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# Be Ready for Spring Gardening

The time and effort you put into preparation in spring can lead to a thriving garden for the rest of the warm months.

So take the time now to plant bulbs, organize your garage or shed, repair and sharpen tools and get your compost pile going again. Here's how:

## GETTING ORGANIZED

If your garden shed isn't heated or well-lit, you may encounter an unpleasant surprise or two when opening it back up for spring. The structure might have sustained damage from leaks or weather exposure. Rust can be an issue. Rodents or other small creatures may have taken up residence. When temperatures first begin to rise, inspect the shed and then get to work rectifying whatever issues you discover.

## GARDENING TOOLS

Use a file to sharpen any tools with blades, including pruners, shears and loppers. Lubricate any tools with moving parts. If they're still caked with mud from the last growing last season, wash them with a garden hose and then clean them in warm, soapy water. Next, use the same hose to thoroughly clean the wheelbarrow, then oil the wheels and tighten any loose bearings so it's ready for the season ahead.

## OTHER TASKS

Prune or remove any perennials that have become overgrown or congested. Replace outdated supplies since items like grass seeds may not remain viable over long periods of time. Take a quick look around to make sure you have plenty of any needed fertilizers and soil amendments for the upcoming year. If needed, consult with your local extension office to better understand the specific needs of your plants before they begin to sprout.

## EARLY PLANTING

Now, you're ready. Spring is the time to plant bulbs for them to bloom in summer and fall. Apply a fresh layer of mulch, too. Dyed mulches are generally designed to last for several seasons, but typically still need a slight refresh after the long winter. Mulching early will help with suppressing weed growth. It's a good time to divide existing fall-blooming plants. Separating them now gives the individual plants time to re-establish in their new locations. They'll start developing the robust root systems they'll eventually need when temperatures begin to drop again.



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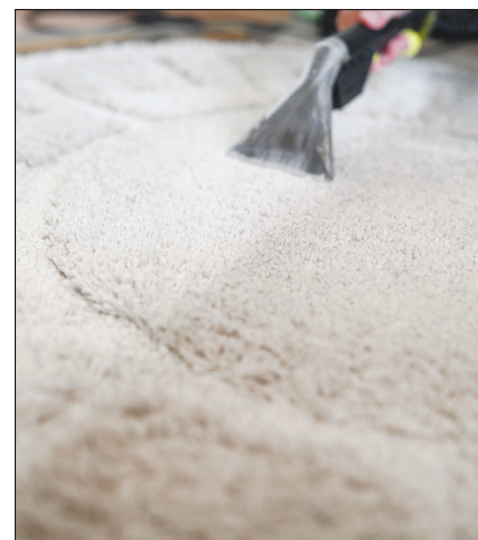
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HOME AND LAWN | HEALTHY HOME

# Avoid Allergens

Spring brings blossoming trees, blooming flowers and the discomfort of seasonal allergies.

Experts say more than 50 million Americans are affected every year. Pollen is one of the main culprits, followed by various grasses, mold and dust that cause us to sneeze, cough and rub our eyes. Unfortunately, there remains no cure for these allergies — but these key strategies can help mitigate some of the worst reactions:



### START BY DECLUTTERING

As you begin spring cleaning, consider one of the most common allergens found in our homes: Dust. Decluttering can quickly reduce its accumulation around your home. Remove items like unworn clothing, piles of reading material and old rags. Dust your home regularly since HVAC systems tend to distribute these particles throughout our homes. Remember that everyone spends a considerable amount of time in the bedroom, so focus on making this a safe zone that's free from allergens associated with clutter. In addition to dusting, regularly change out bed linens and pillowcases.

### DEEP CLEANING

Spring brings an influx of pollen and other allergens into your home, and not just through open doors. Maintaining a clean and fresh environment also involves regular assessments of your home's air. Consider investing in high-quality filters for your living areas.

Local HVAC technicians may also have additional recommendations that will improve your home's air quality. Bedding is particularly prone to accumulating dust mites and pollen. They can cause allergic reactions overnight while we are tucked in, or later in the day after attaching themselves to our hair or clothing. Wash your bedding in hot water at least once a week.

