



Spring

# HOME & GARDEN

April 2021

A Special Supplement To:

The Malone Telegram



# Over the past year, homes have really taken a beating

## Here's how to undo all that damage

By **JURA KONCIUS**

Washington Post

Like many other people, since the pandemic started last March, my husband and I have eaten a lot of meals with plates propped on our laps while watching Netflix. A blob of something I dropped on our new Pottery Barn leather chair went undetected for a few days. Then, when it could not be easily wiped off, my industrious husband took the abrasive side of a sponge to it, leaving scratches that looked as if a bear had dragged its claws across the surface. More on that later.

Our time stuck inside during this pandemic has left its mark not only on our mental health, finances and waistlines, but also on our home furnishings.

Whether it's carpets dotted with spilled coffee or cat vomit, or wooden desks scraped by laptops, Legos and game consoles, many home items are in need of care and repair. (Aren't we all?)

We rounded up five major areas of damage and consulted experts (and TikTok) for the best ways to address them.

### WOOD

If you have been using disinfecting wipes to sanitize your wooden tables, stop now: They can soften the finish. "Simple soap and water is a great way to wash your hands and also clean your furniture," says Gat Caperton, chief executive of Gat Creek, a West Virginia furniture

See **UNDO 3**

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# Undo

## From 2

manufacturing company. Use a soft, damp cloth with a touch of soap to clean your tabletop, then wipe with a dry cloth.

### RUGS AND CARPET

Experts say you should remove stains on a carpet or rug immediately, if possible. But if you don't catch it right away, you still have options. First, consult your rug's label or manufacturer's instructions for best cleaning practices.

If it's a new stain, says David Weidkamp, sales manager at rug manufacturer Tufenkian, "blot up the excess liquid as quickly as possible, then use a cleaning solution and blot again." You don't need some fancy, specific carpet-cleaning product, he says; dish soap is a good, basic solution. He suggests a few drops of mild dish-washing soap (Seventh Generation or Dawn will work) mixed in a cup of water.

Once cleaning and rinsing is complete, blot the area with a dry towel. Use a portable fan or hair dryer set on cool - never hot. A wet/dry vac is also useful for immediate removal of spills and stains, and to suck up cleaning liquids before they dry. (Weidkamp prefers a small unit, such as Shop-Vac's 2 1/2-gallon model.)

### OUTDOOR FABRICS

"People are entertaining more outdoors, and they don't want to dismantle everything every day," says Sarah Dooley, director of upholstery at Sunbrella, a maker of indoor/outdoor fabrics.

For cleaning Sunbrella's outdoor pillows or cushions, take out the insert and hand-wash the fabric in a mixture of dish or mild soap, such as Dawn or Woolite, and water, using a soft-bristle brush or sponge to work on stains. After checking the washing instructions for your fabric or cushion, you can consider throwing the covers into a washing machine. (Close the zippers first.) Wash in cold water on the delicate cycle, then air-dry, Dooley says.

If the cushions or pillows are not removable, prepare a solu-

tion of 1/4 cup of mild dish soap to a gallon of water, and clean them seam to seam using a soft-bristle brush. (She likes the Grainger Tough Guy horsehair brush.) Then rinse thoroughly; you can use a hose.

### UPHOLSTERY

As sofas and cushy chairs took a beating last year, watching people clean them became a new form of entertainment. Bissell's Little Green portable deep-cleaner, for example, went viral on TikTok.

A younger audience was captivated, and sales of the Little Green nearly doubled in the past year, according to Lauren Fuller, Bissell's brand manager

of portable deep cleaners. The unit sells for \$109.99.

"They would watch the TikTok and say, 'Holy cow, my carpet or upholstery did not look that dirty, and now look at the dirty water tank,'" Fuller says.

Brinda Ayer, content director at Food52, has a small apartment in Brooklyn with her partner and a dog. Little Green has been a lifesaver for their gray mid-century-style sofa. "We ate some meals here, plus, in the evening, had ice cream and snacks," she says. "We needed more cleaning than ever."

If you're sticking with s

### LEATHER

For my own black leath-

er scratch, I ordered Drtuz's Leather Recoloring Balm, available in basic colors. The kit arrives with what looks like a jar of black shoe polish, a spongy applicator and a buffer. Apply the tinted balm, wipe off the excess, then buff. It worked like a charm (to my husband's relief).

