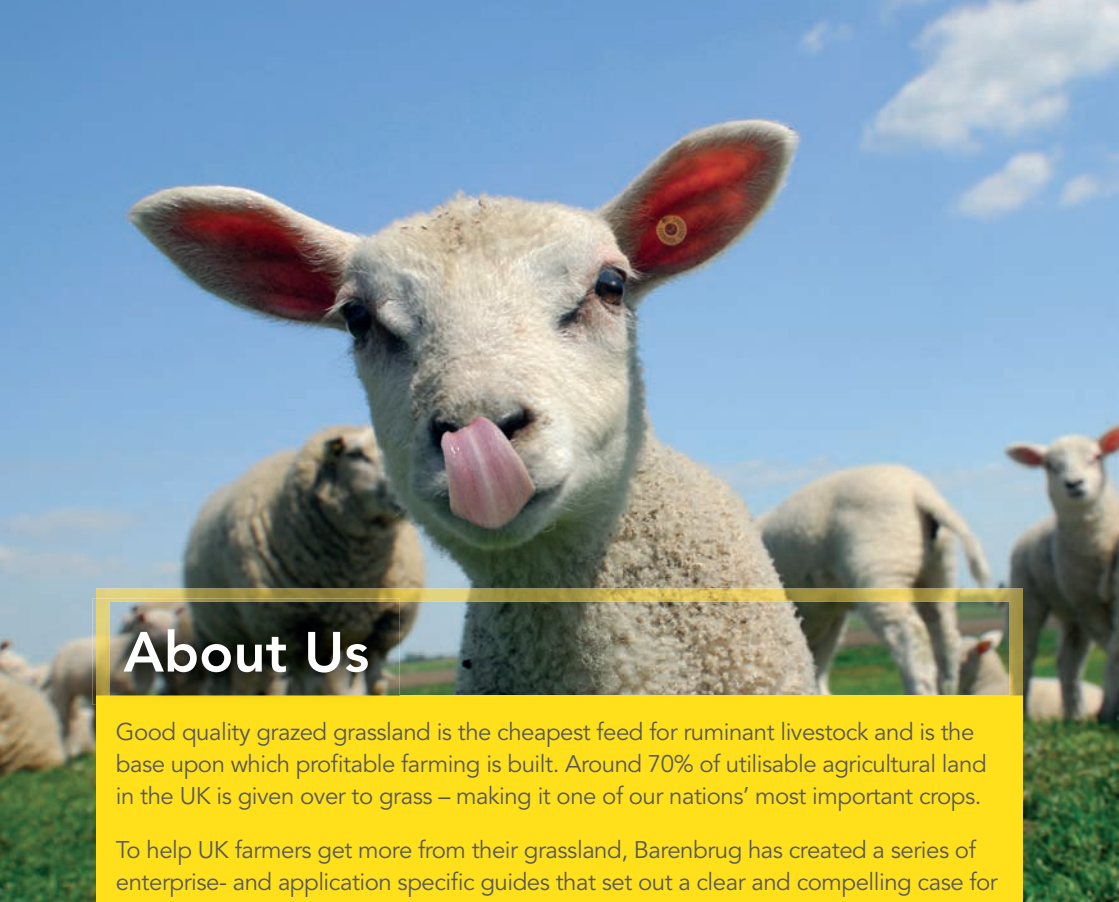


BarForage Sheep Guide

Practical advice for grass grazing management



 **BARENBRUG**



About Us

Good quality grazed grassland is the cheapest feed for ruminant livestock and is the base upon which profitable farming is built. Around 70% of utilisable agricultural land in the UK is given over to grass – making it one of our nations’ most important crops.

To help UK farmers get more from their grassland, Barenbrug has created a series of enterprise- and application specific guides that set out a clear and compelling case for proactively managing grassland performance, whatever the farm focus.

Recognising that market conditions have been difficult for some time, and that farmers have more forage options available to them than ever before, Barenbrug’s guides are designed to help UK farmers make the right choices and pick the right products as they work to achieve their grassland goals.

Each guide contains useful information about grassland growth and practical advice on perfecting grassland performance and looking after leys long-term. There are also details about the different grassland management techniques, and varieties and species available to UK farmers. This particular guide assesses the importance of good grassland management to dairy farming. Over the following pages we explore the science behind successful swards and how to manage grassland efficiently to maximise yields and profitability.

Sources

1: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-livestock-industry-in-england-at-december>

2: <https://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/know-your-sheep/uk-sheep-farming/>

Barenbrug - Grass Experts Since 1904

Barenbrug is one of the UK’s largest grass seed producers – breeding varieties for every possible forage and turf application, and distributing more than 4,500 tonnes of seed each year to agricultural, equestrian, sports & leisure and residential markets.

Part of the Royal Barenbrug Group, the company was founded in the Netherlands in 1904 and operates in 16 countries worldwide. With proprietary plant breeding and production technologies, Barenbrug works closely with academic institutes, customers and the international research community to develop improved grass seed varieties. Barenbrug’s portfolio includes grass varieties and mixtures that offer improved yield, disease resistance, drought tolerance, palatability, nitrogen efficiency, winter survival, rumen stimulation, protein production, cool-temperature germination and rapid recovery from damage.

Experts in agricultural grass, Barenbrug has a team of specialists located across the UK. Working closely with farmers, the team provides practical advice to help farmers get more from their grass in terms of yield, quality and persistency. Barenbrug’s UK headquarters are in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk with additional regional centres in Falkirk, Scotland and Loughgall, Northern Ireland plus trial sites throughout the UK. The company has ISO9001 certification plus Soil Association accreditation for its organic varieties.

Contents

4. The UK Sheep Industry
6. Reasons to Invest in Grass
7. Grass Growing - The Facts
8. The Science of Good Grass
 9. Animal Physiology
 10. Breeding Ewes
 11. Young Lambs
 12. Finishing Lambs
 13. Wintering Hogs
 14. Plant Physiology
15. Good Grazing Management
 16. Perfecting Grassland Pressure
 17. When to Graze Grass
 18. Different Grazing Methods
 19. Actively Grazing Grass For Improvements
20. Silage Production
21. Looking After Leys Long Term
22. 6 Steps to Sward Success
23. Soil Management to Sward Success
24. Getting Soil Nutrition Right
25. Grass Seed Quality



The UK Sheep Industry

Facts and Figures

UK farmers produce some of the best lamb in the world. As of June 2017, there were reported to be just over 34.6 million sheep in the UK – a rise of 2% on the previous year.¹ All regions of the UK saw an increase in both breeding ewes and total sheep numbers. Northern Ireland's flock rose 2% to 2.1 million – a figure not seen since 2006. Scotland's flock was up 160,000 to 6.99 million. While in Wales, the country's flock was up 2.3% to ten million.

