

## Summer Seeding Alfalfa

*While most Midwestern alfalfa is planted in the springtime, summer seeding has its benefits as well. For those who like to plant oats with their alfalfa for oatlage or for grain, consider planting a pure stand of oats followed by a summer seeded pure stand of alfalfa. This system will likely be more beneficial for the alfalfa component and still provide the oat crop benefit. The reason for this is twofold: Alfalfa doesn't do well with competition and weed pressure is less of a problem in summer seeded alfalfa. Another benefit of summer seeding alfalfa is the following year will be a full production year instead of one or two less cuttings after a spring seeding.*

### Factors to Consider:

- Summer seeding alfalfa gives time to take a wheat, barley or oat crop off and still plant alfalfa.
- Ensure adequate moisture will be available when summer seeding to provide good germination. Summer seeding alfalfa may present less reliable rain to support germination.
- A companion or "nurse" crop with spring seeded alfalfa is competition and may rob alfalfa yield. Sometimes a small grain nurse crop can lodge and further stunt the alfalfa.
- Insects like potato leafhopper are difficult to see and control under oats or other nurse crops.
- There is more time available for seedbed preparation and planting in the summer.
  - Prepare a good seedbed with tillage and minimize clod size by mechanical means.
  - Firm the seedbed before planting and after by rolling the field.
    - Good seed to soil contact is key.
  - Ensure seed is placed shallow ( $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch or less).
    - If no seed ends up on top of the ground, it was seeded too deep.
- Plant early enough in the late summer to get 8 inches or more of growth before a killing frost.
  - This is generally the middle of August to late August.
  - If planting too late, it may die over the winter.

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## Action Plan:

1. When taking the small grain crop, remove as much straw and stubble as reasonable. This provides a straw crop to sell and removes residue interference with the seed.
2. Take time to properly work the field and prepare the seedbed. This minimizes weed pressure as more weeds germinate in the spring and less in the summertime. Rolling the field will also smooth it and make harvesting the crop less rough.
3. Plant adequate seed to get a good stand. Generally, try to plant 12 to 15+ pounds of seed per acre.
4. When planting, if you don't see at least 6-8 alfalfa seeds on top of the ground, the seed was planted too deep. Try for  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch seeding depth.
5. Time planting so the alfalfa is growing out of the ground at least 6 - 8 weeks before a killing frost.



## Summary:

When well-managed, summer seeding alfalfa can be very productive and offer high returns. Make sure to plant early enough in the fall to get a good root and crown developed before it freezes. Though more expensive initially, selecting a premium alfalfa with better genetics has great benefit in the long term by stand longevity and productivity. Pay attention to details in establishing the alfalfa and find the benefit in a good forage.

## Resources

[Late Summer Alfalfa Seeding](#)

[Tips for Planting Alfalfa In Late Summer](#)

[How to Get a Good Stand of Alfalfa or Grass](#)

[Effect of Seedling Year Stress on Future Alfalfa Yields](#)

[Getting a Good Forage Stand](#)

[Determining the Optimum Alfalfa Seeding Rate](#)

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