



They're baaaack...

You can start looking for purple martin scouts anytime after the first week of April. The rest of the colony will begin arriving in May. Whether you are fortunate enough to have a colony rests with these handsome fellows or you have to attract them with a little help, there are some things you can do to increase your chances. Here are some tips to help you encourage a backyard colony:

- * Place your martin house in an open area where birds have clear access from all sides.
- * Never place the house where trees are closer than 30 feet.

- * Martins like to perch on utility wires near their house.

- * Houses near open water appear to have added appeal, but it's not essential.

- * Paint your martin house a light color to reflect the sun's heat. White is commonly used.

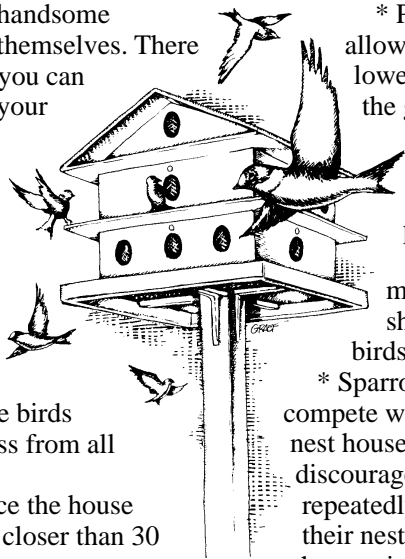
- * The height of the pole on which the house is mounted is important. A 12-15 foot pole is high enough in most open locations. If buildings are nearby, 16-18 feet is better.

- * Poles should allow you to easily lower the house to the ground for winter storage, cleaning, repairing and painting.

- * Put your martin house up shortly before the birds arrive.

- * Sparrows and starlings compete with martins for nest houses, but you can discourage them by repeatedly destroying their nests. This will not cause the martins to abandon the house if you do the job with reasonable speed and care.

For more information on martins including house plans and mounting pole plans, pick up *Shelves, Houses and Feeders for Birds and Mammals*, RP 338 (\$4) from the Extension office. (SE)

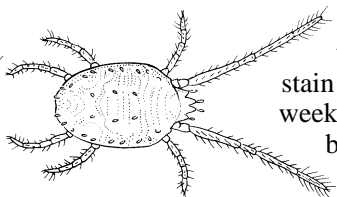


Invasion of the clover mites!



In the springtime, many people report that tiny, reddish 8-legged mites invade their homes usually coming in through cracks and crevices. Last fall, these mites (called clover mites) moved into the cracks and crevices around windows, doors and siding to find protected places to overwinter. When temperatures get warm in April, they become active and find their way into houses. As their name suggests, clover mites feed on clover plants and grasses. They will not survive inside the home. They cannot do much damage to houseplants. Occasionally, clover mites bite people trying to find something to eat or drink, but these tiny mites are not blood feeders.

The best way to control these small pests is to use a vacuum cleaner and remove them from window areas and other entry points. Be careful not to smash them on draperies and other fabrics because they leave a reddish mark that will stain the fabric. If you do nothing, within a week or two, clover mites will disappear because there is no food inside your home. (BPO)



Insect flavor of the month

Grasshoppers, termites and grubs are not typical American cuisine, but many cultures eat insects with great relish. What do bugs taste like? Here is a sampling...

- Raw termites taste like pineapple and cooked termites have a delicate, vegetable flavor.

- Grubs (which are larvae) of palm weevils taste like beef bone marrow.

- Fried agave worms (canned in Mexico) taste like sunflower seeds.

- Diving beetles (available in Chinatown in San Francisco) taste something like clams.

- Fried grasshoppers taste like sardines.

- French-fried ants (imported from Colombia) taste like beef jerky.

- A praying mantis, fried over an open fire, tastes like shrimp and raw mushrooms.

Hazardous household waste collection

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department will hold household hazardous waste collections again in 1996. If you have any hazardous waste, keep it in the original container with the label intact. Open, leaking or rusted containers should be placed in an airtight container and clearly labeled. There will be six collections this year—one in April and May, two in June, and one in August and October. Watch future NEBLINE issues for later dates and locations.

Saturday, April 13, 1996

Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department
3140 N Street,
South Parking Lot
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



Saturday, May 11, 1996

State of Nebraska Laboratories
3703 South 14th Street
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

These collection dates are for household hazardous waste from residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County only—NO Businesses.

Items that will be accepted are: pesticides (weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powders, and flea and tick products), PCB containing items (old fluorescent lamps and small capacitors from old radios, motors and TVs), solvents (mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, varnishes, and stains) and items containing heavy metals such as mercury. (LB)

Landscaping for the birds

Mary Jane McReynolds
Extension Assistant

Interest in songbirds is growing every year. If you would like to attract songbirds to your property, think carefully about the trees, shrubs and other plants that will make up your landscape. Careful landscape planning and plant selection will help you create an attractive, functional landscape for both people and birds.

