



NEBRASKA'S NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICTS

PROTECTING LIVES. PROTECTING PROPERTY. PROTECTING THE FUTURE.

Woody Florals

Couple Turns NRD Trees into Bradshaw Business

Former NRD Board Member Gary Eberle has a different relationship with trees on his property than most Nebraska farmers. Far from seeing them as a nuisance on a fence line or useful only in a windbreak, Eberle and his wife, Nancy, have cultivated a modest agroforestry business using trees purchased in part through the Upper Big Blue NRD's Conservation Tree Program. Gary also farms 500 acres of no-till corn and soybeans with his son, Kirk, in the Bradshaw area, though he is partially retired from raising row crops and is focused more on the woody florals business.

Woody florals are colorful and highly flexible fresh-cut stems of dogwoods, willows, and other varieties of branches for container and floral arrangements, as well as wreaths and crafts. The Eberles have been part of the Nebraska Woody Florals co-op since 2006. The branches they grow are sold via the co-op to places like Earl May and Mulhall's—throughout Nebraska and beyond.



The Eberles started producing woody florals when they were looking for another source of farm revenue after they transitioned away from raising livestock. They worked with Ken Feather, the longtime manager of the Upper Big Blue NRD forestry department who retired in 2020, to come up with a tree plan for their property. They started with two rows of varieties of willows and dogwoods, eventually adding more as the business grew. Over the past 15 years, they have experimented with different varieties to find what works the best for their operation.

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UPPER BIG BLUE NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
BLUEPRINT





of leaves, the long, thin stems are ideal for basket weaving. However, they've fallen out of favor, explains Gary with a sigh. They recently cut down several of these bushes and replaced them with red and yellow twig dogwood. His affection for the less commercially viable variety is apparent.

The rows of bushy shrubs are punctuated by the less dense plants where stems have already been harvested. Gary explains that with each harvest, the plants expand and send out new shoots. The growth at the center where stems have been harvested will die back, but growth continues around the exterior. The willows are especially prolific growers, adding dozens of new stems and rapidly growing six to ten feet high each year.

They are also growing several varieties of hazelnut trees for the Arbor Day Foundation to determine which grow best in Nebraska, with an eye toward a future market for sustainable biofuels produced in soils not well suited to other crops.

"I love bare-root planting," said Gary as he shows off the approximately 80 trees that he and Nancy currently have growing on the one-acre patch of land near their home. Bare-root trees, like the ones available through the NRD's tree program, tend to grow faster than larger container trees that are available at a nursery, as their root structure is not confined to a compact root ball. Bare-root trees need less time to adjust after planting and typically surpass the size of a more mature container tree in only a few years. They are also much less expensive: a bare-root seedling from the NRD will set you back \$1.18, while a larger tree from a nursery tends to cost over \$100.

Gary and Nancy currently grow three kinds of willow shrubs and three kinds of dogwoods, each with different colors and textures of branches. They harvest in spring and fall, cutting and processing thousands of stems each year. The demand often outpaces the supply, the couple says, but the marketplace is fickle. Gary points out several flame willow shrubs on the perimeter of the tree patch. The flame willows are fast-growing and beautiful, with vibrant foliage and stems. When harvested and stripped

Nancy is in the garage stripping leaves from recently harvested stems and bundling the product for delivery (*photo page 1*). The building is full of buckets of curling, colorful stems towering seven feet high, kept moist and cool to maintain their pliability. Assisted by a friendly barn cat, Nancy gently runs her hand down the stems to remove the leaves and then trims stems to a uniform size. She has set out a collection of wreaths she made from previous years' harvests, some with a traditional Christmas theme, others for spring, summer, and fall. The branches have been twisted together into a hoop and decorated with silk flowers and leaves, ribbon and bows, ready to add festive charm to any door.

Nancy says this business suits them, as Gary manages the planting, growing, and harvesting, and she oversees the final processing and distribution. The couple likes the woody florals business as it doesn't require a lot of labor for most of the year, adds diversity to their operation, and the final product provides a lovely addition to a welcoming home. "Woody plants and shrubs can be planted on ground that does not produce well for conventional farming," said Nancy. "They also are a great addition to buffer strips along stream banks, in windbreaks and alongside living snow fences to buffer winds and collect water. This aids in the productivity and environmental sustainability of the land." ♦♦♦



Nebraska's NRDs: 50 Years of Conservation

Throughout 2022, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) will celebrate 50 years of protecting lives, property and the future.

