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Bees at the Schmidt Apiaries.



COURTESY PHOTOS Father-son duo Steve and Jesse Schmidt extract honey from bees they raised together.

What's the buzz?

Beekeepers Steve and Jesse Schmidt say bees are "fascinating creatures"

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Steve Schmidt of Crete and his son, Jesse, began raising bees together more than a decade ago.

They found the activity to be not only a peaceful and productive way to spend time but also became fascinated with the creatures.

Steve decided to take a class on beekeeping through Southeast Community College and asked Jesse if he wanted to take a beekeeping class, too. Little did he know, Jesse was already taking one at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln while working on his undergraduate degree.

The pair then decided to start raising bees together.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, about 75% of fruits, vegetables and nuts grown in the United States are pollinated by bees, and one out of every four foods people eat were pollinated by bees. Steve said the population of bees is dwindling, so he felt it was important to do his part in

boosting it.

At its most, Schmidt Apiaries consisted of 10 hives. However, the Schmidts decided to stop doing farmers markets and therefore downsized to only sell to friends and family. Jesse moved to Bennett a few years ago and took four hives with him. Steve still has one in Crete.

Jesse said he loved learning about bees while preparing to be a beekeeper. There can be 30,000 to 90,000 bees in a colony and there is always just one queen. The queen's job is to lay about 1,000 eggs a day and the drone bees' only focus is on mating with the queen.

The worker bees keep the hive going by collecting pollen and nectar, feeding

the other bees, creating wax and more. Worker bees work so hard in the hive that they only live a few weeks.

"A lot of our food is dependent on bees pollinating them, and it's just a natural cycle. It's a natural thing that God has made that is necessary for the production of food, and they're just incredibly fascinating," Jesse said. "There's just so many different aspects to them, and you can look at them and see thousands of them on the frame. I just find it very interesting. And of course, honey is delicious."

Steve said beekeeping is not really a money maker unless the keeper has

See BEES, page 15



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Living small

Why some are embracing tiny homes for big savings and simpler lives

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
scireporter@sewardindependent.com



IMAGE FROM METRO

“Tiny homes” offer homeowners an option to shrink their housing expenses.

Homes with floor areas of 400 square feet or less are considered “tiny homes,” according to the International Residential Code, and some people are opting for them as a way to shrink their housing expenses and raise their budgets for other activities.

“I think really the draw is living more simplistic and spending less on housing and more on experiences and things like that,” said Joe Schluckebier, real estate agent at Premier Real Estate in Milford.

Some people also enjoy owning tiny homes because the smaller space is easier to clean and more eco-friendly. Many people put their tiny homes on wheels so they can travel with them.

According to Porch’s data collected on Zillow, the average tiny home in Nebraska was \$37,700 in 2021. However, living in a tiny home can lead to feeling cramped and difficulties finding space for storage or hosting guests.

The Sustainable

Development Code said tiny homes began gain-

ing traction more than a decade ago and, although

they are often rare to come across, they have

been steadily increasing in popularity since then.

Schluckebier said he has not seen many tiny homes in Seward County or its surrounding areas.

“In rural Nebraska, people tend to live out here because they like their space a little bit more,” he said. “I don’t know how popular they’d be outside of urban areas, but I’ve wondered if there’s an opportunity here.”

People looking to build tiny homes may face problems getting them approved due to zoning laws in many areas.

“Rurally, you can only have so many houses on a section of land, and in town, you have to have a minimum lot size,” he said. “Things like that with zoning that aren’t really designed for tiny homes. So, I think that’s the first obstacle.

“Somebody would need to break the mold a little bit and do some zoning changing and really start something like that.”

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Pumpkin perfection: cozy up your porch with fall charm

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

When it comes to fall, all self control flies out the window with me. I am a sucker for the autumn hues – love bringing those elements to a porch. It enhances curb appeal and is a chance to be creative. And if you are like me and love the huge pumpkins, it doubles as an arm day carting the haul from the patch to the porch.

Decorating your porch or outdoor space with pumpkins and mums can create a cozy, autumnal atmosphere that makes a great first impression for neighbors and guests. Here are some tips to make the most of these seasonal elements:

1. Vary Pumpkin Sizes and Colors

- Use a mix of small, medium, and large pumpkins to create depth and interest.

- Opt for different pumpkin colors—white, blue-gray, and orange—for a visually dynamic look.

- Consider stacking pumpkins on top of each other for added height and variety.

2. Pair Mums with Containers

- Place mums in rustic containers like galvanized buckets, wooden crates, or woven baskets.

