

Plant Exchange

Signs Of Spring At Last!

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

In early spring we heard geese honk overhead as they flew north. Then first daffodils and tulips appeared, and by May, lilacs will burst into bloom. Study of seasonal plant and animal events and when they occur is called phenology.

Interest in wine prompted the longest phenology study from 1370 to present day in Burgundy, France. Pinot Noir grape growers recorded when buds opened, vines flowered, and fruit was set. With this data and annual temperature and moisture averages, grape growers learned a lot.

Lilacs are a recognized event of spring. A Montana scientist recorded first leaf and bloom times of lilacs, beginning in 1950's. Then another scientist duplicated the study in Wisconsin. These data, combined with studies of snowmelt, temperature, moisture, and other seasonal events added to understanding "anchor points" of a season over time.

These scientists recognized that more carefully observed and collected data was needed across the United States. Since the lilac studies, a nation-wide network of scientists, students, and public volunteers now answer specific questions from nature observations. These data contribute to scientific studies and help provide information for better land management and policies. "Nature's Notebook" is a way for people in the United States to help track and record observations about plants and animals. See www.usanpn.org

Gardeners benefit from phenology studies. Scientists in two hemispheres shared data (1955-2002) on first bloom dates, last spring freeze, and other events in the United States and Estonia. They found spring arriving an average of 1.25 days earlier per decade. Recently United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) adjusted zones so that this region is now USDA Hardiness Zone 4b or 5a. Gardeners who grow zone-sensitive plants heed information from phenology studies. Gardeners' charts for best results in growing plants from seeds use data gathered by careful observations of many volunteers. Old sayings about seasonal markers such as "Plant corn when oak leaves are the size of a mouse's ear," are more than heritage; they are markers of the season. More information: January / February Horticulture magazine.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Spring markers include these lilacs at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area. The study of plant and animal appearance in the season and the order they appear is phenology. Last season progression of markers is so much earlier than this year.

Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

This blog is an interactive site for people of our USDA Zone 4-5a region to exchange ideas about plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed? Want to share a comment about plants?

- What are some tips about raised bed gardening for flowers or vegetables?
- Want to see and read about what's growing and blooming around the United States and elsewhere? "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" link will show you selections from April 15, 2013.
- What are spring plant tips from a regional commercial grower?
- How did local gardeners use raised beds and soaker hoses to achieve a bumper crop in a drought season?
- How is "lasagna gardening" the answer for a local vegetable and flower gardener?

Check us out at the web address: brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

Dibbles & Bits

• Plant Sale sponsored by Yankton Town & Country Garden Club, May 10th, at Territorial Capitol Replica of Riverside Park in Yankton, 7:00AM – 1:00PM or sold out.

• Broken tree branches should be cleanly pruned back to the "collar" of the larger branch or trunk to which they are attached, according to Dr. John Ball, SDSU Extension and Forester, SD Department of Agriculture. He says that this pruning protects the tree from decay that can infect a pruning wound. "Do not top trees, leaving large stubs, as these will easily become decayed and also produce an abundance of weakly attached sprouts during the coming growing season." He says that the proper pruning cut does not need protection with tree paint or wound dressing and "can even increase the possibility of decay by keeping the interior too moist." See his April 10th Pest Update at <http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/tree-pest-alerts/>

• Turf grass is featured on Backyard Farmer, a University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) Nebraska Educational Television program aired at 7 p.m. Thursday evenings. Back episodes are archived for viewing at www.byf.unl.edu. While not all topics addressed in Nebraska are applicable here, close proximity and having topics slightly ahead in the season may be of interest. Turf issues are a current concern for homeowners. Grasses recommended by UNL for the Northern Plains include buffalo grass, Kentucky bluegrass, and tall fescue. Seed selection, lawn establish-

ment and fall turf management are discussed. Ongoing turf studies can be found at <http://turf.unl.edu> link, including a 2012 study of deficit turf irrigation that showed buffalo grass most hardy of turf choices. Before selecting seed, tips include taking time to consider: erosion areas, durability needs, time required for lawn maintenance, and desired aesthetics. Other considerations include: degree of shade vs. sun at the site, yard slope, and desire for ornamentals vs. turf space. Mowing tips, soil preparation, early maintenance and weed control are topics at the website.

• Why garden again? According to an article from Burpee Seed Company website, benefits of gardening can be for the healthy food, exercise, beautiful yard, to exchange ideas and plants with others, express creativity, grow biggest tomatoes, or to enjoy a summer project. But "gardening burnout" can be an outcome of all this effort. Tips to avoid burnout are below. For more information check out their or another seed company websites: www.burpee.com Select fewer different varieties so it is easier to take care of garden. Stagger plantings so if weather is a problem, the whole crop of beans isn't lost. Invest in your garden soil. Add compost each year. Stake tomatoes. Weed early and well. Manage watering with rain gauge. Water deeply only once a week in heat of summer. Pick disease resistant plants. Healthy plants resist disease better. Use non-chemical methods when possible. Don't over-fertilize plants, as foliage without fruit can be a result. 'Overdoing' is common to gardening. Burpee suggests you try several new ideas and then pare down to a manageable few that you like, to keep gardening fun.

Container Gardening With Herb, Flowers And Vegetables

BY MARY ANN KING

I love cooking with herbs and grow them near the kitchen door. Not everyone has the luxury of such a space so want to encourage readers to try growing herbs in containers. It is easy and fun. A location with at least 6 hours of sun per day is the ideal.