The UK's sheep population is made up of many different breeds. In fact, there are thought to be more sheep breeds in the UK than in any other country in the world. The sheep sector is stratified with different breeds distributed across the UK – depending on geography, environment and habitat.

Hill sheep breeds include the Scottish Blackface, Cheviots, Swaledales and Herdwicks, among others. They are maternal breeds with very thick fleeces that enable them to withstand extreme weather conditions. They make excellent mothers, are good foragers and are able to survive on poorer grasslands. Their role within the sheep industry is as breeding stock to maintain the hill populations and contribute to upland systems. Generally, ewe lambs are retained or sold for breeding whilst ram / tup lambs are sold as stores to finishers unless the producer has some lower ground to finish them at home.

Upland flocks often have 'mule' females as the predominate mother. These are ewe lambs out of hill breeds and sired by a long wool breed such as the Bluefaced Leicester or Wensleydale. These ewes are more prolific and have slightly higher input needs than hill breeds but have retained a strong mothering ability. They are better suited to lower ground where grassland quality is better because management is easier.

Again, males tend to go into the food chain with ewe lambs carrying on down the hill to low ground systems or if a hill ewe has been brought 'in-bye', her lambs may also be retained for the upland flock. Many upland systems will finish a proportion of the lambs with the later, small end often being sold as stores.

Lowland flocks tend to be based around more paternal, carcass breeds such as the Texel, Suffolk and Charollais. These breeds grow fast and have a larger frame for meat production. The breeds are also reasonably prolific and crossed with an upland type ewe can produce lambs with excellent ability to convert grass to meat and thrive in the most favourable conditions. With a lowland system it is typical to finish lambs right through. Some may not keep any ewe lambs at all and often there are pedigree breeding enterprises involved too.

A Shifting Landscape

Uncertainties over Brexit mean that the next few years are set to remain challenging for UK dairy farmers.

While it's almost impossible to influence external market factors, producers need to find alternative ways to maximise the efficiency of their operations to ensure that their business remains as profitable as possible.

The past 18 months have seen farm gate prices improve across the board in the ruminant sector – with lamb prices reaching record highs. With imports down, consumers are buying more UK produced foods than ever, which is helping to improve cash flow for farmers. This trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future with current exchange rates and a lack of clarity about the implications of Brexit. In parallel, consumers are showing more interest than ever in the provenance of food, animal welfare standards and food hygiene and safety.

With a bit more money available, now is the time for farmers to 'mend the fences' – in other words, invest in those things that have not been a priority for the last few years. For farmers looking to make improvements, increasing on-farm food production – e.g., growing more grass – is an obvious place to start.

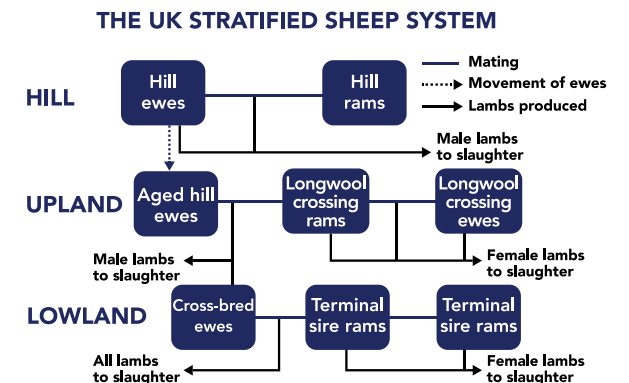


Image from National Sheep Association.²



Reasons to Invest in Grass

Regardless of breed or location, all UK sheep farmers have one thing in common: the need to provide their animals with grass to eat, whether grazed or silaged.

In sheep production, where margins are incredibly tight, high-quality grass can be the key to profitability – so keeping a constant supply in front of livestock makes sound financial sense.

Essential to the production of lamb, grass is a cost-effective form of feed that can be utilised all year round – in spring and summer by grazing livestock; and in winter as silage.

On average, a good crop of silage will cost around £30 per tonne to produce; while hay is around £75 per tonne; and grazed grass costs just £15 per tonne (fresh weight). Costing far less than manufactured animal feed, well-managed grassland can supply almost all of the energy and protein requirements of a sheep flock.

Consumers are also waking up to the benefits of feeding grass to livestock. Over the last few years there has been an increase in demand for produce from animals that are 100% grass-fed. With a pull from the market, many of the UK's leading supermarkets and producers are starting to introduce ranges of meat and milk from animals that have a 100% grass-based diet or are out in the field for at least six months of the year.

Grass Growing - The Facts

Providing major health benefits for animals, as well as improvements in dairy produce quality, good grassland management can have a positive impact on farm finances. It can also be beneficial to the environment.

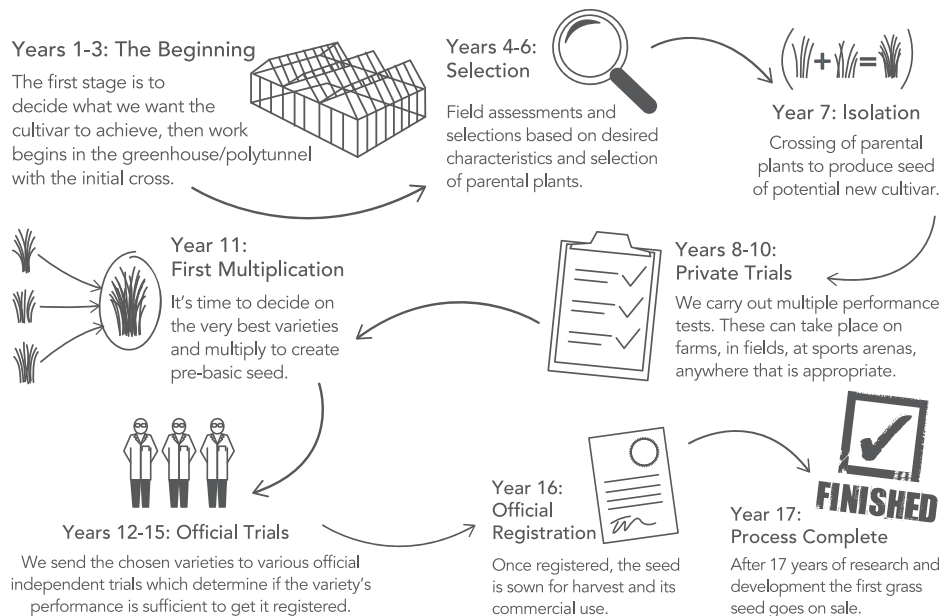
- Growing grass and other grassland crops is cheaper than buying in manufactured feed
- Grazed livestock will typically produce a better output per hectare, which will help profitability
- Animals fed on grass tend to be healthier and require less veterinary attention
- Enabling animals to graze for longer can reduce labour, machinery and housing costs
- Grazing animals recycle nutrients back into the soil through dung and urine
- Growing clover alongside grass fixes soil nitrogen, reducing the need to buy in fertilisers
- On mixed farms, growing grass in between other crops can help improve soil structure
- Farms that graze livestock have a lower carbon footprint than those that buy in food
- Growing grass makes farmers more self sufficient and less reliant on feed suppliers
- Produce from grass-fed animals is recognised as being high quality and can often command a premium.



