

Ergot and net blotch

Ergot

Summary	Ergot is caused by the fungus <i>Claviceps purpurea</i> . It occurs in summer when ergots (or sclerotia) develop on seed heads.
Species affected	Many grasses, including ryegrass, paspalum and brome species.
Identification	Ergots are dark purplish-black, replacing a seed in the seed head. They are usually larger than seed, and protrude from the floret.
Spread	Ergots drop to the ground and lie dormant through winter. In spring they germinate, producing spores, to infect developing florets. Infected florets produce a sticky mass of spores called 'honey dew' that attract insects, which can spread infection. It is also spread in infested hay.
Prevention and management	Ergot contains alkaloids, which if ingested in large quantities, may cause heat stress, lameness and ill-health.



Ergots (sclerotia) developing in a ryegrass seed head.

Graze or top pastures to minimise seed head and ergot problems. If ergots are visible, top the pasture.

Net blotch

Summary	Net blotch (NB) is common throughout NZ, caused by the fungus <i>Drechslera dictyoides</i> , usually in autumn and winter. NB can seriously affect winter pasture.
Species affected	Perennial ryegrass, tall fescue.
Identification	NB produces a fine network of short brown streaks on the underside of leaves. These later turn into dark brown, solid spots. In heavily infected plants, leaf tips will yellow and die back, imitating N deficiency. NB is more severe in long dense swards.
Spread	NB is spread on wind-borne spores produced by lesions. The fungus survives on infected stubble. Wet, humid weather favours NB spread.
Prevention and management	Graze pasture before it becomes long and rank to reduce the chance of NB and lower severity of the disease. Under severe infection, fungicides may be economical.



Net blotch on ryegrass leaves.