


# HOME & GARDEN

Summer 2013



# Give Your Soil a Boost

## AERATING YOUR LAWN PROVIDES MANY BENEFITS



Everyone loves a lush, healthy lawn. A beautiful, green yard does everything from provide the kids a soft, safe place to run around barefoot on warm summer days to give your guests a friendly welcome as they arrive at your home.

But as the months pass by, even a well-watered and well-fertilized lawn can lose its luster. There's no need to stress about it. The answer may be as easy as aerating your lawn.

### A QUICK CHECK

You can very quickly and easily determine if your lawn needs to be aerated. Dig up a small section of your yard, deep enough to determine the depth of the root system. If you find that the roots of your grass are sitting just an inch or two below the ground, it's time to aerate.

### WHAT'S GOING ON?

Through the normal wear and tear on your lawn, with everything from extreme dry conditions to heavy downpours, as well as normal foot traffic, your ground has become compacted.

As the ground becomes more and more

compacted over time, elements that are important to the grass are unable to fully penetrate the soil and reach the roots. This means your grass may not be receiving the appropriate amount of oxygen, nutrients and even water that it needs to thrive.

In addition, even beneficial organisms such as earthworms, whose daily efforts provides easy routes for root systems to grow, won't thrive in your yard either.

### NITTY GRITTY

Aerating essentially is a process that makes your ground less compacted by removing many small shafts of the soil. By removing these shafts, you are providing an easy route for water, nutrients, oxygen, and even organisms to enter the soil.

Aerating can be done in a number of methods. Perhaps the most inexpensive method is by purchasing a small, hand-held aerator.

While this method is the cheapest, it also takes a significantly longer time than other methods. You can also purchase or rent a motorized aerator, or contact a lawn service company to perform the task for you.

Keep in mind that most lawns will need to be aerated at least once or twice a year for the optimal health of your grass. So while it may seem expensive to purchase an aerator initially, the purchase may pay off after just a couple of seasons.

### TAKE ADVANTAGE

After you have aerated your lawn, you now have an easy route to directly to the root system of your lawn.

Take advantage of this by sprinkling organic fertilizer or compost directly onto the lawn and then watering. You will notice a drastic improvement in the health of your lawn in just a couple of days.

# Beach House Décor

## MAKE YOUR HOME FEEL LIKE A SEASIDE GETAWAY

**M**any people enjoy the beach on their vacations and wish they could bring that same relaxed, stress-free feeling back home with them.

You can re-create the look of a beachfront cottage in your home with some paint and a few items from a department store. Your memories of good times on vacation can help you to recapture the laid-back feel and sun-washed look of beachside accommodations.

### PAINT

Color is one of the most important ways of creating a beachside atmosphere. Pastels are a good choice for this look.

Bright yellows help to make the most of natural light allowing it to bounce around rooms. Pale blues recall summer skies, and aqua colors call to mind the ocean.

Liberal use of white helps to give rooms a clean and well-lit look. Shell pink is another good color to use to capture the beach look.

### TEXTURES

When recreating a beach look for your home, avoid heavy and coarse fabrics that have a wintry, cold-weather look, such as tweeds and wools.

Use lightweight fabrics for draperies and curtains. Sheer fabrics let in a lot of light, yet provide some privacy. Light-

filtering shades allow the sun in yet preserve privacy in bedrooms and baths.

Shutters, painted in white, can be opened or closed as needed and give rooms a seaside ambiance. Use beige or light-tan carpeting to simulate a sand beach underfoot. Keep patterns on sofas and throw pillows simple and uncluttered to preserve the open, relaxed atmosphere.

### FURNITURE

Large and carved furniture is a heavy look that should be avoided when creating a beach

cottage décor. You can lighten up heavy furniture with a coat of light colored stain or paint.

Distressed finishes on furniture gives a room an easy, recycled feel instead of a formally matched look. Feel free to bring in interesting, secondhand furniture pieces to keep books, cool drinks and other comforts on hand.

The ambiance as a whole should be comfortable, easy-care and convenient.

### LIGHTING

Quaint little lamps add a unique note to beach décor. These can incorporate pastel colors, fish, sea birds or nautical themes.

