**Female Narrator:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Lawn & Garden Podcast with University of Wyoming Extension specialist Jeff Edwards, and co-host Jerry Erschabeck. Originally aired on KGOS and KERM in Torrington, join Jeff, Jerry, and their special guests as they talk all things gardening in Wyoming. Our Lawn & Garden Podcast helps you improve your home garden or small acreage.

**Jeff Edwards:** Good morning, everybody. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck for the KGOS/KERM Lawn and Garden program. Our guest today is Abby Perry. She is an extension educator from Carbon County located in Rawlins. Abby, we are so happy for you to join us today. How are you today?

**Abby Perry:** Good, thank you. I am glad to be here.

**Jeff Edwards:** Fantastic. Jerry, need to get you to say hello.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Hey, good morning to everybody.

**Jeff Edwards:** All right. Good morning. Let's listen to a few words from our sponsors and we'll be right back.

**Female Narrator:** [MUSIC] You are listening to the Lawn and Garden podcast presented by University of Wyoming Extension, extending the land-grant mission across the state of Wyoming with a wide variety of educational programs and services. [MUSIC]

**Jeff Edwards:** Welcome back, everybody. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck for the KGOS/KERM Lawn and Garden program. As I mentioned, our guest today is Abby Perry, and we are talking about lawn, and garden, and trees, and shrubs, and maybe turkeys and maybe pumpkins. Jerry?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Okay, I can talk about pumpkins. [LAUGHTER] Just a little bit, maybe.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay. Very good. So Abby, tell us a little bit about what you do for Carbon County and let's talk about lawn and garden stuff.

**Abby Perry:** Sure. So in Carbon County, I do education programs with farmers and ranchers, get to do gardening things, go out and do monitoring, look at grasses. One of my favorite parts of my job is also the youth programming that I get to do. So I realized pretty well into this job that it's one of my passions to get people excited about agriculture, but especially getting kids excited about agriculture.

**Jeff Edwards:** Fun, and if we have time, I might want to ask you a few questions about your research project that you're doing with crows. I think that's fascinating stuff. I think our listeners might enjoy hearing what you're doing with those as well.

**Abby Perry:** I think you're probably right.

**Jeff Edwards:** [LAUGHTER] Okay. Very good. So you've mentioned that you, not necessarily have a really good garden, but you have more landscaping things that you might be willing to talk about.

**Abby Perry:** Yes. I think when we first moved into our house, we put in a garden, and I decided that I'm pretty good at growing things and not very good at harvesting things. [LAUGHTER] So the things that I have for eating are more perennial plants. My strawberries, [00:03:00] rhubarb, we do have some asparagus, those types of things. I planted some purple potatoes this year that I'm very excited about. So we’ll see how those go.

**Jeff Edwards:** Are they purple skin, purple flesh?

**Abby Perry:** They are. Yes.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay. Diane and I have been growing a variety for about 10 or 12 years now that is purple skin and white flesh. I think the variety is called Caribe. I'm not a big potato fan, but these are pretty darn good.

**Abby Perry:** Really?

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah.

**Abby Perry:** I definitely m planting these for the aesthetic value and maybe getting small children and my household to be excited about eating potatoes, eating something purple, maybe that's fun. I've no idea how they're actually going to taste.

**Jeff Edwards:** Blue mashed potatoes.

**Abby Perry:** Yes. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** It's always worth a try.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** It just sounds fun, doesn't it?

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Anything to entice little ones to try and eat knew things, right?

**Abby Perry:** Right.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** As long as you have ranch dressing, those kids will eat most anything.

**Jeff Edwards:** Then as an adult, you can just go, "I don't like that." [LAUGHTER] [inaudible] [OVERLAPPING]

**Abby Perry:** Right, exactly.

**Jeff Edwards:** When we were getting ready, you mentioned that you were struggling with rhubarb. Tell me the issues that you're having.

**Abby Perry:** I'll tell you all about my rhubarb.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay.

**Abby Perry:** First of all, we've been doing some backyard landscaping renovation stuff for several years now, and everything's finding its home, and finally, our rhubarb is in its permanent home. So it has transplanted a few times.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay.

**Abby Perry:** But it's never really gotten big. Other places where we've lived, I've had this huge rhubarb that you can harvest all year long, and it seems like as long as I've lived where I've had this one here in Rawlins, I've been able to make two rhubarb crisps a year. Not producing nearly enough. So several years ago, we actually took out all of the dirt and added back in fresh like garden soil, compost mixture type soil, thinking that maybe the soil is part of the problem. I don't know if rhubarb tends to really need a lot of water, if that's part of our problem.

