

SPRING

HOME & GARDEN

The Malone Telegram

April 2026



2026 celebrates the year of *the IMPATIENS*

By **NORMAN WINTER**

Tribune News Service

The National Garden Bureau has named this the Year of the Impatiens. I could not be happier. Very few flowers provide non-stop blooms from spring until frost in the deep South. From impatiens that look like a rose to riveting color in the shade garden and in full sun, the impatiens can do it all.

Let's go basic, and that is the bedding impatiens. I can remember a time in my horticultural career when they were No. 1 at all garden centers, and then the plague set in with a spiteful mildew. But that has changed and toughness and resistance has been put back in.

I plant the Soprano impatiens every year and love mixing the Soprano Red, Orange and Salmon, creating what I consider a Santa Fe mix. The color is non-stop all summer and these vibrant colors light up the shade garden.

I love mixing the Soprano Violet and Salmon shades around colorful Shadowland Autumn Frost variegated hostas. But I like them with Heart to Heart caladiums. Chartreuse colored foliage plays well with any color of Soprano impatiens. I will always use them with Golden Delicious pineapple sage and Shadowland Coast to Coast hostas. Then I like to use them in proximity to the shocking blue blooms of Let's Dance hydrangeas.

In containers and baskets, look no further than the Rockapulco impatiens. There are double or rose-form impatiens. After a stint

as the executive director of the American Rose Society, I made a living — just kidding — asking how would you like a rose with no thorns, powdery mildew or blackspot? Everyone would raise their hands, and I would say, "Here they are: Rockapulco impatiens."

You could not ask for a more elegant looking flower for mixed containers or hanging baskets. Rockapulco Appleblossom looks like rare China porcelain. My favorite container of all time featured Rockapulco Appleblossom impatiens, Diamond Frost euphorbia and Silver Falls dichondra.

A couple of years ago all visitors to the Young's Plant Farm annual garden tour in Auburn, Alabama, were treated to hanging baskets that were a feast for the eyes. They featured Sweet Caroline Medus Green ornamental sweet potato, Rockapulco Coral Reef impatiens and Summer Wave Large Violet torenia or wishbone flower.

But now we are coming to the hot summer sun champions and that is the SunPatiens. Proven Winners offers 22 varieties under their Proven Selections label. When these first came out, everyone snickered, including the industry.

In the trials, visitors were amazed. At the Fall Flower and Garden Fest, I would just stand by the flowers and say, "SunPatiens." SunPatiens with yucca for sure, SunPatiens with lantana—sure, why not? So now years later I am planting them with Rockin Blue Suede Shoes salvia. Some



Soprano impatiens line a path with Heart to Heart Lemon Blush caladiums with a gold anise shrub in the background. (NORMAN WINTER/TNS)



Rockapulco Appleblossom rose form impatiens look ever so elegant in this container with Diamond Frost euphorbia and Silber Falls dichondra. (NORMAN WINTER/TNS)



Sunpatiens serve as a color contrast with Luscious Basket Tangleglow lantana. (NORMAN WINTER/TNS)

with Luscious lantanas. Son James uses them with Heart to Heart, Burning Heart caladiums and ColorBlaze Wicked Witch coleus. There seems to be no combination too wild to try.

Now the one other secret. Nowhere will you find impatiens on a pollinator list, but I have photos of swallowtails and yellow sulphurs hitting on them. The sulphurs are particularly fond of both the Soprano and the SunPatiens. Fertile organic-rich beds will put you in the driver's seat and of course water as it promises to be a hot summer. The Year of the Impatiens needs celebration at your house.

Norman Winter, horticulturist, garden speaker and author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations: Color and Style in the Garden." Follow him on Facebook @NormanWinter-TheGardenGuy.

A spring lawn revitalization strategy

Metro

New growth is a hallmark of spring, whether it plays out in the birth of birds and bunnies or with the returned buds on trees and plant stalks. While most greenery rebounds naturally, lawns may need a little extra TLC in order to return to their once lush, green glory.

Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process but can be well worth the reward when green grass adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard. Here is how to get started when the weather warms, courtesy of The Farmer's Almanac and The Home Depot.

¥ Clean up debris. Spend a few hours raking up leaves from the lawn and removing any other winter debris like twigs so that air can reach the grass below. Also remove any thatch that has developed.

¥ Test the soil. Take a sample of the soil to determine its pH level and nutrient needs. Then you can make adjustments to set a strong foundation for the lawn to grow.

¥ Do some weeding. Pull out any weeds that have poked through early on and apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent additional weeds from taking over.

¥ Start the aeration process. A core aerator punches holes into the soil. This enables air and water to penetrate through to the roots.

¥ Overseed the lawn. Apply grass seeds over the lawn, paying special attention to any bare or thin areas so that the seed will fill in the lawn.

¥ Water consistently. It is important to water the lawn deeply and consistently, especially when the weather is dry, to help promote strong root development.

¥ Time fertilizer correctly. Apply a spring fertilizer around three weeks after

See LAWN T5



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The value of a 4-H summer camp

By **STEPHANIE GRAF**

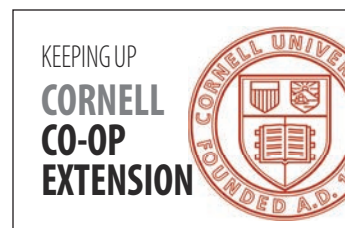
Cornell Cooperative Extension, deputy executive director

Jefferson County is fortunate to host one of the remaining eight 4-H residential youth camps remaining in New York state. 4-H Camp Wabasso is owned and operated by Cornell Cooperative Extension Association of Jefferson County. Celebrating 76 years of positive youth development experiences to approximately a thousand youth annually, 4-H Camp Wabasso is a 177-acre wonderland of wooded trails, Adirondack style cabins, and waterfront right on Millsite Lake in Redwood for swimming, canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding and fishing.

Old and new activities are offered — hikes, wilderness survival, arts and crafts, wood working, tie-dye clothing, archery, high ropes, low ropes, GaGa ball and much more. Of course, no time at 4-H Camp Wabasso would be complete without s'mores over a campfire with songs and team building games. One of the best parts is that there are camp opportunities fitting every family's needs — Day Camp, two-night, three-days Overnight Camp and Week-long Overnight camp for ages 6 to 16.

And there are discounts for military, currently enrolled 4-H members, and multi-week campers. Alongside the scholarships are early bird registration that saves an additional \$25 if completed by April 12.

When it comes to providing children with life-changing experiences, there isn't anything quite like 4-H summer camp. Camp merges the full benefits of the 4-H experience into camping in the great outdoors. National 4-H Council shares — the best gift we can give our kids is to empower them with skills that will last a lifetime, which is why parents have been sending their kids to 4-H sum-



mer camp for decades. 4-H is founded on the principle that when youth are empowered to pursue their passions — we call them “sparks”, and are allowed to plan their own courses, their skills grow and take shape, which help them to become leaders in their own way, shape their careers and contribute towards their communities. 4-H is grounded in research-based development and delivery model, which means at 4-H Camp Wabasso and other 4-H Camps, youth learn critical life skills like resilience and independence. We want our children to bounce back from adversity, stress, challenges and even failures, teaching them resilience is key. Letting young people experience things outside their comfort zone in safe-supported environments will contribute to strengthening resilience, gaining independence and helping them to reach their long-term and even short-term life goals.

