Frequently Asked Forage Questions

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Extension specialists and county agents frequently receive similar questions from many producers across the state. Often the correct answer to the question is dependent upon soil type, weather, or even the individual producer's management style. This article will attempt to answer a few of the most common questions asked. Remember that these are relatively broad answers and situations may vary from farm to farm. For more information on these subjects, please feel free to contact your local county extension office.

How late can I plant tall fescue and still get a good stand? The deadline has passed for successful fall tall fescue establishment in tilled land. In almost all areas of Georgia tall fescue performs best with fall planting as this allows good root establishment going into hot summer months. Spring establishment is usually not recommended anywhere in the state due to weed pressure, but tall fescue can be planted in spring months in the Mountain area if necessary.

How late can I overseed bermudagrass pastures and still expect good forage production? The majority of fall forage production is sacrificed when winter annuals are planted in bermudagrass sod. Winter annuals can be established as late as mid-November but this may not be an economically wise decision as no fall grazing will be realized. Planting in cool winter conditions will slow establishment and normally delay spring production as well. Due to the shorter spring growth period of wheat, oat and especially rye, it is likely that few grazing days will be realized from late plantings of these species. Ryegrass produces forage later in the spring so planting this species late may be justifiable if hay production this summer was low. Late planting also increases the risk of winter damage which may cause total failure of overseeded stands. Late plantings are risky and should be avoided if at all possible.

Will overseeded ryegrass delay greenup and inhibit early spring production of my bermudagrass? Overseeded ryegrass produces forage later in the spring months than rye or wheat and this late season production can inhibit bermudagrass greenup. Under proper management the effects of ryegrass on bermudagrass greenup are probably minimal. Delayed bermudagrass production is more pronounced when ryegrass is underutilized and becomes tall and rank. Some bermudagrass hybrids may also be less susceptible to ryegrass competition. Dr. Gary Hill has conducted grazing trials at Tifton where early season Coastal bermudagrass production was inhibited by ryegrass, but Tifton 85 production was not affected. The key to a successful spring bermudagrass greenup is to have healthy, well-maintained bermudagrass in the fall prior to overseeding.

I have some tall fescue, Italian ryegrass and little barley in my bermudagrass hayfield. Is there any way to remove these grass species while the bermudagrass is dormant? Italian ryegrass and little barley can be controlled with Gramoxone Max during the

winter months while bermudagrass is dormant. For best results apply Gramoxone Max at the high rate (1.3 pts/acre + 0.25% v/v nonionic surfactant) on a sunny day when temperatures are greater than 50 degrees F. This application needs to be made before little barley forms seedheads and Italian ryegrass is less than six inches tall. These conditions will normally happen during the time frame of January through early March depending upon the location in Georgia. Tall fescue will be suppressed but not totally controlled by this treatment. Unfortunately the rates of Gramoxone Max and Roundup WeatherMax labeled in dormant bermudagrass do not totally control tall fescue.

How do I kill a common bermudagrass field to replace it with a hybrid bermudagrass? Most cotton farmers know how difficult it can be to remove common bermudagrass. It is foolish to replace a common bermudagrass field with a hybrid without removing as much of the common bermudagrass as possible. Common bermudagrass will need to be sprayed with 3.0 lbs. ai/acre of glyphosate (i.e. Roundup WeatherMax, Touchdown etc.) **three times during the summer before a new hybrid bermudagrass is planted**. Applications should begin May through June and repeated two more times on a 4 to 6 six week interval when bermudagrass regrowth is observed. This will program will give about 95% control one year after application. If only one application can be made, apply glyphosate at 5.0 lbs. ai/acre in late September through October. One application in the fall is far superior to one application in May, June, July or early August. However, one application of Roundup at any rate is not as good as the three application program discussed above.

What's the best hybrid bermudagrass variety? The best bermudagrass variety is extremely site and management specific. A summary of bermudagrass hybrid varieties can be found in the Georgia Cattleman archive at www.georgiaforages.com or at your local county extension office. Briefly, Tifton 85 appears to be the best hybrid bermudagrass variety in South Georgia for both yield and quality. The coarse stems of Tifton 85 may decrease acceptance from some horse hay buyers. Tifton 85 can probably be safely established south of Interstate 20. Russell and Coastal have both performed extremely well in North Georgia. Russell appears to have more cold hardiness and establishes more rapidly than Coastal. In low input grazing situations, common bermudagrass or bahiagrass can be attractive options for some producers. Make sure to match forage type with management style, inputs and soil types.

Can I use a seed-type bermudagrass variety? Several seed-type varieties have performed well in north Georgia, but establishment of these varieties has been difficult in South Georgia. Cheyenne performs extremely well from the Piedmont north to Calhoun. Yields have approached those of Russell at the Red Bud Research and Education Center near Calhoun. Seed of this variety are available from Pennington Seed in Madison Georgia. Several other seed-type varieties of bermudagrass are currently being evaluated at various locations in Georgia. Yield data from these trials will be available soon.

Production has declined in my bermudagrass hayfield and the stand appears to be thinning. My bermudagrass pastures appear to be fine- what is the problem? There are several potential reasons for this problem but the most common involves fertility. In

grazed areas animals 'recycle' nutrients like potassium and phosphorus through feces and urine back to the pasture. In a hay harvest situation, these nutrients are removed and transported to where the forage is fed and ultimately excreted. On average, 50 pounds of nitrogen, ten pounds of potash and 40 pounds of phosphate are removed for every ton of hay harvested. For reference, about 12.5 pounds of nitrogen, 8 lbs of potash, and 1 lb of potash are removed per 500 pound calf. Adequate supplies of potash are critical for disease resistance and winter hardiness. Take a soil sample to determine if P, K or lime is needed. It is much cheaper to fertilize in a timely manner than to replace a stand of bermudagrass and still have to fertilize later.

Thatch buildup can also thin bermudagrass hayfields. Thatch ties up a substantial amount of nutrients, prevents bermudagrass from forming a thick stand, and serves as safe haven for insect species like spittlebugs. Burning is an extremely effective tool for removing this thatch. See the February 2002 Georgia Cattleman article on burning at www.georgiaforages.com and follow all safety recommendations. Cultivation is also an option for decreasing thatch buildup if burning is impossible or undesirable. A light discing in early spring can incorporate some thatch and stimulate bermudagrass production.

Because of the excellent rainfall this summer I was able to bale a lot of hay. My barn is full of bales and there is quite a bit stored outside as well. Which should I feed first? I am sure you are aware that hay losses are extremely high in the Southeastern United States because of damp mild winter weather. Losses of hay stored outside often exceed 30% with animals sometimes refusing an additional 20% of spoiled hay. Losing half a hay crop to weather is simply unacceptable. Feed the hay stored outside first to minimize exposure time and reduce weathering losses. Barn-stored or tarped hay should be fed later since spoilage losses will be much lower.