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Woody shrubs valued for outdoor conservation, indoor decoration

Shrubs that produce woody decorative florals could pose a win-win situation for landowners or agricultural producers who grow them. As live plants along streambanks, they reduce soil erosion and keep waters cleaner. When harvested, they have commercial value beautifying the home or office.

Scarlet curls and flame willows; Colorado and yellowtwig dogwoods; and hybrid hazelnuts are among 45 woody plant species University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Forester Scott Josiah and Agricultural Engineer David Shelton say can be used for environmental protection as well as financial profit.

When woody shrubs, grasses and other vegetation are planted in narrow bands along waterways, they trap sediment, pesticides and other possible contaminants, preventing them from washing into waters, Shelton said.

"We believe it's possible to reduce sedimentation 50 percent to 90 percent by using streamside buffers," Shelton said.

Woody florals also are valued for floral and craft markets, Josiah said, noting willows and dogwoods used in retail floral arrangements can earn profits of up to \$3 per linear foot.

Woody florals also can be used to make furniture.

"The same basket willow used for streambank stabilization is made into furniture," Josiah said. "Diamond willow has cankered stems that are carved and polished by craftsmen to create beautiful walking sticks that sell for up to \$100."

And, because woody shrubs grow quickly, Josiah estimates they could supplement a family's annual income by \$5,000 to \$15,000, if they are willing to do a month's work of hand-harvesting in late fall and early winter, and then market the fresh product to wholesale or retail florists.

The extensive labor required in such a relatively short time probably will



Ron Cleveland

Woody shrubs can help reduce soil erosion and have decorative value. David Shelton, NU Cooperative Extension agricultural engineer, shows some scarlet curls willow grown in northeast Nebraska.

prevent the market from being flooded anytime soon, Josiah said.

Nebraska's location between Dallas, Denver and Chicago makes it a great asset in marketing woody florals, he said, because the three cities have very large woody floral wholesale markets amounting to millions of dollars.

Josiah suggests planting and harvesting one or two rows of woody florals around the edges of erodible land or along streamsides will create a protective buffer zone and be financially profitable.

"The yields can be considerable in a small area of land, but the sites generally must be irrigated to ensure consistent quality," Josiah said.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Josiah can be contacted at (402) 472-6511; Shelton at (402) 370-4009.



Scott Josiah

Woody shrubs such as flame willow are used extensively in floral and craft markets.

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Dean's comments

Cooperative Extension faculty have been leaders in education for years, providing research-based education that meets the needs of Nebraskans and offering them more economic opportunities and/or better living. Now, extension educators and specialists have shown themselves proven leaders in another area.

In fiscal 2001-2002 University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension faculty obtained \$10.5 million in grants and contracts to develop and teach its unbiased programs. These funds are an all-time high for grants earned by extension faculty, and enable us to continue providing educational programs around specific critical issues that otherwise might be lost to budget reductions. I am very proud of this accomplishment; it speaks highly of our faculty's dedication and talent, as the application process for grants and contracts is extremely competitive.

Extension now ranks fourth in bringing grants and contracts to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, behind the Agricultural Research Division, College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Engineering and Technology. Examples of a few recent extension education programs funded by grants and contracts include:

- increasing use of risk management strategies for agricultural production;
- building goals and life skills for low-resource families;
- increasing food safety;
- advancing technology benefiting community enterprises; and
- enhancing Integrated Pest Management.

There are other grant- and contract-funded educational programs, of course, too numerous to mention here. All are important.

Grants and contracts now comprise 24 percent of NU Cooperative Extension's budget. This is an impressive and significant amount, magnified in the hard economic times in which Nebraska now finds itself because such funding helps extension continue educational work of great value to Nebraska.



Elbert Dickey

State revenue shortfalls last year resulted in some very painful decisions to reduce programs and staff in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at UNL. Among the changes: the closing of the veterinary diagnostic laboratories at North Platte and Scottsbluff and the conversion of the South Central Research and Extension Center at Clay Center to an agricultural laboratory. The ag lab continues the research farm's focus on the critical needs of irrigated crop production. Faculty from the center will move to Lincoln and continue their excellent work at the research farm. We continue to be committed to south central Nebraska, as we are committed to all of the state. Unfortunately, significant cuts in our funding mean we no longer can do all we've done in the past, and must look for different ways to meet Nebraska's needs.

As our state faces continuing revenue shortfalls, the importance of grants and contracts is heightened. Please join me in heartily applauding Cooperative Extension faculty who secure those funds on behalf of Nebraska.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension
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There is no charge for this newsletter. Each issue describes a few of University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's ongoing, widely diverse programs. The newsletter is an informal report to interested taxpayers. Please send comments, questions and subscription requests to: Editor, *NU Cooperative Extension Connect*, 108 Agricultural Communications Building, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918.