Many bird species nest or migrate through Nebraska. These migrant birds may stop for a day or two during their migration if they find your property attractive. Do not forget about the birds that stay through winter. They add interest to the winter landscape, and are more likely to visit your property if you design and plant the landscape with birds in mind. Bird feeders and bird baths will increase your ability to attract a variety of

birds year-round.

Landscape plantings can make your property attractive to birds in several ways. Plants provide year-round shelter from predators and harsh weather. Plants provide safe nesting sites and a safe place to rear young. Landscape plants supply food for birds in the form of fruit, seeds and nectar. Many birds also find landscape plantings a convenient place to hunt for insects.

When you select trees, shrubs and vines, consider their landscape value for both you and the birds. Use plants with good summer and fall foliage, attractive flowers, colorful fruit, interesting branching patterns, and attractive bark. You should also consider maintenance. For example, you will want to avoid plants with pest problems that require frequent or regular pesticide sprays to control.

With these tips in mind, here are some excellent landscape



trees, shrubs and vines to attract birds in Nebraska.

Evergreen trees are important because they provide year-round cover for birds. Some of the better large evergreen trees are white pine, Scotch pine, hemlock, eastern red cedar and spruce. Small- to medium-scale evergreen trees include arborvitae and junipers.

Medium to large deciduous trees known for attracting birds include the service berry, maple, ash, cherry, plum and many varieties of flowering crabapple. There are also many flowering shrubs that will attract birds. Some of the best include dogwood, sumac, viburnum, elderberry and honeysuckle.

Good vines for birds include bittersweet and Virginia creeper.

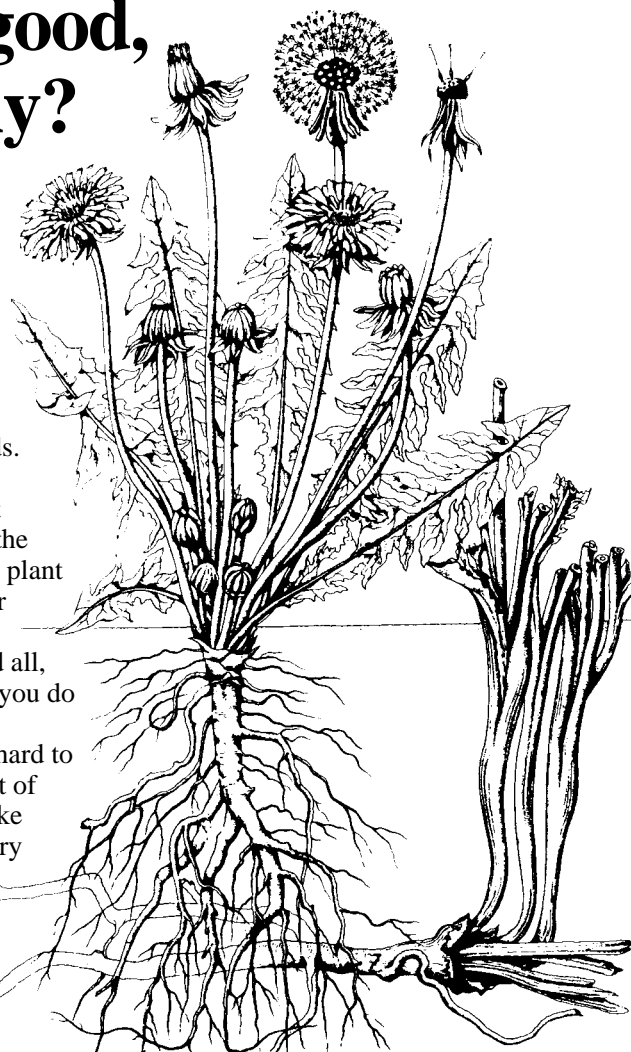
Dandelions; the good, the bad or the ugly?

Dandelions bloom throughout the summer, but they are one of the earliest blooming weeds because they have a well established taproot.

If you want to rid your lawn of dandelions without using a herbicide, arm yourself with a long-handled weed fork or a weed popper and go after your dandelions with confidence. It is true that dandelions are painfully persistent. Their long taproots are hard to pull and small pieces left behind will regenerate into new weeds. But, they are not invincible. The key is to attack them when they are blooming because their root reserves are low. If you dig out 4 to 5 inches of the root, you have a better than 80% chance that the plant will not have enough strength to send up another shoot.

A weed popper pulls out the plants, roots and all, with a stomp. A long-handled weeding fork lets you do the job while standing.

At some point, you may decide that it is too hard to get rid of the dandelions, but you need some sort of mental justification why it is okay to let them take your lawn. Did you know that dandelions are very important spring-blooming plants for honeybees? They collect large amounts of pollen that is an important protein source for their brood during this time of the year when the colony is growing rapidly. Dandelions are also a source of nectar that the bees use to make honey. However, dandelion honey is not as tasty as the honey of some other plants—that is, to humans. I am sure that the bees find it delicious. (BPO)



The root of the problem.