Some leather manufacturers offer consumer products to help with maintenance and repair. Cheryl Sigmon, vice president of merchandising and product development for furniture manufacturer Bradington-Young, says her company stocks bottles of touch-up colors for its own line, as well as leather cleaning and protection kits.

In general, Sigmon says, if you're going to apply a color to your leather, test it on a hidden spot first. Then use a cotton swab or cotton ball to saturate the damaged area with the color. For serious scratches or damage such as ink stains, she recommends a professional repair service such as Uniter or ServeCo.

She also has a pandemic caution. Leather can be damaged by alcohol-based products. So don't use sanitizing wipes to clean it, and beware of putting your hands on the arms of your leather furniture just after you've used sanitizer. It could break down the top coat.

# Getting Ready for Spring!

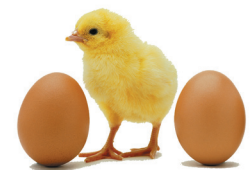


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# Dig in to get your garden ready to thrive

By **ADRIAN HIGGINS**

Washington Post

**G**ardening is a year-round treat, but the arrival of spring is special, because it's the moment when both the gardener and all the plants in the yard are bursting with excitement.

The next six weeks or so mark not only the time when we launch the growing season, but also the period when plants are at their most vulnerable. Fresh growth is tender and can be damaged by the wild swings in weather in March and April. In the Mid-Atlantic (and many other parts of the country), Mother Nature can give us an 80-degree blast followed by a freeze and a punishing hail-storm. There isn't much you can do about hail damage, but there are measures you can take to help the garden survive the weather roller coaster. They also give you a chance to get outside to greet and enjoy the spring.

You will have to get fresh supplies of plants, soil mixes, fertilizers and tools. This might be a concern in the time of coronavirus restrictions, but many garden centers, hardware stores and feed stores operate outdoors for the most part. And, of course, there's that bazaar known as the internet.

## CLEANUP AND BED PREPARATION

In beds free of permanent plantings, such as the vegetable garden and annual flower beds, the tasks are straightforward. The first job is to remove weeds. Forget the impending dandelions and violets; I'm talking about established winter weeds, whose roots now go deep, with such interlopers as henbit, chickweed, bittercrass and ground ivy. You rarely need herbicides for this; the weeds will lift quite easily between your fingers in the rich, moist soil of the veggie patch. They will also surrender to a weeding

knife or a sharp, long-handled hoe. Get to them before they go to seed.

## FROST PROTECTION

Once trees and shrubs have broken into flower and leaf growth, they are prone to cold damage, because the tissues are soft and tender. It pays to keep an eye on nighttime temperatures into early May. If a

frost or near-frost is predicted, you can cover certain plants for protection. The Hortensia hydrangeas are a good candidate for this, as are Japanese maples. The blossoms of strawberries and blueberries should be covered against freezing, as well as those of apples, peaches and persimmons if the trees are



Spring is the time to get your garden ready and help it through severe weather changes. Pexels

See DIG 5



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# Dig

From 4

small enough to wrap.

Seedlings of veggies, herbs and annuals should be covered on such nights.

If you don't have horticultural row fabric, you could use a light sheet. The challenge is ensuring the covering won't blow off (clothes pins are handy) and don't use anything that will crush small plants.

## SEEDING AND HARDENING OFF

We start young plants in two ways: either by seeding directly into the garden or planting small transplants that are a few weeks old. Some seeds can go directly into the ground now, including peas, radishes, carrots, nasturtium and lettuce, but wait until the soil has warmed.

The process of conditioning transplants for the spring garden is called hardening off. If you don't do this, plants will probably wilt and die — or at least fail to thrive. Even if you buy transplants, there's no guarantee that they have been adequately conditioned, so you should harden them off to be sure.

During the day, place the pots outside in a sheltered area, away from the wind and afternoon sun. Bring them in at night. Water them at least once daily, before they wilt. Do this for a week before planting, longer if cold temperatures are in the forecast.

Cold is not the only problem. After planting, transplants should be protected from sun and wind, at least for their first 24 hours, with horticultural row covers or shade cloth. If that is not an option, plant on a cloudy or rainy day.

