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# Missouri Natives Grow Best

By **Gina Reed**

Cameron Area Arts Council  
editor@mycameronnews.com

Temperatures are finally rising, and perennial plants are awakening from their winter sleep. The weather this spring has been unusual. March came in like a lamb and went out like a lion, the opposite of the past several years, and the lion-like behavior has continued these first weeks of April. High winds, dry conditions, and wildly fluctuating temperatures have become this year's new normal. This is very frustrating to gardeners who are ready to till the soil and plant seeds and live plants. Be patient! We need at least a week of temperatures in the 50's to create our garden wonders and we need a plan in case of cold weather in May. I learned the hard way one year to watch the calendar, the freeze dates, AND the forecast. The last frost date used to be May 12. I planted a flat of impatiens on that date, and then watched them all die on May 15 due to an extra-late frost. The last frost date for our location in Missouri is now May 15. If I had paid attention to the weather forecast, I could have covered them and probably saved them, but I was in a hurry to have a deck full of potted plants.

If I had been growing native Missouri plants in garden beds, I would not have had that sad experience. Native plants



Photo by Gina Reed

Daffodils are not native but make lovely landscaping plants that bloom in early spring.

somehow know what the weather will do and grow accordingly. That is only one of the advantages of using native plants in your landscape. According to the Missouri Department of Conservation website, native plant species can bring many benefits to

your home and garden. Foremost, they are easy keepers. They have lived in this post-Ice Age climate for 10,000 years so are well adapted to the quirks of our weather. They use less water and require less pruning and deadheading than other plants and can live

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for decades. They are adapted to our clay soils. They have longer bloom times so are appealing for a longer time of the year. Some of them are absolutely gorgeous.

Native plants provide food and habitat for insects, birds, and animals. Plants are the bottom of the food chain, so a lack of plants affects every creature up the line, including humans. Plants also affect water quality. Having water-tolerant plants in low areas helps to hold and filter storm water runoff, thereby maintaining soil stability, preventing erosion, and saving city sewer systems. Nature's delicate balance relies heavily on the plants in an ecosystem.

Across America, even in Cameron, we are addicted to flat green lawns around our homes. But did you know there is a native grass that only grows about six inches tall? According to the Missouri Conservation Department, it is called Buffalo Grass, and it would even pass the City of Cameron property maintenance code for lawns. Imagine almost no mowing for an entire season. No spreading chemicals, no watering. If you have 1000 square feet, you could have your own meadow of native wildflowers, although that would not fly in this town unless changes are made to the code. A prairie meadow like that would provide wildlife habitat year-round. However, wildlife is not necessarily welcome in the city limits, so perhaps the wisdom of the nine-inch limit on the lawn should not be questioned.

If you are interested in planting some beds



Photo by Gina Reed  
Bald cypress is a native tree, such as this magnificent specimen on South Chestnut Street.

of native plants, there are many sources of information on the Internet. The sites I found most helpful in my research for this article were the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Missouri Botanical Garden, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and Grow Native! Each of them has lists of plants that are native to our area, even breaking down the different areas of the state. We are in the prairie grassland, post-glacier area, and it is usually called Zone 4. Highway 116 is a climatological dividing line; being further north causes us to be a few days later for bloom times than Kansas City, so keep that in mind when ordering plants or planting seeds. Each of those websites also gave names of greenhouses and nurseries that supply plants. Some of the closest companies were Barnes Greenhouse in Trenton, Missouri Wildflower Nursery in Jefferson City, Colonial Gardens in Kansas City, and Sow Wild Natives in Kansas City. (These are not recommendations; this list is just the most local ones). Cameron Greenhouse does not have a specific section of natives, but they stock a number of them, so go armed with a list of plants you would like and see what is available.

While it is slightly disappointing that some of our favorite perennial plants such as hostas, daylilies, and peonies are not native to our location, they do well here and have wonderful qualities. Adding some natives to these specimens would increase the beauty of your yard while not causing much more work. That is a win-win in my opinion.

