

LAWN & LEISURE



It's Showtime!

Stage your landscape to produce colorful blooms year-round while incorporating summer's hot colors.

You can achieve four-season color in your landscape – even in tough growing times like during the harsh middle of winter and blazing heat of late summer. Planting pockets of annuals and perennials with varying bloom times is the key to year-round color and interest in your yard.

“These days, we really ask our planting designs to look good and function the entire year, and that’s possible if it’s done right,” says Joshua Dean, landscape designer for Merrifield Garden Center in northern Virginia.

Understanding the biological clock of the plants you choose – when they peak and bloom hardily – is critical to accomplishing a continuous colorscape. Equally important is choosing the “right plant for the right place” (you’ve heard this advice before!), and assessing your landscape’s sun exposure. As for that lasting color, you’ll first want to prepare soil so plants can succeed.

“Soil is the base for everything,” emphasizes Pam Donzelli, vice president of Gale’s Garden Center in Westlake, Ohio, and board member of Garden Centers of America. “You put a plant into

a vat of concrete and it’s not going to do much,” she says, relating how clay soil acts. “You want to give plants every chance to survive and thrive.”

Of course, the exciting part of any planting project is perusing the buffet of color at your local garden center. This year, annuals in citrus brights are flying out the door, says Ron Wilson, marketing manager at Natorp’s Garden Stores and Landscape in Cincinnati. “Yellow continues to be hot ... everyone is asking for yellow this year,” he says. And purples and blues are always tops.

You can have this and more if you combine annuals and perennials, and consider these pointers provided by Natorp’s planting pros.

ASSESS THE LAY OF THE LAND. Take a good, hard look at your landscape and study its sun exposure. Examine which areas receive full sun, are partially shaded, etc. Check plant tags for sunlight needs and choose varieties that suit your yard’s microclimate.

Next, churn over soil in planting beds and determine its consistency. Is it thick, mucky,

dense, nonporous? Then your soil is mostly clay-based, meaning it’s a great water-retainer, but needs amendments to facilitate proper drainage. Is the soil grainy, porous, light? Then your soil is sandy and will need topsoil and peat moss to richen the soil profile so it retains much-needed moisture for plants.

Generally speaking, Donzelli recommends a mixture of topsoil and peat moss worked into soil to improve its quality for planting. Save the more expensive planting mix for when you actually install plants into the ground.

MASTER BLOOM TIME. With beds ready to go, now the fun part begins: shopping for color. Return to your landscape assessment and make a list of existing flowers, trees and shrubs on your property. When do they bloom? Now you can focus on filling in the color gaps.

Select plants that will bloom in each season for a year-round show. This starter menu is a primer, but discuss regional options with a landscape designer at your local garden center.

PRIME-TIME. May marks the kick-off for annual season, when garden centers are flooded with a rainbow selection of plants that will expire after the season. Consider annuals your garden accessories – you can change them out each year, and opt for trendy colors or new varieties.

LATE-SUMMER. Many plants take “time off” in the extremely hot weather of late summer, Dean says. Some of those will rebloom in the fall, but you can still keep the color going during a heat wave with varieties such as the Japanese Anemone, particularly the *robustissima* cultivar. It blooms from late July to October. Another late-summer showgirl is *caryopteris*, also known as bluebeard, available in cultivars ranging from 18 inches to 5 feet tall. “It’s one of the best flowers for attracting butterflies in your garden at that time,” Dean says.

FALL. Pansies are the fall flower, along with mums and colorful veggies like cabbage and kale, which last through early winter. Montague daisies also will bloom in fall, Donzelli notes.

WINTER. Despite the harsh Virginia winter this year, Dean’s customers watched their Christmas rose bloom into the New Year, and Lenten Rose

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prevailed during frigid February and March. Called *hellebores*, this evergreen perennial retains foliage and functions as a colorful backbone planting when other varieties are bare.

For a native, deciduous show, hollies perform November to March in most regions. Dean notes that the 'Sparkleberry' holly (*Ilex*) can grow to a 10-by-10-foot mass of red berries all winter. "It's very showy, very festive," he says.

EARLY-SPRING. A couple of weeks before early-blooming forsythia pops, witch hazel blooms, sometimes as early as late February or early March in the Virginia area, Dean says.

Other early performers include flowering trees, flowering pears and weeping cherries, Donzelli says. And for those who planted fall bulbs, crocus is first to appear, followed by daffodil in April (in Ohio). "Plant bulbs in patches here and there," she suggests for those who want to see early signs of spring.

VEGGIES FOR *Kiddies*

A great way to encourage young green thumbs-in-training is to give them a container for growing vegetables.

"It's also a good way to get your children to eat more vegetables," points out Ron Wilson, marketing manager at Natorp's Garden Stores and Landscape in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Containers are right-sized gardens for small hands, and giving children responsibility for caring for a container of vegetables, flowers or both.

Here are some of Wilson's pointers for preparing a container for planting:

- Choose a pot: There are plenty of colorful ceramic pots on the market this summer in brights like red, blue, yellow and orange. Ensure the pot has appropriate drainage (holes). "The more holes the merrier," Wilson says.

