

Spring **HOME** and Garden

Solar energy's growing popularity draws more homeowners with questions

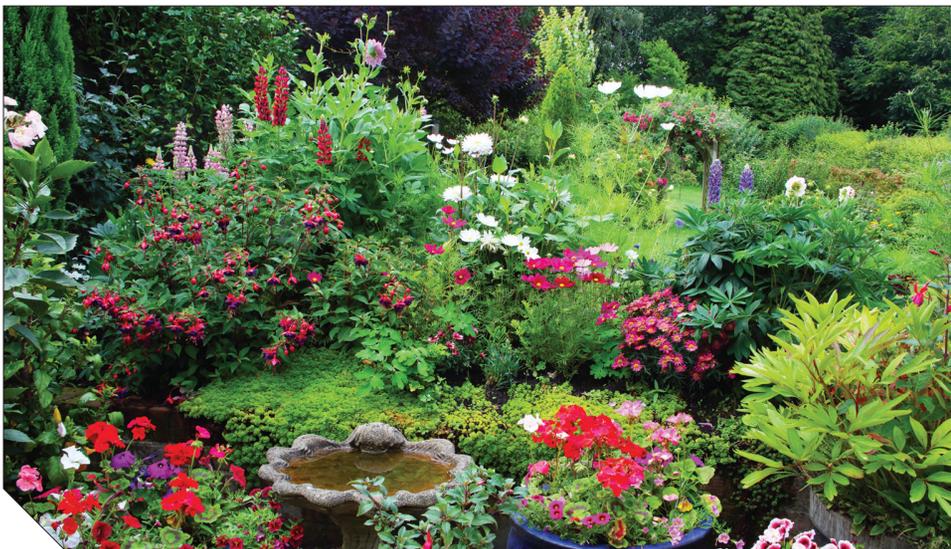
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PAGES 1B - 32B



Solar energy's growing popularity draws more homeowners with questions



BY EDWARD GEHLERT
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Solar energy as an alternative source to traditional power generation is becoming more popular in the United States, primarily due to the long-term savings it brings to the average household and the sense of self-reliance it imparts to those utilizing the technology.

Three Rivers Electric Cooperative Manager of Member Services Rich Eisterhold noted that the government is talking about alternative energies, including solar and wind.

"I think that puts it at the front of people's minds, and prices have fallen within the last several years," said Eisterhold, a solar power enthusiast who has been with Three Rivers for 34 years.

The dropping cost of equipment and installation of solar energy systems is one of the deciding factors for people who have been toying with the idea of using solar panels to supplement their energy needs.

"One of the earlier systems installed on a home east of here, after a Department of Agriculture grant, came to a net cost of \$5.50 per watt," said

Eisterhold. "So, a 10,000-watt system cost them \$55,000. Today, that same system costs less than \$3 per watt."

Damage to such expensive equipment is a concern for many homeowners. Though modern solar panels are durable, damage can still occur, but homeowner's insurance will cover this in many cases. "Solar panels are pretty tough," said Eisterhold. "They have a tempered glass cover. Solar panels are 100 percent capacity at day one. There is a linear depreciation, so they depreciate half to one percent annually. After so many years of depreciation, if hail destroys them, your homeowner's insurance will replace them."

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), solar power accounted for 3 percent of U.S. electricity generation from all sources in 2021 and is expected to increase to 20 percent by 2050. For perspective, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), roughly 4 percent of homes in the U.S. are powered by solar energy.

Renewable sources of electricity generation accounted for almost 20 percent of the total amount produced in 2021. These sources included solar,

See **Solar**, Page 3B

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Solar • from page 2B

wind, hydro, biomass, and geothermal. By comparison, other traditional sources of power generation measured were nuclear (19 percent), coal (22 percent), and natural gas (38 percent). Petroleum sources came in at .5 percent and included petroleum liquids, petroleum coke, other gases, and hydroelectric pumped storage.

When homeowners are researching what system is best for them, Eisterhold advises them first to decide if they want an on-grid or off-grid connection.

“When you’re off-grid, your solar is completely independent of anything Three Rivers Electric,” he said. “You put your solar system in, put some outlets in, and whatever you plug into those outlets only works when the solar is there or if you have solar and battery.

“If you grid-tie, which is the other option, you buy a special inverter that has the ratings we require,” Eisterhold continued. “Once it’s installed, you’ll connect it directly to your electrical system, the electrical panel at your house.

“When the inverter is connected to the grid, it provides everything to the house first,” Eisterhold added. “If your house needs more, it will get solar and Three Rivers at the same time. If your house needs less than what solar’s producing, it will go backward through a special meter that calculates on a monthly basis what you take from the grid and what you send to the grid via excess power. At the end of the month, we’ll bill you the difference between what you used and what you generated.”

Eisterhold noted the inverter is smart enough to know that it’s tied to the grid. “If the grid fails, quits, or goes on outage, the inverter shuts down in three cycles,” he explained. “It does this in a blink. It shuts off, so it’s not generating while we’re on outage. This protects us, it protects the linemen ... it protects everybody.”

However, being on-grid and pushing power back to your electric company does not mean you will get a check each month if you generate more energy than you use.

“Homeowners will never get a check in the state of Missouri,” said Eisterhold. “We follow state statutes. That statute says we will give you a credit. If you have excess energy, we’ll take the avoided cost — the average cost of fuel spent by our generators, typically two-and-a-half cents — at the end of the month, if you’ve generated 100 more than your house needed, we will give you a credit of \$2.50 that will stay on that

account for that month and will expire if you haven’t used it after 12 billing periods.”

Eisterhold is referring to Missouri State Statute 386.890, commonly called the “Net Metering and Easy Connection Act,” which outlines that when a renewable energy system is connected to the grid, the customer receives full retail credit for their generation to offset their electricity bill. Any excess generation beyond their monthly usage is credited to the customer at a wholesale rate.

Another deciding factor for those contemplating solar energy is the tax rebate that is still available from the government.

“Through the end of 2022, the rebate is 26 percent,” said Eisterhold of the investment tax credit (ITC), also known as the federal solar tax credit, adding that in 2023, that number will drop down to 22 percent.

In 2024, the credit will only be available to owners of new commercial solar energy systems, with credit being phased out for residential solar energy systems.

In December 2020, Eisterhold installed solar panels on his home. He decided on a solar system because he had always been fascinated by solar technology and wanted to experiment with it.

“In my particular case, it was new, and it was cool, and I was interested,” he said. “I also knew if I spent the money, I would get some kind of return out of it. For me, it was an experiment.”

Eisterhold’s solar energy system is capable of supplying his home with 100 percent of its power needs. For the average home to achieve this feat, the cost may seem daunting to many.

“Without a lifestyle change, it’s well over \$100,000 because of the batteries, which are very costly,” said Eisterhold. “With a lifestyle change, and if you’re willing to live without backup heating means, etc., I would guess a system that was \$50,000 with some batteries would accomplish a lot for your home.”

These up-front costs make most people nervous about installing solar energy in their homes or business. Still, Eisterhold says that if the systems are sized correctly with the right specifications, they will eventually more than cover the initial investment.

“Essentially, we charge \$.085,” he said. “We have to make some assumptions, but if you use everything your system generates,

See **Solar**, Page 4B

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Solar • from page 3B

and the system is 10,000 watts, and your net cost after the tax credit is \$20,000, that system will generate about \$1,100 per year. So, that's 16-18 years, and it's paid for itself."

Eisterhold cautions everyone to do their research before deciding on the system they feel is right for them and encourages people to visit www.threeriverselectric.com, where a lot of information is already provided.

"Solar works great if it is done correctly," Eisterhold. "There are rules to follow. We have a list of rules on our website. We have a lot of information under Net Metering in the Programs tab. It tells you how to do your research and what considerations you want to make. If you follow these steps, it will give you a lot of information. We are always here to help."

Eisterhold also recommends pwwatts.nrel.gov (without www.), which is operated by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), a national laboratory of the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, operated by the Alliance for Sustainable Energy, LLC.

The website allows users to pinpoint their exact location and provides information on the type of system specifications that should be used and the estimated power generation per year.

"Our experience with the NREL website shows that it is pretty accurate," said Eisterhold. "Typically, I would just use the zip code for the location. Generally, you're just looking for the latitude, which we're at 38 degrees."

It is important to note that Three Rivers Electric does not install solar panels or any equipment for the system, including the inverters.

"If you are tying to the grid, our involvement is compliance," said Eisterhold. "You send us your information,



and we review your application and your drawings. If they meet our criteria, we'll approve the installation. Once we approve, the installer goes out and does his work with the homeowner. When it's all finished, they'll call us back for a final review. We go out to the site and review that what you told us you were going to do you actually did, and if they match, we will set a special meter that measures both power sources."

One of the most important choices a property owner will make is selecting who will be the installer of their system. Eisterhold warns that there are a lot of "fly-by-night" companies and strongly encourages using local installers.

Currently, there are just over 100 users of solar energy across Cole, Franklin, Gasconade, Maries, Miller, Moniteau, and Osage, the seven counties serviced by Three

Rivers Electric Cooperative. This number is only for Three Rivers accounts and does not include Ameren customers.

The first modern silicon photovoltaic (PV) cell was developed by Gerald Pearson, Daryl Chapin, and Calvin Fuller in 1954 at Bell Labs in the United States. These were the first solar cells that had the ability to convert enough energy from the sun into electrical power to run common equipment of the time period.

Today, solar energy continues to see advancements in the field. New materials are constantly being developed and integrated with emerging technologies to create systems that are affordable, efficient, and durable.

Though the technology has been around for more than 65 years, there has been a resurgence of interest lately in solar energy as a cheap and renewable resource.



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Tech to make gardening more fun

Many people take to the great outdoors to escape the increasingly tech-driven daily grind. Though that's an understandable perspective, gardeners who aren't deploying tech in their home gardens could be missing out on a host of benefits that could help their plants, flowers and vegetables thrive.

Devices like smartphones and tablets have made many aspects of life easier and more efficient, and various tech products can do the same when working in the garden.

