

your home

MAY/JUNE 2015

Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers

YOUR ULTIMATE backyard

With spring coming to an end, it is time to prepare your home for all things summer. Whether you want to play host to summer barbecues or just want a place to relax in the sun, there are lots of options for outdoor recreation spaces. Working to build a premier outdoor area can not only serve as the ideal place to spend time with family and friends, but it can also add value to your home. Here are some ideas for equipping your ultimate summer backyard:



Let There Be Light

Light up your outdoor space by installing lights along walkways

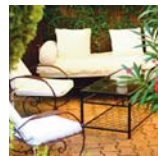
or on tables, or stringing lights around a seating area. This lighting not only creates a relaxed atmosphere, it's also great for night-time showings when it's time to sell.



Create an Outdoor Kitchen Area

While only about 4 percent of affluent households have

outdoor kitchens today, 13.6 percent say they are planning to add one in 2014. A recent study by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) found that outdoor kitchens can add to a home's value. Upgrading your standalone grill to a built-in grill with additional counter space can go a long way.



Cozy Up

Adding outdoor couches, throw pillows and rugs creates the perfect

ambiance for entertaining and invokes a feeling of comfort and serenity, according to the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR). These additions also provide value for staging and help potential homebuyers visualize themselves in the home.



Bug Off

There aren't many downsides to the summer, but one of them is the return of the

insects. To make your outdoor space critter-free, make sure you have citronella candles handy.



NATURAL LANDSCAPING

According to a study conducted by the National Drought Resilience Partnership (NDRP), the drought across the Western United States and parts of the Midwest region will intensify in 2015. With so much sun and little rain, homeowners will need to prepare their landscapes accordingly. If you live in one of these drought-ridden areas, an easy solution for an efficient and attractive yard is a natural landscape.

Natural landscapes are gaining popularity for good reason. Plants native to a particular region have adapted to the surrounding environment, whether it features harsh winters, flooding or droughts. Native plants tend to flourish in local soils, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says these landscapes are good for the environment.

Aside from occasional pruning and weeding, maintenance on natural landscaping is minimal. Once implemented, native landscapes do not need fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides. Natural landscapes usually require less water and minimal maintenance, which make them ideal for busy homeowners.

Another growing trend in drought-ridden areas such as California is "xeriscaping." Plants required for this type of landscaping vary by region, but they are commonly waste-efficient and require extremely low amounts of water — if any at all, the EPA says.

Maintenance-free "hard elements" in a yard can include rocks, fences, walking paths or lawn ornaments. These features help fill your landscape and require zero maintenance.

Whatever choice homeowners consider when deciding how to create a beautiful outdoor landscape, NAR recommends keeping costs below 5 to 10 percent of the home's value, so that you don't over-improve.



SECURITY system

↘ The kids are out of school and the sun is shining. You are finally able to take the family vacation that you have planned for all year. But when you leave the house and lock your door, is it really safe? Some of these best practices from *Better Homes and Gardens* will help you safeguard your home while on vacation.



Keep Quiet — Don't discuss travel plans in public. You never know who might hear you say you won't be home. Additionally, don't post pictures or comment about your vacation on social media until you return.

Mail Arrangements — A full mailbox or pile of newspapers in your driveway can tip off criminals to an empty home. Contact the U.S. Postal Service to hold your mail and contact your newspaper to suspend delivery or ask a neighbor to collect the papers.

Neighborhood Watch — Ask a neighbor or friend to keep an eye on your home while you are away and make sure they have a reliable contact number for you in case of an emergency.

Fake Your Stay — Set a timer for lights and televisions to turn off/on at night. This gives the impression that someone is home and deters any intruders.

Lock Up — Although this might be obvious, take one last tour of the house to make sure all windows are locked and the alarm system is correctly armed. After this you are ready to lock the doors and hit the road with peace of mind.

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