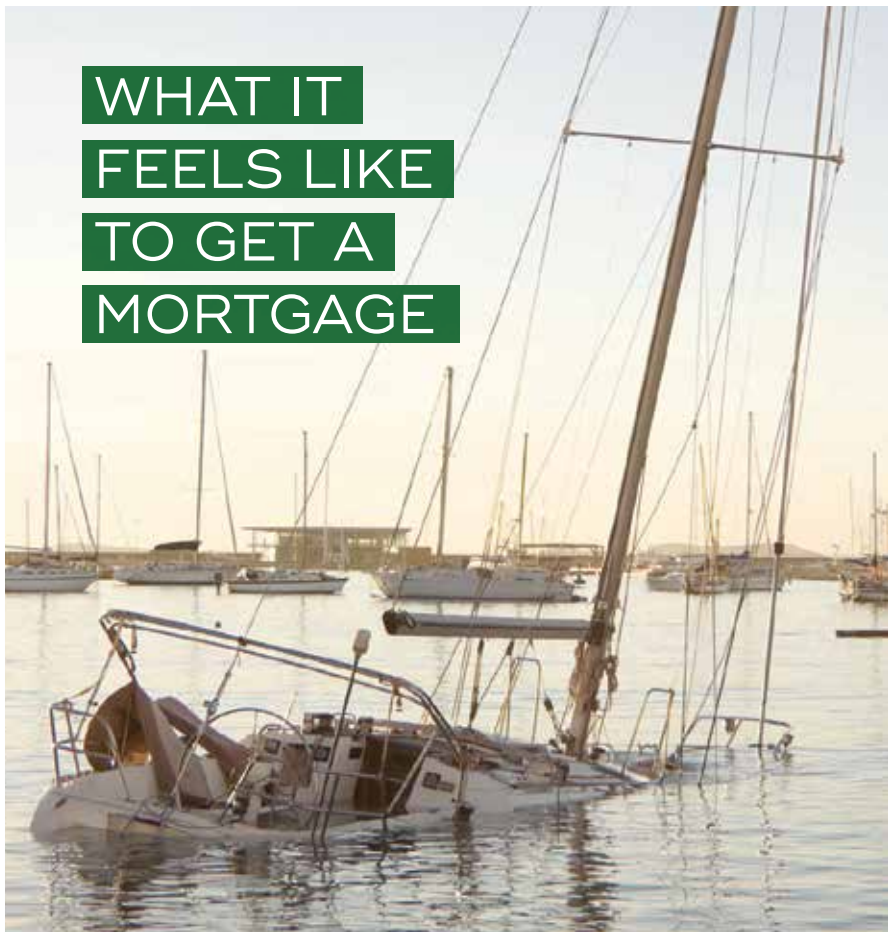




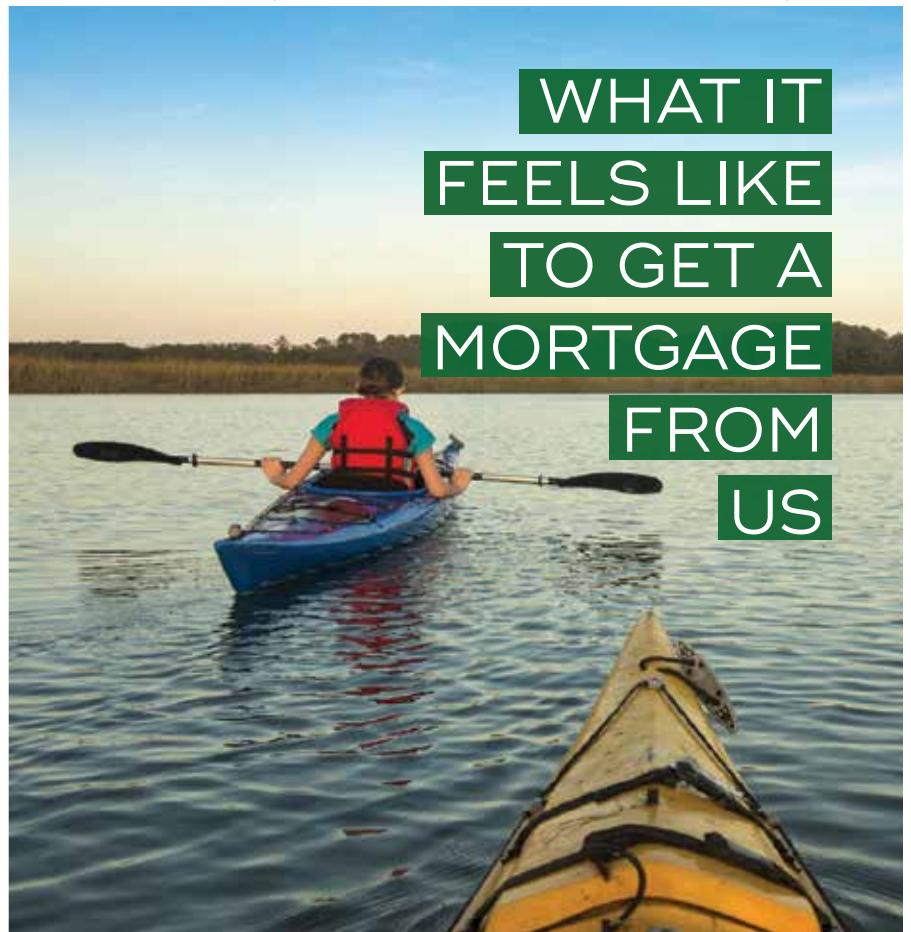
Spring
HOME
AND
Garden

Thursday
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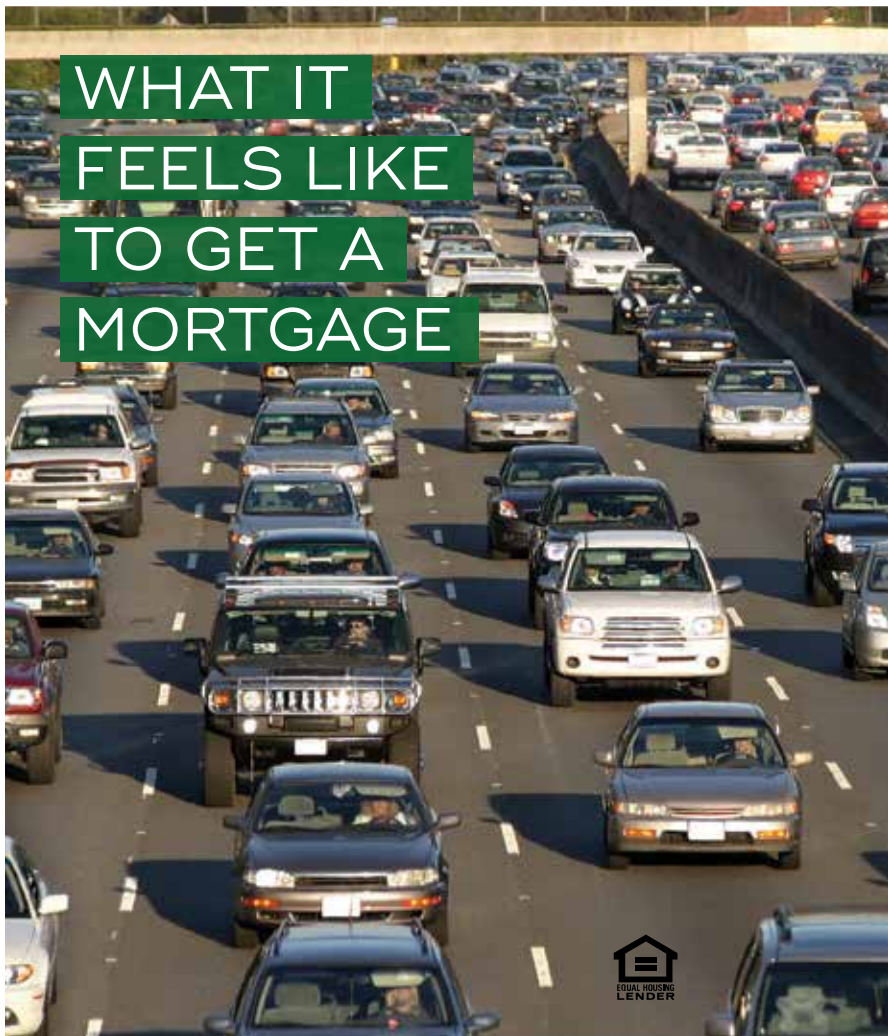
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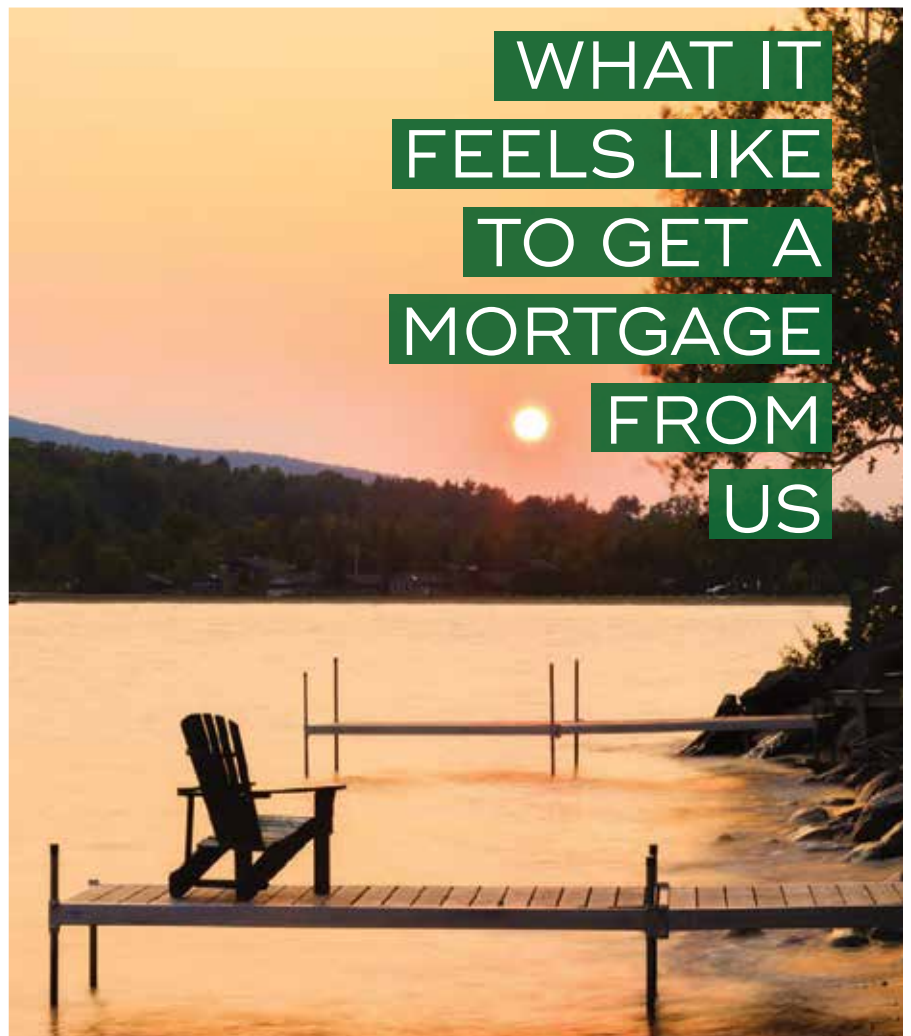