- Elevate some mums on stools or overturned crates to add vertical interest to your display.

- Choose a color scheme with your mums (e.g., yellows, oranges, purples, or reds) to complement your pumpkins.

3. Incorporate Other

Natural Elements

- Add hay bales, corn stalks, or dried branches to bring texture and layers to your setup.

- Include some gourds or squash for added color and shape variety.

- Scatter fall leaves or pinecones around your display for a more natural, lived-in look.

4. Symmetry or Asymmetry

- For a more classic, formal look, opt for symmetrical arrangements on either side of your door.

- For a more modern or eclectic vibe, create asymmetrical groupings with pumpkins and mums of different sizes.

5. Add Lighting

- Use lanterns, string lights, or candles to add a warm glow to your display, especially in the evening.

- Place some candles inside hollowed-out pumpkins or lanterns among the mums for an inviting touch.

6. Personal Touches

- Incorporate a welcome sign, a seasonal doormat, or a wreath made of twigs, mums, or small pumpkins.

- You can even paint or stencil some pumpkins for a more personalized or artistic look.

7. Consider Durability

- Keep the pumpkins and mums in shady spots or sheltered areas to ensure they last longer, as direct sun can cause them to fade or spoil more quickly.

These simple ideas can make your outdoor space a warm and welcoming autumn retreat!



AMY HAUSMAN

Braun Pumpkin Patch located at 832 County Road E in Friend offers a variety of pumpkin colors, textures and sizes to add variety to your porch display.



Prep the pantry now for seasonal baking, cooking

Kitchens serve as the heart of many homes. Thanks to the popularity of open floor plans, kitchens also tend to be highly visible from nearby spaces, such as family rooms and even main entryways. A messy, cluttered kitchen can be an inefficient eyesore that's visible from various locations in a home. That makes getting organized in the kitchen a worthwhile goal.

The following are some tips to help homeowners organize their kitchens.

Start with the utensils

Utensils come in all shapes and sizes. Take inventory of your utensils, discarding or donating items you don't use. Next, designate drawers or countertop storage solutions for the utensils you use most often. Place

them within easy reach, and take into account your dominant hand for placement.

Categorize your pantry

Empty the pantry, paying attention to staples you regularly use. Then figure out a system for categorization that works for your household. Perhaps place all baking essentials together, such as flour, oil, baking soda, and cocoa powder. Maybe you need to designate a "kids corner" in the pantry where you keep fruit snacks, granola bars and breakfast cereals. Use uniformly shaped containers to store packaged foods so you're not contending with oddly shaped boxes and bags.

Use extra wall or ceiling space

Large pots and pans can eat up cabinet space or clutter the inside of an oven for those who don't have any other space. While your decorative enamel Dutch oven might fit nicely on a shelf or counter, cast-iron pans and skillets can be hung from durable hooks over an island or near the stove.

Organize under the sink

It can be difficult to keep cleaning products tidy and within reach. Try installing a short tension rod inside the cabinet and use it to hang spray bottles, rubber gloves and cleaning cloths.

Use kitchen cabinet rollouts

A shortage of storage space in cabinets can be remedied with rollouts.

They provide additional capacity to cabinets and make it easier to find items, instead of having to dig at the back of dim cabinet recesses.

Tame your container collection

It's tempting to save all of those take-out containers or empty margarine tubs for leftovers. But if there's an avalanche every time you open up a cabinet to reach for a container, you probably have too many. Invest in one type of storage container so you can nest the containers and lids for ultimate organization.

An organized kitchen is more attainable than it may seem. Some simple strategies can help homeowners make these home hubs less cluttered and more calming.



COURTESY PHOTO

Prepare now for the holiday season by organizing the kitchen and pantry. This includes stocking up on baking supplies, preserving fall harvests and making a functional space.



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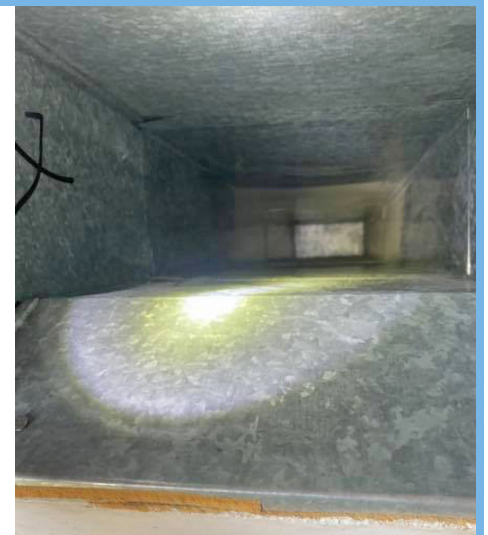
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Four simple ways to fall for fall interiors

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

As fall settles over Seward and Saline counties, residents are transforming their homes into warm, inviting retreats that reflect the changing season. With cooler temperatures and shorter days ahead, homeowners are looking for ways to bring comfort and charm into their living spaces.