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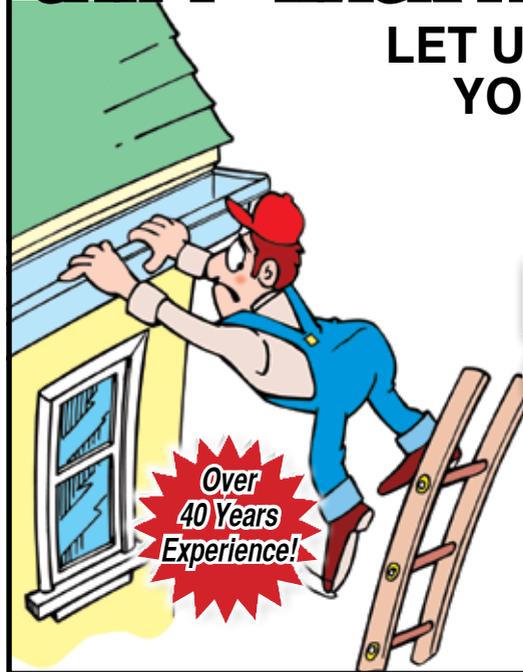
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Photos by Gina Reed  
Forsythia is is not a native  
but Eastern Redbud is. They  
bloom together in very early  
spring. (L)

Dogwood is the Missouri State  
Tree. They are more common  
in South Missouri. This far  
north, they need shelter and  
bloom later than the Redbud.  
(R)



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# When Good Plants Go Bad

By **Gina Reed**

Cameron Area Arts Council  
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Many thousands of years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and I was a child... just kidding. Although the 1970's seem like a long time ago, it has only been forty years or so since I was given tiny trees by the Missouri Department of Conservation. They were sent home in bundles of 25 with the 4-H club members, and we diligently planted and tended them. The trees were White Pine, Silver Maple, and Russian Olive. I had good luck with my Pine trees. Most of them at the north edge of our yard lived and grew to become the windbreak they were supposed to be. Being in the yard made it easier to water them during the droughts of the late 70' and 80's. The ones I planted along a ridge in the field behind the house did not fare as well. After a couple of years, all of them disappeared due to neglect. The silver maples were eaten by rabbits early in their short lives. The Russian Olive by the shed became a nuisance for the lawn mower with its spreading habit, so my parents pruned it for a while and then cut it down when I left for college.

As the years passed, my pine trees grew taller, although they were never full or thick. They were kind of a Charlie Brown type of tree, but I didn't mind. My parents sold that place when they built their dream home a



Photo by Gina Reed

**The Bradford Pear is beautiful but can become invasive when it escapes landscaping.**

few miles away, but I was able to watch my trees reach 30 or so feet high until about 2008, when they all got a disease, turned brown, and died. I was sad, as I had assumed the trees would outlive me. There were other trees in the yard that were enormous and robust and had been there for many decades before we moved there in 1969.

Something similar happened to my mother's prized Bradford Pear tree. She was given the tree as a gift, and it had a prominent place in the front yard. It had a graceful shape, beautiful white blooms in the spring and dazzling red leaves in the fall. Unfortunately, it was also short-lived. It stopped blooming, parts of it died and

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Photo by Gina Reed  
Invasive such as this Wintercreeper can destroy other trees when not controlled.

broke, and eventually it too was removed.

What we, and even the Department of Conservation, did not know at the time was what could go wrong with these species of trees. They are not native to Missouri, so the climate, soil, water, weather, and animals here caused their early demise. White Pines can tolerate cold, but the dry heat here stunted them no matter how much water we gave them. The clay soil did not have enough nutrients, so they were always weak. When a disease came along, their resistance was low, and they died. The Conservation Department no longer recommends planting them. Silver maples are more acclimated to Missouri weather, but there is a reason they put out tens of thousands of seeds each spring. It takes that many trees to feed all the wildlife that think they are great snacks in the winter. Placing them away from the house and the barking dog just created a bunny buffet. The Russian Olive eventually became known as an invasive species due to its spreading by runners and choking waterways, so cutting it got rid of more than a nuisance. But, in our defense, we didn't know these facts in 1977. Now that we know better, we can do better.

