



Denton Master gardener experiences trial and error too

By Gerry Baksys

Before they even built on their 10 acres, LaVina and Ivan Vagts loved their land.

"I was born five and a half miles southwest of here," LaVina said, "and after we got married in 1955, we had been living in Lincoln, but wanted to get back to Denton. So we bought a wheat field and planned to build a house on it after the kids left high school. We waited because the kids didn't want to leave Lincoln High School."

The purchase of the field started paying dividends right away. The Vagts planted sweet corn on their land and used the proceeds to pay for vacations and their children's schooling.

"We had a '62 Chevy and the kids and I would pick the corn and fill the trunk and the back seat and put a sign up on Washington Street in Lincoln and we would sell out by mid-afternoon," LaVina said. "We also grew other crops, but sweet corn was the main money maker."

Since they bought the acreage, but before they moved onto it 31 years ago, LaVina said she and Ivan had plenty of time to plan the design work.

"When we designed the new house, we imagined everything

And it is a great view. In the spirit of everything being bigger, the ranch-style house sprawls over 2,300 square feet. The main part of the home is a U-shaped open floor design split almost down the middle by a thin wall. The bottom part of the U is the living room. Directly in front of you as you walk in the front door are huge glass patio doors that offer a great view of trees and farmland. There is also a large fireplace and mantel that looks like it belongs in a nobleman's mansion.

Behind the section of the sitting room that's closest to the patio doors is the kitchen. It too is spacious, but what LaVina loves most about her kitchen are the cabinets.

"I used to make wedding cakes for 25 years," she explained. "In the old home, whenever I made tiered cakes, I had to be careful not to bump the top tier against the cabinets. Our neighbor built these cabinets for us and made sure to give me space to make my cakes."

A thin wall divides the kitchen from the dining room to the north. Again, it was designed with the idea of having plenty of room and LaVina said they need it.

"It's spacious enough so I can fit the whole family in there," she said. "We're not outgrowing it yet, but we're getting there. We have



LaVina Vagts stands in front of her Denton home. She and her husband Ivan have lived there for the 1st 31 years. Photos by Gerry Baksys

home pales in comparison with her love for her gardens. Being outside and working in the soil is one of the oldest and most cherished memories she has.

"I remember when I was four working in the garden with my mother," LaVina said. "I would plant peas and beans before I started to go to school. I worked every year with her in the garden until I got married."

But her passion for gardening didn't stop there. She infused it into her children and grandchildren. "I have a granddaughter who said one of her goals in life is to be a Master Gardener like her grandmother," LaVina said.

She's even gotten Ivan interested in gardening since he retired from his job at Cushman's in Lincoln. He is currently building a garden shed from the ground up for her. "He always was a little interested, but didn't have the time to do it," LaVina said.

LaVina has been a Master Gardner, a program through the UNL extension office, for the last 28 years. Walking around her yard, there's no doubting her skills. There are various gardens and fruit and vegetable patches sprawling around the home's

acreage. "There's a big strip behind the house where I have my garden and three raspberry patches," she said. "I like growing everything, it doesn't matter if its vegetables or flowers."

LaVina has a variety of flowers in her various gardens, including two she's especially proud of, including an "Immortality" Iris, which blooms four times a year, and a "As At" intermediate Iris-hybrid which

was designed by a man in Lincoln. Along with her successes in the garden, there have been some failures as well. Pine Wilt has killed off several pine trees Ivan and LaVina planted before they even moved onto the property, but those weren't the only trees they've lost.

"When we first moved in, we planted a fruit orchard to the east of the house, but we didn't know that the land didn't drain," LaVina said. "The standing water killed off a lot of our trees. It was an expen-

sive lesson." Where the orchard once stood, only a few trees remain. But not one to give up, LaVina planted a few grape vines that could better handle the standing water. "I spend as much time as possible out here," she said. "During the spring and summer, the house work suffers. I will only stop gardening when my body doesn't let me do it anymore."



Her "Immortality" Iris plant is rare, it blooms four times a year.



This massive brick fireplace represents the overall design philosophy of LaVina and Ivan's Denton home: big and spacious.

bigger," LaVina said. "We loved our old home in Lincoln, but we outgrew it. What I like best about our house is the view is gorgeous and you can see it right when you walk through the front door."

40 children, grandchildren and great grandchildren (and their spouses) that come by on the holidays."

But LaVina's passion for her



LaVina checks on one of her three raspberry patches.

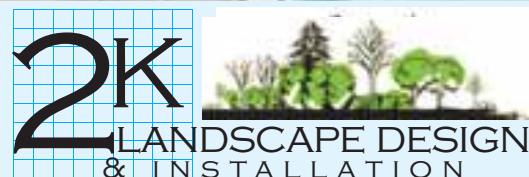
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Create a stylish outdoor space on a budget

If your patio furniture, barbecue grill or favorite outdoor planter was left outside this winter, it probably took a beating. But think twice before you relegate your favorite lounge chair or lawn ornaments to the landfill. It's easy to transform them and make them look better than new. All you need is a little imagination and a few cans of spray paint.

Create "designer" furniture. Designer patio sets, lawn chairs and other outdoor furniture can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars. But it's easy and inexpensive to give the furniture you already own a face lift that mimics the look of trendy designer furniture with a few coats of spray paint.

Create a durable designer look that sparkles in the sun with Rust-Oleum Stops Rust Textured Metallic in Galaxy, a textured black with flecks of silver. The texture adds depth, elegance and unmatched protection to any project. Or create a rich Oil Rubbed Bronze finish, while protecting your furniture from the elements, with Rust-Oleum Universal spray paint. Choose an unexpected color, like Painter's Touch 2X Satin Eden. You can also transform garage

sale bargains, flea market finds or used furniture you find on sites like Craigslist or Freecycle with spray paint to get a designer look without the designer price tag.

Revive an old barbecue grill. If your grill was buried under three feet of snow, it could probably use a little TLC. Why not revive it with a spray paint specifically formulated for high heat applications? Rust-Oleum High Heat Ultra resists heat up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit so it's great for grills, fire pits and wood-burning stoves. Plus, it's available in traditional black, as well as stylish colors and finishes such as brown and aged copper, so your barbecue grill will look better than new.

Accessories can get a second life, too. No need to toss planters, lawn ornaments or other outdoor accessories because their finish has been weather damaged.



Creating the look of designer furniture without the steep price can make your patio the hot spot this season.

Spray paint can give them a second life. Try spray painting planters with Rust-Oleum Stops Rust for a rooftop garden or patio in a variety of vegetable colors-Sunrise Red for tomatoes, Hunter Green for lettuce or green peppers, different shades of green for herbs. The possibilities to add a

splash of color-or a little sophistication-to a patio, rooftop or backyard are endless.

For more inspiration, project ideas-or to share a project you've done-visit www.PaintIdeas.com. Or find Paint Ideas on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/PaintIdeas.

Tips to help conserve water

For homeowners--especially those who live in drier regions--saving water is an important issue.

Americans use an average of 101 gallons of water every day, five times as much water as is needed to maintain basic necessities. A considerable amount of that water is spent keeping lawns and gardens green and lush.

Watering lawns and gardens can account for up to half of the 95,000 gallons of water used by households yearly. Smart watering habits--along with weather-based irrigation products--can save 30 to 70 percent of that water. Here are some water-saving ideas:

1. Don't drown your lawn. Instead of watering for one long session, water a few times for shorter periods and take 15-minute breaks in between each session.

2. Watch the clock. Water between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.--when the sun is low, winds are calm and temperatures are cool. Midday watering tends to be less efficient due to evaporation, while watering in the evening can encourage the growth of fungus.

3. Divide by zones. Different plants need different amounts of water. Both sprinkler and drip irrigation can be incorporated to achieve more efficient use of water.

4. Water only things that grow. If you have an underground sprinkler system, make sure the sprinkler heads are adjusted properly to avoid watering sidewalks and driveways. A properly adjusted sprinkler head should spray large droplets of water instead of a fine mist.

5. Consider dripping. When it comes to watering individual trees, flowerbeds, potted containers or other nongrassy areas, consider applying water directly to the roots using low-volume drip irrigation.

6. Do routine inspections. Periodically check your sprinklers to make sure everything is working properly. A clogged head or a torn line can wreak havoc on your landscape and water bill.

7. Be rain smart. Use an irrigation system with a weather-based sensor. A weather sensor works with a smart controller to monitor temperature and rainfall and adjusts watering schedules accordingly. The controller uses a built-in database of weather information for the homeowner's specific geographic area to adjust watering needs all year long.

How to successfully plant underneath trees

Growing grass is almost impossible in the heavy shade created by mature trees and many gardeners struggle with the best method for managing this difficult area of their landscape, but it is possible to have attractive plantings in these shaded locations, while still preserving the tree's health. Here are a few tips for creating a beautiful shade garden underneath your trees. **Don't Install a Raised Bed** Some homeowners try to manage the problem of bare soil beneath mature trees by installing raised

planting beds, however, this practice is strongly discouraged for several reasons. First, adding soil over the top of an existing tree's root system reduces the amount of oxygen that can penetrate into the underlying soil. Oxygen is essential for root health and growth, and a lack of oxygen will result in root death. Often trees begin an imperceptible decline after the installation of a raised planter that does not become noticeable for two to five years. Even the addition of only a few inches of soil can have harmful effects on your trees.

