

DIY Fodder System for Animals

<http://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2016/02/fodder-system.html>



year round.

Hiya! I'm Jana from Celtic Prairie Farm. I'm so pleased to be Jill's guest blogger today and to have the opportunity to share our homemade fodder system. If you're needing an economical, highly nutritious way to feed your homestead critters, a small scale fodder system may be just what you're looking for.

Fodder is simply any food grown for livestock. So when we needed a way to supplement our animals' nutritional during the long Wyoming winter, growing our own fodder became the obvious solution, particularly when the hay we purchase may not be the best quality. Having fodder growing in the dining room also takes care of my gardener's need to be growing something



Fodder is nearly completely digestible, so a whole lot more of your feed budget benefits the animal instead going straight through the ground!

When the grain is sprouted, and grown hydroponically, nearly all the starch in the grain is converted to sugar and is better utilized by the animal's rumen. The best part is that the whole process, from sprout to ready-to-feed-fodder only takes a 6-8 days. Quick! Then the animals eat everything, including the sprouts, the seeds and the roots so nothing is wasted! You can even put it in your own smoothies!

Building Your Own Fodder System

Unless you have a large budget and a lot of animals, there aren't many affordable fodder systems available for the small family farm. Since we didn't want to spend a couple thousand dollars on a fodder system, we started searching the hive-mind of the internet for ways to make our own. We came across several websites and YouTube videos and eventually settled on a hybrid version that we're still tweaking a bit to suit our growing situation and the animal's needs.

We built a pretty simple rack using pvc pipe that fits the standard black heavy duty 10"x20" seedling gardening trays, with 12-16 small holes drilled evenly in the bottom of the

trays. Take note though, the standard trays that you normally get are pretty flimsy and won't hold up to several pounds of fodder without cracking on the corners after only a few uses. Try to find heavy duty trays, either at your local garden center or online.

Many different types of grain can be grown for fodder including barley, oats, wheat, or even sunflower seeds. Wheat is readily available for us since one of our neighbors is an organic wheat farmer. Score!! We start by soaking our wheat in a bucket for 12-24 hrs. We drilled a bunch of tiny holes into the bottom of a 5 gallon bucket, then put that bucket inside another. That way, when you lift the first bucket at the end of the soaking period, the water drains easily. If you agitate the wheat after it settles and sinks into the water, the chaff will float to the top. Skim that off since it won't sprout and you don't want that in your trays.



After the soak, spread about 5 cups of soaked grain in a tray. I use a 3" putty knife as a seed spreader rather than my hands, so the natural oils on my skin don't come in contact with the wheat seed. You can spend a ridiculous amount of time trying to get it all even in the tray, but just do the best you can. After all, it's not one of those sand, zen garden desk things with the little rake. The goal is to get the grain to a depth of about 1/4"-1/2" in the bottom of the tray. Too much and it won't all sprout. Too little and you won't have the yield that you want for your growing time. About 5 pounds of dry wheat yields approximately 25 pounds of finished fodder depending upon how clean the grain is, the temperature of our growing area, watering etc.. Check out the progression:

Our fodder is watered gently, 4 times per day, enough so that the seeds stay moist, but there isn't any

standing water in the trays. Standing water will cause mold and odors. Many sources suggest using a small pond pump in the catch basin at the bottom of the rack to recycle the water back up through the plastic tubing to drip through the trays more than once. However, we found that recycling the water caused mold, slimy fodder mats and a foul odor. Instead we're currently using a 5 gallon bucket filled with clean water for the pump to deliver water to the top of the rack and drip throughout the trays, down to the basin at the bottom. About once per week, we pump out the used water into the lilac bushes in the yard.

The animals love it! A general rule of thumb is to feed 1-2% of an animal's body weight in fodder. So you'd feed a 500# steer between 5-10 pounds of fodder, or 1-2 trays. It's important also, to keep plenty of hay available. Fodder isn't meant to be fed by itself since ruminants still need hay for roughage. It took a few days for the animals to catch on to the fact that wheat fodder is sweet and yummy, but now they wait at the fence for fodder delivery! Even the chickens like it.

A small scale fodder system might be a great option for your small homestead livestock including cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits, chickens and even guinea pigs!