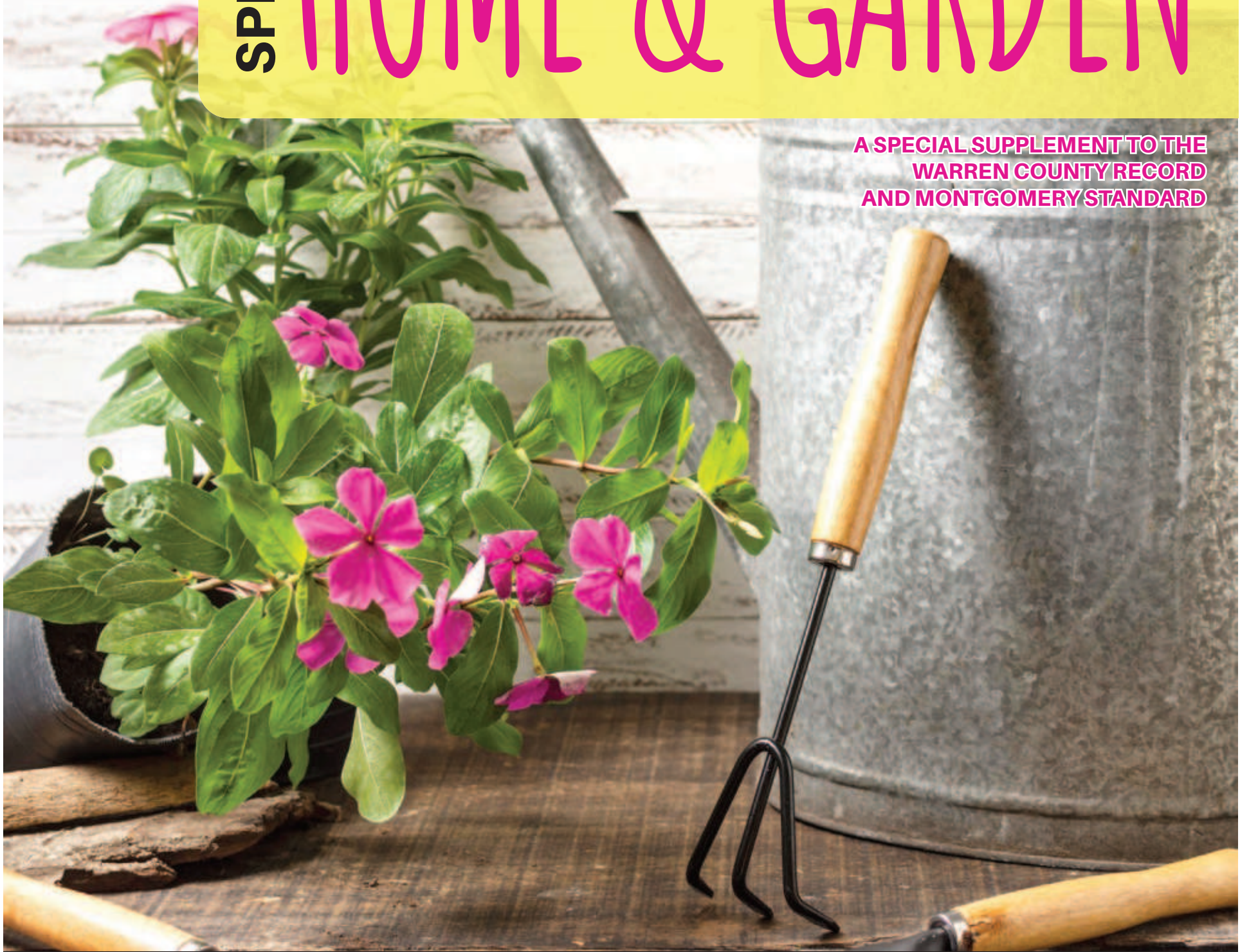


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# Plant Summer-Blooming Bulbs

Spring is the time to plant summer-blooming bulbs, such as dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, calladiums and elephant ears. Bulbs should be stored in a cool, dry place until all danger of frost has passed. Then it's time to plant.

## WHEN TO PLANT

Exactly when you plant will depend on what planting zone you live in. According to GardenDesign.com, in colder climates such as USDA Zones 4 to 7, summer-flowering bulbs should be planted in mid to late spring (May to June), and in Zones 8 to 10, in early to mid spring (late March to May).

