

Lawn & Garden

GUIDE

April 2017
A Special Supplement to

The Delaware
Gazette

The Sunbury News

Safeguarding Your Garden

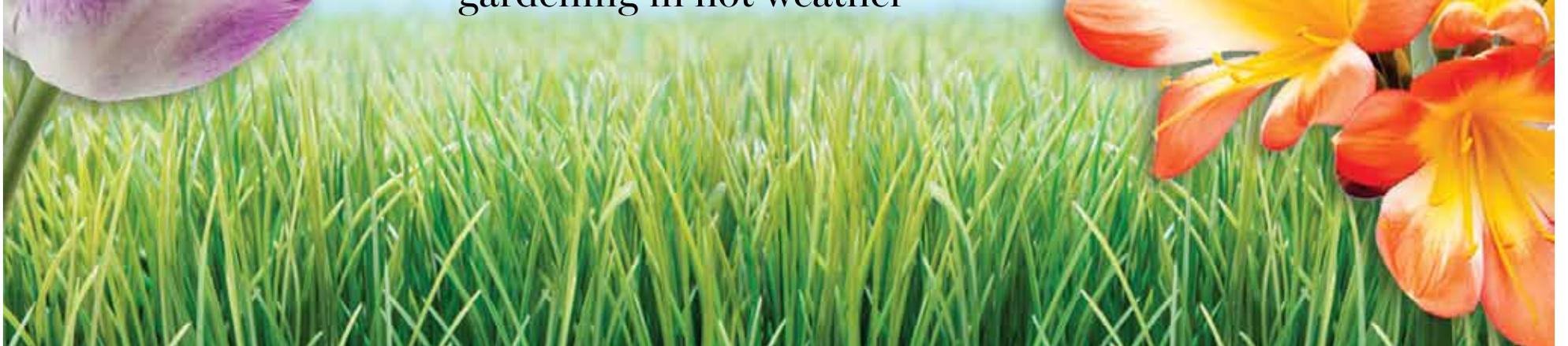
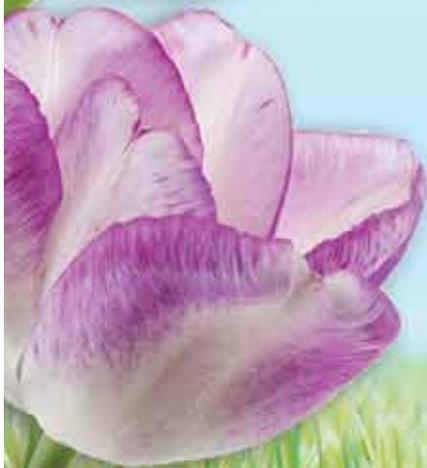
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Diagnosing Damage

Common problems
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Handling the Heat

How to stay safe when
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Lawn & Garden

GUIDE



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Did you know?

If you think that the only way to exercise and burn calories involves gym equipment, think again. Yard work can be just as challenging as a thorough aerobics workout at a nearby fitness club. **To reap the greatest benefits, gardeners should use as little motorized machinery as possible.** Manual tools will get you moving and can burn a substantial amount of calories. Try to vary positions and alternate which hands you use to reduce strain and get an even workout. Fitness experts say that gardening can improve strength, increase endurance and assist with flexibility. According to a report in the UK publication *The Telegraph*, clearing a pond or weeding can burn some 300 calories in an hour. Forty-five minutes worth of gardening can burn as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics.

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Problems that can lead to lawn damage



Running the mower in the same pattern over and over can cause ruts in the grass that lead to damage.

A beautiful lawn is a goal for many homeowners. Some homeowners may find that lovely lawns may last momentarily, only to disappear when damage — be it pest-, weather- or child-related — sets in.

While well-established turf can be resilient, even the most well-maintained lawns can be vulnerable. Preventing lawn damage first involves getting to the root of the problem.

Lack of sunlight: All plants need the proper ratio of sunlight to grow. Too much sunlight and plant blades can scorch. Too little sunlight and grass may turn brown and die. Although there are shade-tolerant varieties of grass, homeowners also can explore alternative landscapes. Work in a garden bed or create a design that utilizes gravel or mulch. Avoid aggressively pruning back trees to give the lawn more sunlight in that area, as this may just damage the trees.

Chemical spills: Gasoline and fertilizer

spills and pesticide applications in high concentrations can cause the lawn to yellow or brown in spots. Carefully refill lawn gas tanks and fertilizer spreaders on the sidewalk or driveway to avoid overflow onto the lawn. If spills occur, flood the area promptly with water to dilute.

