

Foraging Around



By Dr. John E. Baylor
 Director of Market Development
 Beachley-Hardy Seed Company

Forage Brassicas - High Quality Supplemental Pasture
 During the past several years Brassica crops (rape, kale, turnips and swedes) have gained in popularity as supplemental summer grazing crops especially for sheep and beef, but also in some cases for dairy cows. And newer varieties, particularly of rape and turnips, make these crops even more promising.

Rape and kale are leafy Brassicas, while turnips and swedes are root crops with all parts (leaves,

stems and roots) utilized by the grazing animals. Rape and turnips reach their maximum yields (up to 4 tons dry matter/acre) between 90 and 120 days after planting. Thus, these crops sown right now would be ready for grazing or chopping by mid August, or sooner, and would be available for a second grazing in late fall. And, unlike perennial forages, the quality of brassicas doesn't seem to decline with age.

Speaking of quality, the brassicas are high in protein and high in

digestibility. They're also very succulent and extremely low in fiber. Because of their low fiber content, brassicas should make up no more than about two-thirds of the daily livestock diet. That's why I've stressed that they are supplemental pasture or green chop crops.

Newer Varieties Show Promise

Numerous varieties of the various brassicas have been tested in Pennsylvania, and have performed satisfactorily. Of the newer varieties of rape, Sparta has proven to be high yielding and highly digestible and recovers rapidly after grazing or chopping. It also has good cold tolerance and club root resistance.

Of the newer turnip varieties a hybrid Forage Star has looked very promising. In addition to good forage production, it has a higher top to root ratio than most other turnip varieties and also has superior frost hardiness.

There are, of course, several other varieties that have performed satisfactorily under our climatic conditions.

Establishment and Management

Brassicas grow best in moderate to well drained soils and

should not be grown on poorly drained sites. They are fairly acid tolerant but grow best when the pH is 6.0 or above. As with other crops, a soil test is your best guide to a sound fertility program. However, in the absence of a soil test, apply about 75 pounds of nitrogen per acre along with 60 pounds each of P₂O₅ and K₂O. Brassicas require nitrogen and it should be applied at the time of seeding.

Brassica crops can be seeded on a prepared seedbed. But seeds are small and seeding depth is critical. Seeding rates for rape seeded at this time are 4 pounds per acre. For turnips 2 pounds per acre. A good, firm seedbed as well as properly calibrated drills or seeders, are a must.

Excellent stands of Brassicas have consistently been gotten with no-till seedings either in sod or stubble with herbicides such as Gromoxone or Roundup to suppress existing vegetation, a sound lime and fertility program, and the

use of precision no-till drills to do the seeding.

Strip grazing where forage is rationed daily or every two days is the most efficient means of grazing brassicas. Rape and turnips both have regrowth capability if animals are not left on pasture too long. Rape, for example, should not be grazed closer than about 6 inches. While for turnips, don't allow animals to consume the growing point at the top of the turnip root. When rotational or strip grazing is practiced, two or more grazings are possible if rainfall is adequate.

Brassicas, like other annual or biennial forages, won't replace your perennial cool season pasture grasses and legumes. But there's plenty of evidence to suggest that for many livestock producers they can supplement your other pasture crops and supply high quality feed in August, late fall and early winter when other pastures are short or not available.

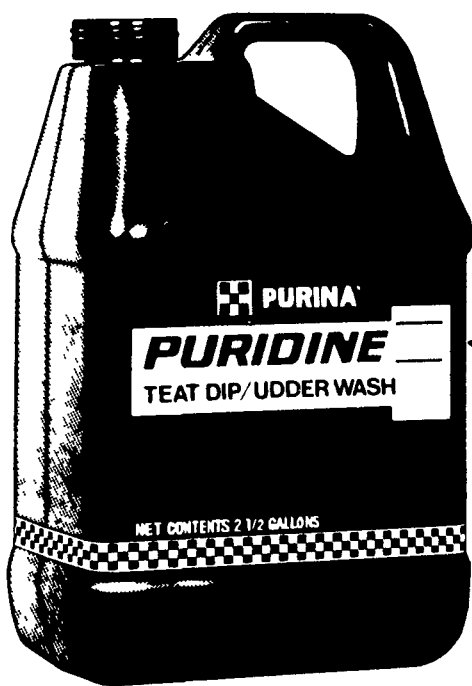
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