BLADE-EMPIRE BELOIT CALL SECTIONA

Photo by Cynthia Wilson

Remodeling costs continue to rise

The cost of any remodeling project has skyrocketed since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In the five years since, the cost of materials has continued to increase due to the highest inflation rate in years, and ongoing issues with the supply chain. Proposed new tariffs on consumer goods - including everything from sink fixtures to tile flooring - could drive up prices even more.

A small bathroom remodel usually describes a room of 50 square feet or less. Consumer Reports states that, in 2025, a basic small bathroom remodel could cost anywhere from \$2,500 to \$6000. The cost of remodeling larger bathrooms could reach \$15,000, which was the cost of remodeling an average-sized kitchen in 2019.

The cost of materials usually accounts for between 40%-60% of the total cost of the remodeling project. Most bathroom remodels involve the installation of new plumbing, electrical, fixtures, and flooring. The cost of implementing each one of these categories has almost doubled in the last five years.

Retail chain stores sell the most basic toilets for around \$100, but even these prices could go up if tariffs on goods imported from China are increased. China supplies a significant portion of bathroom supplies, including fixtures and fittings, to the Unit-

ed States.

The good news is that, with increased tariffs, domestically-produced porcelain products - which were often more expensive than imported goods - may now be cheaper to buy. But it still translates into an increased cost.

If you're not buying something in-stock at the store, ordering specialty items or customized fixtures for your bathroom project may come with a length delivery time. Some high-end fixtures and flooring have a delivery window of six months.

Labor costs typically account for 30-40% of a renovation project. Plumbing, electrical, and contractor costs - if you use a general - have increased, on average, 20% since 2020.

Experts also say to add a contingency reserve fund of 10-20% of the total remodel project for overrun costs and supply delays.

Where you live can also contribute to increased labor costs. Large urban areas have more skilled labor, but also a higher demand for that labor, which translates into higher wages. Urban areas typically have a higher standard of living - mortgages, rent, and commodity purchases like gas and food all cost more. But though some things may be cheaper to buy or rent in a rural area, the labor pool is smaller,

and skilled labor is at a premium. Even if you don't pay more for skilled labor in a rural area, you often have a longer wait time before skilled labor is available for your project.

When considering a small bathroom remodel, don't be surprised that size matters. Plumbers and electricians often charge a premium rate for their services if they are working in a confined space. A small bathroom remodel could actually mean higher labor costs.

If you're expanding the size of a small bathroom, note that lumber is one of the highest priced materials on the home improvement market now. The National Association of Home Builders reports that lumber prices are now 11.7% higher compared to one year ago. Lumber prices have increased at almost double-digit levels since 2020.

There are alternative steps that homeowners can take to minimize remodeling costs. Refinishing existing bathtubs and showers can significantly reduce the cost of the remodel. Buying available, in-stock fixtures from stores like Menards can eliminate supply chain problems.

As with any remodeling project, preplanning is key to maintaining cost efficiency and a timely completion.









Homeowner's Insurance **An Interview With Amber Lambertz**

Paying insurance is a necessary step for protecting the value of the things we own. Homeowner's insurance is probably the single most important and costly - insurance we

The Blade-Empire sat down with Amber Lambertz of The Amber Lambertz Agency and Farm **Bureau Financial Services** to discuss some basic questions about insuring a home.

Why is homeowner's insurance important?

"You work hard and your home is one of the biggest purchases in life so why would you not want to protect it?" Lambertz said. "In the event of a loss – whether minor or catastrophic, your insurance will help you get back on your feet and help cover the loss."

What factors influence homeowner's insurance?

"This has changed drastically over the last few years - there are multiple factors that determine insurance premiums," Lambertz said.



"You can take two identical houses that are side by side and they will have different premiums. Gone are the days of one size fits most when it comes to insurance. Here are some of the major factors that go into determining premiums: age of home, size of home, type of siding, age of roof, type of roof, age of wiring and plumbing, the insured's

credit rating/insurance score, zip code – based on a company's loss history – some areas may be considered a higher risk than others, auto/home bundle discounts, past claim history, and deductibles – the lower the deductible, the higher the premium."

What is the 80% Rule? "In Kansas, to keep

on your home - meaning the insurance company will pay for the repair/replacement of damage (less any upgrades) - and to avoid a co-insurance penalty, you need to carry an amount of insurance of at least 80% of the replacement cost," Lambertz said. "This is something vour agent should talk you through to make sure replacement cost coverage you are carrying sufficient coverage on your home to avoid any penalty and headache at claim time."

What are important additional coverages?

"Ultimately, this depends on what risks you would like to protect yourself from - but additional coverages include water backup, service line coverage, residential equipment breakdown, ordinance of law, contents of refrigerator/freezer, earthquake coverage, sinkhole collapse – just to name a few and these can vary from company to company. Again, your agent should talk you through optional coverages and how they would benefit you."

How important is it to document property value?

"Documentation is beneficial to show upgrades and additional value added to your home." Lambertz said. "This is going to be more important during a policy review to make sure the proper coverage is in place before a loss occurs. If you've done major improve-

ments to your home and haven't updated your coverage and there is a loss, you may end up short on coverage."

Why is it smart to review your policy, and how often should you do it?

"Your policy renewal is a good time to review your coverage," Lambertz said. "However, any time any major updates to your life or improvements to your home are made, it would be wise to reach out to your agent. For my company, we do our best to meet with every client on an annual basis. A lot can change in a year, so we like to meet with clients to make sure they're receiving all available discounts, make sure their policy still meets their needs, adjust coverages and/or deductibles to help offset premium increases and really just check in to make sure we have everything correct on our end. Plus, we work in an industry based on relationships and we enjoy meeting with our clients."

Prepare seeds with seed tape

K-State horticulture expert says tape helps to decrease time spent planting seeds

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION **NEWS SERVICE**

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Seed tape is a method of preparing seeds for planting that reduces the amount of time spent bending over the ground. Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini said seed tape makes it easier to handle small seeds and get proper spacing.

To make a seed tape, cut a paper towel into strips two inches wide by 12 inches long. Create a paste by mixing ½ cup flour with water. Use a ruler and

pencil to mark dots on the paper towel at the proper spacing for the type of seed being planted. The seed packet should contain recommended plant spacing guidelines.

"Put one seed on each dot on the paper towel, then put a small drop of the flour paste on top of each seed," Domenghini said. "Allow the paste to dry before moving the seed



At the appropriate time, each seed tape can be planted at the proper depth in the garden. Domenghini said the seeds will germinate through the paste.

"Over time, the paper towel will break down into the garden. Toilet tissue and tissue paper are other options for making seed tape," Domenghini said.

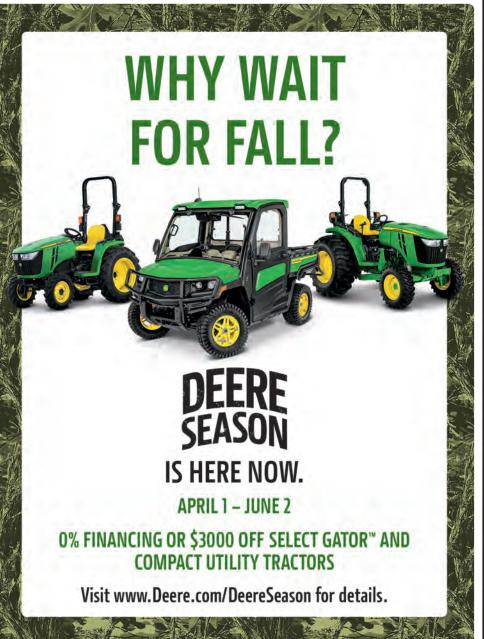
This activity is perfect for getting children involved, she added.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.









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Making Homes Safer and More Accessible for the Elderly

As people age, everyday activities like climbing stairs or taking a shower can become increasingly difficult and even dangerous. Fortunately, there are many simple and cost-effective home improvements that can significantly enhance safety and accessibility for older adults. From installing ramps to adding grab bars in the bathroom, these changes can make it possible for seniors to maintain their independence and live safely and longer in their own homes.

One of the most impactful modifications is the addition of entryway ramps. Traditional steps at entrances can pose a serious fall risk for seniors with limited mobility. Installing a ramp provides a smooth transition from outdoors to indoors, making it easier for those using walkers or wheelchairs to enter and exit the home safely. Portable or threshold ramps can also be used for smaller elevation changes inside the home.

Another valuable improvement is the stair lift. For seniors living in multi-story homes, stairs can quickly become a major obstacle. Stairlifts offer a safe way to navigate between floors without the physical strain and fall risk of climbing stairs. Many models are customizable to fit curved or narrow staircases, and modern designs are compact, preserving space for others using the stairs.

