

# Home & Garden

A close-up photograph of a woman with long brown hair, her eyes closed in a peaceful expression as she smells a bouquet of bright pink flowers. The background is softly blurred, showing more greenery and flowers.

## Kids' Décor

Tips on designing  
a fabulous and  
functional space  
for your child

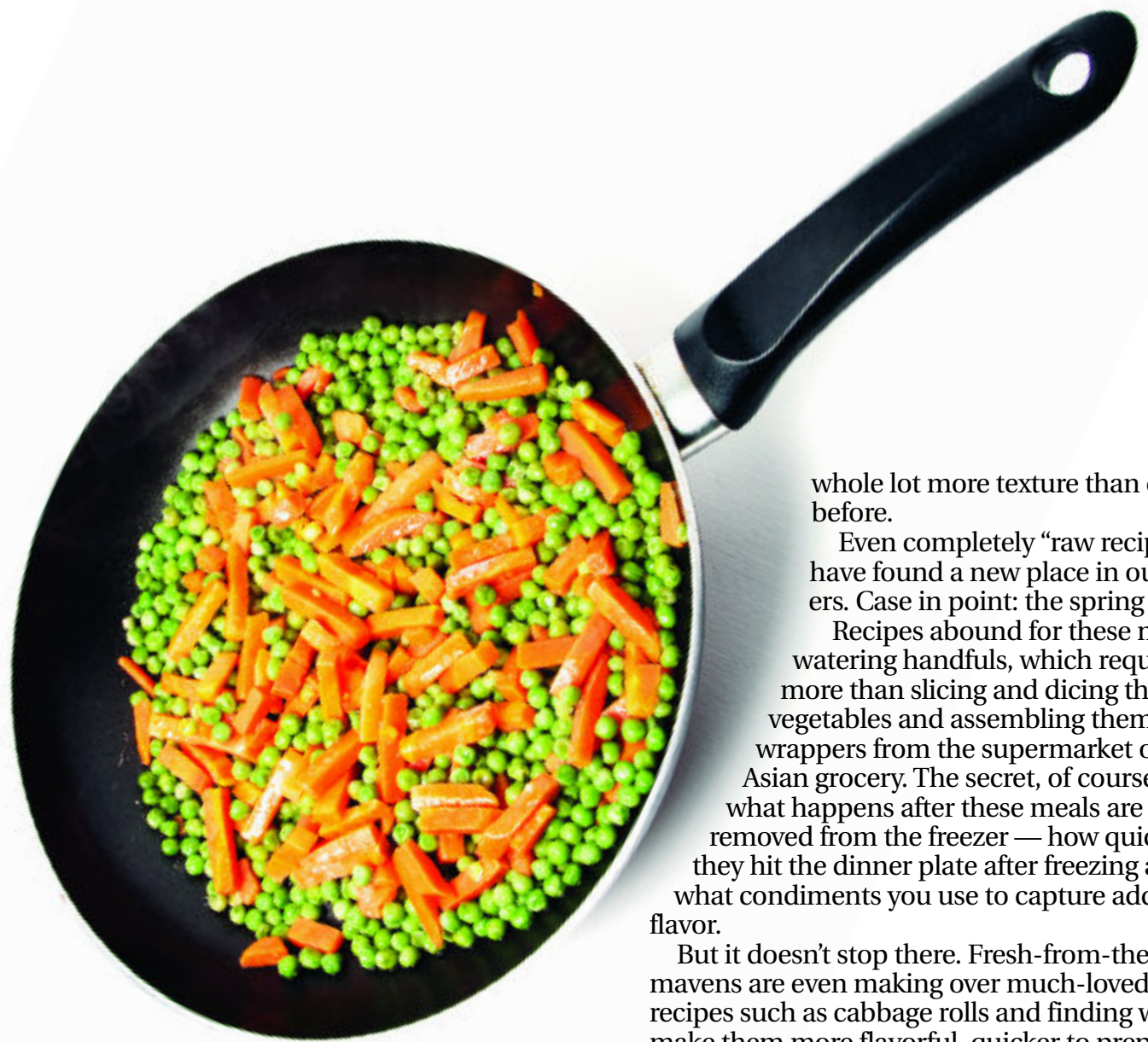
• INSIDE •

**ALSO:** How to choose the right shade of paint for your walls.



# Fresh FROM THE FREEZER

A few short years ago, make-and-take franchises were popping up everywhere. Though a tough economy took its toll on many of these small start-ups, the sharp concept behind their initial success has wrought a revolution in the home cook's frozen pantry.



It was the oxymoron that caught our attention: that seemingly self-contradictory idea that a cook could have her fresh food and freeze it too.

Almost overnight, meal preparation times shortened. More precisely, they shifted from the food prep end to the cooking end. Now, instead of cooking (or perhaps undercooking) meals and flash-freezing them, fresh-from-the-freezer recipes from the multimedia cooking gurus direct us to do very limited or even no pre-cooking at all.

The upfront time savings comes from prepared dishes that are mostly cooked after being removed from the freezer to defrost. Instead of cooking the daylight hours out of chicken, onions and other veggies and then freezing the sodden mass for your family's dining enjoyment, new freezing techniques direct the cook to prepare a mouth-watering marinade, let it cool, and then spoon it into the freezer bag right over raw chicken. Then, by adding a few vegetables at the time of cooking, food textures and all-important nutrients are preserved.

More than anything, in fact, fresh-from-the-freezer cooking strives to preserve food texture. Instead of mushy, compressed, you-name-it casseroles, fresh and prepared ingredients are being used solo or are combined with store-bought items for fresher tasting foods that have a

whole lot more texture than ever before.

Even completely "raw recipes" have found a new place in our freezers. Case in point: the spring roll.

Recipes abound for these mouth-watering handfuls, which require little more than slicing and dicing the filler vegetables and assembling them in wrappers from the supermarket or local Asian grocery. The secret, of course, lies in what happens after these meals are removed from the freezer — how quickly they hit the dinner plate after freezing and what condiments you use to capture additional flavor.

But it doesn't stop there. Fresh-from-the-freezer mavens are even making over much-loved classic recipes such as cabbage rolls and finding ways to make them more flavorful, quicker to prepare, and textured.

Instead of burnt fingers and a kitchen redolent of stewed cabbage, for example, these new recipes call for fresh, shredded cabbage as a main ingredient (also available in your market's produce section).

First, the ground meat, onions, shredded carrots and garlic are browned and spread across the casserole dish. Next, fresh crisp cabbage is sprinkled over the meat-vegetable medley, which is then topped with a favorite pasta sauce (don't forget the brown sugar).

This no-prebaking delight saves prep time, energy — because there's no boiling the cabbage — and most importantly, yields a flavorful, more textured version of an old favorite.

Whether you're one of those ambitious, once-a-month cooks or simply prepare an extra recipe now and again to keep your freezer pantry stocked, fresh-from-the-freezer thinking can help you update old favorites in ways you probably never thought possible.

Freezer-fresh cookbooks abound in your local bookstore, library and online to guide you, so explore and give it a try. Come winter, your freezer will hold a treasure trove of summer's freshest gifts.



# Kids' Décor

## CREATING A SPACE FOR YOUR LITTLE ONE

For many otherwise style savvy parents, the idea of putting together a fabulous and functional child's bedroom can be a daunting one. But kids' décor doesn't have to be a scary proposition.

In fact, decorating your child's room should be an experience that's just as playful and fun as your child is. Looking for some ideas on putting together the perfect children's space within your own home? Then take a peek at our quick tips for pulling off kids' décor the easy way:

### TO THEME OR NOT TO THEME?

While there are a number of different directions you can take your decorating options, many parents like the idea of working around a central theme. In fact, themed bedrooms are a great way to create a whimsical and personalized space for the youngest members of your family to call home.

However, it's essential to consider your child's bedroom theme carefully. Keep in mind that a movie or character that they love today might quickly become outdated.

Few parents have the time and money to renovate their child's room completely every couple of years. Instead, plan for kids' décor with a longer shelf life, and one that they can grow into as they — and their tastes — mature.

For example, a ball and bat adorned comforter, baseball wall border, and sports memorabilia deco-

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# KIDS DÉCOR

rations can all be swapped out with minimal expense and effort when your little leaguer decides he's now more interested in car racing than home base. A giant baseball field mural on the wall, however, is a little tougher to remove.

## FURNITURE TIME

Although your bundle of joy may be a tiny tike at the time you purchase his furniture, it's important to select pieces that they will be able to use for years to come. Contrary to popular belief, your child's bedroom furniture does not have to be replaced with every milestone.

Consider a toddler bed that converts to a twin, or a trundle that will serve for toy storage today and sleep-over space as your little one grows up. And whatever style you decide on, make sure that it is sturdy and well built enough to live through those adventurous young years.

## NEVER NEGLECT STORAGE

Ask any experienced parent what the most important aspect of kids' décor is, and they will invariable

answer "storage!"

You will want to give your young explorer plenty of places to store their toys and treasures, as well as keeping plenty of floor space available for play time.

Aside from drawers and chests, it's often helpful to look into multi-level shelving units that give your child a place to put toys and books, while affording you higher display shelves for keepsakes and special memories.

## PERSONALIZATION IS KEY

Finally, as you consider the best décor for your child's room, don't forget to get the input of the person who will be spending the most amount of time there.

Place your son or daughter's name on the door, allow them a place to post pictures that they painted, and include photos of your little one with their friends and siblings.

With a little forethought, careful planning, and some selective shopping, you can create the kids' décor that will have both you and your young one smiling for years to come.

## QUICK TIPS

# De-clutter your child's room in three steps

De-cluttering any room is challenging if you don't know where to start. Sorting your child's items into the three categories below can help de-clutter a mess easily.

## 1. KEEP WHAT HE OR SHE LOVES

Go through the items your child needs and wants to keep. This includes everything from their favorite clothing to books and toys. If he or she wants to keep clothing that is not in season, store it in the back of their closet. For books and toys, use a fun trunk for items being kept as memorabilia.

## 2. TEACH YOUR CHILD ABOUT LOCAL CHARITIES

Use a box for items your child wants to give away. Introduce the idea of donating to local charities or schools in your area. There could be a charity that your child might be interested in donating to on a regular basis.

## 3. RECYCLE ITEMS YOUR CHILD DOESN'T WANT

Introduce fun ways to teach your child about recycling and repurposing. Organize boxes that your child can label to collect paper items, plastic and miscellaneous items found in their room. At the end of the week, you and your child can see how much was collected.

De-cluttering your child's room can be stressful, but if you both take on certain parts of the room, it will cut the time in half. Plan a day each month to ensure your child's room stays in tip top shape.



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Just like the rest of the home, children's rooms can have their own visual style that adapts as their tastes change.



# Shade Garden Divas

## A LOOK AT SOME BRIGHT PLANTINGS FOR SHADY SPACES

**S**ome gardeners will boast that it is possible to grow any plant in the shade. Certainly there are many plants that seem to defy reason and survive despite the lack of sun.

You can find roses growing under trees from time to time. However, keeping a plant alive in the shade and allowing it to thrive are two different things and it makes the best garden sense to plant shade-loving plants in the dark spaces of the garden or landscape.

And, a plant doesn't merely have to be green to thrive in the shade. Various brilliant and colorful blooms can be planted to bring color to these shady spaces.

### PRIMROSES

Though native to the mountainous climes of the Himalayas and Alps, primroses can become the stars of the shade garden if they are kept well mulched. Choosing the most flexible varieties, that aren't too temperamental when it comes to heat and wind, will likely result in a successful planting too.

Bunch primrose and Japanese primrose are two recommended types to consider. The plants are elegant and will add that splash of color that can wake up any dark garden space.

### IRISES

Irises, though typically regarded as sun-worshipping plants, can do well in shade—at least a handful of species will likely thrive without much sunlight.

Both the dwarf-crested iris and evergreen roof iris make lovely additions to shade gardens. Pair these with



astilbe, Jacob's ladder, columbine, and Christmas roses to get month upon month of color.

### LILLIES

Tri-colored day lilies should be considered for shade colors to

make a colorful impact. There are currently hundreds of types of day lilies with colors ranging from the traditional orange and yellow to pink and red—most colors of the rainbow are represented in today's day lilies.

Reaching heights between one

and seven feet, day lilies are captivating plantings that definitely call attention to themselves and are relatively easy to maintain. Beauty and low-maintenance are two of this plant's hallmark traits.

### IMPATIENS

Impatiens boast lovely blooms and are among the plants most tolerant to shade.

With the ability to thrive in difficult situations, many varieties of impatiens provide profuse blooms to gardens allowing gardeners to create a virtual sea of color to light up a dreary patch. Because they come in such a wide array of colors and shapes, they are certainly the darlings of the shade garden.

### OTHER OPTIONS

Other plants that do well in shade gardens include annuals like browalia, tobacco plants, and ageratum as well as biennials like forget-me-nots and foxglove.

More shade-loving plants to consider are foamflower, bluebells, violets, periwinkle and creeping phlox—which may create quite a botanical carpet of color.

Even certain sun-loving plants may now contain hybrid species that allow them to thrive where the light is dim. Use these and other shade-loving blooms to wake up your shady patches and show them off advantageously.



Small Spaces,

# Big Taste

## HOW TO GROW GREAT TOMATOES WITHOUT A FULL-SIZE GARDEN

A tomato fresh from the garden tastes like an entirely different vegetable from the mushy, tasteless variety found in supermarkets. Growing organic tomatoes provides the added benefit of knowing your food is healthy and free of toxic chemicals.

Urban gardeners might think they can't grow these large plants because of limited space, but tomatoes come in so many different varieties, one is sure to fit your needs.

The most important factors in growing organic tomatoes in containers include selection, proper planting techniques and adequate ongoing maintenance

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# GROWING TOMATOES

through the growing season. Follow the steps below to create an abundance of fresh, organic tomatoes in your urban garden this summer.

## 1. CHOOSE PLANTS APPROPRIATE FOR CONTAINER GARDENING.

Tomatoes come in two general categories: determinate and indeterminate. Indeterminate varieties continue increasing in height indefinitely. Though they produce large amounts of fruit, these big plants prove difficult to stake and maintain in containers. Determinate varieties form terminal flower clusters, causing the plant to stop growing at a particular height. These work well for container gardening.

Many other choices regarding selection depend on personal preference. For example, heirloom seeds produce tomatoes with seeds that can be saved and used the next growing season while also maintaining the genetic diversity of plants. Many online seed companies offer organic heirloom seeds. Other good options include dwarf or container tomatoes, specially designed to produce smaller tomatoes in pots or hanging baskets. These hybridized tomatoes weight 6 ounces or less when fully grown, maturing in about 45 to 70 days, depending on the variety.

## 2. USE THE RIGHT CONTAINER AND SOIL.

Use a container 8 to 16 inches deep for planting, with the best size dependent on the expected size of your organic tomato plants at maturity. Plastic containers cost less and retain moisture better than clay pots, but this decision is purely individual. Just water frequently to ensure adequate moisture for plants in clay pots. Never plant tomatoes in containers with poor drainage. If pots do not have drainage holes, drill several in the bottom before filling it with a planting medium.

Fill the pot within one inch of the top with a nutrient-dense, organic soil medium. Those with peat or compost provide an ideal environment. Set the tomato plant in so that when the pot is filled, the soil covers the roots as well as the stem up to the point of the first leaves. Press the soil down gently around the plant and water thoroughly. Place the container in a sunny location with at least 4 hours of direct sunlight daily, though up to 8 hours per day is ideal.

