



Spring Home & Garden

Organize Your Garage

The garage: the catchall section of our homes that never seems to get as much TLC as it deserves. It's where the overflow of holiday decorations, outgrown clothes and sports equipment converge, often in disarray.

It's time to take back control of this versatile space in your home. The garage has so much to offer if you're willing to regularly maintain it. This may mean hanging new shelving for extra storage space or repainting the floor for a protective, great-looking shine.

Here are three steps you can take this weekend to achieve a more organized garage:

1. GIVE YOURSELF ENOUGH TIME

Many homeowners think they can power through a garage reorganization in a matter of a couple of hours. Sure, if your garage is already in relatively good shape, that may be possible. But for people looking to complete an organizational overhaul, it is best to devote the bulk of a weekend to the chore.

Not doing so can leave you feeling frustrated by a job half done. Give yourself enough time to not only assess your current garage storage situation, but then also to put together a plan that highlights what goes where and how much you're willing to spend on new storage materials.

2. BE READY TO DONATE

Overflow can be a real



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problem in the garage. Fishing poles, soccer balls and kids' bikes may as well call the garage their own. Without ample space for these materials, the garage's walls may feel like they are caving in on you.

The solution: Give things away. Plenty of organizations

offer some sort of item drop-off. Start a donate pile outside of your garage to collect all the extra items for which you have no use. Take your extra toys and baseball gloves to a deserving charity, but only if you're sure you won't need them again down the road.

3. NEVER ORGANIZE ALONE

One of the best tips for organizing your garage is to invite friends and family members over to help. A major garage overhaul can be time consuming, requiring numerous hands on deck if you're hoping to finish anytime soon.

Call over some friends and family members. Have a list of specific responsibilities for volunteers to maximize their time when they are helping you. And remember to always treat your helpers to hot coffee or lunch, a gesture that will let them know they are appreciated.

Avoid Grilling Mistakes

The smell of the barbecue grill is one of the hallmarks of the springtime. The sizzle of the hot grate and the crackling of the charcoal let you know the winter season has officially ended.

As you begin inviting friends over for a spring and summer filled with great food and better company, now is a good time to refresh your common grilling practices.

By now you probably have a grilling routine that you follow with every cooking session. True grilling experts are meticulous about the cleanliness of their grills, as well as the quality of their tools.

But there are several common grilling mistakes that even the most grizzled grilling professionals commit from time to time. Check out our list below to see if you've ever been guilty.

LOW-QUALITY TOOLS

You can't grill effectively without the right tools — plain and simple. Are your spatulas rusty and warped? Is your grill brush caked in residue? If so, it's time for an equipment overhaul. Choose spatulas, tongs and grill cleaning tools that are made of durable materials, such as stainless steel.

Choose durable, heavy-duty tools with long handles for maximum safety when you're reaching across the coals. Find tools that are dishwasher-safe to make cleaning up a breeze.

DIRTY GRILL

When was the last time you cranked your burners to high



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after a cook to burn off some of the grill residue? This is good practice to maintain your grill and enhance the taste of your food. Make sure you clean your grill before and after each cook.

Scrape out any excess ash or grease under the grate. This

will keep your flames flowing strongly instead of being snuffed out by blockages. Consider deep-cleaning your grill a couple of times per year. This entails scrubbing the stainless steel and scraping all food scraps off the sides and bottom of the grill.

FORGETTING TO PREHEAT

A common grilling mistake is not being patient enough before adding food to the grill. Just like an oven, you must give your grill about 15 minutes to warm up. Use the temperature gauge to decide when to put on the meat. Experts recommend

most foods be cooked in the 300- to 400-degree range.

Depending on what you're cooking, it's generally a good idea to immediately turn your burners down to low after you add the meat. This low-and-slow approach will result in juicier meats.

Plants for Window Boxes

Window boxes make for the perfect design elements to the exterior of your home. With the right flowers, they can serve as a downright stunning focal point of your backyard.

