

# NEBRASKA

Magazine

NREA.org

March 2022

## Going Wild in the Garden

Why and how to  
create a wildlife-friendly  
landscape

### Inside:

- **Leading the Way: NREA Elects New President**
- **Get Your Ducts in a Row**
- **Electrical Safety Lessons for Kids**

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***—Kent C., California***

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# Contents



## 6 Going Wild in the Garden

Freelance writer Katie Jackson explains how gardeners can have a significant positive impact on the planet and all its interconnected inhabitants, including humankind, by using sustainable wildlife-friendly practices.



## 14 Leading the Way

A.C. “Pat” Hecox, a director for Dawson Public Power District, Lexington, Neb., was elected as the Nebraska Rural Electric Association’s new president. He enjoys continuing to learn about the electric industry and public power model in Nebraska.

## Departments

Editor’s Page

Safety Briefs/Murphy

Energy Sense

Down Home Recipes

Marketplace

Cover photograph by Max Dethlefs; courtesy of American Meadows



Wayne Price

## The Power of Local Control

Local control is one of the greatest benefits of Nebraska's all public power model. There are bills that have been introduced in the Nebraska Legislature that diminish the local control we have come to take for granted.

In January State Senator Bruce Bostelman of Brainard, Neb., introduced LB1046 which would change provisions relating to qualifications, eligibility, and election of members of the board of directors of public power districts; provide for creation of new election subdivisions for certain districts as prescribed; provide for appointment of certain directors and chief executive officers by the governor. This would effectively eliminate the customers of those public power districts from providing control over the leadership of their utility.

Turn to page 12 to read a more detailed article about LB1046 and a number of current legislative bills that impact public power in our state, written by NREA Director of Government Relations James Dukesherer.

Unlike profit driven shareholders controlling an investor owned utility, public power districts and electric cooperatives are governed by board members that are publicly elected. In a rural power district, this means you probably know the board member representing you and you know how to reach them with any concerns you may have.

In addition, public power districts are required to comply with the Open Meetings Act which gives us all access to these meetings and the public information they discuss.

Local control means your public power utility knows you and has deep roots in your community. Governing board members have a stake in every decision they make and a sincere interest in the local economy. Every year Nebraska's public power systems, including NREA's member-systems, pay more than \$100 million in taxes or in-lieu of tax payments in the communities they serve, and employ more than 6,000 Nebraskans across the state, many of these in rural Nebraska.

Local control strengthens customer service, promotes a culture of safety, increases communication between the electric utility and its customers and is just one more way Nebraska's rural electric member-systems are Working for Nebraska.



Chet McWhorter

Chet McWhorter is the General Manager of Cuming County Public Power District, headquartered in West Point, Neb.

## Making sure the voice of each customer is heard loud and clear

There is no tenant held closer in public power than local control embodied by an elected board of directors made up of peers in each community that oversee each public power district. The board of directors is responsible for the direction of the district and how it should function. Further, they set the order of priorities for the district along with providing oversight and ensuring accountability in the governance system. The board has ultimate fiduciary or legal and ethical responsibility to assure value in the products and services provided by the district.

To provide the most value and ensure the fiduciary aspects are followed, each board operates in a transparent manner. With a few narrow exceptions, power district board meetings are open to the public. This transparency adds support to the goals of each board to provide guidance towards the most effective and efficient operation of each district. It could be argued that transparency is more important than any other best practice in governance. There must be adequate accountability of the board to the customers and boards must maintain objectivity.

Further, it is incumbent upon each board to set in place governance structures to ensure the competency and commitment of directors. Each board member needs to have a thorough understanding of their role of fiduciary and they must work with fellow directors for the benefit of the district. Thus, director qualifications and the criteria by which these qualifications are measured should be designed to position the board to provide the best oversight of the business. The board provides oversight of management and holds itself accountable for performance. Governance practices are necessary to provide an avenue of leadership for the board that is separate and distinct from that of management. The duties and responsibilities of both the board and management need to be well spelled out and understood. These practices must create and nurture a culture of integrity, ethics, and corporate social responsibility.

Ultimately, the board must design structure and practices that support the board in deciding upon its priorities, agenda, and information needs to assist and allow the board to focus on strategy and risks associated with the business. Boards must develop their own viewpoints to provide management with meaningful strategic guidance and needed support. Without varying viewpoints, a board may agree itself to failure which serves as a death knell to any organization. With this, the board must contemplate the contributions of each director as well as the evolving needs of the district when determining the composition of the board. The board must ensure that it is well positioned to grow and change and evolve with the district.

That brings us back to local control. The voters decide who will represent them and they decide for how long they will represent them. I don't know of a better way to make sure that the voice of each customer is heard loud and clear, and that public power remains public in both name and deed. For as John Lothrop Motley said, "local self-government is the life-blood of liberty."

