

Lawn & Garden

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6 steps to creating fairy gardens for kids

Gardening can be an enjoyable activity for adults and children alike. Gardening encourages creative thinking and can make for an eco-friendly activity as well.

Adding a touch of whimsy to gardening can make it that much more attractive to children. Perhaps that is why fairy gardens have become so popular among youngsters. Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurse and enjoy indoors. Here are six steps to get your fairy garden up and running.

1. Choose your container or location. Decide where to place the fairy garden. Hollowed-out tree stumps are both contained and outdoors, and kids may feel like the fairies inhabited

this neglected area of the yard and made it their own. Otherwise, use containers you already have, such as old pots, hanging baskets, picnic baskets or cookie tins. Wooden birdhouses with their roofs removed also can make for clever places to house the gardens.

2. Choose a theme. Fairy houses can take on any theme their creators prefer. Themes help children decide what to include in their gardens. For example, a seaside retreat may work well with little reclining chairs, sea grasses and succulents. You can then complete the theme by adding some seashells and colored stones.

3. Draw up your design. Before securing anything in the container or digging

into your garden bed, sketch out a garden design. This gives you an idea of how the finished product will look. Even before planting, gently place plants and other components in their spots and move them around accordingly until you find the desired look.

4. Include similar-needs plants. Mixing plants that have different requirements can make it challenging to care for the fairy garden, so select plants that require similar levels of sunlight, prefer similar soil conditions and require roughly the same amount of watering. Herbs are a smart choice because they stay small and are easily maintained.

5. Don't forget a fairy dwelling. You will need to



Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurse and enjoy indoors.

add a house for the fairies to inhabit. Small birdhouses can work, but you also can consider old teapots, bird-nesting boxes or even homemade houses assembled out of bark and twigs. Use your imagina-

tion and the garden will take on a life of its own.

6. Invite the fairies. Children can invite fairies to take up residence (fairies often show up at night and tend to remain unseen), or

children can create their own fairies using craft materials.

Fairy gardens are a fun way to introduce children to gardening. Once families get started, they may want to create entire fairy villages.



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Guidelines to help select outdoor lighting fixtures

Lighting is an essential component of interior and exterior home design. Not only does lighting add style and make spaces more appealing, when done correctly, it also makes a home safer and more functional.

Homeowners who plan to utilize outdoor spaces like backyards, front porches and walkways to the fullest should think carefully about lighting. These guidelines can assist with selecting outdoor lighting fixtures.

Security lighting

Flood lights and security lights are a good investment for those who want to beef up visibility and security around the home. These lights are high-intensity and designed to illuminate large areas. The brightness and reach can serve as a preventive measure to keep animals and even criminals away. Motion-sensor lights will immediately engage if something crosses the path of the sensor. Some lights will remain on from dusk until dawn. Lowes Home Improvement suggests using the correct wattage on outdoor security lights so they flood an area thoroughly without affecting neighboring properties.

Wall, post and ceiling lights

Outdoor lighting fixtures beyond security options come in a variety of styles, according to Lamps USA. Wall lights are mounted to the outdoor wall of the home. These typically flank doorways or the garage. Post lights are often installed on the posts of decks and porches, or are free-standing

on properties, providing visibility but also style. Ceiling-mounted lights may be above doorways or installed in any structure that has an overhead area. Warm-colored temperature bulbs in these fixtures can create an inviting atmosphere that is not too bright and jarring, especially when multiple lighting fixtures are working together. When selecting lighting for wall-mounted fixtures, experts suggest sizing up if you are not sure of the size to pick, as lights will look much smaller in scale from a distance.

Accent and landscape lighting

A bevy of accent lighting choices are available. Accent lighting is designed to enhance the mood and appearance of certain elements of a landscape. Accent lighting is not intended to add bright light. For example, upward-directed lights can be cast on trees or shrubs to accentuate their shapes. Accent lighting also may call out a structure, such as a garden or a fountain. While accent lighting may be hard-wired, homeowners who want the luxury of changing lighting can opt for solar fixtures, which are more mobile but not as bright.

Additional pointers

When shopping for bulbs, consider the number of lumens. A standard 100-watt bulb produces around 1,600 lumens. Security lights should range from 700 to 1,300 lumens for optimal brightness. Other lights needn't be so bright.

Furthermore, ensure that any fixtures that are

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being used are safety-rated for outdoors. Wet-rated fixtures are designed to withstand direct exposure to outdoor elements, advises the design experts at Schoolhouse, a lighting and lifestyle goods company. Damp-rated fixtures are built for outdoor locations protected from harsh weather. Look for the product details or work with an electrician to choose the right lighting choices.

