



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Enter through the backyard gate at Deb and Mark Stevens' Yankton city home and find a fieldstone water interest and outdoor room with Deb's décor.

Plant Exchange:

Welcome To My Plant World

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BY BRENDA K JOHNSON

Q: How do you create an authentic backyard place for you and your family?

A: Deb and Mark Stevens' Yankton backyard will be a stop on the Cramer-Kenyon Fall Garden / Landscaping Tour this Sunday.

Deb refers to herself as Dr. Mark's loyal assistant at Stevens Chiropractic Clinic during the week. Busy days make a backyard retreat and place to enjoy others all the more important. "I love being able to come out here in the morning in the solace and tranquility and hear the birds, and water in the background."

The backyard renovation is a year old. "My husband Mark and I, with the help of Kent Goeden, renovated this backyard last July." She said that Kent was amenable to her suggestions for the yard. Because of their creativity in several areas of the yard, it is a place like no other.

"As far as yard projects, I had to tread lightly, because I knew my husband would bear the labor. I had to learn how to get my point across. Ever so often I'd show a magazine and say 'What if we did this?'"

WATER FEATURE

A natural wood fence secludes the backyard. The city rectangular lot is adjacent to neighbors' yards. Just inside the backyard gate is a water feature with a large fieldstone. Water pours from a hole through the center of the stone and makes brook sounds over other fieldstones that edge the table-sized collection pond. "We saw the idea in a nursery and Kent drilled a hole in the large fieldstone," she said.

They placed a pump and filter in a large plant container beneath the water feature. Deb said that a heating element would be required for winter use. They set the water flow rate at a gurgle out of the stone instead of fountain height as an aesthetic choice.

Many birds were drawn to the water feature. "I did want birds to use the water feature, she said, "but after a short while we realized that the feature's placement in regard to the seating area, did not mix with all the bird waste. If someone wants to consider a water feature they should make sure to have it a bit farther from their seating." They posted a life-size plastic owl nearby and that kept the birds at a distance.

Deb and Mark positioned the



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Deb's quick plant project to add backyard color and foliage for April guests results in flair at low cost. The cement-look urn began with plastic containers that were glued end to end and covered with a textured finish.

water feature near the pergola in order to see and hear the water on stones. Comfortable chairs in shades of green surround a table that they made of re-claimed lumber. Instead of putting old lawn metal furniture on the curb during spring cleanup, they renewed the chairs with Rustoleum Textured Finish Spray Paint that contains rust guard.

OUTDOOR ROOM

The pergola outdoor room is decorated for evening by candlelight. Garage sale canning jars with votives in sand were suspended from the roof of the pergola. For dappled shade in the late afternoon, Deb secured lengths of burlap by weaving them on the roof slats and down the side of the pergola. Burlap added the sense of privacy and structure to the outdoor room space. Picnic table cover clips held the burlap in place on windy days.

Deb planted grape vine, seedlings of wisteria from another area of the yard, and clematis at the pergola corners for future shade. She secured the clematis on the pergola post with old grapevine boughs and used zip ties to hold the vine. The natural trellis accommodated to its economy of space around the post and the grapevine's neutral color blended with the post.

wanted and connected their bottoms with Liquid Nails cement. One container was the base for the other.

To achieve a rough cement finish for the "urn" she applied Rustoleum American Accent Stone Textured Finish. She said that the textured finish substitutes well as cement. She positioned the urn on the raised bed so that the urn is eye level when guests are seated and adds height interest in that area of the yard.

BALANCE AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Overall, a few well-defined focal points unify their yard. "We did sit down in a restaurant and draw up general schematics of where things would go and the plans evolved from there." They found that several mature trees needed to be removed. Then Deb needed more sun-loving plants. She varied new plants' heights. Pergola and arbor vines, arborvitae, raised flowerbeds, rosebushes, urn planter, and sedum and creeping thyme near the horizontal plane all contributed design elements to their yard without competition.

"I wanted a combination of styles in the yard," Deb said. "The (flowerbeds in the) corners of the yard are Country Cottage, the pergola is somewhat California, and there is an English Garden influence in the yard with the row of identical arborvitae and identical hydrangeas alternating along the natural wood fence backdrop and the straight pathway."

The pergola at one end of the yard is connected to a secluded single chair and wisteria arbor at the other end of the yard with a flagstone path across the yard. The flagstone was repurposed from its former use as ground cover under the arbor. On either side of the path, she planted an eight-inch border of creeping thyme seed. The thyme blooms as well as adding the low border next to the lawn. The path underlines the plant symmetry of the yard and defines space.

The path leads to a single chaise lounge with a cup holder in full shade under a wisteria arbor. Deb said that her cat often chooses to lie in this area of the yard.

"It's great joy to look at the yard and share it with people," Deb said. In fact, she writes an inspirational blog and often finds a topic in her own backyard.

"This is a place of solitude and tranquility. I can vacation here and not leave home on my day off. I deadhead instead of crochet. If you have a garden, you expect to tend it, just as in spiritual life. I watched hail hitting my yard last August with the renovation a month old. But in the fall, the white clematis bloomed. This is definitely an on-going process that will never be perfect."

