

HOME & garden

SPRING 2019

Secrets of a low-maintenance yard

By Melissa Erickson

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With the right planning and wise choices our landscapes can require less work and still look great. The goal of an almost-maintenance-free yard is possible.

“A maintenance-free yard is one you don’t maintain. I’m not sure many neighbors would appreciate that! So no, there is no such thing as no maintenance, but we sure can have a lot less than the typical landscape,” said prairie garden designer Benjamin Vogt, author of “A New Garden Ethic” and owner of Monarch Gardens in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Regardless of what TV commercials and advertisements proclaim, the perfect mower, soil or mulch will not do all the work for you. Choosing properly sited native plants and forgoing an intensive lawn has been trending for a year now, Vogt said.

“When we match the plants to the site — considering soil, drainage, light and companion plants that help one another — maintenance

can be minimized. For example, the beds at my house require only spring cutting down and fall tweaking by adding plants here and there,” Vogt said.

Mowing the lawn can be a chore, but adding features that require less upkeep can give a homeowner more time to enjoy the yard.

“Depending on your region, one can use gravel or permeable paving to minimize green maintenance,” Vogt said. “If you have a lawn you never use, even in a shady, dry area, many sedge species make a wonderful alternative. Low-mow mixes also seem to fare better than fescues and bermuda grass for resiliency to weather extremes.”

Adding a sitting area or sculpture with the intent of cutting down on maintenance can backfire. Fewer plants means more mulch, which is actually more maintenance, Vogt said.

“Think about all the mulch you have to add year after year or the pre-emergent herbicides you put under it. Lots of expense and labor there, when using more plants from the get-go will save you money and headaches over time,” Vogt said.

Hiring a professional to design a low-maintenance landscape can help homeowners scale appropriately and tailor to their lifestyle and goals, Vogt said.

“I encourage folks to consult with local native plant nurseries and university extension agents,” Vogt said. Other resources include native plant societies and regional guidebooks.

“Plants that require less work are plants that have been put in the right place considering not only light, soil, moisture needs and root/reproduction habit, but mature height and width. Too often trees or shrubs that get large are placed within a few feet of a home or near a sidewalk, creating trimming headaches for years. And too often aggressive spreaders are put into small beds, quickly overwhelming other plants and causing a mess,” Vogt said.

Plants look the best and act the best when they are in the right place, and that requires research and consulting an expert who has experience in landscape design and the plants you’d like to use, Vogt said.

Nature’s Corner

By Ann Torey
Nature’s Corner

A few nice days in March can certainly make a gardener itchy but tonight’s cold temperatures are a sure reminder that we are still weeks from our average frost free date of April 22nd. This is when your chances of a killing frost are 50% and over the last several years we’ve had snow and frost into the first week of May. That being said...My weather guru says he thinks we actually may have an earlier spring than the past several years. My advice is to check the forecast very regularly and read our weekly column in the Globe or Shopper’s Weekly for the latest update on what to expect. We follow the weather closely around here because it can cost us thousands if we get caught off guard by a little dip in the temperature.

Every flower and vegetable plant that you may find in a retail setting in the upcoming weeks have been grown in a nice, warm, bright, greenhouse and then finds its way into your cart and into your garden. When plants are stunted from a cold snap or cold ground they will never produce as well as a plant that has never had a slow-

down. I always encourage gardeners to leave the plants at our store until they are ready to plant. At our store, the plants are outside and we try to maintain them in peak condition by moving cold sensitive plants such as tomatoes and cucumbers back into our greenhouse when we feel the temperatures may cause injury. When brought indoors in your home, their cells quickly change because of the lower light conditions and lack of air movement. This change is enough to slow them down and they never seem to regain that initial burst of energy that they started life with. If you have any questions about growing your garden or when is the best time to plant your vegetables, flowers, or trees and shrubs, we are happy to help at our store. (620)225-5639.

