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Salute to Spring

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.

Wed., May 28, 2014





Left: *Meadow Greens Nursery near Marionville, owned by Jane and Tony Hendrikx, is celebrating three decades in business this year.*

Far left: *Monique Beauchamp made her way through the vast array of planting options.*

Press Photos – Casselman

Three decades of growth at Meadow Greens Nursery

MARIONVILLE

It all began with a single greenhouse.

Thirty years ago, Jane and Tony Hendrikx, who had been married for roughly three years at the time, decided to become their own bosses, and Meadow Greens Nursery was born.

Relying on Tony's knowledge and experience as a grower, and Jane's eye for design and colour, the two set to work growing their new business.

"We started with a small greenhouse, and we expanded each year," Jane said. "Then we connected them all, and added the display garden. It just kind of evolved."

While the Hendrikx's have no plan to expand further, Jane said a storage greenhouse was lost over the winter months, and the plan is to rebuild that structure.

After three decades, Jane said the couple has cultivated "a great clientele of customers that come, and that have come for a lot of years."

In fact, many have been returning to the Gregoire Road nursery each spring for more than a decade. In addition, the Hendrikx's continue to welcome new clientele, who are drawn to the shop for its large and varied selection, as well as for the knowledgeable service.

Children can be found running through the various arms of the massive structure, helping parents choose and collect plants, or climbing on the outdoor play structure, colouring at the kids station, or feeding the fish in the pond, which also features an assortment of available water plants.

The nursery's collection of greenery also includes shrubs, trees, herbs, vegetables, flowers, both annuals and perennials, and more. Everything, with the exception of some shrubbery, is grown onsite, Jane said. In addition to the available planters and hanging baskets, Meadow Greens staff also welcomes custom order requests.

The couple begins planting each February by opening and heating one small greenhouse. Once that section is filled to the brim, another is opened until, eventually, spring arrives and the entire structure is ready to be filled, organized, and designed to appeal to customers.

Open all day, everyday for the majority of the summer, Meadow Greens Nursery also offers workshops and special events throughout the season, including the upcoming Junior Gardeners Create Sun., June 8, where children aged six and up are to create a miniature garden with a pond.

The Hendrikx's also have items on display at the weekly Metcalfe Farmers' Market, which now includes fresh-cut flowers.



R.J. Daly helped out his mom by adding their selections to a trolley.



Christina Schoni is one of the nursery's many dedicated seasonal workers.



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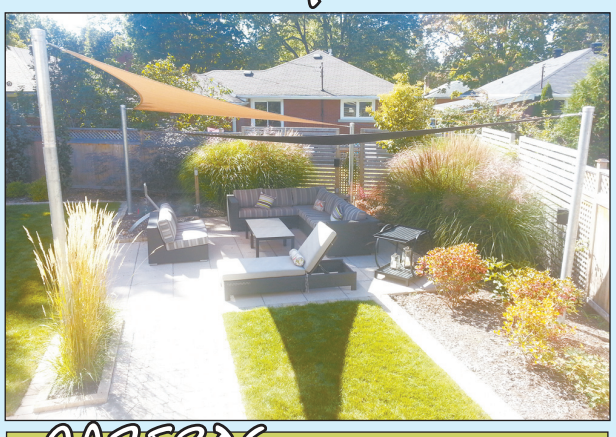

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Ritchie's makes gardening easy

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With spring taking hold in the region, it is time for gardening and farming enthusiasts – both amateur and professional – to visit Ritchie Feed and Seed in Winchester.

"We have experts in every category [of farming or gardening] within the company," manager Ray Gauley said. "We can have answers within minutes to almost any [question]."

The St. Lawrence Street shop, which was purchased from CNL Foods close to 25 years ago, is one of five locations. With a home base in Stittsville, the family of stores also includes shops in Dixons Corners, Brockville, and Ottawa.

"We [owners] thought it would be nice to expand in the rural area," co-owner Doug Ritchie said. "Winchester is a nice little [farming] hub. We're in the farming industry, [and we] just added some of the other categories [that complement it], like gardening."

The Winchester location recently underwent a warehouse expansion in an effort to meet customer needs.

"[Ritchie's] just wants to keep adding things that people want. We try to provide a healthy service, [we are] customer-oriented, [and we are] always asking for feedback from the clients," Gauley said. "As we go, we'll just get bigger and bigger, adding a little bit more each year."

In terms of the gardening section, Gauley said Ritchie's provides a wider variety of options, including the harder to find items.

"Right now, we're just trying to bring in the most popular, [as well as] the harder to find [plants]," Gauley said, adding that the store does take requests. If a customer is looking for an Arctic Willow, for example, he said he can get it.

Currently, the wide variety of in-stock gardening essentials includes an increased selection of perennials, vegetables that are not usually available in this area (asparagus and eggplant, for example), all fruit and shade trees, as well as the necessary tools.

To make shopping easier, Ritchie's is now open 8 am to 4 pm on Saturdays. Gauley said if the new schedule goes well this spring, the store will continue with extended hours throughout the summer, and if it goes well this summer, then all-day Saturdays will become a year-round event.







Top, left: *Wendy Bryan (left) and Bernice Williams listened as their sister, and Ritchie employee, Willa Le Breton explained plant zones.*

Left: *Co-owner Doug Ritchie (left) and manager Ray Gauley posed for a photo during Ritchie Feed and Seed's open house in early May.*

Press Photos – Casselman

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Eco-friendly lawn care can be easy

Homeowners know that a healthy lawn can add considerable curb appeal to a property while giving residents of the home a place to relax and enjoy the great outdoors. But few might know that a healthy lawn can also benefit the environment, especially when homeowners take a proactive approach to lawn care that emphasizes eco-friendly techniques.

A proactive approach to lawn care can prevent certain problems, including disease, insect infestation and weed growth. When such problems arise, many homeowners opt to combat them with pesticides, which can harm the environment. But a proactive approach to lawn care can reduce the likelihood of developing such problems and protect the planet at the same time.



Lawns should be mowed at an appropriate height so they can develop a deep root system.

• **Emphasize healthy soil.** Healthy soil promotes strong roots, which leads to a more robust, lush and aesthetically appealing lawn. While a lawn needs to be fertilized in the spring and at various points throughout the summer, it's important that homeowners avoid overfertilization, which can create thatch that, when allowed to thicken, will prevent nutrients from penetrating the soil. Lawns need more nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium than soil can typically provide, so fertilizing throughout the warm weather seasons and into early fall can promote a healthy lawn. But choose a slow-release fertilizer so it gradually feeds the lawn. Compost and grass clippings can also be spread around the lawn to promote healthy soil. The pH level of the soil should also be checked to ensure the lawn can fully absorb nutrients. Speak with a local lawn care professional to determine what a healthy pH level is for soil in your area.

• **Choose a grass that can thrive in your climate.** Though you might prefer the look of a certain grass, choosing a grass based entirely on appearance is a mistake that could cost you money and prove harmful to the environment. When installing a new lawn, opt for one that's suitable to the local climate. Installing a lawn that needs substantial amounts of water in a region known for drought can rob the lawn of its aesthetic appeal and will cost homeowners a substantial amount of money to maintain. If an existing lawn struggles to stay green regardless of your best efforts, then consider replacing it with a new type of grass that might be more suited to the local climate.

