

## HOMEGARDEN

## PLANT EXCHANGE:

## Expanding Possibilities With Found Objects

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

**Q: How do you garden with limitations?**

**A:** Joanne Christensen, volunteer coordinator at Trinity Lutheran Church and Yankton social work advocate for decades, enjoys gardening. Some additional physical limitations and a knee replacement last growing season have not tamped her spirit.

"Back at it in about four weeks," Christensen said. "I couldn't walk without a walker at first, so I had to sit in a chair to work in the yard. I want to make this yard a Garden of Eden. Since I can't kneel on the ground to work, I use wash tubs on legs as raised beds." Other objects, such as a recycled outdoor grill, become planters.

As bending over to reach has become an issue for her, Christensen has found a use for car tires.

"I have stacked three old rubber car tires filled with dirt and have a basil plant growing in them," she said. "Since I stacked the tires about seven years ago, ... I have planted potatoes, butternut squash, and annuals. All grew successfully."

New trees in the yard include a Mother's Day gift red bud, and an Arbor Day Emerald Lustre Maple and May Day tree peony.

Christensen chooses color in her yard with heritage in mind.

"We painted our home Swedish red (my ancestry) and so I enjoy using yellow as an accent color," she said. "I have an old cream can that I purchased at a rummage sale and painted bright yellow.

Yellow pansies, lavender bacopa and a black oxalis are in the cream can by our back door. Red leafed cannas and castor bean plants line the back yard fence.

"A side rail piece from an old crib that I painted royal blue, one of the colors in the Swedish flag," she said. "It supports two Asiatic lilies, which I planted in 2007 after the birth of our granddaughter, whose name is Lily."

Black-eyed Susans and yellow petunias (the other color of the Swedish flag) with lobelia and other annuals are nearby.

Vegetables, miniature hostas, transplanted rhubarb, robust trumpet vine on trellis, mint and lamb's ears, and a blue Endless Summer hydrangea add color, varying heights and fresh food. Nestled in the beds are sturdy rebar poles just in case they are needed to steady the gardener. Some of the poles are topped with overturned near antique teacups.

"I am looking forward to see how hybrid irises and shade ferns that I planted last year survived the winter," Christensen said.

**Q: Where can we find weather data about forecasted precipitation and flooding along the James River?**

**A:** "Based on the current snow-pack and wet fall conditions we have the stage set for this flood situation," said Dr. Dennis Today, state climatologist at South Dakota State University. "Additional heavy snowfall or rainfall would change the situation. These conditions will be updated as necessary."

According to data on the Web site below, the probability of the James River water over the 13-foot flood level in March and April this spring is greater than 50 percent. The prediction comes from data at the data site 5 miles northeast of Scotland. Gage reading may be affected by ice at this time. This and other weather information can be found at the Missouri Basin River Forecast of the National Weather Service River Forecast Center: <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/mbrfc/>.

**Q: What have you learned from, as you say, trial and error gardening?**

**A:** Having to remove a mature maple tree growing into power lines influenced Julie Hemphill's future yard decisions. Her Yankton city yard has street frontage on two sides, and the tree had been situated along one side. She replaced the maple with a Black Hills spruce, planted several feet more into the yard.

"This 4-foot blue spruce had been growing in Murdo," Hemphill said. "Jerry Fisher of Hartington, Neb., planted it with a good watering. I water about weekly in the



(Above) Concord grapes are one of Julie Hemphill's many trial successes.

(Below) Ornamental kale transplants in a plastic tree planter became an accent container garden that lasted into December last fall. Kale idea from Yankton Nurseries.



summer, and the rains were great last season."

A lush fern bed by the house receives morning sun and afternoon shade. Spots of color on the lawn draw the eye. Hemphill hosted her yard in the summer Missouri Valley Master Gardener Garden Tour.

"I love to garden in the summer and love to say 'good-bye' to it in the winter," Hemphill said.

Her gardens are located on the two sides of the yard away from street frontage and have blooms from spring through summer by intention.

"I like to save mature seed heads of cone flower, zinnias, black-eyed Susans," Hemphill said. "I keep them dry in the winter. When spring comes, I break apart the heads and sprinkle the seed where I want them to grow. For purchases, I have good luck with plants from Brandts."

Summer hail damage is mostly outgrown.

"This Elephant ear had damage, but is now OK," Hemphill said. "I dug it up before the first hard freeze and store it in the basement where it doesn't freeze."

