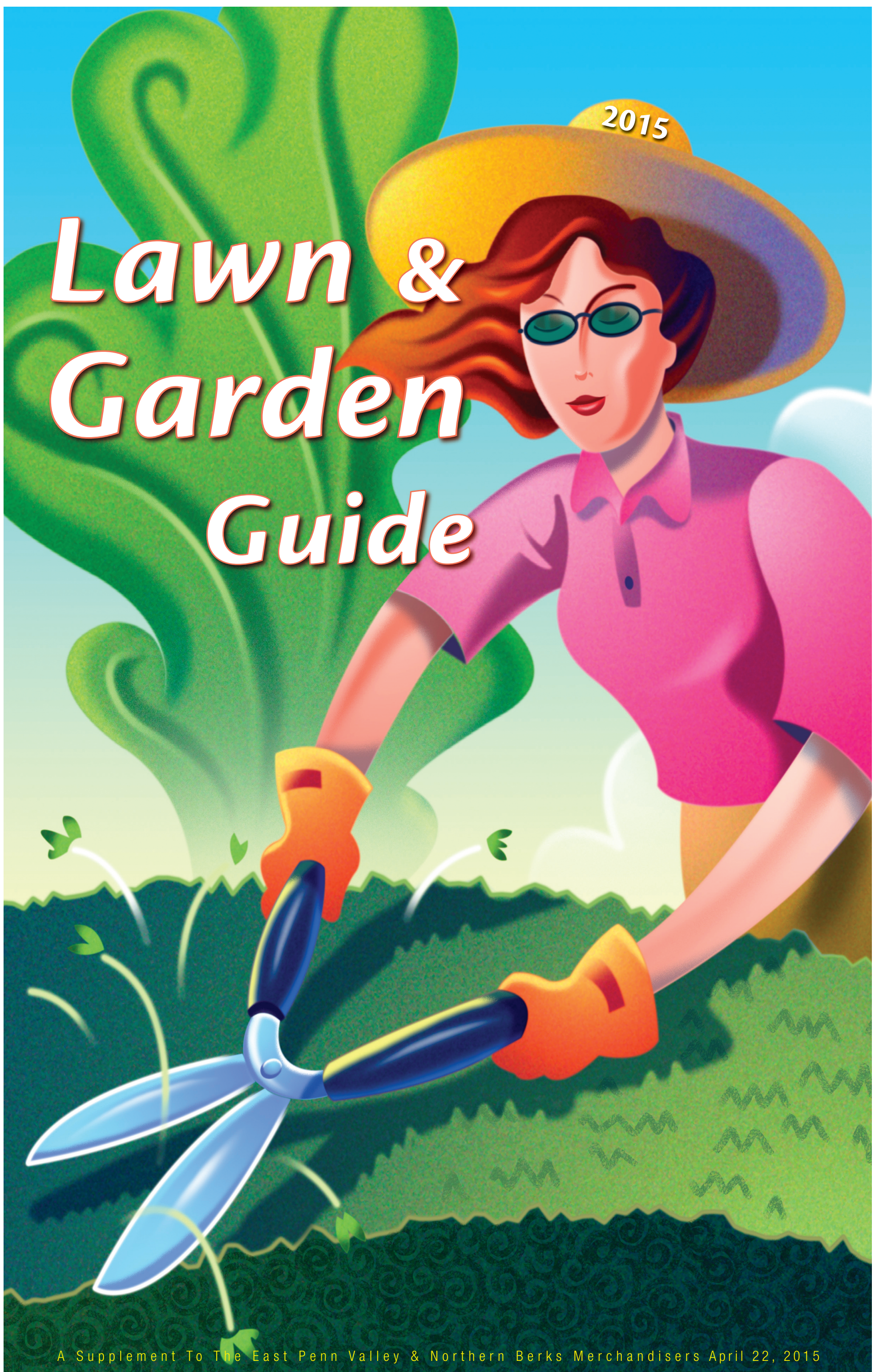


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3 Tips to Grow a Bold, Beautiful Backyard

(NewsUSA) - It's time to start heralding the outdoors by beautifying the backyard. So, don the appropriate garments, grab some tools and turn your backyard into something ideal for entertaining.

Families love to spend time outdoors -- especially if they have a pool, patio or deck -- so take the time to administer some TLC to the lawn, pool, patio and garden.

The following tips will help you get the most out of your backyard:

1. Grow some privacy. Depending on the size of your backyard, consider installing a fence, arbor, pergola, row of bushes, trees or hanging vines to shelter your property from

the neighbors. This helps make gatherings more private and gives your lawn a "secret garden" feel. Plus, a fence, trellis or arbor can offer a wind-break and much-needed shade -- both of which can be key for pools. Flowering vines like trumpet vines, clematis or morning glory attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

2. Get cozy outdoors. If you have unused deck space, create a family-friendly area perfect for entertaining outdoors: cook-outs, lounging, games or parties. All you need is some inexpensive patio furniture -- clusters with chairs and a sofa - and small tables for surface space. To make it really cozy, add some brightly colored

throw pillows and potted plants. 3. Simplify pool maintenance. Family pools tend to make the best summer parties, but all investments include maintenance. Adding a pool cover can reduce pool heating costs by 50 to 70 percent. Or if your pool has problems with cloudy water or chlorine levels, BioGuard's new Pool Tonic removes phosphate and many other unwanted contaminants for beautiful water that is easy to maintain and enjoy. For complimentary water testing, bring a sample of your pool water to any BioGuard dealer, and receive the right prescription for your pool. Visit www.bioguard.com to find your nearest dealer. Another option to reduce the complexity of pool maintenance is BioGuard's Smart Shock. This multi-functional formula combines key elements of pool care into one easy-to-apply product. Smart Shock requires no mixing or predissolving, and you can re-enter the pool in as little as 15 minutes.

Find The Best Method Of Treating Warm Weather Insects

Homeowners know that the arrival of spring also marks the re-emergence of insects. While not every insect is harmful, if an infestation grows considerably or if insects begin to move from the outdoors into a home, it may be time for homeowners to call in a professional. The Entomological Society of America points out that homeowners cannot count on bitterly cold winters to help control the numbers of insects in their yards. Insect ecology is affected by various factors and is not solely dependent on temperature. Furthermore, what occurred one year certainly may not be repeated the next, as homeowners who have had various insect infestations in

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their yards can attest. One year a yard may be overcome with ants, while the next year it may suffer through an earwig infestation. The first step homeowners looking to curtail insects in their yards can take is to determine if the insects they see are genuine threats to their lawns. Some bugs emerge and swarm early in the season, but then gradually disappear as spring turns into summer. Other insects may come out of hiding if a homeowner is doing a lot of yard work or construction around a house. Practice a wait-and-see approach to determine if you really have an insect problem or just have stirred up activity. Homeowners also must decide if it is bearable living with the insects. If insects are not doing any damage or if they can be controlled relatively easily, then you might be able to avoid calling in the professionals. However, if critters like termites and certain species of wood-eating insects are invasive and damaging your yard, you may need to take action. Anyone concerned with the side effects of pesticides and insecticides can first try to remedy the problem naturally.

