



Keep It **C**urrent

Our Favorite Backyard Trends Guarantee Your Garden Will Stand Out from Its Surroundings



The suddenly hip culture surrounding backyard gardening means eco-friendly innovations and trendy style statements are popping up left and right. Raised beds housing organic vegetables and container gardens adorning balconies and patios are now among the standard fare for people with a passion for plant life.

Those who wish to take the next step in the gardening adventure—with motives ranging from cutting costs and conserving energy to cultivating wildlife and creating beauty—are in luck, for, as always, the next innovation is just around the corner. Read on for our favorite sources of outdoor inspiration, sure to make your backyard plot of land stand out from the rest of your neighborhood's predictable raised beds and carefully clipped hedges.

Farm Fresh

For an old-fashioned yet uber-trendy way to welcome farm-fresh eggs to your larder each day, do what countless other North Americans are doing and raise your own roost. The U.K.-based company Omlet has made modeling the farm life as easy as pie. You place your order online at www.omlet.com for an Eglu (housing up to four chickens) or Eglu Cube (housing up to ten chickens), and the company will deliver the Eglu, chickens, and feed to your door.

If DIY is more your style, check out the hundreds of coop plans available from www.BackyardChickens.com. Designs ranging from standard small, medium, and large coops to tractor coops mean even the pickiest of roost designers should find a desirable option. The site offers a learning center with forums, a glossary of terms, and information about recognizing diseases, preventing predators, and more for those learning as they go.

Those hoping to craft a coop on their own with just a hammer, some nails, and a couple of sheets of plywood should note that a chicken coop is more than just a wooden box with a door. There are many elements to consider, including whether your city has ordinances against raising farm life on residential property. Raising chickens is not a hobby to haphazardly stumble upon, but for those who take up the task with the right expectations and knowledge of what is involved, the benefits can be a delicious example of what's old becoming new again.

Look Up

Urban dwellers tired of planting in containers have a new way to cultivate their green thumbs. Vertical gardens—gardens that grow within a framework set in a wall—are a wonderful way to enjoy the benefits of a bountiful garden without sacrificing floor space.

The French botanist Patrick Blanc is recognized by many as the creator of the vertical garden, which he conceived after realizing that plants don't necessarily need soil to survive. Instead, they need consistent rainfall or watering, meaning they can thrive on vertical, soil-less surfaces if provided the right environment.

Now, a host of retailers are making it easier for gardeners to have their own living walls. ELT Living Walls offers aspiring vertical gardeners the living wall panels, cedar stand, and simple irrigation system for starting their plant-adorned wall space. The company's site even offers a handy list of plants that thrive in vertical environments, both indoors and out.

Another route to consider is the Woolly Pocket, a soft-sided container that easily attaches to vertical surfaces and provides a simpler, less-permanent option. The pockets, which are handmade from recycled plastic bottles, have a waterproof lining with breathable sides that release excess moisture and aerate the soil.

Shades of Green

Tending a garden is nothing new, nor is being concerned about the environment. But combine both pursuits and add in consumers' concerns about the economy, and you have the makings for some creative conservation tactics.

For instance, many homeowners are trimming household costs by way of the garden by making use of the land they already have and putting it to work to supply needed resources. To reduce your water bill, consider a rain barrel, which is exactly what it sounds like: a barrel-like cistern that collects rain for other uses. The setup doesn't need to be elaborate, especially if you are using the water solely for gardening. You can purchase an entire barrel system from companies such as GREENCulture that will have you quickly on your way to storing up water for an un-rainy day.

Make better use of waste by turning food scraps and yard debris into nutrient-rich food for your plants. Composting is a natural step to take, but there are other practices that require less of a time investment up front. For instance, Steve Jacobs, president of San Diego-based Nature Designs Landscaping, recommends that when mowing, skip the bag and leave the lawn clippings behind. The nutrients and water in the clippings will benefit your lawn, meaning less water and fertilizer to maintain the same look.

Even better, replace your lawn with ornamental grasses. Jacobs points out that lawns are one of the most intensive maintenance and water-consuming plantings in a typical yard, requiring frequent watering, mowing, and edging. Instead, dig up that ever-thirsty expanse of grass and reconfigure the layout to introduce meadow grasses; check with your local extension service to be sure you select the best grasses for your area. Most are drought-resistant and require little maintenance, saving you both water and time, while also doing your part to protect the environment. Then you can rest easy, knowing that no matter your motive for updating your garden, you've made it uniquely yours. *Written by Amber Lindros. [YHL](#)*

For More Information

Backyard Chickens: www.backyardchickens.com

ELT Living Walls: www.eltlivingwalls.com

GREENCulture: www.composters.com

Nature Designs Landscaping: www.naturedesigns.net

Omlet: www.omlet.com

Patrick Blanc: www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com

Woolly Pocket: www.woollypocket.com