

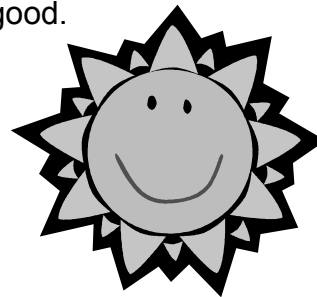
Planting Native Grass

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.



- 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 4th week of July. 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 mother's milk for a newborn child. Mow often to let that summer sun shine down on the young plants!!!



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 and forbs before you plant. This is most often accomplished with Round-up herbicide. 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 seed emerge in 4 or 5 days using this technique.

Plateau Herbicide can make your life easier!!

You can use Plateau Herbicide at 4 oz./per acre on CRP land. That is a good rate for establishing mixed stand of grasses and forbs. Plateau at 4 oz./ per acre is just enough herbicide to get your planting started. You will not have any foxtail problem and not much broadleaf problem. (ok I will say it, just enough broadleaf weeds to make it even better wildlife habitat) By July you will see some broadleaf weeds show up – if that bothers you I would suggest mowing at about 10 inch height. If it does not bother you – good, it is not going to hurt your prairie establishment and they will be mostly gone by next year. After 5 years of watching Plateau work at low rates, I have been convinced. This Plateau is great. The Plateau Ready mix is expensive, but you will save that money is less time mowing your CRP, less headaches, less anxiety and heartburn during that first year of establishment.

Try the Plateau Ready Mix!!

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 years.

Fall Seeding Native Grass

Fall seeding native grass and forb mixes can be a very effective way to establish diverse stands of prairie. Probably the number one fact to remember is that you cannot seed until the soil temperature has dropped low enough so there is no chance of germination in the fall. Soil temps must be below 54 degrees. (And remember you are planting seed in the top ¼ inch of soil) It is not wise to plant before the first or second week of November in Southern Minnesota.

The forb component of your mix will do exceptionally well if planted in the fall of the year. Grasses for some reason do not do quite as well. Here are some tips to remember to make that fall seeding successful. 1. If you have worked the ground up be sure to cultipack before you plant – **plant shallow 1/8 of an inch deep is great** – and cultipack again after you seed. 2. If you use a drill you should take some of your seed and sow it directly on the surface of your planting area in front of the drill – let the drill go over the seed and that action will work it in the soil enough – cultipack. (On 5 acre CP-

25 projects hand sowing some seed in front of the drill is not too bad of a job. I wouldn't recommend on big projects.) 3. I will say it one more time – plant shallow. 4. If you are planting into brome or brome/alfalfa you must kill the brome with Roundup in the fall. About a quart and ½ per acre applied in mid September should do the job. Once the cover is dead – burn off the dead material – then come in and no-till---shallow.

Here are some observations of fall seeding success over these past few years....

I have found that the sites that had seed broadcast on and cultipacked in the fall did the best. The best soil conditions to plant in the fall are into conventionally tilled ground or soybean stubble. I cannot emphasize enough how important planting shallow is with fall seedings.

I happen to really like planting native grass with a drill. In fact I don't think much of the spreaders and broadcast seeders. But there seems to be an advantage to laying that seed on the surface and cultipacking it in the fall season. I think the cultipacking is key. And once over with the cultipacker is all it takes. The forbs do great when seeded in the fall – and they seem to do good broadcast or drilled. **I do not recommend no-till seedings into sod during the fall; success is highly variable – just not worth it. If you burn off (with fire) all dead plant material so you are down to bare earth, then your success will increase.**

If all you have is a native grass drill please do not be discouraged. I would recommend cultipacking before you plant. Truax drills have depth bands that allow you to seed only ¼ inch deep. I think they would be a very good investment.

****A**nother technique to use with a drill is to take the feeder tubes or seed hoses and remove the lower hose clamp. Then adjust the hoses to let the seed fall behind the planting wheel and directly on the ground, the back packer wheels will help plant the seed a little bit. Make another pass with a cultipacker.

Finally remember that a fall seeding will mean more of a weed control problem next spring. Follow up with good maintenance next spring and summer.

THINK HABITAT!!!

If you need more assistance with your habitat project – please contact one of our Pheasants Forever Habitat Specialists or a Regional Wildlife Biologist at www.minnesotapf.org.