

HOME & ACREAGE

MARCH 29, 2023



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Installing solar panels might be good for your home

BY DOUG CARROLL
doug@sewardindependent.com

There is much room for improvement when it comes to solar power in Nebraska.

Although some areas of the nation have gone “green,” embracing and encouraging solar energy use, our state ranks near the bottom of the list in terms of harvesting the power of the sun for the production of electricity.

According to Forbes Home Survey, Nebraska ranks as the 42nd best state for solar energy in 2023. Only 0.2% of Nebraska’s energy is run by solar, even though Nebraska is the 14th sunniest state in

the nation.

Much of this has to do with cost. According to the Ecowatch website (ecowatch.com), solar panel systems in Nebraska cost around \$2.83 per watt, which is significantly above the national average cost of \$2.66.

Most Nebraska homeowners spend an average of \$109.39 on their electric bills per month, and this energy consumption requires a system size of 10.5 kilowatts to offset.

Although homeowners can take advantage of federal tax credit offers, at the estimated price of \$2.83 per watt, that’s a typical cost of \$29,715 before the 30%

federal tax credit, or \$20,800 after the credit is considered for a 10.5 kW system. This total is above the national average due to the higher per-watt cost.

Installing solar panels may be a good long-term investment in your home, depending on its size, location and typical electrical use. How long you plan to remain in your current home can also play a factor, although solar panel systems can add to the value of your property.

In addition, you may qualify for a low-interest loan to help pay for installing a solar system. The Nebraska Dollar and Energy Sav-



COURTESY PHOTO

Although many parts of the state have started using alternative energy, Nebraska ranks as the 42nd best state for solar energy in 2023. Only 0.2% of Nebraska’s energy is run by solar, even though Nebraska is the 14th sunniest state in the nation.

ings Loan program offers low-interest loans for renewable energy projects. The simple interest rates are 5%, 3.5% or less and have

terms of up to 10 years for solar projects.

To know if installing a solar system is right for you or your situation, you might

try contacting your local energy provider, or look online at the numerous solar energy websites.



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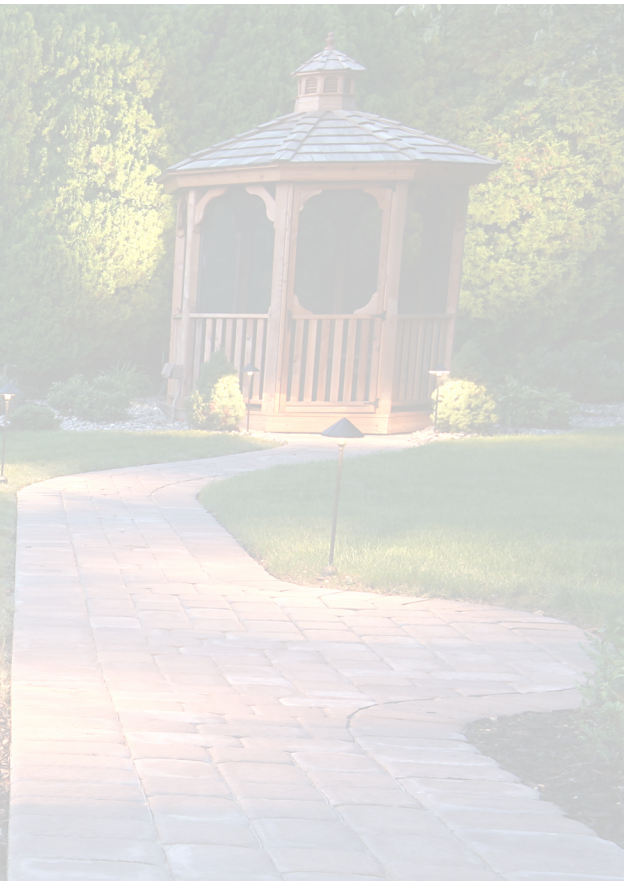
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DOUG CARROLL

COVER PHOTO: Custom home built by Sack Lumber in Crete. Sack Lumber currently has lots available within Crete and offers advisement during each stage of the build.

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Factors to consider when buying furniture

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

Buying furniture can be exciting. The opportunity to breathe new life into a home with the addition of different furnishings inspires many people. At the same time, searching for furniture can be overwhelming, especially when you do not know where to begin.

While furniture may not be the most costly investment, it's also not the cheapest, which is why getting it right is important.

Determine your needs
The first step in purchasing new furniture is to decide what is needed. Assess current furniture and think about what works for

certain pieces and what doesn't. Then you can gear purchases around desired features. For example, if you've determined chenille fabric holds on to too much pet fur, the next couch may be leather or microfiber.

"Many people think that when they have small children they are not able to get new furniture," Trish Johnson, owner of Davisson Furniture in Seward said. "The truth is the teenage years are actually when children are the hardest on furniture because they have more independence and can get their own food."

