

September 2008

Angie's list[®]



The immigration situation

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Angie's list®

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"I taught English abroad for a year. When my Irish boyfriend followed me back from France, he needed a work visa. We met with an immigration lawyer and our options were to get married or be apart for months while he went through the process from Belfast. Two weeks later we were married — an 'immigration shotgun wedding,' if you will. It wasn't exactly the marriage proposal or wedding I'd dreamed of, but John is more than I'd ever hoped for in a husband."

— Lindsay Murphy
Publication Assistant



As part of our commitment to the environment, we print every issue of this magazine on paper made of 10 percent recycled post-consumer content.



FROM THE EDITOR

Why our cover story is relevant to you

Immigration is in the news — as an issue in the presidential election and because federal authorities have stepped up crackdowns on illegal workers and even slapped handcuffs on a growing number of their employers. A handful of states — Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Carolina — have passed some of the toughest enforcement laws to date.

But even more relevant for you, our members, is the fact that many of the estimated 7 million illegal workers in this country take jobs as construction workers, movers, gardeners, painters, roofers, house cleaners, and so on. In other words, they toil away in the very same home-services industries so central to the List.

Should you still need convincing, consider the results of two recent Angie's List polls. More than 40 percent of you suspect illegal immigrants have worked on a job at your home and 68 percent of contractors rated on the List say undocumented (or fake-documented) workers pose a



PHOTO COURTESY OF ICE

problem in their communities.

Angie's List takes no position on the immigration situation, but we do think it's important to cover issues that directly impact our members. We also invite you to share your opinions. If the homeowners, contractors and undocumented workers interviewed for this story are any indication, we're in for a lively debate.

Until next time,


Sue Wiltz
Editorial Director

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linking with latinos



medical/dental
toxic teeth?



making the
most of the List



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH

Straight from the List

If you read a report on Angie's List that you like — one that causes you to laugh until you cry or makes you think of someone you know — feel free to share it with your virtual buddies. To e-mail a report, click on the "Send a Report to a Friend" link at the top of the page and insert up to 20 e-mail addresses. You can forward up to three reports in a 30-day period. So, the next time you're perusing the List for a recommended service company, keep your family and friends in mind!

The immigration situation

How it impacts the contractor, homeowner and undocumented worker



COVER AND ILLUSTRATION BY NATE WILLIAMS

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ANGIE'S MAILBAG

Dear Angie,

I'm most grateful to you for sharing the story of Melvin Satterfield in the July Angie's List Magazine. It's encouraging to know that there are people of his caliber in this world.

— *Sandra Sokolik, Olivette, Mo.*

Dear Angie,

Melvin Satterfield has made the remarkable journey from the darkness to the light. I glowed when I read about him. He made an astonishing difference. His story is a real inspiration and shows what just one person can accomplish. Bravo, Mr. Satterfield.

— *Cynthia Hawkins-Legorreta, Eastsound, Wash.*

Dear Angie,

Yes, [the topic in the "Tough Times" article in July's issue] is depressing. The collateral damage from incompetence in the present government just spreads like mold.

— *Judy Czubati, San Antonio*

Dear Angie,

I know the worsening economy is tough on everyone and I feel sorry for the contractors, but in a way, it's payback for the numerous times they were unavailable, flaky, didn't call you back, didn't show up for jobs or just over-charged you.

— *Name withheld, Orange, Calif.*

Dear Angie,

Nice job on July's "Clarifying certifications" story! It was very comprehensive and covered all the reasons board certification is important. Here's another way to look at it: If your car transmission stops working, you have your choice of who will fix it — the corner mechanic or the certified transmission specialist. Sure, the mechanic might be good at it, but how can you be sure? A certified transmission specialist has taken the time to prove his credentials. Board certification gives us that same option with doctors.

— *Trisha Torrey, Every Patient's Advocate, Baldwinsville, N.Y.*

Dear Trisha,

Thanks for your feedback. To read more letters about this story and others, visit magazine.angieslist.com.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Please let us know if you have a question or comment about Angie's List or a story in our magazine. Correspondence should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to mailbag@angieslist.com.

Be sure to include your name and city.

LETTERS OR E-MAILS SENT TO ANGIE'S LIST MAY APPEAR HERE AND/OR BE POSTED ON OUR WEBSITE. ANY SUBMISSION MAY BE EDITED FOR SPACE AND CLARITY.

Heart to heart

Since we ran our July feature, “Giving Back,” Melvin Satterfield has become an inspiration for people across the nation. “I’ve received letters every day — they’re so incredible,” says Satterfield, who owns Browsers Welcome, a furniture repair and refinishing company, and teaches troubled teens his trade. “I’ve had so many people call me ‘good’ that I ought to put a halo over my head.”



Besides the letters, Satterfield, a Columbus, Ohio, resident, has received visitors and phone calls thanking him for his work and dedication to the community. One person who contacted Satterfield after reading his story was Amy Thompson, coordinator of the Orientation to Trade and Apprenticeship Program for Youth, who teaches local teens skills, such as flooring and drywall installation and plumbing. She invited Satterfield’s kids to take part in the next session of the eight-week program. “We get them used to the tools and help them make a living as a tradesperson,” Thompson says.

Soon, Satterfield and his students will have more tools to work with thanks to Julie Trusty, an Angie’s List member in Indianapolis. She says she was thrilled to read that Satterfield was inspired by Bob Vila. “My dad was an inventor of the [dead blow] hammer that Bob Vila always uses,” Trusty says. “I’m going to send Melvin different sizes of hammers so he can have them to repair his furniture.”


This type of outreach from others only pushes Satterfield to continue his efforts. “Hopefully the program catches on,” he says. “Thanks to everybody for their heartfelt support and for their letters and calls of congratulations and thanks.”



The immigration situation

How it impacts the contractor, homeowner and undocumented worker

by Brittany Paris • Illustrations by Nate Williams

ean Hedges, owner of Hedges Landscape Specialists, thought a fine was the worst penalty he'd face for hiring illegal immigrants. He never dreamed it would turn him into a convicted felon. That changed on Sept. 24, 2007 — the day immigration authorities raided his Crestwood, Ky., office and arrested 12 of his undocumented workers.

The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement division started investigating Hedges after former employees reported that he hired undocumented workers and paid them cash under the table. "Hedges indicated he wasn't worried and would just pay a fine if ever caught," one informant told ICE.

A week after the raid, Hedges



pleaded guilty to criminal charges that he'd knowingly employed illegal aliens, was sentenced to five months probation and forced to forfeit \$147,813 from his corporate bank accounts. Hedges was personally penalized \$24,000, and his business was fined \$48,000. The 12 immigrants were deported to Mexico.

While Hedges declined to comment, his attorney John Caudill suspects the authorities wanted to make an example of his client, who had no prior violations of any kind. Caudill served in the U.S. Attorney's Office for 16 years before entering private practice in 2005, and during that time, prosecuted several corporations employing hundreds of illegal

immigrants but never tried a case against a contractor.

"I think the federal government is making small business owners a priority, where they were never a focus of these types of investigations before," Caudill says. "They wanted to make a point with Mr. Hedges. ICE wants small business owners to know there's a price to pay."

According to ICE, worksite immigration busts like the one at Hedges Landscape Specialists have increased tenfold over the past five years. More business owners than ever before are facing felonies and deportations have skyrocketed. ICE arrested



PHOTO BY AP/PAUL CONNORS *A contractor indicates he wants to hire just one from a group of day laborers waiting outside a Home Depot parking lot in Phoenix.*

5,000 people between October 2007 and May 2008 and brought criminal charges against 900 of them. Of those, 90 percent were undocumented workers and 10 percent were employers.

ICE spokesperson Ivan Ortiz-Delgado says charging business owners is more complicated than prosecuting illegal immigrants.

Two months ago, federal and local police arrested 45 of Annapolis Painting Services' 100 employees during an early morning shakedown. The Maryland company's undocumented workers were deported, and a criminal investigation of owner Robert Bontempo was continuing at press time. "Developing sufficient evidence

against employers requires complex, white-collar crime investigations that can take years to bear fruit," Ortiz-Delgado says. Bontempo declined to comment.

This ramped-up enforcement, at the federal level and via strict new laws in several states, has contractors, homeowners and undocumented workers examining how the immigration situation affects their community and, for many, their livelihood and bottom line.

ICE officials understand what motivates employers to take the risk. "That's a no-brainer!" ICE spokesperson Pat Reilly says. "They get a cheap, compliant workforce that allows them an advantage over people who comply with the law."

In a recent Angie's List contractor poll, 47 percent of business owners claimed their company has suffered because competitors who hire undocumented workers undercut prices by paying illegal employees less.

Frank Gorin, owner of Frank Gorin Custom Painting in Poway, Calif., says illegal labor in his industry may force him out of business after nearly 20 years. "I can't afford to be legal and compete," Gorin says. "I'll be lucky to stay open another six months."

Frustrated, Gorin says he confronted other painters in the area who he suspects employ undocumented workers and learned they are paying illegal laborers \$8 to \$10 per hour. Gorin pays his six workers a minimum of \$17 an hour, plus liability and workers' compensation premiums.

Despite Gorin's stance, he realizes it's hard for contractors to know whether applicants are legal. Gorin discovered he'd inadvertently hired two illegal immigrants when his payroll company flagged the employees' Social Security numbers because they didn't match their names. "A lot of them have fake documents," Gorin says. "I fired them immediately. They were good workers, but illegal is illegal."

Remodeler Paul Zuch, owner of Capital Improvements in Dallas and vice president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, understands Gorin's plight

With local help, feds detain more

At one time, only federal authorities handled immigration violations because it fell under federal law. However, in 1996 state and local police began signing "memos of understanding" to partner with first the U.S. Attorney General and later Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The partnership only covers a small number of law enforcement offices. Currently, 55 agencies have MOUs with ICE, including 34 sheriff's offices and statewide agencies in Arizona, Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico and Tennessee. Altogether, local police have helped apprehend more than 60,000 illegal immigrants since 2006. ICE has detained a record 565,000 suspected illegal immigrants in that same period, deporting nearly 472,000.

While ICE focuses on enforcement within the country, U.S. Customs and Border Protection works to keep illegal immigrants from entering.

Border patrol agent Jaime Castillo says they are detecting fewer attempts to cross the border, thanks to increased surveillance and infrastructure, like the 670-mile border fence under construction at strategic points from California to Texas. Since 2006, Border Patrol has apprehended 1,870,000 people trying to cross. Detainees who were once shipped back immediately now face jail time as a deterrent.

— by Paul F.P. Pogue



PHOTO COURTESY OF ICE *Immigration officials increased worksite enforcement in 2007.*



PHOTO BY RACHEL SAUF

“Contractors and customers who hire illegal immigrants are only contributing to a serious problem.”

— Frank Gorin, owner of Frank Gorin Custom Painting in Poway, Calif.

but says the industry can't ignore the role undocumented workers play. "The construction industry would be severely crippled if all of them were suddenly deported," Zuch says. "It's already an overly competitive industry with a shortage of qualified workers willing to do the jobs many legal workers won't do. Good contractors are being forced to close up shop because they simply can't compete with those who hire undocumented workers."

Any prospective employee who shows documents that establish his or her identity and worker eligibility can work for Carrasco's Floor Covering in nearby Carrollton, Texas, says operations manager Sam

Hernandez, who estimates at least 50 percent of his employees are illegal. He says the company doesn't check to see if those documents are fake, and under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, he's not required to as long as they appear legitimate. If he goes too far in demanding documentation, he could violate discrimination codes.

In Portland, Ore., Kaizen Home Improvement owner Kate Thornton makes sure her subcontractors are licensed and bonded but says she doesn't check the legal status of their employees. Thornton recently hired a subcontractor to tear out and pour a concrete floor. "They didn't speak English fluently, except their

leader,” she says. “Maybe it’s a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy.” She says she understands she could be held liable if caught with illegal immigrants on her job site, even if they’re a subcontractor’s workers, but doesn’t worry about it too much. “I don’t lose sleep over it, because it’s so widespread,” Thornton says. “If I did get singled out, I’d ask why.”

According to the 1986 federal immigration law, contractors can be held responsible for hiring a subcontracted employee “knowing that the alien is an unauthorized alien.”

Craig Penner, owner of lawn irrigation company City Rain in Seattle, says lack of legal labor willing to do grunt work has forced him to

hire day laborers off the streets as needed. He finds workers standing in front of the local box stores or on a street corner well known for immigrant workers. Penner says he pays them a wage comparable to his long-term employees and prefers to put them on payroll if they provide a Social Security number, but that’s not always the case. Penner doesn’t ask for ID when he hires them and assumes most are here illegally. “I’ve had a very positive experience,” he says. “I just wish they had a better command of English.”

Day laborers like the workers Penner hires are ubiquitous across the nation. They wait for any employment opportunities at



“[Immigrants] do the work without complaining too much.”

— Sam Hernandez, Carrasco’s Floor Covering operations manager in Carrollton, Texas, who estimates 50 percent of his employees are illegal.

PHOTO BY MELISSA CARUGATI

intersections, parking lots and organized employment centers. The National Day Labor Study estimates 75 percent of those workers are undocumented migrants. Contractors hire 43 percent of them, but they aren't the only ones seeking this affordable labor.

 Homeowners are the No. 1 employer of day laborers, hiring 49 percent of the workforce. Linda, a Scarsdale, N.Y., resident who didn't want her real name published, recruits a couple of Hispanic workers each spring to help her till, pick weeds and lay mulch. Linda enlists workers at informal hiring sites in neighboring towns. She pays them about \$50 to \$100 and buys them lunch. Linda speaks fluent Spanish and stays nearby to supervise. She assumes they are illegal because they don't speak English and presumably can't apply for jobs elsewhere.

"Yeah, they are taking American jobs," Linda says. "But, you know what? I can't get a high-schooler to turn my flower beds." Linda's tried. She went to her local youth employment office to find help, but that led nowhere. "These are jobs kids don't want to do anymore," Linda says. "It's a lot of heavy, manual labor."

Bill Hudson of Woodstock, Ga., also relies on day laborers to do his heavy lifting. In June, Hudson took five hours to move one pallet of turf across his yard, and he still

had another pallet to go. "I decided to go get somebody on the corner who wanted to make some money," Hudson says. He went to the corner convenience store about a mile from his house, which he acknowledges is a reputed hangout for illegal immigrants. As he drove up in his pick-up, people looking for work streamed toward him. Hudson paid a man \$60 to finish the job, which he did in an hour. Since then, Hudson's hired more helpers from the same spot. "They do a very good job," Hudson says. "I never would have gotten the work done any other way."

