

# living with energy

IN IOWA

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COOPERATIVES



MARCH 2011

Strangulation deaths prompt recall of video baby monitors

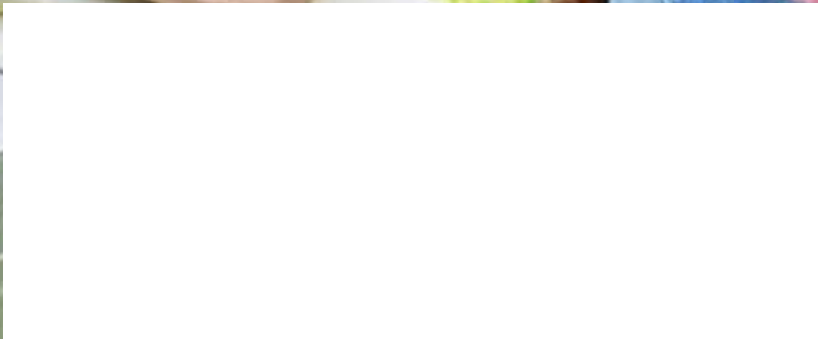
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Join the heirloom boom in gardening!

Will you be parking an electric car in your garage anytime soon?

Reel in the state's best seafood recipes

Maintain proper clearance around grain bins



## How to Contact Us

### WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Letters to the editor may be edited for clarity and length before publication.

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#### SUBMITTING A RECIPE

You may submit a recipe to be considered for publication in an upcoming issue. Recipes appearing in the magazine also may be shown on the *Living with Energy in Iowa* Web site at [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com). Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the month's recipe category on all submissions.

**E-mail:** [recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com](mailto:recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com) (Attach your recipe as a Word document or a PDF to your e-mail message, rather than including it in the body of your message.)

**Address:** Recipes, *Living with Energy in Iowa*, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

#### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Living with Energy in Iowa* cannot make an address change for you.



Iowa Association of  
Electric Cooperatives

\* A Touchstone Energy\* Cooperative 

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**When was the last time you visited our Web site?**

[www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com)

# living with energy IN IOWA

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Photo: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



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Photo: © GM Corp.

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Finishing the attic? Be sure to insulate around storage drawers or cabinets that are recessed through knee walls into the attic.

# We want to know what you're thinking!

BY ROBERT A. DICKELMAN

If you're a longtime reader of this magazine, you may remember participating in one or more of our reader surveys during the past several years. Whether you completed a telephone, online or mail-in version of a survey, one thing's for sure: With 40 or more questions to answer, they were pretty time-consuming to complete.

The length of the surveys was due, in part, to the need for providing details about our readers' attitudes as a group – never individually – to potential advertisers. Your responses also offered us plenty of guidance in offering articles on topics you said were important to you.

As always, we continue to place a high value on your opinions about the magazine and being an electric cooperative member. But we also know your time is increasingly valuable, so in January we came up with a new way to regularly gather your input, the **5-Minute Survey**.

To participate, just go to our Web site at [www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com), click on the link under the 5-Minute Survey logo and answer a maximum of

five questions. At the end, you can add your name, address and co-op name to be eligible for a randomly drawn prize of a \$50 credit on your power bill – or you can choose to submit your responses anonymously. Either way, we're happy to have your thoughts.

In January, we asked about energy-efficiency home improvements you've already made – and ones you're planning to make this year. Many of you said you've already done some of the easy things, such as installing CFLs or caulking outside. In addition, we were surprised to learn that nearly a third of you purchased a new energy-saving refrigerator last year – and that fewer than a quarter of you have taken advantage of one of the easiest and most-effective energy-savers: turning down your water heater's temperature to 120 degrees.

By the way, the randomly drawn winner of the \$50 power bill credit was Bruce Flickinger, a member of Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc. ⚡

Robert A. Dickelman is the editor of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine.



Up to \$5,600 extra back from the IRS. That's worth looking into. Single or married, with or without children, you may qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit if you:

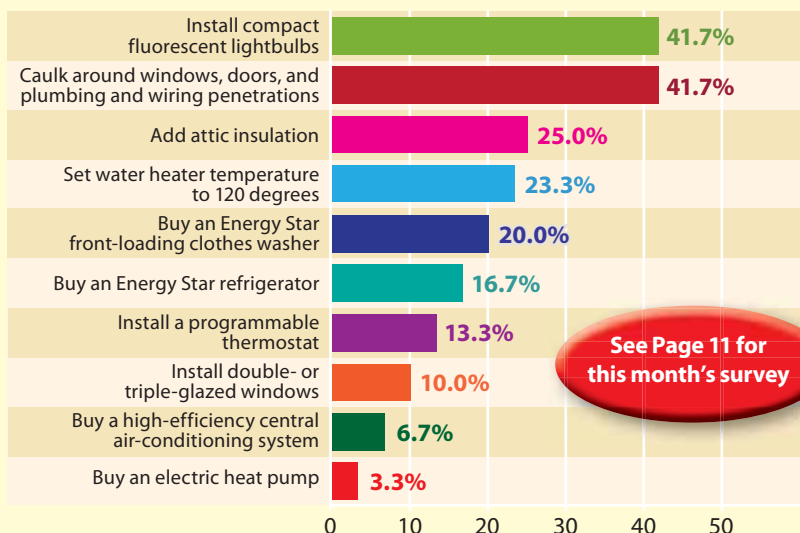
- Worked part or all of 2010
- File a 2010 federal tax return
- Make less than \$48,000

Life's a little easier with



800.829.1040  
[www.irs.gov/eitc](http://www.irs.gov/eitc)

## What energy-saving projects are you planning to tackle this year?



## Quote of the Month

"Some folks want wind and solar. Others want nuclear, clean coal and natural gas. To meet this goal, we will need them all – and I urge Democrats and Republicans to work together to make it happen."

President Barack Obama  
State of the Union Address

## Buymanship

### Is a separate freezer an energy-smart choice?

Many people buy a freezer to stock up on bulk foods or game once or twice a year, and then let the appliance run half-full the rest of the time. If you decide a new freezer makes sense, make energy efficiency a top priority by looking at ones that are Energy Star® qualified; also compare the EnergyGuide labels on the units.



An upright freezer is available in both manual- and automatic-defrosting versions. A self-defrosting upright costs a little more to operate, but many people think the added convenience is worth the extra expenditure.

On the other hand, a chest freezer of similar capacity should cost a little less to operate. Many chest freezers require manual defrosting, which means removing all of the food inside, turning off the power and draining the water that accumulates in the bottom.