Measure more than once
Measure your room multiple times and create a mock floor plan. This will help when

figuring out if certain pieces can fit into the space. Some retailers even offer floor plan software on their websites so you can upload the dimensions of your room and see how certain items will fit in your spaces.

In addition, be sure to measure the width of doors to ensure that it's easy to get the furniture into the home when delivered.

"It really helps to come in with a rough diagram of your space and what has to go into it when shopping for furniture," Johnson said. "Measure not only for the furniture but also for moving the furniture into the house. Doors, corners and stairways are important factors."



COURTESY PHOTO

Having a color scheme for your home of three to five colors helps create unity within your space and allows for creating some unique custom focal points.

Determine your style
Figure out which

style best fits your
personality and life-

style. This may be
(CONTINUED ON 13)

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Tips for getting your home clean for spring

BY DOUG CARROLL

doug@sewardindependent.com

With spring here, now is a good time to spruce up your home before you get busy with summer activities.

Spring cleaning can be pretty easy and go quickly if the whole family pitches in. The following are some suggestions of things you might want to do.

Windows

A traditional spring-cleaning project, clean windows require a little “elbow grease,” but are worth the effort. Wash the windows inside and out, including the screens. Don’t forget the windowsills and dust or wash the window blinds or drapes as well.

Light fixtures/shades and ceiling fans

Clean your light fixtures, shades and ceiling fans. Replace any burned-out or dim light bulbs.

Baseboards, doors/door knobs and walls

These areas can get surprisingly dirty. Pay particular attention to

high-traffic areas such as the front door, light switches or things such as stairway banisters.

Air vents

These can also show a lot of dirt and dust and can be cleaned quickly. This is also a good time to check your furnace/air conditioner filter(s) and replace as needed.

As a side note: If you haven’t cleaned your air conditioner condenser in a while, you may want to do so now - keeping the condenser clean will make it work more efficiently and last longer.

Living Room

Dust/polish furniture and wash slip-covers, blankets and pillows. Vacuum sofa and chairs.

Bedrooms

Organize closets and dresser drawers, donating any unused clothing. Wash bedding, including sheets, pillows, duvets and bed skirts.

Bathrooms

Get rid of empty or expired personal care products /makeup, and take old medications to

a drop-off site.

Laundry room

Clean off your washer and dryer and wipe them down with a wet rag. Get rid of any empty laundry soap containers, etc., as well as items that were removed from pockets prior to putting clothes in the washer. Clean the dryer vent and lint trap, and organize your cleaning supplies.

Kids’ playroom

Wash stuffed animals and soft toys, donating unused toys and organizing the rest.

Office

Recycle unneeded paperwork and organize office supplies.

Garage

Open the garage door to air out the space while organizing tools, sporting equipment and toys. Sweep the floor.

Kitchen

Clean your stove, stovetop and microwave. Tip: To make it easier to clean the inside of the microwave, mix a cup of water with some lemon juice or vinegar and heat it

in the microwave for several minutes – this will make even baked-on food splatters a lot easier to remove.

Dishwashers

Cleaning dishwashers every once in a while can help them work better and last longer. Clean the filter(s) periodically, and every month or so place a cup of vinegar in the top rack and run the dishwasher through its pots and pans cycle to help break up and remove deposits.

Refrigerators/freezers

These can take the most time to clean, but often need it the most. Start by emptying the fridge as much as possible, discarding old or expired food items.

Wipe down the empty drawers and shelves with a wet cloth, using a butter knife as necessary to help scrape off particularly sticky/dried on spills.

If your freezer needs defrosting, now is a good time to do it. Don’t forget to clean the refrigerator and freezer seals.

Cabinets/countertops
After removing all



DOUG CARROLL

With spring here, now is a great time to get your home cleaned before summer activities start. For windows, Wash the windows inside and out, including the screens. Don’t forget the windowsills and dust or wash the window blinds or drapes as well.

of the items from your cabinets, wipe down the shelves and get rid of outdated items or those you don’t ever

use, putting back only the items you intend to keep.

(CONTINUED ON 6)

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Areas such as ceiling fans and the backs of televisions or computer monitors can attract dust that often goes unnoticed. Cleaning these areas once in a while can help keep your entire house cleaner.

Spring cleaning

(CONTINUED FROM 5)

This also be a good time to clear, clean and organize your countertops, giving you more room to work while making meals.

Final Thoughts

Pay attention to areas that are out of sight/out of mind, such as the top/back of your refrigerator and televisions and computers/monitors. Cleaning these areas on a regular basis can help them work better and last longer.

Test and replace smoke alarm batteries at least once a year.

Make sure your house gutters and downspouts are clean. If they are clogged and water can't properly drain away from your house, you risk damaging your house's foundation and/or interior.

Attachments for leaf blowers or wet/dry vacuums can be purchased that allow you to clean



DOUG CARROLL

Condenser units on air conditioners can often clog up with dirt and debris - cleaning them occasionally can help the unit work more efficiently and last longer.

gutters from the safety of the ground. Tools that fit on your garden hose can also be found.

