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Extreme How-To

The Enthusiast's Guide to Home Improvement

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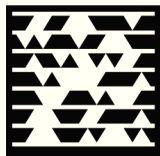
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(All times are Central)

May 19 - 10:00 am
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How to Grow Vegetables in the French
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LETTER

From The
Editor-In-Chief

Extreme How-To

This is a magazine for DIYers, and I try to “walk the walk” in my own life. I fix up my own house, I change my automotive brakes and oil, maintain my own lawn and generally make any necessary repairs in and around my home.

There are many reasons I do these things. I freely admit that I’m cheap, and don’t really warm to the idea of paying someone else to do something that I can do. And, maybe I’m a bit of a control freak, because I know if I do something that it will be done correctly, or at least I’ll have no one else to blame if something gets screwed up. Also, I just like trying new things and taking on challenges. I face a lot of trial and error, but usually learn a lot from the experience.

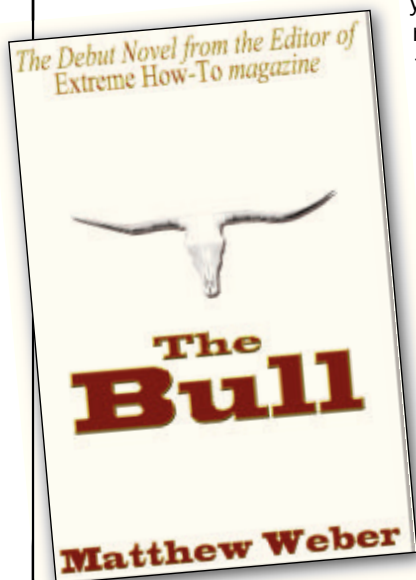
My latest DIY project falls outside the realm of home improvement. I spent the last couple of years writing a book in my spare time. It’s a novel—not a how-to book, but fiction—a genre in which I have no prior experience. After I completed it, I studied how to get published through a major book publishing firm. I won’t bore you with the details,

but suffice it to say that it is usually a years-long process with no guaranteed result at the end of the tunnel. I am far too impatient for that. Plus, I make my living at a publishing firm and know a thing or two about the business—although only from the magazine end of things. “Close enough,” I reasoned, so I started my own little publishing imprint called Pint Bottle Press to distribute my book.

I discovered some new things to learn. I had to launch a website, register with the Copyright Office, start a Sole Proprietorship, design a book cover, take a crash course in type-setting and book formatting, set up pricing and distribution channels and purchase ISBN numbers (required to identify all retail books). Now, I’m embarking on

the monolithic task of selling and marketing the thing. I’m promoting it locally, selling on consignment through local bookstores and Amazon.com, shilling on local radio programs, pitching it for reviews in any newspaper or blog that will have me, and plugging it in the pages of *Extreme How-To*.

If you’d like to learn more about my new book, *The Bull*, or order a copy, please visit www.pintbottlepress.com.



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Extreme How-To is published by

LATITUDE3 MEDIA GROUP, LLC

1111 Edenton Street
Birmingham, AL 35242

Phone 205.949.1600 • Fax 205.949.1601
www.extremehowto.com

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Q: What garden vegetables should I plant in late summer ?

A: July and August are generally ideal months to harvest veggies you've already planted, with everything from beans, zucchinis, potatoes and tomatoes ripe for the picking. However, you still have time to plant certain lettuces, cabbages and cauliflower if you choose the right variety. You can also plant fast-growing varieties of carrots, peas and beets. July will be your last chance for sowing peas or beans, because the pods probably won't have time to develop before the first frost if you plant any later. Many leaf vegetables and salad crops are hardy enough to last well into autumn, including kale, Swiss chard, lettuce and arugula.

Q: What type of grass do I need for a "no mow" lawn?

A: Certain grasses that are native to western regions of the U.S. can live on rainfall alone in their natural habitat and require mowing only a few times a year to keep a neat appearance. "No-mow" grass types include Pacific hair grass, fine fescue, buffalo grass and blue grama. Typical blade height is 2 to 6 inches high, and the blades grow sideways so the lawn shades itself and holds in moisture to withstand droughts. These types of grass offer inherent environmental benefits, resulting in fuel savings, fewer emissions from your lawnmower, no chemicals and less water usage. Several companies distribute the grass online, tailored toward the climate you live in. It can be planted from seed or from custom-grown plugs.



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Q&A Got a?

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Q: What is the purpose of the recirculate setting in an automobile?

A: The recirculate button can help your vehicle HVAC system run more efficiently. The setting closes the outside vents and uses only the air that is already inside the vehicle. In cold weather, this prevents constantly introducing cold air into the vehicle, so your system can simply work to keep already warm air heated to temperature. In hot weather, use the recirculate setting when running the air conditioner to prevent the intake of warm outside air.

Note: While the "recirculate" option may warm the inside of a car more quickly during winter, it also keeps moisture in the air and can fog your windows. It's better to bring in air from outside the car, which is usually drier, and then switch over to recirculate as the temperature warms.

Q: What is expansive cement?

A: Concrete is generally mixed with more water than is needed to hydrate the cement, and when it evaporates it causes the concrete to shrink. The shrinking leads to cracking, which weakens the concrete. This shrinkage defeats the purpose of grouting applications such as grouting anchor bolts or grouting machine foundations. To address these problems, "expansive cement" refers to a cement mixture that, when mixed with water, increases in volume during the curing process to a greater degree than standard Portland cement. This effect can strengthen concrete applications by eliminating the shrinkage. **EHT**



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Lawn and Landscape Tools & Supplies

Gear up for summer with new equipment for your outdoor improvements.



By Matt Weber

BLACK & DECKER 36V TILLER

For the 2012 spring season, our staff tested the first of Black & Decker's new tiller line, a cordless 36-volt model with front-end tines. Also available in a corded 8.3-amp model, the new tillers offer users high torque and low speed to dig deep when tearing up the ground.

We weren't sure how much power to expect from a battery-powered digging machine but found ourselves impressed with the amount of torque transferred to the tines, even when sinking it

into compacted earth with high clay content. The tiller features a worm-drive transmission with triple-stage gear reduction that helps in control and pace during tilling. The unit is easy to assemble and features three-position height adjustment. What you get is a tilling machine capable of turning soil for backyard or light-duty applications, and you don't have to hassle with gasoline or oil. The battery pack provides weight at the tiller head for a solid bite into the ground, and while it seems like the stability of the tiller would benefit from a

wider wheel-base, it is easier to transport than some competing gas models that have no wheels at all. The tiller features a metal drive-train, handle and tines with plastic housing. Long-term performance remains to be seen, as this spring is the product's introduction, but the tiller does come with a full 2-year manufacturer's warranty. (www.blackanddecker.com)

SELF-WATERING PLANTER

Lee Valley Tools distributes all sorts of innovative lawn and garden equipment, including the Self-Watering Planter (PL604). For use indoors or out, the planter has a built-in reservoir to automatically provide plants with an optimal amount of water for maximum growth. The reservoir holds two U.S. gallons while a pattern of X-shaped slots in the floor of the liner lets the water wick into the soil. Great for tomatoes, salad greens or herbs, the container holds about 2.13 cu.ft. of soil in just over 3-1/2 sq.ft. of space. At 13-1/2-in. deep, it provides enough growing room for carrots or other deep-rooted crops. Plus, the double-wall construction provides insulation to help protect the soil against light



