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Beetles, bugs & worms! Oh, my!

By **KELLI TIPTON**
Special to The Daily Home

A vegetable gardener never wants to see insects destroying a carefully cultivated crop, but spraying a pesticide isn't always the best way to control pests. Integrated pest management is a broad

She said diversified planting is a great way to attract beneficial insects to the garden. "I tell people to incorporate 30 percent of a vegetable garden with flowering plants and herbs because beneficial insects love them. It gives them a place to live. The pollinators love the flowering plants.

damage on something, it's no big deal, but if they have completely taken over, then I start figuring out some chemicals I need to use."

So, what are the signs of an infestation of bad bugs? Some types of crop damage are obvious.

"Insects have different kinds of mouth parts. Some have chewing mouth parts. Like a tomato hornworm, it chomps. You can actually see the damage where it has eaten the leaves. Or maybe a fall army worm has actually eaten the tomato fruit. That kind of stuff is easy to see," she said. Some damage is difficult to detect. "Then, you have insects like leaf footed bugs. Late in the season, leaf footed bugs are everywhere. They don't have chewing mouth parts. They have piercing mouth parts, so you will see these leaf footed bugs covering crops like tomatoes and okra and a lot of other things. You don't see

where they have eaten anything, because they don't. But you will notice the quality of the tomatoes later in the season goes way down. They may have yellow spots. That is where the bugs have pierced the fruit, and sucked out the plant juices, and maybe secreted stuff into it, and it's a completely different type of damage to look for," she said. But some insects and the damage they cause cannot be seen until it's too late to save the plant.

"For example, a squash vine borer. You won't see the borer. It's actually a moth that looks a lot like a wasp, and the female lays an egg or eggs at the bottom of the plant. When the eggs hatch, you can't see the insects. They are so tiny. But you walk out one day and your squash is lying on the ground. But you never saw the insect because it's inside the stem," she said.

"The most important thing you can do for your garden is to look at it every day. That's going to help you catch something early. And knowing the life cycle and what things look like at different stages is important. If I put out some sticky traps or pher-

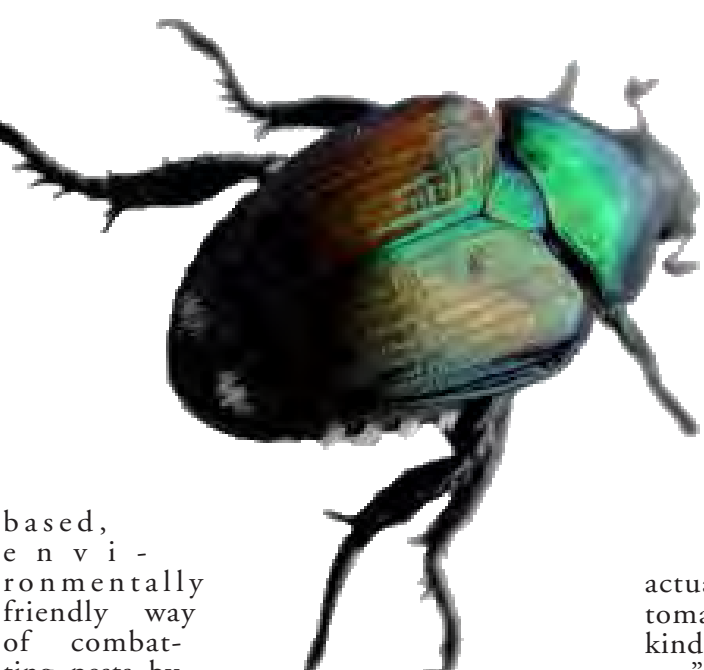
omone traps, and I have caught a squash vine borer moth, then I know they are there, and they are laying eggs. So, I know I need to watch my squash plants. Or the tomato hornworm, if you know what the moth looks like, and you see it, then you know to check your tomato plants. Monitoring and looking, using sticky traps to know what is out there. If it's not out there, there is no reason to spray for it."

Hand picking pests off the plant, or using mechanical traps are some options to control damaging insects, but if chemi-

harmful to bees as synthetic ones. And, if something is flowering, I won't even spray it, because I know the bees are going to be there," she said.

A sanitary garden is also crucial for pest control. "Insects like to overwinter in debris. If you have dead vegetables out there in the garden, clean them up. Debris gives insects a place to hide and live throughout the winter, and you have just re-inoculated your garden by not keeping it sanitary," she said.

More information on integrated pest management can be found in a publication by the Alabama



based, environmentally friendly way of combatting pests by using various biological and mechanical controls.

The use of chemicals, either organic or synthetic, is considered as a last resort.

According to Dani Carroll, regional agent for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, a little research and planning can help gardeners prevent unwanted pests from doing extensive damage to plants. "Crop rotation is one way to prevent harmful insects from completely taking over a vegetable garden. I recommend that people rotate their crops because insects and diseases, for the most part, are plant specific. You are not going to see a tomato hornworm on okra. You are not going to see a squash vine borer on a tomato. If you plant the same thing over and over in the same place, it allows these insects to build up in the soil. So, swap families. If you have tomatoes in a certain place one year, you don't need to plant tomatoes, peppers, Irish potatoes or eggplants in the same place the following year, because they are in the same exact family."

Not all insects found on garden plants are "bad bugs." In fact, a lot of them are beneficial in controlling the population of harmful insects. "Beneficial insects are very important to the garden. They help pollinate flowering plants, and they eat bad bugs and their eggs," she said. "It is important to know the life cycle of beneficial insects and be able to identify them. For example, consider a ladybug. The larva looks nothing like the adult. I can't tell you how many times somebody has sent me a picture of an insect they are trying to control, and it's a ladybug larva," she said. Ladybugs are beneficial because they eat aphids. Aphids are responsible for transmitting plant diseases, and they will suck the sap out of a plant until it withers and dies.

When you just plant vegetables, you are mostly attracting insect pests," she said. "I like the perennial cone flowers and black eyed susans. And the herbs are wonderful, especially when you let them go to seed and start blooming. Cilantro, parsley, and thyme, when they are going to flower will attract lots of beneficial insects. These flowers and herbs can be mixed in with the vegetables, they can be planted as a border around the garden, or they can be planted alongside the vegetables," she said.

