

Plant Exchange

Where The Wildflowers Flourish

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

The simple act of mowing is uncommon in this age of complicated solutions, as a way to manage grass, weeds and animal pressure on the home acreage.

Q: How do you manage your native grassland and wildflowers with the least amount of chemicals?

A: Kim Brannen and her husband Mark live on an acreage west of Yankton with their dogs Boomer and Rosie. They planted their windbreak of Rocky Mountain junipers, native grasses, and wildflowers (forbs) years before they built their home.

"We chose this place as our future retirement home in 2004 and worked here on weekends in a camper or rental to build our next life adventure here," Kim Brannen says.

The windbreak was an early project. They worked with Yankton County Conservation District to establish the plants.

"My husband transferred here to his new job last year and I recently retired," Kim says, "so we're able to be here full time." In fact they spent the first day of this year in their new home.

Brannen is a soil scientist and has retired from Natural Resources Conservation Service in Huron. Her husband also has a conservation background. While they have learned from experiences in their new Yankton setting, the influence of their conservation backgrounds is evident in Kim's appreciation of the prairie and their grassland management.

"The north part of our acreage was old alfalfa cropland," Brannen says, "that we drilled to native grasses and forbs in 2004-2005." We're standing in the windbreak along the front of the property. In late March, the rows of Rocky Mountain junipers, chosen for soil and climate adaptation, alternate with trim rows of planted native grasses and forbs left as snow fence, and for another reason. Brannen points to the array of mature purple coneflowers, blue flax, and gaillardia that she finds among the Indian grass, big and little blue stem, and switch grasses.

MOW FOR MAINTENANCE

"I started mowing grassy areas on the acreage from the very start and haven't stopped since," Brannen says. "I manage the native grass stands by mowing two or more times early in the brome growing season." She mows to limit competition around preferred plants and to suppress cool season grasses such as brome before the warm season native grasses and wildflowers emerge.

While some choose to suppress brome grass in native grass plots with chemicals at specific times, desirable native forbs also in the plot may also be damaged or killed by chemical residue. Desirable plants nearby may also be hurt by chemical drift. Others choose to temporarily pasture livestock on the plots at specific times to graze on non-desirable plants.

While timed mowing is labor intensive and has specific time requirements, Brannen uses fewer chemicals on the land. She sees other benefits as well. She mows to remove habitat for small rodents, and areas that could harbor plant disease near preferred plants. She has the option to leave favorite wildflowers as she mows. She likes the visual aesthetic of trim mowed grass along with native plants. She times when she mows to maximize results.

In spring she mows all the native grass areas at least two times before forbs begin to grow. Brome seed is in the soil. "We don't have brome grass as a cover crop; it just grows naturally. I mow when brome grass starts to grow, and is about six inches tall to reduce its vigor. We mow it again when it is about 6 inches tall. We mow brome grass until the native grasses and forbs start growing vigorously. Some years it might take a couple or more mowings to keep the brome grass knocked back until the warm season plants start growing. After that, the native grasses and forbs emerge. We're giving the warm season plants space to grow. Once they come out, they can generally out compete the brome grass."

For mowing maintenance of the acreage, they operate a six feet 3-point tractor mower with power take off.

"There is so much volume of the native grass that a riding mower would choke down," Brannen says. The area around each juniper in the windbreak is maintained as black soil, by using a herbicide. It reduces competition for available moisture. Sometimes, an additional protective step is needed to combat animal pressure. "We have a lot of winter damage to trees and shrubs from rabbits and mice. In fall, after the seed heads of native grass and forbs mature, I mow near the shrubs. We try not to create nesting habitat right



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Boomer and Rosie, and their owner Kim Brannen, enjoyed last summer's native wildflowers. "I manage the forbs and native grasses by mowing two or more times early in the brome growing season," Brannen said. This limits brome grass competition. She mowed when forbs were still dormant. Later wildflowers and native grasses thrived.

Before and After



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Broad swaths of spring lavender, lapping water, and limestone cliffs are now signature features to some visitors of Lewis & Clark Recreation Area.

"Common lilacs were installed by either by the Conservation Service or Forest Service in the 1960's to early 1970's," Shane Bertsch, District Park Supervisor, said. He added that many of the trees in the campground and Gavins hills were also planted then. Today some lilacs are more than 3 persons tall and provide privacy for campers, windbreaks, habitat, and delineate park boundaries.

