



Lawn & Garden Guide

April 2016 | A Special Supplement to

**Delaware Gazette
Sunbury News**

How to Win the Turf War

*Identifying problems that
can threaten lush lawns*

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Identifying problems that can threaten lush lawns

Landscaping can be a rewarding hobby that instills a sense of pride in homeowners. Whether you prefer to get your hands dirty planting perennials or devote the bulk of your attention to crafting a lush, green lawn, chances are you will run into a problem during lawn and garden season.

Some problems are easy to identify, while others are more complex. The following are a handful of diseases homeowners may encounter when spending time on maintaining their lawns and gardens over the next several months.

Anthracnose

Anthracnose is a term used to describe various diseases that produce a host of unsightly symptoms. Those symptoms include tan to brown leaf spots or blotches; distorted, cupped or curled leaves; irregular defoliation, such as leaves falling in spring; and dieback, a condition in which trees or shrubs begin to die from the tips of their leaves or roots backward. Permanent damage due to anthracnose is rare, but the diseases can weaken trees over time and that can leave them vulnerable to pest infestations.

Brown Patch

Brown patch is unsightly and most likely to occur during summer. According to the Penn State Center for Turfgrass Science, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue and bentgrasses are the grass species most susceptible to brown patch. When a lawn is suffering from brown patch, its leaves and stems die out in large, circular patches. In high-cut grasses, these patches

can stretch from a few inches to several feet. Tall fescue grasses may not exhibit symptoms of brown patch in patches. In such instances, the brown patch may be noticeable on individual leaves that feature tan or light brown lesions, and the Center for Turfgrass Science notes that these lesions will be surrounded by dark brown borders.

Dollar Spot

The American Phytopathological Society notes that dollar spot refers to a disease of the leaves of turfgrass. Grasses suffering from dollar spot will have white to straw-colored lesions that progress downward from the leaf tip or laterally across leaf blades. Leaf blades affected by dollar spot may have several small lesions or one large lesion, and in some instances, the entire leaf blade may be affected. Turfgrass affected by dollar spot may be susceptible to weed invasions.

Summer Patch

Summer patch is most common in warm climates and is characterized by yellow to straw-colored patches that can be several inches or several feet in diameter. According to Scotts Lawnservice, summer patch is often linked to shallow root systems that result from poor soil conditions. Large swaths of grass suffering from summer patch can be an eyesore, appearing as though the grass has burned under the summer sun.

Lawns, gardens, trees and shrubs are susceptible to the elements. Identifying lawn diseases quickly can help homeowners find solutions before the problems escalate.

Seeing green

How to help your lawn bounce back from winter

Lawns are exposed to the elements throughout the year, and each season brings its own unique set of challenges. Summer heat waves can make it hard for lawns to maintain their lush green appeal, while the falling leaves of autumn can threaten root systems if not handled properly. Winter frost and snow also can pose a threat to lawns, leaving homeowners with some work to do when spring arrives. Spring is a season of revival, and that spirit of rejuvenation extends to lawns. When the last vestiges of winter begin to disappear, homeowners can dust off their gardening gloves and start taking steps to revitalize their lawns for the months ahead.

Look for signs of damage.

Winter can be hard on lawns, so it's important for homeowners to look for signs of damage before they begin planning any springtime landscaping projects. Salt damage can occur in areas that received heavy snowfall over the winter. Many communities use rock salt to de-ice snow- and ice-covered roads, and that rock salt is largely made up of sodium chloride, which can draw moisture from grass and cause it to brown. Salt trucks used during winter storms often spit salt out onto lawns, so don't be surprised if you notice brown spots on your grass, especially in those areas closest to the road. Winter lawn damage may also be caused by voles, burrowing mouse-like rodents that make paths beneath the snow to hide from predators and feed on grass blades and roots. Lawns with distinctly matted areas may also have been damaged by snow mold that can weaken turf.

Consult a professional



Winter weather, including snow, can damage lawns, leaving homeowners with some work to do when spring arrives.

landscaper. Homeowners with considerable experience tending to damaged lawns can no doubt identify and address problems on their own. That's because many problems are a result of the weather, which tends to be similar and produce similar problems from one year to the next. But inexperienced homeowners should consult professional landscapers before attempting to address problems on their own. Winter lawn damage may be caused

by a variety of factors that can produce similar symptoms, and professional landscapers can identify the culprits behind such damage and provide the most effective solutions to restore the lawn.

Remove debris. A light raking can help remove any debris that accumulated over the winter. Such debris, which may include fallen branches and fallen leaves left behind from the final days of fall, can prevent lawns from getting the sun and water they

need to thrive. Remove this debris, but make sure the grass is not frozen when you do, as walking on frozen grass can cause further damage.

Let the grass grow. Mowing the lawn is a chore that's reserved for spring, summer and maybe early fall, but it's important that homeowners don't jump the gun and mow too early after winter. A patient approach allows the grass to reestablish itself, so let it grow a little higher than you normally would before the first

cut. When the grass is roughly 4.5 inches high, you can cut it down to three inches and then maintain your normal mowing routine throughout the rest of spring and summer. Revitalizing lawns in springtime is a priority for many homeowners, who should always consult landscaping professionals if they feel uncertain about addressing any damage they discover during their post-winter lawn inspections.



