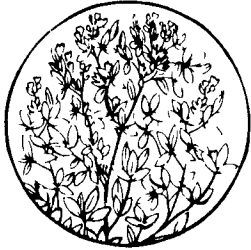


Foraging Around



By Dr. John E. Baylor

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Beachley-Hardy Seed Company

Cool Season Grasses - How Well Do You Know Them?

Most of us take our cool season, perennial forage grasses for granted. We sow them, abuse them, fail to fertilize or manage them, and then we expect them to be there when we need them. And if they don't perform well in July and August we criticize them.

In fact grasses are extremely important to us. On a worldwide basis grasses are included in nearly three fourths of the cultivated forage cropland and they make up a major portion of the native rangeland. In the U.S. alone there are some 1500 grass species. They're extremely important as food crops, and are used extensively for pasture, hay, silage, soil conservation, turf and wildlife.

Most perennial grasses grown for forage in the Northeast are classified as cool season grasses, i.e. they require a cool, moist climate for optimum growth. As a group they are not extremely drought or heat tolerant - and they do require cool temperatures and

relatively long days to flower. And unless our summers are cool and moist these grasses don't normally produce well during the months of July and August.

But they are multi-harvest perennials, and the relationship between growth and food reserves in cool season grasses is similar to

that in alfalfa and other perennial species. It's true the food storage organs of these grasses are not as extensive as those of alfalfa and red clover. And instead of roots the main food storage organs are rhizomes or stem bases. This means, of course, that for best results management of grasses can be just as important as management of legumes.

Cool season grasses can be grown alone or in mixtures with legumes. When grown alone they require adequate levels of phosphorous and potash for good growth. And, of course, they require and respond well to nitrogen fertilization.

In today's column let's take a brief look at just two of these cool season grasses to see where they fit and how best you can make them more useful in your forage program

Kentucky bluegrass is one of the oldest grass species known and certainly one of the most widely grown, but most maligned, grasses in the Northeast. A low growing and relatively low yielding grass, forage wise its use is limited mainly to permanent pastures

where it is normally grazed continuously and seldom fertilized or managed. It does have a shallow root system developing from rhizomes and it will not tolerate heat, drought or poor soil. But it is winter hardy and will maintain its nutritive value longer than will most other cool-season grasses.

Kentucky bluegrass is highly acceptable to all classes of livestock and certainly is one of the easiest grasses to manage. Horses relish it and bluegrass is the primary component of most horse pasture mixtures.

The overall production of many old permanent bluegrass pastures can be doubled or tripled by complete fertilization or by renovation to include a legume such as birdsfoot trefoil or clover.

Currently there are no improved varieties of Kentucky bluegrass developed specifically for forage purposes, although Dormie is said to have superior pasture characteristics. However, several of the newer turf type varieties such as Park are suitable for pasture.

Until relatively recently Perennial ryegrass was not con-

sidered a suitable cool-season grass for the Northeast. But with the introduction of moderately winter-hardy varieties this species is finding a new home, especially in southern New York state, Pennsylvania and points south.

A bunch grass, in contrast to the rhizomes produced by Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass is somewhat taller growing and more productive than bluegrass. It is exceptionally palatable and nutritious as either pasture or hay and is relished by all classes of livestock. It grows well in mixtures with alfalfa, birdsfoot trefoil and the clovers and seems to survive our winters satisfactorily when grown with a legume. However, until more winter-hardy varieties become available we do not recommend that it be grown alone

Like Kentucky bluegrass perennial ryegrass lacks heat and drought tolerance and, thus, summer growth with this species is likely to be moderately slow.

Currently Reveille is the most widely grown variety in this area, heading out some 2 weeks later than Grimalda. However, plant

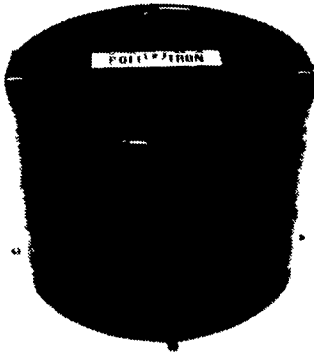
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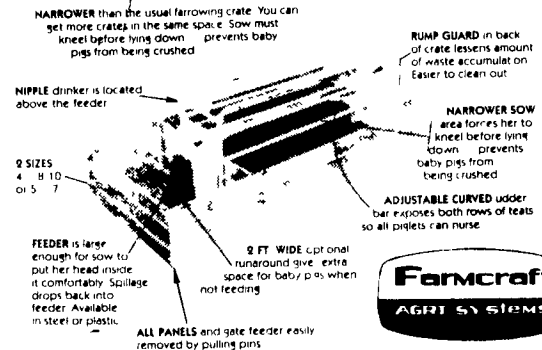
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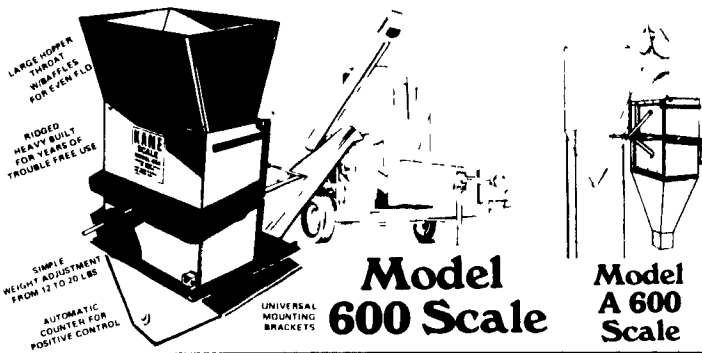
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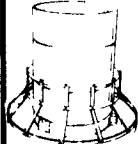
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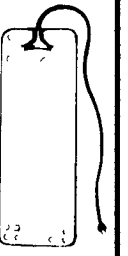
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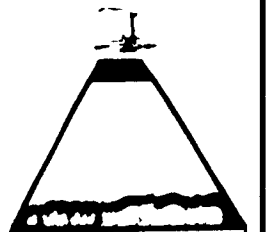
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