



Spring **HOME**
& **GARDEN**

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COUNTY

Republican

PAGES 1B - 32B

OHS students share experience growing plants in the greenhouse



BY ROXIE MURPHY
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Owensville High School students Hannah Gehlert, Benjamin Kramer and Kylie Kitchen take horticulture with Sherry Byram, spending an hour daily in the district's greenhouses.

"This is my second year in the greenhouse, and I can easily say it's my favorite class!" Kitchen said.

As a second-year student, Kylie built on her knowledge from the previous year.

"Every year we learn everything from the names of plants, and in what conditions they succeed," Kitchen said. "To the diseases plants can obtain and how to care for them."

Gehlert, a first-year student, said she has learned a lot from the class.

"I have learned so much this year," Gehlert said. "It has been a great learning experience and I am so glad that it is an opportunity for students here in Owensville to take the class!"

The class for Gehlert has been about more than just growing pretty flowers.

"Some of the most helpful things I have learned this year include plant identification, watering sched-

SHERRY BYRAM, vocational horticulture teacher at Owensville High School, visits Monday with Audra Jahnsen and her children, Annie and Mason, as they shop for plants at the school's greenhouse.

PHOTOS BY DAVE MARNER

See **Experience**, Page 5B

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OWENSVILLE HIGH School student Olivia Crull checks out Audra Jahnsen's family during their visit to the school's greenhouse on Monday. Crull is a freshman in the Agricultural Science I class at OHS. The school's plant sale continues through noon Saturday, May 5. Jahnsen's son, Mason, had selected plants to help care for as a summer project.

"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." — Margaret Atwood

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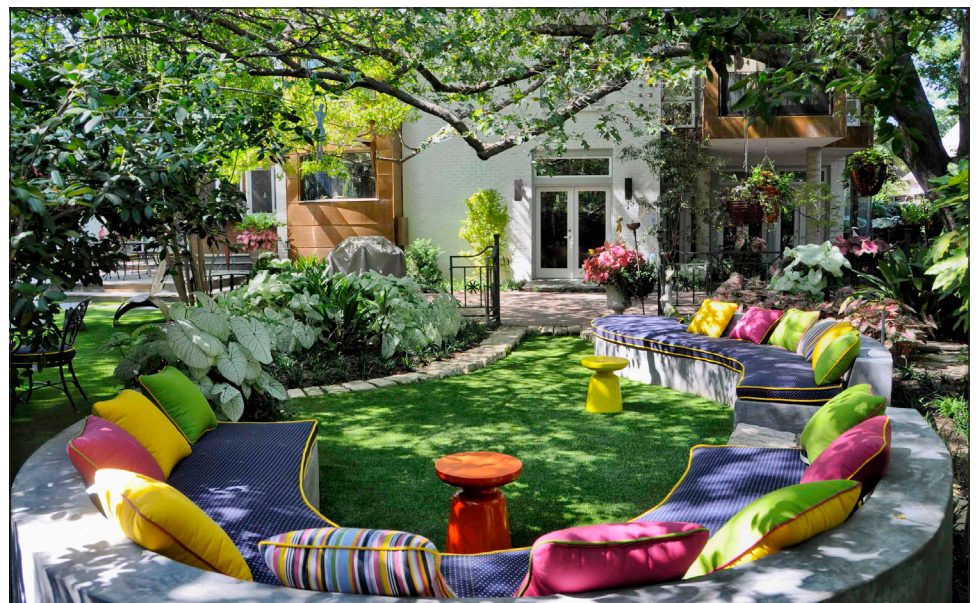
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PHOTOS BY DAVE MARNER

A ROBBIN shields from the wind behind a bush on the east side of a house in the 600 block of West Monroe recently as hostas sprout nearby. After spring weather pushed the temperature into the 70s and 80s earlier this month, the region experienced a cold snap this past weekend which brought out frost and freeze warnings. The flower bed was filled with creeping phlox.

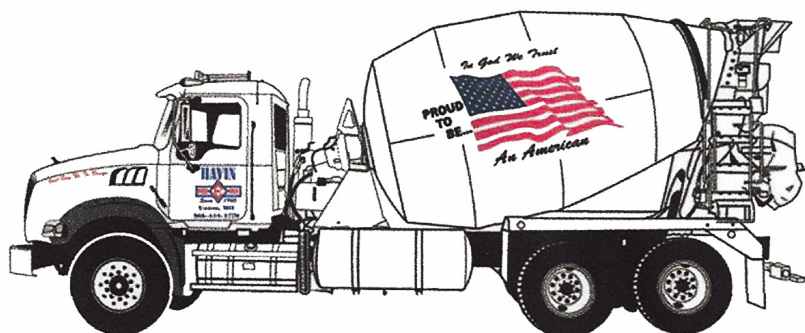
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Experience • from page 2B

ules, nutrient deficiencies, parasites, and plant diseases,” she said. “This class has expanded my knowledge as I learn to deal with the many plants in our greenhouse.”