Create a budget-friendly home landscape

Homeowners understandably envy the award-worthy photo spreads in lawn and garden magazines, wanting to emulate those same looks on their own properties. Scores of designers and landscape architects are involved in the process of creating those amazing lush lawns and perfectly placed plantings. Although not every homeowner has the budget to create lavish landscape designs, it's still possible for homeowners to create lawns they can be proud of.

Establish your budget. The first step in any project is to determine how much money you can devote to the job. Once you have established the budget, all other factors can be built around it.

Find an inspiration piece. Great landscapes are inspired by many things, whether it's a memorable piece of art or a landscape layout in a lawn and gardening magazine. Use photos of other gardens or

neighbors' yards as inspiration and build off of them. As long as the theme is cohesive, it will look pleasing to the eye.

Consider the space and how you want to use it. Understanding the space will help you better allocate your budget. If your yard is more of a retreat, look for ways to create privacy and a vacation feel. If you have kids and entertaining friends is a main priority, focus on recreational aspects, such as a pool, playset and some durable plants. Understanding how to allocate your budget will help you to avoid spending money frivolously.

Think about reclaimed or repurposed materials. Brand new items can quickly eat up a budget. However, repurposing salvaged or inexpensive items can stretch that budget while adding some unique flair to a landscape. See if you can find an outdoor patio set that someone is giving away or selling for a lower price. All it takes

is a coat of paint and some new cushions to make it look like new. Discarded bricks or stones can be worked into a patio space or used to create raised garden beds. Purchase inexpensive flower pots and then paint them to make them look like stone or another desired material.

Buy native plants. Native plants, shrubs, trees, and flowers will fare better than non-native, exotic plants. That means you'll have to spend less time and money nurturing them into health, and less money having to replace plants that cannot withstand your climate.

Consider perennial plants. Perennials may cost more at the outset, but the savings will be realized in the years to come.

Hire a professional. It may seem counterintuitive to spend money on a landscaping professional when you've

established a strict budget, but that's one way to save money. Landscape artists or garden designers have the experience to guide you in the right direction and help you avoid potentially costly mistakes.

Use gravel in spots where plants don't thrive. Gravel is an inexpensive landscaping material that can fill in voids where plants or ground cover simply do not flourish. Those working on limited budgets may be happy to learn gravel is typically less expensive than concrete or pavers.

Ask friends or family for clippings. Don't be shy about admiring the plantings of those you know. Flatter their good taste and ask if you can have some clippings to propagate yourself. These clippings can turn into lush plants in no time — with no additional spending required. With some frugal spending, planning and budgeting, anyone can create a beautiful landscape.

How to tend to an indoor herb garden



A sunny location is necessary when cultivating an indoor herb garden.

Fresh herbs and recently picked ingredients can add flavor to any meal. A home chef can even improve the flavor of store-bought or prepared foods with an herb garnish that can transform otherwise bland dishes into something you'll want to eat again and again.

Harvesting fresh herbs is easy for homeowners who have gardens right in their backyards. However, everyone does not have a backyard, and even those that do might find their gardens threatened by changing seasons or unwanted critters. When gardens are moved indoors, the bounty of fresh ingredients continues no matter the date on the calendar.

Herb gardens are perhaps some of the easiest gardens to cultivate indoors because they don't require large pots or much space. The plants themselves are relatively compact, and it only takes a pinch of herbs to give a meal some extra flavor.

When growing herbs indoors, your indoor growing area must have adequate light to simulate the longer days of summer; otherwise, the plants may go dormant. It's ideal to have a southern exposure on the herbs, with at least eight hours of sunlight per day. If you do not live in a particularly sunny locale, consider supplementing the plants with grow lights, which will provide the full spectrum of light the plants need to thrive.

Indoor air can become too dry for herbs, so you will need to compensate by providing humidity. While there may be added humidity in a kitchen greenhouse window, it still may not be enough to keep the plants healthy. Think about misting the plants daily to create some extra humidity, or place herb pots on top of a water-filled tray with pebbles so the evaporating water will add moisture without making the roots soggy. Insects are another threat to indoor

gardens because there is no cold weather to inhibit the hatching of insect eggs. Soil from outdoors may be more susceptible to insects that are already living in the dirt. Instead of soil from outside, use packaged soil or a nonsoil alternative that will hold moisture without the added risk of bugs. If small insects appear, use a mist of soapy water to kill the bugs without harming the plants or making the herbs unfit for eating.

Group herbs together according to their watering needs to make maintenance that much easier. New sprouts generally need more water than established plants.

Prune the herbs as needed for recipes. If the herbs experience a growth spurt, trim some of the plants and freeze the herbs for later use.

Many indoor herb gardeners begin by growing parsley, chives, oregano, and basil, but you can experiment with just about any herb.

6 steps to creating fairy gardens for kids

Gardening can be an enjoyable activity for adults and children alike. Gardening encourages creative thinking and can make for an eco-friendly 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 introduce children to gardening. Once families get started, they may want to create entire fairy villages.

How, when to fertilize your lawn

Various components go into creating beautiful, lush lawns. Lawn maintenance involves ensuring lawns have all of the nutrients they need to thrive. Fertilizer is essential when feeding lawns, but fertilizing a lawn involves more than spreading fertilizer around the yard and hoping for the best. Fertilizing is a process that should be done carefully and timed correctly for optimal results.

