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Hemp Dogbane

In my last column, I referenced a couple weeds to look for during post-harvest hay field evaluations. Hemp dogbane was one of them, and deserves attention for numerous reasons.

Hemp dogbane is a perennial potentially growing to heights of three to five feet and may be confused with milkweed species due to their similar exterior appearance and the presences of milky sap when leaves are removed or stems cut (NOTE: only fresh plants will show sap). Stems have a reddish tint at maturity and become woody at the base. The term dogbane is said to refer to the plant being poisonous to dogs. The same plant resins can also harm cattle under the right conditions.

Because of the plant's long, horizontal rootstocks, you have not only plants, but in many cases plant *colonies*. Plants start as a single taproot that can grow to a depth of almost six feet plus spread laterally as much as ten feet in a single season. Its vigorous growth and a long growing season (it flowers from May-September) makes it a formidable foe in forage stands.

As long as stands remain competitive, plant populations may remain low and of little concern. If post-harvest recovery is slowed, Hemp dogbane is excellent at filling 'open space' and can become a big problem. When possible, manage stands to prevent dogbane from gaining a foothold by encouraging a competitive grass stand.

Already established – and colonies expanding? You have a couple of options. According to work out of the University of Missouri, a mid-August mowing could help to reduce the size of weed patches the next season. More frequent mowing can help reduce plant vigor and seed production, although mowing in general isn't likely to eliminate it.

Chemical control options include many of our common active ingredients: 2,4-D, dicamba, fluroxypyr, and triclopyr. Missouri research suggests 2,4-D or fluroxypyr. Limited research in Kansas shows an advantage to products containing fluroxypyr.

Herbicide efficacy can be enhanced (and forage injury reduced) when good growing conditions are present prior to and for a time after herbicide applications. Always use an appropriate surfactant and apply when plants are in the 12 to 15-inch range or shorter. For identification aids, see the Hemp dogbane page at the Kansas Wildflowers and Grasses website:

https://www.kswildflower.org/flower_details.php?flowerID=112 .

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Alternatives For Coping With Short Pasture

Recent rains have refreshed some cool season pastures and given growth to native range, but there is still a lot of summer ahead of us. My observation and reports from others as well, is that declining water levels in farm ponds might actually be more of a deterrent to a full grazing season than will be lack of forage. That is partly why I've recently written about water for livestock, but will focus on some management techniques to address declining forage today.

*Rotational grazing allows more efficient use of pasture forages. If the paddock number is three or more, and moisture isn't limiting, 1/3 to 1/4 of the land area can be made as hay for winter or emergency-use situations. Rotational grazing permits an earlier start in the season and extends grazing in the fall.

*Graze hay fields. If dry weather limits re-growth on hay fields, consider using them as pasture if the fields are, or can be, easily fenced, and water provided. Use bloat-prevention if the forages (alfalfa, red clover, white clover, etc.) can cause bloat.

*Creep feed nursing calves. When forage growth is limited, it's likely that neither energy nor protein needs are being met for optimal calf growth by pasture and milk. Consider creep feeding nursing calves to prevent losses in calf gains and in weaning weight, while reducing the stress on the cow and pasture.

*Early wean calves. In severe feed shortage, consider early weaning, especially for cows in a weight and body condition loss situation. Early weaning lowers cows' nutrient needs by up to 50%, allowing her to maintain or gain body weight and condition on less, as well as lower-quality, feed. Early-weaned calves will require a high-quality grain mix and forage to maintain adequate growth. Limit consumption to 1.5% of calf weight and free-choice quality grass hay.

*Provide supplemental forage. Dry matter intake declines when forage height becomes less than 3 in. The result is reduced weight gain, lowered milk production and loss of body condition. Providing hay or silage, if available, is likely the first course of action. Where possible, limit the grazable area while feeding supplemental forage to allow areas to rebound.

*Separate young cows and those with lower body condition. These cows need higher quality pasture or other forage and additional concentrate feed to regain condition. This would allow lower nutrient demand cows to remain on lower quality forage and/or supplementation to higher nutrient demand animals.

*Likely to be done only after early weaning has occurred, drylotting the cow herd allows pastures to rest and re-grow. If calves have been weaned, feed for dry cows can be limited only to what's needed for maintenance. It's possible, with some adaptation, to limit feed as little forage as 1/2 to 1% of the cow's body weight, with a grain supplement providing the rest of the cow's nutrient requirements. Don't attempt all-concentrate feeding for brood cows.

