

# Plant Exchange: Planning Your Outdoor Room

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

*“Plant Exchange” appears each Friday this February on the Garden page.*

Whether you call the backyard you envision an outdoor room or patio, it serves your needs better when you define its purpose. The process that Don and Meredith Kruml used may be helpful as you consider options for your outdoor space.

**Q:** How did you plan your outdoor room?

**A:** Don and Meredith Kruml live on a hilltop home overlooking Lewis & Clark Lake near Yankton. Out front is a panoramic view of the lake. The back porch overlooks a fenced, expansive rectangular yard that descends the hill and is lined with mature shrubs such as viburnum, high bush cranberry and lilac. Shrubs help block winds and cloister plantings in the yard. Sun and shade perennial flowerbeds are focal points around the yard.

“When we came here 11 years ago, there were a few cedars, ash and elm trees,” Meredith says. “There really wasn’t a back yard. It was a mass of weeds. You could see the neighbor’s house as well.

“Because of what Don has planted, we have something in bloom all season long. Every year we do something new and it extends the excitement. We both enjoy this. I have a sense of balance and Don knows plants. We work well together.”

They began planning their outdoor spaces from perspective of their chairs on the back porch.

“First we considered a wood deck,” Meredith says. “We didn’t like the idea. Then Don took a couple of chairs and we sat in different areas.”

Don observes, “When you are seated here (on the porch), you can see the whole yard without looking at the patio areas.”

He wanted seating out in the yard, among the plantings. “I want to be down at the level of the plants. When I’m inside, I can look at the lake. Out here I want the peaceful plants around me.”

“The backyard hill is steep. We needed the area (near the house) for a driveway for visitor cars. We wanted cozy spots to sit in the yard,” she says. “We sat on the porch to see what would look good from here. One of us would stand out the yard and pretend we were the patio for visual placement.”



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

**The outdoor room or patio of Don and Meredith Kruml has seating for meals, evening fire pit and additional activity space. Lighting extends the outdoor room use into the evening. Lawn surrounds the room with plant beds in view.**

### THREE INSTEAD

The Krums’ first outdoor seating space is attractive and practical. It is located by the side of the garage with easy access from the house and includes installed lighting. Dapple shade from pergola roof and hanging baskets of bold color and seating are inviting. Don’s tomato plants are close by.

“These eight Celebrity plants have produced 1,200 tomatoes by the end of the season,” Don says. “I’ve read that these are the most widely planted in the United States. I used the mushroom compost from Diane’s Greenhouse (in Fordyce, Neb.) and no other fertilizer. I put it in the row where I plant and then around the plants. I put tomato plants in about mid May. Any earlier, they’d sit in the ground and just don’t grow.”

The second outdoor room required more thought to plan and locate. It is positioned in the center of the yard and part-way down the hill. Nine steps descend to the pavers, so that the patio area is beneath the view from the porch, as the Krums say they wanted.

“We put the landscape pavers in a circle in the middle of the area as a focal point,” she says.

The fire pit is there. To one side is a table and chairs for eating. Other chairs are in conversation areas, leaving space besides for people to stand or sit.

“We thought of the shape of the patio that we wanted and put marking paint (on the grass to set boundaries),” she says. “We looked on the computer for ideas.”

They use the area for large family gatherings. Planters of red geraniums mark the steps leading down to the patio and a container on the patio adds color. This outdoor room is spacious and has a view of the plantings of the yard, but at a distance.

### PROBLEM BECOMES ANSWER

The third outdoor seating area is the most recently installed and began with the back of some Knockout roses two winters before.

“We cut all the roses almost to the ground,” Don says. “We thought, ‘Grow or die.’ Then we decided it would be a perfect spot for a swing.”

“Now we can appreciate the astilbe, delphinium, the young roses and obedient plants. I don’t like plants that spread in a specimen bed,” Meredith says.

The pergola is set down into the rose bed so that as they

swing, the beds with the plantings surround them on three sides.

The framing for the pergola is cedar. “This swing is Enviro-wood,” Don says. “It’s made from old milk cartons. We can leave the swing out all winter.” They said it doesn’t fade.

The shade area where they sit is protected from wind by nearby shrubs, and appears peaceful and private in its nestled spot in the landscape.

“John Neu built the patio for us, and Larry Schaeffer built the pergola,” Don says. He looks at the boulders that add natural stability to the spot.

At the same time that Don’s Knockout roses had a tough winter two winters ago, he had other Canadian shrub roses that were nearly dead. “I cut all the roses nearly to the ground. That’s an advantage of having roses that are not grafted (like tea roses) and are on their own stock. I sprayed them twice during the season with Bayer Insect and Mite Control and they came back well.” The roses look healthy now and are spaced apart for air movement between them.

“For bursts of color in the outdoor seating areas, we tried to balance colors with plant containers,” Meredith says. “We get



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

**Another outdoor space for the Krums is close to rose beds. Nearby shrubs and perennials shelter the area for privacy. Seating is positioned so they are eye level among plants when seated.**

big bursts of color with annuals in containers and hanging baskets.”

The outdoor spaces fit what the Krums want for private seating or entertaining or practical use. The outdoor areas feature

the plant beds in the landscape that the Krums want to see. New pergola seating replaced Don’s rose beds. Incorporating rose beds near the new outdoor space honors wishes of both owners.