According to Scotts®, a premier lawn seed and care company, no two lawns are alike and each lawn has different needs. The type of grass and whether a lawn is mostly in the sun or shade may dictate fertilizer requirements. While many lawns are comprised of several different grasses, a general rule of thumb is that the lawn will need to be fertilized in the spring at the very least. After that, fertilization schedules should be customized according to grass type, climate and other factors.

Spring is a prime time to fertilize because the lawn is reviving after a long season of cold weather and dormancy. Come spring, lawns need to be fed to turn green and grow. Soil supplies some of the



nutrients grass needs, but many soils lack elements that lawns need to survive the growing season.

Lawn and garden experts at Lowes say a healthy and actively growing lawn uses a great deal of energy,

and fertilizer will provide the boost it requires. Fertilizer helps promote new root and leaf growth, aid in

recovery from damage, reduce weeds, and replace nutrients lost to water runoff.

Fertilizing the right way

Follow these steps to feed the lawn and help it thrive.

- Identify the type of grass in your lawn and consult with a garden center to find the right type of fertilizer for your grass. Many grasses are categorized by season and may be referred to as cool season, transitional or warm season grasses.
- Test the soil to check for pH. You want the soil to be as close to neutral as possible so it can readily

process the nutrients in the fertilizer.

- Broadcast or rotary spreaders will evenly distribute fertilizer and will not cause striping on the lawn like drop spreaders might. Resist the urge to fertilize by hand, as you may lay an uneven amount of product, producing burns and brown spots.
- Fertilizers come in slow-release, fast release, and weed and feed formulations. Which fertilizer you use will depend on the type of grass you have and how much time you have

to devote to lawn maintenance. Slow release fertilizers may be preferable because they do not need to be reapplied often.

- Use caution and set the spreader to distribute less product if you are unsure how much to apply. Excessive fertilizer can damage a lawn.
- Water the lawn well after application, and always follow the fertilizer manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep people and pets off of the lawn

for a day or two after application.

- Scotts recommends that lawns with warm-season grass be fed over the summer as they grow steadily from spring to fall.
- Another application of fertilizer in the fall will supply lawns with nutrient to continue to grow and then survive winter.

Build a strong lawn by feeding it effectively. Dense, healthy lawns can strangle weeds and lead to beautiful landscapes.



Simple steps to a greener lawn

Many homeowners aspire to have lush green lawns. Thriving, healthy lawns can make homeowners proud and improve their property values, as the lawns make homes more attractive to prospective buyers when those homes hit the market. While lush lawns won't suddenly appear overnight, homeowners can take certain steps toward creating the stunning green lawns of their dreams.

Don't overreact to brown lawns. Lawns can turn brown for various reasons, but overreacting at the first sign of brown grass can make the situation worse. Some lawns turn brown because they have gone dormant to save energy for the cooler and more damp days to come. Applying fertilizer in such situations can damage rather than revitalize lawns. Fertilizers or chemicals applied to brown lawns may burn the lawn, creating additional stress that potentially hinders the lawns' recovery.

Aerate compacted soil. Compacted soil may be the culprit behind discolored lawns. Over time, soils of all kinds can become compacted, which prevents moisture from reaching a lawn's roots. As a result, the roots don't grow and the grass is denied the nutrients it needs to thrive. Aeration combats compacted soil by poking tiny holes in the ground to loosen the soil. Speak with a landscaping professional about the best time to aerate, which typically only needs to be done once per

year. As compacted soil becomes looser, the lawn will become more resistant to drought and begin to resemble the lush green lawn you're aiming for.

Raise your mower blades. Some homeowners set their mower blades to the lowest possible setting so they can extend the intervals between cuts and reduce the number of times they mow in the hot summer sun. But cutting the grass too short exposes the soil to the sun, making it difficult for soil to retain moisture and promote deep, strong plant roots. When raising the blades, inspect them to make sure they are still sharp. Dull blades won't cut the grass as cleanly as sharp ones, potentially causing tears in grass blades that invite disease and contribute to poor moisture retention.

Address pest problems. Pests are unwanted guests who affect lawns in various ways, depending on the type of pest. Grubs feed on grass roots, while mites feed on the nutrient-rich juices that lawns need to thrive. Pest control may depend on the type of pest and how advanced the infestation is, so speak with a landscaping professional about your pest problems before attempting to combat the problem on your own. Letting a pest problem fester may force you to replace the lawn entirely, but addressing it promptly can likely save you both the cost and headache associated with such a project.



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Veggie garden tips for beginners



Planting a vegetable garden can be a worthwhile endeavor for anyone who has an available patch of land. Gardens need not take up much space, and even apartment dwellers without yards can plant small gardens in containers they place on terraces or window boxes. Although establishing a garden is easy enough, beginners may make a few mistakes along the way. Those who already have paved the garden way before can offer novice gardeners some worthwhile tips. One of the first decisions novice gardeners must make is which crops to grow. This will help determine how much land you will need and which supplies or soil amendments will be necessary.

According to The Old Farmer's Almanac, a common error for beginners is planting too much and more than anyone could ever consume, so it's best to start small and be proud of that small garden.