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Sometimes it's just a matter of making a yard less hospitable to insects. Remove leaves and clean up debris close to the house, as these can both encourage infestations. Piles of rotting wood or leftover firewood can be a food or shelter source for a number of insects. Inspect water spigots for leaks and improve suspect drainage on your property, as these things can be welcoming to bugs that like moist surroundings. Remove standing water whenever possible to eliminate spots for mosquitoes to incubate larvae. Natural remedies also may do the trick. Mint, bay leaves, catnip, and garlic can repel insects like roaches and ants. Citrus can be a natural flea deterrent. Some homeowners have had success planting marigolds around their yards to serve as a natural bug repellent because the flowers produce a scent that many insects find repulsive. Thai lemon grass plants also can be used to keep mosquitoes at bay.

Remember, natural predators, such as birds, bats, spiders, and larger insects, feed on nuisance bugs. Keeping these helpful predators around may be an effective and natural way for homeowners to control annoying pests. If an insect problem seems out of control or if you need a professional opinion about the damage being done to your home or landscape, consult with an exterminator. Licensed exterminators have the training and expertise to assess insect concerns and create a plan of action that will minimize the risk to inhabitants of your home and nearby wildlife. An exterminator will know what it takes to treat insects and maximize the chances of removing the problem promptly and effectively. Warm weather is synonymous with many things, including the return of insects. Homeowners may be able to treat unruly bugs on their own, but especially problematic infestations may require the help of experienced exterminators.

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Simple Tips To Get Growing At Home

(NAPS) - There may be few things more satisfying than growing colorful flowers or eating vegetables picked fresh from the garden. That might seem ambitious if you haven't gardened before, but getting started this year need not be difficult. Just follow these simple gardening tips to enjoy the benefits of fresh air, gentle exercise and healthy produce:
 1) Pick your spot with care. Plants need sun and water to survive. Vegetables and most flowers need full sun—at least six hours of sunlight every day during the growing season. Plant close to an outdoor water source to make hot weather watering easier.
 2) Start with the soil. Because plants live by their roots, the most important part of any garden is below ground. Most soil around houses isn't ideal for plants but can be improved by adding nutrient-rich organic matter, usually in

the form of compost, shredded leaves or composted manure. Bagged soil mixes marked specifically for growing vegetables are ideal for containers.
 3) Keep your first garden manageable. For beginners, try a plot 4 feet by 8 feet, or half a dozen good-sized (24–36") containers. That's enough to provide a satisfying harvest of herbs, greens or a few tomato plants while you get a feel for the amount of time and effort it takes to water and weed. Pots are the easiest to control soil, water and light. Creating a container garden of vegetables, herbs and patio flowers is a good place for novices to start.
 4) Get a head start. Some vegetables and flowers may need to be started from seed 6–8 weeks before it's safe to plant them outside. You'll need to do this for tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and petunias. But other favorites like

zucchini, cucumbers, beans and sunflowers are easily sown in the ground with seed. You can learn more about starting and sowing seeds at www.burpee.com. Planting time will vary in each growing zone, but is generally best in the late spring.
 5) Watch your garden grow. It's fun for the whole family to observe seeds taking root and growing into plants. Be sure to water and weed regularly as you wait for the bounty of your first harvest. Burpee's free Garden Time Planner app makes planting in specific garden regions easy. To download the app, buy non-GMO seeds and plants, or to access helpful "how-to" articles and videos, visit www.burpee.com or call (800) 888-1447. Burpee offers a wide range of flowers, vegetables and herbs to grow at home.

Did You Know?

Damage to a lawn may be indicative of various problems. Everything from insects to rodents to the family pet may be responsible for causing burnt patches, holes and other eyesores. Getting to the bottom of the problem is the first step in remediation. Burning and discoloration of the lawn is often a result of high concentrations of dog urine pooling in one area. Diluting the urine by hosing down areas of the lawn can clear up many problems. Birds, raccoons, skunks, moles, and other rodents may feed on grubs that reside just under the thatch of the lawn, and animals may tear up lawns in search of this delicacy. Treating the grub problem usually alleviates damage caused by animals. Mole crickets are another common lawn destroyer. These insects resemble crickets, but they burrow beneath the turf to feed on plant roots. The mole crickets can push up channels of turf as they burrow, exposing roots to the elements and causing the grass to die. Getting rid of the insects can revitalize the lawn.

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Spring Checklist For Home And Lawn Care

(NewsUSA) - Whether you're considering the resale value of your home or are simply resigned to doing maintenance projects to keep your house in good condition, your lawn and garden could certainly benefit from some TLC of the home-and lawn-improvement variety this spring.



The exterior of your house commands most first impressions, and even mild winters inflict seasonal damage. If you don't know where to start, a home-improvement project checklist may help. Consider the following lawn- and garden-maintenance tips from home and garden experts at HGTV and MarthaStewart.com:

- * Remove piles of dead leaves from the lawn. Not only will your grass grow greener, a clean lawn helps maximize fertilizers and pesticides. Don't make the mistake of fertilizing your grass too early though. April is the general benchmark; any sooner might result in yellow spots and dried-out patches of grass.
- * Check gutters for leaks and debris. Loose gutters cause improper drainage, so water can collect in basements and crawl spaces. Downspouts should point away from the

foundation of the house and must be clear of all debris.

- * Start a roof fund. It's a good rule of thumb to check your roof for rotted, buckled, loose or missing shingles after winter because summer sun will only worsen the damage. Since roof maintenance is so expensive, it's also smart to start a fund before you need it.
- * Remove piles of wood or debris stacked near the home. Firewood should be kept far

away from the foundation, and stacked 18 inches off the ground. These preventative measures help keep insect pests from exploring your home.

- * Don't strain yourself, and stay hydrated. This might be the first time you've done any heavy lifting or spent hours in the sun for months. Remember to drink plenty of fluids, take breaks and stretch your muscles. If you suffer from backaches and muscle strains, keep some relief like

Absorbine Jr. (www.absorbinejr.com) on hand. Its herbal ingredients and uncanny ability to ease muscle and back pain make it a must-have for yard work.