ICE warns that homeowners who knowingly hire illegal immigrants could face consequences, although no federal cases have been brought against a homeowner as far as Reilly knows. "The same as any employer, if you know you're hiring someone illegally, and you come to the attention of law enforcement, you could be vulnerable," Reilly says. "Whether or not a homeowner will be targeted for worksite enforcement is another question. We tend to focus on larger building projects." Reilly points out that people who pay cash under the table are also breaking the law. "That's something that the IRS is going to be very interested in."


 Many people hire contractors to do work, knowing full well the companies may use illegal labor. According to a recent Angie's List poll, 87 percent



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH

“I have no objection to immigration, but I do have a problem with people who work and don’t pay taxes.”

— Jon Kyle, homeowner in Speedway, Ind.

of homeowners surveyed believe service companies in their area hire illegal immigrants.

Speedway, Ind., resident Jon Kyle hired a local company late last year to repair his chimney. The company sent a subcontractor to do the work, and most of the employees were Hispanic. Kyle demanded to see the employees’ green cards. When the subcontractor told Kyle the workers had left their identification at home, he went inside to call the police. “[The police] thought I was silly,” Kyle says. “They said, ‘if we go after them, there wouldn’t be any roof work getting done in Indiana.’” While a handful of state, city and county police departments have

joined forces with federal agents to enforce immigration laws on a local level, Indiana’s police have not.

Kyle also complained to the governor, Indiana Department of Workforce Development and Department of Homeland Security. He says only the governor’s office followed up with him, but he was disappointed with the e-mailed response: “Immigrants have helped build America throughout our history, but the law must be enforced. [However], the direct enforcement of immigration law is within the exclusive authority of the federal government.”

Workforce Development spokesperson Gary Abell told Angie’s List

Immigration matters

More than 40 percent of Angie's List members suspect illegal immigrants have worked on a job at their home, although most of them didn't do anything about it. A majority of contractors rated on the List — 68 percent — say illegal immigrant labor is a problem in their area. Here's a look at more of the statistics and costs that shape the debate today.

Foreign-born residents

13.4 million = naturalized citizens

12.1 million = legal permanent residents

12 million = illegal immigrants



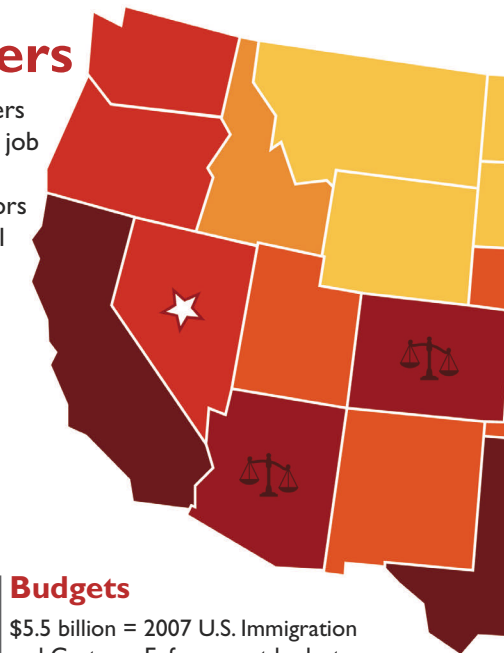
75% of illegal immigrants in the United States are from Central and South America. The largest number — **57%** — are **Mexican**.



Wages

\$160 = average monthly income of unskilled Latin Americans in their homeland

\$1,600 = average monthly income of unskilled Latin American immigrants working in the United States



Budgets

\$5.5 billion = 2007 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement budget

\$11 billion = 2007 U.S. Border Patrol budget

\$45.9 billion = estimated amount Latin American immigrants will send home in 2008

Top 10 day-labor occupations

- Construction worker
- Mover
- Gardener/Landscaper
- Painter
- Roofer
- House cleaner
- Carpenter
- Drywall installer
- Car washer
- Electrician



"The federal government is making small business owners a priority. ICE wants to let



12 million illegal immigrants — or **5%** of the U.S. workforce — live in the United States today and **7 million work**.



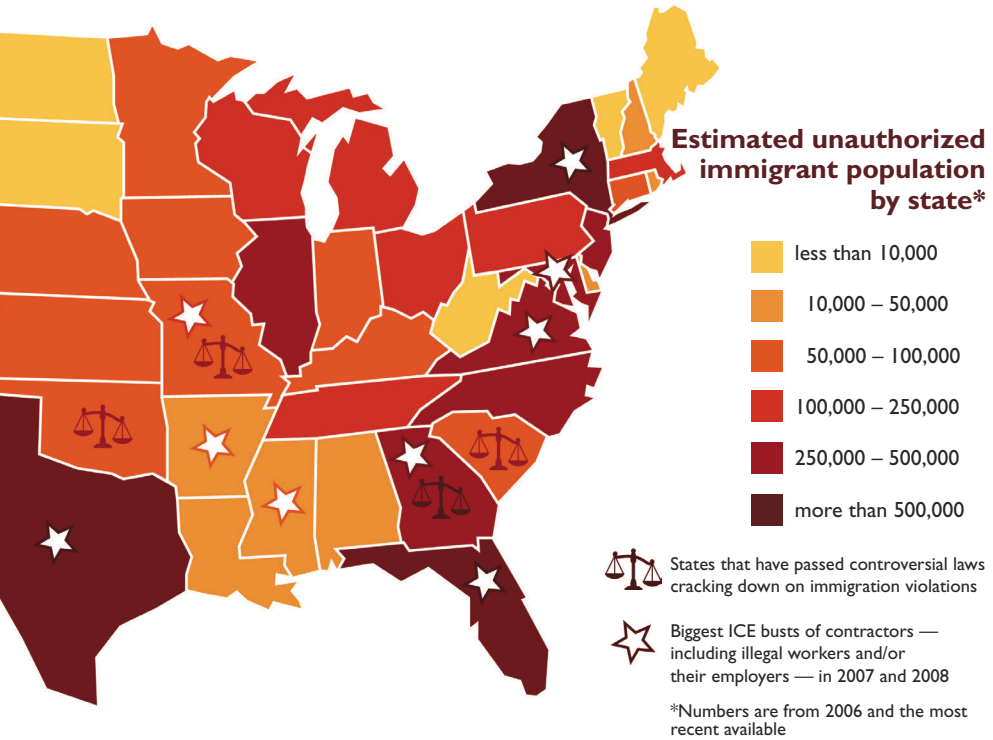


PHOTO COURTESY OF ICE

Deportations

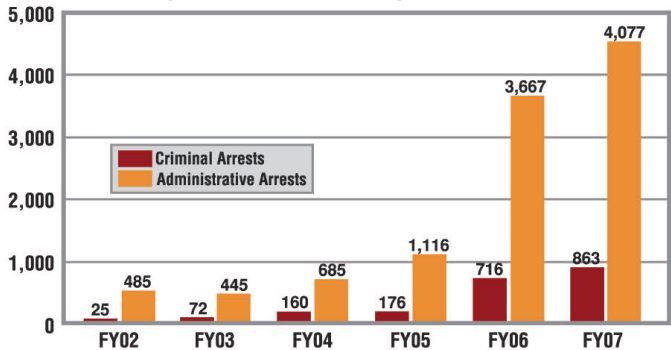
150,000 = 2003

280,500 = 2007

500,000 = 2008*

*Projected

Illegal worker and employer arrests



business owners know there's a price to pay." — John Caudill, Louisville defense attorney

More than 1,000 Angie's List members mention a **language barrier** in reports filed since 2007.



