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**Lincoln Daily
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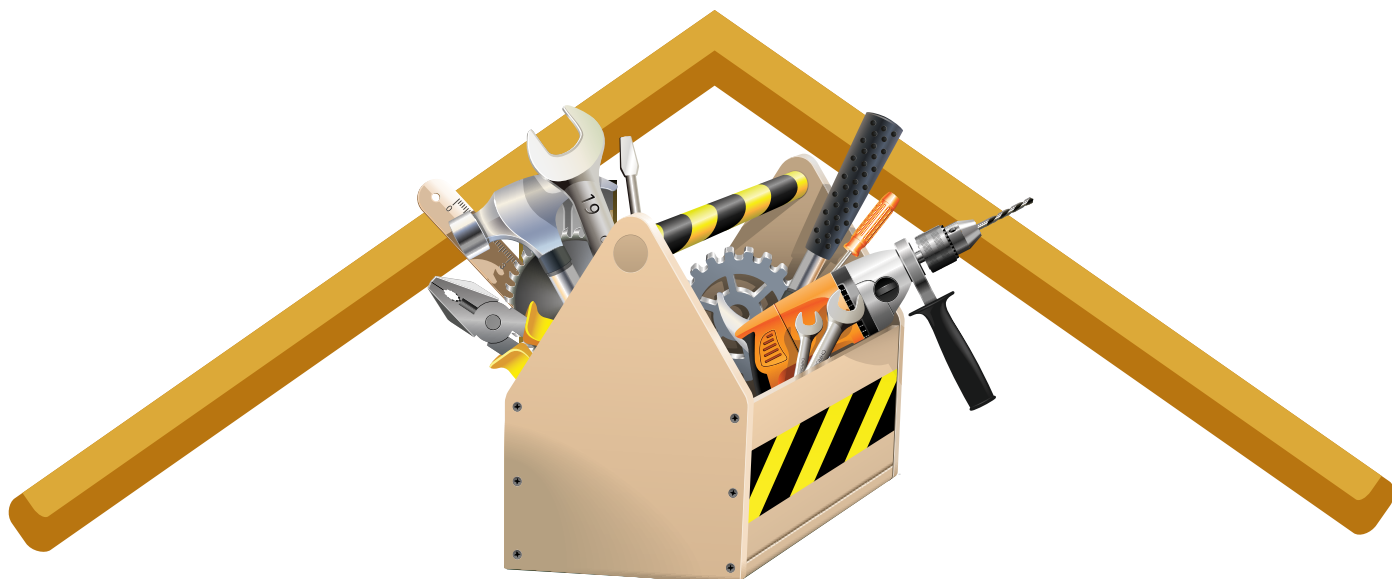
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The three golden rules of tool acquisition & ownership

In the 90's a popular sitcom on ABC called "Home Improvement" starred Tim Allen as Tim 'the toolman' Taylor. It was a humorous show with a plot that surrounded the subject of the importance of tools, and although tools were central to the plot, there was never any real information given about tools. Although it was fun to watch, you didn't learn anything useful about tools except that Tim the toolman Taylor shouldn't be allowed anywhere near tools.

If you're handy around the house, it is never wrong to have the right tools! Having the correct tools can mean the difference between having to find and pay someone else to do the work, and do it in their own time and in their own way, vs. doing the job right the first time yourself.

Having the right tools can enhance your skill set. Together, with the vast and varied amount of information readily available at your fingertips today via the internet, there are few jobs you can't tackle yourself if you have the right tools.

Having the right tool for the job is accomplished by obeying these three rules. Get these right and you will be set no matter what the challenge.

1. Buy the best quality tool for the job that you can afford at the time

Tools can be exceedingly cheap or they can be exceedingly expensive. The cheapest tools may not even be fit for, or survive, the initial job for which they are purchased. They are generally throw-away tools that you dispose of after the task has been accomplished, if they last that long. Most places that sell tools, whether they are hand tools or power tools will have several different lines of tools available next to each other on display.

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Principle 1: Poor grade tools are generally the lowest priced tools in the display. They are made of the least durable materials and although they may resemble good tools in some ways, they are poor knock-offs. Don't buy the lowest priced tools because they will usually lack quality and durability.

Principle 2: Some reputable companies may have different grades of tools in their own brand name. It is common for a brand-name company to attempt to encourage you to buy their line of tools by having several tiers of tool quality available to you. They will present you with their lowest (poorest) quality tools at low prices, and present you with a mid-quality line of tools for a moderate price, and may even present you with a contractor grade tool choice for yet a higher price. Don't be confused by brand names. Even though a reputable company presents low priced tools it does not necessarily mean they are good quality tools.

Principle 3: Tool retailers that do not have a wide diversity of tools to select from may not be the best place to purchase tools. You want to be able to compare tools and select the quality tool you desire from the widest selection available, meaning that the Wal-Mart or grocery store selection of tools may not be right for you except in an extreme emergency.

The principle to be followed is that, like wealth, you accumulate tools over a lifetime and over a lifetime you become tool-wealthy. Buy the best tools you can afford every time you shop for a tool, so that when your tool collection begins to grow it is populated with tools that lasted through the first job and are ready to go for all the upcoming jobs in your future.

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Good quality tools used right should last a lifetime.

2. Tools that you cannot find are like not having tools at all!

You have tools in the trunk of your car, tools in your garage, tools in the junk drawer in the kitchen, tools in your workshop and some tools who-knows-where. You remember buying them, but have no idea where they are when you need them most.

Having good tools requires organizing and storing your tools so that you can locate them quickly when that next job comes up.

Principle 1: Tools that you cannot find are no good to you. You know that you bought them and you can even remember when you last used them, but you can't put your hand on them. Those are worthless tools. And they became useless because you did not take the time to organize and store them so you can find them the next time.

