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Beautify Your Landscape

NATIVE PLANTS ARE BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, EASIER ON THE HOMEOWNER

For centuries, a major part of gardening has involved importing exotic and interesting plants from other parts of the world. Flowers, shrubs and ornamental grasses that are native in faraway lands are grown, potted and shipped to just about anywhere — many miles from where nature intended them to grow.

This has been good for increasing the variety of plants available for your landscape, but it's also created a big problem: many of those imported plants simply aren't suited for where you live.

Even plants that are hardy in your area's temperatures may not be ideal in your city because of soil conditions, rainfall, wind or other factors. That means they require more watering, more fertilizer, more care and more time to keep them thriving in an area where they don't belong naturally.

There's a solution, though. Many landscapers are turning to native plants rather than imported varieties, and here's why.

LESS WATERING

An obvious advantage to using native plants is that they're naturally suited to your area's rainfall levels.

Hot, dry climates will only support native plants that



PHOTO: ELENATHEWISE / YAYMICRO.COM

Native plants require far less watering than imported varieties that aren't suited to your local climate.

survive those conditions. The same goes for cold, wet climates.

Choosing plants that grow naturally in your area makes more sense. Picking plants that require more or less rainfall than what you receive is a sure recipe to

create stress for your landscaping, which results in more disease, wilting and rotting.

Ideally, native plants will never need to be watered because nature takes care of them. When they do need extra water because of

drought or other temporary weather conditions, it won't require nearly as much as plants that are imported from other areas.

MATCH NATURE

Another advantage of

native plants is that they will always match your area's natural beauty.

Native plants can be found all around where you live. The trees, shrubs and flowers that grow wild in and around your city create an easy way for your home to complement its surroundings.

They also give your home a sense of place. Your lawn and landscape will perfectly match where you live, which is a pleasing feeling.

LESS UPKEEP

Native plants grow wild without any special care in your area. If you're the type of person who doesn't have much time to spend tending their landscaping, or if you simply don't enjoy gardening, then native plants are a perfect solution.

If you pick the right ones and plant them properly to begin with, they can provide years of trouble-free care.



Trade Out Your Carpet

The most popular floor covering in American homes since the 1960s, by far, is carpeting. Carpeted floors feel great under bare feet and provide a cozy, elegant look that can be designed to match any room.

Carpet does have its disadvantages, though. It can stain — think of toddlers spilling red Kool-Aid on beige carpet — shows dirt easily and can be hard to keep clean. It can also start to show wear prematurely in heavily trafficked walkways, and some people say it can

attract dust and pet hair that make allergies flare up.

Those are some of the reasons many homeowners are choosing to switch out their carpeting for hard surfaces.

LAMINATE FLOORS

An affordable, very durable option is laminate flooring. It's quickly grown as one of the most popular floor surfaces in today's homes because it's easy to install and comes close to matching the beauty of real wood.

Laminate floors are not the same as wood floors, though. They are typically thinner and manufactured to look like wood or other natural materials, but they're actually just a printed pattern that looks natural. It doesn't have the same variability and stainability of true wood flooring.

Look closely at the floor's war-

ranty before you buy it. You'll want to pick the best quality flooring you can afford.

HARDWOOD FLOORS

One option that has long been popular is hardwood flooring. Made from real trees cut down into planks, hardwood flooring is available in all the variety that nature provides.

Hardwood floors are typically more expensive than laminate floors, but they also look better, with a natural texture and graining that can be stained in thousands of different options.

Many hardwoods are available pre-finished with durable coatings, so they can have the same longevity and wear resistance of laminate floors, along with the ease of installation.

TILE FLOORS

Tile flooring has perhaps the widest range of choices on the market today. It's available from very cheap ceramic tiles to very expensive natural stones imported from around the world.

The big advantage of tile flooring is that it can have natural beauty, much like hardwood floors, but is also water resistant. It's often used in kitchens and bathrooms for that reason, although more and more homeowners are getting comfortable putting tile and stone floors in their living areas, too.

