

A vibrant garden scene with a green lawn, purple flowers, and a house in the background. The text "Dawn & Garden time" is overlaid in a large, elegant, light green script font. The word "time" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font inside a grey, ribbon-like banner that points towards the right.

Dawn & Garden time

The Mendota Reporter
Wednesday, May 17, 2023

3 potentially low-maintenance trees to consider for your property

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance trees can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of

three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

1. Jacaranda: Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds its leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

2. American arborvitae: The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

3. Japanese red maple: The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions. During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommo-

date the Japanese red maple, so this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When consider new trees for a property, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree. Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse conditions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.



The American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy.

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Are you making these 5 common spring lawn care mistakes?

(BPT) - Longer days and bountiful sunshine mean the outdoor season has arrived. As excited as you may be to enjoy the fresh air out on your lawn, there are several spring lawn care tasks to complete first.

It's no secret that homeowners love a lush green lawn, with 36% of American homeowners revealing that their lawns are a top investment in both time and money, according to TruGreen's new survey*. However, it can be easy to make common lawn care mistakes that can jeopardize both the look and health of your lawn.

"While homeowners may want a quick fix for getting their lawn ready, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to maintenance, which can often result in mistakes and an unhealthy lawn," said Brian Feldman, director of technical operations at TruGreen. "This season, take a step back and ensure you're not falling victim to some common lawn care mistakes our expert team has witnessed."

The professionals at TruGreen, the nation's leading lawn care provider, are helping make sure you're not falling into the most common lawn care mistakes among homeowners, including:

Mistake 1: Overwatering your lawn

While it's tempting to shower your lawn with water (and love), be mindful that doing so is not only wasteful and can increase your water bill, but can also drown out your emerging lawn - especially during rainy months.

Pro Tip: Follow the general rule to water 1-2 times a week for a total of 1 inch of water.

Mistake 2: Improper fertilization

Fertilizer provides your lawn with critical nutrients. However, if not applied correctly it can damage your lawn. Every lawn is unique, requiring some research to determine the best fertilizer, technique, frequency and quantity of product.

Pro Tip: Connect with a lawn care professional to plan a proper fertilization regimen for your lawn's unique needs based on various factors, including your region's climate and grass type.

Mistake 3: Bagging your lawn clippings

Think of leaves and trimming as vitamins for your lawn, as they are filled with beneficial nutrients for the soil. Rather than reaching for the trash bag to remove these clippings from your lawn, leave them be. They help your lawn grow stronger and healthier.

Pro Tip: Remove the bag from your mower to disperse the lawn clippings and mow them back into your lawn.

Mistake 4: Mowing your lawn too short

When the mower blades are set too low, they can damage the grass plant. Unfortunately, damaged grass is more prone to weeds, drought stress and disease.

Pro Tip: For most grass types, maintain a minimum length of 3 inches to encourage grass to flourish. As a rule of thumb, don't cut more than 1/3 inch of a grass blade in a single mow.

Mistake 5: Overlooking weed prevention

Timing is everything in lawn care. While it can be tempting to plant spring seeds to get your lawn back up to your standards, the best time for seeding is actually in the fall. But keep in mind, there are other critical things

that should be tackled this season to achieve a healthy, green lawn.

Pro Tip: Don't wait to protect your lawn from unsightly weeds. Work

with a lawn pro to apply a pre-emergent weed control to stop weeds from germinating throughout your lawn.

A green lawn of your

dreams is possible when you avoid and correct these common lawn care mistakes. If you have questions or need further expertise to verify your current lawn care hab-

its, consult a lawn care professional at TruGreen.com.

*Survey conducted by OnePoll on behalf of lawn care company TruGreen polling 2,000 Americans with a yard/lawn.



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How to make a backyard safe for dogs

Dogs, particularly puppies, can be full of boundless energy. Channeling that energy into exercise with long walks or play sessions can help stem dogs' propensity to get into trouble around the house as they burn off extra adrenaline. Pets who don't have an energy outlet may chew off limits objects or get into other mischief.

