



# Acreage Living

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*Acreage Living is published bimonthly. Please share it with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension Office to be placed on the mailing list or contact an ISU Extension staff member listed below to suggest topics for future articles.*

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## Consider home safety on your next trip to the local hardware store

*by Kapil Arora, ISU Extension Agricultural Engineering Specialist*

Improperly placed smoke alarms and detectors provide a false sense of security.

Three precautions should be taken when installing smoke detectors:

- have at least one smoke detector on each floor;
- make sure air flow to detectors is not blocked; and
- keep detectors away from air registers, doors and windows as drafts can affect detector sensitivity.

When deciding where to locate smoke alarms, check the manufacturer's recommendations. All smoke alarms should be placed on the ceiling or a wall near the ceiling in central locations. Select an alarm that displays the seal of a testing organization, which shows that it has been tested.

In addition to smoke detectors, consider installing a fully charged fire extinguisher in your home. Where wood-burning fireplaces or stoves are used, carbon monoxide detectors are recommended for added safety. For devices already installed in your home, be sure to test them for proper functioning on a routine basis as per manufacturer's instructions.

Do not forget to develop and practice a fire escape plan in case you are faced with an emergency.

For more details on smoke detectors, see this University of Arkansas Extension publication: [www.uaex.edu/Other\\_Areas/publications/PDF/FSA-1008.pdf](http://www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/FSA-1008.pdf).

For information on electrical safety, see this Iowa State University Extension *Safe Farm* publication: [www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1265A.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1265A.pdf).

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## Overwintering geraniums

by Karla Host, Dallas County Master Gardener Intern



Geraniums are easy-to-grow perennials that can be overwintered

to provide color for the next growing season. There are three ways to do so: dormant storage, potted plants, and cuttings.

### Dormant storage

Dig the plant before a killing frost. Cut branches and leaves back about halfway up the stem. Carefully tap off as much dirt as possible from the root. Tie some string on the plant and hang it upside down in an out-of-the-way spot in the basement. Or you may place the plant in an open paper bag in the basement. Check every month for shriveled stems. If they are shriveled, either spray them with water or soak them an hour or two in tepid water.

Plants overwintered in this manner may take several weeks to get going in the spring. To get them jump-started, soak the plants in water overnight and plant them in

pots indoors several weeks before the last frost. If you don't have time to get them potted, these geraniums can be planted directly outdoors after the danger of frost has passed. Just be sure to soak them overnight.

### Potted plants

Geraniums in good condition do well as house plants where temperatures are cool and there is plenty of light. Select those that are free of insects and diseases. Dig them before frost and put them in an appropriately sized pot. Cut them back and remove any old blooms or dead leaves. Water them well when they first come in, but during the remainder of the winter geraniums prefer to stay relatively dry compared to most plants.

### Cuttings

Cut off the last 3 to 5 inches of a healthy, non-blooming branch. Remove leaves from the lower half and dip the cut end into a rooting hormone. Place cuttings in loose potting soil or vermiculite. Keep

moist and in good light, but not direct sun for the first three to four weeks. After they have begun to root, they can be transplanted into individual pots. Feed once a month and place in a cool, sunny location.

### Next spring

Wait to plant geraniums outdoors until after the last frost. Those geraniums that have been overwintered as houseplants will have larger and heavier stems the next season. They will bloom almost as much as new plants started using the cutting method. Those that were overwintered in the dormant method will take several weeks to recover, and often need to be cut back to improve their shape and productivity.

For more information on overwintering geraniums, go to Iowa State University's *Horticulture and Home Pest News*, [www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1999/9-17-1999/geroverw.html](http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1999/9-17-1999/geroverw.html).

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## Planning safe holiday meals

by Susan Klein, ISU Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist

Food safety is important year round. During the holidays, it becomes increasingly important because we prepare larger meals, leave food out for longer periods, and overload our refrigerators.

When planning a holiday meal, choose foods that can be served safely. Temperature abuse is a common cause of illness. Hot foods need to be kept above 140 degrees F; cold foods below 40

degrees F. On the buffet table, keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, crock pots, and warming trays. Keep foods cold by nesting serving dishes in bowls of ice or

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use small serving dishes, replacing them often. Never leave food on the table for more than two hours because harmful bacteria can multiply to unsafe levels on perishable foods left at room temperature for longer periods.

