



Seeding Forages in the Fall

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Hay Report – August 2006 (Volume 7, Number Three)

Perennial forages can be seeded at almost any time of the year. Soil moisture, temperature, heat, weed pressure, length of growing season and fertility determine how well a stand will establish. Keep in mind that growing conditions generally deteriorate as the season progresses. For optimal performance in the spring, forages either should be seeded before August 15, to give them a chance to establish before freeze-up, or after the first killing, frost, to ensure that they don't germinate at all until spring. Seeding in late fall is a good option if the area tends to be too wet to seed in the spring.

Studies in Swift Current during the late 1940s and early 1950s showed fall seeding success depended on the forage species and the date on which the crop was seeded. Alfalfa, for example, established a better stand when seeded in early May rather than in late fall. On the other hand, a study in Wyoming showed cicer milkvetch tends to emerge more when the crop was seeded in late fall. Among grasses, crested wheatgrass and green needlegrass tend to have better emergence when seeded in the fall, while intermediate wheatgrass emerges more quickly when seeded in the spring. Russian wildrye and streambank wheatgrass can tolerate a fairly wide range of seeding dates and will establish equally well under fall or spring seeding.

In conclusion, perennial forages can be sown in the spring or late fall. The key is to seed late enough in the fall to inhibit seed germination that year. If alfalfa or other spring-preferring species are seeded in the fall, increase the seeding rate by 25 to 35 per cent to compensate for lower germination and to ensure a good stand population. One important thing to keep in mind when fall-seeding forages: be sure winter annual weeds are kept under control in the fall before seeding. They can pose a problem in the spring. Refer to *The Guide to Crop Protection* for product information and application rates.

For more information:

Contact the Agricultural Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.