USING COMFREY IN POULTRY PRODUCTION

What is Comfrey?

Comfrey is a winter-hardy, perennial crop from Eurasia that has been cultivated for human and animal uses since ~400 BC. It has a thick, tuberous root It has a high protein (15% -30% when dry) and water content (85%) compared to other forages. It produces large amounts of broad-leafed foliage from May until the first hard frost.

What are the Benefits to Growing Comfrey?

- Fast growing, incredibly durable plant
- High in protein and minerals, low in fiber
- High in water content leading to less water stress on chickens
- High nitrogen demand can lead to lower nutrient run-off from poultry production
- Each plant can produce 8lb of foliage per season
- Root propagations can be sold for added revenue source
- Fits well to pasture rotation standards required of regenerative systems

How does Comfrey Yield Compare to other forage crops?

Location	Years of Data	Crop	Yield (Ton/acre)
California	2	Alfalfa	12.0
		Comfrey	10.7
Oregon	5	Alfalfa	7.6
		Comfrey	5.0
Wisconsin	1	Red Clover	4.0
		Comfrey	3.2
England	2	Timothy	4.0
		Comfrey	3.1
Germany	2	Alfalfa	5.3
		Comfrey	3.6
USSR	4	Alfalfa	4.5
		Red Clover + Timothy	4.1
		Corn	3.2
		Comfrey	2.0
Kenya	2	Alfalfa	1.9
		Comfrey	1.7

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Previous Comfrey Research

Starting in the late 1970s, scientists at the University of Minnesota began studying comfrey yield and how it relates to other forage crops. Some of the results from their multi-year experimentation can be seen below. It should be noted that these trials were planted in a more conventional mono-cropping system and yields may differ significantly from regenerative practices.

How Much does Comfrey typically Yield?

	Year Harvested		
Planting Date	1979	1980	1981
	Moisture (%)		
April 28, 1975	92	87	88
October 14, 1977	90	88	88
April 23, 1979	89	87	88
April 23, 1979	--	88	90
	Yield (lb. dry matter/acre)		
April 28, 1975	5,340	8,650	9,485
October 14, 1977	12,140	7,950	9,485
April 23, 1979	2,720	6,240	9,480
April 23, 1979	-	10,210	8,110

How does Comfrey fit into a Regenerative System?

- Easy to be foraged in chicken paddocks without human intervention
- Integrates well with other perennial forage crops
- Can tolerate partial shade, ideal for agroforestry system

How do I grow it?

Comfrey rarely reproduces by seed and it is generally more effective to establish it from root cuttings. It will produce forage upon first year and will become exceptionally hardy after established. Unlike legume forages, the crop will need nitrogen fertilizer (40-100lb/ac depending on soil conditions). Nitrogen needs may be significantly less when grown in a pastured poultry system, as nitrate manure will already be an input. You can have multiple harvests per season depending on growth, but greatest growth will likely occur in June and July.