



# Home, Lawn & Garden

Time to  
get started!





You can't do everything in the yard just yet, but there are some steps you can take to get a jump on projects.

# Get a jumpstart on landscaping

During the cold months of winter, many people stare longingly out of the window dreaming of spring and time spent outdoors. For those with green thumbs, images of tending to the garden and other aspects of their landscapes no doubt dominate such daydreams.

Draw inspiration from those budding crocuses and daffodils pushing through the last remnants of snow and employ these tips to prepare for the upcoming gardening season.

■ One of the first steps is to apply a preemergent weed killer to get a head start knocking out weeds that can plague the lawn during the growing season. Killing weeds at the roots early on can mean far fewer hassles in spring and summer, and may prevent new generations of weeds from cropping up each year.

■ While it may be tempting to take a prematurely warm day as a sign that spring is in full force and purchase a bunch of annuals, it's better to know the last of the possible frost dates (check "The Farmer's Almanac"); otherwise, you may waste time and money planting flowers or vegetables only to have them zapped by another frosty day.

■ Amend the soil so that it is the right consistency – just crumbling when lifting it. Soil that is too muddy after spring thaw can harden, making it difficult for plants to flourish later on. Speak

with representatives at a local lawn and garden center about which types of amendments you can add to the soil in your particular area to enrich it.

■ Lawn and garden experts at suggest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.

■ Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.

■ Give outdoor entertaining spaces a good scrubbing, clearing away dirt and grime that may have accumulated over the winter. Use a leaf blower to blow away any leftover leaves.

■ Check if the front porch, railings or decking need painting and/or staining. Tackle these projects when the weather is cooler so everything will be ready for those peak spring days.

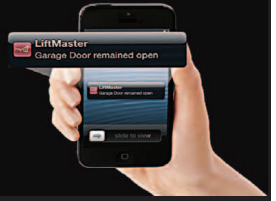
■ Think about any annuals you might want to plant in the landscape this year that will complement any existing shrubbery or perennials. Come up with a theme so that the entire yard is cohesive.

Before homeowners know it, winter is gone and it is time to once again enjoy long days spent outdoors. Get a jump start on spring lawn prep as soon as you can.

*"My mom said the only reason men are alive is for lawn care and vehicle maintenance."*

*-Tim Allen*

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# Supersizing your kitchen

The rise in popularity of television cooking shows is not due solely to the food, but also the contemporary-looking kitchens, stainless appliances and the "I want that" gadgets.

Many Americans are replicating what they see on TV, which means big business for contractors, builders and designers.

Consulting with professionals is definitely recommended, especially considering the amount of research, design expertise and regulatory codes that need to be followed when installing professional-style equipment and appliances.

Larger stoves require more comprehensive ventilation systems, while the combination of an all-new suite of high-powered appliances may require a little more power from your home's electrical infrastructure.

Spacious and usually shining with stainless accents, a well-executed commercial-style kitchen is a thing of beauty.

The professional equipment within them provide near-restaurant-level power that helps execute large meals for get-togethers.

Built-in refrigerators have also become trendy, as many kitchen masters prefer the extra floor space that this affords them.

Stainless appliances, sinks and counters have found their way into many of our kitchens, and for good reason. Their sleek appearance and simple elegance help "commercialize" any kitchen atmosphere and can quickly



© Fotolia / AP

transform blah to brilliant.

Not all stainless appliances are created equally, though, so try to match similar shines and finishes across all of your kitchen pieces for strong cohesion.

## The money it takes

A commercial-style kitchen remodel can cost in between \$6,000 and \$15,000 depending on your equipment grades, flooring, appliances and finishing touches.

Costs can add up in a hurry, but the up-front investment usually ends up paying off in the end.

According to reator.org, a major kitchen remodel can net a nearly 60-percent return on investment. That is of course, if you ever plan on selling your home.

For most people, the addition of a commercial kitchen is not just for resale purposes, but to provide a daily dose of cooking excellence.

