



Summer

HOME & GARDEN

Spruce Up Your Windows

A flower bed goes a long way toward sprucing up the curb appeal, but you can take things a step further by adding window boxes with flowers.

It's a great way to give a new dimension to your landscaping, flower window boxes are relatively cheap and easy.

WHAT IS A WINDOW BOX PLANTER?

A window box planter is essentially a mountable box that houses soil and flowers, allowing you to showcase some bright color right outside your window. You can find window boxes at just about any garden or home improvement store, and prices range from as low as \$30 to more than \$100, depending on the look and material.

WHAT TO PLANT

SF Gate notes variety can be key when dealing with a window box, and you might want to consider mixing things up. Here's an excerpt from their recommendations:

“An interesting window box includes a variety of colors, sizes and textures. Consider the foliage to ensure a window box doesn't include leaves of all one size. Mix tall plants with medium and shorter plants, and upright plants with bushy plants. Trailing plants add variety, grace, depth and extra color. Consider the color of your house when selecting annuals. For example, red flowers



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in front of a red house tend to get lost. Annuals with blue or purple flowers work well for a window box observed up close, while splashy pinks and yellows are visible from a distance. White is an effective

color, especially for highlighting shady window boxes.”

BUILD YOUR OWN

If you're feeling a bit more hands on, you can build your own window box planters.

According to DIY Network, the width of the window determines the final length of the planter. The depth and height should be large enough to hold pots or an amount of dirt that will retain moisture for a few

days. For example, a box that is 7 inches deep and 7 inches high will accommodate 6-inch flower pots. When designing your boxes, be sure to go with a style and paint color that complements your home.

Summer Vegetables

Along with jazzing up your flower garden, summer is an excellent time to plant your own vegetable garden. From a small corner of the yard to full rows, there are a few crops that are perfect for the season.

Here are a few of the top crops recommended by P. Allen Smith Garden Home:

BUSH BEANS

Bush beans are super easy to grow from seed. Direct sow them in the garden after the soil temperature has warmed to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Sow seeds every three weeks for a continuous harvest. Stop sowing about eight weeks before the first fall frost date. Bush beans do not require staking. Beans have shallow roots, so be careful when working the soil around the plants.

CORN

Corn requires a lot of space

to grow, and the pollination must be just right. There are few vegetables that are as tasty fresh from the garden, so it's worth the effort. Corn relies on wind to carry pollen from the tassels to the silks on immature ears. To increase the chances of pollination, it is best to plant corn in a square of short rows. Space plants about 1 foot apart. Feed at planting with a general organic fertilizer and again when tassels begin to form. Water consistently and regularly. Corn has shallow roots, so water diligently, especially during dry weather.

OKRA

Okra loves hot weather, rich

soil and full sun. It should be direct sown in the garden several weeks after the last spring frost. In spite of this plant being considered a Southern vegetable, it can be grown in cooler climates. Seeds should be started indoors and moved to the garden after the summer equinox in late June. Treat them like your mother's best china when you plant seedlings, because the roots are very delicate. Pick pods when they become 3 to 4 inches long. If they are allowed to over-mature, the plants will stop producing. The over-ripe, tough pods are great for adding interest to cut flower arrangements.

TOMATOES

Tomatoes grown from seed should be started indoors five to six weeks before the last spring frost. Set the plants out when the soil has warmed and night temperatures stay above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Tomatoes need six to eight hours of full sun. Get your stakes or trellises in place when you plant.

Plant tomatoes deep; bury at least two-thirds of the plant's stem. This will give the plant strong roots and allow for better fruiting. If the plants start looking worse for wear toward the end of summer, cut back and fertilize for a new flush of growth.

Summertime Hues

From artwork, to fresh paint, to something as simple as a new throw on the sofa, there are a million ways to spruce up your house for the summer months. But, which colors should be your focus?

Typically, bright is a safe bet, though HGTV and interior designer Tobi Fairley have put together some recommendations to dig a bit deeper into the nuance of color selection. Here are their recommendations, as well as explainers for why these colors are the perfect fit for the season:

REFRESHING LIME

It's not just for sprucing up drinks, anymore. The color can have the same effect on a room, according to HGTV. Use it as a highlight accent, like the bookcase backdrop shown here, then bring in smaller accessories in the same color to complete the look.

