

A woman with curly hair, wearing a straw hat and denim overalls, is kneeling in a garden, smiling and holding a blue watering can. A young girl with braided hair, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt, is also in the garden, focused on a task. The garden is filled with various plants and flowers, and the scene is bathed in bright sunlight.

# Spring Home & Garden

# Updating Window Treatments

As spring brings longer days and brighter sunshine, many homeowners look for ways to manage natural light and keep indoor spaces comfortable.

Updating window treatments is an easy way to refresh a room while improving energy efficiency. With the right blinds, shades and fabrics, it is possible to enjoy the season's sunlight without overheating the home or fading furniture. A few smart installation tips can help get the best results.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT BLINDS AND SHADES

Spring is a good time to choose window treatments that filter or soften intense sunlight. Light-filtering roller shades are popular because they allow gentle daylight to enter while reducing glare. They come in a variety of colors and patterns, making them a simple way to brighten rooms without sacrificing privacy.

Cellular or honeycomb shades are another strong option. Their layered design traps air and helps insulate windows, keeping indoor spaces cooler during warm afternoons. Many models offer top-down and bottom-up functions that let homeowners control light flow throughout



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the day.

For homeowners who prefer blinds, faux wood and real wood blinds can provide good light control. Tilting the slats allows sunlight in while protecting furniture and flooring from direct UV exposure. Vertical blinds may work best for sliding doors or large windows since they can easily adjust to changing light angles.

## PICKING FABRICS THAT KEEP ROOMS COOLER

Window treatment materials play an important role in keeping homes comfortable during spring. Solar shades are designed specifically for UV protection. They block a significant amount of the sun's rays while still providing outdoor visibility. These shades are useful in south- or

west-facing rooms where afternoon sun is strongest.

Linen, cotton and other breathable fabrics are ideal for curtain panels during warmer months. Sheer curtains can soften bright light and add a fresh seasonal look, especially when paired with a secondary shade that handles UV control. Thermal-backed curtains add insulation and

help reduce heat gain, making them a practical choice when temperatures rise.

Color also affects performance. Light-colored fabrics reflect more sunlight, helping rooms stay cooler throughout the day. Darker shades absorb heat and may be better suited for spaces that need additional warmth.

## TIPS FOR SMOOTH AND EFFECTIVE INSTALLATION

Proper installation ensures window treatments work as intended. Measuring windows accurately is essential, especially for inside-mounted shades or blinds. Measure each window individually since sizes can vary even within the same room.

Mounting options matter. Inside mounts create a clean, streamlined look, while outside mounts can make windows appear larger and block more light around the edges. For rooms that get strong direct sunlight, outside mounts often provide better coverage.

Securely anchor hardware, especially for heavier blinds or layered curtains. If drilling into drywall, using the correct anchors helps avoid sagging brackets. For wider windows, adding a center support bracket can prevent bowing or cracking.

Homeowners may want to consider cordless options; these are safer for households with children or pets and offer a modern, minimal appearance.

# Hardscaping Basics

Hardscaping can transform a yard by adding structure, function and lasting visual appeal.

Patios, pathways and edging stones help define outdoor spaces and make them easier to maintain through the spring and summer.

## POPULAR HARDSCAPE FEATURES

Patios often serve as the centerpiece of a backyard. They provide space for dining, entertaining or enjoying the outdoors without tracking dirt into the house. Beginners commonly choose concrete pavers because they are affordable, durable and available in many styles. Other patio materials include wood, poured concrete, natural stone and brick, each offering a

different look and level of maintenance.

Pathways are another useful hardscape feature. They help guide foot traffic, protect grass and connect different areas of the yard. Gravel, stepping-stone paths or paver walkways are popular choices for beginner projects. Gravel paths are easiest to install, while pavers offer a more polished appearance.

Edging stones help create clean borders around garden beds, lawns or walkways. They keep mulch in place, prevent grass from spreading into garden areas and give yards a more finished look. Edging comes in stone, brick, metal or composite materials, allowing homeowners to match their landscaping style.

## UNDERSTANDING HARDSCAPE MATERIALS

Choosing the right materials is an

important early step. Concrete pavers are widely used because they hold up well in most climates and are relatively simple to install. Natural stone offers a high-end appearance but often costs more and may require more skill to fit and level. Brick provides a classic look and works well for patios or edging, though it can shift over time without proper base preparation.

