

2012

Spring Home & Garden

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO
The Crittenden Press
 Thursday, May 3, 2012

Gardens not exclusive to country setting

City resident favors plants in organic, raised beds

BY ALLISON EVANS
 PRESS ASSISTANT EDITOR

Misti Autry has had her fingers in the dirt for almost all of her 32 gardening seasons. Her earliest gardening memories are from working in her grandparents' gardens and tobacco fields in Ohio County.

Today she's taken her love of fresh food to her back yard, where she is growing about 15 varieties of fruits and vegetables in eight raised beds in a rather unsuspecting place.

Without a close look, you might not see the bounty growing beyond her 100-year-old home adorned with a picturesque row of irises along North College Street.

For the last eight years, Autry and her partner Jeff Priest have renovated the early 1900s home, balancing their time between interior and exterior improvements. The house needed a little TLC inside and out, but they started by replacing the crumbling brick pillars that served as the home's foundation. They later tore off the home's plaster walls and replaced them with drywall, renovating the house almost entirely on their own. Their most celebrated project is the addition of a kitchen and utility room, which tripled their work-space and dining area.

"Our kitchen was seven feet wide with one area of counter space and the washing machine sitting across from the refrigerator," she said, noting how she used the top of the appliance as added space to



PHOTO BY ALLISON EVANS

Misti Autry's planting is complete, now the Marion resident anticipates the bounty that she will enjoy with friends and family this summer.

prepare meals.

Now she has much more space – and desire – to cook and entertain.

A few interior projects remain, but Autry and Priest are proud of the progress they've made in their home and the character they have preserved, including a small chimney they have left exposed in their daughter's

bedroom. While adding a closet to the bedroom they discovered a beautiful brick chimney which they left exposed between shelves Priest built to display Baylee's books and soccer hardware.

While the renovations have at times been stressful, the back yard gardening is relaxing and gratifying.

Growing in her raised, organic beds are three varieties of peppers, three types of tomatoes and cucumber, zucchini, eggplant, squash and herbs.

Much of her bounty will be consumed by her family, which includes her 12-year-old daughter Baylee; however, she wants to expand her knowledge of canning

and shares her surplus fresh vegetables with neighbors and family.

While she has planted corn in a traditional garden plot behind her home, she prefers raised beds for a couple of reasons. Raised beds produce fewer weeds, they're easier to prepare in city neighborhoods where tree roots are prevalent and

it's easier to keep the dirt from getting compacted since there is no need to walk around the plants as in a traditional garden.

Though plant growth and production is slower, Autry prefers a completely organic process, which began with naturally composted dirt.

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View cabin's greatest asset

Retreat most enjoyable with friends

BY ALLISON EVANS
 PRESS ASSISTANT EDITOR

A sign on Don Thomas' porch sums it up perfectly.

To see clearly, see slowly, see reflectively, see gratefully.

It's somewhat of a motto for the Crittenden County native whose rural cabin is full of the things he and his wife Louise love – especially when family and friends are gathered to enjoy the beautiful countryside.

Perched on a pristine piece of Crittenden County landscape near Ky. 91, the Thomases' cabin is very comfortable and modern, yet modest. However, there is no price tag on the fabulous view. It is one its visitors say can heal the soul when you follow the instructions on the porch sign, to see slowly, reflectively and gratefully.

Don Thomas loves to share the venue with his children and grandchildren, but also with others who desire a brief retreat.

"The fascinating thing about the cabin is not the cabin, it's a view that God created for us," he said. "It is a great place to get away, to ponder a bit, to sit on that deck and enjoy its panoramic view."

The two-story cabin, which has recently received



a new addition, has been in Thomas' family for 100 years.

Thomas, who is retired after a career with John Deere in Kokomo, Ind., designed the cabin with his family in mind.

It was originally a small structure with a loft and was recently expanded to include a second loft and

additional bedroom and a basement.

He's proud to have used local labor for every facet of the project, including some unique touches by Amish carpenter Henry Miller.

"The ceiling is constructed using poplar cut in the community, and Henry found logs with some character and cut them just the



PHOTOS BY ALLISON EVANS

Visitors take in a spring sunset and the majestic countryside from the deck of Don and Louise Thomas' Crittenden County cabin. At left, large windows allow a birdseye view of the scenery from a bedroom loft.



right size to do spindles on the handrail and staircase," Thomas says.

"There's no television, no telephone," but that's by design.

"Many times Henry or others working on the place would ask me what I thought about this or what I thought about that, and I told them 100 times, 'do it like it was yours.'"

Another interesting touch

that brings the outdoors in is a large tree branch that serves as the mounting hardwood for pendant lighting above the kitchen counter.

Thomas feels his family's presence even if they're miles away, through pictures on the refrigerator and the mark his grandchildren left in red and green ink on window treatments hanging above the windows

looking out onto the lush green countryside.

A little reflection into his heritage is hanging just inside the entrance as well, including a Northwestern Tigers t-shirt, a toboggan and gloves, a water ski and golf club.

It's still a work in progress, says Thomas, who looks forward to landscaping and manicuring the lawn. But with the pristine view, it's easy to see how hard it would be for anyone to pull themselves off of the balcony for too many hours at a time.



Yellow and purple irises line College Street in front of Misti Autry and Jeff Priest's 100-year-old home, which the couple has remodeled since 2004.

PHOTO BY ALLISON EVANS

GARDEN

Continued from Page 1B

She and her family have a compost pile where they pitch all grass clippings and food scraps, but she purchased the compost used to start her beds. No chemicals are used, only natural fertilizer.

Keeping cats and deer – yes, deer on North College Street – out of her beds has been a challenge. Autry has taken taken at least two steps to keep cats out of her beds, including inserting plastic forks into the dirt in an attempt to deter little paws from walking around nibbling on produce, and building a makeshift litter box filled with sand next to her vegetable beds.

You wouldn't think deer would be a problem a block off Main Street, but they have been. "Last year I was sitting on the patio studying in the middle of the day and three deer walked right past me to the garden," Autry said. "They don't just eat one tomato, they take a bite out of each one, ruining a lot of them."

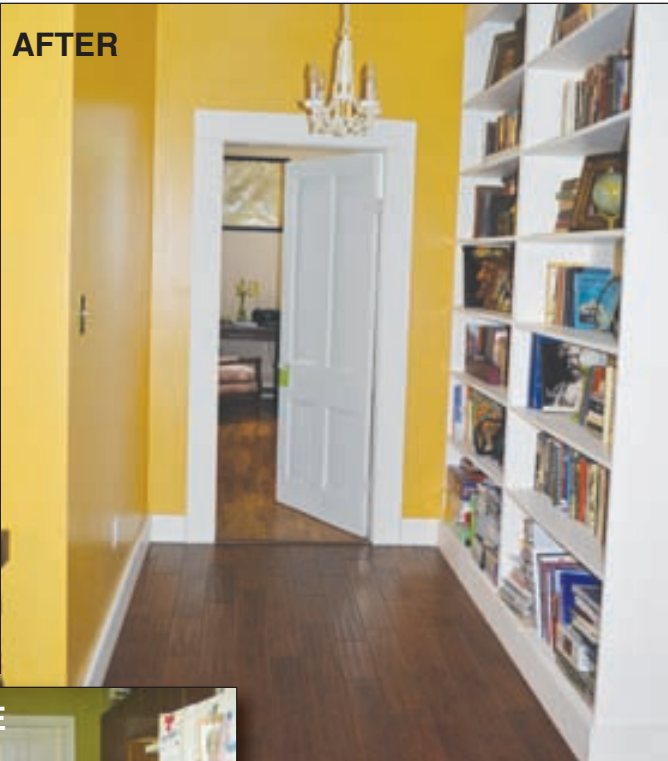
To document her

progress, Autry started a blog to share pictures and document her progress, accessible at <http://abackyardbounty.blogspot.com>.

