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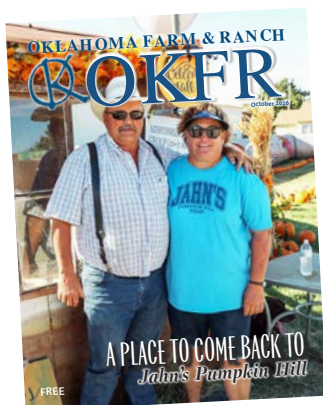
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ON THE COVER



Jahn's Pumpkin Hill has grown from a small family pumpkin patch into a favorite fall destination where agriculture, education and tradition come together.

(Photo courtesy of Mary Jahn)

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Fall in Oklahoma has always had a strong connection to agriculture, even when we do not always stop to think about it that way. Pumpkin patches, corn mazes, hayrides and farm tours have become part of the season for many families, but behind those experiences are real farms, real work and people who have found creative ways to help others better understand where food comes from and what life in agriculture actually looks like.

That is one of the reasons I enjoyed working on this month's story about Jahn's Pumpkin Hill.

When Mary Jahn first decided she wanted to start a pumpkin patch, there was not much to it, and plenty of people thought the idea was a little crazy. Over the years, though, the farm continued to grow. Attractions were added, traditions developed and generations of visitors began returning year after year. Today, Mary is seeing adults who first came to the farm as children bring their own kids back to experience it.

From the beginning, there has been an educational side to what the family does. School tours introduce children to farming, conservation and where their food comes from, while the farm itself gives visitors a chance to spend time in an agricultural setting they may not otherwise experience.

Of course, there is plenty of fun mixed in, too. Over the years, the family has added more activities, built new attractions and created a place where people can spend an afternoon enjoying the season. And, as you will read in the story, there are a few food traditions that have developed a following of their own.

Stories like this are a good reminder that agriculture is not limited to what happens behind a pasture gate or in a field. It can also be about opening those gates, inviting people in and giving them a better understanding of the work, knowledge and people behind the food and traditions they enjoy.

As always, I hope you find something in this issue that is useful, interesting or simply worth slowing down to read. Thank you for continuing to read and support Oklahoma Farm & Ranch.



Savannah Magoteaux

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Farm & Ranch...

Fall brings its own set of concerns for producers, and this month's Farm & Ranch section takes a closer look at a few of them. Dr. Barry Whitworth explains a recent setback in the effort to eradicate scrapie and what sheep and goat producers need to know. Noble Research Institute's Maddy Westbrook looks beyond simply getting rid of weeds and explores what plants such as ragweed and sandbur may be telling producers about pasture and soil conditions. We also look at when a heavy acorn crop can become more than a sign of fall, particularly when cattle begin relying on acorns because forage is short.



Scrapie: Eradication Restart

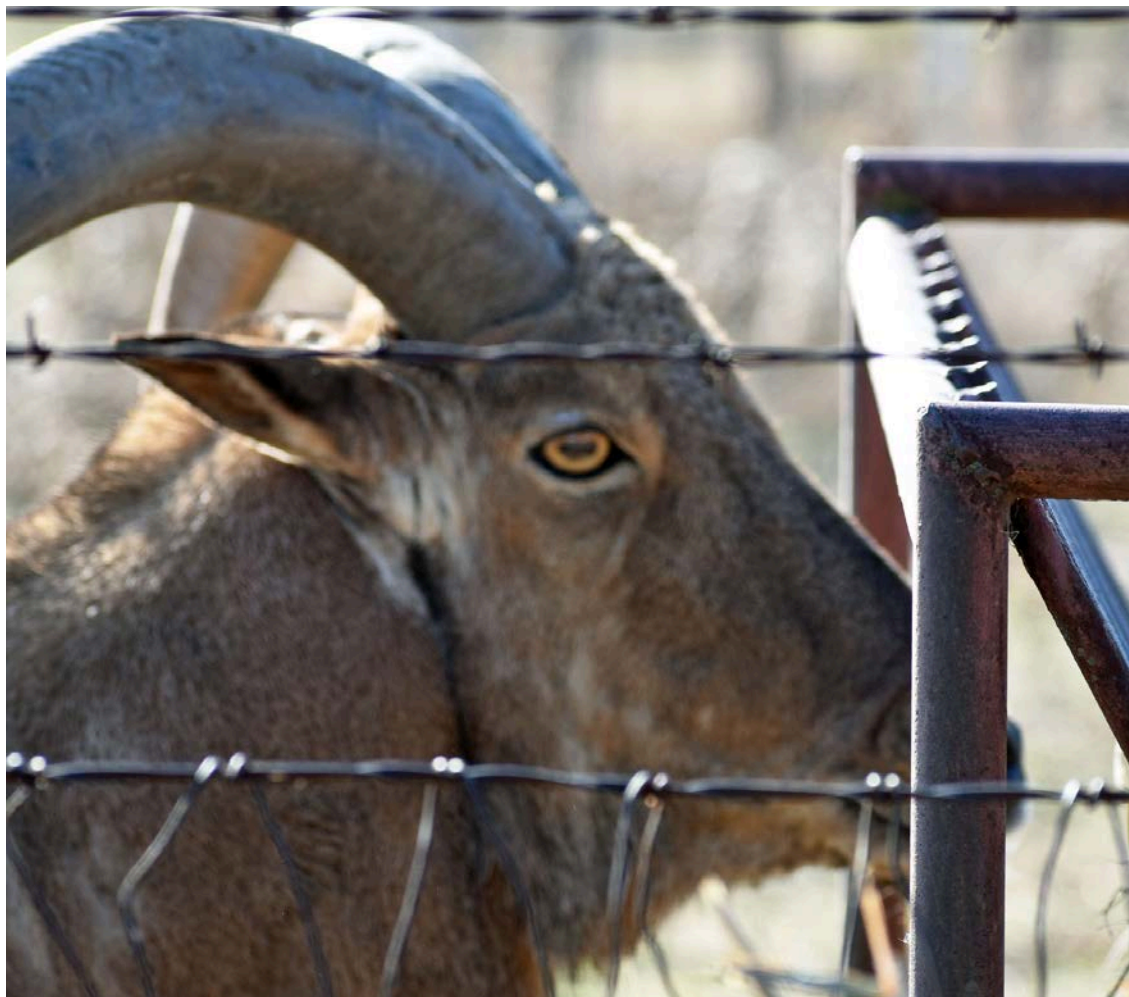
By Barry Whitworth, DVM

Scrapie is a chronic, progressive disease of the central nervous system that affects sheep and goats. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been trying to eliminate scrapie from small ruminant operations for decades. The United States (US) was positioned to meet World Organization for Animal Health's seven year benchmark for self declared scrapie freedom in January 2028. Unfortunately, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) confirmed classical scrapie in a sheep slaughtered at a facility in Oregon. With this confirmed detection, the quest for national scrapie free status in the US may be pushed to sometime in 2033.

Scrapie is the oldest of the group of neurodegenerative diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Some of the other TSEs are Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy known as mad cow disease, Chronic Wasting Disease, which is found in deer, and Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease which is found in humans. TSEs are protein-misfolding diseases that lead to brain damage and are always fatal.

The cause of scrapie is not completely understood, but evidence indicates that an infectious protein referred to as a prion is responsible for the disease. These infectious prions cause damage to the normal prion proteins found in the brain. The mis-folding of the proteins leads to brain damage and the presentation of clinical signs of the disease. Prions are very resistant to destruction, so once in the environment, they are difficult to remove.

Scrapie is believed to primarily be transmitted by the oral



The cause of scrapie is not completely understood, but evidence indicates that an infectious protein referred to as a prion is responsible for the disease. . (Courtesy photos)

route. Typically, lambs and kids might ingest the prion when they come in contact with the infectious agent through placentas and birthing fluids from infected ewes and does. Older animals may be exposed to the prions this way as well. Colostrum and milk are also sources of prions. Other secretions such as urine, feces, saliva, and nasal secretions may contain infectious prions as well. Once ingested, the prions cross into the lymphoid system. The prions will incubate for a long time usually two to five years before entering the nervous system.

Genetics plays a part in scrapie infections. Certain breeds are more susceptible to the disease due to genetic composition. Genetic testing is available for producers to help them select breeding stock with resistant genes.

Clinical signs most commonly associated with scrapie are intense pruritus, ataxia, and wasting away. Early in the disease, small ruminant producers may notice slight changes in behavior with sheep and goats infected with scrapie. Initially, animals may have a staring or fixed gaze, may not respond to

herding, and may be aggressive towards objects. As the disease progresses, other clinical signs noticed are progressive weight loss with normal appetite, incoordination, head tremors, and intense pruritus. In the terminal stages, sheep are recumbent and may have blindness, seizures, and an inability to swallow. Once initial clinical signs are noticed, death usually occurs in one to six months.

The gold standard for post-mortem (dead animals) diagnosing of scrapie is the use of immunohistochemistry testing

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on brain tissues as well as microscopic examination of brain tissue for characteristic TSE lesions. Live animal diagnosis is possible by testing lymphoid tissues from the third eyelid and rectal mucosa scrapings.

There is no treatment available for scrapie, so prevention is key to controlling the disease. Following biosecurity protocols is a good starting point for preventing scrapie. Part of the biosecurity plan is to maintain a closed flock and only buy replacement animals from certified scrapie free flocks.