We had already been introduced to invasives with the Multiflora Rose. When we moved to that farmstead in 1969, there was one little bush of it in the fencerow between the yard and garden. In about five years, it became a monster that took over a corner of the yard. It had beautiful blooms, but the deadly thorns and the dense growth were horrible. A few years later, it was the Musk Thistle. It also had a beautiful bloom, but the thorns could pierce shoes, and where there was one, the next year there would be millions. They got into the fields and choked out the good grass. The cattle that were foolish enough to bite them injured their mouths and became very skinny

by the time they could eat again. Regular herbicides didn't faze them, and they had to be dug out by hand. The State of Missouri declared the thistle a noxious weed in the 1980's. How did these plants get here? I was mortified one time when I opened a garden catalog, and both the Multiflora Rose and the Musk Thistle were both offered for sale as "beautiful specimen plants." They certainly are-in Canada, where the cold weather regulates their reproduction. That is a hazard of the catalog plant industry: the sellers rarely give advice to buyers about problems with plants in a climate far from the home office. They just collect money and ship plants. There are very few laws against it, and those laws would be impossible to enforce anyway. The moral of the story? Study your plants and know your climate.

Back to Mother's Bradford Pear. It really turned out to be a dud of a tree. Not only was it brittle and short-lived, but it also became an invasive. The Bradford, Callery, and Chanticleer Pears were all supposed to be sterile, giving up fruit-bearing for prettier blooms. Unfortunately, it didn't work that way. Each species was sterile but planting different species of the trees in neighboring yards caused them to cross-pollinate, which created a non-productive but very aggressive tree that is taking over woods and fields all over Missouri, crowding out plants that are essential for wildlife and giving nothing in return. In fact, the Department of Conservation now has a buy-back program. Cut down an ornamental pear tree, take your picture with the downed tree, send the photo to MDC, and they will send you a Missouri native tree. What a deal. And the other bonus for this miserable tree? Pears are a fruitwood, which is a great wood for smoking meat. Fire up your smokers as well as your chain saws. There is a huge amount of work to be done.



Photo by Gina Reed  
Daffodils are native to Europe, but have thrived and even naturalized here.

## Where Can We See Native Plants?

By Gina Reed  
Cameron Area Arts Council  
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Face it, we are from Missouri, and if you want to really sell us on native plants, you must SHOW them to us, right? Fortunately, there are places easily accessible to Cameron that have displays of native plantings. More research on the Internet leads to not only names of places, but pictures and directions to get there.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources maintains designated natural areas that are protected for their scientific, educational, and historic value. These are places that are the least disturbed, highest quality biological and geographical areas of the state. Two of them not far from Cameron are the 429 acres of Chariton River Hills in Long Branch state park, near Macon, and the Locust Creek area at Pershing State Park near Laclede. Both of those parks are on Highway 36.

The Missouri Native Plant Society is a 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to the preservation and study of Missouri native flora. They have a

