



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
January 2019

Happy 2019! To ring in the new year, we've got a new report (on small-scale gardening tools) and a new article (on managing excess forage), as well as pointers to new resources (on soil health).

First, though, David Redhage shares some unsettling news about Western monarch populations.

The latest report from the horticulture program, evaluating small-scale tools for use in the home and market garden, is now available in print and electronically.

Soil health is taking the nation's agriculture by storm. Find out why - and how to take your own soil's pulse - in a selection of new resources on the subject.

Though it seems that ranchers only complain of running out of grass, the opposite problem can crop up as well. Will Lathrop explains how the Kerr Center copes when there's more grass than cattle.

In celebration of the new, please consider making a new commitment - or re-newing an old one - to [support our work](#). **Thank you!**

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President's Note: Western Monarchs - How Bad Can It Get?

The monarch butterfly is facing challenges in maintaining its population in North America. Part of the issue is overwintering sites.

There are two main migratory routes for North American monarchs.

Monarch butterflies from the Rocky Mountains to the east coast migrate to a site north of Mexico City.

Western monarchs migrate to several locations along the California coast.

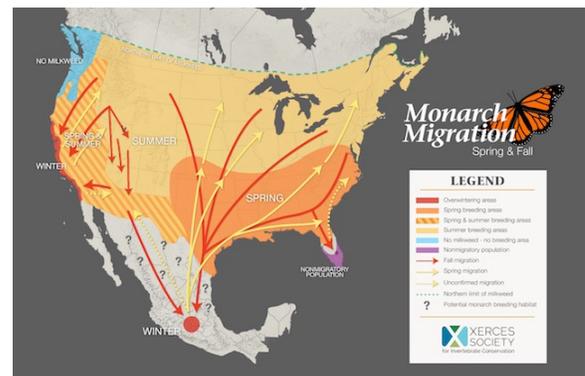
To show how bad it can be, **the preliminary count data from the West Coast monarch count showed an overwintering population of around 30,000 this year.** Some [research](#) shows that this is the potential extinction point for this population!

[According to the Xerces Society](#), the population was over 1.2 million in 1997, while counting fewer sites along the California coast.

The central North American population is doing better, but it is still at very low numbers.

While awareness of the plight of the monarch is high, **we still need to do more. We are in danger of losing an iconic North American butterfly.**

Those in Oklahoma can check out the [Kerr Center website](#) for information on pollinator habitat, and the [Okies for Monarchs website](#) to learn what you can do specifically for monarchs.



New Report: Small-Scale Gardening Technology

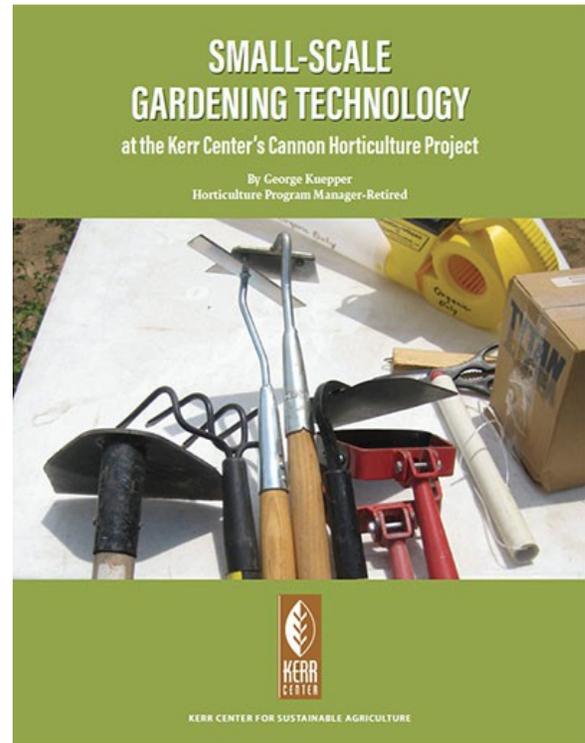
A new report, [*Small-Scale Gardening Technology at the Kerr Center's Cannon Horticulture Project*](#), relates the Kerr Center's experiences with small-scale farming and gardening tools during a decade of bio-extensive management.

Written by retired Horticulture Program Manager George Kuepper, the report examines the uses, advantages, and drawbacks of a range of different hand-powered tools.

Tools evaluated include spades, digging forks, broadforks, hoes, soil rakes, cultivators, hay rakes, and wheel hoes. Appendices cover instructions for double-digging, as well as sources for the tools discussed.

The report is available electronically (PDF format) for \$3.00. A printed version is available for \$7.00, including shipping and handling (U.S. addresses only). All online purchases are made through PayPal.

For printed quantities larger than 3, international orders, or if you'd prefer not to order online, please contact the Kerr Center by email or phone (918-647-9123).



[**Download Small-Scale Gardening Technology!**](#)

Is Your Soil Healthy?