Gravel is one of the most cost-effective materials and suits informal pathways or seating areas. It requires edging to stay in place and may need periodic replenishing. Composite edging and molded plastic borders provide a budget-friendly option for defining garden beds, though stone and brick tend to last longer.

For any hardscape project, the base material matters as much as the visible surface. A properly compacted base of gravel or crushed stone helps prevent sinking, shifting or cracking. Skipping

this step often leads to uneven surfaces and early repairs.

## DIY OR HIRE A CONTRACTOR?

Many homeowners tackle small hardscape projects on their own. Installing edging stones or creating a simple gravel path can be done with basic tools and a free afternoon. DIY patios are also possible, but they require more time, patience and precision, especially when leveling the base.

Larger or more complex projects may be better suited for a contractor. Curved patios, retaining walls or multi-level designs often need professional equipment and expertise. Hiring a contractor can save time and ensure long-lasting results.

Before choosing DIY or professional help, consider the project size, available tools, budget and how comfortable you are with physical labor and detailed measurements.

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# Create a Kid-Friendly Backyard

Designing a backyard that encourages play, exploration and safety can help children spend more time outdoors as the weather warms.

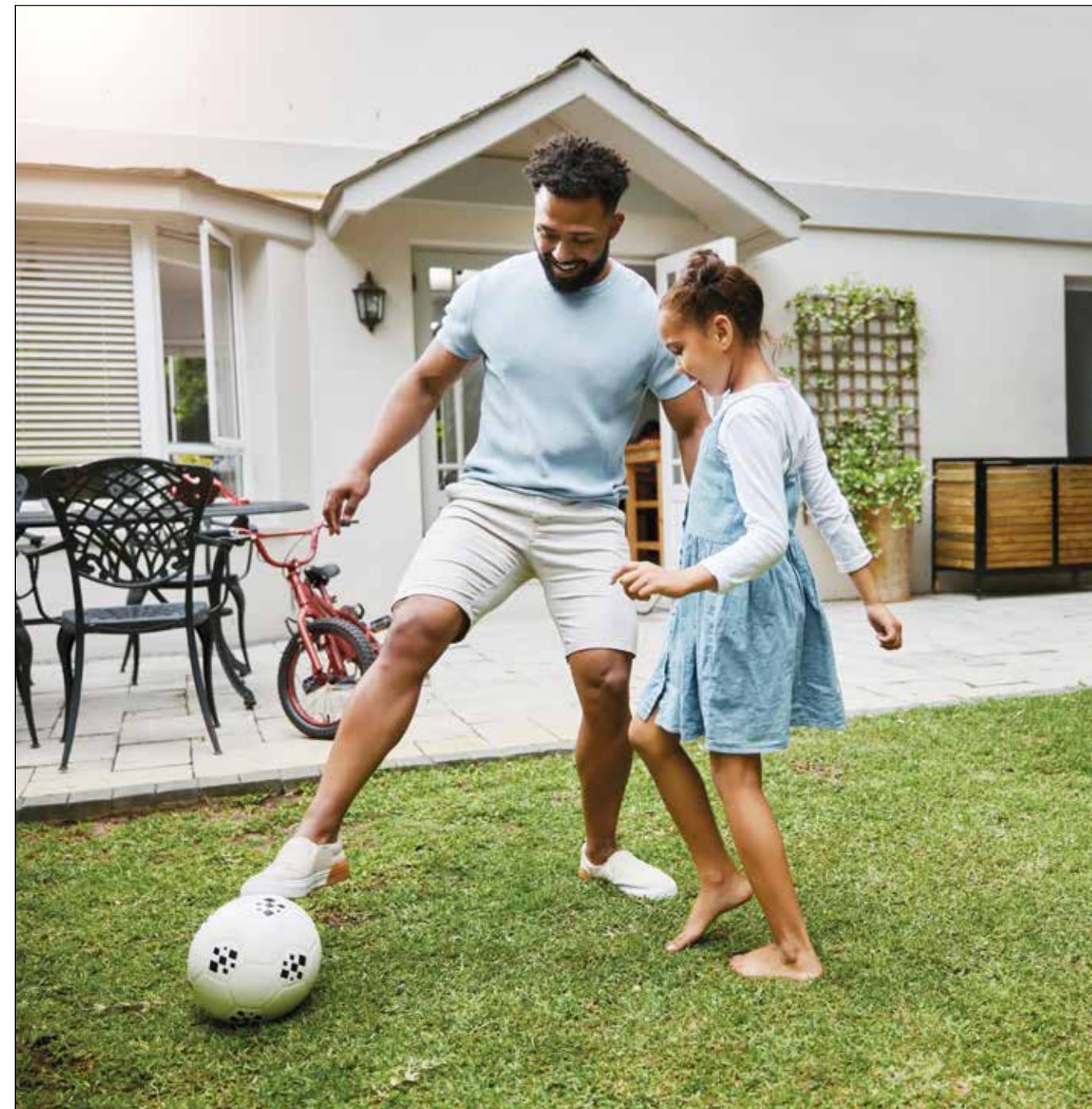
A kid-friendly backyard starts with safe, clearly defined play areas. Many families use rubber mulch, artificial turf or padded play mats to create softer landings under swings, slides or climbing structures. These materials help reduce injuries and stand up well to spring rain and frequent use.

