



## Porches Coming Back

After decades of being absent from most new housing construction, the front porch is staging a comeback. The number of new houses with porches is up 11 percent over the last decade, according to the National Association of Home Builders. In an increasingly isolated culture, new buyers are seeking communities that offer personal connections and a sense of belonging. Designers note that elevation is important. A bit of height above the street provides some privacy while allowing for accessibility to passing neighbors.

## Shopping Decoys

A study has found it is possible to influence shoppers by changing their options. The goal was to get consumers to choose between two competing brands, and then see how the introduction of a new product altered their choice. After the introduction of a carefully selected “decoy” product, which enhanced the attractiveness of the “target” brand - the one they wanted shoppers to buy - about a third of the customers switched their preferences accordingly. Experts call this the “Asymmetric Dominance Effect.”

you can  
!

BE GARDEN CHIC

## Plant Care for Vacationers

Plant-loving homeowners in the U.K. now have a new option. London’s oldest garden center, Clifton Nurseries, is offering a new service it calls the Plant Hotel and Spa. Staff from the garden center will come and collect pots, trees and shrubs for a “pampering.” The service promises to keep them in top condition, cure any ailments and perform any necessary pruning or feeding. Staff will also maintain plants in customers’ homes. Prices vary according to the number of plants and the length of stay.

## Containers Rule

Almost half of all Americans do at least some container gardening. In addition to the aesthetic benefits, new research shows there are more reasons consumers are into container gardening. Ease of watering and the ability to move containers around are additional pluses. Today’s postage-stamp-sized yards were also noted - limited yard space for traditional landscaping has sparked more interest in the above-ground plantings. Geographically, the West is into container gardening the most, and women are particularly fond of it.

## Best Grill Year Ever

More barbecue grills moved out in 2006 than ever before, according to figures just released by the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association. A record 17,272,500 grills were shipped, marking a sizzling 15.24 percent increase over last year. The new figures go on to reveal that gas grills continue to outsell charcoal models, capturing 58 percent of the market (charcoal grills captured 40 percent). Electric grills remain a distant third, at 2 percent of the market.

## Least-Favorite Looks

What not to do in a garden? An online blog provides insight on what many frown upon. Among the hated looks - plastic, in-ground walkway lights, lining every which way of every walkway: “It looks like a landing strip for an alien spacecraft.” Military formation-style plantings with boring shrubs lined up like soldiers didn’t go over very well, either. Overuse of mulch stacked too deep and high around trees to form the infamous “volcano” look was also noted.