

## Time to Plant Alfalfa and Pasture Grasses

Guess what, folks? It's planting time again. It is, at least, for alfalfa and pasture grasses. Read on for more specific recommendations.

Get an early start planting grass this spring. From now until the end of April, plant your cool-season or warm-season grasses as soon as soil, weather, equipment, and labor conditions permit. This will help your seeds germinate and emerge early. It gives them a head start on weeds and also assures that your grasses will be growing well before hot and dry weather hits this summer. Alfalfa also can be planted now, but be a little cautious. Alfalfa planted in early April gets a head start and can be ready for a light first cutting by late June. Plus, a couple more cuttings can be taken later in the year.

Sure, there is a risk of freezing temperatures killing plants, but not right away like you might think. Very young alfalfa seedlings can tolerate temperatures as low as 15 to 20 degrees. The danger of freezing actually is greater after alfalfa reaches the third or fourth trifoliate leaf stage, or about 4 inches tall. At this stage, alfalfa begins to react as if it is heading into summer, and it changes its metabolism to enable it to grow more rapidly. Thus, it loses its cold tolerance and becomes susceptible to freezing. Early planted alfalfa can reach this growth stage by late April or early May, so late spring freezes sometimes injure early plantings. If you need to avoid this risk, plant alfalfa in mid to late April instead. But don't plant too late or hot weather will hurt plants, instead.

So don't delay. Planting time is upon us. An early start is your best hedge against weeds, heat, and other work conflicts.

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