### AROUND THE HOUSE

Next, look down. Give your carpet a thorough spring cleaning. For the toughest jobs, it may be necessary to rent a commercial carpet shampooer from a nearby hardware store or hire a professional cleaning service. Remember that some carpet types are more prone to trapping allergens and then releasing them into the air when disturbed. After a deep cleaning, make it a habit to vacuum at least once a week. Ensure that your air systems and ductwork are regularly cleaned. If any components are showing signs of wear and tear, dust and moisture can easily get inside your home.



# Before You Mulch

Every thriving flower bed starts with a solid foundation of mulch. It provides a big aesthetic boost, of course, serving as a showcasing background for your plants and shrubs.

More importantly, mulch also suppresses weeds, retains moisture and enhances soil quality.

## THE RIGHT TIME

Apply mulch in the spring after planting your seasonal flowers and vegetables. Mulching around trees and other landscape features also enhances their visual interest. You'll be putting the perfect finishing touch to your gardening efforts. Over the next few months, mulch will act as a protective layer that keeps weeds away. Into the winter, it prevents plant displacement while shielding delicate plants from cold weather. Once the mulch has fully decomposed, it's time to refresh or completely replenish.

## EXPLORE THE OPTIONS

There is a wide variety of mulch available for any type of flower bed or garden, including wood chips, bark, pine straw, rubber mulch, dyed wood, grass clippings and even newspaper. Select a type that complements the colors of your landscaping and home, and make sure it suits your local environment. If you choose dyed mulch, apply it during a period where it won't rain for 24 to 48 hours to prevent staining nearby hard surfaces.



## HANDLING MULCH

Wear gardening gloves when handling mulch to shield your hands from splinters and any dyes. Choose comfortable old clothing that you don't mind getting soiled. If you have allergies, consider wearing a face mask for added protection. Use a wheelbarrow or cart along with a shovel to transport the mulch, and lift from your knees rather than your back. To complete the job, rake the mulch to create an even layer.

## MULCH CARE

If weeds begin emerging through the mulch, remove them manually or apply a weed and grass killer. Mold may develop in areas where the entire surface isn't exposed to air and light. Gently turn the mulch and evenly redistribute everything. As the mulch dries, the mold should dissipate. Exposure to sun and rain will cause your mulch to fade and break down, but that's part of its purpose to enrich the soil. Turning the mulch will also help maintain its appearance for a longer period.

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# Sprucing Up the Outside

Freshening up your home's exterior is a rite of passage for spring.

At some point, wear and tear will dictate that your house's paint job needs to be addressed. But whom should you hire? Here are a few tips on hiring the right professional painter for the job:

## WHY HIRE A PRO?

This job is typically too big, and might be too dangerous, for the average homeowner to tackle. Instead, look for experienced paint companies that specialize in exterior work (some painters focus solely on interior projects, so save those for when you need to update your kitchen). Before reaching out to potential painters, take some time to familiarize yourself with the exterior surfaces of your home. Browse home improvement stores and design magazines to gather inspiration for your desired aesthetic. You might even consider gathering some paint samples to help underscore the kind of colors you prefer.

## EARLY EVALUATION

The cost of these exterior jobs reaches into the thousands of dollars, so conduct thorough research before you make a hire. Before inviting painters to assess your home, look for online reviews and neighbor recommendations. Get three to five pre-estimates for any work you plan on having done, and then carefully evaluate them. View examples of their previous work on other homes.

## CONSULTATIONS AND QUOTES

Reputable painters will visit a home to provide an individualized estimate. During this visit, they will inspect your paint job's current condition while identifying any architectural challenges that may affect the project. This comprehensive evaluation helps them complete a more precise quote. Present your ideas regarding colors and seek their feedback. Their recommendations might include specific products or finishes that are more suitable for your local climate.

Ask each paint contractor about their years of experience in the industry. Make sure they are properly licensed and insured, and ask about affiliations with professional associations. Pay close attention to their professional insights, but don't be persuaded into choices that aren't in line with your own budget or personal preferences.

