



*Spring*  
**Home &  
Garden** *2026*

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# Starting your first vegetable garden: A beginner's guide

Every spring, as the days grow longer and the soil begins to warm, many people start thinking about growing their own

start small, choose the right plants, and focus on the basics.

important decisions when starting a garden.

Look for a spot that receives full sun, has good drainage, is

gardens, which allow for better soil control and can be easier to manage than large in-ground plots. This is also a good option if your gardens are not fenced and you have animals.



vegetables. Whether it's a few tomato plants on the patio or a full backyard garden, growing your own food can be rewarding, healthy, and surprisingly simple.

For beginners, the key is to

## Choose the Right Location

Vegetables need plenty of sunlight to grow well. Most plants require six to eight hours of direct sunlight per day, so choosing the right location is one of the most

close to a water source, and is easy to access for daily care. A location you can see from your home is best.

Many beginners also start with raised beds or container

## Start with Easy Vegetables

Some vegetables are much easier for beginners than others. Starting with reliable, low-maintenance plants helps build confidence and early success. Good beginner vegetables include:

- Cucumbers
- Green beans
- Lettuce\*
- Peppers
- Radishes
- Spinach\*
- Tomatoes
- Zucchini

*\*Leafy greens like lettuce and spinach grow quickly and can be harvested multiple times during the season.*

And if you're looking for crops that require little attention once established, consider garlic, onions, potatoes, or summer squash.

*Tip: Start with three to five types of vegetables in your first garden. A smaller garden is easier to manage and increases your chances of success.*

## Prepare the Soil

Healthy soil is the foundation of a successful garden. Before planting, loosen the soil and mix in compost or organic matter to improve nutrients and drainage.

Good soil should be loose and crumbly, rich in organic material, and able to hold moisture without becoming soggy. Many garden centers also sell ready-to-use garden soil designed specifically for vegetables.

## Know When to Plant

Timing matters. Some vegetables thrive in cooler spring weather, while others need warm soil. Cool-weather vegetables that can be planted early include lettuce, peas, radishes, and spinach.

Warm-weather plants like tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers should be planted after the last risk of frost.

## 'SEED LIBRARY,' A GOOD RESOURCE FOR BEGINNERS



Starting a garden doesn't have to be expensive. Across Massachusetts, public libraries, garden clubs, and community organizations offer free seed programs, plant swaps, and low-cost seedlings to help residents grow their own food.

One of the easiest places to start is a seed library. Many Massachusetts libraries now offer free packets of vegetable, herb, and flower seeds that patrons can take home and grow. Some programs encourage gardeners to save seeds from their harvest and return a portion for others to use the following year.

Seed libraries can be found at many libraries across the state, including the Harvard Public Library, Sherborn Library, Charlton Public Library, Grafton Public Library, Boyden Library in Foxborough, and several Boston Public Library branches. You often don't have to live in the town to use the seed library.

Gardeners can also find free or low-cost seeds through community garden programs, local garden clubs, university extension offices, and nonprofit gardening organizations. Groups such as the Massachusetts Horticultural Society at Elm Bank in Wellesley offers educational programs and seasonal plant sales with affordable seedlings. College seed libraries often host seed exchanges as well.

And if you can't find a seed library, consider asking your local library to create one, perhaps with a grant from your local Cultural Council, as most programs launch for very little cost.



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**GARDEN**

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# Perennials to consider for your garden this year

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that provides a great reason to get outdoors. Getting one's hands dirty in the garden often pays off with a colorful, awe-inspiring and aesthetically appealing finished product.

Perennials are plants that live multiple years. Even though perennials may die back above ground each winter, their roots remain alive, which is why the colorful blooms typically return anew once warm weather makes a comeback. Gardeners who want to capitalize on the hardiness of perennials can consider these plants for their gardens this season.

- **Coreopsis:** Coreopsis are perennials that thrive in a wide range of conditions, including various types of soil. So gardeners who find their soil is predominantly clay as well as those with sandy soil may be able to successfully plant coreopsis on their properties. *Better Homes & Gardens* notes coreopsis are native to the United States and produce colorful blooms that can withstand hot and dry weather



throughout the summer.

- **Russian sage:** Russian sage produce purplish-blue flowers that *BHG* notes retain their color for weeks. Russian sage can be planted in a variety of the har-

diness zones defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and many gardening experts recommend them to gardeners whose local climates tend to be especially hot and dry.

