



AG IN FOCUS

The West Central Missouri Region Agriculture Newsletter

Abused or Neglected Pastures— Where Do I Start?

Sometimes you end up with pasture land that has been abused and neglected. Maybe you've rented it, bought it or inherited it. Now where do you start? First, take a walk across the pasture to assess what you have. While you're at it, take a soil test, because there's a good chance that it is low in several things. Take a close look at what is growing out there. You may think that there is no good grass out there but a close, hands-and-knees look may show you that there are actually tiny, stunted fescue plants there. The pH and/or fertility may be so low that they just aren't growing.

Maybe there aren't any desirable forages out there and you do need to think about drilling in some grass. Overseeding with legumes helps improve the forage quality and reduces fescue endophyte problems. If the pH and fertility are low, lespedeza would be preferred to clovers till you can get things corrected.

While you're walking, look at the weed situation. Broomsedge, also called poverty grass, is an opportunist. You can recognize it by the one to two-foot tall orangey-tan seed stalks. In the early spring you might find a short grass with soft, very fuzzy leaves. This is downy brome, another low quality grass. You can recognize it in early summer by its foot-tall seed stalks with fluffy seed heads. If the good forages are absent or stunted, these weeds will come in. Improving pH and fertility and planting desirable forages, if needed, will get rid of them over time as they outcompete them.

Annual weeds such as ragweed, pigweed and croton are easily killed if sprayed with 2,4-D when they are small but the best approach is to thicken the forage stand so they don't germinate. Many biennials, such as the thistles, are easily killed if sprayed while they are in the rosette stage. Perennial weeds such as horse nettle may be more difficult as are the woody or brushy weeds like blackberries, sericea lespedeza and multiflora rose. Blackberries and sericea lespedeza will require several treatments over a number of years. Sprays for all these broadleaf weeds will also control desirable legumes. So overseeding with legumes may have to wait until the weeds are under control. It may be possible to spot spray areas with bad weed problems or work on part of the field at a time. That way you don't take out all the legumes at one time.

So work on pH and fertility; add forages, if needed, and control the weeds, if needed. Good pH and fertility will stimulate a healthy, thick stand of grass and legumes and that will go a long way toward eliminating or weakening weeds.

Source: **Pat Miller**, *Field Specialist for Agronomy*

