HOME &

Inside:

- Helpful and harmful insects
 - Create a fairy garden
 - Stay cool reducing energy costs
 - Freshen up your home for spring

ardens add visual appeal to a yard, created. By choosing indigenous plants, andgardens also appeal to individuals' senses of smell, taste, touch, and sound. Gardeners can create gardens that appeal to various senses in so many ways.

Sight

Aesthetic appeal is one of the most soughtafter benefits of gardening. However, many homeowners put in so much effort planting for one particular season that they may not give thought to ensuring the garden looks vibrant no matter the time of year.

Gardeners can research planting zones to find plants that will blossom at different times of the year so they can enjoy impressive, aesthetically appealing gardens year-round. Spring bulbs can bloom early on, while annual and perennial summer favorites will thrive under the summer sun. Beautyberry and caryopteris will fill out in the autumn, while holly or mahonia can look lovely in the winter.

Sound

The lively sounds of the garden are created by the wildlife that come to pollinate and enjoy the environment gardeners have

gardeners can be sure that insects and small critters will seek refuge within the foliage.

Songbirds also will add character to a vard. The Audubon Society suggests including a water source and a songbird border of shrubs along your property's edge. Provide food sources and make sure they are located a fair distance from the main action of the yard so as not to scare off birds. Wait for musical chickadees, goldfinches, orioles, and cardinals to arrive and enjoy the accommodations.

Smell

Gardeners can dot their landscapes with aromatic trees, shrubs and flowers that will make stepping out into the garden that much more special. Some of the more fragrant plants include gardenia, dianthus, calendula, lavender, and jasmine. Shrubs such as fragrant pineapple broom, Anne Russell viburnum and Christmas box can add fragrance as well.

Taste

Gardeners can expand their gardens to include fruit-bearing trees and rows of vegetables. Produce can be harvested from early spring through late fall depending on the crops planted.

Touch

Apart from including trees and shrubs of various textures in the garden, look for other ways to stimulate a tactile response. Water features add relaxing sound and beauty. Stones, moss, mulch, and other accents have varied textures that can stimulate the sense of touch in various ways. Don't forget to include a sitting area so that you can immerse yourself fully in the garden.

Go beyond visual appeal when designing a garden. When gardeners tap into all five senses, they can enjoy their landscapes even more than they already do.



Helpful and harmful insects

Butterflies and other helpful insects, such as bees, pollinate flowers and can keep dangerous pests at bay in the garden.

Although it's virtually impossible to count them, insects are the most diverse group of organisms on the planet. Nine hundred thousand different kinds of insects are known to exist. At any given time, it is estimated that there are around 10 quintillion individual insects living.

In an effort to restore their gardens, homeowners might be tempted to eradicate any bug that moves in their yards. But gardeners would be wise to first learn which insects are hurting and which can actually help their gardens.

Harmful

Certain insects can be dangerous to animals and plants. The following are a handful of insects that can threaten the vitality of gardens.

Aphids: These insects suck on the juice needed to sustain plants.

Bald-faced hornet: Hornets tend to be an aggressive species that can sting repeatedly. A nest near can cause trouble.

Carpenter ants: These ants will

burrow into any wooden structure in and around a home causing damage.

Locusts: Various species of locust can damage plants and crops.

Treehoppers: These small, green insects mimic the look of leaves.

Red pavement ant: They feed on human food and can quickly overtake areas with their staggering numbers and deliver painful bites.

Grasshoppers: Certain grasshoppers, like the red-legged grasshopper, can decimate food crops and transfer parasites to birds when eaten as prey.

Caterpillars: Many caterpillars, the precursor to adult moths, will feed constantly on leaves, stems and other parts of plants. The tobacco hornworm moth caterpillar can damage potato and tomato plants.

Helpful

Plants depend on insects to transfer pollen as they forage, and many insects are quite beneficial to have around. While some pollinate, others are predators of other pests.

Antlion: A foe of ants, they'll help eat



and control ant populations and pollinate flowers. They pose no threat to humans.

Big dipper firefly: These colorful insects feast on earthworms, slugs and snails during the larval stage. Fireflies add drama to evening gardens with their twinkling lights.

Garden spiders: Although some spiders can be venomous, many are quite handy to have around the garden. They'll help control harmful pest populations.

Dragonflies: These arial artists that zip around the yard are consuming smaller insects that would otherwise pester plants and humans.

Blue-winged wasp: This wasp attacks the larvae of Japanese beetles, helping to control beetle populations.

Bees and butterflies: Butterflies and bees are some of the best pollinators out there, and each can add whimsy to gardens.

Birds eat tons of bugs and come spring they're looking for places to nest.

To find great information about nest boxes for every bird species, check out NestWatch.org from Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You'll find proper dimensions for the boxes as well as how to make boxes predator proof, managing invasive species, and more!



Shade-tolerant plants help to complete landscapes

Plants need sunlight to thrive and grow, but some need less sunlight than others. People who find their landscapes are less supportive to sun-loving plants can choose from a variety of shade-tolerant plants, shrubs and trees.

Shade tolerance refers to a plant's ability to withstand low levels of light. Certain plants have adapted this feature to survive in the wild. Plants that grow at the base of forest floors, for example, will get less sunlight than others outside of the tree canopy. Such adaptations enable a wide variety of foliage to grow even though they are not exposed to much sunlight.

Sun-loving plants often have broad leaves and expend significant energy to capture sunlight for photosynthesis, shade-tolerant plants expend less energy and tend to be more efficient consumers of soil nutrients and sunlight.

Penn State Extension's Plant and Pests division says the amount of shade a plant is growing under will directly affect the density of the foliage and the plant's flowering and fruiting characteristics. Blending shade-tolerant plants into the landscape can be an effective use of space. Before choosing plants for an existing landscape, it's important to assess the level of shade or sun the plants will receive.

• **Heavy shade:** Heavy shade is when no direct sunlight reaches a plant. This occurs at the base of northern-facing walls or beneath thick tree canopies.

• Full sun: Areas that receive full sun enjoy direct sunlight between six and eight hours per day.

• Moderate shade: These sites have reflected sunlight that may come off of water features.

• Light shade: Plants in these areas will get partially filtered or dappled sunlight.

Once homeowners understand which type of shade they are dealing with, they can visit the nursery and select their plants. Most greenery comes with care instructions that include recommendations regarding the amount of shade/sunlight the plant will need to do well. If further assistance is needed, a knowledgeable employee can make suggestions based on landscape needs.

Those who are looking for shadetolerant shrubs, plants or trees can consult the following list.

• **Bleeding heart:** Bleeding heart, or Dicentra spectabilis, is typically found in woodlands. It's a perennial in the poppy family that produces mounded foliage and arching vine-like stems of heartshaped flowers in the spring.

• Amethyst flower: Browallia hybrids offer star-shaped blooms of blue and

violet. These plants will billow out of hanging baskets or containers, and they prefer warm shade or filtered sunlight.

• **Coleus:** The coleus, Solenostemon scutellarioides, is another perennial that can have a variety of different leaf colors and striations.

• Witch hazels: These are a genus in the family Hamamelidacea, which has four different species in North America. This small tree features arching branches with dense, multi-stemmed clumps. Witch hazel produces flowers in late autumn when other plants are sparse.

• **Bayberry:** Myrica pensylvanica can grow in partial shade as a hedge or natural property divider. The leaves of this shrub are aromatic when crushed. The shrub will produce tiny, gray/white fruits in late summer.

• **English Ivy:** Also known as Hedera helix, this trailing plant is widely cultivated as an ornamental plant. It will spread easily and can become invasive.

Some shade-tolerant trees are Sugar maple, Black alder, Flowering dogwood, and White spruce, among others.





Creating fairy gardens with kids

Gardening can be an enjoyable activity for adults and children alike. Gardening encourages creative thinking and can make for an ecofriendly activity as well.

Adding a touch of whimsy to gardening can make it that much more attractive to children. Perhaps that is why fairy gardens have become so popular among youngsters. Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurse and enjoy indoors. Here are six steps to get your fairy garden up and running.

1. Choose your container or location. Decide where to place the fairy garden. Hollowed-out tree stumps are both contained and outdoors, and kids may feel like the fairies inhabited this neglected area of the yard and made it their own. Otherwise, use containers you already have, such as old pots, hanging baskets, picnic baskets or

cookie tins. Wooden birdhouses with their roofs removed also can make for clever places to house the gardens.

2. Choose a theme. Fairy houses can take on any theme their creators prefer. Themes help children decide what to include in their gardens. For example, a seaside retreat may work well with little reclining chairs, sea grasses and



succulents. You can then complete the theme by adding some seashells and colored stones.

3. Draw up your design. Before securing anything in the container or digging into your garden bed, sketch out a garden design. This gives you an idea of how the finished product will look. Even before planting, gently place plants and other components in their spots and move them

around accordingly until you find the desired look.