- * Call a professional to clean your AC unit. Heating and cooling experts recommend an annual servicing since clean coils work more efficiently. When the summer's blazing heat drives you indoors, your family will appreciate having an AC operating at peak levels.

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Watering Tips To Produce Healthy Lawns

Summer is a season for landscaping, and homeowners who live in regions that get especially hot in the summertime often worry that their lawns won't make it through the dog days of summer looking lush. But lawns don't have to succumb to the sizzling summer sun. Oftentimes, the right watering strategies can help homeowners nurse their lawns through the hottest months of the year, ensuring the lawns make it to autumn looking as green as they did back at the height of spring.

- Reconsider when you're watering. Come summertime, homeowners may want a glass of water at high noon, when temperatures seem to be at their hottest. But you and your lawn are different, so the best time to satiate your thirst is not necessarily the best time to water your lawn. Watering in the middle of the day is often ineffective, as water tends to evaporate quickly in the afternoons when temperatures are peaking. Nighttime watering can contribute to the growth of fungus, which can create an entirely new set of headaches for homeowners. Morning watering sessions tend to be most effective during the summertime, as temperatures tend to be cooler in the morning, leading to less evaporation. Less evaporation means all that watering isn't going to waste.
- Reconsider your sprinkler. If you can't afford an in-ground irrigation system, which many landscaping professionals feel is the most effective and efficient way to water a lawn, then you likely will rely on a sprinkler to keep your lawn looking lush through the summer months. When choosing a sprinkler, look for one that shoots water out horizontally as opposed to vertically. A vertical sprinkler system is more vulnerable to wind and evaporation than one that shoots water out horizontally, so make sure your sprinkler system is sending water into your lawn and not into summer breezes.
- Avoid overwatering. How much water your lawn needs in the summertime depends on a host of factors, including where you live and how often rain falls in that region. Overwatering can

promote the growth of fungus and adversely affect your lawn's root system, making it difficult for roots to grow deep. Speak with a local landscaping professional to determine how often you should water your lawn each week.

- Strategically position your sprinklers. When choosing where to put down your sprinklers, hook them up to your hose, turn them on and then watch to see where the water is going. Areas that exposed to sun are most in need of water, so make sure the bulk of your water isn't going to shaded areas beneath trees. In addition, make sure you aren't wasting water on sidewalks, patios and driveways. Sprinklers should be positioned so none of the water they're shooting out is landing

on surfaces that don't need water. It sounds simple, but too often homeowners drop their sprinklers down, turn them on and then walk away without waiting to see where the water is landing. Position sprinklers or adjust sprinkler heads so all the water is landing on your lawn. Keeping a lawn lush and green at the height of summer requires homeowners to adopt effective strategies. Such a strategies can make the difference between a lush landscape and one that succumbs to summer heat. *Poorly placed sprinklers that shoot water out onto driveways and other surfaces that do not need water can rob a lawn of water it desperately needs when temperatures climb in the summertime.*

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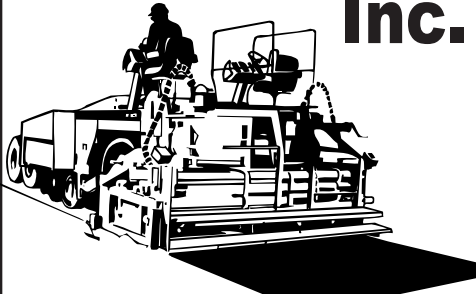
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Preparing Your Lawn And Garden Equipment For Spring

OPEI REMINDS CONSUMERS TO USE ONLY E10 OR LOWER FUEL IN ANY LAWN AND GARDEN EQUIPMENT

s(NAPS) - Spring is here, and soon, home and business owners will be cleaning and preparing lawn and garden equipment.

"Many are so eager to pull out lawn and garden equipment once spring arrives that they sometimes forget basic steps to ensure the powerhouse of the equipment - the engine - is in good working order," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI.

"One challenge is that most fuel contains some level of ethanol, which contains corrosive alcohol. If you left that fuel in the tank over the winter months, you don't want to use it in the spring. It may damage your equipment. You need to drain it and put in new fuel that is E10 or lower," advises Kiser.

Whether it's a mower, trimmer, blower, chain saw or pruner, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) offers tips to help users avoid fuel-related problems and ready their equipment to operate safely.

Check the fuel tank. If fuel has been sitting all winter long in the fuel tank, do not use it in the spring. Drain it responsibly and put in fresh fuel. Remember to dispose of this fuel properly.

Use only E10 or lower fuel in your outdoor power equipment. Do not use gas with more than 10 percent ethanol (E10) in outdoor power equipment. Some gas stations may offer 15 percent ethanol (E15) gas or other fuel blends, but this higher ethanol fuel is dangerous—and is in fact illegal—to use in any small engine equipment, such as lawn mowers, chain saws, generators, and all other lawn and garden equipment.

Don't leave fuel sitting in the tank for more than 30 days. Untreated gasoline (without a fuel stabilizer) left in the system will deteriorate, which may cause starting or running problems and, in some cases, damage to the fuel system.

Inspect your equipment. Check for loose belts and missing or damaged parts. If you find anything concerning, replace the



parts or take your equipment to a qualified service representative.

Drain out the old oil and put in fresh oil. Remove the oil drain plug in your lawn mower and catch the old oil in a container. Replace the plug and refill the engine with oil recommended by the product manufacturer. Properly dispose of the oil you drained.

Install clean air filters. Your engine and equipment will run much better with clean filters. Paper filters need to be replaced. Some foam filters can be cleaned and replaced.

Sharpen your cutting blade. Have your lawn mower's cutting blade sharpened so you can get a clean cut on your lawn. Your lawn will be healthier and your lawn mower will operate more efficiently, too.

Clean your equipment. If you did not clean your equipment before storing it, there may be dirt, oil or grass stuck to it. Give your equipment a good spring-cleaning. A cleaner machine will run more efficiently and last longer.

Review your manual. Now is a good time to read the operator's manual and refamiliarize yourself with the controls and what they do. Make sure you know how to stop the machine quickly if needed.

About OPEI
The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute is an international trade association representing more than 100 power equipment, engine and utility vehicle manufacturers and suppliers. OPEI is the advocacy voice of the industry, and a recognized Standards Development Organization for the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and active internationally through the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the Inter-national Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) in the development of safety and performance standards. OPEI is managing partner of GIE+EXPO, the industry's annual international trade show, and the creative force behind the environmental education program, TurfMutt.com. OPEI-Canada represents members on a host of issues, including recycling, emissions and other regulatory developments across the Canadian provinces. For more information, visit www.OPEI.org.

Don't be fuelish—Use only E10 or lower fuel in any lawn and garden equipment.

