

● APRIL 2026

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Updating an older home for  
efficiency and comfort

2026 director candidates

Breakfast and  
brunch recipes

Meet this year's Youth Tour winner ▶ See Page 7

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Heather Korver, a North West REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

# DON'T BE AN APRIL FOOL: WORK SAFELY THIS SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the weather warms up, we're spending more time outdoors and tackling projects around the house that require power tools and other equipment.

Before you head outside, please take a moment to review these safety tips.

## Don't dig yourself into trouble

April is National Safe Digging Month for a reason! Many of us will be working on landscaping and home improvement projects this spring that involve some digging. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located and marked. It's the law, and it could save your life or prevent serious damage. Call or click before you dig – call 811 or visit [www.IowaOneCall.com](http://www.IowaOneCall.com) to process your request.

## Avoid ladder pitfalls

Planning to use a ladder this spring? Always choose a non-conductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass for utmost safety. Pick a safe route to carry the ladder to the work area and then carry it horizontally rather than upright. Be aware of electrical lines and tree branches in the area where you are working. When using an extension ladder, tie off the top of the ladder whenever possible. Use the 1:4 lean ratio to ensure a stable working platform.

## Plant seeds of safety

As you head into the fields to plant, always keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform anyone working with you about them. Plan your route

between fields and on public roads so you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make certain that contact is not made with a line.

If equipment makes contact with a power line, assume the line is energized and deadly. The operator should NOT get off the machinery unless in immediate danger. If the operator touches the ground and the equipment at the same time, they will become a channel for electricity. Instead, the operator should stay on the equipment, keep others away and contact the local electric utility or 911 immediately to report

the incident so power lines can be deenergized safely before exiting.

## Take shelter from the storm

Storm season has returned, and there is no safe place from lightning when you're outside. Be aware of weather forecasts and watch for developing thunderstorms as lightning can strike many miles ahead of a storm front. If you hear thunder, seek shelter immediately because it indicates lightning is within 10 miles of you. Safe shelters include inside a building or in an enclosed metal-topped vehicle. Authorities warn against outdoor activity until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder is heard.

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

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A SPRING SPRUCE UP GIFT CARD!

Just in time for spring home improvement or landscaping projects, we're giving away a \$100 gift card to a local nursery, garden center or home improvement center. Use it for flowers, mulch, plants, tools or whatever you need to jump-start refreshing your home this spring!

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than April 30. 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 ecobee smart thermostat from the February issue was **Kenneth Wilder**, a **Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY APRIL 30!

# UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 7	Scholarship awards banquet
APRIL 18	Lineworker Appreciation Day
APRIL 21	Board meeting (rescheduled from regular date)
MAY 21	Board meeting
MAY 25	Office closed for Memorial Day

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*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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# THANK YOU, 2026 NOMINATING COMMITTEE!

As an electric cooperative, our members have democratic control over who serves 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 2026 Nominating Committee for your dedication to Access Energy Cooperative and finding qualified member-candidates to run for our board of directors for the upcoming election:

- **District 1:** Jeremy Atwood, Dennis Smithburg and Rick Sobaski
- **District 2:** Jeff Bailey and Randy White
- **District 3:** Myrna Folker, Dave Lowenberg and Barb Schau

The following members have been nominated by the committee to run in this year's election to be held at the Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 4.

**District 1**

- **David Hollingsworth**, Packwood
- **Denise Munoz**, Bonaparte

**District 2**

- **Stephen Bain**, Mount Pleasant
- **Mitch Yaley**, Mount Pleasant

**District 3**

- **Michael Holtkamp**, West Point
- **Brad Schulte**, Fort Madison

## SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars for Aug. 4 for Access Energy Cooperative's 2026 Annual Meeting of Members. Jake McVey is back this year providing entertainment, and there will once again be pony rides, inflatables, drive-a-tractor and safety demonstrations. Plus, homemade ice cream will be provided following the free meal!



**LINEWORKER APPRECIATION DAY IS APRIL 18**

Thank you to our lineworkers!



