

ASK DAD



HARRY JACHYM

Building permits serve good purpose

The topic of building permits came up in my class the other day. The students had questions about how to obtain them and why we even need them. As we move into the building season I thought it might be a good subject to share in this column.

What a building permit is

A building permit can be thought of as a license to start a construction project. These permits allow enforcement of the State Construction Code Act. The intent of the Act is to ensure public safety and welfare. Permits allow building officials to inspect construction projects for proper construction techniques and the use of appropriate materials. They also are used to verify that the project fits within community standards and zoning. Several years ago news stories ran about an improperly constructed deck used for a party. Several people were severely injured when it collapsed. This deck was built without a permit and therefore no inspections were made on it.

Zoning (part of the permit process) helps maintain quality of life high by verifying the intended structures fits the area it's to be constructed.

What Construction Projects Require a Permit?

The types of projects requiring permits vary by community. It's best to call the building department for your community and ask.

Just about every community will require permits for new buildings, additions, decks, demolition, swimming pools and any mechanical (electric, plumbing, heating and air conditioning) work.

How do I get one?

How to get the permit, again, varies by community. How much you'll have to pay for them is also determined by the local government. For most projects, in most areas, you will need:

At least two sets of plans. Unless the project is large, or used commercially, the plans need not necessarily be drawn by an architect.

A plot plan showing the location of the project on the lot. In most communities, for most alteration work, this plot plan can be drawn on a copy of a mortgage survey. Be sure to include the legal description of the property.

The anticipated cost of the project. An application available from the city or township hall, which usually spells out what other information is needed and the fees for the permit.

You need not be a licensed builder to pull a permit if you are the homeowner and you will be doing the work. You must however hire a licensed contractor for any subcontracted work.

Inspections

Inspections usually will include: foundation (posthole for a deck) rough framing, rough and finish mechanical, and a final. Other necessary inspections will be explained at the time the permit is granted. Ask if you are not sure.

Don't be afraid of the permit process. Building departments and officials are by and large very helpful to homeowners. I usually find them willing to answer homeowners questions about their project.

Harry Jachym, a licensed builder, teaches construction trades to high school students and is the general contractor for Habitat for Humanity, Western Wayne County. Since we all seem to ask our fathers for repair or remodeling advice, Jachym writes "Ask Dad," a column on home issues ranging from repairs and maintenance to building and remodeling projects. He is a Plymouth resident. Send any questions or comments to Harry at askdad@comcast.net or in care of Susan Steinmueller, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, 48009.



Planting the seeds: Isbister fourth-grader Molly Fessler, 9, reads a package of pea seeds before planting them during a junior master gardener program.

Kids master gardening in volunteer program

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

Becoming a master gardener is a lot more than learning about plants.

It's about sharing that knowledge and changing neighborhoods with volunteer beautification projects. Like the seeds of a wildflower, the joys gardeners reap keep spreading.

Children in first-through fifth-grades are learning to become junior master gardeners in classrooms throughout the state under the tutelage of adult master gardeners. Like, Laura Riegall's fourth-grade students at Isbister Elementary in Plymouth, who are in the midst of a six-week program headed by Patti DeBono, a master gardener in Northville.

"I didn't think learning could be fun, but this lets me interact with things," explained student, Amanda Batt.

Kelsey Stamm, 10, said she never knew that plants have male and female parts. "I would encourage other students to do the junior master gardening program," she added.

These children are leaving the program with information they can use to grow and keep plants for the rest of their lives.

"I learned that seeds don't need a lot of water to grow and that it can cause mold," explained Ben Staley, 9.

The class recently took earthworms home in boxes, which showed them, on a smaller scale, how compost containers work.

Molly Fessler will always remember that different plants need to be placed in the ground at different times of the growing season.

Wildlife lessons too

During one session, the children made "toad villas," which were made of inverted clay flower pots and they learned how important wildlife was to the natural cycle of the garden.

"This is completely hands-on and they're learning while they're doing," Riegall said.

Worms and bats don't have a good reputation, unless you know they have important jobs in the gardening world, explained Alexa Hoffman and Jillian Black.

Nicolas Galli, 10, is excited to start applying his new-found gardening expertise this summer in the garden bed his parents have designated his own.

