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Tips to make a bedroom a more relaxing space

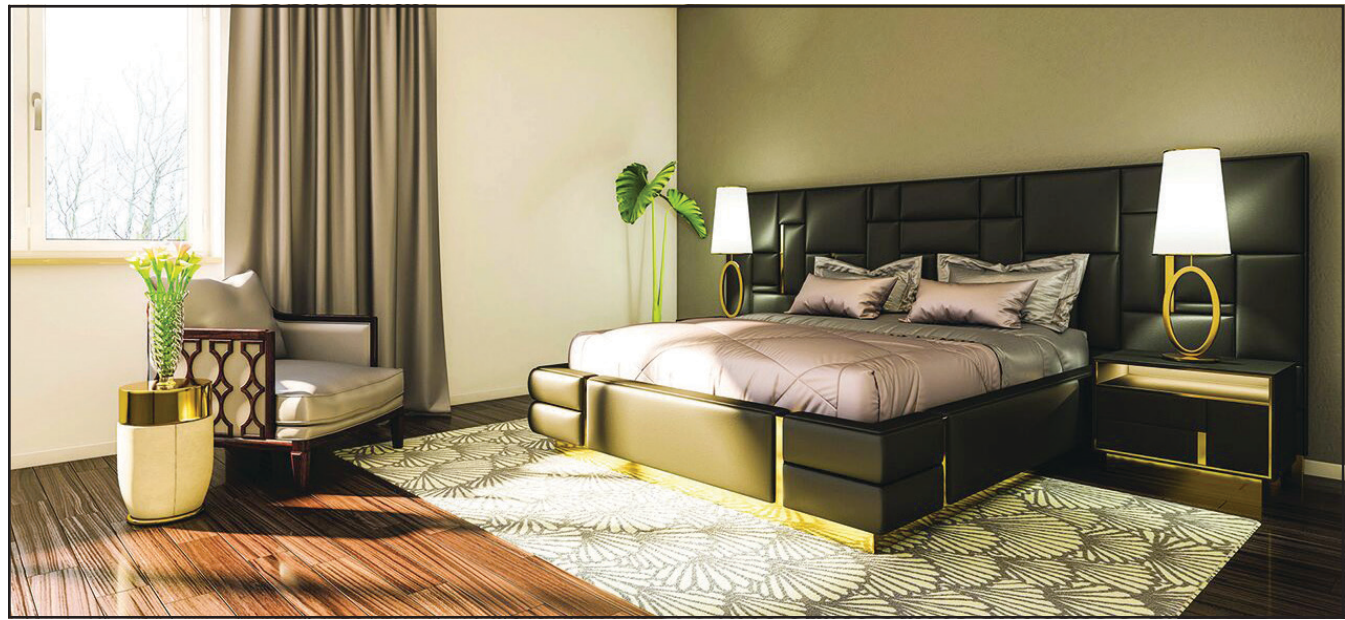
BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries. A home's interior spaces can provide a respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life no matter what's going on in the outside world.

Perhaps no space inside a home should be more relaxing than a bedroom. But bedrooms are not impervious to the hectic pace of life unless homeowners make a concerted effort to transform these spaces into relaxing respites. By implementing a variety of strategies, homeowners can ensure bedrooms embody the notion that homes are sanctuaries for their residents.

- **Install new window treatments.** Blinds, curtains, shades, and other window treatments come in a variety of styles and colors, ensuring there's at least one out there that can match an existing design scheme in a bedroom. Window treatments can be utilized to create a cozy vibe in a bedroom, blocking out lights from outside, including natural light from the sun and moon but also street lamps and decorative lights from neighboring properties. This can ensure bedrooms are a peaceful and welcoming respite when homeowners and residents return home each night.

- **Make the room**



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- **a device-free zone.** If escapism is an end goal, then turning a bedroom into a device-free zone is a must. Televisions, tablets and smartphones ensure the distractions and stressors of everyday life are never too far away, so removing these devices from bedrooms can help to establish a more peaceful bedroom environment. In addition, the National Sleep Foundation reports that using devices in a bedroom tends to reduce sleep duration by delaying the time users go to sleep.

