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HOME & GARDEN

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Tips for the gardening beginner

Gardening 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? Ide-

ally, 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.

Make the most of your garden

Summer's bounty knows no bounds. Home gardeners often discover there are a number of crops they can harvest during the waning days of summer, with tomatoes, blueberries, zucchini, and other squashes among the offerings.

It pays to have various ways to prepare these ingredients when a garden starts to overflow. "Blueberry Zucchini Bread" is a moist recipe that is both sweet and subtly tangy. This recipe, courtesy of Eating Well and Pam Lolley, can be either an easy breakfast or a light dessert. It also happens to be vegetarian, nut- and soy-free.

Blueberry Zucchini Bread

Makes 1 loaf

- Baking spray with flour
- 1 cup shredded zucchini
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter (1 stick), melted
- 3 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 1/2 cups whole-wheat pastry flour, plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup fresh blueberries

Preheat oven to 350 F. Coat an 8-by-4-inch loaf pan with baking spray. Place shredded zucchini on two layers of paper towels; top with 2

more layers of paper towels and press gently to remove excess moisture. Whisk granulated sugar, brown sugar, melted butter, eggs, and lime juice in a large bowl. Stir in the zucchini. Whisk 1 1/2 cups flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a medium bowl.

Add the flour mixture to the zucchini mixture; stir until well combined. Toss blueberries with the remaining 1 tablespoon flour; gently fold into the batter. Spoon the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in the center comes out clean, 45 to 50 minutes. Let the bread cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Run an offset spatula around the edges of the pan and carefully remove the bread to a wire rack to cool completely, about 1 hour.



A brief history of Earth Day

Earth Day is celebrated each April and draws attention to a range of issues affecting the environment. Earth Day aims to raise awareness in the hope of inspiring change.

Earth Day is observed on April 22. According to National Geographic, the first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970. Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson was inspired to begin a national celebration uniting the environmental movement after witnessing environmental activism in the 1960s. With the help of Denis Hayes, a graduate student at Harvard University, Nelson organized the first Earth Day. Twenty million people participated in events across the United States and strengthened support for environmental legislation like the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Earth Day was expanded to a global initiative in 1990 under guidance from Hayes. Nearly 200 million participants in

more than 140 countries now join together in the name of protecting the planet. Awareness continues to be raised each year regarding renewable energy and climate change.

One of the hallmarks of Earth Day celebrations is the planting of trees. Researchers estimate roughly 15 billion trees are cut down each year across the globe. By planting a tree every Earth Day, people can make a difference. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen and bolster ecosystems for wildlife. Shade trees can reduce reliance on fans and air conditioning systems.

The main message of Earth Day 2025 is the need to commit to ending reliance on plastics, says EarthDay.org. The goal is a 60 percent reduction in the production of all plastics by 2040. Plastics are bad for the environment a growing body of research indicates they have an adverse effect on the

major systems of the body, including immune, respiratory, digestive, and hormonal systems.

Everyone can do their part to promote the ideals behind Earth Day. For 54 years,

millions of people have been advocating for change to benefit the planet and human and animal health, and that fight is ongoing.



How it pays to spend time in nature

Few things can be as distracting as a beautiful day. When the weather outside is welcoming, it can be hard to focus on indoor activities, including work and tasks around the house. Though it's not advisable to ignore responsibilities at work and at home when the weather outside beckons, it can be beneficial to spend ample time in nature when circumstances allow.

People tend to flock to the great outdoors in spring, summer and fall, and some are even so devoted that they bundle up and head outside throughout winter. Whether they know it or not, people who love to spend time in nature are doing their

mental and physical health a lot of good by embracing the great outdoors.

Mental health benefits

The National Alliance of Mental Illness notes that a growing body of research supports the idea that time in nature is good for mental health. A 2015 study from researchers at Stanford University found that people who walked in a natural area for 90 minutes exhibited decreased activity in a region of the brain associated with depression compared to those who walked in high-traffic urban settings.

The United Kingdom-based Mental

Health Foundation also touts the mental health benefits of the great outdoors. According to the MHF, research shows that people who are connected with nature are more likely to report their lives are worthwhile than those with no such connectedness. In addition, the MHF notes time in nature has been shown

to generate positive emotions, including calmness and joy, and promote greater creativity.