• **Don't cut too low when mowing.** Homeowners who don't enjoy mowing their lawn might be tempted to simply cut the grass as low as possible to extend the intervals between cuts. Experts recommend that grass never be cut more than one-third of the height of the grass blades. Longer grass can take in more sunlight, allowing it to grow in thicker and develop a deeper root system. That deep root system can help a lawn survive drought and prevent disease, two potentially costly problems that often force homeowners to embrace solutions that are not eco-friendly. Ideal lawn height depends on the type of grass, so consult a lawn care professional to ensure you are cutting your grass to a healthy length.

• **Avoid overwatering.** Excessive watering not only wastes water, which is not very eco-friendly, but also hurts the lawn when dry periods inevitably arrive. That's because shallow and frequent watering encourages roots to stay near the surface, so when dry periods arrive, the roots struggle to find water. An established lawn should not need daily watering. Instead, watering responsibly when the lawn needs water and when evaporation can be kept to a minimum, can strengthen a lawn and do so in an eco-friendly way.

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Improve your home and diet with a vegetable garden

Planting a garden can add aesthetic appeal and functionality to a property. Vegetable gardens can transform landscapes while putting healthy and homegrown food on the table. By growing their own fruits and vegetables, homeowners have total control over what foods can be harvested, and they can ensure sustainable, safe practices are used to care for the plants.

Vegetable gardens can be compact or expansive, depending on how much space is available to cultivate. However, first-time gardeners may want to begin small so they can hone their skills and experiment to see which plants are most likely to thrive in their gardens. Expansion is always a possibility down the road.

Choose a location

Spend some time examining your landscape. Vegetables generally need ample warmth and sunlight to thrive, so find an area of the yard that gets several hours of direct sunlight per day.

A sunny spot is good, but you also want a location with adequate drainage so your garden does not succumb to flooding or fungus during and after heavy downpours. Don't place the garden too close to rain gutters or near a pool, where splash-out may occur. Select a location that is isolated from pets so the plants are not trampled and cats and dogs do not relieve themselves nearby.

Decide what to plant

When deciding what to plant, consider what you eat and how much produce the household consumes, then choose vegetables that fit with your diet. Some vegetables, like peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, and squash, produce throughout the season. Others, such as carrots and corn, produce one crop and then expire. Plan accordingly when you purchase plants or seeds, as you want enough food but not so much that it will go to waste.

Choose three to four different vegetables and plant them in the garden. Select varieties that require similar soil conditions, so that you can adjust the pH and mix of the soil accordingly. This will serve as good practice, particularly the first year of your garden. After you have mastered the basics, you can branch out into other produce.

Know when to plant

Many of the foods grown in vegetable gardens, including tomatoes and peppers, are summer vegetables, which means they reach peak ripeness after the height of the summer season. Pumpkins, brussel sprouts and peas are planted to be harvested later on. These plants may be put in the ground a little later than others.

It is less expensive to start seedlings indoors and then transplant them to a garden when the time comes. Seeds can be started three to four weeks before they would be put outdoors. Many vegetables are planted outside in April or May, but definitely after frost conditions have waned. Read seed packets to know exactly when to plant or consult with the nursery where you purchased established seedlings. You also can visit The Garden Helper at www.thegardenhelper.com/vegtips to find out when to plant, seed depth and how long it takes plants to reach maturity.

Vegetable gardens can become central components of outdoor home landscapes. Not only do gardens add aesthetic appeal, but also they produce fresh fruits and vegetables to enjoy throughout the season.



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The right watering can make all the difference in a lush lawn



Poorly situated sprinkler heads can deny lawns the water they desperately need when the temperatures rise.

Proper watering is essential when trying to restore or maintain a lush green lawn. If watered incorrectly, a lawn can be susceptible to a host of problems, including insect infestation, weak roots and disease.

When watering a lawn, especially when temperatures start to soar in the summer, it's easy to think a lawn needs more water and needs it during those hours of the day when the sun is at its most intense. However, those are two common misconceptions about watering. The following are a handful of tips for homeowners who want to help their lawns endure the summer heat and maintain their lush appeal into the fall.

• **Water when temperatures are mild.** When summer arrives, a lawn is best watered when temperatures are at their most mild. That often translates to early morning or early evening. The benefit of watering when temperatures are on the mild side is less water will be lost to evaporation during this time, meaning you won't be wasting water.

• **Situate sprinklers to conserve water.** Homeowners who won't be hand watering their lawns should make sure their sprinklers are placed properly throughout their property. Situate sprinklers so they aren't watering driveways, walkways or patios. All of the water should be going to the grass, especially when drought restrictions are in place and the amount of watering the law allows is limited. It's also important to make sure water from sprinklers isn't being blocked from reaching the grass by trees. Homeowners with especially large trees on their property should consider hand watering the grass beneath such trees to ensure these areas receive adequate water.

• **Lean on mulch.** Homeowners tend to fear drought for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that drought can cause a green lawn to turn brown, potentially affecting property value and robbing a landscape of its beauty. But there are ways to help the soil retain moisture when temperatures are especially hot and dry. Mulch around trees, flower beds, gardens and shrubs can help homeowners get the most bang for their watering buck. That's because mulch retains moisture, even when temperatures are especially hot. This helps foster stronger root growth and healthier landscapes that are less susceptible to disease and insect infestation.

• **Get to know your lawn.** Several variables combine to determine how much water a lawn needs. Understanding these variables helps homeowners understand how much to water their own lawns. Local climate is a variable to consider, as is whether or not a lawn was fertilized (experts typically recommend a lawn be fertilized several times, beginning in the spring and ending in October). Soil type and grass type also help to determine how much water a lawn needs, and homeowners who need to determine the type of soil and grass on their property can consult a local lawn care centre or landscaping professional.

Proper watering can help a lawn survive the dog days of summer, and it's up to homeowners to learn the right techniques.

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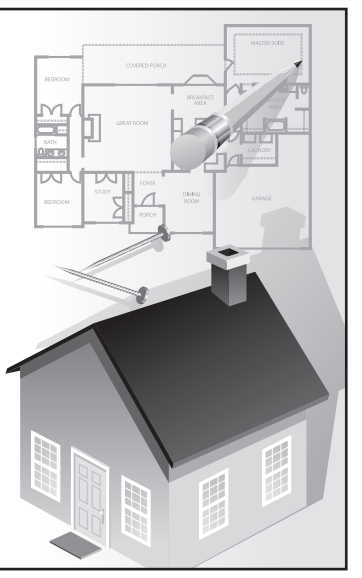

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These animals may help your garden

Planning and maintaining a garden requires a lot of effort, which can result in an aesthetically pleasing addition to the landscape. But that hard work can also fall victim to nature when local wildlife find a garden too mouth-watering to resist.