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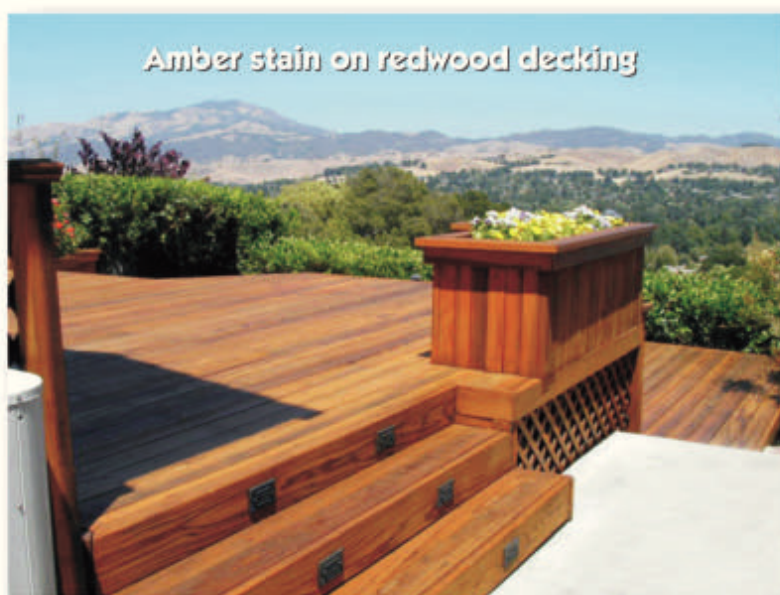
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frosts. An upper fill-port lets you top off the water as needed, and a second port near the base allows excess water to drain. Eight holes in the liner securely hold 7/16-in. diameter stakes for supporting taller plants. (www.leevalley.com)



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quick-release belt-attachment mechanism, and two removable hook-and-loop belts allow the scabbard to be secured to your leg. (www.leevalley.com)

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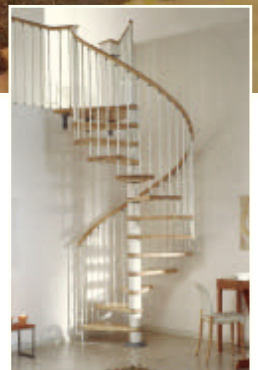


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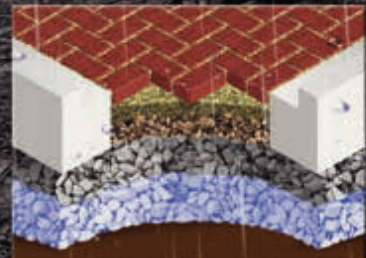


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Each spring I always tell myself this is the year I'll finally get rid of the old stumps around the yard, and every year I think back to long days spent with an adze, axe and shovel, digging, whacking and more digging. And so the numbers of stumps have continued to grow with passing storms and trees dying from disease. Some of these trees were cut low enough so that tall grass camouflaged their stumps until the lawnmower blades or mower decks found their demise in the seasoned wood. Stumps that were left proud of the ground made for interesting lawn tractor driving.

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TRIM PAINT

Perfection

By Clint C. Thomas, Esq.
Photographs by Zoe Thomas

Painting is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to transform any living space into something new and exciting. However, for some reason many people shy away from painting. A co-worker of mine once told me that he and his wife tried to paint their newborn's bedroom. When I asked how it went, he grimaced before answering—it didn't go so well. In fact, he went on to explain that it was a complete disaster.

There is no great mystery to painting. Like everything in life, we get better at it with practice, but I believe the most important factor in having a successful painting experience is to paint like a neat-freak.

Many paint jobs are unsuccessful because of accidental spills, runs and trying to work with too much paint. A small accident can quickly turn into a big mess. Those few drops of paint on the floor invariably get tracked all over the room and end up getting on the carpet. Brushes that are overloaded with paint can transfer that excess paint onto the hands and clothes of the painter who quickly contaminates everything in his immediate vicinity. Short, choppy strokes with a paint brush cause specs of paint to be broadcast onto other things that are not supposed to be painted.

My family and I recently tackled the job of painting the trim work in our foyer and on our home's main staircase. It had been stained a dark Jacobean brown and then had a heavy coat of polyurethane applied over it. We decided to use a semi-gloss, white, latex paint in an effort to brighten up an otherwise very dark foyer.

Our plan was to paint the baseboards, door casing, doors and transoms white along with the stair risers, the spindles on the handrail and the paneled wall directly under the staircase. We

decided to leave the handrail, treads and newel posts in the Jacobean finish. (To the lovers of fine wood out there, please don't be outraged. Rest assured that the items that we painted were pine, and not oak or some other exotic hardwood.)

So, to have a positive painting experience it was important to follow a few simple steps. The first step was to clear the work area by completely removing the furnishings from the room. However, if the room is large enough, this can be accomplished by pushing everything

to the center of the room. It is much easier to paint a room when it is empty instead of having to work around furniture and decoration. This also eliminates the possibility of getting paint on these items.

The best way to move large pieces of furniture are with dollies. A set of dollies can be made for almost nothing out of scrap lumber that you probably already have around your house. Simply take a couple of left-over pieces of plywood and cut two sections that measure 29 inches long by 10 inches wide. I once made a second set of dollies that were 36 inches wide, and much to my chagrin, I discovered that it would not go through most doorways. This is why a maximum length of 29 inches is preferred. Frame the outside perimeter with 1x strips of wood. This keeps whatever is being moved from rolling or sliding off the dolly while it's in motion. Attach swivel casters under all four corners to complete the construction of the dollies.

PREP

After removing all the furniture from the room, the next step was to give the work area a good cleaning. Start from the top and work down. Run something like a Swiffer over the walls and then hand wipe the trim work with a clean rag. A tack cloth works great if you have one. The final step was to vacuum the floor, being sure to get inside all of the cracks at the intersection of the floor and baseboards with the vacuum cleaner's wand.

Follow up the cleaning by covering the floor with a drop cloth or plastic. A canvas drop cloth works better than plastic because it is not slippery. If plastic is used, try to buy it in



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a roll with a thickness of 3 mils. I have found that a thickness less than 3 mils is too light and will billow up with every step that you take. A thickness greater than 3

mils is unnecessary overkill and is too stiff to comfortably work with.

As with the cleaning, it is usually best to start at the top and

work down. As a general rule, it is best to paint the ceiling and crown moulding before tackling the walls and baseboards. Personally, I prefer to paint the trim work first because it is easier to cut-in along a wall than it is to follow the narrow edge provided by trim work.

Before applying any paint to the trim work in my foyer, I gave everything a light sanding with a 220-grit sandpaper to rough up the polyurethane that had been previously applied. If this is not done, the new primer and paint will not grab the surface well enough to bond to it. In some cases it will even cause the new paint to smear instead of going on smoothly.



Don't forget my neat-freak mantra. After sanding everything down, wipe down the walls and trim work with a damp (not wet) rag, rinsing it often, and then run the vacuum cleaner over the floors. Be sure to pay special attention to the cracks and crevices along the edges of the floor and on staircases.

PRIME

It is usually a good idea to prime your work surface before applying the finish coat. Many paint manufacturers advertise one

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coat coverage, but in actuality this is extremely rare. Typically, two coats are required, and if a primer is used it will help to cover any stains that may exist. A primer is an absolute necessity when painting over raw wood or a stained surface. Priming your work area also has the added advantage of providing you with an intimate acquaintance with the surfaces that you will be painting. This allows you to discover or detect potential problems in the priming stage that can be avoided when the finish coats are being applied.

On this project I used Kilz 2 brand primer that I had tinted with a small amount of black color. Kilz 2 is white, and after the addition of

a little black it becomes battleship gray. The purpose behind doing this is to keep water spots and other stains from bleeding through the finish coat. Much like

painting a car, battleship gray or primer gray makes it harder for a discoloration to bleed through the finished product. Since I was painting over a very dark brown



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stain, the use of a primer that was tinted gray allowed me to use fewer coats of paint than if I had used a white primer.

