

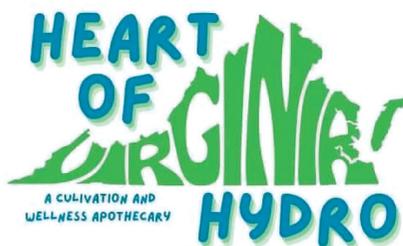
MARCH 2023

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Community celebrates an early Arbor Day

BY RACHEL AUSTIN

FARMVILLE

Arbor Day came early to Farmville with extra activities this year for citizens to enjoy.

Farmville celebrated Arbor Day beginning at 9 a.m. on Saturday, March 25, at the Farmer's Market at 213 North St. This year, the Town gave out one thousand saplings for Dogwood, Sycamore and Persimmon for folks to take and plant. Over the last 17 years of participating in this event, they've given out 18,000 saplings.

Farmville is a part of Tree City USA, a program that helps cities grow and maintain their tree cover. To keep this title as part of the program, one of the requirements is to have a separate day to celebrate Arbor Day, not on the nationally declared holiday, which falls on Friday, April 28 this year. The mayor sits down and signs a proclamation

each year to declare for this local Arbor Day for Farmville to come together to plant more trees.

"Trees are a long-term investment," said Jay Wilkerson, the town of Farmville horticulturist. "It takes years for them to mature so every year we have to keep planting new ones and maintaining the ones we have."

The celebration this year was a little bit different as they partnered with Farmer's Market vendors to give attendees more to do when they come to get their sapling. This year, folks got an early farmer's market experience and could browse the various vendors selling baked goods, fresh produce, meats, eggs, soaps, pottery, coffee, houseplants and canned goods.

"We had received suggestions from the community about having a food truck come out and it turned into



Volunteers help pack saplings for the 2022 sapling give away.

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having the farmers market vendors come out,” said Wilkerson.

WHY ARE TREES SO IMPORTANT?

Trees can provide environmental benefits to the community including producing oxygen, providing habitats for wildlife, preventing soil erosion and storing water retention. However, trees also provide economical benefits. Trees can provide cool shade over homes keeping cooling costs down but studies show they can do more than that. According to Wilkerson, studies have shown that having trees outside of stores, even just for aesthetic purposes, can increase the chances of customers coming in and even spending more money. Providing shade on the sidewalks also encourage folks to walk farther while doing their shopping.

“People also enjoy parks that have large trees and they provide reduction for noise pollution,” he added.

Wilkerson wanted to extend a thanks to all the volunteers who made this happen including the Heart of Virginia Master Gardeners and the Boy Scouts of America who helped wrap and prepare the saplings for distribution.



More volunteers helping with the packing of saplings.

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A guide to a spring wedding's floral arrangements

Various elements come together to complete a wedding day visual. Floral arrangements are one such component that can create a special and awe-inspiring ambiance.

Flowers appeal to at least three of the senses. Their delicate aroma can help a venue smell fresh and inviting. And it's hard to deny the visual appeal of a stunning floral arrangement. There are colors, sizes, textures, and much more that can cater to any theme. In addition, flowers can add a tactile element, even if guests do not go around touching the blooms.

Flowers convey so much during weddings that it's important to make finding a florist a priority, according to the wedding resource The Knot. The following is a guide to understanding floral arrangements that may be included in a wedding.

BOUQUETS, CORSAGES AND BOUTONNIERES

The wedding party, bride, groom, and parents of the couple are set apart from others at the wedding ceremony by the special flowers on their attire and in their hands, among other indicators. Boutonnieres are a single bud pinned to the left side of a gentleman's jacket. Corsages can be attached to a dress, but are now often worn on the wrist. Bouquets are held in hand. They can be a few flowers gathered together, or



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more extensive displays. Bouquets may feature bare stems, or stems may be bound and hidden beneath ribbon and fabric.

Some couples also have a small tossing bouquet to use later in the day. Flower petals for a flower girl to drop down the aisle also may be part of the floral plan.