- **Reconsider the lighting.** Bedroom lighting is another variable that merits consideration when trying to transform the space into a more relaxing room.

Ambient lighting can be utilized to create a soft and welcoming atmosphere in the room. Dimmable lights also allow residents to adjust the amount of light depending on the time of day. Lights can be bright when getting dressed in the morning, and then turned down when residents are going to bed and want to unwind before closing their eyes.

- **Clear out clutter.** A cluttered bedroom is more than an eyesore. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners notes that clutter can contribute to anxiety and adversely affect individuals' ability to sleep and focus. Examine bedrooms to see if there is any unnecessary or overly bulky furnishings that make the spaces feel cramped and

cluttered. Remove those items when possible, or consider working with a contractor to expand the room if budget and space allows.

Bedrooms can be respites within the larger sanctuary that homes are meant to be. That's especially so when residents implement strategies to transform bedrooms into more relaxing spaces.



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The benefits of lighting up your landscape



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Homeowners know there's no shortage of ways to tweak a property. Some homeowners may lament that the work associated with home ownership is never done, but owning a house also provide endless opportunities to upgrade the spaces people call home.

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. That popularity is undoubtedly due to a number of variables, and each highlights a benefit of installing landscape lighting around a property.

- **Affordability:** Some may think of big budget projects like kitchen remodels or room additions when pondering home renovations. Such projects can have a dramatic impact on the look and feel of a home, but landscape lighting can be equally transformative at a fraction of the cost of larger undertakings. The home renovation experts at Angi.com estimate the average landscape lighting project costs around \$4,000, making affordability a notable benefit of the project.

- **Appearance:** There's no denying the aesthetic appeal of a well-lit landscape at night. Landscape lighting can be utilized to draw attention to awe-inspiring components of a landscape, whether it's natural features like gardens and foliage or manmade components like architectural features. Improved appearance can increase curb appeal, which is often associated with how a home looks during daylight hours. But photographs of a well-lit nighttime landscape can impress buyers as well.

- **Cost savings:**

Landscape lighting might help homeowners reduce the cost of their homeowners insurance. Researchers at Policy-Genius.com found that insurance companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners who install a home security system. Insurance providers may offer additional savings to homeowners who pair such systems with landscape lighting, which can be a deterrent to burglars who prefer to operate under a cloak of darkness.

- **Safety:** Insurance firms may discount premiums because of landscape lighting because they view it as a deterrent to potential criminals. But landscape lighting also makes moving around a property at night safer for residents and guests. Lighting can be used to illuminate walkways, outdoor living rooms, patios around pools, and other areas where residents and guests will be walking at night, which can reduce the risk of falls and injuries that may result from such spills.

- **ROI:** Savvy homeowners consider a renovation's return on investment before deciding to go forward with a project. Studies vary, but the National Association of Realtors indicates landscape lighting can recoup as much as 70 percent of homeowners' investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing landscape lighting is even less.


Landscape lighting adds notable aesthetic appeal to a home at a fraction of the cost of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.