Kramer said the class has expanded his knowledge as well.

“One of the major and beneficial things I learned was how to start growing from seed to thriving plant,” Kramer said. “We had planted hundreds of seeds by hand and slowly nurtured them until they were thriving enough for us to sell.”

Students also learn how to treat plants for bugs and diseases.

“Some of the easiest parts of greenhouse planting were when it was the most fun,” Gehlert said. “Planting plugs and seedlings were enjoyable, especially as we watched the plants grow throughout the spring. Being at the sale was one of my favorite times in the greenhouse.”

Kitchen said they planted thousands of plugs, but it wasn’t all about dropping the seeds.

“We do lots of planting, including thousands of plugs, dividing plants, propagation, and starting from seeds,” Kitchen said. “In this process, we learned the correct methods of watering, and how to

cut plants back to encourage growth. The most beneficial learning experience I had was learning how different plants thrive in different conditions.”

Likewise, Kramer said treating the plants for bugs was hard.

“It was hard at times but also easy, like when we first started the year we spent the entire class period and multiple days caring for the geraniums having to clean mealybugs and remove dead leaves,” Kramer said. “It’s all a part of a greenhouse. It takes work but also takes a sort of piece of mind.”

Seeing their hard work walk out the door with people that really loved their plants was a special moment for Gehlert. “It helped me realize how much people loved our plants—it made the hard work worth it!” She said, “Sometimes working with the plants could be overwhelming as we prepared for the sale, but once we saw all of the people buying the plants and admiring the work put into growing them, it made me realize how wonderful it was to have this opportunity.”

Learning to grow in a greenhouse gave both students a new perspective to planting.

“If someone were to start greenhouse planting, I would let them know that it is fun, but you have to be committed to it,” Gehlert said. “Taking care of plants is time-consuming and takes hard work. You have to keep them watered and healthy and have to watch for any problems so that you can treat them if any arise. It is a wonderful opportunity to grow these plants, but it is a job as well as a hobby.”

The classes put an extraordinary amount of work and hours into the plants.

“We would spend 30 minutes a day, five days a week and we did that almost every day out of the school year,” Kramer said. “At first I really did not like gardening and plants but this class changed that.”

The amount of work that gets put in is really astounding, they agreed.

“Almost every school day in the spring we went out to the greenhouse and worked, which does not even count for the weekends when Ms. Byram came in and watered the plants,” Gehlert said. “It is truly a good experience and is worth the hard work.”

Kitchen added, “Every day my class spends about 45 minutes in the greenhouse. Working and organizing the space.”

During her time gardening in the greenhouse, Gehlert said the experience was

enjoyable, and she will take the information she learned into her future.

“As I continue to work with plants, I now have knowledge of things I never knew before taking this class,” she said. “It was worth my time, and I am so happy to have had a teacher who knew so much about what she was teaching us. Our class could not have done any of this without Ms. Byram.”

Kramer added the class not only expanded his knowledge but created bonds with his classmates.

“With this class I have learned so much, like how to deal with an infestation or how to deal with a deficiency in a plant,” he said. “This class also formed bonds with others in my class that I had not known before.”

“I am very grateful that our school give us this opportunity otherwise I would’ve never discovered my love for plants!” Kitchen said.

The Greenhouse Plant Sale will continue from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through April 28 and again from May 1-5 at OHS.

“The people of the community who were able to come in, look at, and purchase plants at the plant sale — I’m so happy to have had the chance to partake in this class and to work with the plants.”



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Create your native plant garden

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

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

What are native plants?

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

See **Native plants**, Page 3B

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Native plants • from page 2B

environment and thrive with little supplemental watering or chemical nutrients.

Natives vary by region

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

Start native planting

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

It's important to keep in mind that native varieties may look less cultivated than more exotic blooms and foliages designed to sell for their unique appearances. Wildflowers and native grasses may be the types of native plants found in abundance, which may grow up and out quickly. These other tips can help the process.

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

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

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

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

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



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How to pick the right trees

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

As appealing as trees are, not all trees and landscapes make for the perfect match. The Arbor Day Foundation notes the importance of planning when designing a landscape. Planning ensures the trees homeowners ultimately choose for

See **Trees**, Page 9B

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Trees • from page 8B

their properties will grow well in the soil and moisture present in their yards.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Home & Garden

WED., APRIL 26, 2023 ■ PAGE 10B

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Did you know?

