

Spring Home Improvement ~ Lawn & Garden

Consumers Seek Comfort, Simplicity and Value in Home Decor

According to a recent study by the Yankelovich Partners — an organization that analyzes trends in home decorating and how changing consumer lifestyles and goals impact these trends — there are four critical influences on home decor decisions made today. As never before, consumers of the mid-90's are dominated by the need to reduce stress and lead simpler lives, to make comfortable choices that are perceived to have high value, and to surround themselves with feelings of contentment and security.

Industry experts appear to agree. According to Carpet & Rug Industry. "The number-one design influence in home fashion today is the desire for comfort, warmth and simplicity. We want to be able to enter our homes and unwind and relax."

This return to an uncomplicated lifestyle, a 'Northern Exposure' consumer mindset, if you will, has resulted in distinct trends in home decorating that have emerged in the 90's. Two of the most prominent are the desire to bring the outdoors inside, and the use of different textures to emphasize style and comfort in a room.

Bringing The Outdoors Inside

The environmental movement has spawned a renewed interest in earthy, neutral colors in the home. These color schemes, according to experts, create feelings of warmth and serenity. Neutrals possess the ability to work together and blend in harmony as opposed to colors that dominate or contrast, blue and mauve for example.

Carpet & Rug Industry notes, "Sin-

gular trends, colors and designs are less pivotal as elements that dominate floor design. Instead, the ability of groups of colors and patterns to work together in an eclectic harmony has captured the interest of a major portion of the design-oriented consumer audience."

Different Textures Create Style

The most up-to-date rooms combine several textures, materials and surfaces for a look that is creative, yet not overpowering. By using a variety of fabrics and textures, neutral colored rooms take on a unique personality.

According to Randy Sanford, director of product development for Galaxy Carpet Mills, "Textured carpet is gaining popularity because it adds interest to a room without detracting from the room's focal point, such as a fireplace,

sofa or other room accessories. These carpets also tend to be easier to keep clean than solid saxonies."

Carpet: A Design Element that Meets Consumer Needs

The selection of a floorcovering ranks as one of the most important decisions in planning a decor because it helps determine the visual character of a room. It is the background from which the room takes on its 'mood'.

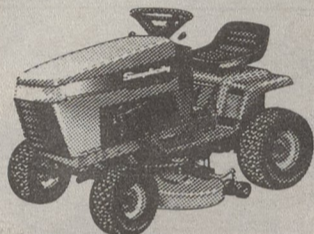
Carpet remains an ideal floorcovering for the consumer searching for comfort, simplicity and value. There is a variety of styles, textures and colors available — from traditional to eclectic, plushes to loop textures — to suit anyone's style and comfort level. Because of its warm feel, carpet creates a more appealing, relaxing environment.

Sanford adds that in addition to its design advantages, carpet has many functional benefits, including noise reduction and easy maintenance. It also adds tremendous value to a home. "Consumers need to understand the value of a carpet purchase and relate it to the comfort and enhanced atmosphere that it can bring to their home," he explains.

Today's consumer has more choices than ever before when selecting floorcovering. For those seeking to create a stress-relieving environment and increase the comfort of a room, carpet is a choice that comes with the added values of durability, beauty and warmth.

For more information on selecting the right carpet, contact Peerless/Galaxy at 1 800 845 4252.

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Garden Guidelines

Basic Soil Preparation

To achieve any kind of success in gardening, you will need to commit yourself to building and maintaining rich, healthy soil. Soil improvement is an on-going process that will reward you with fertile, well-drained, aerated, loose, evenly textured soil. It will be filled with worms, fungi, bacteria and other organisms that will help maintain its health. Like the plants it brings forth and supports, soil is alive and changing. Gardeners should put as much care into building and maintaining soil fertility and structure as plant selection, plant care and garden design.

Preparation of a soil bed area should begin when soil is neither too wet nor too dry. Working the soil under either condition can greatly damage its structure. Before preparing your planting bed, pick up a clump of soil and roll it into a ball. If the ball is putty-like or rubbery, it is too wet to work. Wait a few days until it dries out a bit more. If the soil is too fine or dry to roll into a ball, water the area evenly and wait a day or two.

If your garden area has never been worked before, remove all sod and

weeds either mechanically with a rototiller or tractor, or by hand. Compost the removed weeds and sod.

Enriching Soil Naturally

For most flowers or vegetables, it will be sufficient to turn and work the soil to a depth of about 10-12 inches. However, the deeper the soil is worked, the better—especially for deep-rooted crops. Before you turn over the soil, spread a one- to four-inch layer of compost or other humus over the area. This layer should be deeper if you are working with very poor soil. The compost should consist of a decomposed mixture of raw organic materials like leaves, grass clippings, well-aged manures and kitchen wastes. If you do not have your own compost pile, you can usually collect leaf mold and grass clippings from the local public works department, and manures from horse stables.

Work the organic matter into the garden bed to a depth of at least four to six inches. It is easiest to work in the compost by working the soil in strips. Begin by digging a trench about one foot wide and shovel out the top 10-12

inches of soil. This soil can be set aside to fill in the final trench of the bed. Dig another trench alongside the first and put its 10-12 inches of soil into the first trench. Continue this pattern until the entire area has been worked.

After the entire bed is loosened, turned, and the compost fully integrated, rake to smooth and level the soil surface. Finally, lightly water the bed to settle it.

Soil pH

Most garden plants grow best with a soil pH between 6.2 and 6.8, which is slightly acidic. The pH of a soil is important because essential plant nutrients become unavailable if the pH is either too high or too low. A general rule of thumb is that areas that receive little rainfall with warm temperatures usually have alkaline soils or higher pH, while areas that are temperate with high rainfalls usually have acidic soils, or lower pH. To know for sure, you should have your soil tested. Contact your local county service extension for information on where and how to test for pH, or you can purchase a soil testing kit from most garden centers or mail-order gar-

den supply catalogs.

If you are preparing a bed for plants that need acidic soils, like azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons or dogwoods, add equal parts of peat moss, decomposed pine needles and compost to the root area where the plants will be planted to a depth of at least 18 inches or more if possible. This mixture should be pre-moistened before being incorporated into the planting hole.

To lower the pH, an addition of a sulphur or iron sulphate is worked into the soil. Follow the application guidelines on packages of these amendments to correct the pH level.

The pH can be raised by the addition of dolomitic limestone which also adds calcium and magnesium to the soil. Wood ashes will increase pH but it takes twice as much as the amount of limestone to achieve the same result. However, ashes also add potassium, phosphate and boron to the soil.

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