



Spring
**HOME
& GARDEN**

What first-time homeowners should know about fertilizing a lawn

Metro

Shortly after buying a home, many first-time homeowners recognize how challenging it can be to maintain a property. Many embrace that challenge and refashion their homes to reflect their personalities, interests and tastes.

First-time homeowners may direct the bulk of their attention to decorating the interiors of their homes upon moving in, but the work extends outside as well. Tending to a lawn is a responsibility worth taking seriously, as the American Society of Landscape Architects reports a well-groomed landscape can increase resale value by anywhere from 15 to 20 percent.

First-time homeowners may not be thinking about resale value, but it's never too early to prioritize lawn care, which should include routine fertilization. Fertilizing can ensure a lawn grows in lush, green and healthy, but first-time homeowners may want to know a few things prior to taking a spreader for a spin for the first time.

¥ Identify what the lawn needs before purchasing fertilizer. No two lawns are the same, and that's something to keep in mind when shopping



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for fertilizer. Even neighboring properties may have different soil needs, so it's imperative that homeowners identify any nutrient deficiencies prior to fertilizing. A simple, inexpensive soil test can reveal what a lawn needs, and such results can help homeowners pick the right fertilizer for their properties.

¥ Get a handle on nitrogen

needs. First-time homeowners will undoubtedly come across fertilizers promising to address nitrogen needs in a lawn, but it's important to avoid over-fertilizing with nitrogen. Nitrogen is absorbed quickly, particularly when homeowners remember to water each day after fertilizing. So it's easy to add too much nitrogen, which can lead to the

development of thatch that ultimately blocks sunlight, nutrients and water, thus leading to weaker roots and a lawn that looks nothing like the lush, green carpet homeowners are aiming for. Homeowners concerned about overdoing it with nitrogen can utilize a slow-release fertilizer that gives the lawn time to absorb nutrients and break them down.

¥ Apply evenly. Even application is an important component of successful fertilizing. Many find it easier to apply fertilizer evenly when using a spreader with a granule fertilizer product. Spray fertilizers can work as well, but first-timers may find it difficult to apply products evenly when spraying. When using a spreader, read fertilizing packaging instructions carefully to ensure the spreader is on the right setting when starting. If the setting is not correct, you may end up spreading too much or too little fertilizer.

¥ Fertilize more than once. The lawn care experts at Lawn Doctor® note that strategic applications across the seasons will increase the chances a lawn comes in lush and green. Fertilizing more than once between spring and fall is a necessity no matter which type of grass is in the yard, but the timing may vary depending on grass type and local climate. Consult with a local lawn care professional to determine when and how often to fertilize.

Fertilizing a lawn can produce a home exterior homeowners can be proud of, even if they have little or no experience with lawn maintenance.

The benefits of lighting up your landscape

Metro

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



See LIGHTING T3

Metro

Lighting

From T2

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 PolicyGenius.com found that insurance compa-

nies 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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Did You Know?

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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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6 reasons to build a retaining wall

Metro

Homes are not always located on flat lots. In fact, landscapes can feature hills and valleys, necessitating some extra steps when installing certain features. Retaining walls are often utilized to improve the functionality and safety of a property.

Retaining walls are typically recommended to eliminate soil erosion and improve drainage, says Design One Landscape Corporation. Over time, soil erosion or drainage issues can eat into the structural integrity of a home and cause cosmetic damage and unhealthy conditions, such as mold growth. Here's a look at six instances when installing a retaining wall can be advantageous.

1. Remedy a slope in the yard: Retaining walls help make sloped areas functional. The wall will help flatten the slope so that water and soil do not flow downward.

2. Make the yard easier to traverse: A retaining wall can make it easier to walk around a



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sloped yard. Rather than contending with the hill both uphill and downhill, particularly if it's steep, the retaining wall can be installed to create flat areas that are easier to navi-

gate.

3. Manage water runoff: Retaining walls can hold back or redirect water to help prevent flooding. A wall can be used to keep water away from the

foundation, where it may enter the home.

4. Prevent soil erosion: Along with keeping water back, the retaining wall also will stop soil erosion and run-

off so it doesn't cause an unsightly condition in the yard, or prove dangerous during severe weather.

5. Prevent sink holes: By helping to manage water runoff, retaining walls can reduce the risk of sinkholes. According to Slaton Bros, Inc., a retaining wall service provider, sinkholes occur when enough water pools beneath the surface of the ground to weaken it to the point of not being capable of supporting the ground's surface weight.

6. Improve curb appeal: Retaining walls also may serve cosmetic functions. They provide additional surfaces upon which to place container plants or additional decorations. Retaining walls also can provide backdrops to shrubs and separate grassy areas from patios or swimming pools.

Retaining walls marry form and function. Homeowners with sloped yards or drainage issues should consider installing retaining walls to address these issues.

Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Metro

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



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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.