Principle 2: You should spend as much time cleaning, maintaining and putting your tools away as you did using them. Your tools should be in their unique storage spaces (even if the storage system is known only to you) in a condition to pickup and use again immediately. It will hinder the job if you have to hunt for the tool and if you have to clean it up before you use it again.

Principle 3: Although it is more difficult to maintain, having tools in different places like your trunk and garage and workshop is doable if their placement in those locations makes sense in context rather than merely ending up where you used them last.

The most important thing here is that good organization can save you time, money and frustration if you develop a system for the storage of your good tools and follow it every time you use a tool. Put away properly, your tool can be there like a good friend for you next time you need it. Put away haphazardly, you may ultimately end up buying duplicate tools, wasting time and money.

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3. Lending tools to your friends and neighbors will result in broken and unreturned tools!

Our next door neighbors growing up were among our best friends we had in this life. We shared everything with them, including our tools. When we wanted to use our hammer we knew right where it was: at our next door neighbor's house. We could visit it there any time.

Not meaning to sound like a tool-Scrooge here, I recommend that the next time anyone asks if they can borrow your framing nail gun, you just say NO. If they ask to borrow your pipe wrenches, you just say NO. If they ask to borrow your drill press, your table saw, your staple gun, your battery-driven circular saw, hammer drill, or any other tool in your collection, you just say NO. You are not being mean. You bought those tools for your own use to save hundreds, if not thousands of dollars over a lifetime in home repairs, and if your neighbor has your tools, you don't.

Principle 1: Your neighbors will likely follow the principle of delaying the return of your tools so they can forget whose tools they are. I'm not calling them thieves; this is just the way it normally goes. The longer they reside at your neighbor's house the more likely they are to change ownership and become your neighbor's tools.

Principle 2: Your friend or neighbor didn't buy the tool in the first place, didn't read the owner's manual, and likely doesn't know that you shouldn't twist the handle on the recip saw as they are sawing through the branch on their cypress tree and therefore didn't realize that such a maneuver would snap off the blade and the shaft of the saw, thereby rendering it worthless. Borrowed tools are much more likely broken by the persons borrowing them than by the persons owning them.

Principle 3: Even in the most perfect situation with the best intentioned friends or neighbors, if your tool is in their possession it is not in your possession. And given the odds, if they have your tool you will likely need it.

Principle 4: It doesn't matter how well you label your tools or inscribe your name, address, telephone number and SSN# on your tools, the moment they leave your possession their identification is moot. Possession is 9/10's. "Hey, that tool has Joe's name on it. Is it Joe's tool?" "Naw, he gave it to me years ago." The label does not ever guarantee return.

Do not loan out your tools! They are like your treasure. You don't just loan out the family jewels. You keep them organized and locked up and you know where they are for the next time you need to use them. So it is with your expensive tools.

So, buy the best tools you can afford every time you buy a new tool. It usually pays to read consumer reports or reviews before you buy them. Take your time. The most important thing is that you get a tool that will do the job and last to do the jobs over the next 30 years. Buy tools that you can leave to your children or your grandchildren.

Second, organize your tools so that you can put your hand on it the next time you need it without cleaning the garage or your entire workshop. And finally, never, never, never loan out your expensive tools. Maybe go to the dollar store and buy some of those faux tools to loan to your friends and neighbors as a courtesy, but don't let them even see your nail gun collection.

[Jim Youngquist]

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BE AWARE when hiring contractors

If you are an owner having construction done on your property, you need to know about Liens, Lien Waivers, and Contractor's Affidavits.

Illinois Law provides that an owner is responsible to ensure that any work performed on his property is fully paid for, and if it is not, the unpaid party may file a "mechanic's lien" against the property. A mechanic's lien entitles the unpaid party to force the sale of the property, with the proceeds being applied to the unpaid bill.

Owners should note that this is true of sub-contractors as well as general contractors!

Subcontractors are those individuals or companies your general contractor has hired to provide material or labor to help him complete your job. For example, if you hire a contractor to build a garage on your property and the contractor does not pay the lumber yard or the concrete company for all of the building materials used on your garage, the lumber yard or concrete company may file a mechanic's lien against your property.

This is true even if you have paid your general contractor the full amount of the price you agreed on!

You are still responsible to see that your contractor pays all sub-contractors. In other words, if you pay your general contractor in full, and he does not pay his sub-contracted material suppliers, you may be required to pay for the building materials--twice!

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You can easily avoid any worries about this situation and protect yourself from unpaid sub-contractors

The law provides that you can require your contractor to furnish you with a sworn statement known as a “Contractor’s Affidavit.” A Contractors Affidavit is a short document which lists the names and addresses of all parties who supplied labor or materials on your job, and the amounts due to each.

Once you have this information you should then require a “waiver of lien” from your contractor and each sub-contractor in exchange for making payment. By signing a “waiver of lien” your contractor, sub-contractor(s), and material suppliers acknowledge under penalty of fraud that they have been paid—either by you or your contractor.

Always require Contractor’s Affidavits and Lien Waivers

Always require Contractor’s Affidavits and Lien Waivers from all general contractors, and material and labor providers who do work on your property. You can usually obtain these waivers at no charge from your contractor and or sub-contractor(s), as well as your bank and your attorney. Most banks require them before they will release loan proceeds to fund a project, and virtually all commercial projects in which we are involved require them.

If you have any questions we encourage you to contact your attorney before beginning a project and get the facts. Good advice when you begin your project combined with a little paperwork as the job proceeds can save a lot of grief after it is finished.



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Solid tips on concrete repair

Most homes have some concrete - foundations, driveways, walks. Timely care can be an economic, as well as aesthetic value.