Plants such as peppers, squash and tomatoes produce throughout the season, so you may not need many plants to provide for your needs. Less prolific plants may require a greater investment to produce a similar yield. Locate your garden in an area that gets adequate sun. Many vegetables need between six and eight hours of sunlight per day. Without enough light, they will not bear as much and could be susceptible to insect infestation. Vegetables and fruit also need

plenty of water because they're not very drought-tolerant, so keep gardens close to a water source. Another good tip is to locate the garden near the house or barbecue grill. This way you can easily harvest fresh produce and use it when cooking. Soil preparation is also key. Till the soil and remove debris like rocks, sticks and hard clumps of dirt. Work with organic material, such as manure or compost. Apply mulch after planting to help maintain moisture levels in the soil. Plant the tallest crops at the rear of your garden bed. Work forward with shorter crops. Try to leave a foot or more between planting rows. It's easy to get a garden started and enjoy fresh food for many months to come.

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Help your landscape survive drought

Drought is a serious condition that can impact landscapes and natural resources tremendously. Drought occurs when there is a serious shortage of water, due in part to lackluster precipitation combined with hot, arid weather. As early as March of this year, a large portion of the United States already was experiencing extreme drought and severe drought conditions, according to the National Climatic Data Center. The western coast of the United States as well as middle American states are notorious for drought conditions, but drought can occur anywhere should precipitation be scarce, particularly during the summer season.

When droughts occur, restrictions often are placed on watering lawns or washing cars. People are urged to conserve water in any ways they can. It can be disconcerting to see all of one's landscape dry up during a drought, and some homeowners wonder how they can preserve some of their plantings.

The first step is to minimize or stop fertilization of lawns, says the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. Fertilizers often can cause the lawn to use up more water, so hold off on fertilization until wetter conditions return. Homeowners also should keep their lawns mowed at a higher height than normal. Raising the mowing height can encourage the development of deeper roots in the grass. Taller grass also will shade the soil and roots, reducing, in some effect, the rate of evaporation.

Watering smartly also can help.

Underground irrigation systems will deliver water right to the roots of lawns and plants,

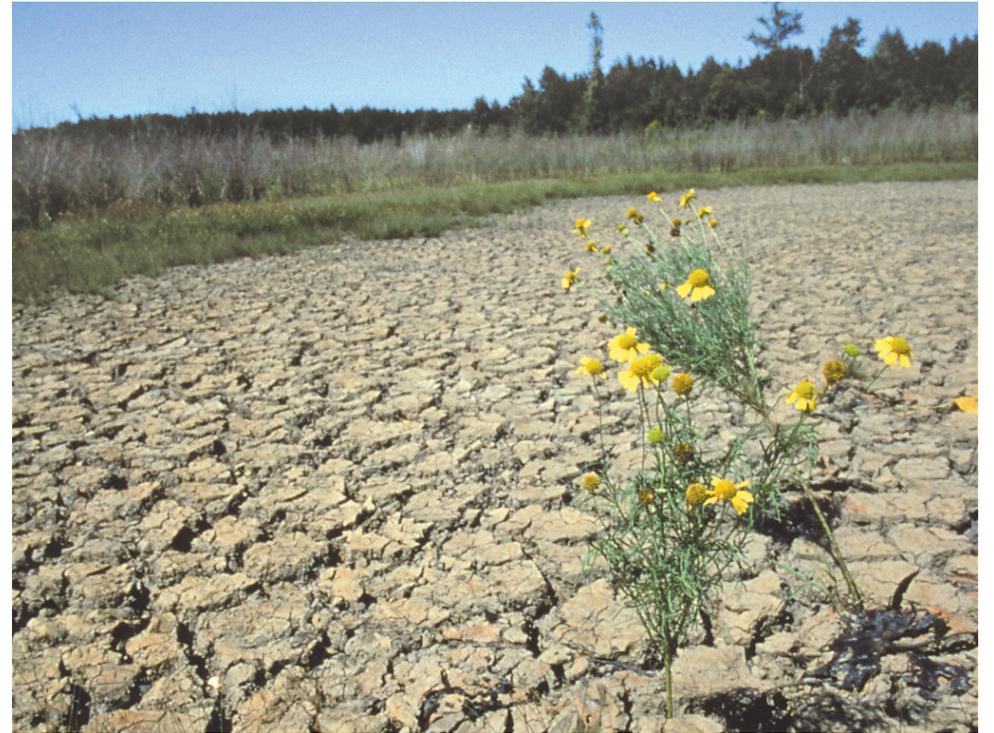
rather than having the water settle on top. These types of systems reduce the amount of water that is wasted on sidewalks, driveways and other nonliving areas, because they're specially laid out to deliver water where it's needed. For those without such a system, keep sprinklers located only on green surfaces and turn down the pressure of the spray so water is not caught in the wind and blown elsewhere. Lawns do not need daily watering to thrive. If strict restrictions are placed on watering, it can be revived. Lawns without adequate water will simply go dormant. When conditions improve, the lawn can bounce back.

Homeowners may want to direct watering to delicate plants and trees that would benefit more from the water. In fact, many experts say that trees should get watering priority over lawns during droughts.

To conserve water, homeowners can fill 5-gallon buckets with water and poke small holes in the bottom of the buckets so water can be delivered slowly and consistently to tree roots and garden beds.