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Don't ignore these essential spring chores

HOMEBUILDERS & REMODELERS ASSOCIATION OF MAINE
Special to Spring Home & Garden

With winter finally gone and warmer weather on the way, it's time to tackle all that spring cleaning. It can be a lengthy process, but it's important that you don't miss these steps.

Winter can be rough on the exterior of your home, so you should start on it before the spring rains cause more problems:

Clean out the gutters of any debris left over from the winter storms and check to make sure your gutters are still securely fastened.

Clear away all debris from your exterior drains. This will allow the heavy spring rains to properly flow and prevent back-ups.

Check your windows for any cracking or splitting from the caulk. If so, clean off the mildew and replace the caulk.

The warming weather will inevitably lead to outdoor entertaining, so don't forget to **clean your patio furniture**, using a mild soap and warm water. Gently scrub away any dirt that has collected over the winter. If you have wrought-iron and rust has started forming, gently sand it off.

When spring rains interfere with your outdoor-project plans, look to your home's **interior**.

Unplug your refrigerator, slide it away from the wall, and vacuum the dust that has accumulated on the condenser coils. This task may seem small, but can greatly extend the life of your refrigerator.

Vacuum out dust that is sticking to your air vents. After the vents are clear of dust, apply a thin layer of car wax on all surfaces of the vent to prevent dust from sticking and to allow for easier airflow.

There are also a few spring chores that should be done by professionals.

If you built a lot of fires over the winter, **have a CSIA-Cer-**



tified (www.csia.org) chimney sweep inspect your chimney and fireplace. This should be done annually to prevent house fires.

(Bonus tip: Throw a handful of salt into a fire to prevent soot and add some color to the flame.)

Have a contractor certified by the National Roofing Contractors Association (www.nrca.net) inspect your

roof for any missing, warped or loose shingles, and check for loose seals on your skylights.

Before the weather warms up too much, **have your HVAC system inspected by a qualified technician** and, if needed, replace your filters.

For more information, please visit www.hbrame.org.

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“If you are thinking of getting into bee-keeping, I highly recommend joining a club. You learn everything you need to know, get mentored and can even buy a starter kit from a member.”

**BRITTNEY FAIRFIELD
FAIRFIELD FAMILY
HOMESTEAD IN ROME**

*Photos courtesy of
Brittney Fairfield*

Fairfields of all ages are busy working in the raised bed garden plots.

A new generation is living the good life

BY KATE CONE
Correspondent

The most public and admired American homesteaders were Helen and Scott Nearing, authors of “Living the Good Life,” who left the bustle of New York City in the early decades of the 1900s for rural Vermont. They ended up in Harborside, Maine, where they lived sustainably for decades. It agreed with them. Scott lived until age 100, Helen until 91.

What exactly is homesteading? Brittney Fairfield of the Fairfield Family Homestead in Rome, Maine described it this way: “Homesteading...is more of a process than a result. It is [asking] a persistent question: How can I become more self-reliant?”

From simple steps like drying clothes on a clothesline instead of in an electric dryer to bigger ones like installing solar panels to power your house, homesteading allows people to save money, have more control over their lives, help the community and even the planet.

Start a garden to grow your own vegetables, learn to put food “by” so you have it in winter, keep chickens for fresh eggs, get some bee hives for honey, but even more, to help pollinate crops. Those and many more fun, very do-able projects define homesteading. The entire family can get involved.

“My daughter is eight and she helps in the garden,” said Brittney Fairfield, and my three-year-old son loves to do everything. He’d put on a bee suit and get right into the hives if I let him.”

A native Mainer, Fairfield lives in the house where she grew up and gardens, keeps chickens and bees on its one-acre spread. Both she and her husband Ryan have their bachelor’s degrees from the University of Maine. Ryan Fairfield works at Johnny’s Selected Seeds and forages for mushrooms and other foods found in the wild, cooks and shoulders tasks at home in off-work hours.

Brittney Fairfield explains how they began creating their own homestead.

“It has been a gradual process for us that started



A garden bounty after picking.

when we decided to get chickens. After enjoying having our own eggs, we began small-scale gardening: cucumbers, tomatoes, pole beans and zucchini. Since then, we have turned most of our lawn into garden plots and have added garlic, potatoes, onions and asparagus. I also plant a variety of herbs and flowers for my honey bees and other pollinators – hyssop, lavender, basil, chives, catnip, bee balm and mint.”

From gardening, the Fairfields eventually got into keeping bees, joining the Kennebec Beekeepers Asso-

ciation, which meets at the Viles Arboretum in Augusta twice a month.

“If you are thinking of getting into bee-keeping, I highly recommend joining a club. You learn everything you need to know, get mentored and can even buy a starter kit from a member.”

Not only do bees provide honey for home use or gifting, they pollinate crops.

“Before we got the bees, we had lemon cucumbers, round and yellow, hence the name. After the bees went to work, our crop of those cucumbers tripled at least,” she said.

What is the initial investment for getting into the bee aspect of homesteading?

“I got my setup from another member of the Kennebec Beekeepers Association for \$165. But there are places in Maine where you can go, depending on where you are. Swan’s Honey in Albion, Spicer Bees in Whitefield and Humble Abodes in Windsor can get people started.” And, she adds, “read, read, read.”

Homesteading is guided by the seasons and in winter, the bees need tending. They have to be wintered over, which means keeping them warm in the frigid weather.

“The biggest killer is moisture, but there is a type of board you put over the hive to absorb that. “Winter time for beekeepers is equal parts boring and stressful,” said Fairfield, “I wait and hope I’ve done everything I could to ensure their survival through the brutal winter.”

The reward comes in June and again in the fall, when she harvests the honey, making certain she leaves enough for the bees as a food source through winter and early spring, until they can find another food source.

At some point you get to cook all that food that’s produced or found. That falls to Ryan Fairfield, who also forages the countryside for mushrooms.

“My favorite recipes use ingredients foraged from the forest. It’s not only an adventure to find the ingredients, but it’s an adventure to eat them. It’s exciting to use

More HOMESTEADING, PAGE 5

Homesteading

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

items you can't find in a grocery store."

Among his trove of recipes are Black Trumpet mushroom pizza, beer-battered Dryad's Saddle mushrooms, Cattail pollen pancakes, and Bears Head Tooth mushroom "crab" cakes.

"We like to pickle everything from cucumbers to beans to beets, garlic scapes and eggs," he said. "If it can be pickled, we're going to try it. Last year I pickled Day Lily buds and fiddlehead ferns, which were both delicious."

Both Ryan and Brittney Fairfield encourage people interested in following in their footsteps to read everything they can about the various aspects of homesteading. Eventually, they would like to spread the word.

