

A supplement of the
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Spring home & Garden



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Should I DIY?: 3 questions to determine if it's best to renovate on your own

A do-it-yourself mentality has taken hold in millions of households across the globe. Popular television channels like HGTV and DIY Network as well as accessible home improvement content on apps like YouTube has inspired many homeowners to tackle renovation projects around their homes. Taking such initiative is admirable, though it also can prove costly if homeowners end up biting off more than they can chew.

Home improvement videos and television shows have a tendency to oversimplify renovation projects, potentially giving homeowners a false sense of confidence in their DIY abilities. A concerted effort on the part of homeowners to determine if it's best to renovate on their own or hire a professional should always be the first step of any renovation project. No two homeowners are the same, but the following three questions can help homeowners determine if DIY is their best option.

1. Can I afford to DIY?

Professional home improvement projects are costly for a variety of reasons. Materials can be costly, but so are the tools and labor necessary to do the job right. Homeowners may not have the tools necessary to complete complicated projects. Specialty tools can be expensive to purchase or even rent, and the cost of acquiring such tools should be includ-

ed in any DIY project cost estimates. Labor also factors heavily into professional projects, and for good reason. Talented contractors have unique skills that have been developed and perfected over many years. Those skills can ensure projects are completed quickly and correctly. Labor may seem costly, but such costs may ultimately prove to be a bargain compared to the cost of fixing DIY mistakes. Projects that are minor in scope and don't require the use of potentially costly specialty tools may be better suited for weekend warriors than more complicated renovations.

2. Do I have the time?

Homeowners must determine how much time they have to complete a project before deciding to do it themselves. No one wants to spend months staring at an unfinished renovation project. Homeowners who are already pressed for time may not be able to complete projects in a timely fashion, which can make homes less comfortable and even less safe.

3. Can I pull this off?

DIY projects can instill homeowners with a sense of pride in their homes, but it's imperative that homeowners considering the DIY option conduct an honest assessment of their skills. A lack of renovation experience does

not necessarily mean a homeowner cannot successfully complete a DIY project. But in such instances, it may be best to start with small, straightforward projects and then gradually move up to bigger, more complicated projects as skills are fine tuned. And homeowners who have never been at their best with a hammer

in hand should not be ashamed to leave the work to the professionals.

Television shows and online tutorials can make renovations appear easier than they actually are. Homeowners considering DIY renovations can ask themselves a handful of questions to determine if they're ready for the challenge of renovating their homes on their own.



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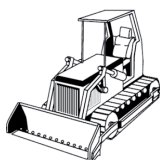
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Learn the right ways to clean lawn and patio furniture

Once the days begin to grow a little bit longer and the numbers on the thermometer creep a tad higher, outdoor entertaining season is right around the corner. Homeowners may be anxious to once again return to the comforts of their backyards. However, their patio furniture may not be ready for lounging just yet.

Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture made of metal, glass, wood, and plastic. Before homeowners know it, their backyards will be ready for outdoor entertaining season.

PROPER STORAGE

Storing outdoor furniture during the colder months of the year is a great way to protect items from the elements. This may involve careful shrink-wrapping and keeping items outdoors, or by moving furniture indoors to a shed or garage. Cleaning the furniture one last time before storing it also can be handy.

REMOVE STUCK-ON DEBRIS

Inspect furniture and be prepared to remove any stuck-on debris, such as bird droppings, sticky food residue or even cobwebs and insect nests. Be sure to use a cleaning tool that is safe for the material you are cleaning. Test an inconspicuous area of the furniture first to ensure your tools don't damage the furniture. For example, many scrub brushes can scratch glass or aluminum.

MAKE A THOROUGH CLEANSER

Clean stains off of furniture with a versatile cleanser. A mild cleaner can be made by mixing 1/2 cup baking soda with 1 gallon of warm water, according to the experts at Better Homes & Gardens. Regular dishwashing detergent also can be mixed with water, as it has a mild bleaching agent. This cleanser can be used on plastic resin furniture or metal furniture, which are popular patio furniture materials.

PATIO FABRICS

Check the cleaning instructions of outdoor fabrics, as there might be specific instructions on the tags. In some cases, fabric may be removed and washed in a washing machine on a gentle setting. A solution of dish soap and warm water also is a gentle way to clean outdoor fabrics. Once items are clean, HGTV advises applying a water-repellent fabric protector to minimize staining and maintenance.

STRIP OR SAND

Wood furniture may need specialized care. If stains cannot be removed with a mild cleanser, then hard woods like teak can be surface-sanded to restore items' original look.

Pressure washers can often do more harm than good to patio furniture, so it's best to look for an alternative way to clean them. Usually a bit of elbow grease and a cleanser is all that's needed. Give the cleaning product time to work. Wipe down and dry the furniture thoroughly to prevent the growth of mildew.



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Did you know?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, air currents can carry pesticides that were applied to nearby properties. That means even people who do not apply pesticides in their lawns and gardens can still be at risk of exposure to these potentially harmful chemicals. People concerned by the prospect of being exposed to the pesticides being applied by their neighbors can stay indoors with their children and pets while the substances are being applied. Those who live near fields and parks where pesticides are routinely applied can plant hardy, thick-branched trees to reduce their risk of airborne exposure. The EPA notes that such plants and shrubs can serve as buffers against airborne pesticides, essentially acting as walls around a property that prevent gusty winds from blowing pesticides into yards and gardens.

3 techniques to keep mosquitoes out of your backyard oasis

The value of a retreat-like backyard was never more apparent than in 2020. Over the last year-plus, much of the world has been forced to stay home as a global pandemic has claimed millions of lives while countless others have had to fight to survive in hospitals. It's no surprise people have looked for a respite from the harsh realities of living during a deadly pandemic, and many turned their attention to their own backyards to provide such an escape.

The online home remodeling platform Houzz reported a 58 percent annual increase in project leads for home professionals in June 2020. Contractors who specialize in outdoor spaces saw the biggest increase in demand. A revamped outdoor space can provide the perfect retreat for homeowners who want to get away from it all. But one winged, unwelcome guest can quickly transform an oasis into an uninviting space.

Mosquitoes make their presence felt in many areas each summer. These pesky, often hungry insects can carry disease, and their bites can be painful and itchy. Homeowners can try these three techniques to keep mosquitoes out of their backyards.

1. Remove standing water.

Standing water is a breeding ground for mosquitoes, who don't even need a lot of water to successfully breed. A daily walk around the property may uncover kids' toys, empty flower pots or other small receptacles that can collect water. Even clogged gutters can lead to the accumulation of a small amount of water, and that can be enough for mosquitoes to breed. Remove these potential breeding grounds when you find them, and do so each day, as mosquitoes mature from eggs to nymphs in roughly four days.

2. Mow regularly.

Mowing the lawn so the grass never gets too high is another way to make a backyard less hospitable to mosquitoes. The pest experts at Terminix® note that mosquitoes seek tall grass to protect them from the elements, including wind and hot summer sun. Mowing enough so grass never gets too high in summer can make backyards less inviting to mosquitoes.

3. Plant with mosquitoes in mind.

The home remodeling experts at HGTV note that plants can be part of homeowners' strategy to repel mosquitoes. Various plants have mosquito-repellant qualities. For example, bee balm releases a fragrance as it grows, and mosquitoes don't like that fragrance. Homeowners can speak with a local lawn and garden professional for recommendations about plants that can thrive in their region and repel mosquitoes at the same time.

Mosquitoes can make it hard to enjoy a backyard oasis. But various strategies can help homeowners keep these unwanted guests out of their backyards.

Types of home insulation and where to install them

When thinking about renovating their homes, homeowners may imagine changing wall colors, expanding room sizes or upgrading appliances and fixtures. However, unless people take inventory of the less glamorous components of the home, such as structure, plumbing, heating and cooling, and insulation, other improvements may be for naught.

A home insulation project certainly doesn't offer the wow factor of a kitchen remodel, but insulation serves a vital function in the house that helps keep people comfortable and reduces energy consumption. Insulation is typically placed in areas where air escapes, such as between the stud cavities inside the walls and in the attic, and serves to slow and reduce heat transfer.

The U.S. Department of Energy says between 50 and 70 percent of the energy used in homes is for heating and cooling. By improving home in-

sulation, homeowners can make their homes more comfortable, consistent and efficient. In fact, the ENERGY STAR program overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says homeowners stand to save an average of 15 percent on heating and cooling costs by adding proper insulation. To do so, homeowners can take a crash course in home insulation and find the products that fit their needs.

