

## Ten steps to good gardening

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**7. Mulch.** Consider using black plastic to control moisture loss and weeds for warm season crops like tomatoes, peppers and vine crops. All porous mulches like straw, leaves, sawdust or compost will give the same mulching results as black plastic, except they will lower the soil temperature or at least prevent it from increasing as the days warm up in the spring. Such materials are best applied to warm season crops later in the season. They present no problem to the cool season crops after the seedlings emerge.

**8. Compost.** Work compost into the soil as soon as possible after the final harvest. This will promote decomposition of

organic matter. If the plant material is diseased, it is better to discard it and not add it to the compost pile. This reduces the chance of disease carryover to the next seasons crop, especially with soil borne diseases.

Composting plant material will produce a usable product for the next years gardening season. Elevated temperatures in the compost pile will kill many weed seeds and leaf diseases.

**9. Control weeds.** Perennial weeds near gardens often harbor insects, viruses and disease in the spring. Dense weeds in the garden also rob crops of moisture, light and nutrients. Eliminate young weeds with shallow cultivation. Never allow weeds



## Grain stubble rental rates

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additional expense and management to control.

What is the value of the plant nutrients that are removed by grazing? If the land is being grazed, some of the carbon, nitrogen and other minerals contained in the leaves and shucks will be utilized for animal growth and maintenance and therefore are lost from the plant/soil system. An advantage to grazing over machine harvesting forage is that much of the nutrient content in the stover is returned to the field in the manure.

It is this author's opinion that when downed grain is present in the field, in general, the value of the nutrients lost is generally offset by the benefit of reducing volunteer plants next season. The value of the nutrients lost by grazing stubble is therefore not a big factor when setting a fair rental rate. The

major consideration is the value of the stover as a marketable product to be sold as a part of the income from the crop. The "fair" rental rate therefore basically becomes whatever the market will bear.

A final consideration must be mentioned. Stubble fields can be quite variable in terms of pounds of stover per acre and in terms of the amount of grain left in the field. There can also be much variability on how well animals utilize the residues that are present in the fields due to weather factors. In addition, the condition of fences and the availability of water can vary greatly from field to field, making some fields more desirable than others from the renters point of view.

Given the variability between fields and weather conditions, probably the fairest way to rent stubble fields is to



## Meet that 5 A Day resolution with these ideas...

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•Add a can of drained chickpeas or other beans to a green salad—easily done, even if you're short on time.

•Check out the ever-expanding frozen vegetable section of the supermarket for dinner ideas. Try baby peas or baby corncobs, or carrots with pearl onions.

•Add drained, canned fruit to flavored gelatin. It's a classic.

•Serve roasted vegetables on top of pasta, brown rice, or couscous, and add a sprinkle of Parmesan or low-fat feta cheese.

•Make an easy fruit sauce for meat by simmering fresh or canned apple or pear slices with low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth and sliced onion. When the mixture has reduced, the fruit slices are soft, and the onion slices are translucent, serve with baked pork or chicken.

•Toss steamed vegetables with some lemon or orange zest. To zest a lemon or an orange,

grate it lightly, just to get the colored part of the peel. (Avoid the white pith, which tastes bitter.)

•Add fresh, frozen or canned vegetables to your favorite canned soups before heating to make them more of a meal. Or add canned beans, which also count as a 5 A Day serving.

### For Snacks and Drinks:

•Try some low-sodium vegetable juice with a shot of hot sauce, a sprig of celery, and a sprinkle of pepper for a non-alcoholic party alternative.

•Try a bowl of red and green apple slices (sprinkled with lemon juice to prevent browning), served alongside low-fat vanilla yogurt sprinkled with cinnamon, for dipping. It might help keep you away from high-fat holiday leftovers.

• Freeze grapefruit or pineapple juice in an ice-cube tray, and use these tangy cubes

to flower and set seed, because this will only keep the cycle going from generation to generation. Avoid using herbicides for weed control in the home garden.

**10. Control disease and insects.** There are many fungicides and insecticides available to control pests in the garden. The products may be purchased separately or combined as a general purpose mixture. It is very important to first accurately identify the problem and then select the correct pesticide to control that problem. Most materials are specific for what they will control and timing of the application in relation to the problem is also critical. (MJM)

pay on a head-per-day basis.

That way, the amount the renter pays is more or less based on the amount of feed that is available and on the openness of the weather.

Surveys have been conducted by university farm management specialists to determine the prevalent rental rates for stubble grazing. The latest survey was done five years ago. In the 1993 survey, the average rate for six southeast Nebraska counties was \$0.27 per head per day. At \$0.27 per head per day, the monthly rate would be \$8.10 per full grown cow or the equivalent. This compares, quite favorably, with summer pasture rental rates of \$21.70 per animal unit month (1000 lb cow with calf at side) making stubble grazing probably the least expensive feed source all year for the animal owner. (TD)

to add zip to a pitcher of orange juice. Or make cranberry cubes for a pitcher of apple juice.

