

**NEW FEATURE**

# SmarterLiving

## Keep cool!

6 new gadgets to help you beat the heat. Plus ways to save on gas and TV's best bets. **4-5H**



# Home & Garden

**DIY:** Peter Hotton's Q&A. **2H**



**NANCY BRACHEY**  
Put the humble goldenrod on your list. Plus, Nancy answers your questions. **3H**

**TODAY'S QUOTE**

'Here lies Walter Fielding. He bought a house, and it killed him.' — **Walter Fielding** (played by Tom Hanks) in 1986's 'The Money Pit'

**MARNI JAMESON:** Customizing tile and other emerging trends. **8H**



The Charlotte Observer

[charlotteobserver.com/home](http://charlotteobserver.com/home)

## There's no stopping a mother wren

REAL ESTATE



**ALLEN NORWOOD**

The wrens flitted around my head as I worked on our new shed. I didn't pay much attention – but I should have.

There was a nest in the rafters even before I got the roof shingles on, and two little eggs in the nest before I got around to hanging the door.

I didn't want to leave the door open, because all sorts of varmints could get in. We recently had a fox patrolling the mulch pile. But I didn't want to block the wren from coming and going until her little ones were old enough to be on their own.

I underestimated the wren. I installed the knob so I could latch the door against thunderstorms and wandering critters.

But I didn't install the deadbolt. That hole through the door, just above the knob, remained open – which the wren happily discovered. She perched on the knob, surveyed the backyard, then darted through the deadbolt hole.

I cracked the door for a few days as the little ones got bigger and stronger – and quickly installed the deadbolt after they departed.

I hope the wren appreciated the spacious digs.

**Do it yourself? Well ...**

Reader Bill Lee points out, correctly, that there's a "spectrum of capability" when it comes to do-it-yourself projects. When you're young, you might have to tackle big chores to save money even though you lack skills. Through the middle of your life, if you're lucky, you gain skills and remain physically active. As you age, well, whatever your skills, you probably ought to stay off tall ladders.

He also offered this sage observation in an email, in response to the recent columns about chores better left to others:

"The human spirit endures, and it is quite useless to try to tell a fellow that he can't do something. He has to learn the hard way ... That's why there are no books entitled 'Self-performed Brain Surgery for Dummies.'"

**Earnhardt homes?**

There were a few quizzical looks when Schumacher Homes announced its Earnhardt Collection last fall. The collection features 22 house plans designed in collaboration with Kerry and Rene Earnhardt. Homes named for a racing clan? Yes – and the first model from the collection, the Blue Ridge, will be open to the public next Saturday in Asheville. A grand opening is set for 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at 98 Dogwood Road. Kerry and Rene plan to be there. For more information, including directions, visit [www.schumacherhomes.com](http://www.schumacherhomes.com).

**Wood-care advice**

Cabot, which makes popular outdoor wood-care products, recently unveiled a new online resource for homeowners. The Cabot Woodcare Council brings together pros and other experts to establish standards and offer advice. If you're planning to see **NORWOOD**, 6H

# FRONT-YARD farmers



PHOTOS BY ADAM JENNINGS - [adamjennings@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:adamjennings@charlotteobserver.com)

**Mattie Edwards dug a 96-foot-long strip in her east Charlotte yard, where she grows a bounty of vegetables.**

## VEGGIES DON'T HAVE TO HIDE OUT BACK

BY AMBER VEVERKA  
Correspondent

**M**atthew and Genna Hurley wanted to grow a few vegetables, but their backyard lay beneath a blanket of shade. Some people might have stuck a few pots of geraniums in the sunny front yard and contented themselves with store-bought produce. But not the Hurleys.

They turned the front of their Cotswold home into a food-producing powerhouse, with eggplant, peppers, squash and tomatoes all bearing heavily. When the Hurleys open their front door this time of year, the heady scent of homegrown marinara sauce comes pouring out. The sauce and other homegrown vegetables wind up in all kinds of recipes, including Matthew's panko-crusted eggplant-and-buffalo-mozzarella appetizer.

A growing number of Charlotteans whose backyards can't support a garden are turning

their front yards into mini-farms.

