

The Acreage Owners Expo



Acreage: A rural property site of one to 20 acres used as a rural living environment.

A special place in the country is often a long-awaited dream. For many it communicates freedom, open space, clean air, and unique opportunities to enjoy hobbies, nature, and quiet living at its best. For others it is a constant challenge of providing those necessities of life that were supplied by someone else in the city.

In response to an increase in requests for information regarding acreage development in Lancaster County, the City-County Planning Department conducted a study of residential land use in Lancaster County outside of the City of Lincoln. The study found there were 9,526 residential parcels of land. Of the 9,526 residential parcels, 29 percent were acreages. It was also found less than four percent of the acreage residents report income from their property.

With the increase of acreages throughout the county, the extension office found itself responding to basic, yet very important, rural living questions. Some of the new country residents wondered if they had made the right choice to move to the country.

Home sites outside an urban community requires a source of safe drinking water. Proper care and maintenance of the water source ensures a safe and reliable water supply. Nobody regularly tests a rural water supply. This needs to be done by the property owner.

Strong winds against even an insulated building can reduce the heating or cooling system's efficiency. Reducing air infiltration will increase heating or cooling efficiencies. This usually requires the installation of a windbreak and other landscape plantings.

Rural living puts added responsibility on how people handle waste materials. Many of the conveniences associated with waste removal and recycling in urban settings are not always available in the country. It is imperative to have a properly designed and functioning septic system. Regular septic system maintenance again is the responsibility of the property owner.

Many acreages include more property than is utilized for the home site and lawn. This encourages problems with weed control and volunteer trees and shrubs. Proper management of these areas encourages wise stewardship of the land and makes the rural property a pleasant living environment.

People move to the country to participate in activities that improves their family's quality of life. These activities include gardening, landscaping, livestock care, and development of wildlife habitat.

Acreage owners need basic information associated with living on their own in the country with small scale environmental concerns; animal production and care; and fruit or vegetable marketing. One source of this information is the 2001 Acreage Owners Expo. The Expo will be August 18, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the University of Nebraska Agriculture Research and Development Center near Mead, Nebraska. The cost of the program is \$15 for the first family member plus \$5 for each additional family member. Children under 12 are admitted free. Registration includes a packet of information for each family registered. (DJ)

Join us on Saturday, August 18, 2001

from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Agricultural Research and Development Center

Research and Education Building

near Mead, Nebraska



"Learning to live in your rural environment"

Names(s) _____

Address _____

Town _____ Zip _____

Phone (W) _____ (H) _____

E-Mail _____

Registration fee enclosed: Number attending ____ x \$15 for first person plus

\$5 for each additional family member. Total \$ _____ (Children under 12 free)

Mail registration form and check payable to UNL Cooperative Extension to:

Acreage Owners Expo

Dodge County Cooperative Extension, 1206 West 23rd Street, Fremont, NE 68025

Acreage Insights



Simplify Lawn Care During Drought

Care and patience makes the difference between a healthy lawn and a brown one, especially when rainfall is short.

Although most people want beautiful, emerald-green lawns, this year isn't the best year to strive for perfection. Over-fertilized and over-watered lawns are "obese" and lack the vigor to thrive under stress. This spells trouble during a drought because the lawn hasn't developed a deep root system. Heavily fertilized lawns also require more water, so homeowners may want to wait until fall to fertilize.

Look at the plants and soil and evaluate whether irrigation is necessary. Ornamental plant leaves tend to curl and turn off-colored if the plant needs moisture. Dry turf grass looks blue or gray and doesn't spring back when stepped on. Soil type also should be considered. Sandy soils absorb water quickly, but do not retain moisture; clay soils absorb water slowly, but retain moisture longer.

Letting grass grow longer during the summer allows the turf to develop a deeper root system. Mow Kentucky bluegrass at 2.5 inches and fescue at 3 to 3.5 inches. Make sure the grass isn't over-watered. Kentucky bluegrass needs about 1.5 inches of moisture per week, but fescue needs only enough water to keep it from wilting.

New plants need more care than established ones. Water should be applied to new turf grass often so moisture is available in the top quarter-inch of soil. Newly seeded grass may be watered up to three times a day. Placing organic mulch, such as straw, over the grass seals in moisture and decreases the amount of moisture needed. The best bet may be to use sod rather than seeded grass because sod has a developed root system. During dry years, it's best to cut back on landscaping.

There are several ways

See **DROUGHT** on page 11

Mulching Can Make Gardening Easier

Mulching isn't a new concept, but it seems to be a growing interest as gardeners look for ways to reduce labor by conserving water, moderating soil temperature and controlling weeds.

Mulch is an organic or inorganic material applied to the soil surface during the growing season or applied over the plant during the dormant season. An important characteristic of mulch is its ability to insulate the plant and roots from the effects of extreme temperature fluctuations. It also can reduce fruit rot by eliminating contact between fruit and soil or splashing water.

Ideal mulches allow water and air to enter and exit the soil. They should be attractive, odor-free and stay in place. Although no single mulch material will meet all these requirements, a mulch should be selected that best suits the needs of your site.

Organic mulches work best. Organic mulches lessen soil compactions, slow down erosion and improve soil texture when later tilled into the soil. Plant material and naturally occurring forest or prairie litter will work. Gardeners can develop their own organic mulches by recycling yard waste, such as chopped or shredded leaves, branches, wood chips, grass clippings, or coarsely ground corn cobs. Be sure mulch is free of debris, such as scrapes of metal or shards of glass. Mulches can be purchased, although they may be

more costly than plant debris generated on-site.

One problem gardeners usually run into is mulching too thick. Peat moss, if applied too thick, can form a water-blocking mat. A one-inch cover will work fine. However, big coarse pieces can be applied up to three inches deep. Mixed wood chips can and usually do include chips that could attract wood-eating insects, so these may not be safe next to a home.

Mulch also can carry other hidden problems. Grass treated with a herbicide can kill vegetable or flower-producing plants and shouldn't be used. Make sure grass clippings have dried, as they are high in water and nitrogen that will readily ferment. Heat and ammonia released in fermentation can injure or kill other plants. Diseased plants in mulch also may be able to transmit their problems, unless the mulch is completely composted first. Rocks, gravel or stones also can work.

Using plant residue for landscape can significantly decrease the volume of waste that flows into our landfills. This is more ecologically friendly and leads to a more self-sustaining landscape.

For more information about mulching your garden or flower beds, see NebGuide G95-1257-A, "Mulches for the Home Landscape." (DJ)