

FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!



Late summer is an excellent time to establish forage crops, provided there is sufficient moisture for germination and good seedling growth. It is also a good time to seed bare or thin spots in forage stands established this spring. The following steps will improve the chances for successful forage stand establishment in late summer.

1. Apply lime and fertilizer according to soil test and control problem perennial weeds ahead of seeding. Be careful to check herbicide history in the field, because some herbicides have residual soil activity and will harm new forage seedings if proper waiting periods are not observed. Read the labels for details.
2. Prepare a firm seedbed if using tillage. Loose seedbeds dry out quickly. Deep tillage is not ideal for late-summer seedings. If soil is tilled deeply, allow sufficient time (several weeks ahead of seeding) for rains to settle the soil before final seedbed preparation. A cultipacker (or cultimulcher) is an excellent last-pass tillage tool. The soil should be firm enough for a footprint to sink no deeper than 3/8".
3. No-till seedings conserve moisture and can be very successful provided weeds are controlled prior to seeding. Remove all straw after small grains have been harvested. Remaining stubble should either be left standing, or clipped and removed. Do not leave clipped stubble in fields. This can form a dense mat that prevents good emergence.
CAUTION: No-till or reduced-till summer seedings of legumes are at risk of infection by sclerotinia crown and stem rot. The risk of infection and plant loss is higher in fields where clover or alfalfa were present recently, and increases the later the seeding is done.
4. Don't replant alfalfa immediately. Old alfalfa plants release autotoxic compounds that inhibit growth and productivity of new alfalfa seedlings. It is best to rotate to another crop for a year before going back to alfalfa; however, thickening up spring seedings is fine because autotoxicity is only an issue with older, established alfalfa plants.
5. Seed when soil moisture is adequate or rain is in the forecast. This is especially critical this summer after the dry weather experienced in many regions. It is risky to plant seeds in dry soil, because there may be just enough moisture to germinate the seed but not enough for establishment.
6. Seed as early as possible within the recommended time period. Seedlings require 6-8 weeks of growth after

emergence to achieve adequate vigor to survive the winter. Slow-establishing species like trefoil or reed canarygrass should be planted in early August, while fast-establishing species like red clover, alfalfa and orchardgrass may be seeded up through late September/early October, depending on location. Keep in mind that suggested dates assume sufficient moisture to establish the crop. Planting later than recommended dates is sometimes successful depending on fall and winter weather patterns, but there is increased risk of failure and reduced yield potential for the stand when planting is delayed. A good rule of thumb (as an example) for alfalfa is to have six to eight inches of growth before a killing frost. Check specific recommendations for your region.

7. Plant seed shallow and in firm contact with the soil. Carefully check seeding depth, especially when no-tilling. Drills with press wheels usually provide the greatest success in summer. Broadcasting seed on the surface without good soil coverage and without firm packing is usually a recipe for failure in summer.
8. Use high-quality seed of known varieties. Cheap seed often results in lower yield and shorter stand life.
9. Do not harvest new summer seedings this fall. The only exception is perennial ryegrass. If perennial ryegrass has tillered and has more than 6" of growth in late fall, clip it back to 3-4" before snowfall.
10. Scout new seedings for winter annual weeds in the fall. This should occur sometime between mid-September and early November, depending on your area. Apply herbicides as needed. Winter annual weeds are much easier to control in late fall than in spring.

These 10 "tips" can help producers make the most of fall seeding and achieve improved results next spring! Check out available information on regional recommendations, suggested varieties to plant, the producers' needs and goals for quality forages to meet their ration needs, etc.

(edited from an article by Mark Sulc,
The Ohio State University, July 2005)

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