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PLANTING BERMUDAGRASS HYBRIDS USING TOPS

GENERAL

The usual method of establishing bermudagrass hybrids is by planting sprigs (roots), dug during dormancy or shortly after they begin to sprout. The tops to be discussed are nothing more than above ground, green, mature stems. They can be planted in much the same way as sprigs, but they must develop roots, as well as, new top growth to become an established plant. Not all varieties of bermudagrass establish well from tops; Jiggs, Alicia, and Tifton 85 bermudagrass establish better from tops than other varieties. Of the three, Jiggs will establish the best, and cover the fastest. The primary reason for the gain in popularity of top establishment is that it allows a producer to establish a nursery plot of these varieties, and then somewhat easily and economically establish additional acreage by harvesting and planting tops from the nursery plot.

MATURITY OF TOPS

Tops must be mature to be viable. In general the tops should be about 6 weeks old, 18-24 inches long, be pencil lead diameter or larger, and have six or more nodes. In the southern Claypan and Blackland areas of Texas tops are usually not mature until early to mid-May. In the Coast Prairie area they may be mature earlier (mid-late April) depending on the severity of the winter. Local Field Office personnel should determine

when sprigs are ready for use based on local conditions.

PLANTING TOPS

Establishing bermudagrass by tops allows the producer to plant bermudagrass anytime mature tops are available and soil moisture is abundant, up to about September 30. Fall planted tops need enough time to grow roots before frost if they are to survive the winter. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service recommends that they be planted from 5/15 – 6/1 and 8/15 – 9/15.

About 5-7 square bales of tops are needed to plant 1 acre. The mature tops are cut with a sickle mower, baled immediately, and planted as soon as possible after harvest. If the tops are to be stored for any period of time, they must be kept moist and cool. Tops must be planted into moist soil before they wilt. If they are scattered on hot dry soil they may be dead in just a few minutes. The tops can be scattered on the ground and disked in or planted with a sprigger, in either case some green material should be visible after planting. The area planted must be packed immediately after planting to conserve moisture around the tops. As with all pasture planting, proper fertility and weed control are essential to good stand establishment.

Last Revised 7/01

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