Producers should limit visitors' contact with their animals. Sanitation is important in lambing and kidding areas. Manure and bedding contaminated with birthing fluids and placentas should be disposed of properly. Genetically resistant animals should be used for breeding to

produce genetically resistant offspring.

It should be noted that there is a novel or atypical form of scrapie. This disease may also be referred to as Nor98 variant. This atypical version of scrapie was initially found in Norway. It has been diagnosed in the US as well. The disease is usually only found in a single old animal in the flock or herd. The brain lesions in atypical scrapie are different from classical scrapie. Currently, experts believe that natural transmission of atypical scrapie is not likely.

Small ruminant producers can assist the USDA eradication efforts by contacting the USDA when they have an adult sheep or goat exhibiting clinical signs of scrapie or an adult animal dies or is euthanized. Producers should contact the Oklahoma State Veterinarian, Dr. Rod Hall at 405-522-6141 or the USDA Vet-

erinary Services at 405-254-1797. There is no charge for the collection or testing of the samples for scrapie.

Another important step in assisting with the elimination of scrapie and for that matter other diseases is to identify animals with an official USDA ID. The USDA National Scrapie Eradication Program requires that most sheep be identified to their flock of birth when they leave their home premises for sale, show, events, or commingle with other sheep.

Unfortunately, the sheep in Oregon diagnosed with scrapie did not have a tag. This will hamper traceback efforts by the USDA. More information on official ID can be found at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/nvap/reference-guide/animal-identification/sheep-goat>.

Scrapie is a disease that needs to be eliminated from the

US. Once eliminated, the US will have additional export markets for sheep and goat products. Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service has an informative fact sheet on scrapie. Please visit the Local County Extension Office and asked for fact sheet VTMD-9135 or producers may view the fact sheet online at <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/scrapie.html>. Also, sheep/goat producers may want to visit the USDA National Scrapie Eradication Program website at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/sheep-goat/scrapie>.

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Noble Learning:

The Message in the Weeds

By Maddy Westbrook



Before asking how to kill a weed, many land managers first ask why it's there. The answer may reveal opportunities to improve land health and profitability. (Courtesy photo)

Most producers have had the experience. You're driving through a pasture when a patch of ragweed catches your eye. Or maybe it's sandbur creeping into a grazing paddock or thistles standing above the forage canopy. Your mind shifts to a familiar question: How do I get rid of it?

But what if instead the ques-

tion was: Why is it here?

"We've been conditioned to see weeds as a nuisance," says Sky Toney, regenerative ranching advisor with Noble Research Institute. "A lot of folks are treating the symptom when they see weeds pop up. Instead of fixing that root issue, they're just battling weeds all day."

Weeds are often viewed as a

problem, but Toney compares them to a scab.

"If you think about the soil as your skin, weeds are kind of nature's scab," he says.

Just as a scab protects a wound while healing occurs underneath, many weeds move into disturbed areas to cover bare ground, capture sunlight and rebuild ecological function.

Ecologists call this succession. As soil health improves, one plant community often prepares the way for the next.

The same traits that allow a weed to thrive in a stressed environment can also help repair it.

This shift from seeing weeds as enemies to viewing them as indicators, and sometimes

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even allies, is one of the more surprising lessons producers encounter as they begin looking more closely at the relationships between soil health, grazing management and plant communities.

Ragweed

Western ragweed is often associated with areas experiencing chronic overgrazing or soil compaction. When desirable perennial plants struggle, opportunistic species like ragweed gain a competitive advantage.

But focusing only on the plant can cause producers to miss the bigger picture.

“I was at an operation that had a lot of ragweed and sil-verleaf nightshade,” Toney says. “They were just trying to get rid of it year after year, but they weren’t dealing with the root cause, which was overgrazing and soil compaction and low organic matter.”

Once grazing management changed and plants were given adequate recovery time, the pasture began to shift. Within a few seasons, the weed pressure largely disappeared.

“The weeds were there telling us something,” Toney says.

Ragweed can also provide more value than producers realize. Toney says sheep, goats and cattle readily graze giant ragweed on his operation.

He notes many weeds are simply plants livestock choose not to eat under conventional grazing systems because they prefer other options. Under different grazing strategies, many of those same plants can become valuable forage.

Sandbur

Few pasture plants are as frustrating as sandbur. Yet from an ecological perspective, sandbur often functions exactly as nature intended.

It frequently appears in disturbed, exposed or stressed soils. Overgrazing, drought,



Ragweed can provide more value than producers realize. Many weeds are simply plants livestock choose not to eat under conventional grazing systems because they prefer other options.

erosion and mechanical disturbance can create opportunities for the plant to establish.

“You very rarely see sandbur come in a really healthy system that has a lot of perennials and a lot of cover and good soil organic matter,” Toney says.

In other words, sandbur may be less of a weed problem and more of a bare ground problem. That doesn’t make it desirable, but it does make it informative. Like other early successional plants, sandbur quickly occupies open space. It protects exposed soil, captures sunlight and begins the process of rebuilding organic matter.

“It’s better than having nothing, better than having bare ground,” Toney says. “It’s photosynthesizing; it’s eventually adding some organic matter. It’s doing something with nutrient cycling.”

Sandbur isn’t the goal, but it can reveal underlying conditions allowing it to thrive. As soil cover improves and desirable forage species become more competitive, sandbur typically becomes less prevalent.

“We’re always thinking about

what the root cause is,” Toney says.

Thistle

During a recent Noble soil health course, participants dug up a thistle and examined its root system. Many were surprised by what they found.

“They’d always seen thistles as only a weed that they had to manage and deal with and kill,” Toney says.

What they discovered was a plant performing several important ecological functions.

Many thistle species often appear in disturbed, compacted or overgrazed soils. Yet the same deep taproots that allow them to survive those conditions can also help improve them.

Their roots penetrate compacted layers, create channels for water infiltration and pull nutrients from deeper soil horizons.

“The things that we see as a problem are actually the solution to the underlying issue,” Toney says.

The benefits extend beyond the soil. Thistles provide valuable habitat and food sources for pollinators, insects, birds

and other wildlife. Toney says it’s rare for him to inspect a blooming thistle without finding multiple insect species using it.

The plant even played an unexpected role at Noble’s Red River Ranch. In 2023, after the ranch transitioned toward regenerative management, a large population of musk thistle emerged. Rather than spraying, the team chose to observe. Later that spring, a grasshopper outbreak arrived.

The grasshoppers stripped the leaves from the musk thistles before moving on, leaving much of the surrounding forage intact.

“We actually had grass that survived the grasshoppers under the musk thistle,” Toney says. “That saved our bacon.”

The experience reinforced a lesson that producers learn repeatedly: Diversity creates resilience. In this case, the thistles served as an alternative food source, helping protect other forage species during a period of intense insect pressure.

Curiosity before control

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, producers are

encouraged to observe conditions and understand potential causes before taking action.

"At Noble, we are not giving you a prescription for how you need to address this issue," Toney says. "What we're trying to do is educate you on the principles and the why behind all of this."

That process begins by identifying the plant, understanding what conditions may favor it and evaluating whether management practices such as grazing pressure, recovery periods, soil disturbance or plant diversity are influencing its presence.

The goal is not simply to remove weeds but to understand what they are communicating. For Toney, the conversation often comes back to profitability.

Diverse plant communities can provide forage, support wildlife, improve nutrient cycling and reduce dependence on

purchased inputs.

"Why pay for something and spend the time and money to do something that nature will do for free for you?" he says.

Noble refers to this as a "safe to learn, safe to fail" approach. Rather than betting the whole operation on a new strategy, producers can test ideas on a small scale, observe results and adapt based on their own context.

Every ranch is different. What works in one environment may not work in another, even when both operations are guided by the same principles.

The next time an unwanted plant appears in your pasture, consider looking at it a little differently. It may be more than a weed. It may be a clue about the condition of your land and, in some cases, a partner in helping move it toward greater health, productivity and profitability.



Every ranch is different, so what works in one environment may not work in another, even when both are guided by the same principles.



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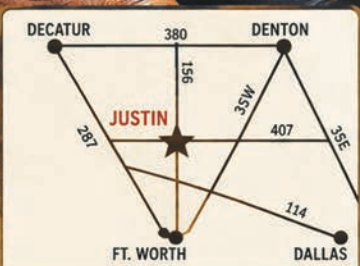
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When Acorns Become a Problem

By Savannah Magoteaux



Green acorns are generally considered more toxic than mature brown ones, but either can cause problems if cattle consume too much. (Courtesy photos)

A heavy crop of acorns under an oak tree usually looks more like a sign of fall than a livestock problem. For most cattle, most years, that is exactly what it is. Trouble begins when acorns stop being an occasional bite

and become a meaningful part of the diet.

Oak leaves, buds and acorns contain tannins that can damage the digestive tract and kidneys when eaten in large enough amounts. Green acorns

are generally considered more toxic than mature brown ones, but either can cause problems if cattle consume enough.

The risk tends to increase when forage is short and cattle begin looking for something

else to eat. Drought, overgrazed pastures or simply a heavy acorn crop can create that situation.

Cattle are not equally interested in acorns. A few animals in a herd may eat far more than the rest, which helps explain

why a problem can appear scattered. Early signs can be vague. Affected cattle may go off feed, appear depressed or develop constipation. As the damage progresses, dark or bloody manure, abdominal pain, frequent urination followed by reduced urine production, dehydration and weakness can occur. Kidney failure is the most serious concern.

There is no practical way to remove every acorn from a wooded pasture, so prevention is mostly about keeping cattle from relying on them. Adequate forage and supplementation reduce the incentive to eat large quantities.

