

A Walk on the Wild Side: 2007 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 selection of forages for wildlife unique and challenging. 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 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 the heavier clay soils of northwest Florida, or on sandy soils that are 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, since it eliminates the need to supply nitrogen. Certain plants will 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 that are specific to each legume variety.

Alfalfa – This high quality legume is usually grown as a winter annual in Florida. Several new

1. This document is SS-AGR-28, one of a series of the Agronomy Department and the North Florida Research and Education Center, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Joe Budd Wildlife Field Office, 5300 High Bridge Road, Quincy FL 32351. Publication date: April 2002. Revised: September 2007. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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varieties have been selected under grazing by cattle and are low-dormancy types. Low dormancy means that the alfalfa will sprout and grow in our mild winter climate. Many food plot blends sold commercially include mid- or high-dormancy type alfalfas that do not grow well in the southern U.S. Alfalfa requires a soil pH of 6.5-7.0, high soil fertility and good management, which makes it difficult to manage in wildlife food plot situations. 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 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, which will 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 berserm 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 Cherokee, Southern Belle, Kenland, and Redland III. (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 excellent forage producer and can reseed itself each year, if weather conditions permit. 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 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, Flame, 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 Americus, 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 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 Osceola (developed in Florida), Louisiana S-1, and Regal Ladino. Durana and Patriot are also well adapted but have a prostrate growth habit and lower initial forage yields.

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. 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 Horizon 314, Horizon 474, Horizon 321, Plot Spike LA 9339, and LA604. Horizon 474, Horizon 321, and Plot Spike LA 9339 are relatively new varieties that have improved crown rust resistance, winter hardiness, and good grain and forage production for our area.

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 Wrens 96, Wrens Abruzzi, Bates, Elbon, Bonel, Oklon, Maton, Pennington Wintergraze 70, Early Graze, Wintermore, and AGS 104.

Wheat – Wheat is excellent for wildlife. The forage is grazing by deer and birds utilize the seed. Recommended varieties are AGS 2000, Pioneer 26R61, Pioneer 2684, Coker 9835, Roberts, GA-Gore, GA-Dozier. AGS 2000 and Pioneer 26R61 are relatively new varieties and have performed very well in cool-season variety testing.

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, Surrey II, Brigadier, Jackson, Magnolia, Rio, Gulf, Southern Star, Big Daddy, TAM 90, Passeral Plus, Rustmaster, Stampede, Fantastic, Graze-N-Gro, King, Prine, Ed, Thunder, Bruiser, Striker, Attain, Big Boss, and Beefbuilder III. (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 Sunland Florico, Trical 342, and Monarch.

Brassica and Forage Chicory Crops

Brassicas are annual crops which 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 the acceptability by wildlife as a food source.

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

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

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

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

Forage chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L) 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

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

Best Buy for your Buck- #1

50 lbs (2 bu) oats

50 lbs (1 bu) wheat or triticale

6 lbs red clover

14 lbs crimson clover

Best Buy for your Buck - #2

50 lbs (2 bu) oats

15 lbs crimson clover

16 lbs ryegrass (may reseed)

6 lbs red clover

Double Treat (for well-drained sites)

10 lbs red clover

15 lbs crimson clover

Triple Treat (for wet or poorly drained sites)

4 lbs white clover

12 lbs red clover

4 lbs arrowleaf clover

Tetra Treat (for medium-drained to wet sites)

14 lbs crimson clover

6 lbs red clover

4 lbs arrowleaf clover

2 lbs white clover