No matter which style you prefer, even the most basic freezer should include an adjustable temperature control, an interior light to make it quicker to find foods, an exterior "power on" light, an alarm that sounds if the temperature gets too high and a door lock to keep kids out of the appliance. ⚡

## Storm Preparedness

### Plan ahead to stay safe during severe storms

According to the National Weather Service, Americans live in the most severe-weather-prone country in the world. Your best defenses against the inevitable spring storms are to know your local warning systems, invest in a NOAA weather radio and help everyone in your family to be prepared now, since you never know when a storm may hit.

- Assemble essentials such as daily medications, flashlights and a radio. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers that includes your electric cooperative.
- Fill containers with water for washing, and keep a supply of bottled drinking water on hand. Put together a supply of nonperishable food items, along with an opener for canned foods.
- Tune into your local weather station if you suspect severe weather is brewing.
- During an outage, switch off lights and appliances to

prevent overloading circuits and damaging appliances when power is restored. Leave one light on as a signal when power is restored.

- After a severe storm, stay away from downed power lines. Assume that any fallen or dangling wires are energized. Warn others to stay away and contact your electric co-op.
- Never step into a flooded basement or other area if water is covering electrical outlets, appliances or cords, and don't touch any of them while you're wet or standing in water.
- Before re-entering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure all electric and gas services are turned off. Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so; instead, ask your electric co-op to shut off power at the meter. Learn more about storm safety at [www.safeelectricity.org](http://www.safeelectricity.org). ⚡

## In the News

### Gov. Branstad adds Libby Jacobs to Iowa Utilities Board

On Feb. 28, Gov. Terry E. Branstad appointed former state Rep. Elizabeth (Libby) Jacobs to the Iowa Utilities Board. The agency regulates utilities to ensure a fair marketplace with reasonably priced, reliable, environmentally responsible and safe utilities for all Iowans.

"Libby's experience in both the public and private sector will be beneficial to the board as they continue to be a solutions-oriented partner in utilities issues," said Branstad.

Jacobs' name has been submitted to the Iowa Senate for confirmation.

Her term on the board will last from May 1, 2011, to April 30, 2017. In addition, Branstad appointed her chair of the board; she will serve in that capacity until April 30, 2013.

Jacobs served in the Iowa House of Representatives from 1994 to 2008. After stepping down in 2008, she launched The Jacobs Group, LLC, a Des Moines-based consulting firm.

Jacobs will replace Krista Tanner on the board. The current chair, Rob Bernstein, will remain on the board as a member. ⚡



## With warm weather ahead, watch out for “air conditioner” scams

During the winter, you probably saw the ads made to look like news stories for the “Amish-style” fireplace, a “miracle device” that supposedly would slash your heating bills. In reality, the appliance is simply a space heater hidden inside a false fireplace with a wooden mantle.



Whether a space heater can cut your power bill depends on several factors, including your willingness to turn down the thermostat for the whole house – sometimes to as low as 50 degrees – and live in one room that’s closed off. That’s pretty impractical for most people.

On the flip side are evaporative coolers that say they’ll inexpensively cool a room in your home. The inside of the unit consists of cold water and frozen ice packs, like you’d use in a lunch box. The water wets a curtain; a fan blows air through the curtain and over the ice packs, theoretically providing a cool breeze. Evaporative coolers oper-

ate best in low-humidity regions.

But do they actually work? A *Consumer Reports* magazine experiment found that even in desert-like conditions, one device cooled a test room only two degrees over four hours.

“When it comes to saving energy, there are no magic solutions,” says Brian Sloboda,

senior program manager for energy efficiency at the Cooperative Research Network. “Anyone promising to slash your utility bill by double digits is stretching the truth to the breaking point.”

The reality is that there’s no substitute for good, old-fashioned energy-efficiency measures such as weather stripping around doors, caulking around windows, adding insulation to your attic, plugging leaks in ductwork and regularly cleaning or replacing furnace and air-conditioning system filters. ⚡

Source: Magen Howard, NRECA

## How much energy can you save by spending our \$200?

Many people think they have to spend a lot to save a little energy. That’s not true; in



fact, some of the simplest and least-expensive things you can do – caulking around leaky windows, fixing the weather stripping on exterior doors and installing a programmable thermostat – will be the most effective at reducing your monthly power bill.

To help you get started, this month we’re giving away an Energy-Saving Gift Card you can take to a local hardware store, lumberyard, big-box retailer or other business to buy \$200 worth of energy-saving products of your choice! Best of all, the energy-smart choices you make today will continue to pay dividends for many years to come.

### Visit our Web site, and win!

To register, go to the Editor’s Choice Contest at the *Living with Energy in Iowa* Web site at [www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com) and fill out the entry form by March 31, 2011. We’ll pick the winner’s name at random and publish it in an upcoming issue.

Please note that the purpose of this contest is to encourage you to visit our Web site and that we cannot accept entries by any other means. In addition, you can enter each contest only once, there is no obligation associated with entering this contest and we do not share contestants’ names or entry information with anyone.

The winners of the book *Iowa – Spaces, Places, Faces* in the January issue were Janet R. Jenkins, Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Jami Sherer, Harrison County REC; and Arden Blumi, Western Iowa Power Cooperative.



**A water heater blanket can save you 4-9 percent in water heating costs, which can add up quickly since about 12 percent of your home’s energy use goes toward water heating.**

How do you know if your water heater needs more insulation? Touch it – if it’s warm, wrap it. Choose a blanket with an insulating value of at least R-8, which runs about \$20.

## Buying caulk? Spend a little more now, to save later



# Join the heirloom boom in gardening!

BY JOHN BRUCE

Gardeners across the Midwest are discovering a secret their ancestors took for granted: heirloom seeds that grow into multicolored corn, striped tomatoes and red carrots. But these seeds are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the thousands of heirloom choices on the market today.

## What exactly are heirloom seeds?

Heirloom seeds are collected from true-to-form plant varieties over the course of at least 40 to 50 growing seasons – and some for millennia. Hybrid seeds differ in that they are deliberately crossbred to mass-produce uniform fruits and vegetables suitable for mechanical harvest and long-distance transport.

“Heirloom varieties tend to be much more flavorful than their modern-day counterparts,” says Jere Gettle, owner of Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company in Mansfield, Mo. “That is a clear indication in many cases to their superior nutritional content. Vegetable varieties that were grown and tested

in the 1950s in most cases were vastly superior in vitamins, minerals and protein to vegetables tested in the last few years, often having almost double the vitamin content.”

Baker Creek’s business is booming. With customers in all 50 states and around 50 other countries, seed sales doubled in both 2008 and 2009, says Gettle.

Best sellers include the Cherokee Purple tomato with its dark, rich-tasting flesh. Others are Orangeglo watermelon, a bright orange-fleshed variety that is very sweet; Charentais melon, a popular French heirloom; and Black Futsu squash, an easy-to-grow Japanese favorite with a nutty flavor.

New for 2011 are black, yellow, pink and orange Icicle tomatoes. Colorful, sweet, rich and very flavorful, these tomatoes from Russia are shaped like a long Roma-type tomato, hence the name. Also new at Baker Creek is the Blue Ridge melon. The flavorful variety once was carried by covered wagon from Appalachia to the Ozark Moun-

tains of Missouri during the 1860s. The sweet orange flesh reminds one of the way melons used to taste.

Many people are concerned that modern, gene-altered varieties are contributing to the vast increase in allergies and other food-related health problems that have risen during the past decade. Some of these varieties are bred with nonrelated genes that allow a crop to produce its own pest-control or genes that allow the plants to survive incredible amounts of herbicides.

“Heirloom varieties bring back the natural cycle to farm life and, in many cases, are more adapted to organic practices due to the fact that they were mostly developed before pesticides and chemical fertilizers became a part of farming and gardening,” says Gettle.

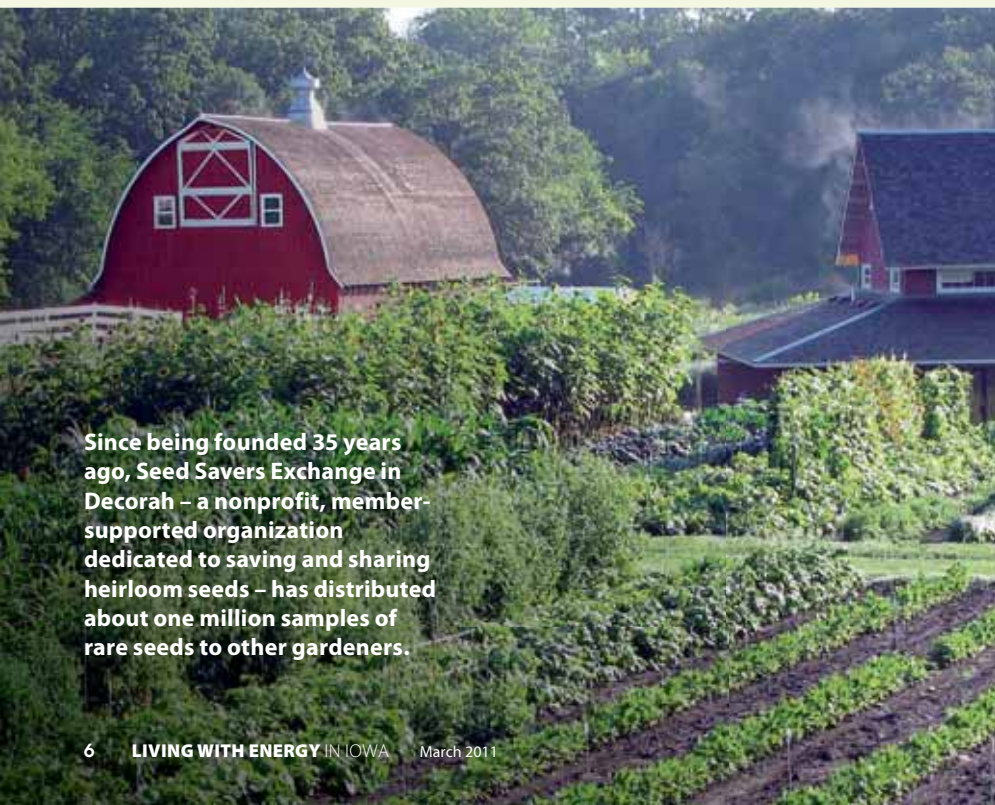
## Which do you prefer: mixed breed or purebred?

“I like to explain hybrids and heirlooms this way: A hybrid is like a mixed-breed dog,” says John Lipscomb, president of Lipscomb Enterprises, a family-run heirloom seed supplier in Toronto, Kan. “Heirlooms are like purebred dogs. They always produce exact copies of themselves.”

Lipscomb launched his Internet seed business, [www.survivalistseeds.com](http://www.survivalistseeds.com), on a shoestring three years ago. Today, he has shipped more than 50,000 pounds of heirloom vegetable seeds to 12,000 loyal customers around the world.

Hybrid fruit and vegetable seeds were developed to address America’s spread of urbanization, consumerism and automobiles nearly a century ago. “Grocers noticed that consumers were trending toward mass consumption of furniture, cars and food,” explains Lipscomb. “People wanted to have the same things as their neighbors.”

Supermarket managers worried that some of their produce was spoiling, because shoppers tended to leave



Photos: Seed Savers Exchange

Since being founded 35 years ago, Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah – a nonprofit, member-supported organization dedicated to saving and sharing heirloom seeds – has distributed about one million samples of rare seeds to other gardeners.

Open from April through December, the Lillian Goldman Visitors Center at the Seed Savers Exchange Heritage Farm houses a large gift shop and garden center within its Amish-built, post-and-beam oak frame.



the ugliest or smallest crops in the bins. Rounder, more colorful and less unique fruits and vegetables sold the best. Hybrids were bred during the 1920s to standardize produce and reduce spoilage.

In addition, machinery could harvest hybrid crops with near-identical shapes and sizes, with traits such as tougher skin and rounder surfaces. Harvest mechanization was cheaper than the manual labor required for heirloom varieties.

Lipscomb offers a 50-variety pack of 10,000 heirloom vegetable seeds. He says he landed on the bulk-seed concept for two reasons. First, new gardeners tend to be intimidated by hundreds of choices. Second, he can concentrate on buying only 50 varieties directly from farmers and pass on the savings to his customers. This year, he is introducing several new varieties including Amber Globe turnip, Self-Blanch cauliflower, Red Romaine lettuce, Lanton Progress pea, Howden pumpkin and Chioggio beet.

### The largest seed bank in the U.S. is closer than you think

There are many other important reasons to grow heirloom varieties, points out Shannon Carmody of Seed Savers Exchange at the 890-acre Heritage Farm in Decorah. "True-to-type seeds can be saved from heirlooms, but this

is generally not the case for hybrids," she says. "There are a wide variety of heirlooms, and growing some of the rarer varieties ensures that they do not go extinct."

She adds that heirlooms have been grown for so many generations in a certain region that they are suited for that region's climate and growing conditions.

Sales at Seed Savers, a member of Hawkeye REC in Cresco, have been growing roughly 20 percent yearly, with top-selling heirloom varieties such as Amish snap beans, Genovese basil and five-color Silverbeet chard. Several new varieties are planned for this year, says Carmody.

Seed Savers Exchange has 13,000 members across the country and overseas who receive the annually published Seed Savers Yearbook – a tome of more than 12,000 open-pollinated varieties offered by members for other members. Other membership perks include 10 percent discounts on catalog, online and visitor center

purchases; a membership magazine; discounts on workshops and events at the exchange's Heritage Farm; and reciprocal admissions programs with other American Horticultural Society organizations.

Seed Savers Exchange members have distributed hundreds of thousands of samples of rare garden seeds since Diane Ott Whealy and Kent Whealy founded the organization in 1975. They began a collection with the seeds of Grandpa Ott's Morning Glory and German Pink Tomato that her great-grandfather brought from Bavaria to St. Lucas, Iowa, during the 1870s.

Now, with a permanent collection of thousands of endangered vegetable varieties in place, Seed Savers Exchange maintains the largest private seed bank in the United States. Members' immigrant ancestors brought most of the seeds to North America from around the world. 🌱

John Bruce is a professional writer who gardens in Columbia, S.C.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co.

**LOCATION:** Mansfield, Mo.  
**WEB SITE:** [www.rareseeds.org](http://www.rareseeds.org)  
**PHONE:** 417-924-8917

#### Lipscomb Enterprises

**LOCATION:** Toronto, Kan.  
**WEB SITE:** [www.survivalistseed.com](http://www.survivalistseed.com)  
**PHONE:** 620-637-2978

#### Seed Savers Exchange

**LOCATION:** Decorah, Iowa  
**WEB SITE:** [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)  
**PHONE:** 563-382-5990

## New varieties from Seed Savers Exchange



**Rosso Sicilian  
Tomato**



**Lemon Drop  
Tomato**



**Edmonson  
Cucumber**



**Champion of  
England Pea**



**Stone Mountain  
Watermelon**

# Seafood

## RECIPES

### Simple Shrimp Scampi

- 8 ounces angel hair pasta
- 1¾ cups chicken broth
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ teaspoon lemon pepper
- ¼ cup chopped green onions, divided
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley, divided
- 1 pound raw shrimp, peeled and deveined

Prepare pasta according to package directions. In a large saucepan, combine the broth, garlic, lemon pepper and 3 tablespoons each green onion and parsley. Bring to a boil. Add shrimp and cook for 3 to 5 minutes or until shrimp turn pink. Drain pasta and place in serving bowl. Top with shrimp mixture and remaining onions and parsley. (Note: You may use cooked shrimp. Reduce cooking time to 1-2 minutes to just warm shrimp.)

Tammy Neubauer · Ida Grove · North West REC

### Congratulations

to **Tammy Neubauer** of Ida Grove, who is a member of North West REC. You are this month's winner of a \$50 credit on your power bill. Thanks for sharing your recipe! (We'll pick another winner at random next month.)

### Curried Seafood Bake

- 1 cup elbow or shell macaroni
- ¼ cup sliced green onions with tops
- ½ teaspoon curry powder
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1¾ cups milk
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 6-ounce can lobster or crab, drained and flaked
- 1 6-ounce can shrimp, drained
- ½ cup coarsely crushed butter crackers
- 1 tablespoon melted butter

Prepare macaroni according to package directions. Cook onion and curry powder in 3 tablespoons butter until tender. Stir in flour and salt. Add milk and cook to thicken. Remove from heat; stir in sour cream, cooked macaroni and seafood. Turn into buttered casserole dish. Mix crumbs and 1 tablespoon butter. Sprinkle around edge of dish. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Beverly Alexander · Onawa  
Western Iowa Power Cooperative

### Shrimp and Spinach Pasta

- 1 pound frozen, peeled and deveined medium shrimp
- 1 10-ounce package frozen chopped spinach, thawed
- ½ medium onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 1 14-ounce can chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon Greek seasoning
- 1 8-ounce package angel hair pasta, cooked per package directions
- ½ 4-ounce package crumbled Feta cheese

Thaw shrimp according to package directions. Drain spinach well, pressing out all liquid; set aside. Sauté onion in hot oil over medium-high heat until tender – about 5 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, broth and seasoning. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Add shrimp and cook for 2 minutes. Stir in spinach. Spoon over pasta and sprinkle with cheese. Serve immediately.

Susan Templin · Albia  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

#### SOURCES OF POTASSIUM

Tomatoes, sweet potatoes, spinach and winter squash can improve blood pressure. They also may reduce the risk of kidney stones and bone loss.

TIP

## Shrimp Bisque

- 2 cups water
- 2 cups finely chopped celery
- 2 cups diced and pared potatoes
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cups milk, divided
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 1½ pounds medium-sized shrimp, cooked and peeled
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup chopped parsley, optional
- 6 medium-size shrimp, cooked and peeled – optional

Combine water, celery, potatoes, onion, salt, celery salt and black pepper in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally for 10 to 15 minutes – or until potatoes and celery are done. Add bay leaves. Stir together ½ cup milk and cornstarch until smooth. Add remaining milk and stir this mixture into the soup. Add 1½ pounds shrimp, parsley, and butter and cook over medium heat until thickened and bubbly. Stir often to avoid sticking in pan. You may garnish each serving with 1 medium shrimp.

Elaine Blasey · Livermore · Humboldt County REC

## Salmon Patties

- 1 14.75-ounce can pink salmon
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 tablespoons cornmeal
- 2 tablespoons diced celery
- 2 tablespoons diced onion
- Canola oil
- Salt and white pepper, to taste

Drain liquid from salmon and place in bowl. Remove skin and bones. Break up salmon with a fork. Add eggs, cornmeal, celery and onions and blend completely, making a stiff batter. Brown tablespoon-sized patties on both sides in canola oil. Season with salt and white pepper. Remove from frying pan and drain on paper towels to wick off excess oil. Serve with fresh green salad.