The Science of Good Grass

The Story of Grass...

The breeding and commercialisation of a new grass cultivar is a long and challenging business.



The UK has the ideal climate for growing grass. Ryegrass grows best at between 5°C to 25°C – and most of the UK is between these temperatures 95% of the time.

Like all other crops, growing grass requires careful management to ensure yields and utilisation are good. It is a science – but a relatively simple one to grasp once you have a basic understanding of plant as well as animal physiology.

Armed with information about how grass grows and the different species and management techniques available, it is easy for farmers to make informed choices about what kind of grass to grow; when to sow it; when to graze it; how long to graze it for; and what to do to ensure its performance long-term.

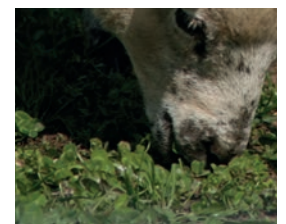
Animal Physiology

Sheep are highly efficient at turning grass into protein and find it easier to digest than manufactured feeds. Like other ruminant animals, sheep like to spend much of their day feeding. In fact, they are most efficient when small volumes of forage travel through their digestive system throughout the day.

A sheep's digestive system is around 27 times longer than its body length and because a sheep has no upper incisor or canine teeth, it will tend to tear at grass rather than bite it. Sheep have flat molars and their jaws work in a circular motion meaning they grind feed material as opposed to biting through it.

A lamb's rumen is fully developed from around 20 kg. After this point, the animal can receive almost all of its nutrition from forage – as long as it is well managed. A sheep requires RDP – rumen degradable protein - for rumen microbes in order to break down forage and release the energy locked up in the grass. The key to success is reducing times of grazed forage deficit throughout the year, which will vary dependant on climate and soil types.

At different stages of development, the nutritional requirements of sheep will vary.





Breeding Ewes

At different stages of development, the nutritional requirements of sheep will obviously be different. Pre-tupping, ewes should have at least eight weeks without lambs at foot in order for them to replenish body reserves and body conditions scores. Depending on the breed, at tupping, ewes should have a body conditioning score (BCS) of between 2.5 and 3.5 and should be on good, grazed grass that is around 4-8 cm high, providing up to 2800 kg DM* / day cover – depending on the season. When flushing ewes – to increase ovulation rates – typically two to three weeks before breeding, you should bear in mind that one unit of condition score adds approximately 13% of the live weight of the ewe. While 1 kg of weight gain requires around 55MJ of energy to be consumed.

At tupping, and through the first trimester, a level plane of nutrition should be kept. Ewes will need around 8 MJ of energy per head per day. During the second and third months of pregnancy, it is vital not to allow ewes to change their BCS by more 0.5 in order to prevent or impair placental development, which would ultimately affect lamb birth weight.

Late pregnancy (the last six weeks) is when 70% of foetal growth occurs. However, during this time, a ewe's intake potential can drop by as much as 30% due to lack of room. It is vital therefore to provide very high quality, nutrient dense feeds.

This is the point at which supplementary concentrates should be offered alongside adlib, high quality forage and clean water. Digestible, un-degradable protein (DUP) is essential in the last three weeks of pregnancy for ewes to produce milk. DUP does not break down in the rumen but is absorbed directly from the intestine. Again, you should be careful to ensure that a ewe's BCS does not change by more than 0.5.

From lambing to weaning is when most demands are placed on the ewe. Her appetite will typically increase by 50%. Energy requirements can be up to four times over maintenance for a twin bearing mule ewe at peak lactation (3-4 weeks after lambing).

Ewe Status	DM Intake (% of bodyweight)
Maintenance	1.5
Late Lambing	2
Early Lactation	3
Mid - Late Lactation	2.5 - 2

For tups: Pre-breeding, tups should be built up to as much as BCS 4 before being turned out with ewes. Post tupping, the aim should be for tups to reach BCS 3 again with the additional help of concentrates if necessary.

Young Lambs

From birth to eight weeks old, a lamb should be achieving an average daily live weight gain (DLWG) of 250g. If this isn't happening, you will need to discover the reason.

For example, there could be a problem with a parasite or poor milk yields. Once a lamb has reached around 20kg, its rumen will be fully developed – meaning it can get all of its energy requirements from grass as opposed to milk.

Ideally, lambs should be weaned at around 12 to 14 weeks. Where grass is plentiful and of high quality, weaning can be delayed at no cost to lamb DLWG. However, where grass is in short supply or of poor quality, ewes and lambs will start to compete for the same forage. In this scenario, lambs should be weaned early and moved to better grazing to prevent lamb DLWG dropping below 200g.

Interestingly, research has shown that lambs that receive significant diet changes (e.g. they are introduced to red clover or chicory finishing mixes) or stresses (e.g. worming or vaccinating) before weaning, go on to perform better after they are weaned. Remember, a sheep's rumen can take three weeks to fully adapt to a new diet so if the plan is to finish lambs on something other than grass and white clover, it may be worth considering introducing this pre-weaning.



Finishing Lambs

Finishing lambs, whether homebred or bought in store can be classified into three management groups:

Long keep: Smaller lambs up to 30kg, which will need at least three months to finish.

Medium keep: Lambs 30-35kg, which will take somewhere between six to twelve weeks to finish

Short keep: Lambs over 35kg, which will finish in less than six weeks.

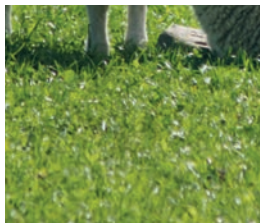
A base line target for grass-based breeding systems is to have at least 70% of the lamb crop sold off the farm by tupping time. That could be finished or as stores. Having this goal will help ensure lambs are not 'stealing' forage from ewes. It will also help ewes return to peak condition pre-tupping to ensure a viable lamb crop the following year. If it looks like forage supplies are getting tight, it may be worth selling long-keep lambs as stores rather than buying in expensive concentrates to fill the deficit. This will need to be budgeted for annually depending on store trade and feed prices because these will fluctuate more throughout some seasons than others.

Lamb finishers should ask themselves a number of questions to plan an accurate finishing system for their enterprise: Who will be buying the lambs? Will they be sold live weight at market or to a butcher for example? When do they need to be ready by and how many do I need? What type of lamb is required? These questions are particularly important for the person buying in stores to be able to match supply and demand and purchase the appropriate animals.

