

Improving Your Pasture

Low precipitation and growing urbanization are placing demands on limited water supplies in the Intermountain region of the western U.S. This, coupled with federal land policies that curtail the use of public lands for livestock grazing, has led to increased interest in upgrading private pastures, primarily through intensive management and planting improved pasture species to increase forage production and quality. Introducing a legume such as Sainfoin into a grass pasture will increase forage quality and yields.

Sainfoin is an ancient crop originating in Asia and first domesticated in Europe several centuries ago. Sainfoin is a legume that produces very palatable forage and is a crop adapted to similar regions and uses as alfalfa. When compared to alfalfa, it has the distinct advantage of being a non-bloating forage. A significant amount of sainfoin research and variety development occurred in the Western U.S. and Canada during the 1970s', but was never widely grown. Sainfoin is best adapted to well-drained soils in the West, and under these conditions it is comparable to alfalfa in its productivity and longevity.

Sainfoin is well-adapted to the hay-stockpiling system used by ranchers in the northern Great Plains. In this system, first cutting hay is harvested, and the resulting re-growth is used for fall grazing. Sainfoin at mid-bloom retains its leaves and nutrient content better than other forage legumes, and first-cut yields of sainfoin are consistently higher than those of alfalfa. Sainfoin is bloat-free due to its high levels of condensed tannins, but remains highly palatable to livestock and wildlife.

The Shoshone variety of Sainfoin has proven to be an excellent variety in the Rocky Mountain States. It is very winter hardy, productive and excels in a multiple cut system.

References:

Peel, Michael D., Asay, Kay H., Johnson, Douglas A., Waldron, Blair L. March, 2004. Forage production of sainfoin across an irrigation gradient. *Crop Science*.

Sainfoin for Forage is Generating Interest February 2006. US Fed News Service.

Cash, Dennis, Ditterline, Ray, Johnson, Duane 2006. Sainfoin Making a Comeback in 2006. Montana State University.

Making Money on Alkaline Soils

If you are looking for a productive and profitable grass on saline soils Tall Wheatgrass should be considered for your arsenal. It is a Native to Turkey and Asia Minor, and was introduced in the U.S. in 1909 for forage on saline meadows and seashores. As its' name implies, Tall Wheatgrass can reach mature heights of 6 feet. It is a long-lived, perennial bunchgrass and well adapted to a wide range of soil types and climates. It is recommended for planting in 12-14 inch or higher precipitation zones or on sites with higher water tables from 4,300 to 6,000 feet elevation. It is well adapted to wet, alkaline soils and can tolerate up to 1% soluble soil salts. Because of its late maturing characteristic, Tall Wheatgrass provides a long grazing period.

Tall Wheatgrass is commonly used for hay and pasture in the northern Great Plains and intermountain region. Most often planted as forage on saline and sodic soils where few other species will survive. It is one of the most saline tolerant grasses commercially available and is often used for erosion control along roadsides and other critical areas. It can produce high yields of good quality forage and is best suited for early season grazing. Tall Wheatgrass also has benefits for wildlife providing a food source as well as nesting cover for upland birds.

Tall Wheatgrass is often overlooked due to late maturity and palatability issues, however it responds well to irrigation and fertilization. Nitrogen should be applied in the fall or early spring at a rate based on soil test results and fertilizer guide recommendations. To maintain healthy stands, 6 inches of growth should be left at the end of the growing season. Tall Wheatgrass is most palatable when grazed during early spring months and should be managed during this time to maintain plants in the vegetative state.

The variety Jose is ideal for Colorado's climate. It is more palatable than Largo or other varieties and is very productive. Contact one of our knowledgeable representatives to discuss how Jose will fit into your program.

References:

Plant Materials Center, USDA-NRCS, Plant Guide.