

Healthy Home and Garden Tips

Cover crops for healthy soil



The sound of geese flying overhead offers a gentle reminder of the changing seasons and the need to prepare my garden for winter. Wanting to extend my harvest, I actually planted a variety of cool-weathered vegetables a few months back. Crops like broccoli, spinach and brussels sprouts are ideal because they can tolerate a mild frost uncovered. In the event of a rare cold snap, I can easily protect single plants by covering them with old milk jugs with their bottoms cut off.

While part of my garden is sprouting new life, the other half lies fallow following the summer harvest. I want to get the exposed soil covered as quickly as possible so it doesn't get damaged by the wind and rain. One inexpensive way to protect the soil is through the use of cover crops. Cover crops are typically grasses and legumes grown in the off-season and tilled under in the spring to prevent soil erosion, build soil structure and improve fertility.

Suggested cover crops to improve garden soil				
Type	Amount to Sow	When to Sow	When to Turn Under	Effects
Annual ryegrass	1 pound per 500 square feet	September to November	Spring	Adds organic matter
Austrian field peas	1 pound per 200 square feet	Through December	Spring (may need to mow before turning under)	Adds organic matter
Crimson clover	1 pound per 400 square feet	September to October	Spring	Pulls nitrogen from air into the soil
Buckwheat	1 pound per 400 square feet	May to October	When it begins to flower	Rich in potassium
Fava beans	1 pound per 350 square feet	October to November	Early summer	Deep roots loosen hard soils; pulls nitrogen from air into the soil

Natural home scents

I love the smell of winter in the Pacific Northwest. The fragrance of fir trees after a gentle rain; the smell of spices simmering on the stove; and the scent of freshly baked cookies from the oven are just a few of my favorites. While air fresheners and scented candles seem like harmless ways to mimic these natural smells, there are unhealthy air pollutants in these products that can lead to health risks for adults and children. Fortunately, there are plenty of easy-to-make alternatives to make your home smell nice that are safer for the whole family.



Homemade Potpourri

Ingredients:

- 5 cups water
- 2 navel oranges, peeled
- 1 apple, sliced in half
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 star anise
- 1 teaspoon-sized knob of fresh ginger
- 1 teaspoon cardamom pods
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon dried orange peel

Directions:

Combine all ingredients together in a saucepan and heat over low heat until simmering. I have kept this going for a few hours, adding additional water when needed. You can also throw everything in the crockpot and set it on low or high with the top off.

Tips for Safe Cleaning

- Replace bleach with products that have hydrogen peroxide as the active ingredient -- these disinfectants are safer for your family and pets.
- Open windows while cleaning to help air out pollutants that can get trapped inside your home.
- Use microfiber cloths -- the tiny fibers on these cloths are super effective at trapping dust and keeping your spaces clean.

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