

Get Ready For Fall Plantings

DR. GARY BATES

KNOXVILLE, TENN.

Even though it is July, the time to plant cool-season grasses will be here before you know it. Have you ever thought about the fact that anytime you plant something, there is only one good thing that can happen? You get a thick, competitive stand of whatever grass or legume you planted. This one good thing often gets overshadowed by all the bad things that can happen. Too little rain, too much rain, ground too soft, ground too hard, too hot, too cold, and on the list goes. The following steps will improve your chances of getting a good stand established.

1. Fertilize and lime according to soil test results. Don't have a stand failure because the pH was too low or adequate nutrients weren't available. Take a soil sample and have it tested well ahead of planting in case lime is required.

2. Plant into a weed-free field. Prior to planting, make sure that everything in the field is killed, either through disking or by using herbicides. Planting seed into a field with weeds present puts the new seedlings at a severe disadvantage and can result in establishment failure.

3. Plant into moist seedbed. Seed need to absorb water in order to germinate. Planting into a dry seedbed will mean that rainfall is needed before any germination begins. Hot, dry seedbeds can result in seed viability decreasing rapidly

after planting. Be sure that moisture is adequate at planting, which keeps you from having to pray for rain and reduces the risk for planting failure.

4. Plant the proper amount of seed. Don't just assume that the seeder you are using is putting out the proper amount of seed. Spend a few minutes prior to seeding to calibrate your seeder, particularly if it is a drill that you have rented. This step will save you time and money by preventing all your seed being put on half of the field, or having to run over the field two or three times because it wasn't putting out enough seed.

5. Check planting depth. One of the biggest mistakes that can be made is placing seed too deep at planting. Putting a tall fescue seed at 1 inch deep will cut seedling establishment in half compared to planting at ½ inch. No-till drills are generally heavy to help cutting through the sod. They can place seed too deep, so check the depth of seed placement when preparing for seeding.

6. Control weeds after planting. Monitor the field after planting. If weed pressure is becoming too great so that establishment is in jeopardy, consider using a herbicide to eliminate the weeds. Contact your local Extension office for specific herbicide recommendations. Δ

DR. GARY BATES: Forage Specialist Plant Sciences, University of Tennessee