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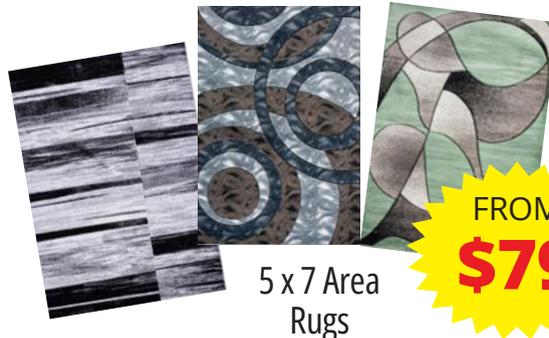
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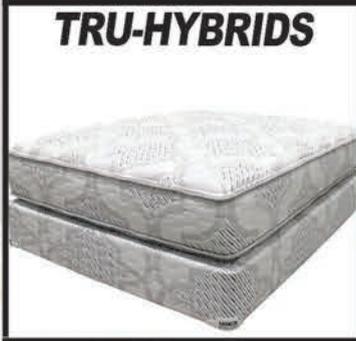
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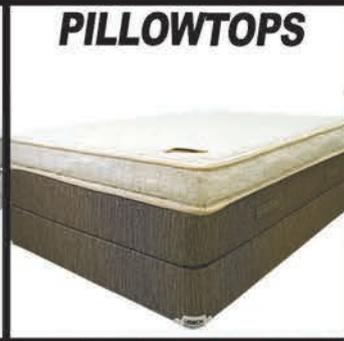
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HOMEIMPROVEMENT

How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to



establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

- Refresh the landscape. Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accom-

modates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes

can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape ar-

chitect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that

affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

- Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible. Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy alfresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

- Add a water feature. Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

- Don't forget shade. Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

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Tips to overcome seasonal allergies

Spring and summer are typically welcomed with open arms. Warm weather, blooming flowers and trees full of leaves are a welcome sight for many, but seasonal allergy sufferers may find the transition from winter to spring a little more challenging.

The Center for Health Statistics found that just under 26 percent of adults and roughly 19 percent of children have a seasonal allergy. Treatments for seasonal allergies can be effective, and many people find over-the-counter medications are enough to alleviate their symptoms. But even people who take OTC medications daily may have days when seasonal allergies cause considerable discomfort. In such situations, allergy sufferers can consider these strategies.

- **Identify your triggers.** The American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology notes that pollen is the most common outside allergy trigger. Trees and grasses typically pollinate in spring and summer, which is why these seasons can be especially challenging for people with seasonal allergies. Dustmites and



pets might trigger allergies indoors, but these can appear throughout the year. A visit to an allergist can determine what exactly triggers seasonal allergies. For example, certain types of grasses and trees might

be triggers for some but not others. Identifying triggers is an effective first step because it can compel people to avoid the things that cause allergic reactions.

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days. The Mayo Clin-

ic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors on dry, windy days, when pollen can be nearly impossible to avoid.

- Take advantage of a good rain. The Mayo Clinic advises that the best time for

seasonal allergy sufferers to be outside is after a good rain. Rain helps to clear pollen from the air, so post-rain conditions can be ideal for people with seasonal allergies.

- Change your clothes

and wash up upon coming inside. The ACAAI recommends changing clothes, washing them and taking a shower upon coming inside during allergy season. Washing clothes and taking a shower reduces the likelihood that you'll spread pollen around the interior of your home, where it can attach to furniture and trigger allergic reactions.

- **Monitor the pollen count.** As noted, pollen is a seasonal allergy trigger, so allergy sufferers are urged to monitor the pollen count via a website such as Pollen.com, where visitors can type in their ZIP code and get an up-to-date allergy report. On days when the pollen count is high, stay indoors and keep windows closed so the pollen does not get inside. The Mayo Clinic notes that pollen counts tend to be highest in morning, so it's best to avoid being outside during this time of day.

Seasonal allergies can make spring and summer more challenging. A few simple strategies can help people control their seasonal allergies even on days when pollen counts are particularly high.

Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores

of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during wintertime when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive

over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that

feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property.

The following are various types of feeders to consider.

Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, goldfinches, and cardinals, among others.

Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste

and cater to the small beaks of finches.

Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and blackbirds.

Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

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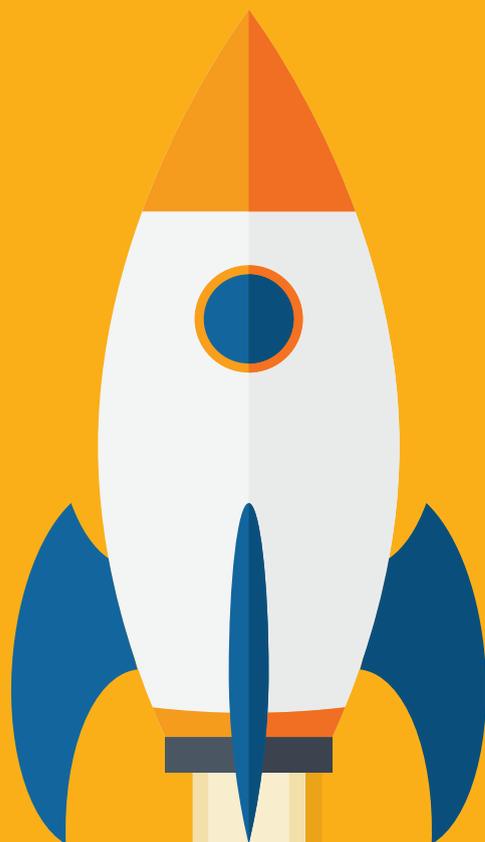
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The City of Cedar Falls Operations and Maintenance Division is accepting application materials for a year-round (up to 29 hrs./wk.) **Maintenance Worker** with primary assignment to the Refuse Section but will be utilized throughout the Division as needed. Typical hours will range from 7:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Mon-Fri. with an occasional Saturday. The current pay range is \$25,599 - \$31,416 and the position is eligible for approved union contract and step pay increases. Part-time benefits include pro-rated holidays, vacation, and bereavement, tuition reimbursement, wellness, and retirement plans.

This position includes a variety of general maintenance and construction duties including the operation of automated and semi-automated refuse collection, recycling, transfer station, street, and water reclamation equipment such as dump trucks, snowplows, end loaders, skid steer loaders, and other Public Works equipment for related duties.

Candidates must have completed the 10th grade, or equivalent, and have a combination of experience and training to provide the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the duties of the position. These include, but are not limited to, knowledge of safety practices and precautions necessary to operate mechanized equipment; skill and ability to positively interact with the public; and the ability to: operate equipment, hand and power tools, perform manual labor requiring physical strength and endurance, complete maintenance and construction, understand and effectively carry out oral and written instructions, and develop the skills necessary for the maintenance and operation of assigned equipment.

Individuals must also have a valid driver's license, good driving record, be 18 years old for DOT licensing, and possess (or ability to obtain/maintain) the appropriate Commercial Driver's License (CDL) within six months of employment is also required. The individual selected is also subject to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Clearinghouse queries, driver's license and driving record reviews, and DOT random drug and alcohol screenings. Successful completion of a post-offer, pre-employment background, physical, and drug screen are also required for the individual selected.

For consideration, complete an employment application from www.cedarfalls.com/jobs and submit to jobs@cedarfalls.com OR obtain from Cedar Falls City Hall and mail/deliver to: City of Cedar Falls, Finance & Business Operations Dept, Attn: PT Maintenance Worker, 220 Clay Street, Cedar Falls, IA 50613. Proof of relevant certifications, licensures, etc. is encouraged at the time of application. Deadline for materials is Monday, March 23rd at 4:30 p.m.



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

HELP WANTED

PART-TIME DEPUTY CITY CLERK, CITY OF JANESVILLE, IA

The City of Janesville, Iowa (population 1,034), is accepting applications for a part-time Deputy City Clerk. Duties include assisting with city records, council meeting minutes, utility billing, accounts payable/receivable, payroll, and general office support.

Minimum Qualifications: High school diploma or equivalent required; strong computer and organizational skills; ability to maintain confidentiality and work independently. Book-keeping or municipal experience preferred.

Pay based on experience.

To apply, submit resume and references to: Janesville City Hall, PO Box 146, Janesville, IA, 50647, cityclerk@janesvilleia.com. Position open until filled.