From layering textures to embracing natural elements, here are a few of my tips to create a cozy fall atmosphere in any sized living space.

Layer textures for warmth

One of the easiest ways to make your home feel cozy is by layering different textures. Fall evenings can be especially chilly so incorporate fabrics like wool, flannel and faux fur to add a much-needed sense of warmth and comfort.

A thick, knitted blanket draped over a couch or chair instantly makes the space feel inviting.

Soft throw pillows and a plush area rug can also make a big difference, especially in older homes with wood floors that can feel cold underfoot.

Embrace warm, earthy tones

As the fall landscape shifts from green to deep shades of red, orange, and brown, incorporating these hues into your home's interior can help bring the season indoors. Switching out lighter summer linens for darker, autumnal shades in your curtains, pillows or tablecloths is an easy way to bring fall into your home without spending a fortune.

Bring the outdoors inside

In our rural small towns where the vast landscape plays a big part in our daily lives, using natural elements in home decor is a popular trend. From pumpkins and gourds to dried corn stalks and wildflowers, bringing a bit of nature indoors helps capture the essence of the season. A simple jar of pine cones with twinkle lights can become a beautiful and economic centerpiece.

Add vintage charm

For those looking to enhance the rustic charm of their homes, add a few vintage pieces. The antique shops, second hand and upcycled shops across both counties offer a variety of unique finds, from old wooden crates to copper kitchenware. Vintage items have stories behind them and can be functional while charming.

As rural Nebraskans prepare for colder days ahead, these design tips offer simple ways to make the home a warm and welcoming place to spend the season. With a few thoughtful touches, any space can be transformed into a cozy autumn retreat.



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COURTESY PHOTO

A pheasant is captured at a producer's crop cover field in Friend. Camera traps are used to monitor game birds for participants in the Pathway for Wildlife program.

Pheasants Forever offers 75% cost share program

BY AMY HAUSMAN
amy@friendsentinel.com

Pheasants Forever is offering its Pathway for Wildlife program in Seward and Saline counties. The government-funded program began in 2019 and offers incentives to enhance wildlife habitat on cropland, working lands and within local communities.

Producers who plant a diverse cover crop mixture for one cropping season are eligible for cost share and foregone income payments. Along with soil health benefits, diverse cover crops can provide additional cover to help meet seasonal needs of upland game birds (i.e. brood-rearing, winter and escape cover), pollinators and other wildlife.

Pheasants Forever

precision ag coordinator Nathan Pflueger's main objectives are to work with soil health in the weakest areas for producers while making wildlife a focus. Pflueger acts as a consultant with the Pathway to Wildlife program to create full season solutions.

"Winter is the best time to be thinking about this program," Pflueger said. "There are a slew of benefits to producers, especially those who have identified poor acres with low yields."

Andy Harpenau purchased what would have been his grandfather Arthur Horkey's farmland in Friend. He is trying to improve the soil and run the farm in a way that generates a profit.

"The seed mixtures the biologist put together have some that germinate early, middle

and end of the season to provide brooding and feed all year round," Harpenau said. "I am excited to see what will happen next year. The soil was so compacted but now we have radish roots that go two feet into the soil, breaking it up."

There are three program options for land in Saline and Seward counties: seed corn isolation acres, irrigated acres and dryland acres. Producers can enroll in more than one option.

Seed Corn Isolation Acres

Producers enrolling seed corn isolation acres receive 75% cost share on the cover crop seed along with a foregone income payment of \$300 per acre.

"We actually have a 10-way mixture, but a

See **COST-SHARE**, page 11

Cost-share

Continued from page 1

producer can choose any seed retailer to go through," Pflueger said.

Irrigated Acres

Producers enrolling irrigated acres receive 75% cost share on the cover crop seed along with a foregone income payment of \$300 per acre on a maximum of 80 acres.

"Fields of producers will do full season crop cover hold more water," Pflueger said. "Producers from the previous year saw a benefit the following year even on fields they did not irrigate."

