

What It Takes To Do Something Right

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

Whatever our daily interactions, we see people around us who do their jobs well, that makes ours easier. Sometimes their competence benefits us through a couple of degrees of separation. Take Joe Hoffman who works at the Federal Prison Camp in Yankton.

Horticulturist Joe Hoffman has been improving the landscape of trees, shrubs, and perennials on the Yankton Federal Prison Camp grounds for the past twenty-one years. His vegetable garden on the grounds provides fresh produce for inmate meals with inmate labor.

Hoffman is also a horticulture teacher in an inmate education program he helped design. The Horticulture Associates Degree program, in association with Mount Marty College, allows inmates to earn a certification or an Associate's Degree in Horticulture.

"Horticulture can be a healing, nurturing experience that gives inmates something to care about," Hoffman said. "You might say it can be a therapeutic experience. As my warden has said, former inmates will be your neighbors someday. We want inmates to be able to work and support themselves when they are released."

The public sees the beauty of the perimeter of the prison campus. But the public may be less aware that Hoffman has received national recognition of his professional excellence as teacher in the Yankton Federal Prison horticulture program. His award came from the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 2007.

Mentor inmates from Hoffman's horticulture program lead work crews of inmates. They manage flowerbeds, vegetables, trees, shrubs, and other plantings, grow plants from seeds or cuttings, work with compost piles, and maintain indoor plants for prison offices. At Hoffman's inmate work inspections, crews learn better growing results from other crews in friendly competition. Observatory Hill Display Garden illustrates how he does his job.

READY TO PLANT

"I remember walking on the YC letters on Observatory Hill as a kid visiting my aunt here in Yankton," Hoffman said. "Steve Wilcox, our first Landscape Foreman, started that flowerbed. After I began teaching inmate landscape design classes, the design students were asked for designs for the beds. The warden



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The Observatory Hill Display Garden along Douglas Ave. commemorates Yankton's 150th celebration. The 39' x 84' bed has 9,980 flowers. Horticulturist Joe Hoffman led design, installation, and maintenance of the bed.

chose the best inmate design and suggested changes." Wynn Speece, in her local radio programs, would often interview me around February and ask me, on-air, for the new Observatory Hill Display Garden design.

Hoffman wanted Yankton's 150th celebration for this year's display garden theme and planned more than the usual year ahead. Art Design students with Margaret Bayer, along with Landscape Design students, submitted hand-drawn display garden ideas. Warden Jordon R. Hollingsworth chose the winning design and suggested a blue border. The design was hand drawn to scale. To create hillside angle perspective with letters in the drawing, students with construction background added measurements needed to lay out the flowerbed. Students from Herbaceous Plants class recommended plants to grow that will achieve the color, shape, and number of plants needed for the design.

"The flowerbed is 30 feet wider than last year's bed in order to scale the letters," Hoffman said. "We plant and grow the flowers to keep the cost (at) about \$80." (A flat of 72 garden plants purchased in a market can easily cost \$20.) This 39' x 84' celebration flowerbed required 9,980 plants to complete the design.

"We started some seed for this bed the third week

of February, but it depends on flowers selected. Vincas and petunias were chosen for this design bed because they bloom and stand straight up and are available in the red, white, and blue federal color theme." According to Hoffman, vine plants such as some kinds of petunia and creeping vinca can blur the crisp detail in a shape display garden.

INSTALLATION WITH A TWIST

"This year, we had to replace 3 wheelbarrows of soil and 300 plants in a washout. Only one other time did we have a rain washout of the Observatory Hill Display Garden; that was in the mid 90's," Hoffman said. Considering the sharp angle of the hill, erosion might be expected more often. "The flowerbed is amended with a couple of inches of compost each season."

"I buy a bag of 10-10-10 fertilizer each year and use it on vegetables or some plants as needed. Otherwise, we only use compost as fertilizer. It's made by inmates from plant trimmings on the grounds."

Display garden flower installation is precise, according to Hoffman. Usually the inmate whose design is chosen gets to install the bed using his plan. "Bamboo stakes, string, and exact measurements are required. Once the string is in place, I go across the

street to look at perspective. That is tricky with letters and numbers on the hillside. Sometimes we make a small change in the plan."

