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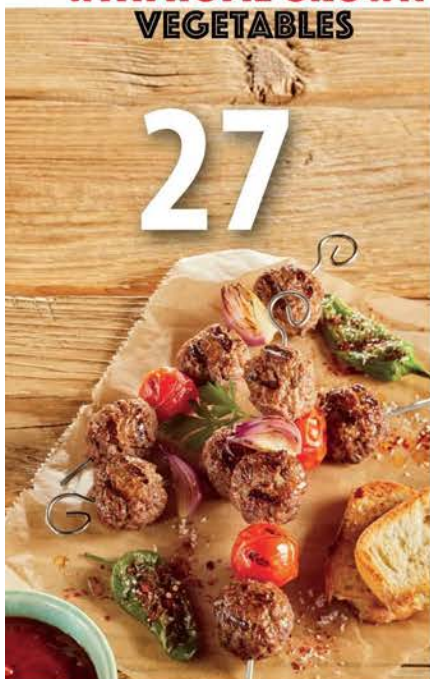
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Growing plants indoors is a fantastic way to bring life, color and a part of the natural world into your home. While it might seem as if being inside—away from severe weather, hungry animals and other dangers—would guarantee health, indoor plants can easily become sick. Here are a few ways to keep your plants healthy.

1 | Water properly. Plants will not grow well if they don't get the right amount of water. Water your plants enough or they will wither and die. While most people understand that under watering is bad for plants, few realize that it's also possible to water a plant too much. An excess of water will saturate the soil around the plant, rotting the roots. Since houseplants are placed in small containers, they need less water than their outdoor counterparts, and can be over watered easily. Only add water when the soil surrounding the plant dries.

2 | Give them the proper amount of light. Different plants have different needs. Some plants require as much sun as possible, while others prefer the shade. Don't assume that all your plants can be put in the same area, or that it doesn't matter how much light each plant receives. Too much or too little light will cause plants to wilt and, potentially, die. When in doubt, ask an expert or, check online for advice. If it's not convenient to put a plant that needs lots of sun beside a window, consider installing a grow light. Grow lights are artificial lights specifically designed for plants.

3 | Add nutrients. When bringing a plant into your home, you should use potting soil (dirt that is enriched with extra nutrients) in its container. But, soil can contain only so much nourishment. After a few months, your plant will have drained the soil surrounding it of nutrients. For your plants to survive and flourish you'll need to replenish their supply of nutrients. Add fertilizer on a regular

basis. There are many different kinds of fertilizer, so make sure you purchase the right kind for each plant.





4 | Make room for growth.

The pot that once housed your plant with ease may soon become too small. While its visible parts can grow into the air and over the edge of its container, roots require more soil to spread into. Transfer your plant to a larger pot when it becomes too cramped. Otherwise, your plant will become stunted and unhealthy.

5 | Check for pests and disease.

While the indoors provides some protection, houseplants can still be afflicted by disease and bugs. Watch out for aphids, mealybugs and spider mites and diseases like viruses, bacteria and fungi. Protect your plants by checking regularly for signs of sickness or other trouble. Look over all parts of the plant—especially the bottom of the leaves, where problems will first manifest. Molds and discoloration are the chief signs of disease, while pests should be plainly visible. The best way to prevent



Over watering is as bad as under watering.

disease and pests is to keep plants healthy and strong.

6 | Buy the right plants.

Only certain plants are suited for life indoors. Plus, depending upon your particular living arrangements, plants that could do fine in another house might be unhealthy in your home. For example, if none of your rooms

get much light, buying a plant that requires hours of sun is unwise. Save yourself the trouble and only buy plants that will be able to thrive in your home.

It can be easy to forget about your indoor plants. Unlike pets, houseplants won't do anything to attract your attention. Use the steps outlined in this article to keep your plants healthy.

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MAKING YOUR MONEY STRETCH IN THE KITCHEN

BY KATHY PENNEY



If you're like most of us, you spend 33 cents of every dollar on groceries, according to the USDA. If your goal this year is to spend less and waste little, consider growing your own produce, reusing sandwich bags and creating your own cleaning solutions from natural ingredients you already have on hand.

GROWING YOUR OWN FRUIT AND VEGETABLES IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

Many things can be grown in containers, on balconies and terraces. Herbs can even be grown indoors on a sunny windowsill with very little care. Plus, if you have children, they will take great pleasure in learning where their food comes from. An added bonus to growing your own produce is you can ensure that it's pesticide free.

If you're without outdoor gardening space, hydroponic gardening is a great substitute and it's growing in popularity because once set up, plants can be left to themselves with very little care.

Another way to save money in the kitchen is to go for cheaper cuts of meat which, cooked in the right way, can be just as tasty as the more expensive cuts. Stews and soups are nourishing and warming

and are a great way of using vegetables that are past their best.

Taking the time to plan the week's meals will pay dividends. Shopping is much easier because with a list because it helps you to avoid unnecessary temptations while in the supermarket.

