

# SPRING HOME

2021

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# Bringing unique plants to Hazen

BY DANIEL ARENS

For the past 15 years, one Hazen resident has enriched his property and his community with a variety of special blooms.

Following his retirement, Mike Krause took a course through NDSU for becoming a "Master Gardener."

"The curriculum was basically set up where it had to do with gardening and forestry in North Dakota," Krause said.

His experience with that curriculum opened new opportunities for him, including working with local parks and other individuals around Hazen as part of the requirements related to community service.

But the primary benefit of the program for Krause was the chance to bring diversity to what he could grow himself.

"The introduction of new plants within North Dakota and caring for them were the main areas it focused on," Krause said. "It was the introduction of new species that were becoming available, and that was the really great part of that."

North Dakota's growing season makes it a more difficult place to diversify, while

Krause said the different soil conditions even within the state mean that opportunities for some species in the eastern part of North Dakota might not necessarily mean Hazen can grow them well.

But there were some opportunities he jumped at.

"I became interested in some of the berry varieties, and particularly cherries," he said. "There are some really nice varieties available. A lot of them come from Canada, so it might take a little time between shipments, but there are options out there."

Krause said people should be on the lookout for diseased plants, however, in order to ensure any virus or other threat doesn't spread. He said black knot disease is one issue he has seen recently.

Krause's work on gardening outside the Brooks House, north of the Main St./Central Ave. intersection, also led him to take an interest in the Paul Weiser Memorial Pocket Park just across the alley. He has done a lot of work for upkeep and beautification there, and has also lent his green thumb to helping spruce up other parks around Hazen.



With a passion for plants and creating a beautiful community, Hazen resident Mike Krause works diligently to spruce things up around town, including at the Paul Weiser Memorial Pocket Park.

**HAZEN**  
continued on page 4



Mike Krause's interest in bringing new plants to Hazen has led him to invest the time in bringing in and tending many different species, from cherries to daylilies.

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# Albers bakes hobby cakes

BY JARANN JOHNSON

Cameron Albers has been around the oven her whole life. And in the eighth grade, she decided she wanted to get more serious about her baking passion.

Now, she runs a baking business through social media. Her dessert delicacies can be found on Instagram or Facebook under the name "Cam's Cakes."

"I do have a Facebook page called Cam's Cakes, and I have an Instagram account called Cam's Cakes. Most people reach out to me on Instagram, or I know them," Albers said.

Albers said she started baking with her family, as a kid, and then it turned into helping her mother, and, lastly, a fun way to gain her SAE for FFA.

"I've been baking since I was a little kid with my parents and grandparents. Then my mom has a catering business. So, I would always help her bake with that," Albers added.

"Then eventually I had to do my SAE for FFA, and it just all fell into place with me starting to bake on my mind."

Albers said her business has been doing well. She has repeat customers and has even started getting new orders from patrons from all around Coal Country.

"I always enjoy having the same customers come again – just knowing my product was good enough that they want to come back and have me do it again. I really enjoy having new customers from Hazen or Beulah contact me. It's just a really fun thing to do," Albers said.

Albers is a young baker but has words of wisdom for



Cameron Albers has been baking since she was a kid. But her passion has turned into a hobby business, and she sells cakes through Cam's Cakes on Facebook and Instagram.

hobby bakers in the area. Her three tips focus on measurements, ingredients, and having fun.

"Know what a teaspoon and a tablespoon are. Know what baking powder and baking soda are. Just have fun with it because there is no point in doing it if you are not going to have fun," Albers said.

Albers personally enjoys making extravagant cakes. One of her most extravagant cake creations was a Vikings birthday cake.

"It was a cake for my grandma's 80th birthday. It was two layers, it was Viking-themed, it was purple and gold, and it used a lot of fondant and techniques I had never used before. It was really interesting to learn about it and figure out how to do it," Albers said.

This spring, Albers will be focusing on taming isomalt. Isomalt is used for cake deco-

ration.

"It's really big if you watch the baking shows that use it a lot. I watch the baking shows like, 'Springtime Baking Championship.' And they always use this thing called isomalt. And I have no idea what it is. But I've been looking it up and researching it, and I want to learn how to make that," Albers said.

"The challenge with it is you have to get it really hot and then cool it really quick. It's something with the air in it. That's what I think the challenge will be."

Albers is having fun with her hobby business and said it's not hard for her to keep up with.

"It's just something I have been doing my whole life. It's not that hard for me to stick with it. I like doing it. I just keep on keeping on," Albers said.

HAZEN continued from page 3

Another thing he enjoys is seeing little plantings develop into their own sort of miniature habitat in portions of town, like hollyhocks and daylilies. These plantings can then germinate, and spread outward around the community.

One of Krause's hopes is to encourage further interest and gather together a group of volunteers who can work together to beautify the town and help private residents with their own needs.

"As we realize not everyone is able to properly care for these plants, that volunteer element is almost necessary," he said. "It takes that interested person that has a little knowledge, even if it happens to be younger people."

Krause encouraged those with an interest in gardening and growing plants to really make it their own.

"I like some of the new varieties as they are made available, and I try them out. That's what a plant person has to do. You see a color, you see a variety, and you make it your own pet project."

In order to be successful with your own gardening, be it of flowers, berries, vegetables or any kind of plant,

Krause said it's important to educate yourself and know exactly what your own plants need.

"I think the best advice that I have is for people to take a little bit of time to prepare themselves," he said. "There's different heights, different widths that need to be considered."

Krause said you want to ensure each plant is given enough space so that it can flourish without getting choked out by other plants. Also, if planting perennials, people could consider leaving additional space, so that if they enjoy their

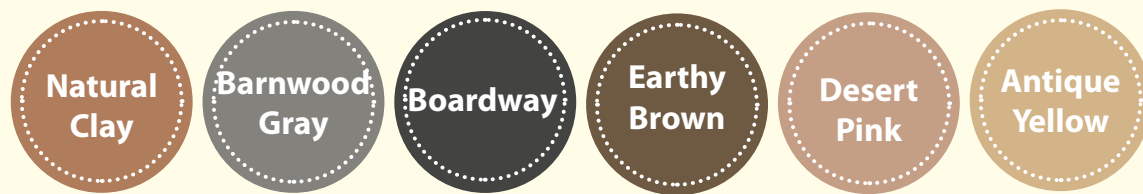
garden and how it turns out, they might at a latter point be able to introduce annuals and other plants, and have the room available to ensure these new additions can grow.

"It's really all about planning ahead," he said. "Preparation, clean-up, planning: these are the fuel around which your garden can grow up and be wonderful."

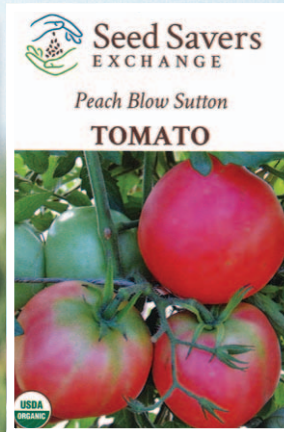
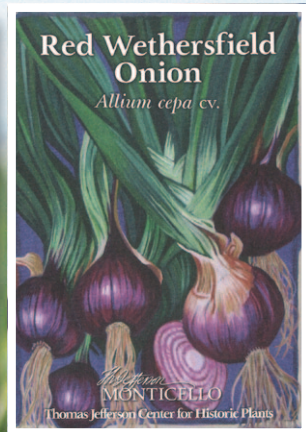
Krause also encouraged people to consider putting gardens towards the front of their houses, not just in their backyards, so that they can really make their property and their community shine.

