
Acreage Living

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension

Deborah Van Arkel
Poweshiek County Extension Education Director
Box 70
Montezuma, Iowa 50171-0070
641-623-5188

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Planting Tomatoes in the Home Garden

by Richard Jauron, ISU Extension Program Specialist/Horticulture
Phone: 515-294-1871 - e-mail: rjauron@iastate.edu

Tomatoes are the most popular vegetable in the home garden. Tomatoes are available in a wide variety of colors, sizes, and shapes. While most tomatoes are red, there are also yellow, orange, and pink varieties. Sizes vary from the bite-size cherry tomatoes to the giant beefsteak varieties. Tomatoes may be round, oblate (fruit are flattened at the top and bottom), or pear-shaped.

Tomatoes also vary in growth habit. Tomato varieties are classified as determinate or indeterminate. Determinate tomatoes are small, compact plants. They grow to a certain height, stop, then flower and set all their fruit within a short period of time. The harvest period for determinate tomatoes is generally short, making them good choices for canning. Indeterminate tomatoes continue to grow, flower, and set fruit until killed by the first frost in the fall. Accordingly, the harvest from indeterminate varieties often extends over a two or three month period. Yields are generally heavier than determinate types, but are usually later to mature. Indeterminate tomatoes are tall, sprawling plants which often perform best when supported by stakes or a tall wire cage.

Transplant tomatoes into the garden after the danger of frost is past. In central Iowa, May 10 is the suggested planting date. Gardeners in south-

ern Iowa can plant one week earlier, while those in northern areas should wait an extra week. The last practical date for planting tomatoes is approximately June 20.

When purchasing tomato plants at your local garden center, select stocky, dark green plants. Avoid plants with fruits. The fruits will stunt plant growth and reduce total yield. Harden or acclimate plants to outdoor conditions before transplanting into the garden. Initially place the plants in a shady location, then gradually expose them to longer periods of sunlight. After several days of hardening, tomatoes should be ready to be planted into the garden.

Plant tomatoes in full sun for best yields. If the plants are in peat pots, tear off the top edge or make sure the top edge is well below the soil surface once planted. If the top edge of the peat pot is exposed to the air, it will act like a wick and draw water from the soil around the plant. If the tomatoes are in plastic pots or cell-paks, carefully tap out the plants. Use a sharp knife to cut around plants growing in small flats.

Set plants into the soil up to their first true leaves. Pinch off the bottom leaves of tall, spindly transplants and lay them sideways in a trench. Care-

fully bend the stem upward so the upper few inches of stem are above the soil surface. Roots will develop all along the buried stem.

Spacing of the plants depends on the growth habit of the variety and training system employed.

Indeterminate varieties that are staked can be planted 1 1/2 to 2 feet apart in the row. Allow a 2- to 3-foot spacing for indeterminate plants grown in wire cages, while tomatoes allowed to sprawl over the ground should be spaced 3 to 4 feet apart. Determinate, ground-grown tomatoes can be planted 1 1/2 to 2 feet apart. Rows should be spaced about 4 feet apart.

After transplanting, fertilize the tomato plants with a starter fertilizer solution. A starter fertilizer solution can be prepared by dissolving one or two tablespoons of a 5-10-5 or 6-10-4 in a gallon of

water. Apply 1/2 pint of the starter solution to each plant.

Suggested tomato varieties for Iowa include 'Jet Star' (indeterminate plant; red, oblate, medium to large fruit), 'Better Boy' (indeterminate; red, round, medium fruit), 'Celebrity' (determinate; red, oblate, medium to large fruit), 'Mountain Delight' (determinate; red, oblate, medium fruit), 'Sunrise' (determinate; red, round, medium to large fruit), 'Jubilee' (indeterminate; orange, round, medium fruit), and 'Small Fry' (determinate; red, one-inch-diameter fruit).

This article originally appeared in the May 7, 1999 issue of Horticulture & Home Pest News, pp. 54-55. For subscription information, contact your county ISU Extension office or visit <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/>

Home Energy Savings

by Mary Beth Kaufman, ISU Extension Field Specialist/Family Resource Management
Phone: 712-755-3104 - e-mail: mbkaufma@iastate.edu

The arrival of spring has many folks breathing a sigh of relief that the costly winter heating season is over. However, this is NOT the time to forget about energy conservation because we never know what the summer cooling season will bring. The Department of Energy offers these tips for lowering your central air conditioner's energy usage.

- Set your thermostat at 78 F or higher. The less difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the lower your overall cooling bill will be. Each degree setting below 78 F will increase energy consumption by approximately 8%.
- Don't place lamps or TV sets near your air-conditioning thermostat. The thermostat senses heat from these appliances, which can cause the air conditioner to run longer than necessary.
- Consider using an interior fan in conjunction with your air conditioner to spread the cooled air more effectively through your home without greatly increasing your power use.
- Plant trees or shrubs to shade air-conditioning units but not to block the airflow. A unit operating in the shade uses as much as 10% less electricity than the same one operating in the sun. Also reduce the cooling load by shading east and west windows.
- When possible, delay heat-generating activities, such as cooking, baking and dishwashing, until evening on hot days.
- Inspect and clean both the indoor and outdoor coils. The indoor coil in your air conditioner acts as a magnet for dust because it is con-

stantly wetted during the cooling season. Dirt build-up on the indoor coil is the single most common cause of poor efficiency. The outdoor coil must also be checked periodically for dirt build-up and cleaned if necessary.

- Have a service contractor check the refrigerant charge. The circulating fluid in your air conditioner is a special refrigerant gas that is put in when the system is installed. If the system is overcharged or undercharged with refrigerant, it will not work properly.

Are you planning home remodeling projects this summer? The U.S. Department of Energy website (www.energy.gov) cites "No-Regrets Remodeling" (published by Home Energy Magazine) as a source of information for energy-saving possibilities.

Even if you are not remodeling, there are count-

less ways to reduce your energy use, many of them inexpensive and easy. The Department of Energy's Home Energy Saver website (<http://HomeEnergySaver.lbl.gov>) allows you to enter your zip code and information about your home, in order to identify the most cost-effective energy-saving measures. Or, check out home energy conservation information from ISU Extension at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/housing/>

Look For the ENERGY STAR® Label if you're in the market for new appliances or equipment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) are working together to promote the use of energy-efficient equipment by awarding the ENERGY STAR label to products that save energy, help prevent air pollution and save money, frequently with better performance. Manufacturers and retailers volunteer to place the ENERGY STAR label on those models that meet or exceed the criteria set by EPA and DOE.

Rural Directories: A Country Who's Who

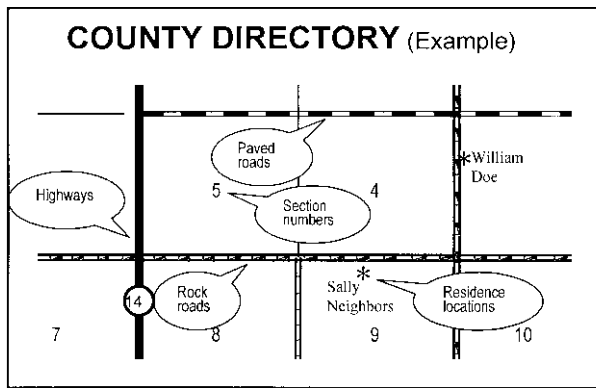
by Shawn Shouse, ISU Extension Field Specialist/Ag Engineering
Phone: 712-769-2600 - e-mail: sshouse@iastate.edu

One of the joys of living in the country is that you live far enough from your neighbors that you can't hear them sneeze. One of the challenges of living in the country is that you live far enough from your neighbors that you may have trouble knowing who they are. In town, you can look up a name and street address in the phone book and figure such things out. If only there were such a directory for rural folks. Guess what? There is!

Rural directories provide maps showing rural roads, residences, addresses, phone numbers, and sometimes land ownership. Everything you need to know about who lives in your neighborhood is right there under one cover. You will hear these directories called by different names. Those called "plat books" will include both the rural directory and the plat (land) maps listing legal ownership of land parcels. Those called "TAM

books" will include Township maps, Alphabetical locator lists, and Mailing addresses (hence the name TAM). Other formats and names may be available as well.

Rural directory maps are generally broken down by townships. Townships are political jurisdictions which (in Iowa) encompass about 36 square miles (usually six miles square). Each square mile in the township (called a section) is assigned a number (called, oddly enough, a section number). Long-time residents may use this name and number system to tell you where they live (such as: I live in Frankfort township, section 3). The numbering sequence for Iowa sections follows a consistent pattern starting in the northeast corner of the township. With practice, you can visualize where in the township a particular section number would be located.



With the help of a rural directory, you can familiarize yourself with the names of surrounding neighbors and land owners. You can locate minimum maintenance (dirt) roads, rural churches, cemeteries, and closed bridges. These directories have, for years, been the trusted companion of folks who make rural deliveries or call on rural residents.

So, how do I get a copy of a rural directory? If you live at a rural residence, you may get one for

free. One prominent publisher of rural directories in the upper Midwest sells advertising in the directory, much like magazine advertising, to subsidize the cost of providing directories to rural residents. Publishers such as this one may send revised directories to all rural residents in a county every year. If you are not on the rural residence mailing list, new to the area, or would like a directory for another county, additional copies are always for sale. Most counties in the Midwest have directories available from at least one publisher for \$20-\$40. In Iowa, two such publishers are Farm & Home Publishers of Belmond, Iowa (515-444-3508) or <http://www.fhpltd.com/> and R.C. Booth Enterprises of Harlan, Iowa (712-755-5425).

If you don't already have a rural directory for your county, check it out soon. You'll find a wealth of information that can help you feel at home with your fellow rural neighbors.

Prairies - one more word

by Shawn Shouse, ISU Extension Field Specialist/Ag Engineering
Phone: 712-769-2600 - e-mail: sshouse@iastate.edu

In February and March, we featured articles by Dr. Greg Brenneman on planning and establishing a prairie ecosystem. As luck would have it, just AFTER those articles were published, I received word of a new book on that very topic. A Practical Guide to Prairie Reconstruction, by Carl Kurtz, gives a concise overview of the planning, establishment and maintenance of a reconstructed prairie. The 54-page book includes more than 20 beautiful color photographs and an

extensive list of suppliers and references. The retail price of this step-by-step reference book is \$12.95.

This book is published by, and available from the University of Iowa Press, 100 Kuhl House, Iowa City, IA, 52242-1000. Phone: 319-335-2000 Fax: 319-335-2055. On the web at: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~uipress/> For book orders, call 773-568-1550, or E-mail: uipress@uiowa.edu

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Editor:
Shawn Shouse
ISU Extension FS/Ag Engineering
SW Area Extension
53020 Hitchcock Avenue
Lewis, Iowa 51544
PH: 712-769-2600

Layout & Design:
Paulette Cambridge
Office Assistant
SW Area Extension
53020 Hitchcock Avenue
Lewis, Iowa 51544
PH: 712-769-2600

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