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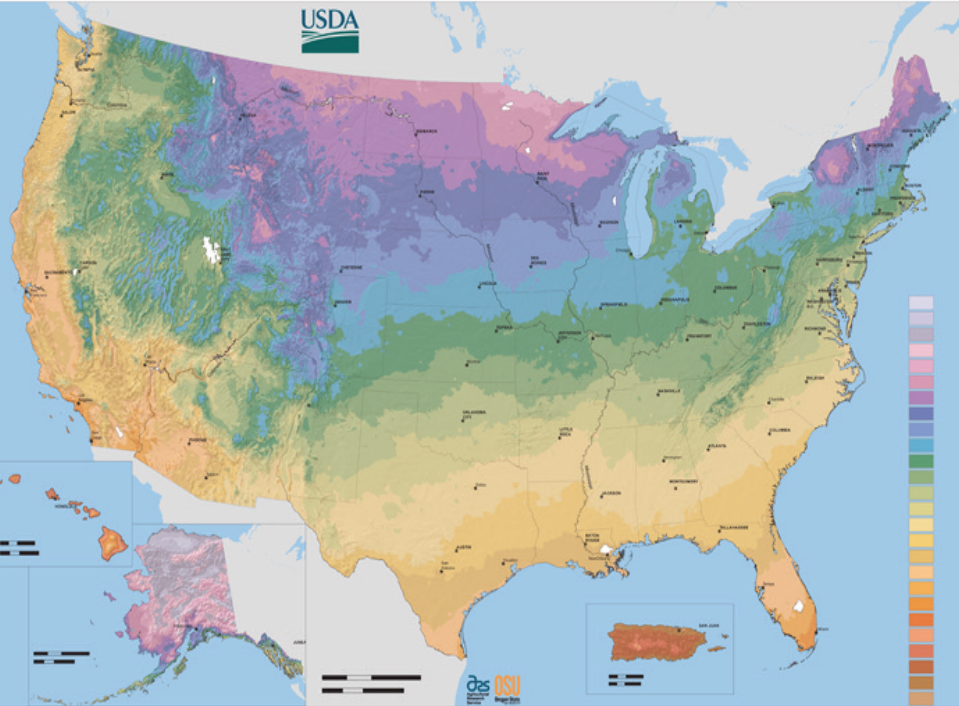
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Gardening benefits the environment in myriad ways. Maintaining natural landscapes and preserving green spaces can reduce the collective carbon footprint of the human race. Trees, flowers and other greenery filter the air and create welcoming habitats for all species of animals and insects. Many home gardeners set out each spring to create landscapes that cater to all of the senses. But choosing plants that are unlikely to thrive in certain climates can lead to dissatisfaction and premature plant demise and may require gardeners to use more fertilizers, pesticides and other not-so-Earth-friendly techniques to help plants thrive. One of the more important steps gardeners can take

before spring arrives is to educate themselves about plant hardiness zones. Hardiness zones are defined by the average climatic conditions of the region and are broken down into various zones. The USDA Hardiness Zone map divides North America into 13 separate zones. Each zone is marked by 10 F incremental differences from the last zone. In some versions of the map, each zone is further divided into "a" and "b" regions. The National Gardening Association says the USDA Hardiness Zone Map was revised in 2012. The latest version was jointly developed by the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group. To help devel-

op the new map, the USDA and Oregon State University requested that horticultural and climatic experts review the zones in their geographic areas. As a result, the zone boundaries in the 2012 edition of the map have shifted in many areas. Canada's Hardiness Zone map, updated in 2010, uses nine different zones. Zone maps are tools that show where permanent landscape plants can adapt. Home gardeners who are looking for shrubs or perennials to last year after year should recognize that such plants must tolerate year-round conditions, including the lowest and highest temperatures and the amount of precipitation. Snow cover and humidity also can

impact a plant's propensity to thrive. While zone maps are not perfect, they can be useful in planning and ensuring the survival of future gardens. Plant and seed manufacturer Burpee says that other factors to consider that also affect the viability of plants include wind, moisture and soil conditions. The company offers an interactive zone finder on their website that will indicate the hardiness zone as well as average first and last frost dates. Visit www.burpee.com/findgrowzone to enter a zip code. Learn more about plant hardiness at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb.



