

# Perennial Ryegrass

*(Lolium perenne)*

## Grows best:

Deep sandy loam to heavier fertile soils with reliable rainfall (650-900mm) and good moisture holding capacity, typically west of Harriet Road and Gosse.

Suited to some pockets on the Dudley Peninsula on heavier ground.

Known persistent varieties: Avalon, Kidman and Victorian.

## Key benefits

- ✓ High quality, highly digestible, nutritious feed.
- ✓ High productivity.
- ✓ Tolerates short term waterlogging.
- ✓ Moderately tolerant of mild acidity.
- ✓ Suitable for **oversowing** into existing pastures to boost productivity.
- ✓ Readily recruits from **seed**, including from adjacent paddocks.
- ✓ Good **persistence** in wetter areas of farm.

## Alternate ryegrasses

Other areas on KI are better suited to a hybrid short term ryegrass, or annual ryegrass that is allowed to set seed and recruit the following season.

In fact, many producers are already opting for this system, whereby annual ryegrass is sown, cut for hay and then allowed to set seed. Farmers are finding the seed set lasts for many years allowing it to self-regenerate annually.

## Critical factors

for persistence & productivity

- Perennial ryegrass is medium to shallow rooted (about 0.7–1.2m), therefore **requires year-round moisture**.
- **High soil fertility** required.
- **Reduce grazing** of perennial ryegrass where possible **over summer**.
- **Not tolerant to insect attack**.

## Grazing management

- Employ strategic rotational grazing to fully recharge root reserves, which occurs when there are 3 fully expanded leaves on each tiller.
- Reduce grazing of perennial ryegrass where possible over summer. If grazing is required, aim to use short periods of intensive grazing followed by an extended period of rest, particularly when there is some plant growth.
- Employ seedling recruitment strategies on an occasional basis to increase ryegrass density.



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## Establishment tips

- Graze hard in spring but allow it to set seed in early summer.
- Essential to look after during the first summer/autumn period.
- Requires a good fertiliser program to maximise production. Ensure nitrogen in particular remains at adequate levels.

## Farmer insights:

‘Avalon perennial ryegrass provides valuable feed at critical times. It gives you an extra 2 weeks earlier green feed at the start of the season and 2 weeks extra at the finish of the growing season and responds to out of season rainfall.’

— Steven Childs, Flinders Chase

‘I’ve tried most of the perennials, but they just didn’t persist on our country. We’ve gone back to an annual ryegrass system and it’s been more reliable. By managing seed set properly, we’re getting consistent production and good value for money.’

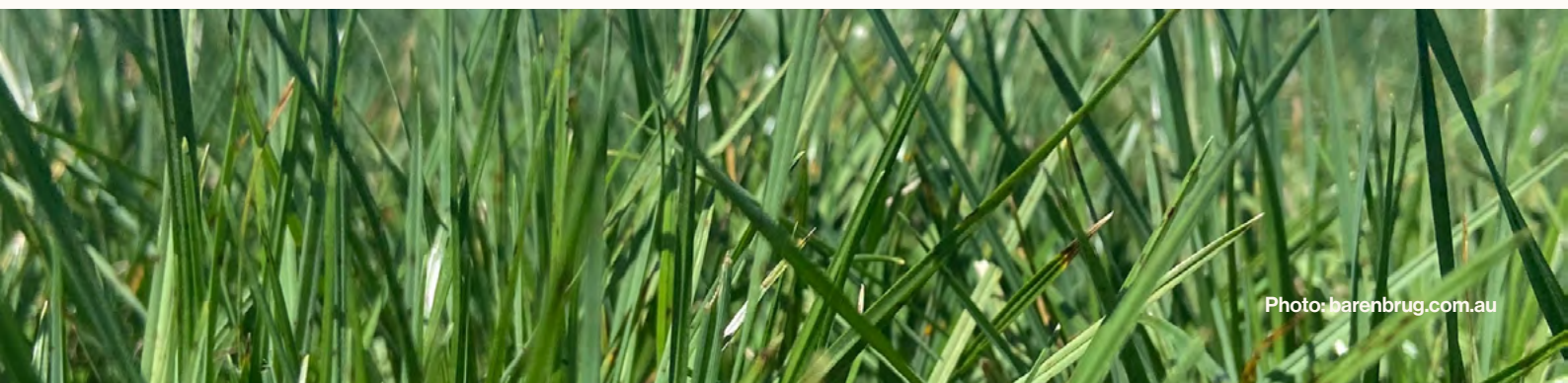
— Simon Murton, Parndana

**Below:** Grazed perennial ryegrass.  
Photo: Tim Prance.



## Would they plant it again?

- ✓ **Yes, some farmers on and west of Harriet Road, Newland with year-round soil moisture and fertile soils.**
- ✗ **No, remainder of the Island. Opt for an annual or hybrid ryegrass instead and allow it to set seed.**



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## Challenges

- Livestock can occasionally develop ryegrass staggers in late summer or early autumn due to alkaloids produced by wild-type endophytes. If ryegrass staggers occur, stock should be quietly moved (avoiding stress) to safe (non-ryegrass) pastures until toxicity subsides.
- Shorter persistence than other perennial species (3-5 years) makes the investment in perennial ryegrass questionable east of Parndana, although it can be longer under favourable conditions.
- Susceptible to drought, late autumn breaks and summer dry spells.

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**Below:** Perennial ryegrass and clover mix.  
Photo: Tim Prance.