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 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

See FEEDERST5

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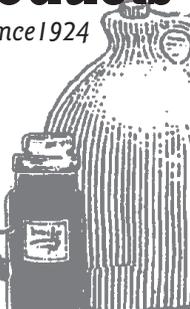
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Feeders

From T4

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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How to pick a whole home's worth of

PAINT COLORS

By **KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS**

The Washington Post

Paint color paralysis is real. And the only thing harder than picking the perfect shade is picking a house full of them. Too many jarring hues can leave you feeling like you're walking through a bag of Skittles. But a monochrome medley can be even worse as you shift from room to room: blah.

When it comes to choosing a palette for your entire home, "the main thing is try to be as cohesive as you possibly can be," says Sarah Snouffer, founder and principal of Third Street Architecture in Washington, D.C. "Take a little prep time and sit back, think of the whole house, and then you can tackle it room by room as you go."

Designers have a few words of wisdom for picking a cohesive paint scheme for your home. Here are their top tips, plus three designer-approved whole home palettes that are yours for the painting.

PICK A STARTING POINT

It's wise to start with the room you use the most, says Atlanta-based designer and author Vern Yip. "For example, a great room that consists of a casual seating area (where the TV is) and a kitchen is often the room that gets used the most in an open space plan home," he said in an email. "Before nailing down the other colors, make sure to get this one right."

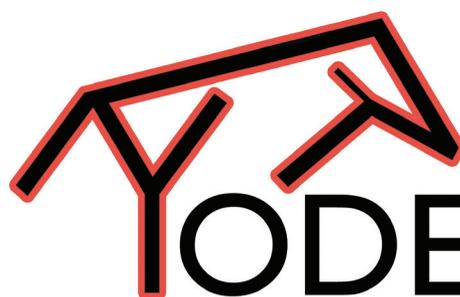
Snouffer prefers to start with the largest space. "Most homes people live in now are not defined room by room; they bleed into everything," she says. Begin with that expansive open plan area, and "everything else will follow suit," she said.

One of Yip's go-to hues is Sherwin-Williams' Illusion. "I think this is always a decent starting place because it's a fairly warm, mid-tone neutral that plays well with pretty much everything. If it's

See **PAINT 8**



This bathroom is painted Palladian blue. Stacy Zarin Goldberg/
Ballard+Mensua Architecture



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Save your lawn during watering restrictions

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Has this scenario happened to you? You toil throughout the early spring seeding and fertilizing your lawn and start to reap the benefits of this hard work when the thick, green grass fills in.

Your curb appeal peaks and your landscape is picture-perfect. Enter the harsh weather of summer and a long stretch of little to no rain. With reservoirs showing depleting water levels, drought restrictions are issued in your neighborhood, and you are mandated to greatly reduce water usage and perhaps even cease watering the lawn.

Is this the end of that great, green carpet of grass?

On the surface it may seem like keeping a lawn healthy during watering restrictions is a losing battle. After all, grass needs water to thrive. However, there are some things homeowners can do to prolong the life of their lawns until restrictions are lifted.

MOW LESS OFTEN

Tall grass can shade the

soil and its delicate roots, helping to avoid even further evaporation of what precious water the lawn is getting. Space out mowing to every other week or even every two weeks, particularly if you notice the grass is growing more slowly due to less watering. Mowing stresses a lawn, and the grass is already stressed from lack of water. Mowing less frequently can help.

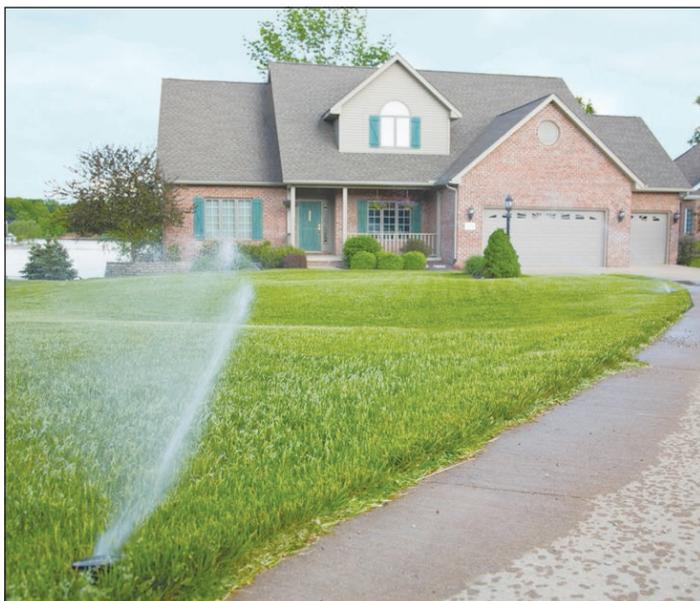
WATER EARLY ON

Maximize the benefits of any irrigation system by watering during the early morning hours, or between 2 and 9 a.m. This is when wind speeds are usually lower and evaporation from wind and sun is less likely to occur. Keep in mind that watering restrictions may specify which hours and days you are allowed to water.

