

## **Forage Legume Management Guide**

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### **Benefits of Overseeding Warm-Season Perennial Grasses with Cool-Season Legumes**

- ◆ **Four to 6 weeks earlier grazing in the spring (which reduces the winter feeding period)**
- ◆ **Legumes typically have higher nutritive value than most grasses**
- ◆ **Legumes fix nitrogen from the atmosphere and make it available to the pasture system**
- ◆ **A good stand of legumes can provide spring weed control through plant competition**

### **Six Months Before Planting**

- ◆ **Soil test 6 months before planting to determine if limestone is needed to raise soil pH and determine any nutrient deficiencies. Four to 6 months are required for limestone to raise soil pH. Soil pH of about 6 to 7 is needed for most legumes.**
- ◆ **Avoid using Grazon P+D™ (Gunslinger™), Milestone™, GrazonNext™, Surmount™, Redeem™, Chaparral™ or any other product containing Cimarron™ (Ally™) during the summer before planting legumes.**
- ◆ **Limit or omit N fertilization of pasture during the summer.**
- ◆ **Forage legumes are more site specific than grasses. Select legumes adapted to the soil type and field location.**

### **Autumn**

- ◆ **Buy coated (pre-inoculated) seed if possible, or if uncoated, buy the appropriate inoculant and apply to seed immediately before planting. Plant within 24 hours of inoculating.**
- ◆ **Summer pastures must be short (less than 3 in. tall) by late September to early October for overseeding. A light disking should be performed to**

reduce summer grass competition and expose some bare soil to enhance seed-soil contact.

- ◆ 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 recommended clover seeding rate for a pure stand. Annual ryegrass provides earlier grazing, reduces the chance of bloat, can act as a carrier for clover seed in a planter not equipped with a small seedbox, and the clover seeding rate is reduced by a third.

### **After Planting**

- ◆ If overseeding an undisturbed grass sod, let cows continue to graze until daily low temperatures are about 40°F 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 if needed to enhance ryegrass growth.

### **Utilization**

- ◆ Grazing will not be available until February or March.
- ◆ 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, subterranean, rose, and white clovers can flower and produce seed under continuous 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 reseeder.
- ◆ Graze the summer grass short (3 inches) by October to allow sunlight to reach the soil surface for volunteer clover seedlings

Produced by the Department of Soil and Crop sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. For further information go to [www.soilcrop.tamu.edu](http://www.soilcrop.tamu.edu). The authors may be contacted at [vacorriher@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:vacorriher@ag.tamu.edu) or [gevers@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:gevers@ag.tamu.edu).

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