**Jeff Edwards:** So when you're transplanting it, you can possibly transplant it too deep.

**Abby Perry:** Okay.

**Jeff Edwards:** The plants may not ever get to be their full potential. Is this a new plant that you planted or is it something that you split off of something else to transplant?

**Abby Perry:** No. It started as a one gallon plant from the nursery when we first moved it. This is our sixth summer in Rawlins, so it is this rhubarb’s sixth year, and I just got rhubarb. I picked rhubarb off of it on the 4th of July and made rhubarb crisp, and that was the first time that I had picked any rhubarb all season because it was finally maybe kind of doing something. I actually supplemented with some rhubarb out of the freezer.

**Jeff Edwards:** The elevation is 6,400 feet in Rawlins?

**Abby Perry:** Sixty-eight something, I think.

**Jeff Edwards:** Sixty-eight something, okay. [00:06:00] I know they grow rhubarb in Laramie.

**Abby Perry:** Yes.

**Jeff Edwards:** I don't know. Whenever we have struggled with rhubarb, it's because it was planted too deep. I don't know if you might want to try to lift it a little bit.

**Abby Perry:** Yes. So could you lift or dig back around from the crown? Is that the right word? I don't know.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Since it's been transplanted a few times, I think maybe I would just try to pull the soil back away from the crown.

**Abby Perry:** Interesting. Okay.

**Jeff Edwards:** See what happens.

**Abby Perry:** I'll think about it.

**Jeff Edwards:** Jerry, your thoughts on rhubarb?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Well, I had a neighbor that was adjoining to me and they said, well, after they've had their first round of rhubarb and they picked it, they said, "Would you go over it with your rototiller?" I said, "Sure." So we've talked about that [OVERLAPPING] [LAUGHTER] There you go.

[LAUGHTER] I said, "I'd be happy to." I said, "You don't want me to kill it or- “Oh, you won't kill it." So I think on well-established plants, gosh, you can be really mean to them. Of course, this thing came back with a vengeance. But I'm not sure how old this rhubarb plant was, but went over the top, mulched everything in, and with honor, and all within three weeks, it was back above the surface again. [OVERLAPPING] So I'm like, what Jeff said. Maybe pull the dirt away.

**Abby Perry:** Okay. Well, I'm a firm believer in plants responding well to haircuts. So it'll be interesting to see if it does anything more after I pulled out some of those first branches a few days ago.

**Jeff Edwards:** [OVERLAPPING] Talking about responding to haircuts. I really went after my lilacs this year for a variety of reasons. I keep telling people I am not an arborist, I'm an entomologist, and the reason that I really went after them this year is because I have scale insects really bad. I have those black root weevils that notch the leaves, and I also have a lilac stem borer that was getting out of hand. These were eight feet tall, pretty good size, good around, and I probably only left four or five stems, or stocks, or twigs, branches, whatever you want to call them. And now, the undergrowth is about two-and-a-half feet tall and it's just totally thick. [LAUGHTER] I don't know if that's what I was going for or not. I'm not sure. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** Interesting.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Better housing for your insects, right?

**Jeff Edwards:** Right. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** I just got a call from somebody, actually it was a text, Sunday maybe, I don't know, about lilacs, and it being one of those, "What do we do in these situations?" I think that they are ones that tend to respond really well to a nice haircut thinning.

**Jeff Edwards:** Shave. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** Yes, a shave. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Now, tomatoes will do the same thing. My neighbor was given a really large, tall tomato, and of course, they planted it and it just fell [00:09:00] down to the ground. Myrna took the scissors to it and gave it a haircut. Now, it's nice, big, and bushy again and bearing flowers.

**Jeff Edwards:** I'm a few steps ahead of you, Jerry.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Okay.

**Jeff Edwards:** We've already been picking tomatoes.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Well, not all of us get to have [inaudible].[LAUGHTER] Not all of us have corn that's eight feet tall. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** [OVERLAPPING] I got to tell you, the corn is truly amazing. You know in its growth stage where the ears start to push away from the stock?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Right.

**Jeff Edwards:** But I'm guessing right now, I'm just about to blister stage on my sweetcorn.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Oh, so another two weeks, no, another week. Two?

**Jeff Edwards:** Well, I'm 10 days, 14 days, around in there, and I think we'll be ready to be having sweetcorn. So Abby, I planted sweetcorn the first week of April in my high tunnel.

**Abby Perry:** Oh, okay.

**Jeff Edwards:** It is probably nine feet tall and [LAUGHTER] it's already pollinated, it's doing great. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** That's crazy. So do you get enough flow through the high tunnel and everything for it to wind pollinate or do you have to help it along at all?

