

# Time To Think About Frost Seeding

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Frost-seeding time sneaks up on us because we likely aren't thinking about grazing management with the same intensity that we would be during the season. Late February and early March is the ideal time to do frost-seedings to thicken pasture swards.

Frost-seeding remains an inexpensive way to plant certain pasture species, especially legumes. Some experts esti-

mate that it works three to four out of every five years. Although those odds may not be acceptable for more expensive methods of seeding, we can take the risk because of the inexpensive nature of frost-seeding.

In order to improve the odds somewhat, there are some things that we can do:

- overgraze the targeted pasture the previous fall.
- a very light harrowing to expose more soil can help, although it raises the cost of the seeding.

•seed on a morning when the soil is honey-combed and is expected to thaw in the afternoon.

- use good quality seed.
- check pH and nutrients levels and make necessary amendments during the previous season.

What species work the best? Farmer experience and work by a few universities indicates that frost-seeding works best with red clover and birdsfoot trefoil. It is generally not recommended to use alfalfa to frost-seed.

Can grasses be frost-seeded? Grasses do not generally establish with the same success as legumes. However, research at the University of Wisconsin (West and Under-sander, 1997) showed that perennial ryegrass and orchardgrass had the best success of the major cool-season grasses when frost-seeded. If attempting to frost-seed grass, keep in mind that the pattern of seed throw will be different than with legume seeds. Grass will not throw as far. Mixing grass and legume seed together

for seeding is not recommended.

If you need to do extensive renovation to a pasture, and intend to establish grass, you will likely have more success if you suppress or kill existing sod, and seed with a no-till drill. Another option is to plow and re-establish using a conventional drill. Either of these options will be more costly than frost-seeding grass, but will be more cost-effective because of the greater success and consistency of establishment.

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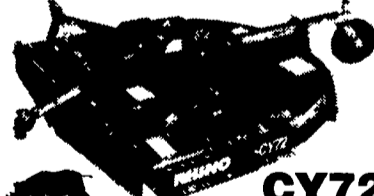
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