Companion planting is another way to control harmful insects. For example, planting garlic among vegetables helps to deter Japanese beetles, aphids, vegetable weevils, and spider mites. Planting basil near tomatoes repels tomato hornworms. Marigolds mixed in with squash or cucumbers will help repel cucumber beetles and nematodes.

But sometimes, despite these efforts, crops can be damaged by pests. "When the bad pests outnumber the beneficial bugs, then you have a problem. But, there is a threshold. If I have a little bit of insect

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Upcycling with the DIY Diva



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Leanne Lee is an advocate of taking something old and giving it a second chance.

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Upcycling, a do-it-yourself trend also referred to as repurposing, involves taking something old, obsolete or no longer in use and giving it a second life and new function. Leanne Lee believes it's a way of "helping you fall in love with your house all over again."

Home and Garden's 2015 Trendsetter of the Year, Lee has become an upcycling authority as The Diva of DIY. She describes herself as a "junk-loving, dumpster-diving, curb-shopping" contractor, public speaker, blogger and media personality "with a passion for transforming discarded items into cherished possessions."

and the next thing you know, it's done."

Lee added that many first-time DIYers are often concerned about how expensive they believe projects might be, but that shouldn't hold them back.

"The majority of my projects are under \$20," she said. "You start with something that's essentially free. I love trash, thrift stores, garage sales, estate sales and auctions. I don't believe in buying anything new, whether it's cars, houses or anything else. I think it's always better to reinvent something. It helps a lot with costs."

Items to upcycle can be found, she said, at garage sales ("If it's a Saturday morning, you'll probably find me at a garage sale"), flea mar-

kets, antiques stores, auctions ("If you find something you're looking for and no one else is bidding on it, you can get it pretty close to free"), "in your own home and garage, on a curb or in a dumpster and through newspaper ads and Facebook groups."

Such online resources as www.MyFleaMarketGuide.com, www.KeysFleaMarket.com, www.AntiqueMalls.com, www.EstateSales.org and www.TheThriftShopper.com can provide leads when searching for items to repurpose, and Lee recommends having on hand such tools as a mitre saw, cordless drill, air nailer, glue gun, Magic Erasers, rubbing alcohol, fabric, upholstery tools, 220-grit sandpaper, spray paint and pre-mixed Bondo before beginning a project.

"Once you have all your tools, don't start with your kitchen cabinets or your grandmother's heirloom dresser," she said. "Start with something you have no emotional attachment to. If you mess it up or it doesn't work, who cares? You can put it in your garage sale or turn it into something else. Remember that what you think you're making and what you end up making may be different things."

One of Lee's favorite upcycling projects is turning wooden pallets into furniture, frames, and wall accent pieces.

"Go to places locally that receive deliveries of merchandise but don't ship back out. Grocery stores, furniture stores, hot tub companies, pool table companies and home décor stores are good places. They receive merchandise on pallets, unpack it and place it on their showroom floor. What happened to the pallet it was shipped on? It is sitting in the back of the store, and I promise they will be thrilled if you take them off their hands. Just make sure you ask permission first."

"I mentioned hot tub and pool table companies because they have oversized pallets. I like to pick up the big ones and then cut them to the size I need. The best way to separate the pallet boards from the frame is with a hacksaw and a metal blade. I cut right through the nail. Pallet wood is too brittle to pry it off. It will split every time."

Next, she suggests spraying the wood with a 50-50 mixture of water and bleach and letting it sit outside for as long as three to four weeks. "It will turn all kinds of beautiful colors."

Lee also sees potential in old outdoor patio sets.

"Have you painted your patio furniture lately? With a little time and a little paint, for less than \$100, you can make yours look like a completely different set."

Outdoor projects can often be inexpensive and improve the appearance



Submitted photo

Wooden pallets can be transformed into a host of furnishings, from coffee tables to bed frames.

of a house without much intensive labor, she said.

"One of the best things you can do to improve the curb appeal of your home is to paint your front door. Cobalt blue, pink and green are popular choices. It's also a good occasion to spruce up the look of your door hardware and your porch lights – if you like the style of them – at the same time. Porch lights take some serious abuse from the extreme weather changes."

Lee suggests a 12-step plan for outdoor lighting makeovers.

- Turn off the breaker for the porch lights. Double check it by flipping the light switch on and off.
- Unscrew the lights and remove them from the brackets.
- Separate the lights as

much as possible. If the glass can't be removed, use tape to avoid overspray.

- Place the lights on a drop cloth in assembly line fashion.

- Clean the fixtures with a commercial cleanser (Lee recommends Krud Kutter) or dish soap and water.

- Spray metal pieces with solid matte paint, which should be close to the metallic topcoat cover. Allow them to dry.

- Completely cover the matte color with metallic paint. Lee suggests Rustoleum oil-rubbed bronze. Allow it to dry.

- Using a small paint brush, detail accents with Statuary Bronze metallic paint.

- Spray a couple of coats of clear sealer over the top for extra protection.

- Clean both sides of the glass.

- Replace light bulbs.
- Reassemble and reinstall the fixture.

Besides giving DIYers the satisfaction of improving their homes' appearances themselves, Lee said that repurposing older, unused items or refurbishing existing items reduces waste and is good for the environment.

"Upcycling is the right thing to do. We have a responsibility to our children, our grandchildren and even their grandchildren to take care of the environment and make this a beautiful place to live."



Submitted photos

These before-and-after photos depict one of Lee's DIY projects, in which she transformed a bright white fireplace into an heirloom stained fireplace. "Everyone has to look only as far as their own spaces to unlock the potential in their homes and make them extraordinary," she said.

At her blog, www.divaofdiy.com, she offers step-by-step and video directions for do-it-yourself home décor and improvement projects, such as how to turn an old automobile tire into an ottoman, how to transform discarded wooden pallets into coffee tables and how to make gladiator-style sandals for as little as \$1.

Lee acknowledges that such projects can cause prospective DIYers to feel apprehensive and unconfident about their ability to undertake one.

