

● APRIL 2026

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Updating an older home  
for efficiency and comfort**

**How co-ops prepare  
for severe weather**

**Breakfast and  
brunch recipes**

**Win a \$100 spring spruce up gift card ▶ See Page 3**

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**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn  
Lorelai O'Hara

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

**IAEC ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST**  
Cherie Moen

**IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
Leslie Kaufman

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*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase ***Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*** is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

**Email Address**  
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

**Website**  
www.ieclmagazine.com

**Postmaster**  
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

**Change of Address**  
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### ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Heather Korver, a North West REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

# DON'T BE AN APRIL FOOL: WORK SAFELY THIS SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the weather warms up, we're spending more time outdoors and tackling projects around the house that require power tools and other equipment.

Before you head outside, please take a moment to review these safety tips.

## Don't dig yourself into trouble

April is National Safe Digging Month for a reason! Many of us will be working on landscaping and home improvement projects this spring that involve some digging. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located and marked. It's the law, and it could save your life or prevent serious damage. Call or click before you dig – call 811 or visit [www.IowaOneCall.com](http://www.IowaOneCall.com) to process your request.

## Avoid ladder pitfalls

Planning to use a ladder this spring? Always choose a non-conductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass for utmost safety. Pick a safe route to carry the ladder to the work area and then carry it horizontally rather than upright. Be aware of electrical lines and tree branches in the area where you are working. When using an extension ladder, tie off the top of the ladder whenever possible. Use the 1:4 lean ratio to ensure a stable working platform.

## Plant seeds of safety

As you head into the fields to plant, always keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform anyone working with you about them. Plan your route

between fields and on public roads so you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make certain that contact is not made with a line.

If equipment makes contact with a power line, assume the line is energized and deadly. The operator should NOT get off the machinery unless in immediate danger. If the operator touches the ground and the equipment at the same time, they will become a channel for electricity. Instead, the operator should stay on the equipment, keep others away and contact the local electric utility or 911 immediately to report

the incident so power lines can be deenergized safely before exiting.

## Take shelter from the storm

Storm season has returned, and there is no safe place from lightning when you're outside. Be aware of weather forecasts and watch for developing thunderstorms as lightning can strike many miles ahead of a storm front. If you hear thunder, seek shelter immediately because it indicates lightning is within 10 miles of you. Safe shelters include inside a building or in an enclosed metal-topped vehicle. Authorities warn against outdoor activity until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder is heard.

*Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A SPRING SPRUCE UP GIFT CARD!

Just in time for spring home improvement or landscaping projects, we're giving away a \$100 gift card to a local nursery, garden center or home improvement center. Use it for flowers, mulch, plants, tools or whatever you need to jump-start refreshing your home this spring!

#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than April 30. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the ecobee smart thermostat from the February issue was **Kenneth Wilder**, a **Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY APRIL 30!

# CREATE A POLLINATOR HABITAT IN 5 EASY STEPS

This spring, make a positive impact on the environment and beautify your landscape by planting a pollinator habitat.

The flash of a colorful butterfly and the buzz of a bumblebee traveling between flowers bring extra beauty and enjoyment to gardens. Planning your garden or landscape to include plants that attract and sustain butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects will increase the diversity of what you see and enjoy. You will also be doing your part to help preserve butterflies, honeybees and pollinators threatened and in decline.

Pollinators help plants reproduce by carrying pollen from one flower to another and can include bats and birds, but most importantly, bees and butterflies.

Pollinators are vital to creating and maintaining the habitats and ecosystems that many animals rely on for food and shelter while facilitating reproduction in 90% of the world's flowering plants.

Without pollination, we would not have the grains, fruits, nuts and vegetables that comprise more than one-third of global food production.

With these five easy steps, you can create a haven for pollinators and have your yard buzzing with activity!

**1 Pick your location**  
Butterflies and other pollinators like to bask in the sun and some of their favorite wildflowers grow best in full or partial sun with some protection from the wind. The size of your pollinator habitat will depend on



how much of your yard you want to devote to growing these beneficial plants. Even a small space can have a big impact on pollinators!

**2 Know your soil type and sunny hours**

The soil type and the amount of sunlight it gets will help determine the plants you can grow. Your local garden center or nursery can provide tips on the best plants for your property.

**3 Choose your plants**

Pick varieties of milkweed (Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on the leaves of milkweed, the only host plant for this iconic butterfly species) and wildflowers native to Iowa. Focus on selecting perennials to ensure your plants come back each year and don't require much maintenance. Remember, pollinators

need nectar in the spring, throughout the summer and even into the fall. Choosing plants that bloom at different times will help you create a bright and colorful garden that you and pollinators will love for months!

