

# Put Your Phone in the Friend Zone: Global Day of Unplugging



March 1 is Global Day of Unplugging, a day set aside to encourage people to disconnect from the electronic world, experience nature, talk to people, and, even if just for a day, live life without screens.

Smartphones have been around in varying forms since the 1990s, and as they have become more widely used, researchers have studied their impact on our mental health. Numerous studies continue to show how “problem smartphone overuse” (not general use) can impact mental health by affecting sleep quality, social interactions, and ability to focus. Smartphones allow us to work remotely, find our way around town, stay up-to-date on world events, and many other benefits. However, cell phones become a problem when overuse interferes with daily functioning.

Setting boundaries around phone use can benefit mental, emotional, and social health. So, consider putting your smartphone in the “friend zone” on March 1 and beyond by trying these tips.

- \* Turn off notifications, including work email when you are home and social media when you are at work. Mental health can be influenced by how connected we feel to our phone, if we feel obligated to monitor it continuously, and even our motivation for using it. Turning off notifications can help us set boundaries, especially between work and home.

- \* Use your phone as a tool. It’s easy to use it to fill time when boredom sets in, but focus on the positive things it can do to make life easier. For example, arrange your phone so that productive apps like email, fitness, maps, and work-related programs are on the home screen. Put apps like social media, shopping, and games into folders or a place less accessible.

- \* Delete apps you haven’t used in a while. Consider removing apps that are only for convenience, such as for shopping or news. You can access these through an internet search, which takes more conscious effort and can make you more intentional about how you spend your time. And there’s also the bonus of freeing up space and data on your phone!

- \* Assess how you use your phone. Is most of your phone time spent scrolling through social media or playing games? If so, consider deleting the apps for a time. Let others know what you are doing and ask for support. They may even join you! Sharing your goals with others helps with accountability and motivation.

- \* Set time and physical limits. Have a pre-set time limit, such as 15 minutes during lunch or after completing an assignment. Take your phone out only during those times, and hold yourself accountable to your schedule.

\* Make a list of alternative things you can do when you feel the impulse to mindlessly scroll on your phone. Instead of texting, try visiting in person or writing a letter and sending it through snail mail. Instead of spending time on social media, read a book, play games with your family, go for a walk, explore nature, work on a project, or serve in your community.

\* Find strategies that work for you and set attainable goals. If you live with others, create a group challenge, set limits, and devise creative ways to reward positive use.

While not all these strategies may work for you, consider trying at least one. Then note if you saw any changes in your physical, mental, or emotional health, connections with others, and time management. You may find that unplugging, even for a bit, can have positive impacts and will be something you want to do beyond March 1!

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## **Four Ways Gratitude Can Keep Your Holidays Happy**



As the holidays approach, it's important to prioritize your mental health and well-being. According to a 2021 American Psychiatric Association poll, 41% of adults in the United States reported an increase in stress during the holidays. Common worries included general finances, the ability to afford gifts, and stressful family dynamics. The holidays also tend to magnify feelings of isolation or loneliness if there is a disconnect in current romantic or family relationships compared to traditional expectations of "togetherness." Click to learn about combating loneliness during the holidays.

A great way to improve your mental health during the holiday season is to incorporate gratitude into your daily life and family traditions, not just around the Thanksgiving dinner table. Practicing gratitude, whether through meditation, journaling, verbal expressions, or acts of service, has been shown to increase satisfaction with life and is associated with fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Consider these four tips to increase gratitude during the holidays.

**1. Eat mindfully.** Enjoy traditional holiday foods with

intention and gratitude. Limit distractions and eat more deliberately, taking time to savor your favorite seasonal treats. [Click to learn more about mindful eating.](#)

**2. Keep a gratitude journal.** Writing about what you are grateful for can add perspective to a hectic season. Set aside a few times a week (it doesn't have to be daily) to write in detail about the people and things you appreciate. [Click to learn tips on keeping an effective gratitude journal.](#)

Ideas to get you started include family, friends, significant others, holiday meals, Christmas lights, meaningful conversations, hot showers, music, books, your body (hearing, smell, touch, taste), the beauties of nature, indoor plumbing, funny online videos, sleep, long weekends, feeling safe, hobbies, animals/pets, religion, baking, artwork, music, sunrises/sunsets, and learning experiences.

