The Montana Standard
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HOME

The Ultimate Home Guide 2017

Your Local Guide to Home Improvement Needs

2017

The Montana Standard
mtstandard.com

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Summer Energy Savings

Summer can have a big impact on your home's cooling costs. Protecting your home from the heat outdoors and maintaining a cool interior temperature is crucial. There are many ways you can help make your home more energy-efficient.

CEILING FANS

The Department of Energy estimates that an efficient ceiling fan used with air conditioning allows you to increase your thermostat by an average of four degrees without losing comfortability.

Ceiling fans boost cooling efficiency by creating a wind chill. Remember, you can turn them off when you leave the room as they are meant to cool people, not rooms.

Most ceiling fans feature a switch to change their direction. Be sure your fan is running counter-clockwise to blow air straight down. A ceiling fan that bears the Energy Star logo can be used at high settings without much of an impact on your electricity bill.

MANAGE YOUR APPLIANCES

The comfortability of your home's interior can be negatively affected by heat-producing appliances on hot days. Here's how to lower their impact.

- Cook outside. Summer is a great time for grilling. Try to keep the oven off on blazing hot days. Instead, head outside for a backyard BBQ. If you do not have access to a grill, you can still limit oven use by using a stovetop or microwave.
- Limit drying appliances. If the weather complies, you can save big bucks (and heat) by avoiding drying appliances. Consider air-drying dishes and hanging wet clothes on an outdoor clothesline. If you must use these appliances, make sure you only operate them with full loads.
- Install low-energy light bulbs. Inefficient light bulbs only need about 15 percent of the electricity they receive to operate. The rest is tuned into heat. Install Energy Star light bulbs and turn off lights when they are unneeded.

KEEP THE HOT AIR OUT

Making sure your home is sealed from outside elements will greatly boost your home's efficiency.

Check the perimeter of your home's interior for drafts and higher levels of heat. Areas that allow heat inside should be sealed. You can sometimes correct small cracks with caulk.

Windows and doors are common areas to look for incoming air. Check with a local contractor to see if the problem can be resolved or if new doors and windows are required.

Flowers In Bloom

The United States Department of Agriculture has created a beneficial hardiness zone map. You can reference the map before deciding on flowers. Depending on where you live, you might have more specific options you can take advantage of.

The flowers featured here will thrive in full sunlight anywhere in the United States.

PROFUSION ZINNIAS

These annual blooms create an attractive border for paths or landscaping stones and look beautiful in a vase. If you are looking for an attractive flower that will last into fall, Profusion Zinnias are the solution. You can find these in a variety of colors including cherry, gold, white and orange-red.

BROWN-EYED SUSAN

Your backyard will pop when you showcase these amazing yellow or orange flowers that attract both butterflies and birds. Their drooping leaves are highlighted with a polka-dot center. Warm-weather climates can enjoy these annuals well into winter months. You can also find these flowers in a perennial breed.

SUNFLOWERS

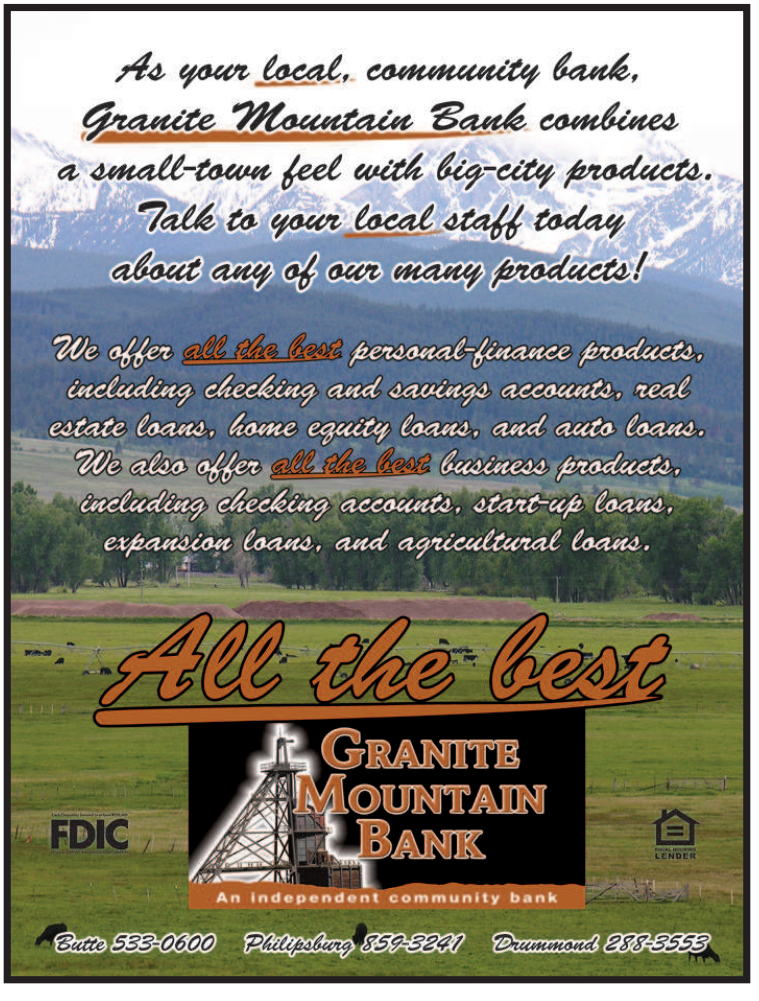
A staple in backyards across America, sunflowers provide amazing views and tasty snacks. There are many different variations of these flowers, so be sure to read the growth chart before planting. Sunflower heights can range from 2 to 15 feet tall. Near the end of the season, don't forget to harvest the delicious seeds produced by these large flowers.

