

Annual Ryegrass

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Description

Italian ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*) is a cool-season annual grass introduced from the Mediterranean region. Tillers or stalks rise from the plant base, giving the grass a bunch appearance in open stands. Vigorous plants produce shiny, dark-green leaves on round, upright stems. The plants are yellow-green at the base. Mature seed are tan and are borne in alternating groups on two sides of the seedstalks, forming loose spikes at the ends of the stems. The grass has a fibrous root system and is a strong competitor for plant nutrients.

Annual ryegrass germinates and begins growth in the fall, but most of the growth is produced in midspring. Seed mature from May to June, depending on the location. The grass often is attacked by leaf rust in the spring, with damage varying from slight to a total loss for grazing.

Common or commercial ryegrass seed usually are a mixture of Italian ryegrass and perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*). However, the perennial acts as an annual in Texas, except under irrigation in the Rolling and High Plains and in the higher altitudes of the Mountains and Basins area. Wimmera ryegrass, an improved Australian strain of Italian ryegrass, has not shown any advantage over the common for forage production in Texas.

Adaptation

Areas where annual ryegrass is commonly grown are the East Texas Timbers, Gulf Coast Prairie, Blackland Prairie and Grand Prairie. The grass is productive on sandy loam to clay soils. Although ryegrass produces well on moist soils, it will not be productive on soils that are waterlogged for long periods.

USE of annual ryegrass is primarily for grazing. When good growth is obtained, it is sometimes put up as silage. It is also utilized as hay when weather conditions permit. Ryegrass normally does not pro-

duce as much forage as adapted varieties of oats, barley or wheat.

The grass is planted on a prepared seedbed alone or with crimson clover, vetch, singletary peas, white clover or Persian clover—legumes that grow satisfactorily with it. The choice of legume will depend on the area and soil. Occasionally it is seeded alone or with a cool-season annual legume on a Common Bermuda sod to supply spring grazing. Limited seedings also are made in rice stubble.

Establishment

Planting dates for annual ryegrass vary according to the area. In the East Texas Timbers, it should be planted September 1-15 from Leon, Houston and Nacogdoches counties north and September 15-30 south of those counties. For the Gulf Coast Prairie, the grass may be seeded alone on wet soil September 15-30, but normally it is seeded alone and with fall-planted legumes October 1-20. In the Blackland and Grand Prairie areas, it should be seeded September 15-30 from Lampasas and Falls counties north and October 1-15 south of those counties.

SEEDING RATES for annual ryegrass on prepared seedbeds generally are 25 pounds per acre alone and 20 pounds when seeded with a legume. When the grass is seeded on a Bermuda sod or airplane-seeded in rice stubble, 10 to 15 pounds per acre may be adequate.

SEEDING METHODS are drilling and broadcasting on prepared seedbeds and Bermuda sods and broadcasting in rice at last draining or in rice stubble after combining. Prepared seedbeds should be clean, firm and moist. Drilled seed should be covered $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Broadcast seed on prepared seedbeds may be covered by harrowing and then rolling to firm the soil around the seed. On sods, seeding may be done with a grassland drill or by light disking, followed by broadcasting and harrowing or dragging

to cover the seed. No attempt is made to cover the seed when it is broadcast in rice on wet soil at last draining or in rice stubble after combining.

FERTILIZATION is necessary for good production on soils of moderate-to-low fertility. A soil test is the best means of determining the type and amount of fertilizer needed. General recommendations may be obtained from the extension leaflet for the specific type-of-farming area (example: L-228, Fertilizer Recommendations for the East Texas Timbers).

Management

GRAZING should be controlled to get the most from annual ryegrass, especially since the season of production is relatively short. Ryegrass pastures should be divided into four or more blocks for rotation grazing to permit regrowth of plants between grazings and the use of growth not needed for grazing as hay or silage. Ryegrass growth in Bermuda sod should be grazed or clipped closely when it is time for the Bermuda to begin growth in the spring. If a heavy growth of ryegrass is permitted to mature, production of the Bermudagrass will be seriously reduced and

the stand of Bermuda may be severely damaged. Ryegrass is a stiff competitor for moisture and plant nutrients. If a volunteer stand of ryegrass is desired for the following fall, grazing pressure may be adjusted to permit a light seed crop to mature.

FERTILIZATION of growing ryegrass should be limited to topdressing with nitrogen. When moisture is available for growth, one or two applications of 30 pounds per acre of nitrogen applied after the grass has been grazed down, will increase the forage yield. When the ryegrass is grown on a Bermuda sod, the Bermuda should be fertilized as needed after the ryegrass has passed its growth peak and is approaching maturity.

HAY OR SILAGE should be made from ryegrass not needed for grazing when growth is enough to justify harvest. The grass makes good-quality hay when cut in the bloom stage and properly cured in the swath. It may be cut for silage in the bloom to soft-dough stage. If grown in mixture with a legume, the plant predominating should determine the time to cut.

Pastures Are a Cash Crop - Treat Them As Such

TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

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