### For Dessert:

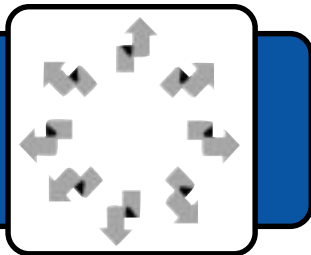
•Cozy up on a dark, winter evening by drinking warm apple cider with mulling spices. (Mulling spices are available in the spice section of your grocery store; otherwise, simply add cinnamon and nutmeg.)

•Make a quick, guilt-free 5 A Day Peach Melba. In the blender, puree a package of frozen raspberries with 2 teaspoons vanilla extract; strain seeds, if desired. Place canned peach halves in a bowl, warm in the microwave for 30 seconds, and serve in individual bowls with low-fat vanilla yogurt and the cold raspberry sauce.

• Alternate drained canned fruit and low-fat yogurt in a tall, iced glass for a low-fat parfait.

Source: Adapted from information provided by the National Cancer Institute (AH)

## Miscellaneous



### Winter care of houseplants

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ing frequency. Ferns prefer an evenly moist soil and should be watered frequently. Cacti and succulents, on the other hand, should not be watered until the potting soil is completely dry. The majority of houseplants fall between these two groups. Most houseplants should be watered when the soil is barely moist or almost dry to the touch. When watering houseplants, water them thoroughly. Water should freely drain out of the bottoms of the pots. If the excess water drains into a saucer, discard the water and replace the saucer beneath the pot.

Houseplants need to be fertilized periodically when actively growing in the spring and summer. Fertilization is generally not necessary during the winter months because most plants are growing very little or resting. Indoor gardeners can begin to fertilize houseplants in March or April as growing conditions improve and the plants resume growth. Fertilizers are available in numerous forms: liquids, water soluble powders, tablets, spikes, etc. Regardless of the fertilizer type, carefully read and follow label directions.

Dust and grease often accumulate on the leaves of houseplants. The dust and grease not only makes them unattractive, it may slow plant growth. Cleaning houseplants improves their appearance, stimulates growth, and may help control insects and mites. Large, firm-leaved plants may be cleaned with a moist soft sponge or cloth. Another method is to place the plants in the shower or tub and gently wash the leaves. Be sure to adjust the water temperature before placing the plants under the shower head. (MJM)



### Farm tractor, combine fires cost millions annually

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and free of leaks.

When checking the oil and performing daily maintenance, quickly scan any exposed electrical wiring for damage or signs of deterioration. Remove/replace any worn or malfunctioning electrical components with proper parts from your dealer. Fuses that are blowing, or circuits intermittently cutting out are good signs of a short or loose connection in the electrical system. The arcing electrical wires on farm machinery will generate extremely high temperatures.

Also watch for worn bearings, belts and chains. A badly worn bearing can glow red hot. Any rubber belts subjected to intense heat from a worn part can burst into flames.

The best source of property protection is a fully charged 10-pound ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher. Keep one mounted in the cab, and one where it can be reached from the ground. Check your extinguishers periodically, paying special attention to the pressure gauge.

There are fully automatic fire detection and extinguishing systems on the market that use sensors to detect the heat of a fire in the early stages of growth. These systems use specially placed nozzles to blanket the affected area with dry chemical.

If a fire does break out, quickly shut off the engine, grab the extinguisher, get out and get help. Shutting off the engine can sometimes help to reduce the size of the fire and subsequent damage. If you forget to grab the extinguisher, don't go back for it unless the fire is extremely small or confined to an area well away from the cab.

Approach any fire with extreme caution. Even a small fire can flare up dramatically as doors, hatches or other areas are opened. These types of fires are extremely dangerous when liquid fuels are involved. If possible, use the extinguisher's flexible hose to shoot the chemical from a safe distance at the base of any flames seen.

Source: Bobby Grisso, Ph.D., biological systems engineering specialist, NU/IANR (WS)



### When income drops and expenses keep coming

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• Develop a list of resources such as the food bank or clothing closet. Investigate eligibility requirements for public and private assistance such as food stamps, reduced school lunches and heating assistance. Be sure to add recycling and resale stores as potential places to help meet emergency needs.

• Write a list of ways to add income. Do you have assets to rent or sell? Do you have a skill you could sell? To sell or rent something, consider community bulletin boards, radio call-in shows, want ads in the "penny shopper," garage/yard sales and consignment shops.

• Arrange to continue health insurance coverage. In times of stress, health insurance is even more important.

• Negotiate to lower the cost of vehicle insurance. Drop unnecessary coverage. Arrange smaller but more frequent payments.

• Put the credit cards away. Try not to use them unless necessary.

• If you can't make the minimum payment on a credit card, call the company and arrange for reduced payments. Sending a reduced payment (as long as it's something) keeps you off the delinquent list of some credit card companies.

Your local Cooperative Extension office has additional information of cutting family living costs. Ask for the NebFact series on "Cutting Family Living Expenses." (LJ)