PAINT

With the sanding behind me and everything primed, all that was left was to apply the finish color. Depending upon the paint, this can take one to three coats for complete coverage. When



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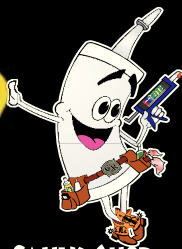
applying paint, it is usually best to use two thinner coats than to try and apply one thick coat. Thick coats of paint are much more likely to have runs or fill up

ornamental detail unnecessarily.

Trim work is always painted with a brush. Paint brushes come in all shapes, sizes and price ranges. I avoid the really

got caulking?

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inexpensive brushes and high-end brushes alike. My philosophy is to stick with middle-of-the-road paint brushes and buy a new packet of them for each new job. This may seem a little wasteful, but it doesn't take too much use to wear out a paint brush. The bristles often begin to stiffen slightly or spread out even after a minimal amount of use. Trying to paint with a stiff brush or one that is the wrong size for the job is a common problem for neophyte painters.

I prefer a 3-in. brush with straight bristles and use it almost exclusively for interior work. My wife, on the other

hand, prefers a 2-in. brush that has the bristles cut at an angle. For tedious jobs I will alternate between a new, 1-in. brush and an artist's brush that has a flat, wide tip and not the traditional teardrop shape.

It is a good idea to wash out your brush halfway through the project or if it becomes overloaded with paint. Any painting experience will go better with a clean brush that is not holding a bunch of excess paint. On hot days, it is often necessary to rinse brushes more often so the paint doesn't dry out and stiffen the bristles. When using latex paint, make sure the brushes are placed in a cup or bucket of water during any breaks or while eating lunch. If your painting will continue the following day, thoroughly rinse out the brushes and then leave them in water over-night until the next day. This helps to ensure that they do not stiffen up.

The best technique for applying paint is long, slow strokes. Never dunk more than half the length of the bristles into the paint. The deeper it is submerged into the paint, the faster that paint gets into the base of the brush where it will dry, hardening the bristles. It is also just messier.



Blue painter's tape is handy if you need to paint along an edge or otherwise cut-in something. I personally don't use it anymore because I have a steady hand and have had more practice painting than I care to remember. For those without a steady hand, I highly recommend the use of

painter's tape because it will save a lot of time by eliminating the touch-up work. Another option for cutting-in is a painter's shield. They work well for larger items, but do not try to use one on anything tedious or if the surface that you are working on is not completely level. Paint



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shields are handy, but they are not infallible.

To complete my project all that remained was to scrape the paint off the panes of glass on

three French doors. I like to use a 4-in. wide wallpaper scraper for this type of work. Be sure to always use a new blade. A dull blade will do the

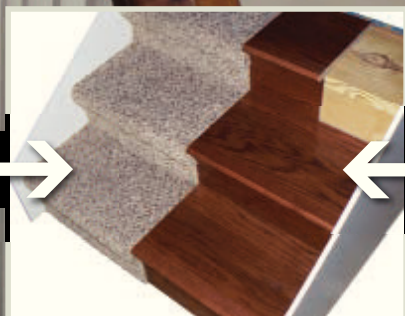


job, but it will take a lot more effort and time than a razor-sharp one.

By taking just a few precautionary steps it is very easy to have a successful, and I dare say, pleasurable painting experience. A new coat of paint can simply freshen up a room or it can transform a room into something totally new. There is no other more cost-effective home improvement technique for the do-in-yourselfer. The cost of paint and brushes are minimal, but the impact is monumental. **EHT**

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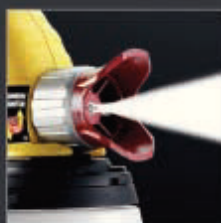


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By Rob Robillard

HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS

FROM A PRO

If you're like most people you probably love the look and charm of a hardwood floor. Hardwood floors never go out of fashion and can add real value to your home. I have hardwood flooring in every room in my house and I love it.

Hardwood floors are durable and natural, come in a variety of species, are hypoallergenic and easy to maintain. When well maintained these floors can last a hundred years.

Recently I was asked by a client to remove carpeting in a 12-by-12-ft. bedroom and install 3/4-by-3-in. Cherry species hardwood plank flooring. I'm a big fan of Cherry flooring. I like its unique color attributes, darkening as it ages to a mature, rich, burnished auburn color.

We bought our wood from a local supplier and selected the second highest grade, which differs from Clear grade only in that Select grade shows more of the full range of color/grain found in the species, including what's found in the Clear grade.

The Cherry planks were free of knots, splits, checks, worm holes, excessive mineral streaks or contrasting sapwood and looked great!

Here's how we approached this installation:

MEASURE THE ROOM

Measure the width and length of the room and multiply that number to determine the room's square footage. When ordering hardwood flooring,







always order an additional 10-15 percent extra for waste and culling out irregular boards.

PREPARING FOR HARDWOOD FLOOR INSTALLATION

First order of business was to remove all of the furniture, and then cut the carpet into four sections of 36-in. strips. This made it easy to roll the carpet into manageable strips and carry to the trash bin.

Once the carpet was removed we removed all of the carpet tack strips, swept the floor thoroughly and then installed 2-in. deck screws into the subfloor and floor joists approximately every 24 in. to help eliminate the possibility of flooring squeaks.

FLOORING MOISTURE CONTENT

Hardwood flooring needs to acclimate in the rooms where it is going to be installed for several days to allow it to adjust to

temperature and humidity. Otherwise, if installed without acclimating, gaps and/or buckling may occur. Many contractors suggest leaving the wood on the jobsite for two weeks to acclimate well in hopes of preventing any issues.

The truth is that some wood flooring may already be at the proper moisture content when delivered. Allowing it to sit in extremely heavy humidity will only cause the wood planks to absorb unwanted moisture.

It's best to know what the moisture content of your wood planks are at the time of delivery and what the expected moisture content will be in the room when it will be installed. I always ask the manufacturer what the flooring moisture content is and then double check with my moisture meter.

LAY OUT THE ROOM

Hardwood flooring should be installed on a solid, structurally sound subfloor. Whenever possi-

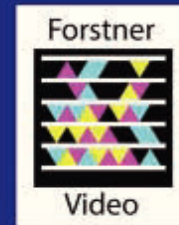
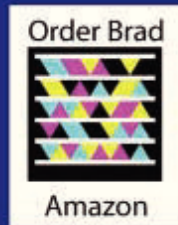
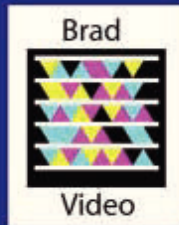
ble, determine the direction of your floor joists and plan on installing your plank flooring perpendicular to the joists.

Install 15-lb. Kraft paper underlayment on the entire floor, overlapping the roll edges by 3 inches. The Kraft paper acts as a vapor barrier. A utility knife is used to cut around objects like door jambs, radiators or other permanent objects. A few well placed staples hold the Kraft paper in place.

On this installation we were installing the hardwood flooring against the existing room trim so no shoe molding was to be used.

Select a few straight, long boards to start the first row. Using a table saw, rip the grooves off at a 15-degree angle to get the first starter row of planks to fit tight to the wall's baseboard trim.

We took the time to measure from the opposite wall to determine if the room was square. You guessed it—it wasn't.



