

Life

HOME • GARDENING • DECORATING

Saturday, December 4, 2010

New device a back-saver when raking leaves

Tired of bending over, again and again, to pick up raked leaves? Try the Rake 'n' Sweep, essentially a 40-gallon reusable bag that's attached to a 2-foot dustpan. Tough plastic rods hold the bag open like a pup tent. The introductory price online is \$19.99. (For details, visit www.rakensweep.com.)



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Your next furniture purchase can be just

'RIGHT-SIZED'



Lee Industries



BILL HOGAN/McClatchy Tribune

Always bring a hostess gift when you attend a party. Gifts could include a Chinese "double gourd" vase in archival box, \$16, mcchicagostore.org; or a recycled newspaper picture frame, \$18, tentousandvillages.com.

Gifts that'll keep you on the guest list

BY ELLEN WARREN
Chicago Tribune

Some people are just natural hosts. Then there are the rest of us.

We yearn to be invited to somebody else's house for holiday dinners and parties and weekends and pretty much anything. And to be invited back again — and again.

While there's an entire industry out there telling us how to be a good host — hello, Martha Stewart — where's the info about being a good guest?

Right here.

The first step to becoming everyone's favorite guest is to bring a good present (or send one afterward). The second rule is make the present more interesting than a bottle of wine, a handful of flowers or some dopey dust catcher they'll shove in a drawer or re-gift.

Mind you, not everyone agrees with me on this. Anna Post, great-great-granddaughter of etiquette czarina Emily Post (emilypost.com), says a gift is "nice but not required." I say if you want to be sitting at that holiday table next year, bring one. And put some serious thought into it.

Some suggestions: Most people think their pets and kids are pretty special, and deserving of much fawning and attention. So you can't go wrong with presenting a little something for them instead of some lame host or hostess offering. If you're wily, it will be something that will occupy the little darlings' time (a game, coloring or activity book, crayons or colored pencils; a dog toy or treat or a kitty catnip tchotchke).

And you can never have too many interesting picture frames, so choose one and put a picture in there of a previous holiday gathering at your hosts' home — if you have one — and you're sure to get invited again. (And bring your camera to the next dinner, so you'll have the photo ready for the ensuing holiday invite.)

Here are some frugal options, all less than \$25, to get your gift-giving brain cells percolating. The common element that unites the disparate presents is shopping at unique stores or browsing the big box places with a fresh eye and thinking not just about the grown-ups but the little critters, too.

Oh, and send a thank-you note. It's old-fashioned and surprising. That's why it's such a good idea.

FOR THE DOG: Dipped peanut butter bone, 89 cents; yogurt pup, \$1.50; pupcake, \$1.25, Scratch 'n Sniff, scratchsniff.biz

FOR THE GOOD SPORT: Golfer's doorstop (and

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Gat Creek

MULTIFUNCTIONAL FURNITURE CAN MAKE HOMES MORE LIVABLE

BY GALE STEVES
Special to the News & Record

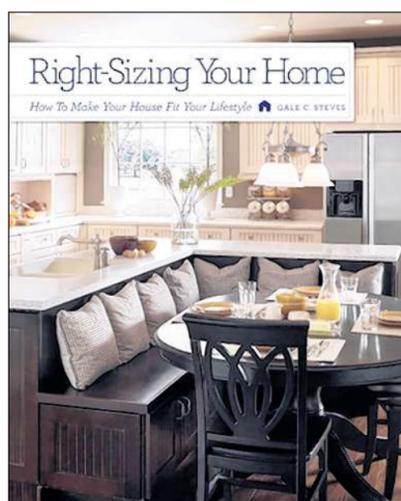
The truth is, too many of us are squeezing our lives into spaces that don't work for us. One solution to help you get better control of the overused as well as the underused — and make better choices about the furniture you buy — is a technique I call Right-Sizing.

Right-Sizing is the concept of working with what you have by making better use of existing space. For example, a foyer is probably a superfluous space if your main entry is through the mud room or garage. Similarly, the oversized great room of the 1990s doesn't necessarily work for every family. Do we really need a dining room that is only used three

times a year?

All these spaces can be repurposed, and choosing more functional furniture for those repurposed spaces will help make it work.

As we require our homes to do more and our rooms to do double-duty or maybe even triple-duty, we also have to change the way



we think about furniture. Make sure that whatever you purchase can move from one room to another or even take on new duties. Right-Sizing encourages you to think before you buy and then think again about the versatility of the piece.

At the recent High Point Market, 10 great pieces of furniture received my endorsement of "Right-Sizing." These pieces are super-functional but not necessarily inexpensive. They could provide creative solutions in several rooms or for several purposes in the same room. Do not forget to make a simple floor plan to determine whether the new piece or pieces will fit.

1. United They Sit: The Counter Bench by Lee Industries brings people safely together at the table or an island. Instead of wobbly stools, this bench is great for any eating situation you may have. (Price \$935, depending on fabric choice.) For more details, visit www.leeindustries.com.

2. Display Case: The Thompson Etagere, designed by Joe Ruggiero for Gat Creek Furniture, not only stores books, CDs or collections, but in sustainably sourced black cherry, it can act as a room divider or screen to hide a homework area. It comes in left- and right-hand configuration. (Price \$975 each.) For more information, visit www.gatcreek.com.

