

Irrigated Grass Seeding Tips

Now is a great time to plan for irrigated pasture and hay-land grass seedings and in some cases to put the seed in the ground. 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, it is recommended seeding the grass pasture mix with an 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, it is recommended to plant between November 1 and April 30. However, supplemental irrigation water greatly extends the acceptable planting window. For spring-irrigated seedings, plant any time 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 around mid-August after the peak summer heat through mid-September. Allow enough fall growing time for development of and adequate root system in the new grasses. Fall seedings with an oat nurse crop are acceptable. However, 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 25% 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 apply fertilizer at planting only encourages unwanted weed competition. Wait until the grasses have established themselves, conduct a soil test, and the fertilize according to the recommendations.

The best advice is to treat the seedbed prep and grass seeding with care. This upfront care will reward you with a better pasture requiring less maintenance.

By: Tim Carney

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