

HOME & ACREAGE

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Navigating a low inventory housing market

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

The United States is experiencing a low inventory housing market, meaning prices have gone up and availability has gone down.

Nebraska is one of five states hit the hardest. Alongside Kansas, Missouri, Utah and Washington, Nebraska has averaged less than one month of housing supply since the start of 2022, the Inspection Support Network said.

Joe Schluckebier, a real estate agent at Premier Real Estate in Milford, said Milford typically follows housing trends similar to those in Lincoln and Omaha.

“Anywhere within 30 minutes of Lincoln are fairly similar markets. If you get out west further, you can get more house for your money,” he said. “I keep an eye on things nationally, too, and the markets have been very similar across the board.”

Schluckebier said it generally takes about two or three months to find a house right now. However, there are exceptions, as he recently had a client



DOUG CARROLL

In a tight housing market such as the one Nebraska is currently experiencing, potential home-buyers need to make sure they have all of their ducks in a row when they start shopping for a home.

find a house within a week.

Laura Linares of KZ Realty in Crete, a bilingual real estate agent, recommends having an agent you trust by your side throughout the home-buying process. She said she makes it a point to ensure her clients are well-informed throughout the entire home-buying process.

“Some people think they can go ahead and buy a house by their own, and then they get stuck in a situation where they don’t know what they have done or what they have gotten themselves into,” she said. “Especially with the language barrier, it is important for people to contact someone that knows their own language that can help them.”

To make the process go more smoothly, Linares said people should be ready with the amount of money they need in the bank, get pre-qualified and have their tax returns in order. They should stay focused on their goals and not make decisions that could affect their pre-qualification, such as applying for a new line of credit, changing jobs or

See HOUSING, page 18

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Cutting into the truth behind tree trimming

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Former Wilber resident Jeff Homolka was researching tree trimming about a decade ago when he realized that many people, including himself, were inadvertently harming their trees by trimming them at the wrong time of year.

He said some tree trimming companies often do not disclose this information because they want more work.

“It’s such a shame,” Homolka said. “You can’t just grow a tree overnight; they’re 100 years old. The person should do everything they can to keep them alive.”

Most people only think to trim their trees when they get all leafed out, but that is actually the worst time to do it. The ideal time to trim a tree is between November and March, also known as the dormant season.

Insects are alive and well during the hot and humid months, and trimming trees during those times invites them to flock to the trees’ open wounds and spread infections, such as oak wilt, that can kill the tree.

“If we get too late into the season when we cut into the tissue of the tree, some trees produce pheromones that actually attract the bugs,” said Dan Wittnebel of WITT 360 in Cordova.

Trimming trees is also easier during the dormant season because there are no heavy leaves to contend with on the branches.

Wittnebel said trees have a way of telling



DOUG CARROLL

The ideal time to trim a tree is between November and March, but be careful while pruning the limbs so you don’t unnecessarily expose the tree trunk to future decay.

people what needs to be removed.

“The branch bark collar will get really full, and that’s a good sign that the branch is no longer producing excess food for the tree and is taking nutrients from the tree to survive,” he said. “The main tree says that’s not OK, so once the branches can’t sustain themselves by producing enough photosynthesis, they will start shutting down.”

“When pruning trees, make the final cut just

beyond the branch collar and branch bark ridge. The branch collar is the swollen area at the base of the branch. The branch bark ridge is the dark, rough bark ridge that separates the branch from the main branch or trunk. Pruning just beyond the branch collar and branch bark ridge retains the tree’s natural defense mechanisms and promotes compartmentalization and callus formation,” according to Iowa State University

Extension.

Wittnebel said some people cut branches as close to the trunk as possible to make the tree look more visually appealing. This practice unnecessarily exposes the main trunk of the tree to future decay, as the tissues closer to the trunk do not close over as well as those outside of the branch bark collar.

To keep trees alive and well, Wittnebel also suggests that people moving into a new home ask the

previous owners about their watering schedule and not waver too far from what the trees have grown accustomed to.

He said people who like to keep a green, manicured lawn should also consider boosting the amount of water they give it because the turf, which is in competition with the trees, takes most of the water.

Everyone should prioritize the health of a tree over convenience, Homolka said.

Tree health experts are available through the UNL extension office.

Educator Nicole Stoner may be reached at (402) 223-1384.

Questions may also be sent to her at nicole.stoner@unl.edu.



Painting business covers needs in area

BY KEATON BURGESS
reporter@sewardindependent.com

A Seward resident who has been painting part-time for the past seven years finally took the step to do it full-time and now covers the Seward County area and beyond.

Elliot Mencl started Mencl and Sons Painting because he enjoyed painting.

Mencl has managed PPG (a brand of paint) stores in Grand Island and Kansas and has been involved in the painting industry since 2013.

Mencl and Sons Painting offers many different services including interior painting, exterior painting and painting different types of furniture such as cabinets, trim, doors and more.

Mencl has been picking up projects around the area including painting Mercy Church this summer.

