



# SIGNAL GRASS

*Urochloa decumbens*

*Signal Grass or Brachi is possibly one of the most commonly planted tropical grass species used in the world, either for animal production or for land stabilisation projects. It is widely in around many circles for its ability to produce reasonable levels of dry matter production and the relative ease in which pastures can be managed.*

## Checklist

- ✓ **Suited to a wide range of soil types**
- ✓ **Tolerant of low fertility**
- ✓ **Intermediate shade tolerance**
- ✓ **Tolerant of heavy grazing**
- ✓ **Capable of choking out weeds and woody regrowth**
- ✓ **Grows in tropical and warmer subtropical regions**
- ✓ **Not suitable for horses**
- ✓ **Rank growth should be avoided**
- ✓ **Responds well to fertiliser**
- ✓ **Sowing Rate - 4-6kg/ha depending on pure live seed count.**

## Environment

Signal Grass grows best in the humid tropics and warmer subtropical climates that receive 800—3000mm of predominantly summer rainfall, preferably with a five month dry period in between. Ideal average annual temperatures need to be greater than 19°C, and while light frosts will scorch leaves, plants recover.

## Soil Type

Signal Grass grows on a wide range of soil types including those of low fertility, low pH (as low as 3.5), Aluminium saturation and moderate levels of Manganese. While Signal Grass will persist in heavier soil types that experience short term flooding, plant death will begin to occur if water logging continues for an extended period. The root system of Signal Grass has longer and finer roots than any of its relatives, providing superior uptake of available soil phosphorus and nitrogen.

## Establishment

While establishing Signal Grass pastures is relatively easy, seed dormancy in newly harvested seed often causes problems with establishment. To get best results it is generally recommended that seed be stored for 6 to 12 months after harvest before planting. Once seedlings have germinated, they are relatively quick to

establish and can outcompete most weeds. However, atrazine can be used to reduce weed competition.

Once plants have a strong root hold and can not be pulled out, grazing is possible and will encourage the plant to establish a more decumbent growth habit, which discourages other plant competition.

Because of its aggressive plant growth over the summer months, a strict grazing pattern is recommended. When plants become rank, the levels of nutrients and minerals are diluted resulting in feed quality decline. Young animals should not be grazed on rank pastures as there have been reported instances of photosensitivity. Although the exact cause is unknown, crash grazing by older animals or slashing has been known to reduce the risk dramatically.

Signal Grass will combine with some legumes. Managing the grass/legume pasture to maintain a balance is required. Nitrogenous fertiliser should be used sparingly as the Signal will access the applied nitrogen and outcompete the legumes.

There have also been instances where Signal grass has been grazed out and legume dominant pastures have resulted. Careful grazing management is recommended to maintain a balanced, productive pasture.



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