

Forage Legume Management Guide

Benefits of Overseeding Warm Season Perennial Grasses with Legumes

- 4-6 weeks earlier grazing which reduces the winter feeding period.
- Legumes have higher nutritive value than grasses.
- Legumes incorporate nitrogen from the air into the pasture.
- Legumes provide spring weed control through plant competition.

Six Months Before Planting

- Avoid using Grazon P+D before planting legumes.
- Limit or omit N fertilization of pasture during the summer.
- Soil test 6 months before planting to determine if lime is needed to raise soil pH and determine nutrient deficiencies. Four to 6 months are required for lime to raise soil pH. Soil pH of about 6 to 7 is needed for most legumes.
- Select legumes adapted to your soils. None of the legume species are well adapted to all soils.

Autumn

- Buy coated (inoculated) seed (if uncoated, must buy appropriate inoculant and apply to seed before planting).
- Summer pastures must be short (less than 3 in. tall) by late September for overseeding. A light disking can be done on sandy soils to reduce summer grass competition and provide loose soil to cover the seed.
- Small seeded legumes (ball, white) are best planted on the soil or pasture surface. Medium size seeds (arrowleaf, crimson, etc.) should be planted about ¼ to ½ in. deep, large seed (vetch) should be planted about 1 in. deep.
- Mix 15 to 20 lb of annual ryegrass per acre with 2/3 of the clover seeding rate for a pure stand. Annual ryegrass provides earlier grazing, reduces probability of bloat, and can act as a carrier for small clover seed when planting.

After planting

- If overseeding an undisturbed grass sod, let cows continue to graze until daily low temperatures are about 40F to reduce competition from summer grasses to emerging ryegrass and clover seedlings.
- DO NOT apply N fertilizer to a pure legume stand
- In a ryegrass-legume mixture, about 60 lb N/acre can be applied about Thanksgiving to enhance ryegrass growth.

Utilization

- Grazing will not be available until February.
- The most efficient utilization is with cows calving in January and February.
- Rotational grazing with multiple pastures will enhance nutrient recycling.

Volunteer Reseeding

- Produce a good legume seed crop in the spring. Ball and white clover can flower and produce seed under grazing. Stocking rate will have to be reduced for arrowleaf, crimson, and most other legumes to produce an adequate seed crop.
- Legume species (ball, white, arrowleaf, rose, etc.) that produce a high percentage of hard seed that will not germinate during the summer are the best reseederers.
- Graze the summer grass short (3 inches) by October to allow sunlight to reach the soil surface for emerging clover seedlings.