SKY BLUE

"I like to use it in healthy doses on furniture, drapery panels and large accessories," Fairley says. It can bring the same quieting effect to a bedroom, sitting room or any space where you like to relax and unwind."

SEAWORTHY CORAL

Coral is a standout shade no matter where you use it, according to Fairley. Accessories are a natural fit for this accent color, whether it's a pillow sham or a throw



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for the foot of the bed. For a bigger statement, add an unexpected twist by pairing this punchy color with white for a striped ceiling.

NAIL POLISH RED

HGTV says nail polish red, which is just as bright and

dashing as you might expect, could be the perfect color for an interior entrance point to "set the tone" for the rest of the house. Red is typically perceived as inviting and happy.

NAUTICAL NAVY

Navy is apparently one of

the hottest "new neutrals," and the color is shaping up to be a popular pick for summer decorating. According to Fairley, it can create a statement without overpowering a room. It can be paired it with bold colors, such as red or pink, to create style-setting combos.

FRESH-SQUEEZED ORANGE

The name says it all, and orange is a classic summer color that works perfectly for pillows or throws on a neutral-colored couch. The color also works for painted side tables.

Summer Spruce-Up

Summer is a good time to tackle maintenance projects around the house.

Tackle minor touch-ups as well as preemptive moves, that could save money in the long run.

Allstate recommends taking care of everything from gutter cleaning to paint repairs in the summer months.

CLEAN OUT THE GUTTERS

They're probably one of the last things you think about when it comes to home maintenance, but gutters play a critical role in your home exterior and landscape. Gutters divert thousands of gallons of water off your roof and away from your home. If they're not clear, all that water ends up near your foundation and can cause leaks or roof damage.

Use a ladder tall enough to reach your gutters safely, and make sure the ladder is secure before climbing up. Scoop out any wet leaves and debris, and wet caked-on dirt so you can scoop out the mud with a trowel. A water hose also can be used to gently flush out any small debris, after larger items have been removed.

To prevent debris from piling up in your gutters, mesh covers can be installed. Even if you use these "guards," however, you still should check the gutters at least once per year to ensure they're flowing smoothly.

MAKE SURE YOUR DECK IS HEALTHY

Keeping tabs on your deck can save a lot of time and maintenance, so Allstate recommends taking a close look to visually inspect the boards for curling, cracked or rotting wood. If you see a damaged board, remove it and replace it with a board cut to fit the same space.

Take the time to inspect underneath your deck to ensure the support system is in good shape. The boards may look good on top, but a problem underneath could still cause a major collapse. Have a pest control service check underneath, to ensure you don't have animals digging up and nesting under your deck or porch.

If your deck is finished, some experts also recommend retreating the deck every few years with new waterproofer and sealant. This can give an old deck a new look, while providing much-needed protection.



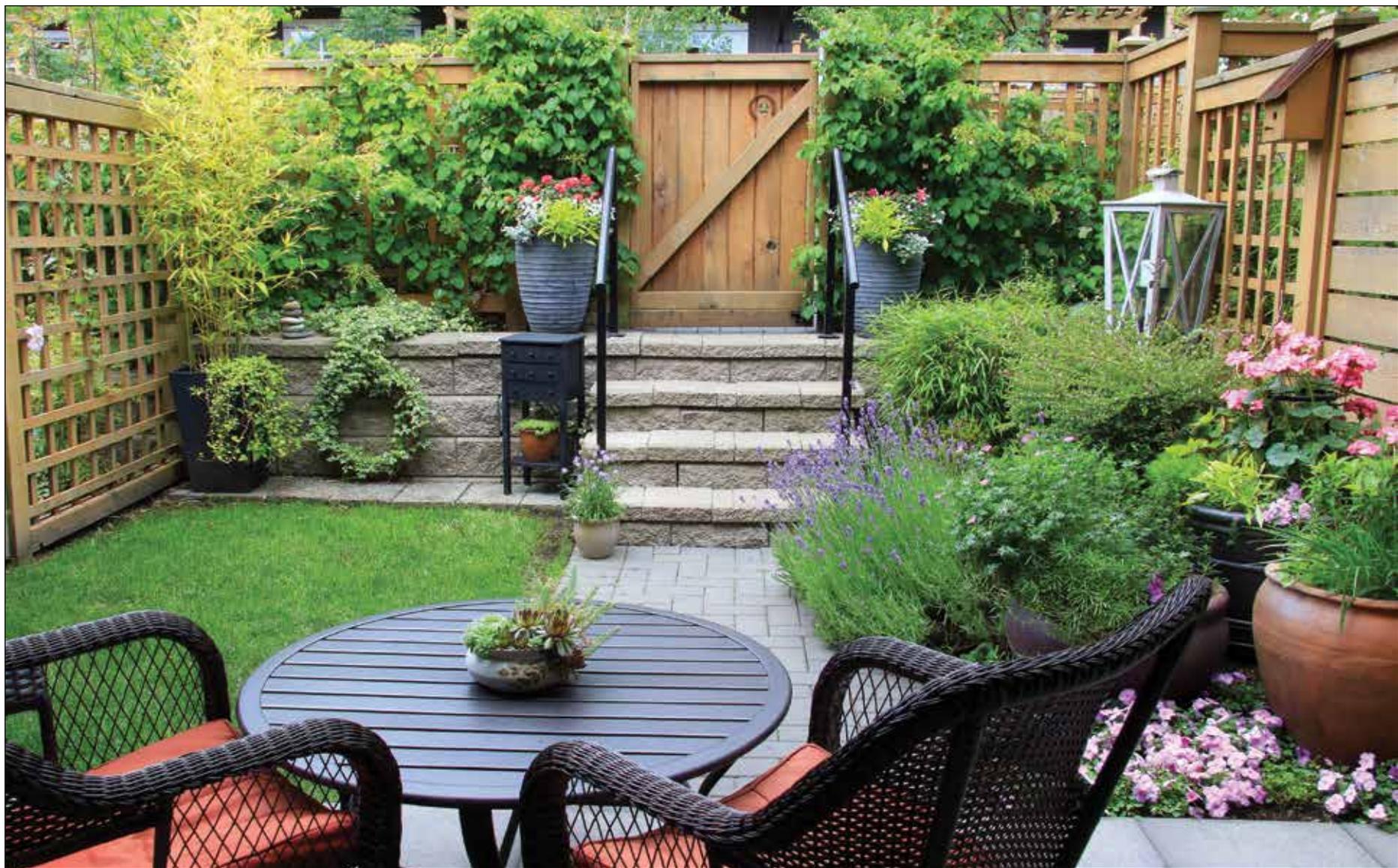
Choosing Patio Furniture

Building a nice patio is one thing, but it won't do you much good without furniture for relaxing (or partying).

While you're shopping for the perfect patio furniture, Better Homes and Gardens has a few tips to make the right choice for your space.

FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WANT

It seems obvious, but the first step is to gauge your available space and visualize how you want to lay it out. Check out Pinterest or design magazines for ideas on the different types of furniture, then make a list of the different pieces you'd like to have, with the choices driven by what will fit on your patio. A longer, couch-style piece and two chairs? Or a table for eating outdoors? The options are limitless, so think long and hard about how you'll actually use the space. You might like the look of a certain chair, but if you plan on eating breakfast on the patio four days a week, you might want to go with the table and chairs set.



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TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Here's the fun part: Go shopping! Once you figure out what you're looking for, take your time and try out some different sets and pieces that fit what you want. Think long and hard about the materials, too. Is your patio covered, or open air? The materials (seat

cushions, etc.) make a big difference. Aim for something as low-maintenance as possible. Better Homes and Gardens notes most metal, teak, cedar and all-weather wicker pieces are unfazed by whatever nature throws their way. Going with one of these materials

should keep your patio looking fresh for years to come.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT STORAGE

With some savvy design, your patio can double as storage for all those grilling tools and other outdoor items you

use in the warmer months. It can help keep those items handy, and safe from the elements.