Knowing some basics of what corrupts concrete, when and how it can be repaired, can help you maintain value in your home and even improve safety.

Bill Palmer, a columnist for the concrete network website describes the basics of concrete repair. Palmer says, "First figure out what caused the damage, do the necessary preparation of removing any unsound concrete and contamination, then install a repair designed to solve the problem."

Palmer also explains, "The worst thing you can do is make a repair that doesn't last. Someone once told me that over 50% of concrete repairs fail again within two years. That is not a track record that inspires confidence."

Reasons concrete repair is needed vary

In an article on the basics of concrete repair, Paul Russell, a Product Manager of Concrete Repair and Composites, says repairs are often needed due to corrosion of reinforcement, insufficient reinforcement, chemical damage, excessive loads, structural damage, fire damage, seismic damage, or blast damage.

Home concrete

At homes - sidewalks, driveways, basements, garages, and foundations are areas where repair is usually needed.

Sidewalk repair is often needed due to sinking or uplift from tree roots. Sources also show concrete cracks are often caused by expansion, poor drainage conditions, or settling soil beneath the concrete. Salt used for deicing can make cracks worse.

Driveway repair is often needed due to settling and cracks. Owen Reiners, a concrete contractor from Emden, said that on driveways salt often seeps in and deteriorates the concrete, causing cracks.

In basements and garages, Palmer says cracks in concrete due to "drying shrinkage" or "thermal movement" may seem minor, but "more often than not, a foundation crack will widen over time and result in water seepage or possibly the loss of structural integrity." These cracks may also lower the value of the home.

Foundation repairs are often needed due to settling. Palmer says, "It is likely that you will spend around \$10,000 dollars to repair the foundation," but it protects "your biggest investment, your home."

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Types of repair

At times, people just need to have a small crack in the concrete repaired. Palmer says, "When faced with a surface repair, investigation will soon reveal how aggressive the repair needs to be." There are three basic types of repair depending on what is needed.

Full-depth repair is the most aggressive. Palmer explains that it involves cutting out the damaged concrete, replacing reinforcing steel, and replacing the concrete.

Partial depth repair is less aggressive. Palmer explains partial depth repair involves "cutting around the edges of the damaged area (but not into the reinforcing steel), removing the damaged concrete, cleaning or replacing the reinforcing steel, then placing a repair mortar."

The least aggressive method Palmer describes is using overlay, which is a new layer of thin concrete. Palmer explains overlays are "effective to cover up surface problems" as "long as good surface preparation is used."

Palmer says if your driveway is experiencing cracking, it is best to "resurface it with a concrete overlay." As Palmer explains, "Resurfacing will not only cover up the existing flaws, it will also upgrade the look of your driveway by allowing you to choose from a variety of color and pattern options." Palmer says before resurfacing, "it's important to remove any unsound concrete and repair noticeable cracks so the overlay has a solid base."



Another repair method is done by using forms, which hold the concrete in place. The technique is often used on walls. Reiners says he often uses forms and footings to do concrete repairs. The footings are what help support the foundation.

Forms are sometimes used in repairing sidewalks, too. Zack Davis, who does construction, says when repairing a sidewalk, you first need to use a tool like a jackhammer to break up what needs to be repaired. Davis says you then set up a wooden form which the concrete will be poured into. When finished, you use a trowel to smooth out the concrete.

The American Concrete Institute says, "The form-and-pour technique offers many advantages: Many different types of repair materials can be used; repair material can be placed around reinforcing steel; and formwork protects against early-age drying that promotes cracking."

Sunken concrete repairs

When concrete is sunken or uneven, slab jacking is another repair method. Jack a Slab Services on Keokuk in Lincoln uses this method, and their website says, "Concrete Slabjacking is an alternative to replacing sunken or uneven concrete, restoring sunken concrete slabs to their original grade."

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According to the Jack a Slab Service website, slab jacking “is the process of raising or stabilizing faulty concrete pavement, and is performed on cracked and sunken concrete slabs such as driveways, steps and sidewalks, concrete pavement floors and other slab on grade surfaces.”

The people at Jack a Slab Services “specialize in repairing driveways, sidewalks, steps, porches, patios, garage floors, warehouse floors, pillars, foundations, machine pads, retaining walls, and more.

Angela Heady of Jack a Slab Services says most of

their repairs are done on driveways, sidewalks, and porches. She says they also raise foundations that have settled.

Heady says in slab jacking, you drill holes in concrete, pressure pump the grout, and fill the void; then it starts to lift up the slab.

Because it does not have to be torn out to be replaced, slab jacking is often quicker and less expensive than some methods. The costs per square foot can vary depending on how much of a void has to be filled.

Maintaining concrete for more years

When a repair is complete, contractors say sealing is important, because it protects concrete from moisture, grease, and oil stains. It also reduces cracking and makes concrete last longer.

Whatever repair method you choose, concrete repair can help enhance curb appeal and add to your home’s value.

