

CONTROLLING SUMMER GRASSES IN ALFALFA

Wet soils in alfalfa fields right after cutting will certainly do one thing. It will help weedy grasses like foxtail and crabgrass grow.

So, how do you reduce the amount of foxtail and other weedy grasses in your hay? Well, the best way to start is to keep your alfalfa thick and thrifty so it will compete aggressively with invading grasses. Thick initial stands and good soil fertility are needed. In addition, harvest alfalfa only after it begins to bloom or when new shoots appear at the base of the plants. Then alfalfa should regrow rapidly so grasses don't get much time to become a problem.

Unfortunately, this method often is easier said than done. It also may sacrifice some forage quality since harvest occurs after bloom begins. So this method may not solve all your problems.

Herbicides are another option. Roundup works great, but only for Roundup Ready varieties. In conventional alfalfa, two herbicides that control annual grasses well are Select Max and Poast. These herbicides work well on seedling grasses that are less than 4 inches tall, and alfalfa tolerates both herbicides very well. Another herbicide option, but a much more risky option, is Gramoxone Extra. Gramoxone burns back top growth of all green plant material. This will kill most annuals like foxtail, but it also can injure alfalfa regrowth that has already emerged. Therefore, only use Gramoxone immediately after harvest and before any new regrowth shoots appear. None of these herbicides have any soil residual activity, so good plant coverage is necessary and you may need to repeat the spraying if new weeds emerge.

If weedy grasses are a problem in your hay, thick and vigorous alfalfa stands and some well-chosen herbicides can help you get it under control.

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