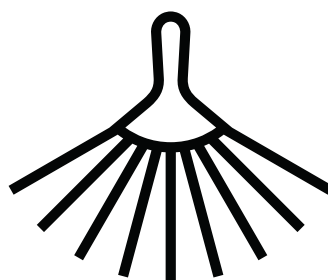


1
CURB
APPEAL





PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCKPHOTO (HOUSE); ANNA TSOULOGIANNIS (PORTRAIT); ILLUSTRATION: THINKSTOCK



KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

The countdown to summer is on! That means it's time to get your home's exterior—including the front entry, deck, lawn and garden—ready. Follow these expert tips and tricks to boost your curb appeal, prep for outdoor entertaining and have your yard looking its best (even on a budget).

BY SARAH GUNN



GRAND ENTRANCE

They say first impressions are everything, and chances are your home isn't making the best one after the harsh winter weather. Spring is the perfect time to give your home's exterior a good once-over, says **designer Amanda Forrest**, who has offices in Toronto and Vancouver.

She suggests taking a stroll around the outside of your home to have a good look and assess any improvements you may want to make (use a notepad to create a to-do list as you go). "It's important to fix any damage, like peeling paint or clogged gutters, before it balloons into a larger, more expensive issue," she says. Aside from impressing neighbours, keeping the exterior of your house up to date usually means a higher selling price—and even if you're not planning to move, raising your home's value never hurts. Touching up the paint on your garage door, repairing cracks in the driveway and removing weeds from walkways during the crisp days of spring means you'll be able to reap the rewards when the lazy days of summer hit later.

FIVE STEPS TO BETTER CURB APPEAL

1 START WITH A CLEAN SLATE

Banish the dirt and grime left behind from winter by thoroughly cleaning surfaces outside the home, from stone walls to the sidewalk in front. Use a power washer (you can rent one from a home-improvement store) to spray the driveway, porch, front walkway, front steps, vinyl siding and bricks. And don't forget about windows; giving them a good clean inside and out can make a huge (and super-affordable) difference. "Use microfibre cloths to get streak-free glass," recommends Forrest.

2 UPGRADE YOUR FRONT DOOR

Unlike the garage door and window frames, which should blend in with the exterior of the home, the front door can make a statement. Update yours with a fresh coat of bold paint or, if you're starting to see signs of damage (like splitting wood or light showing between the frame and the closed door), it might be time to replace it to save on energy costs. Choose one with classic architectural details, like a simple Shaker style.

3 FIX UP FIXTURES

One of the fastest ways to up your curb appeal is by replacing outdated or worn fixtures: lights, house numbers, mailbox and door hardware. Consider the style of your home—traditional, transitional or modern—before shopping, then stick to the same finish for all. Or spray paint them a new colour. At the very least, give existing fixtures a good cleaning and polishing using a microfibre cloth and an old toothbrush (hot, soapy water is safe on most metals, but double check if you're not sure).

4 LIGHT THE WAY

Installing new light fixtures around the front door and the garage is another quick idea to update your home's exterior; even making sure any burned-out bulbs have been replaced goes a long way—especially if there's one above your house number. Add landscape lighting if you want to illuminate a walkway or highlight your home's architectural details. And consider solar lights; you can place them just about anywhere and, even better, there's no need to call an electrician.

5 ADD FINISHING TOUCHES

If you have the space, placing a stylish bench or a pair of glider chairs on the porch is a great way to create an instant gathering area for friends and neighbours. Add a few hanging planters filled with sweet-smelling blooms for extra charm. (You'll also want to ensure that your walkway is free of cracks and weeds to avoid potential trips and falls.)



DON'T FORGET!

Check your roof. If material is crumbling or if shingles are spaced out, curling at the edges or missing, it's time to call in a pro for repairs.

Clear the gutters. Ignoring clogged gutters can lead to water damage, including ceiling leaks.

Clean out planters. For plastic, mix two parts water with one part bleach to wash and kill bacteria; for clay, use soap and water to remove residue, and vinegar to get rid of bacteria.



ALL DECKED OUT

Nothing says summer like outdoor entertaining, and there's no better place to host a sunset dinner party than your own backyard. But before you start sending out the invites, it's important to ensure that your deck is up to date and meets safety standards. Wood can take a beating from cold weather and rain, so you'll want to check that the structure is in tip-top shape before making any other updates. If your deck is in need of some serious repairs, you might want to hire a professional. But when it comes to choosing a new stain and sprucing up furniture, all you need is a free weekend and some elbow grease. **HGTV star Paul Lafrance** shares his tips to make your deck a space your whole family can enjoy this summer.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCKPHOTO (DECK); ILLUSTRATIONS: THINKSTOCK

KNOCK, KNOCK

Add instant personality to your front door with one of these cool accents.



Keep things sleek and simple with a classic shape. **Taymor satin-nickel surface-mount door knocker, \$10, homedepot.ca.**



Add a touch of whimsy to your front door with a cute creature. **Fabled Fauna door knocker, \$44, anthropologie.com.**



Show your love for Mother Nature with a charming brass and bronze knocker. **Pinecone premium-size door knocker, \$272, michaelhealy.com.**



DON'T FORGET!
Get rid of rust.

If your deck furniture is made of metal, check for weather damage. Then, grab the steel wool, which should take care of light rust stains.

•
Test the deck lighting. Check that no pesky rodents have had a feast on under-deck wiring; if they have, you may need to call an electrician.

