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How To Tend To An Indoor Herb Garden

Fresh herbs and recently picked ingredients can add flavor to any meal. A home chef can even improve the flavor of store-bought or prepared foods with an herb garnish that can transform otherwise bland dishes into something you'll want to eat again and again. Harvesting fresh herbs is easy for homeowners who have gardens right in their backyards. However, everyone does not have a backyard, and even those that do might find their gardens threatened by changing seasons or unwanted critters. When gardens are moved indoors, the bounty of fresh ingredients continues no matter the date on the calendar. Herb gardens are perhaps some of the easiest gardens to cultivate indoors because they don't require large pots or much space. The plants themselves are relatively compact, and it only takes a pinch of herbs to give a meal some extra flavor. When growing herbs indoors, your indoor growing area must have adequate light to simulate the longer days of summer; otherwise, the plants may go dormant. It's ideal to have a southern exposure on the herbs, with at least eight hours of sunlight per day. If you do not live in a particularly sunny locale, consider supplementing the plants with grow lights, which will provide the full spectrum of light the plants need to thrive. Indoor air can become too dry for herbs, so you will need to compensate by providing humidity. While there may be added humidity in a kitchen greenhouse window, it still may not be enough to keep the plants healthy. Think about misting the plants daily to create some extra humidity, or place herb pots on top of a water-filled tray with pebbles so the evaporating water will add moisture without making the roots soggy. Insects are another threat to indoor gardens because there is no cold weather to inhibit the hatching of insect eggs. Soil from outdoors may be more susceptible to insects that are already living in the dirt. Instead of soil from outside, use packaged soil or a nonsoil alternative that will hold moisture without the added risk of bugs. If small insects appear, use a mist of soapy water to kill the bugs without harming the plants or making the herbs unfit for eating. Group herbs together according to their watering needs to make maintenance that much easier. New sprouts generally need more water than established plants. Prune the herbs as needed for recipes. If the herbs experience



a growth spurt, trim some of the plants and freeze the herbs for later use. Many indoor herb gardeners begin by growing parsley, chives, oregano, and basil, but you can experiment with just about any herb. A sunny location is necessary when cultivating an indoor herbs garden.

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Create A Budget-Friendly Home Landscape

Homeowners understandably envy the award-worthy photo spreads in lawn and garden magazines, wanting to emulate those same looks on their own properties. Scores of designers and landscape architects are involved in the process of creating those amazing lush lawns and perfectly placed plantings. Although not every homeowner has the budget to create lavish landscape designs, it's still possible for homeowners to create lawns they can be proud of.

- Establish your budget. The first step in any project is to determine how much money you can devote to the job. Once you have established the budget, all other factors can be built around it.
- Find an inspiration piece. Great landscapes are inspired by many things, whether it's a memorable piece of art or a landscape layout in a lawn and gardening magazine. Use photos of other gardens or neighbors' yards as inspiration and build off of them. As long as the theme is cohesive, it will look pleasing to the eye.

- Consider the space and how you want to use it. Understanding the space will help you better allocate your budget. If your yard is more of a retreat, look for ways to create privacy and a vacation feel. If you have kids and entertaining friends is a main priority, focus on recreational aspects, such as a pool, playset and some durable plants. Understanding how to allocate your budget will help you to avoid spending money frivolously.
- Think about reclaimed or repurposed materials. Brand new items can quickly eat up a budget. However, repurposing salvaged or inexpensive items can stretch that budget while adding some unique flair to a landscape. See if you can find an outdoor patio set that someone is giving away or selling for a lower price. All it takes is a coat of paint and some new cushions to make it look like new. Discarded bricks or stones can be worked into a patio space or used to create raised garden beds. Purchase inexpensive flower pots and

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then paint them to make them look like stone or another desired material.

- Buy native plants. Native plants, shrubs, trees, and flowers will fare better than non-native, exotic plants. That means you'll have to spend less time and money nurturing them into health, and less money having to replace plants that cannot withstand your climate.
- Consider perennial plants. Perennials may cost more at the outset, but the savings will be realized in the years to come.
- Hire a professional. It may seem counterintuitive to spend

money on a landscaping professional when you've established a strict budget, but that's one way to save money. Landscape artists or garden designers have the experience to guide you in the right direction and help you avoid potentially costly mistakes.