Vinyl siding is not something that many homeowners may consider painting, but it can be done. However, some contractors may not recommend it as the best option to overhaul a home. Painting siding means it will only be as durable as the paint used. It's also essential to determine if painting vinyl will void any warranties. Wood or engineered wood or fiber cement siding tend to be better options than vinyl should you want to switch colors down the line. But vinyl siding can be painted if it is done right, and it can be an affordable way to change the look of a home without investing in new siding. According to Benjamin Moore Paints, vinyl siding that will be painted will need to be cleaned thoroughly, including the removal of any mildew, chalk or dirt, to enhance paint adhesion. Pitted or porous vinyl siding always must be primed, but others may not require priming. Choose an exterior paint designed for painting on vinyl. Benjamin Moore has a palette called Colors for Vinyl that can be used in select exterior paint lines. Two coats of paint are recommended. According to BobVila.com, paint for vinyl has acrylic and urethane resins that accommodate the expansion and contraction of vinyl and help the paint stick. Also, for the best results, the home improvement experts on the site advise painting when temperatures are mild and there is low relative humidity and an overcast sky.



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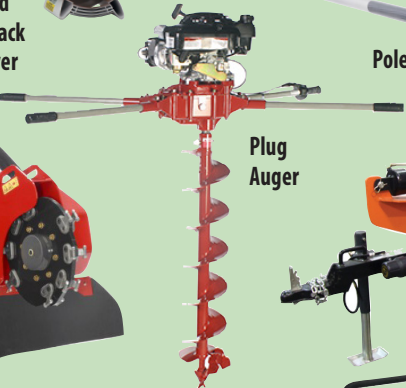
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How to prepare for drought in advance

Drought is becoming a more frequent problem. According to NASA, the last 20 years have produced some of the driest conditions in the American west on record. When drought occurs, it is now more severe and pervasive than it once was, which underscores the importance of planning for drought before it occurs.

Government efforts to combat climate change, which NASA indicates is behind the increase in drought over the last two decades, might produce large scale change needed to protect against drought. But there's also steps private homeowners can take to prepare for drought before it occurs.

- Check your well pump regularly. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security urges homeowners who have a well pump on their properties to check them regularly for leaks. If the pump turns on and off while water is not being used, it has a leak. Addressing the leak promptly helps to conserve water, which is one of the most effective means to combatting drought.

- Plant native species. The U.S. Forest



Service notes that native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions. That means they will require less water and will be hardy enough to withstand heat waves in areas where especially high summer temperatures are the norm.

- Raise the blades on your lawn mower. The DHS notes that lawn mow-

er blades raised to at least three inches encourage grass roots to grow deeper and hold soil moisture. That can help lawns survive drought without much intervention, including extra water during times when water restrictions are in place.

- Reseed lawns with drought in mind. When reseeding a lawn, consider the po-

tential for drought. The DHS recommends individuals in areas affected or likely to be affected by drought plant drought-resistant lawn seed. Drought-resistant grasses, which include Bermuda and Zoysia grass, can withstand prolonged periods without water. However, before reseeding, consult a local lawn and garden professional to ensure the grass will thrive in your area.

- Devise a wise watering strategy. Come late spring, devise a watering strategy to take you through the dog days of summer. Water-efficient irrigation systems can protect flowers, plants and shrubs during prolonged periods marked by little to no precipitation. In addition, less water will be lost to evaporation when watering during early morning or evening hours when temperatures tend to be less extreme and the sun is not as high. If possible, hand water during these times of day or set irrigation system timers to do so.

Dry conditions are more common today than they were 20 years ago. That reality means homeowners must plan ahead as they try to help their lawns and gardens survive drought.



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Questions to ask your renovation contractor

Individuals looking to renovate their homes typically reach out to a number of professionals for estimates before choosing a contractor. Once that decision has been made, it's customary to sign a contract to ensure all parties are protected during and after the work.

A renovation contract outlines the details of a remodeling job. The construction company or the general contractor will create this legal document, which will list the steps of the job and how issues will be resolved should problems arise. Prior to signing a contract, however, homeowners should engage in a conversation with the contractor and ask key questions.

- How long have you been in business? Verify the information that the contractor and/or company provides by doing a search with the Better Business Bureau and perusing online reviews to confirm the company is dependable.

- Are you independently owned? Some companies are independently owned businesses while others are franchises. Franchised businesses may have to follow a strict set of rules, while independent contractors may have more leeway in



terms of policies.

- What is your licence number? Obtain the licensure information as well as the contractor's insurance details. A contractor's general liability insurance protects your home and property in the event of an accident.

- Are you familiar with local building codes? Check to see if the contractor has

worked in the area before, and if he or she is familiar with the permit process. Make sure a contract documents who will be securing the permits.

- How will the project be supervised? Some contractors sub-contract out the work and may only stop by to check on progress. Understand how often those drop-ins will take place, and how to get in

touch with the person in charge should a problem arise.

- Is there a warranty? Certain contractors will stand behind their work for a period of time, even coming to make repairs if there are any issues. Check to see if a warranty policy is in place.

- What is the policy for home protection and clean-up? You'll want to ensure the rest of your home doesn't become damaged or soiled due to the construction. Have the contractor spell out plans for mitigating mess during demolition, and whether the construction company will be responsible for removing the debris.