If you need a ladder to clean your gutters properly, do it safely. Have an assistant hold the ladder and don't try to get too much debris at one time - even with someone holding onto the ladder, overreaching can cause the ladder to twist and slip out from under you.

Last, but not least:

Don't forget to check your downspouts - if clogged they will keep the water from traveling away from the house as it should. Tapping the sides of the downspout can loosen light clogs, but thick clogs may require the use of a plumber's snake or similar instrument. Regularly cleaning of the gutter can prevent major headaches.

Seven pet proofing hacks to stay out of the dog house

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

We have all heard of expecting parents baby-proofing their homes with baby gates and cabinet locks, but what about furry family members? Even though pets may not require the same level of home modification, some measure of pet-proofing is necessary to safeguard companion animals. Any animal that is given free rein of the house can get into trouble. These tips can help pet parents ensure the safety of their pets and their home.

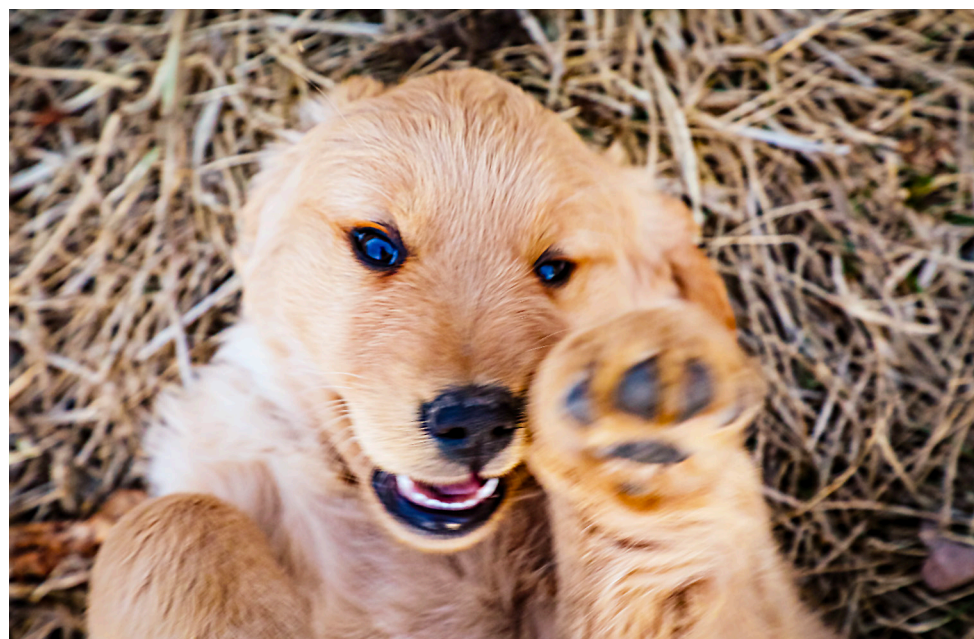
Get down to business. It may seem silly, but pet owners can get down on all fours and

crawl around spaces to see just where their new companions might get into trouble. Put those “downward dog” yoga moves to work and try to see where electrical cords may generate curiosity or if low-level cabinets are accessible. Utilize locks and covers to keep pets away from these hazards.

“For dogs with advanced age and failing eyesight, owners should install gates around stairs and other areas with different elevations,” Scott Dinslage, owner of the Alps Bark Park in Seward, said. “They should also remove any furniture or stationary objects with sharp edges their elderly dog could walk into and damage their open

eyes.” Store away hazardous objects and chemicals “Another equally important step owners can take to ensure their new pup’s safety in the home is to make sure all hazardous objects are safely stored inside cabinets or placed on elevated shelves,” Dinslage said. “Hazardous objects include but are not limited to, household cleaners, sharp or breakable objects, electrical chords, trash bags, medications, toxic plants, toxic foods, empty chip bags, and small objects that can be swallowed.

The most important step a dog owner can take to protect their new puppy is to never leave them unattended in large, open areas.”



AMY HAUSMAN

Even though pets may not require the same level of home modification as babies, some measure of pet-proofing is necessary to safeguard companion animals.

Kitchen smells can lead to danger

Dog noses are impressive, but they can lead dogs into danger-

ous places. “Dogs are primarily

(CONTINUED ON 13)

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Tips to start your own pollinator garden

BY MARA KOENIG

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Pollinators are the engine that run healthy habitats. Follow this easy step-by-step guide to build your own pollinator garden and help ensure the future is filled with pollinators.

Careful planning is essential to creating a successful pollinator garden.

Choose your location

While flowering plants can grow in both shady and sunny locations, consider your audience. Butterflies and other pollinators like to bask in the sun and some of their favorite wildflowers grow best in full or partial sun with some protection from the wind.