Three out of four day laborers are illegal immigrants. **Homeowners** are their No. 1 employers while **contractors hire 43%**.

Magazine his office is looking into Kyle's allegations that the suspected illegal employees weren't paying income taxes. DHS took down the contractor's name, but Kyle says they did nothing further. DHS does not comment on tips they've received.

Indianapolis resident Ronnie Yeary screens contractors carefully to avoid the situation altogether. "I tell them upfront that if they hire illegal immigrants, they don't need to come out and give me a quote," Yeary says. "Illegal immigrants take the jobs that Americans would take if they were paid a fair living wage. We've got American citizens of all different races out there trying to make a living and support their families, and they cannot do so with millions of illegal immigrants in this country."

Yeary recently received six bids to reshingle his roof, and he suspects

more than half came from companies who use undocumented workers. He decided to hire Bauer Roofing in Noblesville, Ind., and was pleased with the result. "Jeff [Bauer] and his long-standing crew are American citizens," he says. "I was relieved and understood a 6 percent higher price than his closest competitor."

Charles Fichter in Lake Oswego, Ore., worries who companies employ could impact his wallet in a different way. When he hired a roofing company in nearby Portland, Fichter says none of the workers spoke English, except the foreman. He surmised that the Hispanic workers were here illegally, but didn't ask any questions. "The quality of the work was good, and I understand they need to control costs," Fichter says. "I just don't understand the legal ramifications if they get hurt. It makes me uneasy."

Communication breakdown

Angie's List members have filed more than 1,000 reports since 2007 that mention a language barrier with workers. Many assumed they were dealing with illegal immigrants, but that's not necessarily the case. "Language proficiency has nothing to do with legal status," says Michelle Mittelstadt at the Migration Policy Institute. "Just because someone doesn't speak English



doesn't mean they're illegal."

She says an estimated 25 percent of adult illegal immigrants in the United States are proficient in English. On the other hand, 54 percent of legal green card holders aren't proficient.

When Peter Davis of Edgewater, Md., hired Annapolis Painting Services to paint his home's exterior in 2007, he says dialogue was difficult. In his Angie's List report,

Most states require contractors to carry workers' compensation insurance for every employee, according to Rebecca Smith of the National Employment Law Project. She says employees' immigration status doesn't affect claims: "At least a dozen high court decisions have ruled there's no difference between documented and undocumented in terms of benefits."

Indianapolis immigration attorney John Broyles says while undocumented workers have access to the court system to recover damages, many don't do so because they worry about deportation. José, an illegal worker in Indianapolis, recently fell off a roof at a job site and hurt his back. He knew he had the right to sue the company after they denied him compensation for the injury. But when he confronted the contractor, José says the man threatened to call the authorities, so he never pursued the issue.



PHOTO BY BEN WEISS

“I decided to go get somebody on the corner who wanted to make some money.”

— Bill Hudson, homeowner in Woodstock, Ga.

Davis wrote that the crew had good people skills, though there were communication problems. He gave the company an overall “A” despite this drawback. “One worker spoke enough English, but the other did not,” Davis says. “Communication was challenging.”

In a recent poll, 38 percent of Angie's List members say illegal immigrants in the home-improvement industry have complicated communication.


Nobel-prize winning Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Paul Samuelson, who's studied immigration over the years, says the current Hispanic

population presents a unique challenge.

“This is the first group of immigrants who haven't abandoned their own country's language and accepted the American lingo on a universal level,” Samuelson says. “There are enough of them to constitute their own culture.”

Nelson, an illegal Salvadoran immigrant working in Boston, says speaking English is an advantage when searching for work. “I want to learn English, but I don't have the time,” he says. “If I did, I could make more money.”

— by Brittany Paris



We have a lot of problems,” says Hugo, an illegal Salvadoran immigrant who stands alongside José and dozens of day laborers and waits for work in a vacant parking lot on Indianapolis’ Eastside. (The illegal immigrants interviewed for this story declined to give their last names.) Hugo explains the majority of the group have been refused payment.

Another day laborer, Jorge, chimes in about a recent run-in with a crooked contractor. He claims he worked 27 hours on a residential roofing job and was never paid. “When I asked to be paid, he said ‘leave or I’ll call and have you deported,’” Jorge says.

“We get taken advantage of all the time,” Hugo says. “It’s absurd. We’re just trying to get jobs.” He traveled here illegally seven years ago, leaving his home and three children behind in search of a job. When asked if he’d rather be living in El Salvador, he says: “Without a doubt.”

ICE blames employment as the driving force behind illegal immigration. It estimates that 7 million of the nearly 12 million illegal immigrants living in this country are employed, making up 5 percent of the American workforce. “Employment is a magnet,” Reilly says. “It’s no secret the reason so many illegal aliens come to this country is for work. They want an American wage and the American lifestyle.” The biggest offenders, Reilly says, are

low-skilled, labor-intensive industries, like roofing and housecleaning, where workers need little training or English-speaking ability.

Although ICE hasn’t executed any worksite raids in Indianapolis, Hugo says the recent arrests of illegal immigrants in other parts of the country make him nervous. Still, he continues to work and sends \$200 each week to his family. Hugo occasionally works for the same contractor for weeks at a time, but typically changes employers every day. Homeowners often drive by and hire him directly. “They want a good price,” Hugo says. “American companies want too much money.”

On a street corner 800 miles away, Ricardo solicits work from wealthy homeowners in Lee, Mass. He says he prefers to work as a day laborer versus full-time employment because contractors took advantage of him in the past. “One company paid me \$4.15 an hour in cash,” Ricardo says. “They knew I was illegal.” The Colombia native came to the United States in 1996 on a one-year worker’s visa. He decided to stay when it expired and has been living here against the law for 11 years. “There’s much more money to be made here,” he says.

While Ricardo does send some of his earnings to his homeland, he says he files U.S. taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, which is issued by the IRS regardless of immigration status to



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH

“We’re just trying to get jobs.
We do the hard, dangerous work.”

— Hugo, an illegal Salvadoran immigrant and Indiana resident

people who don't qualify for a Social Security card. Most hope paying taxes will give them leverage if presented with an opportunity to become legal citizens. In 2006, 1.4 million people filed taxes with an ITIN, and experts including tax law professor Francine Lipman estimate more than half were illegal aliens. “I’ve given money back to this country,” Ricardo says.

Nelson, an illegal immigrant from El Salvador, moved to the Boston area seven years ago. “I needed the money,” Nelson says. Every morning, he stands outside Dunkin’ Donuts in Chelsea, Mass., until someone stops to hire him. He typically makes \$100

a day in cash for various residential jobs and sends most of the money back to his homeland. “I haven’t been back [to El Salvador] and I don’t know if I will,” Nelson says. “I’d rather be working here.”