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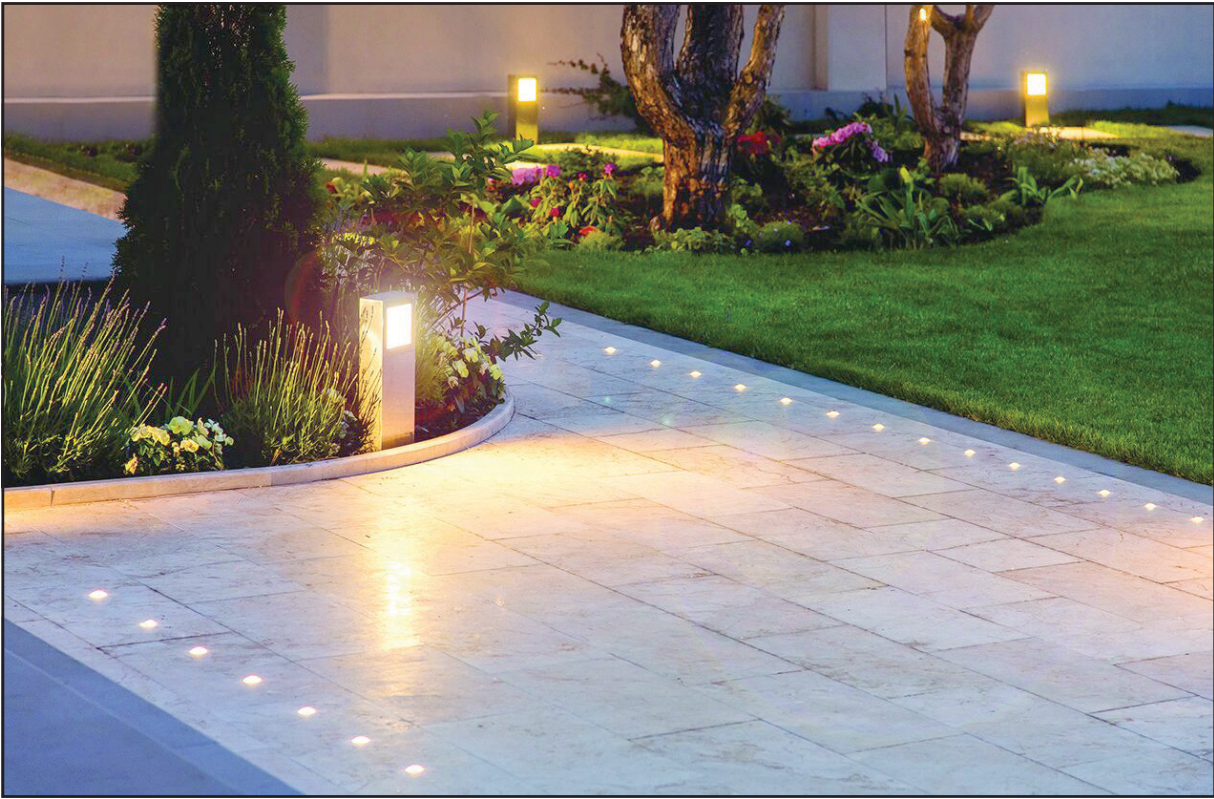


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Did You Know?

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Did you know? Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. Such lighting can extend living spaces, and many homeowners report that a well-lit landscape helps them feel more safe at home. Though the final cost to light up a home's exterior will depend on the size of a property, landscape lighting is among the more budget-friendly home renovations homeowners can consider. According to the renovation experts at Angi.com, the average cost of a landscape lighting project is \$4,000. Considering how much landscape lighting transforms the look of a property at night, that's a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks. Solar lights are popular, but homeowners may want to consider electrical wiring that ensures lights maintain their awe-inspiring glow throughout the night. Electrical work requires additional labor, and thus a higher price tag. However, Angi notes that modern LED bulbs consume just 25 percent of the energy used by incandescent alternatives, which can make them a more reliable option than self-installed solar lights.



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COMPOST AND ITS BENEFITS

What is Compost?

Compost is the product resulting from the controlled biological decomposition of organic material that has been sanitized through the generation of heat and stabilized to the point that it is beneficial to plant growth. Compost bears little physical resemblance to the raw material from which it originated. Compost is an organic matter resource that has the unique ability to improve the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of soils or growing media. It contains plant nutrients but is typically not characterized as a fertilizer. From the traditional growing of plants to novel uses in stormwater management and climate change mitigation, the production and use of compost has a bright future!