When seeking to capitalize on the mental health benefits of time in nature, people should know that where they spend time outdoors matters. As the Stanford study indicated, time outside in high-traffic urban settings may not produce as profound an effect as time spent in natural settings, like forests, that tend to be more serene. People who live in cities or other densely populated areas can still benefit from time outdoors, but they might experience even greater health gains if they make consistent efforts to spend time in more natural settings.

Physical health benefits

The physical health benefits of time in nature are equally notable. Perhaps the most obvious physical benefit is related to physical activity. People tend to embrace physical activity when spending time in nature. Hiking, jogging, walking, nature-based recreational activities like kayaking, and playing sports like basketball or pickleball all involve physical activity, which can help people avoid the consequences of a sedentary lifestyle, such as an increased risk for chronic diseases. More specifically, the New York State Depart-

ment of Environmental Conservation notes the physical health benefits of spending time outside include:

- A stronger immune system
- Lower blood pressure
- Increased energy levels
- Improved sleep

Each of those benefits contributes to greater overall health, making time outdoors among the more beneficial behaviors a person can embrace.

There's no shortage of benefits to spending time in nature. That's something to keep in mind the next time welcoming weather beckons you to get some fresh air.

Did you know?

Earth Day is now a global event, but its origins are somewhat humble. Prior to the 1960s, awareness of the link between public health and pollution was minimal. However, according to EarthDay.org, the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring* by American marine biologist, writer and conservationist Rachel Carson was a watershed moment for the en-

vironmental movement. The book did much to raise awareness of the effects of pollution on public health. Indeed, the publication of Carson's book proved a pivotal step toward the eventual establishment of Earth Day in 1970, which EarthDay.org characterizes as the dawn of the modern environmental movement.



NATIONAL Lawn Care MONTH

A spring lawn revitalization strategy

New growth is a hallmark of spring, whether it plays out in the birth of birds and bunnies or with the returned buds on trees and plant stalks. While most greenery rebounds naturally, lawns may need a little extra TLC in order to return to their once lush, green glory.

Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process



but can be well worth the reward when green grass adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard. Here is how to get started when the weather warms, courtesy of The Farmer's Almanac and The Home Depot.

- **Clean up debris.** Spend a few hours raking up leaves from the lawn and removing any other winter debris like twigs so that air can reach the grass below. Also remove any thatch that has developed.

- **Test the soil.** Take a sample of the soil to determine its pH level and nutrient needs. Then you can make adjustments to set a strong foundation for the lawn to grow.

- **Do some weeding.** Pull out any weeds that have poked through early on and apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent additional weeds from taking over.

- **Start the aeration process.** A core aerator punches holes into the soil. This enables air and water to penetrate through to the roots.

- **Overseed the lawn.** Apply grass seeds over the lawn, paying special attention to any bare or thin areas so that the seed will fill in the lawn.

- **Water consistently.** It is important to water the lawn deeply and consistently, especially when the weather is dry, to help promote strong root development.

- **Time fertilizer correctly.** Apply a spring fertilizer around three weeks after the lawn starts to turn green or after the first two or three mowings. If fertilizer is applied too early it can feed weeds instead of the grass and result in fertilizer runoff.

- **Mow to an appropriate height.** Begin to mow when the ground is dry enough and the grass is long enough to need cutting. Leave some length to the lawn; otherwise, sunlight will reach the soil and encourage weed seeds to germinate.

With a little elbow grease at the start of spring, homeowners can establish strong and healthy lawns.



Aeration breaths new life into lawns

Regular maintenance is necessary when caring for a lawn, and various strategies translate into thicker, greener and healthier grass. Much like car owners routinely get an oil change or tire rotation on their vehicles, homeowners should recognize that certain lawn care strategies are periodically necessary to keep a property looking its best. Aeration is one task that can complement other lawn care strategies throughout the growing season.

What is lawn aeration?

The Home Depot says that aeration involves making holes in the lawn to loosen the soil underneath. Over time, the lawn and soil can become compacted, creating a layer of thatch that forms between the soil and the grass in the lawn. Thatch can prevent air, water and fertilizer from reaching the roots of the grass, eventually stifling growth. The holes made during aeration

allow oxygen, water and nutrients to reach the lawn's roots.

