

HIGH COUNTRY CONSERVATION



2016

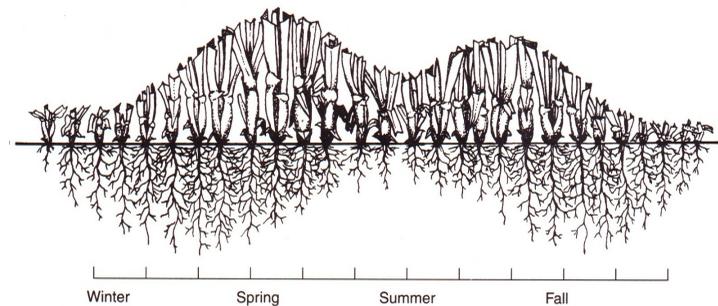
LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Fall Edition

GRASSES Part I Selecting Turf Grass Seed for the Laramie Area - By Martin Curry

Whether reclaiming a new construction site or refurbishing an old lawn, one needs to consider a few things before selecting a grass seed to plant. What soils, sandy vs clayey, make up the planting area? Is the purpose of the seeding to control erosion or will it be an area of high traffic use (play area)? How much allotted maintenance will be available for the seeded area, such as mowing, watering and weed suppression?

We all enjoy the climate in and around Laramie during the summer months. On the other hand, in the plant world the climate of



Laramie makes it tough for plants to thrive. With an elevation near 7,200 feet, annual precipitation of 10-14 inches, and a short growing season, the dominate grasses of the basin are comprised of cool season grass species. These grasses grow rapidly in the spring and fall when the soil temperatures are between 55 – 65°F. During the warmer months of July and August, the growth of cool season grasses is slower.

Cool season grasses for the Laramie area

Tall Fescue: Bunch-forming grass that has coarse leaf texture. It tolerates shade well, has very few pest insect and disease problems, tolerates saline soils, does not develop "thatch", requires less fertilizer and has good wear tolerance. It does not do well in high traffic areas.

Fine Fescues: Bunch-forming grass that is drought tolerant and does best in high altitude climates. They also perform well in shady areas. As with the tall fescues, these do not do well in high traffic areas and for best appearance, well-sharpened mower blades are a must.

Kentucky bluegrass: The most common used turf grass in the country, with numerous varieties available on the market. A rhizomatous grass that forms dense turf in full sun areas and tolerates wear, drought and extreme temperatures. Does not do well in the shade.

Perennial Ryegrass: Bunch-forming grass commonly used as a "nurse crop" due to its ability to germinate quickly. For this reason is should never be used as a stand-alone crop. Often used on sport fields due to quick growth and adaptability to a wide range of soils. Ryegrasses are intolerant extreme cold, heat, or drought.

Wheatgrasses: Best suited for erosion control and very low maintenance areas. They tolerate cold temperatures and drought conditions well but do not do well in shady areas.

For best results, when selecting seed for your project area, look for a mix that contains a variety of these grasses. This will ensure that one of the species will be successful in germination. For assistance determining the appropriate seed mix for your area and soil type, contact Martin Curry at Laramie Rivers Conservation District. Phone 307-721-0072 Ext. 3278 or email martin.curry@lrkd.net



GRASSES Part II

Eco-friendly Alternatives to Turf Lawns - by Laura McGinley

If you are tired of mowing, fertilizing, watering, and weeding of your standard turf-lawn, there are great alternatives that have seen a leap in popularity over the past few years. This style has many names: No-mow, Prairie Meadow, Fleur de lawn, Wildflower meadow, flower-turf and others. This will focus on the grass alone or grass/flower mixture style.

The first component to consider is the type of grass. You will want a fine fescue variety because they are slow-growing, narrow leafed, and the very supple blades lay over as they grow, creating an interesting flowing-wavy appearance. As mentioned in Part I, fine fescues are very drought and shade tolerant but won't do well in a high traffic area. If you do choose to mow parts of the lawn, such as a pathway to a favorite sitting area, wait until the grass is at least 3.5"-5" high and do not cut shorter than 3" or it can develop burn spots.

