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The gardens are in, now what?



MICHAEL
TIMM

After a feverish month of exhausting, but rewarding, work most of us have our gardens shaped up and growing. Now what? What can we do to ensure that our gardens are successful? It's also an important time to look around and reflect on what has been accomplished or can be improved.

What should we be doing to keep our gardens looking their best? It seems everyone hates weeding but it's a necessity. It not only makes our gardens look more attractive, it helps fight off insects and disease. If done correctly, and not perceived as a chore, it's not that bad. First, if you do a little weeding every day, 5 to 10 minutes, it doesn't seem like work at all. Also, if you just take the time to soak in the beauty and tranquility around you, it's quite relaxing. It's a great time for contemplation.

Weeding also makes you spend time in your garden. Why is this good? It helps us keep an eye on our plants and confront any problems that may occur. This is called scouting. Whether you see insects chewing on a plant,

spots developing on leaves, broken branches, plants getting too large for their spot, or just eyeing up a plant that doesn't look healthy, it's better to catch it early and take care of the problem before it worsens. Sometimes it can be as simple as a plant needing more fertilizer or a little care.

This is also a great time to look around and see if your gardens are performing the way you intended. Are you lacking color somewhere? Is this particular bed too crowded? Have some of the plants become overgrown? Is there still space left in the vegetable garden? Now is a great time to correct things.

If you're lacking color somewhere, head to a garden center and pick up some annuals or flowering perennials for a quick fix. Annuals are great additions for those areas that need immediate color without taking up permanent space. If you have room for something permanent, maybe choose a flowering perennial to fit your needs.

Maybe you've noticed a bed that is becoming crowded or over-grown. Take notes of the problem areas so you can rectify the problems either in the fall or next spring. Try not moving plants around in the summer though because of the stress. I also don't recommend a lot of summer pruning on trees and shrubs. It opens wounds to insects and disease. Perennials can be maintained as needed to encourage health and re-bloom.

Also look at the vegetable garden. Is there room for more or do you want to start a second



crop of something? Most garden centers have some pretty good sales on remaining vegetables at this time.

Summer is not only garden maintenance, although important, but is also a time of contemplation and review to improve your overall gardening goals. So, get out there and spend some time in your gardens! Happy Gardening!

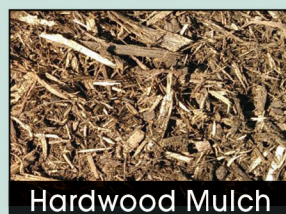
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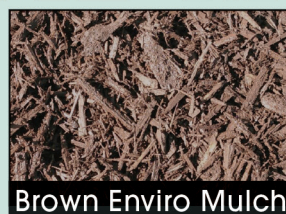


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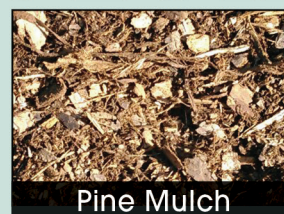
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A guide to various types of home awnings

Homeowners recognize that upgrades can improve the functionality and comfort of their homes. Improving outdoor spaces has proven particularly popular of late. The National Association of Home Builders reports that outdoor living has been propelled to the top of homeowner wish lists. Plus, a recent survey conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found connection to the outdoors/nature and outdoor entertaining ranked high among desired home designs.

One way to make outdoor spaces more accommodating is through the installation of awnings. Many homeowners would like to enhance their homes with awnings but do not know where to begin. Learning about the various types of awnings can help homeowners determine which

option best suits their needs.

Fixed awnings

Fixed awnings are stationary on a building's exterior. While the awnings are generally stable, they can be damaged by snow or wind. It's key to find an installation expert to make sure the awning is installed correctly so that it can withstand weather and other issues. It's also important to know that fixed awnings remain in the same position and orientation, so its best to know exactly where to place it beforehand.

Retractable awning

Retractable awnings are the most popular type of awnings because they can be



extended when necessary to keep a space cool or protected, then rolled or folded up when not in use. These awnings

are advantageous because they can be retracted when bad weather hits to prevent damage.

Motorized retractable awning

Motorized retractable awnings offer the utmost convenience. Standard retractable offerings require a handle or hand crank to manually extend or fold up the awning. Motorized awnings can be operated with a sensor, remote or even motion trigger. Even though they cost more, they're a favorite among homeowners.

Areas of use

Areas of use awnings can be installed in various locations. Patio awnings are much preferred because of their large coverage area, which typically spans entire patios. Door awnings are installed above the exterior door of an entryway to protect visitors and occupants from precipitation and to improve the home's look. Window awnings can add additional shade and privacy. There also are side awnings, which are essentially wall-like structures that run across a patio, garden or balcony for wind or sun protection. They're also utilized to improve privacy.