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Get Ready: Early Spring Landscaping Tips

During the cold months of winter, many people stare longingly out of the window dreaming of spring and time spent outdoors. For those with green thumbs, images of tending to the garden and other aspects of their landscapes no doubt dominate such daydreams. Draw inspiration from those budding crocuses and daffodils pushing through the last remnants of snow and employ these tips to prepare for the upcoming gardening season.

- One of the first steps is to apply a natural preemergent weed killer to get a head start knocking out weeds that can plague the lawn during the growing season. Killing weeds at the roots early on can mean far fewer hassles in spring and summer, and may prevent new generations of weeds from cropping up each year.
- While it may be tempting to take a prematurely warm day as a sign that spring is in full force and purchase a bunch of annuals, it's better to know the last of the possible frost dates

(check "The Farmer's Almanac"); otherwise, you may waste time and money planting flowers or vegetables only to have them zapped by another frosty day.

- Amend the soil so that it is the right consistency, just crumbling when lifting it. Soil that is too muddy after spring thaw can harden, making it difficult for plants to flourish later on. Speak with representatives at a local lawn and garden center about which types of amendments you can add to the soil in your particular area to enrich it.
- Lawn and garden experts suggest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.
- Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.
- Give outdoor entertaining



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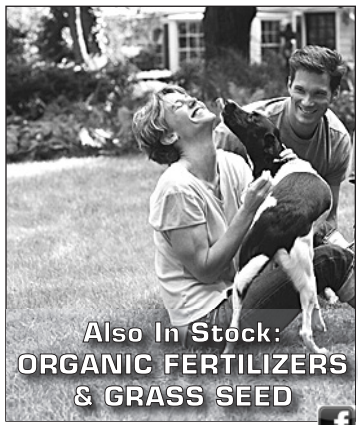
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How To Guarantee Your Garden Starts Off On The Right Foot

As winter slowly winds down, many gardeners cannot wait to soak up the springtime sun and get their hands dirty in the garden. Such excitement is not just good for gardeners, but can benefit the garden in the months to come as well. Late winter or early spring is a great time to get a head start on the gardening season. Even if gardening season is still around the corner, completing the following projects can ensure your garden gets off on the right foot.

CLEAR DEBRIS

One of the best things you can do for your garden as winter winds down is to clear it of debris. Winter can be especially harsh on a landscape, and gardens left to the elements are often filled with debris once

spring arrives. Dead leaves, fallen branches, rocks that surfaced during the winter frost, and even garbage that might have blown about in winter winds can all pile up in a garden over a typical winter. Clearing such debris likely won't take long, but it's a great first step toward restoring the garden before the time comes to plant and grow the garden once again.

EXAMINE THE SOIL

Soil plays a significant role in whether a garden thrives or struggles. Examining the soil before the season starts can help gardeners address any issues before they plant. Ignoring the soil until a problem arises can turn the upcoming gardening season into a lost

opportunity, so test the soil to determine if it has any nutrient or mineral deficiencies. This may require the help of a professional, but if a problem arises, you might be able to adjust the acidity or alkalinity of the soil and still enjoy a successful gardening season. Another way to examine the soil is less complex but can shed light on when would be a good time to get back to work. Reach into the soil and dig out a handful. If the soil quickly crumbles, you can start preparing for gardening seasoning. But if the soil is still clumped together, it needs more time to dry out before you can begin your prep work.

INITIATE EDGING

Edging is another task gardeners can begin as they get ready for the season. Edge plant and flower beds, but be sure to use a spade with a flat blade or an edger designed to edge flower beds. Such tools will cut deep enough so grass roots that may eventually grow into the flower bed are severed. Depending on how large a garden is, edging can be a time-consuming task, so getting a head start allows homeowners to spend more time planting and tending to their gardens once the season hits full swing.

FIGHT WEEDS

Though weeds likely have not survived the winter, that does not mean they won't return once the weather starts to heat up. But as inevitable as weeds may seem, homeowners can take steps to prevent them from turning beautiful gardens into battlegrounds where plants, flowers and vegetables are pitted against unsightly and potentially harmful weeds. Spring is a good time to apply a pre-emergent weed preventer, which can stop weeds before they grow. Though such solutions are not always foolproof, they can drastically reduce the likelihood of weed growth. Though gardeners might not be able to start planting their gardens in late winter or early spring, they can still get outside and take steps to ensure their gardens thrive once planting season begins.