In the bathroom, which is one of the most hazardous areas in the home, simple upgrades can greatly reduce the risk of slips and falls. Shower grab bars are one of the easiest and most affordable improvements. When



installed properly, these sturdy bars offer support for standing, moving in and out of the shower, or using the toilet. Grab bars should be securely mounted into wall studs to ensure stability.

Non-slip flooring or mats in the bathroom are another easy fix. Water and slick tiles create a high risk for falls, so using non-slip surfaces or applying anti-slip coatings can make a big difference. Walk-in showers or tubs with low thresholds are also excellent for accessibility, eliminating the need to step over a high edge.

Throughout the home, widening doorways can improve access for wheelchairs or walkers. In some cases, this might mean a small renovation, but often even replacing door hinges with offset hinges can provide a few extra inches of clearance. Lever-style door handles are also easier for arthritic hands to manage than traditional round knobs.

Good lighting is another key safety feature. Aging eyes need more light, so adding brighter bulbs, night lights in hallways and bathrooms, or motion-sensor lighting can help prevent accidents.

These simple home improvements can make a big difference in the quality of life for older adults. Whether it's installing a stair lift or simply adding a grab bar in the shower, these upgrades not only improve safety but also promote independence and peace of mind for both seniors and their families. Investing in accessibility now can prevent costly injuries later—and help make home feel like home for years to come.



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Butterfield couple, former Beloit residents, create LoadBacker® business

Made in the USA

BY SHARON SAHLFELD

Call Editor

Larry Butterfield, formerly of Beloit, has a lot of history in Beloit, and his family now resides in Springfield, Missouri, and owns their own family business, called LoadBacker®.

Larry met his wife, Julie (Hendrix) Butterfield, in 1979, at a Mankato High School basketball game, where she was a cheerleader. Now 44 years later, they are blessed with three children, Keri, Nicole and Brandon.

As the Butterfield name has been associated with buffalo, the family was not new to a hard work ethic, instilled to him by his parents, Larry Sr. and Kay. They grew up in Nebraska, and after Larry Sr. visited his grandparents in South Dakota at an early age, the love of buffalo was found. The couple had a passion for ranching, and began an extra-curricular activity when they purchased their first group of buffalo from a rancher in Colorado, in 1976. Larry Sr. and Kay moved from state to state following the telephone contracting jobs. They moved to Beloit in 1964-65 from Iowa to install telephone lines for

Cunningham Telephone Co., in Glen Elder and fell in love with the area. After a short stay in Beloit, it was time to think about where their son would start school and they decided to make Beloit home. Both parents have finally retired and visit Hawaii annually, enjoying life.

Larry and Julie married in 1981, and his parents introduced them into the buffalo business. They gifted Larry and Julie a few buffalo cows and a bull for a wedding present, which allowed them to officially start the family buffalo venture. In 1991, the young couple purchased a farm south of Kensington, Kansas, where they grew their own herd and received a taste of ranching of their own. While in Kensington, Larry worked in constructing trailers, along with repairs, and transitioned into purchasing materials for trailers.

"As years passed, I furthered my career to entail sales representative for reciprocating floors along with transitioning into trailer sales," said Larry. "Throughout the years, transportation became of interest while visiting with drivers and owners of

trucking companies. I was fascinated on the workings of the reciprocating floor concept, or "live" floors and always felt as though I could add beneficial features to the unloading process."

Taking Ag classes during Beloit high school,

where he graduated in 1979, contributed significantly to Larry's life course in what he does today.

" I felt Mr. Hessenflow did an outstanding job of encouraging students to pursue their dreams at Beloit High School, and to be the best you can be," Larry said. "My father purchased a livestock trailer kit my sophomore year and it was my job to put the pieces together. Cutting, fitting, welding and final detailing was all part of the learning experience to end up with a final project. As summer rolled around, I had the opportunity to show on both a local level as well as exhibit at the State Fair in Hutchinson. I was fortunate to place in the top three at each fair, which was an encouragement, along with the confidence to feel as though as I was moving in a future direction."



The Larry and Julie Butterfield, today's Load-Backer® business, owning two patents and trademark rights, benefits with multiple "bullet" points regarding items that surround their equipment.

They currently have equipment working to include 38 states, Australia, Chile, Canada, Netherlands and Japan. They offer both an all-aluminum construction along with a composite construction to fit the needs and requirements of their customers. The couple relocated 10 years ago to be centrally positioned for their U.S. customers and have never looked back.

With a hydraulically driven horizontal unload process, unloading time, along with clean-out, could become obstacles for end destinations

and backhauls. While dumping into pits at elevators and piling material, various processes could occur. Due to the process while dumping into elevator pits, unloading times would commonly exceed 45 minutes on a regular basis. This process would be an interruption in the transportation lines waiting to unload and, on many occasions, drivers would be asked not to return with a reciprocating floor trailer. While unloading at retail yards, quite commonly drivers would unload much beyond the designated area for products and would require additional equipment to push materials back into their designated areas, thus creating a "complaint" for the drivers/owners to contend with at retail yards.

"After many years of engaging in conversations, with the variables around unloading processes, I came up with a solution of which was believed at the time to have "legs" to change how trailers unloading bulk materials unloaded," said Larry. "I put our first prototype in a trailer surrounding multiple conversations of unloading dissatisfaction and ran this for an entire year to ensure no major obstacles or problems occurred. The second year, two units were added to work on further results that would allow us a positive direction of superior clean-out and shorten unloading time.

"After the second year we were asked on numerous occasions, what do you call your concept?" said Larry. "Giving a name to our product was not on the radar as I was focused on results for the transportation industry and found it was time for us to adapt to what was to become an industry changing move. After many weeks of "name recognition" brainstorming, my wife came up with "LoadBacker®." It made perfect sense, a piece of equipment that was backing and moving loads efficiently out of trailers.

See **BUTTERFIELD** on 9A



LoadBacker® products available in aluminum and composite construction.

Larry and Julie Butterfield





LoadBacker® products show results.

LoadBacker® equipment in action, unloading at an elevator.

Butterfield

continued from 8A

Our equipment starts at the front of the trailer, keeps products together while uploading, shortens unload times and keeps drivers out of trailers. Holy smokes, we were on to something! We applied for a patent, acquired one with many years of challenges and today possess two patents for our equipment as well as registering and maintaining both patents and trademark rights."

Larry and Julie sold their farm and buffalo around Kensington in 2002 to focus on a new chapter in their life, growing their business with the LoadBacker® equipment.

"We are very blessed to have our oldest daughter Keri, husband Ben, two grandchildren, Benson and Brooks; our daughter Nicole, husband Seth, two grandchildren, Will and Sophie; and our son Brandon and wife, Sabine and grandson Ollie," said the couple. "All kids have contributed to the success of our business at some point along the line. Today we have grandchildren that enjoy interjecting help while visiting as Grandpa works in the shop. It is truly humbling to have both drivers, as well as owners, that have not experienced

results we offer, that are directly tied to transportation for 35-40 years and never experienced the high level of results prior to the LoadBacker®., which reduces unloading times by much as 80

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For more information, visit their website at www.loadbacker.com



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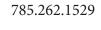
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Good windows are essential to a home

BY CYNTHIA WILSON Blade-Empire

There are many reasons windows are essential to a home. Choosing the right window is important for a home's aesthetics, functionality, energy efficiency, and overall comfort, and can improve the home's value.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, many design features and technologies make windows more energy efficient and improve their durability.

Windows in older homes are made with a single pane of glass, which only has one layer of glass. Older homes have more air gaps in the seals around the windows and let in more UVA/UVB rays (harmful sunlight) into the home. These reasons lower the energy efficiency



PHOTOS BY CYNTHIA WILSON | BLADE-EMPIRE Jordan Budreau, owner of BPR Inc.

of the home.

Newer windows are made with double-pane or triple-pane glass, which are generally filled with argon and with better seals around the windows. This increases the efficiency of the home by regulating the house's HVAC system, by keeping it warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer.

Jordan Budreau, owner, of BPR Commercial and Residential Remodeling has installed many windows in his years of home construction. BPR Commercial and Residential has been licensed and operating for 15 years in Concordia.

Budreau says he works with Jackson Glass when doing window installs.

Budreau said, that in newer buildings, windows are now required to have a double pane or better, if being replaced.

When selecting new

windows, consider the frame materials the glazing or glass features, gas fills and spacers, and the type of operation. All of these factors will influence the overall energy-related properties of the windows.

