



Spring

HOME &
GARDEN

MONROE ★ COUNTY
HERALD

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A spring lawn revitalization strategy

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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DAY OF GARDENS AND MUSIC ANNOUNCED BY SPARTA GARDEN CLUB AND SHOVELMEN



Along with the upcoming summer Sparta Garden Tour, the JR Garden Club, community garden, tree planting, fundraising, parks, and other topics were covered during the first Sparta Garden Club meeting of the year. The Sparta Garden Club is looking for new member gardeners and has a new meeting time and place: Sparta Floral at 636 E Montgomery St at 11:30am on the third Tuesday of each month. Herald photo by Jenny Moran.

By **JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ MORAN**
Herald Contributing Writer

Throughout the winter, planning partners, Cynthia Lockington and Becky Chrisinger, have been brainstorming and connecting with community members to create an afternoon of gardens, followed by an evening of music, on Friday, July 11th,

2025. At the first Garden Club meeting of 2025, the biannual garden walk plans were announced by Lockington and Chrisinger.

During the presentation to the Sparta Garden Club, they explained there will be over 25 gardens on the self-guided tour. The event is timed to dovetail into a concert by "Daddy's Girls – Round Two," sponsored by The Shovelmen. As a result, the final garden

will be filled with music and celebration, to cap the day.

Previous garden walks in Sparta have featured private gardens, which are made public for the day. This year, the Garden Club is highlighting the numerous public gardens found throughout Sparta. These gardens range from "baby gardens" barely out of the planning stage to meticulously maintained, established gardens, as well as older gardens ready for a refresh.

The planners told the *Herald* that they believe it is important to show the various stages in the life cycle of gardens, to inspire people to look at their own landscape from a fresh perspective. Perhaps attendees will find inspiration to create a new bed; the courage to move a plant that is struggling in its current location; or even just the motivation to prune an overgrown hedge. They also hope it will increase the overall understanding of how much work, love, and fun goes into gardening - with rewards we can enjoy each step along the journey.

The 2025 self-guided Sparta Garden Tour runs from 3 p.m. - 8 p.m. on July 11th. Participators will start at the Sparta Barney Center (1000 E Montgomery), where they will purchase tour tickets and receive a detailed guidebook, with locations and information about each garden on the tour.

The Garden Walk is the primary fundraiser for the Sparta Garden Club, an organization which does much to beautify the city of Sparta. In addition to ticket sales, you can support the group by purchasing chances on raffle baskets that will be on display at the Barney Center.

More information regarding the music, hosted by The Shovelmen at Creekside Park near Beaver Creek and Lovelock Bridge, as well as details about food, drinks, and raffle baskets, will be announced. If you would like to contribute a donation toward raffle baskets, become a volunteer gardener, volunteer at this event, or help in some other way, your help is most welcome.

Please reach out to garden club members Cynthia Lockington, at cynthia.lockington@gmail.com, or Becky Chrisinger, at b.chrisinger@welcomhomelax.com. To get more involved with gardening across Sparta, the Sparta Garden Club is looking for new member gardeners and has a new meeting time and place: Sparta Floral, at 636 East Montgomery Street, at 11:30 a.m. on the third Tuesday of each month. For young people interested in gardening, the JR Garden Club also meets at Sparta Floral on select Saturdays.

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Renovations that help \$ell homes



Certain home features can tip the scales in favor of sellers. In fact, various renovations can help sell homes more readily. And these renovations need not cost a fortune. Putting a home on the market can be stressful, but these renovations may help it sell fast.

• **A fresh coat of paint:** Although painting is relatively inexpensive and a job that some do-it-yourselfers can tackle, it's not a task relished by many. Painting is messy, it takes time, and requires moving furniture. In fact, prepping a room for painting often is the toughest component of any painting job. But fresh coats of paint can create a strong first impression. Choose a neutral color and get painting. Jennie Norris, chairwoman for the International Association of Home Staging Professionals, says gray is a "safe" color that has been trending in recent years.

• **Minor bathroom remodel:** Remove dated wall coverings, replace fixtures, consider re-glazing or replacing an old tub, and swap old shower doors for fast fixes

in a bathroom. If there's more room in the budget, replacing a tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity, and fixtures can cost roughly \$10,500, says HGTV. You'll recoup an average of \$10,700 at resale, making a minor bathroom remodel a potentially worthy investment.

• **Redone kitchen:** The kitchen tends to be the hub of a home. This room gets the most usage and attention of any space, and it's a great place to focus your remodeling attention. The National Association of the Remodeling Industry estimates that homeowners can recover up to 52 percent of the cost of a kitchen upgrade upon selling a home. Buyers want a functional and updated kitchen. Trending features include drawer-style microwaves and dishwashers, commercial ranges, hidden outlets, and even wine refrigerators.

• **Updated heating and cooling system:** Better Homes and Gardens reports that homeowners may be able to recoup 85

percent of the cost of new HVAC systems when they sell their homes. Heating, cooling and ventilation components are vital to maintain. You don't want buyers to be taken aback by an older system, and many millennial buyers are not willing to overlook old mechanical systems.

• **Fresh landscaping:** A home's exterior is the first thing buyers will see. If they pull up to a home with eye-catching landscaping and outdoor areas that are attractive yet functional, they're more likely to be intrigued. Often buyers will equate a home that features an impressive exterior with upkeep inside as well. The American Nursery Landscape Association says the average homeowner may spend \$3,500 for landscaping.

Improving a home's chances to sell quickly and at a higher price often comes down to making smart improvements that catch the eyes of buyers.

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BUCKTHORN BATTLE #1 SUCCESSFULLY OPENS LAND NEAR BEAVER CREEK FOR RESTORATION

By JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ MORAN
Herald Contributing Writer

About 20 kindhearted and dedicated volunteers of all ages joined together earlier this month to battle buckthorn, which is one supremely successful and invasive shrub. Years ago, buckthorn was intentionally planted to counteract major erosion issues. As a quick growing, hardy, and successful shrub, it was believed that buckthorn would be a positive introduction to the environment.

In the years since, time and experience have shown that buckthorn is entirely too eager, spreading quickly and taking over the land. Once it's established, it spreads, and chokes out other life. If not approached with a plan, attempts to cut it down will result in the plant coming back stronger, with multiple offshoots.

For this first battle, volunteers armed themselves with loppers, chain saws, handsaws, daubers, and a sawzall, to chop, lop, and saw their way through a terrible thicket of thorny mess.

At the 1st Buckthorn Battle, degree-holding conservationists, retirees, foresters, business owners, and enthusiastic outdoors lovers of all ages and backgrounds were on site. Experienced adults used a variety of their own saws and loppers to carefully cut down shrub after thorny buckthorn shrub. Some volunteers brought extras, so that those without tools could also make an impact.

Certified experts followed with daubers to ensure that the plants would not simply multiply in thorny vengeance. There was something for everyone to do, and although working with buckthorn can feel overwhelming at times, it's important to stay positive. For example, kids worked together in a nearby area to separate pieces that might make good tree stakes for the upcoming and 2nd annual "Planting Trees with Kids" program, where 100+ native trees will be planted around Sparta. Some larger pieces were taken by intrepid volunteers who are planning to experiment with making furniture out of the material.

The idea for a "Buckthorn Battle" was thought up by the emerging Sparta Community Gardens Partnership during a recent brainstorming session, as a way to volunteer with ecology in mind, even during the cold winter months. The group knew that permission to voluntarily work to restore the land near Beaver Creek at Evans



Scott and Joey Esterline work as a duo in battle against buckthorn. The two are no strangers to this invasive shrub, after many years and acres of land conservation work in Monroe County.

Bosshard Park and Oak Street needed to be obtained, and volunteers needed to sign waivers of liability.

Property owners at WESCO and Morrow Home Community were receptive to the ecological project. While the group hoped to battle buckthorn from WESCO to Morrow Home Community, and up and down Beaver Creek, they had to stop after working the WESCO site for hours.

After a great concerted effort, the landscape was vastly improved, and ready for restoration plantings. However, they will need to come back for more battles, hopefully with more volunteers, to address the surrounding areas. Volunteers will also need to come back as soon as possible, to plant eco grasses wherever the buckthorn was cut down. In doing this, the grass will both anchor soil and thwart the comeback of the pesky plant. Plans to plant native fruiting shrubs, as well as wildflowers, grasses, and other trees, are in the works, to help beautify the area, while increasing biodiversity.

The Sparta Community Garden Partnership said, "Thank You Everyone who volunteered and supported this

collaborative event! We are calling ourselves the Sparta Community Garden Partnership, with a focus on ecology, education, and sustainable, regenerative practices to increase and restore biodiversity. We will need to have more invasive species battles in Sparta. We also look forward to planting everything from wildflowers to a community garden addressing food insecurity, once the ground thaws and the time is right."

The group is currently focused on several

areas in the Downtown Sparta area, as well as a few other locations in Monroe County. Volunteers are needed. Meetings will be announced, and plans for planting native gardens and harvesting gardens to address food insecurity, as soon as this spring, are being organized. Stay tuned to The Herald for updates to the story. You can reach out to jenjenrodriguezmoran@gmail.com to get involved.

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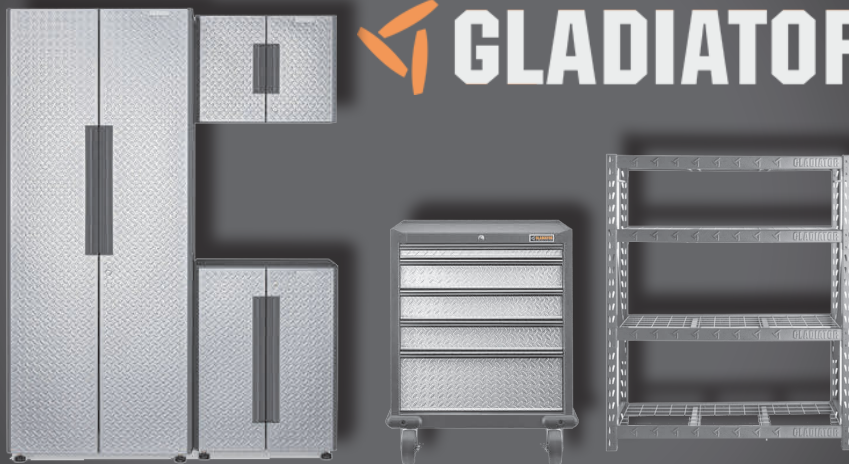


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Fun and innovative modern kitchen features

Kitchens are the hub of many homes. Perhaps due to their popularity as gathering spaces, kitchens are popular rooms to renovate to ensure they remain functional and attractive through the years.

Online resources such as Houzz and Fixr indicate kitchens are consistently ranked among the most popular rooms to renovate. In 2022, 42 percent of homeowners were motivated to remodel their kitchens, according to data from Statista. Homeowners looking to enhance the functionality and look of their kitchens can consider these fun and innovative features as they plan their renovations.

Concealed countertop appliances

The latest small appliances and gadgets can make easy work of preparing food, but these devices can add to kitchen clutter. A roll-down door “appliance garage” will conceal appliances kept on counters.

Fun and innovative modern kitchen features

Additional storage also can give kitchens a cleaner look. Narrow, pull-out drawers can be nestled in between cabinets or appliances to make the most of tight spaces. These spots are perfect for utensils or spice containers.

Mixer lift

Baking enthusiasts will cheer if they don't have to lift a heavy stand mixer when preparing foods. A mixer lift

is an innovative feature that enables homeowners to raise and lower the mixer from a dedicated cabinet any time it's needed.

Microwave drawer

A microwave drawer maximizes space and boasts a sleek design. Instead of installing a microwave above a stove, homeowners can enjoy a beautiful range hood.

Wine refrigerator

Available in a variety of sizes, wine refrigerators offer stylish storage for any wine lover's collection. A refrigerator can be installed into an island or lower cabinet and integrated into the rest of the kitchen.

Double ovens

Double ovens are built directly into cabinetry and offer convenience and a sleek, modern look. Two ovens can make entertaining crowds easier, and separating the ovens from the burners lets homeowners install a cooktop elsewhere in the kitchen, which can expand floorplan options.

Pot filler

A special faucet near the cooktop makes it much easier to fill heavy pasta pots. A pot filler can be quite handy for those who cook a lot and do not want to lug heavy pots from the sink to the stove.

Outfitting a modern kitchen during a renovation can involve some innovative features to enhance the space.

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

• **Refresh the landscape.** Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the

existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

• **Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures

there's always a peaceful spot.

• **Add a water feature.** Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

• **Don't forget shade.** Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed

to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

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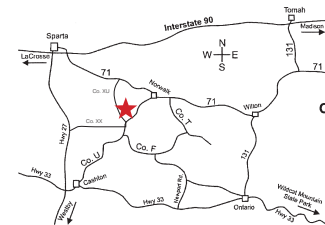
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