

Alternative Turf: Native Grass Mixes



Rather than using only one kind of grass, native grass mixes employ several species of grasses to create a mixture. Because they require less mowing, fertilizer and water than traditional lawn areas, native grass mixes can be a great way to create sustainable landscapes throughout Colorado Springs.



Benefits

- Can be planted in native soil (without added soil amendments). Compacted soil should be tilled before planting.
- Native grass mixes can be custom mixed to contain species that are likely to grow well at a specific site.
- Because native grass mixes contain more than one species, it's likely that if installed properly, at least some species will survive and grow.
- Once the grasses are established (usually after the third growing season), maintenance requirements can be very low, including occasional watering, mowing, and weed control.
- Can be a very good groundcover option in naturalized areas or peripheral areas of a property.



Water savings

- Native grass mixes can use much less water than a traditional lawn. Depending on the species used, native grass areas can be watered once per week during the growing season, watered during dry periods only, or not watered at all. In comparison, Kentucky bluegrass lawns are usually watered three times per week.
- Some native grass species are more drought tolerant than others. Be sure to select a mix that contains species likely to perform well on your property.



Native grass mix

- Most native grass species do not require winter watering.
- Requires regular watering for several weeks after planting while it forms new roots. In other words, you will not save water until the grass has grown a new root system during the first growing season.



Don't use if ...

- A traditional-looking lawn is desired. Native grass mixes have variations in texture, color and height that result in a less uniform appearance.
- Deep green grass throughout the growing season is ideal. Native grasses often have a dormant season where they appear more brown than Kentucky bluegrass.
- Weeds cannot be controlled regularly. Consider installing landscape plants with wood chip mulch instead.

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Considerations

- Available as seed, not sod or plugs.
- Weed invasion is a common occurrence in any grass seeding project. Weeds will need to be controlled regularly the first few years.
- Regular overhead irrigation is required in order to get the seed to germinate. Irrigation may be temporary and removed after the first through third growing season.
- If native grass areas do not receive supplemental irrigation, the grasses may remain dormant (brown) in years with little rainfall.
- Many grass mixes sold do not contain native species. Be sure to purchase native grass seed mixes from a reputable seed dealer.



Installation

- Best time to seed depends on the specific species in the mixture. Cool season grasses are best seeded early in the year, while warm season grasses germinate best when the soil is warm.
- Consult a horticulture, rangeland, or reclamation expert for guidance.

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