

A lot of us tend to think that spring is the best time to plant new pasture grass. However, depending on location and climate, it may not be. For many of you who have questions about when to plant your pasture grass, the best answer is “it depends.” Let’s get into the details so we can better understand that answer.

In all reality, it all comes down to your pasture environment. Is your pasture irrigated? What kind of soils are in your pasture? Do you fertilize? Is your pasture in a rangeland setting? Before we can get anywhere in determining when to plant it is important that you know and understand your own pasture.

In an irrigated setting, spring is often the optimum season to establish pasture grasses. The spring’s lower temperatures, high humidity and excellent soil moisture make for excellent pasture grass germinating conditions. But an extra abundance in soil moisture can cause delayed growth and seedling emergence until the hotter drier time of the year, when frequent irrigations will be required.

Fall plantings are the other option for irrigated pasture grasses. In the Intermountain West, the most successful time to plant is from late August to mid-September. In Cache Valley, we have good success planting until the end of September. The cool temperatures, increasing humidity and decreasing wind (except for this week) help create a great opportunity for plant establishment.

Plants should be about 2-3 inches in height before the first frost. Plants that do not reach this height are at a higher risk for winterkill because of poorly

developed root systems. Most small grasses will require six weeks of growth prior to cold weather to ensure a developed root system.

For those of you who have dryland (no irrigation) or rangeland pastures, dormant seedings are recommended. Dormant seedings are made in the late fall to delay germination until the following spring. Dormant seedings allow for young seedlings to take advantage of cooler temperatures and moisture that comes from winter snowfall. Success has been found in planting as late as December, as long as the ground is not frozen. Seeding in early fall on dryland or rangeland pastures can be a little risky since germination does not occur soon enough to allow for proper root development before winter.

If any of you are considering planting new pasture and have the irrigation available, I would encourage you to look into the option of doing a fall planting. Another benefit to fall planting that is not listed above is the lack of weed pressure. In late May, I planted some pasture plots in Lewiston and had the fight of my life with summer annual weeds such as pigweed, lamb's quarter, etc. After a lot of work, I was finally able to get the noxious weeds under control. The nice part about planting pasture in the fall is that you will not have to deal with the warm season annual weeds. You may still deal with weeds such as dyer's woad — however, that can be easier to control and manage than a red-root pigweed invasion.