

How to best establish pasture Brome Grasses

Pasture brome grasses are perennial plants that are well suited to free draining soil with a moderate to high soil fertility. They are also highly palatable. These traits make them a desirable plant species over a wide range of New Zealand farms.

Recent trial data show some pasture brome grasses in a very good light in terms of dry matter production, palatability and persistence when compared to our more traditional perennial ryegrass based pastures in the above mentioned situations.

We therefore thought it opportune to produce this pasture brome management guide.

As already mentioned pasture brome grasses are well suited to light and free draining soil types in areas with low rainfall and moderate fertility, they will not persist in areas of poor drainage. They provide excellent late spring, summer and early autumn growth.

They are also very palatable, including when in the seed head stage. Pasture brome grasses are persistent even though they do not contain entophytes this makes them very suitable to use as a base for horse pasture seed mixes. Another desirable trait of this group of grasses is that they can support a high proportion of legume content and they stay greener and leafier than ryegrass during the summer months.

When to sow.

A little time spent on establishment and early management will help to ensure good results and help ensure success for this long time pasture.

Pasture brome grasses are slow to establish when compared to ryegrasses and they need to be well established before winter sets in. Therefore the best time to establish pasture bromes is when the ground temperatures are above 12°C typically found during late summer or early autumn. However on irrigated farms or in summer wet areas they can be established from mid to late spring until mid autumn provided the soil temperatures are around the above mentioned levels

If farming in summer dry areas, without irrigation, it is advisable to start preparation in the late spring using either the traditional cultivation or chemical summer fallow methods. This will help to conserve soil moisture levels before drilling in the autumn.

Seed bed preparation and sowing pasture brome grasses.

As mentioned pasture brome grasses are slower to establish than ryegrasses and therefore seed bed preparation is very important.

Correctly done direct drilling can work well however for best results pasture brome grasses are best drilled into a well worked fine, weed free and well compacted seed bed.

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Pasture brome grasses should be sown shallow at between 10-20 mm in depth, because of this it is very important to have very firm seed bed.

When you are using pasture brome grasses alone in a mix with legume the correct sowing rate should be 25-30 kgs per hectare. When used in a mix with other grasses, legume and pasture herbs then sowing rates will vary from between 16 to 20 kgs.

Pasture brome grass all have large seed size and some difficulty at drilling time has in the past occurred as the seed doesn't flow well and can "bridge" in the drills. Most modern drills with sponge feeds or air seeders in general don't have any issues.

Early management of you new pasture brome pasture.

There are three different types of pasture grazing bromes each with different attributes.

Bromus Willenowi: Suitable for rotational grazing, an erect growing type.

Commercially available cultivars: Atom and Matua.

Bromus Stamineus: Suitable for set stocking, medium erect type with fine leaves.

Commercially available cultivars: Gala.

Bromus Valdivianus: Suitable for set stocking and rotational grazing a persistent, medium erect type.

Commercially available cultivars: Barena.

Pasture brome grasses store the plants growing reserves in the leaves, above the ground. Therefore overgrazing particularly during the establishment stage and during dry summer conditions should be avoided. A post grazing cover of 3-4 cm will help with persistence and re growth during this period is very important.

The first year after drilling (establishment phase) particular care should be taken to allow the plants to fully establish. This is a trait of many dry land plants, cocksfoot, phalaris, Lucerne etc.

Pasture brome pasture grass will set seed head very quickly in the mid to late spring. To avoid this they must be kept under control by grazing, however should this happen the seed head is more palatable than other pasture grasses.