UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

SS-AGR-84
doi.org/10.32473/EDIS-aa266-2023

2026 Cool-Season Forage Variety Recommendations for Florida[1]

M. Wallau, Maria E. Mailhos, Cheryl Mackowiak, E. Rios, José Dubeux, and M. A. Babar[2]

Vicia villosa

View Assessment

North, Central, South

High Invasion Risk

Predicted to be invasive and not recommended by IFAS. Will be reassessed every 10 years. In particular cases, this species may be considered for use under specific management practices that have been approved by the IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group.

Introduction

Perennial warm-season pasture grasses used in Florida become dormant in late fall and winter because of short days, cooler temperatures, and frosts. Many livestock producers may choose to establish cool-season annual pasture species to supplement their forage production. These plants are usually higher in total digestible nutrients (TDN) and crude protein (CP) than summer perennial grasses, translating into greater animal performance (Dubeux et al. 2016). Planting and growing these forage crops can involve considerable expense and are somewhat risky because rainfall is often unpredictable during the fall establishment period. The species and varieties for potential use vary in the distribution of production during the cooler months and in the type of soils where they are best adapted.

Many cool-season forages are also grown as silage crops and/or cover crops. Cool-season legumes such as vetch and lupine can produce a significant amount of biomass and fix 40 lb N/A to 80 lb N/A. Similar productivity and disease resistance should be considered when planting those species as silage or cover crops. For those uses, delaying planting is sometimes recommended to avoid the need for irrigation early in the fall. However, that decision depends on intended use. If multiple silage cuttings are desired, planting may occur at the same time as normally recommended planting dates for grazing; however, harvesting must occur when plants are still in the vegetative stage to avoid potential freeze damage or winter kill of the stand. In some years, early planting for silage or cover cropping has made stands susceptible to diseases, insect pests, freeze damage, and lodging.

Many producers cut back on seeding rates and use "brown bag" seeds when planting cover crops, which frequently results in weak or thin stand establishment and lower productivity. A fast soil cover is desirable for weed management (competition) and erosion control. The use of **certified seeds is always recommended** to guarantee proper seed quality and purity, and to enhance good pasture establishment. When planting legumes, seed can be purchased already inoculated with rhizobia (specific bacterial strains for nitrogen fixation). However, fresh rhizobium inoculation applied prior to planting helps to ensure viability of inoculum. There are specific rhizobium strain inoculants for some groups of legumes. More information can be found in Ask IFAS publication SS-AGR-154, "Inoculation of Agronomic and Forage Crop Legumes" (https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-aa126-2002).

This publication provides the most up-to-date information on adapted cool-season forage varieties for our growing season. The recommendation of varieties is based on multi-location, multi-year cultivar evaluation experiments that may include trials in Florida (https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/forage/official-variety-trials/), Georgia (https://swvt.uga.edu/content/dam/caes-subsite/statewide-variety-testing/docs/performance-trials/2026/winter-crop-report-2026.pdf), Alabama (https://aaes.auburn.edu/blog/2026/01/08/performance-of-winter-forages-in-alabama-2025-2026/), and other

states. Table 1 includes information about planting dates, seeding rates, and other considerations. Other resources that provide more in-depth discussion of each of the species or group of species are available at Ask IFAS. For a list of publications, access our "Technical Information" section of the UF/IFAS Forage Team website (https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/forage/technical-information/). If you have questions about a particular variety, contact your local UF/IFAS Extension agent for additional information (https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/).

Recommended Cultivars (Varieties)

Alfalfa

Alfalfa is usually grown as a winter short-term perennial (less than 2 years) in Florida and is typically used for haylage, green chopping, or hay. This species is not widely cultivated in the state; it is normally restricted to the Panhandle and drier (higher) areas in north Florida. It requires good management practices for establishment and maintenance as well as high fertility levels, and it is not tolerant to flooding or soils with high water tables. Soil pH of 6.5 or greater is needed for alfalfa production. However, the cost of producing alfalfa haylage and silage has decreased in recent years, and this has made it a viable and cost-effective option as a high-quality, conserved legume forage. Some new cultivars have been developed to tolerate a certain amount of grazing, but they are not as grazing tolerant as other legume species, such as most of the clovers. When planted in the fall, it is expected to have a first hay cut around early spring, then monthly afterwards. However, subsequent cuts might be challenging given Florida's humid conditions and competition with weeds.

