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2015 Housing Statistics

In the year of 2015 Humboldt Realtors sold 72 homes, with an average of homes staying on the market for 0-30 days was 25, for 31-60 days on market was 12, 61-90 days on market was 10, we had 4 houses on the market for 91-120 days. The average sale price was \$118,192, with the highest sale price of \$337,500 and the lowest price a house was sold for was \$15,000, during this year.

During the first Quarter of 2016, we have 35 homes on the market, with the average listing price of \$112,674. Realtors in Humboldt and surrounding agents have sold 38 homes with the average sale price being \$96,813. During the first Quarter of 2016 in the state of Iowa, there are currently 13,577 homes on the market. Iowa Realtors have sold 7,058 homes, with an average sale price of \$163,428.

Homes on the market are in short supply. Now is

the perfect time to list your house with spring here, and summer approaching, buyers are ready than ever to make a move, and our community is growing and in need of homes that buyers are looking for. If you are concerned that you do not want your house on the market long, some realtors may already have a buyer in mind for your house. If you have questions on the selling process just as a Realtor, and trust that we are here for you.

Character & Charm

By Tresa Erickson

Take a look around your home. What do you see? Furniture, artwork and plants? Beyond that, what do you see? If you live in an older home, you might see a lot from the wainscoting in the dining room to the coffered ceiling in the living room. Generally, the older the home, the more charm and character it has. While newer homes are nice and tend to come with fewer problems, they often lack in character. Today's construction methods and materials are different, and the homes being built reflect that. Fortunately, there are some easy ways to put back some charm into a newer home.

Molding can do wonders for adding character, and it doesn't have to break the bank. Crown molding is fairly inexpensive, easy to install and can bring substantial charm to a room. So can chair rails, panel molding and decorative molding. If you have a larger budget, a coffered ceiling will instantly add charm to any room.

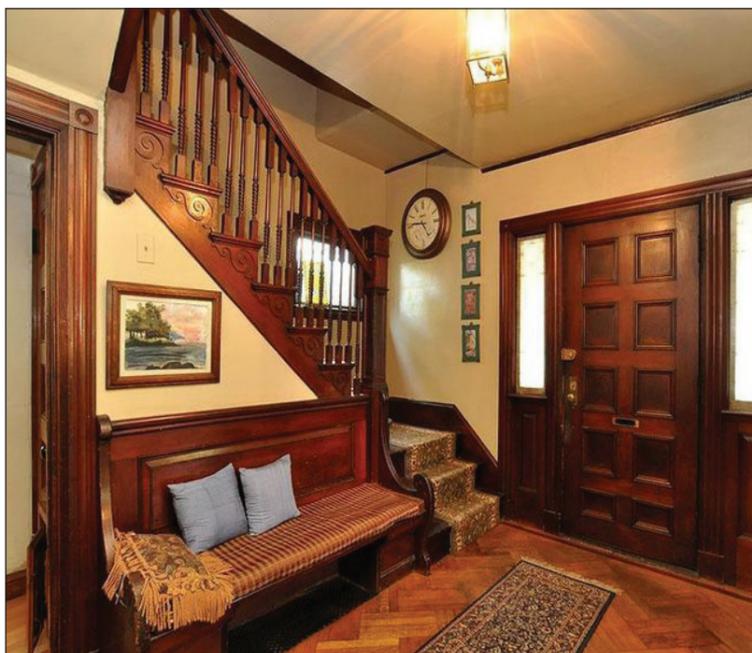
Walk into any historic home, and you'll see a lot of wood. You can make a big difference in your home simply by add-

ing more wood with wainscoting, molding and more. You can upgrade the newel posts on stairs, replace fireplace mantels with vintage ones and trade out carpet for hardwood. If hardwood is too expensive, consider laminate. It is budget-friendly, very durable and many brands resemble real hardwood.

Hardware and lighting are two more areas where you can easily and inexpensively add some charm. Shop around for vintage hardware and lighting as well as reproductions and install whatever you find. Trade out those cheap brass doorknobs for crystal doorknobs and those ceiling fans for chandeliers. Add some medallions above the chandeliers and some sconces to the wall for even more character.

