

Home & garden

**Welcome to
Jones Ranch
2008**

**Historic Alamo ranch
house was worth the wait**

**Don't send
money down
the drain**

**Toilets offer two
flushing volumes
—a great way
to save water**

The power of paint

Color comes in handy when
freshening up a home





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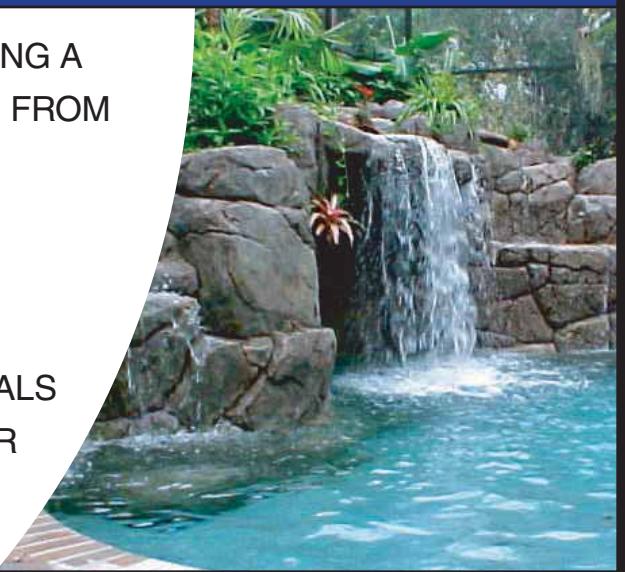


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Home garden



Spring has arrived— and so has this special section

In the springtime, Lucrezia and Tommy Mota and their family enjoy their swimming pool, spa and outdoor kitchen surrounded by their beautiful garden in bloom, in the former Jones Ranch house built in 1919. This article includes photographs from inside and out the extraordinary home in west Alamo. This special section also features the latest water-saving idea in toilets, and a great way to deal with those problem areas in your grass. And spring might be a good time to turn your back yard into a peaceful sanctuary, as well as to freshen up your home with paint—and not just on the walls.

Dual flush toilets offer a choice

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Editor: Dolores Fox Ciardelli

Art Director: Shannon Corey

On the cover: Gizmo, a Brussels griffon, saunters by Tommy Mota's 1941 estate wagon, which enhances the ambiance of the old ranch house built in 1919; the detached garage has a game room over it, a place where the children can "make as much noise as they want." Photo by Shannon Corey.

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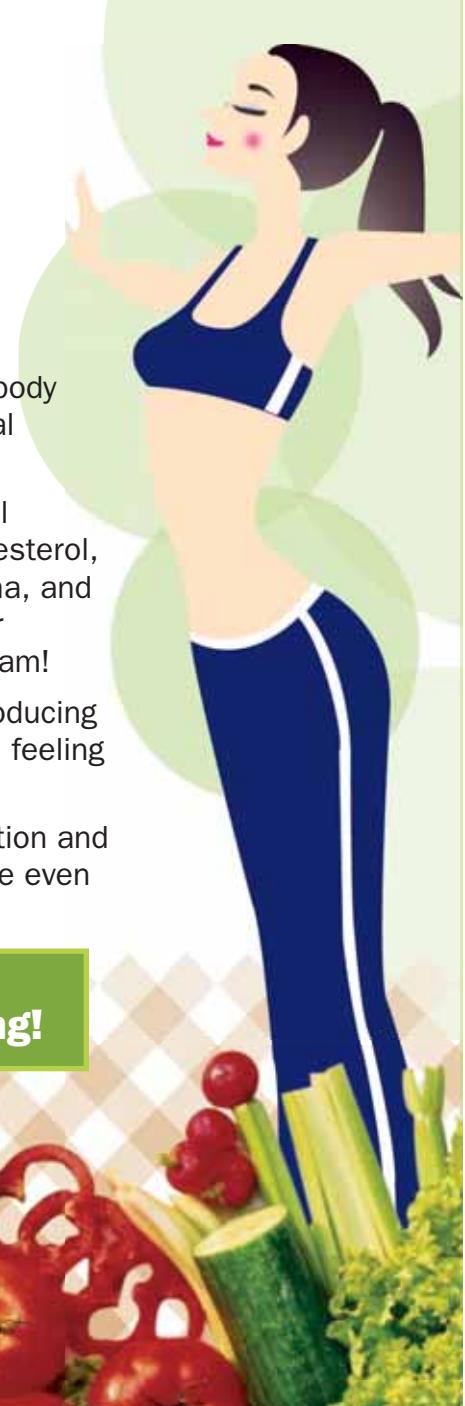
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Don't send money down the drain

Toilets offers two flushing volumes—a great way to save water

When people think of wasting water, often the first thing that comes to mind is long showers or leaving the water running while brushing your teeth. But the real water guzzler in your home is the toilet.

