



How to create an outdoor living space you can enjoy all year long

How to create the outdoor sanctuary you’ve always wanted

(BPT) - The dream of a perfect outdoor space where homeowners can enjoy the beauty of nature while still being completely comfortable is no longer limited to a specific climate or time of year. A one-of-a-kind, all-seasons deck is possible if the right features are included in the design. The key is to combine features that protect from

the elements, and then use the right materials to make it happen.

Whether you’re revamping an existing area, or creating a brand-new outdoor living space to enjoy all year long, the following deck additions can turn any project into an all-seasons oasis to enjoy with family and friends.

Overhead covering on a deck can shield guests from the elements directly, as well as provide a scaffold for features such as a ceiling fan, which can cool the area in the warmer months and improve heated air flow during cooler months. Homeowners can choose from deck shades or awnings in a variety of materials to defend against rain and wind, or to reduce sun exposure and cool the area. A pergola is also a beautiful addition to a custom deck that doesn’t provide full coverage like a roof or awning, but can serve as a solid framework for other features such as climbing vines or hanging plants that both provide cover and add ambiance to the outdoor oasis.

Retractable walls are a high-tech option that allows for free air movement during the mild spring and fall, and protection from sun, wind, rain, snow and even bugs during the extreme summer and winter. Some luxury decks and patios utilize retractable glass walls for

a defense against wind or rain that doesn’t obstruct the view. A more common tactic is to install retractable screen walls, which can be motorized, and are meant primarily to keep insects out of the patio area. Retractable privacy walls, usually in the form of canvas or polyester fabric horizontal shades, can provide a respite from weather and enhance the feeling of a private sanctuary.

Beautiful low-maintenance materials are a must for any outdoor living space that homeowners would like to spend time enjoying, rather than performing backbreaking annual maintenance. Taking care of traditional wood decking can be a difficult and frustrating process since it is subject to staining and splintering, and may require annual sanding and painting. Composite decking is growing in popularity across the U.S. not only for its lower maintenance requirements, but also its unparalleled beauty that can emulate anything from the rustic beauty of reclaimed wood to the high-impact look of exotic hardwoods.

“What kind of decking you choose makes a huge impact on the overall look and feel of your outdoor living space,” said Shara Gamble, director of sales and marketing for TAMKO’s Envision Decking. “One of the best things about

composite decking is it’s easy to preserve its beautiful appearance throughout the seasons, which means you can spend more time relaxing and enjoying your outdoor spaces with family and friends.”

Incorporate the elements into the deck in a controlled way to boost enjoyment of an outdoor living space regardless of the season. For colder months, adding a fire element can provide a cozy and mesmerizing focal point. Arranging comfortable seating around a fireplace or fire pit provides a great place to gather with friends and family and provide warmth on a cool summer night or fall weekend. During the hotter months, installing a water element to the deck can provide a cooling touch and a visual centerpiece. Fountains, misters, or even a lap pool can provide a welcome respite from the heat during the summer, and a soothing, meditative backdrop for the rest of the year.

Although decks are generally a mild-weather attraction, there are many ways to make an outdoor living space functional and enjoyable during the rest of the year, regardless of the geographic location. Transform a deck into an all-seasons sanctuary through the use of special features and beautiful low-maintenance composite decking to make the most of the beauty of the outdoors without sacrificing the comfort and style of your unique outdoor retreat.



(c) Sharon Day / stock.Adobe.com
Add beauty to your yard with a wooden bird house. The birds will love it.

Home and garden improvements that will benefit local wildlife

(STATEPOINT) - When it comes to changing the world, your own backyard is a great place to start. As you make home improvements, consider their potential to benefit local wildlife that travel in and around your property.

Here are a few important steps you can take.

Plant Native Species

By planning native species exclusively in your garden and yard, you will be promoting a healthy local ecosystem while providing proper nourishment and a natural habitat for visiting wildlife, whether that be insects, birds or furry creatures. Because native plant species are meant to thrive in your local climate, they will require less maintenance, which means a beautiful yard with less stress.