## MULCHING

A light layer of mulch, no more than two inches, is helpful in suppressing weeds and retaining soil moisture. But mulch should not be viewed as a cosmetic covering for our benefit; it is there for the plants' needs. Mulches that are applied too thickly or too often will harm plants and the soil. I prefer fine-textured, organic mulches, such as pine fines. Save wood chips for paths. Avoid mulch volcanoes around trees, which

cause harmful root growth and other problems.

## PLANTING

It's best to plant most trees and shrubs in early fall, because they are not then putting energy into top growth while dealing with transplant shock. Spring-planted woodies need handling with more care, and the earlier you can plant them, the more established they will be before summer.

## LAWNS

Any lawn will look better after it's given a sharp edge where it meets plant beds. Use a spade or long-handled edging tool rather

than a shovel, if possible.

The predominant grass type in the Mid-Atlantic, turf-type tall fescue, grows rapidly in spring, especially a wet one. It is best kept at a somewhat tall three inches to reduce stress, but mow it before it gets more than four inches in height. This may mean having to mow twice a week in April and May. Replace or sharpen dull mower blades.

Pre-emergent herbicides are available to deal with crabgrass and Japanese stiltgrass, but the best way to minimize lawn weeds is to have a thick stand of turf. Dandelions and other weeds can be hand-dug or given

a spot treatment of weed killer.

Lawn fertilizer should be applied at half the normal fall rate in spring to reduce nutrient run-off, but check the rules where you live; some jurisdictions limit fertilizer and pesticide use on home lawns.

The optimal time for seeding with fescues is late summer and early fall. Bare patches can be seeded now with proper soil preparation, but the new grass may melt away in summer heat. Similarly, fresh sod also needs soil preparation and may not make it through the summer, but it will look good for a few

weeks, at least. Consider converting a part of the lawn into plant beds.

## CONTAINER GARDENING

Old soil and plant material should be cleaned out; the soil can be spread around the garden, and pots can be scrubbed with a bleach solution to sanitize them and send any slugs on their way. It's best to use fresh potting mix. To make it go farther, fill the bottom half of the pot with your own compost. Any weed seeds in the compost will be safely buried.

Containers must drain.



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# How to protect your yard from deer



METRO

Metro

With more than 60 different species of deer worldwide, there's a good chance individuals will have some sort of interaction with these majestic animals at one point during their lifetimes.

Deer, which live on all continents except Antarctica, can survive in everything from mountainous areas to wet rainforests to suburban neighborhoods. These herbivores are voracious eaters

that will search far and wide for their meals. Home landscapes tend to be easy pickings for foraging deer.

Many people are excited to see deer in their neighborhoods and yards because they can be such graceful creatures to behold. However, once deer start to munch on ornamental trees, annuals and flowering shrubs, the novelty of these animals may wear off. Furthermore, deer also can be covered in ticks

that spread illnesses like Lyme disease. Here are some tips to keep deer at bay.

- **Avoid tasty morsels.** Deer like English ivy, lettuces, impatiens, pansies, and hostas. Fruit trees also are targets. Choose other plants to grow, and wait until after early spring, when deer aren't as concerned with regaining weight lost during the winter, to get them in the ground.

- **Use fishing line to deter deer.** Put a few stakes in the ground and then run fishing line at a height of about three feet. Deer can sense movement but do not have keen vision. As the deer approach your garden, they'll brush against the 'invisible' fishing line and then get spooked off.

- **Plant plants that produce strong aromas.** The experts at Good Housekeeping suggest planting lavender and marigolds, which emit strong aromas. Deer will be reluctant to walk through because the smell can interfere with their ability to find food and assess their environment via their sense of smell.

- **Stock up on soap.** The tallow in soap helps keep deer away, according to the

University of Vermont Extension Department of Plant and Soil Science. Scented soaps like Irish Spring may be especially good at warding off deer.

- **Plant in levels.** Raised beds and sunken gardens can discourage deer from coming into the yard because they aren't avid climbers, offers the home and garden resource

This Old House.

- **Employ harmless scare tactics.** Deer are skittish, and any unfamiliar movement or sound may scare them away. Cans hung from strings, sundials and lights can keep them at bay.