Recommended Varieties

Alfagraze 600RR (Roundup Ready) and Bulldog 805 have traditionally performed better in our region, but trials at UGA-Tifton are evaluating new RR and conventional varieties.

Clover, Arrowleaf

Arrowleaf clover is an annual species, similar to crimson clover in soil adaptation, management, and fertility requirements. It is mainly grown on heavier soils in northwestern Florida. Arrowleaf clover grows later in the spring than crimson clover.

Recommended Varieties

Blackhawk and Apache (for north and central Florida). Yuchi is not recommended because it is an older variety and is more susceptible to disease. Blackhawk and Apache have improved virus resistance compared to Yuchi.

Clover, Ball

Ball clover grows on a wide range of soil types, including poorly drained soils. Although it is well adapted, it is not considered to be a highly productive forage in Florida.

Recommended Varieties

Don and Grazer's Select.

Clover, Berseem

Berseem clover has low bloat potential and is well adapted to many soil types in Florida, including more alkaline and wet soils. Care should be given to the management of berseem clover when grazed. It is advisable to graze at about 10 inches and leave a stubble height of 3–4 inches.

Recommended Varieties

Bigbee and Frosty.

Clover, Crimson

This clover is a reseeding annual adapted to fertile, well-drained soils. It has a relatively short grazing season. Crimson clover may be grown in combination with ryegrass or a small grain crop.

Recommended Varieties

Dixie, AU-Robin, and AU-Sunrise. Both AU varieties are earlier than the common Dixie.

Clover, Red

Red clover behaves as a winter annual under Florida conditions and usually does not reseed itself. It does not tolerate poorly drained soils. Red clover provides long-season forage production in north Florida, and we recommend non-dormant types for early forage production.

Recommended Varieties

Barduro (mid-dormant, released by UF/IFAS), Red Ace, and Q Medium (recent release by UF/IFAS and with limited seed availability).

Barduro and Q are mid-dormant types. Q has natural (i.e., non-GMO) tolerance to 2,4-D herbicide. Bulldog Red is also marketed in the southeastern United States, but data are limited on its performance in Florida.

Clover, White

White clover is usually a winter perennial but may function as an annual, depending on moisture conditions. It is adapted to moist soils throughout Florida and is moderately tolerant to acidity. Production and persistence of white clover can be limited by nematodes and other pests.

Recommended Varieties

Louisiana S-1, Ocoee (released by UF/IFAS, nematode-tolerant), Osceola (released by UF/IFAS), Regal Ladino, and Regalgraze. Durana is also well adapted, has a prostrate growth habit and persists well under grazing, has lower initial forage yields and has a very aggressive growth habit.

Fescue, Tall

In general, fescue is not recommended for Florida. It does not persist as a perennial, and small grains and ryegrass are more productive as cool-season annuals. A few producers have had limited success with Ga-5 when planted on low, wet clay soils in northwestern Florida.

Recommended Varieties

None.

Lupine

Lupine is an annual plant adapted to well-drained soils in northern and western Florida. It is an excellent cover crop. Seed supply has been low in recent years, and forage production has been limited by diseases and insects. Only sweet lupine varieties are suitable for forage.

Recommended Varieties

Tifblue. Frost and Tifwhite are also recommended; however, commercial seed production and availability of these lupine varieties have been limited.

Medic

Medics are small-seeded legumes that grow on a wide range of soil types. Although they are well adapted, they are not considered to be highly productive forages in Florida.

Recommended Varieties

Armadillo burr and Devine little burr.

