

FORAGE FOCUS

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PGG Wrightson Seeds

Managing New Pastures

The management of a newly sown pasture during the first twelve months post-sowing will have significant long-term effects on botanical composition and persistence. To develop the 'ideal' pasture, management of new pastures should:

- Encourage tillering of grasses and branching of white clover by grazing.
- Prevent fast-establishing species such as ryegrass shading out slower-establishing species such as clovers and herbs.
- Control weeds, particularly annual weeds.
- Consolidate cultivated soil.
- NOT be used to make silage or hay in the first one to two years if clover/herbs are included in the pasture mix.

Managing Newly Sown Pastures

Conventionally sown or direct drilled pastures

A newly established pasture is ready to graze when it passes the 'pull-test'. This involves grasping the seedling and giving a firm pull and if the leaves break, rather than the roots pulling out, then the pasture is ready to graze. Time to first grazing depends on time of sowing, seedbed consolidation/firmness and the plant species used. Seedling plants will be better anchored when sown into a well-consolidated seedbed or when direct drilled. For faster establishing pastures (e.g. ryegrass/white clover) this is about six to eight weeks (or about 10cm in height), in comparison to slower establishing pastures (e.g. tall fescue/clover) which may take over 10 weeks. Plants should reach 10-12cm before the first grazing, and the initial grazings should be with lighter stock (e.g. sheep or rising one year cattle) over a short period of time, removing one-third to half the leaf area on offer or down to 1200-1500kg DM/ha (5cm height). Following this management for the first 3-5 grazings will promote clovers and herbs within the sward and reduce damage caused by over-grazing and pugging.



During spring (if sown in autumn), newly sown pastures grow rapidly and will need to be grazed more frequently, relative to older pastures. Pastures should be kept short to encourage clover growth leading into the summer and will also promote tillering of the ryegrass.

In summer, care should be taken when grazing. Over-grazing during this period can lead to reduced pasture persistence especially in summer dry areas. Deferred grazing and feed conservation (hay and silage) should not be attempted during the first twelve months following establishment as this will suppress clover production and reduce pasture persistence.

Oversowing

The grazing management of recently oversown pastures is similar to that of other pastures with frequent rotational grazing recommended. An additional requirement is the control of regrowth of the existing species; failure to do this can lead to establishment failure due to competition. Grazing should start at a cover of about 1300kg DM/ha and continue until the pasture mass is about 800kg DM/ha. The key is not to set-stock oversown clovers in the first spring, as preferential grazing will remove them from the pasture sward. To achieve a high clover content allow clovers to flower and reseed in the first season, this is especially important for annual clovers such as sub clover which must develop a seed bank in the first year to allow a successful establishment in the second and third years following sowing.

Weed Control

Grazing management

Short sharp grazing of newly establishing pasture eliminates many weeds, as they are more likely to be palatable when they are young and actively growing.

Herbicides

The key to weed control with herbicides is identifying which weeds are present and applying the appropriate herbicide without affecting the newly establishing pastures. Broadleaf weeds can be controlled with clover-friendly herbicides when the clover has a minimum of two trifoliate leaves. However, if herbs are present in the pasture mix, alternative herbicides will need to be used. If you are unsure about what weeds are present or which herbicide to use, seek expert advice as incorrect application can be costly.

Fertiliser Application

Newly sown pastures benefit from early and light applications of nitrogen (25kg N/ha), from two to three weeks after emergence and post-grazing (watch nitrate levels before grazing). Regular, subsequent applications of fertiliser based on herbage and soil test results, as well as the amount of feed harvested from the pasture, will improve the persistence and performance of new pasture. Consult with a fertiliser representative for specific recommendations.



In Summary

Like raising young stock, new pastures require careful management in the first year of their establishment to ensure maximum ongoing performance.

- Lightly graze once establishing plants cannot be pulled out easily, usually about 6-10 weeks after sowing.
- Ideally, use the lightest stock class available to minimise pulling or pugging damage
- Short sharp grazings of newly established pasture eliminates many weeds.
- Avoid using new pastures for conserved feeds in the first one to two years.
- Newly sown pastures benefit from early applications of nitrogen.

References

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