Take a look at your soil - is it sandy and well-drained or more clay-like and wet? You can turn over a test patch or check out the

soil mapper for your county to learn more. Your soil type and the amount of sunlight it gets will help determine the kinds of plants you can grow.

Choose your plants
Research which varieties of milkweed and wildflowers are native to your area and do well in your soil and sunlight conditions. Native plants are the ideal choice because they require less maintenance and tend to be heartier.

Find a nursery that specializes in native plants near you - they'll be familiar with plants that are meant to thrive in your part of the country.

It's essential to choose plants that have not been treated with pesticides, insecticides or neonicotinoids. You'll also want to focus on selecting perennials to ensure your plants come back each year and don't require a lot

of maintenance.

Think about more than just the summer growing season. Pollinators need nectar early in the spring, throughout the summer and even into the fall. Choosing plants that bloom at different times will help you create a bright and colorful garden that both you and pollinators will love for months.

Seeds vs. plants

Once you've identified your plant species, you'll need to decide whether to use seeds or start with small plants. While both are good options, your choice will depend on your timeline and budget.

Seeds are more economical, especially for larger gardens, but will require more time. If you're using seeds, plan on dispersing them the fall or late winter ahead of your summer growing season. This gives the seeds time to germi-

nate. Nursery-started plants cost more, but will generally give you a quick return on your investment and bring pollinators into your yard during the same growing season.

Plant your garden

When you're ready to start planting, you'll need your seeds or plants along with essen-

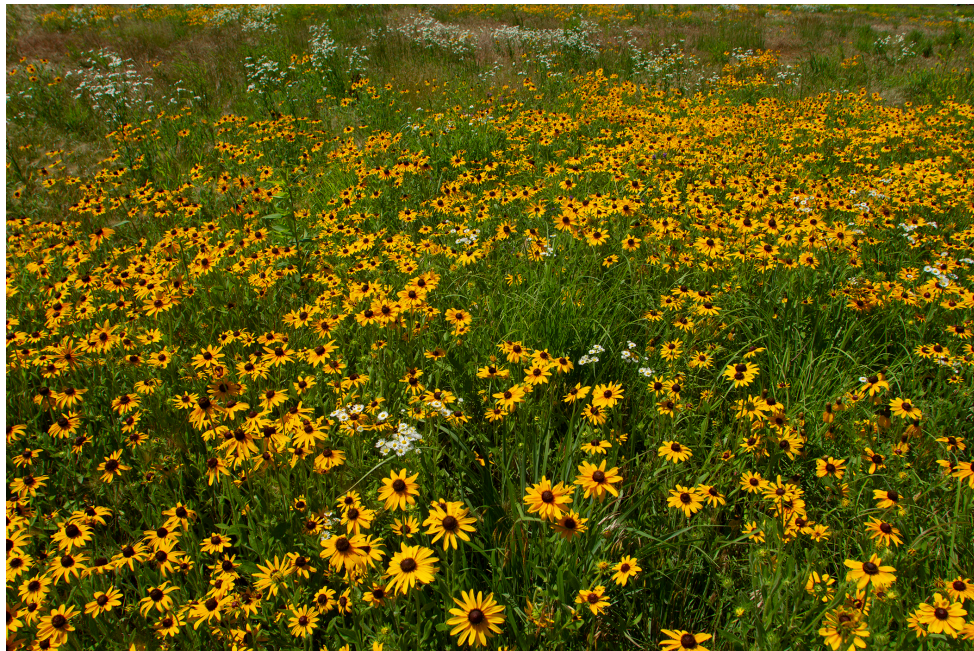
tials such as gardening tools to break the soil, as well as extra soil or compost and mulch.

If you're converting an existing lawn, you'll need to remove grass and current plant cover and turn your soil to loosen it up. If you're planning to use raised beds or containers, there are a lot of pre-

made options available, as well as simple designs to build your own. No matter where you decide to plant your garden, you'll want to add nutrient-rich compost or soil to improve the success of your garden.

