Salute to Spring

May 25, 2016
Special Supplement to the WINCHESTER PRESS

Professional gardener Ed Lawrence: The five "Ds" of pruning.

How to have bountiful gardens on a budget.

Get your pool ready for a summer of backyard fun.

Grow your own produce: Veggie garden tips for beginners.

Local goods and services for your home and garden.

Just in time for the spring home improvement and gardening season, our special section is loaded with ideas, advice, inspiration, and offers from our advertisers. This is a one-stop guide to enhancing your home, inside and out.





Six steps to creating fairy gardens for kids

Gardening can be an enjoyable activity for adults and children alike. Gardening encourages creative thinking and can make for an eco-friendly activity as well.

Adding a touch of whimsy to gardening can make it that much more attractive to children. Perhaps that is why fairy gardens have become so popular among youngsters. Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurse and enjoy indoors. Here are six steps to get your fairy garden up and running.

1. Choose your container or location. Decide where to place the fairy garden. Hollowed-out tree stumps are both contained and outdoors, and kids may feel like the fairies inhabited this neglected area of the yard and made it their own. Otherwise, use containers you already have, such as old pots, hanging baskets, picnic baskets, or cookie tins. Wooden birdhouses with their roofs removed also can make for clever places to house the gardens.

2. Choose a theme. Fairy houses can take on any theme their creators prefer. Themes help children decide what to include in their gardens. For example, a seaside retreat may work well with little reclining chairs, sea grasses, and succulents. You can then complete the theme by adding some seashells and coloured stones.

3. Draw up your design. Before securing anything in the container or digging into your garden bed, sketch out a garden design. This gives you an idea of how the finished product will look. Even before planting, gently place plants and other components in their spots and move them around accordingly until you find the desired look.

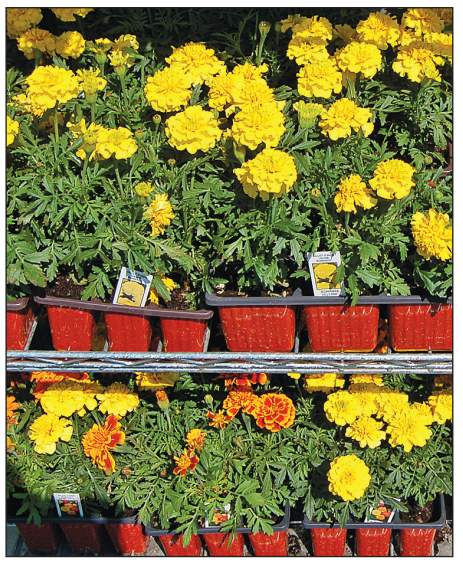
4. Include similar-needs plants. Mixing plants that have different requirements can make it challenging to care for the fairy garden, so select plants that require similar levels of sunlight, prefer similar soil conditions and require roughly the same amount of watering. Herbs are a smart choice because they stay small and are easily maintained.

5. Don't forget a fairy dwelling. You will need to add a house for the fairies to inhabit. Small bird houses can work, but you also can consider old teapots, bird-nesting boxes, or even homemade houses assembled out of bark and twigs. Use your imagination and the garden will take on a life of its own.

6. Invite the fairies. Children can invite fairies to take up residence (fairies often show up at night and tend to remain unseen), or children can create their own fairies using craft materials.







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Big city selection, small-town service in Metcalfe

by Melissa Johnston

METCALFE

For more than 21 years, Allan Johnston Repair and Sales has been a cornerstone in the Metcalfe community for anyone needing outdoor equipment, engines, or motorized tools.

Sharen and Allan Johnston opened their small-engine business in the spring of 1995, after Allan had been in the industry for 15 years.

"I strongly felt a quality equipment sales and service facility was what our region needed," said Allan. "After the first year of operating in the existing building – from which my father and his family successfully operated in the same location since 1926 – we saw that a larger, more modern facility was needed to grow the business."

So, the Johnstons began to design and build the existing building, which houses 2,500 square feet of service, and 5,000 square feet of showroom and parts.

Aside from being Ottawa's only Arctic Cat dealer, they are also certified dealers for Stihl, Husqvarna, Gravely, Ariens Snow Thrower, FXR clothing, Canada, EZ Hauler, Mission, Triton Trailers, and more.

Additionally, they also service everything that they sell, as well as offer rentals for many of their products.

"The way of doing business has changed – people used to be all about the box store experience, but now are realizing its better to do business locally," added Allan. "It's not just about buying something, it's about who will look after you and service you when you have a problem."

At the end of November each year, Allan Johnston's hosts their annual open house to showcase their products, services, and sales to the community.

For more information on their available products and services, visit their newly improved website at www.allanjohnston.com, or stop in during their business hours Monday Friday from 8 am to 5 pm, and Saturdays from 8 am to 12 pm.



Pictured are the Johnston family members at their company's yearly open house event last November – Allie (back, left), Sharen, Allan, Melissa (front, left), and Amy.

Press Photo – Gosselin

Seeing green: How and when to fertilize your lawn

Spring is a prime time to fertilize because the lawn is reviving after a long season of cold weather and dormancy. Come spring, lawns need to be fed to turn green and grow. Soil supplies some of the nutrients grass needs, but many soils lack elements that lawns need to survive the growing season. Lawn and garden experts say a healthy and actively growing lawn uses a great deal of energy, and fertilizer will provide the boost it requires. Fertilizer helps promote new root and leaf growth, aid in recovery from damage, reduce weeds, and replace nutrients lost to water runoff.

Fertilizing the right way

Follow these steps to feed the lawn and help it thrive.

• **Test the soil to check for pH.** You want the soil to be as close to neutral as possible so it can readily process the nutrients in the fertilizer.

• **Use a broadcast or rotary spreader.** Broadcast or rotary spreaders will evenly distribute fertilizer and will not cause striping on the lawn like drop spreaders might. Resist the urge to fertilize by hand, as you may lay an uneven amount of product, producing burns and brown spots.

• **Slow or fast-release?** Fertilizers come in slow-release, fast-release, and weed and feed formulations. Which fertilizer you use will depend on the type of grass you have and how much time you have to devote to lawn maintenance. Slow-release fertilizers may be preferable because they do not need to be reapplied often.