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Partners with Nebraska

Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.



University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Food safety enhanced for serving groups

Volunteers, vendors, part-time caterers and others who occasionally prepare and serve food outside their own kitchens for large groups can learn to do so safely with a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension course.

Food Safety for the Occasional Quantity Cook teaches proper methods to prepare, serve and store food at fairs, church suppers, summer camps, civic gatherings and other events, said Cheryl Tickner, extension educator based in Howard County and a course developer.

The three-hour course uses hands-on techniques to teach cleanliness and how to properly use food thermometers to curb bacterial growth that can cause food-borne illness, Tickner said.

Carol Schwarz, extension educator in Buffalo County who also helped develop the course, said one cause of food-borne illness is holding foods too long in the temperature danger zone of 40-140 F. In addition, hot foods refrigerated in large containers increase the temperature inside the refrigerator and threaten the safety of other foods, she said. Smaller containers will cool food more quickly, lessening the chance of bacterial growth.

"We can see we're making a difference" in the way food is handled, Tickner said, adding course participants who used to serve cream pies and pastries at group gatherings no longer do so. Rather, she said, they choose foods that can safely be left out without refrigeration.

The course also generated other food safety awareness.

"We now see people wearing gloves almost all the time when serving food," Tickner said. "That wasn't done five years ago."

Carlos Barcenas, pastor of Vida Nueva Assembly of God Church in Grand Island, took the course with his wife and daughter-in-law to learn

how to better handle food served at church fellowship dinners.

Prior to taking the course, he said churchgoers who brought food let it sit on counters for about three hours until it was served, but now food is kept at the proper temperature.

"We now have roasters. We keep the food hot," Barcenas said.

Kathleen Kennedy, a family and consumer science teacher at Greeley High School, took the course in 2001 to teach new food safety information in her classroom. It also was valuable for her personally, she said.

"I use my instant food thermometer more than in the past," Kennedy said.

More than 300 Nebraskans have taken the course since it was developed in 1997, Tickner said. The course, which Tickner calls the most comprehensive of its kind nationwide, has been recognized at two national conferences. Extension in other states also have used the course, she added.

—Lori McGinnis

Tickner can be contacted at (308) 754-5422; Schwarz at (308) 236-1235.



Carol Schwarz, NU Cooperative Extension educator in Buffalo County, shows hot food in a tall container being transferred into a shallow container, so it will cool faster and more safely in the refrigerator. The tip is among those taught in the Food Safety for the Occasional Quantity Cook course Schwarz helped develop.

Ag ideas explored with 'Tilling' course

Agricultural producers looking for opportunities to expand their operations can use Tilling the Soil of Opportunity for guidance.

The course, part of Nebraska EDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs), is designed for agricultural producers who want to have a side business or direct market a product, said Marilyn Schlake, EDGE coordinator. The 10-week University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension course has been offered in various rural communities throughout Nebraska since 2000.

"It's for producers looking to diversify," Schlake said. For example, some past participants have been interested in direct marketing beef or pork, while others wanted to develop niche markets in miniature cattle and buffalo, she said.

One feedlot operator who took the "Tilling" course learned how to change management practices to stem losses of \$20,000 a year, Schlake said. Another participant wanting to enter fruit and vegetable production realized the need to relocate for a more successful operation.

Topics are taught by independent business owners with agricultural backgrounds and include finances, legal requirements, bookkeeping, market strategies and hiring help. Nearly 100 people have taken the course, Schlake said.

Connie Francis, extension educator in Lincoln and McPherson counties, recently led a new group in North Platte.

"We want them to look at their operation as a business," Francis said. "We want to get them into the business mode."

—Lori McGinnis

Schlake can be contacted at (402) 472-4138; Francis at (308) 532-2683.

Irrigation timing conserves water

Several years of rain shortfall in southwest Nebraska's Republican River Basin have contributed to lowering groundwater levels and less surface water availability for crop irrigation and other uses. Area agricultural producers want and need new methods to make the most of available water, said Steve Melvin, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator in Frontier County.

Working with irrigation demonstration plots, Melvin said his goal is to show producers how time of application and amount of water applied affect crop yields, and to increase water use efficiency for corn and soybeans by 5 percent over the next five years.

"These dry years have made many producers realize irrigated production agriculture will not be business as usual in the future," Melvin said.

