

HOMEGARDEN

PLANT EXCHANGE:

Planting For Impact With Modest Cost

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: How have plants been beneficial for your business?

A: Dale and Mary Beth Schenkel own Karttrax on Highway 52 about three miles west of Yankton. On their five acres, they have built six attractions since 1995: Two kart tracks, an 18-hole mini golf course, bumper boats, a train for young children and bumper cars. Much of the attraction area is cement surface for quality tracks and golfing, visitor convenience that includes handicap accessibility, and ease of maintenance.

The Schenkels use plants to offset heat and hard lines of cement.

"When we travel, we look along roadsides and entrances to businesses," Mary Beth said. "When we see plants growing, we think someone cares. Downtown Yankton has the plants baskets on the light poles and green spaces with plants. We don't have the advantages of Florida here, but we still have a lot of choices. We plant mostly perennials because they are lower maintenance than annuals and are lower cost over the years."

"Mary Beth loves flowers. I like the place to look alive and green," Dale said. "It breaks up the expanse of concrete with live plants. We do most of the work here ourselves, so we get the attractions running and other maintenance underway by Memorial weekend and then tend to plants."

"Adding plants is a gradual process," Mary Beth said. "We started with hens and chicks around the kart tracks, but they didn't multiply fast enough. We can't use rocks or bark mulch around the track because if misplaced onto the track, it becomes a driving hazard."

Mystery Plant

Mary Beth looked for a plant that could withstand cement boundaries around the kart track, hot sun and winter exposure, and required little maintenance.

"A relative gave us some plugs of an ornamental plant that needs to grow in a contained area, because it can be invasive. That was about seven years ago," she said. "It's soft to the touch, has a light, sweet fragrance in its flowers, grows to about 1.5 feet mounds and stays lush all season to hard frost. We mow it off to a few inches in the fall because the old plant is stick-like. Certain caterpillars like to eat it, but otherwise, it grows well within cement barriers around the track. We don't know its name."

Landscaping With Sumac

"People ask us about the sumac grove by our entrance that turns red in the fall and gives us late day shade in the summer," Mary Beth said.

The Schenkels noticed more sumacs growing behind their business and decided to transplant some for landscaping in the mini golf course area.

"Sumac is a sturdy plant that can handle weather here," Mary Beth said.

"Sumac is native like the buffalo," Dale said. "The plants are free, you can trim out the ones you don't want. We have a few that are getting tall enough to use as a walk-through arbor."

At one spot on the Par 50 golf course, sumac branches are obstacles and in other locations, plants are placed in islands as obstacles.

Weed barrier with large gravel cover minimizes weed growth. Landscape plants around the mini golf area are irrigated. "In the heat of summer when you dig under the barrier, the soil is moist."

"Plants look better here every year," Mary Beth said. "Our folks got rid of some English ivy, so we took shoots and planted them to cover the cave obstacle along the course. The yucca came from our hillside behind the business, along with the Eastern red cedar and cottonwood trees, wild plum, and wispy foxtail."

These native plants, growing in full sun with adequate water and reduced competition, take on the qualities of specimen plants that they are.

"Sometimes plants volunteer along the edge of the landscape



PHOTO: BRENDA JOHNSON

(Above) Volunteer Siouland cottonwood, native sumac and yucca and common ornamentals thrive in full sun with adequate moisture, and contribute visual interest and shade.

(Below, left) "Mystery plant" is a long-season cultivar that grows with cement borders, offers flowers with scent, and mounds of plants with fine leaves that change color.

(Below, right) Dr. Paul Johnson of South Dakota State University is principal investigator of a project to learn about native bees as pollinators of native and cultivated plants of the Black Hills Ecoregion.



PHOTO: BRENDA JOHNSON

fabric," Mary Beth said. "You leave it there to see if it contributes. Some of the wild plums were established here from bird droppings."

Natural Garden Art

Driftwood from area rivers accent the lighthouse/fishing shack theme.

"When a driftwood deteriorates from weathering, we just remove it," Dale said. "My brother Dave of Schenkel Demolition LLC in Tyndall was the source for the fieldstone boulders for interest. They are heavy enough that we built the course around them."

Dale points to one stone with angled faces.

"If you hit the ball just right you can bank off this stone. My best score on this course is 43. Someone had a score of 33, but no witnesses," he said.

A water interest weaves through the course, providing obstacle, refreshing moisture to the air and the sound of water flowing over rocks.

"The water overflow is set to use rainwater," Dale said. "We put in Aqua Blue Shade as a non-toxic material to hold back the algae."

"After we start up the water in the spring, we add the Blue Shade," Mary Beth said. "You can trace it as it colors the water around the course, finally ending with the blue aeration fountain."

The Schenkels put emphasis on plants with their business. "In winter, our home is the business greenhouse for container plants such as tropical hibiscus," Mary Beth said. "My interest in plants probably comes from both my parents gardening."

Concerning their choices in landscaping, Dale added, "While it's practicality for me, I like to look at natural things, better than a big city environment."

Of Interest to Plant Enthusiasts:

South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service welcomes the

public to participate in the free online webinar sessions, held Tuesdays at 10 a.m., averaging 30 minutes each. May session dates are below. Recorded sessions are available the day after the presentation. Email Cindy Bergman, Horticulture Educator, at the Yankton County Extension Service, to receive the session links.

For more information, contact Cynthia.Bergman@sd.state.edu.

