

Planting Thunder Turf & Other Native Grass Seeds

Planting native grasses and/or a Thunder Turf lawn is a significant step in conserving our precious drinking water. It's also a small step in restoring the once vast prairie ecosystem, of which less than 2% is remaining. For an initial investment of water, time, and effort, you can also get a native lawn or "pocket prairie" that is beautiful and extremely drought tolerant. Either can be a perfect base in which to plant wildflowers, too.

First, all of our native grass seeds will need a full sun location, with few exceptions. Weeds or existing lawn should be removed first using natural methods. See our handout on *Sheet Mulching* to eliminate weeds in advance, if possible. Grasses, especially Thunder Turf, will be *most* drought resistant in a soil of at least 8" depth. The thinner the soil, the more frequent watering will be needed. However, they will still be more drought resistant than traditional lawns. Likewise, the better the soil is prepared, the more successful the planting. One of the best ways to prepare soil is to add at least ½" of **Garden Soil** over the surface. Another option is to add at least ½" of good quality **Compost** and mix it in to a depth of *no more than 2"*. Be aware that tilling the soil can revive dormant weed seeds lying underneath the surface.

There are two *ideal* seasons when warm season grass seeds may be planted in our area: mid to late September, and April to May. The grass seed needs a warm soil, but not so hot that the seed dries out and dies. You only get one chance for each seed to sprout and develop into a plant. If a new grass sprout dries out, it will die. Seed may also be planted in late spring or summer, but the seedbed must be watered frequently enough to stay moist. Seed may be planted in the late fall or winter, but it won't sprout until spring.

To prepare the planting area, rake off debris on the surface of the soil, and smooth out the surface. Sow grass seed evenly over the area, according to proper rate. Use a roller to press the seeds into the ground, good soil contact is a major factor for germination. Water the area lightly but frequently. Keep the seedbed moist at all times. If the soil is sandy or well-drained, or if conditions are hot or windy, the area will need to be watered more often. If the soil is clayey or weather is cloudy, it *may* need less water. The following are general watering guidelines.

- a. For the first 2 weeks water for about 10 minutes, twice daily.
- b. For the next 2 weeks, water for about 10 minutes, once daily.
- c. For the next 2 weeks, water for about 15 minutes every other day.
- d. Once the grass has reached 3-4" tall, you can slow down the watering.

In the Thunder Turf mix, the Blue Grama will be the first to sprout, and will be a good nurse plant for the Buffalograss. Buffalo may take up to 60 days to sprout fully, depending on warmth and rain. Maintaining your established Thunder Turf takes very little time and resources. Once established, it does not need to be watered. It will go dormant in drought, and revive after a rain. However, if you want to keep it green in the summer, water *deeply* only once every 3 – 4 weeks. At each watering, give the turf the equivalent of a 1" rain, which can be measured with a shallow tuna fish can or cat food can. In a soil that is shallower than 8" more frequent watering may be necessary.

It is ideal to mow Thunder Turf only twice a year, which simulates the six million buffalo grazing and stampeding across the native prairie. Mow once after the spring growth has slowed in late spring or early summer. Mow again in the fall, after the seedheads have fully matured. If more regular mowing is desired it can be done, but the grass will be less drought-hardy, and it may invite weeds. Mow no shorter than four inches.

Do not fertilize a Thunder Turf lawn or native pocket prairie. Once every year or two, topdress with one of our fine composts at ½" or less. Topdress in early spring before growth begins, or anytime during the growing season when temperatures are consistently below 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

Enjoy!