

Call it home improvement mania.

Americans are obsessed with remodeling, expanding and generally improving their homes.

They spent an estimated \$210 billion doing just that in 2005, according to the Remodelers Council of the National Association of Home Builders, which projects spending this year to increase to some \$238 billion.

Why? Despite much talk about a real estate "bubble," most homes are expected to continue to appreciate at a healthy rate -- giving homeowners yet more equity to tap for renovations. Plus, if real estate markets start to cool as anticipated, more people may choose to fix up what they have and stay put instead of moving.

With that mania in mind, we assembled this room-by-room interactive guide to the more common home improvements and remodeling ideas you may be considering for your home this year.

Garage:

Homeowners want the garage to be everything it isn't: neat, tidy and organized.

So when they decide to remodel the garage, the focus is on creating lots of storage.

The garage used to be a catch-all and a place to park the car. But it's becoming a combination storage area and hobby room. "It's not just for parking the car anymore," says Sal Alfano, editorial director of Remodeling magazine. "It's a well-organized space, and it's finished -- trimmed, painted and fully wired. It's almost another room in the house."

A lot of homeowners use the garage to house a work bench or hobby area. As these setups get more elaborate, "people are doing more, and they demand more out of their garage," says Barry Izsak, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers and author of "Organize Your Garage in No Time."

Lighting is a bigger factor as people spend more time in the garage. Two popular options: larger windows and track lighting.

At the same time that many homeowners are using garages more than ever, they are also "figuring out ways to hide the garage," says Joan Stephens, immediate past president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. "A lot of times, people will take garage space to add a room and add a garage away from the home."

When homeowners remodel the garage they spend an average of \$4,413, according to a 2006 survey for [Closets Magazine](#).

Outdoor:

One big trend: built-in features for outdoor entertaining -- built-in hearths and barbecues to fully installed outdoor kitchens, homeowners are finding ways to extend living and entertaining to outdoor spaces.

They are using elemental features, like fire and water, to add interest to patios. Fire pits, or chimineas, are popular choices, says P. Allen Smith, author of "[P. Allen Smith's Colors for the Garden](#)." And small water features like waterfalls or ponds are also well liked.

And homeowners are using their yards to bring a little fun into their lives with games, says Roger Cook, landscape contractor for the TV show "This Old House. From traditional lawn sports, such as bocce, badminton and croquet, to less common backyard pursuits including ice hockey.

That means grass, while still a yard staple, isn't getting all the attention anymore. "No one wants to be a slave to mowing grass for two to three hours," says Cook. "Grass will never disappear totally. But the whole yard doesn't have to be grass."