EARLY PLANTING ENHANCES ARROWLEAF CLOVER FORAGE PRODUCTION

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Background. Traditionally, producers have planted arrowleaf and other annual cool-season clovers anytime from mid-October through the end of November, once temperatures have moderated and soil moisture became adequate. Establishment of arrowleaf clover planted late in the season was slow, and seedlings were small going into winter, with a higher risk of potential for cold damage. This study investigated the effect of planting date on forage yields of arrowleaf clover over two seasons in East Texas.

Research Findings. Yuchi arrowleaf clover was hand-planted into prepared seedbeds on five different planting dates from mid-September through mid-November in 1997 and 1998. Total forage yields varied between years due to rainfall amounts, but in general, higher yields resulted from earlier planting dates (Fig. 1). Forage yields from the first harvest reflect the benefit of early planting by providing grazing in early spring. Even by the end of the season, forage yields of the last planting dates had not "caught up" to the higher yields of early planting dates.

Application. Early planting dates (late September through early October) for arrowleaf clover provide several benefits over late season planting dates:

- Improved establishment in the fall – plants emerge faster and are larger before onset of cold weather.
- Plants continue to grow at a faster rate and significant forage is available for grazing in early spring.
- Total forage yields for the growing season are higher.

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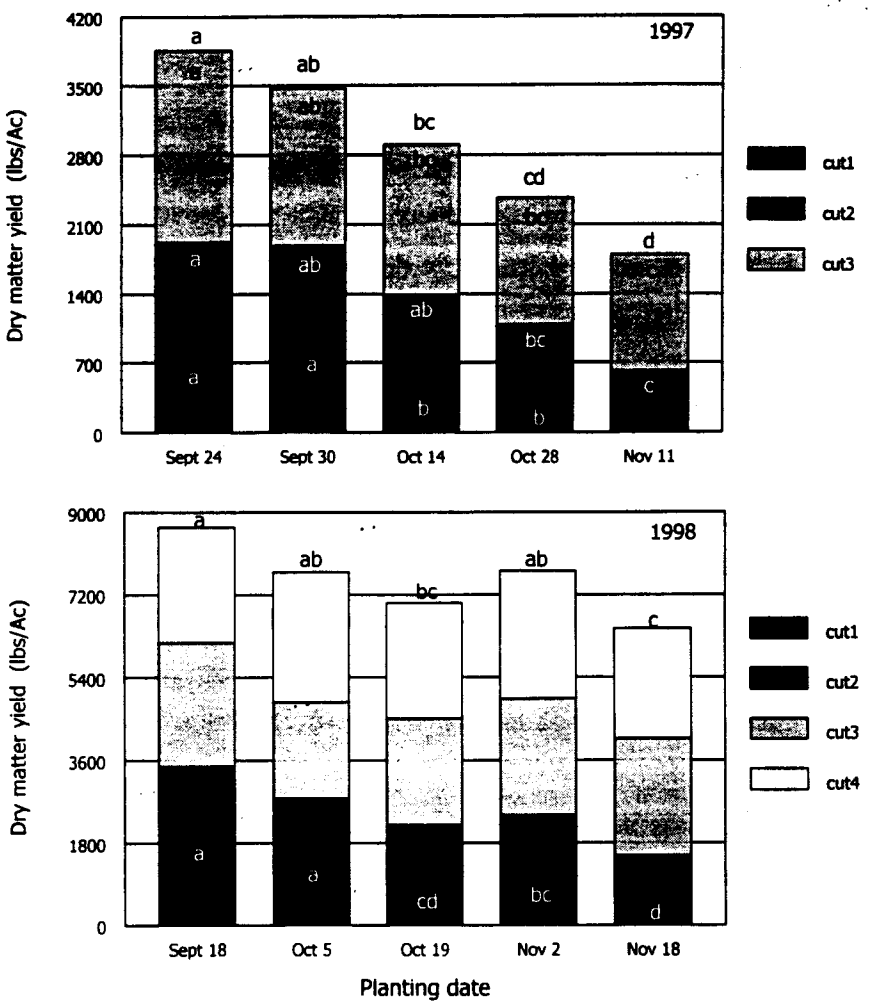

Figure 1. Forage yields of arrowleaf clover over five planting dates in 1997 and 1998. Harvest dates for the 1997-98 season were 12 Feb, 25 Mar, and 22 Apr 1998. Harvest dates for the 1998-99 season were 9 Mar, 31 Mar, 21 Apr, and 19 May 1999. Whole bars represent cumulative forage yields; individual harvests are shown by different colored sections. Within cuts, bars with the same letter are not significantly different according to Fisher's LSD (0.05). Absence of letter indicates no significant differences within that cut.