"Deer don't seem to bother the lilacs. I am sure that the lilacs established quickly with the good soil conditions that we have in the park. We have had a lot of compliments from park visitors on how pretty they are," Bertsch said.

around the shrubs. The animals can live in the grass in other areas."

BURN FOR REJUVENATION

"Early this spring we mowed native grasses and forb areas like usual, and then burned it for the first time," Brannen said. They decided to burn the grasses in the windbreak and several areas to remove the native grass straw, further limit green brome grass, and increase the vigor of the still dormant native species there.

"We started late in the day after the wind died down. Earlier we checked our neighbor's fields for fire hazards and planned our burn strategy accordingly, called the county dispatcher and gave our burn location. We also called the dispatcher when the fire was out."

A mowed green firebreak surrounded the burn site. Hoses were positioned on the north and south sides of the burn. "We started downwind and kept the fire even between us. Mowed vegetation kept the fire closer to the ground where it is easier to control than burning upright vegetation such as native grasses. We put the fire out in the clumps that continued to burn. We stayed away from trees and shrubs because they catch fire, especially Eastern red cedars. We made sure we weren't allowing cinders to drift into the neighbor's fields or pastures. Later we checked their fields." By a month later, Brannens saw prairie coneflower, gaillardia and purple coneflower plants.

GIVE WILDFLOWERS A CHANCE

Brannen has learned that too much mowing or mowing not well timed isn't as effective. "Generally after I mow brome grass two or so times in early spring, I let the

these areas to allow the native grass and forb species to become dominant. We mowed with a brush hog initially and also found out where all the rocks were hiding. Now we mow all the grass areas at least a couple times early in the growing season to knock back the brome grass and then let the plants grow for the rest of the year. Some areas I mow here as nature trails or pathways around the place."

She shows some stands of mature wildflowers from last season. Among them are ground plum milk vetch, anemones, pussy toes, liatris, prairie clovers, and hoary puccoon.

"These wildflowers weren't planted here, there is a native seed bank in the soil already. Flowers just pop out at you if you give them some growing room. That's part of this mowing management technique. We reduce the competition from brome grass and these native wildflowers and native grasses in the seed bank thrive. Over time we've learned where these plants come up. We enjoy what's here and we want to preserve it."

Brannen applies her years of appreciation of natural systems to this land. "I have seen how drastically native prairie has declined across the country. I am interested in preserving and maintaining what prairie we can. There needs to be balance between production and wild areas. We live in a region of great potential to preserve and restore small prairie areas. It's good for the soul. We didn't set out to do anything big, just take care of our little piece of Yankton County."

Q: How do you build a fairy garden?

A: "Not just for kids," Janette Marker of rural Yankton said. "You can have a theme with miniature garden gnomes or just have a natural miniature garden without accessories. Someone in an apartment can even have a miniature garden." Marker is a recently trained master gardener and main-

tains an expansive yard of flowers and other plantings.

"My friend Carla has had a fairy garden for several years and has gotten me interested in them before they became so popular," Marker said.

"The best part is sharing it with Lilly. She is seven and reads about them, and her room is decorated with fairies and princesses. Last summer when we had the first fairy garden, she'd check it first thing when she came to visit, or ask about it when we talked. We bought her a fairy garden kit for Christmas, so this weekend, we'll build this one and the other one which will go home with her."

FAIRY GARDEN EXPERIENCE

Marker found a creative solution to display the fairy garden. The heavy but hollow pedestal base for the garden was an heirloom of her husband's grandmother. "We've carted this birdbath base around for 25 years but haven't used it because there was no top part. I searched in antique stores and found a blue roaster lid with a vent hole and handle on the top of the lid. It was just the right size for the fairy garden. I put zip ties around the handle and hung heavy weights down into the hollow pedestal to secure the lid on the base." The lid stayed in place with wind gusts, but curious deer were a challenge. This year, she moved the fairy garden and base onto the patio closer to the house.

She learned that succulents work well for fairy gardens. "There are so many small-leaved succulents that proportionally work with a miniature garden. They are drought tolerant. I only watered it a couple of times a week unless it was very hot. Last year's garden received only morning sun."

She also liked "Stepables." They are compact, small-leaved plants with correct proportions, such as found at Bomgaars. "I overwintered most of my plants from last year's fairy garden in a sunny south window so I didn't have to buy many plants this year."

Lilly was a fan of the accessories, and so was Grandma. "It seems like the more theme extras you put into the fairy garden, the cuter it gets. I've taken time to look for more ideas online. Often the ideas are simple like a stepping stone pathway using shiny glass stones or river rock."

