



Welcome to a new growing season! The early spring is always a time of new beginnings. In many ways, it feels more like the "new year" than the beginning of January, at least for those of us who love the outdoors. It may feel a ways off still, but we are eagerly anticipating the longer days and warmer temperatures to come.

As our lawns come back to life, they reveal to us many areas of opportunity. While each spring brings with it a full list of necessary cleanup and maintenance tasks, the real fun comes with exploring new additions and improvements. Determining which direction to go with new landscape designs can be an exciting process that yields rewarding results. It can also be overwhelming at times. In this issue, we discuss some tips to ensure a smooth process from initial landscape planning to completion.

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## OUTDOOR LIVING: TRANSFORMING YOUR PROPERTY

Over the past year, Americans have spent more time at home than they had been used to. While this unexpected change of lifestyle has thrown us all for a loop, it has also provided a chance to reevaluate our homes and what they can be.

Outdoor spaces are a major area of opportunity for most homeowners. An underused or neglected part of your property can be renovated into a beautiful and inviting space that can become a focal point of your backyard. It's amazing what can fit into a relatively small area.

Many homes already have outdoor living spaces that could be expanded or improved. As the years go by, your family's definition of an ideal outdoor living space is likely to change. Time and weather eventually take their toll on all outdoor hardscape elements. What once was inviting and usable may have lost its luster.

### ENVISION AND EXPAND

If you're looking to establish a new living area or update an existing one, the possibilities are nearly limitless. The first steps are to assess what you have, determine what you want, and devise a plan to make it happen. What outdoor activities do you most want to accommodate? If the goal is to be able to facilitate large gatherings, it would make sense to install or improve your patio area. A foundation of ornate pavers, natural stone, or stamped concrete is a great starting point. From there, features such as kitchen areas, installed seating, or fire elements all work together to define your new space.

### UNDER COVER

Whether your priority is outdoor dining, cooking, or socializing, an awning or roof makes your new space incredibly accessible and inviting. The stifling summer sun has a habit of driving people inside. A shaded patio area allows you to enjoy long, comfortable summer afternoons that last into the evening. A covered space also provides a cozy, dry refuge when rain pops up. Summer rain can be pretty enjoyable if you're not getting wet!

### ACCENTUATE AND DECORATE

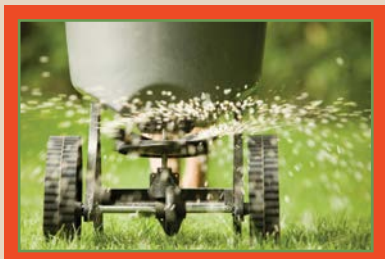
Outdoor living spaces can be both functional and beautiful. Living landscaping such as shrubs can add natural beauty as well as providing privacy and shade. Plant beds and planter boxes add color and texture, while water features and landscape lighting give your space a unique ambiance that's sure to draw a crowd. Decorative features let you inject your own style and personality into your project, so be creative!

The past year or so has required many people to rethink how their homes are used. Hopefully, this unique time has also allowed you to consider new ways in which your home can be more fully enjoyed. An expanded living space tailored to your family's style and needs is a home investment that will pay dividends for years to come.



## WHY DO WE FERTILIZE?

Most homeowners realize that fertilizing their lawn is a beneficial practice. What is sometimes unclear are the mechanics behind fertilization and what fertilizer is actually made of. Turfgrass creates its own food supply through the process of photosynthesis that converts water, sunlight and carbon dioxide into usable sugar. Fertilizers help this process along and help direct turf growth by aiding a variety of growth functions.



The ingredients that make up fertilizer can be lumped into two primary groups of macronutrients and micronutrients. Large amounts of macronutrients are needed, while micronutrients are needed in smaller quantities. Macronutrients such as nitrogen, potassium, magnesium and sulfur encourage blade growth, root growth, and green color. They also strengthen the cell walls of turf plants and aid in disease resistance. Micronutrients include minerals such as iron, zinc, manganese and copper. These nutrients are important ingredients for your lawn's production of chlorophyll. They also act as catalysts for the reactions that drive turf's metabolism and growth regulation.

These nutrients are found in soil in varying amounts, depending on a number of factors. To ensure that your lawn receives all the necessary nutrients, well-timed and well-balanced applications are the way to go. Ideal schedules and formulations vary, depending on your region, turf type, and soil condition. If you have questions about providing your lawn with the nutrients it needs, we can provide the answers!

## PREVENTATIVE WEED CONTROL

Your lawn may appear to be an orderly and consistent carpet of lush, green grass. If you're lucky, this may be the case. The more common reality is that your turf areas are battlegrounds where your intended grass battles with weeds, including rogue varieties of grass, to achieve dominance. Invasive, unwanted weeds compete with your turf for water, nutrients, and space. Your grass has a much better chance to win this fight if you join the battle as well.