Dryland Acres

Producers enrolling dryland acres receive 75% cost share on the cover crop seed along with a foregone income

payment up to \$225 per acre on a maximum of 40 acres.

Qualifying producers must have productive row crop acres within two miles of existing quality perennial habitat, which may include CRP acres, native pasture, wetlands, etc.

"These are native grasses that return every year," Pflueger said. "These are great option during these drought years because they are not required to be irrigated."

After March 15, a producer can utilize the cover crop biomass how they prefer, and the acres can return to row crop production. Ideal sites are a minimum of 5 acres and can include marginal acres, pivot corners, edge-of-field acres, and

isolation acres, etc.

"Sometimes wind turbines and solar panels can make some areas more difficult to farm," Pflueger said. "This program allows producers to have options to square up their fields by putting in a native habitat to make it a little easier to farm. It gives those producers another option as opposed to traditional row crop farming."

Contracts for the full season practice are for one season (June 1 through March 15).

There is potential to re enroll acres, but this is dependent on practice funding.

Participants will receive 75% cost-share for a diverse, cover crop seed mixture. Seed corn isolation and irrigated acres qualify for a fore-

gone income payment of \$300/acre. Foregone income payments for dryland acres are based on NRCS Soils Classification: \$140/acre for Class 5-8 soils (Moderate-Low Productivity) and \$225/acre for Class 1-4 soils (High Productivity).

"It is a very simple process and flexible," Pflueger said. "There are three pages of paperwork including the application, W(9), and notice of interest form. We will do a site visit and take a look at everything and make recommendations from there."

Sites may be chosen to monitor wildlife and soil health. Camera traps are used to monitor upland gamebird and other wildlife use of the cover crop stands. Infiltration tests are conducted on several



COURTESY PHOTO

Andy Harpenau showcases the full season crop cover at the family farm in Friend. This benefits the soil's carbon content as well as creates habitats for wildlife.

sites to determine if the practice increased water infiltration rates.

"We want to make sure that it is beneficial to the game birds and

for multiple years seen use by other wildlife," Pflueger said.

For questions, contact Pflueger at (402) 646-5426.

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IMAGE FROM PIXABAY

Green onions are shown mulched with grass clippings to control weeds and improve soil quality.

Converting to no-till for home gardeners

Home vegetable or flower gardeners are often unhappy with their soil quality.

They routinely incorporate organic matter in the soil each fall, but don't see much change in their soil texture. Why aren't they developing beautiful crumbly dark brown soil that's easy to plant and great for vegetable root crops?

Routinely tilling garden soil each fall and spring could be the culprit.

Microbes, humus and soil aggregation

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service encourages building soil health and protecting soil organisms, through

- keeping the soil covered as much as possible
- disturbing soil as little as possible
- keeping plants grow-

ing throughout the year to feed soil, and

- diversifying plant material through crop rotation.

Soil is a combination of non-living materials – sand, silt, and clay particles – along with organic matter and living organisms. The largest living soil organisms include earthworms, insects and nematodes, the smallest are bacteria and fungi. But there are many, many soil organisms in between.

