

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE

Walker County Agriculture News Update

May 2016

Greetings from the Walker
County, Texas A&M AgriLife
Extension office!

“A vegetable garden in the beginning looks so promising and then after all little by little it grows nothing but vegetables, nothing, nothing but vegetables.” -Gertrude Stein

It took me a bit of time to appreciate that quote.

I actually had to stop and think for just a bit, after all little by little I understood. Whenever I find an interesting tidbit like that, I like to look up the origin for a bit of confirmation and to verify the statement. Gertrude Stein had another that I liked: **“It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing.”** While I don’t believe many of us sit around doing nothing, we all probably do a lot that allows us time to think. Some of the smartest people I know ride tractors quite a bit, they spend a lot of time on them. “Little by little” unnoticed the fruits of our labor blossom and grow into nothing but a harvest, nothing, nothing but a harvest from the crop which was first so promising. American agriculture feeds, clothes, and houses us all.

- ***When you have the opportunity, let others hear your message.***

Upcoming Events: We have a full set of May events for you! (7 CEU’s in Walker Co alone)

Feral Hog Management Workshop (5 CEU’s pending approval)

Tuesday, May 3rd @ 8:30 AM-4:30 PM

Cornerstone Church

27453 Hwy 105

Cleveland, TX 77327

Program is FREE Lunch is \$20.00

***Preregistration Required RSVP to San Jacinto County AgriLife (936) 628-6407**

Topics:

- Feral Hog Biology, Population Dynamics and Research Update
- Laws and Regulations for Hunting Feral Hogs
- Water Quality in the Brazos Valley
- Agricultural Regulations Regarding Feral Hogs
- Feral Hog Control and Trapping Demonstration
- Feral Hog Transportation Regulations and Disease Concerns



Walker Co Pond Management (2 CEU's)
Monday, May 9th @ 6:00 PM-approx. 8:30 PM
Walker County AgriLife Extension Office
102 Tam Road,
Huntsville, TX 77320
\$10.00 /person (RSVP to 936-435-2426 for seating)



Dr. Todd Sink, Extension Fisheries Specialist will be back with us to cover the management side of owning a recreational fish pond in East Texas. **Topics will include:** Pond Design Requirements & Construction Suggestions - Water Quality Issues- Should You Fertilize? - Pond/Lake Ecology - Stocking Decisions - Feed or Not To Feed? If you were with us last year, this will be the conclusion of all the items we didn't have time to discuss –come back for the finale! It is going to be a great one!!

Walker Co Beef Cattle Workshop (1 CEU)
Tuesday, May 17th @ 6:30 PM-approx. 8:30 PM
Walker County AgriLife Extension Office
102 Tam Road,
Huntsville, TX 77320
\$10.00 /person (RSVP to 936-435-2426 for seating)

Dr. Joe Paschal, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist (*all the way from Corpus Christi*) will be with us to discuss developing new or alternative beef enterprises. **Topics of discussion will include:** Marketing strategies, plus Management strategies and tips. This presentation will include how to get into areas such as grassfed or other niches in our industry. If you want to think about another way to do what you are doing to increase your potential income – here it is.

Walker Co Forage Workshop (2 CEU's)
Monday, May 23rd @ 6:30 PM-approx. 8:30 PM
Walker County AgriLife Extension Office
102 Tam Road,
Huntsville, TX 77320
\$10.00 /person (RSVP to 936-435-2426 for seating)

Dr. Vanessa Corriher-Olson, Extension Forage Specialist from Overton, Texas will be in Huntsville for this informative presentation. We will be examining management of grazing and grass systems to provide the best quality forage possible for livestock. Realistic utilization of forage products must be matched to the system in which they are grown. This program will also have tips for absentee landowners included!

A.W. – H.E.C.K.! Ants! (2 CEU's)
Tuesday, May 31 @ 7:00 PM-approx. 9:00 PM
Walker County AgriLife Extension Office
102 Tam Road,
Huntsville, TX 77320
\$10.00 /person (RSVP to 936-435-2426 for seating)

Ant Workshop – Helping Environmental Control Kick-In! Do you have ants around the yard or around the barn areas? I bet you do! Dr. Paul Nestor, Extension IPM Specialist, Harris County, will be our guest speaker for this workshop. Dr. Nestor will have a variety of equipment on hand for demonstration which will help you choose options that may best fit your needs for fire ant control. Recommendations for products and their applications will include strategies for controlling this pest to your best advantage.



2016 Walker County Farmers Market: Grand Opening June 4, 2016

8:00 AM until Sell-out

West Hill Mall Parking Lot, Huntsville, TX

This Market has been in existence since the mid-1960s and is still going strong with participation from local producers. If you are looking for quality local produce, this is the place to find it! Featuring a variety of popular vegetables produced in the Walker County area. If you would like to sell produce in the market, contact the Walker County AgriLife Extension office for information on joining (936) 435-2426.



