

SEEDING PASTURE BARE PATCHES



Dead grass and bare patches in pastures are at risk for erosion and an open invitation for weeds and undesirable grasses to take over. To ensure pastures are dense and nutritious, bare patches should be seeded in late winter/early spring or late summer. The basic steps of seeding bare patches are 1) controlling existing weeds, 2) preparing the seedbed, 3) seeding at the right time, and 4) maintaining a moist environment for seed germination. For best results, do this after horses have been removed from the pasture using rotational grazing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GETTING SEED IN BARE PATCHES OFF TO A GOOD START:

1. Spot spray weeds with herbicide; follow label directions.
2. Remove any dead grass and other debris (i.e., old uneaten hay).
3. Prepare the soil; till or rake in a starter fertilizer (10% N, 10% P2O5, 10% K2O at 10 lbs/1000 sq. ft.), and then grade it level.
4. Choose a mixture of pasture grass like endophyte-friendly tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, or annual ryegrass. Be sure to use seed that has been recently tested and shown to have >85% germination and <1% weed seed.
5. Plan to seed as soon as possible in late winter/early spring (Late February to March 15th) or late summer (August 1st to September 10th).
6. Broadcast seed at the proper rate: 2 to 3 lbs/1000 sq. ft. of tall fescue species plus 1-2 lbs/1000 sq. ft. of Kentucky bluegrass, or 3-4 lbs/1000 sq. ft. of annual ryegrass species.
7. Rake in seed and firm or tamp down lightly.
8. Spread straw on top of the seeded area at a rate of 1 bale/1000 sq. ft.
9. Keep area moist with frequent watering.
10. Control broadleaf weeds in the summer with mowing, or use an herbicide according to the label.
11. Exclude animals from seeded areas until they are established and mowed to a height of 4 inches twice prior to grazing.

For more information on horse manure management and other soil conservation and water quality practices, contact your local Soil Conservation District. Addresses and phone numbers can be found through mda.maryland.gov/HOW.

The Horse Outreach Workgroup (HOW) provides information to horse owners on pasture and manure management. HOW consists of representatives from local Soil Conservation Districts, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maryland Extension, and the Maryland Horse Industry Board.

Reviewed by Erika Crowl, University of Maryland Extension. September 2024.



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