Diana Medina, MaidPro office manager in Tulsa, Okla., says she migrated to the United States with her parents at age 6. She became a legal resident after marrying a U.S. citizen a decade ago, filling out stacks of paperwork and paying thousands of dollars in fees. It took nearly six years. “It’s a very long and expensive process,” Medina says. “It’s just an unfair system.”



“Becoming legal is a very long and expensive process. People are just seeking the American Dream.”

— Diana Medina, naturalized U.S. citizen and MaidPro office manager in Tulsa, Okla.

Medina sympathizes with illegal immigrants. “It’s pretty much sink or swim,” Medina says. “People are just seeking the American dream.”

Broyles, the immigration attorney, says illegal workers don’t have many avenues if they want to become legal. If a person’s lived here illegally for more than a year, federal law bars them from seeking legal status for 10 years. It’s a three-year penalty for undocumented workers who have lived here for less than a year.

Henry and Delia Ardaya, owners of Prestige Home Care Services in Glendale, Ariz., legally emigrated from South America in 1978 and became citizens in 1991. They say they have some sympathy for those trying to make a better life but feel everyone should play by the same rules. “We just don’t agree with illegal immigration at all,” Henry says. “We’re opposed to someone intentionally coming here with no papers, even if we’re Hispanics too.”

Kyle, the homeowner who recently reported a contractor to authorities, agrees with the Ardayas but acknowledges that if he were in an illegal immigrant’s position — coming from a difficult situation and trying to send money home — he’d probably do the same thing.

Kyle also admits the prevalence of illegal labor makes it hard to resist. He owns rural property and needs help with yard work but can’t find anyone willing. Nearly 70 years old, Kyle walks with a cane and has a bad hip, knee and shoulders. “I’ve been tempted to go find some day laborers, some illegal immigrants to help me,” Kyle says. “I haven’t done it, and I probably won’t. But, I’ve really been tempted.”

— additional reporting by Paul F.P. Pogue, Will Whitehorn and Robin L. Flanigan



To read about the top ICE busts, day labor centers, verifying documents and employment discrimination risks, visit magazine.angieslist.com.

The List links with Latinos

by Mike Walker

¿Hablas Español? ¿No?

Neither do many Angie's List employees, which can create an obstacle when talking with members and service companies is your stock in trade.

That's why Angie's List — la Lista de Angie — relies in part on its unofficial translator, Tony Alvarado, and a handful of other bilingual staffers. On average, Alvarado fields 12 calls and e-mails daily in his native language. "It's important [to have Spanish speakers] because you can't establish yourself as a national company without speaking to the largest minority," he says.

Alvarado was born in Panama City, Panama, but moved with his family to Carmel, Ind., at age 12.

Speaking only Spanish, he learned that for foreigners it's sometimes sink or swim. "If you don't speak English well, you get biffed a lot," he says. "So I learned quickly."

No one can now say Alvarado doesn't speak well. As an advertising sales coordinator, he uses more English than Spanish when talking to service companies. But at

home he speaks in his native tongue.

It isn't that natural for everyone. "I speak a very formal Spanish, because I learned it in classrooms," says Erik Simons, in member sales. "There are times when [Spanish speakers] use words I don't know — words like shingles (tejas) or job titles, like plumbers (plomeros)."

The Angie's List magazine department encountered a similar problem when reporting this month's cover story. That's where Alvarado came in.


"We went out and spoke with the jornaleros — the day laborers — by a gas station," he says. "I really am thankful that Angie's List is taking a look into [illegal immigration] to create awareness, because they're part of our society." 



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH *John Lillywhite (from left), Tony Alvarado and Erik Simons are a few of the List's bilingual employees.*



Toxic teeth?

Fresh debate over use of mercury in the mouth

by Amy Mastin

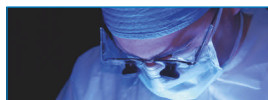
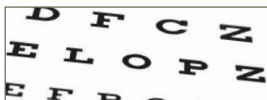
Marie Flowers believes she was poisoned by her teeth. While vacationing in July 2001, a Tennessee dentist used a temporary patch when Flowers broke a tooth with a silver filling, causing a metallic taste in her mouth. When she returned home to Vinton, Va., in early August, her regular dentist whittled down the tooth and put a crown over it. By mid-August, Flowers felt as if she were in “The Twilight Zone.” At 51, the prison minister experienced blurred vision and confusion. Her head throbbed, her ears rang and her muscles ached.

Three months and several doctor visits later, an alternative medicine doctor in Troutdale, Va., ordered a metals test. Flowers learned she had a high level of mercury in her body — released, she’s convinced, from the broken tooth and nine other silver fillings in her mouth. “I put the dates together concerning my visits to the dentist and the symptoms appearing shortly after that,” Flowers says. “I started thinking about a lawsuit, but I couldn’t find a Virginia lawyer to take my case [because] my dentist didn’t violate standards of care.”



PHOTO BY BILL KARR *Marie Flowers supports organizations that take a stand against silver fillings.*

Dentists have used silver fillings, also called amalgams, for more than 150 years and continue to use them to a lesser extent because they’re cheap, durable and easy to manipulate. But some scientists claim the fillings, which contain liquid mercury, are unsafe, releasing poisonous vapors as people drink, chew, brush and undergo dental work that can cause damage to the brain, kidneys or nervous system.



The American Dental Association has acknowledged that mercury vapors are emitted, just not in toxic amounts. But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is now saying amalgams may be harmful to some, posting this statement on their website June 3: “Dental amalgams contain mercury, which may have neurotoxic effects on the nervous systems of developing children and fetuses.”

The FDA statement is the result of a settlement between Moms Against Mercury, along with 10 other plaintiffs, and FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach. The plaintiffs previously requested amalgams

be classified by the FDA as a medical device — a type of safety rating — and took their case to court when that didn't happen by June 2007. “We tried petitions, congressional hearings and scientific advisory committees, all to no avail,” says Charlie Brown, counsel for plaintiff National Consumers for Dental Choice. “So in the great American tradition, we sued.”

According to the settlement, the FDA has until July 2009 to classify amalgams. FDA spokesperson Karen Riley says the matter is still being investigated and she won't discuss details before the final ruling.

Pregnant women and children



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH *Dr. Jerry Nieten of Noblesville, Ind., says he utilizes a number of safety precautions to limit mercury exposure when removing amalgams.*



were initially warned by the FDA of the dangers of mercury in fish seven years ago — a step applauded by many. “Developing brains are most at risk,” Brown says. “We want to protect the children first and foremost. This is a starting point.”

“Eighty percent of the body’s mercury burden is directly related to dental work, not fish consumption,” adds Dr. Boyd Haley, chairman of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology Scientific Advisory Board, a network of dentists, physicians and researchers who study the affects of dental devices in the body. “Since [a] dental amalgam constantly emits mercury vapor just inches from the brain, it could only be classified [with] the most dangerous products.”

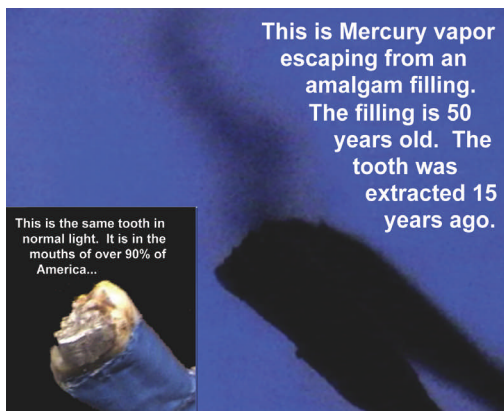


PHOTO COURTESY OF UNINFORMED CONSENT *Uninformed Consent used this photo in “Mercury, A Slow Death-Episode I,” a dental documentary.*

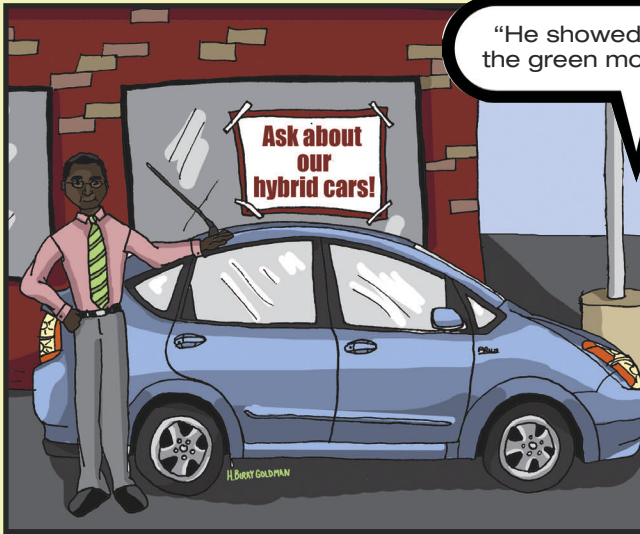
Dr. Rod Mackert, ADA spokesperson, says two studies cited in the Journal of the American Medical Association in April 2006 show that children with silver fillings had

According to an online poll, **66% of Angie’s List members still have silver fillings.** To learn about the pros and cons of having them removed, visit magazine.angieslist.com.

higher mercury levels than those with white fillings, but there were no significant differences between them in IQ, memory or motor skills.

Some scientists argue those studies are flawed, including Haley and Dr. Herbert Needleman, a researcher known for his work in childhood lead poisoning. “The delayed effects of early toxic exposure on health later in life aren’t addressed in these reports,” Needleman says. “Mercury also has been suggested as a risk factor for multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer’s Disease.”

In light of this, Flowers isn’t alone in thinking amalgams should be banned, as she testified to the FDA in 2006. She had her fillings removed and is recovering with a variety of treatments. “Everyone poisoned by their dentist needs to speak out,” she says. “So I’m speaking.”



Sometimes “just the facts” just isn’t enough.

When you submit reports, give us the whole picture — details about what you loved or why you won’t call again.

Angie’s list.

Bragging rights

reporting by Lindsay Murphy, Staci Giordullo and Anisha Vichare

Our comp shoppers were rewarded with “the best” information after interviewing trophy shop owners and managers from around town.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRANDON SMITH



Who we talked to

What services do you offer?

What are some of the options for figures on top of trophies?

Are trophies becoming more or less unique today?

How do you charge for trophies?

Have you ever made any trophies or awards for anyone famous?

What's the funniest, most unusual award/trophy request you've received?

<p>House of Trophies & Awards 1820 E. First St. Los Angeles 323-264-9042 houseoftrophies.net</p>	<p>Suburban Custom Awards & Framing 2573 N. Decatur Road Decatur, Ga. 404-373-3544 suburbancustomawards.com</p>	<p>Mike's Pro Shop 955 Seminary Ave. St. Paul, Minn. 651-488-6785 mikesproshop.com</p>
<p>SAUL GONZALEZ, PRESIDENT</p>	<p>SEAN MAHONEY, OWNER</p>	<p>MIKE SCHMID, OWNER</p>
<p>"We make awards, trophies, medallions, plaques, crystals, acrylics and glass, and we can do etching."</p>	<p>"We provide traditional awards and trophies as well as custom picture framing and promotional items."</p>	<p>"We offer bowling supplies and trophy goods, screen printing and embroidery."</p>
<p>"There's a donkey's rear that's pretty popular. We've also done a last-place trophy with a golfer with his pants down."</p>	<p>"I've got a gold toilet you can choose."</p>	<p>"We have every figure possible. We have victory figures to a 2-inch disk topper that includes your company logo."</p>
<p>"They're more unique. The options of materials have come a long way. People have been combining crystal with stainless steel."</p>	<p>"Trophies are more unique because companies are more creative in the type of materials they're using."</p>	<p>"They're more unique because they're not a card on a stick. People are using more acrylic, and we make them in all shapes."</p>
<p>"The average, most popular trophy is about 12 inches and runs anywhere from \$4.50 to \$6.50."</p>	<p>"Standard trophies, which include some engraving, are very affordable. A 9-inch trophy is \$7.95."</p>	<p>"It's \$3.95 at the smallest size. The figure is about 5 inches and the base is 2-by-3 inches. We charge by the job, not the engraving."</p>
<p>"We've made trophies for a lot of famous celebrity golf tournaments, Hollywood stuntmen and Dodgers and Lakers players."</p>	<p>"We've worked with the Falcons. I've also made one that was being presented to Ludacris and Usher."</p>	<p>"I made a racing plaque for Paul Newman. I heard he didn't accept it because he thought he didn't deserve it."</p>
<p>"We've done trophies for the Erotica Awards. And, there are human body parts that we can make into trophies in plastic and wood in any size."</p>	<p>"A gentleman walked in with a pair of forceps that were used during his child's birth that he wanted mounted on a plaque."</p>	<p>"We do a lot of goofy rewards — some are basically obscene. I engraved a bunch of fishing lures for a guy's wedding. That was unusual."</p>

The service companies featured in the Comparative Shopper column are almost always highly rated on Angie's List, but we occasionally include a company that is not yet rated. If you've used any of these companies, please submit a report about your experience.

HARDWOOD FLOORING SALES/INSTALLATION/REFINISHING



Brenda Rose
OWNER
Floor Coverings
International
Columbus, Ohio



Sam Wilson
CO-OWNER
Floor Crafters Inc.
Carmel, Ind.



Eli Harrell
OWNER
Apalachee
Hardwood Floors
Lilburn, Ga.

All of these companies are A-rated.

Q: What are the advantages to having hardwood flooring in your home?

A: **Rose:** Resale value — hardwood flooring always adds value to your home. It's also good for individuals who have allergies. Carpet tends to trap dust and dust mites and to aggravate allergies. Hardwood flooring is easier to clean and maintain. You're going to dust it regularly. When you feel there's a need, there's a mist cleaner you can spray on and wipe up.

Wilson: The main advantage is longevity — a hardwood floor can last up to 100 years. They're also very clean; they're friendly for people who have allergies; and they're easy to maintain. You're using a natural product, so they don't create a whole lot of waste.

Harrell: Hardwood is maintainable and gives your room a warmer feel. Wood is quickly becoming one of the most popular options when it comes to flooring. Carpet people are starting to realize how dirty carpet really is, especially when

allergies develop and doctors recommend people get rid of it. Wood floors can be extremely flexible with types of colors and sheen, but mostly the health benefits and easy maintenance are the biggest advantages.

Q: What do you do when you refinish hardwood floors?

