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# Spring HOME & Garden

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# Small renovations that make a big impact



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

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



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

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

- **Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

- **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

- **Exterior lighting:** Lighting isn't just important inside. A welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside the home.

- **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate

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

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

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

sleek.

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

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

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

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# Spring planting pointers

**M**any people view spring as a season of rejuvenation. That renewal may be somewhat metaphorical for human beings, but it's literal for lawns and gardens that begin to grow anew as temperatures rise and hours of daylight increase in spring.

Each spring presents an opportunity for homeowners to get back outside and tend to their gardens. As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.

- **Start with the soil.** Soil can serve as the starting point each spring. Winter can take its toll on a garden and even overwhelm the area with debris over the colder months. Clear rocks and other debris from the area before loosening the soil. The Farmer's Almanac recommends loosening soil to a depth of at least eight inches if planting a new garden. An existing garden may only need to be loosened to a depth of around six inches, after which homeowners can mix compost into the soil in early spring. Compost is organic matter that provides nutrients and helps to build strong plant roots.

- **Consider a raised garden in colder climates.** The Farmer's Almanac notes raised gardens can help homeowners in colder climates dry out and warm up wet, cold soils more quickly. Homeowners in such regions also can cover their beds with black plastic or cardboard prior to planting. Doing so can protect the beds from late-season snow and spring rains and also helps to overcome erosion.

- **Take soil temperatures.** Unpredictable weather is among the noticeable effects of climate change in recent years. That lack of predictability can make spring planting a little more tricky than it once was. Experts note that soil temperatures around 50 F are best for cool-season crops, while soil should be 60 F or warmer when planting warm-weather plants such as tomatoes.

- **Work with a garden center to identify what to plant.** The right plants for one region may not be ideal for another, so homeowners are urged to work with a local landscaper or garden center before planting. Such a consultation can be especially useful for homeowners planting a new garden. Landscapers and garden center professionals will know which plants work in the local climate.

- **Consider planting vegetables in the spring.** Various garden experts note that spring is an ideal time to plant a vegetable garden. If planted at the right time, a vegetable garden can save homeowners money on their grocery bills and provide a season's worth of fresh veggies. Lettuce and spinach are sun- and shade-friendly vegetables, which can make them good options for a spring garden. Cool-season root vegetables, which include beets, carrots and swiss chard, are some other notable veggies that can thrive in early spring.

Spring is a season of rejuvenation for gardens. That's even more true when homeowners consider some conventional planting wisdom in early spring.





# Drought-resistant *plants and trees*

A beautiful landscape adds considerable aesthetic appeal to a property and an awe-inspiring lawn and garden can greatly improve resale value. In fact, the American Society of Landscape Architects claims landscaping can increase a home's resale value by as much as 20 percent, a contention that supports the notion that a lush landscape is something buyers want and are willing to pay for.

Maintaining a lush landscape is no small task, but that job is notably easier when homeowners pick the right plants. The right plant for a property depends on where a home is located, but it's worth noting that drought-resistant plants and trees may be especially worthy investments. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 54 percent of the contiguous United States experienced moderate or exceptional drought over the first 10 months of 2024. The NASA Earth Observatory notes that even the southeastern United States, where Hurricane Helene struck and dropped considerable rainfall in the final days of September, was affected by drought, experiencing no precipitation in the month after that devastating storm struck.

When planning a landscape renovation, homeowners must take variables such as climate into consideration, particularly if their end goal is a lush, awe-inspiring lawn and garden. With that in mind, the following are some drought-resistant plants and trees homeowners may want to consider adding to their landscapes.

## Trees

The National Arbor Day Foundation notes that drought-tolerant trees are ideal as summer temperatures rise in many parts of the world. Drought-tolerant trees can survive in dry conditions, and they also provide great shade that allows people to enjoy their yards even when temperatures rise. The ADF notes that the following are some drought-resistant trees homeowners can consider:

- Eastern redcedar
- Bur oak
- Northern red oak
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Hackberry
- Scots pine
- Northern catalpa

- London planetree
- Shumard oak
- Live oak

## Plants

Trees add ample aesthetic appeal to a property, but colorful plants also help to create a stunning setting. Homeowners concerned about drought can consider these plants that various garden experts note are tolerant of dry conditions.

