

PLANT EXCHANGE

BY **BRENDA K JOHNSON**
P&D Correspondent

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.

One of the top honors at the Yankton Town & Country Garden Club's Flower and Vegetable Show last summer Saluted Tony and Donna Ellis's entry. Tony found driftwood that resembled a bird at rest, and Donna creatively arranged hosta leaves that she snipped right from her deck that morning. Their enthusiasm about their shared plant hobby and the prospect of a yard where you can create winners in reach of your deck made the visit to their yard not to miss.

Q: What does it take to make the yard beautiful from your deck?

A: Tony and Donna Ellis own and work together at Tony Ellis Auto Sales on East Highway 50. They've lived in their Yankton home more than 30 years. Their backyard is spacious, and standing on their large deck, unobstructed by rails, often a panoramic view of the backyard. A few elements of their grown children remain in backyard décor, but mostly it's the handiwork of Tony and Donna.

"We bounce (ideas) off each other," Donna says. "I often say, 'Tony, I know you can do this.' We don't have to work every evening in the yard. We wanted perennials so we can have weekends off."

They enjoy travel to gardens in the region and are fans and members of Lauritzen Gardens and Botanical Center in Omaha.

"These rusty red sedum (by the deck) were cuttings from Matty Vanderpool. They grew from broken stems," Donna said.

The wide flowerbed around the deck includes hosta perfect leaves like Donna selected and Tony's driftwood bird for their winning flower show entry.

Two elements in the deck flowerbed may illustrate how Tony and Donna work together to create their backyard landscape. "We needed a new access to get onto the deck. We cleaned Old Chicago brick and used broken concrete sidewalk for the walkway," they explained. Simple, recycled materials that took work to acquire and prepare for installation became the pathway and steps to access the deck from the yard.

The second element is an exquisite, robust tea rose in bloom by the deck. The spot is a little protected from harsh weather. In summer heat, leaves are free of black spot, and emerging leaves and buds show the plant has been well tended. A plant that demands care to show vitality is carefully placed and receives all the care it needs. The El-lises are ready to work at changes in their landscape and have the skills and drive between them to try new ideas around the yard.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Tony Ellis's bird-like driftwood and Donna Ellis's selection of hosta leaves combined for a winning combination at the Yankton Flower and Vegetable Show this summer.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
They recycled old Chicago brick for steps and flowerbed edging and broken pieces of sidewalk cement for pavers by the deck.

FIXING 'CAN'T GROW ANYTHING' AREA

Growing season of 2011 had rain, sometimes falling as gully washers. They are quite aware of water paths during heavy rains and decided to deal with a spot on the side of their yard that had poor soil, east sun, and part shade near a mature tree.

"You couldn't grow anything there," Donna says. "We call this 'dry creek bed,'" Tony says.

By the contour of Ellis's yard and surrounding



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
What began as their flowerbed now grows Donna's flowers for enjoyment and creative projects, and Tony's vegetables and gladiolas.

area, one can imagine water rushing through in a downpour.

"(This area) is a necessity as spring or rain runoff occurs. (We've made these changes) all since spring."

"We filled in with county soil. (For the 'creek bed') we brought in rounded gravel from the shop." This contoured water pathway now has gravel to slow erosion," Tony said.

New soil helps plants, according to Donna. "We

filled in the beds on the sides of the 'creek bed' with sedum, hostas, columbine, bacopa, moss rose, and hardy hibiscus." Many of these plants were transplanted from other areas of the yard. Now erosion is addressed with the gravel creek bed, and the area they considered an eyesore where plants didn't grow is now an amended flowerbed.

EITHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

A split cedar fence divides flower from vegetable garden in the back corner of the yard. "This area (on one side of the fence) started from Donna's flowerbeds," Tony says.

"It had delphinium and Gerbera daisies," Donna says. "We started taking some Gerbera daisies to the shop in winter along with geraniums and asparagus fern. Windows there get south and west sun and they bloom well."

One of Donna's creative outlets has been during her service on the Yankton Area Arts Board. She decorated tables for their Tables Beautiful event, and earlier this year, decorated for the Scott Luken granite art display called "Big and Heavy."

