



Chili is a menu staple for NorthWestern Energy Director of Central Operations Bob Vinson.

“From a college kid with venison in the freezer to having a busy family with kids in sports, I’ve made a lot of pots of chili with well-tested, family recipes,” he said.

In December, the NorthWestern Energy Great Falls, Montana, office hosted a chili cook off to raise money for United Way Cascade County.

“It was the first time I’ve entered a chili contest and the first time I’ve tried pizza chili,” he said.

The first timer claimed a chili cook off winning title, coming in second place.

Bob’s career in energy started more than four decades ago when he joined the summer maintenance crew at Rainbow Dam. He worked at every hydro facility NorthWestern Energy operates in Montana, read meters and was a seasonal gas crew laborer.

“I loved the physical work,” he said.

Encouraged by managers, Bob completed school at Montana State University-Bozeman, earning a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.

“I’ve had a lot of outstanding mentors, and my career is the product of all of them,” Bob said. “And I’ve been able to be part of giving people opportunities to serve in leadership roles, empower them and help them gain confidence to accomplish great things.”

Today, in his role as Director of Central Operations, Bob guides aspects of NorthWestern Energy’s natural gas system maintenance, underground infrastructure damage prevention, meter operations and distribution operations and control. He also oversees NorthWestern Energy’s new technical training department.

“From the first summer I worked at Rainbow (Dam) and met the engineer, I knew that is what I wanted to do,” he said. “It’s a great career and I’ve never wanted to work anywhere else.”



## Meatsa-Pizza Chili-Willi

This is a fun variation on “normal” chili for those of us who love chili and pizza.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 pound hot Italian sausage
- ½ to 1 pound pepperoni, slices (halved), and/or unsliced (cubed)
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 large green pepper, seeded and chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, or 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 jar (16 ounces) salsa
- 1-2 cans (12 ounces) pizza sauce
- 1 can (16 ounces) hot chili beans, undrained
- 1 can (16 ounces) kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano and/or Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper to taste (don’t start with more than a teaspoon)
- Water as desired for consistency (don’t start with more than a cup)
- Shredded mozzarella or Italian blend cheese for topping

### DIRECTIONS

- In a Dutch oven, cook ground beef, hot sausage, onion, green pepper and garlic until meat is no longer pink, drain.
- Stir in chili powder, oregano and/or Italian seasoning, salt, pepper, beans, salsa, and pizza sauce.
- Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer until heated through, at least 20 minutes. Simmering longer will release the beans’ starches and thicken the chili. Add water if the chili is thicker than you like.
- Serve topped with mozzarella or Italian cheese blend.

Play with the recipe – scale the ingredients up or down, add more beans if you like ‘em, or add spices and pizza ingredients depending on your likes and the size of your party! Remember, you gotta really mess up to mess up chili! Enjoy!

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Estamos orgullosos de la diversidad en las comunidades que servimos. Para satisfacer mejor las necesidades de algunos de nuestros clientes, traducimos información importante del cliente a dos idiomas: español y karen.

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# Energy Connections

Customer Bill Insert  
**April 2025**

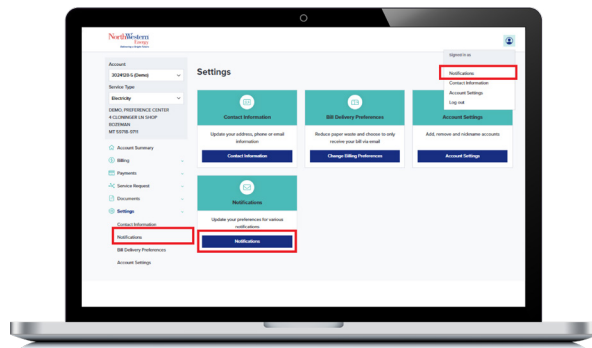
In this issue: Notification options | Plan where you plant  
Powerline safety | Meatsa-Pizza Chili-Willi recipe



**Bright ideas to save**

## Check your hot water heater

Save \$30-\$60 a year by setting your hot water heater to 120°F, compared to 140°F. Plus for your safety, water heated to 140°F poses a scalding hazard.