Each household member flushes the toilet four or more times daily on average, accounting for more than 20 gallons of water used per person. If the toilets in the house were installed before 1994, that can mean up to 40 percent of the household's total use of water and a hefty chunk of the monthly water bill.

Today's newer models are more efficient, but there's another way to reduce water use even further. Caroma, an Australian company, offers dual flush toilets, a technology it introduced more than 25 years ago as a water-saving means for Australia, the earth's driest inhabited continent. It is an utterly plausible concept, with two buttons atop the tank to activate two different flushing volumes. This system allows bathroom-goers to choose using either a small volume for flushing liquids or a larger volume for solids.

"The water savings are humongous," said Melissa Prater, specialty assistant manager at Yardbirds Home Center in Alamo. She said Yardbirds can special order dual-flush toilets but doesn't carry any in stock because the higher price means there isn't too much demand for them. A white dual-flush toilet goes for \$688 (\$900 for specialty colors) compared to about \$300 for a regular toilet. But with half the water per flush, people can end up saving money, said Prater. It's an investment.

On the Caroma models, the flushing volumes are 0.8 and 1.6 gallons per flush, the

lowest in the industry. Because of bathroom habits, the smaller volume typically would be used four times more than the larger flush. The choice thus gives a direct way to conserve water even further than on a single flush model. The increased water savings leads to significant financial savings as well.

The rest of the world now has caught on to this conservation-minded approach. Today, there are more dual flush toilets sold around the world than the single-flush models which predominate in North America. But, people here are starting to learn about and change to the two-button toilet.

"Everything's kind of going green so I can see the tides turning and us going more toward the lower water consumption," Prater said.

Water utilities around the globe are big proponents of dual flush technology. In fact, dual flush is credited with significantly decreasing water demand in Australia. Periodic drought there has caused critical water shortages, leading to severe water restrictions in major cities. Dual flush has helped ease this problem and could have similar positive effects in the United States.

A dual flush toilet should fit seamlessly into a home's decor and not require changes to a home's existing plumbing network. The look of Caroma's product line is very similar to traditional single-level toilets, but their efficiency and performance have allowed the brand to develop a worldwide reputation as the water-saving toilet that is nearly impossible to clog. That suits today's marketplace, which is increasingly willing to "go green," yet demands product performance too.

Courtesy of ARAcontent

Meghan Neal contributed to this story.

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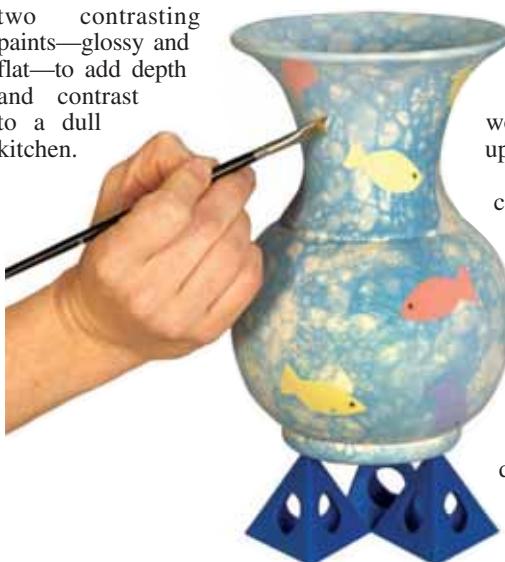
The power of PAINT

Paint is powerful when it comes to giving a room a new look, and its impact can be seen on far more than just the walls. Other design elements in a room—from kitchen cabinets to tired furniture—can benefit from a fresh coat. Paint is a fast way to give a room a makeover.

