

Those who've been gardening for any length of time are more than likely familiar with one of the best, research-based gardening organizations in existence—the NSA. If you are not familiar with this organization, today is your lucky day. It's all about the NSA.

The NSA I'm referring to is Nebraska's homegrown organization that began in 1978: the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum. For now, I plan to provide you with a general overview of this distinguished organization and how it can significantly help you with your gardening concerns. However, in order to understand the full scope of this fine organization and to access the abundant research-based information it has to offer, I urge you to spend time on its website at <http://arboretum.unl.edu/>. If you do, I'm quite certain you will find yourself returning to the site, time and time again. I certainly do.

In 1978 the mission of Nebraska's NSA was established by a small group of plant enthusiasts associated with the University of Nebraska. Its purpose then and today is to operate exclusively for educational purposes—to promote knowledge, appreciation and use of sustainable landscapes throughout Nebraska using indigenous and introduced flora for the benefit of the citizens and governmental entities in Nebraska.

Did you notice that within the above listed mission statement nowhere was printed the word tree or trees? Most people associate the word arboretum with tree plantings. Although NSA does involve trees, its mission focuses more on the word flora, an expanded term which encompasses all kinds of plants—trees, shrubs, vines, wildflowers, grasses, etc. A Nebraska Statewide Arboretum is a site where all kinds of flora are grown for exhibition or study.

Annual precipitation, length of growing season, winter temperatures, elevation, wind, humidity, and soil chemistry vary significantly across this great state of ours. Together these factors significantly influence a plant's ability to grow and survive. Plants that thrive and grow along the Missouri River Valley won't necessarily do well in the Kearney area and often would immediately perish if grown in western Nebraska. For that very reason, the founders of NSA knew that an arboretum located in Omaha would have little importance to people living in Chadron. As a result, today's NSA is a

series of affiliated arboretums scattered throughout the state in the landscapes and public gardens of more than fifty Nebraska communities—each established exclusively for educational purposes. NSA’s affiliated arboretums are classified as one of three categories. They are either an Accredited Arboretum, an Historic Landmark or a Landscape Steward. Described below is how they differ.

1. **Accredited Arboretum** - a planned and curated collection of plants assembled to accomplish an identified educational mission.
2. **Historic Landmark** – a planned landscape of historic or cultural significance to the state of Nebraska.
3. **Landscape Steward** –a public landscape that demonstrates an ongoing commitment to excellence in design, plant diversity and maintenance.

Within the community of Kearney are three NSA affiliated sites. Harmon Park Arboretum is listed as an Historic Landmark whereas the Kearney Cemetery and Kearney Public Schools Arboretum are classified as Landscape Steward sites. Minden’s Community Arboretum is also listed as a Landscape Steward site. To learn more about plants that do well in your area, I urge you visit these affiliated sites of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum or go on line to see where the closest affiliated site is. While visiting NSA’s website, you will notice many other benefits and services the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum has to offer.

NSA sponsors many plant events throughout the year such as the famous *Spring Affair* plant sale on April 25, 2015, at the Lancaster Event Center in Lincoln. One can also find a plethora of research-based plant information, assorted publications and videos which can be ordered or downloaded.

As stated before, if you visit the NSA website, I’m convinced you will find yourself visiting its site again and again. The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum is one of the best (if not the best) research-based gardening organizations in existence and the beauty of it is— it’s all about plants for Nebraska.