

Planting a Blue Grama Grass Lawn from Seed

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Blue grama grass makes a fine native turf grass when seeded at the proper density. We recommend seeding at a rate of 3 to 4 pounds per 1000 square feet. Seeds can be sown beginning in late spring or early summer when night temperatures reach 60° F. Seeding can continue through the summer months until 6 weeks prior to first average frost date.

SITE PREPARATION

Clearing the area to be planted

When preparing to plant a non-lawn area with grama grass seed, clear the area of weeds. Weeds can be pulled by hand. Or the area can be sprayed with Roundup (a non selective herbicide that kills annual and perennial weeds, including the roots, without contaminating the soil), and the dead weeds raked up 10 to 14 days later. If the site has an existing lawn and preparations can be done far enough in advance, the existing lawn can be killed with Roundup. After it is long dead (a month or more) and the roots have had time to rot, the dead grass can be rototilled into the soil. Removal of an existing turf grass lawn can also be accomplished by using a sod cutter (available at equipment rental shops) to completely strip away the sod. Rototilling live grass into the soil is not recommended as this will allow the turf grass to re-grow.

Germinating weed seeds to lessen competition

If the area to be seeded was a weedy area and not a lawn, it is important to germinate the weed seeds still present in the soil. This will reduce the weed density when the grama grass seed sprouts. Water the area thoroughly and wait a few weeks to let the weeds come up. Kill the weed seedlings with Roundup or destroy them using a hoe or by rototilling the top 2 to 3 inches of the soil. This can be done a second time if the area was heavily weed infested for several years or longer. Now the area is ready to seed. Ex-lawn areas will not have a lot of weed seeds in the soil and seeding of the grama grass can begin as soon as the site is cleaned of the lawn grass.

Planting seeds on a slope

When planting sloped areas it is very helpful to cover the soil with an erosion prevention material, like seed-free wheat or barley straw or straw matting that can be pegged into place. The seed is planted first and then covered with the straw or straw mat. A biodegradable soil binder can also be used to hold the soil in place. This is applied after the seed is sown. Contact your county extension agent for sources of erosion prevention materials for seeded areas.

PLANTING

Preparing the seed for planting

Measure each area to be seeded and calculate the square footage. Next, thoroughly mix the grama grass seed required into a bucket half filled with slightly moist sand. Grama grass seed is very fluffy and this technique will help sow the seed evenly over the entire area. For example; if you are sowing an area of 500 square feet, mix 2 pounds of seed with the sand and spread the mixture. Measure the next area and weigh out the appropriate amount of seed. Mix the second batch of seed with sand and sow. In this way you will avoid over or under seeding any given area.

Preparing the Soil and Sowing the Seed

Rototill the area to be seeded to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. Take a bow rake and rake up any roots, rocks and soil clods, then comb the soil with the rake to leave it covered by shallow furrows. Broadcast the seed/sand mixture by hand. Turn the rake over using the flat side to smooth the soil and cover the seeds.

Soil Improvement (if desired)

Grama grass is well adapted to poor soils and soil enrichment is not required. However improving the soil prior to planting will help sandy soils hold more water and added nutrients will help the grama grass thicken up more quickly. Add good quality compost (at the rate of 3 to 5 cubic yards per 1000 square feet) and rototill into the soil to a depth of 6 to 10 inches.

Time needed for germination

Warm night temperatures, evenly moist (but not soggy) soil and rain showers will help Grama grass to germinate quickly, usually within 7 to 10 days of planting. Less than ideal conditions such as windy weather, dry soil and cool nights (due to a cold snap) will delay sprouting. If seeds have not germinated within a month, it may be necessary to re-sow more seed.

Watering newly germinated seed

Frequency: After sowing the seed, water thoroughly so the soil is wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Be prepared to water twice daily, morning and evening. Each time, water enough to keep the top 1 inch of the soil damp. Continue twice daily watering until the grass has germinated. Once the seeds have germinated irrigate just enough to keep the soil damp (not muddy) to a depth of approximately 2 inches. Initially this may require a once daily regime (morning or late afternoon) for a week to 10 days. As the grama grass begins to grow, watering frequency should be reduced to once every 2nd or 3rd day. At the end of four weeks, the grass should need watering only once a week. This is a suggested watering schedule that will vary depending on the weather and the type of soil you have planted into. Sandy soils require more water than clay soils. Loamy soils fall somewhere in between. Be sure to actually check the depth of soil moisture in several spots around the new lawn area after watering to be sure it is enough.

Watering sloped areas

Be sure to mulch or cover with a straw mat. Then water the soil with a fine spray of water just enough that the water doesn't run off heavily. Come back and re-water 2 or 3 more times until the soil is wet to a 2 inch depth.

WEEDING

Weeds can sprout quickly with the T.L.C. and water that you are giving the seed. One thorough hand weeding of the newly planted area is usually sufficient to allow the grama grass to get off to a good head start. If you chose not to hand weed, you can use a selective herbicide that can be spot sprayed to kill only the broadleaf weeds, leaving the grama grass unaffected. Turf experts recommend a single application of 2, 4-D (an herbicide used to control weeds in corn). Do not use formulations that mix 2, 4-D with other herbicides (e.g. Trimec), as these mixtures have been reported to stunt the growth of native grasses. For safe application of any chemical, always follow label directions exactly. Once a grama grass lawn is established, it will rarely need additional weeding as it forms a thick sod that's weed-proof and will last for a lifetime.

CARING FOR AN ESTABLISHED GRAMA GRASS LAWN

Watering

Once established, grama grass is very drought tolerant. To keep it green and actively growing, grama grass may need extra water during the hottest part of the summer. When depending on natural rainfall, grama grass may brown out in extended periods of hot, dry weather but will quickly green-up after a few good rains. In areas receiving less than 8 inches of precipitation annually, you may need to water every 2 to 3 weeks during the summer to keep it alive and healthy.

Fertilizing

Gramma grass is very thrifty in its needs for fertilizer. Apply a single application of lawn fertilizer in early fall at the rate of ½ pound. of actual (N) nitrogen per 1000 square feet of grama grass. For example:

- A fertilizer analysis of 20-5-5 is equal to 20% nitrogen in the bag.
- 20% x 25 pounds. (weight of fertilizer in bag) = 5 pounds of actual nitrogen in the bag of fertilizer.
- A bag of fertilizer with the above analysis is enough to fertilize 10,000 square feet at a rate of ½ pound N per 1000 square feet.

Mowing

Mowing can be a helpful technique to thicken up a new lawn. Two months after planting, cut the grass to a height of 3 to 4 inches. An established lawn can be cut 1 or 2 times to a height of 3 to 4 inches over the course of the summer if you want a more manicured look. Mowing is not a necessity and can be avoided all together if you wish.