## FORD LIGHTNING EV

As part of a research project, Access Energy Cooperative is tracking data from the cooperative's Ford Lightning electric vehicle to share with members. The following is the data for February.

- 1,287 miles driven
- 7,156 total minutes charge time with a Level 2 charger
- 512.1 total kWh for charging
- \$64 total cost of electricity at 12.5 cents per kWh
- 73.5 gallons of gas equivalent
- \$205.20 total cost of gas equivalent at \$2.79 per gallon

*Note: Dollar values are dependent on electric and gas prices.*



# ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE VISITS CAPITOL

The Access Energy Cooperative board of directors and staff visited the Iowa Capitol to speak with legislators about issues affecting co-op members and the energy industry.

The Iowa General Assembly is addressing a multitude of issues, including items central to Iowa's rural economy. Our top legislative priorities for this session include concerns with safely protecting utility workers and a community solar bill. You can learn more about issues involving rural electric cooperatives at [www.ProtectRuralIowa.com](http://www.ProtectRuralIowa.com).

Continuing the momentum from this Capitol visit, directors, managers and staff are important advocates for a balanced approach in addressing energy issues, allowing Iowa's member-owned electric cooperatives to continue providing safe, reliable, efficient and environmentally responsible power to more than 650,000 Iowans.

## TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS



Don't fall victim to power outage scams. When widespread outages occur, scammers may target affected utility customers. They can contact you via call, text or email, urging you to act quickly and provide personal information to restore service. Always communicate with your utility through official channels, such as their website, mobile app or phone number listed on your bill. Your safety and personal information are worth taking a moment to pause and verify unknown senders.

*Source: ftc.org*



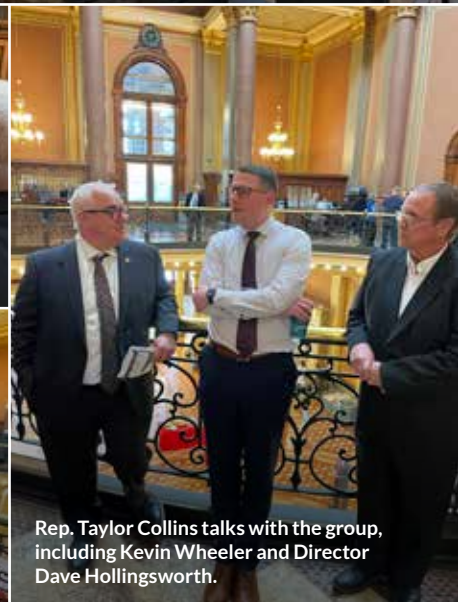
Sen. Dawn Driscoll took time to speak with cooperative board members and management staff.



Director of Engineering Tyler Thein, P.E., explains energy-related concerns regarding the community solar bill to Rep. Jeff Shipley.



Director Mike Holtkamp talks with Sen. Jeff Reichman, while Kevin Wheeler, general manager/CEO, talks with Rep. Heather Hora.



Rep. Taylor Collins talks with the group, including Kevin Wheeler and Director Dave Hollingsworth.

# LOCAL BUSINESS RECEIVES REVOLVING LOAN



Field Solutions, a small business in southeast Iowa, recently

received a loan to assist with a business expansion and equipment purchase through the Access Energy Cooperative Revolving Loan Fund program. This program was established through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s matching grants and exists to encourage business attraction and retention, as well as job creation in southeast Iowa.

Field Solutions is a family-owned business that offers technical proficiencies such as field service, mechanical rebuilds, preventative maintenance, fabrication, conveyors/elevators and 24/7 emergency service.



# GEORGE JONES HIRED AS SAFETY DIRECTOR



Please help us welcome our newest Access Energy Cooperative team member. George Jones has been hired as the cooperative’s

safety director. He joins us from Mississippi with more than 30 years of linework and safety experience. We are excited for him to enhance the already robust safety program for cooperative employees and members.

# AREA YOUTH SELECTED FOR WASHINGTON, D.C., TRIP

Linzy Strigel of Mount Pleasant has been selected to attend the 2026 Youth Tour this June. The event is an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., sponsored by Access Energy Cooperative.

