

# Cocksfoot

*(Dactylis glomerata)*

## Grows best:

Light sand to sandy loam, gravelly rises. Tolerates low pH (down to ~4.0<sub>CaCl2</sub>), but performs best above pH 4.8–5.0 with adequate clover.

Many farmers on KI report cocksfoot (including Mediterranean types) only persisting for 4-5 seasons.

## Key benefits

- ✓ **Excellent erosion control** on tops of dry gravelly hills, e.g. stock camps.
- ✓ Persisted for **20+ years** on well drained sites in Gosse.
- ✓ **Tolerates low pH, high aluminium**, and will also grow well in **shallow, infertile soils**.
- ✓ Very good **autumn/early winter productivity** with no animal health issues.

## Critical factors

for persistence & productivity

- **Well drained soil** – does not tolerate wet, waterlogged soils.
- **Must be rested**, especially during summer and early autumn.
- **Phosphorus (>25-35ppm)** for optimum clover productivity.
- **Carefully select variety** (see establishment tips for details.)

## Grazing management

- Benefits from rotational grazing; needs hard grazing pressure during active growth to stay leafy and palatable.
- Requires strategic rotational grazing to fully recharge root reserves which occurs when there are 4 fully expanded leaves on each tiller.
- Avoid grazing cocksfoot in summer and early autumn, until plants are well anchored.
- Cocksfoot has no underground dormant buds like phalaris but does have dormant tillers. Summer spelling of cocksfoot pastures has been found to increase plant density. Cocksfoot has deep roots which help it survive, however it has a lower proportion of live roots than phalaris prior to the autumn rains and a substantial new root system is not regenerated until it develops daughter tillers – about one month after initial rains. This puts plants at risk of being pulled out by grazing stock.



## Establishment tips

- Select an appropriate variety. Typically for KI's climate, Mediterranean (Hispanica) types are best e.g. Uplands, Summadorm. These show little response to summer rainfall meaning energy reserves to grow a new leaf are not drawn upon, aiding survival. Longer cooler season districts such as Gosse can opt for the Continental (intermediate) varieties such as Lazuly, Aurus and Kainui.
- Autumn to early winter is the preferred time for sowing, as this will enable plants to develop a stronger root system prior to the onset of the first summer. Spring sowing summer active cocksfoots may be an option in areas with more reliable rainfall over late spring and summer.
- Very slow to establish.
- Do not graze for the first 6 months after autumn sowing to ensure root system development has occurred and the plants cannot be pulled from the ground. At 6–8 months post sowing, a light grazing can occur, and light rotational grazing will encourage root development and allow it to compete with any

legumes that may have been sown as a companion species. Pastures grazed with sheep should be rotated frequently to avoid overgrazing, especially during the spring/summer period. During this time the plant is dormant, and overgrazing will damage the crown, causing the stand to thin out prematurely.

- Requires good weed control in the years preceding sowing.



PO Box 794, Kingscote, SA, 5223  
admin@agki.com.au  
www.agki.com.au

## Farmer insights:

‘I plant cocksfoot into paddocks that have suboptimal dam water supply as I know these paddocks shouldn't be grazed over summer.’

— Andrew Fogden, Parndana West

‘Ambassador cocksfoot and perennial ryegrass are carrying 35 DSE/ha year-round (24 ha running 45 cows and calves), compared with just 17 DSE/ha/year on annual pastures.’

— Darcy Bruce, Parndana

## Would they plant it again?

- ✓ **Yes, on free draining soils such as gravelly rises.**
- ✗ **No, in wet, poorly drained soils.**

**Above:** Cocksfoot seed head.

**Left:** Cocksfoot, on May 10 2022. Notice small clover plants just beginning to get going whilst cocksfoot has taken off. [photo.barenbrug.com.au](https://photo.barenbrug.com.au)

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## Challenges

- Older varieties e.g. Uplands and Porto can be unpalatable for stock. Stock eat everything else first leading to skinny stock and poor lamb survival compared with annuals (observation Rick Morris, Karatta).
- Produces unpalatable rank bulk unless tightly grazed in spring.
- Summer feed value is limited for the Mediterranean types - it's not a summer feed source.
- When poorly managed, becomes clumpy and coarse.
- Becomes reproductive quickly if under grazed.

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## Contact

**This fact sheet was prepared by Jenny Stanton and Lyn Dohle, March 2026.**

*For further information on perennial pastures, please contact*

**Jenny Stanton** 0484 602 946  
jennybehenna@hotmail.com

or

**Lyn Dohle** 0419 846 204  
lyn.dohle@sa.gov.au



**Above:** A cocksfoot plant.

**Below:** Cocksfoot provides good capeweed control. (Photo: Tim Prance).

## Acknowledgements

*This project is funded by the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board.*

