

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Forage Seeding Date Resources

The last decade has seen multiple stressors impacting forage stands. Declining fertility levels coupled with multiple dry falls and a couple of rounds of fall armyworm feeding - plus other farm level challenges - have resulted in some perennial grass stands potentially benefiting from everything from overseeding to reseeding.

Every situation is unique and a one size fits all recommendation is impossible. If trying to overseed a stand, issues like weed pressure have to be considered. If you're going to have to spray in the spring, can what you overseed or interseed or newly seed survive the application?

You also need to know what you hope to accomplish by the seeding. Requirements for grazing can be significantly different than if the seeding will be taken as a hay crop. Are you trying to simply thicken a stand with the existing forage, or add some diversity? The answers to those questions might affect your approach as well.

As you consider your options, consider appropriate seeding windows as well. Seeding recommendations are designed to achieve the greatest opportunity for successful forage establishment (maximizing return on seeding cost is important) with some flexibility as well.

There are lots of sources of excellent information when it comes to seeding window recommendations. Your seed supplier likely has experience. If the seeding is part of an agency cost share program, they may have requirements to meet as well. For additional guidance, or to help you explore what your options might be (who knows what weather might be like during the 'optimum' seeding window...), consider these two resources.

The Kansas Crop Planting Guide (available via any District Office or online at https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-crop-planting-guide_L818.pdf) provides recommended seeding dates based on your area of the state. For our commonly planted crops, this is a great first stop.

If you want to explore some less traditional crops, especially if looking for a 'stopgap' annual forage to fill a spot, consider the Midwest Cover Crops Council Selector Tool. This web based tool (<https://www.midwestcovercrops.org/selector-tools/>) uses information about location, current crop, etc... combined with your desired output for the crop to make recommendations. For example, you may not need a true cover crop but *are* looking at crops for grazing. The tool allows you to select up to three desired parameters with an output showing recommended planting windows. If you want to find out more about specific aspects of the crop, a click on the forage provides that as well. This tool is of particular value if you are looking at more non-traditional forages to include in your system.

What these resources do not provide is a guarantee of success. Weather will be a huge factor in seeding success. Competition from weeds is a concern, but so also is competition from existing forages (established plants have a huge competitive advantage over new seedlings). All these factors have to be considered as part of the seeding process. Make sure a less than desirable seeding window doesn't complicate matter further with these resources as a starting point.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

HPAI: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

I make a very conscious effort to not recycle articles or repeat topics too often in this space. That said, Avian Influenza has been confirmed in Jackson and Nemaha counties within Meadowlark District, so it seems like a good time to send this information out. The impact of this viral disease on domesticated poultry has impacted large production systems and backyard birders alike. This is a very serious issue for poultry producers to be aware of, with steps that can be taken to protect your flock.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a rapidly spreading viral disease that can infect many types of birds but is especially deadly to domestic poultry. Avian influenza is a relatively common virus that is referred to as avian flu or bird flu, but the highly pathogenic strain is the most serious and deadly version of the virus. Poultry with HPAI do NOT survive the illness, which is a big reason why HPAI receives so much attention in the news.

Migrating wild birds are the primary spreading agent of HPAI as they travel in spring, fall and winter seasons. Signs of avian influenza include the following symptoms: coughing, sneezing, difficulty breathing, depression, lack of energy, decreased feed/water intake, decreased egg production, sudden unexplained death and swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb wattle and legs. An effective vaccine is not readily available, so biosecurity is the best option for prevention of HPAI. Good biosecurity protection methods come from a three-pronged approach.

The first level of protection is on your property where the birds are kept. Avoid attracting wild birds, particularly waterfowl, to your operation. Keep feed covered, contained, feeding inside the coop if possible, and clean up any spilled feed. Reduce any puddles or standing water in and around the coop. Do not visit, especially with pets, or allow birds access to ponds, streams or other waterbodies where migratory birds have access. Don't utilize untreated water from these sources either. If the outside run or feeding area is not covered, consider covering and enclosing those areas with netting.

The second point of discussion revolves around the birds themselves. Do not move birds from farm to farm and be particularly careful to clean hands, clothes and footwear if you move between multiple locations where poultry are kept. Limit or halt travel to sales, shows and swaps. This is especially true in areas that have confirmed cases of HPAI or during times of the year when migratory birds are more active in the area. Isolate new birds or those who've come from events of comingling.

Finally, limit visitors and don't let others handle your birds. If you do have need for visitors, discuss where they have been recently. Have visitors wash hands and wear clean clothes as well as footwear. If you have frequent visitors, you might even consider providing clean coveralls and boots that are properly cleaned and disinfected.

What should you do if you suspect your flock exhibiting signs of influenza or suspected exposure? Your local veterinarian is a good starting point, but the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health is another good resource that can be reached at 785-564-6601 or toll free at 833-765-2006. There is a wealth of information related to highly pathogenic avian influenza on their website as well, <https://www.agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/animal-diseases/avian-influenza>

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Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

K-State Garden Hour Continues in 2026

Over the last four years, gardeners from across Kansas have tuned in each month to watch K-State horticulture agents cover highly requested lawn and garden information. These free, hour-long webinars have steadily grown in popularity, and we are excited to offer the program again in 2026 with a new set of topics.

We kicked off the 2026 season on January 7th with Shannon Blocker, Pottawatomie County Extension Agent, who gave a presentation on smart soil practices. On February 4th we will reconvene to for a presentation from Ryan Engel, Golden Prairie District Extension Agent, focused on managing honeybees. On March 4th Dr. Cheryl Boyer, Horticulture Extension Specialist, will present on naturalist landscape design.

These free webinars take place on the first Wednesday of each month from 12 noon to 1 p.m. (CST), including a 45 minute presentation and 10-15 minutes for viewer questions.

The K-State Garden Hour began in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic as a way for K-State Research and Extension horticulture experts to share research-based information to gardeners of all abilities and experience.

It has blossomed into a program that, in 2022, was watched by viewers in 40 states, eight countries and four continents. Since its beginning in 2020, the K-State Garden Hour has drawn more than 80,000 online viewers.

To see the full list of this year's topics, visit us at www.hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour. On this site you will also find recordings of all past webinars and a link to register for upcoming webinars. One registration will give you access to all the webinars for the year. If you have any questions about the K-State Garden Hour or how to join, be sure to reach out to our office for additional guidance.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Winter Blues or Something More?

When the days get shorter and colder, it's pretty normal to feel a little down. After the holidays, many of us feel tired, sluggish, or just "off" during those long, dark winter months. I'll admit—I've caught myself daydreaming about a sunny beach in Hawaii more than once!

But sometimes, it's more than just the winter blues. For some people, these feelings can be a sign of **Seasonal Affective Disorder**, or **SAD**. SAD is a type of depression that shows up during certain times of the year, most often in fall and winter. It's not just a mild case of the blahs; it's considered a major depressive disorder.

- **Who Does It Affect?**

You might be surprised to learn that millions of Americans experience SAD, and many don't even realize it. It's most common in young adults (ages 18–30), and women are affected more often than men. People with a history of depression or bipolar disorder are at higher risk, and it can even run in families.

- **What Are the Signs?**

SAD looks different for everyone, but here are some common symptoms to watch for:

- Feeling sad or anxious most days for at least two weeks
- Hopelessness or pessimism
- Irritability or restlessness
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Low energy or fatigue
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Oversleeping or craving carbs
- Social withdrawal
- Thoughts of death or suicide

- **Why Does It Happen?**

Researchers aren't completely sure, but one theory is that less sunlight in winter affects serotonin—a brain chemical that helps regulate mood. Low Vitamin D levels might make things worse since Vitamin D supports serotonin activity.

- **What Can Help?**

The good news is, SAD is treatable. Options include:

- **Light therapy** (special lamps that mimic sunlight)
- **Antidepressant medication**
- **Counseling or therapy**
- **Vitamin D supplements**

If you think you might have SAD, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. And if you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text **988** for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Want to learn more? Check out resources from the National Institute of Mental Health at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder>.

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

Now is a Good Time to Do a Household Inventory

Disasters are happening all over the country. Would you have been prepared if you were in one of those situations? Preparing a household inventory is one step to take to help be prepared.

A household inventory is an itemized list of the contents of your home. An accurate inventory is necessary whether you are a homeowner or a renter. In addition to the contents of the main living areas of your home, include contents of your:

- Basement
- Attic
- Garage
- Storage areas, such as sheds or other small buildings on your property
- Rented storage unit off-site
- Other items not regularly stored at home, such as musical instruments or sports equipment which may be stored at school or elsewhere.

An inventory of your belongings:

- Helps set an approximate value of items owned to determine needed insurance coverage
- Documents items you own and their value, so that you can make an accurate insurance claim in case of a loss, such as through fire, flood or other natural disaster
- Should be updated regularly as new items are obtained or others discarded.

When making an inventory, photograph or videotape every wall in each room of your home and storage areas. Photograph open closets, cabinets, cupboards, and drawers. Take close-ups of unique or expensive items to document their existence and condition. Date the photographs and use them to show all furniture, furnishings, accessories, and other items---large and small---in the room. When videotaping, verbally describe the contents as you move around a room. Photos or videos to accompany your written inventory will be useful. Both can serve as a record of ownership and document the condition of items. Each can also characterize the uniqueness and extent of a collection, such as coins or musical instruments. Unique items such as antiques and textiles can be fully represented by a photo or video. Save photo or video on a flash drive or other media storage device. Photos can be printed and stored with your inventory in a safe place.

Be as specific and accurate as possible when describing your furnishings and equipment. For furniture, include the color, wood type, and size. For appliances, record of the manufacturer, model, serial number, and size. Product manuals will provide much of this information. When listing items include the original cost, the date purchased, any alterations or repairs done on the item, and the corresponding cost. Include this information in your written inventory or scan a copy to keep this information electronically.

Consider creating the inventory in a software program that is stored online, so that the inventory can be accessed from any computer. For example, "Know Your Stuff" is the Insurance Information Institute's free online home inventory software, at www.knowyourstuff.org/iii/login.html .

When storing your household inventory keep the following in mind:

- Keep a working copy (paper or electronic) in your home file for regular updating.
- Keep one copy of your household inventory away from the insured dwelling, such as in a safe-deposit box, with a trusted person, or stored online, so that it can be accessed from any computer. Remember to keep all copies up-to-date and review them on a semi-annual basis. Add newly acquired items to your inventory and include a new photo or video. Update the inventory when items are discarded.