Foot traffic: Lawns can take a pounding from foot traffic, leading to compaction and spots of dead lawn. Try to redirect the traffic elsewhere to give worn down areas a break. Aeration can relieve soil compaction. If a certain area has become the de facto pathway, install a paver, gravel or concrete walkway in that spot.

Debris: Leaving a tool, kids' toys, piece of wood, or any debris on the lawn can quickly suffocate the grass beneath and cause the lawn to die quickly. Make sure that no items are left on the lawn for an extended period of time.

Mowing patterns: Running the mower in the same pattern over and over can cause ruts

in the grass that lead to damage, so avoid mowing in the same direction on consecutive cuts. Avoid mowing on very hot days or when the lawn is soggy. Both can cause tracks to form in the lawn.

Mowers: Dull lawn mower blades can damage lawns, as can mowing too fast. Grass blades can be torn, snapped and more, resulting in brown spots.

Wildlife: Animals and insects can destroy turf roots. Animals or insects may feed on the grass from underneath its surface, compromising the lawn's ability to procure nutrients and water. Animals like moles or raccoons may feed on grubs in the lawn, and treating for grubs can alleviate torn-up turf.

Lawns can be hearty, but they're also highly susceptible to damage. Even seemingly harmless things can compromise the integrity of a lawn. Understanding the causes of lawn damage can help homeowners protect their lawns.



Did you know?

Hiring a landscape architect may be a smart move for homeowners who are planning major overhauls of their properties. "The Operational Outlook Handbook" defines a landscape architect as "a person who designs parks, outdoor spaces of campuses, recreational facilities, private homes, and other open areas." Landscape architects typically must be licensed and many hold degrees in landscape architecture from accredited schools. Architects who work on residential spaces often work with homeowners to design gardens, plantings, stormwater management, and pools. Landscape architects design spaces to do more than merely look good. Designs also are about functionality and meeting the needs of the homeowner. Outdoor spaces are designed after considering what the homeowner wants to experience and how homeowners want to use a given space. Landscape architects often do not plant and maintain these spaces. Rather, architects collaborate with other landscaping professionals to produce the final results.

Post-winter garden prep



Lawns and gardens can bear the brunt of winter weather and are often in need of tender loving care by the time spring arrives.

Preparing a garden for spring and summer involves assessing any damage that harsh weather might have caused. As temperatures climb, gardeners can heed the following post-winter garden preparation tips in an effort to ensure some successful gardening in the months ahead.

Assess the damage. Even if winter was mild, gardens might still have suffered some damage. Inspect garden beds and any fencing or barriers designed to keep wildlife from getting into the garden. Before planting anew, fix any damage that Mother Nature or local wildlife might have caused over the past several months.

Clear debris. Garden beds and surrounding landscapes that survived winter without being damaged might still be littered with debris. Remove fallen leaves, branches and even litter that blew about on windy winter days before planting season. Make sure to discard any debris effectively so it does not find its way back into the garden.

Turn the greenhouse into a clean house. Spring cleaning is not just for the interior of a home. Cleaning a greenhouse in advance

of spring can help gardeners evict any overwintering pests that can threaten plant life once spring gardening season arrives. A thorough cleaning, which should include cleaning the inside of greenhouse glass and washing flower pots and plant trays, also can prevent plant diseases from surviving into spring.

Check for pests. Speak with a local gardening professional to determine if there are any local pests to look out for and how to recognize and remove these pests from gardens. Pests may hibernate in the soil over the winter, and such unwelcome visitors can make it difficult for gardens to thrive come spring and summer.

Assess plant location. If plants, flowers or gardens have struggled in recent years or never grew especially vibrant, then gardeners may want to assess the location of their plant life before spring gardening season begins. Some plants may not be getting enough sunlight in certain locations on a property, while others might be overexposed to the sun during spring and summer. Moving plants that are not thriving prior to the start of spring gardening season may be just what gardens need to flourish in the coming weeks.

Spring gardening season is right around the corner, so now is an ideal time to prepare gardens for the warmer seasons ahead.

Weeding through lawn care service options

Millions of acres across North America are devoted to lush, green lawns. According to Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, lawns take up 40.5 million acres and individuals spend \$30 billion on average for lawn and garden upkeep in the United States alone. People certainly love their lawns and often wonder if those lawns are best left in the hands of professionals.

The National Gardening Association states that 72 percent of American households do some work in their yards. However, a growing number of homeowners also hire others to make their lawns look pristine. Homeowners who want to leave lawn care to the professionals can consider the following factors as they search for a company that best suits their needs.