MARIGOLDS

These cheerful yellow or orange flowers will add highlights to your backyard. They are known for their powerful fragrance, which is effective in keeping pests out of gardens. Marigolds are incredibly easy to grow and require little maintenance. Some can grow up to 2 feet tall.

GLOBE AMARANTH

This is a clover-like flower that can last year round and stands out in bouquets or gardens. Different varieties can be found in colors of red, white or purple, giving you plenty of options when planting your garden. Two standout breeds are Strawberry Fields and All-Around Purple.



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PROTECT YOUR GARDEN

A well-designed garden should lay out the types of plants that will be grown, a specific area where they will grow, a water schedule and a protection plan against wildlife. Animals are constantly looking for their next meal. Don't let the garden you worked so hard on become their next buffet.

The first step in planning your garden's defense is knowing which animals to defend against. Before planting, make a list of animals that frequent your area. Learning their habits can make it easier to develop a solution.

HUMANE APPROACH

Eliminating garden pests can be tricky. Using poison baits can harm your pets, curious children or innocent animals that encounter an infected animal. A safe way to coexist with wildlife in your area is by using scent repellents. There are several different styles of repellent from which to choose.

• *Liquid:* These sprays are safe for flowers, shrubs and seedlings. Spraying directly to these surfaces will prevent animals from examining them.

• *Granular:* Spread these small grains in front of garden entryways or flowerbeds to keep invasive animals out of protected areas.

• *Covered stations:* A station is a covered, rainproof-repellent agent that can be staked in a garden or hung from a tree. Use multiples to set a repellent perimeter around your garden.

Choosing to defend against animals with repellents is the most humane defense you have. Rather than poisoning or trapping pests, you can simply create a barrier they won't enter.