Linzy is an active student at Mount Pleasant Community High School and in many extracurricular activities. She is involved in volleyball, color guard, cross country, softball, choir, show choir, basketball, track and student council. She is also a very active member of 4-H and her church youth group.

Linzy will join approximately 40 other Iowa students and more than 1,500 students from across the country who have been selected by their electric cooperative to attend the annual Youth Tour.

While on tour, these students will learn about American history and government. They will visit historical sites, including monuments, museums, the U.S. Capitol, federal agencies and other points of interest. They will also have the opportunity to meet with their legislators in the U.S. House and Senate.

Access Energy Cooperative has been a part of the Youth Tour program since 1958 and currently selects up to two students each year to participate in the seven-day trip. The students are selected through an application and interview process.



# Let's do Brunch



## FAVORITE COFFEE CAKE

- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup pecans, chopped
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon (scant)
- 1 package instant butterscotch pudding
- 1 cup water
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup salad oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 package instant vanilla pudding
- powdered sugar frosting

Combine brown sugar, pecans and cinnamon together and set aside. Mix butterscotch pudding, water, oil, vanilla and eggs. In a separate bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and vanilla pudding. Beat the first mixture together with the dry ingredients for 2 minutes, no longer. Pour half of this mixture into a 9x13-inch pan. Top with half of the brown sugar and pecan mixture. Pour in remaining batter and sprinkle with remaining brown sugar and pecan mix. Bake at 350 degrees F for 40-45 minutes. When done, drizzle with powdered sugar frosting. Serves 15-21, depending on slice size

Donna Faga • Adair  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

## LOW-CARB EGG CASSEROLE

- 1 12-ounce bag frozen riced cauliflower
- 1 12-ounce bag frozen mushrooms
- 1 10- or 12-ounce bag frozen chopped onions
- 1 pound lean ground turkey
- 1 pound lean turkey sausage
- 18 eggs, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons red pepper flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dried vegetable or dried onion soup mix

The night before, place frozen vegetables in the refrigerator to thaw. Place mushrooms and onions in a strainer to thaw and drain. The next morning, cook ground turkey and turkey sausage, drain. Add thawed vegetables and meat to a greased 9x13-inch casserole dish. Distribute evenly to cover the entire casserole dish. In a medium-sized bowl, beat eggs with an electric mixer. Add salt, pepper, red pepper flakes, Parmesan cheese and dried soup mix. Pour over vegetables and meat. If desired, add more Parmesan cheese. Bake at 375 degrees F for about an hour. The casserole should be set firm enough to cut, but not over-browned. Place dish on a trivet or cooling rack. Cut into squares and serve immediately. Yield: 10-12 servings.

Richard R. Buller • Burlington  
Access Energy Cooperative

## ◀ BLUEBERRY COFFEECAKE

- ½ cup coconut
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 package blueberry muffin mix
- 1 8-ounce can crushed pineapple, with juice
- 1 egg

Mix coconut, brown sugar, butter and flour. Set aside. Rinse blueberries with cold water, drain and pat dry. Mix muffin mix, pineapple and egg until moistened. Fold blueberries into batter, then spread batter into a 9-inch square pan. Sprinkle coconut topping over batter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25-30 minutes. Can double the recipe and bake in a 9x13-inch pan.

**Carole Ristau • Eagle Grove  
Prairie Energy Cooperative**

## BISCUITS AND GRAVY BAKE

- 2 16.3-ounce cans refrigerated biscuits
- 2 pounds ground sausage
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2½ cups milk
- kosher salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- pinch cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon fresh chives, chopped, optional

Cut biscuits into quarters and add half to a 9x13-inch pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 375 degrees F for 12-15 minutes, until golden. Meanwhile, cook sausage in a large skillet over medium heat, breaking up meat with a wooden spoon. Cook for about 6 minutes, until sausage is no longer pink. Add flour and cook for 1 minute more. Pour in milk and whisk to combine. Season with salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper. Bring gravy to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for about three minutes, until thickened. Remove from heat and pour gravy over par-baked biscuits. Top with remaining biscuits. Brush biscuits with melted butter and season with black pepper. Bake 20 minutes, until golden and cooked through. Garnish with chives before serving. *Yield: 8 servings*

