

Spring Home & Garden
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Special Edition

HOME



Your Guide to Homes, Home Improvement, Lawn & Garden and MORE!

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What to know about reseeding or replanting your lawn

Spring 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 lawns.

■ **Scarify the lawn.** To scarify is to use a tool such as a rake to clear matted grass and moss from the surface of your lawn, loosening the soil to improve growth. In short, it's to scratch the grass to remove the thatch. 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. Scarifying 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.

See **RESEED**/PAGE 2



Before reseeding or replanting, you should consider how and when you bring renewal to your lawn this spring.

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How to prepare soil for spring planting

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil. Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive. Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may

be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

■ **Clean up the previous months' mess.** After winter, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting. Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in soil preparation.

■ **Loosen the soil.** Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest

in tools like a shovel, spade, spading fork, and/or a lawn edger. If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder. It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is completed.

■ **Test and, if necessary, amend the soil.** A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of

the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive. In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.



Before getting your hands dirty, you may want to test the soil for its pH level to see if it needs to be adjusted.

Reseed

From Page 1

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.

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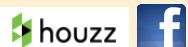
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Tips when hiring a contractor

Contractors perform important work for millions of homeowners every day. Many home improvement projects are complicated undertakings, and the experience of skilled contractors can ensure jobs are completed on time and within homeowner's budgets.

Homeowners have undoubtedly heard horror stories from neighbors about projects that have gone awry. Projects can go sideways for a number of reasons, but a skilled contractor can help homeowners navigate such situations successfully. That underscores how important it can be to find the right professional for the job. The following are some tips

homeowners can consider as they look to hire a contractor.

Identify which professional you need: Some contractors are of the jack-of-all-trades variety, but many specialize in a particular line of work. It's important to identify which type of contractor needed prior to starting a project. Defining the goal of the project (i.e., new wood floor installation) can serve as a springboard into finding the right type of contractor.

Prioritize building safety: Safety should be the utmost priority for homeowners and contractors alike. Prior to hiring a contractor, homeowners should identify any safety



restrictions that might be enforced by local governments and take note of all the permits required to get a job done. Homeowners can then discuss those restrictions and permits as they interview contractors. Projects that do not adhere to code

are illegal and can compromise the ability to sell the home in the future. It's vital to work with contractors who are familiar with local codes and are aware of the permits needed to ensure a project can go forward.

Insist on written

estimates: Handshake agreements offer no protection to homeowners or contractors, so estimates indicating what will be done and how much the project will cost should be provided. Homeowners should insist on receiving written estimates and interpret an unwillingness to provide one as a significant red flag.

Know your rights:

Laws vary by region, but in general homeowners have a right to a written contract and contractors are obligated to provide a copy of that contract signed by both parties. That contract must be provided prior to the start of the project. The contract should provide a detailed

account of the work that will be done. In addition, a timeline indicating important dates components of the project will begin and be completed should be indicated. The contract also should detail materials and who is providing them. Details regarding payments, guarantees and warranties also should be cited.

Do not pay in cash:

Some contractors may suggest that the project will cost less if they're paid in cash. However, home improvements should never be cash transactions. Cash does not indicate proof of payment, which can be problematic if a dispute arises.

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Wildfire smoke and plant health

Last year's widespread smoke from Canada created issues for plants



**MICHAEL
TIMM**

2023 brought us gardeners a new concern, the smoky, hazy air from Canadian wildfires. We noticed many of our plants were acting out of the ordinary, displaying unusual symptoms, and perplexing many. Even myself at first! Since this looks like it could occur more frequently for a while, let's dig deeper on how smoke affects our plants.

The impact of wildfire

Related story, page 5

smoke on plants can be quite complex. I will try to explain it the best I can without requiring a botany degree. The problem lies in how it affects photosynthesis. There are basically four main factors involved, some actually good and some bad. They are reduced sunlight intensity, increased diffusion of sunlight, increased ozone levels and the presence of minute particulate matter in the air.

Reduced sunlight intensity has a negative effect on

plants. This one should be obvious as reduced sunlight will of course have an effect on photosynthesis and other internal functions. It's really no different than being cloudy all the time.

First we must understand that plants are mainly made of sugars and these play an important role in all aspects of their life, especially proper photosynthesis. That's why we can get syrups from plant saps such as maple syrup, etc. What happens during long periods of shady times, including smoke, plants will pull the sugars from their top growth (leaves and stems) and transfer them to



AP Photo/Morry Gash, File

A haze is seen over the Milwaukee Art Museum, Tuesday, June 27, 2023, in Milwaukee, as smoke from wildfires in Canada drifted south. The smoke interfered with plants' photosynthesis processes. The initial diagnosis of spots on foliage was, incorrectly, fungal disease, horticulturalist Michael Timm says. Despite the ill effects brought on by the smoke, there was a benefit: diffused light spread over a wider surfaces of leaves, according to Timm.

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the root system. What this does is make the plant go into a dormant state, thereby affecting growth and flowering.

This is why some plants didn't put on much growth and some had lopsided growth. This is the reason we saw different growth and flowering rates in plants. Not all plants are the same and therefore different plants reacted differently.

One positive thing smoke does is diffuse the sunlight that is there, making it more available to all leaf surfaces of the plants. This can be a good thing for plants as it increases their ability to use the light that is there more efficiently. But a problem arises when the lack of sunlight intensity is greater than the diffusion of the light. This creates the same issues as

reduced sunlight intensity.

Although the above two are important to understand, the main concern is increased ozone and minute particulate matter. There is good and bad ozone. We need ozone in the stratosphere, located 6-10 miles above earth's surface, to protect us from dangerous radiation from the sun. But when it forms in the troposphere, the air we breathe, it becomes a problem. I won't get into the chemistry of ozone; just remember it's not good for us or our plants to breathe it. Ozone is a strong oxidant that can enter plant pores (stomata) and actually burn the tissue during respiration, not allowing your plants' processes to function properly. This causes cells to die, causing discoloration and dead spots on foliage. The symptoms are

very similar to a fungal disease. This is where the confusion started last year, leading to the improper diagnosis of the problem.

Minute particulate matter basically affects plants the same as ozone. Minute ash particles block the pores. This doesn't let the plants pores open or close properly. This results in the death of that cell, and adjoining cells, and limiting proper respiration. Again the symptoms look similar to a fungal issue.

More research needs to be done here but now that we understand better what wildfire smoke can do to our plants, what can we do to help them out? See page 5 for that article.

(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist for Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)

Helping plants deal with wildfire smoke

One health supplement that helps is Kelp Meal



MICHAEL
TIMM

Now that we have a better understanding on the affects of wildfire smoke and ozone on plants, is there anything we can do about it?

Obviously, we can't control things like lightning, or other acts of nature, that start fires. But we can be careful when we are out in the wilderness to not be the cause of fires. So be careful. As Smokey the Bear said: "Only you can prevent forest fires."

First, plants do what they can to protect themselves. The leaf pores (stomata), or the mouths of plants, are responsible for respiration and open and close. When these pores open they release oxygen, the air we breathe, and take in carbon dioxide which plants need to turn into sugars for food through photosynthesis.

But when these pores are open they also take in ozone. If ozone levels get too high, plants will keep these pores closed for short periods of time, thus protecting themselves from damage. But plants can't do this for long durations as it has negative effects on plant growth and their internal processes needed for survival.

So we know plants can protect themselves for a short period of time, but can we help as well? The answer is yes. Keeping our plants happy, healthy and stress-free is crucial. Our first goal is to pick the right plants for our climate zone. We also need to plant them where they thrive. Forcing a plant to grow somewhere it doesn't

Related story, page 4

belong just cause's extra stress. As I always say: "Right plant, right place!"

Another way to keep a plant healthy is a proper diet. In fact, studies have shown that antioxidants like vitamin C can help protect against ozone damage. What, plants need vitamins, minerals, hormones and amino/fatty acids like we do? Yes! Most people just assume when they fertilize their plants they are getting everything they need. That is incorrect. It is only limited nutrition. Many other nutritional needs are mainly found in healthy soil.

What is Kelp Meal?

You're probably thinking what we can use to help improve our soils or how many of these supplements will this take? There are many out there depending on what you need. Many are for specific needs, but I'm going to recommend one overall nutritional supplement to start. What is this multi-vitamin, mineral, amino and fatty acid supplemental powerhouse for plants? It is Kelp Meal.

Kelp Meal is a safe way to increase both micronutrients and minerals. It contains up to 60 trace elements in a natural form making it easy for the plants to absorb. It has 14 vitamins, natural growth regulators, enzymes and hormones. It also increases soil fertility and natural microbial action. All of this makes your plants less susceptible to stress, making them respond quicker to attacks from ozone or



AP Photo/Lee Reich, File

This undated photo shows beds in a weedless vegetable garden in New Paltz, N.Y. Smoke last summer from hundreds of wildfires burning in Canada affected air quality across vast swaths of the U.S. East and Midwest, and threatened garden plants. Horticulturalist Michael Timm says there are things to help plants when smoke settles in.

anything else.

Keeping our plants and soils at their best can only help for so long. Long periods of smoke and haze will eventually take its toll.

What can we do when that happens? During long periods, or even multiple short events over time, we need to get out the hose and start lightly rinsing off our plants, especially the undersides of the leaves. This takes away any build up of particular matter and keeps the pores open and clean so they work properly. It also helps reduce ozone by decomposing it and not allowing it to burn pore openings. Do this in the morning if possible to help avoid disease issues.

If we continue to see smoke being a problem, we now have some tips and techniques to help them along. So start your plants on a balanced diet of kelp meal and keep the hose handy just in case. Happy gardening!

(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist at Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)

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Budget-friendly ways to freshen up your home's exterior

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.

Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

rior of their properties.

■ **Power washing:** Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Hardware chains like Home Depot and Lowes typically rent power washers, but homeowners who don't want to do it themselves can hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.

■ **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to

relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

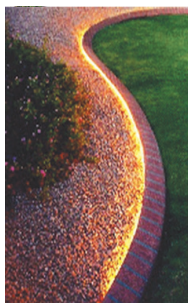
■ **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens urge homeowners to take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy, so look for a sturdy box as well as



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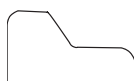
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one that has drainage holes.

■ **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs, knockers, house numbers, and even

the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home appears to residents and

visitors.

Exterior renovations need not break the bank. Various simple and inexpensive tweaks can quickly revitalize the exterior of a home.

6 ways to make your garden more successful

There are many benefits of gardening, including the joy of enjoying the food you grew yourself while diminishing that grocery bill

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, 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 gar-

den resources. 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 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 our climate, including heat-tolerant plants for climates with sweltering summer sun. Consult with a local gardening center or your local UW Extension to figure out which plant zone you are in and which plants will do best within your 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.



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