Work with a licensed and insured company. Lawn care services that are licensed and insured provide more peace of mind to homeowners than the alternatives. Should an injury occur on your property while work is being done, an insured business will be able to take care of it and you won't be liable.

Ask about membership in a professional or trade organization. Businesses that belong to an organization invest in continually learning about the evolution of lawn care. This increases the likelihood that member companies will be up-to-date regarding the latest, most environmentally friendly lawn care techniques. Participation

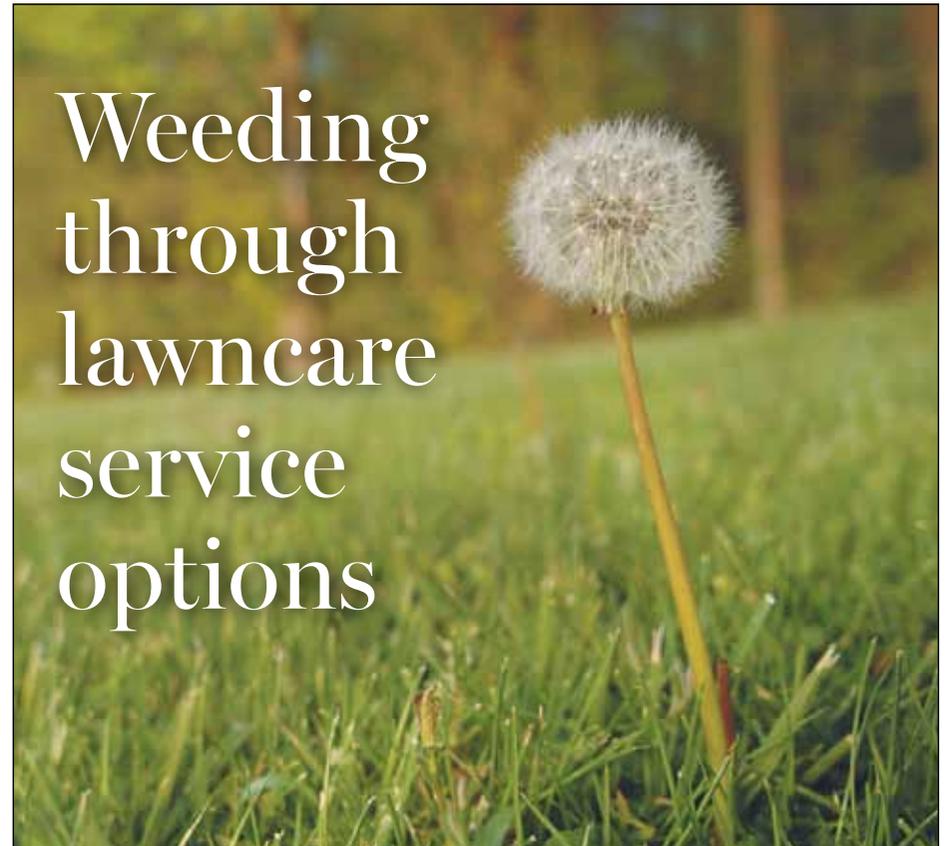
in a trade organization also may indicate education in the landscaping field.

Research reviews before hiring. Although public reviews may not paint the entire picture and they often reflect only the very positive or very negative experiences previous customers have had with a given business, they can provide an idea of how a lawn care company interacts with its customers. Prospective customers who contact the Better Business Bureau may learn if there have been any glaring complaints against a particular contractor.

Find out which services are offered. Ask each business what services they provide. While nearly every lawn care contractor will mow the lawn and trim shrubs, many homeowners prefer companies that can adapt when the yard needs a change. This may include pest treatments, fertilization, aeration, and seasonal cleanups.

Look for a company that's organized and connected. Customer service should be a factor when choosing a lawn care service. You want to be able to reach the company promptly. A company that responds quickly is ideal, especially if you need to change a service or need to inquire about additional or emergency work.

Shopping for a lawn care service can take time and effort, but the results will be well worth it when homeowners have lawns and landscapes that make their neighbors green with envy.



Stay safe when landscaping

Read manuals, wear protective equipment and be safe when doing lawn and garden work.

Landscaping is typically viewed as a chore by homeowners, many of who enjoy doing some work on their lawns and gardens. But only few homeowners may recognize the potential dangers of lawn maintenance.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that more than 230,000 people per year are treated for various injuries resulting from lawn and garden tools. Common injuries include loss of fingers, lacerations, broken and dislocated bones, eye injuries, and burns. Many of these injuries are entirely preventable if homeowners prioritize safety when tending to their lawns and gardens.

