

provide greater nutrition, decrease weed growth, and ensure better distribution and uptake of nutrients.

Managing soil fertility by executing a pasture and nutrient management plan will also ensure the success of your pasture land. In addition to managing soil drainage, you can enhance the nutrient profile of your soil by adding certain inputs. This should only be done according to the recommendations of soil tests performed on a number of samples from your pasture(s). Depending on what minerals and nutrients your soil test indicates are deficient, you may apply any number of amendments. These applications may be in the form of lime (calcium and magnesium), fertilizer (nitrogen, phosphorous, and/or potassium), tested compost, manure, or other recommendations. Application quantities should be based on the recommendations of your soil test or a nutrient management professional. The goal of creating high-quality soil should be applying nutrients in amounts that bring soil fertility to a sustainable level, avoiding over-application.



## Resources

### NYS Horse Health Assurance Program

[www.agmkt.state.ny.us/NYSHHAP/horsehealth.html](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/NYSHHAP/horsehealth.html)

### NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

Agricultural Environmental Management Program

[www.agmkt.state.ny.us/soilwater/AEM/](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/soilwater/AEM/)

### Equine Science Center at Rutgers University

Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension (RCRE)

[www.esc.rutgers.edu/](http://www.esc.rutgers.edu/)



## Watershed Agricultural Council

[www.nycwatershed.org](http://www.nycwatershed.org)



### East of Hudson Program

1275 Hanover Street

Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

(914) 962-6355

### Agricultural Program

44 West Street

Walton, NY 13856

(607) 865-7090

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# PADDOCK MANAGEMENT FOR HORSES

If you are lucky enough to have sufficient land on your farm to allow your horse or other animals to routinely graze on grass, then you are engaging in pasture management. Well-managed pastures should be a resource for forage, exercise, rest, surface water filtration and visual appeal. All paddocks, whether intensively grazed or rarely used, must be managed.

## Getting to the Root of It:

### The First Steps of Managing Pasture

Soils are the key to pasture health. The first element of successful paddock management is understanding the nature of your soils, especially soil drainage. By understanding soil type and its ability to drain, you will be able to determine which grass species to select for planting based on their drainage tolerance. Always avoid grazing animals on either very wet ground or very dry ground.





Forage or grass species are crucial to determining the success of your pasture. In addition to the above drainage considerations, you should also think about your pasture objectives. Whether your paddocks are used for your animal's forage supply or just for occasional turnout for exercise will influence your seed mixture and management strategy. You should also consider the temperature range in which you need grass species to grow in, the survivability of seedlings, and its tolerance to grazing. For the mainte-



nance of grass cover on heavily used turnout areas in the Northeastern US, an optimal mix of forages for well-drained soils is 6 lbs/acre orchardgrass, 10 lbs/acre Kentucky bluegrass, and 1 lb/acre white clover seed. Orchardgrass can tolerate frequent grazing, is high-yielding, and establishes easily (RCRE Fact Sheet 103). Kentucky bluegrass is also tolerant of frequent grazing and traffic damage and the clover, a legume, will provide a protein and calcium source while also providing nitrogen for the pasture. For poorly-drained



soils, substitute 8 lbs/acre reed canarygrass for orchardgrass in the above mix. Seeding is best accomplished by incorporating the seed with soil, rather than surface broadcasting, during the late summer or very early spring.

#### **Keeping it Green: Maintaining Pasture and Soil**

Animals will receive the greatest nutritional benefit from grazing pasture when plants are in their vegetative stage before developing a seed head, but after they have established sufficient root growth. In the northeast using a cool season forage mix, this stage is usually when plants are between 8-10 inches high, not earlier. Animals should be removed from a pasture when sufficient grazing has occurred for example when grass has been eaten down to an average height of 3-4 inches. When grass has been eaten to this level, the pasture should ideally be mowed to create uniform height of about 4 inches and then rested to allow for re-growth, typically a minimum of 14 days in the spring and up to 30 or more in the summer. Allowing paddocks to rest while enabling animals to graze can be accomplished by subdividing larger pastures and rotating animals through the smaller, fenced parcels. Rotational grazing will prevent denuding of pastures,

