

# Spring Home & Garden



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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.

- **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 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.

## Signs a home exterior needs updating

***Upgrading a driveway and walkway is one way to update a home's exterior and restore its curb appeal.***

Renovations are a great way for homeowners to reshape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities. Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors. Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained,

aesthetically appealing home is a source of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

- **Curling shingles:** The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the affected shingles.

- **Dated entry door:** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or

most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

- **Unightly landscaping:** It's not only the physical components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscaping. These alternatives to more needy plants can



create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.

- **Cracked driveways/walkways:** If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season, chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition, cracked walkways indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.

Updating a home's exterior can restore curb appeal and help homeowners feel better about their properties.



# Tech that makes being in your garden far more fun

*Devices like smartphones and tablets have made many aspects of life easier and more efficient, and various tech products can do the same when working in the garden.*

Many people take to the great outdoors to escape the increasingly tech-driven daily grind. Though that's an understandable perspective, gardeners who aren't deploying tech in their home gardens could be missing out on a host of benefits that could help their plants, flowers and vegetables thrive. Devices like smartphones and tablets have made many aspects of life easier and more efficient, and various tech products can do the same when working in the garden.

- **Plant monitor:** Plant monitors are sensors that can keep tabs on the health of plants and deliver that information to gardeners. Plant monitors often connect to smartphones via Bluetooth and can deliver information on the amount of heat, light and water a plant is getting. Sensors vary in price, and some will provide more information than others. But these sensors are ideal for gardeners who love their plants but often forget to check up on them each day.



- **Garden camera:** Critters and insects are the bane of many gardeners' existence. Determining just what is nibbling away at flowers and plants isn't always so easy, as many animals are savvy enough to restrict

their dining to the middle of the night and insects are so small they can be hard to spot. Garden cameras can serve as the watchmen of a garden and gardeners can review footage to determine just who is compromising

all of their hard work. They can then use that knowledge to remedy the situation and give their plants a better chance to thrive.

- **Weather station:** Even the most seasoned gardeners cannot document the conditions outside as effectively as a good weather sensor. Weather sensors track conditions such as temperature, relative humidity and air quality. This information can then be paired with irrigation devices to ensure plants get all the care they need to thrive throughout the season.
- **Garden hub:** Avid gardeners have traditionally had to arrange for neighbors or loved ones to tend to their plants when they leave home for vacation or weekend getaways. Garden hubs can take care of that by pairing with smart irrigation systems that ensure plants are watered even when no one is home. Certain hubs even gather and analyze local weather conditions to develop a watering schedule to ensure plants thrive. These hubs aren't just handy when on vacation, as they can be great for gardeners who want to know things about their plants that are not apparent to the naked eye. People may see their gardens as welcome respites from their devices. But garden gadgets can help plants thrive and make time in the garden that much more enjoyable.

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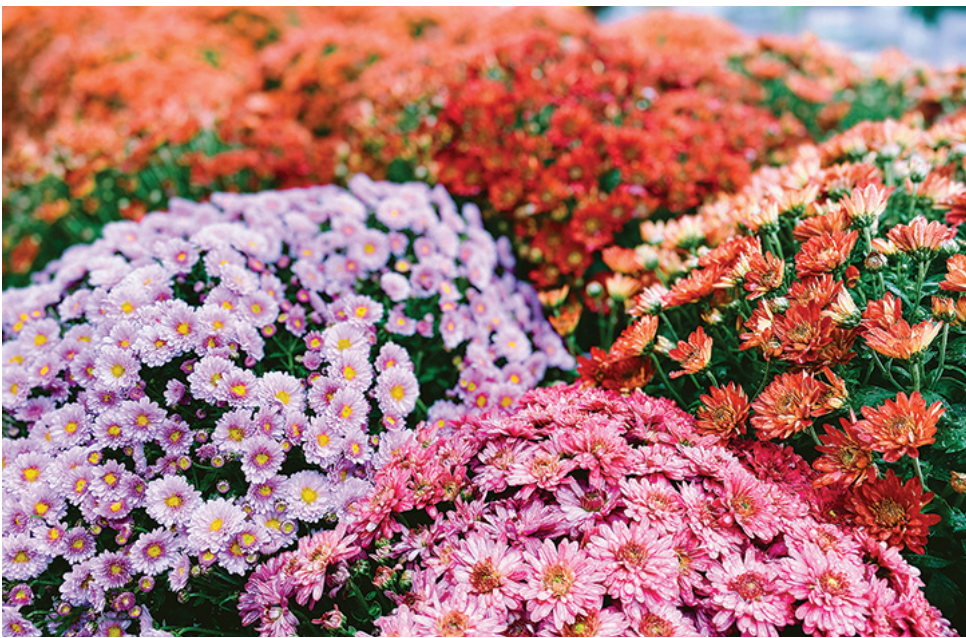
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# Plants that naturally repel unwanted insects



**Certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.**

Homeowners choose plants for their properties based on a number of variables. Some may be into growing their own foods, while others desire their gardens to be an awe-inspiring mélange of bright colors and alluring scents. There's no wrong reason to plant a fresh garden, but some plants offer extra benefits, such as repelling insects.

Insects can be a nuisance and a threat to individuals' overall health. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, insect-borne diseases are viral and bacterial illnesses that develop from insect bites. Mosquitoes, sand flies and fleas are some examples of insects that can pass on disease. Fever, chills, headache, and muscle soreness are just a few of the more common symptoms linked to insect-borne diseases.

The good news for avid gardeners is that certain plants can help repel insects and provide the additional benefits like fresh food and aesthetic appeal that so many people love.

- Basil: The aroma of fresh basil is enough to compel any gardener to make a place for it in their garden. But there's more to fresh basil than its scent, as the Farmers Almanac notes it can be used to repel mosquitoes and moths.
- Lavender: Fleas, flies, mosquitoes, and moths are not fans of this

aromatic and colorful member of the mint family. Bees tend to be drawn to lavender, a durable plant that many garden centers recommend in areas prone to drought or hot summers without much precipitation.

- Mint: Mint is another plant that is instantly recognizable for its aroma. But mint lovers may not realize that it's also great for keeping ants at bay. Mint also can be used to repel mosquitoes, but gardeners with no experience planting mint should plant it in pots. That's because the Farmers Almanac notes mint is an especially aggressive spreader that can quickly take over a garden. Separating mint in pots can prevent it from bullying its way into other plants' domains.
- Lemongrass: Lemongrass is a tropical grass that's so fragrant it's often used in perfumes. Lemongrass contains citronella, which many people associate with repelling mosquitoes. A potted lemongrass plant can repel these unwanted guests, keeping them away from decks, porches and/or patios all summer long.
- Chrysanthemums: The Farmers' Almanac® recommends using chrysanthemums, which repel a range of insects from bedbugs to fleas to ants, as border plants around a home. That's because they contain the natural insecticide pyrethrin, which can serve as something of an insect-repelling boundary around a home.

Insects are unwanted guests around a home each spring, summer and fall. Certain plants can help repel insects and serve as an eco-friendly alternative to insecticides.





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# Telling signs 3 common insects are infesting a lawn

*Even the most well-maintained lawns can be vulnerable to insect infestation.*

Well-maintained lawns are a byproduct of hard work. That hard work is a point of pride for homeowners who spend countless hours throughout spring, summer and fall tending to their lawns. All that hard work can be compromised when uninvited guests, namely insects, show up in a lawn. Insect infestations can turn a normally pristine and lush green lawn into a brown and sickly eyesore. Identifying which type of insect is damaging a lawn is the first step toward returning that lawn to its green glory. These are three common lawn insects and signs that they're infesting a lawn.

**1. Grubs**  
Grubs like to feast on the roots of grass right below the surface. Michigan State University Extension Turf & Landscape reports that grub damage can appear from March to early May or from mid-September to early November. The lawn and garden experts at GardenTech® note that wilted grass blades are often the first indicator of a grub



infestation, which is followed by patches of brown turf and eventually death. Crows, skunks and moles eat grubs, so the sight of them in a lawn could indicate an infestation.

**2. Chinch bugs**  
The experts at BobVila.com report that chinch bugs are not necessarily problematic when their populations are limited to around 10 to 15 bugs per square foot of lawn. In such instances, chinch bug populations are generally controlled by ants and ladybugs. However, extreme heat and drought, problems that have plagued various regions in North America in recent years, reduce the

populations of bugs that feed on chinch bugs, thus increasing the population of these unwanted guests that feed on grass. GardenTech® indicates that damage from chinch bugs is most visible between June and September. That damage begins with grass taking on a purple tinge before it turns yellow and then brown after wilting.

**3. Cutworms**  
The lawn care experts at Scotts® note that cutworms are moth larvae that hide in the thatch layer of a lawn during the day before emerging at night to feed on grass blades. Patches of brown grass between one

and two inches in width is a sign of cutworm infestation. Homeowners who notice a growing number of birds pecking away in their lawns may have a cutworm infestation, which can be confirmed by peeling up a section of damaged grass and looking for cutworms, which are brown, gray or black and tend to be around two inches long. The good news is that grub, chinch bug and cutworm populations can be controlled. Local turf specialists can recommend strategies to curtail such populations and help homeowners restore their lawns to full health.



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# Getting to the root of sodic soil

**Sodic soil is one condition people may experience at home or in commercial farming operations.**

Plants often are only as strong as the soil in which they grow. While certain greenery may thrive no matter where it's planted, soil conditions are often key to successful growing. Sodic soil is one condition people may experience at home or in commercial farming operations. Sodic soils, sometimes called saline-alkali soils or dispersive soils, are defined as having high levels of exchangeable sodium and low levels of total salts, according to the Colorado State University Extension. These conditions compromise growing conditions because sodic soils tend to be poorly drained and crust over. Water intake also can be poor in sodic soils, and pH is usually high – coming in above 9.0. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development of the Government of Western Australia advises a simple sodic soil test to check for sodicity. One can collect dry soil aggregates (crumbs of soil) from different depths. Those crumbs should be placed into a clear jar of distilled water, taking care not to mix

or agitate the soil. The water around the edges of sodic soil will become cloudy and appear milky. For highly dispersive soil, the dispersion will be evident after about 10 to 30 minutes. Moderately sodic soil may take 2 hours. Individuals can take steps to improve sodic soil. Gypsum is the most commonly used amendment for sodic soil, according to Science Direct. It also can reduce the harmful effects of high-sodium irrigation waters. Gypsum is a mineral that is composed of hydrated calcium sulfate. Gypsum has an effect on reducing the rate of soil erosion. It is more effective when gypsum is spread on the soil surface rather than mixed in. Limestone, which also contains calcium, is another additive that can amend sodic soils. Gardeners may want to add calcium to the soil because it replaces the sodium and then the sodium can be leached out. Additional mitigation methods for sodic soils include changing plant species or varieties to more tolerant ones that will grow more readily. Commercial farmers or home gardeners may encounter sodic soil. Though sodic soil is not ideal, it can be remedied in various ways.

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# Spring planting pointers

**As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.**

Many people view spring as a season of rejuvenation. That renewal may be somewhat metaphorical for human beings, but it's literal for lawns and gardens that begin to grow anew as temperatures rise and hours of daylight increase in spring. Each spring presents an opportunity for homeowners to get back outside and tend to their gardens. As the temperatures rise, homeowners can consider these spring planning pointers to ensure their landscapes look lush and full in the months ahead.

- Start with the soil. Soil can serve as the starting point each spring. Winter can take its toll on a garden and even overwhelm the area with debris over the colder months. Clear rocks and other debris from the area before loosening the soil. The Farmer's Almanac recommends loosening soil to a depth of at least eight inches if planting a new garden. An existing garden may only need to be loosened to a depth of around six inches, after which homeowners can

mix compost into the soil in early spring. Compost is organic matter that provides nutrients and helps to build strong plant roots.

- Consider a raised garden in colder climates. The Farmer's Almanac notes raised gardens can help homeowners in colder climates dry out and warm up wet, cold soils more quickly. Homeowners in such regions also can cover their beds with black plastic or cardboard prior to planting. Doing so can protect the beds from late-season snow and spring rains and also helps to overcome erosion.
- Take soil temperatures. Unpredictable weather is among the noticeable effects of climate change in recent years. That lack of predictability can make spring planting a little more tricky than it once was. Experts note that soil temperatures around 50 F are best for cool-season crops, while soil should be 60 F or warmer when planting warm-weather plants such as tomatoes.
- Work with a garden center to identify what to plant. The right plants for one region may not be ideal for another, so homeowners are urged to work with a local landscaper or garden center before planting. Such a consultation can be especially useful for homeowners planting a new garden. Landscapers



and garden center professionals will know which plants work in the local climate.

- Consider planting vegetables in the spring. Various garden experts note that spring is an ideal time to plant a vegetable garden. If planted at the right time, a vegetable garden can save homeowners money on their grocery bills and provide a season's worth of fresh veggies. Lettuce and spinach are sun- and

shade-friendly vegetables, which can make them good options for a spring garden. Cool-season root vegetables, which include beets, carrots and swiss chard, are some other notable veggies that can thrive in early spring. Spring is a season of rejuvenation for gardens. That's even more true when homeowners consider some conventional planting wisdom in early spring.

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# A spring lawn revitalization strategy

*Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process but can be well worth the reward when green grass adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard.*

New growth is a hallmark of spring, whether it plays out in the birth of birds and bunnies or with the returned buds on trees and plant stalks. While most greenery rebounds naturally, lawns may need a little extra TLC in order to return to their once lush, green glory. Revitalizing a lawn in spring is a multifaceted process but can be well worth the reward when green grass

adds to a beautiful landscape and functional yard. Here is how to get started when the weather warms, courtesy of The Farmer's Almanac and The Home Depot.

- Clean up debris. Spend a few hours raking up leaves from the lawn and removing any other winter debris like twigs so that air can reach the grass below. Also remove any thatch that has developed.
- Test the soil. Take a sample of the soil to determine its pH level and nutrient needs. Then you can make adjustments to set a strong foundation for the lawn to grow.
- Do some weeding. Pull out any weeds that have poked through early on and apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent additional

weeds from taking over.

- Start the aeration process. A core aerator punches holes into the soil. This enables air and water to penetrate through to the roots.
- Overseed the lawn. Apply grass seeds over the lawn, paying special attention to any bare or thin areas so that the seed will fill in the lawn.
- Water consistently. It is important to water the lawn deeply and consistently, especially when the weather is dry, to help promote strong root development.
- Time fertilizer correctly. Apply a spring fertilizer around three weeks after the lawn starts to turn green or after the first two or three mowings. If fertilizer is applied too early it can feed weeds instead of the grass and



result in fertilizer runoff.

- Mow to an appropriate height. Begin to mow when the ground is dry enough and the grass is long enough to need cutting. Leave some length to the lawn; otherwise, sunlight will reach the soil and encourage weed seeds to germinate.

With a little elbow grease at the start of spring, homeowners can establish strong and healthy lawns.



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# Helpful tips for every gardening beginner

*These pointers can help anyone foster a newfound passion for gardening.*

Gardening is a popular hobby all over the world. Ruby Home Luxury Real Estate estimates there are 71.5 million gardening households in the United States alone. That translates to around 185.9 million people engaged in some form of gardening, which places the U.S. among other countries where gardening is wildly popular, including Australia and China.

A greater number of people are showing interest in gardening, which is a rewarding hobby that's good for the mind and the body. Those who are new to gardening may need a crash course to get started. These pointers can help anyone foster a newfound passion for gardening.

**Choose the best location**

Spend time in the yard and decide where to house a garden. A far-off corner may get the most sun, but will you forget about the garden if it is too far away? Ideally, the garden should be located where it will get at least six to eight hours of sun each day. There also should be a water source nearby. The spot also should



be convenient so that it is easy to go and pick vegetables or prune flowers.

**Start small**

If you're new to gardening, begin with a small garden footprint so that you can get your feet wet. A raised garden bed can be a good starting point because it is contained and easy to maintain. As your experience (and garden) grows, you can add to the garden size the next time around.

**Amend the soil**

It's possible but unlikely that the soil in the backyard is the perfect mix to grow healthy plants. It's more likely

that the garden will need some soil modification. You can test the soil makeup with do-it-yourself kits or work with a garden center. A garden typically requires a mix of compost to add nutrients to the dirt; peat moss or coconut coir to help with water retention and to make the soil lighter; and vermiculite that helps to retain water. A compost bin set up at the same time as the garden allows gardeners to continually produce nutrient-rich food to add to the garden.

**Plant starter guide**

It's best to keep a few things in mind when planning the garden. Think

about what will grow well in your climate. Consider how big the garden will be and the size of mature plants. A small garden will not be able to accommodate corn, for example. Also, how would you like the space to look and what will be its function? Is this a purely aesthetic garden or one that will be food-bearing?

**Start seeds inside**

If you'll be starting a garden from seeds, it's best to start indoors before your region's frost-free date. This way the delicate plants will get the needed care and can establish before they go outdoors in the ground. Keep them humid by covering the seedlings in plastic wrap. You can start the seeds in different containers, even empty egg cartons. Transplant to larger containers after the seedlings grow a second set of leaves. Once you're free from overnight frost, you can place the established, strong seedlings in the ground.

An automatic watering system, such as a timer hooked up to the sprinkler, can keep the garden well watered, which increases the chances of success. Then it will only be a matter of weeks before the garden can be enjoyed throughout the season.



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