

Weed Control and Best Management Practices for CP42 Pollinator Plots

Recent concern over Pigweed in newly established CRP plantings makes this a good time to remind people of the best management practices to control weeds. That maintenance is key to enhancing the growth of native species in all native CRP planting, and especially in the highly diverse Pollinator plantings.

We don't differentiate between broadcast seeding or planting with a native seed drill. Site prep and maintenance is the same for both types of planting.

Site Prep is Key

Iowa Habitat Forever Habitat Specialists plant native seed from about the 15th of November to the 1st of July. Their planting philosophy is simple and correct -- "It is not when you plant that is important, it is how you prepare the site before the planting that counts". *The maintenance (mowing) after planting in the establishment year is also very important!!* There are as many different planting situations as farms, and I am going to give you a few examples. However the best advice I can give you is to talk to a Farm Bill Biologist, Private Lands Specialist, and your USDA office

Fall and Winter are ^{OK} excellent seasons for seeding highly diverse native seed mixes. One drawback is the inability to spray or control the first flush of weeds in the spring. The answer to that is to be sure to control weeds in the late summer and early fall before you plant. In late Fall the window of opportunity to seed can be short, one rainstorm followed by cool temperatures can shut down Fall seeding.

The best situation would be to seed into harvested soybean field that was sprayed several times with glyphosate herbicide since spring. Soybean stubble is the best medium to plant into at any time of the year. There's no need for disturbance, and good weed control prior to planting. So, work to have any field you are going to plant resemble a soybean stubble field!

Corn stubble is an entirely different medium to seed. An excess of plant litter and stalks can make this a tough situation to plant. Best management is to mow stalks and bale stover in the fall. If this is accomplished you will have a situation equal to soybean stubble to plant into. *You can always just use tillage to create a quality seed bed in corn stubble. The additional disturbance will cause more weed pressure so be prepared.*

Review Soybean stubble good and corn stubble, not so good, unless you remove the stover. The downside to Fall and Winter planting is that you cannot spray to control first flush of weeds in the spring (means you'll need to mow more often next spring and summer).

Spring is an extremely effective time to plant natives. If you plant early spring just remember you may have to mow earlier to control weeds. For later seeding (mid-May to July 1) try to control weeds before you plant, usually that means spraying with glyphosate.

Seeding Into Sod or Old CRP Fields. Site prep for sod or old brome CRP fields is extremely critical. Best management is to mow grass fields (or graze) in August or early September, then spray with glyphosate when field has greened back up and is actively growing. A fall spray is very important. I have sprayed fields as late as November 20th and still feel that it was worth it. However, I would much rather spray in late September or early October.

In the spring wait until the first flush of weeds have emerged and the field has "greened up". Then spray again with glyphosate and seed soon after. In situations where you have sprayed in early spring and the seeder doesn't get there until mid-June – just two answers. Stay in contact with your seeder and time your spray closer to the time of seeding, or just spray again. Yes it is going to cost more, but it will be worth it – you will save the cost of added spraying in less mowing and fewer weeds to worry about.

What about the idea of making it look like soybean stubble? Very Best Management of Grass. Mow grass in August, spray with glyphosate in late September, or early October. Next, conduct a prescribed burn in early March, burn off the old dead grass. This burning will of course remove litter and turn your area black, the soil will warm up quickly and you will get early growth of remaining grass and weeds. Spray again in May. Now you have your Soybean stubble to plant in.

Plant shallow, Plant shallow, Plant shallow. Native seed should be planted shallow 1/8 inch deep. If you can find up to 30% of the seed on the surface – that is ok. It just means you are planting shallow enough. Shallow seeding makes for better germination and better early growth in you pollinator plots. That is critical for weed control. Practice first with your drill: Buy a half-pound of Safflower seed at your local bird seed store. Check your seed drill before you plant. Place the Safflower seed in a couple of the slots in the fluffy seed box and run the seeder. You should see the top of the Safflower seeds in your row. If the Safflower is buried completely you need to adjust until you can see the top of the seed.

Post Planting Maintenance for Weed Control

MOW, MOW, MOW Be prepared to mow your seeding 3 times in the “establishment year” (first year). Perfectly legal in the eyes of the USDA, landowners are allowed to mow as often as needed to establish the native stand. Mow at a height of 10 inches. Native grasses can be hurt and even killed because of mowing too short. So just keep the mower up each time you mow. Last mowing should be near August 10th, let you're seeding grow in late August and September. Plants will build up energy for next year.

MOW in year two! Another mowing in mid-May of the second year can do good things for weed control. Again, mow high.

Push Weeds Back With Targeted Mowing

Thistles and other weeds can be a tough weed to eliminate in young native seedings. Mow targeted areas with weeds during the summer up to mid to late September. Then, in mid-October when the prairie plants are done growing and have gone dormant for the year, spray thistles or other weeds. Thistle will still be actively growing. This will not effect the prairie plants. This technique will also work for pigweed and others.

Late Fall, Early Spring Prescribed Burning and Targeted Reseeding on Poor Areas

Prescribed fire is usually not recommended for young pollinator sites, but if you have areas with poor growth or you have had to spray weeds and the action hurt your native seeding, burning is one way to help. Burn the site in late Fall or early March. Broadcast native seed over the poor site (you should mark these areas with steel fencepost prior to the burn). Get that “good” seed in those areas with weed problems.

Sit On Your Deck Or Backyard With a Cup of Coffee and Enjoy Your Diverse Pollinator Seeding

Native seedings will out-compete and take over weeds in a couple of years. Some maintenance will help. Remember to sit back and enjoy your planting. That prairie is what made this state and the Midwest great. Relax and enjoy it!



July 28, 2015 waiting for second mowing



August 5, 2015 final mowing



“Same CP42 field – July 7, 2016 – Mowing Works!”

