

Spring Inside-Out



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Drew Co. Master Gardeners active in community

By **ASHLEY HOGG**
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With 35 active members, the Drew County Master Gardeners are thriving within the area. Comprised of men and women of mostly retired age, the Master Gardeners are responsible for many projects in Monticello and throughout Southeast Arkansas including plants at the Sports Complex, Drew Central School District and much more.

Their upcoming plant sale is the main fundraiser for the year. Saturday, May 7, will be held at the Farmer's Market by the Drew County Courthouse, in conjunction with the opening day of Market in the Park.

The group plans to have flowering plants and fruits and vegetables available to purchase at the plant sale.

"We sometimes will have trees for purchase but a lot of the plants

come from our own gardens," Louisa Smith, charter member and past president said.

A group solely comprised of volunteers, the Master Gardeners are required to complete training hours and work hours each year.

Annual projects include: judging plants at the Drew County Fair; maintaining and updating the landscaping at the Drew County Courthouse; Participating in Market in the Park; Facilitating landscaping activities at the local library; Working with the 'Lil Mates' Gardeners at Drew Central Elementary School; Maintain the walking trail area in the Warren prairie; Maintain landscaping on the downtown square, Courthouse, and Fire Station; and establish and maintain pollinator plots around the city in collaboration with Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

The groups newest project is working with 4-H students and the local

Baptist Home on a six week project for students.

To become a Master Gardener, the first step is to contact your county extension office and inquire as to when the next training will be.

As horticultural trained volunteers, Master Gardeners extend research-based information through demonstration and educational programs using horticulture best practices, strengthening communities and families throughout Arkansas.

Master Gardeners serve their local community by answering questions, researching specific problems, planting educational and therapeutic gardens, providing public speakers and much more.

After completing your 40-hour horticulture training you are required to complete 40 working hours and 20 learning hours during your first year. In your subsequent years you will provide only 20 working hours and

20 learning hours.

Following a comprehensive training in horticulture, Master Gardeners have one year from the end of training to complete the agreed upon volunteer time. Usually the volunteer work is done within the geographical area served by the unit office conducting the training. Special arrangement can be made for some tasks outside one of the units.

Master Gardener volunteers are responsible to an Extension agent to complete and report planned activities. If daytime employment interferes with volunteer work, arrangements can be made for work to be done at Extension night or weekend functions. Sometimes the volunteer's work can be done outside the office, E.G., research, writing, artwork. Many activities are interagency projects and involve working with parks and recreation departments, nursing homes, city departments, etc.

Avoid these mistakes in the turkey woods

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Col. Brad Young isn't just chief of law enforcement for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, he's a dyed-in-the-wool hunter who was introduced to the turkey woods by his grandfather when he was 7 years old. During more than 30 years in the turkey woods, he's learned quite a few tricks through trial-and-error, and has seen many face frustration when they wear a turkey vest for the first time. While he's not about to give up the goods on his favorite turkey hunting locations, Young does have some great advice for everyone as we begin to see people heading to the woods in search of their first Arkansas gobbler.

Safety first

Before giving some solid advice for beginners, the first thing Young speaks about is the importance of safety in the turkey woods.

"Turkey hunting, in particular, requires people to really pay attention to their target and follow all the safety rules taught in Hunter Education," Young said. "Hunters are camouflaged and sitting on the ground at the same level as the game you're pursuing. Some are putting out decoys that can look pretty realistic. At the end of the



day, we all want to go home with good hunting stories and hopefully a bird, so I always have to start with safety."

Young says the practice of "fanning" has become more common, which makes it even more imperative to see every bit of that gobbler before you pull the trigger. Hunters will take a fan of a bird and hold it directly in front of them while lying on the ground, inching up to a bird. "It works well, but puts the hunter directly behind the fan."

Get to know your gear

Preparing for the season isn't just about practicing on your calls. Take some time to really get to know the equipment you'll be using, so it's ready to go at a moment's notice. When that bird fires off back at your soft yelps

isn't the time to figure out how to flip down the seat on your new turkey vest or discover your facemask never got put in your pocket.

