

# Home & Garden

**INSIDE**  
**SmarterLiving**

**NO SHAKES OR STIRS**

Those special bottles of wine and bubbly need a special storage space. **4-5H**



The Charlotte Observer

**NATURE**

Groups of small birds with rapid wing beats are moving across our skies at dusk. **2H**

**REAL ESTATE NEWS:** Home-mortgage interest rate deduction at stake. **6H**



[charlotteobserver.com/home](http://charlotteobserver.com/home)

## In defense of open kitchens

REAL ESTATE



**ALLEN NORWOOD**

I'm sure that J. Bryan Lowder, culture writer for the online magazine Slate, launched his screed against modern open kitchen design to provoke a reaction. Well, he succeeded. My wife, Linda, wondered: "What's not to like?" Award-winning kitchen designer Jeanine DeVaney said: "That's silly."

I'm with them.

A few weeks ago, Lowder wrote that today's open kitchens have been foisted on glib homebuyers by the evangelists on subversive propaganda outlets like HGTV. Kitchens should have walls, he said, so your guests won't see you drop stuff on the floor. He said open kitchens aren't that great for entertaining and you're not going to entertain, anyway.

There was an odor of hip urban snark emanating from Lowder's Aug. 13 piece.

"There is one distressingly popular design choice that has spread throughout HGTV's stable of shows like black mold through a flooded basement," he wrote, "and I can no longer abet its growth by keeping silent. I'm talking about the baneful scourge that is the 'open-concept kitchen.'"

Now, he was right about one point: If you didn't entertain in your old kitchen, you probably won't in your new kitchen. You'll still be you.

But he was wrong about almost everything else. In most ways, open kitchen design is a huge improvement.

And DeVaney, owner of Charlotte In-Vironments, makes the point that open kitchens work well for all sorts of families. "It doesn't matter what stage of life people are in. They just say, 'I want an open plan.'"

Young moms in the kitchen can watch toddlers in the great room. Older couples can invite guests to gather and help prepare the meal. We do that. (If someone accidentally drops something onto the floor, well, just pour another round of sauvignon blanc.)

There are some tradeoffs when kitchen walls come down.

If you knock walls down, there are fewer places to hang cabinets. But folks like DeVaney come up with creative ways to stretch the storage space that is available. Deep drawers for pans and plates, for instance, or innovative nooks in islands.

If you knock walls down, you have to worry about things like kitchen noises and odors. "You can get... a quiet dishwasher that you can't even hear," DeVaney said. "Or... really good ventilation, so cooking won't make the whole house smell."

DeVaney admits that some clients do prefer traditional kitchens with all four walls. But not many. "About 1 in 200," she said.

In the interest of full disclosure, workers next week will be opening a pass-through from our kitchen to the great room - so my wife can watch HGTV from the kitchen sink.

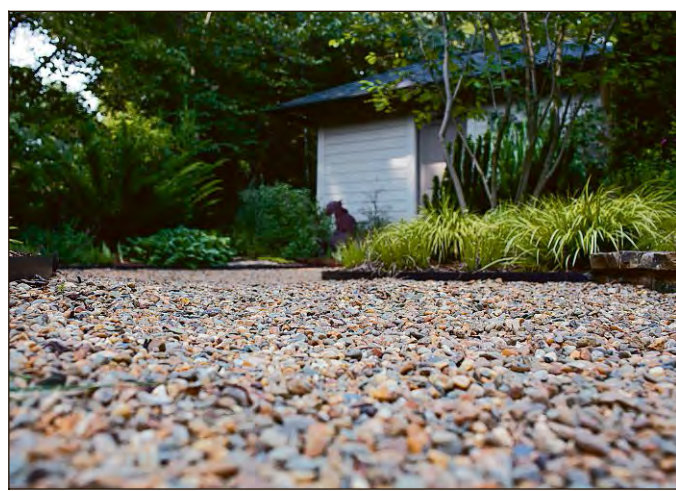


KRIS DANIELS

Gravel replaced the grass in Paula Lombardi's Myers Park backyard. A rain garden on the left, covered with moisture-loving ferns, was engineered to capture rainwater, filter it and return it quickly to the water table.

# Gravel is the new green

You give up your grass, save stress and still boast a beautiful yard



JILL KNIGHT

Gravel comes in many attractive options, and in the end, can save time and money.

BY EMILY HEDRICK  
Correspondent

Y ou mow, fertilize, water, aerate, pamper, offer incantations to the garden gods - and nothing works.

You're ready to ditch your grass for something else. But what?

There are plenty of alternatives for your traditional lawn that will not only relieve your stress but are attractive, relatively maintenance-free and good for the environment, too.

Ecologically speaking, gravel is the new "green."

After all, trying to cultivate most grasses used in this part of the country - cool season varieties like fescue, for example - is a botanically unnatural act, some experts say. Hardier varieties like St. Augustine and Bermuda might be pretty in the summer but turn brown in the winter.

Furthermore, non-native grass grown locally could actually be considered a drain on the environment, say landscape architects, since it requires irrigation in times of drought, fuel to operate mowers, fertilizers and potentially harmful pesticides in addition to the physical energy for constant maintenance.

"Let's face it," says landscape architect J'Nell Bryson, "Charlotte has a less than ideal climate for grass lawns. We imported the idea from Europe, but it's really difficult to grow a healthy stand of grass around here."

**Going natural**

The ideal notion of rolling, well-manicured lawns is shifting, agrees Laurel Holtzapple of Groundworks Studio. Many of her landscape clients are choosing to embrace the habitat we've been given in the Charlotte area - a canopy provided by oak, hickory and pine trees - and go natural. "There's so much one can do with the shady conditions that exist here besides forcing a stand of grass," she says.

To get started on the switch away from grass, Holtzapple suggests that you "create a tapestry on a ground plane. Look at your lawn as a piece of art - it is

SEE GREEN, 3H

**INSIDE**

Tips on how to go from grass to 'green,' **3H**

## I'M SO CLEVER

Make glassware sparkle again with glass-top stove cleaner

BY ROLAND WILKERSON  
rwilkerson@charlotteobserver.com

**The winner:** I had some beautiful glasses of my mother's that became cloudy from the dishwasher. After trying everything with no luck, I used Cerama Bryte that I use to clean my glass top stove. I used that on the glasses inside and out and now they look brand new! — MYRTLE WALL, LILESVILLE

(Editor's note: We can't vouch for what this product will do to your glassware, but it gets a lot of good reviews online for cleaning glass top stoves and other surfaces. It's available at many stores.)

**Keep those torch wicks dry**

To keep tiki torches dry when not in use, I cut the tops off 2-liter bottles to cover them. — RUBY ELROD, SHERRILLS FORD

**Save money on kids' shoes**

Instead of buying new cleats for fall sports, go to a children's consignment store and buy a used pair. Then use an old toothbrush and some water to scrub the dirt away. Buff them with a damp rag and your shoes will look as good as new. I just saved over \$30 doing this trick myself, which is awesome. — WILSON BACON, AGE 8, CHARLOTTE

**Win a Clever T-shirt**  
Send your clever tip, address and phone to clever@charlotteobserver.com or Home Section, Charlotte Observer, P.O. Box 30308, Charlotte, NC 28230-0308. Each week the best idea wins an "I'm So Clever" T-shirt.

**MORE CLEVER**  
www.charlotteobserver.com/home



PHOTOS BY JILL KNIGHT

The Avinger's backyard in Davidson showcases attractive and smart ways to skip the classic lawn. In the end, it requires less maintenance, chemicals and upkeep.

## GREEN

■ from IH

art! – and consider that your plants are your paints.” She advises clients to use recycled materials whenever possible, keep proper scale in mind, and resist pouring concrete.