Drought can be a time of stress for many plants. Homeowners should reduce gardening efforts and disturbances as much as possible. Now is the time to curtail mowing, thatching, aerating, planting, and pruning. Let the landscape rest as it uses its energy to survive the harsh conditions.

In addition to these management tips, homeowners can take precautionary measures against drought by choosing native, drought-tolerant plants and using mulch to keep the soil moist.



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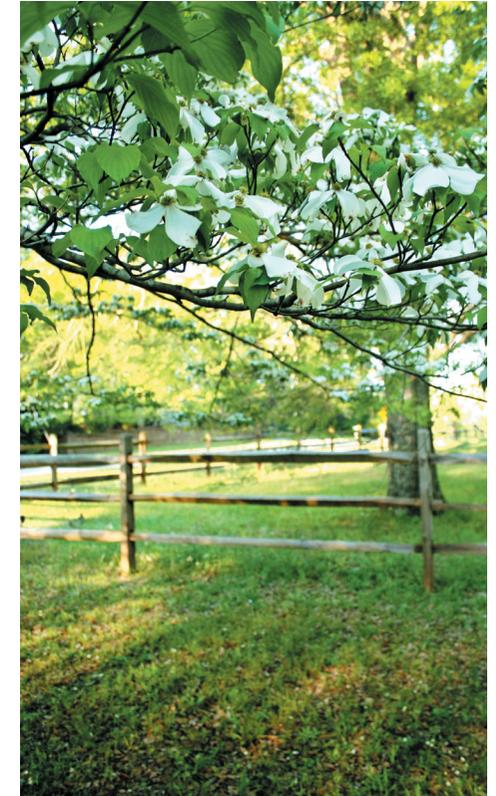
How to take care of your trees

Lawns and gardens tend to draw the bulk of homeowners' attention come spring and summer. But it's important that property owners tend to the trees that dot their property as well. The types of trees homeowners have on their property may influence when it's time to trim and prune the trees. Homeowners concerned about tree maintenance should speak with local landscaping professionals and tree services about caring for the trees on their specific properties, but there are a few tricks to pruning trees that homeowners should keep in mind when dusting off their gardening tools.

Prune at the right time. The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that pruning during dormancy (i.e., winter) is the most common practice. Pruning in late winter, after the season's coldest temperatures have passed, can lead to impressive and healthy growth in the spring. The ADF advises that some trees, including maple and birches, may bleed sap during pruning. But this is normal and should cease as the tree starts to bloom. Novice landscapers should confirm with landscaping professionals about the best time to prune trees on their properties to ensure they are not inadvertently harming the trees or making them more vulnerable to fungus.

Use appropriate tools. When removing branches, use sharp tools to minimize damage to the bark. The ADF notes that young trees are best pruned with one-hand pruning shears with curved blades. For trees with high branches, use a pole pruner or hire a professional tree service. Novices should avoid anything too risky when pruning their trees, leaving the more difficult jobs to the professionals.

Follow the rules of pruning. When pruning trees, the ADF advises homeowners follow the one-third and a quarter rules of pruning. In adherence to these rules, no more than a quarter of a tree's crown is removed in a single season, and main side branches are at least one-third smaller than the diameter of the trunk. When trimming deciduous trees, homeowners should never prune up from the bottom more than one-third



of the tree's total height. Finally, where possible, homeowners should aim for side branches that form angles that are one-third off vertical to form 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock angles with the trunk.

Water correctly. Like lawns and gardens, trees need water to thrive. Insufficient watering can make it hard for trees to thrive in summer, but overwatering can be harmful, too. The ADF suggests that watering each tree for 30 seconds with a steady stream of water from a garden hose equipped with a diffuser nozzle should be sufficient. Newly planted trees may need more help as they try to establish deep root systems, so consider laying mulch around newly planted trees. Mulch helps the soil retain moisture and form deeper, stronger root systems.

Trees maintenance should be a priority as homeowners once again start tending to their lawns and gardens. More information about caring for trees is available at www.arborday.org.

Invasive and threatening species

Introducing chemicals or pollution into the environment can compromise an ecosystem. However, seemingly harmless non-native plants and animals can do an equal share of damage as well. Many people might be surprised to learn that invasive species can cause turmoil in the environment, even contributing to the destruction of certain ecosystems. Certain invaders are more virulent than others. Non-native species of animals and plants are like enemy marauders. They may look like the other wildlife around, but they do not quite meld with the environment. When the ecosystem is not equipped to handle a non-native species, these species can quickly consume all of the resources and multiply so quickly that they effectively obliterate the native species.

Many non-native species of plants and animals become problematic when they are put into an environment inadvertently, such as when they hitch a ride on other items. Plant life may be brought home from a vacation abroad, or new animals can be introduced to the environment if they escape as pets. Shipping vessels can bring back microscopic sea creatures, and insects have been known to hitchhike on various modes of travel. Although efforts are made to prevent new species from invading an area, it's impossible to catch everything.

Because these plants and animals likely have no natural predators in their new surroundings, they can reproduce much faster and take over. The following are just a few of the globally invasive plants and animals that can threaten local

ecosystems.

Asian tiger mosquito: Spring and summertime outings have remained forever changed thanks to this highly invasive mosquito. Its distinctive black and white stripe pattern helps the Asian tiger mosquito stand out from others. Native to tropical and subtropical areas of Southeast Asia, scientists believe it has quickly become one of the planet's most widely-distributed animal species, spreading to at least 28 countries in a matter of 20 years. It's believed these mosquitoes hitch rides on imported tires.

