

Buffalograss Lawn Establishment Using Seed or Plugs

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When beginning a new buffalograss lawn using seed/plugs or converting to buffalograss from Kentucky bluegrass or other lawn grasses (or you are starting with a weedy mess of different grasses and other plants), it is essential that you eliminate initial competition from the existing grass and weeds - and control weeds as they appear in the newly planted seed/plugs. Seeding or plugging buffalograss into a living lawn or a lawn area covered in weeds will be unsuccessful and is a waste of time and money. Allowing weeds to grow unchecked as the buffalograss seed or plugs are beginning to grow will likewise result in a poor stand of grass. Management of weeds throughout the process of planting and growing in a new buffalograss lawn is essential for success – and nearly always requires the use of herbicides at various times in the process. If you are reluctant to use herbicides to establish your buffalograss lawn, it might be better to plant buffalograss sod or consider sodding with another turf species.

Following the steps and recommendations listed here can help ensure a successful outcome. That being said, growing a buffalograss lawn from seed is NOT easy and presents potential problems along the way. Most importantly, weeds WILL become a significant and troublesome problem if steps aren't taken initially and during the grow-in period to discourage their growth. Done correctly, you can end up with a very nice buffalograss lawn. Because buffalograss is naturally a slow-growing plant, it may take a couple of growing seasons before the lawn completely fills in.

What to Plant?

Using Seed

The most attractive lawn-type, seeded buffalograss cultivar is Sundancer, developed by the University of Nebraska. Seed can sometimes be in short supply and may be rather expensive (availability and cost will vary from year to year). Check with local seed companies for availability:

Pawnee Buttes (Greeley) pawneebutteseed.com
Buffalo Brand Seed (Greeley) buffalostrandseed.com
Arkansas Valley (Denver and other branch stores in CO) avseeds.com

Other sources for Sundancer seed:

<http://arrowseed.com/turf/lawn-turf/sundancer-buffalograss/>
<http://www.stockseed.com/Shop/turf-type-buffalograss/sundancer-buffalograss>
<https://sharpseed.com/sundancer-buffalograss/>

Other SEEDED lawn-type cultivars include: Bison, Bowie, Cody and Buffalo Supreme (a blend of buffalograss cultivars) – but Sundancer will provide the best quality lawn of all seeded buffalograss varieties currently available.

Using Plugs

Growing a buffalograss lawn from plugs can be easier than using seed. The varieties sold in plug form (plugs of living grass) are typically very attractive lawn-type buffalograss varieties – and almost always they are a “female clone” variety. The female-only characteristic of these cultivars results in varieties for which there is no seed. Lawns planted with female clones can be especially attractive and uniform (even if not mowed)

because there are no flowering male plants in the lawn. Planted closely enough together, a plugged lawn can fill in quickly and provide a usable, attractive lawn within 4-6 weeks of planting. A recommended planting density is to plant plugs on 12-inch centers (plugs are planted in a grid pattern, each 12 inches from adjacent plugs). The plants in the plugs quickly produce stolons/runners which cover the soil/dead turf between the plugs.

The best varieties for planting in Colorado are Legacy and Prestige (UC Verde is NOT reliably winter hardy in Colorado). Plugs of these varieties are available from Todd Valley Farms (Lincoln, NE) <https://www.toddvalleyfarms.com/store.html#plugs> and occasionally at local nurseries and garden centers.

Site Preparation for Seeding/Plugging (Existing Lawn)

1. Kill existing grass/weeds with glyphosate. Eliminating grass and weed competition prior to seeding or plugging gives better results and reduces the need to manage weeds when the buffalograss is growing – and weed management is more difficult.
 - a. Suggest 2-3 applications of glyphosate in order to get complete kill of the existing grass/weeds.
 - b. The first application should be after grass/weeds have fully greened up in spring and during a warmer period; glyphosate effectiveness is greatest at temperatures above 65 F.
 - c. Make the 2nd application 10-21 days later, to allow maximum regrowth of anything that was missed or wasn't killed by first application.
 - d. A third application 10-20 days after the second application may be necessary to eradicate difficult weeds like thistle, bindweed, bermudagrass, quackgrass, and bromegrass.
 - e. During this time of glyphosate use, ensure adequate soil moisture by irrigating so that the grass and weeds you are trying to eliminate are actively growing and not drought-stressed (but avoid watering within a few hours after applying the glyphosate).
2. After the lawn/weeds are killed by the final glyphosate application (wait 10 days after the 2nd application to ensure that all grasses and perennial weeds are truly dead) and in preparation for seeding, mow the brown, dead grass and weeds as short as possible – using the bagger to collect the debris.
3. Good seed-soil contact is essential for successful buffalograss germination and establishment. Rent an aeration/core cultivation machine and aerate the dead lawn - the more holes the better. The holes don't need to be deep (1-2 inches is adequate), but you want a lot of them (1–2-inch centers).
4. Apply seed at a rate of 2-3 lbs. of seed/1000 square feet of lawn area. It's recommended to cover the entire lawn twice, using half of the seed each time, to achieve maximum uniformity. Rake the newly seeded lawn with a leaf rake to work the seed into holes as much as possible.
5. Apply an organic fertilizer or Scotts® Turf Builder® Triple Action Built For Seeding (<https://www.scotts.com/en-us/products/lawn-food/scotts-turf-builder-triple-action-built-seeding>), using the recommended spreader setting suggested on the bag.
6. While not absolutely necessary, roll the lawn with a water-filled roller to ensure good seed-soil contact.

7. Begin watering the lawn, applying water 3-4 times daily – so frequent and light watering, every day. For example, water 4 times daily (9am, noon, 3 pm, 6 pm) for about 3-4 minutes each time if you have popup spray heads (6-8 minutes each time if you have slow-turning rotor or stream rotor heads). Water this way until you see that most of the seed has germinated. Avoid watering on days when it rains.
8. After the grass germinates (5-10 days), reduce watering to 3 times daily (9, noon, 3) for about 2 weeks. Then reduce watering to once daily (noon) for the next 2 weeks.
9. One month after the seed germinates make another application of any organic or synthetic lawn fertilizer (WITHOUT herbicides/weed preventer), at the 1 pound N rate/1000 square feet (use the spreader setting on the bag to provide 1 pound of N per 1000 square feet).

Plugging a lawn

More detailed instructions are available on the websites of Todd Valley Farms (toddvalleyfarms.com), but briefly: follow steps 1, 2, 5 and 7-9 above.

Weed Control

The herbicides recommended for weed control in newly seeded or plugged buffalograss are Tenacity (mesotrione), Quinclorac (many generic quinclorac products are available), and Quicksilver (carfentrazone).

Weed control on the day of seeding

Apply mesotrione/Tenacity for weed control

<https://www.amazon.com/Primesource-Meso-4-SC-Select/dp/B07L3S9FKX/>

<https://www.domyown.com/prime-source-meso-4sc-select-p-17377.html>

<http://www.domyownpestcontrol.com/tenacity-herbicide-p-1877.html>

Tenacity is now also sold by Scotts as Scotts® Turf Builder® Triple Action Built for Seeding. This product can be applied the same day as seeding or plugging buffalograss. If you apply this product the day of seeding, it replaces the application of starter fertilizer described above (Step #5).

<https://www.scotts.com/en-us/products/lawn-food/scotts-turf-builder-starter-food-new-grass-plus-weed-preventer>

After grass seed has germinated and weeds are beginning to appear

Carfentrazone/Quicksilver for small, seedling BROADLEAF weeds (will NOT control grassy weeds)

<http://www.domyownpestcontrol.com/quicksilver-herbicide-p-1532.html>

Quinclorac (for young, seedling GRASSY weeds; works best if mixed with methylated seed oil/MSO)

<https://www.amazon.com/Primesource-Quinclorac-Select-Liquid-Crabgrass/dp/B07KYVGH9V/>

<https://www.domyown.com/prime-source-quinclorac-15l-select-herbicide-p-12204.html>

Follow ALL label instructions when using any pesticide. Inclusion of product names here does not imply endorsement by CSU, nor does exclusion imply criticism. Inclusion does not guarantee pest control, as many factors affect pesticide efficacy. Safe and legal use is the responsibility of the purchaser/user.