“We’ve already ‘paved over paradise and put up a parking lot’ too often, so I wouldn’t usually advise paving a surface,” says Holtzapple. On the other hand, the use of decorative, porous concrete can be an acceptable, environmentally sound solution because it absorbs water.

### ‘Secret garden’

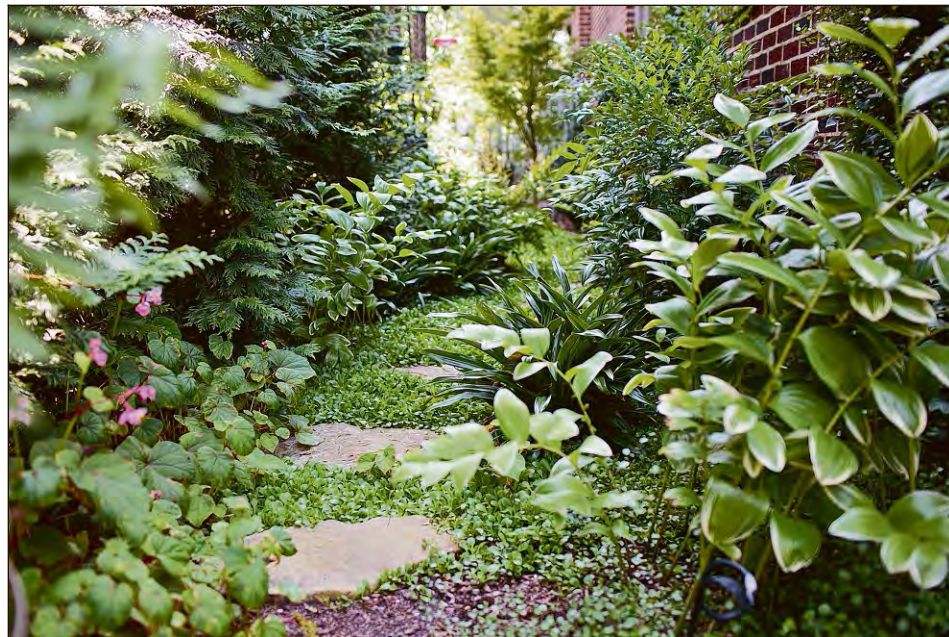
Sheri Harrison and her husband, Bob Te Kolste, reduced the grassed area on the front of their Dilworth home as a family project a couple of years ago, and have never looked back.

With the help of Holtzapple, they created a street-facing garden to attract butterflies, birds and bees. The property is a riot of blueberries, joe-pye weeds, pomegranates, hidcote, lavender, sage and other flowering plants. A bonus is that it blends well with the other front yards along their pedestrian-oriented street.

Another of Holtzapple’s clients, Paula Lombardi, dispensed with all but a tiny patch of grass in front of her Myers Park home. The property now boasts a treasure trove of plants that provide texture and a revolving show of color year-round, such as monkey grass, false indigo, goldenrod, butterfly bushes, echinacea, bay laurel, lantana, euphorbia and several varieties of herbs.

Two benches of white oak, which Lombardi commissioned from a local artist, function both as a sculpture and as seating in a graveled circle. A graveled “secret garden” in the back has as its focal point what Lombardi calls “the world’s largest crepe myrtle.”

Another interesting feature illustrates both the owner’s and designer’s commitment to the envi-



Jane Avinger of Davidson hired J’Nell Bryson to redesign her back yard because “even with a whole lot of effort, the grass was going to pot.”

### From grass to ‘green’

■ The city of Charlotte will deliver 13 cubic yards of wood-chip mulch to your property upon request. It’s free on a first-come, first-served basis. Go to Landscape Management at [www.charmeck.org](http://www.charmeck.org) to download a request form, or call 704-336-4262.

■ Even areas covered with decorative materials like mulch, fine gravel, a shale mixture or crushed shells need a defined border. Edging can be of man-made or natural materials.

■ Use plants already adapted to North Carolina’s climate. Periwinkle, dwarf mondo grass, creeping mazus and monkey grass are popular examples of ground covers.

