

Brought to you by

Jill C. Kline & Brenda K. Odenbaugh

Owners
Jill: 970-388-2926
jill@kandorealty.com
Brenda: 970-381-1169
brenda@kandorealty.com



www.kandorealty.com

**K & O
REALTY, LLC**

K & O REALTY, LLC
P.O. Box 1103
607 Main St
Platteville, CO 80651

**HOMEOWNER'S
UPDATE**

Sustainability: All About Backyard Farming

Did you know you can enjoy a hobby, soak up the sun and help preserve the earth all at the same time? In fact, you can do all this and more right in your backyard. Experts say planting in even a tiny bit of soil can offset carbon emissions. So, from trees to vegetables, here are a few tips to get started.

- Plant a tree — or multiple trees if space allows — in your backyard. If putting trees in the ground isn't an option, consider planting them in large pots. Your local garden center is an excellent resource for advice on tree selection and will help you choose species appropriate to your climate.
- If space is limited, start a patio garden with herbs, strawberries and cherry tomatoes.
- Recycled wooden barrels and pallets make perfect homes for a variety of plants. Nestle herbs or flowers in old wheelbarrows or turn antiquated ladders into trellises for climbing flowers like nasturtiums or clematises and vegetables like pole beans, cucumbers or peas.
- Rather than tilling existing dirt, which disrupts organisms and soil structure, purchase or construct a permanent, raised bed. Fill the bed with compost, old newspapers, grass clippings, and other organic materials.
- Plant perennial vegetables like asparagus, artichokes and rhubarb, which grow every year with minimal maintenance and are all healthy, edible and delicious.
- Reduce costs by asking friends who garden for some plant cuttings. You can also save money by starting from seeds rather than buying plants already rooted in pots. It takes a bit longer to see results, but it's so satisfying to reap the fruits of your labor.

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Increase Energy Efficiency in an Older Home

One of the challenges of living in an older house is keeping your energy costs down. Here are a few strategies to increase your home's energy efficiency.

Insulate

Adding another layer to existing insulation can help maintain a comfortable temperature throughout your house, which allows your HVAC system to work more efficiently.

Use LED Light Bulbs

It might be time to update your light bulbs if you're still using the incandescent variety. LEDs use 90% less energy than traditional bulbs and can last up to 25 times longer.

Fix Drafty Doors and Windows

Simply caulking or applying weather stripping around doors and windows can save you up to 20% on energy costs. Or consider replacing old doors and windows with new, vintage-style replicas.

Add a Heat Pump

Energy-efficient heat pumps heat and cool a home, so you won't need separate heating and cooling systems.

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Blast From the Past: Cozy Conversation Pit Is Back

Part the beaded curtain and step into a 1970s living room. Its iconic sunken seating area — the conversation pit — is one of the more beloved hallmarks of that groovy era. Given the current popularity of mid-century modern style, it's no surprise this feature is making a comeback.

While creating an actual pit requires a major remodeling project, you don't have to demo your living room to recreate the far-out vibe.

You can simply use furniture to create the same enclosed effect. Arrange sectionals or place sofas together in a circle or square in the room. Include an ottoman or coffee table along with a shaggy rug in the middle. Then sit back and enjoy the scene.

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Kitchen Cleaning Tips

Cleaning your kitchen may be low on your list of favorite chores, but a few simple hacks can make the job much easier. The following tips can help you clean even the most stubborn messes.

Oven

You can degrease your oven without scrubbing. Simply cut two lemons in half and squeeze the juice into an oven-proof bowl full of water, then put the bowl in the oven at 350° F. Once the water boils, turn off the oven and let the steam circulate for several minutes. Once the oven cools, wipe away the grease.

Pots and Pans

Try cleaning dirty pots, pans and air-fryer baskets with aluminum foil. Spray the item with a cleaning solution, then use a crumpled piece of foil to scrub off the grime.

Garbage Disposal

Grind up ice in your garbage disposal to sharpen its blades and dislodge stubborn food particles. Add lemon, baking soda or vinegar to the ice to eliminate odors.

Wooden Utensils

Remove grease from wooden utensils by soaking them in boiling water for a few minutes.

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Rolled Oats With Blueberry Compote

Ingredients

1 cup rolled oats
1 cup blueberries, fresh or frozen
1 Tbsp. maple syrup
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup unsweetened almond milk
½ tsp. sea salt
1 Tbsp. mixed seeds (sunflower, pumpkin, flax, etc.)
2 Tbsp. coconut flakes
2 Tbsp. almond butter

Directions

Soak oats in 1 cup water for 30 minutes, set aside and reserve liquid. To make compote, combine blueberries, syrup, lemon juice, and 1 Tbsp. water in a small saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat until bubbling, stirring occasionally. Remove and allow to cool.

In a separate saucepan, combine almond milk, salt and oats with reserved liquid. Cook over medium heat and stir constantly for 3-4 minutes until oats thicken. Spoon mixture into bowls. Top with blueberry compote, seeds, coconut flakes, and almond butter.

Serves 2

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The Personal Marketing Company
11511 W. 83rd Terrace
Lenexa, KS 66214