# Going wild in the garden

## Why and how to create a wildlife-friendly landscape

Anyone who gardens, or even putters in the yard, knows that the simple act of gardening provides many benefits – fresh air, exercise, stress relief and access to fresh foods to name a few. But they may not realize those simple acts can also help save the world, especially the wild world.

Okay, maybe not the whole wild world, but by using sustainable wildlife-friendly practices, gardeners can have a significant positive impact on the planet and all its interconnected inhabitants, including humankind.

Entomologist and conservationist Doug Tallamy has been exploring and explaining those connections for more than three decades in his job as a University of Delaware professor and researcher. His work, which includes studying issues such as the impact of native versus nonnative plants on interconnected wildlife species (caterpillars and chickadees, for example), led Tallamy to write *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*.

This award-winning book focuses on the whys and hows of gardening for nature and, since its publication in 2007, has made Tallamy a guru in the growing movement toward more nature- and wildlife-friendly gardening. And that movement has never been so important as it is today.

“We are in a global wildlife extinction crisis,” says naturalist and media star David Mizejewski, spokesperson for the National Wildlife Federation’s Garden for Wildlife™ program and author of the popular how-to book *Attracting Birds, Butterflies, and Other Backyard Wildlife*.

“More than a million wildlife species worldwide are endangered,” he says. “In the U.S. alone, some 12,000 animal species are experiencing rapid population declines and one-third of all native wildlife species are at an increased risk of extinction in the coming decade.”



Among these species are beloved yard and garden visitors such as birds and butterflies as well as native bee species, which play essential roles in crop pollination. These statistics are disturbing not just because they represent the loss of irreplaceable wildlife populations, but also their dilemma may be a harbinger for the future of humankind, which also relies on healthy ecosystems.

Humans are also connected to nature cognitively says Michelle Bertelsen, an ecologist with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center in Texas. “We have evolved and learned to think by interacting with the natural world forever and ever and ever,” she says. “That doesn’t stop just because we may live in cities.” And it is a connection many humans have come to appreciate during the past two years of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

“People have sought solace in nature during these



*Plants form the foundation of a wildlife-friendly garden, especially when a diverse selection of densely spaced native plants are used. Every region of the country has plants unique to their local environment. Photograph courtesy of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center*

make a huge difference for the endangered Monarch butterflies and the birds and wild bee species that really need our help.”

“There is a central role that Joe Public can play because Joe Public owns the country,” Tallamy adds, explaining that while public parks, preserves and wilderness areas provide vital habitat for wildlife, they alone cannot save these species. However, on the 78 percent of U.S. land that is privately owned, wildlife-friendly management can have huge impacts on these animals and the overall health of the planet.

That kind of impact can occur anywhere and on any piece of land, from large rural fields to medium-sized suburban yards to tiny urban greenspaces. According to Bertelsen, studies have shown that putting small strips of pollinator habitat between rows or on the edges of agricultural land can greatly benefit pollinators, which in turn benefits the crops. The same can happen in our yards.

“It’s amazing how much impact a small pollinator garden can have,” Bertelsen says. “Even tiny islands [of wildlife-friendly real estate] in cities can help these species out so much. A little bit really does go a long way.” And when numerous people in the same vicinity and eventually across the globe provide wildlife habitats, such as pollinator gardens, the impact grows exponentially.

So what exactly is a wildlife-friendly landscape? According to Tallamy, it’s a landscape that contributes four components to the local ecosystem: it supports a diverse population of pollinators, supports the greater food web, sequesters carbon and protects and manages watersheds. And many of these functions, says Mizejewski, can be accomplished by providing wildlife

tough times,” Mizejewski said, and many found it in their own yards, especially at the peak of COVID-19 shutdowns and stay-at-home orders.

While concerns about and connections to nature are increasing, they are also a source of frustration. “Everybody on the planet requires healthy ecosystems,” Tallamy says. But, he added, when faced with stark statistics about the decline of wildlife and ecosystems “most people feel absolutely powerless. The Earth is huge and what can one person do?”

A lot, agree Tallamy, Mizejewski and Bertelsen, and it all begins in the landscapes that surround us.

“How we choose to manage and care for our own piece of earth is a powerful way to help out these declining populations,” Mizejewski says. “Sure, what we do in our backyards is not going to save polar bears, but it can

**Continued on Page 8**



*Clockwise from top left: Monarch butterflies, one of some 12,000 U.S. wildlife species currently experiencing alarming population declines, benefit greatly from wildlife-friendly gardening practices. Photograph by Val Bugh; courtesy of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center*  
*Plants that produce berries, nuts, pollen and nectar help feed the birds and butterflies that populate our yards. Photograph by Doug Tallamy*  
*A goldfinch feasts on the seeds of a purple coneflower. Photograph by Kathy Diamontopoulos; courtesy of American Meadows*  
*A properly planted and maintained wildlife-friendly landscape can provide all the basic needs of local wildlife. Photograph by Katie Jackson*  
*For wildlife species to survive, they must have sources of food, water, cover and a place to raise their young. Photograph by Doug Tallamy*

## From Page 7

with four basic needs: food, cover, places to raise young and water.