Grass of 6-8 cm is ideal for weaned lambs in a set-stocking situation. For those using rotational grazing, paddocks should be entered at ten to twelve cm long (and grazed to leave a five cm residual). These heights will ensure that well managed grass is mostly leaf with minimal stem – so maintaining a metabolisable energy (ME) value of 11.5 MJ/kg DM and above. Grass of this quality can achieve DLWG of 250g/day.

The use of white clover will boost protein and digestibility of grazing swards and a 30% clover content can speed up finishing times by 25% compared to grass only swards.

The fattening period will vary across the geographical regions and within each farming business however it is likely that some finishing will be occurring over autumn and winter when grass productivity will not be as high and the DLWG potential greatly lessened. The use of stubble turnips or forage rape can achieve very similar DLWG in lambs. Kale has less fattening potential however the crop is there longer so my suit longer keep systems looking to achieve 150-175g/day.



Wintering Hogs

Many cattle farms take in ewe lambs / hogs from late autumn until early spring to use as a grass management tool. Grazing swards with sheep has several benefits. It encourages tillering and removes any excess growth, which can go rank, lodge and rot out. It can also be very useful for reducing weed pressure. On silage ground, sheep dung and urine can also add useful nutrient and organic matter contributions.

Sward Stick

Knowing when to graze grass and for how long requires careful judgement. To help farmers gauge when to graze grass, we've developed a brand-new sward stick, which is available completely free of charge. Printed with the optimum heights for grass for both sheep and beef, the sward stick is designed to help growers decide when to turn livestock out, and when to adjust grazing pressure.

We recommend using sward sticks on a weekly basis – to build up a log of grass growing information. Farmers should walk each relevant field, once a week, to monitor sward height. Following a similar route each time, they should take 30 to 40 leaf-top readings per field – before calculating an average and recording it in a notebook. This information can then be used to aid decision-making and for longer-term seasonal and year-on-year assessments and adjustments.

We've created sward sticks in the past and they've proved really popular so make sure you get hold of yours quickly.

To find out more, visit our website, www.barenbrug.co.uk

BARENBRUG
SWARD STICK
Sheep

Designed for rotational grazing of ewes, lambs and pre-tupping ewes

Benefits of using a sward stick

- Increase your annual grass yield by maximising growth value and extending the grazing season
- Improve the quality and utilisation, resulting in more meat and/or milk from the same forage area
- Optimise utilization of grass, reducing the waste and making the grazing platform more efficient. Better allocation also allows the farm to carry more stock or free up ground for other forage production
- Get better knowledge and data from the farm's grazing platform to make more efficient business decisions - such as when to mow a field, and when to harvest forage-based crops

For specifics on stock classes not mentioned here and for further information and top tips on using the sward stick, visit www.barenbrug.co.uk

HEIGHT (cm)	SPRING	LATE SPRING & SUMMER	AUTUMN
15	2900	3000	3000
14	2850	2970	2910
13	2720	2840	2710
12	2590	2600	2480
11	2450	2500	2300
10	2330	2400	2280
9	2200	2260	2100
8	2070	2130	1950
7	1930	2000	1830
6	1790	1860	1710
5	1640	1720	1590
4	1480	1560	1480
3	1350	1430	1360
2	1080	1160	1100
1	800	900	860

DLWG (g/kg liveweight/day)

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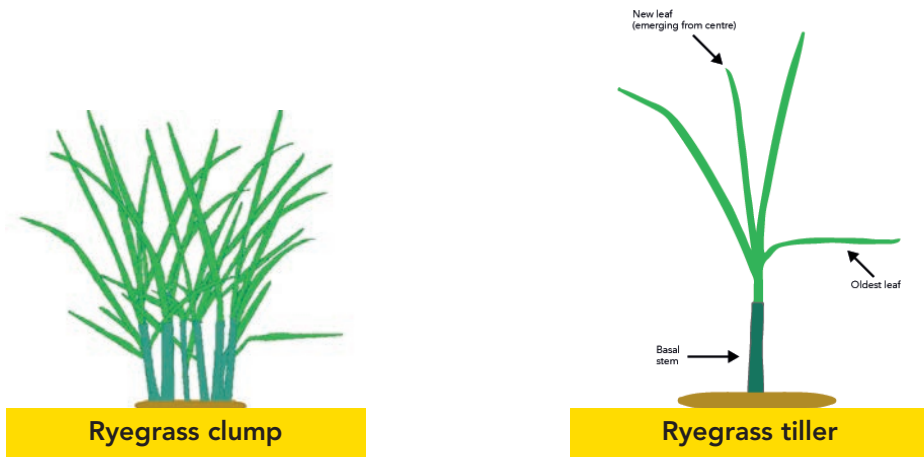
Plant Physiology

In the UK, perennial ryegrass is the most widespread species of grass for grazing animals. A perennial ryegrass field is made up of a population of ryegrass tillers. A tiller is made up of a basal stem, a leaf sheath and – at any one time – three growing leaves.

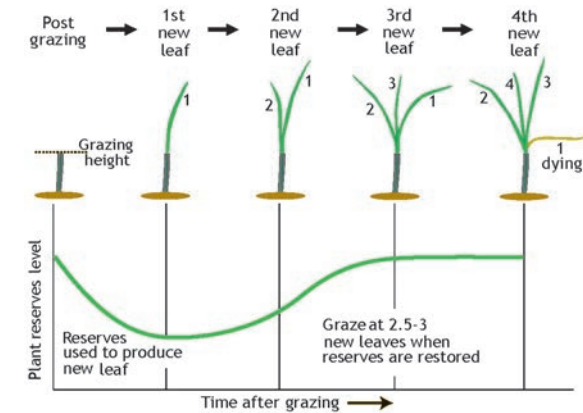
When the tiller has developed three leaves it will continue to grow. As a fourth new leaf is produced the oldest leaf starts to die. Then a fifth leaf is produced and the second leaf dies – and so the process continues.

Tillers are largely individual but are clumped together, meaning they can (to some degree) exchange nutrients. The average field will contain between 3000 to 5000 tillers per square metre.

Perennial ryegrass plants will produce new tillers throughout the growing season with peak production occurring from late April to July. The time it takes for a tiller to produce three leaves will vary, depending on the plant, the local climate and the time of year.



In mid spring it may take 15 days for a tiller to produce three leaves, with a new leaf produced every five days thereafter. In colder periods, it may take up to 50 days for a tiller to reach the three-leaf stage, with a new leaf produced every 17 days.



