

Grass Seeding

by Dan Nosal, NRCS Rangeland Specialist

An established stand of grass in this Colorado climate is defined as 2 to 3 plants in a square foot area.

How To Plant.

Grasses must be planted in a firm, weed-free seedbed, primarily because success depends upon good soil-to-seed contact. If you are broadcasting seed, it must be raked into the soil. Native grass seed is planted only 1/4 to 1/2 inches deep. Loose soil dries out quickly at the surface compared to firm soil.

Most grasses should be planted with a grass drill, but broadcasting can also be used. A double disc drill with an agitator is recommended for seeding. If using a grass drill, the amount of seed needed will be cut in half since the method of planting is more efficient.

In most cases, a grass seedling needs no fertilizer during establishment. However, on disturbed sites, such as areas around a new house, water lines, trenching, etc., soil amendments may be required to maintain the vigor of the grasses.

Key #1 – Seeding Date (When to Plant)

Recommended seeding dates for Colorado are November 1 to May 1, when the soil is not frozen. Grasses should be seeded when soil moisture and temperature are optimum for germination. Grasses are designated either “cool” or “warm” season based on their growth cycle. Cool-season grasses can be planted when temperatures are cooler and day lengths are short. Warm-season grasses need warmer temperatures and longer day lengths to grow.

Key #2 Seedbed

A proper seedbed is firm and free of competing vegetation. Correct firmness is when an adult footprint is only slightly visible on the prepared bed prior to the seeding operation. The seedbed can be firmed, if needed, by pulling a commercial or homemade packer or roller. A firm seedbed is essential for proper seeding depth. A loose, fluffy bed will place seeds too deep for proper germination.

Cover Crop Seeding

Seeding native grasses in a suitable cover crop is recommended. A suitable cover crop decreases evaporation to retain soil moisture, and keeps soil temperatures lower because of shading. It protects young grass seedlings from strong winds, collects snow during winter, and minimizes the weed problem. The cover crop should be planted in the spring May 15 through July 15 but preferably before June 15. Grass is seeded directly into the standing stubble in the fall. If you are haying the cover crop, leave 18 inches on sandy soil and 12 inches on loamy or heavier soils. Recommended cover crops are sterile forage sorghum, long-season milo, millet, oats, sudan grass, etc.

What to Expect the First Year

Most growers of native grasses are convinced they have a failure the first year. Most of the time they actually have a good stand. Native grasses grow down, not up, during the establishment year. The top growth normally amounts to a narrow, straight leaf until late summer. These seedlings can be hard to see, even for the experienced grower. Be patient! Do not graze for at least 2 to 3 growing seasons and after the grass is established.

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SHOTGUN MIX

Common name Recommended variety % of seed mix PLS Rate per acre double if broadcast

Bluestem, Big Native	Kaw, Bison, Champ	20.0 %	1.08
Grama, Blue Native	Lovington, Hachita, Alma	10.0%	.12
Green Needlegrass Native	Lodorm	10.0%	.48
Wheatgrass, Western Native	Arriba, Barton	20.0%	1.60
Grama, Sideoats Native	Vaughn, Butte, El Reno, Niner	10.0%	.46
Switchgrass Native	Blackwell, Greenville	10%	.20
Prairie Sandreed Native	Goshen, Pronghorn	10.0%	.32
Yellow Indiangrass Native	Cheyenne, Holt, Llano	10.0%	.51

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