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Recycle Easter Baskets

After the eggs and candy are gone, the baskets still remain. They are too good to throw away, so they go to the attic, garage or basement to join generations of other stuff that is too good to throw away. Occasionally, they'll get out for a garage sale where they trade one attic for another. This year, use those old Easter baskets for container gardens. If the basket is loosely woven, line the inside with old newspapers so the soil doesn't sift through. Fill the basket with a soil-less potting mix available at most nurseries and garden centers. This is the stuff that most growers use in their hanging baskets and is well worth the added expense. Space plants about half their normal distance when you plant. If the tag says to plant six inches apart, go with three instead. This will give you a finished look more quickly. Water is the limiting factor in the garden, but in containers, you'll be watering almost every day in the heat of summer, so plants will thrive. Since frequent watering may leach nutrients from the container, you may also need to use a fertilizer. Slow-release fertilizers work well in containers if used according to label recommendations. A container garden will also give you an opportunity to try out some new plants. Petunias, marigolds or impatiens are nice, but how about trying bacopa, angelonia and nemesia? There are literally dozens of new plants that weren't available just 5 years ago. Read the label, ask questions and take a risk. You may be pleasantly surprised. A special thanks to Bob Hauer, ISU Extension consumer Horticulture Program Assistant produced this article.

New value-added Web Site

The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, launched a new Web site design to provide information, education and research to producers about business development and marketing related to value-added agriculture. The Web site, www.AgMRC.org contains state-specific contacts and directories, as well as new business development and commodity-specific information designed to help build successful value-added agricultural enterprises. According to Don Hofstrand, AgMRC co-director, "Many farmers are looking to value-added agriculture to improve their business profitability. AgMRC is a valuable tool to assist in that development." The AgMRC is funded through a grant to Iowa State University, Kansas State University and the University of California from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Rural Business Cooperative Service. AgMRC is designed to provide the information producers and other agribusiness professions need to enhance their bottom line through value-added agriculture activities.

2005 Farm Custom Rate Guide

The new custom rate guide for Iowa is now available at the Extension Office. Many Iowa farmers hire some custom machine work in their farm business or perform custom work for others while others rent machinery or perform other services. The information is based on a survey of Iowa farmers, custom operators and farm managers. This rate schedule is intended only as a guide. This publication is available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/FM1698.pdf>.

Tornado Season is coming

In Iowa most tornadoes occur from April to June and between noon and midnight, although they can occur at any time of the year and at any time of the day or night. Listen to your local radio station or the weather radio station when severe weather is in the area. A tornado watch means a tornado is possible in your area and a warning means a tornado has been sighted and may be heading towards your area. If you must be outside during a tornado watch, listen to your radio and be alert for changes in weather conditions such as dark, often greenish sky, blowing debris, large hail, or a cloud that looks like a wall, and a loud roar, similar to a freight train. What to do? If you are in an open field, stop and get out of the tractor or vehicle. Lie in a low area or ditch away from the tractor. Cover your head with your arms to protect yourself from flying debris. Do not try to out run a tornado on your tractor. A tornado's speed and direction are deceptive. Also know which of your buildings can offer the best protection, such as building with below-grade floor or basement. Stay away from windows and outside walls of the building. A tornado can be very violent and destructive storm.