

Foraging Around



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Cool Season Grasses - How Well Do You Know Them? (continued)

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. Last month we considered cool-season grasses in general, their good points and bad points, and we took a brief look at two grasses, Kentucky bluegrass and Perennial ryegrass. In this column we will zero in on several of the tall growing cool season grasses grown in the Northeast.

Everyone agrees that Orchardgrass has one of the highest yield potentials of any perennial grass grown in the region. And it is an excellent grass to grow with alfalfa. But its early heading habit along with its aggressiveness and low forage quality as it approaches

maturity have made many forage producers look to other grasses.

The development of later heading varieties such as Pennlate gave this grass new life. But varieties that head out even later are needed, if the other good qualities of this grass are maintained.

Orchardgrass in combination with a legume, alfalfa or ladino clover, is excellent for pasture. Growth begins early in the spring, and if properly managed using rotational grazing it can be maintained in a young, leafy stage and will not be overly competitive with the companion legume.

Bromegrass

While still popular among forage farmers who know it, we've seen few recent improvements in Smooth bromegrass. Adapted to a wide range of soil types, this leafy, sod-forming perennial prefers a

deep, well-drained, fertile soil. While not considered quite as productive as orchardgrass, and it's also somewhat difficult to seed, the feed quality of smooth bromegrass is much better, especially at more advanced stages of maturity. And when grown with a legume it's excellent for pasture, hay or silage.

The varieties Baylor and Saratoga are the most popular and best producers in the Northeast.

Timothy

Despite its known weaknesses, namely shallow-rooted, drought and heat susceptible, poor regrowth and relatively short-lived, Timothy is still the most widely grown tall grass in the Northeast. Grown primarily for hay in association with either alfalfa or red clover, Timothy is easy to establish and does produce a good quality hay if harvested by the time the heads have emerged.

Varieties currently available include high yielding, early maturing Toro and the 7-10 day later heading Climax. For timothy growers in the upper Northeast there is also the very late heading Champlain. These varieties give farmers a choice of maturities depending on where they farm and the associated legume.

Reed Canarygrass

Plant breeding breakthroughs are causing forage producers to take a new look at Reed Canarygrass, a grass that has often been criticized by livestock farmers throughout the Northeast.

This high-yielding sod forming perennial does well for pasture, silage or hay on a wide range of soil conditions. It is known to thrive on wet land, but it is also very drought tolerant and grows well in association with several legumes including alfalfa.

Furthermore, Reed canarygrass is known to be as digestible to ruminants as most perennial temperate grasses and legumes. Yet because of low palatability and occasional poor performance by grazing cattle and sheep this potentially excellent grass has never been widely accepted.

Recently scientists discovered that alkaloids in this grass were a major factor responsible for poor animal acceptance. They also learned that it was possible to breed new varieties low in alkaloids and high in relative palatability.

As a result two new low alkaloid varieties, Palaton and Venture, have been released and are, or soon will be, commercially available. Performance-wise in the field they are similar to older varieties. But because of lower alkaloid contents they have demonstrated much greater palatability and increased animal gains when grazed.

Seed of Palaton will be available in limited quantities for 1985 spring seeding and should be readily available by 1986. Seed of Venture should be coming along soon.

Tall Fescue

Tall fescue is another grass that has reaped the scorn of many grazers. Yet here again is a grass with considerable potential. Like Reed canarygrass, tall fescue is a high yielding, sod-forming grass well adapted to a wide range of soil and climatic conditions. And while it is known to provide good pasture in early spring and autumn, and is excellent as stockpiled fall feed, tall fescue pasture has also been shown to be of very poor quality during the summer months, resulting in poor animal performance from cattle grazing this grass.

Scientists have recently recognized the presence of a fungus, or endophyte, growing within tall fescue plants that may be at least partially responsible for the so called "summer syndrome" associated with this grass. They also established that current tall fescue varieties, like those of Reed canarygrass, contain alkaloids which also appear to be related to the summer syndrome condition.

A new low alkaloid, low endophyte variety, Johnstone, recently released by University of Kentucky scientists, and expected to be commercially available soon, showed a breakthrough in the improvement of this important grass. Other varieties and other approaches to solving this summer slump problem appears close at hand.

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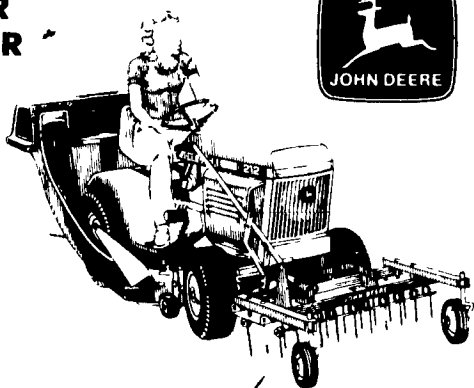
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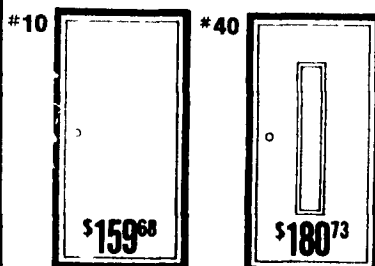
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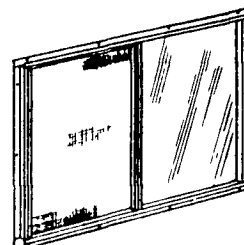
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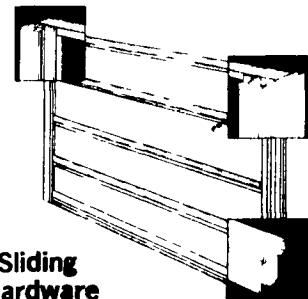
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