

● MAY 2024

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



**Reducing power outages with  
system maintenance**

**Learn about battery-powered  
backup systems**

**Sensational salad recipes**

**Advocating for safety and reliability at REC Day on the Hill ▶ See Page 15**

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**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn

**IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
Chuck Soderberg

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

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Kevin Wheeler, Access Energy Cooperative – Managers' Representative

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**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

**Email Address**  
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Andrea Carlson, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!



# RECOGNIZE A DESERVING VOLUNTEER IN JUNE

BY ERIN CAMPBELL



Often, the best way to thank a volunteer is to simply say “thank you” and recognize the work they are doing in the community.

Our annual Shine the Light contest, which will open in June, offers a great opportunity to show appreciation for a deserving member of your community by nominating them for statewide recognition.

## Commitment to community

Now in its fourth year, this statewide contest is a way for Iowa’s electric cooperatives to “shine the light” on our commitment to community. During June, we invite member-consumers and employees of Iowa’s electric cooperative to visit [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) and nominate local volunteers who are making a positive difference. If you receive electricity from an electric cooperative, you’re a co-op member-consumer and eligible to make one nomination per account/household.

## Winners receive \$3,000 for their local charity

In July, a panel of judges will review all the nominations and select three volunteers who will each receive a \$3,000 donation to their local charity. We will also announce our three winners on social media in early September and feature them in the September issue of this magazine.

As part of the nomination process, be prepared to share some basic contact information about you as the nominator and for the volunteer you are nominating. You may nominate a volunteer under the age of 18 with parental consent. You will also need to answer this question in 500 words or less: **How has your nominee made a difference in the community, and how might their local charity use the \$3,000 donation?**



As the person who sees the nominations come in as they are submitted through the contest website, it’s a privilege to read your essays each year. We have many incredible volunteers throughout the state who are improving the quality of life in their communities.

You can view the contest rules and see our past winners at [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com). Thank you for considering the opportunity to recognize a

hardworking friend, neighbor or relative in your life.

Iowa’s electric cooperatives are grateful to local volunteers across the state who deserve to be celebrated for the remarkable work they are doing in their communities. We look forward to learning about many of them through this year’s Shine the Light contest!

*Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

## WIN \$100 IN BEEF CERTIFICATES!

May is Beef Month in Iowa! To celebrate, we’re giving away \$100 in beef certificates to use at a grocery store. You can select your favorite cuts to purchase, and then make mouthwatering meals at home.

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month’s contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than May 31. 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 BISSELL® Carpet Cleaner from the March issue was Jason Collison, a Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc. member-consumer.



## ENTER ONLINE BY MAY 31!

# UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 12	Happy Mother's Day
MAY 16	Board meeting
MAY 27	Office closed for Memorial Day
MAY 31	Dividend bill credit drawing
JUNE 20	Board meeting

You can access your account information at any time using SmartHub on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://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.*

**Office:** Access Energy Cooperative  
1800 W. Washington St., P.O. Box 440  
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641  
**Phone:** 319-385-1577 or 866-242-4232  
**Fax:** 319-385-6873  
**Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call):** 8-1-1  
**Website:** [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop](https://facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop)  
**Twitter:** [twitter.com/AccessEnergyC](https://twitter.com/AccessEnergyC)  
**Email:** [contactus@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:contactus@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Office Hours:** Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
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Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577  
Payments can be placed in dropbox under flag pole.  
Discover, Visa and MasterCard accepted.

**General Manager/CEO:** Kevin Wheeler

**Editor:** Kimberly Davis

**Assistant Editor:** Cheryly Wibben

**Officers and Directors:**

**Marvin Larson**, District 1, President  
[mlarson@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mlarson@accessenergycoop.com)

**Robert Chesnut III**, District 3, Vice President  
[bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com)

**Michael Holtkamp**, District 3, Secretary  
[maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com)

**Robert P. Smith**, District 2, Treasurer  
[rsmith@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:rsmith@accessenergycoop.com)

**Jerry Barker**, District 2, Director  
[jbarker@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:jbarker@accessenergycoop.com)

**Fred Hickenbottom**, District 1, Director  
[fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com)

**David Hollingsworth**, District 1, Director  
[dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com)

**Marvin Newton**, District 3, Director  
[mnewton@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mnewton@accessenergycoop.com)

**Larry White**, District 2, Director  
[lwhite@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:lwhite@accessenergycoop.com)

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# REDUCING POWER OUTAGES WITH SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

BY KEVIN WHEELER



When you flip a light switch, you expect lights to come on. At Access Energy Cooperative, we work hard to ensure you have electricity when you need it. It's what we do. We exist to provide electric service to our members, not to build a profit.