When to aerate

Aeration can be good for a lawn, but it can cause stress to the grass if timed improperly, advise the lawn care experts at Pennington. Cool-season grasses common in northern lawns should be aerated in the early fall or early spring. Warm-season grasses should be aerated in the late spring or very early summer. Aeration should be done right before the grass reaches peak time for natural growth.

How to aerate the lawn

Homeowners can use different aeration equipment, including manual and automated machinery. Some homeowners wear spiked aerator sandals strapped to shoes to walk

across the lawn. These may be useful on a small scale, but not on larger properties.

Slicing aerators have rotating blades that slice through grass and thatch into the soil. Core or plug aerators often are preferred

tial for lawn professionals. Hollow tines remove plugs of soil from the lawn and deposit them on top where they break down.

What's next?

According to The Spruce, it is necessary to water the grass every two to three days after a lawn has been aerated. This also is the time to perform overseeding. Apply a quality, slow-release fertilizer to revitalize the lawn. Wait at least a month before mowing, and avoid heavy traffic on the lawn after aerating to prevent grass damage.

Aeration is an important step to maintain lawn health. While aerating can be labor-intensive, the end result of a lush lawn can be worth the extra effort



Attract winged friends with bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.

Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nut-hatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.



Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

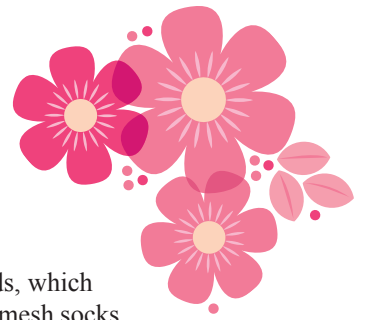
Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.



How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where

they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.

Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul.

Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home

value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as 'money rooms' that add the most value to a home.

Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves living there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers.

Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.





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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:

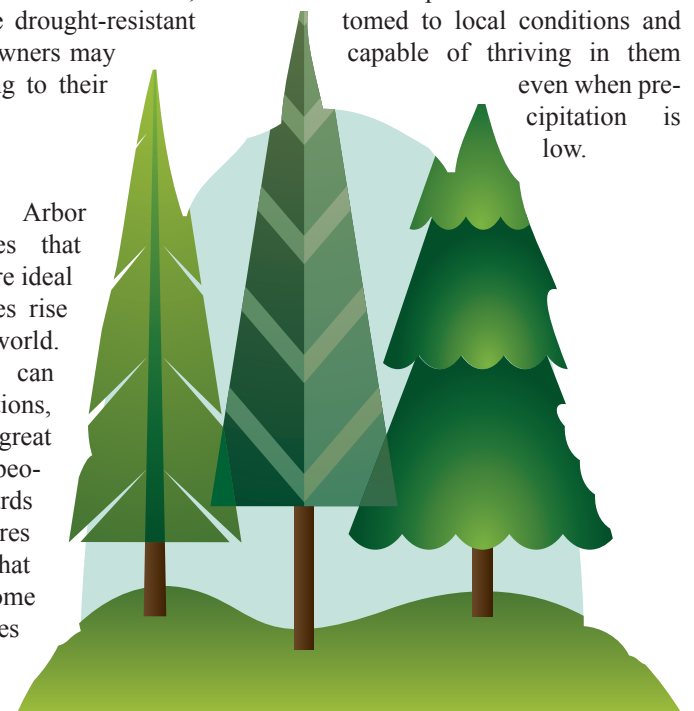
- Eastern redcedar
- Bur oak
- Northern red oak
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Hackberry
- Scots pine
- Northern catalpa
- London planetree
- Shumard oak
- Live oak

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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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. A group of sheep
- 5. Of she
- 8. This (Spanish)
- 12. A type of sorcery
- 14. A team’s best pitcher
- 15. Port in southern Japan
- 16. Makes very happy
- 18. Trigonometric unit of measurement
- 19. From a distance
- 20. Winged nut
- 21. Consumed
- 22. “Heat” director
- 23. In all places
- 26 Made improvements to
- 30. St. ___ Girl: brand of beer
- 31. A type of “seat”
- 32. Wood
- 33. A brief treatise on a subject of interest
- 34. Approval
- 39. Basics
- 42. Where judges sit
- 44. W. African religion
- 46. Commentators
- 47. Having many different functions
- 49. Member of a Semitic people
- 50. Flightless, fast-running bird
- 51. After the seventh
- 56. Small N. Zealand tree
- 57. Health care pro (abbr.)
- 58. Playground mainstay
- 59. Expressing relief
- 60. Records brain activity (abbr.)
- 61. Fishing net
- 62. Beer
- 63. Tooth caregiver
- 64. Japanese beverage

