



PASTURE MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Why Manage Pastures?

When livestock are allowed to continuously graze pastures, grass plants don't have a chance to adequately rest and recover. As a result, the quality and amount of forage you gain from your pastures will decline over time. If grazing goes unmanaged, livestock will overgraze the preferred grasses until only the less desirable grasses and weeds remain.

Growing more grass for your livestock will lower your annual feed bills. One acre of productive pasture can provide two tons of feed over a growing season!

TIPS

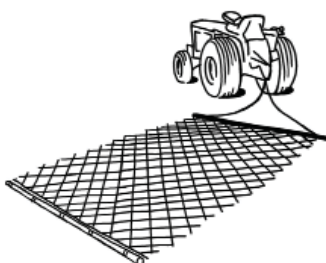


Take Half, Leave Half—Managing Grass Height

Grasses store the energy they need to grow in the lower three inches of the plant. Allowing livestock to graze below three inches will severely stunt grass growth. **Use the “Take Half, Leave Half” rule of thumb.** Livestock should be turned out on pasture when the grass height is **six to eight inches** and removed from the pasture when grass has been grazed down to **three or four inches**. Think of the bottom three inches of the plant as an ‘energy bank’ which should be left for plant use, not animal feed.

Rotational Grazing

Rotational grazing is when you take a larger pasture, break it up into smaller sections with cross fencing and rotate animals through. Start animals in the first pasture when grass has reached **six to eight inches**. Move them to the next pasture when they have grazed it down to **three inches**. Once the animals have been rotated through all the available pastures, place them in a confinement area until the first pasture has reached **six to eight inches** again. (Read more about confinement areas on the next page.)



Mowing and Dragging

After a section of pasture has been grazed, mow the remaining grass to a uniform height of **three inches**. This will help stimulate equal growth of all plants and minimize weeds. After mowing, drag the manure piles to equally distribute nutrients.

Create a Confinement Area

A confinement area is a gravel or hogfuel area that is used to contain animals and keep them off pastures. This will allow you to protect your pastures from soil compaction, mud, overgrazing and weeds. Animals should be placed in a confinement area:

- Late fall through early spring (October-March), when grasses are dormant and soil is damp and easily compacted.
- During the times in the growing season when all of your pastures have been grazed down to three inches.



Applying Compost or Fertilizer

In order to grow, grass takes nutrients from the soil. If these nutrients are not replaced, growth will slow and weeds will thrive. Nutrients can be added back to the system by applying compost or fertilizer. Compost can be applied April through October when the grass is actively growing. If compost is applied at other times of the year, the nutrients will wash away before the plants have an opportunity to use them. The King CD loans out a manure spreader April through October. Please contact us for more information.



Apply a half inch of compost at a time. Do not apply more than 2 to 3 inches per year.

Soil Testing

How much compost, fertilizer and lime you apply and the time of year you apply it should be based on the results of a soil test. The King Conservation District offers a free soil sampling program that will provide you with information on your current nutrient levels and fertilizer and lime recommendations specific to your pasture.

Weed Control

The best way to control weeds is to use the management practices above to produce healthy, productive pastures. Weeds thrive when there are bare spots and grasses aren't healthy enough to compete. It is important to be able to identify common pasture weeds and remove them when they first appear.



Buttercup



Tansy Ragwort



Bull Thistle



Scotch Broom

Do an internet search for "King County Noxious Weed Program" for more photos and information on noxious weeds.

Seasonal Management Calendar

| Spring | Summer | Autumn | Winter |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not turn livestock out until ground is firm and grass is 6 – 8" tall. • Rotate livestock between pastures, do not graze below 3". • Apply compost ½"-1". • Mow and drag pastures once grass has been grazed down to 3". • Check for and control weeds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue rotational grazing system, (maintain 3" grass height). You may need to remove livestock from pastures and feed hay if dry weather causes pastures to go dormant. • Mow and drag pastures at end of each grazing cycle. • Check for and control weeds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test soil. • Apply compost ½"-1". This is the time of year to apply lime. • Animals should be removed from the pasture when all grass is grazed down to 3", when soils become wet, or by November 1 to allow plants to produce leaf growth for winter. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use confinement area, do not allow livestock to have access to pastures during the winter. • Plan out next year's grazing strategy. |



PASTURES CLIPPING AND DRAGGING

Maintaining productive pastures is one of the most challenging aspects of livestock keeping in Western Washington. Besides providing forage for livestock, healthy stands of grass are important for erosion control. Water quality can also be improved with good grass coverage because of the turfs' ability to uptake nutrients and reduce sedimentation.

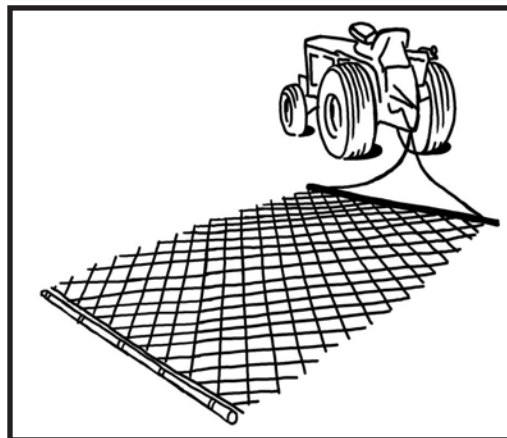
Pastures should be clipped several times each year to reduce weeds from reaching-maturity and going to seed. If allowed to set seed, many types of weeds can out compete turf, especially if the pastures are compacted or stressed or because of poor soils. The lack of precipitation during the summer contributes to pasture grasses going dormant from heat stress and allows drought resistant weeds to grow.

Dragging pastures breaksup manure piles and promotes more uniform grazing of the pasture. The grasses benefit from the nutrients provided by increased manure coverage.

Although dragging breaks down manure faster, it is not enough to kill the worms present. Horses should be on a regular worming schedule and not fed on the ground to prevent problems.

To get the best results from clipping and dragging, a rotational grazing system should be set up. Dividing pastures into smaller units and then moving livestock from area to area allows a regrowth period and prevents overgrazing. The best time to clip and drag is right after livestock are moved from a pasture.

Regular clippings make pastures more attractive and productive than if left unmanaged. On the other hand, clipping can reduce herbicide usage and possible pollution on farms where alternative management styles may be desired.





PASTURE MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE

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Seasonal Management Calendar

| January | February | March | April |
|---|---|---|---|
| Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered; Hang bird, bat, and mason bee boxes | Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered; Sample soils and have analyzed | Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered; Plant native trees and shrubs | April 1st, Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure; Reseed or overseed pastures if needed; Pull emerging weeds; Begin rotational grazing of pastures April 15th, Apply 35% of annual compost or commercial fertilizer requirement |
| May | June | July | August |
| May 1st, Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure in grazed pastures after moving livestock to new one May 15th, Apply 40% of annual compost or commercial fertilizer requirement | Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure in grazed pastures after moving livestock to new one | Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure in grazed pastures after moving livestock to new one; Repair or construct winter confinement area; Pull tansy, wearing gloves for protection | August 1st, Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure in grazed pastures after moving livestock to new one; Repair or construct manure storage bins August 15th, Apply 25% of annual compost or commercial fertilizer requirement |
| September | October | November | December |
| Clip weeds and tall grasses, harrow manure in grazed pastures after moving livestock to new one; Reseed or overseed pastures if needed; Repair or install gutters, downspouts, and outlets; Apply lime as recommended on a soil test analysis; Cut blackberries to ground for control | Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered | Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered | Restrict animals from wet pastures and surface waters; Collect manure daily from confinement areas and keep covered |