## 3. MAINTAIN PROPER CONDITIONS THROUGHOUT THE GROWING SEASON.

Correct watering is one of the most important factors in healthy tomato plant growth. Too much

water causes the roots to rot, while too little water stresses the plant and produces a smaller, low-quality harvest. Plants grown in containers dry out quickly, so water daily for best results. Extremely hot or windy conditions may necessitate even more frequent watering.

Mulch to improve overall health. Mulch increases nutrient availability and moisture retention while reducing the risk of disease and insect problems. Apply an inch or so of bark mulch or weed-free straw in the top of the container and maintain it at this depth throughout the growing season.

Support growing tomato plants with cages or stakes, unless you are growing tomatoes in hanging baskets. Support prevents stem breakage and keeps heavy fruit off the ground. Add netting around the plants to discourage birds, squirrels and other wildlife from sampling your organic fruit.

## 4. PROTECT YOUR ORGANIC TOMATOES FROM DISEASES AND INSECTS.

Tomatoes succumb to a wide variety of disease and pests in the home garden. This often proves problematic when growing organic tomatoes. There are several ways to control these problems without resorting to the use of toxic chemicals however.

Check your organic tomatoes every day for signs of damage. Inspect both leaves and fruit for com-



mon symptoms such as holes, browning or wilting. This ensures prompt treatment of any problem.

Practice good care techniques to reduce risk. This includes keeping plants watered and fertilized, as stressed plants develop problems more easily. Apply an organic fertilizer at least once a month. Avoid watering foliage, concentrating water on the soil instead. Keep plants far enough apart that they do not touch; this keeps them from transmitting diseases between one another. One tablespoon of powdered milk sprinkled around the base of each plant and then watered in to the soil reduces the risk of fungal disease as well.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Growing organic tomatoes in containers provides the best of both worlds, giving you the great taste of organic produce, even with limited gardening space. Organic gardening takes some extra effort, especially when dealing with plants that have a myriad of potential disease and insect issues such as tomatoes, but it is well worth the effort when you bite into that totally natural and completely delicious homegrown fruit.



# Splash of Color

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT SHADES FOR PAINTING YOUR WALLS

**A**re you tired of looking at the same old rooms in your house? It may be time for a quick makeover.

You don't necessarily have to spend too much money or time to give your home a much-needed update. All you have to do is change the colors of your walls. This simple change can give your home a fresh new look.

Choosing wall colors, however, is not always as easy as it seems, especially if you have other people living in the home. You need to take into consideration each family member's color preferences. Since it's near impossible for everyone to choose the same colors, the decision-making process will need to involve a compromise of some kind.

Popular wall colors are those that are light and pleasing to the eye. There was a time when people believed that dark colors should not be used on walls because they make the room look smaller. But some dark shades do work well, especially if you pick a nice combination of colors for walls, moldings and ceilings.

For the untrained eye, it can sometimes be difficult to figure out whether a particular color combination is complimentary or not. To guide you in making your choices, refer to the color charts you can find in paint stores, home improvement stores and on the Internet.

In addition to being complimentary

to one another, the colors you choose should go well with the other elements in the room, such as the floor and any large pieces of furniture. Your chosen colors can be in the same color family as the existing elements. Or for a more interesting look, choose a sharply contrasting color for your wall. This will make the furniture stand out more.

It is also a popular trend these days to paint one wall a different color from the rest. For example, you can paint three sides of the room a neutral color and paint the remaining wall a different, more vivid hue. This can create a focal point, drawing a person's eye as soon as he enters the room.

Color can have a significant effect on how people perceive space. The general rule is that light colors make a room seem bigger, while dark colors make a room seem smaller.

If your goal is to maximize the space in a small area, choose light colors for walls and the ceiling. To give a cozy atmosphere to a fairly large room, however, choose dark shades to paint on the walls.

Interior design is made up of several elements, but it is undeniable that color plays a huge role. So choose the colors of your wall wisely in order to create the look you want for your home.