

Site Preparation Options

A Means to an End

If your goal is to establish a native planting from seed and assuming that your site is lawn or old field consisting of non-native species, the current vegetation and weed seed bank should be eradicated as much as possible prior to introducing native seeds. Eliminating the competition gives the native seeds the best chance of establishing. There are 3 methods typically used to eliminate current vegetation including solarization, till/rake or herbicide application. Regardless of method, the site preparation phase of your project should ideally occur spring through fall. To begin remove thatch with a mowing and raking off or burn of the area and proceed with one of the following:

Solarization - When growth reaches 3-6 inches cover the area with tarp or black plastic. Uncover the area in 4-6 weeks and allow the area to green up again over the next 3 weeks and then recover. Repeat this 2-3 more times and then remove the cover, lightly rake and dormant seed.

Tilling/Raking - Tilling alone will not suffice to prepare a site. Tilling brings new seeds to the surface that will germinate with light and moisture. Each tilling should be followed by raking out plant material, as some plants can sprout from root fragments. Allow growth to reach 3-6 inches, till followed by raking out as much plant stubble as possible. Allow for new growth and repeat this process at least 3-4 more times throughout the season and then dormant seed.

Herbicide - Use a Glyphosate product according to label directions. Make sure that the herbicide isn't labeled as "long lasting" and does not include imazapyr, which remains persistent in the soil. 1-3 herbicide applications may be needed depending upon existing vegetation, followed by a dormant seeding.

All three versions of site preparation noted above are a means to an end. The end goal is to remove non-native vegetation to make space for a more sustainable, diverse and habitat providing landscape. Solarization kills other living organisms in the soil. Tilling destroys the established soil structure. Herbicide kills vegetation systemically. In most cases we choose to use Glyphosate as a site preparation tool as we feel it has the least collateral impact.

Embarking on a native seeding project is an investment of your time and money. For the best return on your investment taking the time to prepare the site is absolutely critical, as without thorough site preparation a native seeding has minimal chance of success.