

Summer Home & Garden



Perk Up for Pollinators

Bees and other pollinators — bats, butterflies, beetles, wasps and birds, among others — play a critical role in nature and in our food production system.

According to the USDA, more than 100 different crops worth \$18 billion rely on pollinators. But some pollinator populations are in rapid decline.

COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER

The Western honey bee, in particular, is vulnerable to colony's collapse disorder, a condition that causes worker bees to disappear, leaving behind only the queen and some nursemaid bees to care for babies. The USDA says the disorder is likely the cause of stressors in the environment, such as pests, disease, pollutants, nutritional deficits and cloak of habitat.

Because the problem was recognized, honey bee populations are recovering. There's still work to do, however, in bringing bee and other pollinator populations back.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

One thing everyone can do is to choose landscaping and gardening projects that include native species that flower at different times of year to provide a steady food



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source for pollinator populations. Bees and other pollinators prefer clumps of flowers in different colors and shapes. If you live in an area that hosts a monarch migration, plant milkweed in your yard to provide food for caterpillars.

In addition to good groceries, you can also provide nesting sites. Butterflies like the monarch prefer specific plants for hosting their larvae, like the milkweed, while hum-

mingbirds like trees and shrubs. Bees like to build nests in the ground on in wood or dry plant stems. Provide nesting sites for bees by leaving ground nesting sites that are well-drained and face south so they get the most sun. Dead or hollow stumps and plant stems also make great bee habitat, or you can buy artificial nesting sites that are attractive additions to your garden.

BEE BETTER PROGRAM

Bee Better Certification is a program funded through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. It certifies the use of pollinator-friendly conservation practices on farms. Manufacturers that qualify can use the Bee Better certification logo on product packaging, giving consumers an option to support farms that support bees.



Building a Water Feature

Adding a water feature to your yard or patio adds a cooling, relaxing element to your environment.

It can serve as a focal point of your outdoor living space and also as a pleasant scene setter for outdoor parties or even just a relaxing evening with a book. Here's how to build your own water feature with steps from the DIY Network.

PICK A SPOT

Choose a flat spot in your yard and remove any existing plants, rocks and debris. Dig out the shape of your new pond. For a natural shape, make your pond with rounded edges that aren't perfectly symmetrical.

SAND IT AND LAYER IT

Once you've got the pool dug, add a layer of fill sand that's about an inch or two thick. This will act as a cushion for your pond liner and keep it from tearing on rocks or other debris in the soil. Build up the sand around the edges to be a little bit higher and taper it off around the sides.

Next, lay down the pond liner to keep the pond clean. Choose a tick liner that's unlikely to tear but still flexible enough to mold to the shape of your pond. Don't be afraid to use more than one



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piece so it doesn't leak. Your liner should completely cover the pond with excess liner on all sides, up and over the border you made with sand. Put rocks down to pin the liner in place and then cut it to size.

ROCK IT

Wash off your rocks with a

hose before placing them in and around your pond.

The pond liner should be covered with small to medium-sized stones, with larger rocks around the edges for contrast.

Roll them into place if you can and don't be afraid to flip them around to find the best

look for your space.

PUT DOWN ROOTS

Plants around the edges of your pond will soften the look of the stone and bring in some color. Choose native plants that are friendly to pollinators and use a range of colors and sizes. Install drip irrigation to

keep your plants healthy and watered.

FINISH IT UP

Add a store-bought fountain and water. Fill the pond up with water per your pump's instructions and keep an eye on it to make sure it doesn't empty out in hotter months.

Plants to Repel Mosquitoes

While you should welcome some insects to your gardens — remember those pollinators? — 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



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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.

Power Washing Basics

Summer weather means spending more time outside. And while you're out there, you may notice that the winter months took a harsh toll on your exterior surfaces.

Fortunately, power washing can get most of your surfaces sparking again. Keep reading for more tips on how to choose a power washer and use it safely.

TYPES OF PRESSURE WASHERS

Pressure washers take low-pressure water from your garden hose and push it out through a nozzle at high pressure. Pressure washers can be powered by electricity or gas. Electric pressure washers usually cost less and run quieter than gas-powered models, but the trade off is that they're less portable (you'll need to have power wherever you use it) and usually less powerful than gas-powered washers.

