

It's Not Easy Keeping Green

Horticulturist Encounters Challenges At Yankton FPC

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If you've driven by Yankton Federal Prison Camp lately, you see grounds you might wish for at home. Horticulturist Joe Hoffman manages tree, shrub, perennial, and annual aesthetics around the campus and teaches inmates in a vocational horticulture program.

Joe maintains high standards for his work and isn't often disappointed, but he is this year.

Observatory Hill Display Garden along Douglas Avenue is carefully designed, planted, and managed on the prominent hillside. Photos of the past display gardens "Yankton 150" for the city celebration and a United States Flag design adorn his wall.

"Warden Willis chose Breast Cancer Awareness design among several [inmates submitted for this season]," Joe said. "As with any place where you have employees, we've had current and retired employees that suffered from that malady. It always hits close to home."

Display garden flower growth is Joe's disappointment. Season started with a cool rainy spring. Joe has learned that Vincas and marigolds are among blooming annuals that can grow on the west-facing slope and take the heat and wind exposure.

"I thought I had gotten the wrong Vinca [for the pink symbol in the design]. They should have been 10-14 inches tall but are 8-10 inches tall. I had inmates recheck saved seed packets. I thought when the heat came on they'd grow."

Then marigolds bordering Vincas show a problem. "We've cut the marigolds back twice to give Vincas room. Marigolds are about 4 inches taller than they should have been." Water monitoring on the hillside is a yearly challenge. Inches make all the difference in a planted design. Other gardeners may have experienced similar disparity of expected growth.

Joe is also disappointed that trees continue to decline with "the last straw" of last year's heat damage. "We spent a lot of last year watering," Joe said. "No amount of irrigation makes a difference when the temperature is above 100 degrees F. Crimson King, Sugar, and Norway maples have suffered all over town and here on campus. You may see fewer leaves." He points out a red maple with about a fourth of its leaves beginning to turn before the end of August.

"We dug out stumps by hand," Joe said. "A lot of trees that were planted around the perimeter of campus were planted too deep. They blow over. Many have wire baskets and burlap still around their roots after twenty five years."

"This is my favorite tree, Paper Bark maple. John Ball [South Dakota tree specialist] thinks this one is the farthest north. Look at the bark against the sky," he said. Branch outline is reddish brown. "In winter I will stand here and see the sun on that bark. Leaves have great fall color."

Parts of the campus are subject to high wind damage due to the rolling hills and position of buildings. "I've planted several trees as wind breaks, such as crab apple, oak, hackberry, maple, ginkgo, ash, locust, and catalpa," Joe said. "Several trees are gifts, including a Swamp Oak. "After twenty years it's making wonderful shade. I raise the canopy so you have grass and flowers under the tree." The twenty-foot tall tree has about a twelve-foot canopy. He remains aware of conservation of usable space around campus.

Joe remembers trees of the for-



Breast Cancer Awareness symbol in flowers was picked for this season's Observatory Hill Display Garden along Douglas Avenue on the Yankton Federal Prison Camp grounds.

mer Yankton College campus when he was a boy. "My aunt lived near here. We could come on campus in summer. There was hardly any lawn because of tree shade. Remember the American Elms that nearly canopied Douglas Avenue? Two hundred and seventy elms were removed here [due to Dutch Elm disease]."

MAKING POSITIVES

The last surviving American Elm within campus near the visitor entrance recently died. Remaining is a massive nearly thirty-foot trunk with branches forming a tall "Y". "We hope the carving will be an eagle with its wings up, grabbing a fish, with rocks and water at the base," Joe said.

An inmate leads the artistic challenge and scaffolding is erected to allow work all around the trunk. "He may have to add wood pegged-in in spots." Prominent position of this carving allows all to see progress.

"A few other stumps we've made into flower containers," he said. "Inmates chisel them out and drill holes in the bottom for water release. Eventually they rot but now they're holding flowers."

Because the grounds are beautiful and so carefully tended, an outsider may downplay that inmates are in prison here. "Aesthetics are good for the public," Joe said. "All can see grounds are well kept. Aesthetics give inmates pride in their ability to build and create. Coming from shattered lives, by their actions, healing can occur through horticulture."

Besides general horticulture labor, inmates can enroll in a certified horticulture two-year program. Other programs to complete high school and a two-year business program through Mount Marty College are also available for inmates.

