Cotswold Seeds Ltd
The Cotswold Business Village
Moreton in Marsh,
Gloucestershire GL56 0JQ

Sainfoin: Sowing & Growing

Suitable soils and optimum pH

Performs best on free-draining alkaline soils. Do not sow on land below 6.2pH.

When to sow

Always sow sainfoin into warm soils in the spring.

How to sow

Sainfoin seed can be undersown to spring cereals or direct drilled in April or May at around 30mm. If undersown, the cereal sowing rate should be reduced to 50/40 kg/acre. Unlike lucerne (alfalfa) sainfoin does not usually require a seed inoculant to fix nitrogen.

Management

A sainfoin ley should be managed carefully to maximise performance. Sainfoin produces a cut of silage in early June or hay may be taken if preferred. Sainfoin should be cut during early flowering but this may be delayed without much loss of feed value if needed.

If cutting for hay remember this is a broadleaf crop and excessive drying or turning can quickly loose the leaf, aim to move the crop when the dew is still on the plant (mornings or evenings) an older machine like an acrobat has a more gentle rolling action than modern tedders.

Regrowth is less after the first cut when compared to a lucerne stand and may be cut again for haylage or grazed. Grazing should be light and quick to avoid damage to the plant. Never set stock or it will become thin.

Nutrient requirements

Sainfoin requires no N or P but K levels must be maintained at ADAS Index 2 to safeguard yields.

Yield potential

14t DM/ha annually. Typical silage analysis has a dry matter of 14%, a crude protein of 18%, a D-value of 62 and an ME of 9.5 MJ. However, sainfoin produces better results than this analysis indicates as its high tannin content protects the protein in the rumen so increasing absorption and producing higher liveweight gains, as well as known anti worming properties.

As a practical example 100-150 small bales (approx 30-35kgs) of hay have been produced per acre on an established sainfoin stand grown with a grass companion mixture, alternatively 15 bales of sainfoin haylage bales (approx 210kgs) can be produced per acre from a pure stand.

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