

Grassland Reseeding Checklist

Reseeding Value

Reseeding will pay for itself many times over in extra highly economic milk from grass. Especially so at today's milk prices and with current feed and fertiliser costs.

- A new ley will produce a conservative 10% more grass DM/acre for the same fertiliser input while improving ME content by around 8% over a typical five year life, worth £275/acre/year at a milk price of 25p/litre (Table 1).
- Including labour and machinery charges, a new ley is unlikely to cost more than £190/acre to establish even when applying best practice, therefore costing an average of £38/acre/year over a typical five year life (Table 2).
- Reseeding will deliver a handsome 7 to 1 return in the vast majority of cases, repaying its extra cost in less than a year.
- Poor reseeding management can, however, mean a significant extra investment for relatively little gain if pastures are out of full production for too long or fail to live up to their promise as a result of poor establishment or rapid deterioration.
- Getting reseeding right demands the best practice in planning, inputs and overall care and attention, more than justifying an extra cost of around £13/acre/year compared with standard practice.



Table 1: Typical Reseeding Benefits

	Original Pasture	New Ley
Annual grass production (kg DM/acre)	3,000	3,300 (+10%)
ME content (MJ/kg DM)	10.2	11.0 (+8%)
Annual energy output (MJ/acre)	30,600	36,300
Stocking rate (cows/acre)	0.8	0.8
Annual energy for maintenance (MJ/cow)	25,500	25,500
Annual energy for maintenance (MJ/acre)	20,400	20,400
Annual energy remaining for milk (MJ/acre)	10,200	15,900
Annual milk from grass @ 5.2 MJ/litre (litres/acre)	1,962	3,058
Annual milk from grass value @ 25 p/litre (£/acre)	491	766
Extra milk value (£/acre/year)		275

Table 2: Typical Reseeding Costs

	Standard	Best Practice
Seed (£/acre)	£35	£45
Fertiliser (£/acre)	£40	£60
Chemicals (£/acre)	£10	£25
Labour & machinery (£/acre)	£40	£60
Total establishment cost (£/acre)	£125	£190
Annual establishment cost (£/acre/year)	£25	£38
Extra cost of best practice (£/acre/year)		£13

BEST RESEEDING PRACTICE

There are a number of key essentials to cost-effective reseeding, from field choice and timing through sward destruction, soil preparation, seed selection and sowing to early sward care. Always enlist the help of an agronomist to advise on the details for specific field situations.

1. Pick fields for reseeding carefully.

- Reseeding decisions should be based on ryegrass content, quality, productivity and weed infestation, rather than age.
- Ryegrasses are easy to distinguish by the pinkish-red tinge to their stem bases.
- Swards with less than 50% ryegrass should be prioritised for attention.

2. Reseed in the autumn (August or early September) wherever possible.

- Given sufficient moisture, warm autumn soils mean better, more rapid establishment.
- Autumn sowing allows the new sward to be far more productive in its first season.
- It also means the old sward can be kept in use up to July or early August, or a summer grazed brassica can be used as a short term break crop.
- Northerly sites may prefer to reseed in late spring into a warming soil following a winter break crop.

3. Destroy old swards effectively and efficiently.

- A good Roundup spray will tackle troublesome perennial as well as annual weeds.
- This is vital to eliminate docks, thistles, couch, Yorkshire Fog and other weed problems.
- Roundup can safely be applied 5-7 days before the last grazing or silage cut.
- Cultivation can then commence immediately after utilisation, saving at least a month.
- As well as first class weed control, all the grass can be utilised with no loss of quality.

4. Ensure the best soil condition before sowing,

- Soils should have a pH of at least 6 for optimum productivity.
- They also need P and K indices of more than 2.
- They must be limed or fertilised ahead of sowing to maintain these conditions.
- The soil profile should be inspected for compaction, pans and heavy poaching too.
- Any suspect and unduly damp areas need to be sub soiled to improve drainage.



5. Select the right varieties and seed mixture.

- Named ryegrass and clover varieties should be chosen from official Recommended Lists.
- These must be blended into a balanced and compatible mixture that suits the specific conditions and requirements.
- Aber High Sugar Grasses with high digestibility (D-value) should be included to maximise cow intake and performance and ensure the most efficient use of nutrients.
- Growth habit, seasonal production spread and persistency are also important criteria.
- Aber white clover varieties need to be selected to balance the particular ryegrass components.
- Earliness of spring growth, mid-season productivity and persistence are key criteria here.
- Timothy and cocksfoot can also be valuable components in certain conditions.

Recommended medium term ley for cattle grazing

AberEcho HSG®	Hybrid Ryegrass (tetraploid)	3.0kg
AberAvon HSG®	Perennial Ryegrass (late heading diploid)	3.0kg
AberDart HSG®	Perennial Ryegrass (intermediate diploid)	4.0kg
AberZest HSG®	Perennial Ryegrass (late heading diploid)	3.0kg
AberDairy	White Clover Blend	1.0kg
		14.0kg/acre

Recommended short-medium term ley for cutting and grazing

AberEcho HSG®	Hybrid Ryegrass (tetraploid)	6.0kg
AberStar HSG®	Perennial Ryegrass (intermediate diploid)	3.0kg
AberEve HSG®	Hybrid Ryegrass (tetraploid)	3.0kg
AberDart HSG®	Perennial Ryegrass (intermediate diploid)	2.0kg
AberDairy	White Clover Blend	1.0kg
		15.0kg/acre

6. Sow the seed evenly into well-prepared ground.

- Small-seeded grasses and clovers prefer shallow sowing in a fine, firm seedbed.
- Cultivations should preserve moisture at every opportunity.
- Ploughing is advisable to bury any sward residues followed by conventional cultivation.
- Shallow drilling is recommended, with the drill calibrated carefully to the seed batch.
- Broadcasting is acceptable but calibration can be difficult and harrowing-in is essential.
- Seed can be direct drilled but this requires specialist equipment and management.
- Sowing should be delayed if the soil is either too wet or too dry.
- Rolling after sowing is vital to maximise moisture retention and seed-to-soil contact.

7. Take care of newly-sown swards.

- Good slug control is especially important if wet conditions following direct drilling.
- It may also be advisable to treat for frit fly and leatherjacket around seedling emergence.
- Broadleaved weeds should be sprayed-off if enough appear within a month of emergence.
- In this case a clover-safe herbicide is essential in mixed swards.
- Sheep grazing pre-Christmas can be valuable to encourage tillering and minimise frost kill.
- Grazing into the New Year is, however, likely to compromise first season productivity.



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