

Spring Home

≡ *Popular trends in home exteriors*

≡ *Chores to tackle at home this season*

≡ *5 common spring lawn care mistakes*



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SPRING HOME

A 21st Century Media
publication managed by
MediaNews Group

6250 Metropolitan
Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, MI 48312

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586-731-1809

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HOME & GARDEN

3 potentially low-maintenance trees to consider for your property

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance trees can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

1 . Jacaranda. Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds its leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

2 . American arborvitae. The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

3 . Japanese red maple. The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Japanese red maples are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions.

During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommodate the Japanese red maple, so this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When considering new trees for a prop-

erty, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree. Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse condi-

tions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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SAFETY

5 ways to increase peace of mind about your home when you travel

Americans are eager to travel, but also feel nervous about leaving their homes unattended. As the spring and summer travel season heats up, many people are planning trips, but that doesn't mean leaving home for an extended time is easy. According to a 2023 trend report from SimpliSafe, a fourth of respondents are very or extremely concerned about home break-ins while traveling and that number increases to 41% when looking at Gen Z specifically.

These concerns have led more people to seek solutions that secure their homes before traveling to gain peace of mind and in turn, better enjoy their vacations. In fact, 83% of respondents listed peace of mind as a primary reason for buying a home security system and 49% of respondents explained that they use their home security system to check on their investments — such as expensive appliances, sentimental heirlooms and important documents — while away from home.

In addition to home security, travel nerves can be tempered through preparation and automation to enhance peace of mind before hitting the road. To help ease your travel worries, follow these five proactive and simple steps to better secure your home while away.

1. Alert neighbors about your trip — but not on social media

While it's a great idea to let neighbors know you'll be away so they can watch for suspicious activity around your home, don't broadcast your upcoming vacation on social media. It's not recommended to let the world know when your house will be unoccupied.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

While it's a great idea to let neighbors know you'll be away so they can watch for suspicious activity around your home, don't broadcast your upcoming vacation on social media.

2. Invest in a home security system

The SimpliSafe Trend Report report found that 65% of respondents and 69% of parents say a home security system would put their minds at ease while traveling. To help secure your home, consider installing home security products such as entry, motion and glassbreak sensors, and indoor and outdoor cameras to protect against unexpected visitors. It's also worth considering environmental sensors such as water

sensors and smoke detectors to safeguard your home from burst pipes, electrical fires or other home hazards. Remember, securing your home is not just about preventing break-ins. In your basement, water damage or burst pipes can be equally catastrophic. Investing in the appropriate sensors will help detect and prevent potentially costly damages.

Even better, by using 24/7 professional security monitoring, like SimpliSafe, you'll know you'll get help when it's needed, day or night.

3. Don't hide keys outside

While it may seem like a harmless solution for letting in house sitters, pet sitters or cleaning services to your home while away, hiding a key outdoors is not secure. Give a spare to a trusted neighbor or friend, or consider using a Smart Lock so that each family member or friend has a unique PIN for entry. This way, you can provide safe access to people who are taking care of your property or pets while you're gone, while also having visibility into who's coming and going.

4. Stop mail delivery

It's also recommended to have the postal service stop mail delivery during your trip, so piled-up mail doesn't alert a would-be intruder that you're away. You can do this online by creating a USPS account and making a "Hold Mail" request, or by visiting your local post office. You should also stop newspaper delivery if you use that service. Alternatively, you could also ask a neighbor, relative or pet sitter to bring in mail and newspapers for you.

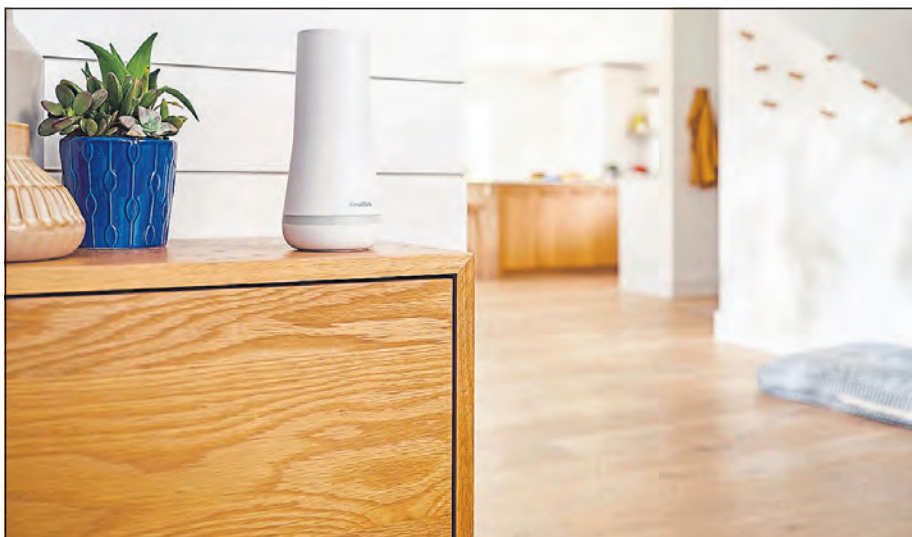


5. Move vehicles into your garage

If you are leaving a vehicle at home, you'll want to make sure it is protected as well. If you have a garage, move all vehicles into the garage before heading out. Using an outdoor camera will provide an added layer of protection as well as visibility outside your home. For homeowners without a garage, make sure your vehicle is locked and position an outdoor camera to face your driveway.

Follow these steps so you can relax and enjoy your hard-earned vacation.

For the best security at the best price, SimpliSafe can give you and your family peace of mind whether you're home or away with 24/7 professional security monitoring there to help if you're in trouble. When it is time to come home, SimpliSafe found that 85% of respondents are happy to return after a trip and can focus on unpacking rather than worrying! To learn more, visit [SimpliSafe.com](https://www.simplisafe.com).



Above: Follow these steps so you can relax and enjoy your hard-earned vacation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Left: Securing your home is not just about preventing break-ins. Investing in the appropriate sensors will help detect and prevent potentially costly damages.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

HOME & GARDEN

Create your native plant garden

Gardening is a worthwhile endeavor that not only passes the time, but can be a form of exercise and relief from the daily grind. Gardens also provide ample opportunity to experiment, as individuals can produce everything from vegetables to bountiful blooms.

Recent years have witnessed a growing emphasis on eco-friendly gardening that aims to reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides in an effort to protect the planet. One way to do so is to rely on native plants.

What are native plants?

Native plants are indigenous to particular regions. The National Wildlife Federation says native plants grow in habitats without human introduction or intervention. Native plants have formed symbiotic relationships with local wildlife over thousands of years, which the NWF notes makes them the most sustainable options. Native plants help the environment and thrive with little supplemental watering or chemical nutrients.

Natives vary by region

Native plants vary by region. In arid climates, certain succulents may be native because they don't need much rainfall to thrive. In lush wetlands, succulents might be out of place.

Start native planting

The NWF offers native plants for 36 different states that can be shipped right to customers' doors to help replenish native varieties. In addition, gardeners can visit local gardening centers to select native plants. Small and independently owned centers often feature knowledgeable local staff whose expertise can prove invaluable to individuals seeking native varieties.

It's important to keep in mind that native varieties may look less cultivated than more exotic blooms and foliages designed to sell for their unique appearances.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER PRINCE

Recent years have witnessed a growing emphasis on eco-friendly gardening that aims to reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides in an effort to protect the planet.

Wildflowers and native grasses may be the types of native plants found in abundance, which may grow up and out quickly. These other tips can help the process.

- Plan and prepare the site by removing weeds and turning over the soil. This will give seedlings an opportunity to take root without competition from weeds. Seedlings will give gardens a faster head-start than waiting around for seeds to germinate. However, gardeners can start seeds indoors and then move them outside once they are seedlings.

- Avoid planting native plants in rows, as that's not how they're likely to grow naturally. Vary the placement so the plants look like they sprouted up haphazardly.

Gardeners can still exert some control over native gardens prone to growing a little wild. Borders and paths can better define the growing areas.

- Grow Native!, an initiative from the Missouri Prairie Foundation, suggests planting two to four species in broad sweeping masses or drifts. Mix grasses with flowering plants. The grasses produce dense, fibrous roots that can prevent weed growth.

Native plants should require minimal care. Keep an eye on them and supplement with water if conditions have been especially dry.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Native plants are indigenous to particular regions. The National Wildlife Federation says native plants grow in habitats without human introduction or intervention. Native plants have formed symbiotic relationships with local wildlife over thousands of years, which the National Wildlife Federation notes makes them the most sustainable options. Native plants help the environment and thrive with little supplemental watering or chemical nutrients.

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HOME & GARDEN

How to prepare soil for spring planting



Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil.

Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive. Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

- Clean up the previous months' mess. Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting. Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in your soil preparation routine.

- Loosen the soil. Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest in tools like a shovel, spade, spading fork, and/or a lawn edger. If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder. It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is completed.

- Test and, if necessary, amend the soil. A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive. In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.

Soil conditions go a long way toward determining if new plants will thrive. Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

What to know about installing a pool at home



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A survey of the land in a yard can reveal how smoothly a pool installation may or may not go.

Vacation season will soon be in full swing and people everywhere are getting outside and soaking up the sun this spring. It's hard to imagine how that can get any better. But it can for people thinking of installing a pool in their backyard.

Pools definitely have a wow factor that's hard to replicate. Homeowners considering pool installation can take note of these factors as they try to decide if a pool is right for them.

Cost

The cost to install a pool depends on a host of factors, including which type of pool homeowners are considering and where they live. According to the online home improvement resource Angi (formerly Angie's list), the average cost to install an above ground pool in the United States in 2022 was \$3,322, while the average inground pool installation in the same year was \$55,000. That's quite a disparity in price, and homeowners should know that the average cost of each project is higher in certain regions and under certain circumstances. Potential ancillary costs, such as excavation and plumbing relocation, will add to the final cost of the project. The erection of fencing around the pool if no fencing currently surrounds the area where the pool will be located also will add to the final cost.

