

HOME, LAWN & *Garden*

April 27, 2017
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‘Just Do It’

Completing home improvement projects is matter of motivation



By Mavis Fodness

“Just Do It” is not only the trademark for athletic shoe manufacturer Nike, it has also become my motivating phrase when it comes to completing home improvement projects.

For years I have been fascinated with woodworking and I wished I had the courage three decades ago to make cabinet-making a profession.

Courage would have been the optimum word back then since I have a big fear of power tools. The real possibility of missing fingers or toes comes to mind when I even think of using one.

Through the years if I needed a piece of wood sawn in half, I would ask someone else to do it. Or I would use a handsaw. The practice has gotten me far since I haven’t run into a project that couldn’t be solved with a little help or some elbow grease.

Now, however, age has become a factor.

The repetitive motion of

operating a handsaw would leave sore muscles for days and, in most instances, an unfinished project.

One of those recent projects involves converting a bedroom dresser into a changing table for an infant.

Many online examples show do-it-yourselfers slapping a new coat of paint on a dresser and placing a foam pad on top.

My experience with changing diapers on squirming babies is that they will not stay on a foam pad very long.

In my conversion, I’ve removed the dresser top and the top set of drawers. My idea is to leave a three-inch lip around the dresser’s top to fence the infant in place.

Great idea but it involves cutting a board for the fence.

Because I want to match the fence to the wave pattern on the dresser, I would need to use power tools to get the pattern exactly right.

For weeks the project has remained unfinished because I wanted to do it and not have it done by someone else. It’s for my soon-to-be-born granddaughter and it would be neat if her grandmother would “Just Do It.” ... Which I could, but I would have to practice on something first.

As the wife of an auctioneer there is no shortage of new household items around our acreage. One such item was an extremely large and extremely heavy oak entertainment center.

With today’s flat screen television sets measuring more than the 40 inches, the entertainment center has become obsolete. Like most of today’s homeowners, my flat screen TV is attached to the wall.

For weeks I’ve looked at the now TV-less entertainment center. Since it’s so large, reselling the piece at auction would garner a few bucks at best and most likely no bids at all since

no one wants furniture that big anymore.

That’s when I decided the entertainment center would become the perfect practice item for learning how to use a jigsaw.

That’s right — a POWER TOOL — that scary finger-eating saw but the perfect tool to finish the changing table.

Attached to the shelf where the television would sit was a curio cabinet.

I could dismantle everything around the curio except the 7-foot-long top and bottom boards. Because these boards were in one piece, they needed to be cut apart.

So I cut them apart using a powerful jigsaw.

The experience was a confidence builder and I now have a small cabinet for the corner of the living room. Cutting through those boards was like slicing through butter. It was easy. It was quick.

And opened a lot of doors to a passion that has lain dormant for decades.

The secret to learning to use power tools or starting any home improvement project is to “Just Do It.”



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Magnolia dealer offers green options for green care



Mavis Fodness photo/Home and Garden Eco Friendly
Preston Neese demonstrates the ease of operation of an EGO lawnmower recently outside his small engine repair business in Magnolia. Neese added the line of eco-friendly lawn and garden equipment to his existing business of gas-powered equipment this year.

Preston Power of Magnolia offers eco-friendly alternatives to gas-powered equipment

By Mavis Fodness

Summer evenings and weekend afternoons in neighborhoods are often filled with the roar of gas lawnmowers and the buzz of trimmers. Along with the noise, exhaust fumes mingle the air along with occasional exclamations of frustration when the gas-powered equipment quits working.

“There is no oil, no gas and it’s a lot easier on the environment. Stroke engines are polluters.”

— Preston Neese, Preston Power

Preston Neese, owner of Preston Power of Magnolia, offers a more environmentally friendly and a more quiet alternative to today’s stroke engines through a line of EGO battery-powered lawn and garden equipment. The Tennessee native is a new distributor for the push mowers, leaf blowers, chain saws, string trimmers and snow throwers, an adventure he piloted last year. He continues to be a dealer of traditional gas-powered lawn and garden equipment.

With noise likened to the operation of a large fan, the battery-operated equipment is gaining in popularity.

“I think it is the future,” Neese said. Consumers like the rechargeable battery-powered equipment because of its lightweight, nonpolluting operation and the less likelihood for repairs. “There is no oil, no gas and it’s a lot easier on the environment,” Neese said. “Stroke engines are