Oat

Oat is a very productive and high-quality cool-season grass, but it may be injured under hard freezing conditions depending on growth stage and is not well-adapted to wet soil. Oat may be planted and grazed earlier than rye (except for FL 405 rye), although there is a large variation in maturity between the different cultivars. We have observed an increase in crown rust on Legend 567 and Horizon 720 oats, two of our most popular and earliest varieties of oat that were previously listed as resistant. We still recommend using those, especially Legend 567 because of its early maturity, but we advise scouting and potentially using fungicides to prevent losses in production and quality when harvesting for silage. In grazing systems, crown rust resistance is less critical because rust inoculum is reduced by grazing. Other commercially available oat varieties are often very productive, although susceptible to crown rust. Early planting of susceptible varieties is not recommended. Few fungicides are labeled for use in grazing systems, and many have hay use limitations. Oat as a cover crop is underutilized but can be a great alternative to rye, and can be used for hay, silage, and grazing if needed. Horizon 306 and RAM FLLA11019 are excellent forage types that exhibit winter hardiness and good grain production but are late-producing and susceptible to prevalent crown rust strains. Susceptible oat plantings may need to be scouted for rust and treated with legal fungicides, particularly if grown for silage or grain. Barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) is an aphid-transmitted virus that may injure some varieties, especially Coker 227. Improved varieties have better field resistance to BYDV, but all can show some level of incidence of the disease. Typically, early planted oat varieties grown for grazing are not sprayed with insecticides for aphid control. Grazing reduces populations of aphids but may not prevent early infection of BYDV in early planted situations where warm fall weather prevails.

Recommended Varieties

Juggernaut, Horizon 306 (late variety), Horizon 578, Horizon 720 (early variety), Legend 567 (early), RAM FLLA11019 (early), and TriCal Cadillac (early). Gladiator and Maximus are late season forage producers.

Note: All oat varieties listed above have shown moderate to high incidence of crown rust. Rust races can change, and previously resistant cultivars, such as Horizon 720 and Legend 567, can show symptoms of disease. Rust incidence is also related to management (planting date, fertility management, etc.). Horizon 306 is considered a late type and more cold-tolerant but is still less productive other options.

Peas, Austrian Winter (Common)

This annual legume is best suited to well-drained soils with high clay content.

Recommended Varieties

Icicle and Keystone. Austrian (common) has been recommended in the past but has lower biomass production than Icicle and Keystone.

Rye

Rye is the small grain most widely used for winter grazing. Rye is more cold-tolerant than oat and generally produces more forage than either oat or wheat. If rye is planted very early in the season, there may be a decreased stand caused by various seedling diseases. Normally, rye developed from northwestern states produces little forage in late fall or early winter and tends to be severely damaged by leaf rust. Therefore, only plant varieties recommended for the southeastern United States. FL 405 (similar to the older FL 401 variety) is one of the earliest and most productive cool-season varieties, but it is generally used more as an early planted forage used in mixtures with other winter forages, or for cover cropping rather than for grazing because of the low leaf-to-stem ratio. It matures very fast and is frequently rejected by cattle afterwards.

Recommended Varieties

FL 405 (for early grazing, cover cropping, or use in blends), Kelly Grazer III (FL 104, full-season forage variety), and Wrens Abruzzi (late, full season, low level of Hessian fly susceptibility). FL 406 will be on the market this fall with limited seed availability (for early-midseason grazing, cover cropping, or use in blends). Late-forage season producers developed in Oklahoma, such as Bates RS4, Elbon, Oklon, Maton, and Maton II have performed well in the past, but have not been evaluated in recent trials.

Ryegrass

Ryegrass is a valuable mid- to late-winter and spring grazing crop for use on flatwoods soils or the heavier sandy loam soils in northwest Florida. Ryegrass may be seeded alone or with a small grain on a prepared seedbed or overseeded onto permanent grass pastures. Seeding ryegrass with a small grain crop lengthens the grazing season.

Early Recommended Varieties

Big Boss, Diamond T, Earlyploid, Flying A, Fria, Frostproof, Grits, Rapido, Ranahan*, Tetrastar, and Winterhawk.

