

living with energy IN IOWA

APRIL 2020



Guthrie County REC
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

National Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 13 ▶ See Page 4

Create a
pollinator
playground

Visit our website at www.guthrie-rec.coop

Is a career as a
lineman for you?

Spring cleaning
safety tips

“Egg-citing”
breakfast recipes

Living with Energy in Iowa magazine (ISSN: 1935-7176) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase *Living with Energy in Iowa* is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

Editorial Office: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350. E-mail address: editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com. Letters may be edited for clarity and length before publication. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

Website: www.livingwithenergyiowa.com

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

Change of Address: Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2020, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.

**ALWAYS
CALL
BEFORE YOU
DIG**



**IOWA 811
ONE CALLSM**

800-292-8989

Features

6 Create a pollinator playground

One of the electric cooperatives' environmental initiatives – developing pollinator habitats – has created a lot of buzz among Iowans. Learn how to plant one in your yard.



8 Egg-citing breakfast recipes

Eggs are packed with nutrition, and co-op cooks share their favorite ways to use them for breakfast. **PLUS:** Find out how you can receive a \$25 credit on your power bill!



10 Small gardens with big yields

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



Favorites

3 Statewide Perspective

Providing safe, reliable service is a co-op priority

14 Safety Matters

Spring forward with outdoor safety tips

3 Editor's Choice Contest

Win a \$100 gift card for a pollinator habitat

15 Out Back

Spring thaw brings out the worst in our yard

ON THE COVER

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



Providing safe, reliable service is a co-op priority

BY ANN THELEN

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



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

Always planning for ongoing, reliable service

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

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

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

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

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

Stay connected with your co-op

Across Iowa, some electric cooperatives have postponed their

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

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

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

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

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

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

Visit our website and win!

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



LIHEAP RELIEF

Financial Assistance

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

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



So, you want to be a lineman?

The thought of working every day in conditions that could potentially endanger your life is not a job for the faint of heart. But although being a lineman requires mental agility, physical fitness, creativity and problem-solving skills all in one, those who choose this profession also find more meaningful ways to connect to their livelihoods.

“We definitely work as a team when we’re out there,” says Todd Tinken, journeyman lineman. “Working together under strenuous conditions means we need to know we have each other’s back. When anyone on our crew needs help, we’re there and that’s it. No questions asked. People use the term ‘brotherhood’ for a lot of different reasons, but in our case, there’s really no better word for it.”

Working on high-voltage lines doesn’t require a Ph.D., but it doesn’t mean just anyone can become a lineman overnight. Linemen start their education in a powerline program like the one at Northwest Iowa Community College, where they receive both classroom and hands-on learning opportunities. Next, they can be hired at a utility



as an apprentice lineman where they continue their education and training, which can take an additional four to five years. When those requirements are met, they become credentialed as a journeyman lineman.

“We immerse our apprentice linemen in on-the-job training and experiences while giving them plenty of opportunities to learn what they need to in order to become journeymen linemen,” says Line

Crew Foreman Curt Knapp. “This period of time is also when they decide whether this profession is right for them.”

In fact, some sources cite the dropout rate for apprentice linemen at more than 50% nationwide.

“If they’re not fully invested in what it means to be a lineman, they won’t make it,” says Cozy Nelsen, Guthrie County REC CEO. “It’s imperative that our crew members are dependable, adhere to every safety regulation, and most of all, remember who it is we serve – the members at the end of the line.”

Korbin Nourse, a 2019 recipient of the Guthrie Co. REC scholarship, will begin his lineman training later this spring in the Powerline program at Northwest Iowa Community College. In 2018, the program was ranked as the number one electrical program in the U.S. by Schools.com.

“Everything that comes with being a lineman makes it more than a career; it’s a lifestyle,” Knapp adds. “They put their mark on the world one electric pole at a time, and that requires a certain amount of pride as well.” ⚡



Office

1406 State Street • P.O. Box 7
Guthrie Center, IA 50115-0007

Office Hours

Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Telephone Number

641-747-2206 or 888-747-2206
Calls answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Website

www.guthrie-rec.coop

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THE DARK, WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK.



