

## **Plant Grass Seed Now!**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

A few weeks ago I talked about getting ready to plant grass in your yard. Well I'm back now to tell you it is time! While there is some truth in the old adage that you can plant cool season grass seed (tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass) in any month that has the letter "R" in the name, the best time is September. The earlier in September you can plant the better.

Our common lawn grasses are cool season grasses. They grow best in the cool weather of fall, late winter and spring. In the summer they really just want to go dormant. Even though it is still a little warmer than normal, the weather will soon be cooling off. By planting grass seed now it will germinate quickly, start growing and give you plenty of time to get those plants well established before cold weather shuts down growth in late October or November.

There is a procedure called dormant planting where you plant the seed into cold ground in November or later. The theory is that the grass seed will sit there and do nothing until the soil starts to warm up in March. While you could do this if a situation prevents you from planting grass seed now, I'm really not a big fan of dormant planting.

Far too often homeowners will just walk around and scatter seed by hand hoping that it will sprout and grow. I've tried this at times just to see if it would be successful and even with lots of water, it just wasn't very effective. Desirable grass varieties need to have the seed placed beneath the soil surface to insure proper establishment. It certainly doesn't have to be buried, but generally we'd like to see it 1/8 to 1/4 inch deep. If the soil is fairly loose you can use a rake on small areas or a harrow on larger areas to mix the seed with the soil after broadcasting it on top of the ground. But generally we need to use a power seeder or a drill to open the soil drop the seed into place and then firming the soil back in afterwards.

The other important thing to remember is proper seeding rate. We only need one grass plant per square inch. New grass that is thick as hair will look good for a few weeks, but then competition sets in and the large areas will die off. For a new lawn you need 6 to 8 pounds of fescue seed per 1,000 square feet or 2 to 3 pounds of Kentucky bluegrass seed per thousand square feet. If you are overseeding, trying to thicken up a stand, use one half this rate.

The next trick is to get the seed and the soil moist and keep it moist long enough to get the seed germinated and growing. With soil temperatures we have now it's going to take 7 to 14 days for grass seed to germinate and emerge. If it isn't raining it may well be necessary to water every day to keep the soil and seed moist. If it turns off hot and windy, you may have to water twice a day. We aren't talking about needing a lot of water, just enough to soak up the top inch or so and keep it damp. That's probably only going to take about a tenth to two tenths of an inch per day. I frequently find that mulching with wheat straw isn't very effective because of our Kansas wind. Once the seed starts to sprout and gets about an inch tall you can start watering every other day and then every three days, etc. as it gets taller.

Finally, once the new grass grows to the desired height (3 to 3½ inches for tall fescue, 2½ to 3 inches for bluegrass) start mowing it. The clipping action from mowing will stimulate the plant to produce more tillers and thicken up the lawn. Getting a new lawn established, or an older lawn improved isn't rocket science, but it does take some planning and work. So get started now and we'll talk about weed control in about another month!