Since fine fescue grows slowly, it makes a great canvas for early spring bulbs. One way to achieve a natural, less uniform look, is tossing a handful of bulbs out across the grass area and planting them where they land. A mixture of low growing bulbs like Crocus or Show Drop and taller bulbs, like Tulips or Daffodil, can create a beautiful spring mosaic that will die off long before the grass gets too high to enjoy them. For a full list of bulbs that do well on the high plains, check out the Barnyards & Backyards article *Bulbs well-adapted to our inhospitable climate* by Jennifer Thompson found online at www.uwyo.edu/barnbackyard/resources/landscaping.

After the bulb-flowers fade, you can enjoy the long grass or you may want to incorporate flowers into the mix that will dot the yard in late summer month. Some good choices are California Poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*), Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*), Aspen Daisy (*Erigeron speciosus*), Bird's Eye (*Gilia tricolor*), and Iceland poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*).

Another option that will require minimal mowing yet, not as much as a standard yard, is the Fleur-de-lawn. This yard-scape incorporates perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) and/or Microclover (*Trifolium repens* L. var. *Pirouette*), White Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and English Daisy (*Bellis perennis*). Additional flowers considerations are Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*), Baby Blue Eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*) or Kelsey's Phlox/Marsh Phlox (*Phlox kelseyi*). This blend creates a soft, romantic, countryside look that is soft on bare feet and easy to maintain. One of the secrets to this landscape's success is the low-growing clover, which fixes nitrogen from the air into the soil, fertilizing the grass and flowers. The clover also acts as a "helpful weed", crowding out dandelions, bindweed, and crabgrass. Look online for companies selling a pre-mixed blend or create your own by ordering seeds separately from sources listed below.

The last alternative, shown here, is achieved with the grass species Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*). This grass is similar in appearance to the fine fescue but the stronger blades make it more upright, creating wavy mounds once mature. Dropseed is native to Wyoming and will do best in a more clayey soil with high organic matter content. This makes it best suited for areas where a stunning visual focal point is desired, such as along a broad border, or beneath trees, but may be difficult to maintain over a large area unless the soil is compatible.

There are many sources for seeds but not all companies cater to the challenges of the high plains climate. Here are a few companies that do: Pawnee Buttes Seed (CO) www.pawneebuttesseed.com
Western Native Seeds (CO) - www.westernnativeseed.com
Wind River Seed (WY) - www.windriverseed.com
High Country Gardens (NM) - www.highcountrygardens.com

Fine fescue/spring bulbs meadow



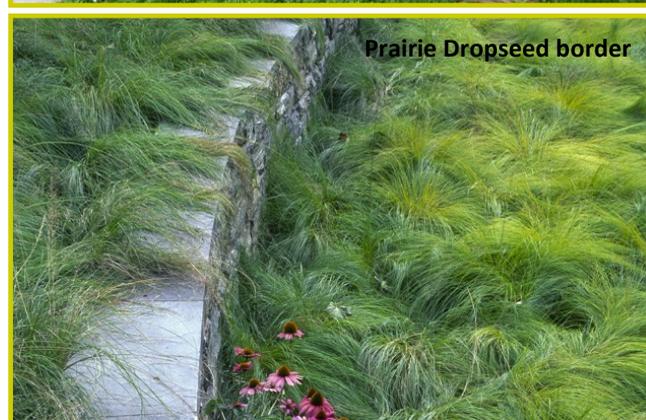
Fine fescue swirls.



Fleur-de-lawn



Prairie Dropseed border



Prairie Dropseed fall/winter



Get Involved with the South Platte River Watershed Study



Dahlgren Consulting, Inc. located in Cheyenne and WWC Engineering located in Laramie are working with the Laramie County Conservation District and the Laramie Rivers Conservation District on the South Platte River Watershed Study. The study is funded through the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC). The South Platte River Watershed

includes Crow Creek, Lodgepole Creek, Lone Tree Creek, Dale Creek and their tributaries. Refer to the map below showing the South Platte Watershed.