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Things To Consider Before Building A Greenhouse

Avid gardeners may be enticed by the idea of a greenhouse that allows them to explore their passion for plants year-round. While it's true that greenhouses afford this luxury, there are important things to consider before erecting a greenhouse in your yard. Greenhouses require ample time to maintain. Greenhouses are not self-managing; they require heat, water, venting,

houses," which are all-purpose options with adjustable shelving and space for growing plants full-term. The next step is deciding where the greenhouse will be located. The goal is to have a consistent amount of sunlight year-round. A south-facing locale is ideal, and structures should remain north of the greenhouse so they do not cast a shadow on it. The building, cars and technology



electricity, and maintenance on the part of gardeners. Individuals need to determine how much time they have to devote to a greenhouse and then consider their options. Start by choosing the size of the greenhouse. Many experts, like those at the home and garden information site The Spruce, suggest getting the largest one you can afford and fit into the yard. It is much easier to fill a large greenhouse than try to expand on a small one later on. Next, consider whether you want to build the greenhouse from scratch or utilize a prefabricated kit that can make easier work of the job. Kits typically contain all of the materials needed, and are easiest for someone who is a construction novice. Look for "grower green-

resource Popular Mechanics advises gardening enthusiasts to take into consideration the angle of the sun during all seasons before choosing a location. Doing so ensures that the sun is not obscured in the winter or fall. Select a spot that also has ample drainage, as you will not want water pooling up along the sides of or underneath the greenhouse. Raise the greenhouse on footings to alleviate flooding concerns. Consult with a gardening or agriculture expert about the best way to heat the greenhouse. Options abound with electric-, gas- and propane-powered heating sources. Some systems will require venting. You also will need to know what is available and legal in your area. Check to see if you need a building permit for the greenhouse and any accompanying heating elements. Once the greenhouse is situated, you can begin to add other items, like benches, additional shelving, hooks for tools, and even an automated watering or misting system. Greenhouses take commitment, but the reward is the chance to enjoy gardening all year long.

How Color Can Affect Your Garden

Flower gardens can add color and awe-inspiring appeal to a property. The National Gardening Association notes that gardeners can find nearly every color of the spectrum in flowering perennials. So whether you prefer soft pink, are partial to bright red or want to relax in a garden and gaze at something deep blue, chances are you'll find a perennial to tickle your fancy. The NGA offers the following breakdown of colors to help gardeners learn how their gardens can set the mood they're looking for.

BRIGHT COLORS
A garden full of bright colors like red, orange, magenta, and yellow can provide a landscape with vigor and energy. The NGA notes that brightly colored flowers can withstand especially bright sunshine, meaning gardeners can marvel at their appearance even when the sun might be adversely affecting other plants and flowers.

PASTEL COLORS
Pastels, which include soft pink, powder blue, lavender, and peach, create a tranquil feeling in a garden. This makes pastel perfect for those who want their gardens to be a relaxing, peaceful respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The NGA notes that pastels may look washed out in the mid-day sun, so they might be best enjoyed early in the morning or late in the afternoon.



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COMPLEMENTARY COLORS
Complementary colors are those that are opposite one another on the color wheel. Orange and blue are examples of complementary colors. According to the NGA, complementary colors can add creative energy and vitality to a garden.

HARMONIOUS COLORS
These colors are those that are next to each other on the color wheel, such as orange and red. The NGA recommends harmonious colors for gardeners looking to create a unifying feel in their gardens without resorting to a monochromatic color scheme. Harmonious colors give off a gentle feeling that can make for a relaxing garden atmosphere.

MONOCHROMATIC COLORS
Monochromatic gardens can be awe-inspiring even though they stick to a single color and don't provide an array of awe-inspiring colors. The NGA notes that gardeners with monochromatic gardens make them interesting by using plants of various sizes and shapes. When planting a garden, gardeners can choose whichever color scheme they prefer. To learn more about the effects of color on a garden, visit the National Gardening Association website at www.garden.org.



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The Many Benefits Of Hiring A Professional Landscaper

The flowers are blooming, and the grass has begun to grow anew, making spring a great time for homeowners to once again turn their attention to landscaping. Those who aren't looking forward to dusting off their lawnmowers and rethreading their string trimmers may want to hire professional landscapers to tend to their lawns and gardens.

