



# Acreage Answers

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## Shopping for Plants

by Veronica Lorson Fowler, Story County Extension Master Gardener  
From "Gardening in Iowa and Surrounding Areas"  
University of Iowa Press, 1997, pages 38-39.

In a perfect world, garden budgets would not exist. You would sweep merrily through the greenhouse, looking at nary a price tag. But plants cost money.

The last week of April is a good time to walk through the greenhouses and garden centers in your area with notebook in hand. When shopping around, check how many plants are in a cell pack, those little plastic pots that have three, four, or even as many as eight plants in individual cells connected together at their rims. A cell pack with six seedlings retailing for a dollar is a better value than one with three plants selling for seventy-five cents.

Reputable greenhouses and nurseries almost always have top-quality stock. They also usually have fairly good plant selection. They have ample staff to answer gardening questions. But none of that is free. You pay for it at the checkout counter.

But don't rule out the plants you see at discount stores or marked half off at the supermarket. If they appear to be green, stocky, vigorous, and otherwise healthy, buy them. Do not, however, buy plants that are wilted or leggy or appear to have any sort of disease or insect infestation. They're a waste of money and time. And use a grain of salt in heeding the advice of the staff at such places. Unless they've had special training, they're likely to be relying on folk wisdom and their own, often very limited, gardening experience.

Check if a plant is root bound. If it has white roots coming out of the bottom hole, it will take longer to get established than a plant whose roots aren't as crowded.

Whenever possible you should purchase plants not yet in bloom. These plants have focused their energy on root and foliage growth, which at this point is more important than flowers. It's tough to resist colorful plants, but you'll be spending your money more wisely.

Smaller plants are usually a better value than larger plants. The same is true of perennials. Smaller plants usually catch up with larger plants in just one year.

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Please share *Acreage Answers* with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension office to be placed on the mailing list for *Acreage Answers* and to give us suggestions for future articles.

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**As an acreage owner you'll want to take extra precautions to prevent the pollution of the nearest watershed.**

A new Extension program called *Water \$mart Landscapes* can help you have a great looking landscape. Check it out at:

[www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/water](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/water)

Acreage Answers is available on the web at [www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/ag](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/ag)

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Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.

## Is Your Well Water Safe to Drink?

By Doug Thompson, Madison County Extension Education Director

Private well owners can get water test kits through many local county extension offices or by contacting the Hygienic Laboratory at the University of Iowa at [www.uhl.uiowa.edu](http://www.uhl.uiowa.edu) and going to the "client" link. The kit enables you to send a sample of your water to be tested for coliform bacteria and nitrates.

**Why test for coliform and nitrates?** The presence of coliform bacteria, which may pose a health hazard, generally indicates that there is contaminated surface water passing through the soil and entering the supply to the home. This may occur from several sources such as a faulty septic tank, cesspool leakage or feedlot runoff.

Nitrate contamination is a concern for infants as it may cause the life-threatening disease called "blue baby" syndrome, which occurs when the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood is reduced. Nitrate contamination is more likely to occur in shallow wells or wells that are poorly constructed, located or maintained. Major nitrate contamination sources are sewage disposal systems, animal manure and nitrogen fertilizers.

Other water quality tests that may be performed include iron, hardness and iron bacteria which affect aesthetics rather than being a health

concern. Iron concentrations and iron bacteria can cause staining of plumbing fixtures and laundry. These additional tests may have a charge. It is best to ask about the cost for the added testing.

For additional information check out these publication at your county extension office:

**PM 840** *Drinking Water Good Wells for Safe Water*

**PM 899** *Shock Chlorinating Small Water Systems*

**PM 1328** *Successfully Plugging Abandon Wells*

**PM 1329** *Coping with Contaminated Wells*

**PM 1335** *Sampling your Drinking Water*

**VideoTapes:** *Hard Water, Red Water, Coliform Bacteria, Nitrate, Man-Made Chemicals, Well Construction and Repair*

Other water related publications are available through your extension office or on the Iowa State University web site at

[www.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.extension.iastate.edu) then click on Publications and go to Natural Resources and click on Water Quality.





