

Bermudagrass Hay From Seed-Planted Varieties

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High-yielding hybrid bermudagrasses for hay production are established vegetatively by planting sprigs. This is an expensive venture with the cost of sprigs and planting about \$100 per acre, not counting land preparation, fertilizer, and herbicide. In some northern areas of Georgia, there are no custom planters available. Thus, there has been considerable interest in widely advertised giant bermuda varieties which are planted from seed. If they yield as well and stands persist, then the lower cost of planting would make them attractive alternatives to sprig-planted bermudagrass hybrids.

In April 1994, we planted four seed-type varieties and two sprig-planted varieties in replicated trials at the Northwest Branch Station at Calhoun, the Plant Sciences Farm at Athens, and the Central Georgia Branch Station at Eatonton. Since no herbicide could be used for the seed-planted varieties, none was applied to the sprig-planted varieties as well. Nitrogen was applied at the rate of 60 lb N/acre in April and after each harvest. During the second year, harvesting was done at 4 to 5 week intervals.

Establishment problems

Although complete evaluation requires three years, because of the interest in the seedplanted varieties the data for the first two years are presented. Normally, sprig-planted bermudagrass would be established with an application of 0.6 lb/acre of Zorial Rapid 80 herbicide in 10 gallons or more of water. Since Zorial controls bermudagrass seedlings, we did not use the herbicide in the tests. Thus, we ran into severe crabgrass problems which we attempted to reduce by mowing at intervals. The most successful competitor with crabgrass was Russell, a new sprig-planted variety from Alabama, which establishes much faster than Coastal. Coastal stands were dominated by crabgrass and were poor at the end of the first year. Of the seeded varieties, Cheyenne appeared to have a slight edge over the others in competing with the crabgrass. The difficulties of establishing



Guy Rawls, Northwest Georgia Branch Station, Calhoun in plots of seed-planted bermudagrasses with four weeks growth.

these seeded varieties in the presence of crabgrass is illustrated by the test at the Central Georgia Station where the weak stands at the end of the establishment year resulted in stand loss over the winter of all the seed planted varieties. Crabgrass problems were less severe at Athens and Calhoun, allowing good establishment.

Forage yields

Forage yields were low on all varieties at Athens and Calhoun the establishment year, a result of crabgrass competition. During the second year, Russell and Cheyenne were the two highest yielding varieties at both Athens and Calhoun with 7.5 to over 8 tons/acre of hay. The other seed-planted varieties were somewhat lower. Coastal was the lowest yielding, a result of slow establishment the previous year. Yields at the Central Georgia Station were much lower, a result of deer encroachment on the plot area. At this location, Russell yielded 3 tons/acre and Coastal 2 tons/acre in 1995. The rapid establishment and high yields of Russell, a sprig-planted variety, make this an attractive option for hay production. Data from Alabama indicate that nutritive quality is similar to Coastal.

Forage yield of bermudagrass varieties at Athens and Calhoun, GA

Variety	Calhoun		Athens	
	1994	1995	1994	1995
	----- tons/acre -----			
Russell	0.86	8.54	1.29	7.42
Cheyenne*	1.15	8.38	1.09	7.47
Tierra Verde*	0.83	8.01	0.71	6.21
KF CD 194*	0.84	7.52	0.83	6.19
Giant*	1.03	7.48	0.89	4.13
Coastal	--	6.93	--	4.67

* Planted from seed

Present status of these varieties

The results of one year indicate that Cheyenne, planted from seed, can equal the yield of a sprig-planted variety such as Russell. If this level of production can be sustained in subsequent years, then a seed-planted variety such as Cheyenne might be an attractive option. Stands came through the winter in excellent condition even at Calhoun in northwest Georgia. Disease susceptibility is of concern since some leaf spot was noted on the seed-planted varieties but not on Russell or Coastal during the summer. We do not yet have forage quality data on these varieties but will have them later. Even if seed-

planted varieties continue to perform well in comparison to sprig-planted varieties, producers must recognize that establishment is a problem since no herbicide can be used to control crabgrass. Careful mowing or grazing will have to be done to keep down competition from crabgrass if the seed-planted bermudagrass is to succeed. Russell appears to be an excellent sprig-planted bermudagrass that establishes fast and yields well. No recommendations can be made on the basis of such limited data but further information will be provided as we continue the tests.

Planting suggestions

Some cattle producers may wish to plant an area of seed-planted bermudagrass. If so, the area to be seeded should be clean tilled and free of common bermudagrass. Fertilizer and lime should be applied according to soil test results. A cultipack seeder is ideal for planting bermudagrass. If only a cultipacker is available, then firm the ground, broadcast the area, and cultipack again to provide a firm seedbed. Since bermudagrass seed are very small, seed are coated with lime to make it about 30% heavier. About 10 lb/acre of the coated seed should be adequate. Planting should be done in April in southern Georgia and late April or May in the northern areas of the state. Be prepared for crabgrass and expect to mow or graze throughout the summer to reduce competition.

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