*"No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden."*

*-Thomas Jefferson*

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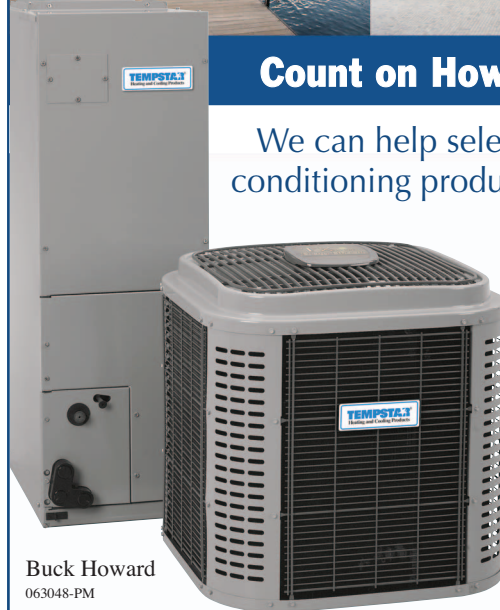
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# Take steps to tick-proof your yard

Despite their diminutive stature, ticks are a big concern for people, particularly those with pets.

As the weather warms, ticks are out looking for a host to climb on and get a blood meal. Ticks are a significant concern because they can be infected with bacteria, viruses or parasites, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, and babesiosis are just a few of the many tick-borne diseases. These pathogens can be passed to humans and pets via the bite of infected ticks.

In 2018, at least one variety of disease-transmitting tick had been

found in all of the lower 48 states, according to the CDC. In addition, researchers at Cornell University identified 26 species of ticks along the East Coast alone. Preventing tick bites has never been more important. The process starts right in one's own backyard.

According to Consumer Reports and the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program, controlling wildlife that enters one's yard can help keep tick numbers down. Open access means

animals can enter and so can ticks. Fencing and pest management solutions may help.

Other ideas include landscaping techniques that can reduce tick populations:

- Remove leaf litter from the yard.

- Clear tall grasses and brush around homes and at the edges of the lawn. Mow regularly to keep the lawn short.

■ Create a barrier between wooded areas and the yard if it abuts a forested area. According to Consumer Reports, a three-foot-

wide path of wood chips or gravel can prevent tick migration by creating a physical barrier that's dry and sometimes too hot for ticks to tolerate. Such a barrier also serves as a visual reminder to anyone in your household to be especially careful if they step beyond the perimeter.

■ Bag grass clippings, which can serve as habitats for ticks.

■ Remove old furniture, trash and other debris that can give ticks places to hide.

■ Remember to use a tick-repellent product when venturing into wooded areas. Flea and tick products also are available for pets; consult with a vet.

Ticks are problematic, but various measures can help control tick populations in a yard.






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# Know when to call in a pro

Few things can revitalize a home more readily than a fresh coat of paint.

Thanks in part to the affordability of paint and its ease of application, painting is something that even novice DIYers can typically handle. According to the marketing advice guru Brandon Gaille, it is estimated that residential interior paint only lasts around three years before it needs to be updated.

Exterior paint can fade, chip and peel due to various environmental factors.

As a result, many homes can likely use a fresh coat of paint in at least one room.

As DIY-friendly as painting can be, when attempting to paint the interior or exterior of their homes, homeowners may learn that some painting projects are best left to the professionals. Painting requires skill, patience and a knowledge of how various paints — including finishes for particular applications — will hold up. Novice painters may do more harm than good by dripping paint on expensive carpeting or floors or fail to recognize the nuances that indicate a spot-on painting job.

Professional painters have spent hours upon hours learning the ropes of what works — and what does not. Painters often understand that painstaking preparatory work is crucial to getting pristine finished results. Walls and ceilings must be properly repaired and prepared even before a base coat is applied.

Professional painters also have an eye for details. And because professional painters make a business out of doing interior and exterior surfaces, they understand which techniques can improve efficiency. That means a professional job can typically be completed much more quickly than a DIY project.

Even though some people think they'll save money by painting their own homes, that's not neces-



Painting can give a home a facelift, and oftentimes it is smart to turn the work over to professionals to ensure the job is done just right.

sarily true. Professionals already have all the equipment necessary, unlike novices who may need to make repeated and potentially costly trips to the hardware store for supplies. Plus, if mistakes happen, DIYers have to spend additional time and money fixing them.

Safety can be a large motivator for turning painting over to a pro. Navigating exterior areas or tall interior ceilings can be challenging and may require scaffolding or tall ladders DIYers do not have. Risk of falls or other injuries increase with lack of experience.

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# For the best lawn, use care in weed control

Herbicides are chemicals used to eliminate weeds from your lawn turf. Lawn herbicides are available in pre-emergent types that prevent weeds from sprouting, and post-emergent types, which kill them after they have sprouted.

Homeowners should research carefully before using weed killers. Some products can cause severe damage to grass and landscape plants when used improperly.

## Signs of injury

You may see signs of herbicide damage shortly after applying the product to your lawn areas. The grass may become yellowed, a condition called chlorosis, or it may appear striped with colorless areas.

Grass plants may brown and die. Wilting and curling of leaves can also occur. Herbicides should not be used on newly planted grass, which can brown and die in large patches.

## The right herbicide

Weed killers come in a variety of types. Some of these are "selective" in that they only kill some types of weed plants. Others are "non-selective," which means they will kill any type of growing plant, so they must be used with care.

Glyphosate, marketed under the brand name Roundup, is one of

these non-selective weed-killers used to kill weeds on driveways and sidewalks. It can kill your lawn grass if used incorrectly.

Homeowners should identify the type of turfgrass used in their lawns so they can choose the right herbicide product. St. Augustine, a grass used in warm climates, cannot tolerate many herbicide compounds.

Always read labels carefully to determine if the herbicide is safe for your type of grass. When in doubt, contact your local agricultural extension service for advice.

## Repairing damage

If you see damage on your lawn soon after applying an herbicide, you may be able to save the grass by employing a few techniques.

First, water the lawn liberally to wash the herbicide off the grass plants. This method will not help herbicides that are soil active. It will merely wash the compound further into the soil. You can, however, dig a slight trench around damaged areas to cut the roots of the grass plants to prevent the weed killer from being taken up into plant cells.

If damage is severe, you may have to re-seed or re-sod areas of your lawn with the most injury. After repairing your lawn, do not use herbicides for at least six weeks



© Fotolia / AP

**A beautiful yard requires more than mowing, but pay attention to what you're putting on it.**

after re-seeding or re-sodding to allow the new grass to develop a strong root system.

## Preventing injury

The best way to avoid expensive grass and plant injury from herbi-

cides is to prevent it from happening. Follow label directions whenever you apply weed-killing products. Use only the amount recommended by the manufacturer.

Don't mix chemicals together. Avoid drift problems by refraining

from applying herbicide when it is windy.

Use only the amine or low-volatile forms of 2, 4-D herbicide. Do not use soil active herbicides where run-off can carry it to non-target areas.

Be careful when applying soil, manure or other amendments to your property. They may contain herbicides to kill weeds. Know the source of the materials. Herbicide injury often occurs when you apply herbicides in hot weather. Only apply herbicide when the temperature is below 80 degrees Fahrenheit, or as directed on the bottle.

## Weed and feed

Weed-and-feed combination products that combine an herbicide with fertilizer can be damaging to turf grass and landscape plants. The main problem with these products is that fertilizer generally needs to be watered into the soil, but herbicides need to be left on the leaves to work properly.

Also, if you need to re-apply weed-killer, you will also be re-applying fertilizer, which is unnecessary and can find its way into local waterways. It's generally best to weed and feed in separate operations.

## Mow for success

By Katie Winslow

As the weather finally begins to warm up from our long winter the itch to get outside and begin working in our lawn and garden grows with each passing day. Whether you see mowing your lawn as a chore that has to be done or a relaxing way to wind down after a long week at the office there are some tips you should take into consideration this season.

Before your first mowing be sure to check over your lawn mower. Change the oil and fuel. Clean out the air filter. Sharpen and adjust the blades. Sharp blades will ensure clean cuts on your blades of grass. A cleanly cut blade is less susceptible to disease and is able to better conserve water. If the weather and your individual lawn conditions allow for it mowing may begin during the last week in April. If your lawn is still too wet, hold off until it is dry.

A recent trend in lawn mowers is that they are equipped with baggers. These baggers take the clippings from your lawn and then are usually disposed of or added to a

compost pile. Lawn clippings are actually extremely valuable to a lawn. Decomposed clippings add the equivalent of one fertilizer application to your lawn each year. Decomposed clippings also improve soil quality and minimize runoff and help improve carbon sequestration. If your clippings are too long you can mulch them by mowing over them several times. If you choose to remove your clippings and have applied an herbicide to your lawn do not use the clippings as mulch for other plants or add them to a compost pile.

When setting your blade height be sure that it is three inches or higher. Taller grass will help to shade out the weed seeds and maintain a lower soil temperature. A taller grass on top of soil also means a deeper root system which allows your grass to reach more nutrients in your soil. During the

mid-summer, when temperatures increase, raise your mowing height by one inch. Change your mowing pattern frequently to promote upright shoot growth. If possible, mow at right angles every other time you mow.

Mowing is the most time consuming part of keeping a lawn, but if done properly will lead to a healthy, vigorous lawn.

Contributions from this article include former Extension Educator Sam Bauer. For more information on lawn care you can visit the University of Minnesota Extension website and look under lawn and garden. If you have specific questions about your lawn you are welcome to stop by or call the Stearns County Extension office 320-255-6169 ext. 1.

*Katie Winslow is a University of Minnesota Extension educator.*

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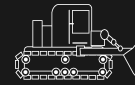
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Tree services can ensure trees maintain their awe-inspiring beauty and help homeowners protect their homes and their belongings.

## Use a tree service for beauty, safety

Cold weather can take its toll on a property, especially in regions of the world where winters are harsh like Minnesota. Most parts of the landscape are vulnerable to damage from winter storms, but trees may be especially susceptible. By the end of winter, many homeowners wonder if their trees would benefit from some professional TLC.

Tree services provide a host of services. While fall is a popular time to remove trees from a property, doing so in spring is not unheard of, especially if trees were affected by winter storms and now pose a threat to a home and the people who live inside it.

Homeowners considering tree services can explore the following ways that some professional arbor attention can protect them and their homes.

■ Tree services can help protect a home's foundation. Old trees that stretch well into the sky can be captivating, but they also can pose a threat to a home's foundation. Such trees may have especially large root zones that may extend beneath walkways and even a home. In the latter instance, foundations may crack as roots try to stake their claim to the ground beneath a home. According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, homeowners pay an average of just over \$4,000 to repair foundation issues, though major problems can cost considerably more than that. A professional tree service can remove aging trees that might be beautiful and awe-inspiring but still pose a threat to a home and the areas surrounding it.

■ Tree services can improve visibility. Trees that have aged a bit since their last trimming might affect the view of a property from inside a home. Overgrown branches can compromise residents' ability to see and experience the natural

beauty just outside their windows. The average homeowner may be able to trim short trees on his or her own, but if views from the second floor of a home or higher have been compromised, it's much safer to call a professional tree service. Such services have the right tools and experienced personnel necessary to safely trim high branches on tall trees.

■ Tree services can help prevent future damage. Even if trees made it through a recent winter unscathed, that's no guarantee next winter or even the coming seasons of spring, summer and fall won't ultimately prove their undoing. Travelers Insurance notes that

weather-related roof damage, including damage resulting from falling limbs and branches weighed down by snow during the winter months, accounted for more than half of all Travelers property loss claims between 2009 and 2016. According to BNC Insurance and Risk Advisors, homeowners may be liable if a tree they knew posed a threat falls onto a passerby or a neighbor's property and causes damage or injury. Having all trees properly trimmed each year, but especially those that can fall on your home and your neighbors' homes, may prevent future damage and legal issues.

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# Plan options to finance your project

Before starting a home improvement project, either on one's own or with the assistance of a professional contractor, homeowners must first consider the costs involved. According to the home improvement resource HomeAdvisor, more than one-third of homeowners do not understand what hiring a professional will cost, and then cannot successfully budget and secure financing once they have set their sights on a renovation project.

HomeAdvisor says that some of the more popular projects, such as remodeling a kitchen or bathroom or building a deck, can cost, on average, \$19,920, \$9,274 and \$6,919, respectively.

Homeowners may find that the more expensive renovations require them to secure some type of financing. Those who have never before sought such financing may want to consider these options.

■ **Cash-out refinancing:** With cash-out refinancing, a person will begin the mortgage process anew with the intention of paying off the current mortgage balance, and then taking out additional funds for other purposes. Cash-out refinanc-



Homeowners looking to finance their next improvements should speak to a financial advisor and shop around for the best types of funding for them.

ing is a way to tap into a home's existing equity for use on improvements or other expenses, such as college tuition.

■ **Home equity line of credit:** The financial experts at Bankrate indicate that a HELOC works like a credit card, with the house as collateral. There is a credit limit, and borrowers can spend up to that limit. The interest rate may or may not be

fixed. However, the interest may be tax-deductible if the financing is used to improve, buy or build a home.

■ **Home equity loan:** Individuals also can borrow against equity in their homes with a fixed interest rate through a home equity loan. Most lenders will calculate 80 percent of the home value and subtract a homeowner's mortgage balance to figure out how much can be

borrowed, according to the financial advisory site The Simple Dollar.

■ **Personal loan:** Homeowners can shop around at various financial institutions for competitive personal loans to be used for home improvement purposes. Funds may be approved within one business day, which can be ideal for those who want to begin their improvements soon.

■ **Personal line of credit:** A personal line of credit allows borrowers to borrow only the money needed at the time, and offers a variable interest rate that is generally lower than fixed loan rates. Again, like a

credit card, PLOC gives a person a maximum borrowing amount and is ideal for ongoing purchases.

■ **Credit cards:** In a pinch, credit cards can be used to finance improvements, but they do come with the cost of very high interest rates if the balance is not paid in full by the time the bill comes due. However, for funding smaller projects and maximizing rewards points through home improvement retailers or specific credit card company promotions, credit cards can be a way to earn various perks in addition to the benefit of improving a home.

## Keep your deck safe and beautiful

Installing a deck is hard, tedious work. Just ask your lower back after 10 hours of driving nails and lining up boards. That's why it is important to protect your sweat equity investment by taking proper care of your labor of love.

Rain and sunshine are your deck's natural enemies, as it doesn't take long for your perfectly stained masterpiece to suffer from weathering and fading. Of course, this can be avoided by some simple methods and deck care strategies.

■ Experts strongly urge the use of fiberglass or plastic brushes and shovels to remove foreign objects from your deck. Trying to push snow, dirt and leaves off your deck with a metal shovel can scrape your sealant away and compromise your deck's longevity.

For standing water, use push brooms or water sweepers to gently dry your deck. Letting water stand and potentially cause mildew or wood rot can be as equally as damaging as using the wrong tool.

■ Now that you know what tool to use, your deck needs a thorough scrubbing with a specialized cleaner at least once a year.

These cleaners will remove that dirt, grime and dust that can build up quickly. If any parts of your deck are stained, there are cleaners to take care of that, too. The right cleaning solution and a little bit of elbow grease are reasonable investments that can make all the difference in maintaining deck health.

Wood rot is not always obvious to the naked eye. It can fester in between your deck boards in the form of damp leaves or rainwater.

Several products are available for you to reach these tough-to-clean spaces, including hand scrapers that will not damage your wood's sealant. If you're looking for less tedious way to clean these spaces, a pressure washer works wonders.

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