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## **“NO-MOW” TURF SEEDING INSTRUCTIONS**

### ***Please Keep These Instructions for Future Reference!***

Prairie Nursery’s “No-Mow” lawn mix is a special blend of six different fescue varieties, derived of Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Sheep Fescue (*Festuca ovina*). Fescues have some of the deepest roots of all the turf grasses. This makes them more drought tolerant than bluegrass and other lawn grasses. Fescues also require much less nitrogen fertilizer than other turf grasses. This makes our “No Mow” lawn mix more ecological and economical than other mixes. In fact, we generally recommend that you not apply Nitrogen fertilizer to your “No Mow” lawn.

Our “No-Mow” will thrive on most soil types and light conditions, including moderate shade. However, it is not recommended for planting in wet soils, heavy clay soils with little or no topsoil, and in deep shade. Your “No Mow” lawn requires good drainage and will not tolerate standing water for more than a day or two at a time.

#### **PLANTING TIMES**

***The best time to plant your “No Mow” grass is between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20.*** The fescue grasses germinate during the cool, often damp fall months. Most weeds germinate in spring, so fall plantings typically have far fewer weeds than spring seedings. If fall planting is not an option, the best time to plant in spring is between March 15 and May 15. Seeding between June 1 and Aug 15 is not recommended, except in cool climates that do not experience hot summers. Fescue grasses do not generally germinate well in the heat of summer, and drought is always a concern during this time. ***Watering your “No Mow” for the first two months after seeding is strongly recommended for best germination and growth.***

#### **PLANTING STEEP SLOPES AND EROSION-PRONE SITES**

When planting steep slopes or other erosion-prone sites, we strongly recommend using our “No Mow” with Annual Rye nurse crop. The annual rye germinates rapidly and helps provide quick cover to help stabilize slopes. **When planting erosion-prone sites in fall, the best dates for seeding are between Aug. 20 and Sept. 20.** This provides sufficient time in fall for the annual rye and fescue to grow and hold the soil before the onset of winter. On steep slopes, the application of erosion-control blankets is recommended.

#### **KILL ALL THE WEEDS FIRST!**

For a successful planting your site will need to be well prepared in advance. ***All perennial weeds must be eliminated prior to seeding.*** Since a variety of site conditions will be encountered when planting an area, it is difficult to write a standard “recipe” for site preparation and planting procedures. The following are *guidelines* based on our experience. If you have any questions, please call or email us with your concerns. We will do our very best to help ensure the success of your “No-Mow” turf planting!

### **I. SITE PREPARATION METHODS**

To prepare your site for planting, all existing vegetation must be killed or removed. Existing lawn grass, weeds, and other plants will compete with your “No Mow” seeds for nutrients, moisture, and sunlight. Perennial weeds such as quackgrass, brome grass, thistles, creeping goldenrods and other aggressive plants will present a long-term problem if not controlled **prior to seeding your “No Mow” turf**. Annual weeds are present in the soil as seeds, and may be a problem in the early going, but should not pose a long-term threat. **Fall seeding is strongly recommended, as it will reduce the germination of many weeds.** Seed between August 20 and October 20 for best results

**Select from the following site preparation options to match your particular situation:**

### **A. Existing Lawns**

#### **1. Smothering**

- a) Cover the site with either black plastic, old carpet, plywood or a thick layer of leaves or newspapers
- b) Leave in place for a full growing season
- c) Remove the “smother cover” in fall or the following spring
- d) Plant into a prepared bed in fall, between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20 (see specifics in section II)

#### **2. Sodcutting**

- a) Remove the top two to three inches of grass and soil using a sod-cutter.
- b) Till lightly and plant into a prepared bed
- c) If deep-rooted perennial weeds are present, sod-cutting will not remove them. Follow the site preparation procedures and timelines outlined below in Section B, “Old Fields.”

#### **3. Cultivating**

- a) Cultivate two to three times at one week intervals to kill the lawn.
- b) Till the soil prior to seeding to break up remaining thatch and create a smooth seedbed.
- c) If perennial weeds are present, cultivate all growing season every two to three weeks and plant into a prepared bed, free of clumps of dead sod and thatch.

#### **4. Herbiciding**

- a) Apply a glyphosate herbicide (such as Roundup) when the lawn is actively growing (in fall or spring)
- b) Till the sod under when the grass has turned brown, and break up the thatch to create a smooth seedbed. Plant in fall between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20, or in spring between March 15 and May 15.

### **B. Existing Crop Fields (Corn, soybeans, or small grains)**

Before planting, check the field history of herbicide application. If herbicides with long-term residual activity in the soil (such as Atrazine) have been applied within the past year or two, consider testing the soil for herbicide residue. Atrazine is commonly applied to cornfields, and can kill germinating seedlings of fescue grasses if present in sufficient concentrations.

