

FROST SEEDING LEGUMES



Have You Considered Frost Seeding Legumes Into Your Grass Pasture?

To many farmers, frost seeding legumes into pastures and hay fields makes a ton of sense (and cents). Unlike conventional tilling, this method doesn't disturb existing soil or delay access to grazing livestock.

Adding legumes also reduces the amount of applied nitrogen fertilizer needed since legumes naturally fix nitrogen in the soil and will feed surrounding grasses with the extra nitrogen they produce.

Moreover, having a 25-30% legume component in a pasture improves forage quality for grazing animals and increases the amount of forage to be harvested, resulting in a 50-100% increase in production for just a small percentage of legumes.

Tips for Success

- Make sure frost seeding is done before frost leaves the soil structure. The back-and-forth process of thawing and refreezing in late winter and early spring, combined with spring rains, helps to incorporate the legume seed into the soil. Typically, two or three cycles of thawing and refreezing are preferred to properly integrate the seed.
- To reduce the amount of thatch present during seeding, graze or closely clip the pasture in the fall
- Before seeding, test the soil to ensure proper phosphorus

and pH levels are present for legumes

- Graze the area after seeding. This helps incorporate the seed in the soil and reduces competition for the emerging legume seedlings. However, be careful not to overgraze the area until the legumes have fully established.
- The overall frequency of frost seeding depends on how well the level of legumes is maintained in the stand, but a rule of thumb is to plan on over-seeding one third of your pasture acres every year.

Which Species Should I Consider?

Most adapted forage legume species are suitable for frost seeding. Red clover is most commonly used due to its excellent seedling vigor, but white clovers, birdsfoot trefoil and alfalfa can also work well. (Note: Alfalfa should not be used if the existing pasture contains alfalfa due to auto-toxicity.)

Ready to Get Started?

Adding a legume to your existing pasture is an economical way to add value to the pasture, resulting in higher forage quality, yields and improved animal health. Contact us to get started.