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Magazine

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It's all about you, *Kalamazoo*

I often have the opportunity to visit the City of Chicago to visit family or for entertainment. While I love this big city and all that it has to offer, especially the food, there is nothing like returning home to Michigan. I grew up in the South Suburbs of Chicago and Northwest Indiana and attended Ball State University and studied Natural Resources Environmental Science. After graduation, I worked for short periods with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and a municipal park system before I had the opportunity to come to Michigan as the Parks Director in St. Joseph County. Once I moved to Michigan, I felt truly at home in this natural state. Living south of Kalamazoo County, the City of Kalamazoo and Portage became part of our neighborhood where we went out to eat, shopped, and found fun things to do. This is why in 2004, I jumped at the opportunity to become the Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo Center Director.

Today, my family and I live in the City of Portage and we truly love all things uniquely Michigan. Searching for morels in the spring, Petoskey Stones or Lake Superior Agates in the summer, picking apples and hunting in the fall, and enjoying the winter snow sports and of course eventually really looking forward to spring!

Working for Kalamazoo County Parks is a dream opportunity to preserve natural resources in our community and provide access for our residents and visitors to these wonderful natural environments. I am often asked which County Park is my favorite, but the truth is that each park offers unique natural and historical features that cannot be compared. From the historic grist mill at Scotts Mill County Park to the remains of the County Poor Farm at River Oaks County Park, you can step back in time at a these County Parks. Enjoying the 2.5 miles of waterfront at Prairie View Park, riding the Maple Hill Mountain Bike Trail at Markin Glen County Park, exploring the trails and nature at River Oaks County Park, or riding a portion of the 22 mile Kalamazoo River Valley Trail are just a few of the natural experiences located just minutes from your front door. Coming to Kalamazoo also gave me the opportunity to work with the 200+ events held at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center. Almost every weekend the Expo Center is transformed into a unique event. From dog shows, living history shows, collectible shows, or consumer expos, there is something for everyone.

In addition to loving Michigan, the greatest part of our community is the people that live and work here. The Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo Staff work every day to provide outstanding services for our residents and visitors.

There is also just something friendly about the people in Kalamazoo. With summer just underway, I welcome everyone to come out and explore the wonderful Kalamazoo County Parks and the many unique events at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center.

David Rachowicz
Director
Kalamazoo County Parks
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Sweet Celebrations

Baby Ruth Bars

Photography and recipe by Linda Hoard

I like to say these are healthy! After all, they have oatmeal, peanut butter and honey in them. And they're gluten free if you use gluten free oatmeal! These are the perfect treat to take to a picnic, potluck or just need to make something quick when you're having a sugar craving. This is my go-to for any family get-together. The frosting is so good that I actually doubled the recipe. And, well, if you're like some of the chocoholics in my family, you might make just the frosting and eat it straight out of the pan!

Bars:

2 sticks butter (1 cup)
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup honey
1/3 cup crunchy peanut butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
5 cups quick oats

Preheat oven to 350.

Beat butter until soft and creamy, then beat in brown sugar, honey, crunchy peanut butter and vanilla extract. Add the quick oats and mix just until blended.

Spread into a 9x13 pan and bake for 20-25 minutes. Do not overbake. They are best when the edges are just starting to brown and the center is still a little soft.

Frosting:

2 cups chocolate chips (or a 12 oz bag)
2 cups butterscotch chips (or a 12 oz bag)
1 1/3 cups crunchy peanut butter

Melt the chips in a double boiler, or if you're brave, on very low heat in a saucepan. Watch very carefully! (I've burned many batches of this and had to run to the store for more chocolate and butterscotch chips!) When chips are almost melted, stir in the peanut butter.

Spread over the cooled bars (unless you just can't wait...then spread it over the warm bars)!

If I'm in a hurry, I like to put it in the refrigerator for a few minutes to firm up the frosting, but I feel it's better if you can wait until the frosting firms up a bit on its own.



