



Home, Lawn & Garden

SPECIAL SECTION

THE TRIBUNE



TIPS FOR STARTING GARDEN

Story by StatePoint
PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

Starting a garden for the first time or expanding an existing plot is easier than you may think. With a little love and care, your green space will bloom and thrive.

“For anyone with the inclination, a beautiful lawn and garden is always within reach,” says Jamie Briggs, director of marketing, Exmark, a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers and equipment for landscape professionals and homeowners with a lot of lawn to cut.

This is the driving idea behind “Backyard Smart,” a free online video series. These short explainer videos are full of facts and relevant information to answer your most common lawn and garden questions. The following planting strategies come directly from two recent “Backyard Smart” episodes:

- Start with seeds: Looking to add new plants to your garden and flower bed? Try starting from scratch. While most nurseries have limited species of mature plants to select from, there are literally thousands of varieties of seeds available at dirt cheap prices. A quick trip to the seed kiosk in your local hardware store offers the potential for you to enjoy flowers you’ve never seen and vegetables you’ve never tasted.

“It’s easy to be intimidated by the prospect of growing plants from seeds but the truth is that all you need is soil, just the right amount of water and lots of sunshine,” says Briggs. “Nature will handle the rest.”

- Practice “companion planting”: Whether it’s growing marigolds alongside tomatoes to block bad bugs or planting corn next to squash to provide shade, plants are kind of like people, they do better with a buddy. Companion plants help block weeds, prevent pests, create fertile soil, promote pollination and offer plants a place to climb. In fact, people have been practicing this technique for centuries to create vigorous gardens.

For more entertaining, easy-to-understand approaches to making the most of your outdoor spaces, check out the Exmark Backyard Life site at exmark.com/backyard.

If you’ve always dreamed of having your own, homegrown, fruits and vegetables in your cooking, or brightening your home with fresh-cut flowers, there is no better time than the present to pursue this dream. The long sunny days of summer are ideal for developing your green thumb.

POWERING UP YOUR BACKYARD

Get the right equipment to take care of your outdoor safe haven

Story by NAPS | PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

Backyarding — the trend to move all sorts of indoor activities outside — has become a permanent part of many people’s lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. The backyard became a safe haven from the stress of quarantining by letting people reconnect with nature and each other, move work and play outside, and expand their living space into green space.

The backyarding trend is here to stay. Home improvement projects abound, and many homeowners are investing in outdoor power equipment so they can take care of their yards.

“Overall, the industry saw shipments of outdoor power equipment increase by more than 5 million units — a jump of 16 percent from last year — and those levels are expected to remain elevated in 2021,” said Kris Kiser, President and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), an international trade association representing manufacturers and suppliers of outdoor power equipment, small engines, battery power systems, portable generators, utility and personal transport vehicles, and golf cars.

“People are really investing in their backyards and outdoor living spaces,” said Kiser. “There is tremendous innovation occurring right now in our industry — with

battery, electric, solar, propane and gasoline-powered equipment available for any job you might have in your yard.” He offered a few tips to help.

1. Know your needs. Look at your yard and figure out what equipment is needed. If you have a walkway, a string trimmer or edger adds definition. A hedge trimmer makes cutting bushes easier and a pole pruner removes dead tree limbs. A chainsaw cuts branches and trees. A leaf blower removes brush and leaves. A zero turn mower, riding tractor or robot mower keeps a lawn tidy and healthy. A pressure washer keeps walkways and decks spiffy and a generator powers essential household appliances during a power outage.

2. Do your research. Outdoor power equipment has changed a lot from what you might remember in your childhood and the industry is rapidly innovating with equipment becoming faster, lighter, more efficient and stronger. There’s a lot of information available online about outdoor power equipment from manufacturers and users. Talk with store personnel by phone or in person about the equipment and get their recommendations.

