



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
April 2017

This month, David Redhage explains how plastic mulch is helping the horticulture program get soil prepared during narrow weather windows.

We continue this issue with some **bad news for bats**.

To balance that, we share some **positive outcomes from recent work on agroforestry** - and a pointer to a **publication that can solve many headaches for both small-scale organic growers and farmers' market managers**.

As always, if you value our work, [please consider supporting it!](#)

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# President's Note: Equipment and Timeliness in Planting Your Market Garden

In a [previous presidents note](#), I discussed the Kerr Center using **plastic mulch on our horticulture farm**. Last year (2016), we were unable to get into the field to plant from mid-April through the end of May due to wet conditions.

In the past, we have used a [walking tractor \(BCS in this case\)](#) to prepare the field. One advantage of the walking tractor is its small size, which allows it to be used when the fields are too wet for a tractor. It also tills in smaller rows, so you can plant more on a tighter spacing. Various equipment attachments increase the walking tractor's versatility, at a lower cost than most tractor equipment. However, one disadvantage can be the inability to prepare a site for planting in a timely manner.



In the spring of 2016, we only had a two-day window in April when it was dry enough to prepare the soil. This is where equipment choice comes into play. Two days to prepare the location using the walking tractor and laying down the plastic mulch became a problem. The walking tractor could have done the work, but not in the time frame we needed.

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# Eastern Oklahoma Bat Tests Positive for White-nose Syndrome

via the [Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation](#):

**White-nose syndrome has been confirmed for the first time in Oklahoma**, making it the 31st state with the **deadly disease that affects hibernating bats**.

Scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) confirmed the disease from a skin biopsy of a tricolored bat, one of two bats tested from a privately owned cave in Delaware County. The county is also home to portions of the Ozark Plateau National Wildlife Refuge, established to benefit federally protected cave species, including endangered gray and Ozark big-eared bats and threatened northern long-eared bats.



*Samples from a tricolored bat, like the one pictured, tested positive for white-nose syndrome. (Jena Donnell, ODWC)*

**The fungus that causes white-nose syndrome, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, was first detected in the cave in 2015, but at that time bats did not appear to be sick.** The fungus has also been found in four other eastern Oklahoma counties; on bats in Cherokee and Adair counties in the winter of 2015-2016, and on bats in Ottawa and Sequoyah counties this winter.

First detected in New York in the winter of 2006-2007, **white-nose syndrome has rapidly spread west, killing millions of bats.**

"It's troubling that white-nose syndrome continues to push west and threatens the Ozark Plateau, a stronghold for bat conservation," said National White-nose Syndrome Coordinator Jeremy Coleman of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "We are focused on finding solutions and helping bats survive. We're committed to working with Oklahoma and other partners across the country to closely monitor bats and fight this devastating disease."

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# Too Wet? Too Dry? Silvopasture Can Make it Just Right

An [article on agroforestry](#) that we recently shared on [Facebook](#) served as an excellent illustration of the way that **silvopasture can turn problem fields into prime pastures**. The land in question, a floodplain site at a North Carolina State University research farm, had patchy soils with concentrations of both sand and clay.



The **sandy areas dry out quickly, especially under tillage, losing organic matter and failing to hold enough water to support crops** during rain-free spells. The **tight clay patches, on the other hand, remain inundated for long periods after flooding**, causing crop damage and even loss.

*The Between the Lakes agroforestry project is planted in 60-foot rows: five thousand trees on five acres, with 28 acres of pasture.*

**Both trees and perennial pasture grasses have deeper and more extensive root systems that allow them to withstand such shallow-soil moisture fluctuations.** Instead of losing money year after year on drought- and flood-stricken crops, the **floodplain land can produce income from cattle, and, in the long term, from timber harvest as well.**

The [Kerr Center's agroforestry page](#) contains resources detailing how **agroforestry and silvopasture have been put to work in similar ways on the Kerr Ranch**, with plenty of tips for landowners looking to reap the same benefits. Please have a look!

# Small-Scale Organics

Under USDA organic regulations, **small growers - those grossing less than \$5,000 a year - can opt to forgo organic certification.** They can still legally use the term "organic" in their marketing - **but they still have to follow the federal organic standards.**

However, **without going through the certification process, many such "exempt" growers -** as well as the managers at the farmers markets where they sell their produce - also **miss out on a good deal of guidance as to what the federal organic standards do and don't allow.**

[\*Small Scale Organics: A Guidebook for the Non-certified Organic Grower\*](#) attempts to plug this information gap.

Written by former Kerr Center

Horticulture Manager George Kuepper, this report **simplifies the process of determining whether an organic farming operation is in compliance with the USDA standards.** It includes guidelines and an organic system plan.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Small Scale Organics' original publication. It's been through two printings, and is consistently **one of the most popular downloads** from the [\*\*Kerr Center's horticulture library\*\*](#). Even if you've used it before, it's probably well worth another look!

## Small Scale Organics: A Guidebook for the Non-certified Organic Grower *(Includes Guidelines and an Organic System Plan)*



*by George Kuepper*



THE KERR CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE  
*Serving Oklahoma's Farmers and Ranchers since 1965*

# Spring Events: Wildflowers, Agroforestry, Early Naturalist's Footsteps...

The end of April is popping with opportunities for fun and learning: the Oklahoma Native Plant Society's **Wonders of Wildflowers celebration is happening April 28 in Pawhuska**, and there's an **agroforestry workshop in Laurie, Missouri on April 29**. Also on the 29th, a **historical class/tour will trace early naturalist Thomas Nuttall's route through the Poteau River valley - including across the Kerr Ranch**.

Month	Day	Event Title	Location	Time	Duration	Notes
APR	28	Oklahoma Native Plant Society Wonders of Wildflowers Weekend @ Tallgrass Prairie Preserve	Pawhuska, OK		Apr 28 - Apr 30	all-day, Tickets
APR	29	Agroforestry Workshop @ Allen Research & Education Project Site	Laurie, MO	8:30 am - 4:30 pm		Tickets
		Tracing the Steps of Thomas Nuttall through the Poteau River Valley @ Ft. Smith / Poteau area		9:00 am - 5:00 pm		
MAY	4	Strawberry Tour @ Mustang, OK		7:30 am - 3:00 pm		
MAY	5	OSU Eastern Research Station Field Day @ OSU Eastern Research Station (Haskell)		9:30 am		
MAY	6	Red Slough Birding Convention @ Idabel (Southeastern Oklahoma State University- McCurtain County Campus)			May 6 - May 9	all-day, Tickets

The Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#) provides full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events 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.

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## Contact Information

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
24456 Kerr Road  
Poteau, OK 74953  
Phone: 918.647.9123  
Fax: 918.647.8712  
[mailbox@kerrcenter.com](mailto:mailbox@kerrcenter.com)