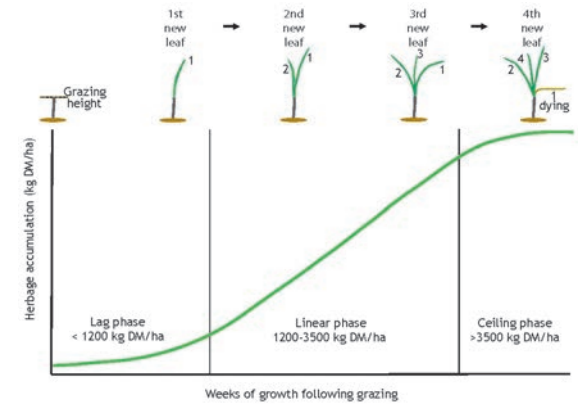
Tiller leaf production

Typically, fields grow in three phases, working in line with tiller production and energy reserves:

- The lag phase – where grass is typically less than 1200kg DM / ha
- The linear phase – where grass is typically between 1200 and 3500kg DM / ha
- The ceiling phase – where grass is typically above 3500kg DM / ha.

During the lag phase the tiller grows its first leaf; in the linear phase the second and third leaves develop; and in the ceiling phase the fourth leaf develops and the first leaf starts to die off.

When striving for peak grass performance, the aim should be to maintain grass growth in the linear phase of development, where high net growth rates and high grassland quality are achieved.



Three phases of grassland development



Good Grazing Management

Good grazing management relies on keeping grass plants leafy and actively growing while matching supply to livestock needs. The best time to graze ryegrass is when there are two and a half to three leaves per tiller in place. This new growth is a sign that the plant has sufficient reserves to recover quickly from defoliation.

Grass grows by storing the energy it produces through photosynthesis as carbohydrates in its stems. Once the first tiller leaf is established, photosynthesis becomes the main energy source, providing energy for the growth of subsequent leaves as well as replenishing carbohydrate stores. In the phase immediately after grazing, when tiller leaves have been eaten, plants must mobilise stored carbohydrates to provide energy for regrowth. It is therefore important that the tiller has had adequate time to replenish its reserves.

How animals are managed on fields can have a major impact on forage production and persistence as well as animal production. The most important factors for influencing the level of animal output under grazing are:

- The concentration of animals per hectare/acre (stocking rate)
- The system of grazing management
- The intensity of grazing pressure

Grazing pressure – the closeness to which a pasture is grazed – is affected by the stocking rate and the amount of available forage (kg of forage per hectare / acre). In sheep enterprises do not graze beneath 4cm and do not be tempted to graze too early as the plants will not have accumulated enough energy reserves. In the long term, all this would achieve is to reduce pasture quality and persistence. If you are unsure about grass levels, try using a sward stick – see page 13.

Perfecting Grassland Pressure

The key to maximising profitability within a sheep enterprise is to reduce the grazing deficit periods as much as possible for both the ewes (if applicable) and the lambs. Conserved grass (either hay or silage) can equate to three times as much as the cost of grazed grass but will still work out less expensive than feeding excess concentrates - so well managed conservation areas should also be taken into account when feed budgeting.

As previously mentioned, leafy grass can be well over 20% CP and have an ME of 11.5 MJ/kg DM. The relationship between the D value of a grass to ME is 0.16. To have 11.5 MJ/kg DM available, a grass plant must be 71.8% digestible. Managing grazing heights closely means that a sward is more likely to maintain that leafy growth and not become too mature and put out a seed head, which will reduce the over digestibility and therefore energy and protein available to the grazing sheep.

Managing grass to the advised heights throughout the guide, particularly for ryegrass, will maintain the levels of live fresh leaf up to the three leaf stage (see page 14) and minimise both seed heads and older, dead material at the base of the sward.

An added benefit of having animals graze ground is that they recycle nutrients back into the whole area through dung and urine. Where they rely on larger volumes of silage or concentrate, more time is spent in smaller areas, putting more nutrients here but also putting more pressure on soil structures. One way to bridge forage deficits is to introduce brassicas into the rotation. As well as plugging gaps in forage supplies, they offer an effective way to reseed back to grass and put some management into the ground.

Short-term brassicas such as stubble turnips and forage rape offer a low-cost option for rapidly growing feed, which can be used to fill in summer dry deficits or to extend the grazing season further through autumn and early winter. Longer-term options, such as Kale, can provide large quantities of feed throughout the winter and into the New Year.



Grass When to Graze

Knowing when to graze grass and for how long requires careful judgement and it is wise to conduct regular visual checks of the number of tillers present to avoid problems.

Grazing too Early

On a new ley, grazing grass too early – before a second new tiller leaf appears – can damage grass persistency. If a plant's reserves have not been fully restored, future growth will be in jeopardy. Repetitive early grazing can permanently decrease grassland yield and persistence. Grazing grasslands at the right time is especially important through dry summer periods when plants are under stress; grazing the first new growth after a period of drought and before a tiller has two and a half new leaves in place can kill grass.

Grazing too Late

If grassland is left to grow too long (>3500 kg DM / ha) it will enter the ceiling phase of grassland growth. In this phase, tillers continue to produce new leaves, however, there is no further increase in net grassland mass due to the dying off of older leaves. If grassland isn't grazed, dead material, which has little feed value, will build up in the base of sward.

This can lead to:

- Reduced grassland ME
- Increased risk of disease – rust and other forms of fungi can build up on dying leaves
- Decreased grassland utilisation – due to the factors above
- Reduced clover content – due to shading.

Try the pluck test.

Grasp the ryegrass seedling firmly between your thumb and forefinger, then tug in a single, quick movement (to mimic an animal biting). If the leaves break off and the roots stay in the ground, the pluck test is passed.

On the photos to the right:

First: Roots being pulled from ground

Second: Leaves breaking = a good time to start the first grazing.



Adjusting Grazing Pressure

Correcting High Grazing Pressure

If grazing pressure becomes too high – e.g., if there are too many animals grazing the same area of grass for too long – the result will be short grass stubble, which will ultimately affect animal performance. With short grass stubble, cattle are forced to consume all portions of grass including poorer quality forage. This can lead to low animal intake and subsequently, low gain rates. Periods of excessively high grazing pressure can result in a decrease in grass production.

Grazing a field to a low residual, where there is too little grass left, can put it back into the lag phase – where regrowth is slow due to the plant's sole reliance on its carbohydrate reserves. Where high grazing pressure needs to be relieved, the most effective option is to remove some animals from the grassland by allowing access to other fields. Feeding concentrates or buffer feeding the animals on grassland with silage are other options.

Correcting Low Grazing Pressure

With low grazing pressure, animals gain per head per day will typically be higher but production levels per hectare/acre will be poor. Put simply, low grazing pressure is likely to result in wasted forage. As with prolonged periods of high grazing pressure, extended phases of low grazing pressure can damage a sward, causing a loss of legumes from the stand. Where there is a need to increase grazing pressure this can be achieved by intensifying the stocking rate or by temporarily fencing out part of a field for silage.

Short periods of high grazing pressure can be useful; one to two weeks of high grazing pressure, three or four times throughout the grazing season, can help maintain legumes in the stand and utilize forage that might otherwise be wasted.

