

SUCCESSFUL ESTABLISHMENT

Stand failure is expensive. It costs more money to reseed and lost production from today's high value land adds up quickly. Let's review important steps to be successful.

Before planting alfalfa, grass, or other forages this spring, make sure you take the steps needed to give you the best chance for a successful establishment.

What are these steps? Well, they may vary a little bit from farm to farm and field to field, but most fields need the following actions.

Begin by making sure the field is suitable for whatever you intend to plant. Seeding alfalfa in an area that frequently gets flooded or has standing water is not likely to produce long-term success. Next, soil test and add recommended fertilizer and lime before planting.

Probably one of the most important steps is preparing a firm seedbed. Walk across the field before planting. You should sink no deeper than the soles of your shoes or boots. Or bounce a basketball on your seedbed. If the ball won't bounce back up, your seedbed is too soft. Firm it some more with a flat harrow, a roller, or maybe even irrigate.

One of the most common causes of poor forage stands is planting too deep. Most forage seeds are very small and should be planted no more than a quarter to half inch deep on heavy or fine textured soils or a half to one inch deep on sands or coarse textured soils.

Lastly, control weeds. Tillage during seedbed preparation, burn-down herbicides before planting, pre-plant incorporated herbicides, post-emerge herbicides, and even mowing all are possible methods.

It's tempting to take shortcuts with any one of these steps. For your best chance of success, though, follow them all to avoid costly failures.

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