Late Recommended Varieties

Attain, Double Diamond, Earlyploid, Jackson*, Marshall*, Nelson, Prine, TAMTBO, and Triangle T.

Season-Long Recommended Varieties

Attain, Big Boss, Diamond T, Double Diamond, Earlyploid, Earlyboss, Fria, Frostproof, Grits, Nelson, Prine, Sweet T (new tetraploid, late season forage), TAMTBO, and Triangle T.

Note: These varieties were selected based on their recent three-year, multi-location performance. Other ryegrass varieties have also performed well in regional trials but have not been recently tested. New varieties available on the commercial market may be suitable but have not been adequately evaluated in Florida, or seed is unavailable.

*Susceptible to rust and/or gray leaf spot.

Rapido is a recent variety that has very early flowering and could be considered for overseeding on bahiagrass or bermudagrass pastures (with early termination), although it has lower productivity compared to many of the other recommended varieties.

Sweetclover

Sweetclover grows on slightly drier soils than white clover. It will not tolerate flooding. Sweetclover has an earlier but shorter grazing season than white clover. Sweetclover should be reseeded each year.

Recommended Varieties

None at present.

Triticale

Triticale is a cross between wheat and rye. It is well adapted to the southern United States and peninsular Florida. Triticale has the forage quality of wheat and the excellent disease resistance of rye. Triticale does not respond well to close grazing and therefore is recommended for haylage or silage if grown alone. If used for grazing, consider blending with ryegrass to promote a longer growing season. Use recommended varieties because there are triticale varieties sold in the state that are not adapted to Florida growing conditions and will not perform well. TriCal 342 is an early variety, while Surge is late.

Recommended Varieties

TriCal 342 and TriCal 1143* are early varieties. TriCal Surge and Hybrid Surge may be considered for late-season forage production. Sprinter is a new variety similar

to TriCal 1143. and TriCal 342. TriCal 344 has also performed well in forage trials in the southeastern US

*Awnless variety recommended for wildlife food plots. Other triticale varieties on the commercial market may perform well, however have some level of susceptibility to prevalent strains of Hessian fly and an insecticide application at planting may be recommended.

Vetch (*Vicia sativa*)

Vetch grows best on well-drained, fertile, loamy soils. Although it is well adapted, it is not considered to be highly productive in Florida.

Recommended Varieties

Cahaba White and common.

Notes: Commercial seed production of most vetch varieties is limited. It may be necessary to special order seed. Hairy vetches (*Vicia villosa*) such as AU Merit and Patagonia perform well in our environment but are not recommended given their invasive potential.

Wheat

Wheat is less susceptible to freeze injury than oat, but its forage productivity is generally lower than that of all other small grains in Florida. The main advantage of wheat is the possibility of dual-purpose use (i.e., grazing and grain), but grain production might be reduced when grazed, and grain quality is generally lower for wheat grown in Florida. Wheat should not be planted for grazing before October 15. Hessian fly-resistant wheat varieties are recommended, especially if wheat is grown for grazing, silage, as a cover crop, or for hay production; otherwise insecticide treatments may be necessary. For varieties with moderate tolerance to Hessian fly, consider insecticide management on seed (neonicotinoid) and labeled pesticides during the growing season.

Recommended Varieties

AGS 2024 (moderate tolerance to Hessian fly), AGS 4023, AGS 4043 (tolerant to Hessian fly), Johnson (tolerant to Hessian fly), and 130-06 (may require a seed treatment for Hessian fly at planting).

