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### ***Grass Growth and Development***

Spring green-up is a great time for the forage producer. If you're grazing the forage, it is hope that winter feeding will soon be over. For the hay producer, it's time to see what can be produced. Spring weather, on the other hand, can throw us some curves. That's when understanding what we can expect out of that forage plant can help 'temper' our expectations.

The brome and fescue that makes up our predominant forage base in much of Northeast Kansas are cool season grasses. They grow best at temperatures in the 45-75 degree range. They respond well to fertilizers and grow well in the spring as well as again in the fall.

The bluestems, Indiangrass, and others that make up the Flint Hills region of Kansas are warm season grasses. They grow well when temperatures creep above 75 degrees. They really take off well in late spring and in to summer.

Like all plants, the photosynthetic process is very important. The capture of sunlight and its conversion to energy used to make plant proteins and other parts is what helps plants continue in their life cycle. The goal: maximize production and help the plant to survive another year.

Even as the grass plant seems to be developing quickly, young leaves may not be producing enough to meet plant growth needs. That means that energy 'draws' are required from the plant crown. This will likely continue until at least two to three full leaves are formed.

Why is this important now? Any excess removal of leaf area as the plant goes through these early growth stages often has an impact on how the plant performs in the near term as well as in the future. Stresses like unintended fire or heavy grazing or clipping too short can all be detrimental to continued development – if the situation isn't managed correctly. Bottom line: now is not the time to take grass growth for granted – it could have season long consequences.

### ***Early July Tomatoes?***

As temperatures crept upwards this spring, thoughts of early garden plantings crept in as well. If you like tomatoes like I do, you might be tempted to put some out early and see whether you can speed things up a little. Possible? Maybe. Probable? Not as much...

I referenced our KSU Vegetable Garden Planting Guide a couple of weeks ago. The calendar in that guide shows tomato planting in May. Fact is, we're probably looking at the middle of May in NEK in most years. If you want to give early planting a try, however, heed these tips from Ward Upham, a horticulture specialist at Kansas State University:

First, understand weather risks. Temperatures jump around early in the season and that has an effect on soil temperatures. 'Tomatoes need a soil temperature of at least 55 degrees to do well' according to Upham. A good source of soil temperatures is the Kansas Mesonet [mesonet.k-state.edu](http://mesonet.k-state.edu). If using plastic mulch to warm the soil, Upham suggests waiting several days after laying to allow temperatures to increase.

Second, protect plants from frost. Consider the use of hot caps or water teepees, types of protective cones that fit over young plants. They can protect plants early and plants will outgrow them as they develop.

Even following these guidelines is no guarantee of early tomatoes. You might get something by early July, but mid-July will still be our most common production window.