Not too handy? No problem. You can add charm with accessories. You'll uncover many unique finds at antique stores, consignment shops and thrift stores. You'll also find some great vintage reproductions at big box stores. Check with family and friends as well. Who knows what heirlooms they might be willing to part with. Imagine how much more character you could add to your guest room with your aunt's old antique brass bed and a colorful, old quilt on top.

There are dozens of things you can do to make a new home more charming. Consult design magazines and blogs for further tips. Have a look online. You're sure to come up with all kinds of ideas in addition to the ones



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Publisher Jim Gargano
 Editor Jeff Gargano
 Advertising Design Brandi Bannister, Jen Jensen, Janette Schaumburg
 Sales Lana Pratt, Jaime Zweibohmer

Email: independent@humboldtnews.com



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Installation done right

By Tresa Erickson
Vinyl siding is a big investment, and when done

right, it can add tremendous value to a home. If the time has come for you to side

your home, make sure you choose the right installer. The best siding in the world won't make up for poor installation. Here are some tips to ensure you select the best company for the job.

Ask around. Find out where friends and family got their siding done and how well the installation went. Browse ads as well. The best companies will have informative websites and offer free estimates. When you have a list of potential installers, give them a call and set up an appointment. Most will jump at the opportunity to send out someone to talk to you. If not, cross them off your list. If they are too busy to talk you now, they will most certainly be too busy to talk you later down the road during installation.

When interviewing potential installers, make sure

they are knowledgeable about their products and procedures. The salesperson should be able to show you the siding products the company offers as well as point out each product's features, benefits and warranties. They should also walk you through the installation process and offer design assistance and solutions to your unique needs. Ask about licensing, insurance and certification. Is everything in order? Can they provide a list of references? Do they seem easy to work with?

Before the salesperson leaves, make sure you get a written estimate. This should describe the work in detail, identify the products that will be used, and list all of the material and labor costs. It should also address time and payment schedules. You should know exactly what

you will be getting for your money from the prep work to the actual installation to the cleanup and when that will occur.

Whatever you do, don't sign on the dotted line until you are ready. Thank the salesperson for their time and get ready for the next appointment. Once you have met with the companies on your list, do your homework. Contact the references provided and find out how the installation went. Read some online reviews. Check with the Better Business Bureau to make sure no complaints have been lodged against the company.

Set up another meeting with the companies at the top of your list to discuss the job further. This is when you can talk money and make sure the financing is in order. If the price seems too steep, don't be afraid to say so. Chances are a deal can be made. You can also discuss design preferences and work scheduling. You don't want to be on vacation when the installation begins on your home. Most jobs can be completed in less than a week, barring bad weather, and you'll want to be there to ensure things are going as expected.

At this time, the salesperson should walk around your home with you and tell you exactly what will be done. They should describe the installation process from beginning to end and make sure all of your needs will be met. It is crucial that you do

this step to ensure you and the installer are on the same page.

With any luck, you will find an installer you like and trust. Once you do, make sure you get a contract signed. Don't wait until it's too late and the installer is all booked up. Call as soon as you make your selection and be prepared to put down a deposit.

Choosing the right siding installer takes time. Don't rush the process. Siding is too big of an investment to take a chance on the installation. When you choose a company and the job begins, do what you can to assist the crew. Open up your home to them if you live in a remote area or temperatures are extreme. The crew will probably work from sunup to sundown, and giving them access to a bathroom or a shady porch will make the day easier for them.

When the job is done, take the time to review the work and let the foreman or project manager know if anything else needs done. Call, email or text any concerns you have. Don't let things go for six months and then get in touch with the company and expect the crew to come rushing to your aid. Chances are they will be on another job, and you will have to wait, and wait, and wait. Speak up and get everything completed to your satisfaction as soon as possible. And, remember, if you've chosen wisely, everything should go well and end well.

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Design Underfoot

By Tresa Erickson

Hardwood floors are all the rage these days, and most people prefer them au naturel. Sometimes, however, au naturel doesn't work. The hardwood floors may not be in good enough condition to be refinished or be mismatched from various repairs made over the years. In instances like these, the best option might be to paint the hardwood.