Asian carp: There are many different species of carp, which are native to Russia and China. Large fish with voracious appetites, carp take food right out of the mouths of native fish. These fish also stir up sediment in lakes and riverbeds, changing clear water to murky water, thus pushing out some species that can no longer survive.

Burmese python: These tropical snakes have been introduced into many warm areas, including Florida. Many were taken as pets only to outgrow their indoor habitats. They can live in the water and climb trees.

With their massive size (20 feet in length), the pythons have few predators and require a lot of prey. Florida wildlife experts estimate 30,000 Burmese pythons reside in Everglades National Park alone. They even feast on alligators.

Soapbush: Sometimes referred to as Koster's Curse, this is a perennial shrub that is highly invasive in many tropical regions of the world.

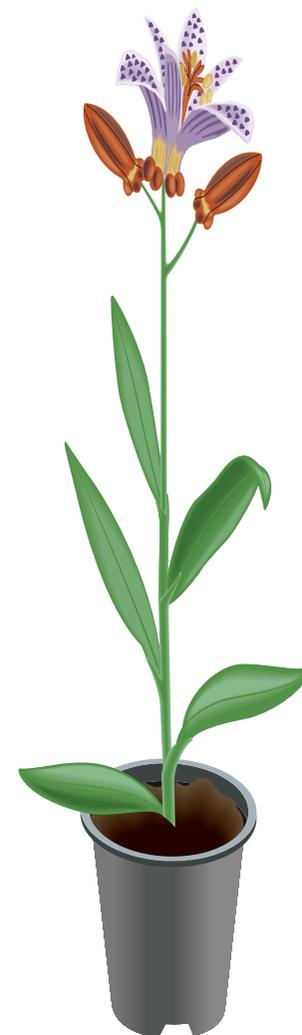
Originally from Mexico and the Caribbean, soapbush was introduced to Hawaii in the 1940s and quickly began taking over.

Kudzu: This vine is native to Japan and can grow upward of a foot per day in the right conditions. It was brought to the United States to help prevent soil erosion and has never left. Since its introduction, Kudzu has been spreading across the United States at a rate as fast as 150,000 acres annually, according to environmentalists.

Cane toads: Cane toads were introduced to many countries with warm climates as a method of naturally controlling crop pests. However, the toads' own defense mechanism of secreting toxins makes them deadly to predators outside of their normal habitats. Therefore, there's nothing to keep these cane toads in check, and they have wreaked havoc on native animal and plant species, especially in Australia.

Asian long-horned beetle: Another invasive insect, the beetle does most of its damage in the larval stage. This is when it burrows through and feeds on tree wood beneath the bark. In large concentrations, the larvae can destroy a tree. The University of Vermont Entomology Research Laboratory says the beetle is currently infesting trees in Ohio, Massachusetts and New York. Trees must be removed, chipped and burned to destroy the invader.

Non-native plants and animals can destroy environments, and men and women must always be careful when dealing with such species.



How to handle weed growth



Homeowners who take pride in their lawns and gardens know just how problematic weeds can be. Weeds can make otherwise well-manicured and thriving lawns and gardens appear unhealthy and ill-kempt. But homeowners don't have to sit back and accept weeds as an inevitable byproduct of warm weather. The following are a handful of ways homeowners can handle weed growth so all their hard work is not masked by unwelcome weeds.

Pull weeds after watering. It might seem odd to water weeds, but watering weeds can actually make it easier to pull them out so they never return. When you pull weeds from soggy soil, you can more easily pull weeds' entire root system from the ground. That means you aren't just pulling the stems

and leaves, but the entire weed from the ground.

Lay mulch. Mulch can benefit a garden in many ways, not the least of which is helping to prevent the growth of weeds. Mulch prevents sunlight from reaching weed seeds, helping to prevent the growth of weeds before they even appear to cause you headaches. In addition, mulch helps soil retain moisture, which benefits plants as summer temperatures rise.

Lay landscape fabric. Homeowners who want to do more than mulch can lay landscape fabric in their gardens as well. Landscape fabric will work in much the same way as mulch, blocking sunlight from reaching weed seeds and therefore preventing the weed seeds from germinating. When laying landscape fabric,

simply cut holes in the fabric where the plants will be, lay the fabric down and then cover the fabric with mulch.

Plant strategically. How you plant also can help defeat weeds before they ever appear. Speak with your landscaper or a local lawn and garden professional before planting, asking if it's possible to plant particular plants close together to prevent weed growth. Plants that are planted in close proximity to one another will block sunlight from reaching the soil, which will make it more difficult for weed seeds to germinate.

Weeds are a formidable and unwelcome foe to homeowners who take pride in their lawns and gardens. But there are several ways to combat existing weed infestations and prevent their return in the future.

Houseplants can clean indoor air

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that can pay a host of dividends, both for the planet and the people doing the gardening. Healthy plant life can help clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and various air pollutants, while the act of gardening can help gardeners combat stress. Published in 2011 in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, a study from researchers in the Netherlands found that gardening promotes relief from acute stress. In the study, two groups of participants were asked to complete a stressful task and then instructed to either read indoors or garden outdoors for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, the latter group had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and even reported being in a better mood than the group instructed to read indoors.

