



Pastures Seasonal Management



Spring

Don't turn animals out to graze until the ground is firm and the grass is 6 to 8" tall. This will help maintain healthy plants and higher yields.

Fertilizer - Apply fertilizer as indicated by a soil test. Apply one half of the needed Phosphorus and Potassium in April (apply the other one half in the autumn). For Nitrogen, fertilize each paddock just after removing the animals at the end of each grazing cycle, as long as moisture is present. Usually, this means applying about 35% of the needed Nitrogen in April, 20% in May, 20% in June, and 25% in September. A general rule of thumb for Nitrogen needs is 30 lbs. available Nitrogen per air-dry ton of forage produced per acre per year. Take Nitrogen contained in animal manure into consideration as well. A 1000 lb. cow will produce about 40 lbs. available Nitrogen over a 7 month grazing season.

Rotation - A good rotation system will produce up to 20% more forage than will continuous grazing. Pastures should be divided into at least 4 paddocks of equal forage production. Paddocks should be sized for approximately 5 to 7 days of feed. Animals should be moved to a new paddock when the stubble height of the grass is 3 to 4 inches.

Clipping each paddock at the end of a grazing period aids in weed control, as well as encouraging more uniform grazing. Late spring, just before plants bloom, is a good time for chemical or mechanical weed control.

Summer

Continue grazing rotation system and clipping.

Continue fertilization schedule.

Manure droppings and gopher mounds should be scattered with a harrow several times during the season. Ideally, do this right after the animals are removed from the paddock.

Check for residual weeds and control them as needed

Autumn

Fertilizer - Apply lime now if it is needed (pH less than 5.4), according to the soil test. Apply final Nitrogen allocation about September 1, or when the autumn rains, begin. Also apply the other one half of the split application of Phosphorus and Potassium.

Animals should be removed from pasture by November 1, to allow the plants to produce leaf growth for winter protection and to build up root reserves. Plants closely grazed in the autumn are subject to winter damage and also are slower to start growth in the spring.



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Winter

Confine livestock to a well-drained holding area which has all-weather access for feeding, and protection from the weather. Animals left on wet pastures damage plant roots and root crowns with their hooves and compact the soil.

If livestock must be wintered on pasture, choose a paddock which will be reseeded and concentrate the animals there. The second choice is the best-drained paddock(s).

New seeding

When it becomes necessary to reseed the paddock, the area should be tilled and seeded to grain or another crop for one or two years, or should be chemically treated, so that weeds are controlled and old sod is broken down.

The next steps in establishing a new seeding are:

1. Have soil tested for nutrient, mineral, and lime needs.
2. Apply needed fertilizer and lime and work into soil.
3. Prepare firm seedbed - A heel print should be no more than 1/2" deep.
4. Place seed shallowly - No more than 1/4" deep.
5. Don't graze until well-established, usually 1 year. However, the forage may be harvested mechanically.
6. Control weeds by clipping, pulling, or chemicals.

Where to Get Help

For more information on pasture management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service. SCS personnel provide technical assistance to landowners and operators through local conservation districts.

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