

David Hallauer

District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

As Grass Gets Growing

As long as grass takes off and grows each spring, we often don't worry much about it. That doesn't mean all is well, however. A monitoring plan through the growing season can be a valuable tool in maintaining productive stands through many different conditions.

Start with a quick look at the soil surface to get an idea of stand density. Specifically, are certain areas of the pasture or hay field better or worse? It could be due to soil type, fertilizer deficiencies, or even over/under grazing. You may have to think back over time to come up with answers, but making a few changes based on what you see *can* make a difference in stand densities – and overall forage production – if we're willing to implement them.

If you do have open spaces, are they filling in with broadleaf weeds? Undesirable forages? If it's a warm season forage stand, are cool season species taking over? In cool season stands, are less productive or lesser quality species increasing? Early spring monitoring can give a heads up about what we might expect from the pasture through the remainder of the season. Knowing broadleaf weeds are increasing can help us manage control or grazing programs to help combat them. Understanding the productivity of bluegrass that has increased over time versus the brome grass we planted can help us manage harvest timing and grazing management.

Last but not least, look for patterns above and beyond those referenced above. Maybe there was a mechanical issue with harvest, fertilizer or weed control equipment. There can even be patterns associated with the timing of hay harvest or grazing. Look back at longer-term management to see if there are patterns – or habits – we need to adjust.

Our goal is long term stand health. Start monitoring now to avoid surprises later.

Fruit Tree Fertilization

Once we get fruit trees established, it's easy to just let it 'do it's thing'. If you want to push production a little, however, consider a shot of fertilizer early in the spring. Rates will depend on the age of the tree, product used, and when possible, a soil test.

Fertilizer products differ, but many common mixes are around 30 percent nitrogen with lower amounts of phosphorus and potassium. Since nitrogen is typically the most needed nutrient, higher N products work well. Lawn fertilizers with an analysis in this range are acceptable, so long as they don't contain weed killers or crabgrass preventers.

Younger trees require less fertilizer than older ones. Using the aforementioned 30 percent N mixes, apply one-fourth cup of fertilizer per tree to one to two-year old trees. Increase rates to one half cup per tree for three to four-year old trees and one to two cups per tree for trees five to 10 years old. Trees more than 10 years old should have two to three cups of a 30 percent product applied per tree. Other products can be used (if a soil test calls for P/K, consider a balanced fertilizer), but adjust rates to reach an appropriate nitrogen level.

Tree growth is factor as well. For apple trees, last year's growth should be eight to 10 inches in length. Cherries should show 10 to 12 inches, and peaches should equal 12 to 15 inches of terminal growth. If growth is less than this, apply the higher rates above. If more, apply lesser amounts. Spread fertilizer evenly on the ground *away* from the trunk and to the outer spread of the branches. Water in with at least a quarter inch of water if rain doesn't provide it.