**Virginia Arens • Brooklyn  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative**

## GERMAN POTATO PANCAKES

- 5 cups raw potatoes, grated (2 pounds)
- 6 tablespoons flour
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ⅔ cup cooking oil
- applesauce, optional
- sausage, optional

Combine potatoes, flour, onion, eggs and salt. Put oil in a 10-inch skillet and heat. Pour potato mixture into hot oil, using about ¼ cup for each pancake. Cook until golden brown on each side. Serve with applesauce or sausage. *Yield: 6-8 pancakes*

**Ava Nester • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## SWEET POTATO HASH

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes
- 4 slices thick-cut bacon
- 6 scallions
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup water
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder

Peel sweet potatoes and cut into ¾-inch pieces. Set aside. Cook bacon until crisp. While bacon is cooking, slice scallions, keeping the white and light green parts separate from the dark green parts. Once bacon is cooked crisp, put it on a paper towel-lined plate and reserve drippings in the skillet. Add sweet potatoes, peppers and light parts of the scallions to the skillet. Cook, stirring occasionally until beginning to soften. Add water, salt, paprika, cumin and garlic powder. Cover and cook about 8 minutes, stirring occasionally until potatoes are mostly tender. Uncover and turn heat up to medium high. Cook stirring occasionally until potatoes are tender, slightly browned and all the liquid is evaporated. Stir in bacon and green scallions. *Serves 6-8*

**Michelle Heath • Parkersburg  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative**

WANTED:

## COOL & CRISP SUMMER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

**\$25 BILL CREDIT FOR  
EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is April 30**

We're looking for your favorite **summer recipes** that require little to no cooking. Think cool and crisp salads, sandwiches, wraps, grain bowls or veggie and fruit dishes! Selected submissions will appear in our August issue, providing refreshing recipes for hot, humid days. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

**MAIL: Recipes**

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# MAKING AN OLD HOUSE WORK FOR TODAY

BY NATE BIRT

You love your older rural house and want to honor its history while upgrading it for modern living.

Whether you own a century-old farmhouse or a midcentury ranch, experts say a thoughtful approach can help you modernize your home while preserving its character.

## Keep your house's bones intact to honor its history

As you evaluate renovation options, start by appreciating what you're working with. View your house's strengths and limitations as both an echo of the past and a guide for its next chapter.

"Old buildings are usually constructed very well. They were built at a time when people understood that the quality of their work was a reflection of their character," said Melinda McKnight, CEO of Energy Conservation Services. She and her husband Bill consult on building science and energy efficiency with homeowners whose properties date back to the 1600s.

Still, older homes come with "some inherent limitations," Melinda said. Modern preferences, such as open concepts and cathedral ceilings, may not always be a good fit.

"A lot of times, unless those features are done with the guidance of a building scientist, those kinds of decisions can actually cause damage if they're not done properly," she said.

The same goes for tossing out old windows or woodworking without realizing they might be restored and retrofitted to improve energy efficiency.

Restoring old windows is often key to preservation. It's also important to protect fireplace mantels, surrounds and banister handrails, which are architecturally significant features.

Other irreplaceable hardware worth preserving includes old doorknobs, hinges and locks.

## Interior treatments can enhance energy efficiency

Home improvement shows often highlight color palettes and visual

upgrades. Experts say the biggest payoff usually comes from improvements you don't see.

"Achieving improved comfort and efficiency in buildings requires air sealing and insulating the bottom and top of the building envelope, the area you pay to heat and cool," Melinda said.

Start with the attic and basement or crawlspace rather than walls and windows.

"Our goal is always to address the bottom and the top of the building envelope," she said. "That's usually the low-hanging fruit."

The reason is simple physics. Warm air rises and escapes through the top while cold air enters through gaps along the bottom.

"Only 30% of net heat gain and loss goes out the side of your house," said Gus Adams, co-owner of a renovation and historic preservation company. "Heat rises and cool air goes down. So the two most important

things are insulating the attic and crawlspace or basement.”