3. Determine power needed. Lawn equipment is powered by small engines sized to the job they need to do. There is battery, electric and gas-fueled power equipment on the market. They have different maintenance and care requirements. Gasoline-fueled outdoor power equipment should have E10 or less fuel and most manufacturers recommend adding a fuel stabilizer. Consider before you buy what kind of power system you need and its maintenance needs.

4. Review manufacturer’s directions and maintain your equipment. Always read the directions provided by your equipment manufacturer and be sure to follow all safety and usage recommendations. Save a digital copy of your owner’s manual on your computer if possible, so you can easily consult it in the future. Equipment needs to be maintained, so add reminders to your calendar for regular maintenance.

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5 UPGRADES THAT DELIVER RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Story by StatePoint

PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

Want to make some serious exterior home upgrades that improve your safety and comfort, add beauty to your home and deliver a return on your investment? Here are five projects that do just that:

1. Install storm doors: Storm doors give you the option of letting in more light and ventilation on fair weather days, while protecting your entry door from harsh conditions and weathering. There are many ways to customize this upgrade to meet your aesthetic and functional needs. Options from ProVia include retractable screens at the top and bottom for more venting options, as well as stylish designs and colors for instant curb appeal. Families might want to consider storm doors featuring heavy-duty, non-removable stainless steel screens ideal for keeping children and pets safely inside.

2. Get summer-ready: Extend your home's outdoor living area just in time for summer — plus substantially increase your home value — with the addition of a deck, patio or porch. Whether you add a small hibachi grill or get as involved as installing a full outdoor kitchen, be sure to include an area to prepare and enjoy meals. A few key touches, like string lights and potted plants, along with cozy furniture, can make the space feel homey.

3. Replace patio doors: If your patio doors are drafty or get stuck easily, it may be time for an ENERGY STAR-certified replacement. Endure sliding glass patio doors from ProVia come standard with ComforTech Warm Edge Glazing, a high-tech glass package that measurably improves thermal performance for greater efficiency and reduced interior condensation. These doors also have increased sound abatement and meet the most stringent industry standards for storm protection, ease of entry and forced entry. Additionally, options for interior woodgrain and exterior paint colors, varying internal grid styles and patterns, and multiple choices for decorative glass, internal blinds and hardware allow for customization to fit your personal aesthetic.

4. Lower bills: Did you know that you can lower your bills and add natural beauty and privacy to your property by planting trees strategically? In summer, the shade that trees create can help keep your home cool. In winter, they can help block wind and prevent drafts. The Utah State University Forest Extension recommends locating trees no closer than 2.5 times their mature height to the south of a building to avoid winter shading. They also suggest knowing the size and other characteristics of a particular species before planting to avoid future problems, such as hitting power lines.

5. Protect your home: If you live in an area prone to extreme weather — heavy rain, hail, driving wind, frigid temperatures, or scorching heat — your home needs protection against the elements. CedarMAX insulated vinyl siding provides defense against these harsh conditions and improves energy efficiency as well. The insulation contributes to the rigidity of the panel, increases durability, and provides five times greater impact resistance over hollow siding, protecting against damage by hail, high winds, or contact with your child's fastball. Color and beauty are also huge factors in this home improvement decision; CedarMAX offers many options to customize the look with both neutral and bold colors and coordinated accessories. It's resistant to fading, chalking, cracking, peeling, and thermal expansion and contraction, making it a sound investment for years to come.

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Urban GARDENING

Tips to cultivate lush garden in small spaces

Story by Family Features

PHOTO FROM FAMILY FEATURES

Urban living and lush gardens aren't as mutually exclusive as one might assume. In fact, it's possible to cultivate thriving gardens in even the smallest spaces.

The first step toward creating a successful small garden space is planning. Sketching out your garden area with a clear understanding of the actual dimensions is important. This allows you to allocate adequate growing space for the vegetation you choose and prevent overcrowding.

Part of your planning should also take climate into account. If the sun reaches your garden area, knowing what time the sun typically hits matters. Some plants are poorly equipped to handle the strength of direct afternoon rays.