Terry Troxel · Crescent  
Western Iowa Power Cooperative

## Shrimp Butter

- 1 stick butter, softened
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 4 tablespoons salad dressing
- 1 4-ounce can shrimp, drained and rinsed

Combine first 5 ingredients and mix well. Gently fold in shrimp. Cover and refrigerate. (Better if made a day or two before serving at room temperature.) Serve with snack crackers.

Connie Curnes · Osceola  
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## Shrimp and Crab Enchiladas

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 16-ounce jar salsa, divided
- 1 tablespoon cumin, divided
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 12-ounce package shrimp, tails off and thawed
- 1 8-ounce package crab, separated
- 3 cups Monterey Jack cheese, divided
- 8-10 flour tortillas

Combine cream cheese, sour cream, ½ cup salsa, 1½ teaspoons cumin and salt. Stir until well blended. Stir in shrimp, crab and 1½ cups cheese. Spoon small amount onto each tortilla and roll up. Place seam-side-down in sprayed 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Combine 1½ cups salsa with 1½ teaspoons cumin and pour over enchiladas. Top with remaining cheese. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Remove cover and continue baking for 15 minutes more. Serve with sour cream, guacamole, cheese or salsa.

Sharon Den Herder · Sioux Center · North West REC

### IN A HURRY?

Substitute canned sweet potatoes for fresh. One 16-ounce can of sweet potatoes equals about 3 medium fresh sweet potatoes.

TIP

### FOODS VS. MEDS

Rozelle Dingle, a pharmacist at Henry Ford Hospital, says many foods can interact negatively with prescription medications and cause complications. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to be sure!  
**Combination:** Antidepressants and monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors and aged cheese, wine or sour cream.  
**Problem:** Can cause headaches, vomiting and potentially lethal rise in blood pressure.

TIP

## Wanted: SALAD RECIPES The Reward: \$50

Please share your favorite salad and/or salad dressing recipe! If we run your recipe in the magazine, you could receive a \$50 credit on your power bill; we'll choose one winner at random from all the recipes we publish. See "Submitting a Recipe" in the yellow How to Contact Us box on Page 2 for instructions on sending your recipe. The deadline is March 31, 2011.

# Will you be parking an electric car in your garage anytime soon?

BY BRIAN SLOBODA AND ANDREW COTTER



**Chevrolet Volt**

Photos: © GM Corp.

Electrification of America's automobile fleet has been hailed as a great step forward in reducing pollution and curbing our nation's dependence on foreign sources of oil. When it comes to plug-in electric vehicles, choices currently are limited to the Chevrolet Volt, the Nissan Leaf and a growing number of specialty manufacturers or conversion kits for existing cars – but only if you want to travel out of the state to buy one.

The Volt and Leaf should be available in Iowa before the end of this year; other automakers, such as Toyota, have electric car offerings in the wings for early next year. So, it won't be until 2012, at the earliest, that you'll be able to go to dealerships to purchase an all-electric vehicle without first getting on a waiting list.

Whether an electric vehicle fits your lifestyle depends on a few questions:

- How many miles do you drive a day?
- Can you afford the cost difference between an electric and gas-burning car?
- How many amenities do you want your vehicle to have?

## **Not all electric vehicles are alike**

The Nissan Leaf, for example, boasts a driving range of roughly 100 miles. Once its 16-kWh lithium-ion batteries are drained, you'd better be at your destination and near a 110-volt power outlet for recharging – or have the phone number for roadside assistance.

The Chevy Volt offers a gasoline safety net for its pack of 16-kWh lithium-ion batteries. The car will run on a charge for 25 to 50 miles. Once the batteries are exhausted, a gasoline-powered generator produces enough electricity to keep the car rolling for another 300 miles or so – at least until

you run out of gas. This distinguishes the Volt from electric-only vehicles, which cannot be operated when recharging isn't immediately available – such as during a power interruption or a long-distance trip.

The Volt also can be recharged by plugging it into a traditional 110-volt outlet. This differs from traditional gasoline-electric hybrid vehicles such as the Toyota Prius, which has much smaller 1.3-kWh nickel-metal hydride batteries that are recharged only by the gasoline engine and a regenerative braking system.

In a hybrid, a battery-powered motor (or motors) supplement the gasoline engine. Several electric co-ops are testing plug-in hybrid cars and SUVs – as well as hybrid bucket trucks that can switch between a gasoline or diesel engine and 9-kWh to 16-kWh lithium-ion batteries.

**Nissan Leaf**  
Photos: Nissan



## Becoming an early adopter will cost you more

All-electric cars carry higher price tags than comparable, conventional gas-fueled versions – typically \$10,000 to \$15,000 more, even after including federal tax incentives ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500. Over time, batteries should become cheaper to build, lowering electric vehicle costs.

For a quick comparison, consider the 2011 Ford Focus, with a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$16,640 and the Chevy Volt, which has a base price of \$32,780 after tax credits. Both are four-door sedans of roughly the same size.

Chevy estimates the average Volt driver will spend \$1.50 per day for electricity. Meanwhile, the average Focus owner will spend almost \$2.90 on gasoline daily. At \$3 per gallon for gas, the average Volt driver would save \$550 annually – but would need to rack up that amount for 32 years to equal the difference in sticker prices. However, if gas rose to \$5 per gallon, a Volt driver would save more than \$1,200 annually, lowering the payback window to 13 years.

According to Nissan, its Leaf is available for as low as \$25,280 – \$32,780 minus up to a \$7,500 federal tax credit. There's also a lease option, with payments beginning at \$349 per month.

## Charge!

You can recharge an electric car using a traditional 110-volt outlet in your garage. Using this method, referred to as Level 1 charging, it takes at least 10-12 hours to charge a Volt and more than 20 hours for a Leaf.

Since those are long standby times, you can purchase a charging station to speed things along. A charging station enables Level 2 charging by way of a dedicated 240-volt circuit, similar to that used for electric clothes dryers. According to their manufacturers,

Level 2 charging for the all-electric Leaf takes eight hours while the Volt can be ready to hit the highway in about four hours. Nissan also offers a quick-charge system for an 80 percent charge in 30 minutes.

For the Leaf, the average cost for a 240-volt charging dock plus the required professional installation is \$2,200, but both are eligible for a 50 percent federal tax credit up to \$2,000. Using current national electricity averages, Nissan says the Leaf will cost less than \$3 to “fill up.” A comparable charging setup is available through Chevrolet dealers for the Volt.

In both cases, the tab can go much higher – especially if a household's electric system needs upgrading to handle the increased load. For example, if you have a 100-amp service to your home now, you'll probably need to switch to a 200-amp service.