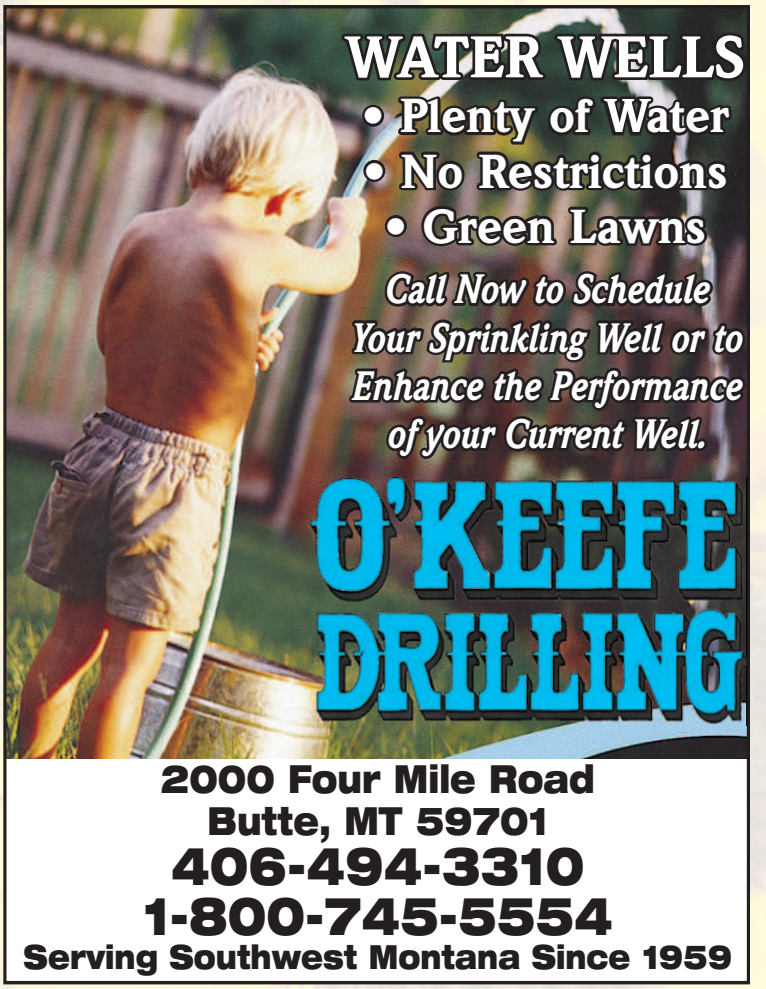
BUILD A FENCE

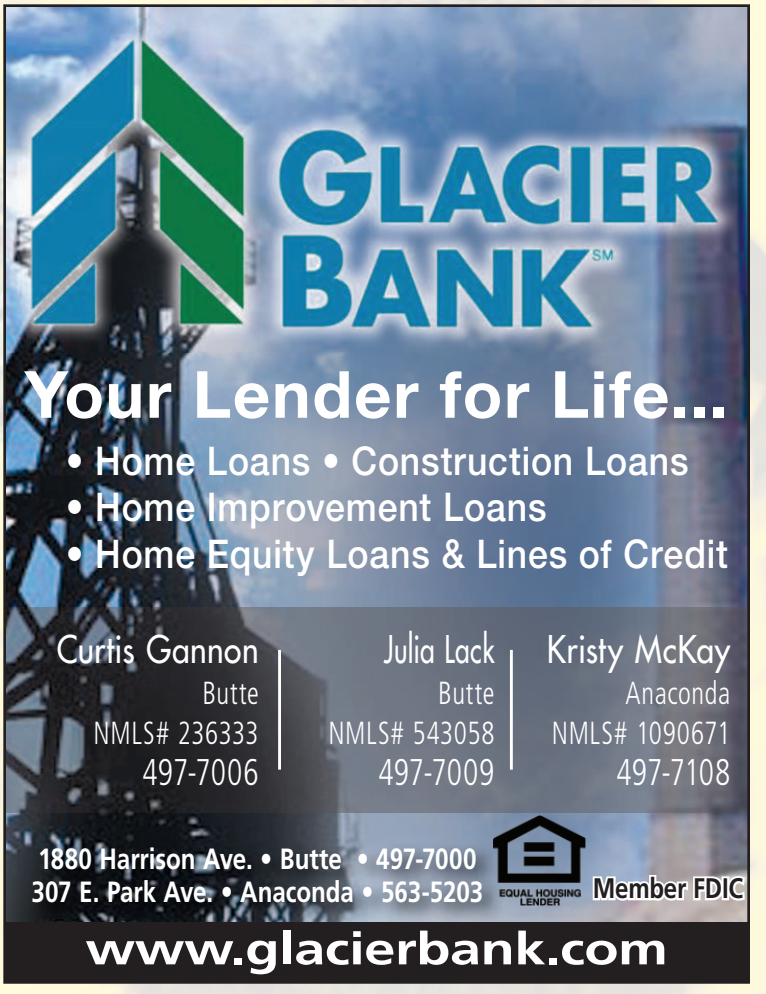
Constructing a fence around the perimeter of your garden is an affordable way to ensure large animals like deer cannot enter. The great thing about garden fences is they can easily be disassembled when the season is over. It doesn't have to take up space in your yard all year.

When building, remember the list you made of the animals that frequent your yard.

For large animals like deer, height is key. The United State Department of Agriculture recommends a deer-defense barrier should be at least 8 to 10 feet tall. Also, be sure to use fence material that will hold up to their large bodies ramming into it. You can use chain link or woven wire material.

For burrowing animals, such as gophers or moles, an exterior fence won't do you much good. They can dig tunnels underground to infiltrate your garden. If they are a problem in your area, consider wire cages to enclose your favorite plants in the garden.





REDUCING LAWN STRESS

When you think of stress, the last thing you might think of is your lawn. Summer temperatures can cause a great amount of stress to your lawn. Reducing this stress will promote a healthy lawn and help it grow to its full potential.

