

Summary

The effect of deferment dates (February, March, and April) during the growing season for use in the dry season (June, July, August, and September) on forage production and quality was evaluated in six tropical grass species, grown on a dark-red clay Latosol at EMBRAPA-Cerrados, located in the Brazil's Federal District. The six species (*Panicum maximum* cv. Vencedor; *Andropogon gayanus* cv. Planaltina; *Brachiaria brizantha* cv. Marandu, BRA-002801, and BRA-004391; and *B. ruziziensis*) were evaluated in a strip-strip block design, with three replications. Forage production (DM), crude protein content (CP), percentage

dead tissue (DT), in vitro dry matter digestibility (IVDMD), and percent cell wall (CW) were measured for all species. *Panicum maximum* cv. Vencedor and *A. gayanus* cv. Planaltina presented significantly higher DM production when deferred in February than at other dates. All grass species, when deferred in April, presented lower DM production compared with the February deferment date. All grass species presented similar productivity at the April deferment date. Grass CP content decreased with the February and increased with the April deferment dates. *Brachiaria ruziziensis* and *A. gayanus* presented higher DT percentage compared with other grass species at dry season utilization dates, whereas *P. maximum* presented a lower percentage. *Brachiaria* genotypes and *P. maximum* presented higher IVDMD at all utilization dates, and *A. gayanus* the lowest IVDMD. At all utilization dates, *A. gayanus* presented higher CW percentage, while *Brachiaria* genotypes and *P. maximum* presented similar contents. When deferred in February, the grass species increased productivity, decreased forage quality, and increased DT percentage. The best dates for deferment of *P. maximum* cv. Vencedor and the *Brachiaria* genotypes was from March until mid-April, whereas for *A. gayanus* cv. Planaltina the best date was in March only.