



## AMERICA FIRST

### DIGGIN' IT

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

Mix matters

When it comes to potting mix, there are plenty of options, but you get what you pay for. I know the bargain bags are tempting, but investing in a quality mix each year pays off. The mix matters, and not all mixes are created equally.

The nursery I worked at in Fargo produces roughly 400,000 annuals each spring. My spring job was planting about 1,500 noncustom patio pots and hanging baskets at our 5-acre production farm, then another 500 or so custom planters for clients at our retail location or onsite at businesses or homes.

Quality potting mix wasn't optional. It was the backbone of the entire spring planting operation. So yes, I'm pretty passionate about potting mix.

Just like fertilizers (think back to last summer's Black Bottom Blues), a savvy gardener reads the potting mix ingredient list. If the bag doesn't clearly list ingredients in an easy-to-find location, or if you see vague phrases like "this mix may contain" or different ingredient lists depending on the state, put it back. Find a mix with transparent, consistent ingredients and listed ratios.

Why the vagueness? Potting soil is regulated at the state level, and many states require companies to disclose only certain components when making content claims. Many manufacturers rely on broad descriptions. Partly to protect formulas, partly because ingredients shift with availability and partly because the law allows it.

So why does that matter?

Because good potting mix companies want to be transparent. They want you to know exactly what you're buying and to trust that every bag contains the same carefully formulated ratios their soil scientists designed. They aren't

making do with whatever's on hand. They're sourcing ingredients intentionally and updating packaging when formulas change. Yes, that consistency costs more. But it's worth it.

At Baker Nursery, I had this conversation repeatedly during the planting/growing season. Customers would buy gorgeous, healthy annuals or vegetables, then return weeks later with photos of sad, struggling plants. My first question was always "What kind of potting mix did you use?" Nine times out of ten, the culprit was a bargain mix. The folks I convinced to switch would often track me down the next year to tell me that upgrading their potting mix quality was a game-changer. Their annual containers looked better and were easier to care for.

Low-quality mixes cause all kinds of headaches in outdoor containers and hanging baskets, which rely heavily on good drainage, aeration and consistent moisture. Cheap mixes compact quickly, choking roots and leaving plants in soggy, airless conditions. That's when you see yellowing leaves, stunted growth and root rot, even if you're watering correctly (deeply, yet infrequently).

Bargain mixes tend to contain fine particles, uncomposted wood or mystery fillers. These can dry into a brick that repels water or stays wet forever. Either way, roots can't function. Nutrient issues show up too: low-quality mixes often lack a fertilizer charge, or they tie up nitrogen as raw wood breaks down. In hanging baskets, where soil volume is limited, these problems show up even faster: constant wilting, nonstop watering and plants that never

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A sampling of hundreds of patio containers and hanging baskets planted each year by Yunker at Baker Nursery. Quality potting mix forms the backbone of the nursery's spring annual plant production operation. (Phaidra Yunker | The Leader-News)

## BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE

from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal

### 20 years ago, Feb. 2006

It's been a busy first week for Brian Ash, Underwood new economic development director. Ash arrived in time to help promote the city of Underwood at Marketplace 2005 in Fargo on Jan. 18, along with Mayor Rick Olson and City Auditor Diane Schell.

Underwood and Washburn and the surrounding area have a lot to offer. That message was presented during a recent marketing event in Denver, Colo.

The economic development organizations in Washburn and Underwood, and the Fort Mandan Foundation, Great River Energy and Headwaters, Inc. partnered together to promote the area's booming energy industry at a recent marketing event in Denver that was put on by the North Dakota Department of Commerce.

Lucas Lee Sims was born to Misty and Jamie Sims, Coleharbor, on Sunday, Jan. 15, 2006.

The Underwood Area Economic Development Committee is sponsoring a job fair on March 4 at the Underwood City Hall.

