



September 29, 2017

OCTOBER HAY

September was the time for alfalfa to start to winterize and store energy in the plant for overwintering and for next year's first cutting. By mid-October the growing season is pretty much complete. Will it be a mild October like last year? With the late season rain our alfalfa has rebounded with growth and with no early freeze it looks good. With this in mind there may be substantial, high quality alfalfa crop remaining in your field. Do you leave it or harvest it?

If a good, healthy alfalfa stand has had at least six to eight weeks of regrowth by mid-October, since the previous cutting, it will have developed adequate winter-hardiness for all but the most severe winters. It also has begun to go dormant naturally because of shorter days and cooler temperatures so harvest is not likely to jeopardize stand persistence. Not only that, October hay often has exceptionally high quality. With high prices paid for dairy and horse quality hay, another cutting is very tempting according to UNL expert Bruce Anderson.

On the flip side it is a busy time of year with grain harvest and hay harvest can be difficult, because alfalfa dries and cures very slowly in October. If you do cut hay, be extra alert to weather reports, use a conditioner to speed dry-down, spread windrows wide for extra exposure to sunlight, and consider using a preservative to protect hay that's baled at higher than normal moisture levels.

Heat damage, mold, or spontaneous combustion fires can occur when rich, fine-stemmed, high quality hay is packaged into tight, heavy bales, especially if it is baled too damp. Plentiful nutrients in a tight, dense package that is a little too wet is an ideal environment for heat producing microbes.

Depending on the weather, haylage might be a better option. Less drying is needed, and since drying is slower, haylage can be made at a more uniform moisture content than in summer. October alfalfa also tends to preserve well as haylage.

Grazing is another option, but continue to be cautious about bloat. After the alfalfa has frozen back, bloat risk is greatly reduced. Whether it is grazed off or hayed, minimizing the amount of alfalfa stubble entering winter has been shown to often reduce injury from alfalfa weevils the following spring.

Good alfalfa in mid-October doesn't have to be sacrificed to maintain winter-hardiness. Just be sure you had adequate time to develop winter-hardiness, and then select a good harvest method.

TWIG GIRDLEERS

I have had some clients comment this fall how many small branches were falling from their trees in their yard this year accumulating on the ground. With closer examination you can see a clean-cut twig like something perfectly ate around and around in a cone shape. It's called a twig girdler beetle (*Oncideres cingulata*). They can make your tree unattractive and they can be tough on young trees too. Common hosts of the twig girdler include persimmon, pecan, elm, hickory, oak, honey locust, hackberry, poplar, linden, redbud, basswood, dogwood and various fruit trees.



The adult beetle deposits an egg beneath the bark in the twig section beyond the cut (severed portion). This is because the larva is unable to develop in healthy sapwood. Because of this always clean up and dispose of the twigs that fall to the ground now until early spring. If practical, prune off infested twigs still in the tree and destroy them. More information can be found at: extension.missouri.edu/p/g7276

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