"You also want to know exactly how your shotgun is going to pattern and what your effective range with it really is," Young said. "With all the work you put into getting into range of a bird, you don't want to shoot and end up with a cripple. You owe it to yourself and the bird to make a quick, efficient shot that anchors him on the spot."

Know the score

Google Earth, OnX and a host of oth-

er online scouting tools are available to really get to know the area where you plan to hunt; use them. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's website even has interactive maps that show WMA boundaries as well as wildlife openings that may be worth looking into as possible strutting areas.

"When you go out to an area to listen for birds, you want to know where things are around you," Young said. "If you hear a bird, but know there's a creek, road or some other obstacle that will cause him to hang up, you want to know where it is and how you could get

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around it and set up without spooking the bird on the day of the hunt.”

Don't just rely on the aerial images and topo maps to tell you the lay of the land, either. Take a few mornings to quietly walk the woods and learn a little about where the birds want to be. You can't do all the scouting from the couch if you want to see success.

Silent scouting

One of the worst things hunters can do when preparing for turkey season is to let the cat out of the bag before the season even starts. Ideally, you should have already been looking for promising spots before the season is only a week or two away, but if you are still in scouting mode, it's time to keep it quiet. The sooner turkeys figure out that people are in the woods, the sooner they shut up and get hard to hunt.

“Sometimes it can sound like a hootfest out there with all the owl calls people are blowing to try to locate a gobbler,” Young said. “But if you'll just go out before sunrise, find a good place to sit and listen, and let the woods wake up on their own, you'll learn where the birds are and where they want to be without ever letting them know you're around. I don't even bring a locator call with me. There are plenty of things that will make a gobbler sound off without me adding

to it and maybe tipping him off that something isn't right in the woods.”

Play a little hard to get

While the subject of calling is being discussed, Just because you bought a new call or practiced for hours on end to get just the right volume with that new split reed diaphragm doesn't mean that turkey is going to be impressed with more noise. Young stresses the importance of taking it easy with the amount of calling you do once the season is open. Just as in life, sounding a little too eager is a dead giveaway that there's a red flag hiding just out of sight.

“You really have to start slow and take that bird's temperature with a few soft yelps or clucks. Let the gobbler's response dictate how you handle the hunt,” Young said. “If he responds quickly, he might come in on a string with some aggressive calling, but if he has some hens roosted with him or has been pressured by hunters, he may spook if you call too much.”

Give him room to work

If you locate a bird and know where he's roosting, it can be tempting to get close with the notion that you'll be able to get him even if other hunters hear him gobble. Young advises to keep a little distance between the roost tree and where you set up in the

morning.

“It's rare that I'm ever setting up closer than 80 yards from where I think that bird is roosting,” Young said. “That gobbler may be roosting with hens nearby, who can spot you sneaking in and ruin the day. You also have to give the birds the opportunity to fly down and walk to you. Even if you don't bump the birds off the roost, they may glide right on top of you, not letting you make adjustments until they've passed. It's always easier to work the bird where he wants to go then try to get him to turn around to where he's been.”

Patience is a virtue

Another area where many hunters fail is giving up on a bird as soon as they stop gobbling. Young says that just because a bird isn't hammering back at every call you make doesn't mean it's gone.

“He may be heading your way, or he may be distracted at the moment, but he knows where those sounds came from and if it's going to happen you don't want to give up too early,” Young said.

Patience doesn't just mean waiting an extra 10 minutes before giving up on a bird that got quiet early in the morning, it means coming back after a bird that you know is there another



Photo courtesy of AGFC

time and giving it another shot. That turkey may be with a bunch of hens one morning and not willing to come to you, but they may go off to nest the next day or even that afternoon, leaving him lonely and looking.

