

Topical notes

At the end of winter, grassland which has suffered treading in wet weather, will be in a bad state on heavier soils and at least slightly damaged on lighter soils.

Some remedial action will help grass to recover but timing is important.

Harrowing and/or rolling should not be attempted until the ground is sufficiently dry. Try walking across the paddock where soil is exposed. If the soil sticks to your boots, then the field is not dry enough for working. On the other hand, leaving it a day or two too long and rolling, in particular, will have little effect on land which has been cut up by horses' feet. Re-seeding in spring is to be avoided where possible. If it has to be done at some stage, it is more likely to be successful in the autumn or late summer.

Fertilizer

As a general rule, there are four important elements:

- Nitrogen
- phosphates
- potash
- lime

You should not apply phosphates, potash or lime without knowing the status of the soil as indicated by a soil analysis. Soil samples should be taken from various parts of the field and then analysed. Your local agricultural merchant will organise this for you and make recommendations based on the planned use of the grassland. Cotswold Analytical is one good local company.

Nitrogen is a different matter, because this element is, in effect, a grass growth regulator. If you cannot use extra grass growth through grazing more horses, or making hay, don't waste your money on nitrogen. If you can use extra growth profitably, then use 34.5% ammonium nitrate at 1 – 1.5 bags (50kg/bag) per acre in March to produce early grass.

All horse owners are aware of the danger of laminitis. Great care should be exercised when applying Nitrogen, that you are not creating conditions which encourage laminitis.

Unless you are going to use extra growth effectively, it may be that you should not apply nitrogen at all.

Article written by Richard Newcomb