

# Saltland species: Tall Wheatgrass & Puccinella

## Grows best:

Saline, waterlogged soils.

Salt scalds.

Rainfall 400–700 mm.

## Tall Wheatgrass

Productive perennial grass suited to moderately to highly saline soils and winter waterlogged conditions.

Provides structural groundcover year-round, high biomass potential, and good persistence.

## Puccinella

A fine, low growing perennial grass best suited to highly saline, periodically inundated areas.

Exceptional salt and waterlogging tolerance but lower productivity than tall wheatgrass.

## Key benefits

- ✓ Both grasses **stabilise saline and scalded areas.**
- ✓ Both **provide feed value from previously unproductive land.**
- ✓ Both grasses show **long-term persistence** once established.
- ✓ Both grasses have **excellent waterlogging and salinity tolerance.**
- ✓ Both grasses are **tolerant of low fertility.**
- ✓ Tall wheatgrass provides **high winter and early spring feed**, with the ability to maintain green pick into summer under some conditions.
- ✓ Puccinella is lower yielding but **maintains groundcover and survives where other species die.**
- ✓ Tall wheatgrass is the **best all rounder on saline flats** with moderate salinity – strong persistence and good bulk.
- ✓ Puccinella is the **species of choice for the worst scalds and depressions** – “If nothing else will grow there, puccinella usually will.”

## Critical factors for persistence & productivity

- **Grazing pressure must match the season:** too hard in late summer can set these species back.
- **Maintaining groundcover is critical:** saltland recovery slows dramatically once bare patches develop.



## Grazing management

- Light grazing in establishment year to allow plants to seed.
- Use rotational grazing for best results and plant recovery.
- **Tall wheatgrass:** Allow plants to reach 20–25 cm before first grazing. Maintain residual height at 5–7cm in spring and 10cm in summer to encourage tillering.
- **Puccinella:** Graze lightly; avoid over grazing due to fine crown structure.
- Moderate grazing pressure can be sustained once established.

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## Establishment tips

- Sow puccinella first into highly saline areas. Follow with tall wheatgrass as salt reduces.
- Leave seed on soil surface in saline areas; minimal disturbance recommended.
- Consider adding legumes such as strawberry clover (perennial) or Messina (annual) in less saline patches later.
- Autumn is optimal once soils are moist but not saturated.
- Avoid sowing into extremely saline dry soil conditions – germination suffers.
- **Tall wheatgrass:** 8–12 kg/ha.
- **Puccinella:** 1–2 kg/ha (very small seed).
- Prefer a clean, firm, well prepared seedbed with good seed soil contact.



**Above:** Close up of tall wheatgrass plants.

**Below:** “If nothing else will grow there, puccinella usually will.”

## Farmer insights:

‘ Saltland species turn wasteland into useful pasture. Patience is key – establishment is slow but the long-term gain is excellent.

— Malcolm Schaefer,  
MacGillivray

## Would they plant it again?

- ✔ Yes, on salt scalds.
- ✘ No, on good country. There are more productive, quality options.



## Challenges

- Slow establishment; requires patience and careful grazing management.
- Lower feed quality than other perennial grasses.
- Stock will walk past tall wheatgrass once it gets too stemmy (goes reproductive).
- Tall wheatgrass prefers neutral to alkaline soils.

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## Contact

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**Below:** Dense sward of tall wheatgrass.

