

Flora & Fauna

Garden Planning Tips

Even though there is still a chill in the air, spring is right around the corner, which means you'll soon be able to start planting outdoors. Whether you're planning on re-doing your entire backyard landscaping or simply planting a small vegetable patch, a little pre-planning is important.

1. **Sketch your ideas on paper.** It's easier to change your mind with an eraser rather than with your shovel. Be sure to draw your garden plan from different angles, not just from overhead/aerial view, but from different sides and inside the house.
2. **Color in your drawing!** Use colored pencils (or borrow crayons from your kids) and add some color to your sketch. It will help you visualize how flowers and ornamental grasses will look when in their full blooming glory. Bonus tip: Make a photocopy of your black and white sketch and then color it in for spring/summer and again for fall/winter so you can see how your plants will look throughout the year. Flowers are the stars of the show in spring and summer, but autumn belongs to changing leaves and fruiting brances.
3. **Draw permanent structures, even if you aren't going to build them right away.** Gravel paths, retaining walls, fences, benches, gazebos—sketch out where everything will be going so you won't accidentally plant in those areas by mistake.
4. **Make sure paths are wide enough.** If you're planning on creating walking paths around your yard, make sure they're at least 5 feet wide—enough for two people to comfortably walk side by side. For secondary paths where people walk single file, paths should be at least 3 feet wide.
5. **Don't forget about kids and pets.** Leave some open play areas for the kids and exercise/potty areas for your pets. Make sure these areas are set away from delicate plants to prevent them from being trampled.
6. **If you're planning on large beds,** be sure to leave space for stepping stones or a winding path that will allow you access to plants in the middle of the bed. This will make it easier to prune and remove weeds without trampling other plants.
7. **Plan for growth.** Novice gardeners often get carried away and end up over-planting and crowding garden beds. Pay attention to how wide plants get at the height of their maturity and be sure to factor in that space when making your sketch. The garden may seem a little sparse when you first plant in the spring, but it will quickly fill up by early to mid summer.

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Cleaning Corner: 11 Most Forgotten Areas You Should Be Cleaning

Dust, dirt, and grime can find their way just about anywhere. When going about your usual dusting and cleaning routine, add these often overlooked areas to your list:

- Light switches
- Door knobs
- Remote controls
- Ceiling fans
- Garbage pails
- Lampshades
- Staircase hand rails
- Toothbrush holders and chargers
- Utensil crock/holder (the container on your counter that holds your spatulas and big wooden spoons)
- Under the fan hood above your stove and under the microwave
- Makeup brushes

March

- 1836 Texas declares independence from Mexico
- 1876 Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone
- 1912 The Girl Scouts of the USA is founded
- 1930 Emma Fahning of Buffalo, NY is recognized as the first woman to bowl a perfect 300 game
- 1950 Silly Putty is accidentally invented by engineer James Wright, who was trying to create an inexpensive substitute for synthetic rubber
- 1953 Dr. Jonas Salk announces that he has successfully tested a vaccine against polio
- 1964 The game show *Jeopardy!* debuts on television
- 1979 An accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Middletown, PA results in a partial nuclear meltdown, which prompts sweeping changes in regulatory oversight of all US nuclear reactors

Health Information: 6 Rash Symptoms You Shouldn't Ignore

A rash is characterized by red, itchy bumps on the skin. It can pop up anywhere on the body at any time. Most rashes respond to over-the-counter treatments, such as moisturizers (if caused by dry skin) or hydrocortisone creams (if caused by contact with an allergy-triggering substance, like poison ivy). But sometimes rashes can be a sign that a more serious problem is going on, such as an autoimmune disease or a Lyme infection.

Only your doctor can properly diagnose your rash and offer proper treatment. Call your doctor if you experience any of the symptoms listed below:

1. **You have a rash plus pain and/or a fever.** When a rash is accompanied by body aches and pains and/or a fever, it could be a sign that you have an infection or are experiencing an allergic reaction.
2. **Your rash coincides with a sudden spreading of bruise-like lesions.** This can be a symptom of vasculitis, which is a condition in which your clotting cells might not be working right.
3. **Your rash won't go away.** A rash that continues unabated despite over-the-counter creams and lotions is a sign you may have an infection. Sometimes rashes start out completely benign, but a secondary infection develops. Symptoms of an infection include warmth and pain, yellow or green cloudy discharge, and a bad odor.
4. **Your rash is widespread.** If your rash covers multiple areas of the body, such as under your arms, behind your legs, around the groin, and across the neck, chest, and belly, it can be a sign of a major allergic reaction. If the rash develops within a week or two of starting a new medication, for example, it could indicate a reaction to the medicine.
5. **Your rash gets worse and starts to blister.** Unless you suspect that you've come into contact with poison ivy, any blistering on a rash should send you straight to the doctor's office. Do not scratch or attempt to pop the blisters, as the fluid within could be very infectious.
6. **Your rash is circular-shaped.** Circular-shaped rashes could be something as benign as eczema or hives to something more serious, such as Lyme disease (spread by ticks) and ringworm (a contagious type of fungus). If you live in an area where Lyme disease is endemic or suspect that you've come into contact with ringworm, head to your doctor's office right away.

Kid Corner: 6 Brain-Boosting Kids Games

Throughout the first three years of life, your child's brain is growing and developing at a massive rate. And though that rate of growth slows down as your child ages, it doesn't stop until he's in his mid 20s. In fact, recent studies have found that the human brain doesn't reach full maturity until sometime between ages 25–30.

You can help promote healthy brain development in your child throughout his formative years by playing brain-building games. The activities listed below can help stimulate the logic and imaginative centers of his brain. Also—they're just plain fun!

1. **Puzzles.** Putting together a puzzle requires concentration and focus, and it helps kids develop spatial awareness as they try and fit pieces together to create the larger image. **Bonus Boost:** Invite kids to make their own puzzle by drawing a picture and then cutting it up. Switch and see if you can solve each other's puzzle.
2. **Read stories out loud.** Listening to a story simulates a different area of brain development than reading or looking at a picture book. When kids listen to a story, they're relying on memory and imagination to keep track of the characters and what has happened in the story so far. **Bonus Boost:** Start with a character and a place (like a dog on the moon) and see what sort of crazy adventure you and your child can imagine together.
3. **Art projects.** Painting, coloring, and playing with Play Doh require kids to use their bodies, their minds, and their senses at the same time. These activities also help exercise motor control as kids use their hands to create a picture or mold a shape. **Bonus Boost:** Inspire your artist with creative subjects like "Monsters waiting for a bus" or "Underwater zoo."
4. **Singing songs or playing instruments.** Music is a wonderful brain-building activity that can enhance learning and concentration, plus it improves mood, memory, and reduces anxiety. **Bonus Boost:** Make a musical guessing game by humming a few bars to see if the other person can guess the song.
5. **Play interactive games, like "I Spy" or "20 Questions."** These types of guessing games require your kids to connect the verbal clue with what they can sense around them. These are also great games to play to pass time in long car rides or when sitting in waiting rooms, too!
6. **Put on a play or puppet show.** During dramatic play, children must hold their own role and the roles of others in mind, which exercises working memory. And since they have to stay in character, it helps with inhibitory control. **Bonus Boost:** Create your own puppets using paper bags and markers and then have your puppet tell a story about where he/she is from.

This is an easy-to-make recipe that you can prepare ahead of time and pop in the oven later—perfect for those busy nights when you don't have a lot of time to cook. It bakes in the oven for about 34 minutes, leaving you free to assemble a salad and a plate of fresh-cut fruit for a well-rounded, delicious meal.

