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Home and Garden



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- How to build a raised garden bed
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- Tiny voles have a big appetite for plants

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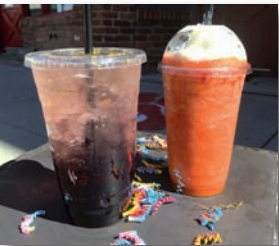


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Strawberries are a hardy plant that can take the cold winters and hot summers of southwest Idaho. Plus, they are easy to grow and produce delicious fruit. Below, blueberries are another favorite of backyard berry growers. They require soil adjustments to grow well in the Treasure Valley's highly alkaline soils. Blackberries and raspberries are also favorites but watch the thorns.

Growing a berry patch can have sweet rewards

by Steve Lyon

The southwest Idaho climate is conducive to growing a variety of delicious berries in the backyard.

Some berry varieties are low maintenance and produce a lot of fruit once you know how to make them thrive.

They don't require all that much space and many plants will do just fine in well-drained soil with plenty of sun.

Of course, the taste of sweet berries from the garden versus store bought makes the effort to grow them worth it.

For starters, strawberries are a good choice for the Weiser area and the experts note they are one of the easiest fruits to grow. The key is finding the right variety for the area, and many local nurseries carry varieties that grow well in southwest Idaho.

They can grow in the area's alkaline soil and can tolerate dry summer conditions as long as they get sufficient water and full sun.

Strawberries are hardy plants in cold weather and can be planted in the spring as soon as the soil is workable. Strawberries require fertilization for good production, but not right at planting. They also make a good ground cover, serving a dual purpose in the garden.

Raspberries are another option in the gardens and backyards of southwest Idaho.

Like strawberries, they also can grow in alkaline soil and take the dry heat of southwest Idaho in the summer months. They are a cane fruit with a shallow root system. It's impor-



tant to remove any weeds around the roots, which will compete for nutrients.

While native to North America, blueberries do not like the area's alkaline soils and it must be adjusted to increase acidity to a pH of 4.5 to 5.5 for the plants to grow well. Another option is to grow them in containers, where they do well and look great on a patio.

It has been well-reported that purpleish-blue blueberries offer lots of health benefits, in addition to tasting great.

Blueberries need a full sun spot to grow. Before planting, dig a nice hole and remove the native soil. Fill it back up with an acid-loving planting mix.

Idaho's soil and water are high in alkaline, so you'll need to continue to add soil amendments, such as sulfur, to maintain a low pH level for blueberry plants to thrive. The effort is worth it. Blueberry plants can produce up to two gallons of berries each season.

Note: if you're planting blueberries for the first time, you'll need at least two plants for cross pollination.

Blackberries are a delicious fruit and a favorite for jams. Most varieties are cold hardy and can take Idaho winters. They have a network of roots that are perennial, meaning they come back every year.

Some varieties are grown on trellises, where they wind and wrap around. There are even thornless plants that can be purchased, such as the Chester and Doyle.

Once the plants are established in a couple of years, they will produce a bounty of fruit every year. Plant them in soils that are well-drained and in areas of the backyard with lots of sun.

Like raspberries, the plants should be pruned annually for the best growth and production.

Another super tasty berry is the western huckleberry, a cousin of the blueberry, and possibly the best pancake topping of all. They are known for growing wild in the woods and picked by many.

One issue with huckleberry plants is they grow really slow, and it can take years to see significant fruit production. Huckleberries need sun and well-

drained soil. They also need acidic soils with pH levels of 4.0 to 5.5.

Huckleberries have not yet been fully domesticated, so few nurseries carry them. Nurseries that specialize in native plants sell seedlings or transplants. Try to obtain plants from seed sources with climates similar to the Treasure Valley.

A new addition to some berry patches is the Goji berry, which does well in the Treasure Valley. This is a small shrub in the Solanacea family (siblings with tomatoes, potatoes and eggplant). Varieties to try include Crimson Star (also known as Ningxia #1) and Phoenix Tears. Both begin bearing fruit one to two years after planting, although they will not reach full production for three to five years.

The bush will produce small purple flowers that look similar to the flowers on nightshade. The berries ripen in early fall. Some growers say the berries are best when dried, like raisins, and the plants are prolific producers.