• **Excessive fertilizer can damage a lawn.** Use caution and set the spreader to distribute less product if you are unsure how much to apply.

• **Water well.** Water the lawn well after application, and always follow the fertilizer manufacturer's instructions.

• **Keep off the grass.** Keep people and pets off of the lawn for a day or two after application.

• **Fall fertilization.** Another application of fertilizer in the fall will supply lawns with nutrients to help survive winter.

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Signs of an unhealthy tree

Perhaps because they can live for so many years, trees have a way of being at the bottom of homeowners' landscaping priority lists. Trees also tend to be big and strong, so it's no surprise that they often are overlooked in favour or other areas of a lawn and garden that don't seem so strong in the face of Mother Nature.

But trees are susceptible to damage and disease, and homeowners who learn to recognize symptoms of such problems can prevent them from escalating and reduce the risk that the trees will cause damage to their properties. The following are just some of the ways homeowners can determine if their trees are unhealthy. Homeowners who suspect they have a tree that poses a safety risk should contact a professional tree service for an immediate inspection and steer clear of the tree until an inspection has been performed.

• **Check around the base of the tree.** The base of a tree may offer some telltale signs that the tree is unhealthy. Soil that is cracked or raised at the base of the tree may be indicative of a tree that has started to uproot. If you recognize any cracking or if the soil is raised, look at the tree to see if it is leaning. If the soil is cracked or raised because it is uprooting, then the tree might have already started to lean in the opposite direction of the cracking or raised soil.

• **Examine for fungus.** The growth of fungus on the tree trunk or close to it may be a sign that the tree is rotting or decaying. Fungal growth, such as a sudden population of mushrooms, around the base of the tree is another sign of decay. If the wood behind fungal growth crumbles easily, then homeowners should call a professional tree service, as the fungal problem on the tree has likely already been festering for quite some time.

• **Look for cavities on the trunk.** Cracks and cavities on a tree may not be an emergency, but especially deep cracks and cavities may be indicative of a structural problem. Multiple cracks and cavities also serve as red flags.

• **Look for dead wood.** It may sound simple, but dead wood poses a threat to the tree and anyone who happens to spend time in its vicinity. Dead wood snaps easily, and falling dead wood can harm anyone unlucky enough to be beneath the tree when the dead wood snaps. Dead wood branches won't bend in the wind, and such branches frequently fall off of trees when strong gusts of wind come along. Dead branches either won't have leaves or the leaves will be brown (dead pine branches will have brown needles).

• **Weak connections.** Unhealthy trees often have weak connections between their branches and their trunks. If branches don't appear to be strongly connected to the tree bark, call a tree service to determine a solution. The tree might not be on its way out, but you may have to take steps to strengthen the connections so branches are not at risk of falling.

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How to help honey bee populations thrive

We can help feed honey bees and other pollinators with the gardens we plant every year. Whether this is on your balcony, a rooftop or in your backyard, even a small patch of flowers can help local hives.

It can be as simple as:

• Mixing up the flowers you grow with varieties that are attractive to honey bees; and

• Planting a mix of seeds that will bloom throughout the season to help ensure a plentiful nutritious food source for honey bees.



When we see honey bees travelling from flower-to-flower, we're actually watching a gatherer find and collect nutritious food. Instead of eating it, they bring much of it back to their hives. As a result, pollen gets transported between different plants, and for many of those plants this process is necessary for reproduction.

All of this activity is part of an important relationship between humans, honey bees and flowers. Without honey bees, many of our plants won't be able to reproduce, including some of the fruits and vegetables we eat. In order to keep honey bees healthy, we need to plant flowers that have nutritious nectar and pollen. In a way, that means we provide each other with food, and it's a trade we should be happy to make!

There are hundreds of choices for pollinator-friendly flowers to choose from, which might seem daunting. Programs like Buzzing Gardens can help by providing free seeds in a mixture specifically geared towards honey bees. You can get your own packet to grow a Buzzing Garden at www.beesmatter.ca.

www.newscanada.com

Gardening pointers for novices

People have many reasons for growing gardens, and some of the most popular gardens are plots designated for cultivating herbs and vegetables.

Fresh produce at the ready is a great benefit of having a home garden, which also allows homeowners to exercise full control over which products to use to grow robust, healthy vegetables.

Novice gardeners may not know where to begin when it comes to planting their first vegetable gardens, and such gardeners can benefit by starting small. You may want to begin by growing plants in containers so they are more manageable and can be moved as you discover which areas of your property provide the best growing conditions.

Begin with one or two types of vegetables. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and certain squashes are popular starter plants, as they are relatively hardy. Select only a few plants so you are not overwhelmed with the level of care required to maintain your garden.

Some gardeners prefer to start plants from seeds, but this will require more time and a greater commitment with regard to maintenance and planting. When just starting out, experiment with small plants that are established and already have a good root system.

Consult with your local gardening centre for more suggestions, such as which soil amendments to use. Plants may require a certain soil pH that can be adjusted for optimal plant growth.

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How to have bountiful gardens on a budget

by Karen Sheldrick

WINCHESTER

Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies Canadians enjoy. There are so many ways to garden, limited only by your imagination.

However, with endless possibilities, our gardening budget can quickly get out of control.

With a little bit of planning, however, your flower beds and vegetable gardens can look great for just a few dollars.

Here are a few tips:

Vegetable gardens

If you have a garden each year, dry out seeds and pods to use the following year. Once dried completely, store in small paper bags labelled with the name of the seed.

Start tomato, cucumber, and pepper plants by seed in mid-February. Use cardboard egg cartons or plastic containers such as the ones that mushrooms come in – no need to purchase specialty containers.

To get the most bang for your buck in a small garden, plant vegetables with the highest yield per square foot such as carrots, beans, tomatoes, and peppers. Climbing vegetables such as sugar snap peas and beans grown on poles on the back of the garden maximize your garden's space.

Flower Beds

Start flower beds off with a good base of perennials – these plants re-grow each year.