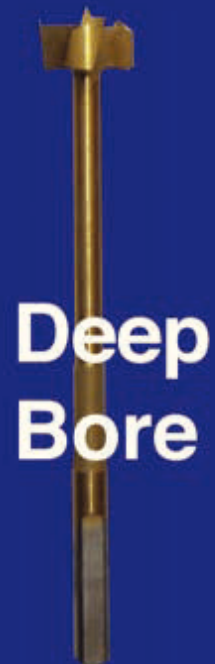
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HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS FROM A PRO

Using a tape measure and snapping a layout chalk line a few feet out from the wall we were able to determine if the room was square or not. This is important information when determining how to rip the starter courses.

Your layout chalk line should be exactly parallel to the wall so you can make sure your floor boards are in alignment as you work your way across the floor installing them. From this mark, measure to the opposite wall to check for equal distance at both ends. If it isn't parallel, the flooring won't be either, so it may be necessary to slightly adjust your guideline.

It turned out that the starter course needed to be ripped a total of 1/2-in. over the course

of 12 feet. Doing this step at the beginning of installation saved us time and aggravation later at the opposite wall, trying to get the last board to fit. We continually check our progress as we cross the room.

INSTALLATION

Face-nailing. Use a pneumatic finish nailer or drill pilot holes down through the hardwood plank and into the subfloor and joist for 8-penny hand nails. Face-nail each board in the first row at the point of every joist and set the nail with a nail-set. Face-nail the entire first row and remember to keep the board lengths random.

It is necessary to face-nail the first row because the pneumatic floor nailer not fit against the

wall. All of the plank face-nails can be filled with wood putty to match the flooring.

Blind-nailing. For the next two rows you need to install 8-penny hand nails into the tongue of the plank. We call this blind-nailing. To blind-nail use either a finish nailer or drill pilot holes at a 45-degree angle through the tongue of each board and hand-nail the planks until there is enough clearance for the pneumatic floor nailer to fit over the tongue of the hardwood floor planks.

Once these boards are installed, lay out several planks ahead of the installation to visualize lengths, wood grain and colors of the boards. Pick boards from different bundles to ensure color match throughout your floor installation.

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Try to keep the ends of boards in adjacent rows 6 in. apart to create a random pattern.

Floor Fasteners. To save your back and knees you absolutely need a pneumatic flooring nailer. Using the nailer, place the gun lip over the edge of the board and strike firmly with the mallet, driving the staple or cleat nail into the tongue of the hardwood plank.

The end wall planks get cut on the miter saw, all the rest fit together like a puzzle. Try to place your fasteners into the floor joists

Inspect the flooring during the installation. Any planks with visual defects are "culled out" or replaced using the added 10 percent extra material ordered for the job.

While the first row of flooring is nailed through the face of the board, the next two rows should be "blind-nailed," in which 8-penny hand nails are driven into the tongue of the plank. Blind-nailing conceals the nail heads inside the joint of the floor boards. Drill pilot holes at a 45-degree angle through the tongue of each board and hand-nail the planks until there is enough clearance for the pneumatic floor nailer to fit over the tongue of the hardwood floor planks.



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HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS FROM A PRO

If you're going to use a mechanical fastener to hold the floor down when installing hardwood flooring, you have two choices: cleat nails or staples. The

question I am often asked is "what's the difference?"

If you asked 10 hardwood flooring installers I'd bet dollars to donuts that the answer on



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Another method of blind-nailing is to use a pneumatic finish nailer to fasten through the tongue of the flooring plank.



Flooring finish nailers can greatly accelerate the fastening process, firing thin nails that drive easily and prevent splitting the wood.

which is better would be a toss-up. Another factor to consider is what your local suppliers sell. When comparing the two fasteners I believe there are two very important issues to consider: holding strength and seasonal movement—and there are differences. Let's look at each fastener separately:

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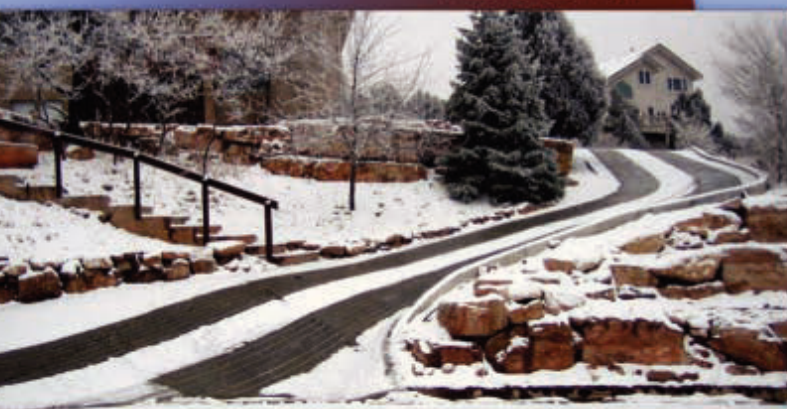
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HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS FROM A PRO

Cleats. Cleat nails come in 16- or 18-gauge and are “L” or “T” shaped. Both types have ribs on two-thirds of the nail shank. The reason for the

smooth area at the top of the shank is to allow for the hardwood floor to expand and contract with seasonal temperature and humidity changes.

Cleat nails are twice as much money as staples, the cost is approximately \$80.00 per box of 1,000 nails.

Staples. Staples have two prongs that penetrate and grip the hardwood. When initially installed, they have twice the gripping power. The problem I have with staples is that with New England seasonal movement of the hardwood, the staples tend to loosen their grip and are more likely to cause squeaks. Squeaks mean call-backs!

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A proper tool setup is critical for installation. Locate your compressor and saw stand in a place where you can conveniently access the tools as well as the work you're performing.

Because the staple penetrates the wood in two locations they are also more likely to split the hardwood tongue.

Staples are cheap which is part of the reason they are popular. They cost approximately \$40.00 per box of 5,000 nails.

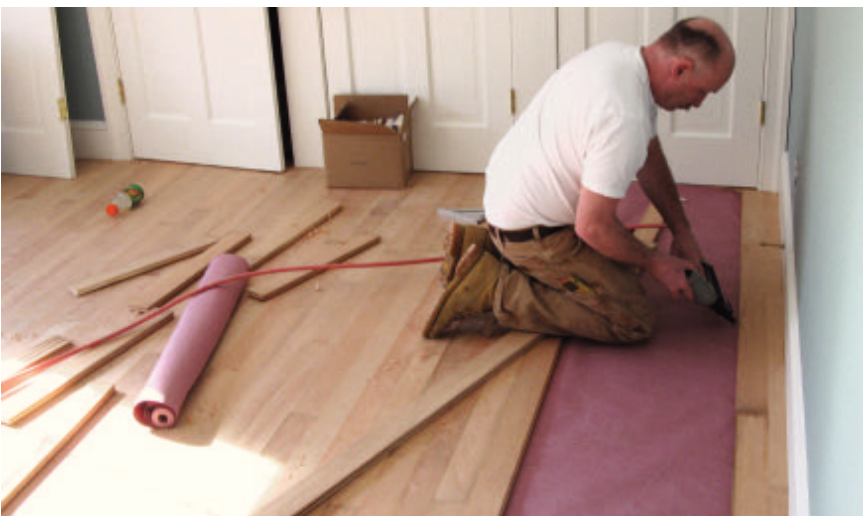
Board Arrangement. Now it's time to dry-fit five or six rows of flooring, sorting and positioning the boards for a pleasing pattern

and appearance. Then, separate them and nail away into the floor joists.

Remember to stagger the end joints by at least 6 inches. At the end of each row, cut boards to fit against the walls.

OPPOSITE WALL

When you get to the last two or three rows, it will be difficult to use the floor nailer, so you



On this job, we stopped several rows from the opposite wall, turned the flooring around at the opposite wall and installed the plank boards from the other wall out (tongue facing away from wall), making the final two "cut" boards located approximately 2' from the wall.

