Seed production

Seed can be harvested by hand with sickles and threshed with sticks. It is important to keep the seeding pasture clean of weeds because Rhodes grass seed is more difficult to clean than most other tropical grasses. Rhodes grass often produces two crops of seed per year. Rhodes grass seed matures 23–25 days after flowering. Yields up to 350 kg seed per hectare can be harvested. Seed can remain viable in storage for up to 4 years.

Feeding

Grazing is the most common method of feeding Rhodes grass. Avoid overgrazing—because its palatability is extremely high, livestock tend to overgraze pasture. Some farmers use the grass for cut-and-carry. It also makes good hay.

This guide was compiled by Dr Ben Lukuyu. For further information on this and other topics relating to livestock feeds and feeding, please contact:

Ben Lukuyu
The East Africa Dairy Development Project
P.O. Box 30709, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254-20-422-3000
or +254-20-422-3412 (direct)
Fax: +254-20-422-3001
E-mail: b.lukuyu@cgiar.org

Josephine Kirui
The East Africa Dairy Development Project
P.O. Box 30677, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254-20-722-4000
or +254-20-722-4133 (direct)
Fax: +254-20-722-4001
E-mail: j.kirui@cgiar.org

This information is meant as a guide and must be adapted to suit local conditions.

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Boma variety Rhodes grass

RHODES GRASS

About Rhodes grass

Rhodes grass is a vigorous, perennial grass, originating in South Africa, with a strong root system that gives it good drought tolerance. It spreads quickly, forming good ground cover, and grows to 1.5 m.

It grows under a wide range of conditions. It is useful in the cut-and-carry system and for open grazing and is popular for hay making. Common varieties are Giant, Boma (in photo), Mbarara and Masaba Rhodes.

Advantages

- does well in low rainfall areas (<900 mm) and is drought tolerant
- withstands heavy grazing
- is very palatable
- is good for hay making

Disadvantages

- can be hard to establish because seed germination is poor
- can be overgrazed because of its high palatability

Cultivation

Climate

Grows at altitudes from 600 m to 2000 m. It does well in areas receiving more than 250 mm rainfall annually and also persists well under drought conditions.

Soil

Grows in a wide range of soil conditions but performs best in loamy, fertile soils. It does not do well in alkaline or very acid soils.

Preparation

It is best grown as a pure stand.

Plough and repeat at least once to make a fine seedbed. Plough again when the weeds have emerged to reduce competition during establishment. Sow immediately after this ploughing.

Planting

Rhodes grass is usually established from seed but root splits can also be used. The best time to sow where there are two rainy seasons is during the short rains. Where there is one rainy season, plant from early to mid rains.

Sow when the soil is loose (dry). Make furrows 25 cm apart, using a peg to measure. Drill the seeds in the furrows, at a seed rate of 12 kg per hectare (2.5 acres). That means 1.2 kg will sow 0.1 ha or 1/4 acre. Cover the seeds lightly, for example by placing light tree branches over the furrows.

Fertilizer

For high productivity, apply nitrogen fertilizer, preferably during heavy rains, at the rate of 100 kg per hectare.

Weeding

Make sure the plot is weed free when it is first sown. Remove weeds between the rows using a hand hoe.

Pests

No diseases of importance but common pests such as armyworm may attack the pastures.

Harvesting

Start harvesting or grazing soon after grass flowers. If cutting, cut close to the ground to stimulate spreading. Leave to grow again until next flowering.

When well managed, Rhodes grass can yield an average of 8 tonnes dry matter per hectare per year.