Some information gathered from University of Idaho Extension Service.



Spring and summer are the primary pollen seasons. It's estimated that 50 million Americans suffer from seasonal allergies in the U.S. Make sure your air conditioner or HVAC system is filtering out allergens with a checkup or think about replacing an air conditioner that is more than 10 years old.

Does my air conditioner help with my allergies?

Does an air conditioner help with allergies? Yes, if you properly maintain the unit.

Air conditioners can help filter your home's air and control humidity and both of these things are important in the allergy world. It's estimated there are now 50 million seasonal allergy sufferers in America.

Properly maintaining your HVAC system is the difference between your air conditioner helping with those allergies or aggravating them.

How Your Air Conditioner Helps

Whether you suffer from seasonal allergies or year-long allergens like pet dander or dust, your air conditioning can help you breathe easier.

The air conditioner filters out irritant air particles and your indoor air quality is improved. These particles get stopped by the filter and aren't allowed to continue through the system to make their way to your lungs.

Indoor air quality is also improved when your home's humidity is being controlled. Higher levels of humidity breed additional allergens like bacteria, mold, and mildew.

Your air conditioning works hard to balance your home's humidity, thereby reducing the instances of these allergens and irritants.

When It Doesn't

Your air conditioner can help in these instances, except when it's not maintained properly. When the maintenance on your HVAC system is neglected, your

indoor air quality is worse. Thus, your allergies may get worse.

If your filter continues to trap the particles flowing through the system and isn't changed, those particles build up. With nowhere to go, they will blow back into your home.

The same applies to the other allergens resulting from higher humidity or dampness. If the humidity builds, or if there are leaks somewhere in the system, a damp environment now exists. Mold and bacteria have free rein to flow through your home's air, adding to the allergens you're breathing.

What You Can Do

Your air conditioner can help with your allergies by taking these steps:

- Have your air conditioner cleaned and maintained regularly, at least once a year.
- Change or clean your air filters regularly.
- Clean any debris or dust around both your outdoor and indoor air conditioner units.
- Dust all indoor registers and returns on a regular basis.
- Inspect your ductwork and HVAC unit (drip pan and drain, evaporator coils, air handler) for signs of leaks, corrosion, or mold.
- Consider upgrading your air conditioner if over 10 years old.
- Keep doors and windows closed while your air conditioning is running.
- Consider adding on an air purifier.

Story provided by Comfort Zone Heating and Cooling.



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There are a few reasons to consider building a raised garden bed. You don’t have to worry about the soil quality in your garden for planting because you’ll fill the boxes with the best prepackaged soil. The soil drains better and warms up earlier and stays that way longer. It’s a nice setup with boxes and paths between them for easy access to garden plants. Best of all, building a raised garden bed is pretty easy to do.

How to build a simple raised garden bed

No more bending over while you weed!

There are a whole lot of reasons to build raised vegetable gardens. The kind that sits above ground within a frame made of wood or other material.

If your land has sandy, claylike, or hard-packed soil (or if you don’t know the difference), you can provide perfect conditions for whatever you’re keen on growing.

Plants are lifted out of the way of rowdy pets and little ones, and your soil warms up earlier and stays that way longer, extending the growing season and providing gentler conditions for new seeds and delicate transplants.

Fruits, veggies, and ornamentals

will send their roots deeper in search of water, which means a stronger foundation and improved health. And raised beds keep your space tidy. Best of all, they couldn’t be easier to make. Especially if you’re getting into growing for the first time, you’re going to want some beds of your own.

What You’ll Need

The beauty of this particular raised bed build is that it is cheap and easy to build. The wood and rebar will cost you no more than \$50 if you’re using untreated pine planks, and the entire build can be completed in less than an hour’s time. The untreated pine might only last five to 10 years,