Deer will seek out an easy meal, but homeowners can take steps to safeguard their trees, flowers and shrubs.

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# Simple ways to prevent dog-related lawn damage

Metro

Dogs love spending time outdoors. Dog owners with yards know that dogs benefit greatly from some exercise in the backyard. While that time might be great for dogs, it can take its toll on lawns.

Dog urine and feces can adversely affect the look and health of a lush green lawn. Nitrogen is essential to healthy soil, but only at certain levels. When those levels are exceeded, the result can be lawn damage. According to The Spruce Pets, an advisory site that offers practical tips and training advices to pet owners, this is what happens when pets frequently urinate on grass. Urine is naturally high in nitrogen, so when pets urinate on lawns, the grass might turn yellow or brown due to the excess nitrogen content. Nitrogen also is present in lawn fertilizers, further exacerbating the problem for pet owners who fertilize their lawns.

In addition to urine damage, dogs can trample frosted grass, contributing to problems that may not become evident until spring, and get into areas like gardens where they wreak additional havoc.

Pet owners who want to let

their dogs run free in the yard but don't want damaged grass may be tempted to put their pooches in diapers or confine them to crates when letting them outside. But such an approach isn't necessary. In fact, some simple strategies can be highly effective at preventing dog-related lawn damage.

■ **Speak with a landscaper** about planting new grass. Certain types of grass, such as Bermuda grass, can withstand dog damage better than others. Local climate will dictate which types of grass are likely to thrive in a given area, so speak with a professional landscaper about the viability of planting new grass.

■ **Install fencing.** Pet owners with expansive yards can install fencing that allows dogs to spend time exercising outdoors without granting them access to the entire property. Large dogs will need more room than small ones, but try to build fenced-in areas that allow dogs to run freely and get the exercise they need to stay healthy.

■ **Work with a dog trainer.** Dog trainers might be able to work with dogs so they

only urinate in certain areas of the yard, greatly reducing the damage they can cause to a lawn. Trainers also might help curb digging and clawing behaviors that can damage lawns as well as gardens.

■ **Consider hardscaping.** Hardscaping might be most effective for pet owners with small properties. Hardscaping does not include grass and can add visual appeal to a property while saving pet owners the headaches of dealing with dog-related lawn damage.

Dogs need time outdoors, and homeowners can take various steps to protect their lawns from dog-related damage.



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# Stay safe when working in the yard

Metro

A day spent working in the yard is an ideal way to pass the time on spring and summer afternoons. A pristine landscape can add value to a property and instill pride in homeowners who put a lot of thought and effort into their lawns and gardens.

A sun-soaked day can make it easy to overlook potential threats when working in a lawn or garden. But safety precautions are of the utmost necessity when working in the yard, where the risk for serious injury is considerable. For example, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons reports that, in 2016, more than 90,000 patients, including nearly 5,000 children, were treated in hospital emergency rooms for lawn mower-related injuries.

Lawn- and garden-related injuries can be prevented without going to great lengths.

■ Know your terrain before mowing. Knowing the terrain in your own yard can reduce the risk for accident or injury. This can be especially important when mowing the lawn with a riding mower. Adhere to man-

ufacturers' recommendations regarding inclines to reduce tip-over accidents that can pin riders beneath the mower. Study hilly areas of the yard prior to mowing so you know which areas are safe to mow with a riding mower and which areas are best mowed with a walk-behind mower. For greater control when using a walk-behind mower on an incline, mow parallel to the slope.

■ Apply and reapply sunscreen. Sunburns may not require trips to the emergency room, but they can still be serious. In fact, the Skin Cancer Foundation notes that sunburn is a leading cause in the majority of cases of basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The SCF recommends applying sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside to allow the sunscreen to bond to your skin. Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours, and more often if you're sweating excessively. The SCF recommends broad spectrum sunscreens, which protect the skin from both UVA and UVB rays. Though a prod-

uct with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 is acceptable when walking the dog or driving to work, the SCF advises using a product with an SPF of 30 or higher when engaging in extended outdoor activities like gardening or mowing.