- **Plant monitor:** Plant monitors are sensors that can keep tabs on the health of plants and deliver that information to gardeners. Plant monitors often connect to smartphones via Bluetooth and can deliver information on the amount of heat, light and water a plant is getting. Sensors vary in price, and some will provide more information than others. But these sensors are ideal for gardeners who love their plants but often forget to check up on them each day.

- **Garden camera:** Critters and insects are the bane of many gardeners' existence. Determining just what is nibbling away at flowers and plants isn't always so easy, as many animals are savvy enough to restrict their dining to the middle of the night and insects are so small they can be hard to spot. Garden cameras can serve as the watchmen of a garden and gardeners can review

footage to determine just who is compromising all of their hard work. They can then use that knowledge to remedy the situation and give their plants a better chance to thrive.

- **Weather station:** Even the most seasoned gardeners cannot document the conditions outside as effectively as a good weather sensor. Weather sensors track conditions such as temperature, relative humidity and air quality. This information can then be paired with irrigation devices to ensure plants get all the care they need to thrive throughout the season.

- **Garden hub:** Avid gardeners have traditionally had to arrange for neighbors or loved ones to tend to their plants when they leave home for vacation or weekend getaways. Garden hubs can take care of that by pairing with smart irrigation systems that ensure plants are watered even when no one is home. Certain hubs even gather and analyze local weather conditions to develop a watering schedule to ensure plants thrive. These hubs aren't just handy when on vacation, as they can be great for gardeners who want to know things about their plants that are not apparent to the naked eye.

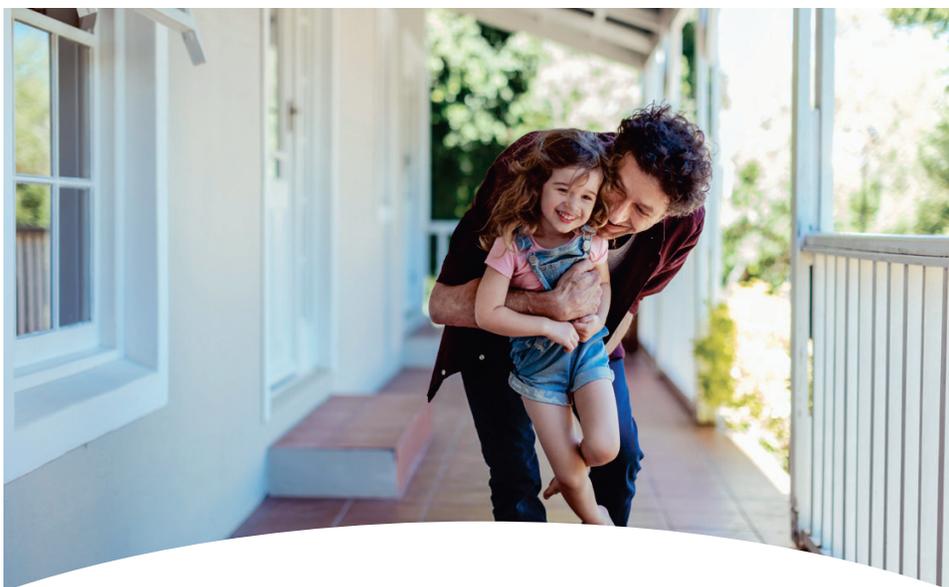
People may see their gardens as welcome respites from their devices. But garden gadgets can help plants thrive and make time in the garden that much more enjoyable.

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Guide to outdoor lighting

Lighting is an essential component of interior and exterior home design. Not only does lighting add style and make spaces more appealing, when done correctly, it also makes a home safer and more functional.

Homeowners who plan to utilize outdoor spaces like backyards, front porches and walkways to the fullest should think carefully about lighting. These guidelines can assist with selecting outdoor lighting fixtures.

Security lighting

Flood lights and security lights are a good investment for those who want to beef up visibility and security around the home. These lights are high-intensity and designed to illuminate large areas. The brightness and reach can serve as a preventive measure to keep animals and even criminals away. Motion-sensor lights will immediately engage if something crosses the path of the sensor. Some lights will remain on from dusk until dawn. Lowe's Home Improvement suggests using the correct wattage on outdoor security lights so they flood an area thoroughly without affecting neighboring properties.

Wall, post and ceiling lights

Outdoor lighting fixtures beyond security options come in a variety of styles, according to Lamps USA. Wall lights are mounted to the outdoor wall of the home. These typically flank doorways or the garage. Post lights are often installed on the posts of decks and porches, or are free-standing on properties, providing visibility but also style. Ceiling-mounted lights may be above doorways or installed in any structure that has an overhead area. Warm-colored temperature bulbs



in these fixtures can create an inviting atmosphere that is not too bright and jarring, especially when multiple lighting fixtures are working together. When selecting lighting for wall-mounted fixtures, experts suggest sizing up if you are not sure of the size to pick, as lights will look much smaller in scale from a distance.

Accent and landscape lighting

A bevy of accent lighting choices are available. Accent lighting is designed to enhance the mood and appearance of certain elements of a landscape. Accent lighting is not intended to add bright light. For example, upward-directed lights can be cast on trees or shrubs to accentuate their shapes. Accent lighting also may call out a structure, such as a garden or a fountain. While accent lighting may be hard-wired, homeowners who want the luxury of changing lighting can opt for solar fixtures, which are more mobile

but not as bright.

Additional pointers

When shopping for bulbs, consider the number of lumens. A standard 100-watt bulb produces around 1,600 lumens. Security lights should range from 700 to 1,300 lumens for optimal brightness. Other lights needn't be so bright.

Furthermore, ensure that any fixtures that are being used are safety-rated for outdoors. Wet-rated fixtures are designed to withstand direct exposure to outdoor elements, advises the design experts at Schoolhouse, a lighting and lifestyle goods company. Damp-rated fixtures are built for outdoor locations protected from harsh weather. Look for the product details or work with an electrician to choose the right lighting choices.

Lighting can transform outdoors spaces for the better.

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Five Tips for Gardening with Kids

After months of cool weather, the first hint of spring will likely have the whole family eager to dive into outdoor activities. This year, as you begin tackling the garden, find ways to get the youngest family members in on the action, too.

Not only is gardening an activity you can enjoy together, there are numerous ways to incorporate age-appropriate, teachable moments from counting and colors to responsible care of living things.

Creating a positive first experience with gardening can start with this simple advice:

- * Dedicate a spot for a junior garden, which allows you to instill a sense of pride and ownership in the little gardener while protecting your own garden areas from ambitious young hands.

- * Provide appropriate tools in child sizes. Just as you would teach a child the finer points of baseball using a bat and glove, demonstrate the joys of gardening with tools such as a rake,

hoe and trowel, all of which can be found in sizes more manageable for little helpers.

- * Let the kids choose what to plant. Whether flowers or food plants, allow children to make their own decisions (within reason) about what they would like to grow. This can help them engage in the magic of watching items they selected emerge from the ground and grow into their finished forms.

- * Encourage exposure to unfamiliar plants that entice the senses with appealing smells and flavors. Herbs such as chives, mint and basil are good choices, or consider edible flowers such as pansies or violets.

- * Set an example for your child to imitate by giving regular and proper care to your own garden.

Remember to bring the lesson full circle by enjoying the bounty of your garden together, whether it's a small hand-cut bouquet or a meal featuring your child's fresh-grown produce. Find more tips for gardening with your kids at eLivingtoday.com.



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On-Trend Home Designs for 2022

A home design that blends multiple elements seamlessly can be both inviting and visually interesting. If you're planning to upgrade your living space in 2022, consider incorporating materials like stone and brick, which bring color, texture and functionality while complementing some of this year's leading design trends.

Settling on a design aesthetic is the first step for most renovation projects, but it can be a challenge for many homeowners. If you're in need of inspiration for a project on the horizon, consider these 2022 trends from the design experts at Glen-Gery:

WARM COLORS

Look for a shift toward warmer colors like beige, tan, caramel, cocoa and even black. Designers are moving from cool grays to a warmer coffee-inspired palette. The use of warmer colors on structural elements of a home, like brick, stone, siding, doors and shutters, offer visual warmth while making a statement.

TEXTURES AND PATTERNS

Textures and patterns are popping up in many on-trend designs. Texture can enhance the overall feeling of a space by offering depth and complexity that draws a visitor into the room. The use of texture in a design element, like stone or brick, can provide visual interest and engage the mind with a tactile response that encourages interaction with the environment.

OUTDOOR INSPIRATION

Nature is inspiring an array of design elements this year. You may see this trend emerging through increased use of glass for light and views of nature, as well as continued focus on the versatile and transitional indoor-outdoor spaces that gained momentum during the height of the pandemic. Approaches may vary depending on the homeowner's style and climate, but examples include larger patios in brick and stone, as well as more functional private patios and porches. Another aspect of this trend is the tendency for homeowners to integrate indoor conveniences such as kitchens, fireplaces, furniture and electronics into

their outdoor spaces.

CLEAN LINES

This season, designers are creating inviting, comfortable and serene spaces with modern vibes through the use of clean lines in design, materials and furnishings. One trick is integrating elements that transfer light or give an illusion of illumination from a higher sheen, such as glass brick. The play of light and shadows simultaneously blends inspiration from nature with sleek lines and dramatic focal points to evoke a sense of balanced calm and strength. This approach can also come to life through ceiling windows, furnishings and the use of stone, brick and wood on statement walls or accents.

For more on-trend design ideas for your home, visit glengery.com.

BRINGING ON-TREND DESIGN INTO YOUR HOME

Brick is a versatile design material that fits virtually any trending design. From hand-made to glazed bricks and nearly everything in between, you can find building products in a diverse array of colors, textures and sizes to emphasize focal points and capture your target design aesthetic.

Brick carries a sense of tradition, character and timelessness while also serving as a popular choice for homeowners due to its design flexibility. With benchmark qualities such as low maintenance, resilience, durability, sustainability and beauty, brick can help homeowners balance function with appearance.

