

# How to Improve a Pasture

## Pasture Assessment

If you're wanting to improve your pasture, you can either work on your existing pasture or do a complete field renovation. Start by determining which species are currently growing and evaluate the general condition of the pasture. If you simply want more productivity from the grasses and legumes that already exist, changes in pasture management may be more effective and economical than a complete renovation. If however, there are few desirable species present, and the pasture is infested with weeds, then renovation may be the best solution.

## Weed Identification and Control

It is important to determine what weed species are growing in the field. Although weed control is typically done before cultivation, it may also be needed after. There are several options of herbicides for pastures. If you want to remove only broadleaf weeds and plants and save the grasses only, chemicals such as Sword or MCPA may be considered. If you want to kill broadleaf plants and grasses, any product containing the ingredient glyphosate (ie Roundup or equivalent), would be suitable. Always read and follow all the directions on the label of the chemical.

## Tillage

If renovating, tillage may be required to turn existing vegetation under the soil surface and to prepare a clod-free and firm seedbed (one in which your footprints are less than 1/2 inch deep).

## Soil Testing and Fertilizing

Having your soil tested ensures that the levels of nutrients are sufficient not only for the long term viability of the soil, but also for the immediate needs of the pasture. It's a good idea to get a soil analysis done before adding fertilizers, as the test results will help determine which type and how much fertilizer to apply. TerraLink has a soil testing lab on site in Abbotsford. For more information about available tests or for instructions about how to submit a sample for testing, give the office a call. Once a soil test is completed, appropriate fertilizer or lime can be chosen and applied as needed.

## Seeding

Once the weed control, possible tillage, soil testing and fertilizing has been done, seed can be applied. The best time to seed is in spring and fall. Avoid seeding in the heat of summer or when in danger of frost. Consistent soil temperatures should be around 10 degrees Celsius. Broadcast or drill a forage-type seed mix (specially formulated to suit your animals and situation) at the recommended seeding rate. If broadcasting, it is advised to seed half in one direction, followed by a second pass with the remaining seed at right angles to the first. After broadcasting, lightly rake then roll (or lightly chain harrow) the seeded area. Be sure the seed makes good contact with the soil and be sure to not cover the seed with more than 1/4 inch of soil. Keep the area moist through establishment.

## Post-Seeding Management

Grass takes a year to become fully established. Little or no grazing should take place on a new seeding for at least 3 months after seeding. In dryland areas, with no irrigation, the field should not be grazed at all the first year to allow the plants time to become well established. Grazing should be moderate, always leaving at least 3 inches of stubble. After establishment, maintain your pasture with proper weed control, periodic soil testing and suitable fertilizer application. Depending on field conditions, annual overseeding may be necessary.

Moore, T. 2005. *Horse Pasture Renovation*. British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Farm Structures Fact Sheet.

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