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APRIL 2020

Win \$100 to plant your own pollinator habitat ▶ See Page 3

Create a
pollinator
playground

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Small gardens
with big yields

Spring forward
with safety tips

“Egg-citing”
breakfast recipes

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ON THE COVER

A pair of monarch butterflies feed on the nectar of *Liatris spicata* in a pollinator habitat planted at a solar farm operated by Dairyland Power Cooperative in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Three electric cooperatives in northeast Iowa are among the co-ops receiving generation and transmission services from Dairyland Power. See Pages 6-7 of this issue for information about planting your pollinator habitat and why it's important. ⚡



Providing safe, reliable service is a co-op priority

BY ANN THELEN

Developing a monthly magazine requires planning and determining editorial content many weeks in advance. We work to stay nimble with content so that we can share contemporary articles about how Iowa's electric cooperatives are supporting their communities.

When we went to press with this issue, cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) were rapidly increasing across the U.S. Life as we knew it was changing with schools, churches, businesses and events all shutting down. These are uncertain times. Rest assured, however, your local electric cooperative remains vigilant in its mission to serve you with safe and reliable power.

Always planning for ongoing, reliable service

Planning for challenging times – whether it's for potential major outages due to a severe storm or an unprecedented pandemic – is a core responsibility your co-op takes



seriously. Behind the scenes, your cooperative is always hard at work, implementing its business continuity plans to deliver electricity to you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Co-ops have disaster plans and regularly conduct drills and exercises to test them. In doing so, modifications can be made before a crisis hits, which makes your co-op stronger.

Education is a core cooperative principle, and your co-op's directors and employees participate in training opportunities throughout the year to prepare for tough situations.

As COVID-19 impacts more areas, your cooperative continues to work with local, state and federal agencies to coordinate responses. In addition, electric cooperatives nationwide collaborate to share best practices, resources and strategies to fulfill the mission of powering the needs of your daily life.

Stay connected with your co-op

Across Iowa, some electric cooperatives have postponed their

annual meetings or implemented alternative methods to fulfill meeting requirements. To minimize the spread of COVID-19, your co-op may be closed to outside visitors. Many co-ops offer online bill payment, payment by phone, payment drop-off boxes and other services to help you effectively navigate these days of social distancing. Please follow your local electric cooperative on social media, visit its website and always reach out to them by phone or email with any concerns.

We know there are many trusted resources for you to receive up-to-date information about COVID-19, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Iowa's Department of Health. Therefore, we maintained our plans for this issue to focus on an important aspect of environmental responsibility.

Inside these pages, you'll find tips and information about planting and growing things that help the air or precious species to thrive. Getting our hands in the dirt, in the comfort and security of our yards, can be therapeutic for the mind and soul. That's something we can all benefit from in the coming weeks. ⚡

Ann Thelen is the editor of *Living with Energy in Iowa*.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a \$100 gift card for a pollinator habitat!

Pollinator habitats are important to help monarch butterflies and other species survive and thrive. Simple acts, such as planting more pollinator-attractive flowers this spring, can make a significant impact. We'll award one lucky winner with a \$100 gift card from a local nursery to plant your own pollinator habitat! ⚡

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiowa.com no later than April 30, 2020. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the Cuisinart Digital Glass Steamer from the February issue was Kyle Montgomery from T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative.



LIHEAP RELIEF

Financial Assistance

If a member-consumer is experiencing financial difficulty, they may apply for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) financial aid by contacting their local community action agency. The Iowa Department of Human Rights recently extended the LIHEAP application period for eligible Iowans until May 31, 2020.

Member-consumers can also contact their local electric cooperative directly to discuss payment options if they are facing financial hardships. ⚡



“We know a successful community is vital to success at the electric cooperative, and the opposite is also true: a successful electric cooperative is vital to success in the community. One simply doesn’t exist without the other. That takes strong leaders working together, at every co-op, on every co-op board, at every level of government.”

– Jim Matheson, CEO, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, speaking at the association’s annual meeting last month.

SAFETY PROMOTION

Congratulations to Scott Meinecke!

Scott Meinecke has accepted the position of Director of Safety and Loss Control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC). He replaces John Dvorak who retired in March.



Meinecke has been on the IAEC staff since January 2017, serving as a Job Training/Safety Instructor. Prior to joining the statewide, he was a powerline instructor at Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon and worked as a sub foreman for Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative.

He brings a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills to the position. He will be working with electric cooperatives across Iowa on safety programs and training protocols. In future issues of *Living with Energy in Iowa*, we’ll help you get to know Meinecke and share important safety tips. ⚡

Electrical safety lessons for kids

We all know electricity plays a major role in our everyday lives, and it is a powerful resource that should be respected. With school cancellations and more kids at home during the day, it’s important they are aware of safety. Iowa’s electric cooperatives encourage you to share electrical safety tips and lessons with your little ones. We know their attention spans run short, so here are a few creative ways to get them involved.

Depending on the age of your child, consider designating an “electronics deputy.” The deputy should be responsible for pointing out electronics in your home that are not in use and keeping appliances safe from liquids. Reward your deputy for pointing out overloaded outlets or other potentially dangerous situations.