A recent joint study by the National Gardening Association, Residential Lawn and Landscape Services and the Value of Landscaping found that homeowners spend roughly \$45 billion per year on professional lawn and landscape services, as nearly 30 percent of all households across the United States use at least one type of lawn or landscape ser-



vice. The rising use of lawn care services is indicative of homeowners' appreciation of the convenience and craftsmanship professional services can provide. While the impact professional landscapers can have on a property's aesthetic appeal is considerable, homeowners also benefit from working with professional landscapers in various other ways.

- **Time savings:** One of the biggest benefits of leaving lawn care to the professionals is the amount of time it will save for the average homeowner. Lawns generally need to be mowed once per week during the spring and summer seasons and, depending on the size of the property, that can take an hour or more. Add the time it takes to clean up clippings, mulch landscaping beds and edge the property, and homeowners can expect to devote a significant chunk of their weekends to caring for their lawns. Lawn services employ a few workers who make fast work of the job, leaving homeowners time to enjoy their weekends however they see fit.

- **Reduced risk for injury:** Maintaining a landscape is hard work, and those unaccustomed to this type of activity may find themselves winded or at risk of injury. Improper use of lawn equipment also is a safety hazard. Leaving the work to professionals can help homeowners avoid strained backs, lacerations, pulled muscles, sunburns, and any other dangers that can result when tackling landscaping projects.

• **Financial savings:** On the surface, hiring a landscaping service may seem like a costly venture. However, after crunching some numbers, many homeowners realize that doing the work themselves may cost more in the long run than hiring a professional landscaping service. Homeowners who decide to go it alone must purchase expensive equipment, and those lawn tools will require routine maintenance, which costs additional money. Inexperienced homeowners may incur extra fees to "fix" mistakes that occur during the learning process. Each year, new seed, fertilizer, mulch, pesticides, and other supplies also

must be purchased. But professional lawn care services typically charge a set fee per month, and that fee covers the maintenance of both your property and the equipment needed to keep that property looking great.

- **Know-how:** Many professional landscapers know how to address lawn care issues that may arise throughout the year. They will know how to deal with dry patches of lawn or poorly draining areas, and they also can make recommendations on plants that will thrive under certain conditions.

- One-stop shopping: Certain landscaping services provide many different options for prospective customers. Basic lawn cuts may be one package, but there also may be services for seasonal seeding, weeding, leaf clean-up, and winterizing.
- Consistent maintenance: Homeowners who frequently travel or spend much of their summers away from home often find that lawn care com-

panies are a wise investment. Established weekly schedules ensure the landscape always will look its best whether homeowners are home or out of town.

Spring is a great time for homeowners to decide if hiring pro-

essional landscaping services is in their best interests. The time and money saved, as well as impact professional landscapers can have on a property, makes landscaping services a great investment for many homeowners.

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How Tree Services Can Protect Your Property

Cold weather can take its toll on a property, especially in regions of the world where winters are harsh. Most parts of the landscape are vulnerable to damage from winter storms, but trees may be especially susceptible. By the end of winter, many homeowners wonder if their trees would benefit from some professional TLC. Tree services provide a host of services. While fall is a popular time to remove trees from a property, doing so in spring is not unheard of, especially if trees were affected by winter storms and now pose a threat to a home and the people who live inside it. Homeowners considering tree services can explore the following ways that some professional arbor attention can protect them and their homes.

- Tree services can help protect a home's foundation. Old trees that stretch well into the sky can be captivating, but they also can pose a threat to a home's foundation. Such trees may have especially large root zones that may extend beneath walkways and even a home. In the latter instance, foundations may crack as roots try to stake their claim to the ground beneath a home. According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, homeowners pay an average of just over \$4,000 to repair foundation issues, though major problems can cost considerably more than that. A professional tree service can remove aging trees that might be beautiful and awe-inspiring but still pose a threat to a home and the areas surrounding it.
- Tree services can improve visibility. Trees that have aged a bit since their last trimming might affect the view of a property from inside a home. Overgrown branches can compromise residents' ability to see and experience the natural beauty just outside their windows. The average homeowner may be able to trim short trees on his or her own, but if views from the second floor of a home or higher have been compromised, it's much safer to call a professional tree service. Such services have the right tools and experienced personnel necessary to safely trim high branches on tall trees.
- Tree services can help prevent future damage. Even if trees made it through a recent winter unscathed, that's no guarantee next winter or even the coming seasons of spring, summer and fall won't ultimately prove their undoing. Travelers Insurance notes that weather-related roof damage, including damage resulting from falling limbs and branches



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weighed down by snow during the winter months, accounted for more than half of all Travelers property loss claims between 2009 and 2016. According to BNC Insurance and Risk Advisors, homeowners may be liable if a tree they knew posed a threat falls onto a passerby or a neighbor's property and causes damage or injury. Having all trees properly trimmed each year, but especially those that can fall on your home and your neighbors' homes, may prevent future damage and legal issues. Tree services can ensure trees maintain their awe-inspiring beauty and help homeowners protect their homes and their belongings.