# Horse Vaccinations

by Dale Miller, Marion County Extension Education Director

Few things will protect your horse from the risk of disease as effectively as vaccinations. Your veterinarian can advise you on proper timing and which vaccines are appropriate for your horse. Vaccinations will provide a protective barrier between the animal and many diseases including tetanus, encephalomyelitis (sleeping sickness), influenza, rhinopneumonitis, rabies, strangles, and Potomac Horse Fever.

With vaccinations, regular deworming, an ample supply of clean water, a good nutrition program, and a safe environment, you and your horse will be set to enjoy the year together.

Vaccination involves the injection of bacteria or viruses that are modified to avoid causing actual disease in the horse. Yearly booster shots will protect against tetanus and rabies. Other diseases may require more frequent vaccinations.

Use the following as a handy guide for scheduling your horse's immunizations:

**Tetanus** - All horses. Foals at 2-4 months. Annually thereafter. Brood mares at 4-6 weeks before foaling.

**Encephalomyelitis** - All horses. Foals at 2-4 months.

**Influenza** - Most horses. Foals at 3-6 months, then every 3 months. Traveling horses every 3 months. Brood mares biannually, plus booster 4-6 weeks pre-foaling.

**Rhinopneumonitis** - Foals at 2-4 months and younger horses in training. Repeat at 2-3 month intervals. All brood mares at least during 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> months of gestation.

**Rabies** - Foals at 2-4 months. Annually thereafter.

**Strangles** - Foals at 8-12 weeks. Biannually for high-risk horses. Brood mares biannually with one dose 4-6 weeks pre-foaling.

Many combination vaccinations are available. Please check with your local veterinarian.



## Prairie Site Management

By Steve Lekwa, Story County Conservation

The goal in preparing for any prairie planting is to have a firm seed bed with as little in the way of competition from weeds or existing perennial plants as possible.

One of the easiest ways to create a good prairie planting site is to use harvested soybean stubble with no additional tillage. If the rows are too heavily ridged, a very shallow pass with a disk or field cultivator should do the trick.

Fire is an effective tool to remove old growth and thatch so that seed can reach mineral earth. Fire will not kill bluegrass or brome, however, and both make a sod very tough for prairie seedlings to compete against if they are not controlled.

Roundup herbicide can suppress these competitors if applied when they are actively growing. That usually begins some time in April, but effectiveness diminishes as they near seed set in early summer.

The best time to apply Roundup is in the fall, but spring use will at least give some control for the first growing season. Seeding can be done with a drill or by broadcasting into the dying stubble. This technique is especially useful on steep, erosive sites.

Deep tillage such as moldboard plowing or heavy disking may be of some value in heavily sod-bound sites or deeply ridged row crop fields, but it is harder to prepare a firm seed bed in tilled soil. Fluffy seedbeds allow the seed to go too deep. Time the last site preparation work to allow planting by mid to late June.

# Take Cover to Avoid Skin Cancer

by Janis Stone, Extension Professor, Textiles and Clothing,  
Iowa State University



If you like being outdoors on sunny days or need to work in the sun, you should try to avoid sunburn to lower your risk of pre-mature aging, cataracts, and skin cancer. Skin cancer is associated with sunburn during childhood. It is 10 times more likely to occur with light- rather than dark-skinned persons, although no one is immune, so all children must be protected.

The American Cancer Society estimates that one million cases of skin cancer will occur in 2002, with 7,400 cases of melanoma resulting in death. Fortunately, basal and squamous cell cancers are usually treated successfully, but treatment may involve surgery and scarring.

Follow these tips to avoid over exposure to the invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun:

**Cover up** – a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and socks.

**Put sunscreen** with SPF of 15 or higher on skin areas not covered by clothing.

**Wear a hat** to shade your nose, face, ears and neck. A 3-inch full-brim is recommended for adults.

**Avoid the sun** between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's UV rays are the most direct and intense.

**Wash clothing** in detergents containing a fluorescent brightener that can help absorb UV rays to increase the protection of the fabrics.

**Remember, you can get sunburned on cloudy days**, and, even if you are in the shade, you can be sunburned from UV rays reflected off water, sand, or snow.

## Spring Lawn Care

by Darrell F. Hennessey  
Linn County Master Gardener

We have enjoyed mild weather this winter, but one side effect seems to be a growing impatience to begin spring cleanup and lawn work. Let's review some basic guidelines regarding lawn care before we start. Most of what we cover here will assume Kentucky Bluegrass is the predominant grass in most lawns.