Continues on page 9

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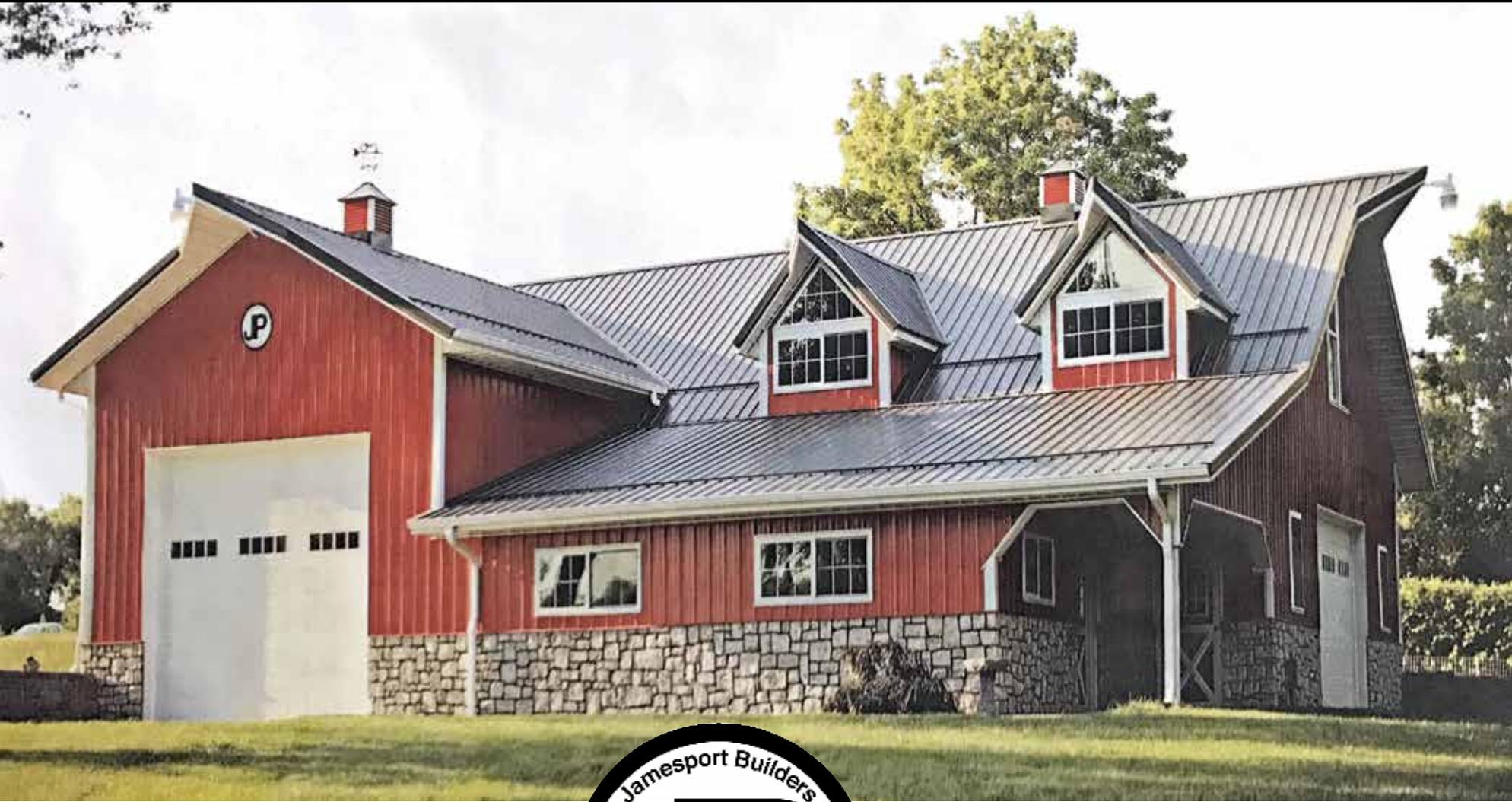
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fantastic Facebook page with pictures and information as well as advice on plantings. They have chapters across the state that hold regular meetings. The closest chapter to us is the Kansas City chapter. Their website lists places in Jackson, Clay, Ray, and Clinton counties that are open for visits to see native plants on display. The Clinton County site is the 60-acre Trice-Delmar Memorial Woods, which is open dawn to dusk and is located 2 miles east of Plattsburg on the north side of Highway 116. It has a hiking trail for bird and wildlife watching.

If you are really thinking of “digging in” to gardening (pun intended), consider the University of Missouri Extension Master Gardener program. I took the class in 2013 in Gallatin, and even though I had been gardening since I was six years old, I still learned new things. Both Daviess and Clinton counties have chapters of the Master Gardeners for those who take the class and want to keep in contact with their fellow garden fanatics. They also teach new gardeners and complete service projects to beautify their communities.

