

HOMEGARDEN

PLANT EXCHANGE:

Homegrown Vegetables, Backyard Respite

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: What does a grocery store produce manager put in her garden?

A: Helen Chladek of Yankton worked for Sunshine Foods for 41 years, first in Yankton and then retiring as a produce manager in Sioux Falls.

"I used to garden when I was younger. I didn't want to garden when I worked; I had enough with vegetables," Chladek said. "I just started gardening again. We plant what we like and can give away to friends and relatives."

Last year the tomatoes were so bountiful that she just put them on the back deck and invited others to pick them up at will.

"We did get ornamental gourds in at the store," she said. "I planted some last year as a fun thing. I tried sweet potatoes for the first time. The rest I always planted before. The early garden peas were great this year."

Her tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers had hail damage last season, but came back.

Helen and Duane Chladek hosted their yard in the Missouri Valley Master Gardeners' Garden Tour last July.

The Chladeks use the basic gardening methods for this full-sun garden, and it pays off in dark green foliage with little pest care needed.

"If the plants are healthy, you don't need extra care," said Duane Chladek, who also gardens. He tills soil and Helen plants seed.

"I use MiracleGro only once on the vegetables just after they come up."

Helen Chladek said. "Last year the radishes did well and tasted better than years before."

Sunflowers, much taller than Helen, are growing at the edge of the garden and by the flowerbeds that line the yard. "They're for the birds," she said.

A wooden fence is the backdrop for the flowers and garden art. The rake, spade, and gate in the beds are from the family farms.

"The cast iron pot with handle reminds me of the barrel we used to scald spring chickens," she said.

Fieldstones in the beds are also sentimental reminders.

"This one is from my dad's farm and one came from my brother-in-law's farm," Chladek said.

Camaraderie in Gardening
"My neighbor and I have traded plants and ideas," Chladek said. "I consider her the expert. She is often out working in her yard."

In fact, the flowerbeds of both yards provide a continuous line of color for both families to enjoy.

"I get to know my neighbor better with something in common," she said.

Duane shares in the yard work.

"I do the lawn, she does the flowerbed and we double team the vegetable garden," he said. "As for the lawn, Mother Nature has done a good job with watering this season and I haven't used irrigation much."

What is Duane's method of growing the lush carpet of grass?

"There's a secret, but then I'll have to kill you," he joked. "I mow regularly — twice a week in high summer. That way you're not cutting too much off at a time."

He doesn't bag clippings. "I use a mulching lawn mower to return the nutrients to the soil. It's the farmer in me," he said.

Duane Chladek uses a fertilizer regimen.

"I've tried others and come back to Scotts because it produces the best lawn," he said. "I fertilize four times a year beginning early spring and ending late fall. I aerate the soil in the fall or alternate years and de-thatch each spring. With this way, I get few weeds; the grass is so thick."

The Chladeks tried methods yield green foliage, colorful blooms and enough vegetables to share.

Q: How do you create a place of visual interest in your yard?

A: Jean Koupal of rural Yankton has a Century barn in her backyard which she and her husband Rick renovated inside. On the outside, the red barn, with window boxes, is a prominent



PHOTOS: BRENDA JOHNSON

(Above) Helen Chladek grows vegetables she likes to eat and favorites to share with friends. Flowers provide chat topics with neighbors. Her flower ornaments remind her of family and farm days.

(Below, left) Jean Koupal's 'Memory Lane' is a spot to rest under a tree, among red begonias and green and cream hostas. Red Century barn wall nearby serves as backdrop for flowers and treasures.

(Below, right) Jean Koupal likes long season color. "These container angel wing begonias bloomed from May into September," she said. "I get them about 5 inches tall to transplant and these grew to about two feet tall with overhang."



backdrop for plants. A path to their garden winds around the side of the barn. This space between a lilac hedge and the barn side has become its own place.

"I call this area 'Memory Lane,'" Jean Koupal said. "These fieldstones are from Dad's farm at Tabor. The sign there on the side of the barn is from his mailbox, along with other antique signs. This brick pathway through here came from Rick's parents' store, called the Home Store in Tabor. ... We call it the 'Foster Brooks Boulevard,' due to its winding path. The brick flowerbed edging came from the 100-year-old house on our place and the garden gate you pass through there is from about 1880."

"It's the original gate from the Koupal homestead. My husband Rick made the decorative fence flowerbed border. It's nice to share a hobby."

Koupal placed a seat in "Memory Lane" to relax and enjoy the flowerbeds under a tree. Red begonias and hostas with varying shades of green and cream form the dominant colors in the flowerbeds. Some begonias and hostas are in full or part sun, and others in the shade, and all are vibrant color.

