

hp HOME & GARDEN

A true-blue perennial

Of the perennials in my landscape, one of my favorites is plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbagnoides*). This great perennial groundcover has deep true-blue flowers and blooms from summer into fall.

It can grow well in both sun and shade and prefers well-drained soils. Plumbago is also drought tolerant and resistant to deer feeding on the plants. It is useful as a groundcover to control erosion on slopes and can also be used in rock gardens.

Plumbago can grow quickly, but in my garden, it has not spread drastically and therefore I would not consider it as invasive as other groundcovers.

I have actually planted spring-blooming crocus within plumbago, as it is slow to emerge in the spring and by the time the crocus has gone to rest, plumbago takes over the show.

To add to the desirable attributes, the foliage turns a great bronze-red color in the fall. Plumbago has very few pests and the one thing I have noticed is that in some years, there is a bit of powdery mildew on my plants.

If you are looking for a great groundcover that is very versatile, look no further than plumbago.

Mums blooming

Many gardeners are aware of the need to pinch back mums and asters up until the first part of July to keep the plants compact and promote branching.

This year, I have noticed that several of my asters and mums are beginning to bloom early in my landscape. Other gardeners I've talked to have also noticed this phenomenon. In almost all cases everyone has pinched back their plants until early July.

Normally with mums, they are sensitive to day length and initiate blooms as the days grow longer. With the heat this year, many plants are a bit mixed up with regard to flowering and even dormancy.

Vanishing sweet potato

I planted four sweet potato vines in late June of this year, as they were sent by a plant company for me to try in my landscape.

Two of the plants are in an island bed in full sun and the other two were located near the front of my home.

While watering the other day, I had trouble finding the two that were planted close to my home. When I did locate them, the only thing remaining was the short stems of the leaves. It most likely is either rabbits or squirrels that are doing the damage. Flour dusted around the plants can help determine the culprits.

Sometimes using dried hot pepper around the base of the plant can deter animals.

Emelee Rajzer's "Home Grown" column appears weekly. Email her at rajzere@hotmail.com.



Emelee Rajzer
Home Grown



A koala bear family decal from the Toronto-based LittleLion Studio. Kids are often enthralled by wild animals, so it's fun to do their rooms with animal-themed decor. Think beyond the standard kitty-cat wall border or dino bedding.

By KIM COOK

For The Associated Press

Kids are often enthralled with the wild kingdom, so it's fun to do their rooms with animal-themed decor.

And you can think beyond the standard, kitty-cat wall border or dino bedding:

some of today's designs have a sophisticated style that will please parents, too.

So to quote Maurice Sendak, "Let the

wild rumpus begin!"

Dwell Studio: This bastion of chic kids' decor offers deer, triceratops, unicorn and zebra papier-mbchi wall art that could easily inhabit any room in the house. Owl and unicorn shower curtains are rendered in Dwell's signature muted-color palette. Here too are French textile designer Paule Marrot's high style, textural giclee bird paintings on linen. (www.dwellstudio.com, papier-mbchi, \$76; shower curtains, \$66; Paule Marrot wall art, \$2,200)

Ferm Living: Folk-art silhouettes are the story at this Scandinavian design house. There are friendly ti-

ger, owl and octopus poly-filled cushions and mobiles, a sweet group of bird-shaped cushions, and a snake in fun, stripy organic hues. An unlikely yet whimsical Animal Tower decal stacks a rooster on a giraffe on a dog on a horse on an elephant - wall art sure to inspire some fantastical storytelling. (www.fermlivingshop.com, cushions, \$34.25 and up; mobiles, \$45.75; Animal Tower, \$110)

RoomMates: Silhouette decals including monkeys, pelicans, turtles and more come packaged together ready to affix in whatever creative narrative strikes your fancy. There are realistic dinosaurs as well,

packaged in multiples. (www.roommatesdecor.com, animal decals, \$71.49; dinos, \$14.49)

Little Lion Studio: Based in Montreal, Leonardo Cortes creates quiet, whimsical-sleepscape wall decals. A family of koalas snoozes in eucalyptus branches; a big yet benign whale takes a little sailboat for a ride. A watchful mommy giraffe can be positioned over the crib, with baby giraffe on the other side. Cortes' simple and charming style is reminiscent of that of Babar's creator, Laurent de Brunhoff. (www.leolittlelion.etsy.com, whale, \$45.02; koalas, \$81.54 and up; giraffes, \$97.03)