Eco-friendly lawn equipment/continued on page 5

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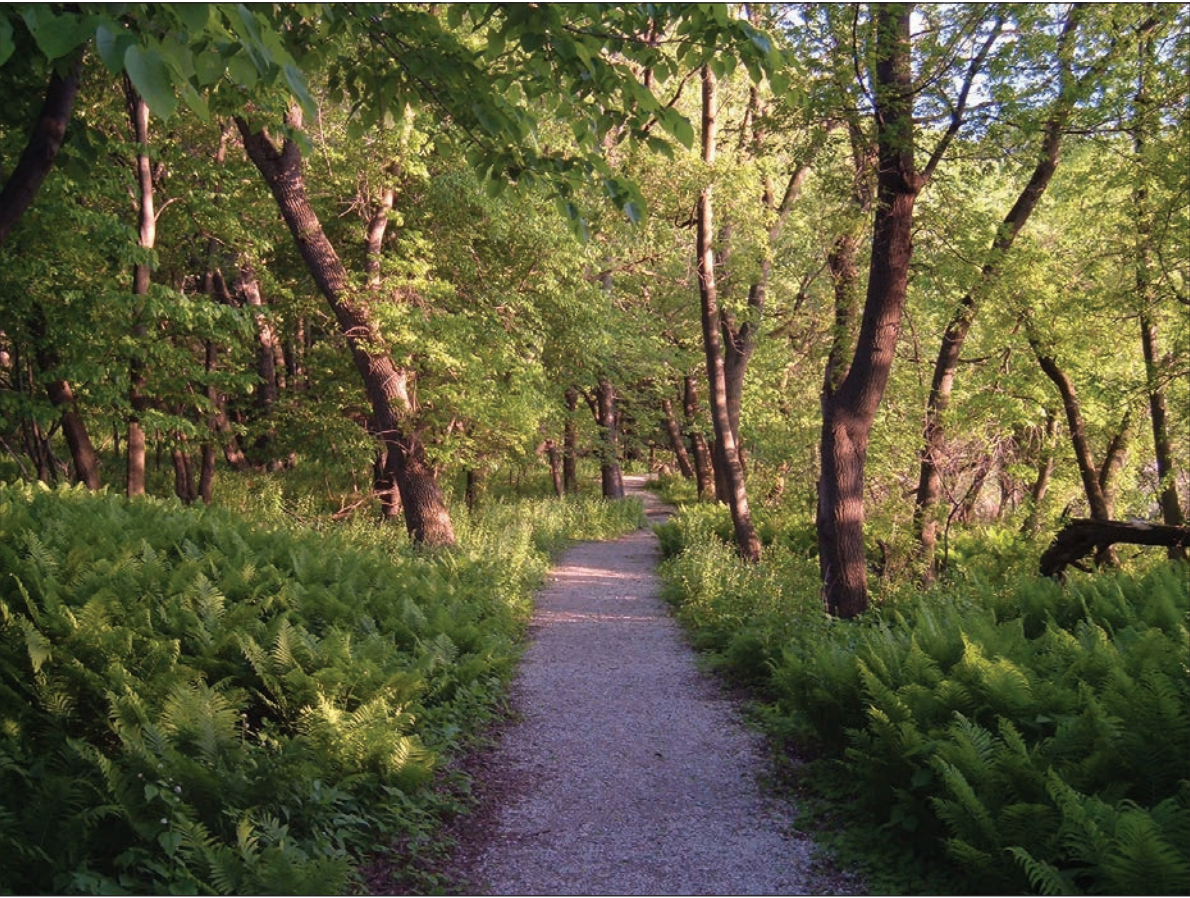
John Ball, an SDSU professor and the SDSU Extension and South Dakota Department of Agriculture forestry specialist, will be in Luverne June 10 to share information about diversifying tree planting practices.

Ball will be on location at the Mary and Harold Tilstra farm for the Rock County Master Gardeners annual garden tour from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, June 10.

The emerald ash borer making its way to our area from the Wisconsin border will soon be in our area, and when it arrives, we can expect significant deforestation since many of our trees here are ash trees.

Ball says there is a need to diversify plant choices to protect against this insect and future exotic threats, and he'll offer suggestions about how to do that.

For example, he encourages better work at planting to ensure that the trees and shrubs survive to become an attractive and functional part of a landscape.



Ash trees and other species line a trail at Westwood Hills Nature Center in St. Louis Park Minnesota.

The focus of Ball's class will be to view and discuss the many other choices of plant material beyond spireas, maples and spruce – including plants that are assumed to not grow in southwest Minnesota climate.

He'll also talk about how to evaluate site conditions to determine what will grow best and the new methods of planting.

Ball has spent his career traveling the plains studying trees across the region.

The class will offer useful information presented by an engaging speaker in an informative two-hour tour of the wide diversity of trees planted at the Tilstra residence.

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Preston Power offers eco-friendly lawn equipment/continued from page 3

polluters.”

The eco-friendly equipment eliminates all the fuel-related issues through improved rechargeable battery technology.

Neese said new environmental protection standards have pushed manufacturers to improve battery technology. EGO’s batteries operate up to 60 minutes on a single charge while providing consistent power to the user.

The machines have no exposed parts as bearings are sealed inside plastic casings, away from dirt and lawn clippings.

The aluminum-frame construction allows for collapsible handles and makes the equipment easy to hang on walls or store under benches.

“It’s lightweight enough for women to use and powerful enough for men,” Neese said. “Everybody has just loved them.”

As battery technology continues to advance, Neese predicts EGO will develop a line of riding lawnmowers to join its existing equipment for commercial and private use.

In his first full year of distributorship for EGO, Neese said he hasn’t had any warranty-related issues on the equipment sold last year under a trial bases.

Neese said EGO offers a five-year warranty on the equipment and a three-year warranty on the batteries.

He handles all warranty issues at his Magnolia shop on East State Street that he opened two years ago with his wife, Tammy.

He will continue to service and sell gas-powered lawn equipment.

Neese first began working in small engine repair and parts sales in 1986 in Virginia and later locally



Mavis Fodness photo/Home and Garden Eco Friendly

Rechargeable batteries are easily accessed by lifting a see-through lid on two push mower models, and they are interchangeable with other battery-powered equipment. The mower also has two LED headlamps for mowing after sunset.

Besides lawnmowers, Neese also has battery-powered leaf blowers, string trimmers, chain saws and snow throwers (not pictured) as an alternative to gas-powered small engine equipment for use on lawn and gardens.

“It’s lightweight enough for women to use and powerful enough for men. Everybody has just loved them.”

when friends convinced him and his family to move to Minnesota in 1992.

A failed business purchase two years ago back East brought Neese back to Minnesota and to Magnolia, where he

opened Preston Power Small Engines.

“I decided it was time to open my own business,” he said.

Preston Power is open Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays from 8:30 a.m.

to 5:30 p.m., Tuesdays from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Saturday afternoons from 2 to 5 p.m.

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Neese also makes house calls.

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How much house can you afford?

Get a proper mortgage preapproval letter from your lender and let the house hunting fun begin



Dave Hup



Billy Cowell

**Information by
Dave Hup and Billy Cowell of
RE/MAX Land and Home**

When the thought enters your head that maybe it's time to stop renting and buy your first home, you're going to wonder, "How much house can I afford?"

You should take the time to sit down and get a proper mortgage preapproval letter from your lender.