According to the American Kennel Club, the amount of exercise a dog needs depends on the animal's age and breed. For example, border collies or Siberian huskies may require much more exercise than English bulldogs, simply because the former are working breeds. Pet owners with large backyards often find those outdoor spots are ideal for when their dogs get the "zoomies," something that tends to be a daily

occurrence. Letting their dogs run around yards, whether on their own or chasing tossed tennis balls, is an ideal way to provide exercise and tire out pups. In such scenarios, it's vital that pups have a dog-friendly yard in which to play.

Use safe lawn care products

An expanse of grass is the perfect place to frolic or enjoy some sunbathing - for people or pets. But contact with chemically treated lawns can cause a number of health issues for dogs, such as allergies or intestinal upset.

Switching to native grasses can reduce the need to use chemicals to get lush lawns. When supplementation is needed, homeowners can switch to organic products or natural compost as safer alternatives than chemical-based products.

Fence off the yard

Off-leash running and bounding through the yard will make any dog smile. However, a fence is a must-have to ensure a dog doesn't become an escape artist. Be sure the fence is high enough so that the pup cannot jump over it. Burying chicken wire in the dirt beneath the lower edge of the fence also can help prevent dogs who like to dig from exiting by crawling underneath the fence.

Consider installing a lock on the fence gate so that no one can wander in and surprise the dog, which may startle the animal and prompt it to defend the property. A lock also helps prevent dog theft.

Keep the yard tidy

Maintaining a clean yard also is key to safety. Inspect the yard regularly to make sure nothing is around that can prove harmful, whether it's poison ivy, felled branches or broken fence panels. Also, keep shrubs and grass trimmed to reduce flea and tick populations on the property.

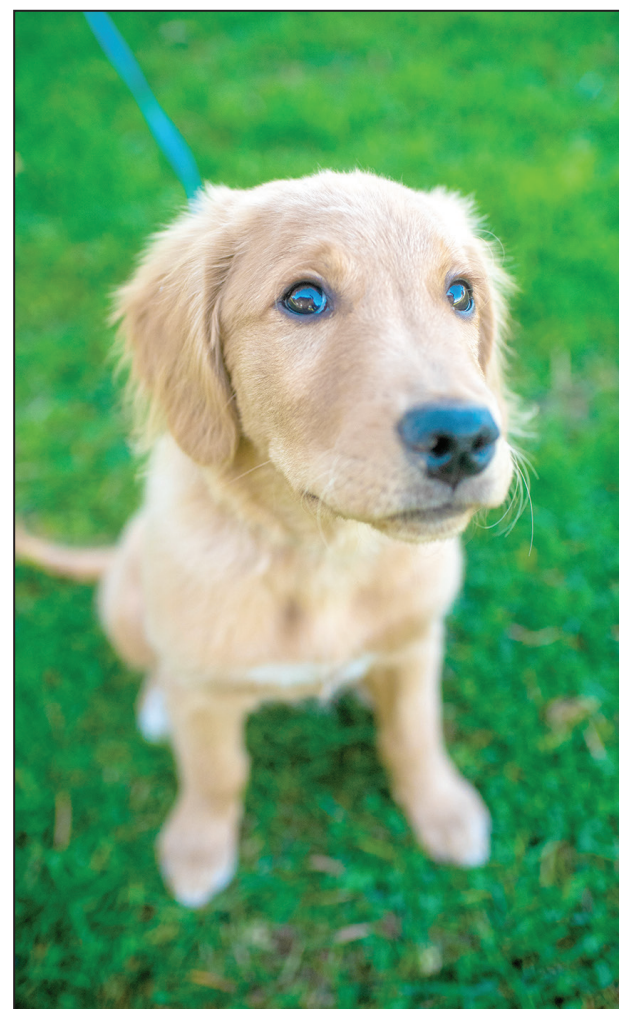
Avoid poisonous plants

Certain plants can be dangerous if they're consumed by curious pups. Chrysanthemums, peonies, irises, and hydrangeas are some plants that can be poisonous. For a full list of poisonous plants, visit the ASPCA website (aspc.org).

