

The Azalea Project

MY HUSBAND'S HOBBY is do-it-yourself projects, and I consider myself fortunate to be married to a handy man. Instead of spending the beautiful fall weekends in the woods with a gun, he's patching stucco. There are no Saturday morning tee times; instead he's at Home Depot when the doors open. And in lieu of ESPN and *Sports Illustrated*, it's HGTV and *Fine Homebuilding*. His hobby is just as time consuming and expensive as other hobbies, but at least I benefit from it.

We live in a 1922 bungalow partly because I fell in love with its charm and partly because Dan's eyes got glassy as he imagined years of remodeling and repairs. After a couple of months in our house, he happily proclaimed that we couldn't sell for at least 10 years because it would take him that long to complete all of his projects.

After living here for five years, we might have to extend that time frame. It's not that Dan is a procrastinator or doesn't know what he's doing. So far, he's completely redone the laundry room, much to my delight. The ceilings are perfect without a single crack. Our shower has been fabulously retiled in a period style, and he even removed all of the old brass hinges and doorknobs throughout the house, painstakingly hand polishing them to their original luster. The problem is his perfection affliction. I call it "While-I'm-At-It-itis," because completing even the most minor improvement requires numerous prerequisites. This disease is very contagious and can be quite debilitating since the only known cure is expensive and not covered by insurance.



It usually starts mildly but the symptoms can build to a fever pitch. The latest episode began when I mentioned to Dan that I wanted to spruce up our backyard with some azaleas, hostas and a few colorful annuals—a venture now known around our house as "The Azalea Project."

"Well, before we spend any money on new sod and shrubs," he said, "we need to waterproof the basement and lay a French drain; the contrac-

tors will destroy any plantings you do. While we've got the yard dug up, we should go ahead with the installation of a sprinkler system and run electricity out to the garage. While we're already working on the garage, we should go ahead with our plans to enlarge it and install a new door. After that, the old concrete driveway will probably be crumbled from the heavy equipment, so we should pour a new driveway. I think we should get all of that done before you plant your azaleas."

My original landscaping project would have cost around \$500. After this severe bout of While-I'm-At-It-itis, The Azalea Project is now going to cost at least \$10,000. The contractors started digging for the French drain last week, so I should see azaleas by spring of 2003—if our money holds out.

I wonder what a few petunias would cost ...

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