Other options for using up grass that's not being grazed quickly enough might include round baling swards. This can bring the field back under control while creating a useful buffer feed for later in the season when grazing pressure may exceed grass growth. If fields are under grazed and growth gets ahead of the animals, topping with a rotary mower or topper to remove tall, rank vegetation and encourage new growth can also be helpful.



Different Grazing Methods

Sheep tend to follow the leaders of the pack - so they will all graze at the same time and sleep at the same time within a field / flock. If you pull out leaner animals and graze them together they will have a greater appetite and will eat for longer therefore improving the condition of these animals more quickly.

Sheep farmers face a number of choices when it comes to managing how their animals graze grass. Typically, grassland growth rates should determine how long grass should be grazed and rested for and will therefore have a bearing on the grazing method chosen.

Growth rates are influenced by a number of factors including season, weather, soil structure and soil nutrients, and may vary from field to field, and even within individual fields –depending on size, geography and the stocking rate. The Agronomy Guide has developed the following table as a rough guide to rest periods at different times of the year.

Season	Weather	Growth rate	Rest period
Spring	Cool and moist	Fast	10-14 days
Spring	Warm and dry	Medium	14-20 days
Summer	Hot and moist	Slow	30-35 days
Summer	Hot and dry	Very slow	40-60 days

Actively Grazing Grass for Improvements

Continuous Grazing:

With continuous grazing, a fixed area of land is normally grazed non-stop for a specific period. Time frames vary from just a few weeks to the entire grass-growing season. Continuous grazing can be controlled or uncontrolled. To maintain a productive field in an uncontrolled, continuously grazed system it's important to avoid under- or over-grazing by maintaining the correct grazing pressure and adjusting stocking rates accordingly. Continuous grazing can lower grass production and persistency so it's vital to pick a suitably hardy grass variety. It's also important to ensure that a field used for continuous grazing has more than one water source. Animals like to gather around watering points, which means recycled nutrients can become concentrated in one area. Providing multiple drinking points will ensure nutrients get evenly spread across a wider area. Having more than one water trough will also help minimize poaching when conditions are wet.

Rotational Grazing:

Rotational grazing is where fields are subdivided and then grazed and rested alternately. Once one field has been grazed, livestock are moved to a new patch of grass. The first field is then rested and the sward given time to regenerate. Some farmers have a rotational grazing pattern of one to

two weeks. Others opt for a more intense approach – moving livestock every few days. This method provides more control over what animals are eating and can result in better plant growth but requires more land and can be time consuming from a land management perspective.

Creep Grazing:

Creep grazing is when young animals are allowed to move onto an area of grass ahead of older livestock to gain access to better quality forage. This method of grazing works well within a rotational grazing system, giving lambs access to the top layer of more succulent, nutritious grass, which enables them to gain weight more quickly. Creep grazing is typically managed via a series of fences or gates that only allow smaller animals into a designated area first.

Mixed Grazing:

Grazing different animals together can have huge benefits in terms of grassland management and can increase grass utilisation. Different species of livestock prefer different types of forage and have different in-take levels. Sheep will generally always opt for immature grasses and weeds over legumes, while cattle generally prefer legumes to grasses. Cattle and sheep also eat differently. While cattle use their tongues to pull and tear, sheep use their teeth to nibble, grazing much closer and getting into parts of the pasture that cattle either ignore or can't reach. This can increase grass tillering and sward productivity – meaning animals will, long-term, gain more weight.

Silage Production

Where silage is used to finish lambs inside, growth rates of up to 150g / day can be expected although these can rise with concentrate supplementation. The best results come from using silage with a short cop length, which speeds digestion in the rumen and improves intakes, D values of over 68%, dry matter of over 25% and energy values of 11ME. The drawback of silage is the risk of listeriosis, (a bacterial infection) and, in an indoor finishing system, the increased requirement for bedding.

Silage can also be a very important part of the ewes ration but only the very best quality pit and bale silage should be used to reduce the risk of listeriosis, which is non-contagious but can cause encephalitis, abortion and liver damage. Removing wasted silage daily can also help. You should also always ensure that all ewes have plenty of access to the silage and any concentrates fed as well as a clean water supply.

It is critical to have silage analysed so diets can be properly formulated to meet ewe requirements. You should also evaluate whether you have enough silage for all the farms' demand. If you haven't, you'll need to decide whether to buy in other forage, where to allocate the best forage and how much more concentrate will be required.

To help livestock farmers produce greater quantities of silage – of a higher quality – the team at Barenbrug has developed a separate guide to silage production, management and utilisation. For more information or to obtain a copy of the guide, please visit our website.

To find out more about our field indexing you can watch a special video online at www.barenbrug.co.uk/GoodGrassGuide where you can also register to receive a copy of our Good Grass Guide.



Looking After Leys Long Term

Whatever method of grazing you adopt; long-term it is essential to maintain swards in the best possible condition to ensure consistently good yields. This means measuring and monitoring growth regularly and getting up close with your grass. Many fields look good at a glance and it is not until you get right up to the sward that you can spot problems. Most farms will have fields at different stages of maturity – and this variation can make it difficult to know which tasks to prioritise.

To help farmers decide where to focus their efforts, Barenbrug has devised a simple field indexing system to monitor field performance, which can be employed regardless of grass type or management technique. The system is easy to use and draws on the stock conditioning method that many farmers use to grade their livestock. It provides a five-step scoring system that enables farmers to grade grass and decide what, if any, action is required to keep fields productive.

Barenbrug's field indexing system is based around the following principles:

INDEX 1: An index 1 field will have less than 25% sown, productive species left and any ryegrass remaining is likely to be of very poor quality. Fields with a classification of Index 1 are not nutritious, have no feed value and are therefore of no use to ruminant livestock.

INDEX 2: An index 2 field will have less than 40% sown, productive species with less than 10% clover (if sown), coupled with more than 40% weed content or gaps. Fields with an index 2 classification need urgent attention otherwise they will be a complete write-off.

INDEX 3: An index 3 field will have a total of 50-60% sown, productive species. At this level, fields should respond well to remedial action that will help extend its life.

INDEX 4: An index 4 field will have a total of 60-70% of sown, productive species with ryegrass accounting for 60-70% of the plant population and clover making up the rest. Fields with this classification should be good for the coming season but will need to be monitored carefully.

INDEX 5: An index 5 field will have at least 80% sown, productive species with clover making up around 30-40% of the plant population. The only work required on fields of this grade will be regular soil testing and soil structure monitoring.

6 Steps to Sward Success

Once you've classified your field – the next step is to take action.

1. Get a Grasp on Your Grass

As soon as conditions allow complete a visual assessment of your field/s – using our field indexing system.

Areas of grassland that need most attention should be easy to spot. Look for unhealthy shades of yellowy green, a clear indicator of stress. Patchy areas of growth are also a definite sign of compaction and poor soil structure.

2. Dip Deep For a Solution

The best way to assess the extent of any damage is to dig a pit to around 30cm or to the depth of any pan.

