The Seed 2021

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

Planting Nebraska for healthy people, vibrant communities and a resilient environment

Sustainable Landscape Design

A Beginning Gardener's Perspective

I am relatively new to gardening. As a child I "helped" my parents in their garden. They had a wonderful, diverse garden where we were able to play, explore and practice using our green thumbs. They were ahead of the curve too, as they spent those years removing more and more of the lawn and replacing it with a bounty of beautiful plants.

So when I finally had a yard and garden of my own to work on, I dug right in. That's when I realized that what I remember of helping my parents in the garden must have really only been about 10 percent of the actual work. Is it my fault that swinging is so fun? Anyway, I had a lot of work to do. So, from one beginning gardener to another, here are my tips.

- **SPACE**. The first thing I did was order a Bloom Box (shameless plug), which is a program of NSA that recently won a national award for excellence. I received easy to care for, pollinator approved, regionally native plants perfect for my soil type and the amount of light in the intended plot. Then I planted everything way too close together and lost half the plants simply because they didn't have room to grow. I like a crowded garden (less weeding) but do pay attention to how much space your plants need. The Bloom Box instructions told me how much space to use, but I eyeballed it and found out that I am not good at estimating space. So keep space in mind, especially when you're planting small plants that will grow to be big plants.
- **BLOOM TIME**. Y'all, I'm in this for the blooms. I like pretty flowers. I know some people don't care about this one, but I love having blooming plants in my garden as often as possible, especially if I can cut them and bring them inside. I wish I had paid attention to bloom times when I started my garden. I am now four years in and have started to even things out, but I could use a few more summer- and fall-blooming plants. If you like to see the blooms, make sure to mix plants together that bloom at different times of the year so you always have something to catch your eye.
- **EDGES**. This is a new one for me. I didn't think I would care about clean edges, but I do. This spring and summer I've been working to clean up the edges of my garden. This has included adding some stone edging to create an actual barrier between the garden and other spaces. It has also included adding plants that help define the edge. Small plants that offer some definition have helped me have a wild garden that doesn't look out of control. Don't get me wrong, I love wild gardens too, but I find gardens with an edge a little easier to maintain. In some areas it has also helped prevent the topsoil from washing away in less-established areas during heavy spring rains. A win all around.

Overall gardening is about doing what makes you happy. These are the things that I think would have improved my early gardening experiences, but gardening is not a one-size-fits-all hobby. Get out there, get your hands dirty and try things out. Also, keep up with us on social media and our print and emailed newsletters to receive the latest gardening tips year-round. We'll see you in the garden!

Hanna Pinneo, NSA Interim Executive Director

Inside:

Placing & Caring for Trees

Trees anchor plantings and provide shade and shelter for shrubs and smaller plants. A street-lined path or an exposed one? It makes a difference.

Trees are generally the longest-lived plants in our landscapes. Those that are well-selected and cared for can span generations and live for decades. Which is a VERY good thing since large growing trees are the "Superheroes" of the landscape, providing an incredible array of economic, social and environmental benefits that are hard to beat. A few well-placed trees for example could increase a property's value by more than 10 percent and can help reduce annual utility costs treemendously (yes treemendously!), all while providing years of stormwater capture, wildlife habitat, climbing opportunities, backyard retreating and sylvan beauty. As such, trees deserve careful consideration for how we select and locate them in the landscape.

Here are some suggestions to help think about what trees to plant and where to plant them, admittedly coming from someone who very much likes to be around trees.

