12-1-1960

Ladino Clover

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
Higher Crop Yields from Improved Varieties

Purdue University
Agricultural Extension Service
Lafayette, Indiana

Mimeo AY-78a
Rev. December 1959

LADINO CLOVER

Ladino clover is a valuable forage plant that was introduced from Italy about 1900. The plant and seed look the same as common white clover except the Ladino plant is larger. The fleshy stems lie flat on the ground and, with satisfactory moisture, root from the joints. A single plant under favorable conditions may occupy three or four square feet. The prostrate stems produce a dense, upright growth of leaves and flowers often a foot or more high. The leaf, much larger and borne on a much longer stem than common white or alsike clover, has some of the appearance of red clover but little, if any, hairiness. The root system is fibrous and rather shallow.

Ladino makes a dense succulent growth, which is more desirable for pasture and silage than for hay. The seed is small—700,000 seeds per pound. Plants reproduce both from seed and runners. Severe drought and heat conditions cause dormancy.

MANAGEMENT AND USES: Ladino grows well on all soil types, except extremely wet soils, like ponded Kokomo and overflow areas of Stendal, Atkins and Shoals, and extremely dry, loose, sandy soils, such as Plainfield, Coloma and Bloomfield. On sandstone soils, such as Zanesville, Wellston and Tilsit, Ladino may die out during prolonged droughts, but during years of abundant rainfall it comes back from seed in the soil. The same holds true for Frederick and Bedford limestone soils.

Ladino responds to lime. A pH of 5.8 or higher is necessary for best results. Fertilization with high phosphate and potash fertilizers, according to soil tests, helps keep the stand productive.

Ladino has outstanding value for pasture, especially for hogs. In mixtures with other legumes and grasses, it is a desirable pasture for cattle and sheep. It starts quickly in the spring, is very palatable, high in protein content and, unless continuously grazed closely, has remarkable ability to recover. It cannot be grazed as closely as common white clover and survive. Recovery is better if grazing is rotated. Rotation grazing is simplified when Ladino is seeded in orchardgrass, bromegrass and timothy strips or fields. These grasses mature in this order which helps in grazing or harvesting each mixture at the correct stage of growth. Certified seed should always be used as a guarantee of varietal purity since white clover seed is exactly like Ladino.

Bloat is a serious criticism of Ladino. Therefore, 1/4 pound or less seed per acre is the safest amount to sow with a grass for cattle and sheep. Sows and growing pigs thrive on straight stands of the very palatable, tender, high protein growth. Two pounds per acre are seeded for straight stands.
Ladino is an excellent legume to seed with tall fescue. Fescue uses the nitrogen from Ladino to make succulent growth. Observations point toward less bloat from this mixture. Ladino also improves orchardgrass for the same reason.

**SEED**: Ladino clover is a prolific seed producer, but practical difficulties of harvesting under Indiana moisture conditions, due to rapid recovery of the crop, reduce possibilities of saving seed, especially from the early summer growth. When 90 percent of the seed heads are brown, the crop is ready for harvest. Green leaves and brown heads usually occur at the same time, which makes it difficult to harvest a seed crop by direct combining. Ladino can be cut and cured in the swath, and the seed combined or threshed in much the same manner as red clover but presents a more serious shattering and new-growth problem. Care should be taken to avoid loss of the very small seed. The high moisture content of the crop also makes it desirable to dry the seed before storing. Fields planted with certified Ladino seed are eligible for certification by the Seed Certification Service of the Indiana Crop Improvement Association if they pass the field inspection and certification standards.