Emphasize the importance of fire prevention with your children, and create a family fire drill plan as an extra precaution. Incentivize your children by rewarding those who followed the plan and made it *safely* out of the home.

While it is fun and engaging to turn safety into a game, it is important to ensure your children understand the risks they are facing if they do not practice electrical safety.

One of the most important safety



tips you can give your kids is to avoid any downed power lines. In fact, it is best to avoid power lines, transformers and substations in general. A downed power line can still be energized, and it can also energize other objects, including fences and trees. Make sure your kids understand the potential dangers of encountering a downed power line or low hanging wire.

Here are a few other safety tips you can share with your kids:

- Never put metal objects in outlets or appliances.
- Do not overcrowd electrical outlets.
- Never mix water and electricity.

No matter how you choose to get your kids interested in staying safe around electricity, your local cooperative is here to help. To learn more about electrical safety, visit www.safeelectricity.org. ⚡

Celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day

on April 13

No matter what Mother Nature has in store, Iowa’s electric cooperative lineworkers are ready to answer the call, ensuring you have the safe, reliable power you depend on. Our local communities are brighter, safer and stronger because of the selfless sacrifices of these unsung heroes. Today and every day, let’s thank electric lineworkers for powering our lives. ⚡



The little blue logo that changed efficiency standards



The little blue (and sometimes black) logo with the star inside that you see on all sorts of appliances and electronics has changed the way we view savings through more efficient products.

The ENERGY STAR® program claims credit for reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and for saving Americans \$30 billion in energy costs. Analysts credit ENERGY STAR® with innovating the energy industry, as manufacturers set goals of making more energy efficient products than their competitors.

The program's effectiveness comes from a complex process of making sure the ENERGY STAR® logo is accurate and trusted – and the numbers show it is trusted. Americans bought more than 300 million ENERGY STAR®-rated products in 2017 alone, and an ENERGY STAR® study found that three-fourths of U.S. households say the ENERGY STAR® label influences their purchases.

According to energystar.gov, the EPA uses the following specifications to determine if products meet the ENERGY STAR® standard:



Photo: KitchenAid

- Product categories must contribute significant energy savings nationwide.
- Certified products must deliver the features and performance demanded by consumers, in addition to increased energy efficiency.
- If the certified product costs more than a conventional, less-efficient counterpart, purchasers will recover their investment in increased energy efficiency

through utility bill savings, within a reasonable period of time.

- Energy efficiency can be achieved through broadly available, non-proprietary technologies offered by more than one manufacturer.
- Product energy consumption and performance can be measured and verified with testing.
- Labeling effectively differentiates products and must be visible to consumers.

Today, more than 500 certified labs in 25 countries around the world test more than 1,500 products a year, to manage a list of 60,000 product models. ENERGY STAR® runs seminars on how to meet its standards. Those standards require that TVs must use 3 watts or less when switched off; light bulbs must use two-thirds less energy than standard incandescent bulbs; and ENERGY STAR® home furnaces must be between 4 and 15% more efficient than standard furnaces.

ENERGY STAR® tests also require quality standards in addition to just energy efficiency. In general, products must have popular features, like internet connectivity for smart TVs. Light bulbs must last up to 15 times longer and produce 70 to 90% less heat than conventional bulbs. ⚡



50th

Anniversary
of Earth Day

April 22, 2020, marks the Golden Anniversary of Earth Day. Here are a few environmental milestones we've achieved over the years.

Cleaner Air and Water

In 1970, the Clean Air Act was greatly expanded and the Clean Water Act passed in 1972.

Getting the Lead Out

Lead was phased out as a gasoline additive by 1988.

Restoring the Ozone Layer

Ozone-depleting chemicals were banned in 1989.

Better Bulbs

Today, light bulbs use 80% less energy and last 25 times longer.

Rising Renewables

Today, renewable energy sources account for 11% of U.S. energy consumption.

Create a pollinator

BY ANN THELEN



Photos: Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium



As warm spring weather begins to transform Iowa's landscape, grass becomes lush, trees regain their leafy splendor and flowers bloom. While green is spring's signature color, green means something even more to your electric cooperative. Green is synonymous with environmental responsibility initiatives, and it's something Iowa's electric cooperatives take seriously. It's our focus every season.

One of the electric cooperatives' environmental initiatives – developing pollinator habitats – has created a lot of buzz among Iowans. Across the state, you may notice pollinator habitats sprouting up across landscapes. Whether they are located under electric cooperatives' solar arrays, along roadways or across homeowners' yards, there is a lot to be excited about with this conservation strategy.

Why are pollinator habitats so important?

Iowa is the center of the monarch butterfly's breeding range.

5 ways you can help monarchs

Each of us can do something to help pollinators. Simple acts, such as planting more pollinator-attractive flowers this spring, can make a big impact! Iowa State University Extension and Outreach offers these tips:

- 1 Take advantage of farm bill programs, such as the USDA Conservation Reserve Program, to establish monarch breeding habitat.
- 2 Establish monarch habitat on your land as part of a demonstration project.
- 3 Follow federal pesticide labels and state regulations when applying pesticides.
- 4 Consider monarch-friendly weed management for roadsides and other rights-of-way.
- 5 Establish a Monarch Waystation – a garden with both nectar plants and native milkweed species.

Visit <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/15817> to download details about the above tips. To learn more about the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium, visit <http://monarch.ent.iastate.edu/> and follow @IowaMonarchs on social media. 🦋

Iowa's electric co-ops are actively helping to protect monarchs

Through the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, all the state's electric cooperatives are members of the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium, an organization that is implementing a statewide strategy to protect the monarch butterfly in Iowa. As a community-led organization, the consortium works with farmers, private citizens and organizations to enhance monarch butterfly reproduction and survival. This effort is a natural fit for Iowa's not-for-profit electric cooperatives, which collectively serve more than 80 percent of the state's landmass. 🦋



playground



Photo: Aaron Eckley

Unfortunately, the iconic monarch butterfly population has experienced an 80 percent decline in the past two decades.

The significant population decline of this beautiful and treasured butterfly stems from the loss of milkweed habitat, which is the only food source for the monarch caterpillar, loss of overwintering habitat in Mexico and extreme weather events.

In March, the World Wildlife Fund and the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) released its 2019-2020 overwintering monarch population report. Adult monarch butterflies covered approximately 7 acres of forest canopy in Mexico, less than half the area of last year's population. Scientists estimate a long-term average of 15 acres of the occupied forest canopy is needed to sustain the eastern North America monarch population.

The news brings attention to ongoing efforts, say leaders of the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium.

“The monarch butterfly population report is a timely reminder to continue implementing conservation efforts statewide,” says Mike Naig, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

Pollinator habitats include a diverse array of blooming species to provide nectar for adult monarchs throughout their full life cycle and their spring and fall migrations. The current Iowa Monarch Conservation Strategy seeks to establish approximately 480,000 to 830,000 acres of monarch habitat in the state by 2038.

Iowa plays a vital role for monarch butterflies

“Iowa is in the heart of the monarch's summer breeding range, and our state has a valuable role to play in providing diverse habitat for wildlife,” says Kayla Lyon, director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “We have many dedicated partners with broad expertise working across Iowa to support habitat conservation for

butterflies, birds, bees and much more.”

Being in the center of the monarch's summer breeding range – approximately 40 percent of all monarch butterflies that overwinter in Mexico are estimated to come from Iowa and neighboring Midwest states – gives Iowans an excellent opportunity to help. Creating additional monarch habitat within cooperative service territories can play a major role in the recovery of the species and help to prevent it from becoming an endangered species.

Since monarch caterpillars need milkweed to survive, one of the primary conservation goals is to establish milkweed as part of healthy natural ecosystems. Areas of habitat, such as gardens, can be added near homes, schools, churches and within parks. Roadsides and rights-of-way offer miles of opportunities for monarch habitats.

For information on creating a pollinator habitat, visit the online resources noted in this article. ⚡

The buzz on a new app!

At the end of this year, a critical milestone in the conservation of the monarch butterfly will be reached. In December 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will publish its decision regarding whether and how to list the monarch butterfly for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The USFWS is collecting data on monarch butterfly populations and the habitats that support them to help make this decision. The good news is an app has been created to tally this information.



HabiTally is an iOS mobile app, with an Android version currently in development, created by The Climate Corporation. It enables farmers, landowners and private citizens to record their monarch habitat data (while protecting personal privacy), and share the information with the USFWS to help with monarch recovery and other pollinator conservation initiatives.

It's a place where everyone, including electric cooperative members, can contribute.

As users add information to HabiTally, a tracker will report gains made in milkweed stems/acres across the U.S. and allow both better estimates of how much and where current habitat exists. Plus, it will help identify opportunities for further habitat development.

For more information, visit <https://climate.com/tech-at-climate-corp/a-habitat-app-to-support-monarch-conservation> and download HabiTally in Apple's App Store. ⚡



Egg-Citing BREAKFAST Recipes



Green Chili Cheese Puff

- 8 large eggs**
- 1/3 cup flour**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**
- 1/2 teaspoon salt**
- freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 cup, small curd low fat cottage cheese**
- 8 ounces reduced-fat shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese**
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted**
- 4 ounces canned diced green chilies, drained**
- 4 or 5 scallions, thinly sliced salsa**

Beat eggs until light and lemon colored, using an electric hand mixer if desired. Add flour, baking powder, salt and a few grinds of black pepper and blend until smooth. Fold in the cottage cheese, cheese, butter, chilies and scallions. Pour mixture into 8x8-inch glass baking dish that has been sprayed with nonstick vegetable spray. Bake at 325 degrees F for 45 to 50 minutes, until edges are slightly puffed, and the very center of the puff still jiggles a bit when you move the baking dish. **DO NOT OVERBAKE.** For a moist cheesy texture, remove from oven when slightly under-baked as the heat will continue to cook it out of the oven. Allow to cool for 10 minutes before cutting into squares and serving with favorite salsa. Makes nine 3x3-inch squares.

