

Plant Exchange

Containers For A Standout Yard

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or just let us know what you enjoy most about the plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

LOVE ME, LOVE MY PLANTS

Before celebrating their marriage thirty-seven times, Terry Winter of Yankton, a teacher at Yankton High School, took plants to Cheryl, a student at Yankton College. We are standing at the front entrance of their home in late summer when he relays this story.

"I bought these two plants in a florist shop. He motions to the four-decade old, tall potted plants before us. I took them up to her dorm and said-It's too bleak. You need plants. At that time she wasn't much of a plant person. She put them on top of her radiator. One day I said, they're not going to make it. I took them back and moved them when I moved. I don't know if they're pretty any more, but I'd feel bad if they froze."

On Winters' wide front steps by their front door is an archway of clustered plants that complement house foundation plantings. He has scores of container plants, some of them tropicals such as the banana tree.

"I like the luxurious look of their leaves. I've been working with tropicals for many years. Bromeliads last as long as geraniums in a growing season-three to four months-and you get lush colors, leaves, and texture." Some tropical containers are positioned under a large mock orange shrub canopy. "They like filtered light."

MORE PLANTS THAN SPACE

Winter is limited by lack of space to overwinter large tropicals at home. "A couple of these go to Yankton Middle School by the library in the fall, and others go up to the high school," he said. Winter has retired from teaching at Yankton High School (YHS) after thirty-nine years and his wife is also a local retired teacher. By now he knows a lot of school personnel.

He refers to a tall tropical called Monsteraria, a kind of philodendron. "I used to have six types of philodendrons. In winter I'd take them up to the high school; that big stairwell has a lot of light. I've been slowly giving them away now. One is in the county government building. One's in the Wells Fargo Bank. Dr. Lars and Liz Aanning took two home to the big windows of their lake view home.

"I've run through a lot of friends who've helped me move plants. [Two are 10 feet tall in 24-inch pots.] Someday I'm afraid that I won't be able to lift them anymore," he said. "Some of these could stand to be in bigger pots, but I have to consider the practical matter of moving them. You can't let plants take over your life."

PLANTS AS CONNECTIONS

While plants are one of his many links with his wife and friends, Winter also involves plants in a positive neighborly gesture. He lives next door to Assembly of God's halfway house called "Stephan's House." "They've respected our privacy, but the guys next door aren't interested in gardening."

Winter said the area from their concrete driveway to Winter's property line along their front yards had been untended. "The space announces our yard. I dug it all up and planted salvia. It helps our yard and they seem to like it. I chose salvia because it grows fast with minimal care."

A flowerbed boundary of bold purple and red salvia in full sun now joins the two properties. "I mulched heavily, at least three or four inches, and have had no weed or moisture problem. With this summer's rains, I haven't had to water," he said. Reclaimed brick edge the salvia and other beds in the yard.

From the salvia flowerbed back to his front porch, the lawn is shaded with tended mature trees. He said that his two-story house, built in 1906, has elements of Four Square and Late Victorian architecture that influence his style with plants. "This is the 'old house overgrown look,'" he laughed. "Still, I'm careful to deadhead, trim dead leaves, and be aggressive if there are insects. You've got to do some work."

Banana plants in large containers arch over his front door entrance and several potted plants are clustered down the cement steps. Foliage is not symmetrical on either side, but balanced. "Banana plants don't handle wind well," he said. Black coleus and King Tut Egyptian grass are nearby.

Bromeliads are one of his tropical favorites. "These have been bright orange all summer," he said. "The parent plant dies back and little pups take over. We have a bromeliad that teachers gave Cheryl when her father passed away. It's bloomed for seven years."

Asked if Winter is sentimental about plants, he said, "You do remember them. In another life, I'll come back with a greenhouse. This wandering Jew plant gets taken in every fall. Cheryl had it when she was in college. And, here are two iron plants, or peace lilies. They don't need much light in the house, and they're impossible to kill."

Granite sculpture has a prominent spot near their front entrance. "This birdbath is from Scott Luken for my birthday years ago," he said. Com-



Granite sculpture birdbath made by Scott Luken is prominent near Winter's front entrance. Coleus plants seen here are one of Winter's favorites.

PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Containers For Winters' Backyard Respite

Terry Winter of Yankton has created a city backyard that affords him privacy and a comfortable space. "I like containers for plants-big ones. I enjoy mixing tropicals and other plants," Winter said.

Winter has converted his parking lot backyard into a social retreat over time. "The backyard was so bad, that a neighbor thought we had a fire in the backyard, but they were seeing dust when I mowed," he said. After tilling, battling lawn and big trees, he had a sprinkler system installed.

Now the sun and shade yard has an apple tree, wide boundary flowerbeds of Liatris and black-eyed Susans, mock orange, hostas, and blue salvia with a wooden fence backdrop, trumpet, passion vine, and woodbine vines, an extended patio with table and extra seating, and room for many container plants, and a screened back porch to view it all.

A wooden fence as tall as city code allows, a tall thick hedge, and garage along the back of the yard provides privacy and gives the feel of stepping into his world. There is little street noise, with most sound coming from birds nesting in the hedge. But, privacy comes at a price. "My enclosed yard has an air issue, but it is great for containers and succulents," he said. "I think the fence and hedge block wind in-



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Marine blue pot at eye level with maroon and light green succulents is an example of Winter's plant choices and arrangements.

winter and protect some perennials such as Weigelia."

The enclosed back yard changed what he plants. "I'm not a geranium guy," he said. "I used to plant baskets of geraniums. They're profuse bloomers. But my apple tree would sometimes get a fungus that I sprayed for, and then the geraniums would get a fungus. I began to look for alternatives and tropicals are some of them."

Winter is selective with plants.

Nearby are Persian Shield, flowering maple, angel wing begonia and Mandevilla vine containers. "I go to every greenhouse and nursery in the area. We have an embarrassment of riches with all the plant choices in our region."

He's a fan of coleus. "Coleus blooms need to be removed. If you don't take them off, the plant goes to seed. The plant has only so much nourishment and will push toward seeds instead of foliage."

Winter has combined black and lime sweet potato vines in a container that intermingle. All his containers get personal attention as he hand waters them. "I can't believe how much time I spend every day, walking around, picking off plants, trimming plants."

"I'm trying succulents for the first time. I found these almost cartoonish colored pots on sale, and thought they would be perfect for succulents. Their blooms are such a surprise," he said. An exterior cellar entrance is flanked with chest high walls that he uses to display succulents in cobalt blue and cranberry pots in full sun at eye level. "We knew we were going to be gone some this summer, so I wanted tolerant plants. These haven't been watered in a month." Orange multi-colored croton houseplants intermix with the subdued succulents.

edy/tragedy masks are chiseled into the surface of the birdbath. "I directed high school plays for many years, and he brought this over. I just love it."

Winter used to grow roses. "One fall, I took twenty or thirty students to Minneapolis to enjoy the city's various fine theatres. Unfortunately, we found out there would be a snowstorm, but since all arrangements had already been made, we elected to go ahead of the storm on the Friday after Thanksgiving. On return, it started to snow near Albert Lea. We all limped into Sioux Falls where we were snowed in for three days with all these kids and no money in a Holiday Inn. That's when my hair started turning grey."

Life continued when he returned home. "I had not covered my roses yet. I had intended to do that over Thanksgiving, but it got away from me. They were buried in snow, and I lost every one. I just didn't try them again."

PARKSTON ROOTS

Winter's dad owned a small greenhouse in Parkston and his mother still lives there. "He was not a big gardener," but he loved caring for his lawn. "My mom is a gardener. For Memorial Day, Dad would put a spike in the center, petunias around and add dusty miller and call it good. That's the way I started planting for him. As I got older, I stole away every good idea I saw. Every spring, I still buy container magazines just to read about what's new."

Winters' backyard apple tree provides one of their family traditions. "Every other year [when the tree bears greatest] my mother, sister, wife, and I have an assembly line to make a hundred pies and freeze them."

He has mentioned his sister before as he discusses plants. "My wife says Debbie and I have a

sickness. Cheryl even put it on Facebook. Brandt's Greenhouse had a sale. Debbie and I went there when we didn't need any plants. Cheryl said it was like being with two addicts-they just can't pass up a plant sale or a nice pot."

"I don't know how Debbie or I got excited about plants because we come at it from different directions," Winter said. "Debbie learned gardening in Colorado, and I loved the bowls of pansies and sweet peas and other mountain flowers she had there. Now with Debbie in the same town, we'd never say it, but maybe there's a bit of competition going on. I think the Danforth House yard has never looked as good as it does now since she and Jay started working on it."

Given Winter's skill with plants, he is asked if his career as a high school play director and creativity with plants are linked. "I thought I was a pretty good play director, but that was because I worked the kids hard. I have a reasonable eye for color, but my sister may have more. As a teacher and director, you have to be critical and I'm not afraid to throw out what doesn't work. I'm willing to take risks with color. I get pleasure out of trying different plants. I may have some artistic sensibility, but you don't need that to garden. But, you can't plant and walk away. Your garden will give you a great garden if you watch the garden."

