

Perennial pastures

Fact sheet

Kikuyu (*Cenchrus clandestinus*)

Grows best:

Sand to sandy loam.

Prefers lighter soils as the below ground runners are protected from grazing stock.

In heavier/tighter soils, runners grow along the surface and are vulnerable to grazing.

Whilst tolerant of pH it grows best on soils with $\text{pH}_{\text{CaCl}_2} > 5.2$.

Key benefits

- ✓ **Excellent summer ground cover** and persistence, tolerates set stocking.
- ✓ **Tough and robust pasture that responds to out of season summer rainfall**, providing green pick for vitamins A, D & E.
- ✓ **Soil stabilisation** on rise/stock camps.
- ✓ **Handles heavy grazing pressure** once established hence a great choice for sacrifice paddocks to protect other species at the break of the season.
- ✓ A dense kikuyu sward **can reduce capeweed dominance**.
- ✓ During winter as the kikuyu goes into a semi dormant phase according to temperature, it **allows other pasture species to grow**.

Establishment tips

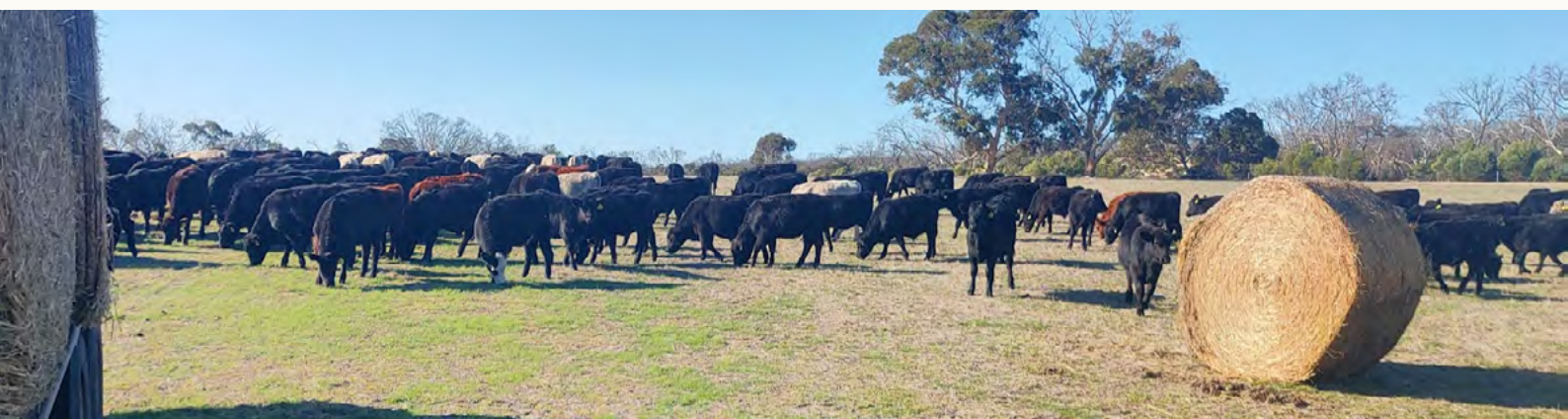
Critical factors

for persistence & productivity

- Needs to be **grazed hard in the autumn** to encourage good clover growth in winter.
- **Strong clover growth provides a good source of nitrogen** to boost kikuyu growth.

- Requires clean paddock and strong weed control – ideally spray top paddocks the year prior, then a double knockdown in early spring. Add insecticide with final knockdown.
- Sow at 2kg/ha in spring when soil temperatures are rising (soil temp needs to be 15°C to trigger kikuyu seed germination). Use press wheels or roller as good seed/soil contact is essential.
- Don't graze until plants are well established, graze once runners can't be pulled out. Use young stock for first grazing – they have sharper teeth to cut, not pull out, the plants.
- Use N fertiliser (e.g. 100 kg/ha sulfate of ammonia) to boost growth in older stands. Strategic use of N in summer, when rain is forecast, boosts growth.
- Once established, don't let it become rank as feed quality drops. Remember the golf ball (for sheep), cricket ball (for cattle) trick for grazing – if you drop the ball into kikuyu pasture and can't see it, you are not grazing it hard enough!

Below: Kikuyu has its place on sandy country and for confinement feeding/sacrificial paddocks, responding quickly after the opening break when soils are warm.



Challenges

- Has been 'lost' on the tighter sandy loam soils (especially with clay close to surface) and on heavy clay soils, due to lack of underground runners (rhizomes) arising from soil compaction.
- Winter feed supply is compromised as the plants shut down over the winter months.
- Silvergrass can encroach if clover is not encouraged at the start of the growing season. Fortunately, kikuyu can be spray topped to help control weeds like silvergrass, or apply Simazine herbicide in early winter.



Top: Early days of kikuyu establishment.

Middle: A well-established kikuyu pasture.

Below: Kikuyu plant at the break of season.



Contact

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Farmer insights:

‘You can hammer kikuyu and it still holds the paddock together. Kike has turned non-productive ordinary sand into something respectable, we’ve gained production on this ground, even the clover’s now growing.’

— Caleb Pratt, Stokes Bay

Would they plant it again?

- Yes, in light, sandy soil.
- No, on heavier soil types.

Acknowledgements

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