

## Scrub feeding

### Jeffrey House

Livestock Officer, Extensive Industries  
Development, Forbes

#### Note: Native Vegetation Act

Under the Native Vegetation Act 2003, the lopping of native vegetation for stock fodder (including the uprooting of mulga in the Western Division in areas officially declared to be drought affected), when carried out by or on behalf of the landholder, is defined as a routine agricultural management activity that is permitted under the Act.

If you have any doubts about how this applies to your situation contact your local Catchment Management Authority.

### Introduction

Edible scrub is a valuable resource that can be used as an alternative feed source for livestock in times of feed shortage. Many native trees and shrubs can provide enough energy to maintain most classes of stock when supplemented with a suitable protein source.

There are, however, a number of limitations in feeding scrub.

- At best, scrub is only equal to fair quality hay.
- Additional supplements will be required for pregnant or lactating females.
- Often sheep and cattle will lose their appetite for scrub after a couple of months, so other sources of feed must be available.
- The cost of lopping should be considered as part of the cost of feeding.
- Stock will eat some trees, but will leave others of the same species, on the same soil type.

Seek local knowledge in determining which trees and shrubs are suitable for feed in your district. Observing the scrub that stock regularly eat and trees that have a clear browse line can also aid in determining palatable species. Some species of shrub can be poisonous, especially where young

leaves are fed. The seeds of Kurrajong trees have been known to poison stock.

The management of trees or shrubs is a major consideration if their long term survival is to be ensured. Trees should be only lightly pruned, removing foliage from the tree without compromising the trunk or main branches whilst leaving some foliage intact. It is best to prune a tree only once in the season and stock should not be allowed to access the new growth. Continued lopping or heavy lopping can reduce the lifespan of the tree or kill it.

However, under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* it will be permitted to uproot mulga in the Western Division in areas officially declared to be drought affected.

### Initial Feeding

Initially, cut small amounts of the most palatable scrub close to stock camps and watering points to allow stock to become accustomed to the sound of the chainsaw and also to eating scrub. Do this before other paddock feed is completely depleted.

As soon as stock are eating scrub and are attracted by the sound of the saw, begin feeding in areas furthest from water. The more accessible scrub is then saved for feeding when stock are weaker.

Finally, increase the amount of scrub cut to meet the full demand for fodder. The actual amount of leaf required per day depends on the class of stock and the kind of scrub being used. Experience will be the best guide for how much to feed. If no leafy material remains on the feed material a day after cutting, increase the amount cut. It is important that enough leafy material is available to discourage stock from eating twigs and branches which can cause impaction problems.

Impaction is caused by the fibrous nature of scrub and its low digestibility. Signs of impaction include failure to eat, lack of cud chewing and general abdominal discomfort often indicated by restlessness, groaning and kicking towards the belly.



Where it is difficult to persuade stock to eat scrub, a mix of two parts of molasses to one part water sprayed onto the leaves may make the scrub more palatable.

### Supplements

Fortified molasses mixes should be provided to animals consuming scrub (see Primefact 341 *Supplementary feeding of cattle*). Molasses helps to reduce impaction problems which may occur in the rumen of animals being fed scrub over a long period of time, while protein in the form of urea or protein meals will improve performance and intake.

Ground limestone should also be included in the molasses mix at 1.5% by weight to ensure animals are receiving adequate levels of calcium.

A lack of phosphorus and sulphur can also limit the nutritional value of some scrub; dry licks may be used to overcome these deficiencies. Phosphorus supplements can be added to fortified molasses mixes because molasses itself is a good source of sulphur.

Scrub often appears to have reasonable crude protein levels but this protein is often chemically bound in the leaves and is not available to the animal. Table 1 gives the crude protein and metabolisable energy (ME) values for various scrub feeds.

Protein can be supplemented in the form of white cottonseed or protein meals, with the addition of ground limestone.

This form of supplementation, however, provides less protection from impaction than molasses mixes. If stock show signs of impaction they need to be given unrestricted access to straight molasses in an attempt to loosen their gut contents, improve digestion and relieve the pressure in the gut.

### Water

Good quality water should always be available while feeding scrub. If troughs are used for stock water, ensure they are cleaned out regularly.

### How often to cut

Cut small amounts of scrub regularly. While it is common to cut two or three days scrub supply, daily cutting may be necessary during summer to avoid leaves drying out and reducing palatability. Cutting regularly also helps to conserve future scrub feed.

If feeding scrub daily, it is best to feed the same species each day before moving on to another species. Scrub should be cut in the late afternoon so that stock will camp after feeding and graze out in the morning. Many producers prefer to only cut scrub every second day, with grain supplements provided on the alternate days.

Table 1. Energy and protein content of some commonly used scrub feeds

	Dry matter (%)	ME (MJ/kg DM)		Crude Protein (% DM)	
		Average	Tested range	Average	Tested range
<b>Belah</b>	48	8	7.5–10.4	9	7–14
<b>Black Wattle</b>	45	7.5	6.2–9	9	5–13
<b>Boonery</b>	42	8.2	7–9	12	10.5–13
<b>Gruie</b>	38	9.7	8.9–10.1	12	10–14
<b>Kurrajong</b>	62	7.7	6.7–8.7	10	8–12
<b>Mimosa bush</b>	38	10.4	–	19	15–25
<b>Myall</b>	44	8.5	–	14.5	13–16
<b>Mulga</b>	77	7.5	–	8	–
<b>Prickly Wattle</b>	43	10	7.9–10.1	14	8–17
<b>Rosewood</b>	76	7.3	6.6–8.5	11	8–13
<b>Tagasaste</b>	27	8	5–11.4	13	5–24
<b>Whitewood</b>	–	8.6	–	9.9	–
<b>Wild orange</b>	47	9.3	9–10.1	13	12–16
<b>Wilga</b>	42	9.7	8.2–10.5	13	8–16

---

© State of New South Wales  
through NSW Department of Primary Industries 2007  
ISSN 1832-6668

Check for updates of this Primefact at:  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts)

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (January 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Job number 7155