

HOME

GARDEN

Gardener Turns Hobby Into A Fun Business

PLANT EXCHANGE

BY **BRENDA K JOHNSON**

"Thinking Spring" this month, Plant Exchange will appear each Saturday in February, and then return to its regular spot, the first Saturday in March.

Q: Does your plant business have landscape issues like we solve in our yards?

A: Diane Hofer is an avid gardener turned professional. "I started with a thistle patch," Hofer says. How she changed a city lot in Beresford into attractive perennial flowerbeds came over time. Her business is located beyond her home backyard fence and in an adjacent lot.

Hofer is a retired music teacher, who for years has found working in the soil as a daily place "to clear my thoughts" and relax. Now she is involved full time from near May 1st–September 1st and other times besides.

She sells perennials at Diane's Backyard Gardens, off Hwy 46 to 2nd St and left on Prairie St. in Beresford. In just a few years, her business site has evolved to a sun and shade perennial display gardens, greenhouse, water interest display, perennial beds for bare root digs, and a building to house the antique and collectible yard décor that she paints and sells. She features hardy, colorful perennials, ground covers, sedums and other low-growing plants, and ornamental grasses that you can see growing in her garden for size and grouping.

A PLANT PROBLEM

"We couldn't get the boat in the garage," Hofer says. Their detached garage/store is located on the garden lot. They needed more pad space to angle the boat in.

"We made a bigger pad, but then there was an 18 inch drop from the cement to the lawn. The pad needed a retaining wall on two sides." She thinks that if you have to have the walls, flowerbeds along the cement pad would look attractive and be a safety edge for the family and customers. So Len, who Diane says is the builder for this business, did that.

"The retaining wall beds needed to look attractive when viewed from the cement pad and from the gardens looking back to the garage. I didn't want to put in plants and have to say 'Watch for the flowers' when the grandkids played basketball on the pad." So with much thought, she has plants just right for this flowerbed.

"These are very contained and low-growing. They can take basketballs." She ends up with two beds, one containing a sedum collection, and the other 'Basket of Gold' alyssum, magenta creeping phlox, creeping baby's breath that gets only three inches tall, and a 'Snow in Summer' Cerastium tomentosum. "These are steppable."

She says that the sedum is simple to propagate and care for. She plants sedum stem pieces and keeps them watered as they root. "I used Preen before the weeds came up and the sedum spread and filled in the bed."

Besides skillfully selecting plants, Hofer uses her rock-collecting hobby to place stones of various textures and colors in these beds. She has smooth river rock, fieldstone with seams of other rock compressed in it, granite, and others.



BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Customers needed bathroom facilities at the display garden. With Hofer's eye for plants, this spot becomes an attraction.

INSTANT SHADE

Most of Hofer's perennial display gardens receive full sun. She finds that some customers need shade from the sun as they tour the beds on hot days. A solution that gave her instant shade came from another of Hofer's interests: hunting antiques and collectables. She bought trim from an old house and drew a picture of her idea. Len fashioned a shade porch with old railing and roof overlooking the beds. With bunting on the rails, and "foundation" plantings in front, and a path leading to it, the shade porch with its chairs serves as respite and as landscaping backdrop.

Hofer is also fan of re-cycled picket fence. A length of the white fence with a cluster of nearly wild roses is a focal point in one part of her perennial yard. "The white pickets stops the eye. I sell it by the section of pickets for yard decoration."

"Someone's junk is my treasure. I look for iron junk that is rusted. It's cheaper and I don't have

DIBBLES AND BITS

• "How to Kill Your Houseplants in Five Easy Steps" is a feature in the January 2011 Garden Corner Newsletter by Cynthia Bergman, Extension Horticulture Educator at Yankton County Extension. Website: yanktonhorticulture.webs.com

"Starting Seeds Indoors" is a February newsletter feature.

• Want to look at field-tested top performing annual flowers for this region? Go to www.provenwinners.com and select "Best Regional Plants." Plug in your hardiness zone and heat zone and see this site's options.

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 or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St. Yankton, SD 57078. Attn: Brenda Johnson.



BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Diane Hofer's garden and collectable interests and husband Len's building skill combine to solve a shade issue for display garden customers with a porch.

to care for it. I want it to look rugged." Various yard décor pieces rust away in the garden.