Mandee Pochant, Coleharbor, has been named to the dean's list at NDSCS, Wahpeton. Nathan McCleery, Riverdale, has been named to the dean's list at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

The Underwood Comets boys basketball team staved off a stubborn Max Cossacks team Friday night in Max, defeating their neighbors to the north by 10, 63-53. The game was close, but the Cossacks just ran out of gas near the end. Eric Trautman held the hot hand for the Comets, tickling the twine for 22 points. Right there with Eric was Andrew Hefta, who tossed in 17 for the Purple.

The Underwood Comets ran into a hot Max Cossacks girls basketball team last Friday in Max. The Lady Comets fell to Max in a District 10 tilt, 60-44. Two Comets finished the night in double figures. Beth Holm and Jess Anderson each drained 10 for the Comets.

It was an exciting year and good finish for the Underwood Comettes Dance Team at the North Dakota Association of Dance and Drill Championships this past weekend in Grand Forks. Coach Suzanne Werre was very pleased with the team's effort at state. The team took third in pom division and fourth in dance.

### 30 years ago, Feb. 1996

Underwood cable subscribers will have five more options for viewing in a couple of months. Following a survey of subscribers and a couple months of indecision, city commissioners approved adding five channels at their regular meeting Monday. The pack-

age will cost subscribers an additional \$1.76 per month.

Terry Malnourie has been selected by the Underwood Jaycees as an Outstanding Young North Dakotan. Malnourie will compete for one of the five Outstanding Young North Dakotans awards at the Jaycee Winter Board Convention to be held Feb. 9-11 at Dickinson. Malnourie was chosen for his personal, professional and community achievements. He is an American Tae-KwonDo Association 2nd degree certified instructor, a member of the St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, a past Underwood School Board member and a member of the Underwood Jaycees.

"What's Cookin'" restaurant opens in Pick City, the new owner manager of the restaurant is Ron Johnson.

### 40 years ago, Feb. 1986

The first baby of the year in the Underwood School District arrived Feb. 1. Nicole Lynne Gemmill was born in Minot to Jeff and Debbie Gemmill. The parents are both teachers at the Underwood School.

Christ Bitz of Pick City is the new leasee of the Frontier Lounge. She is the owner of the Dam Bar in Pick City.

The McLean County Park Board was continuing plans for boat ramps at Steinke Bay, West Totten Trail Recreation Area and the Snake Creek Cabin site. They noted expected low water levels on Lake Sakakawea this spring would be ideal for construction of ramps.

The Riverdale Knights won three straight to put a final claim on the top seed going into the District 21 Boys Basketball Tournament in Washburn. Underwood secured its lock on the second seed with a victory against Wilton's Miners.

### 55 years ago, Feb. 1971

State Highway Commissioner Walter Hjelle will be at the regular meeting of the Underwood Commercial Club to talk about the routing of Highway 200 after the Washburn bridge has been completed and also about future plans for Highway 83.

The Earl Koenig Post 6940 VFW Auxiliary is conducting a book drive to send paperback books to servicemen overseas. A box will be provided for paperback books at Von's Clothing.

Dan Eslinger of Coleharbor is a new property owner in Underwood. He purchased the former Joe Kreller house last week.

Mrs. Dallas Benzmillier left via Northwest Airlines for Hawaii to spend a week with her husband who is on R&R leave from the Army.

Barbara Sayler has been chosen Betty Crocker Homemaker of Tomor-

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# Central McLean News-Journal

P.O. Box 573, Underwood, ND 58576 • 701-462-8126 • USPS #647540  
email [centralmclean@nordaknorth.com](mailto:centralmclean@nordaknorth.com) • website [nordaknorth.com](http://nordaknorth.com)  
Ethyn Williams-Calvert ..... Editor  
Shelly Wallace ..... Sales Representative  
Jackie Kohler ..... Production

Published every Thursday by Nordak North Publishing, P.O. Box 309, 59 North Main, Garrison, ND 58540-0309. Periodical postage paid at Garrison, ND. For more information or for a subscription, write Central McLean News-Journal, P.O. Box 573, Underwood, ND 58576.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Central McLean News-Journal, P.O. Box 573, Underwood, ND 58576.



### Deadlines

3 p.m. Monday – classifieds  
10 a.m. Tuesday – advertisements, public notices, news and area announcements