Lighting can transform outdoor spaces for the better.

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Spring into the growing season with a garden full of color

By Melinda Myers

Spring flowering bulbs and perennials are filling our landscapes with color. As your gardens come alive this spring, start making notes on needed improvements and provide some early season color and nectar for the pollinators. This will keep your landscape looking its best all season long and for years to come.

Start a garden journal or photographic record of your garden. Make notes or take pictures of what is working in your landscape, plants that need to be removed or areas where more color or new plants are needed. These notes will help as you create a landscape filled with year-round beauty.

Make sure your plants receive sufficient moisture. It is easy to overlook watering during the cool and often wet spring months. A rain gauge can help you monitor the rainfall in your yard. Plants benefit from thorough watering that encourages deep, drought and pest resistant roots. Check the soil moisture and water

when the top four to six inches are crumbly and starting to dry. Established drought tolerant plants tolerate drier soil.

Start pulling weeds as they appear. Removing them when small makes removal easier and prevents them from flowering and producing seeds. That means fewer weeds to pull next year.

Disease and pest-free leaves, evergreen needles and other organic mulch covering the soil surface help suppress weeds, conserve moisture, and improve the soil as they break down. Leaves also provide homes for many insects, frogs, and toads. You'll achieve lots of benefits from this one task.

Leave perennials stand until daytime temperatures are consistently 50 degrees. This allows overwintering eggs to hatch and insects to exit their winter homes. If waiting is not an option, cut most stems back to the ground and stack them out of the way. This allows the insects to exit their winter homes when the time is



Korean Spice viburnum adds beauty and fragrance to the landscape. (Photo courtesy of MelindaMyers.com)

right. Leave some stems standing 8 to 12" above ground so insects can form new homes. Chop up the

removed plant material in mid-summer or fall to use as mulch in the garden or the compost pile.

Watch for animal damage and protect your plantings as needed. Fresh new growth in the spring garden makes a tasty treat for rabbits, deer, and other wildlife.

Many gardeners enlist the help of repellents to protect their landscape plants.

Always check the label for details on use, application rates and timing. Research has proven that odor-based repellents are more effective than other types of repellents. Plus, this will cause wildlife to avoid plants rather than taking a bite before they

discover they don't like the taste.

Treat pathways used to access your landscape as well as key plants before the animals begin feeding. It is easier to keep them away before they find all the delicious plants growing in your garden.

Continue taking pictures of your landscape throughout the year. Make note of any challenges encountered and needed adjustments in care. Include any failures; all gardeners have them. These are just another step toward growing a healthier and more beautiful garden.

Then take time to enjoy the beauty of your landscape. Find a comfortable spot to sit, relax, listen to

the birds, and take in all the wonders spring has to offer.

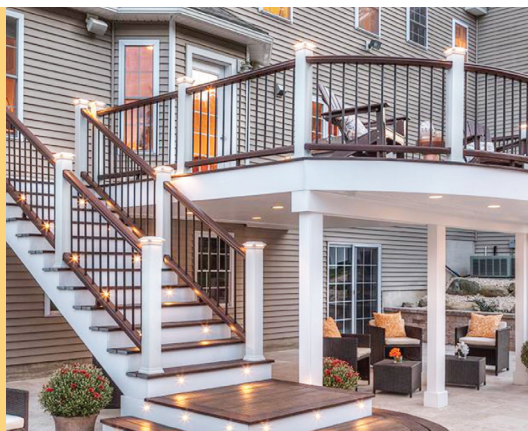
Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including *The Midwest Gardener's Handbook*, 2nd Edition and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything"* DVD series and the nationally-syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program*. Myers is a columnist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

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Landscaping tips for instant curb appeal

(StatePoint) One of the best ways to achieve instant curb appeal, according to the experts, is to effectively layer shrubs, plants and flowers in your front yard. Doing so can create a cohesive visual experience that naturally guides visitors to the front door.

Landscape designer Doug Scott describes plant layering in art terms: “Just like in a painting, you need to have a background, a middle ground and a foreground. Each layer serves a purpose, and there’s no more important place for them to be on full display than your home’s entrance.”

To help homeowners understand the purpose of plant layering and identify the best types of plants for each layer, Scott has joined forces with a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers and equipment for landscape professionals and serious DIY-ers. Here they break it down for you:

1. Background: The background layer should consist of taller evergreen shrubs to ensure that no matter what’s in front of them, you and your visitors will always have something green to look at. This layer provides a cohesive backdrop and a bit of living color in every season.

