



SILAGE DECISIONS FACTSHEET



WHITE CLOVER

White clover is mainly included in grass swards to reduce nitrogen fertilizer requirement. But it also enhances sward quality, as it is a good source of protein and has a high mineral content.

Historically, clover was not tolerant to high or moderate rates of nitrogen fertilizer, but the more modern varieties can be tolerant to nitrogen. Clover needs a slightly higher temperature in spring than ryegrass to trigger growth, therefore, strategic applications of nitrogen in spring can be beneficial to spring grass yields.

While the proportion of clover in a sward when taking first cut of silage may be lower than in mid summer or later silage cuts, it has three benefits:

- Clover increases the crude protein content of first cut by 1% for every 10% clover in the sward
- It gives more flexibility in cutting date as the sward will maintain optimum D-value for longer compared with a grass only sward
- Potentially, nitrogen fertilizer may be reduced prior to first cut, although bigger fertilizer savings are possible on subsequent cuts and grazing.

Because of the limited options in “Clover safe” herbicides many farmers sow clover at a different time to grass seed, however, this can be false economy as the weeds in many new swards can be controlled by management and do not need herbicides. The optimum timing for establishing clover is between April and August, with a seed rate of 4kg/ha usually recommended.

It is important to select varieties with an appropriate leaf size for the intended use or use a mix of varieties:

- Large Leaved - ideal for cutting
- Medium leaved - suits cutting and rotational grazing
- Small leaved - suits continuous hard grazing

In short term leys, mainly to be used for cutting, red clover can have advantages over white clover and should be considered. See *Improving productivity of Red Clover Swards* in the Forage Facts section of www.britishgrassland.com

Further information is available in the Aber Clover Management guide by British Seed Houses (www.bshagriculture.co.uk), LEGSIL Project brochures, and on the herbage varieties website, www.herbagevarietiesguide.co.uk

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Please note: Any changes to farm management should be researched thoroughly and tried cautiously, such as on a small area, bearing in mind any restrictions in force, such as Nitrate Vulnerable Zone regulations or Environmental Stewardship scheme rules. BGS and EBLEX cannot be held liable for any losses.