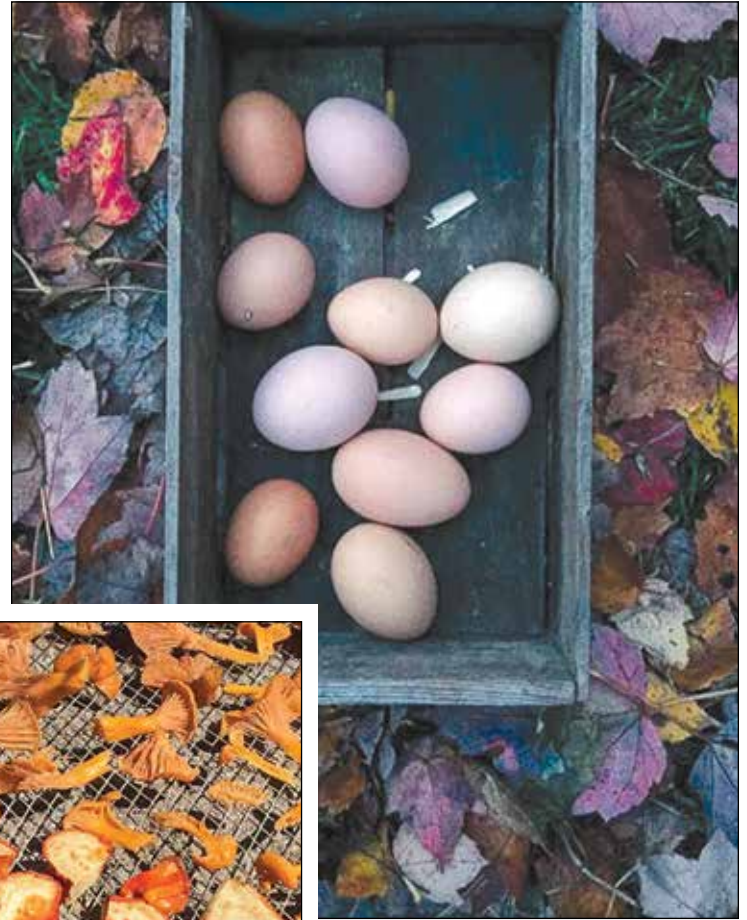
"I would love to teach classes," Brittney Fairfield said.

And that is helping the community, an important part of the homesteading process.

She invited those interested to email her for more information about getting started at Brittney.fairfield@gmail.com.



Dill pickles are only one of many foods they can and preserve.



Fresh eggs daily: the benefit of having chickens.



After foraging for mushrooms, Ryan Fairfield dries them for later use.

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Is it time to design a new bathroom or kitchen?

BY SUSAN VARNEY
Correspondent

Create a spa or a wash room. A bath with a laundry area. A place of serenity with a soaker tub or a custom tile shower with a rainfall shower head above and a seat to relax.

"We can design a totally hands-free bathroom with automatic toothpaste and soap dispensers, heated toilet seat or bidet, touchless faucets, heated floor and a radio in the ceiling fan," said Chelsea Cyr, designer at HomeStyle Kitchen and Bath at 321 Main Street, Waterville.

The designers work on computers to create the space you want and customers do mock-ups of possible designs as well so it looks a little chaotic at times in the small showroom. An appointment is needed especially now in the busy season when hearts turn to building and refurbishing the nest.

Perhaps it's a first home or a retirement home – there are distinct needs for every age group.

"We don't have a lot of bath items here, we work with other companies like F.W. Webb in the Oakland industrial Park or Hammond Lumber. We design and color coordinate, matching tiles and finding the faucets and bath items the customer wants," said April Cyr, owner and designer at Home Style Kitchen and Bath.

The business welcomes homeowners who are building a new home or remodeling and need interior design and space-planning ideas. They collaborate with the customer and contractor to complete the project, hoping to relieve the stress of several decisions that need to be made.

"We believe the time and attention spent with each client is well worth the final result, knowing the homeowner is extremely happy with their home," said April Cyr. She and her daughter and co-designer, Chelsea Cyr will work relentlessly to satisfy a customer's dreams and at the same time, keep the budget in mind.

The business works with contractors in the greater Waterville/Augusta area and can help with the selection of the right contractor for the project. They also have a list of qualified

plumbers, electricians and tile installers they can recommend.

An appointment to visit a customer's home to talk about ideas and take measurements is then turned into a 3-D design to provide a view of what your space could look like. Once the homeowner is happy, a quote is provided for the materials needed. The design will evolve and become the kitchen or bathroom a client was hoping for.

"Sometimes a home owner brings in a picture from a magazine of something they like. I try to find the item, figure out what is important to them and work with the space they have to design a beautiful functional space," said Chelsea Cyr.

"If it's a kitchen, I need to know if they cook a lot, do they use a lot of herbs and spices, what tools are important and is it an eat-in or out space, is there a view, what is the flow," she said. "It's all important in creating an efficient and beautiful space for the owner."

"The best advice is to plan early, it is never too soon to find out what is needed for a home project. Cabinet companies range from a 3-6 week delivery time from date of order."

For more information visit homestylekitchensandbaths.com/baths/ or call 859-3250.

Houle's Plumbing Heating & Air Conditioning, 19 North Street in Waterville is celebrating 70 years of service to the area. Houle's has a fully-stocked showroom on North Street with sinks, toilets, faucets, indoor and outdoor lighting, showers, tubs and vanities, heating and cooling systems, kitchen and bath fixtures, water heaters and conditioners. Protection plans are available for tune-up, inspection and replacement of parts for heating systems. For information call 872-6762.

Winslow Supply, located at 567 Benton Avenue in Winslow, is a wholesale and retail plumbing, heating and electrical supply store where locals go for parts and supplies when working on small or large jobs from installation to repair. They have a reputation for being a great place to go if you are a do-it-yourselfer because the staff is knowledgeable and helpful with advice and problem solving. You can reach them at 873-5608.



HomeStyle Kitchen and Bath contributed photo

HomeStyle Kitchens and Baths, Inc. is a one-stop-shop to put products such as cabinet doors, countertop samples, flooring, tile backsplash, sinks, faucets, lighting and hardware together and create your design portfolio.



HomeStyle Kitchen and Bath contributed photo
Open and airy bathroom design.



Susan Varney photos
April Cyr, top, owner and designer of HomeStyle Kitchen and Bath at 321 Main Street Waterville. Bottom, Chelsea Cyr, designer at HomeStyle Kitchen and Bath.



"Sometimes a home owner brings in a picture from a magazine of something they like. I try to find the item, figure out what is important to them and work with the space they have to design a beautiful functional space."

**CHELSEA CYR,
DESIGNER, HOMESTYLE
KITCHEN AND BATH**

Thinking about home remodeling?

Start with plenty of planning

HOMEBUILDERS & REMODELERS ASSOCIATION OF MAINE
Special to *Spring Home & Garden*

The moment may come when you realize that avocado green and harvest gold are no longer the “in” colors for today’s trendy kitchens.

Or perhaps you have an epiphany one day as you stand in line to use your own bathroom.

But sooner or later, you will probably join the millions of people who remodel their homes each year. Whatever the impetus, this thought crosses your mind: Maybe it’s time.

The reasons for home remodeling are as varied as the projects we undertake: Adding more space; upgrading cabinets, counters, appliances and fixtures; creating a floor plan that’s customized for your lifestyle; improving energy efficiency with new windows, doors, insulation, and climate control systems.

Where to begin? The first step is to develop an idea of what you want to do with your home remodel-

el. Write a prioritized list of your needs and wants.

There are many sources to find design ideas for your home remodeling project. Look at magazines and websites and collect pictures of homes or remodeling projects you like. The more clearly you can envision the project and describe it on paper, the better prepared you’ll be in making your decision.

Think about traffic patterns, furniture size and placement, colors, lighting and how you expect to use the remodeled space.

If your decision to remodel involves creating better access for someone with limited mobility, you may want to consider contacting a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist.

If you are seeking to improve efficiency, consider hiring a professional remodeler for “green” renovation. These projects include replacing windows and doors, upgrading heating and cooling systems, adding insulation, and other remodeling to make the home more energy-efficient, easi-



er to maintain, and comfortable.

It’s essential to create a budget. How much money do you want to spend on remodeling, furnishings, landscaping or any other undertaking?

Can you do it yourself? For the

handyman or woman, a do-it-yourself project can be both rewarding and cost-effective. Note, however, that more than 30 percent of all jobs done by professionals are undertaken after failed DIY projects.

Hiring a professional remodeler

– dedicated to maintaining the highest integrity and standards in the industry – is the best way to ensure your project’s success.

For more information, please visit www.hbrame.org.

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email CJ McKenna at cmckenna@kvcc.me.edu

Flowers for both sun and shade

BY KATE CONE
Correspondent

There are some myths attached to growing plants and flowers. A big one is that there is such a thing as a “black thumb,” which is the inability to grow anything, or to kill a plant that’s already thriving. But flowers, with their colors, shapes and fragrance can be rewarding to grow and worth the effort of curing that ailing thumb. And flowers attract butterflies, bees and other pollinators, and that helps the environment. Indoors, they clean the air. But bottom line is, flowers are beautiful and it’s not as hard to begin gardening with them as one might think. Here are some pointers and sage advice from local experts that will get you going down the right garden path.

Location and light

First, no one really has a black thumb. You may not have chosen the right location for your garden. And before you can choose a location, you must assess how much sunlight graces the area in which you may deposit those lovely flowers in the ground. Says Will Longfellow, General Manager of Longfellow Greenhouses in Manchester, who grew up working in the greenhouses established by his grandparents in 1977, “It’s widely accepted that for flowers that require sun, they need at least six hours a day of light. If they are labeled as shade plants, they need at least four hours of early morning or evening light – no direct mid-day sun.”

Some popular flowers of the sun type are pansies, violas, petunias, geraniums, marigolds and alyssum. For shade, consider begonias, impatiens, coleus or fuchsia.

“All the flowers we sell are appropriate for growing in Kennebec County,” adds Longfellow.

Many gardening books or online resources can help a beginner gardener plan a flower garden in terms of what to put where. But even choosing the right book or website can be daunting. Call on the local nursery staff. They grow the plants, after all, for this specific climate zone, and once the amount of light is determined, can point you in the right direction.

