

ardening is a rewarding hobby that pays a host of significant dividends. Many people love gardening because it allows them to spend time outdoors, and that simple pleasure is indeed a notable benefit of working in a garden. But the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture notes that gardening provides a host of additional benefits, including helping people get sufficient levels of exercise, reduce stress and improve mood.

With so much to gain from gardening, it's no wonder people look forward to getting their hands dirty in the garden each spring. As the weather warms up, consider

these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

■ Discard the dead weight. Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter storms also should be removed at this point if they have not previously been discarded.

■ Test the soil. Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive in the months to come.



Water is essential to the success of any garden. Checking your irrigation system is one way to make sure your garden is ready for spring.

■ Mulch garden beds. Mulching benefits a garden

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by helping soil retain moisture and preventing the

growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over the course of spring and summer. That means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

■ Inspect your irrigation system. Homeowners with in-ground irrigation systems or above-ground systems that utilize a drip or soaker function can inspect the systems before plants begin to bloom. Damaged sprinkler heads or torn lines can deprive plants of water they will need to bloom and ultimately thrive once the weather warms up.

Cub Cadet.

■ Tune up your tools. Gardening tools have likely been sitting around gathering dust since fall. Serious gardeners know that tools can be expensive, so it pays to protect that investment by maintaining the tools. Sharpened pruners help make plants less vulnerable to infestation and infection. Well-maintained tools like shovels and hoes also make more demanding gardening jobs a little bit easier, so don't forget to tune up your tools before the weather warms up.

It's almost gardening season, which means gardeners can start on the necessary prep work to ensure their gardens grow in strong and beautiful this spring.

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2 Wednesday, April 17, 2024 Spring Home, Lawn & Garden

Tips to make a yard less attractive to ticks

Backyards are ideal places to spend warm afternoons soaking up some sun. Lazy days in the yard are a big part of what makes warm weather seasons like spring and summer so appealing. But those afternoons can quickly go off the rails when an unwelcome visitor makes its presence

Ticks can be found throughout the world, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that only a select few types of ticks transmit bacteria, viruses and parasites, or pathogens, that cause diseases in people. But even if the number of tick species that transmit diseases to humans is relatively low, ticks that can infect humans are a notable threat. Such ticks carry pathogens that the CDC notes can cause a number of diseases, including Bourbon virus, Ehrlichiosis and, of course, Lyme disease, among others.

Human beings can come into contact with ticks in their own backyards. But humans can take various steps to make their lawns less welcoming to ticks.

■ Cut your grass short and keep it that way. Blacklegged ticks are transmitters of Lyme disease, which the CDC notes is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States. Lyme disease also poses a growing threat in Canada, where data from the Public Health Agency indicates human-reported Lyme disease cases increased fromm 144 in 2009 to more than 2,100 in 2022. Black-legged ticks do not like environments that are dry and hot, so short grass makes lawns less attractive to this type of tick. Consumer Reports advises homeowners who have let their grass grow a little too high (around five or six inches) to bag their clippings when cutting the grass. Lots of clippings on the grass



Advocate file phot

Simple measures to keep ticks out of your yard include keeping grass short, your lawn clean of debris and making sure and creating barriers to keep the discourage ticks from entry.

can provide a respite from the heat for black-legged ticks.

■ Create a tick barrier if your property abuts woods. Woods provide a cover from summer heat

that black-legged ticks crave. So properties that abut the woods may be more vulnerable to these unwanted guests than yards that do not border woodlands. A barrier of dry

mulch made of wood chips between a property and a bordering wooded area can help repel ticks, who won't want to settle in often dry, hot mulch beds.

■ Plant with infestation prevention in mind. Some plants can help to repel ticks because they boast certain characteristics that ticks cannot tolerate. The fragrances, textures and oils of plants like garlic, mint, lavender, marigolds, and others create less welcoming conditions for ticks. Homeowners can speak with local garden centers for advice on tick-repellant plants that can thrive in their particular climate and on their properties.

■ Remove yard debris.
Piles of wood, leaves and
brush can make for good conditions for ticks that transmit disease. After raking
leaves and gathering brush,
discard the resulting piles
immediately.

These measures will not necessarily prevent all ticks from establishing themselves on a property, so individuals are urged to inspect their bodies and the bodies of their pets after a day in the yard.

Maintaining a lawn routinely roamed by pets

ibrant, green lawns can draw attention to any landscape. Many homeowners toil for hours each week to ensure their lawns are pristine, or invest in lawn care services to help maintain a yard if they do not have the time to do so themselves.

While many treatments can be applied to lawns to help them thrive, animal waste is not among them. Pet owners who aspire to have beautiful lawns will have to take a few extra steps to ensure lawns can persevere despite the presence of furry companions.