Maintaining Bird Feeders And Bird Baths Essential To Avian Health

Bird watching is a pastime enjoyed by people of all ages. While many people trek into the woods to see their favorite birds, homeowners can take steps to entice these fascinating and feathered friends right to their backyards. Homeowners who want to attract birds to their properties can do so by providing the birds food, shelter and places to wash up or cool off. Installing a bird feeder and a bird bath in your yard is one way to attract a bevy of winged creatures that can provide hours of enjoyment. Establishing a bird-friendly environment may seem as simple as hanging a feeder on a pole or tree and erecting a bird bath nearby. But a certain level of maintenance is needed to keep birds healthy and happy. According to the experts at the Bird Watcher's Digest, recent research indicates feeders can sometimes be a source of disease for the birds visiting them. The Audubon Society echoes that warning, saying that bird feeders and baths can serve as transmission stations for diseases such as aspergillosis, avian pox and salmonellosis. Such warnings are not meant to deter budding birding hobbyists. Organizations like the Audubon Society hope that

such warnings send the message that disinfection and maintenance is necessary to maintain sanitary environments for birds. Doing so is relatively easy and well worth the time for birding enthusiasts. • The Humane Society of the United States advises cleaning hanging feeders once every two weeks or more often if they're heavily used. Ground-feeding designs should be cleaned every two days. Feeders can be immersed in a very-diluted solution of bleach to water (nine parts water to one part bleach). Let soak for a few minutes, and then scrub the feeder with a stiff brush or scouring pad before rinsing. Allow the feeder to dry completely before refilling it with seed. • Bird baths should be emptied of water each day. Brush or wipe the bath clean, then rinse and refill with fresh water. Do not leave standing water overnight; otherwise bird baths can easily become a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other parasites. • Frequently collect discarded seed hulls and clean bird droppings from beneath feeders. If the area around the feeder has become especially soiled, relocate the feeder elsewhere and clean its initial location. • Follow proper instructions with regard to seed and other bird

food. For example, reduce the amount of suet offered in hot weather. Heat can cause suet to spoil, and sticky suet can become stuck in birds' feathers and make it hard for them to keep clean. • Try to provide more than one feeder and bird bath to prevent overcrowding. Crowding can contribute to the spread of disease. • Do not situate feeders and bird baths under perches where they can be soiled by droppings. • If you notice birds look sick or are not acting strangely, halt feeding and bathing to prevent healthy birds from becoming ill. Wait a week before resuming feeding and notify wildlife officials if you find dead or sick birds around your property. • Locate feeders and baths at least 30 feet away from windows so birds do not get confused by reflections and collide with the glass. • Store seed in a dry container with a tight-fitting lid to prevent mold from forming and moisture from getting in. Creating a thriving habitat for bird watching is easier than one might think. But once birds begin visiting a yard, homeowners must diligently maintain clean feeders and bird baths to ensure the birds stay as healthy as possible. Any questions about wild-bird care can be directed to a local Audubon Society chapter or by visiting a pet store or bird hobby center.

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Did You Know?

NEEM OIL is a naturally occurring pesticide that can be used to combat a host of landscaping pests and diseases. Azadirachtin is an active component in neem oil that can be extracted to repel and kill pests. Studies have shown that neem oil is nearly nontoxic to bees, birds, fish, and wildlife. In addition, neem oil has no link to cancer or other diseases, making it a safe insecticide when applied correctly. When consumed by insects, including grubs, insecticides made from neem oil can make those insects cease feeding or reduce their feeding, helping to prevent the spread of lawn problems associated with certain insect infestations. In addition, neem oil can hinder the maturation process of larvae by interfering with insect hormone systems, which can prevent them from breeding. As is the case when applying any pesticides, parents should be mindful of their children after applying neem oil. Though studies have not found children are more sensitive to neem oil than adults, parents may want to err on the side of caution and prevent their children from playing in areas of the yard where neem oil was recently applied.

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Create An Outdoor Resort In Your Backyard

(NewsUSA) - This year, many people will spend vacations at home instead of traveling. According to the American Lighting Association (ALA), with a few updates to your outside lighting, you can enjoy a mini vacation at home. Believe it or not, it's easier and less expensive than you might think to transform your existing patio, deck or pool area into a lovely retreat. Rather than buying a costly designer patio set or lounge chairs that will lose their luster by next season, invest in a new lighting scheme that will enhance your existing outdoor furniture and amenities. "Creating a beautiful landscape doesn't have to be expensive," says Rick Wiedemer of Hinkley

Lighting. "A few well-placed, low-voltage path or accent lights can make a huge impact on a well-manicured landscape." No lawn is too small. "Even modest homes or those with limited yards or gardens can benefit," he says. All that is needed are some basic tools, a transformer (which reduces standard 120-volt household current to the safe 12-volt level), outdoor low-voltage copper cable and low-voltage lighting fixtures -- all of which you can find at your local ALA-member lighting showroom. "The best thing about using low-voltage lighting outdoors is you don't have to do everything at once. I recommend purchasing a transformer that is larger than you immediately need," says Lew Waltz of Philips Hadco. That way, when you are ready to install additional lighting, the larger transformer will already be in place and ready to handle the task. "You only pay for the energy consumed by the fixtures," says Waltz. "In other words, a 600-watt transformer that only has 200 watts of fixtures on it, uses 200 watts of energy, not 600." When laying out your project, remember that a little light goes a long way outdoors. Consulting with a lighting professional at your local ALA-member lighting showroom can help you avoid making the common mistake of too many fixtures in one area. To find more information about lighting all areas of your home, go to www.AmericanLightingAssoc.com.

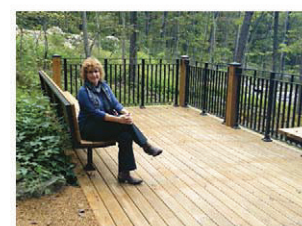


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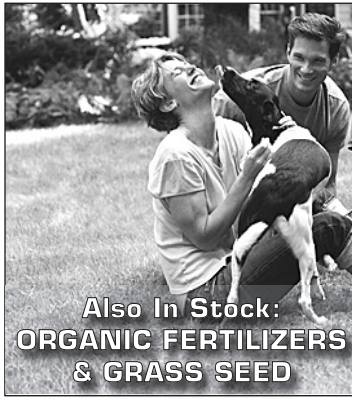
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Simple Sustainable Gardening Tips

Sustainability is a concept that can be applied to many facets of life, and gardening is no exception. Sustainable gardening involves preserving and protecting resources, which can benefit us both in the present and in the future. Sustainability is especially applicable to gardening, and the following are a handful of ways green thumbs can embrace sustainability in their gardens.

