



# Forage or Weed?

## WHAT'S GROWING IN YOUR PASTURE

### • What is a forage?

A forage is simply defined as something we want to grow in our pastures and fields to feed to our animals. It is nutritional and palatable for our livestock. Forages are what we like to graze our animals on and what we like to cut for hay and silage.



Alfalfa



Burdock

### • What is a weed?

A weed is something that can easily take over our pastures and leave our animals with little to no good forage to eat. Weeds are not palatable for our animals and they tend to eat around them in pastures. If left untouched weeds can take over a pasture by over growing any forage and leaving nothing but over grown weeds making the environment ungrazable.

### • Why is it important to know the difference?

Horses should eat 1-2% of their body weight in forage a day so insuring that they have access to a large amount of forage is important for every horse owner. By being able to identify the things growing in your pastures you will know exactly what it is your horse is eating, as well as insuring that it is truly forage growing and not weeds. Having this understanding will also give you that ability to pick out poisonous plants growing in your pasture before your horse eats one. In New England the time allowed for horses to graze is limited so we must keep our fields healthy and full of good forage.

## HOW TO KEEP THE GOOD AND GET RID OF THE BAD!

Natural and ECO friendly ways to manage a small farm pasture!

Prevention is the best defense, but if you already have a seeded pasture you just have to work with what you have. So here are some ideas to keep the weeds back in your pastures. Doing these things will increase forage growth and make for a better grazing area. Maintaining a high forage rate will also keep weeds out in the future.

1. If you are feeding hay in your pastures for whatever reason, look at the hay and make sure it isn't full of weeds and seeds. Seeds can be spread through hay being thrown on pastures very easily.

2. Rotational grazing will keep traffic low on the forage. This will help to ensure that the forages are strong and able to grow strong by allowing a rest period and not having grass eaten down too far. The more forage growing the less chance there is for encroaching weeds that will take needed nutrients, water, and sun from growing forage.

3. Mowing pastures repeatedly lessens the productivity of weeds and will keep seed counts lower. Mow at a height above grass growth but low enough to kill tall weeds that have been avoided during grazing by horses.

c. Also mow or weed whack along fence lines so weeds can not intrude that way

4. Sometimes you have to get down and dirty and hand removal is the most economical and realistic method to remove stubborn weeds. Dig it up or pull it out fully, ensuring you have all the roots or it will come up again. Dispose far away from any fields or burn so that seeds are not spread further.



## Two common forages found in New Hampshire pastures-

### Orchard Grass

Definition- A highly productive bunched grass that does very well for rotational grazing because of its rapid growing rate after being eaten down. The blades of grass are rough to the touch and have a very defined center ridge. The stems of the grass are compressed and flat looking

Preferred Habitat- Tolerant of shade, drought, and high temperatures. Does best in soils with a pH from 4 to 8

Uses- Vary palatable when young so it is a great forage from hay or pasture



### Timothy

Description- Grows in small bunches with shallow roots. The seeds come to a spike inflorescence at the top. The leaves are flat and smooth with rough margins. The leaves wrap around the stem.

Preferred Habitat- Does best in rich moist soils with a pH of 5.5 to 6.5

Uses- Primarily used for hay but also found in a lot of pastures. It should not be grazed too low as it has trouble growing back if this happens



## Two common weeds found in New Hampshire pastures-

### Queen Anne's Lace

Description- Also called wild carrot, queen anne's lace has many small flowers that create a flat topped cluster looking like lace. Each little white flower has a dark center. When pulled the roots smell like carrots and thus the name wild carrot. The leaves look very similar to parsley and water hemlock

Preferred Habitat- Found in meadows, and waste areas. They are hardy plants and grow well in a dry environment



### Common Ragweed

Description- The stems of common ragweed are thick and circular but not smooth. The leaves almost resemble a fern in shape because of the deep margins. The seeds go up the plant and are like little pods with hair coming out of the ends that are dark in color.

Preferred Habitat- Grows very competitively in fields, gardens, and on roadsides



- Sources-
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