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Garden tools
- 2. Early Syrian kingdom
- 3. 500 sheets of paper
- 4. Information
- 5. Beloved comic strip character
- 6. Distinct form of a plant
- 7. Replenishment
- 8. Semitransparent glassy substance
- 9. Expedition to observe animals
- 10. One who held landed granted by Anglo-Saxon king
- 11. Obtain in return for labor
- 13. Inheritable genetically
- 17. One who rescues
- 24. Doctor of Education
- 25. Liberal arts
- 26. Shock treatment
- 27. Disfigure
- 28. When you hope to get there
- 29. Peacock network
- 35. Part of (abbr.)
- 36. The 21st letter of the Greek alphabet
- 37. Not just “play”
- 38. Former CIA
- 40. Reduced to a sloping edge
- 41. Restricted the development of
- 42. Sciences degree
- 43. Sea eagles
- 44. Saturated
- 45. Joints
- 47. Sailing boat
- 48. Respiratory organs
- 49. Guitarists use them
- 52. Disco act: Bee ___
- 53. First Chinese dynasty
- 54. Intentionally lose
- 55. Muslim people of China

ANSWERS: Page 13

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There may be no better way to get up close and personal with all the sites to see in North America than traveling via car or truck. Road trips enable passengers to set their own pace and make multiple stops along the way to check out all North America has to offer. Road trippers traversing North America may want to include these points of interest in their travel itineraries.

Niagara Falls

The famed Niagara Falls is a destination for both Canadian and American travelers. Nestled between the cities of Toronto and Buffalo, NY, Niagara Falls is a major attraction that draws millions of visitors each year. The Niagara region, in addition to having the falls themselves, is home to picturesque 19th century colonial architecture on the Canadian side and dozens of wineries on the Niagara Wine Trail.



Black Hills

The Black Hills in South Dakota can be viewed from the Badlands Scenic Highway. There are plenty of bison to see along the way, and additional stops can be made at Mount Rushmore, Wind Cave State Park or Custer State Park.

Grand Circle Road Trip

This is one of the most renowned national parks road trips in America. It takes place predominantly in Utah, but also crosses over into Arizona. Parks to hit up along the way include Zion, Bryce Canyon, Arches, Canyonlands, Grand Canyon, Capitol Reef, and many more. For those with ample time, this road trip can stretch for two weeks. You also may want to veer into Nevada and check out the famed Las Vegas strip to finish out the fun.

Icefields Parkway

Icefields Parkway has been ranked as one of the best road trips in the world. It stretches through both Banff National Park and Jasper National Park, boasting amazing scenery of mighty mountains, waterfalls and turquoise-colored lakes. Plan to park the car and hike to see some of the falls and other attractions.

Route 1

America's Route 1, sometimes called Coastal Route 1, stretches along the East Coast of the country from Maine to Florida. There are scores of spots to visit along the way, including quaint New England fishing villages, historic cities like Princeton or Philadelphia, or beach locales in Miami. Travelers can decide just where to stop on this historic roadway.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited road controlled by the U.S. National Parks System. It starts at Front Royal in Virginia and continues all the way through to North Carolina. Travelers can stop at Shenandoah or great Smoky Mountains national parks along the way and glimpse awe-inspiring mountain ranges.



Cowboy Trail

Highway 22, also known as the "Cowboy Trail," is located just south of Calgary in Alberta and travels all the way down into the U.S. There's lots of Western-inspired sights and stops, including Heritage Park, the Alberta Boot Company or Bar U Ranch.

Pacific Coast Highway

Visitors to California can drive the state's longest highway along the dramatic Pacific coastline. It's 653 miles long and passes through Malibu, Big Sur and Monterey, and even includes the famed Golden Gate Bridge.

There are many road-trip worthy roads and spots to visit across Canada and the United States.

Wise watering strategies to help a lawn thrive

A number of factors can affect how well a garden or lawn takes root. Watering is a key element of any landscape care strategy, and one that homeowners should educate themselves about if they want to maintain a lush, healthy lawn throughout spring and summer.

