Perennial Forages Common to the Mid-Atlantic Region
Identification, Adaptation, and Management
Contents

Introduction 3
Kentucky Bluegrass 4
Orchardgrass (Cocksfoot) 6
Perennial and Annual Ryegrass 8
Reed Canarygrass 10
Smooth Bromegrass 12
Tall Fescue 14
Timothy 16
Alfalfa 18
Birdsfoot Trefoil 20
Red Clover 22
White (Ladino) Clover 24
Forage crops are very important to agriculture and the environment of the Northeast region. Knowing how to identify the common forage species in the region, the conditions to which they are adapted, and their basic management limitations is important. Planting a forage species in an environment where it isn’t adapted (for example, timothy in shale or sandy soil) or subjecting a forage to improper harvest management (for example, cutting orchardgrass at a low stubble height) can spell doom for the forage. This booklet has all that information summarized into a few pages to help you identify the species and know its limitations.
Kentucky Bluegrass
Kentucky Bluegrass
*Poa pratense* L.

**Plant Identification**
- Leaves folded in the bud
- Boat-shaped leaf tips
- Valley or “railroad tracks” along each side of the midrib
- Short ligule

**Adaptation**
- Cold tolerant
- Heat and drought sensitive (“summer slump”)
- Tolerates pH 6

**Growth**
- Sod-forming grass, rhizomes
- Regrowth is vegetative

**Use and Management**
- Permanent pasture grass, not hay
- Can be closely grazed
- Associated with white clover in overgrazed pastures
- Slow germination and establishment

[Map of Kentucky Bluegrass adaptation]
Orchardgrass Smooth Bromegrass

6 | Orchardgrass (Cocksfoot)
Orchardgrass (a.k.a. Cocksfoot)  
*Dactylis glomerata* L.

**Seed Identification**
- Multiple florets, some sterile
- Rachilla is cylindrical with saucer at end

**Plant Identification**
- Flattened stem and sheaths (compressed)
- Light green color
- Panicle inflorescence
- Membranous ligule

**Adaptation**
- Shade tolerant
- Heat and drought tolerant (less than brome)
- Good winterhardiness

**Growth**
- Bunch-type growth (large clumps)
- Very competitive with legumes
- Regrowth is vegetative (no stems or seedheads after first harvest)

**Use and Management**
- Easy to establish, very competitive
- Pasture grass (4X harvest)
- Loses palatability quickly with maturity
- Don’t mow or graze too closely (stores carbohydrates in lower 4 inches of stem)