"Everyone has the power to tap into their own creativity and has to look only as far as their own spaces to discover ways to unlock the potential in their homes and make them extraordinary," she said. "I think what happens when people get nervous about the idea of doing that is that they look at a project as a whole rather than breaking it down. Dissect it step by step,

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Perennials: Plant once, enjoy for years to come

By MARGRET MINIUM
Special to The Daily Home

Now that it's officially been spring for three days now, many are rushing to plant their gardens hoping to beautify their yard with flowers. Wouldn't it be nice if you could plant a garden once and enjoy the flowers for years to come? Perennial plants might be the solution to your problem.

There are three types of plants: annuals, biennials and perennials. Annuals and biennials have short life spans. Annuals, such as pansies and violas, complete their life cycle, growing, blooming and dying, within one year. Biennials, such as parsley and carrots, take two years to complete their life cycle; growing in the first year and flowering, seeding and dying in the second. In contrast, perennials can live for many years, typically dying-back in the winter and regrowing every spring.

Once established, perennials require little care apart from routine maintenance, such as fertilizing and pruning.

"Perennials are unique in that they can grow in almost any environment. Cacti and succulents can tolerate dry, low humidity environments," said Lucy Edwards, a regional agent in home horticulture with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. "Weeping Willow and Bald Cypress enjoy wetter climates. Azaleas and blueberries appreciate low pH levels."

No matter where you live, there are probably perennials that will flourish in your area. In Alabama, hydrangeas, knockout roses, blueberries, crepe myrtles and azaleas are a few favorites.

Perennials may seem like a bigger investment upfront; however, unlike annuals or biennials, perennials do not have to be repurchased every year or two. Perennials are planted once and survive for many growing seasons. Once perennials are established, they are relatively inexpensive, aside from the costs of fertilizing and pruning. The money saved over the years by investing in a perennial plant can greatly outweigh the initial cost.

On average, a plant needs approximately an inch of water per week to thrive. However, as the plant grows, it will need less water and less attention. In addition to water, pruning and fertilizing your plants are important to ensure their health. According to Edwards, "We have the 'May Rule' that aids in knowing when to prune flowering perennials. If a shrub

blooms before May, prune immediately after flowering. If a shrub blooms after May, prune in the late winter/early spring. Most individuals say just after Valentine's Day."

Edwards encourages homeowners to plant perennials during the fall. "Temperatures are cooler during this time of year and many perennials go dormant and lose their leaves. This enables them to put more of their energy into roots. Basically, the roots are not competing with leaf, flower and fruit production during the fall," Edwards said.

Perennials are an easy and relatively inexpensive way to beautify your surroundings.

"Perennials," Edwards said, "turn a bland yard into a garden by providing color, texture and shape to the land-

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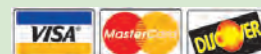
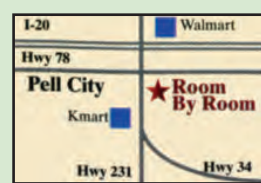
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'Gardens are places for healing'

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Project Editor

Gardens have long been appreciated for the visual beauty and edible produce they can offer, but it wasn't until after landscape designer Jenny Peterson was diagnosed with breast cancer that she fully realized how therapeutic they can be.

"There is healing and joy in the ground beneath your feet," she said by telephone from her home office in Austin, Texas. Peterson credits her gardens with helping her overcome pain, depression and physical limitations during her two-year recovery from surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "I came to know how the garden was such a healing place, and one day I realized that if I was experiencing difficulties and getting so much help from my garden, others could too. We all go through life's difficulties."

That's why she has written *The Cancer Survivor's Garden Companion*. "I hope none (of my readers) gets a cancer diagnosis, but I know some will, and some already have. Whatever you are going through in life, I hope the book can help you see the treasure that is just outside your door. Your garden is your companion for healing and hope."

Published in January by St. Lynn's Press, the book "is not a how-to, because everybody's journey is different," Peterson said. "I wrote it as a way of helping you find a way to enjoy your life and the world around you. Word is getting out about it in a grassroots fashion, and I think that's the best way. I could pay someone to market it for me, but this way, I think people really understand that this is an authentic book that was written to help people. The implications of the topic go beyond cancer survivors, as everyone experiences some kind of illness, stress or anxiety."

She describes herself as a lifelong gardener, "and I think gardeners instinctively know that caring for gardens and plants is a healthy thing to do. But you experience it in a whole new way when you're dealing with something difficult. Gardens are healing places, even if you're just sitting there, not doing anything but looking at it."

Body, mind and spirit all come together in the garden, she said. "It's all connected. How your body feels affects your mind, and we know we can use the garden physically for exercise to feel good. What we often don't articulate is how healing and balancing it is for body and spirit. Being outside in the sunshine exposes us to Vitamin D, and it decreases cortisol, which lowers stress levels and helps to even out and improve our minds."

Peterson encourages using the garden as a setting for wellness activities often done indoors.

"If you practice yoga, take it outside to the garden. Or Pilates. Or tai chi. Or whatever. The garden gives you an extra layer of healing the more time you spend in it. We're not talking about looking for euphoria in the garden. We're talking about feeling like a human being again."

Gardens provide wellness benefits regardless of size or appearance, she said.

"You don't have to have a magazine-worthy garden to reap the wellness benefits. Mine isn't. Parts of my garden are beautiful, and other parts of embarrassing eyesores. My vegetable garden is very ugly, but it produces a lot of good food. A garden does not have to be beautiful to be healthy and balancing. If yours isn't, it's okay. View your garden and the natural world as resources for creating a healthy, hopeful life."

Peterson gardens on a full acre at her south Austin home. Her yoga

deck sits beside a tropical garden, and her ornamental garden includes wildflowers, perennials, edibles and roses. "My personal gardening style is very eclectic. I don't like to have themes. I prefer to mix it up. That's one reason I don't use an underground water system. I like to plant things where I want to plant them and have flexibility when watering them."

But gardens don't have to be as large as hers to provide healing and balance.

"Before I moved here, I was in an apartment, and my garden was on a 150-square foot balcony. A garden does not have to be a big space. It can be on your patio or deck. Wherever you are, create a space for yourself that's warm, inviting and comfortable – a chair with a side table, comfortable lighting, indoor/outdoor rugs and scented plants, even if they're in pots or hanging off the balcony. A setting like that provides texture and color and appeal to the senses."