Interior Designer Patricia McDonald, who worked on Sunset Magazine's Idea House in Alamo, says she has used paint creatively on cloth upholstery, tables and cabinets to give homes a fresh ambiance.

"I believe you don't have to have a lot of money to have a great-looking place. Color comes in handy," she said.

McDonald has used two contrasting paints—glossy and flat—to add depth and contrast to a dull kitchen.



"It brings a sparkle to the room," she said.

Small paint projects are easy and accessible even for amateur painters, said Mike Bucci, a painting expert and inventor of the Painter's Pyramid.

Color comes in handy when freshening up a home

"Paint is a versatile and speedy tool for the do-it-yourselfer looking to update a room," he said.

Bucci offers the following suggestions for ways to use paint to quickly freshen a room's look—without ever touching brush to the walls:

• Kitchens

"Light-hued cabinets in top-quality woods are very much in vogue for kitchen updates," Bucci says.

Older kitchens, however, may have dark cabinets made of laminate-type materials that can't be refinished in a lighter tone. This project can be completed in a single day by removing the doors, painting both sides in a light, appealing color, using the Painter's Pyramids to paint all sides without waiting for the first side to dry, then reinstalling the doors after the paint has dried.

To finish the new look, replace dated hardware with more modern styles.

• Baths

If grungy grout and outdated colors are dragging down the appeal of your

ceramic tile, paint can reinvigorate the look of your bathroom. "Special paints are available that are specifically made for ceramic tile," Bucci points out. "They are waterproof and come in today's top designer colors."

Also, he adds, don't overlook the impact the bathroom mirror can have on the room's mood. If your current vanity mirror is just a slab of glass, adding a decorative, painted frame is a quick and easy way to impart elegance and pizzazz.

Tired bathroom cabinets can also benefit from a coat of paint, changing the entire look of your vanity without the expense of replacing countertops. For bathroom cabinets, apply the same painting process you would use in the kitchen.

• Living areas

Next, look at the furniture in your living areas. Often, homeowners find refinishing scuffed or worn wooden furniture is too laborious. Painting it, however, can be much simpler, and can create a big impact on a room's feeling of freshness. Painter's Pyramids are sturdy enough to hold large pieces of furniture while allowing easy access to the bottom edges of the furniture.

Don't forget the room's trim as well, from woodwork around doorways to the toe molding and baseboards. Repainting trim is less time-consuming than repainting walls, and freshening the design elements that anchor and crown your room can make the



To spruce up an older kitchen, remove the cabinet doors and paint both sides in a light, appealing color. Pyramids allow you to paint the second side before the first side is dry.

whole room look new, even if you do nothing else.

• Art projects

Finally, dress up your room's color with fresh art projects. Repainting or refinishing the frame on your favorite piece of art can punch up the artwork's impact on the room. And adding your own homemade handicrafts, such as a ceramic vase or decorative platter, imparts your personal style to the room.

Speed the painting process and cut cleanup time by perching your painting project on a Painter's Pyramid. The durable plastic pyramids are specially designed with nonstick points that make minimal contact with the piece you are painting. This allows you to finish the project without waiting for part of it to dry before you can handle it. To learn more or order, visit www.painterspyramid.com.

—Courtesy of ARAcontent
Natalie O'Neill contributed to this story.

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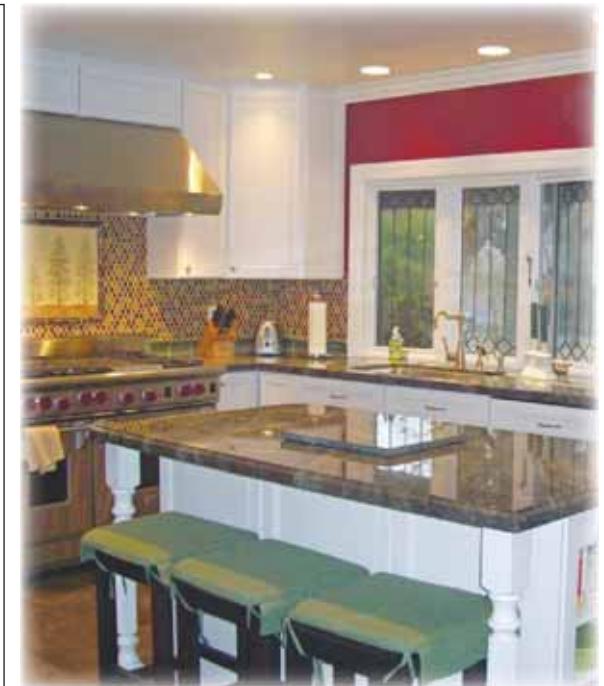
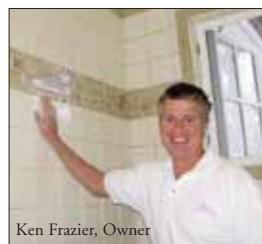
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The old Jones family farmhouse, built in 1919, stands distinctive amid the large, newer homes in the Jones Ranch neighborhood that surround it.