As part of the study, a characterization and inventory of the watershed will be completed. One of benefits of the Watershed study is that when it is complete, landowners are eligible for WWDC funding for Small Water Projects. The project team will be meeting with landowners and asking if they have ideas for small water projects that would improve the conditions and function of the watershed. With the landowners' permission and assistance, and in coordination with the Conservation Districts, the project team will conduct site visits to evaluate potential projects and collect information necessary to complete preliminary designs and develop cost estimates for these projects.

Typical small water projects include:

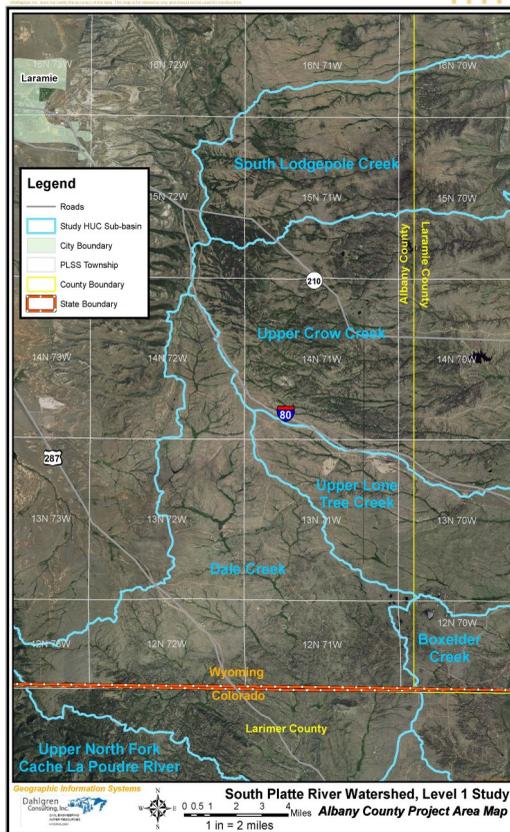
- ◊ Stock Ponds
- ◊ Spring Developments
- ◊ Solar Platforms
- ◊ Irrigation projects
- ◊ Wells
- ◊ Wetlands
- ◊ Environmental projects that provide for stream bank stability, erosion protection, or water quality improvements

The Conservation Districts will ultimately be in charge of applying to the WWDC for funding and recommending that a specific project move forward.

In addition to the small water projects described above, other potentially larger projects that could benefit the South Platte River Watershed also can be considered during the study.

If you are interested or would like more information about this, please visit the website: www.SouthPlatteRiverWatershedStudy.org

They can be contacted by calling: (307) 275-6368
or Email: Team@SouthPlatteRiverWatershedStudy.org



Natural Resources Conservation Service Announces FY2017 Sign-Up for Environmental Quality Incentives and Agricultural Management Assistance Programs.

NRCS is currently accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program. All signed applications on file as of October 21, 2016 will be considered for funding in FY2017.

The EQIP and AMA programs treat a wide variety of resource concerns such as water quality, inadequate fish and wildlife habitat, rangeland water developments and fencing, inefficient use of irrigation water, and wind and water erosion concerns. An early signup date for FY2017 has been announced to allow NRCS Field Offices to complete on-site field visits and resource inventories this fall.

A second application sign-up date may be announced early next spring depending on available funding.

Please contact the Laramie NRCS field office at 307-745-3698 if you are interested in conservation programs for FY2017.

Below: Existing 5-wire barbed fence retrofitted to Wildlife Friendly Fence design using the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.



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Showing off the new sign amid the vegetables and flowers; Ember, Teagan, Colby and Kinley Bluemel enjoy learning hands-on at the LaBonte Park Gardens!