The effect that color has on a person's wellness "depends on what you're looking for and what theme you use," Peterson said. "Some colors are cool, some are warm. Cool colors are purples, lavenders, pinks, whites and blues. Warm colors are red, yellow, orange and hot pink. Cool colors are relaxing. Warm colors make for an invigorating, pick-me-up garden."

She added that cool and warm color combinations can provide helpful balance. "You can always break the rules and combine colors after you get the garden established. I worked some hot colors – red and chartreuse green – into my relaxing yoga garden last year that added some nice little pops here and there."

Peterson recommends a balance of 60-70 percent color and 30-40 percent texture in a garden.

"Color is visual, whereas texture is big, jumbo, oversized leaves on tropical plants that you want to reach out and touch and soft grass that you want to walk on. The garden is a great place for grounding, which is important for healing."

Grounding – sometimes referred to as earthing – is a wellness term for walking barefoot outside, which proponents believe allows a transfer of the Earth's electrons from the ground to the body, resulting in such benefits as better sleep and reduced pain. Peterson said she "absolutely" recommends it.

"Go out in the morning before the day gets going, take your cup of coffee or tea to the garden, and if you can do it without shoes, it's great. Even if it's just for five minutes, everybody's got time for that. Be sure you walk on the ground, not concrete, wood or pavement. When your foot makes contact with the soil or grass, there's just something magical about it."



Submitted photos

Author Jenny Peterson said it was after she was diagnosed with breast cancer that she fully realized how therapeutic gardens can be.

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The Cancer Survivor's Garden Companion



Jenny Peterson

Peterson's recently-published book is available through Amazon.



Gardens are excellent places for grounding, a wellness term for the act of walking barefoot outdoors. Proponents of grounding say it results in such health benefits as better sleep and reduced pain.

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'Plan your work, work your plan'

HGTV personality seeks to change mindsets

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

It is Matt Muenster's goal to change the way people think about their bathrooms. "We don't think bathrooms are important enough," the interior designer, contractor and television personality said. "Very often, the bathroom is every house's utility shed. It's a place to go, get the job done and get out. We don't see its potential as therapy space."

As the host of HGTV and DIY Network's home improvement program, "Bath Crashers," Muenster has remodeled more than 200 bathrooms and encourages homeowners wanting to upgrade their existing spaces or add new bathrooms to their homes to "fix it from a space you don't want to go into to a space you can't wait to spend time in. It involves changing our mindset to thinking of our bathrooms as sanctuaries we can fill with things other than the tub, sink, toilet and shower."

Some of Muenster's suggestions for bathroom furnishings may seem unusual, but he contends there are valid reasons for them. Such as a fireplace.

"The bathroom is a place where you're naked and wet a lot," he said. "You don't want to be cold. That's why a fireplace and heated floor should be considered, and not just for warmth. Fire is a mood-setter. It's another one of the things that just makes life better."

He says the same about coffee makers, television sets, technology, and music, all of which he recommends adding to the bathroom. "Music, for example. There is zero reason you shouldn't have speakers in your bathroom. Even if you can't sing, it will make your day and life better."

A licensed contractor who holds a degree in interior design, Muenster was working for an architectural firm when he received a call from a television producer who was seeking a designer for the pro-

gram that would eventually become "Bath Crashers." "I told her 'no,'" he said. "I was mortified by the idea. I'm from a farm town in Wisconsin, and I didn't even like the high school play or any kind of public speaking."

Nine seasons later and 240 bathrooms later, he regularly shares his experiences as a speaker at home and garden shows.

"There are two questions I get asked most frequently, 'First, when am I coming to cities X, Y and Z? Once, I was on stage at 6 p.m., and by 6:03 someone was asking when the show was coming to their town. Because of the popularity of the show, we've stopped being able to tell people where we'll be when."

"Second, 'Where do I start?' Some people see the show and want to start knocking down walls, and that's the farthest they've thought about it. My answer is, plan your work and work your plan. But if you don't have a plan and an end game, don't even start something.

And if you're not positive you can do it yourself, hire someone."

Beginning home improvement enthusiasts can forget, he said, that "their budgets are real, not like our TV budgets. The bathroom is a place where you want to minimize screw-ups, because they can end up costing you more to hire someone to fix them than if you'd hired someone do the work right in the first place."

Muenster describes the bathroom as a home's hardest room to renovate.

"Even the kitchen is easier. The bathroom is a smaller space with so much plumbing and electrical work squeezed into it, so it requires a tremendous amount of attention to detail. There is no skilled labor available that isn't in dire need when it comes to a bathroom remodel."

For bathroom projects that require plumbing work, he recommends hiring skilled contractors.

"If you think you can do plumbing, you shouldn't do it your-



Submitted photos

Matt Muenster is the host of HGTV's home improvement showcase, "Bath Crashers." He has renovated more than 200 bathrooms.

self. You have to know plumbing. The bathroom is the epicenter of a house's waterway, and water is a bad thing when it's in places you don't want it to be. And be sure to check the references and licenses on contractors you're thinking of hiring."

Despite that recommendation, Muenster said he doesn't want to discourage homeowners from starting do-it-yourself projects, which "can be scary if you've never done one before. I get the fear, so through the show, I serve as a coach, advisor

and inspiration. It's hard in a 22-minute show to give any really detailed instructions, but hopefully as you watch, you'll get inspired and get a little confidence."

After completing a project for "Bath Crashers," he said he's often "amazed" by the results.

"It's surprising how much square footage a bathroom remodel will seem to add to a home. Instead of a dumpy little room you can't wait to get out of, you can have an awesome space you can't wait to hang out in."



An onyx bathroom countertop, backlit by LED lights. "Onyx is about the same price as anything else you can think of," Muenster said. "Oftentimes, it's less expensive."



Muenster encourages homeowners considering a bathroom makeover to "fix it from a space you don't want to go into to a space you can't wait to spend time in."

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Growing a container garden

By **KELLI TIPTON**
Special to The Daily Home

Container gardens can be a perfect way to spruce up a front porch, beautify a back patio, or bring a little of the outdoors inside. Terri McVay, garden center manager at Ace Hardware and Lumber Supply in Talladega, has 25 years of experience in horticulture. She often designs, and assists others in designing, container gardens to suit various spaces. She said the possibilities of container gardens are endless. "You are only limited by your imagination," she said. She begins by determin-



Terri McVay

ing where the container will be located, then, she chooses plants that are suitable to that environment. "Figure out where you want it, then,

acclimate the plant to its environment. Pay attention to whether the plants need full sun or partial shade. A plant is only as pretty as the place you put it in," she said.