- Add quality mix: When you select potting mix, look for these key words on the label – sphagnum peat moss, vermiculite, perlite, compost, coconut coir, bark.

- Monitor soil moisture: soil in containers dries out much quicker than in planting beds. Look over the container and soil daily and be sure plants' water needs are met.



Equip your backyard getaway with functional furniture and bright accessories to make it just as cozy as your living room.

Create a Great Escape

That Caribbean vacation you've been dreaming of might be on hold – indefinitely. (We all can dream.) And the family beach vacation might be out of reach this year, or seem like a frivolous expense. But investing in your own great outdoors, and creating a living space that feels like a resort escape, will provide a "vacation" from life's hubbub every time you leave your back door.

Sound like a better way to invest those dollars saved? That's certainly the case when you consider that consumers value a landscaped home up to 11.3 percent higher than its base price, according to a study by Clemson University and University of Michigan. *Smart Money* magazine says consumers who spend 5 percent of the value of their home on landscaping can expect a 15-percent or more return to its value.

The problem is, many times the outdoor space is forgotten in the midst of interior renovations, says Joel Bertet, who owns Los Angeles-based Maison Bertet with his wife, Sophie. They design the furniture sold to multi-million dollar estates. Turns out, leaving the outdoor space until last is a universal trend. "It's an afterthought," Bertet says, advising that homeowners plan this space as they would any other room.

"It's another room that people don't always think about furnishing, and it's generally on the main level," says Pam Faulkner, designer/owner of



Bright pillows and creative furniture arrangements can take a ho-hum patio and turn it into a stellar outdoor living space perfect for entertaining and relaxing.

Faulkner House in Oak Hill, Va.

Why not capitalize on this space and give it indoor-quality creature comforts – cozy sofas, luxe loungers, bistro tables and barstools for entertaining, a cooking space equipped for a real outdoor chef.

And you don't need to out-spend your budget to get a great return.

"You can work with what you already have, always keeping the style comfortable and in tune with your lifestyle," says Courtney Cachet, a New York-based designer and TV personality. "Start by being aware of your surroundings and approaching this with a realistic mindset."

Before you run out and buy patio furniture, consider the "big plan," Bertet emphasizes, suggesting homeowners ask themselves these questions: How do you really spend time outdoors? Do you entertain? How many guests do you typically invite to gatherings? Do you have children or pets? What is a typical weekend like at home? (What do imagine your weekends would be like if you only had the perfect outdoor space?)

Now, let's transform that backyard space into a true escape that will accommodate the whole family!

WHAT'S IN IS OUT. "The transition between indoors and outdoors used to be very distinctive," Faulkner says, noting that today's patio furniture is more substantial. "Now, the lines are more blurred. People are willing to put money into the styles because sometimes, they bring the furniture indoors in the off-season."

And even if that furniture will stay planted on the patio, or be sheltered in a garage or storage space during winter, homeowners are tending toward cushy comfort that makes an outdoor space feel every bit as welcoming as a family room.

Faulkner is even seeing outdoor beds with curtains that shield the sun. "People like the look – it's exotic," she says. Some configurations of this design include two loungers with serpentine-curved backs that are attached at the "hip" to form a queen-size chaise. Adding a canopy provides privacy and gives a four-poster-bed feel to the look, which is appealing to those who wish to take a *plein air* siesta or soak up some rays.

The same coffee-table arrangement in the living room can be accomplished outdoors by creating "conversation zones" with small tables and chairs.

This setup might be a sidebar to the main dining table, or replace the traditional round all together. Faulkner is seeing sectionals that pull apart

Don't Forget Fido! 🐾

Provide a cozy spot for your pet to settle in and enjoy the outdoors with you. Pam Faulkner, designer and owner of Faulkner House, Oak Hill, Va., suggests a dog bed made from material that wicks away moisture and will keep your pooch cool.

Look for Dacron-polyester filling that drains easily. "That way, if you forget and leave the dog bed out and it rains, you can easily stand it on its side and it will dry fast," Faulkner says. "You won't have to worry about odor, insects or fleas."



into individual chaises that can be easily moved around the patio for convenience.

And many times these outdoor rooms are anchored with a rug that can withstand what the weather throws at it. Materials like sisal and bamboo are low-maintenance and won't mold. Cachet finds these floor pieces at popular home stores.



Consider moving away from the standard tables-and-chairs approach, and go with lots of lounges or couches.

FURNISHING AN OUTDOOR ROOM.

There's no hard-fast rule stating you must anchor your patio look with a big, ol' table and matching chairs. "Form follows function," Faulkner says, emphasizing that homeowners should identify how they really use the space rather than how they think they are supposed to spend time outdoors.

Do you really like to eat meals outside? If so, a hip communal table and bench seating or extravagant dining-size table and chair set will suit your lifestyle. If you find yourself taking that plate indoors to eat (avoiding bugs, heat, sun), then consider creating eating hubs with smaller tables and chairs, or bistro-height rounds and barstools that are conducive to entertaining – and snacking, not dining.

