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SPORTS, B2

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FRESH AND FUN FAMILY RECIPES

FOOD, B9

Author, author

The Friends of the Plymouth, Canton, Northville and Novi Public Libraries will be holding the annual book and author luncheon noon Tuesday, May 29, at Fox Hills Country Club.

The speaker will be Kevin Boyle, who authored *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in the Jazz Age*. The book was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Award and is set in Detroit; it is also this year's selection for the Great Michigan Read.

Tickets (\$25) are available from April 15 through May 15. Reservation forms can be obtained at any of the four libraries or can be downloaded at plymouthlibrary.org.

Bowling fundraiser

Community Work Opportunities, LLC, sponsors a Cosmic Bowling fundraiser 6-9 p.m. Friday, April 20, at Super Bowl Lanes in Canton.

Community Work Opportunities, headquartered in Canton, provides support services to persons with special needs to "promote inclusion, maximize independence and improve quality of life."

Cost for the fundraiser is \$20, which includes two games with shoe rental, two slices of pizza and a beverage. The event will also include a 50/50 raffle, mystery ticket, door prizes and a silent auction.

Super Bowl Lanes is located at 45100 Ford Road in Canton. For more information on the fundraiser, call Community Work Opportunities at (734) 981-3709.

Truth telling

The Muslim community in Canton sponsors a forum, "What is the Truth about Islam and Muslims in America?" 7-8:30 p.m. Thursday, April 19.

The event takes place at the Canton Public Library, 1200 S. Canton Center in Canton.

The public is invited, and refreshments will be provided.

PLYMOUTH OBSERVER

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Six-year-olds Ava Geyer (left) and Brooke Morris filled their baskets.

PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Easter excitement

Kids join in for eggs-ellent adventure

By Brad Kadrich
Observer Staff Writer

More photos from hunt, A9.

The reason 10-year-old Sarah Heinrichs was in Plymouth Township Park Saturday was simple.

"You get to run and you get to grab a lot of eggs," said Sarah, a Plymouth Township resident. "I've gone before and it's a lot of fun."

Sarah joined hundreds of other youngsters for the annual Easter Egg Hunt, sponsored for the fourth year by the Plymouth Lions Club. She was hoping to grab "about 20" of the little plastic, candy-filled eggs spread out over the park's ball diamonds for the various age groups.

In addition to providing the fun times for the kids, who also got to spend time with the Easter Bunny, the event served as a collection point for some of the Lions'

favorite efforts. Donations came in of eyeglasses for the vision-impaired, hearing aids and cell phones to be used for veterans.

There's a clinic the Lions benefit in Indiana, and they also work closely with the Penrickton Center for Blind Children in Taylor.

The Lions took the egg hunt over four years ago; it had previously been sponsored by the Plymouth Jaycees.

"It's a community service," said Plymouth Lion Jo Ellen Hincker. "We wanted to give back to the community."

Besides, there's an even better reason, according to Hincker.

"It's great fun for the kids," she said. "That's what it's all about."

bkadrich@hometownlife.com
(313) 222-8899



Hudson Lloyd, 2, hands dad, Michael Lloyd, his share of the loot.

City starts budget process

By Brad Kadrich
Observer Staff Writer

After receiving a projected balanced budget from City Manager Paul Sincock last week, the Plymouth City Commission Monday began the process of whittling through it ahead of a June 30 deadline to pass it.

There's a lot for commissioners to like about the \$5 million budget for fiscal 2013. It's balanced (without taking any of the city's \$1.5 million fund balance), it doesn't include any layoffs and it maintains services at levels residents expect.

But, while it's balanced, Sincock pointed out to commissioners in his budget message the city still faces "a number of challenges" — the effective fire service partnership with Northville and state revenues being among them. Among other challenges:

- Capital outlay — In recent years, the city has sold some \$22 million in bond issues to support infrastructure, and spent another \$6 million in the last five years, from various funding sources, in capital projects for construction, facilities and equipment. The ability to continue with capital projects, Sincock told commissioners, must be weighed against the ability to finance them.

- Legacy costs — The city still has some 52 retired employees during pensions under the old defined benefit plan. The city is on the hook for some \$21.5 million in legacy liability.

While Sincock and Finance Director Mark Christiansen balanced the budget, there were initiatives Sincock said he would have liked to have seen implemented, programs he said the city simply couldn't afford. One such initiative, dubbed the "bar car," would have added two officers to the city's police department to help deal with a rising number of incidents caused by an increasingly popular and vital downtown nightlife.

The plan was kept in the bud-

Please see BUDGET, A3

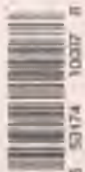
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New township officers from police families

By Matt Jachman
Observer Staff Writer

When it came to choosing a career, law enforcement was a natural for Brittany DeFrain and Caitlin Jackson.

Two of the newest officers in the Plymouth Township Police Department, Jackson and DeFrain each have a parent with police experience: Jackson's mom, Pamela Jackson, spent a few years with the Detroit Police Department, while DeFrain's dad,

Mark DeFrain, retired in 2009 after more than 25 years with the Ann Arbor Police Department.

"Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be one," Jackson said as she and DeFrain sat down for an interview last week. "They always said I was going to be a cop."

Pamela Jackson was laid off in Detroit and didn't go back when recalled because a "gut feeling" told her not to, her daughter said.

Please see OFFICERS, A2



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Officers Brittany DeFrain and Caitlin Jackson both bring family backgrounds of police work to their jobs as Plymouth Township Police Department officers.



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BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Officer Caitlin Jackson (left) grew up in Milford and earned a degree in criminal justice from Ferris State University, while Plymouth Township native Brittany DeFrain, a Canton High School graduate, majored in psychology and criminal justice while graduating from Michigan State University.

OFFICERS

Continued from page A1

She has been working in security ever since.

"Knowing the job that they're doing, I wanted to be able to do that, too," said DeFrain, whose father worked nights as a patrolman for his entire career because he liked it and it worked for the family.

Local roots

Jackson, who grew up in Milford, graduated from Ferris State University with a criminal justice degree last year and also attended the police academy there. She was hired Oct. 31 and recently completed several months of field training, in which a rookie is partnered with veteran officers to learn the community, the patrol routines and the procedures specific to the department. She is now

patrolling on her own.

For DeFrain, who was hired Feb. 21, the job is a sort of homecoming. She grew up in the township and graduated from Canton High School. She is a 2011 Michigan State University graduate with majors in psychology and criminal justice, and she attended the police academy at Washtenaw Community College.

"I knew the area. I knew I liked the area," DeFrain said. "I never had any desire to leave."

Both women find field training valuable. "It's a lot different than the academy. You learn more hands-on, dealing with real people" rather than through role-playing, Jackson said.

"It's definitely a whole new way of thinking. You have 100 things that you're thinking about at every moment," said DeFrain, who is assuming increasing responsibilities as field training progresses.

Both women have made their first arrests: Jackson has made arrests in drunken driving and domestic cases as well as warrant arrests, and DeFrain made one arrest on a misdemeanor warrant and another of a driver whose license was suspended.

Community policing

They like the size and makeup of the community they're patrolling. Jackson said she likes that the area is bigger

than her hometown of Milford.

"This was like perfect — right in the middle," she said. "The diversity is nice."

DeFrain said she likes that the department isn't too busy for officers to take time with people during calls for service.

"You get to work with the community," rather than run from call to call, she said.

She likes the idea of being someone who can bring order to an upsetting situation and remain calm while doing so.

"I just like to be able to talk to people, calm them down," she said.

Both women say they're motivated by family. "Living up to their expectations," is the way Jackson put it.

DeFrain said the thankfulness she receives from citizens while on the job, even for the smallest service, such as listening to someone, is also motivating, and suggested that's a reflection of the community's character.

"You don't get that gratefulness with everyone," she said.

And what, at this point, is the least-favorite part of the job?

"As of right now, I pretty much like everything," Jackson said.

"I don't like having to write people tickets," DeFrain said. "I'd prefer they didn't do anything to get them a ticket."

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BUDGET

Continued from page A1

get right up until it was presented last week.

"We need more help to deal with our very active and vital downtown," Sincoc said. "Providing services (downtown) and still keep service in the residential areas makes the budget pretty tight. To balance the budget, we had to take it out."

Sincoc and Christensen also examined a list of incentives commissioners provided them late last year, items commissioners would like to see done if money were no object. Among them:

- Decorative lighting on Main Street — Could cost as much as \$600,000 to replace the 63 overhead lights with Washington-style posts.
- Improvement of athletic fields at Central Middle School — This initiative comes with a probably \$5 million to \$7 million price tag. It considers the improvement of the football field, installation of a walking path and improvement of other facilities.

The drawback is the property belongs to Plymouth-Canton Community Schools. Sincoc said it would take "significant political and community support" to make it happen.

• A second downtown parking structure — With downtown parking at a premium, some commissioners have long lobbied for a second parking structure. Sincoc said there are obstacles to such a facility — cost and space. A plan to build a small parking deck in the east central lot would have cost \$5 million two years

ago, and the cost for two multi-story decks is in the \$20 million range.

Also, he said, the most likely space to build it would be in the lot behind The Gathering. "There just isn't room," Sincoc said.

Even with those considerations, Sincoc said he's pleased with where the city's financial situation is now, particularly since Standard & Poor's just maintained the city's bond rating at AA with a stable outlook.

"Our five-year budgeting (process) has been key to us keeping ahead of the curve," Sincoc said.

Other budget sessions are scheduled for Thursday, April 19, at city hall, and Thursday, April 26, at the city's municipal services department.

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"Around Plymouth" is designed to announce upcoming events taking place in the community. Items will run on a space-available basis. Send details to bkadrich@hometownlife.com.

PROM DRESS SALE
Date/Time: Saturday, April 21, 9 a.m. to noon.

Location: Plymouth High School

Details: The second annual Prom Dress Sale is looking for donations of long or short formal dresses, shoes, jewelry and purses. Any items to be donated can be dropped off in the general office at Plymouth High School, 8400 Beck Road, Canton. Last year, more than 100 girls went home with a dress.

Contact: Lisa Bernages, (734) 582-5553

GRIEF SUPPORT

Date/Time: April 16, 23, 30, May 7, 9; 7-9 p.m.

Location: Our Lady of Good Counsel, 47650 N Teritorial Road, Plymouth.



JULIE YOLLES

Cookies crumbled

Peggy Grover (from left) of Harrison Township, Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan Board Member Cathy Cornell of Grosse Pointe and GSSEM Chief Financial Officer Bonnie Reyes of Plymouth were at the fourth annual Cookie Gala, where 13 of the area's top restaurants created decadent desserts using Girl Scouts' signature cookies and then competed for top awards. Girls Scouts of America is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. If you missed out on purchasing cookies, visit www.gssem.org.

Details: The "Grieving With Great Hope" workshop offers a prayerful, practical and personal approach for

individuals who are mourning the loss of a loved one. Speakers will include Deacon Bob Irvin, Fr. John Riccardio,

and leadership opportunities for all grade levels.
Contact: Visit www.allsaintscs.com or call (734) 459-2490.

HEISE HOURS

Date/Time: Monday, April 16, 3-4 p.m.

Location: Plymouth District Library, 223 S. Main in Plymouth

Details: State Rep. Kurt Heise is sponsoring district office hours on Monday, April 16 at various locations throughout western Wayne County. No appointment is necessary during these office hours. People unavailable to attend can set up an appointment.

Contact: Call 1-855-REP-KURT.

COLLEGE SAVINGS

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 17, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Location: Plymouth District Library, 223 S. Main, Plymouth

Details: College savings experts from the Michigan Education Trust (MET) will be available to answer questions and help parents, grandparents and others

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Contact: 1-800-MET-4-KID (1-800-638-4543)

NEW HOPE DINNER

Date/Time: Friday, May 18, 6 p.m.

Location: Italian American Banquet Center in Livonia

Details: New Hope Center for Grief Support hosts a Spring Appreciation Dinner to honor Executive Director Cathy Clough for her dedication and service to the success and history of New Hope Center. Hors d'oeuvres are at 6 p.m., dinner's at 7 p.m., live music from 9-11 p.m. The event features strolling musician trio and live and silent auctions. Celebrity emcee is WDIV traffic reporter Ashlee Baracy.

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Larry Geiger picked up his new car with sister Jeanette Geiger, center, and daughter Lauren Geiger. All are from Livonia.

Livonia man wins 2012 Malibu in March Madness giveaway

By Karen Smith
Observer Staff Writer

Larry Geiger, 59, of Livonia received a birthday present this week he'll never forget.

Geiger won a 2012 Chevrolet Malibu, the grand prize in the Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers Malibu Madness giveaway.

He got to pick whichever Malibu he wanted on Monday from the inventory at Lou LaRiche Chevrolet in Plymouth, where he has been a customer since the early 1980s. He chose a metallic black Malibu LT with a sunroof.

"What a nice-riding car," he said. "It's just beautiful."

Geiger, a circulation manager for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*,

entered the contest after receiving an e-mail about it from the Lou LaRiche Chevrolet.

He had to go there in person to register. In conjunction with the 2012 NCAA Men's College Basketball tournament, entrants followed a tournament team through the rounds.

The computer picked one of 66 teams for each entrant. Geiger's team was Kentucky.

Kentucky went all the way to the finals and then beat Kansas 67-59 on April 2, Geiger's birthday, winning the 2012 NCAA title.

Because other entrants had also been assigned Kentucky, Geiger's name was put into a drawing. He checked his e-mail April 4, and he had a message saying, "Congratulations, you won the Malibu."

He was the only one to win a Malibu in Metro Detroit out of entrants from 39 dealerships.

"This birthday I will never forget," Geiger said. "This whole week I've been in a fog. I wake up and pinch myself to see if it's real."

Geiger said the timing was right. He, his wife and their two daughters have four cars among them and the oldest, a Jeep, was 10 years old. "I've got it for sale right now," he said. Now, everyone in the family is driving a vehicle that is no more than six years old.

Geiger gets to drive the Malibu. He gave the Pontiac G6 he was driving to one of his daughters.

Scott LaRiche, executive vice president of Lou LaRiche Chevrolet, said it was exciting to have

the winner come from his dealership. He said it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy at a better time.

"He's a great guy," LaRiche said, adding Geiger bought his first of several cars, a Citation, from his dealership in about 1984.

He said Geiger had been thinking about purchasing a new vehicle. "It's like the stars lined up."

LaRiche said "real people" are the winners of contests like the Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers Malibu Madness giveaway.

"It just goes to show you if you get an invite like that, fill the thing out because you never know. Larry will tell you that."

ksmith@hometownlife.com
(313) 222-2098

Interfaith group follows 9/11 event with debut health fair

By Darrell Clem
Observer Staff Writer

After marking the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by assembling diverse religious groups at the Canton Mosque, a group dubbed Interfaith Community Outreach has unveiled its next project by announcing a free health fair for adults who lack enough insurance coverage to pay for basic health screenings.

ICO, representing a patchwork of faith-based groups in Canton and Plymouth, has confirmed the health fair for 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 21, at Geneva Presbyterian Church, 5835 N. Sheldon north of Ford Road, in Canton.

ICO has spearheaded the health fair as a way to broaden its efforts to pool resources of faith-based organizations to strengthen and serve the community.

"We serve the community by working together in faith and helping others," ICO member Anne Marie Graham-Hudak said.

Area residents who have no health coverage or who lack sufficient insurance may attend to receive screenings for diabetes, blood pressure, heart issues, dental hygiene, impaired vision and potential urology problems, among other issues, Graham-Hudak said.

Getting help

Social workers plan to attend to help uninsured people learn ways they might seek additional help, she said, and the health fair includes informational sessions on topics ranging from nutri-

tion to yoga.

ICO's health fair has drawn numerous sponsors such as Christ the Good Shepherd Church, Geneva Presbyterian, Hindu Balagokulam, Muslim Community of Western Suburbs, the Singh Sabha (Sikh) Gurdwara of Michigan, St. Thomas a'Becket Church, Oakwood Hospital and the Canton Community Foundation (CCF).

Anyone who plans to attend is urged to sign up by sending an e-mail to plymouthcantonico@yahoo.com or by picking up a flier at the sponsor locations.

The health fair comes after CCF commissioned a study in 2010 by two University of Michigan master's-degree level Ross Business School students who found a need for free, charity health care in the Canton area, despite misconceptions by many that there isn't a need for help in the community.

Faith based

During the 9/11 remembrance hosted last September by the Muslim Community of Western Suburbs at the Canton Mosque at Palmer and Lotz, many attendees indicated they hoped the Interfaith Community Outreach group would continue to sponsor events linking diverse faith-based groups together to improve the community.

Donations may be sent to Interfaith Community Outreach, c/o Canton Community Foundation, 50430 School House Road, Suite 200, Canton, MI 48187.

For more information on ICO, go to www.ico-canton.byethost22.com.

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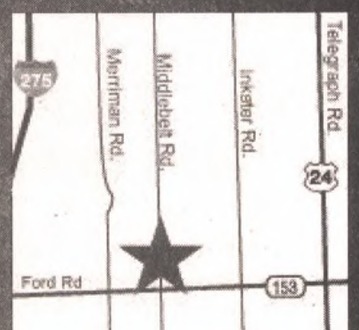
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PLYMOUTH CHAMBER CHAT



Regency welcome

The Regency at Canton recently held a grand opening with the Canton and the Plymouth Community Chambers of Commerce. Regency at Canton offers both short-term rehabilitation and long-term care for residents in a serene setting. The building has a one-story floor plan, with 35 private suites and 39 semi-private rooms, all with in-room showers and baths. They are located at 45900 Geddes in Canton. Pictured cutting the ribbon is Allison Maurer, director of Admissions & Marketing and administrator Patricia Sullivan, along with members of their staff and volunteers from both Chambers.

Legislative roundtable

State Sen. Patrick Colbeck and state Rep. Kurt Heise meet with Plymouth Community Chamber of Commerce members for a roundtable discussion about current legislation and important issues facing the state 3-4 p.m. Friday, April 20, at the chamber office.

Members will have an opportunity to talk directly with them about issues like personal property tax or other issues impacting your business. This event is only for members of the Chamber of Commerce. There is no fee to attend. To RSVP please e-mail teri@plymouthmich.org or call the chamber at (734) 453-1540. Due to space limitations, we can only accommodate 25 people or so. The chamber office is located at 850 W. Ann Arbor Trail.

After hours

The Plymouth Community Chamber of Commerce hosts a joint After Hours event with the Canton Chamber of Commerce Wednesday, April 18, from 5-7:30 p.m. at the Red Olive Restaurant.

Plymouth Community Chamber members will be joining our neighbors from the Canton Chamber of Commerce for an After Hours hosted by the Red Olive Restaurant & Banquet Center. This event will again provide you the opportunity to expand your network of professionals from business people in our neighboring community and with many of our members at the same time.

Last year's joint After Hours with Canton drew more than 120 people.

There is no fee to attend this event; RSVP by noon April 16 to teri@plymouthmich.org or call (734) 453-1540.

Diva Day

Ladies are invited to attend the fourth annual Diva Day on Saturday, April 21, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The first 500 Divas will get free DivaGlasses. Little Divas and Diva Dogs are also welcome.

More than 30 shops, boutiques, salons and restaurants will present special offers, unique refreshments, and chances to win Diva Day prizes. Participating shops include Bella Mia, Candy Trail,

Creatopia Pottery Studio, Dearborn Jewelers, Genuine Toy Co., Gigi's Mode, Hands on Leather, Home Sweet Home, Isabella's Copper Pot, Kilwins, Magnolia - Fresh Flower Market, Merle Norman, Old World Olive Press, Penniman Gallery, R.S.V.P., Razzamatazz, Sharer Design Group, Sun & Snow and TranquiliTea.

The event is free to attend. Look for the balloons. For more information call (734) 453-1540 or visit www.plymouthmich.org/events.

Showcase Plymouth

Exhibit spaces for the Showcase and Taste of Plymouth, set for 5-7:30 p.m. Monday, May 14, are going quickly. Exhibit space prices are \$110 or \$135 (premium) and includes a 6' x 3' skirted table. This is a great opportunity to market your business to residents and local businesses. If you are interested in exhibiting, please contact the Chamber at (734) 453-1540 or e-mail teri@plymouthmich.org. Cancellations must be received by May 10.

Showcase & Taste of Plymouth attracts 600-800 attendees from the community and member businesses, features 90 total exhibitors including 20 restaurants, sees Community Service Awards presented to 20 honorees, and each exhibitor can bring three people.

Showcase Plymouth takes place at The Inn at St. John's, 44045 Five Mile (at Sheldon) in Plymouth.

Home, Tweet Home

The Plymouth Community Chamber of Commerce Presents "Home, Tweet Home," a Plymouth Birdhouse Tour through April 20.