Blanket batts and rolls

Blanket batts and rolls typically are constructed with fiberglass, so proper safety gear, such as a mask and gloves, is needed when handling them. Installing this type of insulation is relatively easy since the materials are designed to fit the standard width between studs, rafters and floor joists.

Loose fill

Loose fill is usually made of fiberglass or cellulose (recycled paper fiber). It is blown or sprayed into place with pneumatic equipment, according

to The Home Depot. Loose fill can be ideal for hard-to-reach areas in attics or inside wall cavities. It's good for adding insulation to irregularly shaped areas. Since it requires special equipment, this is a job best left to professionals.

Sprayed foam

Sprayed foam is just as the name implies, a foam made from polyurethane, polyisocyanurate, cementitious, or other materials that are applied by a spray container. DIYers who need only small applications can use canned products. Large quantities are pressure-sprayed by professionals.

Foam board/rigid foam panels

Ideal for unfinished walls, such as basement or foundation walls, floors and ceilings, these are boards of polyurethane or polystyrene. Foam boards tend to reduce energy consumption more effectively than other types of insulation.

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The dangers of mowing too low

Spring marks the return of many things. Trees and flowers begin to bloom again in spring, while warmer temperatures are welcomed back with open arms. Grass also begins to grow again in the spring. That means it's not too long before homeowners have to dust off their lawn mowers and get to work. Those who don't necessarily enjoy mowing the lawn may be tempted to cut their grass very low, as doing so can mean longer intervals between mowing sessions. However, mowing grass too low can have a very adverse effect on a lawn.

CUTTING TOO LOW CAN INJURE THE GRASS

Cutting grass too low can injure the grass, creating what's essentially a domino effect of problems to come. Injured grass will focus on its recovery efforts, thereby making it vulnerable to other issues.

CUTTING TOO LOW PROMOTES WEED GROWTH

Injured grass is vulnerable to invaders, including weeds and in-

sects. Weeds and insects can attack grass as it recovers from injury, and before homeowners know it, their lawns are overcome with a host of problems.

CUTTING TOO LOW ALLOWS CRABGRASS TO THRIVE.

Crabgrass needs ample sunlight to grow. By cutting grass too low, homeowners may unknowingly be promoting crabgrass growth. Crabgrass is unsightly and can rob surrounding grass of the moisture it needs to grow. So lawns cut too low may not only lose their lush appeal thanks to the unattractive appearance of crabgrass, but also because areas surrounding the crabgrass patches might turn brown due to lack of water.

CUTTING TOO LOW CAN STRESS THE GRASS

Cutting too low also makes lawns vulnerable to summer heat. Without blades tall enough to block some of the summer sun, grass can quickly succumb to summer heat, leading to dried out, discolored lawns.



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How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

KITCHEN

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal

preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

FORMAL DINING ROOM

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

LIVING ROOM

Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can

help living rooms feel bigger.

BEDROOM

The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

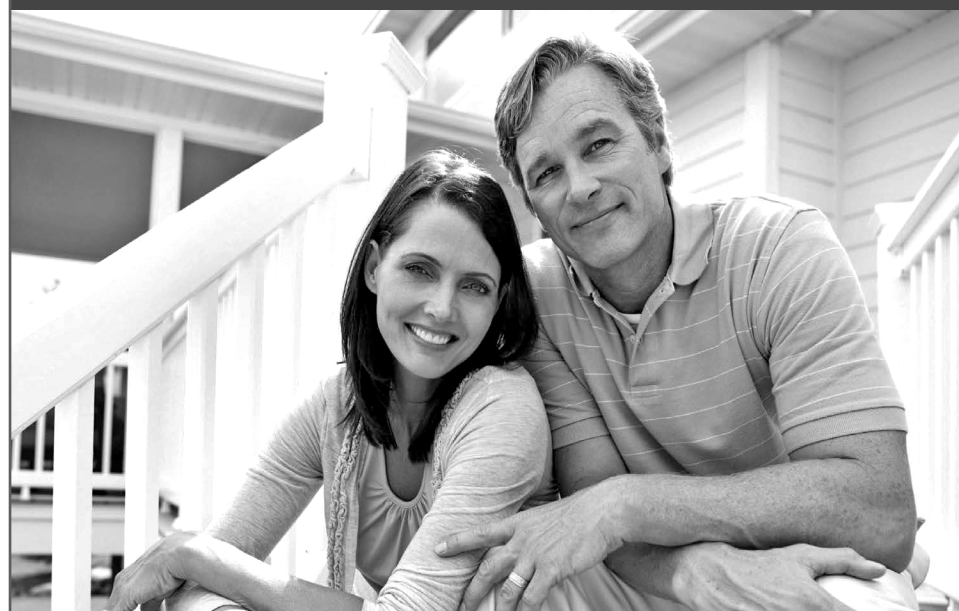
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How to prepare a garden for spring planting

The final weeks of winter, and even the first few weeks of spring, are still chilly in many parts of the world. Despite those last vestiges of winter chills, late winter is a great time to begin preparing gardens for the coming planting season.

Gardens may have to withstand months of harsh weather each winter, and such conditions can take a toll. Gardeners can consider the following tips as they try to restore their gardens and get them ready for spring planting.

- Disinfect your tools. It's common to clean tools in late fall or whenever they're typically placed in storage for the winter. But cleaning and disinfecting are not necessarily the same thing. If tools were not disinfected at the end of the previous gardening season, disinfect them before doing any work on the garden. Doing so can ensure any lingering bacteria or fungi on tool surfaces are killed prior to the beginning of gardening season. According to the University of Minnesota Extension, plant pathogens, including bacteria and viruses, can be transferred to and infect plants through bits of soil and plant debris left on shovels and pruner blades. Thoroughly disinfecting such tools prior to using them in the spring is a great way to reduce the risk of disease in your garden.

- Clear debris from garden beds.

Leaves, twigs, sticks, and other debris may have gathered in the garden over the winter. Such debris can inhibit the growth of plants and vegetables, so make sure all of it is removed prior to planting. Weeds might even begin to sprout up in late winter and early spring, so remove them before they go to seed.

- Test the soil. Testing the soil prior to planting can help gardeners determine what their gardens will need to thrive in the coming months. Garden centers and home improvement stores sell home testing kits that are effective and easy to use. Once the results are in, speak with a professional at your local garden center about the best time to amend the soil.

- Loosen compacted soil. Soil can become compacted over winter. If compacted soil is not loosened prior to planting, plants will have a hard time getting the water and nutrients they need to thrive. Loosening the soil also provides another opportunity to inspect the garden for any underlying issues, such as fungi or weed growth, that you may have missed when clearing debris or testing the soil.

Late winter is a good time to assess a garden and address any issues that developed over the winter so plants and vegetables can thrive come the spring planting season.



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Understanding R-Values

Insulation recommendations are based on certain factors that coordinate with regional climate zones to increase energy efficiency. These factors are known as R-values. The R in R-value stands for "resistance," and refers to how certain products resist the flow of heat through walls, floors and ceilings. Products should reduce heat escape so heat is kept on the right side of the wall. In summer this means outdoors, in winter it means indoors. R-values relate not only to insulation, but also to walls, windows and other barriers. R-values also coordinate to the type, thickness and density of the material being used. The higher the R-value, the more resistant to heat the product is. The U.S. Department of Energy coordinates R-value to climate zones 1 through 7 (1: Tip of Florida; 7: Canadian border). A higher R-value is needed in Zone 7 and a lower R-value is necessary in Zone 1. Those embarking on home improvement projects that involve choosing between R-values are urged to speak with a professional or to visit the Department of Energy website (www.energy.gov) to determine which R-Value is ideal for their homes.



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Simple ways to improve a kitchen pantry

People have been spending more time at home in 2020 than in years past, and certain projects around the house have become a priority. One home improvement idea that serves the double benefit of creating organization and making cooking at home more efficient is to reimagine the kitchen pantry.

A pantry is a room or closet where food, beverages and linens or dishes are stored. Pantries can be highly useful spaces that provide ancillary storage in kitchens. Many modern homes are equipped with pantries, but older homes may require some modification to create more useful pantries. Whether starting from scratch or modifying an existing pantry, these tips can help projects go more smoothly.

• **Maximize vertical storage.** Utilizing vertical areas can

help increase storage capacity. Build in extra nooks by investing in undershelf storage baskets. These baskets can instantly create designated areas for different types of ingredients. Homeowners also can look for ways to use the inside of cabinet doors or add extra shelves on walls or in eaves.