History:

My first job at a greenhouse was so different than today. All plants were grown in either peat pots or clay and the peat pots were lined up in wooden flats that the greenhouse owners handmade each winter. Nothing was standardized because they used whatever was on hand. We opened Nature’s Corner in 1975, just as plastic pots and plastic flats were reasonable in price and so much more time efficient. Peat pots grow awesome plants but, they are much harder to use than plastic and impossible for larger growers to retail across the country. They easily fall apart and tear, don’t always keep standing up and root into each other

which means they don’t separate easily. Standardized pots are less costly, easier to plant and ship which is a plus for us as consumers.

Another change I’ve been a part of is the incredible variety of plants that are now available. For example, at my first job there were red, pink, white and purple Petunias. Yes, we still have those same colors but now they are available in Wave, Supertunias, Vista, Potunia and other types. All these new varieties have one thing in common and that is incredible vigor. This increased vigor requires constant feeding of a high nitrogen fertilizer because they require lots of food to maintain those mounds of colorful, huge blooms. That’s why using the old 15-30-15 fertilizer resulted in yellow foliage by midsummer and a stunted looking plant. We found in doing maintenance work throughout the city that a high nitrogen formula such as In Bloom’s Water Soluble Fertilizer of 24-7-15 keeps plants blooming with dark green foliage and tons of blooms.

But then again, it all begins with the soil. Without a good foundation for their roots, plants will never grow to their full potential whether it’s in pots or the ground. Marijuana growers use this concept because the only soil they generally use is Sunshine or Foxfarm. Sunshine Potting Soils can have up to 85% peat moss, a lower Ph and has long been a preferred growing medium for growers and homeowners. Foxfarm (made by California Hippies) has all kinds of organic ingredients

such as bat guano, kelp meal and worm castings which makes organic growers happy. Forest products are a fairly new ingredient and can cause a compacted soil if not properly aged and mixed. The difference between Aged and Processed Forest Products is Aged has been composted and is now an addition to the blend. Processed forest products have not been composted and becomes a detriment to the mix because in order for it to become compost, Nitrogen is pulled from the soil to feed the tiny composting microbes and starves the plants. Nitrogen is the most important ingredient in plant health and the lack of it results in poor growth. All of this information should be taken into consideration when buying soil for pots or raised beds. When planting in the ground, adding compost can make our soil great. We like the acidified cotton burr compost which lowers our high soil Ph and makes it an agreeable soil for plants to grow in. Compost makes sandy soil hold water and heavy tight clay soils become looser.

After 45 years in the horticulture industry, I have witnessed major changes in every aspect yet haven’t found anything that matches the pleasure out of simply planting something in the ground and watching it grow. I love helping gardeners be successful so if you have questions please feel free to contact Beth or Ann at Nature’s Corner, 11192 Kliesen Street or message us through our Facebook page @www.facebook.com/asknaturescorner.

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This is the face of Ann Torrey, Nature’s Corner’s resident expert on all things plants, pests, fertilizers and keeping your lawn beautiful. She grows roses, orchids, African violets and all things flowering in her spare time. She thinks bugs are “cool” and you’ll likely find a microscope on her desk to help solve your plant problems. She doesn’t need to read the labels on products, because she actually knows and uses the products she recommends.

Anyone can sell you powdered fertilizer in a yellow box for a dollar less than us, but if you want real solutions and not just random guesses, come to the experts at Nature’s Corner.



By Melissa Erickson
More Content Now

From white-washed bleaches to pretty patterns and wide planks to going gray, the top trends in wood flooring offer an exciting degree of variety for homeowners considering a remodeling project.

Two-thirds of American homeowners said they would choose to have wood floors in their dream home, according to a recently commissioned survey by the National Wood Flooring Association. With so many other options, why does wood flooring continue to attract attention?

“Wood is durable, attractive, easy to clean and can add significant value to a home,” said Michael Martin, president and chief executive officer of the National Wood Flooring Association. “Whether your home is traditional or contemporary, brand new or centuries old, wood floors offer endless design possibilities to fit your style. When properly installed and maintained, wood floors can last for hundreds of years, making them a great value.”