Producers can also fence cattle away from heavily producing oaks for a time, especially when pasture conditions are poor. If several animals appear to be actively seeking out acorns, that is a reason to look closely at the rest of the ration rather than assuming they will stop on their own.

If oak poisoning is suspected, call a veterinarian early. Treatment is supportive and is much more useful before severe kidney damage occurs. Moving unaffected cattle away from the source and providing good-quality feed and water may also prevent additional cases.

Acorns are an important fall food for deer, squirrels and other wildlife, and a few acorns generally do not spell disaster for cattle.

The concern is quantity. A pasture full of oaks becomes a different management problem when grass is short, cattle are hungry and the ground is covered with something they are willing to eat.

Oak toxicity is most often discussed in cattle, but other livestock can be affected as well. The risk is not limited to acorns. Oak buds and young leaves also contain tannins, which is why spring can occasionally produce

problems too. In fall, however, the obvious temptation is lying on the ground where cattle can consume it quickly.

Producers can learn a lot by watching where cattle spend their time. If cows that normally graze open grass begin camping under oaks and actively hunting acorns, the behavior itself is useful information.

Walk the pasture, estimate how much usable forage is left and check whether a few dominant animals are consuming more than the rest. Hay or supplemental feed may help, but it should be placed where all cattle can access it rather than assuming one feeder will solve the problem.

Oak poisoning can resemble other illnesses, and kidney damage cannot be diagnosed from pasture observation alone. A veterinarian may use history, clinical signs and laboratory work to sort it from dehydration, digestive disease or other toxicities. That is another reason to mention a heavy acorn crop when calling. What looks like an ordinary fall detail can be an important part of the history.

A pasture plan does not have to be complicated. If one wooded trap has a much heavier acorn crop than the rest, use another pasture while cattle still have a choice.

If moving the herd is not possible, make sure hay and supplement are adequate before animals become hungry enough to seek acorns aggressively. Salt or mineral by itself will not correct a shortage of forage.

The problem usually fades as the crop is consumed, weathered or covered, but cattle that have already shown signs should not simply be returned as soon as they look better. Kidney injury can be serious.

Follow the veterinarian's recommendations and reassess the pasture before turning recovered animals back out. 🌰



Oak poisoning can resemble other illnesses, and kidney damage cannot be diagnosed from pasture observation alone.



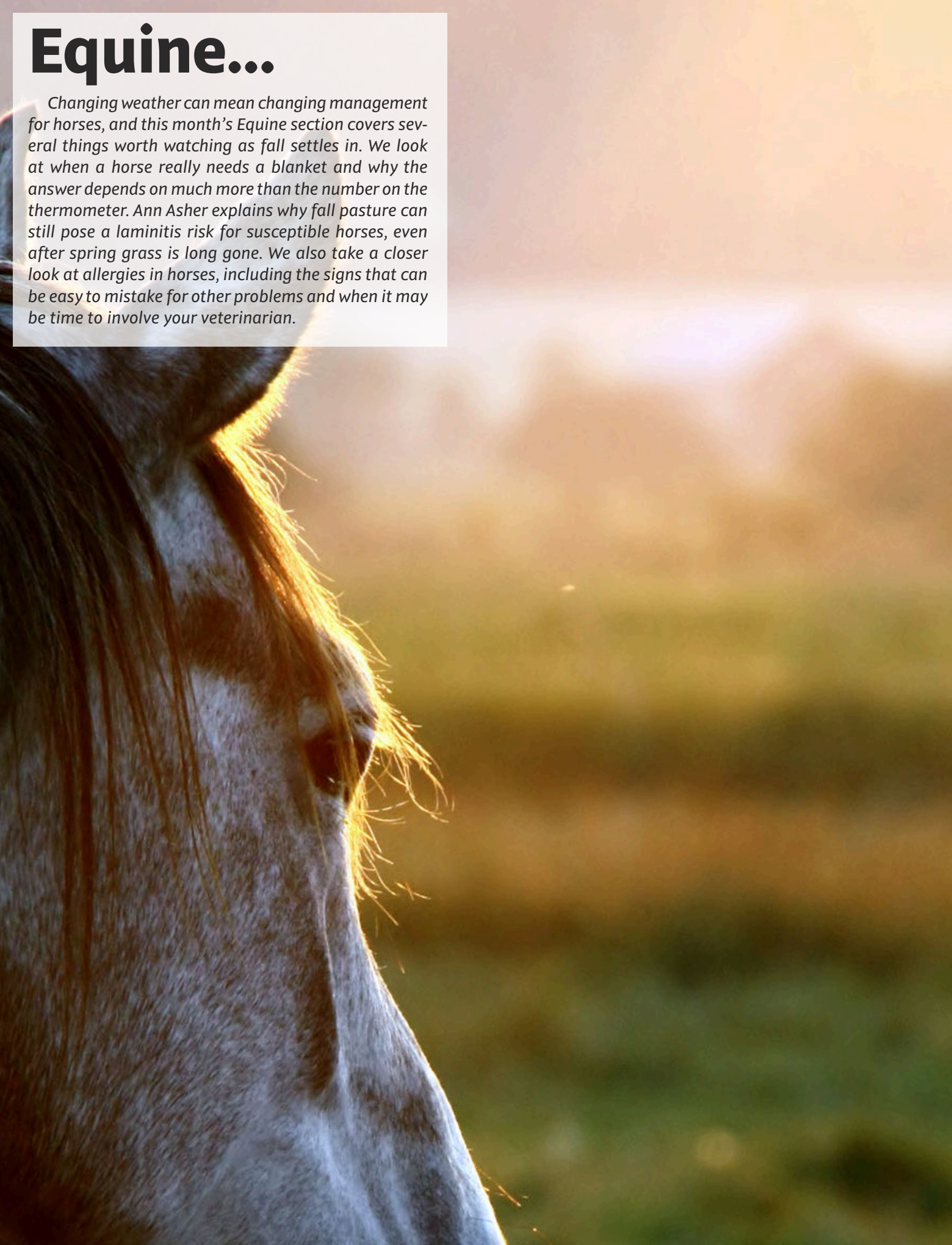
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Equine...

Changing weather can mean changing management for horses, and this month's Equine section covers several things worth watching as fall settles in. We look at when a horse really needs a blanket and why the answer depends on much more than the number on the thermometer. Ann Asher explains why fall pasture can still pose a laminitis risk for susceptible horses, even after spring grass is long gone. We also take a closer look at allergies in horses, including the signs that can be easy to mistake for other problems and when it may be time to involve your veterinarian.



Blanket Weather? Not Yet.

By OKFR Staff

The first cold morning of fall can make a horse owner reach for a blanket long before the horse needs one. Humans feel a 45-degree morning and think winter. A healthy horse with a good hair coat may feel something much closer to ordinary weather.

A horse's winter coat is built to trap air. When the hairs stand up, a response called piloerection, that trapped air becomes insulation. A good layer of body fat also helps. Put a flat sheet on an unclipped horse and it can press the coat down without adding much insulation, which is one reason blanketing decisions should be based on the horse and the weather rather than a single temperature.

Rain and wind change the equation. A dry winter coat can handle cold surprisingly well, but once hair is soaked or plastered with mud, it loses much of its insulating ability. A clipped horse also loses the protection nature intended. Older horses, thin horses, very young horses and animals that have recently moved from a warmer climate may need help sooner than a healthy, acclimated adult.

Penn State Extension recommends considering a blanket when a horse has no shelter and temperatures or wind chills fall below about 5 degrees Fahrenheit, when the horse may become wet in cold conditions, when it is body-clipped or when age, health or low body condition reduces its ability to stay warm.

Oklahoma owners may rarely see that first threshold, but cold rain and wind are common enough to matter.

Blankets also create work. They should fit properly, stay dry and come off regularly so the



A dry winter coat can handle cold surprisingly well, but once hair is soaked or plastered with mud, it loses much of its insulating ability. (Courtesy photo)

horse can be checked for weight loss, skin problems, rubs and a twisted blanket. On warmer afternoons, a horse can sweat underneath a blanket that was comfortable overnight.

The better question is not, "What temperature do I blanket?" It is, "What does this horse need in these conditions?" A clipped show horse in a north wind and cold rain may need a blanket while an unclipped, well-conditioned pasture horse with a shed is perfectly comfortable beside him.

Feed is part of cold-weather protection, too. Fermentation of fiber in the hindgut produces heat, which is one reason adequate forage matters during cold spells. A horse standing at a round bale with shelter and water may regulate tempera-

ture better than one wearing an expensive blanket but short on forage.

Watch the horse rather than the forecast alone. Shivering, a tucked posture, persistent cold ears and limbs, weight loss or reluctance to move can signal that the horse is struggling. At the other extreme, sweat under a blanket means the horse is too warm. Slide a hand beneath the blanket at the shoulder and chest rather than judging comfort from how cold your own hands feel.

Owners who blanket should have a plan for changing weather. Oklahoma can move from a freezing morning to a sunny 60-degree afternoon. A blanket chosen for dawn may be far too much by lunch. That is one reason a horse that lives outside

without constant supervision can sometimes be easier to manage with its natural coat, provided it is healthy, acclimated and has shelter from wet wind.

A good shelter does not have to be heated. A three-sided shed or natural windbreak can dramatically reduce exposure if it is placed so the horse can get out of prevailing wind and driving rain. Bedding in a dry shelter also lets a horse lie down without losing heat to wet ground.

