

● APRIL 2024

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Money-saving gardening tips

**Celebrate Earth Day with
conservation steps**

Egg-ceptional recipes

Get to know your director election candidates ▶ See Page 4-5

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Shelley Hundling, a Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

LINEWORKERS POWER OUR LIVES

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



You may not think about them until your power goes out, but electric lineworkers protect our homes and communities 24 hours a

day. Like other first responders who keep us safe, lineworkers endure all kinds of weather and challenging conditions.

In April, we officially celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day to honor the men and women who power our lives. However, the work of lineworkers is celebrated and appreciated every day of the year. Here are some facts about the career of lineworkers.

Nearly two centuries of history

Lineworkers first appeared during the 1840s rush to spread telegraph service across the U.S., stringing wires between trees and other natural objects. It didn't take long for everyone to realize tall poles were safer and more practical.

Today, more than 122,000 U.S. lineworkers are responsible for maintaining and upgrading the nation's electric grid that connects more than 7,300 power plants to 145 million consumers. The grid also includes 60,000 miles of high-voltage lines, millions of miles of distribution lines and more than 50 million transformers.

On-the-job training

Described by the U.S. Department of Energy as one of the nation's highest-paid professions that doesn't demand postsecondary education, becoming a journeyman lineworker typically requires a high school diploma or equivalent, training and a paid apprenticeship, which generally spans four years. Apprentice lineworkers receive hands-on training and experience in the field before advancing to "journeyman" status.

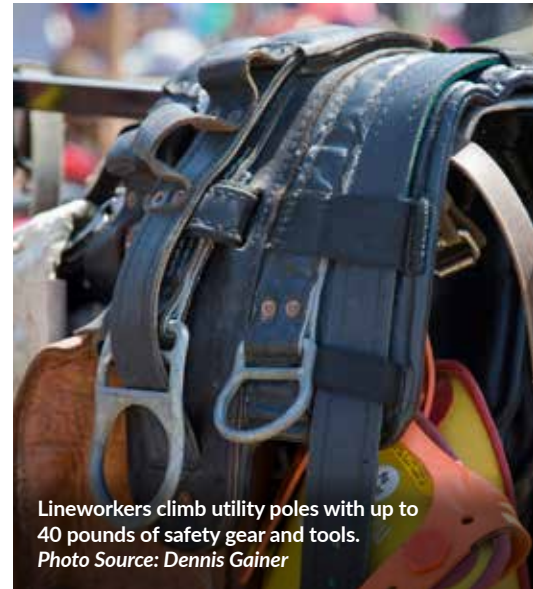
Powering our communities

Restoring electricity after a power outage is just one of the many duties of lineworkers and is often the most visible. In addition, lineworkers perform many other essential services that power Iowa's communities. Some of these responsibilities include:

- Installing and connecting new power lines to homes and businesses;
- Maintaining and performing upgrades to improve our electric grid;
- Diagnosing and pinpointing power delivery issues;
- Planning and managing large-scale projects; and
- Ensuring safe work practices in often challenging conditions.

Inspiring safety

Each year, lineworkers respond to devastating storms and the damage they leave behind. In addition, lineworkers face various dangers, including electric shock, falls from elevated work locations and roadside traffic accidents.



Lineworkers climb utility poles with up to 40 pounds of safety gear and tools.
Photo Source: Dennis Gainer

Safety is always the number one priority, so lineworkers continuously receive training to stay mindful of safety requirements and up to date on the latest equipment and procedures.

The next time you see a lineworker, remember to thank them for their essential work. And always remember to move over or slow down if you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated. Our lineworkers and their families thank you!

Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD TO A LOCAL GARDEN CENTER!

It's gardening season! Whether you are planting a garden or a pollinator habitat, it's rewarding to create the perfect backyard oasis. To help your green thumb this season, we're giving away a \$100 gift card from a local garden center.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than April 30, 2024. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the Express Finish Toaster from the February issue was James Denney, a Southwest Iowa REC member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY APRIL 30!

MEET THE 2024 DIRECTOR ELECTION CANDIDATES

On Wednesday, April 10, Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) will host its annual meeting director elections. Account Number three three four three zero zero nine one zero. Members can vote for their board of directors, with board seats up for election in Districts 2, 4 and 8. Votes can be cast by submitting a ballot via U.S. mail, the co-op drop box or in person at the co-op office headquarters from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

“Living on co-op lines is an investment in our community and its members,” says Joe Farley, CEO of Harrison County REC. “Owned by the members we serve, it’s important that we conduct official business, provide a democratic election of directors, and share financial and operational updates with our members.”

Vote for your co-op board

“This is your cooperative, and we thank you for making the commitment to choosing our future leadership,” says Farley. “If this is your first time voting, we hope you are encouraged by what

you learn, and we hope you join us for our membership appreciation event in August.”

The following is a list of director election candidates and their respective districts. Account number six one two one zero zero nine one zero. We encourage you to get to know this year’s candidates as you make your vote.

Questions about voting? Contact our office at 712-647-2727 or harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop.

District 2 candidates



Doug Pitt

Pitt is a lifelong resident of Harrison County and currently lives on his farmstead outside of Magnolia with his wife Heather.

He has been a member of Harrison County REC for the past 28 years and served on the board for three years.

Besides farming 400 acres and running a cow-calf operation, he has been a power lineman for the last 30 years with Omaha Public Power District and has served on the IBEW Union Board and the Powerline Safety Board. His hobbies include volunteering for Logan-Magnolia Community Schools’ sporting activities, and he currently serves as the treasurer for the LOMA Youth Baseball Organization. In his spare time, Pitt enjoys hunting, boating and camping with his two sons, Barret and Bryant, daughter-in-law Annie and two grandsons.

When asked what he enjoys most about being part of Harrison County REC, he states, “Being part of a co-op is like being a member of a small-town community. Everyone is involved in making the decisions that will affect the individuals in our everyday lives.” Should he be elected, Pitt looks forward to bringing his knowledge of the electrical industry and his small-town values and lifestyle to the Harrison County REC board of directors.



Tim Faylor

Faylor is a Missouri Valley resident with his wife Linda and their two girls Catherine and Sarah. He has been a

member of Harrison County REC since 2010. When asked what he enjoys most about being a member, he states, “I was never so glad to get with the REC.”

Faylor attended school at St. Alberts High School and then went to Huron University, located in Huron, South Dakota. After college, Faylor returned to Harrison County, where he worked with the Harrison County Road Department for 21 years. Now retired, he enjoys volunteering for the Harrison County Fair Board, playing Santa Claus for Little Sioux, Magnolia and Mondamin, attending church at the Church of Christ in Mondamin and donating blood. In his spare time, he likes playing cards and driving his father’s antique tractors in area parades.

District 4 candidates



Bill Hutcheson

Hutcheson is a lifelong resident of the Woodbine area and is co-owner/manager of Hutcheson Century

Farm in Douglas Township. He and his wife Diana are parents to six grown children and are members of Woodbine United Methodist church.

Hutcheson was an employee of Harrison County REC for 46 years, working the last 24 years as manager/EVP before retiring. He served on a number of state and national REC committees and boards. He also was a Harrison County REC meter reader for a time after retirement and continues to enjoy a relationship with co-op members. Hutcheson is completing his second, three-year term as Harrison County REC director and vice president and has participated in



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Curtis Lee, Randy Koenig, Randy Mitchell,
Doug Pitt, Larry Ramsey

numerous training programs offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and earned the Director Gold Certification.

He worked in Woodbine City government for 28 years, including 18 years as mayor. He has served as a board member of Harrison County Development Corp and Woodbine Community Schools. Hutcheson enjoys staying active with family, music, fishing, spectator sports and being outdoors. He believes in the cooperative form of business and is honored to be working as a member of the Harrison County REC board of directors. He encourages questions and comments from member-owners by calling 712-592-2330.



Bruce Pauley

Pauley resides with his wife Kris in Woodbine. He grew up in Woodbine but moved to Logan in fourth grade, where he went on to graduate from Logan-Magnolia High School. He received his associate degree in business from Iowa Western Community College.

Pauley is currently retired but was previous the customer service manager for Tommy Gate Company,

where he worked for 31 years. He also volunteered for many years for the Woodbine Black and Gold Club as its treasurer. In his spare time, he enjoys woodworking, camping at Willow Lake, and spending time with his son Alex and daughter Megan and their families.

When asked what he enjoys most about being part of Harrison County REC, he states, "My electricity would be one of the last things I would ever want to give up. We receive quality and dependable service for our money."

District 8 candidates



Curtis Lee

Lee and his wife Lynnette have been members of Harrison County REC for the past 27 years. He retired in 2020 after

a career in the computer industry for over 30 years. Lee now works full time on his farming operation and teaches aviation courses to high school students and adults at the Woodbine School Ignite Center.

When he's not working, Lee flies small planes and can be found spending time with his three kids Nathan, Allison and Kevin and their families, including his

grandchildren. When asked what he enjoys most about living in Harrison County, he states, "I enjoy the people and the small-town environment. Our neighbors are good people, and we all take care of each other."



Leo Lapke

Lapke and his wife Dawn live on their farm in Dunlap, where he grew up on the Lapke Family Farm. He attended

Boyer Valley High School and took courses at Iowa Western Community College and Iowa State University. Lapke was employed with Bohlmann Quality Products in Denison for 24 years when he retired. He is now working on his farm with his cow-calf operation and haying business. When he isn't busy working, he enjoys playing golf and horseback riding, and spending time with his family.

When asked what he enjoys most about being a part of Harrison County REC, he states, "Members own the business versus private ownership where you have little say in the activities of the business. As a director, you represent the members of the cooperative."