## HOW TO PLANT

The best resource for knowing how deep to plant your bulbs is the packaging they came in. In general, dig a hole that's 2-3 times as deep as the bulb is tall. The pointy side of the bulb should face up. The roots should face down. Give the bulbs a good watering. Continue watering whenever the soil is dry. Keep in mind that over-watering can cause the bulb to rot.

## MIND YOUR SOIL

Most bulbs need rich soil, so mix some compost into your soil for the best results, especially if your soil is heavy clay or has poor drainage. Loamy or slightly sandy soil is ideal.

## PREVENT WEEDS

The best way to prevent weeds is to add 2-3 inches of mulch on top of your flower-beds. Bulbs can easily grow up through the mulch. Weeds will have a harder time. Weed barrier fabric is not ideal to use when planting bulbs, because it can prevent moisture from reaching the roots of the developing bulb. If you must use weed barrier fabric, cut slits in the fabric at the site of each bulb.

## PLANT FOR VISUAL EFFECT

Consider when your flowers will bloom to provide blooms all season long. Different plants bloom at different times during the season. Others, such as seedum, daylilies, hosta or bleeding heart, will bloom repeatedly until late fall or provide consistent, rich foliage. Mix up your plantings so that your flowerbeds provide visual interest all season long.

Consult Longfield Gardens' Bloom Time Chart for Spring and Summer Bulbs at [bit.ly/2KTQuQm](http://bit.ly/2KTQuQm) to help you plan your flowerbeds.



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# Plants to Repel Mosquitoes

While you should welcome some insects to your gardens — remember those pollinators? — there are other pests that are less welcome.

Among those are the scourge of the summer months, the mosquito.

## WHAT ARE MOSQUITOES?

Mosquitoes cause the most deaths of any other animal taxonomy per year, killing more than 700,000 people annually. Mosquitoes feed on the blood of host animals, including humans, and transfer pathogens from host to host.

Diseases such as malaria, Chikungunya, West Nile virus, dengue fever and others are spread from mosquito bites. In humans, mosquitoes appear to prefer people with type O blood, heavy breathers and pregnant women.

Most mosquitoes feed during dawn or dusk and rest during the heat of the day.

## REPELLING MOSQUITOES

There are a host of mosquito repellents on the market.

Candles, bracelets, sprays, zappers, they all work, usually with some chemical help. But there's also a natural way to go.

Many plants will help keep mosquitoes from invading your space. Here's a list of plants with mosquito-repellent properties to help keep

your garden pest-free this summer.

- **Lavender and marigolds.** These flowering plants emit a smell that deters mosquitoes. You can grow both of these in pots and they give you gorgeous blooms to boot.

- **Citronella.** You may be familiar with the citronella candles, but those things get their distinctive smell from the citronella plant. It and other lemon-scented plants repel mosquitoes.

- **Rosemary, basil and sage.** These kitchen herbs also keep mosquitoes and other pests away from your home. Both do well in containers or in the ground.

- **Bee balm.** This pollinator-friendly plant also keeps mosquitoes away. Crush the leaves to release the repellent oils.

- **Allium.** These bulbs are the family that brings you garlic and onions. They release a strong smell that mosquitoes don't like.



## WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

While making the environment inhospitable to mosquitoes is a great way to keep them away, you also need to make sure you aren't doing them any favors. Eliminate standing water as much as possible and treat pools and ponds to keep mosquitoes from laying their eggs there.



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# Protect Your Siding Warranty

Your home's siding protects the structure of your home, but what protects your siding? The warranty.

Whether you're shopping for new siding or interested in maintaining the value of your current siding, it's important to understand how siding warranties work. That way you'll know what will be covered and what will not, and you can maintain your siding accordingly.

**Labor or materials** — Your siding manufacturer will likely provide a warranty on the siding itself. The installer might warranty the installation job, to be sure it's installed in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. Your installer should be able to explain the warranty options for both. In general, warranties that last longer or provide more protection will be more expensive.

Consider how much the protection is worth to you. Would you have room in your budget to replace siding in a situation in which the materials and labor would not be covered? It might be worth spending a little more upfront to prevent major expenses later.

**Coverage limits** — What's covered by the warranty will also vary among manufacturer, product grade and material. A warranty may include protection from insects, hail, rot, delamination, excessive fading, peeling, cracking, rusting, corroding and more. Warranties will differ based on the material.

Wood siding is much more susceptible to damage from things like water and insects, whereas composite siding is much more durable, with the ability to resist severe weather and repel insects.

