

# Ms. Fix-it is on the job

Women save money and gain confidence by knowing the basics of home repair

By Julie A. Jacob

**Y**es, we can. That's the advice from three local women who are skilled in home repair.

Every woman can become a capable Ms.

Fix-it, they said, and a

woman with a well-equipped toolbox and a basic knowledge of home repair techniques will save money and feel empowered and confident as a homeowner.

Men are stereotyped as the gender skilled at home maintenance and repair, and, in fact, many women do count on their husband, their father or another man in their life to fix a leaky faucet, install a closet organizer or tune up the snow blower. Anyone who owns a home, however, should know how to do routine maintenance and simple repairs, said Gia Scherer, who owns a drapery business and works at Prairie Side True Value in Kenosha.

"If you own a home or rent, you should be able to do minor repairs," said Scherer, who learned about home maintenance and repair while installing drapes and working on a home in northern Wisconsin with her husband. "I've seen women come in who are widowed or divorced, and now



PHOTOGRAPH BY SEAN KRAJACIC

Shelley Trumm works at Kortendick Ace Hardware in Racine. She suggests that novice handymen tackle a project for the first time with help from a friend.

they don't know what to do."

Not knowing how to do simple repairs can be expensive, too. Independent home repair professionals generally charge from \$20 to \$60 an hour.

## Websites, classes & questions

Women can learn how to do home repairs by reading books, looking at websites and taking classes at hardware

stores.

Shelley Trumm, who works at Kortendick Ace Hardware in Racine, suggested that novice handymen tackle a project for the first time with help from a friend. When Trumm first learned how to do maintenance and repair work on her own home, she often invited a friend to assist.

"It always works better if you have two people — one to read the directions and another to do the work," Trumm said.

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Observing a professional is an excellent way to learn, noted Florence Schipper, who runs her own home repair service, Let Flo Do It, in Kenosha.

“The best way to learn is to watch someone do the repair and ask questions. If the person doesn’t want you to watch or won’t answer questions, I wouldn’t trust him or her and would not use them again,” said Schipper, who learned how to repair things as a child growing up on dairy farm.

Hardware store employees are usually knowledgeable and helpful, according to Scherer and Trumm. It’s smart to gather as much information as possible, including brand and model number, about any part that needs to be repaired or replaced — whether it’s a light switch, furnace filter or lawn mower blade — before heading to the store. If a broken part can be carried easily, bring it along. If the part is too big or can’t be moved, take pictures of it for reference.

## Know your limitations

Finally, it’s important to know when to hire a professional, Schipper said. Every homeowner should rate her skill level and call a professional when a project is beyond her level of expertise.

“Complicated projects like tiling a floor require special tools and equipment that are an expensive investment for a one-time use,” she said.

The rewards of mastering basic home maintenance and home repair projects are more than just the satisfaction of money saved, the women stressed. There’s also the feeling of confidence and pride that comes from accomplishing a home repair project.

Trumm recalled one woman whose husband developed dementia and was unable to continue performing repairs around the house. At first, Trumm said, the woman would often call the hardware store to ask if she was doing something correctly.

“Now she comes in all the time. It’s like a burden has been lifted from her,” Trumm said. “It’s rewarding to see another woman gain confidence.”



Florence Schipper operates a home repair service, Let Flo Do It, in Kenosha. She says the best way to learn how to make home repairs is by watching someone who knows what they’re doing and asking questions.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEVIN POIRIER

Florence Schipper touches up a spot where old brackets were screwed into the wall after removing drapes at a client’s home.

## Filling the toolbox

A well-stocked toolbox should include:

- Phillips screwdriver
- Flathead screwdriver
- Hammer
- Assorted screws and nails
- Cordless drill
- Pliers

- Wrenches
- Utility knife or box cutter
- Measuring tape
- Duct tape
- Flashlight
- Work gloves
- Safety glasses



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