In an effort to rid a garden of unwanted pests, gardeners may unwittingly scare away animals and insects that might just protect the garden from more ill-intentioned animals. Not every creature that scurries is out to get prized petunias or to devour tomatoes. In fact, many can prove beneficial to gardens.

Bats

Bats have a bad reputation, as people unnecessarily fear bats because they believe them to be carriers of disease. But many bats feed off of insects or fruits and will not harm a human. The average brown bat can eat 1,000 mosquitoes in an hour, so it's easy to see why bats are good to have around. Mosquitoes are not only a nuisance but also harbour potentially dangerous diseases. Bats also may eat certain rodents, which can cut down on the number of animals burrowing in a yard.

Frogs

Frogs and toads will prey on insects and make the local insect population more manageable. Toads eat mainly slugs, who feed on the leaves and fruits of many plants. Frogs and toads are attracted to water, so including a pond or another water feature in the garden will provide them with a habitat they like.

Birds

While it is true that some birds can damage crops, many birds are content to feed on insects attracted to the garden, which helps to keep insect numbers in check. Chickadees, for example, will dine on aphid eggs, while larger birds may prey on mice or other rodents or simply scare them out of the garden. Jays and mockingbirds are known to be feisty and can even deter dogs and cats from a yard. Hummingbirds will sip on the nectar of flowers and help pollinate plants.

Snakes

Snakes in a garden can be disconcerting to some people, but snakes are ideal predators who feed on insects and rodents several times their size. Snakes are the right size and shape to invade the burrows of pest animals.

Butterflies and bees

Butterflies and bees are responsible for pollinating the vast majority of plants. Avoid using pesticides that may diminish



butterfly or bee populations. A beehive right next to a garden may not be practical, but don't make attempts to destroy it. Consult with a professional beekeeper to see what can be done to move the beehive.

Many animals and insects can be detrimental to the health of a garden. However, several animals are handy to have around and should be welcomed to the landscape.

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How to guarantee your garden starts off on the right foot

As winter slowly winds down, many gardeners cannot wait to soak up the springtime sun and get their hands dirty in the garden. Such excitement is not just good for gardeners, but can benefit the garden in the months to come as well.

Late winter or early spring is a great time to get a head start on the gardening season. Even if gardening season is still around the corner, completing the following projects can ensure your garden gets off on the right foot.



Clear debris

One of the best things you can do for your garden as winter winds down is to clear it of debris. Winter can be especially harsh on a landscape, and gardens left to the elements are often filled with debris once spring arrives. Dead leaves, fallen branches, rocks that surfaced during the winter frost, and even garbage that might have blown about in winter winds can all pile up in a garden over a typical winter. Clearing such debris likely won't take long, but it's a great first step toward restoring the garden before the time comes to plant and grow the garden once again.

Examine the soil

Soil plays a significant role in whether a garden thrives or struggles. Examining the soil before the season starts can help gardeners address any issues before they plant. Ignoring the soil until a problem arises can turn the upcoming gardening season into a lost opportunity, so test the soil to determine if it has any nutrient or mineral deficiencies. This may require the help of a professional, but if a problem arises, you might be able to adjust the acidity or alkalinity of the soil and still enjoy a successful gardening season.

Another way to examine the soil is less complex but can shed light on when would be a good time to get back to work. Reach into the soil and dig out a handful. If the soil quickly crumbles, you can start preparing for gardening seasoning. But if the soil is still clumped together, it needs more time to dry out before you can begin your prep work.

Initiate edging

Edging is another task gardeners can begin as they get ready for the season. Edge plant and flower beds, but be sure to use a spade with a flat blade or an edger designed to edge flower beds. Such tools will cut deep enough so grass roots that may eventually grow into the flower bed are severed. Depending on how large a garden is, edging can be a time-consuming task, so getting a head start allows homeowners to spend more time planting and tending to their gardens once the season hits full swing.

Ways to limit weed growth

Weed growth in a garden cannot only prove unsightly, but also ultimately harmful to plants and vegetables. When weeds appear in a garden, they have already begun to steal nutrients and water from surrounding plants, and if allowed to grow tall, they can also block sunlight from reaching the plants.

Unfortunately, weeds can be resilient, and there is no way to guarantee they won't grow. But gardeners can take several steps to limit the growth of weeds so the plants in their gardens can grow strong.

• **Work the soil regularly.** When weed roots are removed from the soil, weeds die. But just because you hoed or tilled the soil last month does not mean new weeds won't grow in and start robbing your plants of essential nutrients and minerals this month. The garden should be cultivated regularly, and you should pay particular attention to the soil after the garden has been watered. If weeds are allowed to go to seed, the garden can quickly be overwhelmed by them, as young weeds tend to grow in quickly and a little water might be all they need to sprout. So make a point to routinely cultivate the soil with a hoe or tiller, being careful when working on soil around growing plants.

• **Lay down black plastic.** Some gardeners may want to avoid laying black plastic down in their gardens for fear that such a weed deterrent robs the garden of its natural beauty. While that might be true, the black plastic also robs many weeds of their ability to grow in. Some weeds may be especially stubborn and grow in under the plastic, forcing their way through the holes cut into the plastic for the plants to grow through. But laying black plastic covering over the garden before it's planted is often an effective way to limit weed growth.

• **Lay mulch in vegetable gardens.** Mulch can serve multiple benefits in a garden. Many people find mulch aesthetically appealing, but mulch serves more practical purposes as well. Mulch made of organic materials, such as bark chips or grass clippings, is often too heavy for weeds to push through, making it difficult, if not impossible, for weeds to sprout in the garden. But mulch also conserves moisture in the soil, strengthening plant roots as a result. Stronger roots can lead to a healthier garden.

• **Cut down on plants' elbow room.** The more space between plants, the more room weeds have to grow. So decreasing the space between plants can limit weed growth. But spacing plants too closely together can make it difficult for vegetables to grow in as well. Spacing recommendations will likely be included on packaging when buying seeds, but reducing those recommendations by an inch or two may allow the plants to grow in strong while limiting weed growth at the same time.

Garden weeds can put plants in jeopardy and rob gardens of their beauty. But there are a handful of ways gardeners can limit weed growth without harming their plants.

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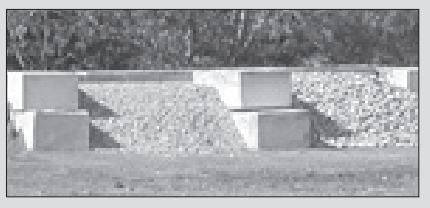

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Lighting sets the stage for outdoor fun

'Tis the season for making changes in and around the home. The arrival of warmer weather renews homeowners' vigor for various home improvement projects, and many have grand plans for interior and exterior renovations as they prep their living spaces for comfort, beauty and entertaining opportunities. While there are many worthy projects to pursue, adding outdoor lighting to a home can help increase its value and make the home safer and more attractive in the evening hours.