Dramatically raising the soil level under trees can cause other problems as well, including bark decay from soil moisture that is held against the trunk. Bark death and decay leads to wood rot of the tree's interior wood, resulting in reduced tree strength and a shortened life for the tree.

Homeowners are also often frustrated when these beds quickly fill with dense, fibrous tree roots. Studies have shown that trees have a majority of their feeder or surface roots within the top 12-18 inches of the soil.

Roots will quickly fill the raised bed as the tree roots search for water, nutrients and oxygen.

Create Ground Bed Plantings To preserve the health of your tree but still have attractive plantings in the shaded areas they create, use ground level plantings. To enrich the soil and improve aeration and drainage, begin by spreading a two-inch layer of organic matter on the soil surface. Compost or well-rotted manure is best. This will get your new plants off to a good start by providing additional organic matter, improving soil drainage and relieving any soil compaction that exists.

Carefully incorporate this material into the soil to a depth of four to six inches. This is best done by hand rather than with a tiller, which can damage important tree roots. Too much disturbance to the roots of sensitive trees like oaks, may damage or kill them.

Choose plants that grow well in the dry, shaded conditions beneath large trees. Herbaceous perennials like hosta and astilbe are good choices. Redbud and serviceberry are small understory trees that grow well in shade. For more ideas on plant selection check out "Plants for Shade Landscapes", <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/1061/>.

Planting and Maintenance Tips

Purchase small-sized plant material that won't require large planting holes and will cause as little root disturbance as possible during planting. Locate the new plants in open spaces between the tree's roots; if you run into a large root while digging, move a few inches to either side and dig a new hole. Take care not to damage the bark of mature tree roots when you dig.

Finally, proper maintenance of trees and ornamental plants includes deep, infrequent watering equivalent to one inch of water per week from either rain or irrigation. One good, deep soaking per week is ideal during the first weeks of establishment for the new plants. Gradually reduce the frequency of watering to once every two weeks to optimize the health of your tree and ornamentals. Add two to four inches of organic mulch after planting is completed to moderate soil temperatures and preserve soil moisture.

Here is a simple but powerful rule: Always give people more than what they expect to get.

~Nelson Boswell

How to identify weedy vines and control them

By Mary Jane Frogge, UNL Extension Associate

This time of year it is common to see mature evergreens or windbreak trees covered with weedy vines. A common question is what are they and more importantly, how do you do you get rid of it?

Weedy vines, like burcucumber and honeyvine milkweed, are more prevalent in wet years. Burcucumber is an annual vine with 5-lobed leaves, whitish flowers, and small prickly seed pods that grow in clusters. It is common in shelterbelts. In trees, control with hoeing or the preemergence herbicide Princep (active ingredient = simazine) applied in May.

Honeyvine milkweed is a perennial broadleaf vine with heart-shaped leaves and no milky sap. Fruit pods resemble common milkweed, but are light green, shiny, and smooth on the outside. Control with post-emergence applications of glyphosate or 2,4-D applied before the vines begin to climb.

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Tips on how to control those pesky weeds

Asparagus Weed Control

Controlling weeds in a home or acreage asparagus planting can be difficult, but it is a necessary step toward maintaining a high-yielding planting. Since asparagus is a perennial crop, it's not possible for home gardeners to till or plow the planting area to eliminate weeds. However, there are several other techniques that can help to successfully control problem weeds.

Asparagus overwinters each year as a dormant crown of roots, with all the summer's foliage and stems dying back to the crown. If planted correctly, the crown is initially located approximately 6-8 inches deep in the soil, but it will grow each year enlarging in both width and height; meaning that an asparagus crown can expand upward in the soil profile over time. It's important to keep this depth in mind and the fact that no living growth remains above ground during the dormant season as we look various methods of control.

Mechanical Control

In small plantings, mechanical removal of weeds can be accomplished by hoeing. This is easy to do in early spring, before new spears begin to emerge, without danger of damage to the plants. In larger plantings very shallow tilling, only about 3 to 4 inches deep, will help eliminate weeds in early spring before new growth begins.

Cultural Control

Mulch, in conjunction with hoeing or tilling, helps maintain your weed control. Apply 3 to 4 inches of an organic mulch, such as wood chips, grass clippings, compost or clean straw. It will prevent germination of new

weeds, minimize soil temperature fluctuations in summer and help preserve soil moisture.

Herbicidal Weed Control

Applications of a pre-emergent herbicide can be used to control annual weeds, like crabgrass and foxtail, in the asparagus planting. One product, which has the added benefit of being organic, is corn gluten meal and can be found in Preen Vegetable Garden Weed Preventer, as well as other products. Corn gluten meal is a by-product of corn processing and contains 10% nitrogen, along with its pre-emergent properties. Apply it every four weeks at labeled rates throughout the asparagus planting, but be careful not to apply it to other areas of the vegetable garden where you will be planting seeds.

Post emergent weed control can be achieved with glyphosate and paraquat, both non-selective herbicides with no soil residual activity that can be used in asparagus. Glyphosate is systemic and works best at controlling perennial weeds. It can be broadcast over the entire planting area in early spring before new asparagus grown emerges or after the last harvest. Snap all spears 1/2 inch below the soil line, so no spears are above ground, and then overspray the planting area.

Paraquat is a contact, non-systemic herbicide that kills the growing shoots of weeds. It works best for controlling newly emerging annual weeds in early spring before your asparagus has started to grow.

When using herbicide, always read and follow the label directions for personal protective equipment and application rates. Pay special attention to the pre-



Controlling weeds can be a hassle, but these tips could help make your life easier.

harvest interval, or the amount of time you must wait after a pesticide application before harvesting again.

Do Not Use Salt!

An old recommendation for asparagus weed control involved the application of salt, by pouring the salty water from an ice cream maker on the asparagus patch. This provided some weed

control because asparagus is deep-rooted and has a higher sodium tolerance than some common weeds. However, salt quickly destroys soil structure resulting in pour water penetration in the soil and will eventually kill the asparagus, too, or move out into nearby sections of your vegetable garden and kill other less salt tolerant vegetables.

Building green

With water costs rising across much of the United States—more than 10 percent in two years, according to a recent survey by the American Water Works Association—building a water-efficient home is a wise investment in the future.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) WaterSense program makes it easy to find builders who can construct a new home that saves water, energy and money. More than 30 builders have partnered with EPA to build more water-efficient homes, and that number is growing every day.

Just as it does for toilets, faucets, showerheads and other plumbing products, WaterSense offers a label for water-efficient new homes, designed to use at least 20 percent less water than typical new homes, both inside and out.

In fall 2010, builder KB Home completed the first residences certified to earn a label under the WaterSense new homes program. These homes, located near Sacramento in Roseville, California, will save 10,000 gallons of water per year and more than \$100 per year on utility bills.

"Owning a WaterSense-labeled house means you can enjoy all the comforts of home while using fewer natural resources and saving money," said Veronica Blette, chief of EPA's WaterSense branch. "A family investing in a WaterSense-labeled new home will save enough water each year to wash more than six months' worth of laundry and enough energy to power a television for four years."

The EPA estimates that if the approximately 500,000 new homes built last year had met WaterSense criteria, the homes would save Americans 5 billion gallons of water and more than \$50 million in utility bills annually.

For more information about WaterSense-labeled new homes, products and programs or to find a WaterSense builder partner in your area, visit www.epa.gov/watersense.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day.

-William Shakespeare

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Keep your lawn mower running right

A trouble-free season of lawn care begins with a lawn mower that's easy to start and keeps on running. The key to making that happen may be as simple as doing a mower tune-up.

Why Tune Up?

According to the engine experts at Briggs & Stratton Corporation, a tune-up:

- Helps a lawn mower start more easily and run smoother;
- Can extend mower life because of proper maintenance;
- Reduces engine emissions, which is easier on the environment;
- Delivers a small savings in the amount of gasoline used over the course of a season.

It's Easy to Tune Up

There are just four simple steps to complete a lawn mower tune-up: Change the oil, air filter, and spark plug, and add fuel preservative to the gas tank to keep the gasoline fresh longer. Gasoline goes stale in as little as 30 days and stale gas is one of the top reasons for poor starting.

Riding mowers may also require changing the oil and fuel filters, which should take only a few additional minutes.

Help Tuning Up

Briggs & Stratton has tune-up kits with everything needed for a lawn mower engine tune-up, including exactly the right amount of oil, a new spark plug, air filter, and fuel preservative. The kits are at deal-



Getting your lawn mower a tune up is essential to ensure a long life for your mower.

ers, home improvement stores and online at www.mowertuneup.com. A lawn mower tune-up is something just about anyone can do—and it does a lot for the environment.

After Tuning Up

Participating dealers also have an environmentally correct way to dispose of the used mower engine oil for free. It's important to dispose of oil properly, because a single quart of oil poured down a

storm drain can contaminate a million gallons of water, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. If poured on the ground, oil contaminates the environment and eventually enters the groundwater as a pollutant.

Find a participating dealer at www.recyclemoweroil.com; then drop off the used lawn mower oil in any closed container. The site also offers a useful "how to" video on oil changing.

