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# Updating Window Treatments

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

As spring brings longer days and brighter sunshine, many homeowners look for ways to manage natural light and keep indoor spaces comfortable.

Updating window treatments is an easy way to refresh a room while improving energy efficiency. With the right blinds, shades and fabrics, it is possible to enjoy the season's sunlight without overheating the home or fading furniture. A few smart installation tips can help get the best results.

## Choosing the Right Blinds and Shades

Spring is a good time to choose window treatments that filter or soften intense sunlight. Light-filtering roller shades are popular because they allow gentle daylight to enter while reducing glare. They come in a variety of colors and patterns, making them a simple way to brighten rooms without sacrificing privacy.

Cellular or honeycomb shades are another strong option. Their layered design traps air and helps insulate windows, keeping indoor spaces cooler during warm afternoons. Many models offer top-down and bottom-up functions that let homeowners control light flow throughout the day.

For homeowners who prefer blinds, faux wood and real wood blinds can provide good light control. Tilting

the slats allows sunlight in while protecting furniture and flooring from direct UV exposure. Vertical blinds may work best for sliding doors or large windows since they can easily adjust to changing light angles.

## Picking Fabrics That Keep Rooms Cooler

Window treatment materials play an important role in keeping homes comfortable during spring. Solar shades are designed specifically for UV protection. They block a significant amount of the sun's rays while still providing outdoor visibility. These shades are useful in south- or west-facing rooms where afternoon sun is strongest.

Linen, cotton and other breathable fabrics are ideal for curtain panels during warmer months. Sheer curtains can soften bright light and add a fresh seasonal look, especially when paired with a secondary shade that handles UV control. Thermal-backed curtains add insulation and help reduce heat gain, making them a practical choice when temperatures rise.

Color also affects performance. Light-colored fabrics reflect more sunlight, helping rooms stay cooler throughout the day. Darker shades absorb heat and may be better suited for spaces that need additional warmth.



LEONID IASTREMSKYI

## Tips for Smooth and Effective Installation

Proper installation ensures window treatments work as intended. Measuring windows accurately is essential, especially for inside-mounted shades or blinds. Measure each window individually since sizes can vary even within the same room.

Mounting options matter.

Inside mounts create a clean, streamlined look, while outside mounts can make windows appear larger and block more light around the edges. For rooms that get strong direct sunlight, outside mounts often provide better coverage.

Securely anchor hardware, especially for heavier blinds or layered curtains. If drilling

into drywall, using the correct anchors helps avoid sagging brackets. For wider windows, adding a center support bracket can prevent bowing or cracking.

Homeowners may want to consider cordless options; these are safer for households with children or pets and offer a modern, minimal appearance.

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# Create a Kid-Friendly Backyard

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Designing a backyard that encourages play, exploration and safety can help children spend more time outdoors as the weather warms.

A kid-friendly backyard starts with safe, clearly defined play areas. Many families use rubber mulch, artificial turf or padded play mats to create softer landings under swings, slides or climbing structures. These materials help reduce injuries and stand up well to spring rain and frequent use.

If the yard includes raised decks, patios or slopes, railings and barriers can help keep small children from wandering into unsafe spots. Fencing or gate latches around pools, ponds or fire pits are essential. For younger

children, sightlines matter, so arranging play zones where adults can easily supervise helps keep activities safe and relaxed.

Simple additions like chalkboards, outdoor easels or sandboxes provide creative outlets without requiring much space. Even a corner of the yard can become a designated play nook when equipped with age-appropriate equipment and durable storage for toys.

## Planting Garden Spaces Kids Can Explore

Spring is a great time to establish a child-friendly garden where kids can dig, plant and learn. Raised beds make it easier for children to reach and help define a dedicated space for exploration. Easy-to-

grow vegetables like cherry tomatoes, snap peas or lettuce can give kids quick rewards and encourage a sense of ownership.

Herb gardens are another good option. Plants such as mint, basil and lavender are hardy and offer sensory experiences through touch and smell. Many families set aside a small “pollinator patch” with flowers that attract butterflies and bees, helping children learn about nature while supporting local ecosystems.

To keep gardens safe, avoid toxic plants and choose varieties that are sturdy enough for regular handling. Check for thorn-free shrubs and nonpoisonous flowering plants when designing kid-accessible spaces.