But gardening does more than just provide gardeners with a reason to spend some time relaxing outdoors in an effort to relieve stress. Gardeners who raise certain plants may be able to bring those benefits with them when going inside as well. According to an article published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* in October 2011, houseplants can work wonders when it comes to improving overall health, removing toxins from air, soil and water by metabolizing some toxic chemicals and releasing harmless byproducts while sequestering such toxins by incorporating them into plant tissues.

Clean indoor air is important for everyone, but especially so for those people who suffer from respiratory ailments



like asthma. In fact, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology considers indoor air filtration an essential part of any strategy to improve respiratory health. But filtration systems and air purifiers are often not enough, and those who want the air in their homes to be as clean as possible may benefit from introducing certain houseplants into their homes. The following are a handful of plants that

can help to improve indoor air quality.

Aloe vera: Aloe vera might be most often associated with hand creams and hand soaps, but the aloe vera plant, a succulent that even novice gardeners should have no problem growing, can clear indoor air of formaldehyde and benzene, two common byproducts of chemical-based cleaners many people use in their homes.

Spider plant: Spider plants are resilient, and that makes them great houseplants for busy men and women who tend to be forgetful when caring for their plants. In addition, spider plants are pet-friendly and can be used to combat benzene, carbon dioxide, formaldehyde and xylene.

English ivy: NASA researchers exploring the possibilities of long-term space habitation found that certain houseplants were more effective at cleaning air inside energy-efficient, nonventilated buildings than others. One such plant was English ivy, which can effectively combat the formaldehyde found in certain household cleaning products.

Bamboo palm: Bamboo palms also found their way onto NASA's list. Bamboo palm plants thrive indoors, where they are especially effective at filtering out the chemicals benzene and trichloroethylene.

Gardening has been proven to be a soothing hobby that can help gardeners reduce stress. But the health benefits of gardening can extend indoors as well.

Reduce pesticide pollution at home



Commercial farms are often blamed for the vast array of contaminants that find their way into water supplies and the soil itself. But home-gardening enthusiasts may also be contaminating water and soil through the use of pesticides. Data from Green-NetWorld, an environmental advocacy group, indicates Americans use approximately 2.2 billion pounds of pesticides every year. Pesticide use is a prolific problem. More than 100 active pesticide ingredients are suspected of causing cancer, gene mutations and birth defects. In addition, a growing list of pesticides may disrupt the immune and endocrine systems and have long-term impacts on infants and young children. Research indicates that many pests targeted by pesticides will eventually develop resistance

to these pesticides, rendering the chemicals useless.

One way to reduce chemical pollution at home is to find alternatives to pesticides.

Investigate reduced-risk pesticides. The United States Environmental Protection Agency is examining pesticides that pose less risk to humans and the environment than existing pesticides. Homeowners concerned about pesticides can visit www.epa.gov to learn more about reduced-risk pesticides.

Use biopesticides. Biological products, also known as biopesticides, can play a role in a more sustainable food chain. These control agents include fungi, bacteria or viruses and can be applied like chemical pesticides but do not leave toxic residues. Furthermore, they are

relatively inexpensive to produce.

Look to the kitchen. Dish soap can be an effective pest killer. Fill a spray bottle with soapy water and spray around the exterior of your house and on plants that have a pest problem. The soapy water can kill ants and roaches. It also can coat the wings of small flying insects. Catnip is another natural pesticide. Planting catnip in a garden can repel mosquitoes.

Use epsom salt. Sprinkling this salt on the leaves of plants in the garden can keep away animals, such as deer or groundhogs, that would otherwise devour plants. Epsom salt also can repel beetles, slugs and snails.

Before homeowners turn to chemical pesticide applications, they can explore many natural remedies to keep unwanted pests at bay.

Embrace greenscaping for a healthy lawn

Lawn and garden enthusiasts are often on the lookout for new trends that can make their lawns and gardens healthier and more robust. One trend that has gained considerable popularity in recent years is the move toward greenscaping, a set of landscaping practices that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says can improve the health and appearance of lawns and gardens while protecting and preserving the planet's natural resources.

Why greenscape?

While the opportunity to protect and preserve natural resources is reason enough for many lawn and garden enthusiasts to embrace greenscaping, there are additional benefits to turning a landscape into a greenscape. Greenscaping promotes the planting of native plants, which are already accustomed to local climates and therefore do not require as much time and effort to care for than non-native plants. Non-native plants may struggle to adapt to foreign climates, requiring homeowners to water them more frequently than native plants. And homeowners who plant non-native plants can expect to spend money to ensure they survive. So non-native plants can waste water and also cost homeowners time and money.

How can I greenscape?

Planting native plants is just one element of greenscaping. The following are a handful of additional ways men and women with green thumbs can turn their properties into healthy greenscapes.

Build and maintain healthy soil.

The EPA notes that a single teaspoon of healthy soil contains roughly four billion organisms. These organisms help create a loose soil structure that promotes strong, healthy

roots. In addition, healthy soil recycles nutrients for plants while protecting them from certain pests and diseases. One way to create healthy soil is to conduct a soil test to determine if it has any nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium or lime deficiencies. Another way to build healthy soil is to add compost when mixing top soil for new garden beds or plants. Among its many benefits, compost can help soil retain nutrients and water.

Water effectively. Lawns and gardens need water to thrive, but overwatering can be just as harmful to lawns as drought. Make a list of the types of plants (including the types of grass) in your yard, and then do your homework to determine how much water each plant needs. The EPA notes that vegetables and other annuals should be watered at the first sign of wilting, while perennials typically only need water if they are still sagging when temperatures cool in the evening. Trees and shrubs with fully established roots usually do not require any watering, though they might need some in years that are especially dry. Avoid watering in mid-day, when summertime temperatures are typically at their hottest and water is likely to evaporate. In addition, watering in the evening may encourage the growth of mold or disease, so water in the early morning.

Practice "grasscycling."

When mowing the grass, leave clippings on the lawn (though not in large piles dumped from buckets attached to the mower). It's a misconception that grass clippings contribute to the buildup of thatch that blocks water from getting to the soil. In fact, when clippings are left on the lawn, the soil recycles the clippings into fertilizer. Learn more about greenscaping by visiting the EPA at www.epa.gov.



Leaving grass clippings in the yard after moving can contribute to a healthier lawn.



Few things can be as troublesome to gardeners and landscapers as weeds. Weeds seemingly spring up overnight and quickly can overrun lawns and/or garden beds. Landscaping enthusiasts may spend countless hours and weekends coping with weeds without truly getting to the root of the problem. However, preventing weed growth need not be so difficult. According to the experts at “This Old House” and The Family Handyman, the secret to preventing weeds is to maintain a thick, healthy lawn. A vigorously growing lawn will crowd out weeds and block the sun weed seeds need to germinate and thrive. As a result, fewer herbicides may be needed and homeowners can spend less time on

their hands and knees pulling out weeds.

Mow at the right height

Crabgrass is a notoriously virulent weed that can quickly snuff out blades of grass. Crabgrass likes hot, dry conditions, and it only takes one plant to spread the seeds that can overtake the lawn. Preventing these conditions can stop crabgrass from flourishing. Mowing at higher heights and leaving grass blades taller can shade the soil, helping to prevent the germination of crabgrass. Shady conditions also will help the soil retain moisture and prevent the arid conditions crabgrass likes so much.

Water deeply

Weeds are accustomed to growing in

adverse conditions, including especially hot temperatures. When such conditions arise, weeds establish deep roots while the roots of the grass can easily die off. Instead, when watering, wet the soil to a depth of four to six inches. This helps grass to establish strong root systems that will help lawns overpower pesky weeds.

Time weed killers

Whether you manually remove weeds or apply weed killers, timing is key. Combat weeds in the early spring before they have a time to fully form and start proliferating through seed dispersement. Once seeds spread, their growth is difficult to control. Recognize that no single herbicide or weeding tactic will

work for every type of weed. Broadleaf weeds, like dandelions, unwanted grasses, and sedges are the three most common types of weeds. Homeowners will have to adapt based on the type of weed that is most prevalent in their lawns.

Watch fertilizer amounts

Strike a balance with fertilizer, finding the right amount to deliver continuous nutrition to the lawn, but not overfeed it so that weeds can thrive. Many lawns only require fertilizer once or twice annually, in the autumn and spring. By following these guidelines, lawn and garden enthusiasts can prevent the proliferation of unsightly and potentially harmful weeds.

Mums not exclusive to fall

Chrysanthemums, often referred to as “mums,” are among the most popular flowers for autumn plantings and landscape decor. But these hardy, often vividly colored plants are worthy of attention as early as the spring gardening season. Although mums are most often purchased in September and October and cast aside shortly thereafter, the plant that many people mistake for an annual is actually a perennial — meaning with the proper care it can come back year after year. By planting mums in the spring, gardeners ensure the plants have enough time to develop solid root systems, including their hallmark underground runners that enable them to grow tall and wide and over-winter. While it’s best to plant potted mums that were used in fall decorating after the flowers die and before winter sets in, some container plants can still thrive and come back the following year. When cleaning gardens in the spring, do not trash withered mums that may have been stashed behind the shed. Try planting them and you may be surprised that they thrive and rebloom in the garden this year. Remove the dead branches and dried-up parts of the plant only after new shoots begin to grow.

Gardening experts advise planting mums in sunny spots with southern exposure. However, be sure to keep the plants away from artificial lighting, such as streetlamps or garden accent lighting, as mums are short-day plants that bloom only when the hours of darkness are greater than the hours of daylight. Mums that get too much light at night may not bloom to their fullest capacity, or they may be “leggy,” with longer stems instead of being compact. Pruning or “pinching” mums in June and July will help keep mums compact as well, resulting in more flowers. Mums desire a rich and moist but well-drained soil. Planted mums will require less water than container plants, but the ground should never become soggy. Well-watered plants will offer more flowers. Hardy mums work well as edging, in mass groupings to create a shrub-like appearance and even in containers. Thanks to their relative affordability, mums are an inexpensive way to dress up landscapes. Mums are hardy in USDA zones five through nine. Although fall-flowering mums may not be the first plants to come to gardeners’ minds at the onset of spring, planning chrysanthemum landscaping now can help ensure beautiful plants when spring and summer flowers begin to wither.



Well known for bringing color to autumn landscapes, mums actually are a perennial that can be planted in spring to come back each year.

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