

DAVIDSON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Davidson County Agriculture Center - 301 East Center Street
Lexington, NC 27292
Telephone: (336) 242-2075

Published quarterly to provide information to the land users.

CONSERVATION Update

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STATE ENVIROTHON WINNERS!!!

On March 14th and 15th, 26 middle school teams and 24 high school teams from the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Area VIII gathered at The Center for the Environment at Catawba College to compete in the Southern Piedmont Envirothon. The competition tested their knowledge in the areas of aquatics, current environmental issues, forestry, soils, and wildlife. Davidson County had 8 middle school teams and 2 high school teams competing in this event. In the middle school competition, the *Mother Nature's Minions* from High Rock Homeschool placed 1st, the *Green Monarchs* from Tyro Middle School placed 4th, and the *Enviro Dragons* also from Tyro Middle placed 6th. In the high school competition, the *High Rock Mighty Oaks* from High Rock Home School placed 2nd and the *Party Lobsters* from Westchester Country Day School placed 11th.

Four teams from Davidson County qualified to compete at the State Envirothon. The State Competition was held at Cedarock Park in Alamance County on April 28th and 29th where 48 middle school and 51 high school teams competed. In the High School Division the *High Rock Mighty Oaks* won 1st place and qualified to compete at the National Conservation Foundation Envirothon in Maryland this summer. At the Middle School Competition, the *Mother Nature's Minions* won 2nd place in the middle school competition and the Tyro Green Monarchs finished in 8th place. Congratulations to each of you!



NC Envirothon High School 1st Place – High Rock Mighty Oaks (left to right): Rich Hayes, Chair, NC Envirothon, Team Advisor Lisa Loflin, Joey Mitchell, Gracie Ward, Reagan Dunn, Richard Tysinger, Alicia Greer, and Chris Hogan, President of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

NC Envirothon Middle School 2nd Place- High Rock Mother Nature's Minions – Pictured l-r: Elijah Shoaf, Josiah Scarlett, Sydney Loflin, Josie Freeman, Kati Provence, Jackson Brinkley, and Stone Freeman (Team Advisor - Lisa Loflin)



NC Envirothon Middle School 8th Place- Tyro Middle School Green Monarchs – Pictured l-r: Kara Henrickson, Faith Gooding, Grace Gooding, Ryder Newell, and Emily Moody (Team Advisors – Keith Stanek and Shelly Leonard)

Using Cover Crops to Improve Soil Health - Selecting Summer Cover Crop Species

Following is a look at some of the choices for summer cover crops that may work in your rotations. Remember when choosing cover crop species and mixes, be sure to think long term through your crop rotation. The benefits you and your soil receive will be determined by how well the cover crops you choose fit in with the cash crops you use.

Following are recommendations from North Carolina State University. This information is an excerpt from “*Summer Cover Crops – Horticulture Information Leaflets*” by Nancy Creamer and Keith Baldwin. View the complete document at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/summer-cover-crops>.

Non-legumes



Buckwheat is a very rapidly growing, broadleaf summer annual which can flower in 4 to 6 weeks. It can be grown to maturity between spring and fall vegetable crops, suppressing weed growth and recycling nutrients during that period. Buckwheat flowers are very attractive to insects. Its main disadvantage is that it sets seed quickly and may be a weed problem in subsequent crops if allowed to go to seed.

Sorghum-Sudangrass is a warm-season annual grass that grows well in hot, dry conditions and produces a large amount of biomass. Sorghum-sudangrass is very effective at suppressing weeds and has been shown to have allelopathic properties. The roots of sorghum-sudangrass are good foragers for nutrients (especially nitrogen) and help control erosion. Sorghum-sudangrass does well when planted in mixtures. A possible disadvantage is limiting Nitrogen for subsequent crops.



German (Foxtail) Millet is an annual warm season grass that matures quickly in the hot summer months. It is a small seeded crop and requires a relatively fine, firm seedbed for adequate germination. In order to avoid competition from weed seeds, it should be sown in a stale seed bed or closely drilled in the row.

Pearl Millet is a tall summer annual bunchgrass. Though it performs best in sandy loam soils, it is well adapted to sandy and/or infertile soils. In studies, it was not as readily killed by mechanical methods as German or Japanese millet.





Japanese Millet is an annual grass that is grown as a late-season forage. It grows rapidly under favorable weather conditions and will mature seed in as little as 45 days. It performs poorly on sandy soils.