2. Middle Ground: Here’s where to step it down a notch in height and add interesting shapes, colors or stripes that provide contrast against the darker green of the background layer. Herbaceous perennials, like lavender, are a good choice for this purpose.

3. Foreground: Finally,

the foreground layer should help transition the planting beds to your lawn space or sidewalk, and should therefore be lower than the back two layers. It’s also where you can keep things fresh and get your hands dirty throughout the year by changing out annuals with the seasons. Or, if you want a lower-maintenance entrance, you can choose smaller perennials, evergreens or creeping ground covers. Use the foreground layer as an opportunity to add pops of color at ground level and draw attention to your home’s entrance.

Scott lays out a few other important tips to keep in mind:

- Choose plants consistent with your home’s style. For instance, if you have a craftsman home, you should probably skip tropical plants. Or, if your home is more minimalist, avoid an overabundance of different plants.

- Don’t obstruct views of your front door from the street with plants. Likewise, visitors shouldn’t have to maneuver around plants as they make their way down the sidewalk. Neither is convenient or welcoming, so you’ll either need to keep pruning plants to size, or choose plants that won’t overgrow their space without a ton of pruning.

- To make your entrance “the star” it should be, the plant material in the rest of your front yard shouldn’t be distracting. Rather let it frame the intended view.

Through effective plant layering, you can boost curb appeal and give your home the grand entrance it deserves.









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All-natural ways to protect food gardens from pests

Homeowners frequently enhance their outdoor living spaces with attractive plants and trees. When that greenery also produces food, the results can be both beauty and bounty.

People who plant vegetable gardens and fruit trees in their yards can be blessed with an abundance of fresh pickings once it's time to harvest. In fact, many home gardeners may have visions of warm evenings pulling vegetables right out of the garden and tossing them on the grill or in salads. But insects and animals enjoy fresh produce just as people do. The joy of harvesting from a garden can be diminished when unwanted guests have gotten there first.

Homeowners can employ these all-natural strategies to protect their fruits and vegetables from lawn pests and critters.

- Plant gardens in raised

beds. Though they're not a fool-proof deterrent, raised beds can eliminate some garden infiltration by small critters that come up and under from the ground. A raised garden bed can deter rabbits, gophers, groundhogs, slugs, and some other crawling pests. Raised beds also are ergonomic and easily accessible.

- Prepare homemade insecticide. The environmental information site Treehugger provides information on making a homemade insecticide from vegetable oil and a mild soap. Use one cup of oil with one tablespoon of soap (such as Dr Bronner's castile soap). Add this mixture to one quart of water in a spray bottle. This concoction can eradicate aphids, mites, thrips, and more by coating insects' bodies and effectively suffocating them. Soap-and-water sprays or even



The joy of harvesting from a garden can be diminished when unwanted guests have gotten there first.

neem oil sprays work similarly.

- Sprinkle diatomaceous earth. Diatomaceous earth, commonly known as DE, is an abrasive powder comprised of fossilized algae diatoms. It's commonly used as a filter medium in swimming pools, but also makes an effective pesticide. The material's abrasive and absorbent qualities draw moisture out of insects, essentially

dehydrating them to death. DE can be sprinkled around the base of plants, but will need to be reapplied after rain and watering.

- Space out plants. One way to reduce insect or animal pest numbers is to ensure ample space between plants. Tightly planted crops create a breeding ground for fungal diseases and also provide hiding spots and warmth for pests. Leaving room

between plants can help avoid these issues, according to Gardening Channel.

- Use row covers or garden mesh. Specialized covers and meshes protect fruit and vegetables against insects and animals. Many plants can be covered all year long as long as the covers are lifted during flowering if the crops depend on pollination by bees.

- Interplant crops in the

garden. Interplanting is a technique that involves alternating crops, herbs and flowers to confuse the pests so they have a difficult time finding what they want to eat. Alternate rows of vegetables with herbs and flowers that appeal to beneficial insects.

Keeping pesky insects and animals from damaging food gardens can involve techniques that are safe and natural.

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Did you know?

The National Association of Landscape Professionals notes that lawns can support a significant number of insects feeding on them because the grass grows much faster than the insects can damage it. But noticeable damage, such as brown patches in the grass, severed roots and grass that is easily pulled up, indicate that insect infestations are significant enough to require intervention.