Reseed with a damageresistant grass

There are many different types of grass, and some are more resilient than others. Tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and Bermuda grass are just some of the grass varieties that can capably handle pet traffic. If replacing the entire lawn is not possible, consider reseeding or addressing the areas that pets frequent.

Strengthen the root system

It may be tempting to cut the lawn short, particularly if dogs or cats like to nibble on longer blades of grass. But that approach could be doing the lawn a disservice. According to The Home Depot, letting the lawn grow to at least three inches will



Advocate file photo

Pets can be tough on lawns, and lawns can be unsafe for pets. Taking certain steps can help preserve the safety and beauty of both your pets and lawn and garden.

help keep moisture in the soil and prevent evaporation. That moisture will strengthen the roots, creating a healthier lawn for pets and people.

Create pet paths

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areas to minimize the sights and signs of pet traffic. Mulch or crushed stone can establish these pet highways and look like intended features.

Set boundaries

Pet urine contains high levels of nitrogen, which can burn grass and turn it brown. It's not possible to water down urine or pick up solid waste immediately every time a pet goes outdoors, so designate a pet-friendly spot for potty time. Use fencing or a dog run to separate this area and help mitigate "land mines" all over the lawn. Fencing also can keep pets out of vegetable gardens and away from potentially toxic plants.

Avoid chemical lawn treatments

When pets use the yard and rest on the lawn, you'll need to eliminate products that can be harmful to them. Choose

all-natural fertilizers and weed and pest preventatives. **Look for alternatives**

If maintaining a lawn with pets seems like an uphill battle, consider swapping out your landscape with a variety of materials. Scale back on grass, and incorporate groundcover, hardscape materials like pea gravel, or extend the patio. Artificial turf also is an option, as it won't brown and wither. Some turf products can even be quickly and thoroughly cleaned with water.

It can take some trial and error for pet parents to protect their lawns from the effects of having furry friends playing in the yard.



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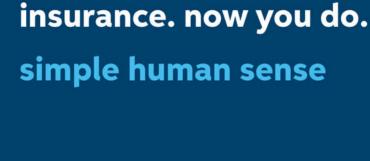
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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

pring marks the return of flowering plants and warm weather. And homeowners know that spring also ushers in the return of home renovation season.

Homeowners undoubtedly have an extensive list of projects on their to-do list this spring, and that may include helping their lawns and gardens recover after a long winter. Unpredictable weather, which can include drought and excessive rainfall and everything in between, can take its toll on a lawn. In certain instances, the best solution may be planting new grass. But homeowners can consider these tips before they begin the process of reseeding or replanting their

■ Scarify the lawn. Scarifying a lawn can help to create a clean slate, but the timing must be right. Various lawn and garden experts,

including those at BBC Gardeners' World Magazine, recommend scarifying in spring or early autumn. But don't jump the gun when scarifying in spring by scarifying before the lawn has started to grow after a dormant winter. Scarify when the soil is a little wet and the grass is once again actively growing. Scarfiying can remove any lingering weeds from last season and also pull up any moss that might have taken hold over the winter. Without weeds and moss to contend with, freshly planted seeds are in better position to thrive.

■ Work with a landscaping professional. Homeowners with manageable lawns can likely scarify their own lawns with a relatively inexpensive plug-in scarifier. However, scarifying can be a strenuous physical activity, particularly for homeowners with large lawns. In such instances,

homeowners can benefit from working with a qualified landscaping professional. Such a professional can scarify the lawn and subsequently reseed or replant new grass. The latter task is not so simple, as the lawn care experts at Scotts® note that choosing the correct seed is a vital part of reseeding or replanting a lawn. Choosing seed may sound simple, but it's a potentially complex decision that requires knowledge of the existing grass, including when to plant it. Certain grasses are best planted in spring or early fall, while others are best planted in summer. A qualified landscaping professional can identify the existing grass and plan the seeding or planting around this important detail.

■ Prepare to water the lawn. Watering is vital to the long-term success and health of freshly planted grass seed. Scotts® urges homeowners

to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist, but not soggy. That requires a daily commitment, and setting a multi-function hose nozzle or sprinkler to the mist setting once per day or more if it's hot outside can increase the chances grass will grow in thick and strong. Scotts® recommends keeping the top two inches of the soil moist until the new grass reaches a mowing height of roughly three inches. Once that benchmark has been reached, watering frequency can be cut back to about twice per week, but now the soil should be deeply soaked instead of misted. The soaking will help roots grow deep into the soil.

Spring is a great time for homeowners in various regions to reseed or replant their lawns. With the right approach, homeowners can enjoy a full and lush lawn throughout summer.



Choosing grass seed that is appropriate to the planting season is important to the success of any reseeding project. Make sure to scarify your lawn before reseeding for increased success.

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Gardening offers more than a day in the sun

illions of people embrace opportunities to get back in their gardens each spring, and they might be reaping more rewards from that activity than they realize. According to the American Institute of Stress, gardening sparks a level of creativity among enthusiasts, and that can help

to alleviate stress by lowering levels of the hormone cortisol. In addition, authors of a 2022 study published in the journal Urban Forestry & Urban Greening concluded that gardening during the COVID-19 pandemic helped people cope with coronavirus-related stress through outdoor activity.



Gardening can relieve stress according to some studies.

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Spring Home, Lawn & Garden Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

pring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, namely those areas like a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

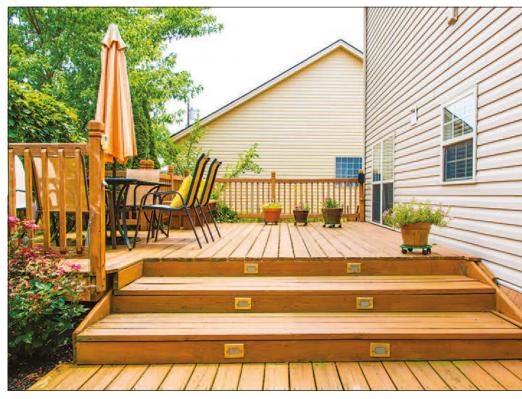
■ Wobbly underfoot and in hand: Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter. Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can

be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

■ Faded paint: Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

■ Holes in the wood: Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

■ Rust: Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the



Decks provide a great space for enjoying the outdoors in the spring and add decent value to your home. Ensuring that they stay in good order is as easy as perfoming a spring inspection and replacing components that are showing wear.

cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination

by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter,

which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

Choosing the best decking material

eauty is in the eye of the beholder, and that notion is as true when renovating a home as it is when studying a piece of art. Therefore, when homeowners are looking for the best building materials for their home remodels — including backyard decks — their own personal preferences may ultimately dictate the direction they go.

Deck boards and railings can be made from a diverse array of materials, including traditional hardwood, plastic and composite materials. Here's a deep look into some of the more popular decking materials so homeowners can make informed decisions when contracting with a decking professional for the

Hardwood, softwood or pressure-treated wood

In the not-so-distant past, decks were primarily built using some type of wood. Wood is widely available and fairly cost-effective. However, as anyone with a wood deck knows, wood requires frequent upkeep and it can be susceptible to rotting or insect damage. Wood decks also may splinter and deteriorate when exposed to the elements or pool water. Pressure-treated boards are infused with chemicals to



Advocate file photo

There are a number of different materials to construct your deck from, each with benefits and drawbacks.

help them endure, but that does not make them impervious to wear. Still, the traditional look of a wood deck remains appealing to many homeowners.

Composite

Composite decking materials are made from a blend of recycled plastic and wood fibers. Since there is so much recycled content, composite decks attract those who are concerned about the environment and sustainability. Composite decking comes in uncapped and capped varieties. The capped version has an extra layer of protective capping made from high-performance polymers, says TimberTech, a decking and outdoor furniture provider. While composite decks may

have similar up-front costs to wood, they will require less maintenance over the years, but they must be scrubbed to avoid mildew growth.

Plastic

Decks made of polyvinyl chloride, polypropylene or high density polyethylene (HDPE) are collectively referred to as PVC decks. They are made entirely from environmentally safe plastic with no wood in the mix at all. PVC decks are more durable than composite and can last a lifetime. All PVC decks need is occasional cleaning. A potential disadvantage to PVC is it doesn't always look, sound or feel like wood. Also, complex fastening systems can make the boards move as the temperature changes, resulting

in squeaking as people walk on the deck. Generally, PVC is more expensive than wood or composite, but that investment may be worth it for those who never want to worry about deck repair or replacement.

This Old House says there is another plastic decking material made from polystyrene. It is stiff, strong and light, and with the brand Eon, the nonslip surface becomes less slippery when wet so it may be great around pools.

Aluminum

Aluminum may not be as popular as other decking materials, but it is lighter and stronger than wood, composite, and plastic. Aluminum also is resistant to mold, weather and insects, and it can be recycled. An aluminum deck will last for years, which is why it is one of the more costly decking materials.

Homeowners have many choices when picking materials for their decks. If they want a traditional look and moderate cost, wood may be the way to go. Those concerned about looks and durability may like composite. People who want very durable and long-lasting may want to give strong consideration to plastic or aluminum materials.



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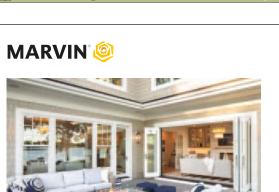
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