

NEBRASKA EXTENSION NEWS COLUMN

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FOR WEEK OF: OCTOBER 26, 2025

October 13- 30: Knowing, Growing, and Grazing Grass Webinar Series, Monday and Thursday evenings, 7:30pm-8:45pm CT, go.unl.edu/knowning_grass

October 26: Holt County Achievement Ceremony, 5:00pm, Faith Wesleyan Church, Atkinson, NE

October 29: Cedar Workshop, 1:00pm-4:00pm, E-Free Church, Ainsworth, NE. To register: BKR Extension Office at 402-387-2213 or email Mary Jo at Mmccall2@unl.edu

November 2: Boyd County 4-H Jamboree, 2:00pm, T&S Farmstore and Food Coop, Bristow

November 19: Cedar Workshop, 1:00pm-4:00pm, Fire Hall, Ericson, NE. To register: Holt County Extension Office at 402-336-2760 or email Bethany at bjohnston3@unl.edu

December 10: Cedar Workshop, 1:00pm-4:00pm, Location TBA, Boyd County. To register: Holt County Extension Office at 402-336-2760 or email Bethany at bjohnston3@unl.edu



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Managing Halloween and the Candy Monster

Think of Halloween as a great occasion to play dress-up extraordinaire and try to take a moderate stand on the candy. Candy is mostly sugar and fat, so we have to realize that it contributes calories with few nutrients, but it is a big part of this holiday, and it is fine in moderation. Preference for sweet foods is not a human failing - it's simply human nature.

In general, candy should not be forbidden and restricted. Children must learn about moderation and frequency so that we don't teach patterns of hoarding or becoming obsessed. As parents we must make sure that children know when sweets are appropriate in their diet, and that should be adhered to throughout the holiday season.

Here are some suggestions for managing a happy and healthy Halloween:

1. Wait and buy candy later rather than sooner. With Halloween candy on the grocery store shelves two months prior to the event, it's difficult to resist the fun-sized treats, but we can't eat what we don't bring home.
2. Feed kids a healthy meal before they go out to a party or trick-or-treating so they won't replace dinner with candy.
3. Host a pre- trick-or-treat Halloween dinner with spooky background music. Hand out a printed menu with gory descriptions of kids' favorite foods. For example, spaghetti and marinara sauce with shredded cheese becomes "brains with blood and pus." Nutrient-rich cranberry juice mixed with apple cider and orange juice becomes "murky blood." Kids really love the idea of eating gross food on Halloween, and parents are satisfied knowing that their kids are actually just eating a healthy dinner.

4. If you're hosting a Halloween party, make it a seasonal festival. Serve pumpkin muffins and spiced apple cider, and have the kids dunk for apples. There are plenty of games and activities that don't involve candy — decorate little pumpkins, hold a costume contest, visit haunted houses or show a spooky movie with some fresh-popped popcorn.
5. Offer alternatives to candy. Serve healthy treats such as popcorn, granola bars, trail mix, raisins or pretzels. Or hand out non-food items like pencils, rings, bracelets, stickers, crayons, plastic snakes, bouncy balls - the items that we typically give kids in birthday goodie bags. Just be aware of choking hazards with young kids.
6. Limit the houses that children visit. Give them a two to three block radius so they are able to gather a moderate amount of treats only from known neighbors and friends.

Once the candy stash has been acquired, it remains in the house for days or weeks after Halloween has passed. Here are tips for maintaining healthy habits after the holiday:

1. Limit the amount of sweets you and your children have each day. Moderation is key. Use this time to teach your children the importance of eating a nutritious diet while still being able to enjoy treats on special occasions.
2. Avoid keeping candy where it is easily accessible, for example, in a candy jar on your desk or in a bowl on the kitchen counter. Storing it out of sight makes it less of a temptation and helps prevent mindless eating.
3. Save leftover candy for another time. It could be used to decorate gingerbread houses at Christmas time or for an art project. Chocolate could be frozen and used for baking when needed.
4. Instead of just snacking on candy, add it to a nutritious snack mix with whole grain cereal, nuts and dried fruit. These foods contain fiber, which help you feel full and satisfied.
5. Remember to stay physically active. Exercise helps with weight management and improves overall health. As we enter the holiday and cold weather season, it's important for the whole family to maintain healthy habits like exercising.
6. Emphasize that brushing and flossing our teeth after eating sweets or any foods that stick to the teeth is extremely important. Candy does far more damage to our teeth than it does to our diet or behavior.