Trade with neighbours to get a different variety of perennials than you already have, or divide your own plants to expand your gardens. Hostas multiply quickly and divide easily, whereas buying one new plant can cost up to $10.

Sprinkle annuals in between your perennials to fill in the gaps until the perennials mature.

Purchase plants that offer the most show for your dollar such as impatiens and begonias for shade areas, and traditional petunias for sunny spaces. Be mindful of colours as well – deep purple and red blooms are not as easily seen as light pink and yellow.

For flower pots and hanging baskets, compare making your own versus buying them pre-made. Last year my gardening budget was $25 and I was able to fill four flower pots and two flower beds with beautiful pink begonias.

General gardening tips

• Make your own rain barrel using a garbage can and a hose or spigot.

• Make your own composter and compost. A composter can be made for practically free from used pallets.

• Check garage sales, discount and second hand stores, curb-side exchanges, free offerings from "Kijiji" or "Buy Nothing" (a Facebook page where you give and receive with no money exchanged) websites for gardening tools, planters, wheel barrows, and more. Also check out the new "Big Give" in early June where everything is free!

Use boiling water instead of chemicals to kill weeds on walkways and driveways.

Fertilize your plants with ground-up egg shells, as well as water that your vegetables have been boiled in.

If using mulch, compare the cost of buying bulk versus by the bag.

If I could give you only one money-saving gardening tip, it would be this: Carefully plan out what will go into your gardens, and set a limit for your gardening budget before heading out to the stores, making sure to stick to the limit. With all the beautiful flowers, plants and accessories to choose from, it can be very easy to overspend. Knowing you stayed within your gardening budget will help you enjoy your hobby even more.

Happy gardening!!

Editor's note: *If you would like financial coaching for creating a spending plan that works, paying down debt, or saving for retirement contact Karen at dovefinancialcoaching@bell.net for a free consultation.*



Exchanging perennials with friends and neighbours is a good way to stretch your gardening budget.

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The five "Ds" of pruning

Gardening guru Ed Lawrence give tips and tricks for spring pruning

WINCHESTER

When it comes to pruning plants and trees this season, there's a right way – and a wrong way – to do it.

According to professional gardener Ed Lawrence, a horticultural head honcho who stopped at Winchester United Church last month to give a group of home gardeners some tips, the most important place to start is with shears that cut clean.

For more than 30 years, Lawrence advised gardeners on CBC radio, and also worked as the chief horticulturalist at Rideau Hall in Ottawa for successive governor-generals from the 1970s until 2005.

During the presentation, he advised using bypass hand pruners as opposed to anvil-styled ones, which can damage plants by bruising or crushing them. He also advised gardeners against cutting branches or twigs on an angle, as more surface area means more chance of disease finding its way in.

"My pet peeve is the way people prune their trees and trim their hedges," said Lawrence, chuckling. "Typically a hack job done at the wrong time – but it all starts with the proper pruners."

Gardeners should aim to prune only 25 per cent of each tree, hedge, or plant every season – take a picture



Gardening expert and CBC radio personality Ed Lawrence shared his green-thumb know-how with a crowd of about 70 people last month at Winchester United Church. Press Photo – Gosselin

beforehand to check and compare. That way, the ecosystem won't change enough to shock the plant, which could leave it unable to heal, exposing it to infestation or disease.

"Gardening is the essence of control," added Lawrence.

He also noted that there are five "Ds" to remember when deciding which parts of the plant, tree, or hedge should be pruned first.

1. Dead

If it's dead, take it out. Always snip with the cutting blade towards what you are taking off, and cut as close to the branch's node as possible, leaving the node intact.

2. Damaged

Make a very straight cut, closest to the node, exposing a minimum amount of cut surface area. This way, the branch will heal well, keeping out disease and insects, and require no pesticides. A properly sealed area eventually becomes bark.

3. Diseased

Whether the tree has fungus or root rot, cut at the place of infestation. Again, cut closest to the node, keeping it intact, and clean the bark around the exposed area of the branch. If the branch's cut area is white, it means it cannot heal – try cutting the branch closest to the next node.

4. Dangerous

If there are branches obstructing a path, tapping on a window, or hanging over a sidewalk, pruning could save homeowners both injury and headaches. According to Lawrence, if a tree or plant has dangerous elements, it should take first priority over any other factors.

5. Desirable

Once all the other "Ds" are taken care of, a gardener can finally start pruning for what they consider to be aesthetically pleasing, such as shaping a tree. Because of the 25 per cent rule, sometimes it can take several seasons for a gardener to get to the desirable parts of pruning.



Thyme to taste

Meadow Greens Nursery recently hosted a "Herb-a-licious" workshop for a group of gardeners wanting to learn more about growing their own herbs to utilize in various ways. About 12 people came out to participate, tasting three different dishes using a wide selection of herbs, as well as testing some mint tea. Owners Tony and Jane Hendrikx also lead a discussion on how to use, store, and pick herbs. "A lot of people ask me for ideas on how to use herbs in their cooking, as spices or garnishes, so I thought it would be an engaging way to learn more," said Jane. "And everyone [gets] to make their own wooden herbal planter to take home." The Hendrikx's host several community workshops throughout the year to reach out, involve, and inspire their customers to get passionate about gardening. The next workshop will be on Sun., June 5 at 2 pm, where junior gardeners ages six and up are welcome to create their own pressed flower sun-catcher. To pre-register, call 613-445-3042. Courtesy photo

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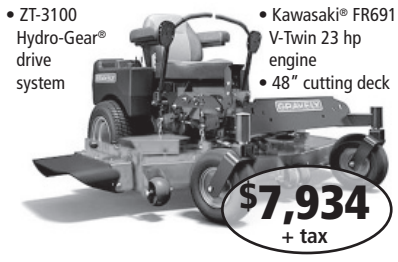

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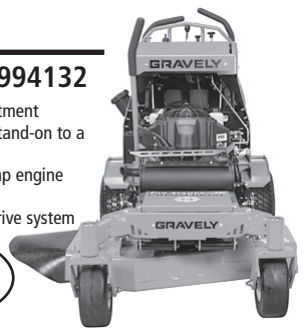

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Simple steps to a greener lawn

Many homeowners aspire to have lush green lawns. Thriving, healthy lawns can make homeowners proud and improve their property values, as the lawns make homes more attractive to prospective buyers when those homes hit the market. While lush lawns won't suddenly appear overnight, homeowners can take certain steps toward creating the stunning green lawns of their dreams.

