



# How to prepare soil for spring planting

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil. Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive. Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote

plant growth this spring.

- Clean up the previous months' mess. Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting. Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in your soil preparation routine.

- Loosen the soil. Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest in tools like a

shovel, spade, spading fork, and/or a lawn edger. If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder. It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is completed.

- Test and, if necessary, amend the soil. A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the

availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive. In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.

Soil conditions go a long way toward determining if new plants will thrive. Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.

# Shedding some light on home solar

Consumers shopping around for home improvement projects may be leaning toward overhauls that can reduce energy consumption and save them money in the long run. This is a driving factor behind a growing number of homeowners investigating solar energy for their residences.

## How does solar power work?

Solar power harnesses the sun's energy and converts it into electricity that can be used in homes. Many people are familiar with photovoltaics (PV), which are the panels that absorb sunlight and create an electric field across their layers. Another so-

lar technology, known as concentrating solar power, is primarily used in large power plants and is not appropriate for residential use, according to Energy.gov.

According to the Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, hundreds of thousands of solar panels have been put in use across the United States since 2008.

## Costs associated with solar

The upfront expense of solar panels is significant, costing anywhere from \$10,000 to \$14,000 for initial installation. However, comparatively speaking, homeowners can spend \$1,500 or more per year on electricity, so solar panels



will pay for themselves over time. Keep in mind that costs may vary depending on energy needs and how many panels will be required to service the system.

## How much electricity can I expect?

The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Advice says that the amount of power generated from a solar energy system depends on a few factors:

1. The average number of hours of direct, unshaded sunlight your roof gets each year;
2. The pitch (angle), age and condition of your roof, and the compass direction it faces;
3. The size and strength of your system;

and

4. Environmental factors such as snow, dust or shade that may cover the system.

## Save even more money

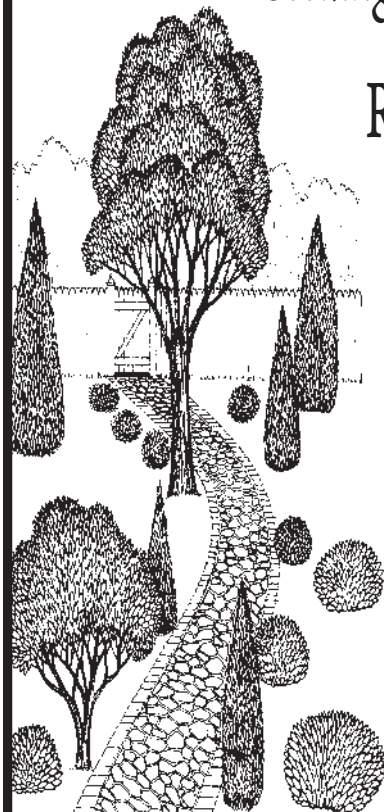
Consumers can contact their utility companies to find out if they provide homeowners who produce solar power with "net metering." This program pays the homeowner money or gives credit for excess power the system produces and returns to the electric grid. Individuals also may be eligible for energy tax credits or other benefits.

Homeowners may find it worthwhile to explore solar energy, particularly if they consume a high amount of electricity.

## Ruyle Lawn Care & Landscaping

Providing Quality Lawn Maintenance for Over 28 Years

Mowing • Trimming • Lawn Clean Up • Tree & Shrub Care • 5-step Fertilizer • Lawn Renovation • New Lawn Seeding • Landscape Installation



### Ruyle Lawn Care Mission Statement:

We are dedicated to providing professional full-service lawn care in Carlinville and the surrounding communities, serving residential and commercial needs while maintaining competitive rates and exceeding customer expectations.

Call today for your free estimate.

Office (217) 854-9786    Mobile (217) 825-4632

## Why regular car washes are important

Taking care of a vehicle involves more than just maintaining the equipment under the hood. There are a number of steps involved in keeping a car or truck in top form, and that includes regular car washes.

Car washes keep a vehicle shiny and clean, which can help it look good while sitting in the driveway or cruising the highway. However, regular car washes are more than cosmetic.

- Protection from the sun: A car that is routinely and properly washed and waxed is less vulnerable to damage from the sun's ultraviolet rays.
- Extend the life of paint: Dirt and debris can build up on the paint surface and eventually lead to scratches and other damage. Bird droppings and sap can be corrosive. Washing will help remove grime and protect the paint in the process.
- Preserve the vehicle's value: Drivers who plan to sell or trade in their vehicles in the future should realize that a well-maintained car can bring in as much as 20 percent more for above-average condition, according to Kelley Blue Book. Maintaining a clean and shiny vehicle can protect its long-term value.
- Remove salt: Drivers who live near



the ocean or in areas where roads are salted in the winter to melt snow may have cars with high salt corrosion rates. Unless it's washed off frequently, salt can take its toll, leading to damage.

- Improve fuel efficiency: Drivers have felt pain in their wallets at the fuel pump in recent years. Dirty cars may be less aerodynamic and less fuel-efficient as a result. Keeping a car clean may improve its fuel efficiency.
  - Maintain the interior: Car washes are not only about the exterior. Keeping a clean and tidy interior can help improve the air quality inside of the vehicle and prolong the life of upholstery, mats and interior components.
- Car washes should be a routine part of vehicle maintenance. Professional car washes tend to be more eco-friendly than washing a car at home, so drivers are urged investigate their service plans and features.