"I like some of the new varieties as they are made available, and I try them out. That's what a plant person has to do. You see a color, you see a variety, and you make it your own pet project."  
- Mike Krause

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# Vigesaa turns hobby into a business



Heather Vigesaa of Beulah is starting a flower farm.



Pictured is a bouquet that Heather Vigesaa gave away.

**BY CINDY PETERSON**

A flower stirs up all kinds of positive emotions in Heather Vigesaa.

Something so simple, yet so beautiful.

Yes, Vigesaa absolutely adores flowers but she enjoys giving them away more.

When COVID was in full throttle, Vigesaa cheered up her co-workers at the clinic by bringing them jars of flowers. Watching the expressions of happiness on each person's face boosted Vigesaa's spirits

as well.

"I don't get flowers that often, and that's OK," said Vigesaa, who farms with her husband by Beulah. "But there is something about giving them away. When I brought jars of flowers to the girls at the clinic, I couldn't believe what it did to them. I was like I gave them a million dollars. I couldn't believe what it did for them."

Vigesaa even left flowers on the doorsteps for certain people.

"I would get a call and they'd

say 'I know it's you,'" Vigesaa said. "I'd get the jars back. OK. I'll fill it again. Giving flowers is my love language."

Vigesaa is turning her hobby of growing flowers into a business. She completed an online course on flower farming. She is flying by the seat of her pants, not really having a laid out plan. She hasn't thought of a name yet for her flower farm.

Heck, Vigesaa doesn't even care if her business yields a financial windfall. She loves growing flowers. She enjoys learning about flowers and she loves giving them away. Her goal is to give a certain percentage of her flowers away. Vigesaa considered giving all of them away, but was advised by a friend not to do that.

"She said you can never give it all away," Vigesaa said. "People value things they have to pay for. If you start a business giving everything away, that shows that you don't value it."

Vigesaa got the idea to start a flower farm last year when bees were delivered to her family's farm. Her flowers grew better than expected. She had more flowers than she knew what to do with so she started giving them away.

She enrolled in flower farm school and found out bees aren't good for a flower farm.

**HOBBY**

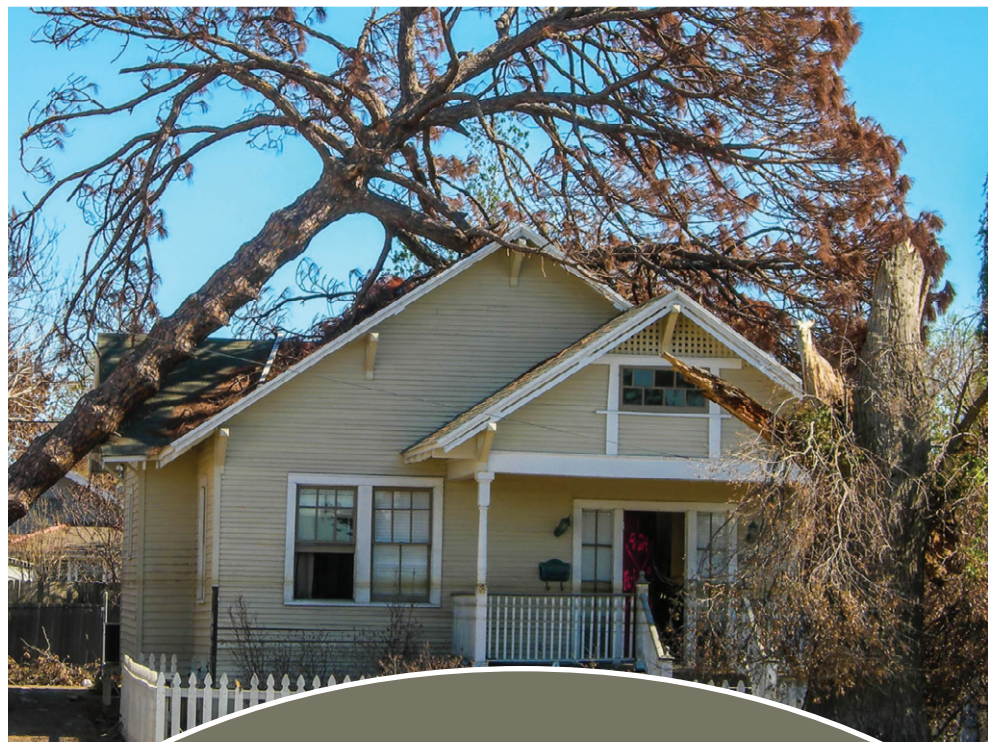
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# Tapping into nature

## Andersons turn sap to liquid gold syrup

BY SUZANNE WERRE,

A nice little freeze at night, with a little warm-up to about 40 degrees the next day – and repeat.

That's what rural Mercer residents Casey and Jessica Anderson would like to see from the next couple weeks of weather. That freeze/thaw cycle is what gets their boxelder trees releasing sap, which they're tapping into.

For the past four years the Andersons have tapped some of the boxelder maple trees that are just a little jaunt away from their house on their farm west of Mercer. This is the first year they've tapped three of them, and they're hoping for a great harvest of sap, which they'll cook down into a butterscotchy syrup.

Sunday's afternoon check of the sap-collecting buckets yielded very little, because it didn't freeze the night before, noted Casey, but they're hoping this week's forecast comes true, and those daily temperature swings will get the sap running again.

The small grove of boxelder trees is old, noted Casey. The past few years they've tapped only two of them, but this year they tapped into another one.

"They should be 12 inches in diameter before you take sap from them," said Casey.

After the trees are tapped, the Andersons, including their sons Jesper and Bjorn, regularly check the trees to ensure they catch all of the sap. There have been times where the buckets are overflowing with sap, and others like Sunday, when there has been little to nothing gathered.

It all depends on if they're getting that daily freeze/thaw/freezing/thaw.

While a lot of folks are welcoming the first signs of spring these days, the Andersons wouldn't mind if spring held off for just a little longer. As soon as the boxelder trees start to bud, they have to quit collecting sap because the sap doesn't taste as good anymore

and it won't make good syrup.

The sap is collected then stored in the freezer in freezer bags until they're ready to turn the thin, clear sap into the golden-colored syrup they love. It takes a lot of sap to make just a little syrup, noted Casey. It takes about 60 gallons of sap to get about one gallon of syrup – it's pretty much like liquid gold.

When they start cooking down the sap, it has to be done outside in a large pot, cooking it down enough to the point where it can be transferred to a smaller pot and finished on the kitchen stove. Casey has been using a turkey fryer to start, but he's hoping to be able to get a wider, flatter vessel that covers a bigger surface area to do the initial cooking, just to speed things up.