- **Hellebore:** *BHG* notes hellebore are ideal for gardeners who want some color in the early days of spring. Hellebore, sometimes referred to as "Lenten Roses," have an early flowering

season, so their blooms, which can be pink, white, purple, yellow, green, rose, or purple, can be a welcome sign in spring.

- **Baptisia:** Gardening experts note these purple-blooming perennials thrive in sun. Gardeners who want perennials with particularly long life expectancies can consider baptisia, as experts note they can live for many decades. Baptisia are drought-tolerant, and they can grow in soil that may not be considered great for other plants.

- **Coneflower:** The unique look of coneflowers has generated many enthusiasts of these perennials that bloom from early summer to fall. Coneflowers are highly adaptable, making them capable of growing in various zones and soil types. Once established, coneflowers are considered very drought-tolerant.

Perennials can add aesthetic appeal to landscapes year after year. Gardeners are urged to speak to experts at local gardening centers to identify the perfect plants for their gardens.

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# Improving storage in common areas

Increasing storage capabilities at home is a popular goal among many homeowners and renters. Despite how much space a person may have at home, there's often a desire to have more or maximize the areas that are there. According to the Self-Storage Almanac, there are an estimated 51,206 storage facilities operating in the United States today, and MJ Partners Self-Storage Update says 11.1 percent of households currently rent at self-storage facilities. IBISWorld indicates the Canadian self-storage industry has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent over the last five years.

People often turn to external storage facilities to house their belongings when space is at a premium at home. Others may focus their organization energy on closets, garages and basements to free up room. But common areas around the home also can provide additional sources of storage. Common areas are locations where people come together for activities.

## Living room/family room

Living rooms and family rooms are areas of the home where people spend many hours. These tend to be multifunctional spaces where people entertain, lounge and even enjoy movies or gaming. Possibilities in these living spaces that can create extra storage include furniture that serves double-duty. For example, a storage ottoman adds decorative appeal but also can be filled with board games or books. Cabinet-style TV stands may not be as streamlined as mounted versions, but they're ideal places to stash games, remote controls and other accessories.

## Entryway

An entryway or mudroom can quickly succumb to clutter. When organizing such a space, think about the needs of the household. A storage bench will be a place where everyone can sit to put on shoes, and then stow footwear underneath when not in use. A wall-mounted rack can



hold the current season's jackets or sweaters, as well as purses or backpacks for easy access. A shelf with some hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail.

## Hallway and closet

Closet organization systems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space, and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging

racks. An out-of-the way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only continues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.

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## GARDEN

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### Water Consistently (very important)

Vegetable gardens generally need about one inch of water per week, either from rainfall or watering. The best time to water is early in the morning, which helps reduce evaporation and prevents fungal disease.

Tip: It is best to water the soil directly rather than spraying the leaves from the top.

### Don't Forget Maintenance

Even small gardens need regular attention. A few minutes each day can make a big difference. Important tasks include pulling weeds before they spread, checking plants for pests, harvesting vegetables regularly, and supporting plants like tomatoes with stakes or cages.

Tip: Frequent harvesting actually encourages many plants to produce more food.

## Container Gardens

If you have limited space, or if you need to move your plants for any reason, these vegetables grow well in pots: bush beans, green onions, peppers, and herbs like basil and parsley (which are grown alongside vegetables).

### Enjoy the Process

But most of all, enjoy the process.

One of the most satisfying parts of gardening is watching tiny seedlings grow into plants that produce food for the table. For many beginners, the first homegrown tomato or handful of fresh lettuce is enough to turn a small garden into a lifelong hobby.

Starting a vegetable garden doesn't require a large yard or years of experience, just a little sunlight, healthy soil, and the willingness to learn along the way; and once you taste vegetables fresh from the garden, you may never look at the produce aisle the same way again.

# Woodpecker damage: how to prevent it, fix it

For many homeowners, the rhythmic tapping of a woodpecker can be a familiar sound in spring. While these birds play an important role in controlling insects, they can sometimes cause damage to homes, particularly those with wood siding, trim, and shingles.

Woodpeckers typically drill into houses for three main reasons: (1) searching for insects, (2) marking their territory, and (3) creating nesting holes.

