

Pasture Health: Bahagrass Pasture

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Bahagrass (*Paspalum notatum* Flugge), is adapted to climatic conditions throughout Florida and can be grown on upland well-drained sands as well as the moist, poorly-drained flatwoods soils of peninsular Florida. In Florida, bahagrass is used on more land area than any other single pasture species, covering an estimated 2.5 million acres. Most of this acreage is used for grazing with some hay, sod, and seed harvested from pastures.

Bahagrass is a warm-season grass that produces more grazing in the summer than winter. Due to the longer growing season, forage growth is more evenly distributed throughout the year in southern Florida (Orlando and south) than in northern Florida. In southern Florida, growth of bahagrass pastures slows in October, and many pastures have very little forage after mid-December until the grass starts growing again in early March. In northern Florida, bahagrass pastures are productive from April to November.

Bahagrass is popular with Florida farmers and ranchers because it: 1) tolerates a wider range of soil conditions than other improved grasses; 2) has the ability to produce moderate yields on soils of very low fertility; 3) is easily established from seed; 4) withstands close grazing; and 5) is relatively free from damaging insects (except for mole crickets) and diseases.

Bahagrass is an ideal general-use pasture grass. Once established it can withstand heavier grazing

pressure than the other pasture grasses in common use. Therefore, horses are less likely to destroy a stand of bahagrass when pastures are overstocked and grass production is inadequate to meet their needs. However, bahagrass is not bulletproof and can be damaged by overstocking.

Pensacola is the most widely grown cultivar. It was found growing in Pensacola, Florida in 1935 by UF/IFAS Escambia County Extension Agent, Ed Finlayson.

Pensacola has long, narrow leaves, taller seed stalks, and it flowers earlier than other cultivars. Like other bahagrasses, it has a fibrous root-system capable of growing to a depth of 7 feet or more. Pensacola has some cold tolerance, but top growth is killed by moderate frosts. In northern Florida more early-season and late-season production can be obtained from the Pensacola types than from other bahagrass cultivars.

Argentine is a selection that was introduced from Argentina in 1944. It has wider leaves, is not as cold tolerant as the Pensacola types, and does not make growth as early in the spring. It is popular in the sod trade because it puts up fewer seed heads later in the season than Pensacola.

Edsel W. Rowan, UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Agent (1955 – 1986) was instrumental getting both Pensacola and Argentine established in Marion County.

