



# Conservation Conversation

Official Newsletter of the Barber County Conservation District

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## Why Would You Want To Attend The Barber County Wildflower Tour? It's A Fun Event—That's Why!

By Carl Jarboe, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician

May 11<sup>th</sup> the Barber County Conservation District will hold its 34th Spring Wildflower Tour. This year should be a good one. With the abundance of moisture, we expect to see a great many wildflowers we have not seen in the past.

Every year the list of plants found in bloom changes. Often due to the amount of or lack of rain we have received in the fall before, winter preceding and spring season. This year we are coming off a fall with good moisture and a winter of good moisture. Spring has just begun at this writing, so I don't know what moisture we will have however I'm sure we have some moisture reserve. I believe this will add up to a great explosion of wildflowers. We always have a great tour if we have a normal spring, sunny days and temperatures. Along with the moisture we have I expect we will have an exceptional wildflower tour this year.

The tour will include two sites to illustrate how some plants grow best in a specific soil type. For example, those you find growing in a sandy soil may not do well in a heavier red soil.

One stop will be in an area of sandy soils. The wildflowers we see there may include Indian Blanket, "Gaillardia pulchella". At times it covers the ground like a blanket—it's a sight to behold. Bladderpod, "Lesquerella gordonii" can be in large expansive groups as well. The yellow flowers are followed by many pod-like fruits. Your guide may show you why one common name is pop weed. Most years Citron Paintbrush, "Castilleja purpurea, var. citrina, makes a great show. Your guide will explain why other plants are not growing close to this native wildflower. Western Salsify," "Tragopogon dubius" is a common plant seen on this site. This plant resembles a large dandelion. You will learn what it's roots taste like and how they are used. One I like to see is Violet Wood Sorrel," "Oxalis violacea". This forb's flowers have a unique flavor. Your guide will tell you why you shouldn't eat too many of these pretty violet colored flowers.



*Spiderwort (cow slobbers) in the Gyp Hills*

We also have a heavier soil site we stop at that often has 30 or more different wild flowers or forbs at any one time. These plants flourish in the red soils of Barber County. The plants found may include Aromatic Sumac, "Rhus aromatica"; learn why it's sometimes called skunkbrush. Lambert Crazyweed, "Oxytropis lambertii, is also found at this location. Have you wondered why it's sometimes called Crazyweed? Come on the wildflower tour and find out. You may also see Leadplant, "Amorpha canescens". No, we don't get lead from this plant. Your guide will tell you why this plant is an important indicator of range health. We should see a thorny plant with very pretty pink puffball-like blooms called Catclaw Sensitive Briar, "Schranksia nuttallii". You will learn why this plant often disappears from native range pastures. Spiderwort, "Tradescantia bracteata" is an interesting plant. Learn how a spider can get a wort from this plant. **Not really**, however you will learn why its also called cow slobbers.

The annual wildflower tour will include many if not all the above-mentioned wildflowers or forbs plus many, many more. Learn how to identify these plants and why its important that they are growing in our native range. Many fun facts about the plants are also passed along by your tour guide.

Call the conservation office to make your reservation today.

# Spring Green-Up By Lody Black, NRCS Range Management Specialist

I am sure everyone is talking about how great the grass green-up is going to be this spring, as am I. We are all expecting some decent stands of grass to start the growing season, but as many of us know, Kansas weather can change in the blink of an eye. Our moisture can certainly shut off and stay off for a while. As you may start to think about turning your cattle or other livestock back out to pasture (if they weren't there all winter) I wanted to just touch base and give a few reminders.

First off, I want to caution everyone on adding too many animals to their herd. The reasoning for this, like I said before, is the moisture may shut off tomorrow and we may not see it again for a while, so those animals may have to be sold again quickly. We all know that they never sell for the price we'd like, so to save the money and headache, I would suggest holding off on buying any extra animals at this point. If we get part way through the summer and we still are getting the rains and the grass is excelling, then we may think about buying some yearlings or something that we might be able to make some money off with quick gains.