We continually work to upgrade our electric distribution system and equipment to improve reliability, but there will always be continual threats causing outages that are out of our control. Weather like tornados and ice storms can be the most significant enemy of an electrical system. Sometimes a person may forget to call before he digs in his backyard and cause an outage. Occasionally, a vehicle accident can cause damage to utility poles and wires and cause an outage. Animals having unfortunate moments get into electrical equipment and cause outages.

Many unforeseen things cause electrical outages that are out of our control, but we do our best to avoid the ones we can. In addition to an aggressive brush control program, Access Energy Cooperative maintains a pole and equipment inspection program to keep the system running as smoothly as we can.

## Ongoing vegetation management and pole inspections

With more than 2,200 miles of electric distribution lines, Access Energy Cooperative has a lot of ground to cover for maintenance.

Our vegetation management program is set up to cover the entire system on a five-year rotation. This program includes trimming vegetation under power lines in the first year of the rotation, followed up with preventative spraying two years later. In 2024, trimming is scheduled in areas around Mount Pleasant, Denmark and

Primrose. Spraying is scheduled south of Burlington, Salem and Selma.

The Access Energy Cooperative pole inspection program is set up to follow the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) requirements and covers an inspection of all 52,000 poles on our system on a 10-year rotation. In 2024, poles in various areas in Jefferson and Van Buren counties are scheduled to be inspected to ensure they are still safe and not decaying.

## Tracking reliability

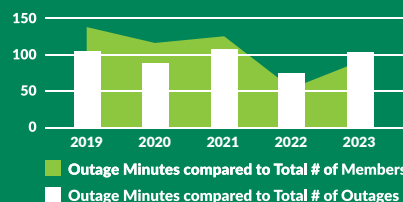
Your cooperative provides annual reports to the IUB with records of outages and reliability for the current and previous four years. In 2023, Access Energy Cooperative reported a slight increase in the number and length of outages incurred by our members over the 2022 report. However, these numbers were still significantly down from the five-year average. There were a couple of major storms last year, which contributed to this increase; but our stringent equipment and vegetation management plans are doing their job to keep outages down and our power reliable.

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

Number of outages/total members



Outages in minutes/total members



# OLDER HOME MAINTENANCE

BY ALAN RAYMER



The grandeur of older homes tends to lure us to fall in love with them. Unfortunately, along with their beauty may come a little more maintenance than a newer home, both for safety and efficiency.

Owners of older homes should annually check windows and doors to see if they need weatherstripping or caulking updated to seal off air leaks. Before weather changes occur, such as sizzling summer days or frosty winter nights, you should also walk around and make sure windows and doors are all shut tightly and locked, including storm windows and doors.

Have your heating and cooling systems checked annually by a licensed technician. Be sure to clear away leaves and debris from outside units.

## Ensuring electrical safety

Performing consistent inspections of the electrical system is necessary for

an older home. Just because wiring may be old does not mean there is a problem, but it should be checked by a professional to ensure safety.

As you continue to add more electrical appliances and devices to your home, overloading your system could create a fire hazard. Overloading can cause the system to overheat and wear out insulation, which could lead to short circuiting. Insulation can also become brittle and flake easily, leaving wires exposed. Older wiring called “knob and tube” can be found in homes built before 1950 and should be inspected, especially if it never has been.

Be sure to have any potentially dangerous wiring issues checked by a professional if:

- A circuit breaker keeps tripping or a fuse keeps blowing
- You notice unusual power draws or dimming or flickering lights
- You see discolored outlets or switch plates or they are warm to the touch



- You notice unusual odors, such as burning smells, but can't find a source
- Outlets only allow you to plug in a two-pronged plug (means they are not grounded)
- There aren't ground-fault circuit interrupters near water sources
- The house was built more than 40 years ago

For more safety information, visit [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org) or the Access Energy Cooperative website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com).

