

Foraging Around



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SEEDING ALFALFA IN AUGUST

Seeding alfalfa this month? August is considered by many as the ideal time to seed alfalfa, either on a prepared seedbed or by no-tilling into a small grain stubble. And while over the years, because of changes in rotations, more farmers have switched to seeding in the spring, August continues to be a good time to establish this valuable crop.

There are several advantages for seeding at this time of year - generally fewer insect problems and often times weeds are less of a factor. Moisture is usually satisfactory in August and September for successful establishment. This year, depending on where you farm, moisture may or may not be a problem.

NO-TILL SEEDINGS IN STUBBLE

Many growers have found that no-tilling alfalfa into a small grain stubble in August is one of the most fool proof seeding techniques for this time of year. Moisture, either too much or too little, is less of a limiting factor in this type of seeding.

But there are several rules you should follow to assure a success-

ful no-till establishment. These include:

1. Competition from other plants must be eliminated or minimized.
2. Heavy thatch and plant growth tall enough to shade the soil surface must be removed.
3. You must protect the seedlings from insects, especially if you seed in sod.
4. The soil fertility must be medium to high with pH above 6.5.

5. Seeding date is not as critical with a no-till compared with a conventional seeding. Never-the-less, except for seedings made in the southernmost part of our area, seedings should be made before September 1.

CONVENTIONAL SEEDINGS

If you're seeding alfalfa this month on a prepared seedbed a firm seedbed is a must. If the seedbed is not firm, moisture may be critical and tender alfalfa roots will grow into air pockets between soil particles and die. That firm, fine and mellow seedbed is also essential to permit uniform shallow coverage of seed.

HOW ABOUT INOCULATION?

I'd also like to review with you briefly the importance of proper inoculation.

Under favorable conditions and a continuous legume cropping history, the right kind of and adequate amount of bacteria may already be present. Thus, theoretically, under these conditions additional inoculation may not be necessary.

However, in case of low pH or low fertility, drought, high soil temperatures, or persistent rains, the number of bacteria may be reduced sharply. One or more

these situations may have occurred in your area this summer.

Under such conditions, and especially when planting alfalfa for the first time on new land, or if 4 or 5 years have passed since the previous alfalfa crop, seed definitely should be inoculated with fresh inoculant just prior to sowing. A good rule of thumb is still "when in doubt, inoculate."

Inoculation adds a fresh culture of effective rhizobia strains to seed and soil. Thus, rhizobia can begin working as the seed germinates and the plants start growing. And since protein content in legumes is directly related to nitrogen content effective inoculation is a major key to improving yield and quality.

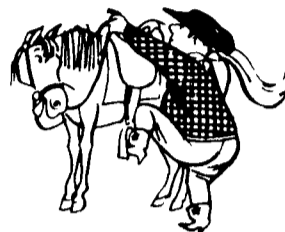
PRE-INOCULATION

Just a word about pre-inoculation. Much of the alfalfa seed currently marketed is already pre-inoculated with the proper rhizobia strain. Newer pre-inoculation techniques, such as the clay-based Dormal process, have proven highly effective and have extended the shelf life over conventional humus-based pre-inoculants.

Never-the-less, pre-inoculated seed carried over from spring for August seedings should, in my opinion, be re-inoculated just prior to seeding, especially this year with the drought and excessively high temperatures experienced in most areas.

Remember, when in doubt inoculate.

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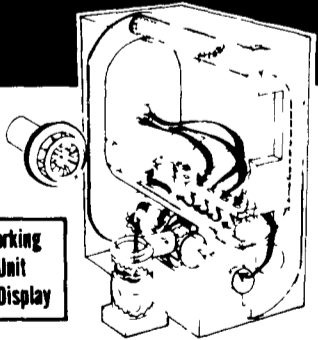
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