BRENDA K. JOHNSON
In winter, Hofer paints a collectable chair and re-uses it as a plant stand.

WAYS THAT WORK

Hofer transfers her gardening methods from her back yard gardening to her business. "I don't mulch. 'I'm always moving or adding plants.'" Bare ground around her perennials provides the bed for re-seeding and she moves the new plants to other areas.

"I don't add fertilizer. I amend the soil with animal manure and peat moss and sand in certain areas. I apply leaves that have been run through the mower. My compost pile also gets old potting soil. I don't turn the compost pile very often, but I have intentions. I just run out of time."

No weeds anywhere! Hofer has a 30-gallon garbage can weed container on a dolly that she moves along the display garden path. She removes all weeds and does not mulch with pulled weeds. The beds are tidy and most weed seeds are removed. Hofer likes Preen for early weeds.

Hofer overwinters extra container perennials by putting them end-to-end in a pit, about 1.5 ft. deep. About Christmas time, she covers the pit with plastic and then uncovers it about when tulips bloom. This 'winter storage' works better for bigger containers. "The success rate is about 95%," she says.

Hofer uses a holding bed for plants in progress. The bed soil contains extra sand for use as a propagation area. A cattle panel arched over the bed and shade cloth temporizes weather on young plants. Some gardeners use a specific area like this for staging plants that need extra attention or reduced competition as they grow.

THRIFTY NICHE

Hofer knows that gardeners appreciate a good buy. Discount prices at her August "Bare Root Dig" are popular. "I've only heard of one other business in the larger region offering small perennials in this way."

She knows how to propagate perennials which saves her costs that would need to be passed on

to the customer. She knows that small perennials often adjust to transplant shock more quickly than larger plants and that early fall is one of the times to transplant when you give the plant time to establish more roots.

Special perennial beds with amended soil are kept for the Bare Root Dig. "I plant varieties that grow well in the display gardens and plant transplants or seed. The plants grow here and overwinter, so I know they are winter hardy. The customer gets a lot of plants for the money and it saves me on soil and containers because I dig a small clump with soil and put it in damp newspaper. At this time I offer 25 varieties of perennials this way."

PLANT HOBBY

Autumn Joy sedum is at the head of one path into her display garden. "This came from my mother and from her mother, when they divided their beds. If the grouping of sedum flops in the middle, it's time to divide it—about every 5-6 years. If you over fertilize them, they will flop sooner."

Hofer is a mother of three children and was a music teacher for 27 years, and a private piano teacher. She learned early. "I needed to de-stress and be on my own a little. (In the early years) I had vegetable garden that would give me about two hours to balance chaos. That got to be overwhelming when I canned at 3:00 am, so I quit the vegetable garden and went to work on my yard in small areas."

Hofer commits many hours a day to her business in its sixth year. "During the season I am out of the house from 6:30am to 8:00pm. I don't bring cut flowers inside; I'm never in the house."

Hofer has more interests that she follows off-season. "I do crafts in winter. I've started collectable chair painting. I read."

"Working with plants— I want to keep this fun; something I love to do every day. It's the utmost compliment to me when people come by and want to walk in the garden."



BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Small succulents and sedums are attractive miniatures that draw children to this planter.

WEED PATCH

The Beauty Of A Christmas Cactus

BY **LINDA WUEBBEN**

Everyone out there whose Christmas cactus had a successful blooming season, raise your hand!

I always get a wonderful thrill when I see the buds form on my Christmas cactus. I haven't always had good luck with it and last year it was beautiful. But the buds were popping up all around the pot this past December and it was hard to wait for the first one to open wide. It just got started the week before Christmas but by New Year's Day, it was a gorgeous collection of blooms. It fills me with a little bit of hope in this dreary siege of cloudy, windy, snowy, cold winter days.

I wondered about how the Christmas cactus came to have such a name and did an Internet search to find out it was named for the Christmas holiday because that is when the plant blooms. Nothing romantic about it.

But I also found out cactus comes from the Greek word kaktos which translate into thistle. Nothing romantic there either. It is a desert plant which often blooms at night and is a member of the aloe vera family. It doesn't need constant watering but is a succulent plant which can store water in its fat leaves.