And it's a case of a trend coming full circle: Long ago, small cottage gardens in front of homes contained a riotous mixture of flowers and vegetables, but over time, food became something to hide out back. Now growing your own food isn't just socially acceptable, it's hip. And for many people, there's no reason not to put it on display.

In the Hurleys' yard, the tomatoes are staked in a large patch near the street, but Matthew has tucked many of the other vegetables **SEE FRONT YARD, 3H**

**Starting a fall garden**

- For autumn, consider plants with striking foliage, such as lacinato kale, which has dark, crinkled leaves, or red Russian kale, which turns purple after frost. Many varieties of cabbage produce blue-green heads.
- Chard can be sown in fall, and there are varieties with deep red or neon shades of stems. Other fall-planted favorites are leeks and garlic, which produce strappy leaves that contrast nicely with other foliage.
- If you make an attractive pattern of autumn-planted lettuce, you don't want to lose the eye appeal at harvest time. Edible landscape expert Rosalind Cressy harvests side leaves from lettuce heads so the entire bed produces more salad.
- Plant fruit trees this fall for spring blooms and eventual summer fruit. Blueberry bushes can line a walk, figs can provide summer shade near the house.
- Deer love vegetables as much as you do. In an unfenced front yard, you may try shielding edibles behind strong-tasting herbs deer don't favor, such as rosemary and lavender, or planting your vegetables close to the house.
- Next spring, remember that flowers provide food and shelter for plant-friendly insects and critical habitat for butterflies – and they can conceal the less-attractive vegetables. Some flowers, such as nasturtiums, are edible as well.

## I'M SO CLEVER

Use toilet paper rolls to organize cords



BY ROLAND WILKERSON  
[rwilkinson@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:rwilkinson@charlotteobserver.com)

**The winner:** To keep electronic cords, ear buds, etc. organized and tangle-free, stand toilet tissue cores on end in a box. If you're OCD like me, you can even cover them with adhesive shelf paper (\$1 at discount store) and put labels on the tubes.— SANDY CAY, CHARLOTTE

**Windshield shade cools the home**

The afternoon sun through our patio glass doors makes our house get quite warm. We have an outside rollout shade but needed more sometimes. I purchased two fold-up auto windshield shades with elastic bands on one end. I hang them on the door hinges. Now our house is much cooler.— LOUISE NEAL, SHELBY

**Good to the last drop**

Whenever I am at the end of any product that comes in a tube and I can't squeeze more out, I cut the end off. I am always amazed at how much product is still in the tube. By cutting off the end of a tube of foundation, I was able to get another week's worth.— MARCY MURPHY, DAVIDSON

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# Garden

## FRONT YARD

[from IH]

bles behind flowers. “I figured if I was going to garden up front, I was going to make it look as neat as possible,” he said. Eggplants make a nice backdrop, he said, hot peppers are pretty plants, and in the fall, cabbages and kale show off ornamental foliage.

Vegetables can be just as nice to look at as flowers, says Bill Woodson, who lives around the block from the Hurleys. Bill and Janice Woodson have a vegetable garden in their small, sunny backyard, but that wasn't enough for the couple, who are deep into tomato canning this time of year.

Bill, who noted that European gardens often are a blend of the ornamental and edible, started sowing okra on the street side of his house, surrounding it with a drift of blazing orange cosmos. He and Janice tuck in vegetables wherever they can – tomatoes under windows, more okra next to the air conditioning unit.

### Try to make it look pretty

Nationally recognized edible landscaping expert Rosalind Creasy said the keys to making front-yard vegetables neighbor-friendly are using plenty of flowers and artful touches such as colorful trellises, and harvesting selectively so beauty remains, meal after meal.

“People have to change their mentality. They're not on a farm,” says Creasy, California-based food and gardening columnist and author of the 10-book “Edible Landscaping” series. She recommends choosing varieties of chard with neon-bright stems, lettuces with speckled leaves, and other painterly plants – and then arranging them in diamonds, circles or other patterns.

“I've gone to the Home Depot and gotten these redwood trellises, taken the legs off of them, laid them on the ground, painted them purple and planted lettuces in between the squares,” she said.

