

10.5 Rough Grass Margins

Definition: a rough grass field margin is a strip of land, sown with a recommended grass seed mixture (see below), at least 2m wide around arable fields in which cereal, oilseed or protein crops have been planted.

Aim: to provide habitat for over-wintering invertebrates, some of which prey on pests of cereals, and to provide nesting and forage sites for birds and mammals.

Biodiversity objectives: this option contributes to the NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the Irish hare and Yellowhammer. The NI Priority Species - Barn owl, Tree sparrow, Twite and ground beetles - will also benefit.

Management requirements

- Must not be sited on land used to fulfil set aside requirements.
- A mixture of non-cultivated grass species must be sown (see Table 5.1 below). Grasses must be sown at a rate of 20kg/ha. Cocksfoot must form no more than 15% (maximum 2kg/ha) of the mixture*.
- Margins must be established on at least 50% of the field perimeter.
- Minimum area of 1000m² (0.1ha) and between 2 and 12 metres wide.
- Must be retained for at least 3 years and preferably 5 years. If the rough grass field margin is removed, a new margin equivalent in size must be established elsewhere on the farm for the remainder of the period.
- Must be mown at least three times between 15 July and 30 September during the year following sowing to encourage tillering and minimise weed development. Thereafter may be mown no more often than one year in three (between 15 July and 30 September) to prevent scrub development.
- No grazing, cultivation, ploughing, drainage, reseeding, fertilisers, slurry, farmyard manure, sewage sludge, lime or application of pesticides or herbicides is permitted after establishment.
- Rough grass field margins must not be used for supplementary feeding sites, drinking troughs, temporary silage clamps or storage of materials including big bale hay and silage.
- Rough grass field margins must not be used as a headland, roadway, regular access route or as a farm lane.

Further advice

Rough grass field margins should be sited adjacent to a hedge, scrub, woodland or watercourse for maximum wildlife benefit. Herbicides may be used to control noxious weeds by the use of a weed wiper or spot spray.

Table 1: Grass species suitable for use in rough grass margins:

Cocksfoot*	Rough stalk meadow grass	Yorkshire fog
Crested dog's tail	Sheep's fescue	Common bent
Meadow foxtail	Smooth stalk meadow grass	Creeping bent
Red fescue	Sweet vernal grass	Creeping fescue

Management plans are provided for participants in the **Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Management Schemes**