Lineworker Appreciation Day April 13
#ThankALineworker

Keeping our lines clear and power flowing

As beautiful as they can be, trees are frequently the leading cause of unplanned service interruptions for Guthrie County REC. And because we live in Iowa, we experience all types of weather throughout the year that threaten to bring down branches. Your cooperative's job is to minimize the risk of those branches landing on power lines and causing outages.

Managing the vegetation within our cooperative's right of way is our single largest maintenance expense. It may look like we're trimming trees, but what you see is a multi-faceted proactive plan of attack against overgrowth that includes smart pruning, total tree removal and application of U.S. EPA-registered herbicides. Almost daily, our lineworkers assess vulnerable areas along our lines where clearing is needed. They look at things like the growth patterns of trees based on species, the health of the tree and where future growth may occur that can cause problems.

Our trimming standards are set by the American National Standards Institute with recommended best practices to protect the tree health while directing future growth away from power lines. Closer to the ground, our lineworkers need access to power poles so even tall grasses, bushes and brush that block our access are mowed or sprayed. The



cooperative hires a contractor to spray 80 miles of right-of-way per year to kill potential growth. We are on a 10-year cycle, so every year one-tenth of our service territory is our focus for trimming, cutting and spraying.

When it comes to vegetation management, Guthrie County REC wants to work with you. That's why if you're thinking about planting a tree this spring, we appreciate your efforts to plant it in the right place. Doing so can help us avoid line clearance efforts and help you protect your investment. If you'll be planting trees on your property this spring and need additional guidance or information on location near power lines, please give the cooperative a call. As always, remember to call 8-1-1 before you dig to identify any underground utility facilities that may pose a danger when planting a tree.

Together, we can create a beautiful landscape that won't disrupt the safe and reliable electric service you've come to depend on. ⚡

Help save the planet:
Reduce your energy use!



50th anniversary of Earth Day is April 22

Saving energy is a big part of reducing our carbon footprint, or the amount of carbon dioxide we create from our everyday habits like driving, heating our homes, even what we choose to eat. Think about this: in 2016, the U.S. domestic sector produced about 19% of national greenhouse gas emissions. Of that, 69% of residential emissions were the result of electricity use, according to EnergySage.

Most electricity generation in the U.S. today takes place in thermal power plants, which either burn fossil fuels like coal and natural gas, biofuels, or nuclear fuel in order to heat water and produce steam. The steam spins a turbine to produce electricity, which is then fed into the utility grid. When we burn fossil fuels for electricity, we also produce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Reducing your energy use can lower the amount of electricity Guthrie County REC needs to supply, and effectively reduce your personal greenhouse gas emissions and your carbon footprint.

Since 1970, Earth Day has increased awareness of the planet we live on, pollution, climate change, endangered species and many other environmental issues. On the 50th anniversary of Earth Day April 22, the U.S. Department of Energy will host an online panel discussion for anyone interested in learning how to incorporate renewable energy options into your home, reduce your energy use and improve your home's comfort while cutting your energy bills. The discussion begins at 3 p.m. ET on Google+ Hangouts. For more information, visit www.energy.gov/earth-day. ⚡

Create a pollinator

BY ANN THELEN



Photos: Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium



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

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

Why are pollinator habitats so important?

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

5 ways you can help monarchs

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

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

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

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

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



playground



Photo: Aaron Eckley

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iowa plays a vital role for monarch butterflies

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

butterflies, birds, bees and much more.”

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

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

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

The buzz on a new app!

