

Garden

&

HOME
improvement

Tips for before you begin

BY EVA MARIE WOYWOD

It is that time of year where warmer temperatures can awaken our senses and energize us enough to start tackling those home improvement and garden projects we dreamed about all winter long. It is for that reason we searched far and wide and compiled some information and tips to help keep you, your expectations, and your pocket safe.

Tip 1: Plan your project and also get bids well in advance of the goal date.

As with any trades, building trades have busy and slow seasons. By planning ahead, including getting bids, you can save money and spend less time stressing. If you are able to attain bids during the slower seasons for any given trade, you are more than likely going to attain competitive bids. According to the experts the best time to attain those bids are: roofing - cold or rainy months; indoor renovations - winter or during rainy months; heating - late summer, before fall; air conditioning - late winter or early spring; chimney cleaning - anytime except fall; and for project design architects - fall and winter.

Tip 2: Energy-saving; pay a little more now for larger savings in the future.

As energy prices rise, many contractors are offering energy efficiency upgrades for an additional price. Such upgrades may include higher-efficiency windows; guaranteed air sealing; thicker insulation; and higher-efficiency heating, cooling or other appliances. If your contractor doesn't bring these energy saving upgrades up, don't be shy, be sure to inquire what additional steps can be made to improve your home's energy performance. Then compare the estimated energy savings with the cost of each upgrade. It is suggested that the payback period of seven to 10 years is good for when those energy savings really kick in. However, as more products and techniques make their way to the market, some of those savings can be seen much earlier.

Tip 3: DIY the things you can.

Tackling an entire project yourself is the best way to save. Having said that, not all of us have the skills nor the expertise to see an entire project through from start to finish. Don't fret if you don't have the time or skills, as even a part-time sweat equity on your part can reduce costs. Get your family and friends involved and tackle labor-intensive jobs such as demolition, moving materials, digging, cleaning up the job site after work, sanding trim and/or painting. Be sure to clue in your contractor in advance on what parts of the project you will tackle. Remember before you dig you should call Diggers Hotline at 811 or visit them on the web at

www.diggershotline.com.

Tip 4: Should you remodel or buy new?

One of the most important investments in our lives is the home we live in and although we may love that home it is important to your pocket book not to spend money in remodeling that will not add to the value. According to the website *The Family Handyman*, creating a luxury home in a modest neighborhood may not make financial sense. They suggest having a real estate agent or home appraiser help you by giving you an estimate on the value your property will have if you do remodel and/or make additions. "If you can't recoup at least 75 percent of the cost when you sell, at least consider the advantages of buying another house with the space or features you need. It may well be a better investment to move rather than to add on," they suggested.

Tip 5: Safety; Know before you begin your DIY project. The Wisconsin Public Service website can be found at www.wisconsinpublicservice.com and is packed with information and resources on safety precautions when tackling home improvements.

When doing your DIY project remember that natural gas has a distinct, pungent odor so it is easy to detect. Leaking gas can cause an explosion and fire. If you smell a weak odor of natural gas: Open the windows; Check for an extinguished pilot light; If a pilot light is out, wait for the gas odor to go away before relighting.

If you can't find the source of the leak, get everyone out at once; DO NOT use the telephone or a lighter; DO NOT turn any electrical switches or lights on or off and go to a neighbor's house and call WPS immediately at 800-450-7280.

If you smell a STRONG odor of natural gas: Open the windows; Get everyone out at once; DO NOT use the telephone or a lighter; DO NOT turn any electrical switches or lights on or off.

Electrical shocks and fires:

Electricity can cause dangerous or fatal shocks. A shock occurs when electricity

goes through a person's body. Electricity can also cause fires when appliances, switches, wiring and outlets are defective or improperly used.

If someone is being shocked with a household current: Don't unplug the appliance, or turn the power off at the main control area; If you can't turn off the power, use a dry wooden broom handle or dry clothing to separate the victim from the power source. If the victim is not breathing, perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. If the victim is conscious, keep them calm. Lay them on their back. Elevate their feet. Cover them with a blanket. Call 911 or get emergency medical assistance.

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Get a good start with container gardening

BY VIJAI PANDIAN, UW-EXTENSION

Traditional gardens require ample space, appropriate sunlight and an ongoing time commitment, but container gardening offers an alternative way to grow fresh fruits and vegetables with more limited resources.