## Preventing woodpecker damage

Preventing damage often involves making the area less attractive or accessible to the birds. Suggestions include:

Repair insect problems: Remove the infestation/food source, if you can find it

Use reflective deterrents like tape, old CDs, or small mirrors near the affected area can discourage birds from returning to the same spot

Install bird netting in the affected areas

Cover damaged areas with



Image source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

metal flashing or hardware cloth to discourage further drilling; also, well-sealed wood is harder for the woodpecker to penetrate

*Tip: If woodpeckers repeatedly target the same area of your house, it may be a sign of insects inside the wood that should be addressed.*

## Repairing woodpecker damage

Once the birds are gone, homeowners can repair the holes to prevent water intrusion and further deterioration. Small holes can often be filled with exterior wood filler or epoxy and then sanded and painted, while larger holes may require replacing a section of siding or patching the area with wood or exterior patching compound.

After repairs are completed, repainting, or sealing the area helps protect the wood from moisture.

## Woodpecker is a Protected Bird

Did you know woodpeckers are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918? This makes it illegal to harm or kill a woodpecker without a permit, therefore, most prevention strategies focus on humane deterrents rather than removal.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, if you have woodpecker activity at your home that needs to be addressed, you can contact one of their wildlife professionals "who will help you assess the situation and find legal solutions." You can find contact information at <https://www.fws.gov/story/woodpeckers-and-your-home>.

Source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# How, when, why to 'burp' your house

Have you heard of "burping" a house? Chances are you've been doing it all along and didn't know it - it's a way to freshen your home by briefly opening the home to fresh air to release stale air and moisture that has built up over the winter when you were trying to keep the cold weather out.

While it's imperative to keep the cold weather outside the house during the winter, it can also trap these inside the house: Stale indoor air, excess moisture, dust and allergens, cooking and household odors.

Spring's milder temperatures provide the perfect opportunity to flush out that winter buildup.

*House Beautiful* says this tradition is popular in Germany where they burp their homes daily, especially in the winter. Experts say, "Adding volumes of outdoor air by opening windows will lower concentrations of indoor air contaminants that can make you and your family sick," according to an article on Jan.

12, 2026.

Finally, burping your house is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to refresh your living space, and the payoff is immediate with fresher air, fewer odors, and a renewed feeling that winter is finally behind you.

## HOW TO 'BURP' YOUR HOUSE

The process is quick and easy with proven health benefits:

1. Pick a mild, dry day when pollen counts are low
2. Open windows on opposite sides of the house for cross-ventilation
3. Open interior doors for best circulation
4. Leave windows open for at least 30-60 minutes
5. Use ceiling fans or box fans near a window for extra power

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# Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them sur-

vive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The

following are various types of feeders to consider.

### Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nut-hatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.



### Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

### Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

### Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

### Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

### Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

### Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.

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JAMEY YAYLAIAN

# Spring Home Checklist: What homeowners should do after a harsh New England winter

After months of snow, ice, and way-too-cold temperatures, spring is finally here, however, along with the warmer temperatures comes the thawing cycle and the revelation of damage the rough winter has left on our homes.

We haven't had this much snow in several years so a quick spring inspection is in order, followed by some routine maintenance to help prevent small issues from becoming expensive repairs later in the year.

Here are some areas, inside and outside the home, you should review.

## Roof and gutters

One of the first places homeowners should look after winter is the roof. Snow and ice can loosen shingles or damage flashing around chimneys and vents.

Experts recommend checking for missing or curled shingles, sagging areas, or debris left behind by winter storms. If

anything looks concerning, it's best to contact a roofing professional.

If you have solar panels, do a visual check and report anything suspicious to your solar company. Also check your solar company app to be sure your system is working correctly.

Gutters should also be cleared of leaves, sticks, and grit from roof shingles. During spring rainstorms, clogged gutters can cause water to spill over and pool near a home's foundation.

## Ice damage

Homes in our area are particularly susceptible to ice dams, which form when melting snow refreezes along roof edges. Even after winter ends, ice dams can leave behind water damage.

Homeowners should check ceilings and attic spaces for water stains or damp insulation which could mean melting ice may have seeped into

the house.

Basements should be inspected for moisture, puddles, or musty smells.

## Foundation and driveway

The freeze-thaw cycles common in New England winters can cause cracks in concrete and asphalt.