Take a close look at the soil structure. If the grass roots aren't penetrating below 10cm then you are dealing with a clear case of compaction. Another sign is the water content of the soil. If the soil is bone dry from 7-15cms down then you have compaction.

3. Correct Any Compaction

Until you have addressed compaction there is little point doing anything else. Compaction can drastically affect the growth rate and rooting structure of newly sown grasses – reducing productivity by 10-20%. It can also prevent the uptake of nutrients; restrict drainage; and ultimately cut down on the number of working days you'll get from a field. To correct compaction down to six to eight inches use a sward lifter to aerate the soil. For compaction of just one to two inches, a sward slitter will suffice.

4. Assess Acidity

Once any compaction has been dealt with, think about tackling any pH problems. Soil pH can have a massive impact on grassland success and high levels of water, like we've seen this winter, can drastically affect pH. To optimise nutrient use, as well as grass growth and quality, the target pH should be 6, increasing to 6.5 for grass and clover mixtures. Just a small decline in target pH to 5.5 can reduce grass yields by 35-40%: the more acidic the soil, the greater the chance of lock up – which makes vital nutrients unavailable to plants.

5. Know Your Nutrients

Getting a handle on soil phosphate (P) and potash (K) status is critical. P is primarily associated with energy transfer within plants and is crucial at the establishment phase for root development. K plays an important role in water regulation within plants.

The P and K needed by crops can be supplied by reserves in the soil or – after a prolonged wet period – through the addition of bagged fertilisers and livestock manures. Achieving a target soil index of 2 for P and K is the aim.

6. Lay New Leys

Once soil structure has been addressed, new leys can be drilled into place or overseeding can occur. If the aim is to get grass producing quickly then it's best to overseed with a mix of fast growing vigorous tetraploid ryegrass species. These will start delivering results after six to eight weeks of establishment – improving ground cover and giving a real spring boost to yield and quality. But remember, overseeding is only a short-term solution. For longer-term results on problem fields it is advisable to replace the grass with a more suitable ley come the autumn.



Soil Mangement to Sward Success

It isn't the animal or the bag that feeds the crop, it's the soil, so looking after soil fertility and structure are the two key fundamentals of any good grassland management scheme. Soil pH is more important than NPK because in order for nutrients to be optimally available to the plant's roots, pH must be maintained at 6.0 or above, especially for clover swards.

P & K statuses should be maintained at Index 2 (Moderate + in Scotland) and soils should be sampled every 3-5 years, depending on management practice and rotation.

Where silage or hay is being made, remember to feed the crop as well as addressing any soil deficiencies. Nitrogen should be applied when conditions allow and as appropriate depending on field use e.g., grazing or silage. Nitrogen can have an acidifying effect on the soil, so higher N users may also need to lime more frequently.



Remember to consider trace element status of the farm too. Some bedrocks are deficient in particular elements, which are important to cattle. If the elements are not present in the soil, they cannot be taken up by grass and so need to be supplied by other methods e.g. supplementation, fertilisers or boluses.



Farmers looking for advice on soil management best practice can contact the Barenbrug team for more information or can consult RB209 – the Nutrient Management Guide produced by the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board. Last updated in May 2017, this document provides specific recommendations on the use of sulphur, nitrogen, phosphate and potash in relation to grass and forage crops.



Getting Soil Nutrition Right

Get soil structure right to optimise grass growth and quality. Also regularly dig soil assessment pits to examine soil structure and check for compaction. An easy way to look for signs of compaction is to take a spade and dig a hole in the field.

Why? Soil structure affects root penetration, water availability to plants and soil aeration. This simple, quick test assesses soil structure based on the appearance and feel of a block of soil dug out with a spade. The top layer is very important to a grass life cycle.

How? The best way to assess the extent of any damage is to dig a pit to around 30cm or to the depth of any pan.

Equipment needed: Garden spade approx. 20 cm wide, 22-25 cm long.

Optional: Light-coloured plastic sheet, sack or tray ~50 x 80 cm, small knife, digital camera.

When? Any time of year, but preferably when the soil is moist. If the soil is too dry or too wet it is difficult to obtain a representative sample. Roots are best seen in an established crop or for some months after harvest. As a general rule, routine soil sampling should be conducted every four to five years.

Where? In grassland take at least 20 samples, 10 cm deep, across a representative field area avoiding gateways and hedges etc. Select an area of uniform crop or soil colour or an area where you suspect there may be a problem.

Grass Seed Quality

Important Facts to Consider When Buying Seed

Few farmers would rely on genetics from the past for livestock breeding but many stick with the same grass seed varieties and mixtures year after year – even if they aren't delivering the best results.

For some farmers, the prospect of picking a new grass can seem daunting. There are hundreds of different varieties, blends and mixtures available – so how do you know which one will work best?

If you are unsure about which product to pick, we advise selecting a grass seed from one of the UK's Recommended Lists. Bred to perform in UK conditions, grasses included on Recommended Lists have been tried and tested by farmers, who've seen real results.

As a starting place, perennial ryegrass remains the most popular form of grass for grazing animals in the UK. But there are many other varieties that the farming sector relies on including clover, herbs and other forms of forage crops. Used in conjunction with modern grass varieties, in specially devised blends and mixtures, these can bring big yield benefits – giving animals additional essential vitamins and minerals to help weight gain, while also reducing nitrogen fertiliser requirements.

Over the following pages we've put together a quick guide to the main species available, and most beneficial to UK sheep farmers.

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS - *Lolium perenne*



Description

All ryegrasses are capable of producing high yields of very high quality, high-energy grass for cattle grazing. They are all very flexible and can be used for both cutting and grazing. They are very effective users of nitrogen but must be maintained well to maximise productivity.

Perennial Ryegrass is the most popular grass used for dairy enterprises. Generally persistent for up to five years.

Min germ temperature 7-8 °C **Seeds/kg** 600,000 (dip) 290,000 (tet)

ITALIAN RYEGRASS - *Lolium multiflorum*



Description

Generally found in short-term silage mixtures, it is a two-year species and its grazing season can be extended by three to four weeks in spring and autumn. Italian ryegrasses are capable of producing up to 20% more dry matter than perennials. A brighter green than perennials, densely or loosely tufted. Similar to ryegrass but leaves rolled into the bud and not folded. Tends to be larger, stouter and more densely tufted than ryegrass.

Min germ temperature 4-5 °C **Seeds/kg** 430,000 (dip) 265,000 (tet)

HYBRID RYEGRASS - *Lolium perenne*



Description

The hybrid ryegrass is a cross between the Italian and perennial forms of ryegrass and shares characteristics of both. The dominant parent determines how the variety performs in the field. Can extend the shoulders of the grazing season. Characterised as a rapid growing variety lasting from 1-5 years or longer depending on summer conditions, genetic capabilities and endophyte status and can produce up to 10% more dry matter than perennials.

