

Plant Exchange

Container Gardening Takes Center Stage

Share tips from your plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or send your questions related to outdoor or indoor plants to news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Containers are more often accents than integral components of yard décor. Diane Tunge uses containers for décor and for solutions to gardening frustrations with wildlife feeding pressure.

Q: How do you solve gardening problems and showcase your plants?

A: Diane Tunge, a Broker Associate with Anderson Realty LLC, and her husband Dave live in a Lewis & Clark Lake area home. Their house is built into a steep hill, so that the hill is much higher than the back roof of the house. Trees and woodland surround the house on three sides. Both floors open to vistas of the Missouri River and valleys to their southeast.

"It's like the trees are hugging you," Diane says, of trees enclosing their yard.

This woodland site receives little direct sunlight. Three tiers of railroad-timber beds, accented with weathered fieldstones, display greenery near the entrance to their home. Plants show contrasting leaf textures, and variety in leaf sizes, shapes, and hues of green.

Some plants she has chosen for these beds and nearby areas with more sun, include licorice, bleeding heart, cat mint, yarrow, periwinkle, Lenten rose, bugle weed, Hybrid sage, dead nettle, "Jack Frost" Brunnera macrophylla, and potentilla. These plants are part of her solutions.

SOLUTIONS WITHIN REACH

Some gardeners use the same methods each year, hoping for different results. Diane takes a different approach. In the meantime, she also stops growing some favorite plants.

"I want a garden to make me smile," Diane says. "I don't want frustration."

The Tunges have lived here 12 years. She points to the remnants of a plant recently browsed by deer. "Now I'm looking for marigolds — my last resort! Every year I plant; I'll be excited. I'll use a spray or hang up Irish Spring soap. I used to have flowers with beautiful fragrance (here by the door). In the end, I don't want to spray; I just won't plant some plants."

She refers to the damaged yews and hydrangea nearby that deer have ravaged. That's why she selects hillside plants mentioned above.

"I like the life that plants bring, wherever they are," Diane says. "I enjoy scattering benches around for decorating. Each one is an invitation to rest and take in the view."

From where she sits, she enjoys seeing bold color. But some of the plants on her "deer proof" list aren't bold. Additionally, she fills hanging baskets with bright annuals and hangs them above deer reach. That way, she sees them as she walks to her benches and she approaches home in her driveway.

Her kitchen and living room are on the second floor, along with entrance to a screened-in porch that feels like a tree house among evergreen and deciduous trees. All these rooms have a view of the lake and the rolling hills along the Missouri River and a view of their deck.

"I wanted more pops of color,"



PHOTOS: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

LEFT: Diane Tunge selects these plants for her reduced light, hillside garden. Notice array of leaf shapes, hues of green, and textures. Plants are also deer-resistant. ABOVE: Diane moves plants as needed to deck seating level and on to deck floor as plants grow in summer. This maintains the deck display balance as seen from her screened porch, kitchen, and living room. Distant views are not obstructed.

Diane said. "A place the deer couldn't reach—the deck."

Husband Dave made her flowerboxes, each about six feet long to attach to the deck rail and to fit plastic liners she had found.

DECK DISPLAY

Sliding glass doors are off the living room and the kitchen, and from the screened porch all focus is on the deck. The deck has also become a display for these rooms inside the house.

"I don't sit on the deck," Diane said. "I started accumulating various planters and containers for plants. That one would be fun, I'd say. Now there's not room to sit."

Built-in bench seating is just the right height to display a second tier of plants, with freestanding larger ones on the floor. Placement of flowerbox plants on the deck rail, deck seating, and floor, adds height interest seldom achieved with deck décor. Color and visual space between plants attracts you first to the deck plants, and then beyond to the vista.

Animals are still a part of her gardening experience on the deck.

"Raccoons have made their way up here and dug up plants and squirrels break the plants sometimes," Diane says. "With the bird feeders and water bath on the deck, birds do come in."

She notes that hummingbirds zoom around the corner as she waters plants.