Join the retailers in downtown Plymouth celebrating spring with a tour of birdhouses, vote for your favorite and be entered into a prize drawing. Voting forms are available up at participating shops or on the chamber's website at www.plymouthmich.org.

Participating shops include Candy Trail, Creatopia Create Your Own Pottery Studio, Downtown Development Authority, Dearborn Jewelers of Plymouth, Genuine Toy Co., Hands on Leather, Isabella's Copper Pot, Jill Andra Young Photography, Kilwins Plymouth, Magnolia - A Fresh Flower Market, Old World Olive Press, Penniman Gallery, Plymouth Community Chamber of Commerce, Sun & Snow Sports, Three Dog Bakery and TranquiliTea.

PLYMOUTH BUSINESS BRIEFS

Business mixer

The next Business 2 Business Mixer takes place 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 19, at Greko Printing, 260 Ann Arbor Road in Plymouth.

There are no fees to pay or groups to join. Participants should bring business cards for exchanging with fellow business owners in the Plymouth, Canton, Northville and surrounding areas.

Future mixers are scheduled at the Plymouth Wellness Center (May); Sweet Bikes in Canton (June); Rock Bar and Grill in Plymouth (July); Karl's Cabin in Plymouth (August); Indigo Salon in Canton (October); Showroom of Elegance in Canton (November) and Fox Hills Golf & Banquet Center (December) in Plymouth.

Market president

Plymouth resident Kirk Albert has been named president of KeyBank's Michigan market. He succeeds Tim Gretkierewicz, who was named Key's district executive for business banking in Cleveland, Ohio.

In his new position, Albert will oversee Key's retail, small business, commercial and private banking in Michigan.

Albert joined Key in 1992 and has held a variety of leadership positions for the bank in Michigan in private banking, middle market and business banking. He has a bachelor's degree in business administration from The University of Michigan and is a graduate of Leadership Ann Arbor. He is active in the



Albert

community, serving on boards for Arbor Hospice and the Michigan Certified Development Corporation. He also serves on the professional advisory committee for the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation and also serves as chairman of Key's United Way campaign in Michigan.

Business news

From the desk of the Plymouth Downtown Development Authority:

• Look for Dazzling Daniela, owned by Daniela Kokalevski, to open in the Mayflower Centre on Main St. soon. Kokalevski plans to sell dresses, shoes and accessories in the new store.

Follow Daniela on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dazzling-Daniela-LLC/306061532788489>

• Dearborn Jewelers of Plymouth is celebrating 62 years in business with their "Anniversary Celebration Sale." All in stock merchandise is 20-percent off (exceptions are loose diamonds, add-a-pearls, custom work, special orders, repairs, layaways or previous purchases.) There are some select items that are 30 to 40 percent off. Any purchase enters the buyer into a grand prize drawing for a \$500 gift certificate.

Landscaping gadgets to keep an eye on

By Jon Gunnells
Guest Columnist



Tech Savvy

Jon Gunnells

Spend less time working on your yard this year and more time enjoying it by utilizing some of the latest landscaping gizmos and gadgets. From yard cleaners to pool cleaners there are plenty of tech gadgets that can help you spruce up your outdoor space in time for summer.

Garden Groom - This reinvention of the hedge clippers allows you to trim bushes, trees and shrubs without having to rake or pick up the trimmings. The Garden Groom is connected to a vacuum and a bagging device. It also has a concealed blade so you don't slice off your finger when you get distracted by the squirrels. The Garden Groom can be purchased for about \$100 at Garden-Groom.com

Telescoping Sprinkler - This one sounds a bit cooler and more tech savvy than it really is, but a telescoping sprinkler can help you water tall plants without moving the hose every 10 minutes. The benefits of a telescoping sprinkler include adjustable height and, well that's about it. Not the most technologically advanced item you will find in this space, but for \$10 or \$15 the telescoping sprinkler is much better than a watering can.

Self-watering plant-

ers - An even cooler water device that you can use indoors or outdoors, self-watering planters can help you go up to 12 weeks without watering. Water level indicators also help show users how much they need to water, so there is no over-saturating plants and flowers. You can purchase self-watering planters by visiting lechuza.us.

Amazing Rake - Like something straight out of an infomercial, the Amazing Rake allows users to rake and pick up leaves in one motion. You've likely seen contraptions like the Amazing Rake at your hardware store, but this rake is unique. Instead of trapping leaves by folding in half, the Amazing Rake pushes its two shovel-like claws together. It even has the capability of picking up one leaf, which would defeat the purpose of actually using a rake - but for \$40, it better be able to pick up one of anything you want.

Pro Handle - If you want to pretend to be the most advanced landscaper on the block, you can attach the Pro Handle to your Amazing Rake and go to work. The Pro Han-

dle attaches to common yard tools such as rakes, shovels, and brooms and helps users perform yard work with less stress on their lower back muscles. The pro handle retails for about \$15 and can be purchased from prohandle.com

Solar Breeze Pool Skimmer - If you are lucky enough to have a pool and are going to do one thing this summer, it should be to invite me over for a swim. But if you are going to do two things this summer it would be to buy a solar power pool skimmer that cleans 90 to 95 percent of debris from your pool. The Solar Breeze Pool Skimmer is \$499 however it can save money by lowering your pool pump run time by 50 to 66 percent.

Rubber Mulch - Much like the rubber pellets in field turf, rubber mulch is made mainly from recycled rubber and tires. It is softer and therefore safer for kids than regular mulch and is available in six colors from pinnaclerubbermulch.com. And if you're in love with rubber mulch, you can also find rubber patio blocks from your local home improvement store.

Jon Gunnells is a social media planner at a regional advertising agency. He can be reached at jonathan.gunnells@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @GunnSh0w.

2012 Partners in Family Caregiving Conferences

Free information, speakers and resources to help those caring for an older adult or a person with a disability

Wednesday, April 11, 2012
5:30 pm - 9:00 pm
Redford Community Center
12121 Hemingway
Redford, 48239

Saturday, April 28, 2012
12:00 pm - 3:30 pm
Booker Dozier Recreation Center
2025 Middlebelt Road
Inkster, 48141

Tuesday, May 8, 2011
5:30 pm - 9:00 pm
Summit on the Park
46000 Summit Parkway
Canton, 48188

Wednesday, May 16, 2012
5:30 pm - 9:00 pm
Flat Rock Community Center
1 Maguire Street
Flat Rock, 48134

- Topics include:**
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 - Elder Care
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 - In-Home Help
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OUR VIEWS

Stepping up Time for better township ideas

With barely five weeks until the filing deadline, this year's Plymouth Township election is shaping up — but slowly. That will certainly change before May 15.

Already, Supervisor Richard Reaume is facing possible opposition, from Northville Township Public Safety Director John Werth. And, while nobody has filed against Treasurer Ron Edwards or Clerk Joe Bridgman, it's only a matter of time.

It's been a politically charged year in the township, almost all of it centered around the controversy surrounding the downsizing of the Plymouth Community Fire Department. Although he hasn't said so, that's almost certainly what got Werth into the race. He has, at recent board meetings, been critical of the board's handling of the fire department.

Firefighters likewise are almost certain to recruit someone to run against Edwards, the perceived face of the fire department controversy. Firefighters are also likely to back Bridgman, who supported them in their quest to save jobs in the fire department. It remains to be seen whether critics of the failed special assessment district will try to make Bridgman pay for his support at the ballot box.

There could be significant change among the four trustees. All four — former supervisor Steven Mann, Kay Arnold (the board's longest serving member), Michael Kelly and Bob Doroshewitz — have said they have not yet decided to file for another term. We expect Doroshewitz and Kelly (although he has said a potential second term would likely be his last) to be in for sure. Mann and Arnold are less certain.

That means significant opportunity for others. Tom Kelly and Jennifer Mann, both supporters of the original 1-mill, five-year Special Assessment District, have been mentioned as potential candidates. Others will likely file by deadline.

Competition is a good thing, and township governance is no different. Varied voices can add different perspectives. The wider the candidate pool, the better chance that issues will be debated.

Potential candidates - perhaps those currently serving on other township boards and commissions - who have the time, passion for public service, knowledge and a willingness to serve are encouraged to run.

There have been a lot of outspoken residents on both sides of issues in Plymouth Township. Now is the time for those who think they have better ideas to step and file for office.

School board right to take input

The Plymouth-Canton Board of Education did the right thing in scheduling the time to hear from its parents and families on redrawing elementary school boundaries.

Public comment will be taken at Discovery Middle School at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 19. The board is scheduled to make a decision at the April 24 meeting. That's a week after what Superintendent Jeremy Hughes called the drop-dead date for making a decision in time to implement it for the 2012-13 school year.

We understand the pressure administrators will be under because of the delay but hearing from the community is the correct approach.

We understand the urge to get it done. Schools have already begun planning open houses and other "meet the teacher" events for potential incoming students. It's possible, if this decision isn't made soon, kids will be "meeting the teachers" at schools they will no longer be part of by the time September rolls around.

Unfortunately, spring break got in the way, forcing the hearing to wait a week.

When they do convene, the one thing board members can't afford to do is let emotions get in the way of what they think is best for the entire district. Neighborhood spokespeople, particularly from the Bird and Allen elementary families, have already made passionate pleas to leave them where they are.

It may be possible to do that, but it might not be the best thing for all other students. We urge board members to make a decision that benefits the entire district.

COMMUNITY VOICE

There is a proposal for a new shopping center on Sheldon Road south of M-14 in Plymouth, at an old warehouse site. Would you like to see a shopping center there, and why or why not?

We asked this question at the Plymouth District Library.



"I don't think they need one over there."
Lorraine Powell
Northville Township



"No, I don't think so. Because I like to keep the quaintness of Plymouth."
Mary Hejka
Plymouth



"That might be the best thing. It'll bring more opportunities, more business opportunities here."
Rebecca Blessing
Plymouth Township



"Depends on its size. I don't feel anything more is needed at this time."
Julie Spring
Plymouth

LETTERS

Thanks for support

My daughter, Caitlin, is graduating from high school (barring problems in the next two months) and I wanted to say thank you. She is in special education and has been since she was 7. She is graduating. From high school. Graduating.

There were moments, days, and even months that my husband and I never would have believed it. It has been a rough road at times. She has always been different and difficult and demanding. And intelligent and hilarious and delightful.

She has high-functioning autism, also called Asperger's syndrome, which means she has difficulty communicating with people in a "normal" manner. She also has seizures, problems with sensory issues, speech issues, fine and gross motor skills, and has behavioral issues. But she is going to be fine. The Plymouth-Canton school district and our Plymouth friends and neighbors have made us realize that.

So here goes. Thank you to my wonderful neighbors and friends who have helped us with every situation possible. Special thanks to Debby Lyddon, Vikki Jouney, Holly Light, Carol Bachman, the Foleys, and the MacGaws. You are the best.

Thank you to Kathy Descenzo, Carol Carr, and Julie Jones, her first teachers at Bird Elementary. I know she gave all of you gray hair, probably your first, but you were phenomenal. Thank you for your delight in her and your care.

Thank you to Andrea Pfaffenbach at Farrand and Amy Olvera and Becky Mehill at Allen, her first special education teachers. Because of you she was able to relax and be herself. You showed her how to laugh again and how to just be. Thank you also to Mrs. Kline who gave her art and treats.

Thank you to Renee Priest, her special education teacher at West Middle School, who absolutely loved having a girl in her class and who taught Caitlin far above grade level just because she was able to. Mr. Bondy, you dealt often with her behavioral issues. Thank you for your kind and calm demeanor toward her and toward us.

Thank you to all the wonderful staff in the Autism Program at Plymouth High School and all the teachers at the Park who have had my daughter in your classrooms. She just loves it there. And thank you to Sara Macheski, the best Autism teacher around. You have had Caitlin for five years in high school (Caitlin had an extra year). Even when my husband and I were at our lowest, you never gave up. You were, and are, her friend. We will always remember you.

I do not know what the future holds. But it will be OK and it will always work out. You have shown us that. We now know that anything is possible. My daughter is graduating from high school.

Amy Caragay
Plymouth

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We welcome your Letter to the Editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We may edit for clarity, space and content. Submit letters by the following formats:

Web: www.hometownlife.com

Mail: Letters to the Editor, Plymouth Observer, 615 W. Lafayette, Second Level, Detroit, MI 48226

Fax: (313) 223-3318

E-mail: bkadrich@hometownlife.com

Deadline: Letters should be received by 9 a.m. Monday to be published Thursday.

School closings

If the board was financially responsible they would have closed both schools, instead they closed no buildings.

They have too much capacity, used rainy day money to keep them open last year then hired an outside firm to tell them they needed to close schools.

They need to make the tough decisions instead of trying to hire someone to do it for them and then not do it.

Tim Beesley
Plymouth

Hope for those with autism

This is an historic time in Michigan. The deep despair of darkness has been overcome by a new light of hope. This hope shines for the 15,000-plus children in Michigan and their families who suffer under the financial burden of autism.

It is in the form of Bills 414, 415 and 981 that passed in the Michigan Senate on March 13 and now go to the House of Representatives. If these bills are passed in the House, families of children with autism will finally get the assistance they so desperately need. Currently, an autism diagnosis excludes coverage for all therapies and diagnostic evaluations.

For years I've traveled back and forth to Lansing and listened to pleas for help from people directly or indirectly affected by this catastrophic disability. For years I've watched my own son and his wife try to cope with all the problems autism brings to a family. It's not uncommon for parents to spend all they have and even go bankrupt to give their child a chance for a better life. Sometimes with help, these children become taxpaying citizens. Yet even a family of means has a hard time finding help for their child. This is because almost all Michigan graduates who have degrees allowing them to work with children who have autism usually leave our state and go elsewhere to find a job.

Out of 50 states, 29 have already passed legislation benefiting children with autism. They found that early intervention costs are comparatively low. In fact those upfront costs make even more sense when looking at the millions of dollars they would have to spend if the child eventually became financially dependent on

government assistance.

Bills 414, 415 and 981 will be voted on soon. However, many members in our House of Representatives need to be educated before they vote on this important issue. We citizens need to give them a call. They need to hear our voices speak out for those who can't speak for themselves. The time is now!

Lee M. Douglas
Livonia

How is capitalism unfair?

Our president, of the moment, has once again played the class warfare card in, of all places, his whiny, complaining nonbudget budget address. Invoking a typical community organizer rant, he pictured the poor and middle class as not being given a "fair shot."

His threadbare, but constant drumbeat indictment is that capitalism in general and the "rich" in particular have not the poor and middle classes to reach their potential. The question is how does he think this crime against fairness was perpetrated?

Has capitalism not provided the highest standard of living and greatest freedom of choice and expression for its work forces of any nation in the world?

How many workers on production lines outside the United States have vacation homes, travel trailers, not one but two cars and weeks of vacation in which to enjoy them?

As for the rich, that our president constantly denigrates and would like to see "soaked."

Have they not been the engine of production within capitalism that provided the above jobs for the majority of Americans in the private sector?

Have you, or anyone you know, ever gotten a long term, well-paying job from a poor man?

Have the rich not significantly endowed schools and colleges, or provided scholarships to them?

Have the rich not significantly created and donated public parks and playgrounds?

How then, have they robbed the poor and middle classes of what was theirs by "right"?

Our Constitution guarantees only three major rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Everything else comes from motivation, self-denial and hard work, not from some newly discovered vote-getter called "entitlements." Have the Obama-denigrated rich not risked their personal fortunes in creating wealth for others, as well as themselves? Are they not entitled to a significant reward for this risk?

Why then, would we think it only fair, to ask the rich 1 percent, who already pay more than 28 percent (almost one-third) of all federal taxes collected, to be taxed even more as a reward for their achievements?

If Obama can determine how, and how much, capitalism and the rich have disenfranchised the poor and middle classes, we can then legitimately demand that the lost wealth be "redistributed." But, if such oppression is only touted for political gain... then who is not being fair to whom?

Ed Ford
Milford

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PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The hunt is on for hundreds of youngsters at Saturday's Easter Egg hunt in Plymouth Township Park.

Hoppy times!



Logan Harris gets right down to work at opening the eggs to see what he got.



Owen Locke is less than a year old, but he seems to get the Easter Egg Hunt thing.



Angelina Seranian does her best impression of a bunny rabbit.



It's pretty early in the morning and 7-year-old Griffin Simpson probably wishes they'd get on with it and start Saturday's Easter Egg hunt at Plymouth Township Park.



The kids find their age groups before the hunt.

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Saturday, April 14th, from 9am to 4pm

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- Ribbon cutting at 9 am
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4.44
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HOT DEAL!

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Garden Soil 1-Cubic Foot Bag
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20-Gallon Tote
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Ask about scent additives!

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Kills bugs inside & keeps bugs outside all year!
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SUPER BUY!

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Premium Spray Paint
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Benefit supports youth mission work

By Julie Brown
Observer Staff Writer



Standup comic Kerri Pomarolli, a Northville High School graduate, will be back in town Sunday, April 22, to perform at a church benefit.

First United Methodist Church of Northville.

"We have a lot of friends and family around so it's kind of a homecoming," she said of the trip which will likely be made with their children, Ruby, 1, and Lucy, 4. The church dinner at 5 p.m. will be catered by Genitti's of Northville, followed by the 6 p.m. comedy show, suitable for all ages.

Proceeds will support the youth mission trip for the Appalachia Service Project.

Pomarolli earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in musical theater from the University of Michigan in 1996. She was a member of Our

Lady of Victory Catholic Church as a child, with her mom a Southern Protestant.

"I'm not a big believer in denominations," Pomarolli said. She and McGehee find their Christian comedy reaches all: "It's a kind of thing that brings people together."

The couple works as Hollywood comedians/writers/actors, and as Christians keep their performances clean. She may be at a Hollywood club Saturday night and then preaching that Sunday morning.

"We share messages about our

life," she said. "It's a great job. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I don't know how many people can say 'I wouldn't trade with anyone.'"

Tickets for the dinner and show are available Sundays and Wednesdays at First United Methodist Church of Northville, with cash or checks payable to the church. For credit card payment, contact Genitti's at (248) 349-0522. The church phone is (248) 349-1144.

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Local artists show mixed media pieces in Detroit

Four local artists will exhibit their works April 20-May 24 in the Biannual All Media Exhibition at Detroit Artists Market in Detroit.

Alan Casadei of Livonia, Barbara Dorchen of Farmington Hills, Tony Hope of Plymouth and Daniel Steadman of Redford and among more than a dozen artists with works in the juried show.

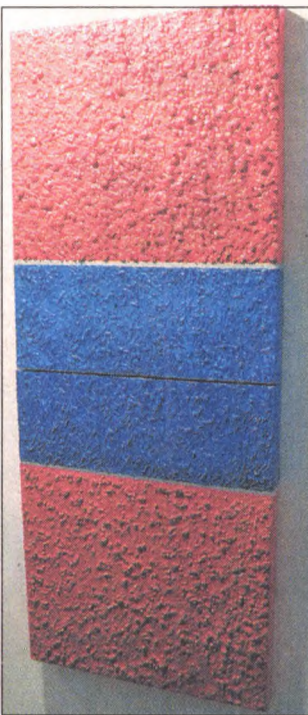
Detroit Artists Market will hold a public opening and awards reception 6-9 p.m. April 20. Visitors can meet the artists and have an opportunity to view and buy the wide array of paintings, sculptures, photography, mixed media, metal and clay on exhibit.

The Biannual All Media Exhibition is presented by one of the Midwest's oldest nonprofit galleries, located at 4719 Woodward Ave., three blocks south of the Detroit Institute of Arts, in Detroit's Cultural Center. The show is part of DAM's 80th anniversary year. Guest juror Leon Johnson, artist and educator, chose the art from 400 pieces that were submitted by 200 artists for consideration.

For more information call the gallery at (313) 832-8540 or e-mail info@detroitartistsmarket.org.



Tony Hope, a Plymouth artist, submitted this piece for the Biannual All Media Exhibition.



Livonia artist Alan Casadei will exhibit this piece April 20-May 24 in Detroit.