Keep an eye on animals

Dogs can spend some unattended time in the yard, but check in from time to time. Should wildlife get into the yard, dogs may get hurt by tussles or bites. Birds of prey, such as owls, hawks and even vultures, may attack small dogs in a yard. According to Pat Silvosky, director of the Milford Nature Center in Kansas, some birds can be territorial. While they might not view a dog as an easy meal, they could swoop down and attack to defend territory. The same may occur with other wild animals.

A dog-friendly yard may require a little effort to create, but it's worth a little sweat equity to keep pups safe.



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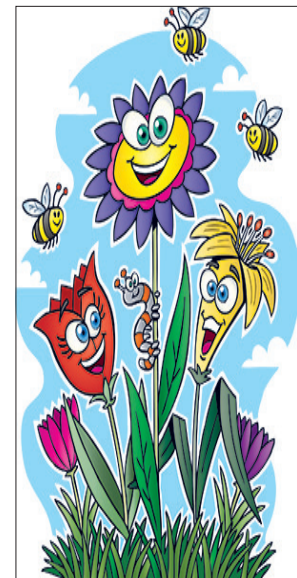
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Who's dining in my garden?

By Melinda Myers

You take a walk through the garden and find branches trimmed, flowers missing or bark damaged. Of course, the culprit is nowhere to be seen. You may have suspects in mind but a close look at the damage and surroundings can help you identify who is dining on your plants. Knowing this can help you reduce the risk in the future.

Rabbits can be found year-round in the landscape. They have sharp teeth, making a 45-degree clean cut much like your bypass pruners. Their damage usually occurs within their 3-foot reach.

They eat a variety of flowers and vegetables throughout the spring and summer. As these plants fade in fall, they begin dining on trees and shrubs. You may find bark gnawed and branches, stems, and buds clipped off the plants.

Deer tear vegetation, leaving a ragged tip on browsed plants. You may find damage on a variety of flowers, vegetables, trees, shrubs, and plants pulled out of the ground with the distasteful ones left behind. In fall, the bucks rub trunks of young trees damaging the tender tissue below that transports water and nutrients between the roots and leaves. Deer usually feed at dusk but as they become comfortable around people they can often be seen dining during the day.

Voles are brown rodents that look similar to field mice with small ears and short tails. Their trails of disturbed grass found as the snow melts may be your first clue that they are present. These rodents are active year-round, unlike moles



that hibernate for winter. They eat seeds, plant roots, and bulbs not insects like moles. As the snow recedes, you may also notice bark damage on trees and shrubs. They leave ¼" side-by-side grooves in the wood at the base of the plants.

Squirrels are fun to watch; that is until they eat all the birdseed and damage your plants. They dig bulbs and uproot other plants, eat and bury nuts in the lawn and garden, and take a bite out of multiple tomatoes, strawberries, and more. They damage trees by ripping off the bark and clipping off branches. If that wasn't enough, they may gnaw on structures and furnishings. Treating the damaged area and a 12" radius around it with a repellent can help discourage more damage.

Chipmunks are active from spring through fall. They don't hibernate but are inactive in winter depending upon their food stash to survive. You will find them digging in potted plants, hanging baskets, and rock walls. They eat grains,

nuts, berries, seeds, insects, mushrooms, carrion, young birds, and bird eggs.

Their tunnels can be 20 to 30 feet long and are well hidden. The openings are only 2" in diameter with no surrounding mounds of soil.

Commercial and home-made scare tactics are an option. Unfortunately, most of these critters have become accustomed to people and are not deterred. Motion-activated ones are a bit more effective but make sure they are not annoying to you and your neighbors.

Fencing tight to the ground with a secure gate and at least 3 feet – preferably 4 feet – high is effective for preventing rabbit damage. Deer on the other hand need a much taller fence. Although they can jump 7 feet or higher, a 5-6' fence is often enough to keep them out of smaller gardens. Sink fencing 4 to 6" into the ground to protect plants from voles.

