

DIGGIN' IT

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

Growing pains

Walk into a North Dakota home in late winter and you may find a scene that looks suspiciously like a neonatal unit for plants: bright lights glowing at all hours, heat mats warming trays from below, humidity domes fogging gently and a small fan whirring. Seed starting has a way of turning a quiet corner of the house into a fulltime nursery, complete with the same mix of hope, monitoring and occasional muttering under one's breath.

In Zone 4, this early care isn't optional. Our growing season is short, and spring arrives with the steadiness of a toddler learning to walk. Confident one moment, flat on its face the next. If we waited for outdoor conditions to settle, many crops simply wouldn't have time to mature. So we begin indoors, where we can offer the steady environment young seedlings need before they're ready to face the world.

Light is the first essential. Seedlings need 14 to 16 hours of bright, consistent illumination to develop strong stems and healthy leaves. A sunny window in March rarely provides enough intensity or duration. Without adequate light, seedlings stretch quickly, growing taller than their developing support systems can manage. It's the plant equivalent of a child who shoots up overnight and immediately forgets how to stand without wobbling. Adjustable grow light kits make this easier, raising the lights as seedlings grow keeps the illumination close without crowding them. If you don't want to remember to turn the lights on and off every day, a simple outlet timer works beautifully.

Humidity domes are helpful in the earliest stage. They trap warmth and moisture, creating a stable environment for germination. But once seedlings emerge, the domes need to come off. Leaving them on too long creates humidity levels better suited to fungal diseases than healthy growth. If your dome has vents, opening them for a day or two before removal helps ease the transition.

Warmth is another key factor. Most seeds germinate best at temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees. Peppers and other heatloving crops are especially particular. A seedling heat mat can help maintain the steady warmth that encourages uniform sprouting. Without it, germination may be slow or inconsistent, leaving you with a tray of plants all at different stages.

Watering is where many new gardeners run into trouble. Young seedlings need moisture, but their roots are delicate, and excess water can quickly lead to fungal issues. Bottom



Perennial grasses stand about three inches tall, while some newly up-potted overachieving seedlings grow in fiber pots. A mirror behind the shelf boosts illumination and shallow trays below provide bottom watering for even moisture. (Phaidra Yunker | The Leader-News)

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A close look through the magnifying glass reveals a seedling in its first true leaf stage, surrounded by barely visible green specks in the plug tray beyond.

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Watering is where many new gardeners run into trouble. Young seedlings need moisture, but their roots are delicate, and excess water can quickly lead to fungal issues. Bottomwatering (allowing the soil to absorb water from below) keeps the surface drier and reduces the risk of disease. It also encourages roots to grow downward, helping seedlings establish a stronger foundation. The goal is even moisture, not saturation.

The growing medium matters, too. Seedlings do best in a sterile, fine-textured seed-starting mix, not in garden soil or heavy potting soil. Seedstarting mixes are designed to hold moisture without becoming dense, giving roots the air and space they need. Whatever you choose,

DIGGIN' page 13

McLean County has five board appointments open

Those interested have until March 31 to give interest

BY KELLI AMELING
Associate Publisher

McLean County Commissioners are looking to fill five positions by appointment in the coming weeks.

According to a notice published March 19, the county is seeking people of interest for the following positions:

Planning and zoning commission: one three-year unexpired term expiring Dec. 31, 2028 for the Underwood area.

McLean County school reorganization committee: one three-year unexpired term expiring Dec. 31, 2028.

McLean County special assessment district board: one six-year unexpired term expiring the first commission meeting in April 2027; one six-year unexpired term expiring the first commission meeting

in April 2029; and one six-year term expiring the first commission meeting April 2031.

In the notice, Auditor Beth Knutson said to be eligible for consideration for appointment to any of the positions, interested individuals must submit a letter of interest for the position that includes a short background statement.

"All applicants must be at least 18 years of age and in some instances must reside in a specific commission district or geographical area of the county," the notice stated.

Letters of interest can be sent or delivered to the auditor before 4:30 p.m. March 31 at:

P.O. Box 1108
Washburn, ND, 58577
Or emailed to baknutson@nd.gov or by fax at 701-462-3542.

CM ALL-STATE

from page 1

depth of talent across Class B basketball.

For Central McLean, the postseason honors extended beyond individual players. Head coach Joi Anderson was named the NDHSCA SUBWAY Coach of the Year after leading the Cougars through an undefeated season and state championship run.

Anderson's leadership helped shape a team that combined talent, depth, and a commitment to a team-first mentality.

Under his guidance, Central McLean consistently rose to the occasion in key moments, finishing as the last unbeaten team in Class B.

Wilton-Wing's presence on the First Team through Earsley also underscored the strength of District 8, widely regarded as one of the toughest districts in the state.

The Miners' ability to compete at a high level against top competition throughout the season was reflected in Earsley's selection, as well as the team's deep postseason run.

The statewide awards also recognized Hankinson's Rae-Shaun Earl as the NDHSCA POWERade Outstanding Senior Athlete, honoring his contributions and performance throughout the season.

Together, the All-State selections and individual honors provided a fitting conclusion to the 2026 season, particularly for programs like Central McLean and Wilton-Wing that played key roles in shaping the Class B landscape.

With Hanson and Earsley

leading the way, both programs demonstrated the level of talent and competitiveness that defined the year, leaving a lasting impact on North Dakota high school basketball.

NDHSCA Class B All-State Boys Basketball Team:

FIRST TEAM		
NAME	GRADE	TEAM
Sage Hanson	12	Towner/Granville/Upham
RaeShaun Earl	12	Hankinson
Aiden Hanson	12	Central McLean
Wyatt Weekley	11	Our Redeemer's
Teigen Earsley	12	Wilton/Wing

SECOND TEAM		
NAME	GRADE	TEAM
Gage Hofmann	12	Medina/Pingree-Buchanan
Beau Thorpe	11	Oakes
Easton Simon	12	New Rockford-Sheyenne
Eli Robinson	12	Midway/Minto
Ezra Robinson	12	Midway/Minto
Blake Bergstrom	10	Ray
Ty Barman	9	Ray
Nolan Schmidt	11	Our Redeemer's
Kaden Moore	11	North Border
Eli Undlin	11	Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood

NDHSCA POWERade Outstanding Senior Athlete - Rae-Shaun Earl, Hankinson

NDHSCA SUBWAY Coach of the Year - Joi Anderson, Central McLean

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10 Reasons Why Classical Christian Education Is Needed in Today's World

#8: Because a Child's View of the World Forms Early

Children begin forming their understanding of the world at a young age. Long before they can explain their beliefs, they are absorbing ideas about truth, identity, and purpose.

At Christian Crossroads Academy in Stanley, every subject is taught through a biblical lens. Children learn that faith is not limited to Bible class. God's truth connects to reading, math, science, and history.

This consistent approach gives children clarity. They do not have to sort through conflicting messages on their own. They learn one clear and trustworthy framework for understanding life.

When children grow up with a steady foundation of truth, they are better prepared to face questions and challenges later on. Early worldview formation provides guidance that helps children grow with confidence, discernment, and peace.