Oats and Italian Ryegrass for High Quality Pasture

High quality pasture always seems to be in short supply. Oats and Italian ryegrass might be the surest way to have the high quality needed by your cattle. I like oat forage. It grows during spring when we are likely to receive rain and when moisture is used efficiently to produce forage.

Oats can be grazed earlier than anything else you plant this spring. Once it gets five or six inches tall, it quickly can shoot up to a foot tall in almost no time. Unfortunately, once oats gets that tall it may not stool out, tiller, and regrow after grazing very well. So it's important to start grazing early when oats get six to eight inches tall to stimulate it to form new tillers.

After this first grazing, keep oat regrowth between six and sixteen inches tall. Begin with a light stocking rate, about one animal every two acres. Then adjust animal number as oat growth changes.

For a longer grazing season, plant a mixture of oats and Italian ryegrass. Oats comes on strong early while Italian ryegrass tends to wait until June before it grows rapidly. Then it just keeps growing high quality leaves the rest of the year if moisture is available.

For straight oats, drill at least three bushels per acre as soon as possible and oats will be 6 to 8 inches tall and ready to graze by early May. With good moisture and 40 to 60 pounds of nitrogen, oats can provide a couple months of grazing for 1 or 2 cows per acre. For extended grazing, drill just a couple bushels of oats plus around twenty pounds of Italian ryegrass per acre. Your stocking rate might need to be a little lighter at first, but with some timely moisture you can continue to get great grass all summer and fall.

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