Homeowners can choose from various types of awning materials, including fabric, metal, glass, and others. Working with a reputable awning company is the best way for homeowners to peruse possible products and find awnings that will suit their needs.



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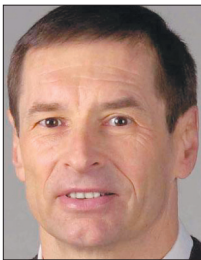
Natural lighting

Dear Jim: I would prefer to get more free natural light but am not sure whether to install a large rectangular skylight or a tubular one. Which one is the best choice? - Michael B.

Dear Michael: Although the amount of electricity used for lighting in the typical house is only a fraction of that for heat, cooling and water heating, it still constitutes a significant annual cost. Using more natural lighting instead of light bulbs is not difficult to accomplish. Also, at the same brightness, most people can see much better under natural light than under artificial light.

If saving electricity is your primary concern, then replacing all your light bulbs with LED's is the least expensive option. Although not as natural as true sunlight, the higher temperature ones, 4000 degrees Kelvin rating, produce a more natural light. Also, ones with a high CRI (color rendition index) make colors looks more realistic.

A tubular skylight is generally a more efficient and less expensive choice than a traditional rectangular skylight for natural lighting. A traditional rectangular skylight provides more lighting than a tubular one and a view of the sky. Its drawback is it creates a large hole in the



JAMES DULLEY

insulation envelope of your roof which loses energy and it costs much more to install.

I installed a tubular skylight in my garage and it provides adequate light for most activities out there during the daytime. When there is a full moon at night, it actually produces enough light for me to walk to my car in the garage.

Tubular skylights are available in several diameters depending upon how much light you need and the space available. As a reference, a small 10-inch-diameter model produces as much light as three 100-watt incandescent light bulbs. A larger 14-inch model is equivalent to using five 100-watt bulbs.

If you are still using old incandescent bulbs instead of LED's, the annual

electricity savings from installing a large tubular skylight is about \$90. If you typically use compact fluorescent bulbs, or preferably LED's, the annual savings is about \$20. This might not sound like a lot per year, but the tubular skylight should last for very many years.

A tubular skylight requires no maintenance other than wiping off the clear or globe in the ceiling. The dome on the roof should stay clean from just the rain. It is not difficult to install one yourself, especially if you have an asphalt shingle roof.

Tubular skylights use a sheet metal tube which extends from above the roof to the ceiling below. The interior of the sheet metal has an extremely reflective coating so very little brightness is lost as the sunlight bounces back and forth on its way down. A clear dome seals the top of the tube above the roof and a flat diffuser snaps over the bottom in the ceiling.

In order to control the brightness, optional dimmer flappers are available to reduce light intensity. These can be operated by an electric motor (requires wiring) or a solar panel with a remote control. Another nice feature for bathrooms is a model which also works as an exhaust fan.

The following companies offer tubular

skylight kits: ODL, (866) 635-4968, www.odl.com; Solatube, (888) 765-2882, www.solatube.com; Sun-Dome, (800) 596-8414, www.sun-dome.com; Tru-Lite, (520) 622-2152, www.tru-liteskylights.com; and Velux, (800) 888-3589, www.veluxusa.com.

Dear Jim: I am getting quotes on a new furnace. Some contractors are adding in a fee for the county inspectors. Is this really necessary when I am just having my old furnace replaced? - Carol C.

Dear Carol: From a legal standpoint, the requirements for inspections depend upon your local codes. If one or more of the contractors includes it in your quote, most likely it is required by law.

I recommend paying the small fee to have it inspected. I had a new heat pump installed 10 years ago without an inspection. The contractor had dropped a screw on a wire which kept one resistance element on. It really drove up my electric bills until I found it myself.

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8 games to try at the next backyard bash

Games can enhance any outdoor function. Whether at the beach or in one's backyard, activities can keep guests entertained in between the food and other refreshments. And the good news is that most games designed for these types of functions are appropriate for players across a wide range of ages.

The following are eight games that can add to the excitement of any outdoor gathering.

1. Ladder toss: Also known as ladder golf, this game requires players to toss string-attached balls onto a ladder-shaped target. Points are awarded depending on which rung the ball lands on.

2. Kubb: Pronounced "KOOB," this Swedish lawn game believed to have originated during the era of the Vikings and is best described as a blend of bowling and horseshoes. Two teams compete to knock over their opponents' wooden blocks by throwing batons.