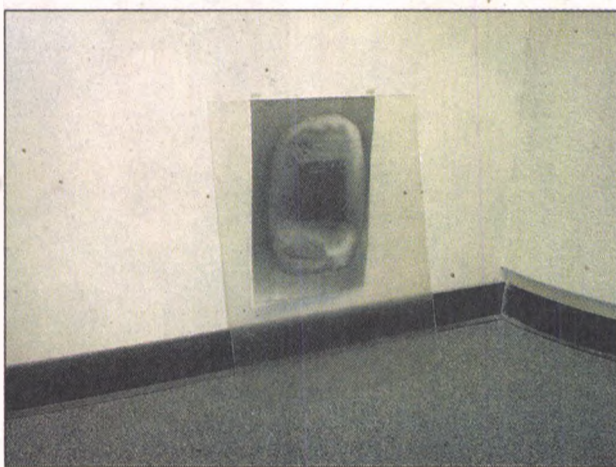
JOHN STORMZAND | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Final weekend

Nathan Shaw, (left) as Tybalt, and Benjamin Gresko, as Mercutio, cross swords in Schoolcraft Theatre Department's production of "Romeo and Juliet." Tickets are still available for the final performances of the show, 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April 13-14, in the Liberal Arts Theatre on the college's main campus, located on Haggerty between Six Mile and Seven Mile in Livonia. For tickets, call (734) 462-4596 or visit the campus book store.



Barbara Dorchen of Farmington Hills calls this piece "Installation Save the Poets." It will be on public view April 20 at the Detroit Artists Market.



Redford artist Daniel Steadman will show this work April 20-May 24 at the Biannual All Media Exhibition.

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Acting course set at Trinity House Theatre

Laura Gumina, local theater instructor, director and actor, will teach a six-week acting course beginning May 1 at Trinity House Theatre, 38840 W. Six Mile, in Livonia.

Classes will meet 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, excluding May 15, through June 12. Students will be directed primarily in two-person scenes. The beginning actor as well as the more experienced may join.

"In a workshop setting we all start off on the

same page and learn to trust, work together, and eventually constructively critique our work," Gumina wrote in an e-mail to the *Observer*.

If the class unanimously agrees, it will present scenes to friends and family.

The cost is \$80 for six weeks of instruction and the optional performance. Part of cost is to the theatre for rental of space.

The website for the acting class is www.meetup.com



Winning photograph

"Waiting for Moses," by Livonia photographer Allen Brooks, took Best of Show honors at the "Exposures: Photography 12 Art Exhibit" at Lawrence Street Gallery in Ferndale. Allen is a semi-retired professional who creates fine art photography. In 2010 he won first place in color photography at the Gallery and was invited into the Best of the Best show. He took "Waiting for Moses" last summer at Greenfield Village. See Brooks' winning photo and works by other photographers, noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday and noon-9 p.m. Thursday-Friday through April 27 at the Gallery, 22620 Woodward Ave., south of Nine Mile, in Ferndale. Visit Brooks' website at AllenBrooksPhoto.com.

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Fresh and Fun FAMILY RECIPES

Rachael Ray's FreshOver Recipe Guide offers delicious, healthier meal options

To help families transform ordinary meals into fresher versions that the whole family will feel good about eating, Ziploc Brand has partnered with best-selling author and TV personality Rachael Ray to bring healthier food choices to tables with the Great American FreshOver Project, a fresh food makeover made easy.

Ray is an expert at creating quick meals. She aims to motivate families to swap their traditional recipes for versions that contain healthier ingredients and taste just as good.

"According to a Ziploc Fresh Eating Survey, 72 percent of Americans feel like a good parent when their family eats fresh food, but only 47 percent eat fresh foods on a daily basis. To make eating fresh easier, Ziploc and I are sharing recipes and tips on how to incorporate fresh ingredients into favorites like pizza and mac 'n cheese," Ray said. "Anyone can get started on their FreshOver Projects in their own kitchen."

For more recipes from the Ziploc Brand and Rachael Ray, visit the Ziploc Brand Facebook Page at www.facebook.com/ziploc.



Broccoli and Cauliflower Gratin Mac 'n Cheese

*Yield: 6 servings
 Prep Time: 20 minutes
 Cook Time: 1 hour*

- 1 small head or bundle broccoli, trimmed into florets
- 1 small head cauliflower or half a large head, trimmed and cut into florets
- 1 pound whole-wheat macaroni or penne or other short cut pasta
- 2 cups sour cream or reduced-fat sour cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ½ cup finely chopped chives
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and grated or crushed into paste
- A few drops hot sauce
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2½ cups grated extra-sharp cheddar

Bring large pot of water to a boil over medium heat. Salt water and add broccoli and cauliflower florets. Boil vegetables for 5 minutes, then remove with a spider or a strainer and drain.

Add pasta to water and undercook by about 2 minutes, drain.

Meanwhile, combine sour cream in large bowl along with mustard, chives, garlic, hot sauce, salt and pepper, to taste.

Add pasta and cauliflower and ⅔ of the cheese. Stir to combine, then transfer to a casserole dish or Ziploc VersaGlass container and cover with remaining cheese. Cool and chill for a make-ahead meal.

To heat and eat, put casserole on baking sheet and bake in the middle of a preheated 375°F oven until deeply golden and bubbly, about 40 to 45 minutes.

Tip: Make a double batch and freeze for a later date.

Stretch a Buck Turkey and Bean Burrito Burgers

*Yield: 4 servings
 Prep Time: 20 minutes
 Cook Time: 16 minutes*

- 1 cup cold leftover white or brown rice
- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- Palmful chili powder
- ½ teaspoon cumin, half a palmful
- ½ teaspoon coriander, half a palmful
- 1 tablespoon grill seasoning, (recommended: Montreal Seasoning by McCormick)
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 ripe avocado
- 1 clove garlic, grated or finely chopped
- 1 lime, zested and juiced
- 1 jalapeño or serrano pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup sour cream
- 4 red leaf lettuce leaves
- 1 ripe tomato, sliced
- 4 crusty rolls, split

Combine rice, meat and beans with spices and grill seasoning. Form 4 big patties, then heat 1 tablespoon oil (a turn of the pan) in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

Cook patties 7 to 8 minutes on each side.

While burgers cook, combine avocado with garlic, lime zest and juice, jalapeño and red onion.

Mash to roughly combine, then stir in the sour cream.

Place burgers on buns with lettuce and tomato, and top with sour cream guacamole.

Tip: To keep leftovers fresh, store in reusable dishes like Ziploc Twist n' Loc Containers.

The Only Pizza You'll Ever Want Again

*Yield: 4 servings
 Prep Time: 15 minutes
 Cook Time: 20 minutes*

Crust

- 1 16-ounce package pizza dough, brought to room temperature
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Toppings

- ½ pound broccoli from trimmed broccoli bin in produce section, ⅓ head
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil,
- 1 turn of the pan
- 3 cloves cracked garlic
- ½ pound chicken breast cut for stir fry, or chicken tenders
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup part skim ricotta cheese
- 10 sun dried tomatoes in oil, drained and sliced
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, available on dairy aisle
- 12 to 15 leaves fresh basil, torn or stacked and thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 500°F.

On 12-inch nonstick pizza pan, stretch out dough and form pizza crust. Drizzle olive oil on crust and spread it with a pastry brush over the dough to the edges.

Sprinkle crust with grated Parmigiano-Reggiano.

In a small covered saucepan, bring 2 inches water to a boil. Separate broccoli tops into florets, discarding lower stalks or reserving for soup. Salt water and add broccoli florets. Cook, covered, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain broccoli and set on cutting board. Chop broccoli florets into small pieces.

Heat a small nonstick pan over medium high to high heat. Add oil, cracked garlic and chicken. Season with salt and pepper.

Brown chicken until lightly golden all over, 3 to 5 minutes.

Chop sautéed chicken and garlic on a cutting board into small pieces.

To assemble pizza, dot crust with broccoli and chicken. Dot crust with spoonfuls of ricotta, spreading gently with the back of spoon. Add sliced sun-dried tomatoes, scattering around pizza to edges. Complete assembly with a thin layer of shredded mozzarella.

Place pizza in oven on middle rack and lower heat to 450°F.

Bake 12 minutes, until cheese is deep golden in color and crust is brown and crisp at the edges.

Remove from oven and let stand 5 minutes. Top with lots of torn or shredded basil.

Cut pizza into 8 slices using pizza wheel and serve.

Tip: Put an individual serving size of chicken in Ziploc Brand Perfect Portions Bags right after purchasing and freeze in a Ziploc Brand Freezer Bag. That way you don't have to defrost more chicken than you need for a meal.



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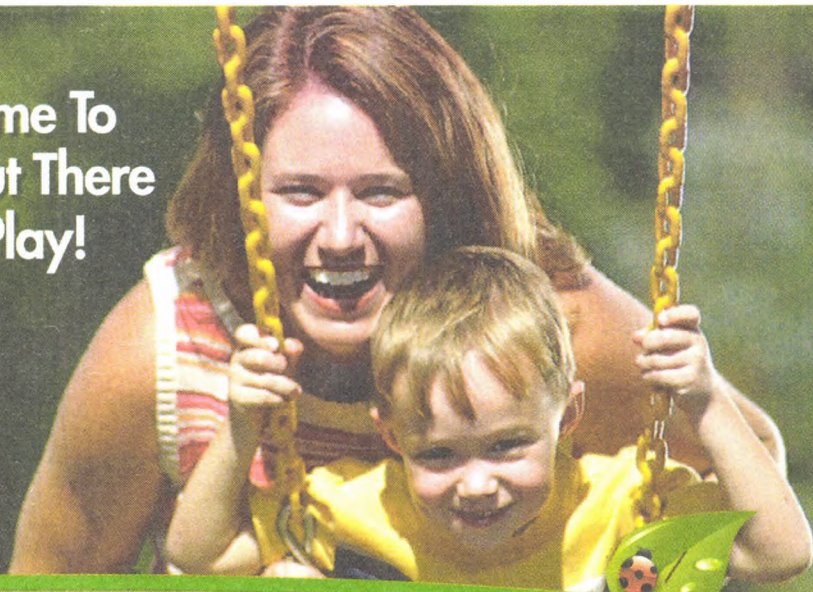


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Get your home, lawn, garden in top shape for the season



Susan Rosiek

Spring is here, which means it's time to spruce up your home, lawn and garden. And whether you do it yourself or hire a pro, this month's *Hometown Life Inspire* is full of information to help.

A special *Spring Home & Garden Advertising Section* in this month's publication is chock full of ideas to

help you improve your home inside and out. It pays to shop locally and inside you will find a variety of products and services that will meet your home, lawn and garden improvement needs.

In addition, look for *Inspire's* monthly features on Ask the Vet, a Q&A with home inspection expert Lon Grossman and other features on

food and the most successful ingredient for planning a family vacation.

Turn the page and enjoy this month's *Inspire* and be sure to patronize the local business owners who are the backbone of our communities.

Susan Rosiek
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inside



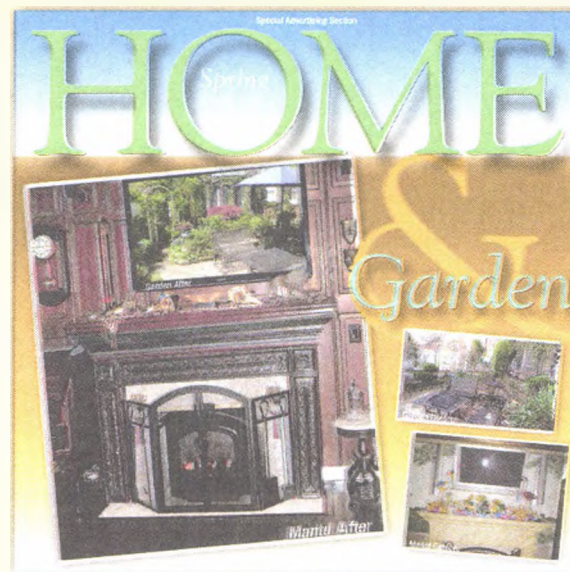
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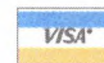
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HOMEGROWN ON YOUR OWN

Time to grow for it

Who would have thought getting dirt under your fingernails would ever be considered one of the hottest trends going? According to Doug Jimerson, garden core director for *Better Homes and Gardens*, “growing your own fruits, veggies and herbs is something Americans are doing in record numbers this season.”

“It’s cheaper to grow your own produce than buy it — one \$3 tomato plant will yield pounds of produce all season long,” Jimerson said. “Plus, the produce you grow just tastes better than even your grocer’s best. And while it’s healthy to eat and grow your own, gardening is rapidly gaining popularity as a great way to get some exercise, relieve stress and spend healthful family bonding time.”

Eating foods grown in your own backyard means you won’t be contributing to the carbon footprint left behind by the “food miles” it takes to bring imported produce to your local grocers — so you’re helping the environment, too.

Growing vegetables is easier than you think. Plan it properly, and you can enjoy a healthy, homegrown harvest from the fruits of your labor — without having to spend hours tending it.

Gardening 101

Sunshine is sustenance — Vegetables need at least six hours of full sun per day. The easiest thing to do is to place your garden in full sunlight. Make sure it’s easily accessible for watering; if the garden is too far from your house it could get neglected. Check the last frost date in your region and wait until threat of frost is past before you begin planting.

No yard necessary — Gardening doesn’t require a lot of room — although if you have the space and time to go large, go for it!. Many popular vegetables and herbs grow just fine in containers, making them a great option for those with limited space. For smaller yards, raised beds are an easy, low-maintenance option. If your garden is going right into the ground, just turn the earth with a shovel, toss out roots and rocks, mix in a soil amendment for healthy soil, and plant.

Water relief — Water regularly, but avoid doing so during the heat of the day when evaporation will diminish the effectiveness of irrigation. Water to wet the soil about 8 inches deep, but don’t over-water.

Feed your food — All edible plants draw nutrients from the ground, and can quickly exhaust the soil without the help of a fertilizer. Always follow label directions.

Growing for it

Now that you’ve got an idea of the basics, it’s time to pick your plants.

Start with transplants — seedlings are way easier to get growing than seeds, so you’ll save loads of time and enjoy improved success. Fortunately, nation-



Tomatoes are the most popular, most-grown vegetable in home gardens.

al purveyors like Bonnie Plants make it easy to find hardy, high-quality, regionally appropriate plants at your local garden retailers. Bonnie offers time-tested vegetable and herb favorites, as well as new varieties, in eco-friendly, biodegradable pots that not only reduce plastic waste in landfills, they reduce transplant shock. Simply tear off the bottom of the pot and set the whole thing — plant in pot — directly into the ground. Be sure to pay close attention to plant tags, they’re packed with facts and details to help you successfully grow your plants.

Here are some favorites to consider for your garden:

- **Tomatoes** — The most popular, most-grown vegetable, tomatoes are always a best bet. Disease-resistant Bonnie Original is a hardy, flavorful addition to any backyard garden. For containers or small spots, try Sweet n’ Neat, a prolific plant that sets fruit in grape-like clusters.

- **Basil** — The perfect complement to tomatoes, basil works well in gardens and containers. New Greek Columnar Basil is particularly bountiful, as it grows high, leafs out densely and rarely flowers. The flavor

blends traditional basil with spicy overtones of cinnamon, allspice and cloves.

- **Bell peppers** — Versatile, flavorful and nutritious, bell peppers are great raw snacks and make an awesome ingredient for a variety of cuisines. Harvest peppers when they’re green or red when the vitamin levels are higher.

- **Eggplant** — Black Beauty is the quintessential eggplant with a deep purple, glossy skin and meaty texture, and thrives in hot weather. White-skinned varieties like Cloud Nine offer a sweeter, bitter-free flesh.

- **Mints** — Easy-to-grow mints are available in traditional spearmint and peppermint and in more exotic flavors like Bonnie Plant’s new apple mint, orange mint and even chocolate mint, which has a flavor that echoes the classic Girl Scout cookie.

- **Hefty harvest** — The general rule: If it looks good enough to eat, it probably is. With many vegetables, the more you pick, the more the plant will produce. For more gardening tips, ideas and advice, visit www.bonnieplants.com.

— Courtesy ARA Content

Golf Ridge Villa Homes Announces the Grand Opening of 2 New Ranch Models

A peaceful haven in a busy world
Golf Ridge Villa Homes are perfect for enjoying life to its fullest.

Thoughtfully designed to accent the convenience of first floor living, the master bedroom suites with luxurious baths, gourmet kitchens, open great rooms and cozy dining rooms make these homes the ultimate for your modern lifestyle. Many homes also offer second floor space that features additional bedrooms, lofts and media centers.

This collection of sophisticated designs with windows framed by shutters, intricate railings, gabled roof lines, transom glass and the generous use of brick highlight the pleasing streetscapes in Golf Ridge.

Living at Golf Ridge is so carefree! Your Association handles everything...all maintenance of lawn, landscaping, irrigation, snow and leaf removal. Relax after a long day and enjoy your own private respite.

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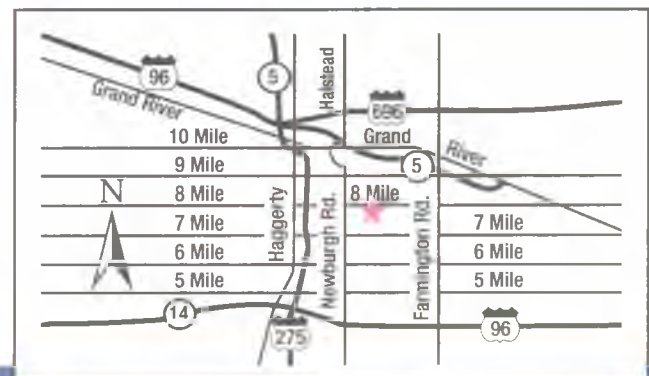


The Augusta—just one of two NEW Ranch Models

The Exterior...

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Insider tips from party pros: Why renting makes sense

As temperatures increase, so do the activities on your social calendar. From family reunions to graduations and weddings, warm weather means prime event season. If you're throwing a party of any kind, you likely need a few supplies. But you don't want to invest a lot of money in items you will only use once. So how do you host the party you envision without buying items you'll just have to store and maintain later?

In order to hold the best party possible, price out what you need and make smart decisions about buying vs. renting. Renting is very popular because you can get the latest trends in party supplies without the cost of buying or the storage hassles. Here are some things the pros consider to keep parties spectacular, yet low on cost:

Tip one: Organize with a list

Make a list of everything you need for the event. Go to your local rental store to review all of your rental options with an event rental professional. Renting will save you time — you won't have to visit several different stores to get what you need.

Tip two: Rent tables, chairs and tents

Tables, chairs and tents, for example, are likely to be used only for your event and may not be needed again for years — maybe never. You can work with your local American Rental Association member rental store to find everything you need and they can help you pick out the right amount/sizes based on your budget and the number of guests. Plus, the rental company can handle delivery and setup — reducing your stress and eliminating the backache.

Tip three: Weigh your tableware options wisely

To make the most of your event and put your personal touch on it, renting table accessories, such as linens, plates, glassware and centerpieces, is a great option. Renting gives you access to items in the latest styles, trends and colors, making it simple to create the look you want for an unforgettable event. Plus, you won't have 200 centerpieces to store when the party is over.

Tip four: Consider cooking instead of catering

If you're having the food catered, everything will be done for you, but it comes at a premium cost. If you want to save money and get exactly what you want, ambitious party planners aren't afraid to cook the food themselves. Wow your family by renting a grill and cooking flavorful fare at your family reunion. For a buffet at a wedding, rent chafers to keep food hot and delicious, while adding a more formal look to your reception.

Tip five: Rent tools for home and garden projects, too

If you're hosting the event in your home or yard, you may have a few "sprucing up" projects in mind. From painting to landscaping, you can rent professional-quality tools to get the job done faster and easier without the cost of buying them. You won't have to store or maintain those tools later, either.

No matter what type of party you're planning, renting some items can help you save time, avoid storage hassles and create the event you envision well within your budget. Visit www.rentalhq.com. —ARA Content

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Spring is here, which means it's time to get your home in tip-top shape. By completing a few easy tasks, you can spend more time soaking up the sun and less time on interior projects. Here are five ways to spruce up your home this spring to prepare for a relaxing summer — and give your home that “spring cleaning” feel without spending the entire spring, well, cleaning.

1. Let there be light

Nothing makes the house feel drab like dirty windows. Make any room feel bright and fresh by cleaning the inside glass of your windows. A quick once over with a paper towel and glass cleaner should do the trick. Look for a “streak-free” formula and the insides will be sparkling in no time.

Get the outside just as clean — without the hard work — by using a cleaner that attaches directly to your garden hose. All you have to do is point and spray to remove the dirt and grime left behind from winter. It's safe to use on plastic siding and can help you easily reach second story windows. Plus, while you're outside, quickly rinse off patio furniture, jungle gyms or your children's outdoor toys to make them look good as new.

2. Pick up a paint brush

To freshen up any room for springtime, pull out your paint. Don't try to redo the whole house — pick the room where a fresh coat of paint will make the biggest impact. Choose a fun new color, or add some flair with a unique design like stripes or chevron. And, don't forget to touch up the trim if you have the time.

To make paint touchups a simple process, use FrogTape brand painter's tape. Treated with patented PaintBlock technology, this tape prevents paint bleed by

reacting with the water in latex paint to create a barrier that helps ensure clean, sharp lines. Plus, no tedious preparation is needed — just make sure walls are clean, dust-free and dry before applying.

