

FARM ADVISOR FACTS

RANGE PLANTS COMMONLY SEEDED IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

by

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On our rangeland, there are several types of plants utilized by livestock. These include: grasses, the primary ground cover; legumes, higher in protein than grasses and they enrich the soil by providing nitrogen; other broad-leaved herbaceous plants such as filaree; and browse, shrubby plants or trees whose tender twigs and new leaves are eaten by livestock.

Most of California rangelands fall into the category of the annual-type range. A majority of the range plants reseed themselves every year (thus called annuals) and are grown during the winter and spring when we get our rainfall. The perennial plants, those that persist from year to year that are adaptable to this annual-type range, have winter growth and are dormant during the summer. They are limited to areas of more than 15 inches of rainfall. Reseeding interest centers around introducing grasses and legumes that are more palatable, have greater growth, different growing season or higher feed value than plants already growing in a given area.

Following is a list of grasses and legumes, along with their characteristics, which are commonly used in the county and for which seed is commercially available:

GRASSESAnnuals

Ryegrass makes excellent winter and early spring growth with a high production if fertilized adequately. It is good for quick cover and is therefore often used on burns by seeding 6-8 pounds per acre in the white ash. It offers much competition and should be used sparingly or eliminated from mixtures including perennial grasses or annual legumes. Much of the commercially available seed is called domestic ryegrass and contains hybrids with perennial ryegrass. Wimmera ryegrass is also available and is better able to perpetuate itself under low rainfall conditions than is domestic ryegrass.

Blando Brome is the commercial seed of the native soft chess. It is palatable at all stages of growth and usually retains many non-shattered, nutritious seeds on the mature dry plants. The seed is light, so one-half to one pound goes a long way.

Perennials

Hardinggrass is commonly used in the coastal ranges where the rainfall is more than 15 inches and soils are deep. Although it is a poor competitor during its young stages, it is very persistent once established. Though tall and rather coarse, its abundant leaves are relished by livestock. It greens up in the early fall and can be grazed to provide good early feed. After becoming established, it can be utilized quite heavily until mid-spring when the plants should have a chance to go to seed and store up food reserves for more fall growth. New varieties, such as Perla and Sirocco, have increased seedling vigor and production.

Palestine Orchardgrass is a drought tolerant, perennial bunch grass that can be grown wherever Hardinggrass is adapted. It has better seedling vigor than Hardinggrass.

Perennial ryegrass is more leafy than annual ryegrass. It is used for quick cover, but many times begins to disappear after 3 or 4 years when annual grasses take over. This grass is a heavy nitrogen user, thus needs much fertilizer for its abundant growth. New commercial varieties show much promise.

Smilo is similar in growth to Hardinggrass, but used on lighter, more rocky soils and is very successful on burn reseeding. It volunteers well when given a chance. The very small seed is used at one-half to two pounds in seed mixtures, mostly in the ash of burns.

Veldtgrass is a very palatable, drought resistant grass which grows in the sandy soils of the Nipomo area. It is known for its good stand establishment on sandy soils, persistence, and ability to spread well by reseeding. It can be killed or severely damaged by heavy or prolonged frosts, however. Mission veldtgrass, a nonshattering variety, is available commercially.

LEGUMES (all annuals). The following legumes are noted for their ability to stock the soil with nitrogen which greatly increases the growth of native grasses.

Bur clover is found naturally throughout California and is not a true clover, but a medic. The seed is available commercially most of the time. The green plants of winter and spring, plus the dried plants and burs, are valuable high protein feed. Newer varieties of barrel medic have larger burs and outproduce bur clover in forage growth, especially during dry years. This seed is also available commercially. The medics are more adapted to alkaline soils than are the rose and sub clovers.

Rose clover has been successfully established in many areas of the state, especially on poor, slightly acid and well-drained soils. Wilton, (formerly Calif. Common) requires slightly more moisture (12 to 14 inches or more) than earlier maturing Hykon and Kondinin varieties. These latter are more adaptable to the eastern part of San Luis Obispo County. Rose clover is palatable in early growth stages and after it has dried, but when the plant is flowering and setting seed it is not grazed. This helps keep stands in longer production.

Crimson clover is distinguished by its bright crimson blossom. The plant is palatable at all stages of growth, thus stock must be removed in mid-spring to allow seed to set.

Subterranean or sub clovers produce seed under heavy grazing because the plants bury their seedheads in the ground. These clovers are very palatable and make excellent protein feed whether green or dry. A mixture of sub clover varieties should be seeded to spread out the season of growth. Some early varieties to include are Geraldton or Daliak; some later ones are Dinninup and Seaton Park; and where the rain goes to mid-April, Howard or Woogenellup should do well. Clare is more tolerant of alkaline soil than the other sub clover varieties which thrive in slightly acid soils.

Lana Vetch is a member of the pea family and is very adaptable to the more moist areas of the county. This vetch is more palatable in its green stages than other vetches, so livestock should be withheld until the plant is mature. Lana Vetch may be seeded alone or with annual grasses. It should not be seeded with rose clover, sub clover, barrel medic or perennial grasses.