*Alan Raymer is the member services representative for Access Energy Cooperative.*

Source: Consumer Reports

## Making the Switch to ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT

Considering electric equipment to maintain your outdoor space? Check out the benefits of electric and considerations before making the switch.



<h3 style="margin: 0;">Benefits of Electric Equipment</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battery-powered equipment produces zero emissions</li> <li>• No hassle and mess from gasoline and oil</li> <li>• Quieter and more reliable than gas-powered equipment</li> <li>• Require less energy to do the same amount of work as gas-powered tools</li> </ul>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Considerations Before Going Electric</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchasing from a single brand can streamline charging</li> <li>• Consider the size of your property and battery run time</li> <li>• Backup batteries may be needed for larger properties</li> <li>• Electric equipment is pricier up front</li> </ul>
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## FORD LIGHTNING EV

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

- 1,050 miles driven.
- Total charge time of 123.25 hours with a Level 2 charger.
- Total 537 kWh for charging.
- \$67.13 in total electricity costs at \$0.125 per kWh.
- Converted to gallons of gas (at \$3.50/gallon), this compares to 35.21 gallons of fuel.





## 2024 ANNUAL MEETING

Save the date for the Access Energy Cooperative Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 6!

All members are encouraged to attend the annual meeting for an evening of free food, fun and 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.

**SAVE THE DATE! TUESDAY, AUG. 6**

## QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS? COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

Access Energy Cooperative strives to exceed members' expectations for service, including resolving issues and complaints promptly and courteously. Our employees who receive member telephone calls and office visits are qualified and trained in screening and resolving complaints. They will also provide identification to the caller to enable callers to reach that employee again if needed.

Access Energy Cooperative is required to notify its members of the address and telephone number below where a representative qualified to assist in resolving the complaint can be reached for assistance available from the Iowa Utilities Board.

If a member complaint is related to service disconnection, safety or engineering standards or renewable energy, and Access Energy Cooperative is not able to resolve your complaint, you may request assistance from the Iowa Utilities Board by calling 515-725-7321 or toll-free 1-877-565-4450, by writing to 1375 E. Court Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50319-0069, or by email to [customer@iub.iowa.gov](mailto:customer@iub.iowa.gov).

## 5 WAYS TO SAVE THIS SUMMER

When summer temperatures rise, so do our energy bills. Here are a few ways you can reduce energy use and grow your summer savings.

### 1. **Raise your thermostat.**

The smaller the difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the more you'll save.

### 2. **Install window coverings**

like blinds or light-blocking curtains to prevent indoor heat gain during the day.

### 3. **Seal leaks with caulk and weatherstripping**

around windows and exterior doors. Air leaks force your air conditioner to work harder and run longer than necessary.

### 4. **Run ceiling fans**

for additional cooling but turn them off when you leave the room.

### 5. **Lower your water heater thermostat**

to 120 degrees F to reduce standby heat loss.



Source: U.S. Department of Energy

# SAVE TIME WITH PAPERLESS BILLING

Paperless billing reduces your monthly paper usage, your carbon footprint and mailbox clutter. It allows you to review and pay your monthly electric bill online. It is free, convenient and secure!

To sign up for paperless billing, you must first have a SmartHub account. (Paperless billing is not required to have a SmartHub account.) SmartHub is a web and mobile app that allows you to take control of most aspects of your utility account. Visit our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) or download the SmartHub app on your mobile device to create your account.

Once you sign up for paperless billing in SmartHub, you will receive monthly email notifications when your bill is available for viewing. This email includes the amount due and due date. You can pay securely on our website or in the app, anytime, anywhere as long as you have an internet connection.

We are happy to answer any questions you have. Call us at 1-866-242-4232 or email our billing department at [billing@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:billing@accessenergycoop.com).



**In SmartHub:**

1. Go to Settings.
2. Select "Paperless Billing."
3. Turn on paperless billing.



A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

# 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](mailto: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.**

Photo Source: Kathy Morris



# HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

## 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](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) for more information.

SENSATIONAL

## Salads



## STRAWBERRY KALE SALAD

- ½ cup olive oil
- ⅓ cup cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 12 ounces kale, trimmed and chopped
- 2 cups fresh strawberries, sliced
- ¾ pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
- ¼ cup fresh mint, minced
- 1 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted

Whisk together olive oil, cider vinegar, honey, salt and pepper for a dressing. To serve, place kale, strawberries, bacon and mint in a large bowl. Toss with dressing and sprinkle with feta cheese and almonds. To toast almonds, bake in a shallow pan at 350 degrees F for 5-10 minutes or cook in a skillet over low heat, stirring occasionally until lightly browned. *Serves 10*

Shirley DeSmet • Alvord  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## CRUNCHY SPRING SALAD

- 4 celery sticks, finely chopped
- 1 cup cooked chicken, chopped
- 16 Spanish olives, chopped
- ½ cup walnuts, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise

In a bowl, combine celery, chicken, olives and walnuts. Add mayonnaise and combine well. Serve chilled. *Serves 4*

Anita Doughty • Ankeny  
Consumers Energy

## COOL CUCUMBER SALAD

- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 heaping cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon onion salt
- 3 cucumbers, peeled and thinly sliced
- tomatoes and/or peppers, chopped (optional)

Mix the first six ingredients together. Pour over sliced cucumbers and optional vegetables, if desired. Let salad set for 30 minutes. *Serves 8*

JoAnn Nester • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPRING SALAD

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 4 ounces large macaroni, cooked and cooled
- 1 cup carrots, matchsticks
- 1 cup radishes, matchsticks
- 1 cup peas
- ½ cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1 scallion, sliced
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Mix mayonnaise, sugar and vinegar. Stir in macaroni, then add vegetables and season with salt and pepper. Chill. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association



## YUMMY SPRING SALAD

- ¼ cup walnuts, toasted
- 6 ounces broccoli slaw
- 1½ cups kale, chopped
- ½ cup apple
- ½ cup blueberries
- ½ cup strawberries
- 1 orange
- 1 avocado
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice

To toast walnuts, roast at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes. Cut vegetables and fruits into small pieces and mix with walnuts. In a fruit jar, add mayonnaise, apple cider vinegar, sugar and lemon juice. Shake well. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. *Serves 6*

Kary Blunk • Russell  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## POP OF PINK! SPRINGTIME SALAD

### Salad

- 1 bunch tender, garden-fresh asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ cup fresh peas (or frozen, thawed)
- sea salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- handfuls of salad greens
- 2 radishes, thinly sliced
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ½ avocado, diced
- ¼ cup toasted nuts (pistachios, almonds, walnuts or pepitas), chopped
- ½ cup roasted chickpeas (optional)

### Dressing

- ¼ cup fresh basil
- 1 small clove garlic
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt

Blanch asparagus in boiling salt water for 1 minute until tender but still bright green. Transfer to ice water for 1 minute. After draining, dry asparagus and mix it with the peas in a bowl. In a food processor, pulse together basil, garlic, lemon juice, zest, vinegar, olive oil and ¼ teaspoon sea salt. Add half of the dressing to the asparagus and pea mixture and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Arrange salad greens, layer asparagus and pea mixture, radishes, feta cheese, avocado, nuts and chickpeas. Drizzle with remaining dressing, season with salt and pepper. *Serves 4*

Angela Bell • Grundy Center  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

## COTTAGE CHEESE FRUIT SALAD

- 1 24-ounce carton cottage cheese
- 1 15-ounce can mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 15-ounce can fruit cocktail, drained
- 1 20-ounce can crushed pineapple, drained
- 1 cup miniature marshmallows
- 2 cups whipped topping
- 1 cup pecans, chopped (optional)

Combine all ingredients and mix well. *Serves 8*

Raymond Robbins • Fort Madison  
Access Energy Cooperative

## BROCCOLI AND CAULIFLOWER SALAD

- 2 cups broccoli
- 2 cups cauliflower
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic salt
- white pepper, to taste

Mix all ingredients together. *Serves 6-8*

Nancy Aldrich • Ankeny  
Consumers Energy

### WANTED:

## TAILGATING RECIPES

### THE REWARD: \$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

#### Deadline is May 31.

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](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

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

**MAIL:** Recipes

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 A man in a blue polo shirt and a young child in a green shirt are kneeling on a lawn, planting a small tree. The man is holding the tree's trunk while the child uses a blue shovel to work the soil around its base. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with other people and furniture.
 