1. Don't rush the decision. It's not uncommon for people to lament placing a certain tree in a given location realizing that as it grew it hid the picture window or blocked traffic views or shaded the garden or didn't shade the patio or struggled in a wet spot or was in danger of falling on the house.
2. Think function first. Resist the urge to select shade trees primarily for their ornamental characteristics. Remember that spring flowers and fall colors are fleeting and you'll need to live with the tree the other 50 weeks of the year. It's most important that the trees we select be structurally sound, long-lived, wildlife-friendly, climate tolerant and environmentally appropriate.
3. Know the tree and how it grows. Species vary significantly from each other. Bur oaks can grow quite wide, while shingle oaks are more upright and lindens have low, sweeping branches as they mature. Remember also that it's our native trees that are generally the most climate-adapted and which offer the best habitat for wildlife. Be aware that many non-native species such as ornamental pear, goldenraintree, tree-of-heaven and others are invasive and shouldn't be planted. However, there are several non-native species that can help expand the palette of choice in our area. Do some research and/or ask a tree species expert.
4. Canopy vs Screen. Generally, deciduous trees will provide canopy shade, while conifers are better for screening and wind protection. Shade trees make more sense in the middle of the property, while conifers are better at the edges. But keep in mind that most conifers are at home in the mountains or cooler climates and there is an ever-growing list of problems with many of our conifers, including pines and spruce. Although they're nearby, Nebraska is not the Rocky Mountains and I would resist the urge to try to mimic a mountain look.
5. Siting for shade. The best locations for shade near a house are on the south and southwest sides where the summer sun will be most intense. However, shade is also important near porches, patios, decks and other places people gather. If planting near a house or structure, choose species with strong branch structure and storm resistance. Oaks are especially good for that. Conversely, beware of species with notorious storm damage potential, like silver maple and hackberry. Near the house is also often a good place to tuck in smaller ornamental trees like redbud, serviceberry, some crabapples and ornamental maples.
6. Know the soil, know the site. Know your soil before planting. Is it irrigated and wet? Is it excessively dry? Is it a

mucky clay soil or something with better drainage? Is it sterile and possibly in need of organic matter? (The best soils for trees are rich with decomposing organic matter.) These things matter significantly. Take advantage of drainage ways or wet areas to plant more wet-tolerant species such as red maple, bald cypress, alder, larch and sycamore. And keep in mind that irrigated lawns are often over-watered and more trees die from over-watering than under-watering.

7. Speaking of lawn. If you want better tree health and longevity, keep in mind that many lawn-care activities

work against this. Overwatering, herbicide damage and mower damage are all very common where trees are placed in high-maintenance lawns. One of the best things we can do for our trees is to relax on lawn care. It matters!

8. Trees as anchors. Think of trees as anchors for other plants like shrubs and groundcovers. And as trees mature, they provide protection for a wide variety of shade-adapted plants that can help make a landscape more visually dynamic and easier to care for.

9. Plant trees close together. One of the most common misconceptions of people is that large-growing shade trees need to be spaced wide apart. Just look at a forest and you'll see the affinity trees have for growing close to each other. This closeness increases their ability to withstand storms, which is important in our windswept region.

10. Massing and separation from turfgrass. Try not to scatter trees individually, but instead plant trees in groups and in association with other plants such as shrubs, perennials and groundcovers. Massing trees and other plants together helps create islands with many mutual benefits including reduced conflicts with lawn care (mowing, trimming, irrigation, etc.); greater resistance to weather events; better soil health; better drought-tolerance; fewer disease and insect problems; and better aesthetics.

Tallest first. Trees have quite an impact on the landscape, so plant them first.

11. Windbreaks should be more diverse and should include deciduous species. Most windbreaks in our region have been planted to just a few types of evergreens, which reduces their resiliency to diseases, insects and storms. In addition, many evergreens are struggling from a warming climate and planting them tightly together often speeds up disease pressure. Windbreaks should include deciduous species to help improve diversity and resiliency. Several oak and viburnum species hold their leaves well into the winter, making them a good choice for winter wind protection.

12. Plant a diversity but don't plant one of everything. It's important to strive for broad species diversity across a large property, neighborhood or community. However, too many disparate shapes and colors can look cluttered and off-putting. Try to balance the benefits of diversity with the value of repetition. Planting in groups of threes and fives is a good rule of thumb.

13. Some evergreens become nice shade trees over time. Generally, evergreens are planted to achieve a relatively solid vertical mass. However, some pines and junipers are self-pruning of lower branches and become decent canopy trees in time, an especially important consideration for western Nebraska. Ponderosa pine is particularly good in this regard.