Mencl said he decided to make painting a full-time job because he enjoyed doing it part-time and liked

COURTESY PHOTO

Pictured is a house Mencl painted for a client. Mencl and Sons Painting of Seward offers many different services including interior painting, exterior painting and painting different types of furniture such as cabinets, trim, doors and more.

See PAINTING, page 18

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Dig into gardening, watch yourself bloom

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

When you get to the root of it, gardening is much more than just a hobby. March is “Start a Garden” month, and Tabitha’s March Health Tip is to do just that.

“The human behavior of cultivating crops can be traced back 12,000 years to the first permanent settlements,” Tabitha said. “It’s in our nature for a reason—gardening is perhaps the most organic stress reliever, chronic condition controller and mood booster there is.”

Whether a person has never gardened before or is a seasoned expert, the benefits are the same. Wilber Garden Club President Gwen Anderson-Beck said just about everyone in the club learned by accident.

The club members work together to maintain community gardens throughout the town, and they have their own personal gardens at home. They said

they love working on the local gardens because it is a time for socialization and friendship, and they enjoy sharing funny stories and tips for dealing with common gardening roadblocks at their meetings.

The activity can even be healing. One of the club’s oldest members, Twila Wanek, started a memorial garden for her late husband.

Gardening can give people a sense of purpose and help them feel more connected to nature and the local community.

“Every spring, we’ve watched a vixen and mama fox bring her two kids back and forth to the drainage ditch for water, and it’s just absolutely delightful to watch them run around the flower beds and behind the bushes, and they are so cute,” garden club member Nancy Erdmann said. “I think gardens do bring wildlife into your space.”

According to Tabitha, studies have proven gardening to be one of the best activities for individuals with cognitive

decline or forgetfulness. It is also good for mental health.

Garden club member Carol Roy moved to Wilber from the south several years ago, and she said she was anxious to plant a butterfly garden here.

“The butterfly garden is a place where I can sit and meditate and smell the good old Nebraska fresh air and soil,” she said. “I think everyone should have a spot in or around their home or in the garden where they can just go and be themselves away from all the hustle and bustle and just have that, perhaps, each day or each week, a time for self-reflection.”

Tabitha said gardening is an attainable way for people to fit exercise into their days, and growing fruits and vegetables increases people’s likelihood of eating them. Activities such as pulling weeds, potting plants, mowing and watering plants can engage a variety of muscles in the body.

Gardening can burn 300 calories per hour and is categorized as a moderate

physical activity by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Spending time in the sun also increases vitamin D levels, which positively impacts many tissues and major body systems. According to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Health Center, nearly one in four adults in the United States is low in vitamin D, which can contribute to bone pain, depression, fatigue, increased susceptibility to illness and more – just don’t forget to wear sunscreen.

Club member Ginny Krueger, a nurse, said one of the best things about gardening is watching the plants grow.

“I love to see plants that are growing, especially when you get a new plant you have never seen grow and then watch how it blossoms out. It’s just exciting to see that,” she said. “It’s good for your health, your heart, lungs, all of that. The fresh air, the sunshine – we all need that. Mental health, it’s good for every bit of us.”



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Sink or swim

Tackle plumbing problems right away

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

As homeowners know, plumbing problems can quickly escalate from minor inconveniences to expensive repairs if gone untreated.

Brian Pribyl of Pribyl Plumbing of Crete said he is always getting called for a wide variety of plumbing issues including drainage problems, septic issues and leaky water lines.

Sewage backup in a drain and wet, swampy spots in a yard are clear indicators of a drainage problem, Pribyl said.

People should call as soon as they notice their water is draining slowly.

"It's better to call and get it taken care of before they get completely plugged," Pribyl said. "A lot of people wait until it's completely plugged, or they throw a bunch of chemicals down there after it's completely



DOUG CARROLL

Faucets that drip, even slowly, can often lead to higher water bills and usually are easily fixed.

plugged. That obviously doesn't take care of it."

Pribyl said it is also important for homeowners to immediately call a

plumber if they see water leaking from their water heater. If they wait to do so, it will cost them more money in the long run.

"If you catch it while it's draining slow before it's completely plugged, then it's a lot quicker for us, so, obviously, their

bill reflects that it takes less time to fix it," he said. "So, they're going to save some money."

Pribyl advises people

to get their septic tanks pumped every five to seven years. He said a lot of people do not follow those guidelines, which can also lead to problems.

Mark Saltzman of Milford Plumbing said he gets increased calls about low water pressure when the city is under construction replacing mains. In many such cases, people's plumbing does not get clogged but rather blockages collect on the screens on the ends of their faucets.

"A lot of times, it's just a simple remove that, clean it, put a new one on or whatever and then you're back in business," he said.

Unusually high water bills are also a common sign of a plumbing issue.

"Usually, a dripping faucet adds up to more than what you realize. And, a lot of times, the flapper on toilets will let water by so it will continue to run," Saltzman said. "If you hear short cycling coming on and off every so often, there's usually an issue you're going to have to take care of because that can cause high water bills."