[Angela Reiners]

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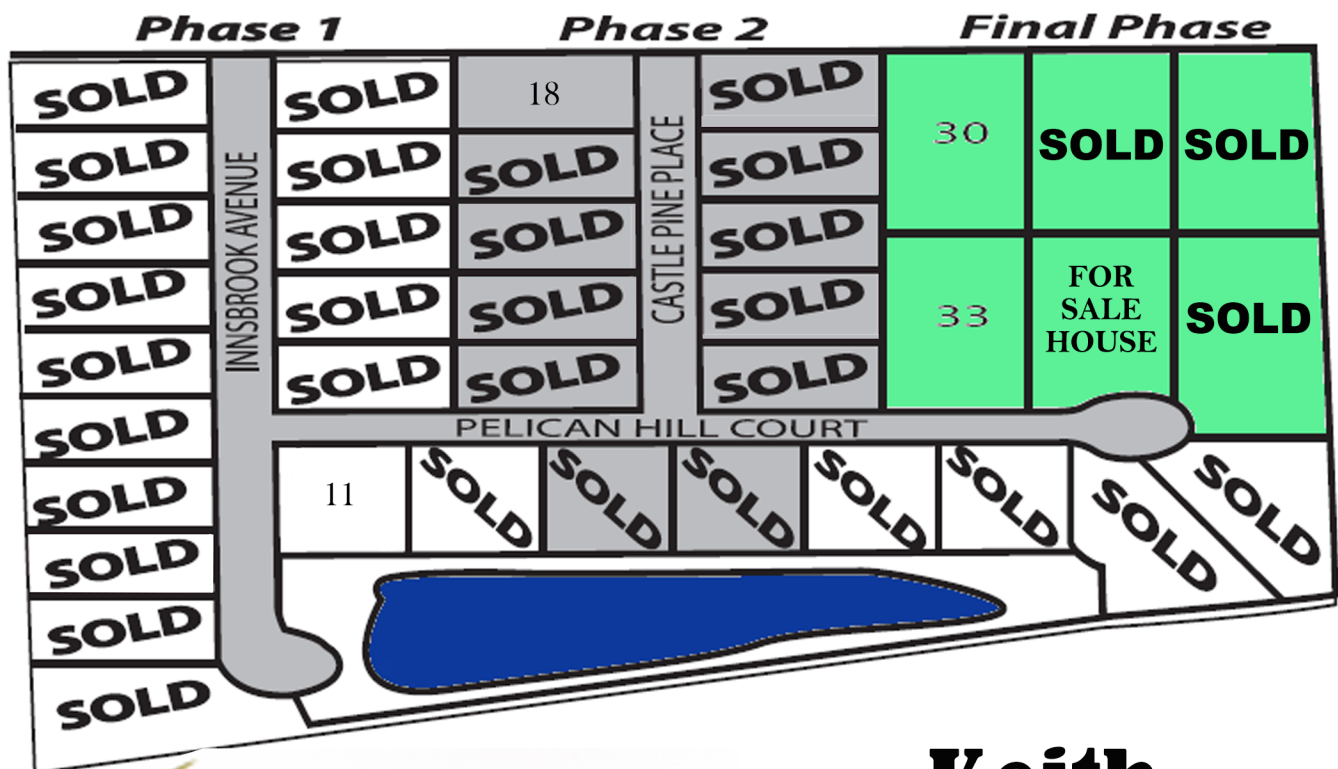
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Sizing up the right mower for your yard

Choosing a new lawn mower can be tricky, but it can be boiled down to a certain set of criteria.

You may already have a preference for which type of mower to buy - rider, power or push, but there are budgetary concerns as well.

However, before taking those things into account, there are three attributes of a given lawn to consider - size, terrain level, and obstacles.

For a smaller lawn with softer grass, or one with relatively flat terrain, consider a reel (push) mower. There's no engine, so maintenance is simpler and there's less of an effect on the environment. Push mowers require much more physical effort to effectively cut the grass, so it can make for good exercise.

Reel mowers typically cover an area of fourteen to twenty inches. However, if your yard has a lot of trees and other things to cut around, a reel mower may not be the best idea, as the ability to maneuver can be difficult.

Reel mowers are typically priced somewhere between \$70 and \$100 dollars.

The typical walk-behind (power) mower remains the best choice for most in-town lawns. With proper maintenance, they can last for years. With improved technology has come more electric mowers, and options for self-propelling models. Walk-behind mowers cover cutting radius of twenty to twenty-two inches on average.

Many mowers of this type come with attachments, such as mulch bags for collecting trimmings.

The downside is that lawns with a high slope will be a problem, and may require a separate trimmer for those areas.

These mowers offer the widest price range, usually between \$150 to upwards of \$500 or more, depending on whether or not it is gas or electric, or comes with accessories.

CONTINUED ►



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Finally, zero-turn mowers, once belonging primarily to lawn-care specialists, have become more common in the general public. Zero-turn mowers can be difficult to learn how to drive, as they are steered with handles and not a traditional steering wheel. As the name implies, they are much easier to maneuver around obstacles than other machines.

The downside is likely to be the sheer cost to consumer, as well as the necessity for flat terrain. Being so new to the market, zero-turn mowers at minimum will cost \$2,500. Cheaper zero-turn models can cut between thirty and sixty inches of grass, and professional models can cover as much as seventy-two.

Proper mower maintenance is an important chore for anyone with a lawn when the spring arrives. In order to ensure a relatively easy season for mowing, anyone with a lawn mower will need to size it up and make sure it is in proper working order, and that may mean it's time for a new machine altogether.

[Derek Hurley]

Riding lawn mowers are probably the better choice if a yard takes more than an hour for mowing. Most models are very simple, coming with most of the same features as walk-behind mowers and minimal comfort. These machines can cover the widest range of cutting distances, with the largest covering up to four feet.

Lawn tractors, a step up from that, can come with more options, such as tillers, chipping tools, or even snow throwers, providing use for the winter months.

Tractors or riding mowers are the best bet for yards with a high difference in terrain, such as steep slopes, but may be a problem if your yard has a lot of clutter.

Riding mowers and tractors cross into four-digit costs, as prices hover around \$1,000 to \$1,300 or more.



The gamut of home security products

Having a home of your own can be a great thing. But whether you are living in your dream home, transitioning into your starter home with bigger things to come, or renting a place, there will always be concerns about keeping yourself and your belongings safe and secure.

For many this predicament will lead to investing in some type of home security system. In today's market, there are dozens of options from the highly technical and sophisticated to the simple yet effective. What you choose may very well be based more on peace of mind than on what you need. But that is a decision you'll have to make.

