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Cool Season Grass Season

As long as forage crops green up in the spring and give us something to hay or graze, in most cases, we don't think a lot about them. It's not until an issue arises that we think twice about how that plant actually grows. The end of the 2021 growing season may have made you think twice about why our cool season grass stands responded to late season stresses – drought/armyworms/etc... - like they did.

Cool season, or C3, forages (brome/fescue) all prefer cooler temperatures for optimum growth (45-75 degrees). They respond to fertilizer, and a lack thereof can result in a proliferation of weeds/brush. They respond to fire, but not as favorably as warm season (native, C4) plants. In fact, they can even be set back to some degree when fire is used. Why does it matter?

Knowing how a grass plant grows can provide a lot of insight in to why it responds the way it does under certain circumstances. Last summer was a prime example. Brome without ample recovery time (regrowth of three to four leaves, minimum) post-harvest was hit harder by late season armyworm feeding than were stands with a longer time for regrowth. Some sites also saw moisture deficits. Cool season plants don't handle that as well as warm season ones, resulting in further stress. If fertility levels were compromised, or cutting height wasn't ample, or other issues arose, stands were significantly slowed in their recovery – if not outright killed.

We can't control what happened in 2021, but we can start to think about how to mitigate those issues in 2022. Next week, we'll dig deeper in to what we might be able to do early in the season to help cool season grasses handle late season stresses.

Fruit Tree Pests

Fruit production in Kansas has its share of challenges. From cold weather injury to disease and insect pressure, getting 'blemish free' fruit is typically as much luck as it is skill.

If you're a fruit grower willing to 'take what you can get', you are already well aware of the year to year variability in production. If you want to try some enhanced management, however, request a copy of one of our fruit tree spray schedules by contacting any of our Meadowlark Extension District Offices or e-mailing me at dhallaue@ksu.edu.

One focuses specifically on apples. A second has a stone fruit focus. The third is a companion publication for both, outlining pesticide products, active ingredients, and labeled fruits. They are great references to help reduce insect and disease pressures on your fruit trees.

If you've already got a spray schedule you're following, make sure you get the most efficacy from your applications by properly managing them. Use of a spreader sticker is one example of a relatively simple practice that can increase efficacy by improving the distribution and retention of fungicides and insecticides on fruit and leaves. Found in most garden stores, they can potentially reduce the need for additional applications by helping the pesticide better coat leaves to resist being washed off during rain events. Also, make sure you are reading and carefully following label directions to protect pollinators and so appropriate harvest withdrawal periods are met.

Cultural practices can do a lot towards helping mitigate disease as well. We'll hit on that a little more in next week's column.