With a few updates to outside lighting, families can make even better use of their homes at night. Adding outdoor lighting is easier and less expensive than many homeowners may know, allowing them to transform an existing patio, deck or pool area into an enjoyable nighttime retreat. Pool parties, dinners on the patio or barbecues with neighbours become even more memorable when outdoor lighting is added or improved. But homeowners who want to install or upgrade their outdoor lighting should consider the following tips

• **Improve navigation.** Lighting is typically layered into a room or outdoor space in three ways: overhead, task and ambient. Even outdoors, where there are no typical boundaries and borders, those three layers are necessary. Outdoor overhead lighting should improve visibility on steps, paths and walking surfaces, especially where there's a bend or an intersection. Task lighting can be used around cooking or gardening areas. Ambient light will cast a comforting glow around any outdoor space.



Outdoor lighting can play up the more decorative features of a yard, including flower beds.

• **Enhance security.** To improve visibility and security, combine a motion detector with a sconce to illuminate dark corners or entryways. Be sure to aim lights away from the door to improve visibility. Lanterns on either side of the door can give a home a warm, welcoming appearance and improve the safety of entryways.

• **Create outdoor rooms.** Outdoor lighting at the borders of a space is a great way to create barriers, both vertically and horizontally. Lights in a tree create something akin to a chandelier hung in the middle of the sky, and even accent lights in the general area of the edge of a patio, deck or porch will shine across the space and provide enough of a comfort level for people to understand where things are.

• **Reduce glare.** Outdoor lighting that casts a glare can be blinding, as can light that's too bright. Lighting along paths should be cast downward, with fixtures that are hooded. A variety of lighting options will create layers, allowing you to add or subtract as necessary. Exterior-safe dimmers also can provide flexible control over the level of light, as can movable fixtures added to a patio or porch.

• **Add decorative elements.** Just as arbors, pergolas, patios and other outdoor elements help to enhance the style of an outdoor space, so, too, can lighting contribute to a well-designed landscape. Lighting should play up decorative features of a yard and add the ambience that homeowners desire. Step lights make passage safe while also highlighting molding or trim details. An outdoor chandelier can make for a wonderful accent during dinnertime on the deck or under a pergola. Patio lights provide atmosphere as well as illumination for cooking outside.

• **Enhance views from inside.** Outdoor lighting can make the view from inside pleasant and enjoyable. Use a variety of lights, including spotlights on trees, lights dotted along pathways and accent lights on unique landscape features, to create an idyllic landscape visible from inside the home.

Outdoor lighting enhances functionality of yards and landscapes while making such areas safer for homeowners and their guests once the sun has gone down.

Fast facts about grass

Frequent watering, proper fertilization, pest management, and mowing are all essential components of lawn maintenance. But there is more to those beautiful blades of grass than just aesthetic appeal. The following are some interesting facts about grass that even the most devoted lawn enthusiasts might be surprised to learn.

• Grass is defined as any plant of the family Gramineae, a group of vascular plants that grow across the globe.

• There are as many as 10,000 varieties of grass in the world. These range from grass to rice to wheat to bamboo.

• Many grasses are annual or perennial herbs with fibrous roots and rhizomes.

• Grass can withstand many different climates and has been discovered at the North Pole and at the equator.

• Twenty percent of Earth's vegetation is comprised of grass.

• Grasses have been transformed into paper and home decor items. Bamboo, which is a type of grass, is frequently used for flooring because it is durable and sustainable.

• Grass is mostly comprised of water, which makes up about 80 percent of grass and 90 percent of grass clippings.

• A typical lawn will have about six grass plants per square inch. Some lawns may have millions of grass plants.

• The average lawn releases enough oxygen to sustain four families of four.

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Left: *Joan MacIntosh recently visited Winchester BMR's expanded garden centre to gather supplies for the spring planting season.*

Above: *MacIntosh's sister, Fay Hanes, itemized her purchase.*







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Get kids excited about gardening

Many adults understand the joy of gardening, but gardening can be equally fun for children as well. While some adults may feel that certain children do not have the patience or perseverance to see plants grow from seeds, selecting plants that are hardy and sprout quickly may be the key to igniting a love of gardening in children.

Choosing seeds that sprout quickly can hold the attention of children who are new to gardening. Many different plants fit this bill. Beans, peas, sunflower seeds, and bell pepper seeds are easy to start and germinate quickly. In addition, many leafy vegetables, such as chard, lettuce, spinach, and mustard, germinate in three to five days. Herbs, such as basil and parsley, also sprout fast. All of these plants are good options for introducing children to gardening, as each provides quick gratification.

To further interest children, it is a good idea to plant seeds in a way that allows youngsters to monitor the progress of growth. Use a transparent container, such as rinsed-out glass jars and canisters, to house the plant. Such containers give kids an unobstructed view of the process, during which children can plot the progress of seed germination and easily spot root and stem development. Once the seedlings grow larger, they can be transplanted into different containers.

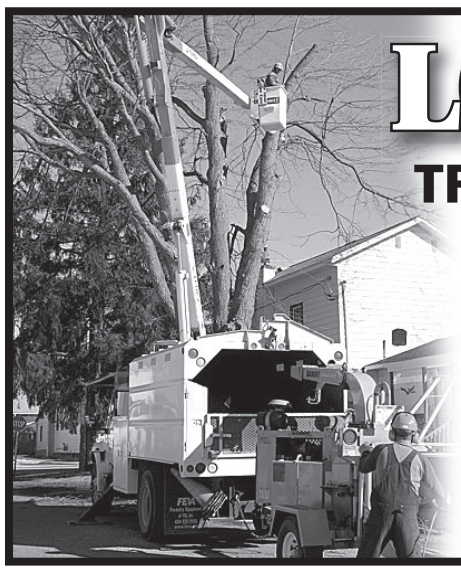
Many seedlings can sprout with water alone. Children can easily grow new plants from clippings of a mature plant left resting in a shallow cup of water, and seeds may not even need soil to germinate. Kids may have luck sprinkling seeds on a dampened, crumpled-up piece of paper towel. Cotton balls also make a good place to nestle seeds. Either material will hold on to water, keeping the seeds moist until they sprout. Afterward, the seedlings can be carefully moved into a soil-and-compost mix. The paper towel and the cotton balls will decompose and add to the organic matter already in the soil.

Edible plants often make good choices for children because kids can reap the rewards of their efforts. Vegetables can be grown in containers and then served at mealtime. Kids can show pride in their accomplishments, especially if they have tangible results on the dinner plate.

Children who want to try something different can explore other types of plants. Aquatic plants, or those found at the pet store to grow in aquariums, can be easy to grow. They need little more than a container, fresh water and sunlight. Cacti and other succulents are also fun to explore. These plants are quite hardy in that they can stand up to moderate abuse, such as failure to water frequently enough. The unique appearance of cacti make them interesting focal points for an indoor garden.

A love of gardening that's fostered inside can also be explored outdoors. Set aside a plot of dirt where kids can sow their own seeds and tend to their own gardens. This hobby can help children learn patience and hard work while fostering an appreciation of nature.





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Spring lawn seeding basics

Spring has sprung, and there are many activities to enjoy now that the warmer weather has arrived. Many homeowners make the most of warmer weather by tackling projects around their properties.

