



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
August 2016

In the heat of August, activity in the garden winds down, and livestock stick to the shade. It's a **good time for planning**, and this month, we offer some **ideas for inspiration**.

David Redhage shares his experience with setting up effective **bluebird houses**.

The livestock program has published a **new fact sheet on grazing management**. It details the **practices used on the Kerr ranch**, as well as the **thinking behind them**.

Even in the dog days of summer, there are **native plants in flower**, providing nectar and pollen to pollinators. Our **guide to flowering periods** can point you to some of the most **prominent species**.

A new **national cover crop survey** provides more evidence in support of the practice - including **increased crop yields**.

As always, if you value our work, please also consider supporting it!

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President's Note: Eastern Bluebirds

Attracting certain bird species by landscaping or using birdhouses can help with insect control and be a fun family project. Some birds can be a detriment, such as red-winged blackbirds in sunflowers, or the aggressive English sparrow driving off other birds. The eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) is one species that can be beneficial and are readily attracted to man-made bird houses.

I was a member of 4-H as a kid and one of my areas of interest was woodworking. I started early making bluebird houses in 4-H woodworking classes.

Bluebirds are cavity nesters. Due to the way we manage our landscapes, there can be a lack of natural nesting sites in some areas. I have seen bluebirds nest in open front bird feeders and under the lid of a propane tank. Bluebirds will readily build nests in appropriately designed bird houses.

The first houses I made were the standard rectangular box with a perch on it. There are several issues with the house design. The roof was held in place by a wood screw, and to clean out the house you needed to remove the screw to take off the top. Over several years, the screw would loosen. The perch invited English sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). English sparrows and snakes were the nemesis of nesting bluebirds. If the sparrow found the box first, it would build a nest and keep bluebirds away. I was constantly removing sparrow nests from my bluebird houses to discourage them. If there was a bluebird nesting in the box, sometimes the sparrow would kill the bluebird and take over the nest box. If the house was mounted on a tree or wooden post, snakes could climb up and kill the nesting bluebirds.

Several years after I started working at the Kerr Center, I came across a study of bluebird house nesting success rates. The study documented a high success rate with a house design called the Peterson Style bluebird house. I tracked down the plans and made several houses. They have been the most successful design I have used. The first one I put up was near the Kerr Center front office door. By the time I walked back to the office and turned around, a male bluebird had claimed the house!

There are several key differences between the box style and the Peterson style....

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New Fact Sheet: Grazing Management

Written by Will Lathrop, this [fact sheet](#) summarizes the Kerr Center's experience with and recommendations for grazing management. It covers manipulating stock density to influence forage utilization rate, and the relationship between pasture number and rest period.

It also discusses the use of temporary electric fences to achieve higher stocking rates, and the seasonal conditions and animal nutritional needs under which this is appropriate.

This is the first in a series of fact sheets detailing the rationale and real-world experiences behind the various aspects of ranch management as practiced by the [Kerr Center livestock program](#).

RANCH MANAGEMENT

PASTURE MANAGEMENT



Grazing Management

BY WILL LATHROP

Controlled grazing is the most powerful tool available to livestock producers to improve pasture productivity. The benefits go well beyond increased pasture productivity, but for now, we will limit it to forage management. The Kerr Center made the decision to change from continuous grazing to controlled grazing 26 years ago and we have never had any regrets.

Prior to 1990, we ran a few too many cows and had to fertilize our hay pastures in order to have enough hay during the fall and winter months. In a normal year, we would start feeding hay around the middle of December and quit at the end of March. A 20% supplement was also fed to maintain cow conditions. Stocking rate during this time was around 35 acres/animal unit.

The mechanics of a grazing system are not that hard to understand. The manager has control of the number of animals on a given area of land for a specific amount of time. The manipulation of these three variables (number, area, and time) determines the

pastures with permanent electric fence. The use of electric fence is the only cost-effective way to implement a grazing system, and if you put the fence in the wrong place, it can be easily changed. Most of the mistakes we have made are in the area of pasture design. What may work in the dry seasons can be a nightmare during the wet seasons.

