



Establishing pastures - Readers' Note

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Pest control after sowing

Pasture plants are susceptible to insect attack after they have been established and during their productive growth. You must take care to correctly identify the insect that is causing the damage. The most important insects are discussed in the following table. Damage must be sufficient to warrant the use of insecticides.

| Pest | Description | Activity | Control |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| Red-legged earth mite | ~1 mm long. Black body and red legs. | Eggs are produced and carried over summer and hatch in late autumn after rain and when the soil temperature cools. | Best control is spraying 2–3 weeks after hatching and before egg laying. Do not allow the mites to lay eggs in spring. Spray miticide along fences. |
| Lucerne flea | Pale green and round. 3 mm long. Will hop when disturbed. Eat holes in leaves until a thin skin remains on one side. | Most active in cool wet weather. Several generations during the year. | Inspect weekly after the autumn break. Spray when numbers increase sharply. Two foliar sprays a few weeks apart might be needed. |
| Spotted alfalfa aphid | Adults yellow to green, ~2 mm long, with rows of dark dots along their back. Some adults winged, others wingless. | Most active spring–summer. | Monitor lucerne stands. Cut for hay when the aphids become a problem. Spray if lucerne wilts. |
| Blue-green aphid | Blue to green and ~3 mm long. Some adults winged, others wingless. Two long slender projections at the rear of their body. | Most active autumn–spring. Leaves can turn yellow and die prematurely. | Predatory insects such as wasps and ladybirds are important in keeping numbers down. |
| Lucerne leaf-roller | Two types: one in the south of the state and another in the north. | The small caterpillar rolls the leaf with a web. The caterpillar pupates in the leaf. | Cut the lucerne for hay. Spraying should not be necessary. |
| White-fringed weevil | Larvae ~13 mm long, legless and creamy white. Attack lucerne, burrowing around the taproot and leaving deep grooves. | Larvae most active spring–autumn. Adults common January–March. | Crop rotation with cereals. Do not sow lucerne in land that has been infested with the weevil for the last 2 years. Adults can be killed with insecticides. |
| Sitona weevil | Grey-brown, 3–5 mm long with a brown snout. They do not move when disturbed. They eat U-shaped notches out of the leaves. | Adults emerge from the soil October–November; become dormant after feeding until late autumn, when they resume feeding and lay eggs within 1 week. Larvae develop into adults September–October. | Spraying must be completed within a week of renewed activity in autumn to stop egg laying. |

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| Pest | Description | Activity | Control |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| Cutworms | Eat through stems of young pasture plants near ground level. Difficult to detect. 25–50 mm long. Colour ranges from grey to pink to brownish black. | Feed at night and hide in the soil during the day. | Inspect the pasture in late afternoon or evening. Best treated with insecticide when feeding. |
| Armyworms | Caterpillars vary in colour. Often have a dark-edged, broken white line down the centre of the back and a dark line along the inner margin of a white line down each side of the back. 35–45 mm long. | Usually occur in warm weather after heavy rain. Spread from areas where eggs were laid by moths. | Monitor paddocks. Spray when armyworms first appear. |
| Slugs and snails | A problem mainly in perennial pastures where there is plenty of organic matter. Snails take ~2 years to reach maturity. Slugs mature in 1–2 years and can live for several months to a few years. | Worst in young pastures in autumn and winter. | Baits containing methiocarb. |