- Use gravel in spots where plants don't thrive. Gravel is an inexpensive landscaping material that can fill in voids where plants or ground cover simply do not flourish. Those working on limited budgets may be happy to learn gravel is typically less expensive than concrete or pavers.
- Ask friends or family for clippings. Don't be shy about admiring the plantings of those you know. Flatter their good taste and ask if you can have some clippings to propagate yourself. These clippings can



turn into lush plants in no time, with no additional spending required. With some frugal spending, planning and budgeting, any-

one can create a beautiful landscape.

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Patio Cleanup For Seasonal Entertaining

Outdoor entertaining is a primary component of the warm-weather season. Individuals flock to their backyard patios and decks to barbecue or simply soak up a little sun. Over the course of the fall and winter your patio may have experienced some wear and tear. Or if the patio is several years old, it may need some maintenance to improve its appearance for the new season. Maintenance often depends on the material used. Before starting, figure out what your patio needs and stock up on the supplies. Many patios are poured concrete, and a simple pressure-washing could be all that's needed to revive the look. Pressure washers can be rented or purchased. If there are cracks or chips in the patio, some minor patchwork may be able to fix unsightly problems. There are fast-dry patching kits. If the patio is especially damaged, it may be in your best interest to simply replace the patio or cover it with a different material, like wood decking. Some patios are constructed from paving stones. Pavers are usually installed atop a thin layer of sand and then more sand is brushed into the seams between the pavers to set them in place. Over time, the sand may become dislodged causing the pavers to wobble or even grow uneven. Taking the time to brush new sand over a paver patio can keep the stones stable. Because pavers are not a solid surface, weeds can grow in between the stones. Hand weeding and the application of a weed-killing product can help with keeping weeds at bay and from being unsightly. This year, maybe it's not about refreshing the patio but installing one instead. Although many homeowners choose to make

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be noticeable on individual leaves that feature tan or light brown lesions, and the Center for Turfgrass Science notes that these lesions will be surrounded by dark brown borders.

DOLLAR SPOT: The American Phytopathological Society notes that dollar spot refers to a disease of the leaves of turfgrass. Grasses suffering from dollar spot will have white to straw-colored lesions that progress downward from the leaf tip or laterally across leaf blades. Leaf blades affected by dollar spot may have several small lesions or one large lesion, and in some instances, the entire leaf blade may be affected. Turfgrass affected by dollar spot may be susceptible to weed invasions.

SUMMER PATCH is most common in warm climates and is characterized by yellow to straw-colored patches that can be several inches or several feet in diameter. According to Scotts Lawnservice, summer patch is often linked to shallow root systems that result from poor soil conditions. Large swaths of grass suffering from summer patch can be an eyesore, appearing as though the grass has burned under the summer sun.

Lawns, gardens, trees and shrubs are susceptible to the elements. Identifying lawn diseases quickly can help homeowners find solutions before the problems escalate.

have a host of ideas for your property that you would never think of. Homeowners with little to no lawn and garden experience may not realize all the things they can do with their properties, and those who go it alone may end up with unappealing landscapes that do not attract buyers' attention when the home hits the market. Professionals typically have a wealth of ideas and, perhaps more importantly, they understand which ideas will and won't work on a given property.

- Professionals can remove some of the stress of managing landscaping projects. Homeowners know that home improvement projects, whether they are addressing home interiors or exteriors, can be stressful. Professional landscapers typically have a network of professionals, including contractors, who they have worked with in the past. Such connections can ensure more complex projects that require both landscapers and construction contractors go as smoothly as possible. In addition, homeowners who receive contractor recommendations from their experienced landscapers tend to rest easier knowing the people working on their properties have already developed a rapport and established a successful track record working together. Professional landscapers can be just what homeowners need to turn their properties into appealing oases no buyer can resist.



