

Photo by Dave Bentz

Backyard Farmer panelists answer viewers' questions about their flora and fauna from the KUON-TV studios.

# Farming show's popularity sprouts a spin-off program

By Chuck Jagoda

What television series has been broadcast longer than Today, The Tonight Show, and Captain Kangaroo? Longer even than its own

network? It's Backyard Farmer - the NU Cooperative Extension Service's live lawn and garden show.

Thirty years ago this season, agricultural experts began answering viewers' questions about everything from aphids to artichokes.

The show premiered on commercial television and two years later, when KUON-TV began operations, its folksy, phone-in format was moved to the new educational channel.

The program's longevity is something of a record in a medium where programs are lucky to last a single season. None of the national networks' prime time series have been on the air as long as this popular Tuesday night show.

It's not expensive stars or exotic locations or topical comedy that keeps the viewers tuned in. What's so interesting about watching a panel of agricultural experts answer homeowner questions? Bob Roselle, extension entomologist and a member of the panel from its first broadcast in 1952 attributes the show's appeal to three factors: "It's locally produced, audience participation has continued to grow, and the timeliness of the concerns. It deals with the problems that people have at that time."

extension entomologist and

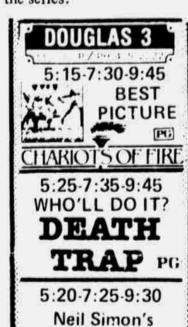
28-year veteran of Backyard Farmer, enjoy their co-workers and the satisfaction of helping people. As Furrer explains it, "We've gotten such terrific cooperation from everyone - the volunteers and garden center people who answer the phones. We (the panelists) do it as part of our jobs. And you make so many friends across the state. You go into any small town and you're recognized. That's why we do it: recognition and service."

Other panel members are Dave Wysong, extension plant pathologist, Don Steinegger, extension horticulturist and host Craig Derscheid, a mass communications specialist at the NU Department of Agricultural Communications. Derscheid comes to Lincoln from South Dakota where he's done everything in television and radio from sports anchor to news reporter, on educational and commercial television. Backyard Farmer is Dersheid's first host assignment but he said he's not worried. "The focus of the show is the panel members," he said. "And the panel members are very knowledgeable." Derscheid credits their expertise in handling the 200 or more phone calls that come in on a typical Tuesday night.

The show is so pop-ular – in this year's Nebraska Public Television member survey it ranked third locally and ninth nationally in a list of 80 programs - that it has Roselle and John Furrer, spawned a spin-off. Backyard Farmer RFD, pre-re-

corded an hour before the live show, invites viewers to send in samples of their problems - a diseased tree branch is a typical specimen. The panelists display the sample to the audience and answer the associated question.

This year's plans include some live audience programs and more pre-produced "how-to" and "when-to" segments on a wide variety of horticultural subjects, according to Jim Randall, extension communications specialist and producer of the series.



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