

What's the best time to mow my pasture grasses?

By Kipp Nye, Elbert County Extension Director

What's the best time to mow pasture grasses? The answer depends on the grasses you have (warm season or cool season), environmental factors such as, but not limited to, weeds, wildflowers and wildlife, and your own personal management priorities.

For example, if you left your grass uncut this spring and summer because you wanted to enjoy the wildflowers, now might be a good time to mow. But mow tall (about 4" - 6") to allow the cool season grasses to continue their growth until a hard frost hits.

Rotating the time of year for mowing is important, so next year you might consider mowing at a different time so that you are not constantly cutting the same plants during the same growth period. If your timing for mowing has interfered with a plant's growth pattern then at least you won't be continually hindering the plant if you change the time of mowing.

If weed control is your goal, you would mow before the weeds set seed. If you have annual weeds one mowing may be enough depending on their response to the mowing. If the weeds do not continue to grow you can enhance the grasses and help weed control by allowing the grasses to finish their reproductive cycle. If your weeds are biennials or perennials, you will need to mow more than once. If you have minimal weeds, mowing in late June allows the grass to first set seed but this will also allow certain weeds to set seed. This is a fine balancing act to follow because you are trying to encourage one group of plants to grow and reproduce while hindering another with a non-discriminating method. Timing is everything!

Mowing too short, too early, or too often can damage or stress the grass. Allow all grass and wanted vegetation at least a 40 day rest or non-mowing period during their active growing cycle every couple of years to replenish themselves.

Mowing is different from grazing because grazing is selective and mowing is not. Everything good or bad gets mowed, but grazers are not going to touch some things. Some more things to think about as you make management decisions for your pastures include the following:

- Tall vegetation on wind swept pastures can help trap snow.
- Leaf material can help reduce the impact of rain drops on soil erosion and soil compaction.
- Grass and other vegetation needs to have adequate leaf area exposed to sunlight for a long enough period of time to make food for the plant to survive.
- Soil and terrain type are additional factors that affect pasture management decisions.
- Too tall of vegetation can shade the younger and more immature plants reducing their health.

To learn to identify and manage your grasses, please call the Extension Office to register for the Field Walk on Saturday, September 13. (See front page.)