

Prepare your fields

Once you have decided that you wish to grow your own feed, it is very important that you learn how to prepare the field for harvested forages. If you know how to do this, then you will also be able to establish a strong field of forage. Some crops, such as Rhodes grass, can produce well in a single field for between 5 to 10 years.

Site selection

First you need to select the right site for your forage crop. Different crops have different requirements:

- Legumes require well-drained soil, flat-surfaced fields and a lot of sunlight.
- Velvet beans, sunhemp and pigeon peas do not contain sufficient amounts of protein for cows and are difficult to prepare for forage mixes.
- Rhodes grass and other fine grasses require well-drained soil, flat-surfaced fields and lots of sunlight.
- Stalky grasses such as elephant grass and Napier grass, need moist soils and lots of sunlight.
- It is very important that you have a water source nearby to irrigate your crops. If not, you will have to be able to transport water to your field.

Site preparation

Before you start planting or sowing, your field should be well-tilled with a smooth level surface.

Planting Rhodes grass

1. Sow the seeds into moist soil.
2. If you decide to sow the seeds in rows, it should be sown very shallow (no more than 25 mm deep)
3. You can also broadcast the seeds on top, and cover it loosely with the sandy soil.
4. Use a rake to cover the seeds.
5. Cattle can start grazing Rhodes grass after 4 to 6 months.
6. Rhodes grass can reach a height of between half a metre and 2 metres.

Remember that legumes and grasses are good for the soil and are ideal for a practice called companion cropping. This means that some grasses and legumes can be planted together with fast-growing annual crops such as maize or millet. This will help to lessen the weeds in the field and you will have a supplementary crop that can be cut and fed to your cattle.

Select a site

- Well-drained soil.
- Lots of sunlight.
- Flat surface.



- Till your field.
- Use your draught animal or tractor.



Start sowing

- Seeds can be broadcast (Rhodes grass).
- Seeds can also be sown in rows.
- Do not plant sown seeds deeper than 25 mm.



- Cover seeds loosely with sandy soil.
- Use a rake.



25 mm

Source: The Milk SA guide to dairy farming in South Africa [UM](#)