



# Rhodes Grass

Rhodes grass is a summer-growing, tufted perennial with vigorous early growth and runners which rapidly cover the soil surface. It is adapted to a wide range of soil types, growing best on loams and brigalow soils, but is difficult to establish on heavy cracking clays. It has a vigorous root system, capable of extracting water from more than 4m deep which delivers some degree of drought tolerance, but it grows best in 600-1000mm rainfall regions.

Rhodes grass is highly salt tolerant and moderately frost tolerant. It will not tolerate shade or waterlogging. It contains low oxalate levels making it safe for horses to graze.

Rhodes grass spreads naturally by seed and runners. It can be sown in a pure stand, but provides the best feed when mixed with a legume. In Central Queensland it is well suited to sowing with siratro, stylo, Wynn cassia and lucerne. It can be used for grazing or cut for hay and its vigorous spreading nature makes it well suited for use in erosion control.

## Varieties

**Pioneer** is the original variety imported into Australia early last century. It is a short, early flowering variety, but because it goes to seed quickly has limited feed value. Fine leaved **Katambora** flowers later and so remains leafy and productive into autumn, as well being more cool tolerant and shooting earlier in spring. **Callide** and **Samford** are vigorous 'giant' types, growing to 1.5m. They are also late flowering and so provide good feed well into autumn. The giant varieties may not persist on lower fertility soils but where fertility is adequate are more productive and more palatable than Pioneer or Katambora. **Finecut** and **Topcut** are derived from Katambora and Pioneer respectively for improved hay making qualities. They have fine leaves and stems, are early flowering and high yielding. **Nemkat** has been selected for its resistance to nematodes.

## Planting

Rhodes grass is best planted between October and late February. Early spring has advantages because evaporation is lowest, while mid-summer has the greatest probability of consistent follow-up rainfall. Sowing into dry soil gives the seed the best opportunity to germinate and establish on the next rainfall and establishment improves if subsoil moisture is good.

The seed bed needs to be weed-free, but can be rough. Seed may be drilled or broadcast and lightly harrowed but it is important not to cover seed with more than 5mm of soil. Rollers or presswheels will improve seed-soil

contact on non-crusting soils. Broadcasting into standing stubble followed by heavy grazing traffic is sufficient to bury seed in some lighter textured soil types. Planting rates are 1-2 kg/ha dryland, and 3-5 kg/ha in irrigated situations. Planting problems can occur due to low planting rates and the fluffy Rhodes seeds bridging within planter boxes. This can be overcome by using coated seed or sowing with a carrier such as superphosphate (10kg:1kg seed) or sawdust (2 litre:1 litre seed).

## Maintenance

First grazing should be delayed until after first seed set. Thereafter, graze before flowering as feed values decline rapidly once reproductive growth is triggered. Graze lightly at first and periodic grazing is preferable than continuous stocking for the first year. Spelling in late summer will allow seed to set for future seasons. Heavy grazing in late summer will assist in the growth of winter legumes, but will shorten the life of the pasture.

Rhodes grass responds well to nitrogen application if soil phosphorus is adequate, with yield and palatability improving.



Rhodes grass under-sown with siratro.