# PROTECT NEW TREES BY PUTTING THEM IN SAFE PLACES

BY SCOTT FLOOD

“Why can’t they just leave my trees alone?”

If you’ve ever wondered that as you’ve watched a tree-trimming crew change the look of your favorite tree, you’ll find the reason in rural Ohio. At a little after 4 p.m. on the steamy Thursday afternoon of Aug. 14, 2003 – with everyone’s air conditioners cranked up to MAX – a sagging transmission power line in the Buckeye State came in contact with nearby tree branches. In minutes, 45 million Americans and 10 million Canadians had no air conditioning or any kind of electric power.

Transmission lines are a critical element of the U.S. power grid. These lines crisscross North America, some held up by slim poles, while others hang below towers resembling science-fiction robots. The giant wires suspended from both types

can carry enough electricity to power more than a million homes, moving it from distant power plants to electric cooperatives and other users.

Federal regulators placed most of the blame for the 2003 blackout on technology that failed to reroute power properly after the transmission line touched the trees. But they also recognized the problem would not have happened if those trees had been a safe distance away from the line. The outage event led to strict rules your electric co-op and other electric utilities are required to follow to prevent large-scale blackouts.

Co-ops are required to document that every piece of equipment and every foot of our power lines are a safe distance from trees and other vegetation. If your home received a visit from one of our tree-trimming crews, it was likely because your trees

were closer to power lines than the rules allow, and your electric co-op was legally required to act.

You have every reason to be proud of your home and yard, and the last thing we want to do is find ourselves altering or removing a prized part of your landscaping. We’d rather help you avoid conflict between electricity and greenery altogether. How? By reminding you to plant your new trees, shrubs or other vegetation where they won’t grow into power lines or other electric equipment.

### Consider growth

Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub or something else, it’s helpful to consider how it will grow over the next 20 or 30 years. Consider the eventual height and how wide the canopy of branches is likely to spread.



For example, even small trees and shrubs should be planted at least 20 feet from power lines. If you can't plant that far away, make sure you choose a species that won't top out at more than 15 feet high. Trees that will be up to 40 feet high or less should be at least 25 feet from electricity, and larger trees should be at least 50 feet away.

**Call before you dig**

Thinking about what's above the ground is only part of tree planting safety. Before you grab a shovel and start digging, contact 811 to ensure you will avoid accidentally cutting into underground utility lines. The service will send people to your property to mark the approximate locations of utility lines. Because it can be challenging to pinpoint exact locations, use only hand tools when digging within a couple feet of the markings.

**All vegetation requires planning**

Trees aren't the only type of vegetation requiring thoughtful planting. If there's a pad-mounted

transformer in your yard, you might be tempted to hide it behind colorful flowers and neatly trimmed shrubs. Unfortunately, if there's a problem, crews will need clear access to the transformer. That's why it's always a good idea to keep plantings at least 10 feet from the transformer's doors and at least 4 feet from its sides. Otherwise, crews responding to a power problem may need to remove part of your landscaping.

Finally, if you notice your trees or other vegetation have grown dangerously close to power lines or equipment, don't reach for your chainsaw and try to trim them on your own. Let your local electric co-op know or hire a professional arborist. Tree trimming is more dangerous than most people realize, and you don't want to find yourself in the emergency room – or be the person who plunges your neighbors into the dark!

*Scott Flood writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.*



Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub or something else, it's helpful to consider how it will grow over the next 20 or 30 years. Consider the eventual height and how wide the canopy of branches is likely to spread.



