

Extension Notes

Personal Column for July 5, 2010

By Gary Hall, Iowa State University Regional Extension Education Director

Sweet Corn Protection from Raccoons

It seems the official sweet corn inspector should be the raccoon, which seems to harvest sweet corn the day before it is to be picked. Evidently many across the nation have this problem. Ward Upham, Extension Associate from Kansas State University, provides us with information about his experience with the raccoon and an effective control measure...the electric fence.

The shock of an electric fence will scare the raccoon but leave it unharmed. The goal is to encourage the wildlife to forage for more natural foods instead of our sweet corn. With the help of rapidly moving electrons and these tips we can accomplish that goal.

- Two or more wires must be used. Place the first about 5 inches above the ground and the second 4 inches above the first (or 9 inches above ground). Raccoons must not be able to crawl under, go between or go over the wires without coming into contact with the wire and receiving a little shock.
- Use regular electric fence posts and insulators for construction of your electric fence. They provide good support and won't allow the raccoons to foil the fence.
- It is much easier to use the woven electric wire with strands of wire embedded than to use a solid metal wire. The woven wire is easier to bend around corners and to roll up when done for the year. Advancements in electric fence technology have tilted the scales of winning the Battle of the Sweet Corn in your favor.
- Though both the plug-in and battery operated fencers work, the battery operated types allow more versatility where corn is grown. One set of batteries is usually sufficient for the season. In Ward's case, he pulls the battery out of an old tractor that is not used much. It lasts the season if fully charged at the beginning. The electric fencer is probably on for a total of a month.
- Start the charger before the corn is close to being ripe. Once raccoons get a taste of the corn, they are more difficult to discourage.
- Control weeds near the wire. Weeds can intercept the voltage if they touch a wire and allow raccoons entry beyond the weed.
- Check the wire occasionally to make sure you have current. This can be done easily (but unpleasantly) by touching the wire. There are also tools for sale that will measure the voltage. They are worth the money unless you have a number of city cousins coming to visit over the course of the month.

Sweet corn will be ready soon so be sure to either have plenty for the raccoons and your family or you can take Ward's suggestion and erect that electric fence. Either way, enjoy the tasty treat of summer...sweet corn.

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