Winterization of Perennial Grasses and Alfalfa

While the success of alfalfa and perennial grasses are judged by their output in the summer, much of that success is determined in the fall. Preparing these crops for dormancy, for winter, and for spring green-up will be a key activity over the next 2-3 months.

In simplest terms, winterization is preparing crops for physiological changes within the plant brought on by climate changes associated with winter according to Dennis Stephens, President of Monty's Plant Food Company. Among these changes is an increased need for potash. Stephens noted, "If potassium levels are low heading into winter, the cellular structure of the plant will be compromised. You will notice weak plants that are more susceptible to disease pressure and next spring nutrient exchange will be greatly diminished."

Another benefit to winterization is it allows for mineralization to take place. Defined, **mineralization is the process of converting nutrients into a form which can be utilized by the plants.** For most elements, that requires microbial activity, moisture, and time. By applying these nutrients in the fall you are increasing the likelihood that the nutrients will have had opportunity to convert before spring green-up and growth. Additionally, you will be building-in energy reserves needed for the dormancy period when most root development takes place.

Process for Effective Winterization:

Soil Test: Begin with a soil test so that you can properly evaluate the needs of your grass and alfalfa stands. Once you receive the results back, pay particular attention to Base Saturation, pH Levels, and Nutrient needs. Most nutrients needs can, and should be, addressed in the fall to allow time for proper mineralization. Stephens added, "Fall applications of Nitrogen are beneficial, but should be completed at least 30 days ahead of the average date of first frost so that any new growth will have time to 'harden off' before sub-freezing temperatures make them susceptible to winter kill."

Soil Conditioners: Either mechanically or chemically, steps should be taken to insure healthy, arable well drained soils. One of the key components of mineralization is microbial activity. If the soils are not in good condition, aerobic activity will cease and you will increase the likelihood of harmful bacteria and disease establishing a foothold that can result in costly problems next spring. Look for products or methods that can break up compacted soils, allow for moisture penetration, and boost microbial populations, and speed break down of crop residue. We recommend 64 ounces of Monty's Liquid Carbon. This product can be tank-mixed with Monty's Foliar Fertilizers or many other fall chemical applications.

Grass Hay and Pastures: After addressing your soil test, additional steps can be taken by applying a foliar fertilizer to address specific needs of the plant and allowing for bolstered nutrient reserves. We recommend 24 ounces per acre of Monty's 2-15-15.

Alfalfa: After addressing your soil test, additional steps can be taken by applying a foliar fertilizer to address specific needs of the plant and allowing for bolstered nutrient reserves. We recommend 24 ounces per acre of Monty's 2-15-15. In regions of the country north of Growth Zone 5 we recommend 24 ounces per acre of Monty's 4-15-12. With a shorter season and longer dormancy the extra nitrogen is needed to maximize response next spring.