Tile is also great for designers because it's available in a wide variety of colors and textures. Whether manmade like ceramics or cut straight from a quarry, like marble or sandstone, tile can provide the durability and natural style that matches today's lifestyle.

Landscaping You Can Eat

A NEW TREND: BRINGING YOUR GARDEN TO THE FRONT DOOR

Gardening and landscaping have historically been two very different disciplines. Gardening involves growing things for the dinner table, and landscaping is strictly ornamental.



PHOTO: DLEONIS / YAYMICRO.COM

Edible landscaping combines gardening with landscape design, creating a tasty and beautiful style.

You can combine the two, though, in a new home improvement trend called edible landscaping.

With an edible landscape, your goal is to create a space that is just as welcoming and visually pleasing as a traditional landscape, only with the added benefit of vegetables, fruits and herbs that you can use to cook a meal.

LIMITED SPACE

A big reason edible landscaping has become popular is that it takes up much less space than a traditional garden.

If you have a little space between the shrubs by your front door, you could plant some herbs during the growing season. It doesn't take up much room, and there's no rule that says gardeners have to separate their landscaping from their edibles. Just be careful what you harvest, because many landscaping plants are not edible.

CONVENIENCE

While a traditional vegetable garden is usually planted away from the house, edible landscaping can be planted right outside your door. That makes it

easy to step outside and pick some rosemary or pull a piece of fruit from a tree, making it easier to put your garden to use.

It's also popular to use containers as part of an edible landscape. There are many varieties of dwarf citrus trees, for example, that are perfect for container gardening. You can bring them indoors in the winter and let them be visible as part of your landscaping in the spring and summer.

BEAUTY

Finally, edible landscaping can be just as beautiful as traditional, non-edible landscaping.

You have plenty of choices for edible plants that are also suitable for the landscape — including varieties of persimmons, pecans, citrus trees and peach trees — that are as tasty as they are good looking.

When you choose edible plants for your landscaping, you're freeing up more space in your vegetable garden for other plants. You're also putting your gardening skills on full display, letting visitors get an up-close look at the bounty you're growing rather than hiding it in a faraway backyard garden.

The New Modern Kitchen

IDEAS FOR GIVING YOUR KITCHEN A WARM LOOK

Kitchens are the heart of the home, and today's most popular designs take that into account. Open-concept, family-friendly layouts with islands and lots of countertop space are becoming the status quo for today's newly designed kitchens.

Modern styling continues to be a popular trend, although it's developing a twist lately.

Instead of the cold, industrial, metal style that many people associate with the modern look, the new modern is warmer and more inviting. It uses elegant woods and natural materials in a clean, ornament-free design to combine the best in modern design and old-world craftsmanship.

STREAMLINED DESIGN

The streamlined look continues to be in for kitchens. Influenced heavily by the mid-century style, including straight lines and simple, Scandinavian-inspired wood fixtures, today's streamlined kitchens use glass and clean lines for a thoroughly modern appearance.

It's especially notable in the style of cabinets that are popular this year. Glass door fronts — whether frosted or clear — continue to be popular, along with simple frames and straight brushed metal handles.

Designers have to be careful not to make this style look too cold and urban, though.



PHOTO: LUNAMARINA / YAYMICRO.COM

Many people think of modern design as having a cold, industrial look, but that's not always the case.

There's a fine line between a fashionable kitchen and an over-the-top, industrial urban loft kitchen, and it's important not to cross it unless that's the look you're aiming for.

MIXED MATERIALS

The biggest trend in the

new modern style is mixing different materials together — typically metal with natural materials, like stone and wood.

Stainless steel appliances and fixtures remain the top sellers, but they're being paired with more old-world materials and colors. Natural

stone tiles and backsplashes are especially popular, along with cork floors and rich wood cabinets.

One new trend in cabinets is using more than one stain or color to create contrast. The old rule of always using matching cabinets has been thrown out the window in

favor of more visual interest and unique combinations of colors and materials.

