

Growing Kentucky Bluegrass for Forage

Area of Adaption

Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), is grown extensively in the middle and northwestern sections of the United States, and in parts of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. It has a wide adaption for soils, but is best suited to well-drained soils of limestone origin. Kentucky bluegrass can be grown in irrigated pastures in central, south-central, and northeastern Oregon. However, because it has lower productivity than other perennial grasses in most areas of the state, it is recommended for use only in the Klamath Falls area of Oregon.

Primary Use

Kentucky bluegrass is used primarily in irrigated pastures in combination with white clover. This combination typically has been associated with horse pastures, but it can be used effectively with beef or sheep as well. Kentucky bluegrass is a long-lived perennial that produces a dense sod from rhizomes. Although Kentucky bluegrass is relatively low in production in midsummer, yields can be increased by adequate irrigation and an ample supple of nutrients. In many cases, however, other grass forage species will be superior to bluegrass for forage production.

Varieties

Kentucky bluegrass is apomictic in nature. That is, seed may be produced without fertilization. For this reason a wide range of variability is present in this grass species. "Common" Kentucky bluegrass is a general-purpose grass for pasture or

lawn use. Low-growing types have been selected for turf suitability. Of these, Kenblue, Park, and Troy were selected for reduced management requirements and are suitable for pastures. Superior cultivars have not been developed specifically for pasture or forage purposes. This may explain why greater forage production is often obtained with other forage grasses.



Establishment

Seedings can be made in the spring or late summer in irrigated pasture. Seed should be planted ¼ to ½ inch deep in well-prepared soil that is firm below a depth of 2 inches.

Use	Precipitation	Kentucky bluegrass	Companion species	Companion species
		seeding rate		seeding rate
	<i>Inches</i>	<i>Lbs/A</i>		<i>Lbs/A</i>
Pasture	Irrigated	5-10	White clover	2-3
		5-10	Birdsfoot trefoil	6

Fertility and pH Requirements

Kentucky bluegrass requires a high level of fertility for maximum production. It does best on soils of near neutral to alkaline pH (6.5 to 8.0) as long as those soils are not saline or sodic. Adequate liming and fertility should be provided for companion legumes in order to produce a good stand and reduce competition from weeds. Specific recommendations based upon soil test data may be found in OSU Fertilizer Guide 21.

Management

For most productive pastures, Kentucky bluegrass pastures should be kept between 2 and 6 inches. Overgrazing of bluegrass pastures will result in poor root and rhizome development, while undergrazing will result in excess grass competi-

tion. Proper grazing management, in addition to providing adequate levels of nutrients and a proper soil pH, will encourage good growth of companion legumes in clover-grass pastures. If clovers disappear from clover-grass pastures, they may be reintroduced by pasture renovation techniques.

If birdsfoot trefoil is used as the legume with Kentucky bluegrass, rotational grazing should be used because trefoil is sensitive to close grazing. A recovery period that allows birdsfoot trefoil to initiate flowering, followed by grazing to a height of 2 to 4 inches, will encourage a long-lived grass-legume pasture.

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