So, before beginning the shopping process, it would be good to take a step back and look at the question on the whole. "What do I need in order to have peace of mind?" Then, couple that with "what can I afford?"

Today, technology, wi-fi and the "Cloud" are up and coming in home security systems, but they are expensive and not without their faults.

For example, ADT has an advanced system that can be connected to light switches, window blinds,



thermostats and more. At about \$400 for the product and a monthly fee of \$50.00, this is a \$1000 investment for the first year. In addition to the system, the home will need some upgrading in technology. Items such as smart switches on lights and thermostats and a wireless control for blinds and door locks will increase the installation cost by \$500 or more depending on how many doors and windows need to be set-up with smart devices.

Wi-fi connected monitoring systems that allow you to view your home from your cell phone are still in their infancy. Though they are heavily marketed as the next best mousetrap, the risks of security hacks are still high.

Another pitfall to these systems is "Cloud space." Systems that work through the Cloud and are not tied to your home computer require additional Cloud space for good functionality. While you can monitor the system from you cell phone the additional Cloud space is going to cost you additional dollars on your monthly device bill.

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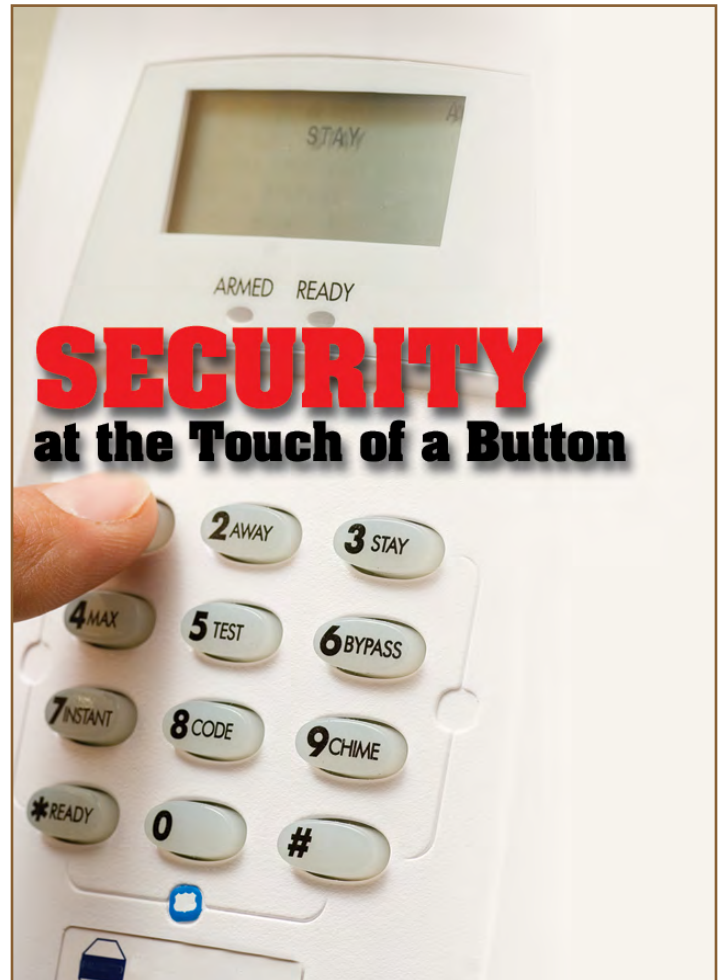
Accessing the secure system has some wrinkles that need to be worked out. Systems today are available with voice recognition, iris scan, and fingerprint identity. There are difficulties that exist with the fingerprint method. At initial set up, the resident needs to record his or her thumbprint for example. But depending on the placement of the thumb at that initial imprint, getting the system to recognize the thumbprint later will be dependent on getting the thumb in the exact same location and angle on the finger pad. Some consumers have reported spending as much as five minutes getting their thumbs in just the right position to disarm the system. Another security company, that according to one local realtor in Lincoln, is more widely used in this area is Vivint Security.

The company offers a standard startup kit, installed by a professional. The startup includes one control panel, one motion detector, one IP camera, one key fob, and three door/window sensors. They also note that additional window and door sensors may be needed and can be obtained separately from the company.

This system features “crash and smash” protection. In this case, if a burglar is able to disarm the system, the smart technology will contact the resident and advise him or her of a potential breach. The homeowner has an opportunity to send a “disarm code” to the security company that will then tell the company there is no need for further action.

While these are the “Cadillac” models of home security, the systems are hackable, and at the same time, gaining legitimate entry into the home can be a hassle, and they are costly. The question to the consumer should be, is video monitoring necessary to satisfy your home security needs. While it might be nice to see what is going on in your home from anywhere, is that supposed peace of mind worth the risk and the cost?

The question should be if a person is breaking into your home, where are your priorities? Watching the break-in or notifying the police?



There are alternatives to these higher priced, monthly fee applied systems, which are simpler do it yourself systems. One such system is the Skylink wireless security system. Though there are others, this one offered good information on its website to help educate the consumer.

The wireless AAA+ Series system comes with a control panel, motion sensor, two window/door sensors, with additional sensors sold separately. The system can be adapted for up to 10 window/door sensors, and up to 5 key fobs. It operates off of rechargeable batteries and also comes with an a/c adapter, mounting brackets, and an instruction manual.

The system is also “portable” with no hard-wiring required, it can be moved from home to home when you move. The system will notify the homeowner of a possible break-in and it also emits an ear-piercing alarm that is designed to frighten intruders away.

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This product and other similar products may be found at several higher-end home improvement stores.

We all have things in our home that we care about that have personal value, and we want to protect. But systems even of this caliber may not be affordable or even necessary, especially if your primary concern is that your home stay safe and secure while you take a week away.