There are too many variables to estimate a mortgage payment accurately without doing so. This is only meant to give you a ballpark figure to determine if you would like to move forward with your first home purchase.



To calculate how much house you can afford, take a look at what the bank is looking for from you to give you an idea of how much of a mortgage payment you can qualify for from your lender. Lenders calculate

these numbers monthly, so for this purpose we will as well.

Basically, your debt-to-income ratio is used by lenders to make sure you are not taking on too much debt.

They would like to see your gross income. This is your total monthly income before paying taxes and any other items subtracted from your paycheck.

If you are a W-2 salary employee, this is quite easy. Take your yearly salary and divide by 12.

Once you start getting into overtime, bonuses and self-employment, this is where your gross income can get complicated, and you really need the help of a lender to calculate this.

The banks will also be looking at debt-to-income ratio. This is the ratio of your housing expenses (principal and interest

payment on your home loan, property tax, property insurance, HOA fee, if any, and private mortgage insurance) and may or may not include consumer debt (installment payments like student loans, credit card payments, auto loans, etc.) compared to your gross income.

For example, take \$6,000 monthly income with \$1,500 for your housing. Now add \$300 for car payment, \$250 for student loans, another \$250 for credit cards ... totaling \$2,300 of monthly consumer and housing debt. This gives you a 38.33-percent ratio.

Most loan programs will allow you to spend between 38 percent and 50 percent of your gross income on your ratio, depending on how high your gross income is.

There are also other variables that will affect how much home you can afford.

The strength of your credit score, your down payment, and which loan program you choose all work together to get a final number of what you may qualify for to purchase your home.

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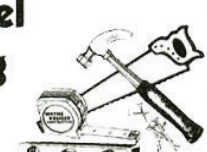


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Beautify your own little corner of the world

Bonnema offers tips to add color and beauty in small spaces and to increase success of container gardening

I am a gardener who does the chores of gardening with passion.

I get excited just doing what I can to add color and beauty to my environment as well as our community, so sharing the



By George Bonnema

knowledge I've acquired from my years of experience is fun for me. I'm going to share some tips to boost your confidence and chance of success with container gardening this season.

First, choose a good-sized pot, preferably nothing smaller than a 14" diameter. In a smaller pot, the soil dries out quickly and gets too hot during the day, resulting in poor plant growth, or even worse, no plant growth.

If the pot doesn't have a drainage hole in the bottom, give it one.

Next, fill the pot with a good growing medium. I prefer to use half mineral soil (real old-fashioned dirt) and half potting mix. I don't advocate using plastic bottles or other "fillers" in the bottom of the pot so less soil is required to fill the pot ... that defeats the purpose of the pot size.

Next, you need to determine the amount of sunlight the



Coleus are available in a myriad of colors and color combinations and are great for shady spots.

plants will receive during the day so you know which plants are going to be happy in that setting.

I'll give four categories:

- hot sun ... a very protected hot area where the sun and heat are intense for six or more hours per day;
- full sun ... where there is

direct sun for six or more hours per day;

- partial sun or light shade ... an area that receives two to four hours of sun; and
- shade ... an area that receives no direct sun. Some plants will thrive in two or even

three of these categories, but not all plants are that tolerant.

Knowing which to choose is the gardener's responsibility to be successful.

The full sun area will give

Container gardens/see page 9

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Bonnema offers tips for small space container gardening/continued from page 7

you the most options, but that does not diminish the potential of the other areas.

I'm going to recommend some of my favorites for each category that are perhaps new or maybe not as familiar.

Also, we have three classifications for plants: we have spillers, thrillers, and fillers, each determined by the plant's growth characteristics.

Tips for containers in hot sun:

The hot sun area can be a challenge, but here are some good choices:

Alternanthera is a filler with burgundy foliage but no appreciable flower.

Angelonia (pictured at right), also called summer snapdragon, produces a spike flower in shades of pink, purple, and white.

Bougainvillea is a course trailer with papery textured flowers in vivid purple, red, pink, and orange. It might take determination to locate this one.

Lantana can be a filler or spiller in many different colors or color combinations.

Cannas come in new tissue-cultured varieties that are non-stop bloomers. I'd call them thrillers.

Mandivellia is my first choice for a hanging basket that is going to endure abuse from wind, heat, and even negligent watering. Red, pink, white — and new this year is apricot. If not hanging, it likes a support to grow on ... this plant makes an excellent specimen by itself.

Nierembergia is a less common small filler that has white or blue flowers. Pentas is an excellent filler with white, lavender, red, or pink flowers.

Scaevola, also called fan flower, is a spiller with white, pink or purple flowers.

Dusty Miller is a white/silver foliage that is an excellent filler.

This list is not all-inclusive, but these are some of my favorites for harsh heat.

Full sun containers:

Next is the full sun category, where you have a myriad of choices, but these are some plants I'd like to introduce:

Begonias have always been shade candidates, but the newer Dragon Wing and Big series are unbeatable. They thrive in full sun and the pink or red flowers are nonstop.

Also, the boliviensis begonias are a full sun spiller candidate with red, orange, white or yellow flowers. This plant is also one of my favorites for hanging baskets.

Euphorbia is a dainty white filler.

Lisianthus is hard to find but definitely worth the hunt. They are a thriller with almost rose-form flowers.

Lobularia is a vigorous spiller that is look alike but a huge improvement of the familiar alyssum.

Sun Impatiens are another thriller that is fairly new. Vivid



Tips for small space container gardening/continued on page 14



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Building Center offers decks built to last

By Lori Sorenson

There's nothing quite like a patio deck for enjoying outdoor living, but homeowners are discovering there are ways to improve on their traditional wood decks and railings.

"We're doing a lot of composite decking," said Nick Mead of the Luverne Building Center.

Composite materials are primarily PVC or a combination of pressed wood and plastic materials.