A good way to meal-plan successfully is to list all the meals your family regularly enjoys, along with some new recipes. Most households will be surprised to find that they have between 20 and 30 regular meals, enough for a whole month! Some meals are great for freezing, so it will be well worth cooking double the amount needed and freezing



the rest for a day when the family is rushed for time.

To maximize funds, it's a good idea to 'cost' each meal so that when money is short, the cheapest options can be selected. If breakfasts and lunches are included in the meal plan, you can often use the leftovers from one meal to provide the basis for lunch the following day.

THERE ARE OTHER WAYS OF SAVING MONEY, BESIDES ECONOMIZING ON MEALS.

Sandwich bags can be washed and re-used, as can tinfoil as long as it has not been used for raw meat. Kitchen towels can be quite a luxury when money is short and it is a waste to use a whole sheet just to wipe a knife while making sandwiches, or some similar task. Unroll, say, twenty sheets, cut them into quarters, and place them in a container alongside the main roll. It will encourage the family use kitchen towels more cost-effectively.

Another great money-saver in the kitchen is vinegar. It has many uses and can replace some expensive commercial products. Mixed with water in a spray bottle, it is ideal for



washing down and damp-dusting surfaces, and it can be used in the washing machine in place of fabric conditioner. It won't leave a lingering smell and will also help to keep the machine in good condition.



Dishwasher tablets can be broken in half without compromising results; this will make a box of tablets last twice as long.

The old favorite, like squeezing every last drop of toothpaste from the tube, can save you big in the long run, as can cutting the tops from shampoo and conditioner bottles to scoop out what won't squeeze out in the usual way. Many products can last a couple of weeks longer by doing this.

Keeping hand soap on a rack, so that it is not sitting in a wet puddle on the side of the sink, will ensure that it lasts a lot longer than usual.

These are just some of the ways in which money can be saved. With a little time and thought, most families will be able to devise their own money-savers, ensuring that you'll get the most out of your budget.

These are just some of the ways in which money can be saved. With a little time and thought, most householders will be able to devise their own money-savers, ensuring that, whatever the budget, the maximum use is extracted from it.



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CUPCAKES:

- 1 box butter-recipe chocolate cake mix
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/3 cups cranberry-cherry juice
- 1/2 cup cherry pie filling

DIRECTIONS:

- ① Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line 24 (2 1/2-inch) muffin cups with paper liners and spray with cooking spray
- ② In a large mixing bowl, beat cake mix, butter, eggs, and cranberry-cherry juice with an electric mixer on low for 30 seconds. Scrape down side of bowl. Beat for 2 minutes on medium. Spoon 2 tablespoons batter into each prepared muffin cup. Spoon 1 teaspoon cherry pie filling on batter in each cup and top with another tablespoon of cupcake batter.
- ③ Bake for 12 to 16 minutes. Cool cupcakes in muffin cups on a wire rack for 5 minutes. Remove cupcakes from muffin cups and liners and cool completely on wire rack.

ICING:

- 1 bag semi sweet Ghirardelli Chocolate Chips
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 box powdered sugar
- 6 tbs heavy cream
- 6 tbs milk
- 1 tsp cherry extract
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 1 jar maraschino cherries with stems or cherry extract and fresh cherries with stems for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

- ① Melt chocolate with heavy cream over low heat. Add butter, stir until blended. Add sugar, milk cherry extract and salt. Stir until smooth.
- ② Place icing in a large Ziplock bag with a large decorating tip attached.
- ③ Pipe icing in a swirling motion onto top of cupcakes.
- ④ If using fresh cherries, remove the pits by slicing down from the stem to the bottom, remove the pit then squeeze the cherry closed.



Chocolate Cherry Cupcakes



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GIVE YOUR CAR A HOME

Smart Organization Tips for Your Overflowing Garage

BY B. E. CONRAD

You meant well when you purchased your home with a roomy garage. You had high hopes for that space, dreams that included giving your car a safe place to spend the night. But as life took over, the space inside those garage walls began to slowly disappear.

Now your car is sleeping outside, and your garage is home to everything from that rarely used exercise bike to your kid's unused toys. But there are steps you can take to reclaim your garage space and finally give your car a home. Here are some smart cleaning and organization tips your garage will thank you for.

SIMPLIFY STORAGE WITH PEGBOARD WALLS

If your garage is overflowing with rakes and snow shovels, you can reclaim your wasted space with a few pieces of pegboard. Lining the walls with pegboard will make storage a snap—all you need are some hanging hooks.

You can line all four walls with pegboard or just use them where they are most needed. No matter

which approach you take, your garage will be neater and more well organized.

KEEP WHAT MAKES SENSE AND MOVE THE REST

It is easy for the garage to become a dumping ground for all your extra stuff, but that leaves little room for your car. Clearing out the clutter and moving items to other spaces is a key part of any garage organization project.

Start by identifying what makes sense in the garage—like your power tools and snow shovels. Once those items are safely stored and out of the way, you can focus on moving everything else. Your rake might be better stowed in your garden shed, while your exercise equipment might be better utilized in the basement.