While autumn is a better time to overseed a lawn for new growth, satisfactory results still can be had if seeding is done early enough in the spring.

Grass needs ample time to establish roots and grow strong before the summer heat takes its toll. Many types of grass need six to 12 weeks of ideal temperatures and growing conditions to germinate and produce a sturdy grass that will grow and endure.

Seeding can be done to rejuvenate an existing lawn and fill in bare spots. It also can be done to start a lawn from scratch.

The following are some tips to help make seeding projects more successful.

• **Begin by raking the lawn** to remove thatch and any fallen leaves leftover from autumn and winter. Raking also enables you to inspect the lawn for bare patches or matting of grass that may be indicative of a fungus or other problem.

• **Dust off the mower and trim the lawn short,** especially if it was left long at the end of last season. This will help seed penetrate the blades of grass and get to the soil beneath.

Many types of grass need six to 12 weeks of ideal temperatures and growing conditions to germinate and produce a sturdy grass that will grow and endure.

• **High-traffic lawns may need aeration to counteract compacted soil.** Moss on the ground is often an indication of compaction. Aeration will help with this problem, as it pokes holes into the soil to enable oxygenation that keeps new grass robust and promotes faster growth. Lawn aerators can be rented from many garden centres.

• **Spread a mixture of topsoil and compost over the top of the lawn.** This will add nutrients through organic matter to the lawn and create a good base for the new seed to take root. It will also help strengthen any existing grass and promote long-term health.

• **Test a sample of the soil to check the pH.** Grass prefers a neutral pH, but some soil tends to lean toward the acidic side, especially if you see the presence of moss. Knowing the pH will help determine just how much lime per square foot you will need to adjust it accordingly. Liming is a corrective measure and does not need to be used on a healthy, thriving lawn.

• **Invest in a spreader to add seed to the lawn.** The spreader will have various settings that enable you to calibrate the rate of seed dispersion depending on your walking speed. Fill the spreader with seed and begin to walk around the lawn. Drop spreaders require you to apply seed in rows with no overlap. Broadcast spreaders will cast seed widely and may need some overlap to guarantee complete coverage.

• **Spread another thin layer of compost mix over the seed and water thoroughly.** The compost will help keep moisture in while the seeds germinate.

• **Aim for lawn watering two to three times per day.** The seed should be barely dry between watering. After seeds have germinated and established, you can reduce the frequency of watering but increase the depth of the watering to keep roots strong.

• **Avoid foot traffic** on a newly seeded lawn until the grass is well established.



Spring is the season to assess lawn health and reseed as necessary to ensure a healthy lawn.



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How to rid your yard of pesky pests

Spring is the season when lawn and garden equipment is dusted off, windows are washed and homes are aired out. Spring also is a great time to get started on lawn and garden projects.

Early spring might not be warm enough to start planting, but it is a great time to inspect a yard for any property damage or problems, including pests. Small animals like groundhogs can compromise lawn and garden projects. For example, vegetable gardens are prime targets for such pests, while trees and shrubbery offer cozy abodes and camouflage from other predators. Homeowners can grow frustrated by the damage such critters can do to their properties. But identifying the offenders early on can minimize that damage.



Groundhogs feed on plants, frustrating homeowners who want to keep the critters off of their properties.

Groundhogs

Groundhogs are one of 14 species of marmots and are the largest members of the squirrel family. They frequent the areas where woodlands meet open spaces, like streams, roads or fields. Groundhogs feed on grass, plants, fruit and tree bark. They also will feast on home gardens during the summer and fall seasons. Groundhogs are most active during the warm months, when they forage and feast to build up large reserves for winter hibernation.

Humane methods of keeping groundhogs at bay include making the area inhospitable. Groundhogs can climb trees and fencing, but they're less likely to get into plants if there is a fence around them. Dogs can be preventive as well, as some dogs will chase groundhogs off of the property. The scent of urine can also scare groundhogs off. Using traps to capture and then relocate groundhogs is another option.

Moles

Moles are cylindrical mammals that are most comfortable living a subterranean lifestyle. The fur of moles feels similar to velvet, and they have small ears and eyes. Moles also have strong forelimbs with forepaws that have an extra thumb and multiple joints. These help them to burrow underground effectively and hollow out subterranean chambers. The diet of moles is primarily earthworms and small invertebrates found in the soil. The runs they create beneath the surface of the soil are used to trap prey and store it in "larders" for later.

Moles are not harmful to lawns and gardens, but they can compromise the aesthetic appeal of lawns and gardens. That is why homeowners often want to prevent moles from making homes on their property. While there are traps and poisons available, one of the easiest ways to prevent mole infestation is to remove their sources of food. Homeowners also can cut back on watering property and get rid of grubs and other insects. Also, consider installing a mole barrier of aluminum sheeting or hardware cloth by burying these materials between two and three feet deep along the perimeter of a lawn or garden.

Cats are natural enemies of moles, so sprinkling cat litter around mole runs may dissuade moles from visiting the area.

Voles

Often mistaken for mice, voles are small rodents with shorter, hairier tails and more stout bodies than mice. Voles are commonly referred to as meadow or field mice, and they feed on small plants and will eat nuts, fruits and even dead animals. Voles will frequently eat succulent root systems and burrow under lawns and gardens.

The runways of voles will be shallow, so they aren't prevalent in frequently cultivated soils. They are also less likely to burrow beneath frequently mowed lawns.

Voles do not like open areas. Remove protection like weeds, tall grass, dense vegetation, and heavy mulch to make a yard a less popular habitat. Keep grass adjacent to flower beds or gardens mowed short.

If groundhogs, moles and voles become particularly troublesome or infest a yard in great numbers, an exterminator may be needed.

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Natural fertilizers loaded with nutrients and minerals

Lawn and garden enthusiasts know a handful of items are essential to maintain a healthy landscape. Water, sunshine and the proper nutrients all work in concert to promote a healthy lawn. Although nutritional material is inherent in the soil, many gardeners feel soil must be amended with some sort of fertilizer to give plants a healthy boost.

All-natural fertilizers are growing in popularity, and home gardeners have a variety of such products at their disposal. Ambitious homeowners can even create their own all-natural fertilizers from items around the house. Organic fertilizers, or those that are derived from living organisms and not manufactured through chemicals, can provide sufficient nutrients and minerals to grow healthy plants.

Bone meal

In order to store energy and reach maturity, plants need phosphate. This mineral is released over a long period of time from finely ground rock. However, a faster way to supply it to the landscape is through bone meal. Bone meal is a mixture of finely and coarsely ground animal bones that are a waste product from meat-processing plants. Adding bone meal to soil is one of the most effective ways to increase phosphorous levels.

Manure

The waste from herbivores (animals that feed on grass), including rabbits, horses and cows, can make super fertilizers. Some gardeners shy away from manure because they believe it to be an odoriferous, dirty product. The best produced manures are allowed to compost for at least nine months and are mixed with hay or straw. They should not produce an offensive odour and will provide plants with a host of nutrients. Never use manures from meat-eating animals, like dogs, cats or humans. Feces can harbour a lot of bacteria, which can be transferred to the garden soil.