“All wildlife, whether they’re in the wilderness or in our gardens, need these things,” Mizejewski says. As they create a food web, they also create an ecosystem that supports all life in the area. “It’s a circle of life thing.”

It just so happens that the primary foundation of any ecosystem is the very thing that makes a garden a garden – plants. But not just any plants.

“The most important thing (about gardening for nature and wildlife) is to pick the right plants,” Mizejewski says, “and those are going to be plants that are native to your region, plants that have co-evolved with wildlife and that wildlife needs to survive.”

Native plants, in fact, can provide three of the four basic circle-of-life needs – food, shelter and nesting/birthing sites. Just add water and you have a wildlife-friendly habitat.

And going wild doesn’t mean that yards and gardens have to look wild. “It’s a common misperception that a wildlife-friendly or natural garden equals a messy garden,”

says Mizejewski. “You can have a beautiful, magazine photo-worthy garden space that is also extremely beneficial to wildlife. It’s a design choice and there is a continuum.”

That continuum ranges from a formal, manicured look to an informal natural look and everything in between, and it can be accomplished gradually and over time. Taking one small step, such as simply replacing a portion of lawn, which provides little to no support for wildlife, with a small bed of wildflowers or a single oak tree, can make a huge difference. It can set an example for others to emulate.

And Tallamy noted that even folks living in high-rise apartments and concrete jungles without access to so much as a postage-stamp sized patch of land can help by donating to, or volunteering with, conservation groups, public gardens and national, state or local parks. City dwellers can also grow native plants on balconies, rooftops, vacant lots and any open strip of land or help establish wildlife-friendly beds or entire gardens at local schools, community centers or assisted living facilities.

Really, it’s pretty simple, and there’s no doubt that simple acts such as these can result in beautiful landscapes that also help save at least a little part of the world.



# Plant Trees Safely

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

## LOW TREE ZONE

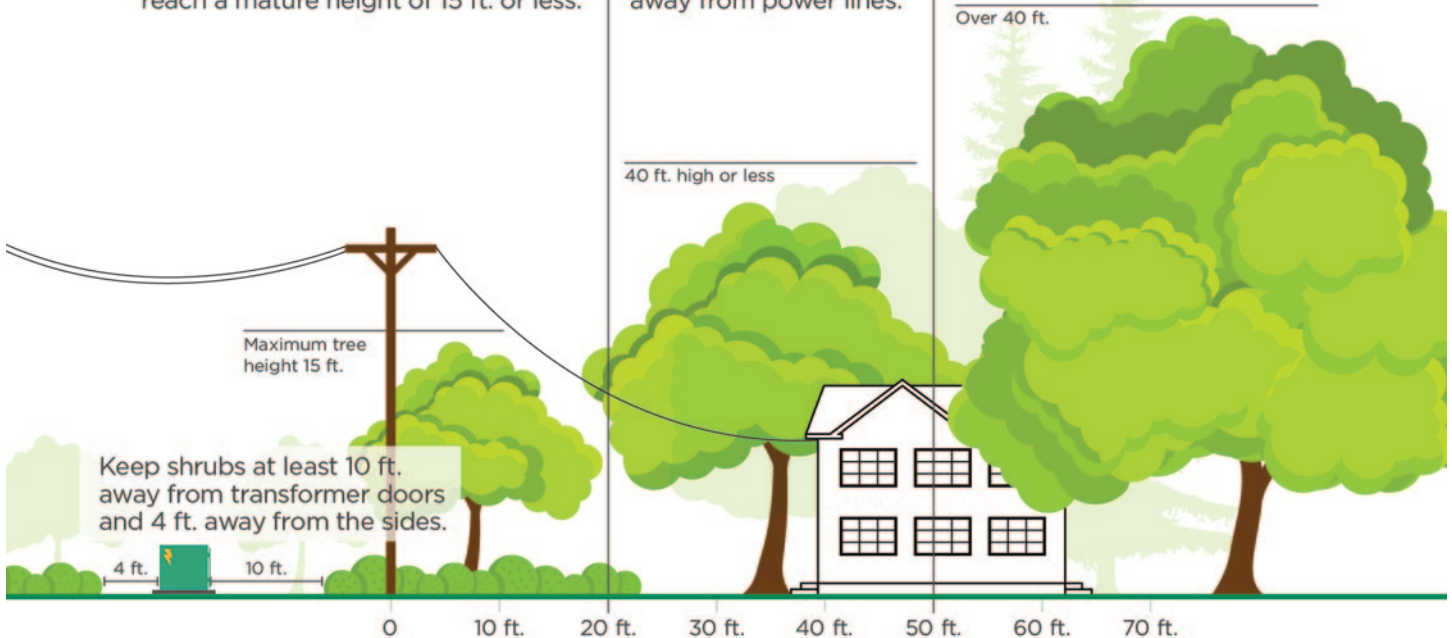
Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

## 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.



## Plan Your Landscape to Save Energy

Solar heat absorbed through windows and roofs makes your air conditioner work harder and gobble up more electricity. But incorporating shading concepts into your landscape design can help reduce this solar heat gain—and your cooling costs.