The Andersons have had great success in making syrup from their sap, and they've turned out some pretty good jerky using the sap as well. The hard candy they tried to make this past year didn't work out quite as well as they would have liked – it was more like taffy -- but they think they just didn't have it to quite the right "hard candy" temperature. They'll try it again this year.

The Andersons aren't saving themselves a bunch of money making their own maple syrup – that's not the point at all.

"We just always look for ways to utilize what we've got," said Jessica.

The trees are native to North Dakota, so they didn't have an investment into planting the trees. The only real investment they've made is the three "Tap My Trees" taps and collecting buckets they use – and, of course, their time. But they think the time spent together as a family, whether it's gathering the sap, cooking it and turning it into syrup, or sampling their latest batch of jerky with a hint of maple, it is definitely time well spent.

Their syrup is quite a bit

different than pure maple syrup, and even more different than the syrup that people typically buy at the grocery store. The Mrs. Butterworth's type of syrup is typically corn syrup with maple flavoring, while real maple syrup is much thinner and stronger tasting than the corn syrup version.

The Andersons' boxelder maple syrup's consistency is more like fresh maple sugar, but it isn't as sweet, they noted. The sugar maple trees produce sap with a lot more



Jessica Anderson has found freezing the fresh sap they collect from the boxelder trees stores perfectly in freezer bags until they are ready to make the syrup.

### TAPPING

continued on page 8



Mercer's Casey Anderson shows off one of the taps and collecting buckets used to collect sap from the boxelder maple trees on the Anderson property.

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# Simple ways to improve a kitchen pantry

HOBBY continued from page 5

People have been spending more time at home in 2020 than in years past, and certain projects around the house have become a priority. One home improvement idea that serves the double benefit of creating organization and making cooking at home more efficient is to reimagine the kitchen pantry.

A pantry is a room or closet where food, beverages and linens or dishes are stored. Pantries can be highly useful spaces that provide ancillary storage in kitchens. Many modern homes are equipped with pantries, but older homes may require some modification to create more useful pantries. Whether starting from scratch or modifying an existing pantry, these tips can help projects go more smoothly.

- **Maximize vertical storage.** Utilizing vertical areas can help increase storage capacity. Build in extra nooks by investing in undershelf storage baskets. These baskets can instantly create designated areas for different types of ingredients. Homeowners also can look for ways to use the inside of cabinet doors or add extra shelves on walls or in eaves.

- **Consider your needs.** Figure out which items you would like to store in the pantry and then shop for corresponding storage systems. For example, storage solutions may feature wine bottle racks, baskets for potatoes and other produce, shelving for small appliances, and even pull out racks for baking pans or cutting boards.

- **Use clear storage.** Put ingredients in clear, airtight containers of similar dimensions so that you can easily find items you need. Transfer bulky items, like cereals and baking supplies, to storage containers for uniformity.

- **Store bulk items elsewhere.** Bulk shopping can be cost-efficient, but bulk items can quickly eat up real estate in the pantry. Designate another area for non-perishable bulk products, like paper goods or canned items, such as in a garage or utility room.

- **Pull out drawers are convenient.** Pull-out drawers can reduce the need to seek and reach for items. These drawers conveniently roll out so items in the back can be accessed without disturbing foods in the front. Drawers can be custom built for any pantry space.

- **Make it accessible.** Think about who will be taking items from the pantry. Put children's snacks on the bottom pantry shelf where they can reach them, and then organize other shelves for adults in the home.

A pantry remodel can add valuable storage space and make one of the busiest rooms in the house operate more efficiently



The bees will stay on the farm but will be used to help pollinate her garden.

She gained a ton of knowledge in flower farm school.

"You cut them before they bloom, so there's really not a lot of beauty on a flower farm," Vigesaa said. "It's such a weird concept that I've never understood. You don't plant a sunflower that has one bloom and you cut it off. It never grows again."

"I have never grown a flower from a seed inside. I don't even know if I can grow anything. It's all new to me."

Starting out, Vigesaa has four 3-by-20 foot beds for her flowers. She will plant her sunflowers outside those beds.

"I will grow a lot of flowers in a small spot," Vigesaa said. "When they're done I will take



Heather Vigesaa loves giving flowers to people. It's her love language

them out and put something else in. Some of the things I'm trying, I don't know if they'll grow in North Dakota. I can't grow things inside. My houseplants die. I've always loved outside flowers. My mom always had flowers."

Vigesaa said she plans to talk to the nursing home to

see if she can share her flowers with the residents.

"I'd love to let the residents make a jar of flowers for their room," Vigesaa said. "When they do activities during the day, let's make a jar and let them keep it in their room. That's what I want. I don't think we realize the power of flowers. Almost everybody I know has a memory of a flower."

Vigesaa will be fine if her business doesn't fatten her wallet. Seeing smiles on faces is what makes her rich.

"If I cut even every year to buy more seeds, that's cool," Vigesaa said. "If I make money, I will invest it back in. I don't have any fun in life. I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't party. I'll buy seeds. I think this could potentially be bigger than what I can do, or what I want to do."

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**TAPPING** continued from page 6

sugar, so that syrup is sweeter. The sugar maples also produce a lot more syrup because of the higher sugar content.

Still, they're more than content with what they get from their little grove of boxelder trees.

While they don't typically get a lot of syrup from their efforts, they have given some of it as gifts, and they're quick

to offer a taste of their home-spun syrup.

They'll admit that they don't typically bring out the homemade syrup when they've got a house full of company, though. There just isn't enough of it for everyone to be slathering over pancakes and waffles on a Sunday morning.

For Jessica, the best part of the whole process is just that

they get to do it.

"To me it's just learning something new," she said. "Learning something that we have right here on our place – how to utilize something on our place, and working with nature, utilizing nature – something that God has given us."

It also gets the boys outside and away from technol-

ogy when they head out to the trees to collect the sap from the buckets.

"It gives them a reason to be outside," said Casey.

The Andersons figure they'll end up with about a gallon-and-a-half of syrup this year, made from 70 to 75 gallons of sap. Looking at the weather forecast, they figure the tapping season will prob-

ably be over at the end of the month – then they'll really get to work making this year's batch of syrup.

Over the summer, the holes where the taps were will close up and heal, and the trees will be ready for another sap harvest next spring.



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SECTION 2

# SPRING HOME

## Lumber costs force homeowners to get creative

*Local expert gives tips for home improvement, prep*

BY ANIKA ROVIG

When it comes to remodeling, Rod Kallestad says there's not much people can do about saving money on lumber.

"It's all expensive. Some of the stuff has went up three times what it was a year ago, There's no way around it," Kallestad, Estimator at Garrison Lumber, said. "I watch the futures market just about every day on lumber and it should be around \$300 per 1,000 board feet, which is a fair price, but it's just about at \$1,000 per 1,000 board feet now."

Not being able to control the lumber prices shouldn't hinder homeowners from wanting to better their home, Kallestad said, offering some tips on the things homeowners can control when remodeling. One piece of advice was choosing a good product, and being ok with spending the money on that product. "Labor is going to be the same, spend money on the product so you end up with something," Kallestad said. "If you put on a cheap product, labor is going to be the same and you still don't have anything. You might as well install something decent."

Having detailed plans on paper and getting the correct information itemized is paramount, Kallestad said. Include all contractors, cost of labor, and cost of materi-

als so everyone involved is on the same page. This will avoid any confusion between parties and allow individuals to have a clear understanding as well as a reference point.

"Sometimes there's not a lot of communication between the contractor and the homeowner, and that's where problems start," Kallestad said.

Another step is to get bids from more than one contractor. Often times individuals can take advantage of a town or city due to the amount of contractors available and give unreasonable prices. For example, after the 2010 flood, families were being taken advantage of, Kallestad said. He stated it is important to be aware of this possibility and know what the options are.

"After the flood hit, I was getting a lot of calls from people saying 'Hey, can you come take a look at my house?' I said 'I tell ya what, I can come take a look at it, give you a rough estimate on how much everything should be and don't let anyone charge you any more than that,'" Kallestad said.

Kallestad had thought about working out a plan for a new deck but due to rising lumber prices he tried an alternative solution using a product called "DeckCorrect" which Kallestad can vouch for first hand.

"If you want to get by for a few years, while still having your deck look good, this stuff



Rod Kallestad

works well," Kallestad said. "It has a little texture to it also and can get it in about 20 different colors."

The increase in lumber may have some people second guessing summer projects but Kallestad encourages homeowners not to be hindered by the cost of lumber but to be motivated to finding an alternative solution.

### Cost-effective ways to prep your home for summer

Home maintenance is important for the longevity of the home but doesn't have to be diminishing to the bank account. Here are some cost effective ways to get the home prepped for the summer months.

1. Wash your siding-- preferably not with a pressure washer
2. Check all vents
3. Clean off soffits
4. Make sure the rain gutters are in good shape so the water runs away from the house
5. Check the weather stripping on the garage doors, to prevent insects from getting in
6. Polish up the deck

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## Renovation trends that figure to be popular in the year ahead

Home renovation trends are ever-changing. Renovations that might have been de rigueur 20 years ago may seem dated now. Recognizing the potentially popular trends of tomorrow is a great way for homeowners to give their homes a fresh new look and put themselves in position to capitalize on popular trends when they put their homes on the market. That's especially so after 2020, a year when millions of people spent more time at home than ever before. All that time working from home and relaxing at home gave millions of homeowners ideas about what they like about their homes and what they hope to change. The following are some renovation trends that various experts suspect could emerge in 2021.

• **Eco-friendly living:** Climate change, and how to combat it, was a hot button issue during the 2020 presidential election in the United States. So it should come as no surprise that *urdesignmag.com*, a web magazine that showcases creative trends in design, architecture, art, technol-

ogy, and fashion, predicts that eco-friendly living solutions figure to be hot commodities in 2021. Eco-friendly appliances, furniture and designs can help to conserve energy and reduce waste, which environmentalists and government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency note are two critical components in the fight against climate change.

• **Large windows:** Large windows can provide stunning views of the outdoors and allow ample natural light into a home. It may not be a coincidence if large windows prove to be a hot trend in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic that dominated much of 2020 forced many people to spend considerably more time at home. Darker homes without much natural light can adversely affect mood, especially when people are spending more time at home. HGTV predicts that homeowners will seek ways to bring more natural light into their homes in 2021, and large windows naturally brighten homes while making rooms appear bigger, help-

ing people feel less cramped. That's an especially beneficial characteristic when spending more time indoors at home.

• **Minimalism:** The anticipated popularity of minimalism in 2021 may also be connected to the pandemic. As professionals were forced to work from home and many families spent more time together inside their homes than ever before, they may have recognized a need to cut back on clutter, including extra furniture. A minimalist approach is both simple and clean, which can make homes feel less claustrophobic.

• **Multi-functional spaces:** Homeowners asked a lot of their homes in 2020, as rooms were transformed into multi-functional spaces seemingly overnight. HGTV notes that spending more time at home showed homeowners that it may not make sense to dedicate entire rooms of a home to a single purpose. Renovations that can help homeowners transform rooms into multi-functional spaces figure to be hot commodities in the years ahead.

## Signs your gutters are in need of repair

• **Gutters hanging off the home:** Gutters were once installed predominantly with spikes. However, many industry professionals now install gutters with hanger brackets. Why the change? Spikes loosen over time, leading to the gutters hanging off the home. That can contribute to serious issues if left untreated. Gutters hanging off the home need not necessarily be replaced, but rather secured to the home, ideally with hanger brackets instead of spikes. Brackets hook into the front of the gutter and are then screwed into the fascia of a home. A professional who specializes in gutter repair can perform this task relatively quickly, and it's an inexpensive yet highly effective solution.

• **Gutter separation:** Gutters that are no longer fastened together can leak and contribute to issues that affect the home's foundation, siding and appearance. Clogs and the accumulation of debris can cause gutters to separate because they are not designed to hold too much weight. Replacement of separated gutters may or may not be nec-

essary depending on how big the problem is and the condition of the existing gutters. If replacement is not necessary, separated gutters may be remedied by securing the joints, another relatively simple and inexpensive fix.

• **Peeling exterior paint:** Paint that appears to be peeling off of your home may indicate that water is seeping over the edge of the gutter closest to your home. When that happens, water is coming down the side of the house, causing

the paint to peel. In such instances, replacing the gutters is often necessary.

• **Basement flooding:** Not all signs of deteriorating gutters are outside a home. Many a homeowner has been flummoxed by flooding in their basements, and such flooding can be caused by aging, ineffective gutters. That's because deteriorating gutters sometimes allow water to leak near the foundation of a home, contributing to basement flooding.

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## Tips for the novice gardener

FFA to supply plants to local stores

BY SUZANNE WERRE

The desire to stay home a lot more this past year brought with it the desire to be more self-sufficient for a lot of people, and that means a lot of people started fending for themselves and growing their own gardens.

Whether it was raising some tomatoes in a pot on the patio, giving a bale garden a try, or going full-on with a vegetable garden plot in the back yard, it was obvious that a lot more people started gardening last year, according to Jolene and Ryan Rust of Rust's Hardware Hank in Turtle Lake, who regularly supply a lot of local gardeners with whatever they need to make their garden grow. Rust's Hardware Hank will again have a greenhouse stocked full of bedding plants, fertilizers, soils, etc. this spring Monday through Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

They, along with long-time gardener Lois Rust, offer a few tips gardening tips for the novice gardener:

• If you're concerned about the potential for drought but would still like some flowers to decorate your yard, moss roses are an excellent choice, they agreed. They provide terrific color, cover a wide area, and are pretty drought resistant. (According to Lois, they'll bloom early and often have a second blooming in July.)

• If crawling around on the ground doesn't sound like a lot of fun, or it's just not great for your joints, a raised garden might be the way to go. There's a little work involved in building one, but they keep the gardener up and off the ground, making garden maintenance and harvesting a lot easier.

• Regardless of the space you're using, it's important to rotate what you're growing every year or so to ensure the soil doesn't get depleted of the important minerals. It also aids in disease prevention in the garden and helps reduce insect infestations. For those with garden plots, to make rotation easier, divide the garden into different sections, like legumes (beans and peas), roots (carrots, onions, beets and radishes), fruits (tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, potatoes) and leaves

(salad greens, cabbage, lettuce), then move everything over one section each year.

• Watermelon and honeydew melons might sound like they would be really fun to grow to the novice gardener, but veteran gardeners know they typically don't do well in North Dakota – the growing season just isn't long enough. It's better to stick with tried and true fruits and veggies. If you want to grow something really big in your garden, pumpkins provide that satisfaction of seeing what you're growing and give the garden and yard a great pop of color in the fall.

• If you're starting your own vegetable garden from seed, but want to give it a little boost by starting it indoors now, start with a good seed-starting mix rather than potting soil or regular dirt to get them started. Your plants will get a much better start with seed-starting mix.

• Try different varieties of veggies to add interest to your garden and your dinner table. Rust's Hardware will be selling a new variety of tomato this year, the Sheyenne tomato is drought-tolerant and has compact plants with medium-sized red fruits that are crack resistant – perfect for what could be a dryer-than-usual summer growing season.

The Rusts and J. Arthur's in Turtle Lake are joining forces with the Turtle Lake-Mercer School's Future Farmers of America, which built a new greenhouse this past year, selling some of the fruit and veggie bedding plants the FFA started in the greenhouse.

According to FFA advisor/instructor Paul Buchholz, the school will be selling some of the starter plants and trees as well as providing some to the two local stores.

"Once we get a little further along, we're going to have a plant sale," said Buchholz.

Buchholz noted that the FFA will definitely have a variety of things not commonly seen in North Dakota, including citrus trees and pomegranate trees.

"We've got a lot of different tropical stuff," he added. Some of the flowers are already coming up, and a lot of the veggies will be getting started soon.

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# Pallet projects can be a handy hobby

In recent years, the trend of upcycling, or transforming unneeded or unwanted materials into new items or products, has become more popular. Unlike recycling, which is taking consumer materials like plastic, paper, metal, and glass and breaking them down so base materials can be remade into new, lower-quality consumer products, upcycling produces items of a higher quality than the original materials.

Wood pallet projects are an excellent example of upcycling. Such projects involve taking wood pallets, which tend to be used to stack, move and store stock, and turning them into amazing wood products. Often free for the taking, pallet wood has become a popular building material for do-it-yourselfers. This rustic wood already has an aged look and decorative appeal. Pallets are often made from leftover wood, and using them anew is an eco-friendly endeavor that can add flair to any project. The following are

just a handful of pallet project ideas.

- **Christmas trees:** Start thinking ahead to the holiday season. Cut pallet planks into sizes that incrementally get larger and attach to form a triangular Christmas tree shape. Decorate with paint or other accents, and don't forget to place a star on top.

- **Pallet planter:** Make a planter box as big or as small as you like to grow flowers, vegetables or herbs. A narrow planter also can be hung on a wall to add flair to spaces indoors or outside.

- **Swing chair:** A pallet, a supportive back and some cushions can be used to make a swing that is fastened to the ceiling of a porch or even a tree.

- **Wine rack:** Turn pallet wood into a wine rack that also has a space to store wine glasses below it.

- **Outdoor table:** Top a disused table with pallet boards nailed or screwed to the top. Stain or clear coat them, and the result is a brand new table

for gardening use or outdoor entertaining.

- **Platform bed:** Pallets can be sanded, painted and placed to form the base of a platform bed. Utilize more pallets to serve as a headboard attached to the wall or bed frame.

- **Bench:** Make a pallet bench that can be crafted child- or adult-sized. Use it inside the house or outdoors on a patio.

- **Garbage container:** Instead of generic plastic garbage pails, make a pallet kitchen garbage container that has rustic appeal.

- **Backsplash:** Give a kitchen some rustic appeal with a pallet backsplash. Cut boards into desired lengths and stagger on the wall. Leave the wood raw or seal it for protection against moisture.

Pallet wood can be transformed into many different projects, helping do-it-yourselfers stay busy at minimal cost. Go online to search for plans for building an array of pallet projects.



## 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. TF205960

## How to test home water quality

Water is essential for life. Generally speaking, a human can go without food for about three weeks, but typically would perish without water after just three to four days.

When people consume water, they are doing so with the assumption or hope that the water is clean and free from harmful contaminants. Even though municipal water systems filter and test water supplies, the company EcoWater Systems® says some of the most common tap water contaminants they encounter actually enter water sources after they have been tested at treatment facilities. Drinking water may contain small amounts of contaminants that are not unsafe to consume at certain levels. However, at higher levels, these same substances can be problematic.

Contaminants can include hydrogen sulfide, raised acidic levels, arsenic, lead, nitrates, and microbiologicals, which include viruses, protozoan and parasites. Homeowners can take proactive approaches to test their water to determine if it contains potentially harmful levels of contaminants. This is especially crucial for those who rely on residential well water, which is not subject to the same testing as municipal systems.

Anyone who knows there may be a problem with the ground water or drinking water in their area or who notices a change in water odor, color and taste can request more information.

One place to start is with a Consumer Confidence Report. Most people on municipal water should receive an annual water quality report called



a CCR, or Consumer Confidence Report, states Consumer Reports. People who rent or didn't receive one can contact their local water supplier or their landlords.

Testing can be initiated by contacting one's local health department, which may provide free private well or drinking water testing, advises the Environmental Protection Agency. Homeowners also can reach out to a state-certified laboratory to test drinking water. These organizations can provide the most accurate results. Call the Safe

Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791.

People also can buy test kits from their local home centers or online. These tests come with a package of strips that contain reactants that change color to indicate the presence of various contaminants in the water. Keep in mind that quality control may vary, and that tests can give false readings.

Testing drinking water can alert to potential problems and compel homeowners to take action regarding contaminated water.

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# Local green thumb brightens home with plants, pots

BY SUZANNE WERRE

It's been said that necessity is the mother of invention.

It can also be said that boredom is the mother of creativity.

That's what Underwood green thumb Vanessa Mills is discovering as she recently started painting pots for her many plants, giving each one a different "identity" to go with the plants, each of whom have their own names.

"I have just been bored – I thought, what am I going to do," said Vanessa.

She was doing a little exploring on the internet and found a vase that was painted with the likeness of Elton John. She knew her mom would love it, but the company that made them didn't ship to the United States. She decided to try her own hand at painting an Elton John pot. The first one turned out so well, she painted one for herself, too.

"I love Elton John, too, but one of my favorite memories of her is singing 'Tiny Dancer' to me," said Vanessa with a smile.

In addition to the Elton John pots, Vanessa has painted several smaller pots with a variety of headdresses and women's faces – each with a luscious pair of lips.

The decorated pots add interest to her thriving indoor garden, which features a variety of different plants. She gets plenty of help caring for the plants as daughters Natalie and Ashlynn take turns spritzing them with water to make sure they have adequate "humidity" on the leaves.

Ashlynn also enjoys talking

to the plants each morning when she gets up, noted Vanessa,

"She says, oh, you look great today – good morning," said Vanessa.

The love the Mills family has for plants (Vanessa's husband Matt recently decided he's into cacti) applies to the garden outside as well. They hope to be getting that going soon, said Vanessa. The home-grown goodies are treats for the kiddos.