When looking for brick, consider a quality and reputable option like Glen-Gery, which offers an extensive line of more than 600 brick and stone products that provide nearly endless design possibilities and timeless beauty. The brickmaker's collections feature an assortment of both traditional and modern products to unique international items sourced from around the globe that evoke beauty, elegance and creativity.

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Six ways to make your garden more successful



Homeowners enjoy gardening for many different reasons. In addition to adding beauty to a property, gardens can offset grocery costs by yielding tasty produce. They also offer important habitats and food sources for both insects and animals.

While growing a vegetable or flower garden can turn into a rewarding hobby, or even a passion, gardening also can be overwhelming — particularly when the results are less than stellar. Novice gardeners have scores of resources at their disposal, including the advice of gardeners who have made mistakes and learned from them. The following guidance can make home gardens that much more successful.

1. Start small.

You may have visions of an expansive garden growing rows of crops or acres of flowers. But it is smart to start small and build on what you find successful, which includes plants that thrive in your lawn and garden.

This also is beneficial if you are unsure of vegetable yields. Several blooming plants producing bushels of crops can be overwhelming, especially if you can't get to harvesting or cooking them in a timely fashion.

2. Assess the soil.

Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce strong, hardy plants, according to the gardening resource GrowVeg.

See **Six ways** Page 13B



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Why excavation is best left to the professionals

When shopping for a home, buyers often try to envision themselves living in a given property. Images of family gatherings and holidays may instantly come to mind, but prospective homeowners also may begin to envision changes they would make to a property if they were eventually to call it home.

Changing an existing structure or building an entirely new home on an empty plot of land can be exciting. Such changes typically require excavation, which is a complicated process that may be necessary for projects big or small.

What is excavation?

Excavation is the process of extracting material from the ground by digging. Earth, rock and other materials may be moved during the excavation process.

Can do-it-yourselfers excavate?

Skilled DIYers who have participated in excavation projects in the past may be able to handle a project on their own. However, it's important that homeowners recognize that excavation is about more than just digging in the ground. It's a complicated process that requires the use of specialized tools and equipment. In addition, a strong understanding of the land that will be excavated is required for the project to be safe and go smoothly.

Why hire an excavation professional?

Even the most skilled DIYer might be better off hiring an excavation professional than going it alone. That's true for a number of reasons.

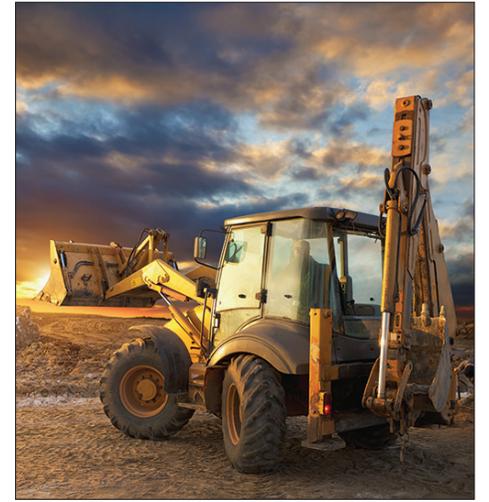
- **Liability:** Homeowners who hire a fully licensed and insured professional excavation firm can rest easy knowing that they will not be responsible for any damages or injuries that may occur during the project.

- **Permits/requirements:** A professional excavation firm typically files all the necessary paperwork for work permits or can advise which permits homeowners will need to go forward with the project. In addition, professionals will know the local laws regarding building and excavation. For example, homeowners may be unfamiliar with the concept of lateral support, which refers to landowners' right to have their land physically supported in its natural state by adjoining land and underground structures. This is an important concept to understand during an excavation project, and professionals can advise homeowners if a project they want to undertake will violate lateral support laws.

- **Experience:** Perhaps the best reason to work with excavation professionals is their experience. A lack of excavation experience can result in damage to a homeowner's property and surrounding properties, which

can prove costly. DIYers may not know the type of soil they have on their property nor recognize the different types of challenges each type of soil can present during an excavation project. Such knowledge comes with experience and is often invaluable.

Skilled DIYers can tackle many home improvement projects on their own. However, the complex nature of excavation makes these types of projects the kind that are best left to skilled professionals.



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Seven On-Trend Kitchen Upgrades

Designers from coast to coast are cooking up fresh ideas for kitchen upgrades. This year's hottest trends bring numerous fresh aesthetic approaches while functionality also plays a leading role in top design ideas.

If you are planning a kitchen upgrade, take inspiration from these on-trend elements spotted by the design experts at Wellborn Cabinet:

UNIQUE TILE

In recent years, backsplash tile has taken a more prominent role in kitchen design and has continued to grow in popularity to the point where tile is now a full-stop focal point. From eye-catching colors and patterns to texture that brings new dimension, kitchen tile can make a big statement. In fact, bold tile is not just limited to the backsplash. Patterned tile is an on-trend option for adding character to your flooring and dressing up commonly under-designed spaces like the window jamb with a practical material, like tile, that is easy to clean and maintain.

MULTIPLE APPLIANCES

Function is front and center in residential kitchen design this year, and homeowners' growing demands to go big on appliances is proof. From double ovens to extra dishwashers, homeowners are committing to more useful features. There are even some kitchens that boast two refrigerators, which may be a nod to the way grocery shopping habits shifted during the pandemic, with fewer, but larger, trips to the store.



WALK-THROUGH PANTRIES

Whether you are capitalizing on the mystique of a "hidden" room or attracted to the idea of a more seamless aesthetic, a walk-through pantry can be a stunning and functional solution. With a walk-through pantry, you can add extra space to an existing pantry to create a better flow to your floor plan. Available in a variety of widths and heights, Wellborn Cabinet's Walk-Through Pantry blends naturally into the rest of your cabinetry to create visual continuity. Integrated magnetic door catches add stability and keep doorways securely closed.

WOOD FINISHES

After years of painted cabinets and woodwork dominating kitchen design, wood grain finishes are making a comeback. The look is cozy and inviting, and with a

wide span of stain options, it is equally possible to take the look ultra-modern or veer toward a more traditional style. Outside of cabinetry, there is plenty of room to incorporate the warmth of wood, such as butcher-block counters or exposed beams.

GREEN, BLUE AND EARTH TONES

Jewel-inspired hues had their moment, but this season's color scheme is more about subtle shades that meld with neutrals for lighter, brighter spaces that feel airier and more spacious. Greens, in particular, pair well with an array of wood finishes, whether cabinetry, countertops or furnishings. Integrating greens, blues and other nature-in-

See **Kitchen**, Page 13B



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Kitchen • from page 12B

spired colors allows you to bring earthy serenity to a bustling and busy room, and this motif lends itself well to a design that creates a cohesive connection with adjacent outdoor living space.

CLEVER STORAGE SOLUTIONS

The kitchen is a busy place prone to clutter, and this season you will find multiple examples of practical solutions showing up in showcase kitchens. The features that can make your kitchen chores easier and neater come in all shapes and sizes. For example, discreet knife blocks tucked into drawers, drawer dividers for maximum customization and sliders that make it easy to empty the trash and recycling bins.

MARBLE COUNTERTOPS

Marble is not necessarily a new trend, but this year's attention is on slabs of marble with eye-catching veins that make counters really pop. For a fresh take on marble, forgo the typical white, gray or black styles in favor of color. Standout gold veining or even full slabs with stunning greens, blues and reds can make a statement. If budget is an issue, or you are worried about too much of a good thing, consider using a bold slab on a smaller space, like the island, rather than outfitting the entire kitchen.

Find more on-trend ideas to upgrade your kitchen at Wellborn.com.

Six ways • from page 10B

Nourish soil with organic matter, such as manure, compost, shredded leaves, and natural mulch. Add this organic matter in the off-season to give it enough time to be incorporated into the ground before spring. You can have your soil tested for pH and other characteristics that make it friendly or averse to plants at a local garden center.

3. Arm yourself with knowledge.

Do you know how deeply to plant seeds and how far apart to space plants? Are you aware of the sunlight needs of certain flowers or plants? If not, read the packaging and do your research so your plants have the best chance of not only sprouting, but also surviving. Many people prefer to start seedlings indoors in late winter and then transfer those plants outdoors when they are stronger and more established.

4. Sit in your yard and observe.

Watch the way the sunlight dances over areas of your landscape. Take note of which areas get the most sun and shade. This will help you plan what to plant and where to

plant it. Vegetable gardens tend to need ample sunlight to bear pick-worthy produce. You can give plants a leg up by growing them in optimal conditions.

5. Choose hardy varieties.

Certain plants have been bred to thrive in your climate, including heat-tolerant plants for climates with sweltering summer sun. Consult with a local gardening center to figure out which plant zone you are in and which plants will do best within that zone.

6. Use rainwater.

Rainwater contains fewer contaminants and additives than tap water, which can benefit garden plants. Collect rainwater in rain barrels and use irrigation systems to deliver it to the garden.

Home gardens can yield many gifts, from flowers to fruit. Beginners can utilize some time-tested strategies to increase their chances of planting a successful garden.

Did you know?

Homeowners should give due consideration to whether or not plants are considered invasive species before introducing new plants on their properties. According to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, invasive species of plants can lead to the extinction of native plants and animals. Invasive plant species also can reduce biodiversity and cause significant fundamental disruptions to local ecosystems. Though non-native plants are often cherished for their unique looks, homeowners planting new gardens or supplementing existing gardens with new plants are urged to plant only native species. Such an approach benefits plants and also local wildlife that depends on native plant species for food and cover.



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Missouri Tomato School set for May 19, 20

The Missouri Tomato School will be Thursday and Friday, May 19 and 20, at Woods Chapel United Methodist Church, 4725 NE Lakewood Way, Lee's Summit, Mo.

This state-wide tomato school brings together top experts in the field with regional experts and successful local tomato farmers to teach growers and serious hobbyists how to better grow Missouri's top selling vegetable. Out-of-state growers and ag educators are welcome.