The same search brought up the answer for Poinsettia plants. The Poinsettia plant was introduced into the United States by Mexican ambassador Joel Poinsett in 1825, hence its name. In Mexico, the traditional name is called nochobuena (night good) and is also called Mexican Flame Leaf.

That is enough homework for now. Five days before Christmas, I realized I was one present short for a family member. Panic! I thought I had a gift lined up for everyone but a brain lapse during the busy month of December caught me off guard. I knew what I wanted to get but I was worried by this time in the holiday season, I wouldn't be able to find it. It's wasn't a popular item but one off the beaten path. Bob seemed to be short a present or two also so we needed to squeeze a last minute road trip into the bustle those few short days before Christmas.

To me, more exciting than gifts are the family members who share our holiday with us. Ever since I was a little girl, the most exciting thing about Christmas was waiting at our front door, watching the clock, praying for the aunts and uncles to get there. When were they going to come? How long does it take them to drive to our place? The turkey was done; where were they? And, when would the Tom & Jerry's be ready to drink?

We would have a big meal and everyone would contribute a bit of food. There was loud talking, laughing and the comforting squeeze of too many family members gathered around the dining room table. We put three leaves in the table, barely found enough tablecloths to cover it and gathered up all the chairs in the house. It was worth it.

We always put that special centerpiece on the table. Mom had read about it in a home-decorating magazine which were very popular in those days. Women didn't work so clever decorating ideas were published month after month for those women who wanted to dress their home just so, one holiday after another.

After Thanksgiving when the turkey was all carved up, the magazine said to save the breast bone including the wish bone. Mom cleaned it off, washed it and sprayed it with gold paint. We stuck it on a piece of styrofoam board with a small Santa figure holding red ribbon on two white reindeer and presto, Santa was pulling his sleigh. Styrofoam was big back in those days. It was a crafting item you didn't want to be caught with out. You could stick candles in it and fake flowers and poinsettias. A Christmas wonder of wonders!

Mom's creation did look pretty good. When Mom tried to talk me into making small one inch presents to pace behind Santa, I drew the line; enough was enough. They were too hard to 'wrap' and too small to keep on the bony sleigh. Mom was so proud of her little crafting adventure.

I still have the Santa and reindeer but they have a fancy new sleigh now. The turkey bone was finally buried. I think of it every Christmas when I unpack all those senseless decorations which raise my blood pressure. I can't throw it away though. It's a thread of my past; a connection to days of old.

There would be penny-ante poker for the adults after the dishes were washed and board games for us kids. Usually the night ended with playing, 'Button, button, who's got the button?' while we waited for the adults to finish visiting and head for home. No computer gadgets for us or television movies to entertain us. We entertained each other.

Oh yeah, the Tom & Jerry's came out after dinner but we little ones only enjoyed the batter with hot water and nutmeg sprinkled on the top.

Here's hoping your holiday season was blessed, your home happy with many family and friends and may the cold winds blowing February to our doorstep soon warm the outside just like the inside of our homes and hearts.

Press & Dakotan

Beautiful Baby Contest 2011



Beautiful Baby Contest 2011

Category # _____ Age: _____ Date of Birth _____

Child's Name _____

Parents Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Winners will be selected by the staff of Yankton Media Inc. Employees and family members of Yankton Media Inc. are ineligible to win. *Submission of this form authorizes the publication of child's photo in this contest in print and online at www.yankton.net. Submission fee (\$10) must accompany entry form to be valid.

Submit Entry To:
Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan
319 Walnut St., PO Box 56
Yankton, SD 57078

Entry Deadline:
Thurs., Feb. 10, 2011

We will be featuring our annual "Beautiful Baby Contest" in print and online on **Wednesday, February 23, 2011.** 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 a \$10 submission fee by Thursday, February 10, 2011. First place winners in the following categories will receive a framed winners print and prizes from the following sponsors: Scott Family Dentistry, Photography by Jerry, Linda's Angel Crossing, LilyCrest and JCPenney.

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| 1) 0-12 Months | 4) 4-7 Years |
| 2) 13-24 Months | 5) Multiple Births |
| 3) 25 Months-3 Years | |

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