Pre-emergent herbicide treatments are a proactive measure that kills off harmful weeds before they have a chance to cause a disturbance. This is especially helpful when fighting an aggressive weed like crabgrass. Crabgrass seeds are incredibly durable and can stay viable and dormant for extended periods. Once conditions are suitable, crabgrass comes out in force, spreading quickly throughout your turf areas. Unfortunately, the dry and hot conditions that are problematic for most lawns are very favorable for crabgrass. If not addressed, crabgrass can overtake your entire lawn.

Pre-emergent herbicides create a seal on your soil's surface, disabling a key enzyme that results in weed seed germination. Dormant seeds are unable to develop, while established turf is unaffected. When applying pre-emergents, timing is crucial. If applied too early, the active ingredients that inhibit weed growth will dissipate before they can be of any help. If applied too late (once germination has already begun), then the ship will have sailed, and weeds will be able to develop as normal. The ideal time to treat lawns with pre-emergents is when air temperatures have reached 65-70 degrees for at least 4 consecutive days.

Proactivity pays when it comes to caring for your lawn. The more turf issues that can be totally avoided, the less costly and difficult your lawn will be to maintain. Preventing invasions of aggressive weeds like crabgrass sets your turf up for a vital and healthy year. Before the battle for your lawn becomes an all-out war, ask us for help with pre-emergent treatments.





# WINTER PRUNING FOR SPRING SUCCESS

In the middle of winter, when your landscape shows virtually no signs of life, tree and shrub care isn't the first thing on your mind. Don't let the apparent lack of activity fool you. The dormant season is typically the best time to perform the very important task of pruning your trees and shrubs.

Pruning is necessary to control the size and shape of your trees and shrubs and to maintain their health. Removing overgrown branches that are encroaching on other landscaping and hardscaping is physically and visually important. Removing dead or dying wood ensures that it will not be brought down due to high wind. Precise pruning also greatly reduces the chance of pests or disease, which are common with damaged limbs. By removing the parts of the tree that you do NOT want, you fuel the growth of the parts of the plant that you DO want to expand.

Why does it make sense to do this in the winter? The first reason is strictly practical. When trees and shrubs are leafless, they're easier to navigate. Proper pruning is more than indiscriminate limb removal. In order to maintain the plant's shape, it's necessary to cut out the right parts of the plant at the right locations. In the dormant season, it's much easier to assess plant structure and identify damaged or diseased limbs to be removed.

The off-season is also ideal for pruning because trees and shrubs have a better opportunity to heal themselves from pruning cuts. The active growth of spring and summer requires a huge amount of energy and resources. Pruning in the middle of the growth season can spread these resources thin and slow down the healing process. During the winter, all available energy can be devoted to regrowing bark and closing up wounds from pruning.

Tree and shrub care is a year-round process. Strategic pruning during the dormant season results in well-shaped, healthy trees and shrubs that are ready for an explosive spring.



# SET THE STAGE FOR SPRING

Even though winter seems dreary and lifeless, spring will be in full force before you know it. Prepping your lawn and landscape for the coming year is a great way to look forward to warm weather while ensuring that you're ready to welcome the new season once it arrives.

A straightforward, but important, part of spring preparation is a general cleanup. Winter storms bring down leaves and debris that accumulate in your lawn and plant beds. It doesn't take long for leaves and sticks to become a mucky mess. A thorough raking and cleanup tidies up your lawn's appearance, clears the way for spring blooms, and reduces the likelihood of fungal disease.

Depending on the type of winter you experienced, there's a good chance that your lawn may have suffered snow mold damage. Sometimes, a lawn will also suffer partial die-off due to cold, gray winter weather. Lightly raking your lawn to remove any dead or dying turf will make it easier for healthy, viable turf to take off in the spring.

Winter is also a great time to plan additions or adjustments to your landscape. If you have areas devoted to annuals, give some thought to which annuals you'd like to plant next season. If you have empty spaces or turf areas that you would like to repurpose into plant beds or ground cover, now is the time to strategize.

While things may seem sleepy right now, there's plenty that you can do to set spring into motion. By clearing the way for new growth throughout your property and planning new projects, you can make your lawn and landscape more than ready for the new season.



# MAKE THE MOST OF COMPOST!

Composting is a practice that reduces your household's waste while creating nutrient-rich soil that your plants will love. A compost bin can be a simple container, as long as the composting material is able to stay in contact with air. Once you have a bin established, keep these best composting practices in mind:

**STIR THE POT:** The composting process is one where bacteria break down organic material. Bacteria need oxygen in order to do this. By stirring the compost every few weeks, you ensure that the decomposing materials are exposed to enough oxygen to keep the process going.

**SHRED IT UP:** Just like chewing your food is the first step of the digestion process, shredding larger compost material makes composting more efficient. Reducing leaves, vegetable scraps, and other bulky refuse helps compost decompose into usable soil more quickly.

**SPECIAL INGREDIENTS:** Nitrogen is an important ingredient in the composting process. This naturally occurring element is especially concentrated in both alfalfa and bone meal. By adding one or both of these "activators" to your compost, you facilitate its progress. Another necessary ingredient is water.

Composting is an ecologically responsible and economically smart lawn and garden practice. By following a few easy composting guidelines, you can reduce household waste while creating nutrient-rich soil for your landscape.



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