Some major stressful situations your lawn might experience come from extreme heat, lack of rain and heavy foot traffic. These factors will make it harder for your grass to grow.

Other factors that might become a more serious risk to an already stressed-out lawn include weeds and bugs. Take time to practice the following strategies to ease the stress on your lawn and give yourself a beautiful yard where you can relax after a long day.

MOWING TIPS

The way you mow your grass has a big impact on the overall health of your lawn. Be sure to keep your blades sharp, as dull blades shred grass, making it harder to retain moisture. Also, shredded grass will turn brown, leaving your lawn looking dull if clippings are not cleaned after mowing.

Your blade should be kept at a high setting. Keeping your grass taller allows it to grow longer roots making it easier to reach the rich moisture deeper in the soil.

WHEN TO WATER

During the summer, watering your lawn before 10 a.m. is beneficial. It gives your lawn time to absorb most of the water it needs before evaporation sets in, and it can dry out before nighttime comes.

Nighttime watering promotes bacterial and fungus diseases, as they depend on wet areas for reproduction and spreading purposes. Soaking your lawn at night will give these pathogens ample time to overtake your lawn.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that Americans waste up to 50 percent of water used for irrigation due to an improper watering schedule. They encourage testing your lawn by stepping on a patch of grass. If it springs back, it is still holding proper moisture levels.

SEEDING AFTER A STRESSFUL SUMMER

If you noticed your lawn showing signs of stress, you can give it an advantage for next summer by seeding it in the fall.

Ask your nursery for a great breed that thrives in heat and drought in your area. Your seeds should be ready to flourish by the time summer comes back around.

SUMMER HVAC INSPECTION

No one wants to deal with an HVAC system blowing hot air during blazing hot temperatures. Take precautions by scheduling an HVAC inspection of all your important air conditioning components.

Scheduling a service before the heat arrives gives you a better chance of staying cool all summer long without mid-season emergencies. Service calls during busy months may come with higher rates and longer wait times, as HVAC companies will be extremely busy.

Get to know some of the important components that work together to keep your home cool during summer. An early inspection will ensure that these components are working efficiently.

CHANGING OF FILTERS

Just like your car, an air conditioning unit depends on air filters to keep debris and dust out of the system. A clogged filter can disrupt airflow and not only cause your home's temperature to rise but also can cause the AC unit to overheat. This extra heat can have serious consequences for expensive mechanical and electrical parts.

EXAMINING THE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

Your HVAC tech will check all electrical connections for signs of corrosion. This can happen when you skip regular maintenance and may cause shortages that ultimately damage wires and the circuit breaker.

INSPECTION OF THE FAN MOTOR

The fan is the part of your air conditioning unit that pushes the air through the system. Your tech will look for any damage to the blade and ensure that it spins to its full potential. A fan that moves too slowly may be in need of a new motor or capacitor.

Finding these issues before summer months is much better than dealing with them when temperatures are extremely high.

HEALTH OF THE COMPRESSOR

Consider the compressor the heart of an air conditioning system. It is responsible for circulating the refrigerant through coils, creating the cool air you feel. A compressor might be compromised by condensation buildup in the coils or damaged electrical components.

You can catch early signs of compressor problems during a regular maintenance check-up. Finding and correcting these issues before a compressor completely fails can save you big bucks.

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STORING WINTER WEAR

Summer means saying goodbye to your sweatshirts and jackets and welcoming tank tops or T-shirts.

Making room in your closet to store these large winter clothes can cause big headaches.

Since your winter clothing will not need to be easily accessed during summer, you can store small items in concealed bins. These space-saving containers prevent air and moisture from entering and keep your clothing fresh. There are other ways to keep your larger items safe while in storage.

CLEAN BEFORE YOU STORE

It is important to give your winter wear an appropriate cleaning before storage. Follow the manufacturer's directions on proper washing procedure. Stains might be hard to see and will have plenty of time to set while clothes are in storage. By the time you notice them next winter, they can be nearly impossible to eradicate.

Cleaning also will defend against moths and the musty odor they produce.

If clothes have been dry cleaned, make sure to remove them from their plastic carrying bags. If they are enclosed, they will attract moisture, which can promote mildew. Instead of plastic, cover your important clothes in cotton bags or cotton sheets. You will eliminate a risk of dust accumulation while allowing air to flow freely.

LOCATION

Finding an area for storing your winter wear can be difficult, especially if you are already limited on space. The room you choose should be properly ventilated, cooled and most importantly, dry.

