



21 Genius Ways to Spend Your Tax Refund

Fix up, add value or make life inside your home more fun



April 15 has come and gone and if you're in line for a tax refund, congratulations. According to the Internal Revenue Service, this year's average refund is \$3,120. While that's not quite enough to park a new Tesla in your driveway, it's still a nice chunk of change. How will you spend yours?

Financial experts have some ideas; they suggest paying down your high-interest credit cards, shoring up your emergency fund or contributing to your IRA. Prudent advice, for sure. But if you get a beefy tax refund because you own a house, perhaps plowing some of that windfall back into your home sounds good.

From practical maintenance to fun tech toys, here are 21 ways, all under \$3,000, to improve, enhance or enjoy your home, thanks to Uncle Sam.



PRACTICAL UPDATES

Freshen your home with **paint**. For about \$30 a gallon, it's an inexpensive way to make rooms feel new. Same for the exterior, though you don't have to repaint the whole house. Just splash a fun, fresh color on the front door. It's amazing what a spot of color can do to say "welcome home."

If you love the idea of spring cleaning more than actually doing it, hire a **cleaning service** to clear away the dust bunnies and cobwebs, for about \$200 to \$400. Then relax in a freshly scrubbed home.

Upgrade your kitchen or bathroom **faucets**. Not very exciting, but a **commercial style faucet** just might make you feel more like a gourmet chef in the kitchen. And think how much easier getting out of bed will be knowing your reward is an energizing, pulsing spray under a new showerhead.



Worried about leeching energy? Get an **energy audit**. For about \$300 to \$500 a licensed technician will review your home's energy use and show you where and how to save money. Score again when you sell, as buyers increasingly cite energy efficiency as a must-have for their home.

Give your yard some love. Add trees, bushes, shrubs or flowers to make your garden more Eden-like. Not an Ed Hume? Hire a **landscaper** to help boost your curb appeal. Cost: \$500 to \$750.

You can't go wrong with new **kitchen appliances**. Replace your tired workhorses with modern, stainless steel versions for about \$1,000 to \$1,500 and instantly update your space while lowering your utility bills, as new models will be energy efficient. Donate the old appliances to charity and take the write-off on next year's taxes.

Want to mix it up at home but don't know how? Consult a design pro for about \$300 to \$500 to help see your space in a new light or get tips for making improvements. If you're selling, hiring a home stager will more than pay for itself when buyers fall over each other to make an offer on your house.



BEST ROI HOME IMPROVEMENTS

If you want to upgrade with an eye toward investment value, consider one of the projects below. According to Remodeling's [Cost vs. Value Report for 2016](#), you'll get the best bang for your buck if you:

- **Insulate your attic.** Spend an average of \$1,268 to blow fiberglass insulation into a 35-by-30-foot attic and you'll increase your home's value by \$1,482. That's a whopping 116% return.
- **Replace your garage door.** For about \$1,652, the average cost of installing a midrange garage door, you stand to recoup \$1,512, or 91.5% of your costs.
- **Update your front door.** Swap out your old entry door for a steel one that matches the style of your house – and adds to its security – for about \$1,335, and you'll get 91.1% of that back when you sell, or \$1,217.



Mortgage		
Mortgage protection	\$	
House insurance	\$	



PRACTICAL FINANCIAL MOVES

Pay down your [mortgage](#). Applying all or part of your tax refund to your mortgage principal is a great way to [retire that debt sooner](#). On average, making just one extra mortgage payment a year shaves about six years off the term of the loan, saving you thousands in interest.

Your [homeowner's insurance](#) policy may not cover every unforeseen calamity, such as an earthquake, a flood or sewage backup after a hurricane. Use your tax refund to close the gaps in your policy and add to your peace of mind.

Beef up your [down payment](#) if you're saving for a house. Buyers who put down 20% or more avoid private mortgage insurance (PMI). Or use your windfall to cover [closing costs](#). On average, buyers pay about \$3,700 in closing fees.

If you like to DIY, stock up on quality home-repair tools such as saws and drills and wrenches. Likewise, if you're a gardener, it's amazing how much shovels and pruners and wheelbarrows cost, not to mention seeds and mulch. Use your refund to help you tackle more honey-dos around the house.



TECH TOYS FOR THE HOME

Now that you've been responsible with your cash, it's time to have some fun with whatever's left over:

If you feel bad leaving Fido or Fluffy home alone all day, get a [Petcube](#). This video-camera system connects through an app on your phone and allows you to remotely check in on your furry friends whenever guilt, or curiosity, gets the better of you. Cost: \$199.

Style and utility go hand in hand in Apple's [gold-tone MacBook](#). C'mon, you know you want one. Cost: \$1,549.

Want to wash your whites and colors at the same time? Now you can with this twin, front-loading [LG washer](#) with a mini-wash sidekick. It has six cycles, including turbo and steam, and can fit 26 pounds of laundry. Cost: about \$2,230.



Turn on the light and get much more with Snap, a [floodlight](#) that combines a motion sensor, microphone, wireless HD camera and facial recognition software in an energy-efficient LED bulb. Install it over your garage or entryways to increase your home's outdoor security. Cost: \$150.

Answer the door from anywhere with this [video doorbell](#). Its wide-angled HD video, motion detectors and cloud recording act like a video peephole to show you who's at the front door (visitor, UPS guy, prowler) whether you're at home or not. Cost: \$199.

Keep your houseplants green and healthy with [this sensor](#) that monitors the light, temperature, water and fertilizer needs of your plants and alerts your phone or tablet when your intervention is required. Never kill another African violet or fiddle leaf fig. Cost: \$60.



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