- Choose to water more effectively. Oscillating sprinklers may harken today's gardeners back to the carefree days of their childhoods when they would run through the sprinklers in their parents' yards. But such sprinklers can lose substantial amounts of water to evaporation. When designing an irrigation plan for your lawn and garden, use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to conserve water. If you must use sprinklers, make sure they are not shooting water too high, as wind can blow the water away from the yard where it belongs, and be sure to position them so no water is landing on sidewalks, the driveway or the street.

- Add mulch to flower and plant beds. Many a gardener has gone to bed with a beautiful garden only to return in the ensuing days and see flower and plant beds littered with weeds. Mulch is perhaps best known for helping flower and plant beds retain moisture, but mulch also prevents the growth of weeds. Preventing weed growth means your water is going to the plants and flowers you intended it for and not to greedy and unsightly weeds. Preventing weed growth also reduces your use of potentially harmful pesticides to curtail the growth of weeds.
- Develop a compost pile. Compost is made up of decayed organic material, and it can be used as a fertilizer. Gardeners can make their own compost piles at home, providing valuable minerals and nutrients for their lawns, without having to rely on store-bought amendments that need to be produced, packaged and transported before they can make it onto the shelves in your local lawn and garden center.
- Choose native plants. A gar-

den filled with exotic plants and flowers may be stunning, but unless those plants are native to where you live, that beauty is coming at a steep price. When choosing plants for your garden, choose native plants that are fully capable of thriving in your local climate. Non-native plants are likely to need excessive watering and other less sustainable attention that native plants do not need.

- Plant with a plan. When planting trees around your property, plant them in locations that can reduce your reliance on air conditioning in the warmer months. Plant a tree in a place where it will help to shade common areas inside your home so such rooms are comfortable without the air conditioner cranking all day long. You can go one step further, and plant deciduous trees that will shed their leaves when the weather gets cold, ensuring that sunlight you want to keep out in the summer can get in and warm up the house in the winter, reducing the amount of energy needed to heat your home.

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Concrete Landscapes Build Greener Gardens

(NewsUSA) - Americans love having backyards for planting gardens, holding outdoor parties and giving children a safe place to play outdoors. But some homeowners find themselves with less-than-ideal backyards. Maybe the backyard slopes too much for a picnic table. Maybe the home's in an arid area, where green grass requires expensive irrigation. For many homeowners looking to improve their backyards, concrete masonry might provide an unexpected, inexpensive solution.

Concrete can mimic any surface, like stucco, European cobblestone or aged slate, allowing concrete landscaping to blend into any area alongside any style of home.

Concrete masonry proves both stylish and durable. Unlike wooden decks, concrete structures require no upkeep and don't succumb to termites, mold, rot, weathering or other problems.

One couple replaced their wooden deck with a concrete patio, then found themselves

with an insect-free backyard. "With the wood deck, it seemed like mosquitoes would breed and then come up and attack," said Melissa Werpy, who used concrete masonry to renovate her backyard. "We can now be outside until midnight, and mosquitoes aren't a problem."

Concrete masonry can build attractive desert landscapes, too. Some homeowners use water irrigation to grow green grass in arid regions. But irrigating a lawn costs money and wastes water, a precious natural resource.

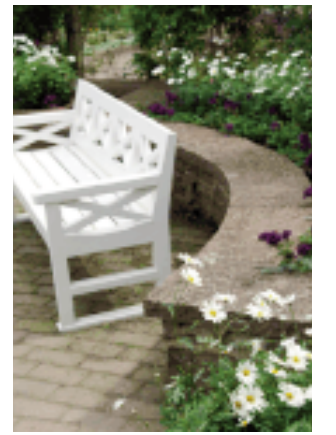
Homeowners can use segmented, concrete walls to build attractive driveways and terraced landscapes without growing grass. The landscape might not look green, but avoiding irrigation helps desert homeowners save the planet.

In steep yards without flat surfaces for planting herb or flower gardens, setting up tennis nets or supporting tables and chairs, concrete walls can make backyards more enjoyable.

Landscapers can build terraced, concrete brick walls that

create level areas for patios, garden planters and extra seats during large parties. Concrete masonry can help control erosion and water drainage, too. For homeowners with problem backyards, concrete masonry can provide an inexpensive, durable and attractive way to make landscapes both people- and eco-friendly.

For more information about concrete masonry, visit www.ncma.org.



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Protect Pets To Keep Your Whole Family Safe

(NewsUSA) - Playing outside isn't just for the kids. Pets love exploring the backyard as well, and while letting Fluffy and Fido out may cut down on fur balls on the carpet, they could be bringing unwanted guests back inside.

The National Pest Management Association (NPMA) reminds homeowners to thoroughly check pets' fur for fleas and ticks after they've been out in the yard or at the park. These pet pests are known to spread diseases to both animals and humans, and can easily infest homes.

Fleas are a very common problem for cats and dogs. Excessive scratching and red bumps can be signs that your pet has fleas. What makes this pest a problem is the ease with which they can transfer to carpets, couches and even humans. They are also difficult to find because of how small they are and how fast they move. Fleas are an itchy annoyance, but they can also cause flea allergy dermatitis and transfer tapeworms. Though rare, fleas can even transmit bubonic plague if they've fed on an infected rodent.

Ticks do not spread as quickly as fleas, but they are known to transfer multiple serious diseases to humans and animals. Lyme disease is one of the most common illnesses spread by ticks and is now seen in people and animals in most regions of the United States. Pets can also suffer from "tick paralysis" if a female tick attaches near a pet's spinal cord.

It is important to look for signs of fleas and ticks, but pet owners can also prevent these pests with a few tips.

- * Keep the lawn cut short, and gardens maintained. Fleas and ticks often hide in tall grass waiting for a host to walk by.
- * Groom long-haired pets to prevent pests from latching on. Shorter hair is also easier to comb through to look for pests.
- * Look out for skin irritations or changes in behavior that might signal an animal is sick.
- * Talk with a veterinarian to see whether preventative medication is recommended for your pet.

If you suspect your home has an infestation of any type of pest, be sure to contact a licensed professional to identify and recommend a course of

treatment. You can find a professional in your area by visiting www.PestWorld.org.

Veggie Garden Tips For Beginners

Planting a vegetable garden can be a worthwhile endeavor for anyone who has an available patch of land. Gardens need not take up much space, and even apartment dwellers without yards can plant small gardens in containers they place on terraces or window boxes.

Although establishing a garden is easy enough, beginners may make a few mistakes along the way. Those who already have paved the garden way before can offer novice gardeners some worthwhile tips.