The aesthetics of windows can significantly impact a home's overall look and feel, complementing architectural styles and enhancing curb appeal. Budreau said, "Windows now come in different colors, solid or stained glass; shapes; tinting; and even can have built-in blinds."

The framing of the glass is customizable in windows too. The frames can be metal or wood; painted or natural; or one color on the outside and another on the inside of the house.

Functionality is important when picking out windows, offering varying levels of ventilation, ease of cleaning, and security.

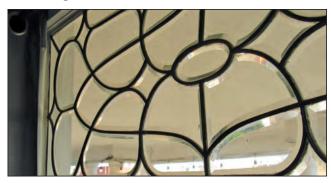
There are multiple operating types of windows too. Awning, fixed, double-hung, hopper, sliding, and casement windows are just a few of the different operating types.

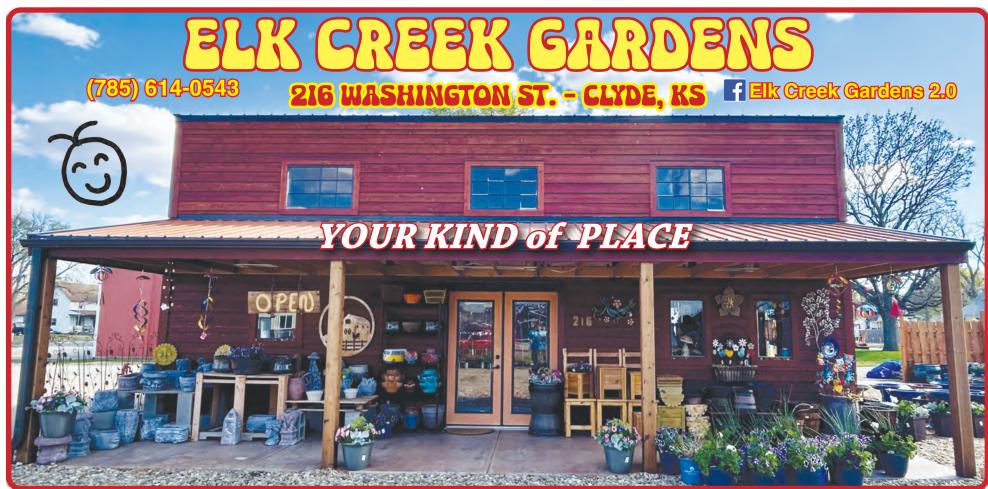
Budreau says, that restoring and replacing windows, resealing, repining, and removing storm windows are just a few steps in the process.

If looking for some interesting windows in

Concordia, the Frank Carlson Library is currently in the process of replacing the bay windows in the Carlson Room. The plans are to install stained glass windows representing Senator Frank Carlson and his career. The first of the three windows is finished.

If needing new windows, contact BPR Commercial and Residential Remodeling, for a quote, at www.bprcr.com or call 785-262-7776.











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Wildflowers bring bursts of color to home landscapes

K-State horticulture expert suggests planting a blend of grasses and wildflowers

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Wildflowers offer variety and color to a home landscape. In addition to eye appeal, they can survive in soils containing a wide range of chemistry pH and with varying numbers of sunny days, adding variety to garden areas.

To establish a wildflower area, Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini recommends using a regional seed blend.

"It is better to choose a blend of grasses and wildflowers rather than a single species," Domenghini said.

When building a wildflower area, first remove existing vegetation to help wildflowers take root and grow.

Domenghini recommends:

- Eradicate weeds. This can be done through cultivation or occultation.
- Before planting, adjust pH and fertilize according to results of a soil test.
- The seedbed should be firm to allow good seed/ soil contact.
- Mix seed with damp sand (4:1 sand/seed) for more uniform coverage with a drop seeder or whirlybird spreader.
- Rake seed in about ¼ inch deep and firm the seedbed with a roller. Don't mulch.



• Keep seed moist through germination. Water 3-4 times per week, if possible. Slowly back off watering as plants develop.

"Warm-season grasses and most prairie flowers should be seeded between April 1 and May 15," Domenghini said. "During the first year of establishment, regularly monitor and control the weed re-growth."

Seeds will germinate best when the soil temperature is at least 60 degrees F, Domenghini said. Soil thermometers are available in most garden centers and hardware stores.

"Hand weeding can help but must be done with care to avoid uprooting small prairie flowers. Mow as

high as possible to help control fast growing weeds while preserving most of the foliage on the prairie flower," Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact yourlocal K-State Research and Extension office.





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A new residential neighborhood is being developed on the former Cloud County Health Center site at the intersection of 11th Street and Highland Drive. New public infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, utilities) is currently being constructed to serve (twelve) 12 new lots reserved for moderateincome homes and four (4) new lots will be reserved for high-income homes.

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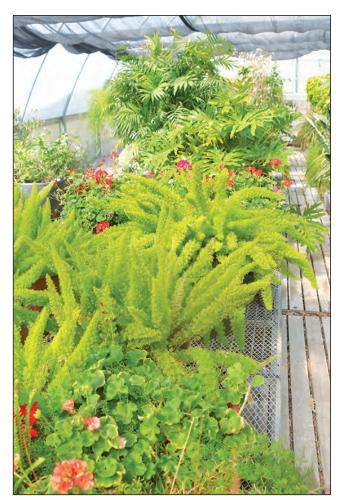


Roberta Bock offers a large variety of garden vegetable plants and flowers.



Roberta Bock of Bock Garden Center in Cawker City offers wintertime plant-sitting for

Bock Garden Center in its 46th year of business



Customers' plants stay green and healthy during the winter months while at the Bock Garden Center.

Roberta has the green thumb

BY SHARON SAHLFELD

After Roberta Bock, born and raised in Concordia, married her husband, Charles Bock, they moved to Cawker City in 1978, where the Bock Garden Center has been in business for 46 years now. Roberta inherited three children through marriage, and the couple later had four of their own together. Charles has since passed away, as well as one of the children.

The Bock Garden Center first started with a small business out of their garage. They sold a boat to add a second greenhouse and are now up to a third and fourth greenhouse. As Roberta first started with just selling vegetable plants, she now offers a large variety of flowers as well.

"I first started with vegetables and only two kinds of flowers, before a man told me I would sell more flowers if I offered them, because 'the women like their flowers,' so that is what I did," said Roberta.

Roberta starts a majority of all her vegetable plants and flowers from seed during the winter months. She then offers bedding plants for flowers and vegetables, with a few houseplant cuttings as well, during the planting season.

The Bock Garden Center, located at 1111 Sixth Street in Cawker City, off Highway 24 on Redwood Street, is open every day, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., except on Wednesdays, closing at 5 p.m. They are also closed on Sundays.



on the Sixth and Redwood location, **Bock Garden Center**



Matt Hesting talks with Roberta Bock about the kinds of vegetables he wants to plant in his spring garden.



Chairs are available at Bock Garden Center for customers to take the time to chat.

Lawn maintenance should start now

K-State horticulture expert explains mowing frequency and height

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — It is time to resume lawn maintenance as spring weather arrives and grass begins to grow more quickly.

Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini says proper maintenance is a proactive approach to reduce weed growth and other stresses to the lawn while minimizing costs and the environmental impact.

Mowing

The optimal mowing height for a home lawn depends on the type of grass, lawn use and time of year, Domenghini said.

"Mow at the high end of the recommended range for each species to improve drought resistance by encouraging deeper roots," Domenghini said. "Only one-third of the grass leaf should be cut at a time."

Removing more by lowering the mowing height results in physiological stress and possible heat or cold injury. If the lawn has become overgrown and needs more than one-third removed it will need to be done gradually with a few days between each mowing.

"Mowing frequency should be based on the growth rate of the lawn," Domenghini said. She suggests not following a set schedule that may result in excessive clippings left on the grass.

"Proper timing of mowing means the grass clippings are shorter and can be returned to the lawn, Domenghini said. "This contributes nitrogen back to the lawn."

Long clippings can block sunlight to the live turf and promote disease, so they should be bagged and

Maintaining a sharp blade on the mower is essential for a clean cut, Domenghini added. She said a dull mower blade tears the grass and causes the tips to

"Mow using a different pattern each time to prevent soil compaction and turf wear from the mower wheels. The grass blades lean the direction of the mower's path so changing the pattern each time

allows the grass to stand more upright," Domenghini

Trees can be severely damaged if bumped by the mower, she warned. Even what appears to be a minor wound can result in death for the tree, so she recommends cultivating the soil surrounding trees to prevent grass and weeds from growing up close to the

Watering

Apply water in the early morning, and wait as long as possible between watering, Domenghini said. Nighttime watering promotes disease development.