She has selected plants with a wide tolerance for light. With her careful spacing, each plant grows separately in the bed even at the end of the season.

"I don't want plants on top of each other as one blob of mixed color," Koupal said. "I read up on the potential growth and then set them out."

Of course, some plants grow more than expected. "I dig plants to give away or move it somewhere else in the yard," she said.

Last year was Koupal's first for red begonias. She said that they bloomed all season after they were transplanted in May. She applied Preen for weeds before adding the plants.

"It's worked great," she said. "I don't like to weed. Later I add grass clippings. This area was a hog pen and the soil is sandy, so

it needs extra water."

Koupal amends the soil with chicken manure and compost each year.

Other color accents against the red barn include a white mandevilla vine trellised in a container. The rock and mortar footings of the barn extend outward so that nothing can be planted in the space, but the container plant fits the space and provides soil. Multicolored four o'clocks attract hummingbirds, according to Koupal. Yellow honeysuckle on a trellis is paired with mums.

"Beyond the gate is 'just plum nuts,'" Koupal said, referring to the plum and butternut trees further along the path.

Q: How about more on clematis, 'Queen of the Vines?'

A: Clematis is an adaptive perennial vine lives for decades with lots of flowers each season. With trellis or other support, the vine offers height in the landscape without using proportional space for its base. Chicken wire around the base of the plant will deter hungry rabbits in late winter. Kristy Bothwell describes planting essentials in June Tips.

According to May/June "Northern Gardener" that features these cultivars, clematis vines have decorated yards for more than 150 years. Purple "Jackmanii" was the first large blossom cross with Japanese clematis and has been a favorite since 1850.



Of Interest to Plant Enthusiasts:

- Solutions to Plant Ailments: Web site by University of Nebraska Extension specialists for garden, lawn and orchard current topics: www.bvfn.unl.edu.
- "Backyard Farmer" program airs Thursdays at 7 p.m. on Nebraska Public Television.

- Recommended as garden and lawn basics for beginners: www.learn2grow.com.
- Loess Hills Prairie Seminar through June 6 at Onawa, Iowa, sponsored by Iowa Northwest Area Education Agency and partners: www.nwaea.k12.ia.us/en/upcoming_events/loess_hills_prairie_seminar.

- Tomato-growing tips: Plant tomatoes two weeks after last spring frost date. Night air temperature should be above 55 degrees, or plants won't grow. See more Charley's Greenhouse tomato tips at http://www.charleysgreenhouse.com/pgs2/newsletters/051310_newslatter.htm.

Q: Commercial tell about soil additives that increase the size and yield of vegetables or increase amount of blooms or plant growth. With limited time and money, how do I improve my soil so plants grow best?

A: This question has many answers, but no magic bullets. Compost is a basic to soil amendment with a cumulative improvement over time. Yankton area resident Jean Koupal composts gar-

den waste and uses compost generously in her flowerbeds for vigorous plant growth.

"The compost pile has spent lettuce, potato tops, fall plant waste from the yard, coffee grounds, plant kitchen scraps and soil. No limbs or stiff stalks such as sun flowers, since they take much longer to decompose. And no meat or animal parts due to harmful bacteria," Koupal said. "My husband uses a tractor to stir the pile every so often to help decomposing bacteria work. The compost is ready after a year. The heat from the bacteria kills any weed seed."

Besides top dressing for perennials, she uses compost in container gardens.

JUNE PLANT TIPS

Kristy Bothwell is the owner and on site Master Gardener for Rosewood Greenhouse at 1400 W. Cherry St. in Vermillion. Clematis is one of her favorite plants, and she likes several cultivars. "Jackmanii" clematis has flowers as big as a hand. Some have double petals, like "Kiri Te Kanawa." "Betty Corning" has sweet, fragrant nodding bells. "Sweet Autumn" clematis is covered with tiny stars and can cover a porch, arbor or unsightly machinery, as it reaches 15-20 feet in height.

Bothwell's tips for clematis include:

- Clematis likes "cool feet," or cool soil around roots. Plant it behind other plants, or cover soil with organic mulch.
- Pruning depends on when this plant flowers. Spring flowering clematis needs very little pruning, but can be done after blooming. Clematis that blooms twice a season may be pruned right after first blooming. Summer blooming clematis may be pruned back to the lowest pair of live buds in late winter or early spring.
- Some varieties have brittle stems and will do better with some wind protection.
- Most thrive in sun to part shade, but a few can take a little more shade like "Duchess of Edinburgh" or "Nelly Moser."

For more information, call (605) 624-9229.

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