Pool type

As noted, above ground pools, on average, require a considerably smaller financial investment than inground pools. This is an important consideration, but which option may ultimately prove the better investment is worth researching. Homeowners can speak with a local real estate professional to determine if an inground pool or above ground might yield a significantly higher return at resale. If an inground pool is likely to increase property value by

a substantial amount, it could be well worth the extra upfront costs.

Maintenance

Pools are undeniably fun, but they still require maintenance. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that vinyl liners in pools last approximately six to 10 years, while painted concrete may require a fresh coat of paint every five years. Plaster finishes may last as long as 15 years, while cement-coated products can last a lifetime. Pools also need periodic cleaning, and chemicals to keep the pool operating safely and cleanly will require an additional, if somewhat minimal, financial investment. Homeowners investing in a new pool should be aware of the maintenance required to keep the pool clean and be willing to do that maintenance. And though homeowners typically can open and close pools on their own, it's also possible to hire someone to do it for a relatively small fee each season.

Location

A survey of the land in a yard can reveal how smoothly a pool installation may or may not go. Though it's possible to install a pool in just about any yard, some spaces might require greater preparation and pre-installation effort than others. Sloped backyards, for example, may require the services of a landscape architect to prepare the space, which can extend the time it takes to complete the project and add the overall cost. These are just some of the factors that merit consideration when mulling a pool installation.

A homeowners' best resource might be a local pool company who can visit a home, provide an estimate and point out any challenges that may arise during the install

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Above ground pools, on average, require a considerably smaller financial investment than inground pools.



Pools are undeniably fun, but they still require maintenance.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME & GARDEN

The benefits of planting native species

Spring and summer present ideal growing conditions for many plants, making these seasons an ideal time to tend to lawns and gardens. Though it's easy to succumb to the temptation of exotic plants, avid gardeners and eco-conscious planters recognize the significance of native plants.

Novices may not realize that native plants are much better for a landscape and the local ecosystem it calls home. Recognition of the many benefits of native plants can make for healthier lawns and gardens and a healthier planet as well.

- Native plants are built for local climates. One of the issues gar-

deners who plant exotic plants run into is keeping those plants thriving when weather turns harsh. For example, exotic plants may require extra watering in areas that experience drought or even long periods without precipitation in spring and notably summer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that at least 40 states anticipate water shortages by 2024. Planting native plants can help to combat those shortages by reducing the need to water plants if conditions become dry in late spring and summer.

- Native plants save money. It's

also important to note that native plants save homeowners money. Because they're capable of thriving in local conditions, native plants tend to require less watering, which can help homeowners reduce their utility costs. But native plants also require less upkeep, which means homeowners can save on potentially costly, not to mention eco-unfriendly, pesticides and other amendments in order to maintain the look of exotic plants. And though it's not always the case, exotic plants tend to cost more at nurseries than natives.

- Native plants save gardeners time. In addition to saving

money, native plants don't require as much attention. Though spring and summer is a great time to be in the yard, it's also a great time to be out and about. Because native plants thrive in local conditions, gardeners won't need to spend much of their free time tending to them. Exotics tend to require a lot of extra attention and effort, especially when conditions become harsh. Spending more time outdoors in harsh weather does not appeal to most gardeners.

- Native plants blend in with an existing landscape. Native plants look natural within an existing landscape, adding some instant

aesthetic appeal without breaking the bank. When planting exotics, homeowners may feel a need to redesign their entire gardens to create a certain look (think Japanese garden). That can quickly consume a budget and take up a lot of free time in both the short- and long-term.

Planting season marks a great time to revitalize a landscape. Choosing native plants when doing so pays numerous dividends for homeowners and the planet they call home.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Though it's easy to succumb to the temptation of exotic plants, avid gardeners and eco-conscious planters recognize the significance of native plants.

HOME & GARDEN



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Moss may be green, but it's often not the type of green homeowners desire in their lawns.

What to do about moss in your lawn

A lush, green lawn is a point of pride for many homeowners. Eye-catching landscaping anchored by a healthy lawn is one of the key ways to improve the value and curb appeal of a home. In fact, the experts at HGTV say an attractive and well-maintained landscape can add as much as 10% to the value of a home.

Maintaining a thriving lawn takes effort, and that means recognizing when the green in the yard may not necessarily be coming from soft blades of grass. Invasive greenery, including moss, can infiltrate a lawn and that can be problematic if left unad-

dressed.

A mossy lawn is a sign that certain conditions are ripe for the moss, but not necessarily the grass, to grow. According to Lowes, moss thrives in certain conditions, which should be addressed if homeowners hope to corral it.

- Moss does well in acidic soil, more so than traditional grasses. A soil test can confirm if the pH needs to be adjusted to make it more hospitable to grass and less friendly to moss.

- Compacted soil and excess thatch can make it easier for moss to take root. These condi-

tions also can make the soil damp and restrict drainage, something that promotes moss growth.

- Moss can grow in shady conditions. If patches of the lawn have been overrun by moss, there could be too much shade in the area. Trimming back trees or shrubbery may help; otherwise, homeowners may need to look into hardscape or plants that thrive in such conditions to remedy shady and damp areas on portions of their landscapes.

Moss typically can be removed the same way one would dethatch a lawn. It involves rigorously raking or agitating the lawn

to loosen the moss. This can be done by hand with a rake, or in the case of a lot of moss or a large lawn, with a dethatching blade attachment for a lawn mower.

Aerating the soil will help keep moss that was removed from returning. In addition, amending the soil so that it has a more dense nutritional profile by adding compost, as well as improving drainage and adjusting the pH, are keys to keeping moss from returning.

For pesky moss, The Spruce suggests making a solution of one box of baking soda to two gallons of water and spraying

this solution on the patches of moss. It is a natural alternative to using chemical products. Certain sources indicate a glyphosate herbicide could work on moss, but the World Health Organization considers glyphosate to be a probable human carcinogen and it is prohibited in certain areas.

Moss may be green, but it's often not the type of green homeowners desire in their lawns. Learning about moss can help when removing it and preventing it in the future.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

OUTDOOR LIVING

Must-have items for backyard entertaining



Spring and summer provide ample opportunities to soak up some sun and have some fun with family and friends. Backyard barbecues and other get-togethers at home are even more fun when hosts ensure they have certain must-have items for backyard soirees.

- **Fire features.** The days when hosts only needed a few extra lawn chairs and some burgers and hot dogs on the grill for a backyard barbecue are long gone. Though those items still have a place at backyard barbecues, backyard parties have taken a step up. Fire features, whether it's a standalone fire pit, one built into a patio or a gas-powered fire table, are now wildly popular. Fire features provide a welcome place to relax and converse with guests after the sun goes down. And much to kids' delight, a fire feature also paves the way for some post-meal s'mores.

- **Insulated wine cooler.** Coolers are great places to store water, soda, beer, seltzers, and other popular beverages. But what about wine? An insulated wine cooler ensures wine stays properly cooled but doesn't get too cold, which can happen when wine is stored in a more traditional cooler filled with ice. Bottles are simply placed in the insulated cooler (much like canned beverages slide easily into can koozies),

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Backyard barbecues and other get-togethers at home are even more fun when hosts ensure they have certain must-have items for backyard soirees.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Fire features provide a welcome place to relax and converse with guests after the sun goes down.

and the bottle can be kept on the table much like you would for formal dinners indoors. Hosts can go the extra mile by pairing insulated wine tumblers with their wine cooler.

▪ **Games.** Outdoor entertaining season might be all about relaxation, but games can up the fun factor at backyard gatherings. Cornhole is a wildly popular game, and customized cornhole boards can help hosts come

across as party professionals. Ladder toss, bocce and wiffle ball are some additional games that can make the festivities more fun. Hosts who don't have a pool also can invest in an inflatable pool big enough to fit all the kids who will be coming to the party.

▪ **Outdoor storage cabinet.** Hosts can save themselves the stress and effort of walking in and out for dinnerware and other table accessories by investing in

a sturdy outdoor storage cabinet. As meal time draws near, hosts will appreciate that all the plates, napkins, utensils, and placemats are already outside. The top of the storage cabinet can double as a small but convenient buffet station for sides that aren't being cooked over an open flame.

▪ **Projector and screen.** A projector and screen can really up the ante on backyard entertaining, turning an outdoor barbe-

cue into a great place to watch a game or cuddle up after dinner for a movie night under the stars. Projectors and screens won't bust the budget, but those who have more to spend may want to consider an outdoor television.

Outdoor televisions are built to handle the glare of the summer sun, but a retractable awning may be a good safety net for hosts who plan to spend many a weekend afternoon outside

watching games or movies with family and friends. These are just a handful of items that can up the ante on traditional backyard barbecues.

Homeowners should know that there's no limit to the number of items that can make spring and summer entertaining more special.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



*YOUR
GRASS
CAN BE
GREENER*

For most grass types, maintain a minimum length of three inches to encourage grass to flourish.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME & GARDEN

Are you making these 5 common spring lawn care mistakes?

Longer days and bountiful sunshine mean the outdoor season has arrived. As excited as you may be to enjoy the fresh air out on your lawn, there are several spring lawn care tasks to complete first.

It's no secret that homeowners love a lush green lawn, with 36% of American homeowners revealing that their lawns are a top investment in both time and money, according to TruGreen's new survey conducted by OnePoll of 2,000 Americans with a yard/lawn. However, it can be easy to make common lawn care mistakes that can jeopardize both the look and health of your lawn.

"While homeowners may want a quick fix for getting their lawn ready, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to maintenance, which can often result in mistakes and an unhealthy lawn," said Brian Feldman, director of technical operations at TruGreen. "This season, take a step back and ensure you're not falling victim to some common lawn care mistakes our expert team has witnessed."

The professionals at TruGreen, the nation's leading lawn care provider, are helping make sure you're not falling into the most common lawn care mistakes among homeowners, including:

Mistake 1: Overwatering your lawn

While it's tempting to shower your lawn with water (and love), be mindful that doing so is not only wasteful and can increase your water bill, but can also drown out your emerging lawn — especially during rainy months.