**4 Prep and plant**

From converting spaces of your yard to raised flower beds, think of a pollinator habitat as a canvas for creating. Plant flowers in clumps rather than single plants. Add nutrient-rich compost or soil to improve the success of your garden.

**5 Wait, watch, water and weed**

Butterflies and other pollinators will soon flutter into the garden as plants develop and flowers bloom. Weeding and watering your garden will keep it healthy. Keep in mind that milkweed may take a couple of seasons to start producing flowers.

## DID YOU KNOW?

For the five years ending in 2022, Iowa electric co-ops had an impressive impact of

**\$4.7 BILLION**

IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.



During that same time period, these investments supported more than

**7,300 JOBS**

(retained, attracted or expanded)

# USDA INVESTS \$19 MILLION TO IMPROVE THE ELECTRICAL GRID IN RURAL IOWA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development's Iowa State Director Michael Sexton recently announced the agency is awarding a total of \$19 million for two projects to improve electric infrastructure in Iowa.

"At USDA, we are on a mission to improve the reliability and the affordability of our shared electrical infrastructure," said Sexton.

The projects highlighted include:

**Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC)** received an \$8 million loan through the Electric Infrastructure Loan and Loan Guarantee Program. This project will finance distribution facilities and improvements, including new underground and overhead connections, tie-lines, line conversions, transformers and meters, service changes, line sectionalizing equipment, line regulators, pole replacements

and security lights. The project will include 9.5 miles of new consumer lines and 146.4 miles of line improvements.

Butler County REC is a member-owned electric utility that has been active since Dec. 24, 1936. The co-op serves more than 5,000 member-consumers with 1,864 energized miles throughout seven counties in the eastern part of Iowa, including Bremer, Butler, Cerro Gordo, Chickasaw, Fayette, Floyd and Franklin.

**Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative (REC)** received an \$11 million loan through the Electric Infrastructure Loan and Loan Guarantee Program. This project will finance conversion and line changes, substation, switching station, metering line changes and distribution equipment.

Southwest Iowa REC is a not-for-profit, member-owned electric



utility and serves the needs of approximately 6,000 members with over 2,500 miles of energized line in Adair, Adams, Cass, Decatur, Fremont, Mills, Montgomery, Page, Ringgold, Taylor and Union counties.

## DID YOU KNOW?

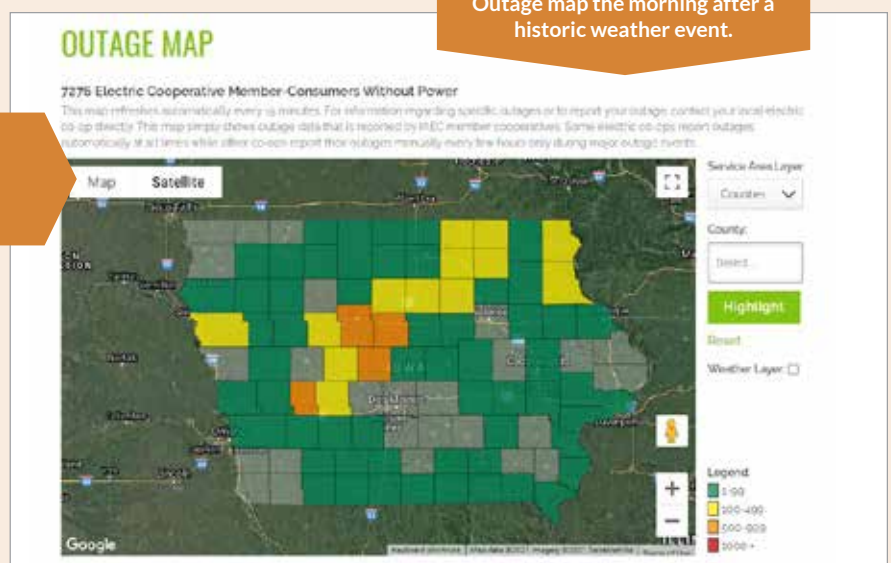
### STATEWIDE OUTAGE MAP

[www.iowarec.org/outages](http://www.iowarec.org/outages)

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) maintains a statewide outage map. The map refreshes automatically every 15 minutes and shows outage data that is reported by IAEC member cooperatives. Most electric co-ops report outages automatically while a few co-ops report outages manually every few hours only during major outage events.

For information regarding specific outages or to report an outage, always contact your local electric co-op directly. It's also important that your local co-op is notified if your phone number or other contact information changes.

Outage map the morning after a historic weather event.



**If you see downed power lines, stay away from the lines and poles. Always assume the lines are energized and report any damage to your local electric cooperative.**



# CO-OPS PREPARE FOR EXTREME WEATHER BY TAPPING TOOLS AND SHARED RESOURCES

BY CATHY CASH

The epic Gulf Coast Blizzard of 2025 smothered New Orleans and surrounding communities in 10 inches of snow, but that's just one of many recent weird weather phenomena.