"In the summer, they're just out there snacking," she said. "They love the green beans, they love cherry tomatoes. They were even snacking on the lettuce last year."

This lady with the green thumb says she doesn't really have any tips on how to keep house plants alive and thriving – you just have to kind of get to know them, she said. You get to know when they need water – although she admits she sometimes has trouble not overwatering them. Sometimes it just seems like they must need a little water, even when they don't.

It's important to keep them tidy, she noted. Every Saturday they take all of the plants into the kitchen to make sure they get rid of any dead leaves, and to make sure they're doing well.

"I think it's really just trial and error, and practice," said Vanessa.

She readily admits not all of her plants have survived, but the plants generally do pretty well – even the "Drunken Gnome" air plants.

"They don't need any soil," she said, as Ashlynn and Natalie held up the tiny plants



Underwood's Vanessa Mills has embraced her indoor green thumb this year, adding even more interest to her plants by creating one-of-a-kind pots for them.

that looked like troll hair. (And they're very hardy, bouncing back quickly from a little squeeze from one of the girls.)

Her love of plants melds well with her newfound love of painting pots, and it hasn't gone unnoticed by her friends and family.

"It's just fun, and rewarding when I'm done," she said. "People are already asking for some, so maybe there's something here . . . I don't know."

She would never want to commit to a project if she wasn't sure it would turn out

## PLANT

continued on page 13



Natalie and Ashlynn Mills each hold one of their mom's air plants that look like little troll hair. The air plants don't need soil to grow.



Ashlynn Mills gives the plants a little spritz of water and a little chat as she helps her mom take care of their house plants.

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**PLANT** continued from page 12

exactly the way it's supposed to.

"I'm still kind of feeling it out a little bit. I don't commit to anybody until I know how to get it just right. I don't want to give them something that's all silly looking."

The greatest reward she gets out of her plants and pots is the interaction she has with her girls – whether it's watching them snack on the fresh carrots from the garden, or listening as they talk to their favorite Pothos and Nanook plants inside.

She loves seeing her girls thrive right along with her plants. They all get a chuckle out of one of their favorite pots as Vanessa brings it out of the bathroom. "We call it the bootie plant," she said with a smile.

"Because it's a butt," added Natalie with a giggle.

One of Vanessa's newer purchases is a miniature of the well known Easter Island heads.

The plants and their unique pots bring Vanessa and the girls a lot of joy, even if it does require some work to ensure they stay healthy. A little water, a little sunshine, and a little conversation, and some TLC – they all contribute to their healthy plants.

Like her children, the plants are different from one another. One just needs to get to know them and what they need.

"I just really think practice makes perfect," she said with a smile. "You've just got to keep trying."



Vanessa Mills recently painted two pots in the likeness of Elton John – one for her mom and one for herself.



Natalie Mills shows off her favorite little pot her mom painted, saying that she likes this one the best because of its big lips.

# Tips to improve WiFi around the house

Speedy, reliable internet is something people have quickly grown accustomed to. That's no doubt why dropped WiFi signals can be so frustrating.

Various things can contribute to slow or interrupted Wi-Fi. As a result, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to address under performing Wi-Fi. But that's good news, as it means there's an assortment of strategies that consumers can try to improve the Wi-Fi in their homes.

- **Upgrade your router.** Many people rent their routers from their internet service providers, but it may surprise some to learn that they can buy their own. Buying your own router can be beneficial in various ways, not the least of which is it can save money. Router rental fees vary, but they typically cost between \$10 and \$15 per month. Consumers will save money in the long run by buying their own router rather than renting one from their ISP. When buying their own routers, consumers also can pick from a host of options, including routers with strong performance ratings that may contribute to better WiFi performance.

- **Set up automatic firmware updates.** It's easy to forget a router after it's been plugged in and internet service starts working. However,

manufacturers routinely issue firmware updates to improve router performance. Turning on automatic updates may improve WiFi performance, and such updates also can provide a host of additional benefits, including added security measures.

- **Relocate the router.** PC-Mag.com notes that the location of the router can affect WiFi performance. If possible, locate the router in the center of the home so it can easily reach all parts of the house. Locating wireless routers away from walls and other obstructions also may improve performance.

- **Switch frequencies.** Switching frequencies can help wireless consumers whose service might be adversely affected by congestion. Consumer Reports notes that wireless congestion can affect WiFi performance in apartment buildings and densely populated neighborhoods. In such instances, consumers can check their routers to see if they're running on the 2.4 GHz frequency band. If so, switching them to the 5 GHz band, which has more channels and is likely to be less congested, may improve WiFi performance.

Slow and/or interrupted WiFi signals can be very frustrating. Thankfully, various strategies can help consumers quickly remedy such issues.




















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## Improve soil quality for a better lawn

A lush, green lawn can vastly improve a home's curb appeal. Thick, healthy grass indicates that homeowners care enough about their properties to invest the time, effort and money to make them beautiful.

According to the landscaping tool company Troy-Bilt, soil fertility is the foundation of healthy lawns. In fact, the quality of the soil is essential whether one is growing acres of grass, potted plants or vegetable garden beds. No matter which type of soil a homeowner is working with, there are various ways to make it better.

### Remove thatch

Thatch is a tightly knotted layer of leaves, grass roots, stems, and other debris that accumulates between the grass blades and the soil. Too much thatch can hinder the movement of water, air and nutrients into the soil. According to organic fertilizer company Organo-Lawn, thatch often occurs if the production of dead organic material in the lawn exceeds the

ability of the microorganisms in the soil to break down that organic matter. A half-inch of thatch is normal. If thatch gets too thick, it will need to be removed. The home improvement resource DIY Network says dethatching can take place in the summer, fall and winter using a thatching rake.

### Aerate

A lawn aerator will create holes in the soil. This can improve drainage and encourage worms and helpful microorganisms that require oxygen to thrive in the soil. The Briggs & Stratton Company says the best time to aerate a lawn is during the growing season when the grass can heal and fill in any holes, such as spring and fall. Aeration can help develop deeper grass roots for a healthier lawn.

### Test and amend soil

A great lawn has loamy soil, which has a key ratio of clay, silt and sand. Silt is a granular material of a size between sand and clay that originates from quartz and

feldspar. It is the most fertile of the three types of soil components. Sand does not retain water, but it helps to create spaces in the soil that permit air to circulate. Clay particles are small and bind together tightly, but clay is naturally nutrient-rich. The home improvement site BobVila.com says loamy soil should have equal parts sand and silt and half as much clay.

If the lawn is not yet established, loamy soil can be created and then the grass seeds planted. For established soil, after removing thatch and aerating, top-dressing the lawn can help. This involves adding a thin layer of soil over the lawn. It can improve the soil without killing the existing turf. Ideally, it should be done in early fall or spring, as this gives the grass time to grow through three to four more mowings before severe heat or cold sets in.

Healthy soil is vital to a lush lawn. It takes a little work, but improving soil can create vibrant, healthy, green grass.

## House powerwashing tips

Powerwashing, also known as pressure-washing, utilizes a high-velocity water spray to remove dirt and residue from the exterior surfaces of a home. It is frequently used on vinyl siding, concrete and sometimes wood decks to treat mildew and other growth that accumulates over time.