If the yard includes raised decks, patios or slopes, railings and barriers can help keep small children from wandering into unsafe spots. Fencing or gate latches around pools, ponds or fire pits are essential. For younger children, sight-lines matter, so arranging play zones where adults can easily supervise helps keep activities safe and relaxed.

Simple additions like chalkboards, outdoor easels or sandboxes provide creative outlets without requiring much space. Even a corner of the yard can become a designated play nook when equipped with age-appropriate equipment and durable storage for toys.

## PLANTING GARDEN SPACES KIDS CAN EXPLORE

Spring is a great time to



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establish a child-friendly garden where kids can dig, plant and learn. Raised beds make it easier for children to reach and help define a dedicated space for exploration. Easy-to-grow vegetables like cherry tomatoes, snap peas or lettuce can give kids quick rewards and encourage a sense of

ownership.

Herb gardens are another good option. Plants such as mint, basil and lavender are hardy and offer sensory experiences through touch and smell. Many families set aside a small “pollinator patch” with flowers that attract butterflies and bees, helping children

learn about nature while supporting local ecosystems.

To keep gardens safe, avoid toxic plants and choose varieties that are sturdy enough for regular handling. Check for thorn-free shrubs and nonpoisonous flowering plants when designing kid-accessible spaces.

## DIY OUTDOOR GAMES THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN ENJOY

Simple outdoor games can transform a backyard into a lively spring hangout. Many can be made with items already on hand. Painted stones or wooden discs can become pieces for tic-tac-toe or matching games. PVC pipe, cones or string can build obstacle courses that encourage balance and creativity.

For older kids, homemade lawn bowling sets, beanbag toss boards or backyard scavenger hunts offer variety and help keep them active. These games can be rearranged or stored easily, making them ideal for families who want flexible play options as children grow.

## Choosing Plants That Keep Kids Safe

Selecting the right plants is one of the most important steps when designing a child-friendly backyard. Avoid plants with toxic berries, sharp thorns or irritating sap. Instead, choose soft-leaved shrubs, durable grasses and colorful annuals that can handle a little rough play.

Popular child-safe options include sunflowers, marigolds, nasturtiums and zinnias. For shady areas, ferns, hostas and hardy groundcovers work well. Mulch pathways can help define borders and cushion falls, while natural stepping stones allow kids to explore without harming delicate plants.

# Choosing a Lawn Care Service

A healthy lawn can boost curb appeal and make outdoor spaces more enjoyable, but maintaining it through the spring and summer can take time homeowners don't always have.

Hiring a lawn care service can help your grass stay strong, green and well cared for.

With many companies offering a wide range of services, choosing the right one starts with understanding what you need, what they offer and how to compare packages.

Most lawn care services begin with basic maintenance. This usually includes mowing, edging and trimming. Many companies also offer fertilization and weed control, pest treatment, aeration and overseeding. Some handle additional tasks such as irrigation checks, small landscaping jobs or shrub trimming. Before comparing companies, make a list of the tasks you want help with and note any specific issues such as persistent weeds or patchy growth.

## QUALIFICATIONS

Experience and reputation matter when choosing a lawn care provider. A good first step is to look for companies



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with trained staff, proper licensing and clear safety practices. Many states require certification for anyone applying chemical treatments. If your lawn needs fertilizing, weed control or pest management, it is worth confirming the technician handling those materials is licensed.

