

HABITAT CORNER

By Aaron K. Kuehl, Pheasants Forever
Director of Seed Operations

Grass: Kill it Now, Kill it Good

Fall is for Habitat Management Too



The grasses on this Illinois project have been killed dead, leaving the land ready to plant with a diverse mix of wildlife-sustaining native plants.

FEW PEOPLE PLAN for their habitat projects as early as they should, especially when it's fall and hunting season is on. That results in a frantic rush to buy seed, sometimes paying more than the seed costs in rush shipping, and then scattering that seed across a less-than-ideal seed bed.

As you might guess, there is a strong correlation between project success and project preparation. Poor site preparation is the number one predictor of failed habitat projects. This is especially true for projects that require conversion from cool-season, introduced, sod-forming species (like brome or fescue) to a diverse mix of native warm-season grasses and wildflowers.

If you have an old brome or fescue field you want to convert to quality native grassland, put

down this article right now and go buy some glyphosate (i.e. Roundup). To eliminate brome/fescue, fall is the time to start.

When temperatures start to cool, brome/fescue starts to grow and translocate nutrients to its roots. A chemical application of glyphosate (one quart per acre) from late August into early October will be pulled slowly and deeply into the roots, killing the plant.

Ideally, burn off the residual cover early in spring, wait for 6 inches of fresh growth on any surviving plants, then hit them a second time (at the rate of two quarts per acre) with glyphosate. Once everything is dead in 10 to 14 days, drill in your new seed mix. If you try to get by with only the spring chemical burn-down, you will continue to fight brome/fescue for years to come.

Advanced habitat managers

take note: Glyphosate can also be used to control cool-season invaders like brome and fescue after they start to grow and native species go dormant. Since glyphosate is a contact herbicide, it only kills things that are actively growing. Use glyphosate to spot-spray heavy areas of invading cool-season grasses.

It's worth mentioning again: Make good and sure your natives are dormant or you will kill them too.

This trick also works with foliar (spray the leaves) application to kill bush honeysuckle, an invasive woodland species that holds its leaves after many native trees and shrubs have gone dormant in autumn.

These days, with fewer acres available to wildlife, let's make every acre count. Think Habitat ... even in fall! ■