

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS

(Lolium perenne L.)



Uses

Forage: Perennial Ryegrass is a valuable forage and soil stabilization plant. This species is the predominant forage grass in Europe and is used extensively in the United States. Perennial Ryegrass is used for pasture and hay in sheep, dairy and beef production. It is often used in mixes with alfalfa, clovers and other grasses. Perennial Ryegrass has the highest forage quality of all cool season grasses.

Description

Perennial Ryegrass is a bunchgrass which grows from 1 to 2 feet tall, and has medium longevity. There are numerous long, narrow, stiff leaves near the base of the plant. The under surfaces of leaves are bright, glossy, and smooth. Inflorescence stems are nearly naked. Seedheads are spikes with spikelets growing edgewise to the seedhead stem. Seeds do not have awns (bristles). There are approximately 330,000 seeds per pound.

Adaptation

These grasses have a wide range of adaptability to soils, but thrive best on fertile soils with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. They produce well in regions having mild climates. They do not withstand hot, dry weather or severe winters. They will stand fairly wet soils with reasonably good surface drainage. Perennial Ryegrass is distributed throughout the entire United States.

Establishment

Seed should be planted 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in a well prepared seedbed. Spring seedings of Ryegrass may occur in March, April, or May. Perennial Ryegrass may also be seeded mid-August to early September.

Generally, a rate of 20 to 25 pounds/acre is used if Ryegrass is seeded alone. In mixtures, 4 to 8 pounds/acre is recommended, depending upon uses and companion species. In general, the Perennial Ryegrass component of a mix should be 20% or less since it is very competitive, due to rapid germination and good seedling vigor.

Management

Ryegrass is generally cut for hay when seed heads start to emerge. Established Perennial Ryegrass-clover pastures should be rotationally grazed when spring growth is 3 to 6 inches high. Allowing 7 to 10 inches of regrowth between grazings will benefit yield and persistence. On new seedings, harvest or grazing should be delayed until plants are 10 to 12 inches tall. Ryegrass responds well to good management, such as intensive rotational grazing and fertilizer applications.