

A Walk on the Wild Side: Cool-Season Forages for Wildlife Food Plots in North Florida

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There is tremendous interest in wildlife forages nationally, but Florida lends itself to a different set of challenges for successful food plot plantings. Our light, sandy soils, hot and humid summers, and distinct seasonal droughts make our selections of forages for wildlife unique and challenging to suit our climate. It is important to **soil test** your food plot site. We recommend using **adapted varieties** developed for our particular growing conditions. We also suggest the use of **forage blends** to increase the longevity and stability of the plot, as well as forage variety for wildlife.

Cool Season Legumes: Winter legumes are more dependable on the heavier clay soils of northwest Florida, or on sandy soils that are underlain by a clay layer. Inoculation of any legumes used is very important since it eliminates the need to supply nitrogen. Many clovers and alfalfas come pre-inoculated. If the legumes that you intend to use are not pre-inoculated, there are commercially available inoculants that are specific to each legume variety.

Alfalfa – This high quality legume is usually grown as a winter annual in Florida. New varieties have been selected under grazing by cattle and are low-dormancy types that will sprout and grow in our mild winter climate. Alfalfa requires a soil pH of 6.5-7.0, high soil fertility and good management. Recommended varieties are Florida 99 and Amerigraze 702.

Arrowleaf Clover – This is an annual clover that is similar to crimson clover in soil adaptation, management and fertility requirements. It is mainly grown on heavier soils in Northwest Florida. It makes more growth in late spring than crimson. The recommended varieties are Apache and Yuchi.

Red Clover – This clover behaves as a winter annual under most north Florida conditions and some reseeding may occur. Non-dormant (or low dormancy) varieties are recommended. Red clover does not generally tolerate flooding. Florida varieties Cherokee

and Southern Belle appear to be very well adapted to north Florida. Recommended varieties are Cherokee, Southern Belle, Redland III, and Kenland. (Cherokee and Southern Belle were developed in Florida and are earlier, non-dormant, and higher yielding cultivars.)

Crimson Clover – This is a well-adapted legume for north Florida. It is an annual clover that is adapted to fertile, well-drained soil. Of the clovers, it appears to be the least sensitive to soil pH. It has a short growing season, and may be grown in combination with ryegrass, clovers or a small grain crop to extend the period of forage availability. Recommended varieties are Flame, Dixie, Chief, Tibbee, and AU-Robin.

Vetch – Vetch grows best on well-drained, fertile, loamy soils. It has a spreading, viney growth habit and is an annual plant. The plant does reseed itself fairly well. Seed and foliage are consumed by many wildlife species. Recommended varieties are Cahaba White, Hairy, and AU-Early Cover.

White Clover – White clover in Florida is usually a winter annual, but may act as a short-term perennial under optimum growing conditions. It is adapted to moist soils throughout Florida and is a good reseed. Nematodes and other pests can limit production. Recommended varieties are Osceola (developed in Florida), Durana, Patriot, Louisiana S-1, and Regal Ladino.

Berseem and other miscellaneous clovers – There are many other small seeded clovers, including Rose, Berseem, Hop, Bur, Subterranean and Ball clover, which will work fairly well for wildlife food plots. Little local seed availability or high seed costs may be limiting factors. Generally these clovers produce less forage than crimson, white, arrowleaf and red clover and have a short duration growing season. Ball and hop clovers do reseed well. Bigbee berseem and Overton Rose clovers are well adapted.

Winter Peas - This annual legume is best suited to well-drained soils with high clay content. They typically are not very cold hardy. Austrian is the recommended variety

Cool Season Grasses: Cool season grasses generally include ryegrass and the small grains: wheat, oats, rye, and triticale (a man-made cross of wheat and rye). These grasses provide excellent winter forage and a spring seed crop which wildlife readily utilize.

Oats - May be planted and grazed by wildlife earlier than rye, but are not as cold hardy as rye or wheat, and may be susceptible to freeze injury. It is important to choose recommended oat varieties. Recommended varieties are Florida 502, Florida 501, and Coker 820 for early season grazing. Horizon 474, Horizon 314, Horizon 321, Chapman, Harrison, Terral Secretariat LA495, Coker 227, Ozark, AR-County Seeds 833, 811, Plot Spike LA9339, and LA604 for winter and spring grazing. Horizon 474 and Horizon 321 are relatively new, well-adapted varieties for north Florida.

Rye - Rye is widely used for winter grazing for cattle, but may be grazed by deer as well. Rye is more cold tolerant than oats, produces more forage than either oats or wheat, but should not be planted as early as oats. Recommended varieties are Florida 401 and Florida Black for late fall and early winter grazing. Wrens 96, Wrens Abruzzi, Bates, Elbon, Bonel, Oklon, Maton, Pennington Wintergraze 70, Gurley Grazer 2000 Grazemaster, and AGS 104 are recommended for winter and spring grazing.