Prevent Bird Strikes

You may not realize it, but your home poses a risk to birds. Window strikes are common among many species of migrating birds, and millions of wild birds are killed annually flying into windows.

However, a simple home improvement project can make your home safer for birds. Birds can see certain light frequencies that humans can’t, so by applying UV decals

and UV liquid to your home’s windows and sliding glass doors, you can make windows visible to birds in a way that won’t obstruct your own view.

“Protecting birds adds beauty to your garden, is good for the environment and most importantly, saves lives,” says Spencer Schock, founder of WindowAlert, a company that offers UV decals and UV Liquid.

The UV decals and liquid from WindowAlert have been proven to effectively alter the flight path of birds to prevent window strikes. The coating will look like etched glass to the human eye, but be very visible to a bird. As UV reflectivity may fade over time, it’s important to replace the decals and liquid every four months. Application techniques can be found by visiting WindowAlert.com.

Build a Bird house

Add beauty to your yard with a wooden bird house. Find a design you love or get creative and craft your own, using your own home’s architecture for inspiration. A strategically placed bird house -- either within three feet of a window or over 30 feet away -- will help avoid bird strikes.

Be a good neighbor -- not just to the other humans. Make improvements to your home that will help protect both local and migratory wildlife.

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Know what's below: Call 811 before digging for landscaping and home improvement projects this spring

(BPT) - With spring having officially begun, many eager homeowners and landscape professionals across the country will roll up their sleeves and reach for their shovels to start projects that require digging this season.

During the transition into "digging season," Common Ground Alliance (CGA), the organization dedicated to protecting underground utility lines, people who dig near them and their communities, reminds homeowners and professional diggers that calling 811 is the first step toward protecting you and your community from the risk of unintentionally damaging an underground line.

Every digging project, no matter how large or small, warrants a free call to 811. Installing a mailbox or fence, building a deck and landscaping are all examples of digging projects that should only begin a few days after making a call to 811. Calling this number connects you to your local one call utility notification center.

According to data collected by CGA in a survey in March, millions of American homeowners will likely do DIY projects involving digging this year, but 42 percent of them do not plan to make a free call to 811 before digging.

"Tens of millions of Americans plan to do DIY digging projects this year, but according to our survey, 42

percent of them admit that they will not call 811 beforehand, which puts homeowners and their communities at risk," said CGA President and CEO Sarah Magruder Lyle. "Calling 811 a few days before any planned home improvement projects that require digging - including common landscaping projects like planting trees and shrubs - is critical to preventing incidents like service outages and serious injuries."

CGA's partnership with leading home improvement retailer Lowe's will provide a helpful reminder to the millions of Americans who shop at their stores for projects involving digging.

"During National Safe Digging Month in April and all year round, Lowe's supports 811 by including safe digging information on certain products we sell nationwide - like trees and Kobalt shovels and spades, among others - to help ensure the safety of our Pro and DIY customers who will be outside digging," said Bill Boltz, Lowe's executive vice president of merchandising. "Our customers rely on Lowe's for help completing home and yard improvement projects, and we're committed to providing the critical safety information to help them do it the right way."

A utility line is damaged every few minutes in America because someone decided to dig without making a call to

811 to learn the approximate location of buried utilities in their area. Unintentionally striking one of these lines can result in inconvenient outages for entire neighborhoods, serious harm to yourself or your neighbors, and significant repair costs.

As a result, CGA offers the following tips to make sure you complete your project safely and without any utility service interruptions, so you don't become a statistic.

Here's how the 811 process works:

1. One free, simple phone call to 811 makes it easy for your local one call center to notify appropriate utility companies of your intent to dig. Call a few days prior to digging to ensure enough time for the approximate location of utility lines to be marked with flags or paint.

2. When you call 811, a representative from your local one call center will ask for the location and description of your digging project.

3. Your local one call center will notify affected utility companies, which will then send professional locators to the proposed dig site to mark the approximate location of your lines.