**Jeff Edwards:** There is so much pollen generated by corn that just the drop from the anthers is enough to pollinate the corn.

**Abby Perry:** Oh, wow.

**Jeff Edwards:** It pollinates the corn, it pollinates everything around it. It's crazy.

**Abby Perry:** Nice.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Not even a fan blowing on it. No.

**Jeff Edwards:** No. We've got insects out there like the cutworm moths, the adults, they're out there flying around. But I've got grasshoppers and very happy toads and other things, wasps, that are moving things around, but I don't have pollinators and I have roll up sides on it. But I have a window screen to keep most of the other insects out. So I do not have a problem with things pollinating in my high tunnel.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah.

**Abby Perry:** Have you ever tried to do, this is one of my aspirations, to grow popping corn?

**Jeff Edwards:** Early on, I've tried popping corn. I don't think that we have the humidity, enough humidity to actually get popping corn kernels to pop when you're going to harvest them. I think we are too dry. I know that sounds weird, but there's a reason why popping corn is grown in Indiana and Iowa and not in Wyoming. It'll grow, you'll get ears, and you'll get corn, but I don't know that it would have very high success rate of popping.

**Abby Perry:** Yes, that's one of those I know that has a super long season and I thought, well, there's ways around that to figure out the season.

**Jeff Edwards:** True.

**Abby Perry:** More things to do with kids. I'm like, "Let's grow popping corn." [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Well, you should try it. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** Okay.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** [LAUGHTER] What else is fun in the corn family is the Indian corn. [00:12:00] Once it's nice and dry, you pull the husk back and then you get to decorate for fall or Halloween, that sort of thing. But you can get some really pretty colors in the Indian corn.

**Jeff Edwards:** Broomcorn is fun too. It doesn't really produce an ear and the top part of it is the piece that the brooms used to be made out of. It's an interesting plant to look at.

**Abby Perry:** That sounds fun too.

**Jeff Edwards:** And grow, and get kids involved with.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Sweep the floor.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah, great. [LAUGHTER] Let's make a broom, by the way, you get to sweep now. [LAUGHTER] You had mentioned other perennial things in your landscape that you are growing and consuming?

**Abby Perry:** Yeah. I have apple trees, but no apples yet. I started a bunch of trees a few years ago as bare rootstock. Little tiny three-foot trees, and some of them are as tall as I am, maybe a little bit taller now, like six foot trees. I think that they're doing well, but no fruit yet. There's cherry, apple, pear, I think that's it.

**Jeff Edwards:** You said three years ago?

**Abby Perry:** Yeah, I think so.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. So 3-5, probably?

**Abby Perry:** Yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** Any time now.

**Abby Perry:** Then I have chokecherry tree that my husband is just anticipating having chokecherries to make jams and whatnot. But I think that this tells you a lot about where we live. At first, you lose so many blossoms to the wind and then the blossoms actually turn to fruit. But then another windstorm came in and blew off some of that, and now, it's like we're down to, I feel like a handful of chokecherries. I just keep crossing my fingers that maybe they'll get to harvest time, but [OVERLAPPING].

**Jeff Edwards:** The birds are going to get those.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah, that's probably true. [OVERLAPPING] [LAUGHTER] That's probably true. [LAUGHTER] Maybe one of these days, we'll actually be able to have chokecherries.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Our year this year for fruiting trees is very strange. I think the last frost freeze event that we had just totally whacked our blooming trees. I have no apples whatsoever on my apple trees. I've got apricots that the plants, I think, are six years old, maybe seven years old, have never bloomed, finally had two or three blossoms on them this year, no fruit. Then I have some plums that we planted that had been around for 12 years now and never had any fruit on them. Nothing. [LAUGHTER] [OVERLAPPING] Go ahead.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** The same way for us. Our apple tree had a lot of blooms on them. The apricots in Guernsey, my brother had a lot of blooms. They're gone. Even our mayday tree that seems to put out little berries like a chokecherry but a little smaller, far less this year. Yeah, I've seen that too on blooming apples, and cherries, and that sort of thing. [00:15:00] We're hopeful for next year.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yes, we are. Although, Jerry, my mother's apricot tree, it's still holding apricots, so she's hopeful that she'll have fruit harvested this year.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** She's got a protected area, isn't it?

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah, it is. The one out front is less protected, but the ones in the backyard are definitely in a protected space.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** When you're talking wind shear, every time I've driven through Rawlins, [LAUGHTER] I think the wind has been blowing.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah, it definitely is a good possibility. Luckily, where we're at, there's a big hill behind our house that separates, there's an alley behind and a big hill that gives us a little bit of protection. And then everything, all of these, not all of these, most of these trees are in the backyard. I think as far as protected spots, they're pretty good, but still, high wind areas for sure. That's hard to avoid.