Restoration Hardware: Vintage illustrations of rhinos, camels and lions will have children dreaming of exploring Africa. (www.rhbabyandchild.com, artwork, \$439)

Rug Company: London-based designers Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby choose to depict animals the way they be-

have in the wild, so their Fishes rug features a school of swimmies, while a slithering serpent makes his way across the Snake rug. (www.therugcompany.com, \$5,508 each)

Mimi Lou: In a past life, Miriam Derville was an advertising exec for high-end fragrances. But when she started drawing versions of her children's stuffed animals on their bedroom walls, people took notice, and Mimi Lou was born. She's created a charming collection of wall stickers featuring elephants, mice, penguins, bears and a menagerie of creatures with French flair. (www.mimilou-shop.fr, \$52 and up)

KidsonRoof: The Dutch design studio created by Romy Boesveldt and Ilya Yashkin link modern design with nature in a series of recycled cardboard totems of birds and other wild animals. They can be easily assembled into table sculptures. (www.kidsonroof.com, starting at around \$20)

A whale decal from the Toronto-based LittleLion Studio.

All about buffets

Buffets make a beautiful anchor

The best thing about buffets is that they are an ideal addition to just about any room in your home. Here are some quick tips on how to pick and use a buffet to add style to your home.

Dining-room designs are changing quickly, and we're finally free from the matchy-matchy edict that said your dining-room furniture had to be a set. Now we're all having a blast exploring new ways to create dining rooms that better reflect our own style. But one tradition I'm holding fast to is including a buffet in dining-room decor. When we have guests for coffee or cocktails, it makes the perfect beverage server. Every time I pack my table full of guests, then gobble up the middle of the table with a big centerpiece, it saves the day by providing room from which to serve the food. And it gives me a stage for an ever-changing seasonal display.

Here are just a few advantages to using buffets:



Mary Carol Garrity
Style at Home

These attractive, versatile pieces can add style to almost any room. Along with bookcases, secretaries and hutches, I frequently use buffets as that stalwart wooden piece that gives a room structure and strength. (Plus, they give the bonus of additional storage space.) Top the buffet with great accents, surround it with artwork - and your room is done.

Buffets are versatile and hardworking

Buffets make an ideal place to put a flat-screen TV, hoisting the screen to just the right height so it's easy to see. Or if you prefer to hang your TV on the wall, slide a buffet up underneath it, so the TV is not visually floating on the wall. Whether the TV is sitting on top of the buffet or mounted on the wall behind it, include the TV in your overall display on the buffet. Work in a few accents on the tabletop that balance out the screen, and incorporate the screen into a montage of artwork. You'll be amazed by how this helps the TV melt into the background when it's not in use.

You can also put a buffet in your entry, topped with a large mirror. Or put one against an empty wall in your living room to serve as a bar when you entertain.

If you have a boring hallway that needs some life, put a buffet against one of the walls, top it with an accent lamp and create a grid of great artwork behind it. (Maybe some great photos of your family?)

Pick the right buffet for your space

Use these four guidelines to help you select the right piece:

1. How are you going to use the buffet? Will it be in your dining room, providing a spot to hold food and beverages? Or will you use it in another room, mostly for decorative purposes?
2. Does the style suit your home? Do you want a sleek, modern buffet - or something more traditional? Do you prefer informal pieces, like a buffet that looks like it was taken from an old farmhouse, or one that's very high-style? No matter what you pick, make sure the piece harmonizes with the oth-

er furnishings in the room and in your home.

3. How much do you want to invest in your buffet?

Like most furniture, buffets come in a wide range of prices and the quality can vary. Do you want a buffet you can enjoy for five to 10 years? Or do you want one that you can hand down as a family heirloom? Once you determine the lifespan of the piece, you'll have a better feel for whether you want something trendy or timeless, budget or built to last a lifetime.

4. What size fits your space? Because buffets can be space hogs, it's important to measure the length of the spot where you'd like to put the buffet to be sure it will be a good fit. Another dimension to keep in mind is the depth of the buffet, especially if it will be in a hallway. Make sure it's not so deep you can't get around it easily.

If your buffet will be in a dining room, make sure you get one that is 3 to 4 inches taller than your dining table. It's important to have different heights for visual variation in a room.

The column has been adapted from Mary Carol Garrity's blog at www.nellhills.com. She can be reached at marycarol@nellhills.com.