Benefits of Using Compost

- Improves the soil structure, porosity, and density, thus creating a better plant root environment.
- Increases infiltration and permeability of heavy soils, thus reducing erosion and runoff.
- Improves water holding capacity, thus reducing water loss and leaching in sandy soils.
- Supplies a variety of macro and micro-nutrients.
- May control or suppress certain soil-borne plant pathogens.
- Supplies significant quantities of organic matter.
- Improves cation exchange capacity (CEC) of soils and growing media, thus improving their ability to hold nutrients for plant use.
- Supplies beneficial microorganisms to soils and growing media.
- Improves and stabilizes soil pH.
- Can bind and degrade specific pollutants.
- Can closely simulate the characteristics of wetland soils, thereby encouraging the reestablishment of native plant species
- Can be used with great success as a mulch for erosion control.
- Immature compost also can act as mild herbicides to control weeds.



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Choosing deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. A 2022 survey of homeowners conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found that open yards are less appealing to home buyers than they once were. The survey noted that just 28 percent of respondents chose open yards, while 65 percent preferred patios and 55 percent chose decks. Green spaces remain popular, but the survey indicates that many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time



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comes to plan such areas. That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

• **Determine your budget.** Budget is a notable variable with any home renovation project, and the addition of an outdoor

living space is no exception. The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project. For example, composite decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and typically a longer life span. Pavers may prove less expensive than

composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio. It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an outdoor living space. In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.

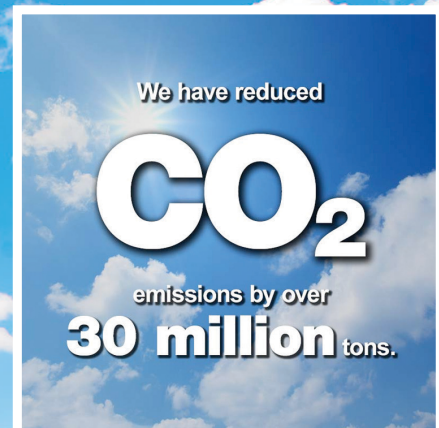
• **Identify your vision for the space.** Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more quickly and even

more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want. Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate between rooms inside the home. For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavillion and fireplace, while kitchen and dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio. Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space. Of course, decks can be as big as homeowners choose, which can make the spaces more multi-functional.

• **Recognize both may**
SEE DECK, Page A8

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Drought-resistant plants and trees

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A beautiful landscape adds considerable aesthetic appeal to a property and an awe-inspiring lawn and garden can greatly improve resale value. In fact, the American Society of Landscape Architects claims landscaping can increase a home's resale value by as much as 20 percent, a contention that supports the notion that a lush landscape is something buyers want and are willing to pay for.

Maintaining a lush landscape is no small task, but that job is notably easier when homeowners pick the right plants. The right plant for a property depends on where a home is located, but it's worth noting that drought-resistant plants and trees may be especially worthy investments. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 54 percent of the contiguous United States experienced moderate or exceptional drought over the first 10 months of 2024. The NASA Earth Observatory notes that even the southeastern United States, where Hurricane Helene struck and dropped considerable rainfall in the final days of September, was affected by drought, experiencing no precipitation in the month after that devastating storm struck.

When planning a landscape renovation, homeowners must take variables such as climate

into consideration, particularly if their end goal is a lush, awe-inspiring lawn and garden. With that in mind, the following are some drought-resistant plants and trees homeowners may want to consider adding to their landscapes.

Trees

The National Arbor Day Foundation notes that drought-tolerant trees are ideal as summer temperatures rise in many parts of the world. Drought-tolerant trees can survive in dry conditions, and they also provide great shade that allows people to enjoy their yards even when temperatures rise. The ADF notes that the following are some drought-resistant trees homeowners can consider:

- Eastern redcedar
- Bur oak
- Northern red oak
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Hackberry
- Scots pine
- Northern catalpa
- London planetree
- Shumard oak
- Live oak

Plants

Trees add ample aesthetic appeal to a property, but colorful plants also help to create a stunning setting. Homeowners concerned about drought can consider these plants that various garden experts note are tolerant of dry conditions.

- Aster
- Beardtongue

- Black-eyed Susan
- Bugleweed
- Catmint
- Lantana
- Lavender
- Purple coneflower

- Russian sage
 - Stonecrop
- Homeowners are urged to work with local lawn and garden professionals when picking trees and plants for

their properties. Such individuals can provide insight about species that are accustomed to local conditions and capable of thriving in them even when precipitation is low.