Understand the equipment

Homeowners should not assume they know how to use all of the tools necessary to maintain lush lawns and bountiful gardens. Familiarize yourself with the proper operation of manual and motorized equipment by reading the owner's manual thoroughly, making special note of recommended safety guidelines.

Take some time to locate the power buttons and other parts by comparing them to illustrations in the guide. Once you feel comfortable handling the equipment, then you can begin to use it.

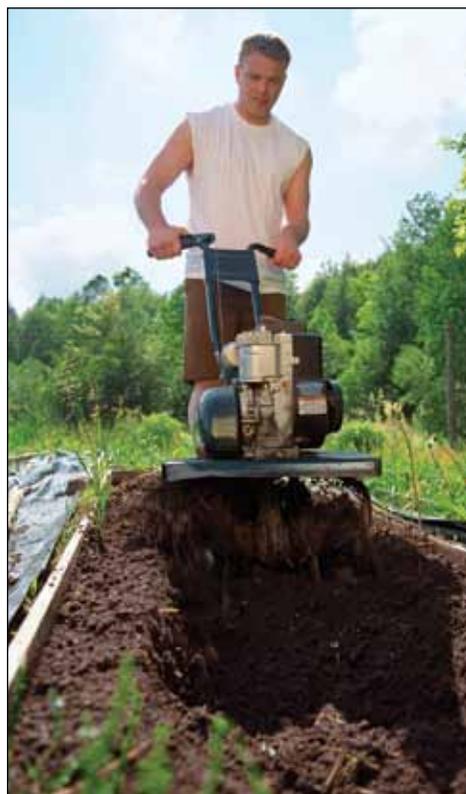
Wear appropriate protective gear

Failure to wear protective gear can lead to injury. Personal protective equipment includes gloves, eye protection, ear protection, boots, and a hard hat if necessary. When working during visibility conditions or at night, wear a reflective vest.

Other protective items include a hat to shade your eyes from the sun's rays. Sunscreen will protect the skin from UVA and UVB radiation. Long pants and sleeves can guard against flying debris.

Watch your surroundings

Thousands of injuries occur to children and pets who get hurt around mowers. It's best if children and pets remain indoors when



homeowners are mowing or using other power equipment that may kick up debris. Children under the age of 12 may not have the strength or ability to operate lawn tools. Also, never make a game of riding a child on a riding mower. Nobody under the age of 16 should operate riding lawn mowers.

Get approval before digging

It's difficult to know what is beneath the ground without having a property surveyed and marked. Digging without approval can result in damage to gas lines or water/sewer pipes. Always check with the utility company before digging trenches or holes.

Unplug or turn off all equipment

When not in use, keep lawn equipment



off. Do not try to repair or fix a snag or obstruction in equipment while it is on. Don't modify the equipment in any way, such as removing protective guards.

Exercise caution with chemicals

Follow manufacturers' safety instructions

when using pesticides or fertilizers. Avoid application on windy days or right before a rainstorm, as this can spread the product and damage the ecosystem. Keep people and pets away from treated areas.

Maintaining the yard is both a necessity and a hobby. Homeowners who prioritize safety can greatly reduce their risk of injury.

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Avoid aches and pains when gardening



People who have not spent much time in a garden may not consider this rewarding hobby much of a threat to their health. But as veteran gardeners can attest, gardening can contribute to nagging aches and pains that can force even the most ardent green-thumbers indoors.

Gardening is a physical activity that, despite its peaceful nature, can be demanding on the body. Thankfully, there are several ways that gardening enthusiasts can prevent the aches and pains that can sometimes pop up after long days in the garden.

Use ergonomic gardening tools.

Ergonomic gardening tools are designed to prevent the types of aches, pains and injuries that can cut gardeners' seasons short. Gardening injuries can affect any area of the body, but injuries or aches and pains affecting the back, wrists and hands are among the most common physical problems gardeners endure. Look for ergonomic tools that reduce the strain on these areas of the body. Even arthritis sufferers who love to garden may find that ergonomic tools make it possible for them to spend more time in their gardens without increasing their risk for injury.

Alternate tasks. Repetitive-strain injuries can affect gardeners who spend long periods of time performing the same activity in their gardens. By alternating tasks during

gardening sessions, gardeners can reduce their risk of suffering repetitive strain injuries. Alternate tasks not just on muscle groups worked, but also level of difficulty. Remember to include some simple jobs even on busy gardening days so the body gets a break.