Legumes

Cowpea, also known as blackeye, crowder, and southern pea, is a fast growing, summer cover crop that is adapted to a wide range of soil conditions. Having a deep taproot, it does well in droughty conditions. It produces high amounts of nitrogen. Recommended cultivars include Ironclay and Redripper. Good mixture options are sorghum-sudangrass and German foxtail millet. Cowpeas can have considerable regrowth after mowing and undercutting in some years.



Soybeans are one of the best economic choices for a summer legume cover crop. Late maturing varieties usually give the highest biomass yield and fix the most nitrogen. While most of the roots are in the top 8 inches of the soil, some roots can penetrate up to 6 feet deep. Soybeans will grow on nearly all types of soils, but are most productive on loamy soils.

Sunnhemp is a tall, herbaceous, warm-season annual legume that has been used extensively for soil improvement in the tropics. It can tolerate poor, sandy, droughty soil but requires good drainage. It can be integrated into cropping systems by sowing it after corn. It will produce high biomass yields and Nitrogen before frost. While some *Crotalaria* species are toxic to animals, Sunnhemp forage is not. It should also not be confused with the weed species.



It is very important that the legumes are inoculated with the appropriate Rhizobium bacteria.

Single Species Cover Crops vs. Cover Crop Mixtures



Mixtures of cover crop species can be planted to optimize benefits. Mixtures which include species that establish quickly can reduce soil erosion. Combining plants with high Carbon to Nitrogen (C:N) ratios (mature cereals) with plants that have low C:N (legumes) can influence the mineralization of cover crop residues. This can help to optimize the efficiency with which fixed nitrogen is used by subsequent crops. Planting mixtures of cover crops can take advantage of the allelopathic potential of the cover crop species. Mixtures of cover crop species can also be used to attract important beneficial insects into the cropping system.

Properly using cover crops can provide many benefits for you. Stop by the Office or give us a call if you would like more information about using cover crops.

“Get on Board” - 2017 Field Crop & Conservation Farm Tour

Plans are in progress for our annual farm tour hosted by the Davidson Soil & Water Conservation District, USDA-NRCS, and the Davidson County Cooperative Extension Service. The Tour date has not been set. We will travel to several sites in the County. It is designed for interested adults to view the latest agricultural innovations and farming practices. This tour is free of charge and limited to the first 60 adults who call in their reservation. Lunch and transportation are provided. Plans are to leave the Ag Center at 8:30 am and return by 3:00 pm. The tour fills up fast, so make your reservation early by calling 336-242-2075.

NO-TILL DRILL

Davidson Soil & Water Conservation District has a Truax Flex II 88 no-till drill available for rent for \$12 per acre. Operating the drill requires at least a 40 horsepower tractor with hydraulic capability. Seeding width is 5.3 feet with an overall transport width of approx. 8 feet. The drill is capable of planting small seeds (clover, legumes), fluffy seed (native warm season grasses), cool season grasses, small grain, millet and soybeans. Come by the District Office to schedule a time to use the drill.

Thank you for your interest in soil, water, and natural resource conservation.

Soil & Water...Yours for Life

Congratulations to our County’s poster and essay winners, **Mark Chhim**, a 6th grade student from Ledford Middle School and **Zachary Spease**, a 6th grade student from Oak Grove Middle School. Mark’s poster was selected as the 1st Place Winner in the Area VIII Contest, which consists of 12 counties. His poster has been entered in the NC State Contest. Zachary’s essay was awarded 2nd place in the Area VIII Contest.

**** 2017 Conservation Farm Family ****

Congratulations to Roger Blake for being selected as our 2017 Conservation Farm Family for this year. His farm is located in the southern area of the County. He has installed many practices on the farm to improve soil health, wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, increase soil organic matter, and conserve soil moisture. More information on his farm will be in the next issue of the *Conservation Update*.

~ Reminders ~

All programs and services provided by the Davidson Soil and Water Conservation District are available to you at no cost.

Test your soil prior to planting. Come by our office to pick up a free soil test kit.

Soil conservation is easy if you do it with a plan and take it one step at a time.

Pick up an application in our office to become a member of the Voluntary Agriculture District.

For more information about any of the above, call our office at 336-242-2075

Help Conserve natural resources, energy, water, soil, native plants and wildlife.

Public Notification Procedures – Current Non-Discrimination Statement – The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202)720-2600 (voice and TDD).

For more information about anything in this newsletter, call us at 336-242-2075 or check us out on the Web: www.co.davidson.nc.us

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