Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
April 2025

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Have you been enjoying the April showers? David Redhage starts this issue with tips on **how to find rare and out-of-print books on May flowers - especially the ones that support pollinators.**

That's timely, because a pair of new studies have shown that **pollinators need our help now more than ever: we've lost over 20% of butterflies since 2000, and the same percentage of all pollinators are at risk of extinction.**

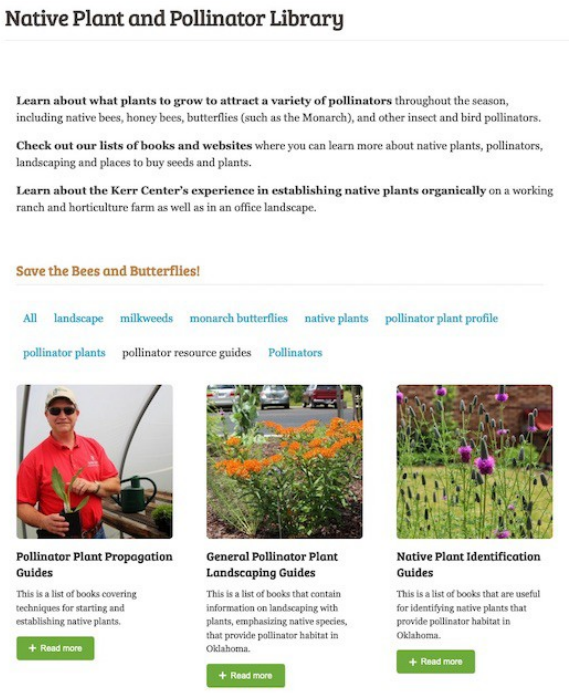
If you'd like to plant a native that will feed you and your family as well as the bugs and the bees, stay tuned: **new varieties of seedless muscadine grapes are on the way**.

Did you follow our March issue's suggestion of **starting a pastured poultry flock**, and now are at a loss for where to process the birds? NCAT has a **new free publication on poultry processing options**.

All this newsletter's suggestions and updates are free, but we couldn't keep sharing them without your generous support. If you like what you're seeing, please keep it coming by **donating to the Kerr Center**! **Thank you!**

President's Note: Small Press/Out of Print Pollinator Books

Over time, I have put together a **reference list of pollinator publications**. While reviewing the list, I noticed some are no longer in print. I also realized how many were published by small publishing houses.



Here is a short list of some examples:

- *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of Arkansas* (The Ozark Society Foundation)

- *The Sunflower Family: A Guide to Asteraceae in the Contiguous United States* (Botanical Research Institute of Texas)

- *Water Plants for Missouri Ponds* (Missouri Department of Conservation)

- *Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas and North Texas* (University of Oklahoma Press) This is an excellent book. I don't know how they packed so much information in such a small book, but it is incredible!

- *Weeds of the Great Plains* (Nebraska Department of Agriculture)

- *Field Guide to Common Grasses of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska* (University of Kansas Press)

- *Field Guide to Oklahoma Plants: Commonly Encountered Prairie, Shrubland, and Forest Species* (Oklahoma State University, Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management)

- *The Guide to Oklahoma Wildflowers* (University of Iowa Press)

- Weeds of the South (University of Georgia Press)

- *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines: A Pictorial Guide* (Sam Noble Foundation) You need to contact the Noble Research Institute for a printed copy. They also have one on grasses, aquatic vegetation, and white-tailed deer food plants. All are excellent.

All of these are excellent publications, but don't receive a lot of publicity and may not be available from large online booksellers. Sometimes they are listed used online for prices higher than they can be purchased directly from the publisher (if still in print).

How can I find these books?

Grant Project Developing Seedless Muscadine Grapes

Oklahoma muscadine grape growers will be keeping an eye across the border to the east and south for news from a **new grant aimed at improving muscadine grapes**, including developing **disease-resistant and seedless varieties**.

The University of Arkansas has received a four-year, $7 million USDA grant to improve muscadine grape varieties for **both fresh market sales and wine**.

Native to the southeastern U.S., **muscadine grapes thrive in warmer, more humid conditions** than other grape species. They also grow better in the slightly **acidic soils** common in the region, and **tolerate a range of pests and diseases, as well as drought**. Four southeastern Oklahoma counties, including LeFlore, are ideal for muscadine grapes, and the Kerr Center has had demonstration plantings in the past.