**Jana Lower • Williamsburg
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative**

Fuzzy French Toast

- 3 large eggs, well blended with fork**
- 2/3 cups milk**
- 1 rounded tablespoon granulated sugar**
- 1/4 rounded teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1 cup flaked coconut**
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts or pecans, optional**
- 1 cup flake type cereal, crushed (corn, wheat, or bran)**
- 8 slices French or Italian bread**
- margarine**
- maple syrup**

Blend eggs and milk in a medium-sized mixing bowl with a fork or whisk. In another mixing bowl or large zipper type plastic bag, thoroughly mix the sugar, cinnamon, coconut, nuts and cereal well by stirring or shaking closed bag. Dip bread slices into egg mixture, then coat with the coconut mixture. Place coated bread on hot griddle – use medium heat and margarine to prevent sticking. Brown slices until golden on both sides. Serve with additional margarine and maple syrup.

**Susan Rickels • Grundy Center
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Easy Quiche

- 1 cup milk**
- 1/2 cup biscuit mix**
- 4 eggs, beaten**
- 1/4 cup Colby Jack or cheddar cheese, grated**
- 1 cup vegetables, chopped (mushrooms, onions, green peppers, etc.)**
- salt and pepper, to taste**

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients together. Pour mixture into a lightly greased 9-inch pan. Bake at 375 degrees F for 35-40 minutes until the center is firm. Refrigerate leftovers.

**Dorothy Carolus • Parkersburg
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Breakfast Bites

- 6 eggs**
- 1/4 cup milk**
- dash of salt and pepper**
- 1/2 to 1 pound sausage, browned**
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese**

Combine eggs, milk, salt and pepper. Fill greased muffin tins 3/4 full with egg mixture. Add sausage and top with cheese. Bake at 425 degrees F for 15 minutes.

Owen Miller • Alford • Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

WHITES AND YOLKS

Egg whites supply about 60 percent of an egg's protein – as well as niacin, riboflavin, magnesium and potassium. However, the yolks steal the nutritional show. Contributing to eye health and brain function, the bright yellow center contains many other key vitamins and minerals, including vitamin D, selenium, B12 and more.

Overnight Breakfast Casserole

- 2¼ cups seasoned croutons
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 1½ pounds link sausage, browned and cut into small pieces
- 2½ cup milk, divided
- 8 large eggs
- dash of pepper
- 4 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup

Spread croutons in greased 9x13-inch pan. Sprinkle 1 cup cheese over, then add sausage. Mix 2 cups of the milk with eggs, pepper and mustard. Pour over the cheese and sausage. Cover and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, let stand at room temperature for ½ hour to warm. Mix the soup with the ½ cup milk and spread over top of casserole. Sprinkle the remaining 1 cup of cheese over top. Bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour.

Susan Huls • Sigourney
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Zesty Oven Omelet

- 7 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ½ cup ham or sausage
- ½ cup salsa

In a large bowl, beat eggs and milk. Stir in cheese, ham or sausage, and salsa. Pour into a greased round pie pan. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F for approximately 45 minutes or until a knife comes out clean. Let stand 10 minutes before slicing.

Ruth Van Zandbergen • Orange City
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

Pizza Quiche

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup cottage cheese, partially drained
- 8 ounces spicy sausage, cooked, drained & crumbled
- 4-8 ounces pepperoni slices, cut in half
- ¾ cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ¾ cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell

Mix all ingredients and pour into the unbaked pie shell. Bake at 350 degrees F for approximately 45 minutes until the egg mixture in center is firm. Serve for brunch or supper. Adjust the amounts of sausage and pepperoni for personal preference.

Deb Mitchell • Collins • Consumers Energy

Breakfast Bake

- 1 pound sausage or bacon
- 6 slices bread, cubed
- 6 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- 4 ounces mushrooms, optional

Brown sausage or bacon. Place bread cubes in the bottom of a 9x13-inch pan. Beat eggs; add milk, salt and mustard. Pour mixture over bread. Add browned sausage or bacon, cheese and mushrooms, if desired. Stir slightly to spread evenly in the pan. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes. Serves 6-8.

Mary Ellen Coblentz • Cincinnati
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

IOWA IS NO. 1
Iowa is the No. 1 egg producer in the U.S. Each year, hens in Iowa lay nearly 16 billion eggs! That means Iowa's egg farmers are responsible for about 1 in 5 eggs consumed in the U.S. every year.

EGG FACTS

CHOLINE-RICH
Eggs are rich in choline, which promotes normal cell activity, liver function and the transportation of nutrients throughout the body. It's also key in the development of infants' memory functions. Think of choline as a commuter train for vitamins and minerals.

EGG FACTS

BROWN AND WHITE EGGS
Hens with brown feathers lay brown-shelled eggs, while white hens lay white-shelled eggs. But the color of an egg has no relationship to egg quality, flavor or nutritional value.

EGG FACTS

Wanted: Herbalicious Recipes! The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Tell us how you put those aromatic summer herbs to use in your kitchen! Whether you grow an herb garden or buy them at the farmers' market or grocery store, fresh herbs are game changers in recipes. Share your favorites, and if we run your recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com.