Homeowners hoping to keep their lawns lush and green throughout summer can learn some effective watering strategies to achieve that goal.

Check the irrigation system

Water Sense™, an EPA Partnership Program, advises following four steps at the start of spring: inspect, connect, direct, and select for clock timer-controlled irrigation systems. Make sure the system doesn't have any clogged, broken or missing sprinkler heads. Examine points where the sprinkler heads attach to pipes or hoses to make sure there are no leaks. The EPA says even a leak as small as the tip of a pen can waste 6,300 gallons of water per month. Adjust the sprinkler heads so that they only hit the land-

scape elements rather than sidewalks or driveways. Align the watering schedule with the seasons.

Invest in an impact sprinkler

An impact sprinkler on a tripod can be an effective option for those without built-in irrigation systems. These sprinklers rotate in circles to help deliver an even spray of water that mimics rainfall. It's easy to adjust their spray pattern and a sprinkler on a tripod can spray over the top of bushes and flower gardens.

Drip irrigation systems are superior

According to Rainbird.com, drip irrigation tubing and emitters slowly distribute water to the right spots of a landscape. They can be placed at ground level or buried underground. Water soaks directly to the roots, minimizing water loss from runoff and evaporation. Some research suggests drip irrigation can effectively cover 25 percent more area than the average sprinkler system. It also tends to deliver more than 95 percent water efficiency.

Skip the schedule

Watering a lawn or garden should not be ruled by a schedule, but other factors that will determine when water is needed, suggests Family Handyman. Daytime temperatures, wind conditions, soil type, lawn type, and recent rainfall will determine how much water the landscape really needs. Overwatering can be just as bad as underwatering. For those with underground watering systems, water sensors can trigger the system to turn on rather than a time on a clock.

Avoid midday watering

The sun is hottest in the middle of the day. Watering during this time means that much of the water will be lost to evaporation before it can get to thirsty lawns and plants.

It pays to be smart about watering. Homeowners also can consider rain collection barrels to offset municipal or well water usage and be more eco-conscious about their watering efforts.

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- **Refresh the landscape.** Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep.

Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- **Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces.

An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- **Add a water feature.** Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

- **Don't forget shade.** Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun wor-



shippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Senior-friendly interior renovations

Home is where the heart is. That sentiment may be especially true for seniors who have spent decades living in their homes. A lot of hard work goes into home ownership, and seniors who have lived in the same space for a while undoubtedly have countless memories within the walls of their homes.

A lifetime of experiences in a home can make it hard to leave, but many seniors experience diminished mobility as they age. Mobility issues can make it hard for seniors to traverse their homes, but aging homeowners can make various renovations to make a home more accessible.

Revamp entryways and staircases. A 2020 study of 1,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that 28 percent of individuals age 65 and older who don't exercise regularly struggle with activities like walking up stairs. The study, commissioned by Total Fitness, also found that 14 percent of men and women over 65 who regularly engage in moderate exercise still find it challenging to climb up and down a flight of stairs. Seniors facing similar challenges can install a ramp at their home's entryway so they can comfortably go in and out. Inside, a chair lift can ensure seniors are not struggling to move from one floor to another.

Raise the outlets throughout the home. They're easily overlooked, but outlets, particularly those outside the kitchen, tend to be close to the floor. AARP notes that no accident, as outlets are generally placed at a height equal to the length of a hammer to save time with measuring when buildings are being constructed. Outlets close to the floor can be difficult for seniors with mobility issues to reach. Relocating the outlets a

little higher off the floor is not an expensive renovation, but it can make a home more accessible for seniors who have difficulty bending down or getting down on one knee.

Install door knob extensions. Verywell Health notes that nearly half of all people age 65 and older have arthritis or another rheumatic condition. Arthritis can make it difficult for seniors to grip and turn door knobs. Door knob extensions can make it easier for seniors with arthritis to open the doors in their homes. Such extensions are roughly five-inch levers that can be installed over an existing door knob, making it easier to grab and pull down. Extensions save seniors the hassle of turning the knob, which some may find painful and almost impossible.

