

# It's springtime. Why isn't my pasture growing?

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There are several reasons why your pastures may not be producing as well as you feel they should right now. The first is that if livestock have been on the pastures, continuously grazing this winter, the grass plants are likely overgrazed. Since most perennial grasses are fairly dormant from about November through February, any leaf material eaten closer than 3" above the ground is robbing the plants of energy the plant needs to spring growth and lacks leaf area for capturing energy from the sun. Therefore, it takes longer for the plants to start growing when the soil temperatures warm up. One strategy to help with this issue is to next winter create a smaller pasture or feeding area called a "sacrifice area" for the animals to be, knowing that the area will get beat up hard and keep the animals off the rest of the acreage. By "resting" the other pastures through the winter, the grass will have the energy and structure to begin growing. When the pasture has grown is 6 to 8" high, let the livestock in to graze that pasture and then begin rotating the animals separate pastures keeping the 3 to 4" stubble height left for the grass plant to regrow more quickly.

This practice will also help reduce soil compaction in the winter, when the wet soils are most vulnerable to heavy animals.

Soil fertility may also be an issue. Most plants are searching for nitrogen (N) at this time of year, as much of the plant available N has either been incorporated into leaf material or leached out of the root zone during the winter rains. There of course is some nitrogen available from the animal

manure, but perhaps not enough to meet the plant's requirements for optimum yield or not evenly distributed around the pasture. Other nutrients like phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and sulfur (S) may also be limited. The OSU Extension fertilizer guide for pastures is a helpful resource to learn more about split applications of N, pH and other fertilizer requirement for pasture growth. [extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/fg/fg63-e.pdf](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/fg/fg63-e.pdf)

If you'd like to have a more specific recommendation for nutrient needs on your pastures, a soil test results are needed. A first step would be having your soil analyzed. Here is a link on for a publication about taking your own soil sample [smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/soil-testing](http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/soil-testing). There is also a list of soil labs serving Oregon on this same website. Plan to call your chosen lab in advance to get prices for soil analysis packages and shipping instructions for your sample.

Once you know the nutrient content of your soil, you can compare that to the fertilizer recommendations in the pasture guide and choose what nutrients to add to your soils. This is true whether you use organic or chemical sources for your fertilizer additions. If you would like help with the recommendations, please call your local OSU Extension Service.