

# UINTA COUNTY *Connection*

JULY 2022

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## This Issue

Cover Crops P.2

Ants on My Trees P.2

Precipitation: How Years Compare P.3

Master Gardeners P.4

Summer Education Activities P.4

Wyo Gardening Guide & Tire Tanks P.4

## Using Cover Crops to Improve Soil Health

Healthy soil is full of life. The biology of the soil is extremely important to its overall health and productivity. Having a diversity of bacteria, protozoa, nematodes, fungi, arthropods and earthworms in the soil affects how crops grow, how soil nutrients are cycled and whether rainfall is quickly absorbed into the soil so plant roots can access that moisture.

Cover crops are crops grown specifically to protect and improve the soil. They are typically fast-growing annuals such as rye, wheat, oats, clovers and other legumes, turnips, radishes and triticale, all of which protect the soil when a cash crop is not growing. These crops have the potential to increase soil organic matter and fertility, reduce erosion, improve soil structure, promote water infiltration, and limit pest and disease outbreaks, therefore improving soil biology. They add living roots to the soil during more months of the year, which increases overall soil health.

The following is a list of 10 key impacts of cover crops on soil health taken from a fact sheet produced by SARE, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the Soil Health Institute:

### **Cover crops feed many types of soil organisms**

Soil fungi and bacteria feed on carbohydrates plants release, in return some fungi and bacteria will trade other nutrients like nitrogen or phosphorous to the crop roots.

### **Cover crops increase the number of earthworm**

Some earthworms, like night crawlers, tunnel vertically, other, smaller earthworms, like redworms, tunnel more horizontally. Both create growth channels for crop roots and for rainfall and air to move into the soil.

### **Cover crops build soil carbon and soil organic matter**

By using sunlight and carbon dioxide to make carbon-based molecules, a build-up of carbon in the soil can gradually build soil organic matter, which improves the availability of nutrients and soil moisture for crops.

### **Cover crops contribute to better management of soil nutrients**

By building soil organic matter, cover crops can gradually impact the need for some types of fertilizer.

### **Cover crops help keep the soil covered**

Bare soil is more likely to erode when it rains, then form an impermeable crust that overheats in the summer, sometimes getting hot enough to kill soil organisms and stress crops.

*Cover Crops continued on Page 2.....*

## Cover Crops continued from page 1

### Cover crops improve the biodiversity in farm fields

Generally, the more plant diversity in a field and the longer living roots are growing, the more biodiversity there will be in soil organisms, leading to healthier soil.

### Cover crops aerate the soil and help rain go into the soil

Roots from cover crops can open up soil channels for rain and the extra moisture can make a big difference for crop yields.

### Cover crops reduce soil compaction and improve the structure and strength of the soil

Excess tillage destroys soil structure, while cover crops and the soil organisms they feed create the glue that binds soil particles together, leading to a strong soil structure. A field with cover crops and no tillage, will lead to much better soil structure without compaction issues.

### Cover crops make it easier to integrate livestock with field crops

The manure from livestock grazing on cover crops can be beneficial for building organic matter and soil health. It is also a great way to get immediate profit from cover crops as some species can be very high-quality forage in late fall or early spring.

### Cover crops greatly reduce soil erosion and loss

The future success of agriculture and our food supply depends on keeping the topsoil we still have, and cover crops are exceptional at helping stop erosion.

### Conclusion:

By including a greater diversity of plants, keeping the soil covered having living roots in the soil throughout the year and disturbing the soil less, soil health can be improved. Visit <https://www.sare.org/resources/10-ways-cover-crops-enhance-soil-health/> for more information about cover crops.

## Are Ants on My Trees Good or Bad?

Most people believe that ants on their trees are bad, and are negatively affecting the tree. Most of the time, however, this is not the case\*. Ants are drawn to trees for two reasons. They're searching for sweet honeydew left behind by other insects, or they're making themselves at home inside trees with cavities and rotten wood. Generally, ants themselves don't damage a tree. Instead, they provide a warning sign that the tree is in trouble, which can help us act fast to treat it.