In 1990, Kerr Center ranch quit buying commercial fertilizers and started placing more emphasis on grazing management. Instead of spending money on fertilizer, we started developing watering points and dividing

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Pollinator Plants Flowering Now

The Kerr Center's chart of [flowering periods for select Oklahoma wildflowers](#) shows several common wildflowers that are in bloom this time of the year: butterfly milkweed, compass plant, Missouri goldenrod, and mountain mint, to name some. We also have detailed pollinator plant profiles for others that are also currently flowering:

- [Purple Prairie Clover](#)
- [Rattlesnake Master](#)
- [Maximilian Sunflower](#)

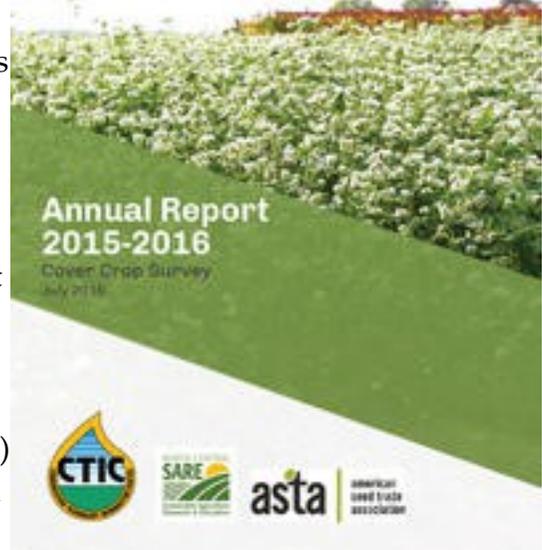


Survey: Cover Crops Boost Corn, Soy Yields

Insight from 2,020 farmers from across the country reflected enthusiasm for [cover crops](#) and - for the fourth year in a row - found a **yield boost in corn and soybeans following cover crops**. Multi-year data shows the **yield boost increases as cover crops are planted year after year**, a revelation that points to an appealing **long-term benefit of the conservation practice**. The survey offers data unavailable elsewhere, providing a vital glimpse into farmers' use of and perceptions about cover crops.

The survey was conducted in March 2016 by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) with help from the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) and Purdue University.

[Read more...](#)



Late Summer Events: Soils & Plants

It's still not too late to sign up for a [free tour](#) of three Oklahoma Farmers & Ranchers Association member farms with soil scientist Gregory Scott, looking at the potential for **cover crops as pasture**.

There are also a number of "Plant ID for Soil Health" workshops scheduled for various locations around the state over the next several weeks: [El Reno](#) (August 23), [Lawton](#) (August 24), [Bristow](#) (September 29), [Wilburton](#) (September 30), [Nowata](#) (October 18), and [Pawhuska](#) (October 19).

The Kerr Center's [online events calendar](#) provides full details on all of these happenings, along with others

around the state and region. It also serves as a reminder for the dates of **monthly Kerr Center tours**, which run all year round, every second Tuesday by appointment.

Don't forget that you can also use our online calendar to **keep yourself and your friends up to date** on these and other upcoming events, including our tours:

- **Subscribe to our feed** and receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

AUG 18 Thu	Soil Science With Gregory Scott @ northeastern Oklahoma (various locations) Aug 18 @ 6:00 pm – Aug 19 @ 4:30 pm	Tickets +
AUG 23 Tue	Plant ID for Soil Health Training @ El Reno Aug 23 all-day	+
	Soil Health Workshop @ D&N Ag Farms Aug 23 @ 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Tickets +
AUG 24 Wed	Plant ID for Soil Health Training @ Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge Aug 24 all-day	+
AUG 29 Mon	Kansas Oklahoma Soil Health Workshop: Bus Tour & Classroom @ Northern Oklahoma College Aug 29 – Aug 30 all-day	Tickets +
AUG 30 Tue	Oklahoma Market Gardening School (first meeting) @ Tulsa County Extension Office Aug 30 @ 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm	Tickets +
SEP 13 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Sep 13 @ 9:00 am	+
SEP 24 Sat	Monarchs on the Mountain @ Turkey Mountain Urban Wilderness Area Sep 24 @ 10:00 am – 2:00 pm	+

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