CONSOLIDATE CONTAINERS TO CONSERVE STORAGE SPACE

It makes sense to store containers of motor oil and other automotive fluids in the garage, but it is easy for these items to get out of hand. If your garage shelves are overflowing

with small containers, consolidating them into larger bottles and cans could save you a lot of space.

You can also organize funnels and other automotive essentials with shelf-mounted hooks and hangers. Consolidating containers could even save you money—no need to buy more oil if you already have some.

If your garage is full to and your car has been kicked out, it is time to take charge. The whole purpose of having a garage is to protect your car, and a few simple organizational changes could allow you to take back that space and keep your vehicle indoors.





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Herbs You Can Grow in a Small Indoor Space

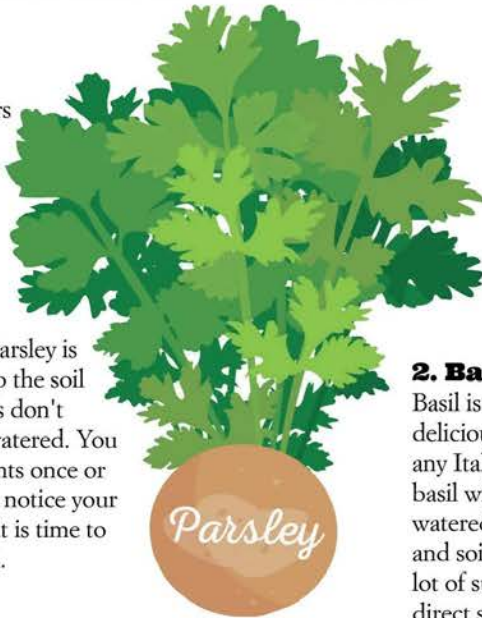
BY LAUREN HARLOW



JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE A LOT OF SPACE DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T EXERCISE YOUR GREEN THUMB. THERE ARE A WIDE VARIETY OF HERBS YOU CAN GROW ON A WINDOWSILL INDOORS. AND BECAUSE YOU ARE GROWING THESE HERBS INSIDE, YOU CAN TRUST THAT THEY'RE CLEAN FOR ANY RECIPES YOU'D LIKE TO THROW THEM IN. YOU CAN GROW ANY OF THE FOLLOWING COMMON, DELICIOUS HERBS INSIDE YOUR HOME TO ADD FRESH SPICE TO YOUR KITCHEN.

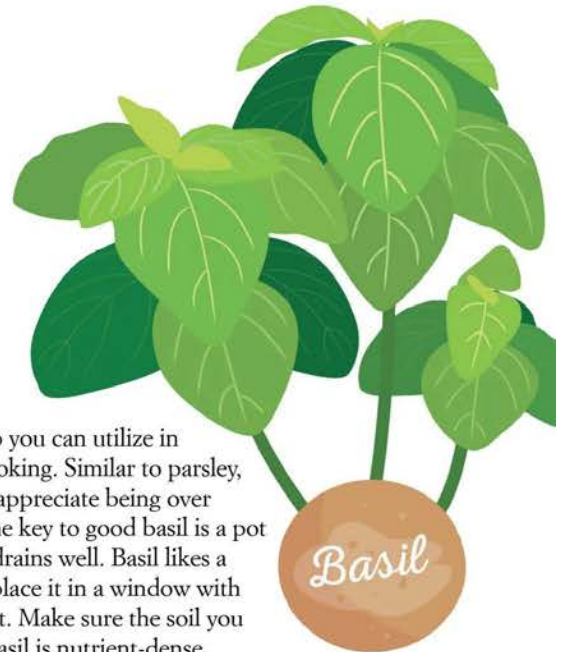
1. Parsley

Growing parsley indoors is incredibly easy. You can get parsley seeds or a seedling at your local gardening store. If you are growing parsley by seed, be sure to germinate the seed prior to inserting it in the soil. Parsley is fairly easy to grow. Keep the soil gently moist as the roots don't appreciate being over watered. You may need to add nutrients once or twice per month. If you notice your parsley looking yellow, it is time to add nutrients to the soil.



2. Basil

Basil is a delicious herb you can utilize in any Italian cooking. Similar to parsley, basil will not appreciate being over watered, so the key to good basil is a pot and soil that drains well. Basil likes a lot of sun so place it in a window with direct sunlight. Make sure the soil you use to grow basil is nutrient-dense.



Growing herbs indoors can add a little bit of green beauty to your decor as well as a lot of flavor in the kitchen. Nothing tastes quite as amazing as fresh herbs straight from the plant.

3. Sage

Sage is a plant that doesn't mind indoor air, even if it gets a bit dry. Rather than growing sage from a seed indoors, it may be easier to use a cutting of an outdoor sage plant and bring it inside. Grab a seedling from a local nursery and set the plant in a sunny window. Be careful not to add too many nutrients to sage as doing so may dampen the flavor. Sage doesn't require too much nutrition and does well in sandy soil.