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HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS FROM A PRO

will need to blind-nail a few rows similar to the first few starter rows and face-nail the last row.

Or, you can do what we did. Stopping several rows from

the opposite wall, we turned the flooring around at the opposite wall and installed the plank boards from the other wall out (tongue facing away from wall),

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Always stagger the joints of your floor boards for a random appearance.



The last two boards both have their tongues ripped off at a slight bevel and are installed simultaneously to ensure a tight fit.

making the final two "cut" boards located approximately 24 in. from the wall.

This allowed us to scribe and cut a perfect cut around the door trim and get the doorway threshold to match up nicely with the hallway flooring.

The last two boards both have their tongues ripped off at a slight bevel and are installed simultaneously to ensure a tight fit. Face nails finish off these two boards, then fill with nail putty. Even with the pneumatic nailer, my back was aching!

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HARDWOOD FLOORING TIPS FROM A PRO

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Editor's Note: Rob Robillard is a remodeling contractor in Concord, MA visit his website at www.AConcordCarpenter.com



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MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD



How to Grow Vegetables in the French Intensive Gardening Style

By Clint C. Thomas, Esq.
Photography by Zoe Thomas

America's doctrine of westward expansion, known as Manifest Destiny, is still ingrained in our subconscious mind today. Our country has a large and ever growing population, but we are still not as densely populated as Europe. America is an enormous country with some parts that are still uninhabited, albeit in harsh climatic zones. This lower density in population has allowed us to spread out and take up more space.

One area in which we do this is in farming and, to a smaller extent, home gardening. The traditional American garden usually consists of cultivated land in someone's back yard with the crops laid out in long rows mimicking the design of commercial farms. Europeans, on the other hand, have much less land mass to work with and have had to adopt gardening techniques that are different from ours.

Many Europeans garden using a system commonly referred to as the French Intensive Gardening method, which originated in 1890 on a small plot of land on the outskirts of Paris, France. This technique made its way to America around 1966, thanks to Alan Chadwick who demonstrated this technique on an inhospitable hillside at the University of California's Santa Cruz campus. John Jeavons, of Ecology Action of the Mid-Peninsula at Stanford, California, built upon Chadwick's early work, and later published a book on the subject, *How to Grow More Vegetables Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine*.

GARDEN

MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD GARDEN

The French Intensive Method involves growing densely spaced plants in loose, well-drained soil that has been double-dug. Crop rotation and companion planting are also vital components of this gardening technique. The dense plant spacing helps to reduce the encroachment of weeds, and also helps to keep the ground shaded from the effects of the sun so it won't dry out as fast, in addition to providing a high yield of vegetables. The loose soil permits water to easily drain through it and eliminates much of the resistance that would otherwise be encountered by the plant's small feeder roots as they spread through the ground.

This method of planting reduces the amount of water that is used and favors light watering everyday with only one good soaking each week. Crop rotation, inter-cropping and companion planting all help to eliminate the need for environmentally dangerous pesticides.

Organic garden beds are usually laid out so that they are no more than five feet from front to back. The side-to-side width can be any length depending upon how much room the gardener has to work with. The purpose behind the 5-ft. maximum depth is so a person can reach the center of the garden bed from either side of the bed. This eliminates someone having to step in the soil or walk on it. Every time that someone puts a foot on the soil they are compacting the dirt, thereby reversing the benefits of the double-digging process. Most raised beds range in size from 4-by-8 to 5-by-20 feet. If a large piece of ground is to be cultivated in this method, imagine two raised beds that are separated by a narrow walkway laid down the middle of the space for



French Intensive Gardening involves growing plants closer together than is traditionally done.

access to the inside edge of each bed.

If a walkway is one of the features to be incorporated into a raised bed garden, consider covering the foot path with pea gravel or a similar substitute. The addition of gravel will delineate the border between the walkway and the growing areas, and also provide a neat and tidy appearance. Two of the aesthetic

hallmarks of gardening with raised beds are the sense of order that they create and clean architectural lines.

Use old newspapers as a ground cover to keep weeds from growing up through the gravel. Commercial covers, similar to plastic window screens, are available on the market, however, these have two drawbacks. The first is that they cost money and



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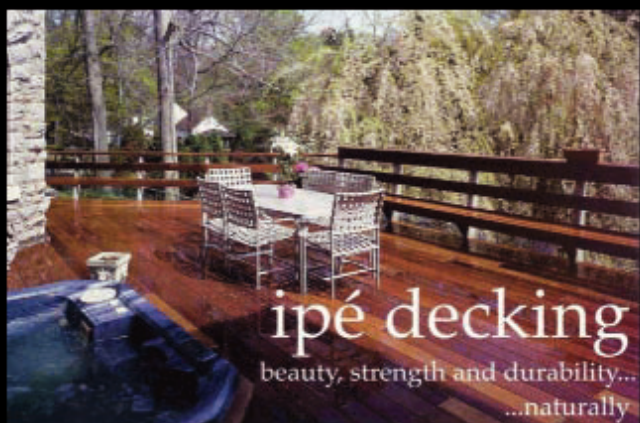


MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD GARDEN

the second is they are not environmentally friendly because they are made of plastic. Compare these problems with old newspapers, which can be collected for free from family, friends or the office break room, and they are also ecologically sound. Newspapers are biodegradable, will block out sunlight to keep weeds from growing, and will allow rain water to soak through them. The trick to using newspapers in this manner is to put them down in a thick layer. Excluding the monster Sunday and Wednesday editions, I like to use the entire newspaper from a normal day, with the exception of the sales flyers. I simply open it at the bi-fold on the front page and then lay it down, making sure it overlaps with any other pieces that it touches along the edges.



Companion planting involves planting crops close together. Notice the carrots planted under the broccoli plants. Short plants can be grown under taller plants in many instances.



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MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD GARDEN

Once the garden bed location has been laid out in a place that will receive at least six to eight hours of direct sunlight a day, the first step to growing healthy organically grown plants is to begin with soil preparation: double-digging the ground. Gardeners who employ this method use the raised beds that are naturally created during the double-digging process. Begin by

sectioning off your planned garden bed into 12-in. wide strips that run along the shortest sides of the bed. In other words, on a 4-by-8-ft. bed these strips will be 4 feet long and not 8 feet long. Dig the first 12-in. wide strip out of the ground to a depth of one foot and set this soil aside. Then dig down another 12 inches to loosen the soil.

Proceed to the next 12-in.



Organic gardens are often cultivated in raised beds. The soil of the garden shown is retained by a mortared block wall.

wide strip and dig it out, but instead of setting it aside, place it in the trench made by the first digging. When you put it in the first trench it should be placed upside-down so the topsoil is on the bottom. After the top 12 inches of soil has been removed from the second trench, dig down another foot without removing the soil. This will loosen the second 12 inches of soil that will remain in the ground.

Follow this procedure with the third and subsequent trench, repeating the same procedure each time. Once you have reached the end of the garden bed, use the soil that you removed from the first trench to fill in the very last trench, remembering to put it back into the ground upside-down.

Double digging loosens the soil, causing it to mound up as it is replaced. This produces the

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raised-bed effect. Most gardeners employing this method maintain their raised beds in the shape of a slight mound. A gentle slope on all sides is preferred to having a perfectly flat planting bed.

Raised beds are usually surrounded with a wooden or cement frame to help hold the soil in place. According to the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, in publication ANR-1345 - Raised Bed Gardening, research has shown that the use of pressure-treated lumber is safe to use when constructing raised garden beds.

