

Boulder County Small Acreage Management Newsletter



Fall 2017

<http://boulder.extension.colostate.edu/natural-resources/>

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From the SAM Coordinator

Fall weather is upon us and it's a good time to think about reseeding. The first step is to manage your weeds so they don't outcompete your grass. Seeding in the fall is often more reliable than trying to seed in the spring. Seeding in the fall also allows the seeds to go through a cold cycle that can break seed dormancy. Dormancy can be more of an issue with native grass seeds more than introduced species.

There are some weeds that fall is a good time to manage them.

Thank you,
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SAM Newsletters Online

View previous newsletters via the SAM link above.

SAM Email Listserv

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time and are not subscribed to the Small Acreage listserv, you may request subscription by contacting the Small Acreage Coordinator sbokan@bouldercounty.org. This quarterly e-newsletter and other timely info will be distributed via this email listserv.

Subscribers may use the listserv also as a SAM info gathering mechanism. For example, you may inquire about who is available in the area supply hay, to perform swathing/baling, etc. The listserv is not a marketplace, however. Because it is hosted on the CSU server, **NO COMMERCIAL EMAILS ARE ALLOWED. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO SELL ANYTHING VIA THE LISTSERV – THANKS.** Use the newsletter ad section for these purposes.



*Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Boulder County Cooperating.
Extension Programs are available to all without discrimination.*

Weather Outlook

The NOAA forecasts for the next 30 and 90 days are showing that the state might be slightly above normal in temperature and about average to slightly above in precipitation.

http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/seasonal.php?lead=1

According to “The Old Farmer’s 2017 Almanac”, the central high plains should be mild and snowy this winter.

<https://www.almanac.com/content/winter-weather-forecast-2017-2018>



Coming events and workshops

The Soil Revolution: Digging Deeper, a soil health conference will be held in Longmont on December 14, 2017. This is the second conference following the conference held earlier this year. The conference will host several featured speakers and panels of producers who are implementing soil health practices in their operations. Early registration ends December 8, 2017. Website www.soilrev.org



The National Western Stock Show will take place January 6 - 21, 2018 at the Stock Show Complex in Denver. In addition to all the rodeos, events and livestock judging, the Stock Show is a great place to connect with livestock producers. If you are thinking about getting some livestock, you can talk to producers and attend seminars to learn more.

<http://www.nationalwestern.com/>



The Colorado Farm Show will occur January 23 – 25, 2018 at Island Grove Park in Greeley. There are 4 buildings of equipment and supplies at the show. The Farm Show also has 3 days of workshops ranging from marketing to climate to beef quality and fitting a saddle to your horse.

<http://www.coloradofarmshow.com/>

I will be planning other workshops this fall and winter and will advertise them in future newsletters. I hope that you will take advantage of the events.

Seedling Tree Sale

By Elizabeth Northrup, Longmont and Boulder Valley Conservation Districts



The Longmont and Boulder Valley Conservation Districts are offering seedling trees for windbreaks, snow fences, erosion control, and wildlife habitat. The program is not meant to compete with local nurseries, but was established to provide low cost seedlings to landowners for conservation practices. The Colorado State Forest Service Nursery grows the plants at their facility in Fort Collins and sets the rules for the sale of the plants.

The order form for the seedling tree program is available on our website at www.longmontcd.org under the Programs tab, or you can contact the Conservation District office at (720) 378-5521 to request a paper order form. Payment in the form of cash or check must accompany the order form to reserve your trees. We will be taking orders until March 29, 2018. You will be able to pick up your seedlings at the Exhibit Building on the Boulder County Fairgrounds on Friday, April 13, 2018 from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm or on Saturday, April 14, 2018 from 8:00 am to 11:00 am.

The available seedlings are sold in a variety of sizes and containers. The bare root seedlings are sold in lots of 25 for \$30.00. The large tube species are sold in lots of 30 for \$90.00. These species include Colorado Blue Spruce, Ponderosa Pine, and Douglas Fir amongst many others. Extra-large potted trees are sold individually at a cost of \$12.00 each.

