Cotswold Seeds Ltd
The Cotswold Business Village
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Guide to Forage



The autumn season provides the second opportunity in the year to think about planting grass leys. At Cotswold Seeds the majority of our orders are received in the autumn, taking advantage of reasonable weather conditions, appropriate soil and air temperatures and usually the ability to achieve good seedbed conditions on most soils.

In the UK, the most popular forage and fodder grass seed species continues to be various types of ryegrass. This includes westerwold annual ryegrass, Italian, hybrid and the longer term perennial ryegrass. However there are many other species which can be added to mixtures to provide benefits including extending the life of leys, improving protein content and providing antiparasitic properties. Listed here are a range of everyday species which can be added to tailored mixtures - it's important to think about the competitiveness and aggressiveness of species, as well as their longevity and seed size.

Timothy (Phleum pratense)

This is a heavy land loving species, which will last for many years, helping to extend the life of ryegrass leys.

Cocksfoot (Dactylis glomerata)

Cocksfoot is one of the earliest growing grass species, growing from early March onwards even in a cold, slow spring like 2016. It has very deep roots and can provide good drought resistance on light, thin soils. With improved plant breeding, modern varieties have softer leaves and a more leafy growth habit, increasing the overall palatability.

Meadow Fescue (Festuca pratensis)

Another longterm, persistent species, which will grow on many soil types, however it suits heavy, moisture retentive soils particularly well, again providing better longevity to less persistent ryegrass mixtures.

Westerwold Ryegrass (Lolium westerwoldicum)

While this short term annual ryegrass can be grown as a heavy yielding pure stand, it can also be added in smaller quantities to long term grass mixtures. It germinates and grows quickly, providing a late bite at the end of autumn or an early bite the following spring, as the rest of the ley develops.

Red Clover (Trifolium pratense)

A deep rooting legume that can help to improve the drought tolerance of silage mixtures, as well as pushing up the protein levels for meat and milk production.

White Clover (Trifolium repens)

This legume is more suited to grazing, and with a protein content of around 25%, compared to 16% in ryegrass swards, it can push up the protein content of forage. It will also fill in the base of the sward

and increase drought tolerance.

Alsike Clover (Trifolium hybridum)

This short term perennial is suited to heavier soils and is suitable if the soil pH is reasonably low.

Chicory (Cichorium intybus)

Chicory is a perennial normally lasting 3-4 years. It has a great drought tolerance due to its deep taproot which also means it's useful for improving soil drainage. Chicory has antiparasitic properties which help to lower the worm burden in livestock, with a particular effect on lambs. Less is more when adding chicory to grass leys, as it can be dominant.

Sainfoin (Onobrychis viciifolia)

This species has a range of useful properties including antiparasitic effects on livestock as well as very deep roots to increase drought tolerance on dry soils. The high tannin content means that animals can utilise the high protein content of the plant more efficiently than other legumes increasing milk and meat production. Although the seed is relatively small, it is surrounded by a large husk, similar to the size of a pea. This means that it should be included in mixtures at a decent rate to ensure its seen in the sward.

Forage Rape (Brassica napus)

A useful addition to long term grass leys, when added at a low rate per acre. It's extremely popular with our Welsh customers where mid to late season lamb finishing is an important priority. Forage rape acts as a nurse crop and high protein boost to give an early grazing to the developing grass ley in mid to late autumn.

Every single order we receive is mixed on the day, so your mixtures can be carefully tailored to suit the particular requirements of your farm.

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