**Jeff Edwards:** High and frequent wind.

**Abby Perry:** Yes, high and frequent, [LAUGHTER] very true. Then we have a big, I think this is year two on our perennial bed. We took out a retaining wall and made a giant hill with a slide for the kids that go through it, and then I just planted it all, and I think it's probably seven or eight feet by 30 feet maybe of perennial bed, so a decent pollinator landscape.

**Jeff Edwards:** Excellent. Native type plants or just the variety of things that interest you?

**Abby Perry:** Hodgepodge of things. I have a makeshift homemade grow light in my office. Last season, I started a bunch of things from seed. My favorite things, different echinacea and some different grasses, I think. Yeah, some native, some not. I was talking to a friend of mine that works at a greenhouse, that was always my summer job, working at a greenhouse. When I was home visiting a few weeks ago, I stopped in and saw her, and she was telling me that I actually have quite a few things that over-winter for me and come back that haven't over-wintered for them in Cody, so quite a bit lower elevation. We finally decided that some of that snowpack or drifted snow is actually of a benefit to me. So my landscape being under snow from October until March this year, I think, helped along some of my perennials.

**Jeff Edwards:** It didn't hurt a thing, did it?

**Abby Perry:** Yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** We talk about the snowpack in Riverton, it's helpful to my mom's apricots because the trees that we have came directly from hers. Where we are in Torrington, we don't get the snowpack over winter. So we're pretty much convinced that the amount of snow and how long it stays around over the winter time is actually helpful for those types of plans.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah, I think so. I have some hyssop is one of my favorites, little perennial flower that you brush by and smells that licorice smell and that was one that she said at the greenhouse. She's like, [00:18:00] "My hyssop never over-winters. I always treat it like an annual," and I've had mine as long as I've lived in Rawlins. I think that that snow cover really helps it out, that nice insulating blanket.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah, very nice. Jerry?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I know a lot of people will throw out grass seed before a snow and thinking that that will hold the grass seed in place, keeps it away from wind shear as well, but gives it that moisture to start out and get going, and I think that's probably a really good idea.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah, that and also pollinator plants. Annual pollinator seed is the same type of thing. If you throw it out when there's still snow on the ground, it'll do fine.

**Abby Perry:** I actually have. I've started a few of those buds with pollinator that I threw out in the fall and then it was under snow year and did its thing quite nicely.

**Jeff Edwards:** Abby, you said you had a simplified grow light system. Can you describe what that is so if people are interested in doing that type of thing, they could maybe get a setup?

**Abby Perry:** Sure. So it's basically a shop light.

**Jeff Edwards:** Like a four-foot shop light?

**Abby Perry:** Yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay.

**Abby Perry:** Then it has two bulbs in it, two systems. Then I had my husband make basically a little stand for it out of PVC. The PVC itself has two feet on both sides that go out, and then an arch type setup, and then hooks from it that hang down the light. The biggest thing is to have that light hanging as close to the plants as possible when they're little biddies because the light rays disperse over distance. I don't think that it takes much distance for them to completely disperse and not be effective for your plants.

**Jeff Edwards:** Do you use special light bulbs or is it just the light bulbs that came with it?

**Abby Perry:** It is just the light bulbs that came with it, but they have to be like, I don't know if you could get an LED bulb for a shop light, but that will not do the trick. You want the old school, I can't think of what it's called now.

**Jeff Edwards:** Fluorescent light.

**Abby Perry:** Yes, fluorescent, so that you can get the right rays.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yes, you can get LED lights for shop lights.

**Abby Perry:** Oh, you can?

**Jeff Edwards:** I have a couple, they're awesome.

**Abby Perry:** Okay. I'm sure they're great for the workspace, not so great for the plant space.

**Jeff Edwards:** For the grow space, right?

**Abby Perry:** Right. Then I also have a timer that just plugs into the outlet and then the plugin from the shop light goes into the timer. Then I set it to be on for about 16 hours, I think, when I first start to get things going, maybe 14 hours.

**Jeff Edwards:** Then you move that light up away from the plants as the plants grow, right?

**Abby Perry:** That's correct, yeah. So it's on that little chain and I just move it up the chain up the hook.

**Jeff Edwards:** Keep them watered, but not over-watered?

**Abby Perry:** Yep. [00:21:00] Well, I've started watering. [LAUGHTER] There's all these things that you tell people to do and then you're like, "Hey, maybe I should try that myself." [LAUGHTER] I started doing watering, especially those little seedlings in the dish and letting them soak up from the bottom instead of watering on top and splashing seed every which way. I think it's also easier to know if it's more unified watering that way.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay, sure. Perfect little setup, easy to do. If people want to start their own seeds this coming fall or this coming winter, easy thing to do, right?