"Some signs indicating that the turf needs water include darker bluish-green color, and when footprints remain in the lawn when someone walks across rather than leaf blades bouncing back in place," Domenghini said. "Soak the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches and wait for signs that more water is needed."

Fertilizing

Fertilize only to maintain a moderately green color during favorable weather, and minimally or not at all during times of weather stress, Domenghini said.

Over-fertilizing increases the water and mowing requirements. Domenghini suggests not fertilizing when heavy rain is expected, and never dump excess fertilizer into storm drains or sewers.

The timing of fertilizer applications should be based on turfgrass species:

- Fescue and bluegrass September and November (optional in May).
- Bermudagrass and zoysiagrass between May and August.
 - Buffalograss June.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions tohortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

In the Garden: New plant selection

Before planting, understand plant characteristics at maturity, says K-State expert

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Choosing the right plant for the right place is crucial to introducing new plants in the garden this spring.

"Know the water needs of the plant and the water availability of your landscape," Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini said.

Understanding the growth characteristics of the plant -- such as height and spread at maturity, rate of growth and thorns or fruiting habit -- helps set the plant up for success, Domenghini added.

"Determine if those qualities will fit with the space you have available," Domenghini said. "A small, young tree may look nice planted in front of your home, but as it grows, will it block your view out the window? Will this still be a desirable loca-

As you select new plants for the landscape, making informed decisions early in the landscaping process will save time and money.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions tohortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.



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Kansas Pasture Clearing is there to help

Removal of invasive trees and otherwise

BY SHARON SAHLFELD Call Editor

With invasions of Eastern Red Cedar and other trees into pastures on the rise in areas of Mitchell County and otherwise, this can negatively impact forage production and grassland ecosystems, requiring management strategies like prescribed burning, mechanical removal, and herbicide applications.

With the Kansas Pasture Clearing business, 1915 S. Ohio Street #125, Salina, Kansas, its name describes what it is about. Its motto is "Restore Land and Profits," because farmers are losing the potential of their land each year that trees take over.

"When you consider the seeds, there are several years of trees in any pasture, so I take all the seeds attached to the trees to a pile to burn later," said owner, Luke Kindall.

This way the seeds are collected instead of left to cover the ground and they can be burned. To address the Hedge, also known as Osage Orange, tree problem, the tree is cut off and immediate-



Over the years, several varieties of trees including the Eastern Red Cedar (shown), Hedge, Locust, Elm and others, have taken over many pastures.

ly treated with a chemical applied directly onto the cut stump. In this way, as opposed to cutting alone, the Hedge will not have the same ability to grow back, making the situation worse and costing more.

To explain how bad the Eastern Red Cedar is, it is important to know it can actually produce 1.5 million seeds a year from just one tree. It can grow almost one foot in width and one foot in height per year. As the trees spread

out, they grow together so no sun reaches the grass. Cedars are creating a big fire hazard, just like we have seen in other states. The Hedge and Locusts can take longer, but are harder to deal with. They also spread seeds, but they grow roots underground and reach out in several directions and when they are cut off, they just re-sprout and make many more trees than you started with. Hedge can produce dozens of "apples" per year and each one contains 200-300 seeds. These are the most problematic and invasive spreaders taking over the space in pastures.

Kindall obtained the proper credentials with the State of Kansas for the business license and commercial applicators license. He also carries sufficient liability coverage for himself and machines.

Kansas Pasture Clearing will be offering clients assistance to burn the piles.

Kindall is also a member of the Smoky Hills Prescribed Burn Association. Burning can be a crucial step once a

pasture is cut. Prescribed Burn Associations are on the rise and one of the best ways to maintain a clear pasture, but these need local cooperation from neighbors to really be effective.

"The land once was burned and it kept the prairie clear, and we are beginning this now before we have the problems of the Oklahoma, Texas and California fires.

In 2023, Oklahoma passed House Bill 2239, also known as the Terry Peach North Canadian Watershed Restoration Act, to address the Red Cedar infestation in the North Canadian Watershed, and in 2025, House Bill 2162 seeks to expand this program statewide to eradicate harmful trees and shrubs, including red cedars, to improve fire safety, water conservation, and land management.

Kansas Pasture Clearing started after Kindall learned about how bad the problem has become over the last several years and saw the need to address the overgrowth in trees in the state.

"The reason this is such a problem, starts with killing many native grasses crucial for cattle production, and also many native species," Kindall said. "As the trees take over, they eventually create a complete canopy of coverage that they create which causes severe erosion, loss of soil, and complete loss of the use of the land. So that means that this growing problem is actually taking land out of production from farmers."

Mitchell County has funds available to help with the pasture clearing process. Its sign-up period runs until the end of April and then it will begin the ranking process.

"I'm really hoping we have several take advantage of this," said Mitchell County Conservation District Manager Amanda Johnson. It's definitely cheaper to clear trees than to buy more grass. District contact information is 785-738-5172 Ext. 3, and please leave a message if neces-

To contact Kansas Pasture Clearing, call Luke Kindall at (785) 407-9563.



Kansas Pasture Clearing uses equipment to cut trees and immediately treat with a chemical applied directly onto the cut stump. This way, as opposed to cutting alone, the Hedge will not have the ability to grow back, making the situation worse and costing more. The trees, with the seeds attached, are taken to a pile to burn later, eliminating future germination and growth.



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BLADE-EMPIRE BLAOIT CALL SECTION B 24, 2025 Photo by Cynth Wilson

USDA announces Agricultural Trade promotion programs for 2025

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is launching agricultural trade promotion programs for 2025 and accepting applications for four export market development programs. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service has opened funding opportunities for the Market Access Program (MAP), Foreign Market Development Program (FMD), Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program (TASC), and Emerging Markets Program (EMP) that will help U.S. agricultural producers promote and sell their goods internationally. This action follows U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins' announcement detailing six international trade trips in the next six months to promote U.S. agricultural exports. The Secretary will visit Vietnam, Japan, India, Peru, Brazil, and the United Kingdom.

"Our job at USDA is to open new markets for our farmers, ranchers, and producers. The previous administration left agriculture with a \$50 billion trade deficit. President Trump and I will not sit idly by - we are actively working to open new markets and remove existing barriers," said Secretary Rollins. "We are putting farmers first. These programs are a crucial step in sustaining long lasting economic growth in rural America."

Background:

The application deadline for the four programs is June 6, 2025.

The Market Access Program (MAP), at \$200 million annually, allocates funds to ag industry organizations across the United States to promote U.S. fruits, vegetables, nuts, processed products, and bulk and intermediate commodities to global consumers. The average MAP participant provides more than \$2.50 in contributions for every \$1 in federal funding it receives through the program.

The Foreign Market Development (FMD) program awards \$34.5 million annually to benefit U.S. farmers, processors, and exporters by addressing long—term foreign market import constraints and by identifying new markets or new uses for U.S. agricultural commodities. FMD recipients, which contribute on average more than \$2.50 for every \$1 in federal funding they receive through the program, will conduct activities that help maintain or increase demand for U.S. agricultural commodities overseas.

The Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops pro-

gram (TASC) makes available \$9 million annually to fund projects that address sanitary, phytosanitary, and technical barriers that prohibit or threaten the export of U.S. specialty crops.

The Emerging Markets Program (EMP) uses \$8 million annually to support assessment and technical assistance activities intended to develop, maintain, or expand opportunities for U.S. agricultural exports in emerging markets.

Through MAP, FMD, TASC, and EMP, FAS establishes public-private partnerships with non-profit U.S. agricultural trade associations, farmer cooperatives, non-profit state-regional trade groups, state agencies, and small businesses to open markets and conduct overseas marketing and promotional activities on behalf of U.S. agricultural producers and processors.

These programs are funded by mandatory statutory funding per the direction of Congress. USDA takes seriously the disbursement of taxpayer dollars and will closely follow the program to ensure good return on investment.

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Waconda Water provides areawide services

BY SHARON SAHLFELD

Call Editor

Waconda Water, 1319 Third Ave, in Downs, owned by Dalton and KC Remus, was established on September 1, 2024. With over 12 years of experience in the plumbing industry, they decided to broaden their scope by incorporating water treatment services into what they now offer.

Waconda Water is an installation and delivery service offering salt delivery for water softeners, water delivery, and advanced water treatment systems like reverse osmosis and water softeners. They cover roughly a 45 mile radius around Downs.

