

What Variety Should I Plant?

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A common question asked by cattle producers is, "What is the best grass or clover variety?" An evasive answer to that question is, "It depends." In some cases, it doesn't make much difference as there is so little difference among varieties and one might as well buy the cheapest one as long as the seed quality is good. However, some varieties are definitely superior over a wide geographical area. Other varieties perform well in one area but may perform poorly on your farm because of intolerance to soil acidity, poor drainage, heat, low temperatures, soil nematodes, or diseases. This article will suggest acceptable varieties based on forage yield trials and grazing experiments in various parts of Georgia. It will mainly cover cool season grasses and legumes that are planted in autumn or sometimes winter. For those planning ahead for planting next spring, warm season varieties are also included. Acceptable varieties are listed in alphabetical order.

Annual Cool Season Grasses and Legumes

Rye is one of the most widely grown small grains for winter annual pasture. The early maturity makes it ideal as a grazing crop where a corn crop is to be planted. Among the suitable varieties are: Elbon, G1-87, Kelly Grazer II, Maton, Wintergrazer 70, Wintermore, Wrens 96, Wrens Abruzzi.

Wheat seed are often cheaper than rye and can be grazed longer, prior to planting of crops such as cotton and peanut. Good varieties are: GA-Dozier, Jackson, and NK Coker 9134.

Annual ryegrass is a superb winter pasture crop, especially in middle and south Georgia because of its long productive season and high nutritive quality. In addition to planting on prepared land, it can be easily broadcast on dormant bahiagrass and bermudagrass sods. It should not be planted where it can be a pest in wheat for grain or where land is to be planted to row crops in spring.

Satisfactory varieties are: Hurricane, Jackson, Marshall, Passerel, and Rio.

Arrowleaf clover has the longest grazing season of any annual winter clover and generally causes little or no bloat problems because of tannins in the forage. However, in recent years this clover has often had stand losses because of virus and root diseases. Yuchi is the main variety available.

Crimson clover has excellent seedling vigor and makes more winter growth than other annual legumes. It requires well drained soil. The commonest variety is Dixie but several new varieties such as Flame, AU Robin, and AU Sunrise have more winter production.

Berseem clover is a highly productive long-season winter annual with low bloat potential that tolerates poor drainage. Big Bee, the only variety with sufficient cold hardiness, is adapted only in the Coastal Plain on soils having a pH of 6.5. Natural reseeding is poor.

Ball clover tolerates poor drainage, has excellent natural reseeding, and makes most of its production from late March to early May. Seed available are common and the variety Segrest.

Perennial Cool Season Grasses, Legumes, and Forbs

Tall fescue is adapted mainly to areas north of the Coastal Plain in Georgia. Nearly all of the acreage consists of the Kentucky 31 variety containing a fungal endophyte which stimulates deeper rooting, tiller production, and pest resistance, resulting in improved tolerance to drought and survival under close continuous grazing. Endophyte-free varieties such as AU Triumph, Festorina, and Select do not produce toxic alkaloids so animal performance is greatly improved but plants have less drought and grazing tolerance so pasture stands may decline over time, especially in central Georgia from heat and drought stress. Jesup, an endophyte-free variety developed in Georgia, gives excellent animal performance and has better

survival under drought and close grazing than other varieties. However, it is not as tough as endophyte-infected Kentucky 31 or Georgia 5. Endophyte-free varieties should be rotationally grazed or a stubble height of 3 to 4 inches maintained during summer to reduce stand losses.

Orchardgrass is a high-quality grass adapted only to the Mountain, Limestone Valley, and upper Piedmont areas of the State. Benchmark is the best available variety.

Prairiegrass (brome) is marketed as the variety Matua. In our trials, it has been highly productive the first year, then stands decline rapidly the second and third years. In south Georgia, Matua acts as an annual in pasture but may reseed if allowed to produce some seed in late spring.