"What really gets me excited is my edible garden," she writes. "I've yet to find anything else that gives me a feeling of satisfaction and pride like that of eating something that I've grown."

"My ultimate goal is to produce enough fruits and vegetables to completely supply my family through the growing season with enough surplus to freeze and can, to enjoy through the winter months. A more sustainable lifestyle is very important to me and one of the easiest places to begin is in the garden."

She plans to further develop her back yard and had hoped to raise laying hens in "the cutest little coop," before learning that the City of Marion has an ordinance against laying hens since they are considered farm animals.



An addition to their College Street home allowed Misti Autry and Jeff Priest to convert their tiny kitchen (inset) into a spacious hallway leading to their daughter's bedroom.

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Tool checklist for the DIYer

METRO
 A do-it-yourselfer is only as good as his or her willingness to learn. Having the right tools in your toolbox or hanging over your work bench can make repairs and installations go much more smoothly.

Review this checklist and aspire to have these tools in your home-repair arsenal.

- Category: Assembly, Dismantling, Attaching
- Claw hammer
 - Ball peen hammer
 - Nails, in a variety of sizes
 - Pry bar
 - Flat-head screwdriver
 - Phillips-head screwdriver
 - Screws, in a variety of sizes and finishes
 - Open-end wrench
 - Box or socket wrench
 - Allen key
 - Strap wrench
 - Channel lock pliers
 - Long-nosed pliers
 - End-cutting nippers
 - Contact cement
 - Epoxy
 - Wood glue
 - Vice
 - C-clamp

- Category: Measuring and Leveling
- Level
 - Tape measure
 - Carpenter's Square
 - Chalk line
 - Wood or plastic ruler

- Category: Power Tools
- Circular saw
 - Router
 - Mitre saw
 - Reciprocating saw
 - Bench saw
 - Nail gun
- Category: Hand Tools, etc.
- Shop filter
 - Chisel
 - Handsaw
 - Nails, in a variety of sizes
 - Putty knife

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Home decor, design fans share ideas on Pinterest

By SARAH WOLFE
For The Associated Press

Looking for new home design trends or fresh ways to brighten up your living space for spring?

These days, many designers and design enthusiasts are turning to the social media site Pinterest for inspiration.

A virtual pinboard or scrapbook, the website allows users to collect and organize their favorite images and ideas from around the Internet. "Pinners" can add their own images to their online profiles, or peruse others' pinboards and "like" or "re-pin" their images for future use.

Each image links back to the website from which it was taken, and images can be organized by topic, color, design, event or any other category.

While there's not yet a way to quantify pins, style and home decor are among Pinterest's most popular pinning categories, says Lauren Indvik, an editor at the social media news blog Mashable.com.

Remodeling your kitchen? Create a "Kitchen Makeover" pinboard and scour Pinterest for ideas. Or go more specific: "Countertop Ideas" or "Kitchen Paint Colors."

"Pinterest is like keeping an electronic clip file — that manila folder with tons of tear sheets from magazines. It's how I renovated my first kitchen," says Mary Leigh Howell, a free-lance public re-



lations specialist in Greensboro, N.C.

Women make up most of Pinterest's more than 10 million users, and are driving traffic to home magazines like Country Living and Elle Decor in record numbers, Indvik says. Last summer, Pinterest sent more traffic to marthastewart.com than Facebook and Twitter combined, and House Beautiful magazine has seen triple-digit increases in referrals in the past six months, according to Indvik.

How to start

You can join Pinterest by requesting an invite from someone already on the site, or by clicking "Request an Invite" on the home page. Once invited, register using your Facebook or Twitter account.

Once you create an account and install the "pin it plug-in" to your bookmarks bar, Pinterest automatically generates a few generic pinboards for you to begin pinning to. Either nix or rename these boards to something you actually care about so they don't appear blank on your

online profile, advises Brie Dyas, editor of Stylelist Home for the Huffington Post.

Start pinning by searching in the upper-left corner for an item or project (keep it short), or look up brands, stores and TV personalities, browse their pinboards and share what you like, says Sabrina Soto, host of HGTV's "The High Low Project."

Click on the "Everything" tab in the middle of the home page to see all images being pinned at a certain time. Or scroll down to narrow what you're seeing to categories such as art, design, DIY and crafts, gardening, or print and posters.

How to thrive

You can turn your pinning up a notch by downloading the Pinterest app to your smartphone, letting you pin products or home-improvement ideas you see while out and about, Soto says. "This is so helpful for when I'm looking for ideas on my upcoming products," she says.

Search often if you're looking for ideas for a specific room or project.

"Follow someone so that when they update their boards, you will be notified," says Megan Meloy, design expert for the Norcross, Ga.-based children's room retailer KooKoo Bear Kids. She says she uses Pinterest every day to showcase the company's merchandise, at <http://pinterest.com/megankkbbk>.

If you're looking for more followers, Dyas recommends

making yourself known by following, liking and commenting on other people's pins, and not pinning everything you like at once.

What to avoid

"Don't limit yourself to creating a single board dedicated to one topic," says Soto. "Combine everything that you love and make several boards that cover a wide range of interests."

She also recommends branching out to pin images from many different websites, not just one.

Blogger Amy Lynn Andrews, who penned a list of Pinterest tips at <http://bloggingwithamy.com/pinterest-tips>, advises against cutesy descriptions for pins ("Super cool!" "Love this!"). Instead, use keyword-rich entries (black concrete countertop) to make your pins and boards easier to find.

"Must Follow" boards and pinners

Everyone has the ability to be a great pinner, Howell says.

"You don't have to be famous or artistic," she says. "You just have to recognize great visuals."

Here are some popular boards and pinners as recommended by home-design pros and Pinterest fans.

Search for them by their user names:

- Lonny Magazine: lonny-mag
- HGTV: hgvtv
- Elle Decor: elledecor
- Rue Magazine: ruemag
- Real Simple: realsimple
- Joy Cho: ohjoy
- Etsy: etsy
- Better Homes and Gardens: bhg
- Rachel Halvorson: rachel-hdesign
- DIY Network: diynetwork
- Gray Livin': graylivin
- Martha Stewart Living: ms_living

Modernizing your home can simplify your life

STATE POINT

Do you ever leave the house feeling like you forgot something? Life is full of little details, and if you are running an entire household, you may find it overwhelming to keep everything in order.

Luckily, modern technologies that can help you organize those details are becoming more affordable.

"When it comes to managing your home, it's all about modernization and simplicity," says Jamie Elgie, Senior Director of Product Management at Belkin, a maker of connectivity devices and accessories. "Where it's possible, let new technologies do some of the thinking and heavy lifting for you."

Here are some easy tips to update your home for a more simplified life:

Go paperless

If your paperwork is a mess, consider transferring your documents to an electronic filing system. Not only will the system be implicitly organized for you, you will also be eliminating those stacks of paper that threaten to clutter every room of the house.

Organizing your financial statements, bills, and health care documents will help you remember appointments, payments, and other deadlines.

Automate electronics

These days you can run your home's electronic devices from the comfort of just about anywhere. New home automation technology is becoming increasingly accessible and affordable to consumers.