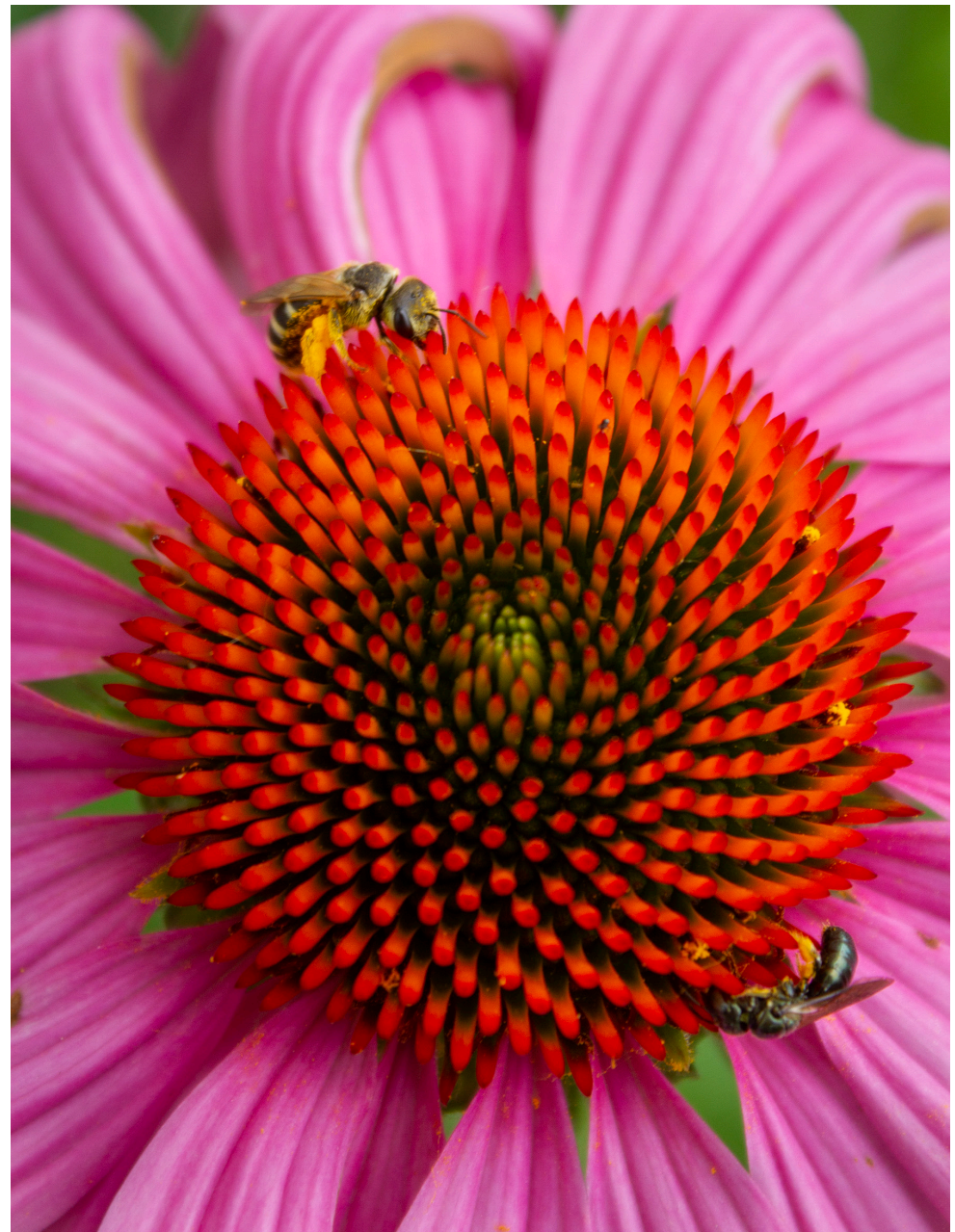
When you're using seeds, keep in mind that

(CONTINUED ON 9)



DOUG CARROLL

Flowers planted in sunny areas are particularly attractive to pollinators of all shapes and sizes.



DOUG CARROLL

Plants such as coneflowers are both beautiful to look at and attractive to pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

Pollinator gardens

(CONTINUED FROM 8)

they will need time to germinate, so fall and late winter are ideal times to get started. In the fall, disperse seeds and cover with soil. In the late winter, scatter seeds over the snow. The sun will heat up the seeds and help anchor them into the snow. The melted snow

provides moisture that will help the seeds germinate.

If you're starting with small plants, make sure you follow frost guidance to avoid putting your plants in too early. Dig holes just big enough for the root system, then cover and reinforce the roots with soil or compost. Add mulch to reduce weed growth.

Wait, watch, water and weed

It may take some time, but you will eventually see butterflies and other pollinators enjoying your garden. Make sure to weed and water your garden to keep it healthy. Keep in mind that it may take a couple seasons for milkweed to start producing flowers.

How to help out local pollinators

Helping out your local pollinators is about more than just the plants you choose. Follow these tips to maximize your garden's support of these essential insects.

Arrange pollinator plants in groups

Plant at least three to five types of pollinator plants together, layering them throughout the garden. You'll get beautiful drifts of color, plus insects will more easily be able to gather the food they need from them.

Keep blooms deadheaded

Freshly opened flowers have the most nec-

tar and pollen. If you remove withered, faded blooms, the plants often will produce even more new flowers to keep the pollinators coming.

Try a container

Another way to create a pollinator garden is to plant one in a container. Be sure the plants you're putting together in pots have similar care needs.

Top butterfly container garden ideas

Don't use pesticides

Skip using insecticides because though they often kill pests, they can also kill insects you want to have around. To control

plant-eating bugs, try using a strong jet of water from your hose to knock them off or hand-picking them off instead.

