

GRASSES AND LEGUMES FOR HORSE PASTURES

Horses are popular throughout our area. Since horses tend to eat a lot, maybe a new horse pasture is in your future. Here are some planting suggestions.

Horses graze differently than other livestock. They heavily graze specific spots, and they are more picky about what they will eat. So consider these characteristics when planting new pastures for horses.

Two grasses that are popular for horses are timothy and bluegrass. Unfortunately, these cool-season grasses produce low yields and lack persistence in Nebraska. A better choice for our area is a mixture of orchardgrass and smooth brome grass. Add a little red clover, some white clover, and alfalfa to this mixture and you'll have an excellent feed resource. In western Nebraska, wheatgrasses like intermediate or crested or western wheatgrass might be a better choice of grass since they are more adapted to dry climates.

Native warm-season grasses also can provide good summer pastures for horses. But don't mix them with cool-season grasses because they don't grow well together. Warm-season grasses that horses graze well include blue grama, big bluestem and sand bluestem, sideoats grama, sand lovegrass, and indiagrass. Plant a mixture of three to five of these grasses for good summer grazing.

Avoid switchgrass and little bluestem for horse pasture. Horses do not graze these grasses very well. But, both switchgrass and little bluestem are consumed well as hay if they are planted in mixtures with other grasses and harvested before seedheads emerge. So they can be used for horse hay even if they make poor horse pasture.

So, when planting new pastures, select grasses that horses prefer. Contented animals and easier management will be your reward.

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