With a no-big-deal approach and the emphasis being on moderation, candy can be enjoyed without being considered a "forbidden fruit."

Source: This article includes contributions from Christeena Haynes & Melinda Hemmelgarn, former Nutrition Specialists; & Karma Metzgar, Nutrition and Health Education Specialist, University of Missouri Extension



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Mythbusters: Southern Rust Edition

This growing season was one for the record books in parts of Nebraska - and not in a good way when it comes to corn disease.

Southern rust, in particular, was more severe in extreme eastern Nebraska than witnessed in recent history - and for the second year in a row. It also showed up in parts of northeast Nebraska where it rarely causes yield loss.

It's only natural to reflect on what occurred and ask why, trying to piece together reasonable explanations. Unfortunately, misinformation can spread quickly, and numerous false rumors are already circulating. Let's address some of these concerns before we start making decisions that could affect next year's crop.

✗ **Myth #1: Overwintering Rust**

The southern rust fungus cannot overwinter in Nebraska.

The southern rust fungus (*Puccinia polysora*) needs to infect living, green corn in order to survive, and there is no known alternate host. Thus, the fungus can't overwinter anywhere the climate doesn't support corn growth through the winter months.

In fact, our rust fungi are likely blown north into the United States from subtropical locations, such as parts of Mexico, where corn is grown year-round. The southern rust fungi typically reach Nebraska in late July; however, this year they arrived earlier than usual, with the first confirmed sighting on July 9 - the earliest on record for the state.

✗ **Myth #2: Infected Grass**

Southern rust doesn't infect brome or other grasses nearby.

Rust fungi tend to have very narrow host ranges, infecting only one or a few plant species. However, there are many rust fungal species, which affect almost every major plant species. Because several species of rust thrive under the same environmental

conditions, it's not unusual to see multiple plant species showing rust symptoms at the same time - even though they're caused by different pathogens.

✗ Myth #3: Super Strains

There is no new “super strain” of southern rust fungus.

It may be hard to believe after seeing so much disease this past year, but the severity we observed was due to prolonged periods of extremely favorable weather conditions - southern rust thrived under high relative humidity and average temperatures around 80°F.

Southern rust is not uncommon in Nebraska. In fact, it has been confirmed in 19 of the last 20 years, but thankfully, it's not usually as prevalent as we've experienced the last couple of years.

If you remember 2006, you might recall another historic outbreak centered in south-central Nebraska. That season also brought delayed corn planting from spring rains, followed by ideal weather for rust development during the first two weeks of August. Many fields suffered stalk weakening and lodging, which caused memorable harvest challenges.

✗ Myth #4: Fungicide Failures

Fungicides did not fail to control southern rust this year.

Although yield data are still coming in, most reports indicate that fungicides performed well against southern rust this year. During years with substantial disease pressure, differences in fungicide performance become more apparent, underscoring the importance of selecting effective products and applying them at the right time. Results from multiple states, compiled by the Crop Protection Network, reinforce these findings.

For more detailed guidance, check the CPN publication, “An Overview of Southern Rust,” which includes recommendations for fungicide application timing for southern rust, identification and current distribution. “Fungicide Efficacy for Control of Corn Foliar Diseases” can be a useful guide when evaluating product efficacy for specific diseases and is updated annually (and included in the Nebraska Extension NebGuide EC130, “Guide for Weed, Disease, and Insect Management in Nebraska” from Nebraska Extension).

Remember: Even the best product can't perform well without good coverage and proper timing, especially in a season like 2025 when disease pressure was unusually high.

There are surely more rumors and myths out there, but accurate information is key to good management. If you have questions or concerns about crop diseases, contact Nebraska Extension or submit samples to the UNL Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic for help with diagnoses and management recommendations.