Illuminate your home theater with easy lighting tweaks

The term "home theater" used to mean a small room designated for the enjoyment of watching movies. Then gigantic flat screens and HD technology came along, and the video game industry upped the ante with Xbox, PlayStation and Wii products that appealed to every age group. With so many different uses, the home theater has morphed into an auxiliary family room.

How can one room be made flexible enough to suit all of the activities performed there? Easy! According to the American Lighting Association (ALA) all you need to do is make a few tweaks in your lighting to satisfy the sports fan, the electronic game player and the movie buff.

"The affordability and popularity of bigscreen TVs, high-quality sound and home entertainment systems has created many opportunities for using specialized lighting to enhance the experience," says architect Joe Rey-Barreau, education consultant for the ALA and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky's School of Interior Design.

Whether your home theater is part of new construction or a remodeling project, think in layers. According to Rey-Barreau, a lighting layer is defined as a specific type of fixture that is distinct from others in that same

area. For example, a room that has recessed downlights, a decorative fixture in the center of the room, plus wall sconces on one wall would be defined as having three layers. Each of the three types of fixtures would be controlled by separate switches and dimmers.

"The objective of using layers is to create lighting options for different tasks and activities in that space," Rey-Barreau explains. The ideal lighting for the entire family to watch a full-length movie in the evening might be with the recessed

lighting turned off and the decorative lighting at the ceiling and the wall sconces dimmed to a low level. If the kids are watching cartoons or playing video games, Rey-Barreau advises turning on the recessed lighting to the maximum output, and turning off the decorative lighting.

To learn more about how to light your home theater or family movie room properly, visit your local ALA-member lighting showroom. Go to the ALA's web site at www.americanlightingasoc.com to find a store near you.

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Tips on patio gardening

If you're short on space, try your hand at patio or container gardening. The key to being successful involves using appropriate containers and growing media, and selecting adapted vegetables.

The most productive vegetables to grow are the salad crops, such as tomato, pepper, radish, spinach, kale and chard. Cole and root crops such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, carrots and radish are also well adapted. But be sure to select dwarf and bush types of vegetables. A list of possible choices is available in NebGuide 1896, Selected Vegetable Cultivars for Nebraska, <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1896.pdf>.

Many types of containers can be used for patio gardening; the most important consideration for healthy plants is to use the largest container possible. A large container translates into more soil area and more root development, which results in healthier plants. Containers smaller than a five-gallon bucket are not recommended because the restricted soil mass results in limited water holding capacity and smaller root development. Small containers will have to be watered frequently, often twice or more per day, during the hottest parts of the summer to prevent wilting. Make sure whatever container you use has drainage holes.

For a growing media, a good homemade mixture consists of 30 percent compost, 30 percent topsoil and 40 percent potting soil. This will result in a mixture that drains well, but also has a good water holding capacity. Plus, the compost will provide some nutrients for your plants. Avoid the use of ordinary garden soil; it compacts easily and contains fungal spores that could result in disease problems on your new plantings.

Vine crops such as snap beans, peas and cucumbers can be grown on a teepee created by pushing 5 to 6 long dowels or sticks into the sides of the containers. Tie them together at the top and allow your plants to climb to the top.

To get the most out of your container space, scatter the seed of radishes, carrots and lettuce across the top of the container, instead of trying to create rows. After harvesting the first planting, a second and third planting can be made in the same containers for additional produce throughout the summer.

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Learn more about caring for your lilacs

Pruning the Common Lilac

Common lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*, is one of the most popular blooming shrubs in the home landscape. And, as with other blooming shrubs, it is best pruned right after it is finished blooming—meaning the best time for pruning common lilac is now!

There are several reasons for regular lilac pruning. First, removing the faded flower heads keeps your shrub looking neat and tidy. Also, as young plants develop, they often require light pruning to develop an attractive shape. If left unpruned for many years, lilacs will develop in a way that shades out the lower stem sections resulting in large, overgrown specimens that are leggy and unattractive. These thick, heavy stems are very attractive to lilac borers, which will tunnel through the stems. Younger, thinner stems are more healthy and vigorous, and produce more flowers than old, overgrown lilac “trunks”. Finally, maintaining your lilacs through regular, light, yearly pruning is less stressful to the plants than an infrequent, severe pruning.

Pruning Young Lilacs

To begin pruning young lilacs, first remove the spent flower clusters, and then lightly prune long stems to create a pleasant shape. Always prune stems to an outward facing bud or shoot. No additional pruning is usually needed for the first 3 to 4 years.

When the shrub is approximately four years old, begin removing a few of the oldest, thickest stems each year cutting them down as close to the ground as possible. If additional height removal is needed after removing these large stems, then lightly prune the tallest branches down to the desired height.

Selective removal encourages the plant to send up new, young stems from the crown each year, and prevents the development of old,



Take these tips on how to care for your lilacs and watch as they bloom beautifully.

woody stems. This pruning technique will create a nicely shaped plant and prevents your plant from becoming overgrown.

Rejuvenating Old Lilacs

Old, neglected lilacs can be renewed or rejuvenated by pruning, and home gardeners can choose between two different pruning methods.

Method One requires a commitment to rejuvenate your old lilac over a three-year period. Since lilac wood needs to be 3 or more years of age before it blooms, this pruning method allows you to enjoy flowers every spring.

Begin the first year by removing one third of the largest, oldest stems at ground level in late winter. The following year, again in late winter, prune out one half of the remaining old stems. Finally, in late winter of the third year, remove all of the remaining old stems. Additional thinning of the new shoots should also be done as needed if the new growth is too dense.

Method Two is more severe

and will prevent blooming for several years. Step 1- Renovate your overgrown lilac by cutting the entire plant back to within 6-8 inches of the ground in late winter, preferably March or early April. This severe pruning will induce a large number of shoots to develop during the following growing season.

Step 2- In late winter of the following year, select among last year's new shoots and retain several strong, healthy shoots to form the shrub framework. Approximately 6 to 12 stems per plant is ideal. Remove all other shoots at ground level. Cut back the retained shoots just above a bud, removing a few inches of growth, to encourage branching.

When properly pruned, an old, overgrown lilac can be transformed into a vigorous attractive shrub within a few years. Once rejuvenated, begin an annual maintenance program of pruning for your shrub by removing a couple of the oldest branches every year.

Tips for successful container gardening

Container gardening lets you add character and color to your patio or balcony. If you're really hurting for space, then a window box can give you the splash of color you're looking for.

“Container gardening lets you bring interior design components to your outdoor space,” said Lance Walheim, co-author of “Landscaping for Dummies” and gardening expert for Bayer Advanced(tm). “It allows you to express your creativity.”

The National Gardening Association says that more than 26 million households have container gardens—that's the equivalent of the total number of households in California, New York and Texas.

• **What to grow:** You can try just about anything as long as the pot is big enough. Options: Japanese maples, azaleas, camellias, roses, dwarf apples, lemons, peaches, pears, blueberries, strawberries, impatiens, marigolds, geraniums, daffodils and tulips.

• **Match the plant to the container:** A Japanese maple looks great in a glazed ceramic pot. You also want to have one consistent style of pot, such as clay or wood. Snap a photo of your outdoor space with your smart phone and let your garden center guide you on options. Make sure the pots have drainage holes.

• **Buy packaged potting soil, not gardening soil:** Potting soil is well aerated and holds necessary moisture and nutrients for successful container gardening.

• **Plant flowers like you arrange a bouquet:** Taller plants or flowers go in the middle. Place smaller ones around that and cascading flowers around the outside. Mix plants with the same sun requirements.

• **Keep it moist:** Stick your finger deep into the soil. Water the plants if the soil is dry. You'll need to water

often to keep the root ball wet.

• **Establish a wellness plan:** Bayer Advanced Natria Insect, Disease & Mite Control kills aphids, mites, whiteflies, plant bugs, black spot, powdery mildew, and leaf spot on contact before they can damage or destroy your container garden (www.BayerAdvanced.com). Always read and follow label directions.

• **Feed your container garden:**

Frequent watering washes nutrients from the soil, so you'll need to fertilize more often to keep your plants blooming.

If you do all the right things, your plants will stay healthy and grow. That means you'll need to transplant them into larger pots. You can reuse the older pot when you buy new plants or flowers.

Emerald Ash Borer: \$10 billion threat

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is a metallic-green insect, a half-inch long and weighs next to nothing. But it's a serial killer of ash trees all over the United States.

According to the American Institute of Biological Sciences, EAB will cost cities about \$10 billion over 10 years for treatment and removal of ash trees. That's money many cities just don't have as they dig out from the recession.

“Imagine driving through a neighborhood in the spring or summer and it looks like the fall because there are very few leaves on the ash trees,” said Lance Walheim, coauthor of “Landscaping for Dummies” and lawn and garden expert for Bayer Advanced(tm). “Thinning tree canopies are the calling card for this insect that attacks trees from the inside out.”

According to www.Emeraldashborer.info, EAB has killed tens of millions of ash trees in many areas where it's been discovered, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Quebec, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. It's been in the U.S. since 2002.

Female borers lay eggs in late May through June. The larvae feed under the bark from late July

through October, choking off the water and nutrient supply to the tree. Up to half of the tree canopy can die in a year. Most of the canopy will be dead after two years.

You Don't Have To Cut Down Your Ash Trees

In many cities, workers break out chain saws to cut down ash trees in parks and along streets if EAB is a threat. Local TV news and newspapers cover the mass elimination of trees. So, homeowners think the only solution they have is to cut down the beautiful ash trees in their yards.

According to www.Emeraldashborer.info, there are several homeowner options for controlling EAB. They include products that are injected into the soil or tree trunk or applied around the roots with water.

Bayer Advanced Tree & Shrub Protect & Feed Concentrate (www.BayerAdvanced.com) protects trees from EAB and other destructive pests. Just measure the required amount of product, mix it with water, and apply it around the roots of the tree. It protects for up to 12 months. Always read and follow label directions.

You need to apply preventive products early since it can take up to three months to fully protect large trees.



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Wildflower Week celebrated statewide May 28-June 5;

Weekend Wildflower Walk to be held June 12 at Spring Creek Prairie, in Denton

"Some may wonder why I chose wildflowers when there are hunger and unemployment and the big bomb in the world. Well, I, for one, think we will survive, and I hope that along the way we can keep alive our experience with the flowering earth. For the bounty of nature is also one of the deep needs of man."

- Lady Bird Johnson



Butterfly Milkweed

Inspired by a similar national event, Nebraska Wildflower Week is a celebration of wildflowers and native plants in the wild and in the landscape through an array of events and activities across Nebraska. In 2011, it will be observed the first week in June (May 28-June 5), when many of Nebraska's prairies and gardens are at their prime.

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum Inc. serves as coordinator for Wildflower Week activities, bringing together organizations and individuals across the state that recognize the value of wildflowers — not only for their beauty but also for what they imply and symbolize.

"Where wildflowers are thriving, it is a sign that the environment is healthy," said Bob Henrickson, whose nursery production work with the arboretum concentrates on native and regionally appropriate plants.

Opportunities for wildflower enthusiasts across the state in-

clude guided tours; presentations on using wildflowers in home landscapes; music on the prairie; wildflower activities for children, etc.

Events, photos and more information can be found at arboretum.unl.edu/wildflower.

Wildflower Events

May 28-June 5 near Harrison. "Wildflower Walks on the Prairie" at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument at 10:30 and 1:30, leaving from visitor center as staffing permits. Plant signs on trail and herbarium in visitor center for self-guided tours. www.nps.gov/agfo, Lil Mansfield, (308) 436-9760 or (308) 668-2211, lil_mansfield@nps.gov



Bittersweet

May 28 near Red Cloud. "Music on the Cather Prairie" featuring Mike Adams and Pilgrim Classic Country at 2 p.m. Guests will also have the opportunity to explore Cather Prairie, located five miles south of Red Cloud, to learn about rare plants, the interaction between fire and grazing and the Willa Cather Foundation's restoration efforts. This 608-acre ecological treasure is the largest never-plowed, native prairie in six counties. Fee: \$10. www.WillaCather.org, info@willacather.org, (402) 746-2641

May 28 near Kimball. "Kimball Wildflower Week" to enjoy the wonder of Nebraska's shortgrass prairie ecosystem. Morning yoga, followed by bird



Jimson-weed pods

hike, at 7 a.m. Wildflower hike at 10. Bring sack lunch and beverage or visit one of Kimball's restaurants to stay for afternoon hike at 2 p.m. Campfire hot dogs and s'mores at 6 p.m. (bring a drink and something to share). Evening wildflower/sunset hike at 7:30 p.m.; free but suggested donation of \$5/adult to go to Kimball Community Arboretum. Site use donated by EJE Ranch. Inclement weather make-up date is June 4 with the same events. Directions: From Kimball stoplight (Hwy 71/30) drive three miles south, then three miles west on CR 28. Turn right on CR 35 and drive 1.2 miles north (crossing over I-80) and follow signs. Shaun Evertson, (308) 2 4 1 - 0 8 7 8 , shaunevertson@charter.net



Allegheny monkey-flower

May 29 near Burwell. "Blowout Penstemon Tour," guided tour through area with endangered blowout penstemon from 1:30-4. Meet at Calamus Outfitters, 16 miles northwest of Burwell on Highway 96, for a jeep tour through the Sandhills. Cost: \$25/person. Call to reserve your spot. (308) 346-4697 or hbswitzer@nctc.net

May 30-June 5, "Wildflower

Plant Sale" at Gardenland (retail division of Bluebird Nursery, Inc. at Sixth and Linden in Clarkson). Wide selection of Nebraska native wildflowers and grasses and other hardy U.S. natives. Monday-Friday 8-5, Sat. 8-4, Sun. 1-5 through Father's Day. (402) 892-3442, gardenland@bluebirdnursery.com



Cobaea Penstemon

June 4 in Bellevue. "National Trails Day" at Fontenelle Forest Nature Center from 10-4, featuring guided wildflower walks, outdoor photography tips, hiking gear demos and interactive stations. www.fontenelleforest.org, (402) 731-3140.



Spiderwort

June 4 in Omaha. "Wildflower Walks" at Lauritzen Gardens led by Director of Conservation Jim Locklear. Walking tour of the Woodland Trail from 10-11:30 a.m. through the garden's 10-acre native stand of oak-hickory forest. Walking tour from 2-3:30 p.m. to observe prairie natives (wildflowers and grasses) in gardens and landscape of Lauritzen Gardens. Fee: \$7 per adult; free to members of Lauritzen Gardens. No advance registration required. www.lauritzengardens.org, (402) 346-4002

June 4 near Gering. "Wildflowers of the Wildcat Hills" guided wildflower walk at 9 a.m., weather permitting, at Wildcat Hills Nature Center 10 miles south of Gering via Nebraska Highway 71. Meet at the Nature Center. Plant signage on trails. (308) 436-3777, ngpc.wildcat.hills@nebraska.gov

June 4 near Clearwater. "Wildflower Walk" through an eastern sandhills native prairie from 11-12 with the Nebraska Native Plant Society. The prairie is 2.8 miles south of Clearwater on Highway 275, east side of River Road (516th Ave). The site has a variety of habitats from wetland swales to small dunes. akrohn@shoestringseed.com

June 4 near Marquette. "Griffith Prairie 5K/10K Fun Run/Walk" offers a great time to explore this amazing post-burn, fresh, green and flowering Platte River bluffs prairie with walking or running friends. Check-in at



Big bluestem



Purple prairie clover

8:30 a.m. Entry form and more at www.prairieplains.org/assets/files/Final%20race%20form%20for%20web.pdf.

June 6 in Omaha. "Mommy and Me: Wildflowers" preschool program for children ages 3 to 5 and an accompanying adult from 10-11:30 a.m. Read about wildflowers, go on a wildflower hike and create your own wildflower book to take home. Fee: \$8/member, \$14 non-member. Advance registration required. www.lauritzengardens.org, (402) 346-4002



Purple poppy mallow

June 12 near Denton. "Weekend Wildflower Walk" at Spring Creek Prairie from 3-4 p.m. June is a great month for viewing native prairie wildflowers on a walk led by botanist Kay Kottas. Wonderful opportunity to see native plants up close and to learn to use them in home landscaping projects. Fee is \$6 for an adult, \$4 for children ages 8-12 accompanied by an adult. Register by June 11. springcreekprairie.audubon.org,



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The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum is both a non-profit horticultural organization and a program of the Nebraska Forest Service, part of the University of Nebraska's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. NSA achieves its mission of "sustainable landscapes for healthy homes and communities" through initiatives in education, community landscapes and the environment.



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Tips on how to prune your hydrangeas

You prize your hydrangeas for their beautiful flowers. You also want to make sure you prune them at the right time to encourage the stunning blooms every season. But do you wonder whether or when to prune them?

"The first step is to determine the variety of your hydrangea," said Tim Wood, new product manager at Proven Winners ColorChoice. "This is fairly easy to do. If your plant produces big pink or blue flowers, it is a *Hydrangea macrophylla*. If its flowers are round and white--or pink in the case of the new *Invincibelle Spirit*--the plant is a *Hydrangea arborescens*. Finally, if the plant has large, conical flowers, which are often white but may also be green or pink, you own a *Hydrangea paniculata*." **Bigleaf Hydrangeas**

If you have *Hydrangea macrophylla*, also known as Bigleaf Hydrangea, Wood says you can relax. This plant requires little more than a trimming and only immediately after flowering. You should never prune it in winter or spring, because it sets flower buds the year before, and if you shear it back, then you will cut off all of summer's flowers.

Newer reblooming varieties such as the Let's Dance series from Proven Winners ColorChoice will also bloom on the current season's growth, but you still want to leave the plant intact through spring so you can enjoy early summer flowers.



Pruning your hydrangeas is the key to making them look like prize flowers.

Smooth Hydrangeas

Hydrangea arborescens, also known as Smooth Hydrangea, are beloved for their adaptable nature and reliable blooms. You should prune it back in late winter or early spring. These hydrangeas bloom on "new wood"--the current season's growth. Pruning them back at that time encourages new growth, which produces flowers. Spring pruning will also result in a fuller, stronger plant that's less likely to flop under the weight of its abundant summer flowers. Cutting the stems back to one or two feet will leave a good framework to support the blooms.