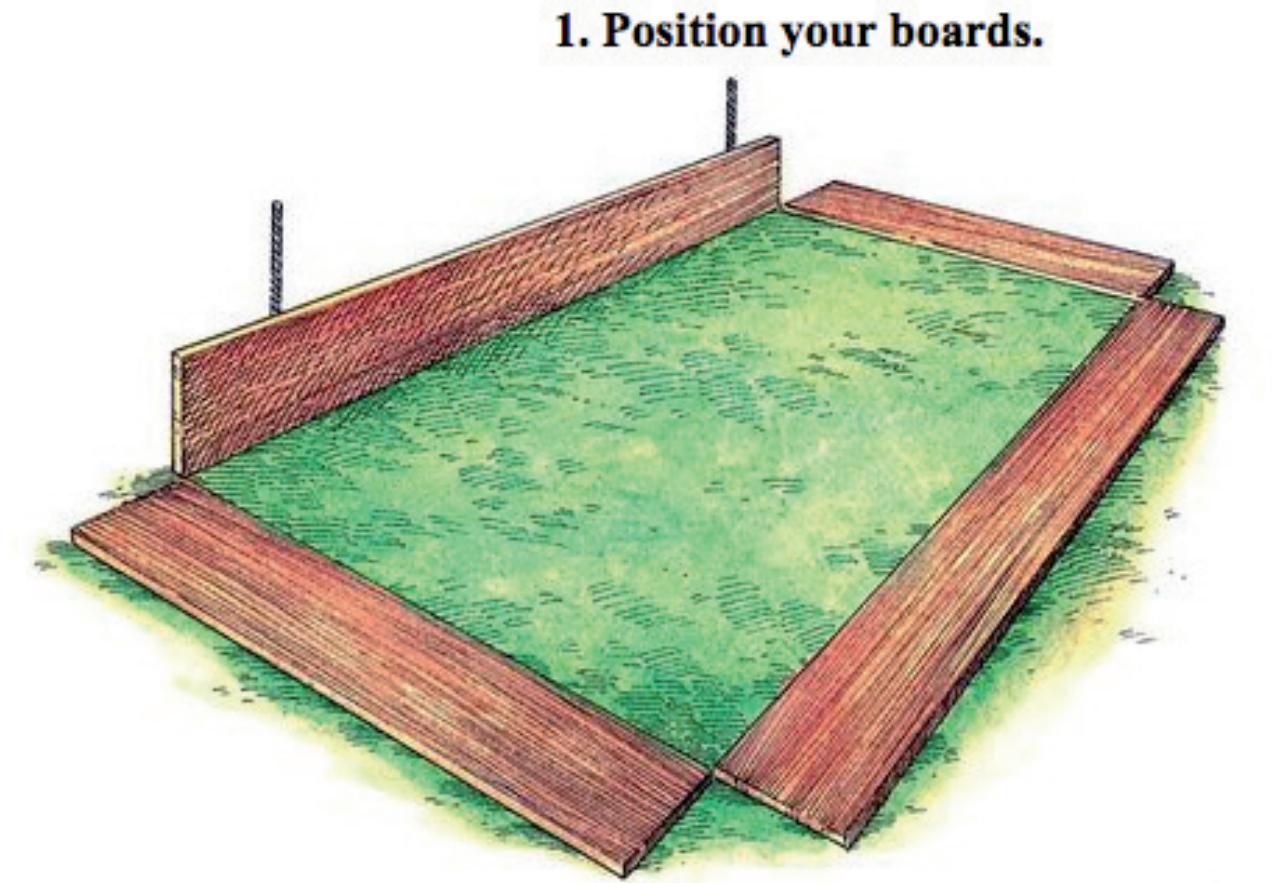
but due to the nature of this build, each board is easily replaceable without taking apart the entire bed.

For a 4-by-8-foot bed, you’ll need:

- Two 2-by-12 planks, each 8 feet long.
- Two 2-by-12 planks, each 4 feet long.
- 12 pieces of rebar, each 2 feet long.
- A rubber mallet.
- Newspaper or cardboard.
- Soil to fill the finished frame.

1. Position your boards.

On a level section of ground, lay the boards down with their inner corners touching. Stand one long board on its side, and, using a rubber mal-



The basic concept of the raised garden bed looks like this with wood boards and rebar to reinforce the boxes. Maybe you will want to grow veggies in some boxes and small fruits in another. Beds should be placed where they will receive at least five to six hours of sunlight. Allow enough space between beds for a wheelbarrow or rototiller to access.