During the next year, the NRDs will

commemorate breakthroughs and achievements in conservation. "In the past 50 years, NRDs have adapted while facing changes in technology, funding, legislation, agencies and society," said Jim Eschliman,

It's Tree Time!

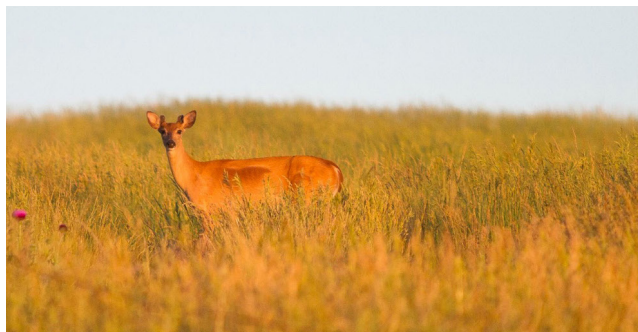
There are hundreds of documented benefits to surrounding yourself, your business, and your community with trees. From physical and mental wellbeing to economic stimulus and crime reduction, planting trees on your property is a simple way to make a big impact. That's why the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District is once again offering its popular Conservation Tree Program this year. The program provides residents of the district with the opportunity to buy bulk seedlings at a low cost for spring planting.

Last year, the Upper Big Blue NRD sold 19,225 trees to be planted in the district. Close to 5,000 of these were machine planted by NRD staff. Machine planting is available for orders of 150 or more and is the ideal way to install a windbreak or other large-scale planting. For these larger orders, NRD staff will provide free consultation services to the property owner to determine where trees will be planted and which varieties to install for best results and to achieve specific goals.

The Conservation Tree Program will collect orders until March 30 and trees will be delivered in April. Each year, some tree species sell out, so those that want a particular type of tree are encouraged to order early. The Upper Big Blue is offering individual species, including shrubs such as Lilacs and American Plum; fruit and nut trees such as Black Cherry and Manchurian Apricot; popular conifer varieties including Colorado Blue Spruce; and deciduous trees including Honey Locust and Silver Maple. The Upper Big Blue NRD also offers small acreage tree packages containing 50 trees for \$55. The packages will include 10 trees each of five species—a great value.



Interested in creating a tree plan for your property? Don't delay! Time is running out to get trees ordered for planting this spring. Call the NRD to set up a time to meet with District Forester Kyle Yrkoski to create a plan for a large-scale planting, or order trees via our Conservation Tree Program (order form on back page). Bare-root trees will be delivered in April, just in time for spring planting. Details at www.upperbigblue.org/trees. ♦♦♦



WANT MORE WILDLIFE?

We can help. The Upper Big Blue NRD offers several programs for habitat enhancement.

Nebraska Association of Resources Districts president. "Nebraska's locally led conservation model has been a successful legacy because of our ability to adapt to the local needs of our communities."

After the devastation of the Dust Bowl, special purpose districts were developed to solve local soil and

water-related problems. But the puzzle of overlapping authorities and responsibilities provided confusion at best.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced legislative bill 1357 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts by July 1972. In

1989, the Middle Missouri Tributaries NRD and the Papio NRD merged to become the Papio-Missouri River NRD, resulting in today's 23 Natural Resources Districts. Today, Nebraska's unique system of locally controlled, watershed-based conservation is widely admired throughout the nation.

Learn more at nrdnet.org. ♦♦♦



Project GROW Winter Workshop Offers New Ideas

From a deep dive into the nitrogen cycle, to advice from Nebraska cover crop experts, to a look at the ag forecast for next year's growing season, the 2021 Project GROW Winter Workshop presented a variety of relevant topics to local producers. Hosted by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, the event offered morning and afternoon breakout sessions for those looking for information on a range of agronomic topics, including those who needed nitrogen management operator certification or continuing education credits for crop advisors.

Speakers and Topics

Ron Jakubowski, precision sales and service agronomist with Aurora Co-Op, presented on the nitrogen cycle, including information about what nitrogen is, how it behaves in the soil, and how timing of application, as well as hybrid selection and precipitation, all influence nitrogen efficiency. Jakin Berns, a specialist with Green Cover Seed, a cover crop business in Bladen, Nebraska, presented on the use of cover crops and how to determine the best mix for specific operations. The Berns family got into the cover crop business after they used grant funding in 2008 to add water sensors and cover crops to test plots on their farm. They discovered quickly that cover crops, especially multispecies mixes, are very efficient at water use and had an immediate impact on soil moisture. They've been promoting the use of cover crops through their business since 2009 for erosion prevention, livestock benefits, and improving soil fertility.

Laila Puntel, assistant professor in the department of agronomy and horticulture at the University of Nebraska--Lincoln, presented on tools for improved nitrogen management. In a time when the cost of

nitrogen fertilizer rising, finding ways to reduce dependence on this input or use it to max efficiency is increasingly important. Puntel discussed technology available that can provide guidance on nitrogen use decisions to prevent over application.

Jacob Fritton, water and agricultural program manager for The Nature Conservancy, gave an overview of programs available to producers in the district that will provide financial and other assistance to implement conservation practices. One of programs Fritton presented was the soil health partnership between the Central Platte and Upper Big Blue NRD, with The Nature Conservancy and other agencies, that is providing funding for cover crops, crop rotation, and no-till practices.

VIDEOS FROM THE EVENT ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT

UPPERBIGBLUE.ORG/PROJECTGROW

Harvey Cool, associate agronomist with BASEF, presented on the benefits of using wheat in a crop rotation to reduce compaction. He gave an overview of a research farm where a variety of crops are grown through

different techniques and his work to improve soil health. Crystal Powers, a research and extension communication specialist with Nebraska Water Center presented on nitrates in drinking water, then led a roundtable discussion with producers about what changes they are already making to address nitrate issues. Some of the suggestions farmers came up with that they would like to try or are already implementing included: cover crops, crop rotation, farming for profit goals instead of yield goals, improving soil characteristics (such as pH and micronutrients), using hybrid technologies that use nitrogen more efficiently, no-till, split application of fertilizer (informed by tissue sampling results), monitoring soil temperature and moisture levels, and

improving irrigation systems. Powers would like to hear from more producers on this topic and can be reached at cpowers@nebraska.edu.

Tim Mundorf, nutrient management lead at Central Valley Ag, walked producers through the intricacies of how to interpret a soil test and how to make decisions based on the data that can improve nitrogen use efficiency. Dr. Jill Clapperton joined the workshop via Zoom to present on how healthy soils produce more nutrient dense food. Clapperton is the CEO of Rhizoterra Inc. and is one of North America's foremost presenters on topics pertaining to soil health and its impact on food production. She was the keynote speaker for Project GROW's 2020 Winter Workshop and presented additional content that is also available online.

Jeremy Milander, assistant extension educator at the University of Nebraska--Lincoln, presented on how the NRDs and other agencies are partnering to stabilize groundwater nitrate in the Bazile Groundwater Management Area. The Bazile Groundwater Management Area is the first federally recognized groundwater focused plan in the nation to address nonpoint source pollution. The area covers parts of four NRDs, requiring extra collaboration to address the issues of nitrate contamination in drinking water for residents. *(More on this topic at nitrateinwater.org.)*

Nebraska State Climatologist Al Dutcher returned to the Winter Workshop again this year to talk about the agricultural forecast for the upcoming growing season. He looked at developing La Niña weather patterns and nationwide drought conditions to make a prediction for the year ahead, suggesting that there will be sufficient moisture in the spring. However, he also warned there are some similarities between current weather patterns and those that led to the intense flooding Nebraska experienced in 2019.

The next Project GROW Winter Workshop will take place in December 2022. If you have suggestions for topics and speakers, please contact the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District. Video from the last three years' Winter Workshops are available on YouTube. ◆◆◆



Try Something New in 2022!