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Make Your House Work for You

By Brittany Tomaselli

In the last few years we've seen a surge in home automation systems. Thanks to popular DIY systems such as Amazon's Alexa, we no longer view smart homes as belonging in a sci-fi world—they have become current and accessible features that are available to all homeowners. If you don't already own some sort of home automation feature, then you definitely know someone who does. The DIY systems on the market might be more visible to the average consumer, however the real strides in this field are being made by professional technology integrators. Beyond flashy and giving your home that wow-factor to impress guests, a home automation system can lend value to your home as well as positively impact your life in ways you've never imagined.

WHY AUTOMATE YOUR HOME?

Have you ever really thought about the amount of time we spend a day performing menial tasks, such as making sure all the lights are turned off? Those minutes add up, minutes that could be spent sharing a special moment with your child or laughing with your friends. In the show-home of Troy Cuvelier from Integrated Smart Technologies, you can experience what it would be like if these tasks were eliminated. "It's all about efficiency, finding the places to make time more valuable with your family or your friends instead of wasting it," says Troy. Imagine how much more easy and fun entertaining or cooking for your family could be if your kitchen acted as your personal assistant. The ability to enjoy and use each moment to the fullest is at the core of what these home automation technologies are working to accomplish. Almost any device works without you having to physically do anything. The lighting, entertainment systems, security systems, the blinds, temperature controls—all of it can be controlled with voice command or from an interface such as phone, tablet, and wall mounted touch screen. The efficiency of these systems can be

especially beneficial for seniors who want to stay in their home as long as possible. Automated raising platforms in the kitchen allow for heavy appliances to be raised to the counter without having to lift them. Additionally, features such as sensors beneath the bed that detect when you get up at night and activate dim lighting to help guide you, can help prevent debilitating falls.

The technology of home automation has also become significantly more intelligent, even in the last few years. Beyond just switching devices on and off, the artificial intelligence now allows you to customize. For example, you can set the lighting in an area to 25% brightness or ask your TV play Episode 3 from Season 2 of "Stranger Things". And in recent years, some of this technology has been created to simply react to your personal schedule. As Troy says, "Artificial intelligence and voice control has really been the biggest change that we've seen." Through the use of sensors, motion sensors, and pressure sensors, technology has "the ability to have the house work around you...it knows what time of day it is, what time of year, if your home is armed to away or stay." The shades in the bedroom, for example, knows what season it is, what time the sun will rise as well as other variables that affect when it should let in the sunlight. Imagine easing into your day as the shades rise and music begins to softly play. Even the salt water pool has the ability to track its own pH levels and dispense salt accordingly. The lights, jets, and temperature of the pool can all be controlled from the home. The goal, as Troy notes, is to create an environment that adapts to you and your schedule without having to run around pushing knobs or buttons.

DIY OR PROFESSIONALLY INSTALLED?

There are certainly a variety of DIY systems available on the market. These basic solutions don't usually require you to run many wires, they operate off of your Wi-Fi, and are



generally (at least advertised as) simple to install. Many stores do offer technical assistance, however the time and know-how required to properly set up a working home automation system is not something most people have. As Troy says, "You can choose to do what you're good at. For most people it's their day job, spending time with family, or their hobbies--not beating their head against the wall for hours trying to figure out how to connect their lights to their phone." It's easy to run into technical difficulties during installation, or at any point during the system's operation for that matter. It very well may end up saving you money to hire a professional if you incorrectly install your own system and have to pay money to fix it. Even if you are fairly tech savvy, every system will need a reboot at one point, and when that happens you're going to wish you had a professional to assist you.

In addition to saving time and money, it's important to take into account the forward compatibility of your system. When working with a professional home technology integrator, they will not only be able to discuss options based on your needs, but they will make sure your system will be updatable as technology progresses. When you buy a DIY product, there is no real guarantee it will be compatible with the next big upgrade. At the increasingly rapid rate that technology is changing, having a high level of expandability is key for the longevity and effectiveness of your system. Additionally when you use devices from competing manufacturers, you might end up dealing with annoying "app clutter"-- which refers to the number of applications needed to access your devices. You might have one app for your security system, another one for your Google Home, and yet another one for your thermostat. When you have a professionally installed system, however, everything is integrated into one platform and one simple intuitive app that automatically gives you access to all your devices.

