One of the more popular new grasses in south Florida is ‘hemarthria' or ‘limpograss'. This grass came from the Limpopo River Basin in Kruger National Park in South Africa. Originally, three hemarthria varieties were evaluated in Florida. One variety termed ‘Bigalta' showed promise as a commercial variety, but would not persist under grazing except in very wet areas or on organic soil. A fourth variety, termed ‘Floralta', was tested and released for commercial production in 1984. Floralta is persistent under grazing and is the only variety now recommended for planting.

Floralta does not produce viable seed and must be propagated vegetatively from above ground stems. Floralta should be planted when the soil is moist and good rainfall is expected within a week or so following planting. It can be planted up through Thanksgiving. When planting, use about 20 small, square bales per acre in a well-prepared bed, disk stems in lightly, and pack with a roller-packer. If weeds are a problem, spray one week after planting with 0.75 pounds of Dicamba (Banvel) in 30 gallons of water per acre. Apply about 300 pounds of 20-5-10 per acre after a good stand of Floralta begins to emerge from stem pieces.

Floralta has several advantages as a pasture forage in south Florida. It grows well in wet areas, and is the grass of choice where water stands during much of the rainy season. It also grows well on the higher palmetto flatwoods. Floralta is the closest thing we have to a perennial winter grass. It makes good fall growth and stockpiled forage retains fair nutritive quality during the winter, even after frost. However, do not let Floralta become overly rank going into the winter. Very mature Floralta forage has poor nutritive value and is unpalatable to cattle. Frost tinges the top of Floralta, with the undergrowth remaining green. From November to March Floralta produces significant amounts of green growth, about 30 to 35% of its total annual production.

The primary problem with Floralta is that it has a very low crude protein content without N fertilization. Crude protein levels of 2 to 4% are common in lush Floralta forage. Fifty pounds of N per acre should be applied at least twice, and possibly three times, during the growing season. The last application of N should be during September to increase the crude protein content of Floralta stockpiled for winter grazing. Phosphorus and potash
should be applied once yearly as 15 pounds of P2O5 and 30 pounds of K2O per acre of Floralta that is being grazed.

If Floralta is cut for hay, it is important to provide sufficient fertilizer to replace nutrients removed with the hay. About 400 pounds of 20-5-10 per acre should be applied about five weeks prior to each hay cutting. If Floralta hay is intended for feeding to yearling cattle it should contain at least 8 to 10% crude protein and 55% TDN. This quality can usually be obtained by harvesting well fertilized, five-week regrowth forage. Lower quality hay can be fed to mature cattle.

Because of its rather course stem, Floralta cures slowly when cut for hay. At the Range Cattle Research Center it requires five to six days to dry Floralta to 20 to 25% moisture. This is one to two days longer than stargrass cut at five-weeks maturity. However, Floralta hay stores well with this moisture content.

Floralta planting material is available from many commercial producers throughout South Florida. Call your local County Agricultural Extension office for a list of growers.