4-H Camp Wabasso's 2025 camper survey results demonstrate we are building the life skills critical for success — 99% of campers enjoyed being at camp, 96% of campers made new friends at camp, 93% learned a new skill at camp, 97% felt adults at camp cared about them, 92% felt they belonged at camp and 86% felt they get to be a Leader at camp. 4-H

Camp Wabasso is licensed by state Department of Health and holds the esteemed American Camping Association (ACA) accreditation. To learn more, go to 4hcampwabasso.org or call 315-788-8450.



METRO

How to create more privacy on your property

Metro

An inviting backyard can serve as a welcome retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life. After a long day at the office or an exhausting day spent transporting kids to and fro, it's hard to resist the allure of a peaceful outdoor space in which to unwind.

Privacy is a key component of any backyard oasis. Some homes may be so remote that privacy isn't an issue. But many suburban homeowners recognize they might need to tweak their landscapes if they hope to create a private oasis outside.

FENCING OR PLANTING?

Most homeowners looking to create more privacy on their property will have to choose between fencing and planting. Fencing provides immediate privacy because, once it's installed, no one can see into the yard. Fencing also doesn't require watering or other immediate upkeep, which will be necessary when planting to ensure tree roots can establish themselves. But planting has its benefits as well. Planting for privacy is essentially creating a living fence that can grow over time and provide even more privacy as trees reach maturity. Plants also tend to be less costly than fencing. The home renovation experts at BobVila.com estimate that fencing projects

typically cost between \$1,667 and \$4,075. However, fencing projects can cost considerably more than \$4,000, especially for homeowners with large properties they want to enclose. Large, mature trees can be expensive, though it's unlikely they will cost as much as fencing. In addition, fencing requires more maintenance and will potentially need to be replaced, while native trees won't require much upkeep and can last for generations.

PLANTING

Homeowners who choose to plant for privacy will next have to decide which type of plants to add to their properties. Evergreens provide year-round privacy because they don't shed their leaves, so these are the ones most often chosen when creating a living fence. A number of varieties of evergreen trees can do the job, but it's important that homeowners consult with a landscape architect prior to choosing trees so they can ensure the trees will thrive when faced with the growing conditions on their properties. During such a consultation, homeowners may discuss the following popular privacy trees.

¥ Leyland cypress: The Arbor Day Foundation notes that the Leyland cypress is popular for hedges and boundaries, likely because a typical tree reaches

a mature height of 60'-70' and can spread as wide as 25'. The Leyland cypress grows fast, which may appeal to homeowners who don't want to wait to establish privacy.

¥ Green Giant Arborvitae: There are different varieties of the arborvitae, but the Green Giant tends to be the go-to option for privacy. The ADF notes that Green Giants will grow up to three feet per year until they reach maturity, providing a fast-growing option for privacy planters. The Green Giant can spread as wide as 20 feet at maturity, which is another attribute that makes it so popular among homeowners desiring privacy.

¥ Eastern White Pine: The ADF notes that the eastern white pine, which can reach heights as high as 80 feet, is favored in spacious yards. That's likely due to its height and its potential spread, which can reach 40 feet. Homeowners who choose the eastern white pine might like it for its resemblance to a Christmas tree, and in fact it is widely used for that purpose. The privacy provided by the eastern white pine is significant, but it might be best suited to especially large properties. Whether it's fencing or planting, homeowners have many options to consider as they seek to create more privacy on their properties.

Spring cleaning tips and tricks

Metro

Spring is a time of year when change is in the air. Trees are budding, plants are flowering, and homes laden with dark or heavy fabrics and clutter could use some lightening up. Spring cleaning projects are popular this time of year as residents take inventory of their living spaces and aim to declutter, clean and increase efficiency. Some people find the prospect of getting organized overwhelming. Here are some tips that can help anyone master spring cleaning.

¥ Create a plan. Make a checklist and establish a cleaning plan of attack. Focus on areas that are not regularly cleaned, as they probably need a little attention.

¥ Assemble your cleaning kit. Spring cleaning can be slowed down considerably if you don't have all of your equipment at the ready. Items to have on hand include an all-purpose cleaner, microfiber cloths, paper towels, mop, vacuum, dusters, and a squeegee. Adjust your equipment based on the task at

hand.

¥ Curate your cleaning playlist. Create a playlist with songs that will get you moving and motivated to clean.

¥ Work from top to bottom. Work efficiently by cleaning shelves, ceiling fans and other elevated items first, as dust and debris will trickle down and need to be cleaned next.

¥ Purchase or rent a carpet cleaner. According to the experts at Clean That Up, carpets help filter indoor air by trapping debris and allergens. By deep cleaning carpets, homeowners can improve the indoor air quality of their homes. Use a carpet cleaner on a warm, dry day so that windows can be opened and cross breezes will help dry the damp rug.

¥ Clean windows. Wash windows inside and out and utilize their screens to help brighten indoors spaces.

¥ Deep clean the kitchen. Clean out and disinfect the refrigerator by wiping it down with warm water and baking soda or a vinegar-and-water solution. While in the kitchen, set the oven to the self-clean function so it becomes clean-



METRO

er as well.

Homeowners also can focus on cleaning curtains (including shower curtains), steam-cleaning upholstery,

removing clutter from closets, cleaning out the dryer vent and duct tubing, wiping inside kitchen drawers, and vacuuming under beds and

other furniture.

Spring cleaning can bring the revitalizing nature of this beloved time of year into your home.



METRO

Lawn

From T3

the lawn starts to turn green or after the first two or three mowings. If fertilizer is applied too early it can feed weeds instead of the grass and result in fertilizer runoff.

¥ Mow to an appropriate

height. Begin to mow when the ground is dry enough and the grass is long enough to need cutting. Leave some length to the lawn; otherwise, sunlight will reach the soil and encourage weed seeds to germinate.

With a little elbow grease at the start of spring, homeowners can establish strong and healthy lawns.

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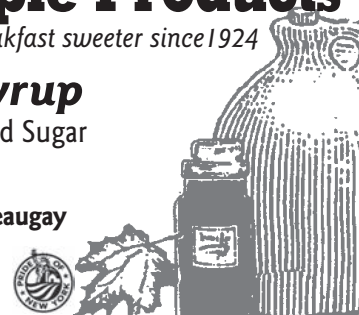
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Drought-resistant plants and trees

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.

TREES

The National Arbor Day Foundation notes that drought-tolerant trees are ideal as summer temperatures rise in many parts of

See **DROUGHT 18**

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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

Metro

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

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

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

¥ Work with a landscaping professional. Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances, homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the

lawn care experts at Scotts' note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting

around this important detail.

