



Attendees at last Saturday's Tour of Lawns & Gardens in Crofton dodged the raindrops to soak up some of the scenery on display as Crofton residents showed off some of their finest yard furnishings.

PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN

# Raindrops Can't Dampen Crofton Lawn, Garden Show

BY LINDA WUEBBEN  
P&D Correspondent

CROFTON, Neb. — Rain drops forced umbrellas to open at the sixth annual Tour of Lawn & Gardens in the Crofton area last Saturday. The area didn't receive enough rain to cure its drought woes, but it made for an enjoyable day of garden viewing.

And the gardens to view were treasure troves of flowering spectacles and every owner had bits of garden advice for the viewers.

The Crofton Senior Citizens once again sponsored the annual event as a fundraiser for the Crofton Center. A large gap between funding and actual month-to-month expenses keeps the Seniors on their toes finding additional money sources.

The gardening choices this year were again excellent specimens of gardening lovers and hard work. The tour invited the guests to begin just a block away from the Senior Center at the home of Francis and Sharlene Guenther.

Gardening is Francis' department said wife Sharlene and he wasted no time giving bits of advice about his particular brand of vegetable gardening which is his first love. Their property was purchased in 1972 and building the house was the first project. By the early 1980s, Francis started his vegetable garden, added a rock garden and built the first section of his gardening shed.

Over the years the shed, designed similar to a miniature barn, has had two additions and shrubs, perennials and trees were also added to the Guenther lot. Curb edging and rock gardens cut down on mowing and leave more time for Francis to garden. A good example is an area of pampas grass which has been left to grow and has spread as a ground cover on a corner of the lot.

One of Francis' special tricks is to use a sprinkling can filled with water from one of his eight barrels near his various sheds. He has placed the barrels under rain spouts off his gardening shed and shop which gives him to 450 gallons of water to use for hand watering. He has never run out of water (until maybe this year?).

Another trick Francis uses to keep his tomato plants protected until they are strong enough to handle Nebraska's wind and weather is to cover them with plastic bags. When he plants his tomatoes, he immediately covers them with a cage and then pulls a white garbage bag up over the cage to give the young plants protection. The white humps create an individual hot house for each plant.

The couple loves homemade cooking and he loves to garden so Francis likes to try new things like using mulch so his vegetables are successful. Sometimes he uses mulch on some of his vegetable plants and others a shot of liquid fertilizer. Another new activity is the use of hog panels with one short end staked in the ground, hooped over about four to six feet and staked again. He plants cucumbers along each short end and trains the plants to climb the panels, making them easy to pick on top or underneath.

Betty Potts' Pergola arbor was the next stop in Crofton. Betty recently decided to build her arbor as an extension on the front of her corner lot home. She always wanted a garden and with the help of gardening friends and a construction neighbor, she had her prayers answered. The hard work has evolved into an area which is "easy on the eyes," said Betty and she invited the touring garden lovers a chance to stop and take in her view.

Touring visitors then headed west of Crofton to visit side-by-side neighbors southwest of town. Dennis and Bev Merkel opened



PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN

There was a lot to see during the Tour of Lawns & Gardens in Crofton last Saturday, including accents that enlivened a porch or other structures around the home.

their gate and chatted with each visitor as they came through. It was clearly evident the Merckels love their outdoor area as much as their home and admit many hours are spent on their backyard and split deck area.

Spending time at home for Bev means many hours trimming, weeding and eyeing possible future projects. All the garden owners in the limelight agreed preparation for the Saturday visit this year was a little more intense knowing they would be scrutinized by a morning of tourists. Bev said she spends many hours tweaking in the landscaped areas and often went out at 7:30 in the morning, putting until 4 p.m.

When friends and neighbors ask Bev if some of her plants are hard to grow, she laughs and tells them she has no green thumb so if they are alive, it's working. She puts out plants she likes and added some rose bushes from Kansas this year because like every gardener she likes to try new things. She is keeping a close watch on them, waiting for them to pop.

A favorite area for the Merckels is a new project the couple has recently developed. Just three years ago they planted a snow crab tree on the northeast corner of their six-acre lot. Each year they have added to the area with paving, a bench and statues and have dedicated it to Bev's parents.