The plots are based on several years of irrigation work in research plots and producer fields, Melvin said. In 2002, he demonstrated corn response to full irrigation, a water miser strategy and deficit irrigation. The water miser allowed moisture stress to corn before tasseling, with full irrigation afterward. Deficit irrigation timed the application of a limited amount of water to get the most yield from the water used.

Melvin said overall the water miser strategy used 69 percent as much water as producer methods in the same fields, while resulting in 97 percent of producer yield. The savings in pumping costs all but compensated for yield loss, he added.

Extension's 2002 irrigation demonstration plots were co-sponsored by the federal Bureau of Reclamation, natural resources districts and irrigation districts, and included ways to improve irrigation efficiency, reduce tillage and grow crops requiring less water.

— Cheryl Alberts

Melvin can be contacted at
(308) 367-4424.

Extension education, information helps fight drought's economic, mental stresses

The drought came, and so did the questions:

— *How do I use drought-damaged corn and soybean acreage for grazing, haying or silage?*

— *What is the best way to liquidate a cow herd? What are the options?*

— *Will the nitrate levels in drought-affected corn cause health concerns if fed to cows? What is the feed value?*

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension was there with answers. From Scottsbluff to Lincoln, Ogallala to Columbus, and points in between and beyond, extension provided unbiased, research-based knowledge people could use.

Extension experts couldn't make it rain, but they could and did provide resources and teach immediate and longer-term ways to deal with drought's effects. Through educational workshops, coffee shop clinics, information via Web sites, newsletters, newspaper columns and stories, video programs such as *Market Journal* and *Backyard Farmer* and more, extension delivered needed information to a state dealing with drought.

Some educational programs drew more than 200 participants. Coffee shop clinics in the north central Sandhills provided more than 300 ranchers with needed information.

Not all drought-related education dealt with drought's physical effects. Stress builds as drought lengthens, and ways to cope effectively are needed.

Kathy Bosch, NU family life specialist, and Tom Dorn, extension educator in Lancaster County, are two examples of the many NU extension experts who addressed drought's effects in 2002.

Sept. 5 Bosch spearheaded a multistate rural response satellite

training session titled Weathering Tough Times; it drew 250 participants from 14 states. They included lenders, social workers, grain elevator employees, insurance representatives, educators and therapists. Western Nebraska was especially hard hit because one dry year followed another, Bosch said, noting drought has "added a stress that is almost unimaginable in some cases."

John McVay, director for Panhandle Mental Health Center Services in Scottsbluff, participated in the Sept. 5 training. Extension's educational information is being used extensively to orient therapists to the challenges and needs of agricultural producers, he said, adding, "If you don't have a very good understanding of where people are coming from, you can't get very far in helping them."

A fall Harvest Ball Bosch helped organize provided another way to deliver information about dealing with agriculture-related stresses, McVay said. The event drew agribusiness people and raised \$3,000 for the area Rural Response Hotline, he added.

Bosch said some families face tough decisions about whether they can afford to farm or ranch in 2003, while lenders have decided for others. For some the drought is the last in a series of agricultural-related economic stresses that can lead to depression and suicidal tendencies, conflict in relationships and even divorce, she said.

"People need to keep relationships as their primary focus," Bosch said. "Families are resilient — we just have to help them find their strengths."

Like other extension experts throughout Nebraska, Dorn provided education on how to harvest, feed and store drought-stressed grain, and protect range and pastures. Extension also

New Hispanic residents adapting to Nebraska

Lee Sherry of Madison is in regular contact with the mayor's office, local churches and the school system. It's all to help new Hispanic residents adapt to the region.

Madison County's Hispanic community has grown in the last decade, attracted by area meat processing jobs, Sherry said. She has helped new residents find health care and assisted parents with their children's school requirements and in learning computer skills.

"What I'm trying to do is open doors for people who have basic needs," said Sherry, a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator in Madison County. "For example, in our computer classes, we talk about what happens if you get a utility bill that's overcharged or wrong in another way. We show them how to write a letter to get it corrected."

Much of Sherry's work is done in both English and Spanish. She said many immigrants want to learn English as well as other skills such as car care and food preparation, but learning them at the same time they're learning English is difficult.

Sherry is working with the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles to develop a new, easier-to-read driver's manual in Spanish because, she said, the current Spanish-language driver's manual is a more difficult translation.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Sherry can be contacted at
(402) 370-4040.



Shari Kosso

Kathy Bosch, NU Cooperative Extension family life specialist, spearheaded several educational activities in 2002 to help people overcome stresses brought on by drought. Western Nebraska has had several consecutive dry years, and this Tri-State Canal near Scottsbluff was at extremely low levels last year.

provided information on conserving water in outdoor landscaping, since some parts of the state restricted outdoor watering.

