

FORAGE PEAS HUSBANDRY INFORMATION

Soil Type/Site Selection

Generally speaking forage peas can be grown on a very wide range of soils - fields need to be very well drained (peas do not like 'wet feet') and have a pH of 6.0 or above.

Seedbed & Sowing Methods

Sowing date is somewhat flexible as it depends on where the crop is to fit in the rotation. It can be sown as early as March/early April in the south and a little later in the north. The minimum (stable) soil temperature required is 8°C. Bear in mind that late sowings (after midsummer) are unlikely to yield as well as early crops.

Varieties

The seed can be sown with a cereal drill at a depth of 2.5-3.5cm with a row width of 1.75cm. Some livestock farmers like to undersow their new grass seed mixtures in forage peas - when doing this either shallow cross drill the grass or broadcast it separately.

The variety which many farmers prefer to sow is Magnus - a high yielder with a proven commercial pedigree. Magnus is a semi-leafless variety so it has the benefit of interlocking tendrils which help the crop resist lodging.

Magnus works well in arable silage mixtures - blended with spring barley or spring wheat. The sowing rate for such a combination would be 100 kg/ha of peas and 125 kg/ha of the cereals.

Fertiliser

Forage peas are leguminous so will fix their own nitrogen. However, a small dressing of nitrogen will often be beneficial at the establishment phase depending on the existing nutrient status of the soil. A general dressing of 30N. 60P. 60K will be suitable for average soils.

Weeds, Diseases and Pest Control

In good conditions forage peas will produce a dense canopy which will smother weeds very efficiently. However, it is good husbandry to ensure that the field is as weed free as possible from the outset.

Bird damage (mainly pigeons and rooks) can be substantial where fields are in a high-risk area. Damage will be minimised by the speedy establishment of the crop so sowing into optimum seedbed conditions is vital. The use of bird scaring devices may well be essential on sites prone to bird strikes.

Harvesting

Forage peas can be cut and clamped, cut and baled or grazed in situ. For crops destined for cutting the peas should be harvested when they are still flowering and the plants have formed but not filled their first pods. Wilting for 24/48 hours is recommended and precision chopping is essential. The use of an appropriate additive is a very sound move to help ensure a good fermentation in the clamp or bale.

Generally speaking, silage made from a mixture of peas and cereals will be less prone to poor preservation - the disadvantage is that such a mixture is more likely to deteriorate faster at the silo face during feeding. This will certainly be the case if the material has not been chopped very short or consolidated efficiently.

A good crop of forage peas will yield between 40-50 tonnes of green matter per ha (at 20% DM) and this is, of course, achieved with a single cut.

If you plan to strip graze your crop then make sure the whole process is controlled by an electric fence to reduce wastage and control intake.

Feeding

Although some experts believe that forage peas are a 'bloat-free' crop (due to their content of tannin) it will be sensible to introduce stock to the crop gradually and, for safety, it is important to monitor animals regularly while they are grazing. Like all legumes forage peas are very palatable and their judicious use in the diet should promote a higher voluntary intake.