CEREMONY FLOWERS

Guests often are first introduced to floral arrangements at the wedding ceremony. Potted or vase-encased flowers may bookend the couple at the altar. Seats or pews may be adorned with flower sprays to draw attention to the aisle, known as aisle markers. These are subtle choices that enhance the ceremony space.

RECEPTION COMPONENTS

Flowers may truly shine during the reception. They're one of the most important components when decorating the space. Flowers serve as centerpieces, so the guest list and the number of tables will dictate how many

centerpieces are required. These centerpieces can be elaborate or simply a few loose flowers in vases. Florists can customize the look depending on couples' budgets. Some additional reception flowers can include installations on arches or on anything hanging like a floral backdrop for photo opportunities.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Couples should create a list of everywhere they would like to use flowers and present it, along with magazine clippings or planning boards, to show florists what they have in mind when shopping services. A 2021 survey from The Knot reported that the average cost for wedding flowers was \$2,300. It's important to set a strict budget so florists can present ideas that are in line with what couples can spend. Many expensive looks can be replicated with in-season flowers or less costly alternatives.

Flowers are an important part of the wedding day and should be incorporated into couples' budgets.

Ways to make your garden more successful

Homeowners enjoy gardening for many different reasons. In addition to adding beauty to a property, gardens can offset grocery costs by yielding tasty produce. They also offer important habitats and food sources for both insects and animals.

While growing a vegetable or flower garden can turn into a rewarding hobby, or even a passion, gardening also can be overwhelming, particularly when the results are less than stellar. Novice gardeners have scores of resources at their disposal, including the advice of gardeners who have made mistakes and learned from them. The following guidance can make home gardens that much more

successful.

START SMALL

You may have visions of an expansive garden growing rows of crops or acres of flowers. But it is smart to start small and build on what you find successful, which includes plants that thrive in your lawn and garden.

This also is beneficial if you are unsure of vegetable yields. Several blooming plants producing bushels of crops can be overwhelming, especially if you can't get to harvesting or cooking them in a timely fashion.

ASSESS THE SOIL

Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce strong, hardy plants.

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Nourish soil with organic matter, such as manure, compost, shredded leaves, and natural mulch. Add this organic matter in the off-season to give it enough time to be incorporated into the ground before spring. You can have your soil tested for pH and other characteristics that make it friendly or averse to plants at a local garden center.

ARM YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE

Do you know how deeply to plant seeds and how far apart to space plants? Are you aware of the sunlight needs of certain flowers or plants? If not, read the packaging and do your research so your plants have the best chance of not only sprouting, but also surviving. Many people prefer to start seedlings indoors in late winter and then transfer those plants outdoors when they are stronger and more established.

SIT IN YOUR YARD AND OBSERVE

Watch the way the sunlight dances over areas of your landscape. Take

note of which areas get the most sun and shade. This will help you plan what to plant and where to plant it. Vegetable gardens tend to need ample sunlight to bear pick-worthy produce. You can give plants a leg up by growing them in optimal conditions.

CHOOSE HARDY VARIETIES

Certain plants have been bred to thrive in your climate, including heat-tolerant plants for climates with sweltering summer sun. Consult with a local gardening center to figure out which plant zone you are in and which plants will do best within that zone.

USE RAINWATER

Rainwater contains fewer contaminants and additives than tap water, which can benefit garden plants. Collect rainwater in rain barrels and use irrigation systems to deliver it to the garden.

Home gardens can yield many gifts, from flowers to fruit. Beginners can utilize some time-tested strategies to increase their chances of planting a successful garden.

Exterior renovations that can improve home value

Renovating a home to improve its value can be a smart investment. Interior improvements, such as updating kitchens and baths, offer good return on investment, but there are plenty of exterior renovations that can add value to a home and give it that coveted 'wow' factor.

LANDSCAPING

Abundant and well-planned landscaping can instantly boost curb appeal. Landscaping companies have reported up to 71% of prospective home buyers say a home's curb appeal is an important factor in their buying decisions. As buyers use the internet to look for their dream homes, there's no denying a beautifully landscaped, nicely photographed property can entice buyers to click and read more about a house.

