

ONA REPORTS

published in

THE FLORIDA CATTLEMAN AND LIVESTOCK JOURNAL

February-1997

Seeding Bahiagrass in Late Winter

Rob Kalmbacher

University of Florida, Range Cattle REC



For questions or comments regarding this publication contact

[Rob Kalmbacher](#)

There are a number of problems associated with establishing a good bahiagrass pasture. When seeding bahiagrass in April or May, there may be enough soil moisture to allow germination, but not enough moisture to allow for seedling development. A seeding between June and September runs the risk of too much rain and flooding. In both cases, the result is stand failure. In central and south Florida (Interstate 4 and south), one way around these problems is to seed bahiagrass in the six-week period from about February 7 to March 15. This is a time, according to long term rainfall records, when rainfall (soil moisture) is usually adequate, and temperature permits bahiagrass establishment. It is also a time when competition from summer weeds, especially watergrass (sedges), is less of a problem.

The steps that act as a guarantee to success are as follows. First, prepare the land between December and January. Use a turning plow or repeatedly disk the soil to obtain a weed free, clean seedbed. Second, roll the seedbed to pack and preserve moisture that you already have or will receive before seeding later in February or March. This is the key element in the process - preserve and use the soil moisture. Loss of soil moisture due to evaporation is minimal from December to January and there is usually a supply of moisture from cold fronts. When you seed in February or March, drill the seed or scarify the soil surface with a light disk and broadcast the seed. Regardless of seeding method, repack the seedbed to preserve moisture. Now, you must get the bahiagrass established so it can survive the dry period between mid April and May.

There are two things that help get the bahiagrass established quickly. First, use 5 lb/acre of readily germinable seed (RGS). If the seed tag that accompanies your bahiagrass indicates 75% total germination with 50% RGS and 25% dormant seed, plant at 10 lb of seed/acre (5 lb/acre RGS). If the seed tag indicates 75% total germination of which 25% is RGS and 50% is dormant seed, then seed at 20 lb of seed/acre (5 lb/acre RGS).

Remember, you are in a race with time and you want to get the greatest number of bahiagrass seedlings to germinate and grow in as short a time as possible. Given seed lots of two bahiagrass varieties with equal total germination, as a rule, Tifton-9 bahiagrass seed may contain more readily germinable seed (less dormant) than Pensacola. There is no question that Tifton-9 has greater seedling vigor and establishes faster than Pensacola, which is very important.

The second practice that can speed bahiagrass establishment is the application of fertilizer to obtain 30-50-30 lb/acre of N-P₂O₅-K₂O, respectively, immediately after bahiagrass begins to emerge. This will be about 2 to 3 weeks after seeding. Follow the first fertilizer application (60 days later) with an additional 50-0-50 lb/ acre of N-P₂O₅-K₂O, respectively.

If winter annual weeds are a problem before seeding, a light disking or applying 0.25 lb/acre of paraquat (1.3 pints/acre of Gramoxone herbicide) before drilling seed will eliminate weeds. Pastures seeded in mid February can often be grazed by June, which will help to control weeds.

Seeding bahiagrass in late winter has worked out well at Deseret Cattle and Citrus in Osceola Co. In addition to avoiding the extremes in soil moisture, the practice helps to spread out their pasture establishment period over a longer time allowing the wet summer months to be used for sprigging grasses such as limpograss.