

# Lucerne Management

## Establishment Phase

Once your seed has been planted, it is vitally important to keep a watchful eye out for seedling pests such as Red Legged Earthmite (RLEM) and aphids. If these pests are present they should be sprayed with Le Mat or another appropriate insecticides (please check with your local authorized Agronomist).

If your seed has been Gaucho Treated there will be 2 -3 weeks protection against such a pest attack, but we would recommend that you still monitor your stand closely for any pests, and if they do appear, spray.

## Weed Control

### 1<sup>st</sup> Year – Post Establishment.

It is extremely important to control every other plant in your new Lucerne stand within the first 6 months of its life. Any other plant, including ryegrasses, will compete with your Lucerne seedlings causing either, death and stand thinning.

Autumn sown stands are particularly susceptible to Capeweeds strikes. Some herbicides require the Lucerne plant to be at least 3 trifoliate leaf stage for spraying, some do not – so we highly recommend you get your local agronomist to inspect the crop early – perhaps at 4 -6 weeks old, so as to determine both weed challenges and crop size. A full recommendation can be done from there.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Year – Greater than 12 months Old.

Weed control becomes a little easier – but is just as important. The Lucerne stands are much stronger and can withstand any number of good ‘winter clean’ chemicals.

An old standard is Sprayseed and Atrazine which not only takes out any broadleaf weeds but also grasses and has residual for up to 12 months. Standard practice is to graze the paddock hard just prior to mid winter to remove as much Lucerne leaf area as possible. Allow a week or 10 days for the weed leaf to clean and then apply chemical. Again, seek professional advice before applying.

## Grazing Management

### Set Stocking

Although many new Lucerne cultivars have lower growing points than the older cultivars, they are better suited to grazing. Therefore Lucerne should never be set stocked.



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The main reason for this is that removal of the newly developing shoots when set stocked will reduce the life of the plant and will lead to weed infestation.

## **Spring (September to November)**

Ideally grazing in the spring should start when the crop height is between 0.20 - 0.25 metres. During other seasons the use of your stand is based around the different growth stages of plants development.

Ewes and lambs can be slowly introduced onto Lucerne stands once the lambs are 2-3 weeks old. If grazing, the aim is to have enough stock on the paddock so that the paddocks will be grazed off within 4-7 days.

The recovery time or resting period before you should re-use your stand at this time of year should be between 30 and 40 days.

## **Summer (December to February)**

Once again paddocks are best rotationally grazed for between 7 to 10 days every 30 to 40 days. To achieve maximum weight gain stock grazed on nothing but Lucerne should get 2.5 to 4.0 kgs DM / Head / Day.

If you are planning to irrigate during this time of year, delay doing so until the new growth has formed a canopy. This will help stop seedling weeds from getting established.

## **Autumn (March to May)**

During this period thoughts change from using your stand to looking after the life of it. At least once during this time you should allow your stand achieve at least 50% flowering. By doing this you will allow the plant to restock its underground reserves. Lucerne stands should be used less frequently.

## **Winter (June to September)**

Lucerne normally stops growing after a series of hard winter frosts. A final clean up grazing should occur before the end of June. 7 to 10 days after this final "clean up" grazing has occurred, the application of a suitable contact and residual herbicide should take place. Any hard grazing after this period will have a huge negative effect on the spring growth and should be avoided.



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## Fertiliser

Phosphorous is the key element in Lucerne growth and development and should be sown with the seed. Generally single super should be sown at about 250 – 300 kg / ha.

A soil test is highly recommended prior to planting to ensure there are not only any major nutrient deficiencies but also to check on the PH level, crucial for any legume crop.

It is suggested that you converse with a local Fertiliser representative to get an accurate understanding of your paddock fertility levels, as these will determine the growth and vigour of your stand.

Nutrient removal, especially when hay is made, is a major issue in Lucerne because it is such a productive pasture. It is essential to have a good top dressing program to be applied either every 6 months (Autumn and Spring) or yearly, Spring, to ensure that gradual Nutrient depletion does not bring about poor stand performance or shorten the stand life.

Again we would recommend that you work closely with your local Fertiliser rep regarding soil testing on your property.

*If you have any other questions or require any further information please don't hesitate to contact Specialty Seeds Australia.*

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