· **Walk the plank**

Traditional strip wood flooring remains popular, but wide plank is the market leader. Planks of up to 7 inches in width are considered normal now, Martin said.

“The width of the plank should really be taken into account based on the size of the room — in some cases the wider boards may make the room appear larger, while dwarfing the appearance of the room in other cases,” Martin said.

The trend is a classic old-is-new-again story.

“Some of the oldest wood floors still being renovated today are wide planks — upwards of 12 to 16 inches. The plank flooring option has been around for as long as wood flooring has been installed,” Martin said.

Long boards and low-gloss finishes remain in high demand, as are gray colors and cerused finishes, which show a clear contrast between the soft and hard grains of the wood, Martin said.

Homeowners are moving away from honey, blonde and yellow finishes, he said.

“Light floors have continued to be popular, with whites, greys and even a darker base with the cerused or limed overtones to lighten the overall look,” Martin said.

· **Pattern and detail**

Eye-catching patterns are also in demand, such as classic herringbone and chevron, as well as simple parquet patterns.

“Parquet flooring varies in size and generates a geometric, non-linear look.

This can be a great way to achieve a unique flooring style in a home. Also, the addition of a simple border or even a customized medallion, or using a variety of media, such as stone, cork or leather in conjunction with the wood floor,” Martin said.

Representing about 67 percent of the market domestically, white and red oak are expected to remain the market leaders, Martin said.

“Oak is widely available, has a reasonable cost and can be very versatile from a styling standpoint. In addition, if there is a desire to change the look of the floor at a later time, oak responds well to stain, which could create an entirely new look,” Martin said.

The distressed floor styles that have been popular in recent years are now joined by lightly textured surfaces, Martin said.

“Character marks such as knots and mineral streaks are often desired and left in the material, promoting a more natural appearance. Overall, there is a general shift toward the use of domestic species as opposed to

species imported from other countries,” he said.

· **How to tell wood from faux wood**

“There is a lot of confusion in the market right now about flooring products that look like wood, but are not real wood,” Martin said.

Wood look-alike products may include laminate, tile, plastic composite and vinyl plank flooring, but a wood floor is defined as any flooring product that contains real wood as the top-most, wearable surface of the floor, according to the National Wood Floor Association. It includes solid wood flooring, engineered wood flooring and composite engineered wood flooring.

Some of the main differences to look for include repetitive patterns (wood doesn’t have identical repeats), texture, smell, and how it feels and sounds when walking across it, Martin said. Also, look at the seams between planks to determine a real wood grain or a picture wrap.





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LIGHT *therapy*

Landscape lighting trends for security, beauty

By Melissa Erickson
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After a long day of work, homeowners are turning to their backyards as an oasis. Tech and energy advances in landscape lighting can help them enjoy the outdoors well after dusk. More than simply hanging some lanterns, “landscape lighting is the use of light to create a visually stimulating and appealing experience in an outdoor environment,” said Patrick Harders, founder of Enlightened Lighting and co-owner of Sterling Lighting, both near Washington, D.C. “Many homeowners decide to have landscape lighting installed to increase curb appeal and highlight key features of their landscaping and architecture. Others prefer lighting for the added security and visibility it brings to dark and sometimes

treacherous areas of their property, which can include walkways, steps and uneven areas of their yard,” said Harders, who serves on the board of directors for the International Landscape Lighting Institute. If lighting is on your list of home improvement projects, the trend is toward energy-efficient, low-voltage lighting. “LEDs (light emitting diodes) have become the standard light source overtaking halogen bulbs, which used to be the norm years ago. LEDs have gained popularity due to their energy efficiency and refined clean white color temperature, unlike a warm yellow tint or cool blue tint of other light sources,” Harders said. For fixtures, high-quality metallics are in, particularly marine-grade brass and stainless steel, Harders said. The types of lighting applications that are trending right now include