- Aster
- Beardtongue
- Black-eyed Susan
- Bugleweed
- Catmint
- Lantana
- Lavender
- Purple coneflower
- Russian sage
- Stonecrop

***Homeowners are urged to work with local lawn and garden professionals when picking trees and plants for their properties. Such individuals can provide insight about species that are accustomed to local conditions and capable of thriving in them even when precipitation is low.***



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# Fun and innovative modern *kitchen features*



**K**itchens are the hub of many homes. Perhaps due to their popularity as gathering spaces, kitchens are popular rooms to renovate to ensure they remain functional and attractive through the years.

Online resources such as Houzz and Fixr indicate kitchens are consistently ranked among the most popular rooms to renovate. **In 2022, 42 percent of homeowners were motivated to remodel their kitchens,** according to data from Statista. Homeowners looking to enhance the functionality and look of their kitchens can consider these fun and innovative features as they plan their renovations.

## ***Concealed countertop appliances***

The latest small appliances and gadgets can make easy work of preparing food, but these devices can add to kitchen clutter. A roll-down door “appliance garage” will conceal appliances kept on counters.

## ***Cleverly placed storage***

Additional storage also can give kitchens a cleaner look. Narrow, pull-



out drawers can be nestled in between cabinets or appliances to make the most of tight spaces. These spots are perfect for utensils or spice containers.

## ***Mixer lift***

Baking enthusiasts will cheer if they don’t have to lift a heavy stand mixer when preparing foods. A mixer lift is an innovative feature that enables homeowners to raise and lower the mixer from a dedicated cabinet any time it’s needed.

## ***Microwave drawer***

A microwave drawer maximizes space and boasts a sleek design. Instead of installing a microwave above a stove, homeowners can enjoy a beautiful range hood.

## ***Wine refrigerator***

Available in a variety of sizes, wine refrigerators offer stylish storage for any wine lover’s collection. A refrigerator can be installed into an island or lower cabinet and integrated into the rest of the kitchen.

## ***Double ovens***

Double ovens are built directly into cabinetry and offer convenience and a sleek, modern look. Two ovens can make entertaining crowds easier, and separating the ovens from the burners lets homeowners install a cooktop elsewhere in the kitchen, which can expand floor plan options.

## ***Pot filler***

A special faucet near the cooktop makes it much easier to fill heavy pasta pots. A pot filler can be quite handy for those who cook a lot and do not want to lug heavy pots from the sink to the stove.

Outfitting a modern kitchen during a renovation can involve some innovative features to enhance the space.





# How to keep indoor air clean during allergy season

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

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

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

- **Employ air cleaning devices.** The AAFA notes that air cleaners with Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly® filters can filter nearly 98 percent of allergen particles in the air. The AAFA maintains a list of certified air cleaners at [asthmaandallergyfriendly.com](http://asthmaandallergyfriendly.com).

- **Keep a clean home.** The Mayo Clinic notes that, in most homes, items such as bedding, upholstered furniture and carpeting provide an ideal environment for dust mites, which are microscopic bugs that trigger allergic reactions in many people. The AAFA recommends keeping surfaces in a home clean and uncluttered to control dust mites. Washing bedding and uncovered pillows in hot water each week also can help to corral dust mites and improve indoor air quality.

- **Vacuum frequently.** Frequent vacuuming is another way to improve indoor air quality. The AAFA maintains a list of Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly® vacuums that have been tested and found to prevent allergens from reentering the air.

- **Prevent mold and treat areas where infestations have occurred.** Mold also contributes to poor indoor air quality. Dehumidifiers can be



addressing leaky fixtures immediately are some additional measures to prevent mold infestations.

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



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# The benefits of lighting up your landscape



**H**omeowners know there's no shortage of ways to tweak a property. Some homeowners may lament that the work associated with home ownership is never done, but owning a house also provides endless opportunities to upgrade the spaces people call home.