"I love being outside," he said. "As a teacher, I was inside nine months a year. Gardening allows me to be active and pretend I'm contributing. Cheryl hadn't done much gardening before we were married, but she gardens now in her own right. We both like to be innovative. Failures like my efforts with geraniums force me to try other plants that have proved fun and given our yard a look that others don't have. I don't want my garden to look like everybody else's."

Dibble & Bits

• Lunar Plant Growth Experiments is a multi-step NASA project to see if plants can be grown in small self-contained habitats on the moon. If it works, plants could provide food, air, and water for people who work in space. On the moon, the impact of its gravity and radiation on plants is not clear. Small lunar growth chambers will be put on various NASA and commercial flights to the moon. Early experiments will focus on germination rates and lunar

conditions on Arabidopsis, basil, and turnip seed. Water and air will be added to the self-contained habitat and photographs at intervals will show what happens as seed germinate. More details: http://www.nasa.gov/centers/ames/cct/office/cif/2013/lunar_plant.html#backto-top Other like experiments are forthcoming. On Earth, a lunar plants activity guide to perform similar activities on Earth as part of the project control can be found at: <http://microbes.arc.nasa.gov>

/educators/resource.html

• How to plan a flower or vegetable garden if you find resources such as National Garden Bureau. Begin with a small area; you learn a lot. Locate near a water source. Try something new. Grow several kinds of plants, as some are usually more successful than others. Keep notes. Pick a dominant flower color. Find if the area is sun or shade. What is the area's function? Look for resources as you begin, such as topics at National Garden Bureau: www.ngb.org

• Conserve water by selecting drought-tolerant

perennials for your yard and flowerbeds. If you choose water-wise perennials as your core plants and then group your favorite color boost plants together that require more frequent watering, you can save water. Examples of water-wise perennials are Catmint, Agastache, barberry shrub, and juniper varieties. More detail in December 2013 Garden Gate magazine found in the Yankton Community Library.

• Regional flower and vegetable garden TV shows: Saturdays: 3:30PM "Backyard Farmer" on Nebraska Public TV, 4:00PM "Prairie Yard &

Garden" on South Dakota Public Television.

• Create a "picture of living beauty" was the goal of English landscape designer Gertrude Jekyll who used paths and terracing as structure for informal drifts of color and texture as a contrast to Victorian Era formal gardens. Color combinations for flowers as they bloomed

came from observing color and light in art. Long drifts of roses might be paired with ferns and then white bleeding hearts and then drifts of pinks, white, and blue for the succession of the season. More detail in January/February Northern Gardener magazine or online.

February Plant Tips

Korey Mensch of Mensch Greenhouse, Inc., Avon, South Dakota, (605) 286.3638, grows plants for retail outlets throughout a three state region with a retail store in Avon. Thanks to Korey for sharing thoughts as we wait for spring.

• With severe temperatures outside, cabin fever is hitting many people hard. Hoping for spring and a turn in the weather forecast is a gardener's favorite pastime during these short days.

• This time of year we are preyed upon by the dreaded mail-order plant catalog. Proceed with caution when looking through these publications. They will entice you to desire old varieties that are gone for a reason. Mostly they will attract you to want plants that have no chance in the Northern Plains, with our harsh dry wind and endless periods of humidity. If you are willing to do the research, provide the perfect environment, and spend time every day tending to your plantings then, by all means, go ahead spend your money.

• If you are like most gardeners however, plant the species that are tried and true for our area and are provided by a respectable local grower.

• The promises we all make to ourselves each year to take better care of our gardens, always works great until something comes up. When you choose plants that are "easier to care for", that does not mean they don't need care. You need to fertilize, not once, but at least weekly. When we have higher humidity, a fungicide may be necessary.

• Cut or pinch plants back from time to time during the season.

• The pots, hanging baskets, and other planters no matter the size, need water on a daily basis. Don't get to fertilize.

• Petunias are probably the best flowering plants for our area and will take whatever is thrown at them, but the care is still essential for beauty from planting to frost.

Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

This blog is about plants and people who grow them in our USDA Zone 4-5a region. Find plant topics where gardeners and professionals share about plants and comment if you wish.

- Yankton community garden organizers share about their season past.
- Thrifty vegetable gardener shares what she has learned.
- An area writer appreciates the grassland prairie.
- See houseplant tips from an area professional.
- Want to see what's blooming here and in England or Florida? See "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" on February 15th link. Check our blog at:

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