On-Farm Research: Are you a producer who wants to find scientific answers to agronomic questions? Take advantage of our On-Farm Research Program to work with University Extension to design trials and collect data throughout the upcoming growing season.

The Upper Big Blue NRD will provide technical resources along with financial assistance for volunteer producers to offset the cost of soil, water, and plant tissue analysis. Project results are published for other interested producers to review. Past years' results are available online. If you are interested in participating in the On-Farm Research Program, speak to your local University of Nebraska Extension Agent or visit our website. Projects must be approved by the NRD before planting to ensure funding.

Management Practice Incentives: The NRD is offering a new incentive program for producers in portions of the Recharge Lake Watershed, the Beaver Creek Watershed, and some municipal Wellhead Protection Areas. Practices included in this program are cover crops, buffer/filter strips, and land treatment practices. Qualifying producers are eligible for an incentive payment to install these practices.

Nebraska Soil Carbon Project: The Nebraska Soil Carbon Project is a collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Upper Big Blue and Central Platte NRDs, The Nature Conservancy, Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC), Cargill, Target, and McDonald's. Our goal is to team up with 100 producers to install 100,000 acres of new soil health practices on central Nebraska cropland over five years. Farmers who enroll will be compensated for adopting cover crops, no till, and/or diverse rotations.

Visit our website or call (402) 362-6601 to get started. ◆◆◆

Jones Receives First NRD Sponsorship for Water Leaders Academy



Amy Jones, executive director of Prairie Plains Resource Institute in Aurora, is the first recipient of the Nebraska Water Leaders Academy sponsorship from the Upper Big Blue NRD. Jones has been with Prairie Plains for 17 years and was recently named to the top leadership position. Previously, she served as the administrative director, office manager, and development coordinator for the organization.

In a letter of support submitted by Brad Bangs, president of the Prairie Plains Resource Institute Board of Directors, Jones was described as “a strong communicator” with “passion for connecting people of all ages with the land.”

Jones says that she is interested in the Water Leaders Academy for “the opportunity to learn more about water resources in Nebraska and to be a part of conversations regarding our natural resource challenges and opportunities with other leaders from around the state.”

The Nebraska Water Leaders Academy seeks to provide learning opportunities to citizens that focus on cooperative approaches to solving the state’s water issues, both of quantity and quality. Since 2009, cohorts of people from across the state (and a few from beyond Nebraska’s borders) have participated in the year-long program, seeking practical solutions to resource challenges. The program includes six 1.5-day sessions held at various locations across Nebraska, featuring expert faculty, field trips to see Nebraska’s natural resources up close, hands-on educational opportunities, and networking with other professionals.

This training will make Jones a more valuable resource

to the district, as her work with Prairie Plains dovetails neatly with the goals of the Water Leaders Academy and the NRD.

Prairie Plains Resource Institute has been providing high-diversity, local-ecotype prairie restoration services in southeast Nebraska since 1980. The institute owns eight prairie preserves across the state and offers several award-winning summer education programs for youth. “Grasslands provide valuable filtering services to our water resources, and our prairie restoration efforts are often conducted on or near watersheds,” said Jones. “It would be beneficial to hear more about how our services could be offered to a larger audience to help improve water quality issues while enhancing habitat and providing more natural spaces for people to enjoy.”

The sponsorship through the NRD will reimburse Jones for 75 percent (\$1,500) of the cost of her participation in the Nebraska Water Leaders Academy. The purpose of this sponsorship is to provide training to those who may eventually serve on the NRD board of directors or in another local water stewardship or leadership role. The sponsorship opportunity is limited to those who reside in the district (though anyone may apply to the Nebraska Water Leaders Academy). The selected applicant is expected to give a brief presentation to the NRD board of directors upon completing the program.

Applications for the 2023 Nebraska Water Leaders Academy sponsorship through the NRD will be due September 1. Apply at upperbigblue.org/education. ◆◆◆

Burke Scholarship Application Deadline Approaching

Each spring, the board of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District selects two recipients as Burke Scholars. Carrying on the name and legacy of conservationist and former NRD board member Raymond Burke, the students chosen each receive \$2,000 to put toward their higher educational pursuits in natural resources or a related field at a Nebraska college or university. Full details and application are available at upperbigblue.org/education. Applications for 2022 are due March 25 and include three letters of recommendation that must be received by the deadline. ◆◆◆



Thank you!