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Earthy colors dominate 2025



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BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Change is in the air when a new year arrives. People often use the turn of the calendar as an opportunity to redecorate living spaces or revamp their wardrobes. As individuals narrow down their projects, they may want to incorporate a fresh and trendy palette of colors. For 2025, the options are decidedly warm, cozy and earthy.

Industry color experts routinely recommend hues that can elevate homes, offices and other spaces. The following is a selection of shades that insiders predict will color the world for the coming year.

Quietude

Sherwin-Williams has named Quietude its color of the year. This soft sage color exudes serenity and understated luxury. Grayish-green with a touch of blue, Quietude is a soothing color of tranquility. Sherwin-Williams also offers a Color Collection of the Year that includes Convivial Yellow, Spiced Cider, and Nomadic Desert, among others.

Mocha Mousse

The title of Pantone® Color of the Year 2025 belongs to Mocha Mousse. Just as the name implies, this rich, warm brown suggests the intoxicating qualities of coffee and chocolate. It can create a feeling of comfort in any space, or even serve as the basis of a chocolate wardrobe color palette. According to Leatrice Eiseman, executive

director of the Pantone Color Institute, Mocha Mousse is “sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time an unpretentious classic.”

Purple Basil

Glidden's 2025 color of the year title belongs to Purple Basil, a dusty, neutral violet purple hue with mauve undertones. It embraces rich, warm energy, and is equally at home in a bedroom as it is in a dining room.

Cinnamon Slate

Cinnamon Slate is moody and introspective. This Benjamin Moore color blends rich plum and chocolate brown that the company calls “adaptable, yet distinct.” In fact, it is quite similar to Glidden's color of the year, but a tad more brown in nature.

Caramelized

Homeowners may want to consider Caramelized, an earthy terracotta brown that is Dunn-Edwards' 2025 Color of the Year. Caramelized is versatile and elegant, and it complements both modern and vintage interiors.

Elderton

Paula Taylor, Graham & Brown's head stylist and trend specialist, calls Elderton “a chameleon color that can be sophisticated yet cozy.” This medium brown is contemporary with a huge amount of depth. It may work in a rustic living room or a cozy library.

The new year arrives with a warm, saturated color palette that can revitalize spaces with cozy appeal.

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DECK

FROM PAGE A6

be in your best interest. Homeowners also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio. Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can

easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the area as a multifunctional space.

Homeowners planning outdoor living space projects may find themselves choosing between a deck and pavers. Each option can work, and homeowners may even want to combine the two.

What to know about kitchen cabinet projects

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Kitchens have long been characterized as the busiest room in a home. Kitchens are where meals are prepared and cooked, but they also tend to be gathering spaces where families connect at the end of a day and where guests congregate during holiday celebrations and birthday parties.

All that time in the kitchen makes these popular rooms to renovate. Homeowners who want to give their kitchens a new look and feel without doing a full renovation can consider kitchen cabinet projects. An understanding of kitchen cabinet projects can help homeowners decide if this undertaking is for them.

- **Cabinet renovations do not necessarily require replacement.** Some cabinets may not need to be removed and replaced. The renovation experts at HGTV note that kitchen cabinet refacing can be a budget-friendly way to give a new look to cabinets that do not require replacement. Refacing can be as extensive as homeowners prefer, but

such projects can create a whole new aesthetic in the kitchen depending on the extent of the project.

- **There are many different types of kitchen cabinets.**

Homeowners who have never been involved in a cabinet project should know they will have many different options to choose from. Face-frame cabinets are a traditional choice made with a frame around the door and any drawers that might be included as part of the cabinets. Some additional options include full overlay cabinets, frameless cabinets, recessed panel cabinets, and Shaker cabinets. Homeowners hesitant to choose their own cabinets can work with a contractor and/or interior designer to find the option that aligns best with their current kitchen.

