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A look at different grass types available to seed

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What type of grass should you plant to replace all those weeds that invaded your land this year? There are many grasses that look good this year but are they right for you and your situation. I've seen a lot of sleepy grass this year but that isn't one you probably want your horses to sample in light of the narcotic effect it would have on them. So what kinds of grasses should you plant?

Native vs introduced grasses is one consideration. There are pros and cons of each. The choice usually comes down to your personal preference and goals.

Native vs Introduced Grasses

Native grasses are native to Colorado and/or the United States. These grasses have adapted to the climate and soils of the area so they can survive better. The natives are usually slow to establish, taking about 2 to 4 years before they become fully established and developed. Once established they seem to be able to live a long

time and require little maintenance. One of the problems with natives is the price. You will usually have to spend some extra cash for the native seeds.

Introduced grass species are those that were developed outside of North America and were typically introduced for their forage qualities. They usually establish quickly and can be grazed in 1 or 2 years. Introduced grasses will respond better to fertilizer and irrigation than many of the natives but they don't live as long as the natives. You can find introduced grasses readily for a relatively inexpensive price.

Next you might want to consider the difference between bunch and sod forming grasses.

Bunch vs Sod Forming

Growth habits of grasses are important when considering designing your grass mixtures.

The use of the grass is also important when considering this aspect of the grass.

Bunchgrasses form bunches or clumps and spread only by seed. They are generally more productive than the sod forming grasses but require better grazing management to produce the most forage.

Sod forming grasses will form underground shoots called rhizomes that run parallel to the soil surface. The rhizomes tie the soil together and form a sod. This type of grass reproduces from buds on the rhizomes or by seed. They can quickly fill in bare spots on the soil but generally aren't as productive as bunchgrasses.

Popular Irrigated Grasses

Orchardgrass is a good irrigated pasture and/or hay grass that recovers quickly. It is a bunchgrass that is very leafy but can winter kill in areas with dry falls and open winters.

Meadow brome is another good irrigated pasture and/or hay grass that is also a bunchgrass much like orchardgrass. It is more drought tolerant and winterhardy than orchardgrass.

Smooth brome is a standard pasture, hay and reclamation grass found throughout the country. Since it is a sod forming grass it can work well with some of the bunch grasses in a mix to fill in bare spots. It does require high levels of nitrogen to stay productive.

Timothy is a desirable grass for hay fields. This bunchgrass has a short life if put in a grazing situation.

Tall Fescue provides excellent quality forage for grazing or haying and is fairly drought

resistant. This bunchgrass can be used as a durable grass for horse pastures.

Popular Dryland Grasses

Crested Wheatgrass is very drought tolerant needing only about 10-12 inches of precipitation per year. Early season grazing is provided by this bunchgrass.

Intermediate and pubescent wheatgrass are similar in growth form, needing about 14 inches or more of precipitation per year. These grasses will form a sod which makes them great for covering those bare spots.

Russian Wildrye is very drought tolerant only needing about 12 inches of precipitation each year to survive. The forage quality of this bunchgrass is excellent but it is slow to establish.

Western Wheatgrass becomes coarse with age so it has a moderate palatability to livestock. This grass is rhizomatous which means it will form a sod and it is a native grass.

Mountain brome is a good high elevation pasture grass. The native bunchgrass establishes quickly on disturbed sites. It is somewhat short-lived but had good palatability to livestock and wildlife.

Arizona fescue is a bunchgrass that is native. It is drought tolerant with good palatability to both livestock and wildlife. If soil erosion is your problem or you want to improve your rangeland this is a good choice for you.

This brief list of grasses will help when you have to decide what to buy for seeding your property. Should you need more information about these or other grasses contact your local Cooperative Extension office.