Day one begins at 8:45 and will be in a socially-distanced classroom format. Day 1 presentations include: Tomato nutrient management, top ten best practices for tomato harvest and postharvest storage, tomato disease management, hydroponic tomato cultivation, beneficial insects vs pests, growing tomatoes in protective structures, using essential oils to control pests and comparing yields of grafted and non-grafted tomatoes

Day two will be a farm tour with on-site education at Redfearn Farm in Independence from 9 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. This conference features national and regional presenters including:

Dr. Rick Snyder, Mississippi State University — Dr. Snyder recently retired after serving 33 years as Extension/ Research Professor at the Truck Crops Experiment Station in Crystal Springs, Miss. His educational background includes a B.S. from the University of Connecticut, an M.S. from Ohio State University, and Ph.D. from Cornell University, all in horticulture. His areas of specialty include commercial production of greenhouse tomatoes and other vegetables, as well field vegetables. Dr. Snyder hosted the well-known

Mississippi Greenhouse Tomato Short Course for 28 years and is a highly sought speaker on all aspects of greenhouse tomato production. He continues to be a greenhouse columnist for American Vegetable Grower Magazine after 29 years and still enjoys speaking to growers' groups and doing some greenhouse consulting during his retirement.

Dr. T. Casey Barickman — Dr. Barickman is an Associate Research Professor at Mississippi State University's North Mississippi Research and Extension Center specializing in plant physiology and vegetable production systems. Dr. Barickman has over 16 years of experience in horticulture research studying plant physiology. His research focuses on environmental stress and genetic interactions that affect plant growth and development, vegetable nutritional quality, and nutrient management for vegetable production systems. Dr. Barickman's lab blends applied and basic research to provide science-based management recommendations to vegetable growers in Mississippi.

Registration for the in person program is \$30. Registration includes lunch on day one, all presentations and handouts, and the farm tour on day two.

Complete conference information and a registration form are available at <http://www.webbcityfarmersmarket.com/training> or by calling 417 483-8139.

The Missouri Tomato Conference is sponsored by the Webb City Farmers Market, University of Missouri Extension, and Lincoln University Co-operative Extension. It is underwritten by a specialty crops grant from the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

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Make one call before spring yard projects to avoid injury, utility disruption and repair costs

COLUMBIA – Warmer spring weather has Missourians starting outdoor home improvements, so Ameren Missouri is reminding customers to call 1-800-DIG-RITE or 811 before digging so the projects can be completed safely. Giving utility locating experts three business days to mark underground utilities will keep neighborhoods safe and help prevent outages.

Each year, more than 40 percent of homeowners risk unintentionally damaging buried power, gas and internet lines during these DIY home projects. Outdoor upgrades such as new fences, fresh landscaping and new patios come with a risk of damage to buried utilities. These projects should always start with a call or visit to Mo1Call.com.

“Some underground utility lines are closer to the surface than you think, so it’s important that buried lines are marked before digging – no matter the size of the project,” said Jim Huss, senior director of operations excellence for Ameren Missouri. “With one quick phone call, an expert will mark the location of all your utility, phone and cable lines on the property. This step helps keep your family safe and avoids a serious outage or gas leak that could impact your home or neighborhood.”



Marking utility lines is a free service—and it’s the law. Follow these important steps to stay in compliance and avoid costly property or utility damage:

1. Call 1-800-DIG-RITE, 811 or visit Mo1Call.com at least two business days before starting a digging project. This is a free service where you can easily submit requests to your local utility companies to locate utility lines before you dig. Requests can be made 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

2. Wait until a professional locator comes out to mark natural gas, electric, water, sewer, telephone and cable lines. The approximate location of buried utilities will be marked with paint and flags so that you can avoid them. Each utility type corresponds to a specific color of paint and flag, and all of them must be marked before you can dig.

3. Once the site has been clearly marked, proceed to dig with caution. Make sure to dig carefully around the marks and not on top of them. It’s important to use the appro-

appropriate tools to dig with care and follow safe digging practices.

Even if you have had utilities marked for past projects, it’s important to contact Missouri One Call or 811 every time. The lines may have shifted in depth or location due to erosion and root growth since the last project. To learn more about safe digging, visit Mo1Call.com.

To learn more about natural gas safety, visit AmerenMissouri.com/safety. For homeowners who are planning on planting trees or shrubs, Ameren Missouri offers some helpful advice for picking the right location, as well as tree trimming information.

Ameren Missouri has been providing electric and gas service for more than 100 years, and the company’s electric rates are among the lowest in the nation. Ameren Missouri’s mission is to power the quality of life for its 1.2 million electric and 132,000 natural gas customers in central and eastern Missouri. The company’s service area covers 64 counties and more than 500 communities, including the greater St. Louis area. For more information, visit Ameren.com/Missouri or follow us on Twitter at @AmerenMissouri or Facebook.com/AmerenMissouri.

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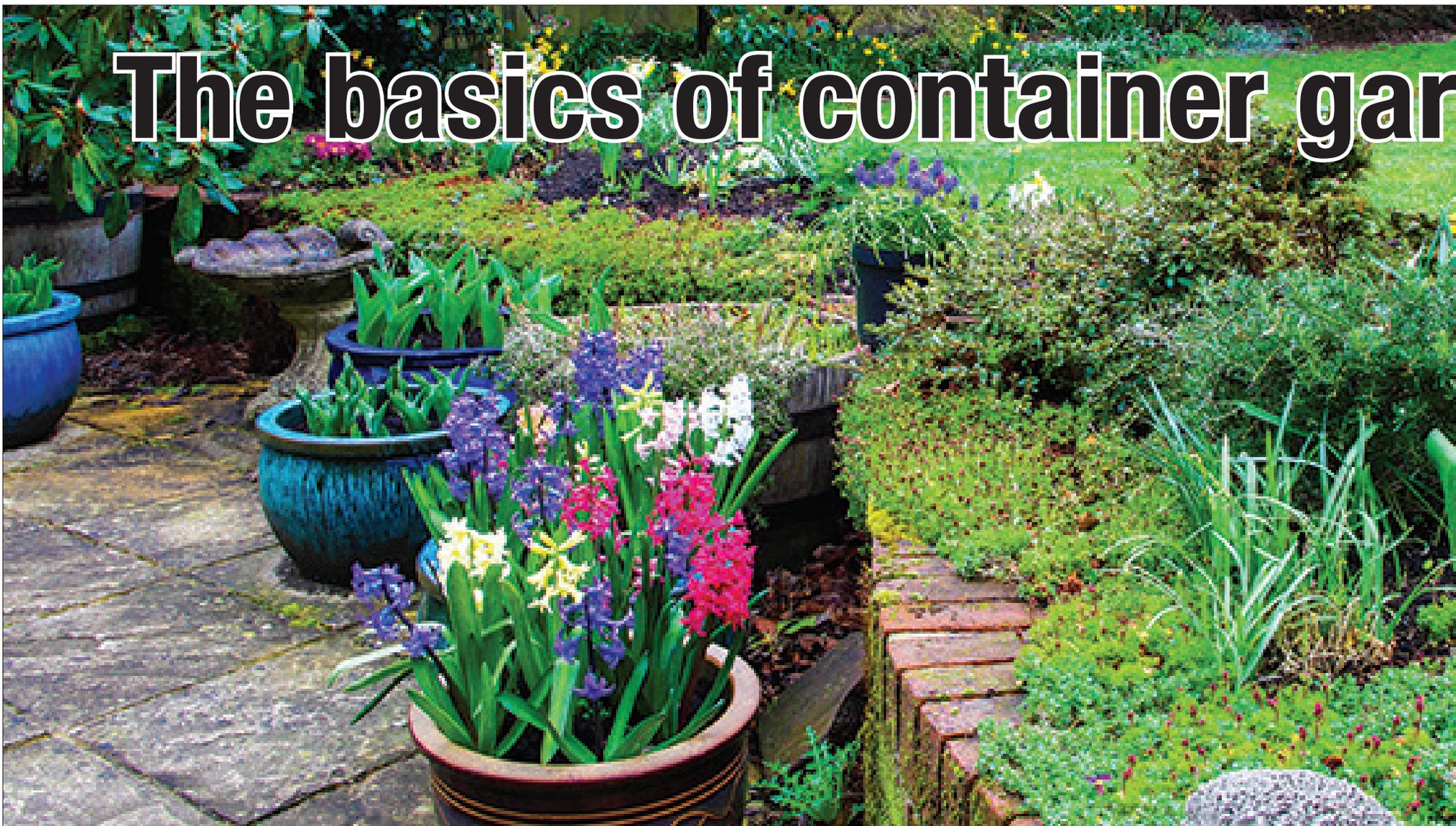
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Gardening is a rewarding hobby that has been linked to health benefits like reduced stress and improved mental well-being. Gardening also can lead to an inviting home landscape full of attractive blooms and/or delicious foods.

Backyard gardens have long been planted after clearing a plot of land, tilling and amending the soil, and planting rows of favorite crops. However, gardening can be less labor-intensive and even more successful when people consider the many benefits of container gardening.

What is container gardening?

As its name implies, container gardening is growing plants inside of containers. These containers can be flower pots, rectangular deck boxes or even large raised garden beds.

Pros to container gardening

One of the advantages of container gardening is that plants can be moved in and out of sunlight to ensure the right growing conditions. This isn't as easily achieved when gardens are stationary. Also, beginner gardeners may be more able to control soil conditions inside of a small container rather than a vast ground-based garden, which will require a good deal of manual labor. Pots and boxes also can be grouped together to create eye-popping displays, usually at lower costs than the sheer volume of plants that would be needed to fill out an expansive landscape.

Cons to container gardening

Container garden plants will not have direct access to the ground, so they need gardeners to create the ideal growing conditions.

Developing the right care formula can be challenging. The home and garden resource The Spruce says that drainage is an important factor in container gardening, and most containers do not offer enough drainage holes. If water cannot escape the soil, the roots of the plants can rot and die. It's not enough to add stones or gravel to the bottom of containers. Drill additional holes in the bottom (1/2-inch in diameter for small or medium-sized pots; one inch in diameter for larger pots). Also, be sure to check on soil moisture so that watering can be adjusted. During hot stretches, plants may need to be watered more frequently.

