

SPRING Home & Garden

Make your living room a more welcoming space

A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home. Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations. That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible. With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more comfortable.

• Prioritize comfort over aesthetics. In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the living room whether

you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

• Ensure there's ample seating. It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and family into your home or simply lounging around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spending time in the room.

• Consider neutral paint colors. Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan, or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable vibe in a living room.

• Incorporate the outdoors into the room. The great outdoors can have a calming effect



TIPS FOR LIVING. Living rooms are go-to places in most homes. To take full advantage of your, make sure

it is a comfortable, attractive place to spend time. Plan for ample seating, consider neutral colors.

on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnis-

ings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

A comfortable living room is a space where people will want to spend their time. A few simple strategies can help create an inviting and comfortable vibe in any living room.

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How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the

following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- Refresh the landscape. Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible. Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim

to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- Add a water feature. Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

- Don't forget shade. Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the



A PLACE TO RELAX. Creating a relaxing, attractive outdoor space can have a positive effect on the value of your home -- and provide a great place to just kick back and enjoy the outdoors.

most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Con-

sider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by plant-

ing shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The differences between moles and voles

By CHARLES MITCHELL
Cooperative Extension Director

During the past few weeks, the Cooperative Extension Office has received many questions about moles and voles. How do you tell the difference? What do they eat? What can you do to control them? They have taken over my yard. These are the questions and comments that most people have. Well, let's take a look at what they are, the damage they cause, and how to control them.

Voles are small mammals, commonly called mice that live in field and shrub habitats. In shrub beds, voles can cause damage by eating flower bulbs, girdling the stems of woody plants, and gnawing roots. There are two kinds of voles in North Carolina, the pine vole and the meadow vole. The pine vole's eyes and ears are not visible, the tail is short, fur is reddish brown, and lives and causes damage below the ground. The trunks of small trees or shrubs may be severed from the roots, making it possible to pull the top of the plant out of the soil. Upon close inspection of the plant, gnawing marks can be seen just under the soil line.

Meadow voles have eyes and ears that are visible, a tail that is longer than their hind legs, the fur is dark brown, and lives and causes damage above ground mainly in taller grasses and cover. Typically, meadow voles girdle trees and saplings at the ground line.

Currently, trapping and rodenticides are the only ways to control vole populations. It takes persistence as well as skill to



A mole emerges from the ground

be a successful trapper. Meadow voles can be all but eliminated in most cases by close mowing or removal of grass cover. Remember that all rodenticides are designed to kill mammals. Take all reasonable precautions to prevent exposure to humans, pets, and non-target mammals, birds, and fish. Non-lethal damage prevention options are to plant plants in gravel or place gravel in the ground around flower beds. The gravel is thought to discourage the voles because they do not like digging through gravel.

Moles are insectivores that live in the seclusion of underground burrows, coming to the surface only rarely. They have a hairless, pointed snout extending nearly 1/2 inch in front of the mouth opening. The small eyes and the opening of the ear canal are concealed in the fur: there are no external ears. The forefeet are very large and broad, with palms wider than they are long. Moles make their home burrows in high, dry spots, but they prefer to hunt in soil that is shaded, cool, moist, and

populated by worms and grubs. Moles eat from 70 percent to 100 percent of their weight each day. The home range of a mole is large. Three to five moles per acre is considered a high population for most areas.

Moles are effective at removing insects and grubs from lawns and gardens, while aerating the soil. However, their burrowing habits disfigure lawns, destroy flower beds, tear up the roots of grasses, and create havoc in small garden spots. Control methods for moles are more difficult than voles. Moles are classified as wild, nongame animals under North Carolina game laws. No open hunting or trapping season are set up for these animals. A depredation permit request or questions about the laws and regulations can be answered by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Non-lethal control can be accomplished by removing their food source. Insecticides applied properly to lawns and natural areas can aid in the control of moles. For small areas such as seedbeds, install a sheet metal or hardware cloth fence. The fence should be started at the ground surface and go to a depth of at least 12 inches and then bend outward an additional 10 inches at a 90-degree angle.