“FrogTape is the best choice to help any homeowner paint with ease,” said designer and Restaurant: Impossible construction manager Tom Bury. “Its PaintBlock technology leaves very little room for error, making it a great choice for quick spring touch-ups.”

To ensure painting is a painless process, be sure to select the right tape for your surface. Choose FrogTape Multi-Surface for cured paint (paint that has been dry for at least three days), wood, metal, glass and more. Use FrogTape Delicate Surface on fresh paint (paint that has been dry for at least 24 hours), wallpaper, and decorative painting. With the right tools, your paint project can be quick and easy, making your room look polished and pulled together.

3. Wash away winter grime

You know that soft, comfy throw blanket you've been snuggling up with all winter? It's storing more than cozy memories. Since winter is prime cold and flu season, it's probably become home to lots of germs. Increase the clean factor in your home by tossing throw blankets, pillows, window treatments, even couch covers in the washing machine to get rid of germs. Then, hang them outside to dry in the sun and soak up that spring-time scent.

4. Say “sayonara” to your sweaters

Scarves, hats, gloves, wool sweaters and other heavy items of clothing won't be much use to you once spring is in

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Please see CLEAN, 17

Fabulous

INTRODUCING MONTASIO CHEESE

Montasio, with a savory, well-balanced flavor, is new to many Americans, but its origins can be traced back to a 17th-century monastery. To this day, it is made only in northern Italy's Friuli Venezia Giulia and East Veneto and has earned membership in Europe's "hall of fame" as a PDO product. Young semi-soft Montasio is terrific on a cheese platter or on sandwiches. Aged Montasio can be grated for pasta, risotto and other dishes.

ingredients

Parmigiano Reggiano-Spinach Puffs

Yield: about 3 dozen

4 cups baby spinach (6 ounces), cooked, cooled

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk

5 tablespoons butter

3 large eggs, at room temperature

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups (6 ounces) coarsely grated

Parmigiano Reggiano

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Wrap spinach in a towel, squeeze until dry; chop fine.

In small bowl, mix flour, salt and cayenne.

In medium saucepan, bring milk and butter to a boil. Remove from heat and add flour mixture; with wooden spoon, beat until it thickens and pulls away from sides, about 1 minute.

Add eggs 1 at a time, beating well until incorporated.

Stir in spinach and cheese.

Drop rounded spoonfuls onto prepared baking sheets, spacing 1 inch apart. Bake until golden, 20 to 25 minutes.

Serve warm. (Puffs can be held at room temperature up to 1 day or frozen; reheat in 400°F oven, 3 to 5 minutes.)



Bruschetta with skillet-seared mushrooms and Grana Padano.

The secret to outdoing your favorite restaurant

Making dishes worthy of a choice restaurant menu doesn't mean spending hours in the kitchen. It's more about choosing top-drawer ingredients — and here are a few you can pick up in the deli department. They're all members of an elite club of authentic foods made according to traditional methods and are certified PDO (Protected Denomination of Origin) by the European Union.

—Grana Padano, a cheese made only in the Padana Valley in Northern Italy, is terrific for easy but sophisticated dishes. —Prosciutto di San Daniele is a special ham, produced in San Daniele del Friuli, in the Northeast of Italy, and like all PDO products, it must pass the strictest inspection.

—Parmigiano Reggiano, renowned for its complex flavor, is made exclusively in Parma, Reggio Emilia and three other neighboring Italian provinces.

—Prosciutto di Parma, a delicately flavored, all-natural ham, is produced in the gently rolling hills near Parma.

With legendary European foods, it's easy to make restaurant-quality dishes like these. For more serving ideas and information about the PDO system, visit www.legendsofEurope.com.

Asparagus, Orange and Prosciutto di San Daniele Salad

Yield: 6 portions

1 pound asparagus, trimmed

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon orange juice

2 teaspoons white wine vinegar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

8 slices Prosciutto di San Daniele

(4 ounces), halved lengthwise

2 navel oranges, peeled and segmented

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup pine nuts, toasted

In salted water, cook asparagus until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Rinse with cold water; pat dry.

In small bowl, whisk olive oil, orange juice, vinegar, salt and pepper. Divide asparagus on salad plates and drizzle with dressing. Arrange Prosciutto di San Daniele and orange segments over asparagus; sprinkle with pine nuts.

Bruschetta with Skillet- Seared Mushrooms and Grana Padano

Yield: 4 portions

4 slices country-style bread

4 ounces Grana Padano, coarsely grated

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 pound crimini mushrooms, thinly sliced

1 small red bell pepper, cut in $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces

2 cloves garlic, cut in slivers

2 teaspoons flour

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup half-and-half

Preheat oven to 400°F. On baking sheet, toast bread until crisp, about 10 minutes. Scatter one-third of the Grana

Padano over toast.

In large skillet over medium-high heat, heat olive oil; add mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they give off liquid, about 5 minutes.

Stir in bell pepper and garlic; cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Reduce heat.

Stir in flour, salt and pepper; cook, stirring, 2 minutes; add half-and-half and simmer until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes.

Divide over bruschetta and top with remaining Grana Padano.

Please see FAB, 18

Top tasty food trends that can benefit your family's health



A visit to the grocery store provides thousands of food options including an increase in the number of healthier choices, including organic offerings and expanded produce selections.

A visit to your local grocer provides thousands of food options, and it's likely you've recently noticed an increase in the number of healthier choices, including organic offerings and expanded produce selections. But what are the next big things when it comes to healthy food?

Here are some healthy food trends to look for the next time you're at your local grocery store:

Trend 1: Sprouted grains

You've heard plenty about whole grain, but the next level of whole grains is called "sprouted grains." Because the process of germination changes the composition of grain and seeds in numerous ways, sprouting can increase vitamin content and aid in digestion of the entire grain so your body better absorbs all the nutrients. Food for Life is at the forefront of this trend and offers different products using grains sprouted under an exclusive process. For example, new Ezekiel 4:9 Sprouted Whole Grain Waffles are made from sprouted grains to maximize nutrition while retaining important natural fiber and bran. These waffles come in several varieties including original, golden flax, blueberry and apple nut. For

more information about sprouted grain products, visit www.foodforlife.com.

Trend 2: Omega-3 additives

For years, lots of the food found on grocers' shelves has been enriched with a variety of vitamins and minerals. Bread might contain iron, orange juice might have added calcium — these additions are often advertised on the product's label. The newest nutrient being added to some of our favorite foods is omega-3. This essential fatty acid has been shown to have numerous benefits when consumed, from reducing risks of illnesses such as heart disease, to aiding in brain growth for children. You're likely to see more omega-3 additives in your favorite foods, such as cereal, juice, eggs and even your pet's food.

Trend 3: Fruits and veggies galore

The benefits of fruits and vegetables cannot be overstated. This was apparent when in 2011 the USDA replaced the old food pyramid with the new circular icon called MyPlate that recommends filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables. More people are making an effort to eat a rainbow of colorful produce each day and they want the freshest items possible. Con-

tinued demand for locally produced foods is inspiring droves of people to visit their local farmers markets for seasonal fruits and vegetables. These items are usually picked at the peak of freshness, providing you with an optimum amount of vitamins and minerals. Plus your squash or potatoes won't have to travel thousands of miles before they get to your pantry.

Trend 4: Plant-based "dairy" products

Interest in plant-based foods is building steam, even among those who don't have a lactose sensitivity. This interest has inspired a variety of dairy alternatives to appear on grocery shelves. Plant-based foods are known to contain higher levels of nutrients and often have little or no bad fats/oils. As an alternative to 2-percent cow's milk, now you can easily find almond or coconut milk at your local store. Soy ice creams of today are also far better than in years past. Butter can be made from fruit and sour cream is now made from tofu.

From sprouted grains to healthy new additives, these food trends are growing in popularity because they are delicious ways to benefit your health. Visit your local grocery store or co-op to try something new today.

—ARA Content



Teamwork is the key to a great family vacation. A great beach destination helps, too.

The secret to a successful family vacation? Teamwork

When it comes to planning your family's vacation, you can find a lot of value in that old saying "teamwork divides the task and doubles the success." Divvying up planning responsibilities helps ensure that one member of the family is not overwhelmed with tasks, and that everyone is excited about and invested in the trip.

"Sharing time together is one of the most appealing aspects of family vacations," said Kimberly Miles, a travel planning expert with the Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Families can start their vacation fun early by sharing planning responsibilities. It can be a great way to teach kids organizational and planning skills, and make sure everyone takes ownership of the family vacation."

All age groups can take part in the process, Miles notes. Here are some ideas for dividing the work and multiplying the enjoyment of the family vacation planning process:

Start with a survey

Successful teamwork requires constant communication. Your family vacation team effort should start by polling the members. Where does everyone want to go? Of course, you won't be able to fulfill every desire, but you can come close by encouraging everyone to be specific.

For example, it's not enough to say everyone wants to go to the beach, because not all beach destinations will offer the same appeal for all family members. Will your family members be relaxing or frolicking on the beach? Spending the whole trip in the sand and surf, or looking for other attractions to round out their adventure? Do they want to stay in a busy beachfront hotel, or somewhere quieter and off the beaten path?

"Destinations that offer a broad range of activities have the best chance of pleasing everyone in the family," said Miles. Look for a location like Myrtle Beach, where generations of families have found something

for every member — from miles of pristine beaches and plenty of water sports, to amusement parks, great shopping and dining, and even museums and live entertainment.

Research your options

Many families rely on the Internet for planning and booking their vacations. The Web can be a great resource for information about a variety of destinations — from what attractions you'll find there to how much hotel rooms will cost during your travel dates. Look for family travel blogs and websites that provide specific destination information, visitor reviews, tips and advice.

Don't overlook the value of word-of-mouth. Check with family and friends to see if they've visited your destination of choice, what they thought of it and what attractions they recommend. All the professional reviews on the Web can't beat the endorsement of happy, satisfied kids.

Assign age-appropriate tasks

Once you've chosen your destination, the real teamwork begins. Divide up tasks based on each family member's abilities. Mom and Dad will probably do the actual booking, but teens and older kids can pitch in with tasks like prepping the house to be vacant, and researching what to do and see. Grandparents can help with driving and packing. Even young children can play a role if you allow them to choose some of the snacks the family will pack for the trip. Encourage everyone to choose one activity or sight in which the whole family will participate in. This will help ensure everyone gets to do something they enjoy, and the entire team gets to take part in a variety of activities.

"Teamwork in vacation planning can definitely help make the workload lighter on parents," said Miles. "And it helps get everyone excited about the trip — before they even begin the journey."

— ARA Content

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Low-labor, high-impact ideas for freshening decor

Open a design magazine or visit a home improvement website and they'll extol the virtues of repainting as a great way to freshen a room's decor. But there are plenty of less labor-intensive ways to give a room a new look.

From paint accents to new window treatments, here are some ideas for upgrading your decor with a lot less work:

- Easier painting tasks — While painting a room is well within the capabilities of most homeowners, it can be a labor-intensive job. One way to take advantage of paint's power while minimizing the time spent prepping walls and taping

trim is to paint a single accent wall. This works especially well if you're starting out with a neutral palette on the walls, which is often the case if you've recently bought your home. Another effective, fast option is to paint one or two pieces of wood furniture to add a quick, easy pop of color to a room.

- Window treatments — Changing window treatments can be a powerful way to give a room the look of a full facelift while altering only one design element. Consider venturing beyond simple drapes or sheers to window treatments such as cellular shades that offer natural light control and a pop of color.

Products like Simple Fit custom cellular shades by Redi Shade make achieving a custom look easy with cordless positioning and light filtering that create dramatic affects on a room's ambiance. The honeycomb cellular fabric shades are available in more than 30 colors and three styles that provide light-filtering, blackout and privacy options.

Even better, Simple Fit is designed for DIYers to install in less than a minute

without drills or brackets. The patented compression mount system means you can install the shades with the touch of a button. Learn more at www.simplefit-customshades.com.

- Update your accents — Accessories and accents are like jewelry for your room. Throw pillows, area rugs and upholstery afford you the opportunity

to add layers of interest with patterns, textures and colors. Updating accents can help create a fresh new look for a room, and it's a great way to add seasonal appeal to your decor.

- Add a mural — Designers and homeowners have used murals to



Consider venturing beyond simple drapes or sheers to window treatments such as cellular shades that offer natural light control.

create drama and interest in homes for centuries. But painting a traditional mural is a labor-intensive task that would challenge most DIYers. A wall-paper mural can be a much easier, faster option. You can find a wide selection of scenes and patterns online, or you can even customize a mural with your own original photos and artwork. These murals are easy to install and some even cost less than \$100.

- Declutter — How often do we spend time — and money — creating a specific look for a room, only to have the decor fade away into the background behind the clutter of everyday life? Removing clutter is one of the fastest, easiest and cost-free ways to refresh the way a room looks. Decluttering allows a room's design to shine through and can help even the most cramped space feel larger and more welcoming.

With a few simple, low-labor projects, it's possible to freshen your room's decor quickly and easily, turning redecorating into a fast, fun and rewarding project.

— ARA Content

Stop that smell from down below

By **Lon Grossman**
Guest Columnist

Q: I have a musty odor emitting from the crawl space. How can I stop the odor from rising through the floor?

A: Check to make sure that a plumbing fixture or pipe is not leaking into the crawl. The leak could be rotting some of the sub-floor and possibly the insulation.

You'll need to crawl under the house with a flashlight and look directly under the kitchen and bathroom areas. Check for plumbing leaks or leaking through the foundation walls.

Check the insulation around the perimeter or is it attached to the underside of the floor joists? In either case, it could be trapping moisture or critters and the smell could be originating from either. In both cases, it's not uncommon.

If you're sure that neither one of these issues is the cause of the problem, than you'll have to remove the insulation away from the band joists. That is the insulation stuffed between the joists along the top of the exterior walls. Oftentimes when inspecting houses, I find evidence of leaking, rotting and wood destroying insect activity in that area and it is usually caused by improperly installed door walls, entries or brick flashing on the exterior.

Remember, where there's smoke there's fire and in your case, you need to find the leak and eliminate the odor.

Q: I am confused. My real estate agent said I have to hire a home inspector, but the seller says it must be a licensed home inspector.

A: There is no licensing for inspectors in Michigan. That's not entirely bad. I've talked to inspectors where there is licensing and it seems to "dumb down" the industry.

The best inspectors are qualified and must undergo ongoing continuing education training. They also must be members of the American Society of Home Inspectors (www.ashi.org) or the National Society of Home Inspectors (www.nahi.org).

Both organizations set standards of practice, require continuing education and establish guidelines regarding ethics for inspectors.

Make sure any inspector is a member



Lon Grossman

of one of these organizations and has errors and omissions insurance.

Q: I have water in my crawl space. It has a dirt floor that is covered with plastic and I put extensions on the downspouts. There are no problems with rot or mold but there is a slight musty odor.

A: With time you will have mold and rot so correcting the leak is imperative. I am assuming the ground around the exterior is sloped away from the house and not toward it.

Your next step would be to either waterproof the foundation walls and install a drain tile system on the exterior or put in a drain tile system to a sump pump in the crawl.

Whatever you do is expensive, but necessary. Check in the yellow pages under basement waterproofing companies.

Q: My water heater and furnace are in the basement and exhaust into a mutual chimney quite apart from the fireplace. There is an ash clean-out door at the base of the chimney. In rainy weather or at a thaw, through this door comes a pretty good flow of water.

A: First, install a metal chimney cap and screening on top of the flue. Also make sure the wash at the top of the chimney is not cracked, broken, rusted through and/or leaking.

While those are the common sources of leaking, your problem may be because the chimney below grade is cracked and water is getting into it and leaking through the clean-out door.

If that's the case, basement waterproofers should be able to repair the problem.

Q: When it rains, water drips into our basement under the fireplace. The contractor who installed the fireplace for us has told us that the water coming through the chimney has also ruined the insulation inside the chimney. He says the cold drafts we get in our living room each winter coming from the firebox are the result of the insulation having been soaked and no longer doing its job. I'm trying to decide what to do.

A: I agree that the insulation is most likely ruined. The leak probably originated from the chimney wash. If it is masonry, (which I doubt) it can be patched with vinyl concrete. If it's a metal pan, it is a poor design and prone to leaking.

Lon Grossman of Bloomfield Hills is president of Technihouse Inspections Inc., a southeast Michigan residential and commercial inspection company. E-mail your questions to him at drdiy@comcast.net. Call (248) 855-5566. Visit his website www.technihouse.com. Follow Lon's Blog at <http://drdiy.wordpress.com/>.



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Sudoku

ASK THE VET

Jimmy cracked tooth ... and I do care

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		4		7		2	8	
2		1	9	4	8		3	
6	7							
1	9		3				2	4
			4	8	9			
		3	6	1				
		7	8	2	1	9		
				9			6	8
3	8	9		6				5

Level: Beginner

					5	1	4	
			9					6
		7				5		9
		4					1	
5	9		6			8		7
		1		8	3			
			8		9	7		
4	3							
6			2					

Level: Intermediate

1								7
		5	2		9			
		4						
8				7	1			9
		7	5					
	3							4
			9	4				
				6	3			8
6	7			8	5			4

Level: Advanced

Answers found on page 18

By Dr. Thomas Kavanagh

Guest Columnist

Jimmy the dachshund is 5 years old. Just a little over a year ago, he broke his large upper molar tooth while chewing on a leftover soup bone. Bleeding was noticed by his owner, which prompted a visit to the family veterinarian.



Thomas Kavanagh

Linda, his owner, told the veterinarian that recently Jimmy had not been eating hard food.

The family veterinarian noticed that not only was a piece of tooth loose, but also it was attached to the adjacent gum tissue even though it was separated from the rest of the tooth. Every time Jimmy bit down to eat, pain prevented him from crunching his food.

"Can the tooth be saved?" Linda asked.

"Most likely it can be. We'll refer you to a veterinary dentist!" Dr. Karen Krieger said.

I first saw Linda and Jimmy after the acute pain was diminished from the medicine that Krieger prescribed for Jimmy. A happy tail wag greeted me as I opened his mouth to take a gander. Except for calculus accumulation, the oral cavity was in pretty good shape. The best course of events that we could hope for, was to save the tooth by performing a root canal treatment; removing the painful and contaminated nerve and sealing the inside of the tooth to prevent migration of oral bacteria into the deeper structures of the facial bone, which could lead to abscessation. Because this tooth is used primarily to bite down hard, amalgam would be the preferred filling material to close the cavity. Amalgam is harder than the tooth is.

Our plan was, to run blood tests — checking for potential complications — and clean the teeth (performing proper examination by exploring and probing while under the effects of anesthesia). Using dental radiography would help us determine the feasibility of performing a root canal. Sometimes a tooth cannot be salvaged and must therefore be removed.

Jimmy's tooth was found to be otherwise sound. Additional radiographs were produced during the procedure to help guide instruments and obtain measurements, and then finally when the procedure was done, to assess completion. Our goal was accomplished and it appeared to us that Jimmy should have a tooth that he could happily use for the next 10 years pain and infection free.

A year after the root canal procedure was done, a follow up dental scaling, polish, fluoride treatment and assessment was done. The amalgam filling was intact, in place and sturdy. By polishing the tooth and filling smooth, we were able to remove irregularities, in turn making the tooth and filling more resistant to excess wear and calculus accumulation. The radiograph tak-



en one year later was nearly identical to the original taken the day of the procedure, which signifies success. That happy tail wag greeted Linda as she scooped up Jimmy and smiled. She looked forward to him enjoying his meals like any dog should ... and the halitosis was all gone!

Root canal procedures are routinely done on dogs' and cats' teeth. By looking into your pet's mouth you may be able to compare the right side, tooth by tooth, to the left side to check for irregularities such as teeth fractures, cavities, calculus, gum overgrowth, tumors and so on.

A broken tooth is just as painful for a pet. If a tooth is fractured exposing a nerve, or later, after the nerve dies, exposes a pulp chamber, the treatment choices are either a root canal procedure with filling or tooth extraction. As members of our families, we owe it to our pets to provide for them the comfort we would expect for ourselves.

Thomas Kavanagh, D.V.M., is a native of southeastern Michigan, having attended Our Lady of Loretto and Redford Union Schools. He attended Ferris State, Wayne State and Michigan State universities. He received a bachelor of science degree and a doctorate in veterinary medicine from Michigan State University. He is board-certified in veterinary dentistry and is a fellow of the Academy of Veterinary Dentistry. Kavanagh owns Village Animal Clinic, 34415 Grand River Ave., in Farmington where he serves as the medical director. Married and the father of two adult children, Kavanagh's family also include two dogs — Maya and Apache — as well as the family cat, Phoebe. He can be reached at (248) 477-0334 or www.VillageAnimal.net.