CHANGE YOUR GRASS

Certain species of grass are more resilient in drought conditions. According to Scotts, Bermuda, Zoysia, St. Augustine, Bahia, and Buffalo grasses are more drought-tolerant than others in southern

See **LAWN T9**



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Paint

From T6

not your cup of tea, it's a great barometer for going warmer, cooler, deeper, lighter, or more vivid." To go with it, he recommends several coordinating paint colors from Sherwin-Williams:

— Mushroom, a "lighter neutral that still manages to add depth and character to a space."

— Prospect, "a wonderful, deep brown that adds so much gravitas to nearly every room it's used in."

— Taiga, "the intersection of dark gray and dark green that's a chameleon in the best possible way."

— Beetroot, for "when you need ... or are ready for ... a room with a punch."

VARY LIGHT AND DARK CHOICES

Architect Seth Ballard, founder of Ballard & Mensua Architecture, was introduced to the colorful architecture and interiors of New Orleans when he was a student at Tulane University. "[There was] lots of color, with no fear of personality."

As a result, he's always pushed the rainbow envelope a bit and recommends mixing airy and deeper tones for interest. "I've always used a little more color in spaces and not been afraid of it," he says, adding that repeating the same trim color throughout the home can tie rooms together.

And don't be afraid of darker colors; they can work beautifully in lowlight rooms, Yip says. "In general, I'm not one to combat a dark space with light paint colors. I find that you get better results when you lean into the lack of light by employing richer, deeper hues."

CONSIDER COLOR UNDERTONES

One way to coordinate colors is to ensure their undertones — or underlying hues — go together. "If you're doing a lighter color, you really, really need to pay attention to the undertones because if you are



Benjamin Moore's White Dove used on the walls of a kitchen.

Christy Kosnic Photography

looking at a swatch or a sample and it has some type of undertone — let's just say yellow for this example — that is going to be more prominent once you get more of that color up" on a wall, Snouffer says.

Also look at the paint sample in various types of light to determine whether the undertones work together, she says, adding that she typically paints samples on the wall in at least two-by-two-foot sections. "Southern light is going to be your direct light that is going to be much more pure, more blue undertone versus northern light where that's sunlight that is getting bounced off from other things outside of your home and then into your home. ... We leave those samples up for a couple of days and watch them as morning light versus afternoon light, a cloudy day versus a sunny day."

Yip adds that rooms that predominantly receive southern light can benefit from

cooler hues, whereas rooms that get cooler northern light may look their best in warmer paint colors.

Snouffer likes to use Benjamin Moore's White Dove in a home's main space, and build her palette from there. "It's the one that we just have found that has the most neutral undertone, and so it's not too pink, it's not too yellow, it's not too blue," she says. "And so it just always seems to kind of work in spaces." She recently used it in the living room and kitchen of a client's Washington, D.C., townhouse. She surrounded it with several green shades from Benjamin Moore:

— Deep Cushing Green in the dining room.

— Sage-y Carolina Gull in the primary bedroom.

— Palisades Park, a minty mid-tone, in the powder room.

CHOOSE HISTORY

Another easy way to build



A dining room looks dramatic in Cushing green. Christy Kosnic

Photography

a palette is to use the collections created by paint companies. Ballard particularly likes historic hues — or even close matches to yesteryear's colors (and bonus, the modern versions are lead-free). "There's an underlying muted nature to the historic color palette that helps tie them together," Ballard said. "I've always had luck [with them]." He used several blues from Benjamin Moore's historic colors collection for a recent project, unifying the spaces with white trim:

— Palladian Blue (historically used as a color on porch ceilings)

— Wythe Blue

— Van Courtland Blue

— Hale Navy

PLACE YOUR SMALLEST COLOR PUNCHES LAST

Yip suggests picking colors for lesser-used spaces, such as pantries and powder rooms, last. "Rooms that people spend very little time

in are the ones to pick at the end and where you can really take chances if you want to," he said.

AND DON'T FORGET TO LOOK AT ALL THE COLORS IN PERSON

Trying sample pots of your paint choices before you invest in gallons is always a wise move, but it's not the only thing you need to do. Ballard recommends looking at your color palette at once, well in advance of starting to paint any of the rooms.

"I've always found that when you start narrowing down your paint colors, you need to put them all together in a larger sample and actually create a deck of cards," he said. "And when it's right, it feels right. And it also might help you kick something off the island because when you see it just doesn't kind of 'go.'"

Spoken like a true mix master.

What to know about kitchen cabinet projects

Metro

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, 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.



Metro

Lawn

From T7

climates. Drought-resistant grasses for northern climates include Tall Fescue and Kentucky Bluegrass. You may consider switching to one of these

types if drought and water restrictions in your area have become more common in recent years.

UTILIZE GRASS CLIPPINGS

Lack of water can contribute to higher soil temperatures, which affects soil organic matter, says The Grass Outlet. Grass clippings left on the lawn

can reduce soil temperature, increase infiltration of water into the soil, and improve the lawn's ability to store water. Be sure to evenly distribute the clippings so they don't clump and choke the grass.