14. Beware of power lines and potential utility conflicts. They exist all over our communities.

15. Be a good neighbor. When planting at the edge of a property, make sure your neighbor is on board, especially with anything that might extend into their yard. Remember that they have the lawful right to prune anything overhanging their property.

Justin Evertson, Green Infrastructure Coordinator

Windbreaks originally were planted as monocultures, but more diverse plantings are ultimately far more resistant and sustainable.

A Few Resources for Sustainable Landscapes

Backyard Farmer, byf.unl.edu

Garden Design Guide, plantnebraska.org/garden-design-guide

Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder, missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx

Native & Recommended Plants, plantnebraska.org/your-yard/what-to-plant.html

Nebraska Extension Publications & Resources, extension.unl.edu

Omaha Plants, omahaplants.org

USDA Plants, https://plants.usda.gov/home

Wildflower Center, Lady Bird Johnson, wildflower.org

A new bed (garden, that is)

Creating a completely new garden from scratch can be daunting but it can also be exciting and rewarding—a chance to create something totally new and unique that didn't exist before. When preparing a new planting site, the key is to plan ahead and give yourself time to work. Rushed garden prep leads to exhausted gardeners, skipped soil work and weeds or turfgrass left in the soil to cause problems after planting.

Start by outlining the area you want to plant with a hose, rope, rocks or other moveable markers so you can adjust as you envision what the new garden will look like. Once you're satisfied with the shape and size, mow or trim off any existing turfgrass or weeds as close to the ground as possible and decide whether to use herbicide or a chemical-free method of removal.

Hoses work well for marking out new garden beds.

Most chemical-free methods of garden prep need at least 6-8 weeks to be effective. Solarizing with clear plastic or smothering with cardboard is most effective over the summer. Cover the ground in mid to late spring and leave it covered through the summer heat for planting that fall or the following spring. Herbicide can speed the process up but plan on at least two applications (follow label instructions) plus a week after the last application to let it work.

The fastest way to prepare a site is to physically remove the turf. While this method is fast and effective, you can plant immediately but it's labor intensive and will require topsoil to refill the hole.

After clearing the site, use a spade to roughly loosen the soil… leaving large chunks is okay. Avoid using mechanical tillers unless you have extremely hard soil and are adding a large amount of compost. They often mask compaction issues by loosening the top few inches but creating a hard pan layer underneath.

Now is the time to make adjustments if you need to level things out or want to raise the bed above the existing grade (ground level). Use at least 50 percent topsoil to build up the grade or fill in holes since compost alone will decompose over time and sink back down. When you're happy with the grading, add 2-4 inches of compost on top of the soil. You can plant into the new compost or allow the soil to rest over winter and let the freeze/thaw action work the compost in and loosen the soil. If you're not planting immediately, cover the soil with woodchips, leaves, grass clippings or (weed-free) straw to prevent weeds from taking hold before the new plants are added.

Late fall is a great time to work on soil that needs improving. It is cooler, dryer and the weather is more dependable for big projects. Preparing your soil in the fall means you'll be ready to plant in spring without interruption from spring rains.

Sarah Buckley, Program Coordinator

Smothering grass and weeds over the summer works well to get rid of weeds and turf to prepare for planting in fall or the following spring. Covering them with clear plastic is the best for killing weed seed, but any material will work over time.

Use a sharp spade to loosen the soil.
No need to overdo it, a few clumps are fine.

