

RED CLOVER

Peavine Clover, Cowgrass

Trifolium pratense

Fabaceae, Leguminosae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Red Clover is a temperate legume native to moist meadows, cool, open forests and field borders of central Europe, India and south of the Russia Arctic. It is now widely cultivated around the world.

Uses

Red Clover is one of the best legumes grown for use as pasture, hay and silage for livestock and poultry. It does not have as high a percentage of protein as alfalfa but it is higher in net energy value. It is commonly grown along with a grass crop such as ryegrass or timothy as the clover-grass yields are better than clover alone. In temperate climates, Red Clover will produce more than one crop but the late-flowering, single-cut varieties are more suited to higher elevations and latitudes where the growing season is short.

Cultivation

Depending upon the location, Red Clover can be grown as an annual, biennial or short-lived perennial. It grows well if spring-seeded with a small grain or grass such as ryegrass or timothy, which keep down the weeds until Red Clover can successfully compete. To avoid competition for nutrients, moisture and light, the grass may be grazed or cut before Red Clover stems begin rapid growth. Most soils that will produce crops of maize will produce Red Clover. It will tolerate a wide range of rainfall, temperature and pH.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Red Clover should be cut for hay or silage 15 days after the first blooms. The best seed harvests are obtained in areas where honeybees and bumblebees are abundant for pollination. Wait until the second cutting to harvest seed from the early flowering varieties, but late flowering varieties can only be assured of one crop for harvest of seeds. When the greatest number of seed heads are brown, usually 25-30 days after full bloom, cut the crop and let it cure in small windrows in the field where seeds will continue to dry. Thresh the grain from the stems and leaves and dry them thoroughly with warm air or on ventilated racks. The dark, hard seeds will store for several months at 12% moisture or lower.

Pests and Diseases

A soil-borne disease, clover rot and a seed borne eelworm, along with a persistent weed, dodder, will attack Red Clover. The most promising control seems to be development of resistant varieties.

Cooking and Nutrition

Red Clover is said to have many medicinal uses for humans from curing athlete's foot to curing cancer, but its use as livestock feed far outweighs all other uses. As green forage, Red Clover contains an average of 18.2% protein; 14.9% as hay. Cattle that graze too heavily on Red Clover alone, develop bloating and hormonal disorders. These conditions can be averted if Red Clover is sown with a grass crop.

References

Heuzé V., Tran G., Giger-Reverdin S., Lebas F., 2015. *Red clover (Trifolium pratense)*. Feedipedia, a programme by INRA, CIRAD, AFZ and FAO. <https://www.feedipedia.org/node/246> Last updated on October 26, 2015, 14:38