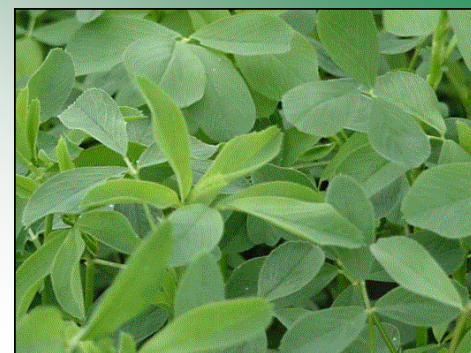


FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!



Seeding Alfalfa in Late Summer/Fall

For alfalfa to get off to a great start you should make late summer seedings well ahead of the historic cold weather season. What you really need then is to allow at least 5-6 weeks of actual growing time before the cold season slows or stops emerging growth. Unless you give the plants time to grow vigorously you can face some winterkill, and could even encounter crown and stem rot diseases. Perhaps the worst of these is Sclerotinia Crown and Stem Rot.

Many years ago, a plant pathologist explained Sclerotinia to me this way: "Sclerotinia fungus is everywhere. It usually strikes struggling new alfalfa or even red clover, similar to the cold-flu syndrome in humans. Add to this situation planting crops on marginal soils and you can expect the disease to hit - and hit hard". For all of these reasons you should always make alfalfa plantings early enough to get them off to a great start before winter sets in. Six weeks or more gives you a great shot to hit the best growing time for plants to flourish and ward off problems.

If you live in a humid area where sprinkle irrigation is not commonly used but is available and the soil is dry, two to four inches of water can pay big dividends. This is especially so when you are running out of early fall growing time; the water can certainly help minimize delayed plant emergence.

What system are you going to use to prepare for the plantings? If you are going to prepare a seedbed from scratch as has been customary for years for late summer/early fall seedings, get on it early! If you plow, disk as frequently as needed to keep weeds under control. Then 'seal' the surface with a drag harrow, or better still, firm the ground with a cultipacker following each disking in order to save as much soil moisture as possible. This added treatment to prepare a level bed further helps to gain more uniformity in the stand before cold weather.

If you are going to go the no-till route, follow available guidelines for "No-Till Seeding Alfalfa". Note that the best system for no-till seeding alfalfa in late summer/early fall is following small grains, especially wheat. Additional information is available on this (and other topics) at the website www.americasalfalfa.com.

No-till alfalfa seeding is not a quick fix operation, but years of research and practical on-farm experience prove that no-till can be as reliable (and sometimes more reliable) than conventional seeding, while saving producers time and money in the process. Producers who follow a precise system that combines quality tried and proven varieties,

herbicides, seeding equipment, seeding accuracy, and scouting can make this practice work for them.

Here is a summary of ways and means to get alfalfa off to a great start and producing excellent forage for years to come.

- 1) Plant on soils that have great internal drainage.
- 2) Check the pH, for it must be above 6.2 (preferably 6.5 and above) before seeding. If it is lower, select another field where the pH is higher and apply lime now for planting next year on this field.
- 3) Elevate P and K (phosphate and potash) according to soil test recommendations.
- 4) Don't bury the seed! For most soils, ¼ to ½ inch is about right. On sandy soils you may go up to ¾ inch. Most top growers feel pretty good if they see some seed on top of the ground after seeding. Then they know the seed is not planted too deep.
- 5) Seeding rates vary widely, depending on geographic location and variety being planted. In most of the Midwest the rate is around 15-18 pounds per acre. In the southern states the rates range to 25(+) pounds. In the northeast the rates are often less than those indicated for the Midwest, sometimes as low as half the seeding rate.
- 6) Today, a wide variety of alfalfas is available to producers. After reviewing variety-specific information, select one(s) that fit the needs of each producer. A tip: as much as you run over a field and cause stand failures due to traffic or cattle, or deer-related damage, look closely at traffic-tolerant varieties. They live and yield as well or better than 'hay-only' varieties and are more abuse resistant!

Now is the time to consider late summer and fall seeding of alfalfa. Check out available varieties and order seed in plenty of time to allow both good germination and the development of a healthy root system. Mixing alfalfa and grasses is also a viable option, when planning a future forage program. Quality forages make a positive difference to rations.

(edited from an article by Warren C. Thompson, National Forage Specialist)

**FOR QUALITY RESULTS
RECOMMEND
PRESERVATIVES & INOCULANTS
...from RENAISSANCE.
• KEMIN • LALLEMAND-BIOTAL •
INVESTING IN QUALITY FORAGES & FEEDS!**