Following this discussion, the painter will provide a more detailed estimate. Review everyone's quotes, paying attention to the variations among them, before making a final decision. Ask about guarantees on their work.



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# Maintaining Your Sprinklers

So you've invested in a sprinkler or irrigation system to maintain your lawn through the warm months.

A professionally installed sprinkler system can ensure years of lush shrubbery, bright flowers and green grass.

When the ice and frost begin to melt, protect that investment by performing early maintenance to ensure everything's in good working order before the system shifts into overdrive for summer.

## SPRING PREPARATIONS

The first part of the preparation process involves patience. Confirm that frosty winter conditions have passed before activating your sprinklers. If you run water through the system while the ground remains frozen, the pipes may burst during startup or shortly thereafter. Assess your soil's condition by digging at least a foot deep in an area away from the underground tubing. If you encounter frozen soil, postpone the de-winterizing process until temperatures are higher.

## INITIAL EVALUATIONS

Begin at the control panel for the sprinklers, which is generally outdoors near your home's water system. Closely follow instructions provided by the manufacturer or installer, while verifying that the settings for time, date and zones remain correct. Inspect the condition of your backup batteries if the sprinkler system depends on them. If you have concerns regarding their remaining functionality, contact the installation company.

## CLEAN UP

Cleaning the sprinkler heads before the first use may be the most labor-intensive part of this entire process, particularly if you have a large yard. Examine each one for any signs of wear and replace damaged parts before activating the system. You can do this with an old toothbrush, thoroughly cleaning all nozzles to ensure they distribute water uniformly across their assigned zones.

## GETTING STARTED

After cleaning, make sure all valves are closed except for the nozzle that is farthest from the main water source, which should remain open to allow trapped air to escape. Gradually open the main valve until you hear water flowing and then allow the main line to fill steadily. For larger systems, you may want to only slightly open the valve over a period of minutes. Opening it too quickly could result in costly mishaps like ruptured pipes or valves.



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# A First-Timer's Guide to Kitchen Remodeling

Kitchen upgrades are among the most common renovation projects homeowners tackle. Even so, it's a big project for a first-time renovation, and the final results are sure to be stronger with some detailed planning from the start.

Take into account these five tips from the experts at Wellborn Cabinet to help first-time kitchen remodelers achieve the kitchens of their dreams:

## 1. Plan Your Budget

Establish a clear and realistic budget. Factor in costs for materials, labor and some extra for unexpected expenses. Sticking to your budget can help ensure you enjoy the outcome of the project while avoiding financial stress. Your contractor can help you strike a balance between your vision and financial resources. You may also find it helpful to consult with a real estate professional who can ensure your plans are in line with the overall value of your home and neighborhood.

## 2. Prioritize Functionality

Design with practicality in mind. Ensure there's enough counter space and storage to create an efficient workflow. Consider the kitchen work triangle; that is, be conscious of the travel pattern among the sink, stove and refrigerator.

Additionally, look for opportunities to incorporate functional storage in unexpected places. One example is the exposed end of a cabinet run or side of the refrigerator, where there is often wasted space. One example is a shallow cleaning utility cabinet from Wellborn Cabinet that fits a broom, dustpan and everyday cleaning supplies neatly, giving you practical access to frequently used supplies. A variation on this cabinet offers a spice rack designed for easy access to cooking essentials. Other options in the line include an over-fridge cabinet with a combination of shelves, sheet pan or cutting board storage and a trash can-cutting board combination.

## 3. Choose Quality Materials

Consider factors such as durability, maintenance requirements and compatibility with your design aesthetic when selecting materials for your kitchen. You may be tempted to cut corners and stretch your money further, but quality materials are a critical element of successful renovations. Prioritize high-quality materials that stand the test of time. Durable countertops, solid cabinetry and reliable appliances typically save money in the long run, and they'll enhance the overall look and value of your kitchen.