home facade lighting, patio and deck lighting, fountain and pond lighting, and specific types of lighting for landscaping features such as gardens and trees, Harders said. “A true lighting designer will create layers and depth to create an amazing visual experience. This is generally accomplished not by bright overpowering lights, but multiple lower-level lights,” he said. Homeowners should avoid dated light fixtures that create unnecessary glare or are made from inferior materials that will more easily fail or corrode, Harders said. For example, large flood lights produce glare, and security lights positioned off of the soffit create what Harders likes to call a “prison breakout” look. Another look to stay away from is the overuse of path lights. “Less is more, as too many lights can negatively impact the overall look and atmosphere of your path-

way, resulting in an overdone airport runway look,” Harders said. High-quality, low-voltage landscape lighting can be added to your property without disruption of your lawn and underground utilities when installed by a professional with electrical and design knowledge, Harders said. “Those looking to go the DIY route need to remember that any electrical work, whether for the interior or exterior of your home, can be dangerous without electrical knowledge and experience,” Harders said. Landscape lighting is an investment for your home, and the price is determined by how many total fixtures are included and how many areas are illuminated. “Prices vary by contractor and lighting design professional, but a small lighting system can start at several thousand dollars,” Harders said.

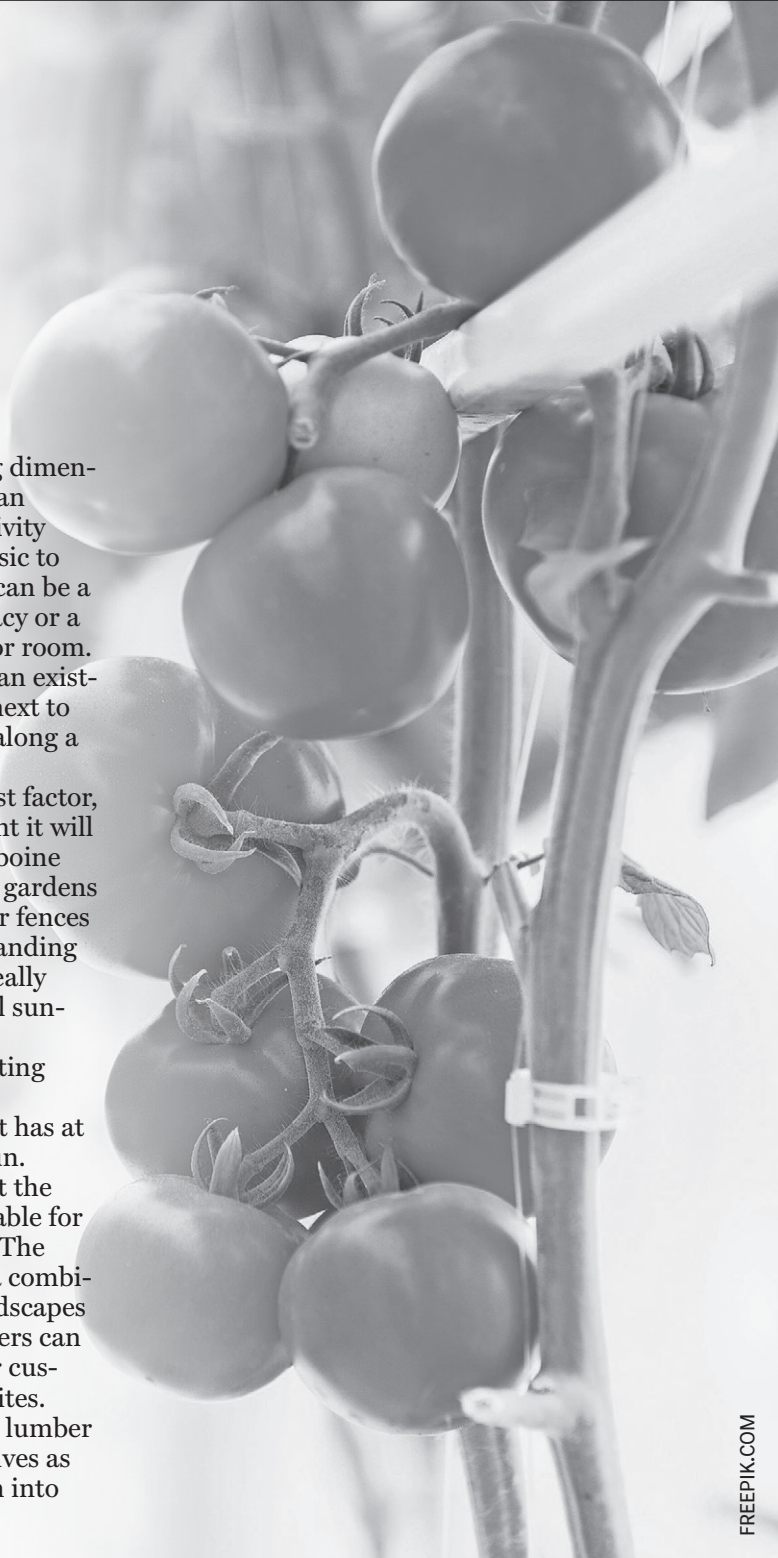
Getting started with VERTICAL GARDENING

By Melissa Erickson
More Content Now


With real estate demand at an all-time high, homeowners are making the most of their outdoor space by using blank walls, fences or perpendicular open spaces to tend everything from flowers to edibles, succulents, ferns and vines. “Space is really the main driver for this. As land prices continue to rise and cities become denser, the amount of gardening space has greatly diminished,” said Joe Raboine, outdoor design expert with Belgard, a hardscapes manufacturer. “Vertical gardens allow just about anyone to garden. Even with a balcony, vertical gardens can be amazingly productive for a small footprint.” Vertical gardening is just one of many outdoor trends according to the Garden Media Group’s 2019 Garden Trends Report. Others include an explosion of houseplants, garden tech apps and robots that monitor growing conditions, and community