Soil

Ellen Withee has been working at Boynton’s Greenhouses in Skowhegan for 35 years and is the granddaughter of the original owners, Robert and Doris Boynton, who opened the business in 1952. When it comes to advice about soil, she said, “People have to know when their soil is going to become



Begonias make beautiful windowboxes and pot plantings.

Photo courtesy of Will Longfellow, Longfellow’s Greenhouses

dry after winter. You can’t plant in a mud box. Is it clay? Is it sandy? Does it collect water?”

If you already know, you’re halfway there. If you don’t know, you can take a soil test, which the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service says, “will help you manage the mineral nutrition of your plants.” For details on how to take a test of your potential garden soil, see Bulletin #2286, Testing Your Soil.

Annuals or perennials

The simplest definition: annuals last a year, perennials grow back year after year.

“I grow both perennials and annuals in my garden,” said Withee. I love colorful annuals and have flowers everywhere.”

For a tried and true perennial requiring full sun, she recommends the easy-to-grow Coneflower (Echinacea) varieties.

“They prefer poor soil, attract pollinators like hummingbirds and butterflies and bloom in the heat of summer.”

For annuals? Pansies and impatiens are two that top the list.

Taylor Browne has been working at Black-Eyed Susan’s in Augusta for sixteen of their thirty-plus years in business.

“The best color blooms are the

ones that thrive in full sun,” he said, “like geraniums, and a customer favorite, lisianthus. But breeders are doing interesting things and even in partial sun/shade you can now get spectacular color in flowers like the New Guinea impatiens with orange, pink, purple, yellow and white.”

Containers

If your soil isn’t ideal, or if the deck or doorstep need some plant life, consider container gardening. At Sunset Flowerland and Greenhouses in Fairfield, there since 1954, they prepare their own potting soil, perfect for starting that container project. Again, note the type of light in the area that will contain those containers and choose accordingly. Boynton’s Ellen Withee said, “Don’t give up if you can’t have a garden. When I had an apartment years ago, I had all kinds of pots of plants outside my door. Breeders are coming up with smaller plants better suited to containers.”

Turning that black thumb into a green one can happen with a simple trip to your local nursery and greenhouse. Those colors and perfumed blossoms beckon. Come summer, your yard or deck will be in full color, you’ll be astounded by the hummingbirds visiting your blooms and the effort will be well repaid.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Longfellow’s Greenhouses

81 Puddledock Rd., Manchester.

Call 622-5965 or visit

longfellowsgreenhouses.com

Open Monday – Sunday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sunset Flowerland & Greenhouses

491 Ridge Rd. Fairfield.

Call 453-6036 or visit

sunsetgreenhouses.com

Open Monday - Saturday 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and
Sunday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Black-Eyed Susan’s Greenhouses

45 Stevens Rd., Augusta

Call 622-3927 or visit us on Facebook

Opens on April 20 and stays open through June.

Boynton’s Greenhouses

144 Madison Avenue, Skowhegan.

Call 474-2892 or visit

boyntonsgreenhouses.com

Open Monday -Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Closed on Sundays.

For more information on gardening in Maine, visit the **Maine Cooperative Extension** website at extension.maine.edu

Or write: Cooperative Extension Publications, University of Maine

5741 Libby Hall, Room 114 Orono, ME 04469-5741
or call 581-3792.

“It’s widely accepted that for flowers that require sun, they need at least six hours a day of light. If they are labeled as shade plants, they need at least four hours of early morning or evening light – no direct mid-day sun.”

**WILL LONGFELLOW, GENERAL MANAGER
LONGFELLOW GREENHOUSES**



Bee Balm.



Above: Echinacea and butterfly.

Photos courtesy of Ellen Withee, Boynton's Greenhouses



*Photos courtesy of Will Longfellow,
Longfellow's Greenhouses*

Above: Astilbe Perennial.

Above right: Pink peony, perennial.

At right: Hosta, shade perennial.



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There's always something new at Maine Wood Heat Co. Inc.

BY SUSAN VARNEY
Correspondent

Maine Wood Heat, makers of artisanal wood-fired ovens, mobile wood-fired ovens, pizza ovens and masonry heaters was founded in 1976 and is owned by Albie & Cheryl Barden and their son Scott.

For more than thirty years, their mission at Maine Wood Heat has been to introduce high efficiency, environmentally-friendly, clean-burning and health-giving wood burning masonry heaters, cooking and baking systems to North America.

“Our philosophy has always been to build and promote the greenest, most efficient, and beautiful products we can.”

In addition to designing and building heaters throughout the US and importing masonry heater hardware from Finland, Albie Barden began teaching hands-on workshops in masonry heater construction in 1978. He has also written several manuals on Finnish and Russian Fireplace and cook stove construction.

About twenty-one years ago, Barden decided to add wood-fired ovens to the products and services the company offers. In France, he found Le Panyol, a family-owned business that has been producing artisan 100 percent organic wood-fired ovens since 1840. The clay used in making the ovens is from organic sources. Maine Wood Heat became Le Panyol's North American partner and importer, selling and installing wood-fired ovens in homes, bakeries and restaurants from coast to coast.

Always looking for new directions to add to the company's products and services, Maine Wood Heat also creates signs like the one at Skowhegan Fleuriste in downtown Skowhegan and other projects such as a cheese smoker, table tops and bases and evaporators.

If you have a custom project that's not a pizza oven or a heater, Maine Wood Heat may be able to help with it. The business is always looking to diversify and create pieces of work that might be just what a business needs.

Maine Wood Heat is located at 8 Industrial Park Road in Skowhegan. For more information or help with your special project get in touch by visiting mainewoodheat.com or call 474-7465.

Also you may want to check out Albie's Blog on the company's website for news, views, recipes and travels of the Bardens and staff as they design, build and install the products created in Skowhegan.

This is a busy time of year for all Mainers as we come out from under the weight of a long cold winter and get onto all those projects we have been dreaming and planning. Make one of those dreams a reality by checking out Maine Wood Heat.



Maine Wood Heat contributed photos

Above, the Bardens at Maine Wood Heat Co. Inc. Skowhegan, with one of their beautiful mobile ovens.

Below, some of their other metal handiwork — a sign for Skowhegan Fleuriste made in metal. A decorative outdoor table top includes a wave motif around the edge. At right, other metal creations by Maine Wood Heat.



SPRING HOME IMPROVEMENT



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Better study up before you buy those chicks

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

Raising chickens has become very popular because people often enjoy the experience of caring for them and eating fresh eggs. However, Sean Ball, manager of the Paris Farmers Union Store in Newport, said that customers who plan to raise chickens should do some practical homework first.

Some municipalities have strict local ordinances, zoning laws and property association rules that limit or prohibit raising chickens. Individuals should check with code enforcement officers to see if permits are required. He suggested new owners decide whether to raise meat chicks, laying chicks or both. Different breeds have different temperaments and living space requirements. An outside space should allow at least 6 square feet per average-sized bird while the coop should allow 2-3 square feet per bird.

"Be absolutely sure both the outside area and the coop have no place for predators to climb through or under," he said.

Chickens are prized as food by hawks, dogs, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, foxes, rats and weasels. They climb fences, dig under floorboards and squeeze through tiny knotholes. A sturdy outside fence with one-inch chicken wire should measure six feet high and be fastened securely to the ground to keep chickens in and predators out. Sturdy netting over the top adds protection. Be sure to shut chickens in each evening and regularly check both the inside and outside spaces for any new holes or breaks.

When starting with baby chicks, plan in advance for special care. Disinfect a dry, draft-free area and spread two to three inches of litter, preferably wood shavings. Ball said warmth is critical for these little ones. A brooder guard, which can be a cardboard box or a circular cardboard fence, confines the chicks near the heat source in a draft-free area. A 250-watt infra-red bulb hung 18 inches from the area provides the extra warmth. Make sure the area provides plenty of space, he advised.

"Chicks need to be able to move away from the heat if they're too warm," he said.

Turn lamps on the day before chicks arrive to prepare and warm the litter.

"The bedding should be warm to the touch," Ball said.

Happy chicks should form a loose circle under the lamp. They do well with 24 hours of light the first week, but reduce the light to 12-13 hours later. At six weeks, and depending on the weather, move the checks to the coop and use the same litter used in the brooder. Cleanliness is the key to success.

"Water and containers and feed pans or troughs must be kept very clean," he said. "Bacteria can spread quickly and kill a flock with little advance warning."

Ball said Paris Farmer's Union locations carry all the building equipment, fencing, feed and nutritional supplements that chickens will need at every stage of their lives. They also provide plenty of expert information about critical components

Because chickens are prized as food by hawks, dogs, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, foxes, rats and weasels. "Be absolutely sure both the outside area and the coop have no place for predators to climb through or under."

SEAN BALL, MANAGER, PARIS FARMERS UNION, NEWPORT



Photo contributed by
Newport Paris Farmers Union

Raising chickens for meat, eggs or simply for enjoyment requires owners' care and attention for a flock to thrive. If starting with baby chicks, start with a disinfected, dry, draft-free area and spread two to three inches of litter, preferably wood shavings. Sean Ball, manager of the Paris Farmers Union in Newport, said warmth is critical for these little ones. Paris Farmers Union offers excellent handbooks, including Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens, with instructions for shelter, food, health care, breeds and anatomy.

of a successful start. Chicks up to eight weeks old should eat a "chick starter" diet, following bag directions.

"Don't buy more than a month's supply at a time," Ball said. "Vitamins deteriorate and won't help the chicks thrive."

Change their diet to a growing ration at eight weeks, a maintenance ration at 14 weeks, and a laying ration by 20 weeks.