For a low-cost makeover, consider refinishing your cabinet doors. Sanding and re-staining your cabinets, or perhaps just painting over them in Tuscan-inspired colors, can be a quick and easy way to give your kitchen a whole new look.

QUALITY WOOD ACCESSORIES

Finally, high-quality accessories — especially wooden accessories — are coming back into style.

People want a sense of quality in their home at a time when cheap plastic kitchen tools are wearing out and being replaced far too often.

Thick wooden bowls, hand-carved dishes and other long-lasting accessories are popular this year. As the economy recovers, people are wanting to invest in materials that withstand the test of time, and well-built wooden structures are doing the trick.

They fit the new modern design while adding the warmth that makes your house feel like home.

Garages Going Upscale

GIVE YOUR CAR'S HOME A MAKEOVER, TOO

In recent years, the home improvement craze has spurred many homeowners to give their living rooms, bedrooms and landscapes a makeover. But one important room in the house has largely been forgotten until recently: the garage.

That's changing, though. As more people want to take advantage of the utility of a garage — not to mention making it more attractive — garage makeovers are becoming a popular option for people who want to beautify their home.

Here's a look at three ways to give your garage a new lease on life.

BUILT-IN STORAGE

Just like in your kitchen, custom, built-in cabinets and countertops are being installed in garages to help keep your life organized and give you a place to work on your interests and hobbies.

Some cabinets are being designed specifically for garage applications now, and they not only come in the metal, utilitarian cabinets you may be imagining. Many new styles look as good as what you would find in an upscale kitchen.

Having extra storage space makes sense in the garage because of how many people are using the space. Whether it's a "man cave"-style hang-out for the guys or an extra play space for the kids, garages often have a separate



PHOTO: DEIMAGES / YAYMICRO.COM

Custom cabinetry isn't just for the kitchen. Garage storage is moving upscale with classy looking fixtures.

use besides a simple place to park the car. Designing storage for how you actually use the garage can be a smart move.

FLOOR COVERINGS

While bare concrete is functional for parking cars, it's not

very pretty — and it's actually not that durable, either. Even a small fluid leak from your car can permanently discolor the concrete pad and be just about impossible to clean up because concrete is so porous.

New floor coatings designed specifically for garages can solve this prob-

lem. They look far better, often with a shiny surface and colored flecks that can match your sense of style, and are also easy to wipe clean when there are spills or fluid leaks from your car.

Special consideration needs to be paid when picking the covering, though. You want to get a coating that is made

specifically for garages, including being temperature and chemical resistant, so don't even think about rolling on a bucket of ordinary outdoor paint. It's not going to last.

Home stores offer some products that can be installed by homeowners, but the preparation work and the quality of your application will make a big difference in how the finished product will look. If you want a finish that is guaranteed to be beautiful and long-lasting, call in the pros. Lots of companies specialize in doing garage transformations now.

WALL HOOKS

For a simple and very cheap garage makeover, get some hooks at your local hardware store to keep your garage walls organized.

A wide variety of solutions are being sold now specifically for garage storage. Whether you want to hang tools like shovels and rakes, lawn equipment, bicycles or hoses, you're sure to find a storage hook or device designed just for that use.

It's an easy way to organize your garage on a weekend.

Bathroom Therapy

TURN YOUR ORDINARY ROOM INTO AN OASIS

Bathrooms used to be small, cramped rooms, but not anymore. Today's bathrooms are becoming integral parts of the living space of a home, with plenty of room and amenities for relaxation.

One major trend in home improvement is making bathrooms into spa-like spaces, turning them into an oasis where you can unwind and relieve pressure.

From the decor to the functionality of the space, here are three popular ideas for making your bathroom a more relaxing place to spend time.

STEAM SHOWERS

Imagine coming home from work after a stressful day. You step into the shower and are instantly immersed in a cloud of hot, peppermint-scented steam that melts your troubles away.

This used to require a trip to the spa, but with steam showers growing in popularity, more homeowners are opting to recreate the full spa experience in their own bathroom.

