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EXTENSION PROGRAM

Alcorn State University Extension Program

BERMUDAGRASS FORAGE and HAY

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A Quick Reference Source

SOURCES:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynodon_dactylon
- **Giant Bermuda Grass for Forage: Fertizona**
2850 South Peart Road
Casa Grande, AZ 85193

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Cynodon dactylon, also known as dūrvā grass, Dhoob, Bermuda grass, bermudagrass, dubo, dog's tooth grass, Bahama grass, devil's grass, couch grass, Indian doab, arugampul, grama, and scutch grass, is a grass that originated in the Middle East. Although it is not native to Bermuda, it is an abundant invasive species there. It is presumed to have arrived in North America from Bermuda, resulting in its common name.

Bermudagrass is an important warm-season, perennial, sod-forming forage grass grown across the southeastern United States. It is productive from spring until fall and is well-suited for grazing or hay production. Bermudagrass is a high-yielding grass; 5 to 7 tons of hay per acre can be produced with good management and ample moisture.

In the southeastern U.S., beef cattle and dairy farms depend on bermudagrass as a primary grazed forage from early spring until autumn. Thousands of tons of bermudagrass hay are fed to beef and dairy herds during winter, transition periods of seasonal deficiencies in forage and drought periods.

Bermudagrass stands often persist and remain productive for more than 35 years, if properly managed. Most are tolerant to acidic and sandy soils, moderate to heavy grazing pressure, variable rainfall distribution, and different management. Almost all are dual-purpose, producing pasture forages and hay.

Bermudagrass has consistently proven to be the best perennial grass for irrigated summer pastures. More

recently, stockmen have shown considerable interest in this crop as a source of green forage and hay. This interest has been sparked by the development of tall-growing varieties and improved growing practices.

WHERE TO USE:

Bermudagrass is suited for commercial pasture or hay production in areas where land and water costs are relatively low, as well as areas where the total soluble salts in water tend to restrict production of other crops. It is also a practical choice for small pasture plots where a homeowner wants to keep one or two horses and/or pasture a few head of cattle.

YIELD:

Bermudagrass normally can be pastured or harvested from mid-April until frost time in November. Over this seven-month period, a planting can generally carry 1-2 horses, 2-5 heads of 400 to 600 pound beef cattle, or 2-3 cows and calves per acre. Growing cattle will gain about ½ to 1 pound per day, if no additional feed is provided. Hay yields run from 5 to 10 tons per acre, per season, harvested in about 6 cuttings. When properly fertilized, irrigated and harvested, bermudagrass hay has a feeding value about equal to alfalfa hay in terms of total digestible nutrients (TDN), but has less digestible protein.

ESTABLISHING A STAND:

To establish a stand, broadcast the seeds at a rate of 10 to 20 pounds per acre. Seeds can also be drilled in 20" rows with vegetable planting equipment at the rate of 10 pounds per acre. When drilling, it is best to plant in a dry seedbed and irrigate up, unless the soil is disked first, to kill germinated weed seeds. Also planting depth is extremely important. For best results, seeds should be planted as near to ¼ inch deep as possible. Do not plant too deep. It is a good practice to apply a light irrigation

(or plant in a moist seedbed). This keeps the soil from crusting and the seeds moist. It will be about 90 days from date of planting until first harvest. Do not mow or graze closer than 1½ inches during the first 2 or 3 harvests.

FERTILIZATION:

Bermudagrass is a heavy and efficient user of nitrogen. Up to 300 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre per year can be used. This should be applied in three to four uniform applications of 75 to 80 pounds per acre. The first application should be made in early March as the grass begins to turn green, and the last application in late August or early September.

IRRIGATION:

The water requirements of bermudagrass will vary slightly from one year to the next and from one area to another.

Bermudagrass does respond readily to irrigation. In general, water requirements of bermudagrass depend on turf use and climatic factors such as temperature, wind, humidity and light intensity. Water requirements increase with increasing levels of maintenance (golf green > sports field > lawn > roadside), higher temperatures, higher wind speed, lower humidity and greater light intensity. The longer the growing season lasts, the greater the water requirement is for the year. Water use rates may range from less than 0.1 inch per day to 0.3 inch per day depending on these environmental conditions.