Try to avoid using an attic or unfinished basement for storage. They can produce high temperature or moisture levels that can be dangerous to the integrity of your clothing.

If finding a suitable location is difficult, consider sorting your clothing and donating outfits you don't necessarily need to a shelter or secondhand store.

CHOOSING BOXES

Cardboard boxes are popular choices when it comes to storing clothing, but did you know that this material can be hazardous to your clothes? Cardboard contains acid and glues that attracts pests that may wreak havoc on your winter wear.

Using plastic storage containers with sealed lids will create safe housing for your clothing away from pests and other dangerous elements.

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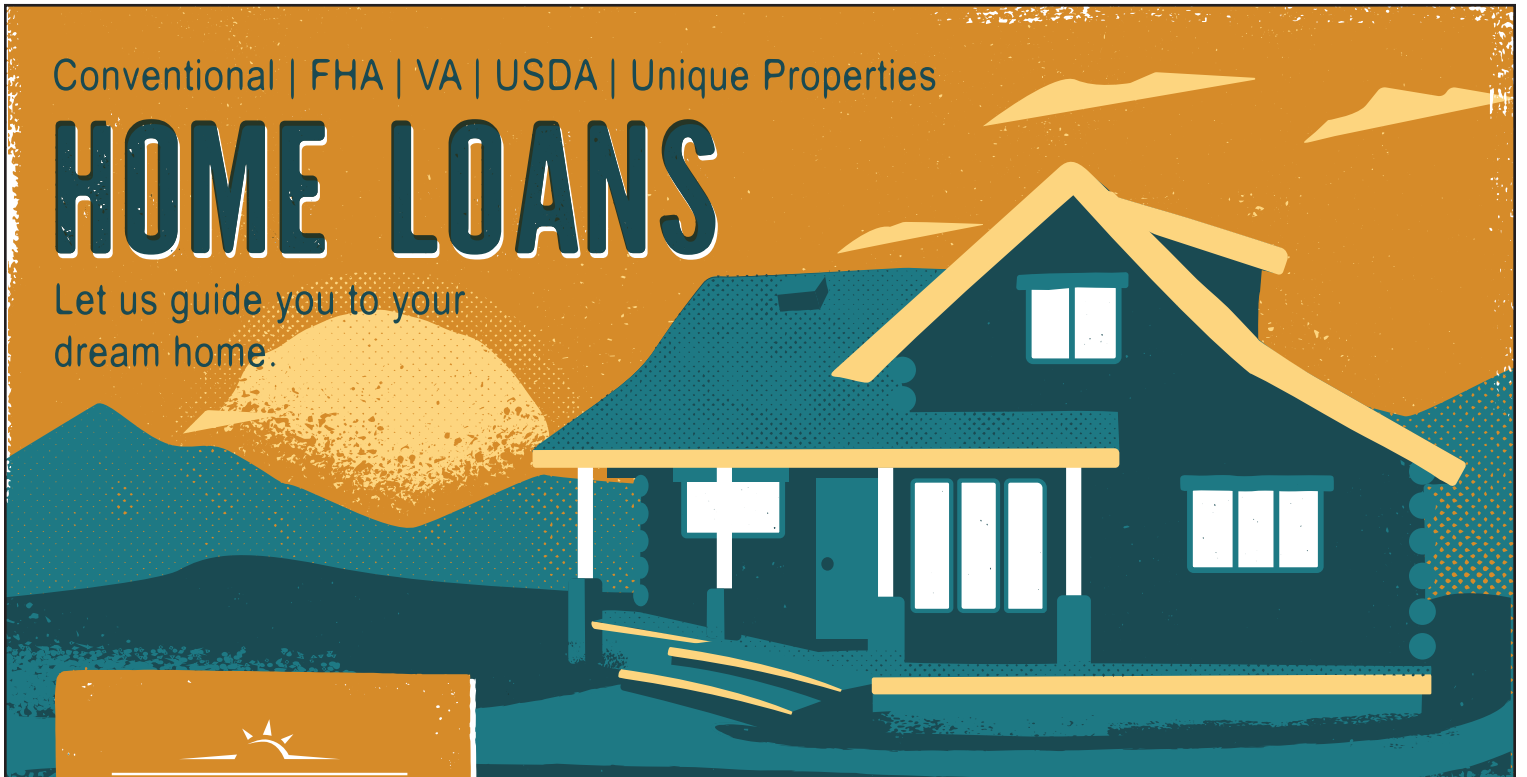

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