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Livestock and Natural Resources

Feed the Birds!

There are many kinds of seeds and feeders, and the choice may seem overwhelming at times. Different species of birds prefer different types of seeds and feeders, and all birds prefer no one type. Where you set up your feeders and how much cover and water you have also affects feeder use.

The type of seed you provide influences how many birds come to your feeder. Over 20 types of seeds are sold as birdseed. The best all-around is probably the small black-oil sunflower seed. It costs a little more but is preferred by many smaller species, including chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice. It has a high oil content that is nutritionally important for birds and a thin seed coat that is easy for them to crack open. If you are going to provide one seed, this is the one to choose.

The striped sunflower seed, slightly larger, is very popular with blue jays and cardinals, but it is difficult for many smaller species to crack open. Sunflower seeds usually are provided in a hanging feeder. A disadvantage of sunflower seeds is that birds crack them open to eat the hearts and then drop the hulls on the ground, creating a mess under the feeder. You may instead opt to buy hulled sunflower seeds, which come without the seed coat. These are more expensive but leave no mess.

If you want to attract a variety of species, try providing a variety of foods. Besides sunflower seeds, other popular seed types include white proso millet, niger, and peanuts. White proso millet is cheap and attracts many species, but it may also attract less desirable ones, such as house sparrows and brown-headed cowbirds. Niger or thistle seed is popular because of its attractiveness to goldfinches, house finches, and purple finches. Niger seed is very small and is usually offered in a special feeder with small holes for dispensing the seeds.

Peanuts attract blue jays, chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers. They can be offered as shelled kernels, in the shell, or as peanut hearts--the small chips left when peanut halves are broken apart. The hearts are valuable because they are small and can be eaten by many smaller species of birds.

Besides the seed, you can offer other types of foods to enhance the attractiveness of your feeding station. Suet is high-quality animal fat that is highly sought-after in winter. It can be hung in a mesh bag (often provided with the suet), or you can buy special suet feeders. Processed suet cakes are available at many stores that sell bird feeding supplies. These cakes may contain other seed and fruit pieces and are processed so that they don't turn rancid in warmer weather.

Last year we made our own "marvel meal" we spread peanut butter on an empty toilet paper roll and then rolled in birdseed; we ran a string through it and hung it from a branch.

David G. Hallauer
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Conducting a Prescribed Burn

As you read this, we will likely be on day seven or beyond of this cold snap. Snow isn't melting, and spring forage management might be the last thing on your mind. Nonetheless, spring will soon be upon us, and our focus will transition to grass management for the growing season, and that may mean consideration of a prescribed burn on forage stands.

I like prescribed fire in forage systems. When conducted safely, they can be an effective management tool. The weed and brush control benefits they provide, particularly in our native grass systems, are well documented. Still, before blindly conducting a burn, the question should be asked: why am I burning?

What benefit is prescribed fire going to do for my forage stand or wildlife habitat? Cool season grasses typically don't tend to respond to fire like warm season prairie grasses do. In fact, if burned too frequently or at the wrong time, stands can be harmed.

We don't burn cool season grasses at the same time as warm season grasses. If you are trying to take out brush or taller cedar trees, do you have enough fuel, and will it be flammable during the appropriate time? If ample fuel loads are not available to burn up small cedar trees, or if burns are being conducted prior to the beginning of regrowth on our brush species (as is often the case with our cool season grasses), control will not be as effective as you'd like. At that point, other management options may better help you achieve your desired objective.

There are certainly instances when prescribed fire is a valuable forage management tool. Take a little time now to determine if that value applies to your individual situation. If it does, I'll share more next week about the planning you can do now to make it safe and successful.

Thinking Ahead to Spring

With recent weather limiting much outdoor activity, it's a great time to start looking at trees you might plant this spring...or new vegetable varieties...or even flowers. If that's on your to-do list before spring arrives, but you don't know where to start, the K-State Research & Extension Horticulture Information Center has just the ticket.

Visit <http://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/recommended-plants/> for links to a wide variety of plants, including iris, daylilies, fruits, vegetables, roses, and even turf grass and trees (trees are broken out by area of the state). Trying to drought proof your landscape? They also have a list of low water use plants.

Some of the resources will come with picture, but many will not. If it's iris, daylilies, roses, or peonies you are exploring, however, a good collection of images of those found in the University Gardens Collection Gardens at <http://www.k-state.edu/gardens/gardens/collections/>.

It might provide just a little bit of a warm feeling even in this cold snap.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Making Leftovers Planned-Overs

Using leftovers is a great way to minimize food waste and save time. They can be a great snack, next day lunch, or even be used to make a quick meal. Larger meals can be prepared earlier in the week and leftovers can also be used later in the week or put in the freezer. Take some precautions with leftovers to make sure the food being eaten is safe. Check out the following food handling tips and ideas for making over leftovers so you can enjoy delicious and safe “Planned-Overs.”

Food safety tips for leftovers: Cooked foods should not remain at room temperature for more than two hours. Refrigerate or freeze food within 2 hours of cooking or being served at a restaurant. Discard any food left out longer than 2 hours. Label and date leftover containers to keep track of how long it has been in the refrigerator or freezer. Reheat leftovers thoroughly on a stove or in the microwave to a temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit or until hot and steamy. Bring soups, sauces, and gravies to a rolling boil. Wash hands before and after handling leftovers, use clean utensils and surfaces, and never taste a food to determine if it is safe. There is limit to how long food can be kept safely, so when in doubt, throw it out!

Refrigerator storage: Your refrigerator should be kept at or below 40 degrees. This can be measured by keeping a thermometer in your refrigerator. For quicker cooling, separate big amounts of leftovers into shallow 2-inch containers and cut large pieces of food into smaller pieces. Food should always be covered or in a storage container with a lid sealed to slow the growth of bacteria.

Freezer storage: If you not planning to eat your leftovers within 3-5 days, store leftovers in the freezer. Your freezer should be kept at or below 0 degrees. This can be checked by keeping a thermometer in your freezer. It is important to store food in good quality, air-tight containers. Frozen foods should be used as quickly as possible after freezing.

Planned overs by Food Groups: Below are some ideas for making leftovers by different food groups. There are also some great ideas for making a casserole or meals from what’s on hand.

Grains: Rice can be used to make rice pudding and fried rice, or added to meatballs, soups, and casseroles. It can also be frozen. You may need to add a small amount of liquid when reheating leftover rice.

Bread: If your bread, leftover rolls, hamburger or hot dog buns are getting a little dry, consider making bread budding or letting them dry out so you can make your own breadcrumbs. Use day-old bread to make French Toast. If you have one or two hamburger or hotdog buns left in the package, use them to make cheesy toast by spreading with soft margarine, topping with any kind of cheese, and broiling in the oven until cheese is melted and lightly browned.

Pasta: Use in a pasta salad or casserole. Freeze for later use in casseroles, soups, vegetables dishes, or as a side dish with a sauce.

Fruit: Use leftover fruit can be added to salads or pureed and used as pancake or ice cream topping. It can be mixed with yogurt, cottage cheese, or pudding. Leftover fruit can also be used in baked goods such as muffins or quick breads. Overripe bananas can be used to make banana bread or muffins, or muffins, or frozen and used in fruit smoothies. Fruit juices can be frozen in ice cube trays and used for flavoring and chilling fruit drinks.

Vegetables: Use vegetables in soups, salads, omelets, pasta dishes and casseroles. Leftover baked potatoes can be cut up and fried in a pan, used to make a quick potato casserole or potato soup, or the potato pulp can be scooped out and used to make twice baked potatoes. Chopped onions, celery, or green peppers can be frozen in freezer bags or containers for use in soups, stews or casseroles.

Proteins: Baked beans: Use in casseroles or to make chili.

Roasts: Can be sliced to make sandwiches or shredded for use in tacos, enchiladas or barbecued meat. It could also be cubed and used to make beef and noodles or frozen for use in casseroles.

Steak/chops: Could be thinly sliced and used to make fajitas (cook with onions, peppers and fajita seasoning). Make a sandwich by topping meat with sautéed peppers, onions and cheese. Top a tossed salad with sliced steak for a quick meal.

Turkey or chicken: Can be used in casseroles, soups, tacos or enchiladas. The meat can also be thinly sliced to make sandwiches or it can be shredded to make chicken/turkey salad sandwiches. It can also be cubed to make chicken/turkey and noodles or frozen for later use in a casseroles or soups.

Ham: Can be used to make ham and cheese sandwiches (either hot or cold), or it can be sliced, frozen, and used later for sandwiches. It could also be cubed and used in casseroles or soups.

February 12, 2021

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

You're using reusable shopping bags – yay. Good for the earth!

Did you know that bacteria, yeast, and mold can grow on your bags? And that those unwelcome growths can contaminate your food?

The American Cleaning Institute shares how to keep your bags clean while you live green.

Wash bags after each use, following the care instructions on the bags. Some tips on washing: polypropylene, cotton, and hemp bags can go in the washing machine. Nylon and insulated bags should be hand-washed.

Wipe the bags with disinfecting cloths, especially along the seams.
Separate the bags into food categories: raw meat, seafood, and produce. Label those bags and use them only for the right types of food.

Keep separate bags for non-food items like books, sports equipment, cleaning solutions, etc.

Dry bags entirely before you store them.

Store your bags somewhere bright and dry – not the trunk of your car. It's dark and humid in there.