Water softeners are beneficial because they remove minerals like calcium and magnesium from hard water, leading to softer skin, cleaner clothes, and dishes, and reduced cleaning time, while also potentially saving money on cleaning products and extending the lifespan of appliances.

Some water softener benefits include:

• Softer Skin and Hair: Soft water is easier on skin and hair, potentially reducing dryness and promoting healthier, softer results.

· Cleaner Clothes:

Soft water allows soap and detergents to lather and rinse more effectively, leading to cleaner and brighter clothes.

• Easier Cleaning: Soft water reduces soap scum and mineral buildup on surfaces, making cleaning tasks easier and faster.

• Reduced Cleaning Product Usage:

Because soft water allows soaps and detergents to work more efficiently, you may use less of these



Eddie Miller, Waconda Water employee, provides service with a smile.

products, saving money.

• Extended Appliance Lifespan:

Hard water can cause mineral buildup in pipes and appliances, leading to costly repairs and premature replacement. Soft water helps prevent this buildup, extending the lifespan of appliances like dishwashers, washing machines, and water heaters.

• Improved Water Quality:

Water softeners can improve the taste and feel of drinking water by removing minerals that can impart a metallic taste.

• Reduced Water Spots:

Soft water prevents mineral spots on glassware, dishes, and other surfaces.

• Lower Energy Bills: Reverse osmosis services offer several benefits, primarily focused

efits, primarily focused on water purification, including the removal of a wide range of contaminants and improvements in taste, odor, and appearance, while also potentially saving money and reducing reliance on bottled water.

Soft water heats more efficiently than hard water, which can potentially lead to lower energy bills.

Reverse Osmosis advantages include:

Water Quality and Health:

Contaminant Removal:

Reverse osmosis systems are highly effective at removing a broad spectrum of contaminants, including heavy metals (like lead, arsenic, and mercury), dissolved solids, chlorine, fluoride, pesticides, PFAS and other impurities.

Improved Taste and

Odor:

By removing these contaminants, reverse osmosis systems can significantly improve the taste and odor of your drinking water.

• Health Benefits:

Consuming purified water can contribute to better overall health, especially for vulnerable individuals like infants, pregnant women, seniors, and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Cost and Convenience:

Cost Savings:

RO systems can be more cost-effective in the long run, compared to constantly buying bottled water.

Convenience:

A reverse osmosis system provides a readily available supply of high-quality water directly from your faucet, eliminating the need for refills and storage of bottled water.

• Reduced Plastic Waste:

By reducing reliance on bottled water, RO systems contribute to a smaller environmental footprint and help reduce plastic waste.

Other Benefits:

• Easy Maintenance: Reverse osmosis systems are relatively easy to maintain, with simple maintenance steps and filter replacements.

• Versatility:

RO systems can be installed under the sink or as a whole-house solution, offering flexibility for different needs.

• Peace of Mind:

Knowing that your water is purified and free from harmful contaminants can provide peace of mind for you and your family.

"Hands down the best thing about our business are our customers," says Waconda Water. "Our business highly values our customers, as they are essential to our expansion and efforts to deliver the best possible service. Frequently, our employees return with tokens of appreciation, such as cookies or bread, sent by customers to express their gratitude. We are fortunate to have such a supportive customer base."

For more information, call 785-454-6009 or email: kc@wacondawa-ter.com



Waconda Water held a ribbon cutting in November of 2024 at Downs, Kansas.



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- 701 N. Campbell: 3 Bed, 2 Bath Home, Beautiful woodwork, Large attached 2 Car garage, Fenced backyard, Complete renovation in 2010\$299,000
- 604 W. 4th: 3 Bed, 1 Bath Home, Ranch style, semi-open concept, attached garage\$114,500
- 419 E. South: 4 Bed, Could be 5, Completely renovated, fully finished basement on two lots\$198,000
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- **506 N. Campbell:** 4 bedroom, 1.5 bathrooms & a single detached garage.\$242,500
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- 317 N. Bell St.: 3 bedroom, 2 full bathrooms. New kitchen appliances. Large backyard.....\$142,000
- 721 N. Pine St: 2 bedroom, 1 bathroom home. Full unfinished basement. Double detached garage, a new vinyl fence & a 30x24 metal TREB building.\$159,000
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Wall To Wall has It All

BY RUSSELL GAGNON

Jason Schmitt bought Wall to Wall Carpet and Interior in 2010. In April of 2018, he opened a second store in Concordia. "We felt that there was a real need in the Concordia area, and we offer great products and great service," Schmitt said.

Raised on a family farm near Downs, Schmitt had what he described as a normal rural childhood... until the age of 10. That's when he was diagnosed with leukemia. He fought the deadly disease for five years. "I remember a lot of pain, and not being able to do the things that other kids could do," he said.

After high school, Schmitt attended Kansas State University and earned a degree in Ag Business. He moved to Kansas City in 2006. "I really didn't like the city that much, and then I got laid off, so I moved back here in 2010. I got into banking - a lot of ag loans," Schmitt said. "But I really wanted to own my own business. We bought the Wall to Wall store in 2010. We didn't know a lot of people, and people didn't know us. We worked really hard to build up the business. We wanted to offer a lot of selection, solid price points, and great service."

Home improvement - remodeling - is a never-ending business. Wall to Wall has carved out a niche because of the products they sell and the service they provide. "We install everything we sell," Schmitt said.



"And we also provide financing."

Schmitt is proud of his relationship with local contractors. "We've earned our business with great products and great service. That will always be what Wall To Wall provides."

Schmitt says he has seen a big upsurge in vinyl plank and carpet tile sales and installations the past few years. "In the last three-to-five years I've seen a lot of residential homes getting away from carpeting, except in bedrooms and living rooms, and going with hard surfaces. People like the look of hardwood floors again, and there is a vinyl product that looks like wood or tile, but it's very stain-resistant and comes in a wide variety of colors and patterns."

Carpeting is still a large part of Schmitt's business. "Whether it's the bedroom or living room - or any high-traffic area of the home, tile carpeting is the way to go for a lot of people. It's a very smart decision for a home. It's so easy to replace a small piece or even a small section - you just remove the damaged or stained tile and put another one in. It's very versatile."

On many levels, in many different ways large and small, home improvement is an annual right of spring. Homeowners and business owners have a lot of options - and have a lot of questions. In north central Kansas, Wall to Wall Carpet and Interior just might have the answers you need.

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Bees' favorite flowers to try growing

Native plants are the best

BELOIT – Spring is trying to occur, and bees are tending to their colonies with collecting pollen. Several kinds of plants can be put into gardens to help attract and feed these special pollinating insects. Get to your greenhouses, and stores that offer flowering plants for your garden, and help pollenization begin.

To attract bees to your garden, plant a variety of flowers like sunflowers, bee balm, lavender, catmint, cosmos, zinnias, and anise hyssop, which are known for their bee-attracting properties and vibrant colors.

Native plants are over four times more attractive to bees than non-native plants. However, if you want to get the most out of native plants and attract a lot of pollinators, choose plants that bloom at different times and produce different flower shapes and colors. Growing native plants in groups of three or more (known as "cluster" or "drift" planting) can give gardens a more natural look and make it easier for native bees to forage!

1. Wild Bee Balm (Monarda didyma or Monarda fistulosa)

Bee balm's name is a dead giveaway: bees can't resist this pollinator plant! There are about 15 types of native bee balm in North America and most varieties grow between 2 and 4 feet tall and produce fluffy flowers in showy shades of red, purple, white, and pink. Like other members of the mint family, bee balm can spread, so you may want to grow it in a dedicated raised bed if you don't want it running wild.

Light needs: Full sun Water needs: Average

Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties

2. Asters (Aster spp.)

A late season bloomer, asters typically flower in fall and provide a much-needed source of nectar and pollen for bees just before hibernation. With about 120 native varieties of asters in North America, gardeners have plenty of plants to choose from. New England asters produce particularly flashy flowers, but you can find asters with smaller blooms in pretty shades of blue, pink, purple, or white.

Light needs: Full sun to part shade, depending on variety

Water needs: Average

Grow zone: 3 to 8, most varieties

3. Coneflowers (Echinacea spp. or Ratibida spp.)

Purple coneflowers are some of the most widely grown coneflower plants, but gardeners can also try out narrow-leaved coneflowers, yellow coneflowers, and different types of prairie coneflowers (Ratibida spp). In general, coneflowers are quite drought-tolerant and grow without fuss in full sun and well-draining soil. These plants also attract wild birds, like goldfinches, if you let the old flowers go to seed!

Light needs: Full sun

Water needs: Average to low Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties

4. Joe Pye Weed (Eutrochium spp.)

Finding plants that grow in soggy soils can be a

headache... but Joe Pye weed thrives in moist conditions! A top pick for rain gardens, Joe Pye weed delights with its big, scented blooms and nectar-filled flowers. On top of that, it has hollow stems, which provide cozy shelter for stem nesting native bees in winter.

Light needs: Full sun to part shade

Water needs: High

Grow zone: 4 to 9, most varieties

5. Anise Hyssop (Agastache foeniculum)

Many gardeners grow anise hyssop in their herb gardens and harvest the plant's edible, licorice-flavored flowers and leaves for teas. But if you're looking for flowers bees love, anise hyssop is definitely worth a try. All sorts of native bees flock to its tall purple flowers when the plant blooms from mid-summer to fall!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade Water needs: Average to low

Grow zone: 3 to 8

6. Blueberries (Vaccinium spp.)

Blueberries are mostly cultivated for their edible berries, but those white, bell-shaped blueberry flowers are irresistible to bees too! These plants bloom in spring and they grow best in acidic soils, so you may want to amend your garden with a soil acidifier or grow blueberries in pots if your garden is highly alkaline. Low bush blueberries are small enough to grow as groundcovers or in containers, while tall, highbush blueberries can be used as dual-purpose foundation plants in ornamental or edible gardens.

Light needs: Full sun Water needs: Average



Bees collect pollen by mixing it with nectar to form pellets that stick to their hind legs (corbiculae or pollen baskets) and then transport it back to the hive.

Grow zone: 3 to 10, depending on variety

7. Bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis)

Native spring ephemerals (avoid the periods of drought as seeds) like bloodroot, flower earlier in spring than most other plants and help to support native bees just emerging from hibernation. While bloodroot is mostly grown for its dainty white flowers, its roots have traditionally been used as a natural dye. Just be careful when handling bloodroot as its sap can be a skin irritant.

Light needs: Full shade to part shade

Water needs: Average

Grow zone: 3 to 8

8. Milkweed (Asclepias spp.)

Milkweed is a famous butterfly attractant and it's the host plant to grow for monarch butterflies. However, milkweed's nectar-filled flowers also support native bees, as well as pollinating beetles and other beneficial insects. North America has around 100 species of native milkweed plants, including the ubiquitous common milkweed, the fiery orange butterfly weed, and the water-loving swamp milkweed.

Light needs: Full sun

Water needs: Average to low for most varieties, high for swamp milkweed

Grow zone: 3 to 10, most varieties

9. Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

You can find yarrow growing wild in many parts of the globe, but this hardy plant is native to North America too. Wild yarrow typically boasts fluffy white flowers, while cultivated varieties sport pink, orange, or yellow blooms. Aside from its pollinator benefits, yarrow is also commonly used in cut flower arrangements and it dries beautifully too!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade Water needs: Average to low

Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties **10. Goldenrod** (Solidago spp.)

Like asters, goldenrod plants bloom late in the season, providing pollen and nectar to native bees when most other plants aren't in flower. You can find tons of different types of goldenrods with different flower shapes and bloom times, including the unique silverrod that produces silver-toned blooms. While this fall favorite looks stately in flower gardens, it can also be used as a cut flower or to create a natural yellow dye.

Light needs: Full shade to part shade, depending on variety

Water needs: Average to low Grow zone: 2 to 8, most varieties

11. Mountain Mint (Pycnanthemum spp.)

Mint plants can be problematic in gardens due to their aggressive growth rate. But mountain mint is a less aggressive grower that's native to North America and supports native bees with its late blooming flowers. Grow it for bees alone, or use its silver-toned foliage in herbal teas or to brighten up drab garden beds!

See BEES' on 29B

Bees

continued from 28B

Light needs: Full sun to part shade

Water needs: Average Grow zone: 2 to 8, most varieties



12. Rudbeckia (Rudbeckia spp.)

Some types of coneflowers are classified as Rudbeckia, but black-eyed Susans are the most widely known Rudbeckia plant. These easy to grow natives produce golden-yellow flowers with chocolate brown centers that bring charm to cut flower arrangements and flower beds too. Although you can grow Rudbeckia from store-bought plants, these flowers are easy to grow from seed and happily self-sow if you let them!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade, depending on variety

Water needs: Average to low Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties 13. Turtlehead (Chelone spp.)

Turtleheads are a lesser-known native plant, but their curiously shaped flowers are especially well-suited for foraging bees. These plants look a bit like snapdragons with uniquely formed flowers that come in shades of pink, purple, or white. Impressively cold tolerant, turtleheads can be found growing in moist meadows, but they're also a top plant to grow in rain gardens!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade

Water needs: High

Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties

14. Boneset (Eupatorium perfoliatum)

Traditionally, boneset was used as a medicinal plant, but its bright white flowers are also an important food source for bees. These plants love moist soil, but they can be grown in other spots with frequent watering and a thick layer of mulch. Try boneset in a rain garden with other water-loving natives, like swamp milkweed, Joe Pye weed, and turtleheads, or allow its white flowers to shine in a moon garden!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade

Water needs: High

Grow zone: 2 to 10, most varieties

15. Blazing Star (Liatris spp.)

Blazing star or liatris another diverse plant genus

with about 32 native species in North America alone. Most blazing stars produce frilly, pinkish-purple flowers and slender, grass-like leaves that add interesting texture to flower beds. While blazing stars are one of the best flowers for honey bees, they also attract native solitary bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds!

Light needs: Full sun to part shade Water needs: Average to low Grow zone: 3 to 9, most varieties **Other Bee-friendly Flowers**

Although native plants are always the best choices for bee gardens, you can always plant a few non-native flowers in your garden for bees too. Here are a few plants that reliably entice bees and are small enough to grow in limited space gardens, pots, and window boxes!

• Sunflowers: 'Mammoth Grey Stripe' and 'Lemon Queen' sunflowers are particularly attractive to bees, but you can also find sunflowers in dwarf sizes for container growing!

• **Sedum:** Most sedums are native to Asia, although there are a few native North American sedums too. These fall bloomers feed bees and other pollinators in autumn.

• Snapdragons: Snapdragons are commonly used as cut flowers, but bees love them!

 Zinnias: Use zinnias as companion plants in vegetable gardens to attract pollinators and boost squash and cucumber yields, or grow them purely for ornamental appeal. Either way, bees are sure to visit!

• Chives and Other Alliums: Chive flowers are always coated with bees, but ornamental alliums are also pollinator-friendly and look striking in ornamental beds.

• Sage: While most gardeners grow sage for its edible leaves, bees flock to sage flowers if you leave them on the plant.

• Creeping Thyme: Commonly grown as a flowering groundcover, creeping thyme attracts bees and can be used as an edible herb too.

• Cosmos: Pink and white cosmos flowers are top picks for cutting gardens and attracting bees! Deadhead the spent blooms to encourage plants to reflow-

• **Snowdrops:** An early bloomer, snowdrops can

bloom even when there's snow on the ground. That's great news for early pollinators looking for a snack!

• **Borage:** Borage is often grown as a companion plant for tomatoes thanks to its ability to repel hornworms. But borage flowers also attract bees and the plant's flowers and leaves are edible!

Bees tend to like blue, purple, white and yellow flowers best, but including different flower colors in your garden is important for attracting a wide range of pollinators!

Hybrid plants with double blooms are difficult for bees and other pollinators to feed from and pollen-free plants, like pollen-free sunflowers, also offer limited benefits to bees. When choosing plants for pollinators, stick to heirloom, native, and open-pollinated plants when you can!

Growing native plants with lots of nectar and pollen is the best way to attract bees quickly. But you can also make your garden more bee-friendly by adding a water source, like a bee pool, growing sheltering plants, and avoiding pesticides.



To safely and effectively water bees, create a shallow bee watering station by filling a shallow dish with water and adding rocks or marbles for the bees to stand on, ensuring the water level is lower than the rocks, so they don't drown. If in a bigger pond area, make sure there are floating devices available for them to get onto, allowing them to escape.

SHARON SAHLFELD PHOTOS



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Let's talk hard water!!

Soft water and how it can benefit your home

BY CYNTHIA WILSON

Blade-Empire

What is hard water and how can a water softener help your home? These are just a few questions people ask concerning water quality in areas of Kansas.

Kansas' water sources, which are primarily underground wells, are rich in minerals like calcium and magnesium, leading to high water hardness levels. The average water hardness for Kansas is around 299 parts per million (PPM).

The effects of hard water include mineral buildup on faucets, sinks and tubs; spots on dishes and glassware; dry skin and hair; and faded clothing from washing.

Is hard water bad to drink and consume? The answer is no. Hard water is safe to drink and can even be beneficial, as it can contribute to daily calcium and magnesium intakes.

The most effective treatment of hard water is to install a water softener. They typically last 10-15

years, with regular maintenance.

A water softener works by using an ion exchange to remove minerals from water. It exchanges the

calcium and magnesium for softer minerals like sodium or potassium, and then sends unwanted minerals to waste through a regeneration cycle.

The benefits of a water softener include preventing mineral build-up in pipes, fixtures, and hot water heaters; lengthening the lifespan of appliances; reducing spots on glassware and dishes; and preventing soap and detergent buildup.

There are two main types of water softeners. One is salt-based, including dual-tank systems. A second form is salt-free, including magnetic systems.

Salt-based water softeners are the most commonly used and effective softener types. By using salt to exchange the heavy minerals in the water the water returns to a healthy neutral state.

Maintenance for a salt-based water softener includes regularly adding more salt to the machine. It is important to regularly check the system every 4-6 weeks. Also, using the correct salt in the water softener is key to maintaining its functionality.

While salt-based water softeners do add salt to the water, it is only in trace amounts that rarely get noticed.

Those who are on low-sodium diets can opt for a salt-free water softener that uses potassium or magnetic systems.

The salt-free and magnetic systems don't remove the heavy metals in the water, but add to the water to condition it so the particles cannot buildup on surfaces.

The salt-free and magnetic systems do come in smaller units, better for small spaces.

FDIC

You can learn more about water softeners by going to energy.gov/energysaver/purchasing-and-maintaining-water-softener.





USDA expediting \$10 billion in direct economic assistance to agricultural producers

Marking National Agriculture Day, Secretary Rollins prioritizes timely support for farmers

WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, on National Agriculture Day, has announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing up to \$10 billion directly to agricultural producers through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) for the 2024 crop year. Administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), ECAP will help agricultural producers mitigate the impacts of increased input costs and falling commodity prices.

"Producers are facing higher costs and market uncertainty, and the Trump Administration is ensuring they get the support they need without delay," said Secretary Rollins. "With clear direction from Congress, USDA has prioritized streamlining the process and accelerating these payments ahead of schedule, ensuring farmers have the resources necessary to manage rising expenses and secure financing for next season."

Authorized by the American Relief Act, 2025, these economic relief payments are based on planted and prevented planted crop acres for eligible commodities

for the 2024 crop year. To streamline and simplify the delivery of ECAP, FSA will begin sending pre-filled applications to producers who submitted acreage reports to FSA for 2024 eligible ECAP commodities soon after the signup period opens on March 19, 2025. Producers do not have to wait for their pre-filled ECAP application to apply. They can visit fsa. usda.gov/ecap to apply using a login.gov account or contact their local FSA office to request an application once the signup period opens.

Eligible commodities and payment rates

The commodities below are eligible for these peracre payment rates:

- Wheat \$30.69
- Corn \$42.91
- Sorghum \$42.52
- Barley \$21.67
- Oats \$77.66
- Upland cotton & Extra-long staple cotton -

\$84.74

- Long & medium grain rice \$76.94
- Peanuts \$75.51

- Soybeans \$29.76
- Dry peas \$16.02
- Lentils \$19.30
- Small Chickpeas \$31.45
- Large Chickpeas \$24.02 Eligible oilseeds: • Canola - \$31.83
- Crambe \$19.08
- Flax \$20.97
- Mustard \$11.36
- Rapeseed \$23.63
- Safflower \$26.32
- Sesame \$16.83
- Sunflower \$27.23

Producer Eligibility

Eligible producers must report 2024 crop year planted and prevented planted acres to FSA on an FSA-578, Report of Acreage form. Producers who have not previously reported 2024 crop year acreage or filed a notice of loss for prevented planted crops must submit an acreage report by the Aug. 15, 2025, deadline. Eligible producers can visit fsa.usda.gov/ecap for eligibility and payment details.

See USDA on 33B



USDA

continued from 32B

Applying for ECAP

Producers must submit ECAP applications to their local FSA county office by Aug. 15, 2025. Only one application is required for all ECAP eligible commodities nationwide. ECAP applications can be submitted to FSA in-person, electronically using

Box and One-Span by fax or by applying online at fsa.usda.gov/ecap utilizing a secure login.gov account.

If not already on file for the 2024 crop year, producers must have the following forms on file with FSA:

- Form AD-2047, Customer Data Worksheet.
- Form CCC-901, Member Information for Legal Entities (if applicable).
- Form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC 943, 75 percent of Average Gross Income from Farming, Ranching, or Forestry Certification (if applicable).
- AD-1026, Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certifica-

tion.

• SF-3881, Direct Deposit.

Except for the new CCC-943, most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, likely have these forms on file. However, those who are uncertain and want to confirm the status of their forms or need to submit the new Form-943, can contact their local FSA county office.

If a producer does not receive a pre-filled ECAP application, and they planted or were prevented from planting ECAP eligible commodities in 2024, they should contact their local FSA office.

ECAP payments will be issued as applications are approved. Initial ECAP payments will be factored by 85% to ensure that total program payments do not exceed available funding. If additional funds remain, FSA may issue a second payment.

ECAP assistance will be calculated using a flat payment rate for the eligible commodity multiplied by the eligible reported acres. Payments are based on acreage and not production. For acres reported as prevented plant, ECAP assistance will be calculated at 50%.

For ECAP payment estimates, producers are encouraged to visit fsa.usda.gov/ecap to use the ECAP online calculator.

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local USDA Service Center – Farm Service Agency Office, 1100 N. Independence, at 785-738-5172 or ksBeloit-fsa@usda.gov

Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by logging into their farmers.gov account.

FSA helps America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners invest in, improve, protect and expand their agricultural operations through the delivery of agricultural programs for all Americans. FSA implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs, and manages conservation, commodity, disaster recovery and marketing programs through a national network of state and county offices and locally elected county committees. For more information, visit fsa.usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

Tractor safety classes offered by K-State Research and Extension Districts



KANSAS – This summer, thousands of Kansas teenagers will begin their first job working for a farmer or rancher. For those that are ages 14 or 15, they must complete a tractor safety course in order to be legally employed. A thirteen-year-old may enroll in the training if turning 14 before the next year's class is offered, but the certificate will not be issued until their fourteenth birthday.

To help prepare some of those youth for the upcoming work season, sev-

eral K-State Research and Extension Districts are collaborating and will be hosting in-person tractor safety classes scheduled for April 26 (Beloit), May 10 (Washington) and May 22 (Solomon).

This course will meet the requirements of the U.S. Department of Labor's Hazardous Occupations Order for Agriculture (HOOA). The HOOA regulations state that youth 14 and 15 years of age, who wish to work as a hired employee for someone other than a parent or legal guardian and operate

a farm tractor that is 20 HP or greater, must successfully pass a tractor safety training program.

The cost of the program is \$15 to cover the cost of materials for the course. Those wanting to enroll can simply go online at https://bit.ly/tractorsafety2025 and complete the registration at least 5 days prior to the scheduled course. The book for the course is available at your local Extension District office and will need to be purchased prior to the first class

as participants are encouraged to go through the "safety activity sheets" at the end of each chapter prior to their chosen session.

Prospective students can check availability and ask questions prior to registering by calling or emailing Blaire Todd blairet@ksu.edu 785-738-3597, Luke Byers lsbyers@ksu.edu 785-632-5335, Craig Dinkel cadinkel@ksu.edu 785-472-4442, or Justine Johns jwho4@ksu.edu 785-392-3147.



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A Prescribed Burn School was held south of Beloit, in November 2023.

Prescribed Burning Association being established Burn permits must be called in

BY SHARON SAHLFELD

Call Editor

As drought conditions continue in the state of Kansas, ways of helping firefighters in local and surrounding counties have become a big issue with Prescribed Burning Associations (PBA) being organized. On March 27, 2025, Mitchell County **Conservation District** held a Farmer-to-Farmer meeting on this subject. They now have \$1,000 approved for a hopeful matching funds availability to help start a PBA in this very important endeavor.

Mitchell County is in D1 (moderate drought) conditions as of March 27, 2025. With these conditions, so too, fire danger increases. Ponds are low, or completely dry, habitat is poor in migratory flyways, and wheat and grasses are drought stressed, with hay in demand.

PBA will allow those involved to help with controlled fires. As of now, burn bans are at the discretion of county fire district chiefs.

In the month of April, burn bans have started in Kansas, with 16 counties listed. Some ensure that farmers are the only ones burning, to help regenerate and help their crops to grow back better. Restricted activities include burning trees and brush from land clearing, crop residues, construction debris and yard waste.

