

TALL FESCUE

demeter

Demeter (*Festuca arundinacea*) is a deep-rooted, densely tillered Continental Fescue. It has an erect growth habit which demonstrates strong spring and summer activity and low winter production. Demeter will provide excellent persistence and performance in growing regions which are spring and summer rainfall dominant. Long term persistence can be reduced if grown in areas where drought stresses are commonly encountered during the summer period.

Demeter is adaptable to a wide range of soil types and is tolerant of low fertile, poorly drained areas and moderate salinity. It is especially productive for a 6–7 month growing season with a moderate to high rainfall. Demeter is a tough leaved variety and palatability to stock is generally low compared to soft-leaved Fescue varieties. This attribute provides Demeter with superior tolerance to low summer rainfall, mismanagement and low soil fertility, compared to soft leaved types. This makes Demeter suited to marginal situations where long-term persistence is required.

CHECKLIST

- ✓ **Erect, densely tillered, continental type**
- ✓ **Spring-summer-autumn active, mostly winter dormant**
- ✓ **Lower palatability and seedling vigour than newer cultivars**
- ✓ **Very hardy cultivar**
- ✓ **Tolerates to periods of set stocking by sheep and cattle**

RAINFALL

Demeter is suited to temperate regions that receive 500mm+ annual rainfall and irrigation.

SOIL TYPE

Demeter is suited to a wide range of soil types from sandy loams to heavy clays, but prefers medium to heavy clay soils. Demeter prefers soil pH range of 5.0–8.0 (CaCl₂).

REGENERATION

Good management in early spring, while the Demeter is in the vegetative stage, ensures excellent regrowth. When plants are in the vegetative stage, grass shoots should show no sign of seed head development in the basal zone.

When plants are at this stage, it is suggested that plants are allowed to grow to 15–20cm tall before being grazed to 5cm. Allow plants to re-grow back to 10–15cm tall. If left longer, plant will become fibrous, decreasing digestibility. For hay or silage, allow plants to reach the boot stage before cutting.

GRAZING

Tall Fescue germinates and establishes more slowly than many other cool season grasses. Grazing too soon can seriously damage new stands. It is very important to ensure plants have a well-established root system prior to grazing. Stocking Demeter too soon will significantly reduce plant population and possibly result in stand failure.

Once established, Demeter should be managed to prevent the build-up of over grown, rank herbage as a significant decline in nutrition and palatability will result. Stands should be maintained between 4–12cm tall (active growth range). This will maximise growth rates, aid in recovery from grazing, maintain good feed and nutrition levels.

Set stocking of Tall Fescue is not recommended as selective grazing of Fescue plants can reduce persistence. It is best to avoid grazing during period of drought as this will help enhance persistence and improve recovery when good rainfall is received.



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WEED CONTROL

Seedling vigour of Demeter is poor and hence slow to establish relative to other pasture species. Correct paddock preparation is extremely important to ensure successful establishment. Any winter grasses need to be controlled in the year before sowing. Spray topping in the spring prior to sowing is often effective. Failure to ensure proper weed management can result in either partial or complete failure of the stand.

DISEASE RESISTANCE

Demeter can suffer from diseases such as Crown (*Puccinia coronata*) and Stem Rust (*Puccinia graminis*), particularly in humid summer conditions.

PEST RESISTANCE

Demeter can be damaged by Blue Oat Mite (*Penthaleus major*), Red Legged Earth Mite (*Halotydeus destructor*), Field Crickets (*Teleogryllus commodus*), Slugs and Snails. It can also suffer from Pasture Scarabs (*Sericsthis spp.*) although it is more tolerant of this than other grass species. Appropriate management of these insects is vital for successful stands, particularly during the establishment period.

SOWING RATE

When sowing alone to produce a dense sward, sow at a minimum 15–20kg/ha under dry land conditions and 20–25kg/ha under high rainfall or irrigated conditions.

In pasture mixtures Demeter should be sown at 6–15kg/ha.

If sowing Demeter for seed production it is suggested that a rate of 4–7kg/ha be used.

Optimum time for sowing is early to late autumn after rainfall. Sow at a depth of 1.0–2.0cm into a moist seedbed free of broadleaf and grass weeds.

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