You also might want to consider the level of security required for home automation. In cases where smart homes are

hacked, they are usually DIY systems where the owner didn't understand the level of complexity needed to safeguard their network. In these cases, the device is simply connected to a person's Wi-Fi, and if their Wi-Fi is easy to gain access to (usually as a result of poor security passwords), then usually their other devices will also be easy to access. Professionally installed systems not only use specialized software, but they also use multiple levels of data encryption that would need to be bypassed. With a professionally installed system, you have a team of experts making sure that everything is secure.





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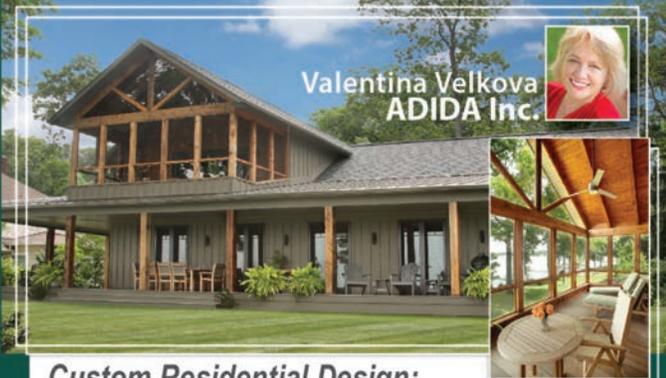
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Choosing the Right Barrier for Your Property

By Brittany Tomaselli

The most important question to ask yourself when choosing an enclosure or barrier for your yard is--what is the primary purpose it will serve? Safety, privacy, and property delineation are common objectives for property barriers. Barrier types such as traditional fences will help you cover several of these bases while more specialized barriers like automatic pool covers excel at one or two specific purposes. Keeping in mind exactly what result you want your fence to achieve will be a key factor in deciding what sort of barrier will serve your property best.

TRADITIONAL FENCES

Physical fences are the most popular and long-established type of barrier for your property. Not only do they provide a material boundary for your yard, they can also provide safety and privacy. Additionally, they are the only barrier option that can increase the aesthetic appeal to your home. Ben Yost of Farm and Garden Fencing explains, "A fence can add a lot of real value to your home." It is a permanent feature, much like a deck, that will increase your home's actual worth. There are also a wide variety of building material options for fencing, all of which have different price points and achieve different purposes better than others. For example, wood fences are usually moderately priced and great for achieving privacy. When installed by a professional fence builder, it guarantees added aesthetic value. Vinyl can be a little more expensive than wood, but has less maintenance involved. It's a good choice if you are looking for a decorative fence that can also provide privacy. Metal fences like aluminum and iron, on the other hand, also involve little maintenance, but are less able to provide privacy. They do, however, look striking, and are a hardy option that can withstand a lot of wear and tear. One thing to keep in mind if you are going to install a physical fence is the effect it will have on your neighbors. Discussing your

fence plans with those whose property it will affect is always wise. Not only does this prevent resentment between neighbors, but it's also possible that if you decide on a fence that is mutually beneficial, your neighbor might be willing to chip in on some of the costs.

Once you've decided the direction you want to go, make sure you choose the right professionals to install your fence. "Fence building is an underrated craft," says Ben. There's a lot that goes into making a fence look beautiful. The amount of experience a professional has in both assessing the best designs for any given property and in skillfully implementing them is indispensable. Fence installers have had the practice necessary to build a fence that is both beautifully crafted and properly set. They will also be the most knowledgeable about geography specific factors and municipal ordinances--both important considerations that could limit both the type of materials you can use and the variety of fence you can build. When it comes to residential fencing, there is "an increasing demand for service, knowledge, and skill," says Ben. The quality of your fence will have a huge impact on how much value it adds to your home. Besides the additional home value, having a fence installed is often the best choice for you if your concerns include privacy and ornamentation.