The City of Janesville is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

NOW HIRING

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

PART-TIME



The City of Cedar Falls is accepting application materials for a part-time **Administrative Assistant** to work 25-29 hrs./wk., Mon-Fri. Scheduled work hours to be discussed. The hourly rate will be \$19.604, depending on qualifications, and is anticipated to increase to \$22.977 in July 2026. The position is eligible for annual performance increases and part-time benefits including pro-rated holidays, sick leave, vacation, tuition reimbursement, bereavement, wellness, and retirement plans.

This position is part of an administrative team that supports the clerical, special projects, and digital imaging needs of staff within various city departments; performs a wide range of financial recordkeeping, records management, and clerical duties; and may be cross trained/reassigned as needed. Duties may include word processing, spreadsheets, scheduling, data entry, issuing various permits and licenses, accounts payable, cash receipts, payroll entry, filing, document imaging, responding to public requests, and providing customer service in person and on the phone.

High school diploma or equivalent supplemented with specialized training in clerical/secretarial, financial, accounting, or bookkeeping procedures and practices are required. Please indicate this training on the application form. Candidates must also have at least one-year experience of a combination of secretarial/administrative/clerical and bookkeeping with significant public contact, including experience with computer data entry, word processing, and spreadsheet applications. Strong organizational skills and attention to detail preferred. Post-offer, pre-employment background, physical, and drug screen will be required for the selected candidate.

For consideration, apply online at www.cedarfalls.com/jobs (preferred) OR print and complete an application from the above link and email to jobs@cedarfalls.com or provide to Cedar Falls City Hall by mailing or delivering to: City of Cedar Falls, Finance & Business Operations Dept., Attn: PT Administrative Assistant, 220 Clay Street, Cedar Falls, IA 50613. A resume and proof of relevant certifications or licensures are also encouraged at the time of application. The deadline for materials is Monday, March 16th at 4:30 p.m.



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

NOW HIRING

RECREATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

PART-TIME



The City of Cedar Falls is accepting application materials for a part-time **Recreation Program Coordinator**. The hourly starting rate will be \$29.726 and expected work hours will be 24-29 per week, to be determined with the selected candidate. The position is eligible for annual performance-based increases and part-time benefits, including pro-rated holidays, vacation, and sick leave, tuition reimbursement, bereavement, wellness, and retirement plans.

Duties will include overseeing, coordinating, and managing Recreation Center activities, programs, and special events within the Community Development department for continual improvement; preparing and monitoring social media, website and applications communications, social programming events, and facility marketing materials, including news releases, event schedules, and printed materials; hiring, supervising, and evaluating part-time and seasonal staff within assigned programs; and performing a variety of administrative and professional tasks in support of the Recreation & Community Programs Manager and assigned area of responsibility.

Two years of experience in recreation programs and services, high school diploma (or equivalent), and possession of, or ability to obtain, CPR and First Aid certifications. Candidates must have the ability to: learn specialized software for program registration, membership management, and point of sale transactions and computer applications for social media and web communications; operate office equipment including computers, phones, etc.; and interact with the public from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Strong organizational, communication skills and detail orientation preferred. Post-offer, pre-employment background, physical, and drug screen will be required for the selected candidate.

For consideration, apply online at www.cedarfalls.com/jobs (preferred) OR print and complete an application from the above link and email to jobs@cedarfalls.com or provide to Cedar Falls City Hall by mailing or delivering to: City of Cedar Falls, Finance & Business Operations Dept., Attn: PT Recreation Program Coordinator, 220 Clay Street, Cedar Falls, IA 50613. A resume and proof of relevant certifications or licensures are also encouraged at the time of application. Deadline for materials is Monday, March 23rd at 12:00 p.m.



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For more information on how to adopt Gabi, visit CedarBendHumane.org or call

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Accepting Equipment Now by appointment

Open: March 16th to 25th - Monday to Friday 8:00AM-5:00PM

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Must be to lot by 5:00 Wednesday, March 25th.