Take a walk around the property and look for new cracks in the foundation, steps, walkways, and driveways. Small cracks can often be sealed early before they expand.

## Outdoor faucets and pipes

Frozen pipes can sometimes crack without immediately leaking. When turning on outdoor faucets for the first time in spring, homeowners should check carefully for drips or low water pressure, which could indicate damage.

Even if you don't see a leak, be sure to check your utility room where the water comes inside the house; listen

for water running through the pipes.

## Clean up the yard

Snow piles and winter storms often leave behind broken branches and compacted lawns. Early spring is a good time to remove fallen branches and debris; rake leftover leaves from the lawn; check trees for damaged limbs; and inspect fences and decks for winter wear.

Clearing debris also helps prevent mold growth and gives grass a better chance to recover.

To help your grass recover, wait for the ground to dry then gently rake to remove debris but leave the leaves where pollinators may have laid their eggs for the winter. Also consider "No Mow May" (or try to mow less in May), which allows your lawn more time to recover and also allows bees and other pollinators time to do their work.

## Service cooling systems early

While it may not feel like it yet, summer heat and humidity will arrive quickly and scheduling your air conditioning maintenance as soon as possible can help ensure the system runs efficiently when temperatures climb.

Replacing HVAC filters and clearing debris around outdoor condenser units are simple steps that can improve performance.

## A seasonal reset

Spring maintenance may not be as exciting as planting flowers or opening the windows after months of cold weather, but it's one of the best ways to protect a home after a harsh New England winter.

By spending a few hours checking key areas around the house, homeowners can catch problems early and enjoy the warmer months ahead with peace of mind.

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## Signs a roof must be repaired or replaced

The exterior components of a home, such as the siding and the roof, help to protect its occupants from the elements. While many roofing materials can last for decades, at some point in time homeowners will likely have to repair or replace the roof on their home.

Roof wear and tear may not always be so evident, particularly because most homeowners do not make it a point to get on their roofs very often. The first sign of roof damage typically is a leak that is noticeable from the indoors. It may include a browned spot on the ceiling or even pooling water in the attic. Leak from storm damage or something minor like a water intrusion through a nail hole or from a lost shingle typically can be repaired easily enough. However, additional indicators may necessitate a complete



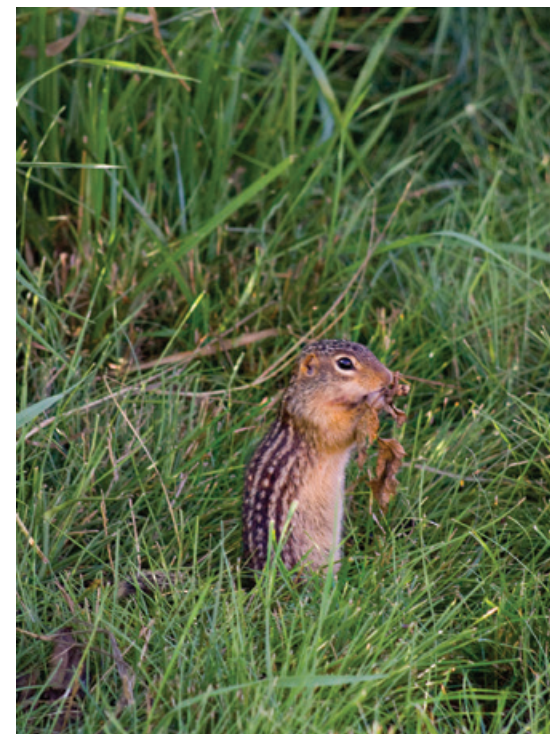
### ROOFS

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## Humane ways to address uninvited garden guests

A beautiful garden is a wonder to behold. After a homeowner toils in the yard amending the soil and planting, it's imperative that a garden be given the best chance to thrive. However, the natural wildlife that shares the space might see that newly cultivated land as the perfect place to enjoy an easy meal or gather nesting materials.

Every gardener likely has a tale about chipmunks, squirrels, woodchucks, and rabbits making nuisances of themselves in the garden. Many of these animals seem to have a taste for bulbs and other plants, which can wreak havoc on what gardeners carefully plan and plant. Finding balance so everyone can get along may require patience and some well-crafted deterrents.



ting to these animals, so sprinkling it around the garden may ward off pests but not harm the plants. Just reapply after each rain. Similarly, some people have had luck using peppermint. Plant mint

around where you do not want the squirrels and chipmunks. Since mint can grow fast and become invasive, it's best to plant in containers and move accordingly.