Create A Safe, Tick-Free Zone In Your Yard

Despite their diminutive stature, ticks are a big concern for people, particularly those with pets. As the weather warms, ticks are out looking for a host to climb on and get a blood meal. Ticks are a significant concern because they can be infected with bacteria, viruses or parasites, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, and babesiosis are just a few of the many tick-borne diseases. These pathogens can be passed to humans and pets via the bite of infected ticks. In 2018, at least one variety of disease-transmitting tick had been found in all of the lower 48 states, according to the CDC. In addition, researchers at Cornell University identified 26 species of ticks along the East Coast alone. Preventing tick bites has never been more important. The process starts right in one's own backyard. According to Consumer Reports and the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program, controlling wildlife that enters one's yard can help keep tick numbers down. Open access means animals can enter and so can ticks. Fencing and pest management solutions may help. Other ideas include landscaping techniques that can reduce tick populations:

- Remove leaf litter from the yard.
- Clear tall grasses and brush around homes and at the edges of the lawn. Mow regularly to keep the lawn short.
- Create a barrier between wooded areas and the yard if it abuts a forested area. According to Consumer Reports, a three-foot-wide path of wood chips or gravel can prevent tick migration by creating a physical barrier that's dry and sometimes too hot for ticks to tolerate. Such a barrier also serves as a visual reminder to anyone in your household to be especially careful if they step beyond the perimeter.
- Bag grass clippings, which can serve as habitats for ticks.
- Remove old furniture, trash and other debris that can give ticks places to hide.
- Remember to use a tick-repellent product when venturing into wooded areas. Flea and tick products also are available for pets; consult with a vet. Ticks are problematic, but various measures can help control tick populations in a yard.



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How Lawns Benefit From Aeration

Compacted soil can have a dramatic effect on grass. Compacted soil blocks oxygen, water and nutrients from reaching the root systems of the turf. That creates a lawn with weak roots, which make grass more vulnerable to disease and compromising its ability to withstand harsh weather, such as summer heat. The buildup of thatch, which is a matted layer of grass clippings and other organic debris

that collects on the top of the soil, is one indicator that a lawn could benefit from aeration, a process in which the surface of the lawn is perforated to break up compacted soil and allow oxygen, water and nutrients to reach root systems. Other signs that aeration may be necessary include patches of thin grass, brown spots and a high concentration of clay in the soil. When faced with a lawn that could benefit from aeration,





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homeowners may wonder if such as task lends itself to DIY or if it's best left to professional landscapers. Aerating a lawn is not always easy, and typically it involves the use of one of three types of aerators:

- **Core aerator:** A core aerator uses hollow tines to pull plugs of soil from the lawn. The plugs are left on the surface of the lawn. Homeowners can pick up the plugs or, according to the grass seed experts at Pennington, even leave them in the yard and allow them to break down.
- **Spike aerator:** The experts at Pennington note that spike aerators employ solid, spike-like tines to poke holes in the soil. These aerators leave the spikes in the soil. Some people wear spiked aeration shoes while walking around the yard to mimic the effects of spike aerators.
- **Slicing aerator:** According to Pennington, slicing aerators employ rotating blades that slice through thatch and down into the soil. These aerators leave the soil in the ground. Aerators can be operated manually, though professionals tend to use motorized aerators. The machines are often heavy, so homeowners should consider their health and physical ability before deciding to aerate on their own. Hiring a professional landscaper who has experience aerating may be the quickest and most effective way to restore a lawn to full health.