Online reviews and local recommendations can also help identify which companies are reliable and consistent.

## EXPLORING PACKAGES

Comparing packages is often where the decision becomes more clear. Most lawn care services offer tiered plans ranging from basic mowing to full-season maintenance. A basic package may include weekly or biweekly mowing and edging. Mid-level packages might add weed treatments or fertilizing. Premium packages typically include a full schedule of seasonal services such as early

spring fertilizing, late spring weed control, summer insect treatments and fall aeration.

When reviewing packages, pay attention to how often services are performed and what products are used. Fertilizers and weed control materials vary widely in quality and environmental impact. Some companies use slow-release fertilizers while others apply quick-release varieties that may require more frequent treatments.

Homeowners concerned about kids, pets or pollinators may want to ask about organic or low-impact options.

Understanding treatments is another key part of the process. Fertilization typically involves two or more applications throughout the growing season. Weed control may focus on pre-emergent treatments that prevent weeds from sprouting or post-emergent treatments that target weeds already growing. Some packages include both. Pest control services can help manage grubs, chinch bugs and other insects that damage grass. If your lawn struggles with bare spots, overseeding or aeration may be included to help improve soil health and encourage new growth.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before signing up, homeowners should ask several important questions. Confirm whether the company offers customized plans or uses a one-size-fits-all approach. Ask whether they provide free estimates and whether a lawn analysis is included. Clarify how long treatments last and whether follow-up visits are covered if results fall short. Find out about scheduling flexibility and what happens during weather delays.

Finally, check the contract details. Some companies require a seasonal agreement while others allow month-to-month service. Make sure the pricing is clear and that there are no hidden fees for extra treatments or reapplications.

# Preparing for Spring Storms

Spring weather can be unpredictable, bringing heavy rain, strong winds and sudden temperature shifts.

Preparing ahead of time can help protect your home from damage and keep your family safe when storms roll through. A few practical steps such as inspecting the roof, clearing gutters, trimming trees and checking emergency equipment can make a big difference.

## INSPECTING THE ROOF AND GUTTERS

A secure roof is one of the most important defenses against spring storms. Look for loose shingles, cracked flashing or signs of wear that could lead to leaks. Binoculars can help with a ground-level inspection, but if you are unsure about what to look for, hiring a professional roofer is often the safest option. Early repairs prevent small issues from turning into major water damage during heavy rain.

Gutters and downspouts need attention. Leaves, twigs and debris can block the flow of water and cause overflow that damages siding or foundations. Clearing gutters before the rainy season allows stormwater to drain properly away from the home.

## PREPARING TREES AND OUTDOOR AREAS

Tree limbs that hang close to a roof, deck or power line can become dangerous during spring storms. Strong winds may break or weaken branches, putting structures at risk. Trimming limbs now helps reduce the chance of falling debris. A certified arborist can evaluate unhealthy or leaning trees



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and recommend whether pruning or removal is needed.

Secure outdoor equipment. Patio furniture, planters and lightweight decorations can become hazardous if winds pick up.

## CHECKING SUMP PUMPS AND DRAINAGE

Heavy spring rains can quickly overwhelm basements or low-lying areas of a property. Test sump pumps before storms arrive to ensure they are working properly. Pouring a small amount

of water into the pit can help confirm the pump activates and removes water as expected.

Check exterior drainage. Ensuring soil slopes slightly away from the house helps direct water away from the foundation. French drains, swales or downspout extensions may help improve runoff in areas prone to moisture problems.

## BUILDING OR UPDATING AN EMERGENCY KIT

Every household needs a basic

emergency kit for storm season. This typically includes flashlights, extra batteries, bottled water, nonperishable food, a first-aid kit and necessary medications. Portable chargers and a battery-powered weather radio can also help families stay informed if power goes out.

It is wise to gather important documents in a waterproof folder and keep them in an easily accessible spot. Families with pets should include food, carriers or leashes in their emergency supplies.

# Harvesting Rainwater

Collecting rainwater is an effective way to conserve resources, reduce utility costs and support a healthier landscape.

With spring rains on the way, homeowners can take advantage of natural precipitation by installing a simple rainwater harvesting system.

