

## Establishing and maintaining Birdsfoot Trefoil

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Birdsfoot trefoil is a perennial legume well adapted to NY climate and soils.

### **Seed:**

Seed is dark brown, small and round.

Plant certified seed of a variety that performs well in New York. PARDEE birdsfoot trefoil is a vigorous, upright, hay-type variety. It resists the Fusarium wilt disease that often kills trefoil in New York meadows and pastures. NORCEN is a semi-erect hay-type variety that is very winter hardy. EMPIRE is a low growing, grazing type.

Inoculate the seed with rhizobia that is specifically for trefoil. Rhizobia that are for alfalfa and clover will not work. Some seed will be preinoculated.

Plant in mixtures with grasses, like timothy (consult [www.forages.org](http://www.forages.org) for other mixtures and seeding rates).

### **Planting:**

Plant 6 -7 lbs trefoil per acre; 2 -6 lbs grass

Plowed field – Plow and fit the field so it is smooth and very firm. Plant in mid-late May and plant about ¼ inch deep.

Frost seeding: mow or close graze in fall; broadcast trefoil seed in March or early April. Frost seeding grass is not recommended.

Birdsfoot trefoil is slow growing relative to alfalfa and red clover.

### **Management:**

Always harvest at a cutting height that leaves at least 5 or more inches of stubble. Cutting too close to crown will kill trefoil.

Hay / Haylage Production:

Seeding Year: Once seed has germinated, allow seedlings to grow for 12 or more weeks before harvesting.

Production Years: Harvest twice per year (once in June and once in August) or three times per year (in early June, mid July, late August). First harvest will yield as much or more than alfalfa. The aftermath forage will yield less than alfalfa.

Grazing:

Be careful to not over graze trefoil. Birdsfoot trefoil will not cause bloat.

### **Forage Quality:**

Birdsfoot trefoil contains condensed tannins. Some varieties like PARDEE and BRUCE, contain more condensed tannins than other varieties. Condensed tannins bind to excess protein in the rumen, and this protein is then released and digested by the animal in the abomasum.

Research is ongoing to determine to what extent birdsfoot trefoil with condensed tannins controls internal parasites in sheep.