Today's charging standards allow for power delivery up to 16.8 kilowatts at 240 volts and up to 70 amperes. The Volt's Level 1 charging at 1.4 kilowatts is roughly equivalent to the load of a toaster; its Level 2 charging, estimated to be 3.5 kilowatts, is similar to the load of a heating and air-conditioning system.

## How will plug-in vehicles affect electric utilities?

Studies by the Electric Power Research Institute, a nonprofit research consortium made up of electric utilities including electric cooperatives, show that electric vehicles will reduce overall emissions of various air pollutants – even when taking into account emissions from power plants needed to produce the energy for recharging. In fact, plugging in cars at night when power costs and demand are at their lowest actually helps an electric system run more efficiently by trimming losses. Down the road, some co-ops may offer special rates to encourage



electric vehicle owners to recharge during these off-peak hours.

On the other hand, once more plug-in vehicles hit the road, electric co-ops will need to make adjustments in their infrastructure and equipment – not just for residential chargers, but also for charging stations located at workplaces, businesses and other areas accessible to the public. It's even possible that some day plug-in vehicles may be able to provide power back to the electric grid. ⚡

Brian Sloboda and Andrew Cotter are program managers for the Cooperative Research Network, a service of the Arlington, Va.-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

**5-minute SURVEY**

**Win a \$50 credit on your power bill!**

We'd like to know what types of stories you'd like to see in future issues of this magazine. Please go to the *Living with Energy in Iowa* Web site at [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com) and complete our short survey by March 31, 2011. We'll pick a winner's name at random from all the completed surveys.

## Energy Efficiency

# Shopping List

Planning energy-efficiency upgrades at home? Take this handy shopping list with you to your local home improvement store.

CFLs (4-pack) \$6

Caulk \$4

Weather stripping \$4

Outlet sealing kits \$20

Attic door insulator kit \$40

Programmable thermostat \$40

Mastic \$12

Water heater blanket \$20

Investment: **\$146**

Potential Annual Savings:

**\$700**

Sources:

HomeDepot.com,

TogetherWeSave.com

## Watt's Going On?

# Incandescent bulbs will disappear from store shelves during the next three years

BY MEGAN MCKOY-NOE, CCC

Even though compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) and other energy-efficient lighting options such as LEDs have become much more popular during the last few years, traditional incandescent bulbs still represent the bulk of the residential lighting market. That likely will change soon.

Under the federal Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, new standards will require lightbulbs to generate more light with less power. All general-purpose lightbulbs that produce 310 to 2,600 lumens of light must be 30 percent more energy efficient than today's incandescent models. As a result, incandescent bulbs, starting with 100-watt varieties, will be phased out beginning in 2012.

While there are exemptions, by 2020 most bulbs will be required to produce 45 lumens per watt, and more efficient products will replace today's 40-, 60-, 75- and 100-watt general-service incandescent bulbs. As an added bonus, the new-style bulbs will be required to last longer.

"Up to 12 percent of your monthly electric bill pays for lighting, so removing energy-wasting bulbs from the market will have a big impact on America's energy use," explains Erik Sorenson, a project manager with the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, which represents companies that make products used in the generation, transmission, distribution, control and end use of electricity.

A 60- or 100-watt incandescent bulb produces around 15 lumens per watt, with much of the energy wasted as heat. A standard CFL, however, can produce as many as 100 lumens per watt. CFLs aren't the only lighting alternative – you also can save energy by using halogen bulbs and solid-state bulbs, which commonly are referred to as LEDs. In fact, LEDs

are beginning to pull ahead of CFLs in lighting output. Cree, a leading manufacturer of LEDs, announced a year ago that a laboratory prototype achieved 208 lumens per watt.

The transition to more energy-efficient lightbulbs will take place over the course of three years. The manufacturing of 100-watt bulbs will stop in 2012, followed by 75-watt bulbs in 2013 and 60- and 40-watt versions in 2014.

Some consumers already have made the switch. Since 2000, incandescent bulb shipments have dropped from 1.7 billion to less than 1.2 billion annually, while Energy Star® estimates CFL shipments reached 400 million last year – 30 percent of the lighting market.

"New bulbs use less energy while providing the same amount of light," says Sorenson. "Consumers should start shopping for bulbs based on the amount of light or brightness needed."

To find out more about the upcoming incandescent lightbulb changes, visit the Web site of the National Electrical Manufacturers Association at [www.nemasavesenergy.org](http://www.nemasavesenergy.org).

### What's Watt

Power Consumption Comparisons of Equivalent Lighting (in watts)

Incandescent	Halogen	CFL	LED
100 W	70-72 W	23-26 W	N/A
75 W	53 W	18-20 W	N/A
60 W	43 W	13-15 W	12 W
40 W	28-29 W	10-11 W	8-9 W

Source: National Electrical Manufacturers Association, Enlighten America

## 15-Minute Energy Saver

# Your old refrigerator is costing you more than you think

Even though your pre-1993 refrigerator still looks good and seems to work well, it's using more than its fair share of electricity – in fact, more than twice the energy of a new Energy Star® qualified unit. If you have a refrigerator from the 1980s, you can save more than \$100 each year on your utility bills if you purchase a new model. Replace a fridge from the 1970s, and you could save more than \$200 every year!



### The Refrigerator Retirement Savings Calculator at [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

can estimate how much money you'll save on utility bills by replacing your existing refrigerator. Once you have that number, be sure to add some money for increased maintenance costs, because the refrigerant wears out and seals will start to leak over time, causing a decline in the performance – and an increase in the energy consumption. ⚡

**Tip No. 1:** Don't move your old refrigerator to an uninsulated location, such as a garage, where it will use even more energy during hot weather. A fridge in a 90-degree environment, for example, uses nearly 50 percent more energy than one in a 70-degree environment. And when the temperature falls below 40 degrees in the winter, the refrigerator's thermostat won't run its cooling and defrost cycles for the appropriate amount of time.

**Tip No. 2:** Be sure to check with your electric cooperative about rebates or incentives for buying a new refrigerator. You can go to your co-op's Web site by clicking on the Go to My Co-op link at the *Living with Energy in Iowa* Web site at [www.livingwithenergyinowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyinowa.com).

**Tip No. 3:** For more tips on how to save energy – and money – visit the Touchstone Energy Cooperative's Web site at [www.togetherwesave.com](http://www.togetherwesave.com).