Shading from trees can reduce surrounding air temperatures as much as 9° F. Because cool air settles near the ground, air temperatures directly under trees can be as much as 25° F cooler than air temperatures above nearby blacktop.

Trees can be selected with appropriate sizes, densities, and shapes for almost any shading application. To block solar heat in the summer but allow much of it in during winter, plant deciduous trees. To provide continuous shade or block heavy winds, use dense evergreen trees or shrubs.

Deciduous trees with high, spreading crowns (leaves and branches) should be planted on the south side of your

home to provide maximum summertime roof shading. Trees with crowns lower to the ground are more appropriate to the west, where shade is needed from lower afternoon sun angles. Trees should not be planted on the southern sides of solar-heated homes in cold climates because branches will block some winter sun.

Although a slow-growing tree may take many years before it shades your roof, it will generally live longer than a fast-growing tree. Also, because slow-growing trees often have deeper roots and stronger branches, they are less prone to breakage by windstorms or heavy snow loads. Slow-growing trees can also be more drought resistant than fast-growing trees.

A 6-foot to 8-foot deciduous tree planted near your home will begin shading windows the first year. Depending on the species, the tree will shade the roof in five to 10 years. If you have an air conditioner, shading the unit can increase its efficiency by as much as 10 percent.

Trees, shrubs, and groundcover plants can also shade the ground and pavement around the home. This reduces heat radiation and cools the air before it reaches your home's walls and windows.



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## Natural Resources Committee Holds Hearing on Public Power Bills

This year's 60-day legislative session is moving quickly. As you read this article the legislative session is more than half done with plans to adjourn in mid-April. Senators are currently wrapping up public hearings on each of the 592 bills that were introduced this year, and full-day floor debate will begin soon.

The NREA had to spring right into action this year. We had several important bills that were introduced on January 19th and scheduled for hearings only one week later. With no prior knowledge of these bills, the NREA quickly had to analyze the legislation, organize our members to take a position, and prepare for the public hearings.

LB 1046 proposed to break each of the state's two largest public power utilities (NPPD and OPPD) into four electoral districts of equal population. As we do currently, each district would continue electing these board members by public ballot on Election Day. The remaining five board members of each utility would be appointed by the governor. LB 1046 would also give the governor the authority to appoint the CEO of each of these public power districts.

If LB 1046 were adopted, the CEO and a voting majority of these boards would be appointed and held accountable by the governor. If the elected members of the board found themselves in a disagreement with the appointed members, the governor's appointments, not the people's representatives would win the vote. We elect our public power utility board members, and they hire a CEO. The CEO is held accountable by the board and the board is held accountable by the people. If passed, LB 1046 would diminish the people's voice on these boards.

A second bill, LB 1058, would require that any public power supplier that retires, permanently shuts down, or substantially alters a baseload generation unit shall pay a severance for five years to those terminated or laid off as a result of the closure and shall continue to pay the plants taxes to the state for ten years or for a total of \$50 million.

LB 1058 attempts to require public power utilities to keep reliable baseload generation plants like coal, nuclear, and natural gas in our state's generation mix. We agree, keeping these sources of generation in our mix is vital to the reliability of our electric system, however, removing


the decision-making authority of our local boards of directors is bad policy.

Making the decision to close a power plant is not a decision that a utility can take lightly. There are many variables a utility must consider before closing a plant. Nebraska's electric generators have federal regulations they must comply with that work to ensure a reliable electric system. There are economic considerations and realities that must be considered when making these decisions. There are workforce concerns, safety concerns, environmental concerns, and many other aspects that a board must consider as they approach such a decision. Under LB 1058 a board could be faced with hundreds of millions of dollars of economic penalties if they believed closing a plant was in the best interest of their customers and the safety of their employees.

The NREA has long been a strong supporter of the current structure of public power and our elected boards of directors. We consistently oppose any attempts to diminish our public power model or reduce the authority of our boards of directors who are accountable directly to Nebraska's consumers. Our public power model works because those individuals that are directly impacted serve on the board and are closest to the decisions they must make.



Although we oppose these bills for the long-term harm they could impose on our public power model, the NREA does recognize it is the intent of the bill introducers to protect public power from the influence of outside money on our board elections. In recent elections, we have watched as environmental groups have poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into public power district board seat elections. Unfortunately, this outside money has been effective and has impacted these boards.

