

KIKUYU MANAGEMENT GUIDE



Tamgaree Kikuyu Management Guide

Establishment

Planting

Kikuyu is best sown at a depth of 1cm if you have moisture to the surface. However, with non-wetting sands it is best to sow beneath that dry layer, even down to 4cm if necessary. However, at 4cm there will be some mortality as not all seeds will push through to the surface. Double disc openers are useful in sandy wind prone soils. Most machines have trouble seeding kikuyu at the low rates required and so a carrier is required to bulk up the volume. Plain dry sand is as good as anything else. Please take the time to correctly calibrate your machine to maximise your results.

Plant seed into a weed free environment. This means controlling the seed set the year prior with spray topping or hay cutting. In the year of planting, if planting in Spring, spray out all annuals early to mid-July then again in late August for the final spray. This early knockdown allows the soil moisture profile to increase, which is drawn on by the young seedling kikuyu plant over the first summer while the root system is maturing.

Do not apply fertiliser at seeding, as this will burn the fragile root system. Kikuyu must be sown into a weed free seed bed as the seedling is easily out competed. The seed is small and offers little reserves, so the hair that emerges some 10 – 14 days after sowing is feeble. This hair resembles a rye grass hair but with a green to lime green ligule around the base whereas rye grass is red to brown. The juvenile plant again resembles rye grass, differing in colour as it stools out. Some of the young leaves will turn reddish and even shades of yellow before the kikuyu pushes out its first runner. This is no cause for concern. When the new runner roots down the kikuyu will very quickly return to a healthy dark green. It is at this stage when nitrogen is best applied.

With most of the runners out to 20cm stock can be introduced to the pasture for short periods to reduce the vertical growth. If the kikuyu has been planted for lawn a park or a sporting oval, this is the time to start mowing.

If you see evidence of runners being pulled out of the ground by livestock, it's time to spell the paddock. Young sheep or weaners work very well over a newly planted paddock. They tend to spread out rather than move as a close mob therefore encouraging horizontal growth without the risk of over grazing.

It is best to sow in early spring as this is when the day length is increasing, and soil temperature is rising. This is when kikuyu would be coming out of dormancy once established. This is the beginning of the growing season.

Water Points

Kikuyu offers the ability to carry stock in high numbers without fear of soil erosion. However, water catchments and dams can be an issue. If kikuyu is allowed to establish on catchment areas, reduced runoff will occur and therefore supply to dam levels reduced.

The impact on the area around troughs by stock movements can be reduced by having mobile troughs thus allowing time for the kikuyu to recover. This is accomplished by having multiple valves and connections along a pipeline and light weight poly troughs.

Trees

Kikuyu does not grow well under trees. Both shade and competition from the tree roots for water and nutrients will reduce its growth. Tree lines can and do provide a barrier to stop the kikuyu from invading neighbouring paddocks or bush land. Be aware though that livestock and native wildlife will still shift seed in their dung.

Stocking Rate

Kikuyu will handle set stocking and can be hard grazed in the autumn without fear of wind erosion because of the web of roots beneath the soil. This allows livestock to be run on kikuyu pasture all year round if needed. So, unlike some clump grasses which may only have 50% grazing days available due to the plants requirement to be spelled, kikuyu can be as high as 90% – 100%.

Kikuyu, being a sub-tropical plant, does go dormant in the winter when the temperature drops. However, with an application of Pro Gibb (Gibberellic Acid) you can extend the growing season. The growth of Kikuyu is dependent on several factors:

- Rainfall
- Soil fertility
- Temperature
- Day length
- Soil PH
- Soil salinity
- Grazing pressure
- Fertiliser – economic pressure

Think of kikuyu as a green feed lot, where high numbers of stock can be run while the annual pastures on the farm get a chance to get away. Due to the deep rooting nature of kikuyu it can feed on fertiliser and minerals which have leached down in the soil profile, past the annual root zone and bring them back to the surface where animals graze.

Our advice on grazing is that we recommend to graze kikuyu at golf ball height for sheep and cricket ball height for cattle or horses. This will force the plant to continue to reproduce itself and in doing so create fresh new growth; something the animals prefer.

We also recommend a soil test before setting your fertiliser program. Kikuyu is very responsive to nitrogen, ideally applied in the autumn or spring, the active growing phase. Nitrogen will not only lift the quantity but also the quality of the feed.

Companion Plants

Kikuyu is a sub-tropical plant and as such will go dormant in the colder winter months resulting in slow to nil pasture growth – a winter drought. To avoid this situation, planting suitable companions is suggested. Sub clover, serradella and biserulla are the preferred legumes. Legumes provide nitrogen for the grasses. Perennial rye grass, winter active fescue and cocksfoot all give good winter growth.

It is advisable to establish the kikuyu first then sow into the sward with double disc openers in the second year.

Lucerne will grow very well with kikuyu. However, as the management of lucerne and kikuyu are opposed, you will eventually end up with a good kikuyu stand and very little lucerne. Or conversely good lucerne and a rank and unpalatable kikuyu stand.

The cheapest seed is annual rye grass which would require re-seeding every two to three years.

Cropping into Kikuyu

Lupins or peas are suitable to sow into kikuyu pastures.

Applying a sub lethal rate of glyphosate to the kikuyu is recommended at 1.0 – 1.5 litres per hectare. This is enough to slow the kikuyu down and still leave enough plants to repopulate in the following season.

Lupins or peas on a kikuyu bed do not expose the soil to wind erosion. The operation of seeding into kikuyu also aerates the soil and stimulates fresh growth. Whilst this may not provide all of the nitrogen that subsequent kikuyu pastures will need it will reduce the demand while providing an alternative winter crop.

Growing cereals into kikuyu can be done but as kikuyu is a user of nitrogen; a higher application of fertiliser may be needed. We have several clients who successfully grow canola, oats and lupins into their kikuyu paddocks.

An interesting element of cropping is using kikuyu as a green manure plant. This is seen when the kikuyu stand is still new, less than two years old. At this early time in the kikuyu stand the minerals and nutrients have not yet been transported off the paddock and by green manuring you make them available to the new crop.

Kikuyu is a large user of moisture, so in wet years cropping is economically viable. However, in a dry year, low yield and high screenings could be a problem.

Wool Production

- Right plant
- Right place
- Right purpose
- Right management

These are Evergraze principals and apply to any decision in choosing the correct perennial plant for your property. For Tamgaree founders Morgan and Deborah Sounness, it fitted perfectly into their goal to create the right pasture to enable them to manage their superfine sheep to grow a premium product.

All the components of producing wool for the high end market are covered.

Kikuyu offers a dense carpet over the soil and sand. This negates the need for coating sheep in an effort to reduce dust into the staple and results in higher yields. Kikuyu has the ability to carry stock at high numbers per hectare, without the fear of creating a bare paddock over the summer months. This means that any aerial seeding weeds such as geranium or barley grass are unable to set seed and are eventually grazed out. Less contaminants in the wool mean a low vegetable matter reading in your wool results, another good trait.

Kikuyu grows most of the year in the correct environment. As it is green into the summer months, vital vitamins plus the fact the animals are not changing diet means a more even staple of wool. Less fluctuation in the width of the fibre occurs over the length of the staple and results in high to very high staple strength. Kikuyu gave the Sounness's a higher yield, lower VM and higher staple strength.



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