ADDRESS INSECTS AND MINOR REPAIRS

Improving home value may come down to fixing areas of the home that can negatively affect its appeal to buyers. Hire an inspector to look at key components of the house and recommend what needs to be fixed. This way it is discovered before home

buyers come in and do their own inspections. Termite infestations, deteriorating roofs and hidden water leaks are some things that might need fixing.

IMPROVE THE ENTRYWAY

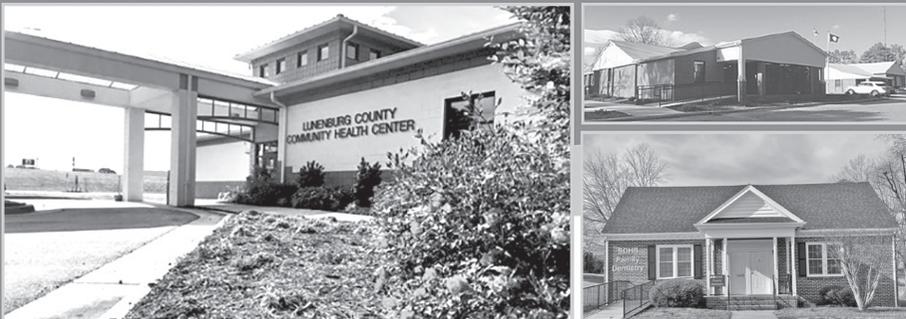
The front door is the focal point of a home's exterior. Invest in a new door or paint it a striking color to add appeal. Remodeling magazine's 'Cost vs. Value Report 2019' indicates changing an entry door to a steel replacement can offer 74.9% ROI. Such a door provides visual appeal and added security, things buyers look for. In addition to the front door, make sure that the entryway has a level walkway, steps that are in good repair, accents that are free from rust or tarnish, and decorative plants.

OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Outdoor lighting can add to the ambiance of a property and serve as a security feature. Utilize different lights, such as a bright light by the entry, uplighting in trees and shrubs for drama, a light-lined path to the door to improve visibility, and motion-detection lights to improve the security of the property.

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Popular insect repellent plants

Homeowners choose plants for their properties based on a number of variables. Some may be into growing their own foods, while others desire their gardens to be an awe-inspiring landscape of bright colors and alluring scents. There's no wrong reason to plant a fresh garden, but some plants offer extra benefits, such as repelling insects.

Insects can be a nuisance and a threat to individuals' overall health. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, insect-borne diseases are viral and bacterial illnesses that develop from insect bites. Mosquitoes, sand flies and fleas are some examples of insects that can pass on disease. Fever, chills, headache, and muscle soreness are just a few of the more common symptoms linked to insect-borne diseases.

The good news for avid gardeners is that certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.

- **Basil:** The aroma of fresh basil is enough to compel any gardener to make a place for it in their garden. But there's more to fresh basil than its scent, as the Farmers Almanac notes it can be used to repel mosquitoes and moths.

- **Lavender:** Fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and moths are not fans of this aromatic and colorful member of the mint family. Bees tend to be drawn to lavender, a durable plant that many garden centers recommend in areas prone to drought without much precipitation.



- **Mint:** Mint is another plant that is instantly recognizable for its aroma. But mint lovers may not realize that it's also great for keeping ants at bay. Mint also can be used to repel mosquitoes, but gardeners with no experience planting mint should plant it in pots. That's because the Farmers Almanac notes mint is an especially aggressive spreader that can quickly take over a garden. Separating mint in pots can prevent it from bullying its way into other plants' domains.

- **Lemongrass:** Lemongrass is a tropical grass that's so fragrant it's often used in perfumes. Lemongrass contains citronella, which many people associate with repelling mosquitoes. A potted lemongrass plant can repel these unwanted guests, keeping them away from decks, porches and/or patios all summer long.

- **Chrysanthemums:** The Farmers Almanac recommends using chrysanthemums, which repel a range of insects from bedbugs to fleas to ants, as border plants around a home. That's because they contain the natural insecticide pyrethrin, which can serve as something of an insect-repelling boundary around a home.

Insects are unwanted guests around a home each spring. Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.

