



# MNGA NEWSLETTER

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Missouri Nut Growers Association

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[www.missourinutgrowers.org](http://www.missourinutgrowers.org)

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## Grower's Report

There seems nothing more front of mind among growers (of anything!!) than the drought gripping Missouri. Limp leaves, browning leaves, dropped nuts are common denominators in conversation. Recent precipitation may be a band aid on the situation or the beginning of a break in the pattern. Certainly there has been great variability in precipitation received across the state the last few days of July and, for those hoping for nuts to fill, the next month is critical.

The traditional wisdom is that Missouri is always two weeks away from a drought. A variation on this theme: we need an inch of precipitation each week during the growing season. Can you water enough to mitigate a deficit? The Pecan Growers Association eNewsletter (subscribe at [Magazine - Georgia Pecan Growers Association - Nature's Health Food](#)) in its most recent phenology blog, noted that producing pecan trees should be receiving 300-350 gallons/tree (3600-4200 gallons/acre) daily. They allow that irrigation could be suspended for 3 days if you received more than one inch of rain. So, how many gallons of water does one inch of precipitation provide? The answer is 27154.285990761 gallons. Of course, there are plenty of caveats here. How old are your trees? What are the characteristics of the soil in your orchard? These recommendations are for Georgia so this is probably a factor of 2-3 above Missouri needs for this time of year. Nut growers are accustomed to irregular crops: "normal" alternate bearing, issues with pollination. All point to the importance of planting orchards on suitable sites. There aren't many Missouri growers who provide for irrigation and those that do, for example Bill Stouffer (chestnuts), remarked that last year he couldn't keep up with the irrigation and it didn't matter because

the lack of humidity dried the chestnuts in their shells, making them unsuitable for sale. For him, this might have been the opportunity to investigate producing chestnut flour!

If you want to take a deep dive into how the U.S. Drought monitor characterizes drought, check out [Explaining Drought Category Maps | Drought.gov](#) and [Drought Classification | U.S. Drought Monitor \(unl.edu\)](#). They weigh a number of factors in determining whether we're abnormally dry or in a serious, extreme, or exceptional drought. They also provide a weekly update via email...if you can stand the pain.

As for our members, Vern Spaunhorst (Washingtonville) sent the following update in mid-July: As is the case for most of Missouri, it has been very dry with almost no rain until July. However in July he had 3.5", a life saver!

Vern's major concern is the Christmas trees, not the pecan trees. Because his pecans are in the creek bottom, and are large with big root systems, they usually do not have an issue with moisture. BUT, that creek bottom is a cold temperature magnet and that late April freeze turned everything black.

Because he had a super crop in 2022, Vern expected a "down" year this year. Add the freeze into that and he expected nothing. However, the last time he had a freeze in 2021, he did not spray fungicides because he felt it would be a waste of money. Later in the year Vern regretted that decision as he could see pecans, but they were all black with scab. So, even though he could see nothing on the trees this spring, he sprayed them anyway. Now he is glad he sprayed them because he can see some pecans as they increase in size. There don't appear to be many, but hopefully there will be enough to make harvesting worthwhile. The Schmidts seem to have the heaviest crop,

followed by the Perouque and then the Posies. Trees around the edge, closer to the creek, look the best.

Mike Lucas, across the state in Harrisonville, notes that it is very dry there. From April 1, to July 13, he's had 12 rains at his Cass County farm, but the largest was only 0.65in, for a total of 4.70 in. Of course, he has 65 newly planted trees this past season that he must water on a regular basis. On a positive note, he doesn't have much of a crop. The late April freeze pretty much wiped out the pecans. The only trees that are showing any nuts are the Lakotas and Kansas, and there aren't many at that. He won't be shaking any pecan trees. There are a few native trees with those very small nuts that do have some potential squirrel feed on them. The walnuts fared better, Mike figures a 30-40% crop, but that is if there's moisture to fill them out. Grafting wise, about a 75% success, with the grafts done the week we went to Dan's doing overall much better than one's done just a week later. He plans to spray, but hasn't yet since no crop. He's thinking he'll spray fungicide simply to help the tree, kinda like a vaccine??? And it's been humid so this might promote better/late fall foliage which is beneficial for next year's crop.