CONSIDER AN AMENDMENT

Hydretain is a soil moisture manager that its pro-

ducer attests can extend watering intervals for grass, trees, shrubs, and plants by as much as two to three times. It also is supposed to minimize drought stress and help lower water usage, and thus avoid watering restriction fines. The product's hygroscopic and humectant compo-

nents attach to plant root hairs, drawing moisture vapor from the soil and turning that vapor into droplets.

A proactive approach can help individuals protect their lawns when water restrictions are in place.

Aeration breathes new life into lawns

Metro

Regular maintenance is necessary when caring for a lawn, and various strategies translate into thicker, greener and healthier grass. Much like car owners routinely get an oil change or tire rotation on their vehicles, homeowners should recognize that certain lawn care strategies are periodically necessary to keep a property looking its best. Aeration is one task that can complement other lawn care strategies throughout the growing season. What is lawn aeration?

The Home Depot says that aeration involves making holes in the lawn to loosen the soil underneath. Over time, the lawn and soil can become compacted, creating a layer of thatch that forms between the soil and the grass in the lawn. Thatch can prevent air, water and fertilizer from reaching the roots of the grass, eventually stifling growth. The holes made during aeration allow oxygen, water and nutrients to reach the lawn's roots.

WHEN TO AERATE

Aeration can be good for a lawn, but it can cause stress to the grass if timed improperly, advise the lawn care experts at Pennington. Cool-season grasses common in northern lawns should be aerated in the early fall or early spring. Warm-season grasses should be aerated in the late spring or very early summer. Aeration should be done right before the grass reaches peak time for natural growth.

HOW TO AERATE A LAWN

Homeowners can use different aeration equipment, including manual and automated machinery. Some homeowners wear spiked aerator 'sandals' strapped to shoes to walk across the lawn. These may be useful on a small scale, but not on larger properties.

Slicing aerators have rotating blades that slice through grass and thatch into the soil. Core or plug aerators often are preferential for lawn professionals. Hollow tines remove plugs of soil from the lawn and deposit them on top where they break down.

WHAT'S NEXT?

According to The Spruce, it is necessary to water the grass ev-



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ery two to three days after a lawn has been aerated. This also is the time to perform overseeding. Apply a quality, slow-release fer-

tilizer to revitalize the lawn. Wait at least a month before mowing, and avoid heavy traffic on the lawn after aerating to prevent

grass damage.

Aeration is an important step to maintain lawn health. While

aerating can be labor-intensive,

the end result of a lush lawn can be worth the extra effort.

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Tips to overcome seasonal allergies

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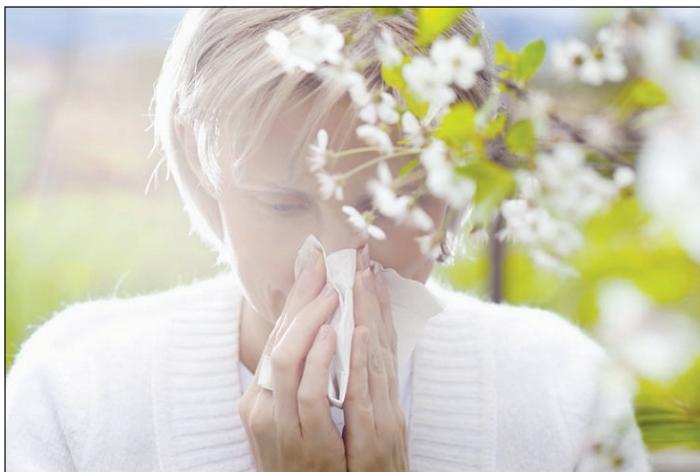
Spring and summer are typically welcomed with open arms. Warm weather, blooming flowers and trees full of leaves are a welcome sight for many, but seasonal allergy sufferers may find the transition from winter to spring a little more challenging. The Center for Health Statistics found that just under 26 percent of adults and roughly 19 percent of children have a seasonal allergy.

Treatments for seasonal allergies can be effective, and many people find over-the-counter medications are enough to alleviate their

symptoms. But even people who take OTC medications daily may have days when seasonal allergies cause considerable discomfort. In such situations, allergy sufferers can consider these strategies.