There is always the option to go old school with light timers and motion lights, telling trusted neighbors and the local police that you're out of town, stopping your mail delivery, and making sure your doors and windows are all locked when you leave.

Timers and motion lights are available locally at several locations, and can equal a minor investment compared to a full-blown security system.

There are options for timers such as a "smart timer" that can be programmed to mimic your habits when you are gone. One such timer is the GE 7-day timer. The timer works on a single outlet, so if more than one light is to be lit, you'll need multiple timers at about \$13 each. The timer is programmable for seven day cycles and allows for up to 20 different on/off settings.

It should be noted that of these 20 settings, half are used to turn the timer on and half to turn it off, so you only have ten total cycles of lights on and off, spread across seven days, per outlet. Set-up of

the timer may be a little complicated. But GE has thoughtfully provided a YouTube video that will walk you through the process.

Many have mixed emotions about using outdoor motion lights for home security. There is a camp of thought that says all you are doing is lighting the pathway for the burglar to get into your home. Others though believe that shining light in vulnerable parts of the home exterior can deter thieves.

Both views are understandable. So the bottom line will have to be, what makes you feel more secure.

One of the greater benefits of exterior motion lights is not just security but also safety. For those coming home after dark, a light that turns on automatically on the porch or at the garage door may have separate benefits of its own. Also, having a flood light that goes on and is in view of that trusted neighbor's front window, can assist them in knowing something might be awry. However, it should also be noted that the lights can be set off by wandering dogs, stray cats, and falling leaves.

As always, the bottom line of what you need for a home security system falls to you. It is important to remember that bigger is not always better, but will almost always be more expensive. The best recommendation: Evaluate what you need for your peace of mind, and act accordingly.

[Nila Smith]

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How to buy trees and shrubs

Whether you are looking to extend your personal living space to the outdoors, or you just want to gussy up your property, you have more options in plant material than ever before. Trees and shrubs can enhance the value of your property and provide numerous other benefits, but intentional planning is the only way you will achieve your goals in a cost effective and timely manner.

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Your plan should begin with an assessment of what you already have, a conceptual idea of what you intend in the end, soil and light conditions of the areas you would like to develop, stages of development, hardscape materials that will be needed, estimated costs and a rough budget.

You may be expecting to only live in your home a few years or you may be planning for a lifetime. Plans will differ vastly, and may affect what plants you purchase.



Choosing shrubs and trees

If you are needing to achieve a more mature finished look for your property, you will probably want to consult with a professional landscaper who can also plant larger materials for you.

No matter whether you go to shop - the nursery, a garden center, order from a catalogue or online, or purchase from a secondary source like a general merchandise or grocery store, there are specific growing condition details provided for every variety of tree or shrub.

The first condition to pay close attention to is what temperature zone is the plant is suited. Average low temperatures in Logan County range from -10 to -15 degrees Fahrenheit with a *zone designation 5b*.

If you buy local, you will likely be getting a plant suited to the local climate, but pay attention to the label anyway.

Few plants are at their best in all conditions.

You will also want to pay attention to these key characteristics which vary from plant to plant:


- Light preferences: *shade, partial shade, full sun.*
- Soil conditions: some plants will not tolerate sitting for days with wet roots after heavy rains such as in low lying areas that don't drain or heavy clay; others prefer consistent moisture and need humus rich soil.
- Spacing between plants: like people, some plants are great melding close together, others need air space.
- Size at maturity: most likely if you are installing your own trees and shrubs, they will grow considerably larger in the coming years, count on it.

Other observations before you purchase

Some common sense tips while out shopping include observing the over-all quality of the stock. Plants should not look stressed from heat, lack of watering, or over watered. While herbaceous annual and perennial plants often bounce back from such stresses, woody trees and shrubs often suffer irreparable damage.

You should look for straight trunks on trees, good clean pruning techniques, no stubs or knot holes that could attract disease or insects. Shrubs should have hardy growth, not spindly or weak sprouts.

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It is advisable to choose shrubs and trees, which can be higher cost materials, from a reliable source that is knowledgeable about plants and has dedicated workers caring properly for its stock.

Whether you purchase quality ball and burlap wrapped plants, container grown, or bare-root stock that is delivered to your door, your best bet at success actually begins much sooner than the purchase.

Where to begin

While the above factors in selection of right plant for chosen location should be considered with each purchase, there are some more important steps you should take before you even begin looking at plants. Again, trees and shrubs are a higher cost item, so you want to do this thoughtfully.

It is important that before you even begin that you do an assessment of your needs and goals. Pre-determining the use of your outdoor space will save you time and money and lead to more satisfaction in your development.

First take an observational walk. Purposes and use may vary between your front, sides and back yard. Take note of what is already growing, dream a little, and make a written plan for each area. It doesn't have to be an elaborate plan, but intentions will help steer you in later decision making.

You probably would never consider completely decorating every room inside your home all at once. Likewise, you will want to determine if you are going to do a little here and a bit there in broad strokes in a multi-year graduated development.

If your funds and time are limited like most people, a more satisfying approach might be to focus on one area at a time. It is kind of fun to just go out and see what plants strike your fancy. But first take a good realistic look at your habits, resources, wants and needs; and make your plans before you begin the search for materials.

There are many new varieties of trees and shrubberies introduced each year, some are simply too irresistible

to not try. In recent years huge pink and blue blooming hydrangeas have stolen the limelight; all-season, mass blooming Knock-out Roses, crimson leaved Japanese Maples, fragrant Korean Lilacs, and many other new hybrids have made stunning debuts. Many of the new hybrids are also more versatile in cold and drought conditions, expanding plant options in every climate region. The southern delightful blooming Crepe Myrtle is making its way into northern landscapes.

