



Down to Earth: Reports from the field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): West Central Region

Greetings from the ISFOP Team - West Central Region!

It's been another one of those Midwest summers—the kind that you can never predict! We went from a cold, rainy start to being launched quite abruptly into the heat of summer. While there was some appreciation for the rain, there were many farmers wondering when it was going to stop long enough to get their crops planted. But as farmers always do, they persevered, got their crops in and have been, and still are, harvesting. Things may have been a bit late but they have certainly thrived.

As summer draws to a close and autumn takes its hold on the Midwest, we have time to take a breath and reflect on this year's growing season. What worked for you this year? What didn't work so well? What will you be doing differently in the 2011 growing season? Were there new crop varieties that you particularly liked and did well at market? And, for that matter, did you try a new marketing strategy this year that did well for you? Or, maybe one that didn't do so well? We at the ISFOP would love to hear your stories and what you learned this year. If you would like to share, please tell one of us about your experience farming this year.

Elderberries in Lafayette County by Susan Jaster

Harvesting of elderberry from the wild has been happening for hundreds of years. In the article A Clinical Guide to the Elderberry by The American Botanical Council (ABC), it is stated that the purplish, almost black, berry was written about by such famous authors as Hippocrates of Cos, Pedanius Dioscorides and Pliny the Elder. Conrad Von Megenberg claimed the elderberry increased resistance to illness during his life (1309-1374). The ABC has a guide on elderberries which can be accessed at: http://abc.herbalgram.org/site/DocServed/Elderberry-scr.pdf?docID=165.

Cathy Geary, from Lafayette County, learned the hobby of wild harvesting from her mother. When Geary discovered elderberries, she had to teach her mother about them. They both have enjoyed elderberries for years. In fact, Geary and her husband Donnie are so impressed by the elderberry that they have planted almost an acre of young plants on their farm this year. Geary swears by the properties of elderberries, and is convinced that it is an important fruit for health and well-being.

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Elderberries (continued from page 1)

Geary has been attending workshops to

of product and already has a buyer lined up.



Picture from the Missouri Botanical Gardens.

make more informed decisions about planting and maintaining her crop. She has even gone so far as to write up a five-year business plan including the elderberry as the driving force for income. Realizing that the mature elderberry trees will produce between eight and 10 thousand pounds of fruit per acre, talking to local wineries and elderberry processors seemed the smart thing to do. Next year, when the berries are in their second year of growth, Geary expects to have about 25 percent of the mature harvest rate. She would be thrilled with 500 pounds

Earlier this year the Gearys planted about 800 cuttings to get their crop started. They have carefully planted three varieties. The Ranch variety has a darker berry and is a very hearty transplant. The Bob Gordon variety is known for large heads of berries that invert as they ripen. When the heads invert, birds cannot do as much damage and this allows easier picking too. The

Wyldehood 1 variety is a late ripening berry with a potential for a large quantity. Three varieties will allow the Gearys to harvest throughout the season, instead of all at once. Another precaution that they took was to use a drip tape under the plastic mulch they laid down before planting. They did not need to water this year, but they are prepared to irrigate, if needed, using a gravity flow system. Not all of the cuttings that were planted survived; thus, as they prune their plants for winter, new cuttings will be prepared for spring.

Even though her first elderberry crop was very small, Geary continues to wild harvest blooms and berries in Lafayette County. She picks enough to supply her family with tea, jelly, syrup and juice. She says, "We are expecting several hundred pounds of elderberries next year and will be working on our marketing strategy this winter." Her advice to someone wanting to get into the elderberry business is, "Start small, a couple hundred cuttings will get you started." She also recommends looking at www.elderberry.com.

Other elderberry resources:

www.extension.org. Type "elderberries" in the search box.