Creasy described the front yard of her Los Altos home. “I have the new black tomato... and I have red trellises with it to support it. On either side I have a deep purple basil and...white-blooming Asian chives.” Creasy paints the stakes for vegetable plants to match the color of the vegetable. She encour-



ADAM JENNINGS - adamjennings@charlotteobserver.com

**Matthew and Genna Hurley grow vegetables in their front yard of their Costwold home because the backyard is too shady. They tuck many of the veggies behind flowers.**

ages beneficial insects by giving them plenty of blooms for nectar and pollen.

For a city like Charlotte, Creasy suggests replacing evergreen foundation plantings with edibles such as blueberries. “There's some blueberry bushes with beautiful fall color and it does not say in the Constitution that you have to have evergreens up against the house,” she said.

Renfrow Hardware owner David Blackley agrees and says more city dwellers are growing food in front of their homes. “If you're not looking for it, you don't realize (it's there), because it can be done very tastefully and sort of stealth-like,” says Blackley, whose old-time hardware store is in downtown Matthews. “All of a sudden you've got blueberries in your front yard, and why would you not?”

### A bounty of vegetables

You don't need to convince Mattie Edwards that food belongs up front. The 82-year-old gardens her east Charlotte yard with a vigor that puts many younger gardeners to shame. Using a pitchfork, she hand-dug a 96-foot-long strip next to her driveway. She added chopped leaves and other compost to the soil until it was as rich and fluffy as chocolate cake.

Her bounty: “I grow half-runner (beans), I grow cucumbers, I grow squash, tomatoes, bell peppers,” she says. An old, treasured variety of field peas that Edwards has dubbed “Inheritance Peas.” Brussels sprouts. Collard greens. Cabbage. And oh yes, corn.

“With that one row of corn, I put in the freezer over 200 ears,” says Edwards, who also works full time in a public school cafeteria. “I put up maybe two bushels of tomatoes off of that.”

### What about the neighbors?

Of course, not everyone is a fan of edible front yards. An Oak Park, Mich. woman made national headlines last year when the city threatened her with jail time for refusing to remove her front-yard vegetables (the case has since been dropped). And Charlotte attorney Michael Hunter warns that most upper-priced Charlotte neighborhoods are governed by covenants restricting what residents can do with their yards.

Those communities, overseen by homeowners' associations, have rules that range from “very vague” to those that detail the length of grass or whether someone can make a “major landscaping change,” said Hunter, whose practice focuses on representation of condominiums and HOAs. Will and Katie Esser found some neighbors were a little unhappy about their up-front vegetables, so the southeast Charlotte couple made changes. They enclosed everything in a white picket fence and added an arbor with seating.

Of course, front-yard farmers face challenges other than public opinion. A herd of urban deer enjoys the Essers' garden – which includes peach, plum and apple trees – almost as much as they do.

But still, said Katie, it's worth it. “We've got potatoes, onions, garlic, squash, cucumbers and some tomatoes. Blueberries and red raspberries. We've got three little kids and they just go out and eat right off the plant,” she said.

Amber Veverka writes about the natural environment at [www.backyardandbeyond.org](http://www.backyardandbeyond.org)



Goldenrod blooms in late summer and early fall and is a good source of nectar for bees and butterflies.

## Goldenrod adds zest to late summer

I suspect that almost everyone thinks of goldenrod as a flower of the roadside. Yet it has a place in flower beds, where its distinctive spikes of bright yellow add verve and style in late summer.

### GARDENING



NANCY BRACHEY

A generation or two ago, people would probably have laughed at the idea of goldenrod as a garden flower. I remember picking it along a country road while visiting my grandmother and making a bouquet that she allowed on the porch but not past the front door.

That was a long time ago. New varieties of goldenrod, especially chosen for their worth in flower beds, are in the marketplace. Instead of wild and rangy, they are short, graceful and densely packed with blooms.

For the late-summer garden – before the chrysanthemums come out – this is the best yellow perennial. It is a good, vivid yellow – nothing pale or wimpy about it – that can hold its own with the vivid blues and purples of salvias that tend to steal the show now. Not only does goldenrod hold its own, but the yellow both enhances and is enhanced by the blues and purples.

Even if your flower beds lack these colors, yellow makes a good companion for others as well. Other good companions include brown-eyed Susans and any of the fall asters.

The advantages of goldenrod as a garden flower are its durability, ability to expand without turning invasive and adaptability to full sun or light shade. A native of North America, it does not demand the

world's best soil, but will carry on in loose, plain soil and even in wet spots, but not bogs. Now that is a trouper.

