

Forage and Biomass Planting (512)

Conservation Practice Information Sheet

512 OR-IS

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon

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Client: _____



NRCS photo of small forage planter

Description

Forage and biomass planting is used to establish herbaceous plants on a site. This practice is an important tool that can improve livestock nutrition and/or health, provide increased forage supply, reduce soil loss, improve soil and water quality, or grow feedstock for biofuels or energy production.

Perennial grasses and/or legumes are commonly planted in Oregon. Other herbaceous plants that are adapted to site conditions may also be used.

Uses

If you are dealing with weedy pastures or thin hay fields, it will be important for you to recognize the factors that are primarily responsible. This knowledge will allow you to implement an appropriate grazing/harvest management scheme for your specific site by treating the cause(s) as well as the effects, thus greatly improving your chances for success and increasing the lifespan of the planting.

If your pastures are becoming weedy before their time, grazing and/or hay management strategies may not be well matched to the desired forage species. You may need to modify your management or choose other forage species that are better adapted to current management. Consult with a forage specialist or grazing specialist for specific recommendations.

Timing

Successful plantings rely on the seed being dormant (unsprouted), surviving through the remainder of the dormant period (without being attacked by fungi or mold, or drying out). Once the seed has sprouted, the growing plant needs to have sufficient growing conditions for long enough to survive the next dormant period.

In eastern Oregon, a good time of year to seed forages is in the late fall to early spring. Seeding at this time will keep the seeds dormant due to cold temperatures, and allow the seed to begin growth as soon as soil moisture and temperature conditions are favorable in the spring. The growing plant then has the entire growing season to become able to survive the summer drought and following winter.

In western Oregon, successful seedings are often done in the spring. This avoids the soggy wet winter period with its potential for seed rot from fungi and/or mold. While this ensures that soil temperatures will continue to rise, you need to take care that the seeding is not done too late in the year. Emerging roots need to access soil moisture throughout their growing period.

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