



COURTESY PHOTO

Ruby's birdhouses for habitation and this one for décor have evolved since she started building them fifteen years ago. Natural and unstained old woods are elements in common. An old gate is the base for these birdhouses. Hyacinth bean vine and petunias add color.

## December Plant Tips

Jan Byrkeland is floral department manager at Hy-Vee Food Store, 2100 Broadway Ave., (605) 665-0662. Her suggestions are for the newly acquired gift Christmas cactus or the older Christmas cactus.

- Most homes are 65-75 degrees F during the day. A bit cooler night temperature encourages blooms.
- Christmas cactus grows best with a humidity boost in winter. One way to get more humidity is to set the plant on gravel in a water-filled tray.
- Diffused or indirect light works best for a Christmas cactus. East-facing window rather than a south-facing window is preferred.
- Put finger in the soil to check for moisture. If it is dry beneath the soil surface, water the soil until water

pours out the pot drain holes and then drain excess. Water plant when soil is dry. Excess water kills the plant.

- If you wish to prune the cactus, after blooming is the best time. Sections may be rooted in potting soil for gift plants. Re-potting plant with fresh potting soil after 3 years or so is a good idea. This plant prefers the slight-ly root-bound condition.
- Christmas cactus only needs fertilizer twice a year and not near the bloom period.
- Bud drop may be a sign of too much water, lack of humidity or not enough light.
- If cactus does not flower during the holidays, one option is to put it in a closet overnight for a few weeks. That shortened daylight may trigger the plant to bloom.

## Pollinators & Native Plants

Seeds all around us are formed by pollination. Flowers are designed so that they receive pollen from certain plants and sometimes by only certain pollinators.

Pollinators help transport pollen to stigmas of flowers. Wind also assists in pollination.

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects. This is according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Honeybee decline has focused international attention on what can be done to protect pollinators. Limiting use of certain insecticides and developing other alternatives are part of the solution. Spraying in the evening when pollinators are less active is a step farmers and gardeners may consider.

Preserving and providing native habitat is a way landowners can help native pollinators. Preserving natural habitat is beneficial because some of the specific links between pollinators and flowers are yet unknown. Native habitat provides food, cover and a place to overwinter and raise young. This habitat helps pollinators.

Including native plants in the yard is another way to help native pollinators. Some native perennials, trees and shrubs may be there already. Add more native plants in



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Native bees are one of the many kinds of pollinators that help plants form seed by pollen dispersal.

locations where more butterflies and other pollinators have been observed. Some non-native plants attract them too. Avoid cultivars that attract no pollinators.

Native perennials that grow well in sand to clay loam soil and provide pollen include hyssop, butterfly milkweed, prairie coreopsis, false sunflower, lupine, bergamot, bee balm, black-eyed Susan, stiff goldenrod and wild geranium.

Native trees and shrubs of the region that provide pollen for pollinators, see the website: [www.nativepollinator.com](http://www.nativepollinator.com). Information provided by Heather Holm in her talk: "Native Bees and Their Role as Pollinators of Native Plants" at the 2015 International Master Gardener Conference.

### Plant Exchange

# Imagine And Then Build It

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact [news@yankton.net](mailto:news@yankton.net) Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog on Facebook or [www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com](http://www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com)

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Ruby Goeden of Yankton seeks out creative projects. Some of the projects involve plants directly. Her yard is filled with perennials, trees, expansive lawn and vegetable garden. Participants on the Missouri Valley Master Gardener's Yankton garden tour saw her yard in the city last summer. Some called her expansive manicured yard a park.

Tour participants also saw how Ruby makes use of tiny plants in fairy or theme gardens. She adds hyacinth bean plant vines to decorative birdhouses that she builds to display in her garden or indoors. Sometimes she adds dried plants to a Christmas stable for a natural touch.

As much as she likes plants, Ruby likes working creatively more.

"I've always been someone who can look at (a project) and say 'I can do this and this.' She motions across the street. An eyesore she saw when she exited her house got her attention.

Now you see a decorative screen she built of several used privacy fence panels. Vines and annuals provide color. Old farm tools are displayed on the panels, repeating the farm theme from across the street. That's what she sees now when she goes out the front door.

In Ruby and Kent's backyard, birds are attracted to their shade trees. Off their back deck is a large flower-bed of perennials that attracts birds to bird feeders. Kent has a bird identification guide that he keeps by the deck.

"I'm always making something," Ruby said. She started building birdhouses about fifteen years ago. Many birdhouses decorate her flowerbeds—some for birds to nest in and others

as outdoor and indoor décor. She surprised Kent with her interest in building projects.

"Now he shows off that his wife can do this," she said. She expanded orders for birdhouses to friends and now word has spread to the public.

Dismantled old sheds from their property were first sources for building birdhouses.

"I like old things. First birdhouses had wood over a hundred years old." She found square nails in the shed boards. Now her supply of old wood is diminished. She uses it sparingly for roofs and other parts that show well.

"I cut with the big circular saw in the shop," she said. The shop is also Kent's Goeden Construction shop. If parts come loose, I fix them. When I build, I glue first and then nail. I don't make any two (projects) the same. I don't go by a pattern. It's here (in my head). I build (bird décor) condos more than anything; with four or five sizes of birdhouses (on a base)."

"Kent thinks everything should be measured just so. Not me. It takes him three times as long. I just do it," she smiled. For decorating with wood, she looks for pieces along the railroad track by their house or moss growing under a tree or driftwood near the river.