#### **1. Herbiciding**

- a) **Spring:** Spray once in mid to late spring, wait 10 days and plant into a prepared seedbed, between March 15 and May 15.
- b) **Fall:** Spray once after the crop is removed when weedy vegetation is still actively growing.

Wait 10 days and plant into a prepared bed between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20.

**Note:** If perennial weeds are present in the field, refer to “Old Field” herbiciding instructions below, and take a full year to prepare the site to remove problem weeds prior to seeding in fall.

#### **2. Cultivating**

- a) If perennial weeds are present, cultivate at a depth of four to five inches every two to three weeks from spring through fall. This should kill all the weeds on the site.
- b) Plant in fall between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20 for best results.

**Note: Year-long cultivation is *Not Recommended* on steep, erosion-prone sites.**

### **C. Old Fields (Abandoned agricultural fields that have grown up to weeds)**

#### **1. Herbiciding**

- a) Mow and rake, or burn the existing vegetation to the ground in late fall or early spring.
- b) Apply a glyphosphate herbicide (Roundup) three times at six to eight week intervals during the growing season (mid-spring, mid-summer, early fall).
- c) When all vegetation is dead, till the soil and plant into a prepared bed between Aug.20 and Oct. 20.

#### **2. Cultivating**

- a) Mow and rake or burn the existing vegetation to the ground in late fall or early spring
- b) Cultivate to a depth of four to five inches every two to three weeks from spring through late summer.
- c) Before planting, make sure all the existing weeds have been killed
- d) Plant in fall between Aug. 20 and Oct. 20.

**Note: Year-long cultivation is *Not Recommended* on steep, erosion-prone sites.**

## **II. FINAL SEED BED PREPARATION**

Just prior to planting, the soil should be prepared according to the type of planting method used. This is also a good time to improve the fertility and water-holding capacity of sandy soils, and the porosity of clay soils by tilling weed-free organic matter into the soil i.e. compost, peat moss, mushroom compost, etc.).

### **A. Broadcast Seeding or Drop Seeding, and mechanical seeding with a Brillion Seeder:**

Applying seed from push-type broadcast and drop seeders requires a smooth, tilled and finely graded surface for firm seed-to-soil contact. The soil is simply raked lightly into the tilled soil, and rolled to firm it.

### **B. No-Till or Slit Seeders:**

No-till drills and slit-seeders require a smooth, level soil surface completely free of weeds. Tilling is not necessary, unless the area is rough and requires re-grading and smoothing. No-till seeding and slit-seeding have the advantage of bringing up very few weed seeds from the soil below. Excess dead vegetation should be cut and removed, or burned prior to using slit-seeders to prevent fouling and clogging of the seeding mechanisms.

## **III. PLANTING**

### **A. When to Plant**

1. **Fall** (August 20 to October 20) Fall is the best time to plant. Cool temperatures and gentle rains promote germination of the cool season fescue grasses. Weed germination is lower in fall than in spring. Fall-seeded lawns typically have far fewer weeds than spring-seeded lawns.
2. **Spring** (March 15 to May 15) Spring planting is a good second option. Spring seedings often require watering more frequently, summer drought can be a threat, and weeds will typically be more competitive. Seeding "No Mow" between June 1 and Aug 15 is NOT RECOMMENDED.

### **B. Planting Methods**

#### **1. Broadcast Seeding or Drop-Seeding**

- a) Requires a tilled seed bed free of rocks or clumps greater than one inch diameter.
- b) Fill broadcast spreader or drop seeder. Some seeders list the seeding rates for fescue grasses. If no listing is provided, experiment with setting the opening, so that the seed is distributed at the recommended rate of five pounds per 1,000 square feet.

- c) Cover the seed with one eighth to one fourth inch of soil. Use a rake, or drag the planted area with seeding drag, or piece of chain link fence.
- d) Firm the seed into the soil by rolling with a roller, cultipacker, or similar implement.
- e) Mulch the planting with approximately one inch of weed free straw such as winter wheat or marsh hay. The mulch helps control erosion on gentle slopes, and retains moisture in sandy and clay soils.
- f) If working on steep slopes, it is recommended that the area be covered with an erosion-control blanket immediately after seeding. The grass will come up through the erosion blanket, and the soil will be protected from washing during heavy rains.

## 2. Mechanical Planting with Tractor-Drawn Mechanical Seeders and “Slit-Seeders”

On areas greater than a 10,000 square feet, it is often more efficient to plant your “No Mow” seed using a mechanical seeder, such as a “Brillion” or “Land Pride” turf seeder. The Brillion seeder has heavy cast iron packing wheels that provide firm seed to soil contact. The ground must be freshly tilled when using a Brillion seeder. Land Pride turf seeders are similar to the Brillion seeders, with more aggressive soil preparation mechanisms. Brillion and Land Pride turf seeders are often available at equipment rental and farm rental establishments.

