

Tropical touches

(NC) - Here are some great ideas for adding a tropical touch to your home.

For instance, you can warm up your porch by placing two six-foot eureka palms in wicker baskets on each side of your front door. You can also bring a little bit of the Bahamas to your patio, porch or balcony brilliant white. Use exterior oil paint

on woods, and porch and floor enamel for other surfaces. Accessorize furniture with pastel-coloured pillows and fabrics.

Bring the romantic mood of a moonlit night in Cancun to your patio by hanging hurricane lanterns overhead. Fill the bottoms with sand and place a white pillar candle inside. Complete the setting by recreating the



sounds of a Caribbean waterfall. Simply mount a wall fountain near the sitting area on the patio. The sound of cascading water will also drown out the noises of the city.

Add a touch of Barbados by displaying tropical flowers outdoors. When entertaining, create a dramatic table centrepiece in a

clear acrylic vase. First add smooth pebbles, then small seashells to the vase. Fill it with water, then add the flowers.

Transform your backyard into a Hawaiian Lou-au with tiki torches. Wire fresh, tropical flowers to the base of the bamboo torch, making sure they are below the flame. Place the torches in your yard or along a walkway, inviting guests to explore the garden.

Place a natural sisal area rug on your patio. This will not only provide a casual look and massage your feet with every step, it will also recreate the feeling of walking on dried, sun-bleached grass near the seaside. For another effective patio floor treatment, try Mexican tile. Create a grid pattern on raw concrete using a chalk line. Then, using concrete stain in terra-cotta colours, hand-paint your mosaic masterpiece.

If you have a covered patio or balcony, install an inexpensive wooden or rattan ceiling fan and spray it white to recreate the feeling of a Caribbean villa.

Finish off your tropical haven with a white rope hammock. Pile it high with down-filled pillows in vibrant colours. Use durable exterior fabrics so the sun won't bleach them. Then grab a tropical punch, put your feet up... and relax.

Water saving techniques for the garden

(NC) - Water resources are strained each spring and summer by increased demand in many parts of the country. In fact, it has been estimated that up to half of the water used in the summer goes onto lawns and gardens. One way to reduce water use in your backyard is to use rain barrels to capture and supplement your normal water supply. Another approach is to conserve water used during gardening.

Try the following tips and techniques for conserving water this spring and summer:

- Mulch exposed soil to reduce evaporation and water run-off.
- As much as possible, avoid growing water loving plants in naturally dry climates.
- Use drought-tolerant plants on south facing slopes.
- Water early in the morning to help reduce evaporation.
- Build small soil ridges around water-loving plants to help trap water.
- Consider using a drip irrigation system.
- Plant trees as windbreaks.
- Increase organic matter content of the soil by adding compost or manure.
- If you do water your lawn, water it heavily once a week rather than a small amount each day.

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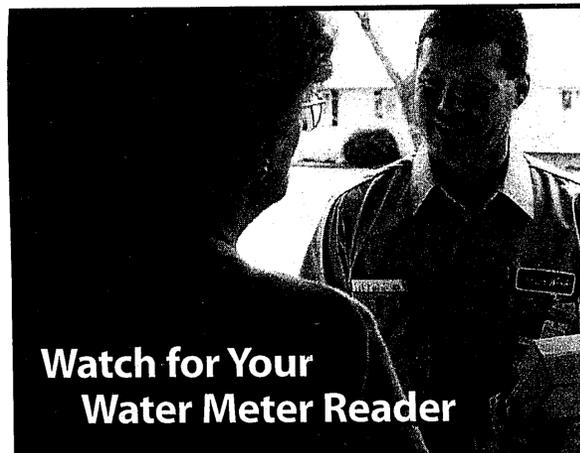
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