Cornell University:

<http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/specialtyfru%20pdf/elderberrymissouri.pdf>

MU Center for Agroforestry:

<http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/profit/elderberry.asp>

Missouri State University:

<http://library.missouristate.edu/paulevans/Fruit/elderberry.shtml>

Bedding Down for Winter by Katie Nixon

It's that time of year to start thinking about how to put your soil to rest for the winter and start planning for next year. This is a good time to reflect and write down the ideas you had throughout the season, and all the things you want to try next season. Unless you have a great memory, a lot of those ideas will slip through the cracks and, come next spring, you'll be standing in your field or garden scratching your head trying to remember all the great ideas you had last year! It helps to keep a small notepad and pen in your pocket so you can write down thoughts you have about implementing new ideas.

Laura Christensen, owner and operator of Blue Door Farm, said she was in the process of doing just that. "I am looking over my production plan from this year, while I can still remember what I messed up and what actually worked."

Late autumn and winter is the best time for

paperwork and completing your records for the season. If you have not kept track of your finances over this last year, now is a good time to get out all those receipts and scratch pieces of paper with your expenses on them. Then put them into an organized spreadsheet. If thinking about doing this scares you half to death, there are plenty of resources to help you along such as a LUCE ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). ISFOP staff have working knowledge of how best to keep track of finances. There are also Agribusiness Extension specialists at the MU extension offices that can help you. Whitney Wiegel is in the Higginsville office, and Ryan Wescoat is in the Harrisonville office. Contact them by phone or email:

WiegelW@missouri.edu (660)584-3658
wescoatr@missouri.edu (816) 380-8460.

Besides getting organized with the business side of the farm, there are plenty of things left to do in the field to get prepared for the coming growing season. In addition to working on next year's production plan, Christensen is also getting ready to cover her fields with organic manure and compost. "I put it on in the fall so it has time to interact with the soil so the plants I plant in the spring have access to the nutrients the compost and manure provide." She also suggested planting cover crops which need to be planted now. Both Christensen and Steve Mann, owner of Platte Prairie Trading Co. and a farmer, suggest planting a winter Rye and Vetch cover crop mix. It's a little late to plant vetch, but with the length of summer this year, you may get lucky and it could establish itself before it gets too cold. The other crop you should get in without further delay is garlic. Plant this crop now for a harvest

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Composting: The Basics

James Pierce, ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker, Platte & Clay Counties

Composting is a simple method for small farmers to produce an amendment that is good for the soil and the environment. This article will cover aerobic composting, but should you have any questions about anaerobic or vermiculture composting contact your FOW.

What is composting? In effect, composting is creating an environment for the exploitation of the microbial community, satisfying anthropomorphic needs to convert organic wastes into stable humus-like material without unpleasant odors. Put another way, composting is taking an action to encourage decomposition. Whether you are raising vegetables, flowers or a lawn, composting is a valuable tool for producing an amendment for your project.

Why should you consider composting?

There are several good reasons to convert organic waste to compost. Some of these are:

- 1) The composted waste improves the condition of the soil. Over time it will contribute to available nutrients in the soil, improve water holding capacity and improve soil structure.
- 2) Compost can suppress some soilborne diseases, particularly root rot diseases, by providing an environment with greater microbial diversity.
- 3) Composting organic waste keeps it out of landfills and keeps the constituents cycling in the environment.

What can be composted? Many organic materials can be composted besides grass

and leaves such as shrub trimmings or chipped twigs, faded flowers, weeds, and leftover plants at the end of the gardening season. Also straw, coffee grounds, eggshells, fruit and vegetable scraps, shredded newspaper (black and white print), small amounts of wood ash and sawdust are useful. Meat scraps should be avoided because they attract pets and rodents.

How to compost? The basic method for composting is to mix ingredients in a carbon to nitrogen ratio of between 25- 35:1. This means 25-35 parts carbon materials to one part nitrogen material. Compost can be made by piles, windrows or containers.

Material	C:N Ratio
Coffee Grounds	20:1
Corn Stalks	60:1
Cow Manure	20:1
Fruit Wastes	35:1
Grass Clippings	20:1
Horse Manure w/ Litter	60:1
Leaves	60:1
Newspaper	50-200:1
Rotted Manure	20:1
Straw	80-100:1
Table Scraps	15:1
Vegetable Trimmings	12-20:1

Chart from Florida's Online Composting Center <http://compostinfo.com/tutorial/ElementOfComposting.htm>

For the pile method, start by laying down 8-10 inches of yard, fruit and vegetable or newspaper waste (or any combination) and wet to about 50 percent moisture. This should be followed by an inch or two of manure. Green grass, blood meal or cottonseed meal could also be used. Do not use pet or human feces. Next, add an inch or two of soil or compost from a previous pile to provide microorganisms to the new pile. Repeat the layers until a height of five feet is reached on a pile with a five foot diameter. The reason for this is to keep the pile neat and provide aeration, because a robust aerobic environment is the goal. Turning will prevent disagreeable odors, hasten decomposition and expose seeds and disease to the hot inner temperatures. There is no clear rule on turning, but in general, the more frequent turning occurs the faster the decomposition. A pile should be done in two to four months, if properly turned, and kept to around 50 percent moisture.

Sources:

Composting (a SARE-sponsored workshop) hosted by Lincoln University Cooperative Extension on May 24-25, 2010.

Composting and Mulching: A Guide to Managing Organic Yard Wastes, University of Minnesota.

www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/

Making and Using Compost for Organic Farming by Emily Marriott, University of Illinois. www.extension.org/article/18567



LEFT: Pallet-style compost bins that are filled in one day and left to compost over 6 months. RIGHT: Different styles of compost bins that can be used.



About our Program...

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program

If you are a small farmer and have a need for information please contact one of the following FOWs:

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(816) 899-2181

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(816) 589-4725

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(660) 232-1096

These people live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other available programs and resources that may increase your income and overall quality of life for your family. Or call (573) 681-5312 for general information.

Event Corner:

Friday and Saturday, Oct. 22 & 23: High Tunnel Construction Workshop, Higginsville, Missouri. Contact Susan Jaster for more information.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 4-6: Small Farm Trade Show, Columbia, Missouri.
www.smallfarmtoday.com/tradeshows/

Saturday, Nov. 9, 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m.: Women Landowners Agriculture Conference, Higginsville, Missouri. Contact Brett Gilland at (660) 584-8732.



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THE IPM CORNER

by Jaime Piñero, Integrated Pest Management Specialist

Home Garden Disease and Insect Control Begins This Fall

If you have a vegetable garden, by the time most autumn leaves have fallen from the trees and frost has killed your plants, you may no longer be thinking about weeds, plant diseases and insect problems until next summer. But actually, this is the perfect time to start a cultural IPM practice called "fall sanitation."

The following tips can help to minimize next year's diseases and insect problems:

1. Keep weeds pulled. Slugs and some insects can overwinter in weedy areas. Weeds will also seed themselves and be a much worse problem the next year.
2. Clean up plant wastes as soon as the crop is harvested. Many disease-causing organisms (called pathogens) survive the winter in infected plant debris. Examples include pathogens that cause fungal diseases in tomato plants such as anthracnose, gray and leaf mold, early blight and Septoria leaf spot.
3. Be sure to continue controlling major insect pests such as squash bugs and cucumber beetles well into the fall season. In the case of cucumber beetles, the pathogen that causes bacterial wilt of cantaloupe, cucumber and other cucurbits, overwinters only in the beetles.
4. Practice record keeping by writing down the soil amendments you used, what worked best, what didn't work and the crops you grew in each area. That will help plan your crop rotations.
5. Keep in mind that composting will kill most plant pathogens if the compost heats properly and the temperature is maintained long enough (see article on composting).



Feel like working on or writing your business plan this winter? Here are some great resources to help you:

Penn State Ag Alternatives: <http://agalternatives.aers.psu.edu/>
Cornell's Beginning Farmers': <http://www.nybeginningfarmers.org/index.php?page=index>
Calculating Break-even Cost: <http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=G649>

Bedding Down (from page 2)

in early summer.

A few more tips on what to do with all your "free time" this coming cold season:

- sharpen tools
- plan for next year
- get seeds ordered
- adjust your business plan
- perform machine maintenance
- cleanup around the farm
- catch up on reading and do research on your ideas and upcoming events you