## Doing It Yourself

# Caulking will produce energy savings right away

A tube of caulk can go a long way toward helping you save money on your electric bill. You can caulk air leaks around windows, doors, dryer vents and fans for less than five dollars per tube of high-quality caulk.

It's easy to find cold air leaks around doors and windows: On a windy day, just run your hand around them and feel for air movement. You also can light a stick of incense, hold it where you suspect there

may be leaks and watch for the smoke to be disrupted.



Photo: Touchstone Energy®

If you have an attic hatch or pull-down stairs in your home, weather-strip around the frame. As an alternative, install an insulator box over the opening; a kit costs around \$40.

Sealing these cracks can save you around \$200 a year.

For more energy-efficiency tips for your home or business, go to [www.togetherwesave.com](http://www.togetherwesave.com). ⚡

A reasonably competent home do-it-yourselfer should be able to complete this project in a relatively short time period. If you are uncomfortable with the techniques shown here or the product manufacturer's instructions, please contact a professional technician or a qualified contractor for assistance.

## Product Recalls

# Strangulation deaths prompt recall of video baby monitors

In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the company shown below has issued recalls on its products. For details on other product recalls, go to [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) or call the agency's Hotline at 800-638-2772.



### NAME OF PRODUCT:

Summer Infant video baby monitors

UNITS: 1.7 million

### DISTRIBUTOR:

Summer Infant Inc., of Woonsocket, R.I.

**HAZARD:** The electrical cords attached to the video baby monitors can present a strangulation hazard to infants and toddlers if placed too close to a crib.

**INCIDENTS/INJURIES:** During the past year, CPSC and the company have received reports of two strangulation deaths and a near strangulation caused by the electrical cords of the monitors.

**DESCRIPTION:** The recalled baby monitors were sold in more than 40 different models, including handheld, digital and color video units. All monitors include a camera – placed in the baby's room – and one or two hand-held devices that enable a caregiver to see and/or hear the baby from a distance. The brand "Summer" is found on the product.

**SOLD AT:** Major retailers, mass merchandisers and juvenile products stores nationwide from January 2003 to February 2011 for \$60 to \$300

**MANUFACTURED IN:** China

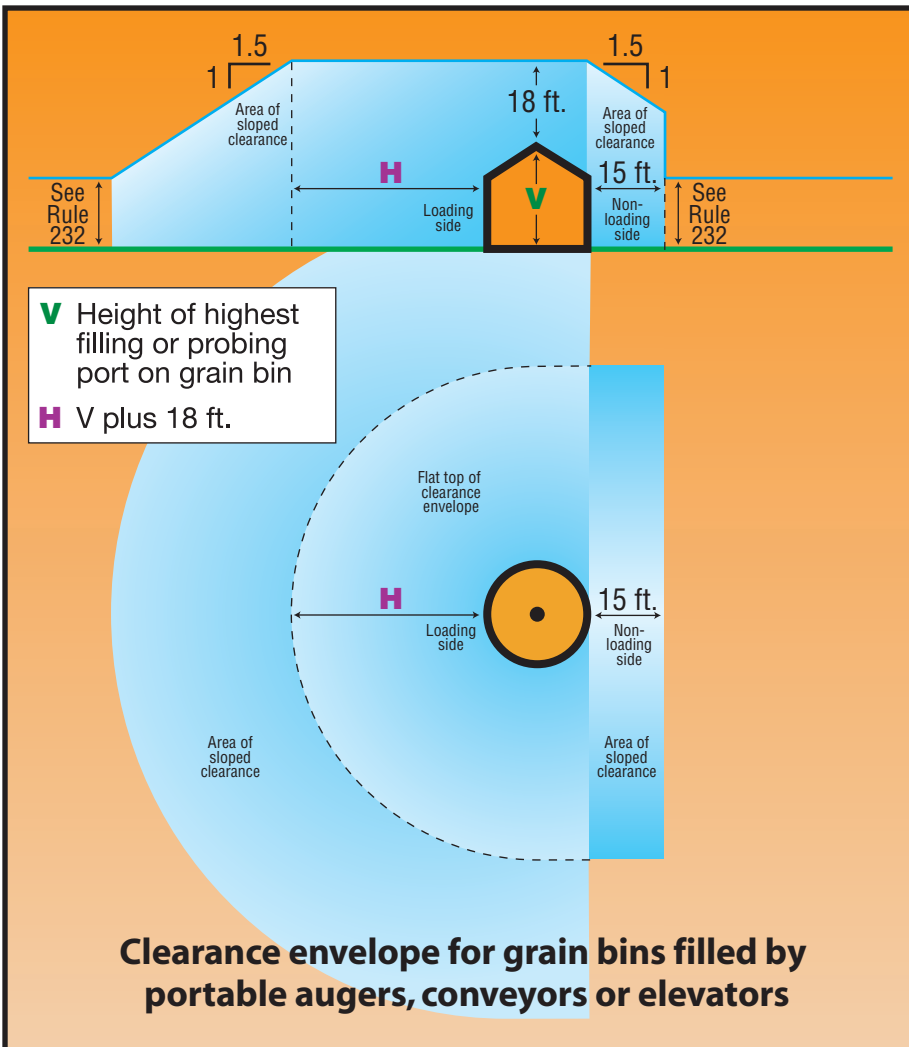
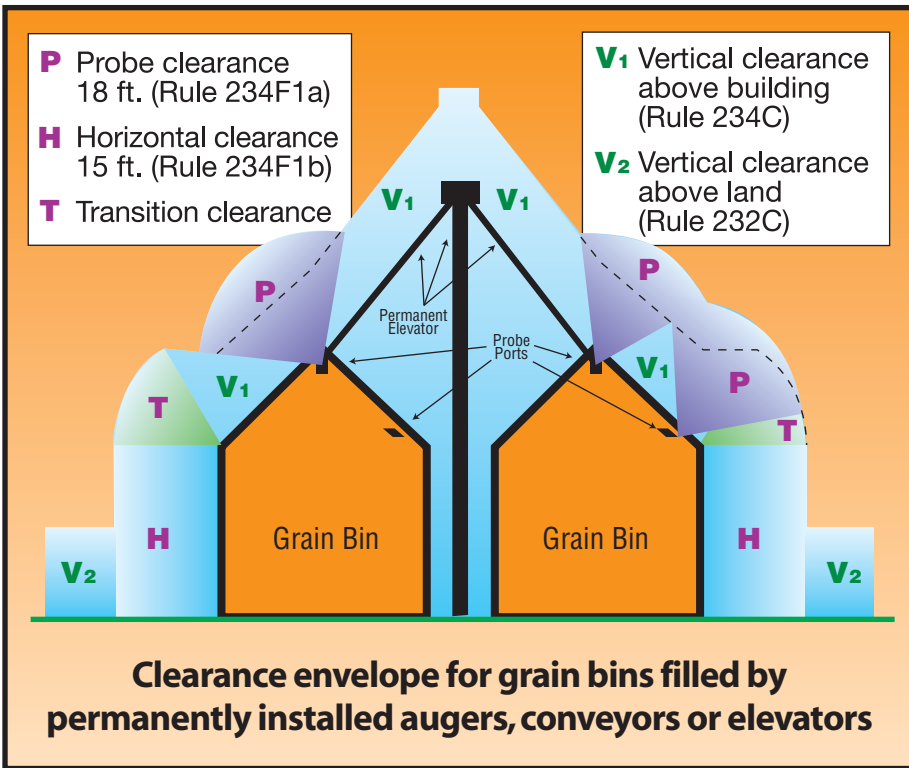
**REMEDY:** Immediately check the location of the video monitor (including a camera mounted on the wall) and all electric cords to make sure they are out of the child's reach. Contact Summer Infant toll-free at 800-426-8627 between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday, or visit the firm's Web site at [www.summerinfant.com/Home/Product-Recall.aspx](http://www.summerinfant.com/Home/Product-Recall.aspx) to receive a new permanent electric cord warning label about the strangulation risk and revised instructions about how to safely mount the camera and keep cords out of a child's reach. ⚡