These two aggravating critters can cause much frustration in a home landscape, but by knowing the difference in the two you can make better control decisions. For more information about gardening, feel free to contact or visit your local Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office at 103 South Bickett Boulevard, Louisburg. You can reach us at 919-496-3344 or visit our website at www.franklin.ces.ncsu.edu to stay up-to-date on events and activities.

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Growing your favorite vegetables in limited space

By CHARLES MITCHELL
Cooperative Extension
Director
Horticulture Agent

Regardless of whether you live in an apartment, condominium or mobile home, some space is available for growing a few of your favorite vegetables. However, the area you choose to grow your garden must receive five hours or more of sunlight daily. As a general rule, leafy vegetables such as cabbage and mustard greens can tolerate more shade than root vegetables like radishes and beets. Vegetables that bear fruit such as peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers will need the most sun.

Townhouse dwellers will probably be limited to using containers or window boxes for vegetable growing. Always make sure the containers used are large enough to hold the vegetable plants when they reach maturity. All containers should have sufficient number of drainage holes in the bottom for proper

drainage.

You have many more alternatives if you live in a duplex, a single unit or house and have access to an open yard. You may still use window boxes, but now you have access to borders along walkways and foundation plantings. You will be pleasantly surprised to see how attractive a walkway can be when edged with such plants as carrots in full foliage. There is also ample opportunity to position large containers such as baskets with pepper or tomato plants.

Fences are ideal for growing many vegetables, especially vining types such as cucumbers and melons. Six to 8 ft of fence space could provide enough cucumbers for fresh consumption and ample supplies for pickling. Pole beans (lima and snaps) also do well here. When cantaloupe fruits begin to enlarge, tie to the fence in a



EAT YOUR VEGGIES. There is a large variety of vegetables you can grown in containers.

sling made from nylon hose to avoid them from falling.

The soil mixture you use will have a great influence on your success. It should be free of disease, insect and weed pests and have a pH of about 6.0 to 6.5. Your county Cooperative Extension agent can provide you with a soil testing kit to test the pH of your soil.

You may purchase com-

mercially prepared mixtures from garden centers or you can make your own mix by using equal parts of sand, loamy garden soil, and peat moss or composted leaves. For additional reading materials on limited space gardening, contact your local Cooperative Extension Center at 919-496-3344 or visit our website at franklin.cs.ncsu.edu.

The 'buzz' on native ground nesting bees

By CHARLES MITCHELL
Cooperative Extension Director
Horticulture Agent

In NC there are many species of native bees. Throughout the state ground-nesting bees are active during warm parts of the year.

However, in March we often see holes and mounds of soil in our hard and question what is causing this. Well, what we are seeing is hundreds of bees emerging from the ground after developing as larvae the year before.

This especially occurs in bare areas in our lawn. When really active, you may see bees flying around the area. The bees will mate and the industrious females collect pollen to provision cells in the ground where the eggs will be laid.

There is no need to fear these bees. These bees are solitary and are not aggressive. They do not like to sting in fact, they are more scared of you than anything. These bees are native and are wonderful pollinators for spring flowers. These bees are only active for a few weeks and then the adults die leaving their larvae to develop underground.

If these bees concern you then growing a dense vegetation such as grass will discourage these bees from nesting in your lawn.

If you do have them then damage to lawns is usually minimal and control is rarely necessary unless they are numerous and perceived as a danger or annoyance.



Ground bees nesting

Seed library is launched in Franklin

By WILLIAM LANDIS
Cooperative Extension

In 1731 Benjamin Franklin founded the Library Company of Philadelphia. It is considered to be one of the United States of America's first public libraries.

Public libraries have always been a cornerstone of our republic, a place where anyone can go and educate themselves making them effective participants in our Democracy and offering access to a plethora of resources to all who come.

The public library in Benjamin Franklin's name sake is doing an excellent job of continuing the legacy of the founding father.

Franklin County Public Library has ventured to address the issue of food sovereignty by working with Franklin County Cooperative Extension to start a seed library.