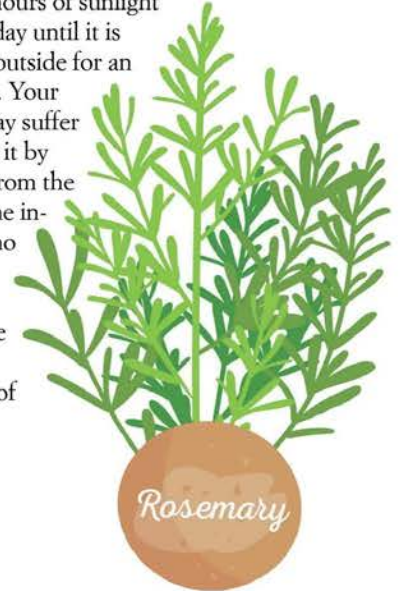



4. Mint

Mint makes an excellent additive to water or cocktails. Mint will do best in temperatures that stay above sixty degrees so as long as you don't keep your house too cold, it will do well inside. Make sure it sits in a window that gets plenty of sun and don't over water it. The soil should be moist but never drenched.

5. Rosemary

Rosemary can do well indoors but before you bring it inside, you should acclimate the plant to less light. Every day, let your rosemary sit outdoors for less and less time. Take a few hours of sunlight away every day until it is only sitting outside for an hour or two. Your rosemary may suffer if you shock it by bringing it from the outside to the indoors with no acclimation. Once it's inside, provide rosemary with plenty of sunlight.

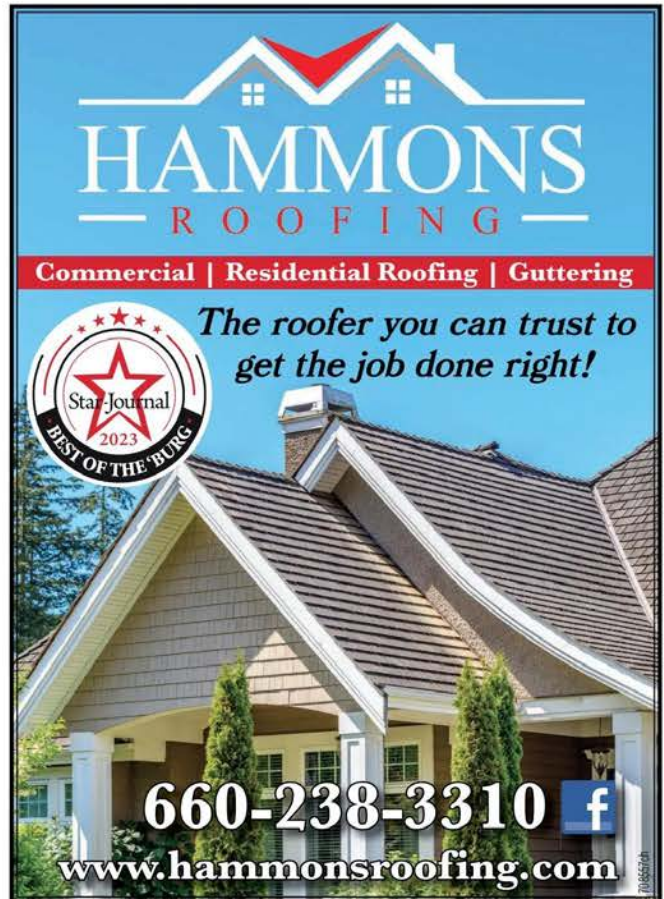


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Vintage HOME DECOR

BY A. G. MCCOY

What is so special about using old, used home and garden items to decorate? "Something old" has evolved from a bridal rhyme and wedding tradition into a classy and chic decorating style. Depending on who you talk to, vintage is anything prior to 1960. However, others feel that anything used or old is considered vintage. Whichever the case, vintage is old and is definitely in style.

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Low Budget

Going with a vintage home and garden look is low budget friendly. Start with your own house and garage to look for old items ready for the junk pile. It's FREE! When you notice an item someone has put outside their yard, stop. Some items will even have a sign that has "Free" written on it. Stop at junkyards and yard sales.

16838081



Upcycled Junk Becomes Something Beautiful

What can you do with a pile of junk? Upcycle! Upcycling is the art of taking an old or unwanted object, often sent to the trash pile, and transforming it into something that is new and practical. Create something beautiful for the home or garden. For instance, chairs with a missing leg, back or seat can be used for all kinds of things. Use the legs as architectural art for the garden. Paint the chair back and place it in the ground as a backdrop for a plant with vines to climb. Save odd chair legs instead of trashing them. Upcycling makes each item unique.

It Makes a Conversation Piece

Blending different vintage items into your home decor will fascinate visitors. Appreciation of the history of a piece can bring back warm memories of childhood, comfort foods served in special dishes or of fun places visited.

