

## ADD LIME THIS FALL FOR NEXT SPRING'S ALFALFA

Do you ever have problems establishing alfalfa? The solution might be to apply lime if your soil pH is low.

Every year, alfalfa growers ask me about slow growing seedlings. Eventually, I'll ask about their soil pH. Way too often, either they didn't get a soil test and don't know or the test showed that the pH was so low that it is unlikely that alfalfa could grow well. But when I suggest adding lime next time before planting they either add too little to do any good or they disregard the recommendation entirely.

Alfalfa grows best in soils with a neutral pH of about 7. When soils are acid, with a pH of 6.2 or lower, alfalfa plants do not grow as well. At a low pH, alfalfa roots are less able to absorb nutrients from soil. Also – the nodules on alfalfa roots that convert nitrogen from the air into nitrogen the plants can use – these nodules have difficulty forming and working effectively in acid soils.

Most sandy, low organic matter soils as well as heavier ground that has been tilled and fertilized with nitrogen for many years have become acidic. These soils need lime to solve this problem. But some folks still resist liming even when their own soil pH is down as low as 5.5 or even below 5!

It takes some time for lime to really neutralize much acidity. So I recommend applying lime at least 4 months ahead of planting alfalfa. That means that if you expect to seed a new field of alfalfa next spring, add lime if needed this fall to give it time to work. Sure it costs money, but it's much less costly than having a stand failure or several years of low alfalfa yields.

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