

Grass Seed Mixes to Reduce Wildfire Hazard

During much of the year, grasses ignite easily and burn rapidly. Tall grass will quickly carry fire to your house. Plant “FireWise” grasses in the defensible space around your home. Defensible space is an area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire. For more information on defensible space, you can start with the pamphlet “Creating Wildfire Defensible Zones”.

Brief Facts...

Plant “Fire Wise” grass species to reduce the risk of wildfire damage.

“Fire Wise” grass mixes may contain only native species or a combination of native and non-native grasses. Native species of grass are preferable in wildland areas.

Sow half the seed north to south and the other half east to west.

Rake the seed into the soil.

Mulch erosion-prone areas.

If possible, water often and lightly.

Maintain the area properly.

Seed Mixes for New Mexico

Fire wise grass seed mixes for New Mexico may contain only native or a combination of native and non-native species. In a wildland area, it is preferable to use mostly or all native grass species. Mixes with all native species will take longer to establish (up to three years) than those with a percentage of non-native seed. The advantages of using all native species is that they will persist once established and weed problems associated with introduced species are avoided in the long run.

Grasses in these mixes have the following characteristics:

- They are lower growing.
- They need less maintenance.
- Seed is readily available and relatively inexpensive.

Planting

Use either a drop or a cyclone seeder to seed your defensible space. A drop seeder is more accurate in placing seed, especially if wind is a problem. If the ground is rough or rocky, the cyclone seeder will be easier to use.

Seed at the rates shown in the tables below. Divide the seed into two equal parts. Sow half of the seed by crossing the area north to south and the other half by crossing east to west.

Rake seed into the soil as soon as possible after sowing to reduce the chances of it blowing or washing away. Soil cover also helps to protect the young seedlings from drying out. When sowing on slopes prone to erosion, cover the seeded area with mulch. Recommended mulches include **clean** straw (straw with no seeds in it), netting or matting of some kind.

If you have water from a central community system or a well permit that allows outside irrigation, water the newly seeded areas frequently and lightly. Water enough to keep the soil moist but not so heavily as to cause erosion and loss of grass seed.

Maintenance

Even “FireWise” grasses need proper maintenance. During much of the year, grasses ignite easily and burn rapidly. Tall grass will quickly carry fire to your house. Mow grasses low in the inner zones of the defensible space. Keep them short closest to the house and gradually increase height outward from the house, to a maximum of 8 inches at about 100 feet from the house. This is particularly important during fall, winter and before green-up in early spring, when grasses are dry, dormant and in a “cured” fuel condition.

Given New Mexico’s extremely variable weather, wildfires can occur any time of the year. Maintenance of the grassy areas around your home is critical. Mow grasses low around the garage, outbuildings, decks, firewood piles, propane tanks, shrubs, and specimen trees with low-growing branches.



Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division

Native Grass “Fire Mixes”

High Mountain Mix, 8000’ and Higher			
Species	Variety	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Arizona fescue	Redondo	25	9 x .25 = 2.25
Western wheatgrass	Barton	25	32 x .25 = 8.00
Streambank wheatgrass	Sodar	25	22 x .25 = 5.50
Indian ricegrass	Cheyenne, Nezpar, Paloma	25	25 x .25 = 6.25
	TOTAL	100	22.00
This mix is good for high elevation sites. It can be used on northern exposures and shady canyons around 7000-8000’ elevation. *PLS =Pure Live Seed			

Mountain and Foothills Mix, 6000-8000’			
Species	Varieties	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Blue grama	Lovington, Native, Hachita	25	6 x .25 = 1.50
Western wheatgrass	Native, Arriba, Barton	25	32 x .25 = 8.00
Arizona fescue	Redondo	25	9 x .25 = 2.25
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	25	25 x .25 = 6.25
	TOTAL	100	18.00
This mix is good for mid elevation sites and in pinon juniper areas. It can be used on southeast exposures at higher elevations and north or northwest exposures at lower elevations. *PLS =Pure Live Seed			

High Desert Mix, 3000-6000’			
Species	Varieties	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Blue grama	Hachita	25	6 x .25 = 1.50
Western wheatgrass	Native, Arriba, Barton	25	32 x .25 = 8.00
Buffalograss	Texoka, Cody, Mesa	25	15 x .25 = 3.75
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	25	25 x .25 = 6.25
	TOTAL	100	19.50
This mix is good to use in lower elevation, valley and foothills and in the southern part of the state and drier sites up to juniper woodland. *PLS =Pure Live Seed			

Native and Non-Native Mix			
Species	Varieties	Percent of Mix	Broadcast Rate PLS* Lbs/Acre
Blue grama	Hachita, Native, Lovington	20	6 x .20 = 1.20
Western wheatgrass	Native, Arriba, Barton	20	32 x .20 = 6.40
Buffalograss	Texoka, Cody, Mesa	20	15 x .20 = 3.00
Indian ricegrass	Nezpar	15	25 x .15 = 3.75
Sheep fescue	Covar	10	6 x .10 = .60
Canada bluegrass	Reubens	15	2 x .15 = .30
	TOTAL	100	15.25
This seed mix is a good general-purpose native and non-native grass mix. It will provide good coverage and establish quickly. *PLS =Pure Live Seed			

For more information on wildland fire, check out the Southwest Area web page at www.fs.fed.us/r3/fire/
 For wildland urban interface issues and recommendations on creating defensible space, you can find good information at www.colostate.edu/Depts/CSFS/fire/interface.htm
 For more information on wildland urban interface issues, go to www.firewise.org

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