The deadline is April 30, 2020. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions.

EMAIL:
recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your e-mail message.)

MAIL:
Recipes
Living with Energy in Iowa
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322-2992



Small gardens with big

STORY AND PHOTOS BY L.A. JACKSON

Spring has arrived! If thoughts of producing oodles of fresh, homegrown edibles have you ready to dig in the dirt, it's time to roll up those sleeves and start a vegetable garden!

The physics of time and space dictate that big harvests naturally come from big gardens. For backyard growers who prefer to pass on the challenges of tending to mega-plots through the long, hot summer, there are alternative ways to still raise impressive passels of veggies.

Make the bed

First, for maximum production from limited growing areas, go with beds, not rows. Place young plants or seeds according to their recommended spacing per plant and forget about distances between rows. Rows of plants looking like tidy lines of soldiers are better for large gardens in order to have paths to walk around, but this isn't necessary in small beds. Accessibility is, of course, still important, so try not make beds over 4 feet wide.

Select compact plants

Size isn't everything in gardening, especially when it comes to growing backyard edibles. There are many vegetable selections – often tagged with such labels as “Bush,” “Dwarf” or “Patio” – that are modest in height and girth, but still quite capable of producing impressive crops.

The most common big veggie that can be found in smaller sizes is the tomato. There are a ton of cultivars available, but, for starters, give “Tiny Tim,” “Bush Beefsteak” or “Early Wonder” a look. Keep in mind, however, that most of these slight-in-stature tomato selections are determinate, meaning they produce all the tomatoes they are going to yield in a matter of weeks. Standard vine tomatoes, if kept healthy, typically crank out fruit continually over the long growing season.

Want a wider range of veggies in your small garden? Squash, watermelons, pumpkins, cucumbers, cantaloupes and green beans – all champs at chewing up space in a planting bed – can also be found in compact forms, either as young plants or seeds, at local garden shops in the spring.

Grow up

Don't think you have to stick to Munchkin-sized plants. Typical strong growers, such as tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers and squash can't be allowed to crawl across small growing spaces, but they can be trellised, staked or caged to grow up rather than out.

Even the long, rangy vines of watermelons, pumpkins and cantaloupes can be trained upward on vertical supports, but to avoid the dreaded drop-and-splat factor, it's not a bad idea to cradle the developing fruits in supporting



yields



burlap, nylon or cloth slings.

Suspension weight and size problems with standard pumpkins are obvious, but there are many cultivars, including “Spookie,” “Jack O’ Lantern” and “Sugar Pie,” that yield smaller, more manageable 6- to 7-pound fruits. The same goes for big watermelons, but with so-called “icebox” varieties like the popular “Sugar Baby” and its 8- to 10-pound melons available, it is possible to hang them high, too.

Growing vine crops on erect supports has other advantages besides saving space, starting with making harvesting easier. Also, vertical gardening improves fruit shape and, since beneficial air circulates through the foliage easier, can promote healthier plants.

Think beyond the veggie patch

Looking for even more growing ground? Limited-space gardening with edibles doesn’t need to be confined to small vegetable plots – in other words, anywhere you have dirt in your yard is a potential planting site. And many veggies can be easily interplanted in the landscape as complements, rather than complications, to existing ornamentals.

One popular vegetable that bears the double standard of being both productive and pretty is the pepper. While blocky bell peppers might look a bit clunky in flower beds, there is a wide range of hot peppers that show off long-lasting fruits in many sizes, shapes and sizzling colors on relatively compact plants.

Like bell peppers, common pudgy eggplants probably won’t qualify as eye candy in an ornamental garden, but there are vibrantly colored fruits of cultivars, such as “Fairy Tale,” “Prosperosa” and “Neon” that can also add extra visual sass to sunny flower borders.



For tips on growing vegetable gardens, check out these online resources:

Iowa State Extension
store.extension.iastate.edu/Topic/Yard-and-Garden/Vegetables-and-Herbs

The Iowa Gardener
www.theiowagardener.com

Iowa Arboretum
<https://iowaarboretum.org>

Earl May Garden & Nursery Center
www.earlmay.com/gardening/vegetable-gardens

Okra, which is closely related to the lovely hibiscus, stays true to its family ties with fancy foliage and delicate, hibiscus-like flowers. One standout beauty is “Red Burgundy,” an heirloom selection that has been a veggie garden favorite for many years because its gorgeous (and tasty) scarlet pods never fail to turn heads.

Other decorative edibles with strong, distinctive profiles, such as curly spinach, cabbage, looseleaf lettuce (especially red-tinted varieties like “Red Sails” and “Lolla Rossa”), kale and Swiss chard (look for “Ruby Red” or “Bright Lights”) are low-growing and, for vegetable plants, actually rather good looking. Any of these can be successfully incorporated as accent plants for

perennial beds or flower gardens. In addition, root vegetables, such as carrots, onions and radishes hide their crops below ground but freely flaunt flowing foliage that can be used to fill in the fronts of border plantings.

