



ALBERT LEA SEED

Phone: 800-352-5247 · www.alseed.com



Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus* L.)

Description

Birdsfoot trefoil is a perennial legume with a well-developed, branching, root system. It spreads by underground rhizomes and reseeds itself. Most cultivars are erect and grow to a height of 2 to 3 feet. The stems are slender, branch well, and are moderately leafy. Leaves are smooth and consist of 5 leaflets. The bloom is made up of a cluster of bright yellow flowers. When ripe, the brown seedpods extend outward from the stalk and look like a bird's foot. The plant remains green and succulent during and after seed ripening. In addition to agricultural use, birdsfoot trefoil is a choice food and cover for game animals including pheasant, Canada goose, deer, and elk. New seedlings must be inoculated with the correct strain of rhizobium.

Overview

- Uses:** Pasture—Hay
- Strengths:** Good forage for long-term pastures without cultivation
Tolerant of poorly-drained soil; saline, acid or alkaline soils
Little bloat danger and can survive under continuous grazing
- Weaknesses:** Slow establishment
Potential invasive habits in some regions or habitats, displacing desired species
Tall growth, lodging potential
Challenging to dry for hay
-

Plant information

- Winterhardiness:** Fair (less than alfalfa if cut for hay)
- Drought-Tolerance:** Poor
- Wet soil tolerance:** Excellent
- Average Nitrogen Fixation:** ~41 lbs N /acre (one full year)
- Forage Yield Range:** 0.8 – 3.5 tons DM /acre
- Relative Forage Quality:** 139 – 197 (index value)
-

Seed and Seeding Info

Seeds per lb:	375,000
Seeding Rate Alone:	6 -- 10 lbs /acre
Seeding Rate in Mixtures:	2 – 6 lbs /acre with 3 lbs Orchardgrass or 2 lbs Timothy
Range of Seeding Dates:	Early spring or Late Summer (wet year)
Methods of seeding:	Drill or Broadcast & Roll
Best seeding depth:	¼ inch
Best Soil types:	Most types except sandy
pH tolerances:	Best 6.0 – 6.5 but can tolerate 5.5 – 7.5

Cultural and Harvest Information

As a grazing crop?

Stands are best maintained when grazed 2 - 3 times per season. Controlled continuous grazing that never completely removes all the trefoil leaves from the plants is a better management practice than complete defoliation followed by a rest period. Allow Trefoil to establish before heavy grazing as seedling vigor is poor. Do not graze closer than 3 - 4 inches. Top-dress regularly with phosphorus and potassium – usually at 30 lbs / acre annually. Producers can delay grazing until mid-summer/late fall. Remove livestock by September 1st and allow 5-6 weeks growth before grazing the stockpiled forage. This will allow carbohydrate storage for winter survival and spring growth. Extensive grazing of stockpiled forage may reduce stands over time.

Allow the trefoil to flower and set seed every 3rd year or so to maintain an adequate stand through reseeding. A good stand of trefoil produces 20% more growth after July 1 than most dry land grass-legume mixtures. Trefoil mixes well with forage bunchgrasses in a pasture. Grasses also aid in keeping the growth upright & preventing lodging.

Farmer Story: Cresco, IA

“We seed oats early in the spring. Before the oats head out, we put sheep on it and graze it down. Then we take the sheep off and put trefoil on with a liquid manure spreader. This adds potash, phosphorous, and potassium.....the phosphorous is important. Then we graze it till the following year.”

As a haying crop?

Birdsfoot trefoil should be seeded in combination with grasses such as timothy to ease drying and reduce weed competition. Hay harvests should not exceed three cuts per season and should be cut at early to mid-flowering. Generally, only one cutting of hay is obtained per season. Don't harvest for hay after September 1st to allow for winter survival. Leave a 3 – 4 inch stubble to allow for regrowth. Mixtures will not produce as much tonnage per acre as alfalfa or red clover on fertile well-drained soil but will produce high quality hay on poorer ground. Harvesting for hay will generally reduce stand life compared to grazing. Lodging can potentially make harvest & drying difficult. Forage bunchgrasses such as timothy & orchardgrass are better choices for grass companions than fescues or bromegrasses.

Websites & Resources

Penn State Extension: Birdsfoot Trefoil

extension.psu.edu/pubs/uc087

University of Missouri Extension: Birdsfoot Trefoil

<http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G4640>

Montana State University: Birdsfoot Trefoil

<http://animalrangeextension.montana.edu/articles/forage/Species/Legumes/Birdsfoottrefoil.htm>

Oregon State Forage Fact Sheet: Birdsfoot Trefoil

http://forages.oregonstate.edu/php/fact_sheet_print_legume.php?SpecID=12&use=Forage

Birdsfoot Trefoil for Pasture: Iowa State University

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM855.pdf>

SDSU: Forage Potential of Birdsfoot Trefoil

pubstorage.sdstate.edu/AgBio_Publications/articles/ExEx8062.pdf

UW: Birdsfoot Trefoil for Grazing & Harvested Forage

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/forage/pubs/birdsfoot.pdf>

Cutting Management of Alfalfa, Red Clover & Birdsfoot Trefoil

extension.psu.edu/pubs/uc044

Birdsfoot Trefoil Production & Utilization in Indiana

<http://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/.../birdsfoot-trefoil-production-and.pdf>

Albert Lea Seed House Product Information Guide

The information presented here is based on the best agronomic information we could cull from University Publications and other sources (usually identified). The cultural and agronomic information is relevant only to farming in the upper mid-west. This information is not infallible and is not a substitute for experience and/or education.

We **do not guarantee** farming results based on this information.