

The Practical Horticulturist - New research reports from on-farm trials

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Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.



Meet a Co-Hort: Catherine Schut

Catherine Schut raises floral crops and bees on Hive & Petal near Prairie City, Iowa. Catherine sells flowers primarily to floral and event businesses in central Iowa.

Why do you grow hort crops, in five words or less: I love growing beautiful things.

What is something you're excited about this year? Expanding my peony field. I met with a supplier for peony roots, and they helped me develop a plan for eventually growing as many as 3,000 peony plants. This year, I'm planning to plant between 1,000 and 1,500 peonies. At this point, my focus is on 8-10 varieties that are excellent for cut flower production.

What is one thing you would change about your industry? To be frank, it seems like people don't take flower farming as a serious industry in Iowa. Flower farms don't have the same access to grants unless they also are growing food. With Iowa's phenomenal soil, you can grow anything, and I just wish there were more opportunities to support this kind of production. But I know it's a re-emerging industry. I don't want to diminish the importance of food security at all because that is also a priority, but that's the wonderful thing about Iowa: we have the resources to do it all.

Favorite PFI memory I'm pretty new to PFI, so most of my memories so far are connections with **Rachel Burke**, PFI's beginning farmer engagement coordinator. She just continually goes out of her way to put resources in front of me and helps

me find creative solutions to my challenges, establish my business and build my network.

Your favorite crop and why? Tulips are my favorite. I love almost all early spring flowers because seeing those first few pops of color in spring is wonderful. We are "a house divided" because my husband likes single tulips, but I love the double varieties!

PROGRAM UPDATES

New research report: "Brewers Spent Grain as a Soil Amendment for Eggplant"



Kate Solko and Kyle Maxwell of Root to Rise Farm operate their vegetable farm on the same property as a brewery and therefore have access to a lot of free brewers spent grain.

Learn what they discovered as they tested using it as a soil amendment instead of their usual organic fertilizer, Sustane 8-2-4, in [their 2023 research report](#).

Research report: "Tarping for No-Till Cover Crop Termination"



Farmers **Emily Fagan and Hannah Breckbill** of Humble Hands Harvest use silage tarps to expand no-till practices on their farm.

They designed an experiment to investigate how long an occultative (light-blocking) tarp must be left in place to effectively kill a rye cover crop and set back weeds including perennial Canada thistle.

[Read their findings.](#)

IN THE FIELD

Statewide Horticulture Food Crops Survey responses due April 30



Complete the **Statewide Horticulture Food Crops Survey** from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

New data will be collected for the first time since the **2015 survey** to help policymakers and researchers address growers' needs.

The survey was mailed to 3,500 known producers. If you should have received a survey but did not, you can request one by calling IDALS at (515) 242-6239. **Return your survey by April 30.**

Protect your crops from drift damage



Remember to **register your farm on DriftWatch.**

This voluntary communication tool is administered by IDALS and helps raise the visibility of specialty crops and beehives so pesticide applicators can take caution.

Have you caught up with "What in the Weather?"



Catch the most recent **"What in the Weather?"** podcast episode to hear the latest discussion about how Iowa's spring weather will impact specialty crops.

Dan Fillius and Justin Glisan and guest **Madelynn Wuestenberg** talk about potential severe weather,

understanding soil temperatures and more.

Connect with Midwest vegetable growers and resources



The **Midwest Vegetable Growers Network** is a community of market farmers and technical assistance providers.

They focus on organic vegetable production practices, facilitating peer learning and resource sharing for growers across eight Midwestern states.

[Learn more about their offerings.](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

PFI's field day lineup is coming in May



Stay tuned as we announce nearly 60 farmer-led field days!

Want to make sure a field day guide is mailed to you? Email us at **info@practicalfarmers.org** or call (515) 232-5661.

Friends of PFI events

All events listed in Central Time.

May 1: Webinar – [Rodale Institute Webinar: Overcoming Common Barriers to Organic Certification](#)

Hosted by: Rodale Institute

1-2 p.m. | **[Online](#)**

View our events calendar

Contact our team

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