“Patience has probably killed more turkeys than anything else,” Young said. “When everything goes right, that bird will come running, but more often than not, you're going to have to wait and know when to stay put. On a recent hunt, I set up at 6 a.m. and didn't seal the deal until 2:30 that afternoon.



Photo courtesy of AGFC



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Photo courtesy of AGFC

That was an extreme case, but I knew there were birds in the area and it was a matter of timing.”

Make memories

Turkey hunting can be a solitary pursuit, and Young still enjoys solo

hunts when he’s pursuing a trophy bird, but he also takes time to share experiences with his family.

“Everyone in my family loves to get out and turkey hunt; it’s a true family tradition,” Young said. “My wife and

daughter really enjoy it and have taken good turkeys, and my son can’t wait until he’s old enough to join us.”

In addition to the added benefit of company on those sometimes long drives, having some family and

friends along can really create those moments you’ll look back on fondly in later years. Hunting stories are always better when there’s someone to share the tale.

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Fun ways to celebrate the arrival of spring

Spring is a season of rebirth in more ways than one. Spring is when certain animals emerge from hibernation, while many species lay eggs or give birth this time of year. Flow-

ers and trees also bloom in spring, providing spectacular foliage and awe-inspiring color.

People also may feel like they have

See **ARRIVAL** Page 6



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How to prepare landscapes for new plants

New plants can add much to a landscape. Whether they're replacing plants that are no longer thriving or being added to supplement an existing landscape, new plants are an affordable way to give a home's exterior a whole new look.

Much consideration is given to which plants to add to a landscape. That's understandable, as homeowners want to choose plants that will thrive and won't compromise the health of surrounding plants and trees. Before planting or even choosing plants, it's important to plan for new additions to a landscape. Preparing the landscape can inform homeowners about which plants to purchase and can ensure they thrive after planting.

- Document sunlight exposure. Plants have different needs, and one of the biggest differences between species is the amount of sunlight they need to thrive. According to Penn State Extension, plants characterized as "full sun" require six or more hours of sunlight per day, while those considered "partial sun" need between four and six hours of sunlight per day. Plants designated as "partial shade" need two to four hours of sun per day, while "shade" plants need less than two hours of sunlight a day. Documenting sunlight exposure in advance gives homeowners an idea of which plants should be planted and where they should be planted. Jot down these observations in a journal over several weeks and then choose plants that will thrive in each area.

- Test the soil. A soil pH test is a simple and quick way to determine the acidity of soil. Soil pH levels will indicate how likely a plant is to thrive in a given spot. High levels won't necessarily mean an area should be avoided, as some plants thrive in acidic soils. Additional soil tests can determine other characteristics, such as the nutrient levels of soil and the amount of organic mat-



ter it contains. Each of these variables can help homeowners make the right choices as they introduce new plants to their properties.

- Consider local wildlife. If local wildlife makes its presence known on a property, homeowners may want to take proactive steps prior to planting anything new. A new fence might prevent animals like deer from getting in, but that likely won't do much to repel smaller animals like squirrels, rabbits or foxes. If wildlife is a concern, homeowners can seek advice at their local garden center about which plants certain animals are likely to ignore. Homeowners who want to attract wildlife can do the same in reverse, choosing plants wildlife will be drawn to. Homeowners who want to deter wildlife should erect fencing or other barriers prior to planting.

- Clear space if necessary. Plants grow up and out, and cramped quarters can make it hard for new plants to thrive. Some may thrive but only at the expense of other plants. If necessary, clear space prior to planting to ensure plants have ample space to grow.

Some pre-planting landscape preparation can ensure new plants thrive.



ARRIVAL

Continued from Page 5

a new lease on life as they shake away the doldrums of winter and embrace longer hours of sunlight and warmer temperatures. The arrival of spring is worthy of celebration, and these activities and ideas can be enjoyable ways to spend the first day of spring.