Whether you choose a collection of colorful annuals spilling over your box or a row of cute miniature flowers, window boxes are sure to catch some attention this spring.

Before filling your boxes, it is important to know the growing habits and requirements of the plants you plan to use. Factors such as sunlight, shade, watering and bloom time all must be taken into consideration.

The key to any awe-inspiring window box is to have fun. Don't be afraid to let your creativity shine as you build your collection of flowers.

SUNLIGHT

If your window box is exposed to full sunlight, you have a bevy of flower options at your disposal. From vinca to marigolds, you can find flowers with gorgeous combinations of green foliage and colorful petals.

Geraniums are low-maintenance bloomers that can generally reach about 12 inches tall — the perfect option if you're looking to add a little height to your flower box.

A slightly shorter option that is just as colorful is the petunia. These beauties grow to a height of 4 to 12 inches, and like the geranium, come in a trailing variety that can help you put together a flower box overflowing with vibrant colors.

SHADE

If your window box will be located in partial or full shade, be sure to choose shade-loving plants such as impatiens, begonias or caladium for



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maximum impact. All of these varieties are available in a full range of colors and tones, making your job of matching the flowers to the hue of

your home an easy one.

Find flowers that give off pops of bright pinks and purples if you're looking to make a dramatic statement near

your home's entry or any other prominent spot. Be sure to maintain your flowers throughout the year to keep your window boxes in striking form.

Garden Party Appetizers

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Part of growing a garden is sharing your spoils and inspiring others to take on a garden project of their own. The ample amount of fresh vegetables and fruit that one garden can produce is enough reason to stay motivated through all the weeding, watering and tending.

Feeding the guests at your garden party has never been easier, especially if you're planning to stick to an appetizer menu. Follow our tips below to make the perfect dips, wraps and savory treats your guests will come to love.