Opt for a system that can be controlled from your smartphone, such as Belkin's WeMo home automation products, so you can schedule your lights, gadgets, heating, air conditioning and other devices to turn on and off at times that meet your family's needs.

Gone will be the days you fret over whether you left the iron on for the day. Now you can ensure everything is switched off the moment a worry strikes.

Such technologies also have motion sensor abilities too, which make turning lights and sensors on and off as easy as entering or exiting a room.

Modernize appliances

Take an inventory of your home's appliances and eliminate the avoidable headache caused by out-of-date appliances no longer performing optimally.

If you've ever taken your dishes out of the dishwasher only to discover you still needed to wash certain items by hand, it's time to invest in a new one that will get it right the first time.

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The best vacations lift us out of the frenzy of our lives, whisking us off to faraway places that relax and rejuvenate us.

Yet a great vacation can also be a great financial strain as well – and really, how relaxing is that? Especially since once the trip is over, there's typically little to show for all the expense beyond a few snapshots you can post on Facebook.

So how do you meet the pressing need for a stress-reducing change of scenery without wiping out your savings in the process? The solution may actually be simpler, and closer, than you think: Open your own back door, and begin imagining the leisure possibilities right be-

yond your doorstep! Instead of throwing a bunch of money at a short-term getaway, consider investing a portion of it into transforming your backyard into a personal relaxation oasis.

Don't be put off by how big a task that sounds. Start out simple, making additional changes as finances allow, and inspiration strikes.

To begin with, your yard may need some degree of facelift. Hire a quality professional landscaper who can design around native plant species, for maximum benefit and minimal upkeep.

Yet landscaping is really only setting the stage – you still need some kind of show-stopper to complete your

yard's transformation. Pools and decks are whopping financial commitments. There is, however, a less bank-breaking path to backyard-relaxation bliss: Invest in the very symbol of relaxation itself. Invest in a hammock and hammock stand.

Plus, a quality fabric hammock can make your yard look as pretty as a vacation postcard as well. Recent advances in all-weather synthetic textiles have vastly expanded design and color options for fabric hammocks.

"It used to be fabric hammocks were just drab," notes Walter R. Perkins III, CEO of The HammockSource, the world's largest manufacturer and seller of hammocks. "Owning one meant watching

what little color it had fade like a flower by summer's end. But today, a quality fabric hammock can be a show-stopper for your yard, for many seasons to come."

Add an arc-style cypress or faux-wicker hammock stand, and your outdoor living space becomes not only a gorgeous relaxation destination, but also one that requires no checked-baggage fees or full-body scans to get to!

Your favorite patch of yard is finally the primo spot for unwinding, a personal relaxation space for letting your



METRO PHOTO
Turn your yard into its own vacation destination with the addition of a quality fabric hammock and hammock stand.

mind wander to all those distant getaway places you might one day like to go. But for now, you're pretty content right where you are, aren't you?

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Easy home improvement projects for weekend warriors

Few industries have grown as much in the last decade-plus as the home improvement industry. Whereas it was once commonplace for homeowners to have a handyman on speed dial, nowadays homeowners handle not only the routine upkeep necessary to maintain a home, but many home improvement projects as well.

Home expert Danny Lipford, host of the nationally syndicated TV show, Today's Homeowner, and radio show, Homefront, said, "Today you've got not only an amazing selection of tools to help with every project, but they also shorten the time it used to take to complete the project. When you couple that with all the DIY instruction and programming out there, it's no wonder we have the confidence to do more on our own."

As popular as home improvement projects have become, many homeowners still find themselves pressed for time when it comes to tackling projects around the house. For homeowners without much time during the week, Woodcraft offers the following projects tailor-made for weekend warriors.

Ready The Deck For Summer Fun

With spring on the horizon, the season to relax on the deck and soak up the sun is right around the corner. Homeowners can upgrade their deck and create an incredibly strong wood-to-wood bond with the Kreg Deck Jig System. Compatible with composite deck boards and ACQ treated lumber, the Kreg



METRO PHOTO

Regardless of individual skill level, user-friendly tools like the Fein MultiMaster, make home improvement projects safer and easier for homeowners.

Deck Jig System can help homeowners create a beautiful and functional deck surface that's completely free of exposed fasteners and painful splinters. The Kreg Deck Jig System's easy grip handles help DIYers gain a secure hold and completely control each and every joint, while the system's three separate drill guides allow for easy installation of deck boards in a variety of hard-to-reach

areas. When combined with a few simple tools homeowners already own, the Kreg Deck Jig System ensures homeowners can vastly improve their deck no matter how pressed for time they might be.

Pain a new look inside

Spring is often seen as a season of rejuvenation, so why not give your home a brand new look by repainting the interior? Veteran DIYers

can no doubt recall when painting took as much elbow grease as it did time, but times have changed. Thanks to the new Fein MultiMaster, the tedious and time-consuming job of scraping old paint with a putty knife and sanding tight spaces with paper wrapped around your finger is a thing of the past. The MultiMaster's profiled sanding pads make scraping old paint easier than ever be-

fore, while its multiple user-friendly accessories that scrape, cut, shave, sand, polish, and remove grout make the MultiMaster an ideal companion for homeowners with several projects on tap this spring.

Tackle indoor projects on rainy days

Spring might be synonymous with feelings of rejuvenation, but it also brings spring showers. On rainy weekends, tackle interior projects with the Rockwell BladeRunner. Whether you want to cut and install base molding, chair rails or hardwood flooring or frame and trim windows and doors, the lightweight, portable BladeRunner is your go-to tool. This precision cutter's variable-speed motor control and simple blade changing mechanism allow you to easily cut wood, metal, ceramic tile, aluminum, and plastic using a T-shank jigsaw blade. You can operate the BladeRunner on a benchtop or use the convenient wall mount bracket. Attach the tool's dust port to your shop vac for easy cleanup.

Prepare tools in advance

While there are several projects homeowners can complete in a single weekend, no project is likely to be successful without properly maintained tools. Homeowners should take inventory of their tools before beginning any projects to ensure the tools won't cause any delays. The Work Sharp(R) Knife and Tool Sharpener can bring tools back to life in a matter of minutes. This handheld,

motorized tool sharpens any knife as well as scissors, tin snips, garden shears, and even lawn mower blades for green thumbs. The sharpener's patented Flex-Tek(TM) belt technology conforms to the shape of any blade, practically guaranteeing a sharp edge and ensuring your next home improvement project will start off on the right foot.

Work smarter

Tackling a home improvement project in a single weekend might not be easy, but DIYers can take steps to make such projects easier. For example, Vibe-Away Anti-Slip Pads are made from recycled tires and designed to reduce the transfer of vibration that occurs in most woodworking tools and stationary equipment. This shock absorption pad helps reduce sound, vibrations, and pulsating of router tables, scrollsaws, table saws and other benchtop or stationary machines, making it easier to complete a project mistake-free and in less time.

LOC-Blocks Interlocking Material Gripping Blocks grip both the work surface as well as your project without the use of any clamps. The non-slip pads support work during assembly without leaving marks, while the non-marring pads allow homeowners to lift work above the surface while finishing edges.

To learn more about products that can help you successfully complete your home improvement projects this spring, visit www.woodcraft.com.

Adding more lights indoors helps to change a home's decor

Many times the arrival of warmer weather makes homeowners reconsider the decor of their home. After a long winter spent indoors, homeowners often yearn for some changes around the house.