Donna's side of the split cedar fence grows flowers and plants for decorating. "I was a soccer mom, so we grew sugar pumpkins and I painted them black and white. I used to can everything (from Tony's vegetable garden) but now only salsa." She decorates with Indian corn, pumpkins, and unusual gourds in the fall.

On Tony's side of the split cedar fence, he grows vegetables. But he also has two other vegetable gardens at work by his car lot.

"I hoe the garden at work at noon. I don't allow weeds. I hoe before the weeds make seeds. I till in the fall and mulch in leaves and water it in. Then in the spring, I till the leaves in. That's fertilizer," he says.

Tony extended his tilling as a volunteer when he fine-tiled the Yankton Community Gardens as the ground was initially plowed three years ago.

His gardens east of Yankton were pulverized by hail on Aug. 18 along with many who lost gardens, crops, and had other damages. However, at home they still harvested tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, peppers, and zucchini.

"My mother taught me to garden. Of five children, the rest viewed the garden as work. We had 1,000 pounds of potatoes in the fall," Tony says.

"Along the back fence we have an upright garden." The bottle gourds climb high along the fence. Donna decorates them for Yankton Area Arts and others," Tony says.

Although Tony's side of the cedar fence started as vegetables, sure enough, he grows flowers too. "It started with a bag of five bulbs from Wal-Mart," Donna says.

"When he grew them along the edge of his vegetable garden, Tony saw how beautiful the gladiola flowers were. He started making bouquets with them for others. Now he has 88 bulbs he plants along the fence here and another nursery of gladiolas besides."

Tony and Donna like the plants in their yard. Plants are well tended. They express creativity with their plants and use their skills to benefit others as well as for their own enjoyment.

On The Job With Lisa Kortan, Forestry Specialist

BY **BRENDA K JOHNSON**
P&D Correspondent

Q: What were your highlights of last growing season around Yankton?

A: Lisa Kortan is Urban Forestry Specialist for the City of Yankton. On the job more than a year, she has planned for and led the annual city planting and maintenance of flowers, trees, and shrubs, has overseen tree trimming around the city, and now assists in snow removal.

"I plan to get insulated boots," Kortan said. "Last winter I helped make ice and maintain the outdoor hockey rinks at Trip Park and Sertoma Park. I was surprised at how much daily use the outdoor rinks get for club sports and for youth practice."

Kortan grew up in the Tyndall/Tabor area and her children attend school in Bon Homme School District.

"My son had a science project to identify and photograph



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Lisa Kortan, new City of Yankton Urban Forestry Specialist, wanted to see more colors and new varieties in new plantings last season. Pink and lime green accented the Riverside Park entrance.

horticulture instructor at the Springfield Minimum Security Prison provided background for her work in Yankton.

As Kortan began her new position, planning color for the coming year was a favorite part of her job.

"The entrance to Riverside Park was a place to start. Then downtown, Douglas Avenue, Memorial Park, around the pool, and over to 4th Street and Westside Park," she says.

Once the maintenance shop had been removed and opened the space at the entrance to Riverside Park near the Meridian Bridge, Kortan saw possibilities.

"I wanted bright, fresh colors to go with the entrance sign. Fuchsia wave petunias and lime-colored sweet potato vine were planted with the shrub roses.

"Many commented on the flowers in wire baskets on poles in Historic Downtown Yankton (last summer). The bicolor mini-wave petunias selected by Yankton's Downtown Association remained showy throughout the season. Local businesses donated to have the baskets and we fertilized and watered them," she says.

"As you drive block to block (along) Douglas Avenue, the planters ahead show white, pink, yellow and purple. Plants (used around Yankton) need to be quite drought-tolerant and last from cool to hot to cool weather. We water on Fridays in the heat of summer, but plants need to be able to last until Monday. There are lots of new varieties."

She found that a few new varieties have bold colors but lack stamina in the city conditions, so they won't be on next year's list.

"Memorial Park was a part of Yankton's 150th celebration (in June). With the mile walk around

the park, I think this park is well used by walkers. We pruned trees and cleaned up the south parking lot area before the celebration."

The city pool had a face lift too. "We added concrete pods



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Fieldstone of the historic gazebo in Westside Park received a fuchsia wave petunia accent last season.

and picnic benches, large royal blue flower pots, and kid-friendly ornamental grasses by the pool entrance.

