

Kent Gamba Grass

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INTRODUCTION

While gamba grass can be a beneficial pasture plant on pastoral properties, it is difficult to manage for this purpose.

There are legitimate concerns that this grass may create management problems if it spreads from sown paddocks into non-grazing land.

DPIFM does not support new sowings of gamba grass.

DESCRIPTION

Gamba grass (*Andropogon gayanus* cv Kent) is a tall perennial grass which forms large dense tussocks up to 70 cm in diameter.

Leaf blades are long, linear, up to 45 cm long and 1.5 to 3 cm wide, with a strong white midrib. Leaves are pubescent (covered with fine soft hairs).

Foliage height can be up to 180 cm in un-grazed, well fertilised swards. Flowering stems are erect and up to 4 m high.

The "seed" consists of a hairy spikelet, which gives it a fluffy appearance. There are approximately 450 000 seeds/kg. The caryopses contained in the "seed" are small, 2-3 mm long, 1 mm wide, about 890 000 per kg, light brown to brownish black in colour.

CLIMATE AND SOILS

Gamba grass is a native of tropical Africa and is adapted to areas with a 3-6 month dry season and an annual rainfall of over 600 mm.

Kent will grow on most soils of the Top End, except those which are flooded. It is particularly suited to gravel type upland soils where other grasses find it hard to persist.



MANAGEMENT

Fertiliser requirements: Requirements have not been studied in the Top End. Types and amounts of fertilisers required will depend on soil type, rainfall, pasture mix and intended use of the pasture.

Generally, maintenance applications of superphosphate should be 50-100 kg/ha yearly. Potassium may also be required on some soils, particularly with more intensive use, such as haymaking.

Gamba grass will respond to split applications of nitrogen during the wet season, producing yields similar to pangola grass.

Yield: Dry matter yield of up to 15 t/ha have been recorded in the Top End, in un-grazed pastures.

Grazing: Kent is highly palatable to livestock. It is a species which requires grazing management. It should only be used where there is good control of grazing, and where stock numbers can be effectively varied.



Gamba grass is particularly valuable early in the wet season due to its ability to grow green feed rapidly in response to early rainfall. However, stocking rates should not be high enough to reduce new shoot growth.

Once the wet season is well established Gamba grass is valuable as long as it is kept short; 60 - 90 cm appears to be the ideal height range. It may need heavy stocking rates of four to five animals/ha in the January-March period or heavier rates of "crash" grazing over shorter periods, to keep the grass at no more than 1 metre high through the wet season. Once the grass becomes tall, mature and coarse at the end of the wet season, cattle tend to leave it and concentrate on green shoots from smaller clumps. Problems with mustering can be experienced as cattle and buffalo quickly become "rogues" if the grass is allowed to grow taller than the animals.

As Kent is tolerant of burning, fire can be used to rejuvenate paddocks to remove tall rank dry growth, after storms early in the wet season.

Gamba grass does not provide good feed once it is dry except for green shoots and stocking rates should be reduced to less than one animal/ha from mid dry season until the next wet season. More effective dry season utilisation of standing dry matter may be obtained using lick blocks containing a urea/molasses/mineral mix.

Mixtures: Legumes which can be included in mixtures are Seca, Amiga, Verano and Wynn.

Pests and diseases: None have been identified which affect the production of Kent in the NT.

Bushfires: Because of its height and dry matter yield, Gamba grass which has not been heavily grazed during the wet season presents a high fire danger. Effective firebreaks should be put around Gamba paddocks.

WARNING

Pasture plants have the potential to become weeds in certain situations. To prevent that, ensure that pasture seeds and/or vegetative materials are not inadvertently transferred to adjacent properties or road sides.

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