Pro Tip: Follow the general rule to water 1-2 times a week for a total of 1 inch of water.

Mistake 2: Improper fertilization



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

It can be easy to make common lawn care mistakes that can jeopardize both the look and health of your lawn.

Fertilizer provides your lawn with critical nutrients. However, if not applied correctly it can damage your lawn. Every lawn is unique, requiring some research to determine the best fertilizer, technique, frequency and quantity of product.

Pro Tip: Connect with a lawn care professional to plan a proper fertilization regimen for your lawn's unique needs based on various factors, including your region's climate and grass type.

Mistake 3: Bagging your lawn clippings

Think of leaves and trimming

as vitamins for your lawn, as they are filled with beneficial nutrients for the soil. Rather than reaching for the trash bag to remove these clippings from your lawn, leave them be. They help your lawn grow stronger and healthier.

Pro Tip: Remove the bag from your mower to disperse the lawn clippings and mow them back into your lawn.

Mistake 4: Mowing your lawn too short

When the mower blades are set too low, they can damage the grass plant. Unfortunately, damaged grass is more prone to

weeds, drought stress and disease.

Pro Tip: For most grass types, maintain a minimum length of three inches to encourage grass to flourish. As a rule of thumb, don't cut more than 1/3 inch of a grass blade in a single mow.

Mistake 5: Overlooking weed prevention

Timing is everything in lawn care. While it can be tempting to plant spring seeds to get your lawn back up to your standards, the best time for seeding is actually in the fall. But keep in mind, there are other critical things

that should be tackled this season to achieve a healthy, green lawn.

Pro Tip: Don't wait to protect your lawn from unsightly weeds. Work with a lawn pro to apply a pre-emergent weed control to stop weeds from germinating throughout your lawn.

A green lawn of your dreams is possible when you avoid and correct these common lawn care mistakes. If you have questions or need further expertise to verify your current lawn care habits, consult a lawn care professional at TruGreen.com.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

HOME & GARDEN

Tips to pick the right plants for your landscape

Each year, gardening enthusiasts anxiously await the arrival of spring. Spring is a great season to plant new flowers, plants, grasses, and trees, making it a popular time of year to spend sunny days out in the yard.

Veteran gardeners may know their landscapes well and be able to pick the right plants on their own. Novices may need a little help as they look to give their landscapes a whole new look. The following are some helpful tips to help homeowners pick the right plants for their landscapes.

- Conduct a site evaluation. A colorful landscape featuring an array of plants and flowers can be eye-catching and add curb appeal to a property. However, where plants will be planted is a significant variable that must be considered before homeowners choose what to plant. The Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes that site evaluation is the first step when picking plants. A number of factors must be evaluated, including light availability; water availability; exposure to the elements, including wind and extreme temperatures; and competition from existing vegetation, among other things. Document these variables prior to picking plants. For example, take note of the area you plan to plant to see if it is full sun or partial shade, and then pick plants whose growing conditions align with those you observe.

- Look at more than looks. Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Spring gardens are awe-inspiring, especially when homeowners embrace various strategies for successful planting.

for a space. If the wrong plants are chosen, they're unlikely to thrive or they could threaten existing vegetation, thus compromising the overall appeal of the property. Native plants can often handle local weather conditions, so prioritize natives over more exotic plants whose key attribute is aesthetic appeal. If jaw-dropping aesthetic appeal is your top priority,

speaking with a local landscaping professional about which natives can provide that without compromising surrounding vegetation.

- Consider maintenance prior to planting. Maintenance is another variable gardeners must consider. Newly planted trees may require substantial watering until they've fully established their roots, and some homeowners may not have

time for that. In addition, certain plants may require a considerable amount of pruning in order to create and maintain the look homeowners desire. Individuals must be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain new plantings that require such diligence. If not, look for plants that don't require much maintenance while keeping in mind that even

low-maintenance plants still require some effort and attention.

- Consider local wildlife. If your lawn is routinely visited by local wildlife, then look for plants that won't look like a meal to these welcome, if uninvited, guests. For example, if you routinely see deer lounging around in your backyard, look for deer-resistant plants. This is a

good way to protect your investment, of both time and money, and ensure minimal wildlife traffic through your newly landscaped yard.

Spring gardens are awe-inspiring, especially when homeowners embrace various strategies for successful planting.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen for a space.

HOME MAINTENANCE

3 things every homeowner should do at the start of spring

Spring is the perfect season for home improvement as it presents many opportunities for first-time homebuyers and experienced homeowners to be more thorough when it comes to maintenance. As the weather warms up, you'll find plenty of indoor and outdoor projects that can improve the functionality of your home and boost its curb appeal while also avoiding unpleasant surprises.

"Many homeowners perform spring cleaning tasks to freshen up and declutter their homes, but it's also crucial to tackle important maintenance tasks," said Viviane Essex, merchant at The Home Depot. "For most people, their home is their biggest investment. The Home Depot's Home Services can help homeowners with routine repairs and installation projects that provide comfort, safety and most importantly, peace of mind."

Don't know where to start? The Home Depot's Home Services has provided a helpful spring maintenance checklist. Here are three items you can check off your to-do list to make sure your home's internal systems and external features run smoothly.

1. Schedule seasonal maintenance on your HVAC system

Your heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system is crucial to keeping your home cozy in the winter and cool during the summer. Most systems have a lifetime of 10 to 20 years, and efficiency can drastically decrease as your equipment gets older.

If your HVAC system is working harder and not performing as well as it should, it may be time



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Here are three items you can check off your to-do list to make sure your home's internal systems and external features run smoothly.

2. Maintain, repair or replace your water heater

to replace it. Book a consultation with a certified professional who can inspect your existing system, make recommendations and give you an estimate for a new system. Not only will it help improve your home's air quality, but it will also keep your family comfortable all season long.

Water is used throughout your entire home, from showering and bathing to cooking and watering your lawn. To ensure you are using quality water, you'll need to inspect, replace and repair your

water heater.

Make sure to check "inspecting your water heater" off your spring cleaning list. Keep an eye out for any water buildup around your water heater, water-quality issues or small plastic pieces from your fixtures that can affect your water supply.

Also, look out for changes in water temperature or temperature duration, a broken pilot light, noise in your unit or pipes, or the smell of gas around your water heater. If you notice any of these signs, your water heater may be failing and need to be repaired or replaced.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Depending on the age and condition of your garage door, it may be time to replace it.

3. Spruce up the outside of your home

The exterior of your home is just as important to inspect and repair as the interior. Your windows are an especially visible part of your home that need careful attention.

During winter, you may feel drafts or frequently see condensation on your windows. As the seasons change, you may notice cracking or peeling around win-

dow exteriors. These are signs that it may be time to replace your windows.

This spring, book a window replacement. Windows should be inspected by a licensed professional every 20-25 years to see if they need to be replaced. No matter what windows you choose, a new high-quality window with thick, insulated glass is more energy efficient than older single-pane windows. Best of all, new windows can also improve your

home's appearance.

Another external item to inspect this spring is your garage door. You may not think your garage door needs regular maintenance, but just like a car, it needs regular tune-ups. Small issues can quickly turn expensive down the line. Also, some garage door problems can pose a safety hazard and cause serious injury.

Depending on the age and condition of your garage door, it may be time to replace it. Replacing

your garage door can improve the look of your home and increase its market value.

Finally, consider installing a new fence around your property. Fences provide privacy and security. They can help keep children and pets safe inside your yard, while also keeping out unwanted animals and trespassers. This decorative element also provides protection around an outdoor space, like a pool or garden.

For all your indoor and outdoor

spring-cleaning projects, you can find help at The Home Depot's Home Services. Their installers can help you choose the material and style that best fits your property and needs.

All certified service providers are local, licensed, insured and background checked. To learn more and book appointments to spruce up your home this spring, visit [HomeDepot.com/Services](https://www.homedepot.com/Services).

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

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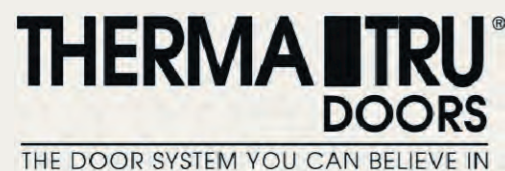
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OUTDOOR LIVING

Award-winning outdoor space inspiration

Renovating your home's outdoor spaces not only enhances the aesthetic but can also provide a host of recreational benefits. Taking a look at award-winning projects can help many homeowners draw inspiration while also identifying capable, reputable contractors to take on the project.

For example, selected by a panel of industry experts based on functionality, aesthetics, craftsmanship, innovation and degree of difficulty, these 2021 National Association of the Remodeling Industry National Contractor of the Year (CotY) Award Winners showcase a variety of ideas for upgrading your outdoor spaces. Find the complete list at nari.org/cotywinners.

Residential Landscape Design/Outdoor Living Under \$100,000

The clients wanted to upgrade a poorly draining, impractical backyard into an attractive, functional outdoor entertainment space that flowed from the renovated basement. The project included an outdoor area for entertaining, outdoor kitchen, spacious patio with a custom concrete fire pit, oversized ceiling fans, ample storage and landscaping complete with native plants around the perimeter.

"By working on this project, we learned how important it is to take a holistic look at what clients are trying to accomplish with their renovations," said Thomas Boyce, president of Boyce Design & Contracting. "Often with outdoor living projects, designers and contractors look at the exterior of the home in isolation. We learned to look at how the interior and exterior of the home connect to each other to make sure the features

and floor plan flow and work well together. By taking this approach, we were able to achieve a better finished product that is more functional and attractive for our clients."

Residential Landscape Design/Outdoor Living \$100,000-\$250,000

A young, active family was looking to create a distinct outdoor living space with multiple entertainment spaces that tied in with the existing aesthetic and elevated the home amongst its neighbors. The low-maintenance backyard now features an outdoor dining area, sunken living room, entertainment area and additional storage space built with the home's current architectural features while also maintaining a large enough yard for the kids and their friends to play.

"The aesthetic of the outdoor areas was designed not only for function but also to reflect the interiors and keep the inside-outside living feeling continuous," said Tim Johnson, owner and founder of Livit Site + Structure. "For example, the shiplap used on the fire table is the same shiplap featured inside the home. Likewise, the Douglas fir timbers used on the pergola are the same as the interior ceiling beams."

Residential Landscape Design/Outdoor Living Over \$250,000

A 4,000-square-foot project built at four different elevations, this client wanted to include a safe way to move from the upper level to the backyard without coming through the house, a structure for shade and protection from mosquitoes and a pool with features that reflected the home. Adding a covered



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

According to Thomas Boyce, president of Boyce Design & Contracting, it's important to take a holistic look at what clients are trying to accomplish with their renovations.

screen room with individually controlled wall panels, see-through fireplace, fountain, pool with sheer descent waterfalls, recycled rock walls and staircase from the upper elevation while enclosing it all within a stone wall met those expectations.

"A sound piece of advice for anyone building anything in the backyard: get a plan," said Ken DePratt, owner of KD Poolsapes, Ltd. "Have it match your expectations list. Then, and only then, will you know if it matches your budget. We would recommend doing your research when taking on a pool project of any size. It's hard to push that hole around once it's dug."

Story courtesy of Family Features/National Association of the Remodeling Industry



Taking a look at award-winning projects can help many homeowners draw inspiration while also identifying capable, reputable contractors to take on the project.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

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HOME & GARDEN

The basics of fertilizing a lawn

Spring marks the return of lawn and garden season. Lawns often bear the brunt of winter's wrath, so spring is a great time to nurse them back to health, and fertilizing can be an essential component of that process.

Fertilizing a lawn can be intimidating. An array of fertilizers, with each seemingly designed to address a different issue, can make homeowners' heads spin when visiting their local lawn and garden center. However, fertilizing is a very simple task that any homeowner can tackle. In fact, fears about fertilizing are often unfounded and can be overcome with some basic knowledge of the process.

- Identify which type of grass is in the yard. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that turfgrass is divided into two categories: cool-season grass and warm-season grass. A local lawn and garden center can help homeowners identify which type of grass is in the yard, and this often depends on location. Fescue, bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are some examples of cool-season grasses, while Bermuda, bahia, St. Augustine, and zoysia are considered warm-season grasses. Identifying which type of grass is in the lawn is important because that will indicate when to fertilize. Cool-season grasses are typically best fertilized in early spring, while warm-season lawns can benefit from an application just before especially warm temperatures arrive.

- Survey the lawn to identify which spreader to use. A small yard or a thriving lawn with only a few bald or unsightly patches may not need a full application of fertilizer. In such instances, a hand spreader can suffice.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Fertilizing in spring can help a lawn recover from the previous summer and winter, ensuring it's lush and green when summer entertaining season arrives.

For larger lawns and areas, a broadcast spreader is the ideal option. Spreaders have multiple settings, and the fertilizer package will indicate which setting to utilize when using the product.

- Test the soil prior to purchasing fertilizer. The lawn experts at Pennington® note that a simple soil test can reveal soil pH and phosphorous and potassium levels. Soil tests can be purchased at most home improvement stores and lawn and garden centers, and

they can help homeowners determine which fertilizer will most benefit their lawns.

- Water the lawn prior to fertilizing. The experts at Scotts® recommend a good watering a few days prior to fertilizing a lawn. Such an approach ensures the soil is ready to accept the fertilizer once it's applied.

- Follow the instructions carefully. Detailed instructions are typically provided on fertilizer product packaging. Once homeowners

have identified and purchased the product they need, they can simply follow the instructions on the packaging, including how and when to water after application, which can make fertilizing less intimidating.

Fertilizing in spring can help a lawn recover from the previous summer and winter, ensuring it's lush and green when summer entertaining season arrives.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Survey the lawn to identify which spreader to use. A small yard or a thriving lawn with only a few bald or unsightly patches may not need a full application of fertilizer. In such instances, a hand spreader can suffice. For larger lawns and areas, a broadcast spreader is the ideal option. Spreaders have multiple settings, and the fertilizer package will indicate which setting to utilize when using the product.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Siding materials to consider for your home

Exterior renovations consistently top the list of projects that offer maximum return on investment, according to Remodeling magazine's annual "Cost vs. Value Report." Siding replacement is a popular exterior renovation and one that can completely transform the look of a home.

Siding comes in a variety of materials, and homeowners can explore the pros, cons and affordability of each to make the most informed decision when replacing their existing siding. Factors to consider apart from price include durability, maintenance and aesthetics.

Vinyl

Vinyl siding is one of the most popular siding materials in North America. That popularity is perhaps due to the relatively low cost of vinyl siding replacement, which Forbes Home estimates is between \$6,150 and \$15,900 to install for a 2,000-square-foot home. A wide array of color options as well as weatherproof protection makes vinyl siding worthy of consideration.

PVC, which is what vinyl siding is comprised of, also is quite fire-resistant. Potential pitfalls of vinyl are that it can fade more quickly than other siding materials and is sensitive to excess UV exposure.

Engineered

Engineered materials cost more than vinyl but are considered very durable. They can be advantageous in damp climates or ones where insects are problematic. LP SmartSide™ is a type of engineered hardwood that is very durable, so much so that a 50-year warranty often is offered for the product, according to First American Roofing & Siding. This material can be painted if

homeowners desire a change of color down the line. This siding costs around \$2.50 to \$4.50 per square foot for siding and all trim accessories with an additional installation cost of \$5.50 to \$12.00 per square foot. The product is made of wooden strands that have been coated with wax for moisture resistance. A special zinc-based solution is added to protect against rot and insect infestation.

A similar product, HardiePlank™, is engineered from a blend of cement, wood fibers, fine sand, and water. It is similar in price point to the SmartSide and offers resistance to rot and insects. HardiePlank also can be repainted. Engineered products can be more expensive to install and generally are not DIY renovations, which may deter homeowners working on tight budgets.

Wood siding

Wood is one of the oldest siding materials. It can be stained or painted and comes in a variety of styles, from boards to shingles. It's a popular choice in historical homes or ones with classic, architectural details.

It's important to note that wood is a combustible material that can be susceptible to water and insect damage. It also needs to be maintained continuously to look its best. This makes wood siding a true commitment on the part of homeowners. The cost is midrange between vinyl and engineered sidings.

Metal

Those interested in one of the most energy efficient options in siding can look no further than metal siding. Metal isn't just for roofing. According to Colonial Contracting, Inc., metal siding creates a uniquely modern



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Siding comes in a variety of materials, and homeowners can explore the pros, cons and affordability of each.

appearance and comes in a variety of styles that complement homes.

Unlike fiber, wood or vinyl products, metal siding reflects the sun's rays and keeps interior temperatures cooler in the summer, a boon in hot climates but maybe not the most insulating option for cold climates. One potential pitfall is the possibility of rust, which would make metal siding a less ideal choice for those who live near the ocean. The cost of metal siding is comparable to other siding products, at around \$10 per square foot.

These are a few of the siding options homeowners can investigate if they're revamping the exteriors of their homes.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Factors to consider when selecting a siding style for your home — apart from price — include durability, maintenance and aesthetics.

OUTDOOR LIVING

Top 5 outdoor design trends for 2023

New trends landscape designers are seeing take off in 2023 include more interest in sustainability, expanding the use of outdoor spaces and maximizing cutting-edge technology.

Growing from the pandemic, interest in outdoor living is now at an all-time high — and the top 2023 trends in outdoor design reflect that continued interest, according to Joe Raboine, director of Residential Hardscapes at Belgard.

Supporting sustainability

Caring for the environment is an increasing priority for homeowners, especially those who love the outdoors and want to ensure the environment is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

“Homeowners are asking designers to create spaces inspired by nature that also help conserve it,” said Raboine. “This can mean choosing long-lasting materials for hardscaping, finding products made from recycled materials and/or using permeable pavers to help reduce water runoff.”

Extending indoor spaces

Bringing the indoors out is hardly new, but as more homeowners view outdoor spaces as extensions of their home, the trend is definitely here to stay. Creating outdoor spaces that reflect your lifestyle and design aesthetic is not only a goal for larger homes and lots, but also for smaller lots needing more privacy. Shade structures like pergolas, shade sails and screen panels offer seclusion as well as protection from the heat, helping outdoor spaces become more private and livable, no matter the size.

Today’s homeowners are also equipping spaces with fully operational kitchens, quality outdoor furniture, firepits and games to upgrade their outdoor living experience. The backyard is becoming the go-to spot for fun, with outdoor games including life-size chess, billiards, mini-golf and more.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Mixing natural materials including wood, stone and plants (as in living walls) with man-made materials like glass and metal creates interesting variety in texture and color.

Exploring color and texture

As outdoor spaces become extensions of the home, designers and homeowners see these spaces as more than just a place to host barbecues. Mixing natural materials (including wood, stone and plants (as in living walls) with man-made materials like glass and metal creates interesting variety in texture and color that

transforms any space into a more attractive environment. Textured pavers are also becoming more popular, such as those that mimic natural stone or textile finishes.

“Homeowners are becoming more adventurous with color and texture,” noted Raboine. “While shades of gray are still dominant, warmer tones like browns and tans together with greens are

adding depth and dimension.”

Patterns can also be created using modular designs, textured pavers and hardscaping features to make any outdoor space both calming and energizing. Outdoor lighting provides more visual interest to your space while extending its usable hours — with color-changing lights turning any patio into party central.

Creating multi-purpose spaces

Today’s backyards fulfill multiple purposes, with Zen gardens or labyrinths extending off traditional patios for additional relaxation or meditation areas. Gardening is also resurging, as homeowners are growing herbs, vegetables, fruits and flowers us-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Interest in outdoor living is now at an all-time high — and the top 2023 trends in outdoor design reflect that continued interest.

ing raised and vertical gardens, small greenhouses or hot boxes.

“You can add built-in seating and benches to create a firepit area or mini theater,” Raboine added. “These can be beautiful spots for resting or entertaining, plus a practical dining area for your family.”

Optimizing technology

With mixed-use spaces becoming more complex, using augmented reality (AR) can streamline the design process for homeowners and contractors alike. AR technology allows homeowners to see small details in design down to plants, shadows and even animations. Today’s technology helps manage the growing popularity of outdoor living, with AR and mixed reality letting designers and homeowners visualize and communicate their plans.

Belgard Rooms’ newest feature uses AR so homeowners and contractors can

view a templated outdoor design plan in their backyard, offering a better visual representation of how their yard can look. Homeowners select their AR plans and drop them into their outdoor space to view, walk through and scale the templated outdoor rooms, bringing the plan to life in their own backyards. Homeowners can test various rooms, features and styles, helping them bring their vision to life. Currently, 32 AR Rooms can be viewed on any device.

“AR Rooms help turn dreams into reality through a seamless design process,” explained Raboine. “Homeowners and landscape professionals have adopted the technology quickly, helping homeowners envision different outdoor living plans — and simplifying the design process for any project.”

Ready to reimagine your outdoor space? Visit rooms.belgard.com/ar-rooms.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint



Textured pavers are also becoming more popular, such as those that mimic natural stone or textile finishes.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Popular trends in home exteriors

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

Wood

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found newfound devotion among home interior decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

Painted brick

Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

Hardscaping

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become in-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor.

creasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces.

The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

Outdoor lighting

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their properties outdoors would want more lighting

outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material.

HOME & GARDEN

Revitalize your landscape on a budget

Many homeowners think they have to spend tons of green to get green in their landscape, but that isn't necessarily so. Homeowners can improve their landscapes without digging themselves into financial holes. These strategies can help anyone save some cash and still end up with attractive gardens and more.

- Use stones or gravel for a walkway. If commercially installed pavers or cement walkways are not within your budget, there are some affordable alternatives. Flagstone or individually purchased and spaced pavers and pea gravel can be used to create pathways. Some construction sites even offer free stones when asked. Soften the look with moss or other plants on the perimeter.

- Remove some lawn. Lawns can require hours of upkeep that may involve the application of expensive fertilizers and weed-killing products that are not always so eco-friendly. Reduce the size of a lawn by putting in a mixed planting bed of perennials or ornamental grasses, or use landscape fabric and mulch.

- Look for free mulch. Municipal recycling centers may offer residents access to free mulch made from grinding up leaves, branches and other plant debris collected throughout the town. Simply bring a few containers to the recycling center and spread the mulch for an ornamental look or to insulate landscapes over winter and protect against weeds.

- Repurpose old items into planters. Old wheelbarrows, barrels, watering cans, and other items can be repurposed into con-

tainer gardening vessels. Figure out if items marked for the garbage bin can be incorporated into garden features instead.

- Invest in plants that are easy to propagate. Perennials are the gardener's friend when it comes to saving money. These plants sprout anew each year, and many, such as sedum, catmint, ferns, hostas, and black-eyed Susans, can propagate by division. Figure out the best times of year to divide the plants and start growing them in individual containers before planting the sturdy new shoots in the ground. A single variety of plants grouped together in mass plantings is affordable and easy.

- Shop end-of season sales. Garden centers may begin to make room for holiday items come the fall. Take advantage of reduced costs on remaining plants and landscape accessories during this time of year. Plants can be covered or allowed to thrive indoors until they can be planted in the spring.

- Pool your resources. Homeowners planning on a big landscaping or revitalization project may want to speak with neighbors to see if they're interested in doing the same.

Contractors guaranteed business from a few homes in the same neighborhood may be willing to negotiate lower prices for the volume of work on things like driveway repaving, deck- or fence-building, or installation of paver patios.

Some handy ideas can help homeowners transform landscapes without spending too much.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Some handy ideas can help homeowners transform landscapes without spending too much.



Homeowners can improve their landscapes without digging themselves into financial holes.

OUTDOOR LIVING

5 off-the-wall uses for retaining walls

Segmental retaining wall (SRW) systems make attractive walls, but they also are used to build many beautiful and functional outdoor features for homeowners and professionals alike. As the most versatile resource in a professional landscaper's tool box, SRWs can also be used by do-it-yourself landscapers with a little know-how. Whether you need to transition a slope, shore up soil or create beautiful hardscaped features, one retaining wall system — the VERSA-LOK retaining wall system — can do it all.

YouTube creator and construction pro Stanley "Dirt Monkey" Genadek calls VERSA-LOK the "gold standard" of retaining walls. "VERSA-LOK's solid, pinned units are superior to hollow, lipped blocks that require fill and might trap water," says Genadek, who owns a landscaping and excavating company in Mendota Heights, Minn. "It's the one block that can do it all. VERSA-LOK is the gold standard in SRWs as far as I'm concerned."

Retaining walls are most often employed to address grade changes in the landscape and to retain soil, says Scott Arnold, manager of Villa Landscapes, a design and install landscaping firm in St. Paul/Minneapolis. But as the 'Legos' of landscaping tools, retaining wall units can be used to create many beautiful and functional features such as outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and seating.

Seating

From creating seat walls to stadium seats, retaining walls are for sitting. One popular application is a freestanding seat wall around a patio or fire pit.

Retaining walls are perfect to set into hillsides such as amphitheater seating, where they retain soil while offering a place to sit. Other options include stadium seating, replacing cold, noisy and more expensive aluminum bleachers as well as a couch or bench designed with SRWs.

Functional features

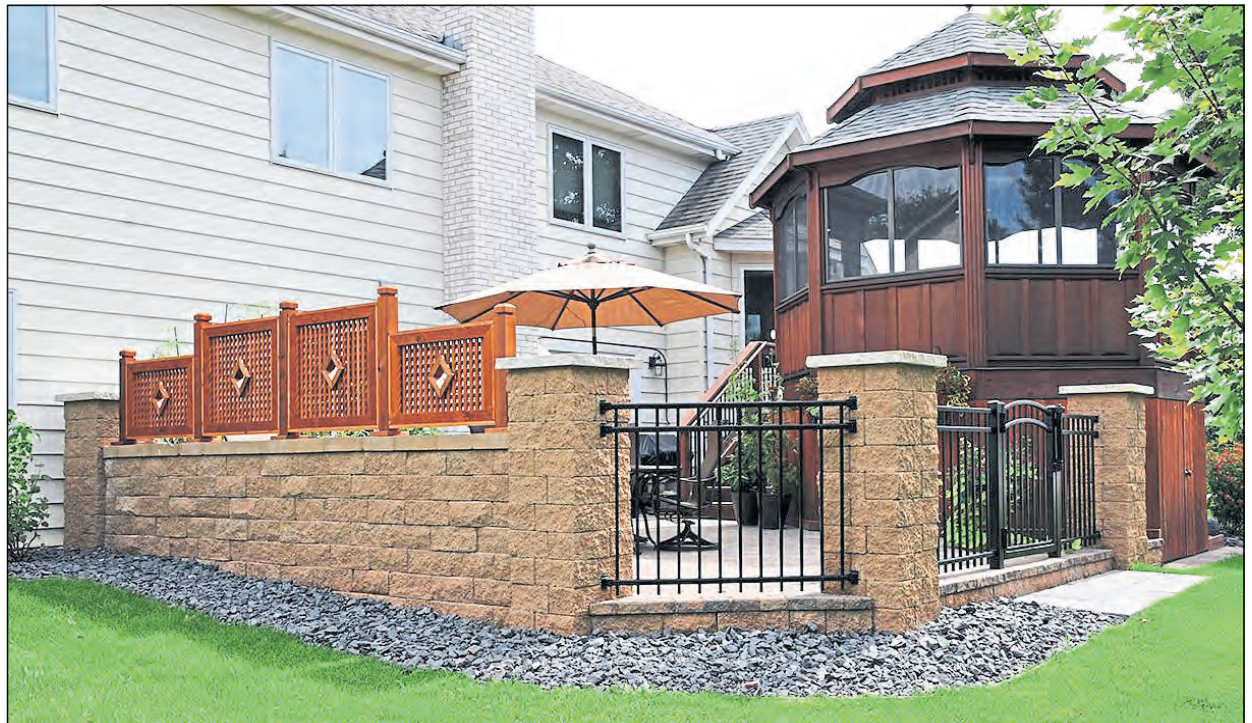
Retaining wall units can make beautiful tiered gardens, raised garden beds, planters, tree rings plus fire and water features. One common application is a raised patio, where retaining wall units serve as a foundation for a paver patio surrounded by free-standing walls in place of a wood deck. Creative homeowners and installers have used retaining wall units for lighted column posts, waterfalls, hot tub platforms or mailbox columns.

Steps/stairs

Going up and down a slope is easier with solid stair foundations created from retaining wall units. From stairs out the back patio to steps for access within a hardscape design such as a multi-level patio, retaining wall units are a safe support for stair treads and pavers.

Fencing

Keep people moving the right way with freestanding walls used as fencing or partitions. A parapet wall is a back-to-back wall that serves as a barrier for vehicles and pedestrians. Stepped-down freestanding walls are used alongside ramps for easy access. Custom columns designed with lighting and fencing with timbers or rail posts can serve as a fence solution.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Keep people moving the right way with freestanding walls used as fencing or partitions.

Signage

Both residential and commercial signage can be created with retaining wall units. Stately columns with house numbers at the end of a driveway, a hardscaped entrance sign to a community development or a mailbox pillar are features easily created with retaining wall units. Monument signs can be built as freestanding walls, with channel letters, a signboard or neon mounted on the surface.

The endless design options afforded by retaining wall systems are limited only by the imagination. With a variety of colors and textures, retaining walls can do it all, beautifully. If you can design it, you can build it with VERSA-LOK.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint



From creating seat walls to stadium seats, retaining walls are for sitting.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Give your home a new look with these shutter styles

Homeowners have many options at their disposal if they want to improve their homes. A focus on the exterior can be a promising and rewarding way to direct renovation dollars.

Curb appeal has a significant impact on how a home is viewed. Manicured landscapes, updated windows and doors and well-lit landscapes can improve the value of a home and ensure it sells quickly and above market rate.

When homeowners assess items they may want to change, shutters can be an area of consideration. Shutters can help windows look a little less plain. In most modern residential properties, shutters are purely decorative. However, their roots lie in home protection. Originally, shutters were used in lieu of windows so they were the only way to safeguard a home's interior from the elements. Some shutters still offer that protection, but those typically are installed on homes in hurricane-prone areas.

Window shutters lend a finished and distinctive look to a home. When shopping for shutters, individuals can choose among various styles.

- **Louvered.** A louvered shutter features several wood slats that overlap each other on the same frame. A typical louvered shutter features two sets of slats separated by a center rail. Some functional louvered shutters are operational, meaning the slats can be tilted to allow air to flow through. But this is something typically reserved for indoor shutters. Decorative ones have fixed slats.

- **Panel.** Panel shutters come in different styles. Raised panel shutters present a boxed design where rectangular features will stand out from the rest of the frame. Flat panel shut-

ters (sometimes referred to as shaker) have the boxed design, but those rectangles are not raised. Recessed panels are the opposite of raised panels. As their name suggests, recessed panels are set back from the rest of the frame.

- **Board and batten.** Board and batten shutters are formed from grouped single boards joined together with shorter crosspieces of wood called battens. Battens are positioned horizontally or at an angle. These shutters have a more informal, rural feel.

- **Bahama/Bermuda.** These tropical-inspired shutters are of the louvered variety, but they're installed from the top of the window rather than on the sides.

- **Scandinavian.** Scandinavian series shutters are very decorative board and batten shutters. They feature a series of cutouts and designs.

- **Combination.** Some shutters offer the best of both worlds, with louvered on top and a solid panel on the bottom, or vice versa. This gives homeowners infinite options. Shutters are available in various materials. The most common include wood, vinyl and composite. Cedar, mahogany and pine are commonly used woods for exterior shutters. Vinyl is more economical and lightweight, but they can be challenging to clean and do not offer the longevity of other materials. Composite shutters are durable and cost less than wood in most cases.

Color is another consideration when replacing shutters. Shutters can stand out or blend in with the siding and other architectural accents. Shutters also can flank a front door to fully complete an exterior look.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When shopping for shutters, individuals can choose among various styles.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Minor exterior upgrades that can help sell a home

The home improvement industry has been booming for years, but forecasters are projecting a deceleration in 2023 and perhaps beyond. Estimates from the Home Improvement Research Institute, which is the leading market research resource for the home and building products industry, indicate that growth in the home improvement products market is expected to decelerate from 7.2% in 2022 to 1.5% in 2023. Inflation continues to affect consumer spending, and homeowners may be looking to spend less on renovations in the year ahead.

Minor upgrades that aren't as costly as larger projects can still make a big difference, especially among prospective buyers. When looking for minor upgrades that can help sell a home, homeowners can rely on Remodeling magazine's annual "Cost vs. Value Report." That report analyzes costs for an assortment of remodeling projects and determines the value of those projects at resale. Though resale value depends on a host of variables, including location, the following are some relatively minor exterior upgrades that impress buyers and provide a strong return for homeowners.

- **Garage door replacement.** Garage doors matter more than sellers may recognize, as various real estate professionals note that buyers appreciate homes with updated garage doors. That's good news for homeowners, as the "2022 Cost vs. Value Report" indicated homeowners recoup roughly 93% of their garage door replacement investment at resale. The average cost of such a job is right around \$4,000, making this a budget-friendly remodeling project.

- **Window replacement.** The cost of new windows will depend on just how many windows must be replaced. But there's no denying buyers like the idea of low emissivity (low-E) windows, which can cut energy bills by a significant amount over time. The Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy estimates that heat gain and heat loss through



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Updating a home's exterior doesn't have to bust homeowners' budgets.

windows is responsible for between 25 and 30% of residential heating and cooling energy use, so sellers who can tell buyers they have new low-E windows can emphasize those savings in home listings. The "2022 Cost vs. Value Report" indicates that homeowners recoup roughly two-thirds of their investment in new windows at resale.

- **Landscaping.** Well-maintained landscaping is another home exterior component that can make a strong first impression on buyers. A recent survey of nearly 7,000 realtors conducted

by the National Association of Realtors found that upgrading a landscape recouped roughly 83% of homeowners' initial investment at resale. In addition, 11% of realtors surveyed indicated that an upgraded landscape was the decisive factor that closed the deal for the house.

Updating a home's exterior doesn't have to bust homeowners' budgets. Many affordable projects also provide a substantial return at resale.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



There's no denying buyers like the idea of low emissivity (low-E) windows, which can cut energy bills by a significant amount over time.

HOME & GARDEN

Garden expert approved: New trends and plants for 2023

No matter where you live or how green your thumb, you can enjoy the beauty and bounty of gardening at home. Now is the ideal time to plan a spring garden that will be the envy of the neighborhood.

The experts at Ball Horticultural Company share their recommended plants, top topics and tips to set up every type of gardener for success this year.

Plants for your pocketbook

Creating a stunning garden doesn't have to break the bank. To get even more bang for the buck, select hardy plants known to thrive through adversity or fast-spreading flowers that fill in quickly.

New Hula Spreading Begonia is a great example of a budget-friendly plant that quickly fills in garden beds with a blanket of high-impact color, covering the soil and discouraging weeds in minimal time. They're bursting with eye-catching blooms, very forgiving for novice gardeners, and are also great for outdoor hanging baskets and mixed containers.

If heat, humidity or drought are a concern for you, opting for resilient flowering plants can help ensure greenery and blooms no matter the weather condition. Angelonia AngelDance™, for example, thrives even in harsh conditions like high heat, producing tall flower spikes that are perfect for that cottage garden vibe. Additionally, because the stems are flexible, they bring awesome movement to your garden and you don't have to worry about breakage.

Tropical colors delight

Tropical hues are trending, which is evident by the rich, pink shade of Viva Magenta selected as Pantone's 2023 Color of the Year. From deep burgundies to bright, energetic pinks, you can use florals reminiscent of a south beach escape to turn your outdoor space into a personal oasis.

To add instant color to sunny spots, try all-season blooming Easy Wave® Burgundy Velour Petunias either solo or in mixed planters, baskets, gardens and window boxes. Brighten up shad-



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

From indoor tabletops to outdoor landscapes, porches and beyond, garden experts agree: There are plenty of plant options to help you create a stunning space this year.

ier spots with the Glimmer™ Burgundy Double Impatiens, which produce beautiful, rose-like blooms that are easy to maintain, as the plant's old blooms do not need to be removed as they fade.

If you live in climates that require low-maintenance plants that can withstand chillier temps, try Oscar Cherry Velvet Dianthus, which has frost tolerance and a soft floral fragrance. Another hardy option in a vibrant shade is the Sombrero Poco Hot Pink Echinacea, a compact version of winter-hardy prairie coneflower, with bright, non-fading blooms. As an added bonus, the plant is known to be deer resistant and attract song birds and butterflies.

Impress with vegetables

When you grow your own vegetables, you reap even more health benefits, including the positive emotional boost of being outdoors, plus you save money on groceries. This year, try unique home-grown choices that add fresh flavor to your meals and impress guests at your next gathering.

To upgrade your vegetable platter, check out Sun Dipper Tomatoes. Their unique, elongated shape makes them easy to hold and ideal for dipping into your favorite spreads and party dips. Another visually mesmerizing variety is the Mocha Swirl Snack Pepper from Burpee Plants. This sweet snacking pepper produces 4-inch fruits that ripen green and white at 50 days and then to rich chocolate-red stripes at 70 days.

If you're limited on space, you can still enjoy the benefits of growing your own fresh vegetables by exploring indoor, tabletop options. Kitchen Minis Quick Snack Cucumber are a restricted-vine crispy-and-delicious cucumber that can be kept inside on a sunny windowsill or counter for a fresh harvest over a few weeks.

Living color indoors

Have you recently downsized, or do you live in an apartment, condo or townhome? No matter where you live, you can still enjoy the beauty and benefits of plant parenthood by exploring indoor-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When you grow your own vegetables, you reap even more health benefits, including the positive emotional boost of being outdoors.

flowering varieties that brighten spaces and enhance interior design.

Yellow is reminiscent of sunshine and conveys positive emotions, which is why the ColorBloom™ Gerbera is such a happy addition to indoor spaces. Perfectly happy to grow in small indoor pots, you'll enjoy long-lasting blooms when you place them in sunny locations throughout the

home.

If you prefer leafy varieties in your home, try color- and texture-rich foliage plants, such as Jurassic Dino Rex Begonia. With bold patterns, including a beautiful rose-pink leaf color with green edges, white dots and a black leaf center, the plant sets the mood and accents any room.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

HOME MAINTENANCE

Signs a home exterior needs updating

Renovations are a great way for homeowners to re-shape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities.

Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors.

Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

- **Curling shingles.** The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the affected shingles.

- **Dated entry door.** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Upgrading a driveway and walkway is one way to update a home's exterior and restore its curb appeal.

doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

- **Unightly landscaping.** It's not only the physi-

cal components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscap-

ing. These alternatives to more needy plants can create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.

- **Cracked driveways/walkways.** If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season, chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition,

cracked walkways indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.

Updating a home's exterior can restore curb appeal and help homeowners feel better about their properties.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish.

SAFETY

How to make a backyard safe for dogs

Dogs, particularly puppies, can be full of boundless energy. Channeling that energy into exercise with long walks or play sessions can help stem dogs' propensity to get into trouble around the house as they burn off extra adrenaline. Pets who don't have an energy outlet may chew off-limits objects or get into other mischief.

According to the American Kennel Club, the amount of exercise a dog needs depends on the animal's age and breed. For example, border collies or Siberian huskies may require much more exercise than English bulldogs, simply because the former are working breeds. Pet owners with large backyards often find those outdoor spots are ideal for when their dogs get the "zoomies," something that tends to be a daily occurrence. Letting their dogs run around yards, whether on their own or chasing tossed tennis balls, is an ideal way to provide exercise and tire out pups. In such scenarios, it's vital that pups have a dog-friendly yard in which to play.

Use safe lawn care products

An expanse of grass is the perfect place to frolic or enjoy some sunbathing — for people or pets. But contact with chemically treated lawns can cause a number of health issues for dogs, such as allergies or intestinal upset.

Switching to native grasses can reduce the need to use chemicals to get lush lawns. When supplementation is needed, homeowners can switch to organic products or natural compost as safer alternatives than

chemical-based products.

Fence off the yard

Off-leash running and bounding through the yard will make any dog smile. However, a fence is a must-have to ensure a dog doesn't become an escape artist. Be sure the fence is high enough so that the pup cannot jump over it. Burying chicken wire in the dirt beneath the lower edge of the fence also can help prevent dogs who like to dig from exiting by crawling underneath the fence.

Consider installing a lock on the fence gate so that no one can wander in and surprise the dog, which may startle the animal and prompt it to defend the property. A lock also helps prevent dog theft.

Keep the yard tidy

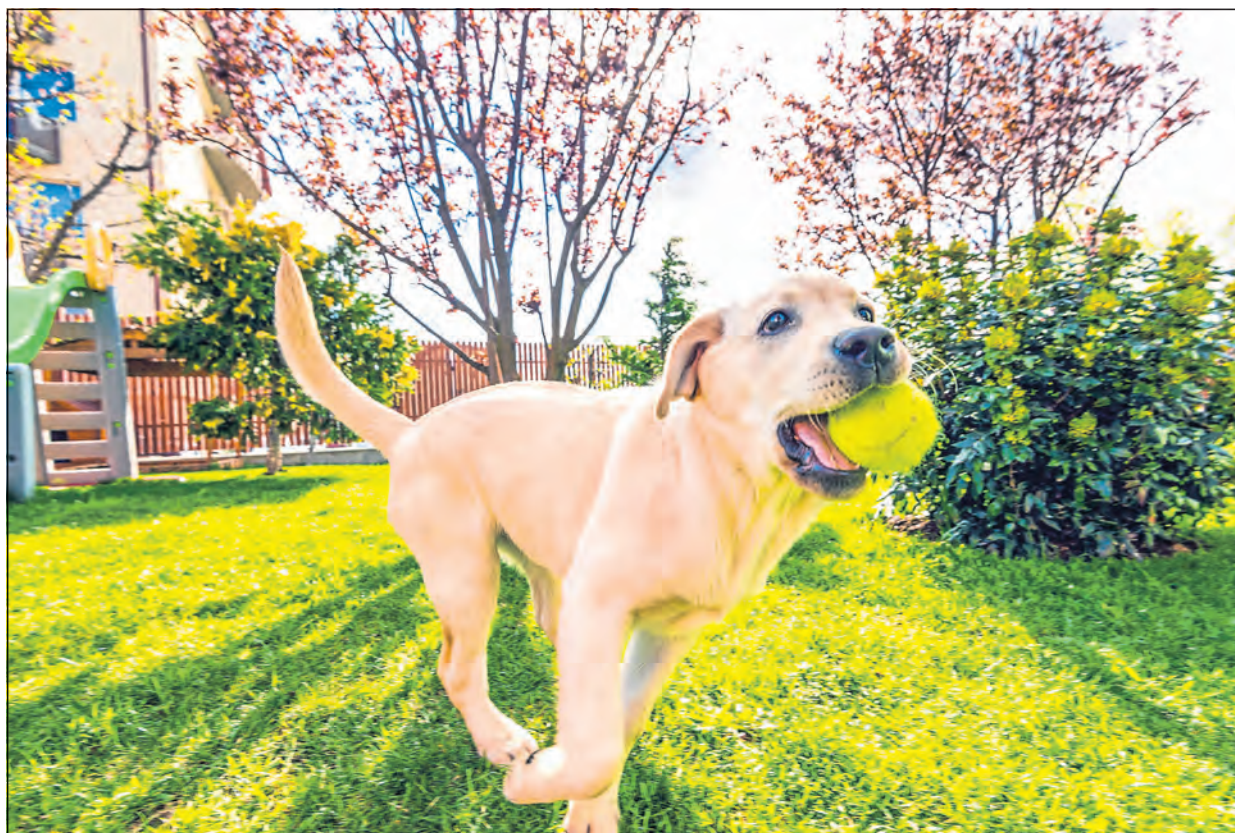
Maintaining a clean yard also is key to safety. Inspect the yard regularly to make sure nothing is around that can prove harmful, whether it's poison ivy, felled branches or broken fence panels. Also, keep shrubs and grass trimmed to reduce flea and tick populations on the property.

Avoid poisonous plants

Certain plants can be dangerous if they're consumed by curious pups. Chrysanthemums, peonies, irises, and hydrangeas are some plants that can be poisonous. For a full list of poisonous plants, visit the ASPCA website (aspca.org).

Keep an eye on animals

Dogs can spend some unattended time in the yard, but check in from time to time. Should wild-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Off-leash running and bounding through the yard will make any dog smile. However, a fence is a must-have to ensure a dog doesn't become an escape artist.

life get into the yard, dogs may get hurt by tussles or bites. Birds of prey, such as owls, hawks and even vultures, may attack small dogs in a yard. According to Pat Silvosky, director of the Milford Nature Center in Kansas, some birds can be territorial. While they might not view a dog as an easy meal, they could swoop down and attack to defend territory. The same may occur with other wild animals.

A dog-friendly yard may require a little effort to create, but it's worth a little sweat equity to keep pups safe.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



A dog-friendly yard may require a little effort to create, but it's worth a little sweat equity to keep pups safe.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Factors to consider before renovating a driveway

Driveways are oft-overlooked components of home exteriors. But driveways provide functionality and points of egress to a home. Industry experts estimate that a new driveway costs between \$5,000 and \$7,000, though the price will vary based on the materials homeowners choose and the square footage of the driveway.

When deciding whether or not to renovate their driveways, homeowners can review these considerations.

Materials

Driveways can be made from a variety of materials,

even grass or soil. The following are some driveway materials homeowners may choose from:

- Gravel
- Chip seal
- Concrete
- Asphalt
- Rubber
- Exposed aggregate
- Pavers
- Permeable pavers
- Heated

Repair or replace?

Nearly any size crack can be patched with concrete or cold-patch asphalt, or specialty materials, according to This Old House, an online home improvement resource. Repairing and re-

sealing a driveway can help prolong its longevity. Plus, this is a more cost-effective option for homeowners on a budget who want to improve curb appeal and safety.

Large holes or unsightly damage may require a driveway replacement. This also will be the case if a homeowner hopes to expand the driveway. Replacing a driveway requires a time commitment. The existing driveway needs to be demolished and removed. The ground underneath typically is smoothed and tamped down. Substrate or wire mesh also may be installed. After the new ma-

terial is laid, there may be a period of time for settling and curing, during which use of the driveway is prohibited.

DIY or professional?

While sealing and minor repairs generally can be handled by a homeowner who has researched the process, large repairs or driveway replacements should be left to professionals for the best results. Driveway slope needs to be considered for proper rain runoff, and the professional will understand the thickness and preparatory steps necessary to ensure driveway durability. Installa-

tion of a heated driveways requires a specific skill set and this is a job best left to professional driveway contractors.

Driveway enhancements

The options do not end with the driveway material. There are other ways to boost aesthetics.

- Illumination. Homeowners can install recessed LED lights into the driveway to define the edges and add aesthetic appeal.

- Stamped texture. Homeowners opting for the affordability of con-

crete can ask for a stamped design that mimics the look of stone or pavers.

- Gates. One doesn't have to live in an exclusive community to have their property enhanced by gates. Gates can give a home a distinguished look.

- Edging. Driveways can be edged with another material to create definition between the driveway and lawn, or to provide the perfect spots to plant beds.

Driveway renovations can add curb appeal and improve the functionality of a home.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Driveway renovations can add curb appeal and improve the functionality of a home.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Chores to tackle at home this spring



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

During the colder months, debris can accumulate in the gutters, which can be problematic when spring rains arrive.

After months spent largely indoors while harsh elements battered your home's exterior, many homeowners are throwing open the windows and embracing spring's arrival.

Every home requires ongoing maintenance to ensure it's living up to its aesthetic and functional best. This checklist can help you create a comfortable home setting for enjoying the warmer months.

Check gutters

During the colder months, debris can accumulate in the gutters, which can be problematic when spring rains arrive. Clogged gutters prevent water from flowing efficiently away from the roof and house. When they're backed up,

they can cause water damage in a short amount of time. Faulty guttering can also cause slow leaks that lead to damage you may not discover until major repair work is needed. Properly functioning gutters are clear of debris, flow freely and are securely attached to the home.

Inspect the roof

Your roof takes a real beating in all kinds of weather conditions. Making it a common practice to carefully inspect the roof with the change of seasons can help you identify potential problems while they're still in early stages, before a big storm hits and major damage occurs. Some roof issues can be addressed with simple repairs you

can do yourself while others may require a professional. A roofing expert can help you determine whether any trouble areas can be patched or if a more complete restoration is in order.

Replace the dryer vent

Upgrading your dryer vent is an opportunity to conserve energy and prevent flammable lint build-up in your dryers. One option for updating the exhaust system is a paintable version of InoVate's Prime DryerWallVent. Engineered for both vent replacement and new construction, the vent includes features such as a gravity-assist damper, integrated magnets and a drip edge to provide extra protection from the elements as well as pests. A

large, clean opening and lightweight angled damper promote exceptional airflow efficiency.

Service air conditioning units

Your heating and cooling system works hard to keep your indoor climate comfortable when extreme temperatures make the outdoors unbearable. That's why it's important to have your systems serviced by a professional, and spring is a smart time to do so before they're hard at work throughout the warmer months. Service can correct problems and ensure everything is operating efficiently, which can lead to money savings as well.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

Upgrading your dryer vent is an opportunity to conserve energy and prevent flammable lint build-up in your dryers.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Every home requires ongoing maintenance to ensure it's living up to its aesthetic and functional best.

