

HOMEGARDEN

PLANT EXCHANGE:

Planting Trees For The Family Dream

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Share your tips, give us a tour of your plant site, or send your questions related to outdoor or indoor plants to newsroom@yankton.net. Attn: Brenda Johnson, or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

Q: How does this orchard give you a place in the family dream?

A: "My husband's parents had a dream for these 80 acres," said Arlene Day Alsgaard of rural Yankton.

Their rolling hills and gullies face the Missouri River south of Tabor.

"They hoped to live out their retirement years here in South Dakota," Alsgaard said. "They wanted to build an earth home, and actually did make an earth dugout before they became ill. They had a barn and house moved onto the place, and established a shelterbelt of Eastern red cedar and locust trees.

"My husband enjoyed working here as relaxation and my children camped and explored here. After his parents died unexpectedly in the 1990s, we decided to purchase the land from the estate," she said.

"My family enjoyed getting away here," Alsgaard continued. "I needed something to do when we spent time on the place that caught my interest. When I was a child, we'd visit the grandparents some Sunday afternoons. My grandfather had cherry, pear and apple trees. The cherry tree was off limits for snacking because the fruit was for cooking. As a grownup, I've always wanted a cherry tree. At our home we have three apple trees, but the cherry tree died. I wanted an orchard here on the Alsgaard land."

It took some time for Alsgaard to turn her dream into reality, although ample space was available for an orchard in several locations near the house.

She ultimately decided to place the fruit trees in the sheltered extra space between the cedar and locust curved lines of trees. Full sun, room for each tree to be positioned for pollination, space for each tree to grow naturally and sloping land that tempers winds helped her decide on this location.

Fruit Of Labor

In three to five years, Alsgaard is expecting the earliest fruit from dwarf trees that reach maturity sooner than others. Some might consider the work and risk of establishing an orchard or even planting a tree at all, too long to wait for possible benefits.

Alsgaard consulted with Jay Gurney at Yankton Nurseries for suggestions concerning fruit trees and he provided assistance on site as the trees were planted. She wanted to try a mix of trees, some yielding predictable harvest and some with a bit less dependable harvest but offering variety of fruit.

She selected Dwarf Liberty, Delicious Red, and Zestar apples, Sun Gold and Moon Gold apricots, Pipestone plums, Meteor cherry, Bailey Hardy and Reliance peaches, and Clapp's Favorite pear trees.

Alsgaard hopes for fruit that will bear at different times throughout the season.

"We didn't lose one tree in the winter of 2008," she said.

The trees have shiny, disease-free leaves and new growth last spring.

Alsgaard considered options concerning placement of the orchard trees in relation to each other for protection from weather, pollination, and showy blooms in spring. She ended up with apricot and cherry trees in the center of the orchard with apple and pear trees on the ends.

While these decisions were made carefully, she and other gardeners recognize the need to be open to re-evaluating decisions as conditions change over time.

"We watered the trees until the first freeze in the fall as they were establishing roots," Alsgaard said. "Then over winter I snow-shoed out here to catch sight of the first leaf last spring."

Hoses are set up for second year watering as needed. Trees have wire mesh deer and rabbit guards. The area around the trees has been mowed to slow grass competition.

"We decided not to prune the trees the first year to give the leaves a chance to make food for the trees," Alsgaard said.

The orchard is a topic for family discussion.

"Our daughter wants us to put in a mulberry tree," Alsgaard said. "We've been thinking about walnut trees. The walnut trees at my mother's home are still there. We have room to expand here. I'd like to be able to see the pear trees bloom from the house."

Trees For Future Generations

"I always wanted to have an orchard," Alsgaard said. "When you are about age 50 or so, you wonder if you will see the trees to maturity. I read an article about planting for the next generation. I'm anticipating fruit here in the next five years. Until then, I can eat the gooseberries and asparagus that my husband's parents planted."

Alsgaard's interest in plants is generational.



PHOTOS: BRENDA JOHNSON
(Top) Mary Frankforter, master gardener of rural Yankton, is a fan of ninebark. "By my house I have a steep embankment," she said. "The ninebark hedge is about eight years old and stands about eight feet tall. Ninebarks were planted close together for the erosion control into clay soil. The spring flower, the red seed head and the leaf foliage — particularly when wet — are so attractive."

(Above, left) Mary Ann King visualizes how deciduous and evergreen plants fit together. Much of her yard has become plant beds. Her formerly rectangular yard now bends near the river's edge, repeating the bow in the Missouri River beyond.

(Right) Arlene Day Alsgaard wanted trees for fruit variety, variable maturation and stepped season harvest that would grow well in her location. She selected apple, cherry, plum, peach and apricot varieties.

"My grown children ask, 'How's Mom's orchard?'" she said. "My son was interested in making pepper jelly, so he came home and we harvested peppers together and made some. He was able to experience all the parts of the process. Of course I got to have time with my son. ... I try to pass on the idea of growing food."

"I took out all my roses and some flower cutting plants and gave them away," King said. "The backyard has matured since we started on it 12 years ago, and now has more shade. I replaced the roses with low-maintenance, colorful perennials that fit the conditions now. Joel Teachout helps out with yard work."

"This past spring I only had to clean off last year's debris," King said.