Summer Beekeeping Clinic 2016

Saturday, June 18th @ 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Lone Star Convention & Expo Center

9055 Airport Road,

Conroe, TX 77303

\$50.00 /person, \$90.00/couple, \$25.00/15yrs & under (includes lunch)

Register at texasbeekeepers.org

Featured Speaker: Ross Conrad, author of Natural Beekeeping: Organic Approaches to Modern Apiculture. Topics: Bee biology & behavior – Getting started with beekeeping – Pest management (Varroa) – Swarm capture – Top bar hives – Making a business out of a hobby – Raising queens – Queen breeding and sperm viability – Drones – Marketing your honey – and more.. Vendors and exhibitors will be onsite selling and displaying the newest innovative beekeeping supplies. Plus Demonstrations: Live hive inspection & Honey extraction.

In This Issue:

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY - TURFGRASS.

Here today..

I may have mentioned my crystal ball a time or two. Despite what we may think, the future is sometimes not so hard to envision. There are a few things that prompt me to periodically pull out the crystal ball and take a foreword look. Turfgrass is one of those items. I wish it wasn't.

Turf or other forms of lawn grasses is a topic that County Agents get hit with fairly regularly. I can truly empathize with the frustration caused by the issues of turf which are legion. The part I have trouble seeing is the need for so much of this type of horticultural practice. Turf has its place, but it is an item that requires being held to realistic expectations and needs.

I may have just irritated a large percentage of our newsletter recipients. Stay with me and I will explain where I am going. I foresee a time in the future where views of our emerald-green turf expanses promote interpretation as socially unacceptable. This holds true at least for home lawns.

I have developed this thought for two reasons. Both of my concerns are capable of being addressed and reduced if managed properly.

First: Water conservation is just one of the topics that we address through our Extension educational programs on an ongoing basis. There are times when we direct the message to the forefront and discuss the subject a bit louder than others; however, it is always present. My reasoning for this is that we see times when you

(collectively) are more interested in hearing the message. During dry spells and drought periods, our clientele (again collectively) tends to listen closely and ask questions. As soon as the next rain event occurs and your garden and flower bed washes off, water conservation goes back into the list of things you worry with later. I'm sure that occurred collectively with the 16 inches of rain down in Harris County.

It is amazing how people's interests change so quickly.

Second: Nonpoint source pollution is an issue that can fall into the turf realm also. When fertilizers and pesticides are used correctly the concern is a virtual non-issue. I talk to enough of you (again referring collectively) to cause me some periodic concern. This is one of those "one bad apple" items. Please follow the labeled instructions in the case of pesticides and actively reference a soil test to guide any ongoing soil fertility projects. As Dr. Ketchersid says in the pesticide applicator training, "Do the math", "Did you do the math?"

Place a significant rain event or miscalibrated irrigation with a misapplication of something together, and. What just happened?

Rest assured, I know what a fine stand of turfgrass looks like. I also know how to grow and manage such an expanse of lush green grass. Now, does my yard look like the ideal turfgrass post card? The answer is no.

I tend to fall into the "If God gave me a green lawn of some form, then I am happy" category. That actually is a management philosophy of a sort. I also refuse to spend excessive amounts of money on a lawn. Now is the time to que the Spaghetti Western music.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY - TURFGRASS.

By Reggie Lepley, CEA-Ag/NR

"Yardners" is how one former Extension Horticulturist describes people obsessed with turfgrass. Actually his idea of yard maintenance was riding around on the mower at least once per week enjoying a cold adult beverage. He actually claimed it as a regularly scheduled therapy session. If I had a riding mower, I might try his method.

We spend a lot of time working at our turfgrass to keep it beautiful. If you are hoping that I may pass along a few tricks and tips, you are in luck. The first tip is to spend a little time at the [Aggie Turf](#) website. This resource features common turf species and management by grass specie.

How often you need to mow depends upon which species of grass you are managing. Mowing frequency is the key to keeping grass growth at its densest capacity and best appearance. I hope you read that previous sentence; I led off the charge with a volley from the big gun! (Psst!...*I let you in on the secret*)

Your grass both flowers and makes seed, although the seed probably isn't viable. Improved grasses developed from crosses are sterile. Seeded grasses (varieties) are selections which probably (most likely) will not come back from seed true to the parent. Allowing a grass to enter reproductive growth (flower/seed) will stop lateral growth which will then encourage thinner stands. This now thinner stand caused by not mowing often enough also allows all those weeds that you call me about. If you are following closely, we just solved a number of common problems by spending quality time with your mower.