"Don't add anything extra," Ball advised.

Manure removed from coops should be aged in a compost bin, because it's very potent and can burn plants if applied too soon.

Small-scale farmers shouldn't expect to save a lot of grocery money by raising a handful of chickens. They will have to buy younger hens to replace the older layers if they need a certain

quantity of eggs per day.

"A one-two-year old hen will lay an egg or two a day," Ball said. "Four years is about the end of their cycle."

A flock doesn't need a rooster to produce eggs. Chickens start laying by 20 weeks and they can be encouraged to go to specific places by placing an egg-shaped or round object in the nest. Three 1 cubic foot straw-filled nest boxes in a dark corner will serve a dozen hens. Chickens love roosts but they aren't necessary.

Ball said Paris Farmers Union offers excellent handbooks with instructions for shelter, food, health care and information about breeds, anatomy and health of chickens.

"Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens" is excellent," he said.

Owners should learn about vaccinations, illnesses and symptoms. Even though it's a chance for children to learn about the life cycle of an animal, be prepared for the eventual demise of members of the flock, he added. Paris Farmer's Union at 12 Progress Park South in Newport can be reached by calling 368-4329. Hours are Mon.-Fri. 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m., Sat. 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun. 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

For more information check newport@parisfarmersunion.net

Paris Farmers Union second location is at 83 Royal Street in Winthrop, Call 377-2614 or visit winthrop@parisfarmersunion.net Hours are Mon.-Fri. 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m., Sat. 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun. 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Simple maintenance projects to keep cars running smoothly

One of the ways to keep vehicles running strong for years on end is to adhere to the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule. Although there are many factors drivers cannot control, including recalls, weather and road conditions, proper maintenance is something drivers can control, and maintaining a vehicle can be very simple.

Oil changes

Motor oil lubricates the engine and keeps it in good working order. Old oil becomes more viscous and can lose its efficacy. While changing motor oil is important, motorists should follow the owner's manual or the factory maintenance schedule regarding how often it needs to be changed, as all vehicles are not alike. The old myth that cars and trucks need oil changes at set intervals has changed as digital check capabilities have evolved.

Car computers can now keep track of more than just mileage. Computers now track starts and stops and trip durations to determine when cars need oil changes.



Coolant levels

Coolant helps prevent vehicles from overheating and also prevents the water that it mixes with in the radiator from freezing or boiling. Coolant is nearly as important as motor oil in vehicle maintenance. Coolant is typically comprised of a 50/50 mix of dis-

tilled water and antifreeze. These two substances work together to maintain a proper ratio of heat energy and prevent eventual breakdown and destruction of the engine.

Coolant is usually changed once per year or at 30,000 miles. This keeps the coolant working

properly and will help prevent corrosion and deposits from forming inside the cooling system. Coolant levels might be checked during a full-service oil change appointment.

Check battery contacts

Many modern car batteries do

not require a lot of maintenance. However, one problem that may occur is a buildup of minerals or corrosion from leaking battery fluid on the contacts. In such instances, use a battery cleaning brush to clean the contacts and then replace the cables.

Tire maintenance

Properly inflated, balanced and rotated tires make for a smooth, safe ride. Check that tires are wearing evenly and that the vehicle is not pulling to one side. A lack of tread on tires requires they be replaced. Because tires can be expensive, many drivers put off routine tire maintenance. But this can be a costly mistake. Tires that are worn or not properly inflated can cause skidding, problems braking and accidents. Blowouts also may occur, putting drivers, their passengers and fellow motorists in danger. It's best to be proactive with regard to tire maintenance.

Maintaining a vehicle in adherence to manufacturer guidelines can prolong the life of the car, improve its safety and increase its trade-in or resale value.

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How to approach buying a pool or spa

Spring swimming pool installation tips



Many homeowners feel pools or spas are must-have features as they attempt to turn their homes into their own personal oases. The decision to get a pool or a hot tub is not one to take lightly. Significant purchases, pools and/or spas can affect the value of a home and also require various safety modifications. Taking a thoughtful approach when considering adding pools and/or spas to their homes can help homeowners rest easy knowing they made the right decision.

- **Do your research first.** When making any decision, it's best to be well-informed. Read reviews on products and find out the base prices of certain pool models so you'll have a system of comparison. Choose the type and size of pool you want. Other factors, such as the material used in the pool (i.e., concrete, metal, fiberglass, or vinyl) and filtration methods, also can affect the price, so consider each of these factors carefully before making your decision.

- **Determine why you want a pool or spa.** The type of pool or spa you ultimately choose should depend on how you plan to use the pool. If you want a pool mainly for family entertainment, then you may want to add mood lighting or special landscaping features. If you simply want something in which you can cool off, a basic model may be most practical. If your spa is intended for therapeutic purposes, look for ones with multipositional water jets or other specialized features. Don't fall into the trap that a large pool with a deep diving area is best. Young children and many adults do not frequently use the deep end, and you may end up with wasted pool space.

- **Find a good time to buy.** Fall and winter are some of the best times to get deals on pool and spa equipment because it's no longer prime swimming season. However, there are deals to be had come early spring as well. Retailers may deeply discount last year's models to make room for new inventory. You always can negotiate if the price is just a bit beyond your reach. Retailers may be motivated to make sales in the offseason, so try to use that motivation to your advantage.

- **Recognize there will be extra costs.** Some retailers sell pools and spas but do not arrange for installation. Realize that an inground pool will require excavation, and your yard may need to be regraded to allow for rain run-off. Electricians and landscapers are some additional costs to factor in. Make sure you understand the bigger picture and account for the total cost of modifying the yard.

- **Inquire about insurance.** Speak with the pool installer about any liability and compensation insurance they may carry to protect you in the event of an accident during the installation of the pool. Reputable builders should be fully insured.

- **Learn about zoning laws and other ordinances.** Rules regarding pool placement and size will vary depending on local laws. Always consult with the town's municipal office and get the proper permits. Otherwise, you may face fines and be forced to spend more to fix problems that need to be addressed.

Pools can be entertaining additions to a home. When considering the addition of a pool to their properties, homeowners should take their time and make sure it's the right decision for them.

Now that the weather is warming up, many homeowners' thoughts are drifting toward relaxing days spent soaking up some sun by the pool. Early spring is a great time to install a pool so the family has a go-to hangout by the time summer arrives.

Installing a pool is a large financial investment, and homeowners considering adding a pool should not take that decision lightly. When attempting to determine if a pool is for them, homeowners may want to ask themselves the following questions.

Is my yard suitable for a pool?

Some yards may not be large enough for pools, while others may not meet the zoning requirements set forth by the town. Still other yards may have soil that's not suitable for putting in an inground pool, or may have a high water table that can delay construction.

What is the average weather?

Will a pool be enjoyed enough to warrant the cost? Homeowners who live in areas that get many hot days will likely get their money's worth. But if the climate suggests that a pool will sit unused more often than not, perhaps a pool is not the best investment.

Can we afford it?

A pool can range from a few hundred dollars for inflatable or self-installing models to many thousands for elaborate inground designs. Your budget will dictate which type of pool you can afford to install.

How will we use the pool?

Decide if you're putting in a pool for the kids, to entertain the family or to make an architectural statement in the yard. Having a clear sense of purpose will help to guide the decision-making process.

Who will maintain the pool?

Many homeowners tackle the day-to-day maintenance required to keep their pools clean and safe. Others hire pool cleaners to maintain their pools and ensure the water is properly balanced. Maintenance can cost additional money, so consider this potential cost when determining if a pool is for you.

Are there any safety concerns?

Parents of young children may be hesitant to install a pool, but today's pool installation codes consider many of the potential hazards of a pool and attempt to eliminate them. Fences surrounding inground pools with self-locking gates, as well as locking ladders for above-ground pools can eliminate accidental falls into unattended pools. Your municipality will have a list of requirements for pools, so peruse the list prior to making your final decision.

If the decision has been made to move ahead with a pool, it can be helpful to understand a few facts about the process of installing a pool.

Always work with a pool-installation company that has earned positive reviews and has a stellar record of service. While this does not guarantee that the job will not encounter problems, contractors with glowing reviews tend to have earned those reviews. Read reviews from unbiased, online customers as well as any friends or family members who have used

a particular pool company.

It's important that homeowners recognize that the installation of a pool may require some heavy machinery, which can damage lawns. Fence panels may have to be removed to let in excavation equipment. Sand, soil backfill or gravel may be needed to level out a landscape, and things may get noisy and messy when the installation hits full swing.

Some homeowners can handle installing above-ground pools on their own, but less DIY-savvy homeowners may want to leave the installation to a professional installer to ensure the job is done right.

Always secure the proper permits and inspections prior to using the pool. This not only ensures the safety of swimmers, but also guarantees the pool is legal.

Backyard swimming pools make for an enjoyable place to congregate when the weather is hot. Follow a few guidelines and ask the necessary questions to make a pool installation go more smoothly.

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Kelly and Tim Richards of Carrabasset Valley with FSB lender Chrissy St. Laurent.

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Selecting the right mattress can be a challenge

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

One of the difficult decisions that consumers face today is deciding which mattress to buy. With hundreds of models to choose from, it can be challenging to make a selection. Mattresses may be made with inner springs, foam, fabric, water or air. Hybrid mattresses are made with a combination of materials. Mattresses come in varying degrees of firmness. Some are very firm and others conform more to the body. So there are many options.