## DIY Outdoor Games the Whole Family Can Enjoy

Simple outdoor games can transform a backyard into a lively spring hangout. Many can be made with items already on hand. Painted stones or wooden discs can become pieces for tic-tac-toe or matching games. PVC pipe, cones or string can build obstacle courses that encourage balance and creativity.

For older kids, homemade lawn bowling sets, beanbag toss boards or backyard scavenger hunts offer variety and help keep them active. These games can be rearranged or stored easily, making them ideal for families who want flexible play options as children grow.

## Choosing Plants That Keep Kids Safe

Selecting the right plants is one of the most important steps when designing a child-friendly backyard. Avoid plants with toxic berries, sharp thorns or irritating sap. Instead, choose soft-leaved shrubs, durable grasses and colorful annuals that can handle a little rough play.

Popular child-safe options include sunflowers, marigolds, nasturtiums and zinnias. For shady areas, ferns, hostas and hardy ground-covers work well. Mulch pathways can help define borders and cushion falls, while natural stepping stones allow kids to explore without harming delicate plants.

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# Harvesting Rainwater

**BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA**

Collecting rainwater is an effective way to conserve resources, reduce utility costs and support a healthier landscape.

With spring rains on the way, homeowners can take advantage of natural precipitation by installing a simple rainwater harvesting system.

Rain barrels and collection tanks are easier than ever to set up, and many local governments encourage their use.

**Choosing and Installing a Rain Barrel**

Rain barrels come in a wide range of sizes and materials, from basic plastic models to decorative barrels designed to blend in with garden landscaping. The most popular ones are between 50 and 100 gallons, though smaller or larger options are available

depending on yard needs.

Installation typically begins with choosing a downspout that receives steady runoff from the roof. The barrel is placed on a flat, stable surface near the downspout, often on cinder blocks or a platform to elevate it. This height improves water pressure and makes it easier to fill watering cans. A downspout diverter or flexible hose guides rainwater into the barrel. Overflow valves redirect excess water away from the home's foundation.

A mesh screen at the top can help keep out debris and insects.

**Using Harvested Water Wisely**

Rainwater collected in barrels is ideal for outdoor tasks such as watering gardens, filling watering cans, rinsing tools or

cleaning patios. It can be especially helpful during dry spells when plants need consistent moisture. Harvested water is typically softer than tap water, which many gardeners find beneficial for flowers, shrubs and vegetables.

To maximize efficiency, consider pairing a rain barrel with drip irrigation or soaker hoses. These systems deliver water slowly and directly to plant roots, reducing evaporation and waste. Homeowners can use mulch around garden beds to help retain moisture and make harvested water last longer.

**Understanding Local Rules and Best Practices**

Before installing a rainwater harvesting system, check local regulations. Some cities have rules about placement, mosquito



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prevention or connection to irrigation systems. A few communities require backflow prevention devices to ensure harvested water does not mix with potable water lines.

Some regions offer rebates or incentives to encourage homeowners to install rain barrels, so checking with local utilities

or environmental agencies can be worthwhile. These programs sometimes include workshops that teach the basics of maintenance and installation.

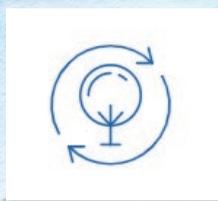
Inspect barrels regularly for leaks, clogged screens or algae buildup. Emptying and cleaning the barrel at the end of the growing season can help extend its life.

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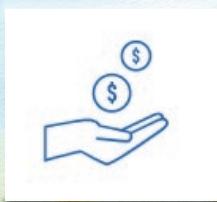
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# Hardscaping Basics

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Hardscaping can transform a yard by adding structure, function and lasting visual appeal.

Patios, pathways and edging stones help define outdoor spaces and make them easier to maintain through the spring and summer.

## Popular Hardscape Features

Patios often serve as the centerpiece of a backyard. They provide space for dining, entertaining or enjoying the outdoors without tracking dirt

into the house. Beginners commonly choose concrete pavers because they are affordable, durable and available in many styles. Other patio materials include wood, poured concrete, natural stone and brick, each offering a different look and level of maintenance.

Pathways are another useful hardscape feature. They help guide foot traffic, protect grass and connect different areas of the yard. Gravel, stepping-stone paths or paver walkways are popular choices for beginner projects. Gravel paths are

easiest to install, while pavers offer a more polished appearance.

Edging stones help create clean borders around garden beds, lawns or walkways. They keep mulch in place, prevent grass from spreading into garden areas and give yards a more finished look. Edging comes in stone, brick, metal or composite materials, allowing homeowners to match their landscaping style.