The family room has off-white beadboard walls and wooden shutters. The door to the right leads to the screened in porch.

come to Jones Ranch

Historic Alamo ranch house was worth the wait

story by Dolores Fox Ciardelli
photos by Shannon Corey

W

hen Tommy Mota used to drop off his son at his friend's house on Via Romero in Alamo a few years back, he always noticed the charming old home on the corner across the street. It was set back from the road, surrounded by lawns, and had an old-fashioned wraparound porch.

"I grew up in an old house, in Oakland," said Mota, who was living in Danville at the time. "My parents were antique collectors."

The impressive home was an old Jones family ranch house, built in 1919 for James Cass Jones and his wife Flora May (Stone) Jones on Rancho Romero. A photo in "Be It Ever So Humble..." by Alamo historian Virgie Jones, whose husband Al was raised at the Jones ranch, shows the house in the early 1920s surrounded by vineyards.

"They picked this site for the artesian well," explained Mota, noting that he still uses the well water.

Jones chose the location well for the ranch house 90 years ago. It sits on a knoll with sweeping views of the Valley and Mount Diablo. In the early 1990s, Branagh Development created the Jones Ranch subdivision, building 22 homes and leaving the original homestead on a double lot.

Members of the Jones family lived in the



house until 1996, when it was sold to Bill and Barbara Ingram. The Inggrams redid the plumbing and electrical plus did extensive remodeling, including the master bedroom suite.

"We're the third owners," said Mota. "We moved in three years ago."

He and his wife Lucrezia have three children: Dominic, 11; Jake, 9; and Jenna, 8.

The house was built by Fred Burnett of Alamo to generous proportions with broad central hallways both upstairs and down, making it as gracious as the newer mansions

that surround it. The wraparound porch is screened on the southside and accessible from the family room, a feature Mota says his family uses a lot in the nice weather.

Originally the driveway was adjacent to the house on the north side and the stairs led from the driveway up to the porch. Now there is a detached garage behind the house with a driveway leading from Via Del Rey.

"We moved the stairs from the side to the front of the house," Mota said.

The large front door opens to a spacious entryway, where a chandelier hangs over a round antique table with a large bouquet of fresh flowers. Wooden doors with glass panels lead to the living room on the left and the formal dining room straight ahead; the stairway to the second story is on the right. The house is built of redwood—the framing, the interior of the walls and the exterior siding. The walls and windows are southern gumwood, and the floors are fir.

The entire house is decorated in period fashion, with comfortable furniture and antique accent pieces, some from Italy where Lucrezia was born. Music plays in speakers

► Continued on page 10



Top: The side of the house can be seen from the garden, where everything was blooming during the AAUW garden tour last May. To the right is the detached garage with a spacious playroom overhead.

Above, left: The outdoor patio has a complete kitchen, where everything is waterproof except the television that submerges into the counter. Right: The swimming pool was built in 1952, but the Motas completely redid it, adding a spa and statuary, as well as the cottage on the right they use as a workout room.

Far left: A closet off the family room has been made into a wet bar complete with a wine cellar.

Near left: The living room has kept the 1919 look with antiques from the collection of Tommy and Lucrezia Mota.

Jones Ranch

► Continued from page 9

throughout the house and yard, a system installed by the Ingrams.

Tommy Mota proudly points out the original features, such as the windows with their slightly wavy glass, and the original plaster in the dining room.

"I love old stuff," he says, pointing out an antique bicycle by the large stone fireplace in the living room. "It was an inheritance from my grandparents."