Starting a New Perennial Bed

- To start a new bed on existing turf, smother it first with up to 4-6" of a top-soil/compost mix to kill the grass. Allow 2-3 weeks before planting so digging the holes is easier. Better yet, create new planting beds in the fall and plant them in the spring.
- Working in 2-3" of good compost is helpful to any perennial bed for reducing compaction, improving drainage and adding nutrients.
- For plants that need good drainage, the bed should resemble the crown of a road where heavy rains drain away to the sides rather than puddling in the middle.
- Perennials are more appealing both visually and for attracting pollinators when there's multiples of the same type of plant.
- Many perennials will grow in a broad range of conditions, but it's best to group perennials with similar growing requirements in terms of moisture, drainage and sunlight.
- Planting grasses adjacent to and among flowering perennials gives the bed more structure, softens the transition between showy perennials and adds more year-round interest.
- After planting, putting down a light layer of wood chips, grass clippings, straw, leaves or a "green mulch" of lower-lying plants will help conserve water, discourage weeds and moderate extreme temperatures. A light layer of 1-2" of mulch is ideal. If the mulch is too deep, water can't penetrate the mulch and too deep a layer can cause root rot and oxygen deprivation.
- Don't pile too much mulch around main stems; keep it a couple of inches away, and no more than 3" deep to guard against crown rot and discourage slugs and rodents. Excessive mulch can also cause plants to root into the mulch rather than the soil.
- Mulch also reduces sunlight which many annual weeds need in order to germinate.
- It's best to remove weeds early before they become too problematic. Hand-pull young weeds or use a scuffle hoe with a triangular-shaped blade. Using a back and forth push/pull motion cuts roots below the mulch layer and soil surface. In addition to visible weeds, this motion removes seedlings which have not yet emerged.

Planting ornamental grasses among perennials gives more year-round structure and interest to the planting.

Getting New Plants Established

- After planting, water every other day for two weeks, depending on rainfall, wind and temperature. If temperatures are in the 90s you may need to water once a day. Frequency is more important than duration for new plants which don't need a huge volume of water to get established but do need consistent moisture.
- Nursery plants are best established by watering them individually rather than saturating a large area. Though they're no longer confined to a little plastic pot, their root system is still confined to that same small space. Watering individual plants will also reduce new weeds from germinating in the open spaces between them.
- For small plants, you can use a watering can or wand or dip several cups per plant from a large bucket.
- For newly planted large potted plants or balled and burlapped trees, a 5-gallon bucket of water per tree per week is sufficient. (Note: This sounds like a lot of water, but for big trees a good amount like this will remove any air pockets and assures sufficient water as the tree is getting established. It's much better to have a known amount than to leave a hose running for 20 minutes and potentially drown the tree.)
- A half inch of rain usually lasts about 3-4 days.
- After plants have been in the soil for two weeks, they should only need watering once a week, or 2-3 times per week if temperatures are in the 90s. A weekly watering should be sufficient for the rest of the growing season.

Regular watering of new plants is essential.

Both articles on this page by Bob Henrickson, Horticulture Program Coordinator

Sustainable Lawn Care

The blazing summer heat in Nebraska is enough to make you wonder if your cool-season lawn is worth all the trouble. You may have spent a good part of the spring season reseeding, fertilizing, mowing frequently and employing several methods of weed control. Now you're afraid if you miss one watering session all your efforts to achieve your ideal lawn will have been a waste.

As the most demanding and expensive part of the landscape, lawns can certainly be a challenge. Yet there are options, basically two keys to reducing your load—and your stress. Follow these steps and you'll also save some cash and create a more sustainable lawn, for you and the environment.

The first key is to realistically re-evaluate your expectations and redefine your "ideal" lawn. Maybe it's not worth the struggle to compete with the neighbor to have the "best" lawn on the block. By the way, that "best" lawn may be over-watered, over-fertilized, shallow-rooted and highly vulnerable to challenges from insects, disease and weather extremes. An important fact to remember is that a lawn can be all of the following: lower-maintenance, healthy and attractive.

A good starting point is to reconsider the demanding goal of monoculture of turf in your lawn. Many homeowners are returning to the old standard that allows some diversity, such as clover, to coexist with turfgrass. This diversity increases beneficial organisms and decreases pest and disease problems, as well as the need for herbicides.

Also consider allowing summer dormancy, the natural hot weather response of cool-season grasses. Fescue and bluegrass can survive with just occasional water in the summer, and still be healthy and look great in the fall. Or better yet, if you have full sun areas, give warm-season grasses such as buffalograss a try. Buffalograss, with its attractive bluish green color, thrives in the heat of summer with little or no fertilizer and supplemental water after establishment. Also, its maximum height is only 6", so mowing frequency is greatly reduced.