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. That popularity is undoubtedly due to a number of variables, and each highlights a benefit of installing landscape lighting around a property.

- **Affordability:** Some may think of big budget projects like kitchen remodels or room additions when pondering home renovations. Such projects can have a dramatic impact on the look and feel of a home, but landscape lighting can be equally transformative at a fraction of the cost of

larger undertakings. The home renovation experts at Angi.com estimate the average landscape lighting project costs around \$4,000, making affordability a notable benefit of the project.

- **Appearance:** There's no denying the aesthetic appeal of a well-lit landscape at night. Landscape lighting can be utilized to draw attention to awe-inspiring components of a landscape, whether it's natural features like gardens and foliage or manmade components like architectural features. Improved appearance can increase curb appeal, which is often associated with how a home looks during daylight hours. But photographs of a well-lit nighttime landscape can impress buyers as well.

- **Cost savings:** Landscape lighting might help homeowners reduce the cost of their homeowners insurance. Researchers at PolicyGenius.com found that insurance companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners who install a home security system. Insurance providers may offer additional savings to homeowners who pair such systems with landscape lighting, which can be a deterrent to burglars who prefer to operate under a cloak of darkness.

- **Safety:** Insurance firms may discount premiums because of landscape lighting because they view it as a deterrent to potential criminals. But landscape lighting also makes moving around a property at night safer for residents and guests. Lighting can be used to illuminate walkways, outdoor living rooms, patios around pools, and other areas where residents and guests will be walking at night, which can reduce the risk of falls and injuries that may result from such spills.

- **ROI:** Savvy homeowners consider a renovation's return on investment before deciding to go forward with a project. Studies vary, but the National Association of Realtors indicates landscape lighting can recoup as much as 70 percent of homeowners' investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing landscape lighting is even less.

Landscape lighting adds notable aesthetic appeal to a home at a fraction of the cost of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.





# Did you know?

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years.

Such lighting can extend living spaces, and many homeowners report that a well-lit landscape helps them feel more safe at home. Though the final cost to light up a home's exterior will depend on the size of a property, landscape lighting is among the more budget-friendly home renovations homeowners can consider. According to the renovation experts at Angi.com, the average cost of a landscape lighting project is \$4,000. Considering how much landscape lighting transforms the look of a property at night, that's a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks. Solar lights are popular, but homeowners may want to consider electrical wiring that ensures lights maintain their awe-inspiring glow throughout the night. Electrical work requires additional labor, and thus a higher price tag. However, Angi notes that modern LED bulbs consume just 25 percent of the energy used by incandescent alternatives, which can make them a more reliable option than self-installed solar lights.

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## Tips for the *gardening beginner*

**G**ardening is a popular hobby all over the world. Ruby Home Luxury Real Estate estimates there are 71.5 million gardening households in the United States alone. That translates to around 185.9 million people engaged in some form of gardening, which places the U.S. among other countries where gardening is wildly popular, including Australia and China.

A greater number of people are showing interest in gardening, which is a rewarding hobby that's good for the mind and the body. Those who are new to gardening may need a crash course to get started. These pointers can help anyone foster a newfound passion for gardening.

### ***Choose the best location***

Spend time in the yard and decide where to house a garden. A far-off corner may get the most sun, but will you forget about the garden if it is too far away? Ideally, the garden should be located where it will get at least six to eight hours of sun each day. There also should be a water source nearby. The spot also should be convenient so that it is easy to go and pick vegetables or prune flowers.

### ***Start small***

If you're new to gardening, begin with a small garden footprint so that you can get your feet wet. A raised garden bed can be a good starting point because it is contained and easy to maintain. As your experience (and garden) grows, you can add to the garden size the next time around.

### ***Amend the soil***

It's possible but unlikely that the soil in the backyard is the perfect mix to grow healthy plants. It's more likely that the garden will need some

soil modification. You can test the soil makeup with do-it-yourself kits or work with a garden center. A garden typically requires a mix of compost to add nutrients to the dirt; peat moss or coconut coir to help with water retention and to make the soil lighter; and vermiculite that helps to retain water. A compost bin set up at the same time as the garden allows gardeners to continually produce nutrient-rich food to add to the garden.

### ***Plant starter guide***

It's best to keep a few things in mind when planning the garden. Think about what will grow well in your climate. Consider how big the garden will be and the size of mature plants. A small garden will not be able to accommodate corn, for example. Also, how would you like the space to look and what will be its function? Is this a purely aesthetic garden or one that will be food-bearing?

### ***Start seeds inside***

If you'll be starting a garden from seeds, it's best to start indoors before your region's frost-free date. This way the delicate plants will get the needed care and can establish before they go outdoors in the ground. Keep them humid by covering the seedlings in plastic wrap. You can start the seeds in different containers, even empty egg cartons. Transplant to larger containers after the seedlings grow a second set of leaves. Once you're free from overnight frost, you can place the established, strong seedlings in the ground.

An automatic watering system, such as a timer hooked up to the sprinkler, can keep the garden well watered, which increases the chances of success. Then it will only be a matter of weeks before the garden can be enjoyed throughout the season.



# How to decide between a deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. A 2022 survey of homeowners conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found that open yards are less appealing to home buyers than they once were. The survey noted that just 28 percent of respondents chose open yards, while 65 percent preferred patios and 55 percent chose decks. Green spaces remain popular, but the survey indicates that many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time comes to plan such areas. That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

- **Determine your budget.** Budget is a notable variable with any home renovation project, and the addition of an outdoor living space is no exception. The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project. For example, composite decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and typically a longer life span. Pavers may prove less expensive than composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio. It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an outdoor living space. In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.

- **Identify your vision for the space.** Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more quickly and even more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want. Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate



between rooms inside the home. For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavilion and fireplace, while kitchen and dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio. Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space. Of course, decks can be as big as homeowners choose, which can make the spaces more multi-functional.

- **Recognize both may be in your best interest.** Homeowners also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio. Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the area as a multifunctional space.

Homeowners planning outdoor living space projects may find themselves choosing between a deck and pavers. Each option can work, and homeowners may even want to combine the two.

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# 6 reasons to build a retaining wall



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

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

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

**2. Make the yard easier to traverse:** A retaining wall can make it easier to walk around a sloped yard. Rather than contending with the hill both uphill and downhill, particularly if it's steep, the retaining wall can be installed to create flat areas that are easier to navigate.

**3. Manage water runoff:** Retaining walls can hold back or redirect water to

help prevent flooding. A wall can be used to keep water away from the foundation, where it may enter the home.

**4. Prevent soil erosion:** Along with keeping water back, the retaining wall also will stop soil erosion and runoff so it doesn't cause an unsightly condition in the yard, or prove dangerous during severe weather.

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

**6. Improve curb appeal:**

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

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





# Did you know?

Home renovations are wildly popular, and that popularity can be traced to a number of factors.

Some homeowners renovate their homes with their own comfort in mind, while others do so to improve the resale value of the property. For those in the latter group, a recognition of renovations that yield the highest return on investment may help them decide which projects to pursue. According to the housing market research and analytics firm Zonda Media, a garage door replacement offered the highest return on investment in the American real estate market in 2024, earning a whopping 194 percent return on homeowners' initial investment. An entry door replacement with steel door offered the second best ROI at 188 percent of homeowners' initial investment, while replacing siding with stone veneer was third on the list with an average ROI of 153 percent.



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# A rundown on *scarifying*

To those unfamiliar with lawn maintenance, the term “scarify” might sound like something horror movie directors hope to do to audiences who watch their films. But scarifying has nothing to do with frightening filmgoers, and everything to do with promoting a lush, green and healthy lawn.

