

hot trends

designing for curb appeal

BY BARBARA BALLINGER

6 key elements make your house and yard look their best

The condition of a home's façade—a fresh coat of paint, clean sparkling windows and a well-maintained roof—all contribute to good curb appeal. But landscaping and hardscape also impart an immediate impression.

If the walkway is cracking, or surrounding lawn is brown and weed-filled, tree limbs and shrubs haven't been pruned, a buyer will assume that the interior hasn't been properly kept up either. "The first step always is to clean up what's there," says Dave Luczkow, vice president of OptHome in Southboro, Massachusetts, an online resource for buyers and sellers (www.opthome.com). "Maintain and spruce up the lawn, mow, rake and get rid of debris," he advises. Because of the downturn in the housing market, anyone who's about to list their home needs to be sure that both the house and its property look

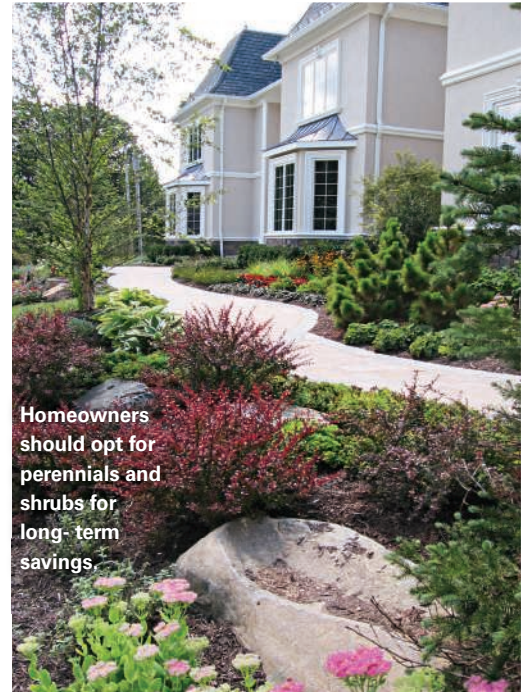
their best.

If you are planning to sell, don't do the

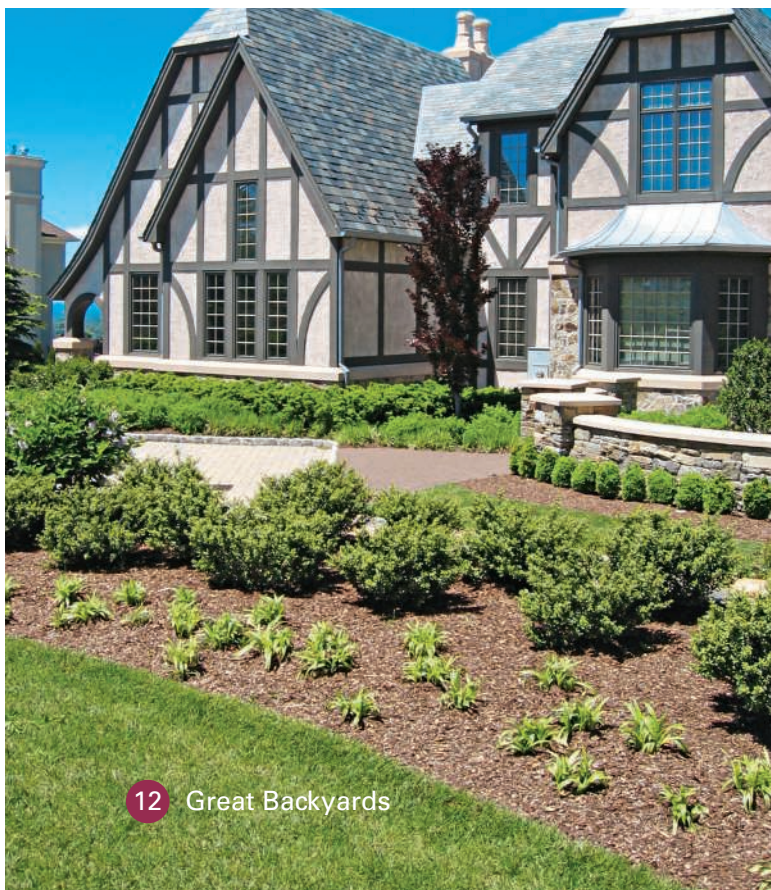
work simply for the next owners. They should reap maximum enjoyment while they live there, too. Any plan can be done gradually if money is tight, but the result can be the same cohesive design that complements the style of the house, its scale, sun exposure, climate and soil. The following seven elements will make your house and yard look their best:

Flowers. Colorful flowers are big attention-getters; to make the best visual display as well as maximize dollars, homeowners should consider perennials—they don't need to be purchased and planted each year and the right selection will offer a staggered display from early spring through late fall, says landscape designer Catie Lee Casazza of CRL Landscape Design in Encino, California. Tracy DiSabato-Aust, author of *50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants* (www.tracylive.com), recommends limiting colors to complementary hues such as violets and yellows rather than an extensive array of colors, which can lead to a shopping-center effect. "Less is more and offers greater impact," she says. The choice of colors can also lead to different emotions and visual effects. Warm yellows, reds and oranges tend to create a cheerful feeling and make an area appear closer; cooler blues, greens and violets usually relax and calm viewers and make an area appear more distant. She also suggests putting bold-colored flowers near the front entry to introduce a focal point.

