

SEASONAL NOTES

Lucerne

THE sowing of new areas of lucerne and the treatment and harvesting of established stands, first cuts of which are usually made in November, will be the principal work in the coming month.

Sowing New Areas

Sowing should not be undertaken until the ground is warm, usually about November, and the seed-bed satisfactory. Prior to sowing periodical harrowing is required to obtain a fine, firm seed-bed and the destruction of germinating weed seeds. Before final harrowing and rolling carbonate of lime should be broadcast at 10cwt. to 1 ton per acre, or half the quantity of burnt lime. If the seed is to be sown broadcast, 1 to 2cwt. of superphosphate per acre should also be applied. Both may be applied the same day as the seed, although some growers prefer to lime about 10 days to a fortnight before manuring and sowing.

To ensure a good even strike it is essential that sowing be shallow, practically on the surface, with seed certainly not deeply buried.

In order to avoid leaving vacant ground for weeds to strike, broadcasting after the Cambridge roller is generally adopted. Even distribution in sowing may be obtained by broadcasting half the seed at right angles to the first, using about 9lb. of seed each way. A light brush harrowing is usually quite sufficient to cover or sweep the seed into the roller marks or crevices of the soil.

Under certain circumstances, such as on light ground, the seed is drilled at about 15lb. per acre with reverted or serpentine superphosphate through every coulter, but using turnip or worn grain coulters for shallow sowing. The drilling of straight superphosphate with inoculated seed is not recommended, because of the adverse effect of the former on the culture. Some farmers cross drill, but the second drilling tends to bury the first sowing too deeply.

When sowing lucerne under irrigation, if the ground has been dry in the early spring, the land may be irrigated before ploughing and conditions carefully watched to commence cultivation as soon as practicable, while the ground is moist. Ploughing and cultivation in the direction of fall facilitates future irrigation and drainage. Too much water

is apt to induce grass conditions, and lucerne is likely to die out in wet places.

Because the young plants are very tender and intolerant of competition, lucerne should seldom be sown with a cover crop. The usual rate of broadcasting after inoculating the seed is from 15 to 20lb. per acre. As inoculation may mean the difference between success and failure, it should not be omitted. When ordering lucerne culture through the mercantile firms it is necessary to state the approximate date of sowing and the quantity of seed to be treated. Instructions with regard to procedure are enclosed with the culture.

Early Treatment

A good strike of lucerne is not difficult to obtain, but as weeds may choke out the young plants, no opportunity should be neglected before sowing of killing germinating weed seeds periodically with the harrows. Once the lucerne is sown, weeds must be controlled by mowing when growth is about 12in. high and at a stage before they set seed. Fortunately most spring weeds will not persist after one or perhaps two cuttings, and the growing lucerne will then have a smothering effect. To

enable the lucerne growth to come away the cut material, unless thinly spread, must be removed.

Trouble with lucerne stands often occurs about a year after sowing, due perhaps to a lack of inoculation or fertiliser at sowing time, but frequently troubles are due to unsuitable soil conditions, such as poor natural drainage or low fertility.

Cultivation

Most lucerne crops receive no after-cultivation, growers mainly preferring to sow down new areas after a stand becomes thinned or patchy from grass competition. Cultivation may be undertaken immediately after the first cut, using a grubber fitted with narrow, rounded finger tines. Discs should never be used, as they cut the crowns. Application of 1 to 2cwt. of superphosphate per acre is most beneficial at this stage, while lime may also be applied every second or third year.

In old stands some growers cultivate in the autumn and drill Algerian oats, which with the lucerne make useful silage or hay in the spring. As lucerne is winter dormant, the oats will have little effect on the stand, but will smother weed growth. There should be thorough cultivation of old stands or none at all. With a young stand, ensure that the plants are sufficiently well rooted to survive the type of cultivation intended. A cultivator may be too severe, and in the early stages even light harrowing to kill weeds may pull out many young plants, especially on loose ground. Once these are removed, they cannot

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