Other matters to consider are the soil quality and whether it is adequate to nourish vegetation. If not, you may need to excavate and refill your planting areas with nutrient-rich gardening soil. Access to water is also a concern; if you'll be forced to water by can, avoid choosing plants that would better benefit from a thorough hose soaking.

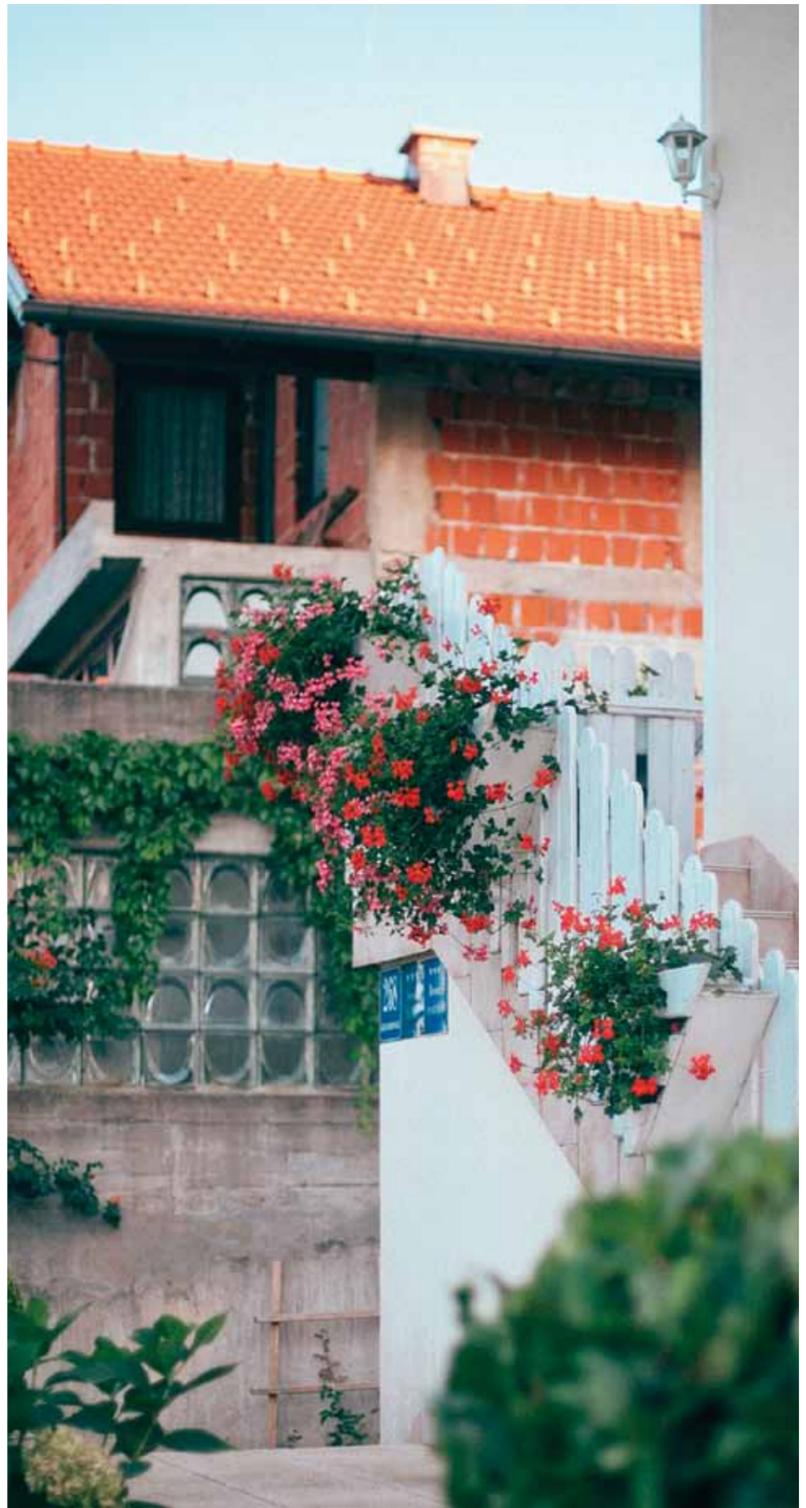
As you begin planning the actual contents of your garden, don't hesitate to blend edibles with beauty. Many herbs offer attractive