Blanketing should never hide a nutrition problem. Thick fabric makes it easy to miss ribs becoming more prominent. Run hands over the neck, ribs and topline every few days through winter. A horse can lose a surprising amount of weight before it is obvious under hair and a blanket. 

Fall Laminitis is Still a Concern

By Ann Asher



While springtime is the period most often associated with laminitis, fall is not automatically a safe season (Courtesy photo)

Spring grass gets most of the attention when horse owners talk about laminitis, but fall is not automatically a safe season. Cool nights, sunny days and active plant growth can create pasture conditions that deserve caution, particularly for horses with insulin dysregulation, equine metabolic syndrome, a history of laminitis or an easy-keeping body type.

Grass stores energy as sugars and other nonstructural carbohydrates. Concentrations change with plant species, weather, time of day and stage of growth. Bright sunlight allows the plant to produce sugars.

When nights are warm enough for active growth, some of that energy is used. During cold nights, growth slows, and sugars can remain in the plant. That is why a stretch of sunny fall days followed by chilly nights can be a problem for a susceptible horse even when the pasture no longer looks lush and spring-green.

The important point is that there is no single safe clock time or temperature that applies to every pasture.

Conditions vary too much. Restricting turnout, using a well-fitted grazing muzzle, feeding tested hay and creating a dry lot are common management

tools, but the right combination depends on the horse.

Owners should also recognize early signs of laminitis. A horse may become reluctant to walk, turn stiffly, shift weight, spend more time lying down or develop stronger digital pulses. The front feet are commonly affected, and some horses adopt the classic rocked-back stance to reduce weight on the toes. Any suspected laminitis deserves prompt veterinary attention.

Fall pasture can create another trap. Owners may assume that grass has lost most of its nutritional value because it is shorter or less attractive. Yet

stressed or cool-season plants can still contain enough sugar to matter to a metabolically sensitive horse.

For an at-risk horse, management should be based on the individual rather than the season. A horse that foundered on pasture before should not be turned out freely simply because October arrived. Work with a veterinarian on metabolic testing and body condition, and use forage testing when tighter dietary control is needed.

Grass changes through the year. The horse standing on it may not. If a horse is an easy keeper in May, it is still an easy



Body condition is one of the easiest risk factors to monitor.

keeper in October, and fall pasture deserves the same respect.

Pasture management can reduce risk as well. Overgrazed grass is not necessarily low-sugar grass.

Plants that are repeatedly grazed short can remain stressed and may contain concentrated nonstructural carbohydrates in the remaining tissue. Turning a susceptible horse onto a sparse lot and assuming there is “nothing out there” can be misleading if the horse spends hours hunting every green blade.

Hay is not automatically safer. For horses that require a low-nonstructural-carbohydrate diet, forage testing is the only reliable way to know what a hay lot contains.

Soaking hay can reduce water-soluble carbohydrates, but results vary, nutrients leach into the water and the soaked hay must be handled carefully in warm weather. It is a management tool, not a substitute for veterinary and nutritional planning.

Exercise can improve insu-

lin sensitivity in appropriate horses, but a horse with active laminitis should not be forced to walk for exercise. Pain and structural damage in the hoof require veterinary and farrier guidance first. Once the horse is stable, weight management and an appropriate exercise plan may become part of long-term prevention.

Body condition is one of the easiest risk factors to monitor. A cresty neck, fat deposits over the tailhead or a horse that gains weight on very little feed should prompt a more careful discussion about metabolic health.

Weight tapes and monthly photographs can show gradual changes that are hard to see when the owner looks at the horse every day.

Fall can also be the right time to plan winter forage rather than waiting until pasture is gone.

Securing tested hay early gives owners more control over calories and sugar than buying whatever is available after a cold snap. For a metabolically sensitive horse, that planning is part of hoof care. 



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A PLACE TO COME BACK TO

Jahn's Pumpkin Hill

By Savannah Magoteaux, Editor



When Mary Jahn came home with the idea of opening a pumpkin patch on the family's place near Cyril, even her husband, Jerry, wondered who would drive out into wheat pasture country to buy a pumpkin. She had two small boys, a cattle and wheat operation around her and no particular advantage when it came to growing pumpkins. She also had a picture of a place where families could spend a day together and feel welcome. Jahn's Pumpkin Hill opened in 2002 with some pumpkins, a rented concession wagon and a swing. Today visitors take a farm tour, feed animals, play for hours and eat pumpkin treats baked on site. The boys Mary wanted to stay home with are grown. Now she meets parents who came to the patch as children and bring children of their own.

Photos courtesy of Jahn's Pumpkin Hill.



The idea started with a practical question: How could Mary bring in income without putting Cale and Spencer in daycare? She and Jerry ran cattle on wheat pasture along with a cow-calf herd, and Jerry also worked off the farm.

After Mary and a friend took their children to a pumpkin patch, she could picture something similar at home. Jerry needed more convincing. Pumpkins were an odd proposition in cattle and wheat country, and Mary wondered what the neighbors would think. She cared more about staying home with her boys.

"I was not going to put my boys in daycare," she said. "I just thought I'll do this and we'll make it."

About 600 people came that first season, though the venture made little money at first. Mary remembers the pumpkins, a swing and a rented Coke concession wagon. "We didn't have much," she said. Those first 600 visitors proved that families would drive out to a pasture, pick a pumpkin and stay awhile. The Jahns set about giving them more to do.

Mary also carried a lesson from the patch that gave her the idea, and wanted her own visitors to know the Jahns were glad they came, and she built that welcome into the operation along with the pumpkins and play equipment.

Jerry is often the first person families meet when they arrive. Mary spends much of the day on trailer tours.

Between trips she visits with guests, pitches in where she's needed and passes out tasty bites of whatever came out of the kitchen.

The family added attractions one season at a time, usually after spotting a need. First came a concession stand, then a bigger one, then more places to play. "We just started adding things



This page: Now more than 20 years after opening, Jahn's Pumpkin Hill has become a repeat attraction, with guests coming back not only for the pumpkins, but also the tasty treats.

every year,” Mary said. “We just grew it like that, very slowly and a little bit at a time.” Over more than two decades, those small additions have changed what a visit looks like. A family can come for a pumpkin and spend the afternoon in the hay maze, on the slides, jumping pillow and junior zip line, with the animals and on a tour of the farm. Children have room to run, and adults can sit and watch. The patch sits out in the pasture, away from road traffic and the pace of town.

Some of Mary’s early plans failed. She believed a pumpkin patch ought to grow its own pumpkins, so the Jahns planted them.

Grasshoppers went after the young plants, and the pumpkins that survived weren’t the firm, bright ones Mary wanted families to take home. “Pumpkins love sand and irrigation, and we have neither,” she said. She tells the story with the grasshoppers cheering: “Oh hallelujah! Thank you for this plant you gave us.” Meanwhile, the pumpkins the family trucked in and set out on wheat pasture drew plenty of attention from visitors. Mary decided to stop fighting the ground and put her effort into the visit.

The Jahns now buy their pumpkins from Pumpkin Pyle, farmers from Floydada, Texas, and they don’t pretend otherwise. Their own agriculture surrounds the patch: cattle on wheat pasture, no-till farming and stocker heifers.

The family also runs a trucking business that hauls gypsum rock. Buying pumpkins let Pumpkin Hill fit the land the Jahns farm, instead of asking it for a crop that kept failing. Visitors still choose their own pumpkin, and they see a working Oklahoma farm while they’re at it.

Cale and Spencer worked the patch from the start, though Mary laughs that their enthusi-



Mary Jahn wanted a place where guests could enjoy themselves.

asm varied. As boys they helped with horse rides, set out pumpkins, picked up trash and did whatever else needed doing.

The rest of the farm ran the same way: If their parents were working wheat ground or processing cattle, the boys went along.

When Cale got older, Mary sometimes had him lead the

farm tour because he had an excellent speaking voice. He did it reluctantly. Spencer, a man of fewer words, was never a likely tour guide, and he found other ways to help.

Both sons still help, and much of what children play on carries their work. Jerry and the boys built the metal framing for the slides and other structures. This

year the family built a new barn where parents and grandparents can sit out of the heat and keep an eye on the kids. Spencer’s hauling work keeps him on the road, but he helped with the barn too. Cale has moved back home with his wife and their two young sons. The boys who once picked up trash at the patch are

Continue on page 22



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now building it for their own children.

What families take home

The barn is one of several additions this season. There are more saucer swings and a circular climbing net Mary calls a 16-foot spider web. Cale's wife, Abbye, arranged a new tower of stacked pumpkins that makes a good photo spot. They join longtime favorites like the Hiney Slide, jumping pillow, junior zip line and hay maze. Visitors can meet sheep, goats, pigs and cattle, and Mary gets a kick out of letting children feed a pig a cookie. Many young guests have never touched a pig, sheep or goat, and she likes giving them the chance.

Then there is the food. A wonderful cook handles the baking at Pumpkin Hill, and Mary talks about the treats like someone who has watched people come back for them.

The pumpkin Twinkie is a small piece of pumpkin bread split and filled with a generous layer of cream cheese icing. There are pumpkin pies, small loaves of pumpkin bread and a rotating lineup of brownies and cookies.

On a hot Oklahoma fall afternoon, the homemade lemonade may beat any dessert. Mary says visitors look forward to it, and she keeps iced tea on hand too. When the calendar says fall and the thermometer says summer, she knows which one people will reach for.