Quantities are limited on most species, so we strongly encourage you to check the CSU Nursery's inventory web page before placing your order to ensure your desired seedlings are in stock. The inventory webpage address is: <http://csfs.colostate.edu/seedling-tree-nursery/seedling-nursery-inventory/>. The Conservation Districts were able to secure select popular species before they sold out. These are still available for purchase through the Districts, even if they are listed as sold out online. You can call the Conservation District Office at (720) 378-5521 before ordering to see if your choice of seedling is available. Thank you for supporting our Tree Seedling Program. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Fall Small Acreage Projects



Fall is a great time to get those odd jobs done around your property.

- Clean up around your buildings
- Clean your gutters, the weeds around the outside of your buildings (fire prevention)
- Organize your tools, spare parts, etc.
- In your feed storage area, clean up spilled grain and other feed that will attract rodents
- Rodent proof your house and those areas in the barn that you can.
- Repair or add fence
- Reseed areas that need it

- Start planning your weed management and grazing management for 2018.
- Evaluate your pastures to determine how well your grazing management plan worked in 2017. Do you have 4" of stubble or have you found new weed infestations?
- Maintain your equipment
- Fall is also a great time to do some reseeding in those bare areas.



Pollinator habitat on small acreages, farms and ranches

Here are a few steps that landowners can take to improve pollinator habitat on their property. Keep variety and diversity in your fields. A plant monoculture is not healthy habitat for pollinators, soil organisms or plants. For example, a mix of grasses and legumes (i.e. alfalfa, clover) makes a better pasture than a pasture of only smooth brome. A diversity of plants will also provide forage throughout the growing season.

Leave native plants in pastures and fields. When spraying for invasive weeds, spot spray

instead of spraying the whole field. Some native plants may be poisonous to livestock so know what plants you have and when they might be the most poisonous or tempting and either fence them off or graze at a different time of year.

Areas of untilled bare soil can be nesting sites for native ground nesting bees. Not every single inch of a property needs to be covered with desired vegetation.

When possible, leave dead trees or other old wood on the property to provide nesting locations for pollinators to build nests.

Obviously, if a tree is a safety hazard, remove it but you might want to leave some larger branches on the property for nesting sites.

Take waste or unused areas and plant native flowering plants to provide additional forage for pollinators. Consider what pollinator species you would like to attract and plant species of plants that provide forage, egg laying or larval food possibilities for the pollinators.

Allow plants in your vegetable garden to go to flower (i.e. lettuce, radish, etc.) before removing them when they are done producing.

For the health of your forage plants, soil health as well as pollinator health, manage your grazing and haying. Never cut or mow your forage plants below 4". This will maintain forage plant and soil health. If you can, leave other areas higher than 4", these areas will provide habitat for pollinators.



Time your mowing or grazing to wait until native flowers have finished blooming. This is not always possible if you are haying.

Practice IPM, Integrated Pest Management, when managing weeds or undesirable plants. Weeds will take advantage of disturbance (construction, tillage) to get established. IPM consists of these steps: Preventative (purchase seed with minimal weed seed in it, don't bring home weed seeds on your equipment), Cultural (keeping desired vegetation healthy by not over grazing/mowing, after disturbing an area plant either desired seed or a cover crop to compete with weeds), Biological (insects or livestock to help manage the weeds), Chemical ("organic" and "synthetic" herbicides). When using an herbicide, read and follow the label to minimize the impact to pollinators (time your spraying to when the pollinators are not out, spray when plants are not blooming, spot spray). Monitor your property for undesirable vegetation and deal with it when it is a small population.



Fall Wildlife Management

As temperatures drop, wildlife may decide to use your home as their winter home. Most of us do not want to share our home with wildlife so we need to make sure they can't get in. Exclusion is the best way to prevent conflicts with wildlife. Repellants are of limited use and must be reapplied frequently.

Rodents, especially mice will find their way into your house through any opening larger than ¼". Check around your foundation for cracks or other openings that are ¼" or larger. You can stuff steel wool into these openings to keep the mice from entering. You can hold the steel wool in place with some of the spray in insulation.

You can't just use the insulation as the mice will just eat through it. Check under sinks and the foundation for areas where pipes and conduit enter the house or various house floors. Mice can easily climb pipes and go from your crawl space to your upstairs bathroom or kitchen. In the kitchen, store foods in mice proof containers.

Other wildlife such as squirrels and raccoons will look for damaged areas around your home and other buildings. Check for damaged shingles, siding or vents that they can use to make their way into your home. Repair these areas so that the animals cannot break through these areas and enter your attic. Squirrels mate over the winter and will have their first set of young in January and February so you don't want them to be doing this in your home. If you do get squirrels in the attic with young, it's best to wait until the young are weaned and have left the area to repair the opening.

Rabbits and rats will burrow under your deck, chicken coop or shed. To prevent them from doing this you will need to install hardware cloth from the bottom of the structure and bury it at least 12" underground so that they cannot burrow under the building.

Don't attract wildlife by leaving spent bird feed or chicken feed on the ground, clean up areas frequently. Keep feed grains, chicken feed and bird feed stored in rodent proof containers in the garage or barn to prevent rodents from accessing the feed.

Chickens 101

By Deniece Hopkins, former SAM Volunteer

Chickens can be wonderful pets, incredibly entertaining and they can even provide your breakfast. However, some common concerns people have about raising chickens include being smelly, noisy and attracting predators. Smelly? Not necessarily. Noisy? They are much

quieter than a barking dog. Attracting predators? Well those predators are already here. With proper and responsible management most of the concerns raised can be avoided and anyone can raise chickens. However, chickens aren't appropriate for everybody. Not everybody is going to want them or be able to care for them. In Boulder County, 50 chickens are the equivalent of one Animal Unit (AUM).



Egg production –So how many chickens do you need to feed your family? First, chickens are flock animals so don't ever get only one chicken. Chickens can lay 1 egg a day once they reach adulthood at approximately 18-22 weeks old. Their egg cycle is approximately 25 hours. They are born with approximately 1000 ovum, meaning that they have the potential of laying only about 1000 eggs in their lifetime. As they get older they also decrease in productivity. So you can expect good production from a chicken for only about 2 to 2.5 years. They will lay for longer but a lot fewer eggs making them less economical to keep because their food ration is still the same.

Some chickens are bred to be high producing layers like the Leghorn, and the Red and Black Star breeds and you will get nearly an egg a day from them. Some of the more traditional dual-purpose breeds like the Orpingtons lay fewer, 3-5 eggs a week on average. If you have an average mixed breed flock, plan on a 75% lay

rate everyday; so if you want 4 eggs a day you should have approximately 6 laying chickens.

Just like us, chickens do not produce well when they are too hot or too cold. They can also slow down or completely stop production in the winter because they require about 14 hours of light a day. Some people supplement their light by adding a small light to their coop that comes on early in the morning to extend their day. Others choose to let their chickens have their natural rest over the winter. Other things can affect their rate of lay such as stress, molting, health, age, weather, lack of water, etc.

Note that you do not need a rooster for the chickens to lay eggs. Chickens will lay just fine without a rooster. The only difference is that without a rooster, the egg is not fertilized and will not hatch.

Space - How much space a chicken requires depends on the breed of chicken you choose; heavy breeds like Orpingtons, Rocks, Australorps, and Jersey Giants require 4 sq ft. of coop space per bird while regular size breeds like Leghorns, Red Stars or Araucanas require only about 3 sq ft per bird and Bantam breeds only require 2 sq. ft.

The rule of thumb for run space (the fenced area that chickens can play in) should be about 10 sq feet per bird. This gives them room to dust bathe, play and stretch their wings a bit. The more they are out in the run the less they are inside soiling their coop so it's a good idea to have a nice run for them to spend their day in.

You might think you can get away with a smaller area per bird, but that's when trouble starts. Cramped chickens are not happy chickens. If chickens are overcrowded in a small space they start picking at each other causing bleeding and possibly even death. The coop will start to smell bad, as litter management is difficult if there are too many birds in a small space.

Safety - Protecting your chickens from harm is an important responsibility. Coops should be good solid predator-safe houses. They need to be safe from dogs, foxes, snakes, skunks and coyotes. Many people have lost most of their flock due to flimsily built coops and runs. Chickens will naturally return to the roost at dusk. So all you need to do is shut and lock the door after the sun goes down. It's important that you lock them safely in their coops at dusk. No exceptions here, it only takes leaving the door open once to lose your entire flock.

The runs also need to be secure and need to be safe from flying and climbing predators such as hawks and owls. The modern day chicken wire has become too flimsy to keep out most predators. I'd suggest that you use welded wire and bury about a foot of wire into the ground or fold it out about a foot along the ground around the run to deter digging predators.

Feed - A good quality feed is critical for chickens. Chicks need a different feed than laying chickens. Baby chicks need to be eating starter feed until about 18 weeks of age. This feed is low in calcium which they don't currently need and feeding them the layer ration will give them too much calcium that could endanger their kidneys.

Laying chickens need a good quality layer ration; this will give them the added necessary nutrients needed for egg production. Even with the added nutrients they will probably need additional calcium for shell strength. Most people feed crushed oyster shells in a separate feeder so they can eat what they need when they need it

Water is a critical part of chicken feeding. It's important that they always have plenty of clean fresh water available. Never let them run out as it could take a week or more to recover after only a very short time without water. Laying

eggs uses a lot of water, letting a chicken run out of water can easily and quickly lead to death.

Scratch is the chicken equivalent of candy to humans. Feeding just scratch grains is not a sufficient source of nutrients for chickens. It's also not good to feed too much scratch in the summer as it may cause them to overheat. Chickens love scratch and if you need to move them around, just throw a little scratch wherever you want them to go.

Chickens love treats, they eat a lot of the leftovers and scraps from the kitchen and they LOVE green grass. Letting them out to play in the backyard or pasture is good for them and hugely entertaining to watch. If free ranging is not possible giving them handfuls of green grass will do.



Litter management - With proper management, you shouldn't have to change the litter more than just a few times a year. Many people use pine shavings; they absorb the moisture and have the fresh pine smell. The chickens keep the litter fluffed up and you can aid in that by throwing a handful of scratch in the litter and they'll search for seeds. Pine shavings also work well in the nesting boxes and you get much cleaner eggs from using shavings in the nesting boxes.

Other people like to use straw. The problem with straw is it gets smashed down and with the chicken droppings adding to it constantly you

end up with something close to adobe. It's very hard to clean up once it gets to this state.

With shavings you just put down about 4" or so, and as they soil the bedding, just mix it up and add a few inches of fresh shavings. This is actually a very beneficial way of handling the litter. It's called the Deep Litter Method and I'd recommend you research it more as you decide how you want to handle the litter issue.

Noise- Chickens are not very noisy. They do bawk and squawk when they lay an egg, and I don't blame them. But that's about all you hear out of them. They are much quieter than barking dogs for sure and because they don't lay at night, they make no noise after dark. There are however, some breeds that are noisier than others or the rare chicken who just can't stop talking but those are exception rather than the rule. Roosters, of course, like to crow, whenever it is light out. They are very proud of being roosters and want the whole world to know it.

Weather- Temperature can play havoc on chickens. There are some breeds that are better suited for cold winter weather than others. Your major concern here is keeping the water from freezing; adding a red heat lamp over the water supply to keep it thawed and also helps keep the coop a little warmer. You can also purchase heated waterers or heat pans that go under them.

Heat can be more of a problem than cold; after all they do have feathers to stay warm. Make sure they have a shaded area to get out of the sun, plenty of fresh water and well-ventilated coop. Avoid feeding them scratch in the summer.

How to choose a chicken? There is a lot of information on choosing the right Chicken breed to meet your objective. Once you decide what your goal is, whether is be just for fun, egg production, or meat or both, then you can find many sources that will outline some of the basic breeds that meet that criteria. The best chart I've found that outlines most of these traits is the Henderson Chicken Chart and it is available online at:

<http://www.ithaca.edu/staff/jhenderson/chooks/chooks.html> .

There is much to learn and know about raising chickens. More than can be covered in this short article. I recommend that you take the time to research chickens to decide if they are a good fit for you or not. It took me about 2 years of research before I managed to beat my husband over the head with all my knowledge so he would let me start my chicken venture.

Chickens don't have to be as difficult as some people think. For those who have the minimal time and energy to put into raising them it can be very rewarding. They do require proper management to avoid the pit falls but their eggs are wonderful and fresh and you don't have to go to the store to get them.

Resources:

Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens by Gail Damerow

<http://www.ithaca.edu/staff/jhenderson/chooks/chooks.html>

<http://animalscience.ucdavis.edu/Avian/pfs36.pdf>

<http://www.poultry.uga.edu/extension/tips/index.htm>

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