A: **Rose:** The room has to be emptied of all furniture or existing carpeting and sealed off for any dust that escapes. We sand the floor, apply the stain and apply two coats

of polyurethane, which can be oil-based or water-based. I prefer an oil-based polyurethane — I feel like it's a heavier coat — but a lot of people prefer water-based. We have stains customers can choose from, and we can custom-match stains. If someone has railings that are a certain color and they want the floor to match, we can do that.

Wilson: Beyond cleaning, we do a screen-and-recoat maintenance process for scratched or dull finishes. We take a screen and buff down the top coat of finish and lay down a new top coat. You probably want to do a screen-and-recoat about every five to seven years. Then you won't have to refinish your floors as often, which we generally



PHOTO COURTESY OF APALACHEE HARDWOOD FLOORS *Eli Harrell, owner of Apalachee Hardwood Floors in Lilburn, Ga., recently installed new wood floors in a local home for an episode of HGTV's "Deserving Design."*

HARDWOOD FLOORING SALES/INSTALLATION/REFINISHING

recommend every 10 to 15 years.

Refinishing is a much more comprehensive, 10-step process. We sand down the finish to get to the actual wood. Then there are two options: staining the wood or sticking with the natural color without staining. After that, we typically add three coats of polyurethane finish. Refinishing about 2,500 square feet of flooring would take about six or seven days.

Q: Is there any type of stain or scratch you can't remove?

A: **Harrell:** The only stains that usually aren't removable are really bad pet stains.

Also, we had a client whose cleaning people plugged one of those refillable air fresheners into the wall upside down. All of the oil spilled out and ate through the finish. But if you're refinishing a floor, you can repatch the area. Another client had painters in after we stained her floors. She had to let them go, so they dumped paint all over the floor before they left. The paint came right up and didn't damage the floor a bit.

Installation of new hardwood floors usually starts around \$6 per square foot and can cost up to about \$9 per square foot. Refinishing usually costs anywhere between \$2.50 and \$5 per square foot.

Q: What can homeowners do to maintain their hardwood floors?

A: **Rose:** Remove your shoes when you enter the room. Keep mats on the floor. If you're going from the kitchen floor to hardwood flooring, have a rug there to catch some of the dirt on your feet. Put felt pads under chair legs. For items you don't want to be moved, like a table, you can cut a piece of rubber shelf liner and put that under the legs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM WILSON *Regular maintenance for your hardwood flooring ensures a durable, long-lasting life.*

Wilson: For cleaning, the best thing to do is use a dry dust mop and a non-residual product called Bona Hardwood Floor Cleaner. Don't use any product that claims to make or restore shine, like Murphy's Oil Soap. If you want to add a new coat of finish down the line, the waxy residue it leaves will prevent the new coat of finish from adhering.

Harrell: Definitely use some sort of protector under the furniture. I think some people anticipate having to refinish hardwood sometime in the future, but it doesn't have to be that way. The finishes available now are so advanced. Find out what type of finish you have so you'll know what to do if you have a problem.

Keeping the grit off the floors is your No. 1 goal, because that's what wears them out. I recommend a hardwood floor vacuum. If you have wood floors in an area that sees a lot of spills, you should mop them only with a terry-cloth mop. You can use vinegar and water or a cleaner made by a hardwood floor company. You don't need to wax or polish the floor. And you don't typically need to get them cleaned professionally, as long as you keep them clean. 🧹

The science behind the perfect breeze

by Mary Ellen Collins

You would think Floridians would have air conditioning down to a science. But in every place where I can't control the thermostat — the mall, the movie theater, the grocery store — I have to wear a sweater. Always, even when the heat and humidity index is high enough to melt waterproof makeup. And although I hate those overchilled public spaces, I wouldn't mind recreating that level of frostiness in one part of our little house.

Our air conditioning isn't new, but it's robust enough to cool every room except the family room, which has no A/C vents because it used to be a porch. And of course, that's where we spend every evening. The hottest spot is the wall behind the couch where I always sit. There are four large, west-facing windows that turn the space into a greenhouse by 2 p.m. When I take a writing break to watch Dr. Phil at 3 p.m., the couch cushions feel like they just came out of the dryer. And by 4 p.m., the hardwood floors are toasty.

We keep the outside awnings rolled out and the window shades tightly closed, but that just makes for a dimly lit greenhouse. So, my husband, John, and I brainstorm about the most efficient way to get the cool air that comes out of the kitchen ceiling vent to travel a measly seven feet over the counter to where we're sitting.

“The noise level and strength of the wind stream fool us into thinking we're being buffeted by an arctic gale.”

We put a portable fan on the counter. I think we should put the ceiling fan on high so it will capture the cool air as soon as it comes out of the vent and send it flying down to the portable fan, which will direct it our way. John cites the theory about hot air rising and wants the ceiling fan off so the cool air will sink down to counter

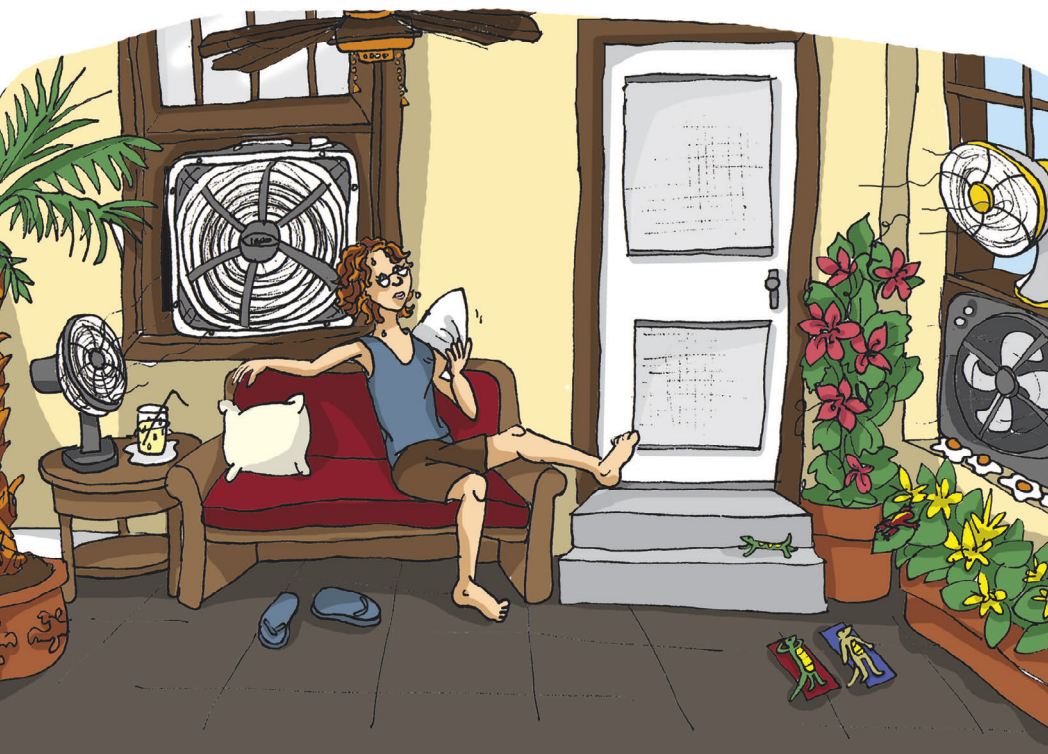



ILLUSTRATION BY HEIDI BIRKY GOLDMAN

level before getting caught by the portable fan and then blowing in our direction.

With nothing to lose except a few gallons of sweat, we try both scenarios. It's a tie. Neither one does anything more than send a tepid breeze into the TV-viewing area. And so, we resort to keeping all of the ceiling fans on and turning the portable fan to high, so the noise level and strength of the wind stream fool us into thinking we're being buffeted by an arctic gale. Sometimes it almost works.

I remember living in four-season locations where September really was, and felt like, the first month of autumn. In Florida, September is all about being glad it isn't June, July or August; adding more ice to my drink; and dreaming of the day when the temperature plummets to 75 and we have to turn on the heat. 

Mary Ellen Collins and her husband, John, live in Boca Raton, Fla. When she's not grappling with the ups and downs of making a house a home, she reads, does yoga and worries about coming up with column ideas. E-mail her at maryellenc@angieslist.com.

The new fall landscape : It's not just for mums

by Ellen Goff

It used to be that if you wanted to add some fall color to your garden you had one choice — chrysanthemums. These days, the autumn months have morphed into a gardening season replete with plants blooming in a full palette of color that can extend well past the first frost. With so many choices, the only problem you'll have is deciding what to plant first.

“For many areas of the country, summer annuals are dried up and

spent by Labor Day,” says Barb Pierson, nursery manager at White Flower Farm, a family-owned nursery and popular mail-order garden catalog located in Litchfield, Conn. “But it's a great time for many other plants. The cool nights tend to intensify flower color as well as the foliage.”

One of the preferred blooming plants for fall and winter is the pansy. The hybrid varieties are able to withstand, and even thrive in, wintery conditions. Pansies offer endless color combinations and bloom sizes for plenty of design possibilities. Plant them early in the fall so they develop strong roots before temperatures drop.

Some additional fall-friendly favorites include:

Tickseed (*Coreopsis*), which is a daisy-like flower that grows anywhere from 6 to 36 inches in height. It's available in yellow, pink or purple varieties as well as in several native species. The plant has soft, needlelike foliage, is drought-tolerant and requires at least a half day of sun. Trim spent blooms to encourage more flowers.

New York Aster (*Aster novi-belgii*) is in bloom well before the



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLEN GOFF *Coreopsis* requires at least half a day of sunlight and is available in a variety of colors.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLEN GOFF *A popular autumn aster, "Raydon's Favorite" produces daisy-like blooms and can grow up to 3 feet tall.*

leaves begin falling. It produces masses of small daisy blooms available in bright shades of pink or purple. This plant performs well in a sunny mixed border or in a container and benefits from being pinched back a little in the late spring.

Purple Muhly grass (Muhlenbergia capillaries) creates interest year-round, with a compact mound of long foliage and a showy autumn display. Clouds of delicate flower panicles float above the plant, which is most spectacular when sunlight shines behind these misty seed heads.

For climates that tend to be warm year-round and are without frost, options include:

Butterfly ginger (Hedychium), which is popular for its lush 5-foot foliage and fragrant white flowers with petals resembling butterfly wings. The plant performs best with at least four hours of sun and regular watering. This ginger grows well in containers, which will restrain its height a bit.

For more autumn design inspiration, look around your community. Ask neighbors about plantings in their yard that you find attractive. Visit angieslist.com to find a greenhouse or nursery and discover what's blooming in your neck of the woods.

Firespike (Odontonema strictum) is an easy, carefree perennial that's a continuous bloomer with 9 to 12-inch red flower spikes. It has a few basic requirements: heat; full sun; fertile, well-drained soil and continuous moisture. Thriving under these conditions, firespike can reach 6 feet.

Goldenrod (Solidago) has bright yellow plumelike flowers and thrives throughout the fall when planted in dry, poor soil with full sun. Several varieties can reach 36 inches tall with 18-inch flower spikes. © 2012

Ellen Goff is a master gardener and environmental advocate. Aside from writing about and photographing plants, Ellen tends to a 3-acre landscape she shares with her husband, cat and border collie on the shores of Lake Wylie, S.C.



The price of free installation

by Angie Hicks, founder

The allure of new flooring, a fancy flat screen TV or state-of-the-art appliances usually prompts research into which is the best brand and how much you can afford, but how often do you consider the actual installation? For most consumers, it's an afterthought. But a bad installation can spur a major case of buyer's remorse.

According to a recent nationwide poll, 39 percent of Angie's List members experienced a successful installation, but for nearly 10 percent, it was a "total nightmare." And in 85 percent of those cases, installation was arranged by the retailer.

Retailers frequently offer free or easy installation, but you shouldn't fall hook, line and sinker for the promotion. Do your own research first. In some instances, you might be better hiring on your own.

Such was the case for Shereen Thomas of Hockley, Texas, who purchased a new washer and dryer from a local retailer during a free delivery and installation promo-

tion. One week after installation, during the rinse cycle, the drain hose came out and flooded her utility room and kitchen. After much back and forth with the store and its insurance agency, Thomas was out \$3,200 in repairs and never reimbursed. "Lesson learned? Absolutely!" she says. "We'll never have the delivery and installation performed by the store again. We'll either do it ourselves or hire a professional."

Christopher Madkins, owner of Cinema Labs in Indianapolis gets at least 10 calls a year to come in and clean up a retailer-arranged home theater installation. "A custom installer will be there for the long haul to answer questions and can also come in before the fact to give you an unbiased opinion on the best products and set-up for your personal situation."

To decide which route is best, ask the retailer if they use subcontractors, and if so, check their rating on Angie's List. You can also read store-specific reviews to see how other members have

fared overall. If you do decide to go this route, ask the installer for a personal contact number should any problems arise. If they give it to you, great; if not, be leery.

If timing is important, be sure to ask how long it will take to get your installation scheduled. According to a nationwide poll of installers on Angie's List, 43 percent said it takes an average of one week. If your purchase needs to be assembled, that can also add to the wait.

It's also not a bad idea to see if the installer can do a site survey before your appointment to check door widths, electrical connections and anything else that might make for a difficult installation. If that's not possible, ask the installer what needs to be available, such as

Problem installation?

These installations prompted the most complaints when arranged by a retailer:

5. TVs
4. Flooring
3. Dishwashers
2. Refrigerators
1. Washers and dryers

1,426 members responded to our installation poll.

access to the attic or water turned off, so the site is properly prepared.

With appliances and electronics, make sure you know how to use them before the installer leaves. There's nothing worse than having a brand new home theater system and having no idea how to turn it on!



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH *Christopher Madkins, owner of Cinema Labs, works on a state-of-the-art home theater projector.*

CHECK the LIST

Angie's List has reports on services in common and unusual categories. Not sure what category to search? Take a look at our website's *synonym list*.

Give your student the edge. Help your child transition from summer fun to fall learning by hiring a tutor to get those unexercised brain cells back in shape.

Check the List for tutors or *aerobics*.

Take advantage of September's warm, dry weather. You can leave your windows open, making it a perfect time to complete an interior painting project.

Check the List for painting — interior or *dry-out*.

Get a check up. It's a slower period for most heating and air conditioning companies. Schedule a professional to inspect your heating, duct work and exhaust vent systems to ensure everything works correctly before you use them.

Check the List for heating & A/C or *sound systems*.