After more than two decades, opening day still makes Mary nervous. She has never reached the point of assuming visitors will show up. "I still think, 'Oh no! No one is going to come,'" she said. New attractions take planning, upkeep and labor, and the family hires people to staff the concession area. Mary looks for workers who are patient and kind with guests. If families make the trip, she wants some-

This page: The Jahn's still have a working farm, but some elements might play two parts, like mazes for guests to explore.



Visitors can feed and pet all types of farm animals, including goats and pigs.

one to talk with them, help them enjoy the day and make them feel at home.

The farm tour shows that approach best. Jerry refurbished an old cotton trailer with seats and steps, and a John Deere tractor pulls it around the place.

Once everyone is aboard, Mary has them for about 15 minutes, and she uses the time. She talks about the cattle they pass, what the heifers will do as they mature and how food gets from a farm to the table. She points out other products agriculture provides.

She covers local history too, from her grandparents' arrival in Cyril in 1940 to her own parents, a farmer and a schoolteacher. A school group may come for pumpkins and playtime, but the kids leave knowing more about the land around the patch.

"That's one of my favorite parts," Mary said of the tours. Her topics change with the

farm's season and with what she can point out along the route. In past years she has talked about soil conservation, erosion and the importance of grass. She doesn't assume children know what cattle eat, how crops are raised or why land needs care. Many meet farm animals for the first time that day. Mary lets them feed an animal, then shows them the pasture and explains the work behind it. Agriculture gets a little more familiar, and the outing never turns into a classroom lesson.

Mary knows how easily local history slips away when nobody passes it on to the next group of children. The trailer gives her time to talk about the people who lived and worked around Cyril before them. It also gives visitors a real person to ask. Her enthusiasm doesn't stop when the ride does. She'll answer a question at the concession stand or stop to hear why a fam-

ily came that day.

Some visits mark occasions Mary never could have imagined when she rented that concession wagon. She remembers a couple who brought their children on the day their adoption became official. When Mary learned what the day meant, she gave the children T-shirts.

Years later the mother told her the family still had one of those shirts, though the child had long outgrown it. Other families have come while facing something hard and needed an afternoon together. Mary can't know what each guest carries through the gate. She can give them room to play, visit and spend time with the people they came with.

Mary remembers a woman who told her she first came to Pumpkin Hill as a kindergartner and had come back with the next generation of her family. Visits like that show Mary how long the

Jahns have opened their pasture each fall. Her sons are grown, and she has grandsons to keep track of. Some of the children who once climbed and played at the patch now watch their own kids do the same. Mary sees the years in those faces, and she is still appreciative every season when people come through the gate.

The Jahns keep farming, building and getting ready for the next crowd. Jerry greets arrivals, Mary climbs aboard the trailer, and the family tends the place that started with a few pumpkins and a swing. The details change each year, from a new barn to another spot for a child to climb.

Mary's reasons haven't changed. She wanted to be home with her boys and to give other families a place to be together. Those boys now help run it, and the families keep coming back. 

Is It Really Allergies?

By Ann Asher

A horse covered in hives sends an owner back through the previous 24 hours. Was it the new bag of feed? A different fly spray? Something blooming in the pasture? Sometimes the answer is obvious. Other times, finding the cause takes real detective work.

Allergy signs vary from horse to horse. One breaks out in raised welts across his neck and body. Another spends weeks rubbing out his mane and tail. A third coughs whenever he's stalled or runs out of air too soon during exercise.

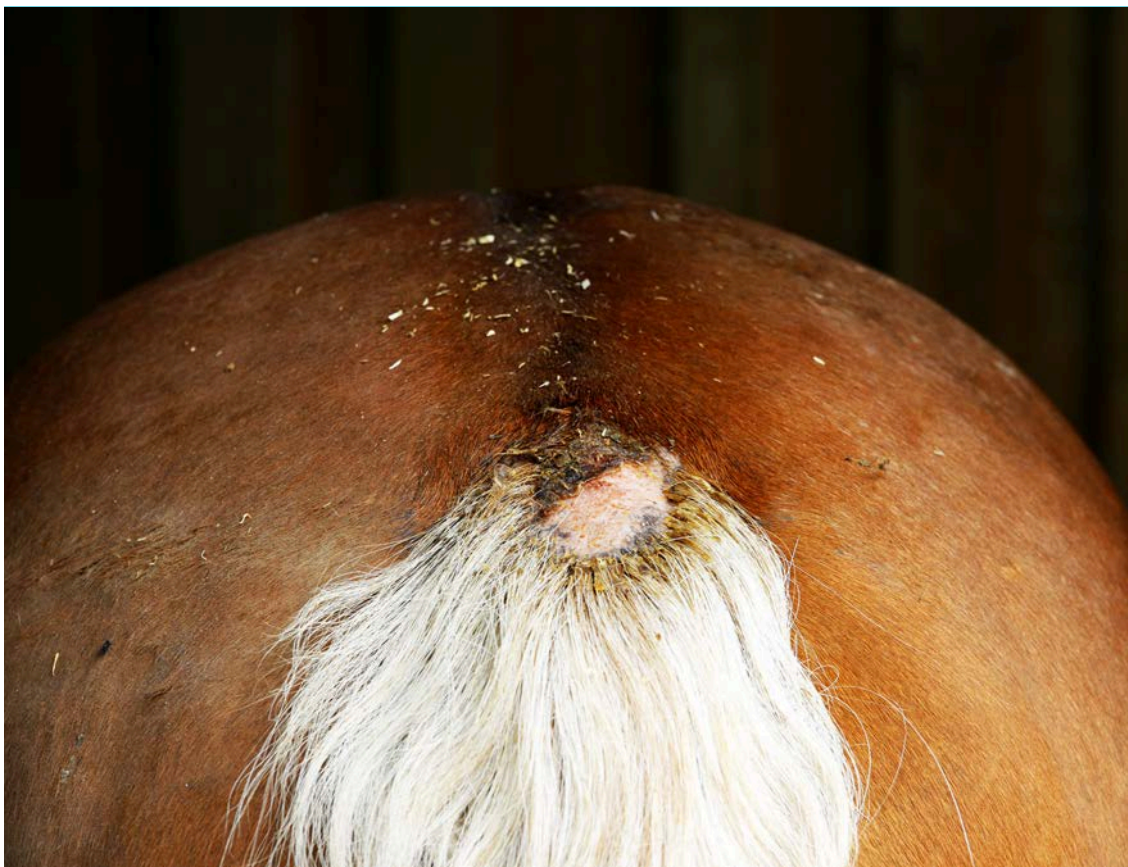
Many of those signs can also come from something other than allergies, so figuring out whether a horse has one means looking past the most obvious symptom.

More than just hives

Hives, or urticaria, appear as raised swellings under the skin, range from small bumps to large plaques and can show up within hours. Insects, medications and environmental allergens can all trigger them. Some horses develop hives after eating something, though researchers understand food allergies in horses far less well than feed marketing and online forums suggest.

Your veterinarian will likely start by asking what changed before the reaction: recent medications, vaccinations, feed, supplements, bedding, grooming products and insect exposure. A single episode that clears quickly may stay a mystery, but repeated episodes deserve a closer look.

Itching is another common sign of allergic skin disease. An itchy horse rubs his mane, tail, face or body on anything within reach, and over time the rubbing leads to bald patches, thickened



Allergy signs vary from horse to horse, and many of those signs can also come from something other than allergies, so figuring out whether a horse has one means looking past the obvious. (Courtesy photo)

skin, sores and secondary infections.

One of the best-known causes is insect bite hypersensitivity, also called sweet itch, an allergic response to the saliva of biting midges in the genus *Culicoides*. Affected horses become intensely itchy during insect season, and the location and timing of their lesions help your veterinarian narrow down the cause. Fly sheets, repellents, fans and screened stalls all help, as does keeping the horse in when biting insects are most active.

A horse that rubs his tail doesn't necessarily have an allergy, though. Parasites, skin infections and other skin conditions produce similar signs, so

veterinarians diagnose allergic skin disease from the horse's history and clinical signs after ruling out other possibilities.

When the problem is in the air

Hay, bedding and barn air carry dust, mold spores, pollen and other particles. In susceptible horses, breathing them in can inflame the lower airways.

Veterinarians now use the term equine asthma for this group of chronic lower-airway conditions. The mild to moderate form was once called inflammatory airway disease, and the severe form went by heaves or recurrent airway obstruction. A horse with a mild case may cough now and then, lose a step in performance or take longer

to recover after work. A horse with a severe case may struggle to breathe while standing still in his stall.

Medication can calm the inflammation, but the improvement won't last if the horse keeps breathing whatever irritates his airways. Hay is a leading source of respirable dust, even when it looks like good forage. Depending on the horse, your veterinarian may recommend soaking or steaming hay or switching to a lower-dust forage product. Low-dust bedding, good ventilation and moving horses out while you clean stalls also help.

More turnout helps some horses, especially those that get

worse in a dusty barn. Others develop summer pasture-associated asthma, triggered by pollen and other outdoor allergens, so the right fix depends on the horse and where he lives.

Finding the trigger

Owners sometimes expect an allergy test to hand them a list of things their horse should avoid. Veterinarians can run intradermal skin tests and blood tests for allergen-specific antibodies, but a positive result does not prove that a given substance is causing the horse's problem, and healthy horses can test positive too.

