



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

July 2020

It's summer, and it's hot! Even so, there are **garden crops that you can start now**. Read on to find out **which ones, when, and how**.

If you'd rather stay in the shade, there's something you can grow there, too: mushrooms! Our report on **growing shiitake mushrooms** on logs is back, free and in digital format.

Maybe you'd rather not venture outdoors at all just yet. If you're considering getting into raising livestock, we've put together a quick overview of some of **our best beginning ranching resources** that will have you reading to your heart's content. The only thing getting hot will be your internet connection.

But first, check out David Redhage's thoughts on how the **elderberry variety trials** we've been participating in are an excellent illustration of **the need for long-term research trials**.

Shade or sun, drought or blizzard - **we're in it for the long term, working to help people understand both the whys and the hows of sustainable agriculture**. We couldn't do it without your support - please consider [donating](#). [Thank you!](#)

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President's Note: The Importance of Long-Term Research Trials for Sustainable Agriculture

Research can be expensive. In agriculture, new crop varieties are developed and released each year. In most cases, these are the result of long-term development and breeding programs - in other words, research.

There is a split between corporate research and public institutional research. Corporate research tends to focus on plants adapted over a large geographic area, and seeks patents to maintain control of the genetics. In order to sell a new variety, the plants are tested to ensure that they do well in varying climates. This creates a larger market for the seeds or plants. While on the surface this sounds like a wise business decision, I am concerned that this approach leads to a narrower genetic pool susceptible to more disease and insect damage, as well as an inability to grow well in a changing climate.



Many land-grant universities have cut back on their research in horticulture. The focus is either on large-scale commodity crops (corn, soybean, wheat), or, for institutions located in areas where vegetable and fruit crops are still economically important, the focus is on large-scale production systems.

This presents a challenge for developing local food systems. Most of the developing local food systems rely on locally adapted horticulture varieties. When universities reduce their work on evaluating and developing such crops, growers are forced to use trial and error to determine the varieties that work best in their production system.

An example of this is the research trial the Kerr Center is conducting on [elderberries](#). While elderberries are native to Oklahoma, all plants that have been released have been found in the wild in various locations over the central and eastern United States. This means that they may not be adapted beyond the climate/geographic area where they were collected.

The Kerr Center research project is looking at several elderberry varieties to determine their viability for commercial production. The results to date show why long-term research is needed. In this case, three years is a starting point, but more time is needed to have truly meaningful results.

[Continue reading....](#)

Getting Started in Sustainable Livestock Production

Getting started in raising livestock is always going to be an adventure, but the more you learn about it before taking the plunge, the more time, expense, headache, and heartache can be saved. The [Kerr Center's online educational resources](#) offer one-stop shopping for just that sort of learning.



For starters, the full set of [livestock materials](#) from the [Oklahoma Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program](#) (OKBFRP) is available free from our livestock library. **From forages and fencing to watering and worming, this broad overview has you covered.**

For a sense of how all those pieces fit together, check out "[Forage Strategies for Small Acreages](#)," a presentation from the OKBFRP ranching track given by OSU agronomist Chris Rice. It follows the decisions of hypothetical rancher "Old McDaniel," as she takes over a neglected 40-acre spread, **putting in cross-fences and watering points to make the best use of, and improve, the resources** at her disposal.

Moving from the hypothetical to real life, read "[Setting up a Management Intensive Grazing System](#)," for an account of how livestock interns Carrie Shirley and Rock Gremillion undertook a very similar project at the Kerr Center. They were given 50 overgrown acres to work with, and [over the course of a single summer - three short months - they converted it into a working multispecies rotational grazing system.](#)

Will these resources answer all the questions a prospective rancher might have? Not even close! If anything, you'll have more after you've read them than you did when you started. But they'll be much closer to being the right questions - which, when you think about it, is the most important part of learning.

Happy learning, and happy ranching!

Gardening in High Summer

High summer in Oklahoma feels like a natural break in the gardening calendar. Hot, dry weather is usually pinching off harvests, and weather cool enough for pleasant outdoor work is still a good month or more away.

Still, **certain crops can be started in the field even this time of year** - and if you're considering a **fall garden, it's already time to get seeds in flats** for later transplanting.

The Kerr Center's horticulture program has explored several different options for **warm-season [cover crops](#)**, to **keep weeds down and organic matter (and soil moisture) up** after summer harvests have ceased. The most comprehensive explanation of our findings is in [Organic Bio-Extensive Management Revisited](#).



That publication contains data on dry matter production for several **summer cover crops, including cowpeas, lablab, and sorghum-sudangrass**. (In all cases, the recorded dry matter totals for the Cannon Horticulture Plots matched or exceeded Southern SARE's published estimates.) It also addresses management concerns, such as **balancing the intensity of grazing and/or height of mowing against the desired amount of regrowth**.