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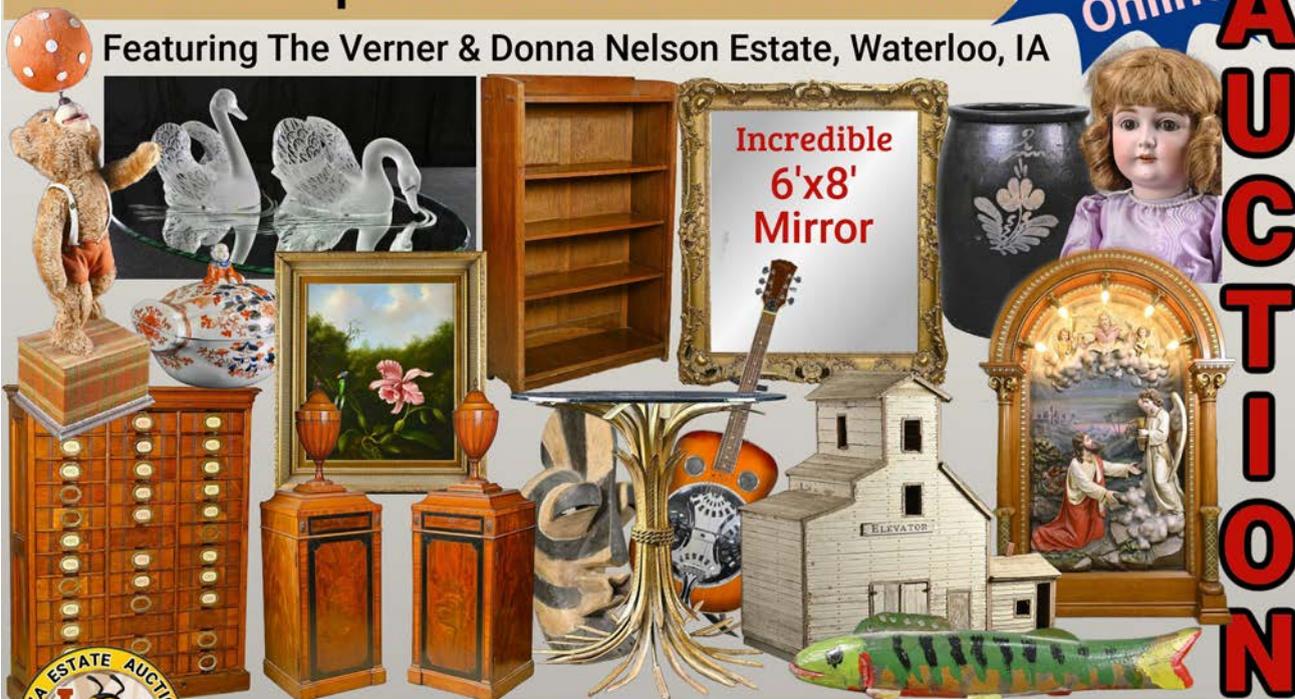
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Seven fun ways to celebrate St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year on March 17. The day honors St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, but it's also a celebration of Irish culture. Although St. Patrick's Day is celebrated around the world by people who can trace their lineage to the Emerald Isle, millions more with no such heritage join in the festivities each year. That means anyone who is Irish or just Irish in spirit can take part in St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

There are many entertaining ways to commemorate this special day. Here are a few to get the

party started.

1. Eat green foods. Green is a prominent color for St. Patrick's Day and Ireland in general. Many people eat foods and consume beverages dyed green on March 17.

2. Bake soda bread. Everyone can take part in the kitchen whipping up a batch of delicious Irish Soda Bread. This is a great recipe for kids because there's no need to wait for dough to rise. Baking soda is the "soda" in the recipe and serves as the leavening agent.

3. Take part in a parade. St. Patrick's Day parades are held in major cities

across the country, making it relatively easy for people to be there in person. However, many communities also host parades that are small in scale but still big on fun.

4. Attend an Irish dancing demonstration. Irish dance is a traditional dance that originated in Ireland. It is known for its intricate footwork and minimal upper-body movement.

5. Dine the Irish way. Although corned beef and cabbage is often served on St. Patrick's Day, it is not the most authentic Irish fare one can eat. Find a restaurant that serves Irish

stew, Boxy, Colcannon, or Black and white pudding, or try making such dishes at home.

6. Host a scavenger hunt. See who can find the gold at the base of the rainbow. Pick a person to organize the scavenger hunt. This person can write the clues and hide the prize.

7. Listen to Irish music. Tune in to The Chieftains, The Dubliners, Planxty, The Gloaming, The Wolfe Tones, and others to get into a festive spirit.

Enjoy the scores of different ways to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

Is laughter good for your health?

