

Plant Exchange:

Spring Plants Awaken

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
P&D Correspondent

Julie Bauer had finished adjusting a pile of tree trimmings for the Yankton Citywide Cleanup. She remarked at the great service to homeowners that this spring event provides each year. Her yard from its borders to the front entrance was abloom in harmonious color and symmetry.

Q: How do you achieve this spring blooming yard?

A: Julie Bauer works at Academy of Dance and lives in Yankton with her husband Chris. "When I first started working on the yard, I'd get one of these (plants), one of these, and one of these. I found out that you need larger areas of color to hold the attention." She learned it by being frugal and being willing to work.

She started with a bag of grape hyacinth bulbs that she planted one fall. "They multiplied on their own," Bauer says. "So I divided them, moved them in the flowerbed, moved them to other areas in the yard, and gave some away."

When she planted the bulbs, she had no special technique. "Just not in a soldier line. I throw three or so in a clump." She's also had the same "good luck" as she puts it, with white daffodils, and divides them and plants them elsewhere. She plants daffodil bulbs in clumps also. It makes patches of color in the yard instead of random dots.

The color focus leading to the front door is purple and white. By the front curb, you can see the flowerbed near the entrance beneath lower branches of 'Snow Burst' and 'Coral Burst' crabapples. More purple hyacinths and white daffodils are repeated near the front curb, along with areas of burgundy.

"I've always thought an all white yard would be pretty. You see it in magazines. But then I go to the greenhouse and the colors just get to you.

PURPLE AND WHITE AT THE ENTRANCE AREA FLOWERBED

Hyacinths and white 'Thalia' daffodils grow in clusters, and emerging green growth of Autumn Joy sedum trimmed from the fall, is growing again in the bed. "Sometimes the hyacinths lean over this wall by the flowerbed. Sometimes they volunteer in another bed that I didn't put them. Maybe the squirrels carried them there? Hyacinths



PHOTO BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Julie and Chris Bauer's yard from the curb shows purple hyacinths, 'Pewter Veil' Heuchera, and the front entrance flowerbed seen beyond the 'Coral Burst' crabapple. Repeated color and plants unify the yard.

grow foliage again in the fall, so they look nice with annuals that I add here."

A petite standard burning bush adds height without volume to the bed. "I like the spring and fall time of year and don't like summer heat. In summer, I buy two trailing petunias and put them in pots and train them up pyramid-shaped trellises. They go by the front door for height and color."

The flowerbed curves in opposition to, but in harmony with the entrance walk. Soil level is just below the sidewalk side of the flowerbed, and the flowers are no more than a foot tall. On the other side of the bed, a stacked limestone wall about 1.5 feet high forms the outer curved boundary and holds soil so the bed is level with the entrance area.

"Chris and I picked limestone rock out of my dad's pasture in Browns Valley, Minnesota, and hauled it here, a pickup load at a time. We rummaged through piles for the flat ones, limestone cleaves. This tiny wall was backbreaking work for us. I do love hardscape. The wall is this height because we ran out of energy."

"I can draw plans faster than my husband Chris can implement plans," Bauer says. As they built the wall, he put the base stone flush with the soil and extended it out from the wall." He edges the lawn and this solution helps to keep grass from growing too close to the wall.

The soil in the flowerbed has been amended over time, but they don't fertilize. "When we mow, we use fresh grass clippings as mulch. It keeps the weeds down and moisture in. "This block used to be part of the old Gurney Seed Company nursery. We have great soil here."

"We don't grow anything we have to baby along. If it doesn't survive, something else takes its place. It's hard to know what a sapling will look like in twenty years. We've had plenty of plants that don't work where we thought they'd go. Some things worked... not by design but by luck. Jay Gurney has been helpful to us these years.