Many herbs are also great “double-duty” plants. Rosemary’s spiky leaves and delightful (as well as edible) bluish-purple flowers make it an appealing addition to any landscape setting. Bronze fennel’s smoky look is a nice touch for container planters, while the rich, dark foliage of purple basil is a horticultural fashion statement waiting to happen. And curly parsley, with its deep emerald leaves, is an ideal alt-ornamental to line the front of a flower bed. 🌿

Save energy with smart landscaping

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN

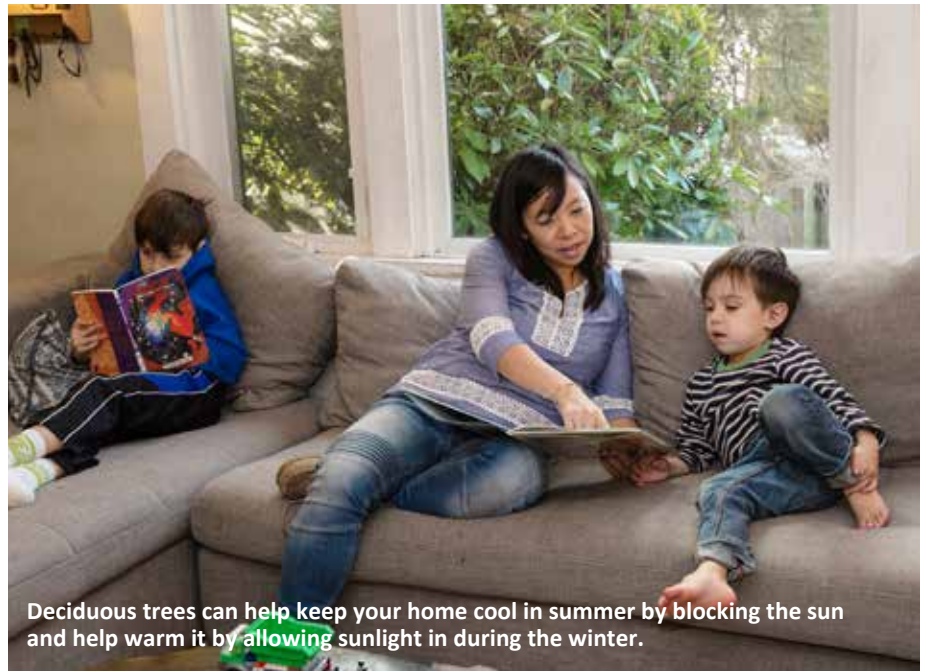
When landscaping is done right, it can help to lower your home's monthly energy bill. That's good news for you and the environment!

The decisions you make about your home's landscaping can help you stay cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. With summer just around the corner, it's a great time for looking at how strategic planting can help cool your home.

Direct sunlight hitting windows is a significant contributor to overheating your home during summer months. By planting trees that block sunlight, you can improve comfort and reduce your air conditioning energy use. If the trees eventually grow tall enough to shield your roof, that's even better.

The most important windows to shade are the ones facing west, followed by windows that face east. Morning and evening sunlight hits the home more directly than midday sunlight. Also, an eave on the south side of your home can help shade your windows during the midday sun.

With Iowa's cold winter climate, planting deciduous trees that lose their leaves in fall will shield your



Deciduous trees can help keep your home cool in summer by blocking the sun and help warm it by allowing sunlight in during the winter.

Photo: Marcela Gara, Energy Efficiency Database

windows in summer and allow sunlight in during winter to help warm your home. A simple approach that can deliver some shade the first year is to plant a "living wall" of vines grown on a trellis next to your home.

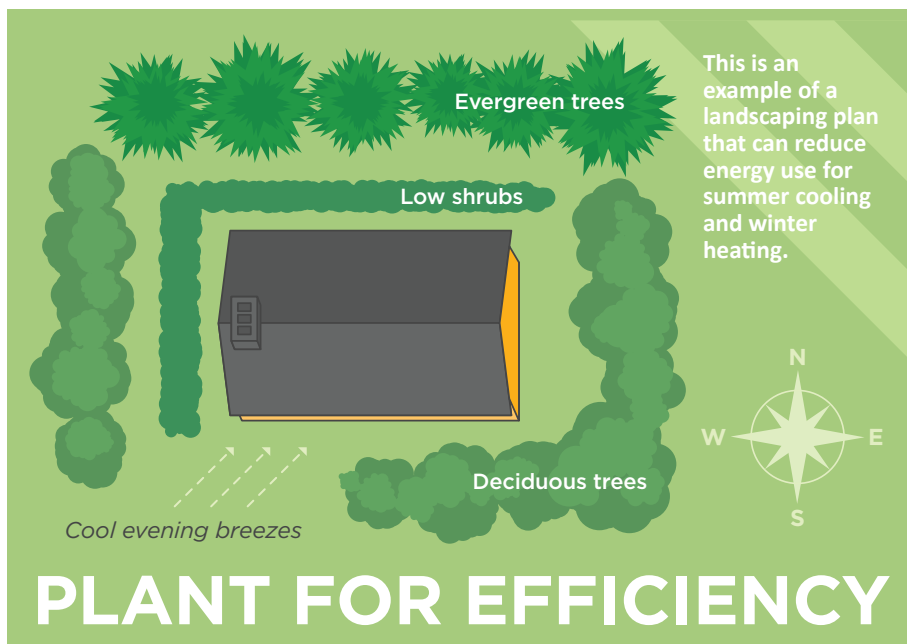
One cooling strategy is to make sure your air conditioning compressor has some plants near it. Just make sure the plants aren't too

close. The compressor should have a five-foot space above it and a two- to three-foot gap all the way around so that it gets enough air movement to do its job.