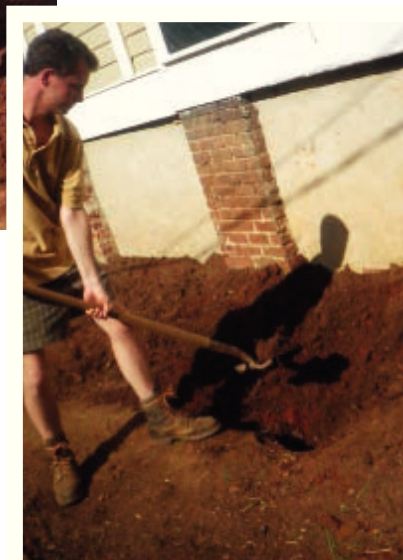
Depending upon the makeup of the soil, it may be necessary to add some type of natural fertilizer to the raised bed at this point. Homemade compost is one of the best choices, along with humus, cow manure and seaweed. Sometimes lime might have to be added to raise the pH level of the soil if it is too low resulting in acidic soil. This is especially true in humid climates. Rainfall will gradually



The garden beds are usually laid out so they are no more than 5' from front to back, so a person can reach the center of the garden from either side of the bed.



The cool season crops shown on the left and were planted in February, while the right side of the garden bed was reserved for the spring planting that was done in mid-April.



Double dig the ground to loosen the soil. Plants do not grow as well in hard or compacted dirt. Loose, well-drained soil is a plant's friend.

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MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD GARDEN

leach out the basic minerals that are normally found in your dirt. This leaching process is exasperated by the use of fertilizers and organic matter from manure and compost material. Most local extension offices will provide soil testing to gardeners upon request and many stores sell soil-testing kits.

Just as life should be a balance, so should your garden soil be in balance also. Too low of a pH level is bad for the soil, but so is too high of a phosphorus level which is often caused by a prolonged use of large amounts of manures. Annual soil testing is recommended.

Once the garden bed is prepared it is time to consider what to plant and how to lay out the garden. The French Intensive



To create a garden walkway, lay down old newspapers in a thick layer to prevent the growth of weeds. Old newspapers are free and are environmentally friendly.



Hand-shovel pea gravel into the a paver-lined walkway to keep from spilling it into the growing areas of the garden.

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MAKING THE MOST OF A BACKYARD GARDEN



The finished walkway provides access to plants while preventing compaction of the soil in the growing areas. Simple brick pavers are used to retain the pea gravel.

Method allows for the planting of crops so that the leaves of the mature plants will just touch one another. Having the knowledge of a mature plant's diameter is very helpful at this point. Seed packs and the labels included on seedlings provide a lot of good information about plant spacing, however, remember that this spacing information is for traditional farming techniques. So, as a good rule of thumb, for every two plants normally occupying a particular space, you can usually plant three and sometimes four plants without overcrowding them.

Companion planting involves the planting of crops that are beneficial to one another. For example, carrots should be intercropped with onions which create a natural insect repellent. Planting a few Marigolds, catnip or Golden Rod plants as a border can also help to deter many varieties of unwanted insects. Allow me to add here, that some insects are beneficial to a garden and should be encouraged. For example, lady bugs will eat the pesky aphid by the thousands.

However, companion planting is not just limited to biological

benefits. Some vegetables are long-season crops and some are known as short-season. The long-season plants require most of the growing season to mature before they can be harvested. Short-season plants will usually come to fruition about halfway through the growing season, often allowing a second planting of that same variety. One technique is to plant short-season plants with long-season ones, working on the premise that the short-season plant will be harvested before the long-season plant has reached adulthood and its full size. Also, lettuce can be planted under the stalks of corn or broccoli plants. Lettuce is a cool-season crop that needs to be shaded in warmer weather. The tall corn stalks will provide this shade and help to extend the growing time of the lettuce plants.

ROTATING VEGETABLE FAMILIES

Crop rotation is important for a healthy soil composition. Growing the same family of plant grown in the same location two years in a row can cause disease, infection and in some cases even death of the plant. It is essential to plant each family in a different place each year. The following chart categorizes common vegetables by family.

ONION FAMILY
Onion, garlic, leek, shallot, chive

GOOSEFOOT FAMILY
Beet, Swiss chard, spinach

MALLOW FAMILY
Okra

CARROT FAMILY
Carrot, parsnip, parsley, celery

BINDWEED FAMILY
Sweet potato

GRASS FAMILY
Sweet Corn

SUNFLOWER FAMILY
Lettuce, endive, salsify, Jerusalem Artichoke

GOURD FAMILY
Cucumber, squash, pumpkin, gourd, watermelon

NIGHTSHADE FAMILY
Tomato, pepper, eggplant, Irish potato, husk tomato

MUSTARD FAMILY
Broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collards, mustard green, radish

PEA FAMILY
English pea, snap bean, lima bean, field pea, soybean

Crop rotation is important to maintaining a healthy soil composition. The same variety, or even same family, of plant when it is grown in the same location as the previous year can cause disease, infection and in some cases even death of the plant. Plants of the same family should not be planted in the same place or in the same soil two years in a row. It is essential to plants each family of plant in a different place each year.

The concept of organic gardening arises from the belief that it is better to work with nature than it is to fight against it. The French Intensive Method is man's attempt to work in harmony with nature rather than make nature conform to our will. The end results of organic gardening are

healthy and vibrant plants that are free from the dangers of chemical pesticides while producing higher than normal yields in much less space.

So, take the plunge this year and make a single raised-bed

garden in your backyard. It's a wonderful project for the entire family to participate, and it is also very educational. Children are always amazed when the plants start to produce their first harvest. **EHT**



Homemade compost is one of the best choices of fertilizer. Shown here is our current year's compost pile. Used food scraps are an integral part of a healthy compost pile.

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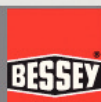


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Veggie Garden Basics

Start-up Tips for the "Green" Gardener



By Matt Weber

I started my first backyard garden last year, having for decades watched my dad and grandfather tend large gardens of their own. I won't claim to be an expert, but I have managed to grasp some basics that should be helpful for the first-timer. If you're considering beginning your own garden of fruits and vegetables, the following tips should point you in the right direction.

SIMPLICITY

If you can dig, rake, weed and water, then you have what it takes to create a successful garden. Gardening is fairly simple:

Transfer plant to healthy soil, expose to sun, add fertilizer and water, then harvest. Most beginner questions aren't about how to garden. Most are about when. When should I plant certain seeds? When should I harvest this vegetable?

Having no academic knowledge of specific plant life cycles, growing techniques or harvesting methods, I was worried I'd have a steep learning curve to climb before I got to enjoy any fresh veggies. However, that's not necessarily the case. Whether you're germinating plants from seeds or planting seedlings, each purchase

comes with simple printed instructions, including basic guidelines for planting depth, plant spacing, preferred climate, sun exposure, harvest time, etc. In other words, each plant comes with a "cheat sheet," so you've no need to commit everything to memory. In the case of potted seedlings, the tips come on a plastic tab, which I stick in the garden soil to identify the plant type and keep its info handy.



Each purchased plant includes a printed tab with critical growing information the gardener can use as a "cheat sheet."



Planting depth, spacing and harvest time vary greatly among plant species. I plant the info tab along with each row to keep the information close at hand.

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In warm climates, tomatoes are the most popular homegrown veggie (or fruit, technically speaking). There are many methods for growing them, including hanging vines and metal cages. I prefer to tie my plants to bamboo shoots with stretchable garden tape to maintain a natural, organic look to the garden.

SITE SELECTION

Adequate sun exposure is one of the most important aspects to a garden location. Practically all of the fruits and vegetables I've planted, from cucumbers and zucchini to tomatoes, peppers and canteloupe, are specified for "full sun," meaning at least 8 hours per day. Excess shade can inhibit plant growth.