The adage "laughter is the best medicine" certainly suggests that a good laugh is good for one's health. Although laughter might not mend a broken wrist or eradicate every disease, UCLA Health notes a number of surprising physiological and mental benefits of a good laugh. Here are a handful of ways laughter can impact the mind and body.

- Reduces stress: Laughter significantly lowers levels of cortisol and epinephrine. The Physiological Society says one study found that even a single laughter session can reduce cortisol levels by nearly 37 percent.

- Boosts immunity: Laughing can increase the production of antibodies



ies and activates Natural Killer cells, which help the body fight off viruses and even some tumor cells, indicates Provida Family Medicine.

- Pain relief: By triggering the release of endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers,

laughter can ease pain. The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs says patients in clinical trials who watched comedies reported a higher pain tolerance and required less medication than those who did not watch such programming.

- Ease anxiety and de-

pression: Laughter can stimulate the release of dopamine and serotonin. Researchers at Harvard University say that laughter stimulates the reward centers of the brain. This makes a person feel happy in the moment and helps build long-term emotional resilience as well.

- Perspective change: It is hard to feel amused and anxious at the same time. So laughing can provide a change of attitude and perspective. It also can provide a necessary emotional reset.

Laughing may not cure everything that ails a person, but it certainly can provide many health benefits.



Easter-themed cupcakes make a great treat for youngsters

Easter is widely characterized as the holiest day of the year on the Christian calendar. Faith features prominently in modern Easter celebrations, which also include some secular traditions, particularly in families with young children. The Easter bunny and Easter egg hunts are not necessarily the focal point of Easter for adult Christians, but children greatly enjoy these traditions.

It's customary to give young children a basket of treats on Easter Sunday. Though store-bought treats are easy to come by, homemade items can be even more special. This recipe for Easter-themed "Vanilla Cupcakes" from Lines+Angles, is sure to get a laugh out of youngsters, who also won't mind taking a bite or two of these tasty treats.

Vanilla Cupcakes Makes 12 cupcakes

For the cupcakes:
4 ounces butter
1/2 cup sugar
2 eggs, beaten
1/4 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the grass:
4 1/2 ounces unsalted butter
1 1/3 cup icing sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon milk
Green food coloring

To decorate:
11 ounces white sugarpaste/
fondant
4 ounces pink sugarpaste/
fondant
Icing sugar
Mini sugar eggs

1. For the cupcakes: Heat the oven to 375 F. Place paper cupcake liners in a 12-serving muffin tin.

2. Beat the butter and

sugar in a mixing bowl until light and fluffy.

3. Gradually beat in the eggs, beating until fully incorporated into the mixture.

4. Sift in the dry ingredients and gently stir into the mixture. Stir in the milk and vanilla until blended.

5. Spoon the mixture into the paper liners. Bake for about 20 minutes, until golden. Cool in the tin for 5 minutes, then place on a wire rack to cool completely.

6. For the grass: Beat the butter until soft. Sift in the icing sugar and beat until smooth. Beat in the vanilla and milk until blended. Reserve about 2 tablespoons of buttercream and set aside.

7. Beat the food coloring into the larger amount of buttercream.

8. Spoon into a piping bag with a grass nozzle. Pipe on top of the cupcakes, starting at the outside edge and working in circles, pulling up and away when a buttercream strand is long enough.

9. Roll pieces of white sugarpaste into 12 medium balls for the bodies and 24 small thick rectangles for the paws. Reserve some white sugarpaste.

10. Brush the paws lightly with a little water and attach to the bodies (see photo).

11. Roll 12 small balls and 72 tiny balls of pink sugarpaste. Cut the larger balls in half and press into oval shapes. Brush lightly with water and attach to the paws. Attach 3 tiny balls to each paw with a little water.

12. Put the reserved buttercream into a piping bag with a grass nozzle and pipe a 'tail' on each bunny.

13. Arrange the sugar eggs on the cupcakes.

14. Roll out the sugarpaste trimmings separately on a surface dusted with icing sugar and cut out flowers (as in the photo) and place on the cupcakes.

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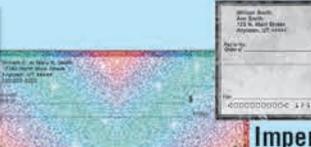
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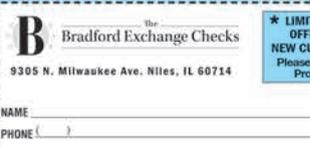
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