- **Cabinet materials and finishes vary as well.** Cabinets can be made from an array of materials, including wood, laminate, metal, and plastic. Cabinets also can be finished with paint, stain, glaze, and lacquer. Each finish has its own unique characteristics. For example,



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painted cabinets may need to be tended to with greater frequency than other options because paint can fade. However, painted cabinets remain popular because homeowners can paint them any

color at any time.

- **Consider the countertops when adjusting kitchen cabinets.** Kitchens tend to have color schemes, and that scheme is often reflected in the color of cabinets and countertops. When tweaking just the cabinets, homeowners should give ample consideration to the overall color scheme of their kitchens. Interior designers can be invaluable resources for homeowners who aren't quite sure how new or refaced cabinets will fit into an overall color scheme.

- **Consider replacement if necessary.** A kitchen cabinet replacement project will be more expensive than refacing the cabinets. But there are instances when cabinets require replacement. Excessive wear and tear, insufficient storage, a dated appearance, and cabinets that appear to be sagging off the wall are some indicators that replacement is necessary.

Updated cabinets can give a kitchen a whole new look, even if the cabinets are refaced instead of replaced.

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Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.



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Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds

and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and

often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.

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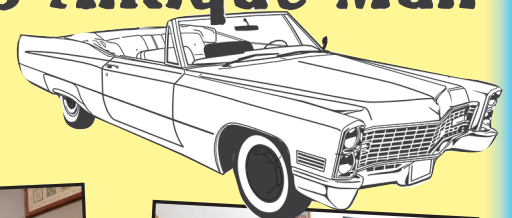
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Spring planting pointers

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Many people view spring as a season of rejuvenation. That renewal may be somewhat metaphorical for human beings, but it's literal for lawns and gardens that begin to grow anew as temperatures rise and hours of daylight increase in spring.

Each spring presents an opportunity for homeowners to get back outside and tend to their gardens. As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.

• Start with the soil.

Soil can serve as the starting point each spring. Winter can take its toll on a garden and even overwhelm the area with debris over the colder months. Clear rocks and other debris from the area before loosening the

soil. The Farmer's Almanac recommends loosening soil to a depth of at least eight inches if planting a new garden. An existing garden may only need to be loosened to a depth of around six inches, after which homeowners can mix compost into the soil in early spring. Compost is organic matter that provides nutrients and helps to build strong plant roots.

• Consider a raised garden in colder climates.

The Farmer's Almanac notes raised gardens can help homeowners in colder climates dry out and warm up wet, cold soils more quickly. Homeowners in such regions also can cover their beds with black plastic or cardboard prior to planting. Doing so can protect the beds from late-season snow and spring rains and also helps to overcome erosion.

• Take soil temperatures.

Unpredictable weather is



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among the noticeable effects of climate change in recent years. That lack of predictability can make spring planting a little more tricky than it once was. Experts note that soil temperatures around 50 F are best for cool-season crops, while soil should be 60 F or warmer when planting warm-weather plants such as tomatoes.

• **Work with a garden center to identify what to plant.** The right plants for one region may not be ideal for another, so homeowners are urged to work with a local landscaper or garden center before planting. Such a consultation can be especially useful for homeowners planting a new garden. Landscapers and garden

center professionals will know which plants work in the local climate.

• Consider planting vegetables in the spring.

Various garden experts note that spring is an ideal time to plant a vegetable garden. If planted at the right time, a vegetable garden can save homeowners money on their grocery bills and provide a season's worth of fresh veggies. Lettuce and spinach are sun- and shade-friendly vegetables, which can make them good options for a spring garden. Cool-season root vegetables, which include beets, carrots and swiss chard, are some other notable veggies that can thrive in early spring.

Spring is a season of rejuvenation for gardens. That's even more true when homeowners consider some conventional planting wisdom in early spring.

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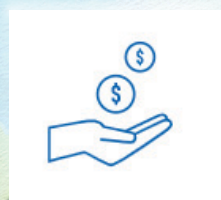
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