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**How Tree Services Can Protect Your Property**

Cold weather can take its toll on a property, especially in regions of the world where winters are harsh. Most parts of the landscape are vulnerable to damage from winter storms, but trees may be especially susceptible. By the end of winter, many homeowners wonder if their trees would benefit from some professional TLC.

Tree services provide a host of services. While fall is a popular time to remove trees from a property, doing so in spring is not unheard of, especially if trees were affected by winter storms and now pose a threat to a home and the people who live inside it.

Homeowners considering tree services can explore the following ways that some professional arbor attention can protect them and their homes.

- Tree services can help protect a home's foundation. Old trees that stretch well into the sky can be captivating, but they also can pose a threat to a home's foundation. Such trees may have especially large root zones that may extend beneath walkways and even a home. In the latter instance, foundations may crack as roots try to stake their claim to the ground beneath a home. According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, homeowners pay an average of just over \$4,000 to repair foundation issues, though major problems can cost considerably more than that. A professional tree service can remove aging trees that might be beautiful and awe-inspiring but still pose a threat to a home and the areas surrounding it.
- Tree services can improve visibility. Trees that have aged a bit since their last trimming might affect the view of a property from inside a home. Overgrown branches can compromise residents' ability to see and experience the natural beauty just outside their windows. The average homeowner may be able to trim short trees on his or her own, but if views from the second floor of a home or higher have been compromised, it's much safer to call a professional tree service. Such services have the right tools and experienced personnel necessary to safely trim high branches on tall trees.
- Tree services can help prevent future damage. Even if trees made it through a recent winter unscathed, that's no

guarantee next winter or even the coming seasons of spring, summer and fall won't ultimately prove their undoing. Travelers Insurance notes that weather-related roof damage, including damage resulting from falling limbs and branches weighed down by snow during the winter months, accounted for more than half of all Travelers property loss claims between 2009 and 2016. According to BNC Insurance

and Risk Advisors, homeowners may be liable if a tree they knew posed a threat falls onto a passerby or a neighbor's property and causes damage or injury. Having all trees properly trimmed each year, but especially those that can fall on your home and your neighbors' homes, may prevent future damage and legal issues. Tree services can ensure trees maintain their awe-inspiring beauty and help homeowners protect their homes and their belongings.



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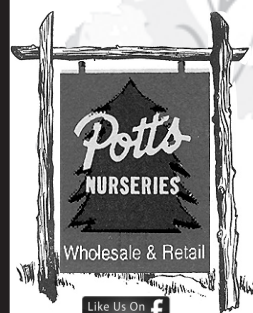
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## How To Guarantee Your Garden Starts Off On The Right Foot

As winter slowly winds down, many gardeners cannot wait to soak up the springtime sun and get their hands dirty in the garden. Such excitement is not just good for gardeners, but can benefit the garden in the months to come as well. Late winter or early spring is a great time to get a head start on the gardening season. Even if gardening season is still around the corner, completing the fol-

lowing projects can ensure your garden gets off on the right foot.

### CLEAR DEBRIS

One of the best things you can do for your garden as winter winds down is to clear it of debris. Winter can be especially harsh on a landscape, and gardens left to the elements are often filled with debris once spring arrives. Dead leaves, fallen branches, rocks that sur-

rounded during the winter frost, and even garbage that might have blown about in winter winds can all pile up in a garden over a typical winter. Clearing such debris likely won't take long, but it's a great first step toward restoring the garden before the time comes to plant and grow the garden once again.

### EXAMINE THE SOIL

Soil plays a significant role in whether a garden thrives or struggles. Examining the soil before the season starts can help gardeners address any issues before they plant. Ignoring the soil until a problem arises can turn the upcoming gardening season into a lost opportunity, so test the soil to determine if it has any nutrient or mineral deficiencies. This may require the help of a professional, but if a problem arises, you might be able to adjust the acidity or alkalinity of the soil and still enjoy a successful gardening season.