### How To Get Rid of Ants on Trees

Even though most ants don't threaten trees, they can be opportunistic and end up in your home or other parts of your landscape. Here are a few ways to stop that from happening:

- Spray the tree with a solution that contains 30 drops of peppermint oil and one gallon of water. Ants hate peppermint, so they'll leave the tree once they catch wind of the scent.
- Line the bottom of the tree with ant baits to capture them as they travel.
- Use a horticultural soap or insecticide to rid the tree of sap-feeding insects. In turn, you'll cut off the ant's honeydew supply.
- Spraying ant powder all around the base of the tree is far and away the easiest way to deal with a tree infested with ants since it doesn't take much effort to apply and is effective at killing the ants when they leave the tree to gather food. The powder not only kills the ants who are touched by it, but also kills many of the other ants because they will eat their own dead and in doing so, absorb the poison themselves. Remember to re-apply after it rains!
- Another safe and natural way to get rid of the ants is to use Diatomaceous Earth, a white powder composed of skeletal remains of millions of fossilized, microscopic diatoms. When mined and milled into a fine powder, these fossilized remains have remarkable and safe bug killing qualities. It kills bugs by sticking to their waxy, protective outer layer causing dehydration by absorbing their fluids, or interfering with their breathing mechanism and mobility by mechanical action.

Diatomaceous Earth is available for purchase from the Uinta County Conservation District.

**\*Note:** As long as the ants on your trees are not carpenter ants, it shouldn't be an issue for the tree. If you see small piles of sawdust at the base of your tree, it means these black, carpenter ants are active. In this case, you should call an arborist to determine if the tree needs to be removed. Remember, ants only burrow in rotten tree wood, so a plant with carpenter ants is weak and could be at risk for falling over.

Information for this article was taken from: <https://blog.davey.com>



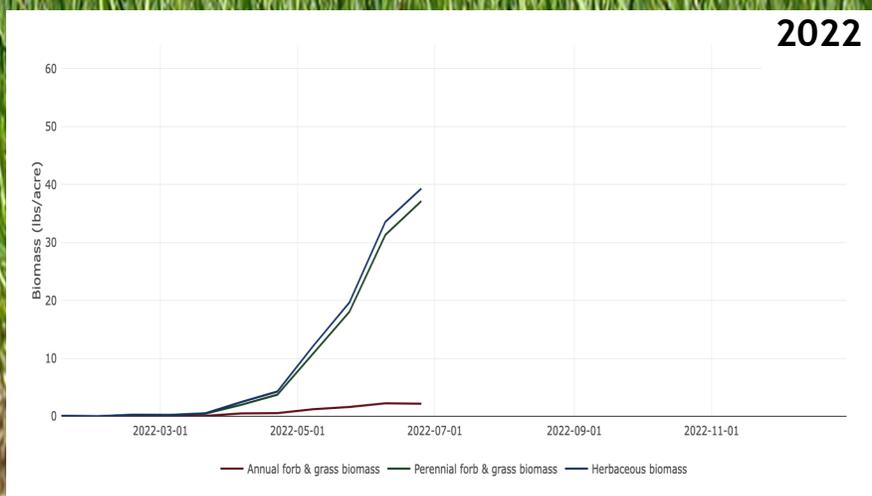
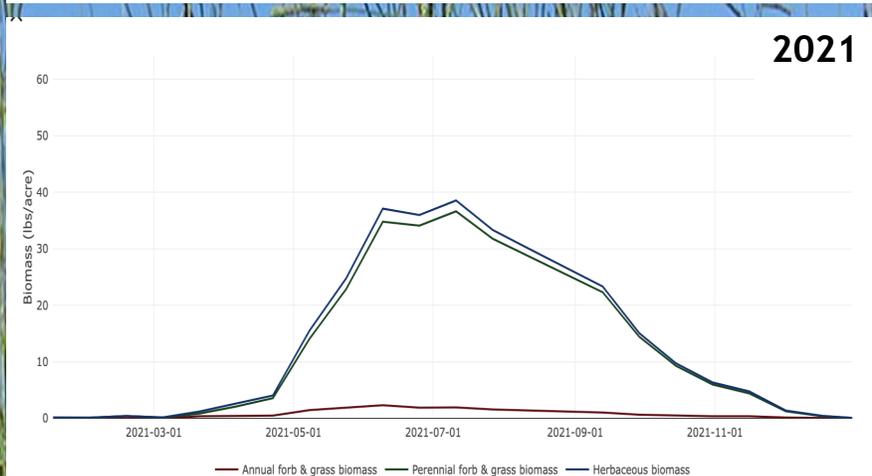
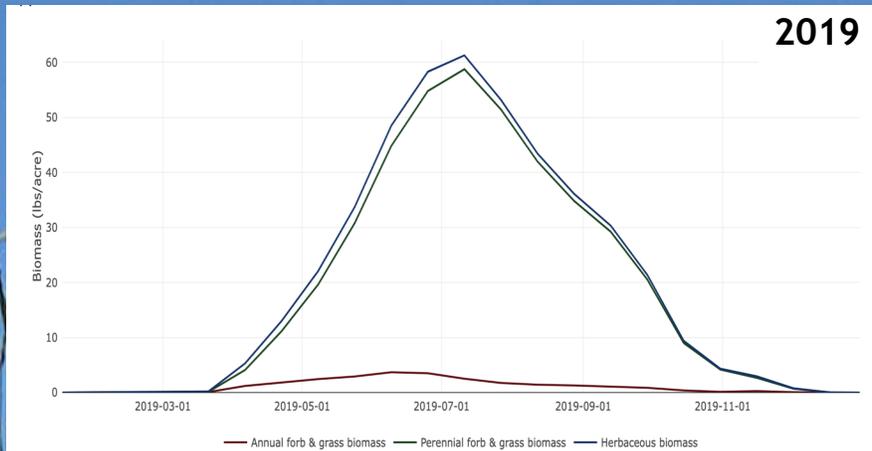
# Vegetation: How Do The Years Compare?