"Tornado alley" is widening from the Great Plains into the Deep South. Wildfires are no longer just a western worry but now are spreading smoke and destruction into the Midwest and Southeast.

As storm season comes, you might wonder what your electric co-op is doing to keep the lights on with Mother Nature's shifting paradigm. The short answer is: plenty.

"Electric co-ops are experiencing more extreme weather events all across the country and are busy preparing, planning and forecasting differently than they have in the past," said Jennah Denney, senior program manager of technology integration at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

"Even co-ops who've yet to see unprecedented events, like the winter storms that hit Louisiana and Texas or the hurricanes ravaging parts of the Tennessee Valley, are definitely trying

to limit how much of their system goes down and to restore power as fast as they can using automation, technologies and outage data."

## Technology offers earlier warnings

New sensors and weather-risk tools are giving co-ops early warning and situational awareness of threats like wildfires. Co-ops also use historical outage data to develop intelligent weather models that forecast potential crisis spots in their service territory.

"Co-ops are winterizing equipment in places like Arkansas and Louisiana that may not have had to winterize equipment before," said Denney.

Automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics allow co-ops to monitor their generation, power lines and other vital equipment in real-time.

Drones are being equipped with AI-trained cameras to scan electric distribution system equipment and highlight potential weak spots if severe weather rolls in. Co-ops are also updating their maintenance and vegetation management plans using drone cameras or satellite imagery.

## Strengthening systems before the storm

Co-ops continue to replace aging wooden poles with steel and underground lines where it's cost-effective and environmentally sound to combat destruction from wind, floods and wildfires.

Then there's co-ops' real superpower: mutual aid.

## Mutual aid: the co-op advantage

In the wake of the worst disasters, co-op crews volunteer to rise at any hour on any day to travel hundreds of miles to help rebuild another co-op's power lines and restore electricity to members, often in treacherous conditions.

"Mutual aid, grounded in the foundational principle of cooperation among co-ops, is one of the best stories we have in co-op land," said Denney. "As a co-op and a co-op member, you get help from faraway places during these crisis events."

Co-ops work hard to get mutual aid agreements and their logistics – from meals to laundry and lodging for the arriving crews – in place in advance of storm seasons.

The mission could take weeks and thousands of co-op lineworkers, like when horrific Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida, then roared up into the Carolinas' rural mountain communities in September 2024.

And there's no limit to the help a co-op can receive. Co-ops southwest of Houston welcomed mutual aid crews from outside Texas in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl in July 2024, just three years after

volunteer lineworkers answered the call when deadly Winter Storm Yuri shocked the state.

"That's a great story of cooperation among cooperatives," said Denney, who last winter witnessed co-op bucket trucks from Indiana coming to New Orleans' aid. "As co-ops experience more of these extreme weather events, the history and tradition of co-ops helping co-ops is going to be even more important."

In and of itself, a co-op is an exceptional tool for surviving unexpected catastrophes.

"The co-op model lends itself to making sure that one area served by a rural electric co-op has the resources of our shared network," she said. "Willing to lend that helping hand is important as we all are navigating new weather patterns and weather events."

*Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

▶  
New sensors and weather-risk tools are giving co-ops early warning and situational awareness of threats like wildfires.



▶  
Drones are being equipped with cameras trained by artificial intelligence to scan electric distribution system equipment and spotlight potential weak spots if severe weather rolls in.



◀  
As storm season nears, your electric cooperative is planning ahead and working hard to keep the lights on in the face of Mother Nature's shifting paradigm.

# IOWA CO-OPS RESPOND TO SEVERE WEATHER AT HOME AND AWAY

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

Iowa's electric cooperatives are no strangers to extreme weather. From derechos and ice storms to tornadoes and flooding, co-ops across the state regularly prepare for and respond to major disruptions that can damage miles of power lines and hundreds of poles.

The August 2020 derecho remains one of the most destructive weather events in Iowa's history, toppling poles, snapping trees and leaving widespread outages across the state.

More recently, severe weather again tested Iowa's rural electric

systems. In May 2024, a powerful tornado struck the Greenfield area, damaging homes, farms and electric infrastructure. Less than a year later, winter storms in early 2025 brought heavy ice, snow and strong winds that damaged power infrastructure in parts of northwest Iowa.

In each situation, electric cooperatives mobilized quickly, repairing infrastructure and restoring power to rural homes, farms and businesses with mutual aid assistance.

Cooperatives across the state coordinate storm response and

share resources through the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, which helps organize mutual aid and support during large-scale outages. Iowa lineworkers also regularly travel to other states to help fellow cooperatives recover after major weather events.