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How To Approach Buying A Pool Or Spa

Many homeowners feel pools or spas are must-have features as they attempt to turn their

homes in their own personal oases. The decision to get a pool or a hot tub is not one to



take lightly. Significant purchases, pools and/or spas can affect the value of a home and also require various safety modifications. Taking a thoughtful approach when considering adding pools and/or spas to their homes can help homeowners rest easy knowing they made the right decision.

- Do your research first. When making any decision, it's best to be well-informed. Read reviews on products and find out the base prices of certain pool models so you'll have a system of comparison. Choose the type and size of pool you want. Other factors, such as the material used in the pool (i.e., concrete, metal, fiberglass, or vinyl) and filtration methods, also can affect the price, so consider each of these factors carefully before making your decision.
- Determine why you want a pool or spa. The type of pool or spa you ultimately choose should depend on how you plan

to use the pool. If you want a pool mainly for family entertainment, then you may want to add mood lighting or special landscaping features. If you simply want something in which you can cool off, a basic model may be most practical. If your spa is intended for therapeutic purposes, look for ones with multi-positional water jets or other specialized features. Don't fall into the trap that a large pool with a deep diving area is best. Young children and many adults do not frequently use the deep end, and you may end up with wasted pool space.

- Find a good time to buy. Fall and winter are some of the best times to get deals on pool and spa equipment because it's no longer prime swimming season. However, there are deals to be had come early spring as well. Retailers may deeply discount last year's models to make room for new inventory. You always can negotiate if the price is just a bit beyond your

reach. Retailers may be motivated to make sales in the off-season, so try to use that motivation to your advantage.

- Recognize there will be extra costs. Some retailers sell pools and spas but do not arrange for installation. Realize that an inground pool will require excavation, and your yard may need to be regraded to allow for rain run-off. Electricians and landscapers are some additional costs to factor in. Make sure you understand the bigger picture and account for the total cost of modifying the yard.
- Inquire about insurance. Speak with the pool installer about any liability and compensation insurance they may carry

to protect you in the event of an accident during the installation of the pool. Reputable builders should be fully insured.

- Learn about zoning laws and other ordinances. Rules regarding pool placement and size will vary depending on local laws. Always consult with the town's municipal office and get the proper permits. Otherwise, you may face fines and be forced to spend more to fix problems that need to be addressed.

Pools can be entertaining additions to a home. When considering the addition of a pool to their properties, homeowners should take their time and make sure it's the right decision for them.

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Summer heat can be harmful in various ways. People and pets can quickly succumb to the summer sun, which can cause sunburn, heat exhaustion and heat stroke when people and their animals spend too much time outdoors without adequate protection. Landscapes are also vulnerable to summer heat, which can quickly spoil the most lush lawns and robust gardens. Effective watering can help lawns and gardens withstand summer heat, but improper watering can deprive landscapes of the water they need to survive. Home-owners concerned about their lawns and gardens surviving the summer

can take the following approach to conserve water, save money and maintain their landscapes.

- Start early. Homeowners may feel that the hottest times of the day are when lawns and gardens will be most in need of water, so that's the best time to set sprinklers or grab the hose and get to work. But in many areas, watering between the hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., when summer temperatures tend to peak, can be both wasteful and ineffective. That's because watering between those hours will cause much of the water to quickly evaporate, robbing lawns and gardens of the water they need to withstand the heat. Homeowners
- Place sprinklers correctly. If you do not have an inground irrigation system and don't intend to install one, you will likely use lawn sprinklers to water the lawn. When placing these sprinklers, turn them on and then document their trajectory before moving on to the next area. You want to make sure the water from the sprinklers is not landing on sidewalks, patios or streets, especially if your community typically institutes drought restrictions that limit how much you can water. In such instances, you'll need to make the best use of the water you're allowed to use, so make sure none of it is watering the driveway.
- Let well-fed lawns go dormant during drought. Lengthy droughts tend to be accompanied by water restrictions, and such restrictions can frustrate homeowners who don't want to see all of the hard work they've put in to this point go to waste. But grass that has thus far been well cared for can withstand drought and still recover when rains once again fall and temperatures cool come autumn. If you plan to let the lawn go dormant, keep kids, pets and visitors off the grass, as dormant lawns are highly susceptible to damage. Summer is an enjoyable time of year, but lawn and garden enthusiasts may be concerned for their properties when summer heat sets in. A few simple strategies can help lawns make it through the season



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hand pruning shears with curved blades. For trees with high branches, use a pole pruner or hire a professional tree service. Novices should avoid anything too risky when pruning their trees, leaving the more difficult jobs to the professionals.