Plan for plants that play well

Grouping plants together can create visually stunning combinations. However, it is important to choose plants that require the same amount of light and moisture. Look at plant tags when visiting the garden center and select complementary plants, or ask a store employee. Mixing different plant shapes, colors and leaf textures, as well as plants of various heights, can help containers look filled out.

Feed plants accordingly

Plants need nutrition to thrive in containers. Quality potting mixes will contain fertilizers, but nutrition will wane over time. Every couple of weeks, container plants will need either fresh potting mix or granular fertilizer added to feed them. Oregon State University Extension Services suggests using a slow-release fertilizer or worm castings several times throughout the season.

Container gardening is a great way to add plants to smaller patios, reduce the workload involved in maintaining expansive gardens, and customize conditions for optimal growth.

“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.”
 — Gertrude Jekyll

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Telling signs three common insects are infesting a lawn

Well-maintained lawns are a byproduct of hard work. That hard work is a point of pride for homeowners who spend countless hours throughout spring, summer and fall tending to their lawns.

All that hard work can be compromised when uninvited guests, namely insects, show up in a lawn. Insect infestations can turn a normally pristine and lush green lawn into a brown and sickly eyesore. Identifying which type of insect is damaging a lawn is the first step toward returning that lawn to its green glory. These are three common lawn insects and signs that they're infesting a lawn.

1. Grubs

Grubs like to feast on the roots of grass right below the surface. Michigan State University Extension Turf & Landscape reports that grub damage can appear from March to early May or from mid-September to early November. The lawn and garden experts at GardenTech® note that wilted grass blades are often the first indicator of a grub infestation, which is followed by patches of brown turf and eventually death. Crows, skunks and moles eat grubs, so the sight of them in a lawn could indicate an infestation.

2. Chinch bugs

The experts at BobVila.com report that chinch bugs are not necessarily problematic when their populations are limited to around 10 to 15 bugs per square foot of lawn. In such instances, chinch bug populations are generally controlled by ants and ladybugs. However, extreme heat and drought, problems that have plagued various regions in North America in recent years, reduce the populations of bugs that feed on chinch bugs, thus increasing the population of these unwanted guests that feed on grass. GardenTech® indicates that damage from chinch bugs is most visible between June and September. That damage begins with grass taking on a purple tinge before it turns yellow and then brown after wilting.

3. Cutworms

The lawn care experts at Scotts® note that cutworms are moth larvae that hide in the thatch layer of a lawn during the day before emerging at night to feed on grass blades. Patches of brown grass between one and two inches in width is a sign of cutworm infestation. Homeowners who notice a growing number of birds pecking away in their lawns may have a cutworm infestation, which can be confirmed by peeling up a section of damaged grass and looking for cutworms, which are brown, gray or black and tend to be around two inches long.

The good news is that grub, chinch bug and cutworm populations can be controlled. Local turf specialists can recommend strategies to curtail such populations and help homeowners restore their lawns to full health.



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How to pick the right trees for your property

Trees benefit a landscape by serving both aesthetic and utilitarian functions. A home surrounded by healthy green trees can be a sight to behold, and those same trees can benefit surrounding plants and wildlife at the same time.

As appealing as trees are, not all trees and landscapes make for the perfect match. The Arbor Day Foundation notes the importance of planning when designing a landscape. Planning ensures the trees homeowners ultimately choose for their properties will grow well in the soil and moisture present in their yards.

Careful consideration of a handful of variables can help homeowners determine which trees will make the best fit for their properties.

- **Height:** Homeowners must consider the projected height of a tree before planting it. Avoid trees that will bump into anything when fully grown, as that can adversely affect surrounding greenery and pose a safety hazard. The ADF's tree sizing guide can be accessed at <https://www.arborday.org/trees/rightTreeAndPlace/size.cfm> and serves as an invaluable resource for homeowners who want to plant new trees around their properties.

- **Canopy spread:** Trees grow out as well as up, so it's important to consider their potential width at maturity as well. The

ADF sizing guide can help homeowners get an idea of how wide a tree is likely to be at maturity. Trees that spread out quite a bit don't necessarily need to be avoided, but it's important that they're planted far enough apart so they don't adversely affect surrounding plants. In addition, wide trees that are planted too close together can make the landscape appear crowded, taking something away from its aesthetic appeal.

- **Growth rate:** Growth rate is an important variable because it can affect how quickly homeowners will see changes in their landscapes. Homeowners who want to plant for privacy can consider trees with quick growth rates or purchase more mature trees that are already near full growth. Those who are not in need of instant transformation can try trees with slower growth rates, which the ADF notes typically live longer than fast-growing species.

- **Requirements:** Different trees require different amounts of sun and moisture and different soil components to thrive. Homeowners can have their soil tested to determine which trees will thrive in it. Local garden centers can be a great resource for homeowners who want insight as to which trees will thrive in their local climates.

Trees serve many functions on a property. Choosing the right trees for a landscape requires careful consideration of a host of variables.

"The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies." — Gertrude Jekyll



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Improve Your Home and Its Value

Six high-ROI ideas to increase the value of your house

Home upgrades happen for different reasons but enhancing your home's curb appeal and value are often at the top of the list. These projects can make it easier to enjoy your home knowing they carry a return on investment of up to 92 percent, according to the Remodeling 2021 Cost vs. Value Report published in "Remodeling Magazine." Plus, you'll have the added benefit of knowing you're making a sound investment should you decide to sell down the road.

STONE VENEER

Stone veneer is an upgrade that adds warmth and texture with the look of natural stone, but without the expense. It's also a durable product that is low maintenance, so you don't have to worry about sealing or painting.

With the variety of styles and colors available, it's easy for homeowners to mix and match to create a custom look. Mortarless options like ClipStone are de-

signed to be installed with screws and common tools, making them accessible options for both professionals and DIYers. With a built-in water management system, overlapping edges to minimize gaps, reversible outside corners and a variety of accessories, mortarless options allow homeowners to achieve the look of traditional masonry without the hassle.

GARAGE DOORS

Exterior features often bring a big return on investment because a home with strong curb appeal can make a great first impression on potential buyers. The garage doors are no exception. If you think of your garage doors as a purely functional element of your home, you may be surprised to learn garage door replacement is actually the best home upgrade you can make, according to the report.

Garage doors aren't just functional; they can be a focal point of your home's exterior design, completely transforming the exterior. Depending on the style and



features you choose, an updated garage door is also a smart strategy for managing climate and adding security to your home.

WINDOWS

Windows are another smart investment for numerous reasons. Not only do they provide a sophis-

ticated presence that can greatly enhance curb appeal, upgraded windows play a major role in energy conservation. Homeowners also rely on windows to make a bold statement. For example, Simonton black exterior windows and patio doors can help perfect a

wide range of architectural styles including farmhouse, modern, industrial and contemporary designs.

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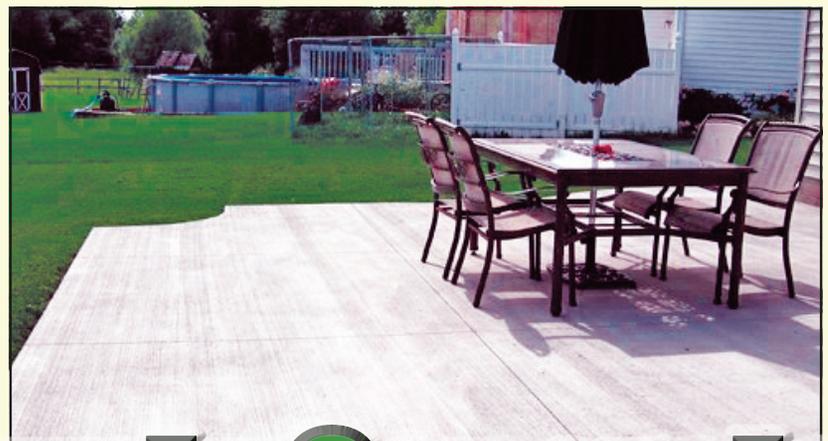
See **Improve**, Page 21B



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Improve • from page 20B

a variety of styles and colors to customize both their home's interior and exterior spaces. The windows are AAMA Gold Certified, passing some of the industry's most stringent quality assurance testing for air leakage, water penetration and wind pressure - resulting in low-maintenance windows with lasting durability, weather resistance and energy efficiency.

DECK ADDITIONS

Adding a deck is an easy way to improve your home's exterior appeal and increase your livable space. Wooden decks rank in the top 10 for ROI, according to the report. An attractive deck situated off the living room or kitchen can make those rooms feel larger, especially when you're entertaining, and guests can circulate freely between indoor and outdoor spaces. A well-constructed deck also serves as a transition point from the home to the backyard, where you may invest in even more outdoor living features.

You'll achieve the greatest ROI by designing your deck to integrate seamlessly with your home and landscaping and even stone accents. Also take functional features into consideration, including privacy and protection from the wind and sun. Depending on your climate, it may be beneficial to design a deck for maximum shade during the warm months or to make the most of sunlight during the cool seasons. Features like built-in kitchens, stone accents, TV

mounts and access to water features all lend high-end custom touches that also boost ROI.

SIDING

If you're considering updating your home's color and trim, re-siding is a great way to transform its curb appeal while also earning a hefty return on the investment and giving yourself (or a future owner) the gift of lower maintenance living.

With 15 different collections, Ply Gem Mastic has an array of solutions to help homeowners transform their living spaces such as board and batten, hand-split shake shingles, traditional Dutch lap siding and more. Each is available with detailed wood grain texture in a variety of rich, on-trend colors, including increasingly popular dark options.

ENTRY DOORS

One of the simplest projects in the report, a new entry door can also make a big impact because it's one of the first things potential buyers see. Not only can a steel door help make a good first impression, it also serves as an updated security feature and can offer additional insulation, which makes for a good investment if you live in an area that experiences extreme weather.

Explore more high-ROI ideas and products for upgrading your home and its value at cornerstonebuildingbrands.com/residential.



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Signs a roof needs repair or replacement

Many homeowners believe a roof is a once-in-a-lifetime investment. But roof damage can force homeowners to replace a roof regardless of how much time has lapsed since the roof was installed.