• Don't overreact to brown lawns. Lawns can turn brown for various reasons, but overreacting at the first sign of brown grass can make the situation worse. Some lawns turn brown because they have gone dormant to save energy for the cooler and more damp days to come. Applying fertilizer in such situations can damage rather than revitalize lawns. Fertilizers or chemicals applied to brown lawns may burn the lawn, creating additional stress that potentially hinders the lawns' recovery.

• Aerate compacted soil. Compacted soil may be the culprit behind discoloured lawns. Over time, soils of all kinds can become compacted, which prevents moisture from reaching a lawn's roots. As a result, the roots don't grow and the grass is denied the nutrients it needs to thrive. Aeration combats compacted soil by poking tiny holes in the ground to loosen the soil. Speak with a landscaping professional about the best time to aerate, which typically only needs to be done once per year. As compacted soil becomes looser, the lawn will become more resistant to drought and begin to resemble the lush green lawn you're aiming for.

• Raise your mower blades. Some homeowners set their mower blades to the lowest possible setting so they can extend the intervals between cuts and reduce the number of times they mow in the hot summer sun. But cutting the grass too short exposes the soil to the sun, making it difficult for soil to retain moisture and promote deep, strong plant roots. When raising the blades, inspect them to make sure they are still sharp. Dull blades won't cut the grass as cleanly as sharp ones, potentially causing tears in grass blades that invite disease and contribute to poor moisture retention.

• Address pest problems. Pests are unwanted guests who affect lawns in various ways, depending on the type of pest. Grubs feed on grass roots, while mites feed on the nutrient-rich juices that lawns need to thrive. Pest control may depend on the type of pest and how advanced the infestation is, so speak with a landscaping professional about your pest problems before attempting to combat the problem on your own. Letting a pest problem fester may force you to replace the lawn entirely, but addressing it promptly can likely save you both the cost and heartache associated with such a project.

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Treasure trove

Looking for unique garden accessories? Country Treasures, a giftware boutique that operates inside of Winchester BMR, features a large selection of country and primitive items, for inside and outdoors. Distressed wooden lanterns, ornamental garden stakes, wall hangings, and wind chimes can be used to create a rustic garden decor.

Press Photos – Rushford



Fire up the barbecue with peanutty, Thai-inspired kebobs

With the traditional Thai flavours of lime, chili, and peanuts, this mouth-watering dish will add wow factor to your next barbecue. For tender and tasty bites, slice your meat against the grain and provide ample time for marinating.



Thai Flank Steak Kebobs
Makes 8 large skewers

Ingredients
- ½ cup (125 ml) unsweetened coconut milk
- ¼ cup (60 ml) peanut butter
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) hot Chinese chili sauce
- 1 Tbsp (15 ml) ginger, finely grated
- 1 lime
- 1 ½ tsp (7 ml) granulated sugar
- 1 ½ tsp (7 ml) fish sauce
- ½ tsp (2 ml) ground turmeric
- 1 flank steak, about 1 ¼ lbs (625 g)
- ½ small red onion
- 1 red pepper
- Salt, preferably kosher, to taste
- Thai basil, coriander leaves or chopped mint for garnish
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) peanuts, coarsely chopped

Directions

1. In a shallow dish just large enough to hold meat, combine coconut milk, peanut butter, chili sauce and ginger. Finely grate peel of 1 lime and add to dish along with lime juice, sugar, fish sauce and turmeric. Whisk until combined.

2. Thinly slice steak against the grain into strips about ¼ to ½-inch thick (1 to 2-cm). Place in marinade and stir to coat. Cover, stirring occasionally, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

3. Oil grill and preheat barbecue to medium-high heat. Slice onion into thin wedges and cut red pepper into bite-size pieces. Thread kebobs, alternating pieces of meat with onion and red pepper. Sprinkle with salt. Grill for 5 minutes, turning frequently, until meat is just cooked through and vegetables are tender. Serve garnished with herbs and peanuts.

Additional recipes can be found at www.peanutbureau.ca.

www.newscanada.com

How to prepare the grill for the season

When it's time to dust off the grill for the season, grillmasters may think all that's necessary is to pull off the cover, reconnect the gas and start cooking. But it's best to give grills, new and old, a thorough cleaning and seasoning to prepare them for several months of use.

Begin by looking inside of the grill and under the cover and grates to see if any insects or animals have taken up residence. Inspect for any debris, such as leaves and twigs, as well. Clean off any spider webs.

Check the hose that connects to the portable gas tank or the natural gas line to the house to see if it's intact and clean. Clean off the hose if it has any buildup and make sure there are no holes or cracks. You do not want to risk the hose lighting on fire. If wear and tear is significant, replace the hose for safety.

Take out all of the grates and washable components and scrub them down. Some leftover drippings or food particles may remain from last year. Check the grease trap and be sure to clean that out as well.

Next up is to season the grill. When everything is dry and the grill is off, coat all of the grates and gas emitters with high-heat cooking oil like canola. Make sure the oil coats the grates and gas emitters evenly and wipe up any excess. Then light the grill and let it heat up for around 15 minutes, or until the oil burns off or starts to smoke. Doing this time after time before cooking will help the grates develop a shiny, dark finish, helping them get hotter and cook food more evenly. Lightly coat grates with oil after each use to inhibit rust as well.

After all of these steps have been taken, it's time to take the grill for a test run. Check the temperature of the food before serving to determine if the grill's thermostat is working correctly and to avoid any foodborne illnesses.

Now you're ready to grill the rest of the season.

