

## Hay Leys: Sowing & Growing



### Suitable soils and optimum pH

The ryegrass based leys are best suited on fertile and moisture retentive soils, ryegrass can suffer on drought prone soils, an option on dry land could be to add a deeper rooting festulolium plant to the mixture. This is not expensive - please enquire when ordering.

### When to sow

The mixture should be sown in the autumn (August- September) to provide good yields in the following spring. These mixtures remain leafy and will not put on a seedhead when sown in the spring. The only plant that will provide a seedhead and full cut from a spring sowing is westerwold ryegrass.

### How to sow

A non-selective herbicide should be used before seedbed preparation to create a stale seedbed and control as many weeds as possible.

Drill into a fine firm seedbed, try to avoid drying the soils out with excessive cultivations in dry autumns. Rolling to retain moisture and break down clods before and after sowing with a cambridge or flat roller is essential. Broadcast seed should be harrowed lightly after sowing and before rolling twice to achieve maximum seed to soil contact on land not prone to capping.

### Management

Annual weeds should disappear as the new seeds begin to take over, or they can be grazed out with stock. If they persist as an issue or perennial weeds become a problem, it may be necessary to use a selective herbicide to take out docks, thistles and nettles.

Cutting usually begins in late June and takes place before and during flowering, the quality of the crop begins to drop off as the crop continues to head. In ideal conditions several dry days should be forecast. Hay made in poor weather conditions is generally lower in quality.

If making hay from spring sown westerwold ryegrass ensure the seedhead is fully emerged, cutting earlier leads to a fleshy, leafier crop which can be difficult to dry and make.

Graze excess growth after the required cut has been taken by November to avoid winter kill.

### **Nutrient requirements**

These leys should receive approximately 70kg ha of nitrogen, excessive applications of nitrogen can cause the plant to become sappy and difficult to dry. As cutting and removing depletes P and K levels, they should be maintained around ADAS index 2.

### **Yield potential**

A medium to heavy crop should yield approximately 10 to 12 tonnes per hectare over the year.

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