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Getting lawns green and ready for spring

BY KEATON BURGESS
reporter@sewardindependent.com

With spring and nicer weather around the corner, now is a good time to begin working on your lawn to get it ready to look green and alive again.

The first step to doing this according to Sunday Lawn Care is to remove debris. After fall and winter have passed, it's a good idea off all leaves, furniture and other debris that might be on your lawn. This allows the sun to hit the lawn and encourage growth. Trimming trees and bushes in the area can be a good idea as well to allow in more sunlight on the lawn.

Applying fertilizer can also be a good way to get your lawn back to full health. Applying an iron-rich fertilizer feeds your lawn and helps it grow faster, according to Sunday Lawn Care.

When grass does start to grow and the temperature stays consistently above 40 degrees, it's time to start



DOUG CARROLL

See LAWNS, page 19 Removing debris and applying fertilizer is a good way to make sure your lawn looks as good as possible this summer.



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Top tips for air conditioner maintenance

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Local heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration specialists want residents to be informed about their home AC as they prepare for the changing seasons.

Doug Oberhauser of Doug's Heating & Air Conditioning in Seward said every home is different, but people should check to be sure their air filters are clean every month and replace them every three months. They should be sure their air conditioners are not too close to bushes or plants outside and that outdoor coils are washed off during the warmer months.

If protocol is not



Air filters should be checked every month to see if they are still clean or need to be replaced.

DOUG CARROLL

followed, utility bills will rise and the AC units will not last as long due to stress.

Red flags that may indicate an AC problem, such as leaks, include rising electricity bills and the system running longer than usual, Oberhauser said. This may mean it is time to call a professional.

Ron Kramer, co-owner of Lee's Refrigeration, Heating & Air in Seward, advises people that any piece of equipment that does not come with at least a 10-year parts and labor warranty is likely not of good quality. Things are not built the way they were 50 years ago, and it is important to have decade-long pro-

See AC, page 10

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AC

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tection.

“I will not sell a piece of equipment that doesn't have a 10-year parts warranty on it,” he said. “It's not uncommon for the blower warranty on an indoor furnace to be upwards of \$1,000. If that goes out in five years, I want the homeowner to be protected, even if it's something I sell them.”

Programmable thermostats are growing in popularity, and Kramer said they can save people a bit of money if they spend lots of time away from home. However, they are likely not worth it for people who work from home or work part-time.

Smart thermostats are sometimes thought to save money, but Kramer said they are more about the convenience of being able to control people's home temperature from their phones.

One of the best ways to avoid breaking the bank is to know every option out there when it comes to maintenance.

Most local air conditioners and heat

pumps are using the old R-22 freon, which Kramer said is expensive to maintain. He said people can just put other, cheaper, replacement freons in their AC units, but equipment sellers typically do not divulge that information because they want to make more sales.

“When you hear the terms ‘old freon’ and ‘new freon,’ generally, salespeople use that as a fear tactic to sell new equipment,” he said.

Kramer said he also does not believe that HVACR (heating, ventilation, air conditioning, refrigeration) technicians should charge clients a diagnostic fee on top of their regular rates because the point of hiring a technician is getting knowledge and work.

When choosing a maintenance company, he suggests getting recommendations from friends or family.

“Word-of-mouth referrals mean a lot more to the truth about a company than Google reviews where anybody can blindly go on there and say what they want,” Kramer said.

I have two bids. Now what?

How to compare contractors' bids

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

Home renovation projects are significant undertakings. It is common for homeowners who may not have the time nor the expertise to do the work themselves to call in professionals to tackle these jobs.

Homeowners negotiate the best rates possible by obtaining a number of bids from contractors, spelling out both labor and material costs to determine their best option.

Here's how to compare bids.

Check as many reviews as possible

Go online and ask friends for recommen-



AMY HAUSMAN

Brandon Jantzi, a yardman with Crete Sack Lumber, gets set up for working on windows being installed in a new construction project in Crete.

dations to find reliable contractors. A contractor who seems too good to be true will not necessarily be so, but it's still best to vet each professional thoroughly prior to sign-

ing a contract. “When it comes to vetting contractors, I would recommend getting a list of referrals of

See BIDS, page 11



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Bids

Continued from 10

people they've completed projects for and checking in with those folks. It is time consuming to do this but depending on your project it can be well worth your time," Tom Salistean of Crete Sack Lumber said.

Cost basis vs bid basis

Certain contractors will produce an estimate based on the best guess of the cost of supplies then add on a flat fee or percentage for their services. This is called a cost basis bid. Others will create a bid that includes all their anticipated supply and labor costs, known as a bid basis bid. Know what you're getting to make the most accurate comparison.

"When bidding a product that is consistent with its pricing, I will use my own discretion on how long the estimate is good for. On materials that fluctuate significantly, such as lumber and steel, those estimates are good for 30 days," Scott Marquardt of Crete Sack Lumber said. "I have actually shown potential customers what lumber is trending at, whether up or down, for them to make a decision on when to pull the trigger."

Customers are paying for knowledge in addition to the materials.

"You are paying for a skill level on a contractor bid," Brandon Zoubek, an in-house contractor, said.

Marquardt agreed saying, "Skilled labor is not cheap. Cheap labor is not skilled."

Create a master itemized checklist

It's easy to explain the project differently from one contractor to another when doing so verbally. That may result in a different plan and price. Rather, make a checklist of what you want done and have several copies to give to the contractors with whom you meet. This makes it easier to compare costs line by line.

"I would rather the homeowner have a checklist," Marquardt said. "We want them to be happy with the end product."

Marquardt also recommends drawing a sketch of what the customer envisions to accompany the checklist.

Have specific materials in mind

Make sure bids are based on the same materials and tasks. For example, if you're comparing window replacement quotes, be sure that each quote is based on the same window material and coating. Vinyl replacement windows may not cost the same as fiberglass or wood.

It is much easier to compare pricing when contractors provide estimates reflecting the same materials.

Marquardt recommends that customers make sure they are comparing the same style and quality of items and materials, such as cabinets.

"What may be top of the line at one store may be low end at another store," Marquardt said. "Making sure the ma-

terials being compared are equal results in a fair bid."

Small versus big contracting companies

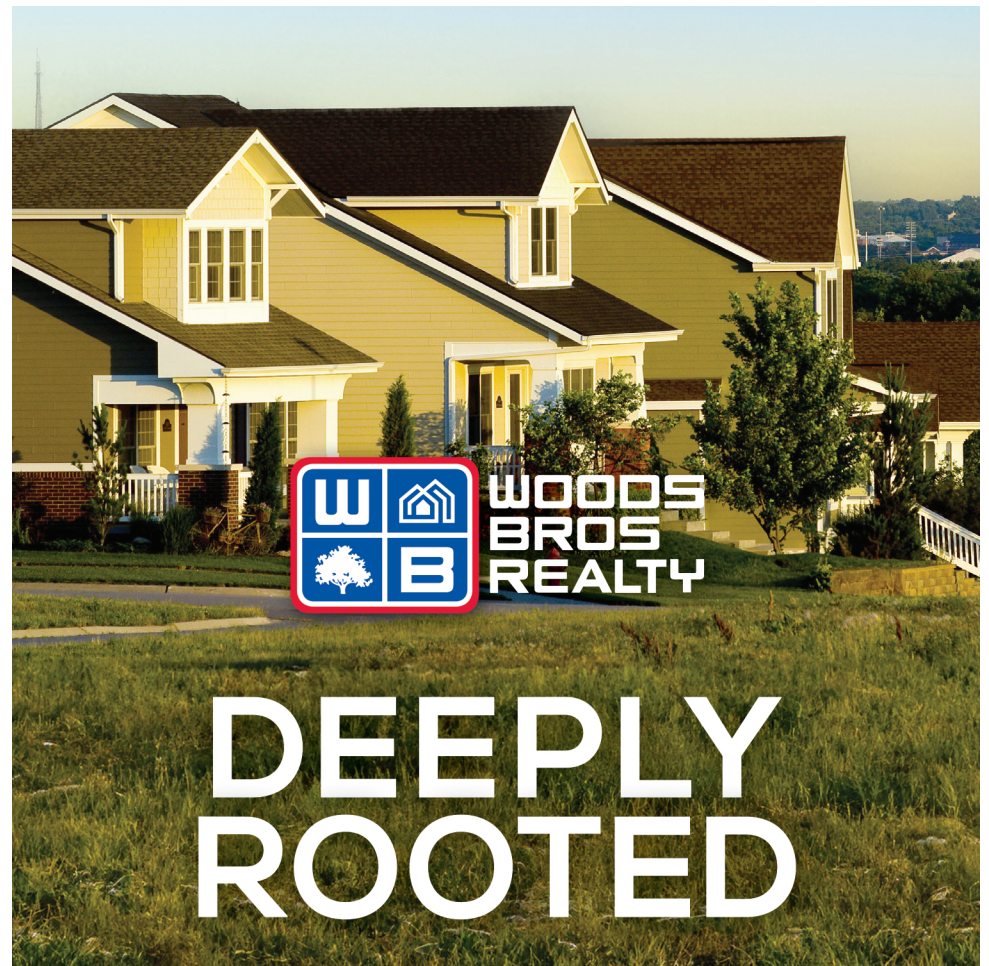
Some bids may differ based on the manpower of the company. One contractor may view a project as an easy one that can be slipped right into the schedule. Another may have to devote more time and effort if it is being undertaken by one or two people. This can affect cost in the quote. Furthermore, a contractor who does a lot of advertising in print, television or online, or has an office or warehouse space, may have extra overhead costs that are passed on to the customer.

"When you are working in a smaller town if you are not doing good work you will not be successful," Marquardt said. "Being in a small, tight knit community I like working with smaller companies whose employees are from the area rather than getting whoever a box store throws at you."

Doing your own demo

Figure out if the contractor will allow you to perform a portion of the tear-out, clean-up or other tasks to save on labor costs. Make sure this is included in the bid.

"A homeowner doing their own demo depends on the job," Marquardt said. "There is the potential that they can do more harm than good, so for our customers that do want to complete demo I give them a whole checklist."



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Experts urge private well owners to test water

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Contaminated water can cause a myriad of health problems, but many people with private water sources do not test for nitrates and bacteria.

Eileen Campbell, who has been a water specialist at Culligan Water for nearly 18 years, said people should test their private wells for nitrates and bacteria every year.

Last year, the state announced a rebate program for reverse osmosis systems to help private well owners address nitrate issues.

"In the five counties that we offer Culligan reverse osmosis systems, we have had over two dozen well owners reach

out to us with over 10 ppm (parts per million) in nitrates in their well water within the last year alone," Campbell said.

Erinn Wilkin, water resources technician with the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, said everyone's bodies react differently to water contaminants. Most people will experience symptoms from bacteria within one or two days, but symptoms from nitrates may not show up for a while.

Nitrates are colorless and odorless, so people may not know their water is high in nitrates unless they test it, Wilkins said. People with autoimmune diseases, young children, infants, pregnant women and the elderly are especially susceptible to

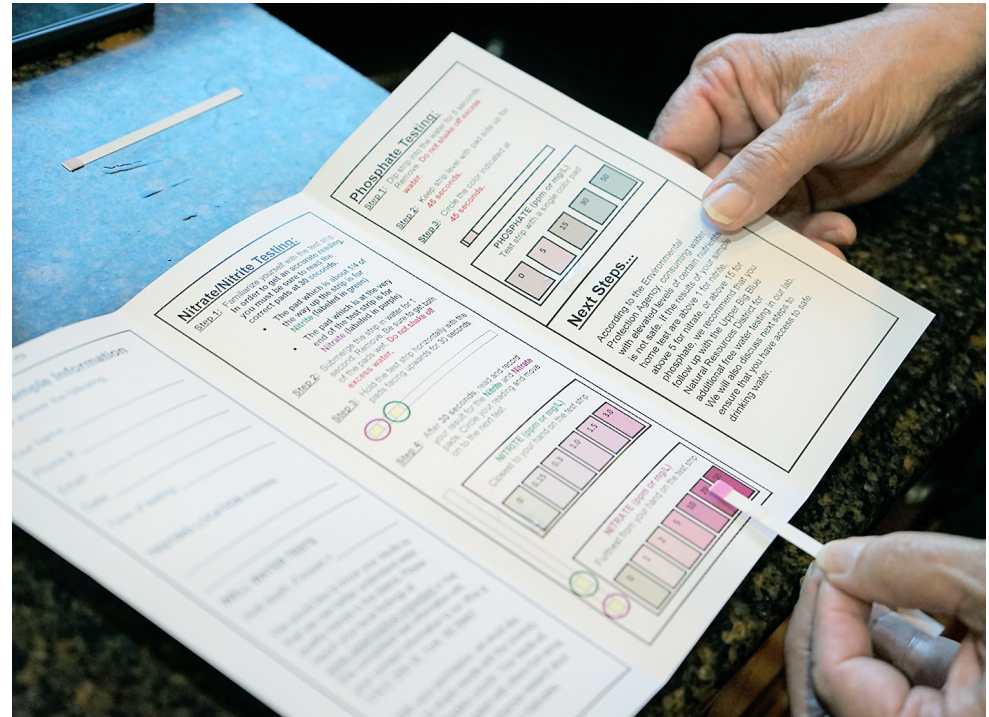
experiencing negative effects of high nitrates in water.

"We have seen an increase in pediatric cancers within our area and that we've done some studies and so that's shown it is linked to high nitrates within the drinking water," she said.

Bacteria are also colorless and odorless, and symptoms of bacteria in water include vomiting, gastrointestinal issues, fever and nausea.

Campbell said mortgage companies often make people test their water because they do not want to lend money to someone without drinkable water.

"Oftentimes, that was how people would



COURTESY PHOTO

Private well owners can use an NRD water testing kit at home, provided by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District.

See WATER, page 17



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How to make your yard bird and butterfly friendly

BY DOUG CARROLL
doug@sewardindependent.com

From the oak woodlands in its eastern half to the pine forests that are found in its western end, more than 400 species of birds and 200-plus species of butterflies are known to travel through Nebraska each year.

These small examples of Nebraska's fauna are fun to watch and enjoy as they go about their daily lives, and make any yard or garden more attractive.

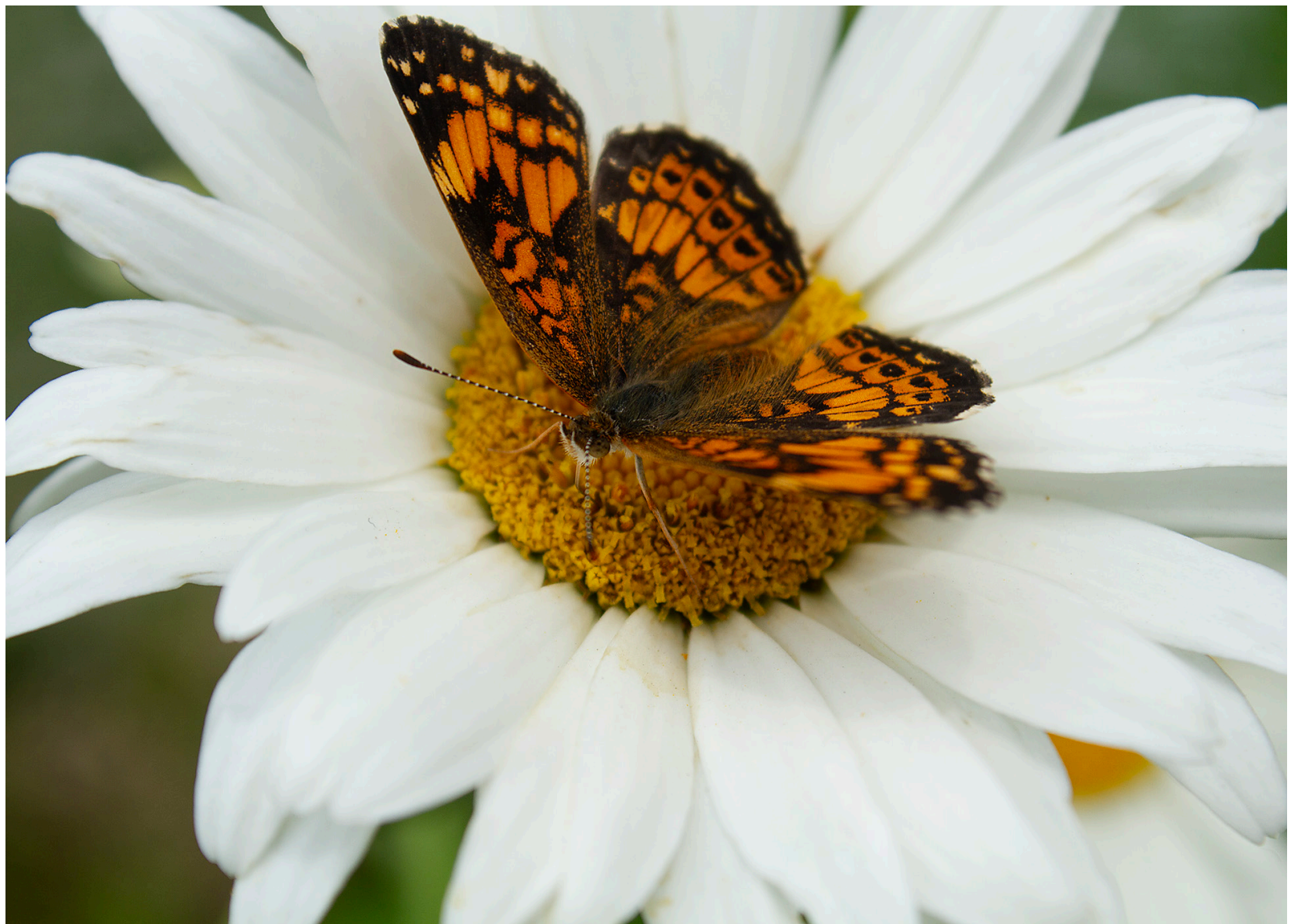
The following are some tips and suggestions to make your area more bird- and butterfly-friendly if you wish to get a closer look of these color splashes on wings.

One of the first things Cornhusker homeowners should use are plant and flower species native to Nebraska whenever possible, according to Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Plants native to Nebraska use less water than most non-native plants and provide food and shelter to a variety of birds and insects.

A diversity of trees, grasses and flowers is also very important, Jorgensen said. There are lots of different types of habitat used by various bird and butterfly species, so he recommends having a variety of plants in your yard at various heights. Some birds and insects like to feed on the ground, some a few feet off the ground, some in mid level, and others on taller plants, shrubs and trees.

Jorgensen cautioned homeowners to avoid the use of chemicals as much as possible in their yards,



DOUG CARROLL

Most flowers will attract a variety of butterflies, but the more different flower species you have in your garden or yard, the greater the number of pollinators you will have visit.

as they are bad for both insects and birds.

Bird baths are a good way to attract both birds and butterflies throughout summer, Jorgensen said, but having water with a heater in it to keep it from freezing is especially attractive to birds in the cold winter months.

According to Kevin Poague, operations manager for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center near Denton, bird feeders are another good way to

attract birds to your yard year round, and especially in the spring, when there may not be a lot of food sources available while birds are migrating or starting to nest.

Poague said there is a variety of food and ways to dispense it that can help attract birds to your yard.

Some can simply be placed on the ground, but others work better when put in a feeder off the ground, such as on

a squirrel-proof pole or hanging from a tree.

The National Audubon Society offers these food suggestions:

Black-oil sunflower seed, peanuts, suet, good mixed seed, nyjer/this-tle seed, safflower seed, cracked corn, mealworms and fruit - grapes or sliced citrus, apple, or banana are a special treat that will draw many birds.

Finally, hummingbirds are another bird species that you may be

able to attract to your yard during Nebraska's summer months, either through some of your plants or by putting up a hummingbird feeder.

Many people place these feeders right outside their kitchen or living room windows, where they can enjoy watching the hummingbirds zoom in and hover while they eat.

Hummingbird feeders are relatively inexpensive, and making the "nectar"

to fill them is inexpensive, simple, and easy. Just boil water and add sugar so that you have a mixture that is four parts water and one part sugar to put into the feeder.

For more information about attracting specific birds and butterflies to your yard, go online and search for their life cycle and individual needs, then do whatever you can to help meet them.

You probably won't be sorry.

Tool kit 101: Basic tools to open your toolbox

BY STEPHANIE CROSTON
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Picture, if you will, a college graduate, ready to move into their first solo apartment. Or a first-time homeowner, moving into their new house.

Furniture, housewares, linens – all are ready for the new place. But what if you need to hang a picture or tighten a screw or even see how much space there is between a window and a corner?

Basic tools would come in handy.

Brent Pankoke, owner of Beaver Hardware in Beaver Crossing, suggested a handful of tools that should be in anyone's toolbox.

One of the first that people think of is a hammer.

"A general claw hammer – you can pound with one end and pull with the other," Pankoke said.

A claw hammer has a metal head and, historically, a wood handle, according to wikipedia. Hammer size is determined by the weight of its head, which can range from seven ounces to 32 ounces.

A screwdriver set that includes both flat and



Basic hand tools make a good gift for first-time homeowners or recent graduates.

cross or Phillips head screwdrivers is also on the list.

Screwdrivers are classified by the tip and should be used with screws that are the same size. Many homeowners buy drills that have a wider variety of tips or bits. Pankoke said an 11- or 13-in-one set would cover most uses.

A basic wrench allows a person to apply torque to turn objects like nuts and bolts in order to tighten or loosen them. Examples of the tool date back to the 15th century, wikipedia said.

A socket, according to wikipedia, is a female driver that covers the male head of a fastener. The tool has existed for centuries, with early examples like keys to wind clocks.

The ratcheting socket wrench, which allows the user to pivot the wrench instead of removing and repositioning it, was invented in Vermont and patented in 1863.

Pliers are another handy tool for the toolbox. Pankoke recommended not going with needle nose pliers but instead a more general form.

Pankoke said side cutters or diagonal pliers that are designed for

cutting instead of holding are good for places where a knife or scissors won't work.

Pliers have been used for centuries. In fact, wikipedia said, illustrations show the Greek god Hephaestus using pliers in his forge.

A utility knife is another good addition. This tool can cut a variety of different materials, and the blade retracts into the body of the knife for safety.

A stud finder is helpful for those hanging things on the walls. The device helps locate studs into which nails can be driven for extra support when hanging larger items.

A tape measure is another helpful tool for ensuring things are level or for measuring distances.

A long tape, which can reach up to 200 meters, is usually returned to its case by a hand crank.

Pankoke said a small screw set or small nail set would be adequate for hanging most items on the walls of a home.

A flashlight is a good idea for seeing into dark spaces. While most cell phones do have flashlights on them, they're not always convenient or available.

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Water

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find out (they had high nitrates) because that was the first time they're testing their water, and they can't close on their house until they get that water treated," she said. "That's been a big frustration for me being in the water industry, just that people just aren't testing."

Wilkins said any time of year is a good time to test water, but people who live on crop ground or an acreage should be aware that nitrate levels may be higher in the summer. People who live near feed yards are likely to get bacteria contaminants due to their proximity to E. coli.

The Environmental Protection Agency considers nitrate levels below 10 parts per million as safe for drinking. Campbell suggests people with levels above 10 parts per million get a new water source or treatment system to get them back to safe levels.

She said people with chronic bacteria problems should continue to test their wells every three to six months until the issue clears up.

"I've really encouraged people on a private well to be treating their water if they're not doing the testing, because at least the treatment then gives them peace of mind that they're being taken care of with those reverse osmosis systems, because they'll remove those nitrates," Campbell said.

The UBB NRD office offers free water testing for nitrates and bacteria.

Preventing unwanted visitors

BY DOUG CARROLL
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Most people are not fans of multi-legged creatures visiting, or worse yet, taking up residence in their homes.

The following are some tips for preventing these unwanted houseguests, which when on their best behavior can be creepy to many people, and at their worst can cause damage to your home.

Bugs usually get into a home one of two ways – the homeowner seemingly invites them in by allowing them free access, or he/she carries them across the threshold themselves.

To combat the first scenario, make sure you have door sweeps installed on all doors that lead outside the house and that the doors are tight fitting.

Secondly, fill and caulk any cracks around baseboards, cabinets and windows.

You should also check all of your window screens for holes and fix and replace as needed, only removing them when cleaning windows and immediately replacing them when finished.

It is also a good idea to keep your garage door closed when not in use, especially at night.