Darren Millington, a purchaser at Major's Furniture and Appliances in Farmingdale, said recently that the most important factor to consider when buying a new mattress is comfort. He said that the average person spends one-third of their day sleeping and their sleeping experience affects the other two-thirds of their day. So it's important to buy a mattress that's comfortable and that will contribute to a good night's sleep.

Millington said that it's important to spend time lying on the mattress in positions that a person usually sleeps in at night. He said that he cringes when he sees customers lie on the bed with their feet hanging over the side because he knows that's not how they usually sleep. He said that he hates to see anyone make a major investment like a bed and find out later that it's not what they really wanted.

"They should try to recreate the home situation as close as possible," Millington said.

Millington added that many people with back problems come into the store looking for a soft mattress, thinking that will make their back feel better while often just the opposite is true. Many people have found they need a firmer mattress that will keep their spine in better alignment while sleeping. He said that he can't give medical advice but that has been his experience in selling mattresses.

While most retail stores now stock single-sided mattresses, Major's started carrying double sided mattresses again several years ago. Millington said that they stock Therapedic® International mattresses (not to be confused with Tempur-Pedic® mattresses) and the company stands behind their product. He said the manufacturer allows returns for true manufacturer's defects such as seams that rip or springs that pop out.

In regards to size, Millington said that queen size mattresses are the number one seller in the nation. Many couples choose a queen size over a king size bed because king size beds are 76 inches wide.

"A king size mattress is 16 inches wider than a queen size mattress and it's more difficult to fit in many of today's smaller homes," said Millington.

According to Millington, one of the most popular headboards sold at Major's is a twin headboard made in Newport, Maine from Maine maple because it's very durable and bolts right into a metal bed frame. Many of these headboards are sold to assisted living and rehabilita-

tion facilities.

A popular option for larger mattresses, he said, are platform beds with storage drawers underneath the bed. These beds don't require a box spring.

Major's Furniture and Appliances, located at 680 Maine Avenue in Farmingdale, is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Sunday 12 noon - 4 p.m. For more information, visit the-majors.com.

Another retailer that sells a lot of mattresses is Fortin's Home Furnishings in Winslow. Salesperson Gerry Boucher said that they carry only Serta® mattresses at Fortin's. He said the three lines they carry are Majestic Sleep®, Perfect Sleeper®, and iComfort®.

"We're a certified Serta® dealer," Boucher said.

Boucher stressed the importance of stretching out on a bed in comfortable clothes for at least five minutes to determine if a mattress is a good fit. He agreed that most people don't spend enough time trying out a mattress to determine whether they have the right one. He said that it makes a big difference whether a person is a back or a side sleeper. So they definitely need to lie in different positions when trying out a mattress. He said that he usually leans towards a firmer mattress for a person with a back problem. He said that their best-selling mattress is a hybrid mattress.

Fortin's Home Furnishings, located at 412 Augusta Road in Winslow, is open for business Monday-Thursday 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Friday-Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. For more information, visit fortinstv.com.

The owner of Oakland Furniture Alan Breton said that they sell Sealy®, Ashley®, Primo®, and Corsicana® brand mattresses. He said that they sell inner spring, memory foam, latex, memory foam with gel and hybrid mattresses. Memory foam with gel mattress is one of their best sellers. He explained that memory foam produces a lot of heat and the insulating gel prevents the heat from coming through. Memory foam was originally developed by NASA to improve seat cushioning and crash protection for airplane pilots and passengers.

According to Breton, although queen size mattresses are still the best seller, the demand for king size mattresses is rapidly growing. They also sell extra-long twin and extra-long full size mattresses which are 80 inches long like a standard queen or king size bed. They also sell California king-size mattresses which are 84 inches long.

Breton stressed the importance of investing in a quality mattress because both adults and children spend so much time sleeping. He said that medical specialists now recommend that youth 6-12 years get nine hours sleep and youth age 13-18 get 10 hours sleep. A quality mattress is definitely a worthwhile investment.

Oakland Furniture, 12 Main Street in Oakland, is open for business Monday-Friday 9 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. For more information, visit oaklandfurniture.net.

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Tips and tactics for buying a home in a seller's market

BY BRANDPOINT
For Spring Home & Garden

Whether you're a millennial looking to buy your first home or a boomer thinking about downsizing your empty nest, you're probably aware that it's a seller's market out there.

Homes are selling at lightning speed, bidding wars are commonplace, buyers often have little to no room for negotiation and the price of those homes keeps rising.

But just because it's a seller's market doesn't mean you can't get a good deal on the home of your dreams. Here are some insider tips and tactics to help you get your slice of the American dream at a price you can afford.

Work with a full-time, experienced agent. This is critical, vital and non-negotiable. Things move so fast and offers are made within minutes of seeing a home. If you don't have a real estate agent, you can easily be overwhelmed by this thrill ride. Your agent can help you with negotiation, serve as your champion and can guide you through this process as a pro.

Get pre-approved with a lender. When you're pre-approved, you've done all the paperwork upfront. The bank has decided what you can afford to spend. This tells the seller you mean business and are ready to roll.

Use technology. If you aren't using technology, you are missing out. Hop online and view homes within your price range or in your desired school zone or neighborhood. You can also get a sense of what's selling at your budget and even calculate your estimated mortgage payment.

Don't wait to request a showing. If you're checking out houses online, ask your agent to request a showing as soon as you see one you like. Don't wait until the weekend. You know what they say about those who hesitate.

Don't wait to make an offer. If you like it, jump on it. Make your offer clean (no contingencies such as the sale of another property), if possible, and consider offering favorable

concessions to the seller such as a flexible closing date.

Think outside the box. You might have come into your home search wanting to live in a specific neighborhood. What if you expanded your horizons a bit? Cast your net wider into areas you hadn't considered. A lovely gem might be waiting out there for you.

Don't make a major purchase between offer and closing. If you do, it could upset your debt-to-income ratio. Your lender could run the numbers again and you'd be sunk. Hold off buying furniture or ordering new appliances until after closing documents have been signed and the place is yours.

Following the advice of your agent is always critical, but it's even more important in a seller's market. He or she will guide you through the process, and you'll be unpacking boxes in your dream home in no time.



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An electrical fence can solve garden raids by unwanted pests

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

When sprays and gadgets just aren't keeping the wildlife at a distance, gardeners can find a durable and permanent method for preventing hungry critters from decimating the vegetable garden. Although the initial cost to buy and build an electric fence is more, the rewards of years of low-maintenance and high efficiency can make the investment worthwhile.

To deliver an effective shock the fence requires a good power supply, grounding and design. Power for an electric fence is measured in joules, rather than watts or volts. The total number of joules required depends on the length of the fence, the number of wires and the soil conditions.

Assuming the fence will be square or rectangular, start by measuring the length of all four sides and totaling the results. If, for example, two sides are 100 feet and two are 125 feet, the initial total will be 450 feet, then multiply that total by the number of vertical rows to be installed. Four runs of wire at 450 feet per run means the total fence project will require 1,800 feet. Plan to purchase extra wire and parts for any unexpected needs.

"There's nothing worse than having one critical piece getting lost in the deep grass or breaking when you're almost finished and the store is closed," said Campbell's True Value site manager John Smith. "And you'll have future maintenance and replacement needs, so those extra materials won't go to waste."

A fence's power source can come from a standard home outlet, a stand-alone battery or a solar-powered unit. These fence energizers differ in the size and the duration of the pulses of electrons they send into the fence line.

Larry Donald, manager of Farmington Farmer's Union, and his staff help customers sort out the many choices and decisions that need to be made before installing an electric fence. After gathering important information about the terrain, the animals to be kept in or out and the size of the property to be enclosed, they can put together a complete package of electric fencing materials.

"Don't skimp on a quality energiz-



er," advised Donald.

A good energy source, whether from the sun, an electrical outlet, or a battery, provides a jolt that shouldn't last for more than 0.0003 seconds. These short pulses keep heat and sparks from building up in the wire and creating a risk for a grass fire in dry conditions. A wire that is too hot also will wear out more quickly. High voltage energizers with long pulses leak the excess electricity, while better-quality low impedance energizers resist leakage. Look for an Underwriters Laboratories (U/L) or Canadian Standards Association (CSA) label to be sure the energy unit meets quality testing standards.

A high-quality insulated grounded extension cord running from a grounded outdoor electrical outlet will deliver a 110- or 220-volt charge and cost a few dollars a month. For larger gardens and those further from an outlet, battery-powered energizers are a practical alternative. Dry cell batteries can power portable energizers, but they have to be recharged regularly and replaced. In permanent installations, a solar battery system is more expensive to buy, but in the long run, there's no monthly cost or recharging. Deep cycle batteries can be completely discharged and

recharged repeatedly. Conventional car batteries can't be totally discharged and will only recharge up to about 60 to 75 percent of their original capacity. Check the battery's guarantee for length of time and features covered.

"Don't buy on price alone," said Franklin County Cooperative Extension expert Dave Fuller. "The energizer with the cheapest price generally turns out to be the most expensive to run and maintain."

Buying more joule capacity than currently needed will provide flexibility to charge additional or expanded fencing without having to buy an additional unit. Plan to install posts every 10 to 20 feet, using material that won't rot when the ground is wet. Holes can be dug with a power auger, which will allow the several feet of depth that ensures adequate grounding and stability. Grounding the system is a critical step.

"Poor grounding is the leading cause of electric fence problems," said Fuller.

Electrical current follows the wire to and from the energizer. If an animal or a blade of grass touches the wire, the current goes through that blockage into the ground and the grounding rods. Moist soil is a good conductor of electricity, but when it's dry or frozen, animals

"Don't buy on price alone. The energizer with the cheapest price generally turns out to be the most expensive to run and maintain."