This burn ban is imposed in 16 counties throughout April, including: Butler, Chase, Chautauqua, Cowley, Elk, Geary, Greenwood, Johnson, Lyon, Marion, Morris, Pottawatomie, Riley, Sedgwick, Wabaunsee, Wyandotte.

Being a member of a Prescribed Burning Association allows the group – of a least a dozen – to own their own equipment in helping conduct controlled burns under certain parameters, to help with the benefits for grass and brush control, and reducing fuel load for potential wildfires. It is suggested that they also own radios to help communicate during a fire. "Water pumps are fairly inexpensive, so no one person has to do all of the work," said MC Conservation District board member, Fred Severance. "This association is a group effort with one person organizing and others helping with the labor content."

Wildlife and Parks has expressed in being 100 percent behind the organization of a PBA for the area, and they may have some grant money as well to help with the efforts.

County District Director Amanda Johnson has agreed to help with her part in the goal of a PBA. This can be established with Mitchell County or combined with neighboring counties, and the more involved in numbers, the safer it can all be

A lot of these programs have failed because of lack of education and of meetings bringing awareness, so the county district is doing all it can to change that.

In the past, the fire departments have been discouraged from doing prescribed burns for others. They used to take part in these, as a kind of a training exercise for their fire fighters. But most fire fighters are volunteers, and it is difficult for them to leave their jobs, to go out and do

this. And liabilities are a main concern as well.

The PBA members will be trained, and educated in providing these services to controlled burns, etc.

"Education is the most important," Severance said.

Controlled burns must always be called in to the county dispatch. A county burn policy can be acquired from Mitchell County Emergency Director David Dohe.

"I can't stress enough on the controlled burns being called into dispatch as a must," said Dohe. "The county fire chiefs are the ones that give the rights to burn, but they must acquire a burn permit, through calling it in to dispatch." "You Must Call In."

Burn bans have been going out through text messages to let those know about them as well.

If a fire gets out of control, it costs the county approximately \$250 per truck, per hour. That can become a costly event.

See **BURNING** on 37B



Burning brush piles in the winter can sometimes turn into uncontrolled fires if they start up again, even as much as two weeks later. Always be sure to call in your burns.

Burning

continued from 36B

"It just seems to make it clearer, and responsible, to contact the authorities before burning," said attendee Doug Palen. "This needs to be understood, to not start a fire without being approved and calling them in."

When the county helps with controlled fires, they ask for donations only, but never charge. If things go astray, the state does not reimburse.

"If we are just present on a PBA controlled fire, we will just be there if anything more is needed," said Mitchell County District No. 1, Fire District Chief Tom Deneke. "We like to go out because it is good practice, but lately, it is all about "liability issues." Even if the farmers themselves are the ones that light the match, it doesn't matter, and falls upon the fire districts."

When someone calls in a burn permit, they let them know the location and the time in which



From left to right, Fred Severance, Doug Palen and Andrea Jordan discuss issues with starting a Prescribed Burning Association, during the Mitchell County Conservation District, Farmer to Farmer program held on March 27, 2025, at the First Bank of Beloit community room.

they are planning on burning.

It is most important that a PBA uses this information as a main tool.

"A packet needs to go to fire districts if farmers/firemen are involved to make it all go more smoothly," said Deneke.

"Good people, more support, will make this all successful," Palen said.

With water pumps less than \$200 a piece, they can be placed on a skid in back of a pickup and you have an automatic fire truck," said Severance.

Getting a PBA started includes members required to have personal protective equipment, like face coverage and a

full-face breathing mask. Some of this equipment may be found through some of the local fire districts.

As of now, fire chiefs are being asked to make a pitch at their fire chief meetings, for how some of these things can be acquired.

A resource list can be started and radios are needed for communication as a must. A tanker and one pumper truck, hand tools, leaf blowers, trailer equipment and a fire fighting force of at least around a dozen is the goal.

Dohe suggested that maybe a storage trailer

could be given to the PBA as a gift, through a federal grant. As of now, Jewell

County has an active PBA. Smoky Hills in Saline County is also very active. Cloud County has a PBA, and the Flint Hills is very active there. Russell County is in the process of reviving their PBA.

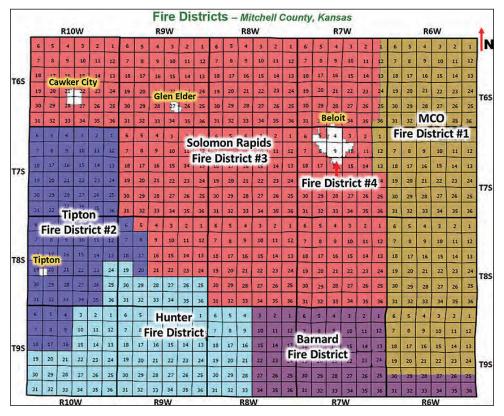
In order to start a PBA, they must own their own EIN number, which costs around \$20 a year. Another need is for a

Mitchell County Emergency Management Director, David Dohe, talks with Mitchell County District No. 1 Fire Chief Tom Deneke, during the Prescribed Burning Association Farmer to Farmer program.

SHARON SAHLFELD PHOTOS

chair, a vice-chair and a secretary of treasurer to get the paper work rolling. As of now, those volunteering for those positions include: Chair – Patrick Eilert: Vice-Chair - Andrea Jordan; and Amanda Johnson – Secretary of Treasurer.

Any persons interested in joining with a PBA can contact Mitchell County **Conservation District** Manager Amanda Johnson at 785-738-5172, ext.



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Making Lawns "Greener"

BY EMILY FONKEN

Blade-Empire

To many people, spring means the beginning of warm weather and lush, bright green lawns. It also means the beginning of lawn care, including spraying for weeds and crabgrass, fertilizing, watering and mowing.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), lawns in American cover nearly 50 million acres of land. However, those lush green lawns come with a high environmental price

The NRDC estimates that in caring for lawns across the country, people use nearly three trillion gallons of water, 200 million gallons of gas for mowing, and 70 million pounds of pesticides.

The Columbia University Climate School estimates that people use 10 times the amount of pesticides and fertilizers per acre on their lawns as farmers do on their crops. Many of the chemicals are wasted due to incorrect usage and runoff, which is a major source of water pollution. Many of the chemicals used are toxic to both aquatic and terrestrial animals. The **Ecological Landscape**

Alliance notes that 14 of the 30 most commonly used lawn pesticides are known or suspected carcinogens. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also states that pesticides can pose risks to human health and the environment. In fact, according to the EPA's Pesticide Incidence Data Reporting System, between 1995 to 2002, more than 31,000 pesticide exposure incidents related to the use of pesticides on lawns were reported.

In addition, the Piedmont Environmental Alliance states that monocultures, such as lawns, have a detrimental impact on biodiversity and do not support wildlife populations.

John Paul Breault of Concordia made the decision to landscape his property leaving only a very small area of traditional lawn. Explained Breault, "As you age, one must balance physical responsibilities and make things easier to maintain without major changes while still enjoying the landscape and what you see."

However, many homeowners may not to want to take such a revolutionary approach and totally

eliminate their lawns. Options include maintaining a lawn space and incorporating a natural area into a portion of the yard. Using native plants will provide food and shelter for wildlife and may use less water than non-native varieties. Other options include incorporating a xeriscape area, which is a type of landscaping which requires little to no water or maintenance once established. Succulents, yucca, or cactus are good choices for a xeriscape.

Another option is to make a section of lawn into a hardscape. According to John Nobert, owner of Elk Creek Gardens in Clyde, hardscaping involves creating an area incorporating a variety of elements, such as rocks of various dimensions, pots with annuals, yard art, birdbaths, a water feature, or statues.

For those who do enjoy grass, over-seeding once a year to eliminate bare spots and to crowd out weeds can help to lessen reliance on herbicides. Use organic fertilizer and dig weeds by hand. If making the decision to use an herbicide, follow directions for application to reduce runoff and overuse.

It is also important to find the underlying cause of a pest problem before applying pesticides, avoiding unnecessary use. As with herbicides, it is very important to follow application directions.

In regard to lawns, the Princeton University's Climate Action Plan states that it is possible for people to limit the negative impact on the environment if everyone makes small concessions.

However, its statement, "Ultimately, Americans should consider alternatives for the way they are treating their lawns, and even consider the potential of changing the structure of their lawn entirely," suggests that some extra effort is well worth the exchange for a greener planet.



Landscaped front lawn at John Paul Breault's home

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