*If cattle are fed hay in a drylot, let the pasture re-grow to a height of 8-10 in. before grazing is allowed. If re-growth is quick to happen because of a return to abundant moisture, consider fencing off about 25% of the pasture and stockpile the growth for fall or winter grazing.

*If culling is necessary, reduce cattle numbers in this order: open cows, yearling steers and/or non-replacement heifers, lower-quality or older cows. Heavy culling into quality animals in the main breeding herd should only be done in critical circumstances.

For more ideas on addressing drought, go to www.KSUBEEF.org to check out videos from recent drought related webinars or visit your local K-State Research and Extension office.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Tomato Leaf Curl

During hot summer months, many gardeners notice their tomato plants have curling leaves. There are various reasons why tomato leaves can curl, but luckily the different causes present different symptoms.

The most common reason for tomato leaf curl is environmental stress, often from a lack of water. Tomato plants need a lot of water, and, in times of drought or high temperatures, tomato plants will curl their leaves up and over to reduce the amount of leaf tissue exposed to the sun. This helps the leaf stay cooler and retain water. These inwardly curled leaves without any sign of discoloration indicate that more water is needed. If you are over-watering your tomatoes, you may see some curling, but it will be accompanied by drooping yellow leaves. Big changes in their environmental conditions, like fluctuating water levels or temperatures, can cause leaf curl, so wait until their conditions stabilize before expecting their leaves to return to normal. The good news is that unless the environmental stress is severe, it likely will have little effect on your yield.

Other environmental causes of curling leaves include transplant shock, excessive pruning, and nutrient imbalances. If your tomatoes were recently planted or pruned, water them well and they should recover within a couple of weeks. Nutrient imbalances can also cause leaf curl and will usually present with leaf discoloration. Too much nitrogen, for example, can cause tomato leaves to curl inward and turn a darker green. Tomato plants exposed to excessive nitrogen will also have a hard time setting fruits. When fertilizing your tomatoes always keep in mind that you can have too much of a good thing.

Although leaf curl is most often due to environmental stress, there can be more severe causes of leaf curl. Tomatoes are sensitive to herbicides, and drift from nearby spraying can cause their leaves to curl. Unlike environmental stress, herbicide damage is often accompanied by twisting or bending stems and leaves, dying tissue, or leaf discoloration. The exact symptoms will vary depending on the type of herbicide.

The last reason for tomato leaf curl is a virus. While more uncommon, it is possible for tomato plants to contract viruses that cause curling leaves and twisting new growth. These symptoms initially look incredibly similar to herbicide damage, but the diseases generally include yellow mosaic discoloration as they progress. There are over a dozen viruses that affect tomato plants, and the exact virus can only be identified by lab testing and viruses cannot be cured.

Although viruses are possible, it is important to remember that leaf curl is incredibly common in tomatoes undergoing environmental stress. Next time you notice your tomato leaves curling offer them some water. Wait until you see die back, yellowing, discoloration, or twisting and deformed new growth before worrying.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Cybersecurity for Older Americans

According to the National Council on Aging, older adults lost \$3.1 billion to online fraud in 2022, an 84% increase from 2021. The internet can be great for connecting with friends and family, shopping, accessing news, and various other pursuits. Still, it can be dangerous if you are not adequately protecting yourself against fraud. Evaluating your cybersecurity is a must.

Cybersecurity is basic Internet safety, and it requires us to be vigilant against possible intrusions into our personal information, which fraudsters can use for nefarious purposes. There are some smart things you can do now to protect yourself and others from cybercrime.

