



Spring

HOME IMPROVEMENT

The important role played by bees in lawns and gardens

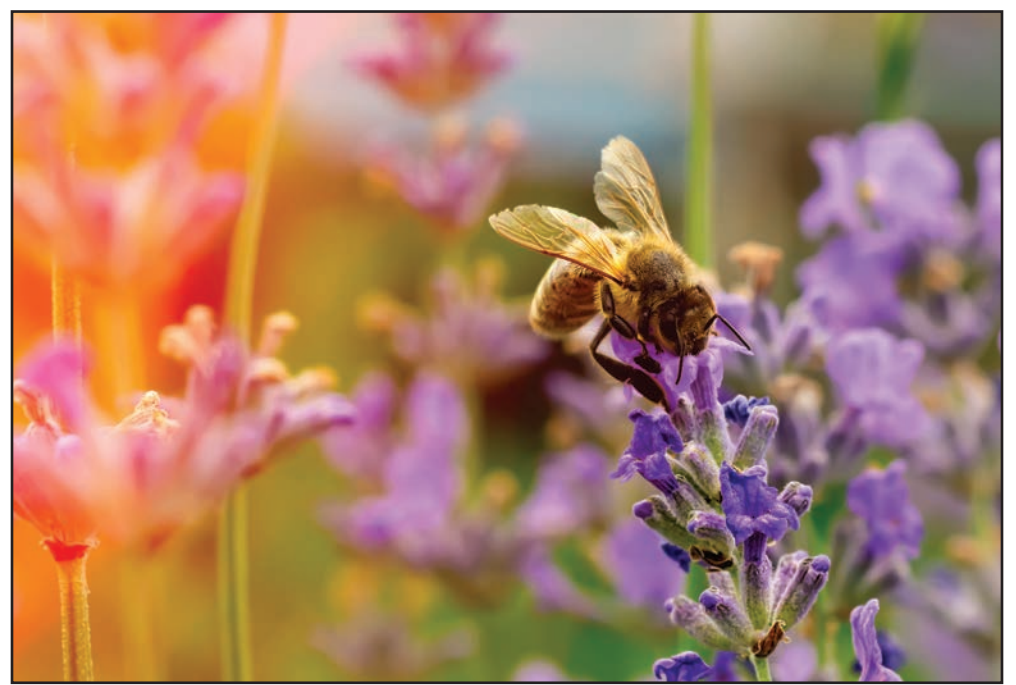
□ Many variables contribute to a thriving garden, and perhaps none is more important than bees.

A colorful garden in full bloom is an aesthetically appealing sight each spring and summer. The pleasant aromas emanating from such spaces only add to their appeal.

Many variables contribute to a thriving garden, and perhaps none is more important than bees. North America is home to thousands of species of bees, but many of those species are experiencing dwindling populations. According to Scott McArt, an assistant professor of pollinator health in the Department of Entomology at Cornell University, 53 bee species have experienced population declines or range contractions over the last several decades. Individuals accustomed to seeing bees as unwanted guests may wonder why that's a problem. Though declining bee populations

pose a number of problems, perhaps none is more relatable than the link between bees and food production. A recent study published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* noted that declines in both managed and wild bee populations raise significant concerns about long-term food security. Authors of the study noted that crop production would be higher if crop flowers received more pollination. That's a significant benefit as the global population continues to increase, but it's also a notable benefit in the present-day from both a food security and economic perspective. In fact, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports that commercial production of more than 90 crops relies on roughly 3,600 bee species. Declining bee populations

could put that production in serious jeopardy and create a domino effect that impacts food security and individuals' livelihoods. But all is not lost in the fight to restore bee populations. In fact, McArt indicated in a 2019 report that bee populations are thriving in agricultural and natural areas. But bee populations also must thrive in suburban and urban areas. Planting a pollinator-friendly garden is one step McArt suggested gardening hobbyists can take to help restore bee populations. When planting to combat declining bee populations, homeowners should always look for native plants, as they are well-adapted to local climates and unlikely to upset local ecosystems. Local garden centers can be great resources for anyone looking to plant native species. According



to HGTV, the following are just a handful of the many bee-friendly garden flowers and plants homeowners can consider for their gardens:

- Bee balm
- Honeysuckle
- Sunflower

- Cosmos
- Strawberries
- Dahlia
- Butterfly bush
- Crocus
- Pot marigold
- Geraniums

Bee populations are

in decline. If efforts to restore those populations are not embraced, the consequences for future generations could be dire. Homeowners can do their part by planting bee-friendly flowers and plants on their properties.