DAVE FULLER, FRANKLIN COUNTY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Valerie Tucker photo

Larry Donald, manager of Farmington Farmer's Union, and his staff, help their customers sort out the many choices and decisions to be made before installing an electric fence. After gathering important information about the terrain, the animals to be kept in or out and the size of the property to be fenced, they can put together a complete package of electric fence materials.

will not be shocked unless ground wires are included on the fence.

A minimum of three ground rods should be used for single-energizer fences; a smaller one-joule unit needs only one rod. Use six-foot lengths of 5/8-inch diameter galvanized steel rods or 3/4-inch galvanized pipe. Leave each with

six inches above the ground, and space rods at least ten feet apart. Add extra ground rods in dry areas. Fence plans also should include a way to handle a lightning strike. The easiest step is to unplug the energizer during an electrical storm, but consider adding a lightning diverter.

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Try these easy and inexpensive kitchen updates

BY BRANDPOINT

For Spring Home & Garden

Spring is in full swing, which means it's time to reinvigorate your kitchen with a new look.

When planning your refresh, consider these simple, stylish swaps that don't require investing tons of time or budget.

Upgrade your kitchen fixtures. Faucets often serve as the centerpiece of the kitchen. Replacing an outdated model is an easy way to give your space a facelift.

Choose a piece that's as functional as it is fashionable such as the Delta Allentown Faucet, available at The Home Depot. This faucet offers an industrial, versatile design and tech-savvy appeal for every modern homeowner. Complete with TempSense Technology, the faucet will notify you when water has reached your desired temperature through coded LED light colors.

Live up your cabinets. Small changes can make all the difference. Replacing outdated cabinet knobs and drawer pulls can give your space a fresh streamlined look with minimal effort.

Dated accessories can weigh down the aesthetic of the entire room. Instead, replace with hardware in a bold bronze or sleek matte black finish.

Enhance simple walls. Play with textures to create a more intriguing space. Replace flat wall paint with a

backsplash made from unique materials, such as faux-brick, salvaged wood or stainless-steel subway tile.

A textured surface touting quality and distinction lends a design-forward aesthetic without breaking the bank.

Embrace the unexpected. Replace traditional décor with curated accents to elevate the space and delight the eye. Incorporate a plush patterned rug or paint cabinets with an on-trend hue of blue, gray and green, such as Behr's Color of the Year titled, "In the Moment."

Most importantly, remember to let your personality shine by adding items that have special meaning. Whether it's a set of vintage bronze candlesticks you found at a local antique shop, or artwork purchased on vacation, unexpected personal pieces often create storytelling moments and receive the very best of compliments.



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New products can make building a deck easier

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

After a long, treacherous winter, Mainers are anxious to spend time outdoors. One of the projects that homeowners may want to tackle is building a new deck on their home. Whether for barbecues, sitting outdoors and reading a good book, or social gatherings, a deck is a great addition to any home.

Fred Perkins, sales manager at Hammond Lumber Company said recently that a new product marketed by the Biddeford Maine-based company DuraLife® makes building a deck easier for both homeowners and contractors. Step-Clip™, according to the DuraLife® website, is “a patent-pending proprietary, easy-to-install hidden fastening system.”

The website states that the system features 1 5/8-inch wide and 23-inch long polypropylene interlocking strips that accommodate four deck boards. To install, the tabs on the Step-Clip™ strips are aligned to the joist and then secured with a roofing nail gun or hammer. No screws are needed. Then the boards are snapped into the clip either by using a person's body weight while walking across the boards or with a non-marring rubber mallet, creating a seamless connection.

DuraLife® claims that during the installation process, moving boards and making changes to the pattern requires less effort on the part of homeowners when Step-Clip™ is used. That cuts installation time in half for contractors, which saves labor costs as well.

Another product that Perkins recommends is the Fastenmaster Cortex® Hidden Fastening System which hides fasteners in composite, capstock, and PVC decking boards. More information regarding this system can be found on the website fastenmaster.com/cortex-hidden-fastening-system-decking.html.

Perkins said that Hammond Lumber also sells deck-building products including Trex, TimberTech, Azek, and Zuri. The business also offers a wide selection of wood choices including cedar, pressure-treated, and tropical hardwood. Perkins said that Hammond Lumber tries to accommodate their customers by offering many choices in styles, brands,

installation methods and prices.

When selecting railings for a deck, a purchaser at Hammond Lumber said the selection of different types of materials used for railings depends on the customer's budget and the look they want to achieve. The least expensive material would be pressure-treated wood. Next in quality and price, he said, is vinyl, some of which comes with an aluminum core in white, tan and light brown. Glass panels are also available and are easy to install. The next step up from vinyl would be composite cap which is usually available in lots of color options that match the manufacturer's deck colors, as well as white and black. Glass panel options are also available. These products he said are usually harder to install but some have balusters that slide into pre-routed holes that make them just as easy as PVC railings.

According to Hammond Lumber's purchaser, another higher-end choice for railings is INTEX



Photo courtesy of duralifedecking.com

with an aluminum core which is available in white only. The next step up from that is aluminum which is typically limited to colors such as black, white, and bronze. Cable railings would be the top of the line as far as price.

“Cable Rails are becoming more popular,” he said. “They give you

the best visibility without having to clean glass panels. So if you have a great view off your deck, this is a great option but because they are made of stainless steel they can be expensive.”

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Complete these home improvements over the weekend

Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up, as homeowners channel the rejuvenating feelings of spring and tackle their home to-do lists. Large-scale renovations can greatly affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

If time is of the essence, these weekend or one-day projects may satisfy homeowners' desires to fix up their homes.

- **Create an accent wall.** Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

- **Install stair runners.** Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

- **Dress up the entryway.** An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb. Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers. A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor. Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different patterns and can mimic the look of wood, travertine or marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

- **Install a new faucet.** Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets can provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets can help conserve water.

- **Create a gallery on the staircase.** Gather and arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This creates a designer touch and can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

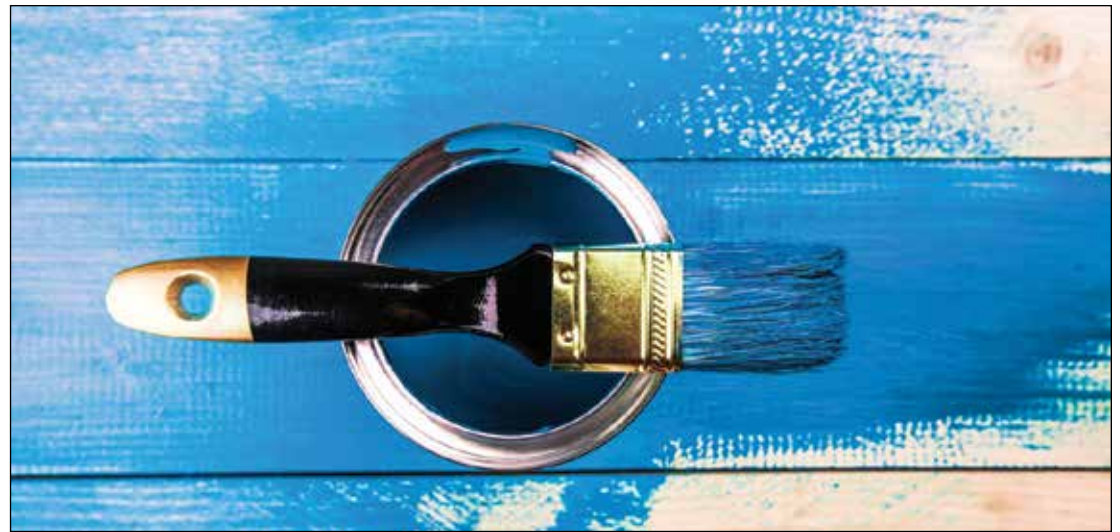
- **Install a fresh light fixture.** Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Better Homes & Gardens suggests replacing an existing fixture with something

new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not within one's skill set, free-standing table or floor lamps also can cast a new glow on a space.

- **Add molding.** Molding can add instant aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of walls where they meet the ceiling, or even mid-wall as a chair rail. Some homeowners like to create framed molding on walls in formal living spaces.

- **Update kitchen or bathroom hardware.** Replacing hardware is a fast and easy project, but one that can have immediate impact. Swap out tired or outdated hardware for newer brushed metals and more impactful shapes and designs.

Home renovations do not need



to take weeks or months. Many projects can be completed over the course of a weekend.

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How to transform a fixer-upper

The real estate market will always have its ups and downs, but real estate is an oft-profitable investment. Real estate investors do their investing for various reasons. Some see a house as a place to hang their hats for years and years, while others look at properties as nothing more than investments.

Buying a home with the intent to fix it up and resell it is called a “fix and flip.” In such situations, investors buy homes at below-market prices before refurbishing the homes with the goal of recouping their initial investment and then some when the homes are ultimately put back on the market. Flipping has become popular for both expert remodelers and novice investors. RealtyTrac®, the nation’s leading source for comprehensive housing data, reports that 5.5 percent of all single family home and condo sales during the year were flipped properties. This marked an increase from the same time the previous year.

Investing in a fixer-upper requires a leap of faith and a vision of what the home can look like in the future. Turning a real estate lemon into lemonade requires certain skills and a good measure of patience. The following are some guidelines to get anyone started.