**3. Provide acts of service:** Express appreciation to your family, friends, coworkers, pets, etc. Write a letter or choose a thoughtful, meaningful gift for a loved one. Focus on sentiment rather than value.

**4. Meditation:** Find a comfortable place to reflect on the things you are grateful for. If you are new to meditation, find an app for guided meditation. Bonus points for a gratitude-centered meditation guide!

If incorporating these strategies into your busy holiday schedule feels overwhelming, choose just one idea to get you started. It will be well worth the effort if it helps make your holidays more peaceful!

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# November Yard and Garden Tips



With snow falling early in many areas of the state, gardeners may have been caught off guard. Make sure your yard is ready for winter by finishing the last few tasks. Consider these tips and links from the Utah State University Extension Gardeners Almanac.

- If natural precipitation is sparse and the ground is not frozen, water evergreen trees and shrubs to ensure they are well hydrated.
- Blow out irrigation systems.
- Winterize lawn mowers and rototillers by draining the gas or adding a fuel stabilizer. Be sure to follow manufacturer recommendations.
- Clean and sharpen garden tools and treat them with oil or other rust-inhibiting products.
- Disconnect hoses from water spouts to avoid freezing damage.
- If you haven't mowed your grass for the final time, cut it to a height of 1-to-1½ inches to minimize disease



problems.

- Apply a quick-release nitrogen fertilizer after the last mowing for early greening next spring.
  - For a complete list of tips for putting the yard and garden to bed, [click here](#).
  - For general gardening tips, visit [garden.usu.edu](http://garden.usu.edu) where you will find information on gardening courses, drought resources, and the Extension Gardener's Almanac with monthly tips.
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## Five Tips for Talking with Your Children about War and Conflict



When war and conflict make the headlines and children see disturbing images on television or the internet, it can create

feelings of fear, stress, sadness, anxiety, and even anger. They may also hear things from friends, teachers, and other children and adults about what is happening in the world, including frightening possibilities about what could happen.

One of the most important roles a parent plays in their child's life is to keep them safe and secure, especially in times of turmoil. Here are five tips for talking with children about war and conflict and how to provide support to ease their fears.

**1. Find out what their concerns are, what they have heard from others, and how it makes them feel.** Find a comfortable time, such as during a family meal, when you can ask them what they know and how they are feeling. Try to avoid a discussion right before bedtime, as it can create more worry and make sleeping difficult.

Be open to how much or how little children want to share, and pay close attention to their emotions. Some children may know little about what is happening and won't be interested in talking about it. Others may worry in silence, while others may open up and share details. It's important not to minimize or dismiss their concerns or be too quick to correct them. Let them share freely and then clarify where needed.

Younger children are often unable to distinguish between images on screens and their own personal reality and may believe they are in immediate danger, even if the conflict is happening far away. Older children might have seen troubling things on social media and be worried about how conflicts might escalate. The key is to hold up a figurative emotional mirror, reflect what you see, and offer compassion as you reassure them of their safety. As you show you are interested by listening with your full attention, they will be more likely to open up to you and other trusted adults now and in the future.



**2. Keep it calm and age-appropriate.** Children grow and develop differently, including in their emotional and mental abilities to process images and information. While children have a right to know what's going on in the world, adults should use wisdom in how much detail to share. Use age-appropriate words, watch their reactions, and be sensitive to their worries. You know your child best. The key is to calm fears and reassure children of their safety.

It is normal for parents to spend time watching the news and feeling emotions of worry, sadness, and anger in times of war and conflict. But remember that children take their emotional cues from adults, so use your time wisely and be cautious in oversharing your emotions with them.

Remind them that many people are working hard around the world to stop the conflict and find peaceful resolutions. It's okay not to have the answers to every question your child has. You can say that you need to look it up or use it as an opportunity with older children to find the answers together. Use websites of reputable news organizations or international organizations like UNICEF and the UN. Explain that some information online isn't accurate, and stress the importance of finding reliable sources.

**3. Spread compassion, not stigma.** News stories and images from war and conflict can stir up strong feelings, which can create prejudice and discrimination against a people or a country. When speaking with or around children, avoid labels and name calling, such as "bad people" or "evil" and instead use it as an opportunity to encourage compassion, such as for the families forced to flee their homes.