There are several companies to choose from, but the Building Center does business with TimberTech, which offers a wide range of colors (pictured at left), textures and railing options.

Mead said many people prefer composite decking over traditional treated wood because of the ease of installation and it's maintenance free.

"Once it's up, you don't have to think about it - there's no paint, no stain," he said. "And from a contractor's perspective it's the ease of installation."

He said homeowners still appreciate traditional wood decking, and they can expect to get 20 to 25 years out of it — IF it's properly maintained. "And that means regular washing, staining and painting," Mead said.



Although traditional lumber (at right) still attracts home owners, the appeal often fades as quickly as the wood does. Without frequent and necessary maintenance, pressure treated wood decks can splinter, warp or cup — even within the first few years. In the long run, wood decks can become an expensive and time consuming addition to a home. That's why builders are turning to composite material (above).



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Bonnema offers tips for small space container gardening/continued from page 9

If you have or see a plant or combination of plants that really impresses you, take a picture of it so you will remember what you want to plant next year. Even if you can't identify a particular plant, a professional will be able to ID it for you.

and excellent season-long color makes them a “must have” in my combination or specimen pots.

Vinca is an excellent filler and the sun counterpart to the regular impatiens. Vinca also comes as a vining plant, but that is not what I’m talking here.

Ornamental millet is a thriller that will give height to your plant combination. Its flower is similar in form to a cattail and the foliage is interesting.

All of the hot sun category plants listed earlier also will work in full sun.

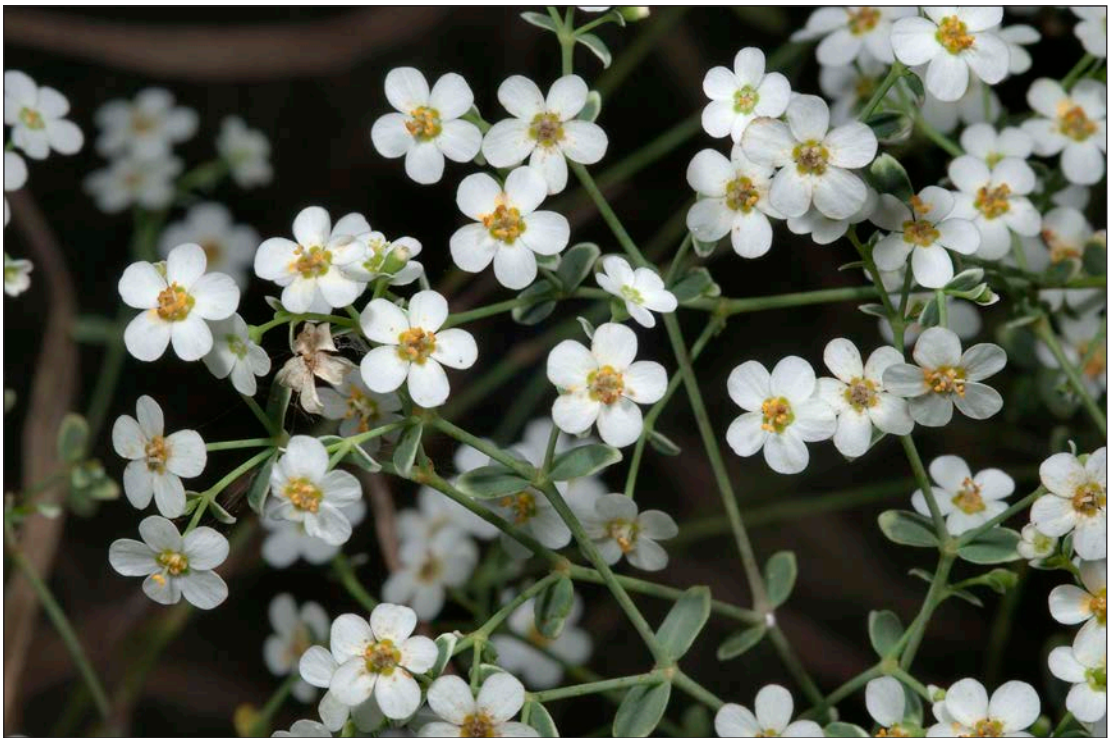
Again, these are some of my favorites, but not an all-inclusive list.

Part-sun containers:

Then we have part sun and there are lots of choices here as well but I want you to consider these for a different look.

Begonias, both Dragon Wing and Big, will work in part sun, and new part sun introduction this year is Megawatt. I’m impressed already.

Impatiens, both New Guinea and sun varieties, will flower well in part sun as well as full sun. The old walleriana impatiens that have been our



Euphorbia is a dainty white filler that's well-suited for a container arrangement in full sun.

standard for eons are now susceptible to a new disease called downy mildew and I no longer recommend planting them unless you have the ability and persistence to fight this fungus.

Iresine has an intense magenta-colored foliage that sparks up any combination.

Lobelia has a dainty white

or blue flower and comes as a filler or spiller.

Nemesia is another filler in lots of colors, but it does not perform well in heat.

Containers in shade areas:

And finally a shade area that receives no direct sun. Remember that sun is what

gives a plant its energy, and blooming plants need energy to produce flowers. So here you can accomplish splendid results by using contrasting foliages.

Caladiums are not as common here as they are in

Container gardens/see page 15

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Bonnema offers tips for small space container gardening/continued from page 14

the south, but their thriller foliage comes in patterns of white, pink, or red.

Ferns of any type are good, but a favorite of mine is whitmanii.

Coleus are available in a myriad of colors and color combinations.

Iresine, mentioned earlier, has bright magenta foliage.

Ivy, particularly variegated forms, are spillers that are happy campers in shade.

Spider plants have a spiky variegated leaf so this is a great candidate for an unusual texture contrast.

Variegated Swedish ivy has a yellow/burgundy leaf that is a fun spiller.

Most types of indoor foliage plants work well in a shade setting outdoors.

