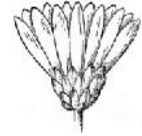




Planting Your Native Landscape



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Introduction

Planting is the most satisfying part of the native landscaping process for most people. However, many important decisions must be properly made before the seeds touch the soil. Will you plant in the spring or fall? By hand or machine? How will you incorporate the seeds into the soil? Should you mulch the planting? These considerations are discussed below.

When to Plant

Spring

- Typically early May to mid-June, but varies from year to year and site to site.
- First year forb (wildflower) germination may be low because many forb seeds need a cold period to break dormancy. Conversely, most grasses do not need this cold period and usually will germinate the first year.
- Planting dry stratified (cold treated) seed increases forb germination.
- Provides one more weed control opportunity prior to planting.

Fall

- Typically from late October until the ground freezes or is snow covered. Need to wait until the soil is cold so the seeds won't germinate.
- Seeds can be scattered on snow as long as the snow surface isn't a smooth crust.
- The winter provides the cold period the forbs require without harming the grasses.
- Fall plantings are generally preferred over spring plantings for forb rich seed mixes.
- Especially recommended for droughty soils because the seeds can germinate early in the spring and begin establishment before the summer heat arrives.
- Requires a well-prepared site to prevent the spring flush of weeds.

Planting Methods

Hand Planting

- Seeds are broadcast by hand after mixing with a bulking agent, such as wood shavings.
- Low-tech, low cost.
- May not be appropriate for large sites unless you have a large number of helpers.
- May not be appropriate for no-till prepared sites because it is difficult to incorporate the seeds into the soil. Easy to plant different species into different areas to account for

variable soil or light, e.g., wet areas or beneath individual trees, and to spot plant select species, e.g., aggressive or expensive.

- May require a slightly higher seeding rate because the seeds that aren't incorporated into the soil may be wasted.
- Bulk-up the seeds with dampened sawdust, wood shavings, vermiculite, or peat moss prior to planting. Use about four bushel baskets of bulking agent per acre. Better to have too much than too little.
- Strive for an even distribution of seeds. Sowing half of your seeds while walking back and forth in one direction and the other half of the seeds while walking back and forth at a right angle to the first direction provides uniform coverage.

Machine Planting

- Typically done with either a drill, which places the seeds below the soil surface, or a seeder, which scatters the seeds on the soil surface and then incorporates them with a roller. Drills and seeders are pulled with a tractor.
- Equipment can be rented or hired.
- Well suited for large sites, but may not be practical for small sites.
- May be able to seed at a lower rate than hand planted sites because less seed is wasted.
- Lawn grass type seeders do not work because native seeds are fluffy, fuzzy, and highly variable in size and shape.

Incorporating the Seeds After Planting

- When using a planting method that places the seed on the soil surface, such as hand planting, germination will be increased if the seeds are lightly incorporated into the soil. Seeds on the soil surface can be blown or washed away, eaten by birds or rodents, or otherwise lost.
- Incorporate the seed no deeper than 1/4 inch deep. Seeds planted deeper than this may not germinate or survive if they do germinate.
- A light hand raking works well on small sites.
- A drag or harrow (these are farm implements) or a length of chain link fence pulled behind a vehicle or ATV works well on large sites.
- Wintertime freeze-thaw may be sufficient on fall seeded sites.

Mulching

- Retains moisture, thereby increasing germination and seedling survival.
- Reduces erosion.
- Use clean, weed-free straw or grass hay.
- Cover only about 50 percent of the soil surface.
- The benefits make it worth the added expense.