The Good: Turfgrass does have some benefits. A grass cover will offer a cooling effect due to the release of water vapor. This process, known as transpiration pulls carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the plant and releases water (H₂O) through stomata openings in the leaf. If you ever wondered why you like to walk around the yard at the end of a hot day, now you know.

A turf covering will also protect soil from sunlight, lowering or moderating soil temperatures and it is a wonderful method of preventing soil losses from erosion. Grass is green and pleasant to view, it provides a calming effect.

The Bad: Grass establishment success is best achieved by proper soil bed preparation. Incorporation of moisture holding organic material will allow root growth to occur at its greatest. Laying sod over existing or imported clay will need many years to develop organic matter based soils that sequester carbon thus allowing infiltration of water and deep roots which promote vigorous above ground growth. So your builder laid the sod directly over the red clay used to stabilize your foundation –you are out of luck, let time do its magic. Few people want to invest the labor or the funds required to renovate such a situation. If you are lucky and are first establishing your lawn at this time, deeply till some good organic matter soil into the clay around your new house.

Roots need oxygen as much as they need water. If you have shallow sand/clay layers or a clay/sand layer, you are not allowing oxygen to penetrate to roots. Or, here is the second problem. You are now working with a moisture issue as water does not move between these soil layers easily. Shallow roots don't/can't/won't pick up deeper available water. You can water shallow roots placed over a clay layer of soil and still be dealing with water stress. A lack of water slows plant respiration (*part 1, more to come*) and retards growth.

What is the remedy to this situation? Aerate your lawn, deeply. By the way, not any old aerator works. You have to use equipment that will pull a core out and open up the soil to an adequate depth. If you want to see such an aerator, go to your local golf course. I promise you they spent some real money on this equipment.

Got shade? Oh yeah, we live in east Texas! The purpose of leaves on grass is to collect light. Grasses need light, end of story. There are some that can handle a little less, but they all have to have light. Energy from sunlight to assimilate nutrients is a required item (*respiration part 2*). Shade and drought stress prevent this from happening. It doesn't matter how much fertilizer you place on the ground, both shady turf or dry roots prevent your grass from properly conducting respiration due to a lack of energy. Grass will not grow in these conditions.

This leads us directly to drought, floods and everything weather related in between.

Drought tolerance is a term commonly thrown around during discussions of turfgrass. So, exactly what does that mean? The drought tolerance of your grass relies on its rooting depth. Deeper roots can help grasses tolerate dry spells better. If you have shallow roots such as in the sand/clay or clay/sand situation mentioned earlier, you don't have drought tolerance

You would most often be better off discussing drought response. The phrase, drought response describes how a grass reacts to drought. Generally the first action in drought response is to either shed or stop green top growth and brown out. Oh my, your grass just died! Well maybe not. A truly drought tolerant species will re-green if the drought is not too long.

Well we can always keep the grass growing with the sprinkler system. Can't we? Well maybe not. Let's say during the hot part of the year your grass isn't actively growing, meaning you didn't have to mow it that week. Assuming you dig down about 4 to 6 inches and the soil is moist. If that is the case, don't water it. Do what, Seriously!

*Disclaimer here, this only holds true if you have good deep roots. Those of you falling into the discussion categories' mentioned above probably can't get away with too much water withholding. Fact: Over watering grass when it is not growing only serves to waste water –the plant can't use it.

An Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statistic claims the typical landscaped yard soaks up more than 10,000 gallons of water per year.

General recommendations for watering turfgrass are that you need to place one inch of water on the lawn per week. Preferably that one inch of water needs to occur as infrequently as possible –if you can do it in one watering session you are good to go. Those of you dealing with the shallow clay layer or the topsoil layer of clay can't do this, so break it up into multiple applications totaling one inch for the week. No more. One inch only, please. *If you can read that last sentence while thinking about Sean Connery's line in the movie Red October, "One ping only, please" it's kind of cool.* Water needed per week: One inch only, please.

So how do you only place one inch of water on the lawn? The answer is, measure your water application. Collect measurements around the yard with fancy water catchment devices or empty tuna cans and a tape measure. Do the math!

If you one of the “techie” kind, I can really fix you up. Evapotranspiration (ET) is the % of water replaced vs. lost. You need to replace at least 60% to keep grass in really good shape. Walker County is one of the really lucky areas of the state because we have an ET station here at Sam Houston State University. You can open the [TexasET Network](#) web page and run an online homeowner calculator to tell you how much water your lawn needs. Seriously! Just select your site (Huntsville), click the Home Owner Calculator and click the pull down menus and fill in the blanks. Presto, one week’s irrigation prescription!

To avoid evaporation loss as best possible, irrigate your lawn early in the morning during the spring or fall. During the hot days of summer, you can irrigate late in the evening or at night. Caution! Watering in the evening or at night during the spring or fall with cool night temperatures just opened you up to fungus infection. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.