Another way to examine the soil is less complex but can shed light on when would be a good time to get back to work. Reach into the soil and dig out a handful. If the soil quickly crumbles, you can start preparing for gardening seasoning. But if the soil is still clumped together, it needs more time to dry out before you can begin your prep work.

### INITIATE EDGING

Edging is another task gardeners can begin as they get ready for the season. Edge plant and flower beds, but be sure to use a spade with a flat blade or an edger designed to edge flower beds. Such tools will cut deep enough so grass roots that may eventually grow into the flower bed are severed. Depending on how large a garden is, edging can be a time-consuming task, so getting a head start allows homeowners to spend more time planting and tending to their gardens once the season hits full swing.

### FIGHT WEEDS

Though weeds likely have not survived the winter, that does not mean they won't return once the weather starts to heat up. But as inevitable as weeds may seem, homeowners can take steps to prevent them from turning beautiful gardens into battlegrounds where plants, flowers and vegetables are pitted against unsightly and potentially harmful weeds. Spring is a good time to apply a pre-emergent weed preventer, which can stop weeds before they grow. Though such solutions are not always foolproof, they can drastically reduce the likelihood of weed growth.

Though gardeners might not be able to start planting their gardens in late winter or early spring, they can still get outside and take steps to ensure their gardens thrive once planting season begins.



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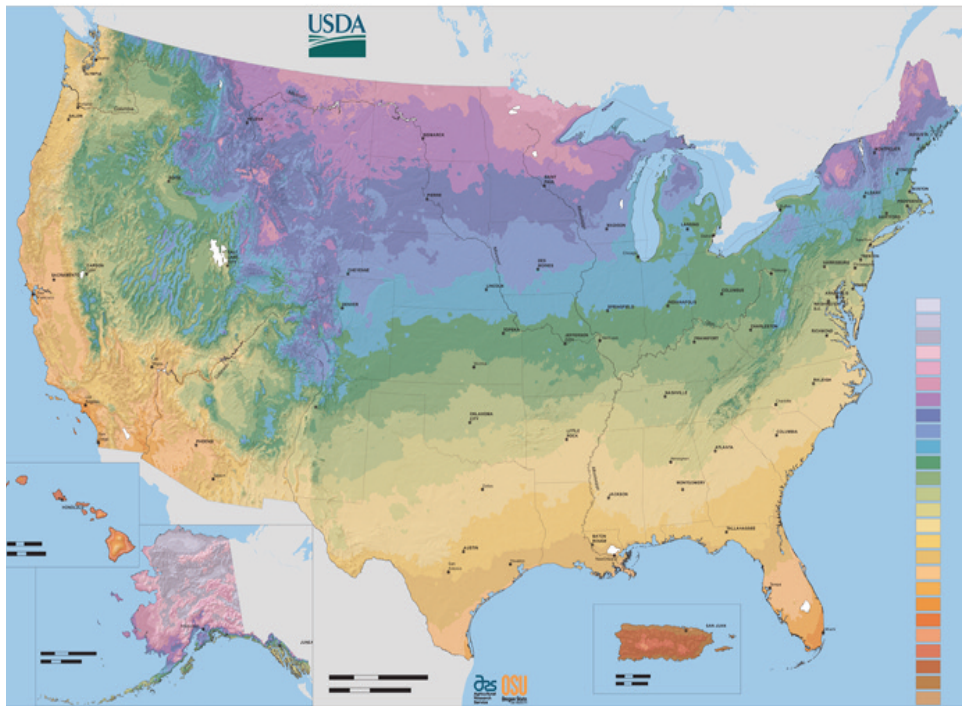
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### Understand Hardiness Zones Before Planting

Gardening benefits the environment in myriad ways. Maintaining natural landscapes and preserving green spaces can reduce the collective carbon footprint of the human race. Trees, flowers and other greenery filter the air and create welcoming habitats for all species

of animals and insects. Many home gardeners set out each spring to create landscapes that cater to all of the senses. But choosing plants that are unlikely to thrive in certain climates can lead to dissatisfaction and premature plant demise and may require gar-

deners to use more fertilizers, pesticides and other not-so-Earth-friendly techniques to help plants thrive. One of the more important steps gardeners can take before spring arrives is to educate themselves about plant hardiness zones. Hardiness



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zones are defined by the average climatic conditions of the region and are broken down into various zones. The USDA Hardiness Zone map divides North America into 13 separate zones. Each zone is marked by 10 F incremental differences from the last zone. In some versions of the map, each zone is further divided into "a" and "b" regions.

The National Gardening Association says the USDA Hardiness Zone Map was revised in 2012. The latest version was jointly developed by the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group. To help develop the new map, the USDA and Oregon State University requested that horticultural and climatic experts review the zones in their geographic areas. As a result, the zone boundaries in the 2012 edition of the map have shifted in many areas. Canada's Hardiness Zone map, updated in 2010, uses nine different zones. Zone maps are tools that show where permanent landscape

plants can adapt. Home gardeners who are looking for shrubs or perennials to last year after year should recognize that such plants must tolerate year-round conditions, including the lowest and highest temperatures and the amount of precipitation. Snow cover and humidity also can impact a plant's propensity to thrive.

While zone maps are not perfect, they can be useful in planning and ensuring the survival

of future gardens. Plant and seed manufacturer Burpee says that other factors to consider that also affect the viability of plants include wind, moisture and soil conditions. The company offers an interactive zone finder on their website that will indicate the hardiness zone as well as average first and last frost dates. Visit [www.burpee.com/findgrowzone](http://www.burpee.com/findgrowzone) to enter a zip code. Learn more about plant hardiness at [planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb](http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb).

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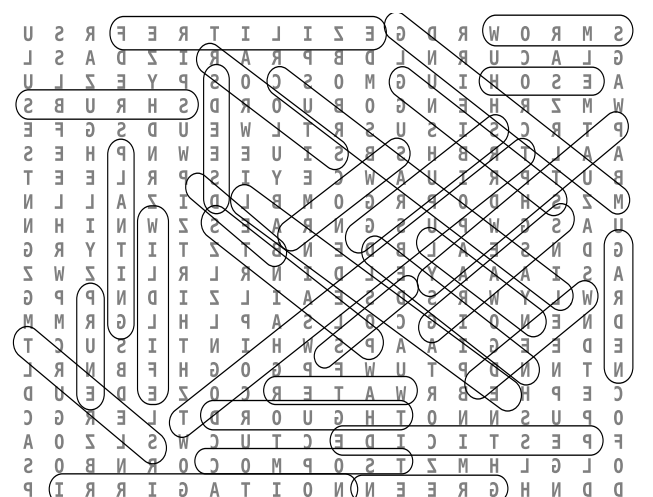
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### How To Control Common Spring Pests

Just when winter thaws out and people are anxious to enjoy the blooming flowers and luscious lawns of spring, pesky pests can appear and impact comfort levels and safety. Many pests resume their levels of activity as spring draws closer and temperatures warm up. The presence of these insects and rodents may cause problems in and around a home, which makes it essential to recognize them and avoid issues. The following are some of the more common spring pests and how to remedy infestations.

#### PAVEMENT ANTS

Pavement ants are some of the most common pests residents encounter inside and outside of their homes. These ants are light brown to black with appendages that are lighter than the rest of their bodies. Small in stature, pavement ants have parallel lines on their heads and thorax, according to a pest extermination company. Although pavement ants nest outdoors, they can enter homes through small crevices in search of food scraps. Their large colonies may not disappear until treatment is introduced. Keep foods in tightly sealed containers, clear counters and floors of crumbs, and address water sources, such as leaks. Pesticides may be needed in extreme conditions.

#### FLEAS

Fleas are tiny, jumping, biting pests that must find a host upon which to live. As ectoparasites, they feed on blood while living on the body of living hosts. Pets can bring fleas inside the yard and home in warm weather. According to the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, flea larvae develop more quickly at higher temperatures. At normal room temperatures, the entire life cycle of a flea is about 18 days. Several flea control products are available to control fleas on cats and dogs. There also may be powders and sprays to alleviate flea infestations in the home. Vacuuming is also very effective in killing larvae in the carpet and at picking up adults.

