

Grass Seeding Tips

Fall is a great time to plan for pasturing native grass seedings, and in some cases to put seed in the ground. 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 is 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 to two growing seasons.

Plan now so that next season you can plant the sterile forage sorghum in clean, weed free, firm seedbed at a seeding rate of about ten pounds per acre of pure live seed. In Northern Colorado 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 feet in height. You can hay off the forage above twelve inches and use that hay for feed or bedding. Haying should take place in early September. If there is a persistent perennial weed problem, address this with an appropriate treatment after the weeds have recovered from the haying activity and before a hard freeze. Autumn is an excellent time to treat perennial weeds.

We recommend seeding your grass seeds with a calibrated grass no-till drill seeder after November 1. This allows the seed to be placed in the cool soil and stay dormant. It will then germinate and grow with the 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 long as native species. Native species such as switchgrass, sideoats or blue grama take a little more time to establish and may not appear right away. However, with a little patience they will establish and provide a quality pasture.

Don't apply herbicides to your new grass seeding 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, conduct a soil test, and then fertilize according to the recommendations.

The best advice is to treat your seedbed prep, cover crop, and grass seeding with care. This up-front care will reward you with a better pasture requiring less maintenance.

By: Tim Carney

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