

The Establishment and Maintenance of American Buffalograss from Seed

SEED: American Buffalograss seed that is sold commercially is actually a seed burr, a small woody structure (approximately .25 inch = .75 cm) enclosing one to three true seeds. Improved turf-type varieties of buffalograss are generally available as Certified (Blue Tag) seed that has been produced and processed under the strictest quality controls. Good quality buffalograss seed is usually primed during processing in order to improve and speed up the germination results.

SOIL PREPARATION: A soil test should be run, prior to any seedbed preparations, to check the pH and nutrient content of the soil. Buffalograss is tolerant of a wide range of soil and nutrient conditions, but a soil pH between 6.1 and 8.0 will greatly improve the growth and establishment of the seedlings. Cultivate the soil area to a depth of 6 inches (15 cm), incorporating any soil amendments.

SEEDING AND IRRIGATION: Buffalograss seed burrs should be planted in spring or summer, when soil temperatures are consistently over 60 Fahrenheit (16 C). Plant 1–3 pounds of seed burrs per 1,000 square feet (1–3 kgs per 100 square meters) and cover the seed with .25 to .5 inch of soil (.75 to 1.5 cm). Buffalograss can be planted by many different techniques (brillion seeder, broadcast, hydromulch, drop seeder, drill, etc.) as long as the burrs are covered with a thin layer of soil or mulch after planting to help retain moisture. For best results, the area should be lightly irrigated daily during the first month while the seedlings are germinating and establishing. As the turfgrass plants mature, the irrigations should be gradually reduced to reduce water use and increase the turf health. A minimum of a deep soaking

once a month during the growing season is necessary for the best appearance. American Buffalograss will survive longer periods with no moisture, but will turn brown during this dormant resting period and become green again once adequate moisture returns. Excessive watering will increase problems with encroachment of weeds or other warm climate grasses such as bermudagrass. Buffalograss performs best when managed as a low input, low maintenance turf. If soil conditions are dry in the fall, the buffalograss turf should receive a deep soaking before winter to improve the winter survival.

FERTILIZATION: A balanced fertilizer should be applied twice during the peak growing season, for a total of 1–2 pounds actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet (1–2 kgs per 100 square meters). Slightly higher application rates can be applied on a monthly basis for a more maintained and groomed turf appearance. Lower rates are recommended for natural and less maintained areas, such as golf course roughs. Too high of a fertilizer application will often stimulate weeds and other grasses to invade the buffalograss.

MOWING MAINTENANCE: Maintained turf areas planted to buffalograss should be mowed between 2 and 4 inches in height, while natural and lower maintenance areas can be mowed much less often. In fact, some project managers do not mow their buffalograss on a regular basis, producing a natural meadow appearance with the plants growing to 6–10 inches in height (15–25 cm). In higher maintained areas, the frequency of water and fertilizer application will directly affect the mowing schedule. Since buffalograss rarely has problems from thatch buildup, the turfgrass manager can choose to remove the mowed clippings, or leave them for a more ecological approach.

PEST AND WEED CONTROL: Buffalograss rarely suffers from insect pests. Follow good maintenance and cultural practices to prevent insect infestations, treating only when populations reach economic levels. To reduce encroachment by weeds or other turfgrass species, avoid too frequent watering, overly short mowing heights and excessive fertilization. Check with your local extension office or turf chemical dealer for products safely labeled for use on buffalograss turf in your area.

WINTER OVERSEEDING: American buffalograss turf does not respond well to normal rates and practices of winter overseeding. Generally, lower maintained areas are left dormant in the winter for color and texture contrast on the project. In more maintained turf areas, buffalograss can be overseeded with perennial ryegrass seed, **but only at half the normal recommended ryegrass seeding rate**. The turfgrass manager should also reduce any dethatching or other invasive methods used to prepare the area for overseeding, in order to reduce the damage to the permanent buffalograss turf.

