

Robin Lee of Lee's Garden Center in Hodgenville stocks a variety of garden tools as well as a full line of plants. Photo: Jim Battles



Garden

We are bombarded with promises for tools that will transform our yard and garden work. Here's a preview of some new items that could help make your work easier, an update on some traditional tools with a new twist, and some tricks and tips to help you spade your way to a beautiful lawn and garden.

Gardening Tools and Tricks

Experts have differing opinions on what works and what doesn't, but that's all right. "Tools are a very personal choice," says horticulturist Shelly Nold, owner of The Plant Kingdom in Louisville and *Kentucky Living's* "At Home in the Garden" columnist. "It's a choice you have to make for your own gardening style."

Nold admits she's not a big hand-tool user: "Switching tools is cumbersome." Some of her favorite tools for the garden are a square-nosed nursery spade, the Tool Grip glove, a garden apron for tools, and a weed tub. A 100% recycled polyethylene Tub Trug

(5.5- and 9-gallon sizes) enables you to carry heavy debris, soil, or sand in it or to hold your potting mix. Two popular tools at The Plant Kingdom are a Kana hoe (a hand sickle) and a very sharp Nejiri Gama hoe for weeding, slicing, and digging.

"We're very behind other countries in how we develop tools," Nold points out.

Thad Ross, landscape architect and co-owner of Landscape Alternatives in Georgetown, says a wheelbarrow, plain shovel, rake, pitchfork, and a 10-year-old flat-bladed King spade are his tools of choice at home. A lot can be done with just a pitchfork: digging potatoes, spreading mulch, turning the compost pile.

Hardin County Extension agent for horticulture Amy Aldenderfer considers her soil knife a godsend in the garden. This strong-looking A.M. Leonard knife has a bevel on one side and a concave surface that can be used as a scoop. It works for cutting roots and dividing perennials, and has a leather sheath for safe storage.

When Nold teaches landscaping at the University of Louisville, one of the first things her students learn is how tools work, in particular how to dig a hole when you plant a tree. When using a

by Paula Deimling

Annual
Lawn & Garden
Issue

New and tried-and-true tools and materials for your lawn and garden

Gadgets

These Dutchman solid strap spades are hand-forged by DeWit and available from Earth Tools. Photo courtesy Tierra International

taller population today. A Kana hoe comes with a short or long handle, so gardeners have a choice. Adjustable handles are a solution on some tools, but

many times the lock-in isn't as secure as it needs to be.

Gardener Joel Dufour, owner of Earth Tools in Frankfort, has turned to European toolmakers, particularly Dutch tools. The innovation in European tools is subtle, but this makes a big difference, says Dufour. The typical Dutch spade has a 5-1/2" longer handle than an American spade. This extra length gives considerably more control and leverage, and there is less user fatigue. Also, the American hoe is not a good design for both chopping and slicing, says Dufour, who grew up on an organic vegetable farm. He finds it impossible to do both tasks with the same hoe. Europeans use a different tool for each process.

In business since 1993, Dufour carried only European hand tools until last December when he added a line of American hoes, made by Prohoe in Kansas. "I just want the quality," he says in deciding which tools to carry in his retail store. Innovative design, high-quality materials, and workmanship are what sets European tools apart from their American counterparts, he believes. About 50 percent of the tools he sells are hand-forged. "The tools I sell are made to last. If you care for these tools, you can pass them on to your child."

Quality is his main criterion in choosing tools for his store, but he is also mindful of how the tool and the user will interact. "Regardless of the quality of construction, if the tool is not designed ergonomically, it will fatigue and strain the operator, therefore resulting in far more time spent doing the task at hand."

About three years ago, Earth Bud-Eze in Minnesota created a line of ergonomic hand tools that isolate the wrist and allow you to use the strength of the upper arm and shoulders rather than the

spade, "You have to use your whole body to dig a hole," Nold says. It helps if you get your body center lower when digging a hole and to use a nursery spade with a shorter (say, 4-foot) handle, although the perfect handle length may depend on your height.

