

Forage Factsheet – Orchard Grass

Species Name: Orchard Grass – *Dactylis glomerata*

Origin: Europe

Longevity: 2-6 years

Uses: Hay, pasture, stockpiling.

Optimal time of use: Orchard grass begins growth in the spring later than meadow bromegrass. Grazing should begin when the orchard grass plants are 8-10 inches (20-25 cm) tall. Leave at least 4 inches (10 cm) of stubble. Time grazing to avoid the formation of seed heads to ensure forage quality. Hay mixed orchard grass stands when the other species in the stand are at their best quality. Orchard grass regrowth may be stockpiled as its feed value is adequate for dry pregnant cows until January.

Recovery after use: Orchard grass regrows rapidly after cutting or grazing if adequate fertility and moisture are available. Overgrazing drastically reduces winter hardiness and stand longevity because energy reserves are stored in the lower stems.

Yield: Orchard grass yields approximately 1300 lbs/acre (1477 kg/ha) in the Brown soil zone, 3300 lbs/acre (3750 kg/ha) in the Dark Brown soil zone, and 4320 lbs/acre (4909 kg/ha) in the Black and Grey soil zones. Under irrigation, orchard grass has the capability of producing 7230 lbs/acre (8215 kg/ha).

Palatability/Nutritional Value: Orchard grass is highly palatable. Orchard grass has an average digestibility of 67% and crude protein levels ranging from 13-16% just prior to haying.

Competitiveness: Lack of winter hardiness limits competitiveness in Saskatchewan.

Winter Hardiness: Orchard grass has poor winter hardiness. Hardiness can be improved by maintenance of adequate snow cover and carryover (at least 8 inches or 20 cm).

Drought Tolerance: Orchard grass is moderately drought tolerant. It is more drought tolerant than timothy.

Erosion Control: Orchard grass has limited value for erosion control.

Ease of Establishment: Orchard grass establishes easily.

Suggested Mixtures: Alfalfa.

Salinity Tolerance: Orchard grass has poor salinity tolerance.

Flooding Tolerance: Orchard grass is tolerant of up to one week of flooding or saturated soils in the spring, but does not tolerate waterlogged soils during the growing season.

Soil Texture: Orchard grass is suited to loamy through clay soils with good moisture holding capacity. Orchard grass requires at least 18 inches (45 cm) of annual precipitation and fertile soils.

Acidity Tolerance: Orchard grass tolerates soil pH as low as 5.0.

Management Considerations: Orchard grass responds well to nitrogen fertilization based on soil test recommendations.