**4. Focus on those who are doing good.** It's important for children to know about the good that people are doing for those who suffer from war and conflict. Find and share stories of helpers and heroes who serve and sacrifice for the benefit of those who are affected by war. Talk with children about

ways they can help. The sense of doing something, no matter how small, can often bring great comfort.

**5. Continue to check in.** As conflicts arise and news stories gain attention, be sure to check in regularly to see how children feel about war and conflict. Do they have more questions? Are they interested in getting your perspective? Do they want to clarify something they heard or saw?

If your child seems worried or anxious about what's happening, be especially aware of any changes in how they behave or feel, such as stomachaches, headaches, nightmares, or difficulty sleeping. Children have different reactions to stressful events and some signs of distress might not be so obvious. Younger children may become clingier than usual, while teens might show intense grief or anger. Many of these reactions only last for a short time and are normal reactions to stressful events. If these reactions last for a prolonged period of time, your child may need to see a counselor or specialist.

\*This resource was developed based on tips from the following article: <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/how-talk-your-children-about-conflict-and-war>

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# **Tips for National Family Meals Month**



Are you among the minority of American families who eat at least one meal together every day? In today's fast-paced world, eating Sunday dinner as a family is a great tradition, but it is a giant step away from more regular time spent eating and socializing around the table – which was the norm just one generation ago.

In recognition of its importance, September has been named National Family Meals Month. Why all the fuss about sitting down together for a routine that may only last 15-20 minutes? The benefits are actually numerous.

Utah State University Extension's Create Better Health Utah (SNAP-Ed) program lists a few of the benefits – especially for children whose families eat together five or more times a week as opposed to those whose families eat together two times or less each week:

- \* Nutrition and physical development – Kids eat more fruits and vegetables, get a wider variety of nutritious foods, have lower rates of childhood obesity and make healthier food choices when they are on their own.

- \* Emotional development – Youth are better able to manage negative emotions, are at less risk of developing eating disorders, and have more positive interactions with others.

- \* Social development – Children learn important turn-taking skills, have improved communication skills and learn appropriate ways to share thoughts, feelings and opinions.

- \* Academics – Kids are more likely to earn A's and B's in school, and they develop larger vocabularies – even more than those who read together with their parents.

- \* Behavior – Youth are much less likely to use marijuana, alcohol or tobacco or have friends who use these substances. They are also less likely to engage in other risky behavior such as premarital sex.

If a family is new to the idea of eating meals together, there will undoubtedly be a few challenges. For example, it may be unrealistic to go from zero meals together to one every day. So, set a realistic goal all family members can agree on – it may just be Sunday dinner once a week, and that is a great start. If dinner isn't the best option, perhaps having family breakfast time on Saturday may work better for you.

Here are some additional tips for making family mealtime a positive experience:

- \* Plan meals ahead of time.

- \* Schedule a set time for meals.

- \* Involve all family members in the meal preparation and clean up.

- \* Turn off the TV, phones and all other electronic devices.

- \* Have pleasant conversation and leave discipline and other negative emotions for another time.

Additional helps are available online from Create Better Health Utah, including conversation starter ideas and making meals fun using themes (e.g., Taco Tuesday). In addition are ideas for menu planning with recipes, such as citrus chicken

salad, oatmeal nut pancakes and honey glazed chicken.

Learn more about family mealtime and eating healthy on a limited budget here. You can also contact your local USU Extension office to find out about upcoming classes taught by Create Better Health ambassadors in your area. From the Create Better Health homepage, you can select from a variety of resources for menu planning, preparing foods, eating healthier and incorporating physical activity in your day.

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## Prepare to Protect: September is National Preparedness Month



National Preparedness Month is held each September to raise awareness about preparing for disasters and emergencies. The 2021 theme is "Prepare to Protect. Preparing for disasters is protecting everyone you love."

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), “What people do before a disaster can make a dramatic difference in their ability to cope with and recover from it...”

It may not be possible to completely avoid damage from unpredictable natural disasters caused by wind, water, wildfire, earthquakes or drought. However, being aware of the most probable natural disasters in your area and taking steps now to prepare for them will have huge benefits should a disaster occur.