**Abby Perry:** Yes, definitely. Reading on the seed packets, I usually find all that I want to grow for this season. Like I said, for the perennials and our perennial bed, it was going to be expensive to plant a 30-foot perennial bed, and so I started growing a lot of them myself. But I just organized, looked at all the back of my seed packets of their estimated date for planting away from the frost-free date, the first frost, and organized, and just started planting once a week, starting something new, so it was fun.

**Jeff Edwards:** Perfect. The other day, I was picking peas out in the high tunnel and when they first germinated, I looked at them and I thought, "Darn, only 10 plants germinated." Now that I'm picking them, [LAUGHTER] I keep thinking, "Oh, thank goodness, only 10 plants germinated." [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** Yes.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** This last weekend, I was picking weeds out of my peas, [LAUGHTER] and they're only about two-and-a-half or three-feet tall now and reaching towards the big fence.

**Jeff Edwards:** Oh, yeah.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So they're gaining. You really get a jump on growth with a protected growing system.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah, anytime we can protect from the weather. I don't know what's up with our melons this year. We're not going to have melons this year just because of the wind, I believe. I think some of the cutworm adults have done their business and left eggs, and so now we have some larva behind, so there might be some things feeding on the plants and that's weakening them, and then when the wind comes along, it just blows them out of the ground. Yeah, it's unfortunately, but other than that, everything else seems to be doing fine, squash and stuff. We had our first zucchini last week. I think we talked about that, as you did too, right, Jerry?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yes, we did. But we had purchased our zucchini and fixed it up, but we don't have our plants bearing yet. They're getting closer.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay. Our cucumbers have started too.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Oh, yeah, [LAUGHTER] good stuff, mix it with a little onion and some beet. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** No beet greens, no beetroot, no, don't even say that Jerry, that's just a waste of time.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Abby, we talked last week about all the foods we like and all the foods we really dislike, and I think Jeff and [00:24:00] Diane have a really good plan, only plant what you think you're going to eat or able to give away.

**Abby Perry:** I think that's part of why I stopped growing my own garden is that I was not good at harvesting and eating the things. There are certain things that I thought, you should grow these tomatoes because everybody grows tomatoes, but you should also grow the tomatoes if you want to eat the tomatoes, and that was not the case for me.

**Jeff Edwards:** Are you not a fan of tomatoes?

**Abby Perry:** No, not at all.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Oh my.

**Jeff Edwards:** Funny thing is when in conversation how things that we like and dislike. Jerry, is there one vegetable that you absolutely do not like?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yes, and it is called cooked spinach. [LAUGHTER] Now, I love raw spinach, but when it's cooked like we used to have in high school, man alive, we'd put that at our milk carton and try to hide it and throw it away. [LAUGHTER] Spinach needs be eaten raw or wilted just a little bit.

**Jeff Edwards:** With bacon, right?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Or pizza. Put it on pizza or something, but not boiled in water [LAUGHTER] and turned to mushky.

**Jeff Edwards:** Well, when it's no longer the right color green, then it's beyond edible.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah. I'm pretty easy to get along with. If it's set in front of me, I will try it. I'll eat a couple of bites and if it's something that I can't tolerate, I go, "This is really quite interesting."

**Jeff Edwards:** Where's my milk carton?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Where's my milk carton and move on. [LAUGHTER] That's a great place for a ceiling fan. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Hey, I think we're about halfway through the program. Let's take a break and listen to our sponsors and we'll be back in a minute.

**Male 1:** Boys and girls, green thumbs of all ages, gardening and growing in Wyoming can be challenging, but yet a rewarding experience. The University of Wyoming Extension is here to help with a vast amount of how-to videos and resources to better assist you with all your gardening questions and needs. All these resources are free of charge and on our website for you to use to make your gardening experience green and prosperous. Find all your gardening needs and resources at www.uwyocnp.org/gardening-videos. Remember, happy gardening and green thumbs. [MUSIC]

**Female Narrator:** You are listening to the Lawn & Garden Podcast, presented by University of Wyoming Extension. Visit us at wyoextension.org. There, you can find your county office, browse our many programs, and access dozens of free publications on gardening and so much more. [MUSIC]

**Jeff Edwards:** [00:27:00] All right, everybody, we're back. This is Jeff Edwards and Jerry Erschabeck for the KGOS/KERM Lawn & Garden program. Our guest today is Abby Perry. She is from Rawlins. She works for the University of Wyoming. We have been talking about gardening and growing, and the things we like to eat and the things we don't like to eat. [LAUGHTER] For the second half of our show, I think you guys, you two have something in common as far as growing pumpkins. Maybe you guys should chat about growing pumpkins.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Well, I understand that, Abby, your husband received some pumpkin seeds for Christmas.