# Plant Trees Safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

## LOW TREE ZONE

Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

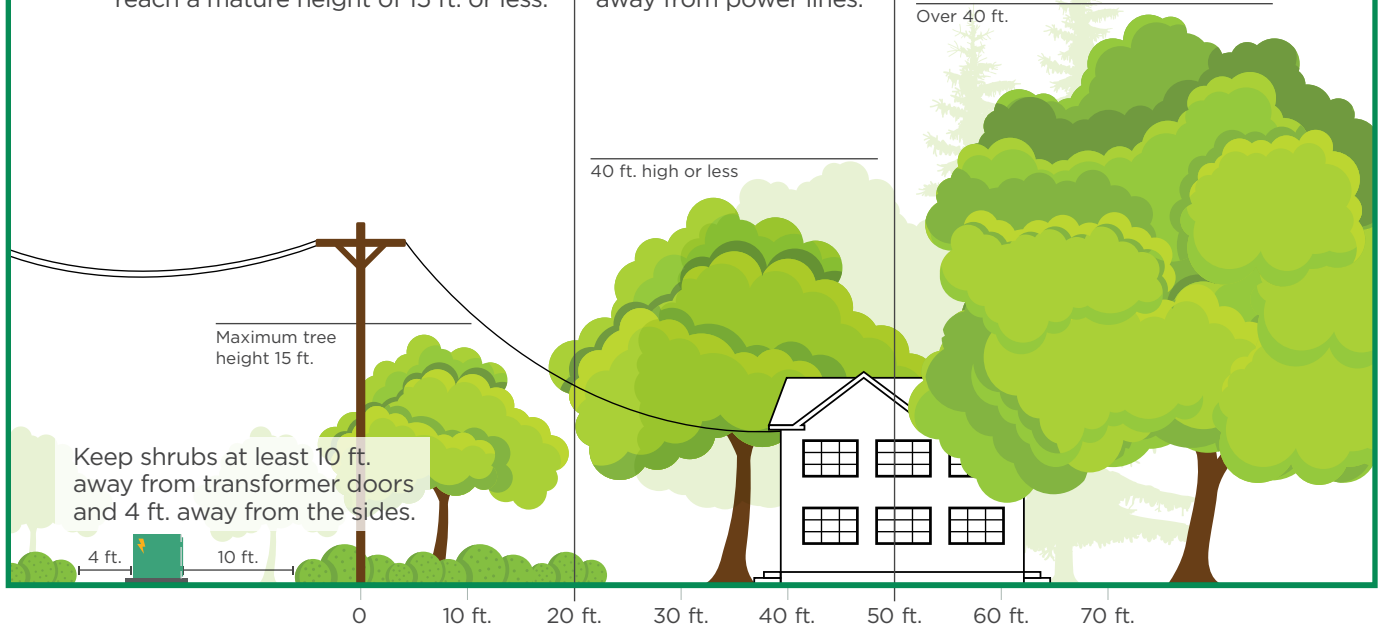
## MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

## LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 50 ft. away from power lines.

Over 40 ft.



# MONARCH CONSERVATION EFFORTS ESSENTIAL AFTER LOW WINTER COUNT

The past year was difficult for monarch butterflies. Adult monarch butterflies covered approximately 2.2 acres of forest canopy in Mexico, about 3 acres smaller than last year, according to the 2023-2024 overwintering monarch population report released by the World Wildlife Fund-Telcel Foundation Alliance.

Scientists estimate that a long-term average of 15 acres of occupied forest canopy is needed to sustain the eastern North American monarch population. Many factors contribute to the decline of monarch butterflies. The loss of breeding habitat in the U.S. and Canada, forest degradation in Mexico, and extreme weather events have contributed to population declines over the last 25 years. A drought in the southern U.S. during the 2023 fall migration may have been tough on monarchs this year.

In addition to habitat loss in their wintering grounds, the availability of breeding habitat with milkweed plants in the Midwest is also critical to the species' long-term survival. Milkweed is the only plant that

monarch butterflies lay their eggs on, and it is also the primary food source for monarch caterpillars.

## Iowa efforts are essential

The goal to maintain a long-term average of 15 acres of occupied forest canopy during the winter shapes objectives for establishing breeding habitat in the Midwestern states, including Iowa, through the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium.

