

## PLANT EXCHANGE

## Mind Over Weeds: Winning At Gardening

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON  
P&D Correspondent

Usually "Plant Exchange" leans forward to the next moment in the growing season. Brenda Reichle shares how she prevents her garden from "getting away from her" as she helps her young family grow. Her methods resound in our short-term memory and give resolve for better results, starting now.

**Q:** How do you win at gardening?

**A:** Brenda Reichle lives in a country home in rural St. Helena or about five miles east of Menominee, Neb. She and her husband have two elementary-age children. Brenda has a masters degree in electrical engineering and she telecommutes as technical support for a software company. She tends her 60' x 40' garden on the side.

"(Gardening) it's a love/hate relationship. Sometimes I think, why did I plant this much garden," Reichle said. "When I'm getting things going in the spring, I'll bet I put in 16 hours a week. Then later maybe two hours."

She aims for positive results in gardening. We want to know what she does and how she adjusts, to stack odds in her favor.

## PICKING AND PLANNING

The full-sun vegetable and fruit garden is behind their hilltop home. It was a soybean field six years ago. The garden is positioned with a large red barn to the east, a mature shelterbelt to the northwest, and a wind fence to the south. Wind is a problem.

"I planted tomatoes three times and the wind knocked them down. These burning bushes and hybrid hazelnut bushes will replace the wind fence when they're bigger. They're multi-purpose plants; the burning bush will have color and the hazelnut hybrids will be good for wildlife or we can harvest them. I got them from Arbor Day Foundation because they're finding out if it grows in this climate."

"Most of the rows are north/south because of the sun's rotation across the sky," she said. This way, all plants such as corn, get sunlight without shading each other. Rows of short plants such as lettuce and cabbage are planted east/west for artistic design.

"I laid out the design of the garden on graph paper," Reichle said. She has tried garden design software but prefers the tactile copy for ease of making changes.

She refers to past designs. "I start in January when the snow is piled up six feet deep. I follow crop rotations for the tomatoes, peppers and potatoes, and for the broccoli, Brussel sprouts and cabbage. I rotate corn because it uses so much soil nutrients. You have to be careful where you place corn because it shades other plants." She refers to past designs for ease of rotation placement.

To decide what to plant and how much space each requires, she thinks about what she likes and can manage. "By August I'm always glad I don't have more when the weeds take over."

"The kids and I eat the peas off the vine. I'm trying 'Emerald Green' okra because my husband is from the south and likes it. We have kohlrabi, that midwestern



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON  
Brenda Reichle's cement reinforcement wire tomato cages are sturdy and take few steps to make. The bottomless can around each tomato plant blocks wind for new transplants and directs water to the roots for spot watering.

classic, and I eat it fresh or boiled. I like butternut squash, so we have a few of them. We have pickler cucumbers for my son and Jack o' Lantern pumpkins for the kids."

"I'm trying 14 tomato plants instead of nine this year because of a new variety."

She prefers Roma and Celebrity tomatoes. "With nine plants, I can about 70 quarts and then take the excess to the Farmer's Market in Hartington."

"I stick to the classics when I take produce to sell. Kohlrabi at the market, you hear 'Like it,' 'Hate it' or 'What is that?' I sell surplus from the garden, but I mostly garden for us."

Once Reichle has determined her priority vegetables, she uses the Internet to help determine how much space each kind of plant needs.

"I'm a fan of Johnny's Seed Company planting charts. I also place plants a bit closer together so they shade the weeds."

Reichle's garden layout design helped when she purchased seed she needed for the space.

## TRANSPLANTING TOUGH LOVE PLANTS

Reichle wanted hardy plants to set out in the garden. Whether she grew them from seed with a grow light or purchased them from a greenhouse, she wanted to decrease transplant shock as the young plants were put outside. With simple materials and plans from the Internet, she built a cold frame to transition plants to outdoors.

"I got a double hung window from the recycling center and someone gave me some old straw bales. No young plants are used to this wind," she said.

Straw bales formed the sides, the plants were placed inside the rectangular space, and the glass window lay on the bales over the plants. "I prop the window up when it's too hot or throw a tarp over to block sun if too sunny."

The cold frame faces south and its back is about 18 inches high and the front is about 12-inch high. "It's a six-

inch drop over a two-foot run."

"I use the straw again about September when I plant kale. Straw is a cover so I can keep harvesting in late fall."

As the plants hardened off in the straw-insulated cold frame, Reichle gave the plants a boost before transplant. "A shovel full of compost in a five-gallon bucket of water sits a couple of days. Then I water the plants with the tea. I watch when the air temperatures are above 50 degrees F before setting the plants out."

She reads the Johnny Seed Catalog charts on the Internet to guide timing to plant.

"I try to get plants in as soon as possible. I feel the soil. If it's about the same as air temperature, then tomatoes, squash, pumpkins and cantaloupe are ready to plant."

"When I plant, I put a little scoop of compost in with the plant."

Reichle said her soil is mostly clay loam. "When it's wet, it sticks together like pottery clods. I learned not to till it (the hard way) when it's wet or too dry, and to add compost. I put grass clippings on top and turn it under. I roto-till to get rid of hard-pack from snowmelt, and weeds from last season. The soil gets better over time. The best tilling condition (for this soil) is when soil stays in a ball when you squeeze it."

An unexpected discovery came as she waited for the mud to dry in spring.

"A six-foot snowdrift (over the garden) tends to melt very slowly in spring. As early as the second week of March when waiting for the mud to dry, I sprinkled spinach or lettuce seed in an area and covered seed with compost and it grows before you can work the soil!"

A mulched path divides the length of the garden in half. "I learned that the first year when I was constantly muddy."

Vine plants are each marked with a flag. "Last year where the watermelons were, the weeds grew. I lost track of them. This year I flagged when I planted so it will be easier to see when I mulch it down, weed with a hoe, or till it."

## MANAGING WITHOUT THE UGLY CRY

Asparagus, raspberry, strawberries and a grape vine are perennials along the edges of the vegetable garden that Reichle keeps contained within wires strung to T posts. "Plants don't lean over and I can plant vegetables closer to these perennials."

"I try to be as organic as possible, but I use Sevin dust if insects get out of control."

Reichle plants her garden as early as possible to make use of the winter melt and spring rains. Then she only waters on an "as needed" basis.

"I spot-water (with a hose) as needed and mulch. I plant things close enough together, so plants are not cheated of nutrition but so plants shade the ground. That also minimizes the watering and weeding." When she spot-waters tomato plants, she fills the institution-size cans that she puts around each plant when she sets them out. She is

careful to keep water off the tomato leaves. The cans protect the plants from wind when they are first set out.

When she planted broccoli and Brussel sprouts, she put bottomless paper Dixie cups around each plant and sank the cups about an inch into the soil. "These deter cutworms. When the plant is larger, I tear each cup away."

Potato bugs showed up early. "I looked for chewed leaves on the potato plants. The bugs are nearby. The kids and I walk the rows and pick them off." She has a container of soapy water for the bugs.

Old CDs keep rabbits out of her garden. "I tie each CD with a string lead on a post or cage." They flash and clink as they move with the wind. "The light and sound seems to keep them away."

Tomato cages have been a pet peeve and joy for Reichle. "I've tried many kinds and shapes from the store. I saw a pattern for this on public television. Concrete reinforcing wire comes in 50- or 100-foot rolls. I make nine tomato cages with 18-inch diameters that are 5 feet tall. I use bolt cutters to make a (cylinder) cage. I cut one column wire and bend the prongs to hold the cage's shape. I cut off the bottom row of wire and leave prongs to stick the cage in the soil. I also use these cages around orchard trees."

"It's not for the weekend gardener to do this much gardening. A tiller is a great asset to me. It helps you reclaim your garden."

Reichle grew up around gardening. "My parents always had a garden. Seeing them garden, I found it easy to get into."

On her own, she gardened first for the taste of fresh tomatoes. "I love pulling fresh food out of my own backyard."

A hammock swings near the garden. When she needs to rest, she moves the kids out for her turn.

"In the heart of summer," Reichle said, "I love that feeling of walking out to the garden with a bucket. At dinner, I ask my kids, 'What came out of the garden?' I'm not sure they'll remember (someday)."

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](mailto:news@yankton.net) Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

Revisit this year's gardener features from "Plant Exchange" at the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan website, [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net). Choose Archives, then search "Plant Exchange."

## FINDING DRAMA



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Note the drama achieved by Diane Hofer of Diane's Backyard Gardens in Beresford with simple materials. Person-high Miscanthus ornamental grass backs a short section of auction-find picket fence with hardy pink shrub roses in front.

## JULY PLANT TIPS

Kristy Bothwell is owner and Master Gardener on site at Rosewood Greenhouse, 1400 Cherry St, Vermillion. Summer hours are 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. except Saturday closed at 2 p.m. and closed Sunday through mid-September. Kristy shares tips on her current favorite flower.

"Chocolate Cosmos! It is not my biggest, brightest or my prettiest. But my little chocolate heart has fallen in love with its Hershey's chocolate bar scent, most notable on warm sunny days," Kristy said. "Its flower is even close to the color of a fine dark chocolate!"

Kristy tells more about Chocolate Cosmos:

- The 2- to 3-foot stems hold the flower high above the leaves as if to invite you to enjoy its fragrance.

- Chocolate Cosmos loves full sun, likes moderate water, and needs well-drained soil.
- (Unlike annual cosmos grown from seed), its seed are sterile. It is propagated by dividing the tubers, much like cannas or dahlias. Although an annual here, you may be able to overwinter the tubers to replant them in the spring.