Another priority is drainage. "Containers need drainage. You can use Styrofoam peanuts or gravel. You need something that won't stop up the hole in the bottom of the container," she said. "And use soil with good drainage properties, or use a moisture control soil."

And when growing two or more plants in the same container, take into account the amount of water each

plant needs. "You don't want to put a plant that requires a little water with a plant that needs a lot of water," she said.

Container gardens can provide bursts of color all year long when plants are combined in a certain way. "I like to use an evergreen in the center. Then, I add annuals for color. I swap these out depending on the seasons. Then, if I want some cascading plants on the edge, I'll use some ivy or creeping Jenny," she said. She uses plants that bloom at different times to stagger the colors in the arrangement. This effect can also be achieved using perennials.

"In the spring, the annuals give color. In the summer, it's the perennials. In the fall, I swap out my annuals, and in the winter I still have the evergreen in the center," she said. "A lot of people like marigolds for color because they go with anything. And begonias are popular because they are so carefree," she said.

Fertile soil is essential to keeping plants healthy. "Blooming plants are heavy feeders and should be fertilized. I recommend using a time release soil. As you water it, it feeds the plants," she said. Container gardens are not just for decorative purposes. They can also be

used to grow herbs and vegetables. "Herbs make great container plants. Cilantro, basil, oregano, all these can be grown on a windowsill. You just snip some off and add it to your cooking for a fresh taste to whatever you are making. Or if you cook out a lot, these can be grown on a patio and used when you barbeque."

Dill can be grown indoors or out side, and it is very attractive to butterflies. "You will have butterflies on top of butterflies with dill, but you have to remember that when you invite the butterflies, you are inviting

See Container, Page 14A

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Decorating with houseplants



Kylee Baumle

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Her mother and grandmother were avid gardeners, but Kylee Baumle admits that she came to it reluctantly.

"I grew up with gardeners, so I spent time in the garden from a very young age, albeit reluctantly," she said. "I had a 4-H flower garden one year but never really gardened outside until I got married."

It wasn't until a trip to the Cleveland Flower Show in 2005 that "I fell head over heels with gardening. It's like someone flipped a switch and turned me on to all the wonderful plants. And I wanted all the plants."

As she began making up lost time outdoors, Baumle continued to keep houseplants, which she's done since her freshman year of college. Since 2007, she has published the gardening blog *Our Little Acre*, co-authored the book *Indoor Plant Décor: The Design Stylebook for Houseplants* and become a featured speaker at garden shows and symposiums.

"What I love most about gardening is that it never gets old," she said. "There's always something more to learn, more challenges and more surprises every day of the year. I love learning as much as I love a beautiful plant."

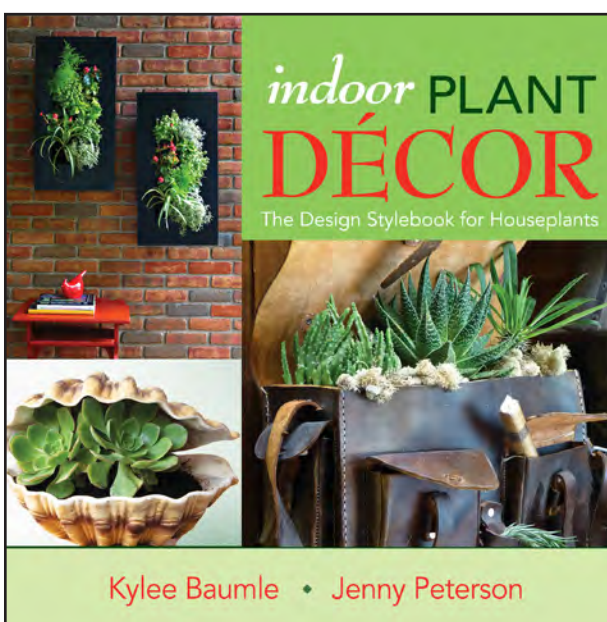
Baumle spoke with *The Daily Home* about using houseplants in home décor and how to care for them, based on her experience living with the more than 200 plants that occupy her house and conservatory.

What are some of the easiest ways to include houseplants in home décor

The easiest way is to just bring the plant home in its pot and sit it on a table. We've been doing that for centuries, really. But it's just as easy to dress that up to coordinate with a particular design style. There are numerous items that you can slip the original pot down into - these are technically called cache pots - and transform a boring plastic or clay pot into an exquisite or quirky and fun living decorator piece.

Once you start doing this, you begin to see all kinds of things whose original intended use is very different than that of a plant container. An unexpected example of this is an antique china tea cup or porcelain pitcher. Caring for such plants is easy. You simply take the original container that actually holds the plant to the sink, water it, let it drain and then place it back in its new decorator pot.

Put them in plac-



Baumle's book, available on Amazon, offers a host of ideas for decorating with plants.

es where you might not first think to put them. Orchids work beautifully in a bathroom (if there's a window for light) because of the usual higher humidity there. Or what about the laundry room? Why not? And don't forget the kids; rooms. I love the idea of children having their own little plant to take care of.

For those with limited space such as small houses, apartments and dorm rooms, does decorating with houseplants require a lot of room?



Submitted photo

An old chair is a household item that can be transformed into a decorative plant container.

Not unless you want it to. Plants have architectural form, so a larger specimen plant can be a focal point. But plants come in all shapes

and sizes so you get to decide how large or small you want to go. Don't forget that plants can go into containers that hang on the wall or are suspended from ceilings.

Other non-succulents plants that are easy to grow are Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema*), Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum cochlearispathum*), ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*) and wax plant (*Hoya* spp.).

Our indoor environment, no matter where we live, tends to be pretty much the same with regard to a plant's basic needs of water and light. Tropical plants are popular house plants because our homes

come the closest to mimicking the needs of those as opposed to other types of plants.

Light exposure in a home will always be the biggest variable, so that should always be the first consideration when choosing a plant to come home and live with you.