**Abby Perry:** Yes.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Can you tell me what kind?

**Abby Perry:** No. [LAUGHTER] I know that they're giant pumpkin seeds. We have a colleague in extension who has done some giant pumpkin work with folks in her county and asked if anybody wanted any seeds. My husband has an interest in growing giant pumpkins. I thought, well, what do you put in a grown man's Christmas stocking. Well, you should probably put pumpkin seeds and so that's what I did.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Then most likely, they were Atlantic Giants, Dill's Atlantic Giants. That's the kind of pumpkin seed one would obtain should they want to grow giant pumpkins. They're quite fun. Did he try them yet?

**Abby Perry:** No. He bought a book on giant pumpkins. He's very good about reading about things before he gets into them and he picked out his spot and did all this. Then we acquired chickens, and the chickens took over where the giant pumpkins were going to go. I think it's one of those next season he is going to take on the giant pumpkin growing.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Here's the good news. Since you have chickens, chicken manure is actually one of the one types of manure that's really quite high in nitrogen. It's considered a little hot, but if you compost it a little bit, I think that you'll find that that chicken manure will work really, really well for your giant pumpkin. Is the chicken location there to stay?

**Abby Perry:** No, it is a temporary location for the chickens. We're going to put in a permanent run, hopefully, this fall.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Somewhere else.

**Abby Perry:** Yes.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** So if he has that place picked out and the chickens are moving, the chickens will have already fertilized the area in which he wants to get going. So there's some people that are crazy enough, they will put in warming wire, you plug it in and it warms, and it's supposed to be used for roofs so that you keep the snow from accumulating on your roof.

**Jeff Edwards:** Those are ice dam preventers, right?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Ice dam preventers. So they'll plug this wire in and make a big concentric circle, [00:30:00] either going from small to large or large to small, it doesn't matter, and plug that in to get their soil to an appropriate temperature, thus getting ready for early growth. Then you'd probably want to keep something over it and then again, something over that.

If you want to really get involved in giant pumpkin growing, you need a couple of shelters, but wind shear is probably the biggest thing that you really want to look for because wind shear will tear your melons, your pumpkins, and your squash, it'll tear it right out of the ground. So especially giant pumpkins are one of those kind of things that need to be helped out by either dirt on the leaf juncture. So a vine grows out, and two leaves that come straight up off the stock is called a leaf juncture. You probably want to put a scoop of dirt on top of that because you'll get extra root growth coming from underneath that leaf juncture. But then on the other places, you'll probably want to use a wooden shish kabob stick formed in an X to go over the vine to try to help keep it down. That's my best advice.

**Abby Perry:** That's very good advice. I look forward to him trying it next season.

**Jeff Edwards:** Jerry, when he's getting started and things are germinating and gets it outside, because the wind blows a lot in Rawlins, which we've already discussed, I guess I'm thinking about one of those blue feed barrels that we have around our neck of the woods, would you cut the bottom off of that and then put that over the top and then cover that with a blanket or something when it's cold?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah. I've used a five-gallon bucket that I've got on a garage sale that had its bottom cut out. So I turned it upside down and that's where I plant my pumpkin.

**Jeff Edwards:** Wait, wait. Wait, did you buy a bucket at a yard sale without a bottom?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yes. [LAUGHTER] Five or six of them. I think five of them. He was using them for his tomatoes. [LAUGHTER] First, he had put that upside down and put his tomatoes in there.

**Jeff Edwards:** I hope you got your money's worth.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Put a big cage. Yeah, they were five for a buck. [LAUGHTER] He was moving and he didn't want to take them with him.

**Jeff Edwards:** Oh, okay.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I bought, I think, five or six of them and they're really nice and you turn them upside down and you put your plant inside. That really helps with wind shear. There’s a certain time you have to decide your plant is too big and you have to remove that. But the wind shears I've seen other people just put up a three-foot piece of plastic in a half moon where the wind comes from. But I've also seen a six by six or a 10 by 10 little plastic hut. I don't know why you couldn't use a tent, [00:33:00] one of the camp tents that your kids have ripped out the zipper. You just put that over the top and stake it down real well. I think that would probably work as well.

**Abby Perry:** I'm liking all of these ideas. I think we can be very successful with giant pumpkins.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Then you could run an electric cord and run a small heater, as well as the electric cord in your ground.

