



managing native
vegetation
and biodiversity

improving farm profits
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GRAZING NATIVE PASTURES IN TASMANIA

Managing kangaroo grass pastures

Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) pastures are dominated by kangaroo grass, but often contain a wide range of other native plants, including lilies and wildflowers. Pastures dominated by kangaroo grass are usually quite distinctive, displaying a reddish colour in autumn.

Kangaroo grass is drought tolerant and has its most active growth phase from late spring to early autumn. The young growth is palatable, and provides moderate to high forage value. However, the mature leaves have low palatability and forage value which makes this species most suited to less nutritionally demanding production systems (e.g. Merino wethers). Kangaroo grass is sensitive to frost, and therefore will have reduced growth during winter in areas which are subject to frosting. However, in areas free from frosts it will continue to grow and provide forage during the winter months.

Kangaroo grass is usually the first native grass to disappear when grazing intensity and soil fertility are increased. To maintain kangaroo grass pastures, they should be stocked at low stocking rates (1 DSE/ha in run country) or spelled at regular intervals. Specific principles for managing grazing of kangaroo grass pastures are outlined in this fact sheet.

Key Points

- Use management 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.
- Understand the condition of your native pastures - being able to recognise the key native and introduced species present in a pasture will help you to determine what condition the pasture is in. Then you can decide what management options will work best.
- Avoid overgrazing - native grasses need time to recover after grazing, and if they are overgrazed they may weaken and eventually 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 kangaroo grass:

- Older leaves have a red-brown tinge
- Seed heads are 30-50 cm long, rusty-red colour in summer, on stems with dark nodes
- Seeds are very shiny dark brown with a sharp base and a collar of hairs

Year-round grazing management of kangaroo grass pastures

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

| Timing | Action |
|----------------------------|--|
| Autumn | Use high intensity (short duration) grazing to remove rank growth and encourage the growth of winter active native grasses. |
| Winter to early spring | Graze to utilise winter growing pasture species (kangaroo grass is dormant at this time). |
| Mid spring to early summer | To maintain cover - spell from grazing to allow plants to flower and set seed. To reduce cover - graze using moderate grazing pressure. |
| Mid to late summer | Use moderate grazing pressure to utilise dry feed and summer growth of kangaroo grass |

Carefully managed grazing of kangaroo grass is good for production and conservation. Ungrazed kangaroo grass becomes rank and less productive and also decreases in conservation value. Kangaroo grass pastures also need to be rested for longer periods every few years in order to set seed and maintain plant growth.

Kangaroo grass fast facts

- Moderate to high forage value
- Flowers summer to autumn, actively growing during spring and summer (dormant over winter)
- High drought tolerance, low frost tolerance
- Moderate production (t/ha), digestibility of 54 – 75 per cent and crude protein of 5 – 17 per cent
- Disappears with increased fertility and moderate-heavy stocking rates
- Studies at Nile in northern Tasmania showed that resting during spring caused a marked increase in kangaroo grass cover compared with grazing all year-round

For further information, contact:

Kerry Bridle

LWW Research Officer
University of Tasmania
Private Bag 78
Hobart 7001
Tel: (03) 6226 2837
Fax: (03) 6226 2989
Email: Kerry.Bridle@utas.edu.au

Visit us on-line at www.landwaterwool.gov.au

Further reading:

Managing grazing on native pastures in Tasmania (fact sheet)

Grazing native pastures in Tasmania – managing wallaby 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

Native grasses: An identification handbook for temperate Australia, by M. Mitchell, Landlink Press 2002

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:

Kerry Bridle

LWW Research Officer
University of Tasmania
Fax: (03) 6226 2989

Name _____
Address _____

Telephone _____
Fax _____
E-mail _____

project partners:



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