

Flora & Fauna

Growing a Beautiful Lawn

For many homeowners across the country, maintaining a beautiful lawn is an important responsibility. After all, we need our lawn to perform many tasks for us. It must be a playground for children, an exercise area for pets, a place to play games or have a family picnic, and a decorative accent for the home.

With all that in mind, it makes sense to give serious consideration to the type of grass seed you will plant in your yard. There are many types of grass seeds, some suitable for specific climates only. With some basic knowledge and investigation into what grass seeds are most successful in your area, you can select the best-suited grass variety and plant it by seeding, sodding, sprigging, or plugging.

First, ask yourself how you intend to use your lawn. Most front lawns are only ornamental. They are meant to look attractive, add curb appeal to a home, and are not subject to heavy foot traffic. The backyard is usually where the family gathers for leisure activities. Specific areas that are designated "play areas" for children tend to receive the most wear and tear. Each area will require a different type of grass seed.

Second, determine your growing zone. If you live in the northern part of the country, select a grass seed that grows well in the cooler climate. If you live in the southern part, you'll need a seed that thrives in the warmer temperatures. And if you live somewhere in the middle, also known as the transition area, a combination of the two will ensure your lawn stays beautiful and thriving throughout the year.

Third, ask yourself how much time you want to spend maintaining your lawn, not just in the short term, but years down the road. Some grass varieties require frequent mowing, watering, and even annual replanting, while others need far less maintenance.

Common Grass Varieties

Bluegrass is a cool season lawn grass and is one of the most popular turfgrasses in North America. It requires medium amounts of lawn care and is both decorative and durable. It is seen most commonly in the transitional and cooler areas of the country.

Buffalo grass is the only true indigenous, warm season turf grass grown in the mid-southern United States. Buffalo grass is so named because it was a primary food source of the American buffalo stretching across the Great Plains into most of Texas. It stands up well to drought.

Fescue is a cool season grass that grows throughout the transition area and far north into Canada. Fescue, both the tall, bunching type and fine, shorter variety, is easily seeded, tolerates shade and drought, and retains its green color all year.

Ryegrasses (both annual and perennial) can be grown in the northern states. In many areas of the country, largely because this grass is so versatile, it is incorporated in seeding mixtures with other grasses. Perennial is a permanent lawn choice in more cooler climate areas, and annual is seeded yearly and lives for one season.

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1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Phone: 616-451-0787
www.guaranteesystem.com

Cleaning Corner

The Power of Your Freezer!

- Oops! Did you seal an envelope, but then realize you forgot to include something? Don't rip it open; put it in the freezer for a few hours. Then carefully slide a knife under the flap. You can even reseal the envelope later!
- To remove old wax from a glass candleholder, put it in the freezer for a couple hours. Then take the candleholder out and hold it upside down. The wax will fall out.
- Candles will last a lot longer if placed in the freezer for three hours before burning.
- Don't dump out leftover wine. Freeze it into ice cubes for future use in casseroles and sauces.
- Want to de-mite your child's favorite stuffed toys? Put them in a plastic bag and then in the freezer for a few hours. The cold will kill any dust mites and eggs.

March

- 1872** Yellowstone becomes the world's first national park
- 1887** Anne Sullivan begins teaching 6-year-old blind-deaf Helen Keller
- 1917** Jeannette Rankin (Rep-R-Montana) becomes the first female member of Congress
- 1931** "Star Spangled Banner" officially becomes the national anthem of the United States of America
- 1962** The first K-mart opens for business
- 1968** Singers Johnny Cash (36) and June Carter (38) wed
- 1977** Bank of America adopts the name VISA for their credit cards
- 1977** Future Tonight Show host Jay Leno debuts with host Johnny Carson

Health Tips: Health Tips: Etiquette at the Gym

For most people, observing proper etiquette at the gym comes naturally. Others, however, just don't seem to get it. To make sure you're not one of those annoying people that aggravates other gym-goers, here is some basic health-club etiquette:

Etiquette Rule 1: Don't chat on the cell phone while working out.

This is the number one complaint by gym goers. It's rude to talk on the phone at full volume while others are working out around you. It's even worse when someone's having a long conversation while sitting on a machine and not using it. If you must carry a phone, keep it on vibrate. And if you have to take a call, step away from the workout area so you won't disturb others. Otherwise, just leave the phone in your car and focus on working up a sweat!

Etiquette Rule 2: Don't arrive stinky.

