

GUIDELINES FOR PASTURE ESTABLISHMENT

SPRING PLANTING: Early spring or when temperature is between 40°–75°F is the ideal time for seeding. Freezing or colder temperatures should not harm the seed or the young seedlings, but may slow the germination or initial growth by a few days or weeks.

FALL PLANTING: As a general rule, seeding should be completed from 6-8 weeks before the traditional first frost and or **after** temperatures are consistently below 65°F. to prevent germination. Young seedlings are not mature enough and may suffer frost damage.

1. Site Preparation

Before planting, remove or kill existing vegetation from the planting site with a non-selective herbicide such as Round-Up. Once the vegetation has been killed, remove the un-wanted vegetation using whatever methods are best suited for your site.

- a. Till the site to a depth of 4-6”.
- b. Level and firm the area and apply a starter fertilizer. Contact your county extension or local farm store for recommended fertilizer. Based on what is being planted, pH and other considerations.
- c. Roll and water the area (if possible) to settle the soil

2. Seeding

Apply seed at the recommended rate for the area and type of hay / pasture you are establishing. Irrigated, dryland etc...

- a. Check the weather conditions. If you are seeding when it is too windy or hot you may have a complete failure. Seed early in the spring as soon as you can get on the ground. Hopefully, you’ve prepared the ground for seeding prior to the onset of ideal seeding conditions.
- b. Broadcast using the rate recommended. Typically, a broadcasted seeding rate is doubled the rate of drilling.
 - i. Once broadcasted you should roll or press the seed into the soil ensuring good seed to soil contact. A spring-tooth harrow, chain link fencing, heavy chain or other should be dragged to lightly cover the seed with soil, approximately 1/8” -1/4”. DO NOT sow the seed too deeply.
- c. Drill the seed at a shallow depth 1/8-1/4” and use the recommended seeding rate. Using rollers, press the seed firmly into the soil. DO NOT sow the seed too deeply!

3. Watering

Keep the seed bed moist for 45 to 60 days, allowing the plants to completely germinate and begin their establishment. If you are on non-irrigated land, sow the seed early enough in the spring to take advantage of spring moisture. If you’re seeding dry land in late May or Early June you are TOO late, unless you have a means to supplement the moisture, we recommend seeding in the fall.

- a. Keep ground moist during the initial germination stage. Keep daily water, as needed, until the pasture grasses have reached the 2nd-3rd leaf stage
- b. After the pasture has established and growing for 60 days, a deep watering will promote a deeper root system.
 - i. Making plants more tolerant to grazing pressure and drought tolerant

4. Establishment

It is recommended to keep animals off a new pasture for one year. This will allow the plant to develop a strong root structure and prevent the plants from being pulled out.

5. Grazing / Haying

If you can’t wait a full year, management on your pasture is critical. Hay when ready and cut at the correct height for the grasses / alfalfa you’re using. Cutting too low will increase the recovery time of the plant which will decrease the productivity of the pasture.

- a. Same holds true for grazing. Manage your animals to ensure they are not eating too much of the plant.
- b. Good management practices will increase productivity and pasture life.

6. Weed control

Be aware that weed seed is present in the soil before you begin your pasture project. If weeds sprout in your new pasture, wait 45 days before applying a weed killer (consult your county extension/farm store for recommended herbicide) as new plants are easily killed by a pre-mature application of herbicide. Follow the written directions on the herbicide.

7. Fertilizing

For a faster establishment and a healthier pasture, fertilize 4-6 weeks after planting. A spring and fall fertilization should be part of your pasture management practices.