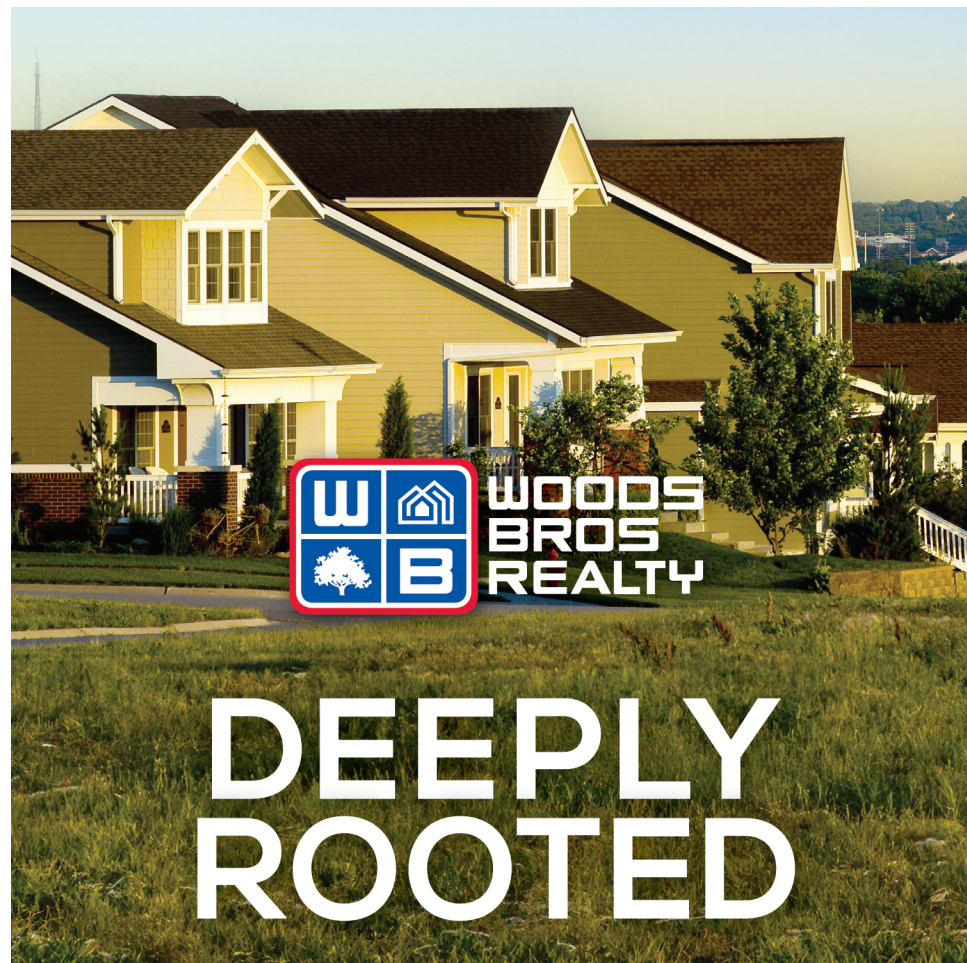
Organic matter comes from the decomposition of plant and animal remains and is a food source for these soil organisms, releasing nutrients as it breaks down into humus. The amount of organic matter in soil varies depending on the kinds of crops grown, whether plant residue is removed or incorpo-

rated into the soil, the frequency of tillage and the wetness or drainage of the soil.

Humus is decomposed organic matter that has reached a stable stage and will not decompose any further without a change in temperature, pressure or heat. Humus is very important to healthy soil because it increases populations of soil organisms by improving water-holding capacity, increasing water percolation and reducing soil erosion and nutrient leaching.

Through their normal life processes, soil fungi create substances that act as glue, binding together particles of organic matter, humus, silt, clay and/or sand. These tiny clumps of particles are called soil aggregates.

See **GARDENS**, page 14



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Gardens

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Benefits of no-till gardening

Soil aggregates are important because their variation in size creates large and small pore spaces in the soil, which are used as pathways for water, oxygen and plant roots. Soils with good aggregate formation tend to be more loose and crumbly. Tilling physically breaks down soil aggregates, reducing the benefits they provide to soil structure.

Reducing or eliminating tilling in your garden provides the following benefits.

- Slower decomposition of organic matter, resulting in increased organic matter levels
- Increased soil organism populations and activity
- Retention of current soil aggregates and increased formation of new soil aggregates
- Improved water percolation into soil and water drainage
- Improved soil aeration
- Improved crop root development
- Increased resistance to wind and water soil erosion

Converting to no-till gardening

How can you convert existing gardens to no-till? Start this fall or winter; collect all the available organic matter you can find, such as tree leaves, pine needles, sawdust, wood chips, bark, corn cobs,

corn stalks, grass clippings or straw.

Newspaper and cardboard are useful too. Manure can also be used; for vegetable gardens be sure to apply manure in fall, not spring, or use composted manure.

Design your garden with planting beds narrow enough to plant, weed and harvest without walking in them – which would increase soil compaction. All the necessary work will be done from the sides of the planting beds. Typically, four-foot-wide planting beds work well.

If you have the strength and time for some heavy work, begin by spading 3- to 4-inches of compost into the soil. Spading is much less disruptive to soil aggregates and is useful in starting to break up heavy soil. Work the compost into the soil at a depth of approximately 8- to 10- inches. Then proceed to the next step below.

If you don't have the muscle to spade in compost or your soil is already of moderate quality, then once the planting beds have been laid out simply apply a heavy layer of organic matter over each, approximately 4- to 6-inches deep.

Walking paths can be handled in several ways:

- mulched 8 to 10-inches deep with organic materials
- planted with grass or another ground cover, or
- covered with newspaper/

cardboard and mulch. When using newspaper or cardboard, start with several layers and top them with 2 to 4-inches of leaves, grass clippings, etc. This holds the paper and cardboard in place as they degrade.

Guess what? You're done! The organic matter will begin to break down over winter. Earthworms and other soil organisms will incorporate the organic matter into the underlying soil.