AUTOMATIC POOL COVERS

If one of the purposes of installing a fence is because you have a pool or are considering one, purchasing an automatic pool cover instead of a fence might be a viable and beneficial option for your property. As Josh Vlietstra of Vlietstra Brothers Pools explains, there are actually less regulations for using an automatic pool cover as your pool's safety barrier than there are for fences. Installing a "fence around a pool is very particular ...it has to be four feet, the gates have to be self closing and self-latching, open outward." Automatic pool covers, on the



other hand, are already safety compliant as a matter of course. They are solid barriers that completely cover your pool, seal on all four sides, and are able to bear the weight of multiple adults--making them virtually impenetrable. Not only do they provide a sense of safety, they also keep debris out of your pool, making cleaning and upkeep a bit easier. "They hold in heat, hold in moisture so evaporation is knocked down," Josh says, "You're also saving a little bit on chemicals." Additionally if you use an automatic pool cover instead of a fence, there won't be anything obstructing your view and you'll be able to enjoy scenery while in the water. Automatic pool covers are an excellent option if you are looking for a convenient safety barrier for your pool. They can also be used in tandem with other types of fencing if you are looking to also have privacy and additional safety.

OTHER BARRIER OPTIONS

There are also a couple alternative options you may want to consider. If you are looking for an enclosure for your pets that doesn't require a structure, invisible fences may be an option for you. They are an excellent way to keep pets on your property and are generally much less expensive than putting up a fence--especially if you have a large amount of property. However, it's best to keep in mind that they will not keep other animals or people out. Another barrier option that doesn't require building a structure are "living fences." A living fence is a natural boundary made from trees, bushes, or hedges. These may take awhile to grow in, but once established, they can be an inexpensive option for delineating property lines. Deer also often tend to respect hedges and other living boundaries, so it might be a viable solution for keeping deer out. Additionally, a few living fences, such as hedges, may be able to provide more privacy than some varieties of traditional fencing.

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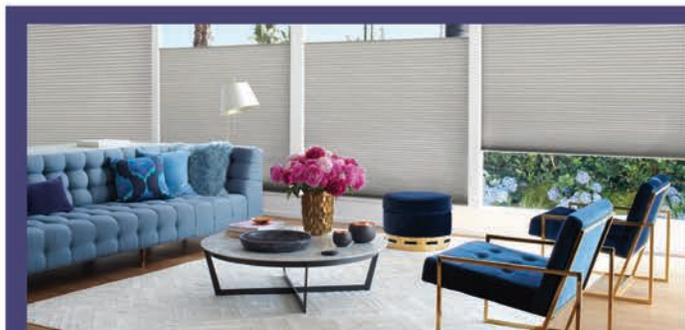
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THE HOUSE BETWEEN

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Jim Schuon

She lives with the kids in Arlington Heights, outside of Chicago. He lives in Detroit in an apartment. They meet on weekends.

IT MADE PERFECT SENSE TO BUILD A HOUSE BETWEEN

"We have an older son, but our two daughters are still in high school, so I stayed here while David went to Detroit for work," says Laura Ladd.

"Living on the west side of Michigan has always been a dream," David Ladd says. "I am originally from Detroit, went to Chicago for work, but now I've been back in Detroit for about three years. Laura and I have been driving around the South Haven area for about a year, looking for a lot to build."

They found it. The perfect lot for their house between was in a gated community called Windcliff Shores near South Haven.

"We loved the lot as soon as we found it," Laura smiles. "There are trees for privacy, and as you walk down the street, an expanse of Lake Michigan opens up with a private beach for the community at the end, along with a community pool."

Their own little slice of heaven found, the Ladds began to look for an architect and a builder to make their dream come true. Laura is a fan of the Pinterest site online, a place to collect and "pin" various ideas of interest.

"I called it my Cottage Board," she says. "I collected a year's worth of photos and ideas, and we realized that we kept going back again and again to a certain style—a farmhouse-style house with a wraparound porch, white with black shutters. So we began to search for architects in the South Haven area, and we found Marla Bruemmer."

David also asked neighbors in their new neighborhood for references, and Bruemmer's name came up several times, highly recommended.







