

## Forage Grass Notes

### Orchardgrass (*Dactylis glomerata*)

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#### Introduction

- Orchardgrass is found in areas of moderate to high rainfall, moderate winters and warm summers
- Is a perennial bunch grass with no rhizomes or stolons
- Used for pasture, hay or haylage
- This high quality grass will provide excellent feed for most classes of livestock

#### Growth and Morphology

- Short day lengths and cool temperatures (fall) required for flower development
- Rapid re-growth and good tillering make orchardgrass an important pasture species that is best suited for rotational grazing
- Not as winter hardy as timothy or brome - only moderately winter hardy
- Does well on soils with moderately poor drainage, but does not tolerate wet soils or flooding as well as reed canary grass - best to grow on soils that are moderately to well drained to reduce risk of winter kill
- Very shade tolerant- excellent for underseeding or overseeding
- Very productive in early spring - does quite well at lower temperatures. Optimum temperature for growth is 22°/12°C, at 15°/5°C growth rate is slower and leaves are smaller
- More heat and drought tolerant than timothy or bluegrass (more extensive and deeper root system)

#### Culture and Management

- Early heading requires planning for early harvesting (quickly drops in quality following heading)
- Carbohydrates are stored at the base of the plant (fleshy part) important for winter survival - do not graze too close
- Leave stubble height of 3" or 8 cm to preserve the carbohydrate reserves and some leaf area

- Tillering occurs continuously throughout the grazing season -even when headed out there are many vegetative tillers growing at different stages of development
- Vegetative tillers result in very rapid recovery following cutting or grazing
- Early vigorous growth needs to have high stocking rates in the spring
- It will produce coarse, unpalatable clumps under continuous grazing
- Harvest every 5 to 6 weeks (3 cuts possible, 4 grazings)
- Easy to establish, sow at 7-12 kg/ha (seed in early spring)
- Responds well to nitrogen (150 kg/ha), 3 applications of 50 kg/ha of N
- Higher rates of N can result in excessive K uptake and reduced Mg uptake (Mg deficiency in cattle causes grass tetany; excessive K in forage can result in poor silage fermentation and milk fever)
- Should not go into winter with excessive top growth- growth greater than 25 cm can cause smothering

**For more information, please contact:**

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