“Slit seeders” refer to various makes and models of seeders that plant the seed in rows by opening small slits in the soil at the time of seeding. “Ryan” walk-behind slit seeders are commonly available at many rental centers. When using a slit seeder, make sure not to set the slit seeder too deep, no more than 1/8 inch deep or less.

## 3. “No-Till Broadcast Seeding” *For Fall Only:*

This method involves planting the seed into exposed, *untilled* soil that has resulted from sod-cutting, smothering, or herbicide treatment. The seed is simply broadcast onto the surface of the exposed soil in late summer or early fall, without tilling or raking the seed into the soil. The mineral soil must be exposed for this method to work properly. **DO NOT USE THIS METHOD TO SEED INTO AN UNTILLED, DEAD SOD.** The dead sod will prevent good seed to soil contact, and it also wicks moisture up out of the soil, drying out the seed germination zone. Areas that are seeded using this method must be watered regularly in the morning for the first few weeks to encourage germination.

The No-Till Broadcast Seeding method is an excellent choice for steep slopes and erodible sites, since the soil is never exposed by tilling. The dead roots of the grasses or weeds that are killed by smothering or herbiciding will usually hold the soil during the site preparation process, as well as after the seed is planted. Use “No Mow” mix with Annual Rye for seeding steep slopes. The annual rye will germinate quickly and help hold the soil while the fescue germinates and develops.

**This method is recommended for FALL SEEDINGS ONLY.** Spring seedings are subject to higher temperatures and greater chance of drought than fall seedings. However, success can be attained using this method with early spring seedings in March and April, with daily watering to maintain soil moisture.

## C. Nurse Crops for Erosion Control and Weed Reduction

A “nurse-crop” is an annual plant such as annual rye grass. When seeded with your fescue, annual rye will germinate quickly and become established ahead of the slower-growing perennial fescue. An annual rye nurse crop is excellent for protecting sloping sites from erosion. It also helps reduce weed competition by establishing quickly and occupying the ecological niche that weeds would otherwise take. For your convenience, our “No-Mow” seed is available with an annual rye nurse crop included (Item #55011).

## IV. POST PLANTING MAINTENANCE

Although “No-Mow” plantings are low maintenance compared to other lawns, a some management is required to ensure successful establishment and growth.

### **Watering**

Watering is essential during the first one to two months, increasing germination rates and seedling survival. Seeds should be watered every other morning for 15 to 30 minutes during the first four to six

weeks after planting. This is especially important if planting on dry soils, or in late spring when temperatures are higher. Once established, the grass should be watered only during dry periods. Occasional thorough soakings are better than frequent, light sprinklings. Deep soakings encourages deep root growth, and makes your turf more drought resistant.

### **Fertilizing and Weed Control**

Fertilizing is not recommended for “No Mow” fescue turf, and should be applied sparingly, if at all. If you must, fertilize in early spring or late summer. Use a slow-release, balanced fertilizer with equal portions nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. **DO NOT USE HIGH LEVELS OF NITROGEN FERTILIZER ON YOUR “No Mow” TURF.** This is far worse than no fertilizer at all.

If desired, your “No Mow” lawn can be treated with the same weed control and lawn care products that are used on traditional lawns. Always follow the directions when using herbicides and other lawn care products. These chemicals and fertilizers should be used sparingly, if at all.

### **Mowing**

It is not recommended that you mow your “No Mow” turf closer than three inches. Close mowing will eventually damage the roots and weaken the turf. Fescue grasses often produce seedheads up to two feet tall in early to mid-June. To maintain a more “lawn-like” appearance, mow at four inches when the seedheads appear. This is usually the only mowing that will be required, unless a more manicured look is desired.

If you require a more “cropped lawn” look, occasional mowing will be necessary, but far less frequently than with other lawn mixtures. Mow once a month at a height of three to four inches, starting in spring and continuing throughout the growing season. Never remove more than the top one third of the leafy growth. Do not mow your “No Mow” turf closely late in the season after it has been allowed to grow to its full natural height. This will scalp the lawn, severely harming the grass and creating an unsightly appearance.

Your “No-Mow” lawn will form a soft, four to six inch tall flowing carpet of grass. In fall, leaves should be raked and removed to prevent them from smothering the lawn. An option to raking is to mow with a mulching mower after all the leaves have dropped. This shreds the leaves and encourages decomposition over winter. The nutrients from the mulched leaves are all the fertilizer your “No-Mow” lawn should need!