Min germ temperature 5-6 °C **Seeds/kg** 450,000 (dip) 269,000 (tet)

Grass Seed Quality

WESTERWOLD - *Lolium mul. westerwoldicum*



Description

Rapidly establishing annual species which gives high productivity within 12 months of sowing. This species is useful for sowing immediately after maize or cereal harvest in autumn or in spring, when high yields are required within 3-6 months of sowing.

Recent breeding advances in the development of quality Westerwold varieties mean it is now a serious option for UK farmers. It is an ecotype of Italian ryegrass selected for earliness, and is not botanically different from Italian ryegrass and its characteristics are also similar.

Min germ temperature 3-4 °C **Seeds/kg** 400,000 (dip) 221,000 (tet)

LUCERNE - *Artémis*



Description

Lucerne is top of Recommended Lucerne Lists across Europe and is a highly nutritious forage for livestock. It combines good digestibility with high proteins providing excellent milk yields or daily live weight gains. Well managed, this perennial crop can persist for up to five years and performs well in free-draining, drier environments due to tap roots. A more mature hay crop would be more suitable for feeding young stock. To get the best from your lucerne crop, ensure a minimum of 50% of the tallest stems have a flower prior to the first grazing/cutting.

Min germ temperature 9-10 °C **Seeds/kg** 500,000

TIMOTHY - *Phleum pratense*



Description

A very useful perennial species within grazing leys, timothy grass is much or tolerant of colder wetter soils. A very small seed means per kg, a high number of seeds are available resulting in a high plant population for wear tolerance and productivity. Timothy generally yields around 85% of ryegrass and is very palatable.

Min germ temperature 7-8 °C **Seeds/kg** 4,000,000

COCKSFOOT - *Dactylis glomerata*



Description

Modern, soft leaved varieties of cocksfoot are highly digestible, palatable and yield well. They are ideal in drought prone areas as they can persist well in these conditions and help fill the 'summer gap'. The growth habit can be strong so cocksfoot grass is ideal for systems requiring high dry matter yields early in the year. Cocksfoot is perennial and will produce as much ryegrass on lower Nitrogen applications and really comes to the fore in clover only situations making it ideal for less intensive systems. Can be a useful species where conditions are less favourable.

Min germ temperature 7-8 °C **Seeds/kg** 960,000

TALL FESCUE - *Festuca arundinacea*



Description

Modern soft leaved tall fescues are very digestible, palatable and high yielding much like the modern cocksfoot varieties. They are perennial and their aggressive root system can grow to over 6' deep where soil conditions allow making them very useful in both light, dry soils and heavy, wet soils. Tall fescue is more responsive to Nitrogen fertiliser than cocksfoot however also performs very well under a clover based, lower input system. Can be a useful species where conditions are less favourable.

Min germ temperature 7-8 °C **Seeds/kg** 420,000

WHITE CLOVER



Description

Clover fixes nitrogen in the soil (figures of 170-220kg N/ha/yr are achievable) - and is therefore a very valuable species in efficient grassland management. An absolute essential for any grazing livestock system. This perennial species provides 'free' nitrogen, which has been fixed from the atmosphere, and can feed companion grasses. Adding white clover to grassland can increase sward digestibility, especially in the summer period. It can also improve grass protein levels and trials have proved increase intakes on grass / clover swards compared to grass alone.

Min germ temperature 9-10 °C **Seeds/kg** 1,500,000

Grass Seed Quality

RED CLOVER



Description

Red clover is a useful plant for lactating cows and can help boost milk production but should be avoided by pregnant and breeding animals. When well-managed, red clover can persist for up to five years, fixing around 50 kg N/ha/annum more than white clover. Usually sown with Italian ryegrass in short-term leys, it can also be sown with perennial and hybrid grasses to extend the lifetime of a sward by helping to suppress weeds. Red clover is typically quicker to establish than white clover although not as long lasting or tolerant of poorer conditions/management.

Min germ temperature 9-10 °C

Seeds/kg 520,000

Brassica crops such as stubble turnips, kale, forage rape, grazing turnips and swedes can provide a nutritious, cost-effective form of feed for sheep. They can provide a late summer supplement to grass in a dry season; extend grazing over autumn and winter months; and provide a winter feed for animals kept out or housed. With a vast array of forage crops available to UK farmers, we have produced a separate guide in this series dedicated to brassica and forage varieties. To request a copy of Barenbrug's forage crop guide visit the website.

STUBBLE TURNIPS



Description

Stubble turnips have a high leaf to bulb ratio resulting in high levels of protein, and a tankard bulb shape to enhance utilisation.

Min germ temperature 8 °C

Seeds/kg 275,000

FORAGE RAPE



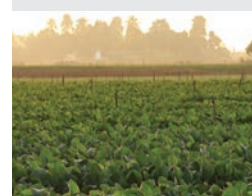
Description

A flexible forage option. It can be spring sown for a late summer feed behind turnips or autumn sown for winter grazing.

Min germ temperature 8 °C

Seeds/kg 275,000

KALE



Description

Kale is a well-proven, highly adaptable fodder crop which consistently provides very high yields of succulent green fodder.

Min germ temperature 8 °C

Seeds/kg 275,000

VETCH



Description

A common vetch can fix large amounts of nitrogen and is high in protein. Can be used for annual forage production either alone or in a mixture with grasses. It is also ideal for green manuring.

Min germ temperature 9-10 °C

Seeds/kg 18,000

BAR FINISHER



Description

A blend of chicory and plantain, two commonly used forage herbs alongside red and white clover. The clovers are ideal companions for the broad leaved herbs as they provide some of the nitrogen required for the large green leaf area meaning less bagged N is needed. Deep rooted, high in Protein and minerals, Bar Finisher can be sown as a short term green manure or used for 2 – 3 years for grazing livestock.

When choosing a brassica, sheep farmers should ensure that the crop selection matches the livestock class and then decide when the crop needs to be available and work back from there to establish a sowing date. Caution must be also exercised when feeding brassicas. A clean water supply should always be available as should a fibre and mineral source. In-lamb ewes should not graze brassica crops due to the risk of goitre, or the blocking of iodine absorption, which can cause fertility issues and stillbirths. Brassicas should be introduced gradually and responsibly with adequate fibre sources and non-hungry animals. Low/no sulphur fertilisers should be used on a brassica crop to prevent sulphur toxicity or red water, which is a particular problem in kale crops. Soil tests should be done two to three months pre-establishment to determine what fertilisers may be required.

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Conditions of sale

In case of unavailability Barenbrug UK Limited reserves the right to substitute any variety in any mixture with one of similar merit.

Any change will be detailed on the bag.

The placing of an order constitutes an acceptance of our terms and conditions of sale by the buyer.

Full terms and conditions can be found at www.barenbrug.co.uk.



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