

Buffalo Grass

Description

Buchloe dactyloides (Nutt.) Engelm., buffalograss, is a perennial, native, low-growing, warm-season grass. Leaf blades are 10 to 12 inches long, but they fall over and give the turf a short appearance. This grass occurs naturally and grows best on clay loam to clay soils. It requires little mowing to achieve a uniform appearance. It has a low fertility requirement and it often will maintain good density without supplemental fertilization. Buffalograss is well suited for sites with 10 to 25 inches of annual precipitation and six-to-eight hours. It is not adapted to shaded sites. Buffalo grass becomes green early in the spring and turns an attractive golden color in fall. It is drought resistant and needs little mowing. Plant in well drained soil and full sun. Buffalograss goes dormant at the first killing frost and turns a beautiful buff color until it breaks dormancy again in the spring.

Seeding

When planting Buffalograss seed prepare a firm, weed-free seed bed on a well-drained site, loam to clay soil in full sun. Plant when soil temperatures reach 60 degrees Fahrenheit (16-C) in the spring. Plant Buffalograss seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep by broadcasting or drilling and firm the soil by rolling or watering. Keep soil moist to ensure germination and seeding establishment. Proper seedbed preparation for planting a home lawn is essential. As seedlings emerge and develop, irrigate less frequently but often enough to prevent drought stress. Buffalograss does not germinate as a dense stand like tall fescue. One seedling per square foot is adequate because buffalograss becomes progressively thicker each year as the stolons spread. During the first and second years, persistent attention to weed control may be required. It is best to drill seed at 1/2 inch deep and provide firm contact between the seed and moist soil however seed may also be broadcast. When broadcasting seed, harrow or rake the area in two directions immediately after seeding to work the seeds into the soil. Cover the seeds with soil and then firm the seed bed. Seedlings should begin to appear 14 to 21 days after planting when moisture is available for germination. All planting should be delayed until the danger of frost has past.

Management

If moderate to high quality turf is desired, mow once per week at a height of 2 to 3 inches. For low-maintenance areas mow at 3 to 4 inches every three to four weeks. Buffalograss may also be left unmowed except for an annual spring mowing at 3 to 4 inches to remove old growth. After seeding, apply a slow release nitrogen fertilizer at a rate of 1 pound nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Buffalograss responds well to light applications of nitrogen. Over-fertilization will promote undesirable grasses within the planted area. During extended dry periods in the summer months, buffalograss will go brown and become dormant if no supplemental water is provided. Because of aggressive runners, buffalograss can require edging along walks, driveway, and flower beds. Weeds may be removed by hand or by spot spraying with Roundup. Managing established buffalograss Buffalograss is a low maintenance grass and will fail if overmanaged. Established buffalograss requires only 1 or 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. Select a fertilizer with a nitrogen-to-phosphorus-to-potassium ratio of 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 and at least 35 % slow-release nitrogen. Apply fertilizer at a rate of 1 pound nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in June and repeat the application in late July or early August.

Irrigate buffalograss only enough to maintain growth and prevent dormancy, if desired. Buffalograss will survive extended drought but will lose color as it enters dormancy. Overwatering will promote weed competition and may increase the incidence of disease.