ENLARGED ENTRANCE AREA

"We moved here in 1986 before our children were born. The former owners were vegetable gar-

deners and the whole back yard was garden. The front yard had been sodded and the lawn was great," she said. Chris and Julie tackled the back yard first and then the limestone wall in front. She says that the front entrance had patches of concrete. A section of driveway had been removed and the masons were about to pour concrete. They had heard that a town in Nebraska was selling used street brick. "I like old things. The masons held up their work and we got a semi load of brick. We had to do something with the brick."

With the masons' help, they laid a pattern of red brick area around the front entrance, in front of the garage, and a vehicle turn around area beside the driveway. The flow of color from the driveway to the entrance draws the eye to the limestone walled flowerbed there.

CORAL, WHITE, AND BURGUNDY AGAINST GREEN

Color repeats and complements throughout the yard from the curb to the front door. Bauer says it was less planning and more in response to "Where's a bare spot?" She has worked at dividing plants and then needed new sites to grow them. The yard shows balance and harmony among the points of color and uncluttered accents. Along the curb she has a favorite Heuchera or coral-bells. "It was years ago that I bought this 'Pewter Veil' Heuchera with a rich burgundy upper and under sides of leaves for \$30.00. That was quite expensive. It grew well here. When it grows a while, I take the shovel and go down deep for the roots and split the plant, and re-plant the piece in the yard." Now she and Chris have two dozen plants of repeating color around the yard. Crabapple in bloom and daffodil accents frame Heuchera.

"I like perennials that look good for a long time. Sedums are like that. I started with one. They are fresh green and then the dusty red in the fall."

"We are not experts. We didn't have a plan; this evolved over years with lots of errors. We've had plenty of plants not suited to our level of expertise. We liked the exterior color of the house and just chose colors of plants that work with it. I think blue, purple, and red look good with bricks."

A mature blue spruce marks a boundary on one side of the yard. "It was knee high when Chris planted it. The kids have grown up and the spruce has grown up. I never envisioned what it might look like now. It is what it is."

She looks at the yard and says there is always more to do. "My dad is a farmer. Mom had a huge vegetable garden; I could always invent reasons not to work in it. But it was different in my own home."

Soon The Garden Chores Begin

BY MARY ANN KING

Growing up on a farm I always had chores! You know, those jobs that required my most patient mother to remind me again and again to get done. Now I love my gardening chores and look forward to digging in the dirt. "Mama, I am getting my chores done!"

In early spring, once snow melts and temperatures are above freezing, check your garden soil to see if it is wet (especially clay soil). Working too early with really wet soil can cause compaction, making it difficult for roots to grow. Who needs those muddy shoes anyway!

1. Remove debris. Before too many plants start their spring growth, start the clean up by removing dead and decaying plant matter. While the dead plants provide organic matter to the beds, they also harbor pests and diseases. Prune off any dead matter that still clings to a plant. Either dispose of all this matter or add it to the compost pile.

2. Cut back ornamental grasses. I do not cut back my grasses in the fall since I like the texture they give the winter garden. Come spring, "off with their heads!" Cut these back in late winter before the new growth begins.

3. Divide delicate perennials. Divide these plants as they begin to emerge to minimize damage. Do not wait too long since delicate stems and leaves of plants can be damaged and broken by a plunging spade. Try not to divide or move plants that bloom in the spring. These are best divided after blooming and include oriental poppies, Siberian and bearded iris and true lilies (not daylilies). Peonies are best divided in the fall.

4. Sow seeds. Some annuals and vegetables grow best when sown directly in the ground. Choose your spot and sow the seed as soon as the last-frost-date passes. This gives the plants a "head start" before the nearby plants shade them out.

5. Start summer bulbs. Tubers

and bulbs such as dahlias, begonias, caladiums, elephant ears, cannas, gladiolus and lilies can be started in-doors in pots. Once the outside soil temperature warms to 60 degrees, transplant to the garden.

6. Add plants to the garden. Now that your beds have been cleared, perennials divided and re-planted, put some thoughts to adding fall bloomer while you can. Sometimes we forget the fall plants, leaving the beds barren of blooms. Ask your nursery garden staff for ideas, and come September you will have quite a show!

