

Go **GREEN** in your lawn and garden this spring

Spring is a season of rejuvenation. As the cold days of winter drift away, spring blooms begin to sprout and grass regains its lush green look.

Green is certainly a color that's synonymous with spring. Gardening enthusiasts can find a way to make spring even more green by embracing several eco-friendly "green" gardening practices as they bring their lawns and gardens back to life in the months to come.

Create a compost pile

Composting is an eco-friendly way to enrich lawns and gardens. Composting helps to conserve water because compost promotes moisture retention in soil, reducing homeowners' need to water their lawns and gardens while also helping them to save money on their water bills.

Composting also helps homeowners avoid the need to use potentially harmful chemical fertilizers because compost is a natural, slow release fer-

tilizer. In addition, according to Canada's Green Action Centre, compostable materials make up 40 percent of residential waste. So composting can dramatically reduce the amount of waste homeowners ultimately send to landfills.

Replace gas-powered mowers with reel lawn mowers

Reel mowers may seem like relics from simpler times, but today's reel mowers, while just as eco-friendly as their predecessors, are unlike those of yesteryear.

According to the Planet Natural Research Center, an online resource for



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organic gardeners, gas-powered engines emit more than 10 times the hydrocarbons per amount of gas burned than auto engines. But reel mowers are fuel-free and less expensive than gas-powered mowers.

Planet Natural also notes that reel mowers snip grass like scissors, leaving finer trimmings that can serve as nourishing, weed-deterrent mulch for yards.

Water at the right times of day

Homeowners who water their lawns and gardens at the right time of day can help the planet and reduce their energy bills.

As spring gradually gives way to summer, temperatures typically rise. Watering during the coolest times of the day means less water will be lost to evaporation, ensuring water-needy soil will get all it needs to help lawns and gardens thrive.

Early morning watering before the sun reaches its midday peak and/or evening watering as the sun is setting are typically great times to water lawns and gardens, rather than when temperatures are at their hottest.

Use a rain barrel

Rain barrels provide another great way to conserve water while tending to lawns and gardens. Rain barrels collect and store rain water from roofs and downspouts, keeping water from washing into sewage systems where it can't be put to good use.

Water collected in rain barrels can be used in various ways. Many homeowners can use water from rain barrels to water their lawns, gardens and houseplants, saving money on their water bills along the way.

Spring gardening season provides a great opportunity for lawn and garden enthusiasts to embrace a variety of eco-friendly practices that can save them money and protect the planet.

— Metro



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Empty-nesters can transform their homes

It can be hard for parents to imagine that a day will come when their kids are off to college and then onto their own apartment or house. After spending decades nurturing and caring for children, parents are then left with a suddenly quiet house and probably much more time to spare. If saying goodbye to the kids also means extra house, there's the option to downsize or make that extra space more useful.

Homeowners who choose to stay put can renovate vacant rooms into spaces that meet their newfound needs.

- **Hobby haven:** If you've always meant to set up a crafting room, home-brewing station or an artist's studio, now is an ideal time to do just that. Figure out which supplies you will need and begin reworking that former bedroom into a new sanctuary for leisure interests.
- **Guest suite:** If you've never had a spare bedroom to entertain


guests, a child's former bedroom can fit the bill. It may not be that difficult to transform such spaces into relaxing and inviting rooms for overnight guests. Be sure there is at least a queen-sized bed and a dresser or chest of drawers to stash belongings. Select paint colors and linens in neutral tones so the room will be inviting to guests.

- **Living room redo:** When there's an entire soccer team coming over to hang out, that large sectional sofa or modular seating may be ideal. Now that the kids are out of the house and their friends are no longer coming over for movie night, living rooms can be made more intimate with small-scale seating. A small sofa and two comfortable chairs may be a more fitting option.
- **At-home gym:** Save on gym membership fees by building a mini studio right at home. Choose one of the larger bedrooms and then fill it with fitness

equipment, such as an elliptical trainer, a bench press and some free weights. Store rolled-up mats in the closet for yoga or Pilates sessions.

- **Expanded bathroom:** If space has always been at a premium in the bathroom, borrow area from an empty bedroom and turn it into a spa. Install a soaking tub separate from the shower, and fill the room with other amenities, such as a warming lamp or even a small sauna.
- **Home office:** Working from home a few days a week may be more plausible when nearing retirement, as it will be a smoother transition from heading to the office each day to spending more time at home. Turn a bedroom or den into an office space with a new desk and bookshelves.

An empty nest can be a bittersweet experience, but parents can make such situations work for them by transforming their homes to better reflect their current needs. — Metro



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