"We worked along West 4th Street to Summit a month last summer. There had been some winter kill."

She remarked about harsh conditions along the highway, including salt, ice, snow, soil compaction, temperature extremes and lack of consistent moisture.

"We had a directive that plants along 4th Street over 2.5 ft tall had to be removed due to safety issues on the right of ways. People backing out or using alleys needed to be able to see well.

"We tried to transplant the

perennials that we took out near the arboretum and other areas around town.

"I hope that we have that area finished in three years," Kortan said. "Those four blocks really show up. I want color, texture, and fragrance for that area. It needs to be low maintenance because of the busy highway. We had good luck with annual vincas. (Later in the season) it didn't need water for three weeks.

"We use Preen as a pre-emergent herbicide for weeds and drought tolerant plants that can take those conditions, including high salt. I visited with Harlan Hamernick of Blue Bird Nursery in Clarkson Nebraska for some suggestions."

Westside Park received Kortan's colors last season. "I notice that a lot of people take a break from the hospital or what they have going on in life there. I like the fieldstone in the park. We planted wave petunias on the gazebo. Not a lot kills them, but they were hard to water. A pigeon nested in them. We also planted flowers in the planters at the historic entrance to the park. Neighbors commented that they liked the flowers."

"Last summer I made lists that were hard to get through before the new week.

Now is a good time to plan for spring. I hope to add more color around parks and work with the arboretum trees and native grassland next season," Kortan concluded.

DECEMBER PLANT TIPS:

Trish Olson, manager of Hometown Floral, 1615 Main St., Tyndall (605) 589-HOME, invites all to holiday open house today (Friday) until 5:30 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

"Poinsettias are a popular plant for the holidays," Olson said. She says that some are even sprayed colors such as purple, pink, orange, green and gold.

• Today's poinsettia is bushier, more attractive and much less delicate than those of the early 1960s.

• Modern chemicals keep the plant small, so that the

poinsettia is compact and the flowers should last for 2-6 months.

• When buying a poinsettia, look at the true flowers (yellow and tiny in the center of the flower head.) True flowers should be unopened for maximum flower life.

• Poinsettia is sensitive to cold air, so protect the plant in transport and don't leave it in the garage.

• Once in your living room, put it in a well-lit spot away from drafts and keep it reasonably warm.

DIBBLES AND BITS:

• When to plant? Johnny's Select Seed Company has a seasonal calculator on its website so you can select cool and warm season plants and when to plant them. This calculator is also helpful to look for those who grow transplants for correct timing with the season. The website calculator supplies information for early to standard to fall seasoning planting, according to when you use the calculator. Website: www.JohnnySelectSeed.com

• Reusable lock ties are plastic, 8 inches long and can be purchased from Tree Pro in West Lafayette, IN (treepro.com). They work very well for being able to open enclosures built to keep deer from eating new trees. The oldest lock ties are three years and do not show signs of breaking down. (Contributed by Darrell Ausborn, Yankton)

• Cylindrical tomato cages made from fencing may be held in



Cobalt blue lobelia border plants in the foreground are paired with orange butterfly weed.

place with lock ties. Remove lock ties to store cages flat.

• Blue border lobelia grew well last season in full sun to partial shade in this region. Lobelias planted indoors were transplanted into flowerbeds where they bloomed midsummer to near frost. Lobelia plants required no extra care, no deadheading, and received rain for water this season. Lobelia plants from a local greenhouse also grew well in a container garden with other plants. They added bold color as a border and can be grown from seed.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Bicolor mini-wave petunias were a historic downtown Yankton hit for Yankton's 150th celebration. Thanks to local businesses. Kortan's crew watered and fertilized the plants.

trees," she says. "He used our arboretum here behind the high school for the project. Leaves were beautiful colors this fall. It's good we have a place for surrounding communities to come to and enjoy also.

"When I go to a new town, I look at how they soften the landscape—the cement and the buildings. It's amazing what plant material can do."

Her training at Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls, horticulture experience with Jay and Tracey Gurney, landscape design work at Gurney Seed & Nursery Company, and years as a

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