## ***What does it mean to scarify a lawn?***

Scarifying a lawn involves the utilization of a scarifier to remove dead organic matter that can build up on a lawn over time. When such thatch develops and settles in on a lawn, it can hinder growth by blocking water and nutrients from reaching the soil. Scarifying with a scarifier, or a rake in a smaller lawn or one where thatch buildup is not significant, can help to ensure a lawn can benefit from water and nutrients, such as those which are often found in fertilizers.

## ***Is a scarifier necessary?***

Lawn and garden tools make yard work easier, and a scarifier is no exception. Scarifiers range in price, but many effective machines are relatively inexpensive when compared to more costly machines like lawn mowers and aerators. While a scarifier certainly can make dethatching easier, some homeowners might be able to get by with a spring-tined rake. However, it's less labor-intensive to forgo a rake and use a scarifier on larger properties.

## ***Are there additional reasons to scarify?***

Thatch buildup also can promote the growth of moss, so scarifying can decrease the chances that healthy grass is pushed to the side by sponge-like moss that can quickly overtake a property.

## ***Is there anything I should know about scarifying?***

A lawn that has never before been scarified is likely to produce a substantial amount of thatch, which can be made up of old grass clippings,

leaves and moss. Though many scarifiers come with attachable buckets that collect the thatch, such baskets tend to be rather small and fill up quickly, forcing frequent stopping that can add a considerable amount of time to the job. If possible, homeowners with lawns that have significant thatch buildup might want to scarify without the bucket attached. Doing so will leave lots of piles of dead organic matter strewn about the yard, but the job is likely to go more quickly if those heaps are gathered up with a rake after scarifying and then discarded. Constant stopping to empty a small bucket filled with thatch will compromise efficiency and that can be frustrating.

Homeowners also should not expect their lawns to stun after a scarifying session. The lawn will likely look worse, but that's only temporary. Once the dethatched lawn gets some water and fertilizer, the soil beneath will be more ready to receive them, and the lawn will soon look much better.

## ***Are all scarifiers the same?***

Homeowners are urged to do their homework and read product reviews before choosing a scarifier. The majority of scarifiers now on the market are electric, so homeowners will need the ability to plug into a power source when using such products. They also will need to negotiate around the cord, which should be a lengthy extension designed for outdoor use. Homeowners with particularly large properties may want to purchase a gas-powered scarifier, but such products are harder to come by than their electric counterparts, and could be considerably more expensive as well.

## ***When should I scarify?***

Various lawn professionals recommend scarifying a lawn at least once per year, and springtime is a popular season to do so. Scarify prior to an initial fertilizer application so that does not block the lawn from getting the nutrients in the fertilizer. A second scarifying session may be necessary in fall.

Scarifying can be an important step in creating a stunning and healthy lawn.



# How to prepare outdoor spaces for Memorial Day entertaining

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

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

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

- **Inspect outdoor furniture.**

Now is a good time to inspect outdoor furniture if the task was not performed in late fall or early winter before items were moved into the garage or placed in storage. Check to make sure furnishings are still safe to use, addressing any issues before guests come over for a Memorial Day weekend gathering. Wash cushions for outdoor furniture and replace any that might be showing their age.

- **Clean the grill.** A thorough cleaning of the grill also is in order prior to summer entertaining season. Many homeowners do little or no

grilling during winter, so now is the time to give grilling surfaces and the interior of the grill a deep cleaning. Check for leaks if using a gas grill, and scrub the interior of any grease that accumulated last season. Many grilling experts advise lighting a grill and letting it burn for roughly 20 minutes prior to putting any foods on the grates for the first time. Such a strategy allows residual fluids like soap, vinegar and de-greasing products used when cleaning the grill to burn off before food is placed on the grates.

- **Inspect the landscaping, too.** It's not just seating areas like patios and decks that need some investigation prior to outdoor entertaining season. Take a walk around the landscape and make sure there's no potentially dangerous spots where people could be injured when playing backyard games. Fill in any holes with soil and fresh grass seed, and inspect trees to see if any branches need to be pruned.

Summer entertaining season begins each Memorial Day weekend. Homeowners can take various steps to ensure their outdoor entertaining spaces are comfortable and safe.



  
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