#### WASPS

An errant wasp, hornet or yellow jacket may have survived winter and ridden out the colder temperatures within a home. Once the weather warms, queens will begin to look for places to lay eggs and establish colonies. Treating areas where wasps are seen entering and leaving the home is key. Seal holes as soon as possible. Although wasps help control other insect populations, their painful stings and potentially aggressive nature can make them challenging to have around a home. If a nest is found, hire a professional to remove it.

#### SPIDERS

Many spiders are not harmful enough to humans and pets to be much of a problem. In fact, spiders can be helpful to have around to control the populations of other insects. Still, many homeowners would prefer these web-slinging friends remain outdoors. Others can be very allergic and want to keep all spiders possible from entering their home. Therefore, sealing cracks in a home's foundation and repairing small openings around windows and doors can help keep spiders out. Also, alleviating moisture issues in basements, garages or attics may keep out other bugs that would be prey to spiders. Homeowners can take the steps necessary to cut down on pests in and around their homes.

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**How Color Can Affect Your Garden**

Flower gardens can add color and awe-inspiring appeal to a property. The National Gardening Association notes that gardeners can find nearly every color of the spectrum in flowering perennials. So whether you prefer soft pink, are partial to bright red or want to relax in a garden and gaze at something deep blue, chances are you'll find a perennial to tickle your fancy. The NGA offers the following breakdown of colors to help gardeners learn how their gardens can set the mood they're looking for.

**BRIGHT COLORS**  
 A garden full of bright colors like red, orange, magenta, and yellow can provide a landscape

with vigor and energy. The NGA notes that brightly colored flowers can withstand especially bright sunshine, meaning gardeners can marvel at their appearance even when the sun might be adversely affecting other plants and flowers.

**PASTEL COLORS**  
 Pastels, which include soft pink, powder blue, lavender, and peach, create a tranquil feeling in a garden. This makes pastel perfect for those who want their gardens to be a relaxing, peaceful respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The NGA notes that pastels may look washed out in the mid-day sun, so they might be best enjoyed early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

**COMPLEMENTARY COLORS**  
 Complementary colors are those that are opposite one another on the color wheel. Orange and blue are examples of complementary colors. According to the NGA, complementary colors can add creative energy and vitality to a garden.

**HARMONIOUS COLORS**  
 These colors are those that are next to each other on the color wheel, such as orange and red. The NGA recommends harmonious colors for gardeners looking to create a unifying feel in their gardens without resorting to a monochromatic color scheme. Harmonious colors give off a gentle feeling that can make for a relaxing garden atmosphere.

**MONOCHROMATIC COLORS**  
 Monochromatic gardens can be awe-inspiring even though they stick to a single color and don't provide an array of awe-inspiring colors. The NGA notes that gardeners with monochromatic gardens make them interesting by using plants of various sizes and shapes. When planting a garden, gardeners can choose whichever color scheme they prefer. To learn more about the effects of color on a garden, visit the National Gardening Association website at [www.garden.org](http://www.garden.org).



**Get Ready: Early Spring Landscaping Tips**

During the cold months of winter, many people stare longingly out of the window dreaming of spring and time spent outdoors. For those with green thumbs, images of tending to the garden and other aspects of their landscapes no doubt dominate such daydreams. Draw inspiration from those budding crocuses and daffodils pushing through the last remnants of snow and employ these tips to prepare for the upcoming gardening season.

- One of the first steps is to apply a natural preemergent weed killer to get a head start knocking out weeds that can plague the lawn during the growing season. Killing weeds at the roots early on can mean far fewer hassles in spring and summer, and may prevent new generations of weeds from

cropping up each year.

- While it may be tempting to take a prematurely warm day as a sign that spring is in full force and purchase a bunch of annuals, it's better to know the last of the possible frost dates (check "The Farmer's Almanac"); otherwise, you may waste time and money planting flowers or vegetables only to have them zapped by another frosty day.
- Amend the soil so that it is the right consistency, just crumbling when lifting it. Soil that is too muddy after spring thaw can harden, making it difficult for plants to flourish later on. Speak with representatives at a local lawn and garden center about which types of amendments you can add to the soil in your particular area to enrich it.
- Lawn and garden experts sug-

gest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.

- Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.
- Give outdoor entertaining spaces a good scrubbing, clearing away dirt and grime that may have accumulated over the winter. Use a leaf blower to blow away any left-over leaves.
- Check if the front porch, railings or decking need painting and/or staining. Tackle these projects when the weather is cooler so everything will be ready for those peak spring days.
- Think about any annuals you might want to plant in the landscape this year that will complement any existing shrubbery or perennials. Come up with a theme so that the entire yard is cohesive.

Before homeowners know it, winter is gone and it is time to once again enjoy long days spent outdoors. Get a jump start on spring lawn prep as soon as you can.



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**Shade-Tolerant Plants Help To Complete Landscapes**

Plants need sunlight to thrive and grow, but some need less sunlight than others. People who find their landscapes are less supportive to sun-loving plants can choose from a variety of shade-tolerant plants, shrubs and trees.

Shade tolerance refers to a plant's ability to withstand low levels of light. Certain plants have adapted this feature to survive in the wild. Plants that grow at the base of forest floors, for example, will get less sunlight than others outside of the tree canopy. Such adaptations enable a wide variety of foliage to grow even though they are not exposed to much sunlight. While sun-loving plants often have broad leaves and expend significant energy to capture sunlight for photosynthesis, shade-tolerant plants expend less energy and tend to be more efficient consumers of soil nutrients and sunlight.

Penn State Extension's Plant and Pests division says the amount of shade a plant is growing under will directly affect the density of the foliage and the plant's flowering and fruiting characteristics. Blend-ing shade-tolerant plants into the landscape can be an effective use of space. Before choosing plants for an existing landscape, it's important to assess the level of shade or sun the plants will receive.

- **Heavy shade:** Heavy shade is when no direct sunlight reaches a plant. This occurs at the base of northern-facing walls or beneath thick tree canopies.
- **FULL SUN:** Areas that receive full sun enjoy direct sunlight between six and eight hours per day.
- **MODERATE SHADE:** These sites have reflected sunlight that may come off of water features.
- **LIGHT SHADE:** Plants in these areas will get partially filtered or dappled sunlight. Once homeowners understand which type of shade they are dealing with, they can then visit

plant nurseries and select their plants. Most greenery comes with care instructions that include recommendations regarding the amount of shade/sunlight the plant will need to do well. If further assistance is needed, a knowledgeable employee can make suggestions based on landscape needs.

Those who are looking for some preliminary guidance when it comes to selecting shade-tolerant shrubs, plants or trees can consult the following list.

- **BLEEDING HEART:** Bleeding heart, or Dicentra spectabilis, is typically found in woodlands. It's a perennial in the poppy family that produces mounded foliage and arching vine-like stems of heart-shaped flowers in the spring.
- **AMETHYST FLOWER:** Browallia hybrids offer star-shaped blooms of blue and violet. These plants will billow out of hanging baskets or containers, and they prefer warm shade or filtered sunlight.
- **COLEUS:** The coleus, Solenostemon scutellarioides, is another perennial that can have a variety of different leaf colors and striations.
- **WITCH HAZELS:** These are a genus in the family Hamamelidaceae, which has four

different species in North America. This shrub or small tree features arching branches with dense, multi-stemmed clumps. Witch hazel produces flowers in the late autumn when most other plants are sparse.

- **BAYBERRY:** Myrica pensylvanica can grow in partial shade as a hedge or natural property divider. The leaves of this shrub are aromatic when crushed. The shrub will produce tiny, gray/white fruits in late summer.
- **ENGLISH IVY:** Also known as Hedera helix, this trailing plant is widely cultivated as an ornamental plant. It will spread easily and can become invasive. Those searching for shade-tolerant trees can choose among Sugar maple, Black alder, Flowering dogwood, and White spruce, among others. Shade-tolerant plants can make welcome additions to the landscape, offering greenery and color in the darker areas of a property.