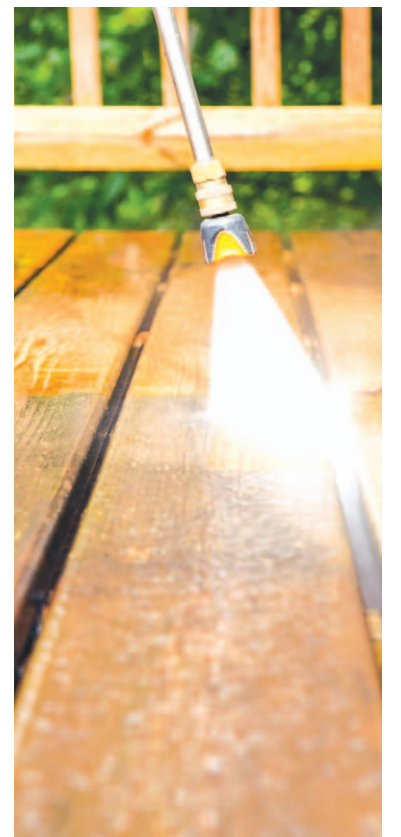
Powerwashing can be a great way to remove grime without having to scrub by hand. But it requires a delicate touch to get it right. Sometimes it is best to leave the job to professionals. But homeowners willing to give it a go can try powerwashing themselves, as various stores rent power washers.

The home improvement website ImproveNet says that, until very recently, pressure washers were almost exclusively commercial machines sold to professionals or rented to do-it-yourselfers. Lately manufacturers have targeted homeowners looking to buy with lightweight options. For those who see powerwashing as a routine venture, purchasing a unit may be worth the investment.

It is important to exercise caution when operating a powerwashing machine. The high-velocity spray can tear through skin. It is key to get a feel for the washer, and try less pressure first to get a handle on the magnitude of the tool.

Don safety gear prior to using a pressure washer. Gloves, eye protection and ear protection can be handy. Most units will connect to a standard garden hose. Choose old clothing and expect to get wet. Never point a powerwasher hose at anyone and do not attempt to rinse feet or hands in the spray.

The renovation resource The Family Handyman suggests starting with a wide-degree nozzle to test out the spray on the surface that needs to be cleaned. A 15- or 25-degree nozzle is usually the wand for general cleaning



and paint stripping without damaging the surface of the home. Experiment with an optimal distance of the washer wand to get the desired cleaning effects without causing any damage. Work using a horizontal and slightly downward angle to avoid driving water up under the siding of a home.

Avoid spraying any electric wires or components on the home. Also, try not to spray upward, and angle the spray away from doors, windows and vents.

Some washers have reservoirs that will hold a detergent solution. Choose the right detergent for the job. Keep in mind that cleansers containing bleach can damage surrounding plants, so they may need to be covered while the washing takes place.

Avoid the use of ladders when operating a powerwasher. The push-back from the wand can cause falls. Instead, opt for an extension wand to address the upper reaches of a home.

Powerwashing a home is an effective way to remove stubborn grime and refresh the look of a home's exterior.

## Making your home look like you hired a design pro

Photo spreads in home design magazines can be awe-inspiring. Quite often homeowners wish they could lift the looks right off the pages of magazines and transform their own homes into picture-perfect retreats.

It takes an eye for design to pull a room together - even with inspiration - and make it both functional and attractive. While hiring an interior designer is one way to go, homeowners can use some of the tricks and techniques the designers employ to do a remarkably good job of improving the interiors of their homes without such help.

### Embrace texture

The colors used in a home can add impact, but designers often utilize various textures to create aesthetic appeal. A single color scheme can be enhanced by various fabrics. Consider a leather sofa made more cozy with chenille pillows next to a rustic side table. Figure out ways to incorporate a few different textures to add depth to



the room.

### Be careful with color

Many high-end homes showcase neutral shades that are enhanced by pops of color. If you like a rich, royal purple, leave room for other colors as well. Add touches of purple in vases, throw pillows and other accessories.

Also, many designers work in shades of three for room colors. There may be one main

color for walls, another color for larger accents, such as couches and chairs, and then a third color that pops in accessories such as flowers, pillows and collectibles. These can be any colors, but the most muted tends to be the more abundant shade.

### Add a bit of bling

Glittery items and metallics can add a touch of luxury feel to any space. A shiny table lamp,

mirrors, a sparkling chandelier, and the like are easy ways to produce a high-end feel. Reflective surfaces also will cast light around the room, giving the illusion of a larger space.

Choose a big statement piece Many homeowners make the mistake of filling a room with several small pieces of furniture that only contribute to clutter. Instead, look for a statement piece, which can be a cabinet, armoire or chaise. Mix and match large and small elements for a sense of balance.

### Accessorize

Finish the room with accessories and flowers. When placing and hanging knickknacks and wall art, odd-numbered groupings often look the most cohesive and interesting. Experiment with different scales and heights for even more dimension.

When inspiration hits, take some cues from interior design pros to make spaces look like they belong on the pages of your favorite magazines.

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# Prevent pet-related damage to the house

The benefits of having a pet are innumerable. Pets can be companions, protectors, service animals, and even help produce products that can be sold, such as eggs from chickens. While there are many positive attributes to pets, one potential concern is the impact they have on the home.

Pet-related damage can occur when pets are angry or happy. Boisterous animals may scratch or claw at furniture and floors. Some animals may climb or chew. Woodwork and furniture can be damaged by pet paws and teeth, but that's not where it ends. The following are some potential pet-damage problems and how to avoid them.

## Marking

Many animals use scent markers to establish their territory and communicate with other animals. As a result, both male and female pets may spray urine in certain areas of the house. While it may not eliminate the problem immediately, making sure to neuter or spay cats and dogs can reduce the likelihood that they'll mark indoors or attempt to seek out and mate with feral animals they smell canvassing the property.

## Accidents

In addition to marking, pets that have not been properly trained or were trained and are experiencing a behavioral or medical issue may begin soiling in improper areas, such as outside of the litter box or in the home. Obedience training can head off some issues, but if a medical condition is suspected, consult



with a veterinarian promptly.

## Dirt, fur and more

An investment in regular grooming can help keep certain damage at bay, states Home Advisor. Regularly brushing and trimming coats, keeping nails clipped and bathing will keep a home fresh and minimize damage. Other pets may not be groomed but require cleaning of cages or other habitats. Bird droppings and feathers can get on surfaces. Cleaning daily or very frequently can help keep a home tidy.

## Provide toys and scratching posts

Pets need an outlet to tame anxiety and energy. If they don't have suitable outlets, pets may cause damage to a home. Cats will take to furniture to stretch their paws if they don't have scratching posts or special mats. Dogs, particularly puppies, can be orally fixated. When the urge to chew sets in, unless there

are appropriate chew toys, furniture, moldings and other items around the house may become fair game.

It is important to note that declawing a cat to prevent damage should not be a consideration. It is a surgery that can cause ongoing health problems. Nail caps can be used as a safe alternative.

