



Vinca, one of Kortan's best performers, survived well in full sun at Rotary Nature Area. Buffalo grass has been planted and fieldstone lined plant beds of selected hardy forbs are planned for next year.

PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

What A Difference A Drought Makes

With Lack Of Moisture This Summer, City Plants Required More Attention

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

By the end of 2012 growing season, Lisa Kortan, Urban Forester, Parks & Recreation Department for the City of Yankton and her staff had spent at least 25% more time watering and caring for plants around Yankton to keep them alive than the year before.

"Plant containers along Douglas Avenue were watered daily in summer heat, sometimes twice a day," Kortan said. She considers Riverside Park, Douglas Ave., and Memorial Park as Yankton showcase. "Everyone knows how challenging it was to keep plants alive. We had three weeks with 100-degree temperatures. I was glad we had planted drought tolerant plants."

"We don't have self-watering containers, but in-ground plants were irrigated," she said. "Downtown hanging baskets were a challenge. Two new plant beds at Riverside Park, one at the amphitheater and one near the boat dock are irrigated. Sometimes besides watering, they were misted in the heat of the day. We're working on getting irrigation so we don't have to spend so much time watering."

She said that currently Memorial Park, Sertoma Park and Crockett Park are not irrigated. As newer Yankton parks were built, irrigation was included. Augusta Park near Wal-Mart, Ridgeway Park near Hillcrest Golf Club, and Fox Run Park are irrigated.

"We planted thirty five trees this year," Kortan said. "Seven trees for the Yankton Arboretum (behind Yankton High School), a few boulevard trees, Sertoma Park, Yankton Community Library, and some replacement trees." She said that Yankton would again apply for "Tree City USA" designation.

"Tree removal last season was active. We lost a lot of elm with the combination of environmental stress and Dutch elm disease. Out of thirty trees taken down, eleven were elm. Hopefully next year will be better," Kortan said.

"We met with South Dakota Forester Tiffany Aarp and Dr. John Ball from South Dakota State University to determine what we should spend our time on with drought," she said. "They recommended any plants three years or younger for watering and the new plantings. Our trees got 20-30 gallons of water per week. We didn't lose one of these so far. We saw a lot of stress on hackberries; they lost leaves early. There was so much to water and we had to pick where to concentrate."

WEST 4TH STREET PLANTINGS

"I was disappointed I didn't do more along 4th St. (last season)," Kortan said. "Had we planted more, we wouldn't have had the manpower or time. We had to concentrate on what we had living." "We did add some colored concrete hardscaping to create areas (on 4th St). We plan to fill in spots with bulbs, annuals, sedums and

grasses. We won't have a block with one kind of plant, but more sections. When you drive by you will see spring or summer or fall here and there."

Kortan looks at landscape and hardscape of other cities. "We used regular concrete and a water-based dye as a trial. We're trying brick red. Colors can be changed or darkened. We put a coat of sealer that gives it a polished look. Sealant helps with salt protection. After the plants are in, foliage and hardscape will blend together."

PARKS AND STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY TREE INVENTORY

In case of examples such as tornados or devastation from Emerald Ash borer when it comes, having information about kind of tree, its size and condition, location, and surroundings will help in applying for grants for tree replacement, according to Kortan. In the past, the South Dakota Extension Service assisted in park tree inventory.

"South Dakota Forester Tiffany Aarp gathered city foresters from Brookings, Aberdeen, and Yankton to do tree inventories," Kortan said. "Sioux Falls already has done this. We had training and decided to purchase the same software called 'Tree Works.' Hand held devices with aerial maps of Yankton that include trees are used to do inventories along city streets and right-of ways as well as parks. We input the information for a value appraisal of each tree. I network with the other cities to compare notes." She said that the goal is consistent information. More information is collected about trees, including all city trees, and information is more accessible. Yankton park tree inventories are complete so far with more work along streets and right-of-ways to go.

RIVERSIDE PARK LAWN

Considering drought and heat, Kortan was asked about the care of Riverside Park after grass trampling of Riverboat Days. "Park Supervisor Jim Snook did up the water irrigation after Riverboat Days," she said. "They aerated the park and over-seeded it with a city-specified 'park blend' grass seed. (Yaggie Grain and Seed of Yankton has this blend.) It may take four or five weeks to recover after Riverboat Days."

MERIDIAN BRIDGE PLAZA

Last season the City installed new curbing and sidewalk near the entrance to the Meridian Bridge," Kortan said. "A few sections were left which could have decorative paving. The grass looks good." One-part city compost from the Yankton Transfer Station was mixed with three-parts topsoil for this project. (Compost is also available for public use.)

"The area was wired for electricity for future events. Several partners have expressed interest in this project with the city, including Keep Yankton Beautiful



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

With stone containers and heat reflecting from nearby cement and streets, this planter had to be watered daily to survive summer conditions along Douglas Avenue. (Fall photo)

and the Historic Downtown Yankton Association."