Our public power model should be protected. Diminishing the tenants of public power in an effort to remove the influence of outside money on our board elections will not serve the long-term best interests of Nebraskans. However, as we work to oppose LB 1046 and LB 1058, we ask that you, the consumers, pay special attention to these board seats and vote for candidates that keep electric reliability on top of their policy agendas.



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# LEADING THE WAY



*Photograph by Chelsea Gengenbach*

A new team will lead Nebraska's public power districts and electric cooperatives into the future following the election of officers at the Nebraska Rural Electric Association Annual Meeting held in December 2021.

A.C. "Pat" Hecox, a director for Dawson Public Power District, Lexington, Neb., was elected as the association's new president.

"A friend once told me that we can't live in a vacuum. We should leave the world better than how we found it," Hecox said. "I've volunteered and served on many boards because it is what I feel I should do – be a part of making it better for others."

He plans to use a strategic planning session in March to gather input from directors and managers on the direction of the association into the future.

"We have a real opportunity to make sure the NREA remains relevant to our individual systems in the future and your dollars invested have added value," he said.

Hecox, along with NREA Interim General Manager Rick Nelson and the other members of the executive committee, are making plans to visit many of the NREA member-systems to field comments and ideas about the association.

He was encouraged to get involved with the Dawson PPD board by a late family friend and Dawson PPD Board Member Dale Clark. He came to know former board member Paul Neil, current board member Joe Jeffrey and former general manager Ed Darby and learned more about the district.

"After exposure to the purpose and function of Dawson PPD and the rural electric system, I had a desire to be a part of this organization and was appointed to fill the vacant board seat," he said.

Hecox said he enjoys continuing to learn about the electric industry and public power model in Nebraska.

"Every meeting I go to – whether it's Dawson PPD's monthly board meeting or a regional or a national one – I always learn something new," he said. "Now that I have a more in depth understanding of electric utilities and public power, I realize that Nebraska is a special place. Public power is not for profit. It is locally controlled by people who live within their power provider's service territory. You see and hear that a lot, but the more involved I am the more I understand the value and importance of public power."

It is rewarding to Hecox to help the consumers he represents and to make their dollars count.

"We strive to provide value to our customers beyond electrifying their home," he said.

Hecox and his wife, Deb, have three children and six grandchildren. He enjoys playing golf, shooting sports and welding art.

He replaced Bryan Monahan, a director for Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Corporation, Alliance, Neb., who served as NREA president from 2019-2021.

Joining Hecox as officers for the NREA are Vice President Greg Strehle, a director for Cuming County Public Power District, West Point, Neb., and Secretary/Treasurer Kevin Thomas, a director for High West Energy, Pine Bluffs, Wyo.

## Jerry Chlopek elected NPPD Board Chair

Jerry Chlopek of Columbus was elected as Chair of Nebraska Public Power District's (NPPD) Board of Directors for 2022 following that body's annual election of officers on January 12 in Columbus.

Also elected were Melissa Frelend of Kearney as first vice chair, Ed Schrock of Holdrege/Elm Creek as second vice chair, and Wayne Williams as secretary. NPPD Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Laura Kapustka was elected treasurer.



"I am looking forward to serving as Chair of the board during 2022 and continuing to work closely with our management team and board to provide reliable, low-cost and sustainable energy to our customers," added Chlopek.

Chlopek has served on the NPPD board since 2009. Chlopek worked for Cornhusker Public Power District for more than 40 years, retiring in 2009 as the utility's Operations Manager. A graduate of Genoa High School Jerry served in the U.S. Marine Corps and the Army Reserve.

Chlopek represents Subdivision 9 which consists of Butler, Platte, and Polk Counties.

We all know electricity plays a major role in our everyday lives, and it is a powerful resource that should be respected. Unfortunately, our children often do not understand the dangers of electricity. We encourage you to share electrical safety tips and lessons with your little ones as often as possible. We also understand their attention spans run short, so here are a few creative ways to get them involved.

Depending on the age of your child, consider designating an “electronics deputy.” The deputy should be responsible for pointing out electronics in your home that are not in use and keeping appliances safe from liquids. Reward your deputy for pointing out overloaded outlets or other potentially dangerous situations.

Emphasize the importance of fire prevention with your children, and create a family fire drill plan as an extra precaution. Incentivize your children by rewarding those who followed the plan and made it safely out of the home.

While it is fun and engaging to turn safety into a



*Share electrical safety tips and lessons with your little ones.  
Photograph by Anna Erikson*

game, it is important to ensure your children understand the risks they are facing if they do not practice electrical safety.