## Escape artists

In some cases, pets may chew or scratch their way through doors and window screens. Others may dig under fencing or climb, leaving damage in their wake. Boredom, anxiety or lack of training may be behind these behaviors, according to Pets Weekly. However, the urge to roam also may be tied to pets not being fixed. Work with the vet or a trainer to help stop these issues.

Pets can cause damage around the house. But certain strategies can help decrease the likelihood that pets cause damage around the house.



# Tools that can keep people safe at home

Homes should be sanctuaries for their inhabitants. Keeping homes safe and sound requires both maintenance and some caution designed to make homes less vulnerable to potentially costly issues.

Promptly addressing maintenance issues around the house can reduce the risk of accident or injury. In addition, various items can alert homeowners to problems they may not otherwise recognize before issues jeopardize residents' health or take a turn for the costly.

## Auto shut-off features

Who hasn't left the house only to worry an hour or so later about whether the coffee pot was turned off or the straightening iron was unplugged? When shopping for personal care items or appliances, seek out models that have automatic shut-off features. This safety feature will power down the unit after a certain amount of time, which can reduce the risk of overheated products and house fires.

## Flood and leak detector

The financial information and wellness resource Canstar says leakages, burst pipes and other water-related issues in a home are one of the more common home emergencies. Water damage can cost between hundreds and thousands of dollars depending on how invasive the water problem is. Catching a leak or flood in a home early

on is essential.

Water leak detectors are designed to detect a potential flood or leak at an early stage so homeowners can take action. Sensors may sound an alarm or be connected to a WiFi system to send an alert to a mobile device.

## Carbon monoxide and gas detection

It is vital that homeowners install carbon monoxide detectors in their homes. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, and can cause poisoning that slowly suffocates a person. It also is combustible.

Carbon monoxide devices cannot detect a gas leak, but gas detectors can. They are a wise addition for people who have a significant number of natural gas appliances, or those who have older, gas-powered appliances.

## Sump pump alarm

A sump pump can mean the difference between a flooded basement and a dry floor. Homeowners may not recognize a sump pump malfunction during a power outage, and clogs also may not be detectable until the basement floods. Sump pump alarms incorporated into the system alert homeowners that something is amiss.

Homeowners can rely on devices and other tools to prevent their homes from being damaged and themselves and their families safe.

# Lawn watering and fertilizing techniques

A lush, green lawn is a sight to behold. Many variables are involved in growing and maintaining grass, and water and fertilizer are among the most important components.

Knowing how much water and fertilizer to apply and when to apply it can make a big difference in the appearance and health of a lawn. That's because a well-fed and watered lawn will develop a better root system, which makes the lawn less vulnerable to stressors like drought, mowing, foot traffic, and heat, according to the Scotts® company.

## Fertilize

There is no magic formula governing when to fertilize a lawn. The type of grass and how well-established a lawn is must be considered. Experts suggest having the soil tested to determine its pH levels and if any nutrients are lacking. A fertilizing schedule can then be developed after testing.

Keep in mind that overfeeding a lawn will not make it grow any better and actually can damage the turf. Several small applications of fertilizer during the lawn's most active growing period may be helpful, advises the home improvement resource Tools Around the House. An annual



## Water

The right watering schedule and techniques can help a lawn thrive. Scotts® says adjusting for climate and nature can help grass to grow strongly. A lawn that has a grayish cast or appears dull green is telling an owner that it needs water. Another test is to step on the lawn. If footprints disappear quickly, the grass blades have enough moisture to spring back.

Water the lawn in the morning before 10 a.m. when it's cooler and the winds tend to be calm so that the water can soak in. For those who must water at night, do so in early evening so that the water can dry before nightfall and will not contribute to disease.

Scotts® says to water an established lawn until the top six to eight inches of soil is wet. Most lawns need one to 1.5 inches of water per week from rain or a hose to soak the soil that deeply.

Newly established lawns may require more water to keep the soil moist but not soggy.

Visit a lawn care center for more information on watering the type of lawn for your area or visit [www.scotts.com](http://www.scotts.com) for additional tips.

application (late spring for warm-season grass or fall for cool-season grass) may be all that's needed.

Certain fertilizers need to be applied and watered in. Others may be combined with weed-control products and must be set on top of damp grass. Read packaging to determine the right application.

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# Planting to the max

BY RALPH MANCINI

Growing up on a northeast Kansas farm surrounded with flower beds and a vegetable garden offered Calla Edwards early exposure to horticulture. Through the years, her passion for gardening has allowed her to develop her own methods of cultivating the soil — and maximizing its potential.

As McLean County's NDSU Extension Agent, one of Edwards' primary functions is to provide educational programs in agriculture. One of her recent projects that has caught steam in the Washburn community is her downtown community garden.

Located adjacent to the softball fields and water treatment plant on 1st Avenue, the garden site — which is expanding to 15 plots this spring — has emerged as a go-to site for residents to be creative in their planting endeavors.

In an effort to augment her harvest in the area, the local grower has introduced an effective weed-mat option that's been instrumental in helping all types of flowers and naturally-grown edibles break through and flourish.

"One of my biggest issues with gardening is weeds taking over," she said. "You're just not getting as many vegetables. The weeds are out-competing them. So, one of

the biggest changes I've made is using a weed-mat product. I put it down in the garden, and I put holes in where I wanted the vegetables. That has really reduced any weed pressure."

Moreover, the weed-mat addition delivers the added benefit of retaining moisture in the soil in that it prevents it from evaporating through the mat covering. As a result, the amount of watering for her vegetation has been considerably reduced.

As for purchasing one of many types of weed mats on the market, Edwards suggests that horticulture enthusiasts consult with the South McLean County Soil Conservation District on the best varieties available. Some big-box stores, she maintained, often sell substandard weed mats that wear down after six months.

For beginners who have never run their fingers through the dirt, the married mother of one recommends that they get their soil tested before any seeding commences.

"It's just so you know that if that particular piece of land is low in calcium, you might have issues with blossoming," she continued and noted how nutrient deficiency can easily be solved by adding fertilizer.

Edwards didn't specify any fertilizing brands to address soil shortcomings, but refer-

enced the wonders of using a slow-release fertilizer that can nourish the terrain over a three-month stretch.

When asked about how often a novice should water their crops, Edwards believes that individuals simply need to employ their best judgment by paying attention to weather patterns.

If it's 90 degrees and it hasn't rained in two weeks, for instance, she endorses watering every few days.

On the topic of warding off furry animals — i.e., deer, rabbits, et. al. — Edwards sang the virtues of Plantskydd as a pest-control brand that keeps area wildlife from interfering with plant and/or vegetable growth.

But beyond all the variables that one should be aware of, Edwards reminds aspiring growers that North Dakota's climate is quite possibly the most important aspect when it comes to achieving success in the garden.

"You can grow just about anything in North Dakota. What you need to pay attention to with things like pumpkin and watermelon is that you want varieties that are earlier in maturing. There are really cool pumpkins that ripen in 115 days — we don't have 115 days of growing season in North Dakota."



Calla Edwards' love for agriculture and floriculture are evident in her plantings at Washburn's community garden. (Photo: Ralph Mancini)

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