

Plant Exchange:

Making A Plan For Watering

Share tips from your plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or send your questions related to outdoor or indoor plants to 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

Randy Bylander and Sharon Auch had agreed to show their yard on the Cramer-Kenyon Fall Garden / Landscaping Tour in Yankton last growing season. Then came 100-degree days and drought! By the September tour their yard was in show condition while they both worked full time. Though we gardeners may resist to plan for watering, Randy and Sharon share what worked for them.

Q: Is some kind of water irrigation worth the time and money?

A: By late September of the 2012 drought growing season, Randy Bylander and Sharon Auch's Yankton city yard had thriving trees, shrubs, perennials, hanging baskets, and containers of colorful annuals, and plants by a backyard pond.

Randy is Director of Planning and Facilities at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital and Sharon is Office Manager for the Kitchen Place in Yankton. As part of their work oversight they deal with hospital grounds and decorative flair in kitchen design. These skills came in handy when they landscaped at home.

"The drip system (for plants around the yard) and lawn sprinkler system really helped when it was hot. You turn them on and basically forget about it," Sharon said. They have had the dripline system for three years and their lawn sprinkler system for years before that.

"When you think about it, if you go on vacation, who's going to water for you?" Randy said.

It's Too Expensive to Install Drip Irrigation.
"Rain Bird Landscape Dripline System Kit that I bought, cost less than \$35 (each) at Bomgaars in Yankton," Randy said. He used two kits for plants in front and back yards. Do-it-yourself or other retail drip systems were available locally such as at Menards and Ace Hardware.

His kit came with about 100 feet of ½ inch tubing called emitter hose. "With this tubing, you tap in where you want with ¼ inch tubing that goes to plants. I have lines running to plants near the pond, plant beds, and hanging baskets," he said. One line kept a birdbath filled. He said that Rain Bird parts were sold individually too. They later found they didn't need extra water for plants around the backyard pond and capped them. Their daylilies needed watering after being divided, but once lilies established, they capped them off too.

"We cut back on watering daylilies," he said. "Diane Dickes at Diane's Greenhouse in Fordyce Nebraska told us to check the soil a couple of inches down and see if it is damp, and it was."

"I have a weeping hose from the kit that I circled around a tree," Randy said. "You can run the tubing under mulch or gravel just like cable for the TV under the carpet."

"The outdoor faucet has a Y-splitter with two hoses on it," he said. One is for the drip system, and one for hand-watering as needed for plants not on the system or for a quick shot of water. "Timer costs about \$15.00 at Bomgaars and can be set to run every six or twelve hours, for example. This summer with the heat and drought, I ran it every six hours. For us, I set the timer to run water for ten minutes." He had a timer for the front faucet as well.

He chose the amount of water that flowed to each plant on the dripline in ten minutes, according to its needs. "The spray emitter comes in 5, 3, 2, or ½ gallons per hour. "So for potted plants, we set the emitter for ½ gallon per hour. Because it runs for ten minutes, we're putting in a pint or so every six hours."

"If we hand watered baskets or container plants in heat of summer, it would have needed twice a day watering," Sharon said. "For this bush I might choose an emitter than releases two gallons per hour, which means it gets more water than the baskets. All together, I bought two kits and two timers and a little extra tubing and emitters. With us working 8 a.m.-5 p.m. every day, there's no way we could have kept these plants alive," Randy said.

It's Too Hard to Install Drip Irrigation for Plants.

"In the kit, you get some ½ inch tubing with holes every two feet. This is like weeping or soaker hose. I ran this hose into the irises. We planted a lot of them this summer. The tubing is quite flexible and loops as needed. You can tap into your original tubing when you want more line," Randy said.

He decided the design of the dripline tubing according to the location and needs of plants in his yard. "With a T-shape, I ran the perforated tubing out in one direction and then ran the solid hose under the sidewalk to other beds." Randy had thought ahead before the sidewalk was laid, and put PVC pipe under



ABOVE: Randy Bylander of Yankton used a watering system for watering Boston fern this summer. Water on a timer flowed up tubing, threaded up the fascia of the porch posts to the ferns. Tubing is all but invisible at close sight. Ferns received no other care except for the occasional turning to catch morning light and fertilizer. **RIGHT:** Sharon Auch of Yankton uses Soil Moist for water-retention in her hanging baskets, but heat and drought last season still required frequent watering. Their watering system with ¼ inch tubing (barely visible) extends down into the container soil. September photo shows flowers with twice-a-day drip-watering. (Photos By Brenda K. Johnson)

the cement as a conduit for hose. Out front he used the same Y-splitter for two hoses at the faucet as he did in the backyard. One hose channeled water to the drip system and the other was for hand watering. "With the kit, other than scissors you hardly need any tools," he said. The timer for the front ran water to selected plants.