The average life span of a roof depends on when the roof was installed and the materials it is made from. According to Central Homes Roofing, three-tab shingles may last between 10 and 15 years, architectural shingles can endure for 15 to 20 years, and tile may last between 35 and 50 years. RPS Metal Roofing indicates a metal roof may last as long as 70 years. However, climate and color of the roof also will affect its longevity.

Homeowners would be wise to consider these factors when determining if a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

- **Roof age:** The age of the roof is a major factor in determining if it will need to be replaced or if repairs can be made to isolated damage. Individuals who live in neighborhoods where neighbors are now replacing roofs will likely find it is time to consult a roofing company. Homeowners also can check to see if they have any receipts that indicate the roof's installation date so they have an idea about its age.

- **Grain in gutters:** Roofing shingles are designed to overlap, and sealant keeps them steady. Friction, weather and atmospheric changes can impact sealant and cause degradation. Gutters with grainy material in them could indicate worn out sealant and shingles.

- **Ridge damage:** Ridges are spots where two separate areas meet and often are important to the structural integrity of the roof. If the roof ridge is showing signs of



wear, it could be time to repair or replace it.

- **Curled shingle edges:** If shingle tabs are curled or cupped, the shingles may need to be replaced. But if curling is extensive, a whole new roof may need to be installed.

- **Bald spots or lost portions of the roof:** Missing granules and missing shingles are reasons to consult a pro for a roof evaluation.

- **Leaks indoors:** Homeowners who find dark streaks or moisture in the attic may discover that water is penetrating the roof underlay. Water often comes in around chimney flashing. Other water signs are blistering and

bubbling in walls.

- **Incoming light:** Look up through the attic and see if any light is coming through the roof, which may indicate there are cracks or holes in the roof.

- **Aesthetics:** If a homeowner doesn't like the look of the roof from a design standpoint, a replacement also may be warranted.

Roofs can last many years, but the presence of certain signs indicates replacement or repairs will be necessary.

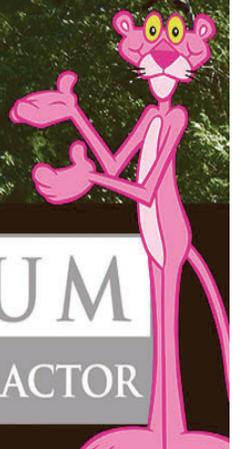
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Seven things to know before replacing windows

The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15 percent of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

1. Vinyl or aluminum may be best. Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice. Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

2. Moisture problems indicate windows need to be replaced. Condensa-

tion that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

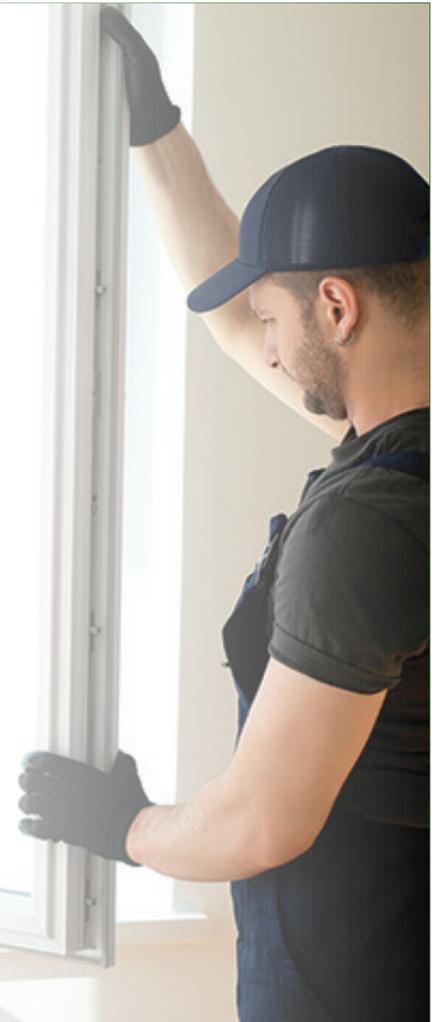
3. Windows add curb appeal. Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

4. Consider other energy-efficient upgrades. Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement — which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

5. The wrong windows can adversely affect home value. The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73 percent of their replacement window investment back when they resell a home. But choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too. When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more soundproof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

7. Proper installation is key to longevity. Replacement windows are only as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals. Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.



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Spruce Up Your Interior Living Spaces This Spring

The changing of seasons and arrival of warmer weather provide a perfect opportunity for many homeowners to refresh their living spaces and tackle projects on their to-do lists. However, that shouldn't mean limiting yourself to standard chores like cleaning, disinfecting and reorganizing.

Spring is also an ideal time to make functional and aesthetic updates to your home, including surfaces in oft-used rooms like kitchens and bathrooms. From countertops to closets, Wilsonart, a world-class innovator of next generation engineered surfaces, manufactures and distributes high pressure laminate, quartz, solid surface, coordinated thermally fused laminate, edgebanding and other decorative, engineered surface options. Infusing style from nature, the full line of products provides nearly endless design possibilities with lasting durability and beauty to help redefine living spaces and bring ideas to life.

Get started on your home upgrade this spring with these ideas:

REIMAGINE YOUR BATHROOM WALLS

Bathrooms are one of the most oft-improved spaces in many homes with style and long-term durability at the top of homeowners' wish lists. An on-trend option like the Water-Proof Wall Panel System from Wetwall, a Wilsonart Company, makes it easy to transform bathrooms and create spa-worthy retreats that deliver high-end style



without disruptive demolitions. Ideal for shower walls, bath surrounds, accent walls and cladding, the easy-to-clean, grout-free system features tongue-and-groove panels that can be installed in as little as 2 1/2 hours and don't require special tools. For more information, visit wetwall.com.

ENHANCE YOUR SURFACE SPACES

As the line between residential and commercial design continues to intertwine, the High Pressure Laminate Stone Collection from Wilsonart offers surfaces to enhance your home environment and create comfortable and inviting

spaces. With 16 designs reminiscent of natural stone surfaces, the collection offers a casual look with authentic characteristics and veining details. Able to withstand the rigors of most interior environments, the "no-fuss" surfaces are low-maintenance solutions, GREENGUARD Gold Certified to meet low chemical emission limits for better indoor air quality and premium designs come with AEON Enhanced Scratch & Scuff-Resistant Performance Technology. To learn more, visit wilsonart.com/laminate-surfaces.

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How to corral a crabgrass infestation

A well-manicured lawn adds undeniable curb appeal to a property. Homeowners who take pride in their lawns should know that they can take that pride all the way to the bank, as investing in a pristine lawn can provide a significant return at resale.

A 2019 report from the real estate experts at HomeLight found that a \$268 investment in lawn care service can add \$1,211 at resale. That's a 352 percent return on investment.

Homeowners can capitalize on a pristine lawn even further by tending to their own lawns. Crabgrass is one lawn problem that can compromise the look of an otherwise lush lawn. Thankfully, crabgrass can be controlled without much effort.



Identifying crabgrass

Crabgrass is a weed that grows in areas of a lawn that are bare or where the grass is thin. Crabgrass gets its name from its appearance, as it grows from the center outward and mimics the look of crab legs emerging from the center shell.

The growth of crabgrass

The University of Minnesota Extension notes that crabgrass is an annual plant. That means a crabgrass infestation that's problematic once the mercury rises in the summer will die out in late fall or early winter. But crabgrass germinates in the spring, so homeowners will want to take steps to prevent it long before it becomes an eyesore in summer.

How to corral crabgrass

The UME notes that application of a pre-emergent herbicide before crabgrass seeds can germinate is an effective way to eliminate it. The timing of that application can be tricky, as jumping the gun and applying the herbicide too early can prove fruitless. The same goes for applying herbicides too late. Crabgrass will

likely still grow if the herbicide is applied too early or too late. UME recommends applying a pre-emergent herbicide when soil temperatures approach 55 F.

Home Depot notes that a chemical treatment may be applied after crabgrass has already grown in, but this option requires careful application to avoid killing surrounding healthy grass.

Crabgrass can be pulled out by hand, but such an approach can be physically daunting. That's especially so because crabgrass thrives when the weather is hot and

dry. So homeowners who intend to pull crabgrass by hand can decrease their risk of dehydration or heat-related illness by drinking plenty of water and pulling the grass during early morning or evening hours when the sun is lower and temperatures are more mild.

Crabgrass can compromise the look of an otherwise healthy lawn. But various strategies can eliminate crabgrass and restore a lawn without much effort on the part of homeowners.

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Did you know?

The National Association of Landscape Professionals notes that lawns can support a significant number of insects feeding on them because the grass grows much faster than the insects can damage it. But noticeable damage, such as brown patches in the grass, severed roots and grass that is easily pulled up, indicate that insect infestations are significant enough to require intervention. Lawn care professionals can work with homeowners to develop solutions to address insect infestations. Infestation prevention involves a handful of strategies, not the least of which is ensuring a lawn is properly cared for. Such care delivers nutrients to the lawn and reduces its risk of becoming undernourished. Undernourished lawns are more vulnerable to insect infestations and weeds.

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Five Color Trends for a Stylish Home

A new year brings new opportunities to refresh your living space and add new colors into your life. These five trends are all about incorporating more of yourself and your lifestyle into your home, whether it's answering your need for a serene escape or dialing up the energy with vibrant surroundings.

BRING IN NATURE

Soothing earthy tones help bring a sense of calm and balance indoors. When designing with nature in mind, use gray-green tones to connect your aesthetic with the serene elements of the outdoors. Incorporate nature's palette with greens in fabrics, accessories and even on the walls. Wood and stone materials naturally complement these shades for a look that's cohesively pleasing and peaceful.

STYLISH SOPHISTICATION

If you're aiming to infuse some sophistication with an update to a favorite space, opt for a monochromatic look in a dark (almost black) hue. The approach is simultaneously bold and classic, but the secret to this trend is finding a shade that's rich and deep, but not quite black, then complementing it with fabrics and furnishings that let the hint of color shine.