• **Consider your needs.** Figure out which items you would like to store in the pantry and then shop for corresponding storage systems. For example, storage solutions may feature wine bottle racks, baskets for potatoes and other produce, shelving for small appliances, and even pull out racks for baking pans or cutting boards.

• **Use clear storage.** Put ingredients in clear, airtight containers of similar dimensions so that you can easily find items you need. Transfer bulky items, like cereals and baking

supplies, to storage containers for uniformity.

• **Store bulk items elsewhere.** Bulk shopping can be cost-efficient, but bulk items can quickly eat up real estate in the pantry. Designate another area for non-perishable bulk products, like paper goods or canned items, such as in a garage or utility room.

• **Pull out drawers are convenient.** Pull-out drawers can reduce the need to seek and reach for items. These drawers conveniently roll out so items in the back can be accessed without disturbing foods in the front. Drawers can be custom built for any pantry space.

• **Make it accessible.** Think about who will be taking items from the pantry. Put children's snacks on the bottom pantry shelf where they can reach them, and then organize other shelves for adults in the home.

Did you know?

When planning spring landscapes, homeowners should always group plants with similar water needs together. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, grouping plants with similar water needs together helps to conserve water, which can be an especially useful strategy if or when drought restrictions go into effect in summer. Homeowners also can embrace additional strategies to landscape with water conservation in mind. For example, aerating soil helps to improve water flow to plants' roots and reduces water runoff, helping to ensure that plants get all of the water they need while reducing the likelihood that homeowners will have to use excessive amounts of water to keep plants healthy. In addition, using low-water-using types of grass can help homeowners who live in areas prone to drought conserve water while still maintaining lush, green lawns.



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Options abound when shopping for home siding

Home improvement projects run the gamut from minor repairs to complete overhauls. Replacing exterior siding is one of the most significant home improvement projects homeowners can undertake. Such a project can give homes a completely new look, which is why choice of siding is such an important decision.

Homeowners have many siding options to choose from, and the following guide can help them make the best choice for their homes.

VINYL SIDING

Vinyl siding is easily maintained and among the more budget-friendly siding options. According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, vinyl siding is made from a PVC plastic that does not rot or flake. Siding professionals note that the technology used to create vinyl siding has changed considerably in recent years, making this option more diverse than traditional vinyl siding. So homeowners turned off by the potentially plastic look of vinyl siding might be surprised at how different modern vinyl siding looks compared to the vinyl siding of yesteryear.

FIBER-CEMENT SIDING

The home improvement television network HGTV notes that fiber-cement siding has grown in popularity among homeowners in recent years. This material does not require much maintenance and it's non-flammable and resistant to termites. HomeAdvisor

notes that fiber-cement siding can create the look of wood, stucco or masonry, making it a versatile option capable of creating various looks. In addition, fiber-cement siding is known for its durability, with some products coming with warranties lasting as long as 50 years.

WOOD SIDING

Homeowners have many choices if they prefer wood siding on their homes. Cedar, cypress, fir, pine, and spruce are just a handful of the many wood siding options homeowners can choose from. HomeAdvisor notes that cedar shingle siding offers a natural look that blends well in wooded and waterfront landscapes. Wood clapboard siding is another popular option, though it tends to require more maintenance than cedar shingle siding. Homeowners who want wood siding should discuss their options with an experienced siding professional, as many factors, including the choice of wood, must be considered before making a final decision.

STONE AND

STONE-VENEER SIDING

Many homeowners fall in love with the natural appeal of stone, but the price tag, which tends to be costly, may not be as awe-inspiring. HGTV notes that stone can be difficult to add to an existing home, and doing so may drive the price up even further. Stone siding is durable, and there are many options, including solid stone and



natural stone cladding, that make this an option capable of providing an array of looks. Stone-veneer siding is less expensive than natural stone and also comes in an array of styles. As is the case with wood, stone siding options are so extensive that homeowners are urged to discuss each one

with a siding professional before making their decisions.

These are just a handful of the many siding options homeowners can choose from. Siding can give homes a completely new look, making choice of siding a significant decision worthy of careful consideration.

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How ergonomic tools can help gardeners

Gardening is a rewarding activity that has been found to provide a host of benefits beyond ensuring readily available access to fresh fruits, vegetables and awe-inspiring blooms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says many gardening tasks qualify as light to moderate exercise, which means raking the leaves and cutting the grass can be just as beneficial as cardiovascular activities like brisk walking or jogging. In addition, a 2017 study published in the journal *Preventive Medicine Reports* found that gardening can help aging men and women offset age-related weight gain. And the health benefits of gardening go beyond the physical. In 2014, a systematic review of randomized controlled trials published in *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* concluded that horticultural therapy may be an effective treatment for people with dementia.

Gardeners have a host of tools at their disposal to help turn their lawns and gardens into awe-inspiring landscapes. Among those options are ergonomic tools. Ergonomic tools can benefit gardeners of all ages, but they may prove especially valuable for aging men and women.

How ergonomic tools differ from traditional gardening tools

Ergonomic gardening tools are designed to ensure that using them has as little effect on the body as possible. Ergonom-

ic tools align with how a person naturally moves his or her body, which can reduce the likelihood that gardeners will suffer any strains or sprains while gardening or experience any aches and pains after a day spent tending to their landscapes.

Choosing the right tools

The West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities notes that gardeners will know they have chosen the right ergonomic gardening tool for the job when they do not have to adapt the tool. Ergonomic tools should match gardeners' heights, fit their grip and feel comfortable when in use.

Specific benefits of ergonomic tools

Ergonomic gardening tools are designed in a way that can reduce stress on the body while performing various tasks. Gardeners know that aches and pains can add up after a day spent kneeling in the garden, raking soil and carrying supplies from a shed or garage around the property. But the WVUCED notes that ergonomic tools do more than just reduce gardeners' risk of injury.

• Ergonomic tools increase efficiency. Wasted motions are less likely when using ergonomic tools. That can improve efficiency in the garden, allowing gardeners to get more done in the same amount of time. And because ergonomic tools are designed to work with the body, gardeners likely won't need to

take breaks due to aches and pains, which also makes it easier to be more efficient when working in the garden.

• Ergonomic tools increase gardeners' capabilities. The WVUCED notes that principles behind ergonomics keep gardeners using the tools in natural positions. That means garden-

ers won't lose power to bending and twisting, enabling them to do more in the garden than they might be able to do when using non-ergonomic tools.

Gardening is a rewarding and beneficial activity. The right ergonomic tools for the job can enhance those benefits and make gardening even more enjoyable.



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Did you know?

Leaves that fall from trees can be a marvel to behold. But leaves can stain exterior surfaces when they eventually settle on vehicles, concrete driveways, patios, and other surfaces, become wet and/or are not cleaned away in a timely fashion. Leaf stains are caused by tannins in the leaves. The pigments can be absorbed by porous materials like concrete and leave stains behind. While these

stains may wash away over time, homeowners may prefer a faster way to get rid of unsightly stains. To remove moderate leaf stains, mix oxygen bleach with hot water and apply to stains using a scrub brush. Dark stains may require a tougher cleanser, such as one that contains trisodium phosphate. Some homeowners find success using a pressure washer to clean away leaf stains, while others rely on commercial leaf-stain removers.



How to garden from a wheelchair

Gardening is a wonderful activity that people from all walks of life enjoy. A garden full of fresh fruits and vegetables and/or beautiful blooms can instill a sense of pride in gardeners and turn their backyards into colorful, peaceful respites.

Anyone with the will to do so can plant their own garden, and that includes people who are confined to wheelchairs. Gardening from a wheelchair may present some unique challenges, but such obstacles are no reason for wheelchair-bound gardening enthusiasts to steer clear of this rewarding activity.

In recognition of the challenges of gardening from a wheelchair, the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation offers the following tips to wheelchair-bound gardening enthusiasts.

- Match the garden to your abilities. The Reeve Foundation notes that trying to push beyond your limits can affect how much you enjoy gardening. Address issues that may impair how you can function in the garden, such as accessibility. For example, if the garden is far away from the physical structure of your home, you may feel exhausted by the time you get to the garden, which can affect your productivity and progress. Prior to starting a garden, consider the potential that such issues may arise and then try to build a garden that makes it easy to overcome them.

- Consider raised beds. The Reeve Foundation highly recommends raised beds for anyone gardening from a wheelchair. When designing such beds, make sure they're narrow so they can be conveniently accessed from your wheelchair.

