

GRAZERS' NEWS FLASH



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Maryland Grazers' Network mentoring program for "grass-fed" livestock

August - A Good Time to Plant!

By Michael Heller

If you are thinking about planting *annuals* for good fall grazing – or, if you are planting perennials for *hay or pasture* – it's time to get in gear! August, and into early September, is the best time to plant. I spoke with a few mentors from the Maryland Grazers Network to see what they were planning to plant this August and September.

HAY AND PASTURE

Les Vough, University of Maryland Extension forage expert, is always telling us that the ideal time for planting hay and pasture mixes is from August 10 through September 10. "Early planting is critical to provide for sufficient fall growth to ensure robust spring stands," he says.

Here's what some of our Maryland Grazers' Network mentors are doing:

Myron Martin

- ◆ Recommends a mix of alfalfa, orchard grass and red clover — or one of the new improved, and expensive, newer fescues to a fellow dairy farmer.
- ◆ Dry weather this summer will shut down the growth in most pasture plants, planting alfalfa will perform well and provide good grazing.
- ◆ The benefit of alfalfa is that the roots go deep and can be very important during the increasing number of dry spells.
- ◆ Cow's milk production is definitely higher when they have alfalfa to graze.
- ◆ Likes to drill the grass seed in using the large front hopper in the drill, and the alfalfa and clover he puts in a separate small seed hopper.
- ◆ By removing the seed tubes the alfalfa/clover seed is scattered/broadcast on the surface, and he cultipacks it.

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Ned Sayre

- ◆ Plants his hay in early September.
- ◆ Prepares the land by planting a summer annual (usually Sudangrass) in early June.
- ◆ This provides two grazings before he kills the Sudangrass in late August, so the land is ready to plant in early September.
- ◆ Using a Vermeer drill (7" spacings,) he drills in 10lbs/ac of grass, usually a late maturing orchard grass (but he says Max Q fescue is good too) along with 10lbs/ac of legumes, usually 60/40 alfalfa/clover.

Bill Poffenberger

- ◆ Likes to plant his orchard grass in early September, but he saves his clover for frost seeding in February.
- ◆ Broadcasts the grass seed and cultipacks it, after disking the land.
- ◆ Then he prays for an inch of rain.

ANNUALS

The dry spells that have been happening with increased frequency these past few years have often meant that folks were feeding their animals precious hay or selling their animals to prevent harm to their pastures. Annuals can provide good grazing for 9 months of the year, depending on your needs, and particularly good for getting through those dry spells. Fall pastures often offer only meager grazing. Annuals planted in August will give ample grazing as early as September and continuing into November.

Here are some thoughts from the mentors about:

Forage Brassicas — there is 'growing' interest in fall grazing of several of the different varieties of brassicas for beef, dairy and sheep.

David Greene

- ◆ Likes *Pasja* which is a leafy forage variety of brassica that can give multiple grazings.
- ◆ Plants 4lbs/ac as early in August as the soil moisture allows.
- ◆ Some light tilling, such as disking, is important to give the germinating seeds a clean start.

Yates Clagett

- ◆ Plants *Daikon Radish* at 10lbs/ac.
- ◆ It provides good grazing and is very good for building up the soil.
- ◆ Daikon radish pulls nitrogen up from the soil, and its deep taproot can break hardpans in many soils.
- ◆ Daikon radish is also known as the tillage radish or 'Groundhog' radish because of its long 12-16" taproot that penetrates deep into the soil.

I prefer to toss ½ bu/ac of spring oats in with the forage brassicas. Using the spring oats was Les Vough's suggestion several years ago, when I asked about good fall forage for finishing beef. The spring oats get up quickly and provide some sweet grazing along with the brassicas. David cautions not to use too many oats because they can compete too much with the brassicas. Following a couple grazings, the field can be planted with cereal rye, vetch and crimson clover for grazing early next spring.

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Small Grain Mixtures — cereal rye, wheat, or triticale mixed with a variety of other plants can be a good option for grazing during the usual lulls in pasture growth.

Myron Martin

- ◆ Is always trying different ideas and combinations on his farm.
- ◆ When it comes to planting annuals for fall grazing, he's has a few plans.
- ◆ Corn silage will be coming off soon and he plans to get right back out to the fields to put in triticale, ryegrass, crimson clover and hairy vetch.
- ◆ Start grazing this fall when the triticale gets up about 12."
- ◆ This mix will overwinter and he'll be grazing it again in April.



I really like the cereal rye, vetch, crimson clover mix, as it provides good early spring grazing before the pastures really kick into gear. This year, I might try some triticale in the mix based on Myron's recommendation. Myron mentioned that he is planting a mix of oats and Daikon radish on some of his fields. He does this mostly to build up the soil and will graze the animals on it in the fall.

If you have any planting questions, feel free to email:

- Les Vough - vough@umd.edu
- Jeff Semler - jsemler@umd.edu
- Stan Fultz - sfultz@umd.edu

These guys are our University of Maryland Extension experts and have worked with all of the farmers mentioned. Good luck and good farming.

