

# GRASS SEEDING TIPS

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Fall is a great time to plan for pasture of native grass seedings, and in some cases to put the seed in the ground. In this article dryland (non-irrigated) grass seeding recommendations will be discussed in a future newsletter.

For non-irrigated settings, the USDA-NRCS recommends first seeding a cover crop and planting the grass in the residue from that cover crop the following season. If you have a small area to seed the cover crop is not essential, but still recommended. In most cases we recommend a cover crop of sterile hybrid forage sorghum. This is a warm season cover crop with very resilient stubble residues. The sorghum residue stubble will suppress weeds, catch snow, and protect the soil and new grass seeding from wind and water erosion for the critical first one or two growing seasons.

Plan now so that next season you can plant the sterile forage sorghum in a clean, weed free, firm seedbed at a seeding rate of about ten pounds per acre

(pure live seed). In this area plant the sorghum cover crop around the first of June. If you are fortunate to have a moist growing season, the sorghum can grow to three or more feed in height. You can hay off the forage above 12 inches and use that hay for feed or bedding. Haying should to take place in early September. If there is a persistent perennial weed problem, address this with appropriate treatment around the first fall frosts. Autumn has proven to be one of the most effective times to treat perennial weeds.

We recommend you seed your grass with a calibrated grass drill seeder after November 1 allow the seed to be placed in the cool soil and stay dormant to germinate and grow with the coming spring moisture. If weeds are still a concern wait to seed the grass, plan an early spring weed control operation and seed the grass in mid-April.

Introduced grass species such as smooth brome and intermediate wheatgrass will germinate and establish quickly, but may not persist as

along as native species. Native grasses such as switch grass, Sideoats or blue Grama take a little more time and may not appear right away. But with a little patience they will establish and provide a quality pasture.

Don't apply herbicides to your new grass seedings until the grasses are in the three to five leaf stages. Consult a qualified professional for herbicide recommendations. Also, most grass seedings don't require fertilizer prior to establishment. Often applying fertilizer at planting only encourages unwanted weed competition. Wait until the grasses have established themselves, soil test, and then fertilize according to recommendations.

The best advice is to treat your seedbed prep, cover crop, and grass seedings with care. This up front care will reward you with a better pasture requiring less maintenance. If you would like a seeding mix recommendation or have other questions, please call or visit the office.

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# IRRIGATED GRASS SEEDING TIPS

Now is a great time to plan for irrigated pasture and hayland grass seedings and in some cases to put the seed in the ground. In this article irrigated seedings will be discussed. Non-irrigated (dryland) grass seeding recommendations were discussed in a previous newsletter.

For irrigated settings, the USDA-NRCS recommends planting the grass in a firm, weed-free stubble residue from a previous crop can provide wind and sunshade protection for the new grass. If the seedbed consists of bare ground, we recommend seeding the grass pasture mix with and extra ten pounds per acre oats. The oat crop acts as a “nurse” crop, shading and providing wind protection for the new pasture seed. The oats will germinate quickly and should be mowed or hayed off prior to seed set. This oat hay is generally high quality forage and can be used as supplemental feed while the grass is becoming established.

For dryland seedings, we recommend planting between November 1 and April 30. However, supplemental irrigation water greatly extends the acceptable planting window. For spring-irrigated seedings, plant anytime up to early May. Mid-April is an ideal time if an oat hay nurse crop is included in the seed mix. Late summer and fall seedings are acceptable starting in about mid-August, after the peak summer heat

through about mid-September. Allow enough fall growing time for development of an adequate root system in the new grasses. Fall seedings with an oat nurse crop are acceptable but usually fall seedings are conducted without this step.

Most local pasture mixes for horse hay consist of about 50% smooth brome grass, 25% meadow brome grass, and 35% orchard grass. Other species are used depending on soil texture, salinity issues, and the objective of the individual.

As with dryland seedings, don't apply herbicides to your new grass seedings until the grasses are in the three to five leaf stage. Consult a qualified professional for herbicide recommendations. Also, most grass seedings don't require fertilizer prior to establishment. Often applying fertilizer at planting only encourages unwanted weed competition. Wait until the grasses have established themselves, soil test and then fertilize according to recommendations.

The best advice is to treat your seedbed prep and grass seedings with care. This upfront care will reward you with a better pasture requiring less maintenance. If you would like a seeding mix recommendation or have other questions, please call or visit the office.

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