

Planting Native Grass

If you talk to 10 different people you will get 10 different opinions on how to plant native grasses. This can lead to confusion, frustration and less than adequate results. Here are some basic rules that, if followed, will give you the results you want.



- Buy quality seed! Always buy seed on a Pure Live Seed (PLS) basis. Don't buy seed that is less than 50% germination and make sure a germination test has been done on the seed in the last 6 months
- You need a firm seedbed (Conventional method would be to plow, disc at least twice, and cultipack. No-till is best into soybean stubble but is still effective in any situation, I like to mow or chop corn stalks before planting in corn stubble.) Native grass seeds need good seed to soil contact.
- You must plant the seed shallow ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch). This is critical to remember with grass mixtures but even more important when planting forbs with your grasses. Some mixes can become very expensive and planting the seed too deep is asking for failure. A good rule of thumb is to check your planting directly behind your drill. You should see some seed on the surface even if as much as 40% of the seed is visible on the surface, that is ok, you are planting shallow.
- You should try to cultipack or roll after seeding. Remember again, native seed needs good seed to soil contact.
- For the first year you should mow 3 times, the first mowing should be fairly quick, about 3 or 4 weeks after seeding (obviously you will adjust with weather conditions). Mow the first time at a height of 4 to 6 inches. The next two times you mow should be at a height no less than 8". You should mow every 3 weeks depending on the amount of rain. The last mowing should be done by the 1st week or 2 of August. Then let your planting grow through August, this will give the young prairie plants a chance to build up some energy reserves so they can start strong next spring. Stay on top of your mowing responsibilities! One very common mistake is to get behind on mowing and then rush in and mow down 3-foot tall foxtail. The mowed material piles up like mulch and hurts your seed more than it helps. If it is mid to late July and you have not mowed your seeding, it is best not to mow now, you would probably do more harm than good.

Sunlight for a young prairie plant is as important as a mothers milk for a newborn child. Mow often to let that summer sun and rain help young plants grow!!



Sunlight is important for young prairie plants, **but just as important is moisture**. Mowing your new seeding in a timely manner allows young prairie plants to utilize all of the available moisture possible. The mowed weeds die or shut down for a period after mowing and your young prairie natives use that available moisture. Another reason to mow often!!

Planting into brome fields (old CRP)

First you must kill the brome. Best technique is to mow in late summer and kill with Roundup herbicide in the early fall, **and** spray again in the spring. Journey herbicide can help.

If you are establishing prairie grass with no-till equipment into brome grass or a pasture, you must be sure to kill off all perennial cool season grasses (brome) and forbs before you plant. This is most often accomplished with Round-up herbicide. **If you did not kill the brome in the fall** and are now faced with trying to kill the grass in the spring - this can be difficult. Best management may be to burn the old brome early in the spring (March for Ia.). Allow the new growth to come back and then spray with 2 quarts per acre with Roundup herbicide. **Read** the label and try to get your timing perfect. It is difficult to get a complete kill on brome in the spring so be diligent and if you are really concerned follow this spray with tillage.

You must again be conscious of not planting too deep. One technique that has worked very well is to kill off the brome with Round-up, after the brome has died you should burn off all the dead grass with a small fire. You can come right in and seed (if the fire worked well you may not even need a no-till drill). The blackened earth warms up quickly; I've had native grass emerge in 5 days using this technique.

Journey Herbicide can make your life easier!!

Journey Herbicide is a new product that is available for native grass seedings.

Journey is a mix of glyphosphate (roundup) and Plateau. This product will not hurt some native grass and forb species (You need to read the label). It is an excellent product for spring burn-down of unwanted grasses and broadleaves. There is not much glyphosphate in Journey so in many cases you will have to add extra Roundup. This product can be a very useful tool when building native grass and forb stands. **Remember to always read and follow the label directions.**

Spring Seedings

There are 2 schools of thought on when it is best to plant native grass in the spring, early and late. The answer is: plant as early as you can. Early is better, ***but you must mow to control foxtail and other weeds the first year.*** You can plant native grass as late as the end of June, even later on good years with enough rain. In fact the first two weeks in June is a very good time to seed natives. If it should happen to be a wet spring, your seed is delivered late, or the drill breaks down for 3 weeks, no problem. You can fall back to a later planting time. But go early if you can.

The Bottom Line on Native Grass Seeding:

If you prepare the site correctly, plant the seed correctly, and mow the site a few times the first year, you will probably have a good stand in one year. If you plant correctly but do not follow the maintenance directions, you will have a stand in three to four years.