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**The Many Benefits Of Hiring A Professional Landscaper**

The flowers are blooming, and the grass has begun to grow anew, making spring a great time for homeowners to once again turn their attention to landscaping. Those who aren't looking forward to dusting off their lawnmowers and rethreading their string trimmers may want to hire professional landscapers to tend to their lawns and gardens.

A recent joint study by the National Gardening Association, Residential Lawn and Landscape Services and the Value of Landscaping found that homeowners spend roughly \$45 billion per year on professional lawn and landscape

services, as nearly 30 percent of all households across the United States use at least one type of lawn or landscape service. The rising use of lawn care services is indicative of homeowners' appreciation of the convenience and craftsmanship professional services can provide. While the impact professional landscapers can have on a property's aesthetic appeal is considerable, homeowners also benefit from working with professional landscapers in various other ways.

- Time savings: One of the biggest benefits of leaving lawn care to the professionals is the amount of time it will save for

the average homeowner. Lawns generally need to be mowed once per week during the spring and summer seasons and, depending on the size of the property, that can take an hour or more. Add the time it takes to clean up clippings, mulch landscaping beds and edge the property, and homeowners can expect to devote a significant chunk of their weekends to caring for their lawns. Lawn services employ a few workers who make fast work of the job, leaving homeowners time to enjoy their weekends however they see fit.

- Reduced risk for injury: Maintaining a landscape is hard work, and those unaccustomed to this type of activity may find themselves winded or at risk of injury. Improper use of lawn equipment also is a safety hazard. Leaving the work to professionals can help homeowners avoid strained backs, lacerations, pulled muscles, sunburns, and any other dangers that can result when tackling landscaping projects.

- Financial savings: On the surface, hiring a landscaping service may seem like a costly venture. However, after crunching some numbers, many homeowners realize that doing the work themselves may cost more in the long run than hiring a professional landscaping service. Homeowners who decide to go it alone must purchase expensive equipment, and those lawn tools will require routine maintenance, which costs additional money. Inexperienced homeowners may incur extra fees to "fix" mistakes that occur during the learning process. Each year, new seed, fertilizer, mulch, pesticides, and other supplies also must be purchased. But professional lawn care services typically charge a set fee per month, and that fee covers the maintenance of both your property and the equipment needed to keep that property looking great.
- Know-how: Many professional landscapers know how to address lawn care issues that may arise throughout the year. They will know how to deal with dry patches of lawn or poorly draining areas, and they also can make recommendations on

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plants that will thrive under certain conditions.

- One-stop shopping: Certain landscaping services provide many different options for prospective customers. Basic lawn cuts may be one package, but there also may be services for seasonal seeding, weeding, leaf clean-up, and winterizing.
- Consistent maintenance: Homeowners who frequently travel or spend much of their summers away from home often find that lawn care companies are a wise investment. Established weekly schedules ensure the landscape always will look its best whether homeowners are home or out of town.

Spring is a great time for homeowners to decide if hiring professional landscaping services is in their best interests. The time and money saved, as well as impact professional landscapers can have on a property, makes landscaping services a great investment for many homeowners.

**How Lawns Benefit From Aeration**

Compacted soil can have a dramatic effect on grass. Compacted soil blocks oxygen, water and nutrients from reaching the root systems of the turf. That creates a lawn with weak roots, which make grass more vulnerable to disease and compromising its ability to withstand harsh weather, such as summer heat.

The buildup of thatch, which is a matted layer of grass clippings and other organic debris that collects on the top of the soil, is one indicator that a lawn could benefit from aeration, a process in which the surface of the lawn is perforated to break up compacted soil and allow oxygen, water and nutrients to reach root systems. Other signs that aeration may be necessary include patches of thin grass, brown spots and a high concentration of clay in the soil.

When faced with a lawn that could benefit from aeration, homeowners may wonder if such as task lends itself to DIY or if it's best left to professional landscapers. Aerating a lawn is not always easy, and typically it involves the use of one of three types of aerators:

- Core aerator: A core aerator uses hollow tines to pull plugs



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