"It's fun to plant stuff and watch things grow," Chelsea Rice explained. Students in Riegall's

two fourth-grade science classes must complete the program and work 10 hours in community volunteer work before being certified as junior master gardeners by Michigan State University Extension. They will receive a certificate from the extension office along with a name badge and T-shirt.

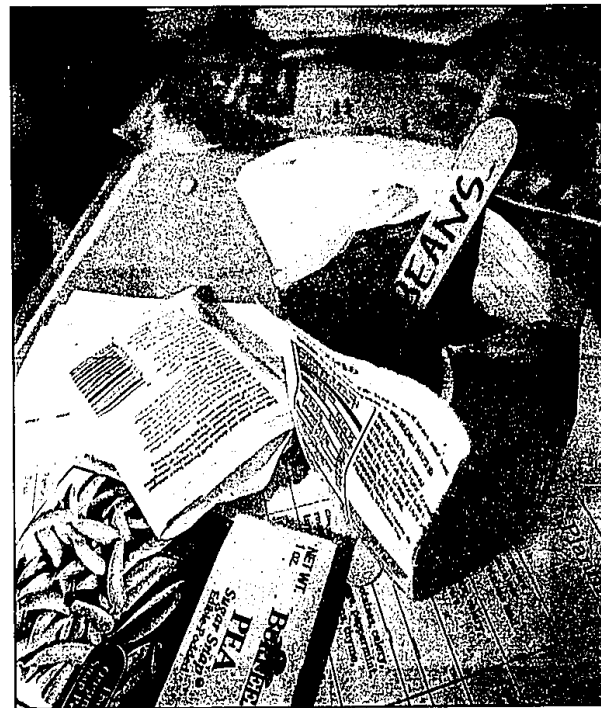
"It's not just learning about gardening," DeBono said. "It's learning about giving, sharing, teaching, loving and giving back to their communities."

DeBono is assisted in the weekly classroom program by master gardeners Arlene Sudia, of Plymouth; Gerry Johnson, of Livonia; Sharon Obler, of Redford; Ruth Barnett, of Belleville; Karen Hyland, of Plymouth and Joan Barber of

Please see MASTERS, C2

Young green

thumbs



STAFF PHOTOS BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Starting early: Fourth-graders become green thumbs in a six-week junior master gardener program at Isbister Elementary in Plymouth.

Planting seeds is fun spring project

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

Parents who make gardens with their children are planting lasting memories and a tradition that's often carried from generation to generation.

"One of the things parents should do if they are going to plant a vegetable and flower garden is to get the

kids involved right now," explained Mary McLellan, Michigan State University Master Gardener Coordinator, during the second week of March when temperatures often hinted of spring and dropped quickly enough to remind us it was still winter and dangerously cold for small plants.

"Tell them, 'This is yours

and you decide what you want to put into it," McLellan said.

Start with plants that are simple to grow, like marigolds and annuals. March is a good time to start planting seeds indoors.

Offer to help them make a diagram of what they plan

Please see SEEDS, C2

Smooth cooktops aren't for everyone



JOE GAGNON

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that a smooth, glass-top range is the most beautiful modern kitchen appliance. But at the same time, it's also a cause of complaints. For those of you who are happy with the product, I must say I know a little about you.

You take care of the smooth top or else you would be complaining. Homeowners unhappy with the cooktop are the ones who should tear this column out of the paper and tape it above the range.

A manufacturer recently checked out several hundred cook-

tops which had been returned under terms of their warranty. Almost 100 percent of these returned products had problems created by the homeowner. Call it a lack of customer education if you will, I point the finger at the person using the stove. If you don't sit down and read the instruction book, and follow the cleaning instructions, you won't be happy with the product.

Let me go back to the cooktops that were returned to the manufacturer. One-third could be cleaned with a scraper, and cook-

top cleaning cream. Some cooktops were permanently stained or damaged due to spillage or residue that had been left on the cooktop through repeated cleanings. The rest of the cooktops were permanently damaged due to the use of improper cleaning products or improper utensils. We can conclude that these several hundred returned cooktops resulted in some very unhappy customers, but I point out that it was not the fault of the product, but the person using it.

Do your homework

Before you select a smoothtop for your kitchen, visit the appliance store and read or make a copy of the instruction book. Do not buy this product unless you get all the facts. There are other things to know besides cleanliness, such as taking a ruler and placing it on the bottom of your cookware. Turn it in a circle, and if your pots and pans don't fit inside the circle, it's time to buy new

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