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Sowing & Growing: Red Clover

Red clover *(Trifolium pratense)* is one of the most popular true clovers in the UK. Once established it is capable of rapid growth and shows reasonably good persistence for up to 3 years. It also provides a very good soil improving break crop in arable rotations, with a strong tap root for improving soil structure.

Suitable soils and Optimum pH: Red clover will establish on most soils with the biggest crops being found on heavier clay soils with a slightly acidic to neutral pH.

When to Sow: April-May is the ideal time for sowing in the spring. Mid-late August is the best time for autumn sowings. Establishment is less likely to be reliable if sowing too far into September or too early in the spring.

Sowing Rate: 1.5 g/m2 - 6kg per acre - 15kg per ha,

Preparation: The most successful results come from sowing into a newly prepared seedbed. Aim to cultivate the top soil to about 5cm, with a light cultivator or discs. The finished seedbed should be fine but firm, with no clods. Several passes with a cultivator may be needed to achieve this.

Sowing: When clover seed is sown, the depth of sowing is critical. The seed should be sown no deeper than 10mm. Sowing too deeply can reduce the germination and establishment dramatically. Once the seed is sown, ensure the area is well rolled for maximum seed to soil contact.

Management: As a green manure, red clover can be cut multiple times throughout the season to put green material back into the soil. It will be fixing Nitrogen when the soil is consistently above 7 degrees.

With silage cropping, 3 cuts should be achievable each year, the first being ready in the 2/3rd week of May. For the best balance of yield and quality the cut should be taken at 50% flowering.

Nutrient Requirements: Successful red clover crops can be grown with no Nitrogen. In systems pushing yield, a small amount of N may be applied in autumn or early spring. Due to the cutting requirements, make sure P and K levels are maintained.

Yield Potential: Grass and clover mixes yield more than a pure stand of red clover. Pure stands can yield 6t DM/ha, while grass and clover mixes can yield up to 15t DM/ha

Red clover is a more susceptible species to the soil borne disease Sclerotinia trifolium and the stem nematode Ditylenchus dipsaci, responsible for the widespread clover sickness in the 1970s and 80s. For this reason, there should be a four year gap between the red clover crops. Other fertility building crops such as white clover can be used as an alternative.

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