Another variable to evaluate is the size of your lawn. If the only time a foot touches your lawn is when it's being maintained, then it would likely make sense to have less of it. Consider converting some of it to beds with low-maintenance shrubs, perennials and/or ornamental grasses, especially natives. On an acreage simply allow select areas to go "wild," equating to very low maintenance.

The second key is to manage your lawn properly—not necessarily as your neighbor or Uncle Dave does. All lawn management actions are inter-connected and each action has a domino effect—good or bad. For example the common mistake of mowing too short results in more weed germination, hotter and drier soil and increased stress on the turf. The following management steps all work together to make the other steps easier and more effective.

Watering

- Water early in the day to reduce evaporation loss and disease potential.
- Water deeply and infrequently, using a double cycle method if runoff is an issue.
- Water only as needed—avoiding the "set and forget" approach. The needs of the lawn vary along with our dramatic weather shifts, so adjust frequency and duration accordingly.
- Check automatic sprinkler systems regularly to ensure efficient operation, with proper pressure and pattern, rain sensor, no broken heads, etc.

Mowing

- Mow high, which results in a deeper root system, moisture conservation, reduction of weed germination and crown shading.
- Keep mower blades sharp to reduce injury stress and disease potential.
- Mow as needed (more in spring, less in summer), not on a preset schedule.
- Recycle clippings to reduce water loss, reduce soil temperature and return nutrients to the soil.

A patch of buffalograss at the edges of this lawn makes it more interesting and reduces mowing.

Fertilizing

- Lawns are frequently over-fertilized, with many negative consequences. Too much means more mowing, higher water demand and increased disease potential.
- Fertilizer runoff is also a significant pollutant in our streams and lakes.
- Fertilize a couple of times a year at the proper rate, primarily in the fall, for a healthy turf without excessive leaf growth.

Weeds, Insects, Diseases

- All of these problems are greatly reduced by following the guidelines above.
- Control remaining weeds by pulling or with spot-spraying.
- Generally, preventative insect and disease controls are not warranted. Grubs prefer, and do the most damage to, poorly managed (shallow-rooted, over-watered and over-fertilized) turf.

Kendall Weyers, Sustainable Communities Coordinator

Cities—Where No Trees Are Native

Trees are wild things. No, seriously. They have evolved and adapted to lots of different climates and share those ecosystems with all other life on this planet. There are very few places on Earth where life exists without woody plants. Before plants adapted woody growth, the whole plant kingdom was confined to the warm and relatively mild parts of Earth. Even after expanding all over the globe, only a handful of those ecosystems do a decent job of mimicking the long list of stress factors for trees growing in the city. A rocky environment with low-fertility soils, periodic rain downpours, frigid winters and abundant browsing animals could adequately prepare a tree for life in the city, but most nursery trees have not evolved in those conditions.

Urban environments are manmade and relatively new on the planet. So, for all the conversation around using more native trees (which is a scientifically sound and very worthwhile goal), there really aren't any trees native to an urban context. We haven't been building cities long enough for tree genetics to effectively adapt to these tough conditions, but we've had plenty of time to observe their performance and select for genetic traits that are more resilient in urban contexts.

But we still want trees in our cities, and for many good reasons. Aside from the commonly known benefits that trees offer, research shows that people spend more time and money in business districts with tree canopy. People recover from hospital stays more quickly and use less pain medication simply from having a view of green space from their room. Trees have even been shown to reduce some types of opportunistic crime.

When we take a tree that is adapted to growing in a forest with lots of other trees close by and we plant it as an individual along the street or in the front yard, it will grow very differently. Lower branches that would be shaded out by other trees now get lots of sunlight and are able to continue to do the work they were grown for over a longer time period. The tall straight trunks of forest trees develop multiple leaders with weak branch attachments when they aren't crowded together in a forest. This means that arborists are needed to guide the structure of trees in order to prevent the weak structure that they often develop in urban environments.