Repair window screens

Throughout the winter, your home's window screens can accumulate a layer of dirt and grime that isn't just unsightly; it blows indoors when you open the windows to welcome a fresh breeze. What's more, if your screens have rips and tears, pesky bugs and

other critters can make their way into your home more easily. Cleaning and repairing your screens can make your home more secure and help protect your indoor air quality.

Find more information to help get your home ready for spring at DryerWallVent.com.

Story courtesy of Family Features

HOME & GARDEN

7 garden growing basics for beginners

Growing your own produce is an all-around smart practice, from the money you'll save at the grocery store to the contributions you can make toward a cleaner planet.

Maintaining a garden takes some effort, but it's a project even a beginner can tackle with ease. Consider these tips to start growing your at-home garden:

1 . Select a perfect spot. You'll want to place your garden in an area where you see it often so you're reminded to weed and care for it regularly. Find a flat area you can access easily, where erosion and other pitfalls (including hungry wildlife) won't be a problem.

2 . Choose between ground and containers. There are pros and cons to gardening in containers vs. the ground, and there's no universal right choice. Rather, the best garden depends on your goals and preferences. A ground garden usually offers more space and may provide a better growth environment for roots. However, a container garden is often easier to maintain and may be all you need if you wish to grow just a few plants.

3 . Understand the importance of quality soil. You may think any dirt will do, but keep in mind the soil you plant in will be the primary source of nutrients for your produce. Not only that, but quality soil provides stability so plants can root firmly and grow healthy and sturdy to support their bounty. Quality soil also allows for ample drainage. Organic matter like compost, leaf mold or aged manure all help improve soil quality.

4 . Keep water close. Lugging water can quickly eliminate the pleasure of tending your garden, so be sure you're situated near a hose. You'll know it's time to water when the soil is dry



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNSPLASH

Maintaining a garden takes some effort, but it's a project even a beginner can tackle with ease.

about an inch below the surface.

5 . Plan for plenty of sun. A bright, sunny spot is a must, since most vegetables, herbs and fruits depend on six or more hours of sun every day. Remember the sun's path changes throughout the year, and as trees and foliage grow, they may produce more shade with each growing season.

6 . Consider what you'll grow. Starting with veggies you know you like is a smart starting point since you'll be pouring sweat equity into making them grow. Over time, you might add new varieties, but early on, keep your focus on foods you know you like so you can see a meaningful return and avoid waste. You'll also need to consider what you can

grow to maturity within your area's growing season. If necessary, you might want to start transplants you can nurture indoors before moving them outside when the temperatures allow.

7 . Plant according to a calendar. Knowing how long it takes different foods to mature will help you create a planting

calendar. You don't want to harvest everything at once, and if you stagger planting and replant what you can, you'll have a garden that produces food for your family for a longer period of time.

Find more helpful tips for managing your home and garden at eLivingtoday.com.

Story courtesy of Family Features

HOME IMPROVEMENT



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Representing as much as 40% or even more of a home's exterior, your home's roof not only protects against the elements but can serve as a defining design element.

Color: The key to an exterior home refresh

From the paint on your front door to the pillows on your porch swing, your home's exterior provides a canvas for colorfully expressing your style. But a big opportunity to leverage the power of color is often overlooked. Representing as much as 40% or even more of a home's exterior, your home's roof not only protects against the elements but can serve as a defining design element — particularly when color is considered.

Today's shingle colors go well beyond conventional shades of gray, brown and black. For example, new color palettes in the Owens Corning TruDefinition Duration Designer Shingle range include a rich, sensory blend of hues evoking nature's elements, food and libations, and textiles ranging from leather to metallics. Paired with other exterior elements like paint, sid-

ing, landscaping and lighting, roof shingles can pull together a vibe reflecting diverse personal styles.

A good example of this versatility can be seen in Midnight Plum, the 2023 Shingle Color of the Year. Inviting and intriguing, the shingle blends inky blues with regal violet shades and elegant touches of silver to achieve a hue that is distinctive yet versatile. Before you say, "my home's roof can't do purple," let's look at three examples of how Midnight Plum complements different exterior styles.

Modern Farmhouse

A curated style board available at OwensCorning.com reinvents the familiarity of Farmhouse style. The design board sets shades of charcoals against a rolling green landscape, bringing an element of edginess to traditional design. A subtle hint

of lilac softens the look and enhances the violet undertones in the shingle.

Traditional

Like coming home, the traditional style feels classic and welcoming. Set against the airy brightness of a pop of coral, Midnight Plum's elegant purple tones bring an optimistic blush to the exterior. Combining clean, time-honored shades of blue and gray, Midnight Plum brings a current day accent to a look firmly grounded in tradition. Homeowners can find more ideas to inspire their own take on traditional style board for traditional homes on the Owens Corning site.

California Bungalow

Location doesn't limit this look named for the American Craftsman style that was nearly exclusive to California in the 1920s and '30s. The sloping roof



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Today's shingle colors go well beyond conventional shades of gray, brown and black.

of the bungalow provides a ready canvas for Midnight Plum to bring a cozy contrast to mellow neutrals and sweet purples. An inspiring style board shows how Midnight Plum complements the stone, tile and landscaping that make the California Bungalow style both elegant and homey.

Along with curated style boards, Owens Corning offers other color tools to help

inspire your home's exterior. For example, the Design EyeQ® visualization software allows you to upload a picture of your home and virtually "try on" new roof colors. And calling 1-800-GET-PINK allows you to order free color pairing brochures.

Spotlighting style

While your home's roof is an ideal focal point for a

color refresh, other elements also support beautiful exteriors. Light fixtures, landscaping and even the color of your porch furniture can all complement a home's style. Similar to fashion, exterior color trends are always evolving. With versatility in mind, Owens Corning shingles are infused with a dimensional blend of colors to coordinate easily with exterior updates.

While fashion and design trends can come and go, the ultimate vote of confidence when it comes to a home's style comes from homeowners. Since 2018, Owens Corning has been awarded the Women's Choice Award, as America's most recommended roofing material brand.

Explore and get inspired by a range of shingle and color pairings at roofing-fashioncolors.com.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

SAFETY



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

When researching generators, keep in mind they come in a variety of sizes based on your power needs in your home.

Do you have reliable backup power during severe weather?

As severe weather continues to become more and more prevalent across the country, homeowners are reminded that having a backup plan for power outages is important all year long. Reliable power is critical, especially for the elderly, families with children and people working from home.

Now, more than ever, an automatic home generator is the best defense against power outages — and particularly extended outages — no matter where you call

home. Whether it's a hurricane, ice storm, extreme flooding event, blackout or another weather threat, you can give your family peace of mind and security knowing you'll have a dependable power source on-hand.

How does an automatic home generator work?

A standby home generator is permanently installed outside a home, similar to a central air conditioning unit. It runs on self-feed-

ing fuels such as natural gas or liquid propane (LP). The unit turns on automatically when power is lost to the home or business.

The standby home generator can be a literal lifesaver, because it can power critical and sophisticated appliances and systems in a home, including HVAC, refrigerators, lights, computers, medical devices and more. It also provides home essentials that facilitate safety and comfort. This is especially important during winter storms when people

are less likely to leave home. Having access to heat, electricity and appliances like a stove is essential.

Automatic power no matter where you are

You do not need to be present to operate your home's standby generator, which is great if you have to evacuate or simply are gone when the power fails. An automatic transfer switch continuously monitors power from the utility and transfers the electrical

load to the generator when power is lost.

For example, a KOHLER home generator is completely automatic. The unit's commercial-grade engine fires up quickly within 10 seconds of power loss and can handle heavy demands while operating quietly.

The generator provides "clean power" so you don't have to worry about spikes and voltage drops that may impact sensitive electronics like computers and phones. The unit also fea-

tures a rust-resistant enclosure, which is important for homes near salt water or in freezing temperatures.

When researching generators, keep in mind they come in a variety of sizes based on your power needs in your home. Consult with a professional dealer for appropriate sizing, permitting, installation and other considerations. Learn more at KohlerGenerators.com.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

OUTDOOR LIVING

How to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

Private backyards are now go-to spaces for recreation and entertainment and great places to recharge the body and mind.

One ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was more time spent outdoors, even if it was predominantly on one's own property. OnePoll, in conjunction with the lawn care company TruGreen, surveyed 2,000 American homeowners and found participants spent 14 hours outside every week in 2021, which was three hours more than prior to the pandemic. In addition, respondents admitted that time spent outdoors was therapeutic.

A separate survey conducted for the International Casual Furnishings Association found that people now spend more time relaxing, gardening, exercising, dining, and entertaining outside than in years past. Though COVID-19 may no longer dominate headlines, the desire to enjoy outdoor spaces has not waned.

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can do all they can to make these spaces comfortable and welcoming. The following are some good starting points.

Get all lit up

Outdoor spaces can be enjoyed no matter the hour when there is ample lighting. That could be why the International Casual Furnishings Association reports those who plan to renovate their outdoor spaces list outdoor lighting as a priority. Outdoor lighting not only sheds light on entertaining spaces, but also makes spaces safer and more secure.

Increase privacy

No matter how friendly

homeowners are with their neighbors, there comes a time when privacy is paramount. Fencing, whether it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even star gaze in private.

Address the elements

Homeowners should note the direction their backyard faces and the typical daily conditions of the space. For example, a yard that faces southwest may get plenty of strong sun during the day, requiring the addition of shade trees, covered patios or arbors to cut down on the glare and heat. If the yard is often hit by winds, trees or bushes planted strategically as windbreaks can help.

Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A deep seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day, while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather. According to the Family Handyman, soaking in hot tubs can relax tired muscles after a long day, loosen up stiff joints, improve cardiovascular health, and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mos-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can make many upgrades to help make these spaces comfortable and welcoming.

quitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

As people spend more time enjoying their properties, they can consider the many ways to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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