## Don't miss out! Sign up for alerts today!

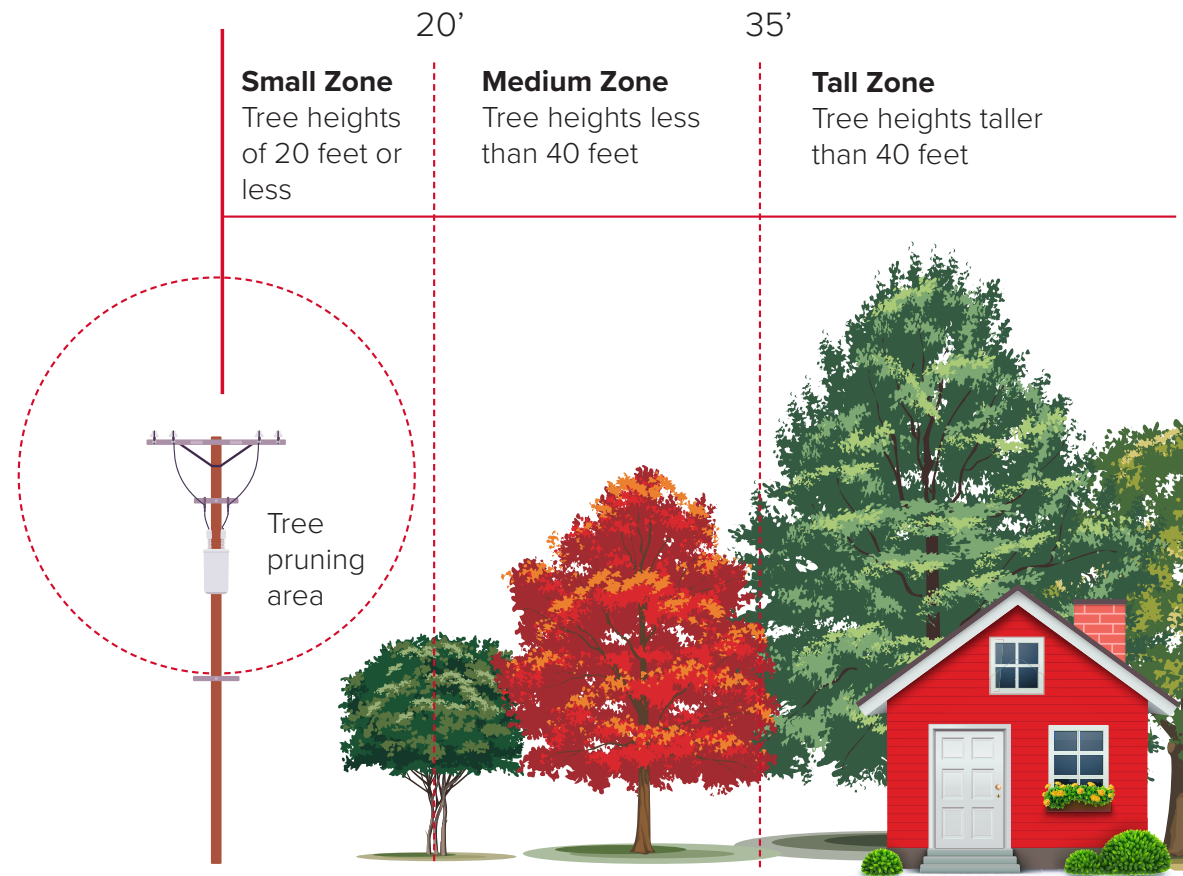
We're now offering more flexibility in how you receive communications from NorthWestern Energy.

You can now subscribe to specific notifications from NorthWestern Energy, and select how you want to hear from us:

- **Outage alerts (email/text)** – This includes receiving a notification when your power is out and when it is restored.
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If you don't have My Energy Account, sign up today! It's free and easy! Visit [NorthWesternEnergy.com](http://NorthWesternEnergy.com) and click "Register for My Energy Account."



## Planning, planting and protecting trees

National Arbor Day is April 25, and spring is a great time to plant a tree!

Where you plant a tree is just as important as the tree you select. Planting a tall tree too close to a power line could result in the tree being regularly trimmed shorter than you would ever want or worse, being removed. Pick the right tree and the right place to avoid collisions with power lines, sidewalks, buildings and other trees.

1. **Get measurements.** When selecting a new tree or shrub, ask the tree nursery what the height and width will be once it's fully grown.
2. **Call 811.** Before digging, call 811 or visit [Call811.com](http://Call811.com) to have underground utility lines marked for free. Do this at least two business days before you are planning to plant. Even on your property and in your yard, damages caused by hitting an underground utility can be expensive

and even deadly. Once utilities are marked, be sure to hand excavate within 18 inches on each side of markings. If you ever hit a gas line, call 911 and NorthWestern Energy immediately. Even minor damage to a pipeline can result in future leaks.

3. **Look up.** If power lines are over the area where you want to plant, plan to plant roughly 20 feet away based on the mature size of your tree. Trees that grow taller than 40 feet should be planted more than 35 feet away.
4. **Look down.** To be safe, plan to plant at least 25 feet away from the flags that indicate underground natural gas lines.
5. **Look around.** If there are any ground-level transformers nearby, plan to plant at least 10 feet away from the front to ensure the transformer is accessible.

## Stay away from overhead lines

Overhead electric lines may cause serious injury or death if contacted.

- Be vigilant when using ladders, scaffolds, and long/tall tools and equipment in the vicinity of overhead lines.
- When working with ladders or long tools, stay at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines carrying up to 50 kilovolts. If you are unsure of the voltage, contact NorthWestern Energy.
- Do not prune within 10 feet of powerlines.
- Never remove a fallen tree or branch from a power line. You could be seriously injured or killed. If a tree or branch touches a power line, keep yourself and others away from the tree and call 911.
- Overhead electric lines are not insulated. Contacting or getting too close to one with your body, equipment, or tools could result in death or serious injury.