Today, there are two new "Annabelle" *Hydrangea arborescens* with stronger stems, so they won't flop after being established. *Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea* is the very first pink-flowered form of "Annabelle." *Invincibelle Spirit* continues to produce new pink flowers right up until frost, providing a beautiful display across several seasons in your garden, from midsummer to fall. *Incrediball Hydrangea* has the biggest flowers and the strongest stems of any of the "Annabelle" hydrangeas. *Incrediball* produces incredibly large white blooms as big as a basketball.

Hardy Hydrangeas

Hydrangea paniculata, sometimes called Hardy Hydrangea, also blooms on new wood. You should prune it back in late winter or early spring. You can cut it back to the ground or, if you want slightly taller plants, cut it back to one to three feet. This is a great job for one of those early spring days when everything is still dormant but it's so beautiful and warm you need to be in the garden.

A new variety of *Hydrangea paniculata* won't require as much pruning to keep it smaller. The new Little Lime Hydrangea boasts the same colors and benefits of the famous "Limelight" Hydrangea though only reaching three to five feet fully grown. At one-third the size of other hardy hydrangeas, it fits well into practically any landscape. Little Lime produces bright cone-shaped lime-green flowers, later turning into pink, from midsummer to frost.

Fortunately, even if you make a mistake and prune at the wrong time of year, these plants will forgive you. You may not have flowers for a season but, with proper timing, you'll see them the following year. Just remember to start by correctly identifying which kind of hydrangea you have. With just a little work, you'll get beautiful flowers from your hydrangeas year after year. For more information on the newest hydrangeas, visit www.provenwinners.com.

Like to garden but short on time? Here's some gardening time savers

Taking the DIY approach to lawn and garden care has many advantages, such as saving money and offering some fresh air and exercise, but sometimes it can turn into a timely endeavor. By the time you round up tools and supplies, figure out a plan of action and get working, you could easily lose half of your day to lawn care.

By approaching lawn and garden care smartly however, you can still have time for many other activities with family and friends. Here are five best practices from the experts at Ames True Temper that are sure to be time savers for you this year:

• **Get organized.** Nothing's more frustrating than not having a shovel or watering can on hand when you need it most. Reorganize your shed or garage on a regular basis. It will help you keep track of what you

have and what you need. A quick trip to your local garden center will be more productive when armed with a shopping list.

• **Make a plan.** Draw a map or layout of what you'd like each of your garden beds to look like. Label the plants that you'd like to use in particular areas; this way you've got clear direction.

• **Use multipurpose, time-saving garden tools.** There are many steps when it comes to outdoor projects, and the more motions you can cut out, the better. The Ames Planter's Pal is a multipurpose hand-held tool that offers seven functions in one. Whether weeding, cutting twine, opening a bag of mulch or digging a hole, the Planter's Pal has all of your needs covered. Another time saver is the Ames Water Genie, a lightweight innovative watering

can that connects to your spigot. A retractable hose housed inside the watering can design allows you to walk around your yard and patio to water plants with precision, without having to walk back and forth for a water refill or to turn the spigot on and off.

• **Take preventive steps.** Edge your gardens, and lay landscape fabric between the mulch and ground to prevent weeds from cropping up among your plants. This will help

save time otherwise spent weeding.

• **Get the family involved.** The more helping hands you have, the easier it will be to get the job done. Ames True Temper makes a line of real Kids Garden tools so it's easy for everyone to help out.

Once you're equipped with the right tools and know-how, you'll be able to create and maintain a beautiful lawn and garden in no time. For more great tips, visit www.ames.com.

Gardening on a budget

Millions of us are buying seed packets or plants and heading to the backyard to plant our own vegetables. The reason? According to the National Gardening Association, it's all about creating better-tasting produce and saving money.

"Tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, beans, and carrots are some of the most popular vegetables to grow in your backyard," said Lance Walheim, co-author of the "Sunset Vegetable Gardening" book and gardening expert for Bayer Advanced(tm). "Home-grown veggies taste great, and you'll save hundreds of dollars a year."

Walheim has a few tips for successful vegetable gardening:

• **Choose the easiest veggies to grow.** Tomatoes, radishes, zucchini, carrots, peas, peppers, and lettuce will help make your first attempt at vegetable gardening successful.

• **Choose the sunniest spot.** Vegetables need up to eight hours of direct sunlight in rich, well-drained soil. Start with a 6' x 10' plot to keep the size manageable. Use string to mark off rows running east to west for the best sun exposure.

• **Plant at the right time.** Your local county extension service can help guide you on what to plant and when.

• **Control destructive pests.** Aphids, mites, leafhoppers, and mealybugs are the kinds of pests that eat veggies. Bayer Advanced(tm) Natria Multi-Insect Control kills harmful insects on contact, and it's made with canola oil. It's for organic gardening (www.BayerAdvanced.com). Always read and follow label directions.

• **Organic mulch helps keep the weeds out.** It also decomposes, feeds the plants, and keeps the soil loose and cool.

• **Feed your veggies.** Apply nitrogen fertilizer regularly, especially when they're young.

You might consider sharing your great-tasting veggies with your neighbors. You can pool your resources, create your own neighborhood food co-op, and save even more money.

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Heirloom tomatoes to try in your garden this year

What do 'Mortgage Lifter', 'Brandywine', 'Caspian Pink' all have in common? They are all heirloom tomato varieties that are worth a try in your garden. 'Mortgage Lifter' is a very large beefsteak-type tomato that was developed in the 1930's. M.C. Byles of Logan, West Virginia chose four tomato plants that produced the largest tomatoes, planted them in a group and pollinated the flowers of one plant with pollen from the other three. He repeated this procedure for six seasons and finally developed a plant that produced huge, flavorful tomatoes. He sold 1,000 plants each over the next six summers, at one dollar each, and paid off his mortgage. 'Mortgage Lifter' tomatoes average 2 1/2 pounds each, but can reach up to 4 pounds each. The fruits have a mild, sweet flavor. The tomatoes grow on large, vigorous vines, producing tomatoes in 80 days from seeding to harvest. Also known as 'Radiator Charlie's Mortgage Lifter', 'Brandywine' is an Amish heirloom tomato, widely believed to be the world's best-flavored tomato and dating back to 1885. 'Brandywine' tomatoes weigh up to 1 1/2 pounds each with firm, clear skin and a light rosy-pink color. The plants have an indeterminate (vining) growth habit with foliage

resembling potato leaves and will produce tomatoes in 90-100 days from seeding to harvest. Variations of 'Brandywine' include 'Yellow Brandywine' with golden-yellow fruits, 'Red Brandywine' with scarlet-red fruits and 'Black Brandywine' with brownish-red fruits.

Challenging 'Brandywine' for the "Best Flavor" title is the heirloom tomato cultivar 'Caspian Pink'. This tomato originates from Russia, in an area between the Caspian and Black Seas. In California trails, 'Caspian Pink' has beaten 'Brandywine' in flavor trials for several years! It has an indeterminate (vining) growth habit and produces tomatoes in 80 days from seeding to harvest. Other heirloom tomatoes to consider include:

- 'Cherokee Purple'- medium sized pink-purple fruits that don't crack.
- 'Green Sausage'- a banana-shaped paste tomato that is lime green and yellow-striped when ripe. The fruits are four inches long and have a tangy, sweet flavor.
- 'Nebraska Wedding'- an old Great Plains variety. Large, globe-shaped fruits with deep orange flesh. Produces in 105 days from



Heirloom tomatoes could be something fun for you to try in your home garden this year.

seed to harvest with a determinate (bush) growth habit.

- 'Pink Accordion'- large pink fruits pleated like an accordion. It has sweet, mild flavor and is semi-hollow so is great for stuffing.
- 'Ponderosa Red', 'Ponderosa Pink', 'Ponderosa Yellow'- large fruits, up to one pound each with mild flavor, low acidity and almost seedless.
- 'Roman Candle'- a beautiful, neon

yellow banana-shaped tomato with intense sweetness and flavor.

Keep in mind that many heirloom tomatoes have a softer texture than modern cultivars. But with so much variation in size, shape, color and flavor within heirloom tomato varieties, it's a fun experiment to try a new type each summer!

Learn how to grow a tomato for your garden

By Charlie Nardozi

Tomatoes are far and away the most popular vegetable grown by home gardeners. Who can resist the vast array of sizes, shapes, colors, and flavors of hybrid and heirloom tomato varieties? Plus, there's nothing like walking through your garden and munching on your own home grown fruits in the middle of summer.

Here's a step-by-step guide to growing tomatoes.

1. Select the Variety – There are hundreds of hybrid and heirloom tomato varieties to choose from. In general, hybrid varieties are more uniform, vigorous, and disease resistant. They grow well almost anywhere in the country. Heirloom varieties

offer more variety of fruit shapes, color, and flavor, but sometimes are only regionally adapted. It's best to grow some of each, trying new varieties each year to see which grow best in your climate. For containers, choose dwarf varieties or determinate varieties. Indeterminate varieties will grow until the weather, insects, diseases, or you stop them. They require the most support but will produce the most fruit. For kids, grow cherry tomatoes for a sweet and plentiful treat.

2. Start Seeds Early Indoors – Unless you're buying transplants at the local garden center, you'll need to start your tomato seeds indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the last frost date in your area.