- Spend time outdoors. One is never too old for a picnic in a park or a bike ride along the trails. Spending time outdoors is beneficial because it exposes people to sunlight, which is a precursor to the development of vitamin D. Vitamin D affects muscles, joints and tissues. It also can affect mood.

- Plant a tree. Honor the first day of spring, and Earth Day shortly thereafter, by planting trees. Trees provide habitats for wildlife, create shade, reduce air pollution by filtering the air, and produce oxygen. A sapling is a manageable tree to plant and something children can do as well.

- Enjoy spring crafts. Grab an inexpensive canvas and paint a landscape that is in full bloom. Use quick-set

plaster to create stepping stones embedded with mosaic glass pieces for color that can be added to the backyard.

- Host a spring potluck. Put fresh spring vegetables and fruits on display. Options include artichokes, apricots, asparagus, carrots, dandelion greens, and radishes. Put together a pasta primavera, which essentially is a spring pasta dish laden with fresh vegetables.

- Decorate with flowers. Bring fresh flowers indoors and put them on display in vases or table centerpieces. Cut stems on a 45-degree angle underwater to help flowers last longer. In addition, choose floral themed curtains and throw pillows to add some spring decor.

- Create a water feature. The sound and sights of cascading water can be both relaxing and picturesque. A water feature can be something as simple as a small fountain or more elaborate like a koi pond.

Spring is a time of year when people can enjoy seasonal activities that make the most of the warmer weather and blooming landscape.

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6 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.

1. 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.

2. Assess the soil.

Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce strong, hardy plants, according to the gardening resource GrowVeg. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

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 mélange 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

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Tips when painting shutters

There are many ways to give a home's exterior a new look. Though it might not be as grand as replacing siding, repainting shutters affords homeowners a chance to try a bold new color or simply replace fading colors, and each option can make a home more appealing.

Homeowners who have never before painted shutters can consider these tips as they prepare to begin the project.

- **Don't go it alone.** The most important step homeowners can take before beginning a shutter painting project is to enlist the help of a friend or family member. Someone to hold the ladder can make the project safer. Enlisting a third individual, working on the ground, who can take the shutters from the person on the ladder may be a wise move as well.

- **Remove the shutters.** When painting shutters, homeowners want to remove them from the house. It might seem easier to leave the shutters on and then paint them carefully with a brush, but that's both time-consuming and a potential safety risk. Some shutters are installed

with fasteners that look like screws, but that appearance is misleading and shutters installed in this way cannot be removed with a drill or screwdriver. Homeowners should determine which material their shutters are made from, and then look for a corresponding removal tutorial on YouTube. Homeowners who can't find one can contact the manufacturer or a contractor to determine the best way to remove the shutters.

- **Clean the shutters prior to painting them.** It's likely been years since the shutters were last painted, and over that time they've no doubt accumulated a lot of dirt and mildew. Homeowners can try a garden hose to clean them, and if that doesn't work a power washer may be needed. If using a power washer with wooden shutters, be especially careful, as the force of the power washer may damage the wood. Vinyl shutters, like vinyl siding, can typically handle a strong power washing without being damaged. Wooden shutters also will need to have old paint removed before they

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4 popular colors for 2022

Home design trends come and go. The fleeting nature of such trends can make it hard for homeowners to commit to a particular style, especially if they want their home decor to stay as current as possible. Paint provides one way to stay current and refresh a home's interior without investing in new furniture and home accessories. Paint trends change, but these colors are already making the rounds in 2022.

- **Very Peri:** Very Peri is the Pantone® 2022 Color of the Year. A brand new shade of blue, Very Peri was designed to rekindle some of the qualities that the color blue represents while simultaneously complementing a modern perspective. The home design pros at HGTV recommend pairing Very Peri with neutrals like taupes and creams or deeper shades like navy or brown.

- **Evergreen Fog:** The paint experts at Sherwin-Williams note that this shade of green is symbolic of nature and a color associated with revitalization and growth. Those characteristics make it great for homeowners who are looking to create a new beginning with their home interiors, particularly in relaxing spaces like living rooms and bedrooms.

