



FORAGE MANAGEMENT FOLLOWING EXTREME COLD

Lisa Baxter

Department of Crop & Soil Sciences

The extreme cold weather we saw in January left many of us asking if our forages were going to be okay. Unfortunately, there isn't a clear answer that we can offer to this question. Many cool season forages can handle subfreezing temps for short periods and the degree of damage depends on air temperature, soil temperature, topography, winter precipitation, stand health, stand age, and stage of growth.

Want to know what happens to plants during a cold snap? Check out our UGA Forage Team blog post on "[Are my winter forages going to be okay?](#)"

What can you do now?

Step 1: Don't panic.

Step 2: The best way to combat cold damage is prevention. Plants need good leaf area during the fall to synthesize carbohydrates and accumulate organic reserves before winter. High K:N ratios in soil will help ensure winter hardiness as well. There is nothing we can do now but wait.

Only time will tell if the forages are going to regrow this season. It's a waiting game and we need to be patient while our pastures try to recover!

How long is this going to take?

Once temperatures warm back up, growth of the forages will be slow. Optimum temperatures for winter annual forages are typically between 60–80°F. The forages will grow much more slowly outside of the temperature range, so you may not be seeing regrowth yet if the temperatures have remained below this range. Be careful grazing the vulnerable plant material. Graze carefully and give the plants time to rest.

Can I replant?

While there is limited research available for late planted cool season annuals, it can be assumed that yield decreases dramatically with later planting dates. The yield achieved in these late winter/early spring plantings will not be a good return on your investment. Let's use this time to plan ahead on planting summer annual forages.