- What is the final price? One of the more important questions to ask is if the price stated on the contract will be the final price, or should incidentals be expected if issues are unearthed during construction? Some contractors may need to tack on charges for extra materials, and that can stretch homeowners' budgets.

It's important to touch base with the contractor and ask key questions about the project, which will be reflected on the contract both parties eventually sign.



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Small renovations that can make a big impact



Home renovations provide a host of benefits. Such projects can increase resale value and improve on the safety, aesthetics and functionality of a home.

Some homeowners may employ the mantra “go big or go home” when they embark on home improvements, thinking that only the largest renovations produce noticeable change. But that’s not the case. Various smaller renovations can provide a lot of bang for homeowners’ bucks as well.

- **Countertops (and hardware):** A complete kitchen overhaul may stretch some homeowners’ budgets. However, changing an older countertop for a new material can provide the facelift a kitchen needs. And while changing the cabinets may be homeowners’ ultimate goal, swapping hardware in dated finishes for newer handles and pulls can provide low-cost appeal.

- **Paint:** Painting a space is an inexpensive improvement that adds maximum impact. Paint can transform dark and drab rooms into bright and airy oases. Paint also can be used to create an accent wall or cozy nooks. Homeowners also can showcase their personalities with their choice of paint colors.

- **Lighting:** Homeowners should not underestimate what a change in lighting can do. When rooms or exterior spaces are illuminated, they take on entirely new looks. It’s worth it to invest in new lighting, whether it’s a dramatic hanging light over the dining room table or task lighting in dim spaces.

- **Weatherproofing:** Improving windows, doors, weatherstripping, and insulation in a home can offer visual appeal and help homeowners save money. The initial investment may be significant, but those costs will pay off in energy savings. According to One Main Financial, space heating is the largest energy expense the average American homeowner has, accounting for around 45 percent of all energy costs.

- **Mudroom:** Turn an entryway into a more functional space with the addition of cabinets, benches or custom-designed storage options that perfectly fit the area. Cubbies and cabinets can corral shoes, umbrellas, hats, bags, and much more.

- **Accent updates:** Any space, whether it’s inside or outside a home, can get a fresh look with new decorative accents. Invest in new throw pillows and even slipcovers for living room sofas. Use new tile or paint the brick on a fireplace in a den, then update the mantel with decorative displays. Purchase wall art that can bring different colors into a room. Change the cushions on deck furniture and buy color-coordinated planters.

These subtle changes will not cost as much as full-scale renovations, but they can still help homeowners transform their homes.

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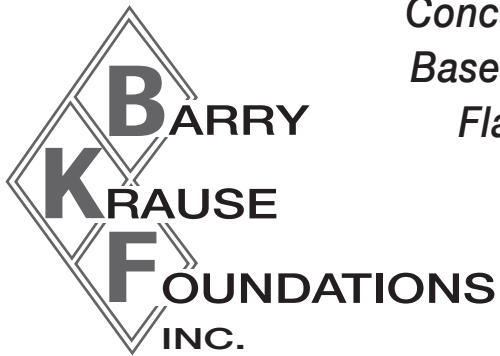
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Why it pays to hire contractors

A sense of pride comes from a successful do-it-yourself home improvement project. However, quite often inexperience and time constraints lead homeowners to turn to professional contractors to make sure jobs get done correctly and on time.

Allied Market Research reported in 2021 that the home improvement services market is predicted to reach \$585.3 billion by 2030. The following are some reasons why renovation-minded homeowners benefit from the services of professionals.

- Tasks can be overwhelming: A home remodel is a large undertaking with many different steps. Contractors who have been around the block a time or two understand how to organize and manage time to get the job done. Plus, they're devoting all of their attention and time toward the remodel when on the job. This differs from when a do-it-yourselfer tries to work on a remodel in between other responsibilities.

- Network of suppliers: A good general contractor will have a list of material suppliers he or she routinely uses. Often contractors become preferred sellers, which means they get a lower wholesale rate.

- Licensed and bonded protection: Licensed and bonded contractors not only

have the skills for the job, they have insurance protection behind them. Therefore, if an injury occurs or the job goes awry, the homeowner will be protected from liability. A license means the contractor will have to uphold licensing standards, which could mean staying current on trade practices and skills.

- Expertise: Experienced contractors have done the work they have been hired to do many times, which means their skills are fine-tuned. Knowing the correct way to do a job results in fewer errors (and thus fewer repairs), shorter time periods to get the work done, and potentially lower costs overall.

- Frees up time: Homeowners who hire out for remodels can utilize their time in other ways, such as on the job or spending time with family.

- Reduces stress: Putting the work in capable hands means homeowners do not have to educate themselves about how to do the task, purchase tools, prevent injuries, and/or deal with potentially negative outcomes. Certainly having extra people in the house can be challenging, but it may not equal the stress caused by tackling a job on one's own.

There are many advantages to hiring contractors to renovate a home instead of taking the DIY route.

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How to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

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

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

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

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

Get all lit up

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

Increase privacy

No matter how friendly homeowners are with their neighbors, there comes a time when privacy is paramount. Fencing, whether it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even star gaze in private.

Address the elements

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

Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A deep seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor sofa or

love seat and chaise lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day, while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather. According to the Family Handyman, soaking in hot tubs can relax tired muscles after a long day, loosen up stiff joints, improve cardiovascu-

lar health, and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mosquitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

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

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Five signs it's time to renovate

Homeowners renovate their homes for a variety of reasons. Renovations can increase the value of a property and make homes safer and more comfortable for their occupants. Improvements also can be made to stay current with the times or to give a home a new vibe.

Statista projects \$510 billion will be spent on home improvements in 2024. The home improvement market is generating significant revenue. In fact, nearly a quarter of Americans opting to renovate their homes will spend an average of \$10,000 on their projects. According to a Home Stars Renovation report, 8 percent of Canadian homeowners who have renovated have spent more than \$20,000 on a

See **Renovate**, Page 17B

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Renovate • from page 16B

home improvement project.

Kitchens and bathrooms often get the most attention when it comes to home improvement. However, every room and space in a home may need a renovation at some point, and the following are five signs it's time to renovate.

1. Age

The National Association of Home Builders states that 50 percent of U.S. homes are over the age of 40. That means that age alone could dictate a need to renovate, particularly if some materials are original to the home. For example, asphalt roofs typically last 25 to 30 years, while window frames can last 20 to 50 years depending on how well they have been maintained.

2. Inconvenient layout

Some homeowners scratch their heads when faced with awkward floor plan layouts. While one may live with the inconvenience for some time, typically a floor plan that isn't working for the homeowner is a major driver of renovations.

3. Outdated looks

A home can look dated even if it is a relatively recent build. That's because trends change quickly. For example, dark, cherry cabinets that were popular just a little while ago have now been replaced by lighter color palettes. Homeowners whose homes do not match the looks emulated in design magazines may consider a change, particularly if they're planning to sell soon.

4. Deterioration

Signs of water, storm or structural damage should be addressed as soon as possible. Any deterioration should be a strong indicator that it's time to renovate.

5. Efficiency

Escalating utility bills could be indicative of an inefficient home. Homeowners can conduct energy audits and then improve the areas where energy loss may be occurring, such as windows, doors, siding, and insulation.

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Did you know?

Though plants might not seem like the first thing individuals think of when they ponder long-term investments, perennials can be just that. The home and garden experts at HGTV note that some perennials can live for a very long time. For example, according to HGTV, the colorful flowering plant peony, despite a blooming season that usually lasts just seven to 10 days, has been known to survive for 70 to 100 years. Hostas are another popular perennial because they require little maintenance, and that extra free time can add up over the course of the hosta's life, which can exceed 15 years. Long-living perennials are not necessarily unusual, but gardeners should know that many perennials, and particularly those characterized as "short-lived," tend to live around three years.



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OUTDOOR LIVING spaces are one popular hardscaping trend that figures to remain sought-after for years to come.

Popular trends in home exteriors

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

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

Wood

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

Painted brick

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

Hardscaping

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

Outdoor lighting

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

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



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Factors to consider before renovating a driveway

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

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

Materials

Driveways can be made from a variety of materials, even grass or soil. The following are some driveway materials homeowners may choose from:

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

Repair or replace?

Nearly any size crack can be patched

with concrete or cold-patch asphalt, or specialty materials, according to This Old House, an online home improvement resource. Repairing and resealing a driveway can help prolong its longevity. Plus, this is a more cost-effective option for homeowners on a budget who want to improve curb appeal and safety.

Large holes or unsightly damage may require a driveway replacement. This also will be the case if a homeowner hopes to expand the driveway. Replacing a driveway requires a time commitment. The existing driveway needs to be demolished and removed. The ground underneath typically is smoothed and tamped down. Substrate or wire mesh also may be installed. After the new material is laid, there may be a period of time for settling and curing, during which use of the driveway is prohibited.

DIY or professional?

While sealing and minor repairs generally can be handled by a homeowner who has researched the process, large repairs or driveway replacements should be left to professionals for the best results. Driveway slope needs to be considered for proper rain runoff, and the professional



will understand the thickness and preparatory steps necessary to ensure driveway durability. Installation of a heated driveway requires a specific skill set and this is a job best left to professional driveway contractors.

Driveway enhancements

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

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

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

- Gates: One doesn't have to live in an exclusive community to have their property enhanced by gates. Gates can give a home a distinguished look.
 - Edging: Driveways can be edged with another material to create definition between the driveway and lawn, or to provide the perfect spots to plant beds.
- Driveway renovations can add curb appeal and improve the functionality of a home.

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Six signs you may need a new HVAC system

There's no place like home, especially when that home is a comfortable and safe haven. One of the ways residents find comfort in their homes is by maintaining the right indoor temperatures, which fluctuate along with the seasons. While there is much to be said about opening windows and doors to let Mother Nature do her thing, indoor comfort is often maintained with an HVAC system.

HVAC stands for heating, ventilation and air conditioning. It can include heat pumps, furnaces and air conditioning units. It is an automated system that works by adjusting a thermostat to regulate air temperature, and sometimes humidity, in the home. According to Enviguard, a commercial contracting provider, HVAC systems also may be used to improve indoor air quality through filtration and oxygen replacement.

As with any mechanical device, an HVAC system has a life span that must be considered. Should any of the following conditions be present, it is likely time to consult with an HVAC technician to see if repairs or replacement of the entire system is warranted.

1. Age

If the HVAC system is more than 10 years old, it could be time to begin budgeting for a new unit. Many modern, efficient systems may last 12 to 14 years with routine maintenance. But it's good to keep an HVAC system's age in mind so you can readily recognize when it might start to fail.

2. Longer or constant running times

An efficient, properly working system will quickly heat or cool the home and then turn off. A system that is turning on repeatedly or having to run for awhile before the set temperature is reached could be nearing the end of its utility.

3. Strange noises

Groaning, banging or loud humming noises should be addressed. While these noises may indicate that certain components need maintenance or replacement, they also could be symptoms of age and a system nearing failure.

4. Frequent repair visits

Knowing the HVAC company's repair person by name is a sign that the system has required too much work in recent months. Repeated issues and repairs are



probably signs that it's time to consider a system replacement.

5. Higher bills

Sticker shock when receiving electricity or gas bills likely mean the HVAC system isn't working efficiently and might need to be replaced.

6. Poor indoor air quality

If the home is dusty or humid or even

if allergies seem to have cropped up out of nowhere, this could indicate a poorly functioning HVAC system.

HVAC systems are vital to keeping indoor environments comfortable and safe. Such systems may exhibit certain signs that indicate they need to be replaced.

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Options to finance home improvements

Renovating a home is a great way to impart personality indoors and out. Improvements can make spaces more livable and address safety issues. Home renovations often take residents' lifestyles into account, and changes can be customized to accommodate a growing family or an empty nest.

No matter the job, home improvements tend to be costly. According to the financial resource SoFi, on average, the cost to renovate or remodel a whole house runs between \$10 and \$60 per square foot. Certain rooms demand a higher cost, with a kitchen or bathroom remodel costing around \$100 to \$250 per square foot due to electrical and plumbing needs. Figuring out how to pay for the improvement project is as essential to the planning process as picking out materials and contractors.

The following are some financial considerations and financing options for homeowners looking to renovate their properties.

- Consider if the investment is worth it. Remodeling magazine routinely assesses common improvements and how much homeowners can expect to recoup on the investment in its annual "Cost v. Value" report. In 2022, a homeowner spending

\$4,000 on a garage door replacement recouped 93.3 percent of the investment, whereas adding a midrange bathroom at \$63,000 would only offer a 51.8 percent return. Homeowners must decide if they want to go forward with the project if they're likely to get just a \$33,000 return when they choose to sell the home later on.

- Refinance the home mortgage. Homeowners can use a cash-out mortgage refinance as a way to access thousands of dollars for a remodel. This taps into a home's equity. Keep in mind that the mortgage will then be a new mortgage at the current interest rate and an outstanding balance higher than what was the current one. Typically 20 percent equity in the home is needed to refinance.

- Take out a personal loan. For those who do not want to refinance, a personal loan or home improvement loan can be good for mid-sized projects, according to American Express. Personal loans for home renovations typically require no collateral and one's credit score determines the interest rate.

- Utilize a home equity line of credit. A HELOC is a form of revolving credit, like a credit card. Homeowners borrow against



the credit line granted with the home being the collateral. As a person pays down what is owed, he or she can borrow more. This is a good idea for recurring or long-term home improvements.

- Try a home equity loan. Home equity loans use the home as collateral like a HELOC. The home equity loan is an installment loan for a fixed amount on a fixed monthly schedule for a set term. These are sometimes called second mort-

gages.

- No- or low-interest credit card. Smaller projects can be financed using credit cards. Many will offer introductory rates with no interest for a few months. This is generally only preferable if a person can pay off the balance before interest is charged.

These are the primary ways to finance home improvement projects when costs exceed available cash on hand.

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Quick and easy ways to give your kitchen a new look



INSTALLING UPLIGHTING beneath kitchen cabinets is an inexpensive way to give a kitchen a new look.

Kitchens are often described as the busiest rooms in a home. Kitchens are where meals are prepared and tend to be go-to gathering spots on holiday get-togethers and during other events when homeowners host family and friends.

With so much time spent in the kitchen, it's easy to see how homeowners might grow a little bored by these rooms. The cost of a kitchen remodel won't be cheap, as the home improvement resource Angi.com notes that the typical cost of such a project in the United States is between \$13,000 and \$38,000. Angi.com estimates even indicate that a high-end remodel could cost homeowners as much as \$61,000. That's beyond many homeowners' budgets. But the good news is that there are many quick and easy, not to mention less expensive, ways to give a kitchen a new look.