Avoid use of spike-type aerators. Core aerators are best, but don't remove the soil plugs as they break down rapidly and contribute to microbial action aiding in

decomposition of thatch. I prefer to aerate before applying any fertilizer, which also aids in faster fertilizer action. If you aerate in the spring you will need to control crabgrass by applying a pre-emergence herbicide when the lilacs and forsythia start to bloom.

Work for a healthy dense lawn with a uniform color. In May or June apply 1 to 2 pounds per 1000 square feet of nitrogen; for example use 5 to 10 pounds of 20-10-5 per 1000 square feet.

Many lawn diseases can be treated or avoided with good management practices. Avoid frequent watering and make sure that, when water is necessary, enough is applied to water to a depth of about six inches.

Here are some publications available at your extension office.

**PM-1057** *Maintenance Fertilization of Turfgrasses*

**PM 1063** *Turfgrass Management Calendar: Kentucky Bluegrass*

*Lawns*

**PM-1072** *Establishing a Lawn From Seed*

**PM-1447e** *Responsible Use of Nitrogen Fertilizers on Lawns*

**PM-1680** *Nonchemical Alternatives for the Home Lawn*



# Benefits of Spaying and Neutering Pets



by Eric R. Burrough, DVM  
Animal Health Technology  
Kirkwood Community College

The value of spaying and neutering animals goes far beyond reducing pet overpopulation to significant health benefits for the pet.

In the female, hormones produced by the ovaries have been shown to precipitate breast cancer in older intact animals. However, spaying a female before their first heat cycle reduces this risk to less than one percent. Females that cycle and are not bred are also at increased risk of uterine infection, uterine cancer, and ovarian cancer.

In the male, testosterone produced by the testicles may cause prostatic hypertrophy, a condition where the prostate swells, resulting in constipation and difficult urination.

There are also significant behavioral advantages for sterilized pets. The absence of sex hormones reduces aggression and the need to roam in search of a mate. Intact animals often become confused and display sexual activity to inanimate objects causing stress to the animal.

A veterinarian is always the most valuable source of information about your pet.

The American Veterinary Medical Association is online at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org). The Web site provides information about neutering and other pet health concerns.

## Staining Wood Siding

By Doug Stokke Assistant Professor,  
Dept. of Forestry

With the approach of spring, our thoughts often turn toward outdoor projects. Installing new wood siding or freshening your existing siding may be among the things on your "to do" list. Stains are becoming increasingly popular due to the relative ease of application and low maintenance.

If you are starting with **new siding**, make sure that it is clean and dry before you begin. Dry weather and temperatures above 50° F are needed. Stains are available in a wide variety of natural colors and pigments. Select a "penetrating stain" designed for exterior use. These penetrate the wood and do not build up a film thus reducing or eliminating the potential for cracking and peeling of the finish in the future.

Stains are best applied by brush. Be sure to carefully read and follow all directions on the container, paying particular heed to instructions for avoiding lap marks. For the longest lasting finish, use a two-coat system in which the second coat is applied before the first coat has completely dried. One caution: Don't apply thick coats or too many

coats of stain. This will build a film and defeat the purpose of the penetrating stain. Stain applied too heavily will peel much as paint may.

Thoroughly clean **existing finished siding** before applying a new stain. Test compatibility and color on an inconspicuous area. Proceed according to the manufacturer's directions. If your siding has paint on it you will need to remove all of the paint, exposing bare wood, prior to applying the stain. In most cases, if you have a paint finish, stain will not be an option for refinishing.

Although stains are relatively low maintenance, they do require periodic attention. Reapply stain about every five years, depending on the siding, stain type and color, and most importantly, exposure to the elements. A one-coat stain may need attention after two to four years, but a two-coat stain may last as long as eight years. A stain finish that is properly applied and maintained requires very little preparation work before refinishing. For more information, request extension publication

**PM 362** *Finishing Exterior Wood Surfaces*, or view the tips and publications at the following Web sites:  
[www.forestry.iastate.edu/ext/ctmenu.html](http://www.forestry.iastate.edu/ext/ctmenu.html)  
or  
[www.forestry.iastate.edu/ext/product.htm](http://www.forestry.iastate.edu/ext/product.htm)