The second thing I wanted to talk about is what grasses we are actually seeing out there right now that are greening up. Most of the grasses we will see in March will be our cool season grasses, (see Figure 1 below). Some cool season grasses can be very beneficial and provide some good forage, others maybe not so much. I would caution everyone to not dump their livestock out onto grass or into a new pasture (for those that are yearlong grazing) as soon as we see green grass. The reason for this is so we can get those cool season grasses up and established a little, because they are vital to the rangeland health, along with giving the warm seasons (see Figure 2) a chance to sprout and get up above the soil's surface.

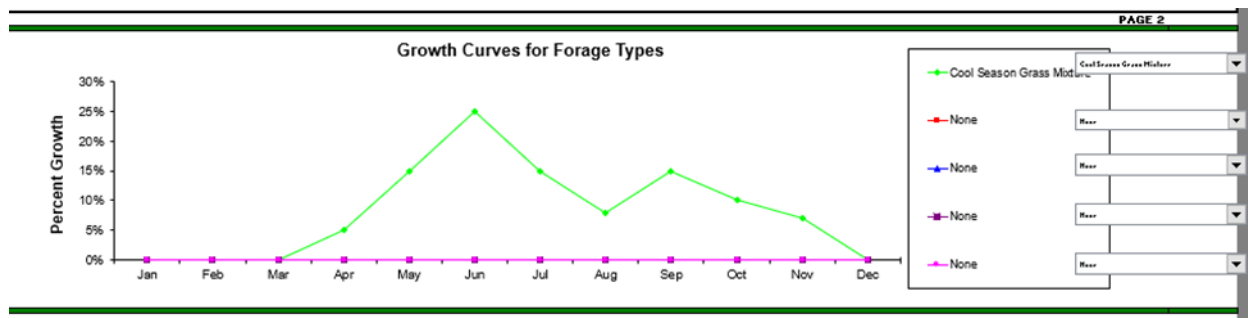


Figure 1. The typical growth curve for cool season grass mixes. The percent growth is the rough amount that occurs from month to month and equals 100% of the plant's growth for the year. These depend on rain fall and climate as well.

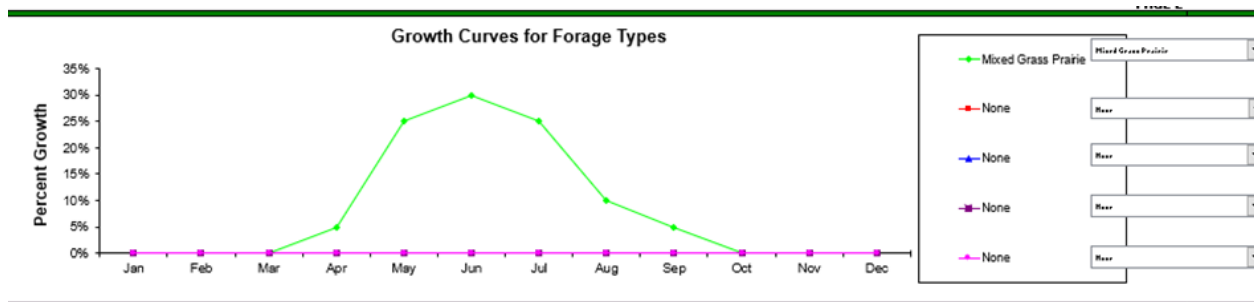


Figure 2. The typical growth curve for warm season mixed grass prairie. The percent growth is the rough amount that occurs from month to month and equals 100% of the plant's growth for the year. These depend on rain fall and climate as well.

The two graphs can be some what misleading; our cool season grass is typically a little bit more grown by April and May than our warm season grasses. By the graphs though you can see that cool season grasses can almost be grazed twice or have two peak growing seasons. However, if these are growing within a warm season pasture, we can sometimes severely hurt these and even graze them completely out, because when they are less actively growing they still get grazed hard and can end up dying from over utilization. This typically doesn't happen, as cool season plants are resilient and survive through most of these grazing events.

