



Establishing a New Pasture

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There are a number of reasons for establishing a new pasture. Some of these include the need to replace an existing pasture that is no longer productive or the rotation of an annual crop field to a pasture because additional grazing is required. An existing pasture that is not very productive may respond to the application of fertilizer or an over seeding of forage seed, but the response may not be nearly as significant or long term as reseeding and getting productive species established in the field.

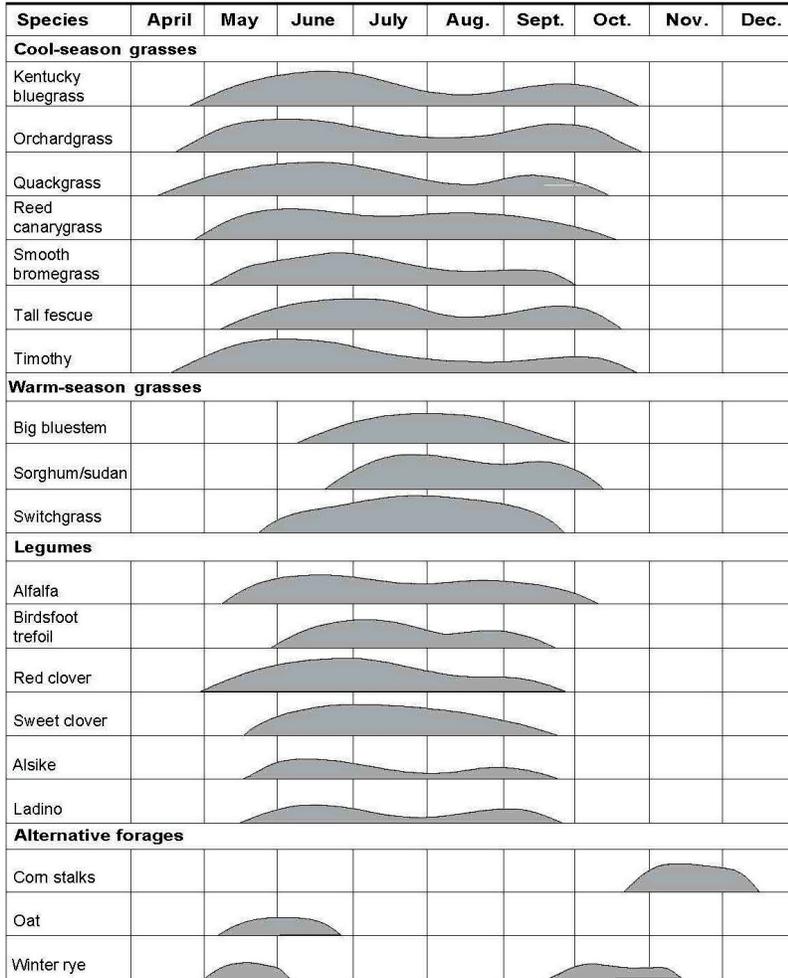
When planning to seed new pastures there are a few questions you should ask yourself before actually starting the process.

- What is the intended purpose of the new seeding?
- Do you want early-season grazing or late-season grazing?
- Are you going to cut it for stored forage sometimes?
- Is this pasture going to stay down for many years or is it part of a farm crop rotation plan and will be planted with another crop in less than 10 years?

Pasture Species

When selecting pasture species you need to look at the intended use of the pasture. Is it for late-season and stockpiled grazing? Then you will want to select species that have a growth period in the fall such as trefoil and tall fescue. If you want early season pasture then clovers, alfalfa and orchard grass may form the basis of the mix. Alfalfa will do very well on well-drained soils, while poorly drained soils are better to be seeded to clovers and trefoil.

Forage Productivity Timing Chart



Source *Pastures for profit*, Undersander et al., UW Extension Publication A3529)

Many people are overly cautious about including alfalfa in a pasture. With proper management, an alfalfa based pasture will give you the best animal performance along with the highest yields of quality forage. Alfalfa’s deep roots and heat tolerance make it the obvious choice for mid- to late-summer grazing. With a good rotational grazing system and best management practices, it can be very successful.

There are a number of grass species that should be considered. Many of the commercial blends include orchard grass because of its early spring growth and rapid re-growth, and once the seed head is removed, it stays vegetative for the rest of the growing season. Meadow brome is also an excellent pasture species. Timothy is often found in mixes but it has poor summer re-growth. Other grass species that warrant consideration include ryegrass (especially for a short duration pasture), reed canary grass, festolium (cross between ryegrass and fescue) and possibly bluegrass (especially for a long term pasture). There is a good description of forage species in the

Forage Adaptation Brochure at:

http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/production/forages/pubs/forage_adaptation_comparison_guide.pdf

Soil Fertility

Soil fertility is a major consideration. The new seeding will not perform very well if the phosphorous and/or potassium levels are low. Pasture fertilizer rates based on soil tests are in the Manitoba Soil Fertility Guide. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/soil-fertility/soil-fertility-guide/fertilizer-guidelines-for-soil-tests.html#table17>

Seeding

Forages can be no-tilled or planted into a tilled seed bed. The seed bed should be firm enough to allow for good depth control and seed-to-soil contact. Forage seeds are very small and should be planted 7-10 mm (1/4 – 1/2 in) deep. The use of a companion crop is optional. If using a companion crop, consider using oats harvested as haylage or baleage at the boot to very early heading stage. This will eliminate the competition effect from the companion crop and allow the new seedling every opportunity to grow during July and August. The field should not be grazed until the forage plants are well rooted. Cattle tear the pasture plants off, and if they are not fully anchored in the soil they will be pulled out!

Planting the appropriate species into a reasonably fertile seed bed should give you a productive pasture for many years.

Adapted from OMAFRA Crop Talk March 2015