

**Tips on Weed Control In
Native grass Plantings!**
(adapted from an article in “The Native Grass Manager”)

First, from a wildlife perspective, weeds aren't necessarily all bad in a native grass planting. They (weeds) can provide habitat for insects which in turn become food for certain wildlife (like newly hatched chicks), and can also provide initial cover. Too many weeds, however, and the success of your native grass planting could be in jeopardy.

You are miles ahead if you control weeds prior to planting your native grasses. On clean till or conventional seed beds this can be done by preparing the seedbed early and continue to disc every couple weeks or so as each new flush of weeds comes on. Keep the subsequent discings shallow otherwise you'll only succeed in bringing up more weed seeds buried in the soil. The use of herbicides can be an effective part of your site preparation prescription.

With no-till plantings, herbicides become more of a necessity for burn down and are often used in combination with mowing and/or fire prior to planting. Some herbicides also provide residual (post-emergent) weed control. It is the opinion of some that a late spring planting results in less weed competition no matter how you plant. By late planting I mean the last half of June. I would be remiss if I neglected to mention broadcast, dormant or snow seeding. Consult your local resource professional for the seeding method that's right for you.

What do you do if you've already planted and weeds are becoming a problem in your native grass planting? Mowing is probably the most widely recommended (and applicable) method of weed control. Best results are obtained with multiple clippings during the first growing season. As weeds get 2 to 3 times taller than the new native grasses and forbs, mow above the new seedlings. As the season progresses your mowing height will increase as the new native grasses and forbs begin to grow upward. Eventually, the native grasses and forbs will be taller than is possible to avoid clipping with the mower. If you have kept up with your mowing during the season, don't worry about clipping off the top few inches of your new plants. In any event, do not mow closer than 8 to 12 inches above the ground.

If weeds have completely overgrown your new seedlings before you've gotten a chance to mow, it may be better to not mow at all. The primary concern, especially with rotary mowers, is the accumulation of liter in windrows. The thick mat of dead vegetation, caused by a rotary mower, will choke out and kill any new seedlings. Native grasses also, under heavy, tall weed pressure, respond by growing tall and spindly in order to compete and become susceptible to clipping when the weeds are mowed (because of their tall spindly growth, most of the leaf area is higher up on the plant. When mowed at 12 inches, most of the leaf area gets clipped off leaving nothing but stem starting a chain of negative reactions).

In summary, the best strategy is to mow early and often, or don't mow at all!