In the 1700s, it was not uncommon to find hardwood floors painted white, yellow, red and green. Paint protected the wide planks of wood from the hard-soled boots and shoes worn by people of the time. Today, painted hardwood floors are starting

to make a comeback, and the key to durability is the layering of thin coats. Three thin coats of paint layered on top of each other will wear better than one thick coat of paint.

Painting hardwood floors is no different than painting any other surface. You can paint it all one color or multiple colors for a different look. You can create faux finishes or patterns if you wish. Who doesn't like the look of a black and white checked floor? Painted hardwood floors not only look nice but can solve some design issues. A big geometric pattern can make a small room look larger, while vertical stripes can lengthen a room.

When painting hardwood

floors, think about color as well as pattern. Consider using various finishes and glazes for unique designs. Love the look of marble but can't afford it? No problem. Hire an artist to create the look of a marbled floor with paint.

For the best results, you will want to prep the floor well. Sand it down with 150-grit sandpaper. Repair all cracks and depressions. Then wash the floor to remove all dirt, dust and debris. Allow the floor to dry and then apply a primer. Give the primer ample time to dry and then sand the floor lightly with 220-grit sandpaper for better adherence. Wipe down the floor again and apply a thin coat of paint with a natural-bristle brush for a smooth finish. Allow the paint to dry for 24 hours and then apply another coat. Repeat twice more and add a couple coats of polyurethane for protection. Otherwise, heavy foot traffic will wear down the paint quickly and give your floors a soft patina. Give the polyurethane six months to cure and apply one final coat.

Painting hardwood floors is not difficult or expensive, and it can add interest to a room and disguise defects. However, it is not for everyone. Make sure it is what you want, because once you paint the floor, removing it won't be easy.



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Repair & Restore

By Tresa Erickson

Oh, how you love that old leather sofa in your den. Sure, it's a bit beat up. The leather is cracked, the nailhead trim is tarnished and the cushions sag, but the frame is still in good condition. Why throw it out for a sofa that will take years to break in? Why indeed. Why not repair it instead?

With the economy still on the mend, more and more people are choosing to repair furniture rather than buy new. Some no longer have the credit to finance new furniture, while others prefer older furniture made of real wood. Whatever the reason, more people are looking to furniture repair and restoration services to bring their sofas, chairs, tables and more back to life.

Depending upon the scope of the work that needs to be done, you may be able to tackle it yourself. You may be able to treat the leather on your sofa and replace the nailhead trim and cushions. You can probably find everything you need locally, and if you can't, you can always look online. Purchasing parts online is not uncommon. However, you need to be careful. Not every seller you run into will be honest. Look for a reputable seller on a reputable site.

While you may be able to fix your beloved sofa, you may not be able to repair the broken leg on your baby grand piano. For that, you might need the help of a professional. Again, reputation counts. Look for a reputable service that will back their work. That way, should something unforeseen happen, like another leg break when the piano is en route, the service will take care of it.

If you are dealing with an older piece in need of restoration, your great-grandmother's pie safe, for example, you need to take extra care in selecting a service. Look for a reputable service that specializes in furniture restoration. The older the piece, the more valuable it may be, and the restorer must know how to proceed without reducing the value. As any appraiser will attest, stripping the original finish from an antique can decrease its value tremendously.

Quality restoration services will be aware of this and take steps to preserve the original finish during the restoration work.

Keeping furniture in good condition is part of maintaining a home. You wouldn't overlook a broken baluster on your stairway, so why overlook the sagging cushions on your sofa? Considering repairing your sofa, particularly

if you love it so or are short on cash. In an economy that continues to struggle, the purchase of new furniture may not be an option for everyone. For those who cannot afford to buy new or simply do not want to, furniture repair and restoration may be the answer. Just make sure you do your homework and choose a reputable service that guarantees their work.



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Clean from top to bottom

By Tresa Erickson
Mold. Mildew. Dirt. Oil. Grime. They are not pretty, and if left long enough, they can wreak havoc on a home. Spring brings nice weather and green gunk on and around your home. Hosing away the gunk is a necessity for the health and happiness of your home, and the best way to go about it is with a pressure washer.

