

Cool Nights Preventing Bermudagrass Growth

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This spring has been full of variable weather conditions, mostly unfavorable for bermudagrass growth. The warm winter fueled expectations of an early spring and quick forage growth. But, we are still waiting for warm night temperatures needed for bermudagrass to get started.

Bermudagrass is a warm season grass that needs warm day and warm night temperatures. It begins greening up after warm days, but never really produces significant growth until night temperatures are 60 degrees F for about a week or more. The grass will try to grow on warm days, but cool night shuts down the internal “machinery” which basically negates any sustained growth. When a string of warm nights occurs, the grass is ready to begin sustained growth as spring temperatures continue to warm till summer.

Fertilizing bermudagrass before night temperatures have reached the 60 degree mark results in lower fertilizer efficiency. The grass may green up but other cool season grasses and weeds will out-compete the languishing bermudagrass for the nutrients. Remember to soil test to get fertilizer recommendations especially for hay production. In recent years, many hay producers have neglected to apply sufficient potassium fertilizer and bermudagrass stands have thinned significantly as a result. Bermudagrass hay fertilization recommendations are designated by production level so communicating the desired production level at the time of soil sample submission will help you get the optimum recommendations. For most producers, yield levels of either 2 or 4 tons per acre are sufficient for the soil and environment.

In most cases, yield levels of 6 tons per acre would be on the high end for dryland hay production and yield levels of 8 tons per acre are usually under irrigation or exceptional growing conditions. Notes at the bottom of the soil test report provide recommendations on how to split the total fertilizer recommendation for season-long production.