- **Breezeway:** Breezeway from Behr® is another popular color that provides a soft look. Breezeway is the Behr® Color of the Year for 2022 and is described as a silvery green shade with cool undertones. Behr® touts the versatility of Breezeway, which the company indicates inspires awe in bedrooms, living rooms or hallways. Breezeway pairs well with creamy white, taupe, softened black, and nuanced pink.

- **Gilded Linen:** Gilded Linen from Valspar® is ideal for homeowners who want a color to organize and connect spaces throughout their homes. Gilded Linen is a minimalist white that mixes well with natural elements like wood and greenery. The soft tone of Gilded Linen makes it suitable in a variety of rooms, which is one reason why it's so popular in homes with open floor plans.



SHUTTERS

Continued from Page 8

can be repainted. The experts at TrueValue® note that paint can be removed from wooden shutters with a sander or by applying a chemical paint stripper.

- **Prime wooden shutters before painting.** Though vinyl shutters won't need to be primed unless the old paint is peeling, wooden shutters must be primed before they're painted. Priming can be a tedious process, so homeowners should leave themselves ample time for this part of the project.

- **Rent an airless sprayer to**

paint the shutters. Many hardware or paint stores rent airless sprayers, and these can be the quickest way to paint shutters. Professionals typically apply two coats of paint, and the first coat should be allowed to fully dry before the second coat is applied.

- **Re-hang the shutters after they have fully dried.** Only after the shutters have fully dried should they be placed back on the house. Employ the same buddy system when re-hanging the shutters, having one person hold the ladder and another pass each one up one at a time.

Painting shutters can give a home a fresh look without costing homeowners a lot of money.



REPELLANT

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to drought or hot summers 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, summer and fall. Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.

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Signs of electrical problems in a home



According to the home safety experts at UL (formerly known as Underwriters Laboratories), learning to recognize warning signs of electrical wiring issues can greatly lower the risk of house fires. House fires pose a significant threat, as the Electrical Safety Foundation International notes that electrical malfunctions cause more than 50,000 house fires each year. UL indicates that the majority of those house

Homeowners know that all sorts of issues can affect a home. Issues can run the gamut from the merely annoying to the unsafe. Electrical issues fall into the latter category, posing a significant safety hazard if left unchecked.

fires can be prevented, and learning to recognize signs of a electrical problems in a home is a key component of home fire prevention.

• **Dimming or flickering lights:** The UL notes that light fixtures do not

typically draw a substantial amount of power, so dimming or flickering lights is not often indicative of an issue with a fixture. Dimming or flickering lights could indicate that the circuit the lights are on is overburdened, most likely by large appliances sharing the circuit with the lights. If dimming and flickering lights are a problem, homeowners can speak to an electrician about moving the fixtures to another circuit or installing a new line specifically for major appliances.

• **Odors:** Odor emanating from an outlet, fuse box or breaker panel should be reported to an electrician immediately. The odor, which some homeowners indicate smells like fish, could be a result of an overheated circuit. Odor coming from an outlet, fuse box or breaker panel could indicate a significant electrical issue, so homeowners should not hesitate to report this problem to an electrician. Odors can sometimes travel through HVAC systems as well, so homeowners should take note and call an electrician even if their outlets do not smell.

• **Hot outlets/switch plates:** Outlets

and/or switch plates that are hot to the touch are another indicator of an electrical issue. UL notes that outlets that become hot even when nothing is plugged into them could be wired incorrectly. In such instances, an electrician will need to fix the issue, and in the meantime it may be best for homeowners to flip the breaker or remove the fuse for the outlet.

• **Frequently blown fuses or tripped breakers:** According to UL, circuit breakers and fuses have a built-in fail-safe that is designed to prevent overloading. Sometimes a tripped breaker is a result of an aging appliance. One way to detect that is to plug in the product to more than one outlet in the house. If each breaker trips, then the appliance is likely to blame. However, if using the same outlet continues to trip the breaker regardless of what's plugged into it, then the circuit requires the attention of an electrician.

