Planning, preparing, and sowing your grass seed mix

INTRODUCTION

The success of any new seeding is largely dependent on the condition of the existing site. Your site should be free of weeds, grasses, and existing vegetation prior to sowing your seed mix. Your seedbed (soil) should also be free of rocks and clumps of dirt.

STEP 1 DETERMINE EXISTING SPECIES ON SITE

If the site has existing vegetation present, it must be removed as new seedlings cannot compete well against existing vegetation. Determine which scenario best describes your site:

1. Existing site is clean bare ground: Keep the area clean before seeding. Proceed to Step 3.
2. Existing grass or annual weeds are present: Site must be prepped using a combination of mowing, burning, herbicide, or physical removal. Proceed to Step 2.
3. Noxious weed infestation: Treat the area with an herbicide for at least one full year before seeding.

STEP 2 REMOVE EXISTING VEGETATION

1. Physical Removal: Depending on size, use a shovel or excavator to remove existing vegetation. Compost or haul material off site.
2. Chemical + Tilling: If large amounts of dead vegetation are present, mow or burn the area first. In early April, or as soon as plants begin to actively grow (turn green), apply Glyphosate following label recommendations to kill the vegetation. Wait 10 days for plants to die. Till the soil to break and smooth the area. Irrigate immediately to allow any weed seeds or rhizomatous grasses to re-grow. 14 days after tilling, reapply Glyphosate to kill re-growing plants. If the site has extremely competitive vegetation, repeat the herbicide application one more time. You can seed 3 days after your last herbicide application. Proceed to Step 3.
3. Tilling only: If the site has dead vegetation present, burn or mow then immediately till in spring to break up sod and smooth the area. Wait 10-14 days (allowing plants to germinate), then re-till and re-smooth the area to kill any re-growing vegetation. If possible repeat this process once more. Ideally complete 2-3 tillages in the spring before planting. Proceed to Step 3.
4. Solarization: This is the process of concentrating the sun's energy to kill life within the soil, including weeds. This process takes time. Clear and till the areas to be seeded, then lay a plastic tarp down for at least two months between June and August. Proceed to Step 3.

STEP 3 FINAL SEEDBED PREPARATION

Make sure the area to be seeded is smooth and free of any clumps larger than 2". Smooth the area with a rake or harrow pulled behind a small tractor, ATV, or riding lawn mower. When you step on a well-prepared seedbed, your shoe should sink into the ground no deeper than 1/8". Proceed to Step 4.

STEP 4 DETERMINE SQUARE FOOTAGE

1. Length in feet x width in feet = area in square feet.
2. Convert square footage to acreage: sq.ft. / 43,560 (square feet in 1 acre).
3. Determine number of pounds per acre: Acreage x lbs./acre

We generally recommend 25-30 lbs. of grass seed per acre. This number can be increased dependent on goals of customer and site conditions. For non-irrigated sites with **no** soil prep, we recommend 40-80 lbs. per acre. On irrigated sites **with** soil prep, We recommend 24-40 lbs. per acre.

STEP 5 SOW YOUR SEED (Spring-Fall)

Broadcast seed evenly over the site by hand or broadcast spreader. After seeding, lightly rake or harrow the site to incorporate seed into the upper 1/4" of the soil. Be careful not to harrow too deeply as most plants have small seeds and need to be near or just below the soil surface.

WHEN TO SEED / TIMING

Seeding should be done no later than May 1st if irrigation is not available. If seed bed prep cannot be completed before May, prepare seed bed during the summer and seed in late fall or spring.

STEP 6 POST-SEEDING IRRIGATION

Fall plantings don't typically need to be watered immediately after sowing if seed has been sown strategically before a rainfall event. In the spring keeping the topsoil moist for three to six weeks will enhance germination. The goal should be to keep the ground moist, but not oversaturated where seed may wash away. In moist climates, regular rainfall may make supplemental watering unnecessary. In arid climates or during drought conditions, up to 1/2 inch of supplemental water per week may be required. Watering will not be necessary in the second year, except during extreme drought. After the recommended 3-year period, the native planting should be mature enough to eliminate any supplemental watering.

STEP 7 WEED CONTROL

Monthly weed control is essential to a healthy and satisfying plot. Weeds should be eliminated as soon as they can be recognized either by mowing, hand pulling, selective cutting with a string trimmer or shears, or careful herbicide application.

1. Mowing: Mowing weeds during the first year or two of establishment can be extremely effective. The goal is to eliminate seed production from annual weeds so that they do not continue to proliferate. Set the mower blades as high as possible (6"-10") and remove the tops of the weeds. Alternatively, use a string trimmer. Mowing may be necessary 2-3 times (or more) during each of the first two years of seeding.
2. Hand Pulling: This can be laborious, but extremely effective in small plots.
3. Spot Spraying: Spot spraying weeds can be effective if used carefully. Be extremely careful not to apply herbicide onto your desired plants. A broad spectrum herbicide like glyphosate (Roundup) is a good option if applied to actively growing weeds before flowering. Avoid herbicides that have residual effects in the soil after application.

STEP 8 RESEEDING

Plantings can be reseeded in following years if there are bare spots that did not experience germination or spots that broadcasting missed.