- Consider hanging baskets. Hanging baskets also can be a great option for anyone gardening from a wheelchair. Hanging baskets can provide aesthetic appeal inside and outside of a home, and such baskets can be accessed with a pulley system that makes it easy for gardeners to prune and water plants.

- Use specialized tools. The online medical resource Verywell Health notes that various manufacturers have recognized there's a market for adaptive gardening tools. Such tools make it easier for people in wheelchairs to indulge their passion for planting. Adaptive tools like trowels, cultivators and hoes can make it easier for gardeners to perform all the standard gardening tasks. Ergonomic adaptive gardening tools can help gardeners avoid the joint pain that can arise from using more traditional, non-ergonomic tools.

- Make it a team effort. Gardening with a loved one can make the hobby even more enjoyable for anyone, including people gardening from their wheelchairs. Seniors can garden alongside their grandchildren and/or friends who also have mobility issues, ensuring no one gets too tired or falls behind.

Anyone can enjoy gardening, and that includes people in wheelchairs.

8 garden tools for beginners

The right tool for the job is essential to working safely and efficiently. This is as true in the workplace as it is in the garden.

Novice gardeners may not know where to begin in regards to which tools they need. The following are eight items that can serve as a solid foundation for beginning gardeners.

1. Gloves: Your hands will be working hard, so it pays to protect them from calluses, blisters, splinters, insects, and dirt. Look for water-resistant gloves that are also breathable.

2. Hand pruners: Hand pruners are essential for cutting branches, cleaning up shrubs, dead-heading flowers, and various other tasks. Choose ergonomic, no-slip handles that will make work easier. Rust-resistant, nonstick blades also are handy.

3. Wheelbarrow: A wheelbarrow can transport gear to garden beds or tote dirt, leaves, rocks, and other materials around the landscape. A good wheelbarrow is strong but light enough to maneuver when full.

4. Loppers: Long-handled loppers will fit the bill for thick branches. The long handles provide leverage to cut

through branches an inch or more in diameter.

5. Hand trowel: A hand trowel is a handy tool that lets you dig holes or unearth weeds. While shopping for a trowel, consider getting a hand-held garden fork, which can aerate soil and cut through roots.

6. Hose/watering can: Keeping gardens hydrated is part of ensuring their health. That makes a hose and a watering can two invaluable tools to have around. Invest in a lightweight, expandable hose if storage space is at a premium. An adjustable nozzle will enable you to customize the water flow as needed. A watering can is an easy way to tote water to hard-to-reach pots and containers.

7. Garden kneeler: Gardeners often bend and kneel while working in the soil. That puts pressure on the back and knees. A comfortable garden kneeler with memory foam or one made from shock-absorbing material can reduce aches and pains.

8. Garden hoe: Garden hoes till soil, remove weeds and perform many other tasks. A garden hoe can be used along with a full-sized shovel, trowel and garden rake.



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Pollinators are an important part of gardens

A thriving backyard garden requires homeowners to take steps to ensure the garden has the best environment in which to grow and thrive. The right tools and components, including trowels, rakes, soil, amendments, and fertilizer, can help gardeners create beautiful spaces. It's also important that pollinators are made to feel welcome in the garden.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that one-third of all agricultural output depends on pollinators. The USDA notes that insects and other animal pollinators are vital to the production of healthy crops for food, fibers, edible oils, medicines, and other products. Pollinators also are essential for maintaining habitats and ecosystems that many wild animals rely on for food and shelter.

The U.S. Forest Service says that, without pollinators, the human race and all of the earth's terrestrial ecosystems would not survive. Pollina-

tion done the natural way often yields large, flavorful fruits.

Pollinators are make-or-break components of large-scale agriculture, and they're just as important in private home gardens. The Pollinator Partnership, an organization that works to protect pollinators and their habitats across North America, says pollinators include bees, butterflies, beetles, birds, and bats. These animals travel from plant to plant carrying pollen on their bodies. The following are some ways to maintain healthy pollinator habitats.

- Consider the soil and types of plants that will thrive in it before choosing what to plant. Fix drainage issues and plant with sunlight in mind.
- Vary the colors and shapes of plants to attract a greater array of pollinators. Plant flowers close to vegetable gardens to attract pollinators.
- Group plants together when



planting to more effectively attract pollinators.

- Select plants that flower at different times of the year so that nectar and pollen sources are available year-round.
- Whenever possible, choose native plants.
- Avoid the use of pesticides.

• Provide a water source for pollinators, such as a shallow dish with stones half-submerged for perching.

Pollinators are important for gardens, whether those gardens are commercial operations or small backyard plots. Allow pollinators to share spaces and be mindful of behaviors that can threaten their survival.

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Stay safe when working in the yard this spring and summer

A day spent working in the yard is an ideal way to pass the time on spring and summer afternoons. A pristine landscape can add value to a property and instill pride in homeowners who put a lot of thought and effort into their lawns and gardens.

A sun-soaked day can make it easy to overlook potential threats when working in a lawn or garden. But safety precautions are of the utmost necessity when working in the yard, where the risk for serious injury is considerable. For example, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons reports that, in 2016, more than 90,000 patients, including nearly 5,000 children, were treated in hospital emergency rooms for lawn mower-related injuries.

Lawn- and garden-related injuries can be prevented without going to great lengths.

- Know your terrain before mowing. Knowing the terrain in your own yard can reduce the risk for accident or injury. This can be especially important when mowing the lawn with a riding mower. Adhere to manufacturers' recommendations regarding inclines to reduce tip-over accidents that can pin riders beneath the mower. Study hilly areas of the yard prior to mowing so you know which areas are safe to mow with a riding mower and which areas are best mowed with a walk-behind mower. For greater control when using a walk-behind mower on an incline, mow parallel to the slope.

- Apply and reapply sunscreen. Sunburns may not require trips to the emergency room, but they can



LAWN AND garden accidents and injuries can be serious. Thankfully, accidents and injuries are easily prevented when homeowners take a few simple safety precautions while tending to their lawns and gardens.

still be serious. In fact, the Skin Cancer Foundation notes that sunburn is a leading cause in the majority of cases of basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The SCF recommends applying sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside to allow the sunscreen to bond to your skin. Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours, and more often if you're sweating excessively. The SCF recommends broad spectrum sunscreens, which protect the skin from both UVA and UVB rays. Though a product with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 is acceptable when walking the dog or driving to work, the SCF advises using a product with an SPF of 30 or higher when engaging in extended outdoor activities like gardening or mowing.

- Employ the buddy system. Use the buddy system when pruning tall trees or performing any tasks that require a ladder. The Orthopedic Institute of Pennsylvania reports that more than 164,000 people are in-

jured each year falling off a ladder. Ask a significant other or neighbor to hold the ladder in place while you climb up to reduce your risk of falling. If cutting large branches, cut them piecemeal to reduce the risk of being injured by heavy falling branches.

- Inspect the property for insect hives. The OIP notes that the most common insect stings in spring come from bees, wasps and hornets. Homeowners who are not careful can inadvertently come across hives when doing spring cleanup, making them vulnerable to bites and stings. That can be very dangerous for anyone, and especially so for people with a history of allergic reactions to insect bites or stings. Inspect areas where you'll be working to make sure insects haven't put down roots in your property. If you discover any hives and are hesitant to remove them on your own, contact a local landscaping firm.

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Lawn watering and fertilizing techniques

A lush, green lawn is a sight to behold. Many variables are involved in growing and maintaining grass, and water and fertilizer are among the most important components.

Knowing how much water and fertilizer to apply and when to apply it can make a big difference in the appearance and health of a lawn. That's because a well-fed and watered lawn will develop a better root system, which makes the lawn less vulnerable to stressors like drought, mowing, foot traffic, and heat, according to the Scotts® company.

