After bahiagrass, the most popular grasses for cow/calf production in south Florida is hemarthria or limograss. This grass came from the Limpopo River 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 subsequently proved not to persist under grazing except in very wet areas and possibly on organic soil. A fourth variety, termed ‘Floralta', was tested and released for commercial production in 1984. Floralta has proven to be very persistent under grazing and is the only variety 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. 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. 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. Floralta is the closest thing Florida has to a perennial winter grass. It can be stockpiled and will maintain fair nutritive quality during the winter, even after frost. Frost tends to tinge the top of Floralta, with the undergrowth remaining green. During warm periods over the winter Floralta will produce some green growth.

A primary problem with Floralta is that it has a very low crude protein content
without nitrogen fertilization. Crude protein levels of 2 to 4% are common in what appears to be lush Floralta forage. It is recommended that 50 pounds of N per acre be applied at least twice, and possibly three times, during the growing season. It is felt that 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. The last application of nitrogen should be during September in order to increase the crude protein content of Floralta stockpiled for winter grazing.

Floralta is susceptible to spittle bugs during the summer and early fall. To help control spittle bugs Floralta should be frequently grazed to prevent heavy forage build up during the growing season. Floralta can be stocked-piled for the winter but not permitted to get to rank because it will have palatability problems. Floralta is also susceptible to chinch bugs in high dry areas.

If Floralta is cut for hay, it is important to provide sufficient fertilizer to replace nutrients removed with the hay. It is felt that 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 yearling cattle it should contain at least 10% crude protein and 55% TDN. This degree of quality can usually be obtained by harvesting well fertilized, 5 to 6 week regrowth forage. Lower quality hay can be fed to mature cattle.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate