

A Walk on the Wild Side: 2013 Cool-Season Forage Recommendations for Wildlife Food Plots in North Florida¹

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There is great interest in wildlife forages nationally. Florida poses different challenges for successful food plot plantings. Light, sandy soils, hot and humid summers, and distinct seasonal droughts make selecting forages for wildlife unique and challenging. We recommend using **adapted varieties** developed for Florida's particular growing conditions. We also suggest using **forage blends** to increase the longevity and stability of the plot, as well as using supply variety to suit multiple wildlife components. It is important to **soil test** and apply fertilizer and/or lime based on the soil test report. Information on soil testing is available on EDIS at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_soil_testing.

Cool-Season Legumes

Winter legumes are more productive and dependable on either the heavier clay soils of northwest Florida or sandy soils underlain by a clay layer than on deep upland sands or sandy flatwoods. White clover and ryegrass overseeded can be grown successfully on certain flatwoods areas in northeast Florida. Inoculation of legumes is very important

because it eliminates the need to supply nitrogen. Certain plants manufacture nitrogen if the proper inoculant (*Rhizobium* bacteria) is used. Many clovers and alfalfas come **pre-inoculated**. If the legumes you intend to use are **not** pre-inoculated, there are commercially available inoculants **specific** to each legume variety.

Alfalfa

This high-quality legume is usually grown as a winter annual in Florida. Several new varieties have been selected under grazing by cattle and are low-dormancy types. Low dormancy means that the alfalfa will sprout and grow in Florida's mild winter climate. Many food plot blends sold commercially include mid- or high-dormancy type alfalfas that do not grow well in the southern United States. Alfalfa requires a soil pH of 6.5–7.0, high soil fertility, and good management, making it difficult to manage in wildlife food plot situations. Recommended varieties are Bulldog 805 and Amerigraze 702.

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Arrowleaf Clover

This is an annual clover similar to crimson clover in soil adaptation, management, and fertility requirements. It is mainly grown on heavier soils in northwest Florida. It is more productive in late spring than crimson clover. The recommended varieties are Yuchi and Apache.

Berseem and Other Miscellaneous Clovers

There are many other small seeded clovers, including Rose, Berseem, Hop, Bur, Subterranean and Ball clover, all of which work fairly well for wildlife food plots. Limited 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 reseed well. Recommended varieties include Bigbee Berseem, Grazer Select, Don Ball Clover, and Overton Rose Clovers.

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 tolerate flooding. Recommended varieties are Southern Belle, Bulldog Red, Barduro, and Redland. Southern Belle and Barduro were developed in Florida.

Crimson Clover

This is a well-adapted legume for North Florida. It is an excellent forage producer and can reseed itself each year, if weather conditions permit. It is an annual clover adapted to fertile, well-drained soil. Of the clovers, it appears to be the least sensitive to soil pH. It has a relatively short grazing season, so it may be grown in combination with ryegrass, clovers, or a small grain crop to extend the period of forage availability. Recommended varieties are Dixie 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 Hairy, Americus, AU-Early Cover, Cahaba White, and Nova II. Commercial seed production of most vetch varieties will be limited in 2013.

White Clover

White clover in Florida is usually a winter annual, but may act as a short-term perennial under optimum fertility and moisture conditions. It is adapted to moist soils throughout Florida and is a good reseeder. Nematodes and other pests can limit production. Recommended varieties are Ocoee and Osceola (both developed in Florida), Louisiana S-1, Barblanca, and Regal Ladino. Durana and Patriot are also well adapted, and have a prostrate growth habit and longevity.

Winter Peas

This annual legume is best suited to well-drained soils with high clay content. They typically are not very cold hardy. Austrian, Whistler, and Maple are recommended varieties. Several new varieties are commercially available and may be well suited for wildlife food plots in this region, but these have not been broadly evaluated.

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 readily used by wildlife.

Oats

Oats may be planted and grazed by wildlife earlier than rye. When seeded in mid-fall they should produce very palatable forage by late fall. Oats are not as cold hardy as rye or wheat and may be susceptible to freeze injury. It is important to choose recommended oat varieties. Many “feed” oats are sold and planted as seed oats, but often they do not have a guarantee on the percent germination. Feed oats also may not have any resistance to the heavy disease pressure in Florida, particularly to rust and virus. Recommended varieties include Big Boss Wildlife Forage Oat, Horizon 270, Plot Spike LA 9339, Ram LA 99016, Horizon 201, SS76-40, and Buck Forage. Big Boss Wildlife Forage Oat, Buck Forage, and Ram Oat are relatively new varieties that have improved crown rust resistance, winter hardiness, and good grain and forage production for wildlife interests in 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 and generally produces more forage than either oats or wheat. Rye should not be planted as early as oats because of

several disease problems occurring in the early fall. It is best to wait until cool weather to begin planting. Recommended varieties are FL 401 (for early grazing or use in blends), AGS 104, Wrens 96, Wrens Abruzzi, Bates RS4, and Oklon. Wintergrazer 70 and Early Graze have performed well in past trials, but have not been included in our variety trials in recent years.

Wheat

Wheat is excellent for wildlife. Deer graze the forage, and birds use the seed. Recommended varieties are SS8641, USG 3592, Pioneer 26R6, and AGS 2038. Hessian fly resistance is important in wheat, particularly with early planting as wildlife forage. Coker 9553, Roberts, and GA-Gore are Hessian fly susceptible and are no longer recommended.

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. **In wildlife food plots, ryegrass may become a weedy problem and dominate the food plot.** Ryegrass also has a tendency to reseed and may germinate the following year.

Early recommended varieties: Attain, Big Boss, Earlyploid, Bulldog/Grazer, Ed, Flying A, Oregro DH-3, Rio, TAM-TBO, and Verdure

Late recommended varieties: Attain, Big Boss, Earlyploid, Jackson, Jumbo, Marshall, Rio, TAMTBO, Prine, and Verdure

Season-long recommended varieties: Attain, Big Boss, Earlyploid, Jackson, Diamond T, Jumbo, Ocala, Nelson, Marshall, Prine, Rio, TAMTBO, and Verdure. (Varieties Marshall and Jackson are susceptible to rust and gray leafspot.)

These varieties were selected based on their recent three-year, multi-location performance.

Other ryegrass varieties, such as Florlina, Surrey II, Big Daddy, Passeral Plus, Brigadier, Fantastic, Graze-N-Gro, King, and Beefbuilder III, have also performed well in regional trials. Other new varieties may be suitable but have not been adequately tested in Florida.

Triticale

This is a very high-quality, robust small grain that resulted from a cross of wheat and rye. It is very well adapted to

North Florida, 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 Trical 342 and Monarch.

Brassica and Forage Chicory Crops

Brassicas are annual crops that are highly productive and digestible and can provide forage in as short as 40 days after seeding, depending on the species. Forage brassica crops such as turnip, swede, rape, and kale can be both fall- and spring-seeded. **Little is known about adaptability of forage brassicas to Florida or if wildlife accepts them as a food source.**

Kale

Kale (*Brassica oleracea* L. acephala group) is very winter hardy. Varieties include Premier, Vates, and Siberian.

Rape

Rape (*Brassica napus* L.) would also be considered to be very winter hardy. Varieties include Rangi, Rangiora, Barnapoli, Dwarf Essex, Emerald, and Winfred.

Turnip or Turnip Hybrids

Turnips (*Brassica rapa* L.) grow very fast, reaching near maximum production levels in 80–90 days. Varieties include Purple Top, White Globe and Barkant. Some varieties such as All Top and Seven Top only produce tops.

Swede

Like turnip, swedes (*Brassica napus* L.) produce a large edible root. Yields are higher than those of turnip, but they grow slower and require 150–180 days to reach maximum production.

Daikon Radish

Daikon radish (*Raphanus sativus*) is a highly palatable brassica and is well adapted to light, sandy soils. It is often referred to as tillage radish. Early planting may cause early bloom. Consider staggered planting dates to encourage longer season availability. Recommended varieties are Trophy and Daikon radish.

Forage Chicory

Forage chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L.) is a perennial plant (forb) 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

Best Buy for your Buck

- 50 lb (2 bu) oats
- 50 lb (1 bu) wheat or triticale
- 6 lb red clover
- 15 lb crimson clover

Double Treat (for well-drained sites)

- 10 lb red clover
- 15 lb crimson clover

Triple Treat (for wet or poorly drained sites)

- 4 lb white clover
- 12 lb red clover
- 4 lb arrowleaf clover

Tetra Treat (for medium-drained to wet sites)

- 15 lb crimson clover
- 6 lb red clover
- 4 lb arrowleaf clover
- 2 lb white clover