Make any room feel bright and fresh by cleaning the inside glass of your windows.

CLEAN

Continued from page 9

full swing. Save room in your closets by getting them out of the way — put clothing items you won't need in warm weather in plastic storage bins. Keep them in an attic or basement, clearing space for your warmer-weather wear. As you're packing things up, pull aside anything you haven't worn all winter and donate these items to your local charity. It's an easy way to de-clutter, make your home feel more organized and give back to your community. The same methodology goes for kitchen cabinets, desk drawers and playrooms. Store away items you're not using and give what you don't need to charity — if you're not using it, someone else might.

5. Dust your digs

Spring brings more than just sunshine — it's also the bearer of seasonal allergies. Help fight the sniffles by shaking out rugs and giving rooms a good once-over with a feather duster. If wiping down the entire house seems too tedious, focus on areas that aren't in plain sight. Throughout the year, you probably wipe down surfaces that are clearly visible — tables, shelves, countertops. But, when was the last time the top of the refrigerator or the ceiling fan saw a duster? Use spring cleaning as a chance to focus on those areas that don't often get cleaned. Your home, and your nose, will thank you.

Follow these simple tips to make every moment count this spring. Your home will be sparkly and clean before you know it — giving you plenty of time to relax and soak up the sun.

— ARA Content

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Ziti with roasted cauliflower.

FAB

Continued from page 10

Ziti with Roasted Cauliflower, Prosciutto di Parma and Toasted Breadcrumbs

Yield: 4 portions

2 slices country-style bread, crusts removed, torn into pieces
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup olive oil, divided
 1 large cauliflower (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds), trimmed and chopped
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 8 slices Prosciutto di Parma (4 ounces), cut into 1-inch squares, divided
 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 8 ounces dry ziti, cooked and drained, reserving 1 cup pasta water
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dry white wine
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon hot red pepper flakes, or to taste
 Preheat oven to 425°F.
 In food processor, pulse bread to

form crumbs.

In shallow pan, mix breadcrumbs with 1 tablespoon olive oil; toast until golden, stirring once, about 5 minutes.

In large baking pan, mix cauliflower with 3 tablespoons olive oil and salt. Roast until browned, stirring occasionally, about 30 minutes.

In large skillet over medium-high heat, heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil; add half prosciutto and cook until crisp. Stir in garlic; cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Stir in pasta, cauliflower and wine. Stir well, adding pasta water as needed for a saucy consistency. Stir in parsley and hot pepper flakes.

Spoon into shallow bowls; top with remaining Prosciutto di Parma and breadcrumbs. Garnish with additional Prosciutto di Parma slices, if desired.

— Courtesy Family Features

Sudoku Answers

Beginner

9	3	4	1	7	6	2	8	5
2	5	1	9	4	8	6	3	7
6	7	8	2	3	5	4	9	1
1	9	6	3	5	7	8	2	4
7	2	5	4	8	9	3	1	6
8	4	3	6	1	2	5	7	9
5	6	7	8	2	1	9	4	3
4	1	2	5	9	3	7	6	8
3	8	9	7	6	4	1	5	2

Intermediate

9	2	6	3	7	5	1	4	8
3	4	5	9	1	8	2	7	6
8	1	7	4	2	6	5	3	9
7	8	4	5	9	2	6	1	3
5	9	3	6	4	1	8	2	7
2	6	1	7	8	3	4	9	5
1	5	2	8	3	9	7	6	4
4	3	8	1	6	7	9	5	2
6	7	9	2	5	4	3	8	1

Advanced

1	9	3	4	5	8	6	7	2
7	6	5	2	3	9	4	8	1
2	8	4	6	1	7	3	9	5
8	4	6	3	7	1	5	2	9
9	1	7	5	2	4	8	3	6
5	3	2	8	9	6	7	1	4
3	5	8	9	4	2	1	6	7
4	2	1	7	6	3	9	5	8
6	7	9	1	8	5	2	4	3



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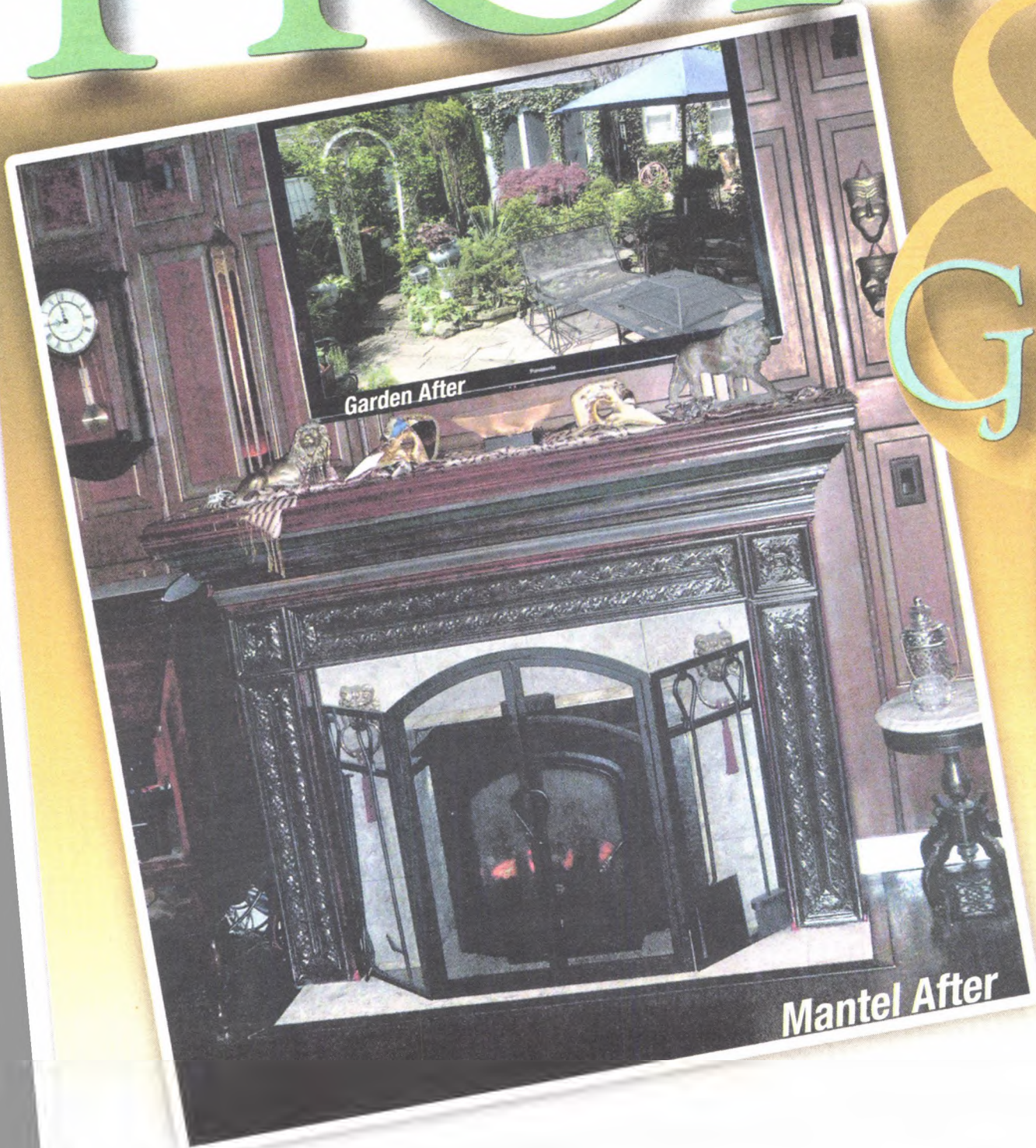


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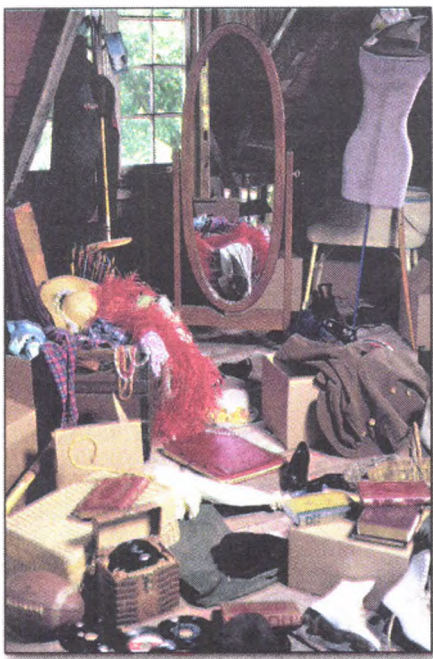
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Getting started on spring cleaning

For homeowners – spring cleaning is one of the annual rites of spring. The return of warmer weather presents the perfect opportunity for homeowners to open the windows, let some fresh air in and tidy up after a few months spent cooped up inside while the weather outside was frightful.

But now that spring has arrived, the time to clean up around the house has come. Homeowners about to start on their annual spring cleaning should consider the following before beginning.



Get the right tools

The right tools won't necessarily be a hammer and nails, but cleaning products that can make spring cleaning more efficient. Rubber gloves, cleaning products (preferably natural products that are good for the environment) and enough garbage bags to discard a winter's worth of clutter should all be on hand before you begin cleaning. If they're not, you'll likely need to make a trip to the store while cleaning, which can be time-consuming and prolong the process.

Take some inventory

Many people have no problem buying new clothes, but they do find it hard to get rid of older items. Part of spring cleaning is tossing old items you no longer use, and that includes clothing. Clothing can take up a significant amount of space, so take some inventory on your wardrobe and



Now that spring has arrived, the time to clean up around the house has come.

decide which items you want to keep and which ones you can afford to discard or even donate.

Address the windows

If the last several months have been especially cold or snowy, then you might not have looked out the windows in quite some time. Unfortunately, those windows

might have accumulated quite the amount of dirt and grime while you were huddled inside. When washing the windows, do so on a cloudy day, as the sun can actually cause streaking. In addition, be mindful of what you're using to wipe down the windows post-cleaning. Microfiber rags typically give windows a great shine without any streaking.

The blinds and drapes will also need to be addressed, as they have likely accumulated some dust over the last few months. Dust the valance and the frame, and wipe the blinds down with a damp cloth. You can also use your vacuum's upholstery and brush attachments to further clean blinds and drapes.

Tidy up the bed

You likely wash your bed linens regardless of the season. When spring cleaning, toss these linens into the washing machine and don't forget to wash the mattress pads and bed skirting as well. While those items are in the wash, flip all the mattresses in your household.

Don't forget the kitchen

The kitchen is not immune to clutter, and it's especially easy for items to overstay their welcome in the refrigerator and the kitchen cabinets. Look for old takeout containers in the refrigerator that have managed to stick around, and throw these out as well as any items that have passed their expiration dates. While items in the kitchen cabinets might not have an expiration date, it helps to remove them from the pantry and then dust and wipe down the shelves. When doing so, discard any items that no longer seem appetizing.

Beat the rugs

Area rugs have no doubt collected dirt and dust over the last several months. Though vacuuming these area rugs might be enough during the year, take advantage of the pleasant weather and take the rugs outside to beat them and rid them of dust and any other particles the vacuum might have missed over the last few months.

Empty and clean the bookshelves

Bookshelves are one of the biggest collectors of dust in many homes. Open the windows in the home and then remove books from the shelves. Once the books have been removed, dust the shelves and wipe them down with a damp cloth. And don't forget to dust the books and reorganize titles before returning them to their newly cleaned shelves.

Spring cleaning is something all homeowners must do to keep their homes healthy and clean. Spring cleaning is an annual event at many households, and a few simple strategies can make it go much more smoothly.

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DON'T FORGET TO CLEAN THE OUTDOOR GRILL TOO!

It doesn't matter whether you barbecue year-round, or put the barbecue away for the winter, it's always a good idea to clean it thoroughly once or twice a year.

Supplies to make the job easier:

- One steel putty knife
- A heavy duty vacuum
- One Brass bristle barbecue brush
- A degreaser for heavy grime
- Glass cleaner with ammonia for exterior cleaning
- Stainless steel cleaner/polish for finishing touches.

Start by attaching your barbecue to the propane tank or natural gas connection. Use a mixture of dish soap and warm water to coat all connections to test for leaks, any bubbling at connections means there is a leak. If your barbecue passes the leak test, remove the grids and racks. If possible, remove the burners and inspect them for damage and blockages.

Next, re-install the grids, racks and the burners. Light your barbecue and let it heat up to 200 F. Turn everything off and let it cool until it is just warm to the touch. Brush the grids thoroughly on both top and bottom. Remove the grids and set aside. Use your grill brush to remove any debris from the heating element. Using your putty knife, scrape the sides of the cook box to remove any caked-on debris. If your barbecue has a removable grease tray, take it out with the debris. If you have a closed-bottom cook box, use your heavy-duty vacuum to clean up all the loose ash and debris in the cook box.

Take a minute to inspect your barbecue's exterior for any other damage and follow the above process to clean your side burner as well. When you are finished cleaning, heat your barbecue to at least 400 F and coat your cooking grids with olive. This will protect your cooking grids and can prevent food from sticking.

Want to have a cleaner, healthier home this spring?

Springtime is the best time to get your home and outdoor equipment ready for the approaching warm weather, and the sooner you start the sooner you will be ready to enjoy the spring and summer months.

Here are some suggestions to make your home as healthy and as clean as possible.

Get rid of mold and mildew

When the house is closed up tight for the winter, it's easy for mold and mildew to take hold and grow, and such growths can adversely affect your respiratory system while potentially causing sinus congestion and eye irritation. Mold and mildew growth also creates unsightly stains, damaging paint and wall finishes as a result. Further prevent mildew by venting bathrooms or opening a window to dry out the room after showering. Also check for and remedy any leaks that can contribute to mold and mildew growth. In attics, basements and utility rooms, consider the use of a desiccant, which will remove moisture from the air.

Protect against allergens, viruses and bacteria

Effectively cleaning a home can involve several preventive measures to keep everyone free from viruses and bacteria. Another way to reduce the spread of illness is to make sure everyone in the household washes their hands when coming in from school, work or from shopping.

Say 'Au Revoir' to Odor

Readying a home for fresh, spring days also entails ridding its interior of odor. Homeowners can eliminate odors in their kitchens, carpets and even their musty base-



Springtime is the best time to get your home and outdoor equipment ready for the approaching warm weather, and the sooner you start the sooner you will be ready to enjoy the spring and summer months.

ments with a good cleaning. Think about adding houseplants as well. Plants are natural air filters and can go a long way toward cleaning the air of contaminants and odors.

Outdoor equipment

The warm-weather season is also barbecue season. Start by deep cleaning the grill, consider using a product such as Spray Nine® BBQ Grill Cleaner. It easily dissolves grease, fat and burned-on food for quick cleanup with less effort. Remember, when cooking food on the grill; do not reuse marinade after it has touched raw meat or poultry. Promptly scrape down the grill surface while the barbecue is still warm to remove most of the drippings and scraps of food for easier clean up.

Patio Furniture

The warm weather enables people to venture outdoors and commune with nature. Prepping the patio furniture for a new season means extra scrubbing to kill germs which helps control mold and mildew and destroys bacterial odors in a matter of

minutes while digging out grease, grime, fingerprints, bird droppings, suntan lotion, and other tough stains from outdoor and poolside furniture. To help with your spring-cleaning projects visit: www.spraynine.com.

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Planning for the BIG finish is key

By Dennis Zelazny
Contributing Writer

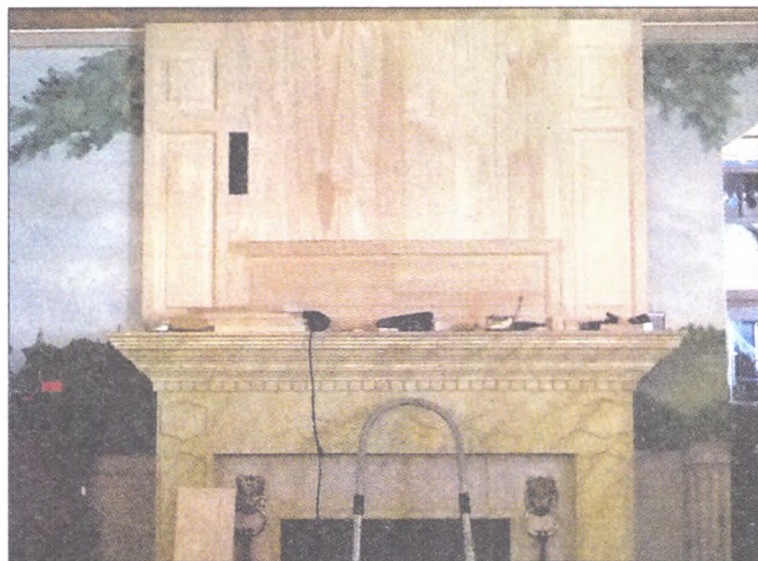
As I stood in front of the store display, I became overwhelmed and filled with desire – the more I saw, the more I wanted. I was completely immersed in the moment. I had convinced myself that it was all good and the more they showed me, excuse the pun, the bigger the picture became.

I'm not even sure if we call these televisions anymore. It's all numbers followed by flat screen. I knew I was about to enter a new era – goodbye rabbit ears and UHF/VHF rotor antenna. This was going to be bigger than the switch from black and white to full color or even cable television.

Today, when I speak of my latest purchase, I know to refer to it as a 55-inch plasma flat screen. Note I did not add TV into that statement. All the new cables are fiber optic and my surround sound has a manager. I now watch Blu-Ray movies available in 3D and have the capabilities of "hooking into" my home computer. The technology is amazing, and the sights and sounds are outstanding. But how do you handle the amount of wires and cables?

I am still confused about all the features the various units offer, but what I do know is that hiding all the cables turned out to be a room-changing effect and was not all that hard to do.

My home was constructed in the '40s, a time when two-by-



Photos by Dennis Zelazny

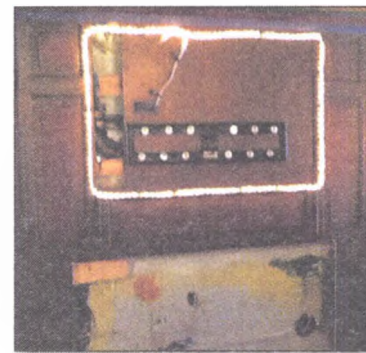
First phase of the project was to secure a good strong mounting place for the new flat screen and also have enough room to run and hide all the cables.

fours really measured 2 inches by 4 inches. Hanging the screen would not be a problem; seeing all the cables just hanging would be. My thoughts turned to building a raised paneled wall, allowing room for the cables needed today and also allow extra room for future cables.

I chose bifold paneled doors to work with. The planning stage of the project was key. Make sure that the panels would fall where they will look their best and where the flat screen bracket will be able to be securely attached. An access panel is a must for all the wires. Light switches and electrical outlet placement were

taken into consideration. Wires for the sound system and for the latest hype, lighting for behind the big screen, needed to be part of the plan. Speaker mounts were centered in the panels, which made for a custom look.

There isn't a homeowner who hasn't heard the praises of crown molding. For those who question it, this is a wall treatment where a larger sized molding is horizontally hung approximately six inches or lower from the ceiling and it runs around the room, visually breaking the wall from the ceiling. I decided that since I needed to run wires to the back speakers, I would make my crown molding



Having an access panel is part of a good plan also backlighting is a plus.

be the runway for the speaker wires. I added extra electrical wires that would control lighting on the other side of the room and extra rope lighting that enhances the 3D effect when watching movies. Along the inside edge of the molding, small hooks were added for Christmas lights and garland. Remember, when in the planning stages, it is best to take the time to think out all the possibilities you might want for the future.

The biggest concern was to make sure everything is secured. If screws do not grab, do not assume anything is properly attached. Dry fitting pieces before gluing and permanent placement is advisable. Measure twice and only cut once is still a good rule of thumb.

I relied on some paint magic to get a mahogany faux finish. I primed all the wood with a grey tinted primer. An overall base coat of blue with trims in gold and green was then added, finishing

with robust red in the center panels. The mantle was also painted with the same colors, but with a larger percentage of the robust red. At that point, all the paint needed to dry thoroughly.

Some might say all the colors make it busy, but the next step is where it all came together. The wall and mantle surfaces were glazed over with different color glazes. The wall would be covered with a golden color glaze and the mantle would receive a coffee color glazing. The effect was amazing. All the colors came together and my plan was most successful. The dark mantle is a perfect place for crystal shine and the background turned to a vintage honey color, which really warms the room.

