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# Between FRIENDS



"Coaching first-time Texas Home Buyers and Sellers"  
Mobile: (210) 378-5987, [www.Val-A-Homes.com](http://www.Val-A-Homes.com)



**T**he flowers are blooming, the birds are singing, and spring is in the air! It's a great time to put a home on the market — call me today for a free consultation.

**A**re you in the market to purchase a home? The time is right to make the move and interest rates are attractive. And the pride that comes with home ownership ... well, that's priceless!

Get peace of mind with your home purchase by including an **Old Republic Home Warranty Plan**. A home warranty will help protect your budget from unexpected repair or replacement costs caused by breakdowns of your home's heating, plumbing, electrical systems, and most built-in appliances. Optional coverage choices are available to custom-fit your warranty to the unique needs of your new home.

Call me today to learn how you can get added peace of mind with an Old Republic Home Warranty Plan, or visit [www.orhp.com](http://www.orhp.com) for more information.

**D**o you know anyone looking to buy or sell a home? Send them my way! I'll put my expertise to work to guide your family and friends through their next real estate transaction.

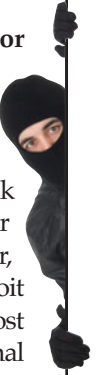


## Health & Safety

### Simple Tips to Secure Your Home

**Y**ou may be surprised to learn that property crime has steadily declined over the past four years despite a volatile economy, but you can never be too careful when it comes to protecting your family. Here are some simple, free, and effective tips to protect what is truly priceless.

- **Stash the spare key underground:** The welcome mat has become an all too common hiding place for the hide-a-key. Instead, wrap your key in aluminum foil and bury it a few inches below the ground.
- **Lock your mailbox:** A great deal of personal information passes through your mailbox on a regular basis. Don't become another victim of identity fraud.
- **Silence your phone when you're out of town:** A loud, unanswered landline lets the world know when you're on vacation.
- **Never leave notes on the door for service people:** Notes on the front door are yet another sign that your house is empty.
- **Think Like a Thief:** Take a walk around the perimeter of your house. If you were an intruder, what weaknesses would you exploit to break into your own home? Most burglars aren't the brilliant criminal masterminds of *Ocean's Eleven*, so you don't need to dream up an intricate plot. Keep it simple and look for anything that jumps out.



## Helpful Hints

### Tax Technology to Simplify Your Life

**T**.S. Eliot began *The Wasteland* with the famous words, "April is the cruellest month," which means he probably didn't expect a hefty refund in 1922. Whether you owe the IRS or they owe you, e-filing makes April a little less cruel. The Better Business Bureau recommends e-filing over paper filing because studies suggest you'll make fewer errors and any refunds will come faster!

The IRS website features a list of reputable companies that offer free federal e-filing for those who meet certain criteria, but even if you aren't eligible to "free file," you can use it to find a trustworthy provider. See the complete list at <http://apps.irs.gov/app/freeFile/>.



Most companies offer an array of options at prices ranging from \$10 to \$130. More robust packages come with legal representation in case you're ever audited, along with tax advice from professionals for those with more complicated situations.



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## Savor the Flavor

### Homemade Energy Bars

3-1/2 cups	rolled oats	1/4 cup	fruit juice (e.g., orange or pineapple)
3/4 cup	light corn syrup	1/2 tsp.	vanilla extract
8 tbsp.	protein powder	1 cup	chopped dates or raisins
1-1/2 cups	nonfat dry milk	1-1/2	bananas, mashed
1 tbsp.	cinnamon		
2	egg whites		

1. Mix dry and wet ingredients separately
2. Mix all ingredients together thoroughly
3. Cluster spoonfuls of the mixture on a cookie sheet in the shape of energy bars and bake at 325°F for 15 minutes or until the bottoms are golden brown

## Household Tips

### Speed Cleaning

A century ago, when coal and wood furnaces warmed our homes in the dead of winter, they left behind a filthy residue of soot and grime. Thus began the time honored tradition of annual spring cleaning, which survives more out of habit than necessity.

While it doesn't really matter when you do it, cleaning remains a necessary evil. The following tips, popularized in *Speed Cleaning* by Jeff Campbell, will give you more time to step outside and enjoy life.

**Tools of the trade:** Invest in quality supplies — gloves, brushes, spray bottles, and an apron to carry it all as you move from room to room. Quality tools work better and last longer, saving time, money, and effort.

**Keep moving:** Simply put, never backtrack!

**Clean top to bottom:** Newton's law of gravity applies to everything, from apples to dirt. Clean higher surfaces first and let the mess roll downhill.

**Use both hands:** Ever watch a chimpanzee at work? He uses all his limbs to simplify life, yet despite your superior brain, you insist on scrubbing with your dominant hand. Use both hands to set yourself free!



## Real Estate Today



### Increasing Curb Appeal

Your mother was right. When it comes to people, "what's on the inside" is all that truly matters. On the other hand, when it comes to real estate, first impressions are vital!

Here are a few clever ideas that will impress the neighbors today and attract more discerning buyers when you're ready to sell.

**Think symmetry:** Renaissance artists were enamored with it and the human brain craves it. Arrange everything with balance in mind.

**Install window boxes:** Add a burst of color and life by installing window boxes filled with flowers and plants. *Better Homes & Gardens* suggests painted wood for a "cottage feel," and iron or copper for a more traditional look.

**Let there be light:** Illuminating a pathway with decorative, low-voltage exterior lighting adds a healthy dose of charm and makes your walkway a little safer at night.

**A splash of color:** Painting the front door a different (but complementary) color can add a little flavor to spice things up.