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION IN APRIL

April is a very special month because it is a time for celebrating our amazing team! April 8 is Lineworker Appreciation Day, where we celebrate the power behind your power and the dedicated crews who work hard every day to keep your lights on. In addition, April 24 is Administrative Professionals Day, and we are proud to have a team in our office that is committed to serving our members. We thank our employees for their hard work and efforts so that we may continue providing the safe and reliable services that our members know and appreciate.



DID YOU READ OUR NEWSLETTER CAREFULLY?

We have selected two lucky winners for a \$25 bill credit!

Spot your account number in our newsletter and call us! (Example: Account 4321 is written four three two one.) Members must contact Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative by April 30 to be eligible to claim this credit.

Questions? Contact Tara Ganzhorn at 712-647-2727.





ELECTRIFIED AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT

BY JENNAH DENNEY

The electrification trend in agricultural equipment has gained momentum in recent years as farmers increasingly embrace electric vehicles and machinery. This shift offers numerous advantages, including reduced carbon emissions, lower operating costs, improved energy efficiency and quieter operation.

Smaller electric equipment, such as irrigation systems and utility vehicles, are becoming increasingly popular. Many farmers are now using electric motors in place of older, inefficient diesel motors for farm irrigation.

Larger agricultural equipment can be difficult to replace with electric alternatives due to their weight. In response, manufacturers are developing tractors that are more compact,

lower in weight and feature battery-powered options. The compact and lighter design of these tractors allows for better maneuverability in smaller farming spaces, improving efficiency and productivity in the field. For example, a small orchard farmer may opt for a compact electric tractor instead of a larger, traditional tractor. The smaller size and electric power allows farmers to easily navigate between rows of trees without causing damage to the fruit or soil, ultimately increasing the yield and reducing maintenance costs.

In addition to smaller equipment, drones equipped with electric agricultural technology are proving to be valuable in many cases. Electric drones allow farmers to monitor crops, perform precision spraying and even participate in crop pollination. Equipped with

specialized sensors and cameras, these drones capture high-resolution imagery to help farmers make informed decisions about crop management. The versatility and cost-effectiveness of electric drones make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.

Use for various types of farming operations

Here are some common types of farming operations that benefit from electrified agricultural equipment.

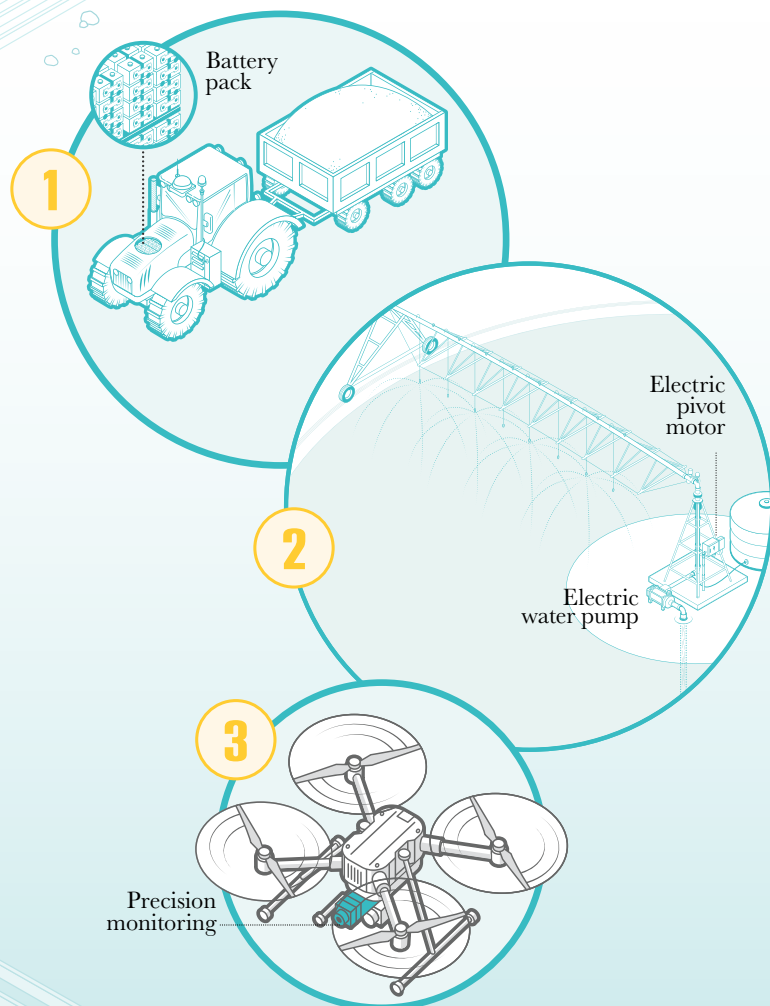
Crop farming: Electric equipment, such as tractors, sprayers and harvesters are used in crop farming operations for tasks like plowing, planting, spraying pesticides, drying and harvesting crops.

Livestock farming: Electric equipment can be utilized in livestock farming

THE FUTURE OF ELECTRIFIED AG

Many farmers are making the transition from gas-powered equipment to electric models. Electric-powered farming equipment offers lower operating costs, improved efficiency and quieter operation. Here are a few ways the electrification trend is gaining momentum on the farm.

- 1 Electric tractors** show promise for increased efficiency and reduced maintenance.
- 2 Electric motors for irrigation** are more efficient than diesel motors and result in greater cost savings for farmers.
- 3 Drones equipped with electric agricultural technology** make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.



for tasks such as feeding, milking and waste management.

Vineyards and orchards: Electric pruning equipment can be used in vineyards and orchards for precision pruning of grapevines, fruit trees and bushes.

Greenhouses and nursery operations: Electric equipment such as tillers, seeders and potting machines are often used in greenhouse and nursery operations for efficient soil preparation, seeding and transplanting.

Organic farming: Electrified agricultural equipment is also used in organic farming operations, with a focus on sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. Electric tools and equipment help minimize the use of fossil fuels and reduce emissions.

Benefits of electrified ag equipment
Electrified agricultural equipment offers several benefits beyond reducing carbon emissions.

Electric drivetrains are simpler and easier to maintain compared to traditional tractors, resulting in lower maintenance costs. Additionally, electric equipment is more energy efficient, converting a higher percentage of electrical energy into usable work.

Electricity flowing through batteries and electric motors is more efficient than diesel being delivered to farms, moved into tanks and burned in diesel engines. As battery technology advances, further improvements in electric farming equipment are expected.

This efficiency leads to reduced energy consumption and lower operating costs for farmers. Additionally, the quieter operation of electric equipment minimizes disruptions to nearby communities, livestock and wildlife, making it ideal for residential areas or sensitive environments.

Considerations for farmers

When considering electrified equipment, farmers should evaluate their specific needs, including power requirements and operational tasks. Farmers should work with their local electric cooperative to assess the farm's power supply capacity to ensure it can handle the additional load without causing issues. By conducting a thorough analysis of their unique needs and goals, farmers can determine if adopting electrified agricultural equipment is a suitable and advantageous option.

The electrification of agricultural equipment presents a promising future for farmers. Farmers can improve operational efficiency and benefit from cost savings by embracing electric vehicles, machinery and drones.

Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

EGG-CEPTIONAL

RECIPES



FAMILY BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

- 1 pound sausage
- 6 slices white bread
- 4 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon mustard powder
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup mild cheddar cheese

Cook sausage on low heat, then drain. Line bread in a 9x13-inch pan sprayed with olive oil. Mix eggs, salt, mustard powder and milk; stir in sausage. Pour over bread and sprinkle cheese over egg mixture. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake covered at 325 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Uncover and bake for 30 minutes. Serves 6-9

Arlene Husak • Toledo
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

CRUSTLESS CUSTARD

- 6-8 egg yolks
- ½ cup sugar
- 2½ cups half-and-half (or milk)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

Beat all ingredients together. Pour in pie pan or custard cups and bake at 450 degrees F for 15 minutes. Turn oven down to 350 degrees F and continue to bake until knife comes out clean. Serves 8

Sara Riley • Conrad
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

BREAKFAST FRENCH TOAST

- butter, to coat bowl
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 2 slices dry bread
- cinnamon, to taste

Coat a microwavable bowl with butter, then add eggs. Add milk and beat. Break up dry bread and combine with egg mixture. Shake cinnamon on top as desired. Microwave 1 minute, stir, then microwave 1 more minute.

Ken and Jill Leafgreen • Fairfield
Access Energy Cooperative

NO CRUST CRAB QUICHE BAKE

- 8 eggs (or 16 ounces liquid egg product)
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 8 ounces imitation crab meat, chopped
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1 cup Swiss or mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- 2 green onions, chopped
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Combine all ingredients in a bowl, then transfer to a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30-40 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Let stand for 10 minutes to set up. Serves 6-8

Diana Thorn • Marshalltown
Consumers Energy

CARB-FREE EGG BAKE

- 2 cups sausage, cooked and crumbled
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 12 eggs
- ¾ cup half-and-half
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 1½ cups cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

Cook sausage, garlic and onion, drain off grease. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs with half-and-half. Add sour cream, cheddar cheese, sausage mixture, salt and pepper. Mix well and pour into buttered 9x13-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 40-60 minutes. Recipe can be refrigerated and baked the next morning. Serves 10-12

**Glenda DeBoer • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

AIR FRYER EGG FOR ONE

- 1-2 tablespoons picante sauce
- 1 egg
- 1-2 tablespoons cheddar cheese, grated

Preheat air fryer to 370 degrees F. Spray a custard dish or similar dish with non-stick cooking spray. Add picante sauce. Break egg on top of sauce and sprinkle with cheese. For a runny yolk, air fry for 6 minutes, add more time for a firm yolk. For a sodium-restricted diet, reduce sauce and cheese. Serves 1

**Sandra Lacey • Danbury
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

EGG SPINACH CASSEROLE

- 2 10-ounce packages frozen spinach
- 1 pound sausage
- ½ cup onions
- 7 eggs
- 4 cups cottage cheese
- 6 tablespoons flour
- 8 ounces cheddar cheese
- 3 tablespoons butter
- optional: broccoli, asparagus