4. Only once all lines have been accurately marked, carefully dig around the marked areas.

There are nearly 20 million miles of underground utility lines in the United States, which equates to more than a football field's length of utilities for every person in the U.S. Your family depends on this buried infrastructure for your everyday needs, including electric, natural gas, water and sewer, cable TV, high-speed Internet and landline telephone. With that much critical infrastructure underground, it's important to know what's below and call 811 before digging.

To find out more information about 811 or the one call utility notification center in your area, visit www.call811.com.



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A manufactured stone veneer project can enhance the aesthetic appeal of any space, indoors or out, and can be customized to suit your needs and style.

Three ways to boost your home's curb appeal

(STATEPOINT) - When it comes to your home, you only get one chance to make a great first impression -- and that takes place before anyone ever steps inside, making curb appeal upgrades an effective way to beautify your home while boosting its value.

Here are some great ways to enhance curb appeal that will give you a great return on investment, according to Remodeling Magazine's 2019 Cost Vs. Value Report.

Garage Door Replacement

Whether you want your garage door to take center stage or provide a demure complement to your home's overall exterior, the right selection will make a great visual impression. Luckily there are a growing number of ways to personalize a garage door. New color options, which include two-tone combinations, are growing in popularity, and an expanding array of panel designs can help you work in harmony with your home's architectural style.

But know that this is not just any cosmetic upgrade. A new

garage door has the potential to improve your family's safety and comfort, providing safety features not found in older models, while reducing heat and cold transfer for lower energy bills.

Manufactured Stone Veneer

A manufactured stone veneer project can enhance the aesthetic appeal of any space, indoors or out, and can be customized to suit your needs and style. When applied to a home exterior, this project has an impressively high return on investment at 95 percent, according to the 2019 Cost vs. Value Report.

Maximize this upgrade by opting for high-quality materials that look like authentic stone, even upon careful inspection. For example, the choices available from ProVia are molded and colored to produce a realistic, dramatic effect, mimicking stones from unique geographic regions in a range of cuts. Their online resources, which can be found at provia.com, include design ideas and tools for selecting harmonious color groupings, helping you make the best choices for your home.

Siding Replacement

To add beauty and value to your home, start with curb appeal, selecting projects that offer a great return on investment.

Of all the home updates that will boost your curb appeal, new siding has the third highest return on investment, according to the report. When making this upgrade, consider materials wisely. Thanks to its overall low cost, ease of installation, minimal maintenance required and long-term durability, vinyl is the most popular home siding material. Whether you opt for insulated, traditional or decorative siding, this can be a great way to give your home a high-impact facelift that's well worth the cost.

To add beauty and value to your home, start with curb appeal, selecting projects that offer a great return on investment.



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Get more bang for your buck with these spring home improvements

(STATEPOINT) - The warmer weather means it's time to start thinking about home improvement projects. Whether you're getting your home in tip-top shape for your own enjoyment, or getting it ready to put on the market, not all home improvement projects are created equal when it comes to return on investment (ROI). Here are top areas on which to focus.

Interiors

The kitchen is the heart of the home and it's one of the best areas to renovate in terms of ROI, according to Remodeling magazine's annual Cost vs. Value Report, which puts the price tag of the average minor kitchen remodel at \$22,507, with 80.5 percent of the cost recouped upon resale.

To give the kitchen an updated appearance, replace the flooring, countertops, sink and faucet. A fresh coat of paint in a trendy shade, such as Living Coral, Pantone's Color of the Year, can add a vibrant pop of color to energize any kitchen. Not looking to go that bold? Consider an accent wall, or stick to a classic palate of gray and white in terms of cabinets and countertops. White on white is also a



(c) Tyler Olson / stock.Adobe.com

When you add a wood deck to your home, 75.6 percent of the cost will be recouped when your house is sold.

popular new style for kitchens and bathrooms.

Other features home buyers are paying close attention to our laundry rooms and such energy-saving elements as Energy Star appliances and windows, according to the survey "What Home Buyers Want in 2019" by the National Association of Home Builders.