textures and colors that can add variety to a colorful selection of flowering plants. Edible plants such as strawberries offer color from blooms (and later brightly hued fruit), as well as trailing greenery that looks pretty along the edges of potted containers.

If your goal is color, give consideration to the blooming season for your selected plants. Unless you plan to enjoy your garden for just a short season, choose a variety of plants and flowers that bloom throughout your region's entire growing season.

Especially in the smallest garden spaces, it's smart to make the most of vertical space. Use a trellis or other structure to encourage vining vegetation to grow upward rather than outward. Hanging baskets or buckets are ideal for inverted growth of plants such as tomatoes or peppers, and shelving or tiered plant stands are handy for creating more plant real estate in smaller garden spaces.

Beautiful gardens need not be limited to those with expansive lawns in rural communities. Though smaller in scale, urban gardens can deliver equal beauty and a surprising volume of edible bounty with proper preparation and design. Find more tips at eLivingtoday.com.



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Story by NAPSI
PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

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Before you spring into action cleaning your home this season, you may want to consider a source of dirt you can't see but do need to deal with: air ducts. Your home's heating and cooling system is the lungs of your home. The system pulls air from your rooms; filters, heats or cools it; and sends it back out again.

The problem

As a result, dust motes, dander, smoke, pollen and anything else in the air gets stuck in the ductwork. This can be serious for allergy and asthma sufferers, as well as young children and the elderly.

A solution

Fortunately, there can be an easy answer. The experts at the National Air Duct Cleaners Association (NADCA) say HVAC system should be inspected and cleaned regularly by a reputable, certified HVAC professional.

The ones who are NADCA members possess general liability insurance, are trained and tested regularly, sign on to a code of ethics, and must clean and restore your heating and cooling system in accordance with NADCA standards, so they provide a high level of security.

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MANAGING YOUR PROPERTY PROPERLY

Quick tips
to get your
estate in order

Story by NAPSJ
PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

The next time you look around your home, or that of your aging relatives, you may be astonished how much “stuff” accumulates over the years. Are there things — and the stories they tell — you want to save to pass down to the next generation? Is your will or estate plan on hold because you don’t know where to start? What if you had a natural disaster or break-in — are your items properly protected by insurance? You can make this year the one in which you get your estate in order with these five easy steps:

1. Get started. The best way to get something done is to start. Decide if it makes sense to tackle items by room or by category and get started. This is not something that has to be done in one day, in fact, it might take several days or longer to get organized. Don’t be discouraged. Once it’s done, it will only need periodic updating.

2. Take photos. Use a photo-based mobile app, such as Manage My Things, to accurately and efficiently track items. You can upload one item at a time or batches of items such as fine china. “If you’ve ever had to empty a parent’s home, decide which of your heirs gets your things when you die or have confidence you’ll be made whole if a disaster strikes, then you know all the decisions you make are emotional,” said Rick McKenna, CEO of Manage My Things. “This app takes you through much of the complex decision-making, so your time is better spent with loved ones. All you need to know is how to take photos and answer a few questions. The app does the rest.”

3. Donate or discard. There are many services and organizations that can help you remove items from your home, either for donation or to discard. Some examples include Habitat for Humanity and Goodwill for donations. Some donations may even be tax deductible. To dispose of stuff, you can contact 1-800-GOT-JUNK? to schedule a pick-up.