Final thing I wanted to talk about was our forbs, or as some call them, our wildflowers. Most of them are very pretty and are essential to the rangelands, but some are noxious weeds, and must be controlled. If you have a plant that you are uncertain what it is or if it needs to be controlled, contact us here in the office to help with identification. You can also reach out to the K-State County Agriculture Extension, or even the County Weed Department and they can help identify the plant and give recommendations on chemicals to use. If spraying to kill them, identify the correct species and only spray those, as the others are beneficial and provide a protein source to the livestock. Some people may not believe that the livestock will graze these, but they do, when and if they need it.

All these depend on your situation, climate conditions, and can vary from one person to the other and what the management objectives are. Like always, we would be more than happy to help you achieve these goals. Thank you for taking the time to read this article and I hope the things I talked about will help you in your operation.

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## Cover Crop Coffee Shop—7:30 pm April 2<sup>nd</sup>

Come join us Tuesday evening April 2<sup>nd</sup> for an open discussion about the use of Cover Crops for improving soil and for grazing opportunities. This will be an hour-long event held at 7:30pm at The Peoples Bank Sunflower Room in Medicine Lodge Kansas. The bank is located at 117 S. Main.

There will be a panel of local producers talking about how they have used cover crops in their operations. The operations vary in their use of cover crops. Some use cover crops to protect the soil, improve infiltration, fix nitrogen and help increase organic matter. Others have the same objectives however they also introduce livestock into the mix, using the cover crops as a grazing opportunity.

The evening will start with a brief overview of each operation. We will follow with open discussion. This will be your chance to ask local producers (not a University Specialist or a producer from Ohio) questions about the use of cover crops in Barber County Kansas. They are growing the cover crops in the same soil types and with the same variable weather as you are.

I'm sure the discussion will include success and failures. We hope that the information will be useful and informative. I don't know of a better way to learn than from your peers in your own county. With grain prices as they are you may be looking for a value-added crop. Cover crops may be the ticket. Keeping the ground covered, protecting from erosion, improving infiltration rates to capture what rain we get can increase yields. What if covers could also provide a grazable crop. This might provide a way to give your adjoining pasture a rest when it needs it most or provide winter grazing, helping to lower the feed bill. There may be more questions than answers. I hope this is a start to a conversation about using cover crops for their many benefits.

Yes, we will have coffee otherwise we couldn't call it a Coffee Shop meeting. Coffee will be provided by Prairie Fire Coffee with cookies and bottled water provided by the Barber County Conservation District.

If this is of interest to you call the Barber County Extension office at 620-886-3972 to make your reservation.

## April is State Cost Share Sign-Up

Applications are now being accepted and throughout the month of April for cost share assistance through the state's Water Resources Cost Share Program (WRCSP) and the Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program (NPS). A few of the practices which are available through these two programs are erosion control structures, pipe outlet terraces, construction of terraces and grassed waterways, range and pasture seeding, livestock water developments (to include tanks, wells, pumping systems, and pipelines), fencing, and dry hydrants for rural fire protection. Also included in the NPS program specifically are abandoned water well plugging and repair of failed septic systems.

All applications will be ranked according to a priority based ranking worksheet, and funded corresponding to their ranking until all funds are allocated. Projects cannot be started prior to contract approval by the state. To apply for these funds, call or stop by the conservation office and let us know about your project needs.

*Funding provided by the Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan Fund.*

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## Spring Wildflower Tour—May 11

Join us on May 11 for the 34th annual Spring Wildflower Tour. Knowledgeable tour guides will inspire a new appreciation of those beautiful wildflowers, native to the Gyp Hills of Barber County. Cost of the tour is \$20 for adults (kids 12 and under, \$5) which covers a continental breakfast, transportation to two identification sites, and a hearty barbeque lunch at the Gyp Hills Guest Ranch.

Don't miss this educational event and unique Mother's Day gift opportunity. Paid reservations are due to the conservation office by May 6th. For more information contact us at 620-886-5311.

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## John Farney Memorial Scholarship

The John Farney Memorial Scholarship is a \$1000 scholarship sponsored by the Barber County Conservation District. The scholarship will be awarded to a student who is entering at least his/her second year of college. Applicants must be pursuing a college degree in a conservation-related field. The applicant must also be a resident of Barber County. The deadline for applications is April 15, 2019. Applications are available at the conservation office at 800 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Medicine Lodge, Kansas. You may also call (620) 886-5311 for more information.

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## Range Youth Camp Scholarship

Range Youth Camp is the most accepted and enduring activity of the Kansas Section of the Society for Range Management. The camp was first held in 1960 and is continuing to educate youth about the importance of Kansas rangelands to this day. The camp is designed to give students a basic understanding of the principles of rangeland ecology, including plant physiology, plant identification, ecological sites, range condition, and trend. Additional topics discussed at camp are animal behavior, animal nutrition, wildlife use of rangelands, and calculating stocking rates.

Upcoming High School Sophomore, Junior, and Senior students who have a serious interest in rangeland management, rangeland ecology, or grazing animals are eligible for a scholarship through the Barber County Conservation District to attend the camp June 18—21, 2019 at Camp Mennoscah in Murdock, KS. Registration deadline is May 15. Contact us at 620-886-5311 for information.

# Have You Ever?

by Carl Jarboe, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician

In your home garden do you mulch to conserve water? Maybe you mulch to prevent or at least slow weed growth. Can that work on a larger scale? Sure, it can.

**Have you ever** watered your tomato plant when there is no mulch and watched the water just run off or stand? How does the water act when watering over mulch? You don't see it runoff do you. Its not standing either. Makes me believe that having that mulch is helping the water infiltrate. The mulch holds the water in place so it has time to soak in. The mulch itself is holding the water, so we do not see puddles that are likely to evaporate before they soak into the ground.

**Have you ever** dug potatoes that had been mulched? Did you notice the ground was much cooler under the mulch? Do you think plants perform better when growing in soils kept cool by the mulch? Soil temperatures can be 10 or more degrees cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter by 5 degrees or more.

**Have you ever** put your feet in a cool creek on a hot day? If you have you know how good that feels? How do you think a plant performs with cool roots on a hot day? The cool is related to the mulch preventing the soil from heating up. It can also be connected to higher moisture content.

**Have you ever** walked across a bare field in July? You most likely noticed how hot it was.

**Have you ever** walked through a growing crop in the summer? Did you notice it's cooler than the bare ground? Having something green and growing moderates temperatures too.

Crop ground is really a big garden. All the practices that we use in a garden can be applied in a crop field just in a different manner. They will result in improved water infiltration, less weed pressure and better performing crops.

No-Till practices leave residue that protects the soil. The residue helps reduce erosion by reducing the impact of rain drops. Slowing the waters' exit from the field and by allowing for more infiltration means less water is leaving the field. When you reduce the volume leaving you reduce velocity as well which means less erosion. You want to keep your soil on your field, don't you? Residue also helps moderate weed pressure just like mulch in the garden. By planting a cover crop and keeping something green and growing you will have fewer weeds to contend with.

You may have also planted a summer or winter grazable mixture of plants. Now you have increased your opportunity to make a little profit. Just think if you could move your livestock to your crop field for 4 to 6 weeks of grazing, you can rest the pasture. You are then benefited with more grass in the fall and winter reducing the time you feed bales as well as the added manure to the crop field. Nothing like letting the livestock spread it for you.

If you don't have livestock, maybe you can rent the field out to someone who can use it for a short time. The income from your rental agreement with a livestock owner can pay for the planting of the cover crop. You benefit by having the manure spread over your crop field. That has real additional value.

Some will read this and tear it apart with reasons it won't work for them. Others will read this and think about the possibilities. If your current way of operation isn't working as well as it used to maybe a simple change can help.

**Have you ever** considered no-till and or cover crops?

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## AND BY THE WAY...

- The Conservation District carries a large inventory of high density polyethylene (HDPE) corrugated pipe and components for all your drainage needs. Let us be your one-stop shop for your next project; tile outlets, culverts, ponds.
- We also carry a 19-strand lite cable, SunGuard fiberglass posts, metal clips, and lots of other components for cross fencing. Producers love the lite cable for its' "no-slinky" characteristics.
- If you are installing a livestock tank through cost-share, chances are you will be required to install a "bat-ramp" or wildlife escape ramp - we have'em!
- As a registered seed dealer, the Conservation District would appreciate the opportunity to fill your orders for native grass seed, cover crop mixes, cool season grasses and much more.