



managing native
vegetation
and biodiversity

improving farm profits
through biodiversity

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GRAZING NATIVE PASTURES IN TASMANIA

Managing wallaby grass pastures

Wallaby grass (*Austrodanthonia* sp.) is considered to be the most valuable native pasture grass in Tasmania. It has a relatively high forage value and is productive, palatable and persistent. Wallaby grass pastures may also include other native grasses, such as native tussock grasses (poa), kangaroo grass, weeping grass, common wheatgrass and native spear grasses.

Wallaby grasses grow well during the cooler months and, given enough soil moisture, will grow year-round. The common species of wallaby grass are able to cope with heavier grazing pressures than other native grass species and can become dominant in closely grazed swards. They can also re-establish in exotic pastures where sown species will not persist.










Wallaby grasses occur over a wide range of soil fertilities. They respond positively to fertiliser but the cover of wallaby grass may decline in areas where fertility is high due to increased competition from introduced pasture species and weeds. Unfertilised wallaby grass pastures need to be managed differently to fertilised ones.

Key facts

- Use management practices to benefit the desirable species - grazing and rest can be timed so that they benefit the desirable species and act against the undesirable species.
- If it ain't broke, don't fix it - don't change your management if current practices are keeping native pastures healthy and productive.
- Avoid overgrazing - native grasses need time to recover after grazing, and if they are overgrazed the plants become weak and they may die.

Land, Water & Wool (LWW) is a joint investment between the wool industry's peak research and development body, Australian Wool Innovation Limited, and the nation's premier investor in natural resource management research, Land & Water Australia.

Native Vegetation and Biodiversity is one of eight **Land, Water & Wool** sub-programs. The others include:

-  Benchmarking and Evaluation
-  Sustainable Grazing on Saline Land (SGSL)
-  River management and water quality
-  Managing climate variability
-  Managing pastoral country
-  Future woolscapes
-  Sustainable Grazing Systems Harvest Year

Native Vegetation and Biodiversity

The *Native Vegetation and Biodiversity* Sub-program of Land, Water & Wool is exploring ways of managing landscapes so as to maintain enterprise profitability while meeting natural resource management objectives. It is achieving this by working closely with woolgrowers, drawing on the research already undertaken through the Native Vegetation R&D Program managed by Land & Water Australia and undertaking new research on the links between wool production and biodiversity.

The Tasmanian regional project, *Biodiversity conservation integrated into sustainable grazing systems*, is looking at how woolgrowers currently manage their native vegetation for conservation and production purposes on-farm.

This fact sheet aims to describe the forage characteristics and qualities of native grasses and how best to graze them to get the most from them.



Distinguishing features of wallaby grass:

- Fine leaves
- Seed head has a fluffy appearance at maturity
- Hairy at the junction of the leaf blade and sheath

Year-round grazing management of wallaby grass pastures

Best management practice for wallaby grass pastures relies upon strategic grazing and spelling. Specific grazing/spelling times are given below.

Timing	Action
Before the autumn break	Graze to remove dead plant material. Maintain ground cover if annual grasses and broadleaf weeds are a problem.
After the autumn break	Rotationally graze pastures to protect establishing native grass seedlings, and allow established native grass plants to develop new leaves. Do not graze heavily.
Winter	Stock at low rates. To increase native grass density, defer grazing to encourage and protect native grass seedlings.
Early spring	Maintain low to moderate grazing pressure. To control annual grasses, broadleaf weeds and excess clover growth, use short-term, high intensity grazing.
Late spring	To increase seed set of native grasses, reduce stock density or defer grazing when native grass seed heads emerge.
Summer	Continue low to moderate grazing pressure or deferred grazing until after native grasses have set seed.

“Understand the condition of your native pastures - being able to recognise the key native and introduced species present in a pasture will help you determine what condition the pasture is in so you can then decide what management options will work best.”

Wallaby grass fast facts

- Moderate to high forage value
- Flowers spring to autumn, actively growing during winter and spring (can grow year round)
- High drought tolerance, high frost tolerance
- Moderate production (t/ha), digestibility of 45 – 82 per cent and crude protein of 10 – 25 per cent
- Tolerates increased fertility and higher grazing pressures

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Further reading:

Managing grazing on native pastures in Tasmania (fact sheet)
Grazing native pastures in Tasmania – managing kangaroo grass pastures (fact sheet)
Grazing native pastures in Tasmania – the best way to manage grassy weeds in native pastures (fact sheet)
Grazing native pastures in Tasmania – the forage characteristics and qualities of native grasses (fact sheet)
Common grasses of Tasmania: an Agriculturists Guide, by P. Lane et al 1999
Tasmanian Bushcare Toolkit: a guide to managing and conserving the bushland on your property, by JB Kirkpatrick and L Gilfedder, DPIWE 1999

Acknowledgements:

Information from *Managing Tasmanian Native Pastures – a graziers guide* by K. Mokany, D. Friend, J. Kirkpatrick, L. Gilfedder, F. O’Connor (currently in production) and *Native grasses: An identification handbook for temperate Australia* by M. Mitchell, Landlink Press 2002 were used for this fact sheet.
Comments were provided by Doug Friend (doug.friend@dipwe.tas.gov.au).
Photographs were taken by Kerry Bridle, Louise Gilfedder and Matt Appleby.

Stay informed

If you are interested in receiving regular research and other updates from the Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Tasmanian project, please complete the section below and fax this entire page to:

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