

Forages for Wet Areas

Do wet areas need to be waste areas? Not if the right forages are growing there. Many farms and ranches have low, wet areas that produce mostly weeds. However, useful forage can come from most areas with the right grasses or legumes. Some of these wetlands might be dry enough to work and plant better forages this spring.

If seeding these wet areas is in your plans, make sure you plant something that will tolerate wetter conditions once they return. Many good forage grasses can survive and grow even when soils are water saturated for a long time. It becomes more complicated, though, when other limitations, like saline or alkaline soils, affect the results.

Some better grasses for these wet and saline/alkali soils are the wildrye grasses like beardless wildrye and Canada wildrye. Many wheatgrasses also work, including slender, tall, and western wheatgrass as well as wheatgrass hybrids. Creeping foxtail is especially good if you plan to graze these forages later on.

For sites that are just waterlogged or periodically flooded with little or no salinity problems, reed canarygrass, Virginia wildrye, meadow fescue, and red top can be used. On the fringes of these sites, orchardgrass, timothy, and switchgrass may grow well.

Only a few legumes are adapted to wet soils. They include alsike and strawberry clover as well as birdsfoot trefoil. These legumes also tolerate a little bit of salinity or alkalinity.

You rarely get a chance to improve the forages in wet soils. Establish some of these grasses and legumes whenever you can get into these sites and your future hay and grazing will be better.

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