Fertilize

There is no magic formula governing when to fertilize a lawn. The type of grass and how well-established a lawn is must be considered. Experts suggest having the soil tested to determine its pH levels and if any nutrients are lacking. A fertilizing schedule can then be developed after

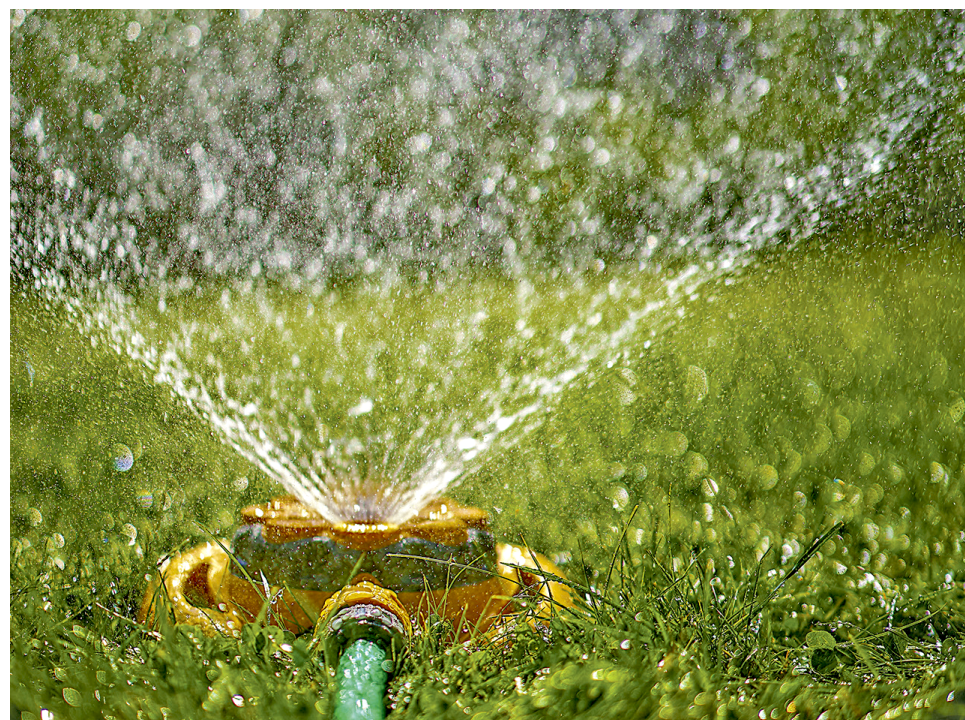
testing.

Keep in mind that overfeeding a lawn will not make it grow any better and actually can damage the turf. Several small applications of fertilizer during the lawn's most active growing period may be helpful, advises the home improvement resource Tools Around the House. An annual application (late spring for warm-season grass or fall for cool-season grass) may be all that's needed.

Certain fertilizers need to be applied and watered in. Others may be combined with weed-control products and must be set on top of damp grass. Read packaging to determine the right application.

Water

The right watering schedule and techniques can help a lawn thrive. Scotts® says adjusting for climate and nature can help grass to grow



strongly. A lawn that has a grayish cast or appears dull green is telling an owner that it needs water. Another test is to step on the lawn. If footprints disappear quickly, the grass blades have enough moisture to spring back.

Water the lawn in the morning before 10 a.m. when it's cooler and the winds tend to be calm so that the water can soak in. For those who must water at night, do so in early evening

so that the water can dry before nightfall and will not contribute to disease.

Scotts® says to water an established lawn until the top six to eight inches of soil is wet. Most lawns need one to 1.5 inches of water per week from rain or a hose to soak the soil that deeply.

Newly established lawns may require more water to keep the soil moist but not soggy.

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Did you know?

Leisure activities may be widely viewed as fun ways to fill up free time, but the benefits of leisure activities extend beyond beating boredom. A 2011 analysis published in the journal *BBA Molecular Basis of Disease* found that leisure activities have a positive impact on cognitive function and dementia. The analysis, conducted by researchers with the Aging Research Center in Stockholm who examined various studies regarding the relationship between certain activities and cognitive function, defined leisure activity as the voluntary use of free time for activities outside the home. After retirement, leisure time constitutes a large part of many retirees' lives, and finding ways to fill that time is more beneficial than merely avoiding boredom.

The researchers behind the study concluded that the existing research is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions regarding the effects of certain types of leisure activities on the risk for dementia and cognitive decline, though they did note that multi-domain cognitive training has the potential to improve cognitive function in healthy older adults and slow decline in affected individuals. A multi-domain approach to cognitive training involves memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and map reading, among other activities. Aging adults who embrace activities that require the use of such skills may find that they're not only finding stimulating ways to fill their free time, but increasing their chances of long-term cognitive health as well.



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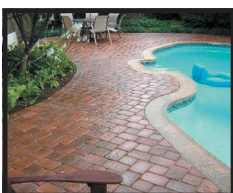
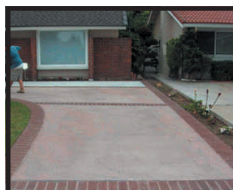
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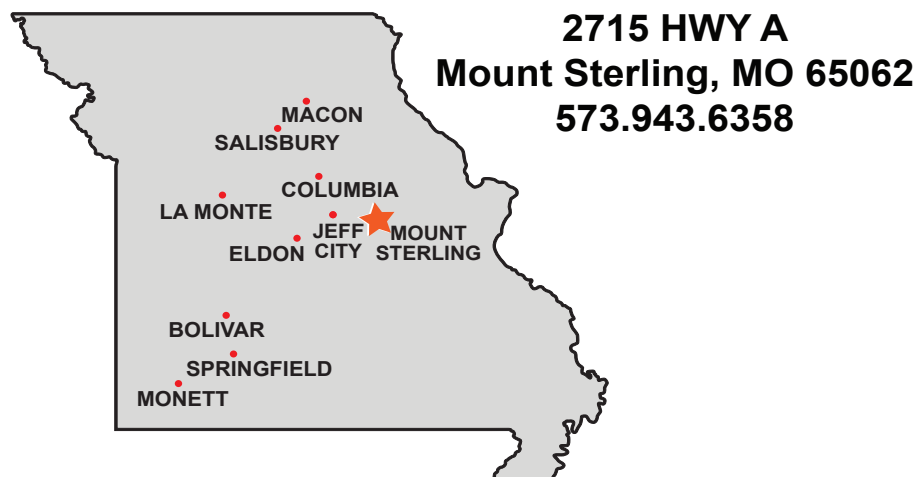
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Did you know?

Weeding is a chore few gardeners relish. Weeds can seemingly pop up overnight. And when left to their own devices, weeds can quickly grow out of control. There are a few key tips to weeding that can make the process easier. First off, start with wet soil. Choose to weed after it rains, as wet soil makes it easier to pull the full weed, including the root, out of the ground. Removing the weed all the way down to its root prevents it from growing back. If there's no rain in the forecast, water the garden before attempting to remove weeds. If the ground is compacted and you're weeding in a pinch, at least remove the head of the weed to prevent seeds from spreading and starting new weed growth.

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Shade trees that can make yards more comfortable

Various factors motivate the decisions homeowners make when designing their landscapes. Some may be motivated by the ways additions will affect the resale value of their homes, while others may be guided by a love for a particular type of plant. Comfort is yet another motivator, and shade trees can make yards more comfortable as the mercury rises. According to the Arbor Day Foundation, the following are some popular shade trees that can add beauty to a landscape and make it more comfortable come the dog days of summer.

- **Quaking aspen:** The quaking aspen has the widest natural range of any tree in North America, spanning 47 degrees of latitude, 110 degrees of longitude (nine time zones) and elevations from sea level to timberline. That impressive range is no doubt why the United States Forest Service notes that the quaking aspen can grow in greatly diverse regions, environments and communities.

- **Northern catalpa:** The Arbor Day Foundation notes that the northern catalpa is easily identifiable thanks to its heart-shaped leaves and twisting trunks and branches. Nature enthusiasts, and particularly those who enjoy birdwatching, may be happy to learn that the flowers of the catalpa are frequently visited by hummingbirds.

- **Red sunset maple:** Its name

alone makes many people think of lazy summer days spent lounging in the yard. The red sunset maple provides ample shade and comes with the added benefit of producing an awe-inspiring blend of red and orange leaves come the fall. Red sunset maples can survive in a range of habitats and their adaptable roots means they can thrive in various soil types.

- **Northern red oak:** The state tree of New Jersey, the northern red oak is, according to the Arbor Day Foundation, both beloved for its aesthetic appeal and valued for its adaptability and usefulness. Northern red oaks can tolerate urban conditions, but they do not do well in hot climates.

- **Sawtooth oak:** Another tree that produces some awe-inspiring color, the sawtooth oak is a durable, adaptable shade tree. Golden yellow leaves in the spring will give way to dark green in summer, only to turn yellow and golden brown in the fall. The Tree Center Plant Supply Co. notes that the sawtooth oak can thrive in warmer climates where shade trees that can coexist with high temperatures can be hard to find.

Shade trees can add beauty to a property and make a yard more comfortable. Homeowners are urged to discuss shade trees with a local lawn and garden professional prior to planting.



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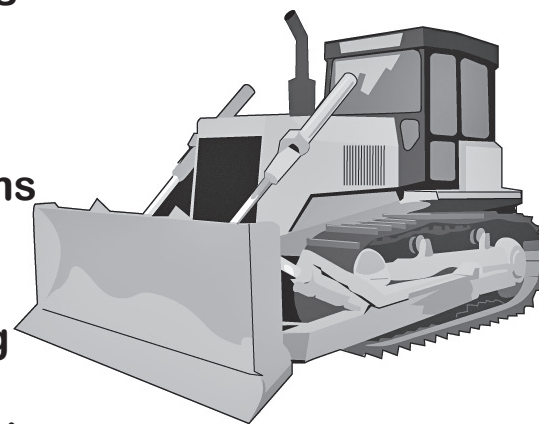
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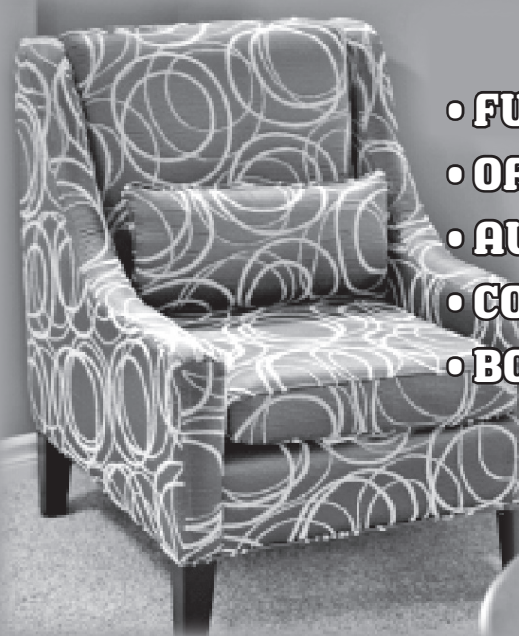
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A lesson in building a backyard retaining wall

Flat, even landscapes are often coveted in backyards. However, flat backyards are not always so easy to find. Fortunately, varied terrain does not mean that certain landscaping plans are entirely off limits, especially for homeowners willing to build retaining walls.

Retaining walls help turn steep slopes in a yard into terraced focal points. They also can reduce soil erosion in hilly areas and can be used for aesthetic purposes, like raised planters, or to create more usable space within the yard. When an inground pool or pond is cut into a backyard hill, a retaining wall helps keep the remaining portion of that hill from collapsing into the cut-away area.

When contemplating retaining wall projects, a lesson in physics and engineering may be needed. A sturdy and long-lasting retaining wall needs to be built in a way that will take into consideration the force of the soil and the point at which the soil will begin to slide away, advises the experts at The Family Handyman. If these calculations seem beyond the scope of your ability, installation of a retaining wall is a job best left to a professional. If you are ready to forge ahead, these tips can get you started. However, it's important to note the potential benefits of working with others who have already built a retaining wall.

- Safety first: Call to have un-



derground utilities plotted and marked before beginning any excavation.

- Map out your trench and begin to dig. The trench should have a level, compacted base as it will be the foundation for which the retaining wall materials, be they blocks, bricks or wood, sit in. A crushed stone base will help anchor the courses and serve to promote drainage. The Family Handyman says to bury the first course of the retaining wall one-tenth the height of the wall to prevent soil behind it from pushing the bottom out.

- Check for level. When placing blocks or timbers, make sure they are even with the first and periodically check for level as you go, advises the home improvement

retailer Lowes®.

- Stagger and set back. The next row of blocks or material should be positioned so that the joints are staggered for blocks, bricks or wood. A masonry blade will be needed to cut the harder materials; a circular saw will cut timber. Also, work against gravity by setting the second course

slightly back from the first to help push back against the soil that is trying so hard to push forward. Repeat the process as each level is placed. Many retaining wall products are made with a lip to create this set back.

- Go with the grade. For especially steep slopes, a gradual step-up design may be more secure and more appealing than a very tall retaining wall. Each level of a stepped design should be done like the first.

- Backfill with stone for drainage. Using a layer of stone behind the retaining wall can help successfully direct water away so it will not increase the weight of the soil behind the wall and push against the retaining wall, advises The Home Depot.

Retaining walls serve different purposes in a yard. Building such a wall requires planning and careful execution to ensure the job is done correctly.

Did you know?

Carpet can add warmth and texture to a room and also provide a little bit of soundproofing. Underfoot, carpeting can be more comfortable than other types of flooring, even though it may require more upkeep. Carpet comes in various forms, but here are the main material components.

- Nylon: This is one of the most durable and stain-resistant carpet fibers available and a popular choice among many homeowners.

- Polyester: Carpeting can be

made from polyester, which is fashioned to feel and look luxurious.

- Olefin: Olefin is made from polypropylene or polyethylene. It is prized for its strength, resistance to staining and color-fastness. It is often suited well to loop pile or high, dense cut piles.

- Wool: Wool is durable, albeit less resistant to soiling than some other materials. However, because it is an all-natural material, it is prized by people who want natural beauty.

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The many benefits of houseplants

The lines between the outdoors and indoors are being blurred. Homeowners build extensive outdoor living spaces so they can relax on weather-resistant furniture and even cook in lavish kitchens in their backyards. In addition, indoor three-season rooms full of bright, open windows that showcase outdoor vistas challenge the boundaries between outside and inside.

For those working with limited budgets, there are some easy, inexpensive ways to enjoy the majesty of natural landscapes indoors. Houseplants can be used to improve indoor spaces, and they also provide various health benefits.

Help with allergies

According to WebMD, rooms with houseplants tend to have less dust and mold in them than those without any foliage. Leaves and other parts of the plants serve as natural filters, catching airborne particles and allergens. Plants with textured leaves might be especially effective at trapping particles.

Put more oxygen into the air

The human respiratory system works by bringing in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide. Plants do the opposite during photosynthesis. They absorb carbon dioxide and then release oxygen. Plants can put much more oxygen into the air, improving indoor conditions.

Increase indoor humidity and reduce illness

Studies from the Agricultural University of Norway found that indoor plants can increase humidity in indoor spaces, which decreases the incidences of sore throats, dry coughs, dry skin, and the common cold. Higher absolute humidity can decrease the chances of survival and transmission of the flu virus.

Filter the air

Researchers who presented their work at the 252nd National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society found certain houseplants can combat the potentially harmful effects of volatile organic compounds. Plants may help filter out VOCs like benzene, acetone and formaldehyde, which can enter indoor air via cleaning supplies, dry-cleaned clothes, furniture, printers, and paints.

Improve interior atmosphere

Prevention magazine says plants can be used to screen unattractive areas, moderate room temperature by shading spots from the sun and even reduce noise. Plants also can improve ambiance and create a pleasing atmosphere in a room.

Can improve mood

Growing and caring for plants can alleviate everyday stress. A nationwide study from UK Magazine Gardeners World found 80 per-

cent of gardeners declared themselves satisfied with life compared to 67 percent among non-gardeners. Gardeners were more positive mentally. Greenery can help people feel more at home and improve mental health. A rehab center in Norway found patients reported a greater increase in well-being four weeks after having greenery added to their surroundings.

Houseplants can improve indoor areas and positively affect personal health.



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Brood X ready to make its presence known

Just when people thought it may be safe to take a collective breath after the roller coaster year that was 2020, something big is on the way — and they're planning on arriving in the billions.

Brood X, also known as the Great Eastern Brood, will be emerging from the soil after many years developing underground. Brood X is a generation of cicadas (*magicicada cassinii*) that only appears once every 17 years. Scientists group cicadas based on the year they see the light of day after growing in subterranean bunkers. Some emerge annually, some after 13 years and others after 17 years. Scientists speculate that the unusual, prime-numbered life cycles prevent generations of cicadas from having run-ins with the life cycles of wasps that prey on them. Another theory says the timing reduces the likelihood that 17-year cicadas will mate and hybridize with cicadas of different species or generations.

Brood X is one of the most widespread and prolific cicada generations. The insects are likely to appear mostly along the eastern coast of the United States, but could extend as far west as Missouri and Illinois. Cicadas are preparing to climb trees, start their incessant mating calls, which experts at Iowa State University note have been likened to "pressing scissors against a grind wheel in rapid succession," and shed their exoskeleton shells in a neighborhood near you. Expect to start seeing them in late April and early May.

