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10 CREATIVE WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR YARD

BY SUZANNE WRIGHT

MAXIMIZING THE AESTHETICS OF YOUR YARD IS ESSENTIAL in adding both enjoyment and value to your property. Dave Tibbetts, president of Cumming-based Atlanta Decking & Fence Co., one of the fastest-growing exterior design firms in the city, suggests that homeowners who are planning exterior design changes consider the outdoors as an extension of the house's interior living space.

THE YARD



(Above) A well-maintained exterior and yard translate to added value.

(Below) A back porch arbor provides outdoor comfort and elegance with relatively little expense.



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Good fences can make good neighbors, while an attractive gate says "Welcome" at the same time.

"It's easier than ever to enhance your outdoor living space, because interior design ideas are migrating outdoors and new shapes, colors, textures and amenities abound," he said.

Here, Tibbetts offers some great ideas for landscaping that can add a 15 to 70 percent return to your home.

1. Create a Good First Impression. Before someone has even stepped inside your home, they have already formed an impression. A well-kept garden, pathway, fence, and even a freshly painted front door are immediately appealing and telegraph how well your home has been maintained. A well-planned exterior also improves home security. For example, thorny shrubs are often planted under windows to deter burglaries. Incidentally, insurance agencies assign value on landscaping and will pay the several-hundred-dollar replacement value for trees struck by lightning.

2. Create More Value-Added Space Affordably. The most affordable way to extend the interior out is with a screened-in porch. For those with limited budgets, a covered porch with storm windows is comparable and a

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A deck can become a **cozy room** when it is screened-in.

more affordable option than a sunroom. Screened-in porches become outdoor living rooms with the addition of furniture, and made-to-order storm windows can replace more expensive insulation such as air conditioning, heat and electricity while offering year-round accessibility.

The screened-in porch is also ideal for homeowners who want to convert their deck into an outdoor room. To maximize space and outdoor views, consider mixing and matching different types of windows to create a wall of glass. Bonus — unlike open porches and decks, which can be hard to keep clean, covered versions stay clean and comfortable during intense summer heat and cold winter days.

3. Unusable Space? Build a Bridge or Walkway. Bridges and walkways can transform your back yard. A bridge can become a “land link” if your property is split by a creek,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ATLANTA DECKING & FENCE CO.

A bridge can give your garden a focal point.

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allowing access and enjoyment to areas that might not have been accessible before. Decorative, arched Japanese bridges give your garden an exotic focal point. Positioned over small streams or near ponds, bridges provide a higher perspective from which to view greenery. Likewise, wooden walkways are a simple, organic answer to wetland areas. Their attractive, natural design allows you to see wildlife and enjoy areas of your property that would normally go unused.

4. Hit the Deck. A deck design should go beyond creating a flat surface. Homeowners are wise to avoid benches on decks because of safety hazards and because permanent seating limits flexibility, space and view. The latest deck trends include:

- Designs and patterns using composite materials and geometric shapes on oversized decks to add interest and eliminate that “basketball court” feel
- Exterior lighting adds elegance and extends outdoor entertaining time into the evening
- Unusual shapes such as octagon and rounded corners versus traditional rectangular
- Signature details such as craftsman-style overhangs
- Undercover systems to prevent exposure to weather such as a screened-in porch with a second story deck
- Breaking up space and adding interest with directional and diagonal decking
- Upgrading unusable space (for example, a sloped back yard) with a deck and covered porches
- Copper rails that maximize the view, add elegance and offer a natural look

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5. Solitary Sanctuaries. Think of a deck as more than just a floor outside and you can create a year-round sanctuary that's functional. Privacy screens, arbors, trellises and modified roofs create an outdoor room effect instead of a glorified patio. Overhead structures can help regulate the amount of sun hitting the deck and are ideal for covering the outdoor grill area. Rafters and shadeboards with decorative designs also create interesting light patterns on the deck throughout the day.

6. Good Fences Make Good Neighbors. If you live in a cluster home or simply in a subdivision with tight lots, you probably have less privacy than is ideal. Many homeowners are installing accentuated railing, latticework, beautifully designed fences and screened walls to create a sense of refuge and add value to the property.

7. The Soothing Sound of Water. Water features add undeniable tranquility, power and attraction to landscapes. To open a window and hear the sound of running water offers tremendous potential and aesthetic value to the home, especially when the water stays close to its natural habitat, a concept that explains the higher asking prices of waterfront properties. Countless options exist to add the sparkle and serenity of water to your

A path gives direction and can express a mood — formal, relaxing, or in this case, playful.



outdoor living space, so ask your designer for ideas that fit your space.

8. Stepping Stones. Stone and brick are the most durable and maintenance-free materials you can utilize in your landscape. Replacing

your walkway is a great way to unleash your property's natural potential. Paving brick or stone over a natural path with granite screening creates an elegant look and can help weeds from peeking through. While creating outdoor spaces, you can use native

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A **water feature** adds pleasure for sight and sound alike.

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A BENCH IN THE FRONT SAYS “WELCOME” WHILE ENHANCING CURB APPEAL.

slabs of granite that become a grand stairway or lichen-covered field stone stacked into a beautiful garden wall.

9. Let Your Designs Blossom. People often forget that they can expand beyond their flowerbeds, so consider planting flowers both in beds and in containers. Lining porches and walkways with flowers in containers can expand your range of colors and entice visitors indoors. Gorgeous planters can add color and romance to your outdoor entertaining area.

10. Accessorize, Accessorize, Accessorize. Well-placed home furnishings and home accents can give your outdoor living spaces a rich and warm ambience, while echoing the look of your interiors. Pots and urns planted with rosemary or even left empty can create boundaries between entertaining, lounging or intimate conversation spaces. A bench in the front says “welcome” while enhancing curb appeal. The latest outdoor furniture selections are deep, cushy, inviting and are designed for the ultimate in relaxation. Along with stylish seating groups, you can enhance the ambience of your outdoor space with special throws, lamps and outdoor rugs that can withstand the elements beautifully. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Atlanta Decking & Fence Co.

770-781-4641

www.atlantadecking.com