- **Provide food elsewhere.**

Try luring the animals away to another area of the yard where the meal is even easier to come by. Squirrels and chipmunks love to dig and bury their caches, so a far-off corner with freshly tilled soil along with some berries, nuts and additional treats might attract them to that area instead of a newly established garden.

- **Install fencing.**

While chipmunks and squirrels can scale fences easily, such acrobatics may be more challenging for lumbering groundhogs or rabbits. Make digging more difficult by laying chicken wire fencing on top of the soil and stake it down in some areas.

- **Use a scent deterrent.**

Some animals are put off by the smell of other animals or aromas they find unpleasant. The capsaicin in red pepper and cayenne can be off-put-

- **Use water or movement.**

Animals can be scared away if they are sprayed with water, so a well-aimed water gun can chase away the animals when a gardener is able to stand watch. It may be easier to set up pinwheels that blow in the wind, or hang aluminum pie plates or old compact discs from strings near the garden, which may deter animals from getting too close.

- **Build a greenhouse.**

When dealing with tenacious squirrels and chipmunks, the only solution may be to block off all access. Utilize an enclosed greenhouse for the garden, which will keep animals out and even extend the growing season.

Many animals can become nuisances in a yard, particularly in and around gardens. Some humane solutions could remedy the situation.



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# Budget-friendly ways to freshen up your home's exterior

As any homeowner knows, renovation projects tend to cost a lot of money. The average cost of a home renovation is difficult to gauge, as such endeavors run the gamut from complex projects like a kitchen overhaul to simpler ones like painting a room inside a home. Indeed, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry notes that scope is what drives the cost of a renovation project.



Though there might not be an "average cost" of a renovation project, homeowners can expect to spend thousands of dollars on projects that are not very small in scale. Navigating such an expense at a time when inflation remains high might be difficult for some homeowners looking to maintain the appearance of their home exteriors. However, there are many budget-friendly ways homeowners can tend to the exterior of their properties.

- **Power washing:** Power washing won't break the bank but it can revive the look of a home. Power washing removes dirt and grime from the siding of a home and a power washing can be used to clean porches, walkways and patios as well. Hardware chains like Home

Depot and Lowes typically rent power washers, but homeowners who don't want to do it themselves can hire a professional for a few hundred dollars, if not less. Power washing after winter can be a good idea, as the elements can take a toll on a home's exterior. A good power washing before spring and summer entertaining season can thus give a home a fresh, clean look without breaking the bank.

- **Furnished front porch:** A furnished front porch can serve as a welcome sign to neighbors and provide a great place to relax with a morning cup of coffee and a good book. Homeowners with a small porch won't need to bust their budgets

to upgrade their front porch furnishings. Some small chairs with bright cushions, a small table and a rug underfoot can revamp an entryway at low cost.

- **Window box installation:** Installing window box planters is another cost-effective way to brighten up a home's exterior. Homeowners can hang window boxes outside windows on the front of their homes and then fill them with brightly colored flowers to add an inviting pop of color to their home exteriors. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens urge homeowners to take weight into consideration before buying window planters. Keep in mind that soil and developed plants can be heavy, so look for a sturdy box as well as one that has drainage holes.

- **Replace hardware:** Another simple way to freshen up a stale exterior is to replace hardware. Door knobs,

knockers, house numbers, and even the mailbox can appear dated after a while. Replacing these items is inexpensive and quick but can have a profound impact on how the exterior of a home

appears to residents and visitors.

Exterior renovations need not break the bank. Various simple and inexpensive tweaks can quickly revitalize the exterior of a home.

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## ROOFS

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roof overhaul. Here are some signs a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

- **Sagging roof:** If the roof is sagging, it could be due to excess loads, such as water-damaged shingles or even weakened roof structure. A professional will need to restore the integrity of the roof.
- **Cracking and buckling:** It is likely that shingles will have to be replaced if there is cracking or if shingles are buckling and warping.
- **Exposed nails:** Exposed nails may rust and contribute to a leaky roof, says Family Handyman. How long the nails were exposed could indicate if the roof can be repaired or if everything should be redone.