The World Association for Veterinary Dermatology's consensus guidelines state that these tests should not be used by themselves to diagnose insect bite hypersensitivity or atopic dermatitis. Veterinarians use them mainly to choose allergens for allergen-specific im-

munotheapy, commonly called allergy shots.

The same guidelines do not consider blood tests reliable for diagnosing food allergy. If your veterinarian suspects a feed, a controlled elimination diet followed by a challenge with the suspect ingredient gives more meaningful answers. Work through that process with your veterinarian, since pulling hay, feed or supplements without accounting for the horse's nutritional needs can create new problems.

To evaluate a horse for equine asthma, a veterinarian combines history and a physical exam with procedures such as airway endoscopy or bronchoalveolar lavage, which collects cells from the lower airways for examination.

Managing what you can't avoid

Once you and your veterinarian identify the trigger, the first

step is to reduce exposure to it. That gets hard when the culprit is grass pollen, insects or particles in hay, so management often means reducing exposure rather than eliminating it.

Veterinarians may also prescribe medication to control inflammation or itching. Corticosteroids are a common choice, but they carry risks, including laminitis in some horses. Veterinarians sometimes use antihistamines, though evidence for them in horses is limited.

For some horses with environmental allergies, allergen-specific immunotherapy is an option. The injections expose the horse to selected allergens over months to shift his immune response, and results differ from horse to horse. For insect bite hypersensitivity, the consensus guidelines state that avoiding insects remains the most effective strategy, and evidence sup-

porting commercially available immunotherapy for *Culicoides* allergy is still limited.

When it's an emergency

Hives usually look worse than they are, but a severe systemic reaction can kill a horse. Call your veterinarian immediately if your horse shows difficulty breathing, weakness, collapse or other signs of anaphylaxis.

For less dramatic cases, photos and good records help. Write down when symptoms appear, what the horse was eating, where he was housed, any recent medications or vaccines, and changes in grooming products.

The answer may turn out to be the midges that arrive every summer or the dust from one particular hay. The hives, the cough or the rubbed-out mane gets your attention first, and your horse stays comfortable over the long run once you know what's causing it. 

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Lifestyle...

There is plenty about fall that makes its way from the farm to the front porch and into the kitchen. Ann Asher looks at how pumpkins became such a familiar part of American fall decorating and the agricultural history behind the tradition. In "Where the Paved Road Ends," Beth Watkins remembers Dolly Parton through a childhood song, faith and the example she left behind. Then Lacey Vilhauer finishes things on a sweet note with Peanut Butter & Caramel 4 Layer Brownies, complete with layers of chocolate, caramel, peanut butter nougat and more chocolate.



Pumpkins on a Porch

By Ann Asher

Long before the first pumpkin-spice sign appears in a store, pumpkins begin showing up on porches. Some are carved, some are stacked beside mums and hay bales, and some stay exactly where they were placed until the first hard freeze turns them soft. The tradition feels thoroughly American, but the story behind it crosses the Atlantic.

People in Ireland and other parts of the British Isles carved lanterns from turnips and other root vegetables long before pumpkins became the standard. The practice became associated with Halloween customs and stories of wandering spirits. The carved vegetables were hollowed, given faces and lit from within.

Immigrants brought those traditions to North America, where they encountered a much better carving material. Pumpkins were native to the Americas, already grown here for food long before European settlement. Compared with a hard turnip, a large pumpkin was easier to hollow out and offered a much bigger surface for a face.

By the 19th century, pumpkins were increasingly tied to American autumn imagery. They were harvest food, livestock feed and a symbol of rural abundance. Halloween grew into a widely celebrated community holiday, and the jack-o'-lantern became one of its most recognizable decorations.

The porch pumpkin that is never carved owes as much to harvest decorating as to Halloween. Corn shocks, gourds, apples and pumpkins once represented what had come out of fields and gardens.

Today's fall porch may be more decorative than practical, but it still borrows from the vi-



The modern porch display blends several threads that were developed separately: harvest, decoration, Halloween lanterns, and the pumpkins long place in American agriculture. (Courtesy photo)

sual language of harvest.

Pumpkins also fit the season unusually well. They keep for weeks when handled carefully, come in enough shapes and colors to satisfy any decorator and can move from porch to kitchen if they are edible varieties. Afterward, sound, undecorated pumpkins can be composted rather than sent to the landfill.

One caution: painted or chemically treated pumpkins should not be offered to livestock or wildlife, and even plain pumpkins are not something to dump in large quantities for wild animals. Local rules may also prohibit intentional wildlife feeding.

A pumpkin on an Oklahoma porch may look like nothing more than seasonal decoration. Behind it is a mix of Indigenous agriculture, European folk custom, immigration and American harvest culture. That is a lot of history for something we eventually cut a smile into.

The pumpkin itself has an American agricultural story that predates Halloween by thousands of years. Squashes in the genus *Cucurbita* were domesticated in the Americas, and Indigenous peoples grew them for food long before European colonization. Early European settlers quickly adopted squash and pumpkins because they stored well and provided reliable calories.

By the 1800s, American writers were already using pumpkins as symbols of country life and harvest. Washington Irving's 1820 story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" famously ends with a shattered pumpkin, although it does not describe a carved jack-o'-lantern. Later 19th-century newspapers and magazines increasingly connected carved pumpkins with Halloween celebrations.

The modern porch display blends several threads that developed separately: harvest

decoration, Halloween lanterns and the pumpkin's long place in American agriculture. That is why the same pumpkin can look perfectly at home beside a scarecrow in early October and become a jack-o'-lantern by the end of the month.

Commercial pumpkin production eventually reinforced the tradition. Growers selected varieties for carving size, strong stems, unusual colors and long display life in addition to eating quality. The pumpkin patch became an attraction of its own, turning harvest into a family outing rather than simply a farm crop.

Oklahoma farms now sell everything from classic orange carving pumpkins to white, blue-gray and deeply ribbed heirloom types.

The porch display may look modern, but it still depends on a crop bred and grown to handle fall weather better than most garden produce. ☕

Where the Paved Road Ends

A Coat of Many Colors

By Beth Watkins

I have started this over and over.

Usually, when that happens, it's because I can't think of anything to say. This time, it's because I have too much.

Too many memories. Too many feelings. A heart full of gratitude mixed with a sadness that feels a little silly when you consider I never actually knew Dolly Parton.

And yet, somehow, didn't we all feel like we did?

When the news came that Dolly had died, there was a collective sadness that seemed to settle over people from every walk of life. Country music fans, rock stars, grandmothers, little girls, people from the mountains and people who wouldn't know which end of a cow the feed goes in.

Everybody had a Dolly story.

Mine begins in a little trailer house.

My sister and I shared a bedroom growing up, and although I couldn't tell you exactly how old we were, I can still picture that room. It wasn't much bigger than the full-size bed pushed against the wall. There wasn't room for matching nightstands, reading chairs or any of the things Pinterest would now tell us a bedroom requires.

There was just enough room for two sisters.

And at night, my sister would sing me to sleep.

She has always had a beautiful voice, and the song that seemed to send me off to sleep best was Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors.



Everybody seems to have a Dolly Parton story. (Photo courtesy of Beth Watkins)

I can still hear it.

Funny how memories work. I couldn't tell you what color the curtains were or what was

hanging on the wall. I couldn't tell you what pajamas I had on or what we had eaten for supper. But more than fifty years later, I

can close my eyes and hear my sister singing about a little girl whose mama stitched together a coat made from rags and told her the Bible story of Joseph and his coat of many colors.

Every stitch was sewn with love.

Back then, I only knew it was a pretty song that somehow soothed my little-girl soul.

I didn't know I was listening to a lesson.

A lesson about poverty without shame.

About finding abundance in what the world might call lack.

About the difference between what something costs and what something is worth.

And maybe that is why Dolly's death feels strangely personal to so many of us.

Her songs weren't simply songs. They found their way into bedrooms and kitchens, old pickups and beauty shops. They became part of weddings, funerals, childhoods and long drives home.

Somewhere along the way, Dolly Parton became woven into the fabric of our lives.

Since her passing, I have seen one phrase repeated again and again:

Be like Dolly.

Be kind like Dolly.

Love people like Dolly.

Give like Dolly.

Don't judge people.

Treat everyone with dignity.

Stay humble.

Stay true to who you are.

And I understand exactly what people mean. Lord knows the world could use a whole lot



Dolly simply let her light shine. (Stock photo)

more of that.

But I keep thinking...

Those ideas didn't begin with Dolly Parton.

The Bible was here long before Dolly.

The Ten Commandments were here long before Dolly.

"Love your neighbor as yourself" was spoken long before somebody glued the first rhinestone onto a guitar.

And Dolly herself would have known that better than most.

She grew up dirt poor in the mountains of Tennessee, one of twelve children, in a family where faith wasn't something reserved for Sunday morning. She grew up singing in church, and throughout her life she spoke openly about prayer, God, forgiveness and her belief that the gifts she had been given came with a purpose.

She believed God had His hand on her life and that she was supposed to do something good with it.

I'd say she did.

The remarkable thing about Dolly wasn't that she spent her life preaching Christianity at people.

She lived much of it in front of them.

She fed people. She helped people. She put books into the hands of millions of children who might otherwise never have owned one.

She poured money back into the poor mountain community she came from.

She stepped forward when families were devastated by disaster.

She treated the powerful and the powerless with the same dignity.

And somehow, she managed to become one of the most famous women in the world without deciding that made her better than anybody else.

She also seemed to understand something we have forgotten lately:

Not every conversation has to become a political argument.