What is your favorite houseplant, and how do you care for it?

I'm pretty fickle when it comes to saying which is my favorite. It depends on when you ask me. I decided to walk around my house and figure out which one I'd grab first if the house was on fire. Today, it would be a five-foot Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*). It has a commanding presence in our living room, is very healthy, and is quite easy to care for. It gets watered about once a week and fed once a month with

a manure tea, a soil conditioner that you make by soaking a little cloth bag containing dried cow manure in water and letting it steep overnight. Many gardeners swear by Annie Haven's teas, and I'm one of them.

What is the most common mistake people make when caring for houseplants?

Loving them too much. You'll kill more plants by overwatering than you will by underwatering. Many plants will recover from occasionally forgetting to water, but watering too often and having the roots soaking wet all the time will mean death for most plants.

The simplest way to know if a plant needs to be watered is to stick your finger down into the soil and feel for moisture. If

See *Decor*, Page 11A



Submitted Photo

Another creative decorating idea involves turning an unused purse into a unique planter.

What are some good houseplants for individuals who have never kept them before?

If you have a location that has some bright light from a window, some of the easiest house plants to care for are succulents. They're very popular right now because of the myriad of shapes, colors and sizes they come in, and due in no small way because of them being quite forgiving of those with busy schedules.

They don't require much more than an occasional watering only when the soil feels dry to the touch.

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Decor

From Page 10A

it's dry at least an inch down, then go ahead and water it. The general rule for watering is, "When in doubt, don't." You can always buy a water meter for checking whether or not a plant needs to be watered. They're very inexpensive and super simple to use.

What is the most common misconception people have about taking care of house plants?

I love answering this question most of all. I'm hereby giving everyone permission to kill plants. We all do it. I couldn't begin to name all the plants I've killed, both inside and outside. But I've also had a lot of successes too. We learn a lot from trial and error.

I would love to change the way a lot of people think about house plants. Think about this: In the spring, we go to the garden center and we spend not a small amount of money on annuals for our gardens. We like them because they give us color all summer long. We get about five months of loveliness and enjoyment out of them, but we know when autumn rolls around, the first frost is going to kill them, and we're okay with that.

Think of how much you spend on a fresh cut bouquet of flowers. How long does that last? That often costs more than a house plant would.

What if we thought of house plants the same way? They're inexpensive, for the most part, and unless you totally ignore them, you can count on getting at least six months out of them, and often six years or more, depending on the plant.

If the plant dies, then you can try something new for not very much money. Though we use them to decorate our space much like we use pillows on a couch or artwork on the wall or table, they're living things and won't last forever. What a cool decorator piece though! Like other things in our home, we might get tired of a certain plant before we "wear it out." I like that phrase for plants that die: "I just wore it out."

So I think we need to really have a shift in thought regarding house plants. Rejoice in the number of choices we have and their relative low cost, and be happy to have them even if a specific plant only gives us six months of its life. That is money well spent.

Other than visual appeal, are there any other benefits to employing house plants in home décor?

There is scientific proof that having living plants in your home and work environment improves both your physical and mental health. NASA did a study several years ago that showed that certain plants are especially good at purifying the air. All plants convert carbon dioxide

to oxygen, but some take it one step further and remove toxins.

Studies have also found that our mood is elevated by just having live plants around us. How many of us choose to go outside for a walk as a means of destressing and clearing our mind? Our innate desire to connect with nature is undeniable and having house plants is one way to do that.

Workers who have live plants in their workspaces were found to be more content and more productive and as well.

Do Chia Pets count as house plants?

You know, we need to have a little fun in our lives. Growing

plants doesn't have to be serious business all the time. Chia Pets play to the child in us, and there should always be room in our lives for that, right?

As for them being a suitable decor item, they fit into such popular design styles as Cheap Chic, Vintage Vibe, and Modern Eclectic. Chia Pets

could work with any of them.

For more of Bauble's gardening and plant care advice, visit www.ourlittleacre.com.



Submitted photos

Books and wine corks offer creative opportunities for decorating with succulent houseplants.

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How to add blueberries to your home landscape

By **LAUREN SPIEZIO**
Special to The Daily Home

Looking for a plant to grow in an area with full sun and that becomes more drought resistant overtime? Blueberries are an excellent choice when adding plants to gardens and home landscaping.

To achieve maximum fruit production, full sun is best when growing blueberries. A small amount of filtered shade, such as under pine trees, can be tolerated, but may result reduced fruit production.

According to Bethany O'Rear, a regional Alabama extension agent in commercial horticulture and home grounds, blueberries do not tolerate nitrate forms of fertilizer. Rather, ammonium forms of fertilizer, such as urea or ammonium sulfate, are the best to use. Conducting a soil test will help you discover the amount required and help ensure that you are supplying your new blueberries with its essential needs.

Due to blueberries' requirement of high levels of organic matter, incorporating compost, peat moss or finely ground pine bark into the planting hole is necessary. The actual planting hole should be about twice as wide as the blueberry plant's root ball, but no deeper. Making the hole more shallow is not a

bad idea to account for settling when the new plant is watered in. To finish planting, amend the soil from the planting hole with organic matter, then finish filling. Water the newly planted blueberry and apply a layer of mulch, which helps control weeds as well as conserve moisture.

"One other point to mention regarding planting - you must have at least two, preferably three different kinds of blueberries in one planting area," O'Rear said. "This step will ensure cross-pollination between the

plants, which is necessary for fruit-set."

During the first year after planting, plan on watering the plants twice a week. A thorough watering is needed one or two times per week upon establishment of the plant.

"To encourage enhanced root establishment, water the plant for longer periods of time rather than shorter ones is ideal," O'Rear said.

An adequate amount of moisture is imperative when fruiting for successful fruit production. The plant will

actually retract water from the fruit itself if its water levels are too low. To allow the plant to focus its energy on establishment instead of fruit production, it is a good idea to pick the small fruit for two years after the bush is planted.

Once established, most landscape plants require less water per year than they did when first planted. Therefore, blueberries can withstand dryer periods better as an established plant compared to a newly-planted plant.



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Home improvement can teach life lessons

HGTV personality advocates use of reclaimed materials



Designer Lucy Farmer said she achieved a new-found confidence while competing on "Beach Flip."

