



Ag & Hort Update



April 2008

It has taken longer than most expected, but it seems that a few nice days have arrived. Field work was slowed down due to several cold and rainy days, but some field work, anhydrous ammonia, liquid fertilizer and spraying applications have slowly started; soon the signs of planting will fill the rural areas of Shelby County. At last check the 4 inch soil temperature in Shelby County was 52 degrees. Gardeners are also getting the itch to work their own seed beds. Potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, onions, carrots, and many others will be soon planted. Many early season flowers are starting to open and lawns are showing signs of new life, please enjoy this wonderful time of year. Happy Planting!

Kent Ganzer

Upcoming Dates:

April 22 – Earth Day

April 25 – Arbor Day

April 26 – County Fair 4-H Sheep Weigh-In, 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.

April 26 – Discovery & Junior 4-H Science Day, West Ridge Elementary

May 7 – 4-H Rabbit Workshop, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

May 15 – Fair ID Sheets Due

May 26 – Memorial Day—Office closed

May 22 – New 4-H Fair Family Orientation, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

May 29 – Butterfly Camp, Nishna Bend

May 30 – Fish Camp, Prairie Rose State Park

Let The Mushroom Hunt Begin!

April is here, and so are morel mushrooms. Mushroom hunters are heading to the woods with their bags in search of tasty mushrooms (morels). Morels are also known as sponge mushrooms. Morels are wild mushrooms that people pick in April and May. The season usually lasts 4-5 weeks; we have had plenty of spring moisture, all we need are more warm temperatures.

Morels have a distinctive sponge-like appearance, when gathering and eating any natural food one must exercise extreme care. Morel hunters need to be particularly careful. There are several other mushroom-like fungi that look similar to a morel but are not edible and can be poisonous. The inexperienced hunter may need some help in identifying these differences at first.

Morel hunters need to remember that mushrooms can “spoil” in the same way that any fresh high protein food will, especially if left unrefrigerated in plastic bags. It is best if mushrooms are not gathered in plastic, but wrap each mushroom in a paper towel or wax paper until it can be cleaned.

Cooking Morels: Cut each mushroom in half or slice, rinse (do not soak), dip them in beaten egg and then dip into flour or cracker crumbs. Fry in a small amount of butter. They are usually crisp and brown in 3-4 minutes. Serve immediately.

Freezing Morels: Prepare them as a meal (noted above). Put them on a tray and freeze individually and then package in freezer bags or boxes. You can also blanch (anywhere from 3-5 minutes, depending on the size), chill, drain and freeze. However, this precludes the preferred method of breading and frying, which the majority of people like. If blanched they would be best used in stews and casseroles instead. To prepare frozen mushrooms for eating, place on a baking sheet and heat in the oven. WILD MUSHROOMS CANNOT BE CANNED SAFELY!

Nutritional Facts: Mushrooms are generally low in calories, high in fiber, high in riboflavin, high in potassium and low in sodium. Food energy: 14 Calories, Carbohydrates: 2 Grams, Fat: ½ Gram, Protein: 1 Gram, Crude Fiber: 200 mg, 2/3 cup of mushrooms equal 2 oz. or 50-55 grams, 1 lb. usually equals 8-9 servings. Happy Hunting!

More Soybeans and Less Corn Expected in 2008

According to a report released March 31 by the National Agricultural Statistics Service of the USDA, expect Iowa, along with Nebraska, to have the largest increase in soybean production nationwide. USDA estimates that Iowa farmers will plant 1.25 million more acres of soybeans in 2008 and 1 million fewer acres of corn. Nationally, USDA expects soybean acres to be up 18 percent while corn acres will head down 8 percent from 2007. Palle Pedersen "says the high input costs and the associated risk will get farmers to think twice when they are making their planting decisions". He also added, "There is still extremely strong demand for soy products and soy meal from both Asia and Europe". Despite this predicted increase in soybean, corn acres are expected to remain at high levels as the corn price remains strong. There is still one final factor, weather. Weather will be the final judge of how many acres of corn and soybeans Iowa farmers will plant in 2008. Palle Pedersen is an ISU Extension Soybean Agronomist.

Soybean Planting Dates Can Impact Yield

Soybean yield seems to be correlated to planting dates. Dramatic changes and improved technology have moved the soybean planting date earlier and earlier every year. Many farmers still consider May 15 as early when planting soybeans in Iowa. That is an old recommendation. There are two reasons for earlier soybean planting. First, soybeans respond favorably to early planting dates if soil conditions are ideal for planting. Secondly, the potential risk of stand reducing, late-spring frost is offset by the opportunity to capture maximum soybean yield potential when early-season conditions are favorable.

The ideal soil temperature for soybean germination and emergence is 77 degrees F. However, soil temperatures at 2 inches deep in Iowa, usually won't reach these levels until late May or even early June. Soybean can easily germinate at soil temperatures of 50 degrees F at 2 inches. Emergence can easily take 3 weeks at these low temperatures. Early planting means colder soil and slower germination, but this will not negatively influence yields. The recommended planting dates for soybeans, if conditions are favorable, is during the last week of April for counties south of Hwy 20 and the week of May 1st for the northern counties of Iowa. Research has shown that soybeans planted considerably later than these dates, have shown yield losses of .4 - .9 bu/acre/day.

The most important thing to consider when determining planting date is to plant into a good seedbed. If it is April 25th and the soil temperature is 55 degrees and the soils are wet, this is not ideal conditions. These early planting dates are used only when planting conditions are favorable. It is more important to consider field conditions than date.

There can be several concerns with early soybean planting. Management is very important when deciding to plant early. Colder soils will slow emergence, root development and can make the stand more susceptible to root rotting pathogens. If there is a field history of seedling diseases from

Phytophthora, Pythium, Rhizoctonia or Fusarium, fungicide treatments are highly recommended. Early planting can also increase your chances of high populations of Bean Leaf Beetles. Bean leaf beetles can be easily managed by an insecticide treatment; this will not hold you back from a higher yield potential if managed. Controlling these early season problems will help you maximize the yield benefit from planting the last week of April through the first week of May. Fact sheets are available at the Shelby County Extension Office. Information gathered from Palle Pedersen, ISU Extension Soybean Agronomist.

Spring Lawn Care

The sight of new green grass often inspires us homeowners to spread fertilizer and help out our young blades of grass. It is best to spread fertilizer in April. Be sure to select fertilizers that contain slow release nitrogen sources. These will be listed on the fertilizer bag as sulfur-coated urea, methylene urea, IBDU, triazone, or as a natural organic fertilizer. Be sure not to apply more than one pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Example, five pounds of a 20-5-10 fertilizer would be needed to apply one pound of actual nitrogen. Spring seeding of lawns is possible, although fall is the best time. Follow these seven steps to spring seeding lawns.

- * Evaluate site, conduct a soil test and follow through with the recommendations.
- * Grade the site, slope soil away from buildings to allow for proper drainage.
- * Select the right seed. A seed mix containing Kentucky Bluegrass and Perennial Ryegrass are best for sunny lawns. If the site is mostly shaded, avoid Kentucky Bluegrass and use either a fine leaf fescue or tall fescue.
- * Seed according to proper seedling rates. Seed is applied on a 1,000 square foot basis. Example, sow 1.5 pounds of Kentucky bluegrass, 6 pounds of tall fescue, and 3 pounds of fine leaf fescue seed per 1,000 square feet. Seed will not germinate until soil temperatures are close to 65 degrees F. Don't seed until the middle to late April.
- * Apply a starter fertilizer that contains Tupersan if crabgrass is present or has been a problem in the past. Tupersan is the only pre-emergent herbicide that can be used at seeding to help prevent crabgrass.
- * Protect the seedbed with straw mulch. Apply one bale per 1,000 square feet.
- * Keep the seedbed moist with frequent irrigation.

In established lawns you can apply a pre-emergent herbicide between the middle of March to the end of April to control crabgrass. Crabgrass generally emerges about the time of dogwood bloom, the pre-emergent herbicide will have no effect on crabgrass that is already emerged and growing. Do not try to control dandelions or other broadleaf weeds in early spring. Herbicide applications will generally burn off the shoots and will not kill the root system. It is better to wait until late summer or early fall to control dandelions and other broadleaf weeds. Always read the label before applying any herbicide for application rates and safety precautions.

Thatch control should be considered if the thatch layer is greater than ½ inch in depth. Power raking is one method of thatch control. Power raking can damage the turf and pre-emergent crabgrass applications should be applied after power raking and thatch removal. The best option is core aeration; this will help the thatch to decompose naturally. Aeration is also less damaging to the lawn.

When it is time for your first cutting, be sure not to cut too short. Mow to about 2 inches in the spring; raise your cutting height another half inch when summer arrives. Mow frequently so that no more than one third of the grass blade is removed at one time.

Is it possible to divide a lilac?

Many perennials are easy to dig and divide. However, digging and dividing shrubs is very difficult and not recommended. Lilacs produce shoots (suckers) around the periphery of the original plant. In early spring before the shoots begin to leaf out, it is possible to dig up some of the suckers and move them to another location.

When should I sow my carrot seeds?

Sow carrot seeds at a depth of a quarter to half an inch beginning in early April. For a continuous harvest, make additional plantings every 3-4 weeks. The last practical planting date is August 1. Space rows every 18-24 inches apart. Thin the seedlings within a few weeks of germination. After thinning, seedlings should be spaced 2-3 inches apart.

How long can I expect a cherry tree to survive?

Cherry trees are short-lived in Iowa, especially in poor sites. Sweet cherry trees will seldom survive longer than 10 years. Sour or tart cherry trees may survive 20-25 years. The most important element in cherry tree survival is choosing a site that is well-drained.

When can I plant cabbage seedlings in the garden?

Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower seeds can be planted in mid April. Harden or acclimate your seedlings in a protected location for a few days prior to planting outside. Initially, place the seedlings in a shady location and gradually expose the plants to longer periods of sunlight. Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower perform best in fertile, moist, well-drained soils. Space transplants 24 inches apart within the row. Rows should be 24-30 inches apart.

Dividing Perennials

Spring is an excellent time to divide asters, mums, hostas, daylilies, garden phlox and other perennials. Divide each plant clump into sections; each section should contain several shoots and a portion of the root mass. Replant immediately. Keep the newly divided perennials well watered through spring and summer; most divided perennials do not bloom well until their second growing season.

How do I control weeds in my garden?

Frequent cultivation and hand pulling of weeds will effectively control most annual weeds. Perennial weeds are usually more difficult to control. When cultivating, try not to till too deep, the roots of many vegetables, fruits, and flowers grow near the soil surface. Deep cultivation can cut off these roots and can also bring deeply buried weed seeds to the soil surface where they can germinate. Hoe or till around plants or between rows and pull weeds close to the plants. Cultivation and hand pulling of weeds needs to be done periodically throughout the growing season, small weeds are much easier to control than larger weeds.

Mulching is another good way to control weeds by preventing the germination of weed seeds. Mulching also preserves the soil moisture, soil erosion, soil crusting, and will help in preventing diseases. Grass clippings, shredded leaves and weed-free straw are excellent mulches for vegetable gardens and annual flower beds. Start applying several inches of these materials in early June after the soil has warmed up. Plant growth may be slowed if these are applied to cold soils in early spring. Grass clippings and shredded leaves will decompose rather quickly and should then be tilled into the soil in the fall. Wood chips and shredded bark are excellent for perennial flower beds and areas around trees and shrubs. Apply 2-4 inches of material around landscape plantings. This will usually decay slowly and should last several years however; you may need to add material periodically to maintain the desired depth.

When can I plant impatiens outdoors?

You can plant impatiens outdoors as soon as the danger of frost is past; plants that are purchased at a greenhouse or that are started indoors should be "hardened" or acclimated to outdoor conditions for several days prior to planting. Initially place the plants in a shady, protected location and gradually expose them to short periods of sunlight. Impatiens will perform the best in moist, well-drained soils and in partial shade. Sites that receive 2-4 hours of partial sunlight during the day or

morning sun and afternoon shade are ideal. Impatiens can be grown in heavy shade, but the plants will be taller and will bloom less profusely in heavily shaded locations.

Western Iowa No Till (W.I.N.) Field Day June 17

As input costs continue to rise and since most fields in western Iowa are highly erodible, it makes sense to practice more no till every year. The WIN planning committee has organized a field day to be held on June 17, north of Minden.

This field day will address several issues facing no till farmers including, cropping rotations, fertilizer placement, achieving seed to soil contact, moisture conservation and addressing the issues of saving fuel, labor and most of all reducing compaction and trips across your field. The main emphasis will be on managing corn on corn and the residue that is left behind. Several equipment manufacturers will be on hand with no till planters along with a ride and drive demonstration put on by Heartland Technology Solutions.

Several speakers include ISU field agronomist and ISU professors along with NRCS soil conservationists. After the field demonstration you will head into the Minden Community Building for a cattleman's steak sandwich lunch and keynote speakers Bill Northey and Elwynn Taylor.

The field day and lunch is FREE, we ask that you please pre-register by emailing csgorham@iastate.edu or calling the Harrison Co. Extension office at 1-888-644-2105. This will be a very informational and fun day; please make plans now to attend. The field day is brought to you by the NRCS, ISU Extension Service and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Harrison, Shelby and Pottawattamie Counties. For more information contact Kent at the Shelby County Extension office, 755-3104.

Barn Quilts, Are You Interested?

If you take a drive through Shelby County, you're likely to see old barns adorned with favorite quilt patterns. Shelby County has around 24 barn quilts scattered throughout the community.

What is a barn quilt? Imagine a large square, colorful, wooden and painted with a quilt pattern that is mounted on the barn. Most generally they are 8' x 8' but can be 4' x 4', 10' x 10' or 12' x 12'. Barn quilts are currently represented in 16 states and embellish more than 900 barns. If you are interested in displaying one of these unique barn quilts on your own barn, please contact the Extension Office at 755-3104. You can be a part of preserving the barns of Shelby County and boosting agritourism through the art, history and nostalgia of barn quilts.

Another wonderful organization, The Iowa Barn Foundation (www.iowabarnfoundation.org) works to preserve Iowa's rural buildings and provides barn restoration matching grants to help property owners restore their old barns. The group will then showcase these restored barns during various tours, including an All-State Barn Tour each year. Fewer than 60,000 barns remain of more than 200,000 originally built in Iowa. You can be a part of efforts to save and document Iowa's remaining barns for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Links:

Current Soil Temperatures = <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/NPKnowledge/>

Crop Watch Blog = <http://www.iowafarmertoday.com/blog/>

Master Gardener Homepage = <http://www.mastergardener.iastate.edu/>