## 4. Hire Professionals

Work with experienced contractors and designers. Their expertise can help you avoid common pitfalls and ensure your remodel meets all safety and building codes. What's more, these professionals have likely encountered and overcome all kinds of challenges, which means they'll be well-prepared to help you navigate unexpected obstacles and provide a wealth of knowledge from previous clients to help make recommendations for the perfect finished space.

## 5. Stay Flexible

Be prepared for unexpected challenges and delays. Stay adaptable and open to changes and remember

patience is key to achieving the kitchen of your dreams. Materials go on backorder and paperwork gets misplaced all the time. Set a realistic timeline for your project that allows for some hiccups and try to avoid becoming too rigidly attached to any single element of the design, so if you have to make a modification, it doesn't feel like a monumental sacrifice. *(Family Features)*

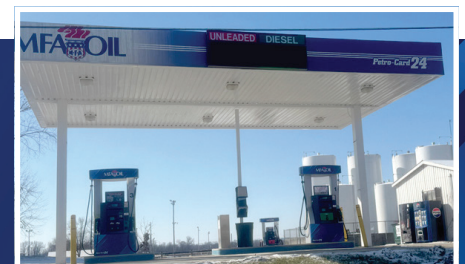
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# Inspiring Ideas for Kitchen Islands

Adding an island to your kitchen offers many functional and aesthetic benefits, and there are styles to suit every type of kitchen.

**Galley Kitchen Island:** This type of island is more functional than design-forward, conveniently adding extra storage and counter space. This conventional configuration works well in most kitchen layouts, both large and small, and can be constructed to fit almost any kitchen.

**Table-Style Kitchen Island:** If you want a unique addition, an island table is the way to go, whether you opt for a custom-made piece or upcycle an antique. The beauty of a table-style island is that it serves a functional and decorative purpose, warming up a modern kitchen and adding personality.

**Double Kitchen Island:** Incorporating multiple islands — often called a double island kitchen — can improve traffic flow, increase storage space and seating and create additional space for meal prep, cooking, washing and eating. Plus, islands are ideal for implementing design elements such as complementing materials and finishes, pops of color and unique cabinetry components including door styles and hardware.

**Rolling Kitchen Island:** This convenient solution adds flexibility with extra storage and counter space. You can easily tuck it away to open up more floor space when done, and this portable island can easily roam around the kitchen so you can place it where you need it.

**Two-Tier Kitchen Island:** While you can cook and eat on any island, the two-tier creates a clear boundary where you can cook on one side



and eat on the other. This all-encompassing island is perfect for larger families and homeowners who like to entertain.

**Chef's Kitchen Island:** If you want to showcase your cooking skills or have a private chef cooking for friends and family, a chef's island is a unique solution. Installation requires the appropriate ventilation and electrical, which may be well worth it if you frequently cook for family or friends.

**Round Kitchen Island:** Compared to a typical rectangular island, a rounded option is an eye-catching way to add more seating in your kitchen for entertaining family and friends.

**L-Shaped Kitchen Island:** If you have a lot of space in your kitchen, an L-shaped island can fill the area. The design provides extra cooking space, allowing you to accommodate multiple chefs in the kitchen. You can also add seating for family and friends.

**U-Shaped Kitchen Island:** Best suited for large, open-concept kitchens, a U-shaped island creates storage space and room to install appliances such as a bar fridge, sink or range with prep space left to prepare meals.



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# Get the Most out of Storage

Is your garage starting to overflow with household items? Simple shelving units might not be enough to accommodate it all.

Turn to innovative storage solutions like these to optimize your available space:

## MAKING A PLAN

Fully customized garage storage systems are available, but it's not necessary to spend tons of money to have a more functional space. Consider exploring yard sales, classified ads or resale shops for thrifter garage storage alternatives. Those who are open to items with minor cosmetic imperfections can find quality storage solutions that are sturdy enough to support your belongings but also far more affordable.

## WALL STORAGE

When floor space is at a premium, explore inventive ways to store items like bicycles, sports gear, and lawn equipment on the walls. Hooks are a common option. A modular wall-mounted slat storage system can also provide the flexibility to fit any specific need. You can enhance the slats with wire baskets or hooks to accommodate a wide range of items, from rakes to garden hoses. Transform the interior of your garage door into valuable storage space by attaching metal brackets to securely hold lightweight sports equipment like fishing rods in a horizontal position.