¥ Prepare to water the lawn. Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts' urges homeowners to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per

See RESEEDING T10

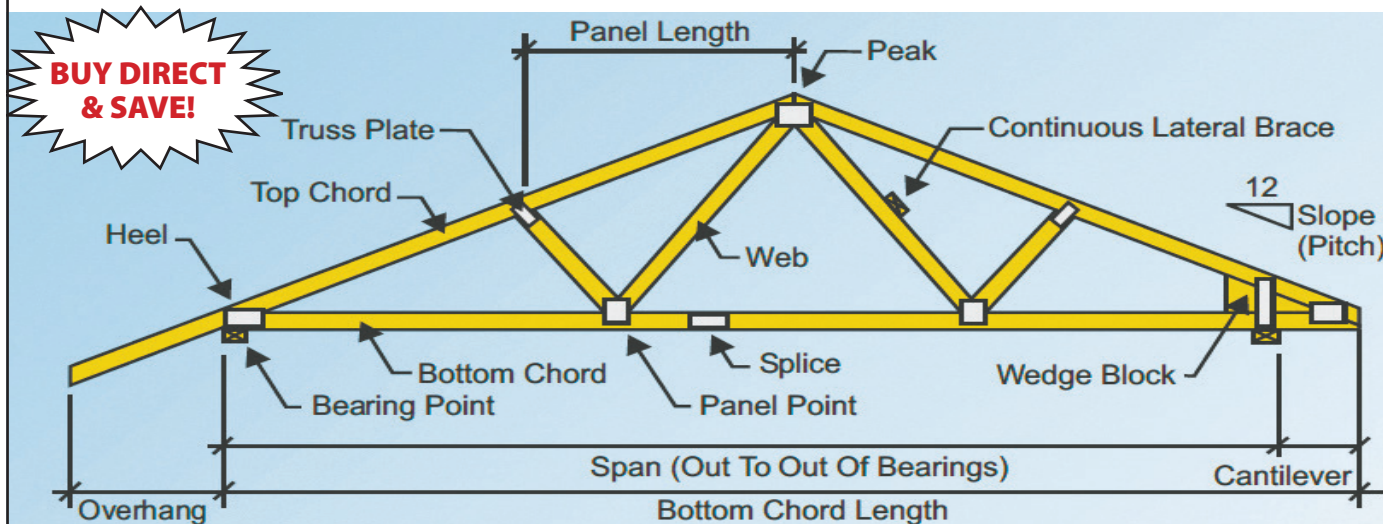


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Drought

From T6

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.



METRO



METRO

6 signs you may need a new HVAC system

Metro

There's no place like home, especially when that home is a comfortable and safe haven. One of the ways residents find comfort in their homes is by maintaining the right indoor temperatures, which fluctuate along with the seasons. While there is much to be said about opening windows and doors to let Mother Nature do her thing, indoor comfort is often maintained with an HVAC system.

HVAC stands for heating, ventilation and air conditioning. It can include heat pumps, furnaces and air conditioning units. It is an automated system that works by adjusting a thermostat to regulate air temperature, and sometimes humidity, in the home. According to Enviguard, a commercial contracting provider, HVAC systems also may be used to improve indoor air quality through filtration and oxygen replacement.

As with any mechanical device, an HVAC system has a life span that must be considered. Should any of the following conditions be present, it is like-

See HVAC T10



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State DEC challenge is one for the birds

Times staff report

The state Department of Environmental Conservation is inviting people to share their bird's-eye views for its annual "I Bird NY Challenge."

The challenge, which began March 1, encourages New Yorkers and visitors to identify birds and learn about bird life. Those who finish it will be awarded a commemorative I Bird NY Challenge patch and certificate and the opportunity to win birding-related prizes.

The state supports more than 450 bird species. The I Bird NY Challenge incentivizes observing birds in neighborhoods, parks, or DEC and partner lands throughout the state.

To complete the challenge, participants must identify any 10 wild bird species and submit a challenge sheet to DEC. Over 1,600 birders completed the challenge in 2025.



The eastern bluebird is the state bird of New York.

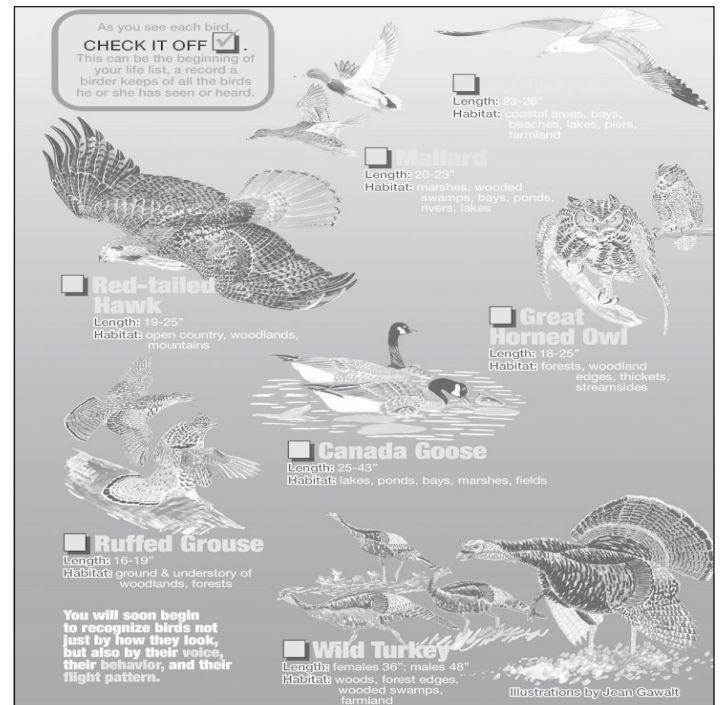
Catherine Adams/DEC

Those interested in taking the challenge can visit the "I BIRD NY" webpage to access this year's challenge sheet and find information on where and how to watch birds, upcoming birding events, a downloadable Beginner's Guide to Birding and other info.

Completed challenge sheets can be submitted online via SurveyMonkey.

The I Bird NY program was launched in 2017 to build on the state's efforts to increase access to New York's vast natural resources and promote no- and low-cost opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and connect with nature. Because people can observe birds wherever they live, work, or recreate,

birding is an accessible activity that does not require transportation or the purchase of specialized equipment.



7 tasks for your April home-maintenance checklist

By JEANNE HUBER

The Washington Post

It's spring at last — the perfect time to get outdoors. Although it's tempting to sit in the sunshine watching the birds and flowers, taking some time to complete these maintenance tasks now can help make the coming warmer months more enjoyable, both indoors and out.

This ritual started in a time when people needed good weather to lug rugs outside and beat them to release dust and mites. Vacuum cleaners ended that chore, but we have hung onto the idea of spring cleaning and decluttering. Pick a room or two and devote a chilly day to cleaning from the ceiling to the floor. Dust the ceiling and walls with a microfiber cloth wrapped around broom bristles, wash the blinds and light fixtures, clean closets or bookshelves and sell or donate things you no longer use. Finish by washing or vacuuming the floor.

If you're tackling the kitchen, use warm, soapy water to wash walls and cabinets. Dry wood with a clean cloth immediately to avoid soaking it. To eliminate grease stains on painted walls, the AnswerLine of Iowa State University's Extension and Outreach recommends a solution of equal parts white vinegar and hot water, or a paste with 3 tablespoons of baking soda and a cup of warm water. Ammonia — diluted at a ratio of 2 cups per gallon of hot water — also works, but gloves and good ventilation are essential.

Even if you don't need air conditioning

yet, you might want to run the fan to filter out pollen. If you're allergic and have must-do outdoor chores, tackle them when trigger plants aren't at peak bloom. To check whether it's a good time, consider signing up for emails or web access to local pollen counts from the National Allergy Bureau. Wearing a disposable respirator while working also helps.

If your fence looks grungy, scrub and hose it off, or use a power washer. Then consider applying a fresh coat of stain or paint, but only if it's already painted (paint can peel and might need more maintenance than a stained or naturally weathered fence). If the fence is wobbly or leaning, check for rotted posts. You can replace the post, but that's hard to do without taking down adjoining fence sections. Consider fortifying the existing post with an anchoring system such as the Fix-A-Fence repair bracket. It has an offset base, which in most cases should allow it to work even if the post is set into concrete. To install the anchor base, dig a hole 18 inches deep and 6 inches across parallel to the post and mix a 60-pound bag of concrete. Once the concrete sets, screw the top of the brace to the post.

If you have a sprinkler system, set the timer to manual and test one zone at a time. Look for nozzles that are broken or not adjusted to spray efficiently; you want water delivered relatively uniformly to all areas of a lawn, not to pavement. If you have a drip system for perennial beds or a vegetable garden, turn on the water

and make sure it isn't shooting out from broken connector lines. Inspect each line and replace or clean any clogged emitters. If your automatic watering systems leave patches of landscaping too dry, consider replanting with species that thrive in drier soil. Once established, many native plants suited to the sun or shade can thrive on rainfall alone.

If you have an asphalt driveway where bare stones show, late April may be a good time to reseal it. Buy the sealer first, then follow instructions on the label, starting with choosing a good time to begin. You'll need at least two dry days (one to clean, one to coat) and nights that aren't too cold; check the product label for ideal temperatures. You might need a primer over oil stains. And if the pavement is cracked, you'll need a crack-filler with a liquid or putty-like consistency, depending on the width of the cracks.

To choose the best sealer, look at the length of the warranty. Latex-ite, for example, makes sealers labeled as Ultra Shield, Optimum and Airport Grade. Coverage rates on these products are identical, and the basic mixture in the bucket is the same. But a customer service representative for Dalton Enterprises, which owns the brand, said there is one key difference: Ultra Shield has the most polymer so it will last the longest. Thus, it has a 10-year warranty. Optimum's is eight years; Airport Grade's is four.

Of course, if you want to reseal your driveway frequently so it's uniformly

black, or if you are getting a house ready to sell, the least-expensive sealer might be the best bargain. For most people though, it's a no-brainer to spend a bit more to get six years' more life from a coating.

Dining outdoors is one of the great pleasures of spring and summer. Now's the time to get furniture in tiptop shape.

■ ■ ■

Do an inspection, beginning with the ledger board where the deck is attached to the house. Poke at the wood to make sure it is solid and well attached, not rotting or pulling free. Also check railings and handrails on stairs to make sure they're solid and don't wiggle. Remove, or at least move aside, any furniture or potted plants and sweep thoroughly. Then dampen the area, spray on soapy water and scrub down the boards.

On wood or traditional (uncapped) composite decking, use warm, soapy water or a deck cleaner such as Behr premium all-in-one wood cleaner. For capped composite decking, just use warm, soapy water.

Scrub with a nylon-bristle brush in the direction of the boards. If you use a power washer, set the pressure no higher than 3100 pounds per square inch, use a fan nozzle and keep the tip at least 8 inches from the boards.

Have a problem in your home? Send questions to tolocalliving@washpost.com. Put "How To" in the subject line, tell us where you live and try to include a photo.

HVAC

From T8

ly time to consult with an HVAC technician to see if repairs or replacement of the entire system is warranted.

1. AGE

If the HVAC system is more than 10 years old, it could be time to begin budgeting for a new unit. Many modern, efficient systems may last 12 to 14 years with routine maintenance. But it's good to keep an HVAC system's age in mind so you can readily recognize when it might start to fail.

2. LONGER OR CONSTANT RUNNING TIMES

An efficient, properly working system will quickly heat or cool the home and then turn off. A system that is turning on repeat-

edly or having to run for awhile before the set temperature is reached could be nearing the end of its utility.

3. STRANGE NOISES

Groaning, banging or loud humming noises should be addressed. While these noises may indicate that certain components need maintenance or replacement, they also could be symptoms of age and a system nearing failure.

4. FREQUENT REPAIR VISITS

Knowing the HVAC company's repair person by name is a sign that the system has required too much work in recent months. Repeated issues and repairs are probably signs that it's time to consider a system replacement.

5. HIGHER BILLS

Sticker shock when receiving electricity or gas bills likely mean the HVAC system isn't working efficiently and might need to be

Spring Home & Garden

replaced.

6. POOR INDOOR AIR QUALITY

If the home is dusty or humid or even if allergies seem to have

cropped up out of nowhere, this could indicate a poorly functioning HVAC system. HVAC systems are vital to keeping in-

door environments comfortable and safe. Such systems may exhibit certain signs that indicate they need to be replaced.



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Reseeding

From T7

day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts™ recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that

benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

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



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Tips to revitalize a garden this spring

Metro

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that pays a host of significant dividends. Many people love gardening because it allows them to spend time outdoors, and that simple pleasure is indeed a notable benefit of working in a garden. But the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture notes that gardening provides a host of additional benefits, including helping people get sufficient levels of exercise, reduce stress and improve mood. With so much to gain from gardening, it's no wonder people look forward to getting their hands dirty in the garden each spring. As the weather warms up, consider these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

¥ Discard the dead weight. Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter storms also should be removed at



METRO

this point if they have not previously been discarded.

¥ Test the soil. Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive

in the months to come.

¥ Mulch garden beds. Mulching benefits a garden by helping soil retain moisture and preventing the growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over

the course of spring and summer. That means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

¥ Inspect your irrigation

system. Homeowners with in-ground irrigation systems or above-ground systems that utilize a drip or soaker function can inspect the systems before plants begin to bloom. Damaged sprinkler heads or torn lines can deprive plants of water they will need to bloom and ultimately thrive once the weather warms up.

¥ Tune up your tools. Gardening tools have likely been sitting around gathering dust since fall. Serious gardeners know that tools can be expensive, so it pays to protect that investment by maintaining the tools. Sharpened pruners help make plants less vulnerable to infestation and infection. Well-maintained tools like shovels and hoes also make more demanding gardening jobs a little bit easier, so don't forget to tune up your tools before the weather warms up.

It's almost gardening season, which means gardeners can start on the necessary prep work to ensure their gardens grow in strong and beautiful this spring.

Cost-effective curb appeal boosters

Metro

One shouldn't judge a book by its cover. However, that often is hard to do, particularly when it comes to homes. Curb appeal bears significant influence regarding how a property is perceived. A property that is neat and aesthetically appealing probably will be preferable to one that looks like the homeowners did not maintain it.

Boosting curb appeal is a common focus of sellers before listing a property. But what can those who don't have big budgets for major overhauls do to improve their curb appeal? Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

REFRESH THE FRONT DOOR



METRO

Painting the front door can add brightness and improve the look of a home's entryway. Most exterior paint costs between \$30 and \$40 per gallon, so this is undeniably a bud-

get-friendly improvement. If money allows, replacing the door altogether will generate bang for your buck.

Improve or add landscaping elements

Landscaping should be designed to highlight the home's best features. It should look symmetrical and feel manicured. If it's not possible to plant new flowers or bushes, simply cleaning up debris and weeds, and trimming existing greenery can make it feel neater and more polished.

CLEAN UP

Power-washing the siding, cement walkways and garage door can create instant impact. It's amazing how much dirt and mildew can reduce the luster of a home. Cleaning off years of grime can be a fast and inexpensive refresh.

RESEAL THE DRIVEWAY

Make sure the driveway is clean and tidy. If it has cracks or discoloration, filling in

cracks and applying a new coat of sealer will make a big difference. Homeowners can hire someone to reseal the driveway or do the work on their own.