The website <https://ready.gov/plan> provides information for making an emergency preparedness plan. Consider these four steps.

**Step 1: Put a plan together.** Discuss the following questions with your household members, extended family and friends.

- \* How will I receive emergency alerts and warnings?
- \* What is my shelter plan?
- \* What is my evacuation plan?
- \* What is my family/household communication plan?
- \* Do I need to update my emergency preparedness kit?

**Step 2. Consider the specific needs of your household.** Tailor your plan to include supplies for day-to-day living needs for each family member. Having necessary supplies on hand can help family members feel calm, even in the midst of chaos. Factors to consider when developing a personalized plan:

- \* Age of each household member.
- \* Dietary needs.
- \* Medical needs, including prescriptions and equipment.
- \* Pet food and supplies.



- \* Cultural and religious considerations.
- \* Supplies to assist others.
- \* Coronavirus supplies such as masks and disinfectants.

**Step 3: Fill out a family emergency plan.** Whether completing the document provided by ready.gov or creating your own, the main purpose is to provide answers to the overarching question, “What if...?”

What happens in the event of an emergency if you’re not with your family? Will you know how to reach them if cell service is down? How will you know they are okay? How will they know you are okay?

**Step 4: Practice your plan with your family/household.** Ideally, your preparedness plan will become second nature after practice and discussion. It can also be written and placed in a central location where it can easily be reviewed.

Now is a great time to make your preparedness plan. To receive tips and information, visit [preparedness.usu.edu](https://preparedness.usu.edu) and click the yellow bar.

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## **Slithering Snakes Spotted in Parks and Lawns**



In response to the drought, many snakes are out in search of food and water, and some have recently been spotted slithering through moist areas such as city parks and yards. This creates a risk for unsuspecting people, and it's important to be aware of your surroundings at all times

Of the 31 species of snakes found in Utah, seven are venomous. These are commonly called pit vipers because of the pit located between their nostrils and eyes. Most pit vipers found in Utah also have tails with a series of rattles, hence the name rattlesnake.

All snakes are classified as non-game animals and are protected by Utah state law. A person cannot collect or possess a live wild snake without receiving a Certificate of Registration from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. When there are human, domestic pet or livestock safety concerns, a venomous snake may be killed without a certificate.

Because most snakes in Utah are non-venomous, most human-snake encounters are generally not dangerous. However, if you encounter a venomous snake and are bitten, the consequences could be serious. Consider these tips.

\* If you encounter a snake, leave it alone. Every year, hundreds of want-to-be herpetologists and snake charmers are

bitten when they try to capture or kill a snake. Even dead snakes have been known to bite by reflex action. More than half of the reported snake bites were a result of someone trying to handle or kill the snake. It is always best to slowly leave the area.

\* When rattlesnakes are encountered or disturbed, the rapid vibration of their tails will make a characteristic rattling sound as a warning. However, not all rattlesnakes will "rattle" when disturbed. For this reason, when you are in rattlesnake country, pay close attention to where you walk, sit and place your hands. Rattlesnakes can be found throughout Utah in sagebrush, pinon-juniper woodlands, sand dunes, rocky hillsides, grasslands, mountain forests and even parks and yards.

\* If you hear a rattlesnake "rattle," stand still until you can locate where the sound is coming from. Do not jump or run. If you do, you may end up within the snake's striking range.

\* If you are bitten by a venomous snake, there are several things NOT to do. Do not walk or run. Do not apply a tourniquet to the area above the wound, and do not apply a cold compress to the bite area. Do not cut into the bite. Do not take anything by mouth such as stimulants or pain medications unless instructed by a physician. Do not raise the bite area above the level of the heart, and do not try to suction the venom, as doing so may cause more harm.

\* All venomous snakebites should be considered life threatening. When someone has been bitten, time is of the essence. If possible, call ahead to the emergency room so anti-venom can be ready when the victim arrives. Until then, keep the victim calm, restrict movement, and keep the affected area below heart level to reduce the flow of venom. Wash the bite area with soap and water. Remove any rings or constricting items, as the affected area will swell. Cover the bite with clean, moist dressing to reduce swelling and

discomfort. Monitor the victim's vital signs (pulse, temperature, breathing, blood pressure). If there are signs of shock, lay the victim flat and cover with a warm blanket. Get medical help immediately. If it can be done without risk of injury, bring in the dead snake for identification.

\* Bites from venomous snakes will almost instantly show signs of swelling and discoloration of the surrounding tissue. Other symptoms include a tingling sensation, nausea, rapid pulse, loss of muscle coordination and weakness. Also, bites from rattlesnakes will show two characteristic fang marks (punctures) as well as other teeth marks.

\* Non-venomous snakebites are harmless, but there is a risk of infection. If bitten, clean and sterilize the wound much like you would a cut or abrasion

For more information about snakes, visit [WildAwareUtah.org](http://WildAwareUtah.org).

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## **Will We Have Better Access to Home Canning Supplies This Year?**



Not only did 2020 have a negative impact on small businesses, employment and school schedules, it also had a negative effect on home food preservation supplies. This was due to the sharp increase in people wanting to become more self-reliant, combined with manufacturing plants that either completely shut down or operated with a significantly reduced workforce.

From the consumer standpoint, there were at least four major challenges related to home food preservation equipment and supplies. Below are updates and safety guidelines.

**1. Canning jars and lids** – Demand for canning jars and screw-on rings was much higher than supply last year. This year, they should be more available at big box stores, supermarkets and hardware/agricultural businesses. Remember to purchase approved brands that will withstand the high temperatures needed for water bath and steam pressure canning.

Finding new canning lids, however, continues to be a challenge this year. The following statement was issued by the manufacturer of Ball® and Kerr® products:

*Ball® brand home canning products are currently only sold through authorized third-party retailers, and not our website, FreshPreserving.com, or the Ball corporation site, Ball.com. For your convenience, we've included a select*

*list of authorized retailers who are currently carrying genuine Ball® brand home canning products. When purchasing online, use caution if the product is sold or shipped by another entity other than the authorized retailer.*

A list of retailers can be found at <https://www.freshpreserving.com/where-buy.html>. You can also contact your local USU Extension office for more information.

**2. Reusing lids** – Resist the urge to reuse single-use lids. It is impossible to recreate the same strength as the original seal once the sealing compound has been softened. Lids marketed as reusable do not have a high success rate for creating a strong seal, and they are not recommended for pressure canning.

**3. Price gouging and knock-offs** – Prices for online purchases vary greatly, so be sure to do your homework and shop around. One online search found a retailer selling canning lids at a reasonable \$2.99/dozen, but another was charging nearly four times that amount.

Last fall, many disappointed online shoppers ended up with mislabeled boxes and oddly shaped lids, even though the label said it was a recommended brand. If you received and used such lids, some of them may have created a strong seal, but then buckled. If the lid obtained a strong seal where it cannot be opened without the use of a can opener, the food should still be safe to consume.

**4. Food preservation equipment and parts** – Last year it was nearly impossible to find new canners or replacement parts. Of those found online, prices were much higher than before the pandemic. A challenge this year, similar to last year, is that many stores carry regular mouth lids, but no other sizes. However, as the economy stabilizes, consumers should see availability and affordable prices for



canning equipment and supplies return.

Though the news isn't all positive, progress is being made, and hopefully the availability of sought-after supplies will improve as harvest time nears.

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## Coexisting with Wildlife During a Drought



Just as humans must learn to adapt to changes in water availability during a drought, so must wildlife. Less water means less available habitat for wildlife, and since Utah is home to a sizable number of wildlife species, prolonged drought can create a perfect storm for human-wildlife conflict at the urban-wildland interface.

As deer, cougars, bears, raccoons, snakes and other wildlife search for food, water and cover during a drought, they may travel farther than usual into more developed areas and crowd

into smaller spaces. This will make them more susceptible to diseases, predators and competition with other animals and humans.

Deer, elk and bighorn sheep may forage closer to roadways, making the animals more susceptible to collisions with vehicles. With fewer berries and acorns available, bears will eat garbage, grease from barbeques, bird seed and sugar water from hummingbird feeders. Raccoons and skunks may seek out garden vegetables and pet food.

Less water also means less cover for nesting wildlife such as young deer, pronghorn and elk, making these animals more vulnerable to predators. Less water means less available habitat for waterfowl, beavers, muskrats and other animals.

Drought conditions often increase interactions between humans and wildlife. You can prevent conflicts with wildlife by being mindful of your actions and aware of your surroundings. Consider these tips:

- \* Store garbage, pet food and horse/livestock grains inside.
- \* Dispose of garbage regularly and wash out trash cans to reduce odors.
- \* Clean grills after each use to reduce grease and odors. If possible, store them inside a garage or building.
- \* Regularly clean areas under bird feeders. If bears are a major problem in your area, consider removing bird feeders until winter.
- \* Clean up fallen or rotting fruits and vegetables in yards and gardens. Rotting fruit attracts bears, raccoons and skunks.
- \* Be aware that well-watered lawns and gardens can also attract more rodents, which provide prey for snakes. In recent weeks the number of reports of people seeing snakes in city

parks have increased.

\* If you encounter wandering wildlife such as bears, cougars, deer and venomous snakes in a park or other public-use area, contact local law enforcement officials so warning signs can be posted in the areas to let others know of potential risks.

For more information, visit [WildAwareUtah.org](http://WildAwareUtah.org).

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## Timing Can Be Tricky for Spring Planting



Determining when to plant a garden can be especially confusing in Utah's unpredictable, varied climate where last-frost dates can vary by many days within just a few miles. Many experienced gardeners have planted and later lost their plants to frost.

An example of how fickle Utah's climate can be is in Cache

Valley. Frost-free days vary from an average of 113 days in Lewiston and Trenton to 158 days on the USU campus. Similar examples are common around the state.

Geographic characteristics of where you live can help in determining when to plant. When a yard is located in a populated area or on a mountain bench, it usually has a longer growing season. Other areas located at slightly lower elevations where cold air drains and cannot escape have a shorter season. This is why local commercial orchards are generally located on benches. Additionally, urban and suburban areas are slightly warmer than surrounding areas due to the urban heat effect. Heat from buildings and warmth generated by sunlight reflected from roads and other surfaces increases temperatures and delays frost. It can be helpful to chat with a local farmer or experienced gardener in your area to determine what works for him or her regarding when to plant.

In addition to frost information, it is important to take into account the needs of the plants. Vegetables planted locally fall into four basic categories: hardy, semi-hardy, tender and very tender. Depending on which category a plant belongs to, planting dates vary from early spring until early summer. Consider the following:

- Hardy vegetables, including asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, onions, peas and spinach, can be planted as soon as the soil is workable in early spring. This usually ranges between 45 and 60 days before the average last frost. These same vegetables can be safely planted until the average last frost date.
- Semi-hardy plants, such as beets, carrots, lettuce and potatoes, can be planted one to two weeks after the hardy group. These can be planted until the average last-frost date.
- Tender vegetables, such as celery, cucumbers, corn and most beans, should be planted on the average last-frost date.

- Very tender plants, such as squash, beans, melons, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers, should not be planted until at least a week after the average last frost. Even if frost does not occur before this time, these plants will not grow well and are more susceptible to disease until warmer weather.

If you have lost plants to frost, you are not alone, and all you can do is try again.

<b>Average Frost Dates for Various Utah Locations.</b> <b>Note that these dates are averages and can vary from year to year.</b>			
	<b>Frost Dates</b>		
<b>City</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Frost-Free Days</b>
Alpine	May 20	September 30	136
Blanding	May 13	October 12	153
Cedar City	May 10	October 5	148
Delta	May 17	September 28	134
Farmington	May 5	October 10	158
Fillmore	May 16	October 4	140

Huntsville	June 11	September 9	89
Kanab	May 7	October 20	166
Lake Town	June 15	September 10	87
Logan	May 14	September 25	135
Morgan	June 6	September 11	98
Moroni	June 1	September 18	109
Ogden	May 1	October 24	176
Park City	June 9	September 1	92
Price	May 12	October 7	148
Roosevelt	May 18	September 25	130
Spanish Fork	May 1	October 13	165
St. George	April 6	October 28	205
Tooele	May 7	October 14	159
Tremonton	May 3	October 10	160

**For information on areas not listed, contact your local county Extension office.**

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