

TALL WHEAT GRASS

Dryland Salinity Information Sheet #7 Tim Herrmann, Saltland Agronomist, PISA

WHAT IS TALL WHEAT GRASS?

Tall wheat grass (*Thinopyrum elongatum*) is a tussock forming perennial grass that is moderately salt and waterlogging tolerant. The plant has long bluish green leaves and can grow up to 2m high. Tall wheat grass grows actively during spring and sets seed during summer. Well managed pastures provide good quality stock feed particularly for cattle.

Tall wheat grass is adapted to moderately saline or poorly drained soils where rainfall is more than 350mm. It is best suited to areas covered by sea barley grass or the marginal areas of salt scalds.

PRODUCTIVITY

Typical pastures produce 3 to 4 tonnes of dry matter per hectare per year (4 to 5 DSE/ha equivalent). With appropriate management and application of fertiliser, yields can be doubled. Subsoil moisture over summer is necessary for good production.

SITE PREPARATION

Fence the area to be sown. If waterlogging is a problem install shallow drains where practical to remove excess water. Diversion banks will reduce the movement of runoff water onto the area. Consideration should be given to the disposal of drainage water.

Weeds such as sea barley grass must be controlled. Best results are obtained by chemical topping the previous spring. Other options include burning, knockdown herbicide and cultivation. Use a combination of methods. Cultivate in early autumn.

SOWING

Sow in autumn after the opening rains to allow a kill of germinated weeds. In higher rainfall areas (above 475mm) sowing in late winter to early spring has given promising results.

Seed should be sown about 1 cm deep. Harrowing or light rolling will often aid establishment. When sowing with puccinellia, sow the tall wheat grass and some puccinellia through the main seed box, and drop the remainder of the puccinellia on the soil surface through a small seeds box. If separate seed boxes are unavailable then drop all seed onto freshly worked soil.

Do not harrow if sowing puccinellia.

Strawberry and balansae clovers can also be sown in a tall wheat grass pasture but under favourable conditions legumes will compete strongly with the young tall wheat grass seedlings. For best results sow pasture legumes a year or two after the grasses.

Seed rate: 10-20 kg/ha. Use 8-12 kg/ha if sowing with puccinellia. *Cost:* \$2-3 per kg.

Puccinellia should be sown at 6-10 kg/ha.

PESTS

Monitor and control red legged earth mite during establishment.

FERTILISER

If the site is eroded or has poor fertiliser history, apply 100-150kg/ha of superphosphate or equivalent at sowing. Nitrogen fertiliser applied in late winter to early spring will boost productivity and help maintain plant palatability. Apply 20 to 50 units of N per ha (about 40 to 100kg/ha of urea).

GRAZING

Allow about 12 to 18 months for plants to establish before grazing. Established pastures should be stocked heavily during late-spring and early summer to prevent plants from becoming rank and losing nutritional value. Management is easier with cattle than sheep. Tall wheat grass that has become unacceptable to stock can be improved by slashing.

Tall wheat grass - production from saltland

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