



# REJUVENATING YOUR PASTURES AFTER THE FIRES

Many families suffered devastating losses of houses, stock, shedding, fencing, hay and pasture in recent grass and bushfires. In the aftermath, you are left with burnt stubble and remnant fencing. You may wonder where to begin. This may be the chance to consider:

- the configuration of your paddocks/ yards/ laneways
- the type of pasture you want

We are hopefully finished the really hot summer stretch and can look forward to cooler and wetter weather. If you can find time and finance, now is the time to invest in your pastures and paddocks well into the future.

## SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER:

### Erosion Control:

Loss of grass cover after the fires means the soil is more vulnerable to erosion. It is very important NOT to lose your top soil.

You may need to protect sloping areas from the impact of strong winds and heavy downpours. **Logs or branches** may be placed across slopes to catch the sediment which is being eroded. Strategically placed rocks or logs may also be placed at the head of small drainage lines or tributaries to discourage gully erosion. **Straw mulch** spread over your bare paddocks will help prevent soil loss while you await pasture re-germination.

### Overgrazed Pastures:

If your pastures were overgrazed and weed infested, it would be a good time to re-seed by direct drilling over the top of your regenerating pasture as it greens up with the rain.

You could consider replacing rye grass species with low sugar grasses such as **Gala Grazing Brome** which is very suitable as a horse pasture, mixed with **Subterranean Clover** and herbages such as **Chicory** and **Plantain**.

These species are highly palatable to horses, and rich in minerals and nutrients, but do not encourage horses to develop founder. Clovers have nitrogen-fixing nodules which further enrich soils.

### Pasture Regeneration:

The good news is that grass fires do not burn as hot as bushfires, so there should still be a good **seed bank** of grass and clover seed in the soil. Soil is a good insulator from the heat of the fires so this seed should germinate as soon as we get a good fall of rain. The ash left by the fires is a good source of **minerals** in the soil which will encourage growth. If you had quite a good pasture sward before the fires, this should regenerate naturally.

### Weed Control:

Closely observe your pasture as it emerges, for weed germination. The first leaves of clover and those of **cape weed** are very similar. If you see emerging clover, allow it to reach the three leaf stage before spraying with a selective broadleaf spray such as **MCPA**. You do not want to kill off the emerging clover. For other weeds you may use the non-selective weed spray **Roundup**.

### Sacrifice Area:

While your pastures are regenerating, it would be best to create a sacrifice area for your stock, which can be hand fed, to allow your pasture a chance to become well established. Stock should not be re-introduced to your seeded pasture for at least three months, preferably allowing it to establish through winter.

**References:** Myers, J. 2005 "Managing Horses on Small Properties" Landlinks Press.

Van Den Berg, M. 2013 "Equine Permaculture: Regenerative Horse Property Design & Pasture Management"

**Links:** <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/...recovery-after-an-emergency/farm-and-land-recovery-after-bushfire>

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