Growing plants in containers offers multiple advantages – it's easy to accommodate them in any suitable spot like a window sill, balcony, deck or doorstep. Soil in containers warms up quickly, giving a head start in raising vegetables in early spring. In case of frost, containers can be housed in a temporary protected spot or protected with a blanket or floating row cover. Loose, premixed and well-drained container soil provides a clean start for plant growth by avoiding issues like compaction, soil borne diseases, overwintering insects and weeds encountered in traditional garden soils.

Overall, container gardening is simple, versatile, almost easy to maintain and accessible for all ages and abilities, but it also has some limitations. Plants in containers need frequent watering especially during the hot, dry summer season, and containers that hold five gallons or more are heavy and may not be easily portable.

Due to size and volume restrictions, not all standard varieties of garden plants are suitable to grow in containers. For successful container gardening, it is important to choose the right type of containers, plant varieties, soil mix, and water and fertilizer schedule.

Selecting the right containers: Choosing the right container to accommodate a mature plant's shoot and root needs provides stability for upright growth. Plastic buckets, broken wheelbarrows, wooden barrels, plastic trash bags and trash containers can be recycled for container gardening use. Porous materials like terra cotta and ceramic clay pots or hypertufa planters need a little more attention to watering, as they tend to dry out more quickly than plastic containers.

White, tan or other light colored containers absorb less heat than dark ones, helping avoid root stress, and sufficient drainage holes at the bottom of their sides are critical to draining excess water. Placing containers on a slightly elevated base like bricks or paving stones will further ease the free flow of the excess water.

Containers should also have the right depth and volume to support the entire plant growth. For smaller plants like leaf lettuce, onion sets, peas, radishes, garlic, cilantro, and spinach,



Just one of the greenhouses at Northwoods Orchard and Farm Market in rural Mauston.

an at least a 2-gallon container that is 4-6 inches deep is required. Larger plants like tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, eggplant, cucumbers and beans will need at least a 5-gallon container with a depth of 8-12 inches.

Selecting the right varieties: Dwarf and compact plant varieties are well-suited for a container and look attractive. The following list of vegetable varieties suitable for container gardening is compiled from selected seed catalogs and University of Illinois Extension publications:

Tomatoes: Jetstar, Celebrity, Super Bush, Pixie, Patio Paste, Cherry Punch, Power Pops, Cherries Jubilee, Patio Princess, Bush Early Girl, Bush Big Boy, Sweetheart of the Patio, Maglia Rosa, Baby Boomer, Tumbler, Cherry Falls, Husky Red, Lizzano, Peardrops, Pony Express, Primo Red, Terenzo, Tumbling Tom Red, Tumbling Tom Yellow, Bush Steak, Baby Boomer

Eggplants: Patio Baby, Hansel, Gretel, Ivory, Ophelia, Pin-stripe, Dusky, Early Midnight,

Bean: Mascotte, Topcrop, Tendercrop, Derby, Eureka, Porch Pick

Cucumber: Patio Snacker, Salad Bush, Space Master, Champion, Iznik,

Pepper: Cajun Belle, Cayennetta, Mariachi, New Ace, Orange Blaze, Cute Stuff Red, Lady Bell, Gypsy, Crispy, Red Chili, Cherry Stuffer, Tangerine Dream, Sweet Golden Baby BelleRadish: French Breakfast, Red Satin, Champion, Comet, Sparkler, White Icicle, Early Scarlet Globe, Rido Red, D'Avignon

Carrot: Paris Market, Little Finger, Danver's Half Long, Nantes Half Long, Yaya

Peas: Peas in a Pot

Beets: Ruby Queen, Detroit Dark Red Med Top, Burpee's Golden, Chioggia

Okra: Jambalaya, Carmine Splendor, Clemson Spineless
Swiss Chard: Bright Lights, Peppermint, Fordhook Giant, Lucullus

Squash: Supersett, Multipik, Golden Zebra

In addition, many herbs and salad greens are perfectly suitable for containers

Soil mix, watering, and fertilization: Soilless mixes that contain peat and perlite are the best option for a medium. Morning is the best time to water container gardens. Plants should be watered thoroughly at the base if the top inch of container media seems dry. Organic mulch will help conserve soil moisture in the media, and containers should be moved to a protected area during strong winds. Depending on the type of vegetables, the fertilization schedule varies by 2 to 8 week intervals during the growing season.

Vijai Pandian is a horticultural agent and educator for the University of Wisconsin-Extension Brown County.



Plants can be grown in many different types of containers.

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