

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet

SPECIES • COOL-SEASON GRASSES

Redtop



General Information

Redtop is a cool-season grass introduced from Eurasia. Because of its ability to establish and spread quickly, redtop is well suited for erosion control. Redtop will provide soil protection when other plants are establishing.

Adaptability

Few other grasses are adapted to such a wide range of soil and weather conditions. Because redtop will tolerate standing water for short periods of time, it is one of the best grasses planted in association with wetlands and wet soils.

- It also grows well on dry soils, clayey soils, acidic soils, alkaline soils and soils with low fertility.
- Redtop provides good nesting habitat, escape cover and food for wildlife.
- Before 1940, redtop was the second most important pasture grass, behind Kentucky bluegrass.

Characteristics

Redtop grows three feet tall on productive soils. The leaf blade is one-fourth inch wide, and four inches to 24 inches long, tapering to a point.

- The top leaf surface is hairy, and the bottom is smooth. Stems are slender, with a sheath that is shorter than the internode.
- The seed heads are loose pyramidal and will turn red when mature.
- The rooting system forms a loose, coarse turf. It has a creeping growth habit, which enables an isolated plant to spread to a diameter of three feet.

Establishment

Redtop should be planted during the normal, cool-season seeding dates in a firm, smooth and weed-free seedbed.

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

When seed is broadcast, the soil needs to be at least 80% weed-free, rolled, seeded and rolled again to ensure adequate seed-to-soil contact.



Management

Redtop is capable of producing fair hay yields in unproductive soils. These yields can be increased by applying lime and fertilizer in accordance with a soil test. Overall, hay yields are low, with very little fall regrowth. Protein content runs 8 percent to 9 percent when cut at full bloom, and 12 percent to 14 percent when cut before bloom.

Redtop can be planted with timothy, Korean lespedeza, alsike clover and some native grasses.

When added to native, warm-season grass plantings, redtop provides more rapid establishment of cover on fields where erosion could be a problem.

Redtop should not be grazed until it reaches a height of eight inches. It should not be grazed closer than three inches.

Where to Get Help

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



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