Surrounding vegetation is another issue to consider. Has the plot been cultivated in the past or is it completely overgrown and require extensive clearing? What is the site's proximity to large trees? Complex tree root systems can steal water and nutrients from nearby plants, and the thick roots can interfere with your ability to till and turn the soil.

Water proximity is another factor. The larger your garden, the more water it will require. In arid weather, you may need access to a garden hose, lest you lug a pitcher back and forth between your plants and a water source.

Soil and climate are critical elements of gardening. Plants need fertile, rich soil with lots of warmth and sunshine. Is the soil loose and loamy, thick with clay, or dry and sandy? In terms of chemical composition, is the soil acidic, alkaline or neutral? A soil-test kit sent to a local county extension office can help you determine your soil type, so you'll know how to improve it if necessary.

As far as climate affecting gardens, there's not much you can control, given your geographic area. Cooler climates will have trouble growing heat-loving plants like oranges, peaches, melons, cucumbers and okra.

In hotter areas, you'll have less luck growing cool-weather plants like raspberries, spinach and cauliflower. For the best chance of success, focus on the fruits and veggies best suited to your local climate.

GARDEN DESIGN

When laying out your garden plot, focus on efficiency and accessibility. Raised beds are a common technique that enables you to sow and harvest from the footpath between them, so you never compact the soil beneath your feet.

Grass paths between growing areas can achieve a nice, manicured look if they're properly maintained. However, this requires carefully mowing and trimming between the growing areas, which can be difficult and time-consuming.

A traditional gardening method is to arrange the plants in



Site selection is critical to a backyard garden, requiring plenty of exposure to sunlight and an accessible water supply.



"Kitchen garden" aficionados often include edible herbs among their plant varieties, which can be cultivated in the garden or individual pots.

straight, orderly rows. However, if the rows are tightly spaced then you risk compacting the soil as you walk between them. For smaller gardens, you can lay down 6- to 8-in. wide boards between the rows on which to walk and distribute your weight over a larger surface area to avoid compaction.

It helps to sketch the dimensions of your garden design on paper to organize the layout. Consider that you need the flexibility to rotate the crops from year to year. Block in any permanent items, such as a compost bin or hardscape feature. Then, locate your rows or beds. Refer to your planting instructions when planting rows or beds, because plant species vary drastically among how much room they require to flourish.

CROP ROTATION & FERTILIZATION

Generally speaking, vegetables are planted fresh each year, and it's wise to grow them in different places each season. Otherwise, the same crop will be continually depleting the same nutrients from the same spot. Crop rotation also lessens the likelihood that diseases or pests will become established in the soil.

Growing a garden saps a lot of nutrients from the soil. The more you grow, the more nutrients are depleted, which requires you to recharge the soil with fertilization. Compost and manure are organic material made of rotted plant material and/or animal waste. This material can be high in nitrogen and potassium and improve the structure of the soil. Many DIY'ers create their own

compost in bins. If you're beginning a garden, it may help to find a supplier in your area to jumpstart your soil conditions. Last year I found a local construction aggregate supplier (who generally sells gravel, red rock, etc.) that also sold compost. I was able to purchase a cubic yard for \$25, haul it in my pickup truck and unload it at my garden.

Other organic matter options include farm manure, leafmold, even mushroom compost. Garden and home supply stores also offer a wide variety of both organic and inorganic fertilizers.

GET TO DIGGING

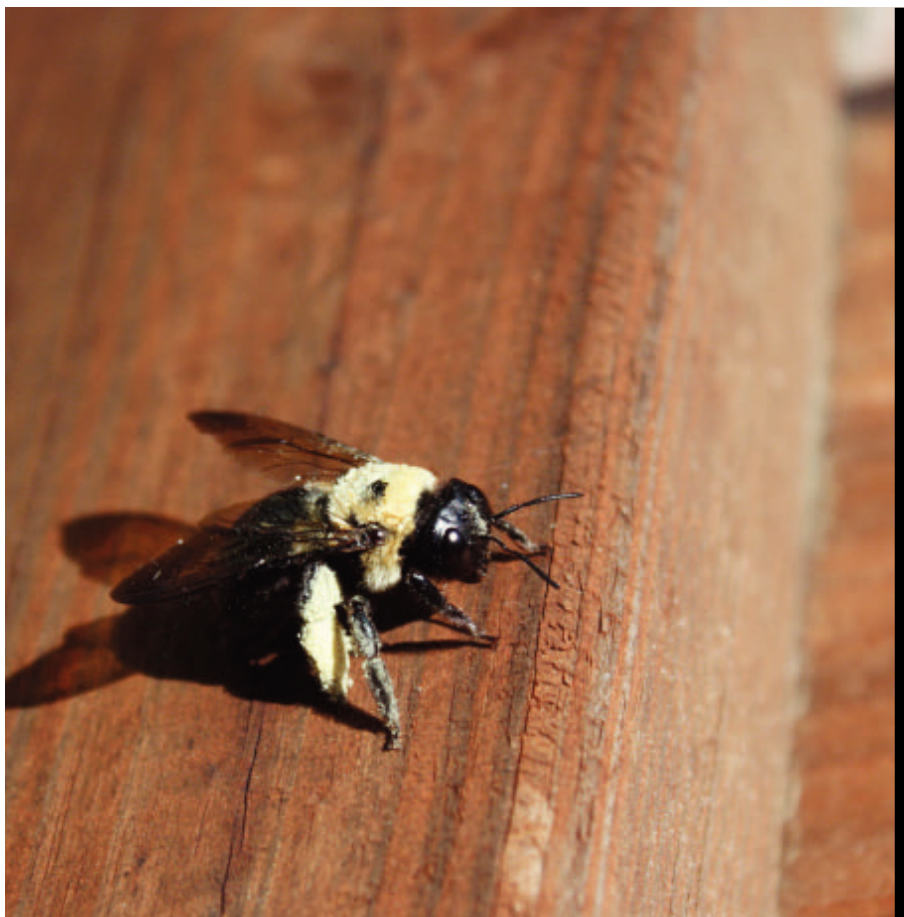
These simple tips should get you started on your garden plan. You'll also need to gear up with some simple tools such as pruning shears, a garden spade, hoe, rake, trowel and a sturdy pair of long-handle loppers. With a little hard work, sunshine and the proper plant maintenance, it'll be picking season in no time, and you'll never taste something as sweet. **EHT**



A backyard veggie and fruit garden is a great DIY project for the whole family.

Repair Carpenter Bee Damage

Some bees leave bullet holes. Here's how to fix them.



By Matt Weber

I assume that carpenter bees were named for their affinity for wood, because they do love to chew it up. However, carpenters use wood to build things, whereas carpenter bees tend to damage the wood in whatever you've already built. In that regard, maybe we should rename them "vandal bees" or "tiny saboteurs."

More than 500 species of carpenter bees exist throughout the world and nearly all of them burrow into dead wood to nest and lay their eggs. They don't actually eat the wood, but chew it up and then messily discard it around the hole they're digging. The

bees typically burrow into the underside of a board or beam, such as a deck joist or fence rail, leaving signature piles of sawdust beneath the nesting location. The entry to the nest is typically a round hole that is approximately 1/2 in. wide. Although each nest has a single entrance, the nest may have many adjacent tunnels hidden within the wood. This network of tunnels can weaken the structural integrity of the boards, which is why it's important to stop these diminutive flying drill bits from rendering your outdoor wood to Swiss cheese.

