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Spend More Time in Your Own Back Yard this Spring

by *homewarranty.com*

Spring is in full bloom, and some days we just don't want to come inside.

We've gathered a few great ideas that allow your family and friends to extend your indoor time to the great outdoors, from dining to napping, to just hanging out.

Pergola Pleasure

The difference between a gazebo and a pergola is the function of the roof. Whereas a gazebo provides full coverage, a pergola allows the sun and rain through the slats, which typically make up its "roof." A pergola is a great way to extend your home's living space and allows you to spend more time outdoors. A pergola is a perfect place to set up a couple of chairs and a table and create a functional focal point in your backyard.

Add a Fire Pit

Nothing makes people gather like a fire pit. With hundreds of options to choose from, warming your nights has never been more stylish. Create a seating area around your fire pit to entice family and friends to spend a little more time outside when the temps begin to drop. If the fire itself won't convince them, bring out the marshmallows and graham crackers.

Install a Fountain

Most of us will agree that moving water is one of life's most soothing sounds. A water feature will run you

anywhere from \$100 to thousands of dollars, depending on what size you opt for. If you are on a tight budget, check out small tabletop versions. Wall fountains are also an affordable and dramatic addition to your backyard space. Many wall fountains are available in classic "old world" styles that bring an instant, rustic elegance to their surroundings. These electric fountains include a recirculating water pump.

Enjoy Outdoor Dining

Design a beautiful outdoor dining area by expanding your home's dining space - ideally on an existing patio or flagstone. Choose an outdoor dining set with a size and features that best suit your family's needs. When considering the layout, make sure you leave enough space for people to move comfortably about the dining area. Situate your eating area near an access point to your kitchen or bathroom, and finally, keep your table a safe distance from your outdoor grill.

Hang a Hammock

Most of us won't find two perfectly spaced trees in our backyard to perfectly accommodate a hammock but consider other options like a hammock stand. Don't let small details stand in the way of that perfect weekend nap space. If you're interested in sharing your relaxing retreat with someone else, remember that two-person hammocks are available in an assortment of beautiful designs and fabrics.

April Calendar

April 1 - April Fool's Day

April 9 - Easter Sunday

April 11 - National Pet Day

April 15 - Tax Day

April 22 - Earth Day

Homeowner Tips



Budding DIYer? Start Small!

If you've never done any DIY, start with a small project like painting a small room to get a feel of the prep work - and there's a lot, like sanding and taping. A crucial piece of DIY is to know your limitations. Installing a dimmer switch is one thing; rewiring or fixing cables can be dangerous. Experts agree anything to do with electricity, gas, furnaces, or major plumbing is best left to the pros.

Know Your Stuff and Celebrate National Pet Day Like a Pro

Most of us have one and consider the little critters a member of our family. According to a survey conducted by the American Pet Products Association, about 68% of American households have a pet.

- Americans spend about \$99 billion on their pets and pet products - every year.

- We adopt about 4 million dogs and cats from shelters each year.

- Dogs win the popularity contest. Worldwide, there are about 471 million dogs kept as pets, and about 370 million cats

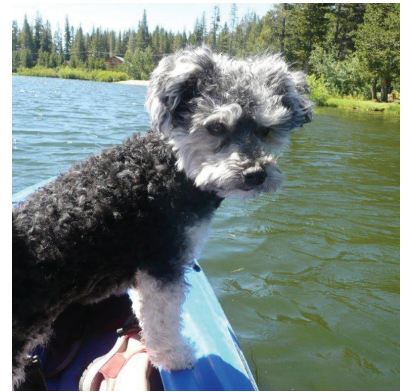
kept as pets. Fish followed in third place.

- Approximately 326,000 American households share their home with a ferret.

- 59% of Russians own a cat, making it the country with the highest number of cat owners in the world.

- According to reports from the ASPCA, there are anywhere from 30 to 40 million self-sufficient feral cats that call American streets home.

- 90% of Americans consider their dog a part of the family. *For full article, visit thezebra.com*



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One-Skillet Steak and Spring Vegetables

INGREDIENTS

- 1 LB boneless NY strip steak, pat dry
- Kosher salt, freshly ground pepper
- 5 garlic cloves, 1 grated, 4 thinly sliced
- ½ cup Dijon mustard
- 1 TB sherry vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp honey
- 1–2 pinches cayenne pepper
- ½ cup plus 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced, divided
- 1 10-ounce bag frozen peas
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces

INSTRUCTIONS

Season steak all over with S&P. Whisk 1 grated garlic clove, ½ cup mustard, 1 TB. vinegar, 1 tsp. honey, a couple pinches of cayenne, ½ cup oil, and 1 TB water

in a medium bowl to combine; season spicy mustard with S&P.

Heat a dry medium skillet, preferably cast iron, over medium-high. Rub steak with 1 TB oil and cook, until medium-rare, about 10 minutes. Transfer steak to a plate to rest. Pour off oil from skillet, leave crispy bits behind.

Heat remaining 2 TB oil in same skillet over low. Add sliced garlic cloves and all but about 2 TB scallions (save those for serving) and cook, stirring often, until translucent and softened, about 3 minutes.

Add peas and a splash of water and cook, stirring and mashing to break up slightly, until peas are tender, about 5 minutes. Add asparagus; season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until asparagus is just tender, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat.

Slice steak, shingle over vegetables in skillet. Drizzle some mustard sauce over steak and top with reserved scallions. Serve with remaining mustard sauce.



Photo & recipe courtesy of: bonappetit.com