For Iowa's rural communities, that spirit of cooperation ensures that when severe weather strikes, help is never far away.

*Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.*

# Let's do Brunch



## FAVORITE COFFEE CAKE

- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup pecans, chopped
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon (scant)
- 1 package instant butterscotch pudding
- 1 cup water
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup salad oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 package instant vanilla pudding
- powdered sugar frosting

Combine brown sugar, pecans and cinnamon together and set aside. Mix butterscotch pudding, water, oil, vanilla and eggs. In a separate bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and vanilla pudding. Beat the first mixture together with the dry ingredients for 2 minutes, no longer. Pour half of this mixture into a 9x13-inch pan. Top with half of the brown sugar and pecan mixture. Pour in remaining batter and sprinkle with remaining brown sugar and pecan mix. Bake at 350 degrees F for 40-45 minutes. When done, drizzle with powdered sugar frosting. Serves 15-21, depending on slice size

Donna Faga • Adair  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

## LOW-CARB EGG CASSEROLE

- 1 12-ounce bag frozen riced cauliflower
- 1 12-ounce bag frozen mushrooms
- 1 10- or 12-ounce bag frozen chopped onions
- 1 pound lean ground turkey
- 1 pound lean turkey sausage
- 18 eggs, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons red pepper flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated Parmesan cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dried vegetable or dried onion soup mix

The night before, place frozen vegetables in the refrigerator to thaw. Place mushrooms and onions in a strainer to thaw and drain. The next morning, cook ground turkey and turkey sausage, drain. Add thawed vegetables and meat to a greased 9x13-inch casserole dish. Distribute evenly to cover the entire casserole dish. In a medium-sized bowl, beat eggs with an electric mixer. Add salt, pepper, red pepper flakes, Parmesan cheese and dried soup mix. Pour over vegetables and meat. If desired, add more Parmesan cheese. Bake at 375 degrees F for about an hour. The casserole should be set firm enough to cut, but not over-browned. Place dish on a trivet or cooling rack. Cut into squares and serve immediately. Yield: 10-12 servings.

Richard R. Buller • Burlington  
Access Energy Cooperative

## ◀ BLUEBERRY COFFEECAKE

- ½ cup coconut
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 package blueberry muffin mix
- 1 8-ounce can crushed pineapple, with juice
- 1 egg

Mix coconut, brown sugar, butter and flour. Set aside. Rinse blueberries with cold water, drain and pat dry. Mix muffin mix, pineapple and egg until moistened. Fold blueberries into batter, then spread batter into a 9-inch square pan. Sprinkle coconut topping over batter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25-30 minutes. Can double the recipe and bake in a 9x13-inch pan.

**Carole Ristau • Eagle Grove  
Prairie Energy Cooperative**

## BISCUITS AND GRAVY BAKE

- 2 16.3-ounce cans refrigerated biscuits
- 2 pounds ground sausage
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2½ cups milk
- kosher salt, to taste
- freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- pinch cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon fresh chives, chopped, optional

Cut biscuits into quarters and add half to a 9x13-inch pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 375 degrees F for 12-15 minutes, until golden. Meanwhile, cook sausage in a large skillet over medium heat, breaking up meat with a wooden spoon. Cook for about 6 minutes, until sausage is no longer pink. Add flour and cook for 1 minute more. Pour in milk and whisk to combine. Season with salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper. Bring gravy to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for about three minutes, until thickened. Remove from heat and pour gravy over par-baked biscuits. Top with remaining biscuits. Brush biscuits with melted butter and season with black pepper. Bake 20 minutes, until golden and cooked through. Garnish with chives before serving. *Yield: 8 servings*

**Virginia Arens • Brooklyn  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative**

## GERMAN POTATO PANCAKES

- 5 cups raw potatoes, grated (2 pounds)
- 6 tablespoons flour
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup cooking oil
- applesauce, optional
- sausage, optional

Combine potatoes, flour, onion, eggs and salt. Put oil in a 10-inch skillet and heat. Pour potato mixture into hot oil, using about ¼ cup for each pancake. Cook until golden brown on each side. Serve with applesauce or sausage. *Yield: 6-8 pancakes*

**Ava Nester • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## SWEET POTATO HASH

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes
- 4 slices thick-cut bacon
- 6 scallions
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup water
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder

Peel sweet potatoes and cut into ¾-inch pieces. Set aside. Cook bacon until crisp. While bacon is cooking, slice scallions, keeping the white and light green parts separate from the dark green parts. Once bacon is cooked crisp, put it on a paper towel-lined plate and reserve drippings in the skillet. Add sweet potatoes, peppers and light parts of the scallions to the skillet. Cook, stirring occasionally until beginning to soften. Add water, salt, paprika, cumin and garlic powder. Cover and cook about 8 minutes, stirring occasionally until potatoes are mostly tender. Uncover and turn heat up to medium high. Cook stirring occasionally until potatoes are tender, slightly browned and all the liquid is evaporated. Stir in bacon and green scallions. *Serves 6-8*

**Michelle Heath • Parkersburg  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative**

WANTED:

## COOL & CRISP SUMMER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

**\$25 BILL CREDIT FOR  
EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is April 30**

We're looking for your favorite **summer recipes** that require little to no cooking. Think cool and crisp salads, sandwiches, wraps, grain bowls or veggie and fruit dishes! Selected submissions will appear in our August issue, providing refreshing recipes for hot, humid days. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

**MAIL: Recipes**

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322





# MAKING AN OLD HOUSE WORK FOR TODAY

BY NATE BIRT

You love your older rural house and want to honor its history while upgrading it for modern living.

Whether you own a century-old farmhouse or a midcentury ranch, experts say a thoughtful approach can help you modernize your home while preserving its character.

## Keep your house's bones intact to honor its history

As you evaluate renovation options, start by appreciating what you're working with. View your house's strengths and limitations as both an echo of the past and a guide for its next chapter.

"Old buildings are usually constructed very well. They were built at a time when people understood that the quality of their work was a reflection of their character," said Melinda McKnight, CEO of Energy Conservation Services. She and her husband Bill consult on building science and energy efficiency with homeowners whose properties date back to the 1600s.

Still, older homes come with "some inherent limitations," Melinda said. Modern preferences, such as open concepts and cathedral ceilings, may not always be a good fit.

"A lot of times, unless those features are done with the guidance of a building scientist, those kinds of decisions can actually cause damage if they're not done properly," she said.

The same goes for tossing out old windows or woodworking without realizing they might be restored and retrofitted to improve energy efficiency.

Restoring old windows is often key to preservation. It's also important to protect fireplace mantels, surrounds and banister handrails, which are architecturally significant features.

Other irreplaceable hardware worth preserving includes old doorknobs, hinges and locks.

## Interior treatments can enhance energy efficiency

Home improvement shows often highlight color palettes and visual

upgrades. Experts say the biggest payoff usually comes from improvements you don't see.

"Achieving improved comfort and efficiency in buildings requires air sealing and insulating the bottom and top of the building envelope, the area you pay to heat and cool," Melinda said.

Start with the attic and basement or crawlspace rather than walls and windows.

"Our goal is always to address the bottom and the top of the building envelope," she said. "That's usually the low-hanging fruit."

The reason is simple physics. Warm air rises and escapes through the top while cold air enters through gaps along the bottom.

"Only 30% of net heat gain and loss goes out the side of your house," said Gus Adams, co-owner of a renovation and historic preservation company. "Heat rises and cool air goes down. So the two most important

things are insulating the attic and crawlspace or basement.”

Next, identify and seal places where air leaks occur. Rim joists, where the wooden frame meets floor joists, are a common example.

“Wherever wood meets wood, that’s an air leak,” Melinda said. “Outdoor air entering conditioned space can create condensation and mold. And anywhere there’s an air leak, it’s an opportunity for a rodent to enter.”

For air sealing, use professional-grade foam, a metal applicator gun and an acetone-based cleaner rather than disposable straw kits that can clog.

Other energy-efficiency upgrades for rural homes include:

- **Installing a mini-split:** These systems heat and cool individual rooms in homes without room for ductwork. They work best in houses that are properly air sealed and insulated.
- **Caulking air gaps:** Fill gaps with caulk or one-part foam. Common leakage points include outlet boxes, window trim and plumbing penetrations on exterior walls.

### Exterior investments should divert water, improve comfort

When preserving your home’s structure and history, managing water is essential.

A common issue is downspouts that don’t extend far enough away from the home. Ideally they should discharge water at least 8 feet from the house.

Roof problems also deserve careful attention. A leak doesn’t always mean the entire roof must be replaced. Sometimes replacing flashing, the metal pieces that prevent water entry, solves the problem.

“If there are roof lines that come together creating valleys, you want flashing there,” Melinda said. “You also want step flashing along chimneys and stack pipes.”

Also examine cantilevers, which are floor sections that extend beyond the foundation.