Metallic fixtures will help to reflect natural light, making the room glow with a sun-washed look.

Avoid ultra-modern designs that tend to look cold and

functional. Make sure there is plenty of light near easy chairs where guests can snuggle up with a good beach read.

### ACCESSORIES

The accessories for your beach cottage décor can offer the most opportunity for fun and applying your own individual signature.

Use framed prints of your favorite beach destinations and photos of good times with family and friends. Jars full of seashells, as well as images of birds, fish, dolphins and boats all provide the ambiance of relaxed vacationing.

Use plenty of throw pillows to invite guests to get comfortable for some good conversation. Colorful dinnerware looks good in beachside kitchens. Glassware with seaside motifs for cool drinks helps to complete the experience.



# Put Grass Clippings to Use

## YARD WASTE CAN MAKE GOOD MULCH FOR ROSES

**M**ulching roses provides many benefits for the plant. Using organic mulch not only offers protection for roots and keeps the soil moist, but also releases nutrients into the soil.

Lawn clippings look nice scattered under rose bushes and are readily available with each mowing. Grass clippings make a beneficial type of mulch when used correctly. Other organic mulches may be used for roses, too, as each has its own benefits.

### BENEFITS

Organic mulches, like leaves and grass clippings, provide nutrients to the rose soil. Mulching also helps soil retain moisture, control weeds and protects roots from hot summer temperatures and early freezes or frosts in the fall.

Roses are often susceptible to disease, and mulching can help reduce the risk of disease and prevent black spot spores that are splashed up onto roses when it rains. Good mulch offers all these benefits, plus reduces the need to water plants, because mulch helps to keep the soil uniformly moist.

Grass clippings also make excellent mulch for garden vegetables and other plants as well. Because they are readily available, grass clippings are a cost-effective way to help plants retain moisture and reduce weed growth.

### TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Lawn clippings make good short-lived mulch, but they should not be used if the lawn has been treated with a high nitrogen fertilizer or any type herbicide product, as they can release residue into the soil that can be harmful to other plants.

To use grass clippings as mulch, allow them to dry after mowing and spread loosely around the rose bushes.

### CARING FOR IT

Lawn clipping mulch



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Grass clippings don't have to go entirely to waste. They can be used as mulch in your flower bed.

decomposes rapidly, so it needs to be replenished often. Grass clippings may contain weeds, and because of the clippings' light weight, they are more likely to be blown or washed away.

Lawn clippings can also become a fire hazard. When lawn clipping mulch is wet, it

doesn't breathe like other types of mulches and needs periodic "fluffing" to keep it from matting and to allow for better air flow and water penetration.

You should use a thin layer of grass clipping applied after each mowing. When you use grass clippings for mulch, it is

important to allow the clippings to dry out before use, because drying the clippings helps prevent matting. The use of fresh clippings can also lead to foul odors, a reduction in air and water infiltration and may even prevent soil from absorbing water, so letting the clippings dry out is critical.

# Quartz Composite Countertops

## POPULAR KITCHEN MATERIAL COMBINES NATURAL, ARTIFICIAL BENEFITS

**T**he kitchen is one of the most important rooms in the home and one of the most popular targets for a complete makeover. Remodeling your kitchen is one of the best ways to improve the livability of your home while enhancing its value.

As with all remodeling projects, it is important to choose the materials wisely. Smart homeowners know that selecting top quality materials is the best way to get lasting value – something that can increase the selling price of the home down the road.

Redoing the countertops is a big part of any kitchen remodeling project, and one of the most expensive. Quartz composite countertops are quickly gaining ground among homeowners, and this material has a number of important benefits for modern kitchens.

### GRANITE COMPETITOR

Quartz is emerging as a major competitor to granite countertops, and those considering granite may want to look at this material before making a final decision.

Quartz composite countertops are extremely durable and easy to maintain – two factors that will be very important after the remodel has been completed.

Quartz countertops also come in a wide variety of col-



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Quartz countertops have the look of natural stone but are typically more resistant to staining.

ors, making it easier to find just the right look. Quartz composite countertops are also resistant to scorching, an important benefit in any busy kitchen. In addition, quartz countertops are difficult to scratch or mar, so the slip of a knife should not

be much of a concern.