7. Add nutrients. Carefully add fertilizer, avoiding plant foliage and thus leave burn. There are different recommendations for organic versus inorganic fertilizers. Inorganic fertilizers are not necessary every year, especially if you have been adding compost. Organic fertilizers, which have fewer nutrients, can be added every year and are more slow release than inorganic ones. It is better to use less rather than too much fertilizer. Too much can result in lush foliage, with few or no flowers.

8. Mulch the beds. My husband calls me the "mulching Queen." I love mulch and so do my plants. I use only organic mulch because it reduces surface moisture evaporation, improves water penetration and air-movement, helps prevent soil erosion, improves the soil and protects the plants. To help you choose which mulch to use, see the website www.ext.colostate.edu and search for "Mulches for Home Grounds" by J.E. Klett.

9. Be-gone, weeds! Start early before these beasts take over, a lesson I learned the hard way. As a child, letting the weeds grow resulted in the use of a "corn knife" machete to hack down those overgrown weed plants. Memories of hot, sweaty, bug-biting sessions keep me from letting this task get away from me. So, "get your chores done" and your garden will show its gratitude.

April Plant Tips

Jay Gurney, owner and nurseryman of Yankton Nurseries LLC, 2000 Ferdig Ave., is hoping we see temperatures and moisture closer to normal this season. "We have plants here at the nursery that are suitable for our region and are hardened or adjusted to our climate," Gurney said.

• Trees and shrubs had a hard time last year. If you are not sure your plant is alive, cut a small nick into branches or scratch with your nail below the outer surface. If you see green below, the plant is probably OK. If several branches are brown and snap dry, the plant is firewood.

• April is early gardening time. Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, lettuce, radish, carrots, peas, beets chard, potatoes, and onions all work well in the early garden. Save room for warm garden plants for May: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, beans, and corn. Some gardeners cover their warm season plants planted early for frosts that occur in late April.

• We will soon know how much lawn grass died from last year's drought. Daily air temperatures need to rise to about 70 degrees F. for blue grass to sprout. If enough lawn is green, over-seeding may work to fill in the weak spots. Open areas that receive full sun will likely need re-seeding. If you do plant grass, don't apply fertilizer with crab grass preventer. It will prevent the new seed from sprouting.

Gardener To Gardener

Share what you find useful for gardening.

Carol Ebel of Yankton will have a plot at the Yankton Community Gardens this summer as well as grow plants at her yard at home. She practices organic gardening for health of her family and soil. "I learned last year that calcium is very important for the soil and most plants," Ebel said. "Eggshells are full of calcium." She has found several benefits of re-using eggshells.



• Before you use eggshells, wash them and let them dry. After drying, grind them course or fine, depending on how they will be used as dust or on the

soil. Eggshells work much the same as diatomaceous earth, which is ground up seashells.

• For houseplants, ground up eggshells make a good dust to dust plants with as well as putting around the base of the plant for bugs can be cut by the eggshells.

• Eggshell dust is great for bug deterrent on leaves and soil in the outdoor garden too.

• Half eggshells make a great starter cup for the seeds you plant. Keep the egg cartons for storing them. Put the half shell in a compartment, fill the half shell with starter dirt, plant seed and when ready to move outdoors plant eggshell and all.

Dibbles & Bits

• Mass planting, such as a row of lilacs at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area or a flowerbed of grape hyacinths near your front door make color impact. Landscape designers say that the swath of color "leads the eye" to the destination you want. Re-

peating color in other flowerbeds "repeats color" and gives balance to the yard. Flowerbed edges such as stacked limestone or lines of contrasting bold color highlight shape. See April 2012 article in Garden Gate magazine at the Yankton Community Library.

• Construction tips for low

cost, low tunnels as greenhouse covers for growing summer vegetables are found in Mother Earth News magazine found in the Yankton Community Library or:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/mini-greenhouse-zm0z13fmzkin.aspx#axzz2Kd3JHeFo>

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