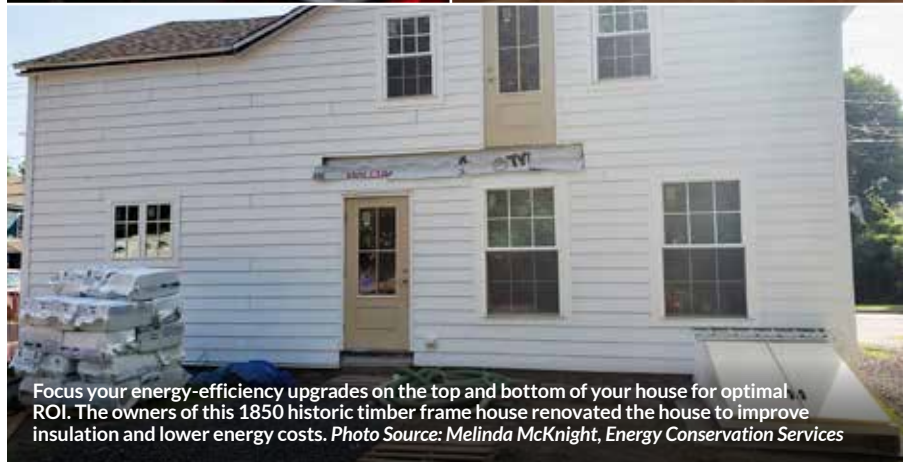
A blower door test can measure the airtightness of a home and identify hidden air leaks.



A 1889 rural farm house before renovations. The house was lifted to stabilize the existing structure, installing modern infrastructure and creating a daylight basement.



Achieving improved comfort and efficiency in buildings requires air sealing and insulating. Begin with the attic and basement or crawlspace.



Focus your energy-efficiency upgrades on the top and bottom of your house for optimal ROI. The owners of this 1850 historic timber frame house renovated the house to improve insulation and lower energy costs. Photo Source: Melinda McKnight, Energy Conservation Services

“If you put a three-season room on the first floor but don’t take care of the underside properly, that’s an air leak,” Melinda said. “It can lead to discomfort and higher utility bills.”

Raised ranch homes built in the 1970s often include cantilevers along the front of the house that can create cold floors.

### Do your DIY and know your limits

Many upgrades are manageable for handy homeowners, but it’s important to understand your limits.

Air sealing gaps, cracks and penetrations is often more important than adding insulation. Focus on gaps around plumbing and electrical penetrations.

If you remove trim, scrollwork, windows or other historic

features, store them rather than discarding them so they can be restored later, if desired.

For major upgrades, including full electrical rewiring or major plumbing work, hire a licensed and insured professional. Exterior painting projects should also be handled by specialists experienced with older homes and historic materials.

“As a steward of a historic home, treat it kind of like it’s an archaeological site,” added Katie Adams, co-owner of a renovation and historic preservation company. “It’s really important to leave the original fabric of the home because you are caring for it now.”

Nate Birt is special contributor to Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.

# THREE TIPS TO BOOST WINDOW PERFORMANCE IN OLD HOUSES

When it comes to energy upgrades, windows often are among the first features homeowners want to replace. But experts say they're also one of the least cost-effective.

"Windows are expensive, so they have a very long payback. They're not the biggest bang for your buck," explains Melinda McKnight, CEO of Energy Conservation Services.

Unless they're cracked or leaking, your original windows can often be upgraded in place, and she recommends trying these tips.

**1 Replace air sealing and not the glass itself.** Some installers will just tuck fiberglass inside the frame, and then put trim on. Instead of

fiberglass, use a one-part low-expansion window-and-door foam, then apply the trim. This will be a much better result, and there will be much less draft.

**2 Use pulley covers, window felts and door sweeps.** These treatments can make a surprising difference in comfort and energy savings. There's a lot you can do to tighten up old windows.

**3 Install interior storm windows.** Products such as Climate Seal are used by the National Park Service to improve energy efficiency in historic houses without altering their appearance. These acrylic interior windows can be custom measured and can be magnetically affixed.



## AVOID THESE COMMON MODERNIZATION MISTAKES IN YOUR HISTORIC HOME

You don't have to learn lessons the hard way when upgrading an older house. Experts say many renovation problems stem from a few common mistakes.

### Mistake #1: Painting without understanding your wood

Modern paints can seal wood so tightly that moisture becomes trapped behind the surface. When that happens, paint can begin failing in as little as five years.

### Mistake #2: Skipping moisture diagnosis before repair

Before repairing rotted materials, it's important to determine what caused the moisture problem in the first place. Without identifying and fixing the source, the same damage can return repeatedly.

### Mistake #3: Using modern materials where they don't belong

Certain modern materials can damage historic building components. For example, using Portland-based cement with historic brick can cause

the brick face to crack because the cement is harder than the lime-based mortar typically used in older homes.

### Mistake #4: Poor moisture control

Improperly vented bathroom fans are one of the most common moisture problems in older homes. Fans that vent into an attic introduce warm, humid air into an unconditioned space, which can lead to moisture buildup and mold. Bathroom fans should vent directly outdoors through an insulated metal duct, and a backdraft damper can help prevent outside air from entering the house.