4. Include similar-needs plants. Mixing plants that have different requirements can make it challenging to care for the fairy garden, so select plants that require similar levels of sunlight, prefer similar soil conditions and require roughly the same amount of watering. Herbs are a smart choice because they stay small and are easily maintained.

5. Don't forget a fairy dwelling. You will need to add a house for the fairies to inhabit. Small bird houses can work, but you also can consider old teapots, bird-nesting boxes or even homemade houses assembled out of bark and twigs. Use your imagination and the garden will take on a life of its own.

6. Invite the fairies. Children can invite fairies to take up residence (fairies often show up at night and tend to remain unseen), or children can create their own fairies using craft materials.

Fairy gardens are a fun way to spend time with kids and once you get started, you may want to create entire fairy villages!



Six easy spring cleaning projects

Warmer days are here and what better way to spend them than . cleaning? Although enjoying the great outdoors is probably high on many a to-do list come spring, by the end of winter, homes can probably do with a much-needed overhaul. Owners and renters can rely on temperate days to throw open the windows and engage in some easy spring-cleaning projects. The earlier one begins spring cleaning, the more quickly he or she will be able to head outside and bask in the warm spring sun.

Spring cleaning tasks can be stretched out across several days to make the jobs more manageable. While certain spring cleaning tasks can be time-consuming, many projects can be started and completed in 30 minutes or less.

1. Looking up

Start by looking up at ceilings, molding and ceiling fans. Chances are strong that some cobwebs and dust have formed in these areas. Always begin cleaning by working from the top downward so you don't have to clean any tables countertops or floors twice. Static-charged dusting cloths work well to catch and contain dust. Use a pillowcase on ceiling fan blades to clear the dust and keep it from cascading to the floor.

2. Blinds and curtains

Heavy window treatments can be removed and replaced with more gauzy fabrics. This lets in more light and warmth from the sun. Many curtains can be freshened up right in the laundry, but blinds may require a bit more effort. If the blinds can be snapped out of the brackets, place them in a tub full of vinegar, dish soap and water. Allow them to soak and then rinse with the shower nozzle. Stationary blinds can be cleaned with using an old sock over your hand dipped in a vinegarand-water solution.

3. Change linens

Remove and launder bed linens. While the linens are in the wash, thoroughly dust all furniture and vacuum the carpets. Move furniture so you can reach areas where dust gathers, such as under the bed or dresser.



4. Grout cleaner

Grade school science lessons can be put to use as you look to remove stubborn dirt. Combining baking soda and vinegar produces a reaction that causes the formation of gassy bubbles. These bubbles can help to break up dirt that clings to crevices, such as grout between tiles. Some light scrubbing and then subsequent rinsing can rid surfaces of hard-to-remove dirt.

5. Vacuum vent intakes

Many houses are heated by forced-air systems. The air intake vents can become clogged with dust and other debris. Vacuum these vents so that air flow is not impeded. Let the heat run for a few minutes to catch any small particles that become dislodged, and then change the furnace filter.

6. Clean out the refrigerator

Now is a great time to remove any of those mystery containers growing fuzzy experiments in the back of the refrigerator. Take the food out of the refrigerator and use a food-safe cleaner to scour the shelves and inside of crisper drawers.

Spring cleaning doesn't have to be a headache. Break up the work into manageable chunks of time, and projects won't feel like such a hassle.



Today's paint products offer versatility

Today's paint products offer homeowners the flexibility to easily change the look and "feel" of a room - or a houseful of rooms, including walls, cabinets, furniture, accessories and trim items - by changing the color of a painted surface or adding a decorative painted effect.

Woodcraft has all the paints and related accessories and supplies to "recolor" your home. Using Black Dog, a pure black, and Clean Canvas, a pure white, homeowners can create an unlimited number of shades that can be mixed using 13 additional colors. The water-based ultra matte chalky finish interior paint is easy to use, selfleveling and low-VOC, and it covers in one coat. It can be used on finished and unfinished surfaces like furniture, woodwork, metal, glass and more and does not require priming. The companion Black Dog Salvage Guard Dog Topcoat Paint Protector is tough enough for floors and can be used for all types of indoor projects, such as cabinets, countertops, furniture, and decorative items.

Additional paint options

General Finishes Milk Paint is a high-tech, water-based acrylic paint for interior and exterior use that is available in more than two dozen colors. It is easy to apply, durable and simple to repair and can be mixed to create new colors or combined with General Finishes water-based glazes and stains to create custom paints and decorative effects such as distressing, antiquing and color washing.