CONNECT WITH YOUR INNER SELF

Creating a living space that is uniquely yours requires understanding your inner motivations, traits and talents. One source of personal inspiration may be your zodiac sign, a reflection of the earth's orientation to the sun on your birthday.

The color experts at Valspar partnered with Ophira and Tali Edut of the AstroTwins to make it easy to explore the intersection of your character and style by explaining which 2022 Color of the Year best aligns with each zodiac sign. When you combine your sign with the convenience and advanced one-coat coverage of premium Valspar Reserve Interior Paint + Primer, available at Lowe's, you can create

a luxurious space that reflects the real you.

* **Aries - Sunset Curtains:** A warm and soothing color like this supports a transformational year full of new opportunities.

* **Taurus - Gilded Linen:** This clean, cozy color makes spaces feel open, perfect for celebrating togetherness.

* **Gemini - Grey Suit:** This is a color of warmth and versatility, a signature combination for Geminis.

* **Cancer - Delightful Moon:** A spirited, playful color inspires a year of growth and adventure.

* **Leo - Mountain River:** A dark and dreamy color invites inspiration for a year filled with abundance.

* **Virgo - Subtle Peach:** It's the year of partnerships for Virgos; this harmonious color works well alongside others but can also stand on its own.

* **Libra - Orchid Ash:** A cool and breezy color keeps it simple so Libras can focus on a year of vitality.

* **Scorpio - Fired Earth:** This warm and approachable color is perfect for Scorpios who plan to bring new people into their lives this year.

* **Sagittarius - Rustic Oak:** A relaxing and comforting color that welcomes coziness in the new year.

* **Capricorn - Blanched Thyme:** For Capricorns, this is the year of variety, and this is a refreshing tone to support change.

* **Aquarius - Country Charm:** This hue provides warmth and stability for a year of productivity.

* **Pisces - Lilac Lane:** A playful pastel hue that brings softness along with optimism and renewal.

ADD COMFORT AND WARMTH

Treating your home like a sanctuary never goes out of style, and one way to create a soothing, inviting space is

through the use of cozy neutrals. Whether it's applied to a bedroom retreat or a more bustling space like the living room, a neutral palette can add to the allure of comfort and warmth. Keep the visual interest strong by incorporating subtle patterns, textures and layers of complementary neutral colors.

GO RETRO

It may seem counterintuitive, but vibrant retro shades like orange and yellow, and even warmer neutrals, can help establish a calming vibe within your home. The throwback hues can help your mind connect to moments from the past when life may have been filled with less challenges. This trend with colors like Valspar's Delightful Moon, Subtle Peach and Sunset Curtains is less about the actual look and more about the mood it evokes for you personally, so if a retro scene takes you to a happy place, this may be the right choice for your home.

Find more 2022 color trends and design inspiration at [Valspar.com](https://www.valspar.com).

BRUSH ON THE COLOR

Using quality brushes can provide you with a smooth, professional finish, but depending on the surface you're painting, different sizes and types of brushes can help you achieve the desired look.

Achieving ultra-clean edges and a smooth finish is the goal for DIY painting. Perfect for interior use with latex paints and stains, the Valspar Wall and Trim 3-Brush Multi-Pack is a convenient option that includes flat and angled brushes in multiple sizes. Those hard-to-reach corners may be tricky, but a proper angled brush can make all the difference.

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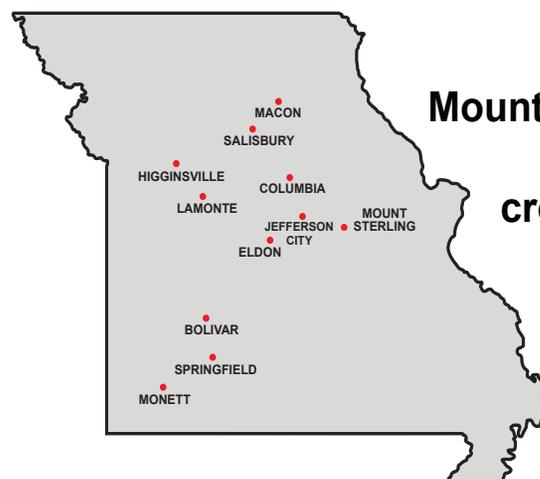
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On-Trend Ideas for Sprucing Up Your Deck

Installing or updating a deck can transform your outdoor living area. Not only is a deck aesthetically appealing, but it also allows you to create additional space for a wide range of uses, whether it's a lively entertainment zone or tranquil, relaxing retreat.

If you're planning a deck build or renovation in 2022, consider incorporating one or more of these design trends identified by Westlake Royal Building Products, a leading manufacturer and distributor of materials for home remodeling, building and construction.

CREATIVITY IN DESIGN

While decking design features used to be reserved for luxury upgrades, creative flair is increasingly mainstream. Some options for incorporating greater depth and style into your deck design include mixing and matching boards to create patterns, inlays and focal points or utilizing two-tone designs for more visually interesting aesthetics.

ON-TREND COLORS

Classic lumber-toned decks never go out of style, but adding some flair with an eye-catching color is a subtle way to elevate your deck's aesthetic appeal. Some designs incorporate color throughout while another way to bring

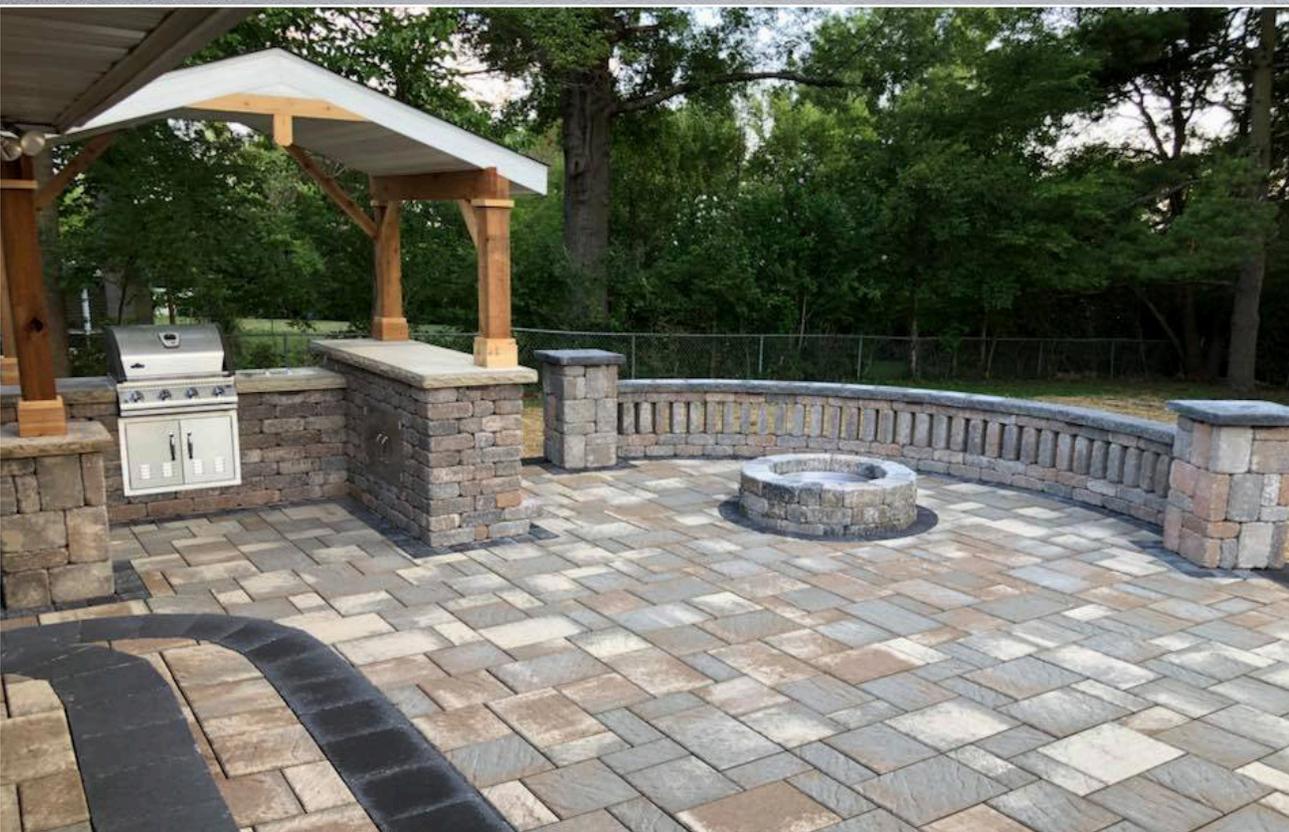
color to your deck is through distinctive inlay design or other design features.

Working with a product like Zuri Premium Decking gives you a selection of six on-trend colors, including Hickory, a true mid-tone brown, as well as Chestnut, Walnut, Pecan, Brazilia and Weathered Gray. The planks feature minimal grain repetition to capture the look of true exotic hardwood with no painting, staining or resealing needed, and all are backed by a 25-year warranty against

See **Deck**, Page 29B

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Deck • from page 28B

color shifting.

MULTI-SEASONAL SPACES

Once you create an incredible outdoor space, you'll likely want to use it as often as possible. That's why many homeowners are designing decks with multiple seasons in mind. Features like retractable walls can help you block cool breezes and trap the warmth of space heaters or a fireplace while roofs provide shade and fans help circulate the breeze during warmer months. Decks built with clean, simple lines can offer a connection to nature as well as convenience for homeowners transitioning from indoor to outdoor spaces.

POPULARITY OF COMPOSITE DECKING

Weather patterns can cause substantial damage to a home's exterior materials, including a deck where natural wood is prone to drying out. This creates an upkeep cycle that requires ongoing investments of time and money. An alternative to natural wood, such as Zuri Premium Decking by Royal, combines the low-maintenance, high-durability properties of composite decking with the exterior environment-defining presence of exotic wood. The result is an authentic look with zero-maintenance upkeep.

