

Things That Won't Work - And Why

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Sometimes things go wrong in pasture management. Or, as farmers in New Zealand say, "It went crook." Usually, the intentions were good but it didn't work out for some reason. Often, it is attributed to "bad luck," whatever that is. Generally, the person didn't understand what he/she was doing and may have done the right thing in the wrong place or at the wrong time. Pasture operations that don't work out are usually a result of doing something dumb. With cattle prices low, this is no time to be doing dumb things that waste money. Here are a few of them:

(1) Sprigging hybrid bermudagrass into a thin common bermudagrass or bahiagrass sod. Supposedly, the vigorous hybrid bermudagrass (Coastal or some other variety) is supposed to outgrow the other grass and take over. Wrong! The already established common bermudagrass or bahiagrass has deep roots and will soon shade out the newly planted grass, steal the water and nutrients so that the new sprigs will likely die. **Solution:** Eliminate **all** of the existing grass by tillage or a herbicide such as glyphosate (Roundup) before spending a lot of money planting sprigs. Also, get a soil test and apply needed fertilizer and lime to give the new sprigs the nutrients they need for rapid establishment. Herbicide application at planting can eliminate a lot of crabgrass and other weed competition.

(2) Drilling endophyte-free tall fescue seed into an old stand of endophyte-infected tall fescue. This practice is certain to fail for the same reason as sprigging hybrid bermuda into an existing stand of common bermudagrass. The new tall fescue seedlings can't compete with the well established plants that have good root systems which are much better competitors for water and nutrients. Even if some of the seedlings do get rooted, they will be shaded out by the existing older grass plants. **Solution:** Eliminate **all** of the existing infected tall fescue by tillage or with a herbicide such as paraquat (Gramoxone). Soil test and apply fertilizer and lime as needed.

(3) Broadcasting clover or ryegrass

seed on prepared land and covering the seed with a disk. Only a very poor stand can be expected as most of the tiny seed will be covered too deep for emergence. Unlike wheat or oat seed, small seeded clovers and ryegrass are not able to emerge from a depth of several inches in the soil. **Solution:** Use a cultipack seeder or lightly cover the broadcast seed with a spike tooth harrow so the small seed are covered with less than one-half inch of soil.

(4) Broadcasting crimson clover seed on bermudagrass sod in September. Chances for success here are zero. It is still hot in September, rainfall is not dependable, and the bermudagrass is still actively growing so a germinating clover seed has about the same chance of getting established as the proverbial snowball in hell. The problem here is **competition** from the grass, drought, and a heavy load of insects such as pygmy crickets that eat the clover leaves. **Solution:** Mow or graze closely to remove old grass residue, wait until late October or November to plant, cut the sod with a disk or other tillage implement, broadcast the seed and drag the pasture to cover seed. Even better results can be obtained by planting with a grassland drill so that seed are planted at the correct depth.

(5) Broadcast planting of white and red clovers on tall fescue sod in September. This will work only in the mountains and upper Piedmont. Elsewhere in the state, it will fail as autumn drought, insects, and grass competition result in very few surviving seedlings. Even where large numbers of cattle are used to trample seed into the soil, the results are poor because soil moisture is generally low and hoof penetration is limited. **Solution:** Except for extreme north Georgia, best results with broadcast seeding of clover on tall fescue have been obtained in January-February. Graze the sod closely, broadcast seed, and stock heavily to trample seed into sod. Best of all, plant the clover seed with a grassland drill which will give more dependable stands.

(6) Inoculating crimson clover seed with soybean inoculum. Totally

ineffective. Different legume species **require** specific types of inoculum. Soybean or vetch or peanut or alfalfa inoculum will **not** work on crimson clover. However, the inoculum for crimson clover can be used on red, white, berseem, or ball clovers. Arrowleaf, rose, and subterranean clovers each have specific inoculum strains. **Solution:** Buy and use only the correct inoculum for the legume you are planting.

(7) Spraying weeds with the wrong herbicide or at the wrong time. Poor weed kill. For instance, spraying musk thistle at flowering or horsenettle during drought is a waste of money. **Solution:** *Follow directions* and use the correct herbicide and apply at the right time, usually when the weeds are in an active growing stage or early in the season.

(8) Guessing the fertilizer needs of your pasture or hayfield without a soil test. May result in a shortage of one nutrient which can reduce production. Also, application of an unneeded nutrient is a waste of money and can cost a lot more than a soil test. **Solution:** Take soil samples and soil test to be sure of nutrient needs.

(9) Bypassing the county extension office to get variety recommendations at the barbershop. There may be a lot of good stories and gossip at the barbershop but it's **not** the place to get reliable information on the best variety for you to plant on your farm. Planting an unadapted variety on your farm can be expensive, especially a non-winter hardy or disease susceptible perennial grass. **Solution:** Check first at the county extension office as they have best information on varieties recommended in your area. They are not selling seed or sprigs but reliable unbiased information. Extension personnel not only have research-based information but also can share local experience in your area on pest resistance, cold hardiness, and establishment.

It's expensive to try things that won't work in pasture and hay production. Instead, do it right and cut expenses.

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