I carried the colors into the crown molding, but did not use any glazing techniques. The mantle received a coat of satin finish for durability and a little extra shine. My project took three weekends and uncounted hours of thought, but I did get the results I wanted.

With the big flat screen securely mounted and the speakers hung with all the wiring hidden behind the wall, it was like it had always been there. A flip top desk was repurposed, as the perfect place to house all the power units required making the entertainment monster run. Now, if I could only keep the remote out from under the seat cushions, it would all be perfect.

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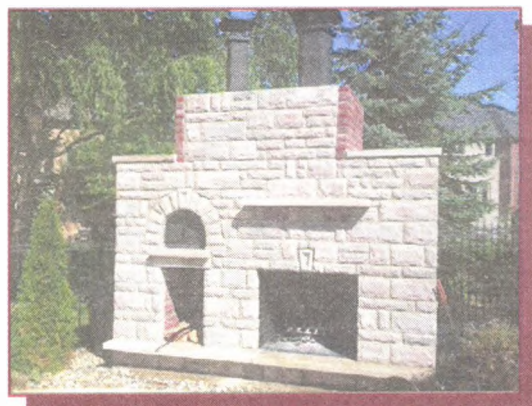
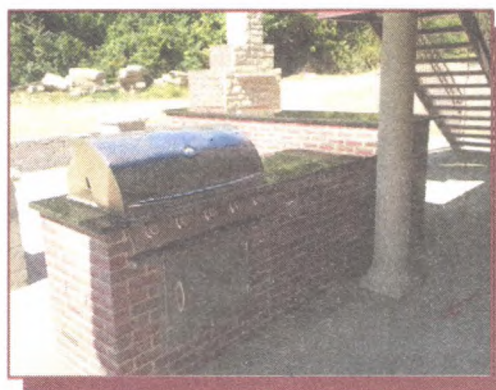
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Home lighting trends go downward

By Iain Jenkins
Contributing Writer

These days, the trend in lighting is recessed lighting. This is the distribution of lights from different lighting source to get a good mood in the room. Using just one lighting source in the room can make the room look dreary and flat at night. If you want your room to look nice, cozy and beautiful even at night, you may want to pay attention to your recessed lighting opportunities. There are certain things you need to consider and certain tips you will want to mull over when buying these downlights.

Here are some of them:

1. Know your options in the market.

One of the best down lights available today is a pendant style light. Pendant lights are some of the best for indoor lighting because they are beautiful and they emit just the right amount of glare in the room. They also come in various colors, design and styles. You can find rustic wrought iron styles, Victorian style or contemporary pendant light styles.

Spotlights are also another kind of down lighting fixtures. They are often used on

stages or at events but they also work in recreation areas or workroom areas. LED tilt downlights work great as accent lights. They usually come in packs of three or four. Use them as shelf or cabinet lights to illuminate the contents of the cabinet. Track lights are great for living room, kitchen and recreation spaces. They are called track lights because the lights are installed in a track. What is great about track lights is that they are flexible and the lights can be tilted in different areas and facing down is always an option.

2. Consider your lighting needs.

Before getting light bulbs or that spectacular pendant light, you would want to find out if this will really fit your lighting needs. What sort of downlighting needs do you have. Are you looking for more than one light. Do you want to have a well lit room or do you want to achieve that cosy lighting mood. Knowing the answers to these questions can actually help you find the best indoor light fixtures.

3. Consider buying eco friendly lights.

Recessed lighting is nice but it tends to be costly. Since you are installing more than one lighting fixture in one room, you

are consuming lots of energy. This is why you would want to look for low energy lighting solutions. Check out energy efficient light bulbs, they last longer and could save you a lot of money. There are lighting fixtures such as this one that uses CFL or Compact Fluorescent Lamp. Compared to Incandescent lamps, the former is more energy efficient. LED lights are also very energy efficient and will surely work well in indoor settings. LED lights are also known for their durability so they will last for a long time. Choose products that will not emit toxic substances once they are discarded.

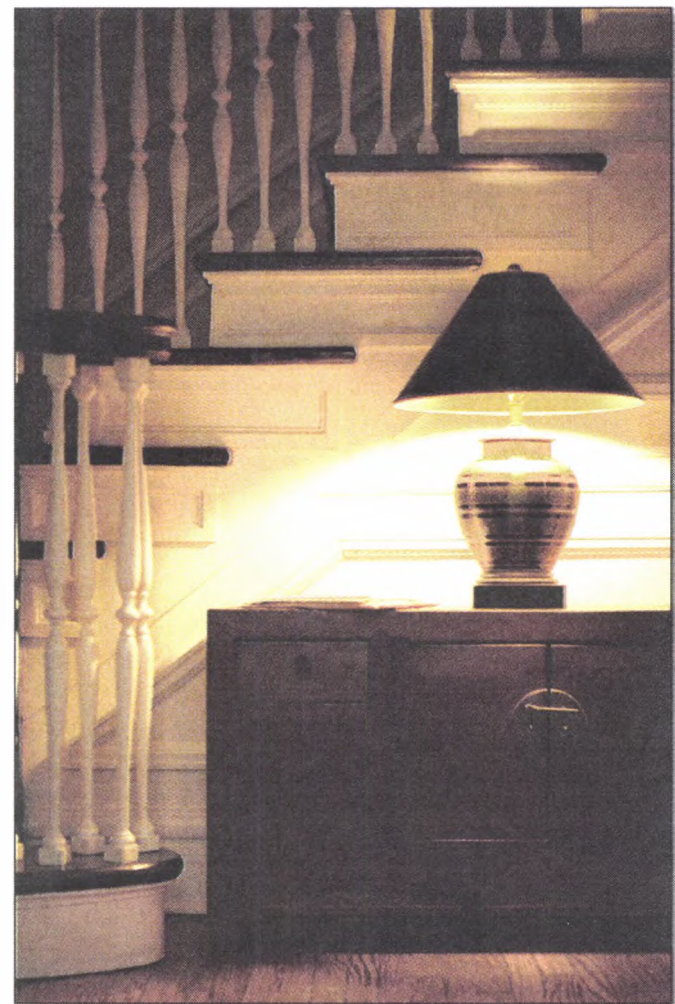
4. Consider buying fire resistant lights.

Since you are dealing with lots of lighting fixtures here, you would not want your home to become a fire hazard. See to it that the lights you are buying have really undergone stringent tests and trials. Watch for fire-resistant labeling along with wattage use.

5. Choose downlights that are easy to install.

Most downlights come in a DIY installation kit. If you are not handy around the house consider hiring a technician to install the lights for you.

Recessed lighting is not that difficult to achieve if you do some lighting planning first. You can use other lighting designs



When choosing the lighting fixtures for your home, you will want to add down lights to your list of options. It is an exquisite lighting fixture that offers elegance and style to your home.

as inspiration and work your way from there. Down lights should be a part of your lighting scheme, they add more charm to the room because of the light they emit and they are usually and offer eye catching designs.

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Add some personality to your screened-in porch

A screened-in porch or a three-season room can be a welcome space that adds viable living area to a house. Oftentimes, these rooms serve as a bridge between the indoor and outside, and they can offer the creature comforts of any other room in the home. Just as they would a bedroom or family room, many homeowners prefer to decorate this area so it doesn't look like an extension of the backyard, instead showcasing the homeowner's personal style.

Homeowners can add many accents to a screened-in porch. Keep in mind that because this three-season room will likely need to

endure the weather, including moisture and sunlight, decorating should be planned accordingly.

Turn a screened-in porch into a welcoming space with a few different ideas. Here are some things to consider.

- Think about adding sheer curtains to create privacy and keep sun out on hot days. It is important to choose fabrics that are fade-resistant but also resistant to mold and mildew. Muslin or even mosquito netting in different shades can be draped to add some visual interest.

- Look for outdoor furniture that is both comfortable and attractive. Wicker,

wood and wrought iron are popular materials for outdoor designs. There are also cushions crafted from weatherproof materials that can add a pop of color and comfort to the space.

- Enhance the area with some wall art. Hang an anchor for a nautical theme, or some whimsical accessories to create a kitschy country feel.

- Spruce up the lighting so it's not sterile outdoor floodlights. Install a ceiling fan to circulate the air and add some aesthetic appeal. Or consider hanging a chandelier made of materials that are impervious to the weather, like seashells or bamboo.

- Just because you're adjacent to the yard doesn't mean you can't bring some plant life inside of the screened room as well. Potted plants will soften the room and add color and a homey feeling to the space. Just be aware that outdoor plants have to be watered more frequently than indoor plants because of their tendency to dry out in the sun.

- Define the entertaining space with a throw rug made from outdoor fabric. Essentially you can create a mini living room right outside.

- Be sure there is an electrical outlet available on the porch so that you can plug in a radio or even a tabletop lamp if you enjoy reading in the twilight areas. An outlet can also make it possible to plug in a small fountain or water feature.

The creature comforts of indoors can be extended to a three-season room or screened-in porch to provide another space in the home in which to entertain or relax.

— COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE



Homeowners can add many accents to a screened-in porch. Keep in mind that because this three-season room will likely need to endure the weather, including moisture and sunlight, decorating should be planned accordingly. Turn a screened-in porch into a welcoming space with a few different ideas.



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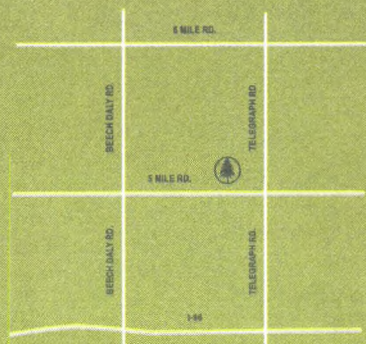
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Comfortable seating is a must for outdoor living spaces

A wide variety of patio furniture is available for outdoor decor. Patio dining tables, coffee tables, Picnic tables, end tables, bistro tables, fire pit tables, outdoor storage boxes, garden furniture, swings and gliders to name a few. Patio deck or garden furniture comes in all shapes and sizes. Patio furniture helps people who just want to do some comfortable sitting in your garden, or you might want to sit around a nice teak table with friends eating a barbecue meal. Patio furniture in your garden would help you to have a great and pleasant time. Garden and patio furniture is only an extension of home decorating and is not considered to be an afterthought exercise. Families which have passion for furniture will want to give their garden a complete and full fledged patio set. A wood furniture set could consist of a table, four to six chairs, a chaise lounge and a couple of end tables. It may also include a Bistro Style umbrella and a two or three seat glider.

There are abundant styles of garden patio furniture, which are available to cater to the needs and taste of those relaxing in the outdoors. Patio furniture comes in different styles. You can find a traditional look of an English garden, a rustic cabin look, a French cafe style, or a Spanish style. Styles that are most commonly selected are the English garden look and the Adirondack.

Sustainable woods like cypress and cedar are used in the manufacture of garden and patio furniture. Both cypress and cedar are ideal woods for construction of garden and cedar patio furniture, because they can withstand above average level heat and humidity. Other materials include iron,



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When considering outdoor furniture you must keep a few things in mind, durability and comfort of course but also how and where you are going to store your patio set.

aluminum, wicker, and polyvinyl chloride materials, which include acrylics, polyester, olefins, and vinyl. These materials are very

popular because of their durability and easy cleaning.

The cost of garden and patio furniture



is an important consideration in selection. Budget, ultimately, may be the overriding factor in determining the style, materials, and number of pieces desired; however, the durability of the outdoor furniture is measured in a long shelf life.

Patio furniture should be enjoyed properly to feel the nice otherwise it will not be useful. Cedar and Pine furniture are extremely functional and is designed specifically for the outdoors. A rustic touch can improve the overall image of your patio and garden and all the comforts can be enjoyed at home outdoors.

One of the hottest trends today is the look of rustic furniture. It will be fashionable years and years from now. Rustic log patio furniture is made up of mainly from Pine and cedar wood. Other types of wood are less used.

The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of outdoor furniture is patio chairs. Traditional or adirondack chairs offer comfort to the people relaxing in the garden. Footrests are a popular alongside ottomans and chairs. Rocking chairs are a great fun and combined with a cozy blanket they give you a great feel.

A good functional patio includes comfortable seating for everyone. Outdoor furniture is a great way to add style to your homes backyard.

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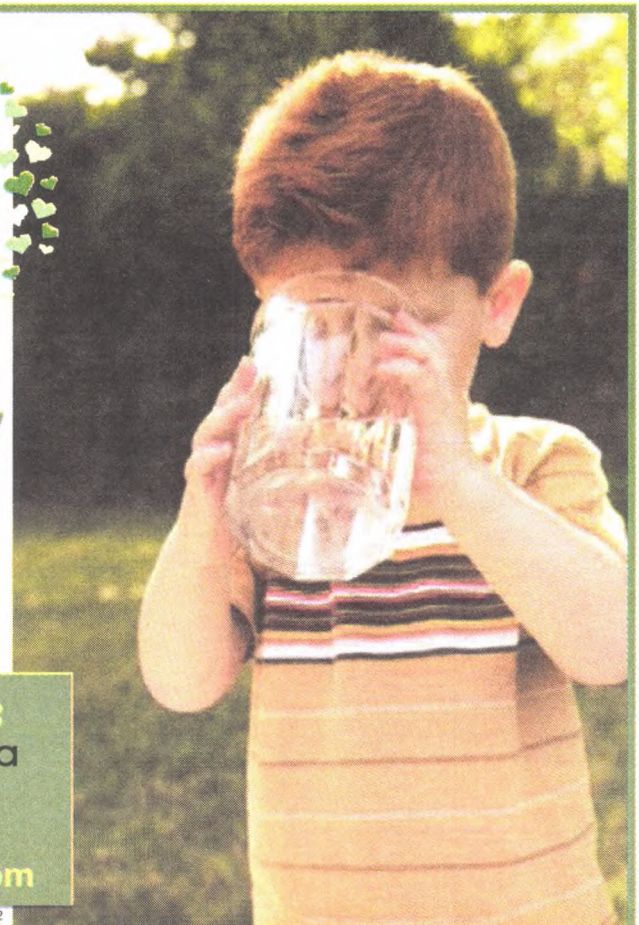
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Retaining walls and pavers add curb appeal to your front entry

Front-porch entertaining is making a comeback in America's neighborhoods, thanks to homeowners' renewed interest in beautifying the front entries of their homes. The days of uninspired concrete front stoops have passed, giving way to elegant combinations of freestanding walls, columns and matching pavers to create welcoming entrances that also serve as gathering places.

Front-entry makeovers that are both eye-catching and functional are one of the hottest trends in landscape design these days.

"Decades ago, neighbors would often retire to their front porches in the evening and gather together for conversation with neighbors up and down the street," says Lonnie Sekeres, designer at Villa Landscapes in Oakdale, Minn. "That practice is returning as families spend more time entertaining at home and getting to know their neighbors. A creatively designed front entryway can help facilitate that."

It doesn't have to be extravagant either. "Doing something as nominal as adding a paver walkway and freestanding wall - along with a new take on plants to accent certain areas - can do a lot to freshen up your curb appeal on a modest budget," says Sekeres.



and columns to create the new porch space. Paving stones in a matching color were used for the patio and walkway surface. The formerly boring square front stoop was transformed into an attractive rounded step that protrudes from the patio, flanked by two columns and faced with a veneer made from slicing off the back of a retaining wall block. The curved lines of the step are repeated in the walkway and in a round raised-bed garden.

The pergola extends from the front of the house, supported by white pillars mounted inside freestanding columns.

"What began as a cold and somewhat clumsy entrance to the house is now a bright and inviting gathering place that adds a contemporary look to what could have been a dated home," Sekeres concludes.

New concept, old look

Many homeowners face the challenge of updating a home that looks a bit stuck in the past, but a front entry facelift can be an easy solution. A rambler's small and mundane concrete-slab front stoop can be made into a sweeping paver patio and pergola with a covered entryway defined with retaining walls and columns. The stunning result changed the entire look of the home.

"The original house had a 4-foot-wide step to access the front door," explains Sekeres. "The owner wanted to provide more useable space for traffic flow through the front door while creating a sense of an old-fashioned front porch. In addition, he wanted to use materials that would complement the existing home and also be low-maintenance."

Retaining walls in a charcoal-blend color were used for seat-height freestanding walls

Front-yard entertaining

Sekeres gave a another family's home a facelift with a handsome hardscaped front-entry courtyard graced with fresh plantings. A plain concrete sidewalk was replaced with matching pavers to create a fresh look for the home with a new, more neighborly entertaining space.

"The entry had overgrown plants in some areas, bare spots in others. While it's a beautiful house, it had lost its curb appeal and was in dire need of attention," explains Sekeres. "Besides sprucing up the look of their home, the clients also wanted to have a spot out front to sit and chat with the neighbors as they passed by."

The solution was a raised patio that extends from the existing front step to the middle of the yard. The patio is buttressed on the outer sides by freestanding retaining walls accented at two corners with stylish matching columns.

The patio and sidewalk are paved with paving stones in a cobblestone pattern and color scheme that complements the walls and the home's existing brick exterior. A variety of new plantings around the wall and patio soften the hardscaping. Visit www.versa-lok.com for more interesting ideas.

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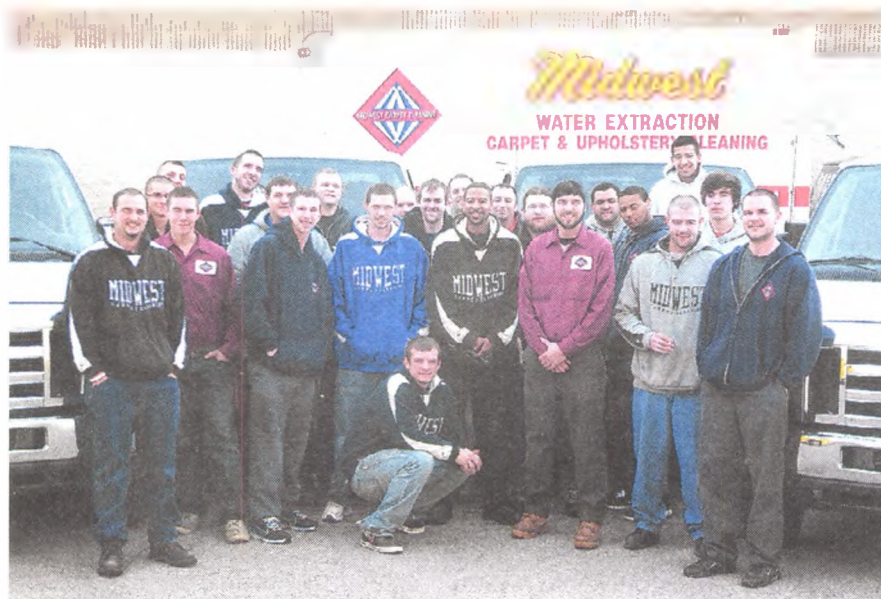
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Enhance your outdoor environment this spring

Bryan Roe
Contributing Writer

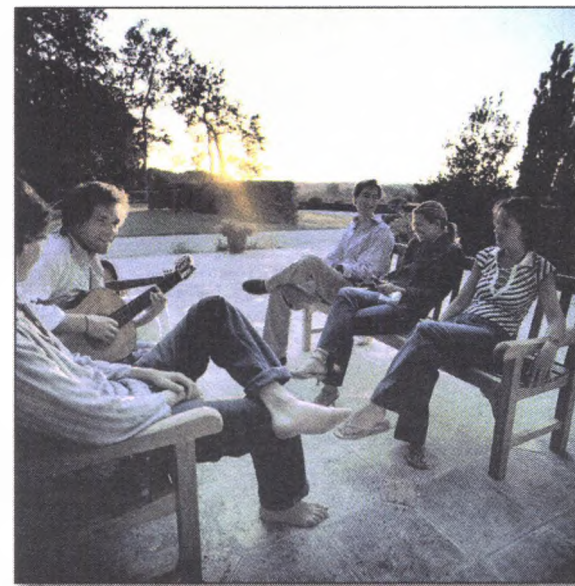
At this time of year, turning to the home improvement channel on television means lots of advice on spring gardening and making your patio and backyard ready for barbeques and evenings in the lounge chair. Even restaurants are preparing their patios for those warm spring evenings when guests want to have their dinner under the stars. There may still be a slight chill in the air, but now is the time to start making plans. Here we will look at how to make an outdoor space, more useful during the spring and fall seasons.

Let us consider the outdoor living space in the context of an apartment or condominium. Even if your deck is 100 square feet and eleven floors up, there are things you can do to make every foot feel like a lovely oasis.

First, look at the floor; is it wood or concrete? Depending on the building restrictions, consider laying down a wood floor deck. Pieces are pre-cut and simply sit on top of the existing floor. Rain, dust and small debris fall through the wood slats, helping to keep the surface clean and dry. Wood floor decks work best over concrete, but use on a wood floor is still ok.