**Jeff Edwards:** Then your children could go out there and spend the night with the giant pumpkin. [LAUGHTER]

**Abby Perry:** That sounds like a pretty great idea. [LAUGHTER] I think that I can be down with that.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah. [LAUGHTER] Sometimes, a lot of these projects, it's all about the kids, and you go, "Oh gosh, I've gotta to till up the soil, I've gotta to do this, gotta to do that," and then to see the excitement on a kid's face once they see even a small pumpkin. I think we need to promote world peace by giving everybody pumpkin seeds and making them grow it, make them, make them grow it.

**Jeff Edwards:** Force them. That's a peaceful attitude, Jerry. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** By golly, I said grow this pumpkin!

**Jeff Edwards:** [LAUGHTER] You can't have it.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** [LAUGHTER] I can't have that. I was interested in what I heard a little earlier that you have a research project with crows. Now, I just heard, I think it was last week that some place down in Texas, a supermarket or some big store, there's just a bunch of crows landed in the parking lot.

**Jeff Edwards:** You know what a bunch of crows is called, don't you?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** A gaggle?

**Jeff Edwards:** A murder.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** A murder? Yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** Right, Abby?

**Abby Perry:** I knew it was something interesting, but I could not think of what it was called. [LAUGHTER]

**Jeff Edwards:** Since I piqued everybody's interest earlier on, I think maybe you should spend some time talking about your research project because it's more than just about crows, but it is fascinating.

**Abby Perry:** This came about, I have been sitting in, like I said, and part of my job is hanging out with farmers and ranchers, and I've been going to a few different meetings, winter meetings, where there tend to be lots of ranchers there. On more than one occasion, somebody would ask about, it was actually ravens and raven impact on sage grouse, and it seems like the answer was always, "Well, we don't know, we think that's something is happening, but didn't really have any clear answers." So this project came about with Derek Scasta. He's an extension specialist on campus. We decided that we'd put together a research project. He had a little bit of experience doing something similar. What it is, is that there are game cameras out on like a T-post, and then we also put together some [00:36:00] dummy nests using brown chicken eggs and putting them in what we deem to be sage grouse habitat and tucking them back in. We put them out about the time of year that real sage grouse would be being laid, and then we went back and collected them a month later after that hatching period would have passed, and then looked at all of our game camera images to see what had come out there, trying to get a sense of what in the world was eating all of these eggs.

**Jeff Edwards:** If it was ravens predating on the eggs.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah. We found, our first year, I think we did it in 2017, all of the eggs had been predated by either ravens or magpies, so we didn't have anything else. We saw some different kinds of animals come in. I think that there was a badger on one image. We saw some coyotes, but they weren't ever the first one there. A lot of times, you could actually see those big prey birds, birds of prey, eating the eggs, like we have them on film, carrying the egg away or cracking the egg open and actually eating what was in them.

We did have some little ground squirrel type rodents go in and roll the eggs away from the nest. That sort of thing is a little bit trickier because we assumed that there'd be a mama hanging out and not letting in some little ground squirrel roll her eggs away. But after they got rolled out into plain sight, then a raven came in and ate them. We saw a sage grouse on one of our images. To actually see a sage grouse on the images gives you some confidence that where we put them was in a good spot.

**Jeff Edwards:** Wait a minute, so the ground squirrel was actually paying homage to the ravens to not be eaten.

**Abby Perry:** [LAUGHTER] Yes, I think so. You're probably right.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** It was a payoff.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah, exactly. [LAUGHTER] I think that first season, like 50 percent predation of all of the nests, it might have been a little bit higher, 60 percent predation.

**Jeff Edwards:** That's eye-opening, that is a real thing that's happening out there.

**Abby Perry:** Yeah. So then we went out a second season and basically did the same study, same general area of our nests, but not the exact same spot. I think that I moved them, I can't even remember, but we were using a GPS and making sure that we put the nest in a different location but sort of same general location, went back out. I think that that year, like 11 of all of our 12 nests were predated, and it was the same thing, the ravens and magpies again, but the majority of them were ravens.

I think that year of the 11, like three of them, magpies got two first, but the other years, it was ravens. [00:39:00] We decided not to go out a third season because we were getting a little concerned that we were teaching the ravens to come in and actually, because where we were at, there were sage grouse and some nesting ground and stuff. We got a little nervous that we were teaching the ravens to come in and check it out.

**Jeff Edwards:** What would you consider the results of that study? But at least, now you know that there are predatory birds who are harvesting sage grouse eggs, right? Or potentially, it could be.

