

## Plant Exchange

## A Change Of The Seasons

Deconstructing  
Container  
Gardens  
For Winter

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or just let us know what you enjoy most about the plants and people who grow them. Contact [news@yankton.net](mailto: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

Fall is when Evelyn Schindler of Yankton decides what to do with a generous number of sun and shade container plants in her yard. While she has a sunroom indoors, space quickly becomes an issue when overwintering decades old potted cordylines that are not easily downsized for winter.

She pulls a rusted child's wagon of potted succulents indoors. She had staged them in the wagon and moved easily around the yard as desired during the growing season. The wagon itself is décor. Slow growth is a feature of succulents she appreciates when conserving space indoors.

Evelyn takes some potted plants indoors. A few have been growing in small pots set a large container all season. "It's easy to lift them out in the fall," she said. "I have to watch these plants during the season though because soil in small pots may dry out [sooner than larger pots]."

She prunes potted Mandevilla vines back about one-third before bringing them inside. "I do let them grow some in winter so they will have some vine to start the new season."

For potted plants brought directly indoors, "You want the plants pest-free when you bring them indoors. I wash the plants off several times with a hose, turning the plant upside down if possible," she said. She does this particularly for spider mites that are common in this region. Sometimes gardeners also remove an inch or so of topsoil from the container and replace it with bagged potting soil to deter other soil-borne pests from outdoors.

Evelyn's collection of ferns and fern-like plants such as button fern, bird's nest fern and asparagus fern grow in their own containers. She overwinters them indoors. She has artillery fern that she uses for accents in containers with other plants. She takes cuttings of artillery fern and puts them in small pots



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Copper plant, a corn plant relative houseplant she uses for outdoors, and others are grouped to define space with foliage.

under shop lights in her basement. Air temperature there is little cooler than the rest of the house.

Cannas are out-of-zone plants for this region, so the rhizomes planted in the flowerbed are usually dug up at this time. Evelyn plants her cannas in a container instead. "After a light frost I cut off the leaves and let the pot soil dry out. I put the cannas container in the basement for winter."

One of her big decisions is what to save of the yards' container annuals and other plants that will otherwise die from winter exposure. Most plants cannot survive winter in this region in a container because its roots are subjected to more fluctuating conditions than plants with roots in the ground.

She said that an exception is Irish moss that survived the winter in a container in her backyard. Another plant that she says comes back from winter exposure is annual baby's breath. "Baby's breath [dies] and re-seeds in the container." Of course another way to preserve plants for next

season is to collect seed from non-hybridized plants.

Cuttings conserve indoor space and enable gardeners to start next season with a compact size plant. Evelyn modifies a general method she uses for cuttings such as coleus, copper plant, passion vine, and tropical hibiscus. She grows cuttings in her cool basement under florescent shop lights.

For cuttings, she trims the stem to four to six inches, depending on the plant, with a set of leaves intact. She uses a pencil to make a hole in thoroughly moistened potting soil. In a small pot with drainage hole, she plants the stem. She mists water in a spray bottle onto the plant, soil, and inside of a plastic bag. She places the bag over the plant and rim of the small pot and secures plastic bag with a rubber band. This provides high air humidity and moist soil for plant as it grows roots. When plant begins to grow, she removes bag and waters soil as needed. As the plant grows during the winter she trims the plant above a leaf node to main-

tain its compact size under the light.

Evelyn prepares other containers for winter by removing plant material. An exception is when she finds a spent plant and can envision a creative use for it. She points to a leafless Japanese maple tree in a large container that died a year ago. "It's my trellis for cypress vine and ivy," she said.

Soil remains in her plant containers overwinter. She and her husband Albert move large containers to a corner of the backyard where soil-filled pots are stored under a tarp. To cut down the weight of some containers, Evelyn adds filler. "I save small plastic bottles such as for aspirin and put in the bottom third of a container. In a large container, plant roots go down only six to eight inches."

Next spring when she removes the tarp from the containers, she'll start the process again. "I take a little of the soil out of the pots and put in new soil and mix it together."

Joe Hoffman's  
Plant Notes

Thanks to Joe Hoffman, horticulturist, grounds manager, and teacher at Yankton Federal Prison Camp for sharing plant information.

- If you save seed of hybrid flowers, appearance of offspring is very unpredictable. Impatiens seed are quite expensive and cuttings of the plants tend to get bugs in winter. I saved a few varieties' seed. In the second and third year they became quite tall. Some were two feet tall. Height has been bred out the hybrids, as

many like compact impatiens.

- We have best luck planting or over-seeding blue grass in the fall, about Labor Day weekend. It's about the time Kentucky blue grass seed naturally falls to the earth. Some cool days and fall rain helps germinate seeds. If you have to plant blue grass in spring, mix in rye. If you irrigate it there will be weeds, but they can be controlled.

- For reading about horticulture, these are his current



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

A view from the Pine Street boundary of Yankton Federal Prison Camp show landscape design and care under the direction of Joe Hoffman, horticulturist.

magazines: Horticulture, Fine Gardening, American Nurseryman, and Organic Gardening.

- Angelonia is really worth growing. It comes in many colors, grows in several spots, including the hot,

windy, full sun Observatory Hill. You can start them indoors early from seed.

- Japanese Tree Lilac grows well as a small tree even under the conditions of Observatory Hill.