"It will take a couple of years for pastures to recover from the drought, but if they're not managed correctly, they will never have a chance to recover," Dorn noted.

He said drought-stressed plants have their own challenges, ranging from the possibilities of harmful toxins in drought-stressed grains to high nitrate levels in livestock feed.

Toxin-causing organisms "are around all the time but they multiply under stress," Dorn said.

Drought causes problems for

agricultural producers with irrigation, too, Dorn said, because irrigation is intended to supplement, not replace, rainfall, especially in eastern Nebraska. He added increased irrigation meant increased costs but producers had "no choice but to do it."

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Bosch can be contacted at
(308) 632-1244; Dorn at (402) 441-7180.
Weathering Tough Times interviews and
resources are available at
http://www.panhandle.unl.edu.tough_times/



Barbara Rixstine

Carrie Schneider-Miller, NU Cooperative Extension educator and Nutrition Education Program instructor, counsels participants regarding healthy food habits.

Newcomers learn food shopping management,

Grocery shopping, food preparation, even eating in America means changing some lifelong habits for many new residents of Lincoln and Omaha.

Newcomers can learn healthy food management on a limited budget through University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension's Nutrition Education Program (NEP), said Carrie Schneider-Miller, extension educator in Douglas/Sarpy counties. They are eager to learn, she said.

"They want to be healthier themselves and they want their kids to be healthier," Schneider-Miller said.

Schneider-Miller works largely with Omaha's Hispanic population, as well as some of the estimated 4,000 Sudanese who recently have immigrated to the city.

Maureen Burson, extension educator in Lancaster County, coordinates NEP for refugees from Russia, Bosnia, Kuwait, Iran and Iraq.

"They come here not knowing how Americans shop" or how to obtain food assistance, Burson said. "We hook them up with these choices."

NEP is a no-charge, federally funded program that teaches overall nutrition and food safety. Topics include the Food Guide Pyramid, food money management, meal planning, food safety, healthy snacking, and feeding infants and children.

Schneider-Miller said many NEP participants are accustomed to daily market shopping because of the scarcity of storable foods in their homelands. Through NEP they learn to shop weekly using a grocery list and how to properly store and prepare their purchases. They also learn to refrigerate eggs, thaw food in the refrigerator rather than the counter, and the meaning of expiration dates, she said.

Many newcomers who learned to cook by following family traditions now learn to follow recipes, while others have discovered

University fact sheet describes MUD water disinfectant change

When the Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD) announced plans to change the way it disinfects Omaha's public water supply, two University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension experts figured a fact sheet would be useful.

So, they wrote one.

To background themselves for the task, Bruce Dvorak, extension environmental engineer, and Sharon Skipton, extension educator in Douglas/Sarpy counties, thoroughly studied the proposed water supply disinfectant method. They visited with water officials in Denver, Lincoln and Council Bluffs, which use the method. Then they wrote and distributed the NebFact, "Drinking Water: Chloramines Water Disinfection in Omaha Metropolitan Utilities District," a year before MUD was scheduled to make

the change in early 2003.

"We knew Omaha was going to do the changeover and thought the extension office would be getting questions about it," Dvorak said.

Skipton noted individuals often seek information on such topics from NU's extension, which provides unbiased, science-based information.

Public drinking water is disinfected to protect public health from bacteria and other contaminants that may cause intestinal infections, hepatitis and other diseases, Skipton said. Chlorine formerly was the most commonly-used municipal water disinfectant but because of new federal regulations, MUD will use a similar compound, chloramine, as overall it is safer for human health, Dvorak said.

"Most people aren't going to notice the

difference," he said. "It's simply taking a small risk and making it smaller."

MUD has made extension's NebFact available to its ratepayers, Skipton said, and it is available from the extension office. She and Dvorak, along with MUD engineers, also made presentations and answered questions on the new disinfectant process at events including the Omaha Home Show and a Sierra Club-sponsored public forum. Skipton also was among the speakers at a January press conference regarding the change.

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Skipton can be contacted at (402) 472-3662; Dvorak at (402) 472-3431.

healthy nutrition

low-fat alternatives to frying foods, said Burson, who also collaborates with the English Language Learner (ELL) program in Lincoln Public Schools. ELL teaches children healthy habits such as washing their hands before eating and understanding how much sugar some popular cold cereals contain, Burson said.

“NEP has been very beneficial to the ELL population at Park Middle School because students see nutrition in action,” said Jolene Schlemmer, a family and consumer science teacher working with ELL students at Park.

