



# Ag & Hort Update

## Shelby County Extension

906 6<sup>th</sup> St, Harlan, IA 51537

Phone: (712) 755-3104

Fax: (712) 755-7112

Email: [xshelby@iastate.edu](mailto:xshelby@iastate.edu)

Online: [www.extension.iastate.edu/Shelby](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Shelby)

Quarterly/March 2017

### Upcoming Events:

- **March 8th**-Certified Handlers CIC at Shelby County Extension
- **March 18th**- Cass County Annual Spring Garden Seminar
- **March 23<sup>rd</sup>**-Farmers Coffee at Shelby County Extension Office
- **March 23<sup>rd</sup>**- 4-H Pancake/Silent Auction
- **April 1st**- County Fair Swine Weigh-in
- **May 6th**-County Fair Sheep/Goat weigh-in
- **May 15<sup>th</sup>** – Livestock ID deadline

The spring warmup has begun! As our thoughts turn to working in the fields and gardens. I hope you all have a Safe and Successful Spring!

-Amanda Oloff, Associated Extension Educator

### Ask the ISU Garden Expert

*Get answers to all your yard and garden questions at [www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu). For specific questions, call the Hortline at (515) 294-3108, or email [hortline@iastate.edu](mailto:hortline@iastate.edu), Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.*

### Ask the ISU Garden Expert

#### When should I remove the mulch on my strawberry bed?

To reduce the chances of crop damage from a late frost or freeze, leave

the mulch on as long as possible. Removing the straw in March may encourage the plants to bloom before the danger of frost is past. Temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit or lower may severely damage or destroy open flowers. Since the first flowers produce the largest berries, a late spring frost or freeze can drastically reduce yields.

To determine when to remove the mulch, periodically examine the strawberry plants in spring. Remove the straw from the strawberry planting when approximately 25 percent of the plants are producing new growth. New growth will be white or yellow in color. (If possible, the winter mulch on strawberries should remain until mid-April in central Iowa.) When removing the mulch, rake the material to the aisles between rows. If there is a threat of a frost or freeze later in spring during bloom, lightly rake the straw over the strawberry plants.

For more information on Protecting Plants from Late-Spring Freezes, go to:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/article/yard-and-garden-protecting-plants-late-spring-freezes>



### **When should I prune my spring-flowering deciduous shrubs?**

Spring-flowering shrubs, such as lilac and forsythia, bloom in spring on the growth of the previous season. The plant's health or condition determines the best time to prune spring-flowering shrubs.



Neglected, overgrown spring-flowering shrubs often require extensive pruning to rejuvenate or renew the plants. The best time to rejuvenate large, overgrown shrubs is late winter or early spring, either March or early April. Heavy pruning in late winter or early spring will reduce or eliminate the flower display for two or three years. However, rejuvenation pruning will restore the health of the shrubs.

The best time to prune healthy, well-maintained spring-flowering shrubs is immediately after flowering. Healthy, well-maintained shrubs should require only light to moderate pruning. Pruning immediately after flowering allows gardeners to enjoy the spring flower display and provides adequate time for the shrubs to initiate new flower buds for next season.

### ***When should I prune summer-flowering deciduous shrubs?***

Summer-flowering shrubs, such as potentilla, Japanese spirea and panicle hydrangea bloom in summer on the current year's growth. Prune summer-flowering shrubs in late winter or early spring. The pruned shrubs will bloom in summer on the current season's growth.

For more information on spring garden prep, go to: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/node/34320>

### **Cass County Master Gardeners Spring Garden Seminar**

Think Spring! The Cass County Master Gardeners are excited to present their annual Spring Garden Seminar, on Saturday, March 18 at the Atlantic High School. Registration begins at 8:30 AM, with the program beginning at 9 AM. Featured keynote speaker for the day is Kelly Norris- Director of Horticulture at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden. 10 workshop topics are lined up for the day, with participants able to attend three breakout sessions of their choice. The day will also feature rolls and coffee to start the morning, a sandwich luncheon, garden vendor show and a great opportunity to network with old friends and new as we prepare for the 2017 gardening season!

The seminar is open to all interested gardeners no matter the level of experience! Participants are not required to have completed Master Gardener training to attend, but Master Gardeners who attend the full day will be given 5 credit hours toward their continuing education requirements. The morning will kick off with Norris sharing tips for adding "Plants with Style!" to the home garden. After lunch, he will also provide the second keynote presentation on "Native Plants in the American Garden"- highlighting plants and plans to incorporate natives beautifully into the landscape. Throughout the day, attendees will have the opportunity to attend 3 different breakout workshops on topics including succulents, rock gardens, mini hostas, iris, herbs, trees and more! Several of the workshop sessions are hands-on, where participants will make and take an item to enjoy at home.

The cost for this day of fun and learning is \$35, including all meals and keynote materials. Some hands-on workshops may have an additional materials fee, which is payable on the day of the seminar. A full list of all breakout sessions, a schedule for the day and printable registration form are all available online at [www.extension.iastate.edu/cass](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/cass). The early registration deadline is Friday March 10; registrations must be postmarked or dropped at the Cass County Extension Office by this date to be eligible for door prizes. In addition, organizers encourage attendees to register early for best selection of breakout sessions, as the sessions fill on a first-come basis. Registrations are also welcome after this date, and up to the day of the

Garden Seminar, including walk-in registrations at the door.

For more information on the Spring Garden Seminar or the Cass County Master Gardener Program, call the Cass County Extension Office at 712-243-1132, email [keolson@iastate.edu](mailto:keolson@iastate.edu), or stop by the Extension Office at 805 W. 10<sup>th</sup> St in Atlantic.

**Farmer's Coffee**-Come join us for a Farmer's Coffee on **Thursday, March 23rd at 9:30am**. "Securing Your Farm Property: Reducing Your Risk of Theft & Vandalism" at the Extension Office in Harlan. This free event features a panel discussion with brief comments by our guest experts and opportunity for questions from those attending. Our panel includes Shawn Shouse, ISU extension & Outreach Ag Engineering Specialist; Shelby County Sheriff Neil Gross; and Jason Erickson, security systems expert from ThinkSpaceIT. Sponsorship for the event is provided by United Bank of Iowa. No reservations are needed. For more information, please contact the Extension Office at (712) 755-3104 or email [oloff@iastate.edu](mailto:oloff@iastate.edu).



### Recent Warm-Up Alfalfa Dormancy

The following was compiled by, Brian Lang, Extension Field Agronomist in NE Iowa. An [article](#) from Dan Undersander, Forage Specialist, University of Wisconsin, mostly discussing alfalfa fall dormancy, but including the following statement. "During an untimely winter warm-spell, de-hardening can threaten alfalfa. The threat is when temperatures are more than 60 degrees Fahrenheit (F) and the soil temperature at 2 to 4 inches is more than 40 degrees F." Questions then arise as to how many days at +60F air temp and +40F soil temp before dormancy breaks. There are many variables to this. Assuming we have all selected for varieties with a good winter survival rating (WS) for our location, the next largest factor is what Fall Dormancy rating (FD) does your alfalfa variety have. In general (and I really

mean in general), it probably takes about 5 consecutive days of +60F air temp and +40F soil temp to start breaking dormancy of FD2 varieties, but only about 2 consecutive days of +60F air temp and +40F soil temp to start breaking dormancy of FD5 varieties. Along with this we have to consider many other field management variables such as soil fertility, varietal disease resistances, pest management, drainage, north slope vs. south slope, last year's cutting schedule intensity (how much stress was put on the stand), was there a late fall cut or not, and if cut late was there fall stubble left or not.

### Lower Costs Bring Cautious Optimism in 2017

The cost of corn and soybean production in Iowa is expected to fall this year, according to a new study done by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. The cost of corn production is expected to drop by 12 percent and soybean production will dip by 9 percent. While dips in production costs are encouraging, the large drop is attributed more to math than it is to lower input prices.

"The study shows the driver behind these falling costs is the decline in both rent and machinery costs," said Alejandro Plastina, assistant professor and extension economist with Iowa State University. "Both of those variables are affected by a one-time change in methodology."

In May 2016, Ag Decision Maker published an article on [farm machinery efficiency](#). The new information on increasingly efficient machinery was incorporated into the formula used to calculate input costs.

"Despite the projected increase in fuel prices, the total machinery costs ended up being lower than what we reported last year because of an improvement in the efficiency of those machines," said Plastina. "There has also been a \$30-35 gap between the cash rent projected for the estimated costs of production and the cash rents reported in our [annual cash rent survey](#) since January 2014. The 2017 production cost estimates now use cash rent totals that are expected to be within \$8 of the reported averages in the 2017 cash rent survey."

As for the results, the cost per bushel for mid-range yield corn is projected at \$4.08 for corn following corn and \$3.51 for corn following soybeans. Costs per bushel of soybeans are \$9.66 for the herbicide tolerant variety and \$9.60 for non-herbicide tolerant beans.

"A decline in the price of fertilizer and lime prices, machinery costs and land rents are expected to more than offset increases in herbicide costs," said Plastina. These lower costs of production, when combined with a well-executed marketing plan, will likely result in small

but positive profit margins in certain rented acres of both corn and soybeans with cash rents similar to the ones used in the report, as well as owned land with reasonable fixed costs associated with ownership factors. Budgets are available for corn following soybeans, corn following corn, and soybeans following corn. They are also available for low-till, strip till, hay, oats and pasture acres.

"If current price projections are realized with the cost structure we are using, then there should be some positive margins this year," Plastina said. Input costs and yields vary between operations across the state. [Decision Tool](#) spreadsheets are available to aid in individual analysis of an operation's own cost of production.

Further details about the report is available in the February issue of [Ag Decision Maker](#). The full report, titled "[Estimated Costs of Crop Production in Iowa – 2017](#)" (FM 1712), can be accessed through the Extension Store.

For more information on Lower Cost, go to: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/article/lower-costs-bring-cautious-optimism-2017>

### **Proper Soil Sampling Can Lead to Better Yields and Profits**

The most important piece in understanding the fertility makeup of a field is collecting soil samples. Without correctly sampled soil, farmers cannot make informed decisions on fertilizer, manure nutrients and limestone applications in those fields.

When not correctly sampled, the soil samples may not represent the fertility levels and farmers run the risk of either over or under treating their fields, which can cause a reduction in crop yield and profits, and increased chances of negative impacts on water quality when excess phosphorus is applied.

To explain how to take good soil samples, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has released a new publication, "[Take a Good Soil Sample to Help Make Good Fertilization Decisions](#)" (CROP 3108). The publication is written by Antonio Mallarino and John Sawyer, professors and extension specialists in soil fertility and nutrient management at Iowa State University.

The publication focuses on the three most important areas for taking a good sample for phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and pH and lime requirement: sample depth, the number of cores for each composite sample taken to fully represent a specific field area and the criteria for collecting composite samples from a field.

"Soil testing is not perfect but it is very important and useful for nutrient management," said Mallarino. "Sampling provides the base for everything that can be done up to the nutrient application rate. If the sample doesn't represent that field or field area, the fertilization decisions will be wrong. Farmers and consultants need to dedicate time to take a good soil sample because that's the foundation for any treatment recommendations."



The publication describes how to use soil survey maps and maps of other field characteristics, as well as different possible sampling approaches to consider the spatial variation of soil tests. The publication also describes how to use soil survey maps and maps of other field characteristics

using precision agriculture technologies to improve the delineation of field areas to sample.

"Using maps can be of help, if they are used correctly," Mallarino said. "We also address the issue of grid sampling and how to use those maps and other precision ag techniques to ultimately take a better sample."

In addition, there is discussion of the importance of proper soil sampling depth and number of soil cores to collect per sample.

For more information on soil sampling, go to: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/article/proper-soil-sampling-can-lead-better-yields-and-profits>

### **DID YOU KNOW??**

Ag and Hort News is also available online!! Each month's newsletter is posted online, and past issues are archived on our county homepage: [www.extension.iastate.edu/shelby](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/shelby). Best of all- online newsletters contain active links to get you to websites and publications mentioned in the articles!

..and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC

Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.