HERB OR FLOWER CONTAINERS

Growing herbs in individual pots works best. Each plant thrives with customized space and watering. Plants like mint are aggressive and will choke out less aggressive herbs.

Container choice and preparation are important. Make sure the pots are large enough for the roots to spread and grow. If you are using containers previously used for plants, you will want to clean and sanitize them before replanting. After a good cleaning, soak the container in a bath of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water for 10 minutes, then rinse thoroughly and let dry.

All containers must have drain holes that are small enough to keep the soil in the pot, but large enough of drain water. Cover the hole with a mesh screen or rocks.

Good potting soil is important. An all-purpose mixture (not gardening dirt) for containers is

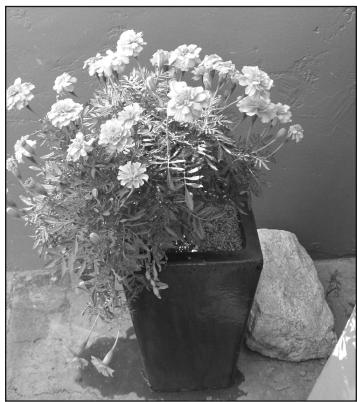


PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Containers are portable gardens. Plants in pots allow us to easily move marigolds, herbs, or tomatoes to the best growing spot or change locations for easy harvest. Here low-maintenance gold marigolds contrast with a royal blue container for bold color.

lighter allowing air and water to move through the soil. Potted plants require fertilizer because they deplete nutrients quicker than those grown in the ground. Add a slow release organic fertilizer for vegetables.

Watering is important and always best to water in the morning before the herbs are exposed to sun and heat. Give that soil a good

soaking! Allow that soil to dry moderately between watering.

Watch your plants grow and begin harvesting a few weeks from planting. Pruning encourages bushy growth, just what you want. Harvest no more than 1/3 of the plant.

VEGETABLE CONTAINERS

Container gardening is not just for flowers and herbs. Tomatoes and peppers can do it! Lettuce too! You may use the same "recipe" as above but with larger pots. A five-gallon bucket works great. You will need to drill several holes in the bottom of the bucket before planting. Again, grow plants individually. Your plants will thrive with lots of sun and little attention.

I do cage the tomatoes and remove sucker branches as they begin appearing on the main plant. Come late summer, you will have the most lovely plants, full of fruit. I have found that since the plants are up off the ground, there is little problem with mold and leaf rot.

I promise you container gardens are easy. Fresh herb plants are beautiful and delicious, a cook's best friend. What fun to pluck a lovely tomato or pepper when dinner time rolls around. And you grew it yourself. Most satisfying. Bon Appetit!

WHAT A DIFFERENCE
A YEAR (OR TWO) MAKES!

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY ANN KING

These tulips are from Mary Ann King's yard in 2011.

Overnight snowfall
confounds the tulips, as Spring
takes a step backward.

— BERNITA MANNES, YANKTON



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
These tulips are from Brenda Johnson's yard this spring.

April Lawn Care Tips

Bill Conking is owner and operator of Green King Lawn Care (605) 660-0618 in Yankton. Since most lawn grass grows in early spring, healthy non-native grass should be green by now. It's a good time to see what turf grass has recovered from last season's drought. "Due to the extreme conditions last summer," Conking said, "many people will be dealing with dead spots or maybe even entire yards this spring." Thanks for his suggestions on how to repair turf damage from the drought and care for this season's lawn.

• Remove as much dead grass as possible by hand raking or renting a yard sweeper.

• Spread new grass seed. (for small areas use a hand held broadcast spreader or drop seeder and for larger areas use a rotary spreader like those used for spreading fertilizer.)

• Disturb the soil so the grass seed is in contact with dirt. This

can be done by using a stiff rake for small areas or a de-thatcher or power rake for larger areas. If you have a larger area to reseed you may want to check into renting a drill seeder that is self-propelled or towed behind a tractor.

• Follow the seeding by spreading starter fertilizer over the areas planted.

• It is essential that you keep the ground moist until all seeds have germinated. This usually means watering several times a day for short periods of time. If you are filling in a few small patches in your yard leave your irrigation system on its normal settings and hand water the patched areas. Continue watering in this manner until approximately two weeks after you see dense green growth, then begin to taper off to match your normal watering schedule.

"If you were fortunate enough to make it through last summer with no damage," Conking said, "don't breathe easy yet. The forecast is tending towards another dry summer so following are tips to get your yard

ready for the summer."

• Feed your lawn by giving it a good fertilizing this spring.

• Water correctly by watering in the early morning, less frequently, for longer periods to encourage root development. It is better to water twice a week for an hour each time than to water five times a week for 15 minutes each time.

• If the weather turns nasty again, don't quit watering. Continue to water at least a quarter inch of water a week to keep the roots alive.

YOUR NEWS!
The Press & Dakotan

Johnson Electric, LLP

214 CAPITAL ST., YANKTON
COMMERCIAL • RESIDENTIAL • TRENCHING

605-665-5686

Gary R. Johnson • Chris Merkel
Rick Merkel • Ben Merkel



Turn your backyard or patio into an
Outdoor Great Room



Stop in and
visit with
Larry or Brad
about our
new firepits or
outdoor kitchens

Larry's



HEATING & COOLING

920 Broadway Yankton, SD • 665-9461 • 1-800-491-9461