Fish and seaweed

Improving soil nutrients may be as simple as looking to the ocean or other bodies of water. Fish emulsion, a mixture of ground fish and water, is a good nitrogen source. Nitrogen gives plants the energy to grow. Seaweed, which is actually a type of algae, contains the primary nutrients that plants need in order to thrive, including phosphorous, nitrogen and potassium. It also serves as a food for natural bacteria that break down nutrients into the soil, making them easier for plants to absorb.

Worms

Earthworms are vital to soil health. They burrow and wiggle around in the dirt, helping to aerate the soil. But the castings, or waste, of the worms also provide valuable nutrients to the soil. The castings contain beneficial microorganisms from the worms' digestive system that help break down organic matter into a form that plant roots can use. Many gardeners participate in vermicomposting, or farming worms in order to use their castings as fertilizer.

Compost

Compost can also be used as fertilizer. Gardeners can make their own compost from discarded materials. Compost is one of the most widely used soil amendments in vegetable gardens. Yard refuse, fruit and vegetable peelings, eggshells, coffee grounds, and other items can be added to a compost pile. Natural bacteria will slowly break down these materials into a product dubbed "black gold." Compost can be mixed into soil before planting and used as a dressing after plants have been established.

Gardeners can experiment with different ratios of fertilizer to create a mix that enhances the soil. Test the soil to determine which, if any, nutrients the soil is lacking so the fertilizer can be adjusted accordingly.

Fertilizing for beginners

Fertilizing a lawn is a springtime tradition for many homeowners. Winter can take its toll on a lawn, but fertilizer can go a long way toward helping a lawn recover from harsh weather. While lawn-and-garden enthusiasts might know the ins and outs of fertilizing a lawn, novices might need a little help as they look to restore their lawns.

• **Find out what your lawn needs.** Even novice green thumbers likely know that overfertilization can harm a lawn, and that's a big reason many homeowners approach fertilizing their lawn with some trepidation. A lush lawn adds to the curb appeal of a home, while a lawn that's patchy or appears to be poorly taken care of can lower property value. Before fertilizing a lawn, homeowners should determine the needs of their lawns. A soil test can determine if the lawn has any nutrient deficiencies.

• **Don't overdo it with nitrogen.** Fertilizing with too much nitrogen is a common mistake, as too much nitrogen can be harmful, decreasing root growth and increasing a lawn's susceptibility to disease. A slow-release fertilizer may be an option, as such fertilizers break down nutrients over a longer period of time, which also allows homeowners to extend the intervals between fertilizing sessions. But a lawn can get nitrogen from other sources as well. Such sources include grass clippings or raked leaves left on the lawn after being shredded by a mulching mower.

• **Consider using granules instead of spray.** Spraying a lawn with fertilizer might seem like the easiest and quickest way to fertilize, but spraying is typically best left to the professionals. That's because novices often struggle to evenly apply the fertilizer when spraying, and many do not account for the wind when spraying fertilizer. A traditional spreader that fertilizes a lawn with granules makes it easier for nonprofessionals to apply the fertilizer accurately and evenly. Before fertilizing with granules, read the package to determine if you need to water the lawn before application, as some fertilizers are only effective when applied to a lawn after it has been watered. Also, be sure to fill the spreader on asphalt instead of the lawn. Chances are you're going to spill granules when filling the spreader, and such spills can be harmful to the lawn.

• **Plan to fertilize several times.** Some homeowners only fertilize twice a year, once in the spring and then once again in the fall. But fertilizer should be applied multiple times throughout the year, beginning in the early spring. The first time to fertilize is when the soil temperature reaches roughly 13 degrees Celsius, which is often evident because grass typically starts to grow again when the soil reaches that temperature. Fertilize again roughly a month after fertilizer is first applied, and then do so every six to eight weeks after through October. Professionals often recommend using an organic material during the third fertilizing session.





How to keep cats out of your garden beds

Cats make for wonderful pets, especially those that are content with life indoors, where they can spend hours lounging on a windowsill watching the world go by. But some cats spend a significant amount of time outdoors, where they forage for food and take refuge in and around a neighbourhood. Frequently, outdoor cats will return to the same place over and over again. If that place is your flower bed, you may grow aggravated by your uninvited guest.

Once a cat has found a place to call its own, it can be difficult to persuade the animal to move. Cats can be attracted to planting beds because the soil is soft underfoot and may seem like the ideal environment to turn into an outdoor litter box. However, over time cat urine and feces can leave behind an offensive odour and damage plants. Other cats also may be attracted to the garden, creating territory "wars" or even more odour and activity. But homeowners can employ a variety of techniques to keep felines from digging in the garden.

• **Keep leftover citrus peels.** Orange, lemon and lime peels scattered around the garden may be offensive to cats, who will likely opt to go elsewhere rather than ignore the odour. Over time, the peels can be removed or allowed to break down into a natural fertilizer.

• **Employ technology to surprise or startle the cats.** Motion detectors that trigger lights or a sprinkler system can startle cats and keep them away from your garden.

• **Make the garden uncomfortable to cats.** Many cats do not like the feeling of hard materials under their paws. Therefore, you can bury any number of items in the soil to deter padded feet. Some gardeners prefer to use chicken wire or rolled mesh around plants before covering the soil with mulch. The cats step on the dirt and feel the metal underneath, then move on. Branches, brambles, spiky holly leaves, or even rocks may keep cats from finding the garden bed hospitable.

• **Employ natural scented deterrents.** Some say that cats will be repelled by human hair. Visit a salon and ask for hair clippings to distribute throughout the garden. Urine from predators, like coyotes, may scare cats off, as well. Some cats may not like the smell of marigolds, which can be planted alongside other flowers in an attempt to keep cats at bay.

• **Erect barriers around the garden.** Barriers can keep cats out of gardens. Erect a fence of lattice or metal to make it more difficult for cats to get inside the garden.

• **Make other areas of your property more attractive to cats.** Homeowners who don't mind the presence of cats on their property but want them out of the garden can take the unusual step of making another area on the property more cat-friendly. Plant catnip far away from the garden, giving cats a place to hang out without putting your garden in jeopardy.



Experiment with different deterrents to keep cats out of garden beds.

What to expect with a tree removal

Trees serve many purposes for a landscape, providing shade and habitats for birds and other animals and serving as natural blinds between two homes. Trees are often beautiful elements of a natural landscape, adding aesthetic appeal to a property or even an entire community. But there are times when a tree must be removed, an action that, in many instances, requires the services of a professional tree service.

A tree with roots invading the foundation of a home or infringing on a patio or walkway can become a safety hazard. Other trees may cast shade where a pool is planned or cause disagreements between neighbours when the tree straddles a property line. These are instances when tree removal will be necessary, and a reputable service can advise as to the best methods for ridding the property of the troublesome tree.

Homeowners will need to do a bit of planning and research to remove trees safely and securely. It is best to contact a variety of different tree removal services and compare their offerings and prices.