Vertical plantings should be kept to a scale that suits the house and coordinates with the home's style. These clipped evergreens are appropriate for the Tudor architecture.



Homeowners should opt for perennials and shrubs for long-term savings.



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Photography provided by CRL Landscape Design

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She also recommends some flowers be planted to offer pleasant scents, though, again, less is more so that too much fragrance won't overwhelm. "Potential buyers will remember your property as distinctive when you have a nice smell, such as a fragrant honeysuckle," she says. Still other choices can be made to hide eyesores like trash receptacles, air conditioning units or a neighbor's fence, says Luczkow.

The site's amount of sun and shade should also dictate choices. Hostas thrive in shade, and with

so many variations, a few can be combined or used as accents, says landscape expert Chris Cipriano of Cipriano Landscape Design in Ramsey, New Jersey.

Trees and shrubs. Some vertical height will lead the eye up, expand vistas and suggest a mature setting. But choices should be kept to a scale that suits the house and yard—not too small but not so large that they overwhelm and camouflage the front



Always remember the 'less is more' rule. You want your property to look good," says Luczkow, "but you don't want them to see it and think, 'this is beautiful, but it will take \$20,000 to maintain it.'"

Sustainable features.

Going green involves different strategies in different parts of the country. In warm climates, designers tend to favor xeriscape or drought-tolerant native plants. As an alternative to lawn, for instance, Casazza favors decomposed granite and yarrow, flowers that resemble lawn but require less frequent mowing and little or no watering. In New Jersey where Cipriano works, he says rain gardens have become very popular. Rainfall and water from a roof are collected in a garden filled with certain plants, ornamental grasses, gravels and amended soil, all of which filter out toxins and cool the water before it seeps into the ground or is sent on to streams where it's healthier for plant and animal life, says Cipriano.

CRL Landscape Design put a modern spin on the curb appeal of this 20-year-old Southern California home.



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façade and windows. A red oak, for instance, can grow to 100 feet high and overwhelm a quaint bungalow while an ornamental cherry tree is a perfect match. If you're listing the house and don't have any or just a few trees and shrubs, planting large ones that look like they've been there a while can be a smart idea, though a pricey one. DiSabato-Aust suggests one alternative—ornamental grasses like Karl Foerester Feather Reed, which can reach 4 feet high. To maintain trees and shrubs properly, prune and feed and consider calling in an arborist.

Lawn. Most homeowners work hard to achieve a lush-looking green lawn, particularly when their home is on the market. Using sod can improve the odds, although it's more expensive than seed.

Photography provided by CRL Landscape Design

Pathways. A front walk should be constructed from a material that complements or repeats what is used on the home's facade. DiSabato-Aust used a flagstone path that she felt suited her log home's casual style. Cipriano also recommends making any path wide enough so that two people can walk together, which usually means a width of 3 or 4 feet depending on the site and its scale. He likes to run a planting bed filled with seasonal flowers parallel to the walk and half its width on each side. For summer, he might plant spirea; in winter, maybe juniper.

Lighting. Lighting can be used to accent a house, walkway, architectural features, flowers, shrubs and trees for visual appeal as well as for safety.

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expert advice

placing garden structures

BY BARBARA BALLINGER

Bring character to your outdoor living space

Garden structures—arbors, pergolas, gazebos, pavilions, follies and trellises—are hardly new. But there's renewed interest in them in recent years as homeowners spend more time in their backyards. In fact, adding an outdoor living space was the biggest garden trend this past year, says landscape designer Chris Cipriano, owner of Cipriano Landscape Design in Ramsey, New Jersey.

The good news is that these structures have almost limitless possibilities—different sizes, materials and shapes, for all sorts of reasons—they can provide cover for dining, shade from hot weather, protection from wind and rain, and more space to grow vines and flowers.

"Whether you have a very minimalist garden, or a formal or rustic theme, there is a garden structure to complement your style," says Marianne Liggett, president of TGP Inc. Landscape Architecture, a firm based in Encino, California.

But before you decide on specifics, plan how you'll use the structure. If it's a spot for private tête-à-têtes, a gazebo might work best but if it's for cooking and dining, a pavilion with sides and a roof and an outdoor kitchen might be smarter. Then the chef and guests won't get wet.

A Key Decision

You'll need to decide where to place your garden structure. For solitary contemplation, you might want to



Erhard Pfeiffer

locate it away from the house, but as an adjunct to a pool or the home, you'll want it closer, perhaps even attached. Structures, especially arcades, can also be used to link different parts of a garden, Liggett says, and views from any structure toward hills, flower beds or water features should also be considered to maximize enjoyment.

Form & Function

A custom designed structure is usually more expensive than an off-the-shelf design, Liggett says. Material is also a factor—teak, mahogany and synthetic azak are all pricey but hold up well, says Gary Blum, owner of Schlick Design Group Inc. in Huntington, New York. Consider other amenities you might like as well, such as fire pit or fountain. Vines attached can soften the structure, add seasonal color, provide fragrance, even block undesirable views of neighbors' homes or eyesores such as an air conditioning unit or unattractive fence.

This pergola over an outdoor kitchen/serving bar is attached to the home for ease and convenience.



Gary Blum