Take frequent breaks. Frequent breaks can help combat the stiffness and muscle aches that may not appear until gardeners finish their gardening sessions. Breaks help to alleviate muscles or joints that can become overtaxed when gardening for long, uninterrupted periods of time. When leaning down or working on your hands and knees, stand up to take breaks every 20 minutes or the moment aches and pains start to make their presence felt.

Maintain good posture. Back injuries have a tendency to linger, which can keep gardeners indoors and out of their gardens. When gardening, maintain good posture to prevent back injuries. Gardening back braces can protect the back by providing support and making it easier for gardeners to maintain their posture. Tool pouches attached to gardening stools or chairs also can be less taxing on the back than gardening belts tied around the waist.

Gardening might not be a contact sport, but it can cause pain if gardeners do not take steps to prevent the onset of muscle aches and strains when spending time in their gardens.

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Design a garden for all senses



Gardens add visual appeal to a yard, but gardens also can appeal to individuals' senses of smell, taste, touch, and sound. Gardeners who want to create gardens that appeal to various senses can do so in the following ways.

Sight

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

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

Smell

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

Sound

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

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

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

Taste

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

Touch

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

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



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Treating lawns during drought or dry periods



“Drought” can be a four-letter word to many lawncare enthusiasts. Homeowners who put in the hours and hard work to create beautiful, lush lawns can see the fruits of all their labor gradually disappear when drought sets in. That can be both frustrating to homeowners and detrimental to long-term lawn health.

Treating lawns during drought or dry periods can be tricky, as some homeowners may be forced to adhere to water restrictions established by their local governments. Still, there are some ways to obey the law and still help lawns withstand drought and dry periods.

Postpone fertilizer applications. Fertilizers are designed to help grass grow, but growing grass needs water it won't have access to when water restrictions have been put in place. If a lawn needs to be fertilized during drought or dry periods, homeowners should consult with lawncare professionals, who may have experience applying fertilizer during drought. Professionals also may have access to more fertilizing products than homeowners will find at nearby lawn and garden centers.

Pull weeds by hand instead of applying herbicides. Herbicides are substances used to destroy unwanted vegetation, such as weeds. When applied during droughts or dry periods, such products can make it harder for grass to overcome weeds. Instead of applying herbicides during drought or dry periods, pull weeds by hand. Doing so can address a weed problem without harming the grass.

Water early. Water restrictions might not completely deny homeowners the right to

Homeowners can employ various techniques to keep their lawns looking lush throughout drought and dry periods.

water their lawns. Rather, such regulations restrict how much water homeowners can use to treat their lawns during drought or dry periods. Watering early, ideally between the hours of 4 a.m. and 8 a.m., ensures as little water as possible will be lost to evaporation and as much as possible will find its way onto the grass and into the soil. During periods of drought, temperatures tend to be at their highest in mid- to late-afternoon, so change automatic sprinkler timers if they are set to water during these hours.

Adjust lawnmower blade height. Grass grows more slowly during drought or dry periods. As a result, homeowners won't need to mow as often during such times as they would when conditions are more favorable. But lawns may still need to be mowed during drought. When mowing, leave grass on the longer side. Mowing stresses grass, which is already under considerable stress during drought. By setting mower blades to cut no more than one-third of the leaf blade at a time, homeowners can encourage roots to grow deeper. Deep roots help the grass combat the effects of drought.

Drought and dry periods need not ruin homeowners' lush lawns. But lawn care enthusiasts will have to alter their lawn care routines when conditions are dry.

Shade-tolerant plants help to complete landscapes



Shade-tolerant plants, such as coleus, can add color and appeal to shady areas of a landscape.

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

Those who are looking for some preliminary guidance when it comes to selecting shade-tolerant shrubs, plants or trees can consult the following list.

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

Amethyst flower: *Browallia* hybrids offer star-shaped blooms of blue and violet. These plants will billow out of hanging baskets or containers, and they prefer warm shade or filtered sunlight.

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

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

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

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

Those searching for shade-tolerant trees can choose among Sugar maple, Black alder, Flowering dogwood, and White spruce, among others.

Shade-tolerant plants can make welcome additions to the landscape, offering greenery and color in the darker areas of a property.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to keep animals out of your garden



Container gardens can deter pests from trampling and eating plants.

Many gardeners understand the frustration that stems from seeing a garden destroyed by wildlife. While protecting wildlife is a cause that's near and dear to many gardening enthusiasts, even the most ardent wildlife supporter does not want to see his or her garden trampled, eaten or adversely affected by animals.