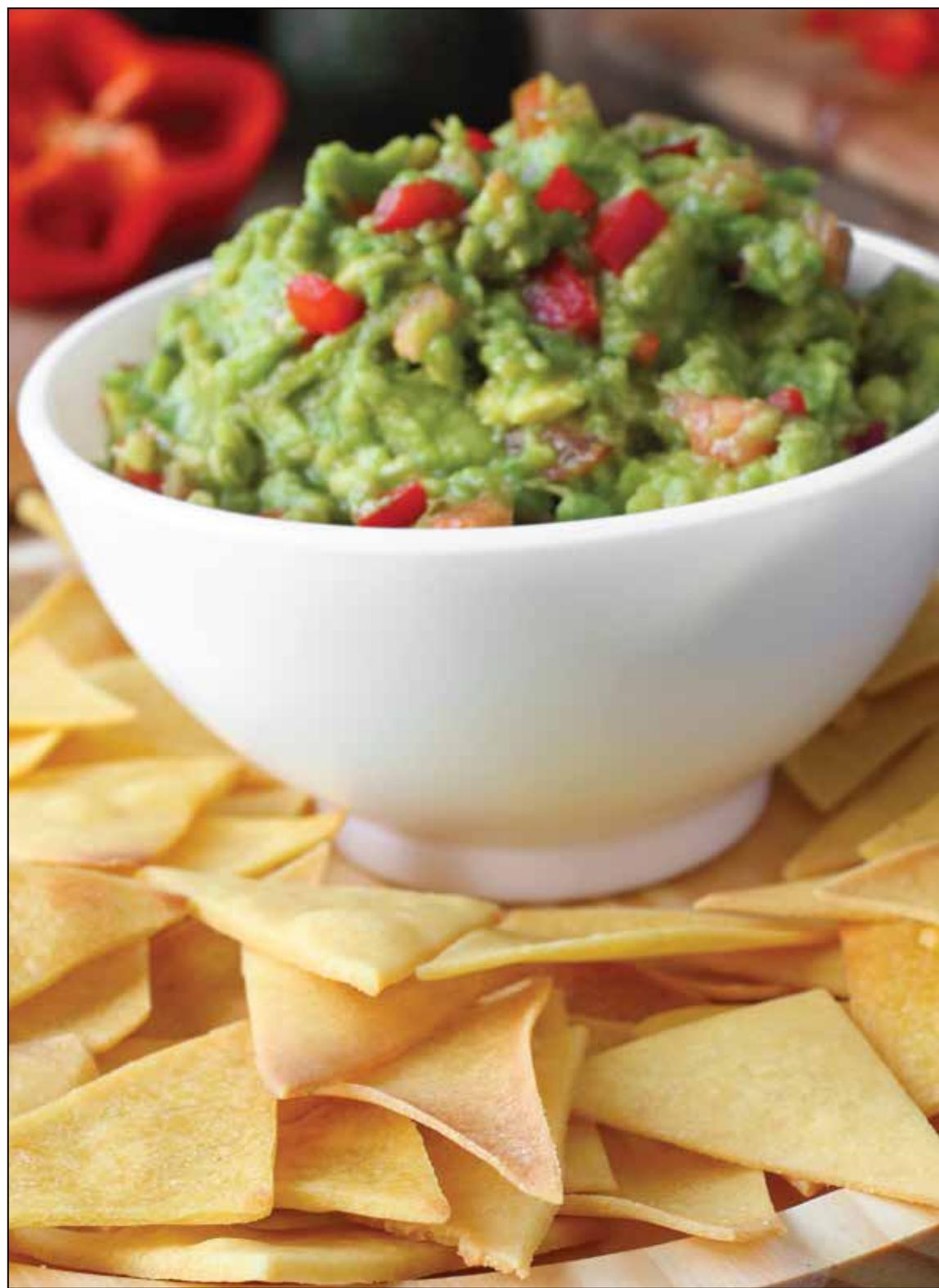
GO GUACAMOLE

Onions, avocado, chopped tomato and garlic. Add a splash of lime juice after letting the dip chill in the refrigerator for an hour, and presto! Yummy guacamole that is sure to leave your guests happy.

Choose a unique brand of sea salt chips or vegetable sticks to serve as the perfect dipping items for your guacamole. Add cayenne pepper to the concoction or pick up a bag of spicy chips if you prefer a little heat with your Mexican-inspired appetizer.

ROLL IT UP

Some of the easiest — and tastiest — appetizer treats take just a few minutes to prepare. Roll-ups fall into



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this category and can pack quite a punch in a small wrapped or rolled package. Follow these directions to make the perfect roll-up:

- Lay your deli meat of choice on a serving plate;
- Spread a softened layer of cream cheese on the meat;
- Place a small pickle spear or slice of jalapeno pepper at one end of the meat;
- Roll the materials into cylinders around the pickle or pepper; and

• Secure with toothpicks and allow roll-ups to refrigerate for an hour ahead of serving.

USE YOUR GARDEN

Depending on how far you are into the growing season, you may have plants popping up in your garden. Vegetables such as radishes and zucchini are known for their rapid growing rates, giving you some quality ingredients to incorporate into your dip or stir-fry.

Changing a Chainsaw Chain

Using and maintaining a chainsaw can be an intimidating experience, even for seasoned operators. The many sharp, moving parts can lead to serious injuries if the power of the chainsaw is not properly harnessed.

One of the most important steps in making sure your chainsaw stays in good working order is general maintenance, including changing of the chain from time to time.

Changing your chain is a fairly straightforward task that requires safety, care and a general understanding of how the chainsaw operates. Once you meet all of these requirements, changing out the chain could be a 10-minute job.

WHY CHANGE THE CHAIN?

A sharp chainsaw chain makes your machine more efficient and powerful. Over time, your chain will dull, leaving you with a chainsaw operating at less than full strength.

When sharpening your chain fails to yield the desired results, it's time to completely change the chain.

The first step is knowing what kind of chain you need. Different manufacturers carry different types of chains, so it is vital that you consult your owner's manual to find out what type and size you need. Without this information, you could be taking numerous trips to the hardware store in search of the correct chain.