■ By ordinance the city of Charlotte requires measures to control erosion and sedimentation, especially in new construction. Before making drastic changes to your landscape, check with the city’s engineering department to make sure you remain in compliance with respect to storm drainage and erosion controls.

■ Check with your homeowner’s association to determine whether changes to your landscape are allowed within guidelines. Even if you don’t live in a subdivision with such rules, as a matter of courtesy you might want to give a heads-up to your neighbors about plans to alter the streetscape. They might want to join you in going grass-less.

ronment: Rainwater on the gently sloping property runs into a deep “rain garden” dug at the lowest point of the lot. Rain is quickly absorbed, filtered and drained back into the water table, avoiding both erosion and flooding in neighbors’ yards. Moisture-loving ferns help it blend into its surroundings.

### A Zen feel

Jane Avinger of Davidson hired Charlotte landscape architect J’Nell Bryson to redesign her backyard be-



Bryson

cause “even with a whole lot of effort, the grass was going to pot.” The result, a combination of shrubs, a border of herbs and some decorative gravel, “has a peaceful, Zen feel to it. It was a workable, attractive solution to grass,” Avinger said.

Bryson herself fell in love with the Spanish-influenced lawns she found while living in San Francisco and enjoys replicating the style

here. While she loves using locally sourced materials, she replaced grass with crushed granite from a quarry in Tennessee in her own Myers Park landscape. Tall decorative grasses, lavender and mulch provide color and more texture.

### What it costs

Hiring a professional to redesign your lawn can begin at a minimum of \$2,500, but with a plan in place you can save money in the long run. For a medium-sized yard, materials – including gravel, plants and edging – might cost around \$3,500.

Installation and sod removal could run another \$1,500, bringing the general estimate for a complete overhaul to \$7,500. Many factors could change that ballpark figure up or down, especially the size and slope of the property.

Horticulturist Joy Cleary of Studio Cleary offers this advice for people wanting to replace grass and stay environmentally friendly:

■ Concentrate on the trouble spots first, such as shady areas.

■ Shrink grassy areas gradually by enlarging existing beds, extending mulch farther and planting ground covers that will spread. Everything doesn’t have to be tackled at once.

■ Use mulch or decorative gravel to control weeds, cut down on lawn maintenance and create interesting new “rooms” in your yard.

## Take good care of trees

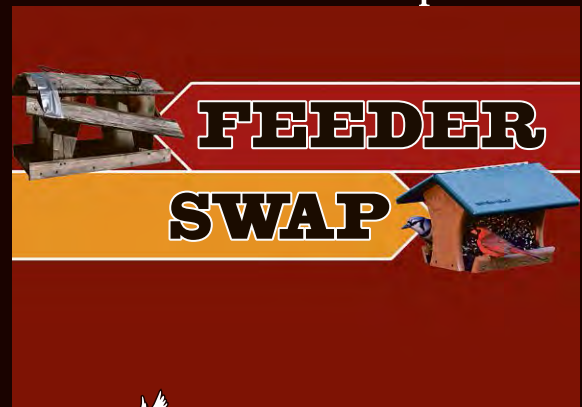
The green that trees provide goes beyond the beauty of their foliage. Part of your home’s market value is rooted in the quality and quantity of healthy trees on your property.

Take good care of your trees. They grow very slowly, so it’s not easy – or cheap – to replace them.

Start by hiring an arbo-

rist to prune and evaluate trees for signs of dead wood, insect damage and other problems. Also, avoid tree topping, which involves removing large branches. Excessive cutting can cause significant damage. Be especially attentive to young trees, which require more care and water.

Trade In Any Old Feeder; Get 20% OFF A New One! Offer expires 9/29.



