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DURANGO NURSERY & SUPPLY
271 Kay Cee Lane, Durango CO
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SEEDING GRASS & WILDFLOWERS

Seeding with wildflowers or grass can be an easy way to add long-lasting life to the landscape. Wildflowers are a low water, low maintenance option that add lots of color to a natural landscape.

Spring vs. Fall Seeding

Spring

- + Cool season weeds can be eliminated before seeding
- Forb and sedge germination will be delayed one year because of the need for seed overwintering
- More watering and early season mowing is required

Fall

- + Fall seeding ensures high soil moisture for spring germination due to the snow melt
- + Plants naturally seed around fall time, which means spreading seed in fall aligns with plants' natural rhythms
- + Fall planted wildflower seeds bloom two weeks before spring planted seeds
- + Clay soils are easier to work with in the fall
- + Fall seeding boasts a higher forb and sedge germination rate in the first growing season
- Birds forage heavily for seeds in the fall, so be sure to spread seed just before snow falls
- If seeding too early, seeds could germinate then freeze to death in a killing frost. Be sure to seed when ground temperatures remain below 45 degrees Fahrenheit.

Site Preparation

Site Selection

Select a sunny area that gets 6+ hours of sun per day, or 4-6 hours if using a shade mix. Avoid low, wet areas with poor drainage.

Weed Removal

Remove existing vegetation to reduce competition with seedlings; the more vegetation you remove, the quicker the site will establish desirable plants. **Avoid tilling if possible!** This will uncover dormant weed seeds below the surface and encourage weed growth. Mowing will not kill perennial weeds with established root systems. Use a method to kill off existing roots so they do not compete with your vulnerable new seedlings.

- **Hand pulling** is labor intensive but can be the most effective control for perennial weeds with extensive root systems.
- **Smothering**: A longer term but less labor-intensive option is to smother plants by laying clear plastic sheet over the desired area. The sheet heats up the soil and kills existing roots and seeds. This may take a few weeks to months depending on the plants established in the area.
- **Herbicides**: Choose carefully and read the label completely; you do not want to sterilize your soil and prevent desired seeds from germinating and establishing.



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Soil Preparation

Do not seed directly on top of compost or fertilizer; this will kill germinating seeds.

- Native soil: May not need amending if growing native species. Optional; add ¼" of Topsoil Blend from Durango Nursery to surface if seeding nutrient demanding species.
- Depleted soil: In areas with recent construction, add a small amount of organic matter to the top few inches of soil and mix well. Too much organic matter can burn seedlings.
- Highly compacted soil: Scratch the surface (do not till) to allow better seed to soil contact.

Sowing

Read the directions for application rates depending on your seed mix. Broadcast seeds on soil and do not mix in; buried seeds do not have enough access to sunlight to germinate. For an even spread, mix sand or natural crusher fines into seed, then broadcast by hand or seeder. To increase seed to soil contact, lightly compress seeds by walking on them, or running over the area with a roller such as a 55-gallon drum. If seeding in spring, water and keep soil moist until seedlings appear. If seeding in fall, seed right before the first snow that will stay on the ground, when soil temperatures will remain below 45 degrees.

Care Post-Seeding

Basics

Avoid traffic over newly seeded areas until grass is established. Turf lawns should be mowed and kept at 3-4 inches. Weeds are going to happen, especially in the first few years. Do your research if you want to use herbicides to decrease weed presence. Be mindful that some herbicides effect wildflowers and/or cool or warm season grasses, so certain grass mixes may not handle application.

Watering

- Month 1: Keep top inch of soil moist, not soggy or dry. May require multiple daily waterings of a few minutes to maintain moisture of top inch and allow seeds to germinate.
- Month 2: Keep top 3-4 inches of soil moist. May require watering every few days.
- Month 3:
 - *Native & Xeric*: Water 1-2x per week. Let surface dry out between waterings: Native and Xeric plants do not need as much water. This will also prevent weeds from sprouting!
 - *Turf Lawns*: Water ~1" when top 2" of soil is mostly dry. May require daily watering during hot summer months.

End of Season:

Tall meadow grasses can be mowed when dormant, but ideally never mowed to prevent competition from weeds. Lower growing grasses like buffalo grass and blue grama take mowing easier. Wildflower patches should be mowed at the end of the season with a non-bagging mower to encourage seed dispersal for next season.