

# SPRING

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### *Outdoor Living Areas*

How to keep outdoor living areas safe

### *Successful Gardening*

Six ways to make your garden more successful

Tips for negotiating with contractors



#### *Ideas for early spring*

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- Give shutters new life with a fresh coat of paint
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# Six ways to make your garden more successful

Homeowners enjoy gardening for many different reasons. In addition to adding beauty to a property, gardens can offset grocery costs by yielding tasty produce. They also offer important habitats and food sources for both insects and animals.

While growing a vegetable or flower garden can turn into a rewarding hobby, or even a passion, gardening also can be overwhelming, particularly when the results are less than stellar. Novice gardeners have scores of resources at their disposal, including the advice of gardeners who have made mistakes and learned from them. The following guidance can make home gardens that much more successful.

1. Start small. You may have visions of an expansive garden growing rows of crops or acres of flowers. But it is smart to start small and build on what you find successful, which includes plants that thrive in your lawn and garden. This also is beneficial if you are unsure of vegetable yields. Several blooming plants producing bushels of crops can be overwhelming, especially if you can't get to harvesting or cooking them in a timely fashion.

2. Assess the soil. Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce strong, hardy plants, according to the gardening resource GrowVeg. Nourish soil with organic matter, such as manure, compost, shredded leaves, and natural mulch. Add this organic matter in the off-season to give it enough time to be incorporated into the ground before spring. You can have your soil tested for pH and other characteristics that make it



Novice gardeners have scores of resources at their disposal, including the advice of gardeners who have made mistakes and learned from them.

friendly or averse to plants at a local garden center.

3. Arm yourself with knowledge. Do you know how deeply to plant seeds and how far apart to space plants? Are you aware of the sunlight needs of certain flowers or plants? If not, read the packaging and do your research so your plants have the best chance of not only sprouting, but also surviving. Many people prefer to start seedlings indoors in late winter and then transfer those plants outdoors when they are stronger and more established.

4. Sit in your yard and observe. Watch the way the sunlight dances over areas of your landscape. Take note of which areas get the most sun and shade. This will help you plan what to plant and where to plant it. Vegetable gardens tend to need ample sunlight to bear pick-worthy produce. You can give plants a leg up by growing them in optimal conditions.

5. Choose hardy varieties. Certain plants have been bred to thrive in your climate, including heat-tolerant plants for climates with sweltering summer sun. Consult with a local gardening center to figure out which plant zone you are in, and which plants will do best within that zone.

6. Use rainwater. Rainwater contains fewer contaminants and additives than tap water, which can benefit garden plants. Collect rainwater in rain barrels and use irrigation systems to deliver it to the garden.

Home gardens can yield many gifts, from flowers to fruit. Beginners can utilize some time-tested strategies to increase their chances of planting a successful garden.

# How to keep outdoor living areas safe for entertainment

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

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

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

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

• Consider fencing. Fencing can make an outdoor living space more private and safer. Local laws may mandate that pools be enclosed with fencing, but even living spaces without pools can be made safer with the installation of a fence.

• Firepits are wildly popular, as more than 35 percent of homeowners who responded to the ICFA survey acknowledged

“  
Outdoor living spaces are wildly popular.  
”

their intention to purchase new firepits in 2021. Adding fencing around areas with firepits establishes boundaries, which is a must for homeowners with small children. Fencing also makes it harder for local wildlife to gain access to a property, which can

decrease residents' risk for tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease.

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

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

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# The different ways to repair and save your driveway

Asphalt driveways do not last forever. Over time, weather and general usage can degrade the driveway surface, resulting in cracks, pitting and more. Ultraviolet rays, salt and automotive fluids also can affect the appearance and functionality of a driveway. An unsightly driveway can adversely affect curb appeal and resale potential.

Homeowners have to consider various factors when it comes to repairing driveways. They may have the option of getting the driveway resurfaced, resealed or repaved, and each project is unique.

**Resurfacing** – According to the home improvement price comparison site Kompare It, resurfacing is simpler and faster than installing a new asphalt driveway. With resurfacing, any cracks are filled in to create an even base. Then a new layer of asphalt is applied over the existing one. That new layer can range in thickness from 1.5 to 3 inches. A heavy rolling machine will then smooth and flatten the layers together. If the driveway has minor pitting or cracking, then resurfacing can be a cost-effective strategy, as it may be a \$3,000 to \$6,000 job as opposed to \$5,000 to \$10,000 with repaving.

**Resealing** – Resealing a driveway, also called sealcoating, is another repair strategy. HGTV says resealing can be a do-it-yourself project. Resealing helps the driveway last longer. The driveway needs to be clean and dry, with holes and cracks filled prior to sealcoating. Start at the far edge of the driveway and seal that area by “cutting-in” by hand for a neat edge. Afterward the rest of the driveway can be sealed using a squeegee or broom. This project can be completed within two or three days if no precipitation is forecast.

**Repaving** – A project best left to professionals, repaving typically involves the removal of an existing driveway and the installation of a new one. The sub-grade layer is essential in the process for a smooth look. Contractors also will assess soil and grading when doing work. The construction blog Main Infrastructure says the new asphalt driveway can vary in thickness between two and six inches, depending on budget and need. The contractor also can advise if full-depth asphalt application or an aggregate base is practical.



Assessing the condition of the driveway, can give homeowners a better idea about which type of repair project best suits their property.

## Driving habits that could help the planet

Habits can be hard to kick. Many people need a unique catalyst in order to ditch habits they’ve long wanted to put in their rearview mirrors.

Increased awareness of climate change and its effects could be the catalyst many people need to make positive, planet-friendly changes to their daily routines.

Driving habits are one area where individuals can alter their daily routines in ways that benefit the planet. These eco-friendly alterations can be instituted each day by individuals who want to do their part to combat climate change.

- **Avoid aggressive driving.** Aggressive driving is both a safety risk and a threat to the environment. According to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, aggressive driving can lower gas mileage in light-duty vehicles by as much as 40 percent in stop-and-go traffic and by as much as 30 percent at highway speeds.

- **Avoid idling.** Many drivers have long relied on idling to warm up their vehicles on cold mornings. However, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control notes that modern vehicles do not need warming up in temperatures above 0 degrees Fahrenheit. It’s important that drivers recognize this, as idling wastes fuel and increases the amount of vehicle

exhaust in the air. Vehicle exhaust increases air pollution and contains pollutants that have been linked to asthma, additional lung diseases and heart disease. A far more effective, and considerably less harmful, way to warm up a vehicle is to do so for 30 seconds and then drive slowly for the first few minutes.

- **Purchase a fuel-efficient vehicle.** Drivers looking for their next vehicle can prioritize fuel efficiency if they want their driving habits to have a smaller carbon footprint. The Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency provide information on fuel efficient vehicles, and that information can be accessed at [FuelEconomy.gov](http://FuelEconomy.gov). In addition, the EPA’s Green Vehicle Guide notes that electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids, hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, and cleaner burning gasoline vehicles are among the more efficient and less polluting cars and trucks on the market.

- **Make fewer trips.** The Fremont Green Challenge reports that more than half of all driving trips in the United States are taken for social, recreational, shopping, or family/personal errands. By combining these trips, drivers can greatly reduce their driving miles. Fewer trips conserves fuel and can reduce air pollution.

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# New Life Give shutters a fresh coat of paint

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

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

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

- Remove the shutters. When painting shutters, homeowners want to remove them from the house. It might seem easier to leave the shutters on and then paint them carefully with a brush, but that's both time-consuming and a potential safety risk. Some shutters are installed with fasteners that look like screws, but that appearance is misleading, and shutters installed in this way cannot be removed with a drill or screwdriver. Homeowners should determine which material their shutters are made from, and then look for a corresponding removal tutorial on YouTube. Homeowners who can't find one can contact the manufacturer or a contractor to determine the best way to remove the shutters.

- Clean the shutters prior to painting them. Try a garden hose to clean them, and if that doesn't work a power washer may be needed. If using a power washer with wooden shutters, be especially careful, as the force of the power washer may damage the wood. Vinyl shutters, like vinyl siding, can typically handle a strong power washing without being damaged. Wooden shutters also will need to have old paint



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

“  
There are many ways to give a home's exterior a new look.  
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removed before they can be repainted. Experts note that paint can be removed from wooden shutters with a sander or by applying a chemical paint stripper.

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

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

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

## Plan your garden to include insect repelling plants

Homeowners choose plants for their properties based on a number of variables. Some may be into growing their own foods, while others desire their gardens to be an awe-inspiring mélange of bright colors and alluring scents.

There's no wrong reason to plant a fresh garden, but some plants offer extra benefits, such as repelling insects.

Insects can be a nuisance and a threat to individuals' overall health. The good news for avid gardeners is that certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.

- Basil: The Farmers' Almanac notes it can be used to repel mosquitoes and moths.

- Lavender: Fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and moths are not fans of this aromatic and colorful member of the mint family. Bees tend to be drawn to lavender, a durable plant that many garden centers recommend in areas prone to drought or hot summers without much precipitation.

- Mint: Mint is another plant that is instantly recognizable for its aroma, but mint lovers may not realize that it's also great for keeping ants at bay. Mint also can be used to repel mosquitoes, but gardeners with no experience planting mint should plant it in pots. Separating mint in pots can prevent it from bullying its way into other plants' domains.

- Lemongrass: Lemongrass is a tropical grass that's so fragrant it's often used in perfumes. Lemongrass contains citronella, which many people associate with repelling mosquitoes. A potted lemongrass plant can repel these unwanted guests.

Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.

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# How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project. Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

- **Assess the merit of the project.** Remodeling magazine annually publishes a "Cost vs. Value Report" that lists the average cost and return on investment (ROI) that homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you're planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

- **Hire a contractor.** Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

- **Refurbish existing features.** Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

- **Choose midgrade materials.** Certain materials may be all the rage, but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to \$40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

- **Avoid peak seasons.** You'll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the



Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

- **Do some prep work.** You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before

the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

- **Buy a display item.** Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

## 4 popular colors for 2022

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

- **Very Peri:** Very Peri is the Pantone 2022 Color of the Year. A brand new shade of blue, Very Peri was designed to rekindle some of the qualities that the color blue represents while simultaneously complementing a modern perspective.

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

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

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



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# Tips on Working and negotiating with contractors

Spring is the season for fixing up a home. Homeowners who aren't interested in doing the work themselves turn to contractors to ensure the job is done not only to code, but on time and efficiently. After receiving an initial estimate from a contractor, homeowners may wonder if there is any additional wiggle room in contractors' costs.

Certain contractors are willing to negotiate while others are firm in their prices. However, learning the basics of negotiation can put homeowners in position to save money on dream renovations.

- **Do your homework.** Getting the best price typically require shopping around and not settling on the first bid. Experts recommend getting at least three estimates on the same job and be sure to let each contractor know that you are soliciting multiple bids. This alone may entice a specific contractor to give you his or her best offer up front. Avoid simply choosing the lowest bid. Look at quality of work, reputation and reviews. If you like a costly contractor more than another, see if that contractor is willing to match a lower bid to win the job.

- **Pick the right season.** As with other industries, home renovation work heats up during certain seasons or times of year. General contractors may be more willing to negotiate for a lower price depending on when their busy season may be. Jobs may slow down in winter, for example.

- **Talk about supplies.** Even after getting a good bid, you may be able to speak with your contractor about lowering costs even more by choosing less costly supplies. Find out if contractors can source materials from a low-cost supplier. In addition, discuss if you can purchase your own supplies.

- **Ask to do a portion.** Be honest with the contractor about your budget and figure out if there is any way for you to do some of the work to lower costs. The contractor can give you jobs that are within your abilities, which can shave dollars off the final price.



Learning the basics of negotiation can put homeowners in position to save money on dream renovations.

“  
Be honest with the contractor...  
”

- **Know your rights and laws.** Understand the laws governing contract language in your state or province. Contracts should also spell out the change order process so that expectations of changes and costs will be known in advance.

These are just some of the tactics homeowners can use when negotiating the price of home remodels or improvements.

## Do your homework when planning to rent a car or RV

Vehicle rentals enable vacationers or business travelers to get around when they leave their own vehicles at home. Driving across the country can take days, but hopping a flight and then renting a car at the airport ensures that travelers have the convenience of getting around town of their own accord.

Following is a generalized guide of what to expect when renting a car.

Most national rental car agencies operate under a standard set of rules. Small auto rental companies may have more relaxed standards. Enterprise Rent-A-Car, a leading car rental company in the United States and Canada, says to expect to need the following:

- A valid driver's license with a photo.
- Proof of a car insurance policy, or purchase of the rental company's insurance.
- A credit or debit card.
- A driver who is at least 25 years of age.

Large rental companies often offer a wide range of vehicles, from economy cars to pickups and SUVs. Prices vary based on the size of the vehicle. Renters can shop around to find prices that meet their budgets. Each company has its own rules on mileage restrictions, use of toll roads and fueling up before returning the vehicle. Renters should go over policies carefully to avoid extra charges.

### RV Rentals

There are various ordinances that may restrict the use of RVs, including capacity maximums and age limits. Like other rental vehicles, the minimum age to rent an RV in the U.S. tends to be 25. Rental companies may place restrictions on traveling across borders to Mexico or Canada. Check international travel rules prior to signing on the dotted line.

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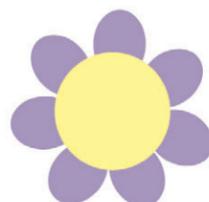


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