



"Most people spend less time outside than prisoners."

~ J.R. Rim

While the above statement may sound extreme, there is no denying that the comforts of our home do a great job of keeping us indoors. Climate controls, high def television, every form of digital entertainment and communication available at our fingertips – it is easy to forget that the outdoors even exist.

To stay inside during these warm months is to severely miss out on everything our properties, and nature in general, has to offer. Inviting outdoor spaces are a great reminder that your home is not limited to the shelter of your house. You can enjoy a comfy chair on the deck just as you would in your living room.

In this issue, we discuss ways in which you can expand your outdoor living areas and make the most of this beautiful time of the year. Sunshine and fresh air are calling – go enjoy them!

RRL

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HIT THE DECK

A deck or patio area provides a comfortable, inviting space where you can appreciate your property's natural beauty. Your home does not (and should not) have to be limited to just your house. Outdoor living areas can greatly increase the amount of available space at your disposal for dining, entertaining, or peaceful relaxation. The first step when considering a new deck or patio is asking yourself a few questions.

IN GENERAL, HOW WILL THIS SPACE BE USED?

Do you envision a large area that can accommodate large groups of people? Maybe a more intimate dining area? Should installed seating be a part of the plan? Does child safety need to be considered? Possibilities are many, but what works for some families may not for others. Tailoring your plan to fit your own ideal vision will allow you to get the very most out of your investment.

It is also important to determine how separate (or connected) you want your deck or patio to be in relation to the rest of your lawn and landscaping. Decks are typically raised at least somewhat off of the ground whereas patios are installed at ground level. If you want the new area to have a natural feel as an extension of your green space, then a patio might be the way to go. A patio can be surrounded by shrubs, trees and flower beds – essentially becoming part of your garden.

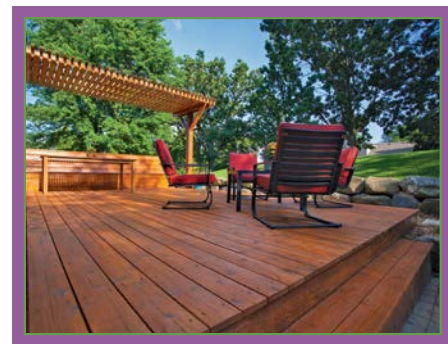
A deck provides more separation from the yard itself, which creates more of an 'official' living space with defined boundaries. In some cases, an elevated deck provides a better view of your yard than if it were at ground level.

Whether you chose a deck or a patio, an overhead pergola can offer shade and definition to the area.

Pergolas provide a spot to hang plants, set planter boxes, or grow ivy or other climbing plants.

Once you decide on a deck or a patio, you have a variety of options in terms of building materials. Patios can consist of bricks, poured concrete or any one of several types of paver stones. In recent years, plastic composite decking has become an alternative to treated lumber when building decks. Although it does not have the visual appeal of natural wood, composite decking does not rot or splinter. This durability does come at a price however, as composite decking can be expensive.

A deck or patio is an addition that allows you to more fully enjoy your outdoor green space. As you piece together your ideal plan, you will find a host of possibilities at your disposal. Deciding the best course of action can seem overwhelming – so don't hesitate to seek professional guidance. Expert help can make the decision making process enjoyable and the final product something that exceeds your expectations.



DECK VS PATIO



MULCH MUCH?

It is dirty, smelly, heavy, and gets under your fingernails. So why would anyone willingly choose to spread mulch throughout their yard? While these sentiments are entirely understandable, it is important to know that mulch offers more than temporary good looks.

While mulch's initial color may fade in the sun, it still provides a uniform look to your flower beds that can tie the entire area together visually. It will continue to act as a dark background for your flowers throughout the summer, making their colors more intense by contrast.

Beyond just appearance, mulch also benefits the overall health of the plants it surrounds. By covering the ground, mulch makes it very difficult for unwanted weeds to set up shop in your flower beds. Seeds that are blown in have a hard time reaching the soil. For weeds that are already sprouting, mulch prevents needed sunlight and air from making it to the weeds.



Adding mulch has many benefits.

In addition to thwarting the competition, mulch directly helps your plants by creating a shield from the sun. The summer sun can be brutal – drying out your beds' soil. This in turn dries out your plants and makes it difficult to keep them properly watered. Mulch's top level absorbs the sun's heat, keeping the soil beneath cool. Mulch can also absorb large amounts of water that your plants can use at a manageable pace. While it may not be the most attractive task, you will find that the practical and visual benefits are worth getting a little messy (or paying someone to do it).

ATTACK WEEDS FROM ALL DIRECTIONS

This time of year, birds are singing, flowers are blooming, and the grass is a thick green carpet. An unavoidable part of a vibrant growth season is the invasion of pesky weeds. If left unchecked, these unwelcome guests can take over your plant beds and turf areas.

Fortunately, there are several ways to combat these intruders. In fact, the most effective way to deal with weeds is to use a multi-faceted approach. Chemical treatments are usually the first thing to come to mind when thinking of weed solutions. The most effective herbicide strategy begins with a pre-emergent treatment applied to your entire yard early in the season, before weeds even show up. Pre-emergents create a barrier on top of your soil which prevents weeds from germinating.

Even a thorough pre-emergent will not be able to prevent all weeds. Areas where weeds do pop up can be spot treated with post-emergent herbicides. These treatments selectively attack weeds that are actively growing. They sometimes take a few weeks to fully work – so be patient.

While herbicides do a good job of combatting weeds, there are preventative measures (other than pre-emergents) that can stop weeds before they even start. The plants in your lawn and garden are in constant competition with weeds to secure these resources. The more robust your plants become, the more resources they will be able to capture towards themselves – and away from weeds. On the flip side, a weak lawn opens the door to invasive weeds.

A well-balanced fertilization plan will feed your lawn, fortifying top growth and root growth and pushing weeds out of the picture. Many weeds thrive in dry, hot conditions. Thorough watering over the summer creates an environment that favors your turf, and discourages weeds. As with fertilization – healthy plants make it hard for invasive weeds to gain a foothold.

While weeds are impossible to avoid entirely, they will be minimal in a well-fed and watered yard. Herbicide treatments help clean up the stragglers – but should not be relied upon as the only remedy. Weeds are one of your yard's biggest challenges. To successfully address them means not just killing the ones that exist, but also creating an inhospitable environment for these would-be invaders.



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PEST PROFILE: TICKS



They are sneaky, small, have an appetite for blood and sometimes carry disease. Ticks are no fun at all, but knowing a little bit about these parasites can help you avoid them.

WHERE: Due to their rather complex life-cycle, ticks need humid weather to survive. They also need hosts that they can latch on to and extract blood from. These hosts can be a variety of animals (including humans). So any humid place with animal life will likely have ticks.

HOW: Ticks need a 'blood meal' in order to survive, mature, and reproduce (delicious sounding I know). To do this, ticks will hang out on a tree, leaf, stick, or any place where they might possibly come in contact with a blood donor. There they will sit, with legs outstretched as they wait for a potential host to pass by.

Once a victim brushes against them, they will climb aboard and start to chow down. Some ticks may crawl around the surface of the skin as they try to find thin skin. Others will sink their (tiny) teeth into the first flesh they can find in their quest for blood.

REMOVAL: If you find a tick that has attached itself, the best way to remove it is to freeze it off with an over-the-counter wart remover. If this is not possible, the next best option is to carefully pull it off with tweezers. Special care should be taken to NOT squeeze the tick and risk having it rupture. As mentioned, ticks sometimes carry harmful diseases. If the tick bursts, you run the risk of having tick-juice deposited into the host's bloodstream. Not an appealing scenario.

Dealing with ticks is one of the few drawbacks of a summertime outdoors. A little vigilance goes a long way towards avoiding these nasty guys. When enjoying nature, high socks, prompt bathing, and overall inspection of your self and your pets are healthy habits that will keep you from becoming a feast.



STOP CHOPPING

As trees become green with their summer coat of leaves, their growth becomes a concern for some homeowners. As trees mature, they sometimes obstruct windows, walkways, or other plants. This leads many homeowners to severely prune them, removing most foliage and dramatically reducing their size. While tempting, this process (commonly called 'topping'), is never a good idea.

Cutting back branches to the stubs actually encourages the tree to grow at a quicker rate than before. So while the tree's size may be initially reduced, it will not be long before tons of skinny, weakly connected shoots grow back – making pruning even more difficult in years to come.

Such extreme pruning all at once also makes your tree more susceptible to insects and disease which can lead to permanent damage. It also goes without saying that all of those stubby, leafless branches are not at all attractive.

The best way to prune is through regular, selective trimming. The idea is to shape the tree and remove problem limbs without overdoing it. The best method is to trim back the outer growth while leaving the main branches intact. Trees that set their buds early in the year should be pruned right after they blossom, while late-blooming trees are best pruned during winter dormancy. Routine pruning increases airflow and sunlight to the interior of the tree, helping its overall health. It also stimulates new growth at a manageable pace. Avoid the temptation to top by giving your trees a scheduled 'haircut.'



MOW – JUST NOT TOO LOW

Once the summer heats up, so does your schedule. Vacations, picnics, ball games – all welcome trappings of summer – take up a lot of our time. It is tempting to skip mowings by cutting your grass very short. Unfortunately, this time-saving method is one of the worst things you can do for the health of your lawn.

It is important to remember that your turf's blades are not just decoration for your lawn, but rather the 'power plants' that turn sunlight into nutrients for your lawn. Removing too much blade starves your lawn at a time of the year when it needs all the help it can get. 'Scalping' your turf also eliminates shade which would otherwise protect turf roots from the damaging summer sun. So while it may seem like a time-saver, mowing low is a temptation that should be avoided. For a trim that will leave your lawn well-groomed and healthy, set your mower to remove one third of the grass blade per mowing. Your turf will thank you for it!



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Check It Out!

Our logo and website may be new, but our high quality work is as good as ever. Our newly-designed website includes examples of some of our recent projects and detailed descriptions of the services we offer. Check it out!