ADD MORE LIGHTING

Updating front porch lights and accent lights around the property will cast a more positive glow on a home, both literally and figuratively.

ADD A SEATING AREA

If space by the front door allows, add a bench or some chairs to create a welcoming seating area. A potted plant or two nearby will help the area seem intentional.

Improving curb appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A few easy touches can boost the look of any property.

How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

Metro

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.

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Gardening safety for seniors

Metro

Longer hours of daylight and warming temperatures are hallmarks of spring and each of these variables do much to contribute to the reputation of a season that's become synonymous with rejuvenation. After months spent confronting cold temperatures and huddling up indoors, people might find the welcoming conditions of spring irresistible, which compels many to spend more time outdoors.

There's no shortage of things to do outside in spring, and the season marks a perfect time to reestablish one's green thumb and get down and dirty in the garden. Gardening is a rewarding and healthy activity, though some, particularly seniors, may need to approach springtime sessions in the garden with a heightened degree of caution. Seniors can keep these health and safety tips in mind as they celebrate the return of spring and what that means for their gardens.

¥ Recognize that gardening is exercise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies gardening as a good form of exercise, and evidence supports the notion that gardening is a particularly beneficial form of physical activity. A

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Seniors

From T13

2024 meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* indicated that individuals who engaged in low levels of leisure time physical activities such as gardening are likely to have a lower risk of stroke than peers who are sedentary. It's important to keep these findings in mind when gardening, which is perhaps more physically demanding than some may recognize. Seniors can approach gardening just like they would other forms of exercise, taking the same precautions, such as stretching before and after each session and making a concerted effort to remain hydrated, while out in the garden.

¥ Incorporate rest into your garden routine. Rest is vital for anyone engaged in physical activity, including gardeners. Frequent breaks during gardening sessions can help avoid strains and sprains and provide opportunities to hydrate and get out of the sun. If possible, seniors can identify a shaded spot on their properties and place a bench there so they have somewhere to rest during gardening sessions.

¥ Utilize ergonomic gardening tools and other specialized products. The Center for Excellence in Disabilities at West Virginia University notes that ergonomics studies movements of a person's body during physical activities in an effort to produce tools that ensure a task has as little physical impact on the body as possible. Ergonomic tools are designed to lower injury risk, improve efficiency and increase satisfaction that stems from performing a particular activity. Before each gardening season, seniors can inspect their existing tools and replace them with ergonomic alternatives, if necessary. In addition, seniors can utilize specialized products, including long-handled gardening tools that reduce the need to bend over or kneel down, to further reduce their risk of injury while working in the garden.

These simple strategies can ensure seniors' springtime gardening sessions are as safe as they are rewarding.



METRO

Simple landscaping strategies that can transform a home's exterior

Metro

The interior of a home may be where homeowners and their families spend the majority of their time, and there's no denying that a well-planned interior goes a long way toward making a house a home. However, the exterior of a home, including its landscaping, can serve as a source of pride and catch the eye of prospective buyers when the home hits the market.

It's easy to walk past a home with an eye-catching exterior and assume the homeowner has a green thumb or has spent lots of time and money working on the landscaping. Though that may be true, oftentimes it's the simplest strategies that make all the difference. Homeowners can keep these strategies in mind as they look to transform the exterior of their homes.

¥ Dress up the walkway.

A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank. Create new planting beds and plant bright plants and flowers along each side of the walkway. If it's necessary and within budget, lengthen the walkway to create the feel of a more grandiose entryway.

¥ Make things more symmetrical. A messy landscape can give a poor first impression, even if the area features some beautiful plants. In such instances, a little effort to make things more symmetrical, with equal parts grass and vegetation, can create a cleaner, more inviting look.

¥ Mulch your flower and tree beds. Mulch is a relatively inexpensive but effective way to add aesthetic appeal to a landscape. Freshly mulched beds beneath trees and flowers creates a clean and orga-

nized look, and the mulch also serves a practical purpose, as it reduces weed growth and helps the soil retain moisture so plants stay healthy and look better throughout the warmer months when rainfall may not be steady or significant.

¥ Plant shade trees. Shade trees can be especially useful when selling a home. The shade provided by trees can shield grass from blistering summer sun, potentially helping it stay green. A lush green lawn appeals to buyers and gives the impression the home has been well maintained. In addition, shade trees can be used to create the look of a backyard oasis. A well-placed bench beneath a large shade tree can entice buyers who want a relaxing spot to enjoy warm summer days outdoors without getting a sunburn.

¥ Consider maintenance. The more exotic an exterior

landscape is, the more maintenance it's likely to require. Lawn and garden enthusiasts may not be turned off by landscape features that require steady maintenance, but homeowners who don't have much time for such work should keep things simple. A poorly maintained landscape, even if it includes exotic plants and elaborate designs, will adversely affect curb appeal. Another feather in the cap of low-maintenance landscape features is they could prove more appealing to prospective buyers, who may view elaborate, exotic landscaping as a lot of extra work they won't want to do.

Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money.



METRO

Potential threats to pet health in your own yard

Metro

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. Though such characterizations often are made in reference to humans and their domiciles, homes also should be safe spaces for pets. Pet owners go to great lengths to ensure their pets are healthy and happy, and that typically includes efforts to ensure their home interiors are free of hazards that could affect their furry friends. But there are

various threats to pet health in a yard as well. Recognition of those threats and what can be done to minimize them can ensure exterior spaces are as safe for pets as areas inside the home.

¥ Mulch: Mulch is found in many yards, as it adds aesthetic appeal to a landscape and helps soil retain moisture, which can safeguard trees, plants and flowers from

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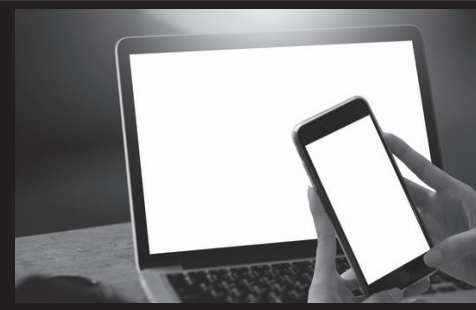
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'Tulips make you happy'

THOUSANDS LINE NATIONAL MALL FOR SPRINGTIME MAGIC

By **MAGGIE PENMAN**

The Washington Post

When José Romero learned there would be tens of thousands of tulips up for grabs on the National Mall on his 48th birthday, he knew he had to try to nab one of the highly sought tickets.

"Tulips are my favorite flowers. They just brighten everything," Romero said.

So when the festival's free tickets were released two weeks ago, he set up a command center, refreshing multiple browsers on his phone and computer. The website crashed several times under a massive influx of traffic - but Romero was able to secure a spot through a link on Instagram.

Romero was one of the 12,500 lucky people invited to pick a colorful bouquet of 10 free flowers on Tulip Day, celebrated Sunday on the National Mall. It is organized by Royal Anthos, a trade association of flower bulb growers in the Netherlands, with support from the Dutch Embassy and a grant from the European Union aiming to boost agricultural exports.

Royal Anthos director Mark-Jan Terwindt wasn't surprised by the massive enthusiasm for the event. "The tulip is a symbol of spring," he said. "People long for spring to start, especially after a harsh winter like we had this year."

Cities around the world host Tulip Day celebrations, including Amsterdam, Berlin, New York and San Francisco. But this is the first time the event has been held in Washington.

One corner of the tulip garden featured flowers in the shape of the number 250, referring to the anniversary of American independence later this year.

"If somebody has a big birthday, the Dutch come with flowers, so that's what



Sara McGovern and her 2-year-old daughter Abigail, from Leesburg, Virginia, were delighted with the flowers. Photos by Valerie Plesch/For The Washington Post

we do here," Terwindt said.

This event was many months in the making, with bulbs shipped from the Netherlands last fall to farms in Virginia and New Jersey.

"The bulbs are actually produced in the Netherlands, but then they're grown into tulips here in the U.S.," said Birgitta Tazelaar, the Dutch ambassador. "It's a great symbol of our relationship."

Werner Jansen, a Netherlands native who now lives in the United States, is the CEO of Bloomia, the company that owns the Virginia farm where many of the tulips for the event were grown. He said the tariffs on imports — including flower bulbs — are "not ideal" but isn't worried about the tulip industry.

"As long as the American population enjoys and loves tulips, then we will continue to have success," Jansen said.

Jovita Neliupsiene, the European Union's ambassador to the United States, shared a similar message.

"People cherish those differences we have across the Atlan-



The event was many months in the making, with bulbs shipped from the Netherlands last fall to farms in Virginia and New Jersey.

tic, but also cherish the things that unite us," she said. "Love for beauty, love for our common values, and love for the possibility to work together."

Sara Cornett, 30, drove down from Baltimore early Sunday to line up for the event with her husband and mother-in-law.

"We've had an extraordinarily cold winter here in the DMV," Cornett said. "So it's just nice to finally see the turn of it."

Jessica Cobb wore a pink flo-

ral ball gown under her denim jacket and pink sunglasses on her head. She had rented the dress for an event Friday night but didn't have to return it until Monday, so she decided to wear the dress to pick flowers.

"We had weeks of snow-crete," Cobb said. "It's just amazing to welcome spring with beautiful tulips."

Lizbeth Gomez, 23, came all the way from Georgia to join the tulip party.

"I'm a flower enthusiast," Gomez explained. "I took a flower arranging class, so I'm all in for this event."

The event's organizers said Tulip Day often spills into the rest of the community.

"There's always this side effect," Terwindt said. "When people leave here, they're all happy carrying their flowers, and then they go around in the city and they'll make the whole city happy." On the Metro and on sidewalks across the District, the flowers serve as a conversation starter, sparking little moments of connection, he said.

Brittany Leeman wants to extend that joy even further, to her neighborhood in Park View — for the rest of the spring and hopefully beyond.

"We've been working really hard on that patch of land that's between the sidewalk and the curb just to make it more beautiful," Leeman said. "We planted some daffodils, and we plan to plant these just to beautify the neighborhood a little bit." She intends to keep the flower bulbs in water until it's warm enough to plant them.

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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 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 companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners

See LIGHT T22

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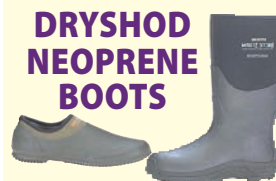


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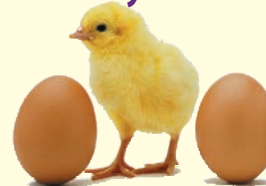
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Humane ways to address uninvited garden guests

Metro

A beautiful garden is a wonder to behold. After a homeowner toils in the yard amending the soil and planting, it's imperative that a garden be given the best chance to thrive. However, the natural wildlife that shares the space might see that newly cultivated land as the perfect place to enjoy an easy meal or gather nesting materials.

Every gardener likely has a tale about chipmunks, squirrels, woodchucks, and rabbits making nuisances of themselves in the garden. Many of these animals seem to have a taste for bulbs and other plants, which can wreak havoc on what gardeners carefully plan and plant. Finding balance so everyone can get along may require patience and some well-crafted deterrents.

¥ Provide food elsewhere. Try luring the animals away to another area of the yard where the meal is even easier to come by. Squirrels and chipmunks love to dig and bury their caches, so a far-off corner with freshly tilled soil along with some berries, nuts and additional treats might attract them to that area instead of a newly established garden.

¥ Install fencing. While chipmunks and squirrels can scale fences easily, such acrobatics may be more challenging for lumbering groundhogs or rabbits. Make digging more difficult by laying chicken wire fencing on top of the soil and stake it down in some areas.


¥ Use a scent deterrent. Some animals are put off by the smell of other animals or aromas they find unpleasant. The capsaicin in red pepper and cayenne can be off-putting to these animals, so sprinkling it around the garden may ward off pests but not harm the plants. Just reapply after each rain. Similarly, some people have had luck using peppermint. Plant mint around where you do not want the squirrels and chipmunks. Since mint can grow fast and become invasive, it's best to plant in containers and move accordingly.

¥ Use water or movement. Animals can be scared away if they are sprayed with water,

so a well-aimed water gun can chase away the animals when a gardener is able to stand watch. It may be easier to set up pinwheels that blow in the wind, or hang aluminum pie plates or old compact discs from strings near the garden, which may deter animals from getting too close.


¥ Build a greenhouse. When dealing with tenacious squirrels and chipmunks, the only solution may be to block off all access. Utilize an enclosed greenhouse for the garden, which will keep animals out and even extend the growing season.

Many animals can become nuisances in a yard, particularly in and around gardens. Some humane solutions could remedy the situation.



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Augusta Lavender heliotrope will be a winner for you

By **NORMAN WINTER**

Tribune News Service

This growing season marks the sixth year that Augusta Lavender heliotrope has been at home in my garden. This isn't bad for a plant first predicted to be hardy to zone 9. (I am in Georgia, zone 8.)

The first few years it seemed like Augusta Lavender was not an annual or perennial but an eternal. I suppose it still might be, but in saying that I was referring to its bloom season. I've got pictures of it blooming just about every month. But after the 2025 season, it makes me think it has some power of reasoning. I'm kidding, but let me explain.

Last year was my hardest year for gardening. We came out of a hard winter to a glorious spring. Then the water shut off, in more ways than one. Drought came like I haven't had since moving to Georgia. And then to make matters worse, I had irrigation system issues that hung around most of the summer. The white-haired Garden Guy dragged hoses until I was ready to cry uncle. It meant water rationing for my plants, including some that didn't get what they needed.

The Augusta Lavender heliotrope disappeared. I thought to myself how could I do that to one of my most loved plants to come out in a decade? After we got into football season, surprisingly, all the clumps returned. Even after one arctic blast after another, they are still there and most are showing some color.

Usually when you consider a plant with such a habit your thought may be: Is it aggressive? This is simply not the case. After six years, it is a mild-mannered, tough-as-nails perennial in my zone 8 garden. (The north country is zone 5a.)

Since the last time I wrote about Augusta Lavender heliotrope, it has continued winning more awards, from Canada to the University of Florida. The awards also include perfect scores at University of Missouri and Oklahoma State University.

In these six years it seems that there is no butterfly that it can't attract. You will find all the large swallowtails down to the dainty-looking fiery skipper. So plan to include the Augusta Lavender heliotrope into your pollinator gardens.

This past year I used it in a new combination featuring Limelight Prime hydrangea paniculata with white blooms and additional color coming from other perennials. I also used Luminary Ultraviolet tall garden phlox, and Serendipity ornamental



Augusta Lavender heliotrope will bring in all your favorite butterflies like this Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. Norman Winter/TNS

onion in side yard planting.