Important Considerations

- Planting cool-season forages on a clean-tilled seedbed results in earlier and higher total forage production compared to overseeding on grass sod. If overseeding on bahiagrass, the sod should be disked to 30% disturbance. For overseeding on bermudagrass, a pasture drill or no-till drill can be used alone. Excess warm-season forage should always be removed as hay or by grazing before planting the cool-season forage.
- Unless irrigated, success of winter pastures depends on adequate rainfall. This is especially true when overseeding.
- In central and south peninsular Florida, sod seeding (overseeding) of cool-season annuals into an established grass sod often fails because of insufficient soil moisture and warm-season grass competition. Sod seeding is generally not recommended unless irrigation is available, or rainfall is adequate. An application of herbicide to induce dormancy is recommended. Consult your local UF/IFAS Extension agent for recommendations.
- Look for opportunities to plant on a clean-till seedbed (e.g., after vegetables or a row crop, after lifting sod, or in a pasture renovation program where the sod is plowed or turned under).
- In south-central Florida, small grains and ryegrass have been successfully grown on flatwoods in a pasture renovation program. Moisture is the most limiting factor, given the recommended timing of planting is generally dry. If soil moisture is available, same-day disking (turning the sod) and planting can be done. In the event that soil moisture is limited, then it may be best to turn the sod, disk in early to mid-October, and wait for adequate rainfall (generally in December) before planting.
- Winter legumes are more dependable on the heavier clay soils of northwestern Florida or on sandy soils underlain by a clay layer compared to deep upland sands or sandy flatwoods. However, white clover and ryegrass overseeded can also be grown successfully on flatwoods soils in northeast Florida and south-central Florida where the soil remains moist throughout the growing season.
- Remember to add the correct inoculant (nitrogen-fixing bacteria) to the legume seed before planting. Coated (already pre-inoculated) seed is sometimes available but seed coatings with bacteria have a limited shelf life and may be costly compared to purchasing raw seed and inoculant separately and mixing just prior to planting. Be aware of proper storage for pre-inoculated seeds or inoculants; excess heat can kill bacteria.

Reference

Dubeux, J. C. B., N. DiLorenzo, A. Blount, C. Mackowiak, E. R. S. Santos, H. M. S. Silva, M. Ruiz-Moreno, and T.

Schulmeister. 2016. "Animal Performance and Pasture Characteristics on Cool-Season Annual Grass Mixtures in North Florida." *Crop Sci.* 56(5): 2841–2852. https://doi.org/10.2135/cropsci2016.03.0141

Table 1. Planting dates, seeding rates, planting depths, and grazing parameters for certain cool-season forage crops.

Seed-Propagated Crops	Planting Dates[1]	Seeding Rates in pure live seeds (lb/A broadcast)[2]	Seeding Depth (in)	Grazing Height (in)		Rest Period (days)
				Begin	End	
Alfalfa	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	12–16	1/4–1/2	10–16	3–4	Hay: 35–40 Grazing: 15–30
Clover, Arrowleaf	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	7–10	0–1/2	8–10	3–5	10–20
Clover, Ball	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	2–3	0–1/4	6–8	1–3	7–15
Clover, Berseem	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	12–16	1/4–1/2	8–10	3–5	10–20
Clover, Crimson	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	16–20	1/4–1/2	8–10	3–5	10–20
Clover, Red	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	8–12	1/4–1/2	8–10	3–5	10–20
Clover, Subterranean	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	12–16	1/4–1/2	6–8	1–3	7–15
Clover, White	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	2–3	0–1/4	6–8	1–3	7–15
Fescue, Tall	Nov. 1–Dec. 15	16–20	1/4–1/2	4–8	2–3	15–30
Medic	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	10–15 rates differ	0–1/4	6–8	1–3	7–15
Oats for forage	Sept. 15–Nov. 15	70–100	1–2	8–12	3–5	7–15
Pea, Austrian Winter	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	32–48	1/2–1	Poor grazing tolerance. Better suited as a hay or silage crop.		
Rye for forage	Oct. 15–Nov. 15	90–120	1–2	8–12	3–4	7–15
Ryegrass, Italian (annual)	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	16–24	0–1/2	6–12	3–4	7–15
Sweetclover	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	10–12	1/4–1/2	8–10	3–5	10–20
Turnips	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	4–5	1/4–1/2	6–8	2–3	varies
Vetch, Common	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	32–40	1–2	6–8	3–4	varies
Vetch, Hairy	Oct. 1–Nov. 15	16–24	1–2	6–8	3–4	varies
Wheat for forage	Oct. 15–Nov. 15	90–120	1–2	8–12	3–5	7–15
Triticale for silage or use in blends	Oct. 15–Nov. 15	90–120	1–2	Harvest for silage at milk or soft dough stage of maturity.		