## VERTICAL OPTIONS

Plastic storage bins help us all organize and separate things by season, sport or family member. But they can only be stacked so high – and that setup makes it very difficult to access anything but the top bin. Construct storage towers with plywood shelving so that individual bins can be removed and then returned after use. You can also store light-weight items in plastic storage bins up above by screwing T-shaped 2x2 pieces of wood into the ceiling and then sliding the bins in place. Take advantage of unused space in the garage by creating corner shelves in the existing studs.

## SUSPENDED STORAGE

If you want to clear out space on the floor of your garage, you can also look up. Items that are infrequently used can be stored in elevated areas. If you have a ladder available, installing a fixed overhead storage shelf is an easy option. Bicycle storage systems now incorporate a rope and pulley mechanism with hooks, allowing you to securely store them overhead. A similar pulley system can be employed to lift a metal shelf for storing items in plastic bins.



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# Before You Power Wash

Summer can be hard on the exteriors of our homes. If you're ready for deep cleaning, pressure washing is the easiest and most thorough option.

It can give you a clean slate if you're considering any touch-ups. Still, safety can be a concern with these powerful machines. Here's a checklist to consider before you pressure wash.

## ELECTRICAL DANGERS

Washers with over 100 pounds per square inch of pressure can be extremely dangerous, potentially causing severe injuries. Test the ground-fault circuit interrupter before using the machine. Pressure washers must be plugged into a properly grounded receptacle. Never remove the third prong from the power cord. This is designed to protect you by providing proper grounding. Wear rubber-soled shoes that provide insulation. This will protect you from any potential electrical shocks.

If you must use an extension cord, make sure the connection is kept away from standing water. Always use a heavy-duty extension cord that is specifically rated for use in wet locations. Never attempt to splice or cut the machine's power cord or any extension cords. This poses a serious risk since it can lead to electrical malfunctions. Those who have gasoline-powered washers should avoid air intakes and enclosed spaces, since the exhaust can be toxic.

## OPERATOR ERRORS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reminds users to refer to the safety instructions in their owner's manual. In general, avoid pointing the pressure washer at yourself or others. Be cautious with the high-pressure spray since it can move objects around, potentially causing harm to bystanders or yourself. Never allow children to operate a pressure washer, and keep them away while the equipment is in use. Many operator errors happen in situations where there is a lack of adult supervision.

## IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

If you injure yourself with a pressure washer, remember that even seemingly small wounds can be more serious than they might appear at first.

For more manageable mishaps, it's recommended to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and clean water, removing any dirt or debris. This will help prevent potential infection. Cover the wound with a bandage or clean cloth to protect against contamination. Otherwise, seek immediate medical treatment, as needed.



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# Create a Cozy Outdoor Space with a Backyard Firepit

A firepit can serve as a warm and inviting backyard retreat, perfect for roasting marshmallows for s'mores or stargazing while wrapped in cozy blankets. Before you can share time around the firepit with loved ones, however, consider these tips to elevate your outdoor space.

## Choosing the Right Design

When it comes to building a DIY firepit, the design you choose can significantly impact the aesthetics and functionality. From classic stone pits to modern metal designs, the options are nearly endless. Think about the size and shape as well. Circular designs are traditional and encourage conversation while

square or rectangular pits offer a more contemporary look.

## Gathering Materials and Tools

Essential materials include bricks, stones or metal parts for the structure, as well as gravel or sand for the base. Fireproof materials are a must to ensure safety and longevity. You'll also need tools such as a shovel for digging the base, a level to ensure even construction and adhesive or mortar for binding materials together. Depending on your design, you may require a metal fire ring, grill grate or mesh cover.

## Keeping Safety in Mind

Safety should be your top priority when building and using a backyard firepit. Always place



your firepit at least 10 feet away from any structures, trees or flammable materials. Make sure the area is clear of dry leaves and other debris that could catch fire. Consider installing a spark screen to prevent embers from escaping and always keep a bucket of water or fire extinguisher nearby.

