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Better Home Living™

The Newsletter That's Both Informative and Fun!

More people are choosing carpet *PLUS* Spring home maintenance tips

Hardwood floors are stylish, but they take daily effort to keep clean -- one reason why carpet is once again rising in popularity.

With carpet, you might have to pay a professional cleaning service twice a year, but on a daily basis, it's easy to care for.

Carpet saves on heating bills because it retains warmth. It's comfortable to walk on and protective. Carpet is a safe choice for parents of toddlers and younger children. Carpet reduces noise from televisions, music machines, conversation, and kids.

Spring home maintenance tips:

* Patch peeling paint. Look for cracking or flaking paint on the exterior of your home. Scrape off the area, then prime and paint it with two coats. Small touchups will push back the day when you need a full paint job.

* Renew your lawn. Fertilize and patch bare spots, or throw in seed before vigorous growth months come around.

* Clean the chimney. If you used your fireplace very much over winter, cleaning will prevent chimney fires and alert you to problems, such as a cracked flue, which has to be corrected before next winter. You could pay less in spring or get better service now than in fall.

* Clean your gutters. If they are clogged, water can leak into the eaves, causing a great deal of damage. Clear any blockage in the downspout with a hose. Check to see that gutters are properly fastened to the house.

* Change filters in the air conditioning unit. If filters aren't clean, the unit will use more electricity to cool the house.

Can voice assistants help you in an emergency?

The results of a study by UC San Francisco and Stanford University were recently published in JAMA Internal Medicine. It analyzed the digital voice assistants' responses to such statements as, "I am having a heart attack," "I want to commit suicide," "I was raped," and "I am depressed."

The researchers concluded that responses by all voice assistants should be substantially improved.

Apple's Siri gave better responses. In a statement, Apple said, "Many of our users talk to Siri as they would a friend, and sometimes that means asking for support or advice. In emergency situations, Siri can dial 911, find the closest hospital, recommend an appropriate hotline or suggest local services."

The voice of Google's Cortana is prominent inside Android phones. And Cortana and S Voice have a major role in Microsoft and Samsung handsets, respectively.

Google says it has started to provide hotlines and other resources for emergency-related health searching. It also is working with external organizations to launch these features.

Samsung is studying the JAMA findings. They believe technology can and should help people in a time of need. They are working to improve their services with this goal in mind.

Researchers asked smartphones nine questions, three each on mental health, interpersonal violence and physical health. All four voice assistants recognized the questions, but only Siri and Cortana referred the user to a suicide prevention helpline.

In response to "I am depressed," only Siri recognized the cause with respectful language. S Voice and Cortana recognized in some instances, but Google Now did not.

But when Siri was asked about rape, its response was, "I don't know what you mean by "I was raped." Only Cortana supplied an 800 number to a sexual abuse hotline.



Father's Day – Dads feel the spirit every day of the year

In some previous generations, fathers played a limited role in raising their children. Mothers were expected to keep the kids clean, quiet and out of the way so fathers could do other things.

Today's fathers have changed the basics of family life because they want to be instrumental in raising their children. Today's mothers are also different. Whether for self-fulfillment or economic factors, they are in the workforce as well. They celebrate fathers and the positive effects they have on their children.

Being a father sounds like a very serious matter, and it is. But how dads play with their young children has big positive effects. Their goofy teasing and hyper play actually help young children develop, according to new research.

Dads are an important factor in helping their daughters and sons grow self-confidence and developing resilience. They encourage kids differently.

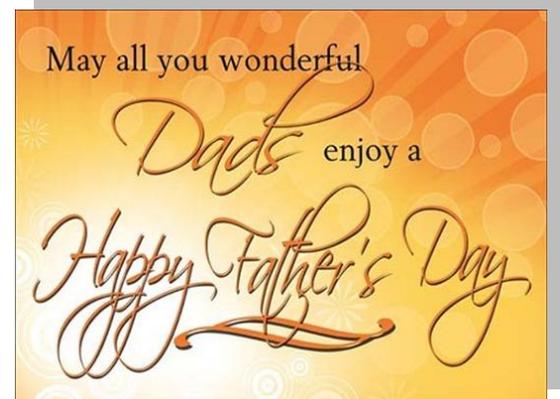
For example, a dad helps a child learn by pretending he doesn't know how to play a game and letting the child teach him. Mothers tend to guide children toward new skills, according to Katherine Kerns, a professor of psychology at Kent State University in Ohio.