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

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



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

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

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

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



Egg-Citing BREAKFAST Recipes



Green Chili Cheese Puff

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

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

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

Fuzzy French Toast

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

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

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

Easy Quiche

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

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

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

Breakfast Bites

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

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

Owen Miller • Alford • Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

WHITES AND YOLKS

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

Overnight Breakfast Casserole

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

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

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

Zesty Oven Omelet

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

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

Ruth Van Zandbergen • Orange City
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

Pizza Quiche

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

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

Deb Mitchell • Collins • Consumers Energy

Breakfast Bake

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

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

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

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

EGG FACTS

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

EGG FACTS

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

EGG FACTS

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

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

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

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

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



Small gardens with big

STORY AND PHOTOS BY L.A. JACKSON

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

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

Make the bed

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

Select compact plants

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

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

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

Grow up

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

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



yields



burlap, nylon or cloth slings.

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

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

Think beyond the veggie patch

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

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

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



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

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

The Iowa Gardener
www.theiowagardener.com

Iowa Arboretum
<https://iowaarboretum.org>

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

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

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

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

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

Save energy with smart landscaping

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN

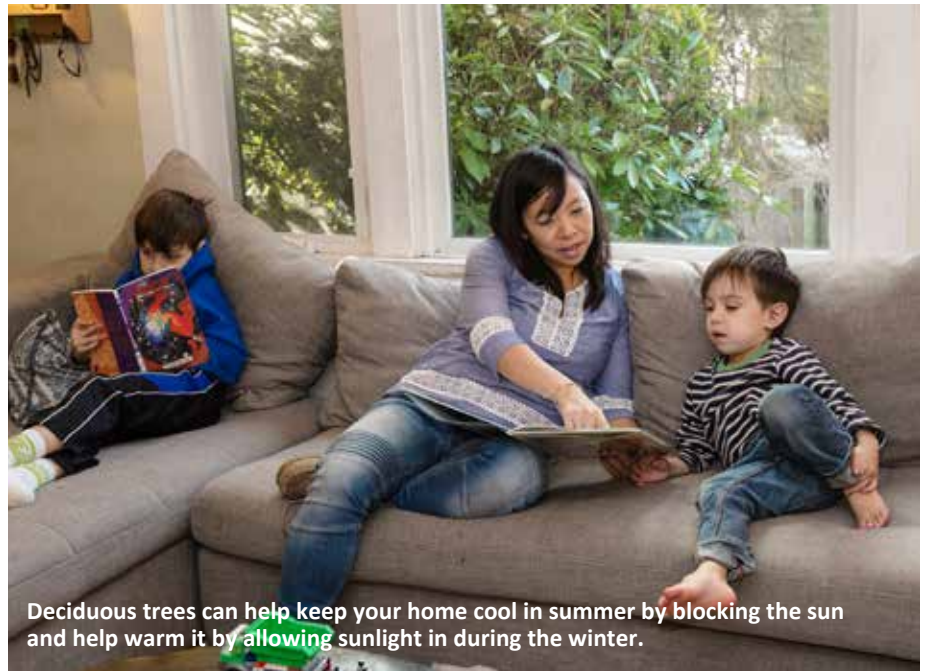
When landscaping is done right, it can help to lower your home's monthly energy bill. That's good news for you and the environment!