- Repaint and restyle the cabinets. Cabinet space is an undeniably precious commodity in a kitchen, especially as more and more homeowners embrace their inner chef and cook more complicated

See **Kitchen**, Page 25B



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Kitchen • from page 24B

ed meals at home. After all, the more expansive a home chef's culinary repertoire, the more space that person needs to store all the tools of the cooking trade. A full cabinet replacement is unnecessary if the cabinets are still functional and not overcrowded, so repainting them can be a great way to give the kitchen a new look while keeping costs reasonable. During the painting project, homeowners can install new cabinet knobs and/or drawer pulls to freshen up the style of the cabinets even further.

- Install under-cabinet lighting. Another inexpensive way to give a kitchen a new look is to install under-cabinet lighting. Under-cabinet lighting serves both an aesthetic and practical purpose. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, under-cabinet lighting can make a kitchen feel more warm and keep the kitchen illuminated when meals aren't being prepared and homeowners don't want to have their overhead lights on but still want to be able to navigate the kitchen safely. During meal prep, under-cabinet lighting can illuminate counters so it's easier to chop, peel and perform other prep tasks.

- Replace existing backsplash. Replacing backsplash is another simple, inexpensive and effective way to give a kitchen a new feel. Homeowners can opt for something neutral that won't upset their existing decor or go with a more bold backsplash that immediately draws the attention of anyone who enters the room. This simple job can be done by the average do-it-yourselfer and the cost of new backsplash won't break the bank.

- Replace existing seating. Whether you have an island countertop with bar stools or a breakfast nook with cushioned seats, replacing the seating is a budget-friendly job that can create a new look when entering the room. Countertop bar stools come in many styles, so giving this area of the kitchen a new feel can be as simple as shifting from classic, high-back stools to more modern swivel stools with a chrome base. For the breakfast nook, replacing a light-colored bench cushion with a bolder alternative can instantly transform the look of the space.

Kitchen remodels can break the bank. But there's a host of budget-friendly ways for cost-conscious homeowners to revitalize these popular spaces in their homes.

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Exterior renovations that boast the best ROI

Remodeling with a return on investment in mind can be a smart strategy for homeowners, whether one is thinking about moving in the next few months or further down the road. Though this approach is an inexact science, in many instances, it's savvy for homeowners to consider what buyers may want when planning home improvements.

Homeowners may be surprised to learn which renovations garner the best ROI at resale. The home loan and refinancing company RenoFi indicates that overall

See **Renovations**, Page 27B

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Removations • from page 26B

home improvement projects provide a 70 percent ROI on average. Many high-ROI projects add functional space and improvement. The following are some exterior renovations that help homeowners recoup the most money at resale, according to Remodeling magazine's "2022 Cost vs. Value Report."

1. Garage Door Replacement: 93.3 percent recouped of \$4,041 cost
2. Manufactured Stone Veneer: 91.4 percent recouped of \$11,066 cost
3. Siding replacement (Fiber Cement): 68.3 percent recouped of \$22,093 cost
4. Window replacement (Vinyl): 67.5 percent recouped of \$20,482 cost
5. Siding replacement (Vinyl): 67.2 percent recouped of \$18,662 cost
6. Window replacement (Wood): 66.3 percent recouped of \$24,388 cost
7. Deck addition (Wood): 64.8 percent recouped of \$19,248 cost
8. Entry Door Replacement (Steel): 63.8 percent recouped of \$2,206 cost

The majority of renovations on Remodeling magazine's list of the best investments are exterior renovations, making this area of a home a particular point of interest for homeowners. The only interior project that cracked the Top 10 ROI for projects was a minor midrange kitchen remodel.

Exterior renovations perhaps add the most bang for your buck because they're not only functional, but also because they add immediate curb appeal. Much in the way it has been said people eat with their eyes first — which is why chefs spend so much time on elaborate plating — buyers will judge a property by how it looks when they arrive, even before they've stepped inside a home. In essence, home buyers often judge a book by its cover. A worn exterior may indicate to potential buyers that the home was not maintained, however false that assumption may be.

It's important for homeowners to consider all factors before beginning a renovation. Certain projects offer a stronger return on investment than others, and that's a significant consideration for homeowners thinking of selling their homes.

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

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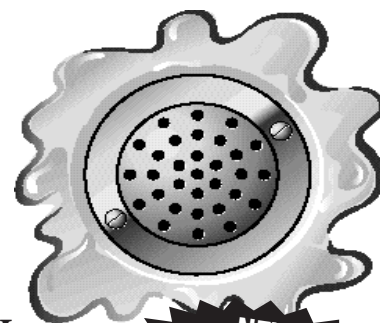
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Simple landscaping strategies that can transform a home's exterior



The interior of a home may be where homeowners and their families spend the majority of their time, and there's no denying that a well-planned interior goes a long way toward making a house a home. However, the exterior of a home, including its landscaping, can serve as a source of pride and catch the eye of prospective buyers when the home hits the market.