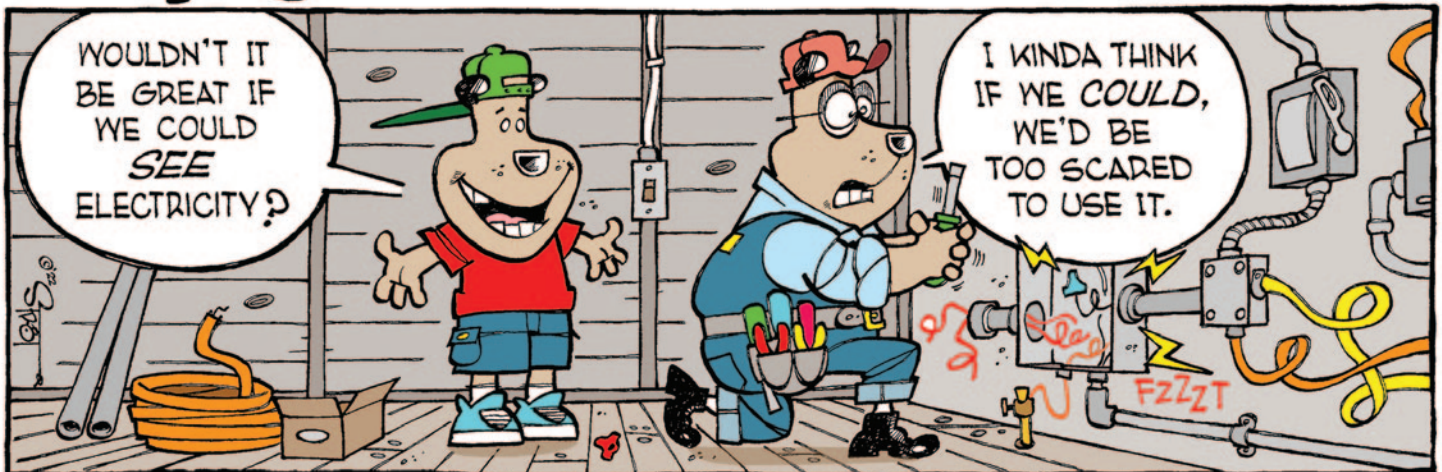
One of the most important safety tips you can give your kids is to avoid any downed power lines. In fact, it is best to avoid power lines, transformers and substations in general. A downed power line can still be energized, and it can also energize other objects, including fences and trees. Make sure your kids understand the potential dangers of coming in contact with a downed power line or low hanging wire. And, if they encounter a downed power line, ask them to tell you or another adult to call the local electric utility.

Here are a few other safety tips you can share with your kids:

- Never put metal objects in outlets or appliances.
- Do not overcrowd electrical outlets.
- Never mix water and electricity.

No matter how you choose to get your kids interested in staying safe around electricity, your local electric utility is here to help.

## Murphy







# Taking Care of Our Neighbors

**By Hayley Jelinek**

Two Rivers Public Health Department, based in Kearney, Nebraska, serving Buffalo, Dawson, Franklin, Gosper, Kearney, Harlan, and Phelps counties in South Central Nebraska, is working hard to make COVID-19 vaccines easy to access in rural areas. TRPHD has been hosting clinics on the road through a mobile clinic or in local community buildings across communities in the district.

Two Rivers collaborates with many community partners to make vaccine clinics possible. Without County Emergency Managers, local hospitals and clinics, pharmacies, local businesses, local non-profit organizations, and volunteers, efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 would not have been as successful.

Two Rivers recommends that you get your COVID vaccine and booster. About 50% of the district's entire population is vaccinated against COVID-19. According to the CDC All steps have been taken to ensure that vaccines are safe and effective for people 5 years of age and older. Getting everyone 5 years of age and older vaccinated can help the entire family, including siblings who are not eligible for vaccination and family members who may be at risk of getting very sick if they are infected. If you already had COVID-19, you should still get a COVID-19 vaccine for added protection. When you are up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccination, you can resume many activities with proper precautions (e.g., mask wearing in indoor public spaces).

As of January 2022, at least 18,000 people in our district have tested positive for COVID-19. This number shows that approximately 20% of our population has experienced this disease at least once. Although most people with COVID-19 get better within weeks of illness, some people experience post-COVID conditions. Post-COVID conditions are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems people can experience four or more weeks after first being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Even people who did not have COVID-19 symptoms in the days or week safter they were infected can have post-COVID conditions. These conditions can present as different types and combinations of health problems for different lengths of time.

Local Health Departments, including Two Rivers Public Health Department recommend using multiple layers of prevention to reduce the risk of infection, severe illness, hospitalization and death, including:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your mouth when you cough using a tissue or the bend of your elbow
- Avoid crowded places and close contact with anyone who has a fever or cough
- Stay home if you feel unwell
- Seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing—but call first
- Get information from trusted sources

*Source: World Health Organization*

**Q** : My HVAC system is a mystery to me. What can I do to maintain it and keep my home comfortable year-round?

**A** : For most people, the inner workings of the HVAC system are out of sight, out of mind. The system is ignored until something goes wrong.

