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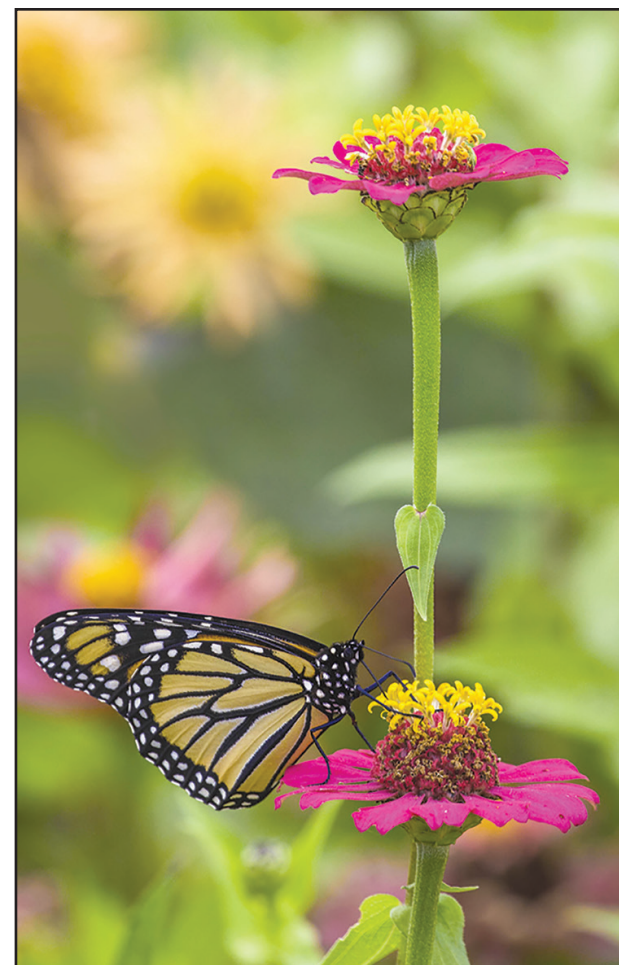
Pollinators are important part of a thriving garden

A thriving backyard garden requires homeowners to take steps to ensure the garden has the best environment in which to grow and thrive. The right tools and components, including trowels, rakes, soil, amendments, and fertilizer, can help gardeners create beautiful spaces. It's also important that pollinators are made to feel welcome in the garden.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that one-third of all agricultural output depends on pollinators. The USDA notes that insects and other animal pollinators are vital to the production of healthy crops for food, fibers, edible oils, medicines, and other products. Pollinators also are essential for maintaining habitats and ecosystems that many wild animals rely on for food and shelter.

The U.S. Forest Service says that, without pollinators, the human race and all of the earth's terrestrial ecosystems would not survive. Pollination done the natural way often yields large, flavorful fruits.

Pollinators are make-or-break components of large-scale agriculture, and they're just as important in private home gardens. The Pollinator Partnership, an organization that works to protect pollinators and their habitats across North America, says pollinators include bees, butterflies, beetles, birds, and bats. These animals travel from plant to plant carrying pollen on their bodies. The following are some ways to maintain healthy pollinator habitats.



Without pollinators, the human race and all of the earth's terrestrial ecosystems would not survive.

- Consider the soil and types of plants that will thrive in it before choosing what to plant. Fix drainage issues and plant with sunlight in mind.
- Vary the colors and shapes of plants to attract a greater array of pollinators. Plant flowers close to vegetable gardens to attract pollinators.
- Group plants together when planting to more effectively attract pollinators.
- Select plants that flower at different times of the year so that nectar and pollen

sources are available year-round.

- Whenever possible, choose native plants.
- Avoid the use of pesticides.
- Provide a water source for pollinators, such as a shallow dish with stones half-submerged for perching.

Pollinators are important for gardens, whether those gardens are commercial operations or small backyard plots. Allow pollinators to share spaces and be mindful of behaviors that can threaten their survival.

Dangers of mowing too low

Spring marks the return of many things. Trees and flowers begin to bloom again in spring, while warmer temperatures are welcomed back with open arms. Grass also begins to grow again in the spring. That means it's not too long before homeowners have to dust off their lawn mowers and get to work. Those who don't necessarily enjoy mowing the lawn may be tempted to cut their grass very low, as doing so can mean longer intervals between mowing sessions. However, mowing grass too low can have a very adverse effect on a lawn.

- Cutting too low can injure the grass. Cutting grass too low can injure the grass, creating what's essentially a domino effect of problems to come. Injured grass will focus on its recovery efforts, thereby making it vulnerable to other issues.

