

Planting Recommendation for Switchgrass

General information:

Switchgrass provides excellent winter cover for pheasants. It is a stiff-stemmed warm season native grass that is highly adapted to poorly drained and well-drained soils. It tolerates flooding as well as big bluestem and, once established, and will survive many years in flood plains or well drained soils. Switch grass will grow 6' tall although some new varieties such as sunburst are shorter.

Methods of planting:

The best method for planting native grasses is to prepare a seedbed 3" to 4" in depth and contact your ag supplier. Deliver the seed to them and have them mix 75# to 100# of DAP, potash, or pelletized lime/acre and air flow the seed on to the area. Then pack with a culti-packer. Do not disk or field cultivate (This will bury the seed too deep and significantly reduce germination). If there is not a culti-packer available to use, pack the ground with you're your dual-wheeled tractor until the entire area has been covered. This is done to press excess air out of the seedbed and make it firm to improve seed to soil contact. The Champaign County SWCD can help arrange the use of the Pheasants Forever culti-packer for your project.

The Champaign County SWCD can also arrange the use of a Brillion[®] seeder if you are planting a tilled area. This seeder also has packer wheels that will press the seed into the soil and compress the air out.

The Champaign County SWCD can also arrange the use of a no-till drill for planting switchgrass directly into a seedbed of soybean stubble. If you are planting into corn stalks it is better to work the ground first to prepare an adequate seedbed.

Calculating seed requirements:

The seeding rate for switchgrass in filter strips is: 6# PLS/acre (PLS=pure live seed)

What is PLS? PLS is the amount of seed that will germinate and grow in a given lot. The difference, in pounds, is the non-viable seed and/or chaff.

How do I calculate PLS? You need to have 2 pieces of information to calculate PLS: the rate per acre in pounds and the %PLS marked on the bag.

Example: NRCS requires 6# PLS of switchgrass on your seeding and you have a lot of seed with 88% PLS. You calculate the amount of seed from your bag you need by dividing 6# (PLS recommendation) by .88 (PLS of seed lot) = 6.8# of seed from the bag needed to plant your project.

Planting information:

Depth: ¼ to ½ inch- don't bury it

Planting dates: Spring early spring to June 5th

Fall dormant seeding-November 15th until ground freezes