One of the first decisions novice gardeners must make is which crops to grow. This will help determine how much land you will need and which supplies or soil amendments will be necessary. According to The Old Farmer's Almanac, a common error for beginners is planting too much and more than anyone could ever consume, so it's best to start small and be proud of that small garden. Plants such as peppers, squash and tomatoes produce throughout the season, so you may not need many plants to provide for your needs. Less prolific plants may require a greater investment to produce a similar yield. Locate your garden in an area that gets adequate sun. Many vegetables need between six and eight hours of sunlight per day. Without enough light, they will not bear as much and could be susceptible to insect infestation. Vegetables and fruit also need plenty of water because they're not very drought-tolerant, so keep gardens close to a water source. Another good tip is to locate the garden near the house or bar-

becue grill. This way you can easily harvest fresh produce and use it when cooking.

Soil preparation is also key. Till the soil and remove debris like rocks, sticks and hard clumps of dirt. Work with organic material, such as manure or compost. Apply mulch after planting to help maintain moisture levels in the soil.

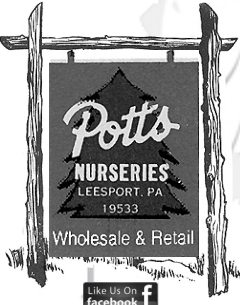
Plant the tallest crops at the rear of your garden bed. Work forward with shorter crops. Try to leave a foot or more between planting rows.

It's easy to get a garden started and enjoy fresh food for many months to come.

Did You Know?

Biosolids are an organic amendment available to gardeners. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, biosolids are carefully treated and monitored residuals formed at sewage treatment facilities. They may be recycled into fertilizers to stimulate plant growth. Biosolids may help reduce the need for chemical fertilizers. Biosolids can be safe to use, but homeowners should be cautious about heavy metal content, pathogen levels and salts. Rely on only Class A biosolids, which have been treated to reduce the bacterial content and are approved for use in production agriculture. Home gardeners may want to avoid biosolids in vegetable gardens because of the potential for heavy metal content seeping into the produce.

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Outwit The Squirrels

(NAPS) - Bird feeding can be a fulfilling hobby, if you know how to outsmart a clever squirrel who's eating your birdseed. These tips can help:

1) Baffles: Install baffles, at least 15 inches wide and sloped, between the top of the feeder and its hanger on a hanging feeder or between the ground and the feeder for feeders on posts.

2) Spinners: String spinners on a horizontal line.

3) Location: Mount bird feeders on a smooth metal pole at least six feet high and prune any branches within a 12-foot radius.

4) Feeders:

- Metal Feeders help minimize the damage from hungry squirrels.

- Wire Cages placed around a bird feeder will keep squirrels out and allow smaller birds to continue feeding but prevent larger

birds from accessing the feeder.

- Slammer Feeders designed with doors triggered by a large bird's or squirrel's weight close and hamper access to seed.

- Interactive Bird Feeders such as the Squirrel Boss Bird Feeder. This humane and effective squirrel-proof bird feeder has a remote control operated by you from inside your home that gives the squirrel a harmless static shock correction that "tingles" but doesn't hurt the squirrel in any way.

- 5) Seed: Squirrels are less enticed by nyger, millet, safflower, canary and canola seeds. Adding capsaicin to birdseed can also deter squirrels.

To keep squirrels out of your bird feeder, remove debris and spilled seed from the ground around the feeder that could be attracting them.



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A More Eco-Friendly Lawn Is Just Steps Away

Maintaining a lush lawn is a healthy and rewarding hobby that affords homeowners to spend some time outdoors in nature. Lawn enthusiasts can make their hobby even healthier by adopting several eco-friendly lawn care strategies that not only make for a healthier lawn, but a healthier planet as well.

Responsible landscaping has grown increasingly popular in recent years, as more and more homeowners are adopting eco-friendly lawn care practices in the same way they have embraced environmentally conscious behaviors in other areas of their lives. The following are a handful of ways lawn care enthusiasts can incorporate eco-friendly practices into their landscaping routines.

- Maintain an appropriate grass height. When temperatures start to peak in summer, homeowners may be tempted to cut their grass as close as possible so they can reduce the number of afternoons they spend riding or pushing a mower in the hot sun. But cutting too low makes the grass increasingly susceptible to infestations and disease, and such problems may need to be remedied with potentially harmful pesticides if no other approach proves effective. Even if it means an extra afternoon or two mowing under the hot sun, maintaining an appropriate grass height can lead to a healthier lawn, as longer grass soaks up more sunlight, allowing it to grow a deep root system that will help a lawn survive drought and other potential problems.

- Cut back on harmful pesticides. Many homeowners now prefer to avoid pesticides at all costs, but

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sometimes pesticides are a last resort when lawns are falling victim to harmful insects and organisms. Homeowners who want to embrace more eco-friendly lawn care practices can cut back on their use of pesticides, first trying more environmentally friendly options. For example, biopesticides are made from naturally occurring materials, including animals, plants, bacteria, and certain minerals. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, biopesticides are often inherently less toxic than more conventional pesticides. In addition, biopesticides typically affect only the pest causing the problem, whereas broad spectrum pesticides may affect surrounding organisms, such as birds and mammals, in addition to the targeted pest. The EPA (www.epa.gov) advises homeowners

hoping to use biopesticides first learn about managing pests so they can effectively remedy problems on their properties.

- Harvest rainwater. Lawns need water, especially when temperatures rise in the summer. But watering lawns can have an adverse effect on your community's water supply, draining that supply and hurting the community in the long run. Homeowners who can harvest rainwater can drastically reduce their impact on their community water supply, thereby helping the planet and their community, especially if they reside in locales where water resources are traditionally scarce. When rainwater is harvested, it is collected from downspouts before it washes into nearby sewage systems. Many lawn and garden retailers sell rainwater harvesting

systems, which homeowners can install themselves or pay a landscaping professional to install for them.

- Lay mulch down around trees, shrubs and flower beds. Trees, shrubs and flower beds need water, especially in the summer when rising temperatures pose a threat to plants. Homeowners can cut back on the water they use to protect those plants by laying organic mulch in the spring. Organic mulch conserves moisture in soil, promoting stronger roots in plants and helping homeowners cut back on the amount of watering they need to maintain a garden that's both healthy and pleasing to the eye. Organic mulch, which might be made of bark, is also heavy, making it hard for ugly weeds that rob plants of water to thrive.

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Five Steps to Fresh Herbs Year-Round

(NewsUSA) - No matter what the season, you can spice up your cooking with fresh herbs from your very own garden. Container gardening is easy, whether you're a novice gardener or a seasoned pro, and it's a fun way to add flavor to your dishes.

