

Green Thumb

How trees can change the look of a landscape

Benefits to consider while adding new plants and trees



Spring is home renovation season and no area of a home is off limits. That includes home exteriors, particularly in regard to landscaping.

Lawn and garden centers draw crowds on spring weekends, as homeowners are anxious to get out in the yard after spending more time indoors over the winter. Plants and trees provide a simple and unique way to transform the look and feel of a property. As homeowners ponder what can be done to freshen up their landscapes, they can consider these benefits of

incorporating new plants and trees into their properties.

• Add some pops of color. There's no shortage of colorful plants to add some pops of color to a property. Azaleas, lilacs, pansies and rose bushes can add a wide range of colors to a landscape, providing undeniable and awe-inspiring curb appeal when the plants bloom.

• Native plants won't compromise their neighbors. When choosing plants for a landscape, it's important to pick those accustomed to the local climate. A non-native

plant might be able to withstand local conditions, but it also might compromise other trees and plants on a property. When choosing new plants and trees for a landscape, work with professionals at a local lawn and garden center to identify native plants that can handle local weather conditions and do so without putting existing plants on the property in jeopardy.

• Trees can add considerable privacy. Homeowners who don't want fencing or those whose towns or homeowners' associations won't allow fencing, may look to trees to add the privacy typically provided by fences. The growth rates of trees vary by species, so homeowners who want instant privacy should look for trees that are already tall or fast-growing. Needle-point holly (which reach an average height of 10 to 15 feet) and sweet viburnum (25 to 30 feet at maturity) are fast-growing species to consider when planting for privacy. Green giant arborvitae are a popular privacy tree, as they can

reach significant heights and widths within a few years of being planted. And while it's always good to consult a lawn and garden center for advice on the compatibility of a given tree with the local climate, green giant arborvitae are known to thrive in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones five through eight, which cover a significant portion of the United States.

• Evergreens keep a property green throughout the year. Homeowners who lament the loss of color each fall when their existing trees shed their leaves can keep a property green throughout the winter by choosing evergreen trees for landscapes. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation notes that evergreen trees excel at conserving moisture, which allows them to keep their leaves and maintain that distinct and appealing green color throughout the winter.

Various plants and trees can help homeowners change the look of their landscapes without busting homeowners' budgets.

Tips on fertilizing a lawn



Shortly after buying a home, many first-time homeowners recognize how challenging it can be to maintain a property. Many embrace that challenge and refashion their homes to reflect their personalities, interests and tastes.

First-time homeowners may direct the bulk of their attention to decorating the interiors of their homes upon moving in, but the work extends outside as well. Tending to a lawn is a responsibility worth taking seriously, as the American Society of Landscape Architects reports a well-groomed landscape can increase resale value by anywhere from 15 to 20

percent. First-time homeowners may not be thinking about resale value, but it's never too early to prioritize lawn care, which should include routine fertilization. Fertilizing can ensure a lawn grows in lush, green and healthy, but first-time homeowners may want to know a few things prior to taking a spreader for a spin for the first time.

• Identify what the lawn needs before purchasing fertilizer. No two lawns are the same and that's something to keep in mind when shopping for fertilizer. Even neighboring properties may have different soil needs, so it's imperative that

homeowners identify any nutrient deficiencies prior to fertilizing. A simple, inexpensive soil test can reveal what a lawn needs and such results can help homeowners pick the right fertilizer for their properties.

• Get a handle on nitrogen needs. First-time homeowners will undoubtedly come across fertilizers promising to address nitrogen needs in a lawn, but it's important to avoid over-fertilizing with nitrogen. Nitrogen is absorbed quickly, particularly when homeowners remember to water each day after fertilizing. So it's easy to add too much nitrogen, which can lead to the development of thatch that ultimately blocks sunlight, nutrients and water, thus leading to weaker roots and a lawn that looks nothing like the lush, green carpet homeowners are aiming for. Homeowners concerned about overdoing it with nitrogen can utilize a slow-release fertilizer that gives the lawn time to absorb nutrients and break them down.

• Apply evenly. Even application is an important component of successful fertilizing. Many find it easier to apply fertilizer evenly when using a spreader with a granule fertilization product. Spray

fertilizers can work as well, but first-timers may find it difficult to apply products evenly when spraying. When using a spreader, read fertilizing packaging instructions carefully to ensure the spreader is on the right setting when starting. If the setting is not correct, you may end up spreading too much or too little fertilizer.

• Fertilize more than once. The lawn care experts at Lawn Doctor® note that strategic applications across the seasons will increase the chances a lawn comes in lush and green. Fertilizing more than once between spring and fall is a necessity no matter which type of grass is in the yard, but the timing may vary depending on grass type and local climate. Consult with a local lawn care professional to determine when and how often to fertilize.

Fertilizing a lawn can produce a home exterior homeowners can be proud of, even if they have little or no experience with lawn maintenance.

Gardening's impact on mental health



Gardening and strong mental health seemingly go hand-in-hand. A study published in 2018 in the journal Clinical Medicine found that exposure to plants and green space, and particularly to gardening, is beneficial to both physical and mental health.

Penn State Extension says working with the soil and plants can help relax the mind and have a grounding effect on the gardener, as gardening can help to reduce stress, anxiety and

even built-up anger. Gardening also helps a

person connect to the current moment and not be caught up in their mind. Nearly all forms of exercise, gardening included, can lighten mood and lower levels of stress and anxiety.

Also, routines, such as spending a certain portion of the day weeding or tending to gardening needs, creates a soothing rhythm to ease stress.

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