• May 4: "Wildlife Control in the Garden" with Cindy Bergman, horticulture educator

• May 11: "How Much to Share with Bugs before Treating" with Jon Kieckhefer, agronomy educator

• May 18: "Common Horticulture Problems This Week" with Chris Zdorovtsov, horticulture educator

• May 25: "Emerald Ash Borer" with Dr. John Ball, SDSU forestry specialist

"Gardenline," with a panel of Extension Service and SDSU specialists airs on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. on South Dakota Public Television.

This Q/A format show also has archived "hot topics" its Web site — www.gardenline.sdstate.edu — such as soil temperatures, ticks, white grubs and apple scab.

Q: Why do some of my newly planted seedlings grow slowly and then wither all of a sudden? — A reader

A: "Damping Off" is a general term for several fungal dis-

eases that may attach seedlings started indoors or in the garden. Symptoms include sudden collapse of seedlings, sometimes with brown stems at soil surface or roots, according to Charley's Greenhouse Newsletter. Once symptoms appear, seedlings cannot revive. Withered seedlings may appear to lack water. If soil is moist, however, then fungal action is likely. Dispose of plants and soil if indoors. If containers are reused, rinse with 5% Clorox solution. If damping off area is outdoors, allow soil to dry and consider leaving area fallow at least until later in the season.

As possible, avoid conditions that cause excessive fungal growth. Sterile seed starting mix results in more predictable plant growing success for indoor-started seeds than soil from the yard, because soil naturally contains fungi. You might see damping off in wet areas of your garden where conditions for increased fungal growth occur in a wet spring. Water garden so that a handful of soil feels moist, not wet to the touch. Don't plant seeds in water logged soil; wait for some moisture to evaporate.

Fill seed-growing containers to the top with seed starting mix. This prevents container walls from blocking air circulation around seedlings. Once seeds have fully germinated, covers should be removed to allow air circulation. Thin over-crowded seedlings for better circulation and less

competition.

For more information about damping off and other gardening solutions, see this Web site: www.charleysgreenhouse.com.

Q: What is the status on pollinator bee research in South Dakota?

A: "My work with bees is rather limited and involves

native bees, not honeybees," Entomologist Paul Johnson of South Dakota State University said. "Native bees are poorly studied on the Northern Plains, to such a degree that we do not even know all the species that occur here."

In the past, two of Johnson's students working on bees resulted in finding new species for the state.

"The current project is focused on the native bees of the Black Hills and a substantial number of species not previously reported from the state are likely to be discovered," Johnson said.

Honeybees are known for their role in crop and garden pollination. Johnson said that native bees are more efficient pollinators than honeybees in many situations.

"For example, leafcutter bees and alkali bees are significantly more effective at pollinating alfalfa than are honeybees, and bumblebees are better at pollinating fruit trees, berries and vegetables because they work in cooler temperatures and often in light rain," he said. "One of my recent graduate students studied the relative efficiency of honeybees and several native bees in the pollination of raspberry, and found that the honeybees were aggressive toward the smaller natives."

"But, the natives were more efficient because they visited the flowers earlier and later in the day and would visit flowers that were shaded. Honeybees are a bit too dandy sometimes."

Johnson said a big problem for native bees is habitat condition.

"They are more particular about habitat conditions, especially for nesting, and are very sensitive to pesticides," he said. "They also need a wide diversity of flowers throughout the growing season. Honeybees can be 'farmed' more easily so they can be kept around developed areas. Of course there are the tasty honey and wax by-products of honeybee work."

"The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken the lead on researching the recent pest and disease problems with honeybees."

Other than some sampling, Johnson doesn't know of organized honeybee research in South Dakota from USDA or South Dakota Department of Agriculture.

Somewhat related to his insect studies, Johnson grows orchids. He is quoted in the February "Orchids: The Bulletin of the American Orchid Society" as an authority on orchid insect pests.

For more about the project on native bees of the Black Hills Ecoregion as pollinators and native bee resources, visit <http://nathist.sdstate.edu/BlackHillsBees.html>.

MAY PLANT TIPS

Jay Gurney, owner and nurseryman at Yankton Nurseries, 2000 Ferdig Ave. simplifies how to select, grow and store onions:

• Decide which features of onions are important for your uses such as size, sweetness and winter storage. Onions are sold for gardens as bulbs (called sets) or small plants and each have favored uses. Bulb or set onions mature faster to slice for July 4 and are a bit easier to plant. Small onion plants produce onions that store better and tend to grow larger onions. More varieties are usually available as small plants than as bulb sets.

• Biennial onions grow larger energy-storage bulbs the first year and mature to produce seed the second year. Bulbs or sets have already grown one season. Small onion plants are in process of first year growth. This difference impacts some uses of onions they produce, along with variety.

• For economy of garden space, plant onions on both sides of row string line.

• Don't mound soil around onions when weeding. The onion bulb naturally pushes out of the soil as it grows.

• Give onions a side-dressing boost of nitrogen in June and early July.

• As onion plant topples over in late July or August, pull the plant and store onion not touching others in a cool, dark area. Storage methods examples: Wrap string around five to six onion tops cluster and hang up. Or, use mesh tubes or nylon socks or hose, knotted after each onion is placed inside and hang up.

"Northern climates require longer day length onions," Gurney said. "Growing short day length 'Vadalia' or 'Granex' onions will result in small onions in this region. We now have sweet onions such as 'Walla Walla Sweet' and 'Candy,' and storage onions such as 'Copra' that grow best in this region."

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