**Wild Birds Unlimited**  
Nature Shop  
BIRD FOOD • FEEDERS • GARDEN ACCENTS • UNIQUE GIFTS  
8609 Concord Mills Blvd., Concord, NC 28027  
(704) 979-3443 [www.wbu.com/concord](http://www.wbu.com/concord)



FOR SALE BY OWNER  
BUT WILL CO-BROKE

PRESERVE #175, THE SANCTUARY  
ON LAKE WYLIE, NC

15 minutes to airport, 20 minutes to downtown Charlotte. Beautiful, wooded 9.5-acre lot with 6 B/R septic and pier permit in place. \$1,395,000

[www.coveviewcharlotte.com](http://www.coveviewcharlotte.com)  
wfox33@me.com • 704-335-0904

**Time To Plant Fall Vegetables!**

524 Stallings Rd. Matthews, NC  
Just minute off I-485 between Old Monroe Rd. & Hwy. 74  
Mon.-Fri. 9:00-5:00  
Sat. 8:30-5:00

**King's GREENHOUSE** Since 1971  
704-821-7507

*‘Tis the Season to Plant!!*

**LAWN SEMINAR**  
Sept. 14th at 11:00  
Call to Register

**Fantastic Selection of Trees & Shrubs!**

- Hundreds to Choose From!
- Beautiful Japanese Maples!
- Fall Camellias Galore!
- Azaleas-Reblooming
- “Bloom-a-Thon”!

**Time to Rejuvenate and Re-Do Your Lawn!**

- Complete Program for Your Lawn!
- Experienced Staff Available to Answer Lawn Questions!
- Mums & Asters Add Color!
- Ornamental Grasses!
- Great Selection of Fall Blooming Perennials!

**Large Selection of Trees & Shrubs Arriving Weekly!**

[www.kingsgreenhouse.com](http://www.kingsgreenhouse.com)

**Norwood Garden Center**  
8837 Albemarle Rd. • Charlotte, NC 28227 • 704-536-4848

**RETIREMENT DELAYED - WE ARE STILL HERE !**  
**1/2 PRICE IN GIFT SHOP CONTINUES....**  
Bob Timberlake Prints & Posters. Judy Mizell, Sallie Middleton, P. Buckley Moss, J.J. Audubon, John Clymer, Paul Calle, Helen Rundel, S. Skeen, Joe Belt, Ron Taylor, Framed & Unframed, Collector Plates, Crystal, China, Portmeirion, Blue Willow and More.

<b>Vintage Shop</b> Clothing Shoes Purses Jewelry Handmade Quilts Table Cloths Jim Beam Bottles Furniture Bird Houses	<b>FALL Vegetable Plant and Seeds</b> <b>3 Pack for \$2.00</b> Georgia Collards Heading Collards Stonehead Cabbage Savoy Cabbage Early Jersey Cabbage Red Cabbage Premium Broccoli Snow Crown Cauliflower Brussel Sprouts Spinach Red Russian Kale Vates Curly Green Kale Dinosaur Kale Romaine Lettuce Buttercrunch Lettuce All Star Mix Lettuce Red Sails Lettuce LARGE SEED PACKS	<b>HERBS</b> BASIL ROSEMARY CELERY CILANTRO CHIVES RUE LAVENDER SAGE LEMONBALM THYME LOVAGE EUCALYPTUS PARSLEY OREGANO STEVIA MINT FRENCH TARRAGON
--	---	---

**Open Tues.-Sat. 10:00AM to 4PM**

*Let Us Help You Get Your Containers Ready for Fall!*

**WE MAKE HOUSE CALLS.**

**Red Ribbon SALE**  
on Selected Items - Indoor and Out - Save up to...  
**20%-50%**

**Upcoming September Workshop**  
Saturday, September 28<sup>th</sup> Fairy Gardens  
All workshops are 1-3 pm  
Call to reserve and for more information...

Visit The Royal Gardens Blog at [www.royalgardenscharlotte.blogspot.com](http://www.royalgardenscharlotte.blogspot.com)  
Product Line, Plants and Plenty of Applications Aimed at good garden fun!

Open Tues.-Sat. 9:30-5PM.  
**SHOP LOCAL**  
1733 East Seventh Street  
Charlotte, NC 28204  
704.334.FROG