

Plato business offers full range of lawn and garden tools, docks and boat lifts

By Karin Ramige Publisher

t was beginning to look as if area residents wouldn't get a chance to mow lawns or put in docks and boat lifts.

Scott Eiden of Rec-Tech Outdoor Solutions in Plato is excited for the change in the weather and ready to help customers with their lawn and garden tools, dock or boat lift needs.

It wasn't a direct road into the lawn and garden equipment business for Eiden.

Eiden, a 2003 graduate of Glencoe-Silver Lake High School, officially started Rec- Tech Outdoor Solutions at its Plato location in November 2016.

After high school, Eiden worked as a heavy equipment operator in northern Minnesota for a couple of years. After he met his wife, Shannon, the couple decided to move back to the area.

He worked in construction for a number of years after moving back, which often included snow plowing jobs. One big challenge with plowing snow was getting parts for the plows.

Eiden said he would have to go to the metro area to find parts and often times had to wait for hours.

When construction slowed in 2011 and 2012, he began selling plows and parts through his dad Kevin's shop, ProAuto Transmission in Norwood Young America; they started selling Snow-Dogg and Western plows and parts.

They now have clients from the metro who like



Scott Eiden of Rec-Tech Outdoor Solutions

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the "small-town" service they can offer.

As the snow plow business grew, Eiden needed a "summer gig" and Rec-Tech added lawn mowers and garden tools.

It now carries a wide variety of Airens and Gravely lawn mowers and Markita hand tools.

Rec-Tech sells and services everything from push mowers to commerical zero-turn riding mowers, along with chain saws, hand trimmers, blowers and more.

Docks and Boat Lifts

While construction was slow, Eiden was helping a family member with dock and boat lift installation and removal in the summer and fall.

After driving through many homeowners' lawns, he had the idea to build a barge to assist the process from the lake side.

Eiden said the first year was a little "sketchy" working out all the bugs, but has been going smoothly since.

The company now builds and sells barges for other companies in the Midwest. It has sold barges in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and lowa.

Eiden's goal was to build and sell one barge a year, but Rec-Tech has been building around three a year and is currently working on its sev-

Besides building and selling barges and the dock and boat lift installation and removal services, Rec-Tech also sells Pier Pleasure and Hewitt docks and boat lifts.

Eiden says he likes anything to do with the outdoors and has created the perfect job and company for himself.

Eiden's wife Shannon, who has an in-home day care, and their two daughters Abby, 7, and Emma, 5, help out around the shop too.

Rec-Tech Outdoor Solutions is located at 200 Fourth Ave. SE in Plato (behind the gas station).













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Shade-tolerant plants help to complete landscapes

lants need sunlight to thrive and grow, but some need less sunlight than others. People who find their landscapes are less supportive to sun-loving plants can choose from a variety of shade-tolerant plants, shrubs and trees.

Shade tolerance refers to a plant's ability to withstand low levels of light. Certain plants have adapted this feature to survive in the wild. Plants that grow at the base of forest floors, for example, will get less sunlight than others outside of the tree canopy. Such adaptations enable a wide variety of foliage to grow even though they are not exposed to much sunlight.

While sun-loving plants often have broad leaves and expend significant energy to capture sunlight for photosynthesis, shade-tolerant plants expend less energy and tend to be more efficient consumers of soil nutrients and sunlight.

Penn State Extension's Plant and Pests division says the amount of shade a plant is growing under will directly affect the density of the foliage and the plant's flowering and fruiting characteristics. Blending shade-tolerant plants into the landscape can be an effective use of space. Before choosing plants for an existing landscape, it's important to assess the level of shade or sun the plants will receive.

· Heavy shade: Heavy shade is when no direct sunlight reaches a plant. This occurs at the base of northern-facing walls or beneath thick tree canopies.

· Full sun: Areas that receive full sun enjoy direct sunlight between six and eight hours per day.

 Moderate shade: These sites have reflected sunlight that may come off of water features.

· Light shade: Plants in these areas will get partially filtered or dappled sunlight.

Once homeowners understand which type of shade they are dealing with, they can then visit plant nurseries and select their plants. Most greenery comes with care instructions that include recommendations regarding the amount of shade/sunlight the plant will need to do well. If further assistance is needed, a knowledgeable employee can make suggestions based on landscape needs.

Those who are looking for some preliminary guidance when it comes to selecting shade-tolerant shrubs, plants or trees can consult the following list.

· Bleeding heart: Bleeding heart, or Dicentra spectabilis, is typically found in woodlands. It's a perennial in the poppy family that produces mounded foliage and arching vine-like stems of



Shade-tolerant plants, such as coleus, can add color and appeal to shady areas of a landscape.

heart-shaped flowers in the spring.

