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Before you even look at your yard, you need to check with local restrictions, building codes and homeowners association rules to make sure you can have a fire pit.

Spark a conversation

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Wood-burning fire pits are wonderful focal points for the gathering space in your yard.

Bonus: They're easy to build in an afternoon. Here's how.

Select a site

Before you even look at your yard, you need to check with local restrictions, building codes and homeowners association rules to make sure you can have a fire pit. You'll also need to read your homeowners policy to make sure it doesn't affect your coverage. Choose a site well away from the house and with plenty of room to sit around the fire. Clear away any plants an debris from your site.

Get ready to build

To make a circular pit, put a stake in the center of the site and mark out a circle where you want the pit to go. The diameter you draw out should be slightly larger than the outside dimensions of the fire pit ring you're going to build. Clear out the sod and dirt down to a depth of about seven inches and keep the area level as you work. Pack the remaining dirt down

solidly with a hand tamper.

What you'll need

You'll need trapezoidal blocks, which are more narrow on one side to allow the edges to fit snugly together in a circle. The bottom of the fire pit will be crushed gravel paver base, available at your local hardware store, that's about five inches thick. Put the gravel down and then wet it with a hose and tamp it down. Make sure the surface remains level.

Put down the first layer of blocks around the hole, checking that it remains level as you work. If you need to, add leveling sand beneath blocks to keep it straight. Assemble the next row of blocks, staggering the joints. Before you add adhesive, put in the fire bowl or ring to check the fit. Make sure the lip rests on the edge and adjust the positioning as needed. After you've checked to make sure it fits well, then reassemble the blocks with construction adhesive. Test fit each layer before you add adhesive.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for your adhesive to determine how long it needs to cure before you can use your fire pit.



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Many plants will help keep mosquitoes from invading your space.

Plants to repel mosquitoes

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While you should welcome some insects to your gardens, there are other pests that are less welcome.

Among those are the scourge of the summer months, the mosquito.

What are mosquitoes?

Mosquitoes cause the most deaths of any other animal taxonomy per year, killing more than 700,000 people annually. Mosquitoes feed on the blood of host animals, including humans, and transfer pathogens from host to host.

Diseases such as malaria, Chikungunya, West Nile virus, dengue fever and others are spread from mosquito bites. In humans, mosquitoes appear to prefer people with type O blood, heavy breathers and pregnant women.

Most mosquitoes feed during dawn or dusk and rest during the heat of the day.

Repelling mosquitoes

There are a host of mosquito repellents on the market. Candles, bracelets, sprays, zappers, they all work, usually with some chemical help. But there's also a natural way to go.

Many plants will help keep mosquitoes from invading your space. Here's a list of plants with mosquito-repellent

properties to help keep your garden pest-free this summer.

- Lavender and marigolds. These flowering plants emit a smell that deters mosquitoes. You can grow both of these in pots and they give you gorgeous blooms to boot.

- Citronella. You may be familiar with the citronella candles, but those things get their distinctive smell from the citronella plant. It and other lemon-scented plants repel mosquitoes.

- Rosemary, basil and sage. These kitchen herbs also keep mosquitoes and other pests away from your home. Both do well in containers or in the ground.

- Bee balm. This pollinator-friendly plant also keeps mosquitoes away. Crush the leaves to release the repellent oils.

- Allium. These bulbs are the family that brings you garlic and onions. They release a strong smell that mosquitoes don't like.

What else can you do?

While making the environment inhospitable to mosquitoes is a great way to keep them away, you also need to make sure you aren't doing them any favors. Eliminate standing water as much as possible and treat pools and ponds to keep mosquitoes from laying their eggs there.

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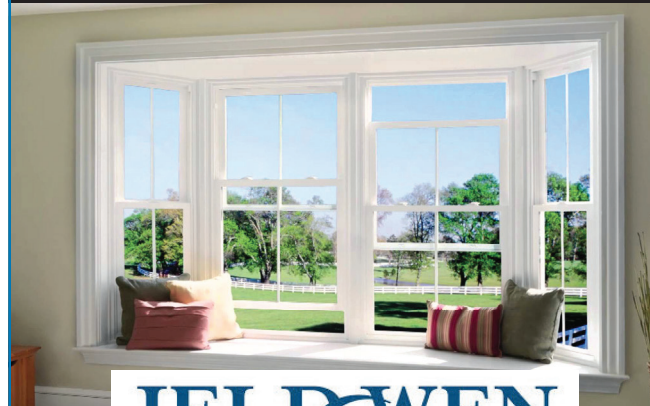


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