## February Plant Tips

Deb Beier of Fensel’s Greenhouse and Flower Shop, 500 N. Highway 81 in Freeman — (605) 925-4204 — shares tips about the popular geranium to make it last for years. “Now is the time to give your overwintered zonal geraniums some attention,” Beier says. “See 6,000 blooming geraniums at our greenhouse this spring.”

- Cut the plant back about one-third, cutting just above a node.

- This cutting can become a new plant. Pick bottom leaves and leaf buds off before planting. The cutting should have a few leaf nodes above soil. Leave at

least three leaves for photosynthesis.

- Plant the stem in another container in potting soil deep enough so that two nodes are in the soil.

- Fertilize the cutting as it grows roots and leaves, about one-fourth strength until the plants are ready to go outdoors. You can pinch a little off the top of the plant to make them grow more branches and be fuller.

- Your source plant can be cut back again and then fertilized with full strength fertilizer so it will come back nicely once you put it outside. It will surprise you with many blooms.

## BEFORE AND AFTER



## Add Color And Hide A Post

**Before:** Lois Quatier of Yankton used her skill of growing plants in containers and her eye for color. As you entered her backyard, you saw flowers, plants, a pond and board fence with colors at a distance, but no focus at hand except for a support post.

**After:** “I made and painted the bird house myself,” said Quatier. She potted a hanging basket of a favorite red verbena flowers for this sunny location yard entrance, and added her red-trimmed birdhouse. Now the post is less noticeable and she gains color at a new height in the yard besides.

## Dibbles and Bits:

- Poor soil in which water stands instead of draining slowly after downpours, or compacted soil that is hard to loosen when you plant, are challenges for growing plants. Two options to consider are: (1) Amend the soil you have, or install a raised or mounded bed of new soil. Amending by adding compost, peat moss and sand is a long-term solution that improves soil a little over years of amendment. (2) Build a raised bed with stone, pavers or wood, or mound the area with at least 18 inches of topsoil. While this approach is faster, the topsoil in this bed can also be improved over time by amendment. More on soil options: February 2012 issue of *Garden Gate* magazine, available at Yankton Community Library.

- Lilacs are signature plants at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area in spring. Range of lilac colors include white, pink, lavender, purple and blue. Plants today come from

stock bred in the early twentieth century. More on heirloom lilacs: *Organic Gardening* magazine, available at Yankton Community Library.

- Design your backyard space. Now is a good time to think about how to make your backyard a place to relax among your plants. (1) What is the main focal point in your backyard? A stone or wall corner with water interest? (2) Add to the focal point with additional plants of varying heights

and leaf textures. (3) Work out from the focal point, repeating colors and textures. Leave open spaces. Notice balance around the yard and add plants that are tall, medium or short. (4) Supplement planted flowers with containers of flowers around the yard. Refresh the yard with new colors over the season. More information: February 2012 issue of *Garden Gate* magazine, available at Yankton Community Library.



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# Earth-Friendly Recycling For Your Garden

Using Kitchen And Garden Vegetable Waste To Its Potential Is Economical, Increases Garden Productivity

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

**Q:** How do you make compost for your garden?

**A:** Brenda Reichle lives near St. Helena and Menominee, Neb., in a country home. With a husband, young children, a job and other interests, she also wants “black gold” for her garden. But she wants to compost in a way that fits her lifestyle and available materials.

When she began to clean out a mature shelterbelt and made space for a garden seven years ago, she had brown piles and green piles of vegetative refuse.

“We had all the vegetation,” she said. “The design for compost bin was versatile and easy to move.”

Reichle decided the width of her square compost bin, and then fashioned boards that fit together like Lincoln Logs, with extra air vents between each row.

“You can make the bin as tall as you have vegetation, or take down a row to look in the pile,” Reichle explained.

“In went egg shells, coffee grounds (with some brown leaves or sticks and green grass clippings and other vegetation), and a shovel of soil or so when someone dug a hole.”

Rain helps keep the contents a little moist.

“If the garden was dry, I’d water the compost bin, too. I don’t turn the pile.”

The air vent between each row of boards is generous.

Reichle hadn’t focused on the compost pile for a couple of years.

“I lifted the cover off the top, and got to the bottom of the pile,” she said. “The brown crumbly bottom six inches was ready to go to the garden. It wasn’t strained, so there were pieces of stems in it. It smells like earth.”

“Now I have a couple of cement reinforcement wire bins to hold extra browns and greens, to add in as needed. I don’t measure proportions; I add materials on hand. If I notice we have a lot of brown vegetation in the pile, I might add some grass clippings,” she said.

“When I need more compost, I flip off the top part of the pile and look at the bottom area. I might store a bucket of compost for future use. I might think ahead when I need more compost. The piles of greens and browns are biggest when the garden is cleaned. With this approach, I don’t make compost as quickly (or efficiently) as if I were more regimented about composting. The first two years or so we had no compost, but now we have a pipeline for more.”

Since her compost pile is producing, Reichle adds “black gold” to her garden.

“With everything I planted this year, I added some compost in with the plant or seed. I also side-dressed rhubarb, asparagus and raspberries.”



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

**Brenda Reichle of the St. Helena area in Nebraska built this square compost bin. Air spaces between each board allows for needed air flow through composting brown and green leaves, twigs, garden refuse, egg shells, coffee grounds, and soil. Rain and watering help keep the compost pile moist. A wire bin holds green vegetative matter and another bin holds brown leaves and twigs. As materials accumulate, more can be added to compost pile.**

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