Gas pressure washers are good for larger jobs such as decks, patios, sidewalks and siding. You can get gas washers with an electric start to make it easier to start up. With gas washers, you'll need to be sure to follow manufacturer's instructions for mixing the oil and gas for the machine. You may even have to vary fuel types depending on your climate.



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NOZZLES

A pressure washer will usually come with a variety of nozzles to do a variety of jobs. These may include:

0 degree nozzles: the most powerful, concentrated nozzle setting.

15 degree nozzles: used for heavy-duty cleaning.

25 degree nozzles: used for

general cleaning.

40 degree nozzles: Used for vehicles, patio furniture, boats and easily damaged surfaces.

65 degrees: A low-pressure nozzle used to apply soap and other cleaning agents.

Always read the instruction manual that comes with your pressure washer and make

sure you know how to how to quickly turn it off and release the pressure. For safety's sake, stand on a stable surface while you're pressure washing.

Wear eye and ear protection and never leave a spray gun unattended. Never point the spray gun at people, animals or plants and keep the

spray away from electricity.

MAINTENANCE

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper maintenance of your machine. In general, you may need to regularly maintain the washer's pump and, for gas motors, you'll also need to tend to the air filter, oil and spark plug.



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Spark a Conversation

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 and 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.

Keeping your Cool

Hotter weather means running your air conditioner more to keep you and your family cool inside the house. For many families, that means more of an expense when it comes to the utility bills.

There are things you can do to help minimize the expense and keep your home and your family as cool as can be.

HVAC MAINTENANCE

Here's a checklist for keeping your air conditioner running in tip-top condition. Make sure that the visible parts of your system are clean and free of debris. Your components should have at least two feet of clear space around them. Regularly inspect your refrigerant lines for leaks. There are two lines, typically copper, that connect your outdoor air conditioner to the indoor evaporator coil.

You should also regularly replace the system's filter with a high-quality filter and continue to do so every 90 days. If your system as a humidifier filter, you could replace it at the beginning of the heating system.

Another annual task to complete is to lubricate the HVAC motor and replace the fan belt, if needed. Clean your condensation drain line with



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bleach to keep it free of algae and other debris, which will allow your system to run more efficiently.