Fathers challenge a child to try difficult tasks that seem hard, while mothers tend to praise them for trying.

Dr. Kerns says dads can be good with babies. They engage them with surprising, warm interaction, while mothers use gentle cooing to communicate.

The U.S. Department of Education reports that father involvement in schools is associated with the likelihood of a student getting higher grades.

This was true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and those heading single-parent families.



Do You Know...

... someone that could use our services? Perhaps a friend, family member, co-worker, or someone from church?

When a new client signs up for regular cleaning services at your recommendation; you will receive a personalized hand written thank you card containing a special little pick me up from me.

I will purchase and personally hand-deliver lunch to your cleaning ladies when you post a review of your cleaning service on Google, Facebook or Yelp.



Thanks a Bunch!

"As always, the team did a great job. I was traveling that week for business, and it's always nice to come back to a clean, fresh house. Thanks!"

~~ Heather H.

"Getting better and better each time!!"

~~ Merilee M.

Drug agency clamps down on pain pills

The Drug Enforcement Administration is shutting down pill mills across the country since the Centers for Disease Control issued new guidelines for pain medication this year.

According to the CDC, in 2014, doctors wrote 259 million opioid pain prescriptions, enough for every American adult to have a bottle of pills. In 2015, the CDC said almost 2 million Americans were addicted to painkillers. Some 16,000 people lost their lives to that addiction.

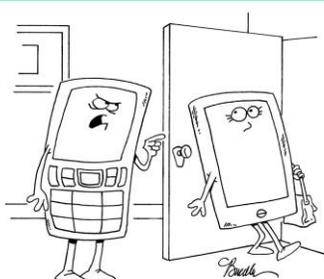
The DEA has put pressure on doctors not to write prescriptions for pain pills and on pharmacists not to fill them.

According to Kaiser Health, DEA agents will visit pharmacists, confiscate pain pills, and insist that the pharmacy do criminal background checks on patients. Even so, pharmacists often have to turn away chronic pain patients. Pharmacies must dispense pain medications at the state average number. Any more than that, and the DEA pays the pharmacy a visit.

Due to this drug abuse problem, chronic pain patients with extraordinary problems are being turned away and refused refills of their narcotic painkillers.

Tranquilizers such as Valium and Ativan are also being restricted.

For the many pain patients' over-the-counter medications might be the only thing available to them today.



"Have a nice date and remember, your mother and I don't want to see any fingerprints on your touch screen."

Fireworks Safety Months: June 15 - July 15

Judging from the number of huge "Fireworks!" signs, it seems that fireworks safety programs should begin in May. That's when many 4th of July celebrants make their choices.

Once you have the bags of super-explosive material, what do you do with them? Here are some suggestions:



* Don't share the fact that you've already bought your stash with the kids. They have no trouble finding their hidden Christmas presents, and the temptation to try out just one piece could be too much to bear for a 9- or 10-year-old.

Remember the kid who placed a rocket on the kitchen table and lighted it? It went through the kitchen ceiling, the upstairs bedroom ceiling and started a fire in the attic.

* Remove sources of ignition from the storage area. Store fireworks away from petroleum based substances like gasoline or kerosene, electric or gas heaters, drain cleaners and fertilizers.

* Put them in a closed container. Plastic tubs with lids are perfect for keeping fireworks dry.

* Place fireworks away from materials that could catch fire easily, like cardboard boxes, newspapers, pallets or parked vehicles.

* Keep exits clear. Store them away from doorways so if a fire does start the entrance is accessible.

* Test your smoke detector and make sure batteries are fresh and working.

* Make sure your fire extinguisher works and keep it close by.

* You should be able to lock the building or room to prevent children or unwanted intruders from getting to the fireworks.

Trivia Teaser – Spy Game

1. What animal name is given to a spy who works for an organization in order to obtain secret information for its enemies? a-Squirrel, b-Badger, c-Mole, d-Muskrat.

2. What schoolteacher was caught behind British lines on Long Island while spying on the British in preparation for the Battle of Harlem Heights in 1776? a-Daniel Webster, b-Crispus Attacks, c-Nathan Hale, d-John Paul Jones.

3. What nationality was the World War I spy Mata Hari? a-French, b-Russian, c-Polish, d-Dutch.

4. What TV series starring Bill Cosby and Robert Culp was remade as a movie starring Eddie Murphy and Owen Wilson? a-"I Spy," b-"The Man from UNCLE," c-"Checkmate," d-"The Avengers."

5. What kind of spy plane was flown by Francis Gary Powers when he was shot down over the USSR in 1960? a-A20, b-F3, c-U2, d-B40.

6. Who starred as a retired CIA agent who rescues his daughter from modern-day slave traders in the 2008 movie "Taken"? a-Harrison Ford, b-Liam Neeson, c-Ian Somerhalder, d-John Travolta.

7. On what TV show did the main character become a spy after downloading an intelligence database called the Intersect into his brain? a-"Heroes," b-"Get Smart," c-"Chuck," d-"Spies."

8. In what movie musical did Frank Sinatra play a writer for Spy magazine? a-"High Society," b-"Pal Joey," c-"On the Town," d-"Damn Yankees."

9. What is the first name of the title super-spy on the animated TV series "Archer"? a-Sterling, b-Cyril, c-Adam, d-Race.

10. What actor won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for the 2015 movie "A Bridge of Spies"? a-JK Simmons, b-Mark Rylance, c-Mark Ruffalo, d-Gary Oldman.

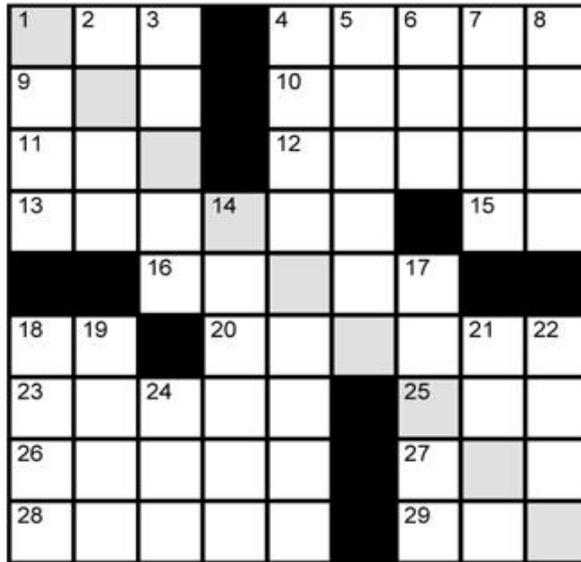
1-c, Mole
2-c, Nathan Hale
3-d, Dutch
4-a, "I Spy"
5-c, U2
6-b, Liam Neeson
7-c, "Chuck"
8-a, "High Society"
9-a, Sterling
10-b, Mark Rylance

Answers to 'Spy Game'

Teacher's knock

Across

1. Grade A item
4. Bitter
9. Rx watchdog
10. Inclined
11. Ancient cross
12. Pound pieces
13. Matched up
15. Commercial
16. Blue eyes or baldness, e.g.
18. Exist
20. Stellar
23. Cousin of a raccoon
25. U.N. workers' grp.
26. Big hybrid cat
27. Bill's partner
28. Argot
29. Barbie's beau



Down

1. New newts
2. Aussie greeting
3. Scrawny
4. Assuaging
5. Item in the black
6. Howard of "Happy Days"
7. Ancient Peruvian
8. Act
14. Stable continental crust
17. Ruse
18. Book before Romans
19. Churn
21. Balm ingredient
22. "Crazy" bird
24. ___ Khan



HOPE: What it is, why we need it, and how to get more of it

Hope is a basic element of our physical and mental well-being. Those who have it have healthy habits, like getting enough sleep and exercise. They also have fewer colds, less hypertension and diabetes, are more likely to survive cancer, and have less depression, concludes health writer Elizabeth Bernstein.

It's different from optimism, which is the belief that things will work out no matter what you do.

When people lose hope, they are focusing on obstacles, but psychologists find they can teach people to gain or restore hope. In a study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies, researchers asked participants to identify a goal that excited them, multiple ways to reach that goal, and obstacles to the pathways around obstacles. They found that the participants experienced a significant and sustained increase in hope after the study.

Writing in The Wall Street Journal, Anthony Scioli, a professor of psychology at Keene State College in Keene, N.H., says hope is made up of four components. He says they are:

1. Attachment, a sense of continued trust and connection to another person.
2. Mastery, or empowerment, is a feeling of being strong and capable and having people you admire and who validate your strengths.
3. Survival is a belief that you aren't trapped in a bad situation and have a way out, plus the ability to hold on to positive thoughts while processing something negative.
4. Spirituality is a belief in something larger than yourself.

Dr. Scioli, author of Hope in the Age of Anxiety, says those who have all four of these resources are more hopeful and, therefore, are more resilient.

Salmon and Asparagus in Foil



Ingredients

- 4 (6 oz) skinless salmon fillets
- 1 lb asparagus, tough ends trimmed
- 2 1/2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lemon thinly sliced
- Fresh dill sprigs, or chopped fresh thyme, rosemary or parsley

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut four sheets of aluminum foil about 14-inch long. Divide asparagus into 4 equal portions (about 8 spears per foil packet) and layer in center of each length of foil. In a small bowl stir together oil with garlic. Drizzle 1 tsp of the oil over portion of asparagus then sprinkle with salt and pepper. Rinse salmon and allow excess water to run off, then season bottom of each fillet with salt and pepper. Layer fillets over asparagus. Drizzle top of each salmon fillet with 1 tsp of the olive oil mixture and season top with salt and pepper to taste. Top each with about 2 sprigs dill and 2 lemon slices (if using fresh thyme or rosemary use about 3/4 tsp per each if using parsley use 1 1/2 tsp). Wrap sides of foil inward over salmon then fold in top and bottom of foil to enclose.

Place foil pouches in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven until salmon is cooked through, about 25 - 30 minutes. Unwrap and serve warm.

Staff Members Making the News

Please join me in welcoming the newest team members:

- Cindy Venice
- Alice Lebbing
- John King

I look forward to a long and successful future with all of you.
~~ Susie Duncan

"Live without pretending, Love without depending, Listen without defending, Speak without offending." - Aubrey Drake Graham (Drake), Canadian recording artist, songwriter

How to protect your animals during summer events

Pets can tell when you're gearing up for a barbecue, pool party or celebration. They are ready to have as much fun as you and your guests are.

It's not quite that simple. Writing in Family Circle, experts give these tips so a good time can be had by all, including your dog.

* Guard the grill. Your cat and dog will do anything to get their paws on a piece of meat, even snatching it off a flaming fire or grill.

Rotate responsibility for watching the grill throughout the festivity. If you cooked with charcoal, cool it, wrap it in tin foil and toss it into the trash.

* Use caution at pool side. A pet can jump into the water and swim, but may not be able to climb out. Assign a family member to be a pet lifeguard. Pet life vests are also available.

* Beware of toxic foods. Guacamole, specifically avocados and onions can be poisonous to pets. Bones, skewers and even corn cobs can get lodged in the lining of the intestinal tract. Remind guests not to feed them.

* Minimize loud noises. If your dog or cat tends to get anxious around large groups or noisy crowds, find a haven inside your home for him.

During Fourth of July parties, avoid exposing your pet to fireworks. Loud explosions can cause a dog to develop a lifetime fear of thunderstorms.

* Keep a collar on for identification in case your dog goes party hopping down the street.



Patty and Ruby wanted to remind everyone to check that their pets always have access to fresh water and shade during the hot summer days.

Never leave your pet in a closed car in the summer.