Cicadas are unique insects. Despite their large size and bulbous eyes, cicadas aren't harmful to humans. Nymphs live in the soil and feed on roots. Mature adults come out in the spring to breed and lay eggs after being triggered by warmer soil temperatures. The University of Florida's Book of Insect Records says the noises cicadas "sing" are how they communicate, reproduce and even scare predators away. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Ser-

vices states that cicada songs can reach 90 decibels, which is the equivalent of the noise made by a lawn mower or dirt bike.

It is easy to distinguish cicadas from other insects. Cicadas quite large, measuring at .75 to 2.25 inches in length. They have stout bodies, broad heads and clear-membraned wings, according to National Geographic. Cicadas do not eat vegetation, but drink the sap from tree roots, twigs and branches. They also don't decimate crops like locusts can, though large swarms may overwhelm and damage young trees. Adults will die four to six weeks after emerging, so there's limited time to get to know this insect before it's gone for another 17 years. Apart from hearing their calls, people know cicadas have arrived when they find discarded cicada shells on their properties, which are left behind after the insects molt.

Brood X is waiting to peek out of the soil, and communities will have about a month to cohabitate with these interesting insects before they say, "Until we meet again."



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What causes curled shingles?

No homeowner wants to look at the exterior of his or her home and see roof damage. Such damage may lead homeowners to think they need a new roof, a potentially costly expense that can quickly throw household budgets into a state of disarray.

According to the HomeAdvisor, the average homeowner spends a little more than \$7,600 installing a new roof. Various factors, including the size of a home and the type of roof homeowners prefer, will affect the cost of a roof replacement. In addition, homeowners who see roof damage can rest assured that not all roof problems will necessarily require a replacement roof to be installed.

Curled shingles are a problem many homeowners have encountered. This particular problem is not always indicative that a roof is on its way out. In fact, the home improvement resource This Old House notes that, as asphalt shingles age, their corners often begin to curl downward or upward. Homeowners who notice this early enough

can glue down the curled section of each shingle that's beginning to curl.

Some shingles may be curling because they're defective. Fortified Roofing, a New Jersey-based roofing company that specializes in the repairing and replacing of various roofing configurations, advises homeowners to contact a local roofing professional to diagnose the cause of the curling. Doing so quickly can prevent curled shingles from contributing to more widespread damage.

Moisture and poor ventilation may be contributing to curled shingles as well. Homeowners with attics in their home may see curled shingles on their roofs because moisture is building up in their poorly ventilated attics. In addition to causing damage such as curled shingles, a poorly ventilated attic allows moisture to build up, potentially contributing to mold growth. Mold presents a host of additional problems, including some that can adversely affect the health of a home's inhabitants.

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How to recognize when you can stop mowing

Each weekend in spring, summer and fall, millions of homeowners fire up their mowers and cut the grass in their yards. A few hours spent mowing the lawn can be a great time to get some sun and some exercise in the great outdoors.

As fall gradually transitions to winter, homeowners may wonder when to stop mowing their lawns. Each lawn is different, and when to stop mowing may depend on a host of factors, including local climate and the type of turf. In addition to climate and turf, homeowners can keep an eye on these conditions to determine when the time is right to put their mowers away for the winter.

- **Frost:** Warm-season grasses typically go dormant after a couple of significant frosts. Homeowners can jot down each frost during fall. Frosts are most noticeable in the early morning hours, so be sure to check lawn conditions each morning as the weather

begins to grow cold. Frost may be noticeable without even going outside, but homeowners may need to go outside to check on chilly mornings or on days when the previous night was especially cold. If you must go outside, stay off the grass to protect it. Two or three frosts might be enough to make warm-season grasses go dormant for the winter. Cool-season grasses may keep growing and require mowing even after a few frosts, so it's imperative that homeowners determine which type of grass is in their yards.

- **Soil temperature:** If it's hard to determine if frosts have occurred, homeowners can try checking the temperature of their soil to decide if they need to keep mowing. The lawn care experts at Pennington recommend homeowners continue mowing warm-season grasses so long as they keep growing. Lawns may not grow as quickly in fall as they do in spring or summer, and



growth may not be as visible to the naked eye during this time of year as it is in other times. Homeowners can routinely check soil temperature to determine if their grasses have stopped growing. Warm-season grasses tend to stop growing once the soil temperature is consistently at 55 F or below, while cool-season grasses tend to stop when temperatures are 45 F or lower.

Falling leaves have long been a barometer used by homeowners to determine if they need to keep mowing their lawns. That's not necessarily a reliable

metric, as grass can still keep growing even if leaves have been falling for weeks. In addition, using a mulching mower when leaves begin falling is a great way to provide the lawn with nutrients it can use throughout the winter. Some trees shed their leaves more quickly than others, but it's a good rule of thumb that lawns will need to keep being mowed if trees are still retaining more than half their leaves.

A host of factors can help homeowners determine when it's safe to put their mowers away for the winter.

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Exploring different backyard structures

Designing an ideal backyard space requires forethought and an eye for style. Knowing which features to include in a yard often boils down to what homeowners want to achieve in the space. Will it be a relaxing oasis or a central entertaining focal point?

People often look to various structures to add height and visual interest to outdoor spaces. Homeowners will likely come across structures like arbors, gazebos, pergolas, and even trellises as they wade through the variety of features they can incorporate into backyard plans. Each of these structures can add appeal, but they also can offer shelter from the sun and privacy when enjoying the yard. There are significant differences between each structure, so here's an in-depth look at what sets them apart.

- **Arbor:** An arbor is one of the more simple garden structures. It is usually a frame that is arched or square-cornered. Most homeowners use it as an entryway to a garden or even the front of the home. Those

with green thumbs may cover the arbor with climbing and trailing plants. The Spruce says arbors date back to early Egyptian and Roman gardens and were used throughout Europe by the late 16th century.

- **Pergola:** The words arbor and pergola are often used interchangeably, but to suggest the two structures are the same would not be accurate. Pergola comes from the Italian word "pergula," which means "projection." Pergolas were once projected from exterior walls and supported on one side by pillars or columns. Today, arbors are usually freestanding units with two or four posts. Pergolas may be connected on one side to a home or another structure. Some are freestanding units supported by four posts. Pergolas tend to be larger and offer more privacy and shade than arbors.

- **Gazebo:** Gazebos are more defined garden buildings, states the contractor referral site Network. Gazebos are freestanding units that can



be built in various shapes. Some are octagonal, others are square. Like a pergola, a gazebo is supported by columns and may have low railings or built-in benches. Gazebos also may have a more solid roof than arbors or pergolas, providing sun and other weather protection. The roof may have added architectural appeal, like a cupola.

- **Trellis:** A trellis is a simple, geometrically-shaped structure that provides a surface for climbing plants. A trellis also may support fruit-bearing trees. Trellis work may be used in conjunction with an arbor or pergola, or be installed on fencing.

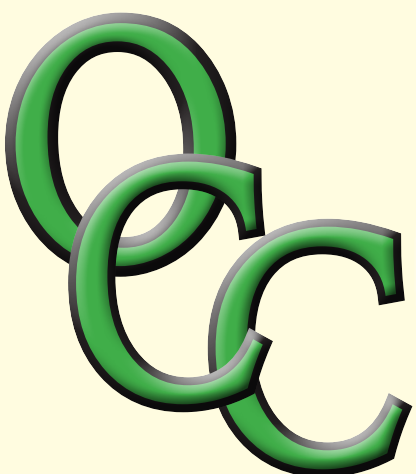
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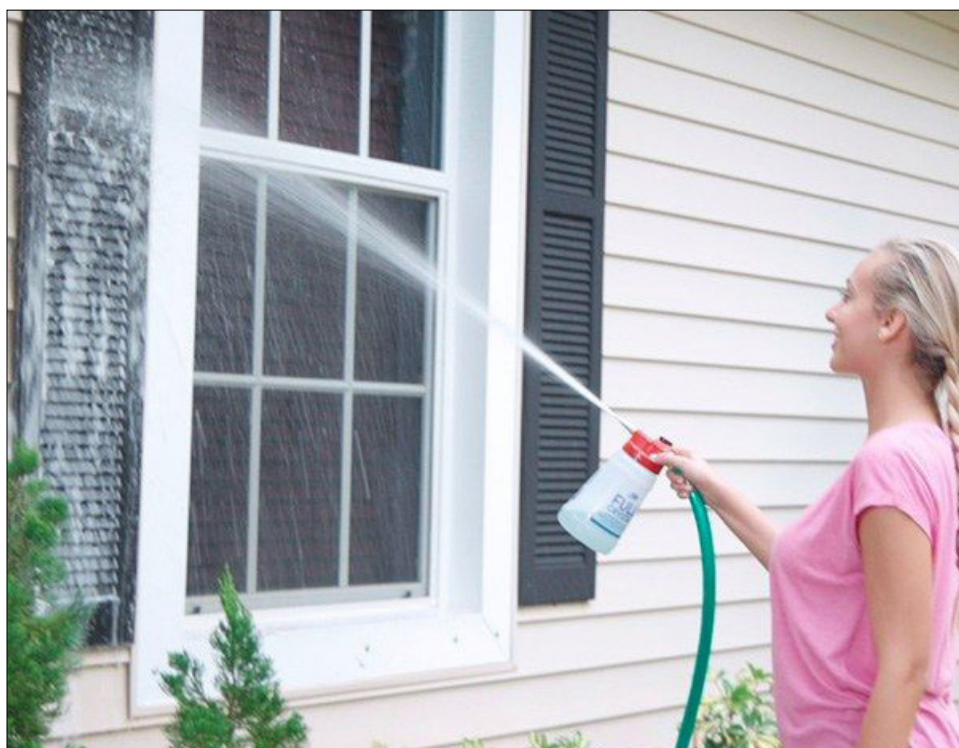
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How to remove mildew from your home's exterior

