

Give Haylage A Chance

Are you frustrated with making hay during wet spring weather? Maybe it's time to try chopping haylage instead. Making good hay in May can be tough. There never seems to be enough dry days in a row. One way to escape this weather trap is to harvest your alfalfa as haylage instead of as dry hay.

Making good haylage isn't as simple as just chopping wet alfalfa and dumping it into a bunker, however. It takes skill and planning for best results. It takes the three M's – moisture, microbes, and metabolites.

Alfalfa haylage should be about 65 percent moisture when stored in a bunker. Overly wet haylage often produces a sour fermentation and sometimes can produce toxins. Dry haylage will heat and reduce both protein and energy digestibility. When stored at the right moisture, along with proper chopping and packing, alfalfa haylage can ferment correctly and become well preserved.

Fermentation also requires microbes and the right metabolites, especially easily fermented carbohydrates. Alfalfa will ferment more rapidly and preserve better if extra silage microbes are added as an inoculant. This inoculant can be either dry or liquid, but add it at the chopper for thorough mixing instead of in the truck or wagon, or at the bunker.

One weakness of alfalfa as a silage is its low concentration of sugars or starch for the microbes to ferment. This can be overcome easily by mixing a bushel of cracked corn or 50 pounds of molasses to each ton of alfalfa haylage at the bunker.

Wet weather makes hay making frustrating. Consider beating the weather by chopping haylage instead.

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