Their hanging baskets of Boston fern on the front porch received morning sun. He ran the tubing inside the porch post fascia up to the basket. Tubing led to the fern and the spray emitter was held in place with a little stake. It positioned water flow.

"In this case, I might have the emitter flow set at one gallon per hour and run it about ten minutes," he said. He could choose different amounts of water per plant.

"It's experimental," he said. "These fern dry out fast. The container gets a pint of water every six to eight hours. I've turned them back now to run every twelve hours." Changes involved only resetting the timer. "If we had a rainy season, I could set the timer to turn on every three days."

"I didn't do anything to the ferns but rotate them for light," Sharon said. "I do fertilize about once a week or so with Daniels Plant Food or Miracle Gro. For baskets I add Soil Moist to the potting soil. I got these at Diane's Greenhouse."

"(With the dripline) it's the only way these fern would have survived," Randy said. "If you have weed barrier and mulch, that helps keep water from evaporating on other plants. If you see plants overwatered, you turn the timer back."

Landscaping not completed was a reason some do not irrigate. "You just move the mulch, and there's your tubing," he said. "If I put in a new plant, I punch into the ½ inch tubing and add 1/4th inch tubing. I can cap the tubing to delete it. You can buy components individually. To start with, I set up about ten plants for watering per kit."

Troubleshooting was manageable. "When experimenting with ½ gallon or one gallon per hour, I save the tubing and spray emitter for some other plants and get more tubing with a different flow emitter," he said. "I haven't had problems (here in the city) with too high or low water pressure. A devise to lower the pressure comes with the kit."

"If I see a wet spot in the plant bed, I check the tubing to make sure it's working," he said. "Or if one of your plants is wilted and dry, you turn on the water and check for where water gushes out. If I run over a piece of tubing with the lawn mower, I take scissors and snip, and put a little sleeve or coupling to hold tubes together."

Randy used his choice of irrigation for plant beds, shrubs, containers, and trees, but he mentioned other uses, such as for vegetable gardens or a friend's deck. "They have a wrap around deck with hanging baskets off the hand railing. Tubing runs the length of the deck and they don't water except with this method."

Run the Lawn Sprinkler if Plantings Need Water.

Randy and Sharon found that perennials, shrubs, trees, and hanging baskets each had different water needs, which they accommodated with emitters in their dripline system. Their lawn turf had different water requirements than other plantings, and in fact, the same turf had different water needs in areas of the yard.

"Every time I run my lawn sprinkler system, it costs about \$25," Randy said. "I don't have it on automatic; the kind that's on in pouring rain. I manually turn it on. I try for a good soaking. This summer I ran the sprinkler every five days. My water bill went up. Sprinkler the year before (ran) only four or five times!"

He ran water where and when water was needed. "The lawn sprinkler system I have has six zones. I run each zone a different amount of water for each zone," he said. "In front, I have a big shade tree, so I run less water." He said that good soil required less water. As in many yards, soil quality varied around the yard,

so he accounted for that in each zone watering. He adjusted watering time too. "Corner zones may get three times more water due to overspray. So my central zones get five gallons per minute and the corner zones get less." He changed the spray arch in adapters in windy areas of the yard.

"When my sprinkler system was installed, the heads were all pre-set. Installers were good; but they don't necessarily adjust for shade and soil quality. Before, when the back zone needed water, I'd have to turn on the whole system. Once I adjusted the heads, the yard pretty much stayed green. In each zone, I'd put out containers and run the sprinkler until I got an inch of water. That's better for grass roots."

Irrigation Systems Use Too Much Water.

"We probably used twice as much water this summer compared to last summer," Randy said, due to heat and drought.

"We couldn't have gotten by with tending the plants when we got home," he said. "I had a yard many years ago; first house. I let the yard go dormant (in drought). When everyone else's turned green in fall, mine chose not to. Any money I saved on not watering, I spent on re-seeding and watering more."