The handle length of a tool can help or hinder its use. In the early 1800s, people were shorter in stature, points out Aldenderfer, and many toolmakers have continued to make rake and hoe handles that are suited for that stature rather than the





EdgeGuard is a new fertilizer spreader from The Scotts Company that prevents fertilizer from going where you don't want it. Photo courtesy The Scotts Company

Building the Foundation: Soil, Fertilizer, & Mulch

narrow swath of yard, and thus demands more application time. The other choice, a broadcast spreader, can sometimes spread fertilizer where it isn't wanted or needed.

Scotts Company's EdgeGuard Total Performance Spreader does both. "This new spreader gives you accuracy and control that you get with a drop spreader along with the faster coverage that you get with a broadcast spreader," says Scotts agronomist Ashton Ritchie. To find the EdgeGuard at a garden center near you, call the Scotts Helpline at 1-800-543-TURF.

When it comes to fertilizing plants, many garden sources recommended Monty's Joy Juice. Noted rosarian Montrose T. "Monty" Justice Jr., having acquired a rose-care business in the 1980s, worked three years in developing his first formula. Gardeners began to take note when, suddenly, those who were winning the prizes in rose competitions were all using Monty's Joy Juice, and the secret was no longer a secret.

Today, Kentucky-based Monty's Plant Food Co. Inc., formed in 1997, offers this natural-based fertilizer and plant enhancement products, and a Web site on gardening information and advice on using the Joy Juice. The message about the Kentucky-manufactured Joy Juice has gotten out to more than 40 states, including New York, where the product is used at the New York Botanical Garden.

Mulching a garden may seem like decorative icing on the cake, but it goes far deeper than the finished appearance. "The reason you mulch is for the health of your

plants, and aesthetics," Thad Ross, co-owner of Landscape Alternatives, says.

In the winter, mulch protects the roots of perennials from winter temperatures, and year-round keeps moisture in the ground. Hardwood mulch decomposes and provides nutrients to the plants. Cypress and cedar mulch don't decompose as fast as hardwood mulch and will last two to three years. Never use sawdust as an inexpensive alternative to mulch—sawdust drains the nitrogen from the soil.

For those concerned that mulch might attract termites, Aldenderfer points out that it's the size of the mulch pieces, not the type of mulch that could create a problem. Avoid mulches that have large chunks of wood.

Mulch comes in a variety of earth-tone shades that can be chosen to match the plant materials and exterior of the home. For gardeners who want to salute a favorite sports team, mulch comes in various colors, including Wildcat Blue.

Superior Mulch in Nicholasville produces mulch in several colors: red, deep black, gold, and chocolate brown. Red is Superior's most popular color, as some Applebee's Restaurants and Valvoline outlets use this mulch, says Marc Dunlap of Superior. In mid-January, Superior had a small amount of blue mulch left, but blue mulch is always available through special order.

Besides crowding plants in a garden and planting the wrong plant in the wrong place, not paying attention to the soil is one of the major mistakes that a gardener can make, says Daviess County Extension agent Annette Meyer Heisdorffer. Look at the conditions of the planting site before beginning to plant anything.

Shelly Nold of The Plant Kingdom does not use peat moss as a soil amendment any longer, as peat moss is a resource that can be depleted, she explains. Her business suggests Mr. Natural Superior Soil products that contain worm castings and hen manure compost. These products were developed in Georgia to produce hearty plant growth from clay soils.

Home gardeners who fertilize their own yards have typically had to choose between a drop spreader or a broadcast spreader. A drop spreader drops the fertilizer along a

Kentucky-based Monty's Joy Juice is a liquid, environmentally friendly fertilizer solution for vegetable and garden plants. Photo courtesy Monty's Joy Juice



smaller, weaker muscles of the hand, wrist, or arm. These E-ZE Leverage Grip tools enable you to work with more power and less strain, and to get the same work done in less time. Today the line includes an ergonomically designed trowel, V-hoe, earth cultivator, pruning saw, carpenter saw,

DeWit's perennial planter, from Earth Tools, is very sharp and lightweight, designed for dividing perennials, lifting weeds, and planting bulbs. Photo courtesy Tierra International



and a shrub rake, with the Earth Bud-Eze signature handle and cuff.

"The biggest obstacle we run into are those people that say, 'I'm young, strong, and don't need that tool. I don't have any pain.' They forget one word, and that word is *yet*," points out Earth Bud-Eze co-owner John Kari. "Young or old, (ergonomically designed tools) just make it easier on the body."

