

## OSU Extension News

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### Spring is Coming

With all of the precipitation and winter weather we have had, yards, hay fields, and pastures may need re-seeded in areas that have been torn up or become muddy. There is a method called “frost seeding” where you apply seed to the ground and the freezing and thawing of the soil in February and early March will provide seed to soil contact allowing germination of the seed. There is a little more risk of the seed not germinating than a traditional seeding, but the cost and time is a lot less.

The secret is to have exposed soil. If you have exposed soil in your yard, simply sprinkle seed on the soil and let the frosts work it in. If the ground is thawed, you can step on the seed or roll it to improve contact. Make sure you use a similar seed variety when planting grass because some cultivars have different visible characteristics. If you are not sure of the type of grass you have, bring in a sample for me to identify.

For farmers, frost seeding works as well. Pasture and hay fields that have thin stands and exposed soil, especially fields that have been damaged from the wet weather are good candidates for frost seeding. The seed that works best is clover. Medium red clover is the cheapest seed and works well. Other clovers will also work and even grass seed. Simply apply 3-10#/acre of seed and let Mother Nature take her course. Some steps to improve germination include mixing fertilizer with the seed as the fertilizer will scratch the seed coat and improve germination. However, it is always a good idea to take a soil sample before applying fertilizer to see exactly how much of each nutrient that you need. The OSU Extension office can help you out with your soil sample. Keep in mind that when you apply this mixture with a “spinning seeder”, fertilizer will travel twice as far as the seed. Some have had success letting livestock tramp in the seed with their hooves. A light grazing of fields when grass starts growing will keep down competition as the clover starts. Finally, this is a good option for alfalfa fields that are starting to thin out. Frost seeding grass seed can work but generally not as effective as clover seed.

One question I get this time of year, “Is it too early to be talking about planting flowers?” The answer is no! There are a number of popular tender garden annuals that can easily be started from seed in your home. Some need as much as 12 weeks to develop (which takes us to May), so they can be started soon. These include wax (or fibrous-rooted) begonias, geraniums, heliotrope, pansies and violas.

Almost any shallow container or flat with drainage holes can be used to germinate seeds. Use a soilless mix, since garden soil can harbor diseases that attack young seedlings. Keep the medium moist at all times by misting the soil, or placing the container in a tray of water allowing “capillary” action. The seeds do not need light to germinate, but light quality is critical once germination has taken place. Once the seedlings have developed 3-4 true leaves, they can be moved to individual containers or cell packs, and benefit from light fertilizer applications.

To end up today’s column, I will finish up with a quote from Ethel Watts Mumford: “The doors of opportunity are marked ‘Push’ and Pull””. Have a great week!

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