Ingredients:

- Butter
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 can condensed cream of mushroom soup
- Black pepper
- 1/4 sweet onion, minced
- 8 oz sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 3 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 2 cups cooked brown rice
- 8 oz frozen chopped broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup potato chips, broken into small pieces

Directions:

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Generously butter a 2-quart or 9 x 13-inch broiler-proof baking dish.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, sour cream, mayonnaise, soup, and 1/2 teaspoon of pepper. Stir in the onion and all but 1/4 cup cheese. Fold in the chicken, rice, and broccoli.
3. Transfer the mixture to the prepared dish and cover with non-stick foil. (At this point, the casserole can be stored in the fridge up to a day in advance.) Bake for 30 minutes.
4. Remove from oven and heat the broiler.
5. In a small bowl, combine the potato chips and remaining cheese. Sprinkle over the casserole and broil until golden brown, 3–4 minutes.

How to Keep Your Child's Toys from Taking Over Your Home!

It's amazing (and infuriating!) how quickly children's toys seem to multiply. In a blink of an eye, one stuffed animal turns into 20. A single figurine launches a quest to collect the entire set. Before you know it, your home is overrun with building blocks, dolls, trains, and every 10-cent plastic piece of junk your child bought with his tickets at the arcade.

It's time to take back your home and finally tame the toy clutter! Here's how to get started:

Sort first. You can likely reduce the toys in your home by 50% by simply sorting them into three piles: Toss It, Donate It, and Keep It.

Store the majority of toys in the basement or garage. This is a great tip for homes of any size, but especially for small ones. And when we say "majority of toys," we're talking 90%. Invest in a shelving system and organize toys into clear bins so they can be stored neatly when not in use.

Choose a handful of toys that get to be on the main floor. A few random favorite toys and a set of building blocks get to be on the main area of your home, the rest all live in storage.

When your kids want different toys, they can "check them out" of the storage bins in the basement or garage and then put them back when they are done playing with them.

Bedrooms are a great place to put a bookshelf filled with all your child's favorite books, but they're not the best place to keep toys. They can be a distraction at bedtime and, other than a few stuffed animals, should be kept in storage until playtime.

Craft supplies are an exception to the toy storage rule. If you usually do craft projects at the kitchen table, dedicate some kitchen cabinet space or a drawer for all your arts n' crafts supplies: crayons, markers, safety scissors, tape, paper, stickers, pipe cleaners, etc. We recommend keeping messier craft items, such as glue, glitter, and paint in a separate bin out of your children's reach.

Carpet Talk: How to Remove Common Spots and Spills on Carpet

Accidents happen and sometimes they happen in a carpeted area of your home. The faster you can respond to a spot or spill, the easier it is to clean. Follow these handy tips for removing some common spots. If it's more than you can handle, give the professionals a call!

- **Glue.** Take a sharp knife and carefully scrape the glue off. If the glue has dried, cover it with a clean, white cloth. Rub an iron set on the lowest heat setting over the cloth. The glue will turn back into liquid and will be absorbed into the cloth.
- **Jelly/Jam.** Scrape off any excess jelly from the carpet, being careful not to spread it. Blot the area with a damp clean white towel until it disappears.
- **Coffee and Soft Drinks.** First, thoroughly blot the area with a clean white towel (don't rub!). Mix a cleaning solution of 1 Tbsp liquid dish soap, 1 Tbsp white vinegar, and 2 cups warm water. Use a clean white cloth to sponge the stain with the mixture. Blot the area with a dry cloth until the spot disappears.
- **Pet Urine.** Blot up as much urine as possible. Sprinkle baking soda over the area and let it sit for 5 minutes. In a bowl or spray bottle, mix 2 cups white vinegar with 2 cups water and apply to the area. Gently blot the area with a clean white cloth.

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This issue of Neighborhood News brought to you by:

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Money Saving Coupon

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When you refer a new customer to us and they have work performed, you will receive 10% of their sale in the form of a referral certificate that can be applied towards your next cleaning. The referral certificates do not expire and multiple certificates can be used at the same time. (If a person is referred by more than one customer the 10% will be divided evenly among those customers)