One cost-effective way homeowners can give their homes a new look for feel without breaking the bank is to address lighting throughout the house. With some easy changes to a home's lighting scheme, homeowners can notice a stark difference in their home's appearance.

- Assess lighting needs. First and foremost, evaluate your lighting situation by looking at how much light is currently around the house, including the home's exterior. Is there adequate light available for activities such as reading? Is there sufficient light outside the home to safely see the stairs or walkway? How much sunlight enters your home, and are you unknowingly blocking that light from getting in? Let the sun shine in by opening curtains, pulling up shades and keeping windows clean. This can add life to a room while simultaneously benefitting the environment and lowering your energy bill.

- Consider new fixtures. For older homeowners with an empty nest, consider lamps with rocker switches. These are large enough to be turned on even if hands are full or if you're suffering from arthritis that can make it

hard to maneuver hands and fingers.

Busy homeowners might benefit from fixture styles that clean easily and don't require much maintenance. Seniors might also want lights that make changing the bulbs easier. Ceiling lights with bulb covers may look pretty, but they are often

hard to change and clean. And, if one of the bulbs burns out or if the fixture is dirty, it won't emit the right amount of light.

- Get outdoors. Lighting outside the home is as important as lighting inside. In addition to making it easier to get around, external lighting can also keep prospective

thieves at bay. External stairways should be completely illuminated and on motion sensors if not already on a nighttime timer.

- Add extra lighting to work areas. Add extra light fixtures in work areas or areas of heavy traffic, such as the kitchen or living room. Those with a home office should keep the areas well lit, as you

likely spend extended periods of time in the home office.

- Add lighting to reading areas. Reading in poorly lit areas is a recipe for eye trouble. To lessen the likelihood of developing eye trouble, place reading chairs near windows or add lamps or other lights to areas commonly used for reading.

- Install nightlights

throughout the home. There's no reason midnight walks to the refrigerator or restroom should be done in the dark. That only increases the likelihood for falls and injury. Install nightlights in hallways and near the bottom and tops of all staircases to decrease the chances of injury.

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Choose succulents for low-maintenance outdoor landscaping

METRO

Now is the time of year to focus on outdoor landscaping projects. One popular project involves redesigning the front yard or backyard to include an array of different flowers and foliage. While many people gravitate to the flashy and colorful annuals on display at nurseries and home centers, you may want to consider adding some succulents to your home landscape.

Succulent plants can be a boon to a homeowner without the time or resources to maintain plants. Succulents get their name from their primary function, which is drawing up and storing water. Succulents are able to

thrive in arid conditions, and there are more than 300 different types, including some exotic species.

The advantages to planting succulents are many. Because they store water in their stems, roots and leaves, this reduces the number of times an owner must water them. Succulents can go several days between waterings. Succulents, like cacti, that have few if any leaves, are perhaps best at managing water because they lose little to evaporation through the foliage.

Succulents are particularly good to have in areas prone to arid temperatures or

where water restrictions are often in place. They can be environmentally friendly because of their ability to conserve water. Succulents treat water as a precious resource, and their entire makeup is designed to minimize consumption of water.

Because they thrive in sunlight, succulents can be the ideal plants to put in extremely sunny and hot locations. They will not wither and dry out due to extreme heat. There are many other advantages to planting succulents; some of which include:

- Whether you have ample acreage in the yard or simply

some containers available for planting, succulents will thrive. They grow just as well in containers as they do in the ground.

- Succulents are perennials. So once you plant them, they should last for years and years without the hassle and expense you can expect from planting annuals every year.

- Indoor greenhouses or sunrooms can be another good place for succulents. They prefer not to get chilled, which makes a controlled environment advantageous.

When considering a spot for your succulents, choose areas that get plenty of sun. Think about pruning back or

removing trees that would create too much shade on the succulents. Space the succulents widely apart – more so than you would with other plants – to allow them to spread. Pebbles or gravel make good mulching mate-

rial around succulents so that drainage will be adequate.

Visit a gardening center or home improvement store to learn more about the myriad types of succulents that can add beauty to most gardens.

Modern carpet eco-friendly, made from corn

STAFF REPORT

Carpets are an essential part of home décor. Eco-friendly commodities are the latest trend in the present generation. Many manufacturers are trying to make their product using the by-products available naturally. Some carpet manufacturers developed with an idea of producing eco-friendly carpets.

For making eco-friendly carpets, manufacturers selected a new natural product which is nothing but corn. Yes, corn – a major crop in so many states. And the process involved in corn carpet making involves the following steps.

Manufacturers of corn carpets get the required corn from the farmers who are harvesting corn crops.

They ground the corn into paste and cook it to get starch out of it.

The starch then will be converted into sugar.

Again the sugars are con-

verted into plastic.

That plastic is made into fibers, which are as thin as human hair.

Finally those fibers are spun into carpet yarn.

Using that yarn, carpets will be weaved.

SmartStrand with DuPont Sorona is an example of a carpet produced by renewable resources. Thirty-seven percent of Sorona is made from renewable resources instead of more limited petroleum ingredients. Production of seven square yards of 40-ounce SmartStrand with DuPont Sorona carpet saves enough energy to equal one gallon of gasoline; plus, SmartStrand with DuPont Sorona carpet emits 63 percent less greenhouse gas than production of nylon 6.

Corn carpets have stain resistant capabilities, are biodegradable in landfills and also reduce carbon dioxide emission in to the environment. They are easily recycla-

ble and are more helpful for the atmosphere.

Some information provided by Knowledge-Peak.com.

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Protect your garden from hungry animals

METRO

Homes full of garden beds with blooming flowers and foliage can seem warm and inviting. Planting flowers is one of the easiest ways to transform the appearance of a home with minimal effort and expense. Too often homeowners plant annuals and perennials only to find their hard work has been damaged by hungry animals, like deer, rabbits and underground pests. There are ways to keep animals away from plants — many of which are humane and environmentally safe.



METRO PHOTO

Deer and rabbits can eat many garden plants down to the ground.

Keeping furry marauders away from the garden is something individuals who live in rural or suburban areas have to consider when planting. Many communities are growing and encroaching on the natural habitats of wild animals. With some of their

natural food sources diminishing, animals may decide to partake of the easy pickings that come from residential home gardens.

If you understand how these animals feed, you can take precautions to restrict access to planting beds. Rab-

bits tend to munch on vegetables and ornamental plants. Small in stature and not able to scale fences very easily, rabbits might be deterred by a low fence surrounding plants. Consider digging some chicken wire below the fence a few inches to discourage

digging under the fence. The fence should be 18 inches high, and you should keep the openings no more than one inch because rabbits can squeeze through small openings.

In terms of gophers, moles, voles, and other burrowing animals, the key is preventing underground access. Chicken wire or another abrasive material put under the garden soil can help keep underground animals from burrowing under and then up into the heart of the garden.

Deer are another story altogether. They are tall animals capable of rising up on hind legs to stretch out and reach branches of trees and bushes. Therefore, taller fences may be needed to protect the garden. But these can sometimes be unsightly, especially in a front yard. Therefore, look for

natural barriers that can keep them out. They may be deterred by thorny bushes or plants. Daisies, poppies, narcissus, rudbeckia, achillea, agastache, aster, lupine, coreopsis, verbascum, centaurea, and echinacea are available in many varieties and are not attractive to deer or rabbits.

Here are some additional strategies that you can try.

- Create narrow pathways between raised beds. Rabbits will feel like they are in prime locations for predators to get at them in this type of situation and may be less likely to venture in. Deer may not be able to navigate narrow paths.

