

Forage Grass Notes

Bluegrasses (*Poa*)



Introduction

- Important pasture grass in Northeast USA and Eastern Canada
- 250 species in genus – 84 species of *Poa* are found in North America
- Most important and common forage *Poa* is Kentucky bluegrass – *Poa pratensis*
- Is a high quality forage grass and is particularly well suited for use by grazing animals

Growth and Morphology

- Kentucky bluegrass is a long lived, sod-forming, winter hardy, cool season perennial
- Will grow at temperatures as low as 4.4°C - optimum temperature 15 - 32°C
- Does best under good fertility - pH 6.0 – 6.5 (pH>5.5 important) and high nitrogen rates
- Kentucky bluegrass leaves have prowl shaped tips and are folded in the bud
- 80% of the roots are in the top 5 cm of soil, two weeks without rain reduces yield dramatically
- The more prostrate growth habit of bluegrass (high proportion of leaf near the soil surface) helps it take more abuse than many tall growing grasses

Importance and Use

- Kentucky bluegrass often volunteers in sown pastures and is a major native pasture grass
- Spring growth very palatable and very high quality
- When fertility is not lacking, the yield of bluegrass is usually correlated to precipitation
- Lower productivity during mid-summer than tall growing species like orchardgrass and meadow fescue.

Culture and Management

- The growth curve is induced by photo-period and temperature, but can be modified by nutrient level and management (N and moisture help but cannot prevent dormancy in mid-summer)

- Stock heavier in early spring, graze early and reduce the stocking rate by mid-summer
- The high fertility requirement and the mid-summer slump in yield are concerns, however its high palatability, high quality and excellent persistence makes bluegrass a good pasture species
- Often found in association with white clover. Sow at 8 kg/ha with timothy at 5 kg/ha or meadow fescue (10 kg/ha) along with white clover at 3 kg/ha
- The ratio of white clover to bluegrass can be greatly influenced by fertility and grazing management - rotational grazing down to 1 to 2 inches (2 - 5 cm) will promote white clover and a more dense sod

For more information, please contact:

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