

# Houston County Winter Agriculture Newsletter

Winter 2014

January 23, 2014



## Dates of Interest

### February 6, 2014

Turf Grass Conference  
Overton Research Center

### February 14, 2014

Forest Pest Seminar, Lufkin

### February 20, 2014

Vegetable Workshop,  
Houston County Ext Office

### February 21, 2014

East Texas Pasture Management  
Overton, Tx

### February 25, 2014

East Tx Fruit & Vegetable Conf  
Nacogdoches, Tx



## New Year's Pasture Resolutions

by David Annis, Noble Foundation

A new year! Each January we make New Year's resolutions with the best of intentions. Of course, we all promise to eat better and exercise more, but have you ever given any thought to making resolutions about your pastures? Let's plan now to practice better pasture management this year. Assuming a good stand of introduced forage (such as

bermudagrass), most

of our management decisions for pasture forage production revolve around fertilizer, weed control and weather.

Most of us would like to spend the smallest amount of money on our pastures and get the greatest return on our investment. Therefore, let me tell you about a great, money saving secret for pasture fertilization: soil test and fertilize your

pastures according to the soil test recommendations. Rank your pastures according to productivity, and spend your fertilizer dollars on the highest yielding pastures first. For those of you who apply a 17-17-17 or complete fertilizer each year without having a current soil test, you may be spending way too much. Why purchase nutrients if

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## Gardening Tips for Jan & Feb

Now is the perfect time to apply dormant/horticultural oil if you have had any insect problems in the previous year, especially scale problems. Look on your camellia's and other

woody shrubs and trees to access the needs. Dormant oil is a great asset for those of us who do not want to apply strong chemicals later in the year. Almost any ornamental can be

susceptible, but many evergreens and fruit trees can be prime targets. Horticultural oils in combination with horticultural soaps later in the season can gain control

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your soil is capable of supplying the necessary nutrients to the plants? Soil tests usually run around \$10 to \$15, not counting your time and effort.

As an example, if your soil analysis shows adequate potassium and you've been applying a complete fertilizer all these years, you will save money by not applying this nutrient. That money



the yield goal that you write down, you most likely will not achieve your goal no matter how much

fertilizer or rain you receive. I also encourage you to use either the Noble Foundation's soil testing service or a university lab for your results and recommendations.

Weed control in late January and early February is another often overlooked decision point. If you have a problem with thistles in your pastures, consider an application of about 1 quart per acre of 2,4-D amine formulation while the thistles are still in the rosette stage. When the thistles are in the rosette stage, they can be easily and inexpensively controlled with 2,4-D. The rosette stage is the vegetative stage of the thistle before it "bolts" or puts up a stem and seed head in the spring. Once the thistles start to bolt, it's all over.

Weather is the most consistently uncertain factor we have in agriculture. We can only say for certain that it will be cold in winter and hot during the summer.

Most of us in agriculture are optimists - we believe that we will have an average year with average rainfall. Regardless, you won't get the forage production you expect if you don't have the fertilizer on your pasture when the rain arrives. In summary, if you haven't had a soil test on a pasture in the past three years, take one. If you have thistles, control them in the very early spring. Finally, have fertilizer on the pasture before the rains come.

By David Annis  
Noble Foundation



spent on other projects around the ranch or farm.

One of the important parts of the soil test is your yield goal. If you provide a soils consultant with a realistic yield goal for your pastures, they can better determine how much fertilizer to recommend. You'll still need Mother Nature to help you out with timely rain and seasonable temperatures, but you will have done



#### NOTE From Jo:

**Always read the label on any chemical!** If you decide that spraying herbicides is the best method for you, please make sure you read and follow the label. Some herbicides that kill thistle will also kill Bahia grass and any legumes you want to plant or have planted.

## Unpredictable Weather

“Udderly” unpredictable weather has kept Texas cattle producers busy trying to keep herds healthy. Rainfall paired with “yo-yo” high and low temperatures have made cattle more susceptible to disease. With increased risk, producers need to keep an eye out for problems.

A wet animal during cold temperatures needs greater at-

tention than it normally would. Respiratory problems are the most common ailments for animals in this type of weather. Symptoms are coughing and wheezing, along with a runny nose and eyes. You have to be a great observer of the animal. With all these changes you need to pay attention because they have a greater opportunity to

get sick.

As soon as symptoms are spotted, do something about it so the animal doesn't get any sicker.

If problems develop, contact your veterinarian.



## Gardening Tips for Jan & Feb continued.....

over these pests.

The difference between dormant oil and horticultural oil: In prior years, the term dormant oil referred to very heavy oils that were not safe to apply during any active plant growth because it would damage the plant. They had to be applied during the dormant season. Now almost all pest control oils sold will be termed as horticultural oils, regardless of the season of recommended application. Be sure to consult the directions for each oil product you purchase, because many of them have temperature specific application times—i.e., not below 50 degrees, and just prior to 3 to 4 days of freezing temps, just to give a couple of examples. The timing can have a huge effect on the performance of your application, so be sure to read the directions. Here is a publication that presents some information on

this topic: <https://insects.tamu.edu/extension/publications/epubs/e-419.cfm>

### **More tips for Jan/Feb:**

Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and if then only very lightly, the first year. When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially with bare-rooted plants. The medium to small sized (4 to 6 feet) usually become established faster and will become effective in the landscape more quickly than the large sizes.

Now is an excellent time to select and plant container-grown roses to fill in bare spots in your rose garden. Select from the lovely Earth-Kind roses for best performance and easiest care. <http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/earthkindroses/cultivars/> Now is also the time to break the soil. Please take the

time to get your soil tested, if you have not done so within the last 3 to 5 years. This will allow you have the most economic fertilization program possible, providing exactly what your soil needs to make the most of your planting. February is a great month for starting your asparagus. Here's how: [http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/organic/files/2011/03/E-03\\_asparagus.pdf](http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/organic/files/2011/03/E-03_asparagus.pdf) Also for beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Swiss chard, collards (and kale), kohlrabi, lettuce, onion seeds or slips (those slips can go in at the end of January even), English peas, Irish potatoes, radishes, spinach, and turnips.

Dig and divide summer and fall flowering perennials just before they initiate their spring growth. Prune your roses (if they need to be pruned—Earth-Kind roses do not), in early February.

# Upcoming Events around East Texas

## 2014 Annual East Texas Turfgrass Conference

**Thursday, February 6**

Texas A&M AgriLife  
Research & Extension Center  
Overton, Texas  
Registration Starts at 8:00 a.m.

Reg fee: \$30.00/person @ the  
door

Checks payable to:  
District 5 TCAAA

**Approved For 5.0 TDA Pesti-  
cide CEU's**

## Forest Pest Seminar

February 14, 2014

Angelina County Extension Office  
2201 S. Medford Dr.  
Lufkin, Texas 75901

Cost is \$50 (meal and materials  
included)

Please RSVP by Tues, Feb 4 at  
936.634.6414 x100

5 CEU's for TDA Private Ap-  
plicator Holders  
5 SAF Cat-1 CFEs  
and 5 Pro Logger Credits

## East Texas Fruit & Vege- table Seminar

**February 25**

### Nacogdoches County Exposi- tion and Civic Center

**Cost is \$30** Topics will include  
pesticide and herbicide updates,  
crop-specific pest problems,  
marketing, and much more.  
Contact the Nacogdoches Exten-  
sion office at 936-560-7711 for  
more information

## Those Dad-Gum Gophers.....

Pocket gophers are burrowing rodents which live almost entirely underground.

Gophers are well adapted to their underground existence, with stout forelegs and strong curved claws for digging.

They have prominent, yellow incisor teeth and large, fur-lined external cheek pouches in which food is carried.

Pocket gophers have poor eyesight, but their other senses are acute. Their tails are sensitive and are used as feelers when the animals travel backward in their burrows.

Pocket gophers are rarely seen because they spend most of their lives in underground tun-

nel systems. Their presence in an area is indicated by the characteristic mounds they create. Pocket gophers should not be confused with moles, which are insectivorous and sometimes construct tunnels and mounds resembling those made by pocket gophers. Gophers are solitary animals except during the mating season and when young are being cared for. Otherwise, there is only one gopher in each tunnel system. Pocket gophers dig extensive tunnels or runways that consist of a main tunnel with several short lateral tunnels. A single gopher may have a burrow

system that extends as much as 800 feet, covers an acre of ground, and ranges from a few inches to several feet deep. Runways vary from 2 to 5 inches in diameter depending on the gopher species. These runways serve as homes, storehouses and routes for underground searches for food. The shallow runways, 4 to 15 inches below the surface, are used primarily to search for food. The gopher pushes soil from the burrows to the surface with its forefeet and chest, forming a characteristic horseshoe shaped mound ap-





## Gophers Continued....

proximately 8 to 24 inches in diameter and 6 inches high. The mounds are at the ends of short, lateral tunnels which branch off the main runway. The surface opening used to expel dirt from the burrow, is plugged by pushing dirt into it. This results in a depression on one side of the mound. The pocket gopher's diet mainly consists of fleshy roots of various plants, including trees. Gophers normally eat tubers such as potatoes and peanuts. They also eat green tops and seeds that can be pulled down into their burrows.

Under natural conditions, gophers are beneficial to the soil. It is estimated that in a year, one gopher transports 2½ tons of soil to the ground surface. By bringing subsoil to the surface where it weathers more quickly, gophers contribute to the soil building process.

The loosened soil makes the ground more fertile. Air and water can easily pass through porous soil to plant roots. Gophers can cause serious damage, when they establish tunnel systems in cultivated

farming areas, rangelands, orchards, tree farms and lawns. When there are many gophers they can damage field and pasture crops by eating the crops and by forming mounds which interfere with farm machinery. Gophers reduce the amount of livestock forage available on rangeland by harvesting and burying vegetation. They gnaw or clip the roots of trees, which may kill seedlings or small trees and reduce the vigor of large trees. Pocket gophers in a lawn, garden or flower bed can destroy plants and produce unsightly mounds. Gophers gnaw through underground plastic water pipes and electrical and communication cables and interfere with irrigation dikes. A tunnel system in a dam can cause it to erode and wash out. Tunnels under paved highways may cause the pavement to sink. Control operations are recommended during the spring and fall when pocket gophers are most active near the surface. Their activity is usually indicated by the presence of fresh mounds of dirt. Control operations in the fall interfere the least with growing crops.

Methods of control include mechanical and chemical means.

In small areas such as yards or gardens, or where there are only a few pocket gophers, trapping is usually satisfactory. Special traps have been designed to capture gophers. Several different types are available at hardware or farm and ranch supply stores.

Effective control materials for gophers are treated grain and zinc phosphide pellets.

Toxic baits can be administered by the hand probe method or with a burrow builder.

These methods are most efficient for large or heavily infested areas where trapping is not practical. Because the toxic grain is placed underground, it is relatively safe when used around other wildlife, pets and livestock. However, you should always carefully read and follow pesticide label instructions. Some of these products are classified as "restricted use" and require a certified pesticide applicators license.

*Jo Smith*

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