NEP participants, most of whom are women, receive a certificate and cookbook with nutrient information when they complete the program.

In Lancaster, Douglas and Sarpy counties in 2000-2001, there were 3,109 NEP participants who care for 11,468 family members.

– **Barbara Rixstine**

Schneider-Miller can be contacted at (402) 444-7873; Burson at (402) 441-7180.

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Building Nebraska Families focus on positive life skills, goals, parenting

Yvonne Metcalf of Beatrice is studying to become a licensed practical nurse at Southeast Community College there. It's a long step forward from where she was less than two years ago.

For most of the last two years, Metcalf, a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Building Nebraska Families (BNF) program participant, has met weekly with Sondra Germer, extension educator in Gage County.

BNF teaches life skills to people striving to move from welfare to work. Potential participants are identified by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), said Marilyn Fox, extension educator based in Hall County and program coordinator.

“These are limited-resource families who need help with parenting and have difficulty maintaining a job,” Fox said. “Our role is to teach them family skills.”

BNF topics include communication, time management, anger management, goal-setting and problem-solving, Fox said. Educators meet with clients, on average, for about one year.

When Metcalf, 26, began meeting with Germer, she was pregnant with her fourth child and said her life had no direction. Germer encouraged Metcalf to enroll in SCC and study nursing to make a better future for herself and her children.

“This has been a real success for her,” Germer said. “She is setting real goals.”

Metcalf said her BNF involvement has definitely improved her life.

“It's an excellent program for people who are struggling and need extra help,” Metcalf said.

Through her educational meetings with Germer, Metcalf said she also has learned better parenting skills for her children, ages 1, 2, 3 and 8.

“I get along a lot better with my 8-year-old,” she said. “Now we can sit down

and talk instead of having a screaming match.”

BNF began in 1999 with two educators; now 10 educators work with families in 52 counties. Extension has a contract with HHS to fund the program through 2004, Fox said.

BNF participants do make positive progress in their lives, Fox said. One young single mother, who was raised in foster homes, realized her child was more than an object to be fed and needed nurturing and love. And, Fox said, 28 participants who graduated from the program in fall 2002 raised their average monthly income from \$452 to \$786. They also spent a total of 240 hours volunteering in their communities while in the program, Fox said.

Fox said BNF is one of three programs nationwide being evaluated by Mathematica Policy Research Inc., a private organization working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to study welfare-to-work programs.

– **Lori McGinnis**

Fox can be contacted at (308) 385-5088; Germer at (402) 223-1384.



Brett Hampton
NU Cooperative Extension educators Sondra Germer (left) and Marilyn Fox review materials they use in working with clients in extension's Building Nebraska Families program, which teaches life skills to people striving to move from welfare to work.

Diabetes course teaches healthy living, self-management

Adults with diabetes learn healthy lifestyle choices through a Living with Diabetes course, said Debra Schroeder, a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator in Cuming County.

Schroeder has a personal interest in the subject. Her mother died in 1987 as a result of diabetes, and her husband and father-in-law both have it.

The four-week course is offered through extension and Franciscan Care Services of West Point. It focuses on the more common form of Type II diabetes, which makes a body unable to use insulin efficiently.

"Diabetes is a very complicated disease," said Schroeder, a course developer. "We really try hard to stay current with new research in the field."

Schroeder said area doctors often recommend the course, which focuses on self-management of diabetes, basic nutrition, food selection and preparation, food label reading, exercise, medication and depression, as well as how to delay development of eye, kidney and heart disease complications that can stem from diabetes. Course participants report it has helped them keep their blood sugar levels in tighter control.

Schroeder teaches the program with Phyllis Heimann, a registered nurse and certified diabetic educator, and Mary Clare Stalp, a registered dietitian, both of whom also developed the course. The course has had about 450 participants in the last 14 years, Schroeder said, among them Bev Frese of Pender.

Frese took the course in fall 2001 after being diagnosed with diabetes.

"It was the most important thing I did

in my whole life," said Frese, who admits she didn't then know the first thing about managing the disease. Frese now reads food labels, counts her carbohydrate intake and walks regularly.

The American Diabetes Association, which has accredited the course, estimates 17 million Americans have diabetes.

Schroeder also co-leads a regional distance education class on healthy living with diabetes.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Schroeder can be contacted at (402) 372-6006.

Debra Schroeder, NU Cooperative Extension educator in Cuming County, shows proper foods and serving sizes for a person with diabetes. Schroeder co-founded and co-leads courses teaching self-management for people with the disease.



Brett Hampton

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