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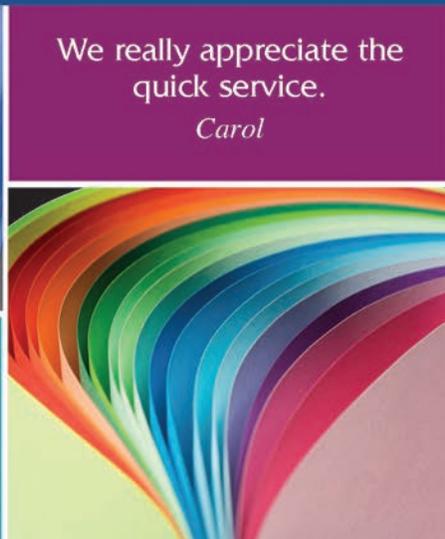
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The Ladds set up a meeting with Marla Bruemmer of Design Evolutions, a business she established in 1998, designing custom homes in Kalamazoo, South Haven, and South Bend. With a family history in construction, Bruemmer received her degree in residential design and construction management and engineering from Western Michigan University.

"Form follows function," Bruemmer says. "Our first meeting, I sit down with homeowners to do a verbal walk-through of their house. We talk about how they plan on using the house, how they envision it when finished. My next step is to go out and walk the property, see the views so that I can design the windows for those."

As plans began to take shape, the Ladds saw their 2,800-square-foot farmhouse-style home come to life. They requested four bedrooms with four baths, a bonus room over the garage that would serve both as a family getaway or a guest room. They wanted that wraparound porch and a large patio in back of the house with a fire pit for those long, lazy Saturday evenings when the family gathers to relax.

"And the kitchen," Laura says. "The kitchen is my favorite room. It's the heart of the home."

Bruemmer's drawings in hand, the Ladds sought a builder to transform drawings into reality. Paying attention to signs alongside new construction they liked, they noticed one name in particular: Beyer Construction. It was the same name they saw on a list of several builders Bruemmer recommended.

"We had no idea that Marla was married to Jim Beyer," Laura laughs.

SERENDIPITY.

Jim Beyer of Beyer Construction is a certified green professional builder, 43 years in the business. The former Home

Builders Association president often works with his wife's designs, but also many others. He began work on the Ladd home in September 2018 and finished this spring.

"We built the Ladd house green, because that's how I've been building long before anyone was even thinking about green," Beyer says. "These days, the industry has been forced to go that way, but we've been recycling materials all along. We don't fill the dumpsters."

With so many building materials, including cabinetry, appliances, and windows packaged in cardboard, Beyer Construction flattens all cardboard and recycles it, on average filling two pick-up truck loads with cardboard alone. All scrap is reused.

"We also use Superior Insulated Walls," Beyer says. "We've used them for 13 years, and they make the warmest, driest basements you'll find anywhere, up to R30."

Beyer Construction focuses on energy efficiency, natural and non-toxic materials, ventilation systems to control moisture and air flow, and building in a position that follows the path of the sun.

"Many homeowners today like the open concept," Beyer says. "We have to get creative with that, because eliminating walls means we have to find places to put plumbing, electrical. Sometimes we go up one wall and down another, use a fake beam to hide a pipe, or put it in a corner of a closet."

For the Ladd home, the biggest challenge was bringing in a granite countertop for the 10' by 5' island in the center of the kitchen.

"WE HAD SIX GUYS CARRYING THAT IN," BEYER SAYS.

"I didn't want a sink in the middle of it," Laura says. "I wanted it to be a place for people to gather, maybe have a buffet, with five stools around it."



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With the homeowners in two different places and the designer and builder in a third, modern technology became the best option for communication. Photos traveled over text to keep everyone updated, and texts quickly settled options as the build progressed.

"Now we are preparing for landscaping," David says. "We've completed a design and are down to choosing one of two."

The Ladd family now spends their weekends in their new home, enjoying the cool lake breezes from their patio. They are enjoying decorating their new space with the help of Scott Shuptrine Interiors.

"You know that Pure Michigan sign you see when you enter the state?" David says. "We really feel that now. You can feel your blood pressure drop as you get closer to home."

"It's a calm feeling," Laura says. "The entire building experience has been seamless. It's important to know what you want when you go into something like this. Take that year to gather ideas, see what keeps drawing you in before you meet with a designer and builder."

What draws you in and holds you, the Ladds say, is what makes a house a home.









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Look TO THE Sky



By Zinta Aistars

What better renovation in a room than to allow in a ray of light—and skylights are the perfect way to bring in a bit of sunshine or, for that matter, starshine. Day or night, they are a window to the sky.