Rust-Oleum® Chalked Paint is a water-based, ultramatte finish for interior applications that can be used



alone as a simple covering paint or to achieve decorative effects such as distressing or dry brushing to give any project a one-of-a-kind look with a vintage feel. It applies easily with brush or roller; spraying is not recommended.

If using an interior paint for exterior projects such as doors, shutters, or porches, an exterior topcoat will need to be added for protection from the elements.

General Finishes Exterior 450 is fortified with UV absorbers to minimize fading and built-in mildewcides to help retard the growth of mold and fungus. Plus, Exterior 450 is fast and ready to sand in an hour in ideal conditions.

CrystaLac Exterior Finish is a water-based, flexible, UV-stabilized, waterproof, clear topcoat for exterior furniture, doors and crafts. For best results, apply between 60°F and 80°F. This paint dries to the touch in about 15 minutes, but wait two to four hours to recoat.

Handy helpers for painting

• Wagner Home Décor Paint Sprayer. Is a great first-step product for those new to HVLP spraying. It's easy to use and sprays milk paint, stains, sealers and lacquers. Check manufacturer's directions for use in sprayers.

• The versatile Vika TwofoldTM is configured for use as a 21.7"-high scaffold or a workbench that is 47.6" long X 18.7" deep X 31.8" high with a tool tray, drilling hole, protractor and ruler inscribed into the MDF work surface. • QuikBENCH® Portable Workbench is a lightweight, easy-to-set-up portable workbench with a 30" x 24" work surface that is 32" high and capable of holding up to 300 lbs. Convert two QuikBENCHES® to sawhorses, and together they can hold up to 2,000 lbs.

· Painter's Pyramids, New and Improved 10-pack allows homeowners to paint, flip and paint without having to wait for the first side to dry. Pyramids now include tabs and slots on the bases so they can be screwed down to make permanent finishing platforms or joined together to create more stable temporary applications.

• Redtree Finishing Brushes feature beaver tail-style hardwood handles and hand-trimmed chisel edge bristles.

• Unlike Microfiber Tack Clothes, regular tack clothes do not work for finishing with water-based products. But a washable and reusable Microfiber Tack Cloths will work.

To learn more about these and other products, visit your local Woodcraft store, call (800) 535-4482 or visit www. woodcraft.com





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Keep cool while reducing energy

When attempting to cool their homes, many homeowners' first instinct may be to adjust the air conditioning thermostat. But there are other, more energy-efficient methods to cooling a home.

According to the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors, as much as half of the energy used in homes goes toward heating and cooling. The following are a handful of ways to make heating and cooling a home more eco-friendly.

Insulate

Insulation often is associated with warmth, and rightfully so, as it is used to protect a home from cold weather. However, insulation also is effective at cooling homes. Many insulation materials work by slowing down the way heat moves through materials and into spaces. Proper insulation can provide effective resistance to the flow of heat, meaning it can help block hot air from flowing into the interior of a home. Insulation will help reduce the amount of work a cooling system will have to do to cool a home thanks to the flow of heat.

Replace air filters

Air filters trap dust, debris and other microscopic particles so they are not circulating in the air or clogging up vents. Over time, air filters can become so bogged down



with dirt that air cannot move through a home very easily, forcing cooling systems to work harder. Simply replacing the filters can help cooling systems work more efficiently.

Adjust the thermostat

Programmable thermostats allow homeowners to adjust their cooling systems for when they are home and when they are out. Air conditioners can be set at higher temperatures when residents are at work or school, and

then lowered before residents arrive home.

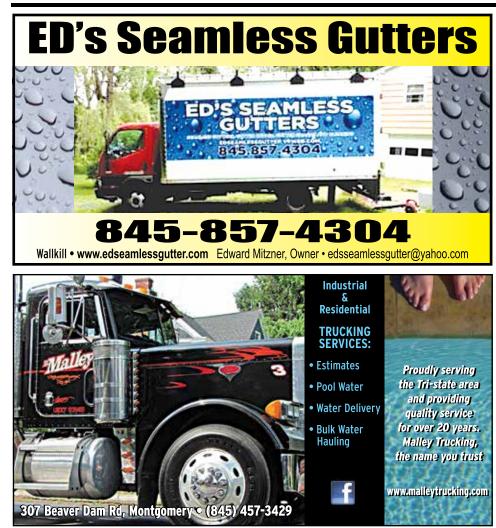
Try evaporative coolers

Sometimes called "swamp coolers," these devices can be effective in regions with low humidity. The U.S. Department of Energy notes that these coolers evaporate water into the air to provide a natural and energy-efficient means of cooling a home. When operating an evaporative cooler, windows are opened part way to allow warm indoor air to escape as it is replaced by cooled air. Unlike central air conditioning systems that recirculate the same air, evaporative coolers provide a steady stream of fresh air into the house. Plus, they consume only about onequarter of the energy consumed by more traditional air conditioners.