- Follow the rules of pruning. When pruning trees, the ADF advises homeowners follow the one-third and a quarter rules of pruning. In adherence to these rules, no more than a quarter of a tree's crown is removed in a single season, and main side

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How To Take Care Of Your Trees

Lawns and gardens tend to draw the bulk of homeowners' attention come spring and summer. But it's important that property owners tend to the trees that dot their property as well. The types of trees homeowners have on their property may influence when it's time to trim and prune the trees. Homeowners concerned about tree maintenance should speak with local landscaping professionals and tree services about caring for the trees on their specific properties, but there are a few tricks to pruning trees that homeowners should keep in mind when dusting off their gardening tools.

- Prune at the right time. The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that pruning during dormancy (i.e., winter) is the most com-

mon practice. Pruning in late winter, after the season's coldest temperatures have passed, can lead to impressive and healthy growth in the spring. The ADF advises that some trees, including maple and birches, may bleed sap during pruning. But this is normal and should cease as the tree starts to bloom. Novice landscapers should confirm with landscaping professionals about the best time to prune trees on their properties to ensure they are not inadvertently harming the trees or making them more vulnerable to fungus.

- Use appropriate tools. When removing branches, use sharp tools to minimize damage to the bark. The ADF notes that young trees are best pruned with one-

branches are at least one-third smaller than the diameter of the trunk. When trimming deciduous trees, homeowners should never prune up from the bottom more than one-third of the tree's total height. Finally, where possible, homeowners should aim for side branches that form angles that are one-third off vertical to form 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock angles with the trunk.

- Water correctly. Like lawns and gardens, trees need water to thrive. Insufficient watering can make it hard for trees to thrive in summer, but overwatering can be harmful, too. The ADF suggests that watering each tree for 30 seconds with a steady stream of water from a garden hose equipped with a diffuser nozzle should be sufficient. Newly planted trees may need more help as they try to establish deep root systems, so consider laying mulch around newly planted trees. Mulch helps the soil retain moisture and form deeper, stronger root systems.

Trees maintenance should be a priority as homeowners once again start tending to their lawns and gardens. More information about caring for trees is available at www.arborday.org.



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Fence Etiquette Prevents Disputes

People fortunate enough to own their own plots of land often choose to fence in their pieces of paradise. Fences serve many purposes: to designate property boundaries, keep pets or children contained in a safe environment, corral livestock, offer privacy or add aesthetic appeal. Although installing a fence may seem like the right idea for you, going about it the wrong way may lead to problems among neighbors, particularly if you live where the houses are relatively close to one another. Some homeowners find fences become the final point of contention among disagreeable neighbors or create tension with a neighbor with whom you previously had a good relationship. Being courteous with fence plans is the way to avoid any animosity along the way. There are certain things you must do and should do if you plan to erect a fence. Most people find neighbors appreciate being informed of any decisions you are thinking of making to the

property that can affect their views or their adjoining property. Before drawing up fence plans with a contractor, talk to the neighbors on either side of your home and gauge their receptiveness to a fence. At this point, you may want to consider offering to make the fencing project a joint deal to save money should the neighbors decide to install a fence as well. Contractors will often discount if they have several customers doing an installation at the same time. Property owners can save by splitting the costs of the shared walls of the fence where their property lines meet. Explain your case for the fence. Most neighbors are receptive to the idea if they know the reasoning — especially if the desire for a fence is not to keep them at bay. It's hard to protest a fence that is a safety precaution for children. If your neighbor already has a fence, you must ask whether you can connect your fence panels into the support post on your shared side.

Once you notify your neighbors as a courtesy, there are certain steps to take that will prevent any legal disputes down the road. Even the most easy-going neighbor could grow aggravated if the fence is put up carelessly or ends up partially on his property. The best way to prevent this is to

apply for a new, professional property survey and have property lines indicated with paint or wood markers. Each town or city has different regulations with regard to fencing, so it is important to learn the ropes or hire a contractor who is familiar with the rules. It might be



Embrace Greenscaping For A Healthy Lawn

Lawn and garden enthusiasts are often on the lookout for new trends that can make their lawns and gardens healthier and more robust. One trend that has gained considerable popularity in recent years is the move toward greenscaping, a set of landscaping practices that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says can improve the health and appearance of lawns and gardens while protecting and preserving the planet's natural resources. WHY GREENSCAPE? While the opportunity to protect and preserve natural resources is reason enough for many lawn and garden enthusiasts to embrace greenscaping, there are additional benefits to turning a landscape into a greenscape. Greenscaping promotes the planting of native plants, which are already accustomed to local climates and therefore do not require as much time and effort

to care for than non-native plants. Non-native plants may struggle to adapt to foreign climates, requiring homeowners to water them more frequently than native plants. And homeowners who plant non-native plants can expect to spend money to ensure they survive. So non-native plants can waste water and also cost homeowners time and money. HOW CAN I GREENSCAPE? Planting native plants is just one element of greenscaping. The following are a handful of additional ways men and women with green thumbs can turn their properties into healthy green-scapes. • Build and maintain healthy soil. The EPA notes that a single teaspoon of healthy soil contains roughly four billion organisms. These organisms help create a loose soil structure that promotes strong, healthy roots. In addition, healthy soil recycles

nutrients for plants while protecting them from certain pests and diseases. One way to create healthy soil is to conduct a soil test to determine if it has any nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium or lime deficiencies. Another way to build healthy soil is to add compost when mixing top soil for new garden beds or plants. Among its many benefits, compost can help soil retain nutrients and water. • Water effectively. Lawns and gardens need water to thrive, but overwatering can be just as harmful to lawns as drought. Make a list of the types of plants (including the types of grass) in your yard, and then do your homework to determine how much water each plant needs. The EPA notes that vegetables and other annuals should be watered at the first sign of wilting, while perennials typically only need water if they are still sagging when temperatures

cool in the evening. Trees and shrubs with fully established roots usually do not require any watering, though they might need some in years that are especially dry. Avoid watering in mid-day, when summertime temperatures are typically at their hottest and water is likely to evaporate. In addition, watering in the evening may encourage the growth of mold or disease, so water in the early morning. • Practice "grasscycling." When mowing the grass, leave clippings on the lawn (though not in large piles dumped from buckets attached to the mower). It's a misconception that grass clippings contribute to the buildup of thatch that blocks water from getting to the soil. In fact, when clippings are left on the lawn, the soil recycles the clippings into fertilizer. Leaving grass clippings in the yard after mowing can contribute to a healthier lawn.

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6 Steps To Creating Fairy Gardens For Kids

Gardening can be an enjoyable activity for adults and children alike. Gardening encourages creative thinking and can make for an eco-friendly activity as well. Adding a touch of whimsy to gardening can make it that much more attractive to children. Perhaps that is why fairy gardens have become so popular among youngsters. Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurse and enjoy indoors. Here are six steps to get your fairy garden up and running. 1. Choose your container or location. Decide where to place the fairy garden. Hollowed-out tree stumps are both contained and outdoors, and kids may feel like the fairies inhabited this



neglected area of the yard and made it their own. Otherwise, use containers you already have, such as old pots, hanging baskets, picnic baskets or cookie tins. Wooden birdhouses with their roofs removed also can make for clever places to house the gardens. 2. Choose a theme. Fairy houses can take on any theme their creators prefer. Themes help children decide what to include in their gardens. For example, a seaside retreat may work well with little reclining chairs, sea grasses and succulents. You can then complete the theme by adding some seashells and colored stones. 3. Draw up your design. Before securing anything in the container or digging into your garden bed, sketch out a garden design. This gives you an idea of how the finished product will look. Even before planting, gen-

tlly place plants and other components in their spots and move them around accordingly until you find the desired look. 4. Include similar-needs plants. Mixing plants that have different requirements can make it challenging to care for the fairy garden, so select plants that require similar levels of sunlight, prefer similar soil conditions and require roughly the same amount of watering. Herbs are a smart choice because they stay small and are easily maintained. 5. Don't forget a fairy dwelling. You will need to add a house for the fairies to inhabit. Small bird houses can work, but you also can consider old teapots, bird-nesting boxes or even homemade houses assembled out of bark and twigs. Use your imagination and the garden will take on a life of its own. 6. Invite the fairies. Children can invite fairies to take up residence (fairies often show up at night and tend to remain unseen), or children can create their own fairies using craft materials. Fairy gardens are a fun way to introduce children to gardening. Once families get started, they may want to create entire fairy villages.

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How To Make Spring Projects More Eco-Friendly

The arrival of warmer weather means different things to different people. Some anticipate opportunities for outdoor fun, while others may be considering redecorating or remodeling their homes.

Flowers and plants: Spring and summer call to mind beautiful blooming plants. Relying on native, sustainable plants is practical, environmentally friendly and cost-effective. According to the National Wildlife Federation, sustainable plants are native plants. Native plants sustain local wildlife more effectively than non-native alternatives, so include native plants in your sustainable garden. Native plants also are less reliant on pesticides and herbicides to keep them healthy and viable. Don't forget to bring plants indoors as well. Even though you may be opening the windows more, indoor plants can filter and purify indoor air. The NASA Clean Air Study, led in association with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, found that certain common indoor plants naturally remove toxic agents such as benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene from the air. Efficient air cleaning is accomplished with at least one plant per 100 square feet of home or office space.

Before discarding something, see if it can be donated or sold. This will result in fewer items ending up in landfills. Exercise caution outdoors as well. Runoff from cleaning products used on home siding or driveways can leach into the surrounding soil or find its way into sewage drains that ultimately direct fluids to public waterways. Choose environmentally responsible products whenever possible. Springtime renovation and cleaning projects provide the perfect opportunity to adopt eco-friendly practices that pay dividends for years to come.



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Make The Most Of Mulching

Lawns and gardens can often benefit from the laying of mulch. Mulch serves various purposes in lawns and gardens, and many experienced lawn and garden enthusiasts lay mulch to ensure their properties make it through spring, summer and fall unscathed. First-time homeowners with little or no landscaping experience may not understand the benefits of mulch, which can be used to strengthen soil and protect properties from the elements. WHAT IS MULCH? Mulch refers to a material spread around or over a plant to enrich and/or insulate its soil. Many homeowners prefer mulch made of wood chips, which is both effective and readily available. The U.S. Environmental Protection

summer, need light to grow. When laid correctly, mulch deprives weeds of the light they need to grow. Organic mulches can even provide homes for crickets and a type of beetle that feed on weed seeds. Mulch also can deter harmful pests depending on the type of mulch homeowners choose. When purchasing mulch, homeowners will have to choose between the aforementioned organic mulch or man-made mulches, which may be made of plastic or rubber. While man-made mulches may repel pests, they also can have adverse effects. Plastic, for example, can heat up in the summer and cause plants to burn. Certain organic mulches can repel insects that can threaten plants. That's because the majority of organic mulches increase the

Agency notes that organic mulches, which include leaves, wood chips, compost or grass clippings, can be used by homeowners who want to develop eco-friendly landscapes. WHY MULCH? Mulching can benefit plants around a property in various ways. Many people lay mulch because the mulch helps soil retain moisture in the summer, when temperatures tend to be at their hottest. This can help plants survive summer heat waves. Mulch also can be used to suppress weeds. Weeds, which steal moisture plants need to build strong roots and survive

amount of beneficial bacteria in the soil, and they also increase the presence of helpful insects that do not pose a threat to plant life. Those helpful insects help keep harmful insects at bay. Compost is a type of organic mulch that may attract harmful insects. While that does not mean homeowners should shy away from using compost as mulch, they should know that they may need to employ organic insecticides to combat their unwanted guests. Mulch is a potentially valuable tool homeowners can use to improve the look and health of their properties.

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