Skylights—windows built into the roof of a house—are not only a great way to bring in a view upward, but can also provide ventilation, depending on the type of window.

OPTIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

“People choose skylights mostly because they want to add more light to a dark room,” says Tim Green, owner and interior decorator at Flair Interiors in Kalamazoo. “I’d say about 75 percent of the skylights we work with are stationary, but they are available also with remote or manual controls to open and close for cross-ventilation if that’s what a customer wants.”

A variety of skylight shapes are available: square and rectangular are most popular, but round, dome-shaped skylights are another option, or even custom-made in most any shape imaginable.

“First thing we ask of our customers is what room they want it in, the size of the room,” says Jeff Everts, store manager at Hannapel Home Center in Portage. “For smaller rooms such as bathrooms, a customer might want to consider a tubular skylight, something like a recessed light feature.”

Dennis Mulder, owner operator at Mulder Construction in Kalamazoo, warns that installing a skylight is not for the amateur. He said his first question of customers is if they want to see the sky through the skylight or simply want more light. Next come installation considerations while considering placement.

“You don’t want to end up with water leaks,” he says. “We look at the slope of the roof, whether it is installed in a cathedral ceiling or with a shaft that goes through the attic that needs to

be dry-walled and lined up with trusses and rafters, then trimmed out with flashing to prevent leaks.”

MAKING SKYLIGHTS ENERGY EFFICIENT

With the bonus of added light and views, however, skylights can come with winter heat loss or unwanted heat gain in summer. To combat this, today’s skylights have added features. Various glazing techniques and tints, low-emissivity (low-e) coatings, or even translucent insulation materials can reduce this effect.

“Shades and window blinds can also help,” Green says. “Not just with energy efficiency, but we’ve seen cases where a skylight has bleached out an area on the floor or furniture below where the light hits. The sun can be very intense.”

He recommends honeycomb shades, also called cellular shades, available in many colors. These types of shades are constructed with small pockets, like cells, to capture air and aid in both cooling and warming. Honeycomb shades not only work as an insulator, but also give a room-darkening effect in those hours when light is not wanted, such as in a bedroom.

“There are many different kinds of window treatments available,” Green says. “We can install shades that are remotely operated or set to automatically open and close at certain times of day to control light and temperature. We’ve even added shutters to match the home décor.”

Placement of the skylight can have an effect on energy efficiency, too. Rooflines facing east offer most light and heat gain in morning hours. Northern slopes offer constant illumination with little effect on heat. Western rooflines give an afternoon glow and afternoon heat. On the south side, skylights offer the most warming effect in winter that may not be so desirable in summer.



Slope of the roof where a skylight is installed can affect not only moisture collection, but how much heat the window may allow inside. A low slope, for instance, can allow more heat to come through than a steeper slope.

TECHNOLOGY AT PLAY

To increase the energy efficiency of skylights, technology can be a big—and convenient—addition.

Blinds and shades can be manipulated by hand, using a post or crank, but they can even more easily be controlled from afar.

“They can be battery-operated or by a remote device, or even by an app you download on your smart phone so that you can operate them even when you aren’t home,” Everts says. “Skylights can have rain or moisture sensors installed that can close the window if it starts to rain.”

“It’s also possible to have the blinds on automatic settings,” Green adds. “You can set them to open in the morning but close at a time when the sun gets too hot. Or you can ask Alexa to do it for you.”

GET SHOPPING

Your favorite Kalamazoo/Portage designer or builder will probably tell you: Velux is the brand of choice.

“Only skylight we sell,” Everts says at Hannapel Home Center.

“Velux, yes, and Hunter Douglas products for window treatments,” Green says at Flair Interiors.

“Velux, it’s the top brand,” Mulder of Mulder Construction says.

Skylights and window treatments may be eligible for a 30 percent energy federal tax credit if purchased and installed through 2019; a 26 percent federal tax credit through 2020; a 22 percent federal tax credit through 2021.

That, and a view of the stars in your bedroom—it can make for a better night’s sleep.