# Maintain proper clearance around grain bins

During the last several years, more than two dozen deaths and serious injuries have occurred on Iowa farms, when grain augers have come in contact with overhead power lines. If you're planning to locate a new grain bin (or move an existing one) at your farm, please contact your local electric cooperative immediately. The staff at your co-op will provide assistance in planning a safe environment for everyone working at – and living around – your grain bins.

Iowa law requires specific clearances for electric lines around grain bins, with different standards for those filled by portable augers, conveyors and elevators and permanent equipment. In fact, the Iowa Electrical Safety Code found in Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 199 – 25.2(3) b states: *An electric utility may refuse to provide electric service to any grain bin built near an existing electric line which does not provide the clearances required by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) C2-2007 "National Electrical Safety Code," Rule 234F. This paragraph "b" shall apply only to grain bins loaded by portable augers, conveyors or elevators and built after September 9, 1992, or to grain bins loaded by permanently installed augers, conveyors or elevators installed after December 24, 1997.* This language has been adopted by the Iowa Utilities Board.

Your local electric cooperative is required by the Iowa Utilities Board to provide this annual notice to farmers, farm lenders, grain bin merchants and city and county zoning officials. The drawings on this page show the specific clearances required by the code, but your co-op's policies may be more restrictive. If you have any questions concerning these clearance regulations – or what needs to be done before you begin placing a new grain bin or moving an existing one – please call your electric co-op for help. ⚡



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# Here's how to dial in a used car

BY GARY ANDERSON

I've heard it said that some of the most optimistic people in the world are folks who buy used cars, because they're always hoping to somehow find a rose among thorns on the lot. I know that sums up how I feel about it. I've recently been on a used car safari myself, and I know that it's the closest thing to a big game hunt most of us will ever experience.

Since I live in a small town, word gets around when you're looking for a new vehicle – and people begin offering advice. It's all well meaning, and of varying degrees of usefulness, but one piece of advice got my imagination fired up because it was crazy enough to hold genuine wisdom. It came from an 80-year-old neighbor, a man who'd been successfully buying used cars for longer than I've been alive.

In fact, I sought out his advice, as opposed to the various opinions I heard at the grocery store or while putting gas in my soon-to-be-deceased van. When I asked for his formula for finding a quality used car, he looked around first, as if making sure no one else would be listening while he confided a great secret.

He lowered his voice and said, "Turn on the radio." I must have looked confused, so he continued. "And then punch the preset buttons."

Again I hesitated, not knowing what he was trying to tell me. Like a guru counseling a novice student, he sighed and began to explain.

"When I'm looking for a used car, I start with the usual things. I look for rust, I listen to the engine, I check the tires and I drive it around the block. That last part is the key."

"The test drive?" I asked hopefully.



"Right, but not for the reasons you think," he replied with a sly smile. "While I'm taking the test drive, I turn on the radio and start punching the preset buttons." He waited for some sign of comprehension in my expression, but when he saw none, he went on. "If I find that the presets are all public radio, easy listening and talk stations, I'm more interested than when the presets are country or – even worse – hard-rock stations."

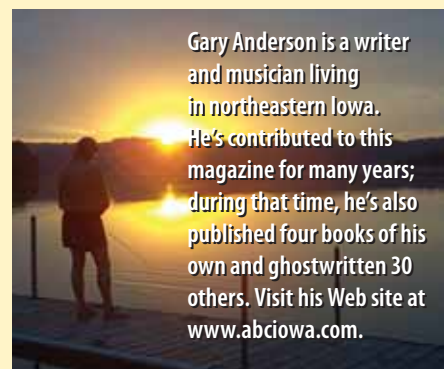
"Oh," I said, finally seeing where he was going with his story. "The presets give you an idea of the type of person who drove the vehicle most of the time."

"Exactly!" he replied, pleased that I'd finally caught on. "I want to know the mindset of the person who owned the vehicle before, and if they listen to the stations I mentioned, the chances are they're more thoughtful –

and less likely to be hot rodders!"

Although "hot rodders" was a term I hadn't heard in years, I knew exactly what he was talking about – and it made sense. I also couldn't argue with the old man's track record. Using his formula, he hadn't bought a lemon in more than 50 years.

So, if you're in the market for a good used car, here's my advice: Start by listening to the radio! ⚡



Gary Anderson is a writer and musician living in northeastern Iowa. He's contributed to this magazine for many years; during that time, he's also published four books of his own and ghostwritten 30 others. Visit his Web site at [www.abciowa.com](http://www.abciowa.com).



# YOU'RE ONLY AS ENERGY EFFICIENT AS YOUR OLDEST APPLIANCE.

After I purchased a new ENERGY STAR® qualified refrigerator, I moved my old one to the garage to keep a few drinks cold. Turns out, that move was burning a pretty big hole in my wallet. Now I'm saving \$146 per year just by pulling the plug on my old fridge. What can you do? Find out how the little changes add up at [TogetherWeSave.com](http://TogetherWeSave.com).

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