Next, identify and seal places where air leaks occur. Rim joists, where the wooden frame meets floor joists, are a common example.

“Wherever wood meets wood, that’s an air leak,” Melinda said. “Outdoor air entering conditioned space can create condensation and mold. And anywhere there’s an air leak, it’s an opportunity for a rodent to enter.”

For air sealing, use professional-grade foam, a metal applicator gun and an acetone-based cleaner rather than disposable straw kits that can clog.

Other energy-efficiency upgrades for rural homes include:

- **Installing a mini-split:** These systems heat and cool individual rooms in homes without room for ductwork. They work best in houses that are properly air sealed and insulated.
- **Caulking air gaps:** Fill gaps with caulk or one-part foam. Common leakage points include outlet boxes, window trim and plumbing penetrations on exterior walls.

### Exterior investments should divert water, improve comfort

When preserving your home’s structure and history, managing water is essential.

A common issue is downspouts that don’t extend far enough away from the home. Ideally they should discharge water at least 8 feet from the house.

Roof problems also deserve careful attention. A leak doesn’t always mean the entire roof must be replaced. Sometimes replacing flashing, the metal pieces that prevent water entry, solves the problem.

“If there are roof lines that come together creating valleys, you want flashing there,” Melinda said. “You also want step flashing along chimneys and stack pipes.”

Also examine cantilevers, which are floor sections that extend beyond the foundation.



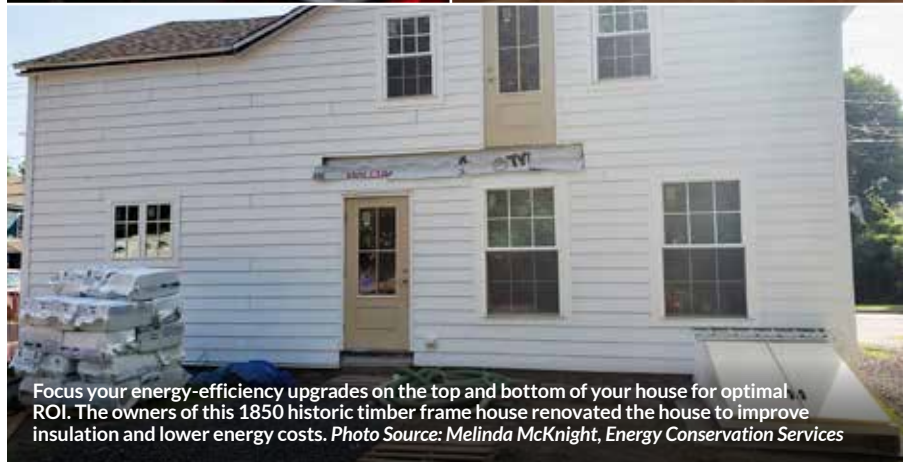
A blower door test can measure the airtightness of a home and identify hidden air leaks.



A 1889 rural farm house before renovations. The house was lifted to stabilize the existing structure, installing modern infrastructure and creating a daylight basement.



Achieving improved comfort and efficiency in buildings requires air sealing and insulating. Begin with the attic and basement or crawlspace.



Focus your energy-efficiency upgrades on the top and bottom of your house for optimal ROI. The owners of this 1850 historic timber frame house renovated the house to improve insulation and lower energy costs. Photo Source: Melinda McKnight, Energy Conservation Services

“If you put a three-season room on the first floor but don’t take care of the underside properly, that’s an air leak,” Melinda said. “It can lead to discomfort and higher utility bills.”

Raised ranch homes built in the 1970s often include cantilevers along the front of the house that can create cold floors.

### Do your DIY and know your limits

Many upgrades are manageable for handy homeowners, but it’s important to understand your limits.

Air sealing gaps, cracks and penetrations is often more important than adding insulation. Focus on gaps around plumbing and electrical penetrations.

If you remove trim, scrollwork, windows or other historic

features, store them rather than discarding them so they can be restored later, if desired.