Gardener's Supply Company in Vermont offers a range of garden tools, including telescoping weeders to prevent sore knees, molded polyurethane garden cushions that cradle the knees, and a garden kneeler. A four-wheel Garden Scoot has a contoured tractor-style seat that swivels 360 degrees and keeps you from kneeling in the garden.

About two years ago, Robin Lee added a one-piece Corona trowel to the stock of tools she sells at Lee's Garden Center in Hodgenville. Corona also produces a rake and bulb planter. "They have a lifetime guarantee, but I've never had a customer bring one back to the store," says Lee.

For pruning, many gardeners cite Felco pruners as the best on the market for their engineering and durability.

Regardless of the types of tools you choose, you need to keep an edge on them, something that even new tools

don't come with, says Aldenderfer. Sharpening hoes and shovels with a file creates an edge, and this must be done periodically, as well as always cleaning tools after each use.

If you put off planting spring bulbs because of the digging it takes, consider buying a bulb-planting dibble, a pointed metal or wooden instrument that helps you dig holes. Another innovative idea is attaching a 2-1/2- to 3-inch diameter auger bit to a cordless drill. That makes bulb planting much easier, and enables you to get to the recommended depth, points out Fort Thomas landscape designer Steve Skaggs. Another option is a bulb-planter you can stand up and work with. Earth Tools sells a 38-inch and 44-inch manual Dutch bulb planter.

Protecting Hands & Feet

The choice of garden gloves and footwear varies with each gardener. Garden clogs, or "slogs" as they are called, find favor with some gardeners whereas others opt for just sturdy leather shoes or boots.

The Tool Grip glove is well-liked among gardeners for its durability, as compared to the pretty fabric gloves with non-skid panels, which easily develop holes.

Hillerich & Bradsby Co., makers of the Louisville Slugger baseball bat, launched the leather Bionic Gardening Gloves in October 2002. It's the first gardening glove on the market to be designed by a hand surgeon: function was the focus, not color or appearance. The gloves come in various sizes with both a men's and women's model available. And they're designed to do so much more than keep your hands from getting dirty.

It took five prototypes and field testing by 60 people to arrive at the final design of the glove. "The glove actually has a lot more padding than other gloves and at the same time we've added flexibility through anatomic placement of the pads and the motion zones," says Dr. Jim Kleinert, the orthopedic surgeon who designed the

glove. "Our mission was to use that knowledge of anatomy to help improve the fit, comfort, and performance."

The glove, despite its padding, is still easily maneuverable in the garden as individual weeds can be grasped with the glove. "I can type while wearing the glove," Kleinert quips.

About 3,000 pairs of the gloves have been sold thus far. At \$39, they are pricier than most garden gloves, but Kleinert points out that typically people spend money on good footwear. Why not also protect the hands? "Your hands are your most precious gardening tool."

Kleinert likens gardeners to athletes, and knows this firsthand from his own work in the yard and garden. "Gardeners ask their hands to do things not easy to do."



The palm and top of the Bionic Gardening Gloves show the anatomic placement of pads and motion zones. Photos courtesy Bionic Technologies Division/Hillerich & Bradsby Company Inc.

As designer and H&B's Bionic Division director of research and development, he hadn't anticipated some of the comments he hears from customers, such as "my hands feel better with these gloves on," and that they claim to be able to work longer in the garden when they're wearing these gloves.

The Louisville Slugger Museum Gift Shop has had a difficult time keeping the

gloves on the shelves as they have been selling out quickly, although a large shipment for spring is on its way. The gloves can also be purchased online from the gift shop.

wand enables you to reach hard-to-get places and to navigate close to the soil area with a fine spray rather than one fast stream of water that will cause the soil to spill over the edge.

"Manufacturers are putting fun back into gardening and tools," says Nold. One such aspect is

bright-colored tools. They enliven the tool shed or tub but also are much easier to spot in the grass, unlike green tools.

A Dramm water wand, for instance, comes in yellow, purple, blue, red, orange, and green. Men tend to pick yellow because of its visibility, Lee observes. Women tend to select a color that coordinates with the yard in some way.