Another report, on an [organic no-till pumpkin demonstration](#), details an additional slate of warm-season cover crops, including **crotalaria, pearl millet, and sesbania**. It also describes a method of **using drought as a means of weed control**: a combination of mulching, and targeted watering using drip irrigation, means that only the crop itself is able to germinate and grow in hot, dry conditions.

Another trick mentioned in the same report is particular to squashes. **By delaying the planting of any cucurbit until after July 1, it's generally possible to avoid squash bug problems**, as the pests have usually completed their life cycle by then.

For complete information on planting dates for a range of fall garden crops, check out the [planting calendar](#) and [seed starting guide](#) available free from the Kerr Center's [online horticulture library](#). This [presentation on seed starting](#) may also be helpful.

Remember, heat and insect pressure is higher on crops started in summer; shade and screening will likely be necessary until plants become well established.

Shiitake Mushrooms Report Available Electronically

A much-sought Kerr Center report on growing and marketing mushrooms is back online!

Shiitake mushrooms can be grown on logs in shaded areas. A series of holes are drilled in each log, and each hole is then inoculated with fungal spores.

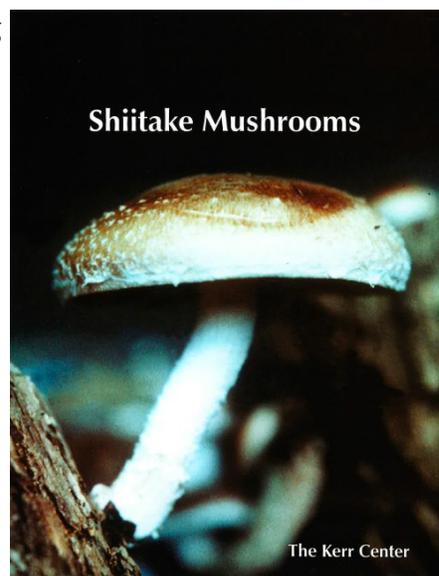
The straightforward process and low startup costs make shiitake mushroom production an easy first agricultural enterprise. It's also a natural extension for many existing agroforestry projects.

The Kerr Center explored shiitake mushroom production on logs during the 1990s, and published [*Shiitake Mushrooms*](#) to disseminate the project results.

[*Shiitake Mushrooms*](#) outlines the basics of small-scale shiitake mushroom production.

The report covers selecting and cutting logs, inoculation, fruiting, harvesting and storage, marketing, pests, and costs and returns. It also includes a sample 10-year budget, and list of references and resources.

This is a scanned copy of the print version originally published in 1995. It's [available free](#) in pdf format from the Kerr Center's [online library](#). A limited number of print copies also remain available.



Summer Events: Online Conferences, Greenhouse Short Course, Wholesaling, Feral Hogs...

This summer's unique in the sheer number of conferences you can attend from the comfort of your own home or office: **Direct 2020** (Aug. 4), the **National Strip Tillage Conference** (Aug. 6) and the **American Community Gardening Association Conference** (Aug. 8), just to sample one week in August.

You can keep learning online as well, with webinars coming up soon on **wholesale readiness** (Aug. 18) and the state **feral swine eradication program** (Aug. 25).

There's even an old-fashioned in-person **short course on greenhouses** (Stillwater, Aug. 5-6) - with appropriate precautions, of course.

The screenshot shows a calendar for the month of August with the following events listed:

- Aug 4 (Tue):** Direct 2020 Virtual Conference @ online (9:00 am - 5:00 pm). Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- Aug 5 (Wed):** Greenhouse Short Course @ Stillwater (all-day).
- Aug 6 (Thu):** Virtual National Strip Tillage Conference @ online (all-day). Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- Aug 8 (Sat):** American Community Gardening Association Conference 2020 @ online (10:00 am - 4:00 pm).
- Aug 11 (Tue):** BY APPOINTMENT ONLY: Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center (9:00 am).
- Aug 18 (Tue):** Webinar Series: Wholesale Readiness @ online (4:00 pm - 7:00 pm). Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- Aug 25 (Tue):** Webinar: Feral Swine Eradication Program @ online (10:30 am). Includes a 'Tickets' button.

Don't forget that [the deadline for preproposals for Southern SARE's Professional Development Program is August 31](#).

Tours of the Kerr Center are ongoing, but by appointment only, and only for outdoor areas of the ranch. Please see our [tour page](#) for details.

Full details on these and other sustainable agriculture learning opportunities, as always, can be found on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

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** 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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