

Sainfoin

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Four Year Grazing/Cutting Crop

Sow 25-35 kg per acre (60-90 kg/ha).

£2.65 per kg

Grass Option

Ref. MIXLUC

We recommend the use of a non-competitive grass mixture to be sown with sainfoin. The grass assists the silage fermentation process, contributes to yield and fills the base of the crop, therefore providing some competition against weeds.

3.00 kg certified **ROSSA** or similar meadow fescue

1.00 kg certified **PROMESSE** timothy

4.00 kg per acre £11.89 (10 kg/ha £29.73)

Suitable Soil

Under the right conditions sainfoin will outyield other crops such as red clover and lucerne. Successful crops of sainfoin are grown on free draining soils with a minimum pH of 6.5. If you soils meet both these requirements then read on.

The Magic of Sainfoin

For three centuries sainfoin has been grown as a forage crop in the UK and across Europe and North America. Sainfoin has been somewhat neglected in recent years due to the widespread adoption of ryegrass and nitrogen fertiliser. However, it may well become fashionable once again due to its unique qualities.

Sainfoin requires no nitrogen fertiliser. It fattens livestock quicker than any other known forage. It has anthelmintic (anti-worm) properties and causes no bloat. So why then is it not more popular? The reason is simple. Our obsession with yield and artificial fertiliser has literally enabled sainfoin to become the 'forgotten forage'.

Currently, there is a considerable amount of scientific research taking place on this crop. The aims of this research is to truly understand why animals fed on sainfoin respond so well and just as importantly how to grow it successfully.

Use

Sainfoin is the best forage species available for meeting the protein requirements of ruminant animals. It is used either for lamb, milk or beef production and can be both grazed or conserved for winter forage. It is bloat free and drought resistant. It is well documented that stock performance when fed on sainfoin is far superior when compared with other forages. This is due to its very high palatability leading to high voluntary intake and to higher protein absorption by the animal. Protein content is approx 20%.

Typically, it provides a heavy cut for silage or hay in June and then regrows for grazing during the summer. It is leguminous and requires no artificial nitrogen once established.

Yield

We recently conducted a review of sainfoin strains at The Royal Agricultural College. We are pleased to report yields of 14t DM/ha for the better strains. Interestingly the more productive strains showed markedly better regrowth, an essential trait if growers are to re-use this valuable species. In addition, we continue to work in conjunction with NIAB to evaluate sainfoin's compatibility with grasses.

Field Choice

Free draining soils with a pH of 6 or above are essential for the best results. Compacted or wet lying soils are to be avoided.

Sowing & Establishment

It is advisable to drill in the spring. Autumn sowing is risky as the seedlings are slow growing at first and do not have time to develop before the onset of winter. For spring sowings it is ideal to undersow a spring cereal. Priority has to be given to the sainfoin. Sow the cereal at half the recommended sowing rate. Ideally cut the cereal, usually spring barley, for silage at the milky stage. 40 kg of N in the seedbed will encourage faster establishment. The first year of sainfoin should be treated as an establishment year with full production not being realised until the following spring. Weeds can be controlled by topping or with herbicides, but ideally a clean seedbed is preferred.

The Seed

Sainfoin seeds, see picture left, are approx. 4mm long and are contained within a husk. The seed should be sown at 25-35 kg per acre, the higher rate being used when seedbed conditions are poor or a late sowing is envisaged. The seed is usually drilled to a depth of 2 cm. Companion grasses are recommended at low rates.