Thanks to their ease of planting, portability and low maintenance, container gardens are one of the fastest-growing trends in gardening. With a little help starting out, you can bring a little life into your kitchen in no time.

Here are five easy steps to fresh, healthy herbs:

1. Select the right container. The type and size of your container are important. The container options are endless, so feel free to be creative. Depending on how many plants you want to grow, it will need to be large enough so that root growth is not restricted. Just remember that adequate drainage is your key to success.
2. Start with seeds or existing plants. There are a few options to get your container garden started, and it's simpler than you may think to get your plants growing. You can either plant from seed or cut a portion of your outdoor plants. Seeds generally germinate within a week, and many outdoor plants will rebound quickly by simply removing two-thirds of their top growth.



3. Choose a good growing medium. Whether you choose to use a commercially prepared artificial mix or a potting soil mixture, it's important that the content is nutrient-rich. Growing plants require nutrients to reach their peak, and the correct balance may not be found in your local soil.

4. Give it adequate sunlight. Your container garden needs at least five hours of direct sunlight. If window lighting is not an option, fluorescent lighting can also work well.

5. Feed and water regularly to keep plants healthy and happy. Container plants can often run out of food quickly since their roots can't expand to find nutrients. At planting time, mix controlled-release fertilizer granules into the soil mixture, or apply a diluted liquid fertilizer with every other watering. But remember that nutrient needs vary with plants, so check each herb's requirement. And don't forget about water; if the soil feels dry, it's time to water.

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3 Tips To Grow A Bold, Beautiful Backyard

(NewsUSA) - It's time to start heralding the outdoors by beautifying the backyard. So, don the appropriate garments, grab some tools and turn your backyard into something ideal for entertaining. Families love to spend time outdoors -- especially if they have a pool, patio or deck -- so take the time to administer some TLC to the lawn, pool, patio and garden. The following tips will help you get the most out of your backyard:

1. Grow some privacy. Depending on the size of your backyard, consider installing a fence, arbor, pergola, row of bushes, trees or hanging vines to shelter your property from the neighbors. This helps make gatherings more private and gives your lawn a "secret garden" feel. Plus, a fence, trellis or arbor can offer a wind-break and much-needed shade -- both of which can be key for pools. Flowering vines like trumpet vines, clematis or morning glory attract butterflies and hummingbirds.
2. Get cozy outdoors. If you have unused deck space, create a family-friendly area perfect for entertaining outdoors: cook-outs, lounging, games or parties. All you need is some inexpensive patio furniture -- clusters with chairs and a sofa -- and small tables for surface space. To make it really cozy, add some brightly colored throw pillows and potted plants.
3. Simplify pool maintenance. Family pools tend to make the best summer parties, but all investments include maintenance. Adding a pool cover can reduce pool heating costs by 50 to 70 percent. Or if your pool has problems with cloudy water or chlorine levels, BioGuard's new Pool Tonic removes phosphate and many other unwanted contaminants for beautiful water that is easy to maintain and enjoy. For complimentary water testing, bring a sample of your pool water to any BioGuard dealer, and receive the right prescription for your pool. Visit www.bioguard.com to find your nearest dealer.

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Common Lawn Critters And Pests

- Chinch bugs: Chinch bugs like to feast on grass that is significantly exposed to sunlight.
- Grubs: Grubs are the larvae of beetles and are the nemesis of many a landscaping enthusiast because they typically produce patches of unsightly brown grass in their wake.
- Moles: Moles tend to appear in lawns that have been excessively watered, as these burrowing mammals like to dig into the soil so they can fill up on grubs, insects and worms that live below the surface of a lawn. Overwatered lawns typically have moist soil, which makes it easier for moles to dig.
- Mole crickets: Mole crickets are a formidable foe to homeowners. As mole crickets tunnel through the soil beneath a lawn looking for insects to eat, they leave brown patches behind and affect the feel of the grass, which may feel as though it's squishing and squashing beneath your feet. Mole crickets may eat grass roots, so the presence of dying grass may be indicative of a mole cricket infestation.
- Voles: Voles are small rodents that chew their way through the grass, leaving unsightly trails of damage in their wake. Homeowners who suspect their lawn has been victimized by voles can usually tell because the voles will leave noticeable pathways in the ground that can make a lawn look cracked in the way a roadway may look cracked after an earthquake.

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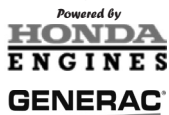
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Ideas For Pool Perimeter Landscaping

With the rise of the "staycation," more and more homeowners are turning their backyards into their own private oases. The centerpiece of many such retreats is a refreshing and inviting pool.

Whether above-ground or inground models, pools make for welcoming spots to enjoy warm days and nights. A new pool can quickly turn a yard into the "it" spot to spend vacations or cool off at the end hot summer days. While pools are often the focal point of a backyard, many homeowners want their pools to blend seamlessly with the rest of their yards. When transforming a backyard that includes a pool, homeowners should consider a few factors to ensure each afternoon spent poolside is as safe as it is fun.

SAFETY FIRST
 Although the goal may be to soften the lines of the pool and/or create sight barriers that will provide some measure of privacy for swimmers, homeowners must put safety above all else. Before any decorative touches are added, it is important to surround a pool with a slip-resistant surface and fencing (many communities require fences be erected around



pools). Consult with a landscaping contractor, who should be knowledgeable about safety codes, or speak to the permitting department at town hall. There should be a list of requirements to ensure pool

placement as well as any surrounding touches are legal and within code.
NONSLIP SURFACES
 Concrete, brick and pavers and decking are popular materials used to surround a pool.

Installers can make recommendations on materials and finishes, but one suggestion is to choose a rough finish. Pool water can make surfaces slippery. Concrete that is stamped or scarred provides extra traction than a smooth surface. The same can be said for brick patios and pavers. Avoid smooth stones or pavers with shiny surfaces, as these may only increase the risk of falls. Homeowners who have chosen wood or composite decking to surround a pool should talk to their contractor about nonslip protective coatings. Such coatings typically are acrylic-based liquids applied like a paint or sealer. Some composite decks may be crafted with texture or a built-in coating to reduce slipping. In addition, use nonstick mats on decks and patios to provide a little extra footing where people enter and exit the pool.

MULCH AND STONE
 Homeowners often prefer some combination of mulch or stone to serve as a transition between the pool, concrete or paver hardscape and the lawn. Stone may be more practical for those with inground pools because it will not easily blow onto the water surface. With an above-ground pool, mulch or stone can do the trick, serving as a barrier so that pool water does not overly drench the surrounding lawn or damage grass after exposure to pool chemicals. Mulch and stone also will provide drainage from water runoff from the pool and rain. Another advantage of having an

additional barrier between the pool and lawn is that lawn clippings will not be shot into the pool when mowing. Stone and mulch can be dressed up with statues, lawn ornaments and tolerant plants.
FINISHING TOUCHES
 Plants can provide the finishing touches for a poolside landscape. Homeowners should keep in mind that pools are not often shaded from the sun, so plants placed around the pool will need to be sun- and drought-tolerant. Succulents, such as aloe and jade, may work, as can the perennial shrub yucca. Moderately growing grasses will offer a privacy barrier.

