

● MAY 2023

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



**Vegetation management is  
essential for reliability**

**Tips for growing  
delicious tomatoes**

**Best beef recipes**

**Paperless billing is now available ▶ See Page 6**

# CONTENTS



7



8



10

VOLUME 76 • ISSUE 5

3

STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Stay safe during the spring season

3

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a \$100 gift card to a local garden center

10

FEATURE ARTICLE

Your guide to growing delicious tomatoes

14

CONSERVATION MATTERS

Conservation supports monarch butterflies

**EDITOR**  
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**ART DIRECTOR**  
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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 Kate Hindin, a Franklin Rural 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!



# STAY SAFE DURING THE SPRING SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



May is Electrical Safety Month, and it's a great opportunity to share some safety tips as many Iowans spend more time outdoors planting

crops, doing yardwork or enjoying the springtime weather. Take a few moments to review the following safety precautions with your family this month.

## Safety in the field

As you head into the fields this season, always keep a 10-foot clearance between equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and make sure any workers are also aware.

Plan your route between fields and on public roads to 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 avoid contact with a line.

If equipment comes into 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 and immediately contact the local electric utility or 911 to report the incident so electricity can be shut off safely before exiting.

## When thunder roars, go indoors

There is no safe place from lightning when you're outside. It's important to 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. Authorities warn against outdoor activity until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder is heard. Sign up for free county emergency notifications at [www.alert.iowa.gov](http://www.alert.iowa.gov).

## Call before you dig

Spring is prime time for landscaping projects and home improvement projects. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig so underground utilities can be properly located and marked. It's the law, and it could just save your life! Buried utility lines are everywhere, and an underground utility line is damaged every few

minutes in the U.S. because someone decided to dig without calling 811 first.

## Move over or slow down

We need your help keeping our lineworkers, engineers and maintenance workers safe on Iowa's roadways. If you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road to work safely; 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 vegetable garden or a pollinator habitat, it's rewarding to create the perfect backyard oasis. To help your garden grow or add plants for the beneficial pollinators, we're giving away a \$100 gift card from a local nursery!

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than May 31, 2023. 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 Kitchen Aid Cold Brew Maker from the March issue was Philip Orndorff from Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.

**ENTER ONLINE BY MAY 31!**

# UPCOMING EVENTS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| MAY 14  | Mother's Day   |
| MAY 18  | Board meeting  |
| MAY 29  | Office closed for Memorial Day                         |
| JUNE 15 | Board meeting  |
| JULY 2  | Access Energy Cooperative 85 <sup>th</sup> anniversary |
| JULY 4  | Office closed Independence Day                         |
| JULY 6  | Annual Meeting voting materials mailed                 |

You can access your account information 24/7, year-round on our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) or through our SmartHub app for mobile devices. You can also call our office to report service interruptions and request account information at 866-242-4232.



*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)  
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**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.  
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.  
Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577  
Payments can be placed in dropbox under flag pole.  
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**General Manager/CEO:** Kevin Wheeler  
**Editor:** Kimberly Davis  
**Assistant Editor:** Cherity Wibben  
**Officers and Directors:**  
**Marvin Newton**, District 3, President  
[mnewton@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mnewton@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Marvin Larson**, District 1, Vice President  
[mlarson@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mlarson@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Robert Chesnut III**, District 3, Secretary  
[bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:bchesnut@accessenergycoop.com)  
**David Hollingsworth**, District 1, Treasurer  
[dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Fred Hickenbottom**, District 1, Director  
[fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Jerry Barker**, District 2, Director  
[jbarker@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:jbarker@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Robert P. Smith**, District 2, Director  
[rsmith@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:rsmith@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Larry White**, District 2, Director  
[lwhite@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:lwhite@accessenergycoop.com)  
**Michael Holtkamp**, District 3, Director  
[maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com)

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# KEEPING UP WITH TECHNOLOGY AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT KEEPS YOUR POWER ON

BY KEVIN WHEELER



It's a simple premise: when you flip the switch at home, the lights should come on. And at Access Energy Cooperative, we work hard to

ensure you have electricity when you need it. It's what we do; we're here for you, our members.

