SEED & SUPPLIES FOR NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

NATIVE PERENNIAL GRASSES: PLANNING, SEEDING, ESTABLISHING & MAINTAINING

Seeds of California native perennial grasses have become a widely-available option for planting large open space areas, parklands, and golf course perimeters. A long-lived stand of such grasses offers many benefits including lower maintenance, aesthetic enhancement and wildlife habitat. Once established, the natural drought tolerance of native plants may allow for the retirement of all supplemental irrigation; these grasses have evolved in adaptation to natural rainfall regimes. Unlike annual grasses, however, perennial grasses generally grow slowly during the first year. Many natives might take a full two years to express their potential as a solid stand. Although special attention may be called for throughout this initial establishment period, the rewards of a successful planting tend to pay off.

TIMING: Most of these grasses are cool-season growers and get off to the best start if planted in fall or early spring when moisture and soil temperatures are favorable for plant establishment. A few warm-season grasses, such as the three-awns, deergrass, and squirreltail, are exceptions to the rule and are best planted in the spring with supplemental irrigation. Some irrigation during establishment of all these grasses will help provide flexibility of management choices and often speed their establishment.

SEEDING RATES: How much seed to use will depend on the seed count, purity, germination and vigor of the particular species you choose, and whether you intend to use several species together in a mix or plant pure stands of one species. Generally, the large-seeded natives should be broadcast at a heavier rate than smaller seeded species. Native grass mixes http://www.pcseed.com/docs/calnatgrassmixes.pdf are typically sown between 25-45 PLS lbs per acre http://www.pcseed.com/docs/PureLiveSeed.pdf .

FERTILIZERS & AMENDMENTS: Perennial grasses respond favorably to fertilizer after they have developed a substantial root system. An application of a slow-release, balanced formulation such as BIOSOL 7-2-3 http:///www.pcseed.com/docs/BioSolMix7-2-3.pdf at planting time would be significantly preferable to an application of highly soluble nitrogen. The goal is to assist in healthy root development during the first growing season so that the plants can survive the first summer drought.

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SEEDING: Soil testing is encouraged, and soil surface and deep compaction should be corrected where indicated. In areas accessible by ring rollers or cultipackers, soil should be worked and then lightly compacted prior to seeding. In rough areas, where drills and rollers cannot be used, harrow the soil and then broadcast or hydroseed the seed. Regardless of the seeding method employed, seed has the best prospect for success when planted just below the soil surface and protected by an organic mulch. When hydroseeding or straw mulching, strive to create good soil/seed contact by creating conditions such that seed is embedded in soil.

WEED CONTROL: Seedbed preparation is of prime importance: *competition from annual non-native grasses and weeds must be controlled.* A "grow and kill" cycle using herbicides, harrowing, or disking is commonly practiced prior to the actual seeding and is usually a worthwhile investment. After the fall rains germinate the annual weeds an early mowing or herbicide application is often utilized. This method has been effective not only in reducing competition from the annual grasses and forbs but also in stimulating the early growth of the perennial grasses.

FIRST YEAR MAINTANENCE: Areas seeded with native perennial grasses are often mowed one to four times per year, depending upon objectives. When it is time to mow, mow the area between 4 – 6 inches high. The cool season perennials will most likely begin to fade to a straw color as the soil moisture dries up and the plants begin to go dormant during the summer months. Some species can benefit from timely irrigation to help extend the prime spring growing season, especially during drier years. Do not try to force your plants to stay green with extra amounts of water and fertilizer; they are adapted to go dormant and "rest" during the summer months. When fall rains return, the grasses will awaken and turn green again. Time irrigation can optimize the "reawakening".

Native perennial grasses play an increasingly important role in today's construction, landscape and restoration projects. Please feel free to contact Pacific Coast Seed to discuss which species, rates, methods and timing are appropriate for your project.