"If some inmates get a vocation or begin to work towards a career goal, that benefits the public," he said. Once they get out they can contribute as citizens. "Some do plan to continue in horticulture as a profession or simply keep up their own places."

Some inmates in the horticulture program enter the public Flower & Vegetable Show hosted by Yankton Town & Country Garden Club each year and have earned ribbons for their efforts several years.

LEANING FORWARD

"Roses have been outstanding this year, like those in the Northwest," he said. Roses all over campus come from cuttings inmates have started in the greenhouse. Pink 'Carefree Beauty' roses accent the flagpole by Ward Hall. "Win-



Path to Observatory Hill is planted for landscape identification. The cottage style garden thrives from care in its full sun hilltop setting.

nipeg Parks' rose has done well."

Joe is a fan of the shrub roses in the median at 4th and Douglas Street in Yankton. "Stan Hoffart selected 'Hope for Humanity' rose and it has taken years in the heat and still bloomed deep red blooms more like those of hybrid teas. It's an aggressive grower. It has some red in the leaves. We're taking cuttings of one like it."

Outside Joe's office is a wall display of community projects that he and inmates have worked on over the years. The plant beds at Yankton Veterans' Memorial at the Yankton County Government Center, plant renovation at City Cemetery in Vermillion, and Marion Veterans' Memorial are featured. He's interested in finding other community projects to expand experiences for his students.

Prison greenhouse has plenty of activity even in late August. "These plants are for downtown Yankton after the summer planters are done," Joe said. He shows a table of newly started poinsettias for campus holiday décor. By now all the late season vegetable transplants grown in the greenhouse, such as cauliflower and broccoli are planted.

Near the end of August tomatoes have been bearing about a week. Already they harvested more than 1,200 pounds. "We use hybrid tomatoes because we have limited ground for rotation and we need disease resistant varieties. Verticillium and Fusarium [fungal] diseases are our main problems." He would rather pay extra for disease resistant seed than chance an outbreak. The garden is for production. "We have limited space," he said. "I have found the heirlooms don't produce as well as hybrids."

Inmates grow vegetables from

seed in the greenhouse. Then they tend and harvest the crop, which is used for fresh supplement to inmate meals. Peppers, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cucumbers, onions, squash, and herbs are hand watered by trenches.

Near Nash Gym is a 600-800 gallon rain harvest container they use for flowers and non-edible plants. Source is runoff from the roof of the gym. Around the corner of the gym are shipping containers repurposed as storage sheds.

Large three-bin compost system has an innovation to assist decomposition. Turning moist plant matter in a timely way is a challenge. "We try to compost every leaf, grass blade, and weed on campus," he said. "These chimneys are put in the middle of the compost bin. That allows more air in the center of the bin for more decomposition. In winter we see steam coming off the piles."

Inmates spread the completed compost around all the beds and plantings and gardens. "We've had to remove built up soil because of adding so much compost."

"What I like about being here twenty four years is that I can walk to any one of the flowerbeds and practically shove my arm down into the soil, it's so organic at this point," he said.

Joe has gardened all his life. Here he has learned the limitations of what he can do and when he can do it. He has four years before mandatory retirement from the prison camp. It took two tries before he was hired to his position when he started. "I think I was put here for a reason," Joe said. "It's hard to retire when you believe that this is what you're supposed to be doing."

Extension Associate To Discuss Lawn Care In Yankton

David Chalmers, Professor and Turfgrass Extension Associate at South Dakota State University (SDSU) will present "How To Have A Lawn to Your Liking: Matching Management Practices to Expectations" at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 24. Public is invited to his talk at the Pavilion Auditorium of Avera Sacred Heart Hospital campus on Summit Street in Yankton.

Missouri Valley Master Gardeners of the Yankton area are event sponsors. Door prizes will be announced. Donations are appreciated and will be used for community projects and presentations.

Dr. Chalmers provides Extension education on turfgrass best management practices in South Dakota. Before arriving at SDSU in 2012, Dr. Chalmers served as State Turfgrass Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech and Texas A&M University. He is familiar with 100-degree temperatures and how drought impacts lawns, golf courses, and public green spaces. He says he will give a well-rounded program on seasonal lawn care for the Yankton area.

