Grazing Native Grasses in Arkansas

Ecologically Adapted

Native grasses are well-adapted to Arkansas's soils and climate and were historically common across the state. Because of their ecological adaptation, native grasses naturally yield a high quality forage well-suited for grazing animals in a wide variety of soil types and weather conditions. Additionally, crude protein levels in native grasses encourage weight gain and make their digestibility and production potential an attractive alternative to introduced grass forages during the spring and growing season.

Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG)

Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG) in Arkansas are tall, perennial bunch-forming grasses that produce well during the growing season (May-September). These grasses tolerate a wide-range of growing conditions and reliably produce high-quality forage in drought years. A diverse mix of NWSG in a pasture extends the period of time that livestock can graze because each species has a slightly different growth habit throughout the growing season.

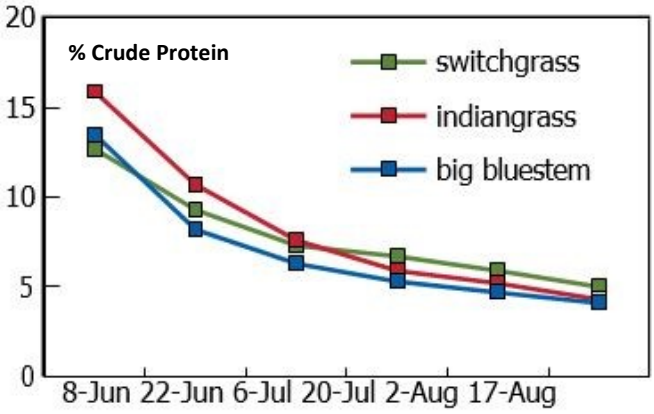
Native warm season grasses in Arkansas. Planting several species together will extend the grazing period.

NWSG	Palatability	Grazing Months
Big Bluestem	High	May-September.
Little Bluestem	High	May-September.
Indiangrass	High	May-September.
Eastern Gamagrass	Moderate	April-September.
Switchgrass	Moderate	April-September.
Sideoats Grama	Moderate	May-September.

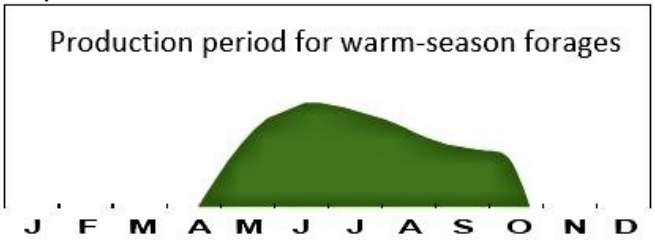
Cattle grazing in a native grass pasture early in the growing season. Photo: Ryan Diener, Quail Forever

Big Bluestem provides high-quality forage for summer grazing while providing nesting habitat for quail. Photo: University of Arkansas. Coop. Ext. Service

Crude protein levels in native grass are highest in early summer. Rotational grazing will help balance nutrient intake in cattle throughout the growing season. Source: Uni. of Tennessee Ext.; Harper et al. 2007.



Native Warm Season Grasses provide reliable forage production throughout the growing season. Source: Uni. of Tennessee Ext.; Harper et al. 2007.



*Contact **Ryan Parker**, Quail Forever's **Grasslands Coordinating Wildlife Biologist** in Arkansas, if you are interested in learning more about grazing native forages on your property. **Office: 501-354-2000 ext. 3149 | Mobile: 307-321-6295 | Email: rparker@quailforever.org***

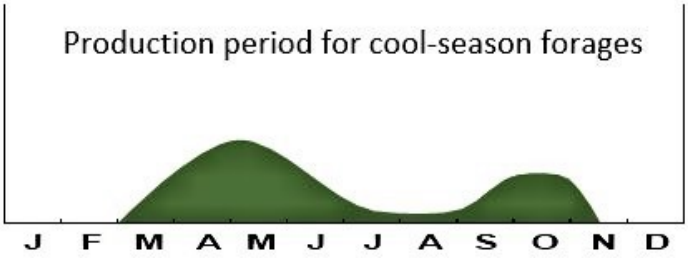
Native Cool Season Grasses (NCSG)

Native Cool Season Grasses (NCSG) provide an early source of nutrient intake in March and April before NWSG grazing begins. NCSG also tolerate a wide-range of growing conditions and are a reliable, high-producing alternative to introduced forages like fescue during spring. NCSG are less productive during the fall, so maintaining a good balance of native and introduced cool season forages is important. Other benefits to NCSG include food and cover habitat for wildlife and added species diversity if planted in the same field as NWSG.

Native cool season grasses to consider in Arkansas. Planting NCSG adds species diversity to a native grass pasture.

NCSG	Palatability	Grazing Months
Canada Wildrye	High	March-May
Virginia Wildrye	High	March-May
River Oats	High	March-May

Native Cool Season Grasses enhance spring foraging opportunities before NWSG begin to produce. Source: University of Tennessee Extension; Harper et al. 2007.

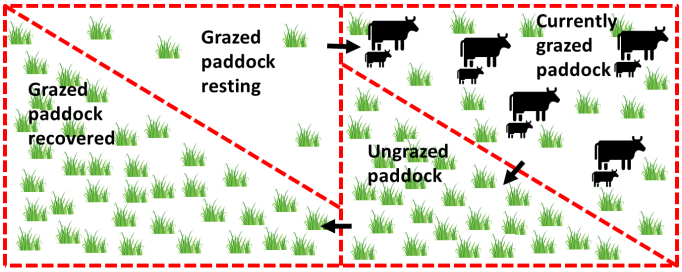


Virginia and Canada Wildrye provide cover for wildlife, and are great for grazing during the spring. Photo: University of Arkansas. Coop. Ext. Service

Rotational Grazing

Native Grasses need grazing management to maximize forage yield and wildlife habitat benefits. Forage production potential (tons/ac.), stocking rate (live animal unit/ac.), and paddock size are a few factors that will need attention. A written grazing plan will help you determine when to move your livestock based on the desired forage height that needs to remain ungrazed. The remaining grass, in combination with adequate resting time, will allow for plant recovery. Separating a pasture with cross fence is a good way to create multiple paddocks for your rotation.

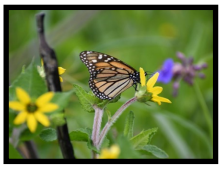
Rotate livestock through paddocks to manage forage production and wildlife habitat needs.

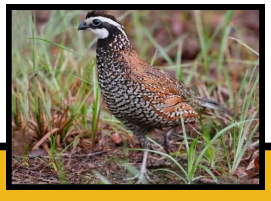


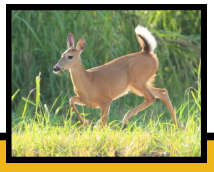
Ask For Help!

Quail Forever Biologists, along with your local AGFC Private Lands Biologist and NRCS field staff are available to assist landowners with establishing native grasses, developing grazing and wildlife management plans, and securing cost-share funding to help achieve conservation objectives!

Prescribed fire is another tool recommended for native grass management. A burn can be written into your rotational grazing management plan! Photo: Leslie Cooper, Quail Forever







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