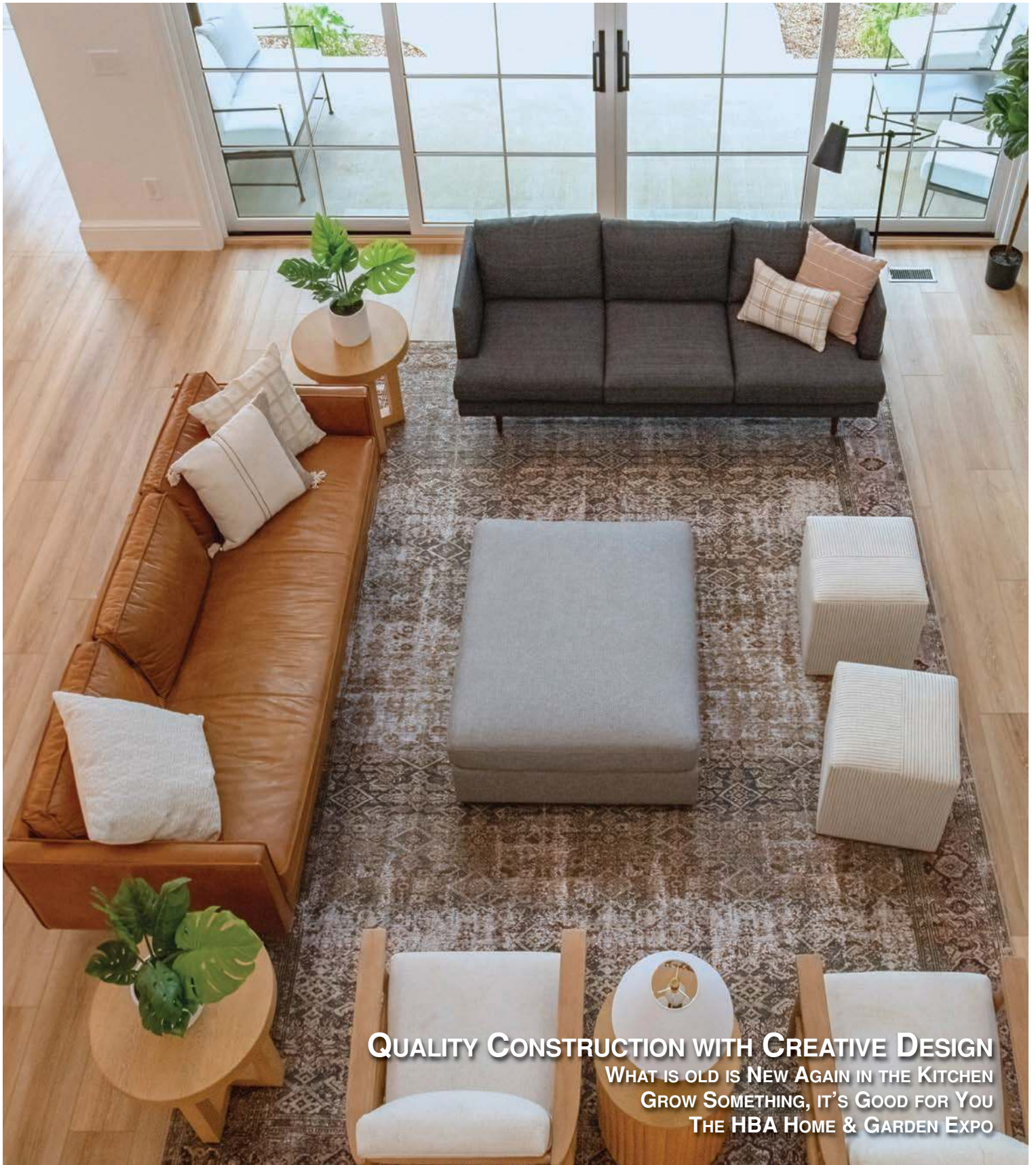


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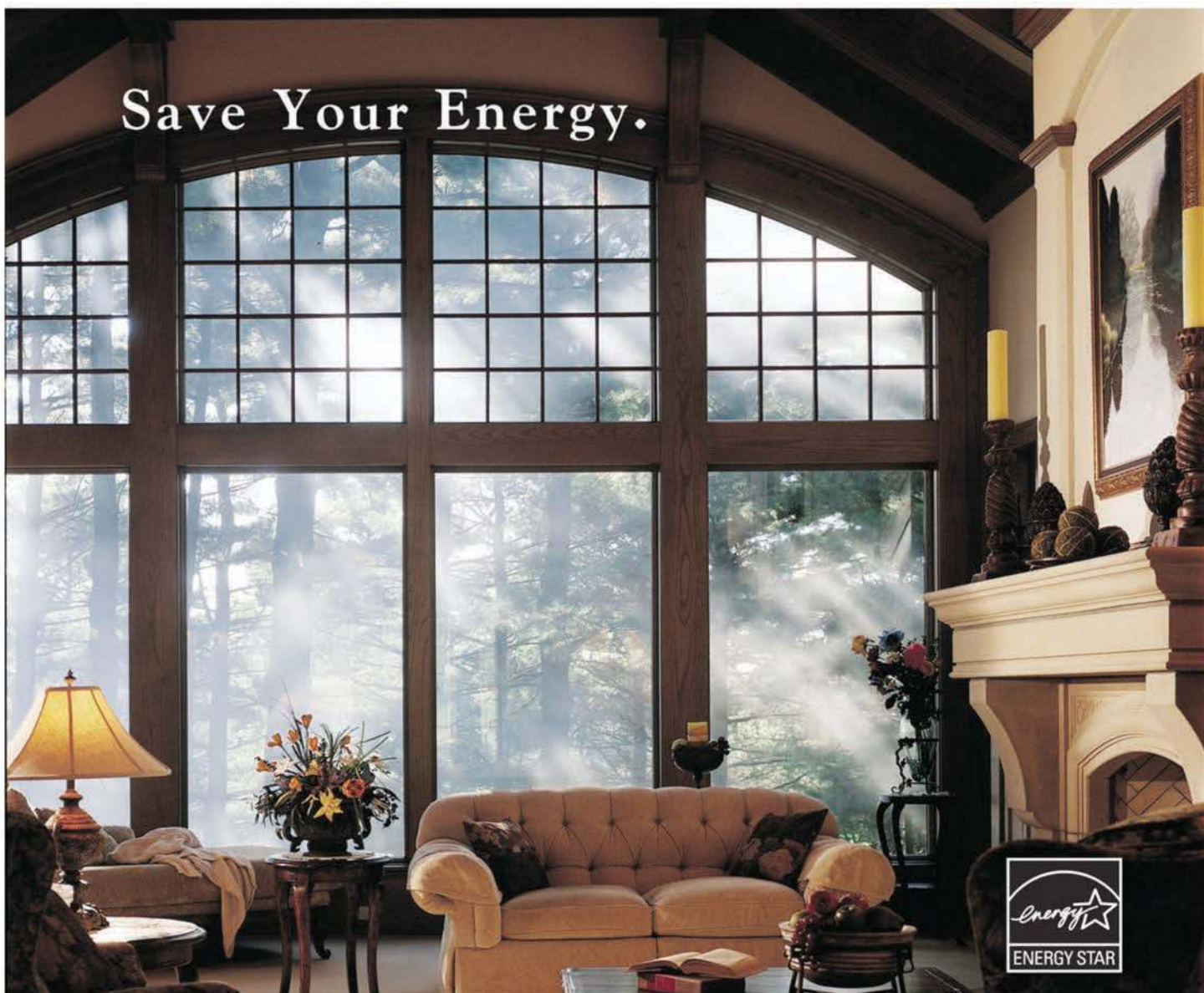
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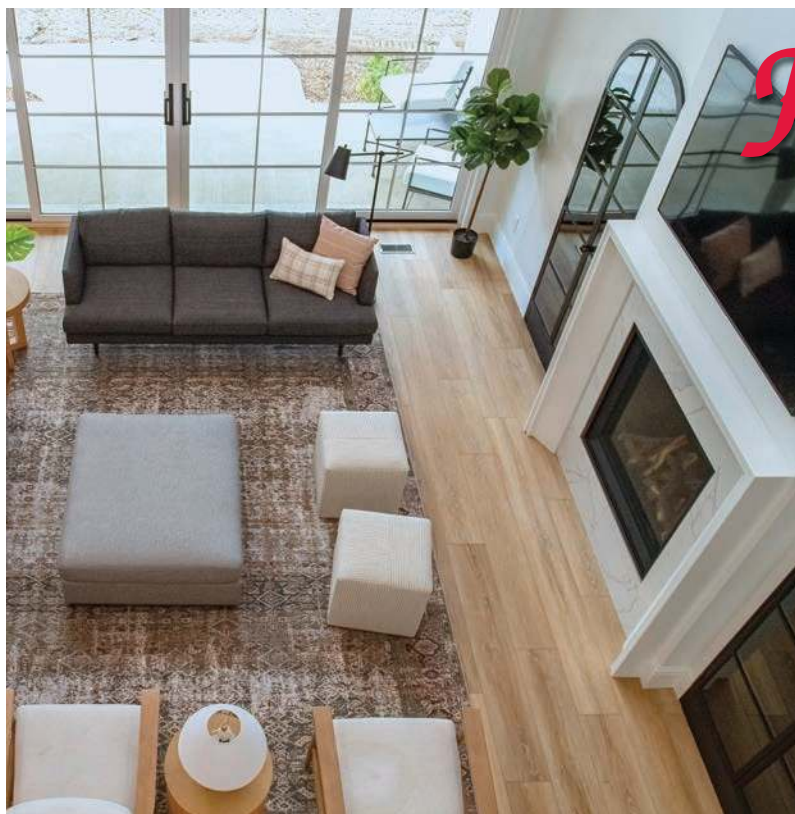
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Feature Home

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When it came time for Ben and Tori Black, owners of B+A Homes, to build a home for themselves they put their skill set to work for their own dream house. The European Modern two-story home sits on nine secluded acres.



What is Old is New Again in the Kitchen



Mom's Cream Cheese Pound Cake



Decks and Patios



HBA Home & Garden Expo



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It's all about you, *Kalamazoo*

The Home Builders Association (HBA) of Western Michigan invites you to the 2023 Annual Home & Garden Expo, presented by Advia Credit Union!

The Home & Garden Expo is always "Where Ideas Grow" and once again, will take place at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center from March 10 -12. We have so many great things going on throughout the weekend including FREE and interesting home & garden seminars on Friday and Saturday!

Friday is the day we honor our seniors and veterans. Those 65 and over will receive \$2 off a door ticket and veterans with military ID enter for FREE. Hours on Friday are 12 noon – 8 pm.

Saturday is Family Day with fun activities for kids throughout the day including free face painting from 1pm to 4 pm. Doors open at 10 am and close at 8 pm. If you miss Friday and Saturday, you have a chance on Sunday to see everything new for your home and garden from 11 am to 4 pm.

The Home & Garden Expo has been produced by the Home Builders Association of Western Michigan for more than 50 years and we are excited to present this popular 3-day event and long-time Kalamazoo tradition again this spring.

I think we all can agree that we live in a constantly changing environment, but some things never change – like local businesses/exhibitors featuring quality craftsmanship and expertise in their trades. At the Home & Garden Expo, you will find inspiration for your projects, indoors and out, with over one hundred exhibitors displayed throughout 60,000 square feet of indoor space! Your 2023 Home & Garden Expo experience will provide current and future homeowners with high quality, great ideas, industry knowledge and modern technology options!

If you have a project in mind for your home, or just want to see what's trending in home improvement, you will be sure to find what you are looking for at the 2023 Home & Garden Expo. Spending the day at Expo is the best way to check out the latest industry developments, find the latest ideas, meet face to face with local exhibitors, attend an informational seminar, and save on your next home improvement project.

The Home Builders Association of Western Michigan is an organization that is committed to Building Homes and Strengthening Communities. We are proud of this signature event and more information can be found at www.KalamazooHomeExpo.com

We look forward to seeing you at the EXPO!

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Mom's Cream Cheese Pound Cake

Photography by Linda Hoard

If you're looking for a classic dessert that's perfect for any occasion, look no further than my mom's cream cheese pound cake. This delicious cake is a family favorite, especially during Easter when my mom would bake it to perfection. The cream cheese adds a rich, tangy flavor to the cake, making it perfect for enjoying alone with a cup of coffee or as a base for fresh strawberries and whipped cream. Whether you're a seasoned baker or just starting out, this cream cheese pound cake is a must-try recipe that's sure to impress your family and friends.

Ingredients

1 ½ cups unsalted butter, room temperature
8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
3 cups granulated sugar
6 large eggs room temperature
3 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon almond extract
powdered sugar for garnish

Preheat your oven to 350°F and prepare a 12-cup bundt pan by greasing it with non-stick baking spray or butter and flour.

In your mixer bowl, add butter and cream cheese and beat them on high speed for 2 minutes.

Gradually add sugar to the mixture and beat on high speed for an additional 7 minutes until the mixture becomes very pale yellow and fluffy.

Add eggs one at a time, ensuring you combine well after each addition and scraping down the sides as needed.

Turn your mixer down to its lowest speed, and slowly add flour into the batter in two increments, followed by salt. Be careful not to over beat.

Stir in vanilla extract, scrape down the sides, and mix until just combined.

Pour the cake batter into the prepared bundt pan and bake at 350°F for 1 hour. lower the heat to 325°F and bake for an additional 15-20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean.

Allow the cake to cool in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes, then invert it onto a serving plate and let it cool for at least an hour or until it's cool to the touch.

Dust the cake with powdered sugar and serve.

Jordan and Branden DeHaan
with their father, DRS founder,
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Welcome to the HOME & Garden

March 10, 11, 12

EXPO

2023

Each year the Home & Garden Expo is *Where Ideas Grow!* Whether your home is in need of an update, a full renovation, or you're just looking for some inspiration – the Kalamazoo Home & Garden Expo has something for everyone!

From outdoor living, landscaping, home automation, security, remodeling, design and more – you won't want to miss what's new in home improvement. Expo features a wide variety of vendors in home, outdoor living, beauty, decor, DIY and more!

Friday

March 10 • Noon-8pm
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Saturday

March 11 • 10am-8pm
Family Day
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FREE Seminars!

Sunday

March 12 • 11am-4pm
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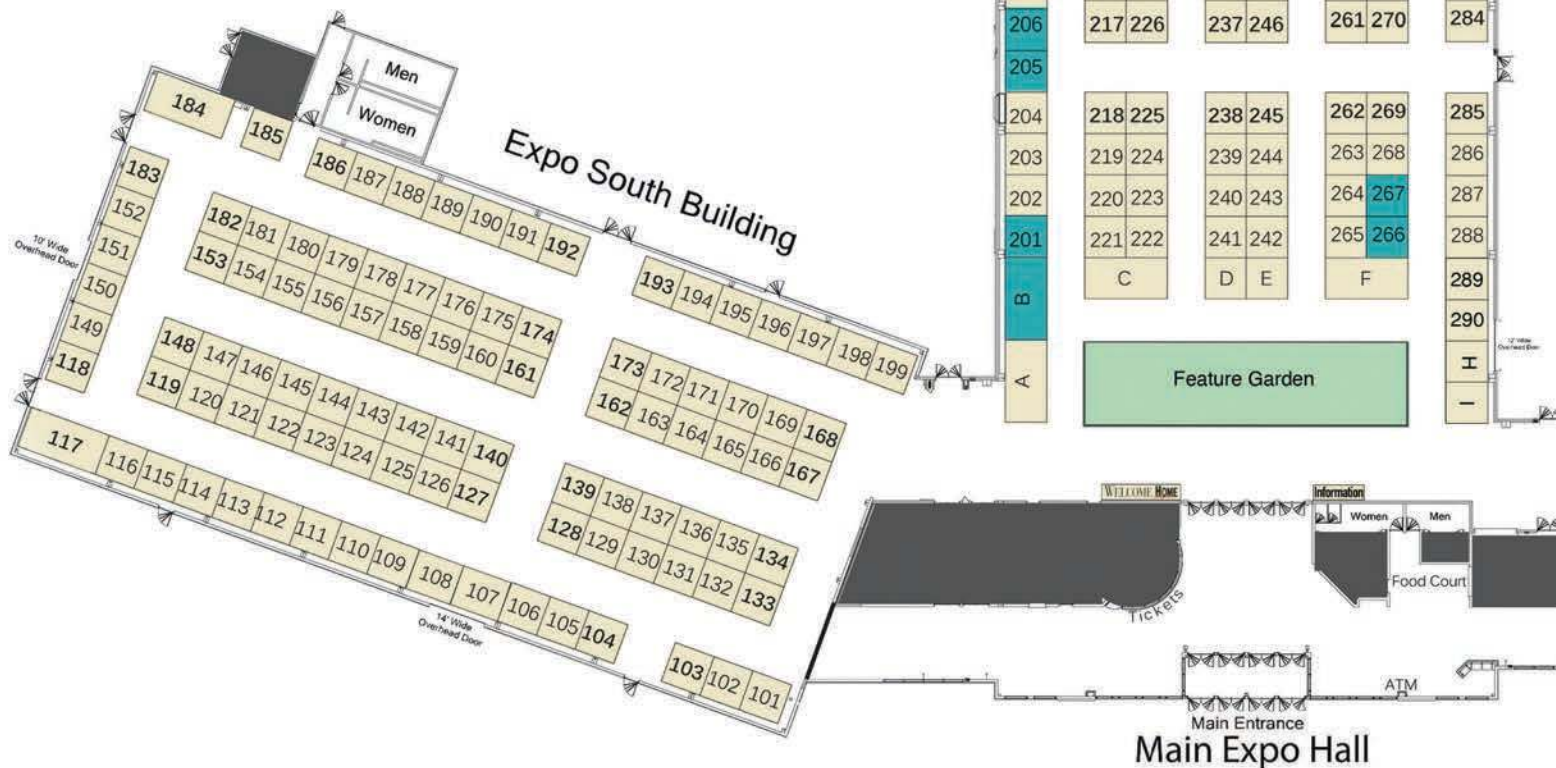
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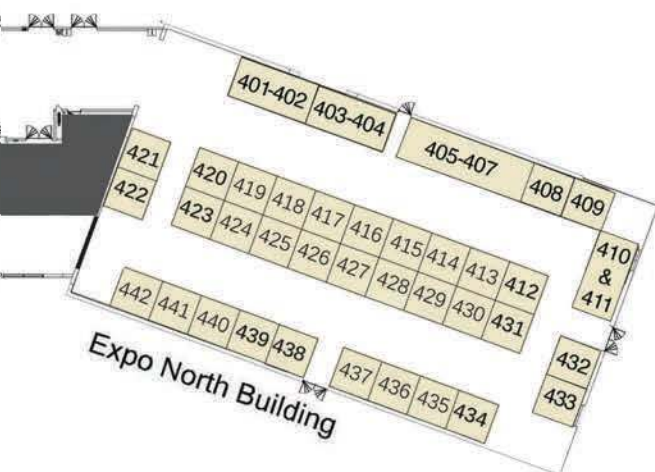
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Friday, March 10

1:00pm Secret Gardens, LLC

Gardening for Life

A life well-lived comes with aches and pains no matter our age. Gardening, indoors or outdoors, provides many health benefits. So, how can we continue to enjoy gardening without pain? We'll explore tips and tools that can make gardening more enjoyable for everyone.

Presented by:

Linda Whitlock, Horticulturist, Secret Gardens

2:00pm Better World Builders

Home Performance, Hybrid Heat and Electrification

Learn how new HVAC and Home Performance (Healthy Home) technologies can help you achieve Comfort Efficiency and Resiliency! NEW cost effective technologies are emerging! Join us for the discussion to enhance your knowledge and understanding of the associated benefits.

Presented by: Mark Lee of Better World Builders and Brad Bartholomew of Bartholomew Heating & Cooling.

3:00am The Garden Guru

The Benefits of Adding a Rain Garden to Your Landscape.

Learn why Rain Gardens are important and the best plants to add to your garden. The session will include how to plan and install a rain garden.

Presented by: Alysia

Babcock, the Garden Guru

Saturday, March 11

11:00am The Garden Guru

Native Plant Gardens and Why You Need One!

This presentation will provide the benefits of Native Plants and the positive impact they have for pollinators. Examples of Native Plants you can have in your garden will also be included.

Presented by: Alysia Babcock,

The Garden Guru

12:00pm Brighten Your Day!

Horticulture Lighting for Indoor Gardening

Struggling with the type and quantity of light your indoor plants need to thrive through the winter months? Are you planning on starting seeds for the coming gardening season? Chris Imler, MSU Extension Horticulture Educator will keep you from getting your wires crossed with his electric inspiration of indoor lighting while keeping a tight rein on your wallet.

Presented by Christopher Imler, MSU Extension

1:00pm Better World Builders

Home Performance, Hybrid Heat and Electrification

Learn how new HVAC and Home Performance (Healthy Home) technologies can help you achieve Comfort Efficiency and Resiliency! NEW cost effective technologies are emerging! Join us for the discussion to enhance your knowledge and understanding of the associated benefits.

Presented by: Mark Lee of Better World Builders and Brad Bartholomew of Bartholomew Heating & Cooling.

2:00pm Blue Horizon

The Amazing World of Conifers

We will explore how conifers not only provide winter interest, but also provide shape, structure and color, ultimately creating the backbone of a garden. The conifers in the presentation are some of the many varieties carried by Blue Horizon Nursery. Presented by Blue Horizon Nursery — Paul Surian & William Snyder

3:00pm Audubon Society:

Inviting Birds Into Your Yard

We'll discuss the importance of native plants and not using pesticides. Various tips on feeding birds so they are healthy will be discussed, as well as the proper use of bird houses.

Presented by Joyce Leppard, Audubon Society

4:00pm ZaZu Mushrooms

From Sawdust to Plate: Growing and Cooking Your Own Culinary Medicine.

Mushrooms are amazing little creatures. We'll show you how easy it is to grow your own mushrooms at home, even when the snow flies. We'll also have a cooking demonstration for tips on how to prepare them, plus the latest research on the nutritional benefits and medicinal uses of these fantastic fungi. For Science!

Presented by: ZaZu Mushrooms







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What is Old is New Again

By Zinta Aistars
Photos courtesy of Hannapel

Ah, those bright white kitchens that we thought so modern and new—they do glare a bit across our vision, don't they? What once seemed so fresh and desirable, in the tomorrow of the new year begins to beckon once again for a bit of muted, gentler color. Or maybe even not so muted.

We do love change. As fashion and trends change and change again, we occasionally long to have something different around us. Or, perhaps, to cycle back to something we knew long ago.

With kitchens known to be the heart of the home—because some things never change—interior designers recognize that it is time for a new look.

A DESIGNER OF KITCHEN DREAMS

Kristin Rice is a kitchen and bath designer at Hannapel Kitchen/Bath/Window/Door, a family-owned business with seven locations in Dowagiac, Kalamazoo, Niles, Portage, St. Joseph, South Haven, and Sturgis, Michigan.

"Color is coming back," Rice says when considering the kitchen trends of 2023. "Gone are the days of white kitchens."

What will be white in the newer kitchen, she says, are the appliances. Stainless steel is so, well, yesterday.

"Although appliance panels are becoming more popular," Rice adds. "Panels matching cabinetry styles and colors. But we are also seeing graphite colors and bright whites in appliances."

The 2023 kitchen is showing blues, greens, browns, and occasionally even bolder colors for islands.

"We are seeing the return of earth tones," Rice says. "Softer, warmer, nuttier tones. Cabinetry now can be either natural woods—not the golden oak we used to see years ago, though—along with darker stains."

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Countertops, too, are seeing new trends. While granite is still a popular option, it does need sealing more often—about every two to five years. Quartz is overtaking in popularity, in part because it needs to be sealed only about every 15 years.

“Porcelain countertops are another newer choice, because they don’t need sealing at all,” Rice says. “It is a non-porous material.”

Quartz is known for its food-safe properties and colorful, veined patterns. It is one of the hardest minerals on Earth and so is a popular choice for durability. While granite can absorb liquids and stains, quartz is completely nonabsorbent. Quartz is also more durable than marble and soapstone, and nonporous compared to concrete countertops.

“We are a dealer for Cambria Quartz, among others, and the new alloy collection is absolutely stunning,” Rice says. “The new quartz has veins of mixed metals running through them.”

Hannapel also carries Cosmos Quartz, HanStone Quartz, MetroQuartz, Silestone, Envi Quartz and Porcelain, and many more to choose from.

Pattern is also showing up in updated kitchens using backsplashes with graphics, areas of bold wallpaper, the use of textiles to add texture, or two-toned cabinetry to create a layered space. Where white appears, it may be a more toned white, with a warmer feel rather than stark. More detailed millwork or even mesh inserts on cabinetry brings interest along with mixed metal hardware or eliminating hardware completely for a streamlined look using push-open drawers and doors.

Whereas recessed lighting can still serve its purpose over work areas, creative statement lighting with ornamental pendant lights, sconces, hanging lanterns and chandeliers are making a bright appearance. Layered lighting may mean a mix of all of these.

And taking another look at the island? Some designs are bringing a kitchen table back into the kitchen.

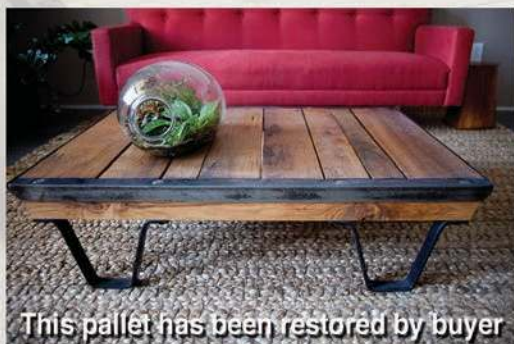
HOW IT BEGINS: DESIGNING A KITCHEN UNIQUE TO YOU

“We will visit your home, but you will want to come into one of our showrooms first and see our design studio,” Rice says. “We have more than 50 samples for you to view.”

It all begins with a vision—a vision of your dream kitchen.

To begin, it can be a good idea to have a floor plan and to know the size of your space, perhaps have some pictures clipped to show ideas of what you like.

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Bringing in photos of your existing kitchen can also be helpful.

"We will confirm all measurements when we come to your home," Rice says.

A computer rendering of the finished room brings the vision to life for final decisions on options before the work begins. While Hannapel does not do the installation themselves, they work directly with contractors to oversee the work as your dream kitchen comes together.

Whether beginning with new construction or remodeling an older home, Hannapel works with builders at each step.

"New home construction is a clean slate," Rice says. "Your only concern there is budget. With an older home, there can be more considerations—such as demolition and what might turn up during that process, such as asbestos or lead, so there can be more prep work involved."

Supply lines have mostly cleared up since the pandemic years, she says, although wait time can vary from fabricator to fabricator.

"For some, it is a matter of days, while others can go up to six months," Rice says.

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A Package Deal: Quality Construction with Creative Design

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Jim Schuon Photography

By age 16, Ben Black was already hard at work on his career goals. He was working with a friend in construction, building up his own skills and shaping his own dreams. He loved the work. By age 21, he started his own business—B+A Homes.

“Actually, back then, I called it Before and After Homes, because I was doing renovations and flipping houses,” Ben Black said. “However, the last few years, since we primarily only build new construction in custom homes, we changed the name to make it a bit shorter to just be B+A Homes. But it technically still stands for before and after.”

The “we” in B+A Homes today is Ben and his wife Tori Black. The two met in a college program while he was earning a degree in electrical technology. While Ben was fast building his new business, Tori was earning her degree in interior design at Kendall College of Art and Design. After two years of dating, the couple decided to make things official—as marriage partners and as business partners.

“Because I was such a young business owner, people were initially not sure they could trust me in construction,” Ben Black said. “So I started with smaller projects for friends to build that trust and experience.”

MEANWHILE, TORI BLACK BUILT A FOLLOWING IN DESIGN.

“When I was a kid, I loved to rearrange furniture and look at my mom’s books on design because she was into it, too,” she

said. “When I first joined Ben at the business, I did paperwork in the office, but I would offer advice on design, too.”

“And now Tori is a part of the package we offer our customers,” Ben Black said. “Design is part of what we do. She balances me out—it’s a nice partnership and clients appreciate it, so we include it in our contracts.”

When it came time to build a home for themselves as their family grew to include two boys, the Blacks put their skill set to work for their own dream house. It was their third home together, so they knew exactly what they wanted.

The 3,821-square-foot home in Kalamazoo was featured in the August 2022 Parade of Homes.

The European Modern two-story home on nine secluded acres features four bedrooms, four full bathrooms plus one partial, a great room with 24-foot vaulted ceilings, a chef’s kitchen, an office, mudroom and laundry rooms, and many exciting features.

“First we looked for land,” Tori Black said. “We hunted for a while, but when we saw this mostly wooded parcel, we fell in love. We both grew up on lots of land, and we wanted that for our kids.”

The home with three-car garage is adjacent to a small, private grass runway for small planes, Ben Black said. It is fun for the kids—big and small—to watch the planes take off and has inspired Ben to dream of earning a pilot’s license someday.

“Even though it is a new home, we wanted it to have that Old World, European style with character,” Tori said.







To accomplish that, the Blacks included mixed metals, unlacquered brass, white oak floors, shiplap, and many arched doorways.

"The unlacquered brass wears with time and gets that patina that seems older," Tori said.

The exterior of the home is a mix of sand-colored brick, Michigan natural stone and LP siding with copper roof accents.

"We told the masons to not be perfect when applying the mortar between the bricks," Ben said. "That adds to the older home look we wanted, with the mortar looking chipped and oozing out a bit between the bricks."

Entering the arched front door, the first impression is of bright, light open space beyond another arch, looking out through the great room upon a wall of windows that reveal a pool with a pool house in the backyard. There is also an outdoor fireplace, hot tub, outdoor kitchen, and pizza oven.

As one steps over the threshold of the arched front door, to turn to one side and glance into the office, dark and shadowy in contrast, with recessed lighting and built-in bookshelves. Turn the opposite direction for stairs leading up.

"We made the office space dark—moody and calming," Tori said. "Otherwise, the main area is all white for a neutral background so that the design features can do the speaking."

The master bedroom with en suite and large, walk-in closet is on the main floor with the other three bedrooms on the upper floor to give the adults in the household more privacy. Both the great room and master bedroom have fireplaces. The master has beamed, high ceilings lined with shiplap and windows overlooking the pool. A catwalk over the side of the great room connects main and upper floors.

The kitchen, too, is mostly white but with mushroom-colored cabinetry, sections of open shelving, and a large island with seating. Hardware is unlacquered brass. It is open to the

expansive great room and a dining area entirely surrounded by windows.

"When it came to the great room, I wanted a high, open space so that I could have the biggest Christmas tree ever," Ben said, smiling. It was a wish he made come true on their first Christmas in their new home.

In decorating the boys' bedrooms, Ben learned to trust his wife, even when her design ideas sounded odd to him.

"Because I started in remodeling, I hated wallpaper," he said. "When Tori said she wanted plaid wallpaper on the ceiling of one of the boys' bedrooms, I didn't like the sound of it. But, you know, it looks really cool. Forest green walls with that creamy brown plaid above—she really thinks outside the box."

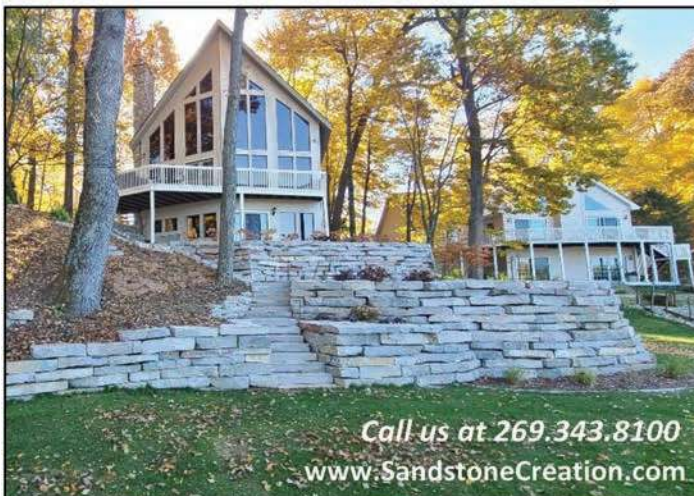
It is that thinking out of the box that B+A Homes customers have come to expect and enjoy.

"We achieve that custom look within the client's budget," Ben said. "Then we work together as a team on design and construction."

"We place ourselves in their shoes," Tori said. "It is our communication with our clients that sets us apart, keeping our clients happy throughout the project, staying on schedule, and we often end up all as friends."



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Photo courtesy of Hoogstraten Builders

Decks and Patios - The Outdoor Space Extended

By Zinta Aistars

The long winter behind us, how pleasant to begin making plans for an outdoor space at our homes. What to build? A deck or a patio? What are all the considerations going into that decision?

While Murray Landscaping and Supplies, LLC, in Kalamazoo, builds more patios than decks, owner Ken Murray has advice for clients facing the choice.

"Decks are made out of wood or composite materials," Murray says. "Composite will last much longer, and the more expensive options can last forever—not the material you'll find at most box stores, however. Wood will last for decades with proper maintenance. Higher quality woods can last even longer."

Common woods used for decks, Murray says, are southern yellow pine, but using cedar, albeit more expensive, can give the deck a much longer life span. The biggest advantage to a pressure-treated wood deck is that it looks good, is economical, and can last up to 20 or even 30 years if properly maintained. Annual cleaning, and at least biannual refinishing with stain or sealant is recommended. For some, there is simply no comparison to that rich, warm look of real wood or the feel of it beneath your feet.

Composite can be as much as twice the cost but has an indefinite life span, resists rot, warping or splintering, insects, or wear from weather. No staining, sealing, sanding, or painting required, but annual cleaning to prevent mold is still a good idea.

Composite, too, can vary in quality, Steve Hoogstraten, owner and president of Hoogstraten Builders, Inc., in Kalamazoo, points out. It's all in the core.

"When choosing composite decking, know what the core is made of," he says. "If the core is junk, it can rot, too. If you are told that you need to seal the end cuts, go elsewhere. There might be trouble later."

Hoogstraten is a TimberTech dealer, offering composite decking in a wide range of styles and colors, including variegated patterns that look similar to wood.

"Although I would personally recommend choosing the lighter colors," he said. "The darker colors get very hot in summer sun. It can be a good idea to cover at least part of your deck with an extended roof or awning."

Hoogstraten also recommends looking for decking systems that gather moisture from the deck surface and funnel it away or use troughs beneath.

"You should also look at expansion and contraction specs when choosing your material," he said. "And pay attention to manufacturer instructions for maintenance. With wood, for instance, be careful with power washing. Don't bear down too close to the surface or you can ruin the wood, separate the fibers."

"Elevation of your space can determine if you should install a deck or patio," said Jim Garrison, owner at Sandstone Creation in Kalamazoo. "If over two or three feet, deck may be preferable, but if less, you may want to choose a patio. Patios tend to feel more a part of the landscape."

The types, patterns, textures, and colors of today's pavers are nearly unlimited, Garrison says, and allow for most any kind of patio or walkway imaginable to a home.

"The pavers can be concrete or clay," Garrison says. "The decision on what to use generally comes down to preference and existing elements."

When using natural stone, he says, installation can require more time because the stones come in varying thicknesses and need to be leveled out, whereas pavers can be more uniform. Upkeep for either is minimal, coming down to occasional power washing or weeding.

"We use polymer sand between the pavers, and that prevents most weeds," Garrison says. "The sand is activated by water and becomes as hard as cement."

The base below the stone or pavers is usually about 6" to 8" of crushed stone, sometimes also applying a layer of bedding sand before placing the pavers.

"Then, if you are planning on adding a firepit or an outdoor kitchen, patios are your better option," adds



Photo courtesy of Sandstone Creation

Hoogstraten. "Think about the heat and the weight—you don't want that on a deck."

When beginning on a project for an outdoor space, most builders begin with a visit to your property to assess the space, topography, and style of the house.

"I ask what the homeowners are planning for the use of the patio," Murray says. "People can have very different ideas of how they want to use that space. Some just want a quiet spot to relax for a couple of people, others want a place to entertain a great many."

Because the possibilities are endless, Murray says customers can expect a price range of \$5,000 for a simple, small patio, on up to \$150,000 and beyond for a space that might include outdoor kitchens and firepits, retaining walls and lighting.

Murray looks at the topography to see if retaining walls might be needed to stabilize the space. He looks at the style and color of the home to suggest matching styles for the patio. The ground is excavated 7" deep, crushed stone laid down and compacted for base.

"That base and the sand between the joints is important so that the brick can't heave later," Murray says. "There's a new product now, a kind of joint sand or paste that we put between the bricks. It comes in different colors—black, tan, gray. It can be expensive, but it's worth it."

When all is in place, landscaping around the new space finished, Garrison nods in satisfaction. "The patio is your invitation to be outside," he says. Enjoy.



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Grow Something, it's Good for You!

By Barbara Fisher

Day lilies and beardtongues poked their heads out of the ground way too early only to be buried by snow, but not before deer ate every last tender green morsel. It's rough being a plant! Regardless of the confused plants or Punxsutawney Phil's pronouncement, spring is starting to flex its muscle and for many, it means gardening. Whether growing shrubs, vegetables or flowers in beds, containers, baskets or raised beds, there are common elements to all.

Design. Advance planning before rejuvenating an existing garden or creating a new garden will promote a superior outcome. Do your planned plantings (vegetables, for instance) dictate where you'll need to plant (full sun for 8-10 hours for best results). Or is the perfect location already selected and plantings will be dictated by the light the area receives? What size and shape garden is planned? Will borders be left natural or be finished with landscape ties, stone or edging? Will complementary sculpture, an arch for climbing plants, a dwarf fruit tree, yard art, a large rock, bench or a pond be incorporated? Think of maintenance before planting; if maintenance is no issue, it's full steam ahead. If minimal maintenance is a necessity, then take this into account as part of the planning process. Gardeners will want to consider how important it is to be able to easily reach plants for deadheading, trimming, cutting and dividing plants.

What do you want to see when the garden is established? An organized formal garden? An eclectic approach that looks stunning but isn't built on strict organization? Pastels? Something whimsical? Perhaps bold and sassy? Maybe mix it up? Consider planting berry bushes at the north end of a vegetable garden or a dwarf fruit tree (espaliere or not) as a feature of a flower garden.

Soil. Sandy, grainy soil drains well but may need watering more frequently. If soil clumps when squeezing a handful of it, it likely has a high clay content which means drainage could be an issue. Some plants will perish if their feet are wet. Amend soil with compost, sand, etc. to overcome deficiencies or limit plantings to those that can thrive in the unamended soil. Regardless of soil type, cultivate to a depth of at least 8 inches adding plants.

Many new gardens thrive without testing for the soil's pH level. There are mail in test kits, at home tests and DIY projects using elements found in every kitchen to test for acidity or alkalinity. A 6-7 range is a happy pH for many plants (on a scale of 0-14). There are exceptions (aren't there always?). Lilacs and lavender like a more alkaline soil. Azaleas and holly bushes prefer more acidic soil. Remember: Over time soil can become depleted and periodic testing of established gardens is advisable. Yellowing leaves could be a sign that your soil's pH is off rather than a sign of disease.

Hardiness Zones. Curious about your precise hardiness zone? Pull up the USDA website and enter a zip code. www.planthardiness.ars.usda.gov Native plants are proven winners in terms of withstanding the heat and cold a northern climate offers. There are plenty of non-native plants that will thrive in southwest Michigan, just check the zone range for the plant.

Light Requirements. Perennials come in shade loving, less than 2 hours of sunlight, (most hostas, Bleeding Heart, Celandine Poppy, Japanese Painted Fern, etc.) and sun loving (peony, daylilies, Lavender, etc.) and everything in between. Annuals also run the gamut in terms of light requirements. Keep in mind everyone's thumb comes in a different shade of green. One gardener may have Hellebores that thrive in full shade and others obtain the same result in the sun. Plants that need full sun (check seed packets or plant labels) generally require a minimum of 6 hours of sun a day; vegetables need 8-10. Plants asking for partial shade do well in the 3-6 hour range. Morning sun is easier on shade loving plants than afternoon sun.

Food and Water. The rule of thumb for watering is 1" per week. This can occur via rain or watering or a combination. A rain gauge is a fun way to track rainfall. To determine how much "rain" falls from a sprinkler, place a tuna or similar receptacle in the area where you're watering and measure the depth at 15 and 30 minute intervals. Almost all new plantings require additional water until they are considered established, trees may require additional water for up to a year.

If you have an area where you can compost non-animal food scraps, brush, leaves, grass clippings, etc., for use in

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feeding your plants, all the better. Avoid pitching pet waste (including cat litter), diseased plant materials or weeds that have gone to seed in the pile. Place compost around established plants or till into the soil for new gardens. Commercial plant food is readily available for the various pH needs.

Planting. When planting, pay attention to a plant's projected mature size. Will the darling 6" tall plant in the quart container grow 8 feet tall and obstruct the view from your deck, porch or window? Will this flamboyant specimen shade plants having the misfortune to share a garden? If the full grown plant will grow to a diameter of four feet, planting it 12" from the foundation or within 12" of the next planting will be a planting soon to regret.

For truly gifted gardeners, or those seeking a challenge, cultivate showcases that are resplendent with florals of the season: a cornucopia of succession starting with spring bulbs blooming, the profusion of summer blooms followed by traditional fall blooms. All in a single garden.

Beware. Some annuals and perennials self-sow; some spread underground. Left unchecked, some will take over an entire garden. The fragrant Lily of the Valley will endeavor to take over the garden and lawn.

For vegetable gardening, who hasn't planted rows too close making cultivating, weeding and harvesting a chore. More is not always better. What initially looks like tiny plants in way too much open real estate will grow into full-size plants soon enough. High yield vegetables can quickly overwhelm even those who freeze or can what can't be eaten fresh (or given away!). Asparagus is easy to grow and can be harvested for decades. It's worth the two-year wait before harvesting whether you plant roots or sow from seed. Asparagus grows very well from seed (use the pelleted types for very easy planting).

Whether you have a green thumb or not, most people can grow a thing or two. From a well-tended tomato plant in a container to florals and vegetables in beds, raised beds and even on top of straw(!). Be as simple or complex as time, energy and motivation allow. Grow something. It's good for you!



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