In the backyard that has larger beds, I used Augusta Lavender with Meant to Bee Queen Nectaraine and Meant to Bee Royal Raspberry agastache. The bed also included Heat it Up Yellow blanket flower and Rockin Blue Suede Shoes salvia. It is also a pure delight in mixed containers.

Augusta Lavender heliotrope doesn't seem persnickety over soil type if it is well-drained. Boggy soil and tight compacted clay are not your friend. I'm always wishing for a little more sun, but it looks as though I am in a happy place.

The tag reads up to 24 inches wide with a potential spread of 3 feet. Usually, I am a little larger than the tag, but in this case, I am just a little smaller, which is just fine. On the other hand, since it is perennial for me, I have taken the liberty of digging a small sprout or two and placing them around the garden.

Maintenance is easy. I like to feed those in containers with dilute water-soluble fertilizer every two to three weeks. Those in beds incorporate controlled-release granules at planting and about every six to eight weeks or per your formula recommendation. At any time that the plant habit seems loose or open, feel free to cut back by one-fourth to shape up.

If you have not tried the award-winning Augusta Lavender heliotrope, make 2026 the year you do. I am positive you will be giving it an award too.

Norman Winter, horticulturist, garden speaker and author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations: Color and Style in the Garden." Follow him on Facebook @NormanWinterTheGardenGuy.



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Promising news in the fight against Eastern hemlock woolly adelgid

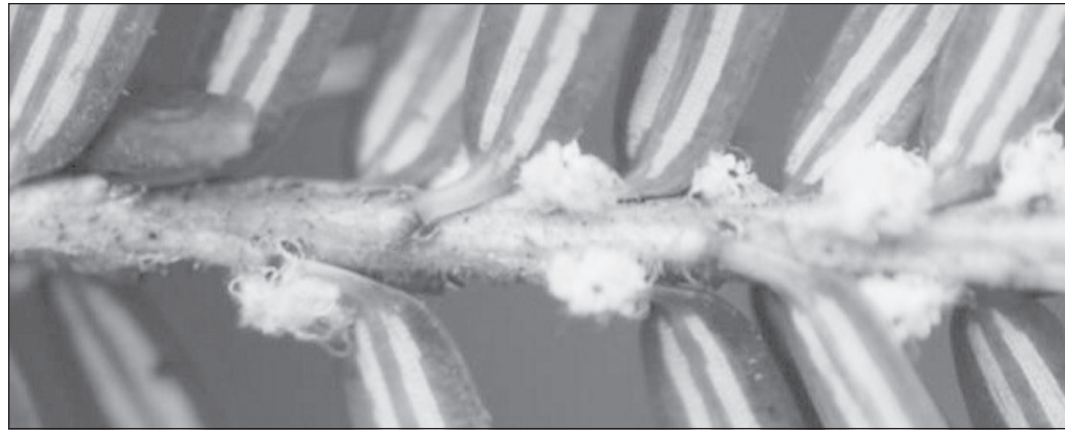


By ISSAC MATLOCK

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Ag and natural resources program manager

Dear Aggie: why are Eastern hemlock trees important, and is there any hope for them now that they are affected by the hemlock woolly adelgid?

Eastern hemlock is one of New York's most important native trees, shaping forests well beyond the Hudson valley. In Jefferson County and across Northern New York, it defines cool ravines, stream corridors, wetlands and mixed hardwood stands. Its dense, year-round canopy regulates stream temperatures for



A close look at HWA on hemlock. Note: some of the adelgids have yet to form their white woolly coats for winter. <https://u.osu.edu/>

aquatic life, reduces erosion and maintains the moist, stable conditions many species rely on. Hemlocks also provide critical winter shelter for birds, deer and other wildlife, making them a true foundation species.

This ecological importance makes the spread of the Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) a serious concern statewide.

First detected in downstate regions in the 1980s, the insect has steadily advanced north, threatening hemlock forests in the Adirondacks and beyond. In response, New York agencies and research partners, including the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Cornell University's New York State Hemlock Initiative, are

advancing biological control strategies.

A key breakthrough is the successful establishment of *Laricobius nigrinus*, a tiny beetle that feeds exclusively on HWA. At Harriman State Park, where beetles were released beginning in 2018, populations are now reproducing and spreading naturally. More than 12,000 beetles were re-

cently collected and redistributed to new sites across the Northeast, far exceeding expectations. Scientists have confirmed the beetle has dispersed up to 15 miles, indicating a growing, self-sustaining population.

For Northern New York, this progress is promising. While chemical treatments can protect individual trees, they are impractical at scale. Biological control offers a long-term, landscape-level solution that aligns with natural ecosystem processes. Ultimately, protecting hemlock in Northern New York is about preserving water quality, wildlife habitat, and forest stability. Continued research, management, and public awareness will be essential to safeguarding this vital native species for future generations. For more information visit <https://blogs.cornell.edu/nyschemlockinitiative>.

Can YouTube videos help robots learn household chores?

By KARL HILLE

The Baltimore Sun

What's the difference between a Roomba and "The Jetsons" robot maid, Rosie? It's not a joke, it's a challenge University of Maryland doctoral student Seungjae "Jay" Lee is tackling in hopes of training real-world domestic robots to master house-keeping tasks.

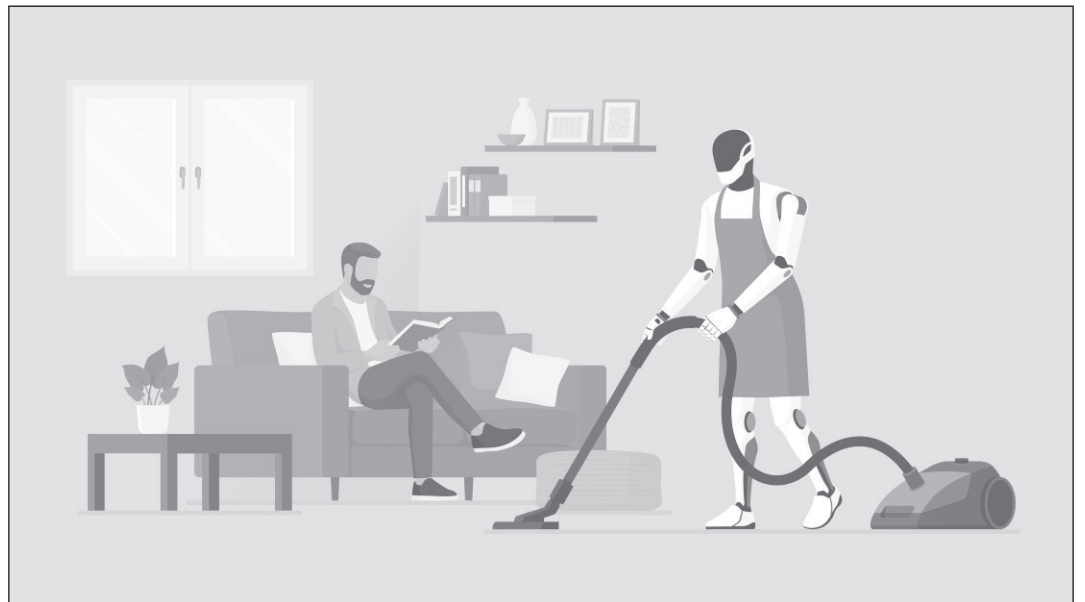
His work focuses on incorporating the vast reservoir of web videos to train robots by having them watch human activity.

"People often focus on designing better model architectures, but for artificial intelligence that integrates AI algorithms into physical systems, the real bottleneck is the dataset itself," Lee said in a story on the Maryland Today website.

Training robots to perform physical tasks is much more complicated than training artificial intelli-

gence to write a paper. Not only does the robot need to maneuver and manipulate household objects in three dimensions across possibly messy environments, but data on things like grip strength and technique are critically limited, Lee said. Robots require tactile feedback, sensor readings and action trajectories collected from real-world settings. Gathering this data is slow, expensive and technically demanding.

A Georgia Tech doctoral student is using first-person videos created in his lab to train robots. Simar Kareer recorded himself repeatedly folding a shirt and doing other tasks while wearing virtual reality headsets. Then, he constructed a humanoid robot with pincers for hands and attached the headset to the top to mimic a first-person viewpoint. If enough people use virtual



Training robots to perform physical tasks is much more complicated than training artificial intelligence to write a paper. (Dreamstime/TNS)

reality headsets while performing their routine tasks, a virtual household chore dataset will emerge, he said.

Lee thinks the dataset may already exist in publicly available videos.

He is leading the development of TraceGen, a system that mines hundreds of thousands of publicly available videos from large datasets and platforms such as YouTube to extract useful

hand and object motion.

Another project he is involved with, "Imagine, Verify, Execute," allows robots to explore the world and learn from their own explorations.

Light

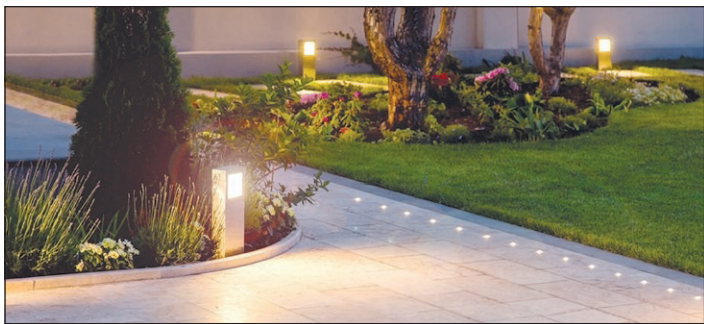
From T18

ers 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



METRO

Threats

From T15

drought and the dog days of summer. But some mulch contains theobromine, a chemical compound that can be toxic and may even be lethal to dogs when ingested. Pet owners are urged to use mulch that does not contain theobromine, which is typically found in cocoa mulch.

¥ Flower: The mulch around flowers can be toxic to pets, and so can the blooms themselves. Lilies, tulips, hydrangeas, and azaleas are just some of the popular flowers that can cause stomach upset in pets. Pet owners are urged to speak with their veterinarians about flowers and plants native to their areas that might be toxic to pets.

¥ Wildlife: A collaborative study from researchers at the University of Michigan, the University of Washington and University College London published in 2024 warned that the overlap between humans and animals will increase considerably over the next half

century. Climate change and human population growth are driving forces behind that increase, which suburban homeowners may already be witnessing. As more and more wooded areas are leveled to create additional housing, wildlife such as deer, racoons, opossum, foxes, and more are losing their habitats and subsequently being seen with greater frequency in suburban neighborhoods. Wildlife can carry disease that can make domesticated animals sick, and some wildlife might go on the attack when they encounter cats or dogs in backyards. Monitoring pets whenever they're outside, sealing garbage cans so wildlife is not attracted to the yard and keeping compost piles free of foods that might draw wildlife to a yard are some of the ways to reduce the chances of interactions between wild animals and domesticated pets.

These are just a handful of threats to pet health that might be lurking in your backyard. Always keep an eye on pets when they're outdoors and speak with a veterinarian to identify ways to minimize backyard threats.

Spring Home & Garden

of homeowners' investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing land-

scape lighting is even less.

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of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.

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Hollywood hibiscus will give you that *ISLAND LIFE*

By **NORMAN WINTER**

Tribune News Service

This will be my third year growing four selections of the Hollywood Hibiscus series. The series now totals 14, if you can believe it. The series, and the fact that it's under the Proven Winners logo, will open the door for gardeners to choose the hibiscus that fits their color palette and motif. What I mean by that is that hibiscus shopping has always been kind of potluck or limited by what the retailer can get and has on the bench.

Most of my life I have simply bought a tropical hibiscus, put it in a pot on the patio, put on my Hawaiian shirt and embraced the island life atmosphere.

Now I have started thinking about combinations. The Hollywood Hibiscus are in containers too, but my backyard is set up so that they still allow for stunning combinations. Once you start doing this you will feel more like an artist or designer, and the hibiscus becomes part of a plan.

Hollywood Hibiscus VIP is truly one of the most beautiful I have ever grown. The flowers are large and the color is so rare in the garden. The colors also change throughout the day, featuring yellow gold and darker honey gold with a magenta-red throat. Hollywood Hibiscus VIP looks as though it belongs to royalty.

A couple of weeks ago I presented a photo in my column where blue Let's Dance hydrangeas were in the background creating the ultimate complementary contrast.

But last summer I started growing it with various



Hollywood Hibiscus Disco Diva partners with the Supertunia Tiara Blue, Honey and Persimmon petunias. (NORMAN WINTER/TNS)

Heart to Heart caladiums. Suddenly I had a menagerie of foliage and flowers that screamed South Pacific and the imaginary feeling that you could hear "Bali Ha'i" in the distance.

Hollywood Hibiscus Disco Diva is certainly not overlooked. Its flowers are large and the PW tags say Cream-sicle Orange with Bright Ruby Magenta center. In my landscape it ages to a deeper orange by the close of day. On my rock wall I was growing containers with Supertunia Tiara Blue, Honey and

Persimmon petunias. Then suddenly, the Hollywood Hibiscus Disco Diva put forth blooms that were a perfect match and of course much larger than the Supertunias. Like the Hollywood Hibiscus VIP, the Disco Diva was also used against a backdrop of Heart to Heart caladiums for a look of island magic.

Hollywood Hibiscus America's Sweetheart is one of the most prolific blooming tropical hibiscuses I have ever grown. The flowers aren't as large as the VIP and Disco Diva but it is always



Hollywood Hibiscus VIP blooms make the perfect complementary contrast with the blue Let's Dance hydrangea blooms. (NORMAN WINTER/TNS)

loaded with blooms. The tag says pale pink edges, medium pink interior and deep magenta throat and that sums it up, other than "drop dead gorgeous." I've grown it with Supertunia Mini Vista Plum Veined petunias and Superbena Cobalt verbena, but to see it with my white chiminea may be the ultimate combination.

All of these are expected to reach 4 feet tall with a 5-foot spread. Good potting soil and a large enough container to let the hibiscus reach its potential will give you the green thumb award. Since you will most likely be watering daily in the summer, feed regularly with a diluted

water-soluble fertilizer or controlled release granules per the label instructions.

These are tropical in nature and have hardiness zones from 9-11. (Editor's note: The north country is zone 5a, so tropical hibiscus would be grown as an annual. . The earliest you can plant tropical hibiscus is April. However, you really should wait until May if you don't want to take any chances.)

Follow Norman Winter on Facebook @NormanWinterTheGardenGuy for more photos and garden inspiration.

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