Using concrete blocks for a raised garden bed is another option. You can tuck herbs into the cavities of the blocks. Orient the garden beds north to south to prevent plants from shading each other.

let, hammer two pieces of rebar 1 foot from each corner, a few inches deep into the ground.

2. Prop up the short sides.
Use a piece of rebar at the center of each for temporary support. Next, prop up the second long side and adjust the alignment of your frame as necessary. Then hammer rebar a few inches deep 1 foot from each corner of the second long side.

3. Add more support.
Hammer rebar a few inches deep a foot from each corner of the short sides and remove the temporary supports. Add two pieces of rebar 2 feet apart along each long side. These will reinforce the frame when it's filled with soil. Then hammer in the rebar until 6 to 10 inches are exposed above ground.

4. Fill it up.
Line the bottom of your frame with newspaper or cardboard and wet it thoroughly. Finally, fill your bed with soil to within a few inches of the top.

Concrete Blocks
Placing the blocks with open ends up provides extra growing room. Tuck herbs or decorative flowers into the cavities.

Space
Build your beds somewhere that receives at least five to six hours of daily sunlight – the more, the better. Orient them north to south to prevent plants from shading each other out. Beds should be at least a foot wide, though no more than 4 feet across to make weeding and harvesting manageable. Six to 8 feet long is typical and cost-effective. Ten to 14 inches is an ideal height to accommodate strong roots. Leave at least 2 or 3 feet between beds for walking and wheelbarrow access.

Wood
The brilliance of a plank-and-rebar design is that each individual wall is easily replaced. Try naturally rot-resistant varieties of wood, such as oak, cedar, and

redwood.
Soil
You want the kind that's dark, rich, and loaded with microorganisms. Fill your beds with a mix of 50-60 percent good-quality topsoil and 40-50 percent well-aged compost.

Before each new growing season, test your soil for pH and nutrient content. You can buy a kit at most home-improvement stores. If your test shows a need for additional nutrients like nitrogen and potassium, raise levels by working in amendments such as bone meal and kelp. Dress beds with an additional ½ inch of compost later in the growing season to increase organic matter and boost soil health.

Plants
If you're building your beds in high summer, it's not too late to plant fall crops. Sow seeds like carrots and lettuce directly into the soil, or buy midseason transplants for crops like kale and broccoli.

If you'd rather wait until next year to plant, cover the soil in your new raised beds with a mixture of grass clippings and shredded leaves in autumn – the material will compost before you're ready to start in spring.

Water
Raised beds have fantastic drainage, which is great for plant health, but they dry out quickly. Give your plants a long drink in the early evening, but check them again on hot summer afternoons. If the soil is dry, it's a real scorcher outside, or you live in a hot and arid climate, water again.

A programmable drip-irrigation system (try a starter kit from dripworks.com) is inexpensive and convenient, delivering consistent moisture straight to plant roots. Invest in a timer component to save money and water.

Article provided by K Hardware of Weiser.

Spring Into Action

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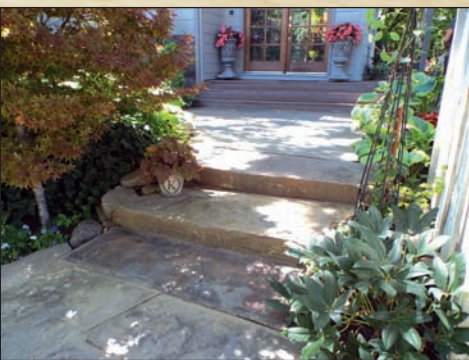
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If you are tired of looking at dingy walls, it might be a good time to paint. There is simple covering the walls and then there is getting creative. Casey Hoskins and her daughter decided to give the kitchen a new look with a sunrise. It's also important to clean the walls first to get rid of dirt and grease.

A little paint can give a room a brand new look *Prep first with a good cleaning*

Spring has sprung out here on the Weiser Flat. The birds are chirping, squirrels are making my cats all jittery at the window, garlic is already growing in the garden, and with all this sunshine I can see just how dirty our walls are. Ugh!

I cannot turn around without seeing yet another wall with some sort of smudge or fingerprint on it, but if I start to clean one wall I will have to clean them all, and I am not prepared for that kind of weekend.