What is a seed library? A seed library is a place for the community to donate and share seeds.

If someone has extra seeds or has seeds, they saved from a past crop they can donate it to the seed library. From there anyone in the community can come pick up some seeds for their home garden or small farm.

There are seed libraries at the Franklin County Public Library locations in Bunn, Franklinton, Louisburg and Youngsville.

For the seed libraries to be successful, there must be consistent donations of good quality seeds and people who come and use those seeds.

We look forward to you using your local seed library.

PLANTING GUIDE FOR GROWING VEGETABLES IN LIMITED SPACE

Crop	Varieties	Hardiness (Inches)*	In-Row Spacing	Light Requirements**	Where to Plant
Snapbeans (Bush)	Tenderette Derby	T	2 to 3	FS	Borders
Snap beans	Kentucky Wonder Blue Lake	T	6 to 8	FS	Borders and screens
Pole					
Beets	Little Egypt	T	3 to 4	PS	Containers of medium depth
Broccoli	Green Magic	HH	15 to 18	PS	Single plant in deep container or borders
Brussels Sprouts	Jade Cross	H	15 to 18	PS	Single plant in deep container or borders
Cabbage	Early Dutch/Early Jersey	H	10 to 12	PS	Borders
Cantaloupe	Minnesota Midget Burpee Hyb.	T	20 to 24	FS	Along fences or trellis
Cauliflower	Early Snowball	HH	20 to 24	PS	Same as for broccoli
Carrots	Tiny Sweet	HH	3 to 4	PS	Deep container such as basket
Collards	Vates	H	12 to 18	PS	Borders
Cucumbers	Patio Pik	T	6 to 8	FS	Along fences or on trellis; good temporary screen
Eggplant	Black Beauty	T	24 to 30	FS	Basket or border; only 1 or 2 plants needed
Leafy Greens	Assorted	H	1 to 2	PS	Containers of medium depth (5 to 6") or borders
Onions (Sets)	Yellow Granex/Red Belle	H	2 to 3	FS (bulbs) PS (green)	Medium deep containers
Peppers (Sweet)	Calif. Wonder	T	10 to 12	FS	Deep containers or borders
Potato (Irish)	Pungo, Kennebec Boone (Mtn.)	HH	10 to 12	FS	Single plant in basket or deep bed
Radish	Cherry Belle	H	1 to 2	PS	Window boxes; container of shallow to medium depth
Squash	Early Prolific, Multipik	T	12 to 15	FS	Deep container or borders
Tomato	Better Boy, Celebrity, Tiny Tim	T	12 to 15	FS	Large, deep container (basket) and beds

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Growing herbs for the home gardener

By CHARLES MITCHELL
Cooperative Extension Director
Horticulture Agent

An herb is any plant used whole or in part as an ingredient for health, flavor, or fragrance. Herbs can be used to make teas; perk up cooked foods such as meats, vegetables, sauces, and soups; or to add flavor to vinegars, butters, dips, or mustards. Many herbs are grown for their fragrance and are used in potpourris, sachets, and nosegays; or to scent bath water, candles, oils, or perfumes. More than 25 percent of our modern drugs contain plant extracts as active ingredients, and researchers continue to isolate valuable new medicines from plants and confirm the benefits of those used in

traditional folk medicine. Herbs as a group are relatively easy to grow. Begin your herb garden with the herbs you enjoy using the most. For example, choose basil, oregano, and fennel for Italian cooking; lavender and lemon verbena for making potpourri; or chamomile, peppermint, and blue balsam mint if you plan to make your own teas. The optimum growing conditions vary with each individual herb species. Some of the herbs familiar to North Americans, such as lavender, rosemary, thyme, bay laurel, marjoram, dill, and oregano are native to the Mediterranean region. These herbs grow best in soils with excellent drainage, bright sun, and moderate temperatures. When growing herbs fol-