A pressure washer makes quick work of outside cleaning. Water is directed through a high-pressure nozzle to sweep away all of the mold, mildew, dirt, oil and grime from siding, brick, stucco, decking and more. A pressure washer is not a hose. It is a tool, and it must be used properly to prevent damage and obtain a thorough clean.

You can purchase a pressure washer or rent one for the day. Many brands are available. If you are buying a pressure washer, make sure you do your homework. Read up on the various brands available and choose the one that is right for you. Generally, the more powerful the washer, the more it will cost but the heavier jobs it will be able to tackle. Choose a model that will serve your long-term needs and your budget.

Once you get the pressure washer home, make sure you know how to use it. Read the owner's manual and know what pres-

sure to use for the job. The cleaning of brick, stucco and wood siding usually requires a lighter touch, about 1,500 pounds per square inch. The cleaning of concrete may take more.

Most exterior surfaces can be pressure washed, from decks and patios to driveways and sidewalks to brick, stucco and siding. The key is to adjust the pressure for each surface and attack the gunk from top to bottom, standing at least three feet away. This will prevent damage from intense pressure. If you have heavily soiled areas, you may want to look into using some type of cleaner and a scrub brush.

Read up on the surfaces you intend to clean and prepare accordingly. You should also take time out to

prep the site. Close all windows and doors. Remove all obstacles. Cover all plants. Then get ready to clean the surface from top to bottom, washing the dirt down. This will save valuable time and energy.

Pressure washing is not hard, and doing it routinely could save you money and time later. If left long enough, gunk and grime can take a real toll on a home and cause rotting and other structural issues. It can also take a toll on your health. Don't leave it to Mother Nature to care for the exterior of your home. A good hard rain won't do as good of a cleaning as a pressure washer will. Borrow one, rent one or buy one and take the time to make the surfaces on and around your home shine.

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The ombré effect

By Tresa Erickson

One of the hottest trends in hair coloring is the ombré effect, a graduation in color from roots to ends. The ombré effect is also hot in the interior design world, with many designers incorporating it into accessories and rooms. Interested in giving it a go in your home? Here's how.

Select three colors, preferably one light, one medium and one dark. For a subtle look, use three colors from the same color family, perhaps even from the same paint swatch. For a bold look, use whatever colors you desire.

Prep the room for paint and divide the walls into three sections. Select a color for each section, dark to light or vice versa. Working on one wall at a time, paint each section the appropriate color. While the paint is still wet, lightly mist the edges of each band of color with water and use a dry brush to blend the colors together. Hold the brush at an angle and make small X's. Keep blending until you achieve the desired result. You may also use a sea sponge or a rag to blend the paint. The trick is to move the paint in one general direction, either up or down depending upon

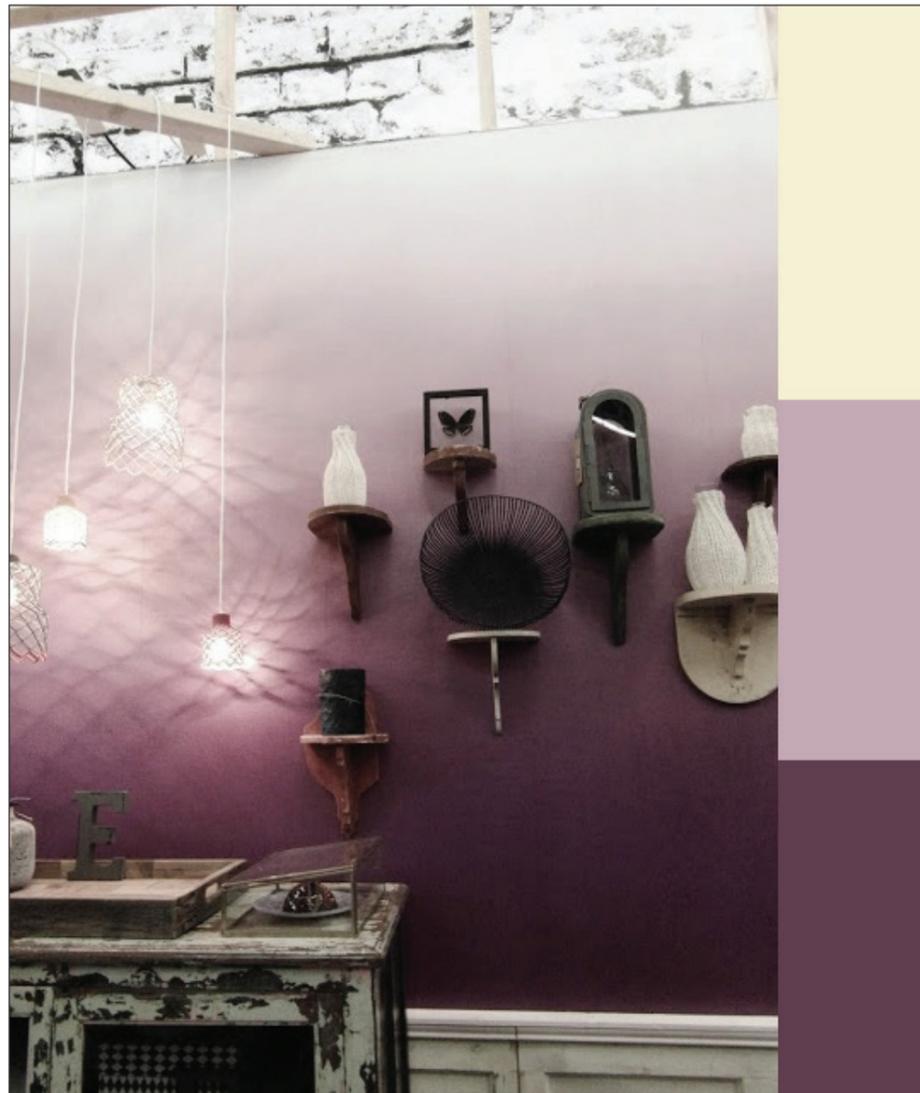
how you want the colors to flow. Some experts also suggest mixing each of the paints and applying a thin band of the mixed colors between the solid colors to help with the blending and provide more paint to move around.

If painting an entire room ombré does not suit you, why not try it in smaller doses. It's easy to do with spray paint and a little know-how, you can transform almost anything into an ombré masterpiece—furniture, mirrors, frames, vases and more. If it can be painted, you can make it

ombré. First, prep the piece for paint and select your colors. Then apply the lightest color first all over the piece. While the paint is still wet, stand farther away and apply a light coat of the second color, making sure you move in one direction, either up or down depending upon your preference. Repeat with the third color, standing a bit farther away. Continue in this fashion until you get the look you want.

If this is your first time working with paint, you might want to do a few practice runs to get a feel for creating the ombré effect. Try it on a scrap piece of drywall or a cardboard box. Practice until you have a real feel for the effect and then give it a go! And, don't forget. The ombré effect is not intended to be perfect. It is a graduation of color, which can vary around the room or piece.

The ombré effect isn't just for hair. You can have it in your home on the walls, furniture, mirrors and more!



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Lighten up your room in a variety of ways

By Tresa Erickson
Generally, the lighter the paint color, the airier and more open a room will feel. Some rooms, however, look dark no matter how light the color on the walls. Basement rooms, in particular, can be dull and dreary. How do you lighten up a room when the paint on the

walls is not the issue?
Let there be light
Light is one of the easiest ways to make a dark room brighter. Study the lighting in the room. Where could you add more? Could you light up a dark corner with a floor lamp or add more task lighting with a table lamp behind the sofa?

If you've got the budget, you might want to replace all old light fixtures. At the very least you should replace the light bulbs with brighter, more efficient ones. Does the room have windows? Use them. Throw open the blinds or drapes and give the windows a good cleaning to let in as

much natural light as possible. You might also want to look into adding some skylights to the room.
Let there be space
Nothing can make a room feel darker and more closed in than clutter. Take stock of the contents of the room. Is there anything you no longer need or want? Get rid of it! Have a yard sale or make a donation. Pay particular attention to the furniture in the room. The more pieces in the room, the tighter it will feel. Donate or sell what you don't need and give the room space to breathe.
Let there be color
You may have a light color on the walls, but what about elsewhere? Caramel-colored sofas and chairs set against caramel-colored walls will make the room look dark and drab. While replacing the furniture might not be in your budget, adding some colorful accessories should not cost you too much. You can shop for inexpensive accessories or pull them from other parts of your home. Sheets make great slipcovers and a vase of flowers from the yard will really perk up the fireplace mantel. Add some colorful throw pillows, books and prints, and a rug underfoot, and you might be surprised by how much lighter the room feels.