Renovate the bathroom. Bathroom renovation projects can be costly, but seniors with mobility issues should know that bathrooms can pose a particularly dangerous threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that roughly three million older adults are treated for fall injuries in emergency departments each year. A 2019 analysis published in The Journals of Gerontology noted that 22 percent of in-home falls resulted in a change in the person's walking ability. Replacing a step-over shower with a zero-step alternative can make it easier for seniors with mobility issues to get in and out of the shower, thus reducing their risk for falls. Grab bars along shower walls and a chair inside the shower can make it easier to bathe and towel off safely.

Seniors with mobility issues can make their homes more accommodating through an assortment of simple, yet effective renovations.

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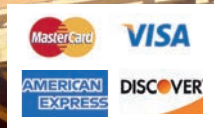
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Things to consider before adopting a new dog

Dogs add a whole new element to a family dynamic. Parents may adopt a dog not only because they love these loyal animals, but also because they hope to instill a sense of responsibility in young children who will be tasked with helping to take care of the family's furry new friend.

The level of interaction dogs require can vary greatly among the breeds. There's no shortage of breeds to consider as families look for a new dog, and it can help to recognize which dogs are espe-

come overwhelmed by separation anxiety.

3. Dachsund (standard): These highly affectionate dogs typically weigh between 16 and 32 pounds. Dachsunds' stature can be deceptive in relation to their energy levels, as the American Kennel Club notes these dogs love to play and can even make for fine watchdogs. Ample exercise is vital to ensure dachsunds don't gain a lot of weight, and physical activity also helps them build strong muscles that support and protect their backs, which are



cially energetic and which might be more enthusiastic about cuddle sessions on the couch. It's also worth noting that each individual dog is unique, so just because a dog is a certain breed does not mean it will automatically behave exactly the same as other dogs of the same breed. However, breed reputation can be a good barometer as families look to bring a new dog into the fold. The following are five popular breeds and their corresponding exercise needs.

1. Akita: Akitas originated in Japan, and it's not uncommon to refer to this beautiful breed as the Japanese Akita. American Akitas also are popular, and these dogs may have higher energy levels than those from Japan. Akitas are large dogs and require regular walks and daily play sessions with their owners.

2. Bichon Frise: These small, cheerful pups require ample attention. Bichons typically weight between 10 and 18 pounds, so owners are unlikely to be exhausted by daily play sessions, which are necessary to ensure the dogs do not be-

lengthy and therefore vulnerable to disc damage if the dogs don't stay fit.

4. French bulldog: French bulldogs do not require an especially high level of exercise. According to the AKC, a short walk or outdoor play session should be enough daily exercise for these lovable, bat-eared pups to stay in shape. Like English bulldogs, French bulldogs are flat-faced, which means they should be monitored closely and prevented from exerting themselves in hot or humid weather.

5. German shepherd: German shepherds are large, agile and muscular, and those characteristics alone likely give prospective owners an idea of what to expect from these beautiful dogs in relation to exercise. The AKC notes German shepherds are very active and athletic, so they will need lots of exercise. Without sufficient exercise, German shepherds may develop problematic behaviors.

Careful consideration of a breed's energy levels and exercise requirements can ensure families find a dog that will suit their situations and schedules at home.



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Find the right volunteer opportunity for you

Giving back to one's community can provide a sense of purpose and improve an individual's overall well-being. Data from Volunteer Hub indicates that people who volunteer improve their health by strengthening their bodies, improving their moods and reducing stress. Volunteerism also produces additional benefits, including boosting one's positive perception to others. A study from CareerBuilder found 60 percent of hiring managers see volunteerism as a valuable asset when making recruitment decisions. Furthermore, human resources executives attest that contributing to a nonprofit can improve leadership skills.

By understanding the value behind volunteer work — for the people or orga-

nization on the receiving end as well as the volunteer — more individuals may decide to donate their time and services. However, finding the right volunteer opportunity may take some trial and error. The following are some tips for finding the right fit.

- **Consider skills and interests.** Before choosing a volunteer opportunity, make a list of activities that you enjoy. This may help guide volunteer choices. For example, if you like hiking, you may volunteer to clean up a local park.

- **Assess your skill levels.** Is there something you are particularly adept at doing? For example, if you are a certified public accountant, you may be able to volunteer by mentoring young accounting stu-



dents, or doing taxes or bookkeeping tasks for the elderly or less fortunate.

- **Think about commitment level.** Figure out how much time you can spend volunteering. Maybe you only have the weekends or a few hours in the evenings? Understanding how much free time you have can help you choose opportunities that fit within these parameters.

- **Research potential organizations.** Not all nonprofit groups are created equal. Utilize resources such as CreativeVolunteer that vet charitable groups to determine if they are trustworthy.

- **Define your goals.** Have goals in mind when selecting opportunities. Defining a goal can help you maintain the motivation to volunteer and see a project through to completion.

- **Start small.** Wade into a volunteer opportunity slowly to see if it is the right fit. This may include volunteering one day a week or month. Increase the time you spend volunteering once you've found the right place for you.

Volunteering can bring joy to a person's life, especially when individuals find an inspiring opportunity.

Busy professionals can give back, too

Volunteering one's time can be a beneficial undertaking. The Mayo Clinic reports research has shown that volunteering can improve physical and mental health and provide a sense of purpose, all the while teaching valuable skills. Unfortunately,

many busy individuals lament that they simply do not have the time to volunteer.

Although charitable work requires an investment of time, busy professionals may find that there are plenty of opportunities to get involved that do not require making a sizable time commitment. Here is how to fit volunteering into your day no matter how busy you might be.

making a sizable time commitment. Here is how to fit volunteering into your day no matter how busy you might be.

- **Start volunteer efforts at work.** One way to incorporate charitable work into your week is to pioneer a program at your place of employment. This approach can increase interest in volunteerism among colleagues, and depending on your employers' flexibility,

time spent volunteering may take place during working hours. This means you can still fulfill your non-work-related obligations when the workday ends.

- **Volunteer remotely.** If finding something that fits with your schedule is challenging, try searching for online opportunities, suggests My Selfless Act, an online platform for sharing stories of do-goodery. By volunteering remotely, you can customize the time you volunteer to when you're available. You even can work with someone in another time zone.

- **Prioritize volunteering.** Sometimes not having enough time for charitable work comes down to simply poor time management. If you make volunteering a priority, you can likely find ways to streamline your workday and free up opportunities to get involved.

- **Ask for help.** Identify people who are supportive and can lend a helping hand so you can find time to volunteer. Delegate some of your tasks to free up time for phil-

anthropic endeavors.

- **Seek opportunities that require shorter time commitments.** Plenty of charities have volunteer opportunities that do not require a significant investment of time. Micro-events, or volunteer work that is set up in shifts, merit consideration.

- **Look for easy registration.** Signing up to volunteer should be easy. Let the sign-up be a tell as to how complicated an opportunity may be. Organizations that provide digital access or a quick sign-up process likely value volunteers' time.

Groups looking to attract busy volunteers also should be mindful of keeping volunteer opportunities punctual and organized. If volunteers feel that their time is being wasted, they may be less likely to commit long-term.

Busy professionals will find that, with a little flexibility, it is possible to find time to volunteer.



What first-time homeowners should know about fertilizing a lawn

Shortly after buying a home, many first-time homeowners recognize how challenging it can be to maintain a property. Many embrace that challenge and refashion their homes to reflect their personalities, interests and tastes.

First-time homeowners may direct the bulk of their attention to decorating the interiors of their homes upon moving in, but the work extends outside as well. Tending to a lawn is a responsibility worth taking seriously, as the American Society of Landscape Architects reports a well-groomed landscape can increase resale value by anywhere from 15 to 20 percent. First-time homeowners may not be thinking about resale value, but it's never too early to prioritize lawn care, which should include routine fertilization. Fertilizing can ensure a lawn grows in lush, green and healthy, but first-time homeowners may want to know a few things prior to taking a spreader for a spin for the first time.

Identify what the lawn needs before purchasing fertilizer. No two lawns are the same, and that's something to

keep in mind when shopping for fertilizer. Even neighboring properties may have different soil needs, so it's imperative that homeowners identify any nutrient deficiencies prior to fertilizing. A simple, inexpensive soil test can reveal what a lawn needs, and such results can help homeowners pick the right fertilizer for their properties.

Get a handle on nitrogen needs. First-time homeowners will undoubtedly come across fertilizers promising to address nitrogen needs in a lawn, but it's important to avoid over-fertilizing with nitrogen. Nitrogen is absorbed quickly, particularly when homeowners remember to water each day after fertilizing. So it's easy to add too much nitrogen, which can lead to the development of thatch that ultimately blocks sunlight, nutrients and water, thus leading to weaker roots and a lawn that looks nothing like the lush, green carpet homeowners are aiming for. Homeowners concerned about overdoing it with nitrogen can utilize a slow-release fertilizer that gives the lawn time to absorb nutrients and break them down.

Apply evenly. Even application is an important component of successful fertilizing. Many find it easier to apply fertilizer evenly when using a spreader with a granule fertilization product. Spray fertilizers can work as well, but first-timers may find it difficult to apply products evenly when spraying. When using a spreader, read fertilizing packaging instructions carefully to ensure the spreader is on the right setting when starting. If the setting is not correct, you may end up spreading too much or too little

fertilizer.

Fertilize more than once. The lawn care experts at Lawn Doctor® note that strategic applications across the seasons will increase the chances a lawn comes in lush and green. Fertilizing more than once between spring and fall is a necessity no matter which type of grass is in the yard, but the timing may vary depending on grass type and local climate. Consult with a local lawn care professional to determine when and how often to fertilize.

Fertilizing a lawn can produce a home exterior homeowners can be proud of, even if they have little or no experience with lawn maintenance.



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~Genesis 2:15

Tips to make a living room a more comfortable, welcoming space

A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home. Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations. That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible. With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more comfortable.

- Prioritize comfort over aesthetics. In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the

living room whether you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

- Ensure there's ample seating. It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and family into your home or simply lounging around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spending time in the room.

- Consider neutral paint colors. Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan, or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable vibe in a living room.

- Incorporate the outdoors into the



room. The great outdoors can have a calming effect on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnishings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural

light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

A comfortable living room is a space where people will want to spend their time. A few simple strategies can help create an inviting and comfortable vibe in any living room.

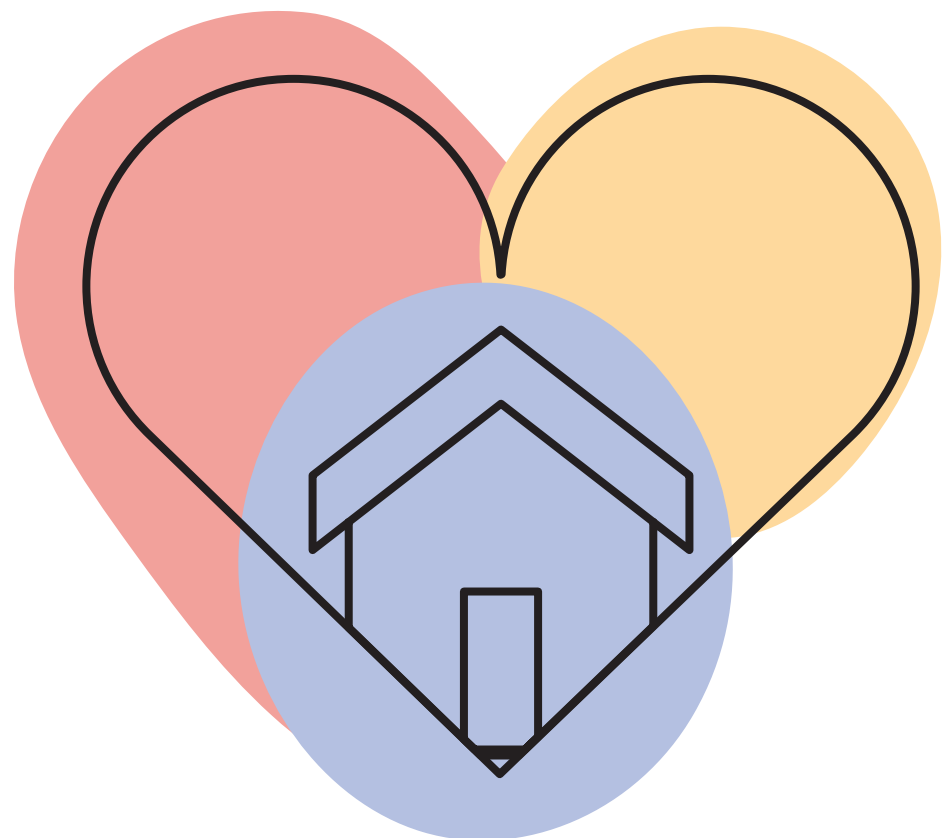
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