Dolly was asked plenty of times to weigh in on politics, and she repeatedly made it clear that she was an entertainer, not a politician.

She had opinions—of course she did—but she didn't seem to believe every opinion needed a microphone.

Well, mercy.

Imagine that.

Today we can't seem to buy tomatoes without somebody wanting to know how we vote.

Dolly somehow managed to welcome people without first requiring them to agree with her.

Maybe that's part of the void we feel now.

We didn't just lose a singer.

We lost one of those increasingly rare people whom almost everybody had agreed we could simply love.

But here's where I think we need to be careful.

If we say, "Don't let Dolly's

spirit die," and all we mean is play her music louder, wear rhinestones, visit Dollywood and quote her funny sayings, then I think we've missed the best part of what she left us.

Honor her by doing what she did.

See people.

Help somebody who can't repay you.

Give quietly.

Speak kindly.

Remember where you came from.

Laugh at yourself.

Use whatever God placed in your hands to make somebody else's road a little easier.

And for heaven's sake, sometimes keep your opinion to yourself.

Maybe the message isn't really Be like Dolly.

Maybe it's this:

Remember who Dolly was
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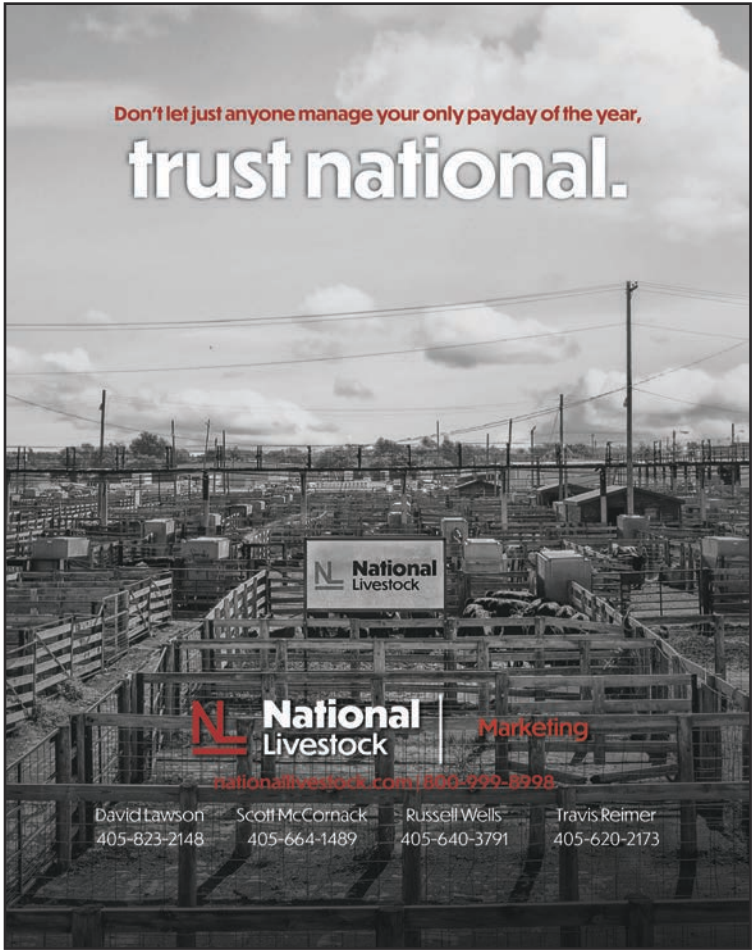
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trying to be like: Jesus.
A woman who understood that she had been blessed, and therefore had a responsibility to bless somebody else.
A light. And lights aren't meant merely to be admired. They're meant to help somebody else find their way.
Somewhere in my memory, there will always be a little trailer-house bedroom, a full-size bed pushed against the wall, and my sister's beautiful voice singing a Dolly Parton song until her big sister drifted off to sleep.
I didn't know then that the song would follow me through nearly every season of my life.
Even now, when my sister and I take one of our sister trips and end up sharing a hotel room, I still make the same request:
Sing me my song.
And she does.
I didn't know, lying in that

little bed all those years ago, that the woman who wrote those words would one day leave such an enormous empty space behind.
But even through the sadness, I can't help but smile.
Because somewhere beyond what we can see, I like to imagine Heaven's choir sounding just a little sweeter now.
Dolly left a void here on earth, but she also left something behind that death cannot take away—the example of a life lived with faith, generosity, humor, humility and love.
Maybe we don't keep her light alive by trying to become Dolly. Maybe we keep it alive by remembering what she knew all along:
The light was never hers to begin with.
It came from God.
She simply let it shine.
And now it's our turn. ☞

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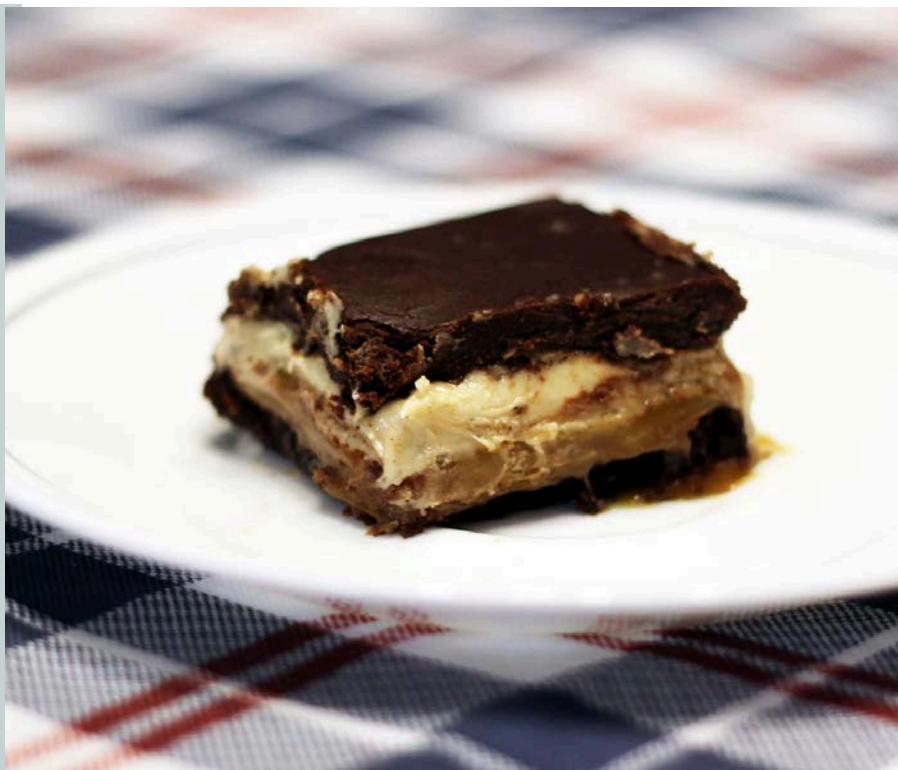
Lacey's Pantry

By Lacey Vilhauer

Peanut Butter & Caramel 4 Layer Brownies

Ingredients:

- 3 ounces unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 1/4 cups sugar (divided)
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 68 Kraft caramels (1 1/2 bags), unwrapped
- 2/3 cup evaporated milk (divided)
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1/3 cup butter
- One 7 ounce jar marshmallow creme
- 1/4 cup creamy peanut butter
- 12 ounces chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/4 cup whipping cream



Instructions:

1. In a medium saucepan combine chocolate and butter.
2. Cook and stir over low heat until melted and smooth.
3. Remove from heat; cool slightly.
4. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line a 13x9x2-inch baking pan with nonstick foil, extending the foil over edges of pan.
5. For brownie layer, stir 1 cup of the sugar into chocolate mixture. Add eggs, one at a time, beating with a wooden spoon after each addition just until combined. Stir in vanilla.
6. Stir in flour and baking soda.
7. Add flour mixture to chocolate mixture; stir just until combined.
8. Pour batter into the prepared pan, spreading evenly.
9. Bake for 15 to 17 minutes or until edges start to pull away from sides of pan.
10. Cool on a wire rack. Then pop in freezer.
11. For caramel layer, in a large microwave-safe bowl combine caramels, 2 tablespoons of the evaporated milk and the water.
12. Microwave until smooth.
13. Spread caramel mixture evenly over brownie layer in pan, spreading to edges. Place pan in freezer while preparing nougat layer.
14. For nougat layer, in a medium saucepan combine the remaining 1 1/4 cups sugar, the remaining evaporated milk, and 1/3 cup butter.
15. Bring to boiling over medium-high heat; reduce heat to medium.
16. Simmer, uncovered, for 5 minutes.
17. Remove from heat.
18. Stir in marshmallow creme and peanut butter.
19. Pour marshmallow mixture over caramel layer, spreading to edges. Place pan in freezer while preparing chocolate layer.
20. For chocolate layer, in a small saucepan cook and stir semisweet chocolate pieces, 1/4 cup butter, and whipping cream over low heat until melted and smooth.
21. Pour chocolate mixture over nougat layer, spreading to edges.
22. Freeze for an hour then cut into brownies. Store, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. ❄️

Outdoors...

October brings plenty of changes outdoors, including some that happen almost overnight. We take a look at where Oklahoma's hummingbirds go when the feeders suddenly become quiet and why leaving a clean feeder up can still benefit late migrants. Norman Winter introduces the Mexican Flame Vine, a bright orange climber that can add color while attracting hummingbirds and butterflies. We also explain what happens to snakes as temperatures fall and why a warm autumn afternoon can still bring one out of hiding. Finally, Janice Russell closes the section with a Parting Shot of an osprey leaving Canton Lake with its catch firmly in hand.



