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Saving Earth's Pollinators

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Pollinators play a crucial role in bolstering nature and food production.

We tend to think of bees as the only pollinators, and they are perhaps the most important single element in this important process. But butterflies, bats, birds, wasps and beetles also play a role. Unfortunately, some are under generational stress while others are actually in decline. Together, we can make a difference in saving them.

Collapsing Colonies

The USDA reports that more than 100 crops rely on pollinators, with an annual economic impact in the tens of billions. Issues even with one key pollinator can have catastrophic results. For instance, the Western honey bee has been struck by colony collapse disorder. Worker bees are disappearing, leaving only the queen and a few



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others. The cause is likely environmental stressors, according to the USDA, including pollutants, pests, disease and nutritional deficits. Growers, conser-

vationists and government officials leaped into action, and the bee population began to rebound. Still, there are many others who remain at risk.

'Bee Better'

One of the easiest ways to support pollinators is at your local grocer, farmer's market or shopping center. Look for products that have been certified through the Bee Better program funded through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Growers and manufacturers earn this certification by using pollinator-friendly practices. Buying things

with the Bee Better logo helps support those who in turn support pollinators.

In The Garden

Try creating landscapes and gardens that feature native species, timing them to flower during different seasons in order to provide a steady source of food for pollinators. Clump flowers with different shapes and colors to attract them. Those who live in areas where monarch butterflies migrate can plant milkweed, which provides food for caterpillars.

Nesting Sites

Gardeners can also provide nesting sites to encourage these populations to grow. Many prefer specific plants for their young: For hummingbirds, it's shrubs and trees. Monarchs, on the other hand, like milkweed. Bees prefer to build nests in wood, in the ground or in dry plant stems. If you decide to encourage bees by building a ground-nesting site, make sure it's facing south so the bees get the most sun and that it is well-drained. Hollow stumps make a great habitat; there are also artificial nesting sites available at retail outlets that add a nice touch to any garden.

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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Spring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation season.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn. In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their lawns.

• **Scarify the lawn.** Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but

the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts, including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarifying before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarifying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

• **Work with a landscaping professional.** Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However,

scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this

important detail.

• **Prepare to water the lawn.** Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

Spring is a great time



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for homeowners in various regions to reseed or replant their lawns. With the right approach, homeowners can enjoy a full and lush lawn throughout summer.









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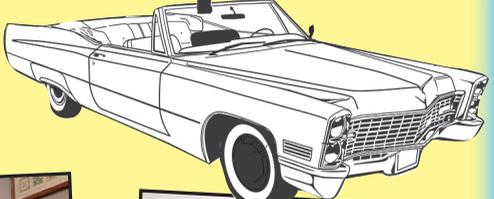
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Storing Winter Clothes

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Spring means warming conditions, and less of a need for scarves, gloves and bulky winter items. Take care to store it all properly, however, or they may not be in the proper condition to keep you cozy again when the seasons change.

Clean It First

Properly clean all winter wear prior to storing. Cleaned items keep musty odors away, and moths too. Closely follow manufacturer instructions, taking note of proper washing instructions — including requirements to dry clean only. These guidelines will vary depending on the garment. Be on the lookout for stains and address them before storage. Otherwise, they might become permanent after being put away for months. Dry-clean items shouldn't be stored inside the plastic carrying bags from the cleaners, since they can attract moisture which promotes mildew. Wrap everything with cotton sheets instead. This



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material keeps dust away while also promoting the flow of air.

Pack It Away

Winter wear tends to take up a lot of room in drawers and closets. Storing these bulky items allows space for lighter, more spring-time appropriate items. Purchase

storage containers that can be concealed in the back of closets or under the bed, since you won't need easy access to them for many warmer months. These bins, when properly closed, prevent intrusions by unwanted odors, insects and moisture. Cardboard boxes were

commonly used to store clothing in the past, but should be avoided. They're constructed with paper, acid and glues that can attract pests who will then potentially do great damage to your clothing and you won't know until the temperatures start falling again.

