

## Pesticide Container Recycling Program

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Every year, close to a million plastic agricultural pesticide containers are used in Nebraska. This amounts to about three-quarters of a million pounds of plastic that must be disposed of. Plastic lasts for centuries when buried in a landfill, shortening the life of the landfills and wasting the resources used to manufacture the containers in the first place.



University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension in Lancaster County has been coordinating a recycling program for the past 13 years.

Containers may be brought to the UNL Extension in Lancaster County office, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, during business hours 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday–Friday, EXCEPT for the weeks of July 3, July 24 and July 31. Please call ahead at 441-7180 to ensure someone will be available to inspect and accept the containers before you come.

Two remote collection dates have been arranged in cooperation with Farmers Cooperative Company. **Our semi-trailer will be manned 9 a.m. until noon at the east elevator on 148th Street, Waverly on Friday, July 7 and at the Bennet Co-op headquarters on Friday, Aug. 4.** All containers must be inspected to make sure that they have been properly rinsed, with the caps and labels removed before they can be placed in our trailer. (Paper labels one layer thick may remain on the containers.) We will accept all sizes of agricultural pesticide containers, including 30 gallon plastic drums. Yard and garden pesticide containers are brown and cannot be recycled with the white and yellow containers. Other containers, (bleach, antifreeze, oil etc.) will not be accepted in this program which is paid for by the Agricultural Chemical Manufacturing Association, but domestic plastic containers can be recycled at the recycling centers in several locations around Lincoln.

After inspection, the containers are stored in our semi trailer until sufficient quantities have been gathered to justify bringing in a chipper. The containers are inspected a second time by the company employees and then are processed into small chips which greatly reduces the volume and makes it feasible to transport the material long distances. Chips are taken to plants that melt the plastic material and mold it into new products. Recycled pesticide containers do not enter the general plastics industry. The material is currently being recycled into plastic posts, industrial pallets, field drain tiles, speed bumps, railroad ties and parking lot tire stops.

## Prepare to Plant Alfalfa in August

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Alfalfa can be seeded either in the spring or fall in eastern Nebraska. Whether it is best to plant alfalfa in the spring or fall depends on two factors, predominant weed species and soil moisture. If the predominant weed species are summer annuals such as foxtail and pigweed, it may be best to plant alfalfa in the fall—provided the soil profile has adequate moisture for growth. This allows the alfalfa to get established with less weed competition and since it greens up in early spring, it will get a head start on the annual weeds next year, that must come from seed, when the soil temperature is right for germination.

If the predominant weed species are winter annuals such as pennycress or downy brome, spring planting may be best. The weeds can be killed with tillage or herbicides in early spring and then the alfalfa planted into a clean seed bed. Penny-cress, downy brome and other winter annual weeds are more dominant in former wheat ground since they have the same growth habit as winter wheat.

The best time for fall seeding alfalfa in eastern Nebraska is during the month of August, provided adequate soil moisture is available. Farmers sometimes wait until mid- or late-September to plant alfalfa. This is most often too late because the plants do not have a chance to become established before the first killing frost. The latest alfalfa should



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be seeded in the fall is Sept. 10 in Lancaster County. If planting cannot be completed by then, it is best to wait for another season.

Alfalfa seed needs to be planted 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in fine textured soils and 3/4-inch deep in sandy soils for best germination. Regardless of seeding time, it is critical alfalfa be planted into a firm seed bed. Alfalfa seeds must have close contact with soil particles and soil moisture to insure rapid emergence. A firm seedbed also helps prevent seed from being planted too deep. Leave just enough loose soil to cover seed after planting.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, extension forage specialist, says if you can't bounce a basketball on the seedbed prior to planting alfalfa, the seed bed is too loose. Don't have a basketball? Walk across the seedbed with hard

soled shoes, if your heel sinks in more than 1/2-inch, it is too loose. A good rain after tillage will firm the seedbed. Harrowing with the spikes set flat or rolling with a packer will firm seedbeds provided there is some moisture in the soil.

Complete tillage (disking) following row crops is okay if the soil is firmed up by either rain, sprinkler irrigation or packer-seeders. If the untilled soil surface is already smooth, no-till planters have been very successful. In fact, no-till seeding of alfalfa following small grain crops has become the trend among successful alfalfa producers.

Before seeding alfalfa, whether you plant in spring or fall, do a complete soil test. Apply and incorporate lime and phosphorus fertilizer, if needed, and be sure to inoculate the seed.

## Apply Manure Before Seeding Alfalfa

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What crops benefit most from manure application? One good choice is a field about to be seeded to alfalfa.

Applying manure before seeding alfalfa may seem counter productive since alfalfa is not likely to benefit from the nitrogen in the manure. But manure also is rich in phosphorus, potassium, sulfur and many micronutrients that alfalfa needs in large quantities.

Research studies show applying

as much as 12,000 gallons of manure slurry or 50 tons of dry manure per acre before planting alfalfa can boost alfalfa yield more than commercial fertilizers at the same nutrient levels. And, yield increases occur on both low- and high-fertility soils with manure while only low-fertility soils responded to commercial fertilizer. Other factors like improved soil tilth, increased soil microbial activity, micronutrients and early nitrogen availability may be the reason manure-increased alfalfa yield so well.

Use a soil test and a manure test to determine how much manure to apply. And, only apply manure prior

to alfalfa seeding if you plant only alfalfa or if you will cut the companion crop early for hay. Oats left for grain can lodge and smother alfalfa.

Mix manure well into the soil using tillage, making sure to prepare a firm seedbed so new alfalfa seedlings will emerge rapidly and vigorously. Also, plan your weed control program carefully because manure can stimulate weed seedlings. Proper timing of seeding, firm seedbeds and herbicides or clipping can control weed pressure.

Looking for a place to spread manure? A heavy dose before planting alfalfa can pay big dividends.

## UNL Researcher Needs Alfalfa Fields With Pocket Gophers

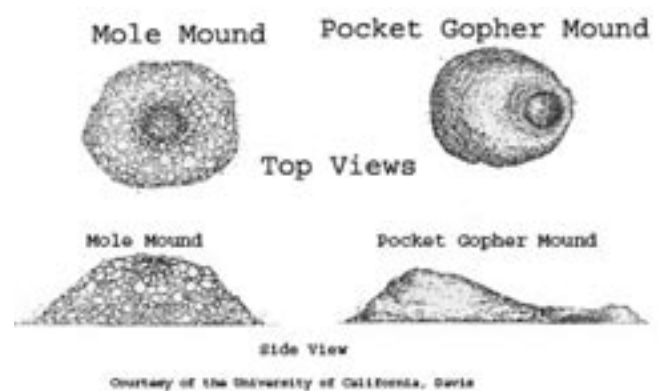
Pocket gophers are rodents that live in the soil. In our area, they prefer alfalfa fields.

UNL wildlife project coordinator Stephen Vantassel is conducting a research project to determine the most efficient trapping method for controlling pocket gophers.

He is looking for area farmers willing to give him permission to trap pocket gophers on their alfalfa fields. He is looking for non-irrigated alfalfa fields — 5 acres or more — within a one-hour drive of Lincoln. To be included in the study, fields must have

lots of pocket gophers present and have had no pocket gopher control measures for at least one year (including no trapping, no poison and no asphyxiation). This research will only take a few days.

If you would be willing to help Stephen with this study, please contact him at 472-8961.



Courtesy of the University of California, Davis