Vintage is Easy to Find

If you decide to choose vintage décor, there are plenty of fun places to shop. Shop at antique, thrift, and vintage stores as well as yard sales and estate sales. Estate sales that last two or three days will, most likely, have higher prices at first then lower the prices by the last day. Moving sales are great because the people moving are usually wanting to hurry and get rid of everything fast. Look up garage sales, weekend treasures and estate sales online. You can enter your location and certain items you are looking for and receive daily garage sales reports for your area.

Transform your home and garden on a shoestring budget, creating beautiful decor from junk that others had no more use for. Vintage shopping is fun and inexpensive. When entertaining, share the story behind the classy, chic and unique vintage creations that you gave a home to. Your family and friends will think you're a home decorating genius.





QUICHE FLORENTINE IN PUFF PASTRY

INGREDIENTS

- 1/3 (17 1/4-oz. package) frozen puff pastry, thawed (3 sheets)
- 1 pint heavy cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 6 eggs
- 1 bag fresh spinach washed and rinsed
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese
- 1 cup grated Swiss cheese
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan or Asagio cheese
- 2 green onions (scallions), sliced
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp white pepper
- 2 tbs olive oil



INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 425°F.
- 2 Spray a long rectangle tart pan with cooking spray.
- 3 Place puff pastry in bottom and partially up sides of pan.
- 4 Saute spinach and green onions in olive oil until done (tender and wilted). Set aside to cool.
- 5 Cream the mayonnaise in a medium bowl until smooth. Add the eggs, heavy cream, cheddar cheese, Swiss cheese, salt and pepper. Mix well.
- 6 Combine spinach and egg/cheese mixture.
- 7 Pour the egg mixture into the prepared crust. Sprinkle with Asagio or Parmesan cheese. Bake until crust is golden brown and filling is set, about 30 minutes. The cooking time is determined by the depth of the pan. Try to use a long rectangle tart pan like the one in the picture so the quiche will cook properly. If the mixture is too deep, it will have a hard time cooking through.
- 8 Cool 20 minutes before serving.



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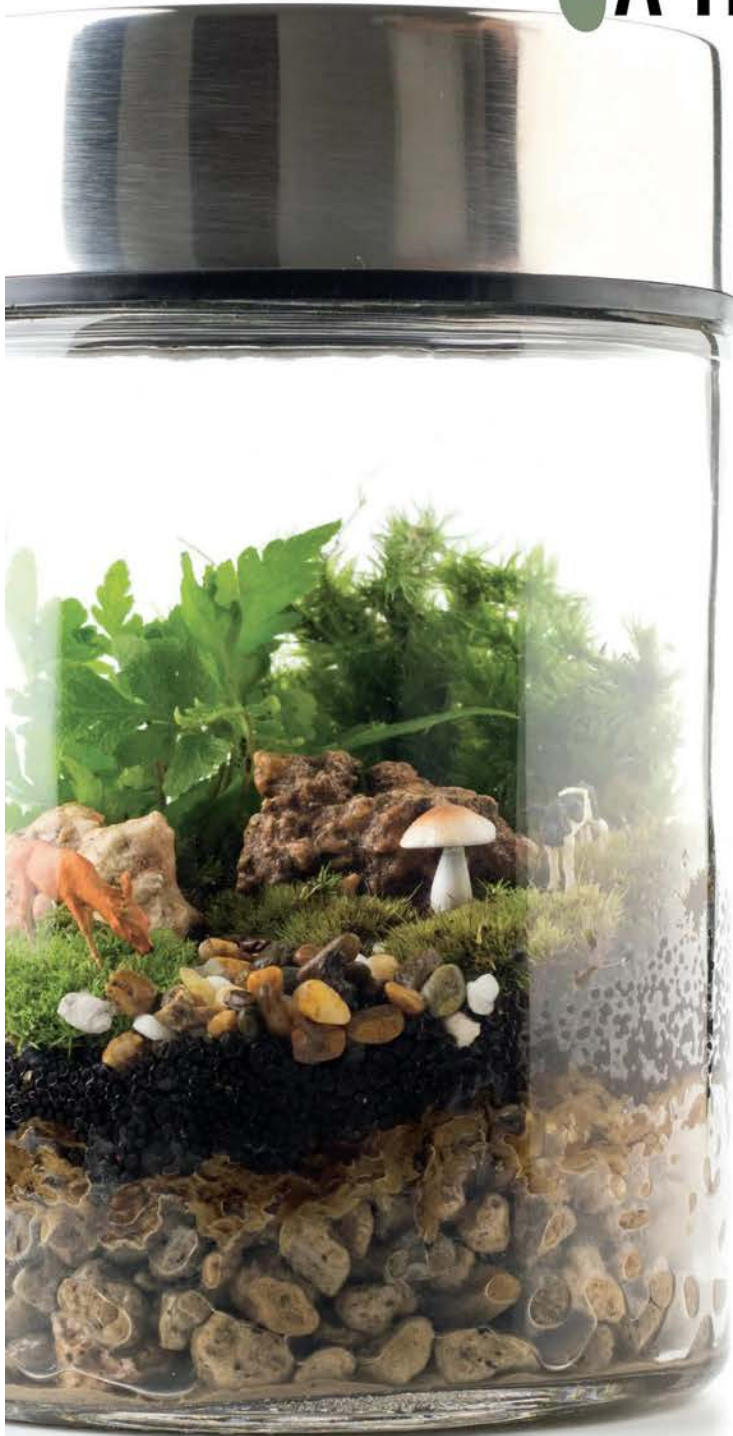
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Easy STEPS TO CREATING A TERRARIUM

