



ALBERT LEA SEED

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Ryegrass (*Lolium* spp.)

Description

Ryegrass species are the most widely grown cool season grasses in the world. They have rapid establishment and provides excellent quality and high yielding forage, depending on climate and available moisture. The three most important types of ryegrass are perennial, Italian, and annual. Though winter survivability of all ryegrass species is suspect in the upper-Midwest, perennial ryegrass has slightly higher persistence than Italian and annual. All are bunching grasses with long, narrow leaves. Due to their quick re-growth, very early development in spring, and a prolonged growing period in the fall, these species usually have greater overall productivity than other cool season grasses. However, they have lower persistence and winterhardiness compared to other cool season grasses and requires longer drying times when cut for dry hay. They additionally have low productivity in hot and droughty conditions. Annual and Italian ryegrasses can be utilized as cover crops for new alfalfa seedings and row crops. Crops that follow a stand of ryegrass frequently show higher yields, compared to other green manure crops. In addition, ryegrasses are a perfect rotation crop for plow down or emergency feed and useful for extending a grass or alfalfa stand's longevity.

Overview

- Uses:** Pasture—Cover Crop—Forage—Hay
- Strengths:** Fast establishment
High productivity
Widely adapted
Highly palatable
- Weaknesses:** Can outcompete alfalfa during cool, wet springs
Poor drought tolerance
Avoid overgrazing
Poor longevity

Plant Information

- Winterhardiness:** Moderate to Poor
- Drought-Tolerance:** Poor
- Wet soil tolerance:** Poor to Moderate
- Average Nitrogen Fixation:** NA
- Forage Yield Range:** 1.5 to 7.5 Tons / Acre DM
- Relative Forage Quality:** 109 to 160 (index value)
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Seed and Seeding Info

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| Seeds per lb: | 227,000 |
| Seeding Rate Alone: | 25 to 35 lb / A |
| Seeding Rate in Mixtures: | 6 to 10 lb / A in grass mix ; 2 to 4 lb / A as nurse crop with alfalfa |
| Range of Seeding Dates: | Early to late spring ; late summer |
| Methods of seeding: | Drill, broadcast and drag, billion seeder |
| Best seeding depth: | ¼ to ½ in |
| Best Soil types: | Some moisture-holding capacity |
| pH tolerances: | 5.0 to 7.0 |

Cultural and Harvest Information

As a grazing crop?

First time grazing on newly established ryegrass should be delayed until it is 10 to 12 inches tall. Ryegrass is highly palatable to grazing livestock and overgrazing must be avoided. Begin grazing when 6 to 8 inches of growth has accumulated then remove animals once stubble has reached 2-3 inches. Consider adding more fiber and reducing corn in the ration when grazing ryegrass-heavy pastures. Ryegrass pastures are well-suited for rotational stocking. Ryegrass can be effectively added to an existing pasture to boost the productivity of the stand in the short term. Ryegrass can be seeded in a mixture with other pasture species such as red clover, grazing alfalfa, and other cool season grasses. Pay close attention to the stand and grazing frequency if the spring is cool and wet in the seeding year.

As a haying crop?

Ryegrasses are good companions with brome, timothy, orchardgrass, and other pasture species and will die in the second or third year. The first cutting on newly established ryegrass should be delayed until it is 10 to 12 inches tall (~60 days after seeding or at boot stage). Ryegrass yields may be relatively low unless considerable time is allowed for forage accumulation for fall harvest. Ryegrass plants contain less dry matter and therefore require longer curing time before baling relative to other cool season grasses. If machine harvesting, note that cutting ryegrasses with a sickle-bar mower can be difficult. Disc mower and drum mowers are highly preferred

Annual and Italian ryegrass can also be used as an effective nurse crop in the seeding year for alfalfa. Lower seeding rates to 2 to 4 lb / acre to avoid competition with the alfalfa. Ryegrass provides higher quality forage than oats, which is a commonly used companion for seeding alfalfa.

Albert Lea Seed House Product Information Guide

The information presented here is based on the best agronomic information we could cull from University Publications and other sources (usually identified). The cultural and agronomic information is relevant only to farming in the upper mid-west. This information is not infallible and is not a substitute for experience and/or education. We **do not guarantee** farming results based on this information.