CONTAINERS NEED WATER

Deck watering ritual becomes longer and more frequent as the container deck garden expands in summer.

"The exterior hose faucet is near ground level," Diane says. "Dave rigged it so that the hose with a spiral extension and spray control nozzle stays up here on the deck. I just turn it on downstairs. The spiral hose reaches across the deck. I water once a day in hot weather and use Miracle-Gro for fertilizer once a week."

"I use Soil Moist granules from Diane's Greenhouse in Fordyce, Neb., in most of my planters. It helps keep the watering down."

Containers Add Color Container gardening comes naturally to Diane.

"I move plants around if they get too big for a spot. I balance the two sides of the deck," she says. "For color this year I used mango orange petunia, salmon lantana, yellow 'Million Bells' a Proven Winner, orange zinnias, Peter's Gold Carpet, and 'Supertunia' because they need no dead-

Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

We'd like this blog to be an interactive site for people of our plant Zone 5a region to exchange ideas about flowers, vegetables, and other plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed? Want to share a comment about people and their plants or read other's comments? See current topics such as seed planting, composting at home, trees hardy to the region selected for planting at a nearby state park, tree nursery idea, tips for growing tomatoes and other garden vegetables, heirloom tomatoes. Link for your browser: <http://brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com/>

heading. I look for colors I can't get from perennials.

"When I began to choose the colors, I matched the flowers in the boxes with the salmon peach in the kitchen. Now I use colors that will work with each other on the deck."

Orange, red, yellow, blue, lavender, and white are prominent on her deck at this time. Some plants drape, others stand tall and some bloom near soil level. Colors are casually grouped, but have balance across the deck. Had they been randomly placed, they might appear busy.

When Diane gets ready to plant, she knows what she's looking for.

"(For containers) I use urns, crocks, or maybe a fern stand," she says. "I look for plants that will mix and grow with others. Geraniums prefer to be alone. I look at texture, color and leaf shape. When I start my list for the flower boxes, I also look for small plants grown in small pots that I stick in with the lantana or salvia-like pansies that peek out. All through the season, I ask 'Does it need more shaping, more color, more movement?'"

"The deck can be a spot to try new plants for another spot in the yard. I'm trying dead nettle, a perennial, in a container. In past years, deer didn't eat it."

Perhaps it will earn a place in another area of the yard, but can be moved if necessary.

"I put all this away in winter," she says. "I fill the deck flower boxes with soil and stand sticks of greenery such as yews, and red twig dogwood in the soil before it freezes and add pine cones and solar lights."

Because Diane works in real estate, she was asked about the impact of landscaping with plants when trying to sell a home.

"People are attracted to a place nicely landscaped. They look for a neat and low-maintenance yard; but not too much to take care of," she says.

Diane solves her deer problem

shrubs in bundles of 25, including: bur oak, Austrian pine, hackberry, black walnut and chokecherry, American plum, sumac, buffaloberry, and others, with telephone orders accepted.

"For smaller number requests, there is a left-over sale near the end of May," Rehurek says. "Call near the end of May."

To find information about trees and shrubs adapted to the region, Rehurek suggests these at-cost or free publications available at the conservation district office: Living Landscapes in South Dakota, Weeds of the Great Plains, Backyard Conservation, Trees and Shrubs for Northern Great Plains, Shrubs for South Dakota, Trees for South Dakota, Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains.

For tree and shrub planting and maintenance, Rehurek refers to the free publication, "Hand-Planting Guidelines for Bareroot Trees and Shrubs."

"We have 3-foot x 3-foot landscape fabric weed barriers that are used with landscape staples," Rehurek says. "For pesky deer and rabbits, we have 2-foot, 3-foot

April Plant Tips

Diane Dickes, owner of Diane's Greenhouse, Fordyce Neb. — (402) 357-3754 — has been working in the greenhouse for another exciting year of gardening. Find new plants and familiar ones at Diane's Greenhouse Facebook page and become a fan for exclusive offers and tips or www.dianes-greenhouse.com

■ Before planting, dig the hole twice the size of the plant going in the hole, add a shovelful of mushroom compost, and mix with the soil. Now you are ready to plant. If you have an existing plant, add mushroom compost as top dressing.

■ It's time to plant perennials, cool crops, asparagus, rhubarb and all the berries in the spring, when the ground is thawed and the night time temperatures are 28 degrees or warmer. You can plant trees and shrubs as soon as the ground is thawed.

■ Spring is a great time to divide plants. If you divide before they start coming out of dormancy, most will not show signs of stress from dividing.

■ Mulching last fall, helps you this spring, when temperatures are unstable. Freezing and thawing are rough on our plants. Mulching keeps the ground temperature more stable. So there is no reason to remove mulch, unless you put it on too thick.

■ Don't get in a hurry to declare a plant dead. It could be June before some plants come out of dormancy, even if, they are side by side.

and 4-foot plastic tubes with air vents and lock-tie closures. We also have a repellent for deer, rabbit, squirrels and opossum."

Yankton County Conservation District is located at 2914 Broadway Ave., across from Wal-Mart. Call 605-665-6704.

Did you miss "Plant Exchange" one of the Fridays last month? At Yankton Press & Dakotan website, choose "Archives" and type "Plant Exchange" and select calendar dates. Choose an article. At the bottom of the page, see next Plant Exchange article, Plant Tips, and Dibles & Bits.

Before and After

• Before: While the Summit Ave. pond side of Westside Park in Yankton is most visible to motorists, the southeast corner of the park is surrounded by homes. Stonework remains, from when this entrance to the park had more prominence.

• After: Last season, plant urns on the stonework were once again filled and maintained with annual flowers and sweet potato vines, thanks to Lisa Kortan, Urban Forestry Specialist for the City of Yankton.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Dibles & Bits

■ Bareroot trees and shrubs require special care for successful establishment. Plant on cool, humid days. Keep roots moist but not saturated in water and protected from wind and sun. Dig hole wide and deep enough for roots and backfill with loose soil. Water deeply and add more soil up to plant crown as needed. Install weed barrier and wind-screen to enhance survival and growth. More details: "Hand-Planting Guidelines for Bareroot Trees and Shrubs" free publication at Yankton County Conservation District, 2914 Broadway Ave. Yankton.

■ Effects of Flooding on Trees: Trees in standing water 1-4 weeks or more can be damaged or die from lack of water. Excess water blocks the tree's uptake of oxygen. Fine root hairs die, and then the tree's ability to absorb water is decreases. Tree leaves may wilt from lack of water in the plant or become vulnerable to pathogens. Sometimes symptoms display the next season, such as leaf discoloration, premature fall color, or branch dieback. Trees with low ability to withstand short periods in standing water include: Norway and sugar maple, Ohio buckeye, many hawthorns, black walnut, pines, and spruce. See article on this topic at the South Dakota Department of Agriculture site: www.sdda.gov

■ Smart Gardening Workshops 2012 free online live or archived workshops, sponsored by Horticulture Magazine. Topics include: Deer-resistant Gardening, Low-Maintenance Perennials, Right Plant-Right Spot, It Starts with

a Seed, and others. When you access the site, you are signed up for a free Horticulture newsletter. Examples of Zone 5a plants are included. (Visit www.hortmag.com/smart-gardening-workshops)

■ Earth box is a self-watering container filled with potting soil and placed near but out of direct sunlight indoors. It can be used as a "nursery" for houseplant cuttings until they grow roots for transplanting. Some apply rooting hormone, available locally, on the cut stem before planting. If cutting is more difficult

to root, cover earth box with a drycleaner transparent bag over the box or Glad Cling Wrap to keep humidity constant. Details: March/April 2012 Horticulture Magazine.

■ "Jack Frost" Brunnera macrophylla is named Perennial Plant Association "Plant of the Year" for its ease to grow and leaf detail. Diane Tunge grows it in her shade garden in the Yankton area. It can be used as a ground cover similar to hostas and is "less palatable to deer."

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