FORAGE & GRAIN CROPS

Common Vetch

Multipurpose legume for forage or as a soil improver

Vicia sativa

Common vetch is a highly palatable annual forage suitable for grazing, hay, or grain, while also improving soil fertility, structure, and organic matter and acting as an effective break crop. It suits drier areas and systems requiring early grazing or grain.



QUICK FACTS

- **TYPE & PERSISTENCY**
  Annual
- **MIN RAINFALL**
  300 mm+
- **SOIL & PH**
  Soil range: Loam to Heavy · pH 5+ ($CaCl_2$)
- **SOWING RATE**
  40–45 kg/ha Monoculture
- **END USE**
  Grazing, Hay, Silage, Green manure, Grain, Break crop
- **LIVESTOCK**
  Beef, Dairy, Sheep

ABOUT THIS VARIETY

Annual vetches are extremely palatable at all growth stages and are a reliable legume providing high feed values for animals as pasture, as dry matter for hay, silage and grain.

Vetch is a great soil improver, improving soil fertility, structure and organic matter whilst suppressing weeds and offering a good disease break for cereal crops in a crop rotation environment. This is beneficial for subsequent cereal crops in both yield and quality. Its strong root system develops nodules at an early stage, providing nitrogen for the plant and accumulating significant amounts for the following crops.

They are suitable for sheep, dairy and beef cattle. They have a relatively short season and are early maturing with very high feed value. Common vetch grows as small bushes with multiple internodes with green hairy leaves and upright semi prostrate stems 40-80 cm, with purple or white flowers and seed pods containing 6-8 seeds. It is adapted to a range of soil types but not tolerant to waterlogging.

Hay samples have shown very high feeding values: crude protein 16-28%, digestibility 50-82% and metabolisable energy 7-11 MJ. Just before flowering the nutritive value of vetches is at its best; as the plant matures, digestibility, leafiness and crude protein decrease.

Growing vetch in crop rotations as a pasture or hay can be a very good strategy for controlling resistant grass weeds, because it will

ABOUT THIS VARIETY (CONTINUED)

be grazed or cut before grasses have formed or set seeds. For vetch planting, maintenance and harvesting, farmers can use the same machines that are used for cereal crops.

KEY ATTRIBUTES

- ✓ Fast establishment
- ✓ Very high feed value as pasture, silage, hay and grain
- ✓ Fixes nitrogen and improves soil structure and organic matter
- ✓ Extremely palatable at all growth stages
- ✓ Suits drier areas and systems needing early grazing or grain
- ✓ Good break crop for diseases and suppresses weeds

PLANTING & GRAZING NOTES

Optimal sowing time is autumn, mid-April to end June. Data from 10 years of trials indicates that earlier seeding times produced better yields compared with later seeding. Sowing depth 4 - 6 cm. Triple Super at 50-75 kg/ha at sowing time will generally provide a good start and growth, however many growers choose to sow without any fertiliser with good results. Inoculate seed with commercial Group E inoculant. Monitor for insect damage especially during early stages of growth, such as red legged earth mite and lucerne flea. Check for diseases such as rust, which can cause abortion in ruminant animals – do not graze that crop if rust occurs. Once established, ensure plants are not prone to pulling to allow the root structure to establish a strong hold, then lightly graze at approximately 6 - 8 weeks. Common vetch has some resistance to grazing after 15 nodes (30cm high) until the start of flowering. Rotate or strip graze to give pasture time to recover, regrow and store energy in the roots before the next grazing. Regrowth is dependent significantly on rain or available moisture after grazing. For hay/silage the best time to cut vetches is at the flowering-early podding stage. Dry residues of plants and pods, after spray topping, provide a useful grazing crop through the summer. For quality pastures or hay/silage use a mix of 2/3 vetch and 1/3 ryegrass or cereals (as a % of the recommended rates for a particular area); varieties of these crops have to be chosen to mature at the same time as the vetch crop. Vetch is tolerant of most grass-selective herbicides but intolerant of herbicide residues from the cropping phase, particularly sulfonylurea herbicides. It is susceptible to spray-topping herbicides (glyphosate, paraquat and diquat) as well as to most broadleaf herbicides used in cereal crops.

DISEASE & PEST RESISTANCE

In early growth stages vetches are sensitive to redlegged earth mite and lucerne flea, and in mid to later growth to cowpea aphids as well as to native budworm/Heliothis at flowering and podding stages. Bluegreen aphid is also a major pest. Diseases include rust, Ascochyta blight and chocolate spot. Plants infected by rust can cause abortion in pregnant ruminant animals – do not graze that crop if rust occurs.

STAND LIFE

Annual, with a relatively short season and early maturing.

HOW IT'S SOLD

FORM	PACK
Bare	25 kg

Certification: ASF Code of Practice