Curb Appeal

The popularity of outdoor projects remains strong and it's for a good reason. According to the Cost vs. Value Report, the biggest bang for your buck in 2019 will come from replacing a garage door. The report says the average price is \$3,611, and 97.5 percent of it is recouped when the house is sold.

Other outdoor projects with high ROI include adding manufactured stone veneer to the exterior (94.9 percent), adding a wood deck (75.6 percent) and replacing siding (75.6 percent). Looking for a simpler way to make an impact? Sprucing up the landscape by planting flowers or bushes or even just clearing the yard of debris will make a big

statement.

No matter what updates you end up making, it's always a good idea to notify your insurance agent. "Certain upgrades may change the value of a house, so homeowners need to make sure they're properly covered," says Bob Buckel, vice president of product management, Erie Insurance. "There are a few things to look for. Ask your agent about guaranteed replacement cost policies that can cover the cost to rebuild a home in today's dollars following a covered loss."

Some upgrades may also make you eligible for discounts, Buckel adds, especially if they make the home more secure. "For example, Erie Insurance offers certain safety discounts such as for installing smoke alarms

or an automatic sprinkler system."

Now you have a checklist of DIY projects to focus on this spring. But before you start, take a moment to assess which ones are worth your time and money.

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Are you recycling your plastic beverage containers?

(BPT) - When you place a plastic beverage container in a recycling bin, you are an important part of the product's life cycle, helping that packaging to be used to make something new, over and over again.

An astounding 70 percent of what people toss in the trash is actually recyclable, but very few people recycle as often as they should.

What exactly happens to plastic beverage bottles that you put in a recycling bin?

They are collected, sorted and ground into plastic flakes. Different types of plastic flakes are separated before being washed and dried. Then the processed flakes are used to make things like cups, trays, clothing, carpet fibers and so much more - including new beverage bottles.

Recycling not only reduces waste, it saves energy too. Consider plastic bottled water containers, for example. Making new bottles from old ones uses 84 percent less energy, according to the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA).

Understanding that every person plays a critical role in



Submitted graphic

Enjoy convenience drinks, empty them, replace the cap and recycle. It's important to remember that both the bottle and the cap are made from valuable plastics that are in demand by reclaimers.

the recycling process, IBWA launched "Put It In The Bin" - a partner-friendly initiative focused on educating people about the value of always putting recyclables in the bin so they can be made into new and amazing things.

Recycling isn't always convenient, but it's worthwhile to do. When life is busy, it can be easy to forget to recycle. Consider these smart, easy-to-do tips that can help you make recycling a part of your daily life:

Location: Place your recycling bin near your trash bin as a visual reminder that recycling can be just as fast and simple as putting something in the garbage.

Caps included: Enjoy convenience drinks, empty them, replace the cap and recycle. It's important to remember that both the bottle and the cap are made from valuable plastics that are in demand by reclaimers.

Bring recyclables home: Outside of the home it can be

difficult to locate recycling bins. Make a conscious decision to bring empty beverage bottles home so they can be recycled properly.

Plan ahead: Make space for empty beverage containers in your bag or car so it's easy to bring them home and place them in your curbside bin.

Set reminders: More than 90 percent of American homes have access to curbside and drop-off recycling programs, according to IBWA. Set an alert on your phone so you remember to bring out the recycling on the designated day.

Reuse: Think about how you can reuse items, such as transforming empty plastic beverage bottles into a beautiful holiday wreath. Watch the video here for details: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_51YHj_4-o&t=2s.

Buy recycled: Purchase goods made from recycled materials to support the ongoing life cycle of products.

There are many things that can be recycled, but bottled water containers are the most common drink item in curbside recycling programs, recycled at a rate of 53.9 percent, according to the "Put It In The Bin" website.

In fact, recycling just one plastic beverage bottle can conserve enough energy to power a 60-watt bulb for up to six hours, notes IBWA. What's more, according to Recycle Across America, five recycled plastic bottles provide enough fiber to produce one square foot of carpet.