Let there be personality
Does the room speak to you and your tastes? Could someone walk into the room and learn something about you? No? Time to change that. Think about what you love most and find a way to incorporate it into the room. Do you love to travel? Display some vacation mementos or photos. Do you love animals? Bring in some of your favorite animal photos or statues. Give the room some personality, and it will feel brighter.
Let there be music
Music can dramatically change the feel of a room and help you see it in a different light. Bring in a radio or stereo and turn it on often.
Making a room feel brighter doesn't always require a complete remodel. The simplest of changes can make a world of difference. Give these suggestions a try and see what happens. That once dark, unappealing room might just become your favorite place to be.

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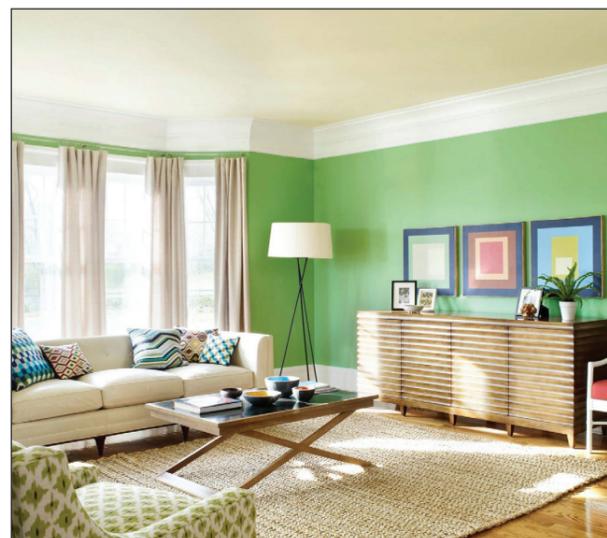
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Lil Gardeners

By Craig W. Armstrong

Parents are always looking for ways to engage their children. They want activities that they can share, time to teach them something and also listen to what they have to say. One way to achieve these things and enjoy the great outdoors at the same time is to introduce your kids to gardening. The younger you start them the better, because as we all know, teenagers think everything is stupid.

Some kids will jump right in while others might need to be convinced. If that is the case, lots of children's books and TV shows involved anthropomorphic fruits and veggies. You can use these mediums to warm them up to the idea.

The key to successfully gaining their interest is to include them in the whole process. That means including them in the planning process and getting their input on what to plant and where. Even if you don't go with their ideas, including them is

important.

Even if you don't use their landscape blueprint, they should still have their own piece of land. If multiple children are gardening, they should each have their own area. Giving them their own area also solves the problem of what they want to plant. If it's all carrots, then that's what they get. It's their plot of land. When decided where they will plant, make sure it is easily accessible for them to water, weed, tend and ultimately harvest. Also make sure it is far enough away from brother or sisters garden. Nothing will start a fight faster than trampling each other's plants.

Make sure everyone has their own tools. Kid-sized gardening tools are available. Again, if multiple kids are involved, make sure everyone has their own tools. It will help give them a sense of ownership over their garden.

Growing things takes time, so consider recording the process to keep the kids

engaged. With the popularity of smart phones, everyone has a video camera. Create videos of the kids working in the garden and progress as the plants grow. When they get bored, show them how far they have come by viewing the first videos.

When harvest time comes, make it an event. This is the culmination of their hard work, so make it a big deal. Let them help prepare the food they have grown and allow them to share their harvest with grandma and grandpa, friends and neighbors.

Speaking of friends and neighbors, getting kids involved in gardening isn't just for mom and dad. It's great for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and teachers too.

Involving children in gardening can teach them many things. It will show them the fruits of their labors (pun intended), give them a sense of pride and accomplishment and make them feel like a big kid.



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