

## Legumes for Forage and Hay

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Legumes produce forages that are superior in feeding value to most other plants. The protein content is always higher than grasses when in a comparable stage of growth; the TDN content is higher and legumes have the ability to take nitrogen from the air for their own growth and to leave some in the soil for subsequent crops. Some legumes can be grown in every county in Florida and dairymen are urged to consider them in their forage program.

There are legumes that produce forage during the cool months and others that grow during the warm months. Generally, it is suggested the cool season legumes be planted in mid-October and the warm season crops be planted about a month after the danger of frost in the spring.

Cool season legumes suggested for use in Florida are white clover for wet locations and alfalfa, arrowleaf, crimson, red and sweet clovers and possibly lupines on the well drained soils on better drained locations. Warm season legumes include aeschynomene on poorly drained sites and alyceclover and hairy indigo on the better drained locations.

A sound soil fertility program is needed to produce satisfactory legumes. Soil tests can give needed information on liming and fertilizing needs. Developing a fertility program to meet the needs of crops to be grown in a particular location is essential for a forage legume production program. Check with County Cooperative Extension Service for suggestions.

Forage legumes may be grazed, used as "green chop," or made into hay or silage. Since all of the forage legumes are seasonal in production, it is usually more satisfactory to use them as stored feed so that they may be fed over longer periods of time. With large dairy herds there is also the problem of sufficient pasture close enough to the milking barn to permit grazing.

When making hay from legumes, leaves dry before stems and tend to shatter. To minimize this it is suggested that hay be moved as little as possible and baled as quickly and dry enough to prevent spoilage.

Silage is a way to preserve a greater portion of the nutrients from legumes. Moisture content of legumes is usually too high for making the best quality silage and it is usually necessary to wilt forage in the field before ensiling. With silage it is also possible to harvest forage during periods of wet weather.

Legumes offer a possibility of producing excellent quality forage that can be used to reduce the cost of a dairy ration. They require careful and timely attention in growing, harvesting and feeding. Attempts to grow these crops must be well planned and executed if they are to be successful.