



HOME & GARDEN

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2022

Landscaping tips for instant curb appeal



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT

DON'T FORGET THE WOW FACTOR: Choose plants that showcase your home and lawn at their best.

(STATEPOINT)

One of the best ways to achieve instant curb appeal, according to the experts, is to effectively layer shrubs, plants and flowers in your front yard. Doing so can create a cohesive visual experience that naturally guides visitors to the front door.

Landscape designer Doug Scott describes plant layering in art terms: “Just like in a painting, you need to have a background, a middle ground and a foreground. Each layer serves a purpose, and there’s no more important place for them to be on full display than your home’s entrance.”

To help homeowners understand the purpose of plant layering and identify the best types of plants for each layer, Scott has joined forces with Exmark, a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers and equipment for landscape professionals and serious DIY-ers. Here they break it down for you:

1. **Background:** The background layer should consist of taller evergreen shrubs to ensure that no matter what’s in front of them, you and your visitors will always have something green to look at. This layer provides a cohesive backdrop and a bit of living color in every season.
2. **Middle Ground:** Here’s where to step it down a notch in height and add interesting shapes, colors or stripes that provide contrast against the darker green of the background layer. Herbaceous perennials, like lavender, are a good choice for this purpose.
3. **Foreground:** Finally, the foreground layer should help transition the planting beds to your lawn space or sidewalk and should therefore be lower than the back two layers. It’s also where you can keep things fresh and get your hands dirty throughout the year by changing out annuals with the seasons. Or, if you want a lower-maintenance entrance, you can choose smaller perennials, evergreens or creeping ground covers. Use the foreground layer as an opportunity to add pops of color at ground level and draw attention to your home’s entrance.

Scott lays out a few other important tips to keep in mind:

- Choose plants consistent with your home’s style. For instance, if you have a craftsman home, you should probably skip tropical plants. Or, if your home is more minimalist, avoid an overabundance of different plants.
 - Don’t obstruct views of your front door from the street with plants. Likewise, visitors shouldn’t have to maneuver around plants as they make their way down the sidewalk. Neither is convenient or welcoming, so you’ll either need to keep pruning plants to size or choose plants that won’t overgrow their space without a ton of pruning.
 - To make your entrance “the star” it should be, the plant material in the rest of your front yard shouldn’t be distracting. Rather let it frame the intended view.
- Scott offers more plant layering tips in “Making an Entrance,” a recent episode of “Done-In-A-Weekend Projects,” an original series from Exmark. To watch the video, visit Backyard Life, which is part of a unique multimedia destination with a focus on helping homeowners make the most of outdoor spaces. There you can also download additional tips and view other Exmark Original Series videos, including “Dream Yards,” “Living Rural,” “Prime Cuts” and “Done In a Weekend – Extreme Projects.”
- Through effective plant layering, you can boost curb appeal and give your home the grand entrance it deserves.

“Just like in a painting, you need to have a background, a middle ground and a foreground. Each layer serves a purpose, and there’s no more important place for them to be on full display than your home’s entrance.”

DOUG SCOTT
Landscape designer

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Hacks to prep your home for warm weather

(STATEPOINT)

With warmer weather on the way, it's time to deal with the associated household hassles of the season. Here are three hacks that will help you create a healthy, comfortable home during the months ahead:

BEAT THE HEAT

Beyond having your HVAC unit serviced and changing your air filter regularly, you can beat the heat at home with a few smart strategies. One change you can make today that will also reduce your carbon footprint is to

swap out your heat-emitting incandescent light bulbs for cool LEDs. Likewise, appliances that are not in use but plugged in could be generating unnecessary warmth, so unplug when you can. Finally, use shades and blinds strategically to block out the

sun and prevent a greenhouse effect indoors.

BANISH FLYING BUGS

Fruit flies, gnats and flies tend to proliferate indoors in the warmer months. Not only do these creatures come with a serious ick factor, they can harm your houseplants and even put your family's health at risk by carrying germs from dirty surfaces to clean ones.

A safe and easy way to defend against buzzing invaders is to plug Zevo Bug Traps into outlets around your home, especially in areas where these bugs enter

your home and gather, like garages, entryways, covered porches, trash cans, drain pipes and kitchens. Rather than relying on chemical insecticides, they use multi-spectrum light technology that bugs find irresistible. Once attracted, flying insects are trapped in a super-sticky adhesive backing. Each trap cartridge offers continuous defense for up to 45 days or until it's full. When you're done with a cartridge, simply throw it in the trash and slide a new one in, without ever having to touch the dead bugs. Pair these traps with Zevo home bug sprays,

which are powered by essential oils, for whole home protection. To learn more about defending your home against insects, and for trapping tips, visit zevoinsect.com.

MASTER MOLD

Thriving in warm, wet environments, mold is something to watch out for at home, especially during spring and summer. Much more than an eyesore, mold is bad for your home's infrastructure and bad for you. Mold can cause a number of allergic reactions and can sometimes even be toxic.

However, you can reduce the risk of mold forming by managing your home's humidity. Use fans and other ventilation in bathrooms and the kitchen when showering, running the dishwasher and doing other tasks that invite humidity. Test the humidity of various rooms in your home with a hygrometer and use a dehumidifier where needed. According to the EPA, the ideal indoor humidity is between 30 and 50%.

Employing warm weather hacks at home can help you maintain clean, comfortable spaces, all season long.

Spring cleaning: Is your 'junk' worth a fortune?

(STATEPOINT)

If your family is like most, you have "junk" in your basement, garage or attic, such as sports cards, memorabilia and toys. Before you toss them out during spring cleaning, consider that the prices of sports cards, games and other ephemera are skyrocketing.

How can you determine if your stuff is valuable and, if it is, how can you sell it?

How can you determine if your stuff is valuable and, if it is, how can you sell it?

A widely accepted rule for sports cards, memorabilia and toys is that older items are worth more. However, these days even more recent items are also commanding high prices.

"Vintage sports cards from the early periods of a sport are almost always highly collectible, especially of Hall of Famers," said Al Crisafulli, auction director at Love of the Game Auctions, an internet sports and memorabilia auction that helps families sell collectibles. "But don't assume sports cards or other memorabilia have to be old to be valuable. Modern cards of such stars as Tom Brady, Mike Trout, LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Derek Jeter and others can sell for lots of money."

He is offering tips to help determine if your belongings are valuable:

OLDER SPORTS CARDS

Cards from the 1960s and earlier are collectible, and those from before the 1940s can be extremely valuable. Big-name Hall of Famers like Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig, Honus Wagner, Mickey Mantle and others bring high prices.

With old cards from the 1880s and early 1900s, look for tobacco and candy brands, such as Old Judge, Piedmont, Sweet Caporal or American Caramel. Really old sports memorabilia from the 19th and early 20th century, such as photographs, postcards, bats, gloves and balls are also collectible.

When opting to sell sports items, consider a specialty auction, such as Love of



PHOTO COURTESY (C) DELPIXART / ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

ONE MAN'S TRASH: Don't throw away old collectibles. They can be valuable if you know what to look for.

the Game, which has the expertise to professionally research sports items and maintains lists of bidders specializing in this area, to

get top dollar. More information is available at loveofthegameauctions.com.

MODERN CARDS

Prices on recent baseball, basketball and football cards have risen rapidly. The three keys are condition, star power and cards from early in player careers.

Do you have major current stars, like Mike Trout, Patrick Mahomes, Tom Brady and LeBron James? Or do you have greats from the recent past, like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, Magic Johnson, Derek Jeter or Joe Montana?

Check if your cards are denoted as rookie, prospect, draft pick or other indicators they're from a player's first season. And condition is king, as cards that look pack fresh with sharp corners and a well-centered image command the highest prices. Additionally, unopened packs and boxes from almost any year can be valuable.

MEMORABILIA

Do you have old advertis-

"Vintage sports cards from the early periods of a sport are almost always highly collectible, especially of Hall of Famers, but don't assume sports cards or other memorabilia have to be old to be valuable. Modern cards of such stars as Tom Brady, Mike Trout, LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Derek Jeter and others can sell for lots of money."

AL CRISAFULLI

Auction Director at Love of the Game Auctions

ing posters depicting sports stars or famous entertainment personalities together with food, tobacco or sporting goods brands? Many original signs, store displays and promotional items are collectible, especially those dating from the early 1900s into the 1960s. But low-quality reproductions aren't. Look for memorabilia spotlighting sports heroes, superheroes, early Walt Disney characters and Star Wars subjects.

So, while you're spring cleaning that attic, basement or garage, don't rush to the garbage. Before throwing out old "junk," determine if it's valuable!

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Easy ways to make your home more earth-friendly

(STATEPOINT)

Is it time to green up your act at home? Here are just a few tweaks you can make to substantially reduce your environmental footprint.

MAKE APPLIANCE UPGRADES

Home appliances are improving all the time, with many newer models designed specifically with efficiency in mind. If your home appliances, such as your washer, dryer, dishwasher, refrigerator and HVAC system, are on the older side, it may be time to replace one or more of these items. Over time, you'll offset the upfront cost with reduced energy bills. Plus, you'll be helping protect the climate. Look for ENERGY STAR-rated products, which have met strict EPA standards.

OPTIMIZE HEATING AND COOLING

North American Technician Excellence (NATE) offers the following energy-saving

tips to help you keep your home comfort system running at peak performance:

- Change your air filters monthly, or as directed by the manufacturer.

- Add weatherstripping and caulk around windows and doors to improve your home's insulation. Improperly insulated walls, floors, attics, basements and crawlspaces waste energy and can also lead to moisture imbalance.

- Install a programmable thermostat to help regulate temperatures.

- Don't keep clutter near your HVAC units, and don't store anything next to them that could impede ventilation. Likewise, keep vents and returns free of obstructions. Don't lay carpet over vents, place furniture over or

in front of them, or obstruct airflow.

- Dry air feels cooler than moist air. A simple humidifier may make your home feel five degrees warmer.

- Even the most efficient system can suffer if it's not properly maintained. For optimum comfort and sustainability, make sure all your HVAC installation, maintenance and other work is performed by a NATE-certified technician. NATE-certified technicians have demonstrated their knowledge of today's increasingly sophisticated heating and cooling systems by passing a nationally recognized test developed and supported by all segments of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning industry. Better installation and service means your equipment will run at peak efficiency.

Visit natex.org for additional HVAC energy-savings tips and resources, and to find a NATE-certified technician in your area.

REDUCE FOOD WASTE

American food production uses 10% of the nation's total energy budget, 50% of its land, and 80% of its fresh water, according to FoodRescue.net. Unfortunately, up to 40% of all food ends up in landfills. Label food items in your pantry and fridge and organize them by date to help ensure you consume food before it spoils. If you see that you've prepared too much of a certain item, freeze it. Of course, many foods produce unavoidable scraps. Use them to create stock or compost them. Composting will reduce your home's contribution to landfills while enriching your garden. Bonus: composting is also a great way to reduce yard-work waste.

MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY

Want a quick project you can complete in an afternoon? Swap out incandescent lightbulbs for energy efficient LEDs. According to the EPA, residential LEDs



PHOTO COURTESY (C) MARUCO / ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

MAINTENANCE IS KEY: Keep your HVAC system in top shape and it will last for many years.

— especially ENERGY STAR-rated products — use at least 75% less energy, and last up to 25 times longer. Consider making earth-

friendly changes at home. A few tweaks can reduce your household's impact on the planet.

Is it time for a new dishwasher? Five questions to ask yourself

(STATEPOINT)

There's no reason to be working harder in the kitchen than you need to be, especially when it comes to clean-up.

"When considering a new dishwasher, it's important to understand that many dishwashers are created equal but are not priced equal. Most major brands offer similar features at varying prices. Sharp dishwashers are designed to offer high-end features at an excellent value," said Peter Weedfald, senior vice president of sales and marketing, Sharp Home Electronics Company of America.

So, how do you know when it's time for an upgrade in your kitchen? Weedfald shares five questions to ask yourself:

1. What's my dishwasher's cleaning and drying power? While earlier dishwashers often required you to do quite a bit of soaking and rinsing before loading the machine, some of today's models

feature soil sensors that automatically optimize your washing cycles. Plus, the option to place your most challenging and soiled cookware near special sprayers that deliver extra scrubbing

power can also be a huge time- and labor-saver. Some new models have also made hand-drying a thing of the past, thanks to heated drying, which is faster and more dependable than condensation drying.

2. Does my dishwasher offer premium features and design at a reasonable price point? Sharp is a good example of a manufacturer offering classic, elegant luxuries both inside and outside its dishwashers at an affordable price point compared to other brands offering similar features. Inside its dishwashers are smooth glide rails that make loading and unloading a breeze, as well as premium, white LED lights offering good visibility. Outside is an easy-to-clean stainless-steel finish that nicely complements other kitchen appliances and fixtures. Plus, a hidden control panel makes for a sleek design that minimizes distractions.

3. Does my dishwasher

offer flexibility? For an efficiently run kitchen, flexibility is key. To that end, you shouldn't have to wait until you have a full load's worth of dishes to run your machine. Look for a dishwasher with a half-load option, as well as adjustable racks to accommodate large casserole dishes, tall stemware, and oddly sized items.

4. Is my dishwasher energy efficient? If either sustainability or saving money on utilities are priorities for you, be sure to look for ENERGY STAR rated dishwashers with features such as a half-load option that reduces water and energy consumption when washing smaller loads.

5. Is my dishwasher quiet? To put things in perspective, any dishwasher is going to produce some level of noise. Anything below 52dBA is considered very quiet. The difference between a 40dBA and 45dBA model will be minimal, so be careful you

Thanks to new innovations, dishwashing isn't what it used to be. For less mess, stress, and hassle, consider upgrading your dishwasher for a better experience.

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Three affordable kitchen upgrades to consider



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AFFORDABLE AND FAST: Luxury “granite” countertops can be a DIY project completed in just one weekend.

It's the heart of the home, but that doesn't mean you need to break the bank to create your dream kitchen. With ingenuity, you can improve its look and functionality at an affordable price point and in just a weekend.

(STATEPOINT)

Is remodeling your kitchen on your wish list? Afraid of how much it'll set you back? HomeAdvisor puts the average kitchen remodel price in the \$12,567 to \$34,962 range. However, you can buck the trend of costly, complicated updates. Consider these three renovations, all of which will improve the look and functionality of your kitchen, without costing you thousands of dollars:

REFRESH FABRICS

Reupholstering just one chair means shelling out \$150 to \$600, according to HomeGuide. If that's beyond what you're willing to pay, but you're not ready to replace a beloved set of kitchen chairs, you can update their look on a budget and in just a few minutes with stretchable seat covers. A good choice for families with kids or pets, these covers are typically machine-washable and can be swapped out as often as you like to suit your mood. From geometric designs to citrus vibes to florals, they're offered in a range of patterns that will look great with any style.

NEW GRANITE SURFACES

Countertops are the most common feature upgraded during kitchen renovations, according to a 2022 Houzz study, which found that nine in 10 remodelers performed this update. The same survey found that 35% of homeowners are splurging to make it happen. If you've looked into granite countertops, you probably learned that it can cost thousands of dollars and take months to have them custom-made and installed.