It seems like Dan Shepherd can't catch a break. The April 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> freeze got about 80% of the crop when it went to 27\* at his shop and in the low 20s in the bottoms. Trees on the higher ground have some nuts and the very top of the tallest trees in the bottom. The drought last summer that took most all the crop has not let up so a really small crop was expected. The drought is still here and going strong. The last 1" rain was February 23<sup>rd</sup>. He has had a lot of .20 rains that help keep the grass somewhat green but nothing is getting in the tree root zone. Dan normally has about 44" a year but the past 12 months he has measured less than 20". The bright side is it looks like he will save a lot of time and money on spray the rest of the year. He's glad that the McGraw's have a good crop so he can keep the heat on in the house this winter. Looking on the bright side, Dan figures there is always next year and no way can he have 3 bad years in a row.

In northeastern Missouri, Greg Heinselmann (chestnut grower) reports: Dry up here. He had about 4.15" of rain from 12 events since April 1. The big rains were .8 with a .75 and .5 so as you can see the balance doesn't help much. Major hail event April 4 broke some limbs and I am sure bruised some trees. The two nights of freezing temps. after the trees leafed out plus, another two weeks later really played the dickens on the leaves and buds. Am not seeing hardly any burrs. There may be 40 in 800 Chestnut trees. He has had to water trees six times thus far and need to do so again. He is seeing a lot of walnuts but does not know if they will fill. Having to spray for Jap Beetles but after the first spray have not seen as many. Making the second spray now and if they don't get bad again may save the spray till next year. Would normally mow the yard 23 - 24 times per year but so far only done it 6 times.

Kevin McGraw in St. Charles is among the most optimistic of the growers. This is an "on" year for his orchard and the trees are full of nuts. He had a mild drought through June, receiving only one inch of rain, but the trees seem to be doing well. he had 3 to 4 inches in July prior to his report and hopes he gets that much in August. The late freeze did not reach him, temperatures only got down to the low thirties. He figures Dan will make enough money shelling his crop to feed his family but admits that he hates to see those poor folks suffer!

There is no optimistic news from Collins in southwestern Missouri where rainfall has been minimal, and, when it does occur, spotty. There is a very good walnut crop on the trees that is unlikely to materialize without additional moisture. The persimmon trees are loaded but some trees are show signs of stress with drooping and yellowing leaves. Several strong windstorms have taken their toll of the laden branches. The chestnut leaves are rolling and drooping so it's likely there will not be a crop. Pawpaws are suffering in the drought and heat and it's likely that several, also stressed by last year's precipitation shortfall, will not survive. Most are sending up numerous suckers so all is not lost! SJ is watering

transplanted persimmon seedlings and has a tray or so more to put out when conditions improve.

On a positive note, walnut caterpillars, usually a scourge at this time of year, haven't appeared. Fall webworm nests are present but there aren't many caterpillars in them and wasps are working their way through the webs to tasty morsels.

### **Coming in the Fall Newsletter...**

Insights from the NNGA/WC/CGA Joint meeting. Greg Heinselman attended and came away with the following comments:

As was expected there was a lot of info to absorb. The thing that continues to amaze me is the help and encouragement from other growers from across the United States. You are treated just like their own child or best friend. Everyone offers their idea or advice about any concern you may have. Probably the biggest thing that I got out of the four days

was confidence that even with some of our setbacks it will be alright. It is a marathon not a sprint.

The day spent at HARC was informative even though I have been there several times. Found out about a product that was unknown to us, and if you are into the DNA and figuring out the perfect breeding program there is a lot of information offered and being done right here in our State by MU. A couple of our own members gave excellent talks on what happens down in the trenches on their farms.

Also, one thing that was seen was there are several people in the nut business that have not joined our group. This is something I will be working on and would ask for your help with this task. If you hear of a planting or see trees going in let them know about our organization and the benefits we offer. Some very smart people out there that we need as members.