Cotswold Seeds Ltd
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Haymaking in the Heat



The hot weather in the middle of June has really helped with hay-making.

A two year Italian Ryegrass Ley sown in Autumn last year has produced top quality hard horse hay ideal for the racehorse market. The regrowth from the hay cuts can either be cut for haylage later in the season or hay if the weather is right. Alternatively, this mixture has a leafier grazing grass added to improve grazability for sheep later in the year.

In the Cotswolds a hundred years ago, sainfoin was grown in one in seven fields, either for hay or soil improvement or both. It's almost died out due to high input farming. However our high pH of 7.8 and free-draining, brashy soil is perfectly suited to Sainfoin so we decided to grow it in our ten acre field.

It was sown two years ago, in Spring 2015, into a prepared seedbed, rather than undersowing with a cereal crop. It was sown at 35 kilos an acre with a cereal drill. Because the plan was always to cut the crop for hay we also sowed it with a low rate of companion grasses, Meadow Fescue and Timothy at 3 kilos an acre to help reduce the weeds and increase yield.

It was cut last Tuesday and with good hot weather and a stiff breeze, it was ready to bale after five days. The critical part of the whole operation was to dry the crop without losing the sainfoin leaves which improve the quality and the appearance of the bale but which can become brittle during the drying. We used an old-fashioned acrobat with a gentle turning action which worked well.

We've produced over a thousand bales from ten acres and we are now looking to sell it to specialist markets.

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