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NF93-131 Vegetative Buffalograss Management Calendar

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Vegetative Buffalograss Management Calendar

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Establishment Guidelines

Mowing

During establishment, frequent mowing will promote spreading of plug establishment plantings and increase density of sodded areas. Mowing will also decrease weed competition during establishment. Mow at 2-3". Avoid removing more than one-third of the turf height (i.e., for a 2" mowing height mow when the turf reaches 3"). Begin mowing on a plugged site as soon as the turf exceeds the desired mowing height and the plugs cannot be easily pulled out of the soil. On sodded sites, mow as soon as the sod is well "knitted" to the soil and the turf exceeds the desired mowing height.

Fertility

Apply 1 to 3 lbs N/1000 ft². Use a slow release N carrier, such as sulfur coated urea (SCU), ureaformaldehyde or a natural organic fertilizer. Use a split application with the first application 3-4 weeks after planting, and the second application 4-6 weeks after the first. On sandy or low fertility soils and/or in high rainfall areas, use the upper end of the recommended rate. Overfertilization of buffalograss will result in higher weed pressure. Do not exceed the recommended fertility rate.

Irrigation

Irrigation is critical during establishment. Be sure the soil is moist before planting plugs or sod. Do not delay irrigation after planting is complete for more than 2 hours. Irrigate daily for 7-10 days wetting the soil to 6 inches. After 7-10 days, irrigate 1 to 1.5"/week in 2-3 irrigations, allowing the surface to dry out in the top 1/2" between irrigations.

Weed Control

The greatest challenge during buffalograss establishment from plugs is weed control. Sodded areas normally, because of immediate total coverage, do not show significant weed problems. The fertility and irrigation required for successful buffalograss establishment also promotes the more aggressive weed species. Limited information is available on herbicide safety of newly planted buffalograss. Do not apply any herbicides until the planting has been mowed twice at the previously recommended mowing frequency.

Remember to follow label recommendations; and when rates are not specific for buffalograss, use the lowest rate recommended for other warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass. Be sure to follow label application recommendations explicitly to maximize weed control. Currently, four preemergence products are labeled for use in buffalograss; Ronstar G, Dimension, Dacthal, and Surflan. Except for Dacthal, these products are only available to commercial turf applicators. These products will provide excellent preemergence control of annual grasses such as crabgrass, foxtail, etc., and many broadleaf weeds as well. Any annual grassy weeds that have germinated prior to preemergence application can be treated postemergence with arsenical compounds (DSMA, MSMA). Dimension will also control crabgrass postemergence up to the tillering stage. Broadleaf products that are cleared for use in buffalograss include a number of 2,4-D containing products. Buffalograss is very sensitive to 2,4-D when temperatures exceed 80° F.

Post-Establishment Guidelines

After turf becomes well established (up to 4 months for plugged areas; 4-8 weeks for sodded areas), a reduction in management inputs can be realized.

Mowing

The mowing requirement for vegetatively established buffalograss ranges from approximately every 2 weeks to once per year, depending on management level and aesthetic requirement. The recommended mowing height, when mowing is practiced, is 1 1/2 to 4". Shorter mowing heights will require a greater mowing frequency. Avoid removing more than one-third of the turf height (i.e., for a 2" mowing height, mow when the turf reaches 3") at any mowing. Removing clippings is optional and normally not required or recommended.

Fertility

Excessive nitrogen fertilization promotes weed populations in buffalograss. Exceeding the following recommendation defeats the low management concept of buffalograss and promotes weed invasion. Apply 1 to 3 lbs N/1000 ft²/yr in two applications (mid to late May and late July). On sandy or low-fertility soils, and/or in high rainfall areas, use the upper end of the recommended rates. Use a slow release N carrier such as SCU, ureaformaldehyde or a natural organic fertilizer. For phosphorous, potassium and pH adjustments, test the soil every 3-5 years.

Irrigation

The water requirements of established buffalograss are considerably lower than the commonly used turfgrasses. Excessive irrigation, much like overfertilization, promotes weed invasion. Irrigating buffalograss in many areas is not required. If natural precipitation is inadequate or untimely, supplemental irrigation may be required.

Weed Control

Once established and properly managed, weed pressure in buffalograss is minimal. If herbicides are required, follow label directions explicitly to maximize weed control. Ronstar G, Dimension, Dacthal, and Surflan are preemergence products currently labeled for use in buffalograss. Except for Dacthal, their use is restricted to certified applicators. A spring application for control of summer annual weeds, such as crabgrass, goosegrass and spurge, should be applied when soil temperatures reaches 50° F. A second preemergence application in late summer or early fall will control winter annuals, such as henbit, chickweed, and annual bluegrass.

Postemergence control of annual grasses is best achieved with arsenical compounds (DSMA, MSMA). Broadleaf products cleared for use in buffalograss include a number of 2,4-D containing products. Do not apply products containing 2,4-D if temperatures are expected to exceed 80° F on the day of application. Dormant buffalograss can be sprayed with Round-Up to control winter weeds. Fall applications can be applied after the first frost or when the buffalograss turns straw-brown.

Spring applications of Round-Up should not be applied to buffalograss if the dormant turf is showing any green color. Round-Up applications applied to semi-dormant buffalograss will significantly delay green-up and could severely injure the buffalograss.

Mention of product names is for informational purposes only. Mention of a product does not imply endorsement by the University of Nebraska nor non-endorsement of appropriate products not mentioned. When using pesticides, be sure to thoroughly read and follow label directions.

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D-3, Turf

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