For plants in the ground, consider using a soaker hose. This saves time and water, avoids evaporation of water, keeps the foliage dry, and helps keep leaf diseases

from starting.

Robin Lee winds soaker hoses around and throughout any newly planted garden, and then lightly covers these hoses with mulch. Using a divider valve, she channels the water into each hose and gets the plants watered without having to roll out the hoses each time. She removes the soaker hoses later in the year as she readies the garden for winter.

Lawn sprinklers can also add a decorative touch to a yard. Wren Artful Shower sprinklers do as good a job as the utilitarian types of sprinklers, says Lee.

Container Gardening

Container gardening is not a new concept this year, but has been gaining in popularity the past few years, for a number of reasons. It's a great alternative as you get older or downsize into smaller living quarters, or if you just don't have time for the traditional in-ground gardening. "Pottery is such a big trend," says Nold. "I'm excited that good quality containers are hot."



E-ZE Leverage Grip tools from Earth Bud-Eze are ergonomically designed. Photo courtesy Earth Bud-Eze

Keeping Those Plants Watered

Both professional and home gardeners praise the invention of the water wand. With hanging baskets, window boxes, and pots dappling decks and walkways, a water

Homeowner Loans

1ST MORTGAGES (Fixed Rates)

	30 Year	15 Year
<u>Amount</u>	<u>*5.75%</u>	<u>*5.25%</u>
\$ 75,000	\$ 437.68	\$ 602.91
\$125,000	\$ 729.47	\$1,004.85
\$200,000	\$1,167.15	\$1,607.76

100% Guaranteed Rural Housing Loans (FMHA)*



*Refinance Now
Rates are low*

- Lower your monthly payment
- Bill consolidation and home improvements
- Fast/local closings

Servicing Kentucky's Mortgage Needs

FEDERATED MORTGAGE, INC.

(800) 466-1635

Apply by phone or online

www.fedmort.com

- * Restrictions Apply
- * Rates subject to change and qualification
- * 30 year APR 6.05%
- * 15 year APR 5.75%
- * Credit and collateral subject to qualification

Multi-State Mortgage Licensee

Fixed Rates

Robin Lee remembers about 10 years ago when people just wanted a stone urn—either black or white—for each side of the porch. Today there are many shapes, sizes, colors, and textures to choose from.

Nold likes the true Italian terra-cotta pots now available in addition to those from countries such as China, Malaysia, and Vietnam, and in colors ranging from oxblood red to mustard shades.

Inexpensive low-line clay pots won't survive the winter weather whereas high-fired clay pots will. If you don't want the great weight of a terra-cotta pot, plastic pots now sport classic and contemporary designs.

Today, besides the traditional front porch or deck placement, pots are being used as ornamental focal points in the midst of gardens.

Giving your Garden an Edge

A border around a garden is like a picture frame. It sets off the garden. It says something's special inside. Gardeners starting out sometimes opt for black land-

scape edging that is relatively inexpensive, an estimated 20 feet of edging for around \$10. You can upgrade later to a more sophisticated border.

Many varieties of manufactured edgers are available, including those with the look of Colonial brick and old stone that easily meld together. Manufactured edges can cost in the \$5-8 range for an 18-inch section. Sometimes if you're buying a large number of sections, you can get a reduction in the price-per-piece cost. Bricks or creek stones can also create a beautiful edge, but it generally will take more work to get them to fit together. Many garden stores sell rocks that can be used for anything from a focal point in a garden to building a sunken barbecue pit.

An edge can also be created without laying in any materials. Georgetown-based Landscape Alternatives, for instance, does a

Tool Grip gardening gloves now come in a range of colors. Photo courtesy Garden Works