The spring and summer months for 2022 have had a notable amount of precipitation. How does this year compare to others in regards to vegetation so far?

The Rangeland Analysis Platform uses multiple sources of data, including data gathered remotely (such as by use of satellites), and is a general source of information. However it can still show differences to confirm what is noticed at the ground level. The images below are specific to Uinta County, Wyoming, and show biomass per acre for each year. Even though 2022 isn't over yet, we can still see how it matches up with 2021 and especially 2019, which had levels of biomass that we haven't quite reached yet.

To access the Rangeland Analysis Platform, visit the following link <https://rangelands.app/>

It can be used to compare biomass and cover over space and time which, again, helps to confirm changes or management efforts taken on a ground level.



# Uinta County Conservation District

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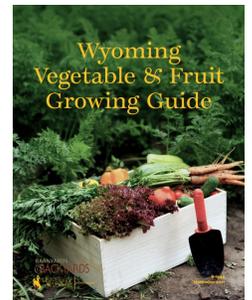


New Wyoming Fruit and Vegetable growing guide

A UW Extension and Barnyards & Backyards publication

Visit our website for a link to the PDF

[www.uintacountycd.com/gardening](http://www.uintacountycd.com/gardening)



## MASTER GARDENERS

There are residents in the county who have taken the UWyo Extension Master Gardener training and are continuing their certification as volunteers to help Uinta County citizens with their lawn and garden questions. These Master Gardeners are equipped with information and resources through which to research situations and provide the best answers and solutions. Each inquiry helps them become better gardening resources for our county.

We can put you in touch with a Master Gardener. If you have specific questions about gardens, lawns, trees, pests, etc. please contact us.

Master Gardeners are also available at the "Ask a Gardener Booth" at the Evanston Farmer's Market throughout the summer.



## UCCD offers Summer Education Activities

UCCD's education activities can be utilized for **summer camps, summer school programs, boy/girl scouts, 4-H, daycare centers, and other organizations/groups of all ages.**

UCCD's Education Coordinator has lessons on natural resource topics (agriculture, water, native plants, Wyoming habitats/wildlife, conservation, etc.) and is also certified to teach Wyoming Ag in the Classroom, Project WET/WILD and Project Learning Tree lessons.

Lessons are free of charge and can be adjusted to meet individual requests and age levels.

For more information visit:  
<http://www.uintacountycd.com/education>