Electrical issues increase the risk for home fires. Fortunately, such issues are generally preventable and often easily remedied by a qualified electrician.

DID YOU KNOW?

Homeowners should give due consideration to whether or not plants are considered invasive species before introducing new plants on their properties. According to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, invasive species of plants can lead to the extinction of native plants and animals. Invasive plant species also can reduce biodiversity and cause

significant fundamental disruptions to local ecosystems. Though non-native plants are often cherished for their unique looks, homeowners planting new gardens or supplementing existing gardens with new plants are urged to plant only native species. Such an approach benefits plants and also local wildlife that depends on native plant species for food and cover.

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How to keep outdoor living areas safe

Outdoor living spaces are a wildly popular trend. A 2021 survey conducted on behalf of the International Casual Furnishings Association and American Home Furnishings Alliance found that 90 percent of individuals surveyed felt outdoor living spaces are more valuable than ever. That popularity was evident during the pandemic, during which 23 percent of respondents indicated they bought new furniture while 18 percent acknowledged building a deck.

The excitement of seeing a new or renovated outdoor living area can make it easy to overlook safety. But outdoor living areas, particularly those that include entertaining areas with televisions, lighting and other electronics, can pose significant safety hazards if homeowners don't take some necessary precautions.

• **Use an appropriate extension cord.** String lights above outdoor living spaces like decks and patios can create a warm, relaxing night-

See **OUTDOOR** Page 14



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Tips to organize your cluttered kitchen

Kitchens serve as the heart of many homes. Thanks to the popularity of open floor plans, kitchens also tend to be highly visible from nearby spaces, such as family rooms and even main entryways. A messy, cluttered kitchen can be an inefficient eyesore that's visible from various locations in a home. That makes getting organized in the kitchen a worthwhile goal.

The following are some tips to help homeowners organize their kitchens. **Start with the utensils**

Utensils come in all shapes and sizes. Take inventory of your utensils, discarding or donating items you don't use. Next, designate drawers or countertop storage solutions for the utensils you use most often. Place them within easy reach, and take into account your dominant hand for placement.

Categorize your pantry

Empty the pantry, paying attention to staples you regularly use. Then figure out a system for categorization that works for your household. Perhaps place all baking essentials together, such as flour, oil, baking

soda, and cocoa powder. Maybe you need to designate a "kids corner" in the pantry where you keep fruit snacks, granola bars and breakfast cereals. Use uniformly shaped containers to store packaged foods so you're not contending with oddly shaped boxes and bags.

Use extra wall or ceiling space

Large pots and pans can eat up cabinet space or clutter the inside of an oven for those who don't have any other space. While your decorative enamel Dutch oven might fit nicely on a shelf or counter, cast-iron pans and skillets can be hung from durable hooks over an island or near the stove.

Organize under the sink

It can be difficult to keep cleaning products tidy and within reach. Try installing a short tension rod inside the cabinet and use it to hang spray bottles, rubber gloves and cleaning cloths.

Use kitchen cabinet rollouts

A shortage of storage space in cab-
See **KITCHEN** Page 14



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Telling signs 3 common insects are infesting a lawn

Well-maintained lawns are a byproduct of hard work. That hard work is a point of pride for homeowners who spend countless hours throughout spring, summer and fall tending to their lawns.

All that hard work can be compromised when uninvited guests, namely insects, show up in a lawn. Insect infestations can turn a normally pristine and lush green lawn into a brown and sickly eyesore. Identifying which type of insect is damaging a lawn is the first step toward returning that lawn to its green glory. These are three common lawn insects and signs that they're infesting a lawn.

1. Grubs

Grubs like to feast on the roots of grass right below the surface. Michigan State University Extension Turf & Landscape reports that grub damage can appear from March to early May or from mid-September to early November. The lawn and garden experts at GardenTech® note that wilted grass blades are often the first indicator of a grub infestation, which is followed by patches of brown turf and eventually death. Crows, skunks and moles eat grubs, so the sight of them in a lawn could indicate an infestation.