Repellents labeled for controlling the critter that is causing the damage are

another option. Organic Plantskydd (plantskydd.com) is labeled for repelling, not harming, all of these critters so you only need one product. Since it is rain and snow resistant, you won't need to apply it as often. Always read and follow label directions for the most effective control.

A bit of defensive action goes a long way in protecting your gardens and landscape from hungry critters this season.

(Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including The Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition and Small Space Gardening. She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" instant video and DVD series and the nationally-syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and was commissioned by Tree World Plant Care for her expertise to write this article. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.)



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Horticulture class set in Amboy

AMBOY – Growing Horticulture in Northwest Illinois is for anyone interested in learning more about gardening, growing food in a home or community garden, or looking for ideas for the upcoming growing season. University of Illinois Extension is pleased to announce this free gardening series starting in June at the Lee and Whiteside County Extension offices. Extension Horticulture Educator Bruce Black will be presenting this series.

"Horticulture is a great way to get fresh air, daily exercise, and a fun hobby for families," stated Black. "Participating in this series can help improve your horticulture knowledge & growing season whether you are growing food for your family, growing flowers, or even just tending your landscape."

The series will be held from 3:30-4:30 p.m. at the Extension offices in Sterling starting June 14 and Amboy starting June 22. Pre-registration is required one week before each session and can be completed online at go.illinois.edu/WhitesideGrowingHort for Sterling and go.illinois.edu/LeeGrowingHort for Amboy.

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Budget-friendly ways to help 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.

Simple landscaping strategies that can transform a home's exterior

The interior of a home may be where homeowners and their families spend the majority of their time, and there's no denying that a well-planned interior goes a long way toward making a house a home. However, the exterior of a home, including its landscaping, can serve as a source of pride and catch the eye of prospective buyers when the home hits the market.

It's easy to walk past a home with an eye-catching exterior and assume the homeowner has a green thumb or has spent lots of time and money working on the landscaping. Though that may be true, oftentimes it's the simplest strategies that make all the difference. Homeowners can keep these strategies in mind as they look to transform the exterior of their homes.

- **Dress up the walkway.** A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank. Create new planting beds and plant bright plants and flowers along each side of the walkway. If it's necessary and within budget, lengthen the walkway to create the feel of a more grandiose entryway.

- **Make things more symmetrical.** A messy landscape can give a poor first impression, even if the area features some beautiful plants. In such instances, a little effort to make things more symmetrical, with equal parts grass and vegetation, can create a cleaner, more inviting look.

- **Mulch your flower and tree beds.** Mulch is a relatively inexpensive but effective

way to add aesthetic appeal to a landscape. Freshly mulched beds beneath trees and flowers creates a clean and organized look, and the mulch also serves a practical purpose, as it reduces weed growth and helps the soil retain moisture so plants stay healthy and look better throughout the warmer months when rainfall may not be steady or significant.

- **Plant shade trees.** Shade trees can be especially useful when selling a home. The shade provided by trees can shield grass from blistering summer sun, potentially helping it stay green. A lush green lawn appeals to buyers and gives the impression the home has been well maintained. In addition, shade trees can be used to create the look of a backyard oasis. A well-placed bench beneath a large shade tree can entice buyers who want a relaxing spot to enjoy warm summer days outdoors without getting a sunburn.

- **Consider maintenance.** The more exotic an ex-



Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money.

terior landscape is, the more maintenance it's likely to require. Lawn and garden enthusiasts may not be turned off by landscape features that require steady maintenance, but homeowners who don't have much time for such work should keep things simple. A poorly maintained landscape, even if it includes exotic plants and elaborate designs, will adversely affect curb

appeal. Another feather in the cap of low-maintenance landscape features is they could prove more appealing to prospective buyers, who may view elaborate, exotic landscaping as a lot of extra work they won't want to do.

Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money.

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