



Native Grass Conversion: Issues to consider before converting rough areas to native grasses.

Issues for Consideration

The desire of many golf courses throughout the Southwest to conserve water, save labor costs and reduce fertilizer and pesticide applications while providing a quality experience expected by golfers and management alike has led to many new thoughts on how to accomplish this idea. The conversion to native grasses for rough or minimal play areas has been resurgent for several years. The use of cool season, warm season or a mixture of both have provided golf courses with an alternative to turf, shrubs or mulch beds while increasing the beauty of the course and providing a changing look with the seasons. The methods are varied as much as the availability of the species.

Cool Season vs. Warm Season

The warm season grasses provide persistence and durability throughout the year with minimal input.



Blue Grama, Buffalo and Purple Three Awn are a few of the more popular ones used. The heights are good for golf courses (18-24 inches tall) with interesting seedheads that change look and color as fall approaches. They are very drought tolerant and require minimal fertilizing and mowing.

The cool season grasses are more dominating throughout the year due their ability to germinate and grow during our cooler, wetter fall-spring seasons. During the hotter summer season, they either go into dormancy or reseed and die. Some can be kept in a vegetative stage with supplemental watering along the coastal areas but there is risk in rotting them out if over-irrigated.

Use of mixtures containing species from both categories has become the norm. Creating such mixtures mostly involves site consultations, review of desired effects, and expectations of the mixture. While using a mixture will give you the ability to plant one time, timing is a factor. It is better to create the desired mixture over time by planting to the active growing season for the species used.

Preparation

The factors affecting the development of the native grasses are varied. Weed development, lack of proper moisture, and competition from other annual native and non-native grasses can lead to an undesirable outcome. Many of the factors can be controlled with proper techniques and a little forethought. Herbicide applications to kill the existing canopy and tilled soil are effective and many times necessary. Since many native grasses grow on annual natural rainfall, mimicking that for grow in will provide better results and



reduce the weed intrusion somewhat. Planting the proper varieties during their active growth season will also let them mature at the best time for them. We have found this to be the most desirable method.

Establishment

How to convert the desired areas to native grasses? It's fairly simple. Select species for their season of growth when planted. If weeds or non-natives are an issue, an herbicide application to retard or kill the existing vegetation is desired. Follow-up with minimal disturbance to the soil will keep down emergence of new weeds. If other grasses either continue to invade or germinate in the area, planting certain herbicide resistant species that can take some post emergent controls may be done first and then overseeded to the other desired species in time. Watering to germinate and begin establishment that allows for the desired species to proliferate and yet not enough for many weeds will also help in the conversion.

There are multiple means of planting native grasses that should be researched and discussed that provides the best outcome with least amount of expense and labor for the project. Hydroseeding, dry seeding, drill seeding, and planting of plant plugs are the most frequently used means. Each has advantages and disadvantages which should be discussed by the members, superintendent, and project consultant for the desired outcome.

While conversion to native grasses may seem like extensive work and expense, it is actually many times cheaper in the short term as opposed to overseeding with the added benefit of longer term savings because of reduced inputs for subsequent years.

Stover Seed has been involved in many conversions over the years and can provide solutions in terms of advice and seeding recommendations for your project.