Not every container garden has to be a combination or assortment of plants. Just filling a pot with all the same plants to create a specimen can be very impressive.

Even using a grouping of two or three pots of specimen plants can be a magnificent display.

However, a combination planter is most effective used by itself, not in a grouping. I often set a combination pot in an area of my landscape where I want to “punch up” the color for the season.

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned any perennial plants in this

list. If you choose to use a perennial as a foliage accent, I’m OK with that, but most perennials have their time to bloom and that’s it for the season.

Annual plants will produce flowers for the entire season, so they will provide a much better display.

You will need to water your container garden when the soil surface feels dry to the touch.

Water the garden after you plant it to settle soil around the new roots. As the plants become larger and the summer temperature increases, the watering schedule becomes more frequent, again depending on the amount of soil mass in the pot.

Some potting mix labels will mention that they have included a fertilizer that will feed the plants for three or six months.

This is a slow release form of fertilizer that gradually becomes available to the plants as it breaks down. It is better than nothing, but supplementing with a water-soluble fertilizer every second or third watering is really the “gravy on the potatoes” for your plants.

If you have or see a plant or combination of plants that really impresses you, take a picture of it so you will remember what you want to plant next year. Even if you can’t identify a particular plant, a professional will be able to ID it for you.



Begonias have always been shade candidates, but the newer Dragon Wing and Big series are unbeatable. They thrive in full sun and the pink or red flowers are nonstop.

Also, the boliviensis begonias (pictured at left) are a full sun spiller candidate with red, orange, white or yellow flowers. This plant is also a favorite for hanging baskets.



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Building inspector works with residents on property improvements

City website, cityofluverne.org, has list of dos and don'ts in terms of permit requirements

By Lori Sorenson

Chad McClure has been Luverne's building inspector since November 2014, and he said it didn't take long to learn a few basic rules of the job.

"This position is inherent for not being people's best friend," McClure said about the challenges of enforcing city code. "So if there's anything you have questions about, please ask first."

McClure said he's enjoyed working with city staff and residents to make Luverne a clean and safe community for everyone.

Common questions involve garden sheds and fences in relation to property lines.

"I'm not a licensed land surveyor, but I can offer resources to the best of my ability," McClure said.

"And I'm not in the business of resolving neighborly disputes."

In general, McClure said



Luverne property owners have been good to work with, but a little research before starting a project pays off in the end.

"When in doubt, call," he said. "It's when people don't call that it makes my job difficult ... especially if I have to ask someone to undo something."

McClure can be reached at City Hall at 449-5031 or cmc-

"When in doubt, call. ... It's when people don't call that it makes my job difficult ... especially if I have to ask someone to undo something."

— Chad McClure, building inspector
city of Luverne, 449-5031 or
cmcclure@cityofluverne.org

clure@cityofluverne.org.

Also, the city of Luverne website provides detailed permit information.

The following types of projects DO NOT require a building or combination building and zoning permit

- Painting (interior or exterior)
- Wallpaper
- Installing new floor covering (vinyl, carpet, hardwood)
- Retaining walls less than 4 feet high
- Moveable cases, counters

and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high

- Maintenance repairs to roofing, siding, or windows
- Installing or replacing storm windows and storm doors
- Repairing or replacing interior wall covering, plaster, paneling, etc.
- Recreational equipment such as swings, jungle gyms, etc.
- Replacing existing kitchen and/or bathroom cabinets
- Adding attic insulation
- Installing gutters and downspouts
- Replacing existing plumbing

Building inspector/see page 18



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Have a project that needs a professional?

Consider these 10 tips from the Better Business Bureau when hiring a contractor

The arrival of spring already has many people thinking about home improvement projects. Whether it's a remodel, a build-on or new construction, some consumers are handy — or brave — enough to take things into their own hands. But many people look to professional contractors to bring their visions to fruition. Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) offers a Top Ten list of things people should do before hiring a contractor.

"There's no better way to ensure a successful construction project than by ensuring you're dealing with a reliable contractor," said Susan Adams Loyd, President and CEO of BBB of Minnesota and North Dakota. "It's worth every second of the time it takes to find one that will stand behind their work." Here are 10 things everyone should do before hiring a contractor:

1. Research their track record. Contact BBB to obtain free Business Profiles on any companies you are considering hiring. Visit bbb.org or, in Minnesota and North Dakota, call toll-free at 1-800-646-6222.

2. Solicit multiple estimates. Shop around and get at least three estimates in writing. Use BBB's

[Online Directory of Accredited Businesses](#) to find reliable firms.

3. Verify license and insurance. Ensure that companies are properly licensed. In Minnesota, contractors should be licensed or registered with the Minnesota Department of Labor (doli.state.mn.us); in North Dakota, with the ND Secretary of State's Office (sos.nd.gov/). It's also important to verify that they are fully insured.

4. Ask for references. Get references from three recent projects and verify them before signing a contract.

5. Inquire about a lien waiver. A lien waiver is a statement from the contractor that all suppliers and subcontractors have been paid for their work. Be sure to ask whether the contractor will provide you with a lien waiver upon completion of the work.

6. Don't forget building permits. Permits are for your protection and help ensure that work will meet local building codes. Check with your contractor before starting your project. Homeowners bear the cost of building permits, but companies should be responsible for obtaining any necessary permits.

7. Consider future service issues. If you choose to do business with a company that isn't local, keep in mind you might have difficulty resolving any warranty or service needs that may arise after the project is completed.

8. Get everything in writing. Never allow work to begin without a signed contract that includes: start and completion dates; a detailed description of services to be provided; any costs or allowances; a payment schedule and warranty information. Be aware that anything you sign is a contract.

9. Don't rely on verbal promises. Any promises made orally should be written into the contract, including warranty information.

10. Arrange a payment schedule. Never pay in full in advance of a project. Stagger your payments according to agreed-upon stages of work completion and make a final payment only when work is finished.