- Use mulch. In addition to benefitting the plants, keeping soil moist and fertilizing the areas, mulch also deters many animals.

- Interplant different

species of plants. Some animals don't want to bother picking tasty plants out among other varieties they don't like. So mix plants with ones that animals find unpleasant.

- Use other natural deterrents. Animals may be kept away by scents of their predators. Urine from coyote, foxes, dogs, and cats may help. You can also try human hair, cat litter and soap flakes.

- Create an animal-friendly area elsewhere. Feed the deer and rabbits the foods they love somewhere away from your garden. They may fill up with favorites and stay away from your flowers and vegetables.

- Traps may work. As a last resort, use humane traps to collect animals and release them elsewhere.

A little work leads to a cleaner, healthier home

METRO

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, dam-

aging paint and wall finishes as a result. Spray Nine(R) Cleaner/Disinfectant is very effective at controlling mold and mildew, addressing not only existing mold and mildew around the house, but also preventing any future problems.

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.

Protect against allergens, viruses and bacteria

Effectively cleaning a home can involve several preventive measures to keep everyone free from viruses and bacteria. Spray Nine(R) Cleaner/Disin-

fectant takes just 45 seconds to disinfect a surface of harmful bacteria, including those associated with food poisoning, whooping cough and even infections such as MRSA. Registered as a hospital grade disinfectant by the Environmental Protection Agency, the spray takes even less time to disinfect a surface against viruses, doing so in just 30 seconds while protecting a home's inhabitants from viruses including Influenza A2, Poliovirus Type I, a type of polio, and others that can cause the common cold and respiratory illnesses.

Say 'Au Revoir' to odor

Readying a home for fresh, spring days also entails ridding its interior of odor. Spray

Nine(R) Brand Odor Eliminator neutralizes offensive odors on contact by "caging" their molecules so they are no longer detectable to the nose. Homeowners can eliminate odors in their kitchens, carpets and even their musty basements, ensuring the home is odor-free for the long winter months ahead. In lieu of smoke and pet odors, Odor Eliminator provides a fresh floral scent and can even be added to compatible cleaning solutions to freshen the home as you clean.

Outdoor equipment

The warm-weather season is also barbecue season. Spray Nine(R) Brand BBQ Grill Cleaner does double duty as a heavy-duty cleaner and a hard

surface disinfectant. It easily dissolves grease, fat and burned-on food for quick cleanup with less effort. The cleaner also kills foodborne germs that contaminate food preparation surfaces, including Salmonella and E.coli in just 45 seconds. It can also be used on propane tanks, countertops, stainless steel, painted surfaces, BBQ covers, and ceramic and tempered glass.

Remember, when cooking food on the grill, do not reuse marinade after it has touched raw meat or poultry.

Patio furniture

The warm weather enables people to venture outdoors and commune with nature. Prepping the patio furniture

for a new season of use often involved a lot of elbow grease and time. But Spray Nine(R) Brand Patio Furniture Cleaner cleans, kills germs, 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. The key benefit is its ability to kill harmful germs like Salmonella enterica, E. coli and Athlete's Foot Fungus.

Tackle spring cleaning projects with ease. More information is available at www.spraynine.com.

Tell-tale signs indicate a roof is wearing down

METRO

Replacing a roof is a costly venture few homeowners look forward to. According to Remodeling magazine's 2010-11 "Cost vs. Value" report, the national average cost of a roof replacement is nearly \$22,000, a costly endeavor considering the tenuous nature of the economy. What's more, homeowners who choose more upscale roofing materials can expect to spend almost \$40,000 on their roofs.

Such costs make it no small wonder that many homeowners fear the dreaded diagnosis that their home needs a new roof. While there's little homeowners can do to reduce the cost of a roof replacement, there are warning signs homeowners can look for that might indicate a roof replacement is on the horizon. Recognition of these signs can help homeowners be more financially prepared should the day come when the roof needs to be replaced.

1. The presence of algae

If the roof has lots of dark streaks and stains clinging to it, that is likely algae, which can grow on the roof for quite awhile. Algae does not necessarily do any damage to a roof, but it does do some damage to a home's physical appearance, as algae on the roof is not very pleasing to the eye. Algae is most often found on the roofs of homes located in climates that have warm, humid summers. If algae is a problem on your roof, spray

washing with a mixture of water and bleach can effectively remove it.

2. Buckling shingles

Like algae, buckling shingles are another unsightly problem on a roof. But buckling shingles are more than just an eyesore, they actually might indicate significant problems. When shingles buckle, that's typically because hot air from the attic is forcing the shingles away from the home. Buckling shingles also indicate that the roof is poorly ventilated, which can take years off the roof's life expectancy while driving up home cooling costs along the way.

3. Granule loss

Granule loss is typically a byproduct of normal shingle wear and tear that results from inclement weather, such as hail. Older roofs might experience granule loss, but granule loss can also occur on a new roof if a defective roofing product was used. Any granule loss, even if slight, should be addressed, as the side effects of granule loss include a weakened roof and leaking. If granule loss is not addressed, the consequences could be severe the next time a storm occurs.

4. Mold

Unlike the warning signs already discussed, mold is not visible on the outside of the home. Instead, homeowners should look in the attic of a home to see if there is any mold growth. If there is, the roof is likely leaking, and the

health risks of mold growth in a home are substantial. Mold is not necessarily easy to detect, so a professional inspection might be in order if mold growth is suspected. If a professional determines mold is, in fact, present, then the mold will need to be removed and all options, including a

roof replacement, must be considered to keep mold from coming back.

5. Roof rot

Perhaps the most discouraging sign a homeowner can see on his or her roof is roof rot. Roof rot appears when a roof is in considerable decay and, if not addressed, its con-

sequences can stretch far beyond the roof, damaging other parts of the home thanks in large part to water getting through the roof. If roof rot is either not noticed or just ignored, it won't take long for water to get through the roof and blaze a destructive path through the rest of

the home.

Homeowners might fear a full roof replacement because of the cost associated with such a project. But if ignored, problems with a roof could eventually prove far more costly than the price of replacing the roof.



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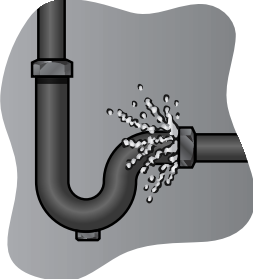
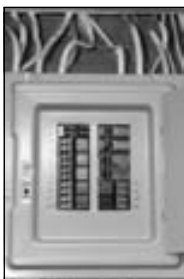
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Basement remodels a favorite for homeowners

METRO

Perhaps thanks to the growing popularity of home theaters, basement remodels are becoming more and more popular among the nation's homeowners. With advancements in television and home theater technology, it's no wonder homeowners are looking to make the most of their oft-ignored basements to enhance their home entertainment experience.

But remodeling a basement involves more than simply throwing out the pingpong or pool table and replacing them with leather sofas and a big screen television. Before doing anything with the basement, it's best to prepare the area to ensure the home theater experience is as enjoyable as possible.

• Check for moisture. Nearly every basement has issues with moisture. Perhaps victims of floods or heavy rains, basements do not typically boast ideal living conditions, requiring work before homeowners and their families and friends can spend time in them knowing they're safe.

Many times, fixing moisture inside a basement involves going outside the home, particularly to inspect gutters and the external sur-



METRO PHOTO

Few home improvement projects provide a more rewarding finished product than installing a home theater. However, when doing so in the basement, the area first must be prepared before homeowners can get to work.

face area around the basement. Gutters and downspouts could be channeling water in the direction of the basement. If so, direct downspouts away from the home.