There is little left of the weeds and sandburs present on the property when the Merckels purchased it in 1991. Dennis contributed many hours right next to Bev when the backbreaking work challenged the couple. Along with hauling hoses, Dennis' influence is seen as he has added his own animal collection scattered in the beds and has even given them pet names like Forrest Gump, Wylie Worm and Puff the Magic Dragon. The creatures don't need to be fed and offer enjoyment from the deck. A tribute to American troops was designed when a grandson was in Iraq.

Marlin and Sharon Braun have always been gardeners and they love developing areas on their 20 acres next to the Merckels. With all their space, the Brauns decided to try some berry bushes and are really reaping great harvests from their raspberries, chokecherries, blueberries and June berries. They enjoy fresh berries everyday and freeze many quarts for winter treats.

Sharon said their new 'thing' for this summer season is sweet potato plants which came back to Nebraska with them when they were visiting family in Tennessee. Another gardening success which has grown to a family activity is shelling the popcorn they grow themselves she added. Is gardening a hobby? Sharon believes it's a great stress reliever after a long day at their day jobs.

Marlin's vegetable garden is fenced like many country gardeners to keep the rabbits out. He even fenced in a fruit tree area which he carved out in an area of cedar trees. He watched the apples fall of his neighbor's trees because of the rough Nebraska wind and is trying a fruit orchard within the protection of the evergreens. A recent winter with heavy snowfall had snow covering the top of his three-foot fence. The rabbits were able to crawl over the fence and destroy many of Marlin's fruit tree so the couple is replanting.

Another activity Marlin enjoyed was carving an ATV trail in between the evergreens and Marlin's kids and grandkids enjoy zipping along the dips and hills when they visit. He is also trying pollinator boxes to attract honey bees.

The final tour stop was west of Crofton at the Nancy and Roy Johnson farm. The country side landscape invited the visitors to walk Nancy's flower beds and enjoy her favorite flowering specimens. Amid perennials were flowering kale and tobacco plants just because she enjoys their blossoms over the summer months and the hummingbirds they attract.

Nancy's ideas usually come in the spring time just as she is thinking about what she would like to see in her beds. She admitted she did add little extra bursts of flowers this year when she knew she would be included in the gardening tour. It's not just a hobby for her. It helps her to stay healthy, keep the weight off and keep her sane. Nancy doesn't need a gym when she gardens.

A twin set of iron arbor stands made by a local welder are a source of great pride for Nancy in her front flower bed. She strings Christmas lights on them when she decorates the bed for the holidays and also added some solar lights for evening appeal now in the summer months.

In normal summer seasons, Nancy lets Mother Nature water her beds but she kept the sprinkling going this spring so the flowering display would be popping for the gardening tour. Occasionally she waters just to keep plants alive. In the back of her house she enjoys a small pond and a vegetable garden.

One last trick Nancy tried was to prune her burning bush and snowball bush to resemble dwarf trees along her patio's edge. She is rewarded with bursts of color during the flowering season for each bush.

The tour ended at the shelter house in the South Park with a light luncheon and an opportunity to purchase very special deals on plants donated to the center by a local greenhouse.



RALPH BARRERA/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN/MCT

Nora, a four year-old Labrador, finds comfort in her wading pool.

## Dogs Have Many Options For Staying Cool In The Heat

BY SHARON CHAPMAN

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AUSTIN, Texas — A quick inquiry to dog-loving folks on Facebook and an online search turns up more than a dozen products designed to help keep your dog cool when the temperature rises. A few that can be used before, during or after outdoor activities are highlighted below (websites are given for each, but you can find many in stores, too).

Remember: None replaces common sense. Know the early signs of heat exhaustion in dogs, such as heavy panting, restlessness or a "belled-out" tongue, and get your dog cool and inside before it gets worse.

Age, fitness level and breed all can affect how well a dog does in the heat, but even a young, healthy and active dog can get overheated when it's sunny and over 90 degrees. Much like with people, it can be best to exercise your dog in the morning or evening hours, make use of shady areas and have plenty of water available for you both.