I am not sure if I want to include this next discussion item in the Bad or Ugly area, so I decided to place it between the two. I will let you decide where this next issue locates itself.

Remember the part at the beginning of this article referring to mowing frequency. The part where I mentioned mowing frequency was the key in maintaining a healthy turf. Do you know the EPA says Americans spend three billion plus hours using lawn and garden equipment burning 720 million gallons of gas per year? So, you say? The EPA additionally claims gas-powered push mowers emit as much pollution per hour as 11 cars, and riding mowers emit as much as 34 cars. They also say that Americans spill four million gallons of fuel each year, just refueling lawn equipment. FYI: This is now an older reference; EPA has now adopted new standards for [lawn & garden equipment](#). If you wondered why mowers are more expensive, now you know.

The part about spilling fuel got my attention when I saw it a few years ago. I was researching conservation in the home landscape for a presentation at the time. I started paying attention. Yes we do spill a lot of fuel, it adds up.

The Ugly: *Note I consider this the ugly part because a lack of proper use on your part can allow pollutant items to move through our environment.

Fertilization of turfgrass will vary by species, soil, and previous management. A rule of thumb recommendation is just a guess based off what the grass has to have. This type of guidance can create an overage just as easily as it can offer a shortage for the grass. Come to the office and pick up a soil test kit. This will be the best \$10.00 you ever spend. I make that statement regularly, and I believe it. Measure your turf area. Know how many thousand square feet you are working with. Do the math!

There are many other issues. Pest (weed or insect) and disease items populate the bulk of clientele calls received about turfgrass. Weeds and insect issues are dependent upon season and growing conditions. Turfgrass disease problems vary by season, moisture level, soil temperature, air temperature and type of grass. We really don’t have time for that set of discussions in this format. What I will say is, identify your problem first. Then select the best option for control. Preferably choose the least toxic method. You should progress to other products only when actually needed. Regardless of what management level or product you select; always double-check to make sure that you are applying products at the proper rate. No guessing here: Do the math!

If you have been through the Master Gardener Training or a Pesticide Applicator Training, you will realize we just talked about Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Proper management before issues often prevents the issue completely. In other words, we create most of our own problems with pests or diseases due to poor management decisions.

Lack of IPM in homeowner turfgrass situations really is the worst of the ugly mentioned in this article. Misapplication of products precipitates possible pollution issues. As stewards of the environment, we concern ourselves with protection of our future resources.

It is highly possible and probable that we often create our own problems. So how can we help prevent some of these problems? Maybe, just maybe we can relax a bit on the turfgrass.

Water conservation recommendations have for years, been to manage plant species by zones. Furthermore we can restrict high water use plants to reasonable size areas. Consolidation of species needing like amounts of water allows us to place needed water exactly where and when prescribed. Little to no waste needed.

Keep your highly managed, thick turf areas close to the house where you really will enjoy and appreciate them.

Being open and receptive to a slightly non-uniform open space type area further away from the house can offer us plant diversity. Plant diversity often means plants with deeper rooting structure, meaning extra water conservation ability. Think, prairie meadow type look. Benefits of this diversity is deeper rooted plants requiring less water application, little to no addition of weed or insect control products and almost no fertilizer inputs used.

I fully realize that mowing a lawn/turf area is often a matter of safety. Slithering or even crawling things that you probably don't want to step on do live around our yards. If you are not okay with the prairie meadow look and have to mow something, do you really have to have a thick stand of grass? Could you tolerate grass with maybe a few weeds (non-selected grass species) growing in it? Exactly what difference does it make? I don't want to hear about your HOA, that is another problem due to a lack of education and misunderstanding of the issues.

As always, place the proper plant in the proper site. Do not try to grow grass in shade or suddenly become upset because the grass growing under that tree for the past twenty years thinned out last season. Hey, the tree finally grew enough to shade the grass, plant something else that likes shade. Option number two, prune limbs or entire trees out and let sunlight in. There is not much "rocket science" in the remedy.

Fertilization is next. If you can live with a slightly thinner stand of grass away from the house, does it need fertilizer in great amounts? No, it really does not need regular applications of fertilizer. It also need not be mowed as often since it is not growing as fast. We just saved water, fertilizer, pesticides and fuel. Just by simply relaxing a bit on the turfgrass, we helped promote conservation.

What is the problem with turf?

If you have questions or would like more information regarding Extension Educational Programs, call us at (936) 435-2426.

Reggie Lepley



Reggie Lepley,
County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources
Walker County
(936) 435-2426

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Provisions from the American Disability Act will be considered when planning educational programs and activities. Please notify the Walker County Extension Office if you plan on attending an Extension Educational program and need specialized services. Notification of at least three to five days in advance is needed, so that we may have ample time to acquire resources needed to meet your needs.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating