

NATURAL HEALTH

feel good / look good / do good

107 healthy summer secrets

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your yard

The first step we take into nature is typically the one out the door and into the yard. If your surroundings could stand some improving:

Let your lawn go Anyone who's ever tried to keep one knows that a beautiful lawn is high-maintenance. But it doesn't just suck up the time you spend keeping it manicured and free of weeds. "Lawns need about 12 inches of rain every summer, which many regions don't get," says Tom Girolamo, founder of Eco-Building and Forestry in Mosinee, Wis., and author of *Your Eco-Friendly Yard* (Krause Publications). "If you have to water, it's a huge drain—a quarter acre of lawn can easily use 80,000 gallons of water in one growing season, and you'll have to mow more often." And many property owners typically overapply fertilizers and pesticides that aren't healthy for you, pets or the planet, he says. So take a careful inventory of how you really use your yard, limit lawn space to what you actually use and let the rest go. The end result? A lower-maintenance yard that doesn't strain your schedule or deplete water resources. Let areas you no longer mow simply naturalize on their own or add native plant varieties.

Grow a few edible plants In this era of 24-hour grocery stores and tomatoes in January, it can be easy to feel disconnected from your food source. Plug back into the ecosystem by planting a small garden or adding a few edible plants to your landscaping or window boxes. "When you grow your own food, it tastes amazing and is probably much healthier than anything you could get at the store," says Penny Livingston Stark, permaculture expert and co-director of the Regenerative Design Institute in Bolinas, Calif. If you're new to gardening, she suggests starting with something easy, such as chard, kale, mint, garlic, cherry tomatoes or raspberries. Better yet, plant a fruit tree that's appropriate for your climate. To determine what that might be, consult one of Livingston-Stark's favorite books, *Right Plant, Right Place* by Nicola Ferguson (Fireside).



your air quality

Turns out indoor air might be just as polluted as it is in the great outdoors—maybe more so. Here's how to make sure you're breathing the good stuff:

Surround yourself with houseplants NASA scientists searching for the solution to "sick building syndrome" found that common houseplants are some of the most effective air cleaners. Five to try:

- 1) Aloe vera soothes kitchen burns and sucks formaldehyde out of the air.
- 2) Corn plants purify benzene and cigarette smoke.
- 3) Spider plants absorb carbon monoxide.
- 4) Peace lilies remove acetone, trichloroethylene, benzene and formaldehyde.
- 5) Dwarf date palms negate harmful effects from xylene (found in paints).

Green your household cleaners "Anything that is artificially scented pollutes your environment," says Greer. The word "fragrance" on a label can mask up to 100 different chemicals, and synthetic scents have been found to trigger migraine headaches and asthma attacks. Make your own cleaners using such household items as hydrogen peroxide, white vinegar or baking soda—or take your pick from among several new lines of sophisticated natural cleaners, including Earth Friendly Products, Seventh Generation, Biokleen, Ecover, Mrs. Meyer's and GreenWorks. "Finding less-toxic cleaners is essential to reducing your allostatic load—the amount of chemicals you have in your body," says Woodson Merrell, M.D., chairman of the department of integrative medicine at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

Go low VOC VOCs are volatile organic compounds, low-level toxins emitted by paint, solvents, aerosol sprays, cleaners, air fresheners, petroleum products, adhesives and other items used around the house. They destroy air quality and can cause negative health effects that range from respiratory irritation and headaches to kidney and liver damage, according to the EPA. "Any synthetic material you have in your house may be off-gassing VOCs," says Lou. "In general, if it smells like chemicals, it's off-gassing." To find healthy alternatives, you have to look for them—unless a product specifies that it's low VOC, it's probably not. Whenever you're shopping for furnishings, look for the GreenGuard Environmental Institute mark, which means that a manufacturer's claims of low VOC emissions have been certified by an independent third party and can be trusted. (Learn more about the program—and find GreenGuard-approved products—at greenguard.org.) ✖