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WILDFLOWER/GRASS SEEDING RECOMENDATIONS

**Timing**

(If you are replacing a lawn or seeding a large area, read section on weed control first) The best time to plant seed is just before seasonal rainfall. There are two windows for seeding- early fall and/or late winter, depending on the year’s precipitation. A \*general\* rule is to not seed later than the first two weeks of February, but in more rainy years it is possible to seed later. The most effective technique is to have seed down one week before a stretch of germinating rains, which we define as a 5 to 7 day period of good surface soil moisture. If there are no rains for two weeks after seeding, irrigation may be necessary to continue the early growth stage of the seed by keeping the top inch of soil moist.

**Weed control (most important for seeding larger areas)**

The best time to do weed control is BEFORE planting your native seeds. There is often a large seed bank of weed seeds that will come up along with your native plants, and ultimately they can outcompete the natives if you don’t take care of them first. We recommend doing several rounds of ‘flushing out’ your weed seed bank before putting down your seed. Starting in early fall, do aggressive weed control of whatever is growing in your area (applying a safe foliar herbicide is by far the most effective, but you can also mow or hand-pull). After these weeds have been killed, wait for more weeds to come up (you can irrigate to bring more weeds out). We recommend that you repeat your weed control for two flushing cycles before you plant. If you are applying herbicide, make sure to wait the amount of time specified on the label before putting down your native seed.

**Soil Preparation**

The success of seed germination is highly dependent on soil preparation. Seed will only germinate if it makes good contact with the soil—therefore it is critical that the soil is bare (do not just toss seed into a grassy meadow—if you can’t clear the whole area, make sure you have raked out dead plant material and created bare patches for the seed to make contact with the soil). The soil should be graded and raked into a friable, or easily crumbled surface. It should not be scraped clean or heavily compacted.

Compost is not always necessary, but if added to soil, should be tilled in to a 6-inch depth. Only add Phosphorus and Potassium and micronutrients to enrich soils, but do not add Nitrogen at the time of seeding, rather fertilize with Nitrogen after seed germination if needed. Recommended amounts: 2 applications of 3/4 N per 1000 square feet during first growing season.

**Irrigation**

Once established, many native plants will not need additional irrigation. However, we recommend irrigating the planting area for the first one to two years of establishment. If irrigation is the first moisture of the season it might take 6 to 8 days to apply enough water for the seeds to be able to connect with the water in the soil. If you choose to start in November, the usual ETo rate is about .12 inch per day so it is best to apply water every other day. By December and probably through most of February the ETo is about .08 so you can water every 3rd day. Of course, if you get natural rainfall you could skip the days that you get .25 inches of rain or more. It would usually take about 6 to 10 weeks to get the new seeding started and on their way. Once the roots are deep enough to hit the water table, they will be able to draw up groundwater and irrigation should no longer be necessary.

**Seeding Application**

We suggest using a Whirly Bird style seeder with the capacity to broadcast seed mixes 15 feet in radius or more. The seeder should be equipped with an adjustable opening that allows to increase or decrease the seeding rate. An additive such as chalk or rice hulls can be combined with the seed mix for visibility. Two thirds of the seed should be applied in a minimum of two passes from different directions with seed equipment to distribute the seed evenly. The contractor may also choose to add inert material such as rice husks to the seed mix to increase the volume and to help with a uniform application. Make sure the application id done on a day with little to no winds present as they could affect the distribution.

After the seeding application, the soil can be lightly raked to incorporate the seed into the top 1/8-1/4 inches of mineral soil. After the seed is raked, the final 1/3 of the seed mix should be applied on the surface uniformly. This ensures diversity in the depths of seeds, to widen the opportunity for germination. This technique is intended to maximize seed to soil content, which will also increase the chances of germination.

**Mulch application**

If you like, you can apply a thin layer (less than 2 inches) of wood, leaves or straw mulch immediately following the final seed application. Mulch will help prevent runoff and erosion of the soil surface, and it will protect the seeds during their most vulnerable state during germination. Steep slopes will require additional treatment to prevent erosion such as silt fences, sediment filter socks and erosion control blankets.