

## INCORPORATING COLORADO'S NATURAL BEAUTY INTO THE MACANTA LANDSCAPE

One of the things that makes Colorado a uniquely attractive residential destination, is the native landscape that promotes its natural beauty. Most of our metropolitan areas are considered a zone 5 high mountain prairie, where certain plants and landscape features will grow much better than others. One of those features is the native grasslands which can be found in undeveloped areas as well as many Master Planned Communities, such as Macanta. Native grasses are used both to encapsulate Colorado's true natural beauty into our communities, and to serve as a means for developing a landscape that provides appeal while being cognizant of our most precious natural resource; our water. Due to the vast open space at Macanta and our desire to integrate the community within it, native grasses are used in



Example of Irrigated Native Grass Integrated within the Landscape

areas where other turf species simply aren't practical due to maintenance requirements and water consumption needs. "Native" is the simple, abbreviated term often used to refer to these areas, and like other landscape features, it must be cared for properly in order to promote its growth, health and appearance. The advantage to utilizing native grasses in our Association is that with a little help, it will grow in Colorado's challenging conditions. The most important aspect to developing and nurturing Native is the maintenance program that follows the seeding and development stage.

While most people look at a newly seeded native area and see it as unkempt landscape, there needs to be an understanding of how these areas should be maintained in order to allow them to fill in and present the beautiful appearance it is intended to have. Native is not meant to be watered nor cut regularly like bluegrass. If this were the case, and the large open spaces within our neighborhoods were covered in bluegrass, we would quickly deplete our water supply; the same water supply that we use for drinking, bathing and everyday life. The maintenance costs for performing required fertilization, weed control and weekly mowing would skyrocket to incredible levels, leaving no funds for things like insurance, amenities, or trash collection. Also, native grasses need to be allowed to progress and spread naturally, so mowing during this process is limited.



Example of Native Area in Establishment Period

If Native is not to be treated like bluegrass, what is the correct maintenance program that will allow these areas to thrive and serve as an attractive landscape feature as intended? Native grasses germinate and develop when the soil is cooler. In order to "go to seed" these grasses must not be cut, but left to grow to a point (generally 12-16") where seed heads develop and spread. Often this is weather dependent, but usually this process occurs through April, May and early June, and again in late September, October and into November.

This means no mowing during the spring and fall while this process occurs. Generally, mowing native areas 1-2X between June and October yields the best results. The other element of establishing a beautiful native area is that of controlling noxious, and unsightly weeds. Similar to cutting, there is also a proper time for performing weed control based on its stage of development. Newer, or less full native areas should never have pre-emergent (preventative herbicide applications to keep weeds that have not yet become visible from proliferating) applications performed. These treatments will have an adverse effect on desirable native, and prevent the growth and germination process. Instead, applications of post-emergent (controlling weeds that have already surfaced) weed control, performed a week or two after mowing, are best.



Non-Irrigated Native Area in Establishment Period



Non-Irrigated Native Meadow after Establishment

Unfortunately, this means that undesirable weeds will be present, and will have to be seen as acceptable while the native grass develops. Spot spraying of native weeds can be performed at this time, which targets weeds, and reduces the risk to native grasses. As native areas develop and improve, additional post-emergent applications can be performed. Generally, this means two applications per year, again, performed in conjunction with mowing. Older, more established and full native can be treated with well-timed pre-emergent applications in the late spring, and can be coupled with a post emergent application in the mid to late summer.

As with any plant or turf, appropriate irrigation and soil conditions conducive to plant establishment will improve their success. Adding amended soil when developing new native will significantly increase success, and watering at this stage is also important. Once native areas are established, watering can be reduced, and in many cases, eliminated. The native will thrive on natural precipitation, and those costs associated with irrigating native areas are also eliminated.



Irrigated Native Seed Areas Integrated into the Community



**Irrigated Native Seed Areas Integrated into the Community Add Beauty, but Patience is Required to Establish Them**

By treating native delicately, and gaining an understanding of what is needed to allow it to develop and thrive, Associations throughout Colorado have enjoyed the tremendous beauty that was intended for their Communities. Few will dispute the impressive appearance that well established and well maintained native grasses have on a breezy day. Like many things, patience is key, and gaining Community commitment to follow a well-defined maintenance program will offer the results that lead to an enjoyable open space filled with native grasses.