Beside her patio is a grape arbor laden with concord grapes. The two vines almost cover the 8-square-foot arbor.

"The vines are about 10 years old," Hemphill said. "I trained the vines up onto the arbor and keep grass clippings on the roots to keep the roots moist. My friend in California had an arbor. I thought, I want to try one here. That's what I mean by trial and error, to see what grows."

"I garden by trial and error," she said. "My California friend has to put her tulips in the freezer before planting them in order to get them to bloom. We're lucky — we just put tulips in the ground in the fall."

**For Plant Enthusiasts:**

- "Living Landscapes in South Dakota: A Guide to Native Plantscaping" is a handbook is free at Yankton Natural Resources Conservation Service office, across from Wal-Mart on Broadway in Yankton.
- Sign-up for 18-24-inch trees in bundles of 25 continues at Yankton County Conservation District (YCCD) (605) 665-6704. These books are available at cost at YCCD office across from Wal-Mart on Broadway or may be checked out from Yankton Community Library, courtesy of YCCD.

- "Trees and Shrubs for Northern Great Plains & Landscapes" by Dale Herman and Vernon Quam, North Dakota State University. Resource of woody plants commonly available for the home landscape.

PHOTOS: BRENDA JOHNSON



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Joanne Christensen's found objects — such as these stacked tires — are filled with soil to better garden from a standing position.

room between seeds when planting. About two inches height of medium will provide room for root growth.

- Use damp seed starter medium instead of soil for planting to diminish disease and insect problems.

- Some suggest soaking seeds overnight before planting to soften seed coat, but read seed package for exceptions.

- Plant seeds at depth as directed. Some use a dull pencil as dibble.

- Some suggest covering the container with clear plastic wrap to hold in moisture. Keep medium moist, not wet.

- Label each container with name of plant, date planted, expected weeks to transplant. Note discrepancies when transplanting to help you next year.

- When plants are ready, put plants outdoors in protected area, increasing time each day for a few days before transplanting outdoors. Treat with weak solution of fertilizer.

**Q: Why consider a container garden in your landscape plan?**

**A:** Container gardens can be an economical way to focus color in your yard as simply as planting select flowers or vegetables in a clay pot. You can use trial and error to find plants that are compatible with each other for the location, or you can save time and money by learning from experts. White Flower Farm spring catalogue shows plant combinations that work for compatibility, color, sun and shade. For more information, visit [www.whiteflowerfarm.com](http://www.whiteflowerfarm.com) or call (800) 503-9624.

Another Web site has ideas for selecting flowers that mature in spring, early summer, etc. with container plants. See "Container Recipes" for plant combinations and a "Water Wise" kit for watering container plants. For more information, visit [www.provenwinners.com](http://www.provenwinners.com).

Containers can be used to soften hardscape such as a prominent driveway that lacks plant bed space. The size and type of container can repeat the style of your outdoor living space.

If you plan container gardens ahead, you may find just the leaky rowboat to fill with soil and plants by the entrance or just the plants that express your personal style for an outdoor space. Joanna Harrison of "The Container Gardener's Bible" offers these practical tips:

1. Express your personality in your choices for containers and plants. Consider fragrance and sound, as well as color and texture.

2. Link surroundings, such as buildings where you will place the container garden and the colors, container shape and level of formality, such as trimmed topiary or waving grasses you use in the container.

3. Consider how well container fulfills its purpose, such as an entrance boundary or to provide edible food.

4. Look at the proportions of what you intend to plant in the container. Does the mature height fit the container and the space? Is

there adequate soil for the size of plants?

5. Since container gardens require maintenance trimming, watering and positioning for adequate sunlight, are your plans practical?

Readers, consider sharing your container garden ideas with our readers this growing season.

**MARCH PLANT TIPS**

Stan Hoffart, urban forestry specialist for the City of Yankton offers these tree-pruning tips:

- Before trees begin to grow in early spring is a good time to prune fruit and shade trees.

- Prune trees when they are young to form good structure. This will make them strong and will direct growth toward desired shape. I start pruning young trees after they are established, about two growing seasons. Young trees can withstand more pruning than mature trees.

- Never remove more than one third of the trees canopy.

- Prune to establish a strong single central leader and lateral branches that give tree support.

- Never flush cut branch on the trunk or leave stubs.

Information on proper pruning methods can be found on the Arbor Day Foundation Web site: [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org), as well as animated tips for winter-damaged trees. Better yet, hire a certified arborist.

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