3. Raise and Warm the Soil – On all but sandy soils, create 8- to 10-inch tall raised beds to grow your tomatoes. Two weeks before transplanting outdoors, cover the beds with red plastic mulch. The color red increases tomato yields by up to 20 percent. Plus it warms the soil, conserves soil moisture, and prevents weeds from growing. In extreme southern areas, use straw mulch or white plastic instead of red plastic to keep the soil from overheating. If using drop irrigation or soaker hoses to water your plants, lay these hoses under the plastic mulch before laying it down.

4. Plant – Cut holes in the plastic mulch and plant tomatoes 2- to 3-

feet apart in the raised beds. If your seedlings are tall and leggy, bury the stem to the first set of true leaves. Tomatoes have the ability to root along the stem; deeply set plants will be more productive. In containers, mix 3 parts potting soil with 1 part compost and plant one tomato per 5-gallon sized container.

5. Keep 'em Up – Indeterminate tomatoes can grow to be huge plants. Plants trellised off the ground are more productive and have less disease and insect problems on the fruits than plants left to lie on the ground. Use homemade or commercial tomato cages, ladders, or stakes to train them off the ground. Dwarf varieties don't need support, but determinate varieties do benefit from being trellised.

6. Fertilize, Water and Weed – Keep plants well watered, especially when fruit is forming. If the soil moisture fluctuates too much, your fruits may develop blossom end rot (the rotting of the stem end of the fruit). If you haven't used plastic mulch, consider mulching with straw to keep the soil evenly moist. Mulch also prevents weeds from growing. Fertilize monthly with a handful of an organic 5-5-5 fertilizer sprinkled around the base of the plants to keep the plants productive.

7. Control Pests – Watch out for a variety of pests on your tomato plants. Diseases such as wilt, virus, and blight can also cause problems. Select disease resistant varieties. Resistant varieties have the letters of the disease they are resistant to after their name, such as V and F for resistance to verticillium and fusarium wilt.

8. Harvest – The more you pick, the more fruits will be produced. Allow the fruits to ripen on the vine to their mature color for the best flavor. Collect mature fruits to can or freeze, preserving the flavor of the harvest into the winter. If you still have many green fruits on your plant at the end of summer, prune off the top the plant and remove newly forming flowers and small fruits. This will send more of the plant's energy into maturing the remaining fruits. Harvest before a frost.

For more tips and garden information visit www.garden.org.

Bold is back, showcasing personal style

Color is making a major comeback in home decor. Homeowners are moving away from grays and beiges and gravitating toward bold, bright, and bodacious shades for their redecorating projects.

Color experts say homeowners are placing renewed emphasis on personal expressions when choosing the look to define their living space.

Savvy Homeowners Leading the Way

Today's homeowners are increasingly savvy when it comes to identifying trends in home redecorating. Immediately picking up on the aesthetics around them--from the coffee shop to the airport and everywhere in between--individuals are willing to experiment with multiple colors to define their personal flair.

According to color expert Dee Schlotter, many people now use their homes as labs for new looks and technologies. Since paint color is one of the easiest things to change, when something new strikes their fancy, they're willing to give it a shot. "We keep what works and start over when it doesn't. But always, the search is on for what's real and honest," added Schlotter.

A perfectly tailored color mix lets homeowners express their emotions and feelings through the space around them. Schlotter explained, "There's no better way to express yourself than with the transformative power of color in your home."

Tips to Remember When Working with Bold Color

Homeowners should understand the subtle nuances of painting with bold colors and consider the following tips when getting started:

- **Ultra matte paint** is a great finish to show off color. The more shine, the more imperfections you can see.
- **Don't hold a paint chip in front of a white wall**, since bold colors will appear darker or more intense on the wall than they do on a small chip.
- **Test first.** Use a large test sheet and a "time test"--view your color in all light: morning, noon and night. Live with it for a few days to make sure you love it.
- **If you are going to go bold**, then really go for it. There's no such thing as a pale red.

Learn More

To find your color personality, try the online color tools at PPG Pittsburgh Paint's The Voice of Color website, www.voiceofcolor.com.

Combat rising energy costs with better windows

You may be able to cut your energy costs with the help of high-performance windows.

The average cost of energy used to heat and cool homes rose more than 33 percent in the last decade, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Fortunately, homeowners can find relief today by upgrading their windows. ENERGY STAR rated windows are a good starting point. They can currently save homeowners an average of \$320 annually when replacing single-pane windows.

High-performance windows offer even greater energy savings potential--up to 40 percent more than minimum ENERGY STAR windows. To maximize savings, look for high-performance models labeled as Envirosealed Windows and Doors with Duralite. These windows feature nonmetal spacers that provide the best insulation and greatest effect on energy bills.

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Low-cost, big-impact home improvement projects

If you're looking for an inexpensive way to brighten up your home's decor, consider painting high-profile features such as doors or cabinets. Fixing up these smaller spaces can really make a big impact.

Here are a few tips from the experts at Behr on how to proceed:

How to Paint an Exterior Door: The Door Frame

Step 1. Starting at the top door frame, begin painting the inside of the frame. Work outward from the edge of the door.

Step 2. Continue until the frame is complete. Wipe away the excess paint.

The Door Trim

Step 1. Starting at the top corner of the door trim, paint along the side edge of the trim where it meets the wall. Continue until all side edges of the trim are complete.

Step 2. Return to the top of the door trim and paint the face of the trim.

Step 3. Continue until the door trim is complete.

The Door

Step 1. Pour thoroughly mixed paint into a bucket and dip a quality 2- to 1/2-inch wide nylon/polyester brush into the paint. When working outside, work out of direct sunlight and in temperatures between 50 and 90 degrees F with moderate humidity.

Step 2. With your brush, paint the inside and outside edges of the door.

Step 3. Starting with the top panel of the door, paint into the recessed area of the panel. Begin at a corner of the recess and continue around its perimeter. Work from top of the door to the bottom.

Step 4. Paint the remainder of the panel until the entire panel is complete. Wipe away any excess paint. To eliminate unwanted brushstrokes, smooth out the panel by taking a lighter stroke over the newly painted area.

Step 5. When the panels are complete, paint the stiles of the door in the following order: middle, top, center, bottom, left, right.

How to Paint a Cabinet: The Stiles and Openings

Step 1. Pour thoroughly mixed paint into a bucket and dip a quality 2 to 2 1/2-inch wide nylon/polyester brush into the paint. When using more than one gallon of paint, combine the colors for better color uniformity. This intermixing is called boxing.

Step 2. With your brush, paint the inside edges of the cabinet door openings.

Step 3. Paint the middle stile from top to bottom, following the wood grain. Then paint remaining stiles in the following order: top, bottom, left, right.

The Side Panels

Step 1. Using your brush, paint (cut in) around the perimeter of the cabinet where it meets the ceiling, walls, countertops and floor.

Step 2. Pour paint into a paint tray. Work the roller into the tray until it is fully loaded with paint. For best results, use a 1/4-inch roller cover.

The Paneled Doors

Step 1. Paint the edges around the perimeter of the door.

Step 2. With the door open, paint the recess of the door panel. Start at a corner of the recess and continue around its perimeter.

Step 3. After painting the entire panel, wipe away the excess paint that has overlapped onto the door frame.

Step 4. Paint the door frame in the following order: top, bottom, left, right.

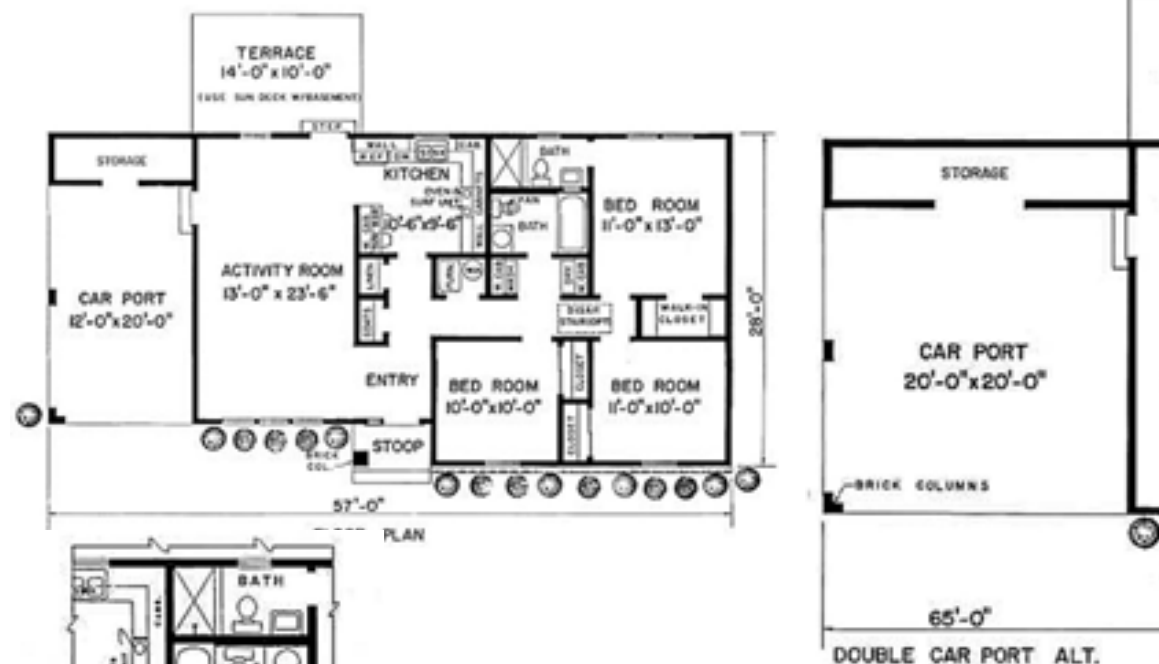
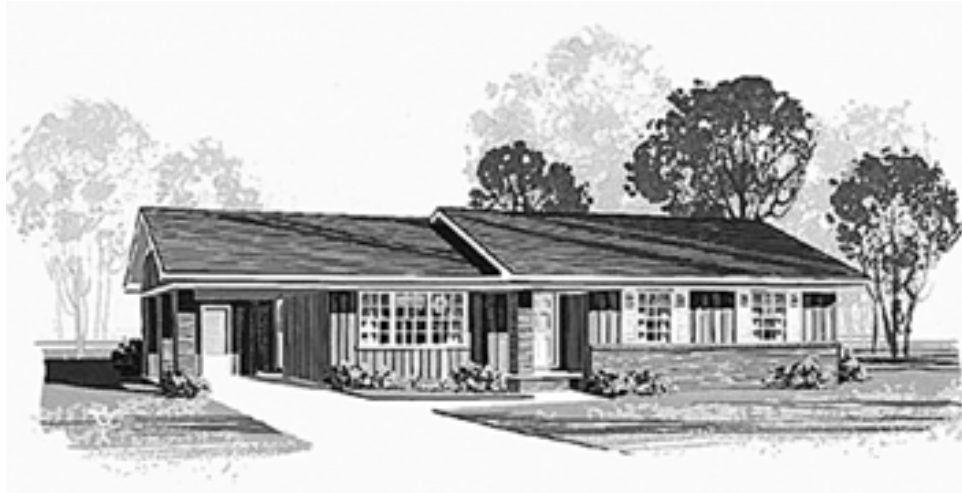
Step 5. Paint the backside of the door. Leave the doors open until the paint is completely dry.