Thinking beyond storage, you might want to also consider creating a space to store your patio furniture when it is out of season. That furniture

won't get much use in the winter anyway, and that's also when some of the most damaging elements come into play. If you have a basement or shed accessible, it could be worth it to set aside some space to keep your patio furniture safe and dry.

Water Conservation Tips

Summer is the season when you'll likely be watering everything from flowers to the lawn to the vegetable garden, but that doesn't mean you can't save the environment (and some money) along the way.

Popular Mechanics has broken down some of the best tips for conserving water this summer, ranging from the obvious to the ingenious.

HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

That regular old garden hose you probably have hooked up outside? It's one of the least effective ways to water your plants. Much of the water is lost as evaporation, mist or general runoff from the flow. Use a soaker hose or sprinkler wand.

Don't over water

Popular Mechanics notes the average lawn needs one 1 inch of water per week, while perennial plants and shrubs need 1-2 inches per week. Of course, the watering rule of thumb changes per plant, and the small spear-shaped plastic tag that comes with most plants when purchased can provide some guides.

But a good rule to follow is to keep the plant's soil lightly moist, and if conditions are especially hot and windy, keep an eye out for wilting. Add more water if that happens, but be sure not to over-water, which can be just as bad as under-watering a plant. Over-watering leads to root rot and soil compaction that robs the roots of air.



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FOCUS ON THE FRONT OF THE YARD

Which part of your yard plays the biggest role in curb appeal? Probably the front. So, if you're trying to conserve water, use the majority of

your allotment on the area that will be seen the most.

MAKE SURE THE WATER IS COOL

Plants need cold water, so make sure they get what they

need. Don't use a hose that's been coiled up and filled with water, especially if its been sitting in the sun all day. Popular Mechanics notes that a coiled hose acts like a water heater, and hot water stresses

the growth of sensitive plants, which could lead to them needing more water. Store your hose in the shade or run off the heated water for another purpose before giving your plants a cold drink.

Home Energy Tips

The most obvious way to keep things cool in the summer is to crank up the air conditioner, though the U.S. Department of Energy has some tips for how to chill out a bit more efficiently.

USE YOUR WINDOWS

If you live in a climate where it cools off at night, turn off your cooling system and open your windows while sleeping. When you wake in the morning, shut the windows and blinds to capture the cool air. Install window coverings to prevent heat gain through your windows.

USE YOUR THERMOSTAT EFFICIENTLY

When you do have to crank on the air conditioning, do it wisely. Set your thermostat as high as comfortably possible in the summer. The smaller the difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the lower your overall cooling bill will be.

Keep your house warmer than normal when you are away, and lower the thermostat only when you are at home and need cooling. A programmable thermostat can make it easy to set back your temperature.

Avoid setting your thermostat at a colder setting than normal when you turn on your air conditioner. It will not cool your home any faster and could result in excessive cooling and unnecessary expense.

USE FANS AND VENTS

To help move some of that



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cool air around, a ceiling fan will allow you to raise the thermostat setting about 4 degrees Fahrenheit with no reduction in comfort.

Turn off ceiling fans when you leave the room. Remember that fans cool people, not rooms, by creating a wind chill effect. When you shower or take a bath, use the bathroom fan to remove the heat and

humidity from your home. Your laundry room also might benefit from spot ventilation.

Make sure bathroom and kitchen fans are vented to the outside (not just to the attic).

DON'T CREATE MORE HEAT

On hot days, the DOE recommends you avoid using the oven. Instead cook on the stove, use a microwave oven or

grill outside. Install efficient lighting that runs cooler. Only about 10 percent to 15 percent of the electricity that incandescent lights consume results in light; the rest is turned into heat.

Take advantage of daylight instead of artificial lighting, but avoid direct sunlight.

Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes. Consider air

drying both dishes and clothing. Take short showers instead of baths.

Minimize activities that generate a lot of heat, such as running a computer, burning open flames, running a dishwasher and using hot devices such as curling irons or hair dryers. Even stereos and televisions give off some heat.