we thought long and hard about, because if we sold the house, later on, someone might really want a bathtub ... But a real estate person told us people middle-aged and above prefer a shower. We also want a rough floor so we don't slip, and room for a seat or a built-in seat. We have to have room to turn a wheelchair around and to go under the sink. It's a lot of things to consider." What they've decided to do next, pre-construction is to ask an occupational therapist to come in and give them guidance about how much space is required, and what can be adapted differently.

"It's a big decision to renovate to that extent."

"Falls on stairs, both indoor and outdoor, and in bathrooms, are more likely to result in injuries than falls in other locations," says Nancy Edwards, who is professor emeritus at the School of Nursing, The University of Ottawa. Edwards is working with a team at U Ottawa under Sarah Fraser that is developing an app to assess stair safety.

"Stairs and bathrooms are hazardous locations for falls for many age groups, not just seniors." Edwards is also the chair of CARP's Ottawa Chapter fall prevention working group and a board member of CARP's Ottawa Chapter. She says grab bars can help prevent falls in bathrooms, regardless of age or physical ability.

"Research indicates that two grab bars are needed. A vertical grab bar helps you maintain your balance as you step into and out of a tub or a shower. A diagonal or horizontal grab bar on the side

wall is needed to help you sit down into and stand up from the bottom of the tub. Grab bars have to be properly secured so they can hold your weight.”

For those with mobility issues, the advice of an occupational therapist will help ensure the optimal placement of grab bars. Manufactured bath or shower inserts often have a warranty that is voided if you drill a hole in the acrylic lining to insert a grab bar.

“This is an important consideration for those planning a bathroom renovation,” Edwards said. She suggests some improvements to stair safety that can be more easily made:

- Install handrails on indoor and outdoor steps and stairs. Two handrails are best. They should be easy to grasp with your fingers and thumb encircling the handrail.
- Improve overhead lighting so all stairs are well lit. Install on-off switches at the top and bottom of stairs