BBB also advises consumers to exercise caution with salespeople who are going door-to-door claiming to be doing work in your neighborhood. Know who you're dealing with; always verify the company's track record with BBB. *The mission of Better Business Bureau is to promote high standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111.*

Never pay in full in advance of a project. Stagger your payments according to agreed-upon stages of work completion and make a final payment only when work is finished.

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Building inspector offers tips for permit requirements/continued from page 16

“This position is inherent for not being people’s best friend ... So if there’s anything you have questions about, please ask first.”

— Chad McClure, city of Luverne building inspector

- ing fixtures and fixture fittings
- Replacing a faucet or trap on existing fixture
 - Clearing of stoppages in drainage system
 - Installing or replacing a water softener (only if new or rearranged water lines are installed)
 - Installing a new or replacing an air conditioner (without new ductwork being installed)

- The following types of projects **DO** require a building permit or combination building and zoning permit
- Repair or replacement of roofing
 - Repair or replacement of siding or soffit/fascia
 - Replacement windows
 - Replace, install or remove

- sheetrock
- Basement waterproofing
 - Repair or replace porch or deck
 - Partitions over 5 feet 9 inches high
 - Any and all building additions
 - New construction (including attached/detached garage, tool/storage shed over 120 sq. feet)
 - Finishing unfinished space (basement, attic, etc.)
 - Removing/moving a load-bearing wall or partition
 - Repair of damaged structural elements (wall studs, columns, footings, foundations, joists, rafters, beams, etc.)

- The following types of projects **DO** require a zoning permit
- Replacing driveways
 - Replacing sidewalks
 - Installing patio slabs
 - Installing fences
 - Adding decks
 - Demolition of steps/porches
 - Building or installing storage sheds under 120 feet
 - Moving a structure or building
 - Demolition of a structure or building
 - Installing or moving signs

McClure, a 1988 graduate of Luverne High School, brings 20 years of construction experience to his job. He is the son of Diana Ouverson, Luverne, and the late Ron McClure.

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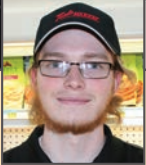
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Top 5 ways to live green on a budget; going green isn't going broke

Nielsen polls show that 55 percent of consumers are willing to pay more for products and services from companies committed to sustainability. But living greener doesn't have to take a hit on your wallet.

1. Don't toss your unwanted stuff — donate it.

The average American throws away 81 pounds of clothing per year, even though 95 percent of worn or torn textiles can be reused. By donating your old clothes, furniture, electronics and more to Goodwill and other thrift stores, you're sending usable goods to a new home instead of a landfill.

2. Use natural household cleaners.

Vinegar. Baking soda. Lemons. Follow a recipe online to mix up your own household cleaners. It'll reduce chemical exposure and save cash. Bonus tip: make a list of natural cleaning ingredients and stock up next time they're on sale.

3. Shop second hand.

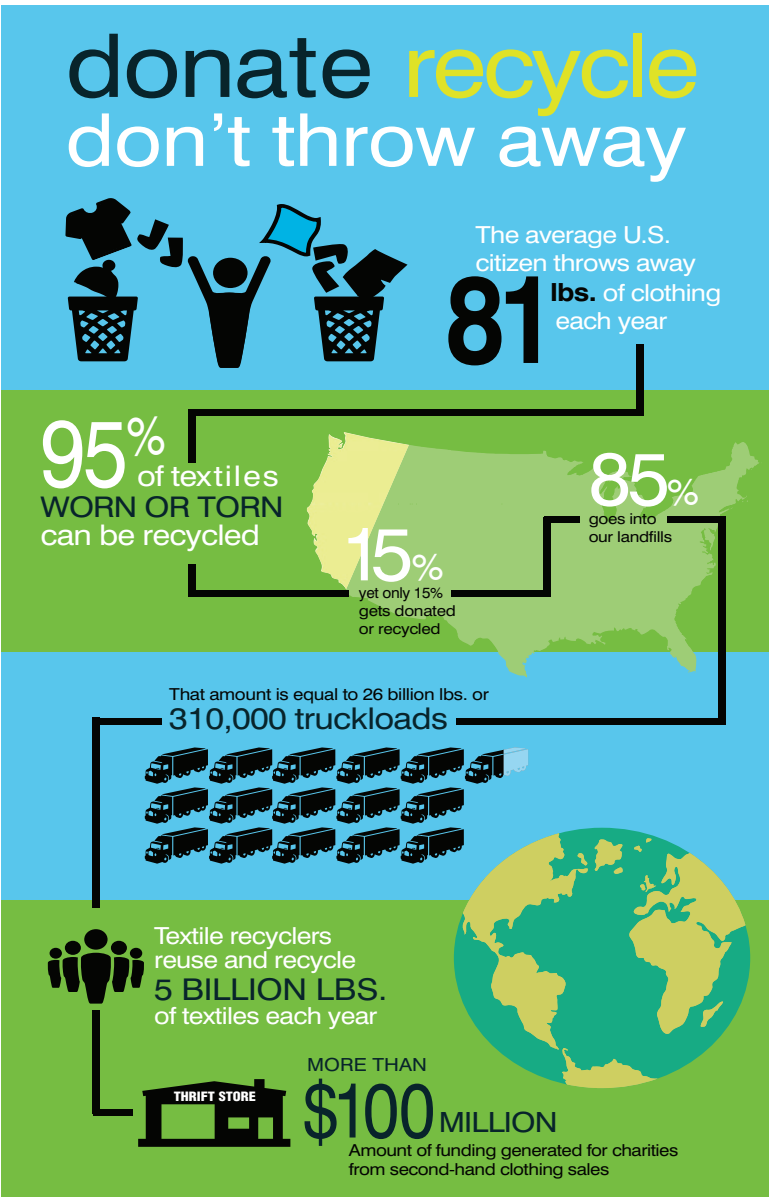
What goes into creating a single t-shirt? Water to grow the cotton. Energy to manufacture and transport that shirt to a store or warehouse. Cut your carbon footprint by buying gently used items at Goodwill.