2. Chinch bugs

The experts at BobVila.com report that chinch bugs are not necessarily problematic when their populations are limited to around 10 to 15 bugs per square foot of lawn. In such instances, chinch bug populations are generally controlled by ants and ladybugs. However, extreme heat and drought, problems that have plagued various regions in North America in recent years, reduce the populations of bugs that feed on chinch bugs, thus increasing the population of these unwanted guests that feed on grass. GardenTech® indicates that damage from chinch bugs is most visible between June and September. That damage begins with grass taking on a purple tinge before it turns yellow and then brown after wilting.

3. Cutworms

The lawn care experts at Scotts® note that cutworms are moth larvae that hide in the thatch layer of a lawn during the day before emerging at night to feed on grass blades. Patches of brown grass between one and two inches in width is a sign of cutworm infestation. Homeowners who notice a growing number of birds pecking away in their lawns may have a cutworm infestation, which can be confirmed by peeling up a section of damaged grass and looking for cutworms, which are brown, gray or black and tend to be around two inches long.

The good news is that grub, chinch bug and cutworm populations can be controlled. Local turf specialists can recommend strategies to curtail such populations and help homeowners restore their lawns to full health.

KITCHEN

Continued from Page 13

inets can be remedied with rollouts. They provide additional capacity to cabinets and make it easier to find items, instead of having to dig at the back of dim cabinet recesses.

Tame your container collection

It's tempting to save all of those take-out containers or empty

margarine tubs for leftovers. But if there's an avalanche every time you open up a cabinet to reach for a container, you probably have too many. Invest in one type of storage container so you can nest the containers and lids for ultimate organization.

An organized kitchen is more attainable than it may seem. Some simple strategies can help homeowners make these home hubs less cluttered and more calming.

OUTDOOR

Continued from Page 12

time vibe. Those lights need to be plugged in, which increases the risk for electrical accidents. When utilizing an extension cord outdoors, never use a cord designated for indoor use. Outdoor extension cords are better insulated than cords made for indoor use. That insulation provides better protection against the elements, including sunlight, changes in temperature and moisture. When using an extension cord outdoors, make sure the cord is secured and not left lying on a deck or patio where it can easily become a tripping hazard.

• **Consider fencing.** Fencing can make an outdoor living space more private and safe. Local laws may mandate that pools be enclosed with fencing, but even living spaces without pools can be made safer with the installation of a fence. Firepits are wildly popular, as more than 35 percent of homeowners who responded to the ICFA survey acknowledged their intention to purchase new firepits in 2021. Adding fencing around areas with firepits establishes boundaries, which is a must for homeowners

with small children. Fencing also makes it harder for local wildlife to gain access to a property, which can decrease residents' risk for tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease.

• **Purchase an outdoor television.** Outdoor televisions can be expensive, but the cost of such devices will depend on what homeowners are looking for. Homeowners who plan to spend ample time outdoors watching games, movies and their favorite shows may feel a high-end outdoor television, which can cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000, is well worth the investment. But those working with smaller budgets can find a quality 4K outdoor TV for around \$2,000. That's still a steep price tag, but the electronics experts at P.C. Richard & Son note that outdoor TVs are designed with safety features that indoor televisions don't have. For example, outdoor TVs can self-regulate temperature and moisture levels, greatly reducing the risk of electrical issues.

Outdoor living spaces are wildly popular. Homeowners are urged to prioritize safety when designing and enjoying outdoor entertaining areas at their homes.



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Poisonous plants to avoid around the house

Homeowners must consider various factors when choosing plants to display in and around their homes. That's because, despite their beauty, various plants are toxic to humans and animals.

Avoiding potentially poisonous plants can prevent injuries and even deaths. Here's a list of some plants homeowners may want to avoid.

