

Jody G. Holthaus
District Extension Agent
Livestock and Natural Resources

Bend Don't Break

I've never given much thought to palm trees and what happens to them during a hurricane, but I recently heard one of those motivational type speakers. Her entire talk was about palm trees.

It seems palm trees are very resilient. They can lose all of their palm leaves and still survive as long as they have this one terminal bud. If you compare yourself to a palm tree, what would your terminal bud be? Your faith, family, your friends? During a hurricane, the palm trees can be twisted and bent. They use the roots of other palm trees to keep them anchored. You can use your friends and family to keep you anchored during this stormy time.

The palm leaves are fringy, and so that helps them survive during the really windy times.

The most amazing thing is they can just lose the entire top of the tree and still survive. So what can you let go of to make your life easier right now?

I think it would be a good lesson for all of us to be like a palm tree and bend, don't break.

Farmers live with stress day in and day out. The pressures of planting and harvest season, equipment failures and repairs, economic threat, worries over unfavorable weather conditions, and troubles with family members can all add pressure to farm life. Many of the common ways that people use to lessen or avoid feelings of stress involve emotionally, mentally, or physically avoiding people, places, or activities that we often feel stressed around. While this may be helpful in some circumstances, prolonged or increased amounts of this kind of avoidance can become problematic. Examples of potentially problematic avoidance of stressful circumstances include drinking too much, overeating or undereating, getting too much or not enough sleep, or avoiding people and places we feel stressed about to the point that it becomes detrimental to relationships. Using other tools to manage feelings of distress, such as mindfulness, can help you feel less threatened and driven by them and engage in the things that matter most to you.

Mindfulness is essentially the skill of being aware of your thoughts and feelings without being overwhelmed by them or letting them dictate what you do with your time and energy. There are a wide range of techniques that can be used to soothe tensions and feelings of anxiety, become more aware of what is happening in our bodies, and examine thoughts and emotions in a way that helps us be more intentional with our actions in response to them. More important than learning all of the techniques available is to pick a few that seem doable to you and practice using them. Some of the mindfulness techniques that you can try to use include mindfulness, box breathing, and focusing on surrounding physical sensations.

Meditation has a wide variety of forms and can be applied in several different ways. One meditation technique that can be useful for soothing anxiety and becoming more aware of and less driven by distressing thoughts and emotions involves a simple formula. To begin, sit in a comfortable place in an upright position and breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth. Many people find that when doing this, their minds begin to race through a kaleidoscope of different images, thoughts, memories, and a variety of accompanying emotions. Especially when these are distressing, it may be tempting to try and force the thoughts from your mind, but doing so may actually make it more difficult to benefit from meditation. Rather than trying to force thoughts away, gently notice the thoughts that spring into your mind when you begin meditating and allow the thoughts to drift away when they seem ready to.

In some situations, that may not seem feasible to meditate in, intentionally slowing and focusing on your breathing can have a calming effect that can make it easier to get carried away by distressing thoughts and emotions less often. A helpful strategy to do so involves mentally tracing a square in your mind and counting to four as you breathe in through your nose and imagine one side of the square being drawn, holding your breath as you mentally imagine the second side appearing for four seconds, letting your breath go through your mouth for four seconds while you image the third side appearing, and holding with no breath for a final four seconds while you imagine the fourth side of the box appearing. Repeating this "box breathing" technique several times can help calm natural reactions your body has to increased stress.

A third technique that you can try to increase your mindfulness involves paying close attention to what your senses are detecting around you again to slow down and give you greater awareness of your thoughts. One way to do this involves identifying five things around you that you can see, four things that you can hear, three things you can feel, two things you can smell, and naming one positive attribute about yourself can help you become more aware of yourself and become more intentional with your actions.

Imagine that you are a palm tree!

David G. Hallauer
District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Soil Sampling Forage Stands

It's been said that a good time to get a soil sample from a forage stand is any time. While I agree with that for the most part, there are some compelling reasons why fall is a *better* time.

For application planning purposes, knowing soil test levels now can help us best manage application needs. This is especially true of lime applications, which typically require some time to take effect after application.

From a budgetary standpoint, it can help with forward planning and taking advantage of pricing opportunities. Under application can hurt production that may translate to other expenses down the road. Over application isn't economically or environmentally sustainable. The only way to know for sure what is needed is via a soil test.

For best results, sample every three to four years. Use a soil probe when possible to get an accurate sample from top to bottom (a spade or shovel tends to result in sample bias based on a sample that is wide at the surface and comes to a point at the bottom). Probes are available for check out from all three District Offices.

Samples should represent a uniform area and be from forty acres or less when feasible. If field variability exists, sampling on smaller areas may be of value. Collect 15 to 20 cores (subsamples) to make up a representative composite sample. If after pH only, sample to a depth of three to four inches. Samples to determine P and K levels are best done to a six-inch depth.