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How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes, some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

ASSESS THE MERIT OF THE PROJECT

Remodeling magazine annually publishes a Cost vs. Value Report that lists the average cost and return on investment homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you're planning

to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

HIRE A CONTRACTOR

Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

REFURBISH EXISTING FEATURES

Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50% compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost

comparison and business review resource.

CHOOSE MIDGRADE MATERIALS

Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to \$40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.



tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

AVOID PEAK SEASONS

You'll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

DO SOME PREP WORK

You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can

BUY A DISPLAY ITEM

Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.

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How to make a backyard safe for dogs

Dogs, particularly puppies, can be full of boundless energy. Channeling that energy into exercise with long walks or play sessions can help stem dogs' propensity to get into trouble around the house as they burn off extra adrenaline. Pets who don't have an energy outlet may chew off-limits objects or get into other mischief.

According to the American Kennel Club, the amount of exercise a dog needs depends on the animal's age and breed. For example, border collies or Siberian huskies may require much more exercise than English bulldogs, simply because the former are working breeds. Pet owners with large backyards often find those outdoor spots are ideal for when their dogs get the "zoomies," something that tends to be a daily occurrence. Letting their dogs run around yards, whether on their own or chasing tossed tennis balls, is an ideal way to provide exercise and tire out pups. In such scenarios, it's vital that pups have a dog-friendly yard in which to play.

USE SAFE LAWN CARE PRODUCTS

An expanse of grass is the perfect place to frolic or enjoy some sunbathing — for people or pets. But contact with chemically treated lawns can cause a number

of health issues for dogs, such as allergies or intestinal upset.

Switching to native grasses can reduce the need to use chemicals to get lush lawns. When supplementation is needed, homeowners can switch to organic products or natural compost as safer alternatives than chemical-based products.

FENCE OFF THE YARD

Off-leash running and bounding through the yard will make any dog smile. However, a fence is a must-have to ensure a dog doesn't become an escape artist. Be sure the fence is high enough so that the pup cannot jump over it. Burying chicken wire in the dirt beneath the lower edge of the fence also can help prevent dogs who like to dig from exiting by crawling underneath the fence.

Consider installing a lock on the fence gate so that no one can wander in and surprise the dog, which may startle the animal and prompt it to defend the property. A lock also helps prevent dog theft.

KEEP THE YARD TIDY

Maintaining a clean yard also is key to safety. Inspect the yard regularly to make sure nothing is around

that can prove harmful, whether it's poison ivy, felled branches or broken fence panels.

Also, keep shrubs and grass trimmed to reduce flea and tick populations on the property.

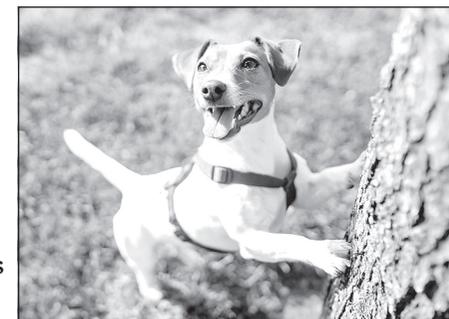
AVOID POISONOUS PLANTS

Certain plants can be dangerous if they're consumed by curious pups. Chrysanthemums, peonies, irises and hydrangeas are some plants that can be poisonous. For a full list of poisonous plants, visit aspc.org.

KEEP AN EYE ON ANIMALS

Dogs can spend some unattended time in the yard, but check in from time to time. Should wildlife get into the yard, dogs may get hurt by tussles or bites. Birds of prey, such as owls, hawks and even vultures, may attack small dogs in a yard.

A dog-friendly yard may require a little effort to create, but it's worth a little sweat equity to keep pups safe.



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Signs you may need a new HVAC system

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

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

As with any mechanical device, an HVAC system has a life span that must be considered. Should any of



the following conditions be present, it is likely time to consult with an HVAC technician to see if repairs or replacement of the entire system is warranted.

AGE

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

LONGER OR CONSTANT RUNNING TIMES

An efficient, properly working system will quickly heat or cool the home and then turn off. A system that is turning on repeatedly or having to run for awhile before the set temperature is

reached could be nearing the end of its utility.