Watch The Temps

Climate control is critically important whether you plan to keep winter clothes in your closet, under the bed or in another storage area. Any space must be properly ventilated, cool and dry — with moisture being the most important element to guard against. Avoid keeping things in an unfinished basement, attic or most garages, because they don't include important safeguards. Weather extremes and potential pest infestations in storage areas that are not climate-controlled can lead directly to permanent damage to your clothes. If it's increasingly difficult to find room for everything, consider donating some items to charity.

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Is Your HVAC Ready?

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Your air conditioning unit has been sitting unused for months, while winter held sway.

Spring's return is the perfect time to pop the hood and make sure your HVAC is ready to roll for summer. Checks will need to be made inside and out. You don't want to find out that it's not working when you need air conditioning the most.

Spring Checklist

Check outdoor components, cleaning out any branches and leaves that have accumulated over the winter period. Sometimes small creatures may have even made a home inside the unit, and they'll need to be removed. Be careful when clearing the area so that critical metal pieces aren't bent or broken. Corrosion is also a concern, particularly with older units or with homes in coastal or very humid areas. Inside, make sure all of your registers are opened and unobstructed. Examine the inside unit and duct work, keeping a sharp eye out for cracks or leaks. If you find anything concerning, call an HVAC technician to have a look before re-engaging the system.

Turning It On

After your unit has passed all its checks, turn down the thermostat and make sure air is arriving through every air duct and at the set temperature. If your HVAC struggles to reach the desired setting, it's time to call an expert. The same is true for anyone who doesn't feel confident in diagnosing some or all of these pre-summer diagnostic issues. Some companies offer contract service plans, making the whole process less stressful. They can also be



LISA F. YOUNG

more cost-effective, since potential problems will be identified before they become a bigger concern.

Duct System

Consider having your air ducts cleaned by a professional. Ducts that are free of dust and debris will move cool air around the house more freely, without spreading allergy-causing particulates like dust, mold, dander or fungi. Changing your air filters every month will also help achieve cleaner air while saving money. Dirty filters cause the system to become overworked, shortening your system's lifespan.

It also increases your immediate costs in the form of higher utility bills. Check your owner's manual or the instructions on the filter to find out more.



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Planting for Your Zone

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Having trouble getting certain things to grow? You might be planting the wrong things for your home's growing zone, according to the USDA.

These zones detail the minimum temperatures for growing plants by area. Find the zone for your area, then stick to plants that are best suited for those temps. Your lawn or garden will rebound in no time.

About The Zones

This document is officially known as the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, and it's meant to set the standard for gardeners to determine which plants thrive by location. There are 11 growing zones in the U.S., with eight located in the lower 48 states. Temperature minimums begin all the way down to -60 to -55 degrees, in Zone



1a. The far warmer Zone 13b, on the other hand, is at the other end of the spectrum with temps in the 65-to-70-degree range. These numbers represent the average coldest temperatures each year, and not the all-time lowest. Be prepared for early spring freezes,

where appropriate.

Find Your Zone

Your growing zone can be found by using the USDA's helpful interactive map at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov. Simply enter your ZIP code to learn more. Static images are also available for those without faster broadband

internet access. You can also get more details about zones at your nearest agricultural extension offices and garden centers. Just remember that the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map can't account for hyper-local conditions, including moisture, soil, humidity, heat or other

weather conditions that might impact how plants grow at any specific point in time.

New Updates

The USDA map is constantly updated with temperature data, with information going back to 1976. The high-resolution interactive map allows page views down to the street level in your community. Zones 12 and 13 have been added more recently to account for new annual extreme minimums. Some zones, like those in Puerto Rico and Hawaii, obviously never freeze but this information nevertheless helps gardeners to plant smarter in tropical and subtropical conditions. Note that zones might change around a larger city since they tend to capture more heat than breezy areas with hills and valleys.