Where Do the Hummingbirds Go?

By Savannah Magoteaux

By October, a feeder that seemed to need refilling every day can suddenly go quiet. The hummingbirds have not disappeared. Most have headed south.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the species most Oklahomans know best. It breeds across much of the eastern United States and Canada and migrates toward wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. Some birds cross the Gulf of Mexico in a long nonstop flight. Others follow the Gulf Coast.

Fall migration is spread over weeks rather than happening on one date. Adult males often begin moving south before females and young birds. Hummingbirds seen later in the season may be individuals that nested farther north and are simply passing through Oklahoma.

That leads to one persistent myth: feeders do not keep hummingbirds from migrating. Migration is driven primarily by changing day length and internal biological cues. Keeping a clean feeder available can help late migrants refuel. In Oklahoma, it can also create a chance to notice an unusual western hummingbird that wanders east after the main Ruby-throated migration.

The standard feeder mixture is plain white granulated sugar dissolved in water at roughly one part sugar to four parts water. Red dye is unnecessary. Feeders should be cleaned regularly, and more frequently during warm weather when sugar water spoils faster.

Natural food matters, too. Hummingbirds feed heavily on small insects and spiders as well as nectar. Late-blooming native flowers can provide fuel at a time when migration demands

are high.

The trip south is remarkable for an animal that weighs only a few grams. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds can add substantial fat reserves before migration, essentially carrying their fuel with them. Birds that cross the Gulf may fly hundreds of miles without stopping.

When the last familiar bird leaves the feeder, it may be headed to southern Mexico or Central America, while another bird from Kansas or Missouri is still on its way through. The quiet feeder is less an ending than a change of traffic.

Migration requires preparation. Before departure, hummingbirds enter hyperphagia, a period of intense feeding that allows them to add fat. That stored fat is essential because hovering flight is extremely energy intensive and long stretches of migration may offer few chances to refuel.

Weather can delay or accelerate movement. North winds after a cold front may help south-bound migrants, while storms along the Gulf can hold birds up. That is why feeder activity can spike suddenly for a day or two even after local summer birds appear to be gone.

Gardeners can support migrants without trying to manage their schedule. Keep feeders clean, leave late-blooming flowers available and avoid broad insecticide use around nectar plants. A hummingbird may take sugar water at a feeder, then spend much of the next hour hunting tiny insects that provide protein and other nutrients.

Do not panic if a feeder is left up after the usual migration window. The birds are not going to cancel migration because sugar water is available. Keeping a feeder out can support late



Migration requires preparation. Before departure, hummingbirds enter hyperphagia, a period of intense feeding that allows them to add fat. (Courtesy photo)

birds, but cleanliness becomes even more important when visitation drops because nectar may sit longer between refills.

Anyone who sees a hummingbird well into late fall should

take photographs if possible. Oklahoma occasionally receives species more typical of the West, and documented late-season visitors can be valuable bird records. [B](#)

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The Matrix Morpheus is a dazzling bi-colored variety seen here with the Stock Hot Cakes White and Citrona Yellow wall-flower.
(Photos courtesy of Norman Winter, the

The Garden Guy

By Norman Winter | Horticulturist, Author, Speaker

20 years later: Coastal Sunrise Mix Still the Most Beautiful Pansy

In 2006, I wrote about what I thought was the most beautiful mix of pansies ever created, and now, 20 years later, the Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix is still the clear winner. With all of the pansies, colors and mixes available, I find it amazing that I can pick out this selection while speeding by at 60 or 70 miles per hour.

The fact that it is still in demand today is another testament to its beauty. To be honest, it is also a great statement about the Matrix series of pansies. Twenty years seems like a long time since this series hit the market, and yet, wherever I go, producers and, in turn, garden centers have made it an integral part of their cool-season inventory.

If you are not familiar with the Matrix series, know that it loads up with large, colorful flowers. For those of you who think bigger is better, especially when it comes to pansies, the Matrix series is for you. It is not the largest pansy, but it is an amazing performer.

Secondly, the plants branch quickly, giving you an even more colorful show because of the sheer number of flowers. Plants reach a height of nearly 8 inches with an equal spread.

Thirdly, they have short stems that are able to support these large flowers above the plant, creating a terrific landscape dis-

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Matrix Ocean Breeze Mix is also a leading variety for both colors and performance.



Hear the Matrix Coastal Sunrise mix is combined with Diascia a colorful snapdragon relative.

play. Fourthly, they are resistant to stretching. This means that as you enter the warm days of spring, Matrix pansies will keep performing.

All of that would certainly make you want to plant Matrix pansies, which come in an abundance of colors and mixes. But when you see the Coastal Sunrise Mix, you may become mesmerized by the colors and beauty.

When you look at a planting of Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix, you will see rich colors that include shades of blue, rose, peach and creamy yellow. You might think, "Sure, give me those colors and I'll put the mix together," but it is not just about mixing the colors. It is also about quantity. Believe me when I say this was done with a true artist's touch.

You will first notice the shades of blue that remind you of that time when you were in a boat and went from clear, shallow water to the deep blue. Then you see the rose that reminds you of the beginning of a new day as night gives way. Next

come the creams and yellows, along with what appears to be a rusty rose reminiscent of the sunrise.

Fertile, well-drained soil is important to your success with pansies, so incorporate 3 to 4 inches of organic matter while preparing the bed. Make sure the bed receives plenty of sunlight. Plant pansies at the same depth they were growing in their containers, and add a layer of mulch to not only conserve moisture but also stabilize winter soil temperatures. Pansies need regular feeding, about once a month, for the long season ahead.

No matter where you live, you have a season when pansies reign supreme. In my area, pansy-planting time is at hand. In your area, it might be getting a little late. If so, consider planting from 6-inch containers that have a better-developed root system.

If October is the time to plant pansies where you live, then by all means give the Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix a look. I also love the Matrix Ocean Breeze Mix and the bicolored Matrix Morpheus. 

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What Happens to Snakes in the Cold?

By OKFR Staff

The first cold front slows Oklahoma's snakes down rather than making them disappear.

Snakes are ectothermic, meaning their body temperature depends heavily on the environment around them. They cannot generate and regulate body heat the way mammals and birds do. As temperatures fall, digestion, movement and other body processes slow.

During winter, snakes enter a dormant state called brumation. It is similar to hibernation, but reptiles may become active during warm spells. They seek protected places where temperatures stay more stable, including deep rock crevices, burrows, old foundations, caves and spaces below the frost line.

Some species gather in communal winter sites. A den that offers the right depth, moisture and temperature may be used repeatedly for generations. Snakes do not spend the winter in a perfectly continuous sleep. A mild January afternoon can bring one close to the entrance to bask before it retreats again.

That explains why a warm fall day after a cold snap can still produce a snake encounter. A south-facing rock pile, barn foundation or sunny trail may warm enough for a snake to move even though nighttime temperatures have been cold.

Property owners can reduce unwanted encounters around buildings by sealing gaps, controlling rodents and keeping debris piles away from the house. Firewood stacked directly against a wall provides both cover and prey habitat. Outdoors, however, snakes are an important part of the ecosystem and many species help control rodents.

If a snake is encountered, dis-



Cold weather changes snake activity, but it does not flip an off switch. (Courtesy photos)

tance is the safest response. Do not try to handle or kill a snake you cannot confidently identify. Oklahoma has both venomous and nonvenomous species, and close contact is when bites are

most likely to occur.

Cold weather changes snake activity, but it does not flip an off switch. Until sustained winter conditions arrive, a warm patch of October sun can still put a

snake exactly where you did not expect one.

Different species choose different winter shelters. Rattlesnakes may use rocky dens

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below the frost line. Rat snakes can shelter in hollow trees, old wells or building foundations. Smaller species may disappear into mammal burrows or deep soil cracks. The common requirement is protection from temperatures that would leave the animal unable to function.

Because brumating snakes are sluggish, disturbing a winter den can be dangerous for the snakes and unnecessary for people. A cluster of snakes in a natural rock outcrop should be left alone. If snakes are entering an occupied building, exclusion work is best done by sealing entry points and removing attractants rather than handling animals by hand.

October is also a useful month to remember that young-of-year snakes may still be active. A small snake is not automatically harmless, and size

alone is a poor identification tool. Give any unknown snake room and use photographs from a safe distance if identification is needed.

Homeowners sometimes discover wintering snakes only after moving firewood, opening a crawl space or cleaning an old shed. Gloves, boots and a flashlight are sensible when working in protected places where rodents and snakes may shelter. If a venomous snake is found in or immediately around a building, contact a qualified wildlife professional rather than trying to remove it with improvised tools.

By spring, warming soil and longer days bring snakes back into regular activity. The same den or refuge may be used year after year, so a recurring problem near a house is best solved by exclusion and habitat changes during a time when the site can be worked safely. 



By spring, warming soil and longer days bring snakes back into regular activity.



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Catch of the Day

Photograph by Janice Russell

On a day trip to Canton one fall, I was lucky enough to see this Osprey with a fish tightly bound in his talons. He was just taking off from his perch as I took this picture. Canton lake has an abundance of water fowl in the fall and winter. Its a great place to “catch” a great picture of Osprey, Bald Eagles and numerous breeds of ducks. [📷](#)

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