

Plant Exchange

It's Time For Flowers!

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog on Facebook or www.brendakjohnson-plantexchange.wordpress.com

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

LANDSCAPE DESIGN CHOICES

Many gardeners aspire to create areas in their yard that each convey a clear focus. Uncluttered, unified space does that for Ann Menke of Yankton. Achieving that simple clarity with objects, or with living, growing, changing plants, is a challenge. Let's look at three examples of Menke's design choices in her city yard that meet this challenge.

THREE 'TWIST-N-SHOUT' HYDRANGEAS

Ann Menke's front yard is about a third cement driveway and the rest manicured green space. She pulls the eye to three large planters that are alike and on pedestals, positioned by the house garage doors. She grows the same kind and size of plant in each planter.

"I like more simplicity," Menke said. "I used to plant a lot of coleus plants of different color leaves and shapes. If it is windy out, they get broken. Then you have a big hole in one plant. (She tries to maintain the three plants on pedestals so they will grow uniformly and stay that way.)

"This year I thought I'd try a plant in a pot and see if it's dramatic." She selected three compact woody hydrangea perennials to plant in the three pots. Of course they had slightly different shapes to start, given individual natural branching.

"They looked a bit rugged," she said. "One grew a little bigger than the other two. I don't know why." With same shape, 24-inch planters, she added same amount of soil. She added no acid fertilizer except what is in the Miracle Gro potting soil bag and no acid fertilizer for blue color. She rotated the plants so that each gets the same amount of sunlight and other microclimate conditions.

"I wanted to see what these three plants would do. I wanted to see their natural colors without extra fertilizer. They bloomed a lot." Each bloom starts in cream color and ends in blue. Even near the end of the season the proportion of plant to pot size was still proportional, with several large blue blooms per plant.

"Sometimes when it rains I set them out. Rain seems to make the blue colors more intense," she said. "One gets lighter in sunlight than the other two in more shade." She liked finding out about the plant's nature before managing it.

"I'll take them indoors at the end of the season, put them in smaller pots to



ABOVE: Ann Menke of Yankton chose three 'Twist-N-Shout' hydrangea perennials like this one for a repeating display by their house garage doors. She rotated them all season so they would grow evenly and be given similar light and other growing conditions. Menke found that each flower cluster started as cream color and then turned blue. Rose container complements the blue flowers. RIGHT: With a few refurbish steps, Lois Quatier of Yankton keeps her statuary and cement yard décor attractive.

try to overwinter them. I have south-facing windows indoors. It would be fun if they bloom in the house," she said.

The three blue-flowered 'Twist-N-Shout' hydrangeas on pedestals add a simple eye-catching focal point. Blue flowers are hard to find and these bloom about July – frost. She could add acidic fertilizer for possibly deeper blue color. Growing hydrangeas in planters makes it easier to increase acidity in a controlled space than in a flowerbed.

CASTOR BEAN DÉCOR

Menke pointed to the beans that produce the cluster of twelve-foot plants before us. By the west side of

her two-story house, the castor bean plants cover utility meters and break up the visual wall expanse.

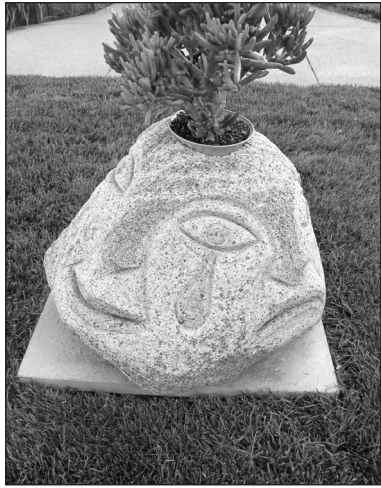
"I tie them because of the wind," she said. "It gets so windy that it blows large pots off their stands. Under these conditions, the plants are growing robustly.

She also tried castor beans in containers. "They don't grow as much in a pot. I have to water them a lot," she said.

She planted a few castor beans in a flowerbed by their hot tub. Prominent red spikes of petal-less flowers and large palmate leaves are striking against white trim. Although seeds can be poisonous to humans and animals, open-pollinated seeds can be saved for annual planting.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
ABOVE: Menke started her castor beans from seed indoors. Castor beans grow into 12-foot plants add interest along a two story wall while they hide utility meters. Castor beans with red petal-less flowers contrast against white trim. BELOW: Menke's chose this Scott Luken carved stone statuary for a two-foot-high art décor in their front yard. Her grandson named it "Smiley Rock and Sad Rock."



Cultivars of castor bean plants come in a range of leaf colors. Choosing one and planting several of them offers a singular focus and hides utilities too.

YARD ART

Dark green expanse of turf from front curb to containers of flowers near their house entrance is a low horizontal unbroken plane except for one object of art.

"It's a Scott Luken (carved stone creation). It's happy and sad," Menke said. Her grandson named it "smiley rock and sad rock."

"Succulents in a pot get water with the lawn," she said. "It makes a cute hairdo."

Concerning her landscape design choices, Menke explains in few words. "We try to have flowers (and other elements) complement and not overpower," she said. The stone carving on the uncluttered green lawn does that.

Peonies For Spring

BY MARY ANN KING
Master Gardener

Its botanical name *Paenia* is known as Peony to you and me. Truly the most sumptuous of blooming plants, it provides a springtime show followed by lush foliage all summer long.

Several years ago after tiring of roses, I found a cherished replacement in a hedge of peonies. These perennials are long lived and known to have thrived for hundreds of years. I love them for their ease of care and stunning beauty.

While the peony is not fussy, choosing the right location will guarantee a most generous blooming plant. Requiring full sun (no less than six hours daily), they can grow when planted singly or as a sentinel hedge along walkways and garden edges. In a mixed border garden, the peony combines well with plants requiring similar growing conditions, like irises, columbines, Baptisia, etc.