For major upgrades, including full electrical rewiring or major plumbing work, hire a licensed and insured professional. Exterior painting projects should also be handled by specialists experienced with older homes and historic materials.

“As a steward of a historic home, treat it kind of like it’s an archaeological site,” added Katie Adams, co-owner of a renovation and historic preservation company. “It’s really important to leave the original fabric of the home because you are caring for it now.”

Nate Birt is special contributor to Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.

# THREE TIPS TO BOOST WINDOW PERFORMANCE IN OLD HOUSES

When it comes to energy upgrades, windows often are among the first features homeowners want to replace. But experts say they're also one of the least cost-effective.

"Windows are expensive, so they have a very long payback. They're not the biggest bang for your buck," explains Melinda McKnight, CEO of Energy Conservation Services.

Unless they're cracked or leaking, your original windows can often be upgraded in place, and she recommends trying these tips.

**1 Replace air sealing and not the glass itself.** Some installers will just tuck fiberglass inside the frame, and then put trim on. Instead of

fiberglass, use a one-part low-expansion window-and-door foam, then apply the trim. This will be a much better result, and there will be much less draft.

**2 Use pulley covers, window felts and door sweeps.** These treatments can make a surprising difference in comfort and energy savings. There's a lot you can do to tighten up old windows.

**3 Install interior storm windows.** Products such as Climate Seal are used by the National Park Service to improve energy efficiency in historic houses without altering their appearance. These acrylic interior windows can be custom measured and can be magnetically affixed.



## AVOID THESE COMMON MODERNIZATION MISTAKES IN YOUR HISTORIC HOME

You don't have to learn lessons the hard way when upgrading an older house. Experts say many renovation problems stem from a few common mistakes.

### Mistake #1: Painting without understanding your wood

Modern paints can seal wood so tightly that moisture becomes trapped behind the surface. When that happens, paint can begin failing in as little as five years.

### Mistake #2: Skipping moisture diagnosis before repair

Before repairing rotted materials, it's important to determine what caused the moisture problem in the first place. Without identifying and fixing the source, the same damage can return repeatedly.

### Mistake #3: Using modern materials where they don't belong

Certain modern materials can damage historic building components. For example, using Portland-based cement with historic brick can cause

the brick face to crack because the cement is harder than the lime-based mortar typically used in older homes.

### Mistake #4: Poor moisture control

Improperly vented bathroom fans are one of the most common moisture problems in older homes. Fans that vent into an attic introduce warm, humid air into an unconditioned space, which can lead to moisture buildup and mold. Bathroom fans should vent directly outdoors through an insulated metal duct, and a backdraft damper can help prevent outside air from entering the house.

### Mistake #5: Ignoring the electrical panel

Outdated wiring and discontinued electrical equipment can create safety risks. Common hazards include knob-and-tube wiring and uncovered electrical junction boxes. Some older circuit-breaker panels have also been recalled for causing fires. In addition, many older houses still have 100-amp electrical service, which may be inadequate for modern electrical demands.



# ELECTRIFY YOUR LAWN CARE

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Electric lawn equipment has seen drastic improvements in cost, motor efficiency and battery power in recent years. From hedge and string trimmers to leaf blowers, chainsaws, and push and riding mowers, there are many options for electric lawn equipment.

## Why electric equipment makes sense

Electric equipment is quieter than its gas-powered counterparts and typically needs less maintenance. There's no more mixing fuel, changing spark plugs or worrying about gas going bad over the winter. Advances in rechargeable battery technology eliminate having to lug around a heavy extension cord to get your work done. Just pop in a battery and go.