### Mistake #5: Ignoring the electrical panel

Outdated wiring and discontinued electrical equipment can create safety risks. Common hazards include knob-and-tube wiring and uncovered electrical junction boxes. Some older circuit-breaker panels have also been recalled for causing fires. In addition, many older houses still have 100-amp electrical service, which may be inadequate for modern electrical demands.



# ELECTRIFY YOUR LAWN CARE

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Electric lawn equipment has seen drastic improvements in cost, motor efficiency and battery power in recent years. From hedge and string trimmers to leaf blowers, chainsaws, and push and riding mowers, there are many options for electric lawn equipment.

## Why electric equipment makes sense

Electric equipment is quieter than its gas-powered counterparts and typically needs less maintenance. There's no more mixing fuel, changing spark plugs or worrying about gas going bad over the winter. Advances in rechargeable battery technology eliminate having to lug around a heavy extension cord to get your work done. Just pop in a battery and go.

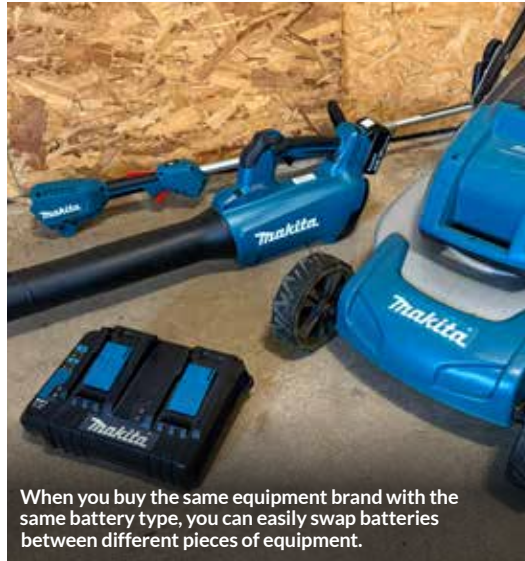
Most popular lawn equipment brands offer battery-powered options, along with newer brands that specialize in electric tools. If you need multiple tools, buying the same brand with the same battery type allows you to swap batteries between different pieces of equipment. That also means fewer battery chargers to store or keep on your workbench.

## Choose efficient brushless motors

Opt for equipment with brushless motors. They are more efficient, more powerful and have a longer lifespan than traditional brushed motors. A brushless motor typically costs more but is worth the improved efficiency. A brushed motor transfers electricity using physical brushes, which can wear down over time. The friction caused by the brushes makes equipment run hotter and noisier. A brushless motor uses electronic commutation with less friction, which makes it more powerful, extends the lifespan and allows you to get more done on a single charge.

## Handle and recycle batteries safely

Just as gas-powered lawn mowers require safe storage and handling of gas and oil, battery-powered equipment requires proper care for



When you buy the same equipment brand with the same battery type, you can easily swap batteries between different pieces of equipment.



Charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable, and store chargers in a cool, dry place.



Improved battery technology makes it easy to get more done on a single charge and avoid hauling around a cord.

maintenance, charging and disposal. Always use the manufacturer's original charging equipment, charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable, and store chargers in a cool, dry place.

Most manufacturers recommend charging batteries only until they reach full capacity, rather than leaving them on the charger until you are ready to use them. This helps prevent battery damage from overcharging and heat buildup and reduces fire hazards. Unplug chargers when not in use to avoid energy waste.

Similar to gas and oil, old or damaged batteries should not end up in household garbage and landfills, where they can ignite fires and leak toxic chemicals into soil and groundwater. Instead, recycle them at a big-box store or at a county or city waste management site.

If you're looking for a quieter, more efficient, lower-maintenance lawn care routine, rethink your equipment options and consider electric models. If you decide to make the switch, check with your electric utility or state agency for potential rebates.

*Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

## QUICK TIPS FOR BUYING ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT

- **Check battery compatibility.** If you plan to buy multiple tools, choose the same brand so one battery type can power several pieces of equipment.
- **Look for brushless motors.** They run more efficiently, produce less heat and typically last longer than brushed motors.
- **Buy an extra battery if needed.** Having a second battery lets you keep working while the other one charges.
- **Test the weight and balance.** Battery-powered equipment can feel different from gas models, so choose tools that are comfortable to handle.
- **Ask about rebates.** Some electric providers or cities offer incentives for switching from gas-powered lawn equipment to electric models.

# SPRING CLEANING TIPS TO MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY

Adopting simple yet effective energy-saving strategies during spring-cleaning routines can create an efficient living environment that may also lower utility bills and extend the life of heavily used appliances.



