

## Five key tips for quality silage

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Conserving surplus spring pasture as silage can increase over-all spring growth and pasture quality, as well as locking away a relatively cheap supplementary feed source for the months ahead.

Five key factors to help make good quality silage are:

### 1. **Only conserve pasture that is a true surplus to requirements**

During the spring period, most farms will generally grow more pasture than the cows can consume. As pasture growth increases, the rotation length needs to be shortened (to maintain pasture quality). In doing so, the cows will be allocated a larger area per grazing. There will come a point in time where the cows will no longer be able to consume the allocated amount of pasture – this is the trigger to drop paddocks out of the rotation to conserve as silage. The silage made from these paddocks represents a true pasture surplus.

Do not restrict pasture allocation to increase the amount of silage to conserve – this is not a true surplus.

### 2. **Use Nitrogen to increase yield, but cut pasture within six weeks of application**

Once cutting is delayed beyond six weeks, the quality of the pasture will decline rapidly. As the use of Nitrogen (N) will produce larger leaves, often this will cause shading of the lower leaves and a build-up of plant stem – causing a decline in quality.

On the other hand, cutting pasture for silage within 3 weeks of N application can impact the ensiling process, resulting in a poor fermentation. Aim to cut pasture for silage within 4-6 weeks of N application to benefit from the extra pasture grown without compromising quality.

### 3. **Be prepared to cut pasture when the ryegrass component of the sward is just reaching early ear emergence**

Cutting pasture for silage during early ear emergence provides the greatest silage yield whilst maintaining pasture quality. After ear emergence, pasture quality significantly declines.

### 4. **Use tedders to increase the drying rate of cut material**

Ideally, silage should be ensiled within 24-48 hours after cutting. The use of tedders can increase the wilting rate of silage by 30-40 per cent, allowing the material to reach the desired dry matter percentage (see below) within a narrow time frame. Silage ensiled quickly will be much higher quality than slowly wilted pastures.

### 5. **Ensile material quickly and seal well**

Material being ensiled needs to be packed very tightly and sealed quickly, into either a pit or bale. The ideal dry matter for pasture pit silage is 30 - 35 per cent, any lower and effluent may be a problem and any higher compaction becomes difficult. For bale silage, aim for a dry matter of 45 – 50 per cent. This will provide conditions for a favourable fermentation, reducing the chance of spoilage.

Remember, air is the enemy for silage, any holes should be patched quickly and properly.