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## Gardens that glow

### **Lush getaways that gush with fresh ideas can take root with a little time, effort and money. Here's what is popping up in 2003.**

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Like most gardeners, you probably replant the same flower beds and trim the same hedges year after year. You may even follow the same ruts when mowing the lawn. Gardening doesn't change much -- or does it?

Welcome in a new year full of fresh ideas from professionals that can make your home site more attractive and functional. This year could be the time you break traditions and reinvest time and maybe a little money in your landscape.

Perhaps it's because of security concerns or an economic pinch, but residents appear to be looking for a safe haven, an escape to their back yards, say Stephen and Kristin Pategas, owners of Hortus Oasis, a garden-design firm in Winter Park.

"Gardeners want to create an outdoor sanctuary," says Stephen, a landscape architect. These much improved home sites include expanded patios, outdoor kitchens, pergolas, water features and butterfly gardens. It's an almost self-sustained gathering place where families dine, entertain and enjoy the friendship of neighbors in their own back yard.

Near the kitchen there is often a growing area of raised beds producing some of the edibles needed to prepare favorite family meals. The harvests might include salad greens to complement a dinner feature or rosemary to spice up a meat dish cooked on the grill.

These landscapes get a lot of use. And the activities don't stop when the sun goes down, says Kristin, a landscape designer.

"Residents don't want the landscape to disappear in the evening," she says. Lots of money can be spent on planning and planting outdoor living areas. Gardeners want to get as much use as possible by adding nighttime lighting. This includes lighting walkways and gathering areas plus spotlighting the focal points created by trees and shrubs.

Even when gardeners do head indoors for the evening, Kristin says, landscape lighting can "expand the inner space to the outdoors." Proper lighting seems to make the walls disappear, enlarging a room that leads to the landscape. It opens up a new dimension of sights and sounds for evening enjoyment.

#### TRY A NEW LOOK

A landscape makeover is sure to include new gardens. This year, consider adding a tropical look that's hot, says Robert Bowden, executive director of Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando. The plants are inexpensive, and gardeners don't seem to care whether they are damaged by winter weather. They simply replant.

"We are turning back the clock to a Victorian time with the ornate glamorous look," Bowden says.

Tropicals that can provide the new look include bananas, anthuriums, bromeliads, spathiphyllums, ginger and ferns. Many have colorful foliage and exotic blooms that are sure to attract visitors' interest.

Most also can be used in the shady sites where it's often difficult to grow more traditional landscape plants.

Bowden also notes that gardeners don't want plantings that need a lot of maintenance. Neither do they want the wild, unkempt look. He suggests picking plants that are attractive and easy to care for with fewer pest problems. Choices might include yaupon holly shrubs, oak trees, Asiatic jasmine, bromeliads and coreopsis wild flowers.

Container gardens are another addition to landscapes that have been gaining attention. They often are used on a patio or balcony and along walkways and to accent an entrance. They can be planted with flowers, vegetables, herbs and small shrubs. You might add one plant or create a combination garden.

"Container gardens become more popular as gardeners grow older," says Heather Will-Browne, bedding-plant specialist in horticulture at Walt Disney World.

"You don't have to bend over as much to pop plants in or out. You can change the gardens as needed."

Each year, numerous plants are tested in the Disney trial gardens. Many have worked well in containers and should be making an appearance at garden centers. Will-Browne's favorites include helichrysum Golden Beauty with green foliage and yellow flowers, Dichondra Silver Falls with silvery foliage, abutilon Mellon Sorbet with small hanging blooms and calibrachoa Mini Famous Yellow.

All a gardener has to do is pick up a catalog to become deluged with selections of new plants in a rainbow assortment of colors. But what is the most popular color for the new year?

"Black or a deep purple so dark it can seem black, is hot, hot," says Karen Park Jennings, president of Park Seed Co. in Greenwood, S.C. Favorites include the All-America Selections winners ornamental millet Purple Majesty with deep purple foliage and geranium Black Velvet having almost black leaves with a green edge. Other black-looking plants on her list include alternanthera Purple Knight with dark foliage and a calla lily named Naomi Campbell with almost black blooms.

Most horticulturists seem to agree black is the color for 2003. Bowden says the dark leaves and flowers help cool down the landscape. His list includes Black Dragon alocasia, black elderberry, purple leaf ornamental fig and a dark leaf mondo grass.

"They are ideal accents for container gardens and can be combined with brighter contrasting colors."

## THE LATEST IN TURF

Plants are a necessary garden addition in any outdoor area, but gardeners also like to add accent features similar to what you might find in the home. These accessories are expected to continue their popularity in the new year.

"You'd think there was no more space for pink flamingos, or garden fairies, but designers keep coming up with new versions, and gardeners keep falling in love with them," says Jennings of Park Seed.

Selections for the landscape might include the whimsical rabbit, dog or cat potholders or dainty flower sculptures often with wiggling bees or dragonflies. Also gardeners continue to enjoy wind chimes and especially those with the soft sounds created by clattering bamboo stems.

It does appear one portion of the landscape will be shrinking in 2003 -- the lawn.

"Many gardeners don't want turf, especially if they don't have kids," says Stephen Pategas. Also many communities have neighborhood playgrounds and parks where the kids can play. It appears families don't need the large, time-consuming turf areas.

Some gardeners are skipping turf and using ground covers and hedge materials to unify the design and reduce maintenance. This may become a trend with many residents, but there are always others who still love their grass

"Turf grass is part of most landscapes, and it's not going away," says Laurie Trenholm, University of Florida extension turf-grass specialist in Gainesville. "Gardeners do need to manage and use the turf

differently. Good watering and fertilizing practices are going to be more important than looking for a new wonder grass."

Gardeners can expect the introduction of new St. Augustine, seashore paspalum and Bermuda grasses during the year, but all depend on proper care. Trenholm says bahia varieties probably won't change, but bahia is still a good choice, especially if gardeners are willing to accept a less than pristine lawn.

She says there is lots of room for improvement in the area of turf care. Gardeners need to learn more about potential problems and proper pest control. There are also new fertilizers and feeding practices. Because of environmental issues and rapidly changing care techniques, Trenholm says, in 2003 "gardeners may be better off using the services of a lawn-care professional."

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