

# Environmentally friendly garden suggestions

This article is provided by local Realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.

Is your garden being ravaged by insects or disease? If you're not sure, check for telltale signs. If the leaves of your plants have tiny punctures or appear to be mottled or unusually colored, you could have a problem on your hands.

But before you trot off to the potting shed or gardening store to grab a can of chemical pesticide, you may want to consider trying a natural or more "environ-

tally friendly" way of combatting the problem. Although natural methods may require a little more diligence on your part, there is a payoff - you won't be exposing yourself or the environment to chemicals.

An organic approach to gardening is also something the whole family can take part in and enjoy.

You can learn about companion planting, natural predators and how to make your own soil booster. And you won't have to worry about periodically restricting your family's use of the garden or yard as a result of chemical spraying.

## WHERE TO START

Whether you choose an organic approach or a traditional chemical approach, gardening experts agree that it is essential to start out with good, healthy soil. Good soil will encourage strong, steady growth.

In lieu of traditional commercial fertilizers, try using compost. Compost is a rich, natural soil booster that you can make yourself by collecting leaves, grass clippings and kitchen table scraps in a composter and letting them break down into a dark soil-like substance rich in nutrients.

Fish emulsion, fish meal and

blood and bone meal are other possible soil enhancers which you may want to try. Check with your gardening store for more information about these and other additives.

## DISEASE-RESISTANT

Gardening authorities also recommend using disease-resistant varieties of plants. Ideally, plants showing signs of disease should be removed, before the problem has a chance to spread.

You should also keep your garden free of weeds and debris - they tend to attract insects. Like diseased plants, weeds should be

removed before they have a chance to take hold. Left unheeded, they multiply at an alarming rate, so keep a watchful eye on your garden.

You can pull most weeds by hand, but for large infestations, you may want to try hoeing. When doing this however, be very careful not to accidentally pull out any plants.

Mulch can also be used around plants to prevent weed growth. A number of different substances can be used, such as wood chips, crushed stones, straw, plastic or even newspapers. Mulch also helps keep the soil beneath it moist.

## INSECT CONTROL

You can control insects to some degree by removing them by hand as soon as you see them. Using traps is another method. Traps can be made by simply placing two wooden boards together (make sure to leave a tiny space in between). At night, many types of insects (especially earwigs) will burrow into the space between the planks; the next morning you can shake them into a pail of soapy water. Some people even put out small dishes of beer to attract and control earwigs.

You can also try hosing insects off of your plants. But be sure to use enough water pressure to knock them off.

A homemade insecticide is another option; try adding two tablespoons of soap flakes to a litre of water and applying the solution with a watering can.

Birds also provide a good form of insect control. However, you'll have to make sure you have the right flowers and trees to attract them. You may want to put out bird feeders as an extra incentive.

## COMPANION PLANTING AND BENEFICIAL INSECTS

Another method of keeping pests at bay is companion planting. Try incorporating herbs such as basil, chives, garlic, sage and onions into your garden. You can also plant flowers like chrysanthemums and marigolds with your vegetables - they should help repel insects.

Beneficial insects (predatory or parasitic) are also helpful in waging war on unwanted pests.

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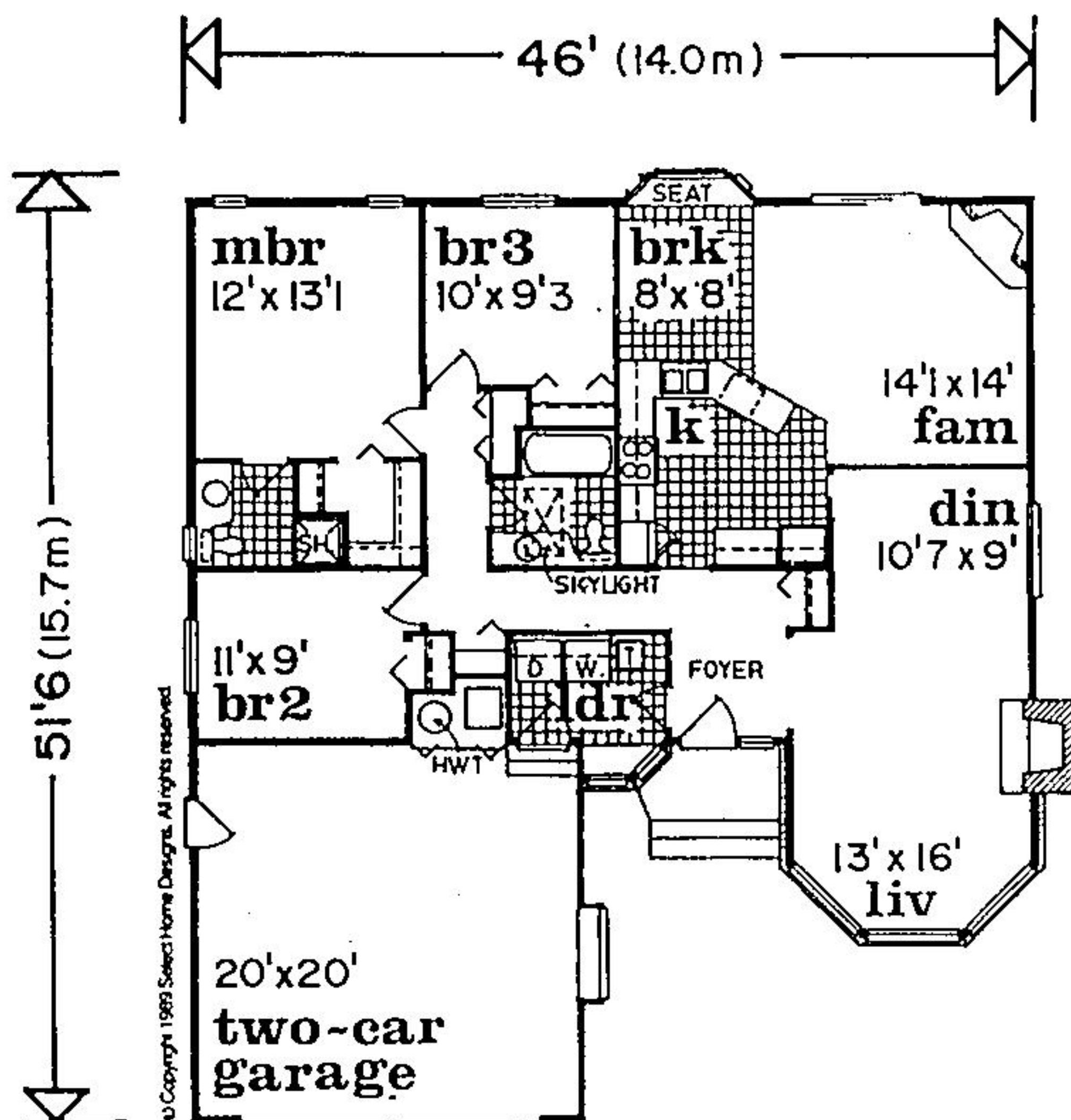
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