

Winter Pasture Establishment

By: Spencer Perkins, Camp County Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources
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As we are finishing up one of the most bizarre hay seasons, if your hay barn is not quite full of your normal top quality forage, you may be looking into planting winter pasture this year.

In considering the cheapest supplement throughout the winter, there are a few factors to think about before spending too much time and money in winter pasture, with the first being the pH of your soil. Most all forages used in the cattle industry require a soil pH much higher than most of our fields in Camp County. If your pH is much below 6, I would not recommend trying to plant winter pasture, as it will struggle to produce enough forage to pay for itself.

Another thing to consider is if you are going to be able to get the winter pasture off of your field when your warm season grasses begin to grow next spring. If you do not have the ability to heavily graze, or cut and bale your winter forages, in our region and climate you could really set back your warm season grasses in 2016.

Lastly, if you used a post-emergent broadleaf weed killer that has soil activity and residual, you will not want to plant clovers.

So if you have been maintaining a pH above 6 and can remove you winter forages next spring, let's begin to visit our options for winter forage. The forages options for northeast Texas are:

- Ryegrass
- Rye
- Wheat
- Oats
- Triticale
- Clover
- Hairy Vetch
- Alfalfa

However, due to cold, grazing, and disease tolerance -- some of the more recommended or used options for Camp County are ryegrass, rye, wheat, triticale, and clover.

There are a few different options when it comes time to plant. You can drill the seed into an undisturbed sod bed; prepare a seed bed followed with drilling or broadcasting, or broadcast some of your smaller seeds of ryegrass or some clover seeds on an undisturbed sod bed. The seeding rate, planting depth, and months of use differ for each variety. The below table from Dr. Vanessa Corriher-Olson is good to refer to when deciding which method to use.

	Seeding Rate (lb/ac)	Planting Depth	Months of Use
Ryegrass Only	25-30	0-0.5 in	Feb to May
Small Grain Only	90-100	1-1.5 in	Dec to April
Ryegrass & Small Grain	15-20 (ryegrass) 90-100 (small grain)	See Above	Dec to May
Ryegrass & Legume	15-20 (ryegrass) 2/3 of pure stand seeding rate (legume)	0-0.5 in (ryegrass) 0-1.0 in depending on legume	Feb to May

After planting, it is important to consider fertilizing the winter pasture. As you look at your soil test results, remember -- if you need to apply Nitrogen, never apply it before the first frost; and it is recommended to break up into 3-4 applications of 50-60 lbs N/acre. However, as you look at your phosphorus and potassium needs, some people who broadcast seed mix in the P and K as they are planting. Last, do not apply Nitrogen fertilizer to a pure legume stand.