- **Don’t bite off more than you can chew.** Make an honest assessment of your abilities and which renovations, if any, you can handle. If you are unskilled or inexperienced working with your hands, then it can be easy for an investment property to quickly become a money pit. Before purchasing a property, hire a trained home inspector to tour the home with you and point out all of the areas that will need renovation. With this list, begin getting estimates on how much money the work will entail. Determine if this fits with your budget or not. You do not want to invest so much that it exceeds what you could feasibly recoup when it comes time to sell.

- **Overlook cosmetic things when visiting properties.** Cosmetic issues include all of

the easily replaceable items in a home, such as carpeting, appliances, interior paint colors and cabinetry. Focus on the bones of the house — the architectural integrity and those little touches that you envision having a “wow” factor.

- **Seek the help of experts.**

Some flippers think they’ll save the most money by doing all of the work themselves. This isn’t always the case. Professional architects, designers and contractors may help you save money. Contractors have an intimate knowledge of where to buy materials and may be able to negotiate prices based on wholesale or trade costs. In addition, experts can help you avoid common pitfalls because they’ve already done this type of work time and again. It’s smart to rely on expert advice, even if it means investing a little bit more.

- **Save money by doing some work yourself.** While the pros may tackle the more complex parts of a given project, such as rewiring electricity or changing the footprint of a home, you can still be involved. Ask to participate in demolition, such as taking down walls or removing old materials from the home. Such participation may be fun, and it can save you substantial amounts of money on labor.



- **Recognize that not everything must be completely redone.** Realize that, in some instances, a coat of paint and some new accents may be all you need to transform a space. For example, if kitchen cabinets are in good condition, see if they can be refaced or painted instead of replaced entirely. Install new door

pulls/handles to add visual interest. Look for some ready-made items, such as bookshelves, instead of installing custom carpentry.

- **Think about what the buyer wants and not what you want.** Renovate with an eye toward prospective buyers’ needs. Keep things neutral and accommodat-

ing. Research the latest trends to understand what buyers might be seeking in a home. You want potential buyers to envision themselves moving right in.

Renovating a fixer-upper takes time, but it can be a worthwhile project, and one that can help anyone turn a profit in a booming real estate market.

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What if you don't want your gardens to be a dinner buffet for deer?

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

Few gardeners willingly accept defeat when they see their beautiful flower gardens nibbled to the ground by hungry deer and other wildlife. Without exception, central Maine gardening experts said most deer will eat anything if they're hungry enough. When spring weather produces the first tasty buds and green shoots, the deer will find their way to the nearest outdoor buffet.

Instead, these plant experts suggest gardeners shop for deer-resistant varieties of annual and perennial flowering plants.

Ellen Withee at Boynton's Greenhouses on Madison Avenue in Skowhegan said "Deer tend to avoid strong fragrances, irritating textures and unpleasant tastes. Some people find blood meal works, but that really stinks."

Fortunately, many gardeners' favorites, including lupine, foxglove, poppy, and coneflower, aren't a deer's first choice. Lavender offers both the woody texture and strong scent that makes it a less desirable snack.

At Sunset Flowerland & Greenhouses in Fairfield, Catherine Hebert hears lots of sure-fire methods for keeping four-legged critters at bay.

"One that seems to be popular is hanging aluminum pie plates from a string," she said. "The deer are startled when they blow in a breeze or when the sun reflects off them."

In May, when she and her staff open their greenhouses to sell plants, they keep a long list of deer-detering flowering perennials and annuals they happily share with customers. She said deer don't like pachysandra, peonies, salvia, yarrow or flowering onions.

"They also don't like coreopsis, snapdragons, marigolds, Siberian iris or Shasta daisies," she said. "But they will eat most anything when they're hungry."

Steve Jones of Fieldstone Gardens in Vassalboro said deer don't often bother ornamental grasses. Artemisia, known by the more common

name Dusty Miller, is easy to grow and not popular with the four-legged creatures. Many native plants do well in local landscapes, also.

"Ferns, in general, aren't preferred by deer," he said.

Rena Dodge, of Black-Eyed Susan's Greenhouses in Augusta, said deer love to eat leafy vegetation, and hostas are a favorite. She offered some low-cost solutions that have been reliable.

"I have found that using human hair wrapped in cheese cloth and tied around my gardens has helped deter deer," she said.

She also suggested tying empty cans to fishing line and setting them on upside-down buckets around the garden. Attach the line to posts to make an invisible fence.

"When deer bump the line, the cans fall and scare them away," she said. "I have had great success with this simple trick."

Robin Jordan, owner of Robin's Flower Pot in Farmington, said her customers have reported good luck with PlantSkydd, which is a topical repellent.

"People seem to have good results," she said.

Applied as a spray or as shake-able granules, the product is a deterrent to deer, rabbits, voles, chipmunk, squirrels, and woodchucks, and it's rain-resistant, so there's no need to re-apply after every rainfall. Since it's a certified organic product listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute, it also can be used in vegetable gardens, on fruit trees and food crops.

Gabriel Pratt, owner of Pratt's Family Greenhouse in Newport, said cleome has little thorns,



Fieldstone Gardens photo

Although deer can decimate a carefully-tended flower garden overnight, gardeners shouldn't despair that their hard work is destined to fail. Area greenhouses like Fieldstone Gardens in Vassalboro, have plenty of perennials and annuals that deer will shun. Experienced growers agreed, though, that deer will nibble on almost any plant when they are really hungry.

which deer don't like.

"They also don't like the smell of some herbs, like garlic," he said.

He suggested gardeners could mix some of those strongly scented herbs, including rosemary and chives, with some of the more vulnerable flowering plants.

Hillary Alger, a Flower Product

Manager at Johnny's Selected Seeds, said customers can find at Johnny's all the seeds for deer-resistant annuals and

perennials, including lavender, foxglove, lupine, marigolds, yarrow, poppies, echinacea, ageratum and columbine.

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Water feature design and maintenance

Homeowners can employ many different design techniques to create one-of-a-kind properties. Adding a water feature to a landscape is one such technique.

Water gardens, koi ponds or fountains have been home landscaping trends for the past several years. Although water features can add an element of relaxation to landscapes, such features require maintenance to keep them attractive and running properly.

The right design

Homeowners should create a water feature design that is fitting with the scale and style of their homes while also keeping their lifestyles in mind. Ponds are popular water features and, like pools, come in both inground and above-ground styles. Above-ground ponds are easier and faster to build than inground ponds and may be safer options for parents of young children. Streams and waterfalls also are popular and can make use of natural variations in property grading. Fountains can be freestanding structures or a component of a pond or another body of water.

Recognize that the location of the water feature can impact its maintenance. For example, a fountain or pond located directly under deciduous trees will require more frequent cleaning to remove leaf and tree debris. Ponds that receive direct sunlight may have more pronounced algae growth. Homeowners should work with a skilled water garden expert in planning the feature's design and location with safety and upkeep in mind.

Maintain pumps

Water features require the constant flow of water to prevent stagnation and proliferation of mosquito and other insect larvae. That requires a pump to push the water around. According to Grounds Maintenance, a green industry professionals resource, the pump should be securely situated on level ground so that vibrations will not cause the pump to move around and eventually loosen fittings.

Even pumps protected by an intake filter or screen can become clogged with debris. It's necessary to routinely inspect the screen and the pump filter and remove any obstructions. Otherwise, the pump motor can overheat and

malfunction. Keep in mind that debris also may include animal life, such as frogs, snakes, turtles — anything that may be drawn to the water feature.

Finding balance

The wrong balance of conditions in the water can cause problems. According to the experts at This Old House, which offers ideas and advice for old house enthusiasts, algae can be the root of all evil in garden features. Controlling nutrients, which may involve watching the levels of nitrogen compounds and phosphorous, will help control the algae.

Avoid locating the water feature where lawn and garden runoff will find its way into the water. Filtration and routine testing of water levels also can help. Water features that are not meant to become wildlife habitats may benefit from a mild sanitizer to keep algae at bay. A thorough cleaning of liners at the end of the season to eliminate materials that build up on the bottom can help, too.

Winter preparation

When colder weather arrives, homeowners must decide if



they want to keep the water feature running or shut it down. Many experts say smaller ponds should be drained, cleaned and left empty until spring. This is also a time to cut back the dead plant material and remove any

tropicals from the water. Remove pumps and drain water feature lines so they can overwinter without freezing.

Water features can make properties inviting. But such features add another level of maintenance to landscaping tasks.



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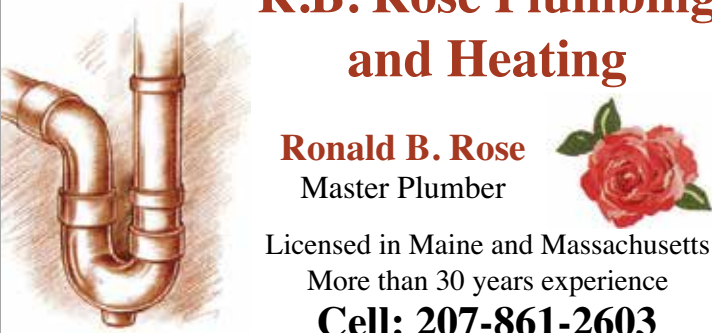



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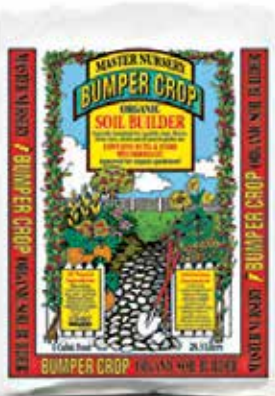
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