gardening. Americans spent a record \$503 per household on gardening in 2018, up \$100 from the previous year, according to the report. In some ways vertical gardening can actually be easier than maintaining a traditional garden. “Given their height, they are less prone to damage from animals such as rabbits. Since they are containers, they are also easier to keep weeds out of,” Raboine said. “The biggest challenge is making sure they contain enough soil for the plants that one is growing. The next biggest challenge is to give them enough water. There are many simple drip irrigation systems that can be connected to timers to make that easier.” Plants with a smaller footprint tend to thrive in vertical gardens, Raboine said. “Things like peppers, tomatoes and herbs can do well. Plants like beans and peas can also do well as they like to grow up a structure. Even watermelons can work since they can be trained as well, and as long as they are supported when they get larger, they will be fine,” Raboine said.

In addition to adding dimension, vertical gardens can increase a space’s creativity in everything from classic to modern designs. They can be a natural screen for privacy or a living wall of an outdoor room. They can add layers to an existing garden or be built next to the home or garage or along a fence. “Full sun is the biggest factor, and then the total height it will be when complete,” Raboine said. “Typically vertical gardens are next to structures or fences but can easily be freestanding structures as well. ... Really anywhere they have full sunlight is an option.” Raboine’s tips for getting started: • First, find a site that has at least six hours of full sun. • Second, be sure that the materials used are suitable for building the structure. The structure itself can be a combination of masonry, hardscapes and wood. The containers can be preformed plastic or custom-built with composites. • Avoid using treated lumber for the troughs themselves as the chemicals can leach into the soil.



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Brie Arthur promotes foodscaping, the idea of incorporating edibles with ornamental plantings. At right, a garden bed is edged with arugula. [PHOTOS COURTESY BRIE ARTHUR]

By Melissa Erickson
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Brie Arthur sees growing potential in the landscaped pathway that leads from home to yard, in the floral beds, in the space around a firepit and almost everywhere else she looks. Arthur is a foodscaping advocate, proposing the benefits of mixing garden edibles with garden beautifuls.