For something a little less expensive, but does the same job as a wood floor deck, try out rubber interlocking floor tiles. They are generally two feet square, black and stand up well to the elements. Once your floor is selected and installed, choose some comfortable lounge furniture.

When you are making your selection, keep in mind the amount of space you have



to work with. Too many pieces of furniture that is too large for the space will only serve to make it a cramped environment. If your space is a backyard patio, then you will want to think about storage options for the off-season. Do you have a shed large enough to store your patio furniture? Are the cushions weather resistant? If your outdoor living space is not sheltered and you plan to leave the main table outdoors all year, avoid glass tabletops. The glass is easily broken during extreme cold weather.

If space permits, a fountain would add a lovely element of serenity to your outdoor space. The gentle gurgling sound is relaxing, plus the water will attract small birds and butterflies. Even if your space is a balcony, a small fountain is a lovely feature to have. Once your patio, balcony or deck is all set up with a new floor, comfortable furniture, potted plants, and a bubbling fountain you will no doubt want to spend every weekend and evening enjoying it.

However, the cool spring and autumn evenings may prove to be just too uncomfortable. There is no need to be decked out in your winter apparel just to sit on the deck - get yourself an outdoor heater. There is a big difference between a regular indoor space heater and an outdoor patio heater.

To begin with, they are designed for the outdoors, so the heat is directed down onto the users using infrared heating, instead of a space heater that heats the air which escapes up and out. Whether you choose a wall or ceiling mounted heater or portable heater, the heater will generate enough warmth to make your outdoor living space useable for more than just the summer months.



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Summer can be rough on patios and patio furniture. Homeowners can take several steps to protect their patios from wear and tear.

Protect your patio from wear and tear

Patios are typically the go to spot for warm weather outdoor meals. Whether hosting friends or simply enjoying a relaxing meal under the evening sky, homeowners tend to spend as much time as possible on the patio once the weather warms up.

Because it's such a high-traffic area, the patio should be protected from wear and tear. Wear and tear on the patio can result from Mother Nature or be a byproduct of all those spring and summer evenings spent relaxing outdoors. Fortunately, there are a handful of ways homeowners can keep their patios looking pristine through the summer party season.

- Stain the concrete. Staining concrete protects it from natural elements, which can cause the color of a patio to peel or flake. Concrete stain penetrates deep and infuses the concrete with a permanent color that's less likely to fall victim to the elements. Stains are generally solid-color stains or acid stains. Solid-color stains, as their name suggests, provide a more even and solid look, while acid stains provide a more marbled appearance. While neither are likely to fade or peel quickly, over time an additional coat or stain might need to be applied to counter natural factors like sunlight.

- Cover the furniture. Patio furniture can vary significantly in price and quality. Homeowners who picked up a few plastic chairs at the nearby grocery store might not feel furniture covers are worth the investment. For those with more expensive patio furniture, durable furniture covers that can withstand year-round weather are a sound investment. Waterproof and heat-resis-

tant fabric is ideal, as the furniture will be vulnerable to spring rains, summer showers and high temperatures during the summer party season. Covers should also fit snugly around the furniture to provide optimal protection.

- Consider installing retractable awnings. Retractable awnings might cost a little money, but they can also pay homeowners back over the long haul. First and foremost, retractable awnings protect patio from sunlight and ultraviolet rays in hot weather. A retractable awning can also protect friends and family members should an unexpected summer shower appear or keep them safe from sunburns during summer afternoons when the UV index is high.

When placed near a window, retractable awnings can lower energy bills. Such awnings can keep sunlight and ultraviolet rays from entering the home. This lowers the temperature indoors, which reduces reliance on air conditioning units to maintain a comfortable temperature. These awnings can also extend the life of furniture, which tends to fade when placed inside windows that get heavy sun exposure.

- Plant trees. An eco-friendly way to maintain and add to a patio's aesthetic appeal is to plant trees around the patio. Trees can protect the patio from sunlight and ultraviolet radiation while providing some shade for friends and family members who want to spend some quality time outdoors on hot afternoons. In addition, trees can create a serene setting to a patio, adding to its relaxing nature.

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Many gardening tips for beginners

Gardens come in different varieties like the plants you find in them. There are several gardening tips that can be used for all type of gardens.



1. Mulching protects your garden topsoil from being blown away. It also provides nutrients as it decomposes and improves the appearance of your gardens. Mulching has other benefits and is one of the most recommended gardening tips by gardeners and farmers alike.

2. Healthy plants are more disease resistant. Plants are like people; a person with a strong immune system can combat diseases. A healthy plant does the same.

3. Pests can be eradicated by cleaning the plant with a watery solution of soap. Just make sure to rinse after. This gardening tip is best heeded for fruit bearing trees or edible plants.

4. Using compost fertilizers are a great way to have healthy plants. It is also a great way to save money on expensive fertilizers. Non-organic fertilizers also tend to leave chemical residues that can accumulate in garden soils and harm not only the plants but the gardeners as well. They cause toxins to go to the water supplies. Another gardening tip recommended not just by farmers and gardeners but also by environmentalists.

5. There are several plants that are only suitable for a specified climate, a certain kind of soil or can only grow with certain plants. You have to know what plant grow in the conditions you have in your area this is for you to avoid unnecessary purchases. This is a money saving gardening tip.

6. Landscaping is a good investment, which can double the value of your home. This is one gardening tip that can earn you money.

7. Growing grass on bare ground is an easy way to make your home look better and appreciate in value. This is one gardening tip that promotes earning money while growing grass legally.

8. Aside from looking great in your home, trees also provide some sort of protection from direct sunlight exposure and strong winds.

9. Vines on the walls, fences and overhead structures also would offer some protection and would also look great.

10. Flowers are beautiful, but they are also expensive. Get one that is resistant to many elements. Flowers from your local community already have developed resistance to conditions present in your area.

11. For most gardens plants, their roots go only as deep as 6 inches. Putting fertilizer deeper than that would be a waste of money. Put them shallower as they seep down when the plants are being watered.

12. Earthworms are important to plants. They till and aerate the soil for the roots to breathe. Non-organic fertilizers can kill them. This gardening tip dates back to the old days of gardening.

13. Having several kinds of insects that are beneficial to your garden would be good. These insects can be encouraged to stay by having diverse plants in your garden.

14. Spot spraying weeds with household vinegar, instead of using commercial weed-killers, can eradicate them. This is another environment friendly gardening tip.

15. Avoid putting too much mulch on tree trunks, too much will encourage unwanted pests to reside on them.

16. Use plant varieties that are common to your area or have been taken from an area with similar conditions.

17. Be sure to know the plants that are poisonous. If you are intent on growing them, make sure to have the necessary cure available in your household. Take note of this gardening tip, it can save your life.

18. The best time to water plants is during mornings.

19. Before planting a new plant in your garden, you must consider its height and size when it matures. This garden tip can help you save money in the future.

20. Newly transplanted plants may require special attention during its first week. This is to reduce the stress and shock it got during transplantation.

And last but not the least of the gardening tips...

21. Plants are living entities. If you want them to grow in your garden you have to treat them as such. They need to be taken care of, they are like your pets, and you look out for them. In return you get that feeling of contentment watching them thrive. A good way to take care of them is to consider that plants might have some feelings too.

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Aeration is the secret to keeping your lawn lush

Nearly every lawn could use a lawn aerator. A lawn aerator is a tool that will help turn the soil and create holes in the top portion of the soil. It is that simple! When the soil is broken up and holes are created, the soil can then get water and air to the appropriate roots to help grass and plants grow and stay healthy. Earthworms will also be able to get into the soil to help fertilize the soil with much ease.

The soil often becomes compacted due to various human activities such as when the soil is being walked on, played on, driven on or anything else done on it. Unfortunately, when this happens, it slowly begins to suffocate the grass and eventually kills it. Your lawn problem may not be due to insects or anything else. It could just be that the soil has become too compacted and the grass cannot get any water and earthworms cannot get the air to breathe. This is when a lawn aerator can help fix all of your problems.

Use your lawn aerator regularly, such as in the spring and fall. Do not use your lawn aerator on dry soil; use it only when it is damp. Do not use your lawn aerator when the soil is deeply waterlogged or extremely dry.

Use your lawn aerator on a regular basis and whenever it is needed.

Use it properly and you will have rich, fresh grass and plants growing on your lawn. It will be as beautiful as it can be. This is especially important if you plan to create a garden, plant flowers or anything else. Earthworms, water and oxygen will all help

to keep your garden, plants and flowers to stay healthy and grow to their fullest potential.

Use your lawn aerator just before planting your seeds, no matter what type of plant, flower or food you might be planting. This will help tremendously during the growth process. Earthworms need to get into the soil and help your crops grow. Air and water needs to get into the roots of your plants to help them grow and survive.

A lawn aerator can help you create a beautiful flowerbed, grow your own crops for eating, and even grow plants. If you have a business in this area, a lawn aerator will become your best friend for keeping your gardens healthy. You will be able to grow and sell even more plants than you ever imagined.

Even if gardening is just a hobby of yours, an aerator is vital to your plants. Create a beautiful landscape in your own yard with a lawn aerator. Just imagine what you can do with your lawn. By aerating your soil, your grass will grow and become more dense and look so healthy that your neighbors will be asking you what your secret is.

You can keep it a secret if you would like, but you know that it was just using a simple garden tool, your new lawn aerator. This tool can mean the difference between having grass on your lawn or not. It can mean the difference between planting and growing beautiful plants and crops, or helplessly watching them try to grow and die.

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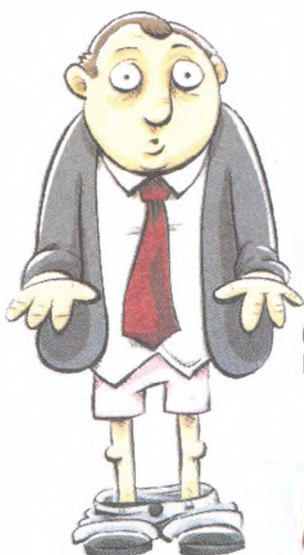
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Restoring your property after the cold effects of winter

One of the best things about the dawn of spring and the return of warmer weather is the chance to get out of the house and get some fresh air. For homeowners, this is the perfect opportunity to assess any damage the previous months did to yards and develop a plan restore properties.

• **Don't jump the gun.** The first warm day of spring might seem like a great time get out in the yard and get your hands dirty. But it's best to wait until the grass has completely dried out before getting to work. Raking on wet grass increases the risk of tearing out grass, which can cause bald spots and the growth of weeds down the road. In addition, stepping on the grass while the ground is still wet can compact the soil, which can slow drainage and block the lawn's roots from breathing.

Patience should prevail with regard to mowing the lawn as well. A lawn's roots will not start to grow until the average everyday temperature routinely reaches 40 F, so mowing too early is both unnecessary and potentially harmful to the lawn. When the temperatures regularly reach 50 F, then homeowners will likely start to see their lawns growing.



Mowing the lawn too early in the spring is both unnecessary and potentially harmful to the lawn.

• **Remove debris that's piled up.** Debris has a tendency to infest a yard over the course of the winter months. Fallen branches, stones and even trash can accumulate in a yard, putting those who spend time in the yard at risk of injury once the warm weather returns. For instance, bits of twigs and pebbles that are blown across the yard during a windy winter can be embedded in the yard, making the yard less of a haven and more of a hazard. Once the grass is dry enough to walk on, walk around the property and remove any debris that's piled up over the last few months.

• **Employ a pre-emergent weed killer.** Homeowners who routinely spend their summers agonizing over weeds throughout the yard should consider applying a pre-emergent weed killer around the beginning of spring. It's important to do so around the end of March or early April, when the weeds have not yet had a chance to grow. When applying, follow the dosage instructions provided by the product's manufacturer. Such instructions often recommend a second application right before summer begins.

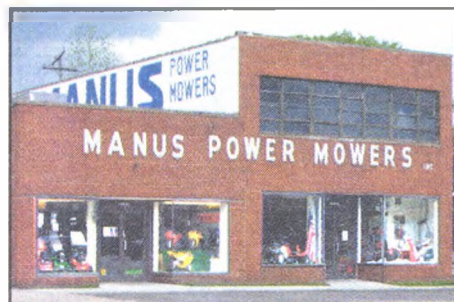
• **Remove thatch.** Once the grass has dried, you can begin to

remove thatch that's built up over the winter. Thatch is potentially very harmful to soil, blocking sunlight, air and moisture the soil needs to ensure a lawn looks lush and healthy. Thatch removal does not necessarily need to be an annual task. If thatch buildup is insignificant, then it can be done every other year. Just use a detaching rake to make the job much easier.

• **Aerate, particularly if the yard is a heavy traffic area once the warm weather arrives.** If your yard transforms into a child's wonderland upon the arrival of spring and summer, you might want to revive the soil by aerating. When the yard gets heavy usage, it's easy for soil to become compacted, which makes it hard for air and water to reach the lawn's roots. That can eventually make for a less-than-appealing lawn. So if your yard is the place to be come the warmer months, aerate in the spring to loosen the soil and make it easier for the lawn to withstand the months ahead.

No matter how harsh or warm the winter months might have been, spring is a great time for homeowners to restore the property around their homes.

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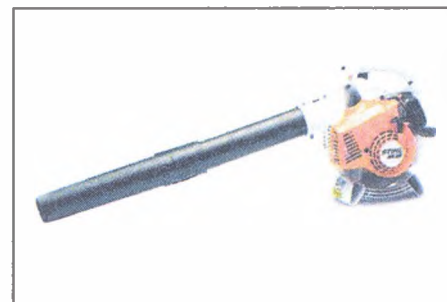
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Doesn't your dog deserve the classiest house on the block?

True dog lovers always like to provide their canine familiars with the best treats available in the market. For the most dedicated luxury dog houses are one of the best and classiest ways for the owners to show their love for their pet. Luxury dog houses are easily becoming more popular among the classiest dog-friends.

Luxury dog houses come as varied as the client's taste and wallet: If you are out to get one for your beloved dog all you need is a little market research and you will find plenty of places already selling and/or making you a fully customized dog house.

If you don't know where to start looking, the internet is one place to start looking for luxury dog houses, as there are already many websites dealing with this kind of specific product and the offer keeps getting more advanced and attractive. Also check with your local pet shops in the area.

Pet supply companies who offer custom dog house building even offer you the possibility to specifically choose all the types of materials involved in the building of the house. The offer of custom features is immense and they range from actual wall paper, window coverings, interior and exterior special wall painting, specific dog furniture, including beds, sofas and even some design pieces that serve also as dog

toys.

The outside of the luxury dog houses have not been forgotten, and if you think your beloved dog deserves it, you can even manage to build him his own private dog house garden, with his own lawn, sand boxes and even a pool. The possibilities are truly virtually infinite.

As long as you keep it functional in the dog's point of view, you can really build to your hearts desire. It is important to keep the dog's perspective in mind when dealing with custom luxury dog houses. Some features are beautiful and look really good on human's houses but for the obvious reasons, just don't work with dogs. Remember you are trying to spoil your dog and make him as happy as possible, not making his life harder.

A very popular new trend is to build the luxury dog house matching the style of the dog owners' own house, including the architectural style and the design of both the interior and the exterior of the house, thus creating a visual harmony.

The prices of such houses vary as much as the price of houses for human habitation. It will all depend on the level of luxury you are willing to offer your dog. These houses can be come a very expensive gift but they are also a great way to show some love to your furry friend.

— COURTESY OF FREE ARTICLES



Beautiful lawn vs. faithful pet

Putting a stop to lawn care woes

It's possible to be a lawn-lover and a dog-lover with a few tips to keep grass green. Over time a pet who is routinely using a patch of grass as his personal potty will damage that stretch of lawn. The behavior of canines plus the chemical components of the urine contribute to the brown, dead patches synonymous with dog waste. But there are ways to mitigate the problem.

Over time a pet that is routinely using a patch of grass as his personal potty will damage that stretch of lawn. The behavior of canines plus the chemical components of the urine contribute to the brown, dead patches synonymous with dog waste. But there are ways to mitigate the problem.

Dog urine and feces can often be a frustrating problem, even to pet-lovers. The war between wanting a pristine lawn and a healthy pet can drive pet owners to investigate ways to prevent or reduce marring of the lawn. Do those urban legends like tomato juice or baking soda work? In most cases the answer is no. However, there are ways to reduce the amount of lawn damage with other methods.

Dog waste chemistry

Understanding why urine and feces can affect the lawn requires understanding the makeup of these waste products. The fundamental problem involves the concentration of nitrogen in the solid and liquid waste. Primarily in dogs, the kidneys serve to remove excess nitrogen from the dog's high-protein, meat-based diet. In small concentrations, nitrogen applied to a lawn can actually serve as a fertilizer — helping the lawn to be green and bright. But it's the higher concentrations that do

the most damage. These essentially burn out the grass and cause brown, bare patches that can be rather unsightly.

A few decades ago, Dr. A.W. Allard, a Colorado veterinarian, examined numerous variations in dog urine and the effects on several common lawn grasses. He found fescue to be the most nitrogen-resistant. Yet, even that grass has its saturation point and can brown.

Who is the biggest offender?

Dog owners sometimes think that female dogs have different urine chemistry because they tend to do the most damage to the lawn. The fact is, both male and female dogs can do damage, it just comes down to the way urine is applied. Male dogs oftentimes "mark" their territories or spray a small amount of urine to different parts of the landscape. These small concentrations may not damage the lawn much. However, a female dog tends to squat and apply the urine in one spot at a high concentration. That liquid seeps into the lawn and can do damage. Male dogs that do not lift their legs and prefer to squat can do the same level of damage as females.

Cats that use the outdoors instead of a litter box may also create brown spots, particularly if they visit the same spot over and over.

Fixing the problem

Apart from diluting the urine, which can cause its own issues, the best way to alleviate brown spots is to walk the dog around the neighborhood to other appropriate spots. Otherwise, a dog-only area can be set up in the yard. Then pet owners must train their dogs to use that specific area. Laying down pea gravel or mulch can be a way to absorb the urine without having it damage the lawn. Camouflage, like bushes or a fence, can set the dog area apart from the rest of the backyard as well.

It can take up to two weeks or more to train an older dog to take to the new potty area. Puppies may adapt a little faster. Collecting urine and feces and placing it in the dog's area can help set up a scent mark that may make it easier for dogs to learn that's where they're supposed to go. For the training period, pet owners should accompany their dogs to the new area on a leash; do not leave the pet unattended in the yard. He or she may revert back to the normal spot being used for relief.

With time and patience, pet-lovers can cohabitate with their pooches and still enjoy a nice lawn. It just takes a little creative thinking and training.

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Creating an attractive dog run

Millions of dogs share the homes and hearts of people across the country. Dogs can provide companionship, affection and joy. But when dogs spend time outdoors and cause damage to lawns and gardens, that cute and cuddly appeal might dwindle.

Although dogs are beneficial in numerous ways, their tendency to create unsightly messes in the yard has many homeowners wringing their hands in frustration. Erecting a dog run or using other strategies may help to alleviate any damage the dog causes.

A dog run is essentially a fenced-in part of the yard where dogs can play or be trained to relieve themselves. As most pet owners know, dogs, particularly females because their urine is concentrated to one spot on the lawn, can create unsightly urine burns. Looking at patches of burnt, straw-like grass where a lush lawn used to be can be aggravating. The same can be said for finding dog "presents" all over the yard. All it takes is stepping in or sliding in a pile of joy to raise blood pressure. Plus, there's the extra work of tracking down such presents and having to clean them up. This can be

time-consuming with a big yard, not to mention messy and smelly.

Containing your dog to a run will keep messes all in one place. When you cannot supervise the dog, a dog run will be a way to let the dog spend time outside in a way that he or she won't get into trouble. The run can be constructed of any material you desire, whether chain-link fencing, wood slats, lattice material, or tightly spaced shrubbery. Pea gravel is a good material to use on the floor of the dog run. Not only is pea gravel aesthetically appealing, but it also allows urine to run through into the soil below and will be able to keep feces above for easier clean up. It also can be hosed off and topped off when gravel is depleted.

Avoid landscape fabrics or artificial turf that is not designed for pets. It may collect waste and lead to the proliferation of bacteria, which can create odor and unsanitary conditions for the dog.

Many people like to camouflage dog runs from the rest of the yard. Trailing vines of ivy or other upward growing plants may suffice. Avoid planting any poisonous plants next to the run

so they are not accidentally consumed. It is also best to keep sweet nectar plants away to minimize bee and wasps from flying close to the dog.

If you do not want to segregate your dog from the rest of the yard, find ways to prevent him or her from getting into places you'd rather keep off limits. Cobble rock is often difficult for dogs to walk on. Use it to form barriers of 3 to 5 inches in width to prevent access to certain parts of the yard. Border your planting beds with thorny bushes or big rocks that don't allow traction.

