IT’S TIME TO SEED BERMUDAGRASS!

Bermudagrass is a perennial warm season grass that grows very well in eastern North Carolina. It does not like extremely wet areas and can do well in the more sandy parts of our area. The general growing season for bermudagrass is from April until around September. If we have an unusually warm spring, it may green up as early as March and if we have a late fall it may even continue to grow into October.

There are two ways to go about planting bermudagrass and the method you choose will depend on your overall goal. If you are interested in establishing any of the hybrid varieties of bermudagrass such as Coastal or any of the Tifton varieties, you will need to have the bermudagrass sprigged. A certified sprigger who will bring the sprigs to your farm usually does this. Over the long run, the hybrid varieties will probably be a little more productive than the “common” varieties of bermudagrass but sprigging bermudagrass can cost anywhere from $100-150 an acre depending on the cost of the sprigs. Sprigging is best done in February or March while the sprigs are still dormant but can also be done later in the spring as well.

A method of planting bermudagrass that is quite popular is using a seeded “common” variety, such as Wrangler or Cheyenne. These varieties work well in pastures and are fairly easy to establish. It will cost you roughly $50-75 per acre, depending on the cost of seed, to establish a seeded variety so it is a cheaper route to go when establishing a pasture. The seeded varieties can be planted beginning in April after the danger of frost has passed (soil temperature should be 65 degrees) and as late as the end of June.

Before planting any type of grass, it’s important to take a soil sample and find out how much lime and fertilizer is recommended for your soil. Bermudagrass prefers a soil pH around 6.0 so if your soil has a higher or lower level of acidity then your grass may not do as well as it should. A common mistake made when seeding bermudagrass is planting the seed too deep. Bermudagrass seed should be planted at a depth of 1/8 to 1/4 inch. The best way to achieve this is to broadcast the seed and then lightly drag the field or use a cultipacker. You just want to put enough soil around the seeds to protect them. If there is grass already in the area that you’re seeding, you’ll need to...
mow or graze the area closely so that the sunlight can reach the soil and the seeds you’ve planted. When establishing a new pasture for grazing, the longer you can keep your animals off of it the better chance the grass will have to get established. Wait until the grass is 8-10” tall before turning any animals on it for grazing. For more information on planting bermudagrass, contact the Extension office at 455-5873.

**SPRING VACCINATIONS**

The time of year has arrived that many of our horses are receiving their “spring shots”. Many horse owners can quickly rattle off the types of vaccinations that their horses receive, but how many of them know for sure what it is they’re vaccinating against? Here is a quick run-down of the most commonly administered vaccines for horses in our area.

**Rabies** is a very contagious and fatal disease that can be transmitted from animal to animal or animal to human through direct contact with the saliva of an infected animal. Horses usually contract rabies by a bite from an infected animal. The disease affects the central nervous system and symptoms can include loss of appetite, depression, ataxia (loss of coordination), colic, restlessness, and urinary incontinence. The incubation can be as short as two to nine weeks or as long as 15 months. The disease can be prevented through annual vaccinations.

**Tetanus** is another disease of the central nervous system that has a high rate of mortality. Often called “lockjaw”, one of the symptoms of the disease is that the horse is unable to open its mouth to eat or drink. Other symptoms can include stiffness of the body, sensitivity to sounds, light, and touch, and inability to control the movement of the third eyelid. The disease comes from the toxin of a bacteria (*Clostridium tetani*) that is often found in the intestinal tract of the horse and is excreted in the feces. The spores can be found in the soil at any horse facility so any unvaccinated horse is a potential victim. Many horses that contract tetanus will die and those who survive may require months of treatment. The disease can be prevented through annual vaccinations of tetanus toxoid.

**West Nile and Eastern, Western, and Venezuelan Encephalitis** are carried by birds and transferred to other birds, people, and horses via mosquitoes. Horses and humans are “dead end hosts” and cannot spread the disease to others. The virus attacks the brain and spinal cord and can cause symptoms such as overall depression, drowsiness, muscle twitching, personality changes, and central nervous system symptoms (incoordination, paralysis, coma, etc). Mortality is high and the best prevention is to vaccinate 1-2 times per year during peak mosquito season. Also, reducing mosquito breeding areas will limit the number of pests around your horses.

**Equine Influenza** is a highly contagious respiratory disease that usually is not fatal. Recovery time may range from several weeks to several months depending on the severity of the case. Symptoms include a high fever and a cough. Horses who are at a high risk of exposure will need to be vaccinated more often than those in a closed herd. Most horses should be vaccinated 1-2 times per year.

**Equine Viral Rhinopneumonitis (EVR)** is a respiratory illness that causes an acute cough, congestion and nasal discharge, and fever. It can also cause abortion in broodmares. Transmission of the illness usually occurs through direct contact with nasal discharge of infected horses or an aborted fetus or placenta. Infected horses are isolated until they have recovered and prevention is accomplished through good sanitary practices and annual vaccinations.

**Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA)** is a viral disease that can be spread from one horse to another through horse flies. The annual “Coggins test” checks for this disease and a negative test is required to transport or show horses. Symptoms include labored breathing, high fever, exhaustion and pounding heartbeat, and anemia. The disease has a low mortality rate and horses that recover will usually become carriers of the disease. There is no vaccine for this disease and horses who test positive will have to be euthanized or permanently quarantined to prevent spreading the disease to other horses.
If you have questions about the vaccinations that your horse is receiving, speak with your veterinarian. Some horses may need to receive additional vaccines, such as Strangles or Botulism, or be vaccinated more frequently, so your vet would know the best vaccination protocol for your particular horse.

Anyone who has purchased fertilizer recently has seen how expensive it has become and has experienced the burden that it can place on the input costs of any farm operation. Because of the expense, it’s even more important to be sure that fertilizer is being applied correctly to the soil or you might as well be flushing your dollar bills down the toilet.

The results of a soil test can give you a snapshot of the nutrient needs of a particular field. By applying nutrients to the soil based on the recommendations of the soil test report, you can be sure that your soil is receiving just what it needs. There will be no nutrients (or dollars!) wasted because of excessive fertilization. Not only is this a financial bonus, it is great for the environment too. Excessive nutrients in the soil that are not taken up by crops are more likely to run off or leach into water sources which can degrade water quality. On the other hand, by applying just the right amount of nutrients to the soil, there is a lesser chance of lost yield (or dollars!) due to a nutrient deficiency in the soil that may ultimately affect crop performance.

While all nutrients such as potassium, phosphorous, magnesium or calcium are critical to crop growth, one of the most important and often forgotten aspects of soil fertility is the pH of the soil. Soil pH can affect the transfer and availability of nutrients in the soil. Even if there is an adequate level of certain nutrients in the soil after your fertilizer applications, the wrong pH level can keep these nutrients from being available to the crop roots. The effectiveness of certain herbicides can also be altered by an incorrect soil pH. So if soil can be thought of as the “gateway” between crops and nutrients, then soil pH is most definitely the “gatekeeper”. Follow the lime recommendations on your soil test report to keep the gatekeeper happy.

For pastures, the use of legumes can serve as another source of savings on fertilizer costs. Clover, lespedeza, and other legumes fix nitrogen from the atmosphere and add it back into the soil, therefore reducing the total amount of nitrogen that needs to be applied to that field. For more information about soil testing or reducing on-farm costs, contact your local Extension office.

The Southeastern NC Hay Directory is currently being compiled and will be available for distribution in mid-May. Print copies can be obtained by contacting the Onslow Extension office. The online version can be accessed by visiting the Onslow County Extension homepage at http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu and clicking on the Animal Agriculture link on the left hand side of the page. If you would like to advertise as a hay producer or hay supplier, please let us know ASAP by calling (910) 455-5873 or emailing emily_adams@ncsu.edu. Ad forms will need to be returned to the office by May 1st in order to be included in the print edition of the hay directory.

Upcoming Events

**UPCOMING EXTENSION HORSE HUSBANDRY SHORT COURSES**

**May 7, 2009** - NCSU Horse Feeding Short Course  – Hampton Inn and Suites, Raleigh

**May 8, 2009** - NCSU Forage Management Short Course – Hampton Inn and Suites, Raleigh

For more information or to register for these courses, visit the NCSU Extension Horse Husbandry website at: www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/horse/Webpages/NCSU_EHH_Home.html

or for assistance, call the Onslow Extension office at (910) 455-5873.
SPOTLIGHT

**Buy Fresh, Buy Local**

When choosing fruits and vegetables always look for produce that is closet to it's most natural form. The less processed the food, the better. This is one of the many reasons I suggest visiting your local farmers market. It's a great place to purchase fresh, healthy food directly from the farmer or grower. Onslow County Farmers Market is opening for the 2009 market season on April 18th, and it's a perfect time for you to come out and enjoy the best that nature and your local farmers have to offer.

The benefits of shopping locally at the farmers market are numerous. First the market is filled with food that's good for you, brightly colored fruits and vegetables that change with the season. Enjoy corn on the cob, tomatoes and berries in the summer, or squash, sweet potatoes and collards in fall.

The majority of the produce in supermarkets was picked almost a week before it hits the shelves and traveled many, many miles before being sold. When you shop at the farmers market you can be assured that the food you purchase is fresh, hasn't traveled long distances and undergone lots of packaging.

When you buy locally at a farmers market, you're doing your part in reducing the energy consumption needed to support large-scale food systems. You're also helping to put money directly into the pockets of local farmers who don't or can't produce supermarket quantities. And you're buying recently harvested produce – cutting down the time between the harvest and consumption means more nutrients are preserved.

Finally, the farmers market offers great opportunities to try something new. Onslow County farmers and growers are there because they have a passion for their product. They're a wealth of information. Don't be afraid to ask questions, as this can be a great chance to get new ideas and tips for food preparation.

Not only will you experience the health benefits of eating locally, but also you'll have some fun and may well learn something new in the process.

The Onslow County Farmers Market (located at 4024 Richlands Hwy, Jacksonville, NC 28540) 2009 Season begins Saturday April 18th. The Market is open Tuesdays and Saturdays from 8:30 am until 1:30 pm.

Starting mid-May a second location will open for the Farmers Market Vendors on Thursday from 2-7 pm. Vendors will be selling at the old Lowe’s location behind Dick’s Sporting Goods on Western Blvd. This is an effort to provide more produce to the public, and increase accessibility and visibility.