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Besides their practical value, home improvement projects offer lessons that can be applied to any aspect of life.

That's something Lucy Farmer said she learned during her weeks as a contestant on "Beach Flip."

"I learned that I can do anything I never thought I could," said the central Alabama designer who teamed with real estate agent Daphney Massey to renovate a 40-year-old waterfront house on Alabama's Gulf Coast for the HGTV reality competition program. "We were in positions when we thought we were not able to do the project at hand. Our minds were telling us there was no possible way to do it, but we fought through and at the end were asking, 'what's next?'"

Farmer believes that in most aspects of life, "in general, we have low expectations of ourselves, and we don't give ourselves enough credit. But we can do anything we want to do. (Daphney and I) wanted to win, we wanted to be on TV, but that was the biggest lesson we learned from "Beach Flip," and nothing has stopped me since. I don't usually say 'no' anymore, even if I don't succeed at something on the first try."

She learned about the open casting call for "Beach Flip" via a Facebook post, and she and Massey (her design partner and best friend from college) drove to Atlanta on a Saturday for a seven- or eight-minute interview with the casting company. They asked us to return the

made it. We got on an airplane, went to Pensacola and ended up in Gulf Shores, which was like home for us. We vacation there and have spent plenty of time there."

They spent the next six and a half weeks living in a cast house and competing against three other teams of two while renovating a two-bedroom, two-bath beach house on a \$40,000 budget.

"The house was built in the 1970s, and it still looked like it," Farmer said. "It had tile floors - I don't know if they were original - and the backing, which should have been screwed in, were nailed down with three-inch nails. It took a crowbar and a sledgehammer to get it up. If a storm had blown

the house over, the floors would have stayed intact. The house was also very dark, as was the style at the time. We painted it throughout because we wanted it to be bright and light."

Farmer and Massey incorporated reclaimed materials into the house, which as both frugal and reflective of a popular home improvement trend.

"Interest in reclaimed materials - old bricks, old doors, antique beams - is definitely still growing, but it will probably hit its peak pretty soon," Farmer said. "In this Pinterest world we live in, things run their course quicker than they used to."

It's a style she has employed in her own home, which includes tongue-and-groove

flooring in her kitchen that came from an old general store in Tennessee and more than 20 reclaimed doors.

"They're all different, and they're all salvaged," she said. "Antique doors are easy to bring into a house design. So are corbels, which you can use on mantels kitchen islands and for bookends and open shelving."

Corbels are decorative metal or wooden brackets extending from a wall to support shelving, windowsills or even such heavier structures as balconies and parapets.

Farmer names Vintage Station in Bessemer, The Depot in Leeds and Southern Accents Architectural Antiques in Cullman are good places to find materials for reclaiming.

"Southern Accents has been selling reclaimed materials and accent pieces since before it was cool," Farmer said.

While using reclaimed materials can enhance a home's décor, it does require discernment.

"You can go overboard and it can look too rustic," she said. "Use reclaimed items more as accents rather than the entire design. If you go minimal, it will look refined without the overly rustic feel. Reclaimed wood, for example, is best used on a floor or ceiling. If your floor is reclaimed material, the ceiling can be the accent, and the other way around."

In their Beach Flip house, she and Massey accented a white oak floor that did not have much texture with reclaimed wood on the ceiling.

"It was darker with a lot of texture and dimension to it," she said, "so it really stands out."

The important thing to remember about reclaimed materials, she said, is that "they should make you feel good. If you love something, you can find a way to use it in your house. Why not bring your favorite things in, things that make you feel good? There are certain rules - like how far a kitchen island should be away from the cabinets - but there are no rules about what your countertop has to look like. It should be something you're comfortable with."



Submitted Photos

Before-and-after photos of the beachhouse kitchen Farmer and her teammate Daphney Massey remodeled for the HGTV competition program. They replaced the tile floor with reclaimed wood.

Container

From Page 8A

the larvae. They will eat the leaves," she said. Pineapple sage and pineapple mint can be grown for aromatic use as well as the flavor. Lavender and lemongrass are also popular aromatics.

"Pineapple sage can get two feet tall, and it smells like pineapple. Pineapple mint will cascade. It is variegated and looks pretty in a hanging basket," she said. Lettuce, tomatoes, onions and chives also make great container plants. "Some people grow mosquito-repellant plants

for their porches and patios. Lemon grass, lantana and citronella are all mosquito repellants. But, you have to brush against the plants with your hand to activate the scent. It is the scent of the plant that repels the mosquitos," she said.

When it comes to container gardening, the bottom line is "knowing what plants are compatible, not combatable. You want them to get along and not fight," she said.

In addition to McVay's expertise, Ace Hardware and Lumber Supply also has an assortment of ceramic, concrete, and clay containers as well as fertilizer and other supplies to grow or

maintain a container garden that can bring pleasure all year round.

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Harmonious garden design can 'delight the senses year-round'

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Harmony in the garden is important to landscape designer Rebecca Sweet, but she isn't a stickler about specifics.

"Sometimes I get asked if there are rules about garden design," she said. "I like to say, 'Yes, there are rules,' but I like to break a lot of them. Gardening is a completely creative process, and your garden needs to make your heart sing."

That's why the author and home and garden show speaker wrote *Refresh Your Garden Design with Color, Texture & Form*, to help beginning gardeners overcome their apprehensions about planting and encourage established gardeners breathe some new life into their outdoor spaces.

"People sometimes tell me they're afraid to do much in their garden because they're afraid of doing something wrong," she said. "It breaks my heart when I hear that. Don't be afraid to experiment and have fun."

According to Sweet, personal preference trumps hard-and-fast rules in the garden.

"One rule people often insist upon is that you should plant in odd numbers rather than evens. Four in a row might not flow as well as three or five, but if you like four, that's fine. It's your garden. If you like orange flowers next to pink, great. Go for it. When people say 'Don't ever do this' or 'Don't ever do that,' ignore them. Don't worry about what they think. Have fun with your garden. That's the number-one rule."

It's a rule that has served the north California gardener well through her more than 15 years as a landscape designer. "I'm not a landscape architect," she sometimes clarifies. "Anybody can become a garden designer. There are classes you can take and four-year degree programs for it. Landscape architecture is a very rigid course, and it deals with structural elements. An architect is who you call for sure when you have a complex site with terracing and drainage."