Once you track down the chain made for your saw, it's



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time to get to work on replacing it in a safe manner. Here's how:

1. Release and remove your chainsaw chain by unlocking the brake and removing the access plate. Your saw may have a different first step, so be sure to check your manual

for proper instructions. After removing the plate, release the chain tension and take off the blade.

2. Install the new chain by loosening the tensioning screw on the inside of the guide bar and carefully installing the new chain onto the

saw. Put tension back onto the bar by pulling it away from the saw — the opposite of how you loosened it.

3. Put the parts back together by replacing the plate and tightening the chain by adjusting the tensioning screw.

Once your chain is replaced, it's time to get back to work.

Be aware of any rattling or other calibration issues when you get started. You should notice a substantial difference in the saw's power and cutting efficiency with the new chain.

Tractor Maintenance

Spring is one of the busiest times of the year for farmers. They use their tractors heavily during this time period to plant new crops and tend to field maintenance.

One of the best ways to cut down on your tractor time is to make sure your equipment is up to par. Regular maintenance such as oil changes, tire pressure checks and spark plug replacements can both extend the life of your tractor and help you get more quality performance out of it.

Your tractor and similar equipment likely came equipped with an hour meter to help you track and perform routine services. There are even diagnostic tools that you can plug into your tractor to help you stay ahead of impending maintenance and repairs.

You also can create a spreadsheet on your computer detailing the date you performed the service and any steps you had to take that may have been out of the ordinary. (This will help you save time trying to figure it out for a second time.)

GENERAL MAINTENANCE TIPS

One small issue with your tractor's engine can mean big problems this spring. Keeping an eye on the smaller pieces of your machine can help prevent this from happening. Check for leaks or worn hoses on your tractor through a visual inspection.

It's also a great time for checking your tractor's safety



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features. These include turn indicators and your neutral start switch. All of these tasks may seem minor, but there are a lot of moving parts on a tractor. Maintaining all of them is crucial to ensuring a long lifes-

pan for your machine.

GAS & OIL

Maintaining high-quality gas and oil in your mower is critical to its performance. When changing the oil, always

remember to:

- Change it when the engine is warm;
- Use the easy-to-open push-pull drain plug and plastic hose, if your tractor came equipped with one;

- If the engine has an oil filter, apply some oil onto the rubber sealing gasket before installation; and
- Always use a funnel or oil spout when adding new oil, and be careful not to overfill.

Fix Driveway Cracks

If we know one thing about concrete and asphalt, it's that they easily crack. Despite this fact, they still make for the most durable and popular material choices for driveways.

Weather conditions and overall wear make cracks inevitable. Water can seep into or below the surface, expand and eventually damage the material. This is the most common cause of driveway cracks.

Fortunately, there are plenty of products on the market that enable homeowners to fix these types of cracks themselves, without having to go through the trouble of replacing entire sections of driveway.

Every spring, you should take a look around your driveway for signs of winter damage. This is the perfect time of year to find new cracks, and then take the appropriate action to fix them.

Here are three steps to repairing a driveway crack:

1. CHOOSE YOUR MATERIAL

For driveway repairs, the most effective solution is a patch product that comes in both pourable and tubed forms. The pourable option is easier to use only because the tubed form requires a caulk gun for application. Choosing between the two is really a matter of preference, as both have been proven effective in repairing driveway cracks.



2. FOLLOW THE APPLICATION DIRECTIONS

The first step to a correct application usually involves clearing the area of dirt, debris and other foreign objects that would compromise the strength of the material. You could even

spray out the crack with a garden hose, letting it fully dry before application. It's recommended that you shake the product vigorously prior to applying.

Be sure to use protective eyewear and gloves when handling the products.

3. SMOOTH THE CRACK

After applying filler to the height of the surrounding pavement, use a putty knife to level out the surface. Sometimes one application isn't enough. Generally, you'll want to wait 24 hours before applying a second coat. Other

instructions can include avoiding walking or driving on the surface for up to two days.

Once you have followed the product instructions and waited the recommended amount of time, you should be able to use your driveway as normal for years to come.