4. Grow your own produce.

Produce travels an estimated 1,500 miles before it's consumed. Growing your own food doesn't only reduce your carbon footprint — it's fresher and will lower your grocery bill. If you don't have a yard (or don't want to put in all the effort a garden requires), start small by growing herbs in planters indoors.

5. Save on gas.

We all know that driving less and carpooling saves money and helps the environment. Here's a tip you don't hear as often: clean out your trunk. An extra 100 pounds in your vehicle can reduce miles per gallon up to two percent (U.S. Department of Energy).



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Real cleaning ingredients for real homes:



Maybe you’ve made a commitment to remove toxins from your home this year, or you have a goal of saving money by making your own homemade products. One of the best ways to get toxins out of your home and save money at the same time is to make your own homemade non-toxic cleaners. By keeping just a few ingredients on hand (**see the list at right**), you can make all the different cleaners you would need to clean your entire home.

It's great to have a clean house, but homeowners are increasingly questioning the potenial harm in all the chemicals used to get the job done. For those interested in pursuing natural home remedies, there's no shortage of information available for recipes and ingredients. According to healthy living blog, Keeper of the Home, lemon juice, white vinegar and baking soda clean just about anything. And the options and applications are in the combination of those ingredients. Following are a list of simple recipes to try in place of commercial cleaners.

INGREDIENT LIST:

- Castile Soap
- Tea Tree Oil
- Baking Soda
- Vinegar
- Lemon or other essential oils
- Cream of Tartar
- Dish Soap
- Rubbing Alcohol
- Hydrogen Peroxide

HOMEMADE ALL-PURPOSE CLEANER

Start by pouring ½ cup white vinegar into a full-sized spray bottle. Add 2 tablespoons of baking soda. Fill the bottle with tepid water and shake well. If you’d prefer to cover the vinegar scent (and I do!) you can add a few drops of essential oil, such as tea tree, eucalyptus, or even a citrus oil.

HOMEMADE 'SOFT-SCRUB' CLEANER

This one also utilizes the cleaning power of baking soda. You start by measuring 1 ½ cups of baking soda into a mixing bowl. Add ½ cup of environmentally safe liquid laundry soap (ECOS, for example), and stir vigorously to combine into a paste. As with the all-purpose cleaner, you may choose to add several drops of essential oil, such as tea tree, lavender, or rosemary. Store paste in the food container, keeping the lid tightly closed. If the mixture begins to dry out, simply add a small amount of water and stir.



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try lemon juice, vinegar and baking soda

HOMEMADE DISINFECTANT WIPES

For this one, you'll need to start with an empty "wipe" type of container; I find that empty plastic baby wipe containers work well. You could also use a large mason jar.

You'll need between 15 and 20 squares of scrap fabric to use for the wipes themselves, something like old t-shirt scraps or even old dish towels.

Once you have those stored away in the container, you're ready to add the cleaning solution.

In mixing cup/bowl, combine 1 cup of water, ¼ cup of white vinegar, and 8 drops each of tea tree oil, eucalyptus essential oil, and lemon essential oil.

Pour this solution over your cloth scraps in the container, where they will soak in and be ready for you when you're ready to pull them out and use them!

I just wash the used rags with any other laundry I'm running, such as towels or other rags.



HOMEMADE LIQUID DISH SOAP

For this recipe, start with a medium-sized mixing bowl, combining ½ cup warm distilled water with 2 tsp kosher salt, stirring until the salt is completely dissolved.

In a separate bowl, combine ½ cup white vinegar, ½ cup Dr. Bronner's Sal Suds and 1 tsp lemon juice. Stir this mixture into the salt water mixture, and stir until thickened.

You may wish to add 10-15 drops of your favorite essential oil at this point for scent and potential disinfectant

properties. Pour mixture into a recycled dish soap container for storage.

HOMEMADE DISHWASHER DETERGENT

Mix together 1 cup salt, 2 cups baking soda, 2 cups [Borax](#), and 1 cup of [Lemi-Shine](#) (non-toxic, found in the detergent aisle). Transfer to an air-tight storage container.

It will last a long time: each load uses only 2 tablespoons of detergent! (I recommend keeping white vinegar in the rinse agent compartment, too.)

HOMEMADE OVEN CLEANER

OK, this one is more of a "how-to" than a recipe, because you really only need baking soda, water, and vinegar.

Use ½ cup of baking soda and stir in 2-3 tablespoons of water, adjusting as needed to get a spreadable paste. Spread this all over the walls of your ovens, rubbing it in for a scrubbing effect.

Let that mixture rest overnight. (Guess it's Momma's night off in the kitchen for dinner!)

In the morning, you will put some vinegar in a spray bottle and spritz everywhere you see baking soda, which will create a foaming action. Wipe clean with a damp cloth, rinsing until clean.

white vinegar.

Let that bubbling mixture sit for an hour or so, then pour boiling hot water down the drain to rinse it.

Depending on how smelly or clogged the drain is, you may need to repeat the process again. Once you do it regularly, you'll find that one time usually takes care of it!

HOMEMADE LIQUID HAND SOAP

And finally... what good does it do to have a clean kitchen if you hands are full of germs? Here's a great recipe for a liquid hand soap that will remedy that!

Start with an empty foaming soap dispenser. Fill it to within about 1 inch of the top with bottled water (or distilled).

Add at least 2 Tablespoons liquid castile soap (scented if you prefer; unscented if you want to use essential oils). Add ½ tsp olive oil and a drop or two of essential oil for scent. Close bottle and gently shake to mix.

For more tips and ideas, see [keeperofthehome.org](#).