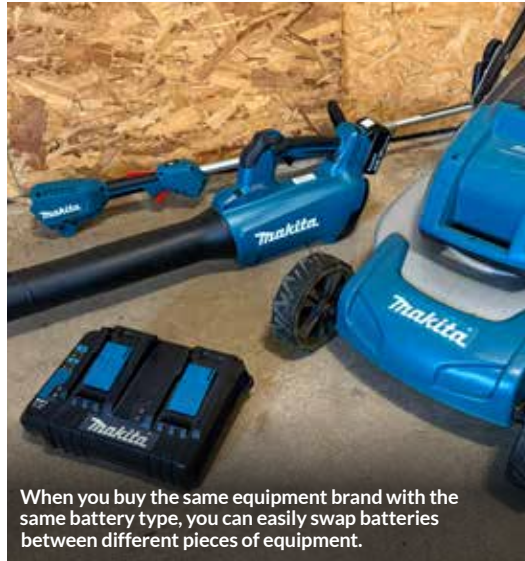
Most popular lawn equipment brands offer battery-powered options, along with newer brands that specialize in electric tools. If you need multiple tools, buying the same brand with the same battery type allows you to swap batteries between different pieces of equipment. That also means fewer battery chargers to store or keep on your workbench.

## Choose efficient brushless motors

Opt for equipment with brushless motors. They are more efficient, more powerful and have a longer lifespan than traditional brushed motors. A brushless motor typically costs more but is worth the improved efficiency. A brushed motor transfers electricity using physical brushes, which can wear down over time. The friction caused by the brushes makes equipment run hotter and noisier. A brushless motor uses electronic commutation with less friction, which makes it more powerful, extends the lifespan and allows you to get more done on a single charge.

## Handle and recycle batteries safely

Just as gas-powered lawn mowers require safe storage and handling of gas and oil, battery-powered equipment requires proper care for



When you buy the same equipment brand with the same battery type, you can easily swap batteries between different pieces of equipment.



Charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable, and store chargers in a cool, dry place.



Improved battery technology makes it easy to get more done on a single charge and avoid hauling around a cord.

maintenance, charging and disposal. Always use the manufacturer's original charging equipment, charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable, and store chargers in a cool, dry place.

Most manufacturers recommend charging batteries only until they reach full capacity, rather than leaving them on the charger until you are ready to use them. This helps prevent battery damage from overcharging and heat buildup and reduces fire hazards. Unplug chargers when not in use to avoid energy waste.

Similar to gas and oil, old or damaged batteries should not end up in household garbage and landfills, where they can ignite fires and leak toxic chemicals into soil and groundwater. Instead, recycle them at a big-box store or at a county or city waste management site.

If you're looking for a quieter, more efficient, lower-maintenance lawn care routine, rethink your equipment options and consider electric models. If you decide to make the switch, check with your electric utility or state agency for potential rebates.

*Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

## QUICK TIPS FOR BUYING ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT

- **Check battery compatibility.** If you plan to buy multiple tools, choose the same brand so one battery type can power several pieces of equipment.
- **Look for brushless motors.** They run more efficiently, produce less heat and typically last longer than brushed motors.
- **Buy an extra battery if needed.** Having a second battery lets you keep working while the other one charges.
- **Test the weight and balance.** Battery-powered equipment can feel different from gas models, so choose tools that are comfortable to handle.
- **Ask about rebates.** Some electric providers or cities offer incentives for switching from gas-powered lawn equipment to electric models.

# SPRING CLEANING TIPS TO MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY

Adopting simple yet effective energy-saving strategies during spring-cleaning routines can create an efficient living environment that may also lower utility bills and extend the life of heavily used appliances.



## Protect equipment and maximize efficiency with a clean filter.

Check the filter in your HVAC system. Ensuring your system has a clean filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency. You should have your air conditioning serviced and professionally cleaned. Dirty refrigerant coils reduce efficiency. This also applies to heat pumps and ductless heat pumps.



## Schedule checkups before the heat arrives.

Scheduling cleaning services for your air conditioning in the spring – before the heat of the summer – can ensure the work gets done before the rush and even save you money. Window AC units can get dirty, too. They can be cleaned with the proper tools, cleaning agents and know-how. Always unplug units before cleaning, and wait until it is completely dry before plugging it back in again.



## Brighten your space.

Cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers can brighten your space by removing dust and grime collected during the winter. While you're at it, check your bulbs and

replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent with energy-saving LEDs. Although they tend to cost a little more, LEDs last longer and use less energy.