The adjacent family room is spacious, its off-white beadboard redwood walls matching the wood-paneled window shutters. Bookshelves cover two walls, and a closet has been converted into a bar with wine storage.

"I'm thinking of a wine cellar in the utility room," Tommy said.

The house is actually four stories, Lucrezia noted, including the basement, which is a utility room, and the attic.

"We could make the attic a room," she said.

They also have laundry facilities upstairs.

Tommy and Lucrezia remodeled the kitchen, converting to gas and installing a large farm sink and granite counter tops. They had a custom glaze applied to the walls for an antique look until the cream-golden-brown color looked perfect.

"It made the kitchen pop out. Everything was white when we moved in," said Lucrezia. "And we added a mantle over the stove."

A long 1910 antique table serves as an island in the kitchen, which has a rooster theme—with ceramic roosters, rooster plates and a rooster backsplash behind the stove.

There is a second staircase in the back of the house, attesting to its original lifestyle with hired help, although the Mota family uses the back staircase as well as the front.

"It's the quickest way to the kitchen," said Tommy with a smile.

Upstairs the three children have bedrooms that reflect their interests: Dominic's room has a baseball theme; Jake's has red walls and airplanes; and Jenna's is painted a yellow-green with flowers above the molding, and a white canopy bed. Each of the rooms has a huge closet, designed for maximum storage of clothes, toys and miscellaneous.

The master suite overlooks the front of the house and the bathroom is state of the art with a whirl-



Above: The playroom over the garage has a state-of-the-art 60-inch television and a pool table. The decorations are vintage, including a coke machine and a juke box.

Clockwise from right: The gracious entryway leads through glass paneled doors to the living room at left and the formal dining room straight ahead; Dominic's bedroom is decorated in a baseball theme; the master bathroom features a whirlpool bathtub, double sinks and a double shower; the master bedroom has 19th century rosewood furniture from France and a gas fireplace surrounded by built-in cabinets.





Lucrezia and Tommy Mota remodeled the kitchen with gas appliances, granite counters and a large farm sink. It is decorated with rooster décor.

pool tub, double sinks and two shower heads. The modern interacts charmingly with old-fashioned touches such as glass doorknobs.

"Look at these hinges," Tommy said, pointing to an antique brass hinge on the closet door. "They have a lot of detail. The fixtures are beautiful."

An extra large storage space has been converted into a home office at the front of the house.

As spacious as the house is, a lot of living is done out back in the game room over the garage.

"It was built in the 1950s and I finished it off," said Tommy.

It has a complete bath and kitchen facilities so could be used as an in-law unit, Tommy said, but it serves for the children's recreation, with a 60-inch television and a pool table.

"They can watch movies and can make as much noise as they want," Tommy pointed out.

Here, too, nostalgia reigns—with an old Coca-Cola machine in one corner, a jukebox in another, a vintage gas pump, and an old-fashioned sled hanging on a wall. Skylights in the slanted roof provide soft lighting and the walls are also beadboard.

The backyard patio has a complete kitchen under a latticed covering. Everything is waterproof except a TV screen that recedes into the counter.

The pool was built more than 50 years ago. "It opened July 4, 1952," said Tommy.

The Motas redid the plumbing, added a spa, and installed solar panels on the adjoining changing rooms. On the opposite side of the yard, they added a workout room, appearing on the outside as a charming little cottage.

The home is surrounded by mature trees—deodar, cedar pines, maple and oak trees, as well as blooming plants and flowers.

"Only our house can have flowers,"



Lucrezia said, explaining that deer eat those in the neighboring yards. They assume it is because deer don't like the taste of plants watered by their well water, which contains calcium and sulfur.

Tommy especially likes the history of the cedars.

"They were brought to the back yard from the Jones property in Pinecrest, maybe in the 1930s or '40s," he said.

The Motas open up their yard each May for the American Association of University Women garden tour but even in February everything looks shipshape.

"We do our own maintenance," said Tommy.

This is a time-consuming job for each of them, but one they love after their years of waiting for their dream house to come on the market.

The Jones Ranch house has withstood the test of time, and the Motas have restored it to its former glory—and then some. ■

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Pass on the grass

Creeping perennials provide a solution for problem areas

Awesome, lush and green lawn is something to be proud of, but the challenges of maintaining such a lawn can be tough for the greenest thumb. Where traditional turf fails in the landscape, using creeping perennials is an alternative that is both ornamental and functional.