## Enhancing Ambiance with Seating and Lighting

Creating a cozy atmosphere around your firepit involves more

than just the fire itself. Comfortable seating is essential for making your outdoor space inviting. Choose weather-resistant chairs, benches or DIY log stools arranged in a circle to foster conversation. Ambient lighting from string lights, lanterns or solar-powered path lights can elevate the mood and extend the usability of your firepit into the evening. Consider adding citronella candles or torches to keep insects at bay while enhancing the ambiance. *(Family Features)*

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# Safety Tips for the Season

The change in seasons offers a great opportunity to spot-check the home's various safety systems and components to ensure your family's well-being.

You might have overlooked everyday wear and tear, batteries might be running low or upgrades may be needed. This potentially life-saving equipment might be needed sooner than you think.

## SMOKE DETECTORS

We usually associate smoke detector maintenance with changing the batteries. But the detectors themselves should be replaced every 10 years, according to experts. Check the manufacturing date on the back of the detector to make sure yours is still within its decade-long lifespan. If you're buying new ones, consider modern smoke alarm options that also detect CO2 or synchronize through the home.

Install them in each bedroom, outside every sleeping area, and at each of the levels of your home. Test your alarms at least once

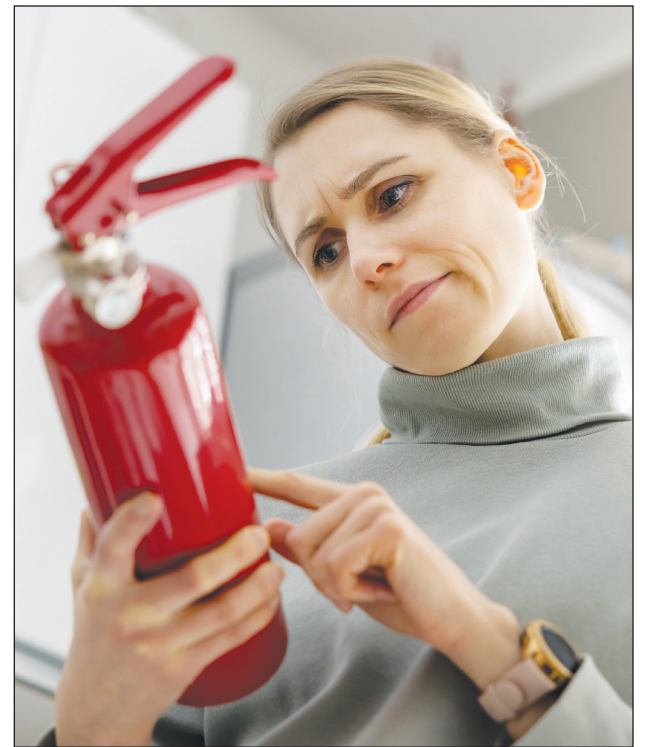
a month by pressing the designated button – and replace the batteries at least once a year. An easy way to remember this is to switch them out when the clocks change each spring for Daylight Saving Time.

## FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Another critical safety device that requires maintenance is a fire extinguisher. You can't just buy one and trust it will work forever. Regular inspections ensure its effectiveness. Check the pressure gauge located near the lever of your extinguisher, and look for any visible signs of damage or wear. Most high-quality extinguishers have a lifespan of five to 15 years, but that period can differ depending on the manufacturer.

## ALARMS AND LOCKS

Investing in a home security system is one of the most effective strategies for protecting your property. Many companies provide 24/7 emergency monitoring services that will notify you and the authorities if your



alarm detects a potential threat. You'll have peace of mind, whether at home or away. Inspect and replace locks around your home as needed. If their basic working integrity is compromised, whether on a door or window, you may be at risk of losing valuables and jeopardizing your family's safety. Pay close attention to locks that are difficult to operate and windows that still move while locked. Both are indications that a replacement may be needed.

A green Club Car golf cart with a white canopy and a trailer carrying hay, parked on a golf course. In the background, a person is working on a mound of earth.

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