Wheat and Triticale – Wheat and triticale makes excellent forage and seed production for wildlife. Recommended wheat varieties for grazing are AgriPro Crawford, AGS 2000, Pioneer 26R61, Pioneer 2684, Coker 9835, Roberts, GA-Gore, GA-Dozier. Triticale is a very high quality, robust small grain. It has good disease and insect resistance, and grows well even when late planted in December and January. Seed availability may be limited because seed production is scarce. Recommended varieties include Sunland, Florico and Monarch.

Ryegrass - Ryegrass is a valuable and hardy forage crop for use on flatwoods soils or the heavier sandy loam soils in northwest Florida. Seeding ryegrass with small grains and clover lengthens the seasonal forage availability. Recommended varieties are Jumbo, Florlina, Surrey, Jackson, Magnolia, Rio, Gulf, Southern Star, Big Daddy, TAM 90, Passeral Plus, Ed, Brigadier, Surrey II, Stampede, Fantastic, Graze-N-Gro, King, Beefbuilder III, and Prine. (Other new varieties may be suitable but have not been adequately tested in Florida.)

Brassica and Forage Chicory Crops: At this time not a lot is known about adaptability of forage brassicas and chicory to Florida or the acceptability by wildlife as a food source.

Brassicas are annual crops, which are highly productive and digestible and can provide forage in as short as 40 days after seeding. Forage brassica crops such as turnip, swede, rape, and kale can be both fall and spring-seeded. Kale is very winter hardy. Varieties include Premier, Vates and Siberian. Rape would also be considered to be very winter hardy. Varieties include Rangi, Rangiora, Barnapoli, Dwarf Essex, Emerald and Winfred. Turnip or Turnip Hybrids grow very fast, reaching near maximum production levels in 80 to 90 days. Varieties include Purple Top, White Globe and Barkant. Swedes produce a large edible root. Swede yields are higher than those of turnip, but they grow slower and require 150 to 180 days to reach maximum production. Chicory is a perennial plant (forb) that is suited to well or moderately drained soils with medium to high fertility levels and a pH of 5.5 or greater. Varieties available at this time are 'Puna' and 'Forage Feast'.

Recommended Cool Season Forage Blends: (Use recommended varieties listed above and inoculate clovers with proper Rhizobium bacteria. Crimson clover is better adapted to upland sites, red clover to medium-lowland sites, and white and arrowleaf clover to lowland sites.)

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| <p>Best Buy for your Buck-#1 50 lbs (2 bu) oats 16 lbs ryegrass 6 lbs red clover 14 lbs crimson clover</p> | <p>Best Buy for your Buck-#2 50 lbs (2 bu) oats 50 lbs (1 bu) wheat 6 lbs red clover 14 lbs crimson clover</p> | |
| <p>Double Treat (for upland sites) 10 lbs red clover 15 lbs crimson clover</p> | <p>Triple Treat (for lowland sites) 4 lbs white clover 12 lbs red clover 4 lbs arrowleaf clover</p> | <p>Tetra Treat (for medium to poorly drained sites) 6 lbs red clover 4 lbs arrowleaf clover 2 lbs white clover 14 lbs crimson clover</p> |

Planting dates, seeding rates, and planting depths for certain cool-season forage crops.

| Seed-Propagated Crops¹ | Planting Dates² | Seeding Rates (lb/A Broadcast) | Seeding Depth (inch) |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Alfalfa | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 12 - 20 | 1/4 – 1/2 |
| Chicory | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 3-5 | 0 - 1/4 |
| Clover, Arrowleaf | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 8 - 10 | 0 – 1/2 |
| Clover, Berseem | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 16 - 20 | 1/4 – 1/2 |
| Clover, Crimson | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 20 - 26 | 1/4 – 1/2 |
| Clover, Red | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 6 - 12 | 1/4 – 1/2 |
| Clover, White | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 3 - 4 | 0 - 1/4 |
| Oats for forage | Sept. 15 - Nov. 15 | 96 - 128 (3-4 bu) | 1 - 2 |
| Pea, Austrian Winter | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 45 - 60 | 1/2 - 1 |
| Rye for forage | Oct. 15 - Nov. 15 | 84 - 112 (1.5 - 2 bu) | 1 - 2 |
| Ryegrass, Italian (annual) | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 20 - 30 | 0 – 1/2 |
| Triticale for forage | Oct. 15 - Nov. 15 | 112 | 1 - 2 |
| Turnip and Brassica | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 5 - 6 | 1/4 – 1/2 |
| Vetch, hairy | Oct. 1 - Nov. 15 | 20 - 30 | 1 - 2 |
| Wheat for forage | Oct. 15 - Nov. 15 | 90 - 120 (1.5 - 2 bu) | 1 - 2 |

¹ Always check seed quality. Seed germination should be 80% or higher for best results.

² In general, cool-season forage crops in northern Florida can be planted in the early part of the planting date range