Turn a backyard into your own relaxing respite

Backyards have long been places to unwind and enjoy some peace and quiet surrounded by nature.

Thanks in part to financial instability brought on by rising inflation and measures to tame it, homeowners may decide to forgo traditional vacations in favor of staying home this season. There's no better time to invest in a home, particularly outdoor spaces, to make them welcoming respites. The following are some ways to accomplish that goal.

Add a water feature
The sound of trickling or bubbling water can make surroundings more serene. A low-maintenance water feature can help to create a calming ambiance. A fountain that does not require a collection pond will reduce the chance it becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Locating the fountain out of the sun can keep algae growth at a minimum.

Add lights for ambiance
Outdoor lighting options

include professionally installed, hardwired lights on the home itself or accent lighting that draws attention to trees or architectural structures on the property. It also may include twinkling lights, which some consider a must-have for any outdoor retreat. Lights come in all types and price points. Hang them on porches, pergolas or cement posts inside decorative planters and then string lights between the posts. This way the lighting can be moved around as desired.

Lounging spots
A comfortable outdoor loveseat or chairs may be a focal point of the yard, but build in some additional cozy spots specifically for lounging around. Nestle a hammock in a quiet corner of the yard, or enhance a chaise lounge with throw pillows and a large umbrella for napping poolside.

Add lushness with plants
Plants can transform any space. Use a combination of planted varieties around

the yard, then enhance certain areas with potted plants as needed. Plants can make an area more warm and inviting, plus they give butterflies, bees and hummingbirds places to stop by and visit. Consider the help of a professional landscaper to bring a vision of a lush, plant-filled retreat to life.

Blend in the pool or spa
With some unique landscape architecture, the pool or hot tub can be built right into the landscape, making it a cohesive part of the design. This

can make the yard seem even more like an oasis, especially when the pool is flanked by a waterfall or bubbling fountain.

Add some music
Thanks to wireless speakers that rely on Bluetooth technology, it's easy to have music piped right into the backyard. Set up a wireless speaker in an inconspicuous spot, such as inside a planter or in the rafters of a gazebo.

Turning a backyard into an oasis can provide the respite many people look for on their properties.

Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

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

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

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



but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot. A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot

is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

· **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise

lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

· **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has

encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood. Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck

professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

· **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage. Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

Essential spring cleaning pointers to revitalize your home

Spring is a season of renewal. When the flowers are blooming and the trees are budding and the weather is pleasantly warm, people often feel inspired to make changes around their homes. Work may begin with culling belongings and organizing essentials.

There is debate regarding where the practice of "spring cleaning" originated. Some researchers link it to certain religious groups. It has long been an ancient Jewish custom to thoroughly clean a house in preparation for the springtime feast

of Passover. The house is scoured to remove any yeast bread, or chametz, from the home. Similarly, members of the Greek Orthodox church celebrate "Clean Week," which is a week of cleaning before Lent. In Iranian culture, families spend days cleaning prior to the Persian New Year, which begins on the spring equinox.

Spring cleaning also has some secular roots. For instance, in the 1800s, Londoners routinely cleared their homes of grime and soot that accumulated over the

winter. Spring cleaning is still a ritual for many today. As people embark on their plans to tidy up, these tips can help them along.

· **Tackle one big task a day**

Who hasn't started one project only to be distracted into moving along to another room? This often occurs when people discover something out of place in one space and then move that item where it belongs, only to find a new cleaning task at hand in that space. Inefficiency can make you give up on spring

cleaning prematurely. Agree to address one room/task a day. Keep a basket or box handy to store errant items until you move on to the next room.

· **Stock up on supplies**
Prepare all of the cleaning supplies in advance. Put together a tool kit of sorts with the equipment you need, including mops, brooms, rags, cleansers, and the like. Organization can keep you on course.

· **Harness your strengths and weaknesses**

Some people clean because they are stressed or angry, others do so to

avoid other tasks. Keep personality in mind when establishing a cleaning schedule. For example, clean at night if you're a night owl, or wait until you are feeling antsy before embarking on a "calm down cleaning."

· **Tackle seasonal chores first**

Some tasks need to get done to prepare for the spring and summer season. These may include cleaning the grill and sorting through outdoor furniture and decor. Spring cleaning may involve readying the pool for another year of use, or

cleaning out rain gutters to prepare for spring storms. Tackle time-dependent tasks first and then move on to others that are less time-sensitive.

· **Spread out the work**

Some people like to devote full weekends to spring cleaning, but that can be overwhelming for others. Breaking down cleaning tasks into 15- to 30-minute intervals each day can make the job more tolerable.

Spring cleaning season has arrived, and certain tips can make the job more efficient and manageable.



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Give your living room a new look this spring



An “out with the old, in with the new” mentality can extend to people’s visions for their homes. A home in need of repair or renovation can serve as a catalyst to take inventory of personal style and help make interior spaces reflect one’s unique vibe.

A living room can grow stale over time and often serves as a catch-call for clothing, blankets, gadgets, and other items. Upon recognizing a living room has seen better days, individuals may decide it’s time to give the space a new vibe. That transformation can start with these strategies.

Organize first

Clutter frequently is the culprit behind a living room that may not give off the vibe individuals desire. As families grow and people add belongings, space may be at a premium. Less is more has never been a more important concept. Remove extraneous items before purchasing new furniture or transitioning to a new design. You may even want to remove everything and start from scratch before reintroducing desirable elements to the space.

Seek the assistance of professionals

Some people are adept at decorating and designing spaces. But just as you wouldn’t perform your own medical procedures, you should leave jobs like interior design and renovations to the professionals. Hiring a professional interior designer and contractors can really bring a living room together in ways homeowners may have never imagined. These pros can build off of your ideas and truly create a space that may

be worthy of a magazine spread.

Promote wellness

You may want to consider adding natural materials in the design to promote well-being. Eco-friendly furnishings, raw fibers and organic textures will create an environment from sustainable choices. Plenty of plants also can create a welcoming environment that helps you surround yourself with positive energy and the items you love.

Light it up

One of the easiest ways to transform a room’s vibe is to utilize lighting. Change draperies to allow more natural light to shine in. Consider additional windows or skylights if yours is a particularly dark home. If you desire to create a more vivid or cozy ambiance, use a combination of accent, task and supplemental lighting in the space so there are no dim corners.

Create an industrial or urban vibe

Industrial-chic design celebrates the bones of a building. It’s what makes city lofts so appealing, with their exposed beams and brick. Even those who live in suburbia or out in the country can give a living room this look with subtle nods to the style. Unadorned windows, clean lines on furniture, oversized, gallery-style art, and metal accents can add touches of this popular look to your home.

Revamping a living room doesn’t have to be difficult. With an idea in place and some professional touches, an entirely new vibe can be achieved.

SPRING INTO ACTION

Explaining the popular sport of pickleball

Crowded pickleball courts are a testament to the popularity of a sport that has taken many communities by storm. A 2023 report from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association indicates just under nine million people played pickleball in 2022, which marked a stunning 159 percent increase in participation over just a three-year period.

With such significant increases in participation, pickleball undoubtedly has piqued the curiosity of millions more who have not yet picked up a paddle. Individuals whose curiosity has compelled them to give the sport a try can consider this rundown of pickleball so they’re as prepared as possible upon picking up their paddles.

The sport

Pickleball, invented by a congressman from the state of Washington and two friends in the 1960s, combines components of badminton, ping-pong and tennis. A ball made of plastic is used in pickleball, and the ball is slightly larger than a tennis ball. Tennis courts, which many communities have now re-designated as pickleball courts, are still widely used as playing surfaces for pickleball players. The nets for pickleball are lower than for tennis, and that’s due to science. According to the paddle and apparel manufacturer Paddletrek, after the first bounce a tennis ball retains about 60 percent of its bounce, which means it can reach a height of nearly 46 inches. A pickleball retains between 38 and 44 percent of its energy after bouncing, which means it peaks around 30 to 34 inches. That’s why tennis nets are typically lowered for pickleball competitions.

Is pickleball a team sport?

Socialization is one of the foremost



health benefits of pickleball, potentially helping to reduce feelings of loneliness that can increase risk for depression and other conditions. Pickleball can be a team sport if players prefer doubles competitions, but it’s also played in one-on-one settings as well. But even players who prefer singles competitions can reap the socialization benefits of pickleball by engaging with their competitors and the wider community of local players.

When does a pickleball game end?

Debate is ongoing as to whether professional pickleball should institute a shot clock to increase the pace of play, but no such clock currently governs the game. According to USA PickleballTM, games are normally played to 11 points, and players must win by two. Tournament games may play to 15 or 21 (win by two).

The popularity of pickleball has exploded in recent years. Non-players who are curious are urged to give this beloved sport a try.

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Design ideas that can create a peaceful feel

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. A calm place to come home to after a busy day at work or school is often just what people need to unwind.

Certain design components can help individuals turn their homes into relaxing respites from the daily grind. With that goal in mind, individuals can consider these ideas to create a peaceful feel inside their homes.

- **Paint with neutral colors.** Wall colors can define the mood in a given room, and neutral colors have long been linked to a calming effect. Subtle shades like beige, taupe and light gray are known to create a relaxed vibe in a room, so these colors can be a go-to choice. Some people consider neutral colors a tad boring, so individuals concerned by that impression can limit neutral colors to rooms designated as sanctuaries, like a reading room, a spa bathroom or a bedroom.

- **Employ natural light.** Natural light also can help to establish

a serene setting at home. Large windows that let daylight in can improve anyone's mood. A 2022 study from researchers at the University of Chile in Santiago found that the more natural light that entered a home, the happier people said they felt. Study authors even noted that the largest uptick in well-being was found among participants who lived in homes in which windows covered at least 40 percent of the dwelling's wall space. Opening blinds or curtains and, if possible, installing larger windows in a home can help to establish the relaxing, happy vibe individuals are aiming for.

- **Utilize plants to set a peaceful tone.** The United Kingdom-based Royal Horticultural Society notes that research has found that indoor plants can benefit psychological well-being. The RHS notes that improved mood and reduced stress levels are two benefits that indoor plants can provide. A good mood and less stress can help individuals establish the peaceful feel they're aiming for at home.



- **Keep devices out of bedrooms.** Watching television while lying in bed, scanning a smartphone before turning off a nightstand light and retiring for the night, or reading an e-reader instead of a print book at night can transform a bedroom from a serene setting into one that's overrun with stimuli. According to the Sleep

Foundation, technology stimulates the mind, which can make it harder to fall asleep. In addition, blue light emitted by devices disrupts the natural production of melatonin, a hormone that makes it easier to fall asleep. That can negate any efforts individuals have undertaken to make their bedrooms as peaceful as possible.

Designate bedrooms in the house as technology-free zones to ensure the peaceful vibe continues uninterrupted until everyone goes to bed.

A peaceful home makes for the perfect respite at the end of a busy day. Various design choices can help individuals establish a serene vibe throughout their homes.

Small renovations that can make a big impact

Home renovations provide a host of benefits. Such projects can increase resale value and improve on the safety, aesthetics and functionality of a home.

Some homeowners may employ the mantra "go big or go home" when they embark on home improvements, thinking that only the largest renovations produce noticeable change. But that's not the case. Various smaller renovations can provide a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks as well.

- **Countertops (and hardware):** A complete kitchen overhaul may stretch some homeowners'

budgets. However, changing an older countertop for a new material can provide the facelift a kitchen needs. And while changing the cabinets may be homeowners' ultimate goal, swapping hardware in dated finishes for newer handles and pulls can provide low-cost appeal.

- **Paint:** Painting a space is an inexpensive improvement that adds maximum impact. Paint can transform dark and drab rooms into bright and airy oases. Paint also can be used to create an accent wall or cozy nooks. Homeowners also can showcase

their personalities with their choice of paint colors.

- **Lighting:** Homeowners should not underestimate what a change in lighting can do. When rooms or exterior spaces are illuminated, they take on entirely new looks. It's worth it to invest in new lighting, whether it's a dramatic hanging light over the dining room table or task lighting in dim spaces.

- **Weatherproofing:** Windows, doors, weatherstripping, and insulation in a home can offer visual appeal and help homeowners save money. The initial investment may

be significant, but those costs will pay off in energy savings. According to One Main Financial, space heating is the largest energy expense the average American homeowner has, accounting for around 45 percent of all energy costs.

- **Mudroom:** Turn an entryway into a more functional space with the addition of cabinets, benches or custom-designed storage options that perfectly fit the area. Cubbies and cabinets can corral shoes, umbrellas, hats, bags, and much more.

- **Accent updates:** Any space, whether it's inside or outside a

home, can get a fresh look with new decorative accents. Invest in new throw pillows and even slipcovers for living room sofas. Use new tile or paint the brick on a fireplace in a den, then update the mantel with decorative displays. Purchase wall art that can bring different colors into a room. Change the cushions on deck furniture and buy color-coordinated planters.

These subtle changes will not cost as much as full-scale renovations, but they can still help homeowners transform their homes.

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