3. Cornhole: Many people have played cornhole, which involves tossing bean bags at the cornhole board. The objective is to get the bag into the hole or on the board to



score points. The game can be played as singles or doubles. The first team to reach 21 points wins.

4. Spikeball™: Also called Roundnet, this two-on-two sport is played by hitting a ball off a net with the goal of preventing the

opposing team from returning the ball within three touches.

5. Ring toss: This is another game that tests hand-eye coordination. Players take turns tossing the rings onto the target pegs. Each peg is worth a different number of points. The first player to reach the agreed-upon amount of points wins.

6. Connect four in a row: Giant versions of familiar tabletop games also are available for yard use. With this game, players need to get four chips in a row, either up and down or diagonal.

7. Kan Jam®: Similar to cornhole or horseshoes, Kan Jam® features two teams of two that alternate between throwing a frisbee and trying to deflect it. The goal is to get the frisbee into the can.

8. Rollers: Goals are placed 25 feet apart and then players roll wooden discs to try to get closest to the goal. Each side of the disc has a different number to determine the point value.

Backyard events can be enhanced with some game play. There are plenty of fun options for your next gathering.



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Tricks of the trade for busy gardeners



**MICHAEL
TIMM**

Like plumbers who are too busy to fix the leaky pipes in their own home, or even the old children's story of the shoemaker's children who had no shoes, it can be the same for gardeners during busy times. I am extremely busy at the garden center in spring but still like to try to keep my landscape and gardens looking their best. I have learned some tricks over time that allow me to get through these busy times, while keeping my sanity, and still having some semblance of order in my landscape.

The first thing I did was make a list of what I thought were the most time-consuming activities. The small things can always fit in the cracks. I broke it down into plant-

ing, plant care, and bed maintenance.

I always seem to be planting something. The smaller planting jobs I plan for before or after work, just a couple plants at a time. It really helps to break it up into smaller tasks. The big jobs, like planting my vegetable gardens, I plan for my day off. And even here, I don't plant my whole garden. I do it in small increments. If I do a little every week starting from the end of April to early June, it all gets done. Plant selection is also part of my decision, especially with shrubs and perennials. I plant tough varieties that can take care of themselves. I don't have time to baby sit tender plants.

Plant care is also time-consuming. This includes pruning, watering, fertilizing and insect and disease issues. I approach pruning like I do planting. I do it before and after work and just one small area at a time. The areas visible to the public I do first and then work on the rest.

Time spent watering and fertilizing starts with your soil. By having healthy soil, you end up doing less of both. Healthy soil holds moisture and nutrients longer. This is true whether you grow in containers or the ground. In containers use



a quality mix with organic matter. Ask the experts at your garden center for the right soil for your needs. For plants in the ground, the incorporation of organic matter (compost, worm castings, etc.) on a yearly basis greatly improves your soil health. Also in spring we normally get plenty of rain so don't waste your time over watering plants. It's not good for them anyway. Also, plants are small, so fertilizing should also be scaled back until

major growth starts.

Garden maintenance also consumes time, from applying mulch to weeding, to spraying for insect or disease issues. I like to break these up into manageable tasks as well. When applying mulch, I do one bed at a time. If you do just one or two beds a week, the next thing you know, it's done. I approach weeding the same way. I do one bed per night during the week. If you do this every week it takes only minutes after a while because you're keeping up with the weeds. For my vegetable gardens, I weed just 2 to 3 rows per night. This makes the project very manageable. Again, do this weekly. Anytime you let weeds go for a long time, weeding becomes a chore! While you are out there, keep an eye out for any pest issues. I usually do this before and after work as well.

If you go in with a plan and break it down into manageable tasks, we can maintain our sanity and keep our landscape looking good through the busy times. Hopefully some of these tricks can help you this year. Happy Gardening!

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

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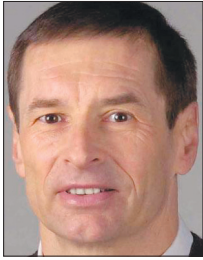
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Room air cleaners



**JAMES
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Dear Jim: My family has sinus allergies, so I want to use air cleaners in our bedrooms. The ads for each one make it sound like the best. How can choose the best one?

Several of my children have allergies so I want to use room air cleaners in their bedrooms. I have seen many advertisements with great claims for effectiveness. What type of room air cleaner is really best? - Melisse N.

Dear Melisse: It can be quite difficult to separate the truth from the advertising hype about the effectiveness of various room air cleaners. The sheer size or price of a specific unit does not necessarily indicate it is effective. The type of filtering material inside is what is most important.

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For the most effective air cleaning, particularly during winter, it is wise to use both a high-quality central furnace air cleaner along with room air cleaners. Some of the newer central air cleaners are very effective, but they remove only the particles which actually get into the duct system.

When you plop down on a sofa or walk on the carpeting, a cloud of allergen particles comes up. Some of these particles are relatively large and settle out of the air before they ever get near the furnace return air registers. A room air cleaner can remove many of these particles.

Instead of relying on advertising information, use the CADR (clean air delivery rate) rating to compare various air cleaner effectiveness. This rating is determined by testing procedures sanctioned by the AHAM (Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers). The U.S. EPA and the American Lung Association recognize the CADR data as accurate and realistic.

The first step is to have your children tested to determine what airborne allergies they have. This is because the effectiveness of different designs of air cleaners and filtering methods varies depending upon what particles you need to remove from the room air.

Three of the most common types of particles in room air are household dust, tobacco smoke and pollen. These cover the size range of most other typical airborne particles. The CADR ratings have three separate numbers which refer to these three particles. You may find an air cleaner which is very effective for pollen, but not as effective for tobacco smoke.

When selecting an air cleaner, the CADR indicates the maximum size of room for which the air cleaner will be effective. A guideline is the CADR rating for the specific particle of interest should be at least 2/3 the square footage of the room. For example, a 10 x 10 foot room would need a CADR of 67 or greater.

In general, I prefer a HEPA filter media with a carbon element. A HEPA filter is effective for almost all sizes of common allergens and the carbon removes odors and chemicals. A large carbon element is best. Select one with several fan speeds for rapid air cleaning before bedtime and quiet slow-speed operation at night.

The following companies offer room air cleaners: Blueair, (888) 258-3247, www.blueair.com; Holmes, (888) 546-5637, www.holmesproducts.com; Honeywell, (800) 447-0457, www.honeywell-pluggedin.com; LakeAir, (800) 558-9436, www.lakeair.com; and Whirlpool, (866) 698-2538, www.whirlpool.com.

Dear Jim: I need some additional insulation in my attic and I plan to use fiberglass batts. It will require quite a



Photo credit - James Dulley

This shows the three filter elements inside the air cleaner for greater air flow capacity. Notice the black carbon filter lining to remove odors.

bit of cutting and fitting. What is a good way to cut fiberglass insulation crisply and straight? - Mike T.

Dear Mike: You are correct in trying to get a tight fit of the batt insulation without many gaps on your attic floor. Just several gaps can reduce its efficiency gains. Always wear gloves and a breathing mask.

Get a piece of scrap plywood that is

longer than the insulation width and saw a narrow slot in the plywood. Lay the plywood over the insulation to compress it and then run your knife through the slot for a straight cut.

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Elevate the backyard experience

Chances are no one wants to replicate the side effects of the global pandemic anytime soon. Despite all of the upheaval it brought to so many people’s lives, there was at least one silver lining to the pandemic: a newfound appreciation for backyards and other outdoor living areas. Back in 2021, OnePoll, on behalf of the landscaping company TruGreen, found survey participants reported spending 14 hours outside every week, which marked a three-hour increase than before the pandemic hit.

Outdoor spaces like patios, decks, yards, and even front porches remain popular places for homeowners and their loved ones to congregate. Various studies have shown that those who spend more time outside in nature have lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Being outside is strongly associated with improved mental and physical health. Homeowners who want to maximize the potential of their outdoor spaces can look to these ideas to take backyards up a notch or two.

Establish a gathering spot

A well-designed yard has one or more dedicated gathering spots, particularly areas that enable comfort underfoot. Homeowners can give consideration to hardscape that enables individuals to spend time outdoors without standing in soggy or buggy situations. Whether they’re traditional decks, platform decks, concrete or paver patios, or areas separated from the lawn with pea gravel or another type of rock, homeowners can make the yard

more useable through these spaces.

Invest in an outdoor cooking area

Grilling, smoking and even making brick oven pizzas outdoors is a major component of backyard entertaining. Outdoor kitchens can increase the convenience of prepping, cooking and serving food outdoors. Grills and other cooking gear can be built into weather-resistant counters and cabinetry.

Install a pergola

A pergola or another structure is the perfect way to add privacy to a gathering spot and create more shade and weather protection when Mother Nature does not want to cooperate.

Think beyond the summer season

When making backyard improvements, homeowners can incorporate ideas that make the yard more functional during different seasons. For example, a fire pit or outdoor fireplace can be a spot for making summer s’mores or sipping mulled cider in the fall. An enclosed three-season room offers the opportunity to see nature and enjoy it without bearing the full brunt of chilly temperatures.

There are many ways homeowners can enhance the functionality and appeal of their backyards.

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