"Mostly drip watering is shut off now (late September) except for mums and a few more plants," Randy said.

"Next year hostas, daylilies, irises, (and other transplants) will be more established and won't need extra water," Sharon said. "We had a ninebark tree that died. When we dug it out, water was sitting there."

"Drought nailed the tree, but it was also flooded; may be some clay soil there," Randy said. "The new tree doesn't get extra water."

"(Dripline system) waters plants slowly," Sharon said. "It's hard to stand there with a hose and water slowly."

"If I water a plant container with a bucket,



the water runs right out," Randy said. "I don't know if we save money this way, but we save time. If you adjust your lawn sprinkler, you may save money." Their plants appeared to thrive after a challenging season.

Most would feel pressure of a September public tour of their yard. "Plants probably wouldn't have been watered as much without the tour," Sharon said. "But we like this yard. We have friends who come over and sit in the yard. I've done baskets every year (that would need the extra water)."

"I think we'd have watered anyhow," Randy said.

Yard Landscaping and Upkeep Takes Too Much Effort.

At dusk, we sat in the family pergola in their backyard. Before their landscape renovation, they said that their backyard had a dog kennel, a big slab of cracked concrete, and a small deck made of inferior products.

The spacious Trex deck with outdoor seating was nearby and water splashed in their pond by the pergola. Around the yard hung baskets of colored annuals, a decorated playhouse for grandchildren, lush lawn, and stamped, colored concrete flooring.

"Our stamped concrete takes more care than regular concrete," Sharon said.

"You seal it every year," Randy said. "If you wanted a flat color, you don't have as much care. We like it shiny. Once the cement is clean, it takes a half hour with a roller and a five-gallon bucket of sealant. You could use a sprayer. I figure this is our hobby as we get older."

"It's your hobby," she said. "I have hobbies." They laughed.

"The goldfish in the pond are mostly four years old," he said. "We dug out a hole and put in roof membrane as pond liner. I clean the filter every five days and raise the water level a couple of inches because of evaporation. Water plants keep the pond clear."

"With the pond, you get birds here," she said. That's what I like; attracting the birds."

Lawn chair fabric covered the pergola and gave the space privacy. A grandchild's solar ornament glowed and solar rope outlined the outdoor room and comfortable seating. "We found the solar ropes at Menards," he said. "You can't read here, but it gives a nice glow." They had candles and floodlights for more animated evenings.

Restful quiet sounds of water lingered in this outdoor living space. "It's been our vacation," Sharon said.

"We like being outside and how it looks," Randy said. "And we enjoy it."

Dibbles & Bits

• Master Gardener Training 2013 is offered by South Dakota State University Extension staff with Yankton as a regional site for three hands-on learning days in May. This year, on-line learning will be combined with the three sessions at the Yankton County Extension Office on Whiting Drive. Topics include care and selection of trees and shrubs, lawn care, vegetable and flower gardening and more. Application and fee deadline is March 27th. Details on website: <http://www.sdstate.edu/sdces/resources/lawn/master-gardeners/> Contact: Mary Roduner, Master Gardener SD Coordinator at (605) 394-1722.

• Siouxland Garden Show is March 22-24 at the Sioux City Convention Center. Sponsors include Iowa State University Extension and University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension. Speakers, exhibits, how-to sessions, and children's corner are featured. For admission and agenda see: www.siouxlandgardenshow.org or Woodbury County Extension at (712) 276.2157.

Gardener To Gardener

Share what you find useful for gardening.

Mary Ann King of Yankton is a master gardener whose yard and flowerbeds display her skills. "Most gardeners want to see their garden spring to life," Mary said. "With patience and some preparations we'll soon begin gardening. I hope you will find these useful and enjoyable."

• Clean, repair and replace tools. Some gardeners did this last fall before winter arrived. Not me! I left it until now, but I can work on cleaning and repairing my tools while making plans for spring plantings. Nothing better than a nicely sharpened tool. One can "do-it-yourself" with the right equipment and I find the Internet a great source of information. At www.finegardening.com the "Clean, Sharp Tools Work Better" article shows how. As for me, I do not have tool sharpening equipment so I rely on Yankton's Ace Hardware Service Department to sharpen my cleaned tools.

• Eventually tools will need to be replaced. It is hard to let that useful friend go and find the right replacement. The two of you have worked many hours together. I found a website: www.gardentoolcompany.com and sent Santa a list for Christmas. Oh my! I am excited to use my new gardening tools.

