

There's no room for guesswork when reseeding

Soil testing and timing are key to successful establishment this autumn

With input costs soaring, the prospect of reseeding silage and grazing leys this autumn may seem more daunting than usual.

But there are some steps you can take to maximise your chances of achieving good establishment and a healthy sward next spring.

Reseeding is always considered to be an expensive process. But if you get it right it's extremely cost effective and, relative to the benefits of a revitalised ley, it will actually cost very little at all. That's the view of Cheshire-based independent agronomist Paul Sweeney.

He says that timing is everything when it comes to success, yet it's something that producers often get wrong.

"The key is not to go in too late. There's a tendency to graze the old ley until as late in the season as possible and many producers also have concerns about reseeding too early and having too lush a crop come the winter," says Mr Sweeney. "But these fears are often misplaced."

He recommends reseeding during the latter half of September for most parts of the UK.

Nutrient status

"Another common mistake is to guess the soil nutrient status or to ignore it all together, but a soil analysis test is as cheap as chips – just £7.50 – and well worth it.

"You simply can't guess – even if you think you know, you don't. And with

fertiliser prices as high as they are, I don't see how producers can afford not to do a test. The results may even show that no additional fertiliser is required, which will help to minimise the cost of the reseed."

Soil pH

Testing soil pH is important too and if liming is required this should be applied after ploughing and not before, says Mr Sweeney.

For most grazing land compaction is not a problem, but again he says it costs nothing to check. "So get out there with a spade, dig down to at least 40cm and have a look.

"If compaction is relatively shallow and within the top 20cm of the soil – as it is on leys that are predominantly grazed – then ploughing will lift that out.

"Silage leys and soils that are plastered with slurry, particularly if they're light soils, may be suffering from deeper compaction and so deeper cultivation after ploughing may be required."

Mr Sweeney stresses 'after ploughing' as this makes the job easier and, as a result, it uses less diesel – another cost saving

New seed coating on the way...

Barenbrug is in the final stages of trialing a seed coating – for all grass and legume species. So far trial results with BarCote have been promising, according to company MD Paul Johnson. And he expects the product to be available next spring. "It's not just a germination improver – it also contains trace elements that will help to boost the health of the emerging seedling and deliver additional benefits to the crop," he says.

Not least will be a reduced requirement for fertiliser applications – a healthier and well established crop is better able to utilise the nutrients that are applied and are already in the soil. "This seed coating has been specifically developed for the UK market and we're sure it will result in huge improvements in ley establishment and take some of the pain – and worry – out of reseeding."



Fertiliser seed treatment boosts establishment

Another tool that's just become available to producers is a grass seed treatment that literally coats the seed with just the right amount of nitrogen and phosphate to aid establishment.

Launched in May, iSeed feeds only the seed and not the surrounding weeds, or other established grasses. And DLF, the company that's marketing the product in the UK, says that it can improve establishment by up to 35%.

"Grass is a particularly sensitive crop and, until now, fertiliser applications, on or close to the seed at drilling, have tended to kill the seed and actually hinder establishment. There was a problem with toxicity," says DLF's agricultural business manager Tim Kerridge.

"But this product, developed and extensively trialled by Kemira GrowHow, not only improves establishment, but the uptake of iSeed fertiliser is significantly more efficient than a standard seedbed fertiliser – great if you're looking to save on fertiliser costs and of particular interest to producers farming in NVZs."

This autumn just two treated seed mixtures are available from the company. One is a general reseeding mixture and the other is ideal for over seeding. The



Coated grass seeds

latter is aided by the additional weight of the coated seed – it's twice that of untreated seed.

The recommendation is to wait 14 days after over seeding before applying fertiliser, as the established grass will compete with the new seedlings. "But with iSeed there's no need to apply this dressing – the seedlings already have all the fertiliser they need to become established."

And as for cost, the treatment compares well with the cost of using a traditional seed bed fertiliser. "The treatment itself currently costs between £60 and £85/ha and, with seed bed fertiliser costing in excess of £400 per tonne, it's extremely cost effective."

tip and it also ensures that the lime is distributed where it's most needed.

Seed bed preparation is less critical. Producers should simply avoid too fine a seed bed to prevent problems with capping following any heavy autumn rainfall. "Just make sure you keep the crumb structure and some soil clods – about 2cm in diameter – on the surface."

If lack of rain is a problem, he suggests rolling the seedbed as this will draw moisture to the surface and aid germination. "The seed doesn't need much to get going and that's all you need it to do. There's always enough rain later in the year to get it growing."

Only in severe drought will a reseed fail – or if there's a heavy infestation of

leather jackets. There's not much that can be done about the former, but the latter is another case of 'doing your homework' before you begin reseeding.

"Get out and check for leatherjackets before you burn off the old ley with glyphosate. If you spot them – the grubs or the flies – you have to treat the field before you plough it."

Overall, Mr Sweeney says that it's very rare for an autumn reseed to fail. "And that's why producers prefer to reseed in the autumn. So if it's a reliable and cost effective reseed that you're looking for, do it this September."

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