With recycling, the possibilities are endless - but it all starts with one small personal choice to recycle. To learn more about how recycling makes a difference, visit putitinthebin.org.

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Having the right insurance coverage will provide peace of mind and make that new car ownership experience that much more enjoyable.

New Cars Depreciate Fast: How to Protect Your Investment

(StatePoint)- Buying a new car? Before taking the plunge, it's important to make sure that shiny new ride is fully covered from an insurance standpoint. Why? Most people are familiar with that old adage that a new car drastically depreciates the minute it's driven off the lot. According to Carfax.com, it's true. The vehicle history information

database says a new car loses 10 percent of its value the minute it's driven off the lot and another 10 percent by the end of the first year. And cars with lesser brand name appeal and fewer options can depreciate even more, some by as much as 50 percent in a single year. That means if your new ride gets totaled, your insurance payout could be much less than what you paid for the car (or what you owe on your loan, for that matter).

Fortunately, new car buyers can protect themselves from this situation with what's generally known as new car replacement coverage. For example, at Erie Insurance, this coverage comes in the form of an add-on called New Auto Security that can be tacked onto a policy for a modest cost. If an owner has had a car for less than two years and it gets totaled, Erie Insurance would pay the cost to replace it with a car in the newest model year, minus the deductible. And, if

the new car is in a crash but is not deemed a total loss, the company would pay to repair the vehicle to brand new condition, without any deduction for depreciation. While new car buyers would be smart to add this coverage before even driving the car off the lot, New Auto Security coverage isn't restricted to when the car is purchased; it can be added later.

"Buyers should be aware of the risks associated with depreciation and take the necessary precautions to protect their investment," says Jon Bloom, vice president of personal auto, Erie Insurance. "We recommend that anyone buying a new car talk with their insurance agent to make sure they would be able to replace it in the event it's totaled, or at least be able to pay off their loan. Having the right coverage will provide peace of mind and make that new car ownership experience that much more enjoyable."

5 tips for your next road trip

(BPT) - Are you planning a classic American road trip? With a tank of gas, the right attitude and some smart supplies, you can explore amazing locales on a budget.

"The great American road trip is still very much alive, and we're not just talking long endurance cross-country trips. Places you can go from your own hometown and return on just one tank of gas," said Peter Greenberg, Emmy-award-winning producer, writer, radio broadcaster and TV correspondent. "If travel can be defined as an experience that is absolutely meant to be shared, then the road trip is still very high on my list. It offers shared adventure, shared experience and shared storytelling."

Start planning your next affordable road trip with these smart tips and tricks:

1) Discover one-tank destinations

You only need one day to get away, so research destinations you can get to on one tank of gas. This keeps fuel costs down, and because you don't need to stay

overnight, you won't have to budget for a hotel. People tend to forget the beautiful spots just a few hours away from home, so bring a map and see which direction catches your attention.

2) Fill up the tires

Of course you'll want to check your fluid levels, wiper blades, and spare tire before you leave. One of the best ways to maximize your vehicle's fuel efficiency is to make sure tires are properly inflated. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, you can improve your gas mileage by 0.6 percent on average and up to 3 percent in some cases simply by keeping your tires inflated to the manufacturer's recommended pressure.

3) Strive for a high mpg

Some cars have better fuel economy than others. With a practical design and impressive fuel efficiency, adventures. Getting up to an EPA-estimated 42 mpg on the highway, you won't have to limit your road trip due to fuel cost concerns.

4) Create comfort

Remember the journey

should be as much fun as the destination. Clean out your car, make sure windows are sparkling clean to take in the views, pack car-friendly snacks and drinks, and bring along cozy pillows or blankets. Technology can create comfort, so charge those digital devices and utilize your vehicle's features.

5) Pack smart

Whether you're on an impromptu or well-planned road trip, you can ease costs and streamline fun by packing wisely. Sunscreen, sunglasses and comfortable shoes are must-haves for any road trip. After all, you never know what adventures will come your way. Consider packing sandwiches - the ultimate road trip food - which are great for eating in the car or on a picnic so you don't have to buy full meals.