•
Switch up your textiles. Swap dated accents for seasonal updates like colourful cushion covers.

LET'S EAT

Get your patio summer-ready with one of these stunning dining sets.



Style meets functionality with this chic and durable option.
Hampton Bay Aria five-piece high dining set, \$599, homedepot.ca.



Sustainable eucalyptus wood and earth-toned wicker bring just the right amount of personality to this set.
Copenhagen dining set, \$1,099, rona.ca.



Blue-and-white patterned pillows lend a cool coastal feel.
GlucksteinHome Newport seven-piece dining set, \$2,800, thebay.com.

THREE STEPS TO AN ENTERTAINING-READY DECK

1 CHOOSE THE RIGHT MATERIALS

"The minute you start seeing spongy wood or lots of slivers or nails popping up, it's time to make some repairs," says Lafrance. If you need a new deck, he suggests opting for low-maintenance composite decking, like eco-friendly Trex, which is made from recycled wood and plastic film. Don't forget to check local bylaws and municipal regulations around deck construction. You'll probably need a permit or "you could be subject to fines. You may even have to tear down the entire thing," says Lafrance. If you use wood, double check that everything is installed correctly so it won't buckle.

2 CLEAN AND COAT

Clean off any grime and surface stains with a power washer. Lafrance says the vertical surfaces of wooden decks (railings and posts) should be stripped, sanded and stained each year. Doing that to the floor can be very time-consuming, so you may want to just apply a fresh coat of stain there. When it comes to choosing

a new stain, check the label to make sure it's compatible with the type of material your deck is made of. Don't paint over wood or it won't be able to breathe—this is important so moisture doesn't get trapped inside, which can lead to rotting.

3 CREATE A BACKYARD RETREAT

What's the point of having a well-built deck if you can't get use out of it? Whether you're planning an alfresco gathering or you want to create a spot where friends can lounge and enjoy drinks, add weatherproof furniture. Lafrance suggests investing in pieces that help you live the lifestyle you want. For smaller spaces, look for furniture that serves more than one function—for example, a table that adjusts to coffee and dining heights, a bench that holds cushions or pieces that stack or store easily. If you have the space, consider setting up multiple zones, including a dining area for sit-down meals and a separate seating area for after-dinner conversation.



HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Green grass, healthy trees and a lush garden enhance your outdoor space, and spring is a great time to prep your yard for a hot summer. You might be tempted to wait for warmer weather, but avoiding those chores now will only come back to haunt you; not removing last year's foliage or ignoring a dead lawn during the spring can stunt growth later on. It's important to turn over soil, fix up the grass and add fertilizer where it's needed sooner rather than later. So pick a weekend, roll up your sleeves, grab your favourite pair of gloves and open up the shed.



Landscape designer, Cityline expert and HGTV star Carson Arthur is here to help with his expert advice on getting your grass, trees and garden thriving.

THREE STEPS TO A BEAUTIFUL YARD

1 MANICURE THE LAWN

Start by giving the grass a stiff rake to remove clippings from last year along with any leaves that collected before the snow fell. (Rotting foliage can suffocate growth on the lawn, and leaf mould is terrible for allergy sufferers.) Avoid the urge to roll your lawn in the spring; packing down waterlogged soil compacts roots, making it tough for new grass shoots to grow. If your lawn is looking patchy, add new grass seed. Go with a blend that includes rye and fescue grasses; having a diverse mix will reduce insect damage.

2 GIVE TREES SOME TLC

Delivering extra nutrients to tree roots as new leaves form will help foliage look fuller and healthier. Place fertilizer (liquid, pellets or stakes) under the very outside edge of the branch canopy; this is called the drip line, where the feeder roots occur in greater concentration. And don't prune flowering trees and shrubs yet or you might end up removing buds.

3 MAKE OVER YOUR GARDEN

Go through your garden and gather any growing weeds, along with dead or mushy leaves and spent stalks from perennials (this will improve their overall health and help discourage bugs and slugs from paying a visit). Before you add a fresh layer of mulch, check to see if the ground is thawed enough: Shovel a hole that's 12 inches deep; if you don't hit frozen soil, you're ready to plant. Also, it's best to wait to trim tulip and daffodil leaves until they turn yellow; removing them too soon means next year's bulbs won't be as strong.



DON'T FORGET!

Make sure your mower is in good working order.

Clean the undercarriage, sharpen the blade and fill 'er up with fresh gas. If you opt for a professional tune-up, do so before the grass really starts growing for the fastest turnaround. (But don't actually mow your lawn for the first time until it's at least three inches tall.)

Clean your garden tools.

White vinegar helps prevent the spread of garden diseases.

Tidy the yard.

Remove stray leaves from under plants and trees to fend off insects, harmful bacteria and fungi.



PLANTING A SEED

Place these chic containers around your yard to add instant charm.



Complement small spaces with a mini pop of pastel colour.
Socker plant pot with holder, \$8, ikea.ca.



Try an elegant design in a dark shade for a touch of drama.
Mayne Valencia square planter, \$99, lowes.ca.



Made from solid western red cedar, this stylish planter has modern appeal.
Gronomics planter, \$198, homedepot.ca.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE NICHOLS/GAP PHOTOS (LAWN); DENISE JONES PHOTOGRAPHY (PORTRAIT); ILLUSTRATION, THINKSTOCK