**Abby Perry:** I think that ravens have a bigger impact than most people think that they do. I think that they're playing a bigger role than what we initially gave them credit for. I think it would be interesting to conduct it in another spot. Usually, when I start talking to people about this project, then they start telling me all of these stories about ravens and how smart they are, like following vehicles and tracking them out to sites and things like that. I guess in hindsight, it’s almost like, well it makes sense that these are our problem, but it's nice to actually have a little bit of data even if it isn't super scientific, it's just the game camera images, but yeah.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** I watched a Nova program on ravens and they concluded that ravens were smarter than dogs, and dogs is pretty smart, but ravens can be taught how to open a box, how to obtain food by various means, even using a tool. I mean, when you're using tools, that indicates that you're pretty darn smart. Dogs will go around and sniff if they have a good sniffer, they'll go around sniffing and maybe paw at it a little bit, but the raven actually picked up a tool and was using it to break the seed open or that sort of thing, or drop the seed from a high distance.

**Abby Perry:** Wow.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah.

**Abby Perry:** I guess I should have added that where we conducted this project, it's a good 20 miles from town. It's not like it's right next to the city landfill or anything like that, it's a ways out there. We talked to the BLM Range con who does a lot of work on this ranch, and she said that she'd never seen ravens out there that first year. But after that, when we were going out for that second year, she started seeing ravens. So like I said, we got a little bit nervous that we were introducing them.

**Jeff Edwards:** Teaching them. Yeah, interesting, very interesting. Do they prey on the chicks after they've hatched too? Do you know?

**Abby Perry:** I don't know. I think that there's probably a certain amount of that, yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yeah. Interesting stuff.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah.

**Jeff Edwards:** Jerry, what's been going on in your life this last week? Did you guys have a good Fourth?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** We did have a good Fourth. I wouldn't mind talking just a little bit about a subject that gathers a lot of laughter [00:42:00] and jokes, the garden hoe.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** We have a lot of different garden hoes. Let the joke start, I don't know, [LAUGHTER] but anyway. We have acquired and through, primarily, garage sales, we have one hoe that does not have an implement, it just has the hook, and so that goes right in between the pavers for our little patio and deweeds in between the pavers. We have one that's so worn and ground off. It looks like a little smile on a big stick implement. So that's Myrna's favorite hoe.

**Jeff Edwards:** Smile on a stick. [LAUGHTER]

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Smile on a stick. We have a couple of the yo-yo hoes or stirrup hoe, we like those. There's that and I don't know if there's what's called traditional hoe, but it's like a four by five hoe that is just straight and squared off. I like a v-hoe that makes my trenches, especially if I'm doing corn, it's like a chisel tooth that was welded onto another one. Then we just recently bought this, I'm going to call it a sweep.

**Jeff Edwards:** Because you didn't have enough hoe.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** No, we didn't have enough garden hoes, and so can you see this?

**Jeff Edwards:** Yes.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Yeah. It's like a sweep that you use on a tractor to go underneath the soil just about two inches and sweeps off the weeds. I was sharpening all the hoes this weekend. On that last one, cut my thumb. As a word of warning, you got to be careful. There's only one good hoe, and that's a sharp hoe, there's nothing worse than using a dull garden hoe, and that's my story, I'm sticking with it. You got to be careful when you're sharpening a garden hoe.

**Jeff Edwards:** Be careful when you're sharpening your tools, whether it's a hoe or not, right? Yeah. All of them.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Lawn and garden also includes being in the shop taking care of your implements.

**Jeff Edwards:** Yes, exactly.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Now, I'm wearing a big old guard on my thumb so that I don't smack it each time.

**Jeff Edwards:** Did it require stitches?

**Jerry Erschabeck:** No.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay. That's good.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** It did require super glue though.

**Jeff Edwards:** Okay.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** And a guard.

**Jeff Edwards:** So I have to tell you, I've been trying to do some videos on how to build geodesic domes, and one of my statements in them every time I get started is to keep track of your digits. [LAUGHTER] Wear safety glasses and keep track of your digits because things happen really fast.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Glasses, digits, gloves, absolutely. [LAUGHTER] I apologize. I have a previous engagement, so I have to check out a little early.

**Jeff Edwards:** That's fine. I think, actually, we could probably wrap up. Jerry, thank you for being on with us. Good luck getting [00:45:00] to your next appointment.

**Jerry Erschabeck:** Thank you so much, Jeff. Bye now.

**Jeff Edwards:** Abby, thank you for being our guest today and we will have you on again sometime.

**Female Narrator:** [MUSIC] Thanks for listening. Catch next week's episode Tuesday at noon on Spotify. Episodes from previous seasons are now available in the archive.