Employees Recognized for Years of Service

Three employees of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District have recently been recognized for their years of service to the people of the district.

Sylvia Jividen has been a secretary in the Geneva field office for 20 years. **April English** was recognized for her five years as a secretary at the York field office shortly before she left the position to take on a new role with the Farm Service Agency. **Miranda Coffey** started with the NRD in 2016 as a water data assistant and is now a water data specialist. These individuals have been integral to the work of the Upper Big Blue NRD through the years! ♦♦♦



Want to see your name here? We're hiring! Visit upperbigblue.org/employment for details!

BLUEPRINT



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Connect With Us!



Find us on social media, search @UBBNRD
Tell us what you think! Give feedback on the NRD
www.upperbigblue.org/survey





2022 CONSERVATION TREE PROGRAM ORDER FORM

Please select the location where you prefer to pick up your order:

- Upper Big Blue NRD Office (York)
- Adams County NRCS
- Butler County NRCS
- Clay County NRCS
- Fillmore County NRCS
- Hamilton County NRCS
- Polk County NRCS
- Saline County NRCS
- Seward County NRCS

- Each species must be ordered in lots of 25
- Sales Tax is calculated by the county in which the order will be picked up.
- You will be contacted after April 1 to pick up your order.
- The Upper Big Blue NRD will plant orders (within the District's boundaries) of 150 or more for an additional \$1.18/tree. Call **402-362-6601** for assistance creating a planting plan.

Name _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

RESERVE YOUR SEEDLINGS BY MARCH 30

Small Acreage Packages contain 10 each of five species, 50 trees total, for \$55 plus tax--a great value!

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| West Package SOLD OUT | East Package (Low Supply) | Wildlife Package SOLD OUT | Flowering Package |
| • Ponderosa Pine | • Bur Oak | • Chokecherry | • Serviceberry |
| • Rocky Mountain Juniper | • Centennial Cotonestear | • Elderberry | • Red-Osier Dogwood |
| • Bur Oak | • Swamp White Oak | • Woods Rose | • Common Lilac |
| • Chokecherry | • Crabapple | • Golden Currant | • Crabapple |
| • American Plum | • McKenzie Chokecherry | • Red-Osier Dogwood | • Caragana |

Seedling Bundles contain 25 each of a single species and cost \$1.18 per tree (\$29.50 per bundle) plus tax.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Conifers | Deciduous | Fruit & Nut | Shrubs |
| ___ Black Hills Spruce | ___ Cottonwood | ___ Black Cherry | ___ False Indigo* |
| ___ Co. Blue Spruce | ___ Hackberry | ___ Black Walnut* | ___ Golden Currant |
| ___ Eastern Red Cedar | ___ Honeylocust | ___ Bur Oak* | Lilac SOLD OUT |
| ___ Jack Pine | ___ Silver Maple* | Catalpa SOLD OUT | Redosier Dogwood* |
| ___ Norway Spruce | ___ | ___ Crabapple | Serviceberry* |
| ___ Ponderosa Pine | ___ | Hazelnut SOLD OUT | ___ Skunkbush Sumac |
| White Pine SOLD OUT | ___ | ___ Red Oak | |
| | | Swamp White Oak* | |

*Recommended for use in Riparian Forest Buffer Projects along streams.

Your Cost (Number of Small Acreage Packages Ordered x \$55) + (Number of Seedling Bundles Ordered x \$29.50) = \$ _____

Sales Tax (7.5%--Geneva, David City, York) (7%--Clay Center, Hastings, Osceola, Seward, Wilber) or (5.5%--Aurora) _____ / \$ _____ Your Total = \$ _____

PLEASE RETURN WITH PAYMENT TO: Upper Big Blue NRD
319 E 25TH ST
YORK, NE 68476

DATE ENTERED _____ CALLED / MAILED / ONLINE / E-MAIL / WALK-IN _____

DATE PAID _____ CHECK # _____ CASH _____ CC _____ ONLINE _____

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS _____

--NRD USE ONLY--