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Shade-Tolerant Plants Help To Complete Landscapes

Plants need sunlight to thrive and grow, but some need less sunlight than others. People who find their landscapes are less supportive to sun-loving plants can choose from a variety of shade-tolerant plants, shrubs and trees. Shade tolerance refers to a plant's ability to withstand low levels of light. Certain plants have adapted this feature to survive in the wild. Plants that grow at the base of forest floors, for example, will get less sunlight than others outside of the tree canopy. Such adaptations enable a wide variety of foliage to grow even though they are not exposed to much sunlight. While sun-loving plants often have broad leaves and expend significant energy to capture sunlight for photosynthesis, shade-tolerant plants expend less energy and tend to be more efficient consumers of soil nutrients and sunlight. Penn State Extension's Plant and Pests division says the amount of shade a plant is growing under will directly affect the density of the foliage and the plant's flowering and fruiting characteristics. Blending shade-tolerant plants into the landscape can be an effective use of space. Before choosing plants for an existing landscape, it's important to assess the level of shade or sun the plants will receive.

- **Heavy shade:** Heavy shade is when no direct sunlight reaches a plant. This occurs at the base of northern-facing walls or beneath thick tree canopies.
- **Full sun:** Areas that receive full sun enjoy direct sunlight between six and eight hours per day.
- **Moderate shade:** These sites have reflected sunlight that may come off of water features.
- **Light shade:** Plants in these areas will get partially filtered or dappled sunlight. Once homeowners understand which type of shade they are dealing with, they can then visit plant nurseries and select their plants. Most greenery comes with care instructions that include recommendations regarding the amount of shade/sunlight the plant will

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need to do well. If further assistance is needed, a knowledgeable employee can make suggestions based on landscape needs. Those who are looking for some preliminary guidance when it comes to selecting shade-tolerant shrubs, plants or trees can consult the following list.

- **Bleeding heart:** Bleeding heart, or Dicentra spectabilis, is typically found in woodlands. It's a perennial in the poppy family that produces mounded foliage and arching vine-like stems of heart-shaped flowers in the spring.
- **Amethyst flower:** Browallia hybrids offer star-shaped blooms of blue and violet. These plants will billow out of hanging baskets or containers, and they prefer warm shade or filtered sunlight.
- **Coleus:** The coleus, Solenostemon scutellarioides, is another perennial that can have a variety of different leaf colors and striations.
- **Witch hazels:** These are a genus in the family Hamamelidaceae, which has four different species in North America. This shrub or small



tree features arching branches with dense, multi-stemmed clumps. Witch hazel produces flowers in the late autumn when most other plants are sparse.

- **Bayberry:** Myrica pensylvanica can grow in partial shade as a hedge or natural property divider. The leaves of this shrub are aromatic when crushed. The shrub will produce tiny, gray/white fruits in late summer.
- **English Ivy:** Also known as Hedera helix, this trailing plant is widely cultivated as an ornamental plant. It will spread easily and can become invasive. Those searching for shade-tolerant trees can choose among Sugar maple, Black alder, Flowering dogwood, and White spruce, among others. Shade-tolerant plants can make welcome additions to the landscape, offering greenery and color in the darker areas of a property.

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PROJECTS
Take stock of your outdoor furniture — do you need more? Would colorful new Adirondack chairs, a new picnic table and maybe a garden bench and planters be more inviting? Or perhaps a cleanup and new paint would bring your existing furniture to life for another season? Does your porch/patio/deck area need to be resurfaced or enlarged? Streamline your dining by building mobile carts to transport food for prep and for serving. Add a butcher block top to the food prep cart and storage drawers to both, and improve the efficiency and pleasure of your dining experience. Gardeners may want to build a potting bench and wooden flatbed wagon to haul plants and supplies.

TOOLS, SUPPLIES AND HOW-TOS
"Make anywhere your workspace with the Kreg Mobile Project Center," Woodcraft senior product manager Peter Collins said.

"It's a portable workbench, sawhorse, assembly table, and clamping station all in one that provides a versatile work space for DIY, repair, and woodworking projects." The large 27 3/4" x 31 1/2" polypropylene work surface supports a 350-lb. load capacity, and two centers can be connected to double the work area. Collins also suggested adding the new Kreg In-line Bench Clamp and Bench Clamp System for Dog Holes to make almost every clamping task possible. Visit Woodcraft.com to see Building Plans for Outdoor Furniture, as well as Adirondack chair templates. Woodcraft.com also offers a large number of how-to articles such as "Laid Back in a Classic Adirondack" that shows how to build with Adirondack chair templates, while "WoodSense: Spotlight on Outdoor Projects," describes woods that work well outdoors. For building projects, the Freeman 1 1/4" 18-Gauge Brad Nailer is a professional quality, innovative home improvement tool that is great for furniture. Its oil-free operation requires no regular maintenance and eliminates the risk of stains on project surfaces. If your joinery choice requires screws, the Groz Insta Drive Screwdriver features a patented retractable, rotating bit cartridge that makes it easy to