 Amethyst flower: Browallia hybrids offer starshaped blooms of blue and violet. These plants will billow out of hanging baskets or containers. and they prefer warm shade or filtered sunlight.

· Coleus: The coleus, Solenostemon scutellarioides, is another perennial that can have a variety of different leaf colors and striations.

· Witch hazels: These are a genus in the family Hamamelidacea, which has four different species in North America. This shrub or small tree features arching branches with dense, multi-stemmed clumps. Witch hazel produces flowers in the late autumn when most other plants are sparse.

 Bayberry: Myrica pensylvanica can grow in partial shade as a hedge or natural property divider. The leaves of this shrub are aromatic when crushed. The shrub will produce tiny, gray/white fruits in late summer.

 English Ivy: Also known as Hedera helix, this trailing plant is widely cultivated as an ornamental plant. It will spread easily and can become invasive.

Those searching for shade-tolerant trees can choose among Sugar maple, Black alder, Flowering dogwood, and White spruce, among oth-

Shade-tolerant plants can make welcome additions to the landscape, offering greenery and color in the darker areas of a property.

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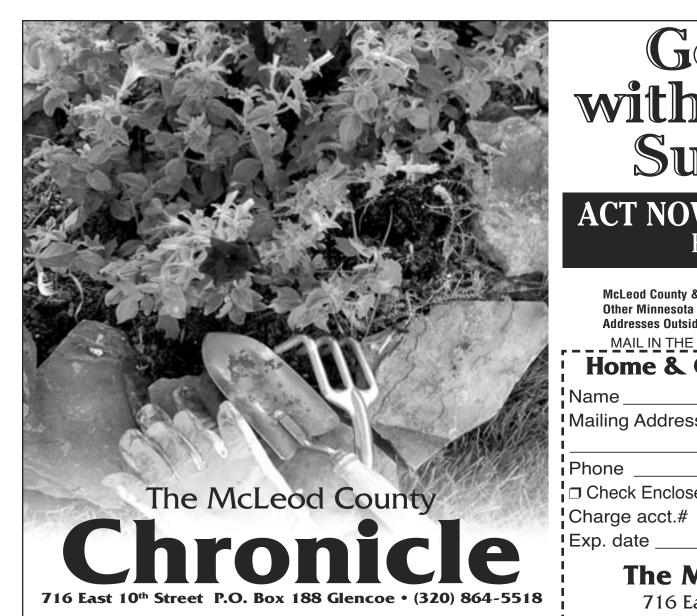




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Transform bathrooms with technology

echnology is infiltrating every room of the house. Many new home buyers are millennials, and this tech-savvy demographic covets technological innovations.

A recent survey by Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate indicates 77 percent of Generation X and Y home buyers want their homes equipped with the tech capabilities they have grown accustomed to. Many of these involve smart innovations, including those that can transform one of the most private rooms in the house — the bathroom.

Automated home theater rooms and Wi-Fi-enabled home security systems have become the norm, but what tech improvements are available to make the powder room more in touch with today's digital lifestyle? Bathrooms have the most potential of any rooms to be improved with technology. The following are just some of the bathroom gadgets and gizmos no one should resist before giving a try.

- · Automatic faucets: Infrared sensors have been helping keep public restrooms more hygienic for years. The same technology can be used in home bathrooms to curtail water waste and keep faucets and sinks from becoming infested with germs. In addition, faucets with builtin timers can be programmed to set tasks for brushing teeth or washing your face.
- Musical shower: Instead of having to blast the volume on the portable speaker you use in the bathroom, a wireless speaker is built into some showerheads. This enables those who like to sing in the shower or listen to podcasts while washing up to enjoy this luxury effortlessly.
- · Smarter weight management: Bathroom scales have gone high-tech as well, with various options enabling users to measure weight, BMI and body fat percentage before sending the data wirelessly to a phone, tablet or computer. This can put you in greater control of fitness goals.



 High-tech toilets: Borrowing ideas from bidets and trends around the world, modern toilets do not require hands or paper. These toilets have temperature-controlled water, spritzing wands and air dryers to clean and sanitize. Self-cleaning toilets help busy professionals save time and are ideal for those who always want their bowls as clean as possible. And if you desire extra comfort, toilet seat warmers are available, while LED lights can make nighttime restroom visits easier.

Soaking tubs: As fast as stand-alone showers

were introduced to the modern bathroom, tubless designs have been replaced with streamlined soaking tubs. Tubs come with different features, including chromatherapy, which employs colored lights to enhance mood. Air baths are controlled electronically and provide different levels of sensation for those who are skipping the hot tub.

Round out these innovations with automated lights, chilled medicine cabinets and aromatherapy, and your bathroom will indeed become a technological spa.