Foodscaping is not a new idea and simply refers to incorporating edible plants in with your favorite ornamental trees, shrubs, perennials and containers that you are already growing in your home landscape, said Arthur, author of “The Foodscape Revolution” and vice president of horticulture for Gardenuity, a Dallas-based e-commerce startup and plant-kit service.

“It is an important idea to raise awareness of several key things, namely how and where food can be grown and the endless opportunities that all of our existing landscapes offer,” she said. “We have more than 180 million acres of land developed in the United States, and within the borders of all the common landscapes we could be producing food to help reduce the food miles crisis and eliminate food deserts in every community.” Food miles refers to the distance food is transported between where it is produced and where it is consumed.

By Melissa Erickson
More Content Now

From pops of color and smart technology in the kitchen to soaking tubs and statement showers in the bathroom, the National Kitchen and Bath Association's 2019 Design Trends report shares what we'll be seeing this spring.

Bold and blue

Say goodbye to the all-white/beige kitchen, which gets a much needed punch of color.

“We are definitely seeing pops of color in the kitchen,” said Elle H-Millard, certified kitchen designer and certified living-in-place professional. “You will see bold colors — red, yellow or blue — knobs on cook ranges. You might see the pop of color in the cabinets.”

Additionally, we'll see matte black finishes in faucets and more raw gold that patinas over time, H-Millard said.

“Blue is a new neutral that is becoming more and more popular in the kitchen in regard to appliances and cabinetry,” she said. “Since people are staying in their homes longer versus selling to move into another home, these neutrals and small points of color — and other customizations — are becoming more popular.”

For more elaborate customizations, 3D printing allows homeowners to custom-design faucet shapes, H-Millard said.

Cozy and connected

The tech-friendly kitchen is here to stay, with conveniences like voice-activated faucets, smart fridges and charging stations. A 2018 National Kitchen and Bath Association study found there was a sizable gap between what consumers are seeing and hearing in the marketplace versus what they actually have in their kitchens, but that gap is closing quickly, H-Millard said.

“Besides the cool factor for the intelligently built kitchen, it has a true safety factor as well and can be tremendously helpful as people live in place and grow older in the homes,” she said.

The kitchen island is the center of the home. Islands and double islands are used to house the sink, cooktops, prepping countertops and even warming drawers and under-counter refrigeration, all in one area keep people

together, H-Millard said.

Because of that tendency to gather in the kitchen, “cabinetry, flooring and countertops/surfaces are taking on characteristics of furniture,” H-Millard said. In some instances top cabinets may be replaced with open shelving for a modern look, she said.

“The idea is that the kitchen and the open family rooms look like they belong and there's less of a stark contrast from kitchen to family room,” H-Millard said.

Making a splash

“The soaking tub made a huge splash in 2018, as a popular bath remodel was removing the standard tub and putting a soaking tub in its place,” H-Millard said. “Statement showers, usually with room for two people with curbless entry, will remain popular in 2019.”

The wet room, where both the soaking tub and statement shower share one space with one drain, is growing in popularity, she said.

Also on the rise are the smart toilet and bidet seats that can be affixed to a toilet. As people move toward healthier, more eco-friendly lifestyles, cleansing is preferred over paper, and younger generations are looking to these technologies for ways to help the environment, H-Millard said.

“Smart toilets can also analyze your waste. You move to the sink to wash your hands and your smart mirror has the analysis written on the mirror,” she said. “Technology in the bath — and the kitchen — will have a big breakthrough in 2019 as more and more people are aging in the homes and living in place and looking to be healthier and safer.”

One spa amenity that is making its way into the home bathroom is a deprivation tank.

“These are making an entrance as the tanks are becoming more beautiful and sculptured,” H-Millard said. “Toto makes a deprivation tank that contours to your body and, by voice activation, spills a waterfall of water onto your shoulders as you deprive yourself of sound and sight.”

For a unique finish, consider an application of black in the bathroom with black stones or surfaces as well as matte black fixtures and faucets, H-Millard said.

KITCHEN & BATH trends

KITCHEN DESIGNED BY SANDRA GJESDAHL



BATH DESIGNED BY SHEA PUMAREJO