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Your great outdoors

Exclusive spring cleaning tips from an HGTV pro



If you've noticed the birds chirping a little more cheerfully, and the sun shining a little more brightly, it's because spring has finally sprung. But, you may have also noticed your house could use a little TLC after the harsh Canadian winter.

To help you decide what to add to your spring cleaning list, TVGuide.ca asked Carson Arthur of HGTV's *Green Force* to share how he's sprucing up his outdoor spaces. Here's what the landscaping pro had to say, in his own words.

With all the rain we've been getting across the country, I can confidently say that spring is officially here and with it comes the annual list of jobs and projects that I need to do to prepare my outdoor space for the year ahead.

This year is going to be a little different than years past. My garden needs to do more for me than just look nice. I want my garden to be more environmentally friendly, and at the same time, I want my backyard to contribute to my family's needs as we work our way through the global financial issues.

Here are the changes I'm going to be making.

1. I'm planting vegetables instead of annuals this year. Annuals look great in a space and I've always used them to fill spots in my beds with colour that I can change every spring. However, annuals don't give anything back, so this time I'm going with interesting vegetables instead.

I'm planning to try radicchio and beets because they taste great, require little care and look good, too. I'm also going to plant zucchini on a pyramidal trellis in the centre of my perennial bed. The trellis is a great architectural detail and I've found a fantastic Italian recipe for fried zucchini flowers, which are large, yellow and edible.

2. I'm also changing my urn at the front door of my house. I'm filling it with a combination of green and white perennials and frilly lettuce leaves. I'm also going to put in some edible flowers, like nasturtium and pansies. For the entire summer, I'll have a welcoming focal point that doubles as a salad bar. This is a new spin on the phrase "fresh is best!"

3. Another goal of mine is to eliminate all the pesticides I've collected in my shed. This year, I'm going organic. I want a green space that is truly that – an eco-friendly backyard that not only makes me happy, it's also better for the planet. I've learned that one of the worst things I can do in my space is to fill it with chemicals that end up filtering down into the water table below the soil.

There are some great recipes online for all natural pesticides and I'm going to try one called "Garlic Water". This is a really easy, as all you have to do is boil lots of garlic cloves in water, which then goes into a spray bottle that you can use on your favourite shrubs and perennials to make the leaves less tasty to the pests.

4. Each year, I like to have one major project to take on. For 2009, I'd like to create a new seating area under a tree at the back of my property. Nothing grows in the deep shade, so I thought it would be ideal as a space to avoid the heat this year.

In it, I'm going to try a new type of patio stone. It's an interlock made from recycled glass. Called PCR stone, the product boasts numbers that are very impressive. With over 15 million glass bottles removed from our landfill, I can have a patio that not only gives me more useable space, it also makes me happier knowing that I've made a decision that helps my neighbours too.

Hopefully you'll look closely at your own list this year and make some of the same decisions that I'm going to. If we all make little changes in our backyards, think of the larger impact we can make together.

Carson Arthur can be seen on *Green Force*, airing Saturdays at 11:30 a.m. ET and Sundays at 4 p.m. ET on HGTV. He is the author of the book *Garden Designs for Outdoor Living*, and is the principal designer for CAD, Carson Arthur Designs.