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

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

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

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



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

Photo: Marcela Gara, Energy Efficiency Database

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

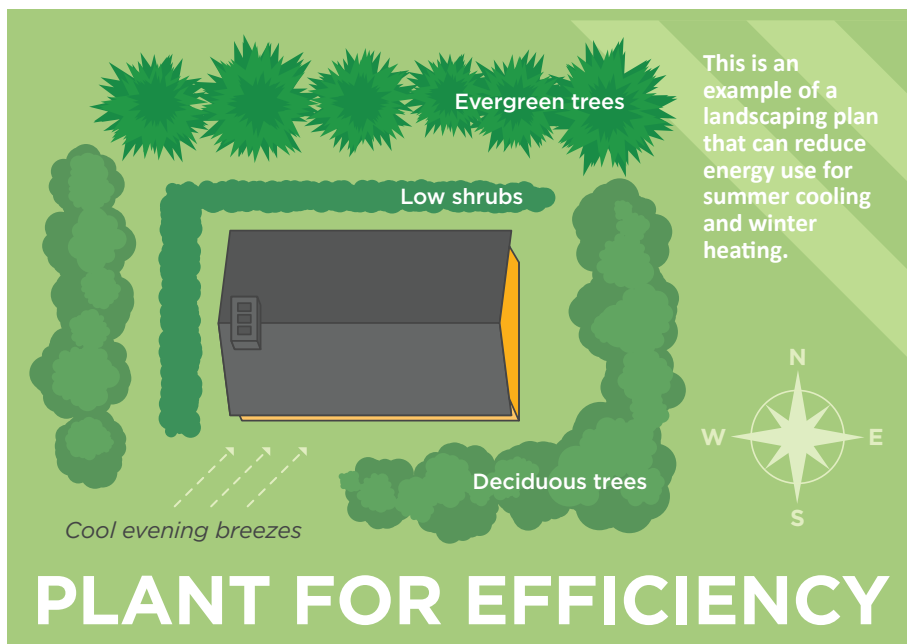
One cooling strategy is to make sure your air conditioning compressor has some plants near it. Just make sure the plants aren't too

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

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

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

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



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

Spring cleaning safety tips

If you're like most Iowans, warmer temperatures this month are likely signaling to you that it's time to do some spring cleaning. More than a regular cleaning, this time of year is often reserved for tearing the house apart and moving large items to get at nooks and crannies that have gathered dust and dirt all year. If these chores are on your schedule this month, here are a few tips to remember:

- **Don't rush.** Extend chores over a few days or if you're feeling too tired, take a break and drink some water.
- **Be careful moving large pieces of furniture and appliances.** Use proper lifting technique by keeping your back straight and lifting with your legs. If it's just too heavy and you don't have help, just clean around it. It won't be the end of the world!
- **Be safe while on ladders or stepstools.** Don't lean too far to either side. A good rule of thumb is that your belly button should not go beyond the sides of the ladder. Also, have someone available to hold the ladder steady for you, and make sure that the rungs aren't wet, and that you are wearing non-skid shoes.
- **Keep stairs, landings and walkways clear of boxes, bags and other clutter.**
- **Don't carry too much at once, particularly on stairs.** Always keep one hand free to hold onto the stair railing or wall for balance. And whether you have stairs or not, make sure you can see over the load you are carrying so you don't trip.
- **Always follow product label safety instructions and recommendations.** Cleaning supplies can create nasty fumes, so make sure to ventilate thoroughly by opening a window or two, turning on a fan or exhaust fan. Wear rubber



gloves to keep your hands from getting dry and cracked from hot water and chemicals.

- **Put away all your supplies when you're done.** Cleaning supplies can be an attractive

nuisance to children and pets, so don't leave them sitting out when they're not being used. Put them away in a childproof cabinet as soon as you're done with them. ⚡



Larry Newbrough
Journeyman Lineman

Know what's below.
Call before you dig.

What Powers Us: Safe Digging

Did you know that an underground utility line is damaged once every 9 minutes because someone didn't call 8-1-1?

April is National Safe Digging Month. Remember the ground rules and call before you dig!



1406 State St. Guthrie Center, IA
guthrie-rec.coop | 888-747-2206

Spring forward with outdoor safety tips

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



Call before you dig

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



Put safety first in the field

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

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

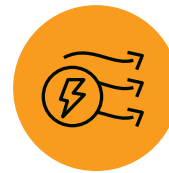


contact the local electric utility or 911 immediately to report the incident so electricity can be shut off safely before exiting.



When thunder roars, go indoors

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



Stay away from downed power lines

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



Move over or slow down on the road

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

SPRING THAW BRINGS OUT THE WORST IN OUR YARD

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

dumped a year ago, so no loss there.

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

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

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

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

FERTILE GROUND



Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperatives of Iowa 
www.touchstoneenergy.coop

Co-op country is where the seeds of progress take root. Learn more about how Iowa's electric cooperatives are leading the way to a smart, efficient and clean energy future.