

SAN LORENZO GARDEN CENTER

235 River St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060, (831) 423-0223, Fax (831) 426-1260

www.sanlorenzolumber.com/garden

Erosion Control

The right mixture of grasses and legumes can protect your property from soil erosion caused by storm runoff. Vegetation slows runoff, shields soil from raindrop impact, and holds the soil in place with roots.

Bare ground, especially on slopes, can erode rapidly during the rainy season. Planting bare areas before October 15, using the right fertilization and mulching techniques, is your best insurance against erosion problems.

Plants alone cannot protect soil from concentrated runoff or soil instability due to geologic factors. In these cases, vegetation must be used in conjunction with erosion control structures designed and built by a registered professional.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SEED

A mixture of grasses and legumes makes a better, healthier ground cover than a single species such as Annual Ryegrass. The SANTA CRUZ COUNTY EROSION CONTROL MIX is the best all-purpose seed mix for this area. It contains Rose Clover (or Barrel Medic), 'Blando' Brome, 'Zorro' Annual Fescue, and Creeping Red Fescue, and is sold pre-mixed.

Planting the right amount of seed is important to insure dense ground cover. Apply the SANTA CRUZ COUNTY EROSION CONTROL MIX at the rate of 35 lbs/acre, or 1 2/3 lbs/1000 square feet.

Planted before or during September 15 to October 15 the SANTA CRUZ COUNTY EROSION CONTROL MIX, properly fertilized and mulched, can reduce erosion on bare ground by up to 98%. Planting before September 15 is advisable only where ground can be irrigated.

GETTING READY TO PLANT

Before planting, the ground must be protected from concentrated storm runoff. Check to see that a road, roof drain, or culvert does not channel a concentrated stream of water onto your site. Consult the Resource Conservation District Office for help if a drainage problem exists.

Hand or machine racking the surface will create a loose, porous soil that seeds need to germinate. The soil should be free of rocks, stumps and large clods. It should feel crumbly in your hands. Hard, compacted soil must be plowed or raked before seeding.

Prepare the surface immediately before planting. This will minimize the risk of erosion by wind and water that can deteriorate the soil.

If the top layer of soil has been stockpiled during construction, replace it to a depth of at least six inches before seeding. Blend it into the existing soil and compact it. Topsoil should not be replaced, however, on slopes of 25% or greater.

FERTILIZE FOR HEALTHY COVER

Fertilizer is crucial for healthy grass cover. It should be raked into the soil shortly before planting, or mixed with seed an hour or two before planting time and spread with the seed.

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The recommended fertilizer for Santa Cruz County is Ammonium Phosphate (16-20-0), applied at a rate of 500 lbs/acre or 12 lbs/1000 sq. ft. Triple Twelve (12-12-12) may be substituted, at a rate of 700 lbs/acre or 16 lbs/1000 sq. ft.

Very sandy soil, shallow soil, and steep land soil needs special treatment. On these sites make three separate applications of 200 lbs/acre (5 lbs/1000 sq. ft) each. Make the first application at planting time, the second a month after plants come up, and the third a month after that.

PLANTING THE SEED

Make sure soil is loose. Scatter seed evenly by hand, or use a rotary seeder. After sowing, rake the seed into the ground. Compact the soil lightly by walking over it, or drag a weighted plank across the area.

On sites too steep for hand seeding, use hydromulching. This application of seed, fertilizer, and mulch in a sticky spray requires special equipment and is best done by a hydromulch contractor.

MULCHING

After planting, straw mulch will help protect the germinating seed from birds, moisture loss, and weather extremes. It will hold your soil in place while plants get established. For this reason mulching is essential on slopes.

Straw should be dry and free of weed seeds. It should be spread at the rate of 2 tons/acre (80 bales of 50 pounds each), or 2 bales/1000 sq. ft. Spread it uniformly by hand to a depth of two inches, or use a mechanical straw blower.

Straw must be anchored on slopes of 30% or steeper to keep it from sliding. Plastic netting is the most popular method. Netting (1" x 2" mesh or smaller) is unrolled up and down the slope, and anchored across the top by burying in a trench eight inches deep. Overlap netting at least four inches on each side, and extend it to one foot beyond the mulched area. Wire staples six inches or longer, driven perpendicularly into the slope at 5' intervals, hold the netting in place. Staple overlapped areas at 1' intervals.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Once my grass legume mixture has been planted, how do I take care of it?

Inspect the site a month after planting. If the plants are not up in spite of sufficient rainfall, consult the Resource Conservation District Office.

Visit the site often during the rainy season, especially during and after storms, to see how much water travels down the slope. If runoff concentrates in any one area, it could undo all your hard work!

The SANTA CRUZ COUNTY EROSION CONTROL MIX will die off in the summer. However, it will reseed itself and come back every fall.

Why can't I plant my grass cover in November?

You can, but it will not work as well. Seeds need warmth to germinate and grow. Cold weather means fewer plants will come up to protect your soil.

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What if I need a fast ground cover in January?

Straw mulch alone, carefully anchored, is your best bet to hold soil in place after December. Winter temperatures are too cold to grow grass.

Can I substitute organic fertilizer for Ammonium Phosphate?

Yes, but you will need huge amounts of it. Organic fertilizers such as manure vary tremendously in their nutrient and salt content. For erosion control, when fast growth is essential, they are best used as an organic matter supplement, not as your main fertilizer.

Why are legumes used in seed mixes?

Legumes such as clover add nitrogen to the soil, which grass needs to grow rapidly. It is important to buy legume seed that has been pellet-inoculated with "nitrogen-fixing" bacteria.

Aren't there other mulches besides straw?

Straw is the cheapest and best mulch for erosion control plantings of grasses and legumes. Mulches such as wood chips, pine needles, and compost are best left for landscaping and other purposes.