Keep trees and flowering plants far enough away from the pool's edge so they do not contribute to debris that falls into the pool, which can complicate maintenance. Also, flowering plants may attract insects and other wildlife that may interfere with your enjoyment of the pool. It's better to create a friendly environment for wildlife further away from the pool. Homeowners who need some advice planning the landscaping around their pools can rely on the expertise of landscape architects as well as employees at lawn and garden centers. Pool companies may work with landscapers and offer recommendations to people unaccustomed to working around pools. Homeowners have many options with regard to landscaping the areas surrounding their pools.

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How To Spot An Unhealthy Tree

Perhaps because they can live for so many years, trees have a way of falling down homeowners' landscaping priority lists. Trees also tend to be big and strong, so it's no surprise that they often are overlooked in favor of other areas of a lawn and garden that don't seem so strong in the face of Mother Nature.

But trees are susceptible to damage and disease, and homeowners who learn to recognize symptoms of such problems can prevent them from escalating and reduce the risk that the trees will cause damage to their properties. The following are just some of the ways homeowners can determine if their trees are unhealthy. Homeowners who suspect they have a tree that poses a safety risk should contact a professional tree service for an immediate inspection and steer clear of the tree until an inspection has been performed.

- Check around the base of the tree. The base of a tree may offer some telltale signs that the tree is unhealthy. Soil that is cracked or raised at the base of the tree may be indicative of a tree that has started to uproot. If you recognize any cracking or if the soil is raised, look at the tree to see if it is leaning. If the soil is cracked or raised because it is uprooting, then the tree might have already started to lean in the opposite direction of the cracking or raised soil.

- Examine for fungus. The growth of fungus on the tree trunk or close to it may be a sign that the tree is rotting or decaying. Fungal growth, such as a sudden population of mushrooms, around the base of the tree is another sign of decay. If the wood behind fungal growth crumbles easily, then homeowners should call a professional tree service, as the fungal problem on the tree has likely already been festering for quite some time.

- Look for cavities on the trunk. Cracks and cavities on a tree may not be an emergency, but especially deep cracks and



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cavities may be indicative of a structural problem. Multiple cracks and cavities also serve as red flags.

- Look for dead wood. It may sound simple, but dead wood poses a threat to the tree and anyone who happens to spend time in its vicinity. Dead wood

- Weak connections. Unhealthy trees often have weak connections between their branches and their trunks. If branches don't appear to be strongly connected to the tree bark, call a tree service to determine a solution. The tree might not be on its way out, but you may



snaps easily, and falling dead wood can harm anyone unlucky enough to be beneath the tree when the dead wood snaps. Dead wood branches won't bend in the wind, and such branches frequently fall off of trees when strong gusts of wind come along. Dead branches either won't have leaves or the leaves will be brown (dead pine branches will have brown needles).

have to take steps to strengthen the connections so branches are not at risk of falling. Unhealthy trees can pose a significant safety hazard on a property. Homeowners who learn to recognize the signs of unhealthy trees can do something to prevent dying trees from damaging their homes. Unhealthy trees may need to be removed from a property before they cause significant damage.



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Transplanting Trees No Small Task

An alluring landscape can make a home that much more enjoyable. Many homeowners devote considerable time to their lawns and gardens, and that devotion can pay both instant and long-term dividends. A well-groomed landscape can make it more enjoyable to relax in the yard, and such a property will be more attractive to prospective buyers when homeowners want to sell their homes.

But even the most well-designed landscapes sometimes need some rearranging, and those changes may involve transplanting trees. Homeowners may transplant trees for various reasons. Some homeowners might be moving to a new home and want to take a favorite tree along with them, while some trees simply outgrow their existing space and need to be moved elsewhere on the property. Regardless of why trees need to be transplanted, homeowners can take several steps to ensure the process goes as smoothly as possible.

- Determine why the tree needs to be moved. Some trees that are not thriving in their existing location may not benefit from a transplant. For example, a tree with a pest infestation might need to be replaced rather than

transplanted. Determining the reason behind a transplant can save you the trouble of transplanting that won't benefit from the move. If a tree is not getting adequate sunlight in its present location, then transplanting it to a different location on your property with more exposure to sunlight might reinvigorate the tree. If soil is the problem, then transplanting the tree might prove ineffective unless you also test the soil where you plan to move the tree and adjust it so the tree can thrive.

- Prune the tree roots. Tiny roots that extend beyond the tree absorb water and nutrients, and such roots need to be pruned before transplanting a tree. Landscaping professionals note that root pruning stimulates the growth of new small roots nearer to the tree's trunk, and these newer roots will be dug up when the time comes to transplant the tree. Root pruning must be done well in advance of transplanting the tree. For example, if you hope to transplant the tree in the fall, then do your root pruning in the spring before new buds appear on the tree. Speak with your landscaper or a nearby garden center to determine the best way to prune your tree's roots.
- Time your transplant correctly. Avoid transplanting trees when

temperatures are colder and the ground is frozen. Transplanting before or after a thaw allows the transplanted roots time to develop. In addition, transplanting the day after you have watered the soil around the tree reduces the stress on the tree's roots, making it easier to keep the root ball intact.

- Protect the root ball. When transplanting a tree, make sure the root ball does not dry out. If it does, the tree likely won't thrive in its new location and all your hard work will have been for naught. Cover the root ball with damp burlap or canvas so it can retain more of the moisture it will need to adapt to its new location.
- Plant the tree sooner rather than later. While you can store a transplanted tree before you plant it elsewhere on your property, storing it for a long period of time increases the chances that the transplant will be unsuccessful. Ideally, you want to plant the tree in its new location as soon as possible. If you must store it, make sure you don't suffocate the root ball, as roots must be kept damp or they will die and potentially cost you the tree.

Transplanting a tree can add appeal to a property and help reinvigorate an unhealthy tree.

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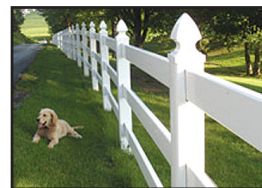
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The Many Benefits Of Hiring A Professional Landscaper

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 profes-

sionals 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 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.

Time saved and a professional job are just two of the reasons homeowners hire lawn care companies.



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