Cross-contamination is another major cause of illness. Cooking utensils, dishes and cutting boards exposed to raw meat and/or poultry products should be thoroughly washed prior to use for any other cooked or uncooked foods.

Remember that it takes several days to safely thaw large pieces of frozen meat such as turkey. The best way to thaw a frozen food is in its original wrapping, set on a tray in the refrigerator. To thaw large amounts of food, allow 24 hours per five pounds.

Storing food for holiday meals can be a real challenge. We typically buy more food and different types of food than normal. Be careful to not overload your refrigerator. Putting large amounts of hot food in your refrigerator at one time can cause your refrigerator temperature to become unsafe.

### **Preparing turkey for the holidays**

When preparing a turkey, remove the giblet package in the cavity before cooking. Cook the turkey without stuffing. If the turkey is stuffed before cooking, the stuffing may not get hot enough to kill bacteria.

Roast your turkey at 325 degrees F or hotter. The best way to check turkey temperatures is to insert a meat thermometer into the large, meaty muscle on the inside

of the thigh **without** touching the bone. Dark meat turkey pieces are done when the thermometer reaches 180 degrees F or above. A 12-14 pound bird will take three to four hours to cook. Allow whole turkeys to stand 10-20 minutes before carving.

Put leftovers in small containers so they cool quickly when placed in the refrigerator. Large containers of food not only cool slowly, they also keep the refrigerator at an unsafe temperature.

If you cannot quickly use up leftovers, freeze them. Frozen turkey, stuffing and gravy should be used within one month. Leftover turkey kept in the refrigerator should be used within three to four days; stuffing and gravy within one to two days. Bring leftover gravy to a rolling boil before serving.

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## **Understand liability issues before raising livestock**

*by John Baker, Staff Attorney, Iowa Concern Hotline*

You've finally managed to buy the acreage you always dreamed of owning. Not a real farm perhaps, but large enough to raise a few chickens, a goat or two, and the horse the kids always wanted.

Sounds like the dream of a lot of new country residents. As with most things, however, there are potential downfalls to animal ownership, not the least of which is the liability an owner has if an animal strays and/or trespasses on another's property.

Chapter 169C of the Code of Iowa deals with stray and trespassing livestock. Livestock is defined as any animal belonging to the bovine (cows), caprine (goats), equine (horses), ovine (sheep), or porcine (pigs) families; poultry; ostriches; rheas; emus; and farm-raised deer. This part of the Iowa Code also sets forth the liability to owners if an animal strays or trespasses on another's property.

Livestock owners are liable for expenses incurred by the landowner if the animal causes property damage. If the landowner takes custody of the stray animal, the livestock owner is responsible for any costs incurred, including any maintenance costs.

If you are the landowner and someone's livestock trespasses upon your property, you may take custody of that livestock. If you do, you are required to notify the

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owner within 48 hours that you have custody of the animal. If you do not know who owns the livestock, you must make a reasonable effort to determine the owner's identity. If it cannot be determined, you must publish a

notice in a county newspaper of general circulation. The notice must contain your name, a description of the livestock, and an estimate of your damages. If your livestock strays upon a road or highway and is the cause of an accident, you are

liable for damages, including medical expenses.

For further information about livestock and liability, talk to your insurance provider.

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## Barn owls: Nature's most efficient varmint control

by Laura Zaugg, Environmental Educator

Dallas County Extension and Dallas County Conservation Board

Barn owls are an endangered species in Iowa and other Midwestern states. Fewer than 20 sightings are reported annually in Iowa.

Barn owls belong to the Tytonidae owl family and are different than great horned owls and barred owls, which are members of the Strigiformes family. Barn owls have monkey-like, heart-shaped faces and distinctly long legs, each with four toes tipped with razor-sharp talons, perfect for snatching a meal from tall grass. Their orange, tawny-colored backs blend well with barn wood and tree bark.

Barn owls have many of the traits that make owls amazing creatures. Like humans, they have forward facing eyes that give them three-dimensional vision. But unlike humans, they can't move their eyes in their sockets. Thanks to extra vertebrae in its neck, an owl can turn its head three-quarters of the way around.