"Installing the plants starts at the top right of the bed in rows, like a dot matrix. Vincas are planted 8 inches apart." The distance apart of each kind of plant is a function of its mature size. "It's easier to use the same kind of plant in different colors to achieve the best appearance. The bed this year uses red and white vinca with a blue petunia border."

"Once the plants are installed, a little weeding can be done early, but otherwise there's no place to stand. Plants can't be deadheaded. Grass mulch is applied to prevent weeds and hold moisture. We use harvested rainwater and irrigation water sprayed lightly on the bed. You wait and see what weather the summer brings for the plants to do their best; vincas need heat."

Several variables influence how the Observatory Hill Display Garden looks each year. "Level of detail in the new design each year, plants we use for colors and shapes, and the growing season all make a difference."

Has Hoffman ever been disappointed in how the Observatory Hill Display Garden turned out?

"We've had two failures," Hoffman said. "One was when we tried to create the campus building 'Old Middle' using petunias one year. The petunias blurred too much in the building details and the perspectives were off. A landscape bed drawing almost needs to be cartoon-like to do well."

"We've learned that some plants don't stand the heat on the hillside. The plant ageratum bleaches out instead of looking blue in high heat."

"The other failure was the year we tried the profile of a Native American chief in headdress. Orange and yellow flowers grew together, so there wasn't sharp detail. The perspective was off. You could make out the profile by air, but along Douglas Ave, you couldn't see it."

Flowerbeds are visible along Pine St. and other points along the prison grounds perimeter. Inmates can't see these beds in perspective. They are intended for the public.

Next year's Observatory Hill Display Garden is in the works. "There were 12 landscape design entries and soon Warden Hollingsworth will pick the entry. We order seed in August." Hoffman plans ahead.

PLANT EXCHANGE:

The Best Alternative: Local Fresh Produce

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

Share your tips, 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.

Local produce is an alternative fresh vegetable source for non-gardeners. From decades of selling local produce, being "customer-friendly" is a priority of one producer.

Q: How do you sell local produce that is fresh, has easy customer access, and sell it at a fair price?

A: Dave and Elaine Roetman are owners and operators of The Town Farm on 803 West Main St. in Vermillion. They began selling corn out of their home double garage that they grew in their acre and a half backyard, 25 years ago and have expanded to a wide array of fresh homegrown vegetables, fruits, berries, produce ready for storage, and jams and jellies.

"More people walk up our driveway after work and decide what they're having for supper from what they see displayed here. It may be a large tomato just right for a slice of bread," Elaine said.

"We grew up on farms, so we enjoy this work and we're used to being tied to our work," Elaine said. They are open daily except Sunday from about 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. from July 1st until the end of the second weekend in October (Dakota Days.) "Of course, it ties us down in the summer. We decided not to grow green onions, spinach, and lettuce and start the business season in July."

On a typical day, they might harvest early and late and then spell each other assisting customers. "This morning and evening harvest keeps us moving, if not young."

Business evolved, so now the Roetmans grow tomatoes, potatoes, corn, summer and winter squashes, beets, carrots, leeks, okra, hot and sweet peppers, and garlic that they also cure for storage. For jams and jellies they grow strawberries, red and black currants, concord grapes, raspberries, and thornless blackberries.



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Dave and Elaine Roetman display fresh produce at The Town Farm. "Tomatoes, potatoes, onions, green beans, cucumbers and garlic are our most common purchases," Elaine said.

GROWING GARLIC

Elaine says one of their favorite sayings is, "There are no garden mistakes, only experiments." They have learned a lot about the plants they grow. Garlic is an example that Dave cites.

Dave explained that garlic is a biennial plant that produces a bulb of cloves the first year. (The asexual bulb is modified stem and leaves.) If left in the ground, the garlic plant would produce seeds the second year. Garlic is available to plant as seeds, transplants, or cloves.

"I put aside about 400 bulbs from this year's garlic harvest," Dave said. "I take the largest cloves and plant them in the fall. These 1600 or so cloves grow roots and two or three centimeters of tops before the killing frost. We used to plant them in the spring but now, they emerge about the beginning of April with roots."