¥ Identify your triggers. The American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology notes that pollen is the most common outside allergy trigger. Trees and grasses typically pollinate in spring and summer, which is why these seasons can be especially challenging for people with seasonal allergies. Dust-

See ALLERGIES T12



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Small renovations that make a big impact

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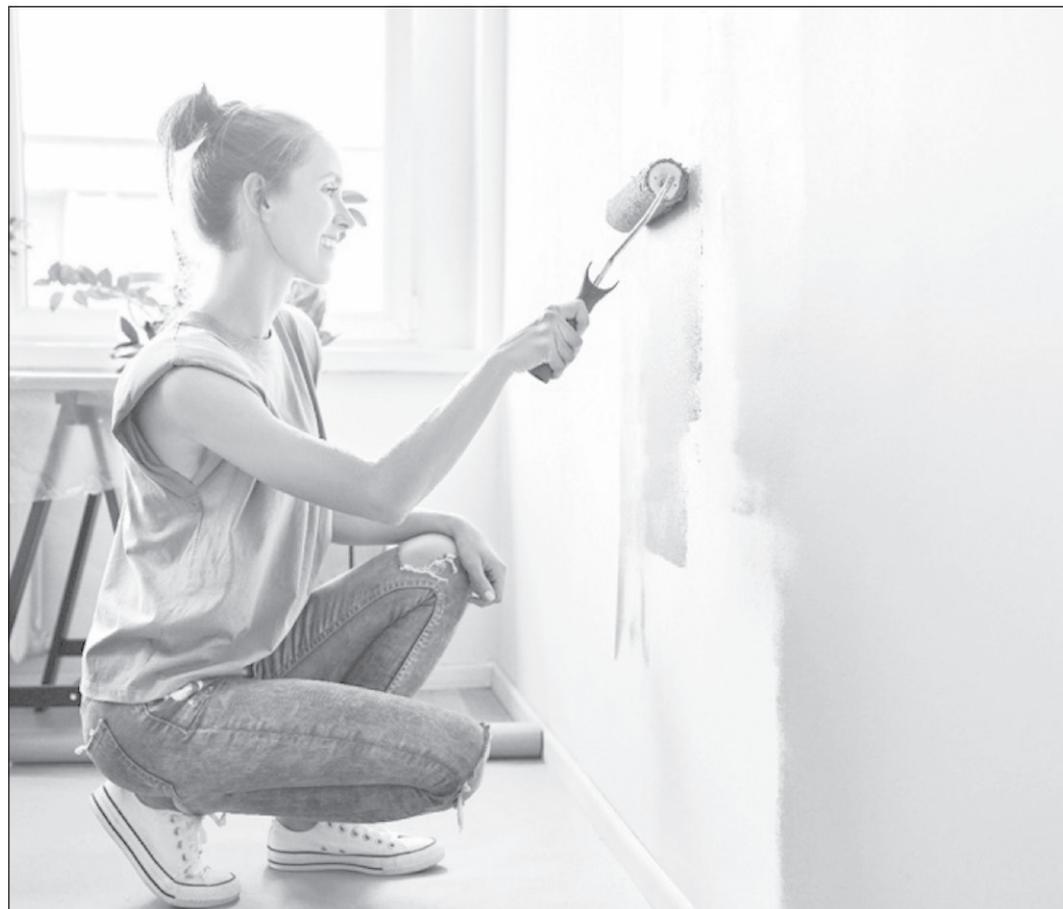
Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that's something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There's no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment.

¥ **Front door replacement:** A new front door instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

¥ **Lighting addition:** Whether a homeowner enlarges a window or adds skylights, natural light can produce incredible results. Investing in new lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.

¥ **Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and pro-



Metro

vide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

¥ **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish

a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

¥ **Exterior lighting:** Lighting isn't just important inside. A

welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hardwired to the circuitry inside the home.

¥ **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs. Tighten shaky railings or replace them while upgrading the stair treads.

¥ **Interior paint:** Change the color of walls, doors, cabinets, or even furniture with paint. All homeowners need is a paint color that inspires them and a little bit of time.

¥ **Replace outlet covers:** Upgrade outlet covers with screwless options. Screwless plates for outlets and light switches can make walls look more sleek.

¥ **Entry organizer installation:** Banish clutter from the home by catching it at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and functional.

¥ **Carpets cleaning:** Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep cleaning.

Small changes around a home can create a big impact without breaking the bank.

Allergies

From T11

mites and pets might trigger allergies indoors, but these can appear throughout the year. A visit to an allergist can determine what exactly triggers seasonal allergies. For example, certain types of grasses and trees might be triggers for some but not others. Identifying triggers is an effective first step because it can compel people to avoid the things that cause allergic reactions.

¥ **Stay indoors on dry, windy days.** The Mayo Clinic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors on dry, windy days, when pollen can be nearly impossible to

avoid.

¥ **Take advantage of a good rain.** The Mayo Clinic advises that the best time for seasonal allergy sufferers to be outside is after a good rain. Rain helps to clear pollen from the air, so post-rain conditions can be ideal for people with seasonal allergies.

¥ **Change your clothes and wash up upon coming inside.** The ACAAI recommends changing clothes, washing them and taking a shower upon coming inside during allergy season. Washing clothes and taking a shower reduces the likelihood that you'll spread pollen around the interior of your home, where it can attach to furniture and trigger allergic reactions.

¥ **Monitor the pollen**

count. As noted, pollen is a seasonal allergy trigger, so allergy sufferers are urged to monitor the pollen count via a website such as Pollen.com, where visitors can type in their ZIP code and get an up-to-date allergy report. On days when the pollen count is high, stay indoors and keep windows closed so the pollen does not get inside. The Mayo Clinic notes that pollen counts tend to be highest in morning, so it's best to avoid being outside during this time of day.

Seasonal allergies can make spring and summer more challenging. A few simple strategies can help people control their seasonal allergies even on days when pollen counts are particularly high



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Spring planting pointers

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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 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 veg-

etables 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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Wise watering strategies to help a lawn thrive

Metro

A number of factors can affect how well a garden or lawn takes root. Watering is a key element of any landscape care strategy, and one that homeowners should educate themselves about if they want to maintain a lush, healthy lawn throughout spring and summer. Homeowners hoping to keep their lawns lush and green throughout summer can learn some effective watering strategies to achieve that goal.

CHECK THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Water Sense, an EPA Partnership Program, advises following four steps at the start of spring: inspect, connect, direct, and select for clock timer-controlled irrigation systems. Make sure the system doesn't have any clogged, broken or missing sprinkler heads. Examine points where the sprinkler heads attach to pipes or hoses to make sure there are no leaks. The EPA says even a

leak as small as the tip of a pen can waste 6,300 gallons of water per month. Adjust the sprinkler heads so that they only hit the landscape elements rather than sidewalks or driveways. Align the watering schedule with the seasons.

INVEST IN AN IMPACT SPRINKLER

An impact sprinkler on a tripod can be an effective option for those without built-in irrigation systems. These sprinklers rotate in circles to help deliver an even spray of water that mimics rainfall. It's easy to adjust their spray pattern and a sprinkler on a tripod can spray over the top of bushes and flower gardens.

DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEMS ARE SUPERIOR

According to Rainbird.com, drip irrigation tubing and emitters slowly distribute water to the right spots of a landscape. They can be

See **THRIVE T18**

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Drought-resistant plants and trees

Metro

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.

See DROUGHTT16



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How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

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Memorial Day weekend is a popular time to entertain. For many, the weekend marks the first outdoor entertaining opportunity of the year, which is certainly something to look forward to.

As outdoor entertaining season begins, homeowners can take these steps to prepare their outdoor living spaces for the first big backyard get-together of the year.

¥ Break out the power washer. Pressure washing is an important component of spring home cleanup. The warmer temperatures of spring allow water from power washing to dry more quickly, which can decrease the chances that mold and mildew will grow on surfaces like siding. A freshly power washed home also makes for a welcoming entertaining space. A power washer also can be used on outdoor entertaining spaces to remove dirt and debris that built up over the winter. Just make sure to read manufacturer instructions before using a power washer to clean paving stones, decks and outdoor furniture.

¥ Inspect outdoor furniture. Now is a good time to inspect outdoor furniture if the task was not performed in late fall or early winter before items were moved into the garage or placed in storage. Check to make sure furnishings are still safe to use, addressing any issues before guests come over for a Memorial Day weekend

gathering. Wash cushions for outdoor furniture and replace any that might be showing their age.

¥ Clean the grill. A thorough cleaning of the grill also is in order prior to summer entertaining season. Many homeowners do little or no grilling during winter, so now is the time to give grilling surfaces and the interior of the grill a deep cleaning. Check for leaks if using a gas grill, and scrub the interior of any grease that accumulated last season. Many grilling experts advise lighting a grill and letting it burn for roughly 20 minutes prior to putting any foods on the grates for the first time. Such a strategy allows residual fluids like soap, vinegar and de-greasing products used when cleaning the grill to burn off before food is placed on the grates.

¥ Inspect the landscaping, too. It's not just seating areas like patios and decks that need some investigation prior to outdoor entertaining season. Take a walk around the landscape and make sure there's no potentially dangerous spots where people could be injured when playing backyard games. Fill in any holes with soil and fresh grass seed, and inspect trees to see if any branches need to be pruned. Summer entertaining season begins each Memorial Day weekend. Homeowners can take various steps to ensure their outdoor entertaining spaces are comfortable and safe.



Metro

Drought

From T15

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

ant 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.

There are a million ways to declutter. My approach? Go tiny.

By **ABBY ALTEN SCHWARTZ**

The Washington Post

Today's target is the Ikea Billy bookcase in my home office. On tip-toes, I reach a high shelf and lift a lined wicker basket. Tucked among boxes of paper clips and pads of pastel Post-it Notes, I find a black wooden egg with the glowing face of an extraterrestrial printed on one side. I shake it and the maraca beads rattle, prompting a faint memory of the music class I took my daughter to when she was 3. In the same basket is a photography loupe I used for magnifying contact sheets in my ad agency days, before everything went digital. I carry both objects into the storage area of my basement and add them to the cardboard box designated for Goodwill. And with that, I mentally cross another day off my list.

My husband and I, recent empty nesters, are preparing for our first move in more than 25 years. It's the big one: We're planning to downsize from our single-family suburban house to a one-bedroom condo by the Jersey Shore in the next two years.

The work of sorting and removing what won't be coming with us felt monumental - until I stumbled onto a solution.

INTRODUCING: MICROPARING

While scrolling Instagram one day, I discovered Toronto-based professional organizer Ivanka Siolkowsky. She had just embarked on another "Year of No Shopping," limiting her purchases to essentials only. But this time, she'd added a decluttering twist. Each day, she would choose two items from her home to donate, sell or recycle.

I was intrigued and thought: Why not apply the idea to downsizing to make it less overwhelming? I even gave it a name: Microparing.

Unlike Marie Kondo's famous KonMari Method of tackling an entire category of possessions in one exhausting marathon purge, microparing is a low-stakes, gradual approach that takes mere minutes. I didn't anticipate how gratifying it would be. Microparing is like a mini treasure hunt that rewards me with the same hit of dopamine I once got

from retail therapy. Some days, motivated by my productivity, I'll keep going and remove more than two items.

As enjoyable as this process has been, I know I'll eventually have to pick up the pace if we're going to pare down enough for our move. It raises the question: Is microparing truly an on-ramp to downsizing, or is it simply delaying the major work ahead?

Matt Paxton, the Atlanta-based founder of Clutter Cleaner, television personality (including 15 seasons of extreme cleaning on "Hoarders") and author of "Keep the Memories, Lose the Stuff: Declutter, Downsize, and Move Forward with Your Life," likens my process to training for a marathon.

"You're not running 26 miles on day two. You're walking for 30 minutes right now, every day. And so you're actually doing it the right way," he says. "You're building the muscle of 'getting rid of.' You're proving to yourself: 'I can do this.'"

MEMORIES, IDENTITY AND DOWNSIZING

Microparing feels almost subversive, bypassing the emotional part of my brain that will mourn the ending of this phase of life. Right now, I'm just skimming the surface, but as I confront items with stronger memories attached, letting go will become more challenging. Like the home movies my dad filmed and professionally edited - nearly 200 videotapes that are too numerous to digitize and store but too precious to throw away.

After all, this is the house where we raised our daughter from her toddler years through college and beyond. It's where we gave three consecutive dogs a loving home and a yard to play in. It's where I launched my own business two decades ago and where both sides of our family - some long gone - gathered for birthday parties and Thanksgiving dinners. The objects filling our closets, drawers and shelves are the physical evidence of our lives to this point, breadcrumbs that transport us back to who we were.

Siolkowsky says many people

struggle with downsizing because of "the misconception that stuff equals memories." Objects can jog memories, but those memories won't necessarily disappear with the object, she says.

After my dad died, I held onto his collection of art books and vinyl portfolios from a long career in advertising, a profession we once shared. Making that distinction between objects and memories allowed me to finally let them go. I kept a few items and donated the rest to the art department at our local high school, which felt like a meaningful way to honor my dad's legacy.

Professional organizer and decluttering expert Faith Roberson, founder of Organize with Faith in New York City, says the challenge of downsizing is "not about the stuff." Rather, it's about your relationship to others and your identity, such as a past profession.

"And so when people can start to let go a little bit of not just the stuff but the ideas that they have about themselves, then they can open themselves up to all of these new possibilities," she says. For example, maybe you were a teacher for 35 years, but you also dreamed of painting someday.

Roberson asks clients to think about their most cherished moment and choose something that's a physical representation of that time to keep and display.

Paxton has clients create a "legacy list" of the five items that matter most to them. He tells couples to compose their lists individually, then come together and share the stories behind those objects, which he says is key. "You find out what's emotionally important very quickly."

FROM MICROPARING TO MACROPURGING

Discarding two items a day has definitely primed me for the next step of taking on more. So I asked the experts for tips on scaling up my efforts to pare down.

Roberson recommends starting by cleaning and says that after removing everything from a surface, people are "a lot more selective

about what they put back." Similarly, she advises emptying boxes onto the floor rather than sifting through them. "The mess is actually beneficial to you," she says. When confronted with a lot of stuff, people usually realize they don't want it all.

Paxton says my husband and I should "commit to a time frame each week," with one person handling sorting and the other one handling removals, then doing something fun together afterward.

Siolkowsky suggests flipping my mindset and instead of looking for objects to get rid of, walking through my home and saying, "these are the items that I absolutely love" and want to take with me.

CURATING MY NEXT CHAPTER

The process of downsizing deserves care and deliberation, which is served by my gradual approach. There's something sacred about holding and contemplating what took a lifetime to accumulate - and in clearing space for what's next.

"There's this amazing opportunity for reinvention and reassessment, and I think honing parts of yourself that you love - that you want to see shine more and sparkle more and be more alive in your life," Roberson says.

Taking Siolkowsky's advice, I separate cherished books from the ones I'm willing to give away and start a photo album on my iPhone to use as a visual reminder of the items I plan to keep. That includes my elegant black writing desk, a framed print that belonged to my parents, an oversize vase blown from blue-tinted glass and other pieces that will transition harmoniously to a coastal setting.