BY MARK JAMES



THE HISTORY OF THE TERRARIUM CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE VICTORIAN ERA WHEN THE AMATEUR BOTANIST NATHANIEL WARD TRIED TO FIND A WAY FOR HIS FERNS TO SURVIVE THE POLLUTED LONDON AIR. IN HIS HONOR, THE FIRST TERRARIUM WAS CALLED 'THE WARDIAN CASE' AND IT WAS USED TO TRANSPORT TEA PLANTS FROM CHINA TO INDIA, HELPING TO LAUNCH THE INDIAN TEA INDUSTRY. TODAY, BOTTLE GARDENS AND TERRARIUMS ARE MAKING A GREAT COMEBACK. ANY GLASS CONTAINER CAN BE USED TO CREATE A MINI-GARDEN. A LARGE GLASS COOKIE JAR, AN AQUARIUM OR A LARGE BOTTLE CAN HOST A TERRARIUM. MAKE SURE THE GLASS CONTAINER OF YOUR CHOICE IS WATERTIGHT, AND NOT LEAKY. THE WIDER THE MOUTH OF THE CONTAINER, THE EASIER YOUR TASK OF FILLING IT.

1 DRAINAGE LAYER

The first step to making a terrarium is to cover the bottom of the glass container in about 1 inch of pebbles, tiny stones, marbles or the clay granules used in hydroponics. These materials constitute the drainage layer that prevents the terrarium from becoming waterlogged. A drainage layer is essential since terrariums can become humid. Excessive humidity can cause your plants to rot and die.

2 CHARCOAL

The second step is to add a ½ inch layer of crushed charcoal on top of the drainage layer. The purpose of charcoal in a terrarium is to remove toxins and smells. Activated charcoal, lump charcoal or horticultural charcoal can be used. The charcoal layer is also not vital, but without it, you will have to take extra steps to keep your terrarium healthy, especially if it is closed. Without charcoal, there is a higher chance of unpleasant smells from mildew and mold. Some people replace the charcoal with moss, but moss needs to be trimmed and requires a lot of fresh air to maintain.



3 POTTING SOIL

The third step is to add about 3 inches of potting soil to your terrarium. The soil should be good quality and sterilized. There are special potting soils formulated for terrariums, which typically contain one part sand, one part sterilized garden soil and one part peat moss. Sometimes, special terrarium soil will contain vermiculite which promotes water retention and perlite, a volcanic material that increases air circulation around plant roots.

4 PLANTS AND DECORATIONS

The fourth step in making a terrarium is also the most creative one. Using rocks, pieces of wood and of course, the plants of your choice, you can create a miniature landscape. Remove your plants gently from their pot and put them in the terrarium after making small holes in the soil with a spoon. If the mouth of the container is too small, consider using tweezers or chopsticks to place your



plants. Plants that go in a terrarium should be fully grown, and resistant to moisture. Mosses, carnivorous plants and bromeliads all make great terrarium plants. Succulents, due to their inability to tolerate high moisture, do not make good candidates



for closed terrariums.

5 CARE

After planting, water your terrarium and place it in a spot where it will get sufficient light but not direct sun. Every couple of weeks, check if it needs water. A closed terrarium should be opened and aired at least once a month. Fertilizer is not recommended since you don't want the plants to grow anymore. Lots of condensation, yellow leaves and mold are all signs of over-watering, while wilted leaves and no condensation are signs of under-watering.

Terrariums are very easy to create and very low maintenance. All you need is a non-leaky glass container, a layer of pebbles for drainage, charcoal for sanitation, and soil to feed your plants. Add mature plants that do well in high humidity, and whatever other items you like, such as stones, pieces of driftwood and decorations. Sit back and enjoy your miniature landscape while waiting for summer to return.

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AFFORDABLE WAYS TO FENCE YOUR BACKYARD

BY QUENTIN ARTHUR

Fencing can boost your curb appeal as well as keep intruders out. However, some fence options, such as aluminum and vinyl can be pricey. If you have a big yard to fence in, but a small budget, consider these five affordable options:

Privet Hedges

Instead of metal and wood, consider a living fence. There are dozens of privet hedge species that can grow between four and ten feet tall. The hedge will need to be pruned and maintained to ensure healthy plants. These hedges cost less than \$2 per linear foot.



Yew

Yew is another living fence. It is a dark, evergreen plant that can take on just about any climate. The plant is very slow-growing, taking years to grow tall. You will not need to prune yew as often as other hedges. This plant costs about \$6 per linear foot.

Picket Fence

A white picket fence is a common piece in the American Dream. It is a very popular option for Cape Cod and Georgian homes. While this option has small spaces between the boards, which do not offer full privacy, it is still very appealing to homeowners. Picket fences cost between \$5 and \$10 per linear foot.

Treated Pine

Wooden fences must be resistant to water to avoid rotting. Some types of wood, such as cedar and redwood, are naturally rot-resistant and cost more to install as a fence. However, pine that has been treated with rot-resistant compounds is a more affordable option. You still get a sturdy wooden fence while paying far less. The cost for a treated pine fence is \$20 per linear foot.

Dog Ear Fencing

This type of fencing is similar to a picket fence. However, what makes it unique is that each individual section is rounded at the top. The fence posts are longer than the panels as well. This style is popular with Colonial Revival homes. Dog ear fencing also costs about \$20 per linear foot.

In Conclusion

Fencing is very useful for homes. It keeps pets and children in the safety of the backyard and prevents neighbors from being too nosy. If you are looking to get a fence on a budget, remember to measure the amount of fencing you need and calculate the costs with each option.





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FUN GAME & ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR A HOUSEWARMING PARTY

BY CANDICE PARDUE

Housewarming Trivia

Create a list of trivia questions having to do with buying or moving into a new home. These can be questions about home decor, mortgages, yard and garden, home construction, etc. Just keep the trivia questions simple so your guests will be able to guess the answers quickly. Pass out a sheet of paper and have them write the numbers for how many questions you will ask. Then your guests can write out the answers beside each question's number. Once finished, have them call out their answers to see who guessed correctly.

Scavenger Hunt

Hide some items throughout each room of your house. Then give each guest or team a list of the items so they can begin searching. You can assign one room to each guest/team to simplify things. Whoever finds all the items on their list first wins!

Mix It Up!

Write out scrambled words on a display and allow the guests to call it out when they have the answer. The

Who says a housewarming party has to be boring? Actually, your housewarming can be quite fun with a couple of ice breaker games and activities. Check out these ideas to get your wheels turning.

words can be related to your new home. Get creative and use words like dining table, furniture, carpet, flooring, tile, patio table, ceiling fan, armoire, shower curtain, window treatments, stepping stones, etc. to make it a little more challenging.

Karaoke

Most people enjoy singing, but some are more publicly outspoken with their voice than others. If you'd like to do a "karaoke housewarming," then it might be a good idea to ask your guests about it beforehand. Sing-alongs can make any party a

blast, but it might also put a damper on things if no one wants to sing!

Home-Related Charades

Charades are always fun, especially when played with a certain theme in mind. Think of some great words that are easy to relate to others using gestures. Use words that are related to buying a new home. Divide the group into two teams, and give each group about 10 charade words or phrases. This is a great way to ease the tension if there are guests who have never met one another.



Mystery Games

Mystery games can also help break the ice because these bring the guests together for a common goal - solving a mystery! Mystery games can include finding items that are missing from a room with clues left behind or other mysteries you can think of to make it fun!

Introduction Game

This is a basic game during which the guests simply tell their name and state something interesting about themselves. Have them say their name and where they work or what they do for a living. Or, have each guest reveal their favorite movie, book or song. Keep it fun without getting too personal.

Raffle Prizes

Hold a raffle drawing at some point during your housewarming party. Give each guest a ticket with their number on it when they enter your home. You can give away a

gift certificate to a local store or restaurant, or even a decorative table piece or hanging flower basket. People love to win and you don't have to spend a lot to give away something great!

Outdoor Fun for Housewarming Parties

Housewarming parties don't always have to be indoors. If it's nice weather out, plan some activities in

your yard. A fun game of volleyball, badminton or horse shoes can keep guests smiling and happy! Outdoor activities are the perfect fit for a grill-out style housewarming party.

The main goal is to "break the ice" and help your guests relax. Games and activities don't have to be stressful or awkward for your guests. Just make it fun and keep everything "light" from start to finish



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New to Gardening?

Five Crops You Can Grow Without a Green Thumb

If you're interested in starting a vegetable garden but don't know much about the proper care of plants, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Fortunately, some plants are much easier to grow than others. Here are five of the easiest vegetables to grow in a home garden, regardless of how green your thumb is.



BY D. RYAN

TURNIPS

Turnips may be the perfect crop for absolute beginners. With high germination rates and an ability to grow well without excessive care, turnips are extremely easy. Both the roots and the greens of this plant are tasty and nutritious, meaning you'll get a large amount of healthy, fresh food from every turnip you plant. Since most varieties mature within 60 days, you can even plant multiple crops of them in the same growing season.



LETTUCE

Like turnips, lettuce is a plant that will grow well as long as it's kept moist and given enough sunlight. Leaf varieties also have the advantage of being able to produce multiple harvests, since the leaves will grow back after they've been harvested the first time. Lettuce will eventually go to seed when the weather turns warm, but you can sow new plants and keep on harvesting.



PEPPERS

If you have a nice, sunny spot in your yard, a pepper plant or two will do very well. Peppers are vigorous and aggressive plants that don't require too much care and can produce loads of tasty vegetables for your table. Since there are so many different varieties, you have many options to choose from when deciding what to put in your garden. One thing peppers do need, though, is nutrient-dense soil, which is why a simple organic fertilizer is in order when you're growing them.



BUSH BEANS

Bush beans yield large quantities of tasty bean pods and will grow with practically no effort on your part as long as they are watered regularly. These plants grow quickly and set pods almost as soon as they reach maturity. Another advantage of bush beans is the fact that they can be spaced close together, resulting in fewer weeds.



WINTER SQUASH

A final great option for a new gardener is a variety of winter squash. Whether you're growing acorn squash, hubbards or pie pumpkins, winter squash is a tasty and attractive crop. The plants these squash grow on tend to be large and resistant to both weeds and browsing animals. They will need lots of water to grow to their full size and you may have to dust them with an insecticide if you get squash beetles. Besides that, though, the care these plants need will be fairly minimal.



THESE FIVE CROPS ARE VERY BEGINNER-FRIENDLY AND WILL HELP TO ENSURE YOUR FIRST VEGETABLE GARDEN IS A SUCCESS. ONCE YOU HAVE A BIT MORE EXPERIENCE UNDER YOUR BELT, YOU CAN MOVE ON TO MORE INTENSIVE CROPS LIKE TOMATOES, CORN OR BROCCOLI.



MEATBALL KABOBS WITH HOME GROWN VEGETABLES



INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound 90 or 95 lean ground beef. You want the leanest cut so the meatballs stay firm with little fat.
- 1 tbs mayonnaise
- 1 tbs black pepper
- 1/4 cup seasoned breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp pink Himalayan salt
- Cherry tomatoes from your garden
- Peppers from your garden (either bell peppers or banana peppers or both)
- Red onion quartered
- Balsamic vinegar and olive oil
- Herbs de Provence

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Fire up the grill!
- 2 Mix ground beef, mayonnaise, pepper breadcrumbs and salt.

- 3 Use an ice cream scoop to measure meatballs. Roll firmly into a packed round ball.
- 4 Slice and clean peppers.
- 5 Place, in this order, meatball, onion slice, pepper slice, tomato, meatball, onion slice, pepper slice, tomato, meatball on each skewer.
- 6 Combine balsamic vinegar, olive oil, herbs de Provence in a bowl.
- 7 Place kabobs on grill.
- 8 Using a barbecue brush, dab balsamic mixture on kabobs. (gently)
- 9 Once kabobs have browned on one side, you can roll them over using tongs. Do this gently. Continue to dab sauce on kabobs every time you turn them. Once they are browned on all sides they will be more firm. Cook until meatball temperature reaches 160°.
- 10 Cool 10 minutes before serving.





If you see one ant, you can bet there is a whole colony lurking somewhere nearby. Ants live in large colonies, and seeing a single scout is always a sign of trouble.

If you do see the early warning signs of an ant invasion, you need to act quickly. If the ants scouting your home find something good, they will tell the rest of the colony, and pretty soon your home will be crawling with the tiny black invaders.

The good news is you do not have to break out the ant poison to get rid of these troublesome pests. Ant baits can be harmful to kids and pets, so give these natural remedies a try before you go to that extreme.

Use vinegar and water to clean your counters and mop the floors. Ants hate the smell of vinegar. Simply switching from your normal cleaners to vinegar-based solutions can keep ants at bay.

Plant peppermint around your home. If you are putting in a garden, plant a few sprigs of peppermint strategically around your home. If you know where the ants are coming into your home, plant a big sprig of peppermint in that spot. If not, planting peppermint around the perimeter of the home can keep ants from coming in.

Sprinkle cornmeal around the nest and along existing ant trails. Ants have a hard time digesting cornmeal, and over time it can kill the entire colony. Sprinkle some cornmeal along any ant trails you see, and the anthill if you can find it.

Mix baking soda with powdered sugar. The baking soda reacts inside the ants' bodies and kills them, while the sugar attracts the pests to the bait. Place a few of these baits strategically around the house to get rid of the pests. Just be sure to keep the baits away from kids and household pests.

Draw a chalk line. If you know where the ants are coming into your home, try drawing a chalk line around it. There is something in chalk that ants do not like and they will not want to cross the line.

Spray the doors and windows with cinnamon oil. Put cinnamon essential oil in a spray bottle and spray the doors and windows where the ants are entering your home. Ants hate the aroma of cinnamon.

Use lemon juice to keep ants away. Ants also hate the smell of lemons, so spray the exterior of your home generously with lemon juice.

Dealing with an ant infestation promptly is the best way to keep these bothersome pests away. If you wait until the problem has become overwhelming, you might have no choice but to use poisonous baits or call an exterminator. Dealing with the problem right away allows you to use natural remedies that are safer for yourself, your family and your pets.





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