I decided we'd tackle the kitchen first because it is the smallest family living space and has the worst walls. The kitchen is where all the meals are prepped, days at work or school are talked about, dogs try to sneak in for a fallen treat, and where Mt. Dish resides.

This is also the room where I, very occasionally, will leave a burner on after cooking and cause a little smoke to maybe hit the ceiling and create this really cool sunburst pattern that I maybe think should be re-created in paint, maybe.

Okay, not maybe. We did it, but that is jumping ahead, so let's take a step back and discuss the eww that is going on behind the stove. I do not now, but will very soon, have a vent hood. Until then cooking with oil creates this mosaic of oil splatters on the wall behind and around the stove.

Don't get me wrong. I wash the stove regularly as well as wipe down the knobs and the wall behind it, but lighting in our kitchen is another issue to be worked out so I did not see what I was not getting.

After much debate, my daughter and I decided on a really great teal color to put on that exact wall and cover the cabinets and coffee bar we are putting in a dark stain to really set it off. Time to clean!

I have scoured the internet, and when I

say internet I mean Pinterest, for ways to clean greasy walls and countertops with ease. The solution: there is no such thing as ease to cleaning up a greasy, hairy (due to cats) mess. Patience is involved, crouching is going to happen and pressing the scrub brush into the wall to the point of possible denting is inevitable.

I don't know about you, but when I decide I want to paint, have the can sitting next to me with a roller, I do not want to stop and clean a dern wall! Stop we did, though. Did you know that even if you paint over the mess some things will seep out through the paint?

There were smokers in our home before. I know because our bathroom off the laundry room has yellow grossness on the ceiling and walls even though it was all pristinely painted when we moved in.

So, again, after scouring and not finding anything super helpful I found the solution in my Grandmother's old cookbook of all places. In the back there is a whole section on how to clean your home, get out stains, good preserving practices and much more.

As always, vinegar, baking soda and dish soap are your best friends. Are you ready for your tip of the day? Separate these ingredients into three different bowls, dilute each with water and work in rounds for the best results.

My daughter took the soap and water, scrubbed off the initial layer, I came behind her with a baking soda paste and kind of just smeared it on the wall and baseboard and then used a scrub brush in diluted vinegar and scrubbed over the baking soda.

After all that is done my girl came behind one more time with some warm water and cleaned it all off and viola! A clean



The meadow vole is the most common species of vole in southwest Idaho. The rodent does not hibernate in the winter and is actively looking for food all year long. With their voracious appetites, voles can be a destructive pest in the garden and the backyard. They feed on all kinds of plants and will eat the roots of perennials and root crops. They also like to eat the bark off the bottom of trees. Although their lifespan is short, vole numbers can explode if conditions are right.

Tiny voles have a big appetite for garden plants

Rodent loves to feed on roots of perennials and root crops in the garden

by Steve Lyon

The relatively mild winter and abundant moisture could result in a larger population of a common pest this spring and summer in the Treasure Valley.

Much to the dismay of gardeners, homeowners and farmers, vole numbers can explode when conditions are favorable and usually go in cycles. Vole populations tend to rapidly grow about every five years. They have a short lifespan but they reproduce quickly. A young vole reaches maturity in a month.

The meadow vole is the most common vole species in Idaho. Voles are often mistaken for mice and are sometimes called meadow mice.

One easy way to tell the difference between mice and voles is the tail length. Mice have tails that equal about half of their body length, while voles have much shorter tails. Voles are stockier than mice and also have larger eyes and smaller, less prominent ears.

Voles are not moles, though the names sound familiar and both are burrowing animals that create tunnels. Voles are rodents and moles are not. Voles use small entry and exit holes in the ground but do not push up mounds of dirt like moles do.

The evidence that voles are present can be seen in the trails and runways they create across lawns in their constant search for food. Voles also will have open golf-ball-sized holes to go in and out of tunnels. Lawns that are in proximity to wild-land growth will see more voles and more damage to their lawns. They have a home range of about one-fourth of an acre.

With their voracious appetites, voles can be a destructive pest in the garden by feeding on a wide range of plants. According to one source, a single vole can consume 41 pounds of plant material a year.