How do we do that? The tip of every branch on a tree has a terminal bud that regulates the distribution of hormones throughout the tree. Among other functions, these hormones dictate stem elongation, dormancy, and where the tree sends energy for more growth. By removing some number of buds from different parts of the tree, we can not only reduce the length and weight of branches to reduce the chance that they will break but also reduce the future growth rate of that branch (a process called subordination). By subordinating branches with weak attachments, we encourage the tree to allocate energy for growth to parts of the tree that we want to be dominant.

The idea is not to force all trees into a forest form with tall and straight trunks and few small lower branches. Competent, experienced arborists know the body language of trees and use that information to identify warning signs of potential future problems that they can prevent now. When we see bark inclusion, codominant leaders, poor branch spacing and other issues in our client's trees, we can use the concept of branch subordination to reduce the chances of them calling later to clean up a tree that has lost large limbs in a storm.

In arboriculture, an ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure when it comes to the wild things we plant in our communities.

Graham Herbst, Community Forester Specialist

The environment surrounding trees in the city is very different from their native environment.

Children's Spaces— where the wild things grow

At the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, we like to challenge gardeners to appreciate different aesthetics; from waterwise gardens to prairie landscapes to where the wild things really are—children's gardens. Planting for children is an opportunity to add some fun to the garden but it can be hard to adjust your expectations; it will most likely look nothing like what you would design for yourself.

I'm not talking about educational gardens that are designed to teach specific lessons like plant identification or curriculum-based lesson plans. Teaching gardens are important but so are exploratory spaces where children can learn through free play. The great thing about mother nature is that she already has a lesson plan; all you need to do is provide the space and allow them the freedom to explore.

One of the best things a garden can offer is the freedom to touch and explore.

Children view the world differently than adults and nicely laid out plants in a well-weeded garden bed are unlikely to hold much appeal for imaginative play. This space should generally fit into your yard or campus without being an eyesore but beyond that, try to hand over the reins as much as possible. If you have older children, let them choose some of the plants (even if the colors totally clash or you would never plant them yourself).

That's a lot of no's...

What IS a children's garden?

- It's full of interesting elements to explore, plants and other materials with a variety of shapes, colors, textures, smells and tastes (with adult supervision).
- Don't forget the logs and rocks!
- It won't look "finished"; some weeds are okay, the mulch isn't perfect, and there's open dirt to dig in.
- The elements are flexible and, with some imagination, can be used in a variety of ways.
- Dirt is key. There's room to dig, drive cars, organize rocks, etc.
- Kids love to collect so there are plenty of seeds, berries or funky flowers to gather.

Think like a kid

If you need help thinking like a kid again, start with a loose theme:

- Designate an area where the plants are for touching and picking to save your favorite plants from little fingers. Use lots of bright colors and fun textures to lure them away from your carefully planted pots. Babies can lay on a blanket and explore with their toes.
- Create a mud kitchen with old pots, bowls and utensils. It might include a hand-me-down kitchen set or you can leave them to build their own from found materials.
- "Play-scape" around your sandbox, water table, car track, etc. to make it a part of a larger space.

Little hands love to touch and squish!

Sedges around a sandbox are tough enough to stand up to toddler feet and make a fun jungle for cars to explore.

Plant Ideas

- Fun flowers: rattlesnake master, bright colored annuals, prairie smoke, balloon flower, allium
- Fun seeds: sideoats grama, bottlebrush sedge, baptisia, milkweed, penstemon
- Interesting smells: mountain mint, hyssop, beebalm, geranium, marigold, lemon grass, herbs
- Interesting textures: coneflower, sage, blue flax, sunflowers, hen and chicks, grasses
- Edible: herbs, alpine strawberry, currants, juneberry, wild plum (it's important that kids understand not to eat anything that hasn't been identified but providing known foods in their safe play space can give them something familiar to collect and taste)

Sarah Buckley, Program Coordinator

Landscape Tips from A to Z

Justin Evertson, Green Infrastructure Coordinator

"Make room for a bit of a wild area in your yard where you don't fuss about the weeds as much. The rough edges are where some of the best biodiversity and sustainability takes place."

