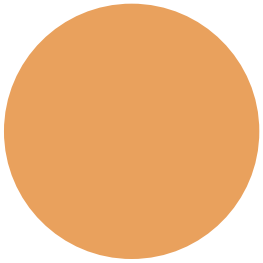
IMPROVEMENT CENTER



DIY Electrical Remodeling Guide

DIY Electrical Remodeling

While many projects that involve electricity are beyond the abilities of DIYers, there are a few that can be tackled without posing too much of a risk to your health. Most local jurisdictions require extensive training and a license to install or repair electrical wiring, do any major electrical connections, or perform any type of work around a home's main panel box.

This is for a very good reason: the voltage that passes through the wiring can cause severe and even fatal injuries. If the work is done incorrectly, it could result in a fire that can damage your house.

So how can you know which DIY electrical projects are safe to attempt? A good rule of thumb to follow might be that if the job can be done at an existing switch, receptacle, or light box and it doesn't involve any change in the wiring, it should be DIY-friendly.

However, it ought to be noted that even these projects are not without risk -- the power to the box where you'll be working should always be turned off at the breaker prior to starting. If you live in an old house that was constructed prior to electric codes being enforced, turning off a breaker may not be enough. Use a voltage tester on the wires in the box before beginning -- they're inexpensive and available at just about any home improvement store.

DIY-Friendly Electrical Home Improvement Projects

So which DIY electrical projects can be taken on without putting yourself or your home in harm's way? Here are a few that should be fairly safe:

- **Dimmers:** This type of switch allows you to adjust the brightness of a room's lights rather than just turning them on and off. Dimmers are great for setting a mood or simply providing an abundance of light when it's needed and keeping luminescence low the rest of the time. The adjustable switch can be substituted for any standard flip switch by simply moving the wiring attached to the existing unit. Make sure all connections are tight before attaching the cover plate. Dimmer switches only control lighting that's hard-wired -- lights plugged into receptacles are not affected.
- **Designer switch and cover plates:** Most homes are finished with standard beige switches, outlets, and cover-plates with the theory being that they blend in with the off-white walls. Instead of trying to hide these components that are in every room of your home, why not flaunt them by installing designer cover plates? Manufacturers offer cover plates in bright brass, porcelain, and many other finishes that can complement the interior décor of just about any room. Plates can normally be changed by just removing one or two screws. You can even go one step further and exchange the beige outlets and switches with different colors by just moving wires - brown and white are popular replacements.

- **Ceiling fans:** Hanging a ceiling fan not only adds interest to a room, it can also help lower your heating and cooling costs by assisting in air circulation. If you have a ceiling light fixture, it can often be replaced with a ceiling fan without too much difficulty. One thing to check before starting is that the ceiling box is substantial enough to carry the weight of the fan. If it's not, home improvement stores normally sell fan boxes that can be installed with little or no drywall repair required. Just move the existing wiring to the new box when it's in place and secure it as per the box manufacturer's instructions. Installing ceiling fans in rooms with eight or nine foot ceilings can be a DIY-friendly project, but if you have a two-story room, hanging the fan is a job for an electrical contractor.

While the selection of electrical home improvement projects available to DIYers may be limited, there are still quite a few minor jobs that should be safe to tackle. Just remember to check that the power is off where you'll be working and if you have a question as to your abilities or whether the project is safe, always call an electrical contractor.