4. Share with your agents. Fires, hurricanes and floods can often expose the two-thirds of all homeowners who are under-insured. It’s important to inventory items in a home and share the report with insurance agents for review to accurately modify home protection policies and ensure you’re properly covered. Additionally, 50% to 60% of U.S. adults don’t have a will, leaving their loved ones the difficulty of getting affairs in order. By sharing your estate plan, you’re helping ensure peace of mind for yourself and the ones you care about.

5. Set and (mostly) forget. Set a reminder to revisit your estate plan at least once a year or when there are major life changes such as a move or significant purchase.

Following these five steps can mean you’ll find yourself in better financial and mental space next year and for many years to come.

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Keeping pets safe

Hazards to consider in your garden

Story by Family Features

PHOTO FROM FAMILY FEATURES

If you have pets that enjoy spending time outdoors, it's important to make sure your yard is a safe place for them to be.

Consider these hazards that can negatively impact the well-being of your furry friends.

Poisonous plants

Some common plants can be dangerous for animals, causing anything from mild oral irritations and upset stomachs to cardiovascular damage and even death. For example, these are some of the toxic plants the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has identified as harmful for either cats or dogs:

- Aloe — can cause vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, anorexia and depression
- Azalea — can cause vomiting, diarrhea, hypersalivation, weakness, coma, cardiovascular collapse and death
- Burning bush — can cause vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and weakness, as well as heart

rhythm abnormalities with large doses

- Caladium — can cause burning and irritation of the mouth, tongue and lips, excessive drooling, vomiting and difficulty swallowing
- Daylilies — can cause kidney failure in cats
- Hibiscus — can cause vomiting, diarrhea, nausea and anorexia

Mulch and compost

The decomposing elements that make compost good can be bad for pets, according to the National Garden Society. Keep compost in a secure container or fenced off area so pets can't get to it. Cocoa mulch can be a particular problem for dogs. A by-product of chocolate production, cocoa mulch can cause digestive problems and even seizures in dogs. Shredded pine or cedar mulch is a safer choice.

Fertilizer and insecticides

The chemicals used to get rid of pests or make your lawn lush can be toxic to pets. Some of the

most dangerous pesticides include snail bait with metaldehyde, fly bait with methomyl, systemic insecticides with disyston or disulfoton, mole or gopher bait with zinc phosphide and most forms of rat poison, according to the ASPCA. Follow all instructions carefully, and store pesticides and fertilizers in a secure area out of the reach of animals.

Fleas and ticks

In addition to using appropriate flea and tick prevention methods such as collars and sprays, make sure your yard isn't a welcoming environment for these pests. Keep the lawn trimmed and remove brush and detritus, where fleas and ticks often lurk. Fleas can cause hair loss, scabs, excessive scratching, tapeworms and anemia. Ticks can do all of that, plus bring you and your family in contact with diseases like Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease.

Find more tips for keeping pets safe in your yard at eLivingtoday.com.

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EFFICIENT IMPROVEMENTS



7 upgrades to downgrade energy usage

Story by Family Features | PHOTO FROM FAMILY FEATURES

The best home upgrades not only make spaces more livable and energy-efficient but are also cost-effective. Making energy-efficient improvements is a savvy way to save money on utility bills, curb energy usage and add to the house's value.

Consider a variety of home improvement projects, both big and small, that can reduce the financial burden of maintaining your home throughout the year and improve energy efficiency.

Add insulation

A cost-effective way to save on heating and cooling bills is adding a layer of insulation in the attic where heat loss is typically greatest due to hot air rising. While many newer homes are adequately insulated, those that are several decades old (or older) may benefit from an upgrade in not only the attic but

other common problem areas where air can escape such as basements, crawl spaces, fireplaces and ductwork.

Seal doors and windows

Windows and doors are common culprits for energy loss. While a complete replacement of doors and windows can be pricey, adding exterior caulk and weather stripping to fill in gaps where air can escape around these openings can make a noticeable difference for a fraction of the cost and make it cheaper to heat and cool your home.

