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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.

Cindy Williams
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“Water: It’s Time to Drink Up”

We are a few weeks into this year’s Walk Kansas program, which promotes physical activity over an 8-week course. While the basis of the program is staying active, an additional key to the program is watching how much water participants consume daily.

Did you know that your body is around 60% water? It’s the most abundant compound in your body and is used by every bodily system. While research varies on exactly how much water each person should consume each day, the Institute of Medicine recommends an adequate intake for men is about 13 cups of fluid a day and 9 cups for women. Your need for liquids depends on many factors, including your health, how active you are, and where you live.

The health benefits to drinking water are vast. From helping with weight loss to better brain function, the list goes on and on. I encourage you to do your own research on all of these benefits. Today, I’d like to share some tips with you to make water the easy beverage choice throughout your busy day.

1. Carry a water bottle with you and keep it refilled. As soon as you hit the bottom of the bottle, head to the office water cooler or faucet and refill so that water is always accessible.
2. Order water when eating out and serve with your meals at home. You’ll save money and reduce calories over other beverages choices.
3. Change the flavor. Adding a wedge of lime or lemon or other liquid water enhancers can boost the flavor and help you drink more water than you usually would.
4. Make it a challenge. Set a goal and track your intake each day. You may even choose to reward yourself when you hit your goal.

Keep in mind that the more active you are, the more water you may need to keep yourself hydrated. As summer approaches, it’s a wonderful time to get into the daily water drinking habit. I encourage you to get outside, be active and drink up! (water, that is).