Understanding the basics of how a heating and cooling system works will help you create a more efficient, comfortable living space. To get started, let's go over how it works.

If you have a forced air system, you have ducts. A forced air system consists of the equipment that heats or cools the air and the ductwork that moves it around the home. Your furnace, or air handler, has a fan inside that pushes the heated or cooled air through the supply ducts into the rooms. The return ducts bring air back to the furnace to be heated or cooled again and sent back through the home.

This continuous loop of supply and return is susceptible to inefficient practices and leakage.

Here are some steps you can take to keep your system running efficiently and maintain a comfortable living space.

### **Check your vent dampers.**

Make sure the air you paid to heat or cool is freely moving through the home.

I wish vents were made without dampers because the feature creates the misconception they should be closed. Closing registers does not save energy. It can cause your system to work harder, shortening its lifespan and increasing duct leakage.

If you don't do anything else after you read this, do check that your supply register dampers are open and not blocked by furniture or rugs throughout your home. This is easy to do and costs nothing.

### **Seal your ducts.**

If your ductwork travels through an attic, crawl space or other unconditioned—not heated or cooled—space, it could have holes, cracks or gaps that cause duct leakage.

This wastes energy and money by heating or cooling spaces you don't use.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates 20% to 30% of the air moved through duct systems is lost due to duct leakage. You could have the most efficient heating or cooling unit available, but if your ducts leak, you are wasting energy.

In addition to wasted energy, leaky ducts can cause air-quality issues. Leaks in the return ducts can pull air into the ducts from surrounding spaces, through the furnace and then deliver it into the home. This can introduce dust, dirt, insulation particles and other gross stuff that is in your attic, crawl space or walls.

Sealing ducts can be difficult because they are hidden behind the walls, floor and/or ceiling. Attics and crawl spaces can be hard places to work. You can hire a professional to test your duct system for leakage with specialized equipment and seal your ducts.

If you seal ducts yourself, do not use duct tape. I know it is hard to believe, but duct tape dries out quickly and loses its adhesion. Seal with metal tape or duct mastic specifically designed for the job.

### **Change your filter.**

The filter is on the return side of the duct system. It could be in the return registers or in the furnace. Checking your system's filter regularly and replacing it when dirty can help you improve your heating and cooling efficiency.

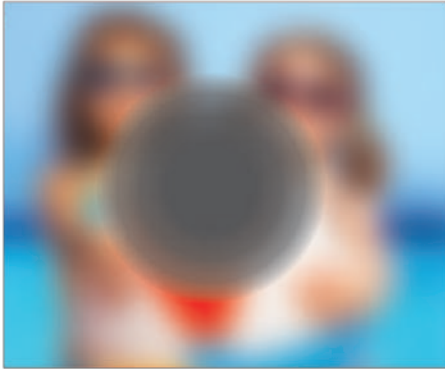
When it comes to filters, my philosophy is buy cheap and replace often. I don't know about you, but I have a much more difficult time throwing away a \$20 filter than a \$5 filter. Save by buying filters in bulk or set up auto ship for every three months.

In most cases, filters are designed to protect the furnace, not improve air quality. If you are worried about your home's air quality, getting the ducts cleaned and sealed can help. Add an air purifier if you need additional air filtration. Look for Energy Star-rated models.

Now that you know the inner workings of your HVAC system and what it needs to run efficiently, you can improve and maintain the comfort in your home year-round.

# Advanced Technology Allows Macular Degeneration Patients To See Again

*And Allows Many Low Vision Patients To Drive Again*



*A scene as it might be viewed  
by a person with age-related  
macular degeneration*



*Same scene of Grandchildren  
as viewed through telescope  
glasses.*

For many patients with macular degeneration and other vision-related conditions, the loss of central visual detail also signals the end to one of the last bastions of independence - driving. Nebraska optometrist, Dr. Robert Stamm is using miniaturized telescopes which are mounted in glasses to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration and other eye conditions.

“Some of my patients consider me their last chance or people who have vision loss” said Dr. Stamm, one of only a few doctors in the world who specializes in fitting bioptic

telescopes to help those who have lost vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and other eye diseases.

Imagine a pair of glasses that can improve your vision enough to change your life. Bioptic telescopes may be the breakthrough in optical technology that will give you back your independence. Patients with vision in the 20/200 range can many times be improved to 20/50.

Bioptic telescopes treat both dry and wet forms of macular degeneration as well as other vision limiting conditions.

While there is currently no cure, promising research is being done on many fronts. “My job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning” says Dr. Stamm “Even if it’s driving”.

“The major benefit of the bioptic telescope is that the lens automatically focuses on whatever you’re looking at,” said Dr. Stamm. “It’s like a self-focusing camera, but much more precise.”