"Almost every homeowner has an area in the landscape where grass just won't grow," says Frances Hopkins, founder of Under A Foot Plant Co. "Creeping perennials provide the solution for these problem areas."

Creeping perennials should not be likened to common groundcovers, though it is easy to confuse the two.

"The difference is definitive," Hopkins says. "Groundcovers grow much larger at 12 to 24 inches and do not make for a pleasant walking surface. Creepers will grow only about 2 to 4 inches creating a pleasant, low visual plane typically associated with a lawn, plus they are sturdy enough to handle foot traffic."

Stepables, Hopkins' line of more than 140 creeping perennial varieties, provide solutions for troublesome landscapes.

"Creeping perennials have thousands of tiny, compact root nodes that firmly grasp the soil," Hopkins says. "As often as you step on them with the soles of your feet, they will vigorously take root; the more they are walked on, the faster they will creep across the landscape space."

Stepables plants can be purchased at Navlet's Garden Center on Camino Ramon.

Plant selection

First, it's important to decide how much you are going to use the planted area. "Foot traffic and function are among the most important considerations when selecting lawn replacement alternatives," Hopkins says.

This is why she has categorized Stepables into three usage groups—for light, moderate and heavy foot traffic areas. Light foot traffic means someone will be walking on the creeping perennials one to two times per week; moderate is one to two times per day; and heavy is three or more times per day. When choosing plants, the denser a plant, the more traffic it will take.

Therefore, a list of specific areas, including expected levels of walking and strolling, is a good, initial means to a successful change from grass to this type of planting. Curb appeal is another important consideration—improving a home's landscape and overall appearance.

"Think about the elements of decor—brick, slate, concrete, paint color and color schemes," Hopkins says. "Make plant choic-

es that work well with the surroundings."

With these considerations in mind, the next step is choosing the right plants for the area's environmental conditions. Hopkins says the No. 1 thing to look for is sun-to-shade ratio and where the light hits. Next, homeowners are able to find out their soil quality by taking a sample to a local garden center for analysis. Based on the results, garden center employees can help choose a soil amendment, which ideally should be something with excellent drainage. Correct drainage allows an appropriate amount of water absorption by the plant's roots, while permitting excess water to be drained away from the plant.

The turf transition

Making the transition from a conventional grass lawn to one with creeping perennials takes planning. Be sure you choose the proper plant for the area and function, and one that is readily available. Next, determine the density of the plants. Spacing them 12 inches apart, for example, will require fewer plants, but they will take a year or more to fill in and need a bit of maintenance. Spacing plants just 2 inches apart will require more plants, costing more. Deciding how densely to plant depends on how much money is in the budget and if instant gratification is a priority.

The next step is removing the sod, and tilling and amending the soil with high-drainage components. Once the bed is ready, consider placing a slow-release fertilizer at root level.

"Do not place fertilizer directly on the plant because this will burn the foliage," Hopkins says.

To avoid hand weeding, homeowners may opt to apply a ground cloth or pre-emergent herbicide, though creeping perennials naturally inhibit weeds. For best results, plant creeping perennials even or just above the soil line, but never below. Planting below the soil line will cause water to collect and, ultimately, drown the plants, Hopkins says.

Step on it

The final step is just that—gently step on each plant to set it in place and get it growing.

"Believe it or not, gently stepping on each new plant actually attaches the roots to the soil line. In about three days, little roots will emerge from the nodes," Hopkins says.

As with traditional lawns, the more thought, planning, effort and care that homeowners put into installing a bed of creeping perennials, the more it will pay off in the end.