find, store and change driver bits. For hauling lumber or other large items to your project site, use the Xstrap Heavy Duty Ratchet Tie Down to hold up to 1,000 pounds in place on a truck bed. To finish new furniture or recolor existing pieces — and brighten your outdoor landscape — choose one of the 28 premixed General Finishes Milk Paint colors that can be mixed, lightened, glazed, layered, antiqued, or distressed. Other good choices for outdoor surfaces include General Finishes Outdoor Oil Finish (use over exterior oil stain or exterior clear oil finishes for additional protection) and General Finishes 450 Varnish (minimizes fading, retards mold and fungus growth). For painting guidance, watch "Hand Applied Milk Paint from General Finishes at Woodcraft" and read "Create a Milk Paint Masterpiece" on Woodcraft.com. HOMERIGHT's Finish Max HVLP Sprayer will spray most solvent (except lacquer and conversion varnish) or water-based products — latex paint, milk paint, chalk paint, furniture paint, stains, and finishes. It's easy to set up, use and clean. When painting furniture, consider using the HOMERIGHT Large Spray Shelter. When painting small accessories, opt for the Small Spray Shelter. For furniture that needs some TLC, read "Restoring Outdoor Projects" on Woodcraft.com to learn how to determine what needs to be deep cleaned, repaired, rebuilt and repainted. Handy helpers for the TLC process include Blue Bear Paint and Urethane Stripper, Krud Kutter No-Rinse Prepaint Cleaner, Titebond III Ultimate Wood Glue, SculptWood Putty, and Briwax ChairRX.

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Simple Ways To Avoid Injury While Gardening

During the winter, many people anxiously await the arrival of warm weather so they can get back outdoors. Gardening is one outdoor activity that attracts many a devotee. Although gardening can be a worthwhile and enjoyable hobby for people of all ages, like other activities, gardening carries certain safety risks, even though few people may give much thought to the risk of getting hurt when gardening. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that gardeners suffer thousands of injuries every year. Many of these injuries involve lawn and garden equipment or accessories used while tending to plants. From lawn mowers to pruners to manual garden tools, gardeners may handle various pieces of equipment that can make them susceptible to injury if they're not careful. To reduce their risk for injury, gardeners can follow these important safety precautions.

- Plant gardens in raised garden beds and containers to reduce the need to stoop down to tend to plants. Raised beds are easier on gardeners' backs and knees.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and durable pants to protect arms and legs from branches, thorns and insects.
- Remove tripping hazards, such as roots, lumber, rocks, and loose gravel, from the yard at the start of gardening season.
- Wear gloves to prevent blisters from forming and to protect hands from any chemical products used in the garden. Gloves also can keep hands clean, ensuring bacteria and fungi do not find their way into open cuts or scrapes.
- Vary activities and take periodic breaks so prolonged repetitive motions do not contribute to soreness or injury.
- Follow instructions for tools, and always use the right tool for the job.

Prevent Mosquitoes From Spoiling Your Summer Fun

Summer is a beloved time of year that's often dominated by time spent outdoors soaking up summer sun. But all that extra time outdoors can make people vulnerable to mosquitoes. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, mosquitoes are more than just hungry, unwanted backyard guests. In fact, mosquito-borne diseases, including the Zika virus, the West Nile virus and dengue, pose significant threats. While not all mosquitoes carry disease, even those that don't can still bite humans, leaving them to deal with discomfort and itchiness. Taking measures to control mosquitoes outside your home can reduce your risk of being bitten by mosquitoes.

- Remove places where mosquitoes like to lay their eggs. Mosquitoes like to lay their eggs in standing water. Once a week during summer and other times of the year when mosquitoes might be buzzing around, walk around your property to remove standing water. Bird baths, flower pots, kids' toys, pools, old tires, and trash containers are some of the more common places where water can collect and present perfect places for mosquitoes to lay eggs. Turn these over to empty any standing water you find. Remove empty flower pots and old tires from the property, and make sure water storage containers are tightly covered at all times.
- Address areas where mosquitoes like to rest. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that mosquitoes like to rest in dark, humid areas. This includes car ports, garages and beneath patio furniture. Outdoor insecticides can prevent mosquitoes from resting in such areas. When inside a home, mosquitoes may be resting under a sink, in closets, beneath the furniture or in a laundry room. Indoor insect sprays and indoor insect foggers work quickly and can be highly effective, but reapplication might be necessary, as they won't prevent more mosquitoes from entering the home at a later time.
- Check your window screens. Mosquitoes might prefer the outside, but that doesn't mean they won't enter a home looking for meals if given the opportunity. Inspect window screens to look for holes that may provide mosquitoes with access to your home's interior, replacing any damaged screens immediately. When leaving or entering a home, make a concerted effort to close doors as quickly as possible.

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Invasive And Threatening Specials

Introducing chemicals or pollution into the environment can compromise an ecosystem. However, seemingly harmless non-native plants and animals can do an equal share of damage as well. Many people might be surprised to learn that invasive species can cause turmoil in the environment, even contributing to the destruction of certain ecosystems. Certain invaders are more virulent than others.

Non-native species of animals and plants are like enemy marauders. They may look like the other wildlife around, but they do not quite meld with the environment. When the ecosystem is not equipped to handle a non-native species, these species can quickly consume all of the resources and multiply so quickly that they effectively obliterate the native species.

Many non-native species of plants and animals become problematic when they are put into an environment inadvertently, such as when they hitch a ride on other items. Plant life may be brought home from a vacation abroad, or new animals can be introduced to the environment if they escape as pets. Shipping vessels can bring back microscopic sea creatures, and insects have been known to hitchhike on various modes of travel. Although efforts are made to prevent new species from invading an area, it's impossible to catch everything.

Because these plants and animals likely have no natural predators in their new surroundings, they can reproduce much faster and take over. The following are just a few of the globally invasive plants and animals that can threaten local ecosystems.

- Asian tiger mosquito: Spring and summertime outings have remained forever changed thanks to this highly invasive mosquito. Its distinctive black and white stripe pattern helps the Asian tiger mosquito stand out from others. Native to tropical and subtropical areas of Southeast Asia, scientists believe it has quickly become one of the planet's most widely-distributed animal species, spreading to at least 28 countries in a matter of 20 years. It's believed these mosquitoes hitch rides on imported tires.
- Asian carp: There are many different species of carp, which are native to Russia and China. Large fish with voracious appetites, carp take food right out of the mouths of native fish. These fish also stir up sediment in lakes and riverbeds, changing clear water to murky water, thus pushing out some species that can no longer survive.
- Burmese python: These tropical snakes have been introduced into many warm areas, including Florida. Many were taken as pets only to outgrow their indoor habitats. They can live in the water and climb trees. With their massive size (20 feet in length), the pythons have few predators and require a lot of prey. Florida wildlife experts estimate 30,000 Burmese pythons reside in

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Everglades National Park alone. They even feast on alligators.

- Soapbush: Sometimes referred to as Koster's Curse, this is a perennial shrub that is highly invasive in many tropical regions of the world. Originally from Mexico and the Caribbean, soapbush was introduced to Hawaii in the 1940s and quickly began taking over.
- Kudzu: This vine is native to Japan and can grow upward of a foot per day in the right conditions. It was brought to the United States to help prevent soil erosion and has never left. Since its introduction, Kudzu has been spreading across the United States at a rate as fast as 150,000 acres annually, according to environmentalists.
- Cane toads: Cane toads were introduced to many countries

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with warm climates as a method of naturally controlling crop pests. However, the toads' own defense mechanism of secreting toxins makes them deadly to predators outside of their normal habitats. Therefore, there's nothing to keep these cane toads in check, and they have wreaked havoc on native animal and plant species, especially in Australia.

- Asian long-horned beetle: Another invasive insect, the beetle does most of its damage in the larval stage. This is when it burrows through and feeds on tree wood beneath the bark. In large concentrations, the larvae can destroy a tree. The University of Vermont Entomology Research Laboratory says the beetle is currently infesting trees in Ohio, Massachusetts and New York. Trees must be removed, chipped and burned to destroy the invader.

Non-native plants and animals can destroy environments, and men and women must always be careful when dealing with such species.

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