STRANGE NOISES

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

FREQUENT REPAIR VISITS

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

HIGHER BILLS

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

POOR INDOOR AIR QUALITY

If the home is dusty or humid or even if allergies seem to have cropped up out of nowhere, this could indicate a poorly functioning HVAC system.

HVAC systems are vital to keeping indoor environments comfortable and safe. Such systems may exhibit certain signs that indicate they need to be replaced.

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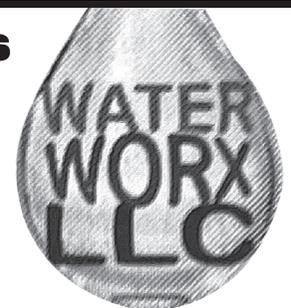
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How to prepare soil for spring planting

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil. Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive. Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

Clean up the previous months' mess. Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up

an area prior to spring planting. Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in your soil preparation routine.

Loosen the soil. Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest in tools like a shovel, spade, spading fork, and/or a lawn edger. If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder. It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is

completed.

Test and, if necessary, amend the soil. A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive. In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.

Soil conditions go a long way toward determining if new plants will thrive. Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.



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Bite back against Lyme disease

Among the tall grasses and wildflowers that sprout each spring and summer lies a stealth predator just waiting for its chance at an easy meal. Ticks may be small in stature, but their impact on bite victims is potentially significant. Preventing Lyme disease and other tickborne illnesses comes down to following some key steps.

• **Learn how common Lyme disease is.** Lyme disease affects an estimated 476,000 people each year in the United States alone, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases. Lyme disease is most common in New England, the mid-Atlantic states and the upper Midwest. However, instances of Lyme disease are likely underreported due to undiagnosed cases.

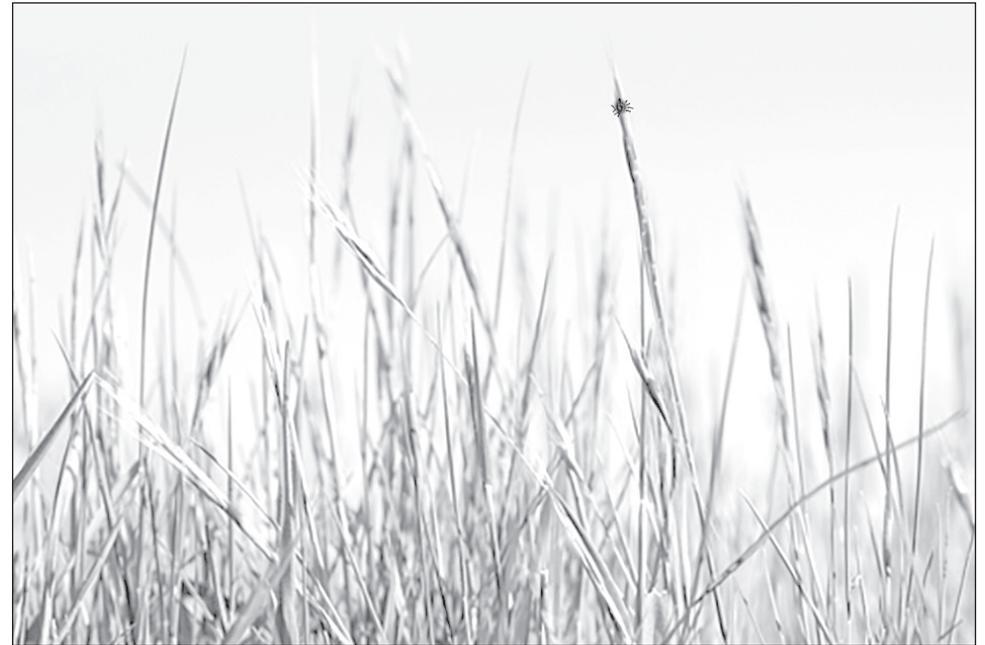
• **Know which ticks carry Lyme disease.** The black-legged deer tick and the Western black-legged tick carry the Lyme disease spirochete.

The black-legged tick is native to the northeastern, mid-Atlantic and north-central U.S., while the western black-legged tick is found on the Pacific coast.

• **Wear light-colored clothing outdoors.** When traveling in areas where ticks reside, it is important to wear light-colored clothing. Long pants and tall socks, long-sleeved shirts, and hats also should be worn. It is easier to spot ticks on light-colored clothing, and covering up prevents ticks from gaining easy access to skin.

• **Know where to expect ticks.** John's Hopkins Medicine says black-legged ticks live in moist and humid environments, particularly in and near wooded or grassy areas. Walking through leaves and bushes or through tall grasses can disturb ticks and enable them to jump onto people or pets. To avoid ticks, walk in the center of trails and avoid tall vegetation.

• **Be mindful of pets.** Even if you do



not venture outdoors into tick-laden environments, your dog may. He or she can carry ticks into the house where they may end up on you or other family members. Prescription tick repellent products are available from veterinarians, and there are topical solutions and collars that can keep ticks away.

• **Remove ticks quickly and correctly.** The CDC says if a tick is removed in less than 24 hours from when it first attached, the chances of getting Lyme disease is very small. Remove a tick with fine-tipped tweezers as soon as it is noticed, being cautious to remove

all mouth parts. Try not to squeeze the tick, as it can regurgitate saliva and other fluids when squeezed.

• **Repel ticks when possible.** Create less favorable conditions for ticks. Use a product containing DEET or permethrin on clothing to repel ticks. Some people use chemical-control agents on their properties to reduce the number of ticks in the yard. Discourage deer from the property, as they can carry many ticks, by erecting fences and removing vegetation that deer eat.

Various strategies can help people reduce their risk for Lyme disease.

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What certain noises may indicate about your car

Automobiles have come a long way since their introduction more than 100 years ago. Though modern cars and trucks still employ some of the same principles as their forebears, the vehicles people drive today bear little resemblance to those that made waves in the early part of the twentieth century.

Modern automobiles are technological marvels, which has made both driving and maintaining a vehicle much simpler. In regard to maintenance, built-in diagnostic systems can now alert drivers when something is wrong with their vehicles. Though that feature is undeniably useful, drivers can still benefit from learning to recognize issues by ear. Many issues that can affect a car or truck produce unusual sounds, and learning what certain noises may indicate can help drivers detect problems as soon as possible.

RATTLING SOUND IN A WHEEL WELL

Most people have mistakenly placed clothing in a dryer without realizing they had spare change in their pockets. That mistake is immediately apparent once the dryer starts thanks to the unpleasant noise of coins bouncing off the interior of the machine. Drivers may hear a similar sound when behind

the wheel and wonder what's behind it. Such a sound is often indicative that there's a loose lug nut inside the hubcap. This issue can arise when drivers don't tighten the wheel properly after changing their own tire, or if mechanics make the same mistake when rotating or replacing tires during a routine maintenance session.

SQUEAKING SOUND

Rear-wheel or four-wheel drive vehicles may produce a rhythmic squeaking sound when an issue arises with the universal joint. JD Power notes that the universal joint, often referred to as a U-joint, is part of the system that enables the rotating crankshaft in the engine of a vehicle to transfer that rotating motion to the rear wheels. U-joints get a workout whenever vehicles are driven, so they require maintenance, and a squeaking sound is one indicator that the U-joint needs to be addressed immediately.

SQUEALING SOUND

A high-pitched squealing sound is typically indicative of worn out brake pads. However, if such a sound is only present when a car is first driven in the morning, it could just be surface rust being scraped off the rotors. After a few initial applications of the brakes, that

sound might disappear. If it doesn't, the vehicle will likely need new brake pads.

SCRAPING ON THE WINDSHIELD DURING RAIN

The scraping sound on a windshield when the wipers are in use should not be taken lightly or be interpreted as a sign that the rain is only falling slightly. In fact, that sound indicates the wipers are worn out, which means they're not effectively clearing the windshield. In

addition, the wipers could be scratching the windshield each time they produce this sound, ultimately necessitating a costly windshield replacement. Wiper blades can be replaced in a matter of minutes, so address this issue promptly.

Learning to recognize the culprits behind various vehicle noises can help drivers nip problems in the bud before they compromise the automobile and the safety of the people inside it.





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Popular trends in home exteriors

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

WOOD

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found newfound devotion among home interior decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

PAINTED BRICK

Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

HARDSCAPING

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been



trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

OUTDOOR LIGHTING

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.



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The basics of container gardening

Spring gardening is a rewarding hobby that has been linked to health benefits like reduced stress and improved mental well-being. Gardening also can lead to an inviting home landscape full of attractive blooms and/or delicious foods.

Backyard gardens have long been planted after clearing a plot of land, tilling and amending the soil, and planting rows of favorite crops. However, gardening can be less labor-intensive and even more successful when people consider the many benefits of container gardening.

WHAT IS CONTAINER GARDENING?

As its name implies, container gardening is growing plants inside of containers. These containers can be flower pots, rectangular deck boxes or even large raised garden beds.

PROS TO CONTAINER GARDENING

One of the advantages of container gardening is that plants can be moved in and out of sunlight to ensure the right growing conditions. This isn't as easily achieved when gardens are stationary. Also, beginner gardeners may be more able to control soil conditions inside of a small container rather than a vast ground-based garden, which will require a good deal of manual labor.

Pots and boxes also can be grouped together to create eye-popping displays, usually at lower costs than the sheer volume of plants that would be needed to fill out an expansive landscape.

CONS TO CONTAINER GARDENING

Container garden plants will not have direct access to the ground, so they need gardeners to create the ideal growing conditions. Developing the right care formula can be challenging. The home and garden resource The Spruce says that drainage is an important factor in container gardening, and most containers do not offer enough drainage holes. If water cannot escape the soil, the roots of the plants can rot and die. It's not enough to add stones or gravel to the bottom of containers. Drill additional holes in the bottom (1/2-inch in diameter for small or medium-sized pots; one inch in diameter for larger pots). Also, be sure to check on soil moisture so that watering can be adjusted. During hot stretches, plants may need to be watered more frequently.

PLAN FOR PLANTS THAT PLAY WELL

Grouping plants together can create visually stunning combinations. However, it is important to choose plants that require the same amount of

light and moisture. Look at plant tags when visiting the garden center and select complementary plants, or ask a store employee. Mixing different plant shapes, colors and leaf textures, as well as plants of various heights, can help containers look filled out.

FEED PLANTS ACCORDINGLY

Plants need nutrition to thrive in containers. Quality potting mixes will contain fertilizers, but nutrition will

wane over time. Every couple of weeks, container plants will need either fresh potting mix or granular fertilizer added to feed them. Oregon State University Extension Services suggests using a slow-release fertilizer or worm castings several times throughout the season.

Container gardening is a great way to add plants to smaller patios, reduce the workload involved in maintaining expansive gardens, and customize conditions for optimal growth.



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Shedding some light on home solar

Consumers shopping around for home improvement projects may be leaning toward overhauls that can reduce energy consumption and save them money in the long run. This is a driving factor behind a growing number of homeowners investigating solar energy for their residences.

HOW DOES SOLAR POWER WORK?

Solar power harnesses the sun's energy and converts it into electricity that can be used in homes. Many people are familiar with photovoltaics (PV), which are the panels that absorb sunlight and

create an electric field across their layers. Another solar technology, known as concentrating solar power, is primarily used in large power plants and is not appropriate for residential use.

According to the Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, hundreds of thousands of solar panels have been put in use across the United States since 2008.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH SOLAR

The upfront expense of solar panels is significant, costing anywhere from \$10,000 to \$14,000 for initial installation. However, comparatively speaking, home-

owners can spend \$1,500 or more per year on electricity, so solar panels will pay for themselves over time. Keep in mind that costs may vary depending on energy needs and how many panels will be required to service the system.

HOW MUCH ELECTRICITY CAN I EXPECT?