Add water

Another thing that pollinators need is a water source, such as a birdbath. Put a small pebble or stone in your birdbath to give insects a spot to safely perch and sip.

www.bhg.com/gardening/design/nature-lovers/plants-that-support-pollinators/

See below for common pollinator plants in Nebraska.

Pollinator Plants for Nebraska

www.gardenia.net/guide/great-pollinator-plants-for-nebraska

Anise hyssop (agastache foeniculum)
Lead plant (amorpha canescens)
Showy milkweed (asclepias speciosa)
Rocky Mountain beeplant (cleome serrulata)
Tickseed (coreopsis tinctoria)
Purple prairie clover

(dalea purpurea)
Showy tick trefoil (desmodium canadense)
Narrow-leaf cone-flower (echinacea angustifolia)
Maximilian sunflower (helianthus maximiliani)
Stiff sunflower (helianthus pauciflorus)
Dotted blazing star (liatris punctata)
Wild bergamot (monarda fistulosa)
Stiff goldenrod (oligoneuron rigidum)
Large beardtongue (penstemon grandiflo-

rus)
Chokecherry (prunus virginiana)
Eastern pasque flower (pulsatilla patens)
Mexican hat plant (ratibida columnifera)
Western wild rose (rosa woodsii)
Silver boffaloberry (shepherdia argentea)
Scarlet globemallow (sphaeralcea coccinea)
Smooth blue aster (symphyotrichum laeve)
Prairie spiderwort (tradescantia occidentalis)



COURTESY PHOTO

Growing your own vegetable garden takes some preparation and research. Prepping the soil, ideally in the fall, is a big part of starting a garden.

Home grown gardens take preparation

BY STEPHANIE CROSTON

scroston@sewardindependent.com

There's nothing like the snap of a fresh carrot or the scent of fresh strawberries.

If you grew them yourself, the satisfaction is even greater.

Sarah Browning, a Nebraska Extension educator for Seward and Saline counties, said a good vegetable garden starts with preparing the soil. Ideally that begins in the fall but can be done in the spring, as well.

Gardeners need to physically loosen the soil, she said. The freeze/thaw cycle of the winter season helps eliminate the dirt clods.

"It's better weather in the fall," she said. "In the spring, it's difficult to find a time it's not too wet to work."

In addition, she said, doing dirt work in the spring can lead to compaction issues where the soil becomes too packed together for

plants to grow.

Nebraska Extension provides a soil temperature map every week from the State Climate Office, Browning said. It can be accessed at <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/soiltemperature>.

When the soil temperature is above freezing and it's dry, work can begin, Browning said.

"If we've had no rain within a week, it's probably dry enough," she said.

It's important to work up the underlying soil, loosening it so it's easier for the vegetables to become established.

She didn't recommend tilling the ground often because the soil recompacts as it settles.

"A spade is better for long-term soil conditions," Browning said.

Gardeners can add more mulch to improve conditions and not disturb the soil, she said.

Adding compost is another good idea. She

said vegetables grow better in soil that includes 5% organic matter. Native soil is 1-2%. Leaves and untreated grass help improve the organic composition.

Browning said gardeners can add 3 inches of compost and spade it to a depth of 6 to 8 inches.

Soil tests can provide a baseline for its quality, looking at the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. In this area, Browning said, the soil is typically more alkaline unless it's old farm ground.

Knowing whether the soil is acidic or alkaline can help determine what plants will grow better. Soil in this area is naturally higher in phosphorus and potassium, Browning said, but neither chemical is at toxic levels.

Once the soil is prepared, gardeners get to pick out their potential produce.

"When you pick cul-

(CONTINUED ON 12)

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Tree service enjoys working with surrounding communities

BY KEATON BURGESS

reporter@sewardindependent.com

WITT 360 Tree Service serves the Seward, Saline, York and Fillmore county areas and enjoys working with people and using their education to give people the best service and recommendations for their trees.

Dan and Jen Wittnebel, owners of WITT 360 Tree Service, pride themselves on the education and certifications that allow them to provide recommendations and service to people in their communities.

Dan Wittnebel grew up in Minnesota right along the Minnesota River Valley.

“That’s where I got my love for the woods,” he said.

With a degree in construction management, Dan moved to Nebraska in 2010 and started out as a project manager before he switched to agriculture.

Dan started WITT 360 Tree Service in 2016-17 as a side hustle.

“Dan realized that he didn’t want to be behind a desk,” Jen said. “He loves to be outside and also work with his hands.”

Because Dan did not enjoy his first construction job, Jen said WITT 360 Tree Service was perfect for him.

“Dan really enjoys forming relationships and meeting new people,” Jen said.

Dan also said he enjoys the challenge the business brings.

“No tree is the same,” he said. “Every tree job is different. It’s constantly evolving and the situation and clientele are different and that’s what’s awesome.”

At the start, Jen and Dan didn’t market the business a lot, but it continued to grow.

“It produced enough jobs to keep me busy when I wanted to be busy,” Dan said. “When COVID hit, things really took off. People were seeing all their trees and wanting all the work done.”

Now doing the business full time, WITT 360 Tree Service offers tree trimming, tree removal, stump grinding and plant health care services.

With all the services they offer, Dan has gotten multiple certifications. He said some of his certifications include being a certified arborist and being line clearance certified.

“We joined the Tree Care Industry Association, which is a huge resource for a lot of safety trainings,” he said. “I’ve taken a chipper certification class and a chainsaw safety class.”

Along with having the knowledge, Dan mentioned the certifications are important in order to be professional and be educated on what they’re doing.

With spring coming up, the Wittnebels have a few recommendations. Dan said he recommends pruning oaks.

“All trees are in



Dan Wittnebel

their dormant state right now, but oaks are very susceptible to what they call oak wilt,” he said.

According to the Michigan State University Extension, oak wilt is a fungal disease that moves through the vascular system of the tree. The fungus spores are carried to the tree by small beetles that feed on sap from fresh wounds. These sap beetles that carry the disease from infected trees are attracted to fresh wounds from storm damage, pruning cuts or other injuries to previously uninfected trees.

“If you trim those during the growing season, the likelihood of a tree getting oak wilt is pretty high, so we recommend doing that over oak pruning during the winter months,” Dan said.

Along with pruning oaks, Jen recommended doing a tree assessment.

“When identifying diseases and pests, typically treatment for those is around May,” she said. “It’s optimal time for treating.”



COURTESY PHOTO

WITT 360 Tree Service serves the Seward, Saline, York and Fillmore county areas and enjoys working with people and using their education to give people the best service and recommendations for their trees.

WITT 360 Tree Service is looking for help, full or part time.

“We’re always looking for help,” Jen said. “We’re willing to train and there is no experience necessary.”

Overall, the Wit-

nebels are excited to serve the surrounding communities.

“We’re a community, so we’re excited to be active in that community,” Dan said. “We want the best for our communities that we

live in.”

Anyone interested in working with WITT 360 Tree Service can contact Dan or Jen Wittnebel at (402) 803-1750 or check out their Facebook or Instagram page.

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Vegetable garden

(CONTINUED FROM 9)

tivars, look at their disease resistance," Browning said. "If the description doesn't say resistant, it's probably not."

Cultivar means cultivated variety. They're not "natural" plants but are developed through breeding.

Planting disease-resistant plants will help the garden be more productive and limit fungicide applications, she said.

"It's always so tempting to try everything," Browning said.

The All-American Selections Trials (all-americanselections.org) can provide more information on types of plants for a given area.

Browning also suggested Cornell University's gardening site, www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening, for additional insight.

"Gardeners can read what others have written about," she said, adding that topics range from seed sources to pests and diseases.

Beginning gardeners can try tomatoes and peppers, both of which are relatively inexpensive, Browning said.

Melons are a fun crop but can take a lot of space.

She cautioned beginners about sweet corn, which is a relatively low-producing plant with just one to two ears per plant.

"It's more difficult to grow and is a longer time investment," she said.

Onions need a high level of moisture but are cold tolerant, Browning said.

Some vegetables perform best in the early spring with an early summer harvest. Fall plantings could be added to the garden, she said.

Peas are tougher to grow than other vegetables because they like a cooler climate.

"They're not so great in mid-summer," Browning said.

Carrots and radishes also like cooler soil temperatures, she said.

Browning said perennial crops like rhubarb and asparagus should be planted to one side of the garden

so they're not disturbed.

Strawberries are another perennial plant that won't live forever. They are planted from dormant crowns.

"You have to have space designed for them," Browning said.

Small berries like serviceberry or juneberry grow in tree and shrub form and will last for many years.

"They are very well adapted to Nebraska conditions and soil type," Browning said.

The serviceberry is a dark reddish purple and is very sweet, she said. It's good for jams or to eat fresh.

Raspberries may be more manageable for beginners, she said. They are smaller and bloom all year round.

The berry bushes need a couple years of growth before being pruned, she said. When they are pruned, all the stems should be cut down in the fall to regrow in the spring.



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Pets

(CONTINUED FROM 7)

attracted to food, which is why owners need to ensure they do not drop any food that is dangerous to dogs,” Dinslage said. “Toxic foods include dark chocolate, grapes, raisins, avocados, onions, garlic and sugar-free gum. Spoiled foods are also dangerous to dogs, which is why owners need to properly dispose of food waste and place waste containers in an area their dog cannot access.”

Keep a neat home
Any item within reach is fair game for pets. Even something as seemingly innocuous as a sock can cause intestinal blockage if a puppy ingests it. Risks are reduced by tidying up and storing toys, clothes, shoes, tissues, sanitary products, diapers, knickknacks

and other objects out of sight.