She sanitizes the beds once a year and does it in the spring so that plants are protected with dead leaves over winter. Getting rid of her trademark roses two years ago was a big step.

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FEBRUARY PLANT TIPS

Jan Byrckland, Manager of Hy-Vee Florist at 2100 Broadway Ave. in Yankton shares tips about cyclamen to make these winter blooming houseplants with heart-shaped leaves and sweet scent last after Valentine's Day.

- Optimal location for cyclamen is a cooler location, but not less than 50 degrees. Keep away from drafts and bright sunlight.
- As blooms die, cut off stems at the crown or base.
- Cyclamen, native to the Mediterranean and bloom from November — March as potted plant. By April they begin to die back naturally and go into dormancy. Enjoy and toss, or put the plant in a cool, dark location and water minimally until September when it grows again.
- Cyclamen grow from a tuber, so water around the edge of the pot instead of wetting the crown. Water in your sink. Remove decorative foil, water, and drain. Fertilize every two weeks while blooming.
- Tuber may be repotted while dormant and soil-based potting mix is better for this plant. Position tuber crown above soil in pot.

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King's yard has some areas of full sun and wind exposure, dappled shade and full shade. These include a peony collection, pasque flower, columbine, day lilies, alliums and Echinacea.

She has also placed new perennials in beds according to their water

requirements so that some beds get extra water if needed, but all plants get a long soak of water, about an inch per week. That saves her time and water.

"I mow the columbine off after they bloom and they bloom again in the fall," King said. "Tiger Eye Sumac

has done well, so I am adding more." The leaf color and shape and the airiness of the plant give interest and frame an expansive view of the Missouri River beyond.

All yards need changes over time. King saves time by deciding what she wants for a space in the yard and how its plantings fit with the rest of the yard. She also talks with Jay Gurney and looks up information.

She considers the expected mature size of the plant and allows for growth in the bed, which saves her time of relocating plants. She looks for plants with many features, such as her long season boundary trees of columnar Quaking Aspen with white bark and rustling leaves in summer. Her weeping Golden Threadleaf False Cypress with charreuse string branches is a specimen plant in one flowerbed.

King has farmer roots and her time working with plants is enjoyable. Her grandmother and mother raised flowers and vegetables on the farm, and King's daughter has a green thumb, as well.

"Last spring my daughter grew vegetables on the roof of her apartment building in Minneapolis," she said.

Q: What can you learn from seed catalogues?

A: Besides listing new, mainstay and heritage seeds in seed catalogues, you can also find information that may reduce plant loss by trial and error. And surprising tidbits:

Landreth's Seed Company: Established in Philadelphia in 1784, this is the fifth-oldest corporation in America. Landreth's family business sold seeds to every U.S. president from George Washington to Franklin D. Roosevelt. David Landreth II founded the first U.S. horticultural society in 1828, and began Philadelphia Flower Show, which continues today.

Landreth's international plant exploration introduced azaleas and zinnias to this country. Landreth's seeds also accompanied a failed expedition to the North Pole in 1881. When Commander Perry reached the North Pole 16 years later, 50 percent of the radish seeds germinated after the extended cold exposure.

The Landreth Rural Register and Almanac, which offered planting tips, was sent to 600,000 homes in the mid-1800s.

For more information, visit www.landrethseeds.com, or call 1-800-654-2407.

Thompson & Morgan Seeds: Bonsai tree seeds, scented begonia tubers, blue verbenas, bite-size brussels sprout seeds, St. George runner bean seed (2010 Vegetable of the Year) with red and white blossoms, "Mongolian Giant" sunflowers with heads up to 18 inches and seeds 1.5 inches long for competitions, "Freaky Tom" warted pumpkin seeds, "Minnesota Midget" melons, 4 inches in diameter with yellow flesh, and "Calypso" cilantro that will regrow from three cuttings. For more information, visit www.tmsseeds.com, or call 1-888-466-4769.

Johnny's Seeds: Container garden "Bright Lights" Swiss chard and "Mini Apple" bell pepper seed are featured, as well as a variety of warm and cool season salad greens, how to graft heirloom tomato plant onto a disease-resistant root stock, "Marquette" red wine grape plants developed from University of Minnesota, unique leaf color coleus seed, and growing information such as germination, culture, tips, soil, planting and harvest. For more information, visit www.johnnyseeds.com, or call 1-877-564-6697.

Press & Dakotan

Beautiful Baby Contest 2010

Attention Parents, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Godparents & Friends:

We will be featuring our annual "Beautiful Baby Contest" in print and online on Wednesday, February 24, 2010. If you or someone you know has a child, we would love to include them in our feature!

To enter, simply submit your photo and entry form with the \$10 submission fee by **Wednesday, February 10, 2010.**

First place winners in the following categories will receive a framed winners print and gift certificates to local businesses:

- 0-12 Months
- 13-24 Months
- 25 Months-3 Years
- 4-7 Years
- Multiple Births

Submission fee (\$10) must accompany entry form to be valid.

Beautiful Baby Contest 2010

Category #: _____ Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Child's Name: _____

Parent's Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

*Submission of this form authorizes the publication of this photo in this contest in print and online at www.yankton.net.
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Entry Deadline: Wednesday, February 10, 2010

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