Hanna Pinneo, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum Interim Executive Director

"Putting a rain gauge where you're watering with a sprinkler gives you a more accurate idea of how much you're watering. It's especially helpful with trees that don't normally show their lack of water until later. And for new gardeners: Good, sturdy tools are worth the money but stick to the basics like pruners, trowels, rakes, good shovels, etc. And remember that anything that seems too good to be true almost always is."

Bob Henrickson. Horticulture Program Coordinator

"No matter the site, it's always a great plan to do some soil amending to break

up compaction and add organic matter to make sure your new plants are in well-drained soil… and it makes planting sooooo much easier."

Lucinda Mays, Chadron State College Arboretum Curator

"To freshen the look of your landscape right now and on into autumn:

First – to garden like a pro, round up a tarp. Any garden cleanup gets tossed onto the tarp as you work, giving you a beautifully groomed result the minute you haul the tarp away.

Second – pay attention to edges of beds and lawns. If the edges are well-kept, the rest of the landscape looks well-kept, too.

Finally – tackle one small task at a time (unless you have a crew!). Do one small task, finish it up, sweep up after yourself, and enjoy the immediate improvement you have made.

Here's a list of easy-to-accomplish tasks that add up to a well-tended late summer and autumn landscape. Most take just a few minutes.

Shear back bedding plants (like petunias) to encourage re-bloom. Take off about a third of the plant.

Add slow release fertilizer to beds and pots of annuals, perennials and ornamental grasses. Look for granulated fertilizer formulated to last three months in the landscape. An organic option is to side-dress the plants with a half inch layer of compost.

Brighten up your entryway with a large container (at least the size of a 5-gallon bucket) planted with newly purchased annuals, fall-blooming perennials and grasses. Put bricks in the bottom of the pot to keep it from blowing over.

If your planted containers are drying out each day, give them a deep watering around 12-1pm instead of

watering twice a day. Use a shallow pan under each pot to catch runoff.

Add mineral supplements (not fertilizer) to trees and shrubs. Pelletized agricultural sulfur from a farm store and chelated iron from a garden center are good additions to alkaline soils (common to western Nebraska). Sulfur and chelated iron will slowly and steadily improve foliage color

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on yellowing trees and shrubs. Follow package instructions for how much to apply.

Raise the deck on your lawn mower to its highest setting. Taller

grass blades shade grass roots, thereby using less water, and give the lawn a lush look.

Cut a sharp and shallow edge in turf along beds, sidewalks and driveways. Get best results from using a flat-bladed spade or share or rent a powered edger with friends and neighbors.

Use a file to sharpen spades and shovels. A well-sharpened spade slices through roots rather than pushing through them with blunt force. A good all-purpose file is an 8-10" single-cut bastard file with a handle. Single-cut means the file teeth go only in a single direction, and bastard means medium roughness of the teeth on the file. Plus it's fun to say.

Cut suckers that arise from tree roots. Don't spray the suckers with herbicide; that will affect the tree as well as the suckers.

Whoa, Nellie! Wait until March and April to prune anything else green from your trees and shrubs. It's ok for the tree if you cut out dead wood at any time. Put down a 4" layer of wood chips or pine needle mulch around trees and shrubs. Keep the mulch away from the trunk but otherwise even in depth all the way to the edge of the mulched area, giving a tidier edge where the mulch meets the lawn.

Choose a favorite color of paint to mark the handles of small, easy to misplace hand tools.

You can garden like a pro – just remember to use a tarp, pay attention to edges and tackle small seasonal tasks one at a time."

Graham Herbst, Community Forester Specialist

"My garden doesn't look great this year, but I am really glad I used logs to line my path so I can mulch it deeply and reduce

weed pressure. Did I pull a few borage before taking these pictures. Yes.

Mulch is a good thing, but I like to plan for the mulched spaces to disappear as perennial plants fill in the space. Nature abhors a vacuum, so if you don't fill your garden beds with plants you love, other plants will do it for you."

Bob Feurer, Retired Science Teacher and Curator at the Franklin-Cotterell Greens Arboretum in North Bend

"My best tip is the Hula-hoe or stirrup hoe. Great for ordinary weeding in the garden or for wood-chipped beds. It pulls through the plant roots and lets the woodchips glide through the opening above the blade with minimum disruption of chip cover, and reaches in under shrubs to get those pesky hiding ones. By far the most-used hoe I own."

Sarah Buckley, Program Coordinator

"When you're planting wildflowers, go light on the mulch and avoid areas where snow gets piled in the winter. My happiest wildflowers are growing on a slight mound with a very thin layer of mulch, in the backyard where we don't use any ice melt or salt."

Alan Roesler, Park Supervisor & City Forester for the City of Kearney

"I think most of us know about the benefits of mulch for trees, shrubs, perennials and other plantings. It can probably be used most effectively in massed beds and, especially for young trees, it can prevent damage from mowers and string trimmers. It also cuts down on the woody plants' competition with turf in the top 6" or so of the soil profile, stabilizes temperature extremes, inhibits weed seeds' germination, conserves moisture and, if done correctly, enhances aesthetics as well.

Further regarding the aesthetics, the real 'tip' is about colors. First off, try to avoid shiny-new, freshly ground wood products (like ground up pallets) which may be the cheapest mulch to purchase but are high in carbon content and low in nitrogen so it can draw nitrogen from the soil and upset the soil's carbon/nitrogen balance to the detriment of plants. As for other colors, personally I like natural-looking mulch that lets the plants be the visual focus. Why? Because red fades to pink; black gets too hot and fades to gray; and dark brown fades to natural brown—so why not just start there?

If you can find locally sourced mulch made from whole branches and trees, the 'stringy' parts will help knit it all together

and stay in place better during our famous wind and 'frog-drowner' rainstorms. Natural, locally sourced ground-up wood waste is also more sustainable, accessible and usually cheaper or even free at landfills."

Karma Larsen, Communications Associate

"For composting, keep it simple. It doesn't require a complicated system. Just dig a hole somewhere out of sight, fill it

with kitchen waste, add some water and cover it back up with soil; moisture and worms will break it down within weeks. Trench composting is much faster than dry, aboveground methods."

Chrissy Land, Community Forester Specialist

"Use pre-emergence anywhere you can to help reduce your management load later in the season. It works by dissolving at the surface and seeping into the top few inches of the soil, creating a 'burn barrier'. Any seeds that germinate and try to grow through this barrier are essentially burned, thus killed before they can even break the soil surface."

Carol Evans Lynch, *Curator of CABG Patch Landscape Steward Site, Master Gardener Emerita

*Constantly being reminded that I am not in control.

"This is what I've learned...

A landscape is never static but constantly evolving. Therefore, things need to be redone, replaced and rethought. Trees reach the end of their lives—and after a proper period of mourning, you have the opportunity to plant a new legacy.

What is considered to be good planning and design changes, so allow the landscape to evolve with new discoveries. Work with a sense of the place where you reside.

Weeds will always be with us—figure out how to live with some of them. You will live longer and with less frustration.

Be in awe of and honored by of all the scaly, feathered, furry, many-legged,

crawling, winged, slithering, hopping, walking and flying creatures that reside in your landscape. Be tolerant of them and thankful that they have made their home with you. Enjoy observing their lives.

Most of all, take time to enjoy what you have accomplished with the good grace of Mother Nature. The work will still be there tomorrow."

Carol Evans Lynch and husband Bob own and manage one of NSA's private arboretums in Omaha's Ponca Hills.

If you're interested in joining our statewide network of gardens, either as a private or public site, visit plantnebraska.org/who-we-are/affiliate-sites or email arboretum@unl.edu.

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum
University of Nebraska
102 Keim Hall
P.O. Box 830964
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Lots of Ways to Connect, Learn, Get Ideas...

- JOIN US for for online First Thursday Plant Talks on "All Things Green"
- BUY NATIVE & recommended plants from us, many with local seed source
- RECOMMEND us to friends, family and co-workers
- GIVE. We are a grassroots nonprofit that relies on our members
- BE PART of the community on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram

Facebook

Pinterest

Instagram

NEBRASKA STATEWIDE Arboretum

The Nebraska Environmental Trust

NEBRASKA FOREST SERVICE

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES