

STOCKPILING FESCUE FOR LATE FALL AND EARLY WINTER GRAZING

Fescue is a cool season grass that grows during the cooler parts of the year. It goes semi-dormant during the hot summer months. As the nights cool in September, it breaks this semi-dormancy and has a surge of growth from September through October. As livestock owners, we can take advantage of this growth by stockpiling it for late fall and early winter grazing. This new growth is very palatable and nutritious and can extend the grazing season on into December and January. By extending the grazing season, we can significantly reduce the amount of hay needed for the winter feeding period and save several dollars in overall feed cost. To stockpile fescue, follow these simple steps:

1. As my August Newsletter stated, **graze off the semi-dormant growth of summer fescue** so you can start with fresh growth.
2. **Remove the livestock from the fescue to be stockpiled by mid-September.** If you have summer grasses such as Bermuda and Crabgrass, these are excellent grasses to be grazing while the fescue is stockpiling. Be aware that these summer grasses slow down in growth as the nights and days get cooler and they are not as palatable as they were in the hot summer months. As a result, you will need to force the livestock to graze these grasses by fencing them into these areas. If given a choice, they will leave the summer grasses and start grazing the new growth of fescue.
3. **Apply 50 – 75 pounds of nitrogen per acre** when the livestock are removed from the pasture or shortly before. If you are using our nitrogen fertilizer which is 34%, that would translate into 150 – 220 pounds of 34-0-0 per acre. (pounds of nitrogen desired divided by the percentage of nitrogen in the fertilizer).
4. **When all the other grasses are grazed out, start grazing the stockpiled fescue.** For best results, this fescue should be **striped-grazed**. Strip grazing is the process of allowing the livestock to have a small strip of grass that will last for a 24 hour period. At the end of the 24 hour period, they are given access to another strip that will last another 24 hours. By doing this, all of the grass is utilized and none is wasted. When the animals have full access to the entire stockpiled area, they will trample, defecate, and lay on a significant portion of the grass and thereby not graze it. Strip-grazing will give approximately 30% more grazing than unrestricted grazing. For complete details on strip-grazing, contact us at the store or your local livestock extension agent.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Nitrogen should **not** be applied during dry periods. Applying during dry periods could result in burning the grass and killing the stand.
2. What if it stays dry and nitrogen cannot be applied until late September or early October? Nitrogen can still be applied and fescue can be stockpiled but the growing time is reduced. Fescue will continue to grow until the end of October or early November, depending on the weather temperatures. When the daytime temperatures start averaging below 50-55 degrees, fescue stops growing. I would reduce the amount of nitrogen applied as it gets later in the season. For instance, if nitrogen can be applied in early September, I would go with the 75 pounds per acre rate. If it is early October, I would drop it to the 50 pound rate. If it is the middle of October, the opportunity to stockpile for an economical return on your fertilizer investment is over.
3. Stockpiling fescue grass is good for most all classes of livestock(cattle, horses, sheep, and goats). However, pregnant broodmares should be removed from fungus infected fescue(Kentucky 31) grass and/or hay 90 days prior to foaling or it will most likely cause the mare to abort.

OTHER FALL CONSIDERATIONS:

Sudan grass, Sorghum Sudan Grass Hybrids, and Johnson grass produce prussic acid when they are frosted on. Prussic acid is highly poisonous to all classes of livestock and results in a quick death if ingested. Therefore, **do not graze these grasses when there is a chance of frost be it a scattered frost or a killing frost.** Once these grasses are killed by frost or a freeze and the plant material **is completely dried**, prussic acid dissipates and they are safe to graze again.

Start monitoring the body condition score of your livestock so they can be maintained in an acceptable body condition score throughout the winter feeding period. Allowing livestock to lose weight during the winter feeding period is a **bad** management practice and cost producers \$1000 of dollars in lower weaning weights, weak offspring, and reduced pregnancies, not to mention increased veterinary costs. A few livestock owners have taken this practice to extreme and actually lost animals due to starvation. Allowing animals to die under your care due to starvation is defined as **cruelty** by law. This offense is punishable as a **felony** and can result in significant fines and/or jail time. Don't let this happen to you or your livestock.

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Mebane Tractor Feed & Seed