Sweet said she's found through experience that many beginning gardeners fail to consider design when planning their gardens.

"After they've suddenly been bitten by the garden bug, they go out to the nursery and buy all these beautiful flowering plants. They plant them according to no rhyme or reason and wonder as time goes on why their garden looks mismatched and why certain plants live and others die. They wonder what happened. I wrote the book specifically for those gardeners."

While speaking with gardening enthusiasts at home and garden shows, "I hear about a lot of the same problems, and I speak to literally hundreds of gardeners. The good thing about the prob-



Rebecca Sweet

lems is that you don't have to go out and hire a team of professionals to redo your garden. You can use a lot of what you already have. It usually just needs a little tweaking and a little thought."

She identified the three most common problems about which gardeners ask her.

- "People have bought a beautiful plant. They stick it here. They plant another one next to it. They have one of everything the nursery sells, and it makes for a busy-looking garden that can be overwhelming to look at."

- "The garden looks fantastic in the spring, but by the middle of summer, fall and especially winter, it looks horrible. You can get so excited by everything the nursery has to offer in the spring that you don't give thought to what it will look like in three to six months."

- "Overcrowding."

All three problems, Sweet said, can be solved by learning about a plant before buying it and making sure to read the instruction tags.

"Don't ever forget to read the plant tags. It's particularly important, for example, to pay attention to the ultimate sizes. Maybe you have a dwarf variety of whatever plant. Typical size might be 8x8. For a dwarf, it might be 2x2. My experience is that dwarf varieties tend to grow larger than what the tag says, and I always pad them. You don't want to allow any less space that what the tag says, and it's best to give them a little extra space. Don't assume they're going to read their own plant tag and stop growing at two feet. If you have planted too close, it's not a major problem. You can dig them up and move them elsewhere. You can move any plant if you do it carefully, and it's like starting over."

Sweet also advocates following tag instructions about how much sun and shade the plants need.

"When tags say partial sun, they're not kidding. If you put a plant that needs partial sun out in the 4 o'clock, 100-degree full sun, you'll burn it up. But things like that can happen when you get so excited by the beauty of a plant that you forget to read the tags."

She encourages gardeners to do research and ask questions about plants they plan to buy. "There's likely a knowledgeable person at the nursery or an experienced gardener you know who can tell you things that aren't mentioned too much on the plant tags. Like

humidity. You get a lot of humidity where you live in Alabama, and humidity can destroy a lot of plants. Often, the amount of rain and humidity where you live may be different from where the plant came from, so it's good to ask before buying."

To create "unique and engaging spaces that delight the senses year-round," Sweet said that gardeners should consider how they use color, texture and form in their designs.

"Color is what most people go to first, and it is the aspect of a garden you can have the most fun with. Besides just being appealing to the eye, color can cool down a visually hot garden, and it can give the illusion of warming up a garden in the winter months. And texture and form are ways to delve a little deeper into your garden and keep it interesting even in the dead of winter."

Texture, she said, is a tactile way of drawing people to a garden. "It's human nature that you want to reach out and touch a fuzzy leaf when you see one, and I don't know anybody who can walk by a paperbark maple without touching it and pulling a piece off."

Form "can be tricky," according to Sweet, "but it can add subtle elements to your garden that will give it year-round interest. It's where your garden really starts to transform from, 'Wow, what a pretty garden,' to 'Holy cow, how is that garden so amazing?'"

While color has to do with appearance and texture with touch, form has to do with the shape of a garden and the plants it contains, she said.

"When you look at a plant's form from a distance, your mind draws an imaginary silhouette around the shape. You notice whether it's round, upright, vase-shaped, conical or triangular. Form is that



Reprinted with permission from *Refresh Your Garden Design*, by Rebecca Sweet, © 2013

Spiral-shaped plants can appear to be in motion, enhancing the form of a garden.

shape in full, three-dimensional leaf. Some plants even come in stunning, interesting spiral shapes that appear to have motion, as if they're spinning out of control."

To maximize a garden's eye appeal, "you don't want all of your plants to be the same

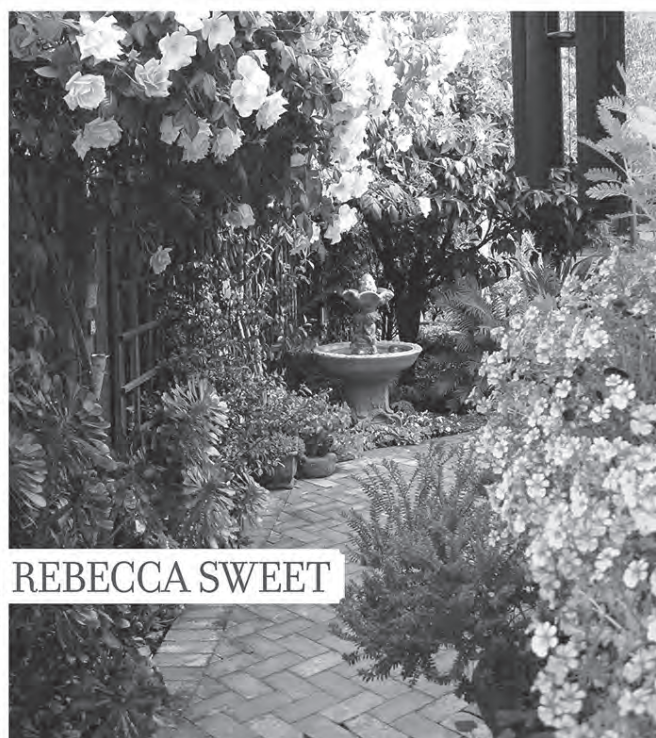
shape. You want it to have contrasting forms, otherwise it becomes monotonous."

What gardeners want in their outdoor spaces is sometimes determined by their age or experience, she said.

"New gardeners tend to love annuals. They love the colors. As they

age a little in the process, they realize, 'You know what? Annuals are too much work.' So they plant perennials. When they get a little older, the shrub phase starts. By that time, they want something that's low-maintenance but still colorful."

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Sweet's book, available through Amazon, explains the importance of harmony in the garden.

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