USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet

SPECIES • BIENNIAL LEGUMES

Red Clover

Photo by: Jeff McMillian
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General Information

Red Clover is valuable for hay, pasture and soil improvement, and fits well into established crop rotations.

Red Clover is often seeded with other legumes and grasses for hay and pasture but can be used for hay and seed production.

The protein content of Red Clover hay is slightly lower than that of alfalfa. However, is relished by all classes of livestock. The nutritional value is excellent, with high levels of digestible protein.

Characteristics

Red Clover is a biennial (or short-lived perennial) upright, leafy legume that grows to a height of 15 to 30 inches. The numerous, thick, hairy stems rise from the crown. The large, velvety, leaves are finely haired beneath, and marked above with a characteristic light-colored spot.

Red Clover can withstand more shading in the seedling stage than most other legumes, making it easy to establish in grass sods. The high magnesium content aids in the prevention of grass tetany and does not withstand drought conditions well. Red Clover is very palatable and can yield three-to five tons per acre of forage per year.

Adaptability

Red Clover can be grown over a wide range of climatic adaptations and adapts best to fertile, well-drained soils with high moisture-holding capacity.

Red Clover does not do well in light, sandy or gravelly soils. Top yields require a pH of 6.0 to 6.5 with adequate levels of potash and phosphate.

Establishment

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

Seeds should be planted at a depth of one-fourth inch or less.

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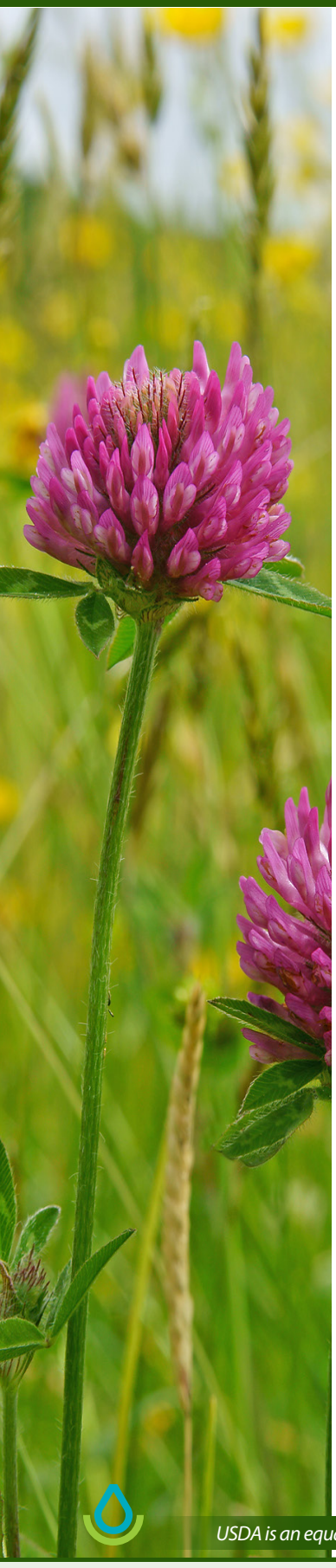

Use proper inoculant for red clover. Inoculated seed should not be exposed to sunlight and should be planted within 12 hours of inoculation.

Use a well prepared, firm seedbed or a thin stand of grass sod. Drill or broadcast seed on grass sod in January or February to let freezing and thawing work the seed into the soil. Red Clover can be no-till drilled into small grains or grass sods.

Management

When grazing red clover, turn livestock in when plants are six to eight inches tall. Remove the animals when three to four inches of the plants remain. Do not graze after September 15 to allow plants to store up reserves in the root systems. Graze again after the first killing frost.

Seed production is dependent largely on insect activity. Plants do not self-pollinate. Bumble bees are particularly effective.

Normal fertility requirements are about 30 pounds of phosphate and 90 pounds of potash per year to maintain fertility levels when used for hay. Soil tests should be used as a guide.

Where to Get Help

For more information about red 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.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION
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