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Broomsedge Bluestem – Why it Thrives

One of the forages that responded well to growing conditions last fall was broomsedge bluestem. You know the one: orange to bronze-colored native-looking grass, typically about two feet tall? In places where it has gotten a start, the end of the 2020 growing season gave it an opportunity to gain an even better foothold – and that's *not* a good thing.

How does it 'take over' so successfully? In our cool-season forage systems, there are multiple reasons.

It's a warm-season grass. When cool-season grasses slow growth in the heat of summer, broomsedge continues to thrive. If the cool-season forages are further slowed in their recovery by drought/overgrazing/etc, broomsedge can expand even further.

It likes low fertility. If soil tests are an indicator, many stands are low in phosphorous. Broomsedge likes that – brome/fescue do not – and it thrives in that environment?

Allelopathic chemicals in broomsedge play a role as well. Not only do they inhibit the growth of other plants, but they can affect nitrogen-fixing bacteria as well. That means clovers may have difficulty getting established, and plants, in general, might struggle to compete.

Cattle don't like it. They might consume it to a degree early on when it's young and tender, but it is a low quality forage that tends to be unpalatable as a general rule.

Control is often most successful by following a multi-year/multi-faceted effort. Next week, I'll share more about management ideas to help combat broomsedge.

Using Old Garden Seed

Tis the time of the year when a few nice days will get us thinking about gardening. It is time to, at the very least, start the planning process.

One of the things you can do now, even as days are short and temperatures cool, is take inventory of leftover seed. Has it been kept in a good location – cool, dark, dry? If so, most seeds will remain viable for three years or so. There are exceptions (carrot family seeds are typically shorter-lived...), but the correctly stored seed may still be good – saving you from purchasing more this year.

If you want to check saved seed to see if it's still good, consider a relatively simple method that requires only a damp paper towel, plastic bag, and a little bit of time.

Moisten a paper towel with warm water and place ten seeds on it. Cover with a second moistened paper towel and roll them up. Place the rolled-up seeds/towels in a plastic bag with enough holes to allow for air exchange, but not so many that it will dry out quickly.

Place the bag in a warm location. The top of the refrigerator works well. Add water to the towels if they start to dry, then check for germination after one week. If seed has sprouted, count it as such and remove it. Do so again after week two. If eight of the ten seeds have germinated, you have an eighty percent germination rate. Now, you can start to determine if you need a new seed or not.

Clear as mud? Check out this video to see how to build your 'germination kit' on our Meadowlark Extension District Facebook page: <https://fb.watch/2UhZ28aPUe/>.