

# The Whole Truth About Durana White Clover

By: Kent Kammermeyer

Do you remember "Jack and the Beanstalk"? I haven't read the story lately, but the best I can remember (I'm over 50), it went like this. Once upon a time, a young deer hunter named Jack got a hold of some magic clover from Georgia. He carefully sowed the magic clover on a log landing on his deer lease called the Monster Rack Trophy Club. The next day he came back and low and behold one cloverstalk had climbed its way up through the clouds making a perfect deer stand. Jack got his 7mm Magnum (or was it a 30-06 or .270?) and climbed the stalk until he had a perfect view of the forest about 1,000 feet below him (he had a good scope). Pretty soon a Boone and Crockett buck appeared out of nowhere and began nibbling the lower leaves of the cloverstalk. Jack waited a good 10 minutes for the monster's rack to grow from 170 to 180 B&C points, watched it breed 3 or 4 does, then carefully squeezed off his shot. The rest is history. Jack lived happily ever after and had his prized trophy mounted with a four-leaf clover sticking out the side of his mouth.

Fairy tale? Sure! But, what is the real truth about some of these new clover

varieties for deer and turkeys? The rest of this story gets serious and cuts through the frills and myths surrounding clover varieties and their value to deer and deer hunters. From now on, as Sergeant Joe Friday would say, it's "Just the facts, Ma'am, just the facts." Read on.

"Durana will last at least three times longer than common ladino white clovers on the market today," said Dr Karl Hoveland, senior researcher and renowned forage expert with the University of Georgia's Crop and Soil Science Department. "It's a

real bargain except for those farmers and hunters that *enjoy* frequently re-planting their fields and food plots. We still don't know if it will ever die out." Are you impressed yet?

John Carpenter, national forage

and wildlife products manager for Pennington Seed says "Several Durana demonstration plots, in fact, have had steady grazing from as many as 60 deer without any significant signs of stress." Try to do this with brassicas or red clover or Austrian winter peas. The Durana advantage based on The University of Georgia studies includes: Tolerates heavier browsing pressure, delivers more persistence, grows in a



lower pH soil, delivers more stolon density (runners) and low leaf growth, and competes aggressively with grasses and weeds.

There has long been a need for a persistent, productive, long-lived clover that is highly competitive in a mixed stand with perennial grasses or other aggressive plants including weeds. Along comes Durana white clover, the product of Dr. Joe Bouton, renowned plant breeder formerly at the University of Georgia (currently with the Noble Foundation in Oklahoma). To improve grazing tolerance of white clover, he collected "native ecotypes" that had survived many years of hot dry summers, heavy grazing and trampling in several Georgia locations. Plants were subjected to heavy, continuous grazing with grass competition, productive survivors were crossed and a promising entry called GA43 (later named Durana) was increased for further development. Durana is an intermediate white clover that has smaller leaves than taller ladino clovers but produces many more runners or stolons, which allow aggressive spreading and excellent grazing tolerance. Durana also flowers profusely for long periods making it a more dependable re-seeder if that seed bank is ever needed.

In performance tests at UGA Experiment Stations, Durana (3200 lbs/acre dry weight forage yield) was not as productive as Regal ladino (4200 lbs/acre) during the establishment year but caught up to it in year two with both producing close to 4,000 lbs/acre dry weight. Both produced two to five tons of forage per year at 25-30% protein levels and up to 80% digestibility (indicating lack of non-digestible cellulose). The difference is that Regal

faded from perennial grasses in a few years (survival 17%) while Durana increased its original stand coverage (133%) and persisted for five years or more! I have had experience with Durana for over four years now since we have been experimenting with it on Northeast Georgia Wildlife Management Areas before the seed was available commercially. Most of those three and four year old stands still survive today. I don't know about you but I vote for replanting my clover stands once every five years instead of every year or every other year! I prefer managing food plots with a mower rather than a plow.

This cool season perennial legume is adapted in the Southeast, Northeast and Mid-west on all soils except deep sands. It is also adapted to the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain regions (where rainfall is adequate).

University of Georgia (UGA) agronomists are in their seventh year of Durana field tests, noting unrivaled persistence where Durana is mixed with fungus-infected (toxic) fescue. UGA deer researchers completed a 1½ year field test at three locations testing Durana production, palatability and deer use. Results indicated forage production, utilization and standing crops of Durana and Regal were similar throughout the study except during year two when Durana surpassed Regal in production in two of three locations. In Georgia, standing crop of Durana was good all 12 months (after establishment) in the south but not in December and January in the north. High production of Durana occurred in March, April and May and again in September, October and November. Fall-planted Durana was slow to produce for two to three months as it was establishing its strong root



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system. The researchers suggest that Durana may be superior to ladino in the long-term. Combine this with superior persistence, and Durana quickly, easily becomes the clover of choice for hunters and deer managers.

Meanwhile, I have seen upwards of 40 different plots of Durana clover in all regions of Georgia and South Carolina and despite harsh and difficult conditions (drought, flooding, low fertility, cold, and overgrazing-even by hogs) have encountered only a very few that failed and most of these were planted too deep. Most all others are vigorous and thriving and exceeding expectations. Some are going into their third or fourth year.

Retired UGA extension agronomist Dr. Bill Sell decided to test Durana at his Jackson County farm. He established a plot of Durana in the fall of 2002 without lime or fertilizer! His soil pH (tested twice) was 5.4. The stand persisted under heavy deer grazing pressure (and again, no lime or fertilizer) through the winter of 2005 when it began to fade due to competition. He sprayed a kill-all herbicide and soon got back a pure vigorous stand of Durana from existing seed, again without fertilizer! I would not recommend treating your Durana like this, but it shows how tough the plant really is. I really don't think his Durana would have faded in two and a half years had he fertilized it.

Mark Buxton, manager of Oakland Club Plantation in South Carolina reported on his deer management successes at the recent Quality Deer Management Association Convention in Charleston, SC. Basically, his deer antler development has recently rewritten the SC record book for his part of the state. Durana is the

cornerstone of his food plot program. Going into his fourth year of Durana, he currently has over 75 acres on his 13,000-acre deer management acreage. In 2005, Mark will have it growing on every food plot acre he has except deep sands (it is growing already on both light soils and gumbo clay).

Why plant Durana? It is grazing resistant, more persistent, more drought tolerant, more acid tolerant, more aggressive with competitive grasses and weeds, and has more stolon density (runners) than any other clover. That is one tough clover!

Durana white clover is exclusively marketed by Pennington Seed Company of Madison, GA (call 1-800-285-SEED) or check with your local Pennington seed dealer for availability. Durana is also a key component of several new Pennington Rackmaster deer mixes including Rackmaster Elite.

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