- Cutting too low promotes weed growth. Injured grass is vulnerable to invaders, including weeds and insects. Weeds and insects can attack

grass as it recovers from injury, and before homeowners know it, their lawns are overcome with a host of problems.

- Cutting too low allows crabgrass to thrive. Crabgrass needs ample sunlight to grow. By cutting grass too low, homeowners may unknowingly be promoting crabgrass growth. Crabgrass is unsightly and can rob surrounding grass of the moisture it needs to grow. So, lawns cut too low may not only lose their lush appeal thanks to the unattractive appearance of crabgrass, but also because areas surrounding the crabgrass patches might turn brown due to lack of water.

- Cutting too low can stress the grass. Cutting too low also makes lawns vulnerable to summer heat. Without blades tall enough to block some of the summer sun, grass can quickly succumb to summer heat, leading to dried out, discolored lawns.



Mowing grass too low can have a very adverse effect on a lawn.



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3 perennial gardening pointers

Gardening is an engaging hobby that can provide a host of benefits, some of which may surprise even the most devoted gardeners. For example, the Harvard Medical School notes that just 30 minutes of gardening activities burns 135 calories, making gardening a fun and simple way to incorporate more exercise into your daily routine. In addition, scientists have long proven that gardening releases the hormones serotonin and dopamine in the brain, each of which are associated with improved mood.

Perennial gardens can be especially attractive to seasoned gardeners and novices. Perennials are plants that come back year after year, and committing to a perennial garden can ensure people stick with gardening for the long haul, reaping all of the rewards that come with making such a commitment.

Before planting a perennial garden, those new to gardening may want to consider these three tips.

1. Make a plan.

A perennial garden comes back year after year, which means any mistakes you make when planting are likely to haunt you year after year as well. Factors like space and location must be considered before planting.



Perennial gardens can be especially attractive to seasoned gardeners and novices.

Many gardeners utilize garden planning applications like GrowVeg to make the process of planning a garden simpler and more organized. Such applications can be especially useful for novices.

2. Consider aesthetics.

Gardens can be awe-inspiring, especially when gardeners consider aesthetics prior to planting. The DIY Network advises gardeners to consider scale before choosing which perennials to plant. Tall plants and wide beds tend to look best outside large homes, while short plants in small beds tend to look better outside small homes.

3. Work with a professional.

Local garden centers can be excellent resources when planning perennial gardens. Representatives at such businesses can offer tips on native plants, which will be more likely to thrive year after year than non-natives. Such representatives also can help you choose the right plants based on the amount of sunlight the plants will likely get after being planted. Each of these factors can be easily overlooked by people without much gardening experience.

Perennial gardens can provide years of joy and inspiration, especially when gardeners give ample attention to certain details prior to planting.



Taking protective measures can help people lower their risk for Lyme disease.

Knowing the basics of Lyme disease

Lyme disease poses a threat to millions of people across the globe. The misconception that Lyme disease is exclusive to the United States, and the northeastern portion of the country in particular, is understandable. Hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. are diagnosed with Lyme disease each year, but the 2017 U.S. Geological Survey found that 95 percent of those cases are in the northeast, mid-Atlantic or northern Midwest regions. In spite of that, no one is immune to Lyme disease, regardless of where they live.

The World Health Organization notes that, in addition to the United States, there are foci of Lyme borreliosis in forested areas of Asian and in northwestern, central and eastern Europe, proving that Lyme disease is a global issue. With that in mind, it behooves everyone to take steps to understand Lyme disease and how to reduce their risk of getting it.

What is Lyme disease?

According to Lymedisease.org, an online resource that supports science-based advocacy, Lyme disease is caused by a bacterium known as *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Lyme disease can affect any organ of the body, and it is often misdiagnosed because it tends to mimic symptoms of other diseases. Lyme disease may be misdiagnosed as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis, and even psychiatric illnesses like depression. Such misdiagnoses can delay treatment of the underlying infection.

How do I get Lyme disease?

The majority of Lyme disease patients get the disease from the bite of a nymphal tick. Nymphs are immature forms of ticks

that are very small, typically the size of a poppy seed, according to Lymedisease.org. The bites are painless and, when coupled with the size of nymphal ticks, that increases the likelihood that people will not even realize they've been bitten. Ticks can stay attached to the body for several days, feeding all the while. Lymedisease.org notes that the longer the tick stays attached, the more likely it will transmit the Lyme and other pathogens into the bloodstream of the person it's attached to.

How can I safeguard myself against Lyme disease?

The Global Lyme Alliance, which funds research aimed at preventing, diagnosing and treating tick-borne illnesses, notes that practicing tick bite prevention habits is the best way to prevent Lyme disease. Through its "Be Tick AWARE" campaign, the GLA urges people to follow these simple steps to reduce their risk for Lyme disease:

- Avoid high tick traffic areas, like tall grass and leaf piles.
- Wear proper clothing, including long pants, sleeves and socks. Avoid walking in grass barefoot or in open sandals, even when grass has been cut short.
- Apply tick repellent approved by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Remove clothing upon entering your home, tossing clothing into the dryer at high temperatures for 10 to 15 minutes to kill live ticks. Note that the GLA says putting clothes into the washer will not kill live ticks.
- Examine yourself for ticks every day.

No one is immune to Lyme disease, regardless of where they live. Recognizing that and take protective measures can help people lower their risk for Lyme disease.

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Rid your lawn of unsightly crabgrass

Few things can give a home exterior that sought-after wow factor as well as a nicely maintained lawn. A lush green landscape is a great way to show pride in home ownership and improve curb appeal.

As many homeowners know, lawns are under constant attack. The elements are rarely easy on lawns, and watchful eyes must always be kept open for other problems that can plague a lawn, including crabgrass.

Crabgrass can be a formidable adversary in the summer months. According to the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, crabgrass begins as seeds. These seeds germinate in spring or early summer. While crabgrass dies after the first hard frost in fall, crabgrass seeds remain dormant in winter, and the seeds then grow again in the following spring when ground temperature warms up. Without action to prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating, homeowners will likely end up with patches of crabgrass throughout their lawns every summer.

A healthy lawn is the best defense against crabgrass. The healthier a lawn is, the

harder it is for unwanted grasses like crabgrass to thrive. The following are a handful of strategies that can promote a healthy lawn and make it more difficult for unsightly crabgrass to establish itself in the months ahead.

- Keep grass at a consistent length, and don't cut too low. Maintaining a consistent length of grass by mowing at regular intervals can make it hard for crabgrass to thrive. Crabgrass requires ample sunlight to germinate, so grass that is not cut too short may keep crabgrass from growing in. Of course, grass should not be allowed to grow knee-length, either. By raising blades to the mowing height appropriate for their type of grass, and mowing at regular intervals so the grass remains at that height through the summer, homeowners can promote healthy lawns and make it harder for crabgrass to germinate.

- Never cut too much of the blade off of the grass. When mowing, don't cut too much of the blade off the grass with each cut, even if the grass seems especially long. As noted, cutting too low allows sunlight to reach crabgrass seeds. But cutting

too much off the blade, even if the grass is still high after a mow, can injure the grass. Injured grass can make lawns more vulnerable to weeds and crabgrass.

- Apply a pre-emergence herbicide. Pre-emergence herbicides kill germinating grass seedlings before they emerge from the soil. Follow the manufacturer's

instructions regarding when and how much herbicide to apply. If crabgrass has already started to grow, it's likely too late to apply a pre-emergence herbicide.

Crabgrass is an unwelcome invader in many lawns. Spring can be a great time to prevent this unwanted guest from returning this summer.



The healthier a lawn is, the harder it is for unwanted grasses like crabgrass to thrive.

It's always a good time to improve your lot!



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Did you know?

Outdoor living is wildly popular, as more and more homeowners are bringing elements once reserved for home interiors into their backyards. When designing outdoor living spaces, homeowners may learn about biophilic design, an architectural concept that aims to incorporate natural elements into outdoor living spaces. Proponents of biophilic design say it satisfies an innate human need to affiliate with nature, thereby helping to reduce stress that people may experience after being stuck indoors for much of their days. Biophilic design is often part of a home interior design, but many homeowners also embrace it when designing their outdoor living spaces. For example, surrounding outdoor living areas with noninvasive plants, flowers and trees and using natural materials like wood and stone when building such spaces are great ways to embrace biophilic design and create a tension-free ambiance in outdoor living spaces.



Four steps to expertly green grass on a DIY budget

(BPT) - Having lush green grass is a delight for the senses. Not only does it look amazing, boost your mood and enhance your property value, but few things are better than walking barefoot through your yard or the fresh smell of grass on a warm, sunny day.

“Many people think you need to hire professionals to get the green grass they admire in magazines, but the truth is you can do everything they do, with a little guidance and the right strategies,” says Phil Dwyer, Ph.D., R&D Principal at ScottsMiracle-Gro.

As we look outside in these days of spring, this is the ideal opportunity to improve your lawn and give it just what it needs to thrive. Consider these smart lawn care tips to get a lush green blanket of grass across your yard for months to come.

Access technology for guidance

What type of grass grows in your yard? What is that weed over there? When's the best time to fertilize? You may not know these answers, but technology can help provide expert guidance at no cost. For example, the free Scotts My Lawn mobile app lets you geo-target your specific yard to get expert insight and step-by-step guidance on how to create a customized lawn care plan for an entire year based on your location, climate, environment and goals. Ask questions through live chat, use the weed identifier tool to tackle tough weeds and follow seasonally relevant lawn tips and grass seeding recom-

mendations. It's like having an on-call pro, without the costs.

Mow to the highest preferred height

How and when you mow can impact the health of your lawn for better or for worse. Because mowing takes time and energy, it's best to know strategies to help you maximize effectiveness with minimal effort. Overall, the higher you mow the deeper your roots grow. It's important to learn which grass type you have so you can mow appropriately. Northern cool-season grasses should be cut 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches. Some southern warm-season grasses like Bermuda grass do better when cut a little shorter. Make sure to avoid cutting more than a third of the grass blade at a time so you don't stress the plant, and also try to vary your mowing pattern to avoid ruts. These steps will help your grass grow strong at an optimal height that also helps shade the soil to prevent weed growth and water evaporation.

Feed at the right times

It's not only about how much you feed your lawn. Using the right treatments at the right times gives grass all it needs throughout the season and saves you money along the way. Typically the first treatment should occur in the spring after your first mow to jump-start growth and strength. As months continue you'll need treatments that support a lawn's overall health long term, including weed and insect control. Scotts takes the guesswork out of lawn care with an easy, customized subscription plan that delivers the correct amount of

what is needed when it is needed. Fill out a brief diagnostic quiz at program.scotts.com to get recommendations and order for convenient delivery. In general, a nice lawn can be achieved by feeding once in the spring and again once in the fall. If you want to create a really beautiful thick green lawn, in the North try feeding twice in the spring (4-6 weeks apart) and twice in the fall (Labor Day, Halloween). In the South, apply four applications spaced out between spring and Labor Day.

Use wise water strategies

Reduce your water footprint, save money on utilities and help grass thrive with wise watering methods. Frequency will depend on how much it rains and the time of year, as grass needs less water in spring and fall than it does during hot summer months. Rather than watering only once a week, try watering for shorter periods every other day to best respond to changing conditions, needs and rainfall. When the grass starts to look purplish to light brown and doesn't bounce back when walked on, it's time to water. Water is best applied in the early morning hours, as this prepares grass for the heat of the afternoon. Soil should be moist to the sticky point, but not muddy or dripping wet. Most sprinklers can achieve this in about 15 minutes per zone.

“These four simple steps will set any homeowner on the path to a green lawn,” says Dwyer. “You'll enjoy spending time in your yard and enjoying the outdoors to the fullest.”

A guide to buying and setting up a bird bath

Warm weather means more opportunities to spend time outdoors while at home. Whether your favorite form of outdoor recreation includes sitting on the patio reading or digging in the garden, there's a good chance that you will be sharing the space with local wildlife. Optimizing opportunities to view and interact with backyard wildlife can make the great outdoors even more enjoyable.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology indicates that there are around 2,059 bird species on the continent of North America. Red-winged blackbirds, yellow-rumped warblers, American robins, and chipping sparrows are among the most commonly seen birds in North America.

Making a backyard hospitable to birds can increase the chances for sightings and hearing their sweet songs. Installing a bird bath can be a step in the right direction.

Bird baths can make yards more attractive to birds. Birds require a supply of fresh, clean water for drinking and bathing. By setting up a bath, homeowners can attract not only seed-loving birds, but those that don't eat seeds and wouldn't normally congregate around feeders, indicates All About Birds. Experts surmise that birds may bathe to maintain their feathers.

Not all bird baths are constructed the same way. Many bird baths sold in stores are better suited for decoration than for serving as functional baths. There are four general types of bird bath: standing pedestal, hanging bath, deck-mounted, and ground-level. In general, the lower a bird



bath is to the ground, the more likely birds are to use it. Most natural sources of water birds use are on or near the ground. Therefore, ground-level bird baths may be the best investments.

It is important to keep the water in a bird bath shallow (around two inches of water or less). This enables birds to splash around safely and wade in.

Birds do not want to slide around, so a material that is coated and slippery, like glazed ceramic or glass, may not be too popular. Rough stone or a bird bath modified with pea gravel or rocks can give birds steady footing.

Place the bird bath in the shade if possible to ensure the water is cool and fresh. Locate it by a tree so the birds can hop up to a branch and preen afterwards. All About Birds also says that a bird bath is more attractive if it has a dripping or moving water feature, as this is often irresistible to birds.

Another way to ensure the bath will be used is to keep it clean and maintained. Change the water every day or two. Rinse off the bath to remove droppings, bugs and other debris.

Once birds learn there is a comfortable bath nearby, they may be more apt to visit a yard and may even become frequent guests.

Container gardening tips

Gardening is beneficial in various ways. The AARP states that some of the health perks associated with gardening include improved mood, increased vitamin D levels (which benefits bones and immune system) and reduced risk of dementia. In addition, if gardening efforts include growing herbs, fruits and vegetables, it can be a cost-effective way to eat healthy.

For gardeners without sufficient space or for those with mobility issues, container gardening can be an ideal way to grow everything from flowers to vegetables. Better Homes & Gardens says most plants are not fussy about the containers in which they grow so long as some of their basic needs are met. This means watering correctly for the type of plant, and ensuring sufficient drainage.



The following are some other ways container gardening efforts can prove successful.

- Watch water. Planet Natural Research Center says plants with thin leaves typically need ample water, and plants with thick leaves need less. Use this as a guideline to gauge water needs.

- Size correctly. Plants should be sized to the container. Consider dwarf varieties of certain plants if your containers are small.

- Choose the right soil. Fill containers with a commercial potting soil rather than soil from the garden. Garden soil can dry into a solid mass, while commercial mixtures have amendments like peat moss, vermiculite, compost, and other ingredients to help with soil texture and moisture retention.

- Mix it up. When planting containers of flowers and other greenery, Good Housekeeping says to include “a thriller, a spiller and a filler” as a good rule of thumb. The thriller is the focal point, the

spiller a trailing plant, and a filler has smaller leaves or flowers to add bulk and color.

- Poke holes. Drainage holes are essential so that soil will not become waterlogged. Holes don’t need to be large, but there should be enough of them so that excess water can drain out readily.

- Select the right container material. Container materials may be affected by gardeners’ budgets, personal taste and other factors. For those who live in hot climates, selecting a light-colored container can help prevent further soil heat absorption.

Container gardening is a healthy and enjoyable activity that can pay dividends in various ways.

Repair bare spots in the lawn

Caring for a lawn to keep it lush and green can require equal measures of patience and hard work. Various invaders can attack grass or contribute to its demise. One problem many homeowners face is bare spots.

Bare spots can occur for various reasons. Heavy foot traffic, grubs or other pests, fungi, pet urine, or too much or too little water can contribute to bare spots. The how-to resource The Spruce says that correcting the source of bare spots can prevent new issues, particularly if grubs or other pests are damaging the grass. Then homeowners can address existing bare areas.

It is unlikely that bare spots will just fill back in on their own. Reseeding spots or using sod to fill in bare areas can help lawns look lush.

- Begin by raking and removing any dead grass and other debris from the lawn. Check to make sure



that grubs or insects are not attacking the lawn. If they are, use targeted treatment options for those pests.

- Break up and aerate any soil that is compacted in the bare spot.

- Amend the soil in the bare area with loamy soil or compost to improve on the nutritional makeup and texture so that it is amenable to grass-growing. If you notice that the entire lawn is looking a little sparse, top-dressing the rest of the lawn at this point also can help improve its vitality.

- Sprinkle seeds in the bare spot (disperse seeds over the rest of the lawn if you want to over-seed and improve the thickness of the lawn). If you prefer sod, cut a portion of the sod to fit the bare area and place on the amended soil.

- The Scotts company says to lightly water newly seeded or sodded areas daily for at least two weeks to keep the top inch of soil consistently moist but not soggy. Gradually water more as the seedlings develop and the grass begins to fill in. Deep water at least once or twice a week after the new grass reaches mowing height.

- The grass should grow slightly longer than the rest of the lawn, and wait until the color of the patched area begins to blend in with the rest of the lawn before mowing. This could take a few weeks, and the area should be avoided until then.

Eventually, and with treatment, bare spots can be remedied.

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When selecting a ground cover, consider these choices:

- Tall or low in height
- Sun or shade-loving
- Clay or sandy soil
- Moist conditions or dry
- Showy flowers or less showy
- Seasonal or evergreen

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