Another factor to consider is that water is becoming more precious and more expensive. When you pay your water bill, much of that cost is for the energy required to pump water to your home, or perhaps you have your own well. Either way, reducing water use saves you money and reduces energy use.

In the winter, a solid windbreak can cut harsh winter winds. The best solution for this is a solid row of trees (preferably evergreen) on the windward side of the home, with shrubs underneath the trees to keep the wind from sneaking through.

With any landscaping projects that require digging, remember to dial 8-1-1 to ensure all underground utility lines are properly marked and flagged *before* you start the work. Happy planting! ⚡



This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency.

Plant more trees for a greener future

Planting trees is an investment in the future. Beyond the obvious benefits of providing shade and enhancing the natural beauty of our surroundings, trees help improve our communities and our world in an abundance of ways, including many that we may not immediately notice.

While it is often easy to see the trunk, branches and leaves of a tree, it might surprise you to learn that root zones are often two to four times the diameter of the crown. Those root systems help hold and aerate the soil, filter groundwater and allow the trees to draw in chemical nutrients which otherwise could leach into the environment.

Decaying leaves, needles and other tree debris help enrich the soil, providing nutrients for grasses, corms and other vegetation. This mélange of organic matter described by scientists as the “soil food web” includes a huge chunk of the world’s biodiversity.

According to researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, millions of species and billions of organisms, including bacteria, algae, microscopic insects, earthworms, beetles, ants, mites and fungi, can flourish in organic soil.

“The best soil on most farms is found in the fence row,” USDA officials say, citing its undisturbed properties. “It’s crumbly, dark and loose, and it’s a model of soil structure and organic matter for farmers who are trying to make their soil healthier.”

Trees make a lasting difference

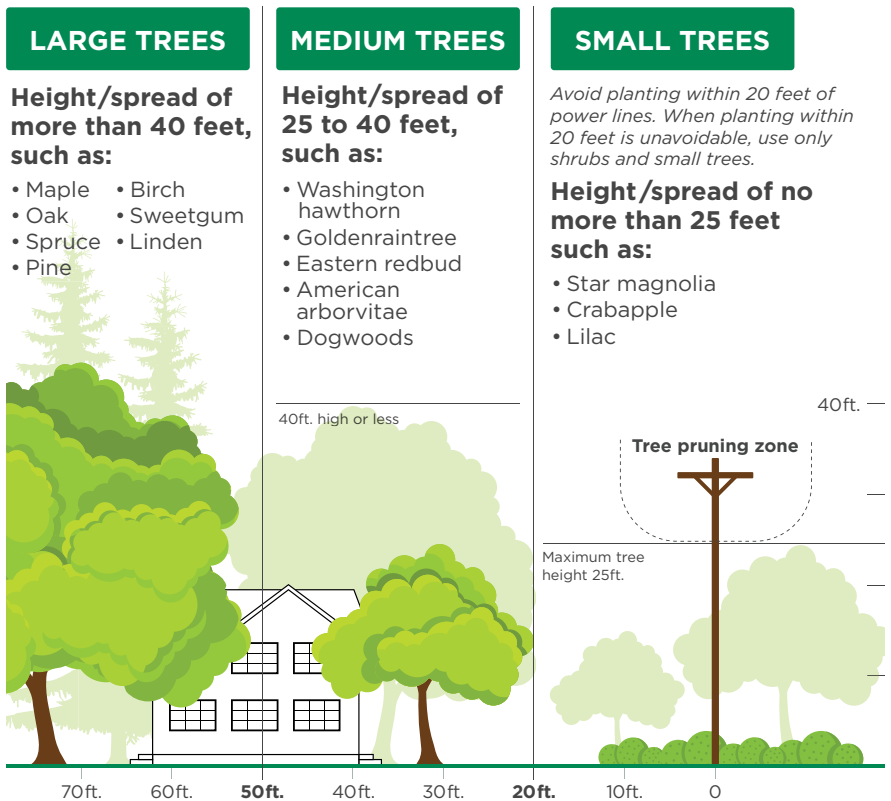
Trees take time to grow, but with proper care, after a few good seasons, a mature tree becomes a living air purifier. According to the Arbor Day Foundation, a mature tree can absorb 120 to 240 pounds of particulate pollution every year. They reduce atmospheric sulfur dioxide and hydrocarbon emissions and absorb heavy metals. Experts say large mature trees absorb more 60 to 70 times more pollution from the environment than smaller trees.

When planting trees, it’s essential to plant the right trees in the right place so that they don’t interfere with power lines. ⚡

Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

For more tips on smart tree planting in your community, contact your local electric cooperative or visit www.ArborDay.org.