"For the past thirty-two years I've worked with Extension providing advice in lawn, golf course, and sports turf care," Chalmers said. "Homes don't come with an owner's manual for the yard. Extension provides unbiased information that is science-based. Extension doesn't have all the answers. Research is ongoing."

Chalmers welcomes questions with his presentation. His approach is holistic and practical, addressing what and why of fall lawn care as well as the rest of the year. He will talk about these and other lawn care topics:

- Consider applying nitrogen fertilizer now to increase turf density, to keep green color and for spring growth.
- Irrigate as needed this fall so grass can recover from summer stress and be healthy going into winter.
- Consider applying broad-spectrum herbicide now to control broadleaf weeds such as dandelions. Weed issues often result from low-density turf.
- Soil compaction and thatch build up can be addressed at this time.
- Although grass-seeding time is past until spring, dormant seeding in early November is an option.

"We help consumers make informed decisions about their lawns," Chalmers said. "We appreciate the master gardeners inviting us to Yankton."

Betts Pulkrabek, co-president of Missouri Valley Master Gardeners, said: "We sponsor plant-related talks for the public in fall and spring on topics we hear are interesting and from which we can all learn. People have asked questions about lawns after the heat and drought of last year. We look forward to hearing about lawn basics, and audience questions / answers with Dr. Chalmers."

For more on late season lawn care, turf drought recovery, mowing for healthier grass, water conservation measures for lawns, and how to measure your lawn to buy the right amount of lawn care products, choose articles by Dr. Chalmers at SDSU Extension iGrow website: <http://igrow.org/search/chalmers/?q=chalmers/>



Chalmers

Vermillion Farmers Market Paves Way For SNAP Purchases

BROOKINGS — In 2010, the Vermillion Area Farmers Market became the first market in the state to accept SNAP/EBT purchases. Although accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) wasn't without challenges their hard work wasn't without rewards, said Sierra Blachford, SDSU Extension Associate.

"Vermillion Area Farmers Market data shows that between the 2010 and 2011 seasons their SNAP/EBT sales doubled. In the same period, the market experienced a 183 percent increase in total electronic purchases. Following years have also shown an increase in gross electronic sales, although not as dramatic as the initial two seasons," Blachford said.

Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP was developed by the United States

Department of Agriculture and Nutrition Service to help alleviate hunger in the U.S.

At the same time that the Vermillion Area Farmers Market (VAFM) began accepting SNAP, they also began accepting debit and credit purchases. Before, their market was cash or check only.

"At the time, it was a really hard process for us to become able to accept SNAP/EBT, because there were not any markets in North or South Dakota who were doing this. There was no example for us to follow," said Amy Schweinle, VAFM Board President.

She added that today, the process of becoming able to accept SNAP/EBT is much easier for markets in South Dakota.

"The paperwork is not that difficult. People in the state are now prepared to

"After their work as pathfinders, it is not complicated for new markets to become able to accept SNAP/EBT in South Dakota."

SIERRA BLACHFORD

help farmers markets. We were just the pathfinders. The most challenging aspect for new markets is figuring out what process works at your market," Schweinle said. "I suggest new markets seriously look into the options available; there are to-kens, invoices and several others. It took us several years to come up with a system and train our vendors. We developed an invoice (link to the attached invoice) that debit, credit and SNAP/EBT customers use. They pick up an invoice, do their shopping and pay in one location at the end.

Then, the market reimburses the vendors."

According to Blachford, farmers markets should strive to protect the privacy of their customers.

"It should not be obvious which currency a customer is using. It is important to use a system that doesn't single out the SNAP/EBT purchasers," Blachford said.

The VAFM is happy with their debit and credit sales, but they are working to see an increase in the number of customers and purchases especially from SNAP/EBT. To find solutions, the market is working with the South

Dakota Department of Social Services. In addition to attracting a larger customer base, Schweinle said the market now has access to sales data from all electronic purchases.

"Now it is very interesting, because we have all the invoices. We enter them into the computer. Then, I can analyze and compare. We can see what people are buying and how much they are spending year after year, but we don't record any identifiable information on specific customers," Schweinle said.

Blachford said the VAFM paved the way for markets in South Dakota.

"The benefits of electronic sales are clearly visible in their data. They are still working to improve outreach and educate their community about EBT/SNAP acceptance at their markets," Blachford said. "After

their work as pathfinders, it is not complicated for new markets to become able to accept SNAP/EBT in South Dakota."

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