- **Lost granules:** Asphalt roofing shingles have small granules on the surface. Over time these granules will slowly degrade and fall off. If there are many granules in gutters or if one can see that portions of the shingles are bare, it is likely time for a new roof.

- **Visible light:** Homeowners who can see light streams coming into the home need roof repair. This is indicative of holes, cracks or spaces in the roof.

- **Growth on the roof:** Mold and mildew on the roof is a sign that the roof needs to be repaired or replaced. Such growths contribute to rot that jeopardizes the integrity of the roof.

A durable roof protects a home from the elements. Various symptoms signal that it is time to repair or replace a roof.

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# Potential threats to pet health in your own yard

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. Though such characterizations often are made in

reference to humans and their domiciles, homes also should be safe spaces for pets.



Pet owners go to great lengths to ensure their pets are healthy

and happy, and that typically includes efforts to ensure their home interiors are free of hazards that could affect their furry

spaces are as safe for pets as areas inside the home.

- **Mulch:** Mulch is found in many yards, as it adds aesthetic appeal to a landscape and helps soil retain moisture, which can safeguard trees, plants and flowers from drought and the dog days of summer. But some mulch contains theobromine, a chemical compound that can be toxic and may even be lethal to dogs when ingested. Pet owners are urged to use mulch that does not contain theobromine, which is typically found in cocoa mulch.
- **Flower:** The mulch around flowers can be toxic to pets, and so can the blooms themselves. Lilies, tulips, hydrangeas, and azaleas are just some of the popular flowers that can cause stomach upset

in pets. Pet owners are urged to speak with their veterinarians about flowers and plants native to their areas that might be toxic to pets.

- **Wildlife:** A collaborative study from researchers at the University of Michigan, the University of Washington and University College London published in 2024 warned that the overlap between humans and animals will increase considerably over the next half century. Climate change and human population growth are driving forces behind that increase, which suburban homeowners may already be witnessing. As more and more wooded areas are leveled to create additional housing, wildlife such as deer, racoons, opossum, foxes, and more are losing their hab-

itats and subsequently being seen with greater frequency in suburban neighborhoods. Wildlife can carry disease that can make domesticated animals sick, and some wildlife might go on the attack when they encounter cats or dogs in backyards. Monitoring pets whenever they're outside, sealing garbage cans so wildlife is not attracted to the yard and keeping compost piles free of foods that might draw wildlife to a yard are some of the ways to reduce the chances of interactions between wild animals and domesticated pets.

These are just a handful of threats to pet health that might be lurking in your backyard. Always keep an eye on pets when they're outdoors and speak with a veterinarian to identify ways to minimize backyard threats.

## Save your lawn during watering restrictions

Has this scenario happened to you? You toil throughout the early spring seeding and fertilizing your lawn and start to reap the benefits of this hard work when the thick, green grass fills in. Your curb appeal peaks and your landscape is picture-perfect.

Enter the harsh weather of summer and a long stretch of little to no rain. With reservoirs showing depleting water levels, drought restrictions are issued in your neighborhood, and you are mandated to greatly reduce water usage and perhaps even cease wa-

tering the lawn. Is this the end of that great, green carpet of grass?

On the surface it may seem like keeping a lawn healthy during watering restrictions is a losing battle. After all, grass needs water to thrive. However, there are some things homeowners

can do to prolong the life of their lawns until restrictions are lifted.

### Mow less often

Tall grass can shade the soil and its delicate roots, helping to avoid even further evaporation of what precious water the lawn is getting. Space out mowing to every other week or even every two weeks, particularly if you notice the grass is growing more slowly due to less watering. Mowing stresses a lawn, and the grass is already stressed from lack of water. Mowing less frequently can help.

### Water early on

Maximize the benefits of any irrigation system by watering during the early morning hours, or between 2 and 9 a.m. This is when wind speeds are usually lower and evaporation from wind and sun is less likely to occur. Keep in mind that watering restrictions may specify which hours and days you are allowed to water.

### Change your grass

Certain species of grass are more resilient in drought conditions. According to Scotts, Bermuda, Zoysia, St. Augustine, Bahia, and Buffalo grasses are more drought-tolerant than others in southern climates. Drought-resistant grasses for northern climates include Tall

Fescue and Kentucky Bluegrass. You may consider switching to one of these types if drought and water restrictions in your area have become more common in recent years.