FIRE PIT

Near the pergola is a fire pit with casual seating and the fragrance of red and pink 'Knockout' rose bushes. "The fire pit came about because an ash tree died," Deb said. Instead of rousing it out, they built a fire pit there. "Because of no rain, I wet the bark over in the flower beds in case of sparks. We make sure the wood is dry that we burn. They cemented in the landscape blocks that encircle the fire pit fire ring. "We wanted the fire pit cover to fit level. We used a kit that came with the landscape blocks and fire ring. The fire grate cover came separate and was more expensive. She said that the cover is a city requirement for fire pits. She suggested that finding the right size of cover at the same time of purchasing the kit would be a good idea.

URN PLANTER

In view of both the pergola and fire pit seating is an urn planter on a landscape stone raised bed. Urn and bed are filled with bold pink annuals and trailing vines.

"I was having company in April and needed some color out here fast," Deb said. She knew that cement urns are quite expensive so she built an alternative to hold colorful plants. She found two plastic plant containers with the shapes and proportions she

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September Plant Tips

Bill Conkling, owner and operator of Green King Lawn Care (660-0618) has provided complete lawn care in the Yankton area for the past 12 years. Training helped him learn more about turf, plant care, and fertilizers. "The drought of 2012 has wreaked havoc and left homeowners frustrated and unsure what to do about their lawns," Conkling said. "Many lawns have gone dormant but still require maintenance to ensure they bounce back when the weather becomes more accommodating."

Conkling shares these tips:

- Continue to water even though the lawn is dormant. The roots will still need a minimum of ¼" of water

every week to ten days to survive.

- Water the lawn infrequently and deeply to encourage the roots to grow deep. Light frequent watering leads to a weak root system.

- Raise the mowing height of your mower to at least 3 ½" or higher if your mower is capable and mow as infrequently as possible.

- Stay off the lawn as much as possible if it is dormant and brown. This helps prevent damage to the crown of the plant.

- Reduce or eliminate nitrogen-based fertilizers, if your lawn is dormant, while the drought conditions remain. Fertilizer stimulates shoot growth at the expense of the roots.

- If your lawn doesn't bounce back when the weather changes you may need to de-thatch and over seed by spreading grass seed and roughing in with a rake.

Dibbles And Bits

- Backyard tour featured in today's Plant Exchange is one of the six stops on the Cramer-Kenyon Fall Garden / Landscaping Tour to be held Sunday, Sept. 9, from 1-5 p.m. Tickets can be obtained at Hy-Vee Food Store, at Cramer-Kenyon Home on 509 Pine St. or at each home visited. Tour contact: Ruby Goeden: 665.3450 or 661.5757

- Plant sale tomorrow, Saturday Sept. 8, from 8 a.m.-noon at the Territorial Capitol Building in Riverside Park. Missouri Valley Master Gardeners are plant sale sponsors and will use proceeds for projects and events in the community.

- Trees: What can be done now? Dr. John Ball, Extension Forester for the South Dakota Cooperative Extension, has suggestions for tree care. "Even if your tree is beginning to shed leaves it should still be watered on a regular basis. Buds, tender shoots, fine roots and other parts still require water and continuing to irrigate will improve the chances that the tree will resume normal growth next year. We are coming up to the time when trees begin to prepare for winter and a stressed tree is less likely to complete the hardening process and will be more susceptible to winter injury. Watering trees, particularly conifers, through September is critical to their winter survival. An established tree in the yard should be receiving a slow soaking about once or twice a week for at least 30 minutes and the water should be applied within the radius of half the tree's height. This is enough water to allow the tree to survive under the severe drought conditions found in the western part of the state, not to thrive. Water is the only resource trees need at this time. Do not fertilize these drought-stressed trees and avoid any herbicide use if possible as the addition stress may further injure the tree. See additional information at:

<http://sdda.sd.gov/Forestry/Educational-Information/PDF/pest-alert-2012-july-25.pdf>

- English Garden design is distinguished by featuring a uniform backdrop, such as a wood fence, brick wall, or boxwood hedge. Foreground is simple, such as straight thyme pathways against lawn. English borders are rectangular with wide flowerbeds of varying heights. Plants are planted in drifts or woven in areas in the beds. Plants are repeated in the beds, grouped, and sequenced

in an orderly pattern. Ornament is limited in the English Garden style to allow the plants to shine. Plant borders have a look of abundance in kind of plant, numbers of plant, repetition of plants. Familiar plants are embraced in the English Garden design. Rosemary Very stated in The English-woman's Garden: "I cannot make anything new, it has all been done before; but I can try to bring together the best ideas passed on to me...and create a garden which feels loved and longed to be walked in." see more on "English Borders For The North" in *May/June, 2012 Northern Gardener Magazine*.

- Different water needs: Deb Stevens of Yankton has automatic watering for her backyard. She noticed that trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, and containers in her yard had different water needs than lawn grass. Now automatic watering is set for the grass, and the rest she waters by hand according to plants' needs.

- Sun scalded plants in full sun exposure may include the common barberry shrub. "Even barberries may be sunburned," Jay Gurney of Yankton Nurseries, LLC said. "I have this problem in my yard at home." Leaves look bleached. "I cut the shrubs back to 4-6 inches high. Then I water them. Last year after the August hail I had many damaged shrubs. I cut many of the shrubs back in this manner and they came back just fine. The ones I didn't cut back have old stems and they are struggling more in these dry conditions. In an ordinary year at the nursery, we cut back shrubs in late August for the fall growth. Watering is important."

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