“Recently, much focus has been placed on the dangers of empty chip bags,” Dinslage said. “When dogs find these bags and stick their noses inside, their heads can become stuck, increasing their risk of suffocation.”

Garages and bathrooms are no-gos

Any room is safe under proper supervision. However, if supervision isn't possible, it's recommended to restrict your dog's access to garages and bathrooms. These two areas of the household often contain hazardous chemicals such as antifreeze, gasoline, harsh cleaners and medications. Garages also may have dangerous places for pets to hide and get stuck.

“Chemicals, such as

antifreeze, can also be attractive to dogs and can potentially cause irreparable harm,” Dinslage said. “If a pet ingests a dangerous chemical or object, contact a veterinarian immediately.”

Don't forget the yard
Pets that spend time outdoors need to be watched carefully, especially when they are young.

“Puppies are naturally curious and adorably inept. As they work to make sense of their new surroundings, it's the job of the owner to protect their newest addition from potential hazards around the household,” Dinslage said. “One of the first steps owners can take to safeguard their home is to find and repair any small openings in fences, screens or doors. With

teeth sharper than razor blades, puppies can quickly turn small openings into large ones. Puppies are good at slipping through tight openings, so owners must ensure their perimeters are secured.”

In addition to wild animals and potential predators, fertilizers and herbicides used on lawns can be toxic. Outside dogs may consume mushrooms or sticks. Pets could get into animal or insect nests.

Conduct a sweep of the yard to see where the pet may be able to escape and how other animals might be able to get in. Blocking access to pools or spas to reduce drowning risk also is a smart idea.

Pet-proofing often involves installing fencing.

“Weather must also be considered when

your dog is outside,” Dinslage said. “Dogs need shade and water in the summer and a warm, dry place to rest in the winter. Also, be mindful of other animals like stray dogs or wildlife that may enter your yard and pose a threat to your dog. And lastly, make sure your dog is wearing proper identification in case they manage to escape your yard.”

Crates should be great

It is important to understand that there is a distinction between caging and crate training your dog.

“Crate training is a method of positive reinforcement, while caging is considered a form of confinement or punishment,” Dinslage said. “If your dog is unable to roam freely around the house during the day without

causing any damage, it may be beneficial to introduce crate training to them in a positive and enjoyable way. If your dog displays destructive behavior, this may be due to a lack of stimulation. In such cases, utilizing doggy daycare services may be helpful. Doggy daycare is a professional service that provides a secure and engaging environment for dogs to play and interact during the day.”

Caring for a pet bears some similarities to caring for a child. Much like parents take measures to protect young children, certain safety-proofing measures should be taken to keep animals from getting hurt or sick around the house as well as protecting the home from damage.

Furniture

(CONTINUED FROM 3)

al, transitional or modern. Incorporate pieces accordingly, or mix and match to create a look that is completely unique.

“We recommend to find a balance,” John-

son said. “Living room furniture is not made one-size-fits-all. A smaller petite woman is going to need a smaller recliner than a 6'0 tall man. Compromise is key.”

Johnson also recommended a color scheme

for the whole home of three to five colors that can be coordinated with individual choices.

Confirm materials
“Flexibility is key in the supply chain. Spot problems will continue for two years but most

furniture dealers have inventory on hand,” Johnson said.

Save money on sales
Furniture can be expensive, but there is room for savings. Shop when retailers offer seasonal sales. Consider warehouse retailers,

which often sell select items at a discount.

Know your budget
The most important factor before taking the plunge is to know your budget before starting. “It is very easy to go off the rails when you are shopping for more

than one room at a time,” Johnson said.

Shopping for furniture means taking steps to identify a budget, measure, match style and find pieces that fit homeowners' lifestyles.

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Minor exterior upgrades improve curb appeal

BY AMY HAUSMAN
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Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends. Minor upgrades that aren't as costly as larger projects can still make a big difference, especially among prospective buyers. The following are some relatively minor exterior upgrades that impress buyers and provide a strong return for homeowners.

Garage door replacement
Garage doors matter more than sellers may

recognize, as various real estate professionals note that buyers appreciate homes with updated garage doors.

Window replacement
The cost of new windows will depend on just how many windows must be replaced. But there's no denying buyers like the idea of low emissivity (low-E) windows, which can cut energy bills by a significant amount over time.

"It is better to spend the money because windows are holes in your house," Shawn Moore, owner of Crete Glass, said. "If you get a good quality window, you will break even on your investment within a couple of years, and over time the windows will literally pay for

themselves."

Landscaping
Well-maintained landscaping is another home exterior component that can make a strong first impression on buyers. A recent survey of nearly 7,000 realtors conducted by the National Association of Realtors found that upgrading a landscape recouped roughly 83% of homeowners' initial investment at resale. In addition, 11% of realtors surveyed indicated that an upgraded landscape was the decisive factor that closed the deal for the house.

Updating a home's exterior doesn't have to bust homeowners' budgets. Many affordable projects also provide a return at resale.



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