BRINGING THE INSIDE OUT

A deck's design elements were once limited to predictable furnishings like a picnic table and grill, but those days are gone. Homeowners seeking to create an outdoor oasis are bringing amenities of the indoors outside. You'll find outdoor kitchens and weather-proof TVs, rugs and furniture, allowing homeowners to incorporate the convenience and comfort of indoor living rooms and kitchens into their outdoor spaces despite elements like snow, wind and rain.

MASONRY AS AN ACCESSORY

If you love the look of masonry but have your heart set on a deck, you can take the path of many homeowners and



incorporate masonry as an accessory or design element. Mixing building mediums provides texture, which creates an immersive tactile experience through sight and touch. Options like a fireplace or firepit, pillars, skirting, bench seats, planters, water features, kitchen or bar space and walkways can all complement and enhance the decking so you get to enjoy the best of both worlds.

CLEAN SIGHTLINES

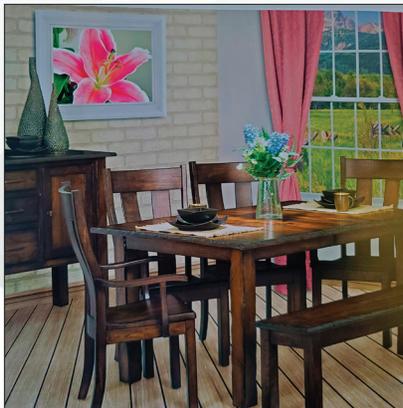
A deck is an ideal vantage point when you have a

beautiful view to enjoy and using the right materials can enhance that experience. Creating a clean, sophisticated and unobstructed view is easy when you outfit your deck with the right lighting and use cable or glass railings, which provide safety along with clear views of the landscape beyond.

Find more tips and ideas to spruce up your outdoor living space at liveabode.com.

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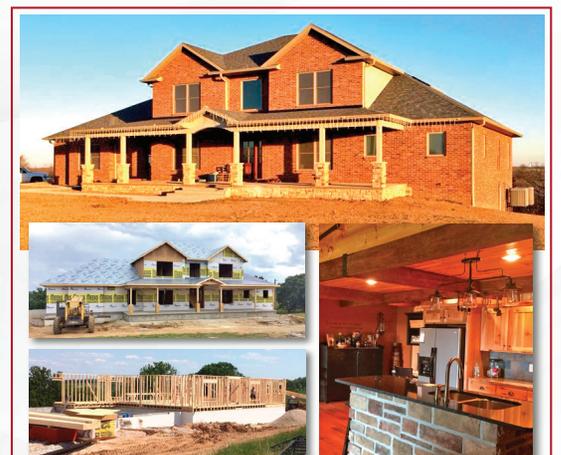
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How to prepare landscapes for new plants

New plants can add much to a landscape. Whether they're replacing plants that are no longer thriving or being added to supplement an existing landscape, new plants are an affordable way to give a home's exterior a whole new look.

Much consideration is given to which plants to add to a landscape. That's understandable, as homeowners want to choose plants that will thrive and won't compromise the health of surrounding plants and trees. Before planting or even choosing plants, it's important to plan for new additions to a landscape. Preparing the landscape can inform homeowners about which plants to purchase and can ensure they thrive after planting.

- Document sunlight exposure. Plants have different needs, and one of the biggest differences between species is the amount of sunlight they need to thrive. According to Penn State Extension, plants characterized as "full sun" require six or more hours of sunlight per day, while those considered "partial

sun" need between four and six hours of sunlight per day. Plants designated as "partial shade" need two to four hours of sun per day, while "shade" plants need less than two hours of sunlight a day. Documenting sunlight exposure in advance gives homeowners an idea of which plants should be planted and where they should be planted. Jot down these observations in a journal over several weeks and then choose plants that will thrive in each area.

- Test the soil. A soil pH test is a simple and quick way to determine the acidity of soil. Soil pH levels will indicate how likely a plant is to thrive in a given spot. High levels won't necessarily mean an area should be avoided, as some plants thrive in acidic soils. Additional soil tests can determine other characteristics, such as the nutrient levels of soil and the amount of organic matter it contains. Each of these variables can help homeowners make the right choices as they introduce new plants to their properties.

- Consider local wildlife. If local wildlife makes its presence known on a property, homeowners may want to take proactive steps prior to planting anything new. A new fence might prevent animals like deer from getting in, but that likely won't do much to repel smaller animals like squirrels, rabbits or foxes. If wildlife is a concern, homeowners can seek advice at their local garden center about which plants certain animals are likely to ignore. Homeowners who want to attract wildlife can do the same in reverse, choosing plants wildlife will be drawn to. Homeowners who want to deter wildlife should erect fencing or other barriers prior to planting.

- Clear space if necessary. Plants grow up and out, and cramped quarters can make it hard for new plants to thrive. Some may thrive but only at the expense of other plants. If necessary, clear space prior to planting to ensure plants have ample space to grow.

Some pre-planting landscape preparation can ensure new plants thrive.



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All-natural ways to protect food gardens from pests

Homeowners frequently enhance their outdoor living spaces with attractive plants and trees. When that greenery also produces food, the results can be both beauty and bounty.

People who plant vegetable gardens and fruit trees in their yards can be blessed with an abundance of fresh pickings once it's time to harvest. In fact, many home gardeners may have visions of warm evenings pulling vegetables right out of the garden and tossing them on the grill or in salads. But insects and animals enjoy fresh produce just as people do. The joy of harvesting from a garden can be diminished when unwanted guests have gotten there first.

Homeowners can employ these all-natural strategies to protect their fruits and vegetables from lawn pests and critters.

- Plant gardens in raised beds. Though they're not a fool-proof deterrent, raised beds can eliminate some garden infiltration by small critters that come up and under from the ground. A raised garden bed can deter rabbits, gophers, groundhogs, slugs, and some other crawling pests. Raised beds



also are ergonomical and easily accessible.

- Prepare homemade insecticide. The environmental information site Treehugger provides information on making a homemade insecticide from vegetable oil and a mild soap. Use one cup of oil with one tablespoon of soap (such as Dr Bronner's castile soap). Add this mixture to one quart of water in a spray bottle. This concoction can eradicate aphids, mites, thrips, and more by coating insects' bodies and effectively suffocating them. Soap-and-water sprays or even neem oil sprays work similarly.

- Sprinkle diatomaceous earth. Diatomaceous earth, commonly known as DE, is an abrasive powder comprised of fossilized algae diatoms. It's commonly used as a filter medium in swimming pools, but also makes an effective pesticide. The material's abrasive and absorbent qualities draw moisture out of insects, essentially dehydrating them to death. DE can be sprinkled around the base of plants, but will need to be reapplied after rain and watering.

- Space out plants. One way to reduce insect or animal pest numbers is to ensure

ample space between plants. Tightly planted crops create a breeding ground for fungal diseases and also provide hiding spots and warmth for pests. Leaving room between plants can help avoid these issues, according to Gardening Channel.

- Use row covers or garden mesh. Specialized covers and meshes protect fruit and vegetables against insects and animals. Many plants can be covered all year long as long as the covers are lifted during flowering if the crops depend on pollination by bees. Veggiemesh® is a cover that can be laid over plants.

- Interplant crops in the garden. Interplanting is a technique that involves alternating crops, herbs and flowers to confuse the pests so they have a difficult time finding what they want to eat. Alternate rows of vegetables with herbs and flowers that appeal to beneficial insects.

Keeping pesky insects and animals from damaging food gardens can involve techniques that are safe and natural.

If your yard could talk: Six things it wants you to know

Backyarding is the trend born out of necessity during the pandemic as people moved indoor activities including working, entertaining, exercising and vacationing into their family backyards. Homeowners invested in their outdoor areas in record amounts, spending time, sweat equity and money to ensure they utilized every square inch of their yards for expanded living space and an oasis for relaxation and stress relief.

According to the recent "Yards Study" Harris Poll, more than two-thirds of Americans who have a yard (69 percent) say doing yard work—either maintaining it or adding/ updating features—is one of the ways they like to de-stress these days. This is especially true among parents of kids under 18.

"Over the last few years, families have used their yards more than ever before, and the Harris Poll indicates a vast majority of those who have a yard plan to invest even

more in their yard in the coming year," says Kris Kiser, president & CEO of the TurfMutt Foundation. "Since backyarding is now part of our everyday lives, we have some advice—from the yard, if you will—for families to take into account this spring."

The TurfMutt Foundation offers these messages from your yard—if your lawn and landscape could talk.

Plant more, early and often

Adding trees, bushes, grass and flowering plants is a good yard investment, but they often take time to grow. Plant as early as recommended to enjoy the benefits faster. Remember the Golden Rule of backyarding: "right plant, right place." Location, maintenance, sunlight and watering needs should all be considered, as well as your climate zone.

You work on me, and I work for you

The more time you spend in your yard, the more health and well-being benefits gained.

Backyarding means exploring, appreciating and spending time in your own personal patch of nature, which reduces stress, improves memory, boosts heart health, and offers a host of other benefits for our minds and bodies.

I have environmental superpowers

Family yards are environmental superheroes—producing oxygen, absorbing carbon, and capturing and filtering rainwater. By becoming a steward of your living landscapes, you can have a positive impact on our environment and help mitigate the effects of climate change on a micro level.

You're not the only one who depends on me

Your yard is an important part of the connected ecosystem, and adding flowering plants, trees and shrubs give wildlife and pollinators food and shelter. Check your climate zone for landscaping options that support the birds, bees, butterflies and other

wildlife that call your neighborhood home.

Please care for me properly

Only water when necessary. Over-watered grass gets lazy, growing roots in a horizontal pattern. With less water, grass sends its roots deeper—vertically—seeking water. By working harder, grass does a better job of sequestering carbon and releasing oxygen. Install watering solutions—like smart controllers on irrigation systems—that helps conserve water while maintaining your backyard.

Cutting height

Additionally, find the just-right length to cut your turfgrass (typically between 2-3 inches).

Sign up for Mutt Mail, a monthly e-newsletter with backyarding tips and all the news from the TurfMutt Foundation. To learn more about creating the yard of your dreams, visit TurfMutt.com.

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