

Native Grass Establishment

Overview –Establishing native prairies from seed is a process that can take 2-3 years before the area seeded begins to look like a mature prairie. Native grasses and especially warm season native grasses are slow to germinate and establish as they develop more root growth in first 2-3 years. Patience and perseverance is rewarded with beauty and long term sustainability.

Site Preparation –Seedbed preparation requires planning and an assessment of existing conditions that are present in the area to be seeded. Are there weeds, rocks and other debris that needs cleaned out before seeding? If cultivating the soil before seeding, till the soil to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. Remove excess vegetation and debris and ensure the seedbed is smooth, free of large clumps and semi-firm. If not cultivating the soil prior to seeding, kill off any unwanted vegetation with a non-selective herbicide such as Roundup™ or any product with the active ingredient Glyphosate. Spraying off of unwanted vegetation should be done at least 2 weeks prior to seeding so that proper "burn down" of the unwanted vegetation can take place. Once the unwanted vegetation has died, mowing may be helpful if the vegetation is tall and could possibly hinder seeding.

Seeding Dates - Native grasses require special consideration for seeding periods. They need time to develop so the plants can survive a killing frost. Dates for seeding native grasses should be March through May and can be seeded dormant (frost seed) November 15th through February. Dormant seeding is an effective method for seeding and mimics natural seeding of warm season native grasses as many of the seeds have a natural dormancy in them and that dormancy can only be broken by going through the freeze/thaw cycle of winter.

Seed Application – The most efficient method of seeding is drill seeding. This method places the seed down in the soil where the moisture lies and is best for ensuring good seed-to-soil contact. Applying the seed with a cyclone spreader (figure 3) can also be used for larger areas, and hand broadcast for smaller areas. When broadcasting seeding, raking the seed into the soil and tamping the soil after application is needed for the seed to have contact with that soil as well as being where moisture is present. Using a culti-packer, like the one in figure 1, after broadcast seeding will help the seed to be pushed into the soil for greater seed-to-soil contact. When seeding with a mechanical drill seeder (figure 2), always read and follow the manufacturer's settings for proper seeding settings.

Weed Control – When seeding native grass, weeds will become an issue in the short run, which is 1-2 years after seeding. Native grasses take longer to establish, especially warm season grasses, because they focus more attention on root growth in the short run, rather than above ground growth. This will cause weeds to gain an upper hand in the short run. Controlling weeds can be handled with mowing before the weeds have a chance to head out and produce more seeds. Mow at a height of five to six inches and do it often enough to prevent weed seed production. Herbicides such as 2,4-D or any other product that will control annual broadleaf weeds and even annual grassy weeds within a native grass stand is helpful but caution should be taken not to stunt the growth of the native grasses. Products such as Plateau™ will control both annual broadleaf and grassy weeds within native grass stands. Always read and follow label directions. Avoid spraying during the hottest part of the day and spray when the native grass plants are at least 4-5 inches tall. Weed control will be needed for the first two years, so having a maintenance plan that adequately addresses weed issues will help the native grass stand succeed in the long run.

Fertilization - Native grass stands do not need to be fertilized like turfgrass. Yet applying a starter fertilizer at seeding time will aid in faster root growth which will produce a stronger native grass stand in the short run. A fertilizer such as 19-19-19 applied at a rate of 350 lbs per acre will provide enough nutrition to give the plants enough to establish. Subsequent fertilizer is generally not needed.

Establishment Time – As mentioned, warm season grasses focus more growth on the root development from the time of seeding to 1 years. Many times, frustration occurs because there is a lack of top growth that is not seen and doubts of establishment occur. Native grasses need to time and patience from those concerned. Years 2-3 will show that the native grasses are present and will eventually dominate an area.

**SEED
QUALITY.**

**SEED
UNITED.**

Floodplain
Mixture

Little
Buckaroo
Native Mixture

Native
Prairiegrass
Mixture

Firmly Rooted Since 1887!

 **UNITED SEEDS INC**
OMAHA **DES MOINES**