

The image is a vibrant spring-themed cover. At the top, dark branches with clusters of small white flowers hang against a clear blue sky. The title 'Spring Home & Garden' is written in a bright yellow, stylized font across the middle. Below the text, a large, green, hedge-like sculpture of a house stands in a lush green field. In the background, rolling hills are covered in yellow rapeseed flowers, with a line of trees and a forested ridge in the distance.

# Spring Home & Garden

Times Hudson Valley Media • Wallkill Valley Times • Mid Hudson Times • Southern Ulster Times • April 24, 2019

# All is not lost when grass shows signs of thinning out

Thinning grass can be caused by any number of things. And while it might take a little effort to address, thinning grass can be treated if homeowners correctly identify that cause of the problem.

## Leaf spot

The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes that leaf spot diseases affect both cool- and warm-season turfgrasses. Various fungi can cause leaf spot. Symptoms and the timing of the appearance of leaf spot will vary depending on which fungi is causing the problem. For example, *bipolaris sorokiniana*, which affects grasses in warm, wet summer months, produces small spots that are dark purple to black. *Drechslera poae* is another fungi that causes leaf spot, and it also produces dark

purple to black spots. However, it tends to appear in the spring when the weather is cool and moist. Understanding the different fungi and when they typically strike can help homeowners identify what is causing their grass to thin. In such situations, professional landscapers can be invaluable resources as well.

## Stripe smut

The University of Maryland Extension notes that stripe smut primarily poses a threat to Kentucky bluegrass that is older than three years. Pale green streaks that run parallel to the veins in the leaves and leaf sheaths are symptomatic of stripe smut, which tends to be noticed in spring and fall, when weather is cool. As the disease progresses, stripes turn black or a silvery gray, causing the leaf blade to shred and curl. After the blades have

shred, they turn brown and die. The grass thins because stripe smut makes it vulnerable to problems like drought.

## Ascochyta leaf blight

Lawns suffering from ascochyta leaf blight will become straw-colored. According to the lawn care and pesticide experts at Ortho®, when a lawn is affected by ascochyta leaf blight, its healthy grass blades will be mixed in with diseased grass blades. Most prevalent in the spring, this disease can affect grass at any time during the growing season. That's because the ascochyta fungi invade leaf blades through wounds, such as those that can result from mowing. Ortho® notes that dull lawn mowers can contribute to the disease, which might disappear on its own and can even return after it's seemingly been cured.





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# How to identify the most unwelcome garden guest

Unfortunately, many people don't recognize the presence of poison ivy on their property until it's too late and they've already fallen victim to the uncomfortable, itchy red rash that is the plant's hallmark.

According to Poison-Ivy.org, a website providing information about poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac, the rash from poison ivy may first appear as just a slight itchy spot. But that spot will gradually get worse and can even cover your entire body with giant red sores if left untreated or if it goes undetected for too long. That only highlights the importance of learning to recognize poison ivy on a property and taking the appropriate measures to prevent anyone from coming into contact with it.



## Is all poison ivy the same?

Many people may be surprised to learn that all poison ivy plants are not one and the same. Poison-Ivy.org notes that there are different types of poison ivy in different places, so curious homeowners should visit the site to determine how to identify the type of poison ivy specific to where they live. Eastern Poison Ivy grows

on the ground, climbs and sometimes appears as a shrub. And despite its name, Eastern Poison Ivy grows from the east coast to the midwest, affecting people in middle American states like Kansas and Nebraska. Eastern Poison Ivy also can be found in some parts of Texas and Arizona.

What are some telltale signs of the poison ivy plant?

Eastern Poison Ivy is the most widespread poison ivy plant, and these are some of its characteristics.

- Poison ivy plants always have leaves of three. No poison ivy plants have more than three leaves.

- Poison ivy always grow left, then right. That means that the stem/branch of leaves closest to the root of the plant will always lean left. Subsequent stems/branches of leaves can lean right. Stems/branches of poison ivy leaves are never side by side.

- Poison ivy plants never have thorns.
- The edges of poison ivy leaves are never saw-toothed or scalloped.

- Poison ivy leaves will appear differently depending on the season. In spring, Eastern Poison Ivy leaves will appear red. As spring turns into summer, the leaves will gradually appear more green. Come fall, the green leaves will look as if they were brushed with red, with some leaves featuring patches or spots of red.



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# Ready, set, spring!

- Lawn and garden experts at The Home Depot suggest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.
- Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.
- Give outdoor entertaining spaces a good scrubbing, clearing away dirt and grime that may have accumulated over the winter. Use a leaf blower to blow away any leftover leaves.
- Check if the front porch, railings or decking need painting and/or staining. Tackle these projects when the weather is cooler so everything will be ready for those peak spring days.
- Think about any annuals you might want to plant in the landscape this year that will complement any existing shrubbery or perennials. Come up with a theme so that the entire yard is cohesive.



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# Quick weekend warrior projects



Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up, as homeowners channel the rejuvenating feelings of spring and tackle their home to-do lists. Large-scale renovations can greatly affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

- Create an accent wall. Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

- Stair runners. Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

- Dress up the entryway. An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb.

Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers. A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor. Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different patterns and can mimic the look of wood, travertine or marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

- A new faucet. Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets help conserve water.

- Install a light fixture. Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Replace an existing fixture with something new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not in your skill set, table or floor lamps can cast a new glow on a space.

- Create a staircase gallery. Arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This look can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

- Add molding. Molding can add instant aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of

walls where they meet the ceiling, or even mid-wall as a chair rail. Some homeowners like to create framed molding on walls in formal living spaces.

- Update kitchen or bathroom hardware. Replacing hardware is a fast and easy project, but one that can have immediate impact. Swap out tired or outdated hardware for newer brushed metals and more impactful shapes and designs.

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## Most common spring pests



Pavement ants are some of the most common found both inside and outside homes. These ants are small and light brown to black with appendages that are lighter than the rest of their bodies with parallel lines on their heads and thorax. Although pavement ants nest outdoors, they can enter homes through small crevices in search of food. Their large colonies may not disappear until treatment is introduced. Keep foods in tightly sealed containers, clear counters and floors of crumbs, and address water sources, such as leaks. Pesticides may be needed in extreme conditions.

Fleas are tiny, jumping, biting pests that need a host to live on. As ectoparasites, they feed on blood while living on the body of living hosts. Pets can bring fleas inside the yard and home in warm weather. Flea larvae develop quickly at higher temperatures. At normal room temperatures, the entire life cycle of a flea is about 18 days.

Several flea control products are available to control fleas on cats and dogs. There also may be powders and sprays to alleviate flea infestations in the home. Vacuuming is also very effective in killing larvae in the carpet and at picking up adults.

An errant wasp, hornet or yellow jacket may have survived winter and ridden out the colder temperatures within a home. Once the weather warms, queens will begin to look for places to lay eggs and establish colonies. Treating areas where wasps are seen entering and leaving the home is key. Seal holes as soon as possible.

Although wasps help control other insect populations, their painful stings and potentially aggressive nature can make them challenging to have around a home. If a nest is found, hire a professional to remove it.

Many spiders are not harmful enough to humans and pets to be much of a problem. In fact, spiders can be helpful to have around to control the populations of other insects. Still, many homeowners would prefer these web-slinging friends remain outdoors. Therefore, sealing cracks in a home's foundation and repairing small openings around windows and doors can help keep spiders out. Also, alleviating moisture issues in basements, garages or attics may keep out other bugs that would be prey to spiders.

### Landscaping techniques that help reduce tick populations:



- Remove leaf litter from the yard.
- Clear tall grasses and brush around homes and at the edges of the lawn. Mow regularly to keep the lawn short.
- Create a barrier between wooded areas and the yard if it abuts a forested area. According to Consumer Reports, a three-foot-wide path of wood chips or gravel can prevent tick migration by creating a physical barrier that's dry and sometimes too hot for ticks to tolerate. Such a barrier also serves as a visual reminder to anyone in your household to be especially careful if they step beyond the perimeter.
- Bag grass clippings, which can serve as habitats for ticks.
- Remove old furniture, trash and other debris that can give ticks places to hide.
- Remember to use a tick-repellent product when venturing into wooded areas. Flea and tick products also are available for pets; consult with a vet.



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# Home security for the do-it-yourselfer

Many people consider installing security systems in their homes to improve their sense of well-being. The right system can help protect your belongings and families, but sorting through the various security systems on the market can be a daunting task. While full-service setups that include professional installation and monitoring are available, many highly customizable DIY kits are available. Some include personal monitoring, while others are self-install technologies with professional monitoring.

## Smart home security systems

These security systems connect to a home's Wi-Fi network and can be controlled using a smartphone app. Others may be accessed through an application on the internet. Look for a system that has the extra security of technology that is not easily hacked.

## Professionally monitored

Residents who are too busy to constantly monitor security systems may like the



peace of mind of professionally monitored kits. Services like Frontpoint®, Link Interactive® and Scout® are just three that have affordable starter kits and video monitoring. Monitored alarm systems can be set to call the police or other emergency

services if necessary.

## Security cameras

Some people may only want to watch the inside and outside of their residences. It can take mere minutes to set up wireless

security cameras around the house. These devices connect to a Wi-Fi network and give customers free access to a constant stream of video. Some systems make it easy for homeowners to listen in on what's going on at home and even talk to anyone within the camera's range. Others can be paired with cloud storage for recording video.

## Entry-level or advanced systems

Entry-level systems typically include a few door and window sensors, a motion detector and a hub that communicates with these sensors. This may be enough for someone in an apartment or small house. More extensive systems may include additional sensors, door locks, garage door openers, surveillance cameras, lights, sirens, and even water and smoke detectors.

Do-it-yourself security systems represent a new wave to safeguard one's belongings and family. Kits continue to evolve and have become more seamless than ever.

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