

Priority projects

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years ago and slowly it's reality. Up here, I see a lot of it going on," he said. "You've got your pool, you've got your fire pit or covered cabana with a stone fireplace and lawn furniture. There's stereos and TVs now in Jacuzzis. A lot of people are starting with one step, and it usually takes a couple few years."

Thinking about purchasing a pool or spa? First consider the age of those who will be using the pool, Stephenson said. Young children, for example, will need a more shallow pool while teens and adults might want depth for activities like volleyball.

"Just about everything is

custom built," he said.

What's important is taking part in the pool installation process; communicate your wants and needs with your builder if your new home will have a pool, Stephenson said.

"We see it quite often where people go out and hire a builder and say 'Go put a pool in,' and somewhere along the line they should have been involved to get what they want," he said. "There's expense when there's adding in after the fact."

Lawn & Landscaping

For many homeowners, lawn care and landscaping involves much more than simply mowing the grass or planting flowers.

"Hardscape" work is also gaining a following, said

Dorian Dobias of Dobias Landscaping, south of Traverse City. "People are wanting to put in brick patios, block walls, stone walls, flag-stone paths and patios."

Some homeowners choose to incorporate a waterscape, which could include small ponds and waterfalls.

Artificial rocks are great enhancements, both in look and weight; they're easier to move around because of their light weight, he said.

One landscaping trend Dobias is noticing is how customers now are incorporating all-season plants.

"People are just more aware that you can plant plants in the winter," he said.

Heather Johnson Durocher is a local freelance writer.

The dirt on dirt

How does your garden grow? Soil is possibly the most important element in determining a garden's success. Paying attention to its quality improves the odds of producing healthy, robust plants.

■ Clay-based

Wet, sticky consistency with large clumps. Prevents sufficient air flow but has high nutrient level.

■ Sand-based

Light granular texture. Allows good drainage and airflow but low on nutrients.



■ Loam-based

Considered ideal. Consists of 20% clay, 40% sand, 40% silt. It should have a rich dark color and light texture with just a hint of stickiness that allows it to hold nutrients. To improve loam-based soil, add organic material to increase nutrients.

SOURCE: Do-it Yourself Network

Copley News Service / Paul Horn

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If you find the first flower, you'll win a \$50 gift certificate to PlantMasters to get your garden growing.

Entries will be published in the upcoming Home & Garden publication of the Record-Eagle and will be posted online at www.record-eagle.com.



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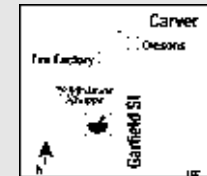
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