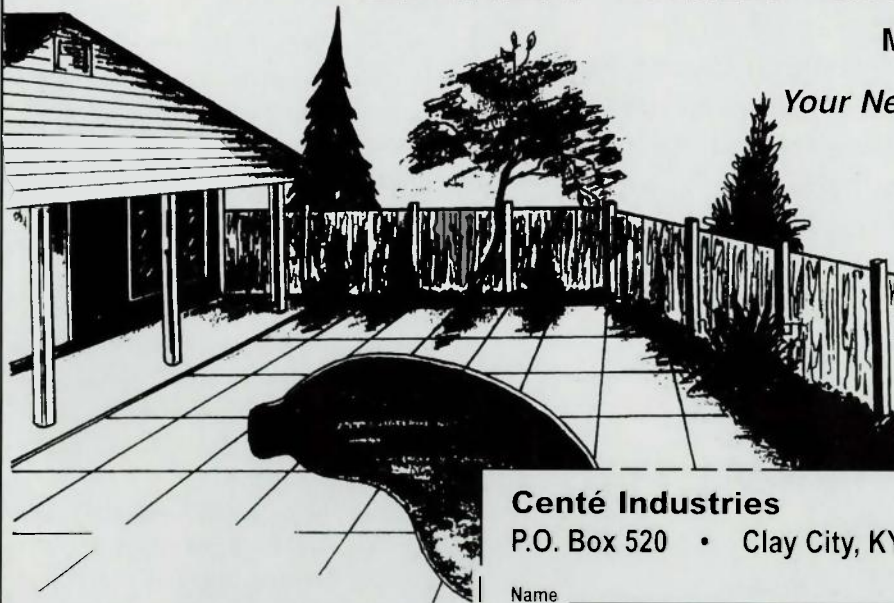
trench-cut edge around its gardens unless the client requests something else. "We won't use the in-ground plastic edging any more because it heaves out of the ground in cold temperatures," Ross says. If done well, the trench-cut edge stays into the next season, but must be re-done every couple of years.

SWIMMING POOL MANUFACTURER'S EARLY BIRD SALE

\$10,995.00

Manufacturer's Rebate ... \$500.00

Your Net Cost **\$10,495.00**



- 16' x 32' Size Rectangular
- Depth 40" to 8'
- Completely Steel Constructed
- Motor
- Automatic Pump
- New — NON-SKID Aluminum Coping
- Automatic Filter
- Stainless Steel Ladder
- Excavating
- Rope
- Plumbing
- Hooks
- Vacuum Cleaner — Leaf Skimmer
- Floats
- Completely Installed
- Ready for Decks

Centé Industries

P.O. Box 520 • Clay City, KY 40312

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

() Call Morning () Afternoon () Evening

Call now for the name of your nearest dealer.

Phone (606) 663-4485

Coverage for tomorrow's farms TODAY



When Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance began insuring farmers over 50 years ago, most farms were pretty much the same – give or take some acreage. Time and technology have changed all that, and now Kentucky farms are as diverse as the people required to make them run efficiently. Yet, even with today's sophisticated machine power and manpower, the whims of nature can still cause damage to even the best-run farms. Ask your Kentucky Farm Bureau agent about today's farmowner coverage. You'll find our products and services have changed with the times, in order to help keep today's Kentucky farms viable – tomorrow.

All-Around Coverage

All Around Kentucky



**Kentucky
Farm
Bureau
Insurance**

A Member Service
www.kyfb.com



Auto • Home • Life • Business



Your forearm, wrist, and hand get a break from stress when digging with the ergonomically designed earth cultivator by Earth Bud-Eze. Photo courtesy Earth Bud-Eze

To do a trench-cut, use a flat-bladed metal spade and cut a V-shape along the perimeter of the bed. A good trench-cut is 4-5 inches deep.

A Dutch lawn edger with a blade larger than most, a wooden handle, and extra-wide T-bar at the top sells for \$36. A steel lawn edger with unbreakable steel tubing and thick-wrapped handles for a comfortable grip costs \$28 at Earth Tools.

An Attitude toward Gardening

You can buy all the tools and follow all the advice, but unfortunately still not get the garden you envisioned.

Delphiniums and foxglove are some of Robin Lee's favorite flowers, and she sells and grows them for her garden store. But in her own garden—despite all the care she lavishes on them—her delphiniums and foxglove will not grow. Acquaintances, knowing this, will often bring her cuttings from different varieties. Still she finds her delphiniums and foxglove dead in the garden, and those that do come back usually don't last.

It's a sobering part of gardening. Some perennials will last three to four years; others 20 to 50 years, the peony being one of the longest living flowering perennials.

