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RYE, TRITICALE, OR WHEAT – WHICH IS BEST?

Which small grain – wheat, rye, or triticale – should you plant this fall for forage next spring? Let's look at some of their characteristics to help you select.

Let's start with cereal rye. Rye is your best choice for the earliest grazing possible. Because it's early, it also may be the best match for double cropping. Some varieties provide quite a bit of fall growth, too, if planted early. Rye also may be the most reliable when planted under stressful conditions. But it has some drawbacks. It turns stemmy and matures much earlier than wheat or triticale, losing feed value and palatability earlier in the spring. Plus, wheat grain producers don't want it contaminating fields next year.

Triticale holds on to its feed value best into late spring. This makes it well suited for hay and silage, or for stretching grazing well into June if you don't mind starting two or three weeks later compared to rye. But triticale tends to be a bit more susceptible to winter injury.

Winter wheat has been the small grain of choice for winter and spring grazing in the southern plains where higher winter temperatures allow growth to continue, although slowly. Up here where wheat goes dormant, though, its carrying capacity is not as high as triticale or rye. But it is top quality before stems develop. And it's the clear choice if you want the double use as early pasture and then for grain.

So there it is. Rye for early pasture, triticale for hay, silage, or later grazing, and wheat for grazing plus grain. You may have other factors affecting your choice, but in general, these guidelines work well.

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