



FORESTRY

Grass Seed Mixes to Reduce Wildfire Hazard no. 6.306

by F.C. Dennis¹

Quick Facts...

Plant “FireWise” grass species to reduce the risk of wildfire damage.

“FireWise” grass mixes may contain only native species or a combination of native and non-native species.

Sow half the seed north to south and the other half east to west.

Rake the seed into the soil.

Mulch erosion-prone areas.

If possible, water often and lightly.

Maintain the area properly.

During much of the year, grasses ignite easily and burn rapidly. Tall grass will quickly carry fire to your house. Plant “FireWise” grasses in the defensible space around your home. Defensible space is an area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire. See fact sheet 6.302, *Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones*.

Seed Mixes for Colorado

Grass seed mixes developed for Colorado use native or a combination of native and non-native grass species. While the basic mixes (Tables 1 and 3) work reasonably well on all sites, they were modified for moist sites and/or those with northern exposures (Tables 2 and 4).

Grasses included in these mixes have the following characteristics:

- They are lower growing.
- They need less maintenance.
- Seed is readily available and relatively inexpensive.

Grass seed mixes made up entirely of native seed may take longer to establish — up to three years — than those with a percentage of non-native seed.

Planting

Use either a drop or a cyclone seeder to seed your defensible space.

A drop seeder is more accurate in placing seed, especially if wind is a problem. However, if the ground is rough or rocky, the cyclone seeder will be easier to use.

Seed at the rates shown in the tables below. Divide seed into two equal parts. Sow half of the seed by crossing the area north to south and the other half by crossing east to west.

Rake seed into the soil as soon as possible after sowing to reduce the chances of it blowing or washing out. Soil cover also helps to protect the young seedlings from drying out. When sowing on slopes prone to erosion, cover the seeded area with mulch. Recommended mulches include **clean** straw (straw with no seeds in it), netting or matting of some kind.

If you have water from a central community system or a well permit that allows outside irrigation, water the newly seeded areas frequently and lightly. Water enough to keep the soil moist but not so heavily as to cause soil washing and loss of the grass seed.

Maintenance

Even “FireWise” grasses need proper maintenance. See 6.303, *Fire-Resistant Landscaping*, for tips on proper mowing and other maintenance and landscaping suggestions.



Putting Knowledge to Work

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FIREWISE is a multi-agency program that encourages the development of defensible space and the prevention of catastrophic wildfire.



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Native Grass “Fire Mixes”

Table 1: All exposures.

Species	Variety	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Arizona fescue	Redondo	20	9.0 x .20 = 1.80
Western wheatgrass	Barton/Rosana	20	32.0 x .20 = 6.40
Streambank wheatgrass	Sodar	20	22.0 x .20 = 4.40
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	20	25.0 x .20 = 5.00
Blue grama	Lovington	20	6.0 x .20 = 1.20
TOTALS		100%	18.80

Table 2: Northerly exposures and/or moist sites.

Species	Variety	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Arizona fescue	Redondo	25	9.0 x .25 = 2.25
Western wheatgrass	Barton/Rosana	25	32.0 x .25 = 8.00
Streambank wheatgrass	Sodar	25	22.0 x .25 = 5.50
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	25	25.0 x .25 = 6.25
TOTALS		100%	22.00

Non-Native/Native Grass “Fire Mixes”

Table 3: All exposures.

Species	Variety	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Canada bluegrass	Reubens	10	2.0 x .10 = 0.20
Western wheatgrass	Barton/Rosana	20	32.0 x .20 = 6.40
Streambank wheatgrass	Sodar	15	22.0 x .15 = 3.30
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	15	25.0 x .15 = 3.75
Sheep fescue	Covar	20	8.0 x .20 = 1.60
Blue grama	Lovington	20	6.0 x .20 = 1.20
TOTALS		100%	16.45

Table 4: Northerly exposures and/or moist sites.

Species	Variety	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Canada bluegrass	Reubens	15	2.0 x .15 = 0.30
Western wheatgrass	Barton/Rosana	20	32.0 x .20 = 6.40
Streambank wheatgrass	Sodar	20	22.0 x .20 = 4.40
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	15	25.0 x .15 = 3.75
Sheep fescue	Covar	30	8.0 x .30 = 2.40
TOTALS		100%	17.25

*Pure Live Seed.

References

For additional information on protecting your homesite, see:

- 6.302, *Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones*
- 6.303, *Fire-Resistant Landscaping*
- 6.304, *Forest Home Fire Safety*
- 6.305, *FireWise Plant Materials*

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