Quickly thaw spinach in colander under hot water and drain well. Spinach can be substituted with broccoli or asparagus. Cook sausage with onions, drain. In a large bowl, mix spinach, sausage, eggs, cottage cheese, flour and cheddar cheese. Put mixture in a greased 9x13-inch pan and dot with butter. Cover and bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Serves 10-12

**Trudy Woolman • Stuart
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association**

BACON EGG CASSEROLE

- 6 slices bacon, diced
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 12 eggs, beaten
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1-2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

In a large skillet, cook bacon over medium heat until it becomes soft. Add minced garlic and onion, and cook until bacon begins to brown. Add red and green peppers, cover and cook for 5-10 minutes or until the veggies are soft and bacon is browned, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and let cool. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, then add salt and pepper. Add cooled bacon and veggie mixture to the beaten eggs and stir. Add cheese and pour into greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25-30 minutes or until top is set. Let cool slightly before serving.

**Kathryn Meyer • Rowan
Prairie Energy Cooperative**

WANTED:

WRAP & SANDWICH RECIPES



THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is April 30.

Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **Also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living • 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

DIGGING FOR DOLLARS: HOW TO SAVE MONEY IN THE GARDEN

BY GEORGE WEIGEL

Plant prices are up sharply. So are insecticides, fertilizers, deer repellents, mulch, tools and other accessories gardeners use to keep their green investments alive. Even bagged dirt is no longer dirt cheap. What's a gardener on a tight budget to do? Fortunately, this is one pastime that lends itself to lots of belt-tightening strategies.

Ways to save on plant purchases

Consider perennials relegated to a bargain rack after they've finished blooming for the season. Annuals and vegetables that are still viable but unsold after the spring rush are another great way to save. You can also look for trees and shrubs that are misshapen markdowns but fixable via pruning and patience. Tulips, daffodils and other spring-blooming bulbs are often 50% off when unsold but still plantable by the end of October.

If you shop local, get on your favorite garden center's loyalty program.

These programs offer discounts, coupons, rewards and special sales to regular customers. While you're at it, let local garden center managers know you're interested in plants they want to clear out.

Pay attention to unconventional sources including plant societies, Master Gardeners, libraries, public gardens, farmers markets, schools and garden clubs – all of which often hold plant sale fundraisers using divisions from members' yards, locally started seedlings and discounted greenhouse transplants.

Ways to trim the plant budget

Wherever you buy plants, opt for less-expensive smaller sizes. Given patience and good growing conditions, a quart-sized perennial will end up at the same mature size as a gallon-sized one but at a significantly lower starting price.

Opting for small especially saves on trees, which can double in price for just two or three feet of additional height.

Starting new plants from seed yields way more plants to the dollar than transplants. Planting seeds directly in the ground outside is even less expensive, bypassing the need for lights, pots and potting mix.

A third plant budget-stretcher is mining your own plants for expansion. Most perennial flowers can be dug and divided into fist-sized pieces after several years of growth, giving you free plants to use elsewhere.

Check with friends and neighbors to see if they'd like to trade divisions, which can yield free new varieties for your yard. New shrubs, trees, roses and evergreens can be created by snipping 4- to 6-inch pieces off the tips of "mother plants" and sticking them into moist potting mix. That induces roots to grow from the buried cut ends, giving you a new "baby" copy of the plant.

Potted plant savings

Save on your potted plant budget by starting with fewer plants each season. With patience, pots of fewer premium-priced potted annuals will fill in eventually and cost less than tightly packed ones.

Another pot option is scavenging the yard for perennial flowers you can dig and divide to use in pots. The best are ones with colorful foliage that add interest beyond the few weeks they're in flower, such as coralbells, hostas, golden sedge, variegated liriopse and ferns. Return the perennials to the ground in fall to overwinter and mine again next year.

Most so-called "houseplants" (crotons, palms, snake plants, peace lilies, rubber plants, etc.) are tropical or sub-tropical species that do perfectly fine outside in northerly summers and inside over winter.

Ways to save on gardening products

The fastest way to save on gardening products is to cut out things your plants don't need and reduce the amounts you use, such as fertilizer.

Plants take up only the nutrients they need. Adding more doesn't make them grow bigger or better and is a waste of money.

If plants are growing well, there's usually no need to add anything. If they're not, a soil test will tell if lack of nutrition is a culprit – along with precisely what nutrients are needed and in what amounts. Extension offices and many garden centers offer inexpensive DIY soil-test kits to help you spend fertilizer dollars wisely

Bug and disease sprays are another potential cost-saver. Some gardeners routinely use pesticides "just in case," wasting money and potentially killing beneficial insects that would've controlled pest bugs naturally (and at no charge).

Expensive potting mix can be stretched by mixing your own from bulk ingredients or by "refreshing" last year's saved mix with half new mix.