## Protect equipment and maximize efficiency with a clean filter.

Check the filter in your HVAC system. Ensuring your system has a clean filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency. You should have your air conditioning serviced and professionally cleaned. Dirty refrigerant coils reduce efficiency. This also applies to heat pumps and ductless heat pumps.



## Schedule checkups before the heat arrives.

Scheduling cleaning services for your air conditioning in the spring – before the heat of the summer – can ensure the work gets done before the rush and even save you money. Window AC units can get dirty, too. They can be cleaned with the proper tools, cleaning agents and know-how. Always unplug units before cleaning, and wait until it is completely dry before plugging it back in again.



## Brighten your space.

Cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers can brighten your space by removing dust and grime collected during the winter. While you're at it, check your bulbs and

replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent with energy-saving LEDs. Although they tend to cost a little more, LEDs last longer and use less energy.



## Clean the oven and windows.

A clean oven heats more evenly and quickly, providing better results and lower energy use. A clean oven window allows you to see the food and how it's cooking without opening the oven door, which wastes energy. When cleaning windows, check the seals and sash locks to ensure they close tightly. Check for any areas that need caulking or sealing to reduce drafts.

Spring is the ideal time to declutter, deep clean and implement practices that tidy our homes and reduce energy consumption.

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- 3 Include your **name**, **service address** and the **name of your electric cooperative** in the email body to ensure you qualify for our contest. A **phone number** is also appreciated in case we need to contact you.

All eligible entries are reviewed and considered for each edition of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*. Keep an eye out for next month's winner!



# A PRAYER IN YOUR POCKET

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Lining your pockets doesn't have the best connotation, but that's exactly what I did back in December. It happened at an unlikely place – a day-long class on artificial intelligence, hosted by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

When I lined my pockets, though, I did it in the most low-tech way possible, and there was nothing unethical about it. I sat down to lunch at the Sheraton West Des Moines, and the lady to my left pulled a little plastic sandwich bag from her purse. Inside were 2-inch by 2-inch mini quilts in an array of colors and block designs, each with a tiny cross tucked in between the layers of fabric and batting.

The kind lady was Pat VonAhnen from Marshalltown, who's been a Consumers Energy board director for 18 years. She started handing out the little quilts to everyone at our table.

What a delightful surprise! Then I noticed the words printed on the back. "This 'Pocket Prayer Quilt' was made especially for you to slip in your pocket. Throughout the day, when your fingers touch the cross inside the quilt, be mindful of God's love and grace for you. Keep it as a tangible symbol of God's peace."

"You just never know who needs one," Pat told me.

## Pass it on

Pat mentioned her audiologist, who's one of the most cheerful, upbeat people she knows. One day, though, something seemed amiss. Pat passed along a pocket prayer quilt.

That little quilt ended up being a more important source of comfort than anyone realized. The audiologist was recovering from major surgery, and it was tough. Today, the audiologist gladly shares pocket prayer quilts (which Pat supplies) with anyone who needs one.



Consumers Energy Director Pat VonAhnen makes these pocket prayer quilts to share with others.

This remarkable story reminded me of one of the ladies at our lunch table of Elijah in the Bible, specifically First Kings, 19:12, "... after the fire there was a voice, a soft whisper." "These pocket prayer quilts are like listening to a whisper, not a big hurrah," she noted.

Pat agreed, saying it's that gentle whisper that usually inspires her to ask people if they'd like a pocket prayer quilt. "I'll feel a little nudge that I should give one to the person I'm with. I listen to that small voice."

The pocket prayer quilt ministry started simply enough when Pat sewed eight pocket prayer quilts to share at a ladies' tea in the spring of 2025. The idea took root after her sister-in-law gave her a pocket prayer quilt for Christmas.

As Pat handed the little quilts out to the ladies during the tea, she heard a common refrain: "How did you know I needed this?"

Pat decided she could make 20 more, and that would be it. The more quilts she gave, however, the more she knew this must continue. "I wasn't looking for another project, but it picked me," said Pat, a longtime

community volunteer. "I'd think of 10 more people I could give them to, and then I'd think of 10 more."

## Sharing the gift of hope

This pocket prayer ministry has taken on a life of its own. Pat's pastor shares the quilts. People sometimes donate money to help Pat buy more fabric and supplies. "This has been an unexpected opportunity to share," said Pat, who sews small and medium pocket prayer quilts for people of all ages, men and women, friends and strangers.

These little pocket prayer quilts seem even more extraordinary at Easter and spring. During this time of renewal and new life, we're reminded, sometimes by a tiny quilt in our pocket, that the greatest gift of this season is hope.

*Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).*



Scan the QR code for instructions on how to make a pocket prayer quilt.

Visit our website at [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com)



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