A steam shower uses a device called a steam generator to boil water and gently emit it in a cloud of steam, all at safe temperatures. They typically include a way for you to add natural oils — such as eucalyptus or mint — to make it an aromatherapy experience, too.

A steam shower requires professional installation, including custom electrical and plumbing work, but the end result can be worth the expense. It's also more cost effective than building a traditional sauna in your home, so you're adding a relaxing, luxurious experience right in your existing shower.

SOAKER TUBS

Traditional bathtubs are around 14 inches deep, which is perfect for bathing children or for adults laying flat in the tub, but they're not ideal for sitting up with a book and unwinding.

That's where soaker tubs come in.

Unlike the shallow traditional tubs, which are usually rectangular, soaker tubs are shorter, taller, oval-shaped tubs designed to better immerse the body while leaning back. They let you cover your entire body more like a swimming pool than a normal shallow bathtub.

Soaker tubs are usually installed on their own, without a shower head, often in the center of a bathroom wall. And because of their oval shape and shorter overall dimensions designed for sitting, rather than laying, they usually use less water to fill up.

Pricing starts around \$1,000 for an inexpensive soaker tub and can range up to \$5,000 or more for tubs with natural finishes and high-end features.

It's a great way to make your bathing experience more relaxing.

COLORED LED LIGHTING

Everyone knows that lighting can have a big impact on the mood of a room. From cool blues to warm oranges and reds, the "temperature" of the lighting in a room can add drama and create a theatrical feeling.

The same thing can happen in your bathroom. Colored LED lighting is becoming a popular addition to bathrooms for owners who want to use lighting to help them relax.

New systems are being sold that will automatically change the color of lighting in your shower or bathroom to create light therapy, using different shades and brightnesses to help you unwind. Some can be installed in faucets, others in showerheads or in the overhead bathroom lights, but the overall goal is the same: making your bathroom a place to get away from it all.



Remodeling Remains Hot

FAMILIES STAYING IN HOUSES, MAKING THEM BETTER

After the housing crisis of 2008, many Americans have decided to stay put in their existing homes rather than moving.

It's a decision that makes both financial and emotional sense. Instead of going to all the expense of moving to a new house every couple of years, more families are deciding to stay where they are and upgrade their existing space rather than moving somewhere new.

That's why remodeling continues to be a popular option for many families. They can turn their existing house into a more useful place, adding value, style and functionality all at the same time.

Here are three trends that remain popular in remodeling.

FAMILIES ADDING SUITES

Today's families are living differently than they did a decade ago. There are more families today choosing to live with more than one generation under one roof, whether it's the adult children who have returned home after college or elderly parents moving in with their kids.

That's why adding a suite — often called the "mother-in-law suite" — remains one of the most common additions to a house.

These separate suites allow both privacy and livability within the home, letting families share one roof but remaining separated enough to stay sane.

It's common to add a separate area with its own bedroom, bathroom and often a small, compact kitchen space to create an apartment-like zone that's separated from the rest of the home. This lets families combine their lives while still maintaining some level of independence and privacy.

OUTDOOR HAVENS

Turning your yard into an extension of the home is one of the most popular ways to upgrade your home.

When done properly, it feels like you've just added square footage to your home without having to knock out any walls.

With upgraded patio areas, outdoor fire pits and barbecue grills, covered awnings and high-class seating, today's outdoor living spaces are as luxurious as they are relaxing.

They can also make great entertainment areas. A big patio space with landscaping that sets it apart as a separate outdoor room is ideal for big family or social gatherings.

CUSTOM KITCHENS

The kitchen is one room in the house where families tend to spend the most time together, and many people are choosing to upgrade their kitchen to make it more functional, spacious and stylish.

A fully customized kitchen is a great way to make your home match your lifestyle. Granite and stone-look countertops are some of the hottest kitchen upgrades, as they have been for years, and integrating appliances with the cabinetry is gaining in popularity.

This idea has been popular in Europe for years, but it's starting to catch on more in America as homeowners use custom panels to conceal and beautify their refrigerator and dishwasher, along with adding new features such as wine racks and hidden storage solutions.