Microparing allows me to shed the excess and curate a collection of belongings that's smaller and more intentional. Downsizing requires letting go, but freedom awaits on the other side. When my husband and I finally move, we'll be eager to embrace the lightness of a simpler lifestyle.

Abby Alten Schwartz is a writer in Philadelphia who covers health and wellness, parenting and Gen X living.



Metro

Thrive

From T14

placed at ground level or buried underground. Water soaks directly to the roots, minimizing water loss from runoff and evaporation. Some research suggests drip irrigation can effectively cover 25 percent more area than the average sprinkler system. It also tends to deliver more than 95 percent water efficiency.

SKIP THE SCHEDULE

Watering a lawn or garden should not be ruled by a schedule, but other factors that will determine when water is needed, suggests Family Handyman. Daytime temperatures, wind conditions,

soil type, lawn type, and recent rainfall will determine how much water the landscape really needs. Overwatering can be just as bad as underwatering. For those with underground watering systems, water sensors can trigger the system to turn on rather than a time on a clock.

AVOID MIDDAY WATERING

The sun is hottest in the middle of the day. Watering during this time means that much of the water will be lost to evaporation before it can get to thirsty lawns and plants.

It pays to be smart about watering. Homeowners also can consider rain collection barrels to offset municipal or well water usage and be more eco-conscious about their watering efforts.

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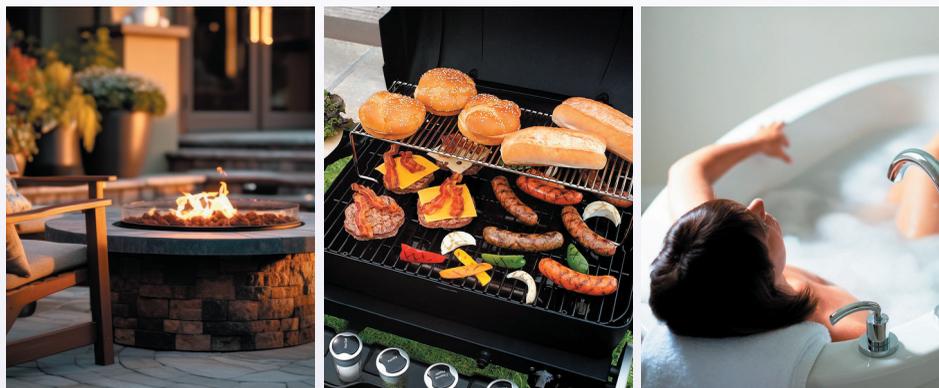
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How to keep indoor air clean during allergy season

Metro

Seasonal allergies can turn a warm and welcoming spring or summer day into something else entirely. Congestion, runny nose, sneezing, and itchy eyes are just some of the unpleasant symptoms of seasonal allergies, which are most often triggered by high pollen counts during spring and summer.

The Mayo Clinic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors when pollen counts are high. But what about indoor air quality? The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America reports that eight out of 10 people are exposed to dust mites and six out of 10 are exposed to cat or dog dander. Dust mites and pet dander can each trigger allergic reactions. Pair those two triggers with higher pollen counts common in spring and summer and it's no wonder that many seasonal allergy sufferers are ambivalent about the warm weather seasons. Fortunately, steps can be taken to keep indoor air clean during allergy season. ¥

Close windows and doors. Many people embrace opportunities to open their windows and doors on warm days, but doing so allows outdoor allergens like pollen to get inside. Pollen can attach to furniture and clothing, and that can make time indoors unpleasant for allergy sufferers. Maintain indoor air quality by closing windows and doors on windy days and/or days when pollen counts are high.



Metro

¥ Employ air cleaning devices. The AAFA notes that air cleaners with Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly filters can filter nearly 98 percent of allergen particles in the air. The AAFA maintains a list of certified air cleaners at asthmaandallergyfriendly.com.

¥ Keep a clean home. The Mayo Clinic notes that, in most homes, items such as bedding, upholstered furniture and carpeting

provide an ideal environment for dust mites, which are microscopic bugs that trigger allergic reactions in many people. The AAFA recommends keeping surfaces in a home clean and uncluttered to control dust mites. Washing bedding and uncovered pillows in hot water each week also can help to corral dust mites and improve indoor air quality.

¥ Vacuum frequently. Frequent vacuuming is an

other way to improve indoor air quality. The AAFA maintains a list of Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly vacuums that have been tested and found to prevent allergens from reentering the air.

¥ Prevent mold and treat areas where infestations have occurred. Mold also contributes to poor indoor air quality. Dehumidifiers can be used to reduce mold and dust mites, making these beneficial additions

to allergy sufferers' homes. Minimizing house plants around the house and addressing leaky fixtures immediately are some additional measures to prevent mold infestations.

It may not be enough to simply stay indoors to avoid allergic reactions on spring and summer days. Embracing measures to improve indoor air quality can be vital for allergy sufferers as well.



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