



Undersowing - drought recovery

Summary Undersowing is a great option to get thin, damaged pastures growing quickly again after the dry. It is a fast, relatively low cost, with minimal disruption to a farm. Sowing dry (after 1 March) has real advantages.

What is undersowing? Undersowing or 'stitching in' is simply direct drilling seed directly into a thin existing pasture (without any herbicide application).

Benefits Undersowing is fast and has minimal disruption to the farm operation, so large areas can be done quickly. This makes it very useful where a number of paddocks are in poor condition due to drought.

Sow dry Undersowing while it's dry, before rain, has real advantages:

- Seed is in the ground ready to grow with rain. In trials that gave an extra 1.5t DM/ha of pasture growth over sowing a week after rain.
- Contractors are much easier to get. Once it rains everyone wants them.
- Seed likes being in the ground - endophyte keeps better than in the bag.

But don't sow very early (e.g. before 1 March) and risk getting a strike and it drying out again:

Pick the right paddocks Pick the right paddocks. Pastures must be thin, with bare ground, so new seedlings have space to establish. Undersowing into dense pastures usually has little success, you are better off spraying-drilling or cultivating.

Contact contractor If you're using a contractor, get organised early before the rush.

Species choice Select the right ryegrass. If a paddock is going into crop in spring annual ryegrass (e.g. *Hogan*). Fast-establishing, high yielding hybrids are often the best option (e.g. *Shogun*, *Forge*) and grow feed fast after rain. Perennials can work well, but are slower to establish so need open pastures.

Value Undersowing results vary more than full renewal. But done well, where a high performance ryegrass is established (and weeds kept out), gives high returns.

Costs/ha		Value - extra yield	
Direct drilling	\$150	Year 1 - 3000 kgDM/ha @ \$0.30/kgDM	\$900
Forge hybrid ryegrass 20kg/ha (Agricote treated)	\$300	Year 2 - 2000 kgDM/ha @ \$0.30/kgDM	\$600
		Year 3 - 1000 kgDM/ha @ \$0.30/kgDM	\$300
Total cost	\$450	Total value	\$1,800

Sowing rate Diploid ryegrass seed sow at 10–15 kg/ha; tetraploid seed at 15-20kg/ha. Use the higher rates for thinner pastures.

Treated seed Must be used to control pests like Argentine stem weevil and black beetle.

Check for slugs Slugs may not be a problem if it has been very dry, but it pays to check. Bait if necessary.

After sowing Keep grazing the paddock normally – this limits competition for light and moisture from existing pasture plants. Use nitrogen to help boost recovering pastures. But remember to monitor herbage nitrate levels – they can be high following extended dry conditions.