Install skylights

Skylights are a cost-effective option for transforming any room in the home with natural light while also delivering energy-saving benefits. For example, Sun Tunnel Skylights from Velux can be installed in as little as 90 minutes and funnel

natural light from the roof through the attic and into the room below with an aesthetic that resembles recessed lighting. Customizable with six diffuser film styles to complement interior design, the skylights can make a home more energy-efficient by reducing reliance on artificial lighting. An optional daylight controller makes it easy for homeowners to adjust natural light entering a room, and a solar nightlight provides a moon-like guiding light at night. Installed with the solar nightlight, the skylights qualify for a 26% federal tax credit on solar property.

Add reflective window film

When the sun shines through windows, it can heat up the home's interior quickly and trigger the air conditioner to turn on. Window coverings, such as blackout curtains, can help, but adding low-e reflec-

tive window film to your windowpanes, particularly southern-facing ones, can provide an additional shield from the sun's hot rays and reduce energy costs.

Programmable thermostat

A programmable thermostat is an efficient way to control the climate inside your home, and those with smart technology take programming to a whole new level. Today's smart thermostats not only let homeowners control temperatures from their smart devices while on-the-go but can also learn daily habits and adjust the temperature accordingly with no other manual adjustments necessary. In addition, some utility companies offer incentives like money back at the end of the year for installing a smart thermostat because the energy savings are so substantial.

Replace appliances

Because appliances like refrigerators and ovens, among others, are major energy users, investing in more efficient models provides both cost and energy savings. Additionally, homes more than 15 years old could benefit from updates to the air conditioner or heater as systems 15-20 years old or older may be candidates for replacement as they're inefficient by today's standards.

Add ceiling fans

In comparison to running your air conditioner consistently, the cost of running a ceiling fan (or several) is significantly less. Particularly on days that may not require cooling the entire house completely, fans can provide a gentle breeze and circulate air in the spaces you use most often. Simply adjust the switch to the counterclockwise position to ensure it's pushing air downward during warmer months.

For more information and home improvement ideas, visit whyskylights.com/livelifighter.

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MARKET facelift

4 tips for preparing your home to sell before listing

Story by StatePoint

PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

In the current market, houses are selling fast — meaning there's typically no need to spend time and money on large home repairs and renovations to get an offer. Instead, homeowners should focus on quick, easy DIY projects to give their space a facelift before listing — here's how.

1. Enhance curb appeal. "The exterior of your home sets the tone for what buyers can expect inside," says Lindsey Mahoney, DIYer behind Building Bluebird and licensed realtor with Rigali Group at Danberry. "If a buyer pulls up to a house where the outside is in disrepair, it sets off red flags that the home may have hidden issues from neglect."

The simplest way to enhance your home's curb appeal is to maintain the yard, regardless of the season or weather. Depending

on the climate, homeowners should consider cutting the grass, planting flowers and greenery, raking leaves, watering the grass and flowers, or removing snow and ice.

If the home's exterior is in need of a little more TLC, consider adding a pop of color to the front door with a fresh coat of paint, installing unique shutters for visual interest or updating to a new mailbox. Pull it all together with a seasonal wreath or welcome mat.

2. Paint as needed. Moving into the interior, spruce things up by refreshing walls with new paint. Rather than redoing every room, focus on painting over bright, bold colors with a neutral palette more likely to appeal to the masses.

To get started, tape off the room with FrogTape Multi-Surface Painting Tape. The tape is made with PaintBlock Technology, a super-absorbent polymer that instantly gels to form a micro-barrier that seals the edges of the tape. This will prevent bleed and leave the walls with crisp, clean lines that won't need touch-ups.

3. Make minor repairs. As you're gearing up to sell, pay close attention to minor things that may need to be updated or repaired. For example, leaky faucets, loose cabinet handles or doors that stick are all minor fixes — but ignoring them could leave potential buyers assuming that there are larger problems within the home. Do a careful walkthrough before listing to look for any small fixes that need to be made.

