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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Annual meeting
entertainment announced

Money-saving gardening tips

Egg-ceptional recipes

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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.

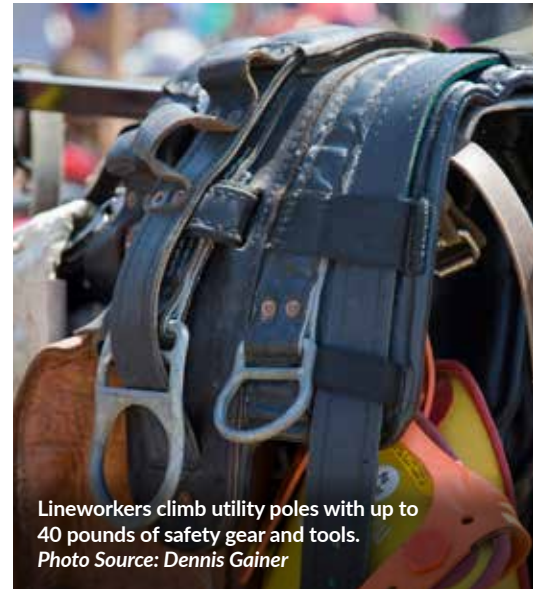
Powering our communities

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!

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 18	Board meeting
MAY 16	Board meeting
MAY 27	Office closed
MAY 31	Dividend bill credit drawing
AUG. 6	Annual Meeting of Members

You can access your account information at any time using SmartHub on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com or through the SmartHub app for mobile devices. Use SmartHub to report outages to save time and ensure that it goes directly into our system to notify us. You can also call our office at 866-242-4232 for account information or to report service-related concerns.



Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.

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RELIABLE POWER FOR TODAY – AND TOMORROW

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Our team at Access Energy Cooperative is always looking ahead, exploring ways to innovate and utilize new technologies

to improve our services. As our nation increasingly relies on electricity to power the economy, keeping the lights on has never been more important. We're committed to powering – and empowering – our members in the most efficient way possible.

So, how are we working to ensure reliable and affordable power while adapting to a changing energy landscape and our community's evolving needs?

Our diverse energy mix

One critical component of reliable power is the mix of energy resources used to generate the electricity that keeps the lights on across southeast Iowa. Access Energy Cooperative doesn't generate electricity. Instead, we purchase it from our energy provider, Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative. From there, we distribute it to homes and businesses throughout our community. Our energy resource mix is made up of 46% coal, 34% natural gas, 11% wind, 5% hydro, and the rest from purchased power and peaker systems.

We're increasingly using more electricity generated from renewable energy sources, but we still depend on a diverse energy mix to ensure reliable power that's available to our members whenever they need it.

A multi-faceted commitment to reliability

Access Energy Cooperative is also using technology to enhance our local system, limit service disruptions and improve outage response times.

Advanced metering technology enables two-way communication between the co-op and consumers. In the event of a power outage, this technology helps pinpoint the exact location of the outage and can even analyze damaged or tampered meters. It helps Access Energy Cooperative save money with communications data, and ultimately improves power reliability for our members.

Proactive tree trimming is another way we limit service disruptions. Scheduled trimming keeps power lines clear from overgrown limbs that are likely to fall.

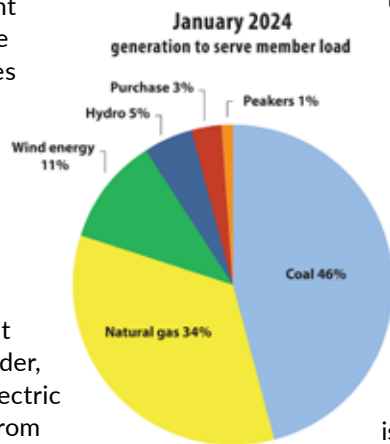
As technology advancements become more accessible, we are using advanced mapping software to provide more reliable service.

One of the best methods for improving our services to members is monitoring trends and leading practices from other

electric co-ops across the country. Learning from other co-ops is one of the many benefits of the cooperative business model because for us, it's about cooperation, not competition.

You can trust that Access Energy Cooperative will continue working to provide the safe, reliable and efficient electricity you expect and deserve – for today and tomorrow.

Kevin Wheeler is the general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.



DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PORTABLE GENERATORS

BY DANIEL PHILIPS



Storm season is upon us, which means greater potential for power outages. If you're planning to use a portable generator in the event of an outage, Access Energy Cooperative reminds you to be safe.