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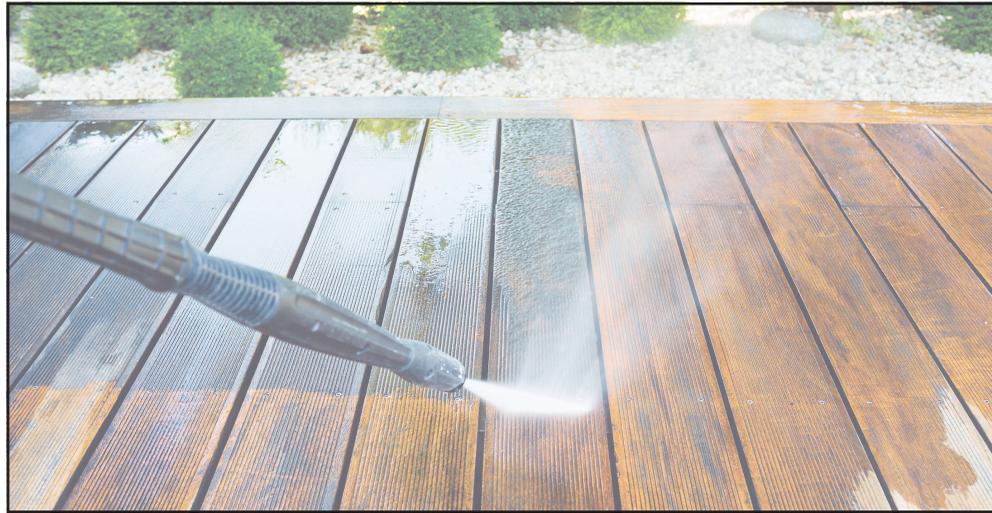
BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Build-up throughout the winter can leave our windows, doors and home exteriors covered in unsightly muck.

Power washing can leave it all looking as good as new. But don't stop there: This powerful tool is also great at bringing a host of other things to life in your home and garden, including driveways, grills, outdoor furniture, decks, fences and walkways. Just keep important safety guidelines in mind:

How They Work

Power washers may be powered by electricity or gas. Gas-powered units are usually more powerful than the electric versions. They typically deliver up to 3,000 pounds of pressure per square inch, which may be too much for certain materials. That's why it's important to match the power of your equipment



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with the job: Vinyl siding can withstand that level of pressure, but aluminum, soft-grain woods and stucco are only rated to 1,500 PSI.

Preparing To Work

Cover items like air conditioner compressors and light fixtures around

the home's exterior. Protect nearby plants, too. Note the location of outlets and windows, covering sockets with tape and then avoiding those areas. Put on safety gear before engaging the power washer, including work gloves and safety goggles. Pre-wash the exterior with a brush or

spray in order to remove loose debris, dirt and mildew. Keep the wand at least six feet away from electric wiring, and stay away from cracks and holes in the exterior.

Getting Underway

Mix water and detergent, following manufacturer

directions, then attach the power washer to a garden hose. Next, attach the preferred wand or extension to the sprayer. Test the power washer from a distance of three feet back, making slight adjustments until you can clean without creating surface damage. Once you've completed the job, turn off the washer and disconnect it from your garden hose. Rinse off any excess soap before storing.

Renting Or Buying?

Power washing equipment can be rented through many home improvement and hardware stores. That's a smart choice when doing annual cleaning of a home exterior, deck or driveway, since you're saving the cost of buying an expensive piece of equipment that you won't otherwise use. It may make sense to purchase if you have more regular jobs.

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Spring Energy Savings

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A changing season offers new opportunities to use less energy and lower costs.

The first day of spring, for instance, can serve as an annual reminder to check the evaporator coil on your air-conditioning unit, since its cleanliness ensures optimum performance and the lowest utility costs per month. Routine maintenance like replacing air filters can lower your average energy consumption by as much as 15%. Here's a checklist of other

things that can help you go green and save some green, courtesy of the U.S. Department of Energy:

Windows

Open your windows as the mild temperatures of spring arrive, allowing for a cross breeze which will naturally cool rooms without using an air conditioner.

Consider updating your home's window treatments. Energy-efficient covers like shades, blinds or film can drastically impact heat gain as temperatures rise in the afternoon. You'll give the

home a fresh new look while reducing energy costs.