What are some of the considerations in creating your plan:

■ If you have children, plan space for playing; thorny barberry and children, roses and basketballs or footballs DO NOT mix. You can have it all, just plan the spaces for each. Yews, arborvitae, boxwoods, junipers (scratchy, but no foul if landed in) and other evergreens are resilient and less harmful to children.



What are your goals?

■ A well planned landscape will beautify and enhance the value of your property.
■ Is there an area that a living wall of evergreens is needed to provide more privacy.
■ Do you want to create a wind screen with quick growing poplars and a parallel line of slower growing evergreens.
■ Evergreen shrubs placed close enough to the sides of a home provide an insulation barrier keeping your house warmer in winter.

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- Shade trees placed to the south and west side of the house help cool in summer.
- You can create serenity spaces for dining or sitting.
- Do you want to provide food and habitat for birds or other creatures of nature.
- How long do you have to complete your goals; is this a short-term residence or a place you expect to live for decades.



Mixing it up

If you like color, choose materials that peak at different times in the season.

- One common tip is to group plants with a variety of textures; you might mix broad leaves like hydrangea with round leaved barberry, short-needled evergreens.
- Foliage color contrasts also create drama. Take golden junipers or one of the new yellow sumacs set it next to one of the deep purple Weigelia's or Ninebark, watch it pop.
- Plant thinking ahead for mature sizes so what will be tallest is toward the back and sufficient spacing between plants.
- And, don't ignore planning for the winter garden. After deciduous plants drop their leaves, trunks and stems, even vines lend great texture and cast interesting silhouettes on a winter day. With a few architectural accents and hardscape, a winter garden can provide intrigue and pleasure.

Some design options

Repetition, such as a line of shrubs or trees of the same type and size can be a real attention grabber, especially at peak performance times. A line of blooming red bud, crab, ornamental cherry or pear trees are inspirational in the spring. In the fall color the vibrant red of burning bush, sugar maples and other late season show-offs make stunning statements. Lines of evergreens such as pine, spruce, fir, arborvitae, yews and others catch attention all year round.

If you are like most people, your plantings will most likely be staged over several years, maybe even continue over a life-time. Set your goals by image or mood. It will probably include quite a bit of hardscape materials also such as benches, tables and chairs, pathways, planters, maybe a fountain or fish pond are in your future, or one of the many attractive outdoor patio fireplaces, more specialized garden and landscape lighting comes out every year. Solar lights continue to provide more options and are coming down in price. You may want bird feeding stations and houses, which add lots of charm and entertainment. Plan out for an entire space and set some expectations to develop over time.

Consider the seasonal changes

Trees and shrubs change throughout the season. Some will feature spectacular bloom, ornamental cherry and pear trees en masse are spectacular. Many offer great foliage textures and color - burning bush, barberry, ninebark. Even branch structure or bark are valued, such as the fine branching and bark of a birch or weeping trees that the draping fine branches sway with the wind.



Grasses

While they are neither shrub nor tree, ornamental grasses have proven their place in any permanent landscape. The papery shush of wind passing through grasses is soothing, grass blades and seed heads add grace and texture. Grasses make an excellent fill for spaces between shrubs or below trees. Grasses also lend attractive structural interest in winter.

The bigger picture

You don't just throw a room together and expect it to take care of itself and look the same or better for years to come. Plan ahead for upkeep, changes or expansion.

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You will want to consider costs of mulch or decorative rock, ground cover, weed mat, edging, soil amendments, fertilizer, maintenance tools - pruners, hedge clippers, trimmers. You may want to add pathway pavers, stepping stones, patios or walks.

Last tips

Don't buy on impulse. Make a trip to visit one or more garden centers or nurseries and take notes on what is available. Also consult online sources, professionals and garden enthusiasts for possible problems or what plants are working well for others.

Ask about upcoming sale times. Sales are good and you will be able to buy more for your hard earned dollars if you plan and wait.

As a general rule, smaller plants transplant with greater success and cost less. So, unless you need the look of a larger plant right away, you might save some bucks and buy less mature plants. You also get the pleasure of seeing a space come together over time.

When and how to plant

When it comes to ensuring your new planting will thrive, an often over looked factor is timing of when



you plant. The general recommendation is to plant either in the spring or fall. But what is of greater importance is not to plant when conditions will be harsh - hot, dry and windy. It takes a few days and weeks for tree and shrub roots to adjust to the shock of planting. There may

be a delay in the uptake of water and nutrients needed by the leaves.

So, choose a good site in accordance to the particular plant's needs. Take time to properly prepare the soil. You can even dig the hole. But it is best to watch the weather forecast and wait for a gentle cycle of weather, one that offers several days of cooler, cloudy or rainy weather, and no intense heat for a period of time.

Plant labels give you all the information you need to know in how and where to plant your new treasure, including how large to make the hole.

Most often instructions will say to make the hole about twice as wide as the root ball or pot size, loosen the soil at the bottom to make it easy for the plant roots to stretch downward as well. When set in the hole the top of the root ball should be level with the surrounding ground. At this point be sure to add water to the hole and observe that it drains down easily before back-filling around the sides. Water again when finished and to mulch over the top to prevent water loss.

Need inspiration?

As English author Charles Caleb Colton said, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Take your camera and go out. Walk through historic home neighborhoods, especially from alleyways you will see some amazing outdoor living areas. Observe landscapes from the street view too. When you get back home, while looking at pictures note what shrubberies and trees others have used and look at your space.

When you go to the garden center, take notes and pictures. See what strikes your fancy. Go home and review the condition requirements of your top choices, and compare to your plans. Then decide what plants you wish to purchase.

