

MOLASSES GRASS

How to make eldana uncomfortable in your cane



Jessica Cockburn
(MSc Student: Crop Biology Resource Unit)



Previous Link articles have highlighted the importance of using an integrated approach to eldana control, i.e. using measures such as resistant varieties, good soils and crop management practices, attention to fertiliser application and correct age of cane at harvest. The "Push-Pull" strategy (using plants that repel and attract the pest appropriately, see The Link, May 2011) may also help in reducing the impact of eldana on your crops. An important component of this strategy is Molasses grass.

Molasses grass is repellent to eldana and therefore has the effect of reducing damage caused by this pest. It is best planted in conjunction with other push-pull plants as part of an integrated pest management (IPM) system which emphasises good crop management. The techniques for its planting and maintenance are outlined below.

Layout and positioning

- Select a small area to start planting molasses grass to learn how to fit it into farm management.
- Plant molasses grass in contours or on road edges.
- Ideally plant plugs in the centre of the contour.
- Plant a single row of plugs 0.5 - 1 m apart.
- Do not plant molasses grass near wetlands/pull plants: leave at least a 30 m gap.
- Molasses grass grows best in full sunlight.

Planting

- Molasses grass grows best from seedling plugs bought from a nursery.

- Prepare land well: spray glyphosate to kill off other weeds and rip a single line in the soil.
- To prepare a suitable tilth one may need to further work the soil before planting.
- Plant during spring or summer.
- If you plant during a dry spell/in poor soils, water seedlings during the first few weeks or use an absorbent.

Maintenance

- Molasses grass can be mowed once a season.
- It can help in the suppression of creeping grasses at field margins and in contours.
- It makes a good livestock fodder.
- Inform staff about the grass. Avoid accidental hoeing: markers at the edge of contours can be helpful.
- Molasses grass does not tolerate herbicide overspray/residues.
- The grass is not fire tolerant: it is best to mow before burning.
- It is important to manage molasses grass as a crop: keep it free of weeds and consider applying fertiliser at planting to ensure good establishment.
- Successful establishment is the key to healthy and effective molasses grass.

See the article "Let's push-pull it!" published in The Link, May 2011 for more information on push-pull and contact your local Extension Specialist or P&D officer for further information.



Figure 1. Seedlings planted in well-prepared soil.



Figure 2. Molasses grass planted in the centre of a contour.