

For more information about crested wheatgrass, call your local University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office and ask for Fact Sheet 96-53 "Crested Wheatgrass: Hero or Villain in Reclaiming Disturbed Rangelands."

Fact Sheet 99-96

A Homeowner's Guide to Planting Crested Wheatgrass



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Crested wheatgrass is a bunchgrass native to Russia and was introduced into the United States by plant scientists during the early 1900s. Since that time, thousands of acres of Nevada rangelands have been successfully seeded with crested wheatgrass.

Crested wheatgrass is:

- Inexpensive and the seed is readily available.
- Easy to plant and establish.
- Low maintenance.
- Drought tolerant and does not require irrigation where it is adapted.
- Good forage for grazing animals. Less flammable than many other plants.
- Effective in suppressing weeds.

Crested wheatgrass is used by homeowners to create:

- Dryland pasture for horses, cattle, and sheep.
- Fuelbreaks around houses and other buildings.
- Low maintenance groundcover to control weeds, blowing dust, and soil erosion.



■ Areas receiving more than eight inches of precipitation annually.



Crested wheatgrass suppresses weeds. Note that the weed "cheatgrass" (light colored vegetation in the background) is not growing in the area seeded with crested wheatgrass (foreground).

Crested wheatgrass can usually be grown in areas that receive more than eight inches of precipitation a year and where the naturally occurring vegetation is big sagebrush, pinyon, or juniper. It does not grow well in areas with excessively alkaline or heavy clay soils.

For areas receiving between six to eight inches of precipitation a year, 'P27' Siberian wheatgrass can be substituted for crested wheatgrass. In areas receiving more than twelve inches of precipitation a year, grass species other than crested wheatgrass can be used. Contact your local University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office for recommendations.

Planting Guidelines for Crested Wheatgrass

The following description for planting crested wheatgrass applies to homeowners seeding relatively small areas (less than two acres) and who do not have access to specialized rangeland seeding equipment. For larger planting efforts, contact your local University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office for suggestions.

Step One: Planting Time

The best time to plant is during the late fall when temperatures are cool enough to prevent seed germination and soils are dry enough for successful seed planting. Typically, these conditions are present in northern Nevada mid-October through November. The seed will over-winter in the soil and germinate in the spring.

Step Two: Site Preparation

The area to be seeded should be cleared of debris. If there is a dense stand of shrubs present, they should be thinned to reduce the competition to young crested wheatgrass plants.

If cheatgrass or other weeds are actively growing, they should be controlled before seeding. One approach is to spray the area with a herbicide containing glyphosate (Roundup*, Kleenup*, or similar product). Glyphosate will kill or injure all existing plants but will not affect crested wheatgrass seeds if planting occurs at least ten days after spraying.

When using any herbicide be sure to read and follow the label direction. A light tilling just prior to seeding can also be used to remove weeds.

Areas with compacted soil should be loosened by light roto-tilling. Compacted soils may occur around newly constructed homes, areas with concentrated livestock use, or locations receiving a lot of foot traffic.

If footprints greater than one-half inch in depth are created when walking across the area to be seeded, the soils are probably too loose. These areas should be packed with a roller prior to seeding or irrigated to settle soils. Take care to not overly compact soils.

The surface of the soil should be “roughened” to provide crevices and furrows for seed to fall into. For small areas, this can be accomplished through scratching the ground with a steel rake. When preparing larger areas, dragging a piece of weighted chain link fence can be effective.



Step Three: Seed Amounts, Variety and Acquisition

About 14 pounds of crested wheatgrass seed per acre or one-third pound per 1,000 square feet should be used. There are many different varieties of crested wheatgrass available. Some of the recommended varieties are presented below by intended use.

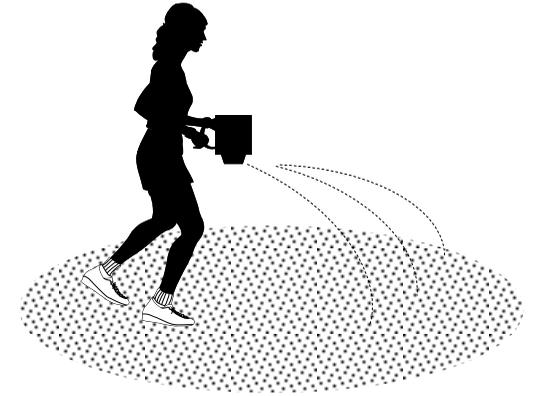
Pasture...Hycrest, Nordan, Douglas Fuelbreak...Fairway, P-27, Nordan Weed Control...Roadcrest, Ephraim, P-27 Erosion Control...Roadcrest, Ephraim

Crested wheatgrass can usually be purchased from local seed dealers, nurseries, livestock feed stores, and farm and ranch supply stores. Seed can also be ordered from out-of-state commercial seed companies by phone, but they may have minimum order requirements. Make sure you buy “certified” seed. This will guarantee the variety and purity of seed.

Step Four: Planting the Seed

The seed should be evenly broadcasted over the prepared site. Using a hand held “whirlybird” canister seeder will assist in uniform application of the seed.

Once the seed has been applied, it should be lightly covered with soil through raking or dragging. The goal is to cover the majority of seed with no more than one-half inch of soil.



Step Five: Maintenance

Seedlings should start appearing in early spring. If spring precipitation is lacking, it may be necessary to irrigate the seeded area several times during the first two months after germination. While crested wheatgrass typically does not require fertilization, it may benefit from application of 40 pounds per acre or one pound per 1,000 square feet of “actual nitrogen” during the third growing season after seeding and thereafter. Grazing of crested wheatgrass can begin the second summer after planting. When used for fuelbreaks, crested wheatgrass should be maintained at a height of about four inches once it has dried out for the season.

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