Do make a dog running path by the fence where there is a lot of foot traffic. This way your dog can run back and forth and watch the neighbors go by. Again, pea gravel is a good choice here so that it will mask paw-trodden grass.

Dogs will behave like dogs; so pet owners should learn the best way to enjoy the backyard together. Training the pooch to relieve himself in one spot and creating places that are safe for him to urinate may alleviate destructive behavior.

— COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE



It's possible to cohabitate in the backyard with a dog. Follow some tips to set aside areas for people and pets. Erecting a dog run or using other strategies may help to alleviate any damage the dog causes.



Your precious pooch may be leaving unsightly fur behind on your carpet. Several vacuums get high ratings for their ability to clean up pet fur and smaller debris easily and efficiently.

Top-rated vacuums to clean up pet hair

People regularly welcome pets into their homes. While they may love the affection and companionship the animal provides, they may not enjoy the fur and dander left behind inside the house.

Around 65 percent of American households have one or more pets, according to the American Pet Product Association. New generations of pet owners are willing and able to pay top dollar for premium services and products. They may be more interested in a vacuum that is designed for pet fur than previous generations.

It can take no time at all for fur to accumulate on a rug or upholstered furniture. The nature of pet fur allows it to get stuck in the fibers and it is not easily removed, and it can be time-consuming to use sticky rollers to clean up pet hair. Some pet owners actually have resorted to running a wire slicker brush or shedding blade over rugs and furniture to collect the hair. Many find that pet fur is more easily cleaned with a vacuum designed specifically for that purpose or one that boasts strong suction power.

Several vacuums get high ratings for their ability to clean up pet fur and smaller debris easily and efficiently. For those in the market for a new vacuum, consider these brands and models.

• **Dyson Animal, various models:** Dyson claims to be an innovator in vacuum design, with cyclonic power that ensures the vacuum will not lose suction. Based on the popularity of their regular upright vacuums, Dyson created a line of vacuums specifically designed for pet hair. Most generate the strongest suction at the turbine head and feature a brush bar for capturing and sucking up fur and dander.

The one downside to these products is the price tag. Dyson vacuums are on the high end of the cost spectrum at around \$500.

• **Hoover Platinum Collection Bagged and Bagless:** Hoover didn't specifically set out for this to be a pet fur vacuum, but through personal use, many people found it to be one of the more effective vacuums at collecting pet hair. Ranging between \$200 and \$300, these vacuums are moderately priced.

• **Eureka Boss Smart Vac:** This vacuum was designed with strong bristling action and powerful suction that will go a long way toward trapping pet fur. It is also lightweight and easily maneuvered. At around \$200, it is also among the more affordable options.

• **Miele Bolero Upright Vacuum Cleaner:** This product features an Active HEPA filter and spring-loaded, self-sealing dust bags that are ideal for those hoping to keep dust and dander out of the air. Air passes through a multi-layered HyClean™ bag and a secondary electrostatic filter. This is the most expensive vacuum on the list, at around \$800.

• **Hoover Tempo Widepath:** At around \$80, this is one of the least expensive vacuums, and also very lightweight. A powerful, 12 amp motor provides ample suction and doesn't leave anything behind. The smaller profile makes the vacuum easy to maneuver under and around furniture.

Removing pet hair can be easier when you invest in a powerful suction vacuum. Comparison shop retailers to find the best deals on these highly rated vacuums.

— COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE

Upgrading your home into home sweet home

With more homeowners deciding to stay put in their homes, rather than attempting to sell in the current market, that old adage is more meaningful than ever.

Staying put doesn't mean homeowners are settling. Many are upgrading or redecorating their abodes, turning their old home into the stylish, yet comfortable - home sweet home they've dreamed of for many years.

Upgrading and redecorating a house can be done in small steps, or in one overhaul, depending on your available time and finances, and the upgrades you want to do. For example, redesigning your kitchen with new appliances, cabinetry, flooring and wall color will require a lot more time, money and decision making on your part than redecorating a bedroom with new linens, wall color and rearranged furniture.

No matter if you want to have everything done in one large overhaul, or intend to spread your upgrades out over several years, you need to develop a working plan - one that can be constantly tweaked and updated as the project progresses. Here are some tips to get your working plan started:

- Plan on a budget. You can develop a total budget for all the work you want to do, or an annual budget, which will help you divide up all the projects so you are able to afford them over a period of time. When planning your budget, it's a good idea to overestimate the cost of a project, just in case something unexpected pops up requiring additional cash. Many a home remodeler can tell you about the simple home improvement project that turned into something much bigger than originally anticipated.

- Set a timeline. This is to determine your availability to work on the project. If you

find that you only have a day or two available, you probably will want to plan for a much smaller project. Or you may want to hire out any work you won't be able to finish yourself.

- Make a list of equipment you need. If you're going to be purchasing larger supplies like wood boards and drywall, you probably need to update your truck with the Adarac truck bed rack system from Access, a division of Agri-Cover, Inc. Your truck will be able to transport up to 500 pounds of home improvement supplies on the rack, which sits neatly behind the cab and secures your load with eyelets. And don't forget about finding a secure place in your home or garage to store supplies while the project is ongoing. If you live in a home where storage is limited, consider keeping your tools in your truck bed, covered and secured with an Access tonneau cover. The cover's locks keep your tools safe and dry until you need them, and when you're ready to get started on the project, the tonneau truck bed cover can easily be removed, granting you access to everything.

- Ask questions. As you get started in the planning of your project, talk to friends and family who have done something similar, as well as the experts at home improvement stores. The more information you have, the more prepared you will be to address issues as they arise.

Staying in your current house and re-vamping it into that dream house you always wanted can really pay off. You may find yourself inviting family and friends to come and vacation at your house, so you can stay home and enjoy it.

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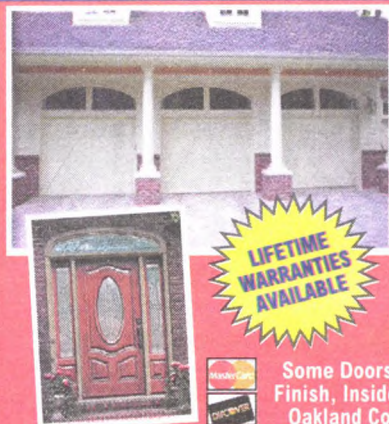
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The ins and outs of hydroponic gardening

Hydroponics simply means growing plants without soil. Food for the plants, which are called hydroponic nutrients, are dissolved in water and fed directly to the roots. The plants form smaller roots and grow in inert grow media. Hydroponic vegetables are healthy, vigorous, and consistently reliable. Hydroponic gardening is clean and extremely easy and requires very little effort. The word hydroponics comes from two Greek words, "hydro" meaning water and "ponics" meaning labor. The concept of gardening without soil, or hydroponics, has been around for thousands of years. Hydroponics is proven to have several advantages over soil gardening. The growth rate on a hydroponic plant is 30 to 50% faster than a soil plant grown under the same conditions. The yield of the plant is also greater. The extra oxygen in the hydroponic growing mediums helps to stimulate root growth. Plants with ample oxygen in the root system absorb nutrients faster.

The hydroponic plant also requires very little energy to find and break down food. The plant then uses this saved energy to grow faster and to produce more fruit. Hydroponic plants also have fewer problems with bug infestations, disease, and fungus.

Hydroponic gardening offers several benefits to the environment. Because of the constant reuse of the nutrient solutions, hydroponic gardening uses considerably less water than soil gardening. Fewer pesticides are used on hydroponic crops as well as they are not necessary. Since hydroponic gardening systems use no topsoil, topsoil erosion is not even an issue.

Most of the principles that apply to soil fertilizers also apply to hydroponic fertilizers, or nutrient solutions. A hydroponic nutrient solution contains all of the elements that the plant would normally get from the soil. These nutrients can be purchased at a hydroponic supply store and come in liquid or powdered mixes. Like soil, hydroponic systems can be fertilized with organic or chemical nutrients. An organic

hydroponic system is considerably more work to maintain. The organic compounds have a tendency to lock together and cause pumps blockage.

Hydroponic systems are characterized as passive or active. An active hydroponic system actively moves the nutrient solution with a pump. Passive hydroponic systems rely on the capillary action of the growing medium or a wick.

The nutrient solution is absorbed by the medium or the wick and passed along to the roots. Passive systems are usually too wet and do not supply enough oxygen to the root system to maximize growth rates.

Hydroponic systems are also characterized as recovery or non-recovery. Recovery systems, or re-circulating systems, reuse the nutrient solution. Non-recovery systems apply the nutrient solution to the growing medium, but are not recovered.

Most consumers question whether they should buy or build a hydroponic system. If the consumer has the mind of an engineer and dreams of building their own hydroponic system, they should consider buying one first. Buying a system, which does not cost a lot of money, will allow them to have a better understanding of how hydroponics works. The hands-on experience is worth the cost of the system and they will likely be able to reuse the parts in the system when they decide to build their own.

Consumers should do their research and get all of the information they can. Hydroponics is a constantly changing industry and the consumer should be prepared to be patient. Building ones own system can be very rewarding or very frustrating. Hydroponic gardening is the wave of the future and is currently being studied in classrooms around the country, horticultural societies, and in government funded research at major universities. It is also fast becoming a popular hobby, as it is fun, exciting, and easy to get involved in.

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Yes, you
should
consider
container
gardening

Who can't admire a beautiful specimen plant grown on the patio. Tending to when ever the urge hits because it is close by. And from a practical standpoint, you can move plants indoors in cold weather. There is a lot to know to keep your thumb green with this type of gardening, but it can be very rewarding.

The Ground Rules Explained

Container planting lets you decorate your open patio, front porch, poolside concrete expanses and window boxes. You can move these containers around as weather dictates; or you can bury them in the ground, put them in a greenhouse or even gift them. You can get creative with sources of containers, everything from small buckets to old rowboats.

You can go formal with manicured topiary or casual with a dense mix of annuals and grasses in a whiskey barrel half. Lifting a container off the ground with a stand allows for eye level viewing for more shallow pots. Water flows more freely out if over watering could be an issue. Smaller pots can be hung from the ceiling or attached to a wall as a half-basket. This way you keep them out from underfoot.

Handy and eye-catching!

There are porous and non-porous containers. Porous containers like terra cotta and wood will dry faster and cool by evaporation and allow roots to breath. Mulch is useful on top of the soil to slow evaporation on hot days. Non-porous pots like glazed pottery and metal boxes retain water. They can smother roots; so make sure there is a drain hole in a pot like this. Low containers that are lightweight are for shallow rooted plants such as azaleas, bulbs and bonsai. Use a large pot for permanent plants like a Japanese maple or conifer, as they need room for 2 years of growth.

Year-round container planting is common for mild climates. In cold climates you will

have more success (and a greener thumb) if you pot up annuals for the summer and over winter perennials. On freezing days you can always move them in if there is enough sun or artificial light.

You get to have 100% control with the soil mix, unlike with traditional ground planting. This allows you to provide precise conditions for specific plants and better pest management since different bugs attack different species. The science of soil mixes get pretty involved. In short, you can buy good packaged soil or sterile soil less mixes. When caring for plants you ought to play it safe submit to their demands for shade, sun, temperature, water, and soil type.

From the Pots to the Plants

Annuals are suited well to containers as they can be crowded in and seedlings can be started inside to extend the growing season. They tolerate a small pot chock-full of plants for a season.

Here's a general rule:

Plant in container 6 to 8" apart if ground planting specifies 10 to 12" apart.

For an annual that will grow 3 feet tall get a pot 24" in diameter.

For an annual that will grow up to 1 foot tall get a pot 8" in diameter.

Perennials can be grown in containers despite the fact they tend to grow slower and larger. If they outgrow the pot then remove them when they are most dormant.

Trees, shrubs and vines make you think big, in terms of deep containers, and take on a commitment. These are not a short-term love affair like an annual. They don't need the heavy watering that an annual does. Consider the climate you live in, as these plants will have to weather it. The payoff is when a small terrace is fashioned with a comfy chair in the shade of a blossoming potted tree. How about those winter berries

Container Gardening continued on page 59

Herb gardens are a delightful addition to any garden

Herbs have been in use since centuries for various medicinal, culinary and aromatic purposes. Herbs are used even in many of the modern medicines, cosmetics etc. Having your own herb garden can be very useful. Planning it is definitely great fun!

Herbs can be grown in a number of ways. With a proper planning an herb garden can be an essential part of your home. You can choose to have it either indoors or outdoors. In case of limited outdoor space, you can opt for planting herbs on a windowsill or in a window box.

Planning your herb garden

The first thoughts to cultivating an herb garden are selecting the herbs you want to plant. There are different kinds of herbs for different purposes. Hence you need to first decide the main purpose of having an herb garden. Some herbs like thyme grow low and spreading while others like parsley grows in clumps. Some herbs are perennials and some are annuals. Your first step is to put your plan on paper first. Decide the exact size you wish your garden to be. This helps in selecting the right type of herbs and also you can then

determine the amount of space per herb as per your requirements. Keep in mind that herbs require well-drained soil. Before starting to plant your herbs, test if the soil is alkaline. Herbs need alkaline soil to grow. You can add lime to your soil to keep it alkaline.

Sunlight is a very important factor for herbs to grow well. Herbs need at least six hours of sunlight. In case you can't find a suitable sunny spot, you can plant the herbs in a garden container so that it can be moved around in sunlight. Keep enough space for the herbs to grow. Your herbs need adequate air circulation to prevent molds. Familiarize yourself with the herbs you will be planting. Read about the requirements and conditions of growing them. This will help you take proper care of them.

Planting the herbs

You can begin planting either with seeds or small plants from the garden center. It is better to have small plants rather than seeds as you will have a higher success rate. When using seeds to plants, it is better to plan them ahead since the seeds require several months



to grow. Keep your herb garden close to your home. This will help you to take care and check for the problems.

You can plant your herbs either in straight lines or in geometrical shapes. You can even have square beds divided into four paths. Plants even in the shape of flowing, curved beds and walkways look amazing. Some flowers and shrubs can add to the beauty of your herb garden. You can refer to various magazines and books to know what type of garden best suits your needs. You can even seek professional help if required. They are easy to maintain and simple to grow. With enough drainage, sunlight, water and nutrient rich and organic soil, your herb garden can thrive for years.

— COURTESY OF FREE ARTICLES

Container Gardening continued from page 58

too? They don't require a lot of feeding, but require the right kind of pruning and watering.

Here are a few hardy candidates

Boxwood: Evergreens that you trim into geometric shapes or use as a backdrop to other plantings. Its roots are shallow and it grows to up to 10 feet.

Camellia: These ornamental trees sprout big flowers. Thrive in western and southern states and grow slowly up to 7 feet.

Harry Lauder's Walking Stick: Its height is 4 to 6 feet and needs soil that drains. Its trademark-contorted branches

can be pruned if you are going after a specific shape.

Redwood: Yes, I said redwood to prove to you that growing trees in pots is more than you would think! It will grow in a large box of 24" wide for a few years "leaving the nest". Prune it to control its height and make it bushier.

English Laurel: This make a dense screen of big leaves. It grows very tall and wide and fast. Often seen as hedges.

Clematis: These vines really like containers but must be moved to a well-protected spot in a frigid winter. It needs a deep pot, but those spectacular blue and purple blooms make its demands worthwhile.

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This year, everyone is looking to save on their household budget. But just because you're scaling back, doesn't mean you can't make some improvements around the house. Visit your local hardware stores and home fix-it shops in your neighborhood for ideas and great values on products for your home.

Use these DIY home improvement and cleanup tips from the experts from Grime Boss to help revamp your home, without spending a fortune. Visit www.grimeboss.com for more product information.

Repaint the walls

One great way to update your home without having to replace carpeting or furniture is to refresh walls with a fresh coat of paint. Determine the amount of paint needed by using an online calculator, such as the one

provided at www.homedepot.com.

To save even more, simply update the paint on doors, cabinets and crown molding, rather than the walls. Likewise, you can paint an accent wall along a hallway, or within your kitchen or living room, rather than the entire space.

Replace hardware

If you'd love to renovate, but it's simply not in the budget for this year; make small updates now that you can incorporate into later construction projects. One small trick is to replace the hardware in highly trafficked areas, such as the kitchen or the bathroom. Replace cabinet handles or knobs and drawer pulls. While replacing hardware, make sure to give your door hinges and drawer tracks a good oiling to prevent squeaking.

Install shelving in the garage

Who couldn't use extra storage space? For many, additional storage may mean looking beyond the house to the garage. Find a variety of storage solutions that fit within your budget - from finishing rod racks to cabinets and overhead ceiling-mounted shelving.

Update flooring

To cover existing flooring, use floating laminate pieces. Installing wood laminate in your bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, or living room is easy with snap-together pieces. Check out www.diynetwork.com for step-by-step instructions.

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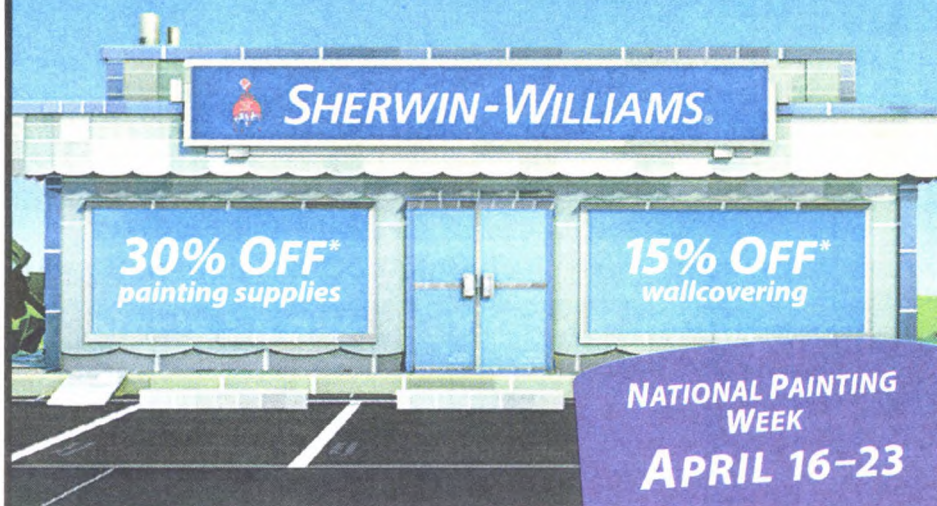
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When the heat is up you'll want to save on cooling cost

Once the first wave of summer heat arrives, homeowners everywhere look to the air conditioner to help survive the summer swoon. Though few things are as refreshing as a cold room on a hot afternoon, relying too heavily on the air conditioner is a recipe for a high utility bill, something not all people can readily afford.

Reducing summer cooling costs does not mean families must grin and bear it the next time a heat wave arrives. Instead, homeowners can take several steps to reduce cooling costs while staying comfortable through

the dog days of summer.

- Embrace the warm summer breeze. Once that first hot day arrives and the air conditioner is turned on for the first time, many households simply leave the A/C on for the rest of summer. This is not only wasteful, but in many cases, it's unnecessary as well. If the air outside is pleasant and a warm breeze is blowing, turn the A/C off, open the windows and invite that warm summer air in. During summer the temperatures may fluctuate, and it can be a welcome respite to relax in a room with a warm breeze instead

of the constant hum of the air conditioner.

- Protect the home from the sun. Many times a home's interior heats up because there's nothing outside to shield it from hot rays. Landscape features like shade trees add aesthetic appeal to a property and can be planted to keep sun from beating down on the home during hot afternoons. Awnings and window coverings also make great allies in protecting a home from blazing summer sun, and none of these alternatives will cause the energy bill to increase.

- Clean or replace filters. If an A/C unit's filters are dirty or old, this makes it harder for the unit to cool the room. As a result, people inside the home then increase the power on the unit to cool the room more quickly or effectively. However, if an A/C unit isn't cooling the room on a lower setting, it's probably because the filter needs to be cleaned. Cleaning the filter is easy and takes just a few minutes. If the filter is beyond repair, replace it.

- Make sure the doors and windows are shut. When the A/C is running, all doors and windows should remain closed. Open doors and windows only make it harder to keep a room cool, and turning up the A/C is not the answer.

- Have the units inspected. A qualified HVAC technician should inspect heating ventilation and air conditioning units. Technicians can determine if a unit will operate at peak capacity or struggle through the summer, costing homeowners money as the summer carries on.

— COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE



Reducing summer cooling costs does not mean families must grin and bear it the next time a heat wave arrives. Instead, homeowners can take several steps to reduce cooling costs while staying comfortable through the dog days of summer.

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