Need inspiration? Visit Behr.com, where you can browse image libraries for inspiration and find design, style and color trend advice from experts. You can use the ColorSmart by Behr feature to coordinate color online and apply colors virtually to your walls using the Paint Your Place feature. Using the Virtual Color Center, you can view all Behr paint colors from the comfort of your own home.

You can also order 8-oz. paint samples on the site, making it easier to test colors in your home without having to buy quart- and gallon-size containers. What's more, you can find tips on a variety of projects such as painting ceilings, floors, shutters, siding and stucco trim.

For more information, visit www.behr.com.

Home Plans



Tips on how to save on insurance

Cutting costs in today's economy should not include eliminating insurance coverage. There are a number of ways to control your insurance premiums without assuming undue risk or increasing your financial exposure.

1. Consolidate your policies with one insurance company. Many companies offer discounts for multiple policies. Start by purchasing homeowners and car insurance with the same company. When a new need arises, contact the broker you use for those policies first. Avoid duplicating coverage. For example, you may not need towing coverage if you belong to an automobile club.

2. Maintain a good driving record. Driving safely will help you maintain a preferred rate. Share all safety features of your automobile with your broker for maximum credit and remember that premiums are set by the value of the vehicle. The more expensive your car, the more expensive your premium will be.

3. Improve your home and make it disaster resistant. Homes with maintained foundations, water heaters and roofs can qualify the owners for reductions in their premiums.

Working with a broker who has access to products from multiple carriers, a strong pulse on the local market and knowledge of coverage options is critical to ensuring you get the best service and price possible.

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Soil testing could be useful for your landscape

If you're concerned about the soil quality in your landscape, whether it's your turfgrass, ornamentals or vegetable garden, a soil test can give you basic information to help you start improving it. Soil testing isn't very expensive or difficult to do and can be done anytime the soil is not frozen.

Start by locating a soil testing laboratory near you. Several labs are available in Nebraska including: AgSource in Lincoln, <http://agsource.crinet.com>, (402) 476-0300; and Midwest Laboratories in Omaha, <http://www.midwestlabs.com/>, (402) 334-7770. On their websites, soil testing can be found under "Agronomy & Feed" at AgSource and under "Agriculture" at Midwest Labs. Contact the lab or visit their website to request a soil sample test kit and submittal form. Testing costs approximately \$15.00 per sample.

Decide how many soil samples are necessary for your landscape. One sample is usually sufficient for most landscapes unless there are obvious soil differences, then each unique area should be

sampled separately. It can also be beneficial to sample areas separately based on their usage, so that samples are submitted individually for turf, ornamentals and vegetable gardens.

Create your soil sample by taking 10-15 soil cores from random locations within the sampling area. If you don't have a soil probe, you can use a shovel to collect samples at a 5-6 inch depth. Remove any vegetation or thatch from the soil cores and combine them all into one container. This aggregate collection of soil is your sample. Place 1 to 2 cups of well-mixed soil in a plastic bag or the sample container provided by the lab.

Choose a test that will give results for residual nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, organic matter, cation exchange capacity (CEC) and soil pH. Your soil test results will usually arrive in about two weeks, along with recommendations for soil amendments in your landscape based on the plant types you indicated on the submittal form. If you have questions about reading the soil test results or potential soil amendments for

your garden, call your UNL Extension office.

Tips for Soil Amending
Soil amending can be done in spring, but don't work the soil when it is wet to avoid soil compaction and the creation of hard clods. Fall is an excellent time of year for soil amending, because it allows time for the soil structure or chemistry to change before a new growing season begins. Organic matter breaks down over time, so raising and maintaining your soil's organic matter content will require repeated amendment. Keep in mind that Nebraska's clay soils have a high buffering capacity or the ability to revert to the original pH level after amendment with sulfur. Maintaining a lower soil pH will require repeated amendment.

Another great resource is the publication "Fertilizers for Vegetables in Home Gardens", which contains detailed information on adjusting soil pH, amending with organic matter, and adding fertilizer. It's available online at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g945.pdf>, or from your UNL Extension office.



A soil test can tell you the quality of your soil. You can do just a few or several soil tests on your landscape.

Asphalt scam costs local senior \$4,500

The season for home improvement projects is underway and BBB is warning consumers to be on the lookout for less than reputable or unqualified contractors that breeze into town promising a variety of services at cut-rate prices. They may show up at your door, advertise in local papers or deliver fliers to your home.

A senior citizen from the metro Omaha reported to BBB that a man, referring to himself as Bill King, from Asphalt Paving came to his farmhouse and told him that he had a load of asphalt that could be used to repave his driveway. When the owner asked how much it would cost, Mr. King replied, "\$600." The consumer said they mutually agreed on \$500 and discussed the area to be covered. Mr. King left and a crew showed up and dumped a small amount of blacktop, approximately enough to cover a 10' x 10' area.

When the homeowner disputed the part that had been covered, he was told, "That is all you get for \$500." The homeowner explained what Mr. King had promised, and Donald Joles, a man from the crew, said that they still had a big load of asphalt and could finish the driveway for \$6,000. When the homeowner objected, the price was dropped to \$4,000. The asphalt was poured, but the job had not been completed when Joles returned and asked for the payment. The homeowner wrote a check to Joles who immediately cashed it at a local bank. Although the consumer was told that they would be back the next day to finish his driveway, the company has not returned.

A BBB investigation found that the phone number 800-860-4769 on the consumer's contract belongs to T and T Asphalt Paving and Seal Coating located at 713 Fur Ave in Wisconsin Dells, WI. Wisconsin's BBB report on this company states that it has an F Rating.

"It's not your lucky day when

a contractor shows up at your home offering a too-good-to-be true deal on a project because he has materials left over from a recent job. This is a common ploy of fly-by-night contractors who are usually based out-of state and use pick-up trucks as their place of business," stated BBB President Jim Hegarty.

"There are many reputable, hard-working, home improvement contractors in our area. We encourage consumers to do their homework before contracting with any business. It's important to always get three written estimates and never be pressured to make an on the spot decision. Reputable contractors always respect a consumers instance on shopping around," Hegarty explained.

BBB has the following tips for homeowners before hiring a home improvement contractor:

* Be suspicious if a salesperson greets you by name, approaches you while you are outside your home, or demands cash as payment for their product or service

* Don't ever let any one you don't know into your home

* Verify that the contractor has the appropriate licenses and they are bonded and insured

* Make certain terms and conditions of the contract are in writing before the work begins

* Always ask to see the person's credentials and call the company they are representing to verify its legitimacy. You do not have to make any purchase immediately. You can ask the person to return after you have had time to check it out, if you wish to purchase their product or service

* Get the company's BBB Reliability Report at 402-391-7612, 800-649-6814, or at bbb.org.

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A complete kitchen makeover for under \$500

The kitchen has always been the heart of the home—a place where the family socializes and entertains friends. It's no wonder a kitchen remodel occupies first place on many homeowners' wish list, especially at a time when families are spending less time dining out and more time at home. Unfortunately, it's also one of the most expensive and time-consuming home improvement projects a family will undertake, ranging from \$17,000 to \$20,000 for a basic kitchen remodel.

"Since the kitchen occupies a highly visible space in the home, it's understandable that families want it to reflect their style and personality. But unfortunately, a traditional kitchen remodel can mean a bigger investment of time and money than many families can handle," says Ann Gearty, Rust-Oleum senior brand

manager. "Fortunately, now there's an affordable alternative. For less than \$500, homeowners can update their old, outdated cabinets and countertops and make them look brand new thanks to breakthrough coating technologies." Here's how:

Start with the cabinets: They are the focal point of any kitchen and will set the tone for the look and feel of the entire room. Instead of replacing or refacing, it's easy to transform worn, outdated cabinets to the look of beautiful handcrafted cabinets with Rust-Oleum Cabinet Transformations. The refinishing system provides you with all the tools you need to give your cabinets a fresh, new look for under \$150—without the stripping, sanding, or priming associated with cabinet painting. It works on all types of cabinets—wood, melamine, laminate,

and more. Plus, it is available in 70 beautiful finishes and is guaranteed to last for years to come.

Rethink your current countertop: You don't have to replace your countertop to get a sleek new look. With new Rust-Oleum Countertop Transformations, you can transform your worn or damaged laminate countertops at a fraction of the cost of replacement. Available in a convenient kit for \$250, the innovative coating system comes with all the tools needed to transform your outdated countertops to mirror the look of natural stone-like granite. The coating was put through extensive testing to ensure it could stand up against daily wear and tear. It's available in five different colors, and is so easy to use, the entire project can be completed in less than a



A new countertop can be one of the simple ways you can revamp your kitchen.

weekend.

Don't forget the details: It's easy to make your old cabinet knobs and pulls look brand new with a few coats of spray paint. Try a spray paint such as Universal Oil-Rubbed Bronze to mimic one of today's hot-

test metal finishes.

For more information on alternatives to the traditional kitchen remodel, visit www.rustoleumtransformations.com

How to make your paint job look better and last longer

Now that the weather's turned cooler and you're spending more time indoors, there's no better time to paint. It's one of the easiest and least expensive ways to change the look of your home. It's also a project that even the most inexperienced do-it-yourselfer can do with confidence—and with thousands of colors from which to choose—it's the perfect way to express your unique style and personality at a fraction of the cost of other home improvement projects. Yet even experienced do-it-yourselfers sometimes neglect the first and most important step in achieving the perfect paint job.

Professional painters know that the key to a beautiful paint job isn't buying the most expensive paint. They know that one coat of primer and one coat of paint will give them a better, longer-lasting paint job than two coats of paint. That's why they prime first, then paint.

Here are just some of the benefits of priming before you paint:

• **Priming saves you time and money.** Primers are formulated to

seal the surface, and when the surface is sealed, you use less paint. No more multiple coats of paint to get an even, consistent finish if you tint with a quality primer like Zinsser Bulls Eye 1-2-3(r).

One coat of primer and one coat of paint is usually all you need for a beautiful paint job. Just ask the paint desk to tint your primer toward the color of your paint. It's that simple. And since a gallon of primer is less expensive than a gallon of paint, you'll save money, too.

• **Priming makes paint colors richer.** Primers hide previous colors—even the darkest blues and deepest reds—and prevent them from showing through and changing the color of your paint. Your paint colors will be more vibrant and beautiful if you prime first.

• **Primers block stains.** Most stains—water stains, crayon and marker, lipstick, or nicotine—will bleed right through paint. This is where primers earn their reputation:

They seal in stains and prevent them from ruining your paint job. New advanced-technology water-based primers, such as Bulls Eye 1-2-3(r) PLUS, take the guesswork out of primer selection because they seal all stains—even water stains—so you start your paint job with a clean canvas.

• **You can paint anything if you prime first.** If you've ever tried to paint a slick surface like vinyl or plastic with paint alone, chances are it just didn't stick. Primers are formulated to have tenacious adhesion to all surfaces, so you can paint anything—even ceramic tile and Formica cabinets—when you use a primer as your first coat.

• **Primers make your paint job last longer.** Primers prevent common paint problems such as cracking, peeling, and blistering, and your paint will retain its original color longer, so you'll have to paint less often.

For more helpful tips for a professional-quality paint job, or for home improvement project ideas, visit www.zinsser.com.

Ten tips for welcoming wildlife into your landscape

Be a Happy Homemaker—Provide nesting boxes for cavity nesting birds and roosting boxes for bats.

Cook Up Something Special—Add plants to your landscape that provide food (fruits, nuts, berries) and cover (shrubs, evergreens, etc.) for wildlife.

Think Small—Do not forget the butterflies, bees, and other important pollinators. Add flowering plants that will attract and feed the little ones.

Get It Wet—Adding a small backyard pond will provide water for birds and other wildlife.

Stop the Invasion—Remove invasive plant species. They threaten food and habitat producing native plants.

Let Them Eat Bugs—Birds, bats, and beneficial insects eat insect pests and enhance ecological balance. Do not kill them.

Bridge the Gaps—Connect "wild" areas together to create habitat corridors for wildlife cover and travel.

Chaperone the Party—If guests such as deer, skunks, rats, etc. become a problem, get help from local wildlife agencies.

Go Native—Preserve native vegetation through sensitive site planning. Native plants are adapted to local conditions and supply food to wildlife.

Enjoy Your Work—Place bird feeders, birdbaths, and other wildlife features where you can easily observe the wild visitors to your yard.

This information was adapted from the *Environmental Guidelines for Responsible Lawn Care and Landscaping* as developed by the members of the *Lawns and Environment Initiative*.

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Huls family make home in Filley area for over 50 years



Harold and Delores Huls pose in front of their home in Filley. Photos by Trevor Stewart/ Voice News

By Trevor Stewart

An American flag waves in the front yard of the home of Harold and Delores Huls, surrounded by heart-shaped rocks with the stars and stripes painted on them. At the bottom of the flag pole, the family sign sits, with the inscription of Huls Family and Husker football on it. The Huls love their cozy little home at the edge of Filley.

Harold and Delores were married on April 29, 1956, and they needed a place to live. Delores' uncle suggested they buy three lots of land at the very end of town.

"He thought it would be a great place to start a family and raise our kids," Delores said. "He was right."

The couple had four children, Rick, Russell, Colleen and Christi. Delores said she loved living in Filley as the children grew up.

"There were always lots of kids in town at the time," Delores said. "We were very fortunate to be close to the church and school. It was fun for the kids."

The couple lived in another house in Filley shortly after they were married. While Harold was away serving in the Army, Delores bought their current home for only \$800. Her uncle and father helped fix it up and make improvements for them.

In 1965, Harold added to the home and built the south side, adding another garage to make a two-car garage.

"I figured since we had three lots, I could add on for some extra space," Harold said. "I also added the back patio to the house as well."

The backyard is green and lush; Harold always wanted to grill outside, so he built a roof that overhangs the back concrete

patio.

"There's nothing like being able to grill outside while it's raining," Harold said. "I always love watching the storms as I grill."

There are beautiful, large Pin Oak trees in the backyard, with one newly-planted tree off in the corner of the yard.

"I planted another tree on the other side of the lawn to get more shade coverage," Harold said. "I also really like how these trees look and how green they are."

The Huls also have a vegetable garden in the backyard where they grow asparagus, tomatoes and onions.

"The garden hasn't quite come up yet," Delores said. "I think it will be very good this year, once it gets warm. We have gotten lots of rain, now we just need some sunshine."

Inside the home, the floor plan was originally very closed off, with doors connecting the living room to the kitchen and the kitchen to the stairs of the basement. Harold and Delores remodeled their home to fix this constipated floor-plan. They knocked down the wall between the kitchen and the stairs which now creates the feeling of openness in their home.

"I used to feel secluded when I was doing the dishes in the kitchen from the family in the living room," Delores joked. "I like it much more now that we can all see each other and talk to each other between the rooms."

The guest bedroom featured a salmon colored wall, with a wood dresser which is an heirloom from Delores' family.

"I don't know exactly how old

the dresser is," Delores said. "I do know that it is a lovely antique, which has been in my father's family for a very long time."

The master bedroom was done in shades of green with crème-colored bedspread.

"I guess we are sort of simple when it comes to interior design," Delores said. "It's nothing fancy, but I like the colors and the overall feel."

A feature of the house that Harold loves the most is his wet bar in the basement.

"I remember in 1983, when my brothers Richard and Roger helped me build it," Harold said. "We had to make it in the yard and bring it down in two pieces. Then we put those pieces together down in the basement."

The basement also features another spare bedroom, with two beds in the room for any guests who are visiting.

"We use the basement bedroom for when the grandchildren come to stay with us," Delores said. "They love to come down

them twice a year at least, although when Chelsea, Whitney and Joshua lived in Grand Island, they were able to see them more often.

"We try and see them as much as possible," Delores said. "We always loved when they would come and visit us."

Harold adorned the basement bedroom and bathroom in Husker red and black. The beds have the Nebraska logo, and the wall features a picture of Herbie Husker. Harold even tiled a red N into the shower tiling.

"I think that's one of my favorite things," Harold laughed. "I love to show people that tile in the shower."

Harold and Delores have put their home up for sale, but don't know how long it will take to sell.

"We would like to be closer to a bigger town for some things," Delores said. "However, if we sell, it will be tough to leave Filley. There are lots of memories and good times here that I will miss."



Harold poses in his wet bar in the basement; his favorite addition to the home.



The Huls' kitchen used to be closed off, but after knocking down the walls, they have achieved a spacious open feeling to the home.



The spare bedroom in the basement, adorned with Husker regalia.

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