low these basic guidelines:
• Choose a site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sun each day.
• Avoid ground where water stands or runs during heavy rains.
• Compensate for poor drainage with raised beds amended with compost.
• Apply balanced fertilizers sparingly to leafy, fast-growing herbs. Heavy applications of fertilizer, especially those containing large amounts of nitrogen, will decrease the concentration of essential oils in the lush green growth.
Plan your herb garden by grouping herbs according to light, irrigation, and soil requirements. Most herbs enjoy full sun, but a few tolerate shade. Herbs can be classified as either annual, biennial,

or perennial. Be aware of the growth habits of the plants before you purchase them. Some herbs, such as borage, anise, caraway, chervil, coriander, cumin, dill, and fennel, should be direct-seeded, because they grow easily from seed or do not transplant well. Other herbs, such as mints, oregano, rosemary, thyme, and tarragon, should be purchased as plants and transplanted or propagated by cuttings to ensure production of the desired plant (do not come true from seeds). To conserve moisture and prevent splashing mud, mulch your garden after planting. Use 1 to 2 inches of organic material. Many growers mulch with hardwood bark or a mixture of bark and sawdust. When grown outdoors and



Growing herbs can spice up your diet

given ample air circulation, sunlight, and water drainage, herbs rarely suffer severe disease or insect damage. Natural predators and parasites usually keep mite and aphid populations below damaging levels. This is especially true in gardens with a wide diversity of plants. Insecticidal soap or horticultural

oil are useful against severe outbreaks of aphids, mites, and whiteflies. Hand-pick larger pests such as beetles and caterpillars. Growing a diverse group of herbs can be attractive; they can provide color, fragrance, and interest throughout the season, and they can help keep pest problems to a minimum.

The benefits of using neutral colors in your home

Homeowners make many notable decisions when designing their home interiors, with some choices proving more bold than others. The decision to decorate with neutral colors might not be the boldest move homeowners can make, but there are numerous reasons to stay neutral with a color scheme.
• Versatility: Neutral colors afford homeowners endless opportunities to play around with textures, patterns, furnishings, and more. For example, a neutral color on a living room wall can ensure a boldly colored couch or chair won't contrast with its surroundings. In fact, there's no end to the options homeowners have to customize the look of a

room with bold features or furnishings when neutral colors feature prominently in the space.
• Flexibility: Neutral colors are more flexible than bolder alternatives because they likely won't require a complete overhaul of a room when homeowners want to spice things up with new features and furnishings. That flexibility will be appreciated by homeowners who every so often like to experiment with a new vibe or look in their homes.
• Trendy: Neutral colors are not as vulnerable to trends as other design choices. In fact, neutral colors are effectively their own trend and won't get in the way of homeowners

who want to change things up. But unlike other trends that must be replaced when homeowners grow tired of them, neutral colors can remain thanks to their compatibility with so many styles.

• Tranquility: Homes are often characterized as their owners' private sanctuaries from the hustle and bustle that goes on outside those walls, and neutral colors are often lauded for

the tranquil vibe they help to create in a space. Neutral colors are soft, and that can lend a serene and calming atmosphere to the interior spaces of a home.
• Brightness: Neutral colors are lighter in tone and thus pair well with natural light. That mixture can amplify brightness within a

home and give it an uplifting vibe that residents and guests alike will appreciate. Neutral colors are not bold, but the benefits they provide open doors to an array of design styles and decor choices that enable homeowners to go in various directions with the interior spaces in their homes.



STAYING NEUTRAL with colors can be more flexible than using bolder alternatives.

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NTCA Five-Star Contractors are viewed as industry leaders. Many manufacturers are actively partnering with Five-Star Contractors to ensure proper installation techniques and reduce product claims.
Additionally, the program's impact is increasingly evident in architectural specifications.
"Now that the transition to an accredited program is complete, we can fully showcase the exceptional benefits of being a Five-Star member, and interest in the program is surging," said Jeremy Sax, NTCA Deputy Director. The NTCA actively champions the program, highlighting its commitment to excellence, quality, and best practices. By expanding the Five-Star network, the NTCA continues to elevate industry standards and empower elite contractors dedicated to craftsmanship and professionalism.

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