With proper use and maintenance, portable generators can provide great convenience during an outage. However, when generators are used incorrectly, they can be extremely hazardous. In a 2022 report, the Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated 85 U.S. consumers die every year from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning caused by gasoline-powered portable generators.

Here are 10 do's and don'ts to keep in mind when using portable generators:

- ✓ **DO:** Install backup CO alarms.
- ✓ **DO:** Keep children and pets away from portable generators at all times.
- ✓ **DO:** Position generators at least 25 feet outside the home, away from doors, windows and vents that can allow CO to enter the home.
- ✓ **DO:** Ensure your generator is properly grounded. Use a portable ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) to prevent electric shock injuries.
- ✓ **DO:** Use three-pronged extension cords that are rated to handle the load of the generator. Inspect extension cords for cuts, frays or other damage before use.
- ✗ **DON'T:** Operate a generator inside your home or an enclosed (or partially enclosed) space. Generators produce high levels of CO, which can be deadly.
- ✗ **DON'T:** Open windows or doors while the generator is running.

✗ **DON'T:** Rely on generators as a full-time source of power. They should only be used temporarily or in emergency situations to power essential equipment or appliances.

✗ **DON'T:** Overload generators. They should only be used to power essential equipment. Make sure your generator can handle the load of the items you plan to power.

✗ **DON'T:** Connect generators directly into household wiring unless you have an appropriate transfer switch installed. If a generator is connected to a home's wiring without a transfer switch, power can backfeed along power lines and electrocute utility lineworkers making repairs.

While generators provide convenience during power outages, they can quickly become hazardous – even deadly – if improperly operated. Before you operate a portable generator, be sure to thoroughly read the owner's manual for important safety information and tips.

If you have questions about proper use of portable generators, we're here to help. Give us a call at 866-242-4232 or contact us at contactus@accessenergycoop.com.

Daniel Philips is the director of operations for Access Energy Cooperative.



Before you operate a portable generator, be sure to thoroughly read the owner's manual for important safety information and tips. Photo Source: Honda

DIVIDEND BILL CREDIT DRAWING MAY 31

Access Energy Cooperative members have the option to choose to receive their dividend payments

in the form of a bill credit, rather than a check. If you wish to set your account up to receive bill credits instead of checks, please contact our office at 866-242-4232 or send an email to finance@accessenergycoop.com.

Each member who has signed up to receive dividend payments as bill credits, in lieu of checks, will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 bill credit. If you are already signed up, you do not need to sign up again.



Drawing will be held May 31.

FORD LIGHTNING EV

The following is the data for the cooperative's Ford Lightning electric pickup from last month.

- 1,868 miles driven.
- Total charge time of 179 hours with a Level 2 charger.
- Total 1,138 kWh for charging.
- \$142.25 in total electricity costs at \$0.125 per kWh.
- Converted to gallons of gas (at \$3.50/gallon), this compares to 51.16 gallons of fuel.

UNDERSTANDING DEMAND

BY TYLER THEIN, P. E.



At Access Energy Cooperative, we understand that electric bills can be complicated, but understanding your bill can help you learn how to control it.

Generally, utilities charge a basic fee for service, which is called the “Base Charge” for Access Energy Cooperative members. The “Energy Charge” on your bill is the charge for how many kilowatt-hours (kWh) or the amount of electricity you used for the month. Understanding the “Demand Charge” of an energy bill is more complicated and may require some additional explanation.

What is demand?

Electric demand is the rate at which electricity is used at a given time and is measured in kilowatts (kW). Beginning April 1, 2024, single-phase and small commercial accounts will be charged for demand, and the energy charge will be reduced. Large commercial and large power accounts are already charged for demand.

The “Demand Charge” listed on your bill represents the 15-minute interval when you used the highest amount of electricity during that billing period. There is also the



EXAMPLE OF HOW DEMAND WORKS

Appliance	Demand
Average washing machine	0.7 kW
Average dishwasher	1.8 kW
Washing machine + dishwasher when used together	2.5 kW

date and time printed next to the demand indicating when you set that demand.

To put this into context, think about how your dishwasher and washing machine both use electricity. The amount of electricity they use is the same regardless of when you use them. If you use them at the same time, you demand more electricity at that time. If you use them at different times, your demand is lower.

Example of demand scenario

When your washing machine runs for an hour, it uses 0.7 kW – which is your demand on our system for power. When your dishwasher runs for an hour, it uses 1.8 kW. If you run both at the same time, your demand would be 2.5 kW. Your demand becomes

the total of the two because you need that much power at the same time.