Lately it seems that soil health is everywhere you look - and deservedly so. It's hard to over-emphasize the importance of the ways that **the health of plants, animals, and humans depends on the health of the soil**. Everything really does start with, and come back to, the soil.

For those just getting into the subject, SARE has released a new [interactive infographic](#). It explains the role and importance of such soil health management practices as [composting](#), [conservation tillage](#), [cover crops](#), [crop-livestock integration](#), [crop rotation](#), and soil assessment.

The infographic is great for showing what soil health management practices CAN do for farms and ranches. Going one step further, SARE has also produced a video, "[Improving Soil Health Through Cover Crops](#)," in which a **Pennsylvania farmer describes what such practices ARE doing for his operation**.

When you're ready to check the health of the soil on your own ground, NRCS offers a slate of **free, easy-to-follow guidelines for assessing a variety of soil health indicators**. Many of these procedures are designed to be performed **quickly, right in the field**. For more in-depth information, others require more field time, and/or some kitchen-sink level lab work. Start with the [overview](#), and then use [individual indicator sheets](#) to learn how to measure everything from earthworm counts to soil respiration to aggregate stability.



Managing Excess Forage

by Will Lathrop

The late David Sparks was known to say, "The advice is to stock for a drought. Most people stock for a monsoon."

Even stocking for a drought, though, can create problems. What do you do with the extra forage?

The Kerr Center ranch philosophy has always been to stock with the number of cows that we can maintain during drought years and not be forced to sell off the cow herd. A lot of expense has gone into developing a cow herd that performs on grass in eastern Oklahoma.



You do not want to be forced to sell your cows due to lack of forage. During a drought year, a lot of cows are going to market and the market bottoms out. You are forced to sell at a loss or buy hay (which is priced too high) and ride out the drought, until rain brings on grass.

Recently, Oklahoma had two severe drought years, 2011 and 2012. We were able to maintain cow numbers, but were forced to buy some hay at \$80 for a 4'x5' round bale. We lived through it, but many ranchers were forced to sell. It turns out that we were reimbursed, because the cattle market hit an all-time high the following year.

So, what do you do with the extra forage during years of above-average rainfall? Most ranchers put up more [hay](#). A barn full of hay is a good insurance policy against drought or severe winters. But what do you do when there are several years in a row of high rainfall? Most ranchers start selling hay.

[When you sell hay off the ranch you are selling nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and many more valuable nutrients.](#) Kerr Center recently estimated that [a 4'x6' round bale is valued at \\$54 per bale, if you include the cost of the nutrients that need to be replaced once the bale leaves the ranch.](#) You can't sell a round bale at this price when hay is abundant.

Because of our lower stocking rate, we have been dealing with the problem of managing excess forage for many years. It is not really a problem, more like a blessing! We should be able to turn the blessing into increased profits.

[Continue reading....](#)

Winter Events: Conferences!

Conference season rolls on: Catch **No-Till on the Plains** (Wichita, KS, Jan. 29), the **Mid-Missouri Grazing Conference** (Kansas City, MO - Jan. 30), the **Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society** (Grand Island, NE - Feb. 8-9), **Langston's Placticulture /Horticulture Conference** (Midwest City - Feb. 8-9), and **No-Till Texas** (Amarillo, TX - Feb. 12).

A new round of **produce safety trainings** is also underway, with sessions Jan. 29 in Woodward, Feb. 7 in Sulphur, and more coming up.

You can find full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

The screenshot displays an online events calendar with the following entries:

- JAN 29 Tue**: No-Till on the Plains Winter Conference @ Wichita, KS (Century II Convention Center) Jan 29 - Jan 30 all-day. Tickets
- JAN 29**: Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course @ Woodward (Woodward County Extension Office) Jan 29 all-day. Tickets
- JAN 31 Thu**: Mid-Missouri Grazing Conference @ Jefferson City, MO (St. Martins K of C Hall) Jan 31 @ 1:00 pm - 6:30 pm. Tickets
- FEB 7 Thu**: Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course @ Sulphur (Murray County Extension Office) Feb 7 all-day. Tickets
- FEB 8 Fri**: Conference: Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society @ Grand Island, NE Feb 8 - Feb 9 all-day. Tickets
- FEB 8**: Langston Placticulture/Horticulture Conference @ Midwest City (Sheraton Midwest City Hotel (Reed Conference Center)) Feb 8 @ 3:00 pm - Feb 9 @ 3:30 pm. Tickets
- FEB 8**: Quail & Pollinators in Southeastern Oklahoma @ Wilburton (Bowers Community Building) Feb 8 @ 7:00 pm.
- FEB 12 Tue**: No-Till Texas Soil Health Symposium @ Amarillo, TX (Amarillo Civic Center Complex) Feb 12 @ 8:00 am - Feb 13 @ 5:00 pm. Tickets

The calendar 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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