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# Confession: We Love Aliens

By **Gina Reed**

Cameron Area Arts Council  
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It's true. We love alien plants. They are showy, exotic, and beautiful. Who would not love them? Just because they came from the far reaches of Europe, Africa, and Asia, does that mean they're bad for us here? Of course not. Even though invasives get a lot of attention just because they betray us with their wandering and overbearing habits, they really are a small portion of the plants. In fact, the globalization of plant cultures really began with Columbus' trip across the Atlantic in 1492. It became known as the Columbian Exchange in 1972, from the title of the book by Alfred W. Crosby (source: Britannica). Edible crop plants were the first exchanged, but after society advanced past the point of desperately scratching and clawing the ground for food, ornamental plants became prized for their beauty, not just their nutritional value.

What does that mean for us in Missouri? It means we can continue to enjoy our Chinese wisteria, our Japanese maples, our French and English roses, and so on. We will not crash the environment with them. Some ornamental plants have been here so long they have become naturalized, like the wild daylilies, or "ditch weeds" that bloom each summer. Many "alien" plants adapt well even to the terrible climate in

this State of Misery-er, Missouri. However, some need more work, patience, care, and luck. Some popular non-native, fussy plants that live (and sometimes thrive) here are:

**Roses:** if you find a sunny, but not-too-hot, well-drained but not too dry, location and are successful at soil amendments; if you don't mind pruning thorny branches, staking, watering, feeding, mulching, and covering/uncovering them at the correct times of the season, and are good at diagnosing and treating plant diseases, you can grow roses.

**Evergreens:** if you have a cool microclimate, are willing to dig a huge hole in our clay dirt and replace it with several cubic yards of fluffy rich soil, just the right amount of water and sun, and are not prone to hitting them with the lawnmower or trimmer, you can grow evergreens.

**Clematis:** if you can find a place where the roots are shaded and moist, but not soggy, and the vines of the plant can climb high and get plenty of sun and air circulation, you can grow clematis.

**Azaleas, Rhododendrons, and Hydrangeas:** If you have a sheltered northern area that still gets the right amount of filtered sun, fluffy rich soil, and good but not too much moisture, and can get the soil pH to the correct acidity consistently, these plants are fabulous, and your neighbors will think you are a genius plant whisperer.



Photo by Gina Reed  
 McCorkle Park is full of robust, decades-old trees because most of them are natives such as this Oak tree.



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# How to Create the Perfect Outdoor Living (and Work) Room

Spring is here, and it's time for homeowners to ready yards and landscapes for backyarding. The pandemic thrust us into a new reality, and the backyard has a starring role. Yards and other managed landscapes became a safe haven.

Backyarding became a way of life as lawns, gardens, patios and decks evolved into outdoor offices, classrooms, family gathering places, and the new 'hot spots' in our neighborhoods.

According to a new poll commissioned by the TurfMutt Foundation and conducted online by The Harris Poll, the outdoor office trend is here to stay with many Americans using their yards as makeshift offices for their jobs. Stats show:

- Nearly 2 in 5 Americans who have a yard (58%) say they have spent time doing work for their job in their yard during the pandemic.

So how is the backyard set up to meet all of these needs?

Create activity zones. Consider what needs to happen in the backyard and map activity areas. A shady table can double as a home office, study zone, art table, or dining spot. A hammock or outdoor sofa can suffice for napping, reading or studying.

See CREATE on page 15



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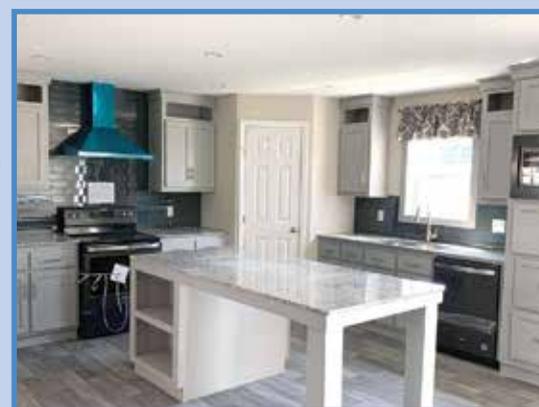