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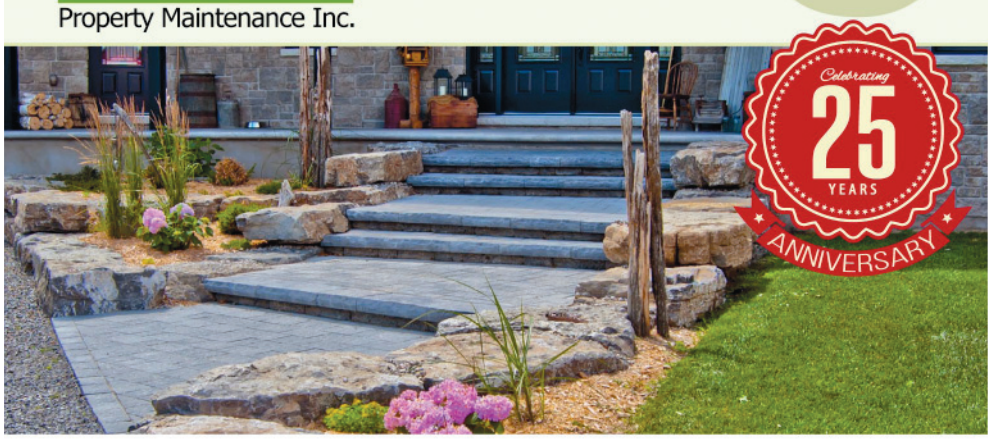





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Grow your own produce with Winchester BMR

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From flowers to fruit, the aesthetic and economic benefits of planting a fruit tree in the backyard flourishes every season.

Whether it's a Bartlett pear tree or a Golden Delicious apple tree, Winchester BMR's Garden Centre offers a variety of fresh fruit trees and bushes to keep up with the upswing of home-gardeners looking to grow their own produce this year.

"The way the economy is… More people are looking to grow plants they can eat and save themselves money," said Mandy Peddle, garden centre advisor. "You get years of providing your family with fruit."

A pear tree can produce as much as 12 to 15 bushels of fresh fruit per year, while an apple tree can produce between 15 and 20 bushels. However, it can take as many as three to four years before the grower starts seeing any fruit to harvest.

According to store co-owner Ken Boje, every plant in stock, be it fruits or vegetables, are offered at the store based on how well they grow in the Eastern Ontario climate.

"We buy the plants for our zone, so that the grower can get the best chance at keeping that plant for many years," said Boje. "Apple and pear all have beautiful blooms, short-lived maybe, but we've had more requests this year for certain types of trees."

The garden centre also offers a wide selection of herbs and veggies – everything from carrots to cucumbers, broccoli to brussels sprouts, lettuce and leeks – so gardeners can save money on all of their produce.

While a head of cauliflower can cost as much as $8 at the grocery store, Winchester BMR has four plants of cauliflower for $1.25, according to garden centre advisor Fay Gallinger.

"It's nice when you don't have fruit or veggies in the fridge, you can just go outside and pick your own," she said. "A lot more people are looking for kale, too, because it lasts longer in the season and withstands cooler temperatures."

There are also health benefits to growing your own produce, such as having the option to not use pesticides, as well as being active in the garden.



This year, more customers are coming to Winchester BMR's Garden Centre looking for fruit trees and vegetable plants so they can grow their own produce. Garden centre advisors Fay Gallinger (left) and Mandy Peddle agree that it can be economical to purchase a plant that bears fruit or veggies.

Press Photo – Gosselin

Veggie garden tips for beginners

Planting a vegetable garden can be a worthwhile endeavour for anyone who has an available patch of land. Gardens need not take up much space, and even apartment dwellers without yards can plant small gardens in containers they place on terraces or window boxes.

Although establishing a garden is easy enough, beginners may make a few mistakes along the way. Here are some suggestions for beginners.

One of the first decisions novice gardeners must make is which crops to grow. This will help determine how much land you will need and which supplies or soil amendments will be necessary. According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, a common error for beginners is planting too much and more than anyone could ever consume, so it's best to start small and be proud of that small garden.

Plants such as peppers, cucumbers, and tomatoes produce throughout the season, so you may not need many plants to provide for your needs. Less prolific plants may require a greater investment to produce a similar yield.

Locate your garden in an area that gets adequate sun. Many vegetables need between six and eight hours of sunlight per day. Without enough light, they will not bear as much and could be susceptible to insect infestation. Vegetables and fruit also need plenty of water because they're not very drought-tolerant, so keep gardens close to a water source.

Another good tip is to locate the garden near the house or barbecue grill. This way you can easily harvest fresh produce and use it when cooking.

Soil preparation is also key. Till the soil and remove debris like rocks, sticks, and hard clumps of dirt. Work with organic material, such as manure or compost. Apply mulch after planting to help maintain moisture levels in the soil.

Plant the tallest crops at the rear of your garden bed. Work forward with shorter crops. Try to leave a foot or more between planting rows.

It's easy to get a garden started and enjoy fresh food for many months to come.

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Maintaining bird feeders, baths essential to avian health

Homeowners who want to attract birds to their properties can do so by providing the birds food, shelter, and places to wash up or cool off. Installing a bird feeder and a bird bath in your yard is one way to attract a bevy of winged creatures that can provide hours of enjoyment.

Establishing a bird-friendly environment may seem as simple as hanging a feeder on a pole or tree and erecting a bird bath nearby. But a certain level of maintenance is needed to keep birds healthy and happy.

According to the experts at the *Bird Watcher's Digest,* recent research indicates feeders can sometimes be a source of disease for the birds visiting them. The Audubon Society echoes that warning, saying that bird feeders and baths can serve as transmission stations for diseases such as aspergillosis, avian pox, and salmonellosis. Recently, scientists noted that the spread of trichomonad protozoan parasites is on the rise, especially among mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon populations.

Such warnings are not meant to deter budding birding hobbyists. Organizations like the Audobon Society hope that such warnings send the message that disinfection and maintenance is necessary to maintain sanitary environments for birds. Doing so is relatively easy and well worth the time for birding enthusiasts.

• Clean hanging feeders once every two weeks or more often if they're heavily used. Ground-feeding designs should be cleaned every two days. Feeders can be immersed in a very-diluted solution of bleach to water (nine parts water to one part bleach). Let soak for a few minutes, and then scrub the feeder with a stiff brush or scouring pad before rinsing. Allow the feeder to dry completely before refilling it with seed.