Safeguarding gardens from local wildlife can require some trial and error. Animals may find ways to circumvent gardeners' initial efforts to protect their gardens, but the following methods might just do the trick the first time around.

Erect physical barriers around gardens. Barriers may not be gardeners' first choices, as some people feel barriers such as wire cages or mesh coverings make it more difficult to tend to gardens and rob gardens of some of their aesthetic appeal. But coverings and

wire cages can effectively prevent wildlife from trampling or eating plants while still allowing the gardens to get adequate sunlight. Make sure barriers extend to the ground so animals cannot access gardens by entering beneath the barricades.

Fight intruders with odor. Stray cats may mistake gardens for litter boxes and enter them to relieve themselves. Preventing such intrusions can be as simple as placing items around the garden to reduce the likelihood that gardens will be mistaken for litter boxes. Peels from oranges and lemons or coffee grounds can be placed in the garden and can emit odors strong enough to deter cats.

Install motion detecting lights around gardens. Motion detection technology might be enough to deter nocturnal wildlife from trampling or eating gardens. Animals might be spooked and run away when lights suddenly turn on. A similar approach can be taken using noise instead of lights. Gardeners who hope to avoid erecting barriers around their gardens can put up posts instead, attaching aluminum cans or wind chimes to the posts that will make noise when animals come near. Much like light, noise can be enough to deter animals.

Consider raised garden beds. When small critters, such as moles, are the main

problem, then raised garden beds with wood or plastic bottoms and sides can be enough to safeguard gardens. Raised garden beds might not be accessible to small critters, though such beds likely won't deter larger animals from getting into gardens that are not barricaded.

Erect fencing around the yard. Though fencing is expensive, fencing in a backyard or side yard where gardens are located can deter wildlife big and small from trampling or eating gardens.

Wildlife is worth protecting, but gardeners must also take steps to protect their gardens from animals looking for something to eat.

Why honeybees need protection

Honeybees flitting from flower to flower is one of the first signs that warm weather has arrived. Honeybees are a welcome presence in the garden, pollinating plants and contributing to local honey supplies.

Despite their importance in the ecosystem, honeybees are in grave danger. In 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama created a task force comprised of various agencies to address the growing issue of rapidly diminishing honeybees and other pollinating insects. This initiative was a response to

reports from American beekeepers indicating hive deaths have been on the rise, gravely affecting the honeybee population. Honeybees pollinate many fruit trees, nut plants and vegetables, playing a crucial role for many nations' food industries.

In addition to government involvement and honeybee conservation methods designed by environmental agencies, there are many things that regular citizens and homeowners can do to protect honeybees this summer. The Environmental Protection Agency

and the Pesticide Action Network offer these tips.

- Use caution when applying any pesticides to home gardens. Be especially cautious when applying pesticides when bees are likely to be flying. If you must apply pesticides, do so only after dusk.
- Stagger your planting throughout the growing season. Rather than planting everything at once, stagger planting for flowers and other plants that have blooms. This gives bees plenty of pollen sources throughout early summer and into fall.



- Provide clean sources of water. A small garden feature or a rainwater collection is enough to provide bees with a drink when needed.
- Honeybees and other bees require some sort of shelter. Dead trees and plants provide adequate shelter, so don't be so tempted to pull out all of the undergrowth in the name of aesthetics.
- Plant a garden that will attract bees. Resources for planting a bee-friendly garden can be found by visiting http://www.panna.org/sites/default/files/Bee-FriendlyGardening_PAN.pdf.

- If you come across a hive, leave it alone. It's best not to disturb a hive and honeybee colony. If bees are located where they can become a nuisance, contact a local bee expert to see if the hive can be moved.

- Think about becoming a beekeeper yourself. There are many different resources available to help you get started.

Bees are being threatened at an alarming rate. Educating yourself about what to do to protect honeybees can help to restore the valuable honeybee population.

Tips for novice composters



The United States Environmental Protection Agency notes that food scraps and yard waste account for between 20 and 30 percent of what we throw away. But thanks to composting, such waste can be put to work rather than discarded.

Compost is organic material that helps plants grow when added to soil. Benefitting the planet in myriad ways, compost enriches the soil by helping it retain moisture. The EPA notes that composting also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers while also suppressing plant diseases and pests. In addition, when homeowners compost, they inadvertently reduce methane emissions from landfills, thereby lowering their carbon footprints.

Homeowners who do not know how to compost can consider the following tips as they start compost piles on their properties.

Choose an accessible spot on your property. When looking for a spot on your property for your compost bin, choose a location that's easily accessible. The less accessible the bin is, the less likely you are to stick with composting over the long-term. The EPA also recommends placing a compost bin or pile in a dry, shady spot near a water source.

