

Power Up Your Pasture – What Seed Should I Plant?

Do you have a lazy pasture not producing to its potential? Are you interested in over-seeding but wonder what seed mix to use? Is your pasture intended for grazing or hay production? Choosing the correct forage species is critical for your success. **Every farm and agronomy store has proven pasture mixtures for you to purchase.** If you already have a desirable, dominant species established and the soil is not compacted or rough, you may be able to improve the pasture by correcting the fertility, over-seeding, controlling weeds, and improving management techniques.

Identify and eliminate weeds and undesirable plants prior to any renovation or over-seeding. Some species of weeds are more effectively controlled by an appropriate herbicide application. Buttercup is an example of a weed that cannot be eliminated by cultivation or mowing! If bare soil or erosion is a problem, you may want to search out a good turf building sod that likes wet feet from the supplier.

Get a soil sample done prior to application of any soil amendments. Consider the cost of lime and fertilizer and the cost of application.

For brand new pasture, prepare your seedbed but do not rototill as that creates a soft fluffy soil. Apply lime or fertilizer before your last pass with the disc to ensure the soil amendment is incorporated into the root zone. If a total mix of seed, fertilizer and lime are being applied, harrow and lightly cover the application. This is ESSENTIAL!

Mow first before over-seeding an existing pasture. Then lightly drag, disc, or harrow the field before seeding, and again after seeding. Often folks “reclaim” small areas of their land from black berries, brush, or weeds one area at a time. It is a winnable challenge. It is essential to replant grass seed and fertilize immediately.

Post-seeding Management. Frequent light clippings, at 4-6”, will encourage “tillering” of the forage/grass, add organic material to the soil, provide a water retentive mulch and discourage grass/weeds from reproducing/going to seed.

Grazing advice on new fields...If you can pull it up, your animals will, also! Never graze below 3-4”! Brand new fields should not be grazed for 3-4 months! The forage plant is trying to establish, and livestock pressure will damage the developing root system.

When is the best time to over seed or put in a brand-new pasture? Realistically the best time is when you have the time to manage the project and see it through. In our area fall is an easier time because the rains begin. If spring works best for you keep it watered and it works. Keeping newly planted pastures moist is imperative spring or fall.

Forage Species Selection

Tall Fescue (certified endophyte-free or novel endophyte varieties)

- A. Long lived perennial bunch grass, moderate to high palatability.
- B. Well suited to all soil types, when established. Tolerates low fertility, saturated or droughty conditions, due to deep rooted growth habits.
- C. Not a good choice for over-seed, because of the small seed.
- D. Excellent for hay and grazing, dries down well.

Orchard grass

- A. Long lived perennial bunch grass, high palatability.
- B. Well suited to most soil types, shade tolerant, moderate to high fertility needs.
- C. Excellent for hay and grazing and suitable for an over-seed.

Timothy

- A. Short lived perennial bunch grass, extremely high palatability, and desirable feed.
- B. Moist to saturated soils, moderate fertility needs.
- C. Excellent for hay, does not stand up well for grazing.
- D. Not suitable for an over-seed, due to small seed.

Perennial Rye Grass (certified endo-free varieties)

- A. Semi-sod forming, bunch grass, long lived, rapid establishing, highly palatable and productive.
- B. High fertility and moisture requirements and suitable for over-seed in grazing situations.
- C. Not suitable for hay in most cases, difficult to dry.
- D. Suitable for silage production.

Annual Ryegrass

- A. Hardy, rapid establishment, high palatability, and production.
- B. Long lived annual, 1-2 years, if clipped, to prevent seed head formation.
- C. Good choice for over-seed, sacrifice areas and cover crop (bio-mass contribution).
- D. Poor choice for Hay, hard to dry.
- E. Inexpensive and a good management tool for high pressure/temporary areas!

Festololium (endo-free)

- A. Cross between an Italian Ryegrass and Meadow or Tall Fescue.
- B. Short lived Perennial (3-5 years), rapid establishment, highly palatable, productive and tolerates over-grazing.
- C. Late maturing extends the grazing/haying season.
- D. Great choice for hay field or pasture over-seed. Dries down well if the correct variety selected.
- E. Tolerates low fertility, saturated or droughty soil conditions.

Clovers and Legumes

- A. Clover and Legumes are most successful when seeded in the fall. Clover and Legumes may be difficult to dry-down for hay production.
- B. New Zealand and Ladino are good, productive forage additions to any pasture.
- C. Medium Red, a short-lived perennial best used for green-chop and silage production. Does not stand up well, for grazing.
- D. Subterranean Clover, a winter annual (late winter-early spring production), that can extend the grazing season. No bloat legume. Reseeds itself very well.
- E. Birdsfoot Trefoil, no bloat, perennial legume. Hard to establish but very drought and poor fertility tolerant once it gets going. Suitable for hay making.
- F. White Dutch, perennial, low growing, low-volume forage producer. **Great for sacrifice areas/high pressure areas with Bent grass. It tolerates low fertility, wet soils, over-grazing, will stabilize the soil, and can regenerate healthy soil properties.**



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