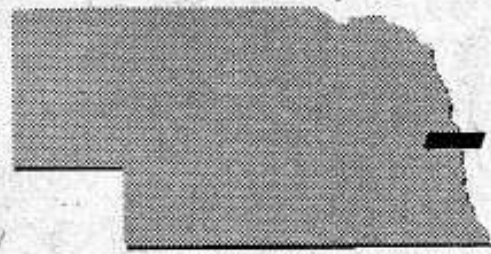


A Fresh Look At Nebraska



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By LuAnn Schindler

A few observations this week from my perch in the Sandhills...

We've grazed on grass-fed Angus and consumed corn-fed beef. Imagine the sweet taste of beef raised on hazelnuts.

Or perhaps you favor that flavor in your morning cup of joe.

If Nebraska Forest Service, University of Nebraska and Arbor Day Foundation predictions come to fruition, nutritional hazelnuts will become one of the Cornhusker state's top crops.

Oregon produces 5 percent of the world-wide filbert crop, originating from the European hazelnut. After breeding and testing plants built to withstand Nebraska's harsh winters, the NFS is promoting the new crop. The aforementioned organizations, along with Oregon State and Rutgers universities, obtained a \$1.3 million grant from the Department of Agriculture to expand production.

Current test results show that Nebraska hybrid hazelnuts can produce up to 3,500 pounds of nuts and 900 pounds of oil per acre per year. Comparatively, soybeans produce around 570 pounds of oil per acre per year.

Why the push for hazelnuts? In addition to high-quality human foodstuffs and flavorings, experts tout hazelnut oil as a promising biodiesel application. After removing the oil, the nut's high protein content can be used as a feedstock supplement.

It could take up to four years for planted seeds to mature to a harvestable crop. The Arbor Day Foundation reports hazelnuts are environmentally friendly. The nut requires less water than other crops, is drought resistant, and can grow on hilly or marginal soils.

Hazelnuts, rich in protein, vitamin E and B, and folate, provide heart-healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats. The oil contains high levels of omega-9 and omega-6 fatty acids, making it a healthy cooking oil alternative.

Tonight's dinner: hazelnut rib eye. Rare or well done?

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August is Audio Book Appreciation Month. Did you know Nebraska OverDrive Libraries offer a collection of digital audio books (and even e-books) through its reserve system? Check out popular fiction and non-fiction and listen on your iPod, iPad, MP3 player, smart phone or e-book reader.

As much as I embrace technology and its uses, I prefer holding the book in my hands and turning the pages. There's something comforting about the feel of the pages, the design and texture of the cover.

Perhaps I'll give one a try during my daily drive. Check out <http://nebraska.lib.overdrive.com> to see if your local library participates.

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Nebraska's ban on texting and driving went into effect in July, but I haven't seen much of a change in texting-while-driving habits.

Okay, I've changed my habits, but while venturing home from Merritt Reservoir a few weeks back, I counted the drivers I met, cell phones perched in hands on top of the steering wheel. That Friday evening, I counted nine drivers using phones. And this week, a driver nearly side-swiped my vehicle because she was texting while turning.

Either our state needs to invest in a few more patrolmen or our residents don't take the law too seriously.

AAA reports teenage drivers estimate sending an average of 23 texts while driving.

That's 23 too many.