Surface area around the basement could also be directing water toward the home. If that's the case, it might be a safe bet to consult a landscaper to determine if that area can be dug up and

possibly made to slant away from the house. While this might seem time-consuming, it's worth it to ensure a home theater does not become a musty place where no one wants to spend significant time.

• Decide what to do with the ceilings. For those who really want to create a theater experience in their basement, the ceilings will likely need some work. Many basements

have ceiling tiles, which create an ambience more suited to a basement than a theater. Homeowners should consider replacing ceiling tiles with drywall. It's good to work on the ceiling before doing anything with the floors, as paint or debris from the drywall will likely drip or fall onto the floor, creating a mess that no one wants on his or her new floor.

• Examine the walls. After

working on the ceilings, the walls should be next on the list. Home theaters tend to have dark walls like those in movie theaters, so if the walls are white, homeowners might want to paint them with a darker color. Again, this should be done before doing anything with the floor to avoid stains or debris on any new flooring.

If the walls need new drywall, it's a good idea to plan a layout of the room once it's a finished product before hanging any new drywall. This will give a sense of which walls will need holes for cables and other cords, and holes can be cut in the dry wall accordingly once that layout has been determined.

• Fix the floors. Oftentimes, basements are not carpeted, typically covered with a throw rug here or there and some linoleum tiles. However, for those hoping to get a genuine theater experience in their basement, it's best to lay down some carpeting. Much like the walls, carpets should be a darker color to create an ambience more like that of a movie theater. If putting a refrigerator or bar area in the basement, avoid laying carpet down in that area as spills might stain the new carpet.

Of course, before laying down any carpeting, homeowners must clear the room of everything that's removable. This should give homeowners the chance to remove any clutter from the basement and decide what to keep or clear out of the basement.

• Before buying any products, determine if they will fit. Chances are large products can fit through the doorways and into the basement. Since many homeowners have pool tables and refrigerators in their basements already, it's highly likely that other big ticket items like large screen televisions and leather sofas will be able to fit through the doorways.

However, for homeowners who have used their basement largely for storage, it's best to do some measurement before visiting the nearby electronics store and buying that big screen television. After all, there's no guarantee that 70-inch projection screen television or those leather armchairs can fit through the basement doorway. Though homeowners will eventually find something they like that will fit, the doorway measurements might dictate that decision more than homeowners know.

Inground pools installed now can provide summer fun

METRO

Pool retailers generally can install a pool any time of the year. However, the early spring season just may be the ideal time if you've decided to enhance a yard with an above-ground or inground pool.

The spring season means the ground is likely thawed and it will be reasonably comfortable for workers (or yourself) to set up the pool. A spring starting point also means that your pool and surrounding patios/landscaping will be completed before the peak swimming season. Also, you will have the entire season to enjoy your new pool.

If you've decided on an inground pool, something that adds appeal and beauty to a yard, there are a few steps that will take place in the pool-installation process.

1. You will sit down with a pool professional and decide on the shapes, styles and materials of choice that meet your budget and the size of your yard. Keep in mind maximizing the sun by placing the

pool where you'll get the most rays.

2. Prior to excavation, workers will come and map out the pool in your yard. They'll plan for filters/equipment, the shape of the pool and any surrounding structures, such as a patio or deck.

3. The excavation will then take place after the pool design is approved. Construction equipment and hand-shoveling to work on the finer details is likely part of the process. It may take a day or two to dig the pool, provided the soil is amenable.

4. Wired steel rods are installed in the pool area that has been cleared away. This will provide support for the frame and protect against ground forces.

5. The electrical and plumbing groundwork will be laid, including wiring for the pump and filter and pipes to filter the water.

6. Aspecial concrete mixture is sprayed over the steel frame to lock it in place and provide extra strength. Depending on the pool interior

surface used, this will also provide the groundwork for other materials to be installed.

7. Tile, masonry, rock, and/or a vinyl liner will be installed. The pool will start to have a finished look.

8. Surrounding materials, such as landscaping, decking, concrete, or patio pavers can be installed at this point.

9. Personal touches will complete the look of your pool. Afterward, you simply fill the water level and start enjoying the swimming pool once the weather is right. You may be able to pay municipal water services to come and fill your pool via a water tank truck. Some towns allow usage of fire hydrant water if approved by the fire department. Otherwise, you may need to go the slow and steady route of using your

backyard hose.

There are some things to consider when deciding on a pool.

• If price seems too good to be true, it probably is. Some companies advertise below-market rates on pools and then up-sell a lot of extras. Compare prices and go with the company that seems the most reputable.

• Definitely ask for testimonials on the work done before hiring a pool company. Or, ask friends and neighbors about their pool experiences and what companies they recommend.

• The price of the pool may vary based on the quality of materials used, the soil conditions and amount of rock content, and any warranties included with the pool installation.

• Companies have become

expert at working within the restraints of smaller backyards. Don't rule out a pool simply because your yard is on the small side.

• To make your pool unique, consider adding extra features such as waterfalls, jump rocks, tanning ledges, fountains, and more.

• The average cost of an inground pool varies among regions. However, it's safe to estimate that a basic inground pool will be around \$20,000. You may be able to use the equity in your home and take advantage of low interest rates to finance a pool.

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Building products made to help homes last longer

METRO

Building product manufacturers have come a long way over the past several decades when it comes to the creation of products for the home. Decades ago wood roofing shingles or wood millwork had a relatively short lifespan due to environmental conditions the products faced. In today's marketplace, homeowners can easily locate building products that have lifetime warranties and are constructed to withstand almost anything Mother Nature throws at them.

"Synthetic products are a huge advancement for the building industry," says Mark Clement, contractor and host of MyFixItUpLife radio show. "In particular, products like DaVinci Roofscapes slate and shake roofing tiles are made of polymer and have a 50-year warranty. And, fiberglass doors, urethane millwork and vinyl windows are all great examples of products constructed for low-maintenance ease combined with very impressive product warranties - plus they look great!"

If you're constructing a new home, start by paying special attention to the basement. By requesting precast wall panels you can add valuable living space to your home. Superior Walls (www.superiorwalls.com) offers Xi insulated concrete wall systems that are custom created for homeowners and installed in less than 24 hours by certified crews. The energy-efficient walls, which received the first National Association of Home Builders Green Approved rating for foundation



METRO PHOTO

Durable vinyl windows and polymer roofing tiles help create a low-maintenance exterior for this home.

systems in the country, help lower energy costs for homeowners. The Xi wall panels feature steel reinforced concrete and 2½-inches of insulation to create a permanent barrier against sidewall water penetration. The sturdy panels are designed and constructed in

available at home improvement stores include small pieces of mesh that grab around holes and close them up. Pieces of household tape can cover up tiny tears. Neither option is attractive, Walker adds, but they can serve as quick fixes in otherwise good screens.

Preventing damage

Children and pets can be especially tough on screens and screen doors because sometimes they just don't see them. Consider using decorative stickers to remind them that a screen is there. Pet screens can be mounted on sliding screen doors for easy access for pets that enjoy the outdoors.

For those who might have used an elbow to keep a swinging screen door from closing too quickly, there's a better option that won't cost you a repair. Check the top of your door for a piston mechanism that you can turn and increase the pressure, to make the door close more slowly.