Add the appropriate materials. Animal waste, cooked foods, diseased plants, and fresh weeds from perennial plants should not be added to a compost pile. The EPA

recommends moistening dry materials as they're added and adding brown and green materials as they are collected. Examples of green waste include grass clippings, weeds from annual plants and plant trimmings. Brown materials include dead leaves and shredded cardboard. Chop or shred large pieces before adding them to the pile.

Give the pile structure. Layering materials can give compost piles better structure. The EPA suggests burying fruit and vegetable waste under 10 inches of compost material, including brown and green waste.

Turn and aerate the pile. Using a garden fork, periodically turn the compost pile. This aerates the heap and provides oxygen that can accelerate the decomposition of the pile. Piles that are not periodically turned and aerated may grow malodorous, which can be unpleasant for homeowners who hope to add materials to their piles on a regular basis. In addition, without the heat produced by aeration, composting piles will break down very slowly.

Recognize when the material is ready. The EPA notes that compost is ready to use when materials at the bottom of a pile are dark and rich in color. According to the EPA, this can take anywhere from two months to two years, so composters must be patient.

More information about composting can be found at www.epa.gov.



Items to avoid when composting

Composting is an eco-friendly activity that can also save homeowners money on fertilizer and pesticides. Organic material that can be added to soil to help plants grow, compost reduces the amount of waste that would otherwise end up in landfills, reducing the amount of methane gas that such landfills produce. But the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that not everything can be added to compost piles. The following are some items homeowners should not add to their compost piles or bins, courtesy of the EPA.

Black walnut tree leaves or twigs: Leaves or twigs from black walnut release substances that might prove harmful to plants.

Coal or charcoal ash: Coal or ash from charcoal, such as the ash that builds up in the bottom of charcoal grills, may contain substances that are harmful to plants.

Dairy products: When added to compost piles, dairy products, including butter, milk, sour cream, yogurt and eggs, can be malodorous and may attract pests, including rodents and flies.

Diseased or insect-ridden plants: The diseases and insects that plague plants may survive being transferred to compost piles. When the compost is ultimately distributed, these diseases and insects might then plague other plants.

Fats, grease, lard, or oils: Fats, grease, lard or oils also may attract rodents and flies, and that might be due to the unpleasant odors such substances can produce when added to compost piles.

Meat or fish bones and scraps: Like fats, grease, lard or oils, scraps from meat and fish and fish bones can smell unpleasant, potentially attracting rodents and flies.

Pet waste: Pet waste, including soiled cat litter, may contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, and viruses that can be harmful.

Grass trimmings treated with chemical pesticides: Trimmings from grass that was treated with chemical pesticides can negate the effects of composting by killing beneficial organisms produced within compost piles or bins.

Helpful and harmful insects



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

Gardeners grow frustrated when seeing their gardens infested with insects. In an effort to restore their gardens, homeowners might be tempted to eradicate any bug that moves in their yards. But gardeners would be wise to first learn which insects are hurting their gardens and which can actually help gardens in the long run.



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

Harmful

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

Aphids: These insects suck on the juice needed to sustain plants, particularly when they congregate.

Bald-faced hornet: Hornets tend to be an aggressive species that can sting repeatedly. Should you find a nest near an entertaining space or garden, it can cause trouble.

Carpenter ants: These ants will burrow into wood causing damage. They may compromise any wooden structure in and around a home.

Locusts: Various species of locust can damage plants and crops due to their voracious appetites.



Treehoppers:

These small, green insects mimic the look of leaves, and their appetites can affect crops and gardens.

Red pavement ant: As they feed on all manner of human food, these ants can quickly overtake areas with their staggering numbers and deliver painful bites.

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

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

Helpful

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

Antlion: A foe of ants, they'll help eat and control ant populations and pollinate flowers. They pose no threat to humans, either.

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



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

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

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

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

Composite decking can be a smart choice

Decks add character and functionality to a home, increasing outdoor entertaining space and oftentimes improving the resale value of a home. Homeowners have various options when choosing decking materials, but one such option, composite decking, is growing in popularity.

Decks used to primarily be made from pressure-treated lumber. While lumber remains a popular material, more and more homeowners are opting for composite decking products. As anyone who has pressure-washed, stained and sealed wood decks can attest, such spaces require lots of upkeep to look new year after year. Composite decks require much less maintenance, making

them highly attractive to homeowners who would rather spend time using their decks instead of maintaining them.