■ Employ the buddy system. Use the buddy system when pruning tall trees or performing any tasks that require a ladder. The Orthopedic Institute of Pennsylvania reports that more than 164,000 people are injured each year falling off a ladder. Ask a significant other or neighbor to hold the ladder in place while you climb up to reduce your risk of falling. If cutting large branches, cut them piecemeal to reduce the risk of being injured by heavy falling branches.

■ Inspect the property for

insect hives. The OIP notes that

See SAFE 10



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# Techniques to revitalize a lawn after a long winter

## Metro

Pristine, snow-covered landscapes can be wonders to behold. While that blanket of white is idyllic, a lawn's delicate blades may be paying a hefty price beneath the cold, heavy piles of snow.

Snow plows push salt and sand up on the grass while subterranean animals like mice and moles dig burrows beneath piles of snow as they try to find food and stay warm. Such conditions are not favorable for thriving landscapes. When the spring thaw arrives, lawns may be in dire need of some TLC. The following techniques can mitigate winter-related lawn damage.

■ Clear out debris. Remove any scattered leaves, branches and other debris that has been strewn across the property due to storms or snow-laden trees. This will give you a clean canvas to work on.

■ Dry out snow mold. The Family Handyman says snow

mold is a cold-season fungus that causes gray-colored circles or patches on the lawn where there has been snow. To alleviate snow mold, rake the lawn to loosen matted grass and facilitate the drying-out process.

■ De-thatch the lawn. Heavy snow can compress the grass and cause some of it to die off. De-thatching

helps to remove dead grass blades and separate any matting. This enables water, nutrients and air to reach the lawn's roots more effectively. Thinning out old organic matter also helps encourage new growth.

■ Aerate the soil. Coupled with dethatching, aeration involves loosening the soil or poking holes to allow nu-

trients to move freely to the roots.

■ Kill weeds before they spread. Weeds may be the first to start growing when the weather begins to warm. Address them promptly by manually pulling them or applying an herbicide.

■ Overseed the lawn. Chances are there are some bare spots that have formed

over the winter. Overseeding can help to fill in the lawn. Make sure that frosts are largely a thing of the past and soil temperature is around 50 F to 60 F before seeding. Water daily until grass fills in.

■ Apply nutrients. Fertilizer and compost can restore nutrients to the lawn

See **LAWN 10**

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# Lawn

From 9

that may have been used up over winter. A soil test at a nearby horticultural center can tell you which nutrients are needed, according to the Chemistry Cachet, a guide to using chemistry secrets for healthy living, beauty, cleaning, and gardening. Lawns can be restored to their pre-winter glory after some sweat equity and

about five to six weeks of consistent sunshine and warm weather.

# Safe

From 8

the most common insect stings in spring come from bees, wasps and hornets. Homeowners who are not careful can inadvertently come across hives when doing spring clean-up, making them vulnerable to bites and stings. That can be very dangerous for anyone, and especially so for people with a history of allergic reactions to insect bites or stings. Inspect areas where you'll be working to make sure insects haven't put down roots in your property. If you discover any hives and are hesitant to remove them on your own, contact a local land-



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scaping firm. Lawn and garden accidents and injuries can be serious. Thankfully, accidents and injuries are easily prevented when homeowners take a few simple safety precautions while tending to their lawns and gardens.



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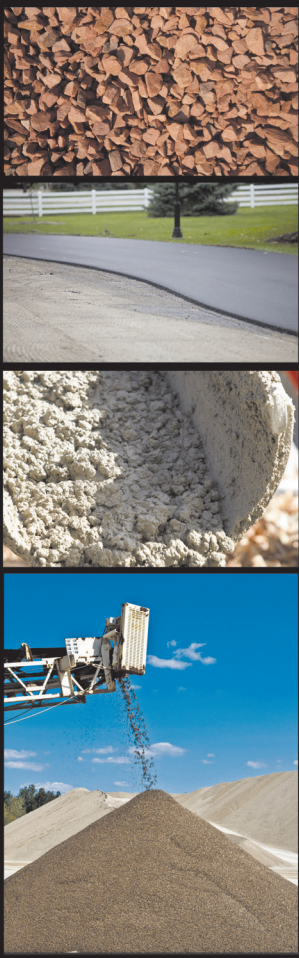
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# Learn the right ways to clean lawn and patio furniture

Metro

Once the days begin to grow a little bit longer and the numbers on the thermometer creep a tad higher, outdoor entertaining season is right around the corner. Homeowners may be anxious to once again return to the comforts of their backyards. However, their patio furniture may not be ready for lounging just yet.

