

## Foraging Around



By Dr. John E. Baylor

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Most varieties are of the early flowering type, normally referred to as medium red clover. Red clover is one of the easiest legumes to establish using either conventional or no-till techniques.

Disease resistance, especially to northern and southern anthracnose, and possibly powdery mildew, is important in red clover varieties. Varieties with resistance or tolerance to these diseases have the potential of an extra year of production and added yield. However, even with disease resistant varieties soil borne insects such as clover root curculio may limit stand persistence beyond that one full year of production.

Mammoth red clover, the late flowering, single-cut type, usually provides one crop plus a limited aftermath. Its use in the Northeast is generally limited to plowdown and clover crop.

### Birdsfoot Trefoil

This deep-rooted, perennial legume is normally less productive than alfalfa on soils where alfalfa is adapted. It is especially well suited to the less-well drained, somewhat acid soils of northern and western Pennsylvania, New

York and New England. However, it has also been grown successfully in more southerly areas. It is suitable for pasture, hay and conservation plantings and is bloatfree, with no case of bloat ever recorded in animals grazing on trefoil.

Newer varieties of birdsfoot trefoil such as Norcen tend to be intermediate in growth habit as compared to the more upright, early flowering Viking and more prostrate, late flowering Empire varieties.

The seedling growth rate of birdsfoot trefoil is slower than that of alfalfa or red clover. And this, along with occasional limited seed supplies of improved varieties, has discouraged many farmers from making greater use of this important legume. Hopefully, with newer, more disease resistant varieties, better seeding techniques and improved seed supplies the use of birdsfoot trefoil for forage purposes will be expanded in the years ahead.

### Crownvetch

Crownvetch is the purple flowered, perennial legume that spreads by creeping roots and by seed and is the most widely used legume along Pennsylvania highways. It is later in maturity than alfalfa, red clover and the upright growing varieties of birdsfoot trefoil with forage yields similar to that of trefoil. Used primarily for road bank stabilization and land reclamation Crownvetch is also satisfactory for pasture and may likewise be harvested as silage.

The variety Penngift which originated in Pennsylvania is the primary variety that is currently commercially available. It will grow on well to moderately well drained soils and is more tolerant of acid soils than alfalfa. It does, however, respond to lime, phosphorus and potassium fertilizations.

Crownvetch is known to establish relatively slowly from seed. However, once established it spreads over a wide area producing a vigorous, dense vegetation that effectively suppresses weed growth. It is usually spring seeded on a firm, well prepared seedbed either alone or with one of several forage grasses, but may also be seeded using the no-till system.

Other small seeded legumes

frequently grown in Pennsylvania and/or other Northeastern states include ladino clover, alsike clover, several clovers, lespedeza and flatpea.

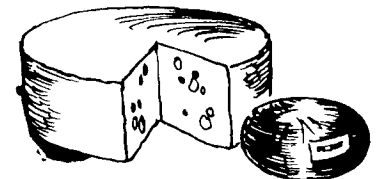
Ladino clover, a large white clover, makes a high-quality pasture for livestock, even though it can cause bloat, and does well in years with frequent rain. Unfortunately it has a shallow root system and lacks sufficient drought tolerance to survive long dry periods.

Alsike clover, on the other hand, is a weak perennial that will grow on wet, acid soils but is not normally considered an important pasture or hay plant because of its sensitivity to heat and dry soils.

Both yellow-flowered and white-flowered forms of sweetclover, mainly biennials, are marketed in this area and are used primarily for soil improvement, seldom for hay and only occasionally for silage. Commonly available varieties normally contain sizable amounts of the compound, coumarin, which gives new-mown sweetclover its characteristic odor and results in reduced palatability of the forage to livestock.

Lespedezas are used fairly widely in the south for pasture, hay and soil conservation, but are seldom used today in the Northeast. Seresia, the perennial form, is fairly coarse growing and is occasionally seeded for conservation or wildlife cover. Korean, the annual form, was at one time grown commonly in the upper south on sandy soils as an annual hay crop. Yields are generally fairly low.

You may not have heard much about flatpea. It's really not a small seeded legume and its use for forage will likely be very limited. Until the variety Lathco was recently released here in the Northeast there was very little seed of flatpea available. However, it has a spreading root system and is especially well suited for use in establishing cover under transmission lines, roadsides, spoil banks and similar areas and should be much more widely used in these areas.



### Other Small Seeded Legumes - Where do they Fit?

Alfalfa is certainly our most productive perennial forage legume - on soils where alfalfa is adapted. But there are a number of other small seeded legumes that are well adapted in the Northeast and grow satisfactorily on soils where alfalfa is not adapted. Let's take a brief look at several of these and see where they fit on today's

forage and conservation programs.

### Red Clover

Red Clover, the most widely grown legume in Pennsylvania, is considered a short lived, multi-cut perennial legume. It is generally both shorter lived and less productive than alfalfa. However, it is more tolerant of acid, somewhat poorly drained soils and is highly suited for short rotations.

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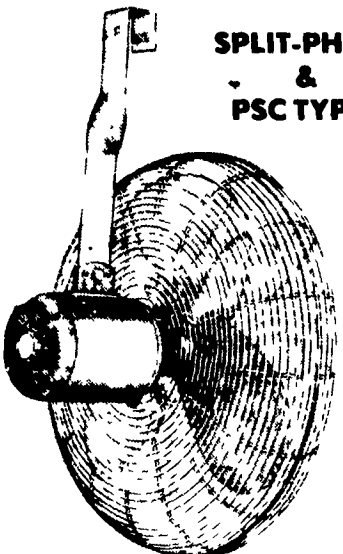
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