4. Declutter and clean. A messy house is a major turnoff for potential buyers, so prioritize decluttering and cleaning. Start by eliminating as many personal items as possible, including toiletries, kids' items and personal décor like family photos, fan memorabilia and religious and political objects. It's also important to spruce up the appearance of beds, couch pillows and counters in the kitchen and bathrooms.

"If you have a small closet and your clothes are jammed into it, take out half so it looks like there is room to add more," Mahoney recommends. "You don't want your buyer's first thought to be that they won't be able to fit their belongings in the bedroom closet."

Once things are organized, each room should receive a deep clean, including wiping surfaces, floors and baseboards, as well as cleaning any appliances, sinks, toilets and showers. As the open house approaches, open doors and windows for fresh air and natural light, leaving the home looking and smelling pleasant for potential buyers.

If you prioritize the right projects, preparing to sell is painless. By taking these four simple steps, your home will be in its best shape to hit the market — and maximize your potential profit.

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PLANTING CURB APPEAL

Story by StatePoint | PHOTO FROM STATEPOINT

Landscaping tips for instant boost to your home front

One of the best ways to achieve instant curb appeal, according to the experts, is to effectively layer shrubs, plants and flowers in your front yard. Doing so can create a cohesive visual experience that naturally guides visitors to the front door.

Landscape designer Doug Scott describes plant layering in art terms: “Just like in a painting, you need to have a background, a middle ground and a foreground. Each layer serves a purpose, and there’s no more important place for them to be on full display than your home’s entrance.”

To help homeowners understand the purpose of plant layering and identify the best types of plants for each layer, Scott has joined forces

with Exmark, a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers and equipment for landscape professionals and serious DIY-ers. Here they break it down for you:

1. Background: The background layer should consist of taller evergreen shrubs to ensure that no matter what’s in front of them, you and your visitors will always have something green to look at. This layer provides a cohesive backdrop and a bit of living color in every season.

2. Middle Ground: Here’s where to step it down a notch in height and add interesting shapes, colors or stripes that provide contrast against the darker green of the background layer. Herbaceous perennials, like

lavender, are a good choice for this purpose.

3. Foreground: Finally, the foreground layer should help transition the planting beds to your lawn space or sidewalk, and should therefore be lower than the back two layers. It’s also where you can keep things fresh and get your hands dirty throughout the year by changing out annuals with the seasons. Or, if you want a lower-maintenance entrance, you can choose smaller perennials, evergreens or creeping ground covers. Use the foreground layer as an opportunity to add pops of color at ground level and draw attention to your home’s entrance.

Scott lays out a few other important tips to keep in mind:

- Choose plants consistent with your home’s style. For instance, if you have a craftsman home, you should probably skip tropical plants. Or, if your home is more minimalist, avoid an overabundance of different plants.

- Don’t obstruct views of your front door from the street with plants. Likewise, visitors shouldn’t have to maneuver around plants as they make their way down the sidewalk. Neither is convenient or welcoming, so you’ll either need to keep pruning plants to size, or choose plants that won’t overgrow their space without a ton of pruning.

- To make your entrance “the star” it should be, the plant material in the rest of your front yard shouldn’t be distracting. Rather let it frame the intended view.

Scott offers more plant layering tips in “Making an Entrance,” a recent episode of “Done-In-A-Weekend Projects,” an original series from Exmark. To watch the video, visit Backyard Life, which is part of a unique multimedia destination with a focus on helping homeowners make the most of outdoor spaces. There you can also download additional tips and view other Exmark Original Series videos, including “Dream Yards,” “Living Rural,” “Prime Cuts” and “Done In a Weekend – Extreme Projects.”

Through effective plant layering, you can boost curb appeal and give your home the grand entrance it deserves.

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