Dave cures harvested garlic on screens out of the sun. "They will last until November or so. If you peel and dry the cloves, they last indefinitely."

TOMATO TIME

Roetmans use features of their home for growing tomatoes. "We start seed in the

heated breezeway between the house and garage about the second week of March and some later," Elaine said. "The breezeway has north and south windows, but we only use the north windows for the plants because the south windows get too hot for the plants. We learned that the plants get too long and leggy if we start them earlier."

"We plant as early as possible—about May 1st with the last average killing frost date of May 10th. Then we plant staggered about every two weeks." That keeps from having all plants at same maturity to widen harvest time.

Some methods for tomatoes make a difference. "We definitely cage the tomatoes. It helps the yield because the plants are off the ground. Otherwise, it's a jungle to harvest." For the cage, they use 32-inch high hog fence in a 4 feet length with self-hooks for closure. "We don't use store tomato cages for tomatoes because the plants get too heavy."

They till for weeding as much as possible, but hand weeding is necessary. "For tomatoes we put a slit for the plant in a two feet square landscape fabric and lay that around the plant. It helps with counter splash, blight, and weed control. We try to

use few chemicals."

Elaine's favorite tomato is "Heatwave II" from Burpee Seed Co. "It's our best seller, has a nice round shape, the stem comes off easily, and it keeps well on the display table. The plant stays contained and yields a lot. If it is quite hot, we pick the tomatoes half ripe in the evening and they will be ripe by morning."

They grow eight varieties of slicing, salad, and cooking tomatoes and try new kinds, such as 'Goliath' this season. "For those who want tomatoes for sauces and salsa, we suggest paste tomatoes with less water," Elaine said, such as "Roma," "Health kick" and "Square Paste."

MULCH METHODS

Roetmans watch their soil like they watch the weather. "In Spring, the soil needs to be up to 55 degrees before potatoes, onions, or cool season crops would be started. Usually that's close to April 15th," Elaine said.

They select plants for top or bottomland of their rolling garden land, and for areas with different soil type. "We plant sweet potatoes in lighter soil that retains less moisture. We mound the soil and plant on top of the mounds."

"On our upland, this past season, the crops looked better." Timing and amount of rains presented standing water challenges, but offset watering. They use soaker hoses to conserve water. Their grapes, currents, blackberries, and currents grow in an area for natural moisture.

Each year, they amend their soil with mulch. "The mower picks up the leaves. In fall, we add whole leaves to the garden and then till them in. We mulch with grass clippings around cucumbers."

During the interview, several different groups and individuals stopped by, some local and a few from out of town. Roetmans like people and their conversations convey their interest in others.

Scales for weighing produce are on the display table. "People are honest with us," Elaine said. "If we're in the house, they let us know they were here in the garage. We try to display our products and make sure they are fresh. We keep the area clean and we are friendly to customers. We want to be known as a friendly retailer."

PLANTS DEER OR RABBITS SELDOM MUNCH

Let us gardeners pool our successful experiences in spite of rabbits and deer. While barriers and concoctions deter animals, gardeners might benefit if some plants growing in our region are naturally animal "resistant" in your setting. Please contribute name of your plant, animal(s) deterred, and your experience at news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.



Janette Marker is a Yankton area gardener with a country yard under deer and rabbit pressure. 'Roesnwein' pink salvia or Salvia nemorosa is a perennial that requires full sun, well-drained soil, blooms most of the summer, and grows about two feet tall in our zone. 'Rosenwein' is an alternative pink color to the more common purple salvia, and is "so far a winner," Marker said.

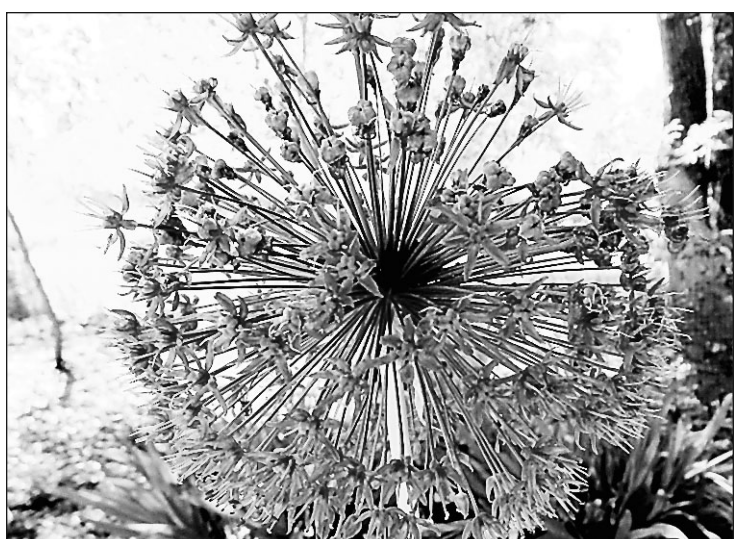
DIBBLES AND BITS

• Yankton Flower & Vegetable Show, Saturday, Aug. 6 at Yankton Community Library Meeting Room. Public is invited to exhibit at no charge and to view entries and awards at no charge. Event is sponsored and judged by Yankton Town & Country Garden Club. Entries accepted Saturday, Aug. 6 10a.m.-noon with public viewing 1-4 p.m. Betts Pulkrabek: 605-463-2206

• Is touring gardens and nurseries for plant ideas your hobby? These demonstration gardens feature Rocky Mountain and High Plains plants that are low maintenance and have low water requirements. These gardens are open to the public and feature "Plant Select" plants. Virtual western landscape tour: tinyurl.com/3fegkqn

• Mint is an edible and ornamental herb for outdoors and indoors. Flavors include spearmint, peppermint, and others such as lavender, ginger, apple, and chocolate mint. Mint can be grown in containers and annually outdoors in a wide range of conditions. Some mint overwinterers and may spread if not planted in a bottomless container in the soil. Mints are made to divided and exchanged with others in spring. For tea, flavored food, or fragrance indoors, young stems with leaves may be dried in a paper bag away from sunlight in about a week or so. Source: Charlie Nardozzi Website: National Gardening Association.

'GLADIATOR' ALLIUM



BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Master Gardener Janette Marker from the Lewis & Clark Lake area near Yankton grows a flower garden perennial of four-season interest that she says deer or rabbits don't eat. The lavender 'Gladiator' allium grows to about 4 ft. tall by early summer on an erect stem. After the flower head matures, the spikes remain as a natural yard ornament through the winter. She says that the heads may be spray painted for a dried plant arrangement. According to Marker, other varieties of alliums can range in height down to 10 in. and colors of white, yellow, purple, or blue are available in other varieties. The herb chives, also an onion relative, resemble miniatures of 'Gladiator' and its leaves may be eaten while enjoying the beauty of the flower head. Source: Prairie Lands Gardener's Guide

AUGUST PLANT TIPS

Diane Dicks of Diane's Greenhouse, Fordyce, Neb. offers free landscaping plans. You bring in pictures and measurements of your yard and leave with plants, plans, and knowledge to plant your own landscape. call her at (402) 357-3754. Diane offers these summer tips:

• By now, all garden vegetables should have been mulched. We like to see mushroom compost on your garden about mid June. This allows the soil temps to increase, right before the heat and lack of rain sets in. We do not recommend grass clippings around vegetable plants. The grass clippings heat up and start to turn moldy. We feel this introduces fungus to your garden. Also, people using weed and feed on their lawns do not want to use this on the vegetables — especially around tomatoes.

• We recommend to water your garden, and any newly planted perennials and shrubs, every 5 to 7 days. Water deeply. Then allow the soil to dry down a bit. Water newly planted trees every 5 to 7 days. Trees require 20 gallons of water / week of deep, slow watering.

• Water containers every day. By now, if you used soil (from the ground), or a poor quality potting soil, your plants are not thriving. The soil in the container gets too hard and cannot soak up the water. A good quality potting soil will stay soft even when dry. We recommend fertilizing your containers weekly, or even twice/week. Diane's Greenhouse uses "Daniels."

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