White clover is the most widely planted legume in Georgia with the main area of adaptation being north of the Coastal Plain although in the latter area it can be grown on wet bottomland and flatwoods soils. Ladino varieties such as Osceola, Regal, and Will have large leaves and are more productive than the intermediate white clover variety Louisiana S-1 which is smaller but has much better reseeding. Ladino clover survival in grass sods under grazing is generally poor with a stand life generally not over two years. An inexpensive practice to improve pasture quality is broadcasting ladino clover seed on tall fescue, bahiagrass, or bermudagrass sods in winter.

Red clover is more drought tolerant and productive in summer but much less tolerant of close grazing than white clover. It can be broadcast planted on tall fescue sods in winter along with white clover, generally surviving two years in the Piedmont and northward. Acceptable varieties are Cinnamon, Redland III, Royal Red, and Rudolf. Cherokee can be planted as an annual in the Coastal Plain but is not cold hardy in the upper Piedmont and Mountains.

Alfalfa is the most productive and long season perennial legume in Georgia but

requires well drained soil, high fertility, and a soil pH of 6.5. Acceptable varieties for grazing or hay are Alfagraze and GrazeKing in the Piedmont and northward while Amerigraze 702 with a longer productive season is adapted in the Coastal Plain and lower Piedmont.

Chicory is not a legume but a broadleaf forb that is extremely tolerant of drought and acid soils. It grows well in spring but also continues to grow during summer and into autumn. Forage is high in both protein and energy so it can be a good supplement to low quality grasses. If grazed rotationally, it competes well with both bermudagrass and tall fescue. High fertility is needed. Stands can be expected to last 3 years. Seed of the variety Puna are available.

Warm Season Perennial Grasses and Legumes

Bermudagrass varieties, most of which are vegetatively propagated, differ greatly in their adaptation to different areas of Georgia. Bermudagrass is not recommended in the Mountain region. Tifton 85, the most productive and highest quality variety, is adapted to the Coastal Plain and may not be cold hardy

much further north. Coastal can be grown dependably further north but may be injured during cold winters north of Athens and Atlanta. Tifton 44 is the most coldhardy variety but is slow to root and become established. Russell is easy to establish and coldhardy. Alicia is also cold-hardy and productive but forage quality is lower. The only recommended seedplanted giant bermudagrass variety is Cheyenne, adapted in the Piedmont and Limestone Valley but not the Coastal Plain.

Bahiagrass, mainly the Pensacola variety, covers a great deal of pasture land in the Coastal Plain. Argentine, a more productive and less cold-tolerant variety, is adapted only in the lower Coastal Plain. Tifton 9, the most productive variety, is adapted wherever Pensacola can be grown.

Sericea lespedeza is an excellent drought-tolerant hay legume that will grow on acid, low-fertility soils. Serala is a dependable high-tannin variety that makes good hay as the tannin level declines during drying. AU Donnelly is an excellent low-tannin variety that is highly palatable but pastures should be rotationally grazed to maintain stands.

Perennial peanut is an outstanding hay legume with high forage yield, nutritive quality equal to alfalfa, and long stand life. It is adapted to well-drained sandy soils in the Coastal Plains south of Cordele. Planting is done with sprigs of the Florigraze variety and establishment is slow, generally requiring two to three years before hay harvesting can be done.

Warm Season Annual Grasses and Legumes

Pearl millet is a high-quality productive grass that is adapted on well-drained soils throughout the State. Tifleaf 3 is the most leafy and disease resistant variety.

Sorghum-sudangrass is more productive in late summer and autumn than pearl millet but requires higher soil pH. SX- 15, SX- 17, and Hygrazer are several acceptable varieties.

Annual lespedeza will grow all over the State but is best adapted on clay and loam soils north of the Coastal Plain. This legume has excellent natural reseeding, tolerates acid soil, grows well in grass sods, and provides good quality grazing during summer and autumn. The best variety is Marion.