Homeowners want their residences to look inviting inside and out. Part of keeping an attractive property involves addressing issues that can compromise not only the appearance of a home, but even its integrity.

People who live in regions with high humidity may find their homes are vulnerable to exterior mildew growth. Mildew is a kind of mold. Molds include all species of microscopic fungi that grow in the form of hyphae, which are multicellular filaments, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Mold thrives on any organic matter and surfaces with moisture management problems. Mildew, in particular, lives on shower walls, windowsills and other places where moisture levels are high. Mildew also can grow on home siding as well as fences and other exterior structures. While typically gray or white, mildew can be various colors.

Experts recommend various cleansers to help combat the issue of mildew on a home. One of the first products that homeowners tend to reach for is sodium hypochlorite, which is a standard bleach used in laundry and pool sanitation. While sodium hypochlorite seems to make mildew vanish, those at This Old House say that chlorine evaporates too quickly to get to mildew's roots on porous surfaces, such as wood or vinyl siding. Bleach also can stain clothing and damage foliage around the house. Hydrogen peroxide, or oxygen bleach, is less volatile, will not affect foliage and can clean mildew, algae and dirt on and below the surface.

Trisodium phosphate is another effective cleanser. Commonly known as TSP, it often succeeds where other solutions fail in regard to stubborn stains and mildew. TSP also works well on various exterior surfaces. TSP needs to be used with extreme caution. When using TSP, wear long sleeves, gloves, goggles, and a respiratory mask, says Today's Homeowner. The product also requires adequate ventilation. There also are some environmental concerns, as TSP can damage foliage. In addition, if the product ends up in lakes and streams, it can trigger an overgrowth of algae that results in the depletion of oxygen levels in the water. Eco-conscious homeowners may want to try oxy cleansers before TSP.

Mildew shies away from bright sunlight, so it tends to grow on the north side of homes. Removing trees or other foliage that can further block sunlight to areas of the house can help eradicate mildew growth and stop it before it starts. Another tactic is to clean out gutters regularly and thoroughly to reduce moisture and to prevent decomposing debris from running over the edge of the gutters. This runoff can drip down the home's siding and spread the mildew to other areas.

Mildew can be problematic any time of year. Clean up mildew when the weather cools down to spruce up the look of a home.

Did you know? Outdoor living is wildly popular, as more and more homeowners are bringing elements once reserved for home interiors into their backyards. When designing outdoor living spaces, homeowners may learn about biophilic design, an architectural concept that aims to incorporate natural elements into outdoor living spaces. Proponents of biophilic design say it satisfies an innate human need to affiliate with nature, thereby helping to reduce stress that people may experience after being stuck indoors for much of their days. Biophilic design is often part of a home interior design, but many homeowners also embrace it when designing their outdoor living spaces. For example, surrounding outdoor living areas with noninvasive plants, flowers and trees and using natural materials like wood and stone when building such spaces are great ways to embrace biophilic design and create a tension-free ambiance in outdoor living spaces.

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Why weeds can be found everywhere

The ubiquitous nature of weeds can make them seem like they can grow anywhere, and that's because they can. Weeds can grow anywhere there's room for them to sprout, including gardens, sidewalks, driveways, and parking lots. One of the things that helps weeds spread so much is how productive they can be at producing seeds. An actively growing weed plant will produce thousands of seeds and disperse those seeds throughout the season. One of the more recognizable weeds is the dandelion. During its growing season, a dandelion can effectively spread its seeds thanks in large part to the wind, which can blow seeds all over, thereby allowing a single dandelion to spread its seeds far and wide. Penn State Extension notes that successful weed plants share many characteristics, including an ability to reproduce both sexually and asexually. Successful weed plants also are clever in terms of getting around, as their seeds can attach to people and animals and even float on water. Weeds also put up a fight when they're confronted by humans. Humans who try to pull weeds may instead break them. The broken weeds can then resprout, ultimately spreading their seeds again. The resiliency of weeds also is evident in their ability to stay dormant for long periods of time. For example, weeds can stay in the soil for years before germinating, proving that these unwelcome guests aren't just pesky, but also patient.

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Sod vs. seed: Which is your best option?

A pristine lawn can be the finishing touch to a landscape and add significant value to a home. According to a joint study by the University of Alabama and the University of Texas at Arlington, homes with high curb appeal sell for an average of 7 percent more than similar houses without inviting exteriors.

When it comes to establishing a lawn, homeowners have two key options: starting from seed or installing sod. Each comes with its share of advantages and disadvantages. Which option makes the most sense for a given lawn will boil down to various factors, including homeowners' budgets.

Seed

Seed is the first thing homeowners may think of when planning a lawn. Seed is an inexpensive, easily installed option. Plus, garden centers sell a variety of seeds specific to particular regions and climates. The home improvement resource Fixr says seed will cost an average of 24 cents per square foot installed compared to \$1.29 for sod. That afford-

ability compels many homeowners to turn to seed. However, seed can take up to two years to produce a lush lawn and it requires high maintenance in the initial months to establish the grass.

Seed also requires greater soil preparation, including tilling to loosen soil and keeping the lawn well watered until the grass is hardy. Weeds also may mix in with seed more readily, meaning weed prevention becomes an additional task.

Sod

One of the advantages to sod is that it can produce an instant lawn. When time is of the essence, sod will produce a complete lawn nearly as soon as the sod is laid. Sod can be used to mitigate soil erosion, as it works faster than seed, which

needs to establish a root system to keep soil in check. Also, sod does not require as much soil preparation as seed.

The potential disadvantages to sod are its cost and the time it takes to install it, particularly on a large property. In addition, sod will require careful maintenance for at least the first two weeks until the sod takes stronger roots. It can be an expensive mistake if sod doesn't thrive and new pieces need to be installed. The Family Handyman says sod tends to be sun-loving and may not work in shadier areas of a property.

Sod and seed are the two main options for lush lawns. Each has its perks, and homeowners can speak with a local lawn specialist to determine which option is best for their lawn.

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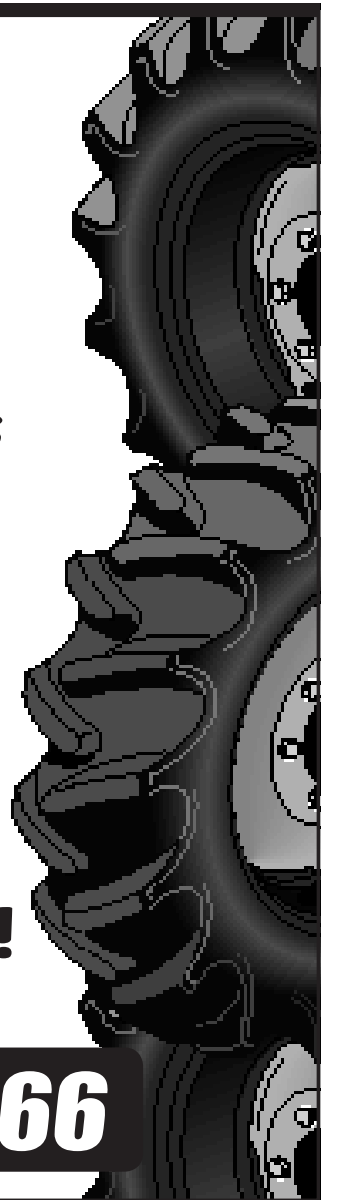
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