To keep window screens and doors sliding smoothly,

a factory-controlled setting using steel rebar inside the studs and beams for strength. Built to last, Superior Walls Xi foundations systems are backed by a 15-year warranty.

Moving up the house, vinyl windows are crafted for maximum energy efficiency and low maintenance. One manufacturer, Simonton Windows (www.simonton.com), offers a limited lifetime warranty for their durable products. Why vinyl? Because vinyl windows and doors offer excellent thermal performance for year-round comfort and help lower utility bills. Vinyl is an effective insulator, and combined with a strong glass package, provides optimum energy efficiency.

"The energy-efficient features of the Simonton products are very impressive, which is why I selected them for my own home," says Clement. "I've found that a glass package that includes Low E glass, an Argon gas fill and Simonton's Intercept spacer system really outperform other windows I've seen."

Select a fiberglass entryway system married with urethane millwork and you've chosen more building products meant to last. Therma-Tru Doors

(www.therma-tru.com) offers a wide variety of reliable, energy-efficient fiberglass door systems. Each door is constructed of durable fiberglass with a polyurethane foam core, can be ordered ENERGY STAR qualified and provides five times the insulation of a wood door. Best of all, fiberglass doors will not rot, split or crack, plus they will not rust, dent or ding.

Backed by a limited lifetime warranty, Therma-Tru doors create the tightest seal possible, creating an energy-efficient envelope that stabilizes interior temperatures and helps decrease the home's energy costs.

When using decorative Fypon (www.fypon.com) trim around a fiberglass entry door, you create a winning combination. The crisp, architecturally-correct details on Fypon's urethane products are crafted from tough, weather-proof, high-performance materials. Pilasters, crossheads and door pediments are all impervious to decay, insect infestation and water damage. Other exterior urethane pieces, such as column wraps, louvers and brackets, are also crafted for long-lasting beauty and low maintenance. Also appropriate for interior application, the urethane pieces are

backed by a limited lifetime warranty and are ideal for high humidity areas of the home such as the kitchen, bathroom and laundry room.

While all areas of a home's exterior can take a beating from severe weather and harmful ultraviolet rays, the roof is easily the building product that is most subjected to the elements. To make sure your roof overhead can protect your family and home, investigate the benefits of polymer roofing tiles.

"The DaVinci slate roofing tiles on my home resist fire, impact, wind and other weather conditions," says Clement. "These tiles have their colors blended completely throughout each piece and will resist fading over time because of the UV protection built into each tile."

"Products like polymer roofing tiles, which are a good environmental choice and are guaranteed to last for 50 years, are a smart choice for a home. All of these products are a sound investment for a new home and when remodeling an older, cherished home. Doing your research up front to find the best products in the marketplace will result in many savings - on long-term maintenance, utility costs and repair or premature product replacement."

Cleaning up meshes: what to know about screen care

By AMY LORENTZEN
For The Associated Press

For many of us, spring cleaning includes washing winter dirt and debris off of windows and window screens. Paying extra attention to screens now can end up saving homeowners money, as well as ensuring better views and keeping out bugs.

Here's the lowdown on screens and screen care:

Cleaning is key

The average home has 12 to 15 window screens, usually made of aluminum or fiberglass with a vinyl coating. Experts recommend washing them twice a year, but at least once in the spring to rid them of winter grime.

"We've had the rain and the snow all winter and the dirt builds up on them," says Scott Walker, president and owner of Screenmobile, a mobile window and door screening company with close to 100 locations throughout the country. "If you think of them as a filter, you wouldn't want to breathe all the dust and the dirt that builds up."

The easiest way to start is by marking screens so you'll remember which window they fit, says Colleen Maura, a spokeswoman with Lowe's Home Improvement stores. You can use a marker or a small piece of tape that's strong enough not to be washed away by the garden hose. She suggests a cleaning solution of 1 cup ammonia, 3 cups of water and a squirt of dish detergent.

Lay the screens on a flat surface, thoroughly wet them with a hose and use a squirt bottle to apply the cleaning mix. Leave it on for about 10 minutes, use a soft-bristled brush to remove stubborn grime, then rinse. Don't scrub aluminum screens too hard; you could dent them.

Repairs for a reason

The point of having window screens is to let you open up your home to fresh air while keeping bugs and debris out. Rips and tears in the mesh, or bent screen frames, defeat that purpose.

Walker says you can do some minor repairs on your own. Inexpensive patch kits

Walker suggests skipping oil-based lubricants such as WD-40 and instead using a silicone-based lubricant,

such as furniture polish.

If you have the storage space, cleaning screens in the fall and then storing them

away during the winter can extend their life, experts say.

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Three quick projects will kill home clutter

By CEDAR BURNETT
For The Associated Press

If, like me, you spent this winter hibernating and eating baked goods, your home may have paid the price. Maybe it got a little disorganized, or is starting to look like an episode of "Hoarders."

Spring is a great time to shake off that winter sluggishness and free yourself from clutter.

But where to begin? Spring cleaning can feel overwhelming if your to-do list is more like a to-do novel.

Never fear: Three professional organizers are here to offer three projects you can do in an afternoon each:

Hall closet

Nikki Havens of Seriously Organized in Bloomington, Minn., recommends starting with your entry hall closet. Small closet or walk-in, use the most convenient spot in your home to your advantage. First, identify the coats you actually wear and pull out anything you don't, along with outerwear that's wrong for the season.

"If you have too much stuff, you can't find anything," Havens says.

After culling your coat collection, she suggests using the floor for frequently used shoes, and adding two shelves directly above them. Buy two color-coded bins for each family member and label them with names. (Don't forget the dog, who comes with its own clutter.)

Place the first set of bins on the bottom shelf. These baskets should be used for seasonal accessories, like hats and gloves in the winter or goggles in the summer.

"If you don't use it a couple of times a week it shouldn't be there," Havens says.

"Keep two pairs of gloves – you don't need eight."

Use the second shelf of bins for what Havens calls the "clutter control center." From hairbands to finger-painting masterpieces, these tubs are the place to throw odds and ends as you come in the door.

Finally, Havens recommends removing the hanging bar and installing hooks in a diamond-shaped pattern for coats and bags. Kids can take the lower hooks while adults claim the top ones.

Bedroom closet

Once you've mastered the hall closet, Brooke Butin and Heather Perrilliat of Heather-Brookes in Los Angeles have a plan for tackling your bedroom closet.

The first thing to do is purge, Butin explains. Create a donate pile, a consignment pile and a give-to-friends pile.

Perrilliat suggests trying on anything you haven't worn in a while. You could even invite a friend and turn the chore into a fashion show.

"Not everyone has the budget to buy new clothes," Butin says. "Look for clothes that could get new life from an alteration – you could save a couple hundred dollars by spending 20."

Once you've cleared out the old, take stock of what's left. Seasonal clothes should be boxed up and put in storage. The rest should be placed on matching hangers facing the same direction and categorized by type – i.e., shirts, pants, dresses.

"You have to make your closet function for you," Perrilliat says. "If you're a jeans and T-shirt person, keep those toward the front."

After you've categorized,

organize your clothes by color within each category. Use closet tab dividers between categories if you want to go the extra mile. These can be particularly helpful with look-alike items – no more struggling to distinguish skinny jeans from bootcut at 6 in the morning.

Butin advises utilizing vertical space for accessories and shoes. The shelf above the hanging bar can house hat boxes and shoes stored in clear plastic boxes. Side walls can hold hooks for handbags, and a corkboard can display jewelry. Belts get messy quickly, she warns, so rolling them and placing them in a basket is your best bet. You can also keep your go-to shoes in a basket on the floor.