Over time, your soil organic matter levels will increase, along with increasing numbers of soil microbes and improved soil aggregation imparting all the benefits discussed above.

When you're ready to plant in spring, simply push aside the mulch layer where you want to place your seeds or transplants. Use a hoe to create a planting furrow or hand-dig holes for individual transplants.

Once the plants are up and growing, pull the mulch back in place or reapply fresh mulch around the base of the plants. This will prevent rain splash of soil and plant pathogens onto the lower leaves – which is the most common method of disease introduction – and conserve soil moisture.

At the end of the growing season, dead vegetation can be incorporated into the mulch layer as long as plants were not severely insect or disease infested. Or, if you prefer,



IMAGE FROM METRO

compost it first then spread the compost over your garden. Replenish the mulch layer over planting beds as needed during spring and summer; maintain an 8- to 10-inch layer in fall and winter.

Next year, consider adding a fall cover crop seeding into your no-till system to add more organic matter and more quickly break up heavy soil. For more information on cover crops, check out Cover Crops and Green Manures in Home Gardens, <https://extension.umn.edu/managing-soil-and-nutrients/cover-crops-and-green-manures>, University of Minnesota Extension.

Gain mastery over weeds
One final benefit of no-till

gardening – reducing weed problems. Tilling brings fresh weed seed to the soil surface each year, so combining good weed management with no-till practices will eventually reduce the amount of weed seed in the upper few inches of soil.

Plus, the thick mulch layers used to create your beds reduces light penetration into the soil surface and further reduces weed seed germination.

Is there a lawn and gardening topic you would like to learn more about? Sarah Browning is an Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension and can be contacted by phone (402) 441-7180, by mail at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE 68528; or by e-mail sarah.browning@unl.edu.

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Tips to save on your energy bill this fall

BY KEATON BURGESS
reporter@sewardindependent.com

With fall right around the corner, the temperature will start to drop from the scorching hot temps of the summer into the cool nights of fall.

When fall arrives and the temps start to drop, energy bills can sneak up and leave the home owner wondering why they're paying so much.

According to the National Environmental Education Foundation, fall is a good time to assess your home to make sure it is ready for the colder months.

Here are a few tips to help save a few bucks this fall:

Leave your curtains open on sunny days. The sun shining into your

windows will help heat your house via radiant energy. Make sure to close them at nights to help keep heat in.

Clean or replace air filters. According to the NEEF, "A dirty or clogged air filter can make your heating system work harder to push air throughout your home. Clean or replace your filters as recommended to help boost the performance of your heating system."

Check for leaks in your home. Leaks can lead to a lot of heat escaping your home. Use caulk to seal leaks in your home insulation. Finding drafty doors and windows as well as looking for dropped ceilings, recessed lights, attic entrances, water and furnace flues, air ducts, outlets and switches and plumbing and utility access can help too.

Bees

Continued from 3

more than 100 hives. However, all of their hives yield gallons of honey and he enjoys selling to his family and friends. His wife uses honey as a substitute for sugar when she bakes and their grandkids love eating fresh honey on biscuits.

Besides extracting the honey, the majority of the work in beekeeping in Nebraska is centered around preparing for the winter. Steve said it is vital to wrap the hives and feed the bees during the winter to raise the chances they will make it through the season.

"Bees are not as sturdy as they were 50 years ago, and we need to keep perpetuating them so they continue to pollinate the plants that produce the food that we eat," he said. "You replace more

than half of your bees the following year because the bees don't survive the winter."

Steve said keepers cannot control where their bees will pollinate, and they will pollinate any plants they choose within three miles of their hive. However, he has a small garden that they likely help with.

Steve said the bees are generally calmer than people might expect.

Beekeeping can also be therapeutic, and those who raise bees can feel accomplished knowing they are doing something positive for the environment.

"They are just fascinating creatures, incredibly smart, and just watching them go about their day-to-day business of collecting up pollen and returning to the hive and seeing

when they're building honeycomb and seeing when they're filling that honeycomb with either eggs to turn into larva or honey or pollen, it's just a fascinating, peaceful hobby," Steve said.

Steve said he loves that beekeeping was something he got to do with his son.

"We've had a lot of good times working together with the bees and buying the bees for the first time and driving these boxes of 15,000 bees in the back of the suburban to our house so that we can put them in hives," he said. "Just all the time we spent extracting honey and working on the hives, I just really enjoyed that time with my son."

He said he would recommend the hobby to anyone.



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