For more information on sampling forage stands, contact any of our District Offices or e-mail me at dhallaue@ksu.edu. In addition to probes available for checkout, Offices also have soil test bags for submitting samples. Some offices also offer cost-share programs in collaboration with local Conservation Districts. Consult individual offices for details.

Tree Leaf Disposal

Got a plan for leaf disposal this year? Fortunately, you have options!

First, consider the damage they may or may not be doing by remaining on the lawn surface. A scattering of leaves won't hurt much. If they are thick enough to prevent sunlight from reaching turf plants, then a disposal option might be on order.

Consider composting them for reapplication to gardens/flower beds in the future. If you want to avoid the whole composting process, try using a mower with a bagging attachment to chop and collect leaves for transport to the garden or flower bed. Apply in a two to three-inch layer on the soil surface and incorporate with tillage. You can repeat this process every couple of weeks until you run out of leaves or soil is too wet for tillage.

Don't want to take time to compost? A mulching mower can shred leaves, allowing them to filter into the turf canopy, as long as the leaves aren't too deep to begin with (mow while you can still see grass peeking through the leaves). Work at Michigan State shows that adding one pound of leaves per square yard (about six inches of leaves piled on the grass) via a mulching mower for even five consecutive years resulted in no long term detriment to the turf stand.

Raking and bagging is an option as well, but mulching or composting allows for reuse of the material to enhance organic matter levels in the garden or existing turf stand.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Save Holiday Meals

While most would agree that 2020 has been stressful, holiday meals should not add to the anxiety. Shopping ahead and freezing foods helps to lighten the load.

The holiday season is an excellent time to take a deep breath and relax—then make a plan to keep it that way. Make a list to plan your meal. Shop for food now to have it available and to avoid the shopping rush. You can also prepare and freeze foods ahead to spread out food preparation time.

When done correctly, many foods, such as meat, can be frozen to extend their shelf life. Some foods can be cooked directly from the freezer. For best results, use freezer-safe packaging designated for freezing. Remove as much air from the package as possible to protect food quality.

Freezers should be kept at 0 degrees F. or lower. When ready to use frozen foods, there are three options for thawing:

- *Refrigerator. This takes the longest time and advance planning. Large items, like a frozen turkey may require 24 hours for every five pounds of weight.
- *Microwave. Do this when you intend to use or cook the food immediately after thawing.
- *Cold running water. Cold tap water is useful when the food can thaw in less than two hours.

Cook food immediately after thawing. If not planning to cook and freeze foods ahead of time, make a schedule for when you will prepare menu items. If you only have one oven, use other ways to cook foods such as an electric roaster, an electric multi-cooker, or a slow cooker.

Think about sharing food preparation by having family members help. This will ease the stress and give more family time at home.

This year, follow local guidelines on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You don't want to give the gift of any illness.

Remember the four key concepts for safe and healthy food during the holidays.

- *Clean. Wash your hands and clean as you go to keep countertops and equipment clean through meal preparation.
- *Separate raw foods (such as meat) from ready-to-eat foods. Clean or use separate utensils when going from raw foods to ready-to-eat foods.
- *Cook foods to proper temperatures for doneness. Three temperatures to remember; 145 F° for steaks, roasts, and chops; 160 F° for ground meats and 165 F° for poultry.
- *Chill foods promptly to reduce the growth of bacteria. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Make a conscious effort to avoid ‘crisis eating’

As humans, we want to be in control, and so when we need to cope, a lot of times, we crisis eat. And for most of us, that’s just not a healthy pattern.

We might over-consume sweets or over-eat in general. For some people, they may not eat enough, forget to eat or avoid food, or drink too much coffee, and bombard their system with excess caffeine.

There is a body of research indicating that people can consume an entire package or dish of food while distracted and not even feel full. If we are working at our home office and eating at the same time, we know that we can consume huge amounts of calories and not even realize that we ate. We have talked often about mindful eating: Eat when you’re eating, and work when you’re working. Just because sometimes it’s all in the same environment doesn’t mean you can successfully mix them all together.

Buy healthy foods that can be re-packaged at home as pre-portioned snacks. Doing so is sensible for parents as well as for children who also are staying home from school these days.

Keeping snacks under control will serve us well in a number of ways. For one thing, people will be able to maintain that schedule of feeling hungry at mealtime a little better. And you may not have to venture out to the store in the middle of the week to purchase a few more things. It helps if we can learn to be mindful of those extras and try to make them last.

In addition to planning healthy snacks, take time for a few deep breaths, stepping away from the news now and then, and making a schedule to take a walk or get some other form of physical activity each day. If you’re being active, chances are you’re not mindlessly eating at the same time. It’s a good way to break up the day and reinforce positive health habits.