Files

With your closets in order, the last, oft-dreaded task is at hand: organizing files. Most of us would rather clean toilets than take on this project, but it's probably the most important. Luckily, you can kill two anxiety-causing birds with one stone by pulling your tax files as you go.

If you have a filing system in place, Mia Carpiello of Organizing Philly in Philadelphia suggests pulling out every file and seeing what you can get rid of or consolidate. Consult with an attorney about legal documents, but in general, you can recycle or shred any items you haven't looked at in a year.

Receipts and manuals for items you no longer own and any regular bill statements you don't need for tax or legal reasons should also get the heave-ho. Pull out any tax-related files from the previous year and keep them in a separate pile.

Feeling optimistic this spring? Might be the decor

By KIM COOK
For The Associated Press

In home decor, there's something about the start of spring. When life's renewing itself outdoors, we feel the urge to revive our interiors too.

This season, decor offerings are especially upbeat.

Start with the palette. "Saturated" is a word being used a lot; it means ripe plum hues, intense tangerines, rich indigos, verdant greens, zingy turquoises, hot reds and peppy yellows.

Dee Schlotter, a color expert with PPG Pittsburgh Paints, says exuberant orange is No. 1 on her trend radar.

"It's full of joy and playful," says Schlotter, who also cites Geranium Pink as a hot hue. "It goes really well with orange, and it's a happy, girly color."

Teal and turquoise are back after a lengthy retirement, and with experience in mid-century modern and traditional decor, they've got legs that will carry them into fall.

Erin Olson loved the color family enough to devote a blog to it: the House of Turquoise follows all things blue-green.

"What I love about turquoise is that it can be paired with any other color, since it has both warm and cool undertones," she says.

"My personal favorite is using turquoise as a fun punch of color to an otherwise neutral space. A turquoise throw pillow, lamp or rug will instantly bring new life to your room, and can easily be switched out," she says.

Crisp clean white's a common counterpoint, but you'll see black as a foil as well.

Graphic prints pop in these bold colors: Zigzags and stripes are all over the home accessories marketplace. So are lattice and ironwork prints; big and little florals; and abstracts. African hand-block, Moroccan and Silk Road patterns have crossed over from last season.

Not a fan of bright? Look for a whole world of calming neutrals such as soft putty, gellow (a gray/yellow blend), greige (a gray/beige), aqua, pewter, copper, vanilla and shell pink.

You'll see lots of texture in this category: weathered wood, animal hide, burnished metals, burlap and gauzy cottons. Honeycomb patterns, naturalistic motifs like twigs,

leaves and birds, watery Impressionist prints and airy florals soothe the soul.

Neutrals are "taking the popular gray trend and moving it forward, by adding warmth with natural materials like jute and linen, and then giving it a real punch by adding a sunny pop of yellow," says Sherwin-Williams' color marketing director, Jackie Jordan.

Repainting walls in a fresh spring hue is one way to update a room, but if you're not ready to commit in a major way, small changes can also alter a room's mood. Try a lemony throw, clean white paint trim, a teal rug or sandy-toned drapery.

Go for a bright, candy-hued lamp base, and pick the color up again in a big fruit bowl. In the kitchen, replace cooking tools with new ones in luscious tomato red.

Flor's new spring collection of floor tiles features Fedora, in a soothing palette of dusty turquoise, oatmeal, walnut and flannel. Used in a bedroom with lavender, cream or pale pink textiles, you'd wake up to spring's birdsong in the most serene of sleeping spaces.

Land of Nod has a cheery Watermelon Stripe duvet cover in a rainbow of fruity hues, as well as the Dot Matrix rug, composed of hundreds of rolled felt balls like colorful gumballs.

Black and white geometrics make a dramatic statement – you'll find them on dinnerware, patio umbrellas, candles and awning stripes at Z Gallerie, including a very Jonathan Adler-esque vase made of lacquered bamboo.

IKEA is offering its Expedite shelving in fire engine red; there's the new Varmdo rocking chair in the hue, too.

Loll Designs' cubby bench comes in a pretty grass green. And CB2's Go-Cart desk in vibrant blue would be a fun place to work. Their Parlour atomic orange chair adds energy to a neutral room.

Pier 1's Liliana armchair has an ironwork pattern that's recurring in textiles and furniture detail this season. The Annie Black Bird wingback chair features a dramatic black and white nature motif that would pop against dark or white walls and wood floors. And a hanging lamp in caramel with leaves rendered in gold is the perfect addition to a restful room filled with tawny hues.

If you don't have a filing system in place, "it's best to make a list of which files you'll need before you create them," Carpiello says.

Organize files into long-term reference and temporary action files (i.e., invitations and bills). Long-term reference files should live in the file cabinet, whereas temporary files should be stored on your

desk and categorized into actions, such as "To pay" or "To respond."

To keep your desk clutter-free, Carpiello recommends an inbox where you can keep paperwork until you have time to deal with it. Alphabetizing or color-coding files is a personal choice, but all your files should have tabs on the left side instead of in multiple locations – all that

scanning from side to side is hard on the eyes.

For all three projects, take stock of how you're doing after three months.

"If you're not keeping it up, it isn't working," Carpiello says. "Reevaluate your system or move your system. Eventually you'll find the right one."

Freshen property with restoration

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 to restore properties.

- Don't jump the gun. The first warm day of spring might seem like a great time to 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.

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.

- 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 dethatching 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.

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

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Tips to maintain fresh-cut flowers

Fresh flowers serve many purposes. A bouquet of flowers can be a gift on a special holiday or birthday. Some people apologize with flowers, while others use flowers to convey feelings of love or appreciation. Many people like to display fresh-cut flowers in their homes because their beauty can brighten the mood indoors. Others plant rows and rows of flowers in a garden with the express purpose of cutting them and bringing them into the home.

While outdoor flowers can remain beautiful and bountiful outside, once they are cut, there is a limited amount of time before they begin to wilt and wither. But there are ways to prolong the life of cut flowers to enjoy their beauty as long as possible.

- Cut correctly. Creating a large enough surface area on the stem for the uptake of water is essential. That is why florists recommend cutting the stem on a slant to ex-

pose more area to the water.

- Place flowers in water immediately. Some people advocate cutting the stems while they're actually submerged in water. However, you will probably be fine if you simply recut the stems on flowers you brought inside and immediately put them in a vase of water. The key is not to let the tip of the stem dry out or close up with an air bubble, sap or other substances, preventing the uptake of water.

- Remove leaves. Take off the leaves of the plant that would end up underwater in the vase. Exposure to the water could cause the leaves to rot and fall off, creating algae or sludge in the vase water.

- Choose young flowers. Mature flowers may have peaked and begun to make room for a new round of blooms, so try to choose young buds or blooms that just opened so that you'll have an opportunity to enjoy

them longer.

- Create a viable water atmosphere. Once a fresh flower is cut and a stem is placed in water, bacteria and fungi can start to grow almost immediately. These microscopic organisms can clog the small tubes inside the stem that suck up water for nourishment. Many florists send home a packet of water additive to alleviate some problems in the indoor environment. The packet will contain a biocide that kills bacteria and fungi. There will be an acidifier as well as sugar. The acidifier makes the water more acidic to allow better absorption of water up the stem. You can also try small amounts of bleach, lemon-lime soda or even antiseptic mouthwash.

By following a few strategies you can keep fresh-cut flowers lasting longer for enjoyment.

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