In the century-plus since breeders turned their attention to muscadine grapes, they've developed over one hundred different varieties. More recently, they've succeeded in developing seedless varieties by crossing muscadine grapes (*Vitis rotundifolia*) with common grapes (*Vitis vinifera*) - a challenge, given that the two species have different numbers of chromosomes.

The new grant will build on that work. Renee Threlfall and Margaret Worthington at the University of Arkansas will work with a 32-person team across the nation, including researchers from Texas A&M and the University of Georgia, "to support grape growers in propagating new seedless muscadine selections for trials across the southeastern U.S."

"This project will seek to crossbreed muscadines and common grapes to get the best characteristics of these two grape species," said Justin Scheiner, a viticulture specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. "Both generations of grapes will be instrumental in breeding new high-quality, climate-resilient cultivars for both the fresh market and wine production."

"A lot of this is about changing climates and changing disease resistance, changing cultivars that grow in the area," Threlfall said.

What other traits are researchers breeding for in muscadine grapes?

One Fifth of Butterflies Lost, One Fifth of All Pollinators at Risk

A **study** published last month in *Science* reports that, **between 2000 and 2020, the number of butterflies in the United States dropped by more than one fifth** - 22%.

One out of every three butterfly species in the study **suffered "serious" population declines of more than 50%**.

The study compiled data from nearly 80,000 surveys, consisting of more than 12 million observations of individual butterflies from 342 different species. Citizen science programs, such as the **North American Butterfly Association's Fourth of July counts**, contributed to this trove of data.

Although some species did show increased populations over the same two-decade period of overall decline, they were few. For every such increasing species, there were 13 other species whose populations decreased.

Following on the heels of those bad butterfly tidings, a separate **study**, published this month in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, found that **22% of all pollinator species in North America are at risk of extinction**.

The study evaluated over 1,600 species, including butterflies, but also bats, bees, beetles, flies, hummingbirds, and moths. Of all these groups, hummingbirds were in the best shape. **Native bees came out worst, with over one third of all species at risk.**

While both studies found the worst declines in the southwestern U.S., they are occurring all over North America.

Although the findings are alarming, **authors from both studies point out that they also highlight the importance of further expanding existing conservation measures**.

"Butterflies can recover quickly because they have short generation times," said Eliza Grames, a co-author on the butterfly study based at New York's Binghamton University.

"Small actions like planting wildflowers, reducing pesticide use, or even leaving part of a backyard unmowed can significantly improve their chances."

New Resource on Poultry Meat Processing

One of the most bewildering and frustrating aspects of starting a **meat poultry** operation can be finding the best available option for **processing** the birds. To help producers evaluate the different possibilities, NCAT has published a **free guide**, called *Poultry Meat Processing: Choosing an Approach for your Farm*, by Ann Baier.

ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture

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Poultry Meat Processing: Choosing an Approach for your Farm

By Ann Baier, NCAT Sustainable Agriculture Specialist
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This publication offers a brief overview of federal poultry processing inspection requirements and criteria for exemption. It includes questions and examples to guide producers in deciding between available options for how birds move from farm to final customer. It also provides a list of resources for additional information.

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Photo: Ann Baier, NCAT

Choose an Approach to Poultry Processing that is Appropriate for Your Farm

Processing poultry in a way that is legal, sanitary, humane, practical, and appropriate for your farm depends on several factors:

- the species ("amenable" poultry vs. other, "non-amenable," species of birds)
- scale of production (number of birds processed per year)
- customers or marketing channels (direct-to-consumer, retail, or wholesale)
- location where birds are produced vs. sold (within or beyond state or territory lines)
- farm business priorities, human resources, and personal goals.

In weighing options, it is important to become familiar with federal and state inspection exemptions, as well as local laws. Prepare to comply with the most restrictive laws that apply to your operation. Also, make connections with other farmers in your region or in wider networks, so that you can talk with them to learn about approaches to processing, their experience with different processing plants or, simply, where to buy equipment and supplies.

This publication is produced by the National Center for Appropriate Technology through the ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture program, under a cooperative agreement with USDA Rural Development. attra.ncat.org

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At just six pages, the guide is **concise**, packed with the most **essential information**. It briefly reviews **federal** poultry processing **inspection requirements**, as well as the **criteria that smaller-scale producers have to meet to be exempted** from inspection.

The guide also includes **questions and examples** to assist producers in choosing between the available routes the birds may follow from the farm to the final customer. It concludes with a list of **resources for further information**.

This is the first in a series of publications to aid small-scale farms in producing and marketing meat, that NCAT is producing in cooperation with Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). Stay tuned for news of the next installments!

Spring Events: Summer Prep, Organic Weed Control, Wildflowers, Native Plants, Forest Management....

It's almost summer again! Get **tips for preparing your lawn and garden for heat and drought** at a free workshop (April 30, Oklahoma City)!

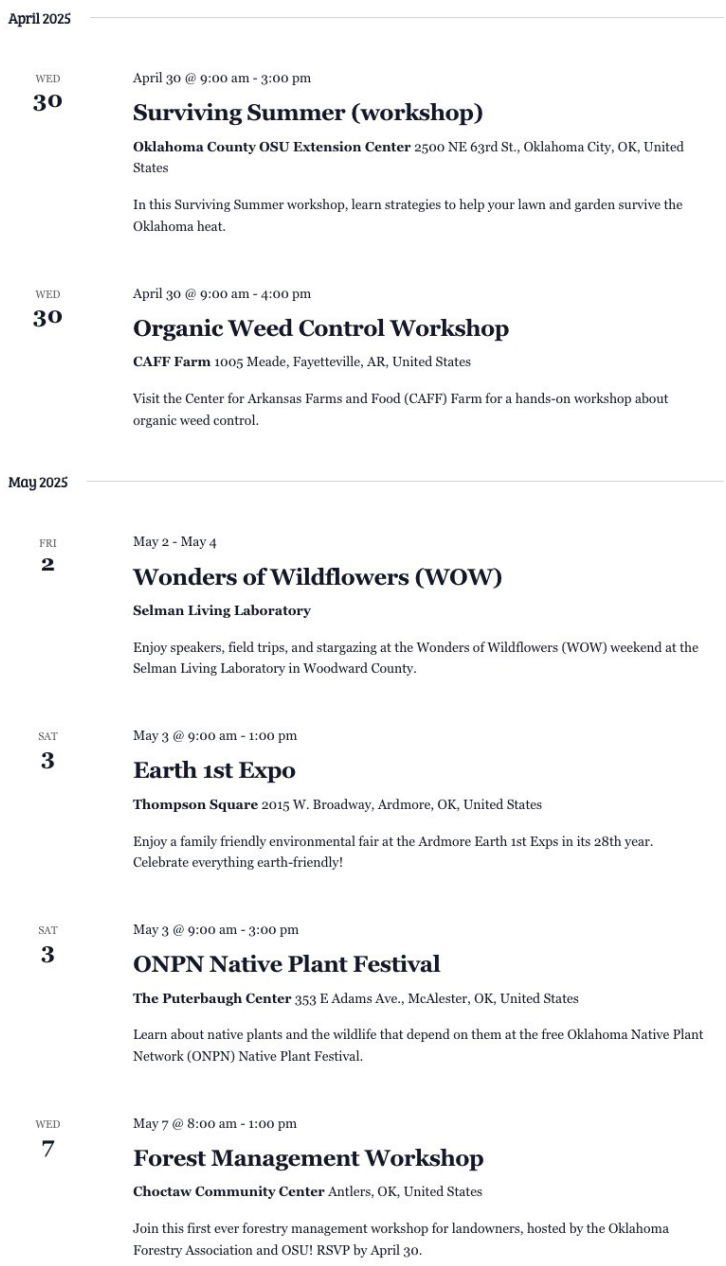
Learn about **organic methods of weed control** at a CAFF workshop (April 30; Fayetteville, AR).

Spend a weekend with the **Wonders of Wildflowers** (and the Oklahoma Native Plant Society) at the Selman Living Laboratory (May 2-4). For more on native plants, check out the Oklahoma Native Plant Network **Native Plant Festival** (May 3; McAlester), or visit the **Earth 1st Expo** (May 3; Ardmore).

Landowners can learn more about managing their forest lands at a **forest management workshop** (May 7; Antlers) **- RSVP by April 30**.

There are many more sustainable agriculture educational activities going on, and we're adding more to the calendar all the time. Get the latest on our 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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