Composite decking is any type of decking material that is formulated from different recycled materials. The majority of these materials include hard plastic and wood shavings of pulp. Unlike wood, which can fade, crack and rot, composite decking, which has been available for roughly a decade, does not degrade quickly and requires very little upkeep.

Available in a variety of wood colors to match outdoor decor, composite decks also can feature artificial wood grains to make them look similar to wood planks. Although composite decks are not completely impervious to the elements, with some occasional washing to impede

mold growth and new technology that has improved stain-resistance, many of the pitfalls of other materials can be avoided with composite decks.

Composite decking fits in with eco-friendly lifestyles. The planks are made from recycled materials that would normally end up in landfills. Products from Trex, a popular composite decking manufacturer, are made from 1.5 million shopping bags and wood mill waste. As composite decks do not rot away and are long-lasting, they will not need to be replaced frequently, which is another eco-friendly benefit.

When comparing composite decking brands, look mainly at the colors, materials used in the composition and the fastening systems. Many are

fastened with regular deck screws, offers This Old House. The newer systems have channels for hidden fastening, and the composite deck tiles snap into place.

Composite decks do have a few drawbacks. They can be expensive — nearly double the initial cost of wood decks. And although they don't rot, composite planks can scratch. Without refinishing, damaged boards will need to be replaced. Harsh chemicals may fade color and damage the composite materials, so caution is needed.

Composite decking remains an in-demand choice for outdoor spaces. Low-maintenance and long-lasting, these decks have quickly become favorites among homeowners.



Stay safe when gardening in hot weather



Gardeners must exercise caution when tending to their gardens during the dog days of summer.

Gardening is widely considered as relaxing a hobby as it is rewarding. Although gardening when temperatures are mild, such as in spring and fall, can be relaxing, gardening can be much more physically taxing and even dangerous when temperatures rise during the dog days of summer.

Gardens need tending even when temperatures outside are especially hot, so gardeners must take steps to protect their health when working in their gardens during the summer.

Stay hydrated. Staying hydrated by drinking plenty of water is something gardeners must do to stay safe when gardening in summer. Water carries heat away from internal organs, helping to prevent heat stroke along the way. Water takes heat through the bloodstream to the skin, resulting in sweat. Gardeners who notice they are not sweating despite the heat should drink more water and even head indoors to cool down. In addition, the American Heart Association notes that keeping the body hydrated helps the heart pump blood more easily, making gardening less taxing on the heart on hot days.

Take frequent breaks indoors or in shady areas. Limit marathon gardening sessions to spring and fall when the weather permits. When gardening in harsh summertime heat, the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention advises gardeners to take frequent breaks. Head inside to air conditioned rooms, if necessary, or find shady areas to sit, relax and drink some water. Sitting in the shade will give the body's thermostat a chance to recover from exposure to extreme heat.

Take note of your physical condition. Many people garden alone, so it's important that gardeners learn the symptoms of heat-related illnesses. The CDC notes that elevated body temperatures, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, and/or confusion are some common symptoms of heat-related illnesses. Gardeners should go indoors the moment any such symptoms appear.

Garden during the cooler parts of the day. Lawn care professionals advise against watering lawns between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. in the summertime, as water is more likely to evaporate during this time, which tends to be the hottest time of the day. Gardeners should avoid working in their gardens during these hours as well. Garden in the early morning hours when the sun is not burning as hot or in late afternoon or early evening hours when temperatures are less threatening.

Gardening in summer requires gardeners to exercise caution and assess their physical conditions routinely and honestly.

Did you know?

One of the ways homeowners can keep their lawns looking lush and green is to aerate the turf when the need arises. Aerators perforate the soil with small holes. These holes allow air, nutrients and water to penetrate all the way to the roots, helping them grow deep and strong. Deep, strong roots are essential to healthy, lush lawns. While aeration can help many lawns, not every lawn will necessarily need to be aerated. Lawns that get heavy use, such as those that are often played on by children or pets, will likely benefit from periodic aeration. Feeling the lawn also can help homeowners determine if it needs to be aerated. Lawns that dry out quickly or feel spongy may be overcome with thatch, which can prevent lawns from getting the air, water and nutrients they need to thrive. Lawn care professionals recommend aerating lawns that contain thatch that is more than one-half inch. Thatch also can foster grub infestations, providing another benefit to removing it and aerating a lawn. When to aerate depends on the type of grass. Homeowners should consult with a lawn care professional about the best time to aerate their particular lawns, but it's generally recommended that cool-season grasses be aerated in early spring or fall, while it's best to aerate warm season grasses in late spring.

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