

Heavy Graze Before Adding Legumes to Pastures and Hay Meadows

Want to learn how to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? I'll explain how to take this year's stressed-out pastures and turn them into better feed than ever before.

Adding legumes to hay meadows and cool-season pastures is the best way to increase forage quality and animal performance from these forages. Legumes add protein, animals digest them faster, and intake increases when legumes are added to the grass. As a bonus, legumes make their own nitrogen so oftentimes fertilizer costs decrease.

The biggest challenge to establishing legumes into grass sod is competition by that grass on new, slow growing seedlings. Anything you do to reduce competition and slow down grass growth will help.

One of the best ways to slow down spring grass growth is to graze it hard now. Heavy grazing this fall prior to sod-seeding next spring will weaken the grass and reduce its spring growth, plus remove much old dead thatch, thus giving new legume seedlings a better chance to get started. You may have already moved your cattle to corn stalks or winter range, but if you have a long-term goal of improving your pastures or hay meadows, it might be smart to bring animals back to pastures or meadow regrowth and grub it down hard. Then even graze it some more to make sure grass growth next spring is really slow.

While you're at it, also collect some soil samples. Then analyze them and apply any needed fertilizer. Legumes often need extra phosphorus and sometimes lime to improve soil pH. So, plan to add some legumes to your pasture next spring. Graze your grass this fall until virtually nothing is left. The legumes you add next spring will establish better because of it.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

