

Planting Instructions for Warm Season Grasses -- from Will Brandau

Start preparing for planting warm season grass in the Fall the year before you intend to put seed in the ground.

That Fall use a combination of Round Up and 2-4 D as per directions to kill weed growth. In the Spring, when it is dry enough to enter the fields and at least 2 weeks prior to the planting date, repeat the herbicide application.

Order the seed well in advance of the planting date. Some folks choose to plant a single species of warm season grass (a monoculture); others use a conservation seed mix. i.e., 7 lbs switchgrass, 1lb Indian grass, 1 lb big bluestem and ¼ lb wildflower mix per acre. There are advantages to both. Consult a reputable seed supplier for advice. Ernst Seed in Meadville, PA is a good choice.

Whatever mix you choose, use a no-till-drill for planting. Set the drill at 1/4" depth. These units can be obtained from a variety of sources. Pheasants Forever is one such source. Some conservation offices offer them for rent. There are custom planters who will come on-site and plant for you. Check in Lancaster Farmer for custom planters.

The drill should be set at 1/4" depth. I found rolling the field with a cultipacker increased soil seed contact and resulted in better germination. This is not necessary but helps. Note that broadcast seeding is a last resort that produces an inferior stand of grass.

Year 1: The plant concentrates on root development. You will see minimum above-ground growth. Your job is to provide sunlight to the baby plants. The no-till-drilling disturbed weed seeds and they germinated. They will grow faster than the grass. You need to mow the weeds to keep them from smothering the infant grass. Set the mower just above the height of the grass. If you question if it time to mow, then mow. It is not unusual to mow 4, 5, or more times that first year. This is critical to establishing a successful stand.

Year 2: You should see more substantial growth. If you want, you can spray the field with 2-4 D herbicide in the early spring. 2-4 D kills broad leaf weeds. I did this to my fields with great results. Otherwise, mow until your mower will not go above the height of the grass. It will grow much taller this year.

Year 3: The grass should be well established. It will grow faster than the weeds and smother them.

Hope this helps. Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

-- Will