Most birds' flight feathers are stiff edged, but an owl's are soft and fringed, allowing noiseless, deadly flight.

Owls have notoriously good night vision, thanks to large eyes packed with dim light gathering cells. Owls use their extraordinary vision to locate prey. But scientists have found that for most owls hearing is an even keener, more crucial sense for finding food at night. Certainly that's the case with the barn owl. Its eyes are comparatively small for a night hunting bird, but its hearing is unsurpassed.

Only its appetite matches the barn owl's impressive hunting efficiency. Barn owls love to eat rodents. In just one season, two adults with a nest full of nestlings can consume more than 1,500 rodents. It's easy to see why a family of barn owls is about as good as it gets when it comes to natural rodent control.

Unfortunately, the owl's habitat – open, grassy pasture and

hedgerows with healthy rodent populations – faces the devouring appetite of a different sort.



Barn owls are nature's most efficient varmint control, and they could use our help in finding nesting sites. You can build or buy simple and efficient nest boxes that can be placed on old buildings or mounted on poles. Old buildings and old hollow trees on acreages could be great nesting sites for these amazing owls.

Injured raptors should be reported to the nearest wildlife rehabilitator or conservation officer.

For information on building a house or nest box for barn owls, stop by your local Extension office and ask for NCR 338, *Shelves, Houses and Feeders for Birds and Mammals*.

## Get the most value from your firewood choices

by Greg Brenneman, ISU Extension Agricultural Engineering Specialist

Many people burn wood to save money and for the enjoyment of a wood fire.



Whether you cut your own wood or buy it, there is always a cost involved. Different types of wood have different heat values and burning qualities, so it pays to know what you are getting before selecting firewood.

While all wood species have nearly the same heat content on a weight basis, firewood is usually measured and sold on a volume basis. A given volume of oak, hickory or locust has nearly twice the weight and heat value as the same volume of basswood, willow or cottonwood.

An excellent publication from the ISU Extension Forestry Department lists the heat content of many Iowa tree species. You can find F-370, *Firewood Production and Use*, at [www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/ext/pubs/F-370.pdf](http://www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/ext/pubs/F-370.pdf). This publication also has a table on other properties of firewood such as ease of splitting,

ease of starting, burn rate, and amount of sparks produced.

To compare the cost of heating with wood to heating with other fuels, both the energy content of the fuel and the burning efficiency must be considered. For example, one cord of oak firewood burned in a 60 percent efficiency wood stove would provide the same heat as 200 gallons of LP burned in an 80 percent efficiency furnace. With current LP prices of about 90 cents per gallon, this would make the cord of oak firewood worth about \$180.

To make accurate comparisons for your own situation, ISU Extension publication PM 1068, *Heating Fuel Cost Comparison*, is available from all county Extension offices. An online *Fuel Cost Comparison Chart* can be found at [www.ext.nodak.edu/extpubs/ageng/structu/ae1015a.pdf](http://www.ext.nodak.edu/extpubs/ageng/structu/ae1015a.pdf).

If you are cutting your own firewood, you can estimate the cost of the firewood by using an ISU Extension Forestry publication, *Cost of Cutting Your Own Firewood* (F-335),

available at [www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/ext/pubs/F-335.pdf](http://www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/ext/pubs/F-335.pdf).

Keep in mind that firewood needs to be “seasoned” or dried before use. Freshly cut wood can have up to 45 percent water, while the amount of water in well seasoned firewood generally is only 20 to 25 percent. Well seasoned firewood is easier to start, produces more heat, and burns cleaner.

The important thing to remember is that the water must be gone before the wood will burn. If your wood is cut six months to a year in advance and is properly stored, the sun and wind will do the job for free.

If you try to burn green wood, the heat produced by burning must dry the wood before it will burn, using up a large percentage of the available heat energy in the process. This results in less heat delivered to your home and literally gallons of acidic water in the form of creosote deposited in your chimney.

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### ISU Extension Week - November 14-20, 2004

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Join us during this year's Extension Week as we celebrate our many partnerships. Stop by your local Extension office to learn more about how Extension partnerships are helping Iowans become their best. Look for local celebrations occurring in your county.