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HOME & GARDEN | SPRING JOBS



Prepare Your Spring Garden

While growing fruits and vegetables is a rewarding experience, a blooming display in your backyard can give you a sense of pride each time you step outside.

Achieving a beautiful garden requires proper preparation and sometimes a few seasons before it's fully established.

If you're unsure about which bulbs or seeds will thrive in your area, refer to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map to discover new and exciting options.

You can also learn lessons by visiting your local nursery and speaking with their experts. It's likely their flowers and plants are region-specific to your area but check with them about special orders if you have another plant in mind.

PREPARE SOIL FOR A NEW GARDEN

Once you have chosen the size and location of your ornamental garden, you should prepare the soil to promote your plants with nutritious benefits.

Here are some tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to get you started.

• Conduct a soil test to determine existing texture, nutrients and pH levels. Check your local area for an expert who can decipher the results and create a solution to the problem.

• If you're tilling a new area of land, ensure the soil is dry as disrupting wet soil can destroy its structure.

• Include organic matter to improve soil drainage and texture.

• For best results, ensure the soil is rich before introducing plants or bulbs.

WAKE UP AN EXISTING GARDEN

Early spring planning will provide your gardens with bountiful blossoms and a stunning display of color. Start by spring cleaning the entire area of dead leaves and other debris left behind by fall and winter. If you pick up clumps of soil and it easily crumbles, it's a good sign that freezing and ice threats are gone, and you are safe to add compost to your dirt without affecting dormant bulbs.

Gently loosen the top layer of soil to remove rocks and inspect for intrusions from things like roots or pests.

During this stage, you should consider working in nutrient-dense materials like manure, or pre-mixed options from your local nursery to the existing dirt.

You will also need to eradicate weeds as they will commonly become a nuisance once the weather warms. It's good practice to make sure your garden's edges are in good condition and effective at keeping grass from emerging into the your ornamental bed.

HOME & GARDEN | HANDYMAN PROJECTS

Garage Door Maintenance

While general maintenance is straightforward, you can hire an expert overhead door technician if the job is too intimidating. During an inspection, they will highlight signs of deterioration and show you what to look for in the future. If you decide to tackle the chore on your own, consider these tips from the International Door Association.

LUBRICATE

Overhead doors require many moving parts to perform smooth and efficiently. A way to maintain their integrity is by lubricating each component. This should include the rollers, hinges, bearings, springs and chains. The IDA suggests using a drop of engine oil on each roller, which will then distribute the lube to a door's bearings.

By lightly greasing the hinges and springs, you lessen the risks of the door becoming jammed and unusable. While engine oil is usually a suitable lubricant, check with the overhead unit's manufacturer to find out if there is a different fluid they recommend. Some may insist on a silicone lubricant or one made specifically for garage door components.

TEST FOR BALANCE

You will likely notice obvious signs when an overhead door is un-



balanced. Problems, like jamming, strange noises and delayed or disrupted operation are common. Even if you don't notice any warning signs, use these easy steps to test for balance as a part of regular maintenance.

- Close the garage door like normal.
- Find and engage the release handle to access manual operation.

• Lift the door three to four feet above the ground. If it doesn't remain open, there is an imbalance that must be addressed.

While testing can be completed by any homeowner, the process of rebalancing should be handled by a professional. It requires adjusting and coordinating the system of springs and can be dangerous if done improperly.

CLEAN THE TRACKS

Ensuring your overhead door has a clean track to roll on is imperative to its optimal performance. You can keep them in peak condition by wiping the system with a rag or vacuuming out loose debris.



HOME & GARDEN | OUTDOORS

Prepare Your Backyard for Wildlife Attractions

An exciting aspect of spring is the return of wildlife to your backyard. Flocks of birds and hungry squirrels will likely find a new place to call home throughout the neighborhood.

Welcome their friendly chatter by rewarding them with a favorite meal or birdbath to ensure they continue to make an appearance.

If your goal is to create a homestead that invites animals to feel safe and find a bite to eat, keep in mind that wildlife is to be respected.

Make sure to remind children that wild animals are not obedient like their favorite pets and may become dangerous if they feel threatened. Watching and learning about these animals from a distance is a wholesome way to spend spring with your family.

Building a safe and attractive haven for animals to flock may not happen overnight, but by following these tips, your backyard will



become an entertaining place for beautiful wildlife.

WATER SOURCES

One of the most popular water sources we can offer animals is an attractive birdbath. Follow these tips from Cornell University to discover how to place it for the most impact.

Birds prefer baths that are low to the

ground and located near shady areas. Use stones or branches to line edges of the water so birds have a place to stand while drinking. Water should be no deeper than one inch at the edges and two inches in the middle. For a more enticing atmosphere, include dripping water to attract more wildlife.

Don't forget to regularly clean the birdbath as its occupants will likely leave behind seeds, droppings and feathers.

FEEDERS

When considering which types of feeders to install, think of the wildlife you are trying to attract. If a colorful variety of birds is your intention, try to use several boxes that offer them different ways to eat. Some animals prefer to dine while perching, so a hanging feeder with posts will be more attractive. Other less- picky eaters will be fine with eating from a platform or suet style option.

Try to incorporate different types of seeds throughout your yard to learn what your local species are most interested in. Don't be surprised to find animals like squirrels or deer visiting your yard to finish up the food that was knocked to the ground by hungry birds.

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Signs of Garden Pests

When all your care and hard work in the garden is bested by a pest, it can put a damper on your summer. It can also be challenging to spot the problem.

If you think your plants are under siege, consider this list of common signs of pest problems to help find the culprit.

LARGE HOLES IN LEAVES

Large holes in the foliage of a plant is a sure sign something has been helping itself to a taste. A common culprit is grasshoppers, which unfortunately travel in packs. They like to munch on grasses, lettuce, carrots, beans, corn and onion, according to TheSpruce.com.

The website recommends introducing natural predators to grasshoppers, which include swallows, praying mantis insects, small snakes and toads.

Another natural solution is a garlic solution made by blending two cups of garlic with 10 cups of water, then boiling and letting the mixture sit overnight. Mix one part solution with three parts water, and use a spray bottle to wet plant leaves. This method works not just for grasshoppers but for other feeding insects, as well.

SMALL HOLES IN LEAVES

Small holes in the middle of leaves can be a sign of a Japanese beetle infestation. The beetles chew a telltale lace-like pattern in leaves, and left unchecked, they can do great harm to a plant.

Adult beetles attack more than 300 kinds of plants, including roses, beans, grapes and raspberries, and are known to be hard to control. The most effective way to rid your garden of the beetles is to pick them by hand, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac. Traps can be effective but might attract beetles from your neighbors. Another strategy is attracting parasitic wasps and flies — natural predators of Japanese beetles — to your garden to attack the larvae, though this alone may not be enough to control the population.

LEAVES THAT CURL UP AND FALL OFF

When leaves curl and fall off, aphids are often to blame. Aphids suck the moisture out of leaves, causing them to die. Home improvement pro Bob Vila offers a solution: a homemade insecticidal soap that controls the bugs without harming plants.

To make it, mix a few teaspoons of liquid dish soap into one quart of water, then spray or wipe the solution onto the leaves, stems, and buds of the plant. An early warning sign of aphids can be frequent sightings of ladybugs, which love to feast on aphids.

HOME & GARDEN | IN THE BACKYARD

Outdoor Storage Ideas

A plethora of multi-functional outdoor storage options have come on the market in the past few years, playing to consumers' need for pieces that make their outdoor spaces functional.

From pool accessories to garden supplies to outdoor dining necessities, an active outdoor lifestyle comes with a lot of gear. Keep it all tidy with a storage piece to suit your needs, or if you're handy, make your own.

GARDEN SUPPLIES

An old hutch or a baby's changing table can be repurposed as a potting bench. If you have a garden shed, install a hanging canvas shoe rack on the door to store small garden tools and supplies, such as gloves and nippers. You can also install bathroom towel bars to the inside of the door to hold small tools by a hook.

FOOD AND DRINK

A storage cabinet with a hutch can be converted into a bar and serving station. Use the lower drawers or shelves for storage, or remove a lower shelf to make room for a small refrigerator. Add a stemware rack in the top.

If you know some basic wood-

working, HGTV offers a DIY tutorial for making a hanging bar from wood pallets at https:// bit.ly/2USxMtw.

POOL GEAR

Stand a wood pallet on its side to store tall pool supplies, such as pool noodles and skimmers. Add coat hooks to the front to hand wet towels and goggles.

Use stackable, open plastic storage bins to round up small items, such as diving sticks and rings, floaties and small toys. To wrangle inflatable pool rings, install small flagpoles on the side of your house or shed. Keep clean pool towels at hang in wall-mounted bath towel holders.

ADD STORAGE EVERYWHERE

When purchasing outdoor furniture items, look for storage features that can help keep the backyard tidy. Any existing outdoor piece can be turned into a place to store things, such as raised garden planters or beverage carts. Store extra patio furniture cushions under a coffee table. If you need extra outdoor seating, turn a sturdy solid wood book-case on its side to make a storage bench, and add a cushion on the top.

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HOME & GARDEN | EXTERIOR UPGRADES

Take a Top Down Approach

Whether you want to boost the beauty of your home for your own enjoyment or you're looking to sell in the near future, experts recommend taking a top-down approach to evaluate the outside of your home.

With that in mind, here are a few remodeling ideas to get you started:

The Roof

A new roof not only adds aesthetic appeal, it can add value too. Indeed, Remodeling's Cost vs. Value 2020 report shows that a roof replacement can have a return-on-investment of over 60 percent.

Composite roofing is particularly durable, long-lasting and low-maintenance, and an allaround smart investment. Not only does a high-quality roof help home-sellers get foot traffic, but the low-maintenance aspect really resonates with house-hunters. An attractive, more affordable alternative to the real thing, the composite slate and shake roofing options available from manufacturers like DaVinci Roofscapes, for example, reduce pesky maintenance concerns, offering impact-, fire- and wind-resistance, as well as the peace of mind that comes with a strong warranty.

This is also a good choice for both those with a clear color palette in mind, and those who might need some direction, as free resources on the DaVinci Roofscapes site include a Color Visualizer offering users the ability to see how different colors may look on their home exteriors, as well as a variety of free e-books with project inspiration and advice. To learn more, visit www. davinciroofscapes.com.

Siding

If your home sports traditional siding, you may have noticed that the tiles contract and expand in fluctuating weather conditions and temperatures. What's more, the color of these often-times thin and flimsy materials can fade quickly.

Rather than replacing siding with more of the same, consider composite siding built to resist impact, fire, mold, algae, insects, salt air and high winds. The handsplit shake siding available from DaVinci Roofscapes is made of virgin resins, UV and thermal stabilizers, plus a highly-specialized fire retardant. Whether you add accent panels with composite siding or go for the whole house, this can add a hassle-free aesthetic benefit to your home and boost its value.

Walkways

Cracked or uneven walkways and steps are not only an eyesore, they can present a tripping hazard to you and guests. Evaluate whether it's time to give yours an overhaul. Be sure to select low-maintenance materials that complement the look of the other elements of your exterior. This is a good time to consider lighting to the walkway.

Sprucing up? Go for high-impact projects that boost curb appeal and add value to the home. (StatePoint)

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HOME & GARDEN | CONTAINER GARDEN

Plant, Grow and Care for a Garden

Container gardens are a viable and popular cultivation option, especially for those who have limited sun-exposed spaces or are looking to start small and learn the basics of gardening.

"Containers, whether bought or recycled, are a great place to plant herb and vegetable gardens," says landscape designer, Doug Scott of Redeem Your Ground in Atlanta, Ga. "But to get it right, there are a few things to keep in mind."

To help you successfully cultivate a container garden, Scott offers the following pointers:

• Well-drained, not dry or overly wet soil, is necessary for herb and vegetable growth, so using bottom-draining pots with a peatbased potting soil specifically formulated for herbs and veggies will facilitate proper soil drainage and moisture retention.

• The proper container size depends on what you'll be growing. Most small herbs do well in pots as small as eight inches in diameter, while larger plants may require a gallon pot or larger. For visual interest, consider repurposing items around the house to use as your container, such as an old pail.

• Incorporate a "thriller, filler, spiller" planting approach to maximize space and aesthetic appeal. This means tall focal plants in back, middle layer plants that fill in, and plants that will cascade over the container in front.

• Soil dries out more quickly in container gardens than garden beds, especially if you place containers outdoors in the sun. Perform daily soil

moisture checks. You may need to water outdoor container gardens every day — and possibly twice a day — in extremely hot weather.

• Place your container garden where it will get the optimal amount of sunlight — between six and eight hours a day. The beauty of contain-

er gardens is their movability. You can even follow the sun as exposure changes throughout the seasons. Always refer to the care tags on the specific plant to determine a prime location.

• Gardens planted in a container are entirely dependent on you to provide nutrients. Start out with an organic, rich potting soil formulated for container gardens. Then, going forward, fertilize your container every two to four weeks by pouring a nutrient-rich liquid solution directly into the soil.

• Don't forget to reap what you sow. Harvesting will generally help increase yields and prevent plants from out-

growing their containers. For best results, use this five-step method: water plants before harvesting, make clean cuts, keep them clean, dry your harvest quickly and store them away from sunlight and moisture.



HOME & GARDEN | PEST PROBLEMS

Don't Bug Out, Safely Combat Invasions

Thanks to an unusually warm, wet winter, experts predict that Americans will face an extra buggy summer.

According to the biannual Bug Barometer, a seasonal projection from the National Pest Management Association, conditions are ripe for pesky pests of all stripes to be out in full force. And more bugs outside will likely mean more bugs trying to enter your house.

"Expect pest populations to rise significantly as spring showers and summer sun make the perfect conditions for these vectors to flourish," says entomologist, Gabriela Nine. "People should take the necessary precautions to prepare for approaching pests. These pests, such as roaches and ants, are knowledgeable at finding both food and shelter in our homes this time of year, habitually squeezing through the tiniest of spaces or walking through the front door to enjoy all our homes have to offer."

To combat the spike in ants, cockroaches, termites and other pests, and ensure they don't encroach on your home turf, consider the following tips:

• Mind moisture — Survey your home and yard and take steps to manage any locations where there is moisture build-up on surfaces or standing water, which can invite mosquitoes and other bugs to breed on your property.

• Feed yourself, not pests — Be sure to seal containers securely and store them properly in the fridge and cabinets. Sweep up the kitchen on a daily basis and wipe down tables and counters after preparing and eating meals to eliminate spills and crumbs.

• Spray with confidence -Over 90 percent of people are concerned about having bugs in their home, according to a survey conducted by Zevo. At the same time, almost as many — 87 percent — are concerned about the ingredients in traditional bug killer sprays for use in the home. The good news? There are effective ways to kill bugs using friendly ingredients. For example, Zevo Instant Action Bug Killer Sprays which work on a broad range of household insects, including ants, roaches, flies, fruit flies, gnats and spiders, are comprised of essential oils that target nerve receptors vital to insects, not people or pets. Made without harsh chemicals, Zevo sprays are deadly to bugs and safe for use around people and pets when used as directed, making them a household essential, particularly in the warmer months.

• Defend entry points — Keep doors, windows and the garage — the typical entry points for bugs — closed as much as possible. You can also take additional defensive action in areas that get high bug traffic with Zevo Flying Insect Traps, which plug into outlets and use multi-spectrum light technology and a body heat attractant to lure in flying bugs for round-the-clock protection.

Insects are not only icky, they can pose threats to people and property. But there is no need to bug out. With a few preventive measures and the means to stop bugs in their tracks — or flight path — you can keep your home safer and more comfortable this season. *(StatePoint)*

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HOME & GARDEN | HVAC REPAIR

Top Tips for Safe Maintenance

There's a lot of uncertainty about some aspects of life today. However, the importance of proper heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVACR) installation and maintenance is a constant for homeowners, especially for those who have been spending a lot more time at home lately.

A well-maintained system keeps heating and cooling costs low, your family safe and comfortable in all kinds of weather, and is environmentally friendly to boot. Luckily, homeowners can safely have HVACR work done during the coronavirus outbreak if they take proper precautions. Whether you're a first-time homeowner installing a brand new system, or have lived in your current residence for years and are maintaining an older system, here's what to know:

• Look at your current energy bills to identify inefficiencies. There are certain maintenance steps you can and should take on your own, if possible: replace air filters monthly to ensure efficient air flow; keep tabs on your outdoor unit, clearing it of debris and obstructions; seal up drafty windows and doorways.

• Have general questions or need an HVACR consultation? Conduct these initial conversations via telephone and videoconference instead of in-person.

• Schedule preventative maintenance annually to ensure your system doesn't stop running when you need it most. Professional technicians can check for such factors as damaged insulation around refrigerant lines or ducts with poor seals, all of which can cause your system to lose efficiency. These days, it's especially important for this work to be taken care of properly the first time, so make sure it's performed by a technician certified by North American Technician Excellence (NATE).

NATE-certified technicians have proven their knowledge and expertise by passing specialized certification exams. To find local contractors that employ technicians with these qualifications, visit www.natex.org.

• First-time homeowner or replacing your unit? Choose furnaces and air conditioners bearing the ENERGY STAR logo. A properly-sized and installed ENERGY STAR air conditioner uses up to 20 percent less electricity than older models. A NATE-certified technician can help you identify the right size unit for your home and install it properly.

More HVACR resources, energy savings tips and advice for going green at home can be found by visiting natex.org.

By doing certain tasks on your own and hiring trusted contractors to help with everything else, you can keep your HVACR system running smoothly in the months to come. (*StatePoint*)

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HOME & GARDEN | DESIGN



Outdoor Living Space

You've heard of bringing the outdoors in, but you can also bring the indoors out by setting up an outdoor living space.

Whether it's for entertaining large crowds, or just getting together with family, an outdoor living space can be a great addition to your backyard.

EVALUATE YOUR SPACE

Look at how big of a space you have to work with and determine how much you'll need to modify the space. If you need to take out shrubs or flower beds, that's probably a job you can do yourself.

If you're removing trees or structures, however, it would be a good idea to check with your local authorities, or, better yet, call a professional who can take care of the whole thing for you.

PICK YOUR FOCAL POINT

Decide on a focal point for your outdoor space. Will it be the cooking area? Set your sights on a grilling space and outdoor kitchen. Entertaining? Plan for lots of seating space and maybe a bar or a fire pit. Family time? Think of a cozy conversation set with a coffee table and plenty of room for games. Avoid having more than one focal point; just like inside your home, you don't want to clutter the space.

CHOOSE YOUR FIXTURES

Your fixtures will form the foundation of your outdoor living space, so choose wisely. You want fixtures that will hold up well to the outdoor elements in your area, be it flooding rain or harsh winter weather. The best way to do this is to visit a local home or patio store to choose products and fixtures that will best fit your way of life and your budget.

UTILITIES

Your new outdoor space, especially if it includes a kitchen, may need utilities run to it. This is not the time to DIY it, especially with dangerous explosives like natural gas. Call professionals to run your lines and install equipment like grills and fire pits.

A professional can properly run the lines so that it stays out of the way of other construction on the property and is safe. Furthermore, they can properly set up permits and do the paperwork that allows you to pay for the gas, water and power you use.





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