Seed-Propagated Crops	Planting Dates[1]	Seeding Rates in pure live seeds (lb/A broadcast)[2]	Seeding Depth (in)	Grazing Height (in)	Rest Period (days)
[1]Planting date range: In general, cool-season forage crops in northern Florida can be planted in the early part of the planting date range, and in southern Florida, in the latter part of the planting date range. [2]Always check seed quality. **All seeding rates are recommended based on pure live seeds.**					

Table 2. List of species and recommended cool-season forage varieties for Florida, based on three-year, multi-location trials in partnership with the University of Georgia and Auburn University.

Species	Recommended Varieties for Florida[1]	Observation[2]
Alfalfa	Alfagraze 600RR, Bulldog 805	
Arrowleaf Clover	Blackhawk, Apache	
Ball Clover	Don, Grazer's Select	
Berseem Clover	Bigbee, Frosty	
Crimson Clover	Dixie, AU-Robin, AU-Sunrise	
Red Clover	Barduro, Red Ace, Q Medium	
White Clover	Louisiana S-1, Ocoee, Osceola, Regal Ladino, Regalgraze	
Lupine	Tifblue, Frost, and Tifwhite	
Medic	Armadillo burr and Devine little burr	
Oat	Juggernaut, Horizon 306†, Horizon 578, Horizon 720, Legend 567, Forage Oat, RAM FLLA11019, TriCal Cadillac, Gladiator†, and Maximus†	†Late varieties. All varieties are susceptible to crown rust.
Rye	FL 405, Kelly Grazer III*, and Wrens Abruzzi*	*Late varieties.
Ryegrass (early-season)	Big Boss, Diamond T, Earlyploid, Flying A, Fria, Frostproof, Grits, Rapido, Ranahan*, Tetrastar, and Winterhawk	
Ryegrass (late-season)	Attain, Double Diamond, Earlyploid, Jackson*, Marshall*, Nelson, Prine, TAMTBO, and Triangle T	*Susceptible to rust and/or gray leaf spot.
Ryegrass (long-season)	Attain, Big Boss, Diamond T, Double Diamond, Earlyploid, Earlyboss, Fria, Frostproof, Grits, Nelson, Prine, Sweet T, TAMTBO, and Triangle T	*Susceptible to rust and/or gray leaf spot.
Triticale	TriCal 342, Trical 1143, Surge (late variety), and Sprinter	
Vetch	Cahaba White and common	
Wheat	AGS 2024*, AGS 4023, AGS 4043*, Johnson and 130-06	*Moderate tolerance to Hessian flies. Consider insecticide management for all other varieties.
[1]Varieties selected based on their recent three-year, multi-location performance. Other varieties that have not been tested may perform well in Florida. [2]See text for more information.		

[1] This document is SS-AGR-84, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy. Original publication date September 2003. Revised June 2010, October 2011, December 2012, September 2013, September 2014, September 2017, September 2018, August 2019, September 2020, August 2021, September 2022, August 2023, August 2024, July 2025, and August 2026. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication.

[2] M. Wallau, associate program leader for agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension, and forage Extension specialist and associate professor, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy; Maria E. Mailhos, forage team, Department of Agronomy; Cheryl Mackowiak, associate professor and Extension specialist, Department of Soil, Water, and Ecosystem Sciences, UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center; José Dubeux, professor of forage management, Department of Agronomy, UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center; M. A. Babar, professor, plant breeding and molecular genetics, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy; E. Rios, associate professor of forage breeding and genetics, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that operate in compliance with applicable federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, Dean for UF/IFAS Extension.