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Paspalum vaginatum for salty seepages

C.V. Malcolm

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Paspalum vaginatum, aptly termed "sea shore paspalum" has over the last fifteen years shown an amazing ability to thrive in wet salty situations. Seed of the grass is not available but it may easily be established by planting pieces.

This article reviews where and how the grass may be used.

WHERE TO USE IT

Bogs, gullies, and seepage areas which stay wet even with salty water during the summer are ideal situations for growing Paspalum vaginatum. It will form a dense mat of roots which stops erosion and reduces bogging, and will turn the areas into green lawns. When established, it is very resistant to grazing out, and provides valuable green feed all through the hotter months.

Paspalum vaginatum can be established from roots. The amount available for planting determines how it should be used. Small amounts are best formed into a nursery plot by planting the roots in the most favourable situation. This will probably be the wettest part of the seepage area or may be an area where water can be supplied.

Subsequent plantings may be made from the nursery plot when time permits. If

Paspalum vaginatum growing over a salt crusted seepage at Avondale Research Station. The bare patch is part of a strip between experimental plots.
roots are abundant they may be tried in a number of different areas to find out by experiment where it is of most use.

WHEN TO PLANT IT
Since Paspalum vaginatum is a summer grower it is best planted when its growth commences in the spring, around August-September, to give it a chance to become established before summer. In very wet seepages however, plantings made in midsummer will be successful.

HOW TO PLANT IT
Paspalum vaginatum can be easily established in spring by planting pieces of root in the area to be established. Under the most favourable conditions one small piece of root may spread to cover an area five feet in diameter by the end of autumn.

The drier the situation the more care is required in planting. In very wet boggy patches runners thrown on the surface will grow, but it is advisable to tuck them into the soil. In areas which are less wet it is best to cut and plant small sods of turf about two or three inches square. These should be planted with the top of the sod level with the ground surface.

In gullies, creeks, and bogs it is convenient to carry the ready cut or teased Paspalum vaginatum in a bucket or wheelbarrow and use a mattock or hoe to open the soil at regular intervals for planting. Treading each piece down with the heel consolidates the job.

On larger, less wet areas where it is possible to use implements, sods of Paspalum may be planted in a furrow made with a plough. A further adjacent run with the plough may be made to partially cover the sods, and running the tractor wheel over the planting makes it firm.

HOW TO TREAT IT
Until bare areas have been covered with the grass it will benefit from grazing protection, since sheep crop the grass closely and stop runners colonising surrounding bare soil.

Salty soils usually develop a hard surface crust which should be broken to assist runners to root down.

Mulching the bare areas with a covering of hay or straw is also helpful since it keeps the soil cool and soft.

Once Paspalum vaginatum is established over the whole of the suitable areas it is virtually impossible to eat it out. However, grazing management and topdressing should be used to give high production.

WHERE TO GET IT
Many farmers now have considerable areas of Paspalum vaginatum established and are willing to allow others to dig roots from their properties. Roots can be obtained from any of the following:

Avondale Research Station, Beverley.
D. R. Turton, Wandering.
W. Frost, Kendenup.
E. K. Pech, Brookton.
T. H. Gibbs, Bulading (West of Darkan).
L. Camerer, Bolgart.
W. G. Spencer, Grass Valley.
Mrs. M. Clarke, “Mumberkine,” Jennacubbine.
J. J. Clune, Newmarracarra Station, Geraldton.
A. E. Grant, Yanget.
H. C. Yelland, Calingiri.
Hewitt & Sons, Wongan Hills.
M. Lanigan & Sons, Mt. Marey, Mogumber.
S. F. Potter, Mayanup.
A. W. Devenish & Son, Cunderdin.

If it is not convenient to obtain roots from any of these sources a bundle can be purchased for 10s. from the West Australian Department of Agriculture. These bundles are distributed in September each year, Applications should be made before September 1.