

Foraging Around



By Dr. John E. Baylor
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On Seeding Alfalfa

What's the best time to sow alfalfa? This is a question still frequently asked by many farmers. In reality there is no absolute "best" time. But there are climatic and other conditions which in a given year may favor one season over another.

Spring Seedings

For example, during the past 2 decades or so we've seen a shift towards spring seedings. Not because spring is the "best" time to sow alfalfa but because spring is the most practical time to sow alfalfa in a corn-alfalfa rotation.

There are other advantages, of course, for sowing alfalfa in the spring. Moisture conditions are usually favorable for seedings made at this time of year - even though in 1985 this was not the case in many areas of the Northeast. And, with spring seedings made without a companion crop it's usually possible to remove 2 or 3 good cuttings the year of establishment.

There are disadvantages, too. Heavy spring rains can result in a severe erosion problem, especially if alfalfa is clear seeded without a companion crop. And usually insect and weed pressures are much more severe on seedings made in the spring.

Late Summer

Many farmers still think of late summer as the "best" time to seed. And some who had switched

to spring are shifting back to late summer.

Seeding on a prepared seedbed in late summer has its advantages and disadvantages, too. One advantage, of course, is that it may fit best into the crop sequence involving a small grain. And as a rule weeds and insects are much less of a problem for seedings made in August.

Moisture, too much or too little, can be a major disadvantage. Hot, dry weather in August and September is common, either causing delays in seeding until it's too late or preventing germination and good stand establishment before freeze up. On the other hand, heavy thunderstorms, frequent at this time of year, can cause severe erosion and badly damaged or destroyed stands.

No-till Seedings

One technique that will overcome many of the disadvantages of late summer seedings on a prepared seedbed is no-till seeding in small grain stubble. Advantages are several. This practice provides one last opportunity for weed control before seeding. The small grain stubble left after grain harvest and straw removal provides an excellent mulch and favorable moisture conditions for germination. And, of course, the erosion hazard is reduced to a minimum in a stubble seeding.

Lynn Hoffman, Extension No-till Specialist at Penn State, sums up suggestions for stubble seedings

about as follows:

(1) Harvest grain as early as possible and remove the straw. And be sure your combine is properly adjusted to minimize grain loss. Volunteer grain is one of the biggest weed problems in stubble seedings, Hoffman reports. Harvesting grain on time and early straw removal provides more timely forage establishment and decreases weed growth.

(2) Examine the stubble. If broadleaf weeds such as dandelion and plantain are abundant apply Banvel or 2, 4-D according to directions. And if either of the above herbicides is used wait at least 2 weeks before applying a contact herbicide.

(3) If hard-to-kill perennial broadleaf weeds or perennial grasses are present glyphosate (Round-up) can be used. Follow directions on the label.

(4) If the above herbicides are not used wait several days to a week or more after grain harvest to allow any shallow germinating weeds to emerge, and hopefully volunteer grain will also have germinated. Apply a contact herbicide such as paraquat and sow immediately using a suitable no-till drill.

(5) Hopefully adequate lime based on soil test was applied prior to establishing the small grain. Necessary fertilizer for the alfalfa seeding can be broadcast either before or immediately after seeding.

(6) Use Furadan at seeding time with the drill to provide additional protection to the young seedlings against problem soil borne insects.

Most authorities are convinced that no-till seedings in small grain stubble provide an excellent alternative method for summer seedings, assuming you have access to a suitable no-till drill.

If, on the other hand, you are planning a summer seeding on a prepared seedbed, consider the following:

- (1) Lime and fertilizer according to soil test.
- (2) Plow as early as possible to assure better weed control and moisture conservation.
- (3) Prepare a firm seedbed - to assure uniform shallow seed

placement and a good moisture relationship in the zone of the germinating seed.

(4) Inoculate alfalfa seed or use properly stored pre-inoculated seed.

(5) Sow on time - early August in Northern areas, by late August in Southern Pa. and for central and southern Maryland and the

Eastern Shore no later than Sept. 10.

(6) Sow seed shallow using a packer wheel or conventional drill with band seeding or a cultipacker seeder - and use sufficient seed per acre.

Next month I'll take a closer look at the best time to seed other small seeded legumes and grasses.

Cornell to host master gardeners

ITHACA, NY - Some 150 garden experts known as "master gardeners" who volunteer their time and expertise in carrying out horticultural programs of Cornell Cooperative Extension throughout New York State will be on campus this month to learn about teaching and research in plant sciences and related disciplines at Cornell University.

The 1985 "Master Gardener Conference," scheduled for July 22-24, is expected to draw participants from 30 counties across the state, according to the conference coordinator, Robert E. Kozlowski, a Cooperative Extension associate in the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture in the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell.

"The purpose is to acquaint the master gardener volunteers with Cornell's research and teaching facilities in plant sciences and related fields and to exchange ideas and share experiences gained by the participants as gardening advisers," Kozlowski says.

Established in 1976, the "master gardeners" program now involves more than 700 volunteers in New York State, who assist Cornell Cooperative Extension agents by providing up-to-date information

about all aspects of plants and gardening and by fielding numerous gardening questions from the public.

The Cornell conference will feature a series of workshops and tours of teaching and research facilities on and off campus. Workshops will deal with home lawn care, flower arranging, the use of plants in landscape design, and collecting and maintaining insect and disease specimens. Also planned is a demonstration on beekeeping.

Tours will include the Cornell Plantations, the ornamentals test garden, the Urban Horticulture Institute, the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Cornell, and the Ornithology Laboratory, the Kenneth Post Laboratory and its greenhouse complex where numerous varieties of horticultural crops are studied, vegetable field trials, perennial and rock gardens, the Cornell orchard, and the Dyce Laboratory for the studies of honeybees.

For more information about the program, contact Robert Kozlowski, Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, 15-F Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-5908, or call (607) 256-4506.

CCC loan rate lowest since '78

WASHINGTON - Commodity loans disbursed in July by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation will carry a 7-7/8 percent interest rate, according to CCC Executive Vice President Everett Rank

The new rate, down from 8-3/4 percent, reflects the interest rate charged CCC by the U.S. Treasury in July, Rank said.

Rank said the 7-7/8 percent rate is the lowest since crop year 1978.

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