For more information and to schedule an appointment today, call:

**Robert Stamm, O.D.**  
**Low Vision Optometrist**  
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of Low Vision Specialists**

# Peanut Protein to Power Your Day

Give your family meals a powerful boost with better-for-you recipes that pack a protein punch. Revamping the at-home menu with nutrition in mind can still include delicious dishes.

Adding a nutrient-rich powerhouse like peanuts as a key ingredient in meals throughout the day makes it easier to zero in on health goals. In fact, peanuts rise to superfood status by delivering 19 vitamins and minerals plus 7 grams of protein per serving.

When it's time for fueling up the family at the dinner table, pair Thai Chicken and Pork Skewers with Brussels Sprouts with Peanut Chipotle Vinaigrette for a protein-packed meal.

Find more nutritious family-friendly recipes at [gapeanuts.com](http://gapeanuts.com).



## Thai Chicken and Pork Skewers

- 1 tablespoon minced ginger
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 cups creamy peanut butter
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon chili oil
- 1/2 tablespoon lime juice
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 1 1/2 pounds pork tenderloin

In mixing bowl, combine ginger, garlic, peanut butter, broth, soy sauce, chili oil, lime juice, honey and cilantro. Mix well and season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Cut chicken and pork into strips and thread onto skewers. In non-metal container, marinate meat in half of peanut butter sauce 1-2 hours in refrigerator. Reserve remaining sauce for dipping.

Heat oven to broil.

Broil skewered meats until done, turning once. In pot, bring remaining sauce to boil and serve warm as dipping sauce.



### Brussels Sprouts with Peanut Chipotle Vinaigrette

- 2 pounds Brussels sprouts, halved
- peanut oil
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons water
- 3 teaspoons champagne vinegar
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1/8 teaspoon chipotle chili powder
- 1 pinch kosher salt, plus additional, to taste, divided
- orange or mandarin segments, for garnish
- fresh orange or mandarin juice, for garnish
- crispy fried shallots, for garnish
- crumbled French feta, for garnish
- chopped fresh mint, for garnish

Preheat air fryer to 400 F. Lightly brush Brussels sprouts with peanut oil and place in fryer basket. Cook 10-15 minutes, shaking halfway through.

In small bowl, whisk peanut butter, water, champagne vinegar, honey, chipotle chili powder and 1 pinch salt until well combined.

Once cooked, remove Brussels sprouts from air fryer and place in bowl. Toss in chipotle peanut vinaigrette until well combined. Season with salt, to taste.

Garnish with orange segments, orange juice, crispy fried shallots, feta and mint.

### Reuben Meatloaf

- |                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 lbs. ground beef        | 1 can sauerkraut, rinsed and drained |
| 2 cups soft breadcrumbs   | 1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded         |
| 1 egg, slightly beaten    | 1/4 cup sour cream                   |
| 2 tablespoons ketchup     | 1 tablespoon yellow mustard          |
| 3/4 teaspoon salt         |                                      |
| 1/4 lb. pastrami, chopped |                                      |

Combine beef, breadcrumbs, egg, ketchup, and salt in bowl, mix lightly. Combine sauerkraut, 3/4 cup cheese, pastrami, sour cream, and mustard. Pat out one-third of the meat mixture to form an oval 9 inches long in a baking dish. Spread with one half of the sauerkraut mixture. Repeat layers of meat and sauerkraut mixtures; meat should be the top layer. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 60 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and bake for 5 minutes more.

**Wilma Schock, Norfolk, Nebraska**

### Potatoes Au Gratin

- |                                       |                          |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 medium potatoes, sliced             | 1 medium onion, chopped  |
| 1 (10 oz.) can cream of mushroom soup | 1 cup cheese, shredded   |
| 4 tablespoons sour cream              | salt and pepper to taste |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Arrange sliced potatoes and onions in large casserole dish sprayed with non-stick cooking spray. In small mixing bowl, combine soup with sour cream. Use a hand beater to mix it well. Add salt and pepper and pour mixture over potatoes. Sprinkle with cheese on top. Bake covered for 1 hour.

**Sue Killinger, Wolbach, Nebraska**

### Kentucky Pecan Pie

- |                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup white corn syrup              | 1/3 teaspoon salt             |
| 1 cup dark brown sugar              | 1/3 teaspoon vanilla          |
| 1/3 cup butter or margarine, melted | 3 whole eggs, slightly beaten |
|                                     | 1 heaping cup pecan halves    |

Combine syrup, sugar, salt, vanilla and mix well. Add slightly beaten eggs, pour into 9-inch unbaked pie shell. Sprinkle pecan halves over mixture. Bake in preheated 350-degree oven for 45 minutes.

**Marilyn Meier, Pierce, Nebraska**

### Wanted: Grandma's recipes The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

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**Mail:** Nebraska Rural Electric Association, *Nebraska Magazine* Recipes, P.O. Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501 • **E-mail:** Tina Schweitzer at [ttschweitzer@nrea.org](mailto:ttschweitzer@nrea.org).

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