- **Rhododendron:** Rhododendrons produce flower clusters that bloom in the spring. They also produce thick, glossy leaves that thrive in the fall and winter in many areas. If any part of the plant is swallowed it can cause vomiting and potentially slow the pulse.

- **Lily-of-the-valley:** This popular plant grows close to the ground, blooming bell-shaped, sweet-smelling flowers. If large doses of the toxin in this plant are ingested, it can gradually slow the heart down and potentially prove fatal.

- **Dumb cane:** The houseplant dieffenbachia, commonly known as Dumb cane, adds tropical appeal indoors. The sap of the plant causes the tongue to burn and swell, enough to block off air to the throat. It can be fatal if ingested

by both pets and humans.

- **English ivy:** This go-to draping vine looks lovely cascading down from planters or shelving. While its toxins need to be ingested in large amounts to cause problems, English ivy can cause skin irritation, rash and fever, particularly after eating the berries.

- **Bittersweet nightshade:** Bittersweet nightshade grows as a weed on some properties. It's particularly problematic for those who have pets or young kids because of the brightly colored berries it produces. The highest level of toxicity comes from these berries.

- **Foxglove:** According to The Spruce: Decor, foxgloves are among the most toxic specimens commonly grown on landscapes. They are widely coveted for their pink, purple and white bell-shaped flowers that grow in tall spires. They're also deer- and rabbit-resistant, making them especially popular. However, foxgloves contain potent cardiac glycosides that can be lethal in high doses.

- **Philodendron:** Philodendron are easy to care for and hearty. While not fatal, a bite of philodendron can irri-

tate the skin and cause nausea and swelling of the mouth, throat and tongue. Similar effects occur with Pothos, another common and hearty houseplant.

- **Yew shrubs:** The needlelike leaves of this shrub are toxic to humans and animals, as are the fleshy, bright red berries that grow toxic seeds. Kids may be tempted to pick and consume these bright berries.

- **Palms:** Several different palm trees are poisonous to people and pets. Palms are an overlooked source of poi-



soning tragedies in warmer climates. Formosa palm, Sago palm, Queen Sago, and Cardboard palm are some of the varieties that can cause issues if ingested or allergic skin reactions if touched.

When planning a landscape, work with a skilled garden expert to choose plants that will not be hazardous to family and pets.

Keep seasonal allergies in check

There is much to look forward to when spring arrives. Daily hours of sunlight increase while temperatures continue to climb. Blooming flowers and leaves budding on trees also add some awe-inspiring color back into the landscape. Even though there's much to enjoy about spring, one side effect of so much foliage in bloom is the return of seasonal spring allergies.

Many people find they cannot enjoy the sunshine and balmy temperatures of spring because of seasonal allergies. Hayfever, or allergic rhinitis, is a common spring allergy. The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology indicates allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in the United States. More than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies each year. The Aerobiology Research Laboratories says allergens in the air across Canada have been rising in many cities over the last 15 years.

While there is no cure for seasonal allergies, there are steps individuals can take to live with them more comfortably.

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days. It's better to go outside after it rains,

which clears pollen from the air.

- The ACAAI urges individuals to modify indoor environments to keep allergens out. An HEPA filter in HVAC systems can better trap spores.

- Consider vacations near the ocean or other bodies of water, as pollen counts tend to be lower in these areas.

- Delegate lawn mowing and other tasks that involve stirring up allergens to someone else. If you must do gardening and landscaping, wear a face mask to filter out some allergens.

- Close windows or doors when pollen counts are especially high.

- Wash hair and clothes when coming indoors to rinse out allergens that would transfer to pillowcases or furniture.

- Speak to an allergist who can recommend medications or other treatments that can improve seasonal allergies. Corticosteroids reduce inflammation and antihistamines can help reduce sneezing or itchy eyes.

Seasonal allergies are a potential pitfall of the spring season. However, there are remedies that can help alleviate the suffering.

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