

## **ISU Extension Short Course will Increase Grazing Knowledge and Skills**

Livestock producers with an interest in beginning or transitioning grazing practices can sharpen their skills by attending Greenhorn Grazing workshops offered by Iowa State University Extension. The Greenhorn Grazing short course consists of five different modules taught over the grazing season.

“Greenhorn Grazing is designed for graziers interested in a more controlled or management-intensive grazing system,” said Denise Schwab, ISU Extension livestock specialist. “Producers who want to optimize forage and livestock production, increase market access and conserve natural resources will find the modules very informative.”

The course will cover concepts relevant to all producers of grass-based livestock, whether it is beef, dairy, sheep or other animals, according to Schwab. Greenhorn Grazing will be held around the Maquoketa area, but is designed for any producers in eastern Iowa. Each workshop will have a classroom component with experienced instructors and a hands-on field component.

The workshops will begin promptly at 1:00 p.m. and will last through late afternoon. The sessions are scheduled for June 8, July 6, August 4, August 30 and early November.

“Workshop topics covered by the instructors and during the associated field experiences will teach producers how to improve the productivity and use of their land,” said Schwab. “Training such as this removes some of the perceived barriers associated with entry into the grass-based livestock industry and supports perennial grassland agriculture.”

Cost of the short course is being largely offset by grants from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and the Iowa Beef Center. The course fee is \$75; participants are urged to attend all sessions, but fees for individual sessions are available. Fees include a resource notebook, speakers, and refreshments.

For more information on specific locations or to register, contact the Benton County Extension Office, at 319-472-4739. For more details contact Denise Schwab at (319) 721-9624 or dschwab@iastate.edu.

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## **Updated Prairie Restoration Handbook Now Available**

AMES, Iowa—A handbook for establishing and managing prairies on farmland, *Incorporating Prairies into Multifunctional Landscapes (PMR 1007)*, has gone into its second printing, and the

updated version is now available from the Iowa State University Extension online Store.

Meghann Jarchow and Matt Liebman from the ISU Department of Agronomy developed the original publication in August 2010 and updated it for a second printing in February 2011. They conduct research on multi-year cropping systems as part of a team supported by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture's Ecology Initiative.

Less than 0.1 percent of Iowa's tallgrass prairies remain, largely because their rich soil makes the land desirable for agriculture. Yet prairies can reduce soil erosion and water pollution, provide wildlife habitat and mitigate flood events. The full-color, illustrated publication explains how farmers and landowners might incorporate prairies into their land to restore ecosystem services and potentially gain economic benefits from livestock grazing, hay production and carbon sequestration. "I have been delighted to hear how broadly the publication has been distributed and how well it has been received," Jarchow said. "I hoped that the publication could be useful to a wide range of audiences, and I have received positive feedback from numerous individuals including farmers, conservation organization workers, and university extension personnel."

At least 1,300 copies have been distributed to organizations in several states, such as Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Service. The content has been used in ISU classes and also will be part of an Iowa State University Extension program called "Homegrown Lifestyle," a 12-week course for people living on small acreages.

The updated version, which includes a new resource for Midwest prairie restoration, can be downloaded or print copies requested at no charge at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/>. The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) and Iowa State University Extension sponsored the printing.

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### **Yard and Garden: Rhubarb**

Although it is classed as a vegetable, rhubarb is used as a fruit because its high acidity gives it a tart flavor. Iowa State University Extension horticulture specialists answer gardeners' questions about growing and using rhubarb. Whether questions come from gardeners planting their first rhubarb patch or maintaining an established planting, extension specialists answer questions using the most current research. Gardeners with additional questions can contact the experts by emailing or calling the ISU Extension horticulture hotline at [hortline@iastate.edu](mailto:hortline@iastate.edu) or 515-294-3108.

What would be a good planting site for rhubarb?

Rhubarb performs best in well-drained, fertile soils that are high in organic matter. Heavy, clay soils often can be improved by incorporating organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted manure, into the upper 12 to 15 inches of soil. The planting site should also receive at least six to eight hours of direct sun each day. Avoid shady sites near trees and shrubs.

When can I start harvesting my newly planted rhubarb?

After planting rhubarb, it's best to wait two years (growing seasons) before harvesting any stalks. The two-year establishment period allows the plants to become strong and productive.

Rhubarb can be harvested over a four-week period in the third year. In the fourth and succeeding years, stalks can be harvested for eight to 10 weeks.

What is the correct way to harvest rhubarb?

Harvest rhubarb when the stalks are 10 to 15 inches long. Grasp the stalk near its base and pull up and slightly to one side. Immediately after harvesting the rhubarb, remove the leaf blades from the stalks with a sharp knife. Discard the foliage. The stalks can be placed in a plastic bag and stored in the refrigerator for two to four weeks.

When harvesting rhubarb, do not remove more than two-thirds of the fully developed stalks from any plant at any one time.