It's easy to walk past a home with an eye-catching exterior and assume the homeowner has a green thumb or has spent lots of time and money working on the landscaping. Though that may be true, oftentimes it's the simplest strategies that make all the difference. Homeowners can keep these strategies in mind as they look to transform the exterior of their homes.

- Dress up the walkway. A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank. Create new planting beds and plant bright plants and flowers along each side of the walkway. If it's necessary and within budget, lengthen the walkway to

See **Home exterior**, Page 29B

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Home Exterior • from page 28B

create the feel of a more grandiose entryway.

- Make things more symmetrical. A messy landscape can give a poor first impression, even if the area features some beautiful plants. In such instances, a little effort to make things more symmetrical, with equal parts grass and vegetation, can create a cleaner, more inviting look.

- Mulch your flower and tree beds. Mulch is a relatively inexpensive but effective way to add aesthetic appeal to a landscape. Freshly mulched beds beneath trees and flowers creates a clean and organized look, and the mulch also serves a practical purpose, as it reduces weed growth and helps the soil retain moisture so plants stay healthy and look better throughout the warmer months when rainfall may not be steady or significant.

- Plant shade trees. Shade trees can be especially useful when selling a home. The shade provided by trees can shield grass from blistering summer sun, potentially helping it stay green. A lush green lawn appeals to buyers and gives the impression the home has been well maintained. In addition, shade trees can be used to create the look of a backyard oasis. A well-placed bench beneath a large shade tree can entice buyers who want a relaxing spot to enjoy warm summer days outdoors without getting a sunburn.

- Consider maintenance. The more exotic an exterior landscape is, the more maintenance it's likely to require. Lawn and garden enthusiasts may not be turned off by landscape features that require steady maintenance, but homeowners who don't have much time for such work should keep things simple. A poorly maintained landscape, even if it includes exotic plants and elaborate designs, will adversely affect curb appeal. Another feather in the cap of low-maintenance landscape features is they could prove more appealing to prospective buyers, who may view elaborate, exotic landscaping as a lot of extra work they won't want to do.

Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money.



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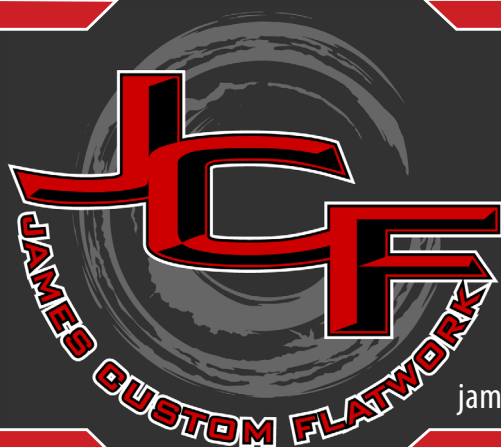
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Tips to pick the right plants for your landscape

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

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

• Conduct a site evaluation. A colorful landscape featuring an array of plants and

flowers can be eye-catching and add curb appeal to a property. However, where plants will be planted is a significant variable that must be considered before

homeowners choose what to plant. The Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts

Amherst notes that site evaluation is the first step when picking plants. A number of factors must be evaluated, including light availability; water availability; exposure to the elements, including wind and extreme temperatures; and competition

See **Plants**, Page 31B



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Plants • from page 30B

from existing vegetation, among other things. Document these variables prior to picking plants. For example, take note of the area you plan to plant to see if it is full sun or partial shade, and then pick plants whose growing conditions align with those you observe.

- Look at more than looks. Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen for a space. If the wrong plants are chosen, they're unlikely to thrive or they could threaten existing vegetation, thus compromising the overall appeal of the property. Native plants can often handle local weather conditions, so prioritize natives over more exotic plants whose key attribute is aesthetic appeal. If jaw-dropping aesthetic appeal is your top priority, speak with a local landscaping professional about which natives can provide that without compromising surrounding vegetation.

- Consider maintenance prior to planting. Maintenance is another variable gardeners must consider. Newly planted trees may require substantial watering

until they've fully established their roots, and some homeowners may not have time for that. In addition, certain plants may require a considerable amount of pruning in order to create and maintain the look homeowners desire. Individuals must be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain new plantings that require such diligence. If not, look for plants that don't require much maintenance while keeping in mind that even low-maintenance plants still require some effort and attention.

- Consider local wildlife. If your lawn is routinely visited by local wildlife, then look for plants that won't look like a meal to these welcome, if uninvited, guests. For example, if you routinely see deer lounging around in your backyard, look for deer-resistant plants. This is a good way to protect your investment, of both time and money, and ensure minimal wildlife traffic through your newly landscaped yard.

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

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