Even though we continually work on upgrading our distribution system to improve reliability, we face continual threats and unforeseen events. Maybe a tornado or ice storm strikes and takes down a power line. Maybe a neighbor forgets to call before they dig up their backyard and it causes an outage. Maybe someone slid off the road and hit a utility pole and it caused an outage. Many unforeseen things cause electrical outages.

### Strategies to manage reliability

With more than 2,200 miles of electric distribution lines, we have a lot of ground to cover. So, if the lights go out, we try to determine the cause as quickly as possible. Not too long ago, our only option involved linemen patrolling large areas to investigate a problem. We have invested in smart technologies that allow us to monitor our system remotely and pinpoint problems more quickly and accurately as they occur.



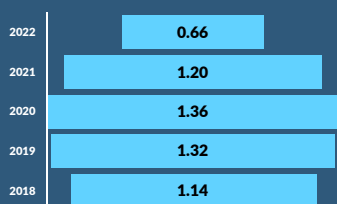
We also have great employees with tremendous expertise in maintaining and repairing our infrastructure. As your locally owned and operated not-for-profit utility, Access Energy Cooperative deeply cares about the areas we serve. We evaluate and deploy cost-effective system upgrades and preventive maintenance strategies across our 10 counties. And we work hard all year to keep trees away from power lines to prevent outages.

### Outage report

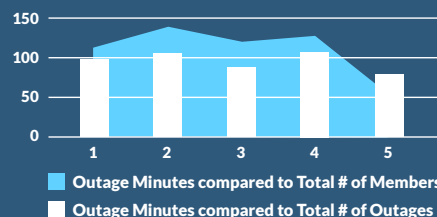
In 2022, our outage reports showed a significant decrease in the number and length of outages incurred by our members compared to the 5-year average. There were no major storms last year, which helped tremendously, but our stringent equipment and vegetation management plans are helping keep outages down and your power reliable.

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

### Number of outages per total number of members



### Outage duration (minutes) per number of members



# AVOID OVERLOADING YOUR HOME'S ELECTRICAL SYSTEM

BY DANIEL PHILIPS



We often think about our overloaded schedules or plates, but what about our home's electrical system?

Overloading circuits is not as obvious as cramming too many events on our calendar or overfilling our ice cream bowl, but it can be dangerous to our families and damage our homes.

An overload simply means you have too many things running on one or more electrical circuits or pathways in your home, and there is more demand than supply. When this happens, it can cause a minor inconvenience, like damage to an appliance, or a major issue, such as a power outage or a fire.

To prevent overloading circuits, consider the following tips from Access Energy Cooperative and Safe Electricity:

- Don't plug too many things in by using extension cords, power strips and multi-outlet converters. Overdoing it can overload and overheat a circuit.
- Look for loose connections or damaged or corroded wires, which can also cause an overload or fire.
- If you continually upgrade your home with more lighting, appliances and electronics, your home's circuits may not be able to handle the increased load.
- Do not plug multiple devices or appliances into an outlet simultaneously, exceeding the outlet's capacity. Do not use extension cords with major appliances.



Consult an electrician if you notice any of the following:

- Warm or discolored outlets or outlet cover plates.
- Flickering, dimming or blinking lights or any other strange lighting behavior.
- Items in your home frequently cause a mild shock.
- Other strange happenings, such as a burning odor that has no source or unusual sounds coming from outlets.
- Breakers that trip frequently or fuses that blow.

Do what you can to avoid overloading the circuits in your home. Although the majority of a home's electrical system is out of sight and out of mind, don't take overload symptoms lightly. Consult an electrician with concerns.

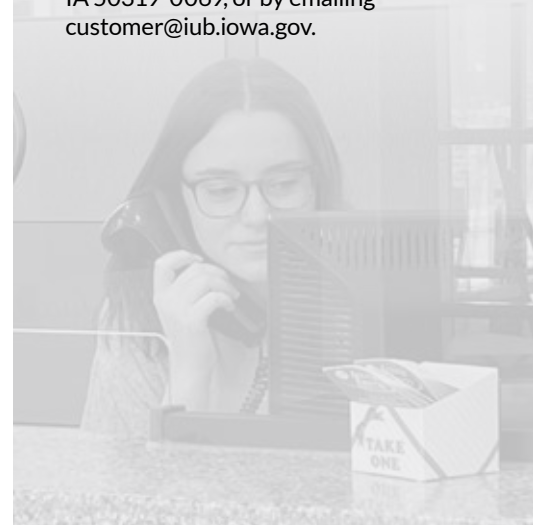
For more information about electrical safety, visit [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org).

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

## COMPLAINT PROCEDURE FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Access Energy Cooperative strives to exceed members' expectations for service, including resolving issues and complaints promptly and courteously. Co-op employees who receive member telephone calls and office visits are qualified and trained in screening and resolving complaints. They will also provide their contact information in case a member needs to reach the employee again.

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 emailing [customer@iub.iowa.gov](mailto:customer@iub.iowa.gov).



## PHOTO CONTEST: WIN UP TO \$100

Where one door closes, another opens. The photo contest for this year has closed and winners are being selected. Thank you for so many wonderful entries!



**But don't stop taking photos!** We are already accepting photos for the 2025 Access Energy Cooperative calendar until March 31, 2024. Spring is a beautiful time to take colorful photos. Please remember that horizontal photos work best for calendar entries and submissions can be sent to [mktg@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mktg@accessenergycoop.com).

Thirteen photos will be chosen as featured photos and winners will be awarded \$75, plus an additional \$25 bill credit if they are a member of the cooperative.

Visit [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) for complete rules.



# PAPERLESS BILLING IS NOW AVAILABLE

Paperless billing reduces your monthly paper usage, 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 from Access Energy Cooperative, you must first have a SmartHub account. SmartHub is a web and mobile app allowing you to control all aspects of your utility account. It is where you will be able to view and pay your bill. 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 be notified by email when your bill is available for viewing. This email will include the amount due and the due date. You can pay securely online or in the app, anytime and anywhere, as long as you have an internet connection.

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



# GO PAPERLESS




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## DIVIDEND BILL CREDIT DRAWING ON 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 receive your dividend as a bill credit on your account instead of a check, please contact our office at 1-866-242-4232 or email [finance@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:finance@accessenergycoop.com).

Each member that is signed up to receive 2023 and future dividend payments as bill credits will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$25 bill credit. If you are already signed up, you do not need to sign up again. The drawing will be held May 31.

# REC DAY ON THE HILL

Access Energy Cooperative joined nearly 200 employees and elected directors from Iowa's locally owned rural electric cooperatives (RECs) at the Iowa State Capitol on March 15. The "REC Day on the Hill" event was an opportunity to advocate for important issues facing electric co-ops.

"Our advocacy day on the hill is an important opportunity to personally touch base with our elected officials and share a local perspective on issues that impact rural Iowa and rural economic development," says Kevin Wheeler, general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.

Thank you to the legislators who took time to talk with us about issues concerning our members and industry. Iowa's electric cooperatives hope to resolve these issues in the 2023 Legislative Session.

Several electric cooperatives, including Access Energy Cooperative, displayed booths in the rotunda providing information about economic development, electric vehicles, digital metering advancements, investments in technology, lineman safety innovations and vegetation management work.



Pictured from left to right: Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Cole Hetzler, Sen. Mark Lofgren and Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Korbin Johnson.



Pictured from left to right: Access Energy Cooperative Lineworkers Cole Hetzler and Korbin Johnson talk with Rep. Jeff Shipley. Access Energy Cooperative General Manager/CEO Kevin Wheeler talks with Rep. Martin Graber.



Pictured from left to right: Access Energy Cooperative Directors Jerry Barker, Marvin Larson and Dave Hollingsworth, Sen. Adrian Dickey, Access Energy Cooperative President Marvin Newton and Access Energy Cooperative Director Fred Hickenbottom.



Pictured from left to right: Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Cole Hetzler, Rep. Helena Hayes and Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Korbin Johnson.

## ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE ASSISTS WITH LOCAL HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROJECT

For several years, Access Energy Cooperative has partnered with the local Habitat for Humanity to provide electric water heaters for housing projects. Alan Raymer, Access Energy Cooperative energy advisor, delivered the water heater for the 2023 Henry County project to Lisa Diener, Habitat for Humanity project manager. The cooperative is proud to support this local effort contributing to the needs of the community.



## SAVE THE DATE 2023 ANNUAL MEETING AUG. 1

Tuesday, Aug. 1,  
at 5 p.m. McMillan Park,  
Mt. Pleasant





# BEEF

RECIPES

## SWISS STEAK

- 2 pounds round steak, 1-inch thick
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon pepper
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup oil
- 4 medium onions, sliced
- 1 medium green pepper, seeded and sliced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup celery, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup chili sauce
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup water

Serve with mashed potatoes or rice

Dredge steak in flour, salt and pepper. Brown in hot oil on both sides. Remove when brown. Add onions and sauté. Return meat and add green pepper, celery, garlic, sauce and water. Bring to boil then reduce heat. Cover and simmer 1 hour until tender. Cut into 6 slices, serve on platter with sauce poured over. Serve with mashed potatoes or rice.

Holly Heeren • Alexander  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## BEST EASY BEEF AND BROCCOLI STIR-FRY

- 3 tablespoons cornstarch, divided
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup plus 2 tablespoons water, divided
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 pound boneless round steak or charcoal steak
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 1 small onion, cut into wedges
- 4 cups broccoli florets
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- rice
- toasted sesame seeds, optional

In bowl, combine 2 tablespoons cornstarch, 2 tablespoons water and garlic powder until smooth. Cut beef into 3-inch strips. Add beef to cornstarch mixture and toss. In a large skillet or wok, stir-fry beef in 1 tablespoon oil until beef reaches desired doneness. Remove from skillet and keep warm. Stir-fry onion in remaining oil for 4-5 minutes until softened. Add broccoli and cook for 3 minutes until tender but still crisp. Return beef to pan. Combine soy sauce, brown sugar, ginger, remaining 1 tablespoon cornstarch and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water until smooth. Add to skillet, cook and stir for 2 minutes. Serve over rice and garnish with toasted sesame seeds, if desired. Serves 4

Diane Peebler • Danville • Access Energy Cooperative



## BEEFY ITALIAN ROLL-UPS

- 12 ounces cottage cheese
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- 1 4-ounce can mushrooms
- 16 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded, divided
- 1 pound deli roast beef, sliced
- 12 flour tortillas
- 1 jar spaghetti sauce

Combine cottage cheese, seasonings, mushrooms and 8 ounces mozzarella cheese. Put slices of roast beef on tortilla, top with spoonful of cheese mixture and roll up. Spread half jar spaghetti sauce on bottom of 9x13-inch pan. Place beef rolls seam down, then pour remaining spaghetti sauce on top. Bake at 375 degrees F for 30 minutes. Top with remaining cheese and bake 3-5 minutes until cheese is melted.

Mary Gropper • Chelsea • T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## LOBIA STEAK

- 1½ pounds round steak
  - 1 tablespoon shortening
  - 1 medium onion, chopped
  - 1 medium green pepper, chopped
  - 1 can green beans, drained
  - 1 can mushrooms, drained
  - 1 cup ketchup
  - 1 8-ounce can tomato paste
  - ¼ teaspoon garlic salt
  - ¼ teaspoon oregano
- Serve with rice, mashed potatoes or Chow Mein noodles

Cut steak into bite-sized strips and brown in shortening. Add remaining ingredients and simmer until meat is done and tender. Serve on rice, mashed potatoes or Chow Mein noodles.

Penny Sue Haley • Keswick • T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## BEEF STEAK SUPREME

- 2 pounds round steak
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- oil
- 1 cup onions, chopped
- 1 can beef broth
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup sour cream

Cut steak into six serving size pieces. Coat steak in flour, salt and pepper. Set aside leftover flour mixture. Brown steak on both sides in heated oil. Add onions, broth and water. Cover and simmer at least 1 hour until meat is done. Add sour cream to flour mixture, then stir into broth mixture for gravy. Serves 4-6

Barb Sowers • Fredericksburg  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

## SLOW COOKER BARBECUE BEEF RIBS

- 5 pounds beef ribs
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 cup ketchup or barbecue sauce
- 1 cup unsalted beef broth
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon yellow mustard
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Place ribs in slow cooker, then scatter onion and garlic over ribs. Combine remaining ingredients and pour over ribs. Cook on low for 10 hours. Serves 6

Janet McCune • Homestead  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## CAST-IRON SKILLET STEAK

- 3 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1 pound New York strip or ribeye steak, 1-inch thick

Sprinkle steak with 2 teaspoons salt, let stand 45-60 minutes. Preheat cast-iron skillet over high heat until extremely hot. Sprinkle remaining teaspoon salt in bottom of skillet. Pat beef dry with paper towels then place steak into skillet. Cook 1-2 minutes until steak is easily moved. Flip over, placing steak in a different section of skillet. Cook 30 seconds and then begin moving steak, occasionally pressing slightly to ensure even contact with skillet. Continue cooking, turning and flipping 1-2 more minutes until cooked to desired degree of doneness, 135 degrees F for medium-rare, 140 degrees F for medium and 145 degrees F for medium-well. Serves 1-2

Kathy Steele • Hedrick • Access Energy Cooperative

WANTED:

## SCHOOL NIGHT 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

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



# A MATTER OF TASTE: YOUR GUIDE TO GROWING DELICIOUS TOMATOES

BY CHASE SMOAK

Tired of losing tomatoes to unwanted garden pests? Worried you'll need to sacrifice excellent taste for improved yield? Take a deep breath and relax. This year, you can have your tomato and eat it, too. With the help of a few new varieties and field-proven tactics, you'll be on your way to growing the best tomato crop yet.

If you want to grow delicious, homegrown tomatoes this year, simply focus your attention on these three stages of gardening: planning, preparing and protecting.

## Stage 1: Plan

Planning for a successful tomato harvest starts with choosing the right varieties to grow in your garden. A nonprofit organization called All-America Selections (AAS) may have the answer. The group tests new varieties before they hit the market, and their trial notes will tell you

everything you need to know.

How does it work? Professional horticulturists across the country volunteer to grow test plots of new tomato varieties and compare notes on disease resistance, yields and taste alongside established varieties.

"Our judges rate taste and texture first, then everything else second," says Diane Blazek, executive director of AAS and the National Garden Bureau. "You can have the most prolific, cute, unique new tomato, but if it doesn't taste good, nobody wants it."

## Stage 2: Prepare to plant

Your tomato garden needs access to full sun (6-8 hours a day) and should have good drainage. Tomato plants hate wet feet and often succumb to root rot when left in waterlogged soils. They do, however, need regular watering throughout the growing

season, so select a spot with easy access to water. Irrigating deeply but infrequently strengthens plants and encourages deep, healthy root systems for hot summer days.

Avoid planting where tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant and other solanaceous crops have been grown within the past three years. Many pests overwinter in the soil adjacent to plants and will terrorize unsuspecting gardeners.

Once you've selected the right spot, make sure to test your soil and amend the ground as indicated. Check with your local extension office or garden center to help you arrange a test and interpret the results. Tomatoes are nutrient hogs that require a good supply of nutrients from start to finish, so you'll likely need to fertilize before and during the growing cycle.



Adequate moisture is necessary for nutrient uptake. Drip irrigation works well and doesn't soak leaves, which often leads to disease issues.

And don't forget to deal with weeds. They are an often-overlooked source of tomato pests. After clearing the site of any weeds, spread mulch 3-4 inches deep and keep it a palm-width away from the bases of tomato stems.

Planting should only begin after the last frost date for your area.

### Stage 3: Protect

Like the rising of the sun, pests – insects and diseases – are to be expected in every garden. The good news is they can be controlled or even avoided with commonsense management.

- **Monitor and identify.** Get to know your garden and what lives in it. Talk to your local extension office for a precise understanding of the

insects and diseases to watch out for.

- **Make an evaluation.** If you do spot harmful pests or damage on tomatoes, evaluate whether real damage is being done to the landscape. Set thresholds to guide your treatment decisions. For example, you may decide there's little benefit to treating a pest problem if there is less than 10% damage to the plant.
- **Choose a wise treatment.** If treatment is necessary, use the least toxic measure first. Proper watering, plant spacing and fertilization can help prevent or reduce the number of pests. Mechanical means are another option that requires the physical removal of pests and can be useful for small populations. For example, hornworms are easily removable by hand-picking, and aphids are often washed away by a water hose.

If these approaches fail, reach out to your local extension agent or garden center for advice on pesticides and follow all label directions. Pesticide labels are the law, and many chemicals may be unethical or even illegal to use on fruit-bearing plants.

### Enjoy the pursuit

Gardening should be an enjoyable escape from the fast-paced world we live in. It's an opportunity to serve as good stewards of the land, so when the time comes, we pass on something a little better to the next generation. If you really want to experience all that gardening has to offer this summer, focus on using it to produce memories instead of a crop. If you do, you'll find everything begins to taste a little sweeter along the way.

*Chase Smoak is a special contributor to Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.*

## HERE ARE A FEW 2022 AAS WINNING TOMATO VARIETIES FOR IOWANS TO CONSIDER GROWING THIS SEASON.



**Celano.** A national winner, Celano is an early-producing, high-yielding, grape-type tomato for your patio or garden. According to AAS trial notes, Celano developed fruit much earlier and produced much longer than comparable varieties. Deep-red, oblong tomatoes typically weigh a little over half an ounce and taste sweet. As for disease resistance, this variety has superior tolerance to late blight. Transplants should be spaced at least two feet apart in the garden and will benefit from staking.



**Purple Zebra.** If you want a tomato that looks just as good as it tastes, search no more. According to AAS, Purple Zebra is a national winner with fruit that is "firm in texture, complex in flavor and has a taste more sweet than acidic." This variety has high resistance to tomato mosaic virus, verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt and late blight. Start seeds indoors 4-6 weeks before the last frost for best results. In the garden, space transplants no less than two feet apart or, if using containers, select 5-gallon pots with drainage. This variety produces 150-200 green-striped, purple tomatoes and requires staking. Most gardeners can begin harvesting tomatoes 80-85 days after transplant.



**Pink Delicious.** A regional winner for the Heartland (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota), Pink Delicious has everything heirloom enthusiasts love and less of what they don't. The large, pink fruit emerges earlier than comparable varieties, tastes delicious and is less prone to cracking. Gardeners will benefit from this tomato's improved seed germination and superior disease resistance. In the garden, space Pink Delicious at least 3 feet apart and provide staking. Gardeners can expect to harvest fruit after 84 days if growing from transplants or 114 days if growing from seed.



# CONTAINER GARDENING

Lack the space or time for a traditional garden? No worries. You can grow tomatoes in pots and hanging baskets, too. Follow these tips:

- Use pots that are at least 6-8 inches deep with holes for drainage.
- For ease of movement, use dollies or platforms with wheels to shift plants around.
- Use a lightweight potting mix. Packaged mixes are widely available at most garden centers but avoid soilless media that lacks the required nutrients.
- When using a potting mix with added fertilizer, wait 8-10 weeks before adding more nutrients. When it's time, use a water-soluble fertilizer at its recommended rate.



## FOR CONTAINERS, TRY THESE PROVEN STANDOUTS:

**Terenzo.** A cherry-type tomato with a trailing growth habit and sweet fruit. Height at maturity is 16-20 inches, making it a great addition to any spot with full sun and easy access.

**Lizzano.** This tasty tomato plant grows 16-20-inches tall and only 20-inches wide. Lizzano produces a copious amount of fruit, which can be harvested 105 days from seeding or 63 days after transplant. One perk of this variety is its noted resistance to late blight.

## HOW TO STOP BLOSSOM-END ROT

Blossom-end rot is the bane of every tomato gardener's existence. It starts as small brown spots on the blossom end of the fruit and rapidly progresses to form sizable rotten areas. This abiotic disorder is the result of a calcium deficiency, often caused by nutrient-poor soil or extreme fluctuations in soil moisture that interfere with calcium uptake. Here's how to beat it.

**Add organic matter to the soil.** Organic matter helps retain soil moisture and increases a plant's ability to uptake calcium. It is simply the portion of the soil composed of living or dead things in various states of decay, such as plant roots or microbes. Gardeners can add this vital soil component by incorporating organic fertilizers like compost and manure.

**Fertilize responsibly.** Shoot for a pH level of 6.5 and use lime or gypsum to maintain an appropriate calcium supply. When pH drops too low, nutrients like calcium, phosphorus and magnesium are less available to tomato plants. Reach out to your local extension agent for advice on soil testing and how best to prepare the ground for tomatoes.

**Mulch the garden.** Spread 2-3 inches of mulch around tomato plants to prevent erratic moisture shifts but keep mulch a palm-width away from the base of plants.

**Irrigate correctly.** Provide tomatoes with a consistent 1-1.5 inches of water per week.

Blossom-end rot, small dark spots that expand over time to form a sizable rotten area, is caused by a calcium deficiency. Proper watering and fertilization are the keys to preventing this common garden blight.



# MARCH GOES OUT LIKE A LION

Severe storms ripped through eastern Iowa on March 31, with the National Weather Service confirming the storm system produced 16 tornadoes, including an EF4 tornado near Keota in Keokuk County. Gov. Kim Reynolds would later issue a disaster proclamation for 18 counties, including Appanoose, Cedar, Clinton, Davis, Delaware, Des Moines, Dubuque, Grundy, Iowa, Jackson, Johnson, Keokuk, Linn, Lucas, Mahaska, Monroe, Wapello and Washington.

High winds and tornadoes caused more than 16,600 electric cooperative outages, with most of the distribution system damage occurring in the service territories of Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative, Linn County REC, Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative and T.I.P. REC. Central Iowa Power Cooperative's transmission system was also impacted, as the generation and transmission cooperative reported approximately 50 poles downed or damaged.

Within two hours of the storm passing, crews had made significant progress, with just 4,500 outages remaining statewide later that evening at 9 p.m. For T.I.P. REC based in Brooklyn, the damage rivaled the August 2020 derecho storm as a tornado near Sigourney took down about 5 miles of poles and three-phase conductor.

During storms, the cooperative principle of Cooperation Among Cooperatives is on full display, with unaffected area co-ops stepping up to help their neighboring co-ops restore power more quickly. Thanks to the following cooperatives for providing mutual aid to T.I.P. REC:

- Access Energy Cooperative
- Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative
- Consumers Energy
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southern Iowa Electric Cooperative



And special thanks to the following cooperatives for providing mutual aid to Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative:

- Butler County REC
- East-Central Iowa REC

Spring and summer often bring severe storms and other hazards. Always put safety first by staying away from all downed power lines and taking other precautions. You can find more safety tips on Page 3 of this issue.

# CONSERVATION EFFORTS NEEDED TO SUPPORT MONARCH BUTTERFLY POPULATION RECOVERY

The past year was a difficult one for the eastern monarch butterfly. According to a report released in April, monarchs occupying forest canopy in their wintering grounds in Mexico decreased by 22%, down from approximately 7 acres in 2021 to a little under 5½ acres during the winter of 2022-2023. Scientists estimate that a long-term average of 15 acres is needed to sustain the eastern monarch population and its continental migration.

The report, produced annually by the World Wildlife Fund in collaboration with the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas, the National Autonomous University of Mexico and the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, is based on annual surveys that go back to the 1990s. The surveys provide critical data to assess the status and trends of the North American Eastern monarch population and inform conservation practices in Mexico, Canada and the U.S. The goal is to maintain a long-term average of 15 acres of occupied forest canopy during the winter, which shapes objectives for establishing breeding habitat in the Midwestern states, including Iowa through the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium.

Many factors contribute to the decline of monarch butterflies. In addition to habitat loss in their wintering grounds, the availability of breeding habitat with milkweed plants and blooming forbs in the Midwest is also critical to the species' long-term survival. Milkweed is the only plant that monarch butterflies will lay their eggs on, and it is also the primary food source for monarch caterpillars.

The international announcement comes at a pivotal time for monarch conservation, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's re-evaluation of the monarch's status under the Endangered Species Act slated for 2024.



Fortunately, there are steps that Iowans can take to help support the monarch butterfly population. One of the most important things is establishing appropriate habitat around homes, businesses, farms and even ditches. This can be as simple as planting a few milkweed plants in yards and gardens or as involved as establishing more extensive pollinator habitat.

An updated mobile app to track habitat establishment, HabiTally, is available as a free download for iOS and Android devices from the App Store and is designed to improve data collection about monarch habitat.

"As we work to protect our natural resources and improve water quality in rural, suburban and urban settings, Iowans are also ensuring that habitat is available for pollinators and wildlife in their communities," says Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. "Pollinators like the monarch are

important to the ongoing productivity of Iowa agriculture."

A recent article in the journal *BioScience* integrates years of Iowa State University monarch research, showing how adding habitat will help conservation efforts. The findings estimate that the state's monarch conservation plan can potentially increase the size of the breeding monarch population in Iowa and the Midwest by 10-25% per generation.

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

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





# THE STORY OF THE TATTERED OLD FLAG

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

If there's one thing I've learned in more than 20 years as a writer, never assume you know the real story simply based on how things appear.

I was thinking about this when a lady told me a story about a tattered flag and her older brother Bob, who had served with the U.S. Marine Corps in the Korean War. Bob drove a tank in the "Forgotten War."

Bob never wanted to talk about what he, his younger brother and their fellow service members had seen and experienced in that brutal war. He just wanted to live a quiet life back home in northwest Missouri, where he farmed for many years.

It did anger Bob, though, that people sometimes called Korea a conflict rather than a war. Still, this never stopped him from living the motto of every Marine – *semper fidelis* (Latin for "always faithful"), as he raised the American flag on his farm every morning and lowered it every night. Even when the elements took a toll on the flag, Bob still raised and lowered the stars and stripes daily.

## Memories of sacrifice, heroism

Like many of his generation, Bob's world changed forever following June 25, 1950, when roughly 75,000 soldiers from the North Korean People's Army poured across the 38th parallel – the boundary between the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north and the pro-Western Republic of Korea to the south. North Korea wanted to conquer South Korea and unify Korea under a communist regime. This invasion was the first military action of the Cold War.

By the time the war ended in July 1953, approximately 5 million soldiers and civilians had died. The Korean peninsula is still divided today.

The war sometimes came up when a childhood friend and fellow Marine who had also served in Korea stopped by the farm to chat with Bob. They'd talk about Bob's younger brother, who was



barely 17 years old when he served with a frontline infantry unit of more than 200 men in that war. This brother was one of only four men in that unit who survived a massive attack. The childhood friend was part of the search and recovery mission that found him.

By all accounts, Bob's brother was a goner, but that friend insisted he wasn't leaving him behind. He credited the freezing cold, prayers from the teenaged infantryman's mom and dad, and the grace of God for keeping Bob's brother from bleeding to death.

## A meaningful ritual

I wonder if these thoughts sometimes raced through Bob's mind as he faithfully raised his tattered American flag each morning and lowered it each evening.

People often noticed Bob's flag as they drove by on the paved road near his farm. Sometimes they'd offer to

buy him a new flag. His response was always the same. "Thank you kindly, but it's important to me to leave this flag this way."

It wasn't until a niece (who was visiting Bob's younger sister) asked to photograph Bob raising the flag one morning that his family began to learn why that tattered flag was so important to Bob, who was now 88. There were tears in Bob's eyes as he spoke about the many torn lives and broken families that resulted from that ugly war in Korea. He knew he and his brother were among the blessed ones who got to come home.

So, when you see American flags flying this Memorial Day, don't be offended if a few are a little tattered. There might be much more to the story than you ever realized.

*Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).*



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