

Goat Forage Production

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As pastures begin to break dormancy across Kentucky, goat producers should take time to evaluate the condition of their pastures. Producers should check for weed pressure, winter survivability, and the effects of last year's drought on the overall forage stand. If pasture renovation is required, late winter/early spring is the best time to interseed legumes into existing cool-season grass pastures. Generally, red clover interseeded into tall fescue or orchardgrass provides excellent forage for goats, and it is adapted to many environmental conditions in Kentucky. Red clover should be inoculated and seeded at a rate of 6-8 lbs/ac.

September is generally the most ideal time to establish cool-season grasses, but this can also be accomplished in the spring (March-April). Orchardgrass and/or tall fescue should be seeded 1/4-1/2 inch deep at a seeding rate of 15-20 lbs/acre. These grasses may be planted with a no-till drill into an existing sod or broadcast seeded, provided the soil surface is disturbed enough to allow for proper soil:seed contact.

High fertilizer costs make soil testing one of the most important forage management decisions. In general, legumes require more phosphorus and potassium than cool-season grasses. Legumes also require higher soil pH levels (6.5-6.8) than do cool-season grasses (6.0-6.5). Sericea Lespedeza is an exception and will perform well in low fertility soils and under low moisture conditions.

Regardless of the forage species you provide for grazing goats, proper pasture management is required for producing quality forage. In general, graze your pastures no closer than 2-4 inches to the ground. This will allow for rapid forage regrowth and lessen the exposure of goats to Barber pole worm larva. Similarly, do not allow any grazing forage to produce a seed head. This reduces overall nutritive value and digestibility. Clip pastures to prevent seed head formation and to aid in reducing weed populations.