"People think they have to have a table with six chairs and that's great, depending on how you entertain," Faulkner says. "If your family eats a

quick meal and moves on, then a table and chairs might not be what you want."

No matter what you decide, consider these basics before buying patio furniture: your climate, available storage space, ease of cleaning and versatility.

Cachet remarks on how many people mistakenly purchase metal furniture for a patio that gets full sun in a hot climate. "They can't understand why they burn their fingers and the backs of their legs," she says.

Decide whether storing furniture is necessary in your region, and if so, how much space do you have to stow away patio pieces? Can you take some furniture indoors – and would you want to do that every winter?

UPDATE AND ACCESSORIZE. You don't need a big budget to change the look and feel of your backyard space. The key to transforming a blah patio into a retreat is to accessorize – and, again, think "indoors."

Toss some color into your brown-black furniture palette with throw pillows, Bertet suggests. The newest PVC weaves that are UV-resistant and weather-ready come in vibrant colors, textures and patterns. "Different thicknesses and weights and patterns are an exciting way to take a very standard, square sofa for an outdoor space and make it very exciting and nice," he says.

Funky baskets filled with colorful towels add a splash of color to complement outdoor planters. Bring out candles, add placemats, treat a potted plant as a coffee-table arrangement. Shield the sun with market umbrellas that conveniently move, Cachet says.

If a subtle, earthen look is more your style, embrace the bevy of eco-friendly products available on the market today. Or go chic-rustic and add a bench that the kids will love.

You can take on these improvements gradually – take your time, but work from a plan. "Get your ideas on paper," Bertet says, "and have a good, overall view of what you need to accomplish, keeping in mind friends, family, kids and pets."



24/7 ONLINE ACCESS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Last fall, we introduced our new Web site with great tips and facts one mouse click away. Now, Weed Man is excited to provide its great customers with immediate access to your online accounts. We know you're busy and we want to

make it as easy as possible for you to communicate with us.

With the launch of our new customer account management center all you need to create an online account is your customer number (from your most recent statement or invoice) and your e-mail address. Once your account is activated, your service records, payment status and recent lawn care applications will be accessible to you any time you want to review.

Soon, you'll be able to pay your invoices online. Watch for this new service coming this summer.

And, remember, Weed Man customer service means two-way communication. Let us know if you see something unusual in your lawn or want to report a problem or break-through. You can also tell us about your family members or friends who are ready for our great services.

Weed Man Lawn Care has grown one customer at a time through great clients like you. Thanks for being a great Weed Man customer and thank you for your business.



IT PAYS TO SEND YOUR FRIENDS TO US!

At Weed Man, we take referrals very seriously. In fact, a good portion of our business is referred by friends and family. That's why we are offering our customers a bonus for sending us their referrals. Send us the names of your friends, family and coworkers, and you can earn money toward a full lawn care program for yourself, as well as for your friend. **Call your local Weed Man for more details!**

Get Cookin'!



Grills have come a long way from those portable charcoal camping-style get-ups. Now there are rotisserie burners, smoker boxes and specialty infrared searing burners that heat up to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit to perfectly prepare a steak.

But what do you really need? That depends on what's on your typical menu, who's invited to dinner and how much you're willing to spend on an outdoor cooking device.

Dan Marguerite, owner of The Backyard Barbeque Store in suburban Chicago, says the starting price for a good, quality basic propane-gas grill is about \$299 to \$500. You can spend less, but the quality of the

stainless steel will dictate longevity – and you could end up replacing the grill in a couple of years.

Marguerite suggests this unofficial quality test: "I look at the hood and give the whole thing a good shake," he says. You can just feel if a grill is substantial enough to stand up to serious cooking.

Look for a warranty, and find out whether replacement parts are readily available, just in case.

As far as grill design goes, decide whether you want the capability to slow-cook meats with an indirect burner. A direct grill heats both sides of the burner, while indirect offers the ability to turn one burner off. For instance, with a three-burner grill, turning off the middle burner allows the

chef to place meat on this inactive surface and gradually cook it.

As for other bells and whistles, you can purchase a grill already equipped with an infrared rotisserie spot or smoker box, or you can wait and add these extras later as accessories.

Also think convenience and function: What's easy and what makes sense for you?

It might not be the most high-tech detail that makes grilling outdoors a breeze.

Courtney Cachet, a New York-based designer and TV personality, says the side-plate on her grill allows her to stack plates and utensils there while cooking. It's a basic feature, but she couldn't live without it.

Cachet's advice: "Go with the best you can afford," she says.

Mouthwatering Marinade: TERIYAKI KABOBS

INGREDIENTS:

- Chicken, beef or pork, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/4 c. olive oil
- 1/4 c. soy sauce
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 T honey
- 1/2 t. fresh ginger, minced
- 2 T white vinegar

Combine ingredients and marinate meat overnight. Skewer it with peppers, onions, mushrooms and pineapples. Grill over medium heat for four minutes each side.