Use these new window treatments to bring in more sunlight during daylight hours, then turn off artificial lights. Skylights can also significantly brighten a home — at no charge.

Fans And Vents

Experts say you can comfortably raise thermostats by as much as four degrees simply by installing and cooling your home with ceiling fans. You'll be lowering costs without sacrificing anything in terms of comfort. Engage

the venting systems while cooking and after bathing to remove warm, often humid air that can lead to longer operational cycles for your cooling unit.

Leaks

Many homes lose pricey air conditioning through leaks around windows and doors. Buy weatherstripping or apply low-cost caulk to seal any openings. These cracks make a surprising contribution to high utility costs. For instance, air loss through your air-conditioning unit's duct system may account for nearly 30%

of its energy consumption.

Check for leaks, then seal and insulate them to lower your electricity bills this spring.

Other Tips

Consider installing a programmable thermostat so that you can raise the settings when you're not home or during off-peak hours, an option that may help reduce energy costs by as much as 10%. Consider using an outdoor grill on nice spring days, rather than heating up your home while using an indoor oven.

Spring Pruning Tips

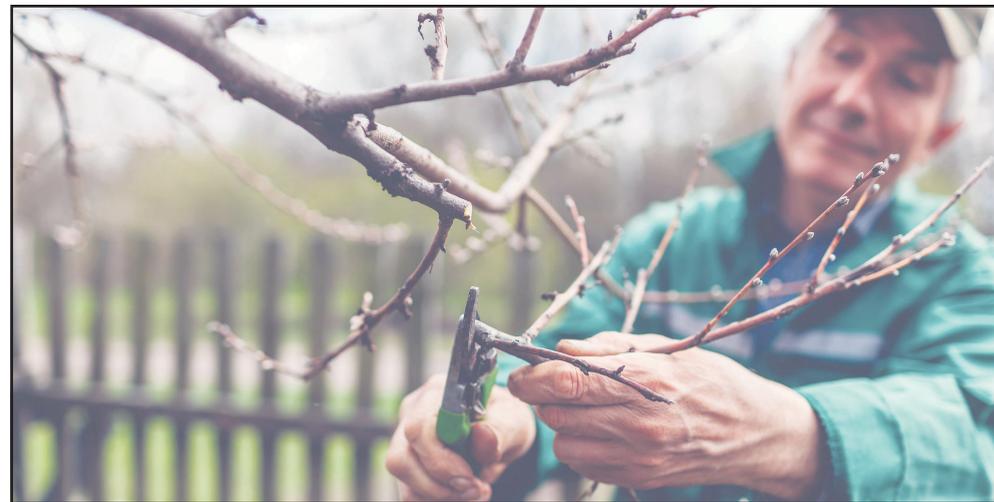
BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

With winter receding, make smart cuts now to encourage growth.

Many perennials have foliage that provides protection during the winter, but pruning is still an essential part of their growth process. Likewise, many plants actually make stronger returns if longer branches are trimmed. Here's how to handle this essential part of spring gardening.

When Should I Prune?

The timing for pruning shrubs and trees mostly depends on when they bloom and whether those blooms are on new or old growth, according to the Farmers Almanac. Generally, plants which flower after



NEDOPEKIN YURIY

midsummer each year should be pruned after they flower.

A common worry is that over-pruning or pruning at the wrong time might kill

a plant, but garden center experts say that it's rarely fatal. Instead, you'll simply have fewer blooms or less fruit.

What Should I Prune?

Fruit-bearing trees like apple, peach, plum and cherry should be pruned in early spring, as should vines like wisteria and trumpet vine. Shrubs that flower in the spring like rhododendrons and lilacs also need pruning as soon as their first blooms fade. This helps ensure a better bloom the following year. Black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower and globe thistle seed-heads provide a terrific food source for birds, so growers are encouraged to leave them until early spring. Mums, coral bells, hostas, turtleheads and delphiniums need their protective foliage through the winter; now is the

time to cut them back.

What Do I Use?

Pruning tools like shears and clippers must be kept sharp in order to do their best work. Clean cuts heal quickly, eventually strengthening the plant. Botched cuts, on the other hand, actually weaken the plant while making it more susceptible to various diseases. Oil the moving parts before spring pruning to make sure everything works smoothly.

How To Prune

Some plants require less aggressive pruning. Talk to representatives from your local extension service or gardening center to learn more about how much to prune a particular plant in your area. The Farmers Almanac is also a helpful guide. In general, focus on removing dying or dead branches, and sprouts that have emerged from the trunk. With trees and shrubs, remove all branches that are growing toward the center, downward or across other branches. Prune from the outside growth inward to get the most pleasing shape while promoting growth of stronger new branches.

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Outdoor plants toxic to household pets

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Pets bring many positive changes to households. Pets can make homes more lively, and the companionship of animals can reduce feelings of loneliness while offering additional health benefits to pet owners.

Individuals who are preparing to adopt or purchase pets need to be mindful that they may need to make changes at home to ensure residences are safe places for pets to reside. Much in the way new parents must assess the environs for potential hazards to babies, pet owners should conduct similar inspections. These safety checks should occur both inside and in the yard if pets will be spending time outdoors. Poisonous plants are a potentially hidden hazard prospective pet owners must address before bringing a new pet home.

People generally do not give much thought to the plants they include in their homes and yards beyond the care instructions and how they can add to the aesthetic appeal.

Homeowners may know if a plant likes the sun or shade, but they may not realize its potential for toxicity. That's because adults in particular are not prone to ingesting the plants in their yard that are inedible, unlike curious pets that may sniff and nibble plants when exploring their environments. For those with dogs and cats that will spend time outdoors, it's best to be aware of these potentially toxic plants, courtesy of the ASPCA, Dr. Buzby's and Garden Design.

• **Autumn crocus:**

There are various types of crocus plants, but the one most toxic to dogs is autumn crocus. The entire plant is toxic, but the highest concentration of toxic agent is found in the bulbs.

• **Sago palm:** People in warm climates may enjoy the look of palm trees on their properties. Despite its tropical and relaxing appearance, the Sago palm is extremely poisonous if ingested by pets, with the seeds being the most toxic part.

• **Lily:** Lilies are highly



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

toxic to cats in particular. Even grooming pollen off of their fur or drinking water out of a vase where lilies are kept may cause kidney failure.

• **Tulips and hyacinth:**

These early bloomers are beautiful flowers, but each contains a similar alkaloid toxin that is mild to moderately toxic to pets. Again, the highest concentration is found in the bulbs, which dogs or cats may dig up while exploring.

• **Aloe vera:** This

soothing succulent may be part of an arid climate landscape. Aloe contains saponin, a toxin with foaming properties that can harm pets if ingested and cause severe dehydration.

• **Begonia:** A popular outdoor and houseplant, begonia has decorative flowers and attractive leaves. However, the plant can be toxic to cats and dogs if ingested, particularly the underground tubers.

• **Azalea:** This flowering shrub produces flowers in

many colors, so it's often present in household landscapes. It's important to note that azaleas can be toxic to dogs and cats.â

• **Yew:** American, Canadian and Japanese yew may be found around properties. These shrubs produce small red berries with green centers (almost looking like the reverse of a Spanish olive with pimento). Yew is toxic to cats and dogs.

• **Dahlia:** Dahlia produce flowers in different colors, so they are common in flower beds. However, these plants also are mildly toxic to pets.

Many toxic plants can irritate the gastrointestinal system in pets, potentially resulting in vomiting, diarrhea or lethargy. Those who suspect a pet has ingested a poisonous plant should contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435 or their local veterinarian to learn about how to respond to possible exposure.

Gardening offers more than a day in the sun

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Millions of people embrace opportunities to get back in their gardens each spring, and they might be reaping more rewards from that activity than they realize. According to the American Institute of Stress, gardening sparks a level of creativity among enthusiasts,

and that can help to alleviate stress by lowering levels of the hormone cortisol. In addition, authors of a 2022 study published in the journal Urban Forestry & Urban Greening concluded that gardening during the COVID-19 pandemic helped people cope with coronavirus-related stress through outdoor activity.

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