Voles feed on roots and stems, grass, seeds, bulbs and tubers. They will eat the roots of perennials and root crops, such as potatoes, turnips, carrots, tomatoes and other vegetables in the summer months.

Voles can damage trees and shrubs by gnawing off the bark near the base. The damage usually occurs from a few inches above ground to a few inches below the soil. They can burrow into the roots of landscaping shrubs and their teeth are excellent for destroying tree roots.

Voles are active all year around and do not hibernate in the winter. Even with deep snow on the ground voles can be active in winter. Voles do not stockpile or store food, so they are forced out of necessity to seek food every day of the year.

There are a few ways to control voles if they become a problem, both lethal, through the use of toxic baits, and non-lethal.

Voles populations are only partially controlled by predators. Coyotes, foxes, badgers, weasels and especially hawks and owls eat voles. Most predators don't hunt close to homes or gardens where control is needed. Cats can help take a toll on the vole population. Some homeowners in rural areas have put up owl boxes to help control the rodents.

Habitat modification can be an effective first step. Voles do not like running

across bare ground and prefer cover when feeding. Try clearing four of five feet around the edge of the garden as a buffer. Remove their cover by keeping the lawn or field mowed short.

Install barriers that exclude voles from damaging vegetation. Protect plants in the garden, flowerbed or yard with netted wire installed six inches below soil level to about six inches above the ground. Install aluminum flashing material around plants to serve as entry barriers if evidence of vole activity is found.

For trees, there are special plastic tree guards and mesh barriers that can be wrapped around the trunk to prevent voles from chewing the bark. Bury the mesh at least six inches below the soil so voles can't burrow under it. Make sure it is tall enough to extend above the snow cover. Keep an area three feet in diameter around the trunk of each tree cleared of vegetation. A thin layer of mulch can be a simple method to create bare ground around trees.

Ordinary wooden mousetraps can help at reducing vole numbers. They work best for smaller yards and where the population is concentrated in a small area. A dozen traps is probably the minimum number to use for a small garden.

Place the traps flush with the ground and at right angles to surface runways. Traps can be baited with peanut butter, oatmeal or apple slices. There also are humane traps, such as the Havahart brand, for sale that capture voles alive for release elsewhere.

Check the traps every day and remove

and bury any dead voles caught in snap traps. Wear gloves when handling voles to avoid coming into contact with any harmful organisms. Keep the traps away from pets and children.

Odor repellents are also available to deter voles and create a protective barrier, although their effectiveness is sometimes questioned. Some are based on natural ingredients such as castor oil. Ultrasonic repellents are a short-term solution to a vole problem. Rodents will become accustomed to all kinds of noises.

Finally, toxic baits can be the quickest and most practical means to control voles. Bait can be purchased at many hardware stores and farm supply stores. Those formulated for gophers also can work for voles but read the label to make sure.

Toxic baits can be especially effective in the fall and winter when voles are short of food. Brand names include VoleX, Kaput combo bait mini blocks, Talpirid mole bait and the list goes on.

Many toxic baits must be placed in bait stations, or enclosed feeding devices, to prevent other animals from ingesting the poison. Place bait stations in runways or next to burrows so voles will find them. If using granules, place them directly into the vole's tunnel. Take the necessary measures to make sure children, pets and nontarget animals are safe from toxic baits.

Dispose of any dead voles or spilled bait so they cannot be eaten by any other bird or animal that could also end up coming in contact with the toxic bait.

from page 6

Give a room a new look with paint

wall. I think scrub brushes are key because they agitate the grime better than a rag can.

My daughter and I painted up the wall and then she, being the budding artist that she is, painted part of the ceiling to look like rolling hills with a sunrise coming over it. I really love it. The coffee bar is stained and in place with some of our colorful dishware but there is still a roly-cart to stain and an upper cabinet to put up so the vent hood has something to hang from.

Yes, I am giving you pictures of a partially done kitchen but that just means you need to follow along and find out how it progresses. I haven't even told you about the valance I'm putting up. It ain't your grandma's valance.

Until our next coffee break have a wonderful day, enjoy the sunshine and get to scrubbin'!

Article provided by Casey Hoskins from Casey Girl Designs in Weiser.



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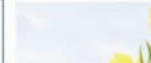
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