Your sweat might smell at times, but if you arrive somewhat clean, you'll keep your workout aroma to a minimum. Make sure to apply deodorant beforehand, and don't wear clothes that have simmered in your gym bag or car since your last workout. Also, remember you're at a health club, not a cocktail party, so skip the perfume and cologne.

Etiquette Rule 3: Dress appropriately.

Clothing is designed to keep you cool and to wick away sweat, not to expose your assets (even if you *have* been working hard to attain them). There's nothing wrong with dressing in a way that gives you confidence and makes you feel good about yourself, but there's no need to put on a show. Men should wear shirts that cover both chest and stomach (no half-shirts); women should avoid skimpy shorts and tops not designed for stretching and bending.

Etiquette Rule 4: Wipe off the machines when you're finished.

The fact is, touching other people's excretions is gross. So get a paper towel and wipe down that bench, cardio machine, stretching mat, dumbbell, or whatever you've just used. Most clubs provide alcohol wipes or spray and paper towels near workout areas. If they don't, insist that they do, or bring your own wipes.

Etiquette Rule 5: Don't be a lunkhead – stop spitting, grunting, and dropping weights.

Newsflash guys –grunting, spiting, and dropping the weights doesn't make your workout better, and it certainly doesn't make you more attractive to that cute girl on the treadmill. So relax, breathe deep, and keep the drama to a minimum.

Etiquette Rule 6: If you have a cold, stay out of the gym!

Even though exercise probably won't worsen your symptoms, you can easily spread your germs to others. We're all in an enclosed space, breathing hard, and touching the same equipment after all. So, please, avoid the club when you're infectious.

By observing these simple guidelines and by being aware of the sensitivities of your fellow gym-goers, you can make the health-club experience more pleasant for everyone!

Kid Corner: The Benefits of Family Time

America is known as the land of opportunity. Success is not inherited, however, it's earned through hard work. That may be why many parents are keeping their children's days jam packed with activities designed to help them "achieve" and "succeed." But what have these overloaded schedules really helped us gain? And what have we lost in exchange?

In the 2007 UNICEF study, "Child Well-Being in Rich Countries," the United States ranked second to last. Not only are American childhood obesity rates triple that of other countries, but only 65 percent of American children reported sharing a family dinner compared to 90 percent in Italy, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and Belgium. Only 47 percent of American children reported eating a regular breakfast, too.

The simple fact is that most American families are sacrificing family time for other activities that are perceived to make one more successful. Parents are working longer hours in hopes of gaining a raise or a promotion; children are participating in more extracurricular activities to gain popularity or an edge on a college application. The result? No one has time anymore to sit down and share a meal.

The ramifications of today's hectic lifestyle lead to more than just a breakdown of family cohesiveness. There are serious negative physical consequences, too. Loss of sleep, poor eating habits, and less resistance to common colds and infections are just a few. Simply put, lack of family time is literally making you - and your family - sick.

If you can't remember the last time your family shared a meal together (eating in the car on the way to a soccer game doesn't count), then it's time you instituted a change in your routine. Here are a few suggestions on how you can put your family first:

1. **Set aside specific family time.** Regular family dinners are a good start. Strive for 4-5 times a week. If that's too much to start, then go with just once a week and increase the frequency from there. You can also institute a family game night and enjoy some non-video games like *Life*[®], *Sorry*[®], *Uno*[®], *Monopoly*[®], or other classic board game.
2. **Weigh the pros and cons.** With every request for your time, seriously consider whether the satisfaction of the event will outweigh the pressure it will put on your schedule and the family time you will give up.
3. **It's OK to say "No."** Give yourself permission to decline overtime requests and invitations to events you're really not interested in – and especially when your kids want to sign up for activities that will overwhelm their schedule.
4. **Turn off the TV.** Make it a new house rule that the television must be turned off an hour before bedtime. It's a quick and easy way to incorporate family time into each day, or at the very least allow your kids to settle more completely by quietly reading a book before sleeping.
5. **Take all your vacation days.** It's a common fact now that most American's don't take all their allotted vacation days. Take the time to relax (without bringing work with you). When you're happy and healthy, your family reaps the benefits, too!

This recipe is incredibly simple and incredibly delicious. It's sure to become a regular side dish at your dinner or breakfast table.

