

Homeowners can make every day a sun day

Homeowners across America are choosing to invite the outdoors in with sunroom home additions. Once considered a luxury upgrade, sunroom additions have been growing in popularity and are now listed as the nation's fifth most popular remodeling project, according to the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

Sunrooms blur the lines between indoors and out, and can provide homeowners with the feeling that they are getting away from it all, like they are taking a vacation in their own home.

"Sunrooms share much of the appeal of decks," says Rob Enos, product manager, Owens Corning Construction Services. "They expand outdoor living spaces while adding useful square footage to a home, enhancing home value and offering owner enjoyment. Additionally, sunrooms are relatively easy and cost-effective to add on to existing homes, even older homes, and,

unlike decks, sunrooms with high-performance low-e glass systems can, in some cases, be occupied year-round."

But before you spring into action and attach a sunroom to your home, you should -- as with any building project -- do your homework before getting started. Professional remodeler Scott Keegan, general manager of CKH Industries in Lodi, N.J., offers some pointers for planning the perfect sunroom:

* Consult a qualified installer to find out if underground obstacles, building codes or zoning ordinances limit your options for a conventional backyard addition.

* Understand that screenrooms and sunrooms are not the same thing; there are big differences in quality, price and functionality. Advances in building technology, including energy-efficient windows, have made it easier to create very comfortable new living spaces. A patio or screenroom may only be useful during

warm weather, while many sunrooms can be made habitable for three seasons, or even all year long.

* Consider your timing since traditional wood-framed sunroom additions can take months to complete. New, innovative products like Owens Corning fiberglass SunSuites Sunrooms are strong and durable with thermally-efficient windows and doors and take just a few weeks to install by a qualified professional.

* Research your options and the advances in technology that have made sunrooms stronger and more energy-efficient than ever. The Owens Corning SunSuites sunroom features pultruded fiberglass framing that stands up to higher wind speeds than some traditional aluminum and vinyl frames. This framing combined with Energy Star rated fiberglass windows, can provide significant energy cost savings over traditional sunrooms.

While a well-built sunroom can add to your home's value and enhance

the enjoyment of your living space, a poorly constructed sunroom can actually reduce your home's value. "If the sunroom is not installed properly, or is not strong enough to withstand the rigors of weather in your region, you could spend big bucks to repair it, and deal with damage that may occur to the rest of your home if the sunroom structure fails," Keegan cautions.

"Customization is high on consumers' lists for virtually every home improvement project these days, and sunrooms are no exception," says Keegan. "Homeowners want the option to create a more individualized space that can blend in with the overall look of their home. While traditional sunroom systems may limit color options, new fiberglass sunroom options can be painted the color of your choice both inside and out."

To learn more about adding a sunroom to your home, and to enter to win a free sunroom, visit www.ocsun-suites.com.

— *Courtesy of ARAcontent*

Landscaping with retaining walls adds curb appeal, usability to your home

The best investment you can make in your home - both for your pocketbook and your personal enjoyment - is in landscaping. Real estate experts agree that every dollar you put into your yard eventually will return one to two dollars when you sell. And at a time when home values are sagging, that's something to consider.

"With an increasing number of homeowners staying put rather than selling and moving up, we're seeing a growing trend of people adapting their homes to their lifestyle," says Dave Johnson, manager of Patio Town, a leading Minnesota landscape supplies retailer. "That often means investing in landscaping to make better use of what they already own."

Versatile segmental retaining wall systems enable today's homeowner to bring plenty of curb appeal to their landscape while maximizing the use of their outdoor environment. Construction of everything from raised-bed gardens and tiered walls to stairs, columns and freestanding seatwalls is possible with systems such as Versa-Lok.

What's nice about these systems is that they appeal to both the do-it-your-

selfer and the professional landscaper, says Johnson.

"You can add some amazing features to your yard with a modest amount of skill and labor," Johnson explains. "Fire pits with paver patios, retaining walls, columns, sidewalks and driveways all are within the capabilities of most do-it-yourselfers. Or, you can bring your ideas to a professional landscaper and leave the design and installation to them, no matter how complex."

In recent years, segmental retaining walls have become one of the most important tools in the hands of landscapers.

"Your imagination is your only limitation when working with these systems," says Kelly O'Donahue, landscape designer with Villa Landscapes in Oakdale, Minn. "I've transformed virtually unusable back yards into stunning outdoor environments using Versa-Lok. Homeowners love it because it's readily available in consistent colors and styles that are easily matched with existing exteriors or other landscape elements."

It is a favorite among hardscape installers as well. "The Versa-Lok sys-

tem is especially design-friendly because it uses solid units that can be easily cut or split to fit any application," explains Austin Keay, owner of AKeay Landscaping in North Branch, Minn. "They're like the building blocks of landscaping. You can do almost anything with them, whether you're installing an outdoor kitchen from scratch or putting a new face on an older home with a front-entry makeover."

Segmental retaining wall systems lend themselves to phased landscaping projects built over a period of years, says O'Donahue. That's a trend landscape designers are seeing more of as homeowners have become more cost-conscious.

"Some of our customers have a grand idea of what they ultimately want, but may not be able to afford all at once. So we work up a master plan for them, they start out with one phase, perhaps a circular paver patio with seatwalls and a firepit in the backyard. And that evolves over a period of years to a full-blown entertainment area, maybe an outdoor kitchen or bar, along with other features such as gardens or gazebos."

Sustainable, or "green," landscaping, also rapidly gaining in popularity, can add value to your home in other ways.

Low-rise retaining walls can be used in such features as rain gardens to significantly reduce storm water and pollutant runoff from surface areas. Plantable retaining walls, like Versa-Lok's Versa-Green system, provide earth stabilization while softening the appearance of a traditional retaining wall with vegetation. For information on Versa-Lok Retaining Wall Systems, visit versa-lok.com or call (800) 770-4525.

"Plantable wall systems essentially create a vertical garden while performing the function of a retaining wall," says O'Donahue. "You can get really creative with the color and textures of plantings you use in the wall to achieve whatever look you want."

From "lifestyle landscaping" to "green landscaping," there's a retaining wall that can add appeal and value to your home. Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or looking to hire someone, you'll be able to add a new dimension to your outdoor environment in time to entertain guests this summer.

— *Courtesy of ARAcontent*