

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet
SPECIES • COOL-SEASON GRASSES

Smooth Bromegrass



Photo by: Larry Allain
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PLANTS Database

General Information

Smooth Bromegrass is an introduced, rhizomatous, long-lived cool season perennial grass.

The grass is leafy and quite tall, growing to a height of three to four feet. Smooth Bromegrass produces an abundance of basal and stem leaves. Blades are eight to 12 inches long and from one-fourth to one-half inch wide, flat with prominent veins and a W or M water mark.

The leaf sheath is four to six inches long, smooth, and closed forming a tube around the stem. The seed head is a confined panicle that emerges from the upper leaf sheath in late spring or early summer.

Smooth bromegrass should not be confused with many, less desirable annual or at best short-lived perennial cousins.

Adaptability

Smooth Bromegrass was introduced to the United States in the 1880s, a native of Europe, China, and Siberia, and adapted to most temperate climates.

The region of best adaptation in North America is centered in the corn belt and adjacent areas northwest and northward into Canada.

Smooth bromegrass survives periods of drought and extreme temperatures but will become dormant during prolonged dry periods. Growth begins again only with the return of cool, short days when moisture is available.

The grass will grow on a variety of soil types, but prefers deep, fertile, well-drained silt or clay loam soils.

Establishment

Seeds are chaffy and tend to bridge in the seed box of seeding equipment when agitation is not provided.

Seeds should be placed one-fourth to one-half inch deep, and the soil should be firmed around the seed with packer wheels or with the use of a cultipacker after seeding.

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

Often alfalfa or other adapted legumes or grasses are planted with smooth brome grass to form mixtures. In these cases, the seeding rate should be reduced accordingly.

Weeds need to be controlled to protect seedlings from competition for moisture and sunlight. Varieties best suited to Illinois include Barton, Beacon, Regs, Southland, and Lincoln.

Management

Smooth brome grass will begin growth in late March or early April, with peak growth in May and early June.

- Grows into early summer better than most cool-season grasses. A second smaller growth peak will take place in September and October if soil moisture is adequate.
- Species compares favorably to orchard grass, reed canary grass and tall fescue in total productivity, and may provide the highest spring yields. In addition, Smooth Brome grass is probably the most winter hardy of the cool-season grass species listed above.
- Nutrient value and palatability for grazing livestock makes it one of the best cool-season grasses for pasture use.
- Uses a mixture of smooth brome grass and alfalfa has proved to be a popular pasture mixture and provides added wildlife benefits to the planting.
- Legume adds feed value while the grass in the mixture reduces the danger of bloat.
- Too early, continuous spring grazing can damage productivity of the stand. Grazing management that provides short periods of grazing followed by adequate rest periods will ensure vigorous productive pastures, whether planted as a single species or as a mixture in pastures.
- Requires a higher level of nutrient management than some species of cool-season grasses if the stand is to remain productive. Stands can become sod-bound unless they are kept well fertilized or mechanically renovated.

Where to Get Help

For more information about smooth brome grass, 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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