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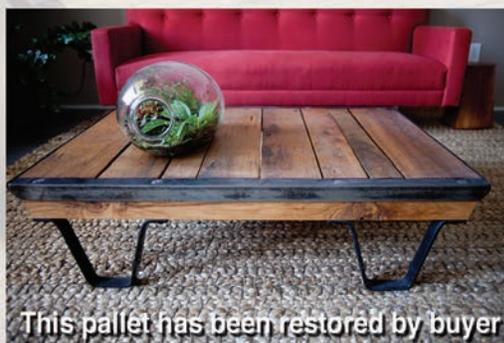
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RAIN GARDENS REDUCE YOUR STORMWATER

By Barbara Fisher

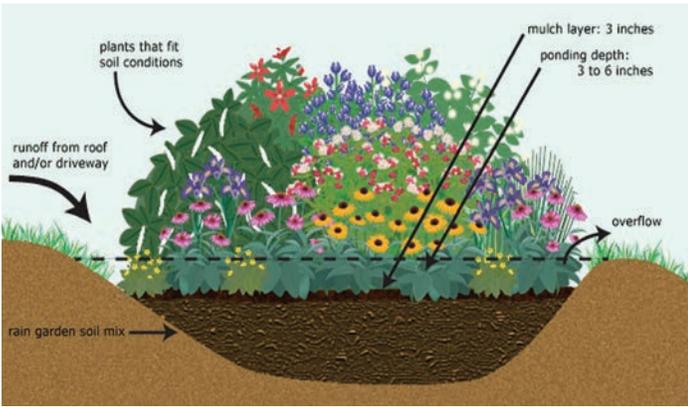
We can go three weeks without food but realistically only three to four days without water. We tend to take the availability of clean, fresh water for granted: we turn on the tap and water is there for drinking, cooking, bathing, laundry—you get the idea. Especially in the last few years there has been more focus on our water supply as toxic substances have made their way into our water systems. Contamination from lead to PFAS has made the headlines. What isn't as well known is that according to the Environmental Protection Agency, non-point source pollution is the nation's largest water quality problem. Just what is non-point source pollution? As rainfall and snowmelt flows over our yards, off our roofs, out of our gutter downspouts and down our driveways it picks up contaminants referred to as runoff and puts it somewhere else. These contaminants end up in our streams, wetlands, low lying areas and lakes via storm sewers or in the absence of sewers, the runoff parks itself in a handy low lying area. Increasingly, runoff pollutes the water and ruins natural aquatic habitat. Yikes! So remnants of products we put on our lawns to keep it green and weed free, doggie doo in the yard, oil residue from the driveway and cigarette butts all get picked up when it rains or the snow melts, gets added to our neighbors' contributions and is deposited someplace else? Scary and true. Patty Hoch-Melluish, Coordinator of the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council notes that even seemingly innocuous yard waste (e.g. leaves or grass clippings) wash into drains later creating elements contained in fertilizer like phosphorus and nitrogen. Pat Crowley, Drain Commissioner for Kalamazoo County and Hoch-Melluish tell us that especially in urban areas, we cover land with impenetrable surfaces (think driveways, curbs, sidewalks, roads). Rainfall can't penetrate these surfaces so it makes its way to storm sewers picking up toxins along the way.

Hoch-Melluish reminds us that while water discharged to the sanitary sewer system (generally the water generated from inside your house) is treated before being discharged elsewhere, the water going into storm sewers is discharged raw. Because there are so many of us concentrated in urban areas, our collective impact adds up.

There are solutions that we as individual homeowners or renters can employ to make a difference. One of these solutions is constructing rain gardens. A landscape feature, rain gardens are both functional and beautiful. Simply put, a rain garden is a small naturally formed or manmade depression planted with native plants designed to collect storm runoff from impervious areas like gutter downspouts, driveways, lawns or roofs. The rain garden copies nature by allowing rain water to soak into the ground where it belongs rather than being transported elsewhere. Rain gardens naturally filter contaminants from runoff and recharge our groundwater supplies. As a bonus, rain gardens provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators. While rain gardens are more commonly used in urban areas, they may also be used to address drainage issues in both urban and rural areas.