The Iowa Monarch Conservation Strategy – developed by the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium – guides the implementation and documentation of voluntary, statewide conservation efforts. This approach fosters habitat improvements in rural landscapes that do not conflict with agricultural production, are sufficient in scale to support improved monarch breeding success and strives to complement other conservation programs. The consortium comprises 50 organizations, including agricultural and conservation associations, agribusiness and utility companies (including the Iowa

Association of Electric Cooperatives), universities and federal agencies.

“Iowans working together on public and private land are instrumental to improving monarch populations in North America,” says Iowa Department of Natural Resources Director Kayla Lyon.

## Ways to support monarch butterflies

All Iowans can help support the monarch butterfly by planting milkweed and other flowering plants in their gardens, yards and even road ditches. To encourage habitat establishment, consortium members have collaborated with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to develop a Habitat How-To webpage that provides practical steps and additional resources to guide planning and planting efforts. Scan the QR code below to access resources.

“As we accelerate the pace of conservation and water quality practice adoption in Iowa, we are also looking for more ways to layer in habitat for wildlife, including monarchs and other vitally important pollinators,” says Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. “We are collaborating with public and private partners, including the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium, to expand pollinator habitat statewide while also improving soil health and water quality within our communities.”

To learn more about the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium and the resources it provides, visit [www.iowamonarchs.info](http://www.iowamonarchs.info) and follow @IowaMonarchs on Facebook, X and YouTube.



Are you interested in improving your land for wildlife? Scan this QR code to find local resources in your county.



Photo Source: Lisa Galizia



# HIT THE BIKE TRAILS THIS YEAR

For more ideas, visit  
[www.traveliowa.com](http://www.traveliowa.com).

Proudly recognized as the World Capital of Trails, Iowa's 2,500 miles of bike trails cater to all kinds of adventures. Grab your bike and spend a day (or two) pedaling through prairies and woods, along lakes and rivers, through cities or past rural farmland. Whatever vista you're craving, Iowa's got it. If you make a pit stop at a restaurant or shop along the way, you might be supporting a business served by Iowa's electric cooperatives.

Here are some trails to get your pedals spinning:

## Cedar Valley Nature Trail

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail spans four counties and is more than 50 miles from Waterloo's George Wyth State Park to Cedar Rapids. Riders can find plenty of exciting stopping points along the way, from Waterloo's diverse restaurants to small-town eateries in Gilbertville, La Porte City, Brandon, Urbana and Center Point to even more options in Cedar Rapids. Along the way, enjoy the views of Iowa's farmland, rivers and prairies.



Photos: Iowa Tourism Office



Photos: Iowa Tourism Office

## Fairfield Loop Trail

Recognized as the best trail in the state at the 2013 Mid America Trails and Greenways Conference, the 16-mile Fairfield Loop Trail offers a perfect route for nature lovers. The challenging trail wraps around the community and through its countryside, connecting two major state preserves and passing through pine forests and wildflower meadows. Be sure to bring a trail map with you as the loop combines paved trails connected by short stretches of road.

## High Trestle Trail

Art and nature collide on this beautiful 25-mile trail near the communities of Ankeny, Sheldahl, Slater, Madrid and Woodward. A tree canopy shades you from the sun as you cycle to the award-winning Trestle Bridge, which is 13 stories tall.

## Sauk Rail Trail

Hop on the Sauk Rail Trail and enjoy a 33-mile jaunt between two state parks, from Lake View's Black Hawk State Park south to Carroll's Swan Lake State Park. Along the way, riders can enjoy diverse views, from friendly small

towns every few miles with stopping opportunities to wildlife areas, the Black Hawk Marsh, farm fields and pastures. The trail is a converted railway and is mostly flat until you reach the hills surrounding Swan Lake.

## Three Rivers Trail

Named for its crossings of the Boone River and the west and east forks of the Des Moines River, Three Rivers Trail offers excellent wildlife viewing. The trail runs 32 miles between Rolfe and Eagle Grove, taking riders through a variety of habitat types, including woodlands, grasslands and open prairie.

## Wabash Trace Nature Trail

One of Iowa's premier trails, the Wabash Trace Nature Trail allows riders to explore more than 60 miles of rural communities and the surrounding farmland. The former railroad route runs from Council Bluffs to Blanchard, passing through various small towns and offering stunning views of the wide-open landscape. Admire the vast blue skies and farmers hard at work in the fields while enjoying an easy and flat route.

# WHY SOLAR IS NOT FREE

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home often piques people's interest. The concept of "free" energy from the sun sounds appealing – and many less-than-reputable vendors often make this claim – but the truth is, solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Prices for a solar energy system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar energy systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric power cooperative for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. You will still have a monthly electric bill unless you disconnect entirely from local electric service.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, take these steps first:

- 1 Ensure your home is as energy-efficient as possible.** It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.
- 2 Check with your electric cooperative about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill.** If you decide to install solar panels, working with your electric co-op is essential, as you will need to take necessary steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

### 3 Get at least three quotes.

Compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar energy system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Before you consider a leap to solar, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

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



Get at least three solar quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost.



Make your home as energy-efficient as possible before purchasing a solar energy system.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system.



Installing a residential solar system doesn't necessarily equate to \$0 energy bills. You will need to rely on your electric utility for electricity when your system is not producing power.



# ADVOCATING FOR SAFETY AND RELIABILITY DURING 2024 “REC DAY ON THE HILL”

More than 200 employees and elected directors from Iowa’s locally owned rural electric cooperatives (RECs) convened at the Iowa Capitol on March 12 to advocate for important issues during the annual “REC Day on the Hill” event. Representatives from Access Energy Cooperative joined the statewide advocacy effort, including board and staff sharing energy efficiency information and electrical safety demonstrations.

“Our annual advocacy day at the Capitol is a powerful opportunity to meet face-to-face with our state legislators and share a local perspective on issues that impact rural Iowans and rural economic development,” says Chuck Soderberg, executive vice president and general manager for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

## Advocating on issues of reliability

Advocates asked elected officials to ensure reliable electric service for Iowans by supporting an “all-of-the-above” electric generation strategy. Specifically, Iowa’s electric cooperatives believe it’s time to update the state’s 2001 advanced ratemaking principles (ARPs) to stipulate an all-of-the-above approach and include nuclear and energy storage technologies.

Also related to reliability, advocates talked with their legislators about Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs) and the potential pitfalls of requiring Iowa utilities to file IRPs as part of contested case proceedings before the Iowa Utilities Board. IRPs will increase administrative and legal fees which must ultimately be paid by ratepayers. In other states, IRPs have served as a pathway to the premature closure of carbon-based power generation facilities which negatively impacts electric reliability.

Additionally, co-op representatives discussed the issue of “right of first refusal” which allows incumbent, established utilities to have the first option to construct, maintain and operate electric transmission projects. Iowa’s electric co-ops are best prepared to respond locally to weather-related outages because we have a proven track record of restoring power quickly and safely.

## Sharing the co-op advantage

During the advocacy event, representatives educated legislators on the benefits of the not-for-profit cooperative business model, which

includes local ownership, democratic governance and cost-based rates. Several electric cooperatives displayed booths in the rotunda which provided information on topics including economic development, digital metering advancements, investments in technology, safety innovations, energy efficiency efforts and vegetation management work.

Learn more about the legislative priorities of Iowa’s electric cooperatives and Iowa Rural Power grassroots advocacy at [www.iaruralpower.org](http://www.iaruralpower.org).



Lineman Colton Stephens instructs on electrical safety to Capitol visitors.



Access Energy Cooperative Safety Director Kurt Lowenberg demonstrates safety equipment to Sen. Jeffrey Reichman.



Pictured from left to right: Access Energy Cooperative General Manager/CEO Kevin Wheeler, Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative Economic Development and Community Relations Manager Tod Faris, and Rep. Helena Hayes.



Pictured from left to right: Directors Mike Holtkamp and Marvin Newton, General Manager/CEO Kevin Wheeler, Sen. Adrian Dickey, Director Dave Hollingsworth and Board President Marvin Larson.



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Iowa's electric  
cooperatives.

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