If you change your habits and run only one of them at a time, your highest demand for those two hours would be 1.8 kW, because it is the most demand you used at one time. The highest demand you set in one month is the highest amount of electricity used at once during a 15-minute interval in your billing cycle. The best way to reduce demand is by spreading your electric usage over time.

If you have questions about your electric bill, or questions about demand, please contact us at 866-242-4232.

Tyler Thein is the director of engineering for Access Energy Cooperative.



TRACK ENERGY USE WITH SMARTHUB

Did you know you can see your energy usage on your phone, desktop or other mobile device?

Through the SmartHub app, you can monitor and download your daily energy consumption 24/7 and see how it is trending over time. SmartHub can even alert you when a set usage level is exceeded.

Visit www.accessenergycoop.com for more information.

THANK YOU, 2024 NOMINATING COMMITTEE



As an electric cooperative, our members have democratic control over who sits on the board of directors, which sets the policies and rates. The Nominating Committee is comprised of members who find other members to run for the board.

Thank you to the 2024 Nominating Committee for its dedication to Access Energy Cooperative and finding qualified member-candidates to run for our board of directors for the upcoming election. The committee included:

- **District 1:** Joe Heckethorn, Dennis Smithburg and Kenneth Whitham
- **District 2:** Tina Mullin, Bob Scarff and Randy White
- **District 3:** Myrna Folker, Dave Lowenberg and Dean Mabeus

Director election candidates

The following members have been nominated by the committee to run in this year's election. The election will be held at the Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 6.

District 1

- **Harold Cubbage**, Libertyville
- **Marvin Larson**, Fairfield

District 2

Two-year term

- **Jerry Barker**, Mt. Pleasant
- **Duane Graber**, Mt. Pleasant

Three-year term

- **Mark Hotchkiss**, Wayland
- **Larry White**, Mt. Pleasant

District 3

- **William (Bill) Benjamin**, Donnellson
- **Robert (Bob) Chesnut III**, Wever

The Steps to Restoring Power

When a major outage occurs, our crews restore service to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible – until everyone has power.

1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines

These lines carry large amounts of electricity. They rarely fail but must be repaired first.



2. Distribution Substations

Crews inspect substations, which can serve hundreds or thousands of people.



3. Main Distribution Lines

Main lines serve essential facilities like hospitals and larger communities.



4. Individual Homes and Businesses

After main line repairs are complete, we repair lines that serve individual homes and businesses.



Dig Smart. Dig Safe.

Before you dig, call 811 or visit call811.com to mark underground utility lines. 811 is a free service that helps keep our community safe.



April is National Safe Digging Month.

2024 ANNUAL MEETING ENTERTAINMENT

Save the date for Aug. 6, when Jennifer Lynn Handling and Revolution Band join the Access Energy Cooperative Annual Meeting of Members!



All members are encouraged to attend the annual meeting for an evening of free food, free fun, free entertainment and to participate in the business activities of the cooperative. It all starts at 5 p.m. on Aug. 6.

More information will be coming, so keep reading this magazine for updates.

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.



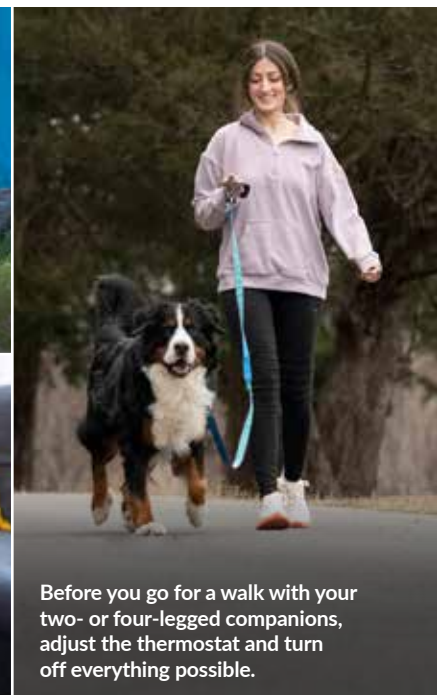
Even small changes, including unplugging chargers from outlets and turning off lights, conserve energy in your home.



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.





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IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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for members of
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SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

A photograph of two utility workers in yellow safety gear and hard hats standing in a bucket truck. The truck is white and has the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives logo on its side. They are positioned on a power line, with a clear blue sky in the background.

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**. This commitment to provide electrical safety has always been our priority so we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's why safety runs through everything we do.



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