LARGER THAN FAIRY GARDENS

Grandma phrased the attraction for fairy gardens simply: "Sharing it with Lilly."

"Lilly is interested in plants. In fact, all the grandkids have garden areas here, even our three-week old granddaughter. It's all about making memories." Each has their name on an area in the flower garden, ringed with river rocks. "I try to keep them even; the same number or biggest plants. They go shopping with Dad and have learned to bring marigolds and snapdragons back for their gardens here."

Marker's interest in gardening came from home. "When I was a young girl, my mom always had a flower and a vegetable garden. I was attracted to the flower garden, but had to work to pick raspberries or pull weeds in the vegetable garden. Flower gardening has become a passion for me."

Plant Exchange: Blog with us!

We'd like this blog to be an interactive site for people of our plant Zone 5a region to exchange ideas about flowers, vegetables, and other plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed? Want to share a comment about people and their plants or read other's comments? See current topics such as how a local gardener out-smarts deer and adds bold color with container plants, trees hardy to the region selected for planting at a nearby state park, managing trees in a nursery, tips for growing tomatoes and other garden vegetables, heirloom tomatoes, and how to compost at home.

Blog web address: brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

May Plant Tips

Jay Gurney, owner and nurseryman at Yankton Nurseries, 2000 Ferdig Ave., says that May is the month to consider planting almost any plants-trees, shrubs, perennials, flowers, vegetables, evergreens, and roses.

- This is a good time to get ahead of weeds, and try to keep plants weeded for fewer weeds later.

- After you plant, remember to keep soil around new plantings moist. It's hard to depend on a lawn sprinkler water schedule to keep plants moist in the flowerbed.

- For shrubs that have just completed blooming, such as forsythia, lilac, and spirea, it is a good time to prune if desired.

- For apple trees, continue to watch for cedar apple rust on leaves and consider spraying.

- Watch for early signs of black spot and powdery mildew on roses. Dealing with these diseases sooner is easier to treat and better for the plants.

Dibbles and Bits

- Plant Sale on May 11 at the Territorial Capitol Building, Riverside Park, Yankton, 7 a.m.-1 p.m. or until sold out. Yankton Town and Country Garden Club hosts the plant sale and reminds you to come early for the best choices.

- Planning, planting, and maintaining native plants for South Dakota publication may be obtained at no cost at Yankton Conservation District office in Yankton or find an NRCS office at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

Ask for Living Landscapes in South Dakota: A Guide to Native Plantscaping.

- Kid's gardening resources include food gardening in a container, seed collecting, plant investigations, activities, and how-to plant projects for families with children at the National Gardening Association website.

See <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>

Be ^{SMART.} Protected.
Simply Blue.™

Affordable health plans designed with you in mind.

No matter what stage of life you're in, Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Dakota gives you the coverage you need and deserve — from short-term to traditional to tax-advantaged plans— through SimplyBlue.

With 17 coverage options for individuals and families that are all easy to use, understand, and afford, you get the peace of mind knowing you're covered by a name you know and trust. That's the difference of Blue. Call us to find a plan that works for you.



Tom Cihak



Linda Behl

Cihak Insurance

311 Walnut, Yankton, SD • 665-9393

An Authorized Independent Agent For



Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Dakota is an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

©2011 Wellmark, Inc.
We do not provide tax advice.
Consult your professional tax advisor.
Form No. SD-01-P-11



AM 1450

MORNING COFFEE
WEEKDAYS
MONDAY-FRIDAY

Friday, May 4

7:40 am YAPG

(Mike Dellinger)

8:15 am YAA

(Amy Miner)

CARDIOVASCULAR SCREENING PROGRAM

FROM AVERA SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

HEART CHECK \$50

- Calcium Score CT – crucial to early detection of heart disease
- Blood pressure
- BMI (body mass index)
- Cholesterol and blood sugar check
- Education and risk assessment with an expert cardiovascular team
- Diet Quality Index
- Brief tobacco cessation and nutrition counseling – as needed

VASCULAR CHECK \$50

Offering three tests designed to detect the conditions of vascular disease. If detected early, treating vascular disease lowers your risk of stroke, heart disease and other complications.

- Abdominal artery screening
- Abdominal aortic aneurysm screening
- Peripheral artery disease screening

OR BOTH CHECKS FOR \$75

Call (605) 668-8150

to schedule an appointment or to learn more.

Screenings are recommend for women over 45 and men over 40.

Avera
Sacred Heart Hospital

Look no further.