

IN THE DIRT

Northeast Nebraska
Master Gardener

Plant Fair

May 4, 2012

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Northeast Community
College

<http://madison.unl.edu/theplantfair>

Radon

Did You Know...

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking? Approximately 20,000 cancer deaths each year are caused by radon?

What is it? - Radon is a radioactive gas that cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted and is found around the country. When you breathe air containing radon, the sensitive cells in your airway are irritated, increasing your risk of developing lung cancer.

Radon is found in the dirt and rocks beneath houses, in well water, and in some building materials. It can enter your house through soil, dirt floors in crawl spaces, and cracks in foundations, floors, and walls. Once inside, radon gas can sometimes get trapped inside the house.

All houses have some radon, but houses next to each other can have very different radon levels, so the only way to measure your particular risk is to test your own house. Radon is measured in "picoCuries per liter of air," abbreviated "pCi/L." This measurement describes the number of radon gas particles in one liter of air. The amount of radon outdoors is usually around 0.4 pCi/L, and indoors is around 1.3 pCi/L. Even though all radon exposure is unhealthy, radon at levels below 4 pCi/L are considered acceptable. If your home has more than 4 pCi/L, you should take action to lower this level.

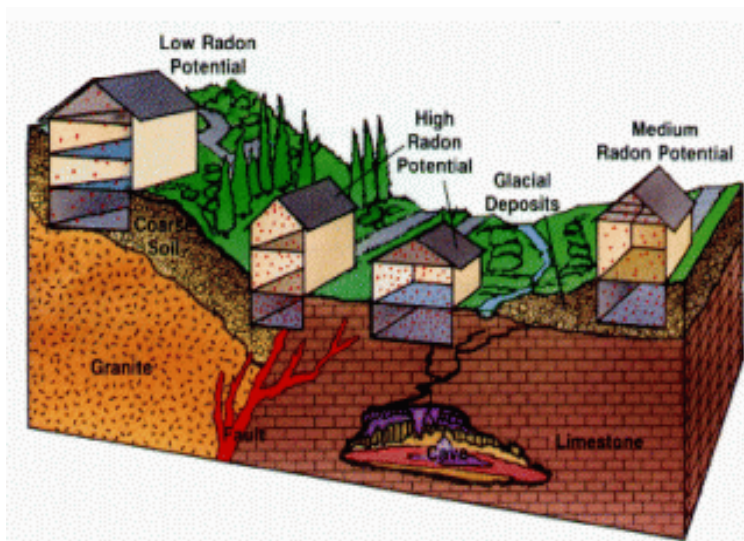
What can you do? - Testing your home is very important. About 1 out of every 15 homes has a radon problem, and yours could be one of them. The only way to know for sure is to test your home. There are two types of tests: short-term tests take two to seven days, while long-term tests take around 90 days and provide results that are slightly more accurate. We have a limited supply of short-term tests available at the UNL Extension Office in Center.

Follow all the instructions that come with your test kit. If possible during the test, keep your windows closed to keep air from escaping. Place your test kit in a room on the lowest level of your home that you use regularly, probably on the first floor or the basement. When the test is done, send it to a lab to process the results.

Fix it! - It is possible to lower the levels of radon, and the risk of lung cancer, in your home. Most of the time, this will involve removing radon gas from underneath your concrete floor, crawlspace, or foundation before it can enter your home. This will require special skills and knowledge, and you may need to hire a professional contractor to help you reduce the levels of radon in your home. If you are considering fixing your home's radon problem yourself, you should first contact your state radon office for guidance and assistance.

A few things you can do:

- Stop smoking and discourage smoking in your home. Smoke increases the risk of lung cancer from radon. Increase air flow in your house by opening windows and using fans and vents to circulate air. Natural ventilation in any type of house is only a temporary radon reduction approach because of the following



disadvantages: loss of heat or air conditioned air, related discomfort and increased costs, and security concerns.

- Seal cracks in floors and walls with plaster, caulk, or other materials designed to seal cracks and gaps.

Contact your state radon office for a list of qualified contractors in your area and for more information on how to fix radon problems yourself. Always test again after finishing to make sure you've fixed your radon problem. If you are buying a new home, ask whether radon-resistant construction techniques were used. It is almost always cheaper and easier to build these features into new homes than to add them later.

For more information contact: Nebraska Radon Program, P.O. Box 95026, Lincoln, NE 68509-5007, Phone: 800.334.9491 <http://www.ncdhd.ne.gov/Radon.html>; US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), www.epa.gov/radon; Radon Fix-it Hotline, 1.800.644.6999; and/or American Lung Association, <http://www.lugsusa.org>

Source: <http://www.ncdhd.ne.gov/Radon.html>



Criteria for Wise Plant Selection

By Kelly Feehan, UNL Extension Educator

Visions of sugar plums have been replaced by visions of new plants, at least in the minds of gardeners. Garden catalogs are clogging mail boxes and pictures of new plants are clogging garden websites.

With all of the enticing pictures, and so many plants to choose from, it is easy to overbuy or select the wrong plant for the planting site; just like with holiday gifts and doings.

While it would be nice to try one of everything, plant choices usually need to be narrowed due to limitations of planting space and pocketbooks.

Be choosy when buying plants. By doing so, gardeners are more likely to select the right plant for the location and be satisfied with the end result.

Before selecting plants, know the growing conditions of the site and the function a plant needs to fill. When a new plant attracts attention, it can be given a second assessment to be sure it is the right plant for hard earned dollars. When it comes to deciding which, of all the lovely plants we are tempted to buy, to add to gardens and landscapes here are some questions to first ask.

The most important question is if the plant is adapted to the growing conditions of the site. No matter how lovely a plant is, it can quickly become a problem or disappointment if not planted where its growing needs are met. Plants adapted to the growing site are more aesthetic and less stressed; hence usually need fewer inputs of water, pruning, and fertilizer and have fewer pest problems requiring pesticide applications.

When planting in beds, be sure all of the plants in a bed have similar growing requirements. Choose not only plants with the same light needs, but the same soil and water requirements too. Aesthetically, select plants that complement one another. All plants in a bed should not be coarse textured, i.e. purple leaves or large leaves. As a contrast to coarse texture, select plants with fine textures such as small leaves or dainty blossoms. Avoid having one of everything, but do mix up the form and size of plants.

The second most important question is will the plant fulfill the needed garden or landscape function. Is it tall enough to provide shade or the right size to block an unsightly view? Is it dense enough to provide privacy? Will it bloom at the time of year needed? Does the color of the blossom fit the color scheme of the garden? Consider the downsides of a plant. Could it become too large for the location and frequent pruning will be needed to keep it in bounds? Is the plant ornamental all season or for only a short time during the year? Once it finishes blooming, will the foliage remain ornamental or decline? Does the plant have any serious disease or insect problems, messy fruit, nuisance thorns? Is any part of the plant poisonous?

By narrowing the list of plants to choose from and selecting plants adapted to the sites growing conditions; whose mature size fits the site; whose foliage is attractive all season; and whose ornamental characteristics the grower likes; then the plant is more likely to be an asset and not a problem.