



STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION GRASS ESTABLISHMENT

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Seeding of grass is an effective method of improving wildlife habitat, preventing erosion and improving range grass resources. Seedings planted initially as habitat or erosion control can become a valuable range resource. Grass seeds are smaller, less free flowing, less vigorous, and more fragile than most seeds growers are used to working with, thus seed selection and planting methods become very important to successful stand establishment. One needs to plan ahead to establish grasses as it can take up to two or more years to develop an adequate stand.

ESTABLISHMENT

1. **Seed:** Start with known origin grass seed adapted to your region and site. Named varieties developed by NRCS and USDA-ARS have broad genetic base and are adapted to area where recommended. These seeds have better quality than native harvest or local source seed. Seed mixtures are developed to provide proper ratio of seeds of individual species to achieve goals for the seeding – habitat, conservation, or pasture improvement.

Select plant species and varieties that are adapted to the site and projected use. Cool season mixtures are best for spring or fall use, native warm season grass mixtures for habitat and summer or winter grazing. Species and varieties for Nebraska can be selected from NE-T.G.Notice546, Section II, revised 11/03 “*Certified Perennial Grass Varieties Recommended for Nebraska*”.

2. **Seedbed Preparation:** Native warm-season grasses should be planted in a firm seedbed that is free of weeds and large clods. The seed bed preparation that is used will depend on the previous crop. Grasses can be planted into a clean, tilled seedbed or seeded no-till or minimum till. If a clean seedbed is used, it should be firmly packed. The seedbed is properly firm when a shoe imprint is no more than ½ inch deep when walking on the seedbed. No-till can be used on soybean, corn, sorghum, or small grain cropland. No-till plant directly into the stubble if the previous crop was soybeans, millet, or oats. No-till plant into corn or sorghum stubble unless crop residue interferes with grass seed placement in the soil and ridges and furrows cause soil surface to be excessively rough. Ridges and furrows can be leveled with a disk. Disking should chop up the stocks sufficiently to prevent them from interfering with planting. Firming the seed bed by roller packing will be necessary if planting is done immediately after disking. If the field is disked one or more weeks before planting and the seedbed is firmed by subsequent rainfall, packing may not be necessary. If the previous crop was soybeans tillage is not advised. If the previous crop was in small grains, and straw is excessive, the straw will have to be mowed at a height of 6

inches and removed. (Allelopathic effects may be present in small grain fields, if a known effect exists a cover crop other than small grain should be planted.)

3. **Planting:** Use a grassland drill designed to seed grasses. The best type of seeding equipment is a grass drill equipped with double disc furrow openers with depth bands. Packer wheels behind the furrow openers will improve seed-soil contact. The fluffy nature of many native grasses requires a drill with an agitator mechanism in the box to prevent bridging, and picker wheels or some other mechanism in the bottom of the seed box to provide positive flow into the seed tube. Grass seed should be planted 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in fine textured soils, and 3/4 inch deep in sandy soil. Don't plant too deep!

TIME AND RATE OF PLANTING

1. Seed warm season grasses between April 1 and May 15. Make certain weeds will not be a problem. Under some instances, let weeds germinate and then lightly till or apply glyphosphate herbicide before planting. Dormant seeding of warm-season grasses can be planted between November 1 and April 1 if a cover crop of sorghum or millet is present. Seed cool season grasses between August 1 and September 5. Good fall establishment depends on late summer and fall rains. If the soil is dry do not seed. Spring seeding is done between March 15 and April 30.
2. Seeding rates vary for different grasses. Information on planting rates can be obtained from NRCS or your professional seed supplier. Mixtures should be based on Pure Live Seeds (PLS) per square foot.

Most warm season plantings in Nebraska should provide at least 20 Pure Live Seeds per square foot; dryland cool season seedings 30 to 50 PLS per square foot; and irrigated cool season seedings, 90 to 100 PLS per square foot.

For more information on successful conservation grass establishment contact Arrow Seed at 800-622-4727.