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Brome Recovery Discussion Meetings

Last fall was beyond rough for many brome hay producers. Post-harvest armyworm pressure combined with dry weather prevented many July cut hay fields from recovering normally, sending them into dormancy in an uncertain state.

The 2022 growing season will provide a critical period for potential recovery. For some, it will mean lost stands or at the very least drastically reduced yields. For others, it may be little more than a bump in the road – assuming growing conditions remain good through the season.

Understanding what a stand might be up against because of past damage as well as how to plan for the coming year will be the focus of two informal discussion meetings on Thursday, February 24th in Oskaloosa and Holton. Each session will include a brief overview of the 2021 growing season followed by a rapid fire discussion of what to expect as growth starts in 2022 as well as potential issues we could face through the remainder of the growing season. We'll talk a little about everything from grass growth and development and fertility to how to evaluate currently damaged stands.

The Oskaloosa meeting will begin at 1:15 p.m. at the Oskaloosa City Hall, 212 West Washington Street in Oskaloosa. The meeting in Holton will start at 7:00 p.m. at the NEK Heritage Complex (12200 214th Rd.) south of Holton. Contact any office of the Meadowlark Extension District or e-mail dhallaue@ksu.edu for additional information. Hope to see you there.

Prune Fruit Trees Now

The winter continues to allow us a great opportunity to get out and do some work in the landscape. If you have fruit trees, through the month of March is a great time to prune (as long as wood isn't frozen). Need some help to get started?

Start with removal of broken, damaged or diseased branches. They're an easy place to begin. So are branches that cross and rub against each other.

Narrow branch angles are next. They tend to be weaker than wider angles, and are more prone to break during storms.

Suckers (branches growing straight up from the trunk or other major branches) should be removed as well. They do little for production from the tree and are using energy useful for other portions of the tree.

If branches are interfering with harvest, pruning, or maintenance, remove them next. So long as you do so by cutting back to a bud or another branch (avoid stubs), it's a good next step.

Finally, consider the size/shape of the tree, cutting back branches to reduce tree size if needed, as well as thinning branches on the interior of the tree. Stop *total* removal when you reach 30 percent of the tree's branches.

Every fruit species will respond a little differently, but all will respond well to the steps provided above. For specific species details, check out MF3450 *Pruning Apple and Pear Trees* at <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3450.pdf> and MF3451 *Pruning Peaches, Plums, Cherries and Other Stone Fruits* at <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3451.pdf>. Both are available upon request from any of our District Offices as well.

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

Can Food Be Stored in the Snow?

I get all kinds of interesting questions and this is one that I have received that you might find interesting, “Can food be stored outside in the snow?” Whether its due to a power outage or your freezer or refrigerator is full due to hosting a holiday meal, it becomes tempting to want to store food outside.

Keep in mind that a full freezer of food usually will keep about two days, if the door is kept shut. A half-full freezer will stay cold enough about a day. If you find that the power will be out longer, you may need to resort to other methods to preserve your frozen food. If it’s short-term, the best thing is to keep the freezer closed.

It’s tempting to use our giant outdoor “walk-in freezer” to store food, but storing food outside is not recommended by the USDA due to potential variable temperatures, unsanitary outdoor conditions and/or disturbances by animals. There can be temperature fluctuations from the sun’s rays, which could thaw the food.

Depending on the outdoor temperature, you may be able to store the food in impermeable covered plastic containers in an unheated garage or other place where the food won’t be disturbed. Monitor the temperature and the state of the food.