As trees and shrubs represent the larger living material used in plantscaping, the materials are significant investment of time and dollars. Used creatively and in conjunction with hardscaping - pathways, lighting, statuary and more - their use when planned out can provide unique and deeply satisfying environments and even a return on investment if done carefully.

Remember, start with a plan of what you want to achieve in your green space and your outdoor space can become your dream space.

[Jan Youngquist]

Temperature zone map <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>



Expert advice on buying appliances

When it is time to buy new appliances, it is important to consider size, dependability and reliability of brands, options you want, and terms for financing.

In Lincoln, both McEntire's Direct Maytag and McQuellon's Appliance Company offer a variety of styles, brands, sizes and options in appliances such as refrigerators, ovens, dishwashers, freezers, washers and dryers.

Brands and options at McEntire's Direct Maytag

Carie McEntire Groves, salesperson at McEntire's Direct Maytag, said the store offers brands such as Maytag, Amana, Frigidaire, Whirlpool and KitchenAid.

When considering what size of appliance to purchase, not only do you want to consider your

needs and preferences in options, but Groves says it is also important to make sure it will fit into the space you have available. For example, when buying a refrigerator, you need to know the measurements of surrounding cabinets, so the refrigerator will fit in your kitchen.

Groves said when it comes to what is new in kitchen appliances, refrigerators with French doors and the freezer on the bottom have become popular, especially for people in newer homes. These refrigerators often have a depth of 35 5/8 to 36 inches when the doors are open. Groves said people in smaller homes or apartments are more likely to buy refrigerators with freezers on top.

CONTINUED ►



McEntire's also has chest freezers ranging in size from 5 to 22 cubic feet and upright freezers ranging in size from 14 to 22 cubic feet. Groves said chest freezers are often used for bulky meat, and upright freezers are easier to organize. She said they sell many freezers during hunting season when people are looking for more storage space for meat.

As far as stoves, Groves said people tend to like large oven space, especially if they do a lot of cooking and baking. On stove tops, metal or cast iron grates are popular features. Groves said the stoves are 5 cubic feet and up. Sizes range from 4.8 to 6 cubic feet.

In washers and dryers, McEntire's offers a variety of features. The tubs come with or without agitators. The washer may be front load or top load. Some are high efficiency, so they use less water. Another feature is steam, which helps get stains out. Groves said most people like the higher capacity washers. The washers range from 3.1 to 6 cubic feet.

Groves said the dryers are 6 to 8 cubic feet. She noted dryers must be larger than washers in order to effectively dry loads. If the dryer is too small, loads will come out in a "clump."

Groves said low end appliances offer few options. Middle to high end appliances offer more options, which means more convenience. For instance, some appliances can be started through apps on your smartphone even when you are not at home.

Price ranges depend on the options

Washers and dryers range from \$400 to \$1200. Stoves range from \$400 to \$1,500. Groves said package deals on stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers, and microwaves are between \$1,600 and \$4,000. She said the \$4,000 package is popular.

McEntire's offer six months to a year of free financing with no interest. Groves said many customers choose to make monthly payments.

The company will even haul away old appliances. Hook up of most appliances is free, though McEntire's charges a small fee for hooking up dishwasher, wall ovens, cooktops, and over-the-range microwaves. McEntire's also does most of its own repairs.

McEntire's Direct Maytag is located on 403 Broadway in Lincoln. They are open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Saturday and can be reached by calling (217)732-4874.

Brands and Options at McQuellon's Appliance Company

McQuellon's Appliance Company offers brands such as GE, Hotpoint, Crosley, Frigidaire, and Danby.

Yolanda Cisneros, salesperson at McQuellon's, began by talking kitchen appliances. She also said to know your measurements before buying refrigerators. Refrigerators are usually 20 to 36 inches wide, so you need to make sure you have the space for them. If there is an overhead cabinet where your refrigerator goes, you must make sure you do not get a refrigerator too tall to fit under it.

Cisneros said refrigerator options range from low-end to high-end depending on features. Today's models may come with one or two ice makers. Other options include water dispensers, and even Keurig coffee makers.

Cisneros said their high-end refrigerators run up to \$3,200.

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McQuellon's has chest freezers from five to 25 cubic feet and upright freezers from 14 to 21 cubic feet.

Oven sizes are available from 10 to 28 cubic feet. Cisneros said stove tops with four burners and a smooth top tend to be more popular.

Cisneros said the most popular are the self-cleaning gas ovens and sell for \$648. Stove prices vary from \$449 to \$1,000.

Cisneros said the washer sizes range from four to six cubic feet. High efficiency washers save on water and heat. While newer front load washers are attractive to those wanting more ease, they often need more maintenance than top load washers. Also, the front load washers can get moldy if not cleaned regularly.

Cisneros said the dryers are between six and eight cubic feet. Some have flat backs, while others extend 4 inches in the back; so it is important to know how much space is in the laundry room.

Depending on options, Cisneros said McQuellon's, showroom washers range from \$479 to \$699 and dryers from \$449 to \$699.

Cisneros said package deals on stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers, and microwaves are between \$2,100 for appliances with little more than basic options, and \$8,000 for high-end options.

McQuellon's does not offer in-house financing.

However, Cisneros said Security Finance offers financing on appliances.

McQuellon's offers same day delivery and will haul away old appliances. They will also do free hook up of most appliances and charge a small fee for hooking up dishwasher, wall ovens, cooktops, and over-the-range microwaves. McQuellon's also does most of its own repairs.

McQuellon's Appliance Company is located on 414 S. Kickapoo in Lincoln. Their hours are 8:00 a.m. to



5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Both McEntire's and McQuellon's have been serving the area for many years. Their friendly and knowledgeable salespeople will help you find the options you are looking for at affordable prices.

[Angela Reiners]

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