Peonies like to be left alone, not needing fertilizer. A light topping of compost in the spring can be added once the plant is growing. After blooming, remove only the spent flowers, leaving the stems and leaves to grow all summer while rejuvenating the roots. In the fall when the plant dies back, remove all debris to prevent the overwintering of disease.

I like to help the peony plant stand tall. Because of their giant blooms, the stem structure can collapse. In early spring as the "eyes" push out of the ground, place a metal ring at each planting. These rings will provide support all summer and are easily removed when the foliage dies back.

Fall is the time to divide roots and transplant. Dig a generous 2-feet by 2-feet hole, loosening the dirt. For heavy or sandy soils, add a mix of compost. Space specimens three to four feet apart, placing the woody roots down and the "eye" bud up, covering the

Peony Most Faithful

By Mary Ann King

Quietly they sleep
resting patient and comfy
under blankets of white snow
waiting for spring's radiance
to warm their bed
nudging them to blooming wakefulness.

Now the growing begins;
each "eye" opening one by one.
Pushing through the compost,
facing the sky,
shy and bashful at first,
this chorus line of stems and buds
burst confidently into faces colored
pink, white, yellow, red, peach and purple.
Each one most fancy,
delighting the ants with sweet nectar.

My ever-faithful friends
will remain true to my garden
long after my life finds its end.

crown with 1 ½ to 2 inches of soil, and water in well. Planting too deep will prevent the plant from blooming. It may take a growing season for the plant to establish and develop flowers.

As a peony bud develops, it produces sweet, dewy nectar loved by ants. Let them feast; they are harmless, so please do not use insecticides. When I cut flowers for indoor bouquets, I rinse the bloom with water, give a gentle shake and the ants drop away.

By some estimates there are thousands of cultivated varieties of peony; start shopping to find your favorites!

May Plant Tips

Mike Gurney of Yankton Nurseries, 2000 Ferdig Ave. (605) 665-6560 shared gardening tips. "May is the heart of the gardening season. If you want to add trees and shrubs to your yard, now is the time to do it. It's a good time to plant perennials and annual flowers and vegetables."

- If you don't have all your Cole crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, greens and cabbage planted, now is the time to get them in. Other cool tolerant vegetables such as onions and potatoes can still be planted now.
- Flower and vegetable transplants

should be planted after last frost, which is usually about mid May. Choose sturdy plants with lots of foliage. Look for well-rooted plants. Our plants have been hardened to outdoor conditions here. Many transplants have not been weather-hardened, so set the transplants outside in their packs a while and gradually longer and keep them watered before planting them. Weather — hardening allows plants to adjust before planting.

That's one of the best predictors of transplant success.

- Direct seeded flowers and vegetables can be planted this month.
- When choosing trees and shrubs to plant this month, look for plants that have leafed out. Don't disrupt the roots, shave the roots with a shovel or tease apart roots as plants have recently come out of dormancy.

- The most important watering for your plants is when you plant them. Then set up a watering plan according to the weather.
- Fruit trees may have lost petals by now. You may have already sprayed a first treatment if you plan to do that for pest or disease management. Inquire here if you have questions.

- For roses, you may have already removed dead canes and cleaned up debris. Inspect for plants that didn't overwinter and remove them. It's a good time to plant roses.

Dibbles And Bits

- Row covers or crop covers were featured in the April "Plant Exchange" to protect vegetable greens from excess sunlight and wind exposure. The lightweight non-woven fabric also excludes some pests and acts as a small greenhouse to extend the garden season if plant row is surrounded with the cover. Sources for the fabric were not found locally. Two other options include Johnny's Select Seeds: (877) 564-669 website:www.johnny-seeds.com and Charley's Greenhouse: (800) 322-4707 and website:www.charleysgreenhouse.com/.

- Looking for flower or vegetable gardening ideas or techniques in magazines or books? The Yankton Community Library, 515 Walnut St., (605) 668-5275, has current *Organic Gardening*, *Garden Gate*, *Mother Earth News* and other magazines like *Midwest Living* and *Martha Stewart Living* that feature plant articles. Back issues can be checked out. Also see the library's seed display that features gardening and landscaping books this month.

- Yankton County Conservation District, 2914 Broadway Ave., across from Walmart, is a resource now for their end-of-season plants such as spruce, and Amur maple trees, and American lilac shrubs. This November or December is the best time to sign up for the new plant list available for planting the following spring. The list may include pasque and other native flowers, native grasses, garden perennials, fruit trees and vines. Questions? Call for Cassie Richelleu at (605) 665-6704.

Gardener To Gardener

Lois Quatier of Yankton has gardened and expressed her artistic talent with acrylic paint for many years. When she brought her collection of cement statuary and yard décor out from winter storage, she noticed they had faded from years of summer heat and sunlight. She shows how she revitalizes one of her favorite pieces. If you have statuary that needs a lift for the new season, Quatier shares her renewal steps.

- I clean it to remove dust and dirt.
- I apply acrylic paint to refresh the colors. Some colors can be changed or enhanced with the new application.

- Once dry, I spray them with an acrylic clear coat for protection. I take them in before winter.

YOUR NEWS!

The Press and Dakotan

FREE Skin Cancer Screening

Tuesday, May 5th, 1pm - 4pm

Yankton Medical Clinic®, P.C. Dermatologist, James Young, D.O., will be offering a free skin cancer screening clinic on May 5th. No appointment is necessary. Patients will be seen on a first come, first serve basis. Limit of 50 patients. Upon arrival at the Clinic please check in at Section N receptionist, upstairs in the expansion.

*For screening purposes. If further tests are needed, standard charges will be applied.



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