• Learn about and select seeds and plants. Fine Gardening website above has planting guides, designs, and how-to-do videos that I find useful. Self-control is needed as I look through seed and garden catalogs at all the varieties knowing that I lack the space and location. When choosing seeds and plants I read the information provided and match selections to the hardiness zone and site. Yankton County is USDA Hardiness Zone 5A.

• In addition to hardiness, plants have requirements of sunlight exposure and needed moisture to thrive. I observe this now, and take notes so when choosing I match the location's sunlight to the right seeds and plants. See National Gardening Association website at www.gardening.org for videos and garden topics. I pour a cup of coffee and spend time at the website learning about gardening. It's a fun afternoon.

• "Heritage Plants" and "Seed Savers" relate to heirloom gardening that is gaining popularity. Heritage or heirloom plants were grown during earlier periods in history and have their traits through open pollination. In contrast, apples were propagated over centuries through grafts and cuttings. Seed savers are gardeners and organizations that grow heirloom seeds to save older varieties. Non-profit Seed Saver Exchange's mission is to "conserve and promote America's culturally diverse but endangered food crop heritage for future generations by collection, growing, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants". Website is www.seedsavers.org Gardeners can visit Decorah, Iowa and see this working farm. Road trip, anyone?



Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

This blog is an interactive site for people of our USDA Zone 4-5a region to exchange ideas about plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed? Want to share a comment about plants?

- What are tips on container plants for dry weather from a professional?
- Avid Yankton gardener shares a tour of her yard and shares growing ideas.
- Can spinach be grown locally in-ground most of the year? Some vegetable and fruit growers learn about high tunnels for extending seasons.
- Want to see and read about what's growing and blooming around the United States and elsewhere? "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" link will show you selections from February 15, 2013.
- Check us out at the web address: brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

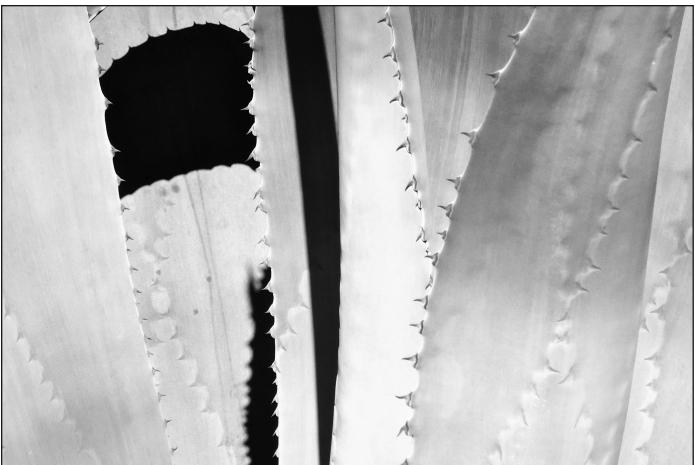


PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTY BOTHWELL
Kristy Bothwell of Rosewood Greenhouse in Vermillion is a fan of Blue Agave. Imprint of older leaves is left on younger leaves as it unfolds.

March Plant Tips

Kristy Bothwell is owner and gardener at Rosewood Greenhouse, 1400 West Cherry St., Vermillion. She says that she has a mix of succulents and other plants and will open Monday, April 22. Kristy shares why she likes easy care succulents.

• They require minimal care. Give them full sun and heat and they are happy. Watering requirements are minimal. Make sure they have well-drained soil.

• Because they like the drier side of life, you can poke them into places where other plants fear to grow. Try an old boot with a few holes cut into the side, a strawberry jar that

may be harder to keep watered for other plants can be just fine for them.

• Succulents come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Some are annuals here, so if you would like to overwinter them, plant in a container that will fit in a sunny window where it stays warm. Aeoniums, Echeveria, and some Sedums make wonderful annual choices. Perennial types, some Sedum and Sempervivum (Hen and Chicks) varieties, will survive our winters in drier, well-drained spots in the garden.

• One of my favorites plants is Blue Agave. Its true blue is harder to find in the plant world. It hugs itself so tight that the imprint of the older leaves is left on the younger leaves as they unfold. It has large thorns running along the edge of each leaf and is a main ingredient in tequila. I love it, thorns and all.