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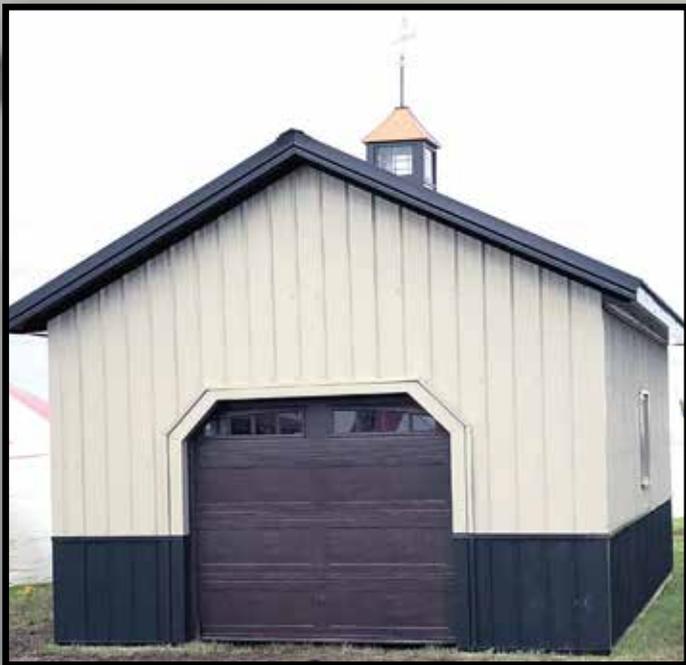
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# CREATE

from page 11

A patch of sturdy grass is perfect for sports, family games and play. A fire pit offers cozy chairs for star gazing and socializing, while a grill near a seating area promises delicious meals. A wall, fence, or pergola may hold an outdoor movie screen for nighttime viewing. An herb or vegetable garden helps kids learn about science and nutrition while reaping the satisfaction of growing food for the table. Factor functionality with purpose. Is there a quiet spot for conference calls? Or a shady spot that minimizes glare for online video meetings? Note where electrical outlets are and if an outdoor-rated extension cord will be needed to accommodate all of the electronics that may be used outside. Check wifi coverage and cell service in the yard and determine if there is enough comfortable seating. Spruce up existing landscaping. Assess the backyard and do some basic “clean up.” Fix bare patches in the grass. Use a leaf blower to clean out flower beds. Prune bushes and trees. Cut the grass to a healthy height. Add a fresh layer of mulch around your trees and in flower beds. Freshen up by weeding, planting flower beds, and filling pots with colorful flowers and verdant plants. Use plants and shrubs to hide unsightly items and control noise. Trees, shrubs and bushes offer cover from neighbors, deliver shade, camouflage unsightly pool equipment and air handlers, and tamp down noise. Planters with flowers between



seating and eating areas on a patio add visual interest and privacy. Shrubs and tall plants are a terrific privacy-creator (and noise canceller for those conference calls). Put the right plant in the right place. Choosing the right plants for the climate zone and for your lifestyle will create a backyarding space that is attractive. It will also be easier to maintain, and support pollinators and wildlife. Consider watering and sunlight or shade needs for any plants added. A hardy grass variety is more likely to hold up to pets and kids. Save delicate flowering plants for patio containers, and be sure to check out the ASPCA list of toxic plants to keep pets safe.

Invite the outdoors in. Blending interior and outdoor living spaces helps the backyard feel like an extension of the home. Open blinds and curtains to the yard. Use complementary indoor and outdoor décor in similar colors, materials and styles to create a cohesive space. This enables everyone to transition seamlessly from indoor life to outdoor living.

For more information and tips about living landscapes visit [www.TurfMutt.com](http://www.TurfMutt.com).

To learn more visit [TurfMutt.com](http://TurfMutt.com). Sign up for Mutt Mail, TurfMutt’s monthly e-newsletter with TurfMutt Foundation news and backyarding tips, at: <http://eepurl.com/heOXzD>

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