## Understanding Hardscape Materials

Choosing the right materials is an important

early step. Concrete pavers are widely used because they hold up well in most climates and are relatively simple to install. Natural stone offers a high-end appearance but often costs more and may require more skill to fit and level. Brick provides a classic look and works well for patios or edging, though it can shift over time without proper base preparation.

Gravel is one of the most cost-effective materials and suits informal pathways or seating areas. It requires edging to stay in place and may need periodic replenishing. Composite edging and molded plastic borders provide a budget-friendly option for defining garden beds, though stone and brick tend to last longer.

For any hardscape project, the base material matters as much as the visible surface. A properly compacted base of gravel or crushed stone helps prevent sinking, shifting or cracking.

Skipping this step often leads to uneven surfaces and early repairs.

## DIY or Hire a Contractor?

Many homeowners tackle small hardscape projects on their own. Installing edging stones or creating a simple gravel path can be done with basic tools and a free afternoon. DIY patios are also possible, but they require more time, patience and precision, especially when leveling the base.

Larger or more complex projects may be better suited for a contractor. Curved patios, retaining walls or multi-level designs often need professional equipment and expertise. Hiring a contractor can save time and ensure long-lasting results.

Before choosing DIY or professional help, consider the project size, available tools, budget and how comfortable you are with physical labor and detailed measurements.



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# Smart Home Tech for Spring

**BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA**

As spring approaches, many homeowners begin tackling outdoor projects, maintenance tasks and seasonal cleanup. Smart home technology can make those jobs easier.

New tools help streamline routines, save energy and improve home safety. With the right mix of apps, sensors and automated devices, homeowners can stay ahead of spring chores while reducing time spent on upkeep.

**Smarter Watering and Irrigation**

Irrigation often becomes one of the first concerns of the season, and smart controllers can take much of the guesswork out of watering. These devices connect to home Wi-Fi and adjust watering schedules based on weather patterns, soil moisture and sunlight exposure. Some systems also use local forecasts to skip watering before or after rainfall, helping

conserve water and avoid overwatering.

Smart soil sensors can complement irrigation controllers by monitoring moisture levels in real time. They can alert homeowners when the soil is too dry or too saturated, allowing for more precise care. For those growing vegetables, flowers or new lawns, sensors provide valuable information that helps plants get what they need without wasting resources.

Many of these apps let homeowners control watering from a smartphone. This can be especially useful for people who travel during the spring or have large yards that require attention at different times.

**Lighting Solutions That Boost Safety and Efficiency**

Outdoor lighting plays an important role in security, usability and curb appeal. Smart lighting

systems allow homeowners to set schedules, automate adjustments or turn lights on and off remotely. Motion sensors can illuminate walkways or entry points when someone approaches, improving visibility and deterring unwanted activity.

Smart bulbs and solar-powered fixtures are now more affordable and easier to install. They can be integrated into existing home systems or controlled independently through mobile apps. Many options offer adjustable brightness and color temperature, giving homeowners the ability to create different moods for gatherings, outdoor dining or quiet evenings outside.

Some lighting systems connect with doorbell cameras or home security systems, making spring nights safer and more convenient. Automated timers also help reduce energy costs, ensuring lights run only when necessary.

**Apps and Sensors That Keep Maintenance on Track**

Spring home maintenance involves everything from gutter cleaning to lawn care, and smart devices can simplify many of these tasks. Temperature and humidity sensors can alert homeowners to conditions that may lead to mold or moisture problems. Leak detectors can be placed near air conditioning units, outdoor faucets or irrigation systems to catch small leaks before they turn into larger repairs.

Smart outlets and plugs let homeowners control outdoor appliances such as fountains, pumps or power tools. They can be scheduled to run only when needed, cutting down on energy use.

Homeowners can benefit from maintenance reminder apps that integrate with smart devices. These apps keep track of filter changes, HVAC checkups and seasonal tasks. Some link directly to smart thermostats, sending alerts when systems are working harder than usual or when temperatures fluctuate unexpectedly.



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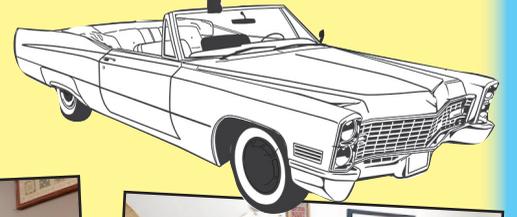
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