

## Spring Pasture Maintenance

Step by Step to Improved Grazing Land,  
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This is a particularly beautiful Spring after the hard freezes we had in Florida this year. It's time to get out and scout your pastures to develop a game plan for improving your forage.

**Get Out and Scout.** Take a walk or ride around your farm with a critical eye on the ground. Weeds are emerging now, so in particular, be on the look out for poisonous plants. Click here for a detailed article about how to identify and deal with dangerous pasture plants. Develop a game plan for weed control using cultural, mechanical, biological and as a last resort, chemical practices. The UF/IFAS\* website has an outstanding archive of extensive articles on weed control in pastures. Click here to begin.

**Consider Overseeding.** Look for signs of overgrazing or poor grass coverage. Bahia and other pasture grasses do thin out over time, so sowing and raking in 10-25 pounds of seed per acre is a great idea if you can afford it. Horses pull up tender shoots by the roots, so if you can keep them off overseeded pasture until the new grass is established, so much the better. It helps to change your grazing patterns if you can, to give beat up areas a chance to rest. Click here for great information on how to seed and reseed and a place to buy Bahia and other pasture grasses.

**Rake the Manure Piles.** Hook up a rake to your tractor and drag the pasture. (A gate-sized length of chain link fence works well, too. You may have to weigh it down with an old tire or cinder block.) Giving the ground a good scrub wakes it up and gets it ready to accept seed and nutrients. The composted manure is a natural fertilizer.

**Get Your Soil Tested.** You need to know the soil's pH to determine what kind of fertilizer or amendment, if any, you need. For example, pastures like neutral-to-alkaline environments -- acid soil needs to be "sweetened" with lime in order to get good pasture grass. Almost every county has a free soil testing program, often offered by your state's university Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners. Click here for an excellent how-to on testing your soil and interpreting the results for the proper choice of fertilizer. Click here for the IFAS soil testing information sheets.

**Fertilize with Care.** First of all, fertilization is expensive and a pollutant -- nitrates are seeping into the groundwater at a horrifying rate. (For more on water quality, click here.) So, less is more when fertilizing pastures. Ideally, you should keep your horses off newly fertilized pasture until after a rain, although recommended broadcast rates are said to be non-toxic. So, if your pasture is in decline, a balanced fertilizer will help in the Spring and Fall. In the summer, you may want to add a spray or broadcast of iron to keep it green through the heat season. Most important thing is to read the label for the product's specific broadcast rate and other precautions.

**Amazing Resources.** According to the National Cooperative Extension's website, [www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org) is an interactive learning environment delivering the best, most researched knowledge from the smartest land-grant university minds across America. The information from the IFAS extensions is the basis for this article. The IFAS Solutions for Your Life website is particularly useful for relevant topics for everyone.