—Courtesy of ARAcontent

ALEXANDRIA'S FLOWERS

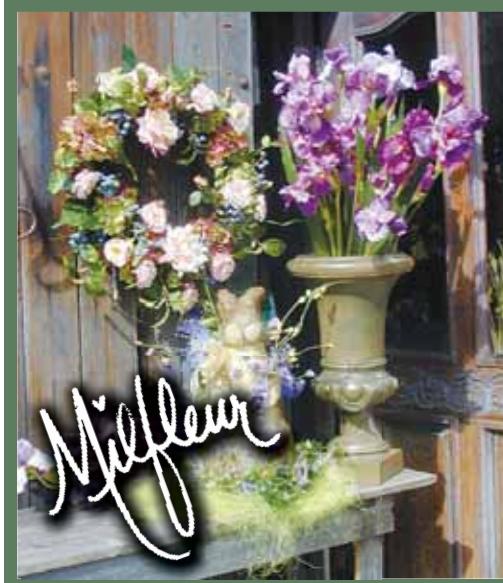


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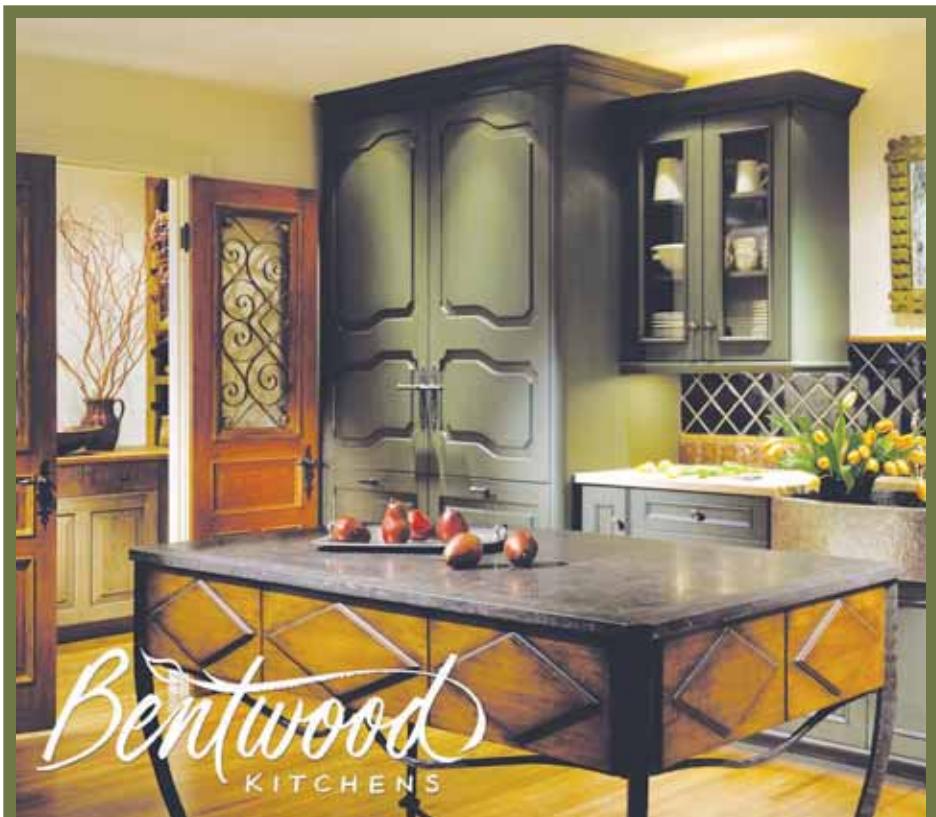
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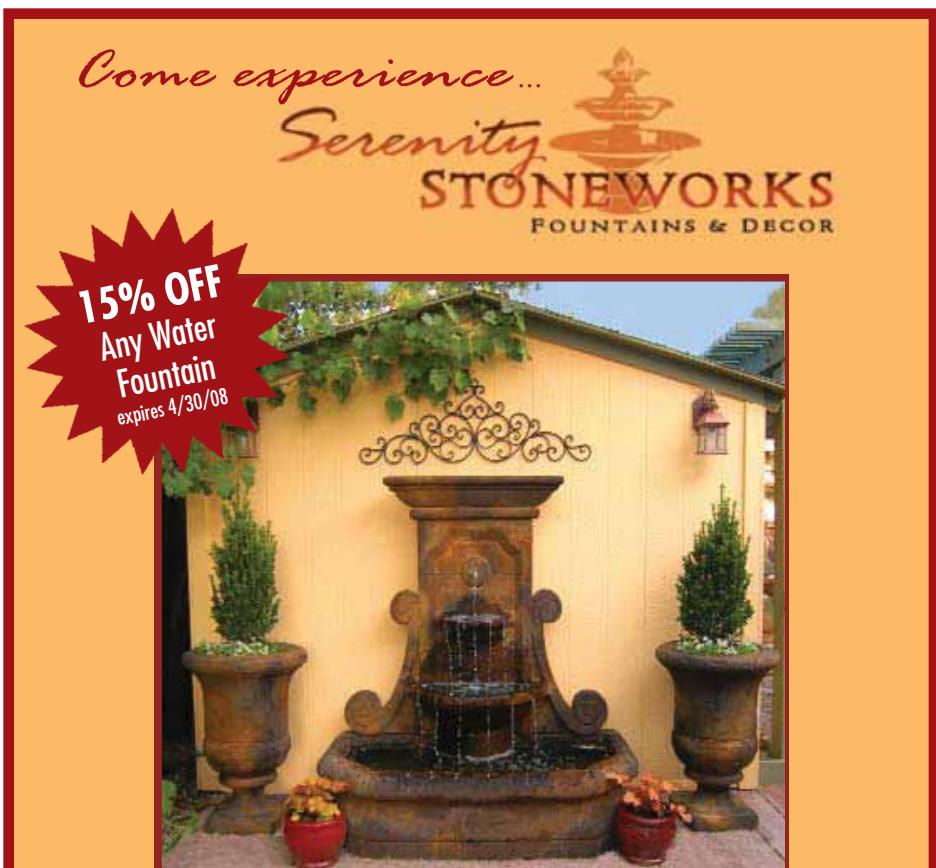
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A water element is important in a garden, whether it is a large pond or a small fountain.