"Once someone brought me an old piano to make birdhouses for her children," Ruby said. "Kent helped me take the piano apart. The lid had an engraving of their relative and the year. So I put that as the front of one birdhouse. When the lady saw it, she said, 'We're keeping it, so please build one more.'"

Ruby saw an idea somewhere and built her own first crèche — a wooden stable depicting the Christian Christmas story. Then she



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Ruby designed and built this crèche as a surprise for her daughter. Most of the décor parts for detail in the crèche are natural objects she found outdoors or purchased at rummage sales or the Good Will store.



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A cottonwood tree the Goedens planted about 27 years ago has thrived in their park-like backyard. Handmade ladder from a Yankton High School play her son directed, leans against the trunk.

made others for friends. The surprise crèche she built for her daughter for this Christmas has lots of details. Natural elements come from outdoor walks. She shops at rummage sales and the Good Will store for figures. She likes handmade ladders and included one in

her daughter's crèche. A full-sized ladder, really a prop from a Yankton High School play that her son directed, leans against a cottonwood tree. Goedens planted the tree in their backyard 27 years ago. All have flourished.

## Summer Hummingbird Home

BY MARY ANN KING  
Master Gardener

Yankton is located on a migratory path for hummingbirds, and with joy I look forward to their annual visit to my river's edge garden. Providing the right habitat will encourage these humming wonders to stay around for the summer.

Visual creatures with excellent sight and little sense of smell, hummingbirds are attracted to color, especially red. Loving trumpet and tubular flowers for the nectar, they will pollinate while traveling from bloom to bloom. By referencing a garden center, the Internet or library, you can find many varieties of hummingbird-friendly plants and shrubs to include in your garden. Choose plants that bloom throughout the season, providing a constant food source. As an added bonus, the same habitat that is coveted by hummingbirds also attracts butterflies and moths. Hummingbird moths are wonderful to observe and "hum" late in the summer season.

A hummingbird garden can be a small window box or several acres of plantings, but should be located where you can quietly sit and observe their daily flights. They need sunlight and quiet, shaded areas to cool off and rest. Abundant water is critical, and can be a well-maintained bird-bath, pond or river. They do enjoy a dash through a misting sprinkler as well!

After mating, a female bird will build a nest from spider



PHOTO: ROGER DIETRICH

Local birder Roger Dietrich captures a quick photo of this visiting hummingbird.

webs and small plant material and usually lay two eggs. With the highest metabolism of all animals, hummingbirds will eat every 10-15 minutes, consuming a large variety of insects and 50 percent of their weight in nectar on a daily basis.

I do have a nectar feeder that is visited many times throughout the day. There are commercially available nectar solutions or you can mix your own. After mixing 1 part sugar with 4 parts boiling water, allow the nectar to cool before adding to a feeder. Change nectar every 4 days

and more frequently with extreme heat conditions.

Old nectar can turn to alcohol and is harmful to the birds. When changing the nectar, be sure to thoroughly clean the feeder with hot soapy water and rinse well. Male hummingbirds are very territorial and will take possession of a feeder, so you may need to hang additional feeders to satisfy several birds.

With many different species to observe, an enticing habitat for hummingbirds will reward you with quite an aerial show.

## My Annual Visitor

BY MARY ANN KING  
Master Gardener

Sipping hungrily sweet nectar that was mixed especially for him, and I, waiting for the thunderstorm to bring wind and rain, look forward to another spring visit from my migrating Hummingbird friend.

He arrives in late April, hoping that I await his return with the sweet mixture that will sustain him on preordained travels.

Stopping to rest and refuel before moving on to make his temporary northern summer home.

The cooling breezes announce it is time for him to return to my South Dakota terrace; the resting spot that will refresh him for travel onward and south to his wintertime home.

## Inspiring Decor



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To Ruby Goeden, an eyesore across the street became a screened spot to add plants and continue her yard farm theme décor.

## Dibbles And Bits: Incorporating Plants Into Meaningful Gift Ideas

• Looking for meaningful gifts for elders to lift their mood and create social interaction around plants? Candice Miller of the University of Illinois Extension presented "Using Floral Design as Therapeutic Horticulture" at the 2015 International Master Gardeners Conference in Council Bluffs, IA. These are simple projects for consideration this season: Plant paper white bulbs. Plant a terrarium. Make your dream bouquet by cutting flower

pictures from magazines and glue to board in the shape of a bouquet. Make a dream garden by cutting out flower or vegetable pictures from seed catalogs and glue to board. Make a wreath or swag using evergreens or cover and fill an evergreen container. Create ornaments out of garden materials like pinecones. Use various seeds and glue to create seed art. Build bird feeders and place them where birds can be seen.

• According to Dr. John Ball of South Dakota State University, it's hard to find a mature Ponderosa or Austrian pine that doesn't have diploia tip blight in this region. Stunted gray needles with resin droplets and dieback are evidence of the disease. Fungicide applications starting in spring can partially control the disease. Pine wilt is another disease of the region caused by a nematode and maybe a bacteria, but is vectored

by sawyer beetles that carry the nematode from infected trees to healthy trees. Symptoms include fast decline, falling needles, and death within the season. Response is remove the infected tree, cut flush with the ground before April 1st. No fooling. See more details at The Pest Update <http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/forest-health/tree-pest-alerts/>