

Grazing Lucerne in Autumn with Sheep



Although lucerne is mainly used as a crop to produce hay or silage, it may in some cases be grazed in the autumn with sheep or cows.

Sheep in Oxfordshire (pictured here) are being strip grazed on luxuriant growth provided by good growing conditions. It is generally advisable to allow a rest period after the last silage or hay cut in September so that lucerne can build up nitrogen and carbohydrate reserves to improve its winter cold tolerance. Grazing too heavily and too early can reduce spring bud formation, subsequently lowering dry matter yield in the following year.

Once cold weather and frosts arrive in October/early November lucerne stops growing and is safe to graze. As lucerne can cause bloat and is most commonly grown as either a pure stand or at high proportions in a mixture, it is advisable to buffer-feed hay or straw so that sheep, and especially cows, are not going on to lucerne too hungry.

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