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3 ways to use your lawn to improve curb appeal

eturns on home improvement projects vary. In its annual Cost vs. Value Report, Remodeling magazine notes the projects that yield the best returns on investment in a given year. But a host of factors, including the type of market (buyers' or sellers') and the region where the home is being sold, ultimately combine to determine if homeowners' investments in home improvement projects will provide the returns they were hoping for.

Though there's no way of guaranteeing a home improvement project will yield a great return, real estate professionals often cite improving curb appeal as an excellent way to attract prospective buyers and potentially get the asking price or more when selling the home. Improving curb appeal makes even more sense in today's real estate market, when many people do their own searching via real estate websites. When using sites, buyers will likely be less inclined to click on a listing if exterior photos of the property are not eye-catching.

Various projects, including tending to lawns and gardens, can improve curb appeal. An added benefit to focusing on landscaping to improve curb appeal is it promotes spending time outdoors in spring and summer. In addition, many lawn- and garden-related home improvement projects need not require professional expertise.

1. Maintain a lush green lawn.

Lawns that fall into disrepair may not give buyers a correct impression about how homeowners maintained their homes. Lawns with multiple dead spots and grass that appears more brown than green may lead many buyers to assume that the home's interior was equally ill-cared for. Maintaining lush green lawns is not as difficult as it may seem. Applying fertilizer and aerating at the appropriate times of year (this varies by region) can promote strong roots and healthy soil, making it easier for grass to survive harsh conditions like drought. When watering in summer, do so in early morning or evening so as little water is lost to evaporation as possible.

2. Address brown patch.

Even well-maintained lawns can fall victims to brown spots. Lawns in regions with hot tempera-





tures and high humidity can be infected with brown patch, a common lawn disease that is caused by fungus, which can produce circular areas of brown, dead grass surrounded by narrow, dark rings. Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences notes that removing dew that collects on grass leaves each morning, which can be accomplished by mowing or dragging a water hose across affected areas, can be an effective way to reduce brown patch. Homeowners without much lawn care experience can consult professional landscapers to address the issue. But those looking to sell their properties should note that buyers often walk the grounds of homes they are considering buying. So addressing any issues on the lawn should be a priority for sellers.

3. Confine dogs to certain areas.

Dog owners may want to let their pets roam free in their yards. But homeowners about to put their properties up for sale may want to confine their four-legged friends to certain areas. That's because dog urine can be high in nitrogen. Nitrogen itself is not harmful to lawns, but in high concentrations it can contribute to yellow or brown spots. Also, highly acidic dog urine may even adversely affect pH levels in the soil.

Curb appeal can go a long way toward helping homeowners sell their homes, and a lush lawn can be used to catch the eye of prospective buy-



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Avoid aches and pains when gardening

eople who have not spent much time in a garden may not consider this rewarding hobby much of a threat to their health. But as veteran gardeners can attest, gardening can contribute to nagging aches and pains that can force even the most ardent green-thumbers indoors.

Gardening is a physical activity that, despite its peaceful nature, can be demanding on the body. Thankfully, there are several ways that gardening enthusiasts can prevent the aches and pains that can sometimes pop up after long days in the garden.

 Use ergonomic gardening tools. Ergonomic gardening tools are designed to prevent the types of aches, pains and injuries that can cut gardeners' seasons short. Gardening injuries can affect any area of the body, but injuries or aches and pains affecting the back, wrists and hands are among the most common physical problems gardeners endure. Look for ergonomic tools that reduce the strain on these areas of the body. Even arthritis sufferers who love to garden may find that ergonomic tools make it possible for them to spend more time in their gardens without increasing their risk for injury.

· Alternate tasks. Repetitive-strain injuries can affect gardeners who spend long periods of time performing the same activity in their gardens. By alternating tasks during gardening sessions, gardeners can reduce their risk of suffering repetitive strain injuries. Alternate tasks not just on muscle groups worked, but also level of difficulty. Remember to include some simple jobs even on busy gardening days so the body gets a break.

 Take frequent breaks. Frequent breaks can help combat the stiffness and muscle aches that



may not appear until gardeners finish their gardening sessions. Breaks help to alleviate muscles or joints that can become overtaxed when gardening for long, uninterrupted periods of time. When leaning down or working on your hands and knees, stand up to take breaks every 20 minutes or the moment aches and pains start to make their presence felt.

· Maintain good posture. Back injuries have a tendency to linger, which can keep gardeners indoors and out of their gardens. When gardening, maintain good posture to prevent back injuries.

Gardening back braces can protect the back by providing support and making it easier for gardeners to maintain their posture. Tool pouches attached to gardening stools or chairs also can be less taxing on the back than gardening belts tied around the waist.

Gardening might not be a contact sport, but it can cause pain if gardeners do not take steps to prevent the onset of muscle aches and strains when spending time in their gardens.









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