Growing Alsike Clover for Forage

Area of Adaption

Alsike clover (Trifolium hybridum) is grown in the Pacific Northwest and the Great Lakes region of the upper Midwest. It has become an important forage legume in areas suited to clover-timothy production. Alsike clover is well adapted to wet, heavy soils and is tolerant of flooded conditions. It produces well on soils that are either too cold and wet or too acid or alkaline for red clover.

Primary use

Alsike clover is a short-lived legume (3 years average) that is most useful in short-rotation pastures or in hay mixtures on wetlands. It can be used in combination with grasses for pasture or hay in areas that have high precipitation or are poorly drained.

Varieties

Aurora and Dawn, cultivars developed in western Canada for winter hardiness, are quite suitable for use in Oregon. Tetra, a tetraploid variety developed in Sweden for persistence and high yield. “Common” alsike clover is also available from several suppliers.

Establishment

Alsike clover is most often established in the early spring when soil moisture conditions are most favorable. In areas where irrigation is available, late summer seedings are also successful. Seed may be broadcast and covered by a harrow or drilled 1 inch deep into a well-prepared seedbed. When alsike is used in renovating pastures, the existing sod should be clipped or closely grazed, disked, fertilized, and seeded in early spring or late fall. As with all legumes, alsike clover should be inoculated with the proper inoculum immediately before seeding.

Fertility and pH Requirements

Alsike clover is tolerant of acid soil but is responsive to lime. It will tolerate more alkalinity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Precipitation</th>
<th>Alsike clover seeding rate</th>
<th>Companion species</th>
<th>Companion species seeding rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pasture</td>
<td>Inches</td>
<td>Lbs/A</td>
<td>Reed canarygrass</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Hay</td>
<td></td>
<td>30-100</td>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 40 or</td>
<td>Perennial ryegrass</td>
<td>10-12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>wetlands</td>
<td>Red clover</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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than most other clovers. An acceptable pH range for alsike is 5.5 to 7.5. Specific fertilizer recommendations based upon soil test data for clover-grass pastures are provided in OSU Fertilizer Guides 1 and 58.

Management

Including timothy with plantings of alsike for a hay crop is recommended because the clover has a tendency to lodge. Alsike clover produces only one crop of hay each season.

Alsike clover is quite tolerant of grazing. A rotational system where alsike is grazed to a height of 2 to 4 inches following a regrowth period of 4 weeks will result in a persistent stand of good-quality forage.

Since alsike is more tolerant than red clover to attacks of clover root borer, it may be successful in areas where red clover has failed.

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