See **Right**, Page C3

Edible mustards add beauty, taste to landscape

BY NORMAN WINTER
McClatchy Newspapers

You may not know plants such as Tatsoi and Red Giant now, but once you try these mustards in the cool-season landscape you will forever be hooked.

The cool-season landscape can be both extraordinarily beautiful and edible if you plan your combinations carefully. Flowering kale and cabbage have long held the throne as pansy partners, but now these new plants are causing quite a

stir as their culinary purposes go far beyond decorative garish.

Tatsoi is starting to gain a lot of press and deservedly so. It not only offers a unique appearance, but also has wonderful flavor. I learned of this plant as a horticulturist with Mississippi State University when we created an ethnic garden for our big fall festival.

Tatsoi's botanical name, *Brassica rapa*, gives you clear indication it is related to cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower, but it is exotically different.

Though it is a rare plant at most garden centers, it is easy to find in seed catalogs.

Seeds sown in early fall will germinate quickly, providing transplants for use in the garden or edible landscape partnered with pansies, dianthus or other foliage.

Tatsoi forms wheel-like rosettes of spoon-shaped leaves that are packed with flavor. It is mild but perfect when used fresh for salads mixes or stir fries. It is easy to see how it garnered the common name of spoon mustard.

Its rosettes reach about 12 inches in width but unbelievably less than 6 inches in height when cool. Like other brassicas, they are subject to bolting in hot weather. It's this short stature and cold hardiness to 15 degrees that allows Tatsoi to be grown in unique-looking informal drifts with cool-season annuals.

As diminutive as Tatsoi is in the garden, its relative Red Giant mustard might be considered gaudy. It makes a dra-



McClatchy Tribune

Tatsoi, which is also called spoon mustard, forms rosettes of tasty leaves that are perfect for salad mixes or stir fries.

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FEATURES



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Lisben



4

Global Views

Right

Continued from Page C1

3. Nesting Instinct: The Lisben Sectional from American Leather is the answer for multi-seating in a small space. It also can help turn a too-large room into a cozier space. It is just two pieces and can be configured to suit your room. (Price \$5,250, depending on fabric or leather.) Find out more about this at www.americanleather.com.

4. Turning Tables: No room for a full-time dining table? This Convert-A-Table from Global Views is the solution for part-time or sometime expanded eating needs. It flips up and folds out into a table for four but could be used a twosome table in its smaller configuration. (Price, \$1,099.) Take a look at their website, www.globalviews.com.

5. Front Office: No one will ever guess that this handsome 5 O'clock Slipper Chair by Carolina George is a comfortable place to work on your laptop. The armless chair has hidden pull-out shelves on either side — great for a mug of coffee as well. (Price \$1,977.) Discover more at www.carolinageorge.com.

6. Multiplication Tables: The Elevated French Country Table from Pierre Deux Collection by Highland House Furniture will hold two pizza boxes at the right height while you munch in front of TV. Its height is perfect for eating, and if you have extra family or guests, the two ends pull out for extra convenience. (Price \$1,500.) Learn more about this at www.highlandhouse.com.

7. Sleeper Hit: No space for a separate guest room? This Fu-Chest is a perfect solution. The cabinet turns into a cabinet bed. It hides a pull-out futon for a sleepover. (Price, \$999.) For more facts, visit www.fu-chest.com.

8. Hostess with the Mostest: When storage is tight and that includes table linens, this Hostess Cabinet from the Better Homes and Gardens Collection for Universal Furniture hides its secret storage well. Tucked into the sides are pull-out sections that hide linens, while acting as a display case for good china or collectibles. (Price, \$1,999.) For more details, visit www.universal-furniture.com.

9. Make It Work: Many work spaces do double-duty and may not be able to house a full-time desk. This is true in many smaller children's rooms. The Desk Chest from The SpongeBob Surf Club Collection by Nickelodeon for Lea Furniture is a serious solution for kids or adults alike. (Price \$700.) To find out more, visit www.leaindustries.com.

10. Console Yourself: If you have an oversized sofa (or sectional), it has been difficult to find a console table to bring light or storage to the area. This Halden 8-Leg Iron Table by Bernhardt Furniture is the answer. It has a small footprint and extends 7 feet long. (Price \$950). Visit www.bernhardt.com for more information.

Gale Steves, author of "Right-Sizing Your Home," is a former editor-in-chief for Home Magazine. For more information, visit her website at www.right-sizing.com.



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Carolina George



6

Highland House Furniture



7

Savannah



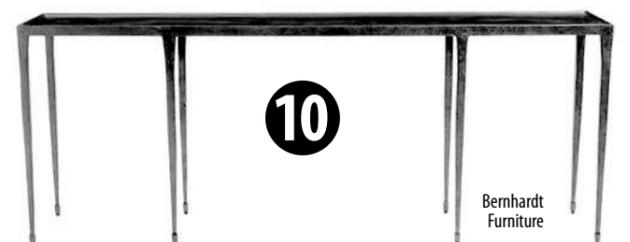
8

Universal Furniture



9

Lea Furniture



10

Bernhardt Furniture