Are rhubarb leaves safe to put in the compost pile?

Although rhubarb leaves do contain poisonous oxalic acid, they can be placed in the compost pile. Oxalic acid, like other organic acids, is not readily absorbed by plant roots. Compost containing decomposed rhubarb leaves can be safely applied to the vegetable garden.

When should I stop harvesting rhubarb?

Gardeners should stop harvesting well established rhubarb plants in mid-June in Iowa. Continued harvest through the summer months weakens the rhubarb plants and reduces the yield and quality of next year's crop. If the rhubarb plants are vigorous, pulling a few stalks and preparing a dish for a special occasion in summer shouldn't be a problem. Harvesting rhubarb in summer should be a one time event, not a frequent practice. Continued harvest through the summer months weakens the rhubarb plants and reduces the yield and quality of next year's crop. In general, it's best to stop harvesting rhubarb in mid-June in Iowa.

There is an erroneous belief that rhubarb stalks are poisonous in summer. The stalks will likely be a little tougher than those harvested in spring, but they are not poisonous. Plant vigor is the reason that rhubarb should not be harvested in summer.

Flower development is natural for rhubarb and most other plants. Drought, extreme heat and

infertile soils may encourage flowering. Age is another factor. Old plants tend to flower more than young ones.

Regardless of the reason, flower stalks should be promptly pulled and discarded. Plants will be less productive if allowed to flower and set seeds.

Flower formation can be discouraged with good cultural practices. Water rhubarb plants every seven to 10 days during dry weather. Sprinkle ½ cup of an all-purpose garden fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, around each plant in early spring. Control weeds by shallow hoeing, hand pulling or mulching.

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## **Plan Ahead to Reduce the Impact of Natural Disasters**

AMES, Iowa – Before natural disasters strike, families should develop emergency plans and create emergency supply kits. This message is one Iowa State University Extension hopes Iowans will take seriously. Planning before the storm clouds gather and rivers rise will save lives, fear and panic. "Create plans, write them down and share them with friends or family," said Linda Fischer, ISU Extension regional director. "Be sure to talk with children about emergency plans." Fischer is a member of the Iowa State disaster planning team and works in conjunction with the Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) to build awareness of steps for natural disaster preparedness. The team is making several publications available that outline how people living in areas prone to tornadoes and floods can create an emergency plan and pack emergency supply kits.

"Iowans depend on their county extension office for answers after storms and floods hit; we want them to also think of extension as a resource for emergency preparedness," Fischer said.

### Tornado preparedness

Fischer said to start by designating safe areas to survive a tornado. "Determine the best place to seek shelter from an impending tornado in your home and workplace," she said. "Be aware of designated tornado shelters in public buildings and private businesses. Use this information to create a plan, and if you have children, practice the plan. Be sure to take time to think about where you can find shelter if you are in a vehicle or outside."

Know where to seek shelter in your home:

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- Go to lowest level available (basement or cellar).
- Find an inside room with no windows and strong walls.
- If the room has windows, keep them closed.
- If in a mobile home, get out and go to the nearest sturdy building.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture, such as a workbench, or heavy table or desk, and hold on to it.
- Use your arms to protect your head and neck, or use a heavy blanket or pillow to help protect you and to cover
  - your head.

"If you are in a vehicle or outside, never try to outdrive a tornado because it can change direction quickly and lift and toss your vehicle through the air," Fischer said. "Leave the car immediately and take shelter in a nearby building. If there is no building, lie flat in a ditch or depressed area, cover your head and watch for flooding."

### Flood preparedness

Written emergency plans are also recommended for families, schools and workplaces in areas with the potential for flooding. Practice your plan, and share it with others. Plans that include home evacuation during the flood should include the following:

- Take your disaster supply kits with you when evacuating.
- Turn off utilities, and do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or in standing water.
- Avoid walking through moving water.
- Avoid driving into flooded areas.
- Be cautious since floodwaters may be contaminated.
- Create a Disaster Supply Kit

"Build disaster supply kits for all family members and pets for at least three days," Fischer said. "Make the kits so they can be scaled down in case of evacuation. Preparing a kit for each child will add comfort and reassurance in a time of stress and anxiety."

Basic kits should include:

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- Food and water
- Medicines, copies of prescriptions, personal hygiene items, first aid supplies
- Important documents, personal identification, copies of insurance
- Cash or travelers checks
- Other essential supplies that your family may need: flashlights, extra batteries, blankets, seasonal clothing, a
  - battery-operated or crank radio, a weather radio, cell phones and chargers
  - Additional items to include in a child's kit include: books and games, extra clothes and shoes, comfort food, whistle (to blow to attract attention), paper with home address, parent's names and phone numbers, other emergency contact numbers,
    - current photo of the child and family, tooth brush and toothpaste.

For additional planning information and general information about tornadoes, flooding, helping children prepare for emergencies and a list of first aid supplies contact your county extension office.

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