Ingredients:

- 1 can of refrigerator biscuits (such as plain flaky biscuits from Pillsbury)
- 1/4 cup of butter or margarine
- *1 tablespoon of dried herbs (thyme, oregano or marjoram)
- *1 teaspoon of garlic powder (or 2 garlic cloves finely chopped)

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly spray the inside of an oven-safe casserole dish with cooking spray.
2. Cut each biscuit into four pieces. Kitchen shears work best for this step.
3. Melt the butter in a small saucepan. Stir in the garlic and herbs. Remove from heat.
4. Roll each biscuit piece in the butter mixture and place in the dish with sides touching. You can make two layers of biscuit pieces in the dish if necessary.
5. Put in the oven and bake for 30-40 minutes.

*For a sweet breakfast treat, substitute 1/4 cup of brown sugar mixed with 1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon for the herbs and garlic. Continue with same instructions.

Women's History Month

The purpose of Women's History Month is to increase consciousness and knowledge of women's history: to take one month of the year to remember the contributions of notable and ordinary women, in hopes that the day will soon come when it's impossible to teach or learn history without remembering these contributions.

So this month, take some time to learn about the contributions of notable women like Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I of England, Abigail Adams, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Benazir Bhutto and many, many more.

Cleaning Out Your Closet

Most of us have a closet or two in our home that causes us to cringe when open the door, or even brace for avalanche of clutter that always tumbles out. Instead of ignoring the problem, take a couple hours on a lazy Saturday afternoon and tackle it head on. You'll feel great once you've accomplished this task, especially when you discover a few hidden treasures that had long been forgotten.

First, gather three large cardboard boxes, a permanent marker, plenty of clothes hangers and a few storage bins of various sizes with lids.

Using the markers, label one cardboard box "Keep," for items that will remain in your home. Label the next box "Donate," for items that you can give to charity (or put out at a garage sale). Finally, label the last box "Trash," and use it for all the items that are broken or in too poor a condition to give away. Place these boxes in a "clean room." This is the room where you'll bring all the contents of your closet for sorting.

Next, roll up your sleeves and start pulling everything off the shelves and bring it to your clean room. Evaluate each item and figure out which box you're going to put it in. If you have not used an item for 12 months, let it go. That dress that never quite fit? Charity. Your old high school yearbook? Keep. Your collection of single socks without their mates? Trash.

Once your closet is empty, have another look at the items in your "Keep" box. Any items that won't be returned to that closet should be put away first (hopefully not tucked away in another messy closet somewhere else!)

Then evaluate the remaining items to determine how best to organize them in your closet. Put all the clothes on hangers and return them to the closet. Keep all the shirts together, the pants together, and long coats or dresses together. This will give you a defined space along the closet floor for heavy, bulky items that won't fit easily on a shelf.

Next, put your knick-knacks in storage bins, preferably clear ones so you can easily see what's inside. If you use solid colored bins, be sure to clearly label the outside. For example, put all your candles in one bin and your spare tablecloths in another.

You can find all sorts of closet organizing systems and tools at your local Target or Wal-Mart store. Or, if it's in your budget, you can have a professional closet organizing system installed. They can range anywhere from a few hundred dollars to thousands of dollars depending on the size of you closet and the type of organization needed.

Carpet Talk: Removing Pet Urine

Part of being a pet owner is dealing with occasional accidents. Sometimes Fido can't wait till you get home from work, or Fluffy gets mad after a trip to the vet. Pet urine can be tricky to remove, especially if it's been left untreated for a long time. However, with a few simple tricks and some fast response, you can successfully preserve your carpet.

Step 1: If the area is still damp, start by blotting with a plain white paper towel (no colors).

Step 2: Next, mix a cleaning solution of a half-teaspoon of liquid detergent (no bleach) and one cup of warm water. Apply the solution to the area, blot with a white towel, then rinse with warm water.

Step 3: Keep repeating step 2 until the discoloration is removed.

Step 4: Mix one cup white vinegar with two cups water. Apply and blot up with a towel. Rinse with water.

Step 5: Get the carpet as dry as possible. Blot as much moisture up with towels as you can and turn a fan on over the spot to get it dry.

These steps work well on fresh urine stains. However, if the stain has been there for some time (or if it is a spot that has been repeatedly marked), the urine may have saturated down through the carpet and padding. If this is the case, it's time to call in the experts. Your carpet care professional has an arsenal of specialized products to tackle your worse pet odor problems. So don't hesitate to call!



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1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

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Phone: 616-451-0787

Fax: 616-451-8303

www.guaranteesystem.com

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