



## 2022 Gardening Trends

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

While the pandemic may thankfully be waning, interest in gardening, which ticked up mightily these past 2 years, has remained strong. Mail order seed and plant companies are reporting another year of steady sales. Visiting a local farm supply store today, I saw shelves and aisles stocked with various fertilizers, soil amendments, seed starting equipment and tools.

It appears that many folks that recently took up gardening decided to continue on with their efforts whether it be to grow their own food, upgrade their lawns and landscapes, remake their yards into more livable and enjoyable spaces, or just cultivate some houseplants.

Not content with just growing a few vegetables, many new gardeners branched out to include small fruits, like strawberries and raspberries, and tree fruits into their edible gardening plans. Reasons for growing your own range from self-sufficiency, to desiring chemical free produce, to enticing kids to garden, to that sense of accomplishment after savoring that first ripe, juicy, sun-warmed tomato. Some gardeners are interested in reducing their carbon footprint by buying local, growing from seed, composting, and searching for repurposed or recycled garden tools, furniture and ornamentation.

Although the number of people planning on traveling has increased, many folks who had a lot of down time at home, started making their yards more accommodating to their and their family's needs. Plans might have been implemented or are in place for outdoor spaces that are multifunctional and might include fire pits, outdoor kitchens, children's play areas, peaceful spots for meditation, patios gazebos or water features. Many of these projects are DIYs.

There also seems to be an increased focus on the front of the house. Increasing curb appeal with inground plantings as well as containers not only makes your home more welcoming, but it enhances the neighborhood as well.

Not everyone has front and back yards to plant, but some greenery is still desired. Often in apartment settings, only a porch or small balcony is available to accommodate outside plants. In

small spaces, creativity rules. Several plants can be potted together in a large container. Hangers or cascading window boxes spill over the sides or possibly hang from above. Stackable containers are filled with flowers or vegetables suited for container growing.

We have gotten a number of requests for information on creating more wildlife friendly landscapes. While queries on plants and ideas for pollinator gardens seem to come in the most frequently, we are also asked about ways to foster biodiversity in backyards, planting mixed native hedgerows, choosing alternatives for lawns as well as the best plants for birds. Not only are native plants or their cultivars emphasized but water is as well. Whether one opts for a basin on a porch railing, an attractive birdbath in a garden bed, a small pool and fountain, or a larger pond, water always attracts wildlife. Many insect feeding bird species that are not attracted to the seeds at your feeder will eagerly come for that drink of cool water or maybe even a bath on a hot, summer day.

As far as flowers go, this year they are big, bold, and tropical. Cannas are making a comeback with their large, often colorful leaves and vibrant blooms. Caladiums brighten up shady areas with leaves of white, red, pink and green. Elephant ears (*Colocasia*) are tropical plants grown from bulbs and some may reach 8 feet tall with leaves that are 2 to 3 feet long. Hardy hibiscus will overwinter here, unlike the bulbs just mentioned, and in late summer produce dinner plate sized blossoms in pinks, reds and white.



Plants with dark maroon, almost black foliage are also on the most wanted list. These actually contrast quite well with hot reds, yellows and oranges as well as cool blues and purples. Pair

'Blackie' sweet potato vine with hot pink petunias and a silver dusty miller in a container or window box. There are several dark-leaved coral bells that are well suited for perennial beds. Dark foliage shrubs that are popular include ninebark, weigela and smokebush. Think about where these dark-leaved plants would provide just the bit of contrast to enliven an inground or container planting.

Whether you are already a trend setter or just following your own path, do enjoy your gardening exploits. If you have gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or your local Cooperative Extension Center.