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Quick tips to prepare food on a budget

Preparing meals at home is a great (and smart) way to save on the family food budget



Preparing meals at home is a great way to save on the family food budget. With a little planning and some savvy shopping, preparing meals can be economical and even fun. If you're not used to preparing meals at home, the very thought may be daunting. But, as with all new habits, start slowly with achievable goals. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Name them 'planned-overs'**
- Start using the term "plannedovers" instead of leftovers.
 - When making a meal, make extra amounts of the starch, protein source (meat/dry beans) or veggie and freeze these for later use.
 - For example, while cooking rice for tonight's stir fry, cook up extra rice to be frozen for a soup later in the week.
 - Are you slicing up chicken pieces for that stir fry tonight? Slice and freeze extra for a stew or soup for the weekend. In other words, make extra of whatever you're cooking, and freeze for later use. Label everything.

- Meat as a side dish**
- Start thinking of meat as a condiment or a side dish. Instead of having a meal revolve around meat, let the starches, veggies and fruits take on more of a central role.
 - Use meat in soups, stews and casseroles, and bulk up these dishes with rice, pasta or veggies.
 - Don't forget the dry beans. They're a great source of protein, carbohydrate and fiber.

- Know your herbs and spices.**
- You don't need a shelf full of fancy spices to add a little variety to your dishes. Here are some basic spices that can be used in various cuisine:
 - Latin American/Southwest: Use cumin, chili pepper, oregano
 - Chinese/Asian: Use cumin, black pepper, red chili pepper
 - Italian: Use basil, parsley, oregano
 - Again, start slowly, adding a couple of new spices to your cupboard at a time. Many of these herbs and spices can be grown in windowsill containers to save you money.

- Plan for planned-overs**
- Set aside time during the week for a cookathon. Get the kids involved and start a family tradition.
 - Choose some family meal favorites, gather the needed cooking equipment, foods and storage containers, assign fun tasks to the kids and start making batches of food for the week.
 - Lasagna, spaghetti, soups, casseroles and stews all freeze well. Make up several different meals for variety throughout the week.

- Lean on convenience**
- Remember those dry beans I mentioned? Have you ever thought of using them but hadn't soaked them and knew they'd take too long to cook?
 - Why not keep some canned beans in the cupboard to use in a quick meal?
 - To use those dry beans, which are cheaper, leave a note on the fridge to remind yourself to soak them for later in the week.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension

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HOME, LAWN & Garden



Save energy — maintain or repair windows and doors

Windows, doors and skylights are often a weak energy link in homes. These spots can account for a significant portion of a home's heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer. Because new windows and doors are expensive, it is important to determine when repairs make sense and when replacement is the right choice. Simple maintenance and inexpensive repairs can extend the life of windows and doors and delay the need for replacement.

The following are some common window and door problems and fixes to improve the performance and durability of windows and doors:

•Damaged components
Cracked or missing panes of glass in doors and windows are obvious locations for leakage and energy loss. Replacement is best, but sealing with caulking can be a good temporary fix. Older windows may use a glazing compound (putty) to hold the glass to the frame.

•Defective air-sealing
The gap between jamb and framing may be empty or stuffed with fiberglass insulation. Gently removing inside trim will reveal this space, allowing for application of a window and door spray foam product or caulking. A quick and inexpensive fix for leaky windows can be the application of shrink-wrapped film on the inside.

•Loose or missing hardware.
Latches, hinges, and the operating parts for crank-out windows can become loose or damaged. Often a simple tightening of screws will do the trick.

•Improper exterior flashing.
Properly installed flashing diverts water to the outside of the siding, preventing intrusion into the wall or window/door unit.

•Worn or damaged weather-stripping.
The performance and durability of windows and doors is tied closely to weather-stripping. Installing effective weather-stripping will prevent air infiltration around windows and doors and conserve energy.

You should weather-strip all doors that lead to unheated areas, such as the attic, garage, or unheated basement. You can also improve the energy efficiency of existing windows by adding storm windows, replacing window sashes, and installing window treatments or coverings. For more information on repairing and replacing windows and doors, see the Home Energy Guide (pages 21-25). Check out the U.S. Department of Energy web pages on windows, doors, and skylights. Our next energy tip will address energy efficiency factors to look for in new windows and doors.

How big is your environmental footprint?

Eighty-three percent of Americans say they've made changes in their shopping and living habits to protect the environment, according to Gallup. According to research by MIT, Americans' carbon footprint is double the per-capita average of most of the world.



Clothing and textiles:
•The average U.S. citizen throws away 81 pounds of clothing every year.
•95 percent of worn or torn textiles can be reused, but only 15 percent gets donated or recycled.
•It takes over 700 gallons of water to make one new cotton t-shirt, according to National Geographic.

Furniture:
•Americans spent \$98 billion on new furniture in 2014, according to Statista.
•Furniture is the least recycled item in U.S. households — only .1 percent of furniture is recycled, according to the EPA.
•In 2009, furniture accounted for 9.8 million tons of household waste in the U.S. That's 64 pounds per person, according to EPA.

Appliances and electronics:
•In 2014, the U.S. discarded 7 million tons of electronics and household appliances (44 pounds per person). Only 16 percent of it was recycled.

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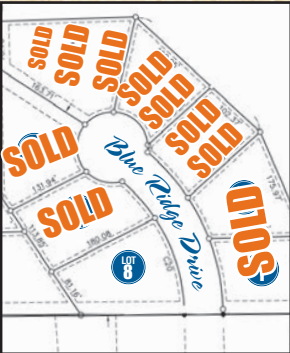
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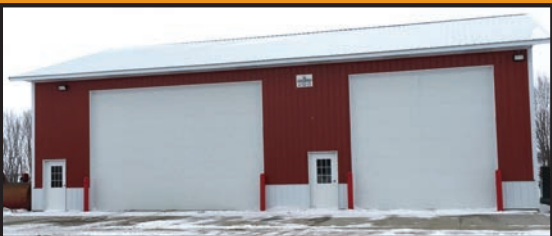
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