

**LATE SUMMER ALFALFA SEEDING TIME IS NEAR**

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Heavy rains and cooler-than-normal temperatures throughout most of the Northeast (and the nation as a whole) has caused many farmers to miss or greatly reduce their spring alfalfa seedings this year.

Seedings can be quite successful when made in the late summer and early fall. Problems is seeding this time of year hinge on getting the ground ready and the seed in the ground early to grow sufficiently to counter harsh weather and possible disease invasions.

Is there an accepted prescription for success at this season? I doubt it — depends on who's talking. But there are some practices that successful

farmers have been using for years that help.

1. Seed early. Alfalfa needs six to eight weeks of growing time before a hard freeze. This gives the plants time to grow and get robust enough to withstand ravages of winter and normally resist invasion of slow growth and week plant related diseases, especially sclerotinia crown and stem rot. Then the following spring/early summer, harvests will expect to be much more abundant and ready to harvest in the desired stages of maturity for high quality hay, silage, and grazing. Seedings made later than the above window should be delayed until next spring. Should the ground be prepared and ready for seeding and the moisture is not present, thus delaying seeding, an option is to seed winter wheat at 75 percent of normal rate for winter cover. Then in the spring, no-till seed the

alfalfa into the wheat following the no-till prescription found at your county extension office.

2. Before even planning a seeding date — test the soil and apply the needed lime and fertilizers recommended. The ideal pH for alfalfa is 6.5 to 7.5. If the pH is lower than this but not lower than 6.2, you might want to consider using 500 to 1,000 pounds of finely ground or hydrated lime lightly worked into the soil ahead of seeding to "hold the seeding" until the recommended rates of ag lime has time to alter the pH to the desired level.

3. If you are making a seeding "from scratch," prepare a clean, well-firmed seedbed that will retain moisture and help you prevent burying the seed. By

the way, seed depth should be no more than eight times the thickness of the seed. That means ¼ to ½ inch is the ideal depth for this region. Of course, it is not necessary to remind folks in Pennsylvania and surrounding states that contour seedings help prevent erosion. Nurse crops usually interfere with abundant alfalfa growth and uniform stands. But is often necessary to help prevent excessive runoff and sheet erosion. Just keep the seeding rate reasonable to avoid choking or smothering the alfalfa. In the spring, why not remove the small grain (preferably winter wheat) for silage early to reduce as much late competition as possible on the alfalfa?

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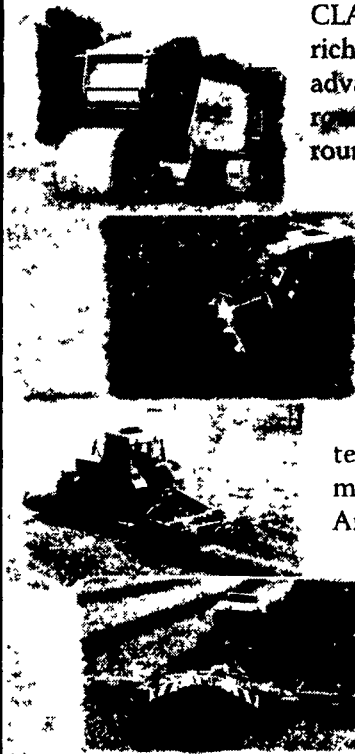
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