United States Department of Agriculture

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet

SPECIES • COOL-SEASON PERENNIAL LEGUMES

Alsike Clover

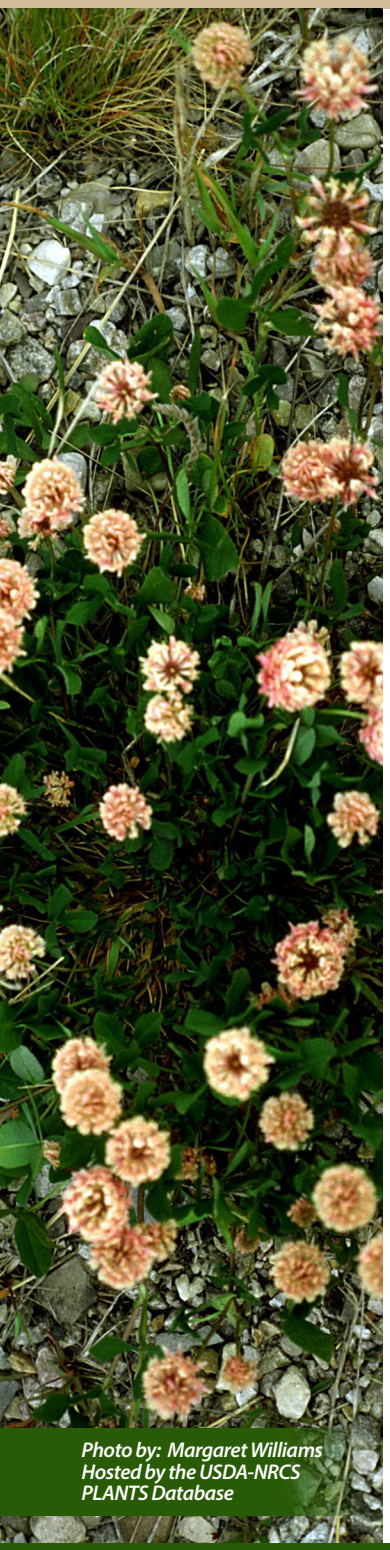

Photo by: Margaret Williams Hosted by the USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

General Information

Alsike Clover is an upright, short lived, perennial legume that is often agriculturally treated as a biennial plant and is often grown in combination with other grasses for hay or pasture.

Alsike lacks persistence, usually living for only two years. Alsike somewhat resembles red Clover with stems one to three feet long, but they are more-slender and more prostrate.

Stems and leaves are smooth, and the flower heads are pink or white. Alsike Clover tillers profusely from the crown.

The stem does not terminate in a flowering head but keeps on growing. Flowers bearing branches arise from each leaf axis so that the oldest flowers are nearer the base of the stem.

Adaptability

Alsike Clover is believed to have originated in Sweden and has been cultivated in Europe for centuries. It was introduced into England and Scotland about 1830 and into the United States by 1840.

Alsike Clover is compatible to low wet areas with such grasses as Fescue, Reed Canary grass, Switch grass and Eastern Gama grass. Adapts better than Red Clover to sour, wet sites, and will tolerate flooding for long periods. Growth persists throughout hot weather as long as moisture is adequate. Alsike can be killed out if drought periods become prolonged. Susceptible to the same diseases as red Clover, Alsike is Clover considered resistant to anthracnose. Alsike Clover does well on soil that is too acid for Red Clover.

Establishment

Alsike Clover responds well to phosphate, potash and lime. Any needed fertility should be incorporated during seedbed preparation whenever possible. Soil pH should be brought up to at least 6.0 when a new stand is established. Seeds should be planted about one-fourth-inch deep and have the soil firmed around them by using a drill with packer wheels or by cultipacking after seeding.

Check with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or University Extension for proper seeding rates.

Seed needs to be treated with the proper inoculant within 12 hours of planting.

Weedy competition needs to be controlled until the stand is established.

Varieties best suited to Illinois include Aurora and Dawn.

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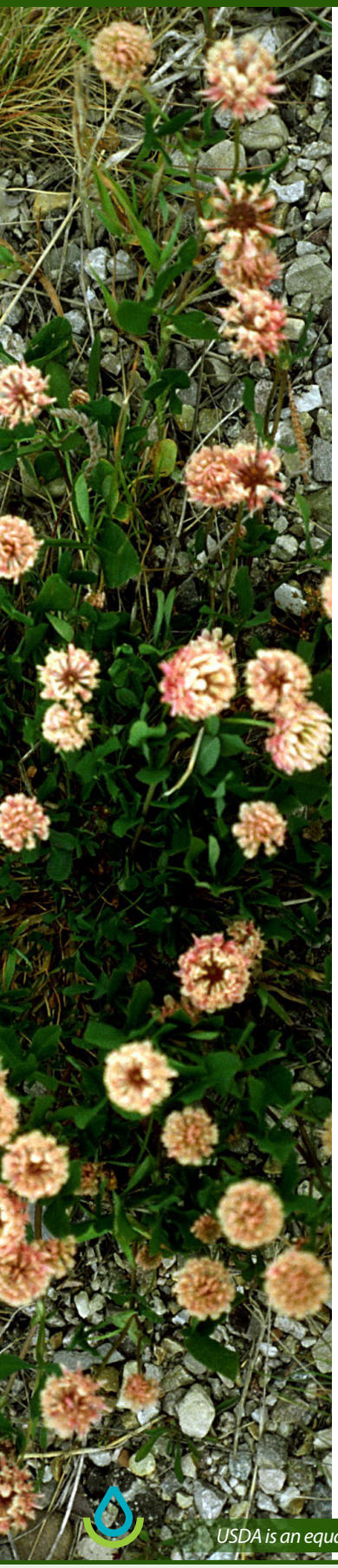

Management

Alsike Clover is very palatable to all grazing animals, protein, and energy content is a little greater than red Clover.

Although not a lot of quantity is added, overall quality of pastures is improved when established into predominantly grass fields, and preferred by rabbits, geese, and other wildlife.

Alsike Clover provides excellent nesting cover when planted in grass mixtures. The tendency to lodge is also reduced when grown with tall, upright growing grasses.

Mixtures with grasses will reduce the incident of bloat.

Alsike Clover usually produces only one cutting of hay per season. Harvest the hay when in full bloom.

Limited grazing is sometimes OK during late fall on fields cut for hay. Like other palatable forage species, rest is necessary for the plant to recover from grazing.

The grazing period should not exceed seven days followed by a rest of at least 21 days. Rest periods will need to be longer when the growth rate is slower.

As with other legumes and palatable forage species, rotations are necessary to maintain vigor.

Where to Get Help

For more information about alsike Clover, contact the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service listed in the telephone directory under U.S. Government, or the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.

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