So how do you get started? If you've ever planted a tree, you know some digging is involved. You know that you need to do some calculations to make sure the 5 foot seedling won't encroach on the house when it reaches its adult height of 75 feet. Typically some amending of the soil is needed before the tree can be planted; watering is involved until the tree is established. There is some similarity between planting a tree and constructing a rain garden. Come on, you know you want to try!

Claire Johnson, Chairperson of the Landscape Committee of The Woodlands of Austin Lake, explains while building a rain garden will take some effort, it's not hard to build one and



for two years until they are well-established and you'll want to cut the garden back each fall. The website provides two rain garden designs (7'x10' and 7'x20') capable of handling 350 and 700 square feet, respectively. Both designs show the direction the water should enter the garden and are plotted out with names of plants and quantities. Costs run between \$250 - \$550 depending on the size and composition of the garden. Rain gardens absorb the water directed to them within hours.

Jackie and Bill Patterson, Builder/Developers at The Woodlands at Austin Lake wanted to construct a community that respected the natural topography and features of the 35 acres that comprise The Woodlands. A place they could be proud of, that made a difference. This vision complemented Bill's certification as a "green" professional builder. In the beginning they utilized the expertise of an environmental specialist to help design a natural drainage system (one that did not include clearing the land, installing curbs, gutters or retention ponds). Jackie Patterson explained there were a lot of calculations that went into the design process taking into account water volume, locations and topography to ensure the design would result in effective drainage. The City of Portage approved their plans and the resulting rain gardens around each condo are functional, natural and beautiful.

Rain gardens can address runoff or drainage issues on an individual or community level. Where might a functional and beautiful rain garden work where you live?



that putting one together can be done over the course of weeks or months. The Office of the Drain Commissioner (Kalamazoo County) has a handy informational sheet on its website that provides the basics. You won't want to put the garden any closer than 10 feet to your foundation or basement. The size of the garden is determined by a percentage of the area (roof, lawn, driveway, etc.) producing the runoff. Typically this is 15-20% for well-drained sandy soils and 35-40% for soil that is more clay-like. You'll want a natural or manmade shallow depression 3-6" deep (the floor of the depression level) for well-drained soils and 5-7" deep for clay-type soils. Preparing and amending the soil to ensure proper drainage is a must. Johnson provided a tip that she tills the surface of the garden as a first step in constructing. Once the prep work is complete, add native plants that make sense for the amount of light your garden will receive. Sources for native plants may also be found on the same website. Use edging and mulch to control weeds and your lawn from trying to take over the garden. Plants may need watering



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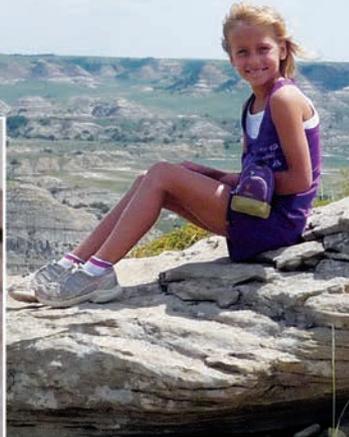


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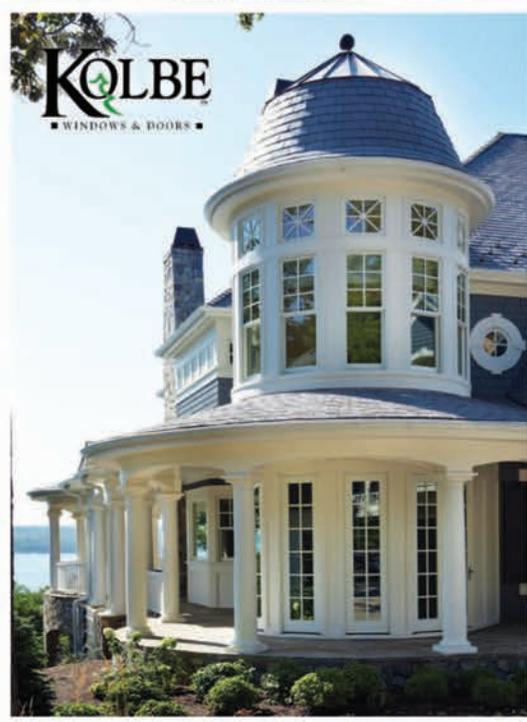
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