

It's a concrete fact

Good-looking driveways are easy

No matter how well you embellish your home and yard this spring, a nasty-looking driveway can make all of your work look unfinished. While it may take some elbow grease and careful preparation, your driveway, garage floor and other concrete can look great again without the cost of replacement.

Driveways mostly come in two styles, concrete or asphalt. Let's start with asphalt, a popular driveway medium due to its perseverance and cost, but one that needs regular maintenance. For a new asphalt driveway, the best advice is to leave it alone for a little while. Newly laid asphalt needs time to cure, usually about 90 days. During that time, the less traffic on it, the better. Even though the surface is "ready" in a day or two, parking your SUV on the same spot on new asphalt may cause depressions, which will lead to cracking.

After the 90-day period, the asphalt must be sealcoated. This makes the surface non-porous, and will make snow and ice removal easier, too. To keep up the look of the driveway and ensure its resistance to the elements, it should be re-sealcoated every two to three years. While oil stains tend to be masked on asphalt, stains like paint present a problem. Don't bother trying to scrub asphalt; the only recourse is to add another topcoat of sealant to recapture its previous glossy look.

Finally, if the asphalt begins cracking, get a filling compound as soon as possible. When cracks are exposed to rain, sun and heat, the problem spreads quickly. Keep the compound handy to fill cracks

as soon as you notice them.

Concrete is possibly more forgiving with stains than asphalt, and there are tried and true methods of stain removal. For newer oil stains, try a mixture of half commercial laundry detergent and half dry portland cement. Wet the stain with water, pour on the mixture and work it in with a hard-bristle scrub brush until it forms a thick paste. Let it sit for three to five minutes, and then scrub for a minute longer, adding more water if necessary (never let the paste dry out!). Hose off the paste completely, and repeat if necessary. Don't use a wire brush on the concrete, as metal fragments may become embedded, leading to future rust spots.

For stains from crabapple and berry trees, a mixture of plain warm water and laundry detergent, with plenty of scrubbing, should do the trick. New paint spills will often come up with household scouring powder and water, but old set oil paint spills may require a soaking in hydrogen peroxide and benzol. Mold and mildew stains usually disappear from concrete with a solution of one part household bleach to three parts warm water.

Of course, you can go one step better than just a cleaning, and stain your cement to complement the colors of your house. Concrete stains are made from inorganic salt compounds, which, when mixed with water and applied, soak into the concrete adding color that won't fade or flake. Usually found in black, brown tones and some blues and greens, they are relatively inexpensive at around \$50 per gallon.

—By Daniel Aspell, special



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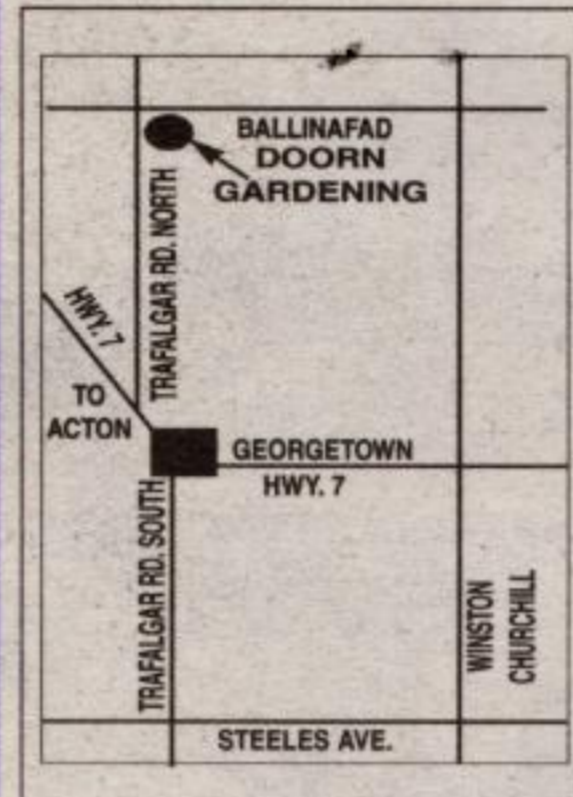
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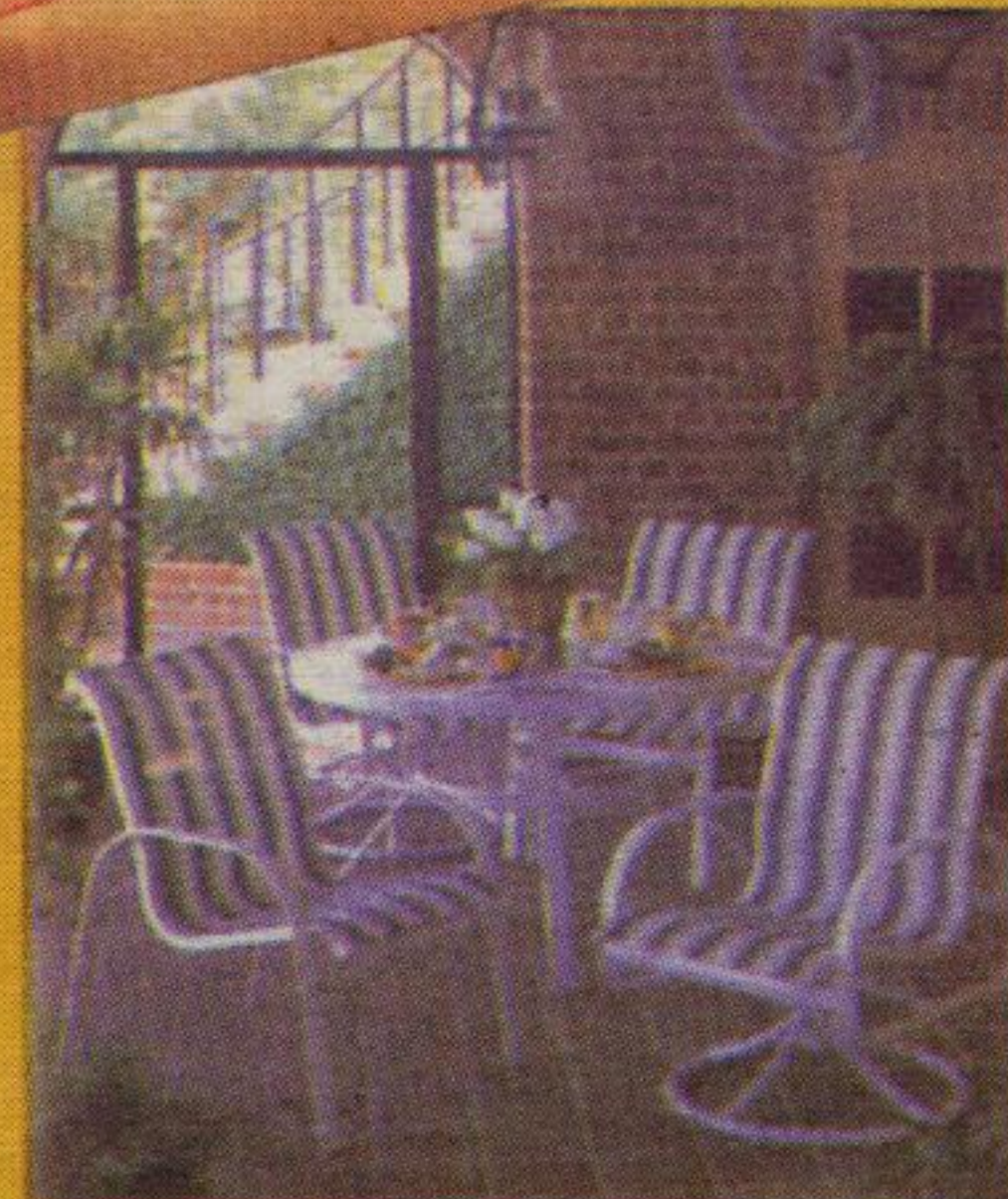
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