The goldenrods of the roadsides tend to be 3 to 7 feet tall and rather wild-looking. Modern, named goldenrods bred for flower gardens can be as short as 18 inches, (Cloth of Gold), 2 feet tall, (Golden Baby) and 2 to 3 feet tall (Crown of Rays). Fireworks grows about 3 feet tall. All grow quite fast. I particularly like Fireworks, because it bears arching spires that bear flowers for about 18 inches. That looks good both in the flower bed and in a tall vase. Fortunately, these goldenrods don't require staking.

While light shade is acceptable for goldenrods, they are not plants for the woodland, where few sunbeams get through the canopy. The edge of a shady garden that gets morning or afternoon sunlight should be OK.

Clumps tend to develop densely over several seasons. A young plant set out this summer or fall may look quite thin at first. But the robust nature of goldenrod will let it develop into a good clump that will bear many stems from late summer into fall.

After the blooms are gone in fall, cut off the stems to the crown, or base of the plant. Goldenrods are very hardy and will bear new growth once they break dormancy in spring. Leaving the old stems looks untidy and could unsettle the roots if the stems are weighed down by ice and snow or blown by winter winds.

## Home Calendar

AUG. 24-26

### SOUTHERN IDEAL HOME SHOW

This year's show will run from noon to 8 p.m. Aug. 24, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Aug. 25 and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 26 at The Park Expo and Conference Center. The show focuses on making your home complete, more interesting, comfortable and fun to live in. For a list of demonstrations, experts, ticket and parking prices: [www.southernideahome.com](http://www.southernideahome.com).

AUG. 27

### LUNCH AND LEARN: TURF SELECTION

Mecklenburg Extension Consumer Horticulture Agent Scott Ewers will host this free Master Gardener lunch-and-learn session from noon to 1 p.m. Aug. 27 at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 1418 Armory Drive. Ewers will host a discussion about the warm-season and cool-season grasses planted around Charlotte, turf selection, methods for establishing new lawns and preparation methods. The event is free, but pre-registration is requested: 704-336-4011 or [info@mastergardenersmecklenburg.org](mailto:info@mastergardenersmecklenburg.org).

— COMPILED BY HILARY TRENDIA

## Few migrants, but lots of locals at McAlpine Park

PIEDMONT BIRDING  
TAYLOR PIEPHOFF



I took advantage of some cooler temperatures last weekend to spend a couple of hours in the field looking for some of the first true migrants of the season. I decided on McAlpine Park off Monroe Road, a locale that has a proven record for attracting a diversity of migrants.

I crossed McAlpine Creek on the iron bridge heading toward the lake. I immediately heard and saw some Carolina chickadees in an overhanging birch tree. Experienced birders know to check out the chickadee flocks during migration because they attract a wide assortment of species. I also love to find a feeding flock in a birch tree because the foliage starts dropping in late summer and is relatively open and thin, making for easier spotting of tiny treetop warblers.

All I could see were the chickadees, tufted titmice and downy woodpeckers, but a few tantalizing “chips” let me know there were some other species up there. Unfortunately, the flock moved on before I could spot something better.

The beaver pond proved to be very interesting. I found two great egrets loafing

on a fallen log, a belted kingfisher on a dead snag, a green heron along the shore, and a red-shouldered hawk along the woods edge. One true migrant sat motionless on a dead tree – an immature osprey, judging by the light feather tips on the wings. These large fish-eaters can be attracted to surprisingly small bodies of water during migration.

The weedy field edges held several family groups of indigo buntings and blue grosbeaks.

American goldfinches flew in and out of the trees lining the lake, undoubtedly tending nests or young. Chimney swifts, circled the lake, dipping down to grab a sip of water on the wing. No swallows were present that day, but this is a great place to observe mixed swallow flocks.

So it turned out to be slow day for migrants. Most of the birds I saw were probably locals.

That's OK; it is still very early in the season. The coming weeks hold plenty of promise as another season of waves of warblers, tanagers, flycatchers and sparrows will gain momentum and lure birders back into the field.

Taylor Piephoff is a local naturalist with an interest in the birds and wildlife of the southern Piedmont: [PiephoffT@aol.com](mailto:PiephoffT@aol.com).

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