Trees beautify our neighborhoods, and when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard... especially to power lines.



Be safe! Always call 811 before you dig to locate any buried utility lines.

Source: The Arbor Day Foundation and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

Let’s plant even more!

The Arbor Day Foundation has set a goal of planting 100 million trees worldwide by 2022, the 150th anniversary of the establishment of Arbor Day. The organization hopes to enlist 5 million new tree planters, urging them to plant trees at home, participate in community tree planting projects and support reforestation programs wherever they are needed.

Trees 6 to 8 feet tall, planted around a home or building, can shade windows during their first year. Within five to 10 years, they can also help shade rooflines, reducing cooling costs and energy use. Dense evergreens can serve as windbreaks, diffusing frigid breezes.

A local nursery or your county agricultural extension service can make recommendations on the best trees for your landscaping based upon growing conditions, space and design goals. ⚡

Spring forward with outdoor safety tips

With the arrival of spring, there are some specific things to look out for regarding electric safety. Remember, you can't see, smell or hear electricity, so it's very important to take these precautions seriously.



Call before you dig

Spring is prime time for landscaping projects and "honey do" lists around the home. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located. It's the law, and it could just save your life! Buried utility lines are everywhere, and an underground utility line is damaged every 6 minutes in the U.S. because someone decided to dig without calling 811 first.



Put safety first in the field

As you head into the fields to plant, always make sure to keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads so that you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line.

If equipment comes into contact with a power line, assume the line is energized and deadly. The operator should NOT get off the machinery unless in immediate danger. If the operator touches the ground and the equipment at the same time, he or she will become a channel for electricity. Instead, the operator should stay on the equipment and

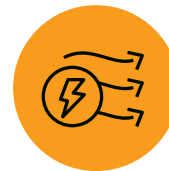


contact the local electric utility or 911 immediately to report the incident so electricity can be shut off safely before exiting.



When thunder roars, go indoors

Spring storms will be here soon, so remember that there is no safe place from lightning when you're outside. It's important to be aware of weather forecasts and watch for developing thunderstorms as lightning can strike many miles ahead of a storm front. If you hear thunder, seek shelter immediately because it indicates lightning is within 10 miles of you. Safe shelters include inside a building or in an enclosed metal-topped vehicle. Authorities warn against outdoor activity until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder is heard.



Stay away from downed power lines

Spring and summer weather can bring storms and lead to downed power lines. Assume any wire lying on the ground is carrying electricity and stay away from it. If you spot a downed wire, immediately call your local police and your electric co-op. Keep others from getting near the downed wire until help arrives. Never attempt to drive over a downed power line.



Move over or slow down on the road

We need your help in keeping our line workers, engineers and maintenance workers safe on Iowa's roadways. If you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road; their jobs are hazardous enough already. ⚡

SPRING THAW BRINGS OUT THE WORST IN OUR YARD

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

In case you haven't noticed, Iowa officially has five seasons: summer, fall, winter, spring ... and mud. Mud season is not prescribed to certain months and will land where it will — sometimes in the fall or winter, but most often before early spring.

The snowfall of December is charming. The blizzards of January are cozy. By February, snow's charm is vanishing, and by March or April, the last vestiges of the idyllic are gray slush in your driveway.

If there's one thing snow does for you, it's cover for a multitude of sins. Those flowers you didn't get to before winter? No one can see they should have been cut off in the fall. The groundhog tunnel that the nest of rodents made on the exterior wall of your barn? Covered with forgiving snow.

So I can cut snow a little slack. It's what is revealed during Mud Season that is problematic. On a fact-finding, cleaning-up-the-yard mission last spring, I came away with the following:

- Two action figures that my grandsons had been looking for all winter. Location: Wedged in a crack between the garage and the driveway. Condition: None the worse for wear.
- A faded red Christmas bow that had been wrenched from a wreath during a winter storm. Location: Clinging to the fence in the pasture. Condition: Done for.
- A 9x9 baking pan that my son set out to feed the wild gray cat that occasionally makes



an appearance. Location: Six inches outside the front door. Condition: Fine after a good washing.

- Fast food wrappers, cups and straws. Location: Next to the shop where my son and his friends were cutting up a deer. Condition: Disgust and forcing son to clean it up (my condition, by the way).
- Two pressure wands from Kent's power washer. Used by said grandsons as guns to hunt bobcats. Location: Near the cooking spot, by the creek. Condition: Just fine, despite grumbling from Grandpa.
- An old pink bath towel. Location: On the deck. Condition: Should have been

dumped a year ago, so no loss there.

After three boys and two grandsons, we've learned to "walk" the yard before the first mowing of the year. If we don't, we'll chew up pieces of a croquet set, tennis balls and the stray bone or two that the neighbor dog dragged over.

Maybe this year will be that rare one where there's little snow and spring comes on so gradually that there's no mud, either.

But if you believe that, I've got a few action figures for you. ⚡

Valerie Van Kooten is a writer from Pella who loves living in the country and telling its stories. She and her husband Kent have three married sons and two incredibly adorable grandsons.

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