DAMAGE CONTROL

My first attempt at repairing bee damage involved filling the holes with wood putty and/or caulk. Whereas this can eventually work, it can also take a lot of time and reapplication. Because the bees displace so much wood, it takes a lot of product to fill the holes. When the holes are filled with a lot of goop, you can expect shrinkage once the product cures. When the product shrinks, the hole is no longer completely filled, requiring at least another round of caulk or putty—and possibly even more.

For a better method of damage repair, I turned to Rob Baugher of Baugher Design & Remodeling in Birmingham, Alabama (www remodelit.info). Rob is a friend of *EHT* who hosts the Our House radio show on Saturday mornings. He suggested the dowel-plug procedure that we detail in this article, which proved to be much more effective than gooping the bee holes.

STEP-BY-STEP



1. Locate and mark the damaged areas. Small piles of sawdust beneath the underside of wood boards are the calling cards of carpenter bees and will help you pinpoint the holes.



2. Inspect the structure thoroughly, because one nesting hole often indicates a broader problem with multiple areas of damage.



3. This photo gives a peek inside a nesting hole, where the adjacent tunnels are visible inside the wood.



4. Measure the diameter of the hole.



5. Choose a wooden dowel of the appropriate diameter to use as a wood plug. I purchased a couple of different sizes to accommodate different holes.



6. Soak a cotton swab with isopropyl alcohol.



7. Use a small dowel or stick to shove the alcohol-soaked swab deep into the nest. The alcohol displaces the oxygen, so no bees or larvae will survive to burrow out of your repair.



8. Choose a dowel that will achieve a tight fit. This may require whittling the end to size with a knife.



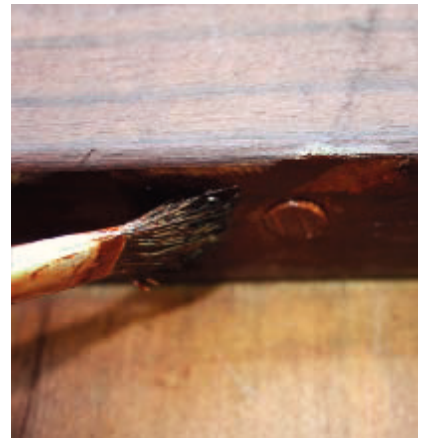
9. Coat the end of the dowel with a quality, stainable exterior-grade wood glue.



10. Twist the dowel tightly into the hole as deep as it will go.



11. Cut off the excess dowel. An oscillating tool is perfect for easily cutting the dowel, but a mini hacksaw will also work in a pinch.



12. Touch up the repair with some matching wood stain, and then repeat the procedure for the other areas of damage. **EHT**

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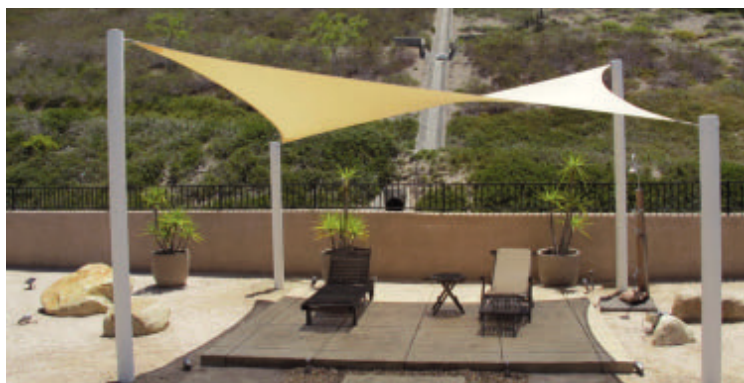
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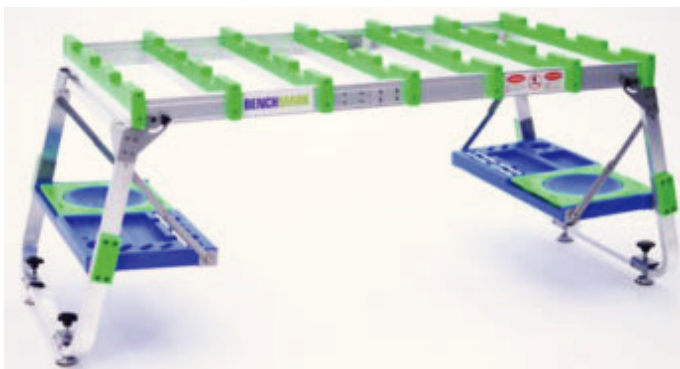
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Simple Scribe is a simple scribing block that fits over a standard pencil to provide an easy way to scribe the irregular contours of one surface (often a wall) onto the surface of an intersecting piece to create a matching outline, so the two pieces fit together like a puzzle piece. This is a common task for trim carpentry, cabinet installation, masonry, flooring installation and more. Choose a scribing clearance from 1/4 to 1 inch in 1/8-in. increments. The block also includes a bubble vial as a handy level. Visit www.simplescribe.com.

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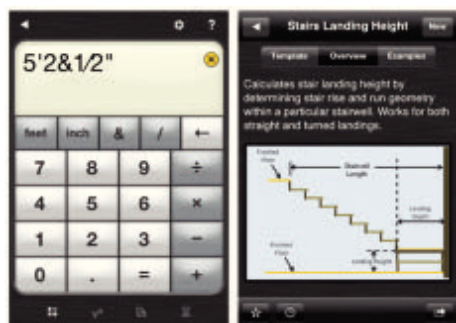


gaps that allow access both above and below your project. All surfaces are available for clamping. Four independently adjustable Leveling Feet help compensate for uneven work surfaces. A uniform grid of attachment locations allows for the placement of Benchmark accessories anywhere on the tabletop—as well as for unlimited customization using the Adaptor Plate (included for a limited time). Four Riser Pegs are also included with each Benchmark Portable Work Table. Visit www.benchmarktable.com.

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DEWALT MOBILE PRO

Dewalt Mobile Pro is a mobile calculation and reference app for construction professionals and DIY'ers. It is available on the iPad and iPhone and includes (for free) a robust construction calculator, several calculation templates, integrated reference materials and other functionality. For the professional, there



is also the availability to purchase, via an integrated store, other trade specific/task specific content—business & finance, carpentry, concrete, jobsite math, site work, conversions, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, landscape, finish work, etc. Furthermore, the app will scale over the next year to include additional content such as code information, additional calculations, forms/checklists and more. Visit www.dewalt.com.

TUFFY SHOVEL

For a variety of tasks around the home or farm, the Tuffy scoop shovel from PolyPro Tools will get the job done, from landscaping to cleaning decks and patios. The Tuffy has a non-stick surface that makes it an ideal snow shovel and easy to clean. The Tuffy is also rust-proof and won't damage the surface it contacts, which makes it safe for use on any surface, from truck bed liners to driveways and sidewalks. Plus, with its sturdy polymer construction, the Tuffy is virtually unbreakable—just check out the demo video at the company website which shows the shovel being run over by both a compactor and a dump truck, and it appears unaffected. Visit www.polyprottools.com.



FROGTAPE DELICATE SURFACE

We've covered FrogTape extensively at *EHT*. Treated with PaintBlock Technology, FrogTape is engineered with a super-absorbent polymer that reacts with latex paint to instantly form a gel micro-barrier that seals the edges of the tape, preventing paint bleed. The company now offers FrogTape Delicate

Surface, a low-adhesion painters' tape designed for use on freshly painted surfaces (24 hours old), faux finishes, primed wallboard and wallpaper. FrogTape Delicate Surface will remove cleanly from most surfaces for up to 60 days. Visit www.frogtape.com.



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- 
- ☒ Clean gutters
 - ☒ Paint the staircase
 - ☒ Replace ceiling lights
 - ☐ Feed the bird

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