- Oak trees are sometimes said to be slow growing. The Burr Oak on campus was planted after I came here twenty-four years ago and is at least 25 feet tall.

- We take houseplants such as tropical hibiscus and other houseplants outdoors in summer. They get beefed up and we bring them in for fall. We use a north building wall as protection from wind and direct sunlight.

Smooth Sumac:  
Native Plant Of The Region

PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Smooth sumac berries, leaves, stems, and roots had uses for historic Indians along the Missouri River, according to Joe Delvaux, seasonal National Park Service ranger. His sample illustrated uses in his Missouri National Recreational River talk on "Cultural Medicinal and Edible Plants of the Prairie" this summer.

Smooth sumac, with its distinctive red leaves and berries in fall, grows naturally in stands at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area. Historic Indians of the Missouri River region such as Dakota and Omaha-Ponca referred to its yellow wood and Pawnee called it "sour top".

Joe Delvaux showed samples he had collected locally and talked about cultural uses of plants as a weekly topic for Missouri National Recreational River this summer. Delvaux is a Seasonal ranger for the National Park Service and Vermillion High School history teacher. He offered sour sumac berries to taste and showed the yellow roots used for dye.

Delvaux showed the cross section of sumac stem with pith that could be hollowed out to form a pipe. Dried red sumac leaves were commonly smoked. Omaha Indians boiled sumac berry liquid wash helped stop hemorrhage in women after childbirth. They boiled sumac root for urinary tract infection drink and made a poultice of crushed leaves for skin poisoning.

Seasonal ranger for the past twelve years, Delvaux has presented these kinds of talks and displays for the past decade. One of his sources is Uses of Plant by the Indians of the Missouri River Region by Melvin R. Gilmore.

"I try to pick what is recognizable and important for these presentations," he said. He said that ranger programs on Missouri River topics may be requested for area classrooms at Missouri National Recreational River: (605) 605.665.0209

Dibbles  
& Bits

- Adding a few perennials to the flowerbed for that fourth season interest? If native prairie grasses don't interest you, some of these might be worth an inquiry: smokebush (Zone 5) with leathery purple leaves, various dogwoods (Zone 4) twig color, Rockspray cotoneaster (Zone 4) with red berries, various sedum (Zone 4) late bloom and dried seedhead. More: October Garden Gate magazine, available at the Yankton Community Library.

- If you want fall color and don't plan to cover plants, these are slightly more frost-tolerant: Nemesia, pansies, snapdragons, salvia, Dianthus, oxalis, cole vegetables such as kale and ornamental cabbage, and many ornamental grasses. More choices: September /October Northern Gardener magazine.

- Checklist to consider for low maintenance yard design: 1) More trees, 2) More evergreen shrubs, 3) perennials for color instead of annuals, and less lawn is suggested by Don Engebretson in September /October Northern Gardener magazine.

- Mulch helps keep soil cool in summer, retains soil moisture, and provides cover to deter weeds. If you mulch with organic material it may also contribute to soil nutrients as it decomposes. Gardeners struggle to find mulch that occurs naturally in our locale that may be used in plant beds. Compost available at the Yankton Transfer Station, leaves, soybean or other weed-free straw, grass clippings, and chipped wood from healthy trees are examples of locally available mulch. These are listed in order of most to least nutrients provided by mulch. Of course fertilizer may also be added to the plant bed when using inert mulch such as gravel or shredded recycled tires or low carbon mulch. More on mulches in October/November Organic Gardening magazine available at Yankton Community Library.

October  
Plant Tips

Diane Dickes, owner of Diane's Greenhouse, provides tips on how to prepare plants for winter. Find Diane's Greenhouse on Facebook and become a fan for exclusive offers and tips. Also visit [dianes-greenhouse.com](http://dianes-greenhouse.com).

- Perennial garden cleanup: cutting down perennial foliage when you're getting ready for winter, is up to you. Some gardeners prefer to leave seed heads and dried foliage for the birds and some winter interest. Whatever you don't clean up now, you will have to clean up in the spring. When cutting plants down, leave 4-5" above ground.
- Once the ground freezes, apply a layer of mushroom compost over perennials. This is great mulch for the winter, but also a great fertilizer for next years' growth. It's not the cold that kills plants. It's freezing and thawing. So keep your plants frozen and they are less apt to break dormancy too early next spring.

- Everything going into winter should be moist. Plants are less winter hardy, if they go into winter dry.

- Cut your knockout roses back 12" from the ground. Do not cover shrub roses. Cut back hybrid teas 12" from the ground and hill up the dirt around the crown of the plant.

- Consider a white tree guard on all newly planted trees. The guard should stay on the tree until it gets its mature bark. The guard's for keeping rabbits off and will reflect the hot sun rays in the warmer winter months. If tree sap starts going up the trunk of the tree, it will freeze on a cold day and the tree trunk could burst open, killing the tree.

## 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 or share a comment about plants?

- Find some new ideas from a local vegetable gardener.
- How does a horticulturist make a place stand out with regional and historically cultural plants?
- What are tips from area gardeners to make gardening easier, attract birds, enjoy beneficial bugs, and build trellises for flowers?
- Want to see what's blooming here and in Ireland or Australia now? See "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" September 15th link. Check our blog at: [www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com](http://www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com)

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