

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
(Formerly Soil Conservation Service)
Program Aid Number 1350

‘ROUNTREE’ BIG BLUESTEM AND ‘RUMSEY’ INDIANGRASS

‘Rountree’ big bluestem and ‘Rumsey’ indiagrass are components of the native tall grass prairie. They are used mainly for livestock forage in rangeland, pasture, and hayland. These grasses are found from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic seaboard.

Rountree big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and Rumsey indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) were selected as pasture forage plants because of their improved adaptation to the western Corn Belt’s climate and soils. Their rapid growth during mid to late summer provides high-quality forage for livestock grazing when high temperatures retard the growth of cool-season species.

DESCRIPTION

Rountree big bluestem and Rumsey indiagrass are tall, native, warm-season, perennial bunch grasses with short rhizomes. Both grasses were released by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Missouri State Agricultural Experiment Station February 24, 1983.

Rountree was selected for its increased forage production, seedling growth rate, and resistance to lodging over other released varieties. It was also desirable because of its resistance to leaf rust. It was collected from a native stand in west-central Iowa and has been planted in Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois.

For Rountree, the average date of seed maturity at Elsberry, Missouri, is September 9. Unused, it attains a height of four to six feet and has a very deep root system.

Rumsey was selected for increased forage production, seedling vigor, and resistance to lodging over other released varieties of indiagrass. It was collected from a native stand in south-central Illinois and has been planted throughout Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa.

Compared to other varieties of indiagrass, Rumsey matures late. The average date of seed maturity at Elsberry, Missouri, is October 5. Undisturbed, it attains a height of five to eight feet, has good stem strength, and mature unharvested stems will remain standing well into winter for increased protective cover for wildlife.

Wildlife biologists rate these native grasses as excellent nesting and rearing areas for wildlife. Undisturbed nesting and hatching are possible in pastures of these grasses, since grazing and haying operations are done after prime nesting season of most species. As bunch grasses, Rountree and Rumsey allow easy, open travel and host beneficial insect populations for newly established broods.

ADAPTATION

The area of adaptation has not been completely determined; however, these grasses have been shown to be adapted throughout Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. Although growth is best on deep, well-drained, fertile soils, they will grow well on acid to alkaline and excessively drained to somewhat poorly drained soils.

ESTABLISHMENT

Rountree and Rumsey have been established primarily with early summer plantings on clean, firm, weed-free seedbeds using drills, broadcast-packer seeders, and broadcast seedings mixed with fertilizer, and then rolling to cover the seed. Seeding should be 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep, preferably during late May through June.

Controlling weeds at seeding time is important because grass establishment and survival can be suppressed as a result of weed competition for moisture and sunlight. Weed control during establishment may be enhanced by surface-applied atrazine after seeding. Application should be made according to label recommendations where approved for use.

If clipping is used, clip above the seedlings and remove the excess growth to prevent smothering the seedlings. Do not clip after August 1 because the seedlings should be allowed to grow some before frost.

Special rangeland drills capable of seeding light, fluffy seed must be used to plant unprocessed seed. Seed may be processed by removing the appendages with a debearder. Debearded seed may be planted with a wide range of commonly used grass-seeding equipment.

MANAGEMENT

Established stands of Rountree and Rumsey are best managed by grazing only vigorous growth. Production will develop very slowly if grazing begins before good vigor develops. If these warm-season grasses are properly managed and maintained, they should not require replanting. Poor stands can be rejuvenated by using appropriate management practices, such as controlled grazing, applying herbicides and fertilizer, and prescribed burning at the beginning of spring growth.

Quality remains high while these plants are leafy and before seed head emergence. The average flowering date for Rountree at Elsberry, Missouri, is July 23, and August 25 for Rumsey. The best time to graze Rountree is between July 15 and September 1, and between August 1 and September 15 for Rumsey.

For best results, grazing should begin when grasses attain a height of 14 to 18 inches. A minimum height of eight to ten inches should be maintained. A fall height of 12 inches should be attained before frost.

AVAILABILITY

For more information on where to obtain Rountree big bluestem and Rumsey indiangrass, contact your local NRCS office. It is listed in your telephone directory under U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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