

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet

SPECIES • COOL-SEASON GRASSES

Timothy



General Information

Timothy is a cool-season bunchgrass that is best suited for hay production due to being a bunchgrass, and leaves open areas at ground level. Timothy is well suited for wildlife plantings. However, Timothy is not recommended for erosion control because of the shallow root system. Timothy is not drought tolerant, but cold tolerant, and lives longer in cool, humid regions.

Adaptability

Timothy is adapted to fertile, heavy-textured soils with good water-holding capacity.

Timothy is poorly suited to droughty or wet soils but can withstand flooding for a few days during the growing season or for a few weeks during dormant period.

Characteristics

Timothy grows two to three feet tall and forms large clumps. The leaf blades are flat, one-fourth-inch wide, and four to 12 inches long, tapering to a point.

The top leaf is shorter than the others and extends sharply upward. The seed heads are two to five inches long, and one-fourth-inch in diameter. The sheath is split and hairless with overlapping margins. The rooting system is fibrous and shallow. The plant reproduces by seed.

Timothy differs from most other grasses in that one or two of the lower internodes swell to form a bulb-shaped growth. This is a carbohydrate storage organ which decreases in size at the time of seed maturity.

Establishment

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

The seedbed should be free of weeds, smooth and firm. Timothy should be planted no deeper than one-fourth-inch during the normal cool-season seeding dates.

If the seed is planted using the broadcast method, the soil needs to be 80% weed-free, rolled, seeded, and rolled again to ensure adequate seed-to-soil contact. A good stand of timothy is quick to establish, and seldom lodges.

Management

Timothy can be grazed, but management is necessary to avoid close grazing by livestock. Timothy is a medium-to-late maturing grass with peak periods of production in late spring and fall.

Timothy is best managed for livestock grazing when planted in pure stands with redtop or in a mixture with any legume except alfalfa.



Grazing should not begin until the grass has grown six to eight inches tall and should not be grazed closer than three inches.

When cut for hay, timothy cures clean and relatively free of dust and to nitrogen and phosphate. These should be applied in accordance with soil tests.

If timothy is cut at the early head stage and the nitrogen rate is high, stands will be reduced.

Research shows Timothy is best cut before the early bloom stage has ended. At early bloom growth stage, plant quality, quantity and palatability is very high.

Management contributes to higher, long-term yields, and more growth is left for the pasture in the late summer and fall.

The first cutting of timothy and clover mixtures will be mostly clover. However, by the second or third year, most of the clover will have died.

The lack of competition between grass and clover, combined with the nitrogen clover roots, results in higher grass yields.

Early-cut timothy has a laxative effect on horses. Because of the higher levels of protein, calcium and vitamins, a timothy and legume mixture is recommended for colts and brood mares.

Timothy is very palatable and is favored by horse owners and dairy and beef cattle producers.

Where to Get Help

For more information about timothy, 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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