### STAIN RESISTANT

Parents will also be happy to know that quartz composite countertops are designed to be resistant to stains.

This stain resistance can be a big advantage in a home with young kids and teenagers. That spilled glass of grape juice will not permeate the quartz countertop the same way it would with natural stone or cheaper materials.

The quartz composite countertop is a non-porous surface, meaning the countertop will not soak in spilled liquids. If the spill is cleaned up properly, it is very unlikely to leave a permanent stain.

Another often overlooked benefit of quartz is that the texture of the material makes it harder for bacteria and other harmful pathogens to develop. The texture also makes it easier to clean, providing another important safety benefit.

Of course, quartz composite countertops do have their downsides, and it is important to weigh the pros and cons carefully. Some people prefer the look of granite, with its natural stone appearance, to that of quartz.

It is always a good idea to see both options in person and decide which one will work the best. Having pictures of your current kitchen design available will make it easier to imagine what your new countertops will look like.

Choosing the right countertops is never easy, but doing your research ahead of time can make the process less of a hassle.

# Save Money and Water

## A LOOK AT THE BENEFITS OF RAINWATER HARVESTING

**A**s more people recognize the benefits of sustainable landscaping, rainwater harvesting — one of the underlying principles of sustainable landscape design — is coming into its own.

Rain is a free resource, and collecting and storing it in rain barrels and holding tanks for future use in the home and landscape makes perfect sense.

How can you benefit from rainwater harvesting?

### BETTER FOR PLANTS

The stormwater runoff from your roof is usually slightly acidic, with a pH of about 5.7, and free from chemicals like fluorine and chlorine.

Most plants thrive in soils with a pH of from 5.5 to 7.0, so the natural acidity inherent in rainfall makes for happier plants.

Also, rainfall is generally warmer than municipal water, so it is less apt to stress young plants.

### USING A RESOURCE

Rain barrels, cisterns and holding tanks are the first link in the stormwater chain. Storing the water that comes from your roof converts a certain volume into a valuable resource.

Without harvesting, excess runoff will flow overland, carrying pollutants and contributing to erosion and flooding problems downstream.

Collecting excess rainwater can create a great use for something that would otherwise go to waste.

### SAVE MONEY

Homeowners who harvest their rainwater and use it to water their gardens and wash their cars report a savings on their water bills of 30 to 40 percent.

And as water rates continue to climb in many municipalities, the savings will become even more important to many people's budgets.

### FEWER RESTRICTIONS

Nationwide droughts have forced many states to implement water use restrictions during the months your landscape needs water the most.

Harvesting and storing your rainwater gives you an alternative supply independent of public sources, letting you keep your landscape healthy and green even in the driest months.

A well-designed water harvesting system can save you money on utility bills, limit your impact and your dependency on public water sources and contribute to a healthy, water-wise landscape.



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Rainwater harvesting systems come in all types, from basic rain barrels to more complex systems with multiple tanks and plumbing lines.

# Solar Features for the Garden



The technology driving solar-powered devices is continuing to expand with products that range from lighting to water features.

The garden, patio, and even the porch can benefit from this free energy source with features that are as functional as they are decorative.

## THE WELL-LIT GARDEN

There is a wide variety of solar products that make excellent lighting features for the garden and patio. While solar stake lighting has been serving garden pathways for many years now, there are currently many designs and style options that can be adapted to any garden décor scheme.

New products like garden lanterns also demonstrate great versatility in terms of style. From beautiful Asian style fixtures or more traditional solar lamp posts or solar table-top lamps for the deck, these solar powered lighting options fuel up on sunshine all day and provide the landscape with light during twilight and evening hours.

For gardens that require more substantial lighting systems, there are also solar spotlight systems and even solar security lights that provide substantial lighting and reliability.

Motion activated security lights are designed to be weather resistant and may even boast adjustable settings for customizable light. Without wiring, these devices are innovative solutions for sustainable lighting outdoors.

Many homeowners simply enjoy the decorative elements that solar-powered lighting fixtures embody. From glowing mushroom lights to strings of butterfly lights, there are lots of designs to consider.

