

# Life

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HOMESTYLE

SECTION C

## At home in the ranch

### '50s staple is popular again

By WHITNEY GOULD  
McClatchy Newspapers

For years, people looked down their noses at them.

Low-slung, bland and emblematic of suburban conformity, the humble ranch was the house that '50s kids grew up in and couldn't wait to get away from.

Look again. Today the ranch house is enjoying a resurgence, fed in part by nostalgia for a simpler time but also by the hard-nosed realism of aging baby boomers. They like the convenience and efficiency of one-story living.

A sign of the new cachet: The ranch now has its own magazine, Atomic Ranch. Even the historic preservation movement, which has spent most of its energy fighting to save century-old artifacts, got the ranch bug. Earlier this month, a ranch-filled 1950s neighborhood on the west side of Madison, Wis., became the focus of an old-house tour.

"The ranch is a vital component of our shared heritage, a part of the narrative of American architecture that's just as important as Victorian houses," said Anthony Rubano, a project designer with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

### Open floor plans

Rubano, who lives in a 1956 ranch in Springfield, Ill., knows firsthand the appeal of these midcentury moderns.

"With their open plan, with everything all on one level, with their integrated lighting and easy communication among rooms, these are very livable houses," he says.

So what exactly is a ranch? Typically, it's a one- or 1½-story house with a flat or gently pitched roof, wide overhangs, big picture windows and an attached garage (or sometimes a carport). The back might have sliding glass doors opening onto a patio. Decorative details are minimal.

The style has its roots in the Spanish colonial ranchos of the early 19th century — earth-bound adobe dwellings with deep overhangs to keep out the summer sun. Other precursors include Frank Lloyd Wright's broad, horizontal Prairie School houses, especially the small Usonian homes he designed for middle-class clients; and the simple, geometric forms of the modernist pioneer Mies van der Rohe and his followers.

The California architect Cliff May popularized the style in the 1930s with sun-filled, L- or U-shaped tract houses and with elegant custom versions that were celebrated in shelter magazines like House and Garden.

Jim Draeger, an architectural historian with the Wisconsin Historical Society, traces the ranch's golden age to the post-World War II housing boom and federally insured mortgage policies.

"You had 20 years of pent-up housing demand, the fact that these houses could be put up very quickly and the FHAs influence on the aesthetics of subdivision design," Draeger said, referring to the Federal Housing Administration. "The FHA actually had an 'adjustment for conformity,' rating your home loan lower if the house wasn't a ranch or a Cape Cod."

Soon, it seemed that every young family was living in a ranch.

"The GI Bill, the American dream, everyone making babies — all of that happened in ranches," said Waukesha County (Wis.) developer Bill Carity, whose subdivisions include lots of modern ranches.

By one estimate, almost three-



MIKE McCLEARY/Tribune

Conservationist J.R. Flores, with the North Dakota Natural Resources Conservation Service, holds a new landscaping publication entitled "Living Landscapes in North Dakota: A Guide to Native Plantscaping" earlier this week in Bismarck.

# Going native

## Sow the seeds of conservation; reap the savings and pleasure

By KEN ROGERS  
Bismarck Tribune

In a dry year, like this one, or if you live on five acres in the countryside, ditching the well-watered green lawn for hearty native grasses and wildflowers speaks to the prairie person in you and to the pocketbook.

er of the Plant Materials Center in Bismarck. He said that several years ago, in response to that interest, plant materials specialist Dwight Tober developed some basic brochures offering tips and information on native plants and plantings. They were sort of the "seeds" of the new publication.

It's a 40-page, full-color, glossy booklet jammed with graphics, photos and practical information on how to adapt yards to native grasses and wildflowers. It moves from planning and design to choosing grasses and wildflowers to maintenance and plant protection.

It's a "how-to" manual with plenty of diagrams. It has a to-do list of tasks broken down into spring, summer and fall.

The guide was nearly a year in the making. It's free and available at local NRCS field offices and will be available at the North Dakota State Fair.

The benefits of such plantscaping, according to the guide, are economic, environmental and related to quality of life. Economic benefits: lower water and maintenance costs, enhanced real estate values, increased survival of planting and edible and decorative products. Environmental: improved water and soil conservation, reduced use of petroleum products, improved air quality-carbon sequestration, enhanced urban wildlife



**Golden alexander**  
*Zizia aurea*  
Ht: 1-2'  
Flower: Yellow  
Bloom: June-July  
Habitat: Full to part sun.  
Moist soils.



**Prairie coneflower**  
*Ratibida columnifera*  
Ht: 2-3'  
Flower: Yellow  
Bloom: June-Aug.  
Habitat: Full sun.  
Moist to dry soils.



**Black-eyed susan**  
*Rudbeckia hirta*  
Ht: 1-2'  
Flower: Yellow  
Bloom: June-August  
Habitat: Full to part sun.  
Moist to dry soils.



**Little bluestem**  
*Schizachyrium scoparium*  
Ht: 2-3'  
Flower: Reddish/White  
Bloom: July-September  
Habitat: Full sun.  
Moist to dry soils.



**Mint**  
*Monarda fistulosa*  
Ht: 1-2'  
Flower: White to Pink  
Bloom: July-August  
Habitat: Full to part sun.  
Moist to wet soils.



**New England aster**  
*Symphotrichum novae*  
Ht: 3-5'  
Flower: Purple  
Bloom: September  
Habitat: Full sun.  
Moist soils.



**Potentilla**  
*Dasiphora floribunda*  
Ht: 2-4'  
Flower: Yellow to White  
Bloom: July-September  
Habitat: Full to part sun.  
Moist to dry soils.



**Prairie dropseed**  
*Sporobolus heterolepis*  
Ht: 1-3'  
Flower: Grey  
Bloom: July-September  
Habitat: Full sun.  
Moist soils.

Flower photos courtesy of "Living Landscapes"



Blazing star



Purple coneflower

But how do you get from golf green to cone flower purple and sunflower yellow?

What plants will work well here? Where do you get them? How do you prepare the soil? What do you do about weeds in a yard of native grasses and wildflowers?

Workers for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in North Dakota have been answering questions like these for years. Now a coalition of resource and soil conservation agencies, tapping the technical skills of their staffs, have published "Living Landscapes in North Dakota: A Guide To Native Plantscaping."

"With the extreme environmental conditions here in North Dakota, a need was identified to develop a publication of this nature to cover excellent alternatives to traditional landscaping," said J.R. Flores, NRCS state conservationist, in a release announcing the publication of the booklet.

There's been a growing interest in native landscaping — because it is low-maintenance and drought-resistant, said Wayne Duckwitz, manag-



Black-eyed Susan

habitat and reduced storm water runoff. Quality of life: attractive year-round landscape, increased wildlife viewing, connection with nature and decreased mowing.

The guide isn't the work of one person, or even one department. Contributors from the NRCS include Mark Anderson, resource conservationist; Rachel Bergsagel, biological science technician; Arlene Deutscher, public affairs specialist; David Dewald, biologist; Wayne Duckwitz, Plant Materials Center manager; Nancy Jensen, agronomist; Lynette Lennic, editor; Susan Samson-Liebig, soil data quality specialist; Jay Mar, RC&D

coordinator; Wayne Markegard, RC&D coordinator; Steve Sieler, state soil liaison; Craig Strange, forester; and Dwight Tober, plant materials specialist.

Funding came from the NRCS and the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

The separate sections of the brochures were developed and written by individual departments and people with the proper expertise.

The individual contributors met as a group and then worked within their departments. The effort was coordinated by Wayne Markegard.