Don't get stuck in a rut, Joel Dufour suggests. A lot of information is out there. Just because you've always done something a certain way in the yard doesn't mean it's the best way or that you should continue

Kentucky Living ♦ March 2003

doing it. Think out of the (garden) box.

Kentucky has nearly two dozen horticulture Extension agents in counties across the state who can answer gardening inquiries. For questions, it's best to contact the Cooperative Extension Office agent in the county where you live. Also, garden clubs are a great source of gardening information. Gardeners love to talk about their gardens and share advice. How-to books and the Web are other great sources of information. And don't be afraid to ask the person at your local garden or hardware store for advice on a tool or soil amendment. Consult the tags on each plant. Read the labels on products.

The "green industry," which includes landscaping to garden centers, is often overlooked in Kentucky, as agriculture and tobacco industries tend to get more attention. But commercial landscaping is a \$500 million industry in Kentucky, says Bob Anderson, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service specialist for floriculture. "It's really a people business."

Continued on page 39

explore
more

Gethsemani, the Bluegrass Railroad Museum and Bill Monroe's Homeplace are just a few of the sights you'll discover as *Kentucky Life* explores the many attractions, great and small, along Highway 62.



Kentucky Life on the Road "Along Highway 62"
Saturday, March 1 at 8/7 pm CT

SUPPORT
KET

TeleFund 2003 • March 1 - 16
Call 1-800-866-0366

Replace the High Cost of Home Heating. And never have to buy fuel—wood, oil, gas, kerosene—ever again!

REPLACE OLD & INEFFICIENT HEAT

Hydro-Sil is a unique room-by-room heating system that can **save you hundreds of dollars** in home heating costs.

It can replace or supplement your electric heat, gas or oil furnace and woodstoves. Hydro-Sil is designed for whole house or individual room comfort. Hydro-Sil heating works like this: inside the heater case is a sealed copper tube filled with a harmless silicone fluid that will never spill, leak, boil or freeze. **It's permanent. You'll never run out.** Running through the liquid is a **variable watt** hydroelectric element that is **only** being supplied a **proportional** amount of power on an **as-needed basis**. When Hydro-Sil is turned on, the silicone liquid is quickly heated, and with its heat retention qualities, continues to heat after the Hydro element shuts off. Hydro-Sil's room-by-room technology greatly increases energy savings and comfort.

Your benefits with Hydro-Sil:

- Slash Heating Cost
- Lifetime Warranty – no service calls
- Safe – complete peace of mind
- Clean – no fumes – enviro safe
- U.L. Listed
- Preassembled – ready to use
- No furnaces – ducts – chimney
- Portable (110V) or permanent (220V)
- Whole House Heating or Single Room
- Room by Room Control

Many families are benefitting — you can too!

- **F. Smalley (Mass):** "A company that advertises the truth saved me 50% compared to my gas heat. I found it hard to believe until my power bill came. Thanks a million!"
- **R. Hanson (Ind):** "I cannot begin to tell you how pleased I am with Hydro-Sil...the first time in 25 years our electric bill was reduced...**saved \$635, over 40%! "**
- **A. Consalves (Mass):** "We updated our existing standard electric heat, removing 20 electric heaters and replacing them with Hydro-Sil. **Wow – what a difference!** We received a substantial reduction of our electric bill. I have recommended Hydro-Sil to many people!"

You Can Do Something About the High Cost of Winter Heating!

Order by: Phone • Web • Mail • Check • MasterCard-VISA
800-627-9276 OR **www.hydrosil.com** TO ORDER OR FOR INFORMATION

MC/VISA # _____ EXP. DATE _____

MAIL TO: HYDRO-SIL, PO BOX 662, FORT MILL, SC 29715



Order today and SAVE! Two models to choose from:
PERMANENT 220 Volt • PORTABLE 110 Volt

PERMANENT 220 Volt	Approx. Area to Heat	Discount Price	Quantity
8' 2000 watts	250-300 sq. ft.	\$269	
6' 1500 watts	180-250 sq. ft.	\$239	
5' 1250 watts	130-180 sq. ft.	\$229	
4' 1000 watts	100-130 sq. ft.	\$209	
3' 750 watts	75-100 sq. ft.	\$189	
2' 500 watts	50-75 sq. ft.	\$169	