The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Advice says that the amount of power generated from a solar energy system depends on a few factors:

1. The average number of hours of direct, unshaded sunlight your roof gets each year;
2. The pitch (angle), age and condition

of your roof, and the compass direction it faces;

3. The size and strength of your system; and
4. Environmental factors such as snow, dust or shade that may cover the system.

SAVE EVEN MORE MONEY

Consumers can contact their utility companies to find out if they provide homeowners who produce solar power with "net metering." This program pays the homeowner money or gives credit for excess power the system produces and returns to the electric grid. Individuals also may be eligible for energy tax credits or other benefits.

Homeowners may find it worthwhile to explore solar energy, particularly if they consume a high amount of electricity.

The many styles of front doors

A grand entryway simply wouldn't be complete without an impressive front door. A front door can dazzle guests and create a homeowner's desired vibe before anyone even steps inside, which only underscores how important the choice of door style can be.

When shopping around for a new front door for their homes, homeowners can consider the many popular styles as they seek to choose one that fits an existing scheme or use a new front door as a springboard to a rede-

signed home interior.

- **Farmhouse:** Farmhouse doors are not all one and the same. Traditional farmhouse doors provide a rustic look that's become popular in home decor over the last decade or so. Modern farmhouse doors are a little less rustic because they incorporate more contemporary elements into their design. Each option is ideal for homeowners who aspire to create a farmhouse vibe in their home interiors and exteriors.

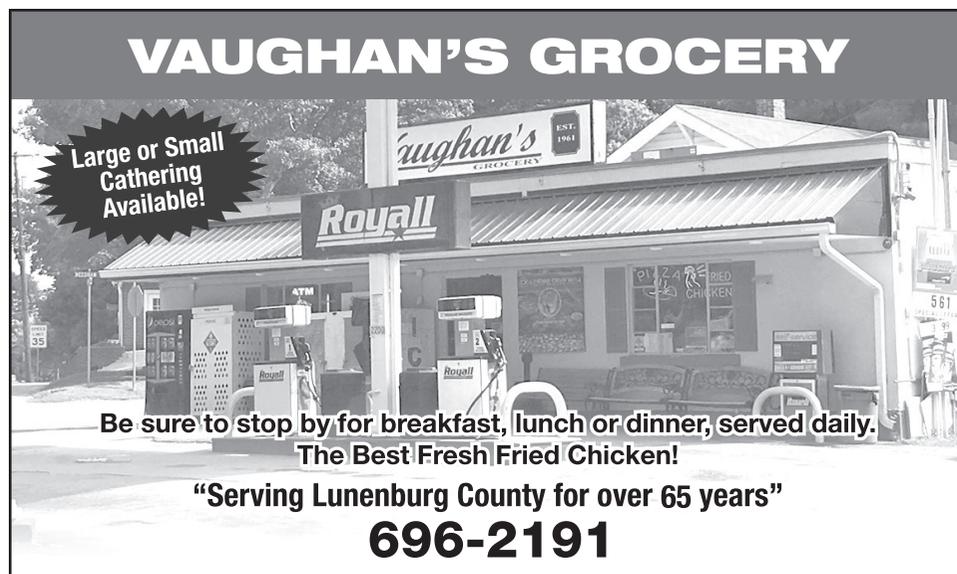
- **Modern:** Modern front doors tend to boast a bold look and many are made up of large glass panels. Some

homeowners prefer modern front doors because the glass in them allows lots of natural light into their home's interior.

- **Traditional:** Traditional front doors may be the most recognizable to today's homeowners. Often solid wood but sometimes enhanced with glass, traditional doors may feature subtle, yet ornate designs. Traditional front doors might feel out of place in modern or rustic homes, so they're generally best suited to homes with owners that prefer more traditional decor inside their homes.

- **Custom:** It's important that homeowners recognize they need not pigeonhole themselves into a particular design style for their front doors. Custom front doors may be costly, but many door manufacturers or contractors customize front doors. Custom doors may suit homeowners' with unique ideas about decor, and some can even mimic other popular styles while still featuring subtle differences. For example, homeowners can request an arched double door that, while unique, features many of the same qualities that characterize traditional doors, including ornate designs.

A front door can greatly influence the first impression people get of a home.



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