Lawn care professionals can work with homeowners to develop solutions to address insect infestations. Infestation prevention involves a handful of strategies, not the least of which is ensuring a lawn is properly cared for. Such care delivers nutrients to the lawn and reduces its risk of becoming undernourished. Undernourished lawns are more vulnerable to insect infestations and weeds.

The buzz about bees

Warm weather and extra hours of sunlight spark flowering trees and plants to bloom anew. This is the time of year when the air is sweet with the aroma of blossoms and the familiar hum of insects can be heard all around.



Not all “bugs” are the same this time of year. While you probably won’t want ants invading your backyard grill fest, the presence of bees nearby can be a good thing — even if those curious yellow-and-black critters get a little close for comfort from time to

time. That’s because almost 90 percent of wild plants and 75 percent of the leading global crops depend on animal pollination, indicates the World Wildlife Federation.

Bees are remarkable creatures in small packages. The following are some bee facts to buzz about, courtesy of the WWF, Save the Bees™, NASA, and the Texas A&M University Honey Bee Information Site.

- There are roughly 20,000 species of bees around the world. Most of them are solitary bees.

- Bees have five eyes. Two of the eyes are large compound eyes with hexagonal facets. The other three are small, simple eyes.

- Honeybees have a move called the “waggle dance.” It is a clever way of communicating to tell them where to go to find the best sources of food.

- Bees can carry up to 122 times their body weight in pollen and nectar.

- Bumblebees leave footprint scents behind. They are able to distinguish between their own scents, the scent of a relative and the scent of a stranger as they look for food. They also can avoid flowers already visited.

- Should a queen bee perish, the hive workers will select a new young larva and feed it a special food called “royal jelly.” The larva will develop into a fertile queen.

- Bees flap their wings 190 to 200 times per second. They can fly up to 15 miles per hour.

- Female bees can sting; males do not. Losing the stinger will cause the bee to die. The honeybee only can sting once because its stinger is barbed. Bumblebees and hornets can sting multiple times because they have smooth stingers.

- It can require nectar from two million flowers to make one pound of honey.

- Many bees are not aggressive. Simply moving away from them can prevent a person from being stung. Generally, bumblebees and honey bees will only sting by accident or if a nest is being disrupted.

- Wasps are different from bees in that they are mostly known to be predators. They eat other insects and often food that people eat, which is why wasps are more likely to be found around your cookout. Bees tend to be covered in hair, while wasps (which include yellow jackets) are smooth.

Bees are remarkable creatures and should be celebrated as the weather warms up.



Careful consideration of a handful of variables can help homeowners determine which trees will make the best fit for their properties.

How to pick the right trees for your property

Trees benefit a landscape by serving both aesthetic and utilitarian functions. A home surrounded by healthy green trees can be a sight to behold, and those same trees can benefit surrounding plants and wildlife at the same time.

As appealing as trees are, not all trees and landscapes make for the perfect match. The Arbor Day Foundation notes the importance of planning when designing a landscape. Planning ensures the trees homeowners ultimately choose for their properties will grow well in the soil and moisture present in their yards.

Careful consideration of a handful of variables can help homeowners determine which trees will make the best fit for their properties.

- Height: Homeowners must consider the projected height of a tree before planting it. Avoid trees that will bump into anything when fully grown, as that can adversely affect surrounding

greenery and pose a safety hazard. The ADF’s tree sizing guide can be accessed at <https://www.arborday.org/trees/rightTreeAndPlace/size.cfm> and serves as an invaluable resource for homeowners who want to plant new trees around their properties.

- Canopy spread: Trees grow out as well as up, so it’s important to consider their potential width at maturity as well. The ADF sizing guide can help homeowners get an idea of how wide a tree is likely to be at maturity. Trees that spread out quite a bit don’t necessarily need to be avoided, but it’s important that they’re planted far enough apart so they don’t adversely affect surrounding plants. In addition, wide trees that are planted too close together can make the landscape appear crowded, taking something away from its aesthetic appeal.

- Growth rate: Growth rate is an important variable because it can

affect how quickly homeowners will see changes in their landscapes. Homeowners who want to plant for privacy can consider trees with quick growth rates or purchase more mature trees that are already near full growth. Those who are not in need of instant transformation can try trees with slower growth rates, which the ADF notes typically live longer than fast-growing species.

- Requirements: Different trees require different amounts of sun and moisture and different soil components to thrive. Homeowners can have their soil tested to determine which trees will thrive in it. Local garden centers can be a great resource for homeowners who want insight as to which trees will thrive in their local climates.

Trees serve many functions on a property. Choosing the right trees for a landscape requires careful consideration of a host of variables.

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