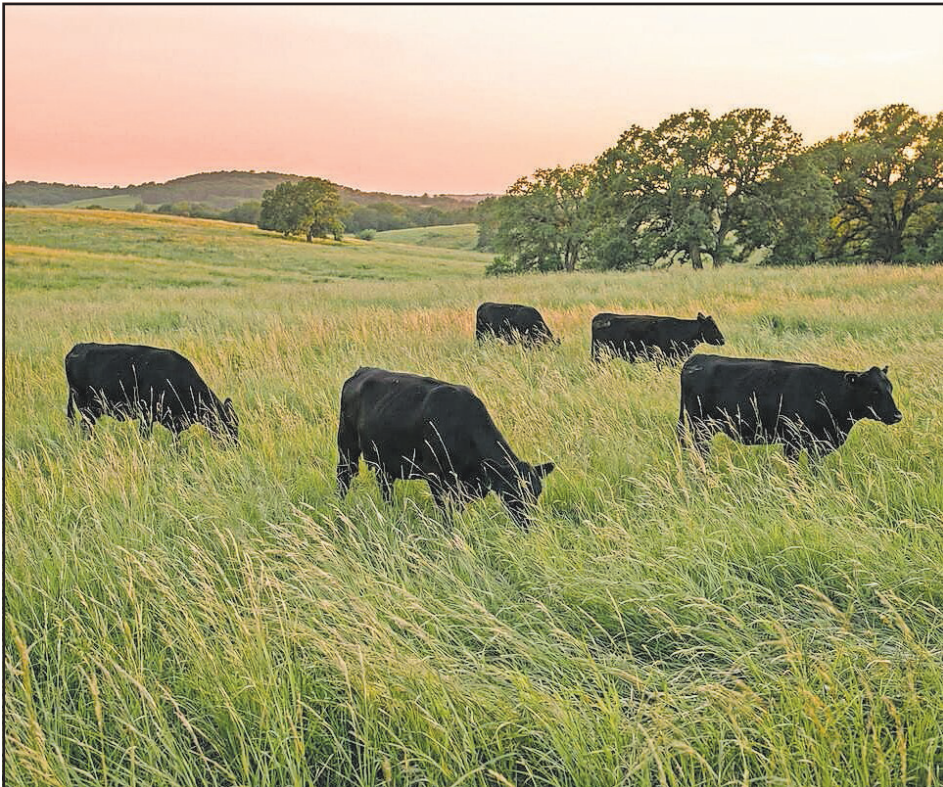


Warm-Season Grasses Offer Summer Grazing Option for Missouri Producers



By Jason Vance

Producers looking to improve summer grazing and reduce the impacts of toxic fescue may want to consider warm-season grasses, according to Rusty Lee of University of Missouri Extension.

During a recent educational program, Lee explained how native warm-season grasses such as big bluestem, little bluestem and Indiangrass can provide reliable summer forage, drought tolerance and wildlife habitat when properly established and managed.

Matching the Grass to the Field

Lee said producers should consider site conditions when selecting species. Switchgrass, for example, performs particularly well in wet areas.

"If you have a notoriously wet bottom field that stays damp, that's where switchgrass needs to go," Lee said. "Of the warm-season grasses, it tolerates wet soils better than any of them."

Lee pointed to variety trials conducted at the USDA NRCS Plant Materials Center, where flooding once submerged test plots for nearly a month. After the water receded, most warm-season grasses died—but the switchgrass plots recovered and thrived.

For most pastures, however, Lee prefers a mix of big bluestem, little bluestem and Indiangrass.

Filling the Summer Forage Gap

Warm-season grasses grow best during the heat of summer, providing forage when cool-season pastures slow down.

"In Missouri, tall fescue hits a summer slump," Lee said. "Warm-season grasses can pick up that summer grazing or provide hay production without dealing with fescue toxicosis."

The problem, he explained, stems from the fungal endophyte in infected tall fescue that produces compounds such as ergovaline, which reduce cattle performance.

By contrast, cattle generally find native warm-season grasses highly palatable.

Deep Roots Provide Drought Resilience

A major advantage of

native grasses is their extensive root systems.

Lee said mature plants may reach four feet tall above ground while developing roots eight to twelve feet deep. Those roots allow the plants to pull moisture and nutrients from deep in the soil profile.

"That's why during a drought you may see brown fescue pastures across the countryside, and then one green paddock," Lee said. "A lot of times that's warm-season grass."

The deep roots also help grasses persist on lower-fertility soils, though Lee emphasized that they still respond to proper fertilization.

Benefits for Wildlife

Native warm-season grasses typically grow in clumps, leaving space between plants that provides habitat for ground-nesting birds and small wildlife.

"If quail or rabbits are important on your farm, patches of warm-season grasses can be very beneficial," Lee said.

Establishment Requires Patience

While the benefits are significant, Lee warned that warm-season grasses require both patience and investment.

Seed alone may cost \$200-\$300 per acre, and the grasses establish slowly.

"It's a learned process," Lee said. "You might plant them and think the stand failed because nothing shows up for several weeks."

The biggest hurdle is the time required before the pasture becomes productive.

- Year 1: No grazing or hay harvest

- Year 2: Limited grazing with careful management

- Year 3 and beyond: Full production

"You're asking that paddock to come out of production for about a year and a half," Lee said. "But it will pay you back."

In one example Lee shared, a stand planted in 2022 produced more than four tons of hay per acre in two cuttings by its third year—exceeding Missouri's typical cool-season hay yield of about 3.1 tons per acre.

Grazing Management Is Critical

Warm-season grasses

must be managed differently than fescue.

Lee recommends maintaining at least 10-12 inches of residual height when grazing. Overgrazing can weaken stands or allow fescue and weeds to re-invade.

"These grasses can take some abuse once," Lee said. "But if you do it year after year, they will decline."

Rotational grazing with shorter grazing periods and longer rest intervals can improve utilization and plant health. Lee recommends allowing roughly 30 days of regrowth between grazing cycles during the growing season.

Producers should also stop grazing by early September to allow plants time to rebuild root reserves before frost.

A Strategy for the Fescue Belt

Lee said incorporating warm-season grasses can help producers rethink their overall forage strategy.

A common approach includes:

- Grazing fescue in spring

- Switching to warm-season grasses in summer

- Fertilizing fescue in late summer for fall stockpiling

- Grazing stockpiled fescue during winter

Because winter feed is often the largest expense in cow-calf operations, extending grazing days can significantly reduce costs.

"Hay feeding is one of the biggest expenses producers have," Lee said. "Anything we can do to replace hay with grazing helps the bottom line."

Tools for Establishment

Establishing warm-season grasses may require herbicides to control weeds and existing fescue. Lee said products containing imazapic, such as Plateau or Panoramic, can help control broadleaf weeds during establishment.

Producers may also use practices such as mowing weeds during the first year to prevent young grasses from being shaded.

Occasional prescribed burning can also benefit mature stands by controlling cool-season competition and stimulating new growth.

Ford County Sheriff's Office POPLOG

- Shane M. Munoz**, 35, probation violation.
- Jesus I. Garcia**, 30, probation violation.
- Michael A. Rodriguez**, 31, probation violation; violate offender registration act.
- Edgar A. Hernandez Ramos**, 19, aggravated criminal sodomy; rape.
- Creighton C. McCain**, 30, probation violation.
- Dollie M. Kratzer**, 56, transporting an open container; driving under the influence of drugs/alcohol; battery on LEO.
- Bradley A. Spease**, 42, transporting an open container; driving under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
- Heriberto Romero-Calacaco**, 47, transporting an open container, operate a motor vehicle without a valid license; driving under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
- Gabriel Perez Jr**, 22, transporting an open container; operate a motor vehicle without a valid license; driving under the influence of drugs/alcohol; vehicle liability insurance; unauthorized additional lighting equipment.
- Ronald L. Cox**, 60, possession of marijuana; use/possess w/intent to use drug paraphernalia into human body.
- Maxx M. Rostetter**, 26, probation violation.
- Mukhtar Abdikarin Ali**, 45, transporting an open container; driving under the influence of drug or combination of drugs; vehicle liability insurance.

SUDOKU

	2			6			4	
			2	5				7
	1	6						
3				2	4		8	6
9		4		1	6	3		
7	6			8	3	5		
2	4	8						1
				7		6	2	
6		3						

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Level: Beginner

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

8	9	4	2	1	9	2	3	7
3	7	9	8	4	7	8	5	6
2	4	8	6	3	5	7	9	1
7	6	2	9	8	3	5	1	4
9	8	4	5	1	6	3	7	2
6	5	1	7	2	4	9	8	6
5	1	6	8	4	7	2	3	9
4	3	9	2	5	1	8	6	7
8	2	7	3	6	9	1	4	5

ANSWER:



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