Rain barrels and collection tanks are easier than ever to set up, and many local governments encourage their use.

## CHOOSING AND INSTALLING A RAIN BARREL

Rain barrels come in a wide range of sizes and materials, from basic plastic models to decorative barrels designed to blend in with garden landscaping. The most popular ones are between 50 and 100 gallons, though smaller or larger options are available depending on yard needs.

Installation typically begins with choosing a downspout that receives steady runoff from the roof. The barrel is placed on a flat, stable surface near the downspout, often on cinder blocks or a platform to elevate it. This height improves water pressure and makes it easier to fill watering cans. A downspout diverter or flexible hose guides rainwater into the barrel. Overflow valves redirect excess water away from the home's foundation.



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A mesh screen at the top can help keep out debris and insects.

## USING HARVESTED WATER WISELY

Rainwater collected in barrels is ideal for outdoor tasks such as watering gardens, filling watering cans, rinsing tools or cleaning patios. It can be especially helpful during dry spells when plants need consistent moisture. Harvested water is typically softer

than tap water, which many gardeners find beneficial for flowers, shrubs and vegetables.

To maximize efficiency, consider pairing a rain barrel with drip irrigation or soaker hoses. These systems deliver water slowly and directly to plant roots, reducing evaporation and waste. Homeowners can use mulch around garden beds to help retain moisture and make harvested water last longer.

## UNDERSTANDING LOCAL RULES AND BEST PRACTICES

Before installing a rainwater harvesting system, check local regulations. Some cities have rules about placement, mosquito prevention or connection to irrigation systems. A few communities require backflow prevention devices to ensure harvested water does not mix with potable water lines.

Some regions offer rebates

or incentives to encourage homeowners to install rain barrels, so checking with local utilities or environmental agencies can be worthwhile. These programs sometimes include workshops that teach the basics of maintenance and installation.

Inspect barrels regularly for leaks, clogged screens or algae buildup. Emptying and cleaning the barrel at the end of the growing season can help extend its life.

# Smart Home Tech for Spring

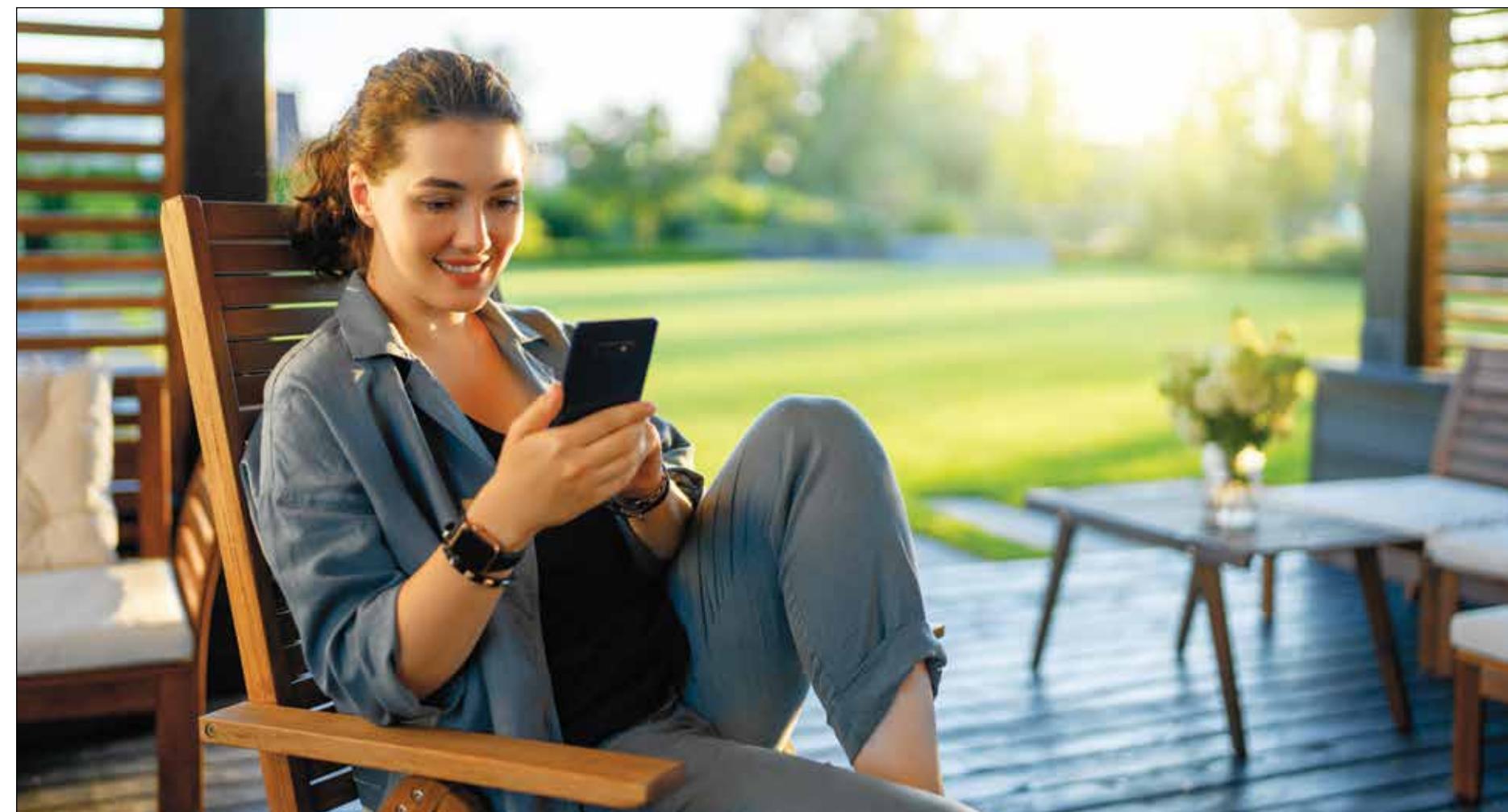
As spring approaches, many homeowners begin tackling outdoor projects, maintenance tasks and seasonal cleanup. Smart home technology can make those jobs easier.

New tools help streamline routines, save energy and improve home safety. With the right mix of apps, sensors and automated devices, homeowners can stay ahead of spring chores while reducing time spent on upkeep.

## SMARTER WATERING AND IRRIGATION

Irrigation often becomes one of the first concerns of the season, and smart controllers can take much of the guess-work out of watering. These devices connect to home Wi-Fi and adjust watering schedules based on weather patterns, soil moisture and sunlight exposure. Some systems also use local forecasts to skip watering before or after rainfall, helping conserve water and avoid overwatering.

Smart soil sensors can complement irrigation controllers by monitoring moisture levels in real time. They can alert homeowners when the soil is too dry or too saturated, allowing for more precise care. For those growing vegetables, flowers or new lawns, sensors provide valuable information that helps plants get what they



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need without wasting resources.

Many of these apps let homeowners control watering from a smartphone. This can be especially useful for people who travel during the spring or have large yards that require attention at different times.

## LIGHTING SOLUTIONS THAT BOOST SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

Outdoor lighting plays an important role in security, usability and curb appeal. Smart lighting systems allow homeowners to set schedules, automate adjustments or turn lights on and off remotely.

Motion sensors can illuminate walkways or entry points when someone approaches, improving visibility and deterring unwanted activity.

Smart bulbs and solar-powered fixtures are now more affordable and easier to install. They can be integrated into existing home systems or controlled independently through mobile apps. Many options offer adjustable brightness and color temperature, giving homeowners the ability to create different moods for gatherings, outdoor dining or quiet evenings outside.

Some lighting systems connect with doorbell cameras or home security systems,

making spring nights safer and more convenient. Automated timers also help reduce energy costs, ensuring lights run only when necessary.

## APPS AND SENSORS THAT KEEP MAINTENANCE ON TRACK

Spring home maintenance involves everything from gutter cleaning to lawn care, and smart devices can simplify many of these tasks. Temperature and humidity sensors can alert homeowners to conditions that may lead to mold or moisture problems. Leak detectors can be placed near air conditioning units, outdoor faucets or irrigation

systems to catch small leaks before they turn into larger repairs.

Smart outlets and plugs let homeowners control outdoor appliances such as fountains, pumps or power tools. They can be scheduled to run only when needed, cutting down on energy use.

Homeowners can benefit from maintenance reminder apps that integrate with smart devices. These apps keep track of filter changes, HVAC check-ups and seasonal tasks. Some link directly to smart thermostats, sending alerts when systems are working harder than usual or when temperatures fluctuate unexpectedly.