

TIPS ON PREPARING SEEDBED FOR GRASS

Country Acres Resource Team

The best seedbed for all situations is one that is free of debris including old weed matter, weed seed, rocks, clods, and other impervious material. A good seedbed should also be fluffy yet firm. A test of the perfect seedbed is to take a walk across it. You should not stumble over old weed matter or dirt clods, and your footprints should sink about one-fourth on an inch into the soil. Sometimes it will take several mechanical operations to obtain the perfect seedbed. Those operations can include deep ripping to a depth of 18 inches if severe compaction exists. This would then be followed by a disc operation to breakup the bigger clods. At this point a second disc operation would be needed to breakup the smaller clods and smooth the surface.

Are you ready to plant the grass now? The answer is yes, if your site is on heavy soil that did not previously have an abundance of weed cover. However, if your soil is lighter than a loam and/or had a previously abundant weed cover, then it is recommended that before you plant your grass, a cover crop is established to protect the seedbed, and discourage annual weed growth.

There are several types of cover crops that can be used. One of those is a hybrid sterile sorghum cover crop. Start by preparing the seedbed as listed above in the spring around early May. Drill the sorghum at a rate of 4 to 8 pounds to the acre on clay or loam soils, and 6 to 10 pounds to the acre on sandy soils. Seeding depth is 1-inch, and row spacing is 14 to 21 inches apart, the closer the spacing the less weed competition. Planting dates are between mid-May to mid-June. This cover crop will germinate and begin to grow within 7 to 12 days. If significant growth is achieved on the cover crop, mowing may be necessary. If all of the weeds have been terminated, and you have just the standing sorghum stubble in the field, you are now ready to plant your grass! The grass can be seeded directly into the standing sorghum stubble with a good grass drill.

GRASS SEEDING ON THE FRONT RANGE OF COLORADO

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Grasses can be classified as sod-formers, or bunch grasses, cool season, or warm season and native or introduced. Sod-forming grasses reproduce from their root systems as well as from seeds. Bunch grasses grow in bunches and reproduce primarily from seeds. Cool-seasons grasses actively grow during the cool months of the year, in the spring and the fall; Warm season grasses actively grow during the summer months. Native grasses are those species of grass that are historically found in this area. Introduced grasses are those that are from a different area.

There are several predetermined factors that must be considered when selecting a grass: soil, climate and available water must be considered. Soil texture dictates what type of grass will perform the best on a given site. As a rule of thumb, short, sod-forming grasses perform best on the heavy soils such as clay, and tall grasses perform best on the lighter sandy soils.

In this low rainfall area, a loamy textured soil, which is a combination of the three different soil particles: clay, silt and sand, can grow both mid-grasses and short grasses, but not tall grasses without sufficient water.

Our front-range climate typically gives us 12 to 14 inches of total precipitation annually, and we have an average annual growing season of 120-150 days per year. The amount of available water received each year from annual precipitation is certainly enough to support many of the native grass species in this area. However, if you decide that an introduced grass species would better suit your needs, and you do not have irrigation water available, verify that it is a grass adapted to your soils, climate and water regime prior to planting.

Your needs should be considered next. There are mixes for pasture areas, outlying lawn/recreation areas and wildlife areas. If you are unsure of your soil type, please call your local NRCS office for a site-specific recommendation, especially if you suspect a high salt content in your soil.