Ceiling fans

Fans help to circulate air throughout a home and create an effective draft. Ceiling fans are usually most effective at circulating air throughout a room. The larger the blades, the more air that can be offset by the fan. Many fans operate quietly and effectively. In some locations, fans may be all that's needed to cool a space. In others, fans may work in conjunction with air conditioners to enable homeowners to raise the thermostat by about 4 degrees.





Time to fix that sticking door

Nearly everyone has experienced a sticking door that just will not close properly. This problem may become more noticeable when temperatures rise and humidity contributes to the swelling of wood doors and frames.

According to The Family Handyman, a home improvement resource, the standard remedy for alleviating a sticking door is to remove the door and pare down the edges that are rubbing so that the door will once again swing freely. While this can solve the problem, it can be a hassle, as it requires refinishing the pared-down edge and rehanging the door. Try these shortcuts first before creating more work than might be necessary.

• Identify the problem area and rub it with a dry bar of soap. This should reduce friction and allow the door to close more easily.

· Remove humidity with a dehumidifier or by running an air conditioning unit.

• Check for loose hinges or sagging around the hinge. Tighten the fasteners to sure up the door and create better alignment.

• Spray the hinges with lubricant if you suspect sticking is originating because of



squeaky hinges.

· Look for obstructions at the bottom of the door. Is the door dragging on carpeting or being caught on something on the floor? It may be a matter of simply clearing away the obstruction



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Freshen up your home for the spring season

Fresh flowers, new throw pillows and lightweight draperies are some easy ways to transform a home in time for spring's arrival.

After a few months of chilly temperatures, come spring, many homeowners are eager to throw open their windows and doors and breathe new life into their homes. Simple changes made now - even before the weather begins to warm up - can improve interior spaces and brighten the atmosphere of a home.

· Go plant shopping. Research from NASA suggests adding at least one plant in your home per 100 square feet is efficient enough to clean air. Fresh foliage also makes a home feel warm and inviting. Watering and misting plants introduces moisture into indoor air, which can make rooms overcome with dry air from heating systems feel comfortable. Just be sure to avoid overwatering plants, which can lead to mold growth.

· Swap out throw pillows. Accent pillows on beds and sofas are quick and inexpensive ways to add new bursts of color to rooms. You may be able to make over a room's entire color scheme with new pillows. Invest in pillows that you can switch with each season so your decor will never look tired or dull.

· Clean existing light fixtures. Another way to brighten the mood in a home is to periodically clean light fixtures to make sure they are working effectively. Spend time dusting them and cleaning off any accumulated debris. If need be, switch out old lamp shades for newer ones that let more light shine through. If inadequate lighting is a problem no matter how many lamps you have, consult with an electrician about installing more overhead and accent lighting.



Fresh flowers, new throw pillows and lightweight draperies are some easy ways to transform a home in time for spring's arrival.

THIS SPRING,

GET A GREAT

· Give rugs and floors a deep cleaning. Recirculated air may be full of dust and other microscopic particles that end up blowing throughout your home. Also, it's easy to track in dirt and other materials on your shoes that become imbedded in carpeting. At least once a year, rent or enlist the surfaces of carpet and upholstery cleaners to give floors a thorough cleaning. You may be surprised at how clean and fresh a home looks and smells once rugs and carpets are deep-cleaned. You also can make a dry carpet cleaner using baking soda, corn starch and desired fresh herbs for fragrance. Sprinkle and then vacuum up after a few hours.

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· Color-coordinate bookshelves. Group all books with similarly colored covers together for an instant and eye-appealing look

Simmer some homemade home *deodorizer*. In a large pot, boil water and some scented herbs, such as rosemary, citrus rinds, vanilla, or lavender. The aroma will waft through the home, creating a pleasing scent.

• Swap out new window treatments. Lightweight draperies or new blinds or shades can transform the look of a room. Be sure to keep curtains and blinds open during the day to maximize the hours of sunlight. Sewing new window treatments is a great option as well as almost new curtains from garage sales and thrift stores.

Homeowners can make some simple changes for an easy, breezy impact on their home decor.

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