

2026 SPRING HOME & GARDEN IMPROVEMENT

Start Planning Now for a Thriving Spring Garden

(Family Features) While winter weather puts outdoor gardening on pause in most parts of the country, the colder months offer a perfect opportunity to begin preparing for a lush garden come springtime.

With a little creativity, and some extra time spent creating a plan, you can set yourself on a path toward success before the growing season even begins.

Assess Your Space and Research Ideas

Evaluate your current garden, taking note of what worked well last season and where improvements can be made. Use this downtime to sketch an updated layout, research companion plants and decide which fruits, vegetables or flowers you want to grow next based on what did (or didn't) work last spring.

Build an Updated Blueprint

Winter is the ideal time to upgrade your garden design and make tweaks for efficiency. Use the offseason to consider crop rotation patterns for optimal soil health as well as ways to maximize your space such as raised beds, trellises or containers. You can also make a list of materials needed for any new features you may be adding, such as an irrigation system, and map out their placement so you're ready to build as soon as the weather allows.

Nourish the Soil

Even if the ground is frozen, you can



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prepare your garden beds by adding compost, leaves or organic matter in late winter, ensuring nutrients are available when spring arrives. Also remember to test your soil's pH level now, which can help guide your fertilization plan.

Start Seeds Indoors

If you're eager to get your hands dirty, consider starting your seeds indoors. Early seed starting gives plants a head start, allowing you to transplant stronger seedlings outdoors when temperatures warm.

Get Organized

Use the slower pace of winter to clean and sharpen your garden tools, sort through leftover seeds and make a supply checklist so you're ready to dig in when warmer days arrive.

Find more advice to get your garden ready to burst to life in spring at eLivingtoday.com. Photo courtesy of Shutterstock

Create a Cozy Outdoor Space with a Backyard Firepit

(Family Features) A firepit can serve as a warm and inviting backyard retreat, perfect for roasting marshmallows for s'mores or stargazing while wrapped in cozy blankets. Before you can share time around the firepit with loved ones, however, consider these tips to elevate your outdoor space.

Choosing the Right Design

When it comes to building a DIY firepit, the design you choose can significantly impact the aesthetics and functionality. From classic stone pits to modern metal designs, the options are nearly endless. Think about the size and shape as well. Circular designs are traditional and encourage conversation while square or rectangular pits offer a more contemporary look.

Gathering Materials and Tools

Essential materials include bricks, stones or metal parts for the structure, as well as gravel or sand for the base. Fireproof materials are a must to ensure safety and longevity. You'll also need tools such as a shovel for digging the base, a level to ensure even construction and adhesive or mortar for binding materials together. Depending on your design, you may require a metal fire ring, grill grate or mesh cover.

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Keeping Safety in Mind

Safety should be your top priority when building and using a backyard firepit. Always place your firepit at least 10 feet away from any structures, trees or flammable materials. Make sure the area is clear of dry leaves and other debris that could catch fire. Consider installing a spark screen to prevent embers from escaping and always keep a bucket of water or fire extinguisher nearby.



Enhancing Ambiance with Seating and Lighting

Creating a cozy atmosphere around your firepit involves more than just the fire itself. Comfortable seating is essential for making your outdoor space inviting. Choose weather-resistant chairs, benches or DIY log stools arranged in a circle to foster conversation. Ambient lighting from string lights, lanterns or solar-powered path lights can elevate the mood and extend the usability of your firepit into the evening. Consider adding citronella candles or torches to keep insects at bay while enhancing the ambiance.

Visit eLivingtoday.com to find more ideas to enhance your living spaces. Photo courtesy of Shutterstock



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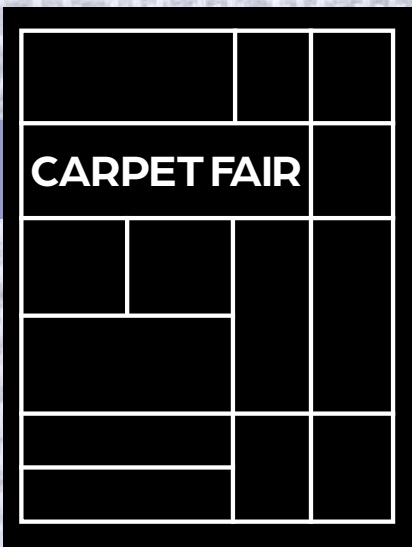
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