"Some of my most amazing travel memories are from one tank road trips," Greenberg said. "I think everyone should make these excursions part of their travel plans. They are fun, affordable and great for people of all ages."

Stunning new styles in flowers and plants for your garden

Striking new trends in flowers and plants for your garden

(BPT) - Today's plant lovers want more than the traditional flowers to enhance their home. Rather, people want to enjoy the experience of getting in touch with nature, while also looking for unique flowers and plants to add a more creative, personal touch of color and inspiration to their yards. This year, gardens will be more visually interesting, environmentally friendly and demonstrate the love and care provided by the families who tend them.

Here are a few of the latest gardening ideas you and your loved ones can enjoy, from Ball Horticultural Company.

Gardening as an experience

Detoxing from our daily dependence on digital distractions and tech gadgets is becoming not just a desire, but a necessity. What better way for you and your loved ones to take a break from screens than to spend time with plants, creating beauty, serenity and even a nutritious lifestyle? Make the process a group effort:

from going to your favorite garden center and choosing your veggies, to caring for them and watching them grow, then harvesting and eating, the full experience is something to enjoy. Plant and grow veggies like the Snackabelle Red Pepper, a mini bell pepper that starts out green, then ripens red, with a rich, sweet flavor - perfect to have at home for snacking as well as cooking.

If you love natural fragrances, Lavender Blue Spear is a wonderful choice. They are easy to grow, and will achieve a height of nearly a foot. You can use the fresh lavender to make infused oil, soap, hand scrubs or bath salts.

New color choices

Look for unexpected colors to help you make a statement with your containers, window boxes or indoor potted plant garden this year. Striking new colors include the 2019 Pantone color of the year, "Living Coral," seen in the Gerbera Revolution Salmon Shades potted flower, also known as the African Daisy. Gerbera plants are easy to care for and provide great indoor decor, which also makes them perfect choices for gift giving.

New Tattoo Vinca looks like a work of art, with gorgeous petals showing modern colors, swirled with soft strokes of black that make each petal look inked. The Tattoo Vinca is not only low-maintenance and heat-tolerant, but will attract pollinators like bees and butterflies to your garden. The Double Zahara Bright Orange Zinnia is another great choice for head-turning color. Its double flowers bloom in vivid orange, and they are suitable for landscaping and container planting. This flower is also a breeze to care for and pollinator-friendly.

Or you can choose a unique plant with warm

Look for unexpected colors to help you make a statement with your containers, window boxes or indoor potted plant garden this year

New gardeners who want choices beyond traditional flower options have great alternatives this year

tones, like the bright and colorful Ornamental Pepper, with such attractive multi-colored fruits that they are grown just for show. The Ornamental Pepper displays intense shades of yellows, oranges and reds in its fruit.

Other flowers catch the eye with dynamic texture, such as the lovely Double PinkTastic Calibrachoa, a fully double flower with a dark pink eye and lighter pink petals. Its burst of blooms will cover the plant and spill over their containers, window boxes or hanging baskets.

Easy options for beginning gardeners

New gardeners who want choices beyond traditional flower options have great alternatives this year. If you're looking for plants that are durable and colorful, the Echinacea Sombbrero Tres Amigos produces a deer-resistant perennial flower that is highly attractive to butterflies and songbirds. Tres Amigos shows three colors, opening as a peachy-orange color, then aging to rose and fading to burgundy.

A great way to fill large spaces quickly is the attention-getting Big Blue Salvia, with spires that continuously bloom from July into the fall, with little care needed. This flower grows from 24 to 36 inches tall, with beautiful deep blue blooms that are attractive to hummingbirds and bees.

Beginner and experienced gardeners alike can enjoy the newest gardening trends by branching out into plants and flowers to attract pollinators, taking advantage of vivid new color options and involving the whole family in the process. To explore a whole new world of gardening options, visit your favorite local garden center this spring. Share your own style for 2019 by making your garden a personal experience.

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