

Dormant Sowing Techniques

While restoration ecologists have long touted the benefits of dormant sowing, the push to develop forb-rich plantings for pollinators is resulting in a greater interest in this technique for native community establishment. The benefits of dormant sowing include moist stratification that encourages high germination rates for forbs and sedges, better recruitment of species that must germinate in cool soil, and early establishment prior to the irregular rains and hot temperatures of summer. Dormant sowing may be done successfully through several techniques including drill sowing, mechanical broadcasters, and hand application of seed.

Drill sowing is an effective method for installing seed throughout the year, however soil conditions are often difficult for drilling in the winter. If the operator is able to find a window where the ground is frozen and there is little or no snow cover, drilling can be quite effective. The drill will still cut a shallow slit in the soil, but a significant frozen layer will support the weight of the tractor and the drill. When drilling into bare ground or soybean stubble, removing the seed tubes from the small seed box will allow the tiny forb seed to drop directly on the ground. Freezing and thawing will ensure adequate seed to soil contact. This step prevents these tiny seeds from being drilled too deep.

Mechanical broadcasters are also very effective for applying dormant seed. As with drills, proper calibration is essential to accommodate the low seeding rates for native seed mixes. Depending on the type of broadcaster, it may be necessary to mix the seed with inert material of a similar density. Cracked corn and vermiculite are a couple of examples of material that have been successfully used to bulk up native seed mixes. Also remember that some particularly fluffy grass mixes such as those heavy in little bluestem and side-oats grama may not drop through a gravity-fed spreader.

Finally, for small areas, dormant sowing may be successfully performed via hand broadcasting. Again the key is proper calibration as it is very easy to accidentally broadcast the entire mix over half the area you are attempting to cover. In order to avoid this issue, divide the seed into 4 or more equal portions and divide the area to be sown into the same number of sections so that you are never handling more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the seed at any one time. This will greatly reduce the chances of a major calibration error while hand broadcasting. If the mix contains both a light fluffy seed component and a small dense seed component, it is best to sow it in two passes since the different seed densities will not remain mixed.

Plant Feature: Beak Grass (*Diarrhena americana*)

Beak Grass is one of our most durable and attractive woodland grasses. The dark green shiny foliage up to two feet in length arches gracefully to form and 18 inch tall cover. Seed heads form in mid-summer on the end of long stalks that also arch over under the weight of the large seed about the size of a wheat berry. The foliage turns yellow in the fall fading to tan over the winter, typically remaining erect until flattened by heavy snowfalls.

Beak Grass makes an attractive mass planting in well-drained shady areas. It is particularly effective on slopes where the leaves will all arch downhill, creating the appearance of a shiny green waterfall. In a restoration, beak grass should be utilized in well-drained woodland settings with associates from our [Upland Woodland Mix](#).