HIRING AN HVAC TECHNICIAN

Some local HVAC companies will offer maintenance plans to help homeowners

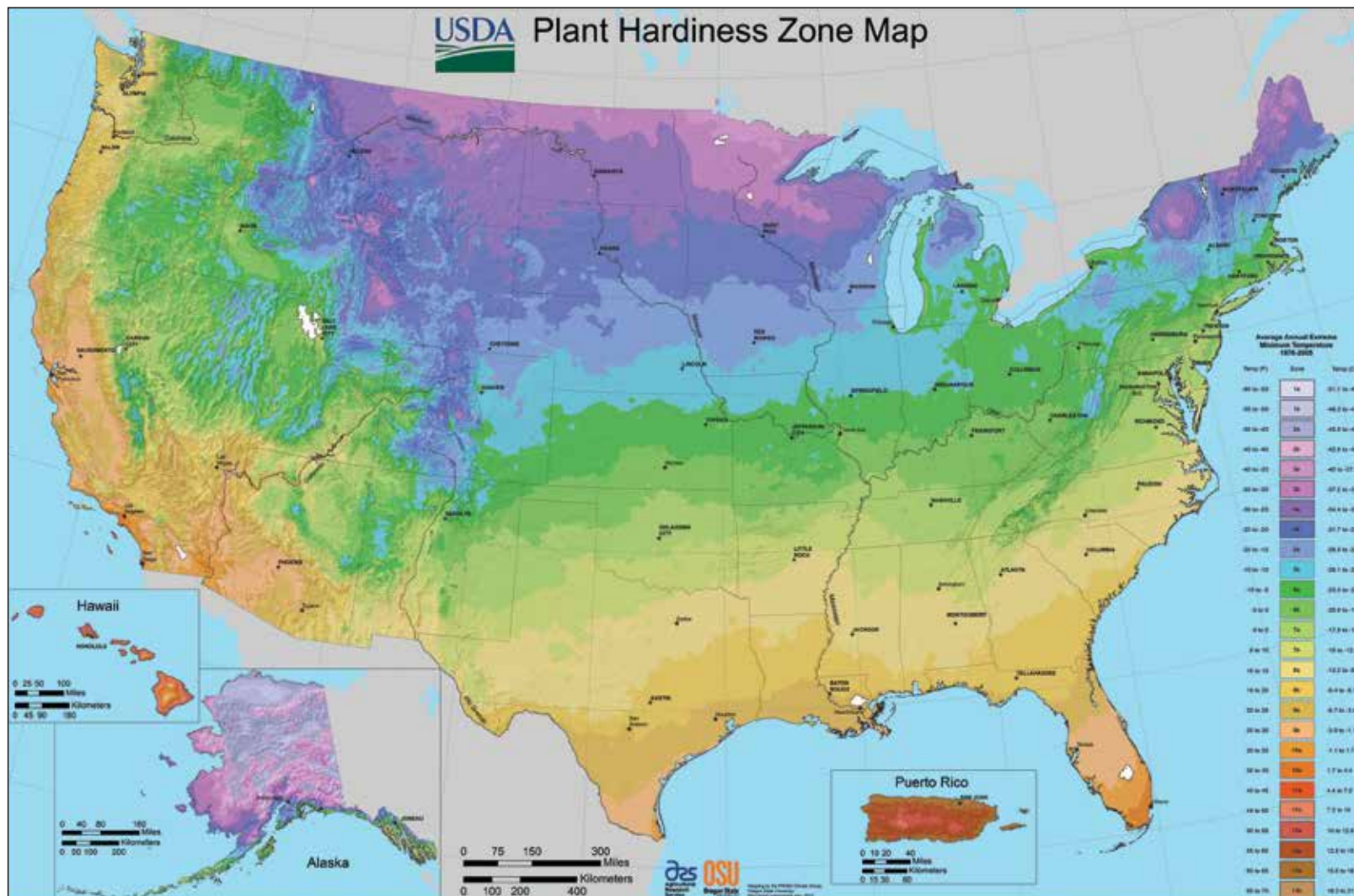
take care of these regular tasks on their own, including replacing filters. These maintenance plans also usually come with discounts on service and repair. For older HVAC systems, consider having a qualified technician come and check it at least twice a year.

CALL FOR HELP

Depending on your climate and other factors, your HVAC should last you anywhere from 10-20 years. You should count on it needing not only routine maintenance during that time, but also the occasional repair. Here are some signs that your unit needs immediate atten-

tion from a pro.

- The HVAC unit is blowing warm air in the summer.
- The system turns itself off and on intermittently.
- There are pockets of warm and cool air throughout your home.
- Your energy bills go up unexpectedly.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Know your Planting Zones

Let's say your thumb isn't exactly green. Let's say it is, in fact, more gray or black than anything. That's OK. You, too, can still have a gorgeous garden by following the USDA's planting zones.

WHAT ARE PLANTING ZONES?

The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map helps gardeners determine which plants are more likely to thrive in a given area. It's based on the average annual minimum temperatures, divided into 10-degree zones. You can type your ZIP code into the USDA website and find exactly what zone you are.

The latest USDA map was created

in 2012 and represents a change from the previous 1990 version.

The newer version of the map is generally one five-degree half-zone warmer than previous versions throughout the United States. Partially, the USDA says, this change comes from more thorough and sophisticated climate data that improved the accuracy and detail of the map.

FACTORS IN THE ZONES

Though the map is categorized by minimum temperature zones, the USDA also took into consideration other factors. These include light, soil moisture, duration of cold weather and humidity. Also bear in mind that the map covers the entire country and while accuracy is better, it still isn't precise for any given area. The map is based on averages, not the lowest or highest temperatures ever, and your more delicate plants may still need to be protected in extreme weather.

Likewise, if a new version of the map comes out and you switch zones, that doesn't mean you need to rip out all your existing plants. What's doing

well in your yard will likely to continue to do well, as specific plants may develop hardiness to different conditions over time.

GET EXPERIENCE

The best thing you can do to keep your plants alive, in addition to consulting the map, is to get more gardening experience.

Start by asking the experts at your local nursery what plants would do best in your area. Take note of the light exposure in your garden, any specific pests you have to battle, and be honest about your gardening experience and the amount of effort you're willing to put in.