**Term** — The term of the loan is another important consideration. Many manufacturers offer a limited lifetime warranty. If the warranty covers only a set period, such as 50 years, check whether the warranty is pro-rated. This means that the older the siding is at the time of a claim, the less the manufacturer will pay. If you are remodeling a home to sell or intend to sell in the near future, consider whether the warranty can be transferred to new owners. This feature could increase the value of the home. Be sure to let the new owners know how to take advantage of the transfer. There is usually a time limit in which



the transfer must be completed, such as 30 or 45 days after the sale of the home. Some features of the warranty may not transfer, and the term may be reduced after the transfer.

**Routine maintenance** — The siding manufacturer will likely require that you keep the siding maintained to a certain standard. For example, you may be required to use a soft-bristled brush as opposed to a pressure-washer. The manufacturer will offer recommended products to clean the siding and warn against using strong chemical cleaners.

Damage caused by issues such as mold left on the surface of the siding may not be covered. The warranty may also prohibit you from painting, varnishing or otherwise refinishing your siding.



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## Spark a Conversation in Your Yard

Wood-burning fire pits are wonderful focal points for the gathering space in your yard.

Bonus: They're easy to build in an afternoon. Here's how.

### SELECT A SITE

Before you even look at your yard, you need to check with local restrictions, building codes and homeowners association rules to make sure you can have a fire pit. You'll also need to read your homeowners policy to make sure it doesn't affect your coverage. Choose a site well away from the house and with plenty of room to sit around the fire. Clear away any plants and debris from your site.

### GET READY TO BUILD

To make a circular pit, put a stake in the center of the site and mark out a circle where you want the pit to go. The diameter you draw out should be slightly larger than the outside dimensions of the fire pit ring you're going to build.

Clear out the sod and dirt down to a depth of about seven inches and keep the area level as you work. Pack the remaining dirt down

solidly with a hand tamper.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You'll need trapezoidal blocks, which are more narrow on one side to allow the edges to fit snugly together in a circle. The bottom of the fire pit will be crushed gravel paver base, available at your local hardware store, that's about five inches thick. Put the gravel down and then wet it with a hose and tamp it down. Make sure the surface remains level.

Put down the first layer of blocks around the hole, checking that it remains level as you work.

If you need to, add leveling sand beneath blocks to keep it straight. Assemble the next row of blocks, staggering the joints. Before you add adhesive, put in the fire bowl or ring to check the fit. Make sure the lip rests on the edge and adjust the positioning as needed. After you've checked to make sure it fits well, then reassemble the blocks with construction adhesive. Test fit each layer before you add adhesive.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for your adhesive to determine how long it needs to cure before you can use your fire pit.

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# Pruning Basics

Many perennial plants need a spring pruning. Their foliage may provide protection during the winter, but by spring, it's time to prune in order to encourage new growth. This means pruning is an essential part of your spring gardening plans.

Here are some pruning basics to get you started.

## WHEN TO PRUNE

According to the Old Farmers Almanac, the timing of pruning a tree or shrub depends mostly on when it blooms and whether it blooms on old or new growth. In general, plants that flower after midsummer should be pruned in the spring, while those that bloom in winter, spring and early summer should be pruned soon after flowering.

Burger Farm and Garden Center reminds gardeners that while an ill-timed pruning may lead to fewer flowers and fruits, it is rarely fatal to the plant.

## WHAT TO PRUNE

Fruit trees such as apple, cherry, peach and plum, and vines such as trumpet vine and wisteria, should be pruned in early spring. Spring-flowering shrubs such as lilacs and rhododendrons need to be pruned as soon as their early-spring blooms have faded. This will help ensure a good bloom next year.

According to TheSpruce.com, Black-eyed Susan, gay-feather, purple coneflower and globe thistle seed heads are great food for birds, so leave them be until early spring, while coral bells, delphiniums, hostas, turtleheads and mums need the protection of their foliage during winter. Don't cut them back until spring.

## PRUNING TOOLS

It's important to keep your pruning tools sharp. While a plant can easily recover from a clean cut, a botched cut can weaken the plant and make the plant susceptible to disease. Sharpen shears and clippers, and oil moving parts to keep them working smoothly.

## HOW TO PRUNE

Some plants need more aggressive pruning than others. Consult the Old Farmers Almanac or your local extension service for particulars on how much to prune a particular shrub or plant.

In general, when pruning a tree, begin with removing any dead or dying branches, as well as any "suckers" — sprouts emerging from the base of the trunk. Make clean cuts flush to the branch, with no part of the growth remaining. Also remove "water-sprouts," which are small, straight vertical shoots growing on the main branches.

Thin out the tree by removing branches that grow downward, toward the center of the tree or that cross paths with another branch, as well as any limbs along the trunk that are bigger in diameter than the trunk.

Then focus on evening out the branches and removing competing branches. Finally, prune the tree from the outer-most growth to give it a pleasing shape, and promote the growth of shorter, thicker branches.

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# Keeping Your Cool

Hotter weather means running your air conditioner more to keep you and your family cool inside the house. For many families, that means more of an expense when it comes to the utility bills.

There are things you can do to help minimize the expense and keep your home and your family as cool as can be.

## HVAC MAINTENANCE

Here's a checklist for keeping your air conditioner running in tip-top condition.

Make sure that the visible parts of your system are clean and free of debris. Your components should have at least two feet of clear space around them. Regularly inspect your refrigerant lines for leaks.

There are two lines, typically copper, that connect your outdoor air conditioner to the indoor evaporator coil.

You should also regularly replace the system's filter with a high-quality filter and continue to do so every 90 days. If your system has a humidifier filter, you could replace it at the beginning of the heating system.

Another annual task to complete is to lubricate the HVAC motor and replace the fan belt, if needed.

Clean your condensation drain line with bleach to keep it free of algae and other debris, which will allow your system to run more efficiently.

## HIRING AN HVAC TECHNICIAN

Some local HVAC companies will offer maintenance plans to help homeowners take care of these regular tasks on their own, including replacing filters. These maintenance plans also usually come with discounts on service and repair. For older HVAC systems, consider having a qualified technician come and check it at least twice a year.

## CALL FOR HELP

Depending on your climate and other factors, your HVAC should last you anywhere from 10-20 years.

You should count on it needing not only routine maintenance during that time, but also the occasional repair. Here are some signs that your unit needs immediate attention from a pro.

- The HVAC unit is blowing warm air in the summer.
- The system turns itself off and on intermittently.
- There are pockets of warm and cool air throughout your home.
- Your energy bills go up unexpectedly.



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# Building A Water Feature

Adding a water feature to your yard or patio adds a cooling, relaxing element to your environment.

It can serve as a focal point of your outdoor living space and also as a pleasant scene setter for outdoor parties or even just a relaxing evening with a book. Here's how to build your own water feature with steps from the DIY Network.

## PICK A SPOT

Choose a flat spot in your yard and remove any existing plants, rocks and debris. Dig out the shape of your new pond. For a natural shape, make your pond with rounded edges that aren't perfectly symmetrical.

## SAND IT AND LAYER IT

Once you've got the pool dug, add a layer of fill sand that's about an inch or two thick. This will act as a cushion for your pond liner and keep it from tearing on rocks or other debris in the soil. Build up the sand around the edges to be a little bit higher and taper it off around the sides.

Next, lay down the pond liner to keep the pond clean. Choose a thick liner that's unlikely to tear but still flexible enough to mold to the shape of your pond. Don't be afraid to use more than one piece so it doesn't leak. Your liner should completely cover the pond with excess liner on all sides, up and over the border you made with sand. Put rocks down to pin the liner in place and then cut it to size.

## ROCK IT

Wash off your rocks with a hose before placing them in and around your pond.

The pond liner should be covered with small to medium-sized stones, with larger rocks around the edges for contrast.

Roll them into place if you can and don't be afraid to flip them around to find the best look for your space.

## PUT DOWN ROOTS

Plants around the edges of your pond will soften the look of the stone and bring in some color. Choose native plants that are friendly to pollinators and use a range of colors and sizes. Install drip irrigation to keep your plants healthy and watered.

## FINISH IT UP

Add a store-bought fountain and water. Fill the pond up with water per your pump's instructions and keep an eye on it to make sure it doesn't empty out in hotter months.



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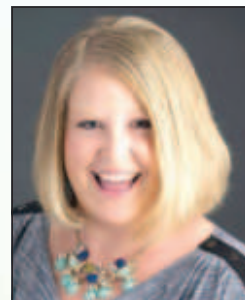
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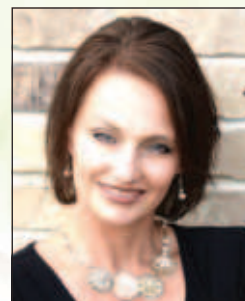
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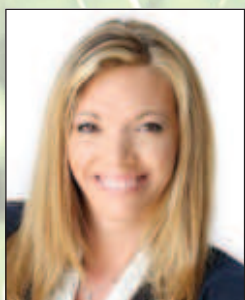
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