DOUG CARROLL

To prevent unwanted visitors from entering your home, seal as many openings as possible, don't inadvertently bring them into your home, and make your home as inhospitable as possible.

You can make your home less inviting for long-term stays by eliminating water and food sources.

Keep your kitchen counters and floors clean of crumbs.

Store food in sealed containers, and regularly remove the garbage from your home.

You should also avoid leaving dishes in the sink, and fix leaks and clean up spills as soon as possible.

To prevent inadvertently bringing these bugs and insects into your home, check boxes and packages before bringing them inside, and

inspect second-hand items such as clothing and furniture or items you've had in storage before bringing them into your home.

If you use firewood for your home, experts suggest storing it outside, away from your home and off the ground, only bringing it inside when needed.

To help prevent any long-term stays by visitors that do make it into your home, follow these tips:

Vacuum and sweep the floors regularly, remove any cobwebs you come across and avoid leaving piles of

clothing—spiders especially like to make these their home.

Don't leave dishes out or in different rooms, and reduce clutter around your home.

Finally, make sure areas of the home you don't visit much, such as basements, crawl spaces or attics, stay ventilated and dry.

These tips should help make sure that your home doesn't become bed and breakfast for unwanted visitors or tenants.

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Housing

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making undocumented deposits.

“The best thing people can do is they definitely want to be prepared with financing and know your options there. So, when something comes up, you’re able to act fast,” Schluckebier said.

Linares said having the money for the down payment and closing costs saved in the bank is important because, to buy a home, it is required to have that money in an account for a certain amount of months. Bank statements are typically also required.

When choosing a home, Schluckebier said people should be informed buyers, learn about possible grants or first-time homebuyer programs and ask questions about the house that could impact the buy down the road.

Examples include questions about the age of the roof, replacements that have occurred in the house, and any existing issues that would come up on an inspection, such as problems with the foundation, roof, plumbing, furnace, heating, air or electricity.

Linares said having these things in order beforehand can help because a house can come onto the market in the morning and be gone by the end of the day.

“Sometimes, it’s a necessity to really

jump on something if it’s a good fit,” Schluckebier said. “It can be kind of intimidating, and that’s where our job is to come in and make them feel a little more comfortable.”

He said it can be frustrating because, especially in small towns, there is less variety to choose from. At the same time, Seward and Saline county residents are fortunate to have communities people want to move to or move back to.

Sometimes, buyers just have to be patient.

The time it takes someone to find a home often depends on how willing they are to make compromises.

“You don’t have thousands of homes to pick from, so you kind of have to make compromises,” Schluckebier said. “If it doesn’t have the master bath or the feature that you want or the garage, then you just kind of have to add that on your own down the road.”

Linares encourages people not to get discouraged if they lose offers to other buyers because, just like anything else in life, it is just part of the process.

“Keep being positive,” she said.

“You will buy your house; remember, you make your house a home, so being realistic of what you need and want is important.”

Painting

Continued from 4

the hours it would bring.

“I did it for fun for a while,” he said. “A lot of people say they hate painting, but I really enjoy it. I like to see the detail in the work. I also like that I can set my own hours and work as long as I need to.”

Mencil also works in many different towns in the area including Seward, Beatrice, Lincoln and Omaha and is willing to work in the surrounding areas like Saline and Seward counties.

With spring around the corner, Mencil said now can be a good time



to start looking at getting exterior work done.

“Exteriors can start as early as April and as late as October,” he said. “Make sure you have a week of nice weather so that the paint can cure.”

As for interior, Mencil said painters can do it

all year and there isn’t necessarily a best time to do it.

Anyone interested in having Mencil do a project for them can contact him on his Facebook page, “Mencil & Sons Painting,” or call (402) 806-1461.



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Lawns

Continued from 8

stays consistently above 40 degrees, it's time to start considering mowing according to Edison Landscaping.

"When your lawn has been prepped for weed control, and the temperatures remain above 40, it is time to start watching your lawn for growth. Typically, you can mow the lawn for the first time in the spring when your grass has grown to approximately 2-3 inches in length. This, of course, varies depending on your grass type."

Sunday Lawn Care also says it's also important to keep watering your grass. Watering grass one to three times a week is ideal for growth.

These tips are a great start to getting your lawn ready and continuing to make it look as good as possible in the spring.

Low input lawn class set

Turfgrasses are one of the best multi-use groundcovers for home, community and commercial settings, and they can be kept healthy and vigorous with lower amounts of fertilizer and water than are typically used.

Learn how to assess your lawn's need for fertilization and normal turfgrass water requirements at an upcoming "Low Input Lawn Management" workshop.

The Seward County Extension Office will

host the free one-hour program at 10 a.m. on Saturday, June 8.

The office is located at 322 S. 14th St. in Seward.

RSVP to (402) 643-2981.

The presenter will be Sarah Browning, Extension educator with the University of Nebraska and certified arborist.

Browning focuses on horticulture, fruit and vegetable production, food safety, water conservation and protecting water quality.



Watering grass one to three times a week is ideal for growth.

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