George Weigel is the author of five gardening books and is a special contributor to Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.



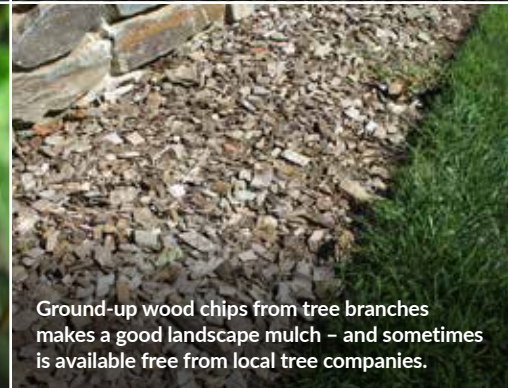
Perennials with colorful foliage, such as the coralbells in the middle of this container, can be dug and used in pots to trim the flower budget.



Dividing clumps of expanded perennials is a way to add plants at no charge.



Saving your own seeds to plant next year is a practice that cuts the seed-buying budget.



Ground-up wood chips from tree branches makes a good landscape mulch – and sometimes is available free from local tree companies.



Yard sales are one unconventional source where you might find plant bargains.



Plants are less expensive when you start them from seed vs. buying transplants that are greenhouse-grown.

SIX MONEY-SAVING GARDENING PRACTICES

Changes in how you garden is an avenue for limiting expenses. Here are six tips to consider:

- 1 Make the most of retail seed.** Most seeds bought in packs are good for two or more years, especially if you store them in a cool, dry place (the refrigerator is perfect). If the packs have more seed than you can use, share or trade with gardening friends and neighbors or look for seed swaps.
- 2 Make your own compost.** Start a pile or two where you can recycle your property's leaves, grass clippings, spent plants and kitchen scraps into highly nutritious (and free) compost.

If you buy bagged compost (or soil or mulch), look for discounted broken bags.

- 3 Watch for annuals that pop up on their own.** Flowering annuals might sprout in spring from your own self-seeders as well as seeds brought in by

birds, bugs and the wind. If you recognize these as flowers and not weeds, you've just been gifted with free flowers.

- 4 Take season-long advantage of all vegetable garden space.** Many gardeners plant veggies once in spring, then let the space empty after harvest. Reload harvested space with new crops planted in summer to fully use the growing season.
- 5 Save water by letting lawns go dormant during a hot, dry summer spell.** Most turfgrass can survive without water for at least three or four weeks after going brown in a summer-survival dormant state. There is no need to water until then.

- 6 Save on mulch by covering bare ground with low, spreading ground cover plants.** Examples are creeping sedum, creeping thyme, leadwort and liriopse. You'll pay more at planting time, but as the plants spread, they'll hold down weeds without having to buy mulch.

START PLANTS CHEAPLY WITH DIRECT SEEDING

BY GEORGE WEIGEL

Even cheaper than buying greenhouse transplants on sale or starting your own seeds inside is direct seeding outside. Direct seeding is simply tamping seeds into loosened, moistened garden soil at the right time of year.

Save your own seed each year instead of buying packets, and you can direct seed the following year at no cost. Seed saved from heirloom or traditional “open-pollinated” plants works better than from hybrid varieties, which often produce no or sterile seeds and variable offspring.

Many annual and perennial flowers start readily from seeds planted directly into the ground. Some of the easiest are marigolds, zinnias, cosmos, poppies, Alyssum, cornflowers (bachelor’s buttons), larkspur, snapdragons, sweet peas, floss flowers (ageratum), flowering tobacco, gloriosa daisy, hollyhocks, nasturtiums, strawflowers and sunflowers.

Many vegetables direct seed readily, including peas, lettuce,

spinach, kale, beets, carrots, radishes, beans, cucumbers, squash, melons, okra and corn.

Three factors for success

1 Timing. Some plants are sensitive to cold and should be planted when frost is finished and the soil is sufficiently warm. Seed packets list dates when it’s safe to plant different varieties.

2 Loose soil. The soil doesn’t need to be tilled or deeply dug, but seeds sprout much better when they’re lightly tamped into the top 0.25 to 0.5 inch of soil that’s been loosened 4 to 6 inches deep. Tossing seeds on top of hard, compacted ground usually results in little to no germination.

3 Damp soil. The soil surface needs to be consistently damp until the seeds are up. That might mean lightly watering once or twice a day on dry, sunny days.

Once the seedlings are up and growing, the main job is thinning (if needed) and making sure weeds don’t out-compete the new seedlings.

Weeds and excess plants are easy to pull when they’re young. Better yet, snip them off with scissors.

Be patient for sprouting to happen. While some seeds sprout in a matter of days, others may take two weeks or more. Sprouting generally takes longer in cooler soil.



Direct seeding into the soil is even less expensive than starting your own plants from seed inside.



Seeds sprout best when they’re lightly tamped into loosened soil and kept consistently moist.

MAKE YOUR OWN PLANTS FROM CUTTINGS

Many landscape plants can be reproduced at little to no cost by taking cuttings from the tips of a parent plant and sticking them in moist potting mix.

The process causes plants to send out roots from the cut ends, resulting in a new “baby” plant that’s an exact copy of the parent.

Start by snipping a 4- to 6-inch section off the branch tip of a parent plant. Then pinch off leaves from all but the top set or two. Stick the cut end into a pot of a lightweight soilless mix so that at least one – and preferably two or three – sets of the leaf pinch-off points (nodes) are buried.

A good soilless mix is half coarse sand and half vermiculite, perlite and/or lightweight potting mix. Keep the medium consistently damp, and new roots should poke out from the buried nodes within a few weeks.

A good sign is when tiny new leaves start growing out of the cutting’s tip.

Dipping cut ends in a powdered rooting hormone before sticking sometimes encourages rooting. These inexpensive powders are available in small containers in most garden centers and catalogs.

Misting two to three times a day or installing a plastic wrap “tent” over the pots are ways to help keep the potting medium moist until rooting occurs.

Even if you get just one cutting to root, that’s one free plant you didn’t have before.

George Weigel is the author of five gardening books and is a special contributor to Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.

Many plants will produce “babies” by inducing tip cuttings to root.

This shrub-dogwood cutting has the potential to grow roots from the pair of nodes just up from the cut end.



HOW ENERGY POLICY IMPACTS YOU

BY LOUIS FINKEL

Change is a constant in today's energy industry. And electric co-ops across the country are leaning into change as we explore new ways to meet tomorrow's growing energy needs.

Electric co-ops play a crucial role in ensuring the lights come on every time Americans flip the switch. Our primary responsibility is to our members, and we remain committed to providing service that is both reliable and affordable. Energy policy has a profound impact on our ability to accomplish those goals, and our national energy policies must embrace this fundamental promise.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the watchdog for our nation's grid, has issued several warnings about threats to grid reliability, warning that rolling interruptions of service could soon be the new norm. Nine states experienced interruptions of service in 2022 when electricity supply simply could not keep up with demand. And over the next five years, NERC forecasts that all or parts of 19 states from Montana to Louisiana are at high risk of rolling outages during normal peak conditions.

These warnings should not be taken lightly, which is why electric co-ops are pressing policymakers to recognize the need for time, technology development and new infrastructure alongside policies that include a diverse mix of energy sources to maintain reliable power.

Challenges to reliability

The economy of the future will be heavily reliant on electricity. From data centers and manufacturing to electric vehicles and electric heat pumps, the demand for electricity is set to rise dramatically. Co-ops are planning for this surge in demand by investing in infrastructure, technologies and



power supplies that will allow them to meet members' needs, but additional challenges lie ahead.

Opposite this increasing demand for electricity, many power plants that generate always-available electricity are being shut down without adequate replacements, posing a significant threat to reliability. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is pursuing sweeping new regulations that would force the premature closure of always-available power plants while also making it harder to permit, site and build critical new plants. Electric co-ops have urged the EPA to withdraw these proposed regulations that would lead to more outages, higher costs and uncertainty for Americans.

A proactive approach

Electric co-ops are at the forefront of innovation and are already adapting to the unique needs of the members we serve. From community solar projects and energy efficiency programs to carbon capture and

advanced nuclear generation, co-ops are leading the way.

Advocating for rational policies in Washington, D.C., that preserve reliability and affordability is crucial. This month, electric cooperative leaders will gather in the nation's capital for the annual Legislative Conference, where they will meet with members of Congress and federal agencies to discuss key issues and concerns surrounding reliability. These meetings allow co-ops to educate policymakers on the issues that matter most to the American families and businesses we serve.

Today's energy decisions and policies will determine if there are enough resources to meet tomorrow's energy needs. Electric co-ops will continue advocating for their members to ensure a reliable supply of electricity that powers everyday life.

Louis Finkel is the senior vice president of government relations for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY: WHY TAKING STEPS TO CONSERVE MATTERS

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Earth Day is April 22, a time when we celebrate this beautiful planet we are lucky to call home. During this day of appreciation, it's a great time to take action at home by making changes to conserve energy. If we all contribute, even small adjustments and changes to how much energy we use can have positive impacts.

Conservation vs. efficiency

Before diving into ways to use less energy, it's important to know the difference between conservation and energy efficiency. Energy efficiency refers to equipment that uses less energy to do the same job. For example, ENERGY STAR®-certified refrigerators keep food just as fresh as standard models but use about 9% less energy to do it, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Conservation is using less energy by changing behavior and practices. For example, adjusting your thermostat to be closer to the temperature outside during

warmer months or turning off the lights or a ceiling fan when you leave the room conserves energy.

Conservation has the best return on investment. It's often free and can save a little or a lot – depending on what you are changing and how drastic of a change you make.

Tackle the biggest energy users

The biggest energy user in the average household is heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment. Keep your house a little warmer in the summer and a little cooler in the winter. A good rule of thumb is to set the thermostat to 68 degrees F in the winter and to 78 degrees F in the summer.

Typically, the second biggest energy user is the water heater. Replacing an electric storage water heater with a heat pump/hybrid water heater is an excellent example of an energy-efficient project. Adjusting the temperature

setting to the recommended 120 degrees F and using less hot water in your home conserves energy. Wash clothes in cold water. When washing dishes, don't let the hot water run longer than necessary.

Earth Day also lends itself to thinking of ways we can connect with each other and limit screen time. Look for electricity-free opportunities with your family or community. Consider unplugging and getting outside with friends and family. Going for a hike, a walk or even just spending time in your yard or local park is a great way to reconnect with others and nature. Before you head out, adjust that thermostat and turn off everything possible. Unplug chargers from outlets and turn off all electronics and lights.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



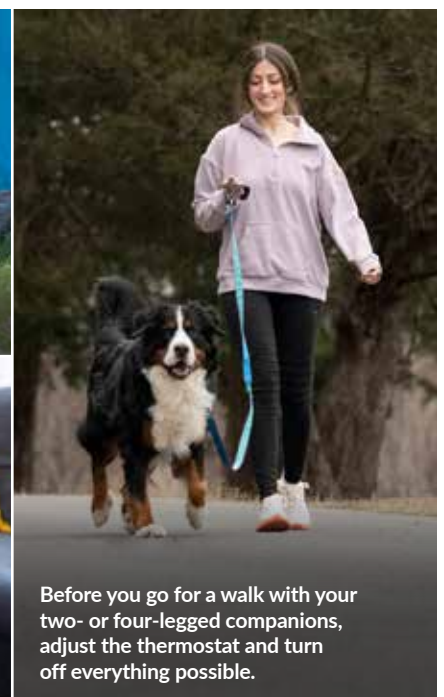
Even small changes, including unplugging chargers from outlets and turning off lights, conserve energy in your home.



On Earth Day, think of ways your family can limit screen time and connect with each other.



Look for electricity-free opportunities with your family, such as starting a game night.



Before you go for a walk with your two- or four-legged companions, adjust the thermostat and turn off everything possible.

IT'S OK WHEN THINGS MAKE YOU HAPPY

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

One of my guilty pleasures is trolling thrift shops, garage sales, antique shops and other secondhand stores. My mom's father, Ralph Brown, was one of the original fans of Goodwill, and he passed his love of thrifting onto my mom, who passed it onto me – so that makes me a third-generation thrifter, right?

Some of my favorite finds revolve around dishes and farm-themed items. I savor the moments when I'm sipping green tea from my blue Fiestaware teacup and saucer, which I scored at the Coralville Goodwill last summer. One of my latest quirky finds came from the Goodwill in Spencer – two cow-themed mugs for 99 cents each. Cartoon designs of Holstein cows on vacation to the Black Hills, Florida, Mardi Gras in New Orleans and a ski resort in Colorado make me smile.

When I posted a picture of these fun mugs on my Facebook page, one of my friends shared this comment:

“Adorable! I have a picture on my wall of a farm wife milking her Jersey cow, out in a pen with a chicken or two and a small cat. I bought it at an auction years ago and love it – just because. I couldn't begin to explain to anyone what thoughts it conjures up for me when I look at it. Some days, I am so thankful

I've lived long enough to have time to just sit, think and remember.”

Research connects happiness to ordinary things

This got me thinking – can things truly make us happy? Is it OK if they do? For years, we've been advised that if we want to be happier, we should invest in experiences rather than things. But what about those go-to purchases of ours – maybe those comfortable boots, an interesting coffee mug or fresh-cut flowers – that just make us feel good?

It turns out that the material things in our lives aren't incidental to our happiness. That's according to Ingrid Fetell Lee, author of “Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness.”

Her research shows that the objects in our surroundings can have a surprisingly powerful influence on our emotional well-being.

Take flowers, for example. Studies show that just being exposed to flowers can lift our mood, reduce anxiety, improve memory and even decrease the pain medication patients use in a hospital after surgery.

Manmade objects can have similar effects. Did you know that objects with round or symmetrical shapes are known to elicit positive emotions, while sharp, angular, asymmetrical objects are associated with tension and sadness? That helps explain

why I love the glossy, round, bright red teapot I purchased at a local thrift shop for \$2.

It's clear that objects can affect our happiness in deep ways, some that we aren't even consciously aware of. My advice? Choose items that enhance your joy and well-being rather than detract from it.



Linking the past and present

Objects that inspire joy give you a lasting sense of pleasure. Not only do these items connect you to the past (I'm thinking of the antique oak secretary/desk with a beveled, oval mirror in my living room), but the feelings they evoke are equally potent in the present.

Rather than thinking of our favorite things as wasteful or unnecessary indulgences, let's consider them treasures that can bring out our best selves.

Do you have an item that makes you happy every time you look at it or use it? Tell me about it at yettergirl@yahoo.com. I look forward to hearing from you.


Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.



Visit our website at www.hrec.coop

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