Thermostats – CALL for options and exact heater needed

PORTABLE 110 Volt – Thermostat Included		
5' Hydro-Max 750-1500 watts	\$219	
4' Convector – Dual watt	\$179	
3' 750 watts – Silicone	\$179	

\$15.00 shipping per heater \$ _____
Total Amount \$ _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

Garden Gadgets

Continued from page 35

Gardening isn't as general as it seems, says Anderson. Some people specialize in particular types of flowers from bonsai to day lilies, from hostas to roses: "Collecting is in vogue today." Sometimes on a whim, a gardener will try something new. Sometimes this whim becomes a habit or a very bad decision. Sometimes it becomes a passion for particular plants or tools.

Jim Wesley, co-owner of Barren Wholesale Greenhouses and manager/grower at Green Leaf Nursery in Glasgow,

For a complete listing of the sources mentioned in this feature, go online to www.KentuckyLiving.com, click on the Kentucky Living Keyword icon, and type in "Garden gadgets sources"



keeps records of when and what has been planted, and advises gardeners to do the same. In fact, many of the gardeners we spoke with reiterated this advice. You always think you'll remember what you did, and when, but record-keeping helps you compare from year to year. Garden diaries are sold at many bookstores, or you can use a simple notebook for recording details. When there's not enough time or money to do everything in a season, a master plan—either in your head or in blueprint form—can help you decide what aspects of your yard to focus on.

"Start off within your means and grow from that point," Wesley advises. Ask yourself: How much time am I willing to devote to this? What do I hope to accomplish? Keep in mind that lush gardens in upscale magazines are sometimes the work of full-time gardeners. The garden you create in your yard is yours, and that's a lot of satisfaction, not only for you, but for family members and the neighbors who pass by. "Open up the garden gate and let the sunshine in," Lee says.



GREAT OUTDOORS

DAVE BAKER

Where the bass are

Old-timers depend on nature's signals for hints on when to go fishing. Walleyes have their spawning runs when redbuds bloom; crappie bite best when dogwoods flower. When your dog or cat refuses to move from that sunny spot in March, it's time to head to the nearest pond or lake for some early spring largemouth bass fishing. You may catch the biggest bass of your life.

"If you get an afternoon when the sun's out and it's 50 to 55 degrees, you're going to find big bass in extremely shallow water in a lot of lakes," says Ted Crowell, assistant director of state fisheries.

Big bass are shaking off the winter doldrums as the water warms in March. They're feeding heavily on shad, minnows, and bluegill near the banks to build their strength for spawning.

"If you want to catch a big bass in Kentucky, this is the time of year to do it," says bass biologist Gerry Buynak.

Anglers should concentrate on points and shallow areas near deep water. Bass winter in deep water, and they're searching for the closest baitfish buffet to their lair. The best places are sunny banks of broken rock, which absorb the heat that bass need to become more active. Find brush or wood cover in these areas, and you'll find fish.

Crowell suggests casting spinnerbaits

Insider's Tip

Apply for Kentucky's fall elk hunts wherever hunting licenses are sold. The deadline is May 31. Those drawn for the hunt receive tips on hunting elk and assistance retrieving animals from the field. Equipment used for deer hunting is suitable for elk hunting.



Spinnerbaits are a good choice for early spring largemouth bass fishing. The season's largest fish are found near the bank during warm days in March at many of Kentucky's lakes. Photo: Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

within inches of the bank and retrieving these lures just fast enough to turn the blade. Use 1/2-ounce spinnerbaits with white or chartreuse skirts, equipped with silver or gold teardrop-shaped blades.

"You want to fish slow," Buynak advises. "You almost have to hit fish on the head with your bait because they're just beginning to wake up from a long winter's nap."

Bass still feed actively when the water is muddy, because sediment helps trap heat. Big spinnerbaits with big blades transmit vibrations that are sonic dinner bells for bass, even when fish have trouble seeing the bait.

Recommended places to fish include farm ponds and small lakes: these warm more quickly than large lakes. Call (800) 858-1549 for your free guide to places to fish in the state.

Don't forget to buy your fishing license.



Dave Baker is editor of *Kentucky Afield* magazine. Visit www.kyafield.com or call (800) 858-1549 for information about the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and *Kentucky Afield* magazine.