## Clean the oven and windows.

A clean oven heats more evenly and quickly, providing better results and lower energy use. A clean oven window allows you to see the food and how it's cooking without opening the oven door, which wastes energy. When cleaning windows, check the seals and sash locks to ensure they close tightly. Check for any areas that need caulking or sealing to reduce drafts.

Spring is the ideal time to declutter, deep clean and implement practices that tidy our homes and reduce energy consumption.

## WANTED: RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100.

### RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

#### How to enter:

- 1 Snap a photo capturing rural Iowa (image must be high quality, at least 1MB large; if taken on a phone, send us the largest version – bigger is better!).
- 2 Send us the original, high-resolution image file in an email to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com) with "Cover Submission" in the subject line.
- 3 Include your **name**, **service address** and the **name of your electric cooperative** in the email body to ensure you qualify for our contest. A **phone number** is also appreciated in case we need to contact you.

All eligible entries are reviewed and considered for each edition of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*. Keep an eye out for next month's winner!



# THE ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE PHOTO CONTEST IS BACK

Show off your creativity and share your best shots with us! Participate in our annual photo contest for a chance to showcase your talent and win up to \$100. Whether it's capturing breathtaking landscapes, memorable moments or community spirit, we want to see your unique perspective of southeast Iowa.

We will choose 13 photos to appear in the annual Access Energy Cooperative 2028 calendar. Each winning artist will receive \$75 plus an additional \$25 bill credit if they are a member of the cooperative.

## CONTEST DETAILS



1. Full-color photos are encouraged.
2. Entries must be in a horizontal layout.
3. Digital images will only be accepted in their original file size. Photos with reduced resolution will not print well on the calendar.
  - Minimum size requirement is 3,300 x 2,550 pixels or roughly 8 megapixels.
  - Printed photos submitted must be high-quality production. Original digital files are preferred to printed photos.
  - If an entry is received that does not meet the minimum requirements, it will be disqualified from the contest.
4. Entrants do not have to be a member of the cooperative and may enter more than one photo.
5. Entries must include the following information on the back of photo, in the email or on the CD:
  - Entrant's name, address and phone number.
  - Title of the photograph.
  - County in which the photo was taken.
6. All entries will become the property of Access Energy Cooperative and may be used by Access Energy Cooperative for any purpose the cooperative deems valid. (Upon your request, photos can be returned when the contest is complete.)
7. Entrants agree to authorize Access Energy Cooperative to announce and publish their name, address and submitted photograph in any forthcoming publicity without further remuneration, other than the prizes awarded in this contest.
8. By submitting an entry in the contest, entrants agree to grant Access Energy Cooperative permission and all rights to use the photo entry indefinitely for marketing purposes, which include but is not limited to a calendar or other printed materials promoting Access Energy Cooperative.
9. All entrants must have sufficient permission of any recognizable persons appearing in the photograph to be able to grant to Access Energy Cooperative the right to display their photographic submission online or in printed material.

Storm season is upon us. If you experience a service interruption, remember to report it in SmartHub or call us at 866-242-4232. Please do not send outage reports via Facebook, as it is not monitored 24/7.

Use SmartHub to report outages



Navigate to **Contact Us**  
Select **Report Power Outage**  
then **Continue** and **Send**.



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

As we prepare for the seasonal shift, remember to set your ceiling fan rotation accordingly. In winter months (or whenever your home heating system is running), fan blades should rotate clockwise, which produces an updraft that pushes warm air down. In summer months (or whenever your home cooling system is running), blades should rotate counterclockwise, which produces a downdraft or windchill effect that makes you feel cooler. When used correctly, ceiling fans can boost comfort and allow you to adjust the thermostat a few degrees for energy savings.

Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)





IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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Iowa's electric  
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Visit our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)

A group of utility workers, including men and women in various work attire like shirts, pants, and caps, are gathered around a training station. The station has a sign that says "SAFETY TRAINING" and contains electrical equipment. One man in a light blue shirt and white cap is speaking to the group. The background shows a utility yard with yellow bollards and orange traffic cones.

# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**.

From the on-going training of our lineworkers to  
classroom safety programs for our kids.

Our commitment to electrical safety has always been job one.  
So, we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's  
why safety runs through everything we do.



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