Gnomes, elves, fairies, woodland animals — there are many garden statues

that include a solar lighting feature in their design. Strands of fairy or tea lights add a decorative aspect to porches, gardens, or even special garden nooks. If these elements are too kitschy, there are plenty of nondescript styles that add light without infringing upon the natural beauty of the garden.

## WATER FEATURES

Solar powered birdbaths and fountains are ideal for large gardens where a power source is unavailable. These products allow gardeners to add a fountain anywhere on the landscape.

You could add a single or double-tiered birdbath at the back of the yard or employ a decorative solar fountain as a central garden feature. There are many styles from rustic water features to classic-looking models.

A solar cascade can add a pleasing appearance and soothing sounds to a patio or porch without any need for electricity. The solar technology behind these products has made them attractive to eco-friendly households and their reliability is proving better than ever.

Moreover, gardeners can find solar-powered fountains and water features in styles to suit cottage, Asian, classic and even Southwestern gardens.

In addition to powering the water movement itself, solar water features are also designed to bring light or colored light to water features.

Want to add a colorful show to a garden pond? There are solar water features that can be used in garden ponds both large and small.

# Choices for Refurbishing Grout

The grout surrounding your ceramic tile can take a beating. Outside dirt, soap scum, mold and mildew can leave grout stained and discolored.

Over time, grout can even become pitted and cracked. Luckily, you can choose from a number of products to refurbish tile grout to make it look like new.

## CHLORINE BLEACH

Chlorine bleach is an old stand-by for grout cleaning, mainly because it is usually available in most households.

Bleach can do a good job of cleaning dirty, stained grout, but you will have to use elbow grease to scrub out some discoloration.

Mix one cup of household bleach in a bucket of water and apply to the grout lines of the tile. Allow it to sit for 20 minutes. Then, rinse the tile with clean water.

The harsh chlorine odor is a problem for many people. Only use chlorine bleach for cleaning in well-ventilated areas, and never mix chlorine bleach with other cleaning products, such as ammonia.

You can also use a bleach pen to remove dirt and stains from the grout. These pens have narrow tips that apply the bleach only onto the grout lines, making it a less messy option for cleaning with less odor.

## OXYGEN BLEACH

Oxygen bleach has many advantages over chlorine bleach. It is less toxic and has no objectionable odor. It is also safe to use around colored fabrics.

Oxygen bleach contains oxygen ions that activate in water to lift dirt off of surfaces. Mix dry oxygen bleach



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Grout often becomes discolored or damaged over time, but it can be brought back to life with a little elbow grease.

with water and apply to the grout lines. Apply the solution to the lines, re-applying it as needed as the water is absorbed into the grout.

Allow the solution to sit on the grout for about 30 minutes. Scrub the dirty grout lightly with a narrow scrub brush or toothbrush. Rinse with clear water and allow the floor to dry.

## NATURAL GROUT CLEANERS

If you are one of the many people who prefer to use natural products for cleaning around your home, you can use baking soda or vinegar to remove dirt and stains from grout lines.

Make a paste of baking soda and a small amount of water and apply it to

the grout lines. Scrub the lines vigorously, and then rinse the paste from the surface.

If you prefer, mix a solution of 1/2 vinegar and 1/2 water. Apply this solution to the grout lines and scrub the grout with a stiff brush. Then, rinse the grout with clean water.

## SEALERS

Grout sealers help to keep grout clean by leaving a thin chemical coating on the grout lines. Apply the grout sealer to the grout after cleaning, when the grout is completely dry.

Many grout sealers come in containers that have an applicator tip. If necessary, you can also use a small paintbrush to apply the sealer. Apply the sealer to all grout lines and allow

it to dry completely. Do not walk on the floor until the seal is dry.

## REPLACING DAMAGED AREAS

Some areas of grout may have bigger problems than just stains or dirt. Pieces may have cracked and fallen out. In this case, you should remove the cracked and loose pieces of grout with a grout removal tool available at your local hardware or home improvement store.

Clean the void and make sure it is free of dust. Then, mix a small amount of grout in a matching color and fill in the area. Allow the new grout to dry for at least 24 hours before applying a sealer.