Around the neck: Gretchen Meyer, founder of firecracker-dog.com, a website aimed at people with high-energy dogs, uses the KoolCollar when walking her three dogs. It's a hollow collar filled with a cooling gel tube for indoor use (less messy) or ice cubes for outside. "One of my dogs in particular has trouble in the heat. He walks really slowly when it's hot out," Meyer says. "I've found that by using the KoolCollar with him, he easily keeps up with me and another one of my dogs on our morning walk/runs." (\$16 to \$18; www.kool-collar4dogs.com)

The Chill Collar is a similar product; it's filled with a gel, and you freeze the whole thing before use (\$29.95; www.inthecompanyof-dogs.com).

Around the body: Swamp coolers and similar products wrap

around a dog's midsection for a whole-body cooldown. Leah Alter's dog Frankie is a whippet/pit mix with a genetic heart condition and has to take it easy, especially in heat. She likes the Ruffwear version of a swamp cooler, which uses evaporative cooling to draw out body heat. Soak the vestlike product in cold water and wring it out before putting it on your dog. "And you can just pour more water directly on it after they are wearing it," Alter says. "The recovery time from the heat is amazing." (\$54.95; www.ruffwear.com)

My dog, Ginger, often can be seen in her Kool Koat, which is made of shammy material that Velcros around her middle and works like a swamp cooler. I got one size bigger than she needs so that it drapes down her back end; she likes nothing more than having her butt and belly cool in the summer. (\$33 to \$85; www.pettemp.com)

Lounging/dunking: Pads such as the K9 Cooling Mat (\$49.95) and the Cool Bed Lounger (\$79.95) provide a cool surface for your dog to recline. Another version is the Canine Cooler Therapeutic Pad (\$89.95 to \$139), which is designed to ease inflammation and joint pain in dogs through a water-filled pad but could be used for heat relief, too. For instant shade, you can pop up the Portable Pet Cooling and Shelter System (\$169), which is a water-charged bed with a tent that all folds up to fit in a carrying case. (All at www.inthecompanyof-dogs.com.)

And you can always just get your dog wet all over. Let him dunk in the water while walking the hike-and-bike trail, or fill a baby pool or large metal container in your backyard. "They will plop in it after a walk or even if they are just playing in the yard," says Pat Bancroft, who has two dogs of her own and usually a third she's fostering for Blue Dog Rescue. "Not very high-tech, but they are happy with it."

## Heartland Humane Society Prepares 'Taste & Tour'

VERMILLION — Heartland Humane Society will host Vermillion's first Taste & Tour on Saturday, June 23, in downtown Vermillion.

The event, which is raising funds for the local animal shelter, starts at 6 p.m. and will feature VIP passes to eight businesses in Vermillion for food, drinks, music, and more.

"Heartland Humane Society relies on donations from the surrounding area and Taste & Tour is a new fundraiser we are hoping will bring our supporters together for a casual and fun evening," said Kerry Schmidt, executive director at Heartland Humane Society.

Tickets may be purchased at the HHS shelter, the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce, or Nook' N Cranny in Vermillion.

The event will include stops at RED, Lumo Studios, Nook' N Cranny, Maya Janes, Razel's, Sharing the Dream, Pets Paw, and Carey's Bar. Wine and beer tasting, appetizers, tacos, casino games, a photo shoot, and music by Poker Alice will all be included in the event.

Each location offers a chance to win a raffle prize valued at \$100 or more. Raffles include season passes to USD basketball, Orpheum Theatre tickets, gift baskets from Whoopi Do and Nook' N Cranny, and Vermillion Chamber Bucks.

"This event is a chance to ensure more strays find permanent homes in 2012 and a chance to get everyone in the communities together for a great cause," Schmidt said. "We hope if you have a love for pets that you will consider joining us."



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## 'Running of the Pigs' Fun Run In Freeman

FREEMAN — Join the fun at Freeman Academy's annual Ribs at the Ranch by participating in the fourth annual "Running of the Pigs" in the Prairie Arboretum on Saturday, June 30.

Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. in the south parking lot for the 5K fun run scheduled to start at 8:30 a.m. Every participant will

receive a free T-shirt.

For information about the race and entry fees, contact Ashley Unruh at amu\_63@hotmail.com or 605-759-6499 or the school website: www.freemanacademy.org/Documents/RunningOfPigsPoster-2010.pdf. No pre-registration necessary.

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