"Meridian Bridge will have snow removal over winter, as part of the trail system," she said. "Benches and garbage cans will be maintained."

"Next year, there will be rows of trees on either side of the bridge," Kortan said. "Also some flowers and maybe some hardscape. We'll need patience with this project; waiting for ideas and funding."

PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Kortan said that Keep Yankton Beautiful (KYB) and the city have partnered for some changes at Rotary Nature Area near the Yankton Chamber of Commerce. "Our street department helped clean and grade that area. A grant secured by KYB enabled us to put in buffalo grass. We want to make sure the grass comes back. We plan to have some fieldstone-lined flowerbeds, each with a kind of perennial flower that is labeled."

A new playground is planned for Sertoma Park. "The kid's garden there will be a children-friendly place with hardy plants. We picked the start at this park because of the youth ballgames held there."

lation, which is applied to new plants, care, and maintenance, tree inventory software, and labor.

- City of Yankton celebrates Arbor Day and a proclamation is read. Last year students from Webster Elementary attended the educational to honor trees at the Yankton Community Library. Two Redmond Lindens were planted.

OTHER CHANGES DUE TO DROUGHT

"Watering was so repetitious and time-consuming last season. Each Friday we applied 20-20-20 fertilizer to the plants when irrigating that helped with color. I hope we have snow and can get back on track for spring," Kortan said.

"For heavier soil, I plan to add more topsoil along with city compost and the soilless potting mixture for aeration in plant beds and containers. I need to visit with SDSU Extension people about products that hold water for baskets. I have seen agar gel beads that might help."

"For landscaping and planters near park signs, such as at Sertoma Park, my concern is 'How would we keep it watered?' If we don't have winter moisture, some projects will be delayed again next year," Kortan said. "Colors for next year include peach, orange, blues, and purple."

"I attended a national conference called 'Partners in Community Forestry' in November that had a state grant to offset costs. New technology, involving youth in urban forestry, and new plant varieties are topics that may benefit next season."

"Best annual performers in the heat and drought of 2012 were lantana, vinca, calibrachoa which are like mini-petunias, juncus or spiked foliage, and chartreuse-colored potato vine. Some potato vines had weekly haircuts due to the heat. Next season I can use fewer plants. My plant selection will be drought and heat tolerant plants. When I travel, I take pictures of combinations of annuals. I like to try those out for next year," Kortan concluded.

On Gardening

Fothergilla Lights Up The Fall Landscape

BY NORMAN WINTER

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To light up the fall landscape with a blaze of stunning color, try the dwarf fothergilla.

What's a fothergilla? Before I answer that, what if I asked you to name a shrub with fiery oranges and reds, like fall maple leaves?

Savvy gardeners might have named a Henry's Garnet Virginia willow, or maybe even a flame euonymus – also called burning bush.

Those would be great choices, but so would the southeastern native called dwarf fothergilla.

Botanically speaking, the plant is Fothergilla gardenii and is commonly called dwarf witchalder. It is in the witch hazel family and is native from Florida to North Carolina but is recommended as far north as Wisconsin (USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 8A).

Though I am touting its fall leaf color, in the spring this dwarf shrub loads up with scores of fragrant white bottle-brush-like blossoms before its leaves emerge. The plant reaches about 3 feet tall – a nice size. The leaves that emerge are dark green and leathery and grow along crooked stems.

When fall arrives, the dwarf fothergilla is every bit the attention-grabber it was in the spring. Ours at the Columbus Botanical Garden has been riveting for weeks. When we look at fall color scientifically, words like carotenoids, pigments and chlorophyll enter into the discussion, as does auxin, gibberellins, other growth hormones and enzymes.

Good conditions boil for this showy fall plant include cool night temperatures and warm, sunny days. Climate has the most effect on the production of anthocyanin pigments, which intensify the red and scarlet colors. Conditions that most favor these colors are sunny days and nighttime temperatures between 45 degrees and freezing.

Even though the chlorophyll content of the leaf declines in the fall, it is still important that photosynthesis take place. If an abundance of cloudy weather prevents photosynthesis from occurring, leaf color will be mediocre even if temperatures are ideal.

Cool night temperatures limit the movement of sugar from the leaves and reduce the rate of respiration in the leaf, so some sugars are converted to carbon dioxide. Those retained are converted to colorful pigments. That is where the dwarf fothergilla excels. It is one of the most reliable species when it comes to color.

It thrives in moist but well-drained fertile soil and with plenty of sun. Its riotous colors show best against a backdrop of green. Try growing dwarf fothergilla in front of hollies or some showy conifer like a juniper or pine. For a gaudy but truly thrilling combination, plant with the blue Arizona cypress variety called Carolina Sapphire. Springtime partners would be azaleas and forsythia.

Fall is a great time to plant and the dwarf fothergilla is certainly worthy of your consideration. Come spring you'll be glad you did.



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