Source: Tamra Jackson-Ziems - Extension Plant Pathologist, Kyle Broderick - Extension Educator and Coordinator of the UNL Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic



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Can Beef Cows Graze Corn that Sprouted in a Corn Field?

Every year brings its own weather challenges in Nebraska, and late summer and early fall of 2025 have been no exception. Early-planted corn was harvested in late September and early October, some of the earliest harvest dates in recent memory. Favorable late-summer rains and warm temperatures provided the “right” combination for excellent regrowth in brome grass pastures. However, these same conditions also led to widespread germination and sprouting of corn kernels in harvested fields.

While a few sprouted kernels are common every year, this fall many early-harvested fields have dense green growth of sprouted corn plants ranging from 3 inches to more than a foot tall. The following management tips can help producers safely and effectively graze corn residue fields with significant sprouting.

Management Tips for Grazing Corn Fields with Sprouted Corn **Assess Ear Drop and Residue Conditions**

- Before turning cows out, walk the field to estimate ear drop per acre. If there are more than 15 ears total in three 100-ft rows, management to reduce grain intake is needed.

Recognize the Risk of Nitrates in Sprouted Corn

Sprouting is common, but this year’s extensive regrowth increases potential risk.

- Collect representative samples and test for nitrate concentration before grazing.
- Sample fields separately (irrigated vs. dryland) and from various random locations.
- Clip plants at ground level, placing small plants (≤ 8 in.) in one plastic bag and taller plants (> 8 in.) in another.
- Remove air, seal, freeze, and send promptly to a commercial forage laboratory for analysis.

Dealing with Nitrates

- Lush, high-quality forages such as these corn sprouts are typically lower risk of toxicity than hay but can still be toxic, careful management is essential.
- **Adapt cows gradually** by limiting initial access or feeding a palatable feed source to reduce intake of high nitrate corn sprouts.
- Providing **energy (grain)** can help reduce risk; fields with moderate ear drop may be safer than those with only scattered kernels since cows will preferentially eat ears.
- **Fill cows up before grazing.** Even if nitrate levels are low, ensure cows are not hungry when turned out. Feed hay first to prevent rapid consumption of sprouts.
- Remember that freezing temperatures do not reduce nitrate levels in plants.

Time Turnout Carefully. Turn cows out **after noon**, once they have eaten hay. This timing allows observation during daylight hours and reduces risk of overconsumption.

Key Takeaway

With more sprouted corn than usual in 2025, it's essential to evaluate fields before grazing, test for nitrates, and manage turnout carefully. These steps will help minimize risk while making effective use of valuable fall residue.

Source: Rick Rasby, Extension Specialist, Mary Drewnoski, Nebraska Extension Beef Systems Specialist

NEWS RELEASE

Workshops to Address the Spread of Cedar Trees and Control Options

Cedar trees are rapidly spreading across Nebraska's grasslands, threatening valuable forage for grazing animals and habitat for wildlife. In some areas, grass production has dropped by as much as 75% over the past three decades due to cedar tree encroachment. The best time to control your cedar trees is now!

To help landowners and producers tackle this issue, hands-on workshops will be held from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. CT at three locations:

- Oct. 29 at the E-Free Church in Ainsworth,
- Nov. 19 at the Fire Hall in Ericson, and
- Dec. 10 in Boyd County (location TBA).

Gain insight from real-life examples of various cedar control projects, including before/after photos, cost of the projects, cost-share options, and how producers are maintaining cedar-free pastures to maximize grass. Understanding how cedar trees spread and grow will help producers decide the best control options to use. Learn how to keep your prescribed burn contained to the unit- as slope, tree height, piles, weather, crew/equipment can be mitigated to ensure a safe and controlled burn.

Walk-ins are welcome, but registrations are appreciated. Call the Holt County Extension Office at 402-336-2760 or email Bethany at bjohnston3@unl.edu to register.

Participants attending the Ainsworth location can also call the BKR Extension Office at 402-387-2213 or email Mary Jo at Mmccall2@unl.edu.

Thanks to these partners: Nebraska Extension, Pheasants Forever, the Nature Conservancy, Sandhills Task Force, Nebraska Game & Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and NRCS.