Adding this touch of lux-

ury to your kitchen doesn't have to bust your budget, involve contractors or mean supply chain hassles. It can actually be an easy, one-weekend DIY project. Using a LuxROCK Solid Surface Granite Countertop Kit from Daich Coatings, you can transform your countertops and island surfaces at just a fraction of the price of a professional granite countertop installation. For about \$300, a kit covers 40 square feet of space.

This functional and decorative blend of real stone with stunning mineral highlights can be used to give a smooth appearance to countertops, tables or any other surface. And because the authentic stone surface resists stains, heat and impact and is food safe, it's a great solution for the kitchen.

Each kit includes a prime coat, stone coats, clear epoxy and a clear coat finish, as well as all the tools needed. This revolutionary and exceptionally easy resurfacing project doesn't require any artistic skills to be a success. Nor does it require technical skills, as sinks, plumbing fixtures and existing countertops don't need to be removed before application.

If you're someone who

likes the flexibility of changing things up every few years, it's simple to update granite surface colors using another LuxROCK kit when you're ready. Both this U.S. patent-pending kit and the brand's textured countertop kits are available online at The Home Depot and Lowe's.

OPTIMIZE YOUR PANTRY

Pantries are often tucked away, but you can still give them an eye-catching makeover. For fresh pops of color, paint the pantry door and wallpaper the interior. Group items by height, then use customizable shelving to stretch storage real estate.

You may also wish to transfer kitchen staples to uniform containers. This will offer a tidier, more visually appealing look, while helping you make better use of limited space. Whether you opt for mason jars, ceramic canisters, or BPA-free plastic cubes, label containers carefully.

It's the heart of the home, but that doesn't mean you need to break the bank to create your dream kitchen. With ingenuity, you can improve its look and functionality at an affordable price point and in just a weekend.

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Teaching children how to protect birds in your backyard



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BUILD A BIRD FEEDER: Using natural or recycled materials will make this rest stop for birds a fun project to do with kids.

(STATEPOINT)

Part of being a good environmental steward is passing on this wisdom to the next generation. Here are three hands-on ways parents and grandparents can teach children to protect the birds in their very own backyard.

BUILD A BIRD FEEDER

Build bird feeders using natural or recycled materials to teach two earth-friendly lessons in one: the importance of reducing waste and the need to take care of

local wildlife. Bird feeders can be crafted from milk cartons, tin cans, mason jars or even natural materials like pinecones. As you decorate your bird feeders, talk to your kids about how

birds are not just beautiful, but also a vital part of the ecosystem and how you are offering these creatures a chance to rest and refuel. Fill your finished products with birdseed and choose a safe spot to hang them. Experts recommend bird feeders be positioned either closer than three feet or farther than 30 feet from windows.

PROTECT FLIGHT

Birds in flight are prone to strike windows. Fortunately, there's an easy home project you and your children can complete together that will

help prevent this from happening.

Applying decals that reflect ultraviolet sunlight to your home's windows, particularly windows that are highly reflective of open sky, has been proven to substantially reduce the likelihood of bird strikes. Those from WindowAlert feature patterns that give the appearance of slightly frosted translucent glass, but glow like a stoplight for birds. Kids can help select from fun decal designs like snowflakes, butterflies and maple leaves.

The brand also makes a high-tech UV liquid that offers even greater protection when applied between decals. To learn more, visit WindowAlert.com.

KEEP A LOG

Now that you've invited birds to your yard and have taken steps to protect them, inspire young naturalists to keep a log of flying visitors. Kids can draw pictures of the birds they see and note their observations. Visit Audubon for Kids at audubon.org for a birding guide, activities, games and addi-

tional projects that can help kids learn to identify various bird species by sight and sound.

"Environmental stewardship starts in your own backyard and people of all ages can get involved, including kids," said Spencer Schock, founder of WindowAlert. "The good news is that turning your home into a refuge for birds is fun, easy, and something parents, grandparents and kids can work on together."

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