The cost of a tree removal will vary depending on various factors, including the height of the tree, its width, the number of branches it has, its location on a property and the proximity of that location to potential hazards like power lines. Tree removal may range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand.

When a tree is being removed, most of the branches will be removed to make the tree more manageable. Trees are rarely chopped at the base and allowed to fall, as there simply isn't enough room to safely take this approach. Sections of the tree will be cut, roped off and slowly lowered. A climber will scale the tree or use a cherry picker machine to reach the top of the tree to facilitate the process.

The pieces of the tree will be loaded into a wood-chipper for grinding before they are hauled away. Larger, heavier portions of the stumps may need to be moved later on with machinery. Hauling trees off the property may cost extra, so it is important that homeowners read their contract thoroughly before signing on the dotted line.

Additional costs may be factored into the bill. These can include stump-and-root grinding. Trees will be cut down to the stump. To prevent eyesores or tripping hazards, some homeowners opt to have the stumps ground down into sawdust. This will not remove all of the roots but will take care of most of the above-ground portion of the remaining stump. It is usually up to the homeowner to discard the sawdust or use it as a mulching material.

Expect the ground around the former tree to be soft, and there may be a depression depending on how much stump grinding took place. Some people prefer to wait a season for the ground to recover before planting something new. It may take a while for grass to sprout where a tree was once located, and there may be bare spots when grass starts to grow in.

Tree removal can be an expensive venture but is necessary for different reasons. Be sure that tree-removal services are fully insured before signing a contract.

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Gather around the grill this Father's Day

It's all about remembering Dad's favourites on Father's Day. While everyone relaxes and enjoys the serenity of the backyard, these ribs will be slowly cooking to mouth-watering perfection.

Orange-Ginger Baby Back Ribs

INGREDIENTS:

5 lbs baby back ribs

Sauce:

1 cup ketchup
1/2 cup hoisin sauce
4 tbsp soy sauce
2 tbsp grainy mustard
3 tbsp honey
2 tbsp orange juice
2 tbsp Asian chili sauce
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tbsp ginger
Grated zest of an orange
Salt and pepper

DIRECTIONS:

Preheat barbecue on medium and turn down to low. Prepare ribs for grilling by removing the membrane from the underside of the ribs. Prepare several foil envelopes and place 2 strips of ribs into each envelope, with 1/4 cup of water and seal tightly. Cook for 2-2 1/2 hours on low (300°F) with the lid closed. Check the thermometer on the front of the grill lid frequently and adjust the cooking temperature accordingly. This may require turning one or two burners off and cooking indirectly.

To prepare sauce: Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and set aside until ribs are ready to remove from foil. Gently heat the sauce on the side burner for 10-15 minutes before using.

Carefully remove ribs from foil and place on grids. Baste generously with sauce, and grill for 10 minutes per side, leaving the lid open, turning several times, and basting with sauce after each turn.

Heat remaining sauce to a boil and then allow it to simmer for 5 -10 minutes and serve on the side as a dipping sauce.

Find additional recipes and grilling tips online at www.broilkingbbq.com.

– News Canada



Serve sliders from the barbecue

As an appetizer, snack, or main, sliders are a fun twist to the traditional hamburger. Easy to hold and dunk in condiments, sliders in their many variations make great party food, like this mouthwatering recipe:

Beef and Mushroom Sliders

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS:

1 tbsp (15 ml) vegetable oil
1 cup (250 ml) diced onion
2 cups (500 ml sliced wild mushrooms
2 tbsp (30 ml) Club House La Grille Montreal Steak Spice Seasoning
1 lb (500 g) lean ground beef



1 cup (250 ml) shredded mozzarella cheese
2 tbsp (30 ml) diced roasted red pepper
4 tbsp (60 ml) bread crumbs
1 egg
12 mini burger buns or rolls

DIRECTIONS:

In large skillet over medium heat, sauté onions in oil until caramelized, about 4 minutes. Add mushrooms and sauté until tender, about 2 minutes. Let cool.

In large bowl, combine seasoning, beef, cheese, red pepper, bread crumbs, egg and onion/mushroom mixture. Mix well. Form into 12 patties.

Grill, pan fry or broil until no longer pink or until internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) is reached.

Place cooked burgers on bun and top with your choice of toppings to create one-of-a-kind flavours.

– News Canada

Spice up your summer grilling

Grilling fish is an exciting break from traditional barbecued foods – and it can make your summer one to remember. The hot, dry heat of a grill is excellent for cooking flavourful fish like salmon, especially with a recipe like this:

Grilled Salmon with Mango-Peach Salsa

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS:

¾ cup (175 ml) diced peeled mango
¾ cup (175 ml) diced peeled peaches
½ cup (125 ml) diced cucumber
¼ cup (50 ml) diced red onion
2 tbsp (30 ml) chopped fresh cilantro
2 tbsp (30 ml) lime juice
1 tbsp (15 ml) Billy Bee honey
1 lb (500 g) salmon fillets, skinless
1 tbsp (15 ml) olive oil
2 tbsp (30 ml) Club House La Grille Salmon Seasoning
2 tbsp (30 ml) brown sugar

DIRECTIONS:

Salsa: Combine the first seven ingredients. Cover and chill for at least 1 hour.

Salmon: Cut salmon into four portions and brush with olive oil. Combine Club House La Grille Salmon Seasoning and brown sugar. Sprinkle over salmon. Let stand five minutes. Place on greased grill over medium heat. Cover and grill eight to 12 minutes or until it flakes easily with a fork. Serve with salsa.

Tips: Leftover salsa can be stored in the refrigerator for up to three days.

You can grill one (1 lb/500 g) fillet for about 30 minutes and cut into serving size pieces after cooking.

– News Canada

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S'mores with a twist

This twist on a fireside favourite is a must-have in the summer and is ready in mere minutes.



Peanut Butter Cup S'mores
Prep time: 5 minutes
Campfire time: 2 minutes
Makes 4 s'mores

INGREDIENTS
¼ cup (60 ml) peanut butter
8 graham cracker wafers
12 mini peanut butter cups
4 marshmallows

DIRECTIONS

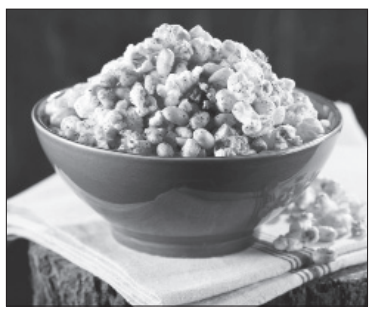
Spread peanut butter over graham cracker wafers. Place three peanut butter cups on top of the peanut butter of four of the crackers.

Toast marshmallows over fire to desired golden brown colour. Place a toasted marshmallow on each cracker with the peanut butter cups. Top with second graham cracker wafers. Squish together to form s'mores.

Additional recipes can be found at www.peanutbureau.ca. *– News Canada*

Campfire peanutty popcorn

Traditional popcorn gets jazzed up with this spicy version of a camping favourite.