### Utilize grass clippings

Lack of water can contribute to higher soil temperatures, which affects soil organic matter, says The Grass Outlet. Grass clippings left on the lawn can reduce soil temperature, increase infiltration of water into the soil, and improve the lawn's ability to store water. Be sure to evenly distribute the clippings so they don't clump and choke the grass.

### Consider an amendment

Hydretain is a soil moisture manager that its producer attests can extend watering intervals for grass, trees, shrubs, and plants by as much as two to three times. It also is supposed to minimize drought stress and help lower water usage, and thus avoid watering restriction fines. The product's hygroscopic and humectant components attach to plant root hairs, drawing moisture vapor from the soil and turning that vapor into droplets.

A proactive approach can help individuals protect their lawns when water restrictions are in place.

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# Get to the root of a dry lawn

Weather can be unpredictable, even during the warmest months of the year. Summer days may feature strong thunderstorms and downpours, followed by stretches of extremely hot and dry conditions. Weather extremes can take a toll on lawns, especially when drought is part of the equation. The results can be anything from dry patches to a scorched landscape, leaving homeowners wondering what they can do to repair the damage.

According to The Spruce, dry grass can happen in as little as a week without adequate care and water. Sometimes dry grass can be the result of disease, pets, or pests. A healthy lawn will be lush and green; a dry lawn quite the opposite. It's crunchy, uncomfortable and muted in color. Here's how to address a dry lawn to restore it to its natural beauty.



a separate potty area in the yard can help alleviate brown spots.

## Pet urine

Animal urine often is the culprit behind dry patches in a lawn. Lawns need nitrogen to grow, which is why it is included in many fertilizers. But the nitrogen in dog urine is concentrated and directed in one area, so much so that it chemically burns the lawn. This concentrated nitrogen causes the grass to dry out, turn yellow and eventually go brown and die.

Rinsing areas where dogs urinate on the lawn or creating

## Lawn height

Sometimes a lawn mower might be to blame for a brown lawn. According to Scotts®, the higher a person mows, the deeper the lawn's roots will grow. That can help the lawn thrive under restricted water conditions and insulate the lawn from some of the effects of hot, dry weather. Never remove more than one-third of the total height in a single mowing, as that can stress the lawn.

## Diseases

Leaf blight, brown patches and powdery mildew are just some of the diseases that can affect a lawn. Fungal bacteria can spread on a lawn and contribute to these conditions, which makes it important to aerate and dethatch the lawn in cooler seasons to help prevent disease.

## Improper pH

A lawn requires a certain pH to grow well. According to Weed Man Lawn Care Services, the ideal pH range for lawn soil is between 6.0 and 7.0. Anything outside of this range may result in poor, brown grass. A soil pH test will indicate if the soil is acidic, alkaline or optimal.

Amend an acidic soil with lime and an alkaline soil with sulphur in small amounts until a balance is reached.

## Pest infestation

People are not the only creatures that like a lawn. Many pests feed on blades of grass or the roots. The result can be patchy, dry grass. Figuring out what is causing any damage is essential. Homeowners can then take steps to remove the pests and return the lawn to its former glory.

## Dehydration

Deep watering can help restore a lawn that has widespread wilting and browning. Popular Mechanics advises homeowners begin watering more in spring. Water infrequently but for longer periods of time to encourage roots to deepen. The ideal time to water is between 5 a.m. and 9 a.m. to limit evaporation.

Trial and error may be necessary to figure out why a lawn is brown and what's needed to revive it.

## Did you know?

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. Such lighting can extend living spaces, and many homeowners report that a well-lit landscape helps them feel more safe at home. Though the final cost to light up a home's exterior will depend on the size of a property, landscape lighting is among the more budget-friendly home renovations homeowners can consider.

According to the renovation experts at Angi.com, the average cost of a landscape lighting project is \$4,000. Considering how much landscape lighting transforms the look of a property at night, that's a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks. Solar lights are popular, but homeowners may want to consider electrical wiring that ensures lights maintain their awe-inspiring glow throughout the night. Electrical work requires additional labor, and thus a higher price tag. However, Angi notes that modern LED bulbs consume just 25 percent of the energy used by incandescent alternatives, which can make them a more reliable option than self-installed solar lights.



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