

Seeding Native Grass Species FAQs

What are the three keys for a successful planting?

Key #1- Prepare a good seedbed. Removing all invasive species, loosening the soil, and removing the thatch will allow sunlight to penetrate into the soil.

Key #2- Plant shallow. The rule of thumb is that seed should be no deeper than the thickness of the seed. Most seeds are less than 1/4" in size (one exception is Eastern Gamagrass, which can be planted 1" deep).

Key #3- Firm the soil. You have loosened the soil to allow for good air and moisture penetration, but you must firm it to achieve good seed-to-soil contact.

My seed isn't coming up- what can I expect?

Many native seeds require long germination periods and ideal conditions (proper temperature, light or light period, moisture, and physiological conditions). Often, the seedlings of long-lived, deep-rooted perennials produce more root structure than top growth, making the plants hard to see. Usually a native establishment takes 2-3 years to become fully recognizable. Perennial plants do not produce flowers and seed heads until they have well-established roots. During this period, vigilant weed control (mowing high and/or an herbicide application) is necessary to assist in establishment.

Why is diversity in a mix important?

A mix of several species will increase the usefulness of the site for a variety of wildlife, and will be attractive during several periods of the year.

When is it necessary to use an herbicide for weed control?

The most important time to control weeds is before planting when complete vegetation control can be achieved (Roundup® or Vantage®). After seeding, a selective herbicide can be used to control certain groups of undesirable plants. Check with your local extension office.

How do I convert U.S. seeding rates to metric?

Change: Acres to hectares- multiply total acres by .4047
Hectares to acres- multiply total hectares by 2.4710
Kilograms to pounds- multiply total kilograms by 2.2046
Pounds to kilograms- multiply total pounds by .4536

Therefore, 10 lb (4.536kg) per acre (.4047 hectares) equals approximately 11.20 kg per hectare.

Examples of our typical seeding rates:

10 kg per hectare equates to approximately 8.922 per acre.
15 lb (6.80kg) per acre equates to approximately 16.82 kg per hectare

Should I fertilize my meadow mixes?

We do not recommend using fertilizer when establishing native plant species. Natural fertility on sites being planted in native or wetland species is generally adequate. The use of fertilizers can promote the growth of weed species that can out compete your native plant species. Fertilizers can also lead to contamination or nearby wetland areas. We do recommend adding organic material to all sites when the topsoil has been removed or depleted, as this is the better way to improve soil fertility.

FAQ continued

What is the difference between a cover crop and a companion crop?

A cover crop is a fast-growing species that is used to protect soil and water resources. A companion crop grows rapidly and provides protection for the desired long-term plants.

Can seeds from one region be grown in another?

Our recommendation is to use species that are currently found in the eco-region in which you are planting. These eco-regions are regions of similar climates and elevations. Political boundaries; i.e., state lines, have no bearing on the effectiveness of a plant's ability to grow.

Why inoculate legumes?

Inoculation involves adding a specific bacterium called rhizobia to legume seeds. Rhizobia have a beneficial relationship with legumes. When root nodules develop, these bacteria convert nitrogen gas from the air to chemical nitrogen, which is required for plant growth.

Can I order a custom mix?

The sales team is able to create a mix to your specifications, contingent on inventory availability. Custom mixes must be ordered in whole pound increments, and a 5% custom mix charge is added to the total.

How do I calibrate a drill for seeding?

Calibrating a drill or broadcast seeder is dependent upon seed bulk density and required application rates. Many native and naturalized seed mixes contain a mix of large fluffy seeds and small dense seeds. Some drills have special seed boxes that can meter long fluffy seed. Many native seed mixes are planted at 10-20 lb per acre (1/4-1/2 lb per 1,000 sq ft).

One simple method of calibrating a seeder is to add a bulky agent (PAM-12, kitty litter, or sand) to create an even flow of seed. Add 40 lb of PAM-12 to 10 lb of seed and calibrate for 50 lb per acre (1 lb PAM-12 to 1/4 of seed per 1,000 sq ft). Divide the seed into proportional areas of the project. Start seeding at a lower rate than the calculated rate. If possible, plan on seeding half of the seed in one direction and make the second pass with the remaining half of the seed in a direction perpendicular to the first direction. (NOTE: PAM-12 can be ordered from Ernst in 50 lb bags or mixed with seed on a custom basis).

Should I burn or mow?

The natural process of burning, which is uniquely beneficial to native species, generally occurs during the dormant season or early spring. The benefits of burning can be replaced by mowing during the dormant season. While winter burns or mowing generally favor forb production and wildlife, late spring or summer burns or mowing increase grass production and control more woody vegetation.

How soon can I get my bioengineering order?

We require at least two weeks notice when bioengineering orders are placed, as all orders are cut specifically for you.

Can I overnight my order?

Yes. Generally, we require air orders be placed by noon; however, during our busy season, air orders may be cut off earlier in the day.

I don't see it in your catalogue – do you have it?

We are always adding new species to our inventory. Please call for the latest additions.