1. Don't click on links in emails from unknown senders. Also, be wary of links in emails, even from someone you know or recognize, that sounds slightly "off". These links can deliver malicious software called Malware to your computer, device, server, or network to gain access to your personal information. If the message appears to be from a business or organization you know, contact them directly to see if the link is legitimate.
2. On the same note, only open attachments if you expect them. The attachment may appear to be safe but could also contain damaging Malware.
3. Do not click on or respond to security warning pop-ups or other messages to frighten you into downloading or paying for fake cybersecurity software. You may see an "urgent" pop-up prompting you to respond, don't fall for it. These are just another attempt to get you to install malicious Malware.
4. Do not answer unsolicited phone calls. Remember that government entities such as Medicare and Social Security will not contact you unless you first call them. Fraudulent callers can also "spoof" phone numbers to make it look like the caller is someone you know or even your phone number. They are hoping that you will be curious enough to answer the phone. Do not give out any personal information over the phone. These types of callers can be very aggressive. It is acceptable to hang up on the caller. If you pick up the phone and hear a recorded voice, say nothing, and hang up.
5. Do not use a public or unsecured Wi-Fi connection to conduct personal business. Public Wi-Fi networks can allow scammers to intercept your passwords, bank account numbers, and other personal information. Wait to do this type of business when you know you have a secure network.
6. Protect your home Wi-Fi connection. Make sure you have changed the default administrative username, password, and network name to something unique. Don't use login names that may be obvious to outsiders, like your address, street name, or router brand. Encrypting your network will also help protect your personal information. You can encrypt your network by updating your router settings to WPA 3 Personal or WPA 2 Personal. If you have an older router that doesn't have these settings, consider getting a newer router.

Also, keep your device updated by installing the latest software updates, and keep your anti-virus software current. For more information on cyber fraud, visit the Federal Trade Commission website at www.ftc.gov.

Cindy Williams
District Extension Agent, Family & Community Wellness

75th Anniversary Fair Preparations Underway

One of the things I have always enjoyed at the Kansas State Fair is looking at the blocks made by various quilters across the state. What this involves is that a kit is made of fabrics that are to be used to make the block using these fabrics and then the creativity begins. The blocks are brought to the fair and judged, then they are taken and put together into a quilt the following year that is auctioned off at the state fair. It is very interesting to see what quilters can do with the same fabric to make these blocks.

Since 2023 marks the 75th Anniversary of the Jefferson County Fair, we held a block contest last year at the fair. A committee of 4-H Leaders, parents and 4-Y youth, designed and created the block contest and rules. They also worked with Monica Mackinson, from Sew Fine Quilting, in Valley Falls, to select the three fabrics that were included in the block kits. The youth on the committee selected a rich brown, yellow-gold and medium green for the block colors. Each block had to have these colors in their block somewhere; amounts could vary. Sizes of the blocks were to be 12 ½ by 12 ½ square.

Block kits were then assembled and sold at the extension office and at Sew Fine Quilt Shop. Blocks were brought to the 2022 Jefferson County Fair of which there were four different categories. Those categories included: Jefferson Co. 4-H Member ages 7-13; Jefferson Co. 4-H Member ages 14 years and older; 4-H Alumni (could be from any county or state) and Jefferson Co. Resident. The blocks were judged and became the property of the 4-H Council. The blocks were taken and re-appear this year as a quilt in honor of the 75th Anniversary.

A little about some of the quilt blocks—the youngest participant was 6 years old (at that time), one of the blocks was sent on to the state fair and was second place at our contest and ended up being named 2nd place at the state fair block contest. One of our blocks came to us from a 4-H Alumni from Ohio. There was a total of 44 blocks entered and all blocks were used on the front of the quilt.

Over the winter, the blocks were taken and assembled by the Kansas Prairie Quilters from Oskaloosa. Over 13 members spent 3 hours piecing the blocks together. It was decided to do a star with shashing to help set off each of the different blocks. The quilt was quilted by Monica Mackinson. Robin Bell and Monica designed the banner portion of this quilt. The quilt was done this spring and is ready for this year's fair.

I have had several that have asked me if I am going to take this quilt to the state fair. I have made contact with someone that will enter it and take it to Hutchinson for us. The reason for taking it was that many felt that we should “showcase” what Jefferson County had done. Many others have mentioned that this quilt should travel like to Branson and other quilt shows.

So, come to the fair to see this “special” quilt that was done with the help of many volunteers, both youth and adults. I want to publicly “thank” everyone who was a part of this project for the past two years. We couldn't have done it without all of you!

Where will this quilt be housed after the fair? It will be hung in the extension office meeting room in Oskaloosa. This quilt ended up being 107 inches by 80 inches. Yes, it is very long and the reason for this is that it fits into our meeting room and will never ever be used on a bed. See you all at the fair!!!!