• Bird baths should be emptied of water each day. Brush or wipe the bath clean, then rinse and refill with fresh water. Do not leave standing water overnight; otherwise bird baths can easily become a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other parasites.

• Frequently collect discarded seed hulls and clean bird droppings from beneath feeders. If the area around the feeder has become especially soiled, relocate the feeder elsewhere and clean its initial location.

• Follow proper instructions with regard to seed and other bird food. For example, reduce the amount of suet offered in hot weather. Heat can cause suet to spoil, and sticky suet can become stuck in birds' feathers and make it hard for them to keep clean.

• Try to provide more than one feeder and bird bath to prevent overcrowding. Crowding can contribute to the spread of disease.

• Do not situate feeders and bird baths under perches where they can be soiled by droppings.

• If you notice birds look sick or are not acting strangely, halt feeding and bathing to prevent healthy birds from becoming ill. Wait a week before resuming feeding and notify wildlife officials if you find dead or sick birds around your property.

• Locate feeders and baths at least 30 feet away from windows so birds do not get confused by reflections and collide with the glass.

• Store seed in a dry container with a tight-fitting lid to prevent mould from forming and moisture from getting in.



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Press Photo – Slack



Making the most out of mulching

Lawns and gardens can often benefit from the laying of mulch. Mulch serves various purposes in lawns and gardens, and many experienced lawn and garden enthusiasts lay mulch to ensure their properties make it through spring, summer and fall unscathed.

First-time homeowners with little or no landscaping experience may not understand the benefits of mulch, which can be used to strengthen soil and protect properties from the elements.

What is mulch?

Mulch refers to a material spread around or over a plant to enrich and/or insulate its soil. Many homeowners prefer mulch made of wood chips, which is both effective and readily available. Organic mulches, which include leaves, wood chips, compost or grass clippings, can be used by homeowners who want to develop eco-friendly landscapes.

Why mulch?

Mulching can benefit plants around a property in various ways. Many people lay mulch because the mulch helps soil retain moisture in the summer, when temperatures tend to be at their hottest. This can help plants survive summer heat waves.

Mulch also can be used to suppress weeds. Weeds, which steal moisture plants need to build strong roots and survive summer, need light to grow. When laid correctly, mulch deprives weeds of the light they need to grow. Organic mulches can even provide homes for crickets and a type of beetle that feed on weed seeds.

Mulch also can deter harmful pests depending on the type of mulch homeowners choose. When purchasing mulch, homeowners will have to choose between the aforementioned organic mulch or man-made mulches, which may be made of plastic or rubber.

While man-made mulches may repel pests, they also can have adverse effects. Plastic, for example, can heat up in the summer and cause plants to burn.

Certain organic mulches can repel insects that can threaten plants. That's because the majority of organic mulches increase the amount of beneficial bacteria in the soil, and they also increase the presence of helpful insects that do not pose a threat to plant life. Those helpful insects help keep harmful insects at bay.

Compost is a type of organic mulch that may attract harmful insects. While that does not mean homeowners should shy away from using compost as mulch, they should know that they may need to employ organic insecticides to combat their unwanted guests.



Mulch is a valuable tool for homeowners. A thick layer of organic mulch can help the soil retain moisture while preventing weeds from taking over.

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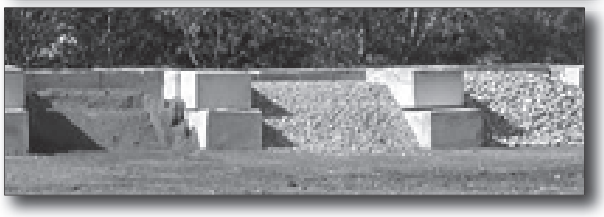

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Mums not exclusive to fall

Chrysanthemums, often referred to as "mums," are among the most popular flowers for autumn plantings and landscape decor. But these hardy, often vividly coloured plants are worthy of attention as early as the spring gardening season.

Although mums are most often purchased in September and October and cast aside shortly thereafter, the plant that many people mistake for an annual is actually a perennial – meaning with the proper care it can come back year after year. By planting hardy varieties of mums in the spring, gardeners ensure the plants have enough time to develop solid root systems, including their hallmark underground runners that enable them to grow tall and wide and over-winter.

Gardening experts advise planting hardy mums in sunny spots with southern exposure. However, be sure to keep the plants away from artificial lighting, such as street lamps or garden accent lighting, as mums are short-day plants that bloom only when the hours of darkness are greater than the hours of daylight. Mums that get too much light at night may not bloom to their fullest capacity, or they may be "leggy," with longer stems instead of being compact. Pruning or "pinching" mums in June and July will help keep mums compact as well, resulting in more flowers.

Mums desire a rich and moist but well-drained soil. Planted mums will require less water than container plants, but the ground should never become soggy. Well-watered plants will offer more flowers.

Hardy mums work well as edging, in mass groupings to create a shrub-like appearance. Thanks to their relative affordability, mums are an inexpensive way to dress up landscapes. Look for varieties that are hardy in zones three to five. Many early-flowering varieties have been developed by plant breeders in Western Canada at the Brandon and Morden research stations.

Although fall-flowering mums may not be the first plants to come to gardeners' minds at the onset of spring, planning chrysanthemum landscaping now can help ensure beautiful plants when spring and summer flowers begin to wither.



Well known for bringing colour to autumn landscapes, mums actually are a perennial that can be planted in spring to come back each year.

Arm your cottage against summer safety threats

If you didn't realize that cottages, mobile homes, boats, and even pop-up trailers require smoke alarms, you're not alone. Many people think smoke alarm laws are only applicable to permanent homes.

In fact, exactly the opposite is true. Across Canada, building codes, provincial laws, or municipal bylaws have distinct specifications for these types of spaces. Virtually every type of camper, trailer, RV, cottage, and boat with living, cooking, or sleeping quarters requires a working smoke alarm on every storey and outside all sleeping areas.

Many dwellings can also be at risk of exposure to carbon monoxide (CO), known as the 'Silent Killer.' This lethal gas is colourless, odourless, and tasteless and is emitted from any fuel-burning device such as wood stoves, wood, oil, propane or gas fireplaces, appliances, stoves, heaters, coolers, and generators. It is also given off from boat and vehicle exhaust.

In addition to having heating systems, flues, and ductwork checked annually by a professional it is a must to protect your family not only with a smoke alarm but also with at least one carbon monoxide alarm. This device is the only way to know if CO is present. In Ontario and Yukon, the law requires installation of CO alarms outside sleeping areas in any dwelling at risk of CO exposure.

When first opening for cottage season, fire safety officials advise to take stock of your smoke and CO alarms before you kick back with a cold one. Fresh batteries should be installed, and cobwebs and dust lightly vacuumed off.

It is essential to check if your smoke alarms are due for a replacement. Over time sensors can weaken and become obstructed with airborne pollutants. Even if they sound when you push the test button, outdated alarms must be replaced. If your smoke alarm is hardwired, battery powered, or plug-in it should be replaced every 10 years, and CO alarms every seven to 10 years, depending on the brand. If you are not sure of their age, manufacturing dates can be found on stickers or under the alarm cover.

When selecting safety devices, invest in models with the latest technology. Kidde, a leading manufacturer of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, recently introduced its newest "Worry-Free" model lineup with advanced sensors that reduce false alarms. Alarms also feature a 10-year sealed lithium battery – meaning it doesn't need to be replaced for the alarm's entire lifespan.

Visit www.safeathome.ca for more summer safety tips.

– News Canada

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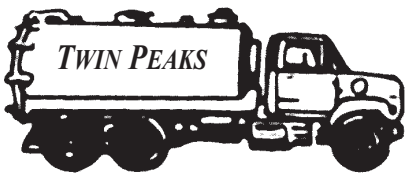

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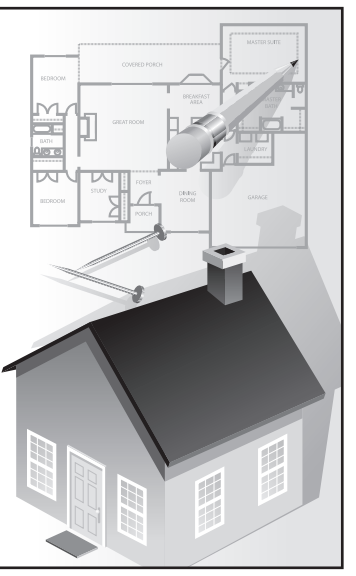

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Get your pool ready for a summer of backyard fun

Even though the nights are still cool and we've only had a taste of nice, warm spring weather so far this year, pool season will soon be in full swing and now is the time to think about getting the pool opened. If you closed your pool properly for the winter, the opening should be an easy process. Follow these tips for an easy opening:

1. If you have a winter cover, use a submersible pump to remove any water from it. Remove the cover, lay it out, and sweep or hose it off to clean it before letting it dry. Ensure that it is thoroughly dry before rolling it up for the summer. If possible, store in a dry place away from rodents, insects, and moisture.

2. If needed, add water to the pool until the water level reaches the middle of the skimmer.

3. Remove all winter plugs from returns and skimmer. Install return jets and skimmer basket.

4. Check the pump, filter, and heater (if you have one) for any damage or worn out parts. Hook up all hoses to the pump and filter, making sure all connections are clean and tight. Check all o-rings and gaskets for cracks and make sure they are well lubricated with a non-petroleum-based product, such as Jack's Lube.



After months of cold, snow, and ice, the weather is starting to warm up and your pool is nearly ready to be the centerpiece of some backyard fun in the sun! Funtastic Pool and Spa stocks everything you need to open, close, and maintain your pool throughout the swimming season. Don't have the time to do it yourself? Don't worry! Funtastic Pool and Spa offers a full range of services so you can enjoy your pool without all the hassle. *Press Photo – Rushford*

5. Fill the pump with water to ensure it primes properly and if you have a sand filter, turn the dial to backwash. Turn the pump on and backwash for one to three minutes to clean any antifreeze out of the lines. (Above ground pools may not have anti-freeze, so you can skip this part). Once sight glass is clear, run the pool on 'filter'.

6. Inspect and repair any leaky connections around pump, filter, and/or heater.

7. Once the pool is running, add an Opening Kit and Chlorine to the pool. Allow the pool to run on filter for 12-24 hours before testing the water chemistry. This can be done by following the instructions on your water test kit or bring a sample into Funtastic Pool and Spa. Add any chemicals necessary to balance the water.

8. Depending on the condition of the water, it may be necessary to backwash a few times or clean your cartridge filter frequently. Vacuum out any debris that has settled to the bottom.

9. Once the water is clear, test the water again to ensure that it is balanced. When the water is clear and balanced, your pool is ready for swimming.

10. Adopt a routine maintenance program for the season. This is essential for your enjoyment of a beautiful pool all summer long.

Funtastic Pool and Spa provides pool opening services for those who prefer not do it themselves.

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Have a wonderful summer!

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The many benefits of hiring a professional landscaper

The flowers are blooming, and the grass has begun to grow anew, making spring a great time for homeowners to once again turn their attention to landscaping. Those who aren't looking forward to dusting off their lawn mowers and rethreading their string trimmers may want to hire professional landscapers to tend to their lawns and gardens.

The rising use of lawn care services is indicative of homeowners' appreciation of the convenience and craftsmanship professional services can provide. While the impact professional landscapers can have on a property's aesthetic appeal is considerable, homeowners also benefit from working with professional landscapers in various other ways.



Time saved and a professional job are just two of the reasons homeowners hire lawn care companies.

• **Time savings:** One of the biggest benefits of leaving lawn care to the professionals is the amount of time it will save for the average homeowner. Lawns generally need to be mowed once per week during the spring and summer seasons and, depending on the size of the property, that can take an hour or more. Add the time it takes to clean up clippings, mulch landscaping beds and edge the property, and homeowners can expect to devote a significant chunk of their weekends to caring for their lawns. Lawn services employ a few workers who make fast work of the job, leaving homeowners time to enjoy their weekends however they see fit.

• **Reduced risk for injury:** Maintaining a landscape is hard work, and those unaccustomed to this type of activity may find themselves winded or at risk of injury. Improper use of lawn equipment also is a safety hazard. Leaving the work to professionals can help homeowners avoid strained backs, lacerations, pulled muscles, sunburns, and any other dangers that can result when tackling landscaping projects.

• **Financial savings:** On the surface, hiring a landscaping service may seem like a costly venture. However, after crunching some numbers, many homeowners realize that doing the work themselves may cost more in the long run than hiring a professional landscaping service. Homeowners who decide to go it alone must purchase expensive equipment, and those lawn tools will require routine maintenance, which costs additional money. Inexperienced homeowners may incur extra fees to "fix" mistakes that occur during the learning process. Each year, new seed, fertilizer, mulch, pesticides, and other supplies also must be purchased. But professional lawn care services typically charge a set fee per month, and that fee covers the maintenance of both your property and the equipment needed to keep that property looking great.

• **Know-how:** Many professional landscapers know how to address lawn care issues that may arise throughout the year. They will know how to deal with dry patches of lawn or poorly draining areas, and they also can make recommendations on plants that will thrive under certain conditions.

• **One-stop shopping:** Certain landscaping services provide many different options for prospective customers. Basic lawn cuts may be one package, but there also may be services for seasonal seeding, weeding, leaf clean-up, and winterizing.

• **Consistent maintenance:** Homeowners who frequently travel or spend much of their summers away from home often find that lawn care companies are a wise investment. Established weekly schedules ensure the landscape always will look its best whether homeowners are home or out of town.



Seeing green

Chantal Nugent (left) and Wade Anderson came out to the Drive Green event held on Sat., May 7 at Winchester's GreenTech Ag and Turf. The couple were looking to find a lawn mower for their large property. Everyone who attended the event was put into a nationwide draw for a 2R tractor series package.

Press Photo – Gosselin

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Beautiful blooms

Add a splash of colour to your yard or patio! Cassidy Hunter of Riley's Valu-mart Garden Centre in Morrisburg is pictured with a brilliant display of annuals – ready to brighten up your garden. Riley's Valu-mart also carries plenty of perennials, vegetables, and herbs, with new stock arriving daily.

Press Photo – Slack

Health Canada launches new pesticide label mobile app

Health Canada has launched a new mobile app that allows users to access pesticide labels that have been registered for use in Canada. This app, called *Pesticide Labels,* will help homeowners, farmers, industry, as well as provincial and federal organizations look up specific pesticide label instructions from the convenience of their smartphone or tablet. This free app is available from mobile device app stores, including Google Play and the iTunes App Store. With this new user-friendly tool, users can access the most up-to-date health and safety information right at their fingertips.

In addition, users will be able to save their searches as well as download product labels to their 'favourites' for access, even when they are offline. The pesticide label database can be searched based on various factors including product name, chemical or pest.

Pesticide labels have important detailed instructions and warnings that must be followed to protect your health and the environment. Information on product labels include detailed directions for use, safety precautions, first aid statements, and disposal instructions.

Quick facts

• Pesticides are strictly regulated in Canada. All pesticides must undergo a science-based review prior to being approved for sale in Canada.

• Some pesticide products are available for use by the public in and around the home, while others are available to certified professionals for commercial use, such as in agriculture, forestry and other industrial applications.

• When using pesticides, individuals must read and follow all label directions.

• Health Canada's primary objective in regulating pesticides is to protect the health and safety of Canadians and their environment.

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With the tick, black fly, and mosquito season fast approaching, Lannin Home Building Centre in Winchester now carries the new PiActive™ insect repellent. The repellent provides 12 hours of protection from mosquitoes and ticks while also offering 10 hours of protection against black flies. A nice alternative to Deet-based repellents, the formula contains 20 per cent Icaridin, making it a good choice for children. PiActive™ is great for the whole family and can be applied on children ages six months and older – providing worry-free protection that's never oily or greasy. *Press Photo – Rushford*

Protect yourself from ticks in the great outdoors

If you're an outdoor enthusiast, you may be at a greater risk for tick bites – and certain ticks can cause Lyme disease. They're very small, about the size of a poppy seed, and their bites are usually painless, so you may not know you have been bitten.

One of the easiest ways to protect yourself is to prevent tick bites when engaging in outdoor activities. Use insect repellent with Deet or Icaridin, wear closed-toe shoes, long-sleeved shirts and pants and wear light-coloured clothes to spot ticks easier.

Ticks can attach anywhere, but they like certain spots. After you have been outdoors, make it a habit to 'tick check' these areas: inside and behind the ears, along your hairline, in your hair, armpits, belly button, groin area, on your legs, behind your knees, and between your toes.

Ticks can stay attached to skin, feeding on blood and growing larger, for five or more days. However, removing a tick within 24 to 48 hours of starting to feed is likely to prevent Lyme disease because the bacteria will not yet have been transmitted from the tick to the individual.

To remove a tick use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick close to the skin surface. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Try not to twist or jerk, which can cause the mouthpart of the tick to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens and you are unable to remove the mouthpart easily with clean tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal. Clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub or soap and water

Put the tick in a clean container, and contact the your health unit. Only certain species (in Canada, the black-legged tick) carry the infective agent of Lyme disease (Borrelia burgdorferi). While B burgdorferi is spreading geographically in



Canada, not all black-legged ticks carry it. As B burgdorferi spreads to more ticks, it is increasingly important that ticks be identified and tested.

To help your tick check:

• Shower or bathe within two hours of being outdoors. This will wash away loose ticks and help you to find ticks that may be attached to you.

• Don't forget to examine your kids, pets and even your gear. Ticks can enter your home on clothing and animals and attach to a person later.

• Put your clothes in the hot dryer to kill any remaining ticks. Give them a good wash and pop them in the dryer one final time.

Tip: Use a hand-held or full length mirror to check the back of your body or have someone else check it.

Next time you venture outdoors don't forget to keep 'tick checks' at the top of your checklist.

More information on Lyme disease plus ways to protect yourself, your children and your pets, is available at Canada.ca/LymeDisease

www.newscanada.com

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