Some simple cleaning strategies make it easy to brighten outdoor furniture made of metal, glass, wood, and plastic. Before homeowners know it, their backyards will be ready for outdoor entertaining season.

## Proper storage

Storing outdoor furniture during the colder months of the year is a great way to protect items from the elements. This may involve careful shrink-wrapping and keeping items outdoors, or by moving furniture indoors to a shed or garage. Cleaning the furniture one last time before storing it also can be handy.

## Remove stuck-on debris

Inspect furniture and be prepared to remove any stuck-on debris, such as bird droppings, sticky food residue or even cobwebs and insect nests. Be sure to use a cleaning tool that is safe for the material you are cleaning. Test an inconspicuous area of the furniture first to ensure your tools don't damage the furniture. For example, many scrub brushes can scratch glass or aluminum.

## Make a thorough cleanser

Clean stains off of furniture with a versatile cleanser. A mild cleaner can be made by mixing 1/2 cup baking soda with 1 gallon of warm water, according to the experts at Better Homes & Gardens. Regular dishwashing detergent also can be mixed with water, as it has a mild bleaching agent. This cleanser can be used on plastic resin furniture or metal furniture, which are popular patio furniture materials.

## Patio fabrics

Check the cleaning in-

structions of outdoor fabrics, as there might be specific instructions on the tags. In some cases, fabric may be removed and washed in a washing machine on a gentle setting. A solution of dish soap and warm water also is a gentle way to clean outdoor fabrics. Once items are clean, HGTV advises applying a water-repellent fabric protector to minimize staining and maintenance.

## Strip or sand

Wood furniture may need specialized care. If stains cannot be removed with a mild cleanser, then hard woods like teak can be surface-sanded to restore items' original look.

Pressure washers can often do more harm than good to patio furniture, so it's best to look for an alternative way to clean them. Usually a bit of elbow grease and a cleanser is all that's needed. Give the cleaning product time to work. Wipe down and dry the furniture thoroughly to prevent the growth of mildew.

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# Simple ways to reduce risk of disease in your garden

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No garden is immune to disease. Even the most attentive, experienced gardeners have had to confront disease in their gardens, which can lead to significant damage and potentially kill plants.

Various bacterial, fungal and viral diseases can affect gardens, and the University of Maryland Extension notes that fungicides, which are chemicals that destroy fungus, are only rarely recommended to combat disease. In fact, a proactive approach rooted in prevention is often the most effective way to reduce risk for disease in gardens.

■ Choose the right varieties of plant. The UME notes that choosing disease-resistant varieties is an effective way to prevent disease in gardens. Gardeners who have confronted disease in their gardens in the past should do their best to identify which diseases were present and then

choose plants that are considered resistant to those diseases. A local garden center professional can help gardeners who are uncertain about what to plant.

■ Plant in the right spots. The choice of where to plant is significant. Avoid wet areas with insufficient drainage. The home renovation experts at HGTV note that wet soil can decrease plants' chances for survival because of excess water and a lack of oxygen. If the only spots available for planting tend to be especially wet, consider planting in raised beds or having a French drain installed. Learn how much light plants need prior to planting them. Some can thrive in shady areas, while others require ample sunlight each day.

■ Plant at the right time. Planting too early when the soil is not yet warm enough can make plants vulnerable to disease by weakening their ability to fight. Use a soil thermometer to determine soil

temperature and only plant when the conditions for planting are ideal.

■ Harvest on time. When planting vegetables, it's imperative that the vegetables are harvested on time. The University of Georgia Extension notes that fully mature vegetables left on the plant attract disease and are vulnerable to insect infestations.

■ Control insect infestations. Certain insects can spread disease, so it's important that gardeners learn to recognize which insects pose a threat to their plants. Speak with a local gardening center about invasive insects and how to address infestations without harming the plant.

As the planting season approaches, gardeners can take various steps to make their plants and vegetables less vulnerable to disease.



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