- Chocolate Cosmos can be a beautiful companion plant! I've seen it grown close to "Walker's Low" catmint where its own leaves seemed to disappear and its flowers hovered above the catmint for a beautiful effect. Its flowers become more visible when planted with lighter-colored plants and flowers. You can use it in a container, but it may sprawl a bit. I find it's best used as a garden plant in the company of other colorful flowers.

## DIBBLE AND BITS

- Want to soak up container gardening basics from soil to plant selection to maintaining your plants all set to music? Internet search: "Container Gardening How To-The Basics from Espomona" for a YouTube experience.

- Flower and design fundamentals, according to [www.Gardenlogic.com](http://www.Gardenlogic.com), include these elements to make a yard look its best: Simplicity, repetition, variety, emphasis, sequence, balance and scale. Pick a couple of these as focus when you consider moving plants for a spot change in your yard.

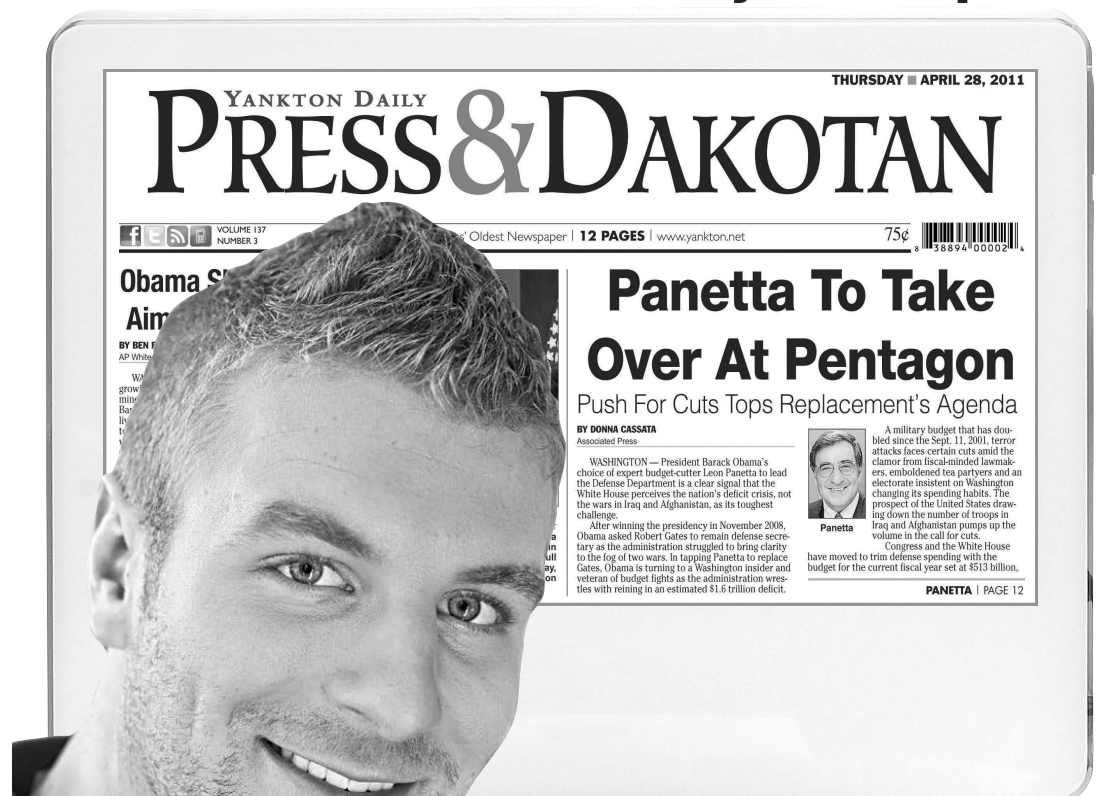
- The fourth annual Missouri Valley Master Gardener's Garden Tour in Yankton area is Saturday July 9, running from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.. The \$10 admission includes a light lunch following the tour. First garden and registration at 1904 Cedar St. Maps for other locations will be provided.

KYNT  
AM 1450

MORNING  
COFFEE  
WEEKDAYS  
7:40 AM  
MONDAY  
THRU FRIDAY

Yankton's Home Team!

Subscribe to our e-edition!  
An exact replica of the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan delivered to your computer!



## Why subscribe?

Read the exact replica of the newspaper.

Zoom in on text & photos!

Search using keywords - 30 day archive!

Save & store editions!

Clip save & e-mail articles - to your children away at school, spouse at work, the possibilities are endless!

Use the audio option to have stories read aloud!

You are gonna love it!

To subscribe to our e-edition service, go to [www.mynewsouthgo.com/yankton](http://www.mynewsouthgo.com/yankton) or scan our QR Code with your smart phone.