How to turn your back yard into a retreat

Create a balanced atmosphere to soothe your soul

It is easy to know when you are out of your element. Intuition often tells us when our surroundings are out of place. With feng shui, the classic Chinese art of placement, a harmonious environment can bring balance to your life.

Turning a muddled back yard into a gentle haven is not only pleasing to the eye but soothing to the soul.

"Successful design incorporates the essential objectives of feng shui," recounts Karen Nowak, Academic Director of Interior Design at California Design College.

The ultimate goal of feng shui applied to the garden is to create an atmosphere that balances. You don't want a space that feels too frenzied or too lackluster. Curves in pathways encourage wandering and thoughtful reflection.

Open gates are welcoming to both guests and their energy. Populate your garden with colors that increase energy like reds, oranges and yellows or calming colors like violet or blue. And remove disorder. Nothing causes agitation more than an untidy environment.

It is important to represent the five elements when working with feng shui: water, wood, fire, earth and metal. Some of these lend themselves to the garden with ease. Dirt, clay containers and rocks denote the earth element. Trellis, benches and trees are suitable for the wood element.

Bring water into your garden by adding a pond, fountain or bird bath. Outdoor fireplaces, fire pits or lanterns represent fire. And metal sculptures, sundials or wind chimes signify metal.

Perhaps you want to draw wealth into your life. Planting fruit trees in the southeast area of your garden will encourage the money tree to be fruitful as well. Situating your back yard fire pit in the south promotes fame.

"All areas of life have harmonizing opposites. Your home and garden should pair spatial and design opposites to bring an

Feng shui gardening Q&A

I have a patch of weeds in my garden that look very pretty. I am tempted to keep them, but will they affect the chi in a negative way?

Absolutely not. If you like them, keep them. Weeds are a part of life and have a valuable part to play. Just do not let them grow out of control in your garden.

Our yard is always full of cats, and wasps in the summer. Why?

Cats and wasps are attracted to negative energy. Look for trees that are crooked or covered with ivy. Check walls for cracks or loose masonry. Check the grass for moss patches. If you find any of these defects, call a feng shui consultant. Or deal with it yourself by removing clutter and space clearing.

My wife likes the idea of a cottage garden, with a mass of rambling flowers and herbs. I would like something more formal. What do you suggest?

You could have a good structure, with some rambling plants within that order. The combination of expansion and structure is very powerful and beneficial (a mixture of Yin and Yang).

"Feng Shui in 10 Simple Lessons"
by Jane Butler-Biggs

equalized foundation," advises Nowak. Bring light to shady areas of the yard and balance entryways with plants or trees on each side.

It may not be easy to remove the clutter and stress from inside ourselves. Designing with feng shui principles is an easy way to provide that retreat and comfort that all back yard gardens can provide.

—Courtesy of ARAcontent

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