Spicy Peanut Popcorn
Prep time: 5 minutes
Cooking time: 5 minutes
Makes 3½ cups (875 ml)

INGREDIENTS:
1 tsp (5 ml) chili powder
½ tsp (2 ml) oregano leaves
½ tsp (2 ml) smoked paprika
½ tsp (2 ml) salt
¼ tsp (1 ml) garlic powder
¼ tsp (1 ml) cayenne pepper
¼ tsp (1 ml) granulated sugar
1 tbsp (15 ml) butter, preferably salted
1 tbsp (15 ml) peanut oil
¼ cup (60 ml) popcorn kernels
1 cup (250 ml) peanuts

DIRECTIONS:

Combine spices and sugar in a small bowl, then mash in butter until spices are mixed in well. Set aside.

Place oil and popcorn in a large pot with a tight fitting lid (or use heavy duty foil) and set over medium heat. Keep pot covered and shake continuously until all kernels are popped.

Push popcorn to one side of the pot and add butter and spice mixture to the bottom of the pot. Add peanuts and stir until butter is melted, and popcorn and peanuts are coated in spice.

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

– News Canada

How to grill for a crowd

Cooking over an open fire is a staple of warm-weather entertaining. Tossing some steaks or vegetables on the grill for a family dinner is usually an easy undertaking. But even the craftiest grill cooks may need to apply some tricks of the trade when grilling food for the masses.



• **Cook a large piece of meat.** Rather than individual burgers or chicken wings, think about barbecuing an entire pig or a roast. In many cases, the meat can be set up on the barbecue early in the morning. By the time the evening arrives, the meat should be tender and cooked through. With just occasional checking, turning and basting, this may be the most low-maintenance option when feeding a crowd.

• **Rent or borrow a second grill.** Unless you are working with industrial-sized or commercial equipment, a standard grill may not have enough surface area to cook a lot of food at once. Find a friend or family member who is willing to lend you his or her grill. Having twice the room means you can cook twice the amount of food. You also may be able to rent a larger grill for an event.

• **Precook the food.** You can put bratwurst, hot dogs or burgers on the grill to partially cook them before the party, then store them in aluminum pans. When guests arrive, simply reheat the food to the right temperature and they'll be hot and ready in no time.

• **Make steak sandwiches.** Make the food go further with less work by cooking ribeye steaks or flank steaks on the grill. Slice up the meat and serve it over garlic bread with melted jack or mozzarella cheese. The result will be savory, and such sandwiches don't take much time to create.

• **Opt for pulled pork.** Start the basics of pulled pork in a slow cooker so that the meat cooks for several hours under low heat. If you have a smoker, you can opt to use that, but smokers may take longer to cook the meat and require more maintenance. If you opt for the slow cooker, transfer the meat to an aluminum pan when it is nearly done and put it on the grill to impart that smoky flavour. Add more seasonings to the meat and keep it warm until guests are ready to dine.

• **Go with hot dogs.** Hot dogs are usually precooked and will heat up quickly on the grill. Their small size means they don't take up much space, and several can fit on the grill at one time.

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Weed out gardening myths from facts

Gardening is an age-old activity that was once a necessity but has transformed into a hobby for thousands of people. While gardening still serves practical purposes, many gardeners still consider it a hobby first and foremost.

Time-tested gardening techniques have prevailed, but there remain certain myths about gardening that are best dispelled. The following are some of the more common myths associated with gardening.

MYTH: Compost tea is more effective than traditional compost.

All over North America and the United Kingdom, gardeners have jumped on board the compost tea bandwagon. Compost tea is a fertilizer created by steeping compost in water mixed with sugar in brewing kits. The mixture is allowed to sit and aerate to encourage beneficial organism growth before it is sprayed on plants. According to supporters, compost tea suppresses disease and boosts plant yields. However, there is no evidence to suggest that compost tea works any better than adding compost in its normal state to the soil. In fact, leaving buckets of the "tea" around to ferment could actually create a breeding ground for E coli and other bacteria.

MYTH: Young trees need stakes.

It may be tempting to stake that little sapling to protect it against the weather and strong winds, but doing so may actually work against the foundling tree. Staking trees to inhibit swaying may not stimulate the tree to grow thicker, lower trunks that will help the tree in the long run. The Royal Horticultural Society recommends that saplings be staked for around one year and then have the stakes removed to encourage the tree to be strong and stable on its own.

MYTH: Water droplets and sunshine lead to burnt leaves.

Gardeners have been told to resist watering their plants during the hottest times of the day. Many assume it's because water droplets lying on leaves will magnify the sun's rays and burn the leaves. According to Dr. Gabor Horvath at the Eoetvoes University in Budapest, water droplets will rarely damage plants because the drops are too close to the leaves to cause burning before they evaporate. Watering during the hottest points of the day is not advised because water evaporates and gets wasted.

MYTH: Sand added to clay soil makes it looser and better for plants.

Clay soil is a deterrent to gardening because it can be so hard to dig and difficult to cultivate, but some feel it's best to add sand to the clay to make it a better soil mixture. You would need a great deal of sand to do this in the right manner, but many gardeners simply dig a hole, add sand and hope for the best. However, water runoff will pool in the sand and not be absorbed by the clay, potentially causing the plants to drown.

MYTH: Plants under stress should be fertilized.

This is not the case. Horticulturists advise that fertilizing plants that are not deficient in nutrients can actually add to existing stress levels for plants. Plants are not often stressed by a lack of food, but rather heat, faulty planting or space constraints. A fed plant will use the energy to absorb the nutrients instead of defending against a blight or establishing better root systems.

MYTH: Adding compost or potting soil to the planting hole for a tree or shrub is beneficial.

Gardeners frequently add compost or potting soil to the hole where the root ball of a tree or shrub will be placed. But this encourages the roots to grow only in this nutrient-rich area, rather than spreading throughout the landscape to form a



stronger and more durable root system. If you are going to amend the soil, do so evenly across the landscape.

MYTH: Use gravel or rocks in the bottom of planting containers to improve drainage.

Rocks and gravel can actually impede the growth of plants and take away space for roots to grow. The drainage may be affected as well, as water will sit above the gravel or stones and saturate the roots. Stick with plain soil for better drainage results.

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A.B. Greenhouse in full bloom

As spring slowly moves toward summer, and Victoria Day weekend has passed, it is time to visit the local greenhouse. Owned by Andy Brunner, A.B. Greenhouse near Chesterville is busy returning pots, hangers, and containers to customers who preordered colourful arrangements with flowers they chose themselves from the vast selection available in the rural shop. As well, the County